

Jeopardy

by

Colin Pink

Jeopardy *n.* danger, esp. of severe loss or harm; danger resulting from being on trial for criminal offence.

Cast: Luker (the Interrogator).

Martin (the Suspect).

One set which at various times is an interrogation cell, a psychotherapist's office and a hospital lecture hall. The actors need to segue smoothly between different personae at points indicated in the script. During the course of the play Martin gradually disintegrates under the pressure of the interrogation.

Note: a / indicates the point of overlap with the next line.

Set: A simple table. A phone on Luker's side of the table. Two chairs. Luker and Martin sit opposite each other, Luker holds a cigarette. Interrogation cell. Menacing atmosphere. The 4th wall is treated like a large two way mirror.

Martin I just popped out for some cigarettes.

Luker I didn't know you smoked.

Martin They'll be wondering what's happened to me.

Luker I'd have offered you one if I'd realised. [Proffers cigarette packet.]

Martin No thanks.

Luker Let's go over a few things.

Martin I'm expected back.

Luker Don't worry, I won't keep you long. I just need to ask you a few questions. You don't mind answering a few questions, do you?

Martin No --

Luker I should think not! It wouldn't be very public spirited if you weren't prepared to spare us a few minutes of your time.

Martin It's just that they'll be worrying - I only popped out for cigarettes.

Luker Want one?

Martin No. I was just --

Luker Yes, I know. I'm not stupid. In fact I'm very observant.

Martin I'm sure you are, I didn't mean --

Luker I've observed lots of things. Things about you. [Pause.] Why are you here? [Pause.] Go on, tell me why you think you're here.

Martin I don't know. I haven't a clue.

Luker You haven't a clue.

Martin That's right.

Luker Not a very attractive admission that. Doesn't give me a lot of confidence in you, does it? Saying you haven't a clue.

Martin It's a figure of speech.

Luker [Imitating.] It's a figure of speech. [Pause.] You think I don't know that! [Leaning in towards Martin] Shall we stop mucking about, get to the point, it'll save time. The quicker we get started the quicker we'll finish; that suit you?

Martin Yes --

Luker Good. Where were you last night?

Martin I had dinner around a friend's place.

Luker And who is that?

Martin Just a friend.

Luker Name. I need a name.

Martin Tomas Kreuzer.

Luker [Writing.] Tomas Kreuzer. K - R - E - U - Z - E - R?

Martin Yes.

Luker Good. Now we're getting somewhere. What did you have to eat?

Martin [Puzzled.] Bortsch to start and then chicken.

Luker Anything to drink?

Martin Beer.

Luker See how easy this is! What did you discuss?

Martin This and that.

Luker Anything in particular?

Martin No.

Luker Anything of especial interest?

Martin No.

Luker Don't just say no. Tell me. I want to know what you spoke about.

Martin We talked about work.

Luker You talked about work. Just work?

Martin Yes.

Luker That must have been a bit boring. Remind me not to invite you round to dinner. You must be a very boring conversationalist.

Martin Yes.

Luker [Laughs.] You don't get it, do you?

Martin Don't get it?

Luker That's right. You don't get it. I already know what you discussed - that's why you're here!

Martin Then why ask?

Luker I wanted to see what you'd say.

Martin Oh.

Luker You haven't done yourself any favours, my friend, withholding information.

Martin I want to go.

Luker You see, if I only asked you things I didn't know I wouldn't be able to discern whether you were telling the truth or not, would I?

Martin Can I go now?

Luker You'd be surprised how deceitful people are. People with nothing to hide, good people, they come in here and they lie, lie, lie. Can you believe it? It gets on my nerves. It makes me angry.

Martin I'll be missed.

Luker It makes me irritable. That's the problem with my job, it makes me irritable. It gives me stomach cramps, do you think I should see a doctor?

Martin I wouldn't know.

Luker I thought you were a doctor.

Martin That's right.

Luker Not very good at your job, are you, if you can't even give me some advice. Eh? A free consultation.

Martin I must be going.

Luker Shut up! I'll tell you when you can go. Is that clear? I'll tell you. You will know when you can go because I'll tell you.

Martin [Scared.] Okay.

Luker I always think it's worse for a medical man.

Martin What?

Luker Worse. I always think it's worse. It stands to reason, doesn't it.

Martin I don't follow you.

Luker It stands to reason. When you know. Knowing.

Martin Knowing what?

Luker It must be worse. Knowing what damage is being done. [Pause.]

Knowledge is a painful thing. I often tell myself that. My knowledge, it upsets me; and your knowledge, your knowledge is a painful thing for you.

Martin I don't understand.

Luker A burden. Your knowledge is a burden. I suggest you get rid of it - give it to me. I will take your burden from you. When I've taken it I'll let you go.

Martin I really don't --

Luker Enough! Enough of these pleasantries. Let's start again. Where were you last night?

Martin Having dinner at a friend's apartment.

Luker Tomas Kreuzer.

Martin Yes.

Luker And you discussed some plans you had. You made some arrangements.

Martin I wouldn't go so far as / to say

Luker I would. I would go that far. [Pause.] We're getting somewhere.

Martin When he.

Luker Yes?

Martin Nothing.

Luker Are you ill?

Martin No, I don't / think so

Luker Only you look pale.

Martin Do I?

Luker Yes, you look very pale. I've seen pale men in my time. I've seen men turn pale, and you're the palest for some time. And you're sweating. Look at yourself. [Gestures to the 4th wall.] Look in the mirror. You're sweating like a pig. It's very unattractive.

Martin I do perspire occasionally.

Luker Get up and look in the mirror. [Martin gets up and walks to front of stage, gazes out.] Don't take my word for it. [Luker gets up and stands beside and slightly behind Martin] So pale, so sweaty. You look like death. You must be ill. You're coming down with something. You should see a doctor. But, of course, you can see a doctor. [Pointing at mirror.] There. There's a doctor. Do you have any pain? [As Martin is about to answer Luker gives him a rabbit punch to the kidneys. Martin doubles up and sinks to his knees.] I thought so. I thought you would be in pain.

Martin [Gasping.] I . . . haven't . . . done . . . / any . . . thing.

Luker [Goes back to the table and sits down, observes Martin recovering from the punch.] You're soft. Do you know that? Soft. You intellectuals, you're all the same. Soft. Have a seat. Don't strain yourself. [Martin returns to his seat.] No backbone. So few people have backbone these days.

Martin [Pleading.] Why?

Luker Have you ever seen a backbone? Of course you have, you're a medical

man, you know how it all works. Such a fragile thing. And you're an intellectual, you have imagination; you can imagine things, can't you?

Martin Of course I can.

Luker So tell me about the plans.

Martin We didn't have any plans.

Luker [Tuts.]

Martin We were just talking. Idle talk.

Luker Idle talk.

Martin Yes.

Luker It gets people into trouble, idle talk. What was it they used to say in the war? It costs lives! 'Idle talk costs lives'. It's good that, don't you think?

A good slogan.

Martin I suppose so.

Luker As slogans go.

Martin Yes.

Luker You see. We can agree. We have common ground. We can agree about something. [Pause.] Tell me why you're here.

Martin I don't know.

Luker Go on. Take a guess.

Martin You can't just go around hitting people.

Luker You're quite right. What a place the world would be if everyone went round hitting people. But you're not people, you're here.

Martin [Turns to the mirror. Lighting changes, as he changes from suspect to

therapist's client.] At this point I always wake up. [Gets up and paces around.] I always wake up [Luker turns into therapist.] and I never know what would have happened.

Luker How does that make you feel?

Martin I feel unhappy. I want to know. I feel cheated. Like I've been given a test and nobody will show me the results.

Luker What do you think would happen if you didn't wake up?

Martin I dread to think.

Luker Something nasty.

Martin Yes. Definitely something nasty.

Luker But you don't want to wake up. You feel frustrated when you wake up. You want to know what's going to happen.

Martin Yes! Yes, I do. I'm scared . . . but . . . but . . .

Luker You want to know.

Martin I want to know if I cope or not. [Pause.] Does that seem strange?

Luker What do you think?

Martin I think it's strange. I mean . . . I should be glad. To have woken up . . . escaped . . . I should be pleased.

Luker It's natural to be curious.

Martin You don't think it's morbid?

Luker No. How frequently do you have this dream?

Martin At least twice a week.

Luker [Writing down.] Twice a week.

Martin Sometimes more. Three . . . four times.

Luker Do you have trouble sleeping?

Martin No.

Luker Good. [Pause.] Is there anything on your mind?

Martin What?

Luker Anything you'd like to tell me. Anything troubling you?

Martin No. I don't think so.

Luker Any bad thoughts. Things you can't face?

Martin I don't know.

Luker You can confide in me.

Martin Yes, I'm sure --

Luker It's all confidential. Nothing goes beyond these four walls.

Martin Good.

Luker I'm here to listen.

Martin Yes.

Luker I'm here to help. [Pause.] Sometimes. When something is troubling us, it preys on the mind. It comes out in all kinds of unexpected ways. With you it is in your dreams.

Martin You mean, like a guilty conscience?

Luker I wouldn't put it as crudely as that. It is just something troubling you. It doesn't mean you've done anything wrong. You're just . . . troubled. It usually means there is something in your life you need to confront. Think about it. [Glances at watch.] Oh, unfortunately our time is up.

Same time next week suit you? [Lights down. Lights up. The two are seated in their original positions. Luker and Martin are interrogator and suspect again.]

Luker I hope you slept well. Did you sleep well?

Martin No. I had bad dreams.

Luker What a pity. It must be a bad conscience.

Martin You think so.

Luker More than likely. A bad conscience gives you bad dreams. You've heard, of course, of the untroubled sleep of the blessed.

Martin Why don't we get on with it?

Luker I see your bad night has made you irritable. Are you often irritable in the mornings? I bet your poor wife has a lot to put up with.

Martin It's hard to sleep surrounded by the sound of people weeping.

Luker You get used to it.

Martin The sound gets inside your head, into your dreams, it haunts you.

Luker In time you learn to ignore it.

Martin There is a city of weeping down there!

Luker Don't be melodramatic. In any case there's nothing I can do about it. If people choose to weep they weep. They weep whether they have anything to weep about or not.

Martin It never stops.

Luker Some of them can't help themselves. They've got into the habit of it and can't stop. Perhaps you should try another room.

Martin There's a nasty stain on the floor.

Luker You'd be amazed what some people do. What sort of stain?

Martin It looks worrying. A worrying stain.

Luker Blood? Piss? Shit?

Martin It's a frightening stain. It's a stain that says something dreadful happened here.

Luker I'm afraid I can't place it. You haven't given me a lot to go on. I'll look into it. I'll look into your stain.

Martin You enjoy this, don't you.

Luker It's just a job.

Martin You love it!

Luker Don't flatter yourself! It's just a job. Do you think I want to be cooped up here with you and the likes of you! You must have a very inflated opinion of your company if you think I enjoy this. I'd rather be out. Taking the air. Don't you think the air has got rather stale in here? [Pause, Martin doesn't respond.] But we can't go out. We can't go around enjoying ourselves when there's work to be done. You, of course, wouldn't appreciate that, you've probably never had to do an ordinary days work in your life.

Martin I work very hard!

Luker You people, with your soft jobs and your soft lives. Can't put up with a bit of inconvenience, can't stand any hardship, bothered by a bit of weeping.

Martin Souls in torment!

Luker Don't go glorifying it with high-falutin' language. Just a bit of weeping. Plain and simple. Why didn't you shout at them to shut up. Use a bit of initiative. Do something practical.

Martin How much longer will I have to stay here?

Luker That depends.

Martin I can't get any sleep. They keep me awake all night.

Luker There's a lot to do, you see, hard to estimate. You know how these things can get bogged down; one minute it's an open and shut case, the next minute it all gets horribly complicated. Things can be very deceptive. They look simple, straightforward, but they're not.

Martin I only popped out for some cigarettes.

Luker I think we've established that.

Martin Why?

Luker I presume you'd run out.

Martin No. Why me?

Luker They all ask that. Sooner or later. Why me, they say. You'll be weeping next. I can see the signs.

Martin I haven't done anything!

Luker No?

Martin No!

Luker Forty odd and you haven't done anything. Leaving it a bit late, aren't you?

Martin You know what I mean!

Luker I wish I did. Really. I really truly do wish I knew what you mean. It would all be over then. We could all go home. Things would be so much easier if you just told me what I want to know. Go on, it's easy.
[Lights change, Luker becomes the therapist, Martin becomes client.]
Why don't you tell me?

Martin Well . . .

Luker Yes.

Martin Well . . .

Luker Go on.

Martin Well . . . I've started hearing these noises.

Luker Noises?

Martin Yes. In my head.

Luker In your head.

Martin Yes. It gets very distracting. I'll be in the middle of doing something and suddenly I'll hear these noises. It's like tuning in a radio, suddenly it's there.

Luker And what are these noises like?

Martin Weeping.

Luker Weeping?

Martin Yes, weeping, people crying. I can't ignore it. It's very distracting. When it happens I can't think properly. I forget what I'm doing. In the middle of conversations I can't understand what people are saying. It's

wearing me down.

Luker It must be very upsetting.

Martin It is, it is!

Luker And these voices; do they say anything?

Martin No.

Luker Just the weeping.

Martin Yes.

Luker I see.

Martin And it keeps me awake at night.

Luker You hear it at night.

Martin Yes. I never know when it's going to happen. It makes me nervous.

Luker And there's no discernible pattern?

Martin No.

Luker It seems to be completely random.

Martin Yes. It can happen at any time.

Luker Why do you think you hear it?

Martin I don't know.

Luker Any ideas at all.

Martin Sometimes . . . [Lighting changes. Martin becomes increasingly distraught and turns into Suspect as Luker turns into Interrogator.]
Sometimes I wonder if they want something from me. But I don't know what it is.

Luker You can tell me any time. You will tell me. At some point. Eventually.

You could tell me now. Or you could leave it until later. It all depends on how heroic you're feeling.

Martin You have no right to detain me.

Luker How heroic are you feeling?

Martin I don't believe in heroism.

Luker Don't you?

Martin No. Heroism is for films, not real life.

Luker Well then. You can tell me now.

Martin I haven't got anything to tell you. I don't know anything, therefore I can't tell you anything.

Luker [Pauses, shocked.] I hope you're wrong. I sincerely hope you're wrong. [Stands up and walks around.] Because if you're right. If you really haven't got anything to tell me then you won't be able to tell me anything, and if you don't tell me anything I won't be able to stop. I'll have to carry on. [Turns to Martin] You can see what a difficult position this puts us in. I could waste a lot of time, and effort. You, on the other hand, would be considerably inconvenienced for nothing.

Martin You can let me go.

Luker But you don't see my position. The only way I'll know if you don't know anything is if I try everything and you still don't tell me anything. Do you see? I will have to go to the point beyond which it is pointless to go.

Martin I don't know anything! You must believe me.

Luker I'll believe you all right. In the end. But the problem with my job is, you

don't trust people. You learn to mis-trust people.

Martin You can believe me.

Luker I can can I!

Martin Yes.

Luker I'm glad to hear it.

Martin Then you believe me!

Luker When you tell me something interesting then I'll believe you.

Martin But I don't know anything!

Luker You are stubborn. Aren't you? You're very stubborn. I don't like the stubborn ones. Kreuzer wasn't stubborn. [Martin looks at Luker, startled.] He told us everything we wanted to know. He was most accommodating. I persuaded him it was for the best.

Martin What did he say?

Luker Everything. He told me everything. I can be very persuasive, you see. What do you think he said?

Martin I don't know. Was it about me?

Luker If I told you what he said I'd be stupid, wouldn't I? Do you think I'm stupid?

Martin No.

Luker I hate it when people imply I'm stupid. It makes me very angry.

Martin I didn't mean to imply anything.

Luker What, do you think, is going on while you're here?

Martin What?

Luker It's quite a simple question. What do you think is going on out there, in the world?

Martin I don't know.

Luker You don't know.

Martin That's right. I don't know, I can't know, I'm here.

Luker Exactly!

Martin [Puzzled.] What?

Luker You're quick. I'll give you that, you're quick all right; and slippery too, I shouldn't wonder.

Martin What are you talking about?

Luker I'm talking about the fact that you don't know what is going on while you're here. Anything could be happening. Anything at all. [Pause.] Don't you find that frightening?

Martin I hadn't thought about it.

Luker You should! You should think about it. [Pause.] Your family, for instance. What do you think is happening to your family?

Martin Nothing.

Luker Nothing.

Martin Yes.

Luker You seem very sure. I thought you just told me you don't know what's going on 'out there'. Anything could be happening. Anything. [Pause.] Would you describe yourself as a family man?

Martin What kind of a question is that?

Luker It's a simple question. Fond of them, are you?

Martin Yes.

Luker Wife and kids.

Martin Yes.

Luker A family man.

Martin Yes.

Luker They're a good looking lot. Your wife and kids. Your daughter's quite a looker already. And your wife. I wouldn't mind giving her one myself.

Martin Leave them alone.

Luker You should see some people's wives. Uugh. I don't know how they put up with them. But yours, with yours it would be a pleasure.

Martin You . . . You . . . --

Luker Am I making you angry. Are you going to threaten me? Make me afraid.

Martin Look, this / is crazy

Luker Go on, do your worst. [Silence.] I do. [Pause.] How old is your daughter? Thirteen. Fourteen. Quite a looker. Bet she has the boys after her already, doesn't she.

Martin She's only twelve.

Luker Really! I could have sworn she was older. Well developed isn't she.

Martin I don't want to talk about my family.

Luker You don't want to talk about anything, do you, bit of a spoil sport. We're not getting anywhere. [Pause.] You needn't think I admire you,

because I don't. I don't admire stubborn people. They just make me tired. [The phone rings.] Excuse me. [Picks up phone and speaks into it.] Yes . . . Yes . . . Really . . . That's unfortunate . . . Yes . . . Most regrettable . . . How did it . . . Yes . . . Yes . . . I see . . . It's a shame but there it is . . . These things happen . . . Yes . . . I understand . . . Just be more careful next time. [Puts phone down.] Such a shame. So young and pretty, and now . . .

Martin What!

Luker Oh nothing. Where was I?

Martin What was that all about?

Luker What?

Martin That phone call, what was it about?

Luker Nothing for you to worry about, don't trouble yourself.

Martin Then it wasn't about me, my family, / it wasn't

Luker [Laughs.] Don't be so foolish! What an imagination. You have quite an imagination. And if I may say so quite an ego, you think you're the only person I have to worry about. The centre of the universe. You think you're the centre of the universe, and you are, to yourself, but you aren't the centre of the universe to anyone else, you can't be because they're the centre of their universe.

Martin What?

Luker You follow me? That's the way it goes. Do you know what's at the centre of the universe?

Martin No.

Luker Pain. [Pause. Martin stares at Luker] Pain is at the centre of the universe. You only have to watch a nature programme to know it's pain that makes the world go round. People say money makes the world go round but it isn't true, / it's pain.

Martin You're mad.

Luker I should know.

Martin Quite mad.

Luker Are you a psychiatrist?

Martin No.

Luker Then you wouldn't know, would you. You see, there is something unique about pain.

Martin What?

Luker It focuses the mind, pain, the way nothing else does. Most people drift through life, dreaming away, hardly concentrating on anything at all, but pain puts you right there, right there, in the moment, at the centre of the universe, at the centre of the universe of pain.

[Lighting change, general light low with spots on Luker and Martin.

Luker stands facing the audience. Martin sits rigidly facing the audience and stares straight forward as if cataleptic, begins to drool.] Good afternoon ladies and gentlemen, respected colleagues. This afternoon the subject is a married man in his early forties with two children. Until recently he was a successful General Practitioner. The subject, who

otherwise seemed to lead an untroubled life, first presented suffering from recurring nightmares. These dreams always took the same form. He was being interrogated by a man he didn't know, he felt intimidated, threatened. Progressively the dreams got worse. A course of therapy was undertaken but proved unsuccessful. In the meantime these troublesome dreams became more intense. Sleeping became a problem. The subject began to hear voices. General debility followed; finally leading to hospitalisation. With the subject's consent we will undertake a course of hypnotherapy with the aim of uncovering any forgotten or repressed events which might prove to be the root cause of the patient's condition.

Martin [The actor continuous to drool. Close up of Martin's face, recorded on video, projected onto Martin's chest, he is gabbling, his face animated, eyes wild:] It was just a small thing. A small thing. It intruded . . . itself . . . into . . . my life before I even knew it was there. [Like a stuck record.] There - There - There - There - There.

Luker At times the patient rambles. At other times he is quite coherent.

Martin [Voice on the video projection.] Let me out! I have to go home. They're expecting me! I only went out for cigarettes. Why are you keeping me here, I haven't done anything wrong.

Luker The patient suffers from a severe guilt complex.

Martin [On the video projection.] First I killed my wife. Then I killed the children and ate them. They were all out to get me. I had to stop them.

Luker [As Luker speaks Martin's face, on the video projection, is still speaking animatedly but no sound.] He frequently feels compelled to confess to all manner of ghastly crimes. I will now commence the hypnotherapy and would be grateful for your indulgence while I initiate the procedure. [Video projection fades. Luker walks over to Martin and leans over him to hypnotise him.] Now, Martin, concentrate on my voice, only my voice. Breathe deeply, steadily, peacefully. Your eyes are becoming heavy, so heavy, with every breath, so heavy. Now. Martin. I would like you to tell me where you are. [Luker moves to Martin's side. Pause.]

Martin [Hypnotised voice.] I am in my village. It is very quiet. I go outside. I wonder why it is so quiet. No children playing, empty streets.

Luker What can you see, Martin?

Martin I see a tree. A big tree. It is at the foot of my garden. It is a good tree. It gives shade in the summer, we sit under it, in summer, in the autumn it gives us chestnuts. And now it blossoms in winter; it blossoms in winter; it blossoms in winter; it blossoms in winter.

Luker How does it blossom in winter, Martin?

Martin It blossoms with people. People from the branches, people everywhere; it blossoms people. Grey people, grey blossom.

Luker Can you see anything else, Martin?

Martin Mud. Sticky mud everywhere. I go out. I have to go out. I walk down the street and all the houses are open to the sky. And it is very quiet. Very quiet.

Luker Do you know where you are?

Martin [Becoming increasingly distressed.] I'm in my village. I'm the only one in my village. I've just come back, back from town. I had to go to town, but now I'm back. In the houses the bodies are charred black, in the trees they hang like blossom. And now I can hear something coming. I can hear hooves. I can hear thunder!

Luker Listen to me, Martin. Don't listen to the hooves, don't listen to the thunder. I'm going to count backwards and as I count you will begin to wake and when you hear me snap my fingers you will be fully awake. Three. Two. One. [Snaps fingers and cue sound of recorded weeping, slightly distorted. Lights change back. Luker is the interrogator again, Martin the suspect..]

They tell me you've been dreaming.

Martin I dream all the time.

Luker What do you dream?

Martin Do I have to tell you everything? Even what I dream!

Luker I want to know. I have a passion for knowledge. Like most human beings I am inquisitive. But I am inquisitive for a living.

Martin I could make it up.

Luker What?

Martin My dream. I could make it up. You can't verify a dream. If I say it's my dream you can't do anything about it.

Luker Tell me anyway.

Martin No.

Luker Tell me something. Make it up. Go on, make it up.

Martin [Breaking down.] I can't make it up! I can't make anything up.

Luker Then tell me the truth. Go on. It won't hurt. I promise.

Martin and Luker stare at one another. Silence. Fade to black. End.