

out to be a Thursday. I wasn't going in for my usual weekly on Friday. I just slipped in, the day before.

MRS. B.: Yes.

MRS. A.: That was the first time I found out she couldn't find a butcher up there, so she decided to come back here, once a week, to her own butcher.

MRS. B.: Yes.

MRS. A.: She came on Thursday so she'd be able to get meat for the weekend. Lasted her till Monday, then from Monday to Thursday they'd have fish. She can always buy cold meat, if they want a change.

MRS. B.: Oh yes. *(Pause.)*

MRS. A.: So I told her to come in when she came down after she'd been to the butcher's and I'd put a kettle on. So she did. *(Pause.)*

MRS. B.: Yes. *(Pause.)*

MRS. A.: It was funny because she always used to come in Wednesdays. *(Pause.)* Still, it made a break. *(Long pause.)*

MRS. B.: She doesn't come in no more, does she? *(Pause.)*

MRS. A.: She comes in. She doesn't come in so much, but she comes in. *(Pause.)*

MRS. B.: I thought she didn't come in. *(Pause.)*

MRS. A.: She comes in. *(Pause.)* She just doesn't come in so much. That's all.

APPLICANT

An office, LAMB, a young man, eager, cheerful, enthusiastic, is striding nervously, alone. The door opens. MISS PIFFS comes in. She is the essence of efficiency.

PIFFS: Ah, good morning.

LAMB: Oh, good morning, miss.

PIFFS: Are you Mr. Lamb?

LAMB: That's right.

PIFFS [*studying a sheet of paper*]: Yes, You're applying for this vacant post, aren't you?

LAMB: I am actually, yes.

PIFFS: Are you a physicist?

LAMB: Oh yes, indeed. It's my whole life.

PIFFS [*languidly*]: Good. Now our procedure is, that before we discuss the applicant's qualifications we like to subject him to a little test to determine his psychological suitability. You've no objection?

LAMB: Oh, good heavens, no.

PIFFS: Jolly good.

MISS PIFFS has taken some objects out of a drawer and goes to LAMB. She places a chair for him.

PIFFS: Please sit down. [*He sits.*] Can I fit these to your palms?

LAMB [*affably*]: What are they?

PIFFS: Electrodes.

LAMB: Oh yes, of course. Funny little things.

She attaches them to his palms.

PIFFS: Now the earphones.

She attaches earphones to his head.

LAMB: I say how amusing.

PIFFS: Now I plug in.

She plugs in to the wall.

LAMB [*a trifle nervously*]: Plug in, do you? Oh yes, of course. Yes, you'd have to, wouldn't you?

MISS PIFFS *perches on a high stool and looks down on*
LAMB.

This help to determine my . . . my suitability does it?

PIFFS: Unquestionably. Now relax. Just relax. Don't think about a thing.

LAMB: No.

PIFFS: Relax completely. Rela-a-a-x. Quite relaxed?

LAMB *nods*. MISS PIFFS *presses a button on the side of her stool. A piercing high pitched buzz-hum is heard. LAMB jolts rigid. His hands go to his earphones. He is propelled from the chair. He tries to crawl under the chair. MISS PIFFS watches, impassive. The noise stops. LAMB peeps out from under the chair, crawls out, stands, twitches, emits a short chuckle and collapses in the chair.*

PIFFS: Would you say you were an excitable person?

LAMB: Not - not unduly, no. Of course, I—

PIFFS: Would you say you were a moody person?

LAMB: Moody? No, I wouldn't say I was moody - well, sometimes occasionally I—

PIFFS: Do you ever get fits of depression?

LAMB: Well, I wouldn't call them depression exactly—

PIFFS: Do you often do things you regret in the morning?

LAMB: Regret? Things I regret? Well, it depends what you mean by often, really - I mean when you say often—

PIFFS: Are you often puzzled by women?

LAMB: Women?

PIFFS: Men.

LAMB: Men? Well, I was just going to answer the question about women—

PIFFS: Do you often feel puzzled?

LAMB: Puzzled?

PIFFS: By women.

LAMB: Women?

PIFFS: Men.

LAMB: Oh, now just a minute, I . . . Look, do you want separate answers or a joint answer?

PIFFS: After your day's work do you ever feel tired? Edgy? Fretty? Irritable? At a loose end? Morose? Frustrated? Morbid? Unable to concentrate? Unable to sleep? Unable to eat? Unable to remain seated? Unable to remain upright? Lustful? Indolent? On heat? Randy? Full of desire? Full of energy? Full of dread? Drained? of energy, of dread? of desire?

Pause.

LAMB [*thinking*]: Well, it's difficult to say really . . .

PIFFS: Are you a good mixer?

LAMB: Well, you've touched on quite an interesting point there—

PIFFS: Do you suffer from eczema, listlessness, or falling coat?

LAMB: Er . . .

PIFFS: Are you virgo intacta?

LAMB: I beg your pardon?

PIFFS: Are you virgo intacta?

LAMB: Oh, I say, that's rather embarrassing. I mean - in front of a lady—

PIFFS: Are you virgo intacta?

LAMB: Yes, I am, actually. I'll make no secret of it.

PIFFS: Have you always been virgo intacta?

LAMB: Oh yes, always. Always.

PIFFS: From the word go?

LAMB: Go? Oh yes, from the word go.

PIFFS: Do women frighten you?

She presses a button on the other side of her stool. The stage is plunged into redness, which flashes on and off in time with her questions.

PIFFS [*building*]: Their clothes? Their shoes? Their voices? Their laughter? Their stares? Their way of walking? Their way of sitting? Their way of smiling? Their way of talking? Their mouths? Their hands? Their feet? Their shins? Their thighs? Their knees? Their eyes? Their [*Drumbeat*]. Their [*Drumbeat*]. Their [*Cymbal bang*]. Their [*Trombone chord*]. Their [*Bass note*].

LAMB [*in a high voice*]: Well it depends what you mean really—

The light still flashes. She presses the other button and the piercing buzz-hum is heard again. LAMB's hands go to his earphones. He is propelled from the chair, falls, rolls, crawls, totters and collapses.

Silence.

He lies face upwards. MISS PIFFS looks at him then walks to LAMB and bends over him.

PIFFS: Thank you very much, Mr. Lamb. We'll let you know.

INTERVIEW

INTERVIEWER: Well, Mr. Jakes, how would you say things are in the pornographic book trade?

JAKES: I make 200 a week.

INTERVIEWER: 200?

JAKES: Yes, I make round about 200 a week at it.

INTERVIEWER: I see. So how would you say things were in the pornographic book trade?

JAKES: Oh, only fair.

INTERVIEWER: Only fair?

JAKES: Fair to middling.

INTERVIEWER: Why would you say that, Mr. Jakes?

JAKES: Well, it's got a lot to do with Xmas, between you and me.

INTERVIEWER: Xmas?

JAKES: Yes, well what happens is, you see, is that the trade takes a bit of a bashing round about Xmas time. Takes a good few months to recover from Xmas time, the pornographic book trade does.

INTERVIEWER: Oh, I see.

JAKES: Yes, what's got something to do with it is, you see, that you don't get all that many people sending pornographic books for Xmas presents. I mean, you get a few, of course, but not all that many. No, we can't really say that people in our trade get much benefit from the Xmas spirit, if you know what I mean.

INTERVIEWER: Well, I'm sorry to hear that, Mr. Jakes.

JAKES: Well, there you are. We make the best of it. (*Pause.*) I mean I put a sprig of holly . . . here and there . . . I put holly up all over the shop, but it doesn't seem to make much difference. (*Pause.*)

INTERVIEWER: What sort of people do you get in your shop, Mr. Jakes?