

WHAT DO ESKIMOS EAT?

A one-act play

By

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FROGETT: Six fifteen! But I have an interview at two thirty.

PORTER: Oh, dear. Looks like you've blown it.

FROGETT: (*consulting his watch impatiently*) I thought the train was due at twelve fifteen.

PORTER: Yes, sir. That's the up line. We're talking about the down line.

FROGETT: But I want the up line? My appointment's in the City.

PORTER: Then your luck's in, in't it?

FROGETT: (*somewhat irritated*) Listen. Is this or is it not the right platform for the up trains?

PORTER: Always has been, sir.

FROGETT: (*pointing right*) Then I'm all right for the twelve fifteen to the City?

PORTER: Unless it's having a nervous breakdown, sir.

The PORTER goes on sweeping. The station telephone rings. FROGETT and the PORTER exchange glances.

PORTER: Oh dear, more trouble in China!

The PORTER leans his broom against the wall, sneezes, and moves right to answer the phone. FROGETT looks up the line, right, returns to down stage.

PIERCE: (*from behind the 'Independent'*) Don't use the trains much then?

FROGETT: (*looking for the source of the voice*) Pardon me?

PIERCE: *(peering from behind 'The Independent')* You don't seem to be too familiar with the platform layout, the direction of the trains, the ups and the downs.

FROGETT: Just a momentary confusion. I was in a hurry.

PIERCE: An interview, is it?

FROGETT: What's that?

PIERCE: Thought I heard you say something to Stanley about an interview at - what was it? - two thirty?

FROGETT: Yes, two thirty.

PIERCE: Couldn't help hearing, that's all.

PIERCE folds the paper and lays it down beside him. A strange figure difficult to pin down to any profession. He speaks with an educated accent.

PIERCE: Always a difficult thing to face...

FROGETT: What's that?

PIERCE: An interview.

FROGETT: An interview? Oh, yes.

PIERCE: It can be quite stressful...being interviewed.

FROGETT: *(with asperity)* Well, it's a necessary evil, isn't it...for some of us.

FROGETT peers up the line right.

PIERCE: Always a good idea to assume the people on the other side of the table are at least as stupid as oneself.

FROGETT: Yes. Thank you. I'll try to bear that in mind.

PIERCE: On the other never assume they're as stupid as they look.

FROGETT: *(smiling)* No, no, of course not. I see what you mean.

PIERCE: Always Important to get the balance right. Your train is due in
five minutes.

FROGETT consults his watch. Shakes it.

FROGETT: I make it four and a half.

PIERCE: Vital to keep the initiative, you know.

FROGETT: In the interview, you mean? Not always easy.

FROGETT sniffs, moves down right. Pretends to be unconcerned.

PIERCE: I wrote a book once.

FROGETT: *(trying to ignore him)* Really?

PIERCE: On that very subject.

FROGETT: Keeping the initiative. Did you?

PIERCE: 'Art of the Interview'.

FROGETT: *(still highly skeptical)* You wrote 'Art of the Interview'? Pull the
other one.

PIERCE: Published by Weaver and Wotton.

FROGETT: You mean you actually wrote 'Art of the Interview'?

*FROGETT extracts a well-thumbed copy of 'The Art of the Interview' from his
pocket, examines it closely.*

PIERCE: In the early days before I knew where I was going.

FROGETT: You're right. It was published by Weaver and Wotton.

PIERCE: I should know. It was my book.

FROGETT: (*holding up the book*) You mean you actually wrote this?

PIERCE: So you've got a copy. Good to see there are still a few well-thumbed copies around. Mind if I take a dekho?

PIERCE gets up from the station seat, moves to FROGETT who hands him the book reluctantly.

PIERCE: (*putting on ancient spectacles*) Amazing, isn't it? 'Art of the Interview' by P.J. Pierce. Takes one's mind back.

FROGETT: Quite a coincidence. I came across it in a bookshop. Thought it might come in useful...

PIERCE: In view of the fact you're looking for another appointment..?

FROGETT: (*shrugs shoulders*) It might have offered a few pointers.

PIERCE: Ah, tactics. Now you're not so sure, I guess?

FROGETT: Interviews can be tricky.

PIERCE: It might be better than you think. A man wrote to tell me 'Art of the Interview' was the best buy he'd ever made. Helped him get a job as Manager of a sweet factory. Fudge for fudge. Eh? (*Laughs. hands the book back*)

FROGETT: Oh, yes: fudge...

PIERCE: He's in Parliament now.

FROGETT: Really?

PIERCE: Just shows you, doesn't it? The effect we have on other people.

FROGETT: That makes you indirectly responsible, doesn't it?

PIERCE: It certainly shows how important chance and tactics can be.

FROGETT: I'd like to believe it.

FROGETT laughs politely, shoves the book into his pocket. The station P.A. system suddenly activates. We hear a sound like someone with loose false teeth gargling followed by an incomprehensible announcement beginning with the words 'The twelve fifteen City train...blaa...blaa...blaa.' FROGETT listens, trying to make sense of it, turns to PIERCE.

FROGETT: What's he talking about?

PIERCE: Oh, Stanley. He said 'due to unforeseen circumstances the twelve fifteen City train is running late'.

FROGETT: How late? That's my train.

PIERCE: Of course, your interview. He didn't make that clear. I try not to listen. They use language like toilet paper these days. Nobody thinks about Shakespeare and Milton any more.

FROGETT: That's my train.

PIERCE: He should have said 'owing to unforeseen circumstances' or 'because of unforeseen circumstances not 'due to unforeseen circumstances'. But they never learn. (*Signaling stage left*) Excuse me, I must just...toddle off...

PIERCE starts moving up left.

FROGETT: Before you go...

PIERCE: *(turning)* Yes?

FROGETT: Could you just tell me?

PIERCE: What?

FROGETT: Did he say how long and why? The delay, I mean.

PIERCE: I told you 'Unforeseen circumstance'. You'd better ask him.
Afraid I can't hang about. Might pee myself.

FROGETT: Of course.

PIERCE: Always take a leak about this time.

FROGETT: Yes, yes. I mustn't hold you up.

PIERCE: *(laughing)* Not a good idea.

FROGETT watches PIERCE moving off left. He looks puzzled. The PORTER enters right, picks up his broom, is about to go on sweeping.

FROGETT: Excuse me.

PORTER: *(stopping in mid sweep)* What's that, sir?

FROGETT: What was that you said?

PORTER: I never said nothink.

FROGETT: But you...*(waves his arm right)*...you made an announcement...
on the intercom.

PORTER: Oh, the announcement.

FROGETT: (*with asperity*) About the City train...the twelve fifteen? You mentioned a delay of some sort?

PORTER: (*leaning on broom*) That's right, sir, due to unforeseen circumstances.

FROGETT: How long is it likely to be?

PORTER: Good question, sir.

FROGETT: Didn't they...give any indication? Only I do have this rather important engagement at two thirty.