

**"THE PERSONAL ASSISTANT"**

by

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## THE PERSONAL ASSISTANT

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# THE PERSONAL ASSISTANT

## CHARACTERS

The following characters are fictitious and are not meant to represent any person living or dead

### PRESENT CHARACTERS

**Mr. Rolf** Retired college principal who was a strict disciplinarian but has now been so incapacitated by a stroke that he is wheelchair-bound, partially paralyzed and almost blind. His disability has forced him to advertise for a personal assistant.

**Steven Icarus** The applicant for the position of personal assistant, chauffeur and general factotum to Rolf

(This character has a hidden identity and later turns out to be Jerry Marshall. It is therefore advised that in the first act Icarus wears a disguise of some sort)

### PAST CHARACTERS

**Jerry Marshall** An underling of Rolf - a liberal English lecturer who rocks the establishment boat and hasn't got on, so immerses himself in trying to write novels, none of which have been published

**Julie** Marshall's long suffering teacher-wife, who bore him a daughter and suffered years of his frustrations while he tried to succeed in his career or in his hobby as a part-time novelist

**Giles** Colleague of Marshall who is higher in status as Head of Department and generally holds less abrasive and more conformist views

**Corin** Giles's superstitious partner who lives in his shadow, adorning his arm at college dances

**Beggar** Seen in rags in street

**Emma** Jerry and Julie's bubbly teenage daughter

**Mrs. Slater** Interviewer on promotion board

**Miss Alfonse** Second interviewer

## THE PERSONAL ASSISTANT

<b>Secretary</b>	A young woman
<b>Bemrose</b>	Bright young lecturer who is an ex-student of Marshall (may be male or female)
<b>Interviewer</b>	Employment Agency worker
<b>Assistant</b>	Female assistant in jewellery shop
<b>Landlady</b>	Owner of low-class bed and breakfast
<b>Prostitute</b>	Working girl
<b>Supervisor</b>	Factory foreman/woman
<b>Worker 1</b>	Female factory worker (friendly)
<b>Worker 2</b>	Man-eating female worker
<b>Clerk</b>	Benefit Office clerk (female)
<b>Down &amp; Out 1</b>	Unemployed man sleeping rough
<b>Down &amp; Out 2</b>	Female down-&-out
<b>Down &amp; Out 3</b>	Second female down-&-out
<b>Officer</b>	Female police officer
<b>Control</b>	Voice of police controller

# THE PERSONAL ASSISTANT

## ACT ONE

### PRESENT

(Rolf sits in a wheelchair in the garden quietly listening to a recording of Bach. After a while Steven Icarus appears and walks towards him. The newcomer stands, silently watching the old man from a distance until a feeling of menace begins to grow ... we hear the sound of a twig break under Icarus's foot and Rolf, with his good arm, turns off the music with a remote control and listens intently)

**Rolf** Hello? Who's there?

(Icarus doesn't answer and there is moment of tension. Rolf looks around him, trying to listen intently)

Who is it? I know there's somebody there

(Slight pause)

**Icarus** (Speaks in an accent at the beginning of the play which is not his own and which will change later - any accent will suffice)

Steven Icarus, Mr. Rolf

**Rolf** (Sharply) Who? Icarus? Never heard of you! Who are you? What do you want?

**Icarus** I spoke to your wife on the phone - about the vacancy

**Rolf** The what? (Change of tone with realisation) Oh, you mean the job? You're the one who phoned are you? Well don't just stand over there, come over here where I can talk to you properly.

## THE PERSONAL ASSISTANT

(He does so and in the following exchange Rolf, due to his sight problem doesn't look at him but past him in the way that people with problems of vision sometimes do)

- Rolf** What did you say your name was?
- Icarus** Icarus, sir, Steven Icarus
- Rolf** "Icarus" - a very unusual name - and you've come about the job have you? Well in that case I suppose I should ask you one or two questions, give you some sort of an interview ... Have you got a clean driving licence Mr. Icarus?
- Icarus** I have, sir, yes
- Rolf** Have you ever been in trouble with the police?
- Icarus** No, never
- Rolf** Do you like Bach?
- Icarus** I do as a matter of fact
- Rolf** Good - a wonderful composer, wonderful. He and I have a great deal in common you know - he had trouble with his sight as well, so I'm not on my own - I only wish I could write music as well as he. Were you aware of my condition?
- Icarus** Yes, it was mentioned in the advert
- Rolf** Of course ... I can make out shapes but that's about all ... You have references I suppose?
- Icarus** (Going into his pocket to take out paper) Yes

## THE PERSONAL ASSISTANT

**Rolf** There's no need now - my wife can read them later. You know what the job entails?

**Icarus** Yes, she told me on the phone

**Rolf** Good - you've actually just missed her, she's just popped out. The terms are that if we consider you're suitable, you're to live in a flat in the village - you have to be on call whenever you're needed. You can have Sundays off, I don't go anywhere on Sundays, but the rest of the time you have to be readily available - is that understood? I know the money isn't much -

**Icarus** It'll be fine

**Rolf** (Surprised) You mean you'll take it?

**Icarus** Yes

**Rolf** Just like that?

**Icarus** Just like that

**Rolf** But you haven't seen the flat yet

**Icarus** I'm sure it'll be satisfactory

**Rolf** I'm not an easy man to work for Mr. Icarus - I get very moody at times

**Icarus** That's understandable.

**Rolf** Well if you're sure you really want the job ... everything seems to be in order - I suppose you can consider yourself hired - for a trial period at least. When do you think you'd be able to start?

## THE PERSONAL ASSISTANT

- Icarus** Right now if you like
- Rolf** That's what I like to hear - decisiveness - I can't stand procrastination ... you're not local though are you?
- Icarus** No, sir
- Rolf** I can tell that by your accent - you can probably tell that I'm not from round here too - we came here on retirement, my wife and I - a nice spot, we thought, near the coast and the country, the best of both worlds - I was really pleased to get away from the rat race I can tell you - I couldn't stand living in the city with all that squalor and degradation - you know what I mean, don't you?
- Icarus** (Pointedly) Yes, sir, I know exactly what you mean ...
- PAST** CHANGE OF SCENE - CROSS FADE AND MUSIC PLAYS FROM AN EARLIER ERA
- (Noises of traffic and city at night. A young girl in a ragged coat appears sitting on the ground holding out her hand begging to invisible passers-by - [if parts are being doubled Icarus and Rolf at this point are putting on coats to become part of a foursome returning from an evening out at the theatre so to cater for this we need to allow the girl plenty of time to time to beg, perhaps to the audience]. The women come on first)
- Beggar** (To invisible passers-by) Spare some change ... any loose change?
- (This is repeated several times as she begs to the invisible people passing)



THE PERSONAL ASSISTANT

**Julie** Now where have they got to? (Shouting to the men off) Come on you two, we haven't got all night

**Jerry** (Off) Coming

**Julie** What on earth are they doing?

**Corin** The last I saw of them they were drooling over some car in a garage window

**Julie** Honestly, they're like a couple of kids

**Corin** Men are like that - they never grow up - didn't you know that?

**Julie** I wouldn't care if we could afford a new car but we can't

**Corin** I think they have different priorities to us

**Julie** You can say that again. Jerry! Giles! What on earth are you doing? Come on!

(If doubling, some ad-libbing may be needed to cover until they arrive)

(The men come on)

**Julie** Here they are - (To Jerry) Get a move on

**Jerry** (To Giles as they come on) Do you see the way she bullies me? I'm the original henpecked husband

(They all see the beggar motioning with outstretched hand)

**Beggar** Spare change? Any spare change missus?

(To Giles & Corin) Spare change? Spare change mister?

## THE PERSONAL ASSISTANT

(Giles is having nothing to do with her and takes his wife's arm, moving her away from the beggar but Corin breaks away and goes to give the girl a coin from her purse)

**Beggar** Thanks

(To Julie) Spare change missus?

(Julie stops, opens her bag and hands the girl a note)

**Beggar** (Pleased at the amount) Good on yer!

**Giles** For heaven's sake don't encourage them - that's just what they want

**Beggar** (To Jerry) Spare change mister?

(He doesn't give her money but pauses briefly to bend down and whisper something to her)

**Beggar** (Disbelieving) Oh yeah?

**Giles** (Off) Come on Jerry

PAST JERRY AND JULIE'S HOUSE - THE FOUR OF THEM COME IN

**Julie** Let me take your coat

**Corin** Thanks

**Giles** (Going to warm his hands on the fire) I didn't realise how cold it was

**Jerry** (To Corin) Can I get you a drink?

THE PERSONAL ASSISTANT

**Corin** Just a fruit juice for me

**Jerry** What about you Giles?

**Giles** Got any whiskey?

**Jerry** Of course - anything in it?

**Giles** No thanks - sacrilege to dilute it

**Corin** (Hesitant) You will remember that you have to drive the baby-sitter home

**Giles** I know that

**Corin** Only I don't want -

**Giles** (Tetchily) Yes, I said all right

**Julie** (Sensing aggravation - to Corin) You couldn't give me a hand in the kitchen?

**Corin** Sure

(They both exit temporarily out of sight)

**Giles** Women! Why do they think they have to wet nurse you all the time?

**Jerry** (Giving him glass) She's just worried about your welfare

**Giles** I can take care of my own welfare - I'm a big boy now - she thinks if I have a couple of whiskies I'm going to get into all kinds of trouble

## THE PERSONAL ASSISTANT

**Jerry** It's dangerous stuff, I found it out the other night - I was trying to write, suffering a bad case of writer's block and I'd had a few - thought it might help me to relax - then Julie came in and said the wrong thing at the wrong moment - we exchanged words and she left hurriedly, closely followed by a flying whiskey bottle

**Giles** You slung the bottle at her? You ought to take more water with it

**Jerry** I know, but what can you do? She just caught me at the wrong moment - there was a happy ending though – it missed her and you know what? It didn't break!

**Giles** So there is a God after all!

(They raise their glasses and laugh)

PAST SCENE CHANGE - JULIE AND CORIN TALKING IN THE KITCHEN AS THEY PREPARE SOME FOOD

**Corin** How are things then?

**Julie** (Sarcastic) Great - they're increasing the workload and cutting down on the money available

**Corin** I don't mean at school, I meant with you and Jerry

**Julie** Not so good

**Corin** Why not?

**Julie** He's never here - he comes home from work, disappears into his room and that's the last we see of him

## THE PERSONAL ASSISTANT

- Corin** Have you tried talking?
- Julie** It's a waste of time - all he thinks about is his latest novel - I'm way down his list of priorities
- Corin** I didn't know things were that bad. Giles has his faults – always away playing golf - but at least I do get to speak to him occasionally
- Julie** (Hesitatingly) To tell you the truth I went to see a solicitor the other day
- Corin** You didn't?
- Julie** Well what am I supposed to do? We never go out anywhere, we never have anyone round - tonight's the first time in ages we've been out and that was only because you rang - I might as well be living on my own
- Corin** What about Emma?
- Julie** She never sees him - the only time she gets to speak is when he's finished a chapter and he comes out for coffee - its like living with a hermit
- Corin** You're not seriously thinking of ...?
- Julie** I don't know, Corin, I really don't know...
- PRESENT** THE MUSIC OF BACH - JERRY AND GILES HAVE MOVED BACK TO THE GARDEN AREA TO BECOME ROLF AND ICARUS AGAIN
- Rolf** Icarus? Are you there? Where the devil have you got?

## THE PERSONAL ASSISTANT

- Icarus** Here Mr. Rolf. I was just admiring the garden
- Rolf** You like it? My wife does most of it and we have a man in once a week - I'd like to be able to help but I'm not much good in my present state - I wouldn't know a weed from a wallflower - its true, though, what they say about blindness, it does increase the ability in your other senses - I can hear and smell things now that I never used to before - its still annoying though, the hand that life deals out ... Are you a gardener Mr. Icarus?
- Icarus** (Lightly) No, but I did once have a window box.
- Rolf** (Chuckles) Best way - that way you keep control - my wife says the place is beginning to look like a jungle
- Icarus** I wouldn't say that
- Rolf** I like to be brought out here on a summer evening - I sit and listen and take in everything around me - you'd be surprised at some of the things you can hear - and there are such smells, such wonderful aromas - there's a clematis over there by the window and last year we planted some night-scented stock - the perfume is overpowering
- I was very active you know - very independent before this happened - retired on a good pension, looking forward to a nice retirement and had such plans of what I was going to do – then they all came to nothing
- Ironic really - I chose this house for its views over the headland - on a fine day you can see for miles - if you can see. It was built by a retired sea captain so he could look out of his window and be reminded of the life he'd left behind - such wonderful views - and now I can't damned-well see them ... I

THE PERSONAL ASSISTANT  
can still feel them though - the sea air and the wind - you'd be surprised at how many different moods the wind can have

What about you? You're very quiet. You haven't told me anything about yourself yet. Have you always done this kind of work?

PAST SCENE CHANGE - CROSS FADE BACK TO CORIN AND JULIE IN THE KITCHEN

**Corin** It seems such a big step to take - how would you manage on your own?

**Julie** I'd still have my job, and Emma will be off to college soon - I'm sure I could get by

**Corin** It seems so final after all this time - how long have you been together?

**Julie** Too long

**Corin** Have you told him how you feel?

**Julie** I hardly get the chance to speak and when I do he's off into his study to finish another chapter - no, I tell a lie, we do speak occasionally - when we're arguing

**Corin** It cant be as bad as all that

**Julie** Can't it?

(Emma, their daughter, comes in, in a hurry to get changed to go out)

**Emma** Hiya!

THE PERSONAL ASSISTANT

**Julie** You do live here then?

**Emma** Occasionally

**Julie** What's the rush?

**Emma** Gavin's coming round to pick me up

**Julie** Am I allowed to ask where you're going?

**Emma** You can ask (implying "But I'm not going to tell you")

**Julie** Just as long as it's not as late as last time

**Emma** Mum, I'm not a little girl any more

**Julie** Perhaps not, but I still worry

**Emma** Is Dad in?

**Julie** He's talking to Giles

**Emma** You mean he's actually available? That makes a change

**Corin** We even managed to drag him out to the theatre

**Emma** You're very honoured

**Julie** See what I mean?

PAST CHANGE OF SCENE - JERRY AND GILES IN THE LIVING ROOM

**Giles** Other than throwing whiskey bottles at your better half, how are things otherwise?



## THE PERSONAL ASSISTANT

**Jerry** (Unconvincingly) Great

**Giles** Jerry, this is me you're talking to

**Jerry** O. K., so they're not so great - what do you expect me to say?

**Giles** The truth perhaps?

**Jerry** The truth?

**Giles** Try me

**Jerry** Julie and I seem to do nothing but argue lately.

**Giles** What about?

**Jerry** We don't need a reason

**Giles** Have you thought about counseling?

**Jerry** We did, but we ended up arguing over which one to go to - Emma had to referee

**Giles** How old is Emma now?

**Jerry** Seventeen. Why?

**Giles** I thought so - a dangerous time - the chicks flying the nest - a time to take stock ... are you feeling O.K. in yourself?

**Jerry** What are you? Some kind of agony aunt?

**Giles** Not so good eh?

THE PERSONAL ASSISTANT

- Jerry** Have you ever been through a period, Giles, when you're totally and absolutely pissed off with life? So pissed off that you don't want to wake up in the morning and when you do you just want to close your eyes again because you know exactly what the day holds in store for you - you know the shower's going to be cold because your daughter will have taken all the hot water again; you know there are going to be traffic jams on the way to work because they're there in the same place every morning; you know the boss is going to tear you off a strip for being late because he does the same every day and you know the students won't really be interested in the finer points of English literature because they'd sooner be talking about the football they watched on last night's T.V.
- Giles** You're depressed
- Jerry** How very observant.
- Giles** Have you seen a doctor?
- Jerry** I don't need a doctor
- Giles** I know just how you feel
- Jerry** You don't - you don't know how I feel because you're you and I'm me
- Giles** I do - I've been there myself
- Jerry** You can't have - you've got to Head of Department, on your way to the top, you'll soon be applying for deputy principal's jobs and look at me
- Giles** I'm looking
- Jerry** What do you see?

## THE PERSONAL ASSISTANT

- Giles** I see a good-looking guy
- Jerry** - Who's losing his hair -
- Giles** With an attractive wife -
- Jerry** - Who doesn't support him
- Giles** A wonderful home -
- Jerry** - Which is mortgaged to the hilt -
- Giles** A nice car -
- Jerry** - That keeps breaking down on me
- Giles** You've got a good job. What more do you want?
- Jerry** Its easy for you to talk, Giles, you're up there on the summit looking down on the rest of us - I'm not even halfway there. You know how long I've been doing this job? Fifteen years - for fifteen years I've done the same thing, taught the same subject to the same students - the only thing that changes are the faces
- Giles** You need a hobby
- Jerry** I've got a hobby - the writing - only it's not a hobby any more, it's an obsession - it feels like my only way out
- Giles** Why do you need a way out? You talk as if you're trapped
- Jerry** Well that's the way it feels, Giles - there's no progression in my life, no development - everybody needs some kind of personal development

## THE PERSONAL ASSISTANT

(Giles has an idea)

**Giles** Old Hardcastle is retiring soon, isn't he? So there'll be a vacancy coming up on your side for Head of Department

**Jerry** So?

**Giles** So there you are - there's your escape route - if you could get that you'd feel like a new man. Are you going to go for it?

**Jerry** I don't know, I tried it before and it wasn't a pleasant experience. I told myself I wasn't going to put myself through all that again.

**Giles** I think you should

**Jerry** But why?

**Giles** It would give you the change that you're looking for, the challenge. Are you saying you couldn't do the job?

**Jerry** Of course I could - standing on my head

**Giles** Well there you are then ...

**Jerry** But it would mean so much hassle and preparation.

**Giles** I don't mind giving you a hand.

**Jerry** That's kind of you but I'll have to think about it.

**Giles** If you do apply, can I give you a word of advice. You really need to think about your image.

**Jerry** What image?

## THE PERSONAL ASSISTANT

- Giles** The risk taker, sailing close to the wind, challenging the system all the time. Abrasiveness is all very well at the lower levels, it shows fire in the belly and the students lap it up but it doesn't work in the corridors of power - you need to try, for once, conforming with the system instead of knocking it.
- Jerry** Who? Me?
- Giles** Yes you - you know what I mean - a little bit of diplomacy sometimes goes a long way
- (Enter Emma)
- Emma** Hi Dad - mum says I've got to speak to you while you're still available
- Jerry** My long lost daughter
- Emma** She says if I don' t speak to you now I might not see you again for a week
- Jerry** Total exaggeration
- Emma** (Nodding to him) Giles (To Jerry) I've brought you a present – close your eyes.
- Jerry** Do I have to? Oh all right (he shuts his eyes)
- Emma** Hold out your hands
- Jerry** I hate this
- Giles** Do as your daughter says
- (Jerry does so)

## THE PERSONAL ASSISTANT

- Emma** (Putting small box into his outstretched hands) There – you can open them now
- Jerry** What is it? (Opens box) A mouth organ! What on earth do I want a mouth organ for?
- Emma** It's a belated birthday present
- Jerry** That was ages ago.
- Emma** You can play it when you get stuck with your writing - it'll remind you of me and bring you inspiration.
- (He looks at it and gives a blow)
- Giles** Can you play anything?
- Jerry** I used to have one when I was a kid but it was so long ago... now how did it go?
- (He tries to play a tune)
- Giles** Don't give up the day job
- Emma** You're supposed to say, "It's what I've always wanted"
- Jerry** (Flatly) It's what I've always wanted
- Giles** Don't be so ungrateful (To Emma) How are you then Emma?
- Emma** Fine
- Giles** Is it true you're doing four 'A' levels?
- Emma** Don't remind me

## THE PERSONAL ASSISTANT

**Giles** You're obviously the brainy one in the family - (To Jerry) I wonder who she takes after?

**Emma** I always tell them intelligence skips a generation! I've got to go - see you ...

(She exits)

**Giles** Don't you wish you were that age again?

**Jerry** No way.

**Giles** So how's the writing going? Still working on the best-seller?

**Jerry** You can laugh - one day you'll get a surprise

**Giles** Then you can tell Rolf where to stick his job

**Jerry** Wouldn't I just love to

(The women return carrying trays of food)

**Julie** Love to what?

**Giles** Jerry's going to give up lecturing and become a famous author

**Julie** I won't hold my breath

**Jerry** See what I mean?

**Giles** Where do you do your creating?

**Jerry** In the study - everything's very organised - I'll show you if you like

## THE PERSONAL ASSISTANT

- Giles** O.K.
- Jerry** I've just got this new computer - it does absolutely everything...  
  
(Jerry leads Giles out)
- Julie** (Looking after them and at the food) Isn't that typical - you prepare the supper and then they disappear
- Corin** Don't worry, they'll be back. What's all this about not supporting him?
- Julie** He's always saying that - he says I don't take any interest in what he does
- Corin** And is he right?
- Julie** Its not my scene, Corin, it takes up so much of his time - if I'd known what it was going to be like I wouldn't have married him in the first place
- Corin** Everybody changes.
- Julie** Not as much as this. I know it's a cliché but he's definitely not the man I married - its not that I don't try to understand - he says I don't, but I do.
- Corin** The oldest line in the world. "My wife doesn't understand me"
- Julie** He doesn't want me to understand - he just goes in there and switches off - for all he knows I could be dead
- Corin** You're not the first, you know, some of us are golf widows, for others its fishing - for you it's the writing



THE PERSONAL ASSISTANT

**Julie** I don't know how much longer I can put up with it - he has such mood swings and he's drinking more than he should - you haven't seen him when he's drunk

PRESENT BACK TO ICARUS AND ROLF IN THE GARDEN

(We catch the end of the previous conversation being repeated)

**Rolf** I said, "Have you always done this sort of work?"

**Icarus** (As though not listening) Sorry?

**Rolf** You weren't listening to a word I was saying. I said, "Have you always done this sort of thing?"

**Icarus** If you don't mind, Mr. Rolf, I'd prefer not to talk about my personal life

**Rolf** Please yourself. It's a free country

**Icarus** I see there's a gate over there in the corner

**Rolf** Yes - it leads to a path down through the fields

**Icarus** Would like me to take you for a walk?

**Rolf** My wife usually does that sort of thing - but I don't see why not, now that you're here - as long as we're not too late - we'd have to leave her a note

**Icarus** (Tapping pocket) There's no need - I have a mobile.

(Icarus takes the handles of the wheelchair and begins slowly pushing him - parts of their walk may be around the auditorium)

## THE PERSONAL ASSISTANT

**Rolf** We used to walk together down here before I had the attack - miles and miles we went - through the fields over the stream - along the cliff path and back in time for tea - I don't know if we've got time to go that far today

**Icarus** We could try

**Rolf** You'll have to be careful with my foot - it tends to drag underneath - I can't control the damned thing

**Icarus** (Checking the foot support) O.K.

**Rolf** There's even a seatbelt to stop me falling out.

**Icarus** (Fastening the belt) No problem

**Rolf** Its not very good being in this position you know, having to rely on other people all the time - it takes a lot of getting used to - I'm all right with this hand but the other side' s completely useless - they told me at the hospital it might improve but I don't think so, not now. Have you any idea of what its like?

**Icarus** No, sir, I can't say I have

**Rolf** Its extremely unpleasant - if I want anything I have to shout for my wife and she's not always available - the cruelest thing was that when I had the attack it took away my sight and half my body but left me with my mind intact - I wouldn't have cared if I wasn't aware of what's going on around me but I am, I'm aware of everything - and its so damned annoying, not being able to do anything for yourself - even the simplest of things like going to the toilet - can you imagine how that feels? Well can you?

**Icarus** No, I can't

## THE PERSONAL ASSISTANT

**Rolf** It's like being a baby again - being wholly reliant on other people - it gets me very depressed I can tell you - my wife tries to keep my spirits up but sometimes its a losing battle

I've even considered taking my own life once, when I was at my lowest ebb – it's true - I don't mind admitting it - but she keeps a keen eye on the tablets and there aren't many other ways when you're in this position

I sometimes think it's a good thing we can't see into the future – all the things that I was going to do when I retired and now look at me - perhaps it was written in the stars - my destiny - do you believe in destiny Mr. Icarus?

PAST BACK TO CORIN & JULIE IN THE LIVING ROOM

**Corin** If you want my advice you ought to have some time away together - a second honeymoon - leave the house, the bills and all the problems and just get away, the two of you together

**Julie** I think we've got past that stage - anyway, I don't think he could cope without his beloved writing

**Corin** Have you read any of it?

**Julie** No

**Corin** Why not?

**Julie** It'd be like talking to his mistress

**Corin** Is that how you see it?

**Julie** Well he spends more time with it than he does with me

## THE PERSONAL ASSISTANT

- Corin** You don't think he might have another woman?
- Julie** The only competition I've got is that computer ... Why Corin? Why is it so important for them to succeed? I don't care if he's a successful writer, a successful lecturer or just ordinary Joe Soap - are they made differently to us?
- Corin** "Slugs and snails and puppy dogs tails"
- (The men return from the study)
- Here they are - I told you they'd be back when they got hungry
- Giles** He's got everything in there - much better than mine - I can see I'm going to have to convert the attic
- (They sit down to eat)
- When you write this prize-winning novel, Jerry, will you still want to know us?
- Jerry** I'll have to think about it
- Corin** It must be strange when it happens - they say it changes your life - people stopping you in the supermarket and asking you for your autograph - I'm not sure I could cope with it
- Giles** What's that saying about greatness?
- Jerry** "Some men are born great, some achieve greatness, others have it thrust upon them"
- Giles** That's it - who said that?
- Jerry** The Bard - Twelfth Night

## THE PERSONAL ASSISTANT

- Julie** (To Corin) You'll notice its only men who are supposed to achieve greatness
- Giles** I'm sure when he said "men" he meant "women" as well. (To Jerry) What does it take then, Jerry, to succeed as a writer?
- Jerry** Ninety nine per cent perspiration...
- Giles** And one per cent inspiration - I've heard that - but how do you know you're not barking up the wrong tree?
- Jerry** Just a gut feeling - we're all of us put on the earth for a reason, aren't we? We've all got some kind of talent - whether its long distance running, high jumping, football, music - it's just a question of finding your forté and giving it your best shot
- Corin** What if you haven't got any talents? There's absolutely nothing I can do.
- Julie** I'm sure you're very modest
- Corin** It's true - I'm useless at drawing, writing, cookery
- Giles** (Jokingly) I'll second that
- (She gives him a withering look)
- Julie** Lets say you're right... what about that girl we saw tonight, the one begging - what talent has she got?
- Giles** Getting money out of people.
- Corin** They're awful aren't they? I never know what to do - if I don't give them anything I always feel so guilty

THE PERSONAL ASSISTANT

**Giles** And if you do, it'll be spent in ten minutes in the next public bar - you really shouldn't encourage them - they're spoiling the look of the city

**Julie** I know, but what can you do?

**Giles** The more that people give, the more it encourages them to try again - if nobody gave them anything they'd soon give up and find themselves a proper job

**Corin** I always like to give something, even if its only a few pence - you never know when you're going to be in that position yourself

(To Julie) How much did you give her?

**Julie** (Matter-of-factly) Ten dollars

**Giles** What!

**Julie** What's the problem?

**Giles** (Incredulously) You gave her ten dollars? A ten dollar note?

**Julie** Why not?

**Jerry** My wife's a sucker for a hard luck story - stray dogs, injured cats, any kind of a loser

**Julie** Which is presumably why I ended up with you

(They exchange a look of mutual disdain)

**Giles** That's a bit below the belt

(To Jerry) Are you going to stand for that?

## THE PERSONAL ASSISTANT

- Jerry** (Touching his temple) An elephant never forgets
- Corin** You never gave her anything, Jerry, but you said something to her? What was that?
- Jerry** I just gave her a little advice
- Corin** What kind of advice?
- Jerry** If you must know I told her to take control of her life.
- Julie** (Turning on him) You did what?
- Giles** If she's got people giving her ten dollar notes she's done that already - and I'm in the wrong job.
- Corin** I saw a programme on TV where a man was begging one minute and the next he walked round the corner and got into an expensive car.
- Julie** (Getting angry with Jerry) What did you mean, "take control"? Do you think she wanted to be there?
- Jerry** Perhaps
- Corin** You really think we're in control of our own lives?
- Jerry** We must be to a certain extent, don't you think?
- Corin** I'm not so sure
- Giles** This woman is so superstitious - she's psychic you know, she sees things that other people don't

THE PERSONAL ASSISTANT

- Corin** Please...
- Giles** Its true - she lives by the stars, eats by the stars and sleeps by the stars - if her horoscope tells her something bad's going to happen she stays in bed
- Corin** Don't exaggerate
- Jerry** You don't believe in those things surely?
- Corin** Why not?
- Jerry** You seriously believe your life is predestined by a single event like which sign you're born under?
- Corin** You' d be surprised at some of the things I could tell you
- Giles** See what I mean?
- Jerry** But those things are just written in broad terms to fit anyone
- Corin** That's not my experience
- Jerry** I'll prove it to you (he reaches for a newspaper) You have this paper don't you? So what kind of a day have you had today?
- Corin** They're not meant for looking back, they're for predicting the future
- Jerry** Nevertheless it should still fit, shouldn't it?
- Julie** Is there any need for this?
- Jerry** I just want to prove a point (he reads the paper) O.K. then, what sign are you Corin?



## THE PERSONAL ASSISTANT

- Corin** I'm not going to tell you
- Giles** She's Sagittarius
- Jerry** And what great events took place in your life today?
- Corin** You're making fun of me
- Jerry** I'm not - come on - this is a serious experiment
- Julie** He's always like this when he's had a drink
- Giles** If she wont tell you I will - she dragged me down to the travel agents, had me looking through dozens of holiday brochures and then when we came to booking a weekend away she found out that she'd lost her credit card
- Corin** It wasn't lost - I'd left it in my other bag
- Jerry** All right then, lets see how that fits. "Sagittarius - Socially you may discover that not everyone shares your views on life. This is a good time for travel but beware - all may not go well on the financial front"
- Corin** You see - I told you - that' s exactly the way it happened
- Julie** Strange
- Giles** What do you say to that Jerry?
- Jerry** Its obvious - she'd read the horoscope that told her it was a good time to travel and it affected what she did - it wasn't a prediction, it was an unconscious prompt

THE PERSONAL ASSISTANT

- Corin** So what about the problem on the financial front? How do you account for me losing my card?
- Jerry** You'd read your horoscope and your subconscious told you your card wasn't important - so you left it at home
- Corin** You mean I subconsciously forgot it on purpose?
- Julie** Isn't that asking us to believe a lot?
- Jerry** No more than that there are people in the world who can see into the future
- Corin** What sign are you Julie?
- Julie** Virgo, but I never look at them
- Giles** Why not?
- Julie** They give me the creeps
- Jerry** Which is the same as admitting there might be something in them - (reading paper) "Virgo ... if relationships have recently become cooler you have to face the fact that some things have a shelf life" - that's definitely us!
- Giles** What about mine? What does mine say?
- Jerry** What are you?
- Giles** Libra
- Jerry** "Financial issues are about to rise up the agenda so stay on your guard and don't make any rash commitments"
- Giles** Fine

## THE PERSONAL ASSISTANT

- Corin** What do you mean "fine"?
- Giles** The kitchen extension's out
- Corin** You're not serious?
- Giles** I am - if it says it in my stars how can I do any other?
- Corin** But you've been promising me that kitchen for ages
- Giles** (Meaning "no way") Sorry
- Corin** If that's the case we can cancel the golfing holiday
- Giles** Oh no!
- Corin** What's sauce for the goose
- Giles** Who started this? (To Jerry) It was you.
- Jerry** Just making a point
- Corin** (Taking the paper off him) If it's all foolish then what sign are you?
- Jerry** I'm a Scorpio if you must know - deep, passionate and creative - but don't tell me because it might be something I don't like and then what would I do?
- (Corin reads, looks at Jerry and hesitates)
- Giles** Well?
- Jerry** Come on. Don't keep us in suspense

THE PERSONAL ASSISTANT

**Corin** (Putting down the paper) I think it's time we were going

**Giles** We've only just arrived

**Corin** Please?

**Giles** Oh all right - (to others) I'm sorry about this

**Jerry** That's all right

**Julie** (To Corin) Are you O.K.?

**Corin** I think I've got one of my heads coming on

**Jerry** I'll get your coats

**Giles** I'm sorry but when she gets these migraines....

**Julie** That's all right

**Jerry** (Bringing coats) Here we are - I haven't offended you have I?

**Corin** No, really - I just feel like an early night

**Julie** Well it's been very nice seeing you both again - we must do it again sometime

**Giles** Yes - when the stars are right

**Julie** (Laughing) Yes

**Corin** Bye then

(They make their exit)

**Julie** Well that was very short and to the point

## THE PERSONAL ASSISTANT

**Jerry** I didn't mean to upset her – it's just that horoscope rubbish gets under my skin

**Julie** (Coldly) You have degrees in upsetting people, you're a master of it

**Jerry** I know and I don't even know I'm doing it.

**Julie** It might have been the horoscope - she's very funny about them

**Jerry** (Picking up paper) Let's have a look

**Julie** What does it say?

(He reads aloud)

**Jerry** "The coming months are a testing time, a time to be cautious – don't put all your eggs into one basket - now is not the time to make any rash decisions" - (He strikes a dramatic pose) Beware the Ides of March!

**PRESENT** ROLF IS IN HIS CHAIR ON THE CLIFF TOP APPARENTLY TALKING TO HIMSELF

**Rolf** Not that I believe in destiny myself, of course - you make your own luck I always say. Survival of the fittest - that was always my philosophy. Darwin had it right. If you want to get on in life you have to be one of the fittest, to adapt to circumstances - compete against the others - (pointing upwards) like that skylark up there - so ingenious - one day we found one of their nests - cunning things they are - if you get anywhere near the nest they try and lure you away from the young - I love the way they can hover for ages in one position singing their hearts out – birds are clever things, you know, there are some that even disguise themselves to look like something they're not.

## THE PERSONAL ASSISTANT

Did you know that? (He looks around but there's no sign of Icarus) Icarus? (No response) Now where the devil's he got to? Icarus? Don't play games with me - he leaves me sitting here like a beached whale - Icarus? We can't be far from the cliff path by the sound of it - if we don't get a move on we wont be back in time for tea ... Icarus! Where the devil are you?

**Icarus** (Coming on) I'm sorry Mr. Rolf - I had to relieve myself

**Rolf** Well I wish you'd tell me where you were going - I didn't know where on earth you'd got to - I was sat here like a fool talking to myself. Are we far from the cliff path?

**Icarus** It can't be far now

**Rolf** Do you think we should go on or turn back? I don't want to be late for tea

**Icarus** Its up to you Mr. Rolf, you're the boss as they say

**Rolf** I am, aren't I? Of course I am - in which case ... (he pauses briefly) in which case I think we should carry on.

**Icarus** Very well

**Rolf** Not a very difficult decision to make, all things considered ... there's a skill in decision-making you know, a definite skill - they have courses on it - its just a question of weighing up all the pros and cons and coming to a logical conclusion - in my time I've had to make a lot of decisions, large and small and I can't say there are any that I really regret - obviously they haven't all been popular with everybody but you're not paid to be popular when you're a manager are you?

## THE PERSONAL ASSISTANT

I was a college principal, you know, before I retired - did you know that? The top of my profession. It was a successful career, I don't think its immodest to say so - it had its up and downs of course but all in all I think you could say it was successful. I put it down to two things - hard work and perseverance - I'm a great believer in perseverance - if you're going to get on in life what you need is hard work and perseverance...

**Icarus**

And luck?

**Rolf**

I don't think luck comes into it - if you work hard and persevere in whatever profession you're in then one day you're bound to get your just desserts - you only have to look at me - I worked my way up from assistant lecturer to senior, deputy principal and finally principal and do you know what my father was? A rat catcher - can you imagine that? You can't get much lower than that - but I told myself that I wasn't going to end up like him, I was going to improve myself come hell or high water and improve I did.

Its a nice feeling you know, to get to the top, to know that you've worked hard for all that you've got but to be there at the end in the driving seat making decisions, important decisions that can affect not just the lives of individuals but the efficiency of the whole organization...

**PAST**

JOB INTERVIEW AT ROLF'S OLD COLLEGE – THE TABLE AND CHAIRS ARE NOW IN FORMAL POSITION - THREE CHAIRS FOR THE INTERVIEW PANEL ON ONE SIDE WITH ONE OPPOSITE FOR THE CANDIDATE. TWO OF THE INTERVIEWING PANEL ARE WOMEN AND ARE ALREADY SEATED WHILE A YOUNGER WOMAN, THE SECRETARY, IS WAITING OUTSIDE

**Mrs. Slater**

Good morning Louise

## THE PERSONAL ASSISTANT

- Miss Alfonse** Morning - has Mr. Rolf arrived yet?
- Mrs. Slater** Not yet
- Miss Alfonse** That's a relief - the traffic was dreadful - absolutely dreadful
- Mrs. Slater** I know
- Miss Alfonse** If it gets any worse I swear it'll come to a complete standstill
- Mrs. Slater** Have you read the application form?
- Miss Alfonse** To be honest I had terrible problems at the weekend with the dishwasher - the kitchen was flooded - I've only just managed to read them
- Mrs. Slater** I hate these situations
- Miss Alfonse** Why?
- Mrs. Slater** Having to choose one person and disappoint the others - I always want to give the job to all of them
- Miss Alfonse** Well that's something you can't do
- (The secretary comes in)
- Secretary** Are you ready yet for the first candidate?
- Mrs. Slater** Not yet - we're still waiting for the chairman
- Secretary** Isn't he here yet? Mr. Marshall's been here for ages
- Miss Alfonse** Then he'll just have to wait a little longer



## THE PERSONAL ASSISTANT

(The secretary goes out and speaks to Jerry)

**Secretary**

I'm sorry but they're still not ready for you

**Jerry**

That's O.K. - they're probably sharpening their knives for the kill

**Secretary**

They're still waiting for you-know-who ... I'm sure you've got nothing to worry about - you must stand a very good chance being the internal candidate

**Jerry**

I don't think it matters. I've been in this situation before - it can work both ways - it can be a disadvantage as well as an advantage

**Secretary**

Well if it's any consolation, if I were the one doing the choosing, you'd get the job

**Jerry**

That's very kind of you - you don't want to put a good word in for me?

(They laugh)

**Jerry**

Are they interviewing many?

**Secretary**

There are five - a real cross section - one of them's somebody you might know - I think she actually came to this college some time ago - a Miss(or Mr) Bemrose - do you know her?

**Jerry**

(Downbeat) I ought to - she was one of my students

**Secretary**

Really? You must have done a very good job - she's very well qualified now

THE PERSONAL ASSISTANT

**Jerry** (Cutting her short) I hope it won't take long – the car park was full and I had to leave my car in somebody's space

PAST IN THE INTERVIEW ROOM THE PRINCIPAL ARRIVES – IT IS ROLF BEFORE HE RETIRED AND HAD HIS STROKE. HE IS IN A BAD MOOD BECAUSE HE'S LATE, WHICH HE DOESN'T LIKE, AND SOMEONE HAS TAKEN HIS PARKING PLACE

**Rolf** Sorry I'm late, I had trouble parking

**Mrs. Slater** That's quite all right, Mr. Rolf, we've only just got here ourselves

**Rolf** Right then, I suppose we'd better make a start - has everyone gened up on the candidates?

**Mrs. Slater** I'm afraid -

**Miss Alfonse** (Interrupting) Yes - we've all done our homework

**Rolf** Good - then all we've got to do is sort out a plan of attack

(They get their heads together, while outside, the secretary pops her head round the door, nods to the board and returns to put Jerry at his ease)

**Secretary** He's arrived - it won't be long now

**Jerry** What kind of a mood is he in?

**Secretary** The same as usual

**Jerry** That's what I was afraid of

(A phone rings and the secretary answers)

## THE PERSONAL ASSISTANT

- Secretary** (Into phone) Right ... (To Jerry) They're ready for you now
- (As he goes in) Best of luck
- (Jerry goes in and sits down facing them)
- Rolf** Good morning Mr. Marshall
- Jerry** Morning
- Mrs. Slater** We'd like to start off by setting you at your ease and giving you time to relax with a few minutes first of all for you to tell us all about your previous experience ...
- PAST  
THE LIGHTS FADE BRIEFLY TO SHOW A PASSAGE OF TIME AND COME UP AGAIN ON THE SAME SCENE SOME TIME LATER
- Mrs. Slater** Well you've certainly been here a long while, Mr. Marshall - how long have you actually been in your present position?
- Jerry** Let me see....
- Rolf** (Who is not on his side looks at some papers in front of him)  
He's been here fourteen - no fifteen years
- Mrs. Slater** Really? And have you applied for the position of Head of Department before?
- Jerry** Yes
- Mrs. Slater** How many times?
- Jerry** Er ...

THE PERSONAL ASSISTANT

- Rolf** Twice
- Miss Alfonse** Mr. Marshall, don't you think fifteen years is rather a long time to remain in one department?
- Jerry** I suppose it is
- Miss Alfonse** Have you never thought of transferring somewhere else to advance your career?
- Jerry** I did consider it - yes
- Miss Alfonse** But never actually got round to applying?
- Jerry** No, you see ...
- Mrs. Slater** Have you published any educational papers or done any research while you've been here?
- Jerry** There didn't seem to be the time, what with all the marking and everything
- Rolf** Correct me if I'm wrong, Mr. Marshall, but you have a certain reputation for being somewhat outspoken
- Jerry** I wouldn't say "outspoken" - I like to speak my mind when necessary but I wouldn't call it "outspoken"
- Rolf** Would you say that the head of a college department should be the type to "speak their mind" as you call it?
- Jerry** If there's something that needs saying, I would, yes
- Rolf** (Doubtfully) Yes ... (Looking to his colleagues) I think that's all I have to ask for the moment (To others) Do you have any more questions? (the others shake their heads)

THE PERSONAL ASSISTANT

**Rolf** Is there anything that you'd like to ask us?

**Jerry** No, I don't think so

**Rolf** (Coldly) Right then ... thank you very much for coming - we'll let you know the outcome when we've seen the other candidates

(Jerry is just about to leave)

Oh Mr. Marshall, one other thing - what kind of car are you driving at the moment?

**Jerry** I've still got the green Ford

**Rolf** I thought so

**Jerry** Why?

**Rolf** No reason

PAST THE LIGHTS GO DOWN ON THE INTERVIEW. IN THE DARKNESS WE HEAR A TELEPHONE RINGING FOLLOWED BY TWO VOICES

**Jerry** (Off) Will somebody please answer that phone

**Julie** Its for you ... I think it's about the job

**Jerry** Jerry Marshall.... Yes ... That's O.K. ... (Shocked) They've done what? No? Please tell me you're joking? You are joking?

PAST THE LIGHTS COME UP ON EMMA TALKING ON THE PHONE TO HER BOYFRIEND

THE PERSONAL ASSISTANT

**Emma** No I'd better not, I ought to stay in and do some revision ... what do you mean "What for?" For the exams, stupid - you know how long we've got left? - We aren't all taking the easy options like you ... you can call me what you like, it still won't make me change my mind ...

No ... If I don't get the grades I'll be in all kinds of trouble - they're not like your parents, you know.

No, he wouldn't let me - not tonight - he's in an awful mood - did he what? Did he get the job? No, he didn't - that's why he's in such a foul mood - apparently they gave it to some young whiz-kid that he used to teach, which makes it even worse - can you imagine having a boss who's one of your own ex-students? I don't think he'll be able to cope with it

(Enter Jerry from his study in a foul mood and somewhat inebriated)

**Jerry** (Crossly to Emma) Haven't you finished yet?

**Emma** (Holding hand over mouthpiece) Do you mind!

**Jerry** (Angrily) Yes I do mind as a matter of fact, I mind a great deal - I'm waiting to use the damned phone and you've been gassing for the last twenty minutes

**Emma** I am not "gassing," I'm talking to Gavin - I have a right to use it as much as you

**Jerry** Is that so? We'll see about that - (he goes and pulls the phone connection out of the wall socket)

**Emma** What the - ? What the hell did you do that for?

THE PERSONAL ASSISTANT

**Jerry** This is my house and my phone - you don't pay a penny towards it and you expect to have free use of it whenever you like

(Julie comes in)

**Julie** What's all the noise about?

**Emma** You know what he's just done? He's just cut me off as I was talking to Gavin – he's pulled the wire out of the wall

**Julie** Is this true?

**Jerry** Yes, it's true - she stands here gassing to her boyfriends all night and she doesn't pay a penny towards the bill - why should I have to pay for her pleasure?

**Julie** You've been drinking again, haven't you?

**Jerry** So?

**Julie** I knew it - it's a waste of time talking to you when you're in this condition

**Jerry** In what condition?

**Julie** Drunk

**Jerry** I'm not drunk

**Julie** Not much you're not

**Jerry** I'm not drunk - I've had a drink, yes, but I'm not drunk

(Emma begins to dissolve into tears)

THE PERSONAL ASSISTANT

- Julie** (Comforting her) All right love. (To Jerry) Are you happy now? Now that you've upset everyone?
- Jerry** She shouldn't hog the damned phone all the time
- Julie** Don't take it out on her
- Jerry** Take what out?
- Julie** It's not her fault you didn't get the job. That's what's at the bottom of it isn't it? That's what's brought on the mood.
- Jerry** I'm in a mood am I?
- Julie** Yes
- Jerry** (Seething) And don't you think I deserve to be? Eh? Have you any idea what it feels like? To be beaten to a job by a slip of a girl that you used to teach, somebody who's half your age - have you any idea how that feels? Well have you? To watch your life and your career slipping away in front of you and not being able to do a damned thing about it - to see people, younger people, coming through and getting the jobs that you should be getting, jobs that you know you could do with your eyes shut - its something of an understatement but I think you could say without fear of contradiction - "Yes, I'm in a bloody mood all right!"
- (Emma breaks away)
- Julie** Where are you going?
- Emma** Out!
- Julie** What about your revision?



THE PERSONAL ASSISTANT

**Emma**

I've gone off the idea

(She goes out)

**Julie**

Are you satisfied with yourself?

(No response)

Well are you? (She follows him) Are you satisfied now that you've driven your daughter out of the house when she should be studying for her exams? I'm talking to you, you drunken bum!

(At this comment he snaps and turns to violently slap her across the face - she puts her hand to her cheek and the lights go down)

PAST

CHANGE OF SCENE – JUDY BEMROSE, (WHO MAY BE EMMA DOUBLING) THE NEW HEAD OF DEPARTMENT AT JERRY'S COLLEGE, COMES INTO HER OFFICE, SORTS THROUGH SOME PAPERS THEN PICKS UP THE PHONE AND DIALS

**Bemrose**

Maria? I've been trying for ages to reach you ... I'm ringing round everybody to tell them the good news ... you know that job I told you about? The Head of Department? Well I actually got it – isn't that brilliant? Yes, that's very kind of you ... of course I'm pleased - wouldn't you be? ...No, I never thought I'd get, it either but I did ... What? ... There were four of them ... yes, he was the internal candidate... well it was a bit strange going for the same job but you've got to give it your best shot haven't you? ... No, I don't know why they didn't choose him - he must have upset them or something - what's that? How do I think we'll get on? I don't know, that's up to him ... are you free on Thursday evening for a drink? Anywhere you like...

## THE PERSONAL ASSISTANT

PRESENT

ROLF AND ICARUS ON THE CLIFF PATH

**Rolf**

Yes, I've had to make some difficult decisions in my time but that's the challenge of being in management you can't please all the people all the time - there are times when you have to do things that you know aren't going to be popular but that's what you're paid to do - if it upsets one or two people along the way that's just too bad - like choosing the right person for the job, its not always obvious who the right person is - do you know what I mean?

**Icarus**

Yes Mr. Rolf, I know just what you mean

**Rolf**

Everybody who applies for something thinks that they're the right one, quite naturally, or they wouldn't be applying but as a manager you have to be objective, you can't let personalities enter into it - you have to have a wider view - the individual might have certain personal needs but they sometimes have to be weighed against the needs of the organisation - the needs of society even - you sometimes have to think in the long term

**Icarus**

I think we're almost there now

**Rolf**

Good - yes - I can hear the waves - not far now ... where was I?

**Icarus**

"The needs of the organisation"

**Rolf**

Oh yes - so you see you can't always give a job to the most obvious person - when you're in management you have to take in all kinds of considerations - things that the ordinary person might not think about - like the image of the establishment - that's very important in the business world ... I'm not boring you am I?

**Icarus**

No sir

## THE PERSONAL ASSISTANT

**Rolf** Just tell me if I am ... do you mind if I call you by your first name? "Mr. Icarus" sounds so formal.

**Icarus** Not at all

**Rolf** Steven isn't it?

**Icarus** That's right

**Rolf** Forgive me for saying this, Steven, but there's something very familiar about you.

**Icarus** Familiar?

**Rolf** Something about your voice. You're definitely not from round here?

**Icarus** No sir – but I'd really prefer to keep my private life to myself

**Rolf** Yes, of course

PAST  
SCENE CHANGE BACK TO MISS BEMROSE STILL ON THE TELEPHONE TELLING PEOPLE ABOUT HER SUCCESS

**Bemrose** Hi mum – it's me - Judy - I'm ringing with some good news - you know that job I told you about? - The Head of Department? - Well I got it - I'm not kidding - I'm phoning you now from my new office - are you pleased for me? You don't sound it. 'Course I am. I can't get over it. I keep thinking I'm going to wake up any minute ... it'll mean a bit more travelling but I can cope with that for a while until I get a new place - yes, I'll send you my new address as soon as I get sorted - after I've got settled in I'll come and take you all out for a celebration meal - O.K? Is that a deal? Fine. Give my love to Dad. Bye then.

## THE PERSONAL ASSISTANT

(She puts down the phone and starts sorting through some papers)

- Jerry** (Coming in) I'm sorry, I was looking for Dennis
- Bemrose** You've just missed him - he's just gone
- Jerry** Damn! Never mind, I know where to find him
- Bemrose** I was just doing a bit of spring-cleaning
- Jerry** He never was very organised - God knows what you'll find
- Bemrose** Don't go mister - er...
- Jerry** You don't have to call me "Mister" now - its "Jerry"
- Bemrose** "Jerry"- it feels strange calling you by your first name
- Jerry** You'll have to get used to it - now that that ... (change of tack)  
that's not what your lot used to call me ...
- Bemrose** Sorry?
- Jerry** Do you remember? When you were students you used to give us all nicknames - you thought we didn't know but we found out on the grapevine - each year they gave us different ones - what was it your year called me? Jez? Jezzy?
- Bemrose** "Red Jez"
- Jerry** "Red Jez" - that's it - I'd almost forgotten
- Bemrose** You were somewhat left wing

THE PERSONAL ASSISTANT

**Jerry** Only "somewhat"?

**Bemrose** All right then, very. Are you still waiting for the revolution?

**Jerry** Still waiting - one day it'll come - only a matter of time

(Pause)

**Jerry** You must have impressed them.

**Bemrose** Who?

**Jerry** The board.

**Bemrose** They seemed very pleased with my qualifications.

**Jerry** You always were very bright.

**Bemrose** (Embarrassed) Please.

**Jerry** Its true - you were miles ahead of the others in your year - kept all of us on our toes if I remember right

**Bemrose** We had good tutors.

**Jerry** But of course

(Beat)

**Bemrose** I heard that you'd applied for it.

**Jerry** (Dismissively) Well ... I went through the motions but I don't think I really gave it my best shot - all that arse-licking and pretence isn't really my scene - I tend to say what I think and I don't think they like that - they don't want to know about the real world do they?

## THE PERSONAL ASSISTANT

- Bemrose** I suppose not
- Jerry** They just want the latest jargon from books – I suppose you' d be good at that...still, its time they had some new blood in the place, somebody to blow the cobwebs away
- Bemrose** I don't intend to make any changes till I've found my feet
- Jerry** A wise move
- Bemrose** I might need your help
- Jerry** My help?
- Bemrose** You've been here a while, you know the ins and outs
- Jerry** You could say that, a part of the furniture almost
- Bemrose** I really would appreciate it
- Jerry** Sure, any time
- Bemrose** I don't want to tread on anybody's toes
- Jerry** There are some that need treading on
- Bemrose** Perhaps
- Jerry** You know where everything is? But of course you do - I was forgetting
- Bemrose** They've made a few changes since I was here
- Jerry** They certainly have - tempus fugit and all that ... it must be strange coming back

THE PERSONAL ASSISTANT

**Bemrose** It is

**Jerry** Right then - I'd better be going - I've got a tutorial

**Bemrose** Of course, don't let me keep you

(He turns to go)

**Bemrose** Jerry ...

**Jerry** Yes?

**Bemrose** I'm sorry

**Jerry** Sorry? What for?

**Bemrose** You know (she sweeps her hand to indicate the office)

**Jerry** Yes, well, that's life isn't it - some you win, some you lose

(He turns to go out)

**Bemrose** Are we going to be friends?

(He stops momentarily and turns)

**Jerry** I might find that a little difficult at first

PAST THE LIGHTS FADE ON THE OFFICE AND IN THE DARKNESS THERE COMES THE SOUND OF JAZZ MUSIC PLAYING LAZILY AT THE END OF A LONG EVENING - WE SEE A FLASHING NEON SIGN OUTSIDE A WINDOW AND A LIGHTS COME UP ON A DRUNKEN JERRY STAGGERING TOWARDS A TABLE WITH A WHISKEY BOTTLE & GLASS. ON THE TABLE IS A

THE PERSONAL ASSISTANT  
BROWN PAPER PARCEL THE SIZE OF A PHONE BOOK  
... THE MUSIC PLAYS QUIETLY IN THE BACKGROUND  
DURING THE FOLLOWING SPEECHES

- Bartender** (Off) Time, ladies and gentlemen, lets have your glasses please
- Jerry** (Mumbling drunkenly) Time please ... time please ... please time ... its time ... (singing) "its time to call it a day, they've burst your pretty balloons and taken the moon away" ... procrastin .. procast ... is the thief of time ... and time and fevers burn away ... there's no time like the present ... for time is money ... and time is the great physician ... time and tide wait for no man ... time flies .... a time to be born, a time to die a time to kill, a time to heal ... a time to mourn, a time to dance ... a time to something and a time to ...
- Secretary** (Appearing from the shadows) A time to love and a time to hate
- Jerry** That's it, a time to love and a time to hate
- Secretary** I thought I might find you here
- Jerry** And you were right young lady - well done!
- Secretary** You haven't been home have you?
- Jerry** "Home is where the heart is." How did you know that?
- Secretary** Your wife phoned - she wondered where you'd got to
- Jerry** Did she really? That's very kind of her (pouring himself another drink he begins singing to himself) "The party' s over, its time to call it a day, they've burst your pretty balloons, they've taken the moon away" ...They've taken my moon away you know
- Secretary** Have they really? Why's that?



## THE PERSONAL ASSISTANT

- Jerry**                   Everybody needs their own moon - something to believe in, to look forward to - and now they've taken mine away
- Secretary**               Is this all because you didn't get the job?
- Jerry**                   Not just the job – I didn't get the job and I didn't get the book ... "I didn't get" ... "I didn't get" ... my life is one long series of "didn't gets"
- Secretary**               Which book?
- Jerry**                   (Holding up brown parcel) This book - this bloody book that I wrote and keep sending away - its made of rubber you know - the publishers and I have this wonderful system where I keep sending it away to them and they bounce it back to me six months later with the same platitudes and the same moronic comments – it's quite amusing really
- Secretary**               (Matter-of-factly) So you've had your book rejected - you wont be the first
- Jerry**                   And I wont be the last - that's right - but this isn't just any book - this is me, my life, my reason for living - it was the only thing I had left - the only ray of hope at the end of a very dark tunnel
- Secretary**               So why don't you just send it off to another publisher?
- Jerry**                   You don't understand, it's not as easy as that. It's getting too dog-eared
- Secretary**               Then you'll just have to make another one.
- Jerry**                   Have you any idea how much it costs? The copying and the postage? It's astronomic ... (He then has an idea and turns to her) Hang on, though - you could do it for me

THE PERSONAL ASSISTANT

**Secretary**                   What?

**Jerry**                        You could copy it for me

**Secretary**                   Where?

**Jerry**                        At work

**Secretary**                   I don't think so. What if Mr Rolf found out?

**Jerry**                        He wouldn't find out - go on - for me

**Secretary**                   I don't know ...

**Jerry**                        Please. You don't know how much it means to me ... just one copy ... please?

(Pause)

**Secretary**                   (Reluctantly taking the parcel) All right then, but don't blame me if there's any trouble.

PAST                           SCENE CHANGE - JULIE IS WEARING DARK GLASSES TO HIDE A BLACK EYE AND IS LOOKING IN A SHOP WINDOW AS CORIN COMES PAST AND ALMOST DOESN'T RECOGNISE HER

**Corin**                        Julie? It is you isn't it?

**Julie**                        (Flatly) Corin

**Corin**                        I didn't recognise you - what's with the dark glasses? Travelling incognito?

THE PERSONAL ASSISTANT

(Julie slowly takes off the glasses to reveal a black eye underneath)

**Corin** Oh no - you look awful

**Julie** I feel it

**Corin** It wasn't - ? (Corin nods)

Come and tell your Aunty Corin all about it

**Julie** What's to tell? Would you believe me if I said that I'd walked into a door? (Corin shakes her head) No, I didn't think so - we argued and he hit me

**Corin** What for?

**Julie** He doesn't need a reason - because he was drunk, because he didn't get the job - who knows?

**Corin** That's no reason to ... love, you cant go on like this

**Julie** I know - I've just come from the solicitor's

**Corin** What did he say?

**Julie** He's going to send him a letter.

**Corin** A fat lot of good that'll do - for God's sake Julie, what are you waiting for?

**Julie** It wasn't always like this – there were good times – before – I don't know why it changed – I keep asking myself if it was something I did – this need of his to succeed – I don't understand it – I keep hoping it's all a dream – that he'll snap

THE PERSONAL ASSISTANT  
out of it and the old Jerry will come walking back to me but  
deep down I know it isn't going to happen

**Corin** Do you want to talk? (Julie nods tearfully)

(Corin takes her arm) Come on

PAST SCENE CHANGE - THE SECRETARY IS IN THE MIDDLE  
OF COPYING JERRY'S BOOK FOR HIM WHEN ROLF  
RETURNS UNEXPECTEDLY

**Rolf** Have you any idea where the notes are for the last management  
meeting?

(She is visibly shaken and moves her body in front of the  
copier)

**Secretary** Mr. Rolf - I thought you'd gone home

**Rolf** I had but I need those notes - what are you doing?

**Secretary** Doing? Er - just a bit of copying

**Rolf** I haven't asked you to do any copying - what is it?

**Secretary** (Trying to bluff him) Just some odds and ends

**Rolf** (Pushing past her) What kind of odds and ends? These aren't  
odds and ends - this looks like a story - a book - how many of  
these are you doing? Who's it for? (No reply) I asked you a  
question young lady...

PAST SCENE CHANGE - DISCIPLINARY HEARING - ROLF  
SEATS HIMSELF IN FORMAL POSITION BEHIND A  
TABLE WITH MISS ALFONSE - THERE IS A SLIGHT

THE PERSONAL ASSISTANT  
PAUSE THEN A KNOCK ON THE DOOR - MARSHALL  
COMES IN.

- Rolf** Come in Mr. Marshall ... you know why you're here
- Jerry** Yes
- Rolf** I've asked Miss Alfonse to be present to ensure fair play... Do you have any explanation for your behaviour?
- Jerry** No
- Rolf** The misuse of college funds is a very serious matter, very serious indeed, especially in such difficult times - what you were doing was underhanded and deceitful
- Jerry** Would you have allowed me if I'd asked?
- Rolf** That's not the point. College facilities are there for the use of staff and students in connection with college business - what you were doing was not college business ... do you have anything to say in your defence?
- Jerry** Isn't this a bit over the top? I feel like the sacrificial lamb
- Rolf** You don't seem to understand the seriousness of your position - you have carried out an act, which I consider to be, both deceitful and dishonest - we've discussed the matter of police involvement -
- Jerry** (Incredulous) The police?
- Rolf** But have decided against it.... This is an act, which, in my opinion, goes to the root of your contract
- Jerry** What are you trying to say?

## THE PERSONAL ASSISTANT

**Rolf** I'm saying that this breach of trust between yourself and this establishment leaves me with no alternative but to terminate your contract of employment

**Jerry** Ter -? You mean you're sacking me? For doing a bit of illicit copying?

**Rolf** Both yourself and your "accomplice"

**Jerry** I don't believe this

**Rolf** I've had an invoice drawn up for the amount outstanding - if you'll leave a cheque at the office I'll see to it that you get a receipt before you leave

PAST SCENE CHANGE - EMMA IS SAT IN THE DARKNESS OF HER ROOM AT A DESK WITH AN ANGLEPOISE LAMP STUDYING FOR HER EXAMS WHEN HER MOTHER COMES IN

**Julie** I've brought you a drink

**Emma** Thanks

(Julie is about to leave when she hesitates)

**Julie** How's it going?

**Emma** (Sarcastic) Great - I keep reading the same things three times and it still doesn't sink in

**Julie** I've made some sandwiches downstairs

**Emma** I'm not hungry

THE PERSONAL ASSISTANT

- Julie** They're your favourite
- Emma** Perhaps later
- Julie** O.K., I'll put them in the fridge
- (Julie is about to go when she hesitates deciding that she needs to speak to Emma)
- Julie** Can I have a word with you?
- Emma** Sure
- Julie** I don't quite know how to say this ...
- Emma** (Matter-of-factly keeping her eyes down on her book) You want to tell me that you and dad are splitting up.
- Julie** (Taken aback) Er ... yes - how did you -?
- Emma** (Looking up) I'm not a kid any more, mum - I've seen it coming for ages - have you told him yet?
- Julie** No - I wanted to speak to you first
- Emma** To ask my permission?
- Julie** No, not your permission - just to say that I'm sorry - I don't feel as if we've been very good parents
- Emma** You've been the same as all the rest - you're not the only ones you know, most of my friends parents divorced ages ago - you've done quite well really getting this far
- Julie** I thought you'd be upset

THE PERSONAL ASSISTANT

**Emma** If you want to know the truth, it'll be a relief not to spend my life living in a war zone

**Julie** Is that how it feels?

**Emma** I was thinking of buying myself a crash helmet for protection

(They both smile then Julie begins to break down and instead of her comforting her daughter at the bad news, as she had intended, she ends up with Emma comforting her)

PRESENT ROLF AND ICARUS ON THE CLIFF TOP -  
BACKGROUND NOISE OF THE WIND AND WAVES

**Rolf** Are we there yet?

**Icarus** (Leaving the chair to look over the edge) Yes Mr. Rolf, we're finally there

**Rolf** Don't walk too near to the edge - there are parts where it's falling away - yes - I can smell the seaweed

(moving his head as though something has just missed him)

What was that?

**Icarus** Just one of the gulls

**Rolf** Find me a stone

**Icarus** What for?

**Rolf** I want to throw it down to hear how far it is

**Icarus** There aren't any - its a long way, take my word for it



## THE PERSONAL ASSISTANT

- Rolf** Tell me what you can see. I want you to describe it to me
- Icarus** Don't you remember?
- Rolf** Of course I remember but I want you to remind me, to act as my eyes - are there any ships out there?
- Icarus** Yes - over on the right - in the distance there' s an oil tanker - but it looks very small, a long way off
- Rolf** What else?
- Icarus** Just the greyness of the sea, the rocks and the sky
- Rolf** Is the light still flashing over there on the headland?
- Icarus** Where?
- Rolf** (Points to the left) On that side - there used to be a light
- Icarus** Oh yes, so there is
- Rolf** In the old days the smugglers used to lure ships onto the rocks there and when they ran aground they looted the wrecks
- Icarus** There aren't any smugglers there at the moment.
- (At this point the mobile phone in Icarus's pocket rings and he steps aside to answer it) Marshall - no, I'm busy - I'll ring you back
- Rolf** Who was that?
- Icarus** No-one important

THE PERSONAL ASSISTANT

**Rolf** You said "Marshall"

**Icarus** Did I?

**Rolf** Yes, you said "Marshall" - why did you say "Marshall" when your name's Icarus?

**Icarus** You must be mistaken

**Rolf** I don't make mistakes - you definitely said "Marshall" - I might be blind but I'm not deaf - are you sure you've told me your proper name?

**Icarus** Why shouldn't I?

**Rolf** I don't know (he begins to think to himself) ... "Marshall" - the name rings a bell ... Marshall ... Marshall ... Why do I remember that name? (Realization) Yes, that was the name of-

**Icarus** (His accent changes to Jerry Marshall's) The name of somebody you used to know a long time ago, Mr. Rolf - somebody whose services you once dispensed with – do you remember?

**Rolf** You're not him, surely? You can't be that Marshall?

**Marshall** (Removing disguise) Yes Mr. Rolf, I'm afraid that I am

(Rolf turns his head as though searching for assistance)

Its no good thinking about getting help - there isn't any ... there's no-one else here I'm afraid ... just you ... me ... and the seagulls.

(Lights down for end of Act One)