

Cambridge University Press
978-0-521-75078-3 - Frozen Pizza and Other Slices of Life
Antoinette Moses
Excerpt
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Two Worlds

‘I’m not taking my car! Not near that estate! The kids will steal it or steal the wheels off it! I only bought it a month ago! What if . . .?’

‘OK, OK,’ Karen interrupted quickly. ‘You’ve made your point, John. You don’t have to take your new car on the film shoot tomorrow.’

She sighed to herself. John was a good cameraman, but he wasn’t the easiest man to work with.

‘Just hire a car big enough for the three of us and all your equipment. And let me get on with my work,’ she added. It wasn’t easy being a woman director, she reflected. Sometimes you had to be tough or your team wouldn’t take you seriously. Unfortunately John had worked with her for too many years and knew Karen far too well. She could be tough, she had to be sometimes. But for the people who worked for her, she would do anything. That was what they said when she wasn’t listening. John didn’t even pretend to be upset when she got cross with him.

‘Do we get danger money?’ he began again. ‘I’ve heard that . . .’

‘Out!’ commanded Karen.

‘But . . .’

‘John, get out of my office right now before I . . .’

‘But I was only . . .’ John started again.

‘Get out before I throw something!’

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John left and Karen turned back to her computer and her preparations for the following day's filming.

The idea for the series had come to her while she was reading the newspapers one morning. There were a lot of articles about children in England. Compared with other European countries it didn't do very well. Too many children lived in poverty. The figures shocked her. She herself didn't know anyone who could really be called poor and she was sure that most of her friends didn't either. It was as if there were two different Englands living side by side. She knew immediately that she wanted to make a documentary series about this. She had sat up all that night and written an outline and the next morning she went straight to Adrian, her producer.

'Yes,' he had said. 'I like it.' This was one of the many things that Karen liked about working for Adrian. He made immediate decisions and said what he thought.

'One nation, but divided into the haves and the have-nots. I think it's the right time to do a whole series on England's forgotten children. Of course you will want to include the north-south divide?'

Karen nodded. This was the way most people thought that England was divided. The north of England was where all the poor people lived and the south was the rich part of the country. She knew that it wasn't that simple, but it was what people thought. No, she corrected herself, it was what some people who lived in the south thought. Reasonably wealthy people living in the south. People like Adrian and herself.

'Yes,' she answered. 'I think we have to.'

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‘The prime minister says the divide doesn’t exist any more,’ Adrian reminded her. ‘Haven’t you read about how England has changed? There are more millionaires in the north of England than in the south.’

‘Yes,’ Karen sighed. ‘I’ve read all about that. I know that in Leeds there’s now a branch of Harvey Nichols where people can buy all the same designer clothes that were only available in London before. But Leeds is only one northern city. There’s still more unemployment in the north of England than in the south. Most of the best-paid jobs are in the south and most head offices are down here, in or around London. And house prices are much higher in the south. There is still a divide, whatever the prime minister says.’

‘I agree with you.’ Adrian smiled. ‘But at the same time I think that a lot of the differences between the south and the north are simply to do with how we see people.’ He frowned.

‘What do you mean?’ asked Karen.

‘Well,’ began Adrian, ‘look at Linda, for example.’

Linda worked for their TV production company as a researcher. It was she who went out and found the right people to interview. She conducted her own interviews, which she gave to Karen, so that Karen knew before they did any filming who was likely to say what.

‘Just because Linda comes from Manchester and has a northern accent, people here in London think that she must be stupid,’ continued Adrian. ‘In fact she got a first-class degree at Cambridge University, she knows more about economics than I’ll ever know and she’s the best

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researcher we've ever had here. But there's always some idiot making jokes about pie and chips, as if that's all people from Manchester eat.'

'I know,' Karen said. Karen liked Linda and they sometimes went out for a drink or a meal together after work. Linda often complained about the very thing that Adrian was talking about.

'Everyone thinks I'm stupid because I have a Manchester accent,' she had told Karen. 'But I'm not changing the way I speak for any insensitive Londoners; I can tell you that right now!'

Karen smiled at Adrian as she remembered the conversation. She was fascinated by the way that Adrian seemed to care about Linda. Was there something going on between him and Linda that she didn't know about, Karen wondered.

That conversation with Adrian had been two months ago. And Adrian had not only liked her idea, but had rung up the head of documentaries at the network the same day. And only two weeks later he'd persuaded the network that it was just what they wanted right now. Karen had never known an idea for a documentary series go through the system so fast. It usually took months and months, and sometimes years. But the network had been criticised recently for not having enough serious programmes, and they had decided to cancel a new series on people with unusual hobbies. That had left a gap in the autumn programming and this new series would fill it nicely.

'So, here I am,' thought Karen, looking at the computer, 'with a six-part series to produce, very little time and too much to do. As usual.' Filming was starting the next day

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and she still had only a rough idea of how she wanted to tell her story. She had written outlines and draft scripts, but there were still a lot of gaps.

‘I think we should start close to home,’ she had told Adrian. ‘Home in the sense of the office,’ she added.

Their company had a floor in Canary Wharf. Everyone called it Canary Wharf, but its proper name was Number 1, Canada Square. It was the tallest building in England, although Karen thought that it would not be long before someone built a taller one. She liked working there. It was a building that everyone knew. You could see it from miles away, a huge tower, fifty-two storeys high. Several newspapers had offices in the tower, and occasionally a friend of Karen’s who worked for one of them would let her use their files to help her research her stories. It saved her hours of work and trips to the library.

But with this new series there was no need to go to the library or visit her friend at the newspaper. All the information she wanted was recent and that meant that all the facts Karen needed were on the Internet. It took her just two days to get all the facts she needed to write the background pieces. She would use these as the voice-over material.

The film would show views of the different places, while an actor’s voice reported all the facts. Then they would cut to the interviews.

Karen still hadn’t decided which actor to use for the voice-overs. That was her next job today. She had to listen to some tapes and decide which actor to choose to read the voice-overs. It was so important to get the right voice. You didn’t want any of the report to sound like a boring lesson