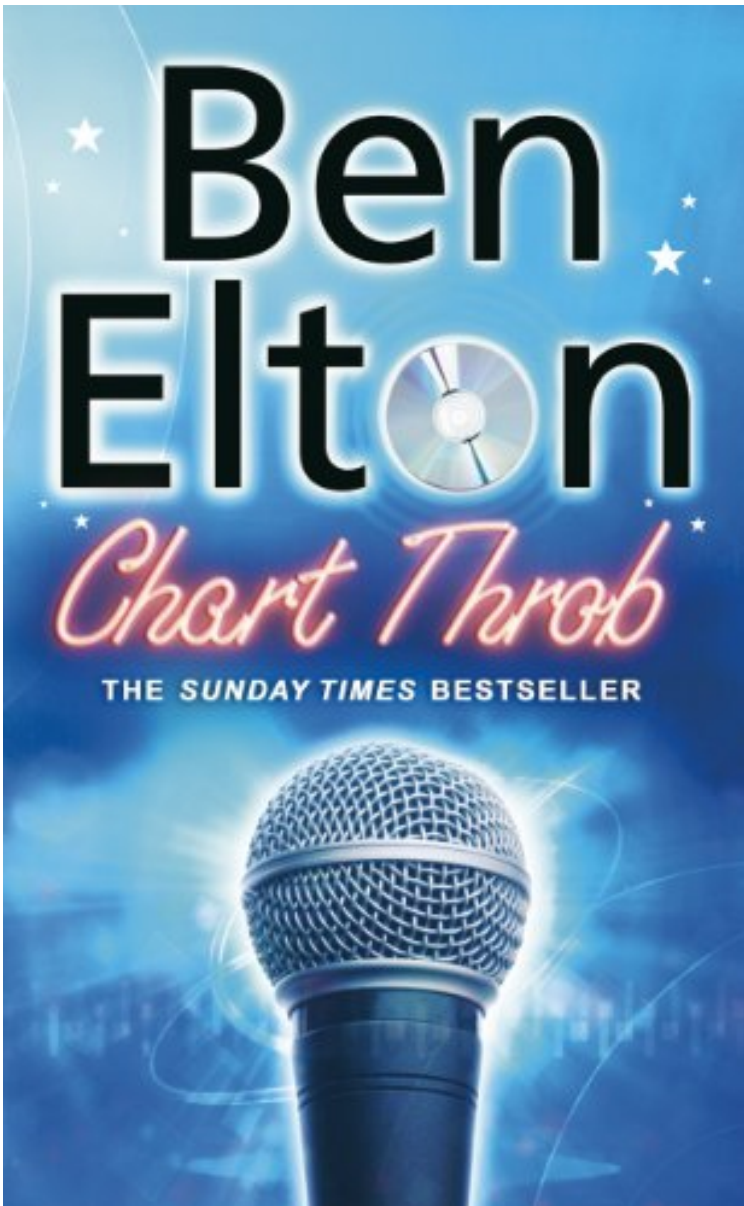


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Chart Throb



Par Ben Elton
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Description :

Prsentation de l'diteurChart Throb.The ultimate pop quest. Ninety five thousand hopefuls. Three judges. Just one winner. And that's Calvin Simms, the genius behind the show. Calvin always wins because Calvin writes the rules. But this year, as he sits smugly in judgement upon the mingers, clingers and blingers whom he has pre-selected in his carefully scripted 'search' for a star, he has no idea that the rules are changing. The 'real' is about to be put back into 'reality' television and Calvin and his fellow judges (the nation's favourite mum and the other bloke) are about to become ex-factors themselves.Ben Elton, author of Popcorn and Dead Famous returns to blistering comic satire with a savagely hilarious deconstruction of the world of modern

television talent shows. Chart Throb. One winner. A whole bunch of losers. Extrait And Still to Come Some years from now The nation had watched Shaiana cry so many times. Heard her voice crack as she struggled to complete her sentence. 'I just want this so much. I really, really want it so much. It's all I ever wanted. Since I was a little girl . . . It's my . . . It's my . . .' She couldn't do it. Words failed her. Her lip quivered, her nostrils flared and a watery film spread across her eyes. The lids closed in an agonized grimace and squeezed out a glistening tear. Just a tear, a single tear, but such a tear. One of the most scrutinized tears that was ever shed. Few tears in all history would be seen by so many and so often. Over and over again it had teetered momentarily upon the thickly mascaraed lashes of Shaiana's lower lid before tipping forward and rolling heavily across the downy expanse of that now nationally familiar cheek, tracing its course through the heavy blusher with which the makeup artist had struggled in vain to cover the tiny blemishes on Shaiana's quivering face. The people in their millions had absorbed this scene immediately before the last break and also before the break which preceded that. They had seen it at the very beginning of the programme and in the trailers that had played throughout the earlier part of the evening. Those with access to the digital channels had been able to watch the tear for nearly a week already and grainy stills of it had appeared in the press. It was also possible to download it to one's mobile phone by accessing the 'preview highlights' section of the Chart Throb website. But despite all this massive exposure, up until now that tear had always been a future tear, a tear which, in the endlessly repeated phrase of Keely the presenter, was 'still to come'. 'And still to come, it's all too much for Shaiana. "Still to come, Shaiana struggles to keep it together. "Is Shaiana's dream turning into a nightmare? All that and more, still to come.' And so the tear had teetered. A maybe tear, present and entirely familiar but nonetheless a tear in waiting. But now finally it had arrived. No longer a tear that was 'still to come' but all of a sudden a clear and present tear, a tear that was on its way. And for the first time (but most certainly not the last) the viewing millions saw it disappear beneath the square white plastic nail of Shaiana's outstretched finger as she rested her chin upon Keely's gorgeous skinny shoulder, and failed to find the word for which she was struggling. 'I just want this so much,' she repeated. 'I really, really do. I want it so much. It's all I ever wanted. Since I was a little girl . . . It's my . . . It's my . . .' At the very last linguistic hurdle, emotion defeated Shaiana and words failed her. 'Dream?' Keely coaxed. 'Is it your dream? Is that what you're trying to tell us? That it's your dream?' 'That's right, Keely,' Shaiana sniffed. 'That is so right. It's my dream.' Keely's bronzed, cadaverously muscular arms enfolded Shaiana's shoulders. Momentarily entwined, they made quite a contrast: the golden girl and the girl with the dream. It all looked slightly uncomfortable as Shaiana's arm (the one which she had raised to wipe away the famous tear) became trapped in Keely's skeletal embrace. Briefly Shaiana's hand rested in the hollow of Keely's armpit and Keely's teeth rattled against Shaiana's big hoop earrings. Neither woman seemed to notice the awkwardness or if they did, they did not care. Emotions were running too high. It was all too much. 'You go, girl,' Keely whispered. 'Just you go, girl.' 'Yeah,' Shaiana sniffed, raising her eyes towards what would have been the stars had it not been daytime and had she not been indoors. 'God gave me this chance and I'm going to rock their asses!' Calvin Simms Some months earlier, one of the asses whom Shaiana intended to rock had been quivering with violent fury as its owner, Calvin Simms, came to the shocking realization that he, the ultimate manipulator, the man who with a single glance knew a person better than they knew themselves, had been had. Calvin always believed that he could read anybody. Anybody, it now turned out, except the woman he had married. 'A divorce?' he stuttered. 'Yays, Calvin,' his beautiful American bride of just two weeks drawled in her sexy, sultry Southern accent. 'Ah want a dee-voxce.' They were standing in the hallway of the vast detached mansion in Belgravia that Calvin had assumed would be his and Dakota's marital home. Numerous items of matching luggage surrounded them. The two drivers who had helped them into the house had only just closed the front door behind them. He had carried her over that threshold not two minutes before. His passport was still in his pocket, he still had sunscreen on his neck, he was still wearing shorts and sandals, which made him feel particularly ridiculous in the light of the shocking revelation that the honeymoon was most definitely over. 'We've only been married a fortnight!' he protested. 'Way-ll, believe me, darlin', it felt lahk a ye-ah,' Dakota purred. 'Why bother with the fucking honeymoon then? Why not dump me outside the church?' 'Gotta consummate, pussycat. Cain't have you claimin' Ah withheld ma fay-vers an' gettin' a judge to declare our nerptuals null an' void.' Like a big win on a fairground coin cascade, the pennies in Calvin's head were tumbling down. That was why she had made such a racket in the sack! Screaming and shouting and beseeching the Lord Almighty to give her strength. She'd never made love that noisily when they were courting. In fact previously she had been rather clinical in her approach to sex, which, being a very busy man, Calvin had always appreciated. Suddenly, however, she'd seemed to feel the need to let the

whole world in on her exertions. There had been complaints from other guests, and Calvin had been forced to book the surrounding rooms and compensate a middle-aged couple who claimed to have had no sleep at all. He had wanted to honeymoon in one of his many holiday mansions but Dakota had insisted on their staying in a very public hotel. Now he knew why. 'Ah do believe eva'body in tha whole o' Venice knows how insatiably you used ma poh weak body, Calvin. Ah wuz lil' more than a sweet young virgin chile an' you done jes about furked me intah a coma.' Calvin stared at his wife. There were many ways one might have chosen to describe her, but 'sweet young virgin child' was not one of them. Thirty-four years old, well over six feet tall, glamorous, sophisticated and now, it turned out, cunning as a snake. They bred them tough, those girls of the Confederate aristocracy. It had after all been only six generations since their great-great-great-great-grandmothers had been left with nothing but their looks and their well-bred gentility to survive in a cruel new world. 'Ahm dee-voicin' you, honey,' Dakota purred. 'An' Ahm filin' in tha city of Angels, which means o'course Ah git half.' Calvin's mind was reeling. Could she do it? A two-week marriage, for heaven's sake. Half? Surely not. 'On what grounds?' he asked. 'Mental cruelty.' 'Mental cruelty!' Calvin exploded. 'Uh-huh.' 'When was I ever cruel to you?' he protested. 'You ain't bin, honey, 'ceptin' boring me half tuh death 'bout how clever you are an' all,' Dakota sneered. 'We both know thay-at. But fortunately for me nobody else knows it, an' since you have so carefully curl-tivated an image as tha nastiest, cruellest, most brutal man on television, Ah don't imagine that a dee-voice court will need merch persuasion tah believe that you treat yo' sweet virginal bride tha same as you treat yo' dumb contestants.' Realizing he was still holding his cabin baggage in his hand, Calvin put it down on the polished marble floor. 'Shall we go in and sit down?' he suggested. 'Nuh. Ahm leavin', ma car's outside.' 'What? Immediately?' 'Sooner if possible.' 'Have you been planning this from the start?' Calvin asked. 'O' course.' 'The very start? Three years ago?' 'Uh-huh.' 'You mean you never loved me at all?' 'Duh!' Calvin's mind was filled suddenly with memories of their courtship. That spilt glass of champagne at the Versace show which had first led him to talk to her . . . 'Ah am so sorry, suh! Did Ah wet yo' pants? Ain't I a fumblefingers? Had she engineered it? She had seemed so disarmingly frank and honest at the time, so cool and assured, wiping him down with a napkin and giggling in that confident, proud way that girls of the Southern aristocracy seemed to perfect in the cradle. It couldn't have been a set-up. And yet it seemed it had been. 'What about the Bay of Biscay? You really didn't love me then?' 'Double duh!' The sunset had been so fabulous and they had found themselves alone and she had said she loved him. That was when he had proposed. 'Please, Calvin,' Dakota said, sounding almost bored. 'Don't look so downhearted. After all, honey, you never lerved me.' Actually this was true, although he hadn't realized she had been aware of it. He had never really loved anyone but he had liked her enormously. 'Of course I loved you! Why else would I marry you?' 'Same reason Ah married you, Cotton Candy. Ta git sermthin' you didn' haive. You wan'ed a wahf. You'd dern your bachelor thing. Yew wan'ed a beautiful wahf. Fer kids, fer premires, ta make your parents happy. Ta git rid of all those gay rumours once an' fer all.' Calvin could only gape. She was articulating his inner thoughts better than he had done himself. It was true: at forty-two, obsessed with work and dripping with wealth, he had decided that a witty, intelligent, glamorous companion of childbearing age was what he required to complete h...Revue de presseAn absolute coup of black comedy.Daily Telegraph on Popcorn.From the Trade Paperback edition.