

Staging is very simple with minimal furniture and props – just a table and two chairs should largely suffice, plus a typewriter and phone. Scene changes need to be as short and sleek as possible to keep action flowing. If desired, scene changes can be covered by a brief musical extract – suggestions given in text.

MUSIC: **Getting to Know (from 'The King and I')**

SCENE 1) *Inner office of the Fiona Buckingham Introduction Agency.*

FIONA: Honesty. Absolute honesty. That's the first rule in this business, Mr Hopkins. Remember that, and we'll soon find you a kindred spirit. Now then, Trevor, isn't it?

TREVOR: That's right. Trevor... Edmund Hillary Sherpa Tenzing... Hopkins

FIONA: Trevor Ed....

TREVOR: You know. Everest?

FIONA: Ah. Yes.

TREVOR: It was my dad's idea. He thought it might help make me, you know...

FIONA: Let's confine ourselves to Trevor, shall we? Keep it simple.

TREVOR: That's what I usually do. Only you did say absolute honesty.

FIONA: Anyway, there isn't really space.

TREVOR: Whatever you think best, Mrs Buckingham.

FIONA: No, Mr... er, Trevor. We went through all that on the phone. There isn't actually anyone called Fiona Buckingham.

TREVOR: But I thought the woman outside called you Fiona.

FIONA: That's right. I am Fiona.

TREVOR: Oh, I see...

FIONA: But not Fiona Buckingham.

TREVOR: ...I think.

FIONA: Good.

TREVOR: What, then?

FIONA: Sorry?

TREVOR: Fiona what, then?

FIONA: We do like to restrict ourselves to *first* names here, Trevor. All part of our policy of complete confidentiality. One can't be too careful. Strictly *entrée nous*, some of my past clients have been household names. I couldn't possibly mention anyone specifically, of course. But if I were to say to you 'Exceedingly Good Sausages'... I'm sure you'll apprehend my illusion.

TREVOR: Sausages?

FIONA: Things were all very different then, of course...

TREVOR: I just thought — if I ever needed to ask for you.

FIONA: Halcyon days...

TREVOR: Don't suppose it matters really... Fiona.

FIONA: (*She gives him a blank look then puts on a bright smile*) Now then, Trevor, where were we... age?

TREVOR: Thirty-six, last March.

FIONA: (*Making notes*) Early thirties...

TREVOR: Er, isn't that rather stretching things?

FIONA: You're as young as you feel, Trevor, that's the first rule here. What's a year or two amongst friends?

(Trevor opens his mouth as if to speak but the phone rings)

FIONA: Would you excuse me, Trevor? *(She picks up the phone)* Beverly dear, I did say no calls... Oh. Oh, is he? Oh, all right, put him on. *(She covers the mouthpiece)* Sorry Trevor, it seems that someone is desperate for my attentions... Malcolm! This *is* a pleasant surprise. Are you? I'm sorry to hear that. Who? Oh, Brenda. Well she's very keen to meet you, Malcolm. Carlisle? Yes, charming part of the world. I *know* it's a long way from Barnstaple. Oh, I see. I don't have your file in front of me Malcolm, but if we agreed fifty miles maximum then I'm sure... What? Petite? Yes, I do know what it means... in, er, broad terms. Well perhaps it's an old photo. Perhaps she's lost weight since... look, Malcolm, I can tell you're the tiniest bit upset, but if you'll just leave it with me, I'll... *(Malcolm has hung up)* Oh dear. Must have been cut off.

TREVOR: Problems?

FIONA: Just a slight clerical error out in the office. All the clients we have to deal with — sacks full of mail every day. Er, not that they don't all get my complete personal attention of course. Now then, Trevor — hobbies. Would you rather: a) go hot-air ballooning, b) visit the ballet, or c) have a quiet evening at home playing mah-jong?

TREVOR: I didn't know there was going to be a test.

FIONA: No, Trevor. We have to build up a picture of you. Your personal profile. Surely you read the brochure?

TREVOR: Oh, I see. Is it for the computer?

FIONA: Er, yes. That's right — for the, er, computer. And, of course, for passing on to all your specially selected prospective partners. That's where I come in. I can always tell whether two people are going to hit it off. Don't ask me how, but I'm never wrong. Of course, we're always limited by who's with the agency at any particular moment, but given time I'm absolutely confident we'll...

TREVOR: Is there a parachute?

FIONA: I beg your pardon?

TREVOR: A parachute. You know. For the hot-air balloon...

MUSIC: Up, Up and Away (Johnny Mann Singers)

SCENE 2) *Living room of TREVOR and his MOTHER's house.*

MOTHER: *(Reading)* Trevor is a sociable, outgoing person, although he also enjoys quiet evenings at home playing m-ha... m-ja...

TREVOR: Mah-Jong. It was either that or hot-air ballooning.

MOTHER: You should have put down balloons. I keep saying you should get more fresh air.

TREVOR: Mother, I do not want to go ballooning. You know how heights affect me.

MOTHER: I expect they'll give you a parachute if you ask them.

TREVOR: I am not going hot-air ballooning!

MOTHER: I was only trying to help.

(Reading) He enjoys the outdoors and travel.

(To Trevor) Well, that's one thing you don't get from *me*. In my day, folks liked to stay in their own homes.

(Reading) He also has a tidy, organised mind. All these aspects of his character are brought together in his favourite pastime of cataloguing travel receipts from public-service vehicles.

TREVOR: She said to put it like that. She said it sounded better than collecting bus-tickets.

MOTHER: Well, I expect she knows about these things. She ought to, the money it's costing.

TREVOR: I did say, but you wouldn't listen.

MOTHER: *(Reading)* Trevor is fond of animals excluding insects but including spiders which are not insects.

TREVOR: I made her put that bit in. In case anybody thought I didn't know the difference. It might put people off if they thought I didn't know.

MOTHER: *(Reading)* Trevor is a strong character but can also be gentle when the need arises. He is articulate, but always willing to listen to both sides. He is decisive but ever ready to take good advice. He is easygoing but always prepared to make a stand when the occasion demands. He has a warm and caring nature and a great deal to give to the right person.

(To TREVOR) Ah, that's nice. She's got you to a T.

TREVOR: I expect she puts all that for everybody.

MOTHER: Never mind. Long as it does the trick. *(Reading)* Age: Early thirties... humh. Height: six-foot two! Since when did you grow four inches?

TREVOR: She said it was for the best. Apparently, women have this thing about height so you have to think positive, otherwise they won't even look at you. That's her first rule, 'think positive'. And then you have to try and meet them in a situation where you're sitting down, so they don't notice, like in a pub or a tea-shop.

MOTHER: And how are you supposed to get into this tea-shop without standing up?

TREVOR: She didn't mention that bit. Anyway, before they have time to realise it, you've got to overwhelm them with the size of your personality. That's what Fiona says.

MOTHER: Does she indeed. So, what happens now?

TREVOR: Well, Fiona feeds my details into her computer. To match me up with... you know. Then she chooses which ones to send me. She picks each one, personally. It's all very scientific.

MOTHER: And then what?

TREVOR: I'm not sure. I think we just have to wait and see ...

MUSIC: Walk Tall by Val Doonican

SCENE 3) *FIONA is lying face down on a table, mostly covered in a towel. JOANNE is massaging her neck and shoulders.*

FIONA: (*Moaning*) Oooh. Errh. Oooh. Aaah.

JOANNE: Just relax. I don't think I've ever seen you this tense.

FIONA: One of those days, I'm afraid, Joanne. In fact, one of those years the way things are going.

JOANNE: I'm sure it can't be that bad.

FIONA: You just would not believe what I have to endure to earn an honest crust.

JOANNE: I wish *I* could charge what you do. What is it — £950 for five introductions?

FIONA: I do wish you wouldn't make me sound quite so mercenary, Joanne.

JOANNE: I worked it out once — it's nearly two hundred pounds a phone number.

FIONA: And I do have my overheads. Beverly, for instance. I know I don't pay her a lot, but...

JOANNE: That's nearly twenty pounds a digit.

FIONA: It would still be a bargain at twice the price for some of them. I mean, take this afternoon. I've got this little form. Thirty questions — forty-five minutes. That's how it usually goes. An hour at the outside.

JOANNE: Was it that bad?

FIONA: Three hours and seventeen minutes. We spent nearly twenty minutes on one question — 'Do you like animals?'

JOANNE: How could you possibly...?

FIONA: Usually, it's a simple choice between 'yes', 'no' and 'no strong feelings.' But if your name's Trevor Edmund Hillary Sherpa Tenzing Hopkins, apparently you need to have a long debate. About whether it means 'all animals', and in that case whether it includes insects. And if it does include insects, then are we also counting spiders which aren't true insects but which most people treat like insects. Or, on the other hand, if the question is about domestic and farmyard animals...

JOANNE: I get the picture.

FIONA: He would go on about spiders, and you know how I feel about them... ugh!

JOANNE: Easy now. Is his name really...?

FIONA: Apparently, his father had this crack-brained theory it would somehow...

JOANNE: Make him go up in the world?

FIONA: I know I shouldn't complain — he's the first new member in six weeks. We'll soon be down to single figures at this rate. And there are limits to who I can pair people up with. Malcolm in Barnstaple's been through *all* the women except old Doris in Basingstoke.

JOANNE: Some men go for the more mature woman.

FIONA: She's old enough to be his grandmother! And I don't know what I'm going to do with Trevor. I can't afford to lose any more clients. And living over the office doesn't help. If the business goes under, I could be out on the streets. Oh well, that's quite enough of my troubles. How are things going with you, Joanne?

JOANNE: Oh, not so bad. In fact *I* had an awkward customer the other day. Montgomery Bartlett, he called himself. IT consultant or something technical, or so he said. A right tosser. I could tell from the minute he walked in what he was really angling

for. Then he started making all these suggestions. You know, extra services — all that sort of thing.

FIONA: Was he upset when you put him straight?

JOANNE: He was more upset by the massage. I really let him have it. The full works. All with a straight face, of course. I bet he ached all over the next day.

FIONA: It must have been quite a performance.

JOANNE: Well, I did once pass the auditions for drama school. That's always been my real ambition — acting.

FIONA: Really, Joanne? I'd never realised.

JOANNE: Yes. Couldn't get a grant, though. You wouldn't believe how much the fees are. But I still dream...

FIONA: I'm sure there's still time.

JOANNE: I don't know about that. Keep those shoulders nice and relaxed. Thirty-two next birthday, me.

FIONA: Forty's the worst. After that you stop counting.

JOANNE: That's better. Well, thirty was bad enough for me.

FIONA: (*Sitting up*) You know, Joanne, I've been thinking. We might just be able to do each other a little favour.

JOANNE: What, you mean find me some more customers?

FIONA: Not exactly. I was thinking more of your acting ambitions.