

ACT ONE

Scene 1

Morning. A smart well equipped office, tidy and clean. There are two desks, one larger than the other. A framed photograph stands on the larger of the desks. There is one telephone, again on the larger of the desks. Robert is sorting out post on the larger desk. From time to time he looks around him appearing puzzled. He sniffs as there is a hesitant knock on the door.

ROBERT: *(as George enters and hovers)* Yes?

GEORGE: You asked me to come and see you.

ROBERT: What now?

GEORGE: This morning.

ROBERT: Can you smell something?

GEORGE: *(sniffs)* Disinfectant.

ROBERT: Makes me feel sick. Do you get it where you are?

GEORGE: I don't think so.

ROBERT: Yes or no?

GEORGE: No.

ROBERT: Just me then, is it? I'll get Linda to sort it when she comes.

GEORGE: The cleaners -

ROBERT: Yes, she'll know it's the cleaners. Highly competent, our Linda, have you noticed?

GEORGE: Yes, / I ...

ROBERT: And confident in her abilities. Knows what she's doing, wouldn't you say?

GEORGE: I'm sure she does.

ROBERT: Late again, of course, but that's my problem. What's yours?

GEORGE: I'm sorry.

ROBERT: You turn up on time all right but what about when you're here?

GEORGE: I - *(interrupted by the sound of the telephone)*

ROBERT: Sod. *(answers the phone)* Yes? *(pause)* Now? *(motions irritably to George to sit which he does)* I've only been here ten minutes. Couldn't you have ... *(pause during which Linda enters. She nods at George and sits at her desk)* I'm very busy just now. Can't it wait? *(pause)* No, don't come here. I'll - *(pause – Linda is getting ready to work – George looks uncomfortable)* No. *(pause)* Do what you like then but don't come here. *(pause)* All right, I'll be there but later. *(pause)* Later, I said, didn't you hear? *(puts down the phone and speaks to Linda)* If you'd been here you could have answered that.

LINDA: I'm sorry I'm a bit late.

ROBERT: Take a look at our George here, he's sorry as well but at least he was here on time.

LINDA: *(switching on her computer)* Bad traffic.

ROBERT: George can manage the traffic, can't you, George?

GEORGE: It can be bad/ in ...

ROBERT: Not so bad that you didn't get here.

LINDA: You don't come my way, do you, George?

ROBERT: Early riser, are you, George?

LINDA: Seven thirty,/ this ...

ROBERT: Seven thirty, our George, did you hear?

LINDA: I'm impressed.

ROBERT: Beat you by?

LINDA: I had things to do and the traffic/ was ...

ROBERT: Never mind the traffic and there's things to do you're supposed to do here, aren't there?

LINDA: So can I get on with some work now?

ROBERT: Don't let me stop you but you can get here a bit earlier from now on, can't you?

LINDA: Let me know when anything doesn't get done. *(commences work)*

ROBERT: That's not the point though, is it? *(pause – Linda ignores him)* You hear that, George? Cheeky, but she's right, she does get everything done. Now, what's your problem?

GEORGE: You asked –

ROBERT: I know what I asked. You're here but you don't give the impression of being here, if you know what I mean. *(Linda stops and glances at him and he speaks to her)* You tell him then.

LINDA: Maybe he wants to get on with his work.

ROBERT: Is that right, George?

GEORGE: If you want me to.

ROBERT: See what I mean? What sort of an answer is that? *(glances at Linda who has resumed work and ignores him so he continues speaking to George)* We buy and sell pots here, George, and we're supposed to make a profit. To do that everybody has to pull their weight. Understand me?

LINDA: George's figures are always on time.

TOBERT: Yes, but he is supposed to speak to people occasionally. I mean suppliers or customers and the people who work here. That's not too much to ask, is it?

LINDA: And they're always neat and tidy. Everything's recorded properly and you can read his writing.

ROBERT: But it's like talking to a sponge and nobody knows what he's saying.

LINDA: I know what he's saying.

ROBERT: Well, nobody else does. We get people on the phone complaining, you know we do.

LINDA: One.

ROBERT: One too many.

LINDA: Maybe he was a bit dim.

ROBERT: He's a customer, isn't he? Customers are entitled to be dim.

LINDA: Everyone has to learn.

ROBERT: But he's not learning, is he, and people want dealing with properly, don't they? And it's not just one, is it? There's been - *(interrupted by*

the phone and makes a gesture of exasperation – pause – no-one answers the phone) I've answered that once this morning. *(looks at George)* You answer it.

GEORGE: *(hesitates)* I ...

ROBERT: My Christ, see what I mean?

LINDA: *(rises and pointedly answers the phone)* Good morning, Mrs Harper. *(Robert makes a face)* Yes, he's here but he's with a member of staff at the moment. *(pause)* Yes, Mrs Harper, I'll try. *(offers the phone to Robert)*

ROBERT: What did she say?

LINDA: She wants to speak to you.

ROBERT: I know what she wants but what did she say? *(pause – Linda continues to offer the phone)* Sod you then. *(takes the phone and speaks in to it)* I've somebody with me, didn't you - *(pause)* What are we doing? We're trying to get on with the day and get some work done, that's what we're doing. What are you? *(pause)* For Christ's sake, Pam. *(pause then puts down the phone and for a moment looks disconcerted)* Sorry about that but women, you know how they are? *(Linda looks at him searchingly)* Yes, that's what I mean, you as well. You married, George?

GEORGE: No.

ROBERT: You'll find out.

LINDA: Maybe you should –

ROBERT: Mind your own business, can't you?

LINDA: Pardon me. *(resumes work)*

ROBERT: All right but you know what I meant. *(then to George)* I don't know what your problem is, personality or what, but you'd better start pulling yourself together. *(pause)* Say something, for Christ's sake.

GEORGE: I'm sorry.

ROBERT: Sorry's not the point though, is it? You have to do something about it, for Christ's sake. *(sniffs)* This bleeding smell. How am I supposed to think straight? *(then to Linda)* Can't you do something?

LINDA: *(rises)* I'll get some air freshener.

ROBERT: You can smell it then?

LINDA: *(leaving)* I can smell a nice clean smell.

ROBERT: *(pause then to George)* Come on now, George, what's the problem?

GEORGE: I ... I get flustered.

ROBERT: Well, don't get flustered. I'm flustered. Everybody's flustered. Just get on and do it, understand?

GEORGE: I'll try.

ROBERT: No, don't try, do it. And sound positive. Sound as if you mean it. *(Linda enters with a can)* Never mind whether you know what you're talking about. It doesn't matter ... Well, it does but - *(Linda sprays)* For Christ's sake, Linda, that's worse.

LINDA: *(leaving again)* I'm sure George does know what he's –

ROBERT: Well, nobody else does, do they? *(then to George)* Yes, it does matter but you know what I mean.

GEORGE: Yes.

ROBERT: Are you shy or what?

GEORGE: I've always been a bit –

ROBERT: You're too old to be shy. People will piss all over you. *(then to the entering Linda)* All right, but it's true. *(then to George)* Any more problems, I mean like actually talking to people, whether it's on the phone or here in the office or anything else you can think of, see Linda, will you?

GEORGE: I will.

ROBERT: You hear, Linda?

LINDA: I heard.

ROBERT: *(to George)* Go on then. Get some work done, can't you?

GEORGE: Yes, thank you. *(stands and hovers)*

ROBERT: That's it. For Christ's sake go. *(George glances at Linda then leaves – Robert speaks to Linda)* Am I too soft?

LINDA: Hardly.

ROBERT: Did he understand a word I was saying?

LINDA: Maybe you should try encouraging him.

ROBERT: You think that will work?

LINDA: It might.

ROBERT: Might won't do.

LINDA: He's steady and he'll learn.

ROBERT: Doesn't seem very steady to me.

LINDA: Not everyone's the same.

ROBERT: You mean like me, I suppose. Anyway, he's your responsibility now.

LINDA: If you say so.

ROBERT: But don't mother him.

LINDA: I'm not that old.

ROBERT: You know what I mean.

LINDA: I'm not sure that I do.

ROBERT: Yes, you ... *(pause)* Linda, don't you ever go off the rails?

LINDA: Who me?

ROBERT: Yes, you.

LINDA: You want me to go off the rails now?

ROBERT: All right then, don't. Get something done instead.

LINDA: That's what -

ROBERT: All right then, so it's me. *Pause)* It was him though, wasn't it? Drives you mad, makes things worse. *(Linda makes a face. Robert goes through some papers on his desk before he sniffs)* That first smell's back now.

LINDA: I'll ask them to try a new polish.

ROBERT: They can use the old one up first. *(pause)* Linda?

LINDA: Yes?

ROBERT: I know I get a bit ... You know?

LINDA: I know.

ROBERT: That's what I mean. You ...

LINDA: Me?

ROBERT: You know, you and ... *(the phone rings)* Sod it.

LINDA: Could be good news.

ROBERT: Such as?

LINDA: A nice fat order.

ROBERT: We shall have to get another phone in here.

LINDA: I've been saying that –

ROBERT: All right, all right. Answer it, can't you?

LINDA *(answering the phone)* Yes, Mrs Harper, I'll see.

ROBERT: It can't be.

(Linda offers him the phone. He shakes his head but she persists and following a pause he takes the phone)

Not now, Pam, for Christ's sake. *(pause)* I'm at work, I'm busy. Don't you understand? *(pause)* She's – *(pause)* I can't take this, Pam, for Christ's sake - *(pause)* No, I can't come now. *(pause)* I can't and that's it. Well, you'll have to bloody well - *(pause then puts down the phone – looks at Linda)* I don't know what's worst that smell or Look, Linda, I know you shouldn't have to hear that.

LINDA: Don't worry.

ROBERT: *(pause)* She won't do anything, will she, Linda?

LINDA: What do you/ mean?

ROBERT: I mean, you're a woman. Not like her, I admit, but ... I mean you always seem to know what to do.

LINDA: Maybe she needs -

ROBERT: How the hell do I know what she needs? You spoke to her.

LINDA: All she did was ask for you.

ROBERT: And what did she sound like to you?

LINDA: Unhappy.

ROBERT: Unhappy, for Christ's sake? Who the hell's ... What if I'm the problem?

LINDA: Robert, I can't –

ROBERT: Right, you're only an employee, I know. No, you're not. You're not only anything. *(pause)* Sod it then, let's work. *(makes a show of starting work but very briefly)* Linda, I can't.

LINDA: Maybe you should go home.

ROBERT: But what if she ... I can't be running after her every time she plays one of these games, can I?

LINDA: She's never kept phoning like this before.

ROBERT: Hasn't she? No, she ... Sod it then. *(rises)* Look after everything, will you?

LINDA: I will.

ROBERT: As if you wouldn't. *(moves to leave but hesitates)* You'd be better at this than me. *(Linda looks at him but does not reply)* Yes, I know. Christ, if only everyone were like you. *(leaves)*

(Linda looks after him for a moment but then rises, moves to Robert's desk, picks up and looks at the photograph, puts it down again, hesitates but then begins to tidy the desk)

Scene 2

A short time later. Linda is cleaning the keys of her computer. She finishes then examines them intently before making a noise of exasperation and starting again. She stops abruptly when there is a knock on the door. George enters hesitantly. He is carrying a piece of paper.

LINDA: You want Robert?

GEORGE: I thought you might ...

LINDA: George, did you see Robert go?

GEORGE: Yes, but I ...

LINDA: You were waiting for him to go?

GEORGE: Yes, but it was you I wanted to see.

LINDA: You mustn't let him get to you, George.

GEORGE: I do try.

LINDA: All you have to do is be yourself and hold your ground. Take it from me, it works.

GEORGE: But that's the trouble.

LINDA: What is?

GEORGE: I am myself. I'm me.

LINDA: And what's wrong with you?

GEORGE: I don't know. I just don't seem able to ...

LINDA: To?

GEORGE: I've never been very good at dealing with people.

LINDA: Just deal with yourself and let the others worry about themselves.

GEORGE: I can try.

LINDA: Let's start now then. Go out, come straight back in then tell me what you came in for.

GEORGE: *(pause)* Now?

LINDA: Do it, George.

(he hovers then leaves before coming back in hesitantly)

Again, George, please but this time come in as if you're not afraid of me. Do it as if you're at least my equal.

GEORGE: But I'm not ...

LINDA: Oh yes, you are. You're a nice smart capable young man. Now go out and come in again. *(he hovers)* With confidence this time. *(pause)* Now. *(he goes out and comes quickly back in)* There's no need to rush. Now tell me what you want.

GEORGE: Is it all right to order these? *(shows her the paper)*

LINDA: What do you think?

GEORGE: Yes.

LINDA: Why?

GEORGE: The stock's getting low and it's a fast moving item.

LINDA: Is there a note to say we shouldn't order any more?

GEORGE: No.

LINDA: Well then?

GEORGE: We should order some more.

LINDA: How many?

GEORGE: The same as last time.

LINDA: There you are then. You didn't need me at all. Now let me hear you do it.

GEORGE: *(pause)* Hear me?

LINDA: You know where the phone is.

GEORGE: I can do it on the computer.

LINDA: I'm sure you can but I shan't be able to hear you if you do. *(he hesitates and hovers)* Now, George.

GEORGE: *(moves to the phone but doesn't pick it up)* There is a bit of a smell in here.

LINDA: If there is it hasn't stopped me using the phone.

GEORGE: It is a bit overpowering.

LINDA: The phone, George.

GEORGE: *(hesitates then picks up the phone)* I don't remember the number. *(she points to the piece of paper)*

LINDA: *(as George pushes the buttons)* Just think of whoever it is as someone you like, someone you've known for a long time.

AMANDA: *(knocks and enters, carrying a cup of coffee, as Linda is speaking)* Excuse me, Linda. I brought George's coffee. It was getting cold.

LINDA: Just put it down somewhere, Amanda, he's busy just now.

AMANDA: *(moves to George and hands him the cup. George takes the cup hesitantly then puts down the phone)* If it's too cold I/ can ...

LINDA: *(rises)* Did you spill it? *(George and Amanda look at the carpet)*

AMANDA: I don't think so. *(but Linda moves to look)*

GEORGE: I am a bit clumsy sometimes but I don't think there is anything.