

MIRROR IMAGE

by

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CHARACTERS

Mark, a banker

Phil, a journalist, friend of Mark

Jenny, Mark's wife

John, a banker, friend of Mark and Phil

ACT 1

(It is early evening one Saturday in Spring. The scene is the living room of an affluent young banker, Mark, who lives in West London. There is a door stage left. On the wall stage right is a mirror. On the wall upstage centre hangs a mirror stuck onto a canvas, the 'work of art'. There are two sofas, one on either side of the 'work of art', facing each other and closer to each other upstage than downstage. There is a small coffee table between them. On this there is a bowl of fruit and a book, E. H. Gombrich's 'The Story of Art').

(As the curtain rises, Mark opens the door and enters the room, followed by Phil. They have just returned from watching a football match and each of them is holding a can of beer.)

Mark: *(Moves downstage right)*. I tell you, that was never a penalty. Not in a million years.

Phil: *(Moves downstage left)*. Come off it. He went down just inside the box.

Mark: Get away. He was nowhere near the box. He'd have needed binoculars to see the box.

Phil: Don't exaggerate.

Mark: I didn't think the other bloke touched him, myself.

Phil: Didn't touch him? Of course he did. That's why the ref blew up.

Mark: *(Sighs)*. One-nil the Arsenal, then. I'm gutted. *(Sits on the sofa stage right)*.

Phil: Sick as a parrot, eh? Under the moon? *(Sits on the sofa stage left)*. Not often you hear that these days is it 'one-nil the Arsenal.' What with Arsène Wenger's beautiful game.

Mark: I bet he saw that penalty.

Phil: How do you mean?

Mark: He wouldn't have seen it if was one of his players, would he? *(Adopts mock French accent)*. 'I did not see it. I was looking the other way.' *(Returns to his normal voice)*. He's got selective vision that bloke.

Phil: I'm sure it will be on Match of the Day tonight. Anyway, good to see the match from your bank's box, rather than from the stands, even if I was surrounded by a load of Chelsea supporters.

Mark: We've got to do something with all that money.

Phil: Money and Chelsea go together, don't they, like Bill and Ben or...

Mark: Give over. What, and Arsenal don't have millions stashed away?

Phil: No, but it's more about style for them, isn't it? (*Adopts mock French accent*). 'Footballistically, we like to entertain. We like to play with a certain amount of style.' (*Returns to his normal voice*). Even Melvyn Bragg supports the Arsenal, he of the bouffant hairstyle. I heard him on the radio the other day. He calls it 'art in motion.'

Mark: Oh, that settles it, doesn't it?

Phil: What?

Mark: Well, if Melvyn Bragg says it. (*They look at each other for a moment*).

Phil: Pity they've axed the South Bank Show, isn't it?

Mark: I don't know. I can't say I ever watched it.

Phil: I went to see a play the other day.

Mark: Oh yer, which one?

Phil: Pinter, Harold Pinter.

Mark: Pinter, Harold Pinter. That was the name of the play was it?

Phil: No, he's the playwright.

Mark: Oh, of course yer, why didn't you say? Huh. (*Embarrassed*). We read some of his plays at school, but I can't say I've ever seen any, you know, on stage. Which one was it?

Phil: It was the Dumb Waiter. Very strange.

Mark: Oh yer, what was it about?

Phil: Difficult to say really. Two men stuck in a room trying to make conversation, waiting for someone else.

Mark: Oh, hardly sounds like a recipe for a good play does it? What do they talk about?

Phil: All sorts, really. (*Stands up and moves downstage left*). There's this one bit where one of the men winds the other one up by talking about a disputed penalty in a Spurs-Villa match. Quite realistic really.

Mark: (*Stands up and moves downstage right*). Two men in a room talking about a disputed penalty? I suppose it happens. Who got the penalty?

Phil: Spurs.

Mark: Oh. You can't have been too pleased about that, being an Arsenal fan.

Phil: It's only a play.

Mark: Of course it is, but even so....

Phil: His dialogue's realistic, too, though cleverly contrived, often for comic effect.

Mark: Funny. Never associated Pinter with comic effect.

Phil: Oh yes, he can be very funny sometimes. There's this one bit, where they're arguing over whether you can say 'light the kettle.' (*Moves centre stage*).

Mark: (*Moves centre stage to face Phil*). What's funny about that? Of course you can say 'Light the kettle.'

Phil: Ah, that's the point, you see. You say 'light the gas.'

Mark: No you don't. You say 'Light the kettle.' 'Light the kettle.'

Phil: No, you say 'put on the kettle.'

Mark: I never say 'put on the kettle.'

Phil: Well, you wouldn't, would you?

Mark: (*Angrily*). What do you mean?

Phil: Well, you'd never say 'put on the kettle' would you?

Mark: Would you?

Phil: Yer, 'put on the kettle,' all the time, well, when I want a cup of tea, that is. And there's this other bit, you see, about an Eccles cake.

Mark: An Eccles cake?

Phil: Yer, one Eccles cake. Who'd have thought you could get humour out of one Eccles cake, but he does. Bizarre. Realistic, yet not realistic. (*Pauses*). Do you ever wonder, though, 'what is reality?'

Mark: That's a bit deep for a Saturday evening, isn't it?

Phil: (*Goes downstage left*). No, it's interesting though, isn't it? (*Ponders*). What is reality? (*Turns to Mark*). And, then, if you take a play, or a work of art even, what's the relationship between that and reality? Should a play, or a work of art, merely reflect reality, or challenge it? Pinter's clever, you see, he shows us something that could be reality, but isn't, and then challenges our ideas about what reality is. Very clever.

Mark: I can't say I've given too much thought to reality recently. I occasionally watch Reality TV, but I can't say you see too much reality

there.

Phil: Too busy making truckloads of money, eh?

Mark: Someone has to.

Phil: How much do you earn, then? You've never told me.

Mark: You're a journalist, aren't you? I don't want my salary up in lights. (*Gestures as if writing a headline in the air*). 'Greedy banker earns squillions.' Read all about it.

Phil: Hardly news, is it? Shock horror. 'Bankers earn lots of lolly.' What's next 'Pope Catholic,' 'Sun rises'...'Late final: sun sets.' (*Sits on the sofa stage left*).

Mark: Alright, alright. (*Sits on the sofa stage right*).

Phil: 'Sir Fred sorry.' Now that would be news.

Mark: Don't drag him into it. We're not all like him, you know.

Phil: Fair enough. Did you get a bonus this year?

Mark: Of course I did.

Phil: How much?

Mark: What is this? Twenty questions? Death by a thousand questions?

Phil: Go on. Was it big?

Mark: Depends what you mean by 'big.'

Phil: Big, you know, big (*gestures with his hands to show something 'big'*. *Mark does not reply.*) A million? (*Mark does not reply, but gestures to show it is less*). Less? Less than a million? Oh, half a million?

Mark: Look, we could be here all night. I'm not going to tell you.

Phil: Oh. And you don't feel the slightest bit guilty?

Mark: About what?

Phil: About the fact that it's thanks to the taxpayer that you've got a job and that you've got a bonus.

Mark: No, why? I'm a taxpayer, too. I've worked hard, I support a family, contribute to the economy.

Phil: But if the government hadn't pumped money into the economy, you'd have been stuffed.

Mark: So, would you, mate. We all would have been. People are always looking for a scapegoat, aren't they? It helps them to stop looking at their own problems.

Phil: So, whilst thousands of steel workers lose their jobs in Redcar, and those poor Cadbury's workers get shafted by Kraft, you're happy to pick up your bonus?

Mark: I pay 50% tax on the bonus, which will doubtless turn up in benefits for the workers who've lost their jobs. So, they should be thankful I'm earning all this money.

Phil: You don't feel at all guilty then?

Mark: No, why should I? I wouldn't be in this game if I felt guilt, would I? *(Pause. They look at each other for a moment).* Anyway, I also contribute to the economy by spending what's left after the Chancellor's grabbed his share.

Phil: Oh yer, how?

Mark: I've bought a work of art.

Phil: What?

Mark: A work of art.

Phil: You, art? I didn't know you were into art.

Mark: I wasn't, but I bought it as an investment.

Phil: To make even more money?

Mark: That's the plan.

Phil: So, where is it then?

Mark: What?

Phil: The work of art. You said you had a work of art.

Mark: *(Waves his hand in the direction of the 'work of art' on the back wall).* You're looking at it.

Phil: What? The wallpaper?

Mark: *(Gets up and goes over to the 'work of art').* No, this.

Phil: That? That's a....

Mark: What?

Phil: Well, it's a, you know, it's a mirror, isn't it? Anyone can see that.

Mark: It may look like a mirror, but it's not. It's a work of art.

Phil: (*Gets up and goes over to the 'work of art'*). You're having a laugh, aren't you? If it quacks like a duck, it's a duck. If it looks like a mirror, it's a...

Mark: Work of art. It's a work of art.

Phil: Alright, fine. Let's say 'it's a work of art' then.

Mark: It is.

Phil: What's it called? It must have a name, if it's a work of art.

Mark: Untitled Painting.

Phil: Untitled Painting? That's a funny name for something that isn't a painting.

Mark: It's on a canvas. Look (*points behind the mirror*). That's painted.

Phil: Who made it?

Mark: Baldwin and Ramsden. 1965.

Phil: Who? Never heard of them.

Mark: Nor had I until I saw this. The dealer said I'd got a bargain. They're the next big thing in art, he said. Everyone's going to be wanting their work soon.

Phil: (*Looks at the 'work of art' for a moment*). I'm sorry Mark, but it is a mirror.

Mark: No, it isn't. Look. (*carefully removes it from its hook and shows Phil the side of the 'work of art'*). The artist took something that looks like a mirror and he's attached it to a canvas. You see, it's a work of art. (*Replaces the 'work of art' on its hook*).

Phil: So, what you're saying is, you can take an everyday object like a mirror, or something that looks a bit like a mirror, and stick it onto a canvas and call it a work of art. (*Gets out a comb from his pocket*). Why not stick a comb on a canvas, or (*gets out his mobile phone*) a mobile phone, (*goes over to the bowl of fruit and takes out a banana from it*) or a banana for that matter, and call it a work of art.

Mark: Now you're being ridiculous.

Phil: Who, me? Ridiculous? You're the one who's being ridiculous, mate. You expect me to believe that by sticking an everyday object on a

canvas and hanging it in your living room, you've got a work of art. (*Looks around for hidden cameras*). This is a wind-up, isn't it?

Mark: Look, even if it is a mirror, and I know it looks like one. (*Pauses and looks at Phil, who raises his eyebrows*). Alright, it's a mirror, but they didn't just choose it at random, did they?

Phil: What do you mean?

Mark: Well, it's a mirror, isn't it?

Phil: I know. I told you that.

Mark: They're very important in the history of art, you see, mirrors.

Phil: Since when did you become an expert in the history of art?

Mark: I'm not, but I've been reading up on it. (*Goes over to the table and picks up the book 'The Story of Art' by E.H. Gombrich and gives it to Phil*).

Phil: (*Reads the cover of the book*). Gombrich, The Story of Art. Very good. And what does he have to say about mirrors?

Mark: (*Moves down stage right*). Lots. Artists use them for self-portraits.

Mark: Take Rembrandt, for example, or Rubens.

(cont.)