

Glide Time

ROGER HALL'S first experience of the Public Service came when as a nineteen-year-old immigrant he joined the State Insurance Office. He was there only two years, though more recently he has been back on the fringes of the Service as editor of the Department of Education's magazine *Education*. He has also had great success as co-author of a number of revues and has written and on occasion acted for television. When in 1975 he was in America on a QE II Arts Council grant and had an idea for a play set in an office, a variety of past experiences came together to produce *Glide Time*, his first stage play. Wellington's Circa Theatre has also accepted for production his second play, *Middle Age Spread*.

Glide Time is not only the hit of a crammed year; it is the best comedy written in this country for eighteen years . . . a play of rare accomplishment and charm, often moving. DOMINION

If you think you know what offices are like, you'll have all your ideas confirmed. THE WEEK

. . . not a ludicrous farce but an accurate satirical comedy. THE PRESS

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New Zealand playscripts are all by New Zealand dramatists. Although the texts will be useful to theatrical companies, each book in the series is designed to be read for entertainment.

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PRICE MILBURN for
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Glide Time

Roger Hall



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Introduction

IT'S ONLY just over a year since the first presentation of *Glide Time*, a year that has made the play one of the most exciting phenomena in New Zealand theatre history. Up and down the country this desk-level view of life in the Public Service has played to rocking, capacity houses.

Perhaps its success bears witness to the fact that if you scratch anyone in the country you will find a Public Servant underneath. All of us, at some time, seem in our working life to experience, for no matter how brief a period, the joys, sorrows and frustrations of that monolith of bureaucracy ruled over by 'they', who remain faceless from the next office all the way back to the State Services Commission. And if we haven't worked for 'them', then 'they' have certainly coloured and shaped our lives by contact with the myriad of departments that record, monitor and regulate our every step from cradle to the grave. Even our private enterprise organisations watch jealously the salary movements and worker facilities provided in the Service to such an extent that, at times, their attitudes and operation make them appear mere extensions of the great, grey parent body—with only a little more emphasis on profit margin.

I will never know, however, whether my own past experience as a green cadet and frustrated clerk with one of Her Majesty's departments qualified me as a choice to direct the first production of *Glide Time* for Circa Theatre. The play had already had a reading by a group of Circa actors. Circa being an actors' co-operative, they were apparently assessing the play for full presentation, but there were dark rumours of another, earlier director.

I was just completing rehearsals for a production of *Kennedy's Children* when I was first approached.

It was a very funny play, the read-through actors told me, I'd love it. . . . I could of course change the cast.

I would *choose* the cast, I said firmly.

Would I do it?

I would read it—but who could be silly enough to go straight from one set of night rehearsals to another?

But before I read it came the first tentative phone call from a quiet-voiced playwright. Could he bring me the script? I was, I could see, almost completely ensnared. But one has to go through the motions; so I read the play.

At this point I'm supposed to say that I was enthralled, that the quality of the script and its hit-potential was immediately apparent to me. I have to be honest. It struck me as a mildly amusing tale about just those people who had sat around me for so many years. It seemed long (it was long—it was cut drastically before the first night and Roger must have a drawer full of re-usable material from excisions). To paraphrase Gwendolen Fairfax, 'it produced very few vibrations'.

I talked with Roger Hall. I liked what he said and I realised that a very workable relationship was possible. Roger convinced me that I should do it. His modesty about the play charmed me into accepting and saying good-bye to my peace of mind for another five weeks. Producing any play is hell—but a new play creates stresses and strains undreamed of with a tried and tested work.

I cast the play. Some of the original readers were not available anyway, others slotted neatly into new roles, and new actors were found. All assembled for the first read-through, and after the first few pages were *spoken*, then, *then* I knew we were dealing with a cleverly crafted piece of theatre. My faith in the play continued to grow from that moment until now when it has no doubt reached the almost excessive proportions of a parent's for a gifted child.

Two things can make a world of difference to work on a new play. First and foremost, of course, is the attitude and ability of the playwright. Roger Hall must rate as one of the best writers theatre people could ever hope to work with. He is co-operative, attentive to changing shape and pattern, happy to cut and re-write, and always totally aware that plays are not born on a typewriter in isolation but like babies have to be slapped into life. His attitude, more than anything else, led to a boldness in manhandling the script towards the finished product. He seemed to know instinctively when to appear and when not to appear at rehearsals, when to arrive with scissors and typewriter or when to dig his heels in. In what can become the highly fraught situation of rehearsals these are qualities devoutly to be fostered but regrettably rarely encountered.

And the second thing? Naturally, the company—the actors, the designer, the production assistant. A new play is a perilous journey for all. They may bring their talent, their skill, their artistry, but faith is the great sustainer. Somehow the balance of faith, and commonsense in continuing work on the play, has to be maintained.

The rehearsals went through the usual highs and lows of co-operation and conflict, but the desire to do Roger's play well eventually overcame all difficulties. Strong pressure to change for the sake of change had to be resisted, the tendency to paraphrase simply because the line was not 'fixed' had at times to be curbed, and the fear of failing to be funny because one was attempting a reality overcome.

Later productions may have played strictly for laughs because of the play's reputation as a comedy but I think we were all very much aware of the basic truth of the situation we were attempting to present. That it was amusing was attributable to Roger Hall's skill in creating a recognisable and totally believable vision of a major part of our society, a realisation on Roger's part that it is possible to laugh at ourselves.

My most intense memory, the lasting one, is of the tired and terrified wait in Circa's tiny foyer, alone, eye pressed to an inadequate keyhole view of a small theatre seemingly crowded with desks, filing cabinets and telephones, waiting for that 'shock of recognition', the first laugh that said, 'My God—there *WE* are!' and then, after two hours, of the applause that thundered on, calling and carrying Roger on to the stage to a justly deserved place in the history of New Zealand theatre.

ANTHONY TAYLOR

First performance

GLIDE TIME was first presented by Circa Theatre, Wellington, on 11th August 1976 with the following cast:

JOHN	Ross Jolly
JIM	Michael Haigh
HUGH	Ray Henwood
BERYL	Pauline d'Emden
MICHAEL	Garry Knuckey
BOSS	Fergus Dick
WALLY	Ian McClymont

Directed by Anthony Taylor

Designed by Grant Tilly

Lighting by Rex Gilfillan

Stage Manager/Production Assistant Alison Baker

The music used in the Circa production was:

OPENING:	<i>Good Old Desk</i> (Nilsson on LP <i>Aerial Ballet</i> —RCA Victor)
BETWEEN ACT 1 AND 2:	<i>Part of the Union</i> (Strawbs)
END OF ACT 2:	<i>Good Old Desk</i>
OPENING ACT 3:	<i>Monday, Monday</i> (Petula Clark)
BETWEEN ACT 3 AND 4:	<i>Part of the Union</i> and <i>Good Old Desk</i>

Characters

JOHN. About 30. Works hard and efficiently at his job, though pretends not to. Quite well educated, well spoken and with a quick wit. Usually wears quite a good suit.

JIM. 46 or 47. A fairly typical public servant of the type who is never going to make it very far. A typical Kiwi who has found himself in a clerical job. Fairly uncouth, and has a Kiwi accent. Tends to wear old cardigan at work, under sports jacket. Quite a boozier. Would have voted National for the sake of the All Black tour.

HUGH. Also mid-forties. A Welshman, though not with a very pronounced accent (does not say "look you"), who has been in the country only 3½ years. Came out for the sake of the family rather than for his own job ambitions.

BERYL. Early to mid-thirties. Stout, but not unattractive, and preferably with an ample bosom. Quite intelligent but not very educated or informed, having been stuck at home looking after her old mother. Content to accept the job day by day.

MICHAEL. 17. His hair is unfashionably short. This is his first job and he is rather shy and very naive. But after a few weeks he grows in confidence and begins to blossom.

BOSS. Mid 50s. Short, fussy, worried—all this reflected in his movements. Wears RSA badge and very conservative. Worries about his super. A stickler for detail.

WALLY. Anything from 40–55. Fairly uncouth. Enjoys wielding the power that administration paperwork gives him.

A PAIR OF HANDS. Which is all we see of the messenger.

THE TELEPHONES

If possible, there should be a distinction between internal calls (a regular *buzz buzz*) and calls coming from outside (one long call). In this script, calls are internal, unless otherwise indicated. **BERYL** and **HUGH** each have a phone but they are linked, as are the phones for **JIM** and **JOHN**.

The play

Set: The stores branch of a Government Department

ACT 1: Monday, August 24	8.05 am to 9.50 am
ACT 2: Wednesday, September 2	9.50 am to 12.35 pm
ACT 3: Monday, September 21	12.35 pm to 2.50 pm
ACT 4: Friday, September 25	2.50 pm to 4.35 pm

Acts 1 and 2 take 1 hour and 15 minutes

Acts 3 and 4 take 1 hour

Act One

Monday 24 August 9.05 to 9.50 am

A Monday morning. Interior small office. Door opens. JOHN enters. Exhausted and furious from grappling with Wellington's wind and rain. His hair is askew.

He pauses for a moment, catching his breath from having arrived—itself an achievement. He moves, looks at his umbrella; it has been inverted by the wind, and broken. Useless. Angrily he thrusts it into the waste paper basket. He gives a great cry as if to the gods.

JOHN. Wellington, I HATE you! I loathe you! Dear God, let This department be decentralised. Anywhere. Anywhere! Just get us out of Wellington. I'd even settle for Masterton.

He rushes to the radiator. Feels it. It is obviously cold. He kicks it and then wrenches the handle futilely, trying to get some heat in it.

JOHN. I'll never forgive the Arabs for this. Siding with the State Services Commission.

He rushes to his desk and flings open the cupboard part of it. His face registers dismay.

JOHN. Where's my heater? Angry. Who's taken my heater? *He runs to HUGH's desk and opens cupboard part of that. It's gone!! He rushes to MAX's desk and opens that.*

That's gone, too. Some maniac's stolen every bloody heater in the place!!

The boss's door opens. JIM is leaning in the doorway. He looks a wreck. He is holding three one-bar heaters. JOHN looks at him amazed.

JOHN. Good God! . . . You look, you look as if you spent the night there.

JIM *slowly nods. (He can't yet speak.)*

JOHN. ALL night?

JIM *slowly nods again.*

JOHN. Isn't that carrying glide-time to excess?

He runs over to JIM and relieves him of the heaters. He begins plugging them in next to the desks.

JOHN, *as he is doing this.* Why on earth would you want to spend the night here? I mean you don't exactly enjoy DAYS here, let alone nights. *Working it out.* You missed the last train?

JIM *nods again.*

JOHN. You missed the last train . . . because you were at a party?

JIM *nods.*

JOHN. Must have been some party.

JIM. Great . . . until someone drove off with the mini-tanker. JOHN, *huddling over the heater.* What party was it?

JIM. Old Boys Football Club. Annual Social.

JOHN. Oh that's right. Wasn't some team coming up from Christchurch? How'd they go against them?

JIM. Wiped.

JOHN. How about Saturday?

JIM. Wiped.

He goes to his desk and sits down.

JOHN takes off his coat and hangs it up, and then sits at desk.

JOHN. So you were drinking to forget?

JIM. It was a great night.

JOHN takes the paper out of his brief case but JIM takes it from him. JOHN resigns himself to it (quite used to it). He goes to the large calendar and alters it from Friday 21 August to Monday 24 August.

As JOHN goes back to his desk, HUGH enters. If anything, he is in a worse state than JOHN was. He is wrapped as much as possible, and he slides across to stand in front of his heater. He cannot speak but stares with eyes wide with cold and the shock of the wind. JOHN starts some work.

JIM reads the paper and lights cigarette. HUGH lets out a moan.

JOHN. Oh it's you. I thought it was a bundle for Corso.

HUGH. They said nothing about this at New Zealand House.

JOHN, *sympathetically.* I know. It's just "It's a great place to bring up kids". That's all they tell you. Oh, and "watch out for the katipos". They never tell anyone that Wellington has a 30 mph wind for 150 days of the year.

HUGH. More in Johnsonville. *Beginning to stir.* Last night, boy, Bronwen was awake all night thinking the roof was

going to go. In the end, I hoped it would, then we could have got to sleep.

JOHN. Pretty bad, was it?

HUGH. Bad? I swear this morning there were three houses up on the hills that weren't there yesterday.

JIM. Having a heat wave in Britain I see.

HUGH. Thank you very much.

He goes to the book to sign on.

HUGH. I can hardly sign my name, look. *He clenches his hand and signs, looking at his watch as he does so. He takes it across to JOHN, who signs it and then gives it to JIM.*

HUGH. Christ, Jim, you look as though you spent the night here.

JOHN. He did.

HUGH. You're kidding.

JOHN. He stayed all night.

HUGH. All night!

JOHN. Missed the train.

HUGH. How did you get in?

JIM. Got a key. Admin'll give you a key if you ask. Wally'll fix you up with one.

HUGH. No thanks. Seven hours thirty-five's enough for me each day. *Still can't get over it.* All night! What did Mabel say?

JIM. Nothing.

HUGH. Nothing?

JIM. I haven't phoned her yet.

HUGH. If I stayed out all night, Bronwen'd have the police dragging Oriental Bay by now. Hoping for the insurance. *Pulls a couple of files across to himself and looks at them. Reluctantly. Sighs.* Ah well. The day after tomorrow's Wednesday . . . and the week's almost gone.

JOHN. Did you have a good weekend?

HUGH. Oh very exciting, yes. Bronwen got me in the garden yesterday—she'd been reading the Yates advertisement. And Saturday I was the girls' chauffeur for the ballet

lessons and netball, plus a bottle drive for the Girl Guides. God's punishment for buying a station wagon.

JOHN. Get a lot of bottles?

HUGH. Are you kidding! They know how to drink in Johnsonville.

JOHN. Ah! But only for a good cause. It's the same everywhere. Jim keeps half the Hutt Valley schools in art paper, don't you, Jim?

JIM, *only half listening.* I do my bit.

JOHN. How's the little boy?

HUGH, *face lighting up.* Oh, he's smashing! He's just learnt how to point. He says "horse!" *He demonstrates, his face looking one way but the finger pointing the opposite (wrong) way.*

JIM, *still in the paper.* Glamorgan lost.

HUGH. What?

JIM. Glamorgan lost. At cricket.

HUGH. Is that supposed to be news? They play cricket like Kiwis play soccer. *(To John)* How did your weekend go?

JOHN. Spent most of it trying to avoid helping my brother-in-law. I think he's got a guilty conscience about something—anyway, he's going through one of his concreting binges.

JIM. Most jokers do more at home in the weekend than the wharfies do in a week.

BERYL enters and signs on. While she is doing so, MICHAEL enters. He signs on also. BERYL is well wrapped up, but doesn't seem as affected by the weather as the others were.

BERYL, *to Michael.* Can you follow the signing-on system?

MICHAEL. Yes thanks.

BERYL. More than I can, since we started glide-time. *(To all cheerfully)* Morning, everybody!

JOHN. The woman's mad. Monday! The weather appalling. And Beryl arrives cheerful!

JIM. It's because she's fat.

BERYL. Thank you, Jim.

JIM. Fat people are always cheerful.

JOHN. Only because the fat keeps out the cold. Morning, Michael.

MICHAEL, *quietly*. Good morning. *He sits at his desk and begins his work, but he is very much aware of all that is said . . . listens to everything.*

BERYL, *going over to radiator, feeling it and realising it's cold*. I'm not fat! *She moves the cactus in its pot slightly.*

JOHN, *pleasantly*. Of course you're not, Beryl . . . we all know that. Now pull up a couple of chairs and sit down.

BERYL, *sitting down*. Mum says I've lost weight.

JIM. She must be blind.

A rather tense silence.

JIM. Sorry.

BERYL. That's alright.

HUGH. Any . . . any improvement in her sight?

BERYL. A bit. She can look at a bit of TV now. We watched the movie yesterday afternoon. It was really good. We both had a good cry. We were going to visit Max, but Mum didn't feel up to it.

JOHN. Tch. I meant to go.

HUGH. So did I.

JOHN. I should have gone.

BERYL. I know he likes to see somebody from work.

MICHAEL. I went.

This is a surprise. They all look at him (except Jim, who is still engrossed in the paper.)

BERYL. You hardly knew him.

JOHN. You were only here a couple of days before he had the accident.

MICHAEL. I thought he might not have any visitors.

HUGH. You were right.

JOHN. That was very Christian of you. Oh. Sorry . . . it probably was.

BERYL. How was he?

MICHAEL. Fine. Considering everything. He should be on crutches next week.

HUGH. Was he cheerful?

MICHAEL. He seemed to be.

JOHN. Of course he'd be cheerful. A broken hip'd be Max's dream injury . . . weeks lying on his back doing nothing.

HUGH, *explaining to Michael*. Max is notoriously lazy.

JOHN. He holds the world record for the Peter Principle.

Been promoted beyond his own level of competence six times. He's in the Guinness Book of Records for it.

MICHAEL, *impressed*. Really?

JOHN. No.

Phone rings.

JOHN. Stores. Hang on. *Puts hand over receiver*. Anyone know anything about twenty clipboards? For staff training.

HUGH. Not me.

JOHN. Jim?

JIM. What?

JOHN. Twenty clipboards.

JIM. Staff training want them.

JOHN. I KNOW. They're on the phone.

JIM. I put the details on Max's desk. He was dealing with it.

JOHN. Very useful. *(Into phone)* Could I ring you back on this? *Rings off. Goes to Max's desk.*

He begins looking through all the paperwork piled up on MAX's desk.

JOHN. Hey! I haven't seen some of these circulars. Jim, I know Max's name is after yours on the list, but wouldn't it be more sensible to let the rest of us see them first?

JIM. What difference does it make? Nobody reads them.

HUGH. Some of us do.

JOHN, *reading from circulars*. Social Club outing, Kapiti Island.

HUGH, *interested*. When?

JOHN. Two weeks ago. *Screws it up*. Missing files. *Puts circular to one side*. Stores board contract numbers—alterations. *Puts that to one side too*. Ah! A message from our Head of Department. "I would like to thank all members of staff for their continuing hard work and co-operation through a difficult year." Make you all feel better?

JIM. Bloody hypocrite!

HUGH. Who? The Director?

JIM. Yes. Why doesn't he come round and tell us himself? Have a few beers or something. Not send round a circular. I bet he doesn't even know we exist.

JOHN. He's never been here, has he?

JIM. Even the MINISTER'S been here. He called in once.

HUGH. That's right. Just after the election.

JOHN. That was to show us his new suit.

JIM. If the Minister could make it, you'd think the Director could once in a while.

BERYL. I don't suppose Michael knows what the Director looks like.

MICHAEL. No.

JOHN. He's short. Almost bald. Wears glasses with very thick lenses.

HUGH. Oh, is THAT who he is. I've only seen him a couple of times when I've worked late. I always thought it was the man with the cleaning contract.

BERYL. I got in a lift with him once.

JOHN. Some people get all the luck.

BERYL. He was very pleasant. Said "Good morning" to me.

JOHN. And I bet it WAS morning, too. He's no fool. *Finds what he wants on Max's desk*. Here we are. Twenty clipboards. April 17th . . . tch . . . no wonder they're getting shirty.

He goes back towards his desk. He stops to watch as the door opens slightly and hands come in to put mail and files in the in-tray and to empty the out-tray.

JOHN. That really is the shyest messenger we've ever had.

BERYL empties the in-tray and sorts it out on her desk.

BERYL. PSIS Statements. Circulars. Files. *Sighs*. What an exciting mail.

JOHN. What do you want? A threatening letter?

BERYL, *holding letter up to the light*. I wonder what the State Services Commission want with the boss?

She takes it, and other mail, into his office.

JOHN. Probably trying to raise our norm.

JIM, *still reading paper*. Jeez, we can't work any harder.

JOHN, *looks at watch*. Where is he this morning?

BERYL, *coming out of the office*. He's left a note on his desk.

She hands out the rest of the mail to the others.

HUGH, *hopefully*. Not a suicide note?

BERYL. Doctor's appointment.

JIM. Pity.

JOHN. Still, it might be something major. *He opens his letter.*

HUGH. He's probably asking the doctor right now if he can have 10 percent discount because he's a public servant.

JIM. He'd be worth a bob.

BERYL. He should be—he never spends anything.

HUGH. He told me he's saving for his retirement—very worried about inflation.

BERYL. He hasn't got long to do, has he?

JIM. Long enough. We've got to put up with him for a few more years.

JOHN. Then he can have a happy six months before collapsing in the radishes. What are the PSIS specials this month? Table lamps . . . single beds . . . modular stereo. *Tears it up.*

MICHAEL. What's PSIS?

HUGH. Public Service Investment Society. You join, boy. You get interest; 12½ percent off everything you buy, including grog . . . oh, you don't drink, I forgot. And they give you loans for cars . . . and mortgages.

JOHN. Give Michael a chance, Hugh. He won't want a mortgage for years.

JIM. He might if he's not careful. I saw you outside the Majestic Saturday night, With a sheila.

MICHAEL. Oh.

JIM. Looked a fair cracker. She give you a naughty after?

They all look embarrassed at Jim's lack of tact. Michael especially so.

JIM, *continuing*. Take my advice. Get all you can before you're married. You get bugger-all after.

MICHAEL. She was my sister.

HUGH. That really sums up New Zealanders' attitude to sex, doesn't it . . . "a naughty". Or that charming abbreviation . . . "a naught".

JIM. What do you call it?

HUGH. It doesn't matter what I call it, but we certainly don't call it that.

JIM. I suppose in England you have to say to the wife (*puts on posh voice*), "Excuse me, my dear, but would you care to join me in a bout of sexual intercourse?"

HUGH. I wouldn't know what they say in England . . . I'm Welsh.

JIM. Same difference.

HUGH. Is it? You see how you like it when you go overseas and you get called an Australian.

JIM. I'm not interested in going overseas. This country's good enough for me.

Hugh raises his eyes heavenwards.

JOHN. But I bet you wouldn't say "no" to this. *Reading from PSIS pamphlet.* "Beachcomber Holiday . . . ten days staying at luxury hotel with private beach in sun-soaked Fiji." Few vacancies left.

HUGH. OHHH! It should be compulsory for all public servants. Compensation for living in Wellington.

JOHN. Beryl went last year, didn't you?

BERYL. Me and Mum went. It was marvellous.

JOHN. Beryl came back so brown and fat immigration would only give her a three-month work permit.

JIM. Pity the Ag Department didn't refuse to let her in.

BERYL. Jim, you're being particularly unpleasant today . . . what's got into . . . *Suddenly notices.* Did you have a shave this morning?

HUGH. He spent the night here.

BERYL. Here!

JOHN. I found him here this morning moaning pitifully for a copy of the Dominion. Which I still haven't read yet.

Gets it back from Jim.

BERYL. Why on earth did you spend the night here?

JIM, *suddenly losing temper*. Mind your own bloody business.

They all look at each other in surprise at Jim's reaction.

BERYL. Sorry.

A pause. Then BERYL dials an outside number.

BERYL, *putting down phone.* Mum must be having her little goss with Mrs Whittaker.

BOSS *enters.*

BOSS. Good morning.

There is a swift attempt to look busy, while the BOSS goes straight to his office while they each mumble some form of "Good morning". The BOSS dumps his bag and umbrella inside his office and then goes straight back to get the signing-on book. On the way back he suddenly stops.

BOSS. Did anyone get a paper?

JOHN *resignedly hands it over.*

BOSS. Thanks. *He goes into his office and shuts the door.*

HUGH, *to soothe an annoyed John.* He'll buy one one day.

JOHN. No. He's holding out till they have a sale. *Goes to Michael with papers.* Here, you might like to have a go at this. Make a change from custom and shipping forms.

WALLY *enters. He has a clipboard and bustles in without a word. He goes straight to BERYL's table and beckons her to stand. When she does so, he upturns her chair and checks off a number on his list. Ticks it. Does the same for HUGH.*

BERYL. When are we going to get the heaters on, Wally?

WALLY. No oil. Still waiting delivery.

HUGH. Lies. We saw them pumping it in on Friday.

JOHN. The heaters have been off for a week!

WALLY. Nothing to do with me.

He checks MAX's chair and then moves on to MICHAEL, who anticipates this and upturns his own chair.

WALLY, *as he checks the number.* You new?

MICHAEL. Fairly.

WALLY, *showing him the list.* Which is you?

MICHAEL. Here.

WALLY. Right. Ticks. Warning. Don't lose that chair.

Michael looks amazed.

WALLY, *to Michael.* It's happened.

He moves on and checks JIM's chair, but JIM won't stand, so WALLY has to kneel and peer under it. When he gets to JOHN's desk, JOHN is standing up against the wall, as if about to be searched for guns by the police.

JOHN. OK, Wally, I'll come quietly.

BOSS *opens door. He has a letter in his hand. He smiles at them all and is about to speak when he sees WALLY.*

BOSS. Ah, Wally. Glad you're here. My power point seems to have fused.

JOHN *silently points to JIM as the culprit, but not so BOSS can see.*

WALLY. Have you done a work order form? Can't do anything unless I've got a work order form.

BOSS. I'll fill one in right now.

WALLY, *following him into office.* I'll check your chair.

BERYL *has dialled the number again. Again, no luck.*

BERYL. I've known Mum and Mrs Whittaker to talk all morning.

MICHAEL. Where do I find contract numbers?

JIM. What is it?

MICHAEL. Cabinet, filing. Three drawer.

JIM. L/bar six double seven.

MICHAEL *looks surprised.*

JOHN. He's been here a very long time. *He brings across a folder. Government Stores Board . . . GSB . . . Contract Index. Looking through. Cabinet, filing . . . three drawer. L/bar six double seven.*

JIM. Told you.

JOHN. You keep this copy. You'll have to use it a lot.

WALLY *comes out of BOSS's office and goes to door.*

HUGH. Try and do something about the heaters.

WALLY. Nothing to do with me. *Goes.*

BOSS *comes to his doorway, holding letter and smiling at them. He is about to speak but his phone goes. He has to dash back in. Phone on HUGH's desk rings.*

HUGH. Hello. Hang on. *Puts hand over the receiver. Calculators. When are they coming in?*

JIM, *aggressive.* Who wants to know?

HUGH. Upstairs.

JIM. Christ, they only asked last week!

HUGH. Well, they want to know what the story is. What shall I tell them?

JIM. I don't know.

HUGH. Well, you're handling it since Max has been away . . .

JIM, *standing up.* I don't give a stuff what you tell them!

I don't give a stuff about them or the bloody calculators.

I'm sick of this place and everybody in it. I'm going to get some breakfast. *Grabs coat, goes out and slams the door.*

JOHN. Yes, Virginia, there is a male menopause.

MICHAEL. What's a male menopause?

JOHN. Look it up in the Readers' Digest.

BERYL. I hope Jim gets a shave while he's out . . . it'll make him feel better.

JOHN. How would you know?

BERYL. Do you think he's alright?

JOHN. Yes! Just got a hangover, that's all.

HUGH. A couple of aspirin and a cup of coffee, he'll come back a new man.

JOHN. We could do with a new man. Look at it all! We're miles behind with some of these orders.

HUGH. Don't tell me. That's what upstairs was complaining about with those calculators . . .

He suddenly realises that he's still holding on to the phone. Er . . . could I ring you back on this? Rings off.

MICHAEL. What's "overt rousers"?

JOHN, *puzzled.* What? *He comes to MICHAEL's desk.*

MICHAEL, *indicating index.* Overt rousers.

JOHN. Ah! Over trousers. Space in the wrong place. Lots of funny things like that. Like they used to have "Drivers, screw" . . . a lot of innocent merriment from that.

HUGH. Michael. Would you mind taking this up to the typists for me? You don't have to, of course.

MICHAEL. No, no. I don't mind.

HUGH. You know where they are? On the third floor.

MICHAEL. Yes.

HUGH. Only these are rather urgent, see. I've put a note on.

MICHAEL. I'll tell them. *He goes.*

BERYL. I'm still a bit worried about Jim. He doesn't seem to have been his usual self for some time.

HUGH. No. Something's getting at him. Do you think things between him and Mabel are . . . ? *He means 'dodgy'.*

JOHN. Who can say? He hardly mentions her . . . not since I've known him anyway.

BERYL. Are they happily married?

HUGH. Is anybody?

BERYL, *indignantly*. Yes! Surely!

JOHN. Name three.

BERYL. Well . . . the Duke and Duchess of Windsor were.

HUGH. They had to be, didn't they. He could hardly give up the Throne of England and then spend the rest of his life throwing crockery at her, could he. *Going into nostalgia*. I remember all of that. What a shock it was! I even had an Edward VIII Coronation mug. I gave it to Edith Nesbitt in the bicycle sheds in the end. Tch! Would be worth a fortune now.

JOHN. Well. That's one happy couple. Two to go.

BERYL. Oh, I don't know . . . it's Jim I'm worried about.

BOSS comes out of his office. Again he is about to speak, but then he notices people are missing.

BOSS. Where is everybody?

BERYL. Jim's gone to get some breakfast.

BOSS. Breakfast!

BERYL. He missed out this morning. And Michael's gone to . . . er. . .

BOSS. Well, would you tell Jim I'd like to see him when he gets back.

HUGH. Rightho.

MICHAEL comes back.

MICHAEL. Mrs Harris says they'll be ready first thing this afternoon.

BOSS looks at MICHAEL a bit sharply. HUGH looks embarrassed.

BOSS. Michael . . . would you see if you could find the correspondence on this for me, please. *Hands him letters, and goes back in his office.*

HUGH, *making sure BOSS's door is shut* . . . Er . . . you weren't to know this, but strictly speaking you're not supposed to take stuff up to the typists.

MICHAEL. Sorry.

HUGH. No, no. Nothing to be sorry about. I should've told you.

JOHN, *getting up*. You must learn the Public Service Corridor Walk.

MICHAEL. The what?

JOHN. The Corridor Walk. The secret is . . . always have a piece of paper in your hand. *He takes a piece of paper and walks across the room looking at it.* And look worried. If you do that you can go to Courtenay Place and back and no one'll mind.

MICHAEL goes over to filing cabinet.

WALLY bursts in again.

WALLY. Diaries!

HUGH. Diaries?

WALLY. You gotta order next year's diaries.

JOHN. We order the diaries.

WALLY. But Admin finds out how many you order.

JOHN. But we don't order for another couple of months.

WALLY. Nothing to do with me. Now then. *Rattles them off.*

One day to a page, two days to a page, one week double page spread, one week single page.

BERYL. I never use mine.

WALLY. You're entitled to one.

BERYL. I gave it to Mum.

WALLY. Government property! You gave your mother Government property!

BERYL. She doesn't use it either.

WALLY. Your name's on the list. I got to order you one. What sort do you want?

BERYL. I don't know.

JOHN. Ring up your mother and ask her what sort of diary she doesn't want to use next year.

WALLY, *making up her mind for her . . . writing.* One week, double page spread.

HUGH. Same for me, please. And for Max.

JOHN, *holding up his own diary and pretending to read. He puts on a schoolboy, cloddish voice.* "Friday. Went to school. Played footie. Went home. Had tea. Mucked about."

WALLY. What sort?

JOHN. One day to a page, thank you. I take it that is the most expensive? You can put Jim down for that, too.

WALLY. Right. *Looks at MICHAEL.*

MICHAEL. What the others have . . . one week to . . .

WALLY. Double page spread.

BERYL, *still worried.* I could get the diary back off Mum if you like.

WALLY, *as he goes out.* Forget it. *Slams door.*

BERYL. Only I think she gave it to Mrs Whittaker.

MICHAEL, *crossing to HUGH with the papers boss gave him.*
Would I find this under the name of the person who wrote it, or the person it's sent to, or what the letter's about?

JOHN. Probably not.

HUGH. Let's have a look. There's a reference number, see.

MICHAEL, *going back to desk.* Thanks.

JIM enters. They all self-consciously don't look at him and appear to concentrate on their work.

BERYL. The Boss wants to see you.

JIM. Huh. Did he say what for?

BERYL. No.

BOSS comes to door of his office. Has letter in hand, is about to say something, but he sees JIM.

BOSS. Ah, Jim! *He pops back in his office and comes out with the signing-on book.*

BOSS. It's about your hours. I'm not sure that you follow the principle of glide-time.

JIM. Yes I do. We start late and finish early.

BOSS, *horrified.* You mustn't say things like that. Even as a joke. We must be very careful what we say, especially when members of the public are present. *In the background JOHN is miming playing a violin . . . it's an old tune the BOSS is playing.* Imagine if "Truth" got hold of what Jim said.

JOHN. Government Work Slide When Glide Time Tried.

BOSS. That's not even funny. You know how sensitive the Commission is about newspaper criticism. Now, Jim . . . your hours. You do realise that during a fortnightly period your hours should add up to seventy-five hours fifty minutes.

JIM. They do, don't they?

BOSS. But it's how you get that total that bothers me. Some days you seem to work nineteen hours.

JIM. Ah! Well I put down my hours each day. Then on the last day of the fortnight I work out how many I should do to make up the balance. And I put them down for that last day. I don't actually work them, of course.

BOSS draws in breath in horror.

JIM. I don't see what all the fuss is anyway. Glide-time hasn't made any difference. I work the hours I've always done . . . get in about eight thirty, and nip away smartish twenty past four to make sure of getting a seat at De Bretts.

BOSS, *about to launch into patient explanation.* Jim. The system depends on people signing at . . .

JIM. I tell you what. I'll sign on each day and you fill in the hours for me at the end of each fortnight.

BOSS. No! Certainly not! *Then thinks.* Yes. Alright then.

He turns to go back to his office. MICHAEL gives him the correspondence he's got.

The others look at each other, surprised.

BERYL. He gave in easily.

HUGH. Not like him at all.

Phone goes (outside call).

BERYL. Hello. Hang on. *Puts hand over receiver. To HUGH:* It's your wife.

HUGH, *looks heavenwards.* Another domestic crisis. *Takes phone.* Hello, love. Yes. Yes. *Telling others:* The car won't start. *Into phone:* Yes, I know the warrant's expired . . . No, Bronwen, because the warrant's expired is NOT why the car won't start. Have you checked the petrol? Well, what about the battery? Well, ring the garage. And while they're at it get them to give us a new warrant. *Sighs.* It's nothing to worry about. How's the little boy? Did he? *Amused.* Did he? Oh I know it meant a lot of work for you, but still. Wouldn't want him sitting still all the time, would you? OK. Bye, love. *Rings off.* He took all the eggs out of the fridge and dropped them on the floor. Thought it a great joke. People who say there's no difference between boys and girls are all wrong, you know . . . he's completely different from the girls. He won't take any notice of us. If we tell him not to do something, he just looks at you and does it.

JIM, *sourly.* They don't get any better as they get older.

JOHN. You having a bit of trouble with young Ross?

JIM. Not now. I thumped him on Friday.

BERYL. Oh, Jim!

HUGH. You hit him! He's seventeen years old.

JIM, *proudly.* But I could still thump him.

HUGH. That's not what I meant.

JOHN. What did he do when you hit him?

JIM. Went flattening.

BERYL. Has he left home?

JIM. Moved in with some long-haired mates of his. He'll be back . . . a taste of what the real world's like'll teach him a thing or two.

JOHN. What did you hit him for?

JIM. Told me my life had been a complete waste of time. Despised everything I've done and everything I stood for.

HUGH. Well, why didn't you talk to him about it? Discuss it . . . not belt him one.

JIM. Talk to him! How do you talk to someone who every-time you ask them something just shrugs his shoulders?

HUGH, *shrugs his shoulders. Then.* Sorry.

BERYL. What did Mabel say about it all?

JIM. Ah, she just went into bloody tears. She always has spoilt him.

BERYL. And you left her all alone last night!

JIM. She went to Sally's place. She doesn't take any notice anyway. It's not the end of the world . . . he's only in Kelburn.

BERYL. But he's only seventeen.

JIM. He's old enough to look after himself.

BERYL. But . . .

JIM. I don't want to talk any more about it, I've finished with him, as far as I'm concerned.

BOSS comes out of his office with coat on.

BOSS. I'm just going out. Only be about five minutes.

HUGH. Right.

BOSS exits.

BERYL. I wonder where he's going.

HUGH, *romanticising*. "Out into the storm."

JOHN. Head bowed into the teeth of the gale. Stumbling past the Cenotaph. Inching his way along Lambton Quay, until at last his goal is in sight . . . the Public Trust Office.

HUGH, *taking up the story*. To change his will. At no charge.

JOHN. But wait! On the very steps he sinks, lies down, to rise no more. Already the wind begins to cover his body with copies of Best Bets and Big Ben pie bags.

JIM, *getting up*. Jeez, you blokes talk a lot of rubbish.

HUGH. And I love you, too.

JIM, *at the door*. Just going upstairs, to the . . . won't be a couple of shakes.

HUGH. I wish he'd think of a new joke.

BERYL has dialled and this time got through.

BERYL. Ah! Hello, Mum. I tried to get through to you, but you . . . I thought you probably were. How is Mrs Whittaker? Mm . . . mm. *Looking out the window . . .* DID he? Oh, how gorgeous. Let me say "Hello" to him. Hello, Blackie. Granny say you've been a naughty boy. Yes she does. A naughty boy. *Others are looking nauseated during this.* Say bye bye to Mum. Bye bye. Kiss kiss. *Back with Mum:* Oh, I forgot to tell you . . . Jim spent the night here. Yes, the whole night. He's been in a terrible mood all morning.

There is a knock on the door.

BERYL. Mum, I can't talk now, it's tea break. I'll ring you this afternoon, alright. Bye. *She rings off. She goes to the door and gets tea tray of cups, etc., from just outside. The tea is poured in the cups.*

BERYL. Mum says she found Blackie curled up in the dryer just as she was about to switch it on.

JOHN. Tch! What a shame.

BERYL. One day you'll say something you'll regret.

BERYL takes cup of tea into the BOSS's office. Others collect theirs, MICHAEL waiting till last. There is a silence.

JOHN gets out a book and reads. HUGH gets a magazine, MICHAEL a book. BERYL sits down and reads a Woman's Weekly. There is complete silence. A phone rings but nobody makes a move to answer it.

During this silence, the BOSS has come back in with two paper bags. He goes into his office.

BOSS comes out of the office. Rips open a bag and offers it to BERYL.

BOSS. Cakes!

They all look up at this.

BOSS. There's one each.

BERYL. Thanks very much.

HUGH. What's the shout?

BOSS. I'm leaving. Going to Agriculture and Fisheries. Stores Manager.

JOHN. Congratulations.

HUGH. Congratulations.

BERYL. That's lovely.

MICHAEL just smiles.

BOSS. The letter came this morning.

JOHN. Up a couple of grades, eh?

BOSS. Yes. Yes. It'll boost my super nicely.

JOHN. A bit of fighting for your job now, I suppose.

BOSS. I expect so. I'll get my tea and join you all.

He goes into his office.

JIM enters and notices the cakes.

JIM. What's the shout?

JOHN. The Boss has got promotion. Going to Ag. and Fish

JIM. Fair go?

HUGH. True.

JIM. Beauty. About time. How long before the old tightwad leaves?

BOSS appears at his door with his tea in his hand.

BOSS, *acidly*. About four weeks.

Black out.

Act Two

Wednesday 2 September 9.50 am to 12.35 pm

Calendar reads Wednesday 2 September.

They are at morning tea and, as near the end of Act One, they are all reading something. JIM is looking at a Playboy.

The BOSS's door is open.

After a short silence, there is a bout of coughing from the BOSS's office. They all take it for their usual signal that the tea break is over and they put away books, magazines, etc., and start work again. BERYL gets up and begins collecting the cups and stacking them on the tray. JIM looks bored with the job.

HUGH, *sighs*. Back to the treadmill.

JOHN, *watching Beryl*. You've never heard of Women's Lib, have you?

BERYL. Of course I have. Why?

JOHN. Look at you. You always get the tea. Then you put the cups away. Why don't you get one of us to do it sometimes?

BERYL. I don't mind.

JOHN. I know you don't. But we all take it for granted.

BERYL goes into BOSS's office to collect his cup. When she comes out she shuts the door.

JOHN. We do, don't we. Just assume Beryl will get the tea.

HUGH. It's just division of labour. You've got your job, I've got mine, Jim's got his.

JIM. That's right.

HUGH. Some people are good at some things. Women are

better at typing. That's why you don't get any men typists. And the thing Beryl's best at is pouring tea.

JIM, *snigger*. I bet there's something else she's better at.

BERYL. Filing.

JOHN. ANOTHER job we give to women.

JIM. Gar! Women's Lib's a load of rubbish.

BERYL. It is not!

JIM. Course it is. Women don't WANT to be liberated because basically most women want to be bossed by a man.

BERYL. You've got to be joking.

JIM. You'd be willing to be bossed by a man if you got the chance. Only you've never had the chance.

BERYL. Well, your idea of bossing somebody is to thump them. And look how that turned out.

JIM. It taught him a lesson.

BERYL. Yes. Not to come back home again. How often does your married daughter come and visit you?

JIM. At least I don't expect her to stay at home and look after me.

BERYL takes the tea tray out and dumps it loudly just outside the door. She comes back into the room and stands by the window and stares out of it, to calm down. A slight pause.

JOHN. How's the cactus, Beryl?

BERYL. What? Oh. *Looks at it*. It's not doing very well actually.

JOHN. Well, if you will buy these phallic symbols, revealing your true desires . . .

BERYL. Rubbish.

MICHAEL. What's a phallic symbol?

JOHN. Er . . . something that er symbolises the male organ.

JIM. A cactus has got pricks, see.

JOHN. That's not it, Jim, but I guess you've got the spirit of the term. Have you tried talking to it, Beryl? You know

what they say these days. Plants need love and attention just as much as humans do. You should tell it how much you love it.

BERYL. It's the only thing I do love round here.

Using this to bait her, all said very quickly:

JOHN. Oh, Beryl.

HUGH. Don't be like that, Beryl.

JOHN. Never thought you'd go that way, Beryl.

HUGH. Spare a kind word, Beryl.

BERYL, *storming out*. I'm going out. *She goes out but comes back in quickly. The pay's here. She goes out again to get it and then the others file out after her.*

BERYL *comes back in with her pay and goes to the BOSS's door and opens it.*

BERYL. Pay's here.

The others come back in. BOSS goes out to get his.

HUGH, *looks at his pay slip*. Tch! Look at all that tax. I knew I should have voted Social Credit.

They sit down and open their pay packets. BERYL gets some tins out of her desk.

BOSS *comes back in.*

JOHN, *mock Cockney cringe and salute*. Carry your pay packet, Guvner?

BOSS. I earn it. I earn it. *Goes into his office.*

JOHN, *pretending to be a little girl sorting out the coins*. Sicpenth for lollith; sicpenth for a new bithicle; sicpenth for thavinth; and sicpenth for God.

HUGH. Those were the days, weren't they! An overdraft was still something came in the top of the door. I remember my first pay day . . .

JIM, *getting up*. Just going over the road to pay the phone bill.

BERYL. Hang on. \$1.45.

JIM. Can't it wait till I get back?

BERYL. I'd prefer it now. Just in case the phone bill only comes in fourth.

JIM, *indignant*. What do you mean? *Hands over the money.*

BERYL. I'm not stupid.

Goes. BERYL sorts the money into different tins. She finds Jim's name in note book and ticks off his name. She goes to Michael.

BERYL. I didn't collect off you last time seeing it was your first pay. I have to get fifty cents off you for morning and afternoon tea, and we all put in twenty cents towards a dinner at Christmas.

MICHAEL. Yes.

BERYL. And we each put in fifty cents towards Kiwi and Jackpot tickets.

MICHAEL, *embarrassed*. I'm not . . . we're not allowed . . . we don't believe in it.

BERYL. That's alright. And there's the magazine club if you're interested. That's twenty-five cents a pay and you get Punch . . .

MICHAEL is shaking his head during this.

BERYL. Time, Playboy.

MICHAEL. Playboy!

BERYL. Yes, Vogue.

MICHAEL, *tempted*. Er . . . no. Thanks.

BERYL. You can join anytime if you change your mind. So that's fifty cents for the tea, and twenty for the dinner . . . that's seventy.

He hands over the money.

Phone goes. HUGH answers. During the phone call BERYL collects the money from JOHN.

HUGH. Hello. Yes. Well, stores board handle them. *Puts hand over mouthpiece. To others, with a grin:* Upstairs. About the calculators *AGAIN*. *Back into phone.* Well, I can quite appreciate your point of view. But there was a shipping delay in Japan, I gather. Well . . . difficult to say . . . end of the month with any luck. Possibly earlier. Sorry . . . bye.

They weren't very happy.

BOSS, *who has just come out with newspaper in his hand.* Who weren't?

HUGH. Upstairs. They ordered those new calculators months ago.

BOSS. What did you tell them?

HUGH. That there was a shipping delay in Japan.

BOSS looks relieved. He hands Dominion to JOHN.

JOHN. Thanks.

MICHAEL. A shop down the road's got a sale of calculators. Why don't they just go out and buy one?

JOHN flings himself around in apparent horror.

JOHN. Go out and buy one! Go into a shop and buy one! Michael . . . that's far too sensible.

BOSS, *stiffly*. The reason is that whatever we buy is done so only after careful deliberation. Then the Stores Board puts out tenders and whoever agrees to supply them at the cheapest price gets the contract. It's very important that the public realises that we take pains to ensure we pay the lowest price possible. I'm supposed to be at a meeting. *He goes to the door.*

BERYL. Just a minute. Two dollars ninety, please!

BOSS. Two dollars ninety!

BERYL. I didn't collect off you last time.

BOSS extracts his pay envelope and turning his back on them extracts three dollars. He hands it to BERYL.

BERYL, *handing him ten cents.* Thank you.

BOSS. I'll be back in half an hour.

HUGH, *has money all ready to hand to BERYL.* Here.

BERYL. Thanks.

HUGH. About time we won something on the Golden Kiwi, isn't it. We buy enough of them. You can't be using the right *nom de plume*.

BERYL. We're not.

HUGH. What do you use?

BERYL. Well . . .

JOHN. I make her do it.

BERYL. You tell him.

HUGH. Come on, say it.

BERYL, *reluctantly.* "The Sir Dennis and Lady Blundell Syndicate".

JOHN. I just thought if we did win, it would be nice to see it printed in the paper.

HUGH. I could just do with a share of sixty thousand dollars.

BERYL. What would you do with it?

HUGH. Make a trip, I suppose. It might keep Bronwen happy.

JOHN. Still homesick?

HUGH. Worse if anything.

JOHN. If you want more money, why don't you put in for the Boss's job?

HUGH. Me!

JOHN. Why not?

HUGH. Well, I . . . what about you?

JOHN. My grading's too low. I wouldn't have a show. You'd have as good a chance as anybody.

BERYL. You'd be good at it, too.

HUGH. I've only been in the country three years.

JOHN. Let them worry about that. Here . . . *taking form across to him* . . . Form PS6 . . . fill that in.

HUGH, *flattered.* I'll think about it.

JOHN. Don't think about it. Be in.

JIM *comes in and sits down.* HUGH *looks at JOHN.*
JOHN *shakes his head.* HUGH *puts form into his drawer.*

BERYL, *sweetly.* Get it on in time?

JIM. Yes, thanks.

HUGH. Would you mind taking this up to the typists for me, Michael?

MICHAEL. Of course not.

JOHN. And while you're up there, could you ask Tina if she could let me have those letters I gave her by this afternoon.

MICHAEL. Which one's Tina?

JIM. The one with the big knockers.

MICHAEL. I know the one. *He goes.*

JIM. That's not his job to take stuff up to the typists.

HUGH. I know that. But don't you remember when you were that age. *Remembering.* When I was an office boy, going into the typing pool . . . BLISS. The sweater girl was the fashion then . . . everywhere you looked, beautiful bosoms encased in Angora and Fair Isle. God, I wanted to die there. *Still remembering.* There was this girl there, Eileen Scrimshaw. She had this marvellous ample bosom, the type I go mad for . . .

BERYL, *who has an ample bosom.* Ahem!

HUGH. Yes . . . it was so big when she leant forward it moved her space bar. She couldn't understand why she had all these gaps in her words. Oh, Eileen, why did you throw yourself away on Harold the Hardware . . . just because you were 23 and I was 15.

JOHN. Well . . . if the Russians ever give us a four-minute warning of a nuclear attack, I'm going right up to that typing pool and have my way with Tina.

JIM. I reckon I'd do better with Tina than you. She gives me a corker little smile every time I see her.

JOHN. She gives everyone a corker little smile. She knows it drives us all mad.

HUGH, *still remembering*. Another girl was Pamela Davies. She used to wear . . .

JOHN. Oh shut up. You'll be telling us next about the first girl you kissed behind the Chapel Youth Club.

HUGH. Willingly. *Sighs*. That's the trouble with sex. Never lived up to its early promise. Probably cos I was told the facts of life all wrong. The headmaster took us one by one into his study and said, "If you ask a girl to go swimming and she doesn't want to go, don't force her, see." And that was it! I had no idea what he meant. No idea! Swimming! I began to think humans had to spread their sperm like trout.

JIM. I can remember a girl I was rooting Kilbirnie way and she . . .

JOHN. What's the Kilbirnie way?

HUGH. "Rooting"; there's another charming Antipodean word.

JIM. What's wrong with it?

HUGH. If I tell you you'll go into your "If you don't like it, you can always go back home" routine.

JIM. Well, it's true, isn't it?

HUGH. Yes, Jim. But it's not an answer to criticism just to tell people to go home.

JIM. It's the best answer I know. Anyway, what word do you use?

HUGH. What?

JIM. Instead of "rooting"?

HUGH. Never mind.

MICHAEL *comes back in*.

HUGH. Did you recognise Tina from Jim's description?

MICHAEL. Yes thanks.

JOHN. And did you get a "corker little smile"?

MICHAEL. Er . . . yes. Here. She had them ready. *Handing him folder*.

JOHN. Thanks.

The MESSENGER's hands appear and empty the out-tray and fill the in-tray. BERYL gets up and gets it and sorts out the incoming mail.

JOHN. Oh no!

HUGH. Hasn't she done them?

JOHN. She's corrected the mistakes and made new ones. She's put "tender flies" instead of "tender files". And "result" comes out as "reslut".

MICHAEL, *eagerly*. I'll take it back.

JOHN. No. I'll correct it myself. Honestly, she can't have any bloody brains at all.

HUGH. With a body like that, she doesn't need brains.

BERYL, *having sorted out the mail*. Anyone want the new Public Service Circular?

JIM. Yes, here.

BERYL hands it to him and then hands out the mail to the rest.

JIM. Here we are. The Boss's job advertised. Vacancy 1799.

BERYL. Not thinking of applying are you, Jim? *Expecting "No"*.

JIM. Too right I am.

HUGH looks at JOHN. JOHN shakes his head to say "Say nothing".

JIM, *to Beryl*. How do you fancy me as boss, eh? You could sit on my lap and take dictation.

BERYL looks far from thrilled.

JIM. I'd just like to see Ross's face coming in here. See his old man with his own office and his name on the door. Couldn't say I'd been wasting my time then, could he?

No one answers.

JIM. Well, he couldn't, could he?

JOHN. No.

BERYL. How is Ross getting on?

JIM. Oh, alright. He's got a job of some sort. I don't know what it is.

BERYL. What does Mabel think about his leaving home?

JIM. I don't know. I never know what Mabel thinks. Anyway, I reckon he'll be back home within a month.

WALLY enters. He is carrying a clipboard and three samples of curtains. He dumps them on shelf near door and goes over to the filing cabinet.

WALLY. Curtains.

JOHN. For us?

WALLY. Choose what you want.

BERYL gets them and holds them up.

BERYL. Ugh!

WALLY. Pick the one you like best and we'll order it.

BERYL. What a choice! Brown, yellow or pink.

WALLY. Nevada Suncloud, Caribbean Gold or Tropic Dawn.

BERYL takes them over to the window.

Meanwhile WALLY has been checking the numbers of the filing cabinets. He carefully counts the drawers of the first (three) and then equally carefully counts the drawers of the one next to it, though it's obvious that it's exactly the same.

HUGH. What's up, Wally?

WALLY. One missing.

BERYL gets up on the window sill and holds the samples up.

BERYL. What do you think?

JOHN. I think you should jump.

BERYL. What COLOUR do you think?

HUGH. That looks brown to me, wouldn't you say so, John?

JOHN. Brown, yes definitely brown.

MICHAEL, *joining in*. And the one next to it is pink.

HUGH. That's right, pink! Just by the yellow.

BERYL gets down, furious. She leaves samples hanging up there.

WALLY. Accounts are having brown.

HUGH. You choose, Beryl.

BERYL, *still angry*. No.

JOHN. Oh come on, Beryl. You say the one you want.

BERYL. I'm not choosing.

HUGH. It's a woman's job to choose curtains.

JIM. You choose, Beryl.

BERYL, shakes her head.

MICHAEL. Yellow.

They look at him slightly surprised.

MICHAEL. I like the yellow . . . it'll brighten the place up.

JOHN. Hear that, Wally? The boy says yellow . . . yellow it'll be.

WALLY. You're supposed to have a day to think about it.

HUGH. We've thought about it. Yellow.

WALLY. Right. I'll come in tomorrow and make a note of it.

JOHN. Make a note of it now.

WALLY. It has to be on an order form.

HUGH. Ah! Speaking of order forms. Could you bring some? We've run out of them.

WALLY, *going*. You've got to order order forms on an order form. *Goes.*

JOHN, *shaking his head*. "You can't beat tea ladies or Admin." Old Public Service saying.

Phone goes (outside call).

BERYL *answers*.

BERYL. It's Bronwen.

HUGH, *into phone*. Hello, love. *Listens for quite a time*. Listen . . . all the Plunket nurse wants to see is the baby . . . clean HIM up, not the whole house. *Then, trying to interrupt*: Don't WORRY! Just try . . . and ENJOY the baby. Let me know what she says . . . I bet he's above average, eh? And don't worry, love. Bye. Yes, I'll be home usual time. Bye. *Rings off. Looks worried*. She never used to worry like this. She's just so homesick. *Sudden thought*. You know, I can't remember the last time I heard her laugh.

BERYL, *reassuring*. Things'll look up.

HUGH. Perhaps if I get this job, it might give her something to smile about. *Then freezes as he realises his mistake, as do the others*.

JIM, *mildly interested*. You putting in for a job?

HUGH. Yes.

JIM. What one are you going for?

HUGH. Oh, just . . . a job.

JIM. Oh come on, not a secret, is it? Or are you frightened one of us will apply for . . . *Suddenly realising*. It's not . . . the Boss's job, is it. *Outraged*. You're not putting in for that!

HUGH, *weakly*. I'm entitled to.

JIM. You're entitled! Entitled. Christ, you've only been in the country three years . . .

HUGH. Nearly four.

JIM. Four then. Four! I've been here all my life. My whole life! I've been in the DEPARTMENT 15 years. And a Pom . . .

HUGH. I'm not a Pom . . . I'm Welsh.

JIM. Same bloody difference as far as I'm concerned. You lot, and that mob from the islands for that matter, you come over here to get a better standard of living, get all the benefits straight away, straight away, having contributed NOTHING. And what have you lot done for us! Stirred up the unions . . . that's what. Few years ago, we'd never heard of a housing shortage. Or a doctor shortage. Or a drug problem. Things were OK. Until you lot came along. What right . . . what right do you think you've got for that job ahead of me?

HUGH, *quietly*. If I do get the job, Jim, you can always appeal.

JIM. Appeal!! I'd burn down the bloody State Services Commission. That's full of Poms, too.

HUGH. I'm WELSH.

JIM. Thanks for reminding me. Let's see, when was the last time you lot beat the All Blacks?

HUGH, *furious—gets more Welsh during this*. Godallbloody-mighty! If anyone mentions the All Blacks to me again, I'll scream. If you must know, I spent my Saturday afternoons watching Cardiff City lose at soccer. But I came out here and because I come from Wales people say "Going was a better half-back than Gareth Edwards" or "What did you think of Fergie McCormick's 24 points then?" One man at a party even tried to fill me in because of Dean's disallowed try back in 1905! Well, as a result, I've become a supporter of Welsh rugby . . . a fanatic supporter. And let me tell you why. Because they use their BRAINS. Because they believe in initiative and brilliance and FLAIR! Here the bloody coaches treat football like they do sex . . . do the same thing hard enough and long enough and you'll get some sort of climax.

A short silence.

JIM, *after a moment's thought*. Grant Batty's got flair.

HUGH, *calming down*. Look, Jim, I know how you must feel. But I've chosen to live here . . . I can't pay the place a higher compliment than that, can I? And if I'm staying I've got to do the best I can.

JIM *doesn't answer*.

HUGH. Anyway, if I do get it, I'll let you sign in the book any way you want.

JIM. If you do get it, I'll bloody well resign.

JOHN. There speaks the true sportsman.

JIM. It's alright for you . . . you'll whizz through the system alright . . . you've got your career marked out, haven't you?

JOHN. True. I could have been Director two years ago.

MICHAEL. Really!

JOHN. No.

BOSS *bursts in, paper in hand*.

BOSS. Order one bar five T double seven six. Sherry glasses. The Director says he ordered them months ago. He's got some overseas visitors coming and he wants to offer them a drink before lunch. All they've got is a couple of old ones.

JOHN. And they're marmite jars.

BOSS. Can anyone remember taking the order? I hope it wasn't Max. *He goes to Max's desk, rummaging through the papers. The others look through their papers.* Tch! What a mess. Never could organise. Is someone going to see him soon? They could take all this mail.

BERYL. I'll be going in tonight. Give Mum an outing. *She gets the mail off Max's desk.*

JIM, *finds it in his papers*. Here we are! July third. Half doz. sherry glasses, crystal. Order went through 10 July. GSB confirmed order July 30. Admin. should have them by now. *He dials a three-figure number.* Ah, Wally, Jim here. Order one bar five T double seven six, July three. You should've had them some time ago. Could you have a look? Thanks. *To others:* He's looking. Hello. Good. Could you do us a favour; take them straight to the Director's office. He wants them pronto. And could you unpack them . . . not just dump them there. What. *Looks puzzled.* Er . . . well, anyway, if you could get them along soon as poss. Thanks, Wally. *He rings off but still looks puzzled and a bit worried.* Er . . . Wally's taking them along right now.

BOSS. Good, Jim. That's all settled then.

BERYL. Jim to the rescue.

BOSS, *goes towards office and then changes mind*. I think I'll just go along and check that everything's alright. No breakages or anything.

He goes.

JOHN, *indicating Boss*. Hoping for a good word.

BERYL. You don't look very happy about it all, Jim. Is anything wrong?

JIM. Nothing.

JOHN, *avuncular*. Come on, Jim, tell us all about it.

JIM. Something Wally said. When I asked him to take them up, he said "I'll have to get someone to give me a hand."

HUGH. For six glasses!

BERYL. Perhaps Wally saw that parcel on top of some others and thought they were all the same order.

JIM. Yes . . . that'd be it. Wally's pretty dumb at times. *Looks at time.* Hey, what's the time?

JOHN. Eleven thirty.

JIM. Jeez, I may have missed it. *He gets out transistor radio from his desk drawer.*

BERYL. Is Phone Bill running in this?

JIM, *trying to shush her. Nods. He listens while the others get on with their work. Then we "see" that the race has started and we watch Jim listening to the race (which we can't hear, of course). Jim gets more and more tense as race progresses. The others work calmly. Phone goes.*

HUGH. Yes? I'll check for you. *He looks at paper. They'll be here first thing tomorrow. Yes, Definitely. Rings off.*

They all carry on with work.

JIM *suddenly stands in excitement.*

JIM. Go! Go! Go! You beauty! It won! It won! *He is at maximum elation when BOSS bursts in.*

BOSS, *furiously.* What are six power drills doing outside the Director's office?

JIM, *tearing earpiece out.* What?

BOSS. Six power drills! Wally's got the whole reception area covered in flex and polystyrene. The noise! He was testing them one by one! Where the hell are the glasses?

JIM. They must still be in Admin.

BOSS. They're not. I checked. *Takes out his pay envelope, hides it from them, and extracts some notes.*

BOSS. Michael. Go out and get six sherry glasses. The best you can get. Alright? The best. Quick as you can.

MICHAEL. Where . . . shall I get them?

BOSS. Anywhere. The nearest place.

MICHAEL. Right.

BOSS. And take them straight up to the Director's secretary.

MICHAEL. Right. *He goes.*

BOSS *dashes to the door and opens it.*

BOSS, *calling.* And get a receipt! Now let's have a look at that order. *Jim hands it to him.* Seems to be alright. *He compares it with one in his hand.* It tallies with the order they sent. Give us your GSB contract book. *He looks and finds the entry.* That seems to be alright.

JIM. Course it's alright. I know most of them by heart.

BOSS *thinks a moment and then goes into his office with JIM's GSB book*

Phone rings (outside call). BERYL answers.

BERYL. Yes, Mum. Yes. Did he?

A great shout from the BOSS's office.

BOSS. You FOOL! *Emerges with two GSB books.* You bloody idiot!

BERYL. Look, Mum, I'll ring you back, OK. *Watches the row eagerly.*

BOSS. You haven't changed the numbers. Some of the numbers were changed. Didn't you see the circular?

JIM. I couldn't have.

BOSS. Where is it? Anybody got it?

JOHN *produces it from his drawer. Air of efficiency.*

BOSS. Yes. Here we are . . . you've initialled it as having read it.

JIM. Yeah, well probably a lot of circulars came through at once.

BOSS. That doesn't matter; you're supposed to READ them. Check through all the orders you've put through and make sure there aren't any more like this. God, Jim, you should know better. How many years have you been in this department?

HUGH. Fifteen.

JOHN. Very few of the changed numbers affected us.

BOSS. Just as well. Anyway, check the lot. *Going into office.*
And let me know if there are any others you've mucked up.

There is a silence. JIM silently gets on with checking through the orders. He looks thoroughly miserable. BERYL walks across and puts her arm quickly round his shoulders.

BERYL. Cheer up, Jim. It could be worse.

He looks up at her.

BERYL. We still love you.

She goes back to her place. JIM looks at her almost smitten.

JIM, *sudden explosion.* Bloody Director! What the hell does he want sherry glasses for! He's on twenty thousand a year . . . why can't he get them himself. Wasting our time with piddling little orders like this.

JOHN. It was your mistake, Jim.

JIM. Yes, a fine mate you turned out to be. Any decent joker wouldn't have found the circular, would they? You couldn't give it to the Boss fast enough.

JOHN. It's my job to keep the circulars. Why should I get in the cactus just because you make a muck-up?

JIM. That's right, that's your whole attitude. As long as you're OK. Fat lot of sympathy I got from you lot. I reckon Beryl's the only one round here with any feelings.

BERYL. Thank you, Jim.

JIM, *throws PS circular into rubbish tin.* That's not going to be any use to me now.

JOHN. Jim, today's incident isn't going to make any difference. You've got as good a chance as anybody. I admit I suggested to Hugh he apply but I think you should, too.

JIM. Well, I've put in for other jobs in other departments . . . never got anywhere.

JOHN. You've got nothing to lose. You'll kick yourself after, if you don't. Be in.

JIM. I suppose so. *Gets his radio out and starts listening.*
Wonder what the divvy was.

BERYL gets out her sandwiches.

HUGH. Why do you always have your lunch at ten to twelve?

BERYL. Well, I don't want to waste my lunch hour eating my lunch, do I?

JOHN. Still on your vitamin-free diet I notice.

BERYL. If you must know, I'm on a yoghurt diet.

HUGH. I thought the idea of a yoghurt diet was that you ate it INSTEAD of lunch, not AS WELL AS lunch.

BERYL. I know! But I get so hungry.

JIM. Fair go! There was a protest.

HUGH. Don't you get anything?

JIM. Not a brass razoo.

BERYL. Oh, Jim. Not your day, is it? Here . . . have one of Mum's coconut roughs.

JOHN. The Tiger Balm of Stokes Valley—a universal panacea.

JIM. No thanks. Thanks all the same.

JOHN. Well, I don't know about anyone else, but I think I'm going to have a pancake lunch. Let's see . . . for the main course, one oozing with mushrooms and ham, followed by a sweet of two pancakes with ice cream, bananas and icing sugar.

BERYL, *envious.* Don't.

JIM. You'll have a heart attack by the time you're forty. With any luck.

JOHN. Not me, Jim. Some people are just born with the good looks and the right metabolism.

BERYL, *bitterly.* And some aren't.

JIM. Nothing wrong with your looks, Beryl.

BERYL, *surprised*. Thank you, Jim. Er, you feeling alright?

JIM. No, I mean it. I reckon you've got a good figure; not like some of these skinny kids you see nowadays.

BERYL. But not like Tina, either.

JIM. No, but you know, it's OK. You don't want to run yourself down all the time.

BERYL, *flattered and pleased*. Well, thank you, Jim.

JOHN. A bit more of that sort of treatment, Beryl, and you'll be able to come off the valium. Hugh. Care to join me in a pancake? So to speak.

HUGH. No thanks. I've got things I want to do. Shopping.

MICHAEL *enters*. JOHN, *who was just about to go, waits to hear the news*.

JOHN. Did you get them alright?

MICHAEL. Yes.

JIM. Good. Well done.

MICHAEL, *looking worried*. They were terribly expensive.

HUGH. He said to get the best.

MICHAEL, *desperately*. But they were sixty dollars.

JOHN. Sixty!

HUGH. What!

JIM. Sixty bucks for six sherry glasses!

MICHAEL. I went into Kirks and the assistant asked me what sort of sherry glass I wanted. So I said the best. He said "OK". He wrapped them up and charged me sixty dollars.

JIM. That's ten bucks a glass!

MICHAEL. The Boss only gave me twenty.

BERYL. Just as well you had your pay on you.

MICHAEL. I didn't. I had to give him a cheque. BOSS'S *phone rings. Blurts it out*. And I've only got four dollars thirty in my account.

JIM. Ten bucks for one glass!

MICHAEL. What could I do!

BERYL. He'll give you the money.

HUGH. Just make sure you get it in your account lunch time.

BOSS *emerges, smiling*.

BOSS. The Director's secretary's just rung. He's delighted with the glasses. You must have good taste.

MICHAEL, *weakly*. Thank you.

BOSS. I'll get you to give me the receipt. *Just as he is going back. Laughs*. And my change.

MICHAEL. What am I going to do?

BERYL. Just tell him. You only did what you were told.

MICHAEL, *miserably*. Yes.

Goes to the office.

JOHN. Over the top.

MICHAEL *closes the door. From inside we hear "How much!!!" shouted*.

JIM. The bloody Director should pay. Remember how they wouldn't buy that tea lady a new trolley? But sherry glasses . . . no trouble at all.

JOHN. Overseas visitors don't see the tea trolley.

HUGH. One law for the rich, and half a dozen for the poor.

MICHAEL *emerges, still unhappy*.

MICHAEL. I've got to claim it off accounts.

BERYL. Oh, that's no good . . . that'll take weeks. John, you go and tell him.

JOHN, *going*. No, no. *He goes towards the door*.

BERYL. Hugh.

HUGH. Well . . .

BERYL. I'll go then.

JOHN *comes back in. To see the outcome*.

JOHN. She won't get anywhere with him.
 HUGH. Oh, yes she will.
 JOHN. You sound very sure.
 HUGH. I am.

BERYL emerges and hands Michael four ten dollar notes. Gives the men a withering glance.

JOHN. Let that be a lesson to you, Michael.
 MICHAEL. What?
 JOHN. Never get behind on your tea money. *He is about to go.*
 HUGH. I think I will join you after all.
 BERYL. Pancakes attractive all of a sudden?
 HUGH. Yes. *They go.*
 BERYL. You go and get that in the bank straight away.
 MICHAEL. Yes. Thanks. *He goes.*

A silence. BERYL eats her sandwiches. JIM carries on with his work of checking all his orders.

BERYL. Aren't you going for lunch?
 JIM. Later.

BOSS emerges from office.

BOSS. Found any others?
 JIM. No.
 BOSS. Just as well. *He goes out.*

JIM begins to stare at Beryl. She looks up at him. He smiles at her. She smiles back. Then she starts her yoghurt. She dials her mother's number.

BERYL. Mum. Sorry about the interruption. Quite a morning, yes. I'll tell you tonight.

JIM gets up and puts something in the out-tray. He stares at her all the time and then gets closer to her.

BERYL. Listen. I thought we'd have the rest of the casserole tonight. Is that alright? And for a treat, as it's payday, I'll get some strawberries. No, Mum, in a tin. It's too early for the fresh . . . not for a couple of months yet.
 JIM, *right by her.* Beryl?

She looks up at him, with an enquiring smile.

JIM, *finally overwhelmed.* Oh, Beryl! *He puts his arms on her shoulders and then slides them down to cup a breast in each hand.*
For a moment they each remain frozen. BERYL'S eyes widen in surprise, then she suddenly comes to.

BERYL. Look, Mum, I'll ring you back. *Rings off.*

JIM tries to embrace her. She tries to push him off.

JIM. Beryl . . . I think you're fantastic.
 BERYL. Mind my yoghurt!
 JIM. You've no idea how much. I . . . I . . .
 BERYL. Jim! *They are still struggling. Annoyed.* Oh! *The yoghurt is tipped over.*

She breaks away from him—not frightened, just slightly annoyed. Managing to stand up.

JIM, *launching another attempt to embrace her.* Please, Beryl. Please. Just a kiss. Not the whole thing. Just a bit of a cuddle.

She breaks away and stands off from him.

BERYL. Jim! What sort of person do you think I am?

But he has suddenly come to his senses. He stands horror-struck by his actions.

JIM. I'm sorry, Beryl. I'm sorry. I really am. What you must think of me. *He sits down and puts his face in his hands.* What you must think of me. I'm sorry, I really am. *He begins to cry, just a couple of tears. He soon controls it, but is upset by the fact that he's cried.*

JIM. Bloody hell. I haven't cried for . . . years. You won't tell the others, will you.

BERYL. Of course I won't. *She offers him a cigarette. He shakes his head, but she takes one and sits down.*

JIM. I'm sorry.

BERYL. Bit sudden, wasn't it?

He shrugs.

JIM. I just had this overwhelming desire to . . . to put my arms round you.

BERYL. From the back.

JIM. I couldn't stop myself. I just couldn't stop myself. I'm sorry.

BERYL. That's OK.

JIM. Some night, couldn't I, couldn't we, go out some place, for a meal or something and then . . .

BERYL. What about your wife?

A pause.

JIM. She's left me.

BERYL, *all sympathy.* Jim. I didn't know.

JIM. It was when Ross went. She left almost immediately.

BERYL. I'm sorry. You've been alone ever since . . .

JIM. Yes. I guess it was coming anyway. I mean, we hadn't . . . you know . . . for years.

BERYL. I am sorry.

JIM. So I thought . . . maybe we could . . . go out. I mean you haven't got anybody . . . I know I'm not much of a person but surely I'm better than nothing. Aren't I? I mean I . . .

BERYL. Jim, I HAVE got somebody. Sort of. I can't really tell you about it but there is a somebody.

JIM. I'm sorry. If I'd known that . . . I'd no idea.

BERYL. You weren't meant to. *Gets up.* Right old pair, aren't we. Come on. Let's go over to the Mid. and have a couple of spots. God, it's usually me have a little weep over a gin and tonic. Makes a change someone else.

JIM, *as they go out.* You won't tell them, will you? About this . . . or Mabel.

BERYL, *indignant.* What do you think I am! I wouldn't tell a soul!

They get to the door.

The phone rings (outside call).

BERYL comes back to answer it.

BERYL. Hello. *Hand over phone.* I'll catch you up. *Into phone.* I can't talk now, Mum, it's my lunch hour. *Giggles.* I've got an awful lot to tell you tonight.

Black out.

Act Three

Monday 21 September 12.35 pm to 2.50 pm

MICHAEL comes back into the office. He checks to see if it is empty. It is. He goes to Jim's desk and takes Playboy (a different one from Act Two), to his own desk. He studies the photographs. They obviously have an effect on him (but not a laughable one). He is disturbed at the desire they engender in him. He crosses to the phone on Max's desk. He hesitates and then he steels himself to dial.

MICHAEL. May I speak to Tina, please. Tina? Michael speaking. Michael . . . from stores. I bring letters to you quite often . . . that's right. I was wondering if you'd like to come to a film tomorrow night. What about Friday night? Well . . . *Longish pause.* Seventeen, actually. Miserably. Yes. Thanks. *Puts down the phone.*

Goes back to the desk. Throws Playboy into corner of office (near JOHN's desk). Starts some work.
The BOSS's door opens. HUGH comes out. MICHAEL sees him. HUGH smiles.

HUGH. Back early from lunch.

MICHAEL. Yes.

HUGH goes to his desk. MICHAEL gets up and recovers Playboy from floor and puts it on Jim's desk, trying not to let Hugh see.

HUGH, surprised. Would you mind taking this up to the typists for me?

MICHAEL. Oh. Do I have to?

HUGH. Not at all. I thought you liked . . .

MICHAEL. I'd rather not. If you don't mind.

HUGH, getting up and putting folder in the out-tray. Of course not.

They both get on with their work. A pause.

HUGH. Have you eaten?

MICHAEL. Yes.

HUGH, hinting. I just thought if you were going out, you could get me a couple of sandwiches.

MICHAEL. I've been out.

They both get on with their work. A silence. The BOSS's door opens. BERYL creeps out, but MICHAEL sees her. She stops and gives him a smile. He smiles back and gets on with his work. She goes to her desk and does a bit of work. The penny suddenly drops with MICHAEL and he looks up at them, shocked. They look up at him, realising he's realised. They put their heads down. so does MICHAEL.

JOHN enters, extremely happy.

JOHN. Dada da Dah!!! *Tune "The Stripper".* Off with the Hallensteins imitation quality raincoat. Off with the James Smiths sports jacket for the easy-to-please man about town. Off with the McKenzie buy-of-the-week genuine imitation silk tie. Ah ah ah! You're all waiting till I get to my jockey juniors!

There is no reaction from the others. He goes to the door and exaggeratedly checks the door number. Room 133 . . . this is the right room. I thought it must be the HQ of the Society for the Prevention of Community Standards.
MICHAEL. "Promotion". Promotion of community standards.
JOHN. That's their story.

BERYL gets some folders and goes out without a word.

HUGH. Nice to know somebody's happy.

Hangs up coat and puts jacket back on.

JOHN. Yes, somebody's happy. Somebody is happy. Did you know, did you know that Wrightsons are having a free wine tasting? Right now. Free. The Boss was there, of course. Cramming down cubes of Blue Vein and Danbo . . . do anything for free toothpicks, that man. Ah! There's nothing like a few thimblefuls of Villa Maria 73 to warm the cockles of your bladder. Good year, 73 . . . not for Villa Maria, perhaps, but a good year.

HUGH. Not for me. We came to New Zealand.

JOHN. Ooooh. Bitter. Bitter. But I thought you liked it . . . wonderful place to bring up children, Jack's as good as his master, the quarter acre section . . .

HUGH. Yes, quarter acre section alright . . . each with four bloody houses on them.

JOHN. There's no stopping Beazley Homes. But I thought you'd fitted in so well . . . you've got the Bremworth, the Fisher and Paykel washing machine and dryer, the Holden Station Wagon, the Morrison motor mower that turns lawn into grass. Hugh, Hugh . . . you've got everything a working Kiwi desires, except a Labour Government.

HUGH. Tell that to my wife.

JOHN, *reaching for the phone*. Certainly. Pleasure.

HUGH, *angry*. It's just a joke to you, isn't it? Yes, we've got all the things we want, most of them. But that just isn't enough . . . at least not for Bronwen. Do you know she is always telling the little boy things against this country? She's determined he's not going to be a New Zealander. She's going out of her mind with homesickness. She is, she's going round the bloody bend.

JOHN, *apologises*. No, no. I didn't mean . . .
HUGH, *ignoring this, goes to door*. If the Boss wants to know where I am, I've gone to get some lunch. *Slams door*.

JOHN, *sighs*. Poor sod.

MICHAEL. I don't feel sorry for him.

JOHN. Oh? Any particular reason?

MICHAEL, *embarrassed*. Nothing.

JOHN. What do you mean, "Nothing"?

MICHAEL. Nothing.

JOHN. Oh. You mean him and Beryl.

MICHAEL. You know about them?

JOHN. Yes. They don't know that I know. I don't think. Shouldn't think they'd care if I did. You think it's wrong, don't you?

MICHAEL. It is wrong.

JOHN. Because he's married?

MICHAEL. Yes.

JOHN. Yes, well. You heard what Hugh's wife's like. I don't know how much affection he's had in the last couple of years. And Beryl. Living at home with a mother with cataracts and who half the time doesn't know if it's winter or summer . . . a great life for a girl. So they have it off in the lunch hour now and then and a seventeen-year-old kid says it's wrong. *Suddenly angry*. Why don't you take that uptight religion of yours and shove it up your . . . *Pause. Sincerely*. Sorry. *Sighs*. SEX. What a bloody misery it causes. Look at you. Miserable because you've got the hots for Tina.

MICHAEL *goes to protest*.

JOHN. Of course you have. I have. Jim has. The whole bloody building has. Even Lester Griffiths on the seventh floor says he'd give his right arm to have a night with her, and he's only got a right arm. And my brother-in-law. He's besotted over some little girl from his work. He's

spent about 900 dollars setting her up in a flat just so he can have a couple of evenings a week with her. My sister pointed out to him that so far he's had to do about twelve hours overtime per fuck.

MICHAEL. Doesn't your sister mind?

JOHN. Of course she minds . . . she wanted new carpets in the sitting room.

MICHAEL. I meant . . .

JOHN. I know what you meant. She minds. But what's the alternative? *Puts on a shrill female voice.* Leave him, and serve him right. Be unfaithful to him and see how HE likes it. *Shrugs.* Being unfaithful. Some blokes go to the pub every night. Same thing really. I don't want to sound pompous, old son, but don't be too quick to condemn.

MICHAEL. Sorry.

JOHN. That's alright. I was the same myself, your age. Worse, probably. *Pulls a file towards him.* Tender for supplying laminated light fittings. Oh, it's a man's life in the Public Service. *He throws it back where he got it. Can't face it. Just sits moodily.*

MICHAEL. What . . . what's it like?

JOHN. What's what like? Oh. "It." Ah! Well . . . it's . . . ah . . .

BOSS enters. Stops when he sees so few in the room.

JOHN, to Michael. Now you'll never know.

BOSS. Where is everybody?

JOHN. Beryl's gone to do some copying. I think. Anyway, she's out. Hugh just popped out for some comestibles. Jim is . . . out. There and back to see how far it is. Enjoy the wine tasting? I did.

BOSS. What? Oh, were you there?

JOHN. Yes. But only for an hour.

BOSS. Yes.

JOHN. Yes?

BOSS. Yes, I enjoyed it.

JOHN. So did I. I thought it excellent. Really really excellent.

And good value! Free.

BOSS. Yes.

JOHN. D'you buy anything?

BOSS. When I can get 12½ percent off at the PSIS?

BOSS goes to his office.

JOHN. They should have PSIS haircuts . . . 12½ percent off.

To Michael: Get it? They only cut off 12½ percent. See?

MICHAEL, *unsmiling.* Yes.

BERYL enters.

BERYL. That damn machine. First it runs out of paper. Then, when it's loaded again, the Director's secretary comes in and has to do copying for him straight away. I still haven't done it all.

JOHN. You know, I have a terrible phobia about Xerox. You can only lease them. Why? Well, I think that they have a tiny-teny camera inside that takes an EXTRA copy of everything and it all goes back to Xerox.

BERYL. What for?

JOHN. What for! To rule the world of course. They'd have the lowdown on every Government department in the world; AND they'd have something against every member of staff.

BERYL. What do you mean?

JOHN. Illegal copying! All the notices for Church galas, extra copies of The Sound of Music and Gay Lib notices.

BERYL shakes her head in disbelief.

JOHN. You buy shares in Xerox and one day you'll be up there, hobnobbing with the rulers.

HUGH enters.

HUGH. I got the last meat pie in the place.

JOHN. You always were a sentimental old thing.

HUGH takes a huge bite.

HUGH. Mmmmmm. Much better than that home-made rubbish. Remember when you were thirteen or fourteen . . . everything tasted marvellous, everything. And dripping. Remember dripping?

MICHAEL. What's dripping?

JOHN. Beryl's nose. Sorry. Sorry. Couldn't resist.

HUGH. We ate it in the war.

BERYL. Not the war again.

HUGH. You lot wouldn't know what it was like. Being a kid then. Do you know, I can remember going down the docks to try and pinch orange peel off the American ships. Orange PEEL . . . stuff they'd thrown away. JOHN and BERYL hearts and flowering in background.

JOHN. Best days of your life.

HUGH. No icecream for six years.

MICHAEL. Really.

HUGH. And the bombs whistling down most nights. It was damn frightening, I can tell you.

JOHN. Yes, yes, yes. We've heard it all before.

MICHAEL. I haven't.

JOHN. Don't encourage him, we'll be going down memory lane all afternoon at this rate.

MICHAEL. It sounds quite interesting. Being in the war.

JOHN. Well, it's not. When you've heard his war stories as long as I have you'll realise they're all tied up with food. Opening food parcels, bludging gum off Americans, lost ration books, whale meat. Tell us about breaking the eggs.

HUGH. Oh yes. I brought home the month's ration of eggs . . . six. Six! For a whole month. Well, one of them must have cracked, see, cos when I got home the bag burst and all the eggs smashed on the pavement.

JOHN. And this is supposed to be the interesting bit.

HUGH. My mother came out and scraped all the eggs off the pavement.

MICHAEL. And you ate them?

HUGH. Of course.

JOHN, suddenly feeling headachy. God, I could do with a cup of coffee.

BOSS comes out.

BOSS. Going to the seventh. Hands JOHN the paper. Sorry I was so long with it.

JOHN. Shrugs. It's alright. I can read it all again tonight in the Evening Post.

BOSS. Is Jim still not back? Silence.

HUGH, just as BOSS going out. Any news yet. About who's got your job?

BOSS. Yes. I heard this morning, as a matter of fact.

BERYL. Who's . . . ?

BOSS. Oh, I can't say . . . not until the person has been informed. It wouldn't be right.

BERYL. Just a hint.

BOSS. It's quite a surprise. To me, anyway. Not my idea of the right choice at all.

He goes.

JOHN to HUGH. That lets you out.

HUGH. Why?

JOHN. You'd be his idea of the right choice.

HUGH. Not necessarily.

JOHN. True . . . Gets up and goes to BOSS's office. I'll see if I can see anything on his desk. He goes in.

BERYL *keeps her fingers crossed.*

HUGH. It won't be me. I know it.

JOHN *comes out.*

JOHN. It's Jim.

MICHAEL

BERYL

HUGH

JOHN. No.

HUGH. Don't do that again. My heart can't stand it.

JOHN. I couldn't find anything. It could be Jim though, couldn't it?

BERYL, *gloomily.* Yes, it could.

JIM *enters.*

HUGH. Speak of the devil!

BERYL. Where have you been? The Boss has been asking.

JIM. Let him.

BERYL. Well . . . where HAVE you been?

JIM. I've been having lunch with my son.

BERYL. With Ross?

JIM. That's right. I bumped into him in town. He asked me up to his place for lunch. So I went.

BERYL. How is he? What's he doing?

JIM. He's fine. He's got a job; does shift work . . . earns 120 notes a week, would you believe?

HUGH *whistles (impressed).*

JIM. Yeah, that's what I thought. And he's got a great flat . . . up in Kelburn. It was rough, but they had it . . . you know, nice. TV, Stereo . . . everything they wanted. And you know what? He's got a girl there.

MICHAEL, *excited.* Living with him?

JIM. Yeah. She was nice, too. Not what you'd expect, she was a really nice kid. Cooked us a great lunch.

JOHN. Sounds as though you enjoyed it.

JIM. I did. I really did. And Ross and me . . . we got on . . . like a house on fire.

HUGH. That's great.

JIM. I'm going up there again.

JOHN. That's good.

JIM. Oh, and he's got a motorbike. Paying it off.

JOHN. There might be another piece of good news for you.

HUGH. The job. The Boss says he didn't approve of the person who got it.

JIM. He doesn't approve of me, does he, that's for sure. Jeez! I might have it.

Phone goes.

HUGH. Hello. Hold on. *Puts hand over receiver. To others:* Upstairs. About the calculators. I can't stall them any more. I've run out of excuses.

JOHN. No need to make them. *He finds the right paper.* They've arrived. They're here.

HUGH. Here! In the building!

JOHN. No. No. In the country. They're still on the wharf.

HUGH, *groans.* You tell them. God, they could be there for months.

JOHN, *comes across to phone.* Hello. *Becomes very smooth.* Yes, I know, we've had a lot of trouble with these. We know they've been landed, so it shouldn't be too long, storeman and packers willing. I'm awfully sorry about the delay, but it's quite out of our hands. Thank you. And thank you for being so patient. *Puts down receiver.* Prick.

HUGH. Nicely done.

JOHN. All part of a day's work. *Contemplates his desk.* Look

at it all! And it's all so exciting and enthralling and inspiring. It makes me want to puke. Or perhaps it's the wine. I could do with some coffee AND an aspirin. Beryl, can't you take a hint.

BERYL. I'm not getting you coffee.

JIM, *thinking it over*. If I DID have the job, I reckon I'd improve things. Speed things up a bit.

JOHN. You reckon?

JIM. Yeah. And I could have Ross in for coffee . . . and his girl . . . in my own office.

BERYL. You might not have it, you know. John reckons it's a woman from Treasury.

JIM. What woman from Treasury?

HUGH. She came round after the job was advertised.

JIM. Aw, they wouldn't give it to a woman.

HUGH. These days, anything can happen. The only thing we know for sure is that the Boss is going.

BERYL. It's about time we thought about a present.

JIM. Present?

BERYL. For the Boss. When he leaves. We'll have to get him a present.

JOHN, *far from enthusiastic*. I suppose so. *Then brightening*: Of course, we should give him a present. Here . . . here's five cents.

BERYL. Come on, be serious. How much do you think?

JOHN. I don't know. A couple of bucks?

JIM. You won't get much for two bucks.

JOHN. I meant two bucks each.

JIM. Each!

HUGH. You should get his job, Jim. You've got his characteristics. Two dollars is OK by me.

BERYL. Yes, I'll put in two.

JOHN. Just put in what you want to, Jim. We won't think any the worse of you, you mean sod.

JIM, *handing BERYL two dollars*. It's not as if we like the bugger.

HUGH. True. But it's worth it to see him go.

BERYL is collecting the money of HUGH and JOHN. She gets to MICHAEL, who has his two dollars all ready.

BERYL. Oh! No, you don't have to put in that much. You haven't been here that long . . . we've all known him for years. Besides, you don't get that much. Fifty cents OK? *Asking others.*

JOHN. Plenty. It's not as if Michael'll get his money back at the pub like Jim will.

JIM. If the Boss shouts.

BERYL. Oh, he'll shout. He's not that mean. *Doubtfully*. But he did give us those cakes.

JOHN. Cake.

JOHN. Oh, Beryl. Here. *Offering another two dollars*. Better shout.

JIM. Hear, hear.

JOHN. Oh, Beryl. Here. *Offering another two dollars*. Better put in for Max. I'll get it off him later.

WALLY *enters*.

HUGH. Wally'll chip in, won't you, Wally?

WALLY. What?

BERYL. The Boss is leaving on Friday.

WALLY, *still suspicious*. Is he shouting?

JOHN. Is he shouting!! The whole typing pool's having their hair done on Thursday.

WALLY. Are they?

JOHN. Sure. The whole Government Stores Board's coming over. The Minister.

WALLY. Er . . . well. Here.

BERYL. Twenty cents.

WALLY. You won't forget to let me sign the card.

BERYL. You want to sign the card?

WALLY. If I don't, he won't know I've chipped in, will he?
Looks at the piece of paper in his hand. "Broken door handle."

BERYL. In this room?

WALLY, *checking*. Room 133. Yes.

HUGH. Nothing wrong with the handle.

BERYL. Try the Boss's.

He does. There is nothing wrong with it.

WALLY. This order came from you lot . . . what are you mucking us around for?

JOHN. Look at the date.

WALLY, *looks*. July 30. *Defensively*. That's not that long.

JOHN. The year!

WALLY. 1973. *A pause*. Well, who fixed it? Somebody must have. *Nobody knows*.

MICHAEL. Mother Nature.

JOHN gives him an approving look for making the crack.

WALLY, *to HUGH*. Sign.

HUGH. Sign what?

WALLY. The form. To say it's been repaired OK.

HUGH. I'm not signing that.

WALLY heads for JOHN.

JOHN. No show, Wally.

WALLY. Somebody's got to sign. I can't take it back unless someone signs it. *Approaching MICHAEL*. You sign it . . . it doesn't matter who signs it.

BERYL. I'll sign it, Wally.

WALLY does an about turn to go to her.

BERYL. As soon as you take our order for the curtains.

WALLY. Sure. The green ones, wasn't it? I'll fix that, no trouble.

MICHAEL. Yellow.

BERYL. We told you that weeks ago. You bring the order form and fill it in here, then I'll sign for you.

WALLY, *knows he's beaten*. OK. *But rallies (to MICHAEL)*: Is that still the same chair?

MICHAEL. Yes!

WALLY goes.

BERYL counts up the money.

BERYL. Ten dollars seventy.

HUGH. We won't get much for that.

JOHN. A sherry glass.

BERYL. I know he likes gardening . . . how about something for that?

HUGH. He swears by chicken manure.

JOHN. Oh, lovely! I can see it now. Here's something to remember us by, chicken shit.

MICHAEL. How about a book?

JOHN. We should give him what we once gave a friend who was just about to sail solo around the world. We bought two of those Playboy nude jigsaw puzzles, mixed up all the pieces, and then gave him half. The master stroke was when we decided to leave in three nipples.

BERYL. We'll have to think of something. And I was wondering if we should have a special afternoon tea Friday. Make some sandwiches and cakes and things.

HUGH. Good idea.

JOHN. We'll get in a bit of beer as well. Make an afternoon of it.

BERYL. It could be quite fun.

JOHN. Anything's more fun than grappling with this stuff.

He means files

JIM. I'd streamline all that.

JOHN. What?

JIM. If I get the job.

WALLY enters. With order form.

WALLY. Right. Let's have those curtains.

The samples are still hanging up. BERYL gets up to get them.

BERYL. We decided on the yellow.

JOHN, *winking at Hugh*. Brown.

HUGH. Pink, wasn't it? Because they went with Jim's eyes.

BERYL, *furious*. Yellow! We all agreed. The Yellow.

JIM. What's wrong with the Venetians, anyway?

JOHN. They rattle like dags in a southerly.

WALLY. Make up your minds.

BERYL, *getting down, but leaving samples there. Firmly*:
Yellow.

WALLY. Right.

He hands her the other form. BERYL signs.

BERYL. How long will they be?

WALLY. Down to the floor.

BERYL. What?

WALLY. No idea. Sorry. *He gets to the door.*

HUGH. The heaters, Wally . . . when are the heaters going to be put on?

WALLY. Nothing to do with me. *Goes.*

BERYL stays at the window and looks at the cactus. She begins talking to it, but very quietly so we cannot hear.

JIM, *still thinking about it*. You know, Ross has a really nice set-up. And his girl. She was, you know, nice. I can't get over it.

HUGH. Does Ross get over it?

JIM. What?

HUGH. Well, didn't you ask him whether he was having naughties, or roots or knee-tremblers, or all the other . . .

JIM. No, I didn't. I wouldn't ask my own son a thing like that.

HUGH. No, but you'd ask anybody else.

JIM. That's different. Anyway, what do you call it?

HUGH just smiles.

They get on with some work and gradually BERYL can be heard.

BERYL. . . . we all love you. You're here to brighten up the room . . . we're all longing to see you brighten up the room. We are, really we are.

By now they are all looking at her.

BERYL. Wouldn't you like to have a nice little flower of your own to look after and . . . *She suddenly realises.*

JOHN. THAT'S more like it, Beryl.

BERYL, *angrily walking back to her desk*. Well, it's not doing any good.

JOHN. No good, Beryl.

BERYL. If anything, it's smaller.

JOHN. Have you fed it?

BERYL, *angry*. Yes!!

JOHN. Keep trying. These things take time.

JIM gets up and goes to the door.

JIM. Just going upstairs. Won't be a couple of shakes. *He goes.*

HUGH. How many times has he made that joke?
MICHAEL. Twenty-one.

They look at him.

MICHAEL. I've been keeping score.

JOHN. Since when?

MICHAEL. Since you pointed it out. About three weeks, I think.

JOHN. Well, when he gets to fifty let us know and we'll take him out to the best lavatory in town.

MESSENGER'S hands come in. Empty out-tray and fill in-tray.

BERYL gets up and sorts out the mail. She suddenly stops at one letter.

BERYL. "Staff . . . confidential." *She hands it to HUGH.*

HUGH. Is there one for Jim?

BERYL, *she looks.* Yes.

HUGH stares at the envelope for a moment.

HUGH. Oh well, here goes. *He rips it open. Yeeeeeechoooooo!*

BERYL { Hugh!! You haven't . . .

JOHN { Have you got . . .

HUGH, *crumpling letter.* "Unsuccessful."

A sympathetic silence.

HUGH. Damn. Blast. Bloody hell.

JOHN. They can't have given it to Jim. They can't have.

BERYL. Why don't you appeal?

HUGH, *bravely.* I give up. Why don't I?

BERYL. You know what I mean.

HUGH. Beryl . . . there's no point in my appealing . . . you've

got to have a really strong case. I hardly had a strong case to apply . . . let alone appeal.

JOHN. I couldn't bear Jim as a boss. I just couldn't take it. Open his envelope.

BERYL. I can't.

JOHN. It's quite simple . . . you just insert a chubby finger and rip along the top. *Goes over.* Come on . . . let's have it.

BERYL. No!

JOHN. I only want to hold it up to the light! *He does so.* Nah! Hopeless.

Hands it back to BERYL, who then hands out the mail.

BERYL. Put it on his desk.

JOHN does so.

HUGH, *a big sigh.* I suppose I'd better let Bronwen know the worst. *He dials.* Hello . . . no. Missed out, I'm afraid. It ISN'T the last straw . . . I told you I wasn't likely to get it. *Sharply.* Bronwen! *Puts hand over receiver.* She thinks it's because I'm not a Kiwi. *Back into phone.* YOU'RE the one that's prejudiced . . . not them. You're talking nonsense, woman . . . don't cry, love. There'll be other jobs. You'll see. Don't cry. *Puts down the phone.* She rang off. *Stares at the phone.* She was pinning her hopes on this. I told her if I got it, she could have a trip home, see. I mean, with that salary, I could've got a loan, and paid it off.

JOHN. Ever thought of going back?

HUGH. I wouldn't get a job.

BERYL. Surely you would.

HUGH. I wrote. She made me write to several places to find out. Even the place I used to work wouldn't have me back. They're just not taking people on. They all said

I'd be better off where I am. And I am. But Bronwen doesn't see it . . . she's forgotten all the bad things there . . . just brushes them aside when I remind her. I don't know how it's going to end. *Tries to smile.* Listen to me . . . I sound like something out of "Close to Home".

BERYL gives out the rest of the mail to them all, including Max. At Max's she looks faintly surprised at one letter but makes no comment.

JOHN. If Bronwen went home for a trip, would it solve things?

HUGH. Well . . . it might. A lot of people need to go back home to remember what it was like.

BOSS enters. Goes to his office but stops when he realises something

BOSS. Isn't Jim back YET?

JOHN. He's been back, he's just gone upstairs. Er . . . we thought on Friday we might have a special afternoon tea.

BERYL. A few sandwiches and cakes. For your last day.

BOSS. Oh. Thank you. That would be very nice. *He turns to go to his office.*

JOHN. Is there likely to be anything afterwards?

HUGH. Say, at a hotel?

BOSS clears his throat in an embarrassed way.

BOSS. Er . . . I thought of inviting just a few friends . . . er . . . for a quiet drink.

They all look at him expectantly.

BOSS, *forced into it. Almost mutters it.* You're all welcome to come, if you can manage it.

HUGH. I'm sure we can.

BOSS, *weakly.* Good. *Turns to office.*

JOHN. Can we bring partners?

BOSS just falters in his step but keeps on going as if he hasn't heard. Shuts the door.

JOHN. No answer means assent. I'll bring Christine. *He dials a three-figure number.* Christine? Hi! Fine. Listen, the Boss is shouting Friday night. And you're invited. Of course I want you to come . . . I want to see his face when you order your double brandy lime and soda. Yes. OK. Bye!

JIM comes in.

JIM. Ran into Fred in the corridor. D'you know he got the double three weeks on the trots?

JOHN, *unimpressed.* Good on him. There's a letter for you.

BERYL. On your desk. Marked "Staff—confidential".

JIM, *not interested.* Oh yes.

HUGH. It's about the job.

JIM looks quickly at HUGH.

HUGH. I missed out.

JIM rips open the envelope.

JIM. Shit! Unsuccessful.

An air of relief all round.

HUGH. Condolences.

JIM. What a bastard.

JOHN. That's life for you.

JIM. What a bloody bastard. Jeez, what more can a joker do? I've served my time here, know the job inside out.

BERYL. Well, who has got it?

JOHN. I told you . . . I reckon it's that woman from Treasury. We'll be working under a woman.

HUGH. The death I've always dreamed of.

JIM. I don't want a woman telling me what to do.

JOHN. Jim. Whoever is the Boss will make no difference to you. You'll just carry on your own sweet way.

JIM. If a woman has got it, I'm going to appeal.

BERYL. Well, I hope a woman has got it. It's about time more women had positions higher up. *Knock on the door. There's the tea. She goes and gets it. Others collect it but this time MICHAEL is one of the first to get it.*

Phone goes.

JOHN. Max! How are you? Still not able to walk much.

That's good news, isn't it! Yes. Yes. I'll do that . . .

Listen, the Boss is leaving on Friday and we're giving him a present, so I put in a couple of bucks for you.

OK? It's not too late to get it back if you want . . . no, I thought you'd want to. Got any ideas what we could get him? *To others: "Drunk", he says. Back in phone.*

We'll do our best. Any chance of your hobbling in on Friday . . . OK, well do if you can. Beryl's Mum's threatened to make cakes, but otherwise it should be OK. Yes . . . there's quite a bit for you. Hang on.

He goes across and gets Max's mail.

Sorry, we should've forwarded this to you. There's your statement from the PSIS. Do you want to know your balance? No, OK. *Opens other letter.* There's one here from the suggestions committee. Your suggestion's been turned down. No, they don't think we should have siestas. One here, postmark Taumauranui. "Dear Max, I still remember that wonderful night we had. But alas, as a result I am afraid that you are going to be . . ." Didn't fool you, huh.

One here from staff . . . about your sick leave, I suppose. *Opens it.* "This is to inform you that your application for vacancy 1799 Manager, Stores Branch, has been successful. You will commence your duties as from 1st October. Please allow us to extend to you our congratulations."

For a moment they are all frozen in disbelief. Then blackout.

Act Four

Friday 25 September 2.50 pm to 4.35 pm

Outside the Boss's office are a number of wastebaskets stuffed with papers. His door is open and every now and then he comes out to put more in.

MAX's desk, too, is being cleared out by JOHN. A lot of his papers and files are piled on to a trolley beside the desk.

BERYL is buttering some bread on the shelf near the window.

MICHAEL is helping her.

JOHN, opening a drawer. Appalled. God! What a hoarder. Rummages through. Pencils . . . foreign stamps . . . Best Bets . . . Picks one up . . . Shows how long he's been here. Pretends to read. Phar Lap. "No show in this company." Makes another discovery. Oh yes. Pulls out a very long chain of paper clips. One of Max's busy days. Gives up and shuts the drawer. Hell, it'll be easier just to swap drawers.

Pulls open another drawer. At same time BOSS appears, holding several calendars.

JOHN. Anybody want a calendar? }
BOSS. Anybody want a calendar? } *Simultaneously.*

JOHN. Government Life? BOSS *nods and throws his away.*

JOHN. You'd think they'd think of something new to put on calendars, wouldn't you? Two maps of New Zealand. Three selections of beautiful New Zealand. *Flicks through one of them. Reads them out as if accompanying*

a slide show, enunciating carefully (as in "The Larch"). "Sunny Nelson" . . . "Tranquil Taupo" . . . "Beautiful Blenheim" . . . "Bloody awful Wanganui". Ah! Nippon Electric . . . A Japanese lady on the beach wearing nothing but a smile. MICHAEL perks up. And an umbrella. It's alright . . . The umbrella's over her head.

MICHAEL comes over to have a look.

JOHN puts the nude calendar up on the wall.

BOSS, *coming out of his office.* A new circular. About the lights. The Executive Officer is concerned about the number left on after work. Wants us to make sure we turn them out when we leave. *He leaves it on BERYL's desk, and goes to the door.* I'm just going down to salaries.

JOHN. Final pay, eh? Lovely.

BERYL. You're not going to be long, are you? Because we've got . . . *Indicating food.*

BOSS. No! *Goes.*

BERYL. What did you get him?

JOHN. You'll see. Something suitable.

BERYL goes to bread.

JOHN takes some files from Max's desk and puts them in out-tray.

JOHN. We're going to have to watch Max with files in there. He sits on them for months.

BERYL. Will this be enough?

JOHN. Plenty. There's only six of us. Five, if Hugh doesn't show.

BERYL, *worried.* I'll try him again. I can't understand it. If he's ill, he'd have phoned by now.

She dials a number and listens.

JOHN. He'll be alright. He's probably been kidnapped by the Johnsonville Girl Guides and he's refusing to let them write a ransom note.

BERYL *gives him a look.*

JOHN. OK, you're worried. I'm sorry. But if something had happened by now, we'd have heard.

BERYL. Not necessarily. *She gives up and puts down the phone.* Well, there's no one there.

JIM *backs into the room carrying a carton of drink.*

BERYL. About time, too. Where've you been?

JIM. Where do you bloody think? *He puts case on shelf near the door.* JOHN *unpacks the bottles.*

JOHN. Did you get any lemonade?

JIM. It's in there.

JOHN. Not in here, it isn't.

JIM. Hell, I must've left it behind.

JOHN. I TOLD you to get lemonade. You know why.

JIM. Let Michael go out and get it then. It's for him.

MICHAEL. It's alright. It doesn't matter. Thanks.

WALLY *enters.*

WALLY. You jokers finished with that trolley?

JOHN. No. Can't it wait till Monday?

WALLY. Sorry.

JOHN, *resignedly unloads the files.* OK.

WALLY *begins to wheel the trolley out.*

BERYL. Any news of the curtains yet?

WALLY. Ah! You can't have them.

BERYL. Why not?

WALLY. They've put the price up.

BERYL. So?

WALLY. They're dearer than the curtain allowance.

BERYL. Oh no!

WALLY. Sorry. There'll have to be a new order form.

BERYL. But by the time that goes through, THOSE curtains will be too dear.

WALLY. Can't help that.

He pauses at the door by the carton of beer.

WALLY. Anything open yet?

BERYL	} No!
JOHN	
MICHAEL	
JIM	

WALLY *goes.*

JIM *sits at his desk. He takes an envelope out of his pocket, writes an address on and puts it in out-tray. Phone goes.*

JOHN. Hello. Hang on. *To Michael:* It's for you.

MICHAEL. Hello. Yes, speaking. Yes. Yes, I'd love to! Thanks very much. Alright. Fine. Thanks. I'll see you then.

Rings off. Looks quite excited.

JOHN. Good news?

MICHAEL. A girl I met at the youth club. She's got two tickets for a show tonight . . . asked me if I'd like to go.

BERYL. Lovely.

JOHN. Is she nice?

MICHAEL, *excited.* Yes. And her tits are even bigger than Tina's.

BERYL, *quite shocked at this coming from MICHAEL.* Michael!
That's not like you.

MICHAEL. Sorry.

JOHN. Well, what do you expect? It's spring . . . the Boss is leaving . . . it's a lovely warm day.

BERYL. Yes, it is warm, isn't it. *She goes over to the window.*
No wonder! The heaters are on! Phew! *She opens the window.*

JIM. Typical admin.

JOHN, *picks up a bundle of files and papers from Max's desk and dumps them just inside the boss's door.* That will just have to do.

HUGH *enters. He looks tired and dejected. He slumps into his seat.*

BERYL. Hugh.

JOHN. We'd just about given you up.

BERYL. We've been trying to get you on the phone.

HUGH. I'm sorry, I should've let you know. Do you mind if I have one of these *(sandwiches)*. I didn't get any lunch.

BERYL, *pushing over the whole plate.* Here. Where have you been?

HUGH. To the airport. Seeing Bronwen off. She's flying to London.

JOHN. That was a bit sudden.

HUGH. It was when I didn't get the job, see. She just went to pieces, said she'd never get home, I was doing it deliberately, all sorts of things. So I said she could go back for a trip and see how she liked it.

BERYL. I thought you couldn't afford . . .

HUGH. I sold the station wagon. Got her on the first plane I could. Just as she was leaving she told me she wasn't coming back.

BERYL. She'll be back.

HUGH *is unconvinced.*

HUGH. It's the little boy, see. She's taken the little boy.

A sympathetic silence.

HUGH, *trying to brighten up.* Anyway, I thought I'd come back and cheer you all up. And I didn't want to miss the send off. The girls are sleeping at a neighbour's place.

JOHN. So tonight you're anybody's!

HUGH. Yes. Yes. So if anyone fancies a bit of the old slippery-slip . . . *He stops. They all realise he's revealed at last what he calls "it" and that it's worse than any of Jim's phrases.*

JOHN. The old what!!!!

JIM }
JOHN } The slippery-slip!!!!

HUGH. Forget it, forget it.

BERYL, *who has been unamused during this.* What if Bronwen does stay?

HUGH, *after a painful pause.* Then I suppose I go back. *He looks at BERYL. The pain shows in her face. JOHN sees it too, as does MICHAEL.*

JOHN. We all need a drink. *Gets bottles out.*

HUGH. Shouldn't we wait until the Boss is here?

JOHN, *opening a bottle.* Yes. Beryl? Beer OK for you?

BERYL. No thanks.

JOHN, *giving one to HUGH.* Michael . . . I'm sorry, there's no lemonade . . .

JIM. My fault.

JOHN. Do you want to nip out and get something?

MICHAEL. No . . . I'll er . . . I'll have a beer, please.

JOHN, *realising significance of MICHAEL's request.* Are you sure? I mean, you know . . .

JIM, *getting his own.* Give the boy a beer . . . he's old enough.

JOHN. That's not the point. *To MICHAEL:* Are you quite sure?

MICHAEL. Yes, please. I'd like to try one.

JOHN. OK. On your head be it.

BERYL. I've changed my mind . . . I'll have one too.

JIM. That's more like it, Beryl.

They all have a glass. A silence.

HUGH. Well. Cheers. *They drink. Another silence.*

JOHN. If somebody doesn't say something soon, I'll do my routine that won the junior boys' tap dancing solo three years in a row.

MICHAEL. Really?

JOHN looks at him. "Got you again."

BOSS comes in. Looks annoyed to see them drinking.

JOHN. I'm sorry we started, but . . .

BOSS, *annoyed to see HUGH*. Oh no! I've put the time sheets in. I'll have to alter them now.

HUGH. Just put me down as sick.

BOSS. I did.

HUGH. Thanks.

BOSS, *brightly*. Well! *JOHN puts glass into his hand*. Oh! Thanks. Good news! The calculators have arrived! *He holds a box up. Beginning to take it out of its box*. There's two cartons of them in Admin . . . Wally's distributing them right now. I was hoping they'd arrive before I went. *Picking up directions*.

JOHN. Otherwise Max would have got the credit.

BOSS *looks at JOHN*. *He's hit the mark. Having got out batteries and wires*. What does it say in the directions?

JOHN, *pretending to read Japanese*. Ah! Ichi kwa. Kawasaki, susuki honda datsan, ha!

BOSS. I've got it. *Fixing in wire*. These are supposed to be little beauties.

JOHN, *still in Japanese accent*. This ah machina Model 76

"The Little Beauty" built of finest Nippon materials, special design for New Zealand Public Service. Will only work 37½ hours a week.

BOSS goes to plug it in.

BOSS. Oh no!!!! Look! *He holds up the plug*.

BERYL. What's wrong?

BOSS. The plug doesn't fit. It's the wrong sort.

HUGH. The pins should be at an angle.

BOSS. They're useless. Useless!

JOHN, *Still as Japanese*. Ah so! With New Zealand order, someone have brundered. *Commits hari kari by plunging biro into his stomach*.

BOSS. You fool.

JOHN. It's alright. Blame Max.

BOSS. I will. I will. He ordered them. What a way to leave a place. With a mucked up order. What will people think. *JIM meanwhile has been rummaging through his desk drawers*.

BOSS rushes to the phone.

BOSS. Wally? Oh. Could you get Wally for me, please. Yes, it's urgent.

JIM finds a pair of pliers that he's been looking for. He gets the plug and bends the pins so that they are at an angle.

BOSS. Wally. How many of the calculators have you given out? Oh! well, get them back. Yes, get them all back. And don't send any more out until I tell you. What? Oh, it's the plug. *JIM has successfully tested the plug in a socket and puts the calculator and plug beside the*

BOSS. The pins of the plug are . . . *He holds up the plug and discovers they are now correct.* I'll ring you back.

JIM, *holding up pliers.* Only took a couple of seconds.

BOSS. That's marvellous. Wonderful. Could you do them all like that?

JIM. Not tonight, I couldn't.

BOSS, *disappointed.* Oh.

JIM. First thing Monday.

BOSS. Fine. Thanks. *To the others:* Of course I needn't tell you to keep all this to yourselves.

JOHN pours himself another beer and puts glass in out-tray on the files, while he hands out some sandwiches.

JOHN. Our lips are sealed. *To Beryl:* Your mother must never tell Mrs Whittaker.

BOSS. Who's Mrs Whittaker?

JOHN. She keeps a diary in Stokes Valley.

BOSS. You don't mean dairy?

JOHN. No.

Meanwhile the MESSENGER's hands have emptied the out-tray, taken the glass of beer and returned it empty to the in-tray, together with some mail. JOHN picks up his glass and is puzzled to find it empty, but just fills it again and sorts out the mail idly.

MICHAEL comes over to JOHN.

MICHAEL. Could I have another, please?

JOHN. The night is yet young, and don't forget you have to meet your busty friend.

MICHAEL. I won't. *Holds his glass out and it is filled.*

JOHN. Here. You'd better tell the PSIS of your change of address.

He hands out to the others their mail, also PSIS statements. HUGH opens his and leaves the contents on his desk.

BOSS. I already have.

WALLY enters.

WALLY. Oh, you've started.

BERYL. Come for your twenty cents worth, Wally?

WALLY. Wouldn't say 'no' to a beer.

JOHN. Help yourself.. *Wally does so, producing his own large glass from his pocket.*

WALLY. I quite envy you.

BOSS. Thank you, Wally.

WALLY. Wouldn't mind retiring meself. Spend more time in the garden.

BOSS. It's a promotion.

BERYL. To Ag and Fish.

WALLY, *surprised.* Huh!

A pause.

WALLY, *to JIM.* Who's taking his place?

JIM. Max.

WALLY. No problems there.

Another awkward silence. HUGH coughs. BERYL nudges JOHN and mouths the word "present" to him. There is a bit of mime trying to decide who should actually give it to him. JOHN wants BERYL to, but BERYL insists on JOHN.

JOHN. Well . . . we all know why we are here. To say farewell to the Boss, to wish him well, and, on behalf of us all . . . including Max . . . to give you this. *He hands over an envelope.*

BOSS. Thank you. Most unexpected.

MICHAEL. Speech!

BOSS *produces some notes from his inside pocket*. I'd just like to say a few words. WALLY *fills up his glass during this as often as he can*. I've been with this Department a good number of years . . . more years than I care to remember . . . and in that time I've seen a number of changes. Mostly for the better but not all. When I first started here, we had to work much harder, no question of that, and that may not necessarily have been a good thing, though I believe that it was. Certainly, there were less complaints from staff . . .

BERYL *is idly looking in the card. Then she suddenly realises a signature is missing. She signals to HUGH to sign it, which he does. WALLY sees and he indicates that he, too, wants to sign. Which he does.*

In those days, as now, we were known as the Public Service. But I think then the emphasis was more on the word "service" . . . we took a pride in serving the public.

The others are fairly restless during all this, and it is too much for WALLY, who drains his drink, steps exaggeratedly silently in front of the BOSS to get out. The BOSS's eyes follow him but he continues talking.

Nowadays . . . well, I'm not so sure. The trade union spirit seems to have become more prevalent, and I'm not sure that it's entirely a good thing. I've made some good friends in this building, and in this room, of course. And it's not going to be Goodbye . . . *When WALLY sees BOSS looking at him he gives him a "thumbs up" sign of good luck, so the speech doesn't have to be interrupted . . .* I'm only just going along the road . . . and I'm sure I'll be popping in from time to time, to see how things are getting along. If you'll let me, of course.
Murmurs of "Of course." "We expect you to." "Yes."

BOSS. And if any of you are ever driving past our place my wife and I will be very pleased to see you. You'll be very welcome.

JOHN. I think we should show our appreciation in the usual manner.

Polite applause, which MICHAEL continues after the others have stopped.

BERYL. Aren't you going to open the envelope?

BOSS. Oh yes. Thanks. *Rips it open and pulls out a card. Reads from it.* "Six months subscription to The Dominion."

There is a silence. The others because they hadn't realised what it was going to be and because JOHN has perhaps gone too far. The BOSS doesn't know how to take it. Then MICHAEL suddenly bursts out with loud laughing which continues for some time.

MICHAEL. Very good. Very good.

BERYL. There's a card as well. *Hands it over.* BOSS *glances at it.*

BOSS. Thank you all very much.

MICHAEL, *still laughing*. Six months subscription to The Dominion.

JOHN, *taking glass firmly away from MICHAEL and exchanging it for a sandwich*. The Breweries must have put some alcohol into this lot.

MICHAEL. Really good. I've got to hand it to you, John, that was really good.

JOHN. Yes. Thank you. *Trying to rally the party*: Come on, everybody, drink up. Have one of Beryl's Mum's coconut roughs.

BOSS takes one and eats it.

JOHN. One thing I will say for Beryl's Mum is that she can't cook.

BOSS, *politely*. They're very nice.

BERYL. She can't see that well. Mistakes the ingredients sometimes.

HUGH. Like salt for sugar, perhaps?

BOSS abandons his cake out of the window.

JIM remains on one side, brooding. MICHAEL beckons

JOHN over to him.

JOHN. What?

MICHAEL. You know what you were saying the other day? About Xerox copying machines?

JOHN. Er . . .

MICHAEL. About them having a tiny camera inside recording everything.

JOHN. Oh yes.

MICHAEL. Well, I don't know whether I should tell you this, but a friend of mine works for Xerox. And I told him about your theory. And he said you're absolutely right.

JOHN, *excited and amazed*. Really?

MICHAEL. No.

Grins in triumph at catching JOHN. JOHN doesn't take it very well.

JIM, *making announcement*. I'd like to say something.

They stop, surprised.

JIM. Listening to the Boss just now. Made me realise a few things. He's quite right. Things were different in those

days. The day I started working for the Government was the proudest of my mother's life. She knew I'd never be out of work. That my family'd never go through what we had to in the Depression. To get in then, it was an achievement! Nowadays, you ever noticed a bloke's face when you tell him you're a public servant? He's sorry for you. He is, he's sorry for you. The wharfies, they laugh at us. They've been on the pig's back for years. And the Cooks and Stewards and all that mob. Jobs I was brought up to avoid. And you know what I sometimes wish . . . I sometimes wish there'd be another Depression . . .

OTHERS. No! Oh no!

JIM. I do! So that lot'd be out of work and I'd still be here. It would be some compensation for being a mug for thirty years.

JOHN. It's not that bad.

JIM. Isn't it? I mean, we're not even appreciated by the people we work for. This is the third department I've been in, and no Head of Department's ever come into any room I've been in. Not even to introduce themselves. I don't think anyone's ever said "Thanks, Jim" or "You did a good job there, mate". You know why? Cos the bosses are so damn worried about what the public might think, they don't give a stuff about the staff. My son . . . he's seventeen . . . he's got a job he likes, money to spare, and all the sex he wants. I never had any of those. I guess he was right after all . . . my life's been just a waste of time.

A pause.

JOHN, *sadly*. I guess there's no answer to that.

JIM. Yes there is. And I've made it. I've resigned.

BOSS. Resigned! But you've only got ten years to do.

JIM. ONLY ten years! ONLY! Jesus.

HUGH. Have you actually handed in your resignation?

JIM. Wrote it out this afternoon. Put it there. *Points to out-tray.* And did I tell the State Services Commission what I thought of them!

BERYL. Have you got a job to go to?

JIM. No.

BOSS. That's very unwise. It's difficult to get a job when you haven't got one.

JOHN. He's quite right.

JIM. I don't care if I get a job or not.

BOSS. You can't not have a job.

JIM. Why not? I'll go on unemployment if necessary. The kids have left home; the house is nearly paid off. I don't need much to live on, so I don't care if I work or not.

JOHN. Listen, Jim. Get the letter back. You never know when you might want to change your mind.

JIM. I won't change . . .

JOHN. You never know. Resign if you want to, but don't foul yourself up with the Commission, just for the pleasure of getting a few things off your chest.

JIM. I hate them. I bloody HATE THEM!! Christ, they spend weeks checking to see if you're fit to be a public servant . . . they get references from people . . . the security service does a run-down on you, and then, after all that, they spend the next forty years not trusting you!

HUGH. Hear, hear!

JIM. They treat us like kids! Terrified we're going to claim a couple of cents we're not entitled to, or drive three miles out of our way in a State car. And as for this! *Going across and picking up the signing-on book.* Kids at school don't have to sign on. *He flings it out of the window.*

The boss winces.

BOSS. Michael, run along and get . . . *indicating the book.*

MICHAEL. No.

BOSS. I beg your pardon.

MICHAEL. I won't get it. Sorry.

JOHN slips quietly out of the door.

JIM. And there's one other thing I've always wanted to do.

He picks up the phone and dials internal number.

JIM. Could I speak to the Director, please?

BOSS. Can't we stop him?

HUGH. Yes, but who wants to?

JIM. It doesn't matter who's speaking, I'd like to speak to him. No, he won't know me, I've only worked in this Department fifteen years. I don't care if he is in a meeting, put me through. It won't take long. Thank you. *To others:* She's putting me through.

BOSS. All this will reflect on me . . . that's what you don't realise.

JIM. Is that the Director? Could I speak to him, please? Yes, it's urgent. Ah, hello. Is that the Director? My name's Jim, I work in stores, Room 133. We're having a few drinks to say farewell to our boss. He's been here twenty years, so . . . er . . . why don't you come and join us? *Others all applaud.* Pardon? Hello? Hello? Shit! I've been cut off . . . probably by that snotty secretary listening in.

HUGH. More likely the Director ringing off. In his terms you've just made an obscene phone call.

JIM. Won't do him any harm. Anyway, he can't touch me. Not now I've resigned. Give us another drink . . . I need it.

HUGH. I think we all do. Pity he's not coming . . . I wanted to see him eat a coconut rough.

MICHAEL, *who has been studying PSIS leaflet.* Excuse me! Isn't this the same type of calculator we've just got?

BOSS, *has a quick look*. Yes, that's the one. PSIS have them as a special, eh? They sell everything these days.

MICHAEL. Yes, but look at the price.

HUGH. What?

BOSS. Good God! They're selling them cheaper than what we paid for them.

HUGH. We spent months making sure we were paying the lowest price.

MICHAEL *suddenly starts another outburst of laughing*.

BOSS. It isn't funny. *But MICHAEL laughs again*. If it got in the papers . . . you must never tell a soul.

MICHAEL. We could've got them from a shop all along.

BOSS, *looks at watch*. I really think it was time I was going.

Begins to edge to the door.

HUGH. Oh, we're all coming.

JIM. I just feel like a booze-up tonight.

HUGH. And John's bringing Christine.

BOSS, *weakly*. Fine.

JIM. Celebrate my freedom and all.

JOHN *enters*. *He quietly puts the signing-on book back in its place.*

JOHN, *holding up envelope*. That's the letter, I take it.

JIM. Where did you get it?

JOHN. I went down to records. Got it just before they put it in the mail. Look . . . *putting it on JIM's desk* . . . think about it during the weekend.

JIM. There's nothing to think about.

JOHN. There's no hurry, is there? It's a big decision. And the Commission will get just as big a shock next week.

BOSS. It doesn't pay to be hasty.

JIM. You should know. You're typical of the system . . . get promoted because you never take a risk or make a mistake. *To JOHN*: And YOU! You and your talk and your funny cracks all the time. Pretending you hate the system; sneering at it. You're going to do alright . . . You'll end up near the top. Because you enjoy it all . . . you do; really, you love it. You're the biggest chicken of us all.

JOHN. I'm doing this for your sake, Jim. You'll be glad on Monday.

JIM. You can't even bear the thought I might escape, can you?

JOHN, *holding letter out to him*. Will you tear it up, or shall I?

JIM, *suddenly slumping in his chair*. You. You finish it off.

JOHN *tears the letter in half, and half again*. *And we all know that JIM won't write that letter again.*

Phone goes.

HUGH. Hello? *To JIM*: It's for you. The Director's secretary.

JIM, *reverting to normal*. Jesus. Er . . . hello. You . . . yes, I did. I see. Right. *He puts the phone down*. *Looks shocked*.
I never thought he'd take it that way.

BERYL. What? What's happened?

JIM. He'll be here in ten minutes.

BOSS, *stunned pause, then*: Sheeyit! *Then quite shocked at himself*. He can't find us like this.

The rest of the act is played very fast.

HUGH. We've only got beer.

BOSS. He won't drink beer.

The BOSS is running round tidying up as much as he can. He shuts the window, removes the nude calendar, straightens files on desks.

BERYL. God, I bet I look a fright.

JIM. How did I know he'd accept? I'm not staying here to talk to that old prick. I'm getting out. *He goes for his coat.*

HUGH. I think I'll join you.

BERYL. If you're not staying, I'm not.

MICHAEL is laughing during all this.

BOSS. You can't go.

JOHN. Abandon ship. Burn the code books.

BOSS. You must stay. What will he think? What about the mess?

They are all getting coats, though not putting them on, and gathering bags, brief cases.

BOSS. Somebody must stay. What will he think?

JOHN, *like a battle charge.* To De Bretts. Ta ta ta taaaa!

JOHN. Just another cock-up.

They get to the door and then pause.

BERYL. The best of luck.

HUGH. All the best.

JIM. Be seeing you.

JOHN. Auf Wiedersehen.

MICHAEL. Goodbye.

They turn to go.

BOSS. Sign off . . . don't forget to sign off.

They do so and pour out of the room.

BOSS sits there nervously for a moment. Then his nerve fails. He runs into his office and gets his coat and brief case and runs out of the door. He comes back almost instantly to turn off the lights.

THE END