

A flashback.

A man in his fifties, a freelance journalist who recently helped out the Editor of Trade Magazine, is in his car, waiting to turn right at a traffic-light-controlled junction. Today his article about Gigantic Business and LocSARA has been published in The Daily Newspaper. He is first in the queue. He is heading for a café near the headquarters of Gigantic Business. Yes, he will buy a snack and a cup of coffee, he will talk to nobody, apart from the necessary conversation to purchase his food and drink. He will just sit, adding up columns of figures of money, so as to give the impression to anyone who glances at him that he is a salesman catching up on his paperwork while he takes a break. Yet the figures are just rubbish, of no purpose as figures, just as a sort of camouflage so that he will hopefully not be even suspected as a journalist trying to pick up a follow-on story from gossip.

As he waits at the traffic lights a car moves across in front of him from right to left. It is a stylish car and in the nearside rear seat he recognises the Managing Director of Gigantic Business.

'Ah, he is heading in a generally northerly direction, off to meet people from LocSARA maybe.' thinks the man. 'So probably an early lunch to be off now, so a special early start to get there in time as it is quite a way. A lot of it on motorways then some rural roads, so a mid-afternoon meeting at or near LocSARA's site is a distinct possibility. But I need more than that to stand it up, he could be just off to a business lunch not far away, I must not let my imagination take over, let's see what I can get at the café.'

The traffic lights change, the man drives his car round to the right and goes a way to a car park, where he parks and gets a ticket for a three-hour stay, just in case.

The man gets out of his car and then heads for the café. He has been here before, always in his 'salesman mode', wearing his well-worn grey raincoat.

He enters the café and goes to the counter. The café is about half-full at present. There are four smartly dressed young women all together collecting their food and moving to a four-seat bay a short distance further on from the counter. The four-seat bay on the opposite side of the aisle to them is empty. How convenient. A good chance that they all work at Gigantic Business, though maybe not, it is not the only business in the area. He buys a filled roll and a cup of coffee and moves to the bay, places his food on the table, spreading his briefcase on the table so as to deter anybody else from coming to sit in the bay, which would be unlikely anyway unless the café fills up, and gets out his faux set of documents and starts to add up figures, so as to set the scene while his coffee cools a little. He becomes socially invisible, just someone who may be seen by the four young women as an elderly man having some problems with adding up all those figures.

The four young women are nattering.

At first talk is of boyfriends and soap operas, then one of them asks "Did you see that article in The Daily Newspaper? I bet your boss wasn't very pleased was he?"

There is no reply.

“Oh come on Janice, was he very annoyed, we know he has a bad temper.”

“I am a personal assistant, I cannot comment.”

‘Jackpot!’ thinks the freelance journalist.

“Oh come on Janice, we’ve known each other ages since we all joined and were in the typing pool together. No need to get snooty because you’ve moved on.”

“I mustn’t say.”

“Oh leave her, we’re older now and Janice has her obligations.”

Another speaks. “I was in a meeting taking minutes and it went on a bit and so I was a bit late going to the canteen to get a coffee, and when I was there his chauffeur was there, having a very early lunch, so it looked like he was getting ready for an early start of a long trip such that he wouldn’t be back for lunch.”

“Ah, but maybe the journey is for a business lunch not far away and he has to sit in the car and wait.”

“Oh no, he told me some time ago that he always does well on trips like that: he parks the car and then he gets a free lunch, not with the bosses of course, either in the staff restaurant if it is at a company or in a public dining room if it is at a hotel while the bosses have a private dining room. Apparently the boss is quite good about it, he gives him a call on his mobile telephone five minutes before he wants to use the car.”

“Has he gone off on a trip Janice - is it to confront those people who are causing trouble?”

“I mustn’t say.”

“So a quiet lull while he is away. I wonder what mood he will be in when he gets back.”

“Oh leave her alone, she has her duty to not say anything.”

Their chat becomes general again.

After a while the journalist gathers his things and leaves while they are still chatting. No need to stay and maybe attract attention for being there too long.

The next day, still in the flashback.

The journalist returns to the café the next day at the same time.

The four young women are already here.

He buys a filled roll and a coffee and sits in the bay just beyond them, not in the same bay as yesterday so as not to produce an exact pattern. Although they should not be able to see him he nevertheless carries on with adding figures, a different set this time, just in case anyone were to stand up and notice him.

The chat is of soap operas, for a while, then a change of topic.

“Was he in a bad temper this morning, your boss?”

“Keep your voice down, you never know who might be listening.”

“Oh Janice you have such a vivid examination.” says one of the other young women.

She stands and looks around.

“There’s nobody around, well just that couple over there more interested in each other and that elderly gentleman trying to add his figures up.”

“You know I can’t say anything.”

“That means he was.”

“No it doesn’t, it means I can’t say anything.”

“We had verbal instructions again this morning about that organization that is causing all that trouble, a bit different this time though. We were told that we must not mention them but that we must not say anything bad about them even among ourselves.”

“That seems to me to mean they’ve reached some deal or other.”

“Maybe they’ll come along to next week’s launch and our lot and their lot will be all smiles and friendly to each other.”

“Will anyone believe it?”

“Will anyone make any comment though - they might not believe it but will anybody actually cause a stir by publishing that though - they all get a lot of advertising from us.”

“The Daily Newspaper might say so.”

There is laughter.

“Is that it Janice, is it all friends together next week?”

“Stop it, you know I mustn’t say.”

“I bet your boss won’t like that, but I bet he’ll be good at making it look friendly whatever he is thinking.”

“Be quiet will you, I could get the sack.”

“Oh don’t be ridiculous Janice.”

“You never know who’s listening.”

The freelance journalist decides that it is time to leave in case they get suspicious. He gathers up his papers and leaves, saying ‘Thank you’ to the lady behind the counter at the café as he passes the counter. She smiles at him. What with having got a copy of Edith’s press release yesterday evening and the comment about the new verbal instructions about now not saying anything bad about LocSARA - which also implies that there were already

verbal instructions from before today about not mentioning LocSARA - which when combined with the comment yesterday about the chauffeur having an early lunch, and yesterday seeing the car heading in a generally northerly direction - is enough to cause him to believe that he can justify his story and that has made the journey today worthwhile.

The flashback ends.

The freelance journalist is reading through the printed version of his story in today's issue of The Daily Newspaper. There is no mention of verbal instructions - he has kept that for later - partly so as to have something in reserve yet also so as not to generate any suspicion about how The Daily Newspaper got the story.

'I wonder what people will make of that.' he thinks.