

THE CLASS

by Michael Percy

The setting is a church hall.

The characters are:

Brian
Wendy
Terri
Nicky
Sheila
Melanie

There could also be a number non-speaking female players to make up a larger class if required.

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Brian enters carrying a large sports bag which he has a little trouble managing and sits in the middle of the row of chairs. He looks at his watch. Wendy enters carrying a huge sports bag. She is having so much trouble with the bag that she does not notice Brian. He just watches. Eventually, she spins round and bangs the bag into Brian.

Brian: Careful.

Wendy: Sorry, I didn't see you there.

Brian: You need wing mirrors on that thing.

Wendy: It's just a few essentials. *(She begins to open the bag to demonstrate the contents)* Things that might come in handy.

Brian: I believe you. *(...making a gesture to stop Wendy opening her bag.)*

Wendy: *(She sits in the furthest chair from Brian and after a few seconds hesitantly asks:)* Are you here for the class?

Brian: *(Surprised to be spoken to.)* Yes, every week.

Wendy: *(Nervously)* That's nice. It's my first time.

Brian: Right.

Wendy: *(Still nervous.)* Nice hall.

Brian: *(He looks around as if seeing it for the first time).* It's Okay, I s'pose *(He takes a newspaper from his bag and starts to read, throwing Wendy a patronising smile.)*

Wendy: Is it a hard class, you know, very physical? *(She pushes both arms in the air to demonstrate).*

Brian: Can be.

Wendy: Because it's the first time I've been to anything like this. I'm not sure I can keep up if it's very physical.

Brian: You'll be alright.

Wendy: So you think I'll be alright then?

Brian: Yes, that's what I said, you'll be alright.

Wendy: Good, thanks.

Brian: That's okay.

Brian returns to his paper and Wendy watches him for a moment before turning her attention to the hall which she surveys in great detail. After a moment she offers to speak again to Brian but thinks better of it, returning to her inspection of the room with a bored look on her face. Silence.

Terri enters wearing a very trendy keep-fit outfit, jazzy hair band and carrying a fancy water bottle with a drinking straw built in. She wears a surprising amount of make-up for the situation.

Terri: *(Sweeping in)* Hi everyone. Good I'm the first. *(She notices who is actually in the room.)* Well the first of the regulars anyway. Except Brian of course but you don't count, do you dear. *(She pats him on the head then turns her attention to Wendy)* Hello, I'm Terri, with an i - but I'm sure you guessed that. *(She leans across Brian to shake hands with Wendy)*

Wendy: Hello. I'm Wendy. That's with a y. I'm new.

Terri: Yes, nice to meet you. It's a lovely class, you'll feel very at home here. Great bunch of girls, we have a hoot every week. Don't worry about Brian – he's a sort of honorary girl on Tuesdays.

Wendy: *(Noticing Terri's outfit)* I didn't know what to wear so I brought a few things. *(She dives into her bag)*

Terri: O lovely, lets have a look.

The women sit on chairs either side of Brian who gets caught in a cross-fire of clothing. After pulling a few things out of the bag and passing them to Terri, Wendy pauses with a concerned look on her face.

Wendy: Is it very physical, because this is my first time - you know.

Terri: *(Full of concern)* O no dear, you'll be fine. I remember feeling exactly like you on my first visit - it's only natural. But don't you worry: Melanie - you must have spoken to our Mel when you rang up about the class. Yes?

Wendy: Yes, she sounded lovely on the phone.

Terri: Our Mel takes great care of the new girls - she'll tell you: STOP when you need to. That's what she'll say. It's better to STOP than risk a pulled muscle, or worse.

Wendy: So I'll be alright then?

Terri: *(Exaggerated assurance)* You will be fine, absolutely fine.

Brian: I said that, I said you'd be fine.

The two women pause and look at Brian for a moment.

Wendy: I just thought I'd check with Terri, you know.

Brian: But I did say.

Terri: *(Patting him on the arm)* Yes dear but you know... there's saying and there's saying. You'll catch on.

Wendy: That's it, that's true. *(Wendy holds up a choice of leotards)* What do you think?

Terri: *(She holds the leotards in turn against her body. She is not keen)* Mmmmm.

Wendy: I've got more. *(She pulls half-a-dozen from the bag, putting them over the chairs in a row.)*

Brian: *(He picks up a brief silky black top with a thong attached)* This is nice.

The two women stare at him. Terri snatches the top.

Brian: Colour...it's a nice colour.

Nicky enters wearing a no-nonsense track suit.

Nicky: Evening everyone. What's this, a jumble sale?

Wendy: I didn't know which to wear - which was most suitable... for the class.

Nicky: Go for comfort, I do. *(She takes the brief top from Terri, examines it and tosses it into the bag.)* Comfort that's the main thing.

Brian: That's what I was saying, exactly that.

Nicky: I bet you were. *(Now to Wendy)* You're new.

Wendy: Yes, my name's Wendy.

Nicky: Nicky.

Wendy: Is that with an i?

Nicky: An i? Why would I spell it like that.

Wendy: I just thought...

Nicky: Do you spell Wendy with an i?

Wendy: Well, no.

Nicky: There you are then - you're obviously not a pretentious pratt like some people.

Terri is listening and reacts to Nicky's comment.

Wendy: *(There is an awkward stand-off moment between Nicky and Terri which Wendy tries to relieve)* I just wondered because... Terri said... It's my first time. Lovely hall. What do you think of this one?

Terri: *(At Nicky)* And don't you think turning up dressed like a tomboy is just a little pretentious?

Nicky: *(Back at Terri)* This is not supposed to be a fashion show.

Terri: But you're a woman, what's the point of dressing like a man.

Nicky: I dress appropriately, not like a...

Sheila: Hello everybody. *(She wears an unfortunate combination of coloured keep-fit kit. At Sheila's interruption, Terri and Nicky part.)*

Wendy: Hello, I'm Wendy. I'm new.

Sheila: I'm Sheila. I hope I'm not late. Hello Brian.

Brian: Hi.

Sheila: You Okay?

Brian: Fine.

Sheila: Good. That's good. *(Now to Wendy)* Are you new? I missed last week so you might not be.

Wendy: It's my first time. I was deciding what to wear.

Sheila: It's difficult isn't it. I like a bit of colour myself *(Does a twirl)*.

Wendy: Yesss...

Sheila: Would you like a bit of advice?

Wendy: NO...thanks. I mean, I think I'm getting the hang of it - I'll be okay now thanks. It's a lovely hall, isn't it.

Sheila: It was built in the thirties you know but the council have done miracles to keep it up to date - central heating and those clever little windy handles that connect to the top windows so we can open them in the summer.

Wendy: Really?

Sheila: Yes. We used to open the bottom windows but the boys from the estate kept coming in the car park and jeering at us through the windows. I can't think why they behave like that, can you?

Wendy: *(Taking a sneaky look at Sheila's colours)* No.

Sheila: No.

Wendy: Mmmm. And there's a lot goes on - they have ballet later don't they.

Sheila: Have you ever...?

Wendy: No, not since I was at school. You?

Sheila: No. Wrong shape really.

Wendy: But it's a lovely hall.

Brian: I said it was a lovely hall when you came in.

Wendy: Oh yes I know. But Sheila... she filled in the gaps for me - painted a little picture.

Sheila: *(Sitting next to Brian)* Added a bit of background colour, that's all. I know you Brian, you're taciturn you are.

Brian: Maybe.

Sheila: Never using two words when one will do.

Nicky: And never reaching the dizzy heights of a whole sentence.

Sheila: That's a manly trait that is - speaking to the point. I like that in a man: I think it shows inner strength.

Brian: *(Standing and moving away)* Yea.

Sheila, having been flirty with Brian, is a little deflated and begins to help Wendy tidy up her clothes.

Wendy: I'd better get changed – one of these will have to do for tonight: I'll try that new sports shop in the high street - they'll have something nice, bound to.

Wendy leaves with her bag.

Terri sits with the deflated Sheila.

Terri: You like Brian don't you.

Sheila: Don't be daft, I'm just being friendly.

Terri: It's nothing to be ashamed of, he's a good-looking bloke.

Sheila: Well...

Terri: Come on, you can tell me.

Sheila: He's alright, I suppose.

Terri: There you are, no harm in telling your friends.

Sheila: I suppose you're right, it's just a bit personal - you know.

Terri: So how's it going?

Sheila: What?

Terri: You and Brian.

Sheila: Well... it's... you know - slow.

Terri: He's not picking up on the signs is he?

Sheila: I suppose not.

Terri: I'll give you some tips shall I? I've leaned a thing or two about hooking a man.

Sheila: It would help if that Nicky would leave him alone. She's always flaunting herself in front of him. Poor man doesn't know where to look sometimes.

Brian has sought out Nicky and now we pick up their conversation.

Brian: Not so hot this week.

Nicky: No.

Brian: I got a bit sweaty last week.

Nicky: Yea.

Brian: Part of it I suppose - working up a sweat.

Nicky: Yea.

Brian: You don't say much do you.

Nicky: No.

Brian: I admire that in a woman.

Nicky: Piss off.

Brian: Okay, fine. I can see you're busy. *(He sits and takes up his newspaper.)*

Now back with Sheila and Terri:

Sheila: You see that? It's obvious he's not interested.

Terri: I know, it's a shame for you. Tell you what, I'll keep a discrete eye on how you're doing in the Brian department shall I?

Sheila: Would you?

Terri: I'll give you the odd tip if I spot anything.

Enter Melanie looking the total instructor.

Melanie: Good evening girls. I hope you're all fighting fit.

All: Hello Mel.

Wendy enters wearing her chosen leotard - something outrageous.

Melanie: You must be Wendy, I'm really pleased you could make it. I hope you enjoy the class.

Wendy: I'm sure I will. *(Giggles)* Do you think this is okay? I didn't know what to wear.

Melanie: *(Turning away – not looking at the leotard.)* Lovely. Right - five minutes everybody, five minutes. *(She begins warm-up exercises ion her own.)*

Wendy: *(To Terri as she does a little twirl.)* What do you think of it?

Terri: Lovely, honestly, I like it.

Wendy: What do you think Sheila?

Sheila: Perfect, you certainly look the part.

Wendy: Good, that's so reassuring. *(She goes to show Nicky.)*

Sheila sits near Brian who is still engrossed in his paper. Terri sees Sheila's move and takes an interest.

Sheila: What you reading Brian?

Brian: My paper.

Sheila: *(Pulling the paper towards her so they are now very close.)* That looks interesting - Catherine Zeta Jones and Michael Douglas, don't they make a lovely couple.

Terri makes an encouraging thumbs up sign out of Brian's sight.

Brian: If you want my opinion, a woman like that is wasted on an old bloke like that.

Sheila: No, I think they really love each other.

Terri makes a 'take it easy' gesture for Sheila.

Brian: Don't be daft woman, she's got her hand in his wallet and he's got his hand in her... well, you know what I mean. I bet he's all over her and I don't blame him but love it ain't.

Brian moves to another chair with his paper. Sheila looks deflated.

Nicky: *(At Wendy.)* Your bloody leotard is fine. Will you shut up and leave me alone.

Terri waves Sheila on for second move on Brian. Sheila sits next to Brian again.

Sheila: Make sure you warm up properly won't you Brian.

Terri gives the 'thumbs up' again.

Brian: *(Still reading.)* I always do.

Sheila: It's very important to look after your body and I can see you take care of yours.

Double 'thumbs up' from Terri.

Brian: Mmm.

Sheila: *(She stretches her arms out and thrusts her chest into Brian's eye line.)* I think keeping fit is very important. What do ya' think? *(Finishes with a little wiggle of her breasts.)*

Nicky now takes an interest in the proceedings.

Brian: *(He stares over the top of his paper at Sheila's breasts for a few beats.)*
Amazing. Could I ask what, exactly, you're doing?

Sheila: Stretching. *(She goes into a super big stretch throwing her head back)*

Unseen by Sheila, Brian shakes his head and moves away burrying his nose in his paper.

Nicky: *(Taking Brian's place.)* What are you doing you stupid woman?

Sheila: *(Surprised so much she almost falls over from her stretching position.)*
Just stretching warming up. You know. *(She begins frantic jogging on the spot.)*

Nicky: You're making a big mistake encouraging that man believe me. Just remember who the enemy is. *(She strides away.)*

Sheila: *(Her jogging slows right down.)* Enemy?

Terri: *(To Sheila)* There's something wrong with that woman. Never mind, I think you were doing quite well on the Brian front.

Sheila: I don't know, he seems more interested in his paper. *(She jogs away to a corner of the hall to be alone.)*

Terri begins stretching exercises using a chair next to Wendy

Wendy: Terri isn't it?

Terri: That's me.

Wendy: I hope you don't think I'm silly but is it normal to feel a little, well nervous actually. Silly isn't it. I've been looking for something to get me out of the house for ages - I hope I've made the right choice.

Terri: I'm sure you have, you'll have a great time - and learn something useful.

Wendy: I didn't tell my husband what sort of class it was, he might have taken it the wrong way - you know what men can be like?

Terri: Do I? Do I know what men are like? I could write a book. Any kids?

Wendy: Sorry, no – not yet. You?

Terri: Managed it once but I can't remember why. Or how come to that. But I remember the pain.

Wendy: But it must be lovely having a little baby all to yourself.

Terri: Err, no dear, you don't keep them to yourself - you give them to a nanny.

Wendy: Oh no, I couldn't: not my little baby. No. I want lots of children.

Terri: Technically I've got two I suppose. The second one arrived fully grown and attached to my second husband. Didn't notice the brat until it was too late.

Wendy: Oh I am sorry... about the divorce.

Terri: Don't be, I'm used to it. I'm on my fourth husband now.

Wendy: *(She catches her breath.)* Poor you. But you had that little baby and that must make up for a lot. Ahhhhh.

Nicky: *(Taking a chair)* Less of the ahhh, more of the Aarrgh. You won't catch me having kids. God must have been a man - only a man would expect a head this big to come out of a hole this big.

Wendy: But the pain passes and it's all worth it in the end.

Nicky: Not my end thanks very much.

Brian rejoins the group having taken an interest in the topic.

Wendy: It is lovely though. Three babies.

Sheila: *(To Brian)* Would you like to have kids Brian?

Terri makes a sign to Sheila as if to say babies are not a good subject for chatting up men. Sheila notices and reacts.

Brian: Me? Bit tricky, I haven't got the right plumbing.

Sheila: *(Reacting to Terri's signal)* Oh you're right there. Kids tie you down. A couple ought to have a really good time before bothering with kids. If at all, don't you think Brian?

Terri gives Sheila the thumbs up.

Brian: *(Directing the remark towards Nicky)* In fact, and you might think this is a strange thing for a man to say, but in fact you women don't know how lucky you are. What you experience when you are pregnant is something men can only guess at - having a new life grow inside you. It must be wonderful.

Terri and Wendy are stunned, Sheila falls deeper in love and Nicky winces.

Terri: Yes it's wonderful - having all you internal organs pushed up into your rib cage for nine months; morning sickness, heartburn, no booze for nearly a year - and you can be lynched for even looking at a fag packet.

Nicky: When will you all realise we don't have to have their little brats. They're just using our bodies to produce carbon copies of themselves so they've got something to play stupid football with.

Brian: Boys, girls - it doesn't matter. What matters is making a family. Terri, I'm sure the pain passes and you're left with having experienced the creation of a new life.

Sheila: That's lovely. So lovely.

Terri: I think your feminine side is showing love.

Nicky: It's a load of new man bollocks. They learn it from their grubby little magazines and they think it makes them irresistible.

Terri: *(To Nicky)* You should have been a man.

Nicky: *(Squaring up to Terri.)* If I was, I wouldn't fancy you.

Terri: *(Now nose to nose with Nicky.)* If you were, you wouldn't stand a chance.

Wendy: Oh you've got to admit It's lovely though, tiny little babies. Lovely.

Melanie: *(Clapping her hands)* Right girls, time to start. You're not changed Brian - chop, chop. *(Brian runs out with his bag.)* Get those chairs out the way, we need plenty of space. Bring the mats over here. That's the way. Line up, make sure there are at least two arms lengths between each of you. Running on the spot in time with the music. Gently to start with and build slowly as you get warmer. Wendy, this way lovely, I'm over here; it's best if you can see me. Good. Don't worry, it'll all make sense in time. Star jumps; one, two, three, four. In time with me if you can manage, it looks tidier that

way. Don't worry though Sheila - it doesn't really matter, you're doing really, really well.

Gently ease down; that's it, little star jumps, lovely. Now little tiny baby star jumps. Perfect. You're all doing really, really well. We shouldn't be sitting just yet Terri should we. We should be slowly coming to a standstill. That's good. And... stop. Deep breathing - in, out, in, out. Perfect, We've all mastered breathing so really, really well haven't we.

Now just marching on the spot, lovely. Reaching up on those toes now girls - lovely. Now just little steps. And now just tiny, baby little steps. Lovely. And come to a gentle halt. Breath deeply. And... stop.

All except Melanie and Nicky collapse on the floor. Nicky carries on with warm-up exercises of her own.

Melanie: Well done everybody.

Terri: I'd kill for a fag right now.

Melanie goes to an exhausted Wendy.

Melanie: How are you my love, okay? *(Wendy can only gasp at her)* Good, well done - you've done really, really well.

Nicky: *(Seeking out Terri.)* Not got so much to say now have we?

Terri: *(Breathless.)* I still don't fancy you.

Nicky: I'm heart-broken.

Terri: Know what, I think you are. I think you fancy me rotten but you won't admit it.

Nicky: Dream on, slapper.

Terri: *(She staggers to her feet and, bent almost double with breathlessness, squares up to Nicky.)* Who are you calling a slapper.

Before the two women can join battle Brian enters wearing a head to toe padded suit and an American football style helmet. He looks huge.

Melanie: Ah the man of the moment. On your feet everybody, now to the main business of the evening. Gather round.

The women make a half circle with Brian and Melanie in the centre.

Melanie: Tonight, we are dealing with attacks from behind. There are several possibilities to be covered but the most common attack involves the assailant grabbing you round the throat.

Brian puts his arm round Melanie's neck from behind. In slow motion she demonstrates the moves while describing them.

Melanie: First, you bring your elbow back sharply into his abdomen. This will make him release his grip and wind him making him adopt this vulnerable bending posture. Now, using the finger grip I demonstrated last week, you twist his arm this way first, thus allowing a clear kick to his face, and now twist this way allowing a clear kick to the testicle region.

Wendy: *(An aside to Nicky)* Is that really necessary, all that kicking in the...you know... the region.

Nicky: The bollocks you mean – yes it is.

Melanie: Now at full speed.

They repeat the action with Brian ending up in a heap on the floor. He gets up unhurt.

Melanie: Who wants to try first?

Nicky: *(Pushing quickly to the front)* I'll go first if nobody else is willing.

Nicky does the move on Brian but is vicious, making loud whoops during the move. Brian ends up in a painful heap on the floor.

Sheila: Come on Melanie, you mustn't allow that. It's not fair on poor Brian.
(She helps Brian to his feet)

Brian: *(Staggering to his feet)* Don't worry, I'm okay. Well done Nicky - it's what I'm paid for.

Nicky: And I intend to get my monies worth.

Melanie: Come on Terri, you try.

Terri makes a lot of fuss about how she is going to stand, then Brian grabs Terri round the neck.

Terri: *(She screams out)* Oh no, I'm not having that, he's jammed my eyelash into my eye.

Nicky: Pull yourself together woman, he's a rapist.

Melanie: She's right Terri, try to imagine you're facing a fate worse than death.

Terri: I am – I've lost an eyelash.

Brian and Terri go through the move with Terri pausing to straighten her leotard before the kicks which she does very gently.

Nicky: Oh my God, this is absolutely hopeless.

Melanie: Give her a chance Nicky. She just needs a little practice.

Nicky: Practise! A rapist won't give you a second chance so you can perfect your technique.

Melanie: Nicky, please - leave it to me. Come on Wendy, let's see what you can make of it.

Wendy: Well, I'm not sure...

Nicky: Just give the bastard a good kicking.

Wendy takes up her position but when Brian grabs her she just screams and collapses on the floor.

Melanie: You're doing really, really well there Wendy...

Nicky: She's not, she deserves everything she gets.

Melanie: I think she's doing REALLY WELL. I'm the instructor, take no notice Wendy. Try again.

Brian and Wendy stand to try again but at the first touch of Brian's arm she screams and runs away. Terri runs after her.

Melanie: Never mind Wendy dear – you did really well, we'll have another go next week. Sheila?

Sheila: Oh yes, I'll try it. *(Flirty)* Not too tight now Brian.

When Brian grabs Sheila she all but swoons in his arms.

Nicky: Brilliant! Brilliant technique that - the rapist will think it's his birthday. *(She grabs Sheila's arm and makes the elbow bang into Brian)* Like this, thrust back hard. HARD.

Sheila: Not too hard, this is only practice.

Nicky takes over the move and gives Brian another thorough kicking.

Sheila: Oh No, stop it. Stop her Melanie.

Terri brings the emotional Wendy back into the room.

Melanie: Nicky, it's my class, leave it to me. I think it's time we all had a break - ten minutes.

Sheila: Are you okay Brian, it must be terribly painful.

Brian: *(Squirming with pain from his testicles)* It's not so bad, I'll be alright.

Sheila: *(To Terri)* It's that so called protective suit, it's useless. *(Now to Melanie)* It's useless that suit, anyone can see that: it's not proper protective clothing.

Nicky: I'd make him do it in the nude, then we'd see what he's made of.

Brian: *(He follows Nicky to one side, away from the others.)* No hard feelings? I wish the others took it as seriously as you, I feel it's wasted on them. Do you fancy practising outside the class - perhaps at your place one evening? I could bring the suit round and we could really go to town.

Sheila notices Nicky and Brian together and works round the room to get in earshot.

Nicky: You want to come round my flat so I can beat you up?

Brian: No. Just practice the moves from the last few weeks. Then maybe relax a bit. I'm sure you'd find it useful.

Nicky: *(Exaggerated reasonableness)* I suppose a lot of women would think themselves really lucky being fancied by a bloke like you.

Brian: I don't know about that.

Nicky: *(Taking his hand.)* But I'm not one of them. *(Nicky throws Brian in a somersault across the room.)* Got the message Casanova?

Melanie: Well done Nicky, It's good to see you practising the old moves.

Nicky: *(Moving towards the prostrate Brian to finish him off.)* They never learn do they?

Sheila: *(Pushing Nicky away)* Leave him, you're just a bully. He's had enough.

Nicky: *(She takes Sheila around the neck to get her out of the way)* Out of my way you...

Sheila executes the move the class have been practising that evening and Nicky ends up in a heap on the floor.

Sheila: Take that.

Melanie: O Well done Sheila. Really, really well done.

All gather round Sheila giving her a round of applause.

Terri: *(She plants a kick on Nicky's bottom as she tries to get up sending her sprawling again.)* Woops, sorry. *(More applause.)*

Sheila move to Brian's side and helps him to his feet.

Brian: *(To Sheila)* It's okay, it didn't hurt much. She didn't mean it, it's what I'm here for. Are you okay Nicky?

Nicky: *(still on the floor)* Fuck off you pathetic Michelin man.

Brian trudges despondently towards the door.

Sheila: *(Appealing to Melanie)* Tell her to leave Brian alone – she's always pushing herself on the poor man.

Brian: Don't worry about that, I don't mind that.

(Exit Brian)

Sheila: *(Calling after Brian.)* Yes you do Brian, of course you do.

Nicky: *(Gaining her feet.)* Why is this world full of so many sad gits.

Melanie: That's it for this evening ladies. Lets gather up our bits and bobs, the ballet class is due any minute.

While all make preparations to leave we pick up on Wendy and Terri.

Terri: How was it for you sweetie?

Wendy: Lovely, I really enjoyed it.

Terri: So we'll be seeing you again?

Wendy: Definitely, I wouldn't miss this for the world.

All exit to ad lib chatter of good nights, see you next week, did you pick up your towel, I think the rain's held off, what are you doing at the weekend? etc.

The voices quickly fade away and the stage is empty for a few beats.

Enter Brian wearing tutu and tights.

Let the scene register then blackout.

The End