

Edith is at her desk.

The telephone rings.

“Secretary-General.” says Edith.

It is Jane.

“Is that you Edith, this is Jane.”

“Yes, it’s me. Hello Jane.”

“When I got home yesterday - I had just been sacked - there was a letter waiting for me. Well, it was offering me a job at Arts Magazine, straight off, not an offer of an interview, an offer for a job. It is a good job too, staff journalist at a good salary, but I don’t feel that I can take it.”

“Oh.”

Jane recounts the story of her sacking and the bit about the mobile telephone that had been found in La Flava Floro and her feelings and now wondering what is going on.

“But I can’t take the job, much as I would like to because the letter said ‘You have been recommended to us as a writer of great talent.’ and I know it was him and I would always feel as if he had some hold over me keeping the job in some way.”

“But it wasn’t him, it was me.”

“You! But you’re not in publishing.”

“The editor and I are old friends, or should I say we have been friends for a long time.” chuckles Edith.

“We have known each other since our college days, I was a bridesmaid at her wedding. I knew she had been advertising and after you had gone the other day I rang her and asked if she was still looking for someone for the post and she said that she was and I mentioned that you might be interested. I suppose that I should have asked you first before telling her your name and address, but, well, it looked like you might be looking for a job, so” Edith tails off without finishing the sentence.

“Oh!”

“I thought that she might send you an offer of an interview or an application form or something, but, well I did speak highly of your writing.”

“That’s very kind of you, but you don’t know my writing. I only helped with two of the weekly editions of Trade Magazine and for what I wrote I did not get a by-line.”

“I was not talking about Trade Magazine. I was talking about your book.”

“My book!”

“Yes, the one that was published about four years ago. That wonderful story. It is one of my favourites.”

“You’ve read it?”

“Yes, several times, and sometimes I have just dipped in to read a favourite part again.”

“I paid to get that book published. It is a publish on demand thing. It only sold about twenty copies.”

“Well, I have one, and I liked it so much, I also bought one for my sister and one for Julia.”

“Julia, yesterday”

“Yes, but I doubt if she made the connection, she had no reason to do so, I did not say anything about you or even that I knew you when I gave them the books, I did not want to prejudice what they might think of it by saying you are a friend, I wanted them to make up their own minds.”

“Ah.”

“The story is wonderful. A retired lady who when she was in her teens had got the idea of going to a performing arts college and being a singer in musicals in the theatre and in films, but she had decided that she had a vocation to be a nurse. Yet she had liked musical theatre, had thought of being in amateur productions but had never really found the time due to work commitments. She had never regretted becoming a nurse, yet sometimes she wondered how her life might have been had she gone to performing arts college instead. Yes, of course, you wrote it. Why am I here musing away telling you what is in your story!”

“I am flattered, I am so pleased that you like it. How did you come to know about it?”

“Well, one day, about three years ago, I remembered the old days and I wondered what you were doing now, so I put your name into an Internet search engine and I got the online bookstore for the publish on demand facility that you used showing an advertisement for your book: well, I bought it because you are a friend and I wanted to read what you had written. Yet I really like it.”

“Some people say that I should not have paid to self-publish my book: if I could not get an established publisher to pay me, then I should have accepted that as an indication that the book was not worth publishing - though actually I had not approached an established publisher, I just wanted the book published so I just went for it. Yet it is real self-publishing, with my own imprint, so I am the publisher, so I have all of the rights.”

“Well, that is a matter for them! You wanted your book published and it has been published: there is no reason to have your dreams decided by what someone with money and a commercial agenda - and who knows what other agenda - says if you can afford to self-publish. Some people pay to do things like going skiing, you chose to self-publish your book. Good for you.”

“Thank you. You mentioned a favourite part? May I ask which?”

“Well, there are lots of parts I like, but I suppose that my favourite is when she is on holiday in Tuscany and she spends a few days in San Gimignano.”

“Ah.”

“The part where it is a summer evening, twilight, and she goes out from her hotel in the Piazza della Cisterna and it is quite quiet, there are lots of people at tables outside hotels and she pauses, then walks to the well structure, goes up the steps, and softly, unaccompanied, just her voice, starts to sing.”

“Yes.”

“And, she is just doing it so that she can say, well, know herself rather than go around saying to others, that she performed live in the Piazza della Cisterna in San Gimignano, to have that memory. It is wonderful. Then there are some people walking through the piazza and they stop, about twenty metres from her, and listen. She notices them and she feels that she is performing before an audience, and she feels young, as if she had chosen her other career. It is wonderful.”

“Thank you.”

“And after she finishes and there is a ripple of applause and she fills up and a tear runs down her left cheek. It is wonderful.”

“Edith, I am overwhelmed. I thought that the book was a flop, but clearly not, at least to you, and I value your opinion so much.”

Jane feels herself filling up with emotion and the hurt of what had happened to her yesterday vanishes.

A pause.

“Edith, what do you advise?”

“Well, it is your choice. You have two job offers, one here and one at Arts Magazine. The one here is open indefinitely, so if you went to Arts Magazine and it didn’t work out, well you could always come here. If you came here now you might wish that you had gone to Arts Magazine, so, much as I would like you to come here, as a friend I suggest that you seriously consider going to Arts Magazine. I am reluctant to give advice because it is you that is affected by what I advise, I do not know what it would be like working at Arts Magazine and if it did not work out for you I would feel guilty, yet you are asking for my advice and I would feel bad if I just said that well it is your decision and I cannot advise you.”

“Yes, I see both sides of that. But yes I have asked and I value your opinion. Thank you.”

“I suggest that you sleep on it and make your decision tomorrow.”

“Yes that is good advice too.”

A pause.

“So, as it was you that got me the job offer, not the editor of Trade Magazine, that goes back to how he knew that I had got another job offer.”

“I suggest you forget about that Jane, it is gone, you don’t work for Trade Magazine anymore, forget about Trade Magazine and its editor. It might have just been guesswork on his part seeing that you were confidently standing up to him.”

“If Julia still has that mobile phone, maybe we could find out what number he was calling.”

“Jane, forget it, it is best not to involve Julia in it - and anyway you do not know that he was calling anyone, the phone was just on.”

“Yes, you’re right, I was not trying to involve Julia in it, I hadn’t realized that well, I hadn’t real”

“That’s alright Jane, I know what you mean.”

“Well, thank you for the chat and the advice. You really are a good friend. Bye.”

“Bye.”

Edith is talking to Julia on the telephone, discussing the arrangements for the Poetry through the Language Barrier evening and for the rehearsal.

“Yes, for the rehearsal John and Henry are going to play the parts of the visiting performers. The visitors will speak in their own languages, but John and Henry will use English at the rehearsals, yet that is not a problem as it is the organization of it all that the rehearsal is about. The visitors might not know much English so we need to work out how to give them their cues. For the rehearsals, John and Henry will, except when they are actually performing, pretend that they do not know any English, so that every cue must be done by gesture, with a noise to attract their attention.”

“Noise?”

“Well I have a few percussion instruments to try, like a mini-xylophone toy. I have not told John and Henry about them so that the rehearsal is genuine, as if they are visitors who have just arrived.”

“Ah, sounds fun!”

A pause.

“By the way Julia, the other day, did the man come back for his mobile phone.”

“Yes, a couple of hours after you had gone.”

“Oh good. ... Anyway, looking forward to the rehearsal. Bye.”

“Bye.”

Edith is feeling relieved.