

“Good morning everyone”, says Edith as she opens a research staff meeting.

Edith is sat the end of a long rectangular table, with the door behind her. John is at the other end of the table, opposite her.

To Edith’s left, yet sat facing the long side of the table, sitting at a right angle with respect to Edith, is Rose, who, although not a member of the research staff, is present as she is taking minutes. Behind Rose is a large window that looks out onto the grounds.

Opposite Rose is Caroline Appleby.

Next to Rose is Mariposa, with Henry on the other side of Mariposa. Next to Caroline Appleby is Edward, then on the other side of Edward is Caroline Ruralby. Thus Henry is next to John, yet sitting at a right angle with respect to him, and Henry is sat facing Caroline Ruralby.

“I welcome Ms Caroline Ruralby, who is an observer from Gigantic Business, to her first research staff meeting with us. We usually meet for around an hour and a quarter, then break for our buffet lunch, then continue after lunch for, ... well, for as long as it takes, which is usually another hour or so but can be a bit longer sometimes.”

Caroline Ruralby smiles in acknowledgement.

Edith continues.

“As we have two ladies each named Caroline present, to avoid confusion ...”

Edith turns to Caroline Appleby.

“Do you have a middle name by which I may address you during this meeting?”

“No.”

“Oh, you don’t have a middle name.”

“I didn’t say that.”

“But you answered ‘no’ when I just asked you!”

“I answered your question.”

“Caroline, you had just said you did not!” says Edith with some frustration in her voice.

“So, do you or do you not have a middle name?”

“I am not commenting. It is not a matter for this meeting.”

“Caroline, I can find out by looking at your staff record card!”

“Yes you could ...”

Edith senses that a ‘but’ or something is coming.

“... yet if you use that information in this meeting then you would be breaking your own rules.”

“How so?”

“You got that information from my application form.”

“Yes”

“The application form says confidential.”

“That was in relation to the application process.”

“It did not say that on the form.”

“Caroline, you are being silly”

“The staff handbook has very clear rules, your rules, about assessing any complaint about a member of staff, and that no decision shall be made before the process is completed. You made the rules, kindly”

“Caroline, stop it!” snaps Edith, losing her temper.

Edith gathers herself.

“Very well, I shall refer to you, in this meeting, as Caroline A.”

“You will not!”

“Pardon me!” says Edith indignantly.

“When I came here, I introduced myself as Caroline Appleby. You may refer to me as Caroline, or Ms Appleby, or Caroline Appleby, but not otherwise.”

“How dare you tell me what I can and cannot do!”

“Point of Order”, calls out Henry.

Edith gathers herself and then quietly, “Yes Henry?”

“Would you consider ordering an adjournment for a while?”

“We’ve only just started the meeting. I would need a good reason to adjourn now.”

Edith hears Caroline mumble something, as if Caroline had thought something and had not meant to say it out loud.

“What was that?” asks Edith somewhat impatiently, “If you have something to say, then say it clearly, not sit there mumbling.”

“I said, ‘I know of three good reasons’, ma’am”, with ‘ma’am’ said somewhat forcefully.

“And what are those reasons?” asks Edith somewhat forcefully and sarcastically.

Caroline points towards the window.

Edith turns and looks. There are three software unicorns, a female and two foals, stood at a distance, looking directly at them. They have clearly sensed things going wrong and have moved up from the meadow to observe what is happening. Not galloping yet.

Edith addresses Henry.

“Yes Henry, I will adjourn the meeting.

“Meeting adjourned for twenty minutes.”

Edith gets up from her chair, turns towards Rose, then goes to the door, opens it, goes through, closes the door rather forcefully. Rose gets up and quietly leaves.

The others get up and go to the window and look out. Henry is explaining about software unicorns to Mariposa and Caroline Ruralby, neither of whom has seen them before.

Unnoticed by the others, John quietly leaves the room.

Edith is in her office, sat at her desk.

A knock on the door.

“Who is it?” snaps Edith.

“John.”

“Oh, come in John”, says Edith quietly.

John enters.

A pause.

“Are you alright?” asks John quietly.

“Not really”, says Edith quietly.

“Want to talk, let it out?”

“That girl! I can’t fault her research work, I wouldn’t want to, she does excellent work. But at times she is so, so, irritating!”

John says nothing.

Edith continues.

“Are you taking her side in this?” asks Edith, somewhat anxiously.

“I am not taking sides.”

“But?”

“Well, she has said her name and you have seemed intent on referring to her other than by the name she uses.”

“Intent!” exclaims Edith.

“I’m sorry John, it just got out of hand very quickly, I suppose that you are right you are right.”

John says nothing.

“I feel tempted to look at her staff record card to find out about whether she has a middle name but I feel I mustn't because if I know it I might blurt it out and then ... well I would be in the wrong, she does have a point, the form does say 'Confidential'.

“Look, you were on the interviewing panel, will you have a look at the application form and see what you make of it all, without saying what the name, if any, is ... please?”

“Very well.”

Edith unlocks the filing cabinet, hands John a folder and goes and looks out of the window.

John opens the folder, finds the application form and looks at it, then puts it back in the folder and closes the folder.

“You can turn round, I've closed the folder again.”

“Well, just tell me in very general terms please, not any actual name.”

“She has two middle names, one is an ordinary female given name, though uncommon, and the other looks more like a surname, though not a surname that I have seen before ... but then, when one meets people one often meets someone with a surname one has not known before ... I had not seen your surname before I first met you.”

“Perhaps it is part of a compound surname.”

“No, there is a box for given name or names and a box for surname. If it were part of a compound surname there was plenty of space to include it in the surname box. ... There could be many possible reasons, maybe it was the surname of a grandparent and there were no males to carry the name forward, so it was used as a given name so that it would not be lost into history. ... Or whatever.”

A pause.

“What should I do?”

“Well, you could just go in, restart the meeting, start on the agenda and if you need to refer to either of the two Carolines, just matter-of-factly refer to Caroline Appleby or Caroline Ruralby as appropriate, using first name and surname every time, and make no comment at all about it, just do it, and hopefully all will get settled without any problem. If there is any bother, and I doubt if there will be, then I will try, as diplomatically as possible, to raise a Point of Order about something that is on the agenda and try to defuse it all.”

A pause.

“Yes, right., ... thank you.”

Edith looks out of the window, she sees the three software unicorns turn and begin to walk slowly back to the meadow.

“They’re beautiful, maybe we can walk down to the meadow after the meeting and watch them grazing quietly for while?” says Edith quietly.

“Yes”, says John, quietly and gently, “That will be nice.”

Edith smiles.

Edith looks at her watch.

“It’s almost time, you go back first please, so as not to make it obvious that we have been together.”

“Right.”

John leaves the room.

Edith gets her handkerchief out, gently wipes her eyes, then puts her handkerchief back.

Edith gathers herself.

‘Right.’ thinks Edith ‘I am Secretary-General. It is my duty to chair the meeting fairly.’

Edith goes back to the meeting. As she passes through the foyer, Rose follows her and they proceed back to the meeting room.