

Act I  
Scene 1

*All the action takes place on a park bench with the greenery changing during the seasons. A middle aged man enters carefully, sits on the bench and starts reading the paper. A middle-aged lady enters from the opposite side looking out front.*

**Joyce**      *(Loudly to the front)* Don't go near that dog! Stay by the climbing frame! That's right - good girl! Stay away from the dog! Keep your coat on! I said keep it on! Well would you believe it? Leave it there then! You might as well talk to yourself - no discipline. Still they're lovely aren't they? - especially when you can give them back at the end of the day. *(He lowers the paper, smiles and then carries on reading)*.I've got four grandchildren in all - this is the only one not in school. Have you got any?

**Alex**      I beg your pardon?

**Joyce**      Grandchildren.

**Alex**      Oh no. *(He tries to read again)*

**Joyce**      Have you got children?

**Alex**      *(Lowers paper)* Yes. *(Raises paper again)*

**Joyce**      Oh that's nice - how many?

**Alex**      *(From behind paper)* Two.

**Joyce**      Boys?

**Alex**      *(Lowers paper and folds it)* No - one of each.

**Joyce**      That's nice isn't it. I had three girls - always wanted a boy. Still that's how it goes isn't it? My sons-in-law are good sorts, company for Frank - that's my husband. Spends all of his life surrounded by tights and ti--- - er- things he says. Mind you I've only got two sons-in-law officially - my youngest and her fella they're not married yet. No-one bothers about that sort of thing do they?

**Alex**      No I suppose not.

**Joyce**      Are yours married?

**Alex**      My daughter is - my son's still at university.

**Joyce**      Education's a wonderful thing. My youngest has got a degree. DON'T GO NEAR THAT DOG! Go back to the climbing frame! Do as I tell you or we'll go straight home! There's a good girl.

Loves dogs she does - well any kind of animal come to that. But you don't know where they've been do you? I'm waiting for her mum - that's my second Kathy. She's gone to the doctors - Dr. Kimble across the park - womens' trouble. Never been right since she had our Mark. Are you waiting for somebody?

**Alex** No.

**Joyce** Just enjoying the spring weather eh?

**Alex** Yes - it is a beautiful morning. (*He moves uncomfortably and pats his chest*). Ooo!

**Joyce** Indigestion is it? My Frank's a martyr to it. Do you want a Rennie? I always keep a few handy.

**Alex** No thank you.

**Joyce** It'll help.

**Alex** I'm afraid it won't.

**Joyce** Something more serious is it? (*no answer*) You should go to the doctors if it is. The sooner you go the sooner it's fixed that's what I say. You can't get my Frank to the doctors till he's half dead - you men are just stubborn.

**Alex** I've been to the doctors. I've just come out of hospital.

**Joyce** Oh sorry love. Had an operation have you? LET GO OF THAT DOG! Now I won't tell you again! Next time you're straight back to your mum! Alright - play in the sand. Damn dogs shouldn't be let off the lead. There's a notice there that says so. THAT'S A GOOD GIRL! (*Alex tries to read again*). I thought you looked pale - hospital leaves you like that - sort of pasty looking. Never mind the fresh air and the sun will soon put some colour in your cheeks. Oh there's my Kathy. KATHY - WE'RE HERE! OH I TOLD HER TO STAY AWAY FROM THAT DOG. COO-EE - I'M COMING! Bye-bye I hope things go well for you - I'll perhaps see you again. KATHY WE'RE HERE! (*She exits as two young women enter - Claire is an untidy, harrassed looking young mum pushing a pram. They stop and she starts fiddling with the baby with much baby talk. Jodie her sister - is smartly dressed and is carrying a huge baby bag*).

**Jodie** Do you really need all this stuff?

**Claire** What stuff?

**Jodie**           *(Peering into the bag)* All this! It's like moving house every time we come out - we're late again! We shall never get as far as M& S at this rate - I told you we should have come in the car.

**Claire**           The fresh air's good for him - look at his little rosy cheeks.

**Jodie**           *(Peers into the pram she sniffs and pulls a face)* That's nothing to do with the weather - he's straining! Poo! He's done it again? That's three times this morning! What are you feeding him on - vindaloo?

**Claire**           No!

**Jodie**           Well I'm sure that's not just milk - I can't believe just milk can make him smell like he does!

**Claire**           Don't be horrible! You'll find out when you've got one of your own. *(To the baby)* He doesn't smell do you my precious?

**Jodie**           There's something wrong with your nose then.

**Claire**           Shut up! He's lovely aren't you Eric?

**Jodie**           I hope you don't mind me saying so but I think that's a terrible name to call a little baby - Eric.

**Claire**           I know - it was my Warren's idea. I foolishly said that he could pick the name if it was a little boy and if it was a little girl I would pick it. How was I to know that he'd name him after Eric Cantonar.

**Jodie**           He won't half get ribbed when he starts school you know - with your surname.

**Claire**           I know - I said that - but he wouldn't listen.

**Jodie**           Eric Merrick! What were you going to call a girl?

**Claire**           Geraldine.

**Jodie**           Oh - Gerry Merrick - nice.

**Claire**           Right! Come on - I must get to Mothercare - I need some more breast pads.

**Jodie**           Oh how thrilling! *(They exit)*

*(A young, outlandishly dressed young man enters)*

**Ben**             Got a light? *(Alex lowers paper irritably)*

**Alex** I don't smoke.

**Ben** I didn't friggin' well ask you if you smoked - that wasn't the question. I asked you if you had a friggin' light.

**Alex** No. *(He puts up paper again)*

**Ben** I'm fed up with people telling me they don't friggin' well smoke - as if it's some sort of disease. I'm talking to you - you toffee-nosed git.

**Alex** I'm sorry - I haven't got a light.

**Ben** That's all I wanted to know right?

**Alex** I'm sorry. There wasn't any implied criticism in my answer. I don't give a damn whether you smoke or not.

**Ben** No - not so much criticism as superiority. Think you're way above me don't you?

**Alex** No. Now will you please leave me alone.

**Ben** I pardon me for disturbing your reading sir. Which page are the jugs on in this paper? *(He sits next to Alex and looks at the paper)* Not on page three eh? Oh no - this paper's got to be friggin' different hasn't it.

**Alex** Jugs?

**Ben** Knockers, Bristols, Boobs, Mams, Breasts - Friggin' Tits!

**Alex** There are no jugs - as you put it - in this newspaper.

**Ben** Oh of course not - this is a superior, friggin' newspaper. I don't suppose it would appeal to the likes of me would it?

**Alex** No - it wouldn't.

**Ben** I suppose that's because I'm such a friggin' moron.

**Alex** If you say so.

**Ben** I don't friggin' well say it. It's you acting so bloody superior.

**Alex** That's because I am superior. If I had an intellect of a dung beetle I'd be superior to you. Look at you - you're just a simple-minded cretin. *(He rises quickly - too quickly - grasps his chest and sits with his eyes closed and breathes heavily and groans).*

**Ben** You friggin' old git - I ought to..... 'ere mate - are you alright? Should I call someone? There's a doctors just across the park - shall I fetch him? It won't take a minute. *(He starts to go).*

**Alex** No.... please.... I'm fine now.

**Ben** You don't look fine.

**Alex** It's alright - it's passing.

**Ben** Have you got a bad heart?

**Alex** No - I've just had an operation

**Ben** Heart operation?

**Alex** Yes - they call it a bypass - this is my first day out and the doctor said the fresh air and sun would be good for me  
but  
not to get too excited. So I thought I'd sit in the park and quietly read my paper.

**Ben** Then I came along eh? The friggin' cretin!

**Alex** Well..... yes.

**Ben** Sorry. I came to think and have a quiet fag. It says in the paper they might be gonna cut off my benefit.

**Alex** What benefit?

**Ben** You know - friggin' unemployment.

**Alex** Ah yes. Why would they stop it?

**Ben** Because of my appearance. They say that when I go for a job it puts off potential employers.

**Alex** Well - I can see that.

**Ben** What's my friggin' appearance got to do with how well I work?

**Alex** I don't know.

**Ben** Exactly. I might be the best bloody worker in the whole friggin' world but just because I dress like this I can't even get a job packing shelves at Sainsburys.

**Alex** Why don't you change your appearance when you go for the

interview.

**Ben** That wouldn't be honest. I am what I am and there's no law saying I can't dress like this. How you dress is a basic friggin' freedom isn't it?

**Alex** Yes that's quite true.

**Ben** So why can't I get a job?

**Alex** Freedom's a two-edged sword. You're free to dress as you please and an employer has the freedom to hire an applicant whose dress pleases him. You both have freedom of choice.

**Ben** But I end up without a friggin' job.

**Alex** Basically - yes.

**Ben** Well it's not friggin' fair.

**Alex** If you're waiting for fairness to come along you'll wait a long time. The first lesson of life..... what's your name?

**Ben** Ben.

**Alex** I'm Alex. The first lesson of life Ben is that it's not fair - never has been and never will be.

**Ben** It seems a friggin' sight fairer for some than it does for others - right?

**Alex** Exactly right. Do you see alright Ben?

**Ben** What?

**Alex** Do you see alright?

**Ben** What's that got to do with anything?

**Alex** You'll see - just answer the questions.

**Ben** Nothing wrong with my eyes.

**Alex** Good hearing?

**Ben** Great.

**Alex** No other major illnesses or handicaps?

**Ben** Oh - I think I see what you're getting at - I'm supposed to be grateful I'm not a friggin' cripple.

**Alex** Do you get enough to eat?

**Ben** I'm hardly in a posh friggin' restaurant every night.

**Alex** But you get enough to eat don't you?

**Ben** Yeah - I know - millions are starving in Africa.

**Alex** That's right. You're fit and you're well fed and there are million's who aren't. It's as you said not fair is it?

**Ben** Ah but it's not the same here is it - not the same as Africa?

**Alex** There's a lot in this country who'd swap with you if they could.

**Ben** Do what? I don't think so.

**Alex** As far as I can tell you've only got two handicaps - the way you dress and your lisp.

**Ben** Lisp! Whose got a friggin' lisp? I haven't!

**Alex** You have. Well if it's not a lisp it's some sort of speech impediment.

**Ben** *(Getting up to go)* I think you're a penalty short of a shoot-out.

**Alex** You "fink" that?

**Ben** Yeah I do!

**Alex** You "fink"?

**Ben** Yeah - that's what I said - what are you on about?

**Alex** Can you spell?

**Ben** Top of the class you ask me anyfing.

**Alex** Spell "think".

**Ben** For God's sake ask me somefing a bit more difficult.

**Alex** Oh - you can't spell it.

**Ben** Course I friggin' well can - T-H-I-N-K - anyone can spell that!

**Alex** But when you say it you say "FINK" with an "F".

**Ben** Who does?

**Alex** You do - "Fink" , "Fought", "Wivvout" - you can't say "Th" - that's a speech impediment that is.

**Ben** Oh no it ain't smart-arse! I can say "Th" - "Think", "thought", "without", "th", "th" "th"!

**Alex** Why don't you then?

**Ben** What?

**Alex** Pronounce "th" correctly.

**Ben** I don't have to! What's it got to friggin' well do with you anyway?

**Alex** Nothing at all. It was you who said life wasn't fair to you.  
*(he moves uncomfortably and gasps).*

**Ben** 'Ere - don't you go getting excited again.

**Alex** *(With a small laugh)* It's alright I'm not getting excited. I'm just trying to show you that you're the one whose unfair to yourself.

**Ben** I am? I'm unfair to myself? How do you work that out?

**Alex** Well - imagine I'm the employer. You come in dressed like that you can't speak properly, I assume you can't spell and that you're a moron - next applicant please!

**Ben** But that's not fair - I can spell.

**Alex** I thought we'd established that fair doesn't exist. You've got more benefits than most people in the world.

**Ben** Oh I see - I suppose you'd describe me as lucky.

**Alex** No - I wouldn't.

**Ben** How then?

**Alex** What - in my considered opinion?

**Ben** Yes

**Alex** *(Giving it careful consideration).* A bit of a pratt!

**Ben** What?

**Alex** A bit of a pra..... Oh - it's so painful when I laugh.

**Ben** You toffee-nosed git! *(He starts to go)*.

**Alex** I'll give you one more piece of advice before you go. If a doctor ever says to you you'll suffer minor discomfort what he really means is bloody agony!

**Ben** Get stuffed you friggin' creep!

Scene 2

*(Same place two weeks later. A silent man sits on the bench in a anorak with a carrier bag. Joyce enters and gives him a long stare from top to bottom).*

**Joyce** *(Out front)*. KEEP AWAY FROM THE SWINGS! EAT YOUR ICE-CREAM BEFORE YOU DO THAT! YOU'LL DROP IT!

EAT IT FIRST! THAT'S RIGHT - THAT'S A GOOD GIRL. *(She sits - glares at man and immediately jumps up again)*. There's that damn dog again - would you believe it? That dog is supposed to be on a lead! Oh that's typical - did you see that?

*(The man is unmoved)*. The manners of some people! I knew it! I knew it! Now it's knocked the ice-cream out of her hand. NO DON'T PICK IT UP - DON'T PICK IT UP! THERE'S A GOOD GIRL. I SUPPOSED YOU'RE SATISFIED NOW! Typical! Puts it on a lead now the damage is done! *(Looks at man)*. Aren't you Letty Morris's brother from George Street? *(He says nothing)*. Yes you are - I was at school with Letty. Went to a special school didn't you? Didn't go with your brothers and sisters did you? Not with the rest of us! Remedial - that's what they called it. LEAVE THAT ICE-CREAM ALONE! Backward weren't you? There's no shame in it. Could happen to anyone I suppose. Mind you - none of you were very bright were you? Runs in the family doesn't it? NOW I'VE TOLD YOU TO LEAVE THAT ALONE - IF YOU TOUCH IT AGAIN WE'RE GOING HOME! Oo she can be a little Madam when she wants to. You were the youngest of them weren't you? Six brothers and sisters was there? Did Letty's husband ever come back? Might as well talk to myself. Are you living with Letty now then? *(Alex enters looking much fitter)*.

**Alex** Good morning. *(The silent man shuffles off)*

**Joyce** Morning. You're looking better than you did last week.

**Alex** I feel better thankyou. *(He looks after the silent man)*

**Joyce** Balmy! Right round the twist! All his family put together wouldn't add up to a half wit. Worries me him sitting in - looking - with all those little ones playing - you never know do you?

**Alex** No - I suppose not. Isn't it a beautiful day?

**Joyce** Yes - we'll pay for it though - all this sun so early and it's not half way through May yet.

**Alex** Well let's hope not eh and enjoy it while we can. *(Ben enters in a new suit, new hairstyle, minus earring. He walks right past and stops)*

**Ben** Morning.

**Both** Good morning.

**Ben** Ah - didn't recognise me did you?

**Joyce** Never seen you before in my life.

**Ben** Not you missus. I've never seen you either - or want to - why don't you hop it?

**Joyce** You want to learn some manners young man. COME ON MY LOVE - WE'RE GOING NOW! OH DON'T START CRYING. Good-bye - it's nice to see you looking better. *(She cuts Ben and exits).*

**Ben** Silly old bat!

**Alex** Good manners cost you nothing you know.

**Ben** Why should I be polite to her - what can she do for me?

**Alex** Like I say - why not? It doesn't cost you anything.

**Ben** You're right. You never know do you - and politeness costs nuffin' nothing I should say.

**Alex** Why the transformation?

**Ben** Looking a bit tasty ain't I?

**Alex** Certainly a big improvement.

**Ben** Well that's a matter of opinion. Would I fool some Personnel Git into thinking I'm a respectable geezer.

**Alex** *(Laughing)* I should think so - who is the potential victim?

**Ben** Some creep - the same creep who turned me down three months ago. I'll tell him what a wonderful influence he was on me. I should have him eating out of my hand - the burke!

**Alex** I bet you will and at least it should get you into the game.

**Ben** What game?

**Alex** The getting on game, the climb the ladder game, the let's get to top game.

**Ben** Is it a game then?

**Alex** Yes it's the life game.

**Ben** What do you do to make a living?

**Alex** What - when I'm not sitting in the park putting myself back together?

**Ben** Yea - that's right. I'll take a guess that you don't get your hands dirty.

**Alex** Quite right - give that young man a coconut! I'm a financial adviser. Ah - I see you're none the wiser. Well people and companies give me their money and I invest it wisely and make it grow for them.

**Ben** Oh - I know - you work for a bank.

**Alex** No - not quite. I work with a group of other like-minded men and women in a partnership - I'm the senior partner or in your parlance - the Boss.

**Ben** Are you rich?

**Alex** Well that's straightforward enough. Yes, by your standards I am very rich.

**Ben** But you don't actually make anything.

**Alex** Yes - I make a profit.

**Ben** No - I mean like a carpenter or a builder. You know make

something real, something you can use, something that will last.

**Alex** No - no I don't - not in that way, but it's hard, stressful work just the same.

**Ben** Hard work? Sitting behind a desk adding up numbers? I don't call that hard work!

**Alex** I've got an ulcer and a heart by-pass to prove it. I work twelve hours a day seven days a week to get where I am.

**Ben** What - knackered on a park bench?

**Alex** Yes - ridiculous isn't it?

*(Jodie and Claire enter with the pram. During their following conversation Alex and Ben listen incredulously Jodie and Claire are completely oblivious to their presence)*

**Jodie** You've changed since you had that kid.

**Claire** Don't call him a kid - he's your nephew. *(They stop and Claire bends over the pram)*. You love your Aunty Jodie don't

you my

boofuls. Where's your dum dum? Here it is - open wide and we'll pop it in - there - num num num num num.