

TOM: I was just saying to Liz. Would you two sponsor me?

JOANNA: *(gesturing to LIZ)* Give the girl a chance! She's only just set foot in the place! *(Short pause)* Right! That's long enough! *(To LIZ)* Get your money out!

LIZ: What are we sponsoring you for, anyway?

TOM: It's for the children's unit at the General. Go on. All for a good cause. It's a charity run.

LIZ: Yeah, I'll sponsor you. *(She takes the form and writes on it)* I've put down 50p a mile.

TOM: Oh, thanks!

LIZ: Well, with a physique like that ... *(TOM looks pleased with himself)* ... it's got to cost meooooh, a quid?

JOANNA: All right. Give it here. *(She adds her name)* When is it?

TOM: Saturday.

LIZ: Oh, where are you doing it?

TOM: Just in the park.

LIZ: Perhaps I'll come and support you.

TOM: *(quickly)* I wouldn't bother. There's not going to be much to see.

LIZ: I don't mind. Could be a laugh.

TOM: No, really. It'll be boring.

JOANNA: What's going on? Is this some scam?

TOM: No, of course not! *(Pause, while both women study him suspiciously)* Oh, all right, all right! They want me to dress up as a bloody chicken! Okay?

LIZ: Battery or free range?

JOANNA: *(wearily)* A chicken?

TREBLE comes out from his office.

TOM: It's the Advertiser's idea. A publicity stunt. Because it's for the children's unit, they want everyone dressed up as different characters from stories. I've got to get the costume today, at lunchtime.

JOANNA: You mean, you haven't already got one in your wardrobe at home? Don't you dress up like that in your spare time?

TOM: Oh, thanks!

JOANNA: For God's sake, don't tell them you're from the Public Library. You'll give the place a bad name.

TOM: You work here - it's already got one. (*Sees TREBLE*) Oh, Mr. Treble, will you sponsor me? Charity run, for the children's ward.

TREBLE: Yes, of course. Er ...

He takes the form, writes on it and hands it back to TOM, but LIZ and JOANNA are peering at it.

JOANNA: A pound? Total? Are you sure you can spare it?

TREBLE: Oh, well ... er ... make it ... er ...

JOANNA: Ten pounds, Tom. That's a nice round figure.

She takes the form from TOM, alters it, then hands it back.

TREBLE: Yes, yes, that's ... um ... fine. Er, Joanna, I need to see you about the book orders.

He turns away and begins to return to his office when he spots his plant. He fetches it down and checks the soil.

TREBLE: This is bone dry! Give it some water please, Miss Brown.

He plonks it down in front of LIZ and heads back to his office.

LIZ: (*Calling after him*) Booth!

TREBLE: Sorry! Boon!

He enters the office. LIZ takes the plant into the staff-room.

JOANNA: Now, Tom, about those books you were supposed to have repaired on Friday.

TOM: What do you mean - 'supposed'?

JOANNA holds up a hardback book. Its front cover drops off.

TOM: That must be one I missed.

She holds up a separate page from a book.

JOANNA: Page 263.

TOM: That's ...

JOANNA holds up another one.

JOANNA: Page 265.

TOM: Oh, well, that's only ...

She holds up a sheaf of them.

JOANNA: Pages 267 to 351. This is a Chemistry textbook, Tom, not a whodunit. Do them again.

JOANNA goes to TREBLE's office. LIZ reappears from the staff-room and settles down at the desk, idly swinging about on her chair.

LIZ: I don't understand how you've lasted here so long. Surely either she'd have sacked you before now, or you'd have got fed up taking your teeth home in a bag.

TOM: She's all right, really. Anyway, this is one of her good days. She hasn't actually threatened anyone with physical violence today.

LIZ: Yet.

TOM: So you've heard a few things about her, then.

LIZ: When I said I'd got the job here, lots of people went a bit quiet. Then they started telling me some of the things she's done. I'm amazed no-one ever complains about her. Except, I suppose, they'd be found later, round the back of the library, concussed by the date stamp.

TOM: Don't exaggerate! She's just a bit uptight, that's all.

LIZ: Uptight! Tom, I've heard about some of her exploits! Sharks in a feeding frenzy are more laid-back!

TOM: It's just her situation.

LIZ: Her situation. You mean, she's tired and ratty because of those peasants with pitchforks trying to drag her out of her coffin all night?

TOM: Be fair. She's left trying to bring up two kids, and do a full-time job.

LIZ: A lot of women do that, Tom. Most of them hardly ever staple someone's tie to the desk.

JOANNA comes out of the office with some paperwork, unnoticed by LIZ.

TOM: Oh, you heard about that, as well?

LIZ: It was practically the first thing Mr. Treble said to me: Welcome to the Library, Miss Baxter – Barker – Booth. Thank goodness you're not wearing a tie!

TOM: Well, Mr. Treble's got plenty of ties.

LIZ: I've only known her two minutes, and I can already tell she's not 'in a situation' – she's just rude, aggressive ... *(She realizes JOANNA is there)* right behind me. I'll just ... er ... *(She begins to sidle away)*

JOANNA: *(to Liz)* Coffee!

LIZ: Thertainly, Mathtter!

LIZ lurches away, Igor-fashion. JOANNA sits down at the desk.

JOANNA: We've got a right one, there. I thought Jenny was bad!

TOM: She's just having a laugh.

JOANNA: I don't mind a laugh, as long as the job gets done. The problem round here is that it doesn't.

TOM: I'm doing it! Look, this is me, doing book repairs! Incredibly boring though they are.

JOANNA: So are you. Get on with it.

TOM: Well, you'll have to talk to keep me awake. What did you do at the weekend?

JOANNA: *(suspiciously)* Why?

TOM: I was only asking to be polite. Don't tell me, then! It's not like I'm interested, or anything.

JOANNA: Sorry. I didn't do much. You know, just housework. Took the kids for a tramp in the woods on Sunday.

TOM: Did you find one? *(JOANNA glares at him)* Well, this'll stun you: on Saturday I went out for a bit of culture.

JOANNA: Found a couple of old yoghurts in the fridge, did you?

TOM: You're always on about people improving their minds. So I improved mine.

JOANNA: Oh, Tom!! You found a brain cell!!

TOM: Ha bloody ha. I went, for your information, to the art gallery.

JOANNA: Had you lost your way?

TOM: No, I went to see the modern art exhibition...

JOANNA: Oh, I might have known! That's not art. That's an old bicycle tyre, a plate of ravioli and a persuasive manner!

TOM: I love that open mind of yours. So come on. What high-brow 'quality time' did you spend with the kids this weekend? Abseiling while drawing in pastels? Advanced ballet and bungee jumping?

JOANNA: Yes, well, I have to spend my weekends getting all those boring jobs done that I don't have time for during the week, and keep two children amused. I've tried, I really have. I made up a game for them, spotting all the letters of the alphabet in the supermarket and in the car we play a game where we each have to remember a different line of a poem.

TOM: Their lives must be one long bout of hilarity! Joanna, have you ever considered.... No, don't worry.

JOANNA: What?

TOM: Forget it. It's too wild, too wacky.

JOANNA: What?

TOM: Ever considered kicking a ball around the park with them?

JOANNA: How does that get the housework done?

TOM: It doesn't. Which is kind of the point.

LIZ appears with a tray, on which are four mugs and the plant.

LIZ: Coffee up! *(She hands them out)* One for you, one for you, one for me. *(She solemnly pours the last coffee into the plant)* And this one's for Mr. Treble.

SCENE TWO

The Library. One week later. 9.15 a.m. The library is buzzing with people and quite noisy. MR. TREBLE is behind the bookstack, while LIZ and JOANNA

are at the desk dealing with a queue of people. MR. TAYLOR is doing the crossword at the table. Joanna looks up.

JOANNA: Could we have some quiet, please! *(There is no reaction, so JOANNA bellows)* QUIET! *(Several readers react badly to this and READER #2, approaching the desk with a heap of books, drops the lot.)* This is supposed to be a LIBRARY! I've been in quieter foundries!

MR. TREBLE hurries from behind the bookstack. LIZ walks round to help READER #2 pick up his books. TOM dashes in at the door, then tries to sneak past the desk.

TREBLE: I do think you could set a better example than this, Joanna. Perhaps you'd like to help these people, instead of shouting.

He goes back to his office.

JOANNA: *(still bellowing)* Why are you late?

READER #1: Er ... sorry ...

JOANNA: *(to READER #1)* Not you! *(To TOM)* You!

TOM: *(starting hesitantly, but getting more assured as he goes)* Well, I started out on time, but when I got off the bus outside, just as the bus was pulling away, I could see this ... squirrel ... yes, squirrel sitting in the middle of the road. Well, I dashed across and managed to chase it over to the pavement and through the railings into the park, but of course that made... me ... late ... *(He tails off)*

JOANNA: Pathetic! Completely pathetic! Even the squirrel could have come up with something more convincing than that!

TOM: Aha! You believe in the squirrel then?

JOANNA: *(wearily)* Tom, there are times when I don't even believe in you. You're just a product of a diseased imagination. Your own, probably. You owe 15 minutes.

TOM disappears into the staff-room. JOANNA takes some post into MR. TREBLE's office. READER #2 approaches the desk with his restored heap of books. LIZ begins to log them out.

READER #2: Thank you very much. I do like coming to this library. Five minutes in here with her tones up the nervous system no end. It's like a good work-out at the gym. Good entertainment, too.

LIZ: You didn't think so last week!

READER #2: True. My lip still smarts, you know. Educational, though, I will say that. I mean, I never knew you *could* do that with a hole punch. *(He takes his books)* Well, thanks very much!

READER #2 exits by main door. TOM emerges from the staff-room and JOANNA from the office. The phone begins to ring.

TOM: *(into phone)* Central Library ...Yes, she's here. Hang on *(To JOANNA)* It's for you. It's the Grim Reaper. He wants to borrow your scythe.

JOANNA clips him round the back of the head as she takes the phone. Her conversation is at first inaudible. TOM takes some books to return them to the shelves. READER #3 approaches the desk, with a book to be returned.

LIZ: Thanks. Did you enjoy it?

READER #3: *(mournfully)* Not really.

LIZ: Are you taking another one out today?

READER #3: Shouldn't think so.

LIZ: *(with forced brightness)* Did you have a good weekend?

READER #3: I spent it burying the rabbit.

LIZ: Well, I hope it was dead.

READER #3 looks disgusted and goes to the bookstack. TOM peers around the stack and does a Harry Worth at the end of it. LIZ laughs silently and hilariously, until she realizes JOANNA is staring at her.

JOANNA: *(Into phone)* Look, don't worry, it can't be helped. I'll just cancel the sitter ... We'll make it some other time. I hope she's better soon ... Okay. Bye!

LIZ: So! What was all that about?

JOANNA: All what about?

LIZ: The call!

JOANNA: You mean my private phone call?

LIZ: Yeah.

JOANNA: The one you were trying to earwig?

LIZ: Yeah.

JOANNA: Let's get this straight. You want to know the contents of my private, personal phone call?

LIZ: Yeah.

JOANNA: Tough!

LIZ: Sounded as though you were going out tonight?

JOANNA: Yes, well, I'm not now.

LIZ: Hot date?

JOANNA: Surely MI5 must be missing you.

LIZ: Someone nice?

JOANNA: (*wearily*) A group of friends were taking me out for a meal tonight, that's all. One of them is ill and one of them can't make it, so we've cancelled. My shoe size is 5, my grandmother's name is Jean and I'm allergic to shellfish. Okay? Anything else you need to know?

LIZ: Yes. Any particular reason?

JOANNA: What?

LIZ: For them taking you out for a meal.

JOANNA: No.

LIZ: Well, you said they were taking *you* out, so that sounds like a ... birthday, or something. Oh my God! Is it your birthday?

JOANNA: No.

LIZ: When is it? Today?

JOANNA: It is not my birthday.

MR. TREBLE comes out from his office with a card.

LIZ: It is, isn't it? It's your birthday!

JOANNA: No!

TREBLE: Happy Birthday, Joanna! Haha! Checked the personnel file!

He struts happily back to the office. JOANNA sinks her head on to the desk.

LIZ: How old?

JOANNA glares hard at LIZ, who darts off to the bookstack.

LIZ: *(quietly, to TOM)* Ah, it's a shame. Joanna was going out for dinner tonight, but they cancelled.

TOM: Yeah, she probably had someone tied up in the cellar, and he's just got free.

LIZ: Oh, it's a shame on her birthday, though.

TOM: She wasn't born; she was quarried.

LIZ: Well, I think it's a shame. Her friends are going to have to rearrange it.

TOM: Oh! Not a bloke, then?

LIZ: No. Do you think we should take her for a drink after work?

TOM: *(looking thoughtfully at JOANNA)* Dunno. Maybe. Oh! You owe me £3.00.

LIZ: What for?

TOM: The charity run.

LIZ: It was 50p a mile.

TOM: Yes, and I did six miles.

LIZ: There's no way you did that much.

TOM: It's all signed for on the form. You have to cough up, or I'll set Joanna onto you.

LIZ sighs and goes into the staff-room. TOM returns to the desk and sits down next to JOANNA.

TOM: I'm afraid you owe me ...

JOANNA: Six pounds. Yes, I know. Here it is.

TOM: How do you know?

JOANNA: We came along to watch.

TOM: I didn't see you.

JOANNA: Well, the kids fancied going out somewhere, and I remembered the fun run was on, so ...

TOM: Oh! I'm glad you went. I wish you'd said hello, though.

JOANNA: Didn't want to distract you – or admit that I knew you, obviously.

TOM: Obviously. Happy Birthday, by the way. You kept that quiet.

JOANNA: I reckoned without Liz, didn't I?

TOM: I hear your plans for this evening have fallen through.

JOANNA: Never mind.

TOM: I ... just wondered ... er ... I mean, don't if you don't want to ... but I thought you might ... er ... fancy going for a drink tonight.

JOANNA: Oh! Er ...

TREBLE: *(leaning out from his office)* Joanna! Do you have a moment?

JOANNA: Yes, of course.

She joins him in the office. READER #3 approaches TOM.

READER #3: Excuse me. Have you got any matches?

TOM: No, sorry.

READER #3 moves on to ask at the table. Someone there nods and hands over a box. READER #3 takes them behind the bookstack. The phone rings.

TOM: *(into phone)* Central Library ... Yes, you can renew it. Have you got your ticket number?

In the pause that follows, we hear a match being scraped against a box. TOM begins to tap the keyboard. LIZ comes back out to the desk and puts some money in front of TOM. From above the bookstack we can see smoke.

TOM: *(Into phone)* Right, but I'll have to look you up on the system. What's your surname and postcode? ... Is this 'The Care of Goats'?

A couple of readers near the bookstack are beginning to sniff the air and frown, looking about them.