

Jane has just arrived in the office of the editor of Trade Magazine, having been asked to attend by his secretary.

“Ah, Jane, how did it go yesterday?”

“Well, not too well I am afraid.”

“Go on.”

“Well the Secretary-General took me out to lunch at a local restaurant and I got all conscience-ridden and said that you had given me instructions to get the story, write it up in detail and then add a final paragraph giving journalistic comment questioning the whole idea. I added that it is nothing personal to the project and that you do it for any new idea that does not come from a well-established company.”

“Oh.”

“Well Jane, I said that I would give you a month’s trial and now I have made up my mind and so you can leave now, you cannot work here any more.”

“What!”

“I cannot have a member of staff not do what I instruct them to do. It is as simple as that.”

“What, instant dismissal!”

“Oh, don’t look at it like that, you have turned in some very good work and I am impressed, you will be paid for the month, and I’ll give you another month’s pay in lieu of notice, even though I don’t need to do so. And if you need a reference I will give you a good one.”

“But you have asked me to go to the exhibition tomorrow and write a piece on the new supercomputer. That is from a well-established company, so there is no problem.”

“No, I will ask someone else to go. I can’t take the risk sending you.”

“Risk? Risk!”

“Don’t get me wrong, I am sure that you would do your best and that you would turn in a very good, indeed excellent piece, that is the risk I mean. The sheer quality might cause me to make the mistake of changing my mind and keep you on.”

“But?”

“Look, I know that you don’t like my policy of adding journalistic comment questioning any new idea that does not come from a well-established company. I respect that. But this magazine exists because of advertising revenue. All of the editorial stuff is just to get the readers to open the magazine and happen in passing to notice the advertisements. If advertisers were to get the idea that we agree with every new idea that someone from outside the mainstream puts forward then we could get the reputation of being a silly magazine not worth reading, and then the advertising revenue would disappear. Lots of

things depend on that advertising revenue coming in. People buying houses, people buying shoes for their children, lots of things.”

“Oh. But do you know that is how advertisers think?”

“Well no, I haven’t asked them, it is just my instinct. There are lots of places that they could spend their advertising budget and I am not taking the risk. You have been working in the Journalist’s Room and, alright, down there you think in terms of producing good articles. That’s good. That’s the job. But there are also people working here who work hard trying to get in advertising revenue, and it is not easy for them anyway and I am not going to risk making it harder. It is as simple as that.”

“But”

“No Jane, you are leaving, now.”

“But there are things of mine in my workspace.”

“Not a problem, I’ll get security to accompany you.”

“Security!”

“Calm down Jane, it will look diplomatic, as if she is just holding the doors open for you as you carry your stuff to your car.”

The editor leans forward and presses a button on his intercom unit.

“Security Sir.”

“Someone is leaving the company, can you send a security guard up to accompany her to get her stuff from her workspace. It’s a lady journalist, so send a female. Make it look good and diplomatic as if she’s there just to hold the doors open, but tell her not to carry anything and always have her hands empty. I don’t anticipate any problems, she’s a lady and behaves well, let her say goodbye to her colleagues if she wishes, but only general stuff, nothing about why she’s going.”

“Yes Sir.”

Jane is shocked and does not know what to say, so says nothing.

Then,

“But I’ve got two large pot plants that I brought in, I can’t carry it all in one go, it will need three trips.”

The editor leans forward and presses a button on his intercom unit.

“Security Sir.”

“Make that three security guards. Don’t worry, no problem, the lady says she has two large pot plants, the extra two are just so that she and all of her stuff can get to her car in one trip. Genders not critical, as long as there is at least one female and that she keeps

her hands empty. Like I say, she's a lady and I don't expect any problems, so make it look good and diplomatic."

"Yes Sir."

"Well Jane, it has been nice to know you, I'll give you a good reference if you ever need one."

"But"

"Jane, you've had a good job offer, why not just take it and enjoy yourself with new horizons."

Jane and the editor look at each other directly, yet neither says anything.

Three security guards arrive, two female and one male.

"Ma'am." says one of the security guards, clearly the one who is going to keep her hands empty.

They go to Jane's workspace.

As they enter, eyes clearly notice them, yet the eyes quickly look away, for the people all know what this means. There is an atmosphere of journalists all very busy with each of them conspicuously concentrating on what is on the screen of his or her computer.

Two of the security guards wait, each by a pot plant.

Jane gathers her personal items from her desk.

None of the journalists are looking in her direction, they all seem so busy.

Jane turns and walks towards the door, without saying a word: two security guards act on this cue and each picks up a pot plant and follows her.

The lead security guard in this mission walks ahead and holds open doors.

The procession arrives at Jane's car.

The security guards behave helpfully and professionally.

The items are all placed carefully in the car. Jane is impressed.

"Thank you." says Jane.

"Ma'am." replies the mission leader.

Jane gets into her car.

The security guards are returning to the building, clearly not making an obvious show of getting her off the premises. Though Jane expects they are watching none the less.

Jane starts her car.

She drives away.

Driving home, Jane is furious.

“How did he know I’ve had a job offer?” thinks Jane.

Jane starts to think.

“Yesterday, as we were leaving La Flava Floro, I thought nothing of it at the time. Julia was walking with us. ‘Oh,’ she said ‘that man has left his mobile phone. I’ll need to start a lost property cupboard. And he’s left it switched on.’ Julia had turned the mobile phone off so that the battery would not go flat if it were to spend weeks in the lost property cupboard. That’s it, not only was the phone on, it was left on deliberately and was making a call. And I know who was listening at the other end, checking up on me: he heard every word! It was only a small mobile phone, pay as you go probably, so just left and no bother about getting it back.”

Jane feels humiliated.

Jane arrives home.

There is a letter on her hall carpet.

She opens it.

It is from Arts Magazine, to which Jane has been a subscriber for many years.

She reads it.

“Dear Ms Hove, You have been recommended to us as a writer of great talent. We offer you a position as a staff journalist at Arts Magazine, at a salary of”

Jane thinks.

“So this is the job that he meant that I had been offered. I bet he knew all along that he was not going to keep me on after that earlier matter and he fixed it so that I would have a job and not then bother about making a fuss. It is a good job.”

Jane feels rather foolish, all that nonsense about being followed and spied upon.

Later, Jane, having had her dinner, is sat relaxed, listening to music, sipping at a cup of peppermint tea.

Suddenly she becomes alert.

“Where is that letter.”

Jane looks at the franking on the envelope. She looks at the date on the letter. Both are for yesterday.

Jane looks perplexed.

Jane now does not know quite what to think!