

Imaginary Advice, Episode 50

FOUR OR FIVE WEDDINGS AND ONE OR TWO FUNERALS

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Hello. My name is Ross Sutherland. Welcome back to Imaginary Advice. It's episode 50! [laughs] Ah, can you believe it?

So, the story for this episode is a collaborative effort written with the author John Osborne. John co-wrote the sitcom *After Hours*, he's written several plays for Radio 4. He's also a poet. His latest poetry collection is published by Go Faster Stripe. I heartily recommend it. The book is called *No-One Cares About Your New Thing*.

About two months ago John and I came up with the idea for this episode. The idea was basically postal chess but with a story.

[intriguing music]

So, together we came up with our setting: our chess board. We chose our characters: our chess pieces. Then—and this is the important part—we chose opposing outcomes for our story. So, both John and I would have to steer the narrative in a different direction. There would be a black side—an author trying to lead the story towards death—and a white side—an author trying to lead the story towards love. Both sides would take turns to write, up to a 500-word capacity. Then, just as if a chess clock had been punched [chess clock punch] control would pass to the other player.

Now, the postal chess thing was just a useful metaphor to begin with but over time the story definitely began to feel more game-like. There were offensive and defensive plays; both sides found ways to hide their setups

from the other; there's a bit in the middle when John and I just both tried to ruthlessly take each other's pieces off the board...

I really like the final piece and uh, and the story that we ended up telling because I don't think it's a story that either side anticipated we would tell but I also-I really love the meta-game of it all, this whole other conflict going on between the lines. Uh, I hope you like it too!

So, what was our setting? What was our chessboard? Well, in the end we chose to set our story in 1994 behind the scenes on the filmset of the British romcom *Four Weddings and a Funeral*. For our protagonist, we chose the actor Hugh Grant. I took the black side, so I am Team Funeral. I'm trying to lead the story towards death. John took the white side, so he is Team Wedding. He's trying to lead the story towards love. So, with that in mind we chose the working title *Four or Five Weddings and One or Two Funerals*.

[music fades]

[IMAGINARY ADVICE]

[rain]

He opens the door. It's her!

"Hello," she says. And then a pause.

"Hi! You're-you're soaking. Come in."

"No, I'm fine," she says, her hair flat against her scalp. "Comes a point when you're so wet that you can't get any wetter."

"OK," he says, "I'll come out."

And she protests, but he steps into the rain, white shirt turning pink.

[flatly:] "I... shouldn't have come to the church this morning. I'm sorry—"

She's leaving before the words have even left her mouth, but he follows her. He begs her to wait.

[romantic string music begins over the rain]

"No! I'm the bastard here," he says. "And it sorted out one thing. Marriage and me were very clearly not meant for one another.

It sorted out another big thing, too. There I was, standing in the church, and [big breath] for the first time in my whole life I realised I totally and utterly loved one person. And it wasn't the person next to me in the veil. It's the person standing opposite me now in the rain."

[flatly:] "Is it still raining?" she says, her eyes hollow. "I hadn't noticed."

[ringing in our ear]

"I..." says Hugh. "I...I...I..."

[sound of the rushing void]

[cuts to silence]

The rain machine stops.

Hugh looks over to the little wigwam across the road. Richard Curtis sticks his head through the flap.

[animatedly:] "Are you OK? For the record, that was lovely. Particularly you, Andie. Very believable."

"I-I-I'm sorry," says Hugh. "Something just...came over me there. I just went totally blank."

"It's the first day of filming," says Richard. "Don't die on us yet, Hugh! Haha."

“Haha. No,” says Hugh.

Mick sticks his head through the flap. “You’re not allowed to die until I say, ‘that’s a wrap!’” says Mick.

“Got it,” says Hugh.

He looks down: Andie McDowell’s hand is on his chest.

“Woah,” she says.

“What?” says Hugh.

“You nearly collapsed on me there,” says Andie.

“I did?” he says.

“Yes,” she says.

“How funny,” says Hugh.

[ringing in our ear]

And the darkness swallows him whole.

[the sound of the void, building]

Now, there is nothing but emptiness. Cold and vast.
And roaring, the sound of rain through the trees.
And he is falling.

[cuts to silence]

How much time has passed, Hugh has no idea. But now he is lying on the sofa in his trailer, his feet propped up on the minifridge.

[chess clock]

JOHN:

“Are you sure you’re OK with me being here?”

“Of course. Sorry. Carry on.”

The woman nods and removes the lid of her black felt tip.

“What was your name again?” asks Hugh.

“Nicole. You were expecting me, weren't you? My dad said it was fine for me to...”

“Oh, of course. You’re Nicole, from the art school. We’ve met before, haven’t we?”

[piano music]

Nicole nods. They both smile.

“It’s so exciting being allowed to draw here,” Nicole says, starting with Hugh’s eyes in her sketch book.

Hugh adjusts his position on the settee, conscious that he is being drawn now. He tries to hold his chin up. He smiles without looking like he’s smiling. He clutches his chest and takes a sharp intake of breath.

“Are you OK?”

“I hope so. I had a slight...wobble earlier. I guess it’s inevitable. The first day of anything is always a bit nerve-wracking.”

“Well, I don't think you don’t have anything to worry about. It’s a brilliant script,” says Nicole. She looks guilty. “Should I not have said that? Am I not supposed to have read the script?”

“Ah, probably not. But when your dad’s the director you can get away with anything!”

Nicole smiles. Hugh relaxes. Outside the trailer he hears the rhythms of industry.

A lorry reverses. Two people sing a Deacon Blue song. He tries to think what it’s called. A woman shouts, “Where are the tomatoes?” She then shouts “Ah, of course! Thanks.” Someone must have told her where the tomatoes are.

Being the lead actor on the first day of filming is like gate-crashing a wedding; wearing a tuxedo, shaking hands, and accepting congratulations from people you’ve never met. Before you know it, you’re dancing with the bride. Hugh closes his eyes and runs through his lines. When he was young, he loved watching romantic comedies. When he first met the producers of *Four Weddings and a Funeral* at a café in West London they told him they had big hopes.

“You have to check out this script,” they said. “You’re going to be a star.”

“Me?” he said. He genuinely didn’t think they could be serious.

[piano music develops]

“Beautiful nose,” Nicole says to herself, sketching.

“Excuse me?” says Hugh.

“Oh, sorry. Nothing,” says Nicole.

[music ends]

[chess clock]

ROSS:

A girl in a green visor thrusts her head through the open window.

“We’re ready,” she says. Then, eyeing Nicole: “Does Mick know you’re in here?”

Before Nicole can answer, the head swivels back to Hugh, still lying prone on the sofa: “I thought you were feeling ill.”

“Just a teeny bit,” says Hugh. The head disappears.

[music starts – steps on a gravel path]

It’s dark outside now. The crew have relocated to the lobby of the hotel down the road. It’s scene 4: his character’s first proper conversation with “Carrie” aka Andie McDowell.

“Funny,” thinks Hugh, “how all actors have to learn to jump through time like this. You finally tell a girl you’re in love with her, then two hours later, you’re meeting her for the first time.”

Hugh remembers Ken Russell, hunched over a gas stove in a limestone cave in the Peak District.

“Film is all about sculpting in time,” said Ken, waving his hands mystically. “It’s the art of What-Leads-To-What. But before you can master the Art of Time, you have to destroy it, yes? You have to pull everything apart! You have to get *outside* of time before you can control it!”

Whatever Ken was making on that stove, it really stunk. Ken rested his cane on Hugh’s shoulder, in what Hugh assumed was meant to be a fatherly gesture.

“Hughey,” he said, “It’s OK to go a little mad.”

Hugh remembers how the light from the stove made Ken’s nose-hair glow.

God, that was six years ago already, back on the set of *Lair of the White Worm*. That was the year the blackouts first began.

First, the moments were barely noticeable: just tiny flashes of darkness, little ripples in his mind late at night. It felt like a kind of involuntary blinking, like when a gnat flies into your eye. But the intervals had slowly grown longer and deeper. The gnat had become something far harder to dislodge.

Hugh had asked to be referred to a neurologist, but his doctor just wittered on about vitamin C supplements. When the blackouts eased last year, [sigh] he let himself believe it was over.

Then, staring into Andie McDowell's eyes this morning, it had returned with a vengeance.

Hugh stands outside the hotel, waiting for his entrance cue. After a few minutes, a man with a beard appears: "Uh, Hugh, we need another 20 to fix the lights. Andie's just gone back to her room."

"I'll pop up," says Hugh, grabbing his script. It'll be good to rehearse the scene anyway, he thinks.

Hugh weaves through the crew inside, heading up the narrow Georgian staircase to the second floor of the hotel. A sign says QUIET: ACTORS MIGHT BE SLEEPING.

Andie's door is half-open. The light is on. Hugh looks inside.

"Andie," he says. "I, uh..." Hugh pauses.

Andie is standing in the middle of the room, face completely empty, her expression frozen.

[ears ringing]

Though she faces the door, her eyes don't focus on Hugh. Instead, she stares blankly beyond, rigid as a shop mannequin.

[ringing continues – sound of the void returning]

[unnerved:] “H-hello?” says Hugh. “Um.”

[the void rises]

[fully freaked out:] “Um?”

[chess clock]

JOHN:

“Do you ever get the feeling you're living the same day over and over again?” Andie asks, without even looking to see who has arrived in her room.

[cheerful bassoon music]

“No, not really,” says Hugh. “Most of my days are different. That's one of the good things about being an actor. Plus, I do lots of other things. I like cricket. I collect P.G. Wodehouse novels. I go on long walks. All sorts.”

“It's always the same. Every time I start a new job, I fall in love on day one and it ruins the whole experience for me.”

“Oh, right. OK. Who have you fallen in love with?”

“Marti Pellow.”

“The guy from Wet Wet Wet?”

“Yeah. My assistant sent me the cassette of this new song, Love Is All Around. They might be using it as a song on the soundtrack. As soon as I heard the chords I just fell in love with the song. Do you think someone on

the production team will be able to fix it for me to meet Marti Pellow one day?"

Hugh smiles. He looks around the room. A suitcase has been thrown open, clothes, books, toiletries, all across the floor in a heap.

"Are you OK?" Andie asks. "I heard you had a wobbly moment earlier."

"Oh, for God's sake. I wish everyone would stop spreading rumours about my impending death. I should put a notice up in the catering van. "HUGH GRANT IS NOT GOING TO DIE DURING THE MAKING OF FOUR WEDDINGS AND A FUNERAL."

Although it would be ironic, wouldn't it? It'd be good publicity if you, me or Richard Curtis died."

"Or if one of us fell in love and got married," says Andie. She starts to sing Love is All Around, first of all softly, then starting to rock out with an air guitar.

Hugh closes the door behind him and goes outside, shaking his head in utter confusion.

In the hotel corridor he hears a familiar voice call his name:

"Hugh!"

[chess clock]

ROSS:

It's Nicole again. She holds out the sketch she drew in the trailer.

"For you. Another headshot to add to the collection..."

Hugh pockets the drawing without looking. He's already drifting back towards Andie's door.

“What’s wrong?” says Nicole.

Hugh peeks back into Andie’s room once more.

[ears ringing]

Once again, she is standing completely frozen in the middle of the room. She has returned to some kind of deep trance, as lifeless as a ventriloquist’s dummy.

—A hand on Hugh’s back. [ringing cuts to silence]

“Ack!”

“What can you see?” says Nicole.

“Nothing,” says Hugh, backing away from the door.

“I reckon you could do with a drink,” says Nicole. How about a late one at The Ship? After you wrap for the day.”

Hugh looks nervously down the corridor.

“OK,” he says, “but...just the two of us, yeah?”

“OK”, says Nicole.

[pub noise]

Three hours later, Hugh is hiding in the furthest booth of The Ship. The dingy pub reeks of batter. Locals yell over the pub-rock band in the corner.

Hugh signals to Nicole as she enters. Nicole looks at the pile of shredded beer mats in front of him.

“How was rest of filming?” she says.

“I just walked through a door twenty times,” says Hugh. “So not much to report, really. Then Andie came down and we did a few lines, but...” Hugh’s eyes flit to the corners of the room. “You don’t think there’s anything strange about her, do you?”

Nicole shrugs. Hugh starts on his third beermat.

“It’s like...whenever she speaks, her voice just seems to come from...so far away. Don’t you think? And whenever she thinks she’s alone she just-she just...stops. She just stands there like a toy that’s wound down—don’t laugh!”

“Sorry,” says Nicole.

“I mean, if it was just in the scenes, I’d say, ‘hey ho, she’s just not a great actor.’ But it’s-it’s *all the time*. Up in her room earlier, she was talking about how much she loved that fucking Wet Wet Wet song that your dad keeps playing on set. She just stood there...talking about being in love with Marti Pellow...and yet her eyes were just...empty. Utterly fucking empty. They were like dead fish.”

“So, you think she’s a robot.”

Hugh, emphasising every word: “She Said She Was In Love With Marti Pellow! Does that sound like something a normal person would say?”

Hugh drains his bottle. “No, obviously I don’t think she’s a robot. But she gives me the fucking willies. Don’t you feel the same? And don’t say this is all because of my fainting spell this morning.”

“What do you want me to say?” says Nicole. “Andie’s a great actor. She’s very believable.”

Hugh stares at her.

“I think Andie McDowell is just as good as you,” she says.

“Oh, fuck off,” says Hugh, standing.

“Jesus,” says Nicole. “You’re properly crazy!”

“It’s not...I’m not trying to...just forget it, OK?” Hugh pulls on his parka.

Nicole applauds him as he weaves towards the exit. “Oh, magnificent!” she says, [clapping] “What a performance!”

Hugh stops. He pushes his way back over to her. “Oh,” he says, eyes afire. “Also: can you stop following me around set, like a lost fucking puppy? It’s embarrassing. Thank you, goodbye.”

[pub noise fades]

[airy synth music]

Midnight.

Hugh is back in his flat now. The lights are off. He rests in the doorframe, barely more than a silhouette.

Elizabeth Hurley’s note is still on the coffee table: “Good luck,” it says.

Hugh tries to remember how long she’d been in America. It must be eight months now. He feels stupid keeping the note, particularly seeing as it was in regards to a totally different film project, but what the hell. Good luck is good luck. She’ll be back soon enough, thinks Hugh, and then it will seem like a sweet gesture. To see the card that she left still there. Either that or it’ll look like he hasn’t tidied for a year.

Turning, he notices a black mass by the front door. A package. He picks it up. The envelope is blank: hand delivered.

Hugh slides out a stack of papers: *Four Weddings and a Fune*—it’s just another fucking copy of the script.

Hugh is just about to sling it into the pedal-bin when he notices the date on the cover page: 1964. He opens the script a second time.

Hang on: this isn't the same story.

[music stops]

Not at all.

[chess clock]

JOHN:

He looks at it again. The title's different: *Four Funerals and a Wedding*.

[mysterious music]

The next morning, Hugh throws the manuscript at Rowan Atkinson mid-breakfast. [pages rustling]

"What's this?" says Rowan. "1964?" He flicks through the pages. "It says here 'Casting suggestions: Charles to be played by Paul McCartney or Kenneth Williams...'"

"This must have been the original idea," says Hugh, taking the script back. "It's exactly the same: the same characters, the same descriptions, a lot of the same dialogue. But it's all about death."

Hugh reads a particularly graphic scene and pulls a face: "Eurgh. Wow. I don't like that."

He repeats the title to himself. "*Four Funerals and a Wedding*." He laughs. He shakes his head.

"I wonder who wrote it?" asks Rowan, snatching the script back.

“There’s no name on it. Maybe it was Richard Curtis’ dad? Maybe he died while writing it! Who knows. They’ve just rewritten it with a load of weddings, without all the death bits,” says Rowan, skim reading.

“Not without *all* the death bits!” laughs Hugh. “They’ve kept one in. Poor old Simon Callow.” He does an impression of clutching his chest and falling to the ground. “We’re filming that scene on Sunday. I love a good death scene.”

“I prefer the romance scenes,” says Rowan.

“I wish Andie McDowell would die of a fucking heart attack,” says Hugh, then realises he’s gone too far. “On screen, I mean. Every actor should have a horrific death scene at least once in their career. It’s character building. Helps get a grip on mortality. It’s good for your actor’s video reel.”

“What scene are you filming today?” asks Rowan.

“I’m not entirely sure,” Hugh says. “I’m pretty sure I’m kissing someone though.”

He smiles, in that way that Hugh Grant smiles.

[chess clock]

ROSS:

“Hughey,” says Rowan. “You play a good bashful softie, but everyone knows you’re a prize twat.”

“What?” says Hugh.

“I don’t care,” says Rowan. “But whatever you said to Mick’s daughter... She’s not happy with you. I overheard her this morning calling you Mr. Fabulous.”

“Mr. Fabulous sounds nice.”

“It’s obviously not, Hugh. You can imagine how she said it.”

Rowan holds up the yellowing script, “Can I keep this?”

“No!” says Hugh, grabbing the corner. Rowan’s grip tightens.

“Let me show it to Kristin Scott Thomas,” says Rowan.

The cover page begins to tear. Rowan locks eyes with Hugh. He forces a smile. “Come on, Hughey.”

Hugh rips the script free. [pages aflutter]

[ears ringing]

For one brief second, Rowan looks as if he might tear Hugh’s neck open with his teeth.

“Well,” says Rowan, “I’ve got dibs next.”

Hugh returns to his trailer. [door shutting] Slipped under his door, a square of paper. The note says, “BRITISH LIBRARY- MIDNIGHT- WE NEED TO TALK.”

Hugh turns the note over. The other side is a signed photo of Simon Callow. He’s doing finger-guns at the camera.

[mysterious music]

By the time Hugh arrives, the library is barely more than a shadow. Two figures wait in the doorway. As Hugh approaches, one of the men blinds him with a torch. Hugh pulls down the hood of his parka. “It’s me,” says Hugh. “Hugh Grant.”

The torch swivels around. One of the men is wearing a staff lanyard and horn-rimmed spectacles. The other man is Simon Callow.

“You used one of your own photos?” says Hugh.

Simon shrugs, “I’m not hiding anymore, love. I simply don’t have the time.”

[music continues]

The man with the lanyard leads the two actors into a lift. He presses the button marked ‘B5.’

“Freddie is doing us a tremendous favour,” says Simon, nodding to the librarian. “I promised him we would be discreet.”

The lift opens onto the deepest level of the library. Leaving Freddie at the lift, Simon takes the torch, leading Hugh through the narrow shelves. Each row is stacked floor-to-ceiling with air-sealed box-files.

“Did you read it?” hisses Simon. “The script.”

“No,” whispers Hugh, “You might have heard, I’m filming a motion picture right now. I’m quite busy.” Simon sighs.

“Anyway, so what?” says Hugh. “So, the story has been knocking around a while, just like every script.”

Simon scans the shelves, sliding out a box-file. He carefully breaks the seal.

“Well, quite,” he whispers, as if the box itself was sleeping. “It’s just that *this* story has been knocking around for quite a long time indeed.”

Simon hands Hugh the box. Inside, an illuminated manuscript, covered in dense script.

“11th century,” whispers Simon. “Found at Malmesbury Abbey. It’s a story originally attributed to Ælfric of Eynsham.

One night, so the story goes, the moon touches the ground, grows legs, and walks off into the forest. The next night, from the same forest, a pale woman emerges with a demand. There must be four weddings before the first day of harvest, but at each wedding, there must be a human sacrifice. The woman warns the village: if this does not come to pass, then—[music cuts out]

Hugh! Wipe that ridiculous look off your face.”

“No, no, no. It’s-it’s very good,” says Hugh. [chuckling] “You had me going for a second.”

[clang!] Simon knocks Hugh’s head against the shelf.

“Ow!” says Hugh.

“Just look!” says Simon, his face red, “Ælfric lays it all out: [music starts playing again]

At the first wedding, one guest ends up drowned in a lake.

At the second wedding, a man creeps into the bridal suite, mid-coitus, and slits the groom’s throat. Now, of course, in our script, no one gets their throat cut. But there is a whole bit about walking in on people fucking, isn’t there? You-you-you can’t deny the similarities here!

For the third wedding, a guest is poisoned and dies whilst dancing—that’s me!” hisses Simon. He grabs Hugh’s lapel. “Look at the description of the dead man: ‘a loud, cow-shaped man with a raincloud for hair.’ Remind you of anyone?

Then-then-then! The final wedding is supposed to be between a ‘duck-faced woman’ and a man called Charles—same name as your character

Hugh, if you remember. But Charles gets scared, runs away into the forest, and that's where he gets eaten by the pale woman. He gets *eaten*, Hugh.

However, [sighs] through his death, the village's debt is paid, and the pale woman disappears. So, that's the story."

"Yes," says Hugh, closing the box-file. "But, Simon, it's still just a story."

Simon pulls out a second box. "Perhaps."

Inside the new file, an incredible gold leaf illustration of a woman in flowing robes, the colour of moonlight. The resemblance to Hollywood actor Andie McDowell is astonishing.

"It's my death scene tomorrow, darling," says Simon.

"I suppose we'll find out then, won't we?"

[music ends – siren driving past]

[chess clock]

JOHN:

Hugh arrives on set the next morning. He's got an odd feeling inside, like when you have to sit an exam you haven't revised for, or when someone you're close to tells you they're convinced they're going to be a human sacrifice.

"Are you OK?" asks Nicole.

Hugh nods. "How are you?" he asks. "Are you coping OK? Film sets can be very stressful, unpleasant places, can't they? I'm sorry if I haven't been particularly nice to you while we've been here."

Nicole smiles. "It's fine. I'm having a nice time. But yeah, it is a bit much, isn't it? Actors aren't the nicest people to be around. I don't think I'm going

to be pursuing a career in film. But I've done some good paintings, and pictures, and taken some good photos."

Hugh sees the Polaroid camera round her neck. "Ah," he says. "Looks like a good bit of kit."

She takes it out and shows him. [piano music begins] "May I?" she asks.

"Be my guest," says Hugh, and poses for a picture, sticking his tongue out and raising the index and little fingers of each hand. As she takes the picture Simon Callow arrives in the production office. Hugh puts his hands in his pockets. Nicole discreetly waits for the photo to develop. A runner fetches Simon a coffee.

"Morning, Simon!" Hugh calls out.

Simon, script in hand, already deep in conversation with Richard Curtis, pretends not to see him.

"He's been in a funny mood the last couple of days," Nicole whispers, as Hugh opens his morning bottle of Dr Pepper, an addiction he's had since secondary school.

"He's an interesting old chap," Hugh whispers. "I had quite an experience with him last night." Nicole raises her eyebrows, anticipating a juicy showbiz anecdote, but Hugh shakes his head. "I wouldn't know where to begin," he laughs, but Simon looks over. He knows he's being talked about.

"It's the death scene today, isn't it?" Nicole asks.

Hugh looks at her, astonished that she knows so much, but then remembers she's talking about filming.

"Oh, yes," he says. "That's right."

"I love a good death scene," Nicole says and looks at the photograph of Hugh. It's beautiful.

Hugh takes another sip of his Dr Pepper. It's delicious.

[music ends on an echo]

[chess clock]

ROSS:

For the next three hours, Hugh watches Simon Callow die, over and over again.

[choir music]

The shot isn't particularly complicated: Callow just has to grab his chest, spin around. Then, as the camera cranes up, Callow must drop lifeless to the carpet. The shot ends with Hugh flying in from the next room, rushing to the aid of his friend.

Neither director nor writer are nearby. Mick and Richard are both watching on monitors in a different part of the hotel.

The radio fizzles to life: "We need to go again." It's Mick. "Simon's kilt keeps flying up when he spins around." The cameraman resets for take 22.

Simon stares blankly up at the skylight above him. His face is porcelain white. He looks genuinely ill, thinks Hugh. But then again, he is wearing a lot of makeup.

"Having fun?" says Hugh. Simon doesn't turn.

"Personally, I think you're doing great," says Hugh. "In the bag, take one. I don't know what the problem is."

Simon begins to stagger backwards. Hugh catches him. "Easy," laughs Hugh, "You're not pissed, are you?"

Simon's pupils are grey hard dots. He tries to speak but no words come out.

“Positions,” says the radio. The crew clear the room, leaving Simon alone at the centre. The radio cracks: “Action!”

Simon clutches his heart. The camera cranes. His body crashes to the carpet. Hugh runs in from next door, falling down at his side.

“Oh, Jesus!” improvises Hugh. “Oh...Bloody hell, no!”

Simon reaches out and grabs Hugh’s lapel, pulling Hugh’s head down next to his own.

“True love,” he whispers. His hand trembling.

It is far too quiet for the boom to hear: this is a message just for Hugh. His voice sounds strange, Hugh thinks, like crumbling paracetamol.

“True. Love.” he says again, face freezing in a startled rictus.

“Cut,” says the radio. “Nice work, guys.”

Hugh stands up, takes two paces towards the edge of the room, then—

[booming sound of the void]

—falls into the darkness.

Hugh wakes up, once again lying on the sofa of his trailer. He looks to the chair opposite, half-expecting to see Nicole. Instead, Rowan Atkinson is sat, dressed as a vicar, reading a car magazine.

“Hey, it’s Rip Van Grant,” says Rowan. “Welcome back.”

The room is still swimming. “Why does this keep happening?” says Hugh, “God, everyone must be furious.”

“Apparently your last take was the keeper, so Mick isn’t too fucked off. The onsite nurse said she thought you had sunstroke. She gave me this to spray you with.” Rowan scootches Hugh with a spray bottle of water. [spray, spray]

“Ow”, says Hugh. “Hey, uh...how is Callow? He was looking rough.”

“He’s gone,” says Rowan. “That was his last scene. I think he said he was going orienteering in the Lake District, I want to say? Looked alright to me, actually! He asked me to pass on his thanks.” Rowan scootches Hugh again with the spray bottle. [spray]

“Please stop,” says Hugh. “How can I have sunstroke? This is England.”

Rowan shrugs, goes to leave, then stops: “Oh, I borrowed that old script you had. I wanted to show it to the rest of the crew. I hope you don’t mind.”

“Yes, I mind!” says Hugh, “I hadn’t read it yet.”

“Oops,” says Rowan. “Well, I don’t know who had it last. Anyway, Mick says ‘there’s only one script he should be reading today, and that’s the one he’s in’, so...” [spray, spray]

Hugh rubs his temples, groans.

“Sorry, chief,” says Rowan. “Burden of being the lead, I suppose.” He hops down from the trailer.

That signed photo of Simon Callow is still lying on the floor. When Hugh closes his eyes, he can still see him, lying on the carpet, the utter desperation in his voice.

“True love,” he thinks.

[chess clock]

[music interlude]

JOHN:

“It sounds like you’ve been through a lot!” says Elizabeth Hurley.

Hugh laughs. He’s so happy to see her again.

[romantic string music begins]

“What are these?” Elizabeth asks, finding an A3 sketchbook in Hugh’s rucksack along with some sandwiches, and a bottle of water, and some sweets, and his Walkman.

“It’s an art project. I’ve been drawn every day during filming. There are photographs too, and an oil painting somewhere, I think. It’s all part of this project.”

She looks at the drawings, flicking over pictures of Hugh getting increasingly confused and worried day by day.

“Oh, and I’ve got something to play you. You know that Scottish band Wet Wet Wet? They’re doing a song for the film.”

Elizabeth takes out a cassette. In Hugh’s handwriting are the words Love Is All Around, but instead of ‘love’ it’s a drawing of a little red love heart. She puts the tape into the midi hi fi in the corner of the room.

[Love Is All Around starts playing]

“Welcome home,” she says. She smiles at him. “I’ve missed you. I can’t wait to see the film.”

Hugh starts to sing along to the song. Liz Hurley, impressed, continues emptying his rucksack.

“Hugh. Why have you got this signed photograph of Simon Callow?”

[chess clock]

[Love Is All Around continues playing]

ROSS:

“Souvenir,” says Hugh. “Callow had a bit of an...episode, you see. I think the pressure got to him? You know, with everyone looking at you all the time when you’re on set... always being the centre of attention...He suddenly got very, very paranoid. I mean, you get it too, don’t you?”

“Sure,” says Liz Hurley. “I guess on the set of *Passenger 57*...I did feel a little...odd. You know, how the director calls ‘cut’ but...everyone is still watching you. It’s like the film is continuing somehow...”

“Right! Right,” says Hugh. “I bet even...what’s-his-name Wesley Snipes gets it...I even went a bit funny myself, you know. My old dizzy spells, they went through the roof. I think it was because as soon as I walked on set... like-like, I *knew* that this film was going to-it was going to change *everything* for me. This wasn’t another forgettable euro-pudding. This was...the Big Time.

And I...I-I felt...not just the eyes of the crew, but I felt...millions of eyes watching me. The whole fucking country turning to look at me. It felt like a gate was opening. As if, the cameras were never going to turn off, ever again. In fact, I know it sounds crazy but...it-it-it feels like there’s still a camera on me right now.”

[music continues]

“Paparazzi?” laughs Liz, checking the window. “You’d be bloody lucky. I mean, there’s a first for everything, I suppose. Maybe after the film comes out, you might get a few. But...come on.”

Hugh drops onto the sofa. [big sigh] “It’s OK to go a little mad, isn’t it?”

“Sure,” says Liz, squeezing his shoulder. “After all the stress, and, you know, grieving at the same time, it’s no wonder, really.”

[music starts to wobble]

“Liz,” says Hugh. “What did you mean by...grieving?”

“You know,” says Liz, “Simon Callow. You said yourself, he had a funny turn and disappeared.”

[music growing more distorted]

“He went orienteering,” says Hugh, “in the Lakes.”

“He vanished,” says Liz, walking into the bathroom. “And then there was poor John Hannah accidentally gassing himself in his flat. It’s awful! So awful. And what was his name, uh, James Fleet? Walking right into the path of that combine harvester. I mean, it’s like the whole production was cursed!”

Hugh feels the walls breathing...

“—Bollocks,” says Hugh. “Utter bollocks. Liz, I was right there. No one died on...I mean, I would have known if anything horrible happened.”

“Oh, Hugh. How did you not know? Maybe they protected you from it? So you could concentrate on your role, maybe? Oh, God, Hugh. I’m so sorry to have to break it—”

“Well, how do you know about it then?”

“Andie told me,” says Liz. “She and I had coffee together this morning, right here at the flat.”

Liz’s voice echoes room to room. [music is barely recognisable as music]

“In fact, I hope you don’t mind, but uh, I invited her to come have a drink with us tonight, to celebrate. She’s just gone back to her hotel to change. She should be back any minute.”

[void comes undulating back]

Hugh turns to the window, but outside it is completely black. No streetlights, no cars...just the moon. Pale and whole. A perfect circle, infinite, a glass disc. The size of the face on a wristwatch. No, the size of a plate, now. Porcelain. Empty. Hungry. A camera finally moving in for its close-up.

“True love,” thinks Hugh.

[sound of the void becoming its own terrifying music]

Once again, Hugh feels millions of eyes upon him. Eating into him. Eyes swarming in the walls, pouring from his telephone, from the letterbox, the light fixtures.

He feels a droplet of water hit the top of his head. Then another. Soon there is a constant patter of liquid raining down on the top of his skull.

“Are you OK?” says Liz from the other room. “Sounds like it’s raining in there.”

[the void and the rain gushing together]

The dripping water feels inside his head now, thundering, pushing him down, dissolving him. He feels it run down his face, pooling on the floor around him.

“Is it raining?” says Hugh. “I hadn’t noticed.”

[silence]

[music]

[IMAGINARY ADVICE]

Thanks to John Osborne for writing that with me and lending his voice to his sections. Also, thanks to In the Dark in Bristol for letting John and me try out on their live audience earlier this week.

Seeing as it's episode 50, um, let me thank everyone who's supported the podcast over the last four years. If you've posted about it on social media, or written a review on iTunes, or supported the show on Patreon...uh, the show literally wouldn't exist without your help. This show is a labour of love but one day my goal is to pay myself a wage to make this show and um, with your help I'm getting there. So, thank you.

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I'm on tour right now. Uh, dates coming up. I've got Edinburgh Book Festival, Green Man Festival, London Podcast Festival, and Norwich Arts Centre. If you want dates and more info you can check my website imaginaryadvice.com.

Uh, thank you for listening. Look after yourself and um, I'll be back soon with more Imaginary Advice.

[music plays out]