

Scene 1

The action takes place in Ted's Place - a Cafe in the early 70's. The hatch and counter are stage right. Exit to kitchen stage right and entrance/exit to street stage left.

Scene 1 opens with Ted wiping down the tables of which there are four with a none-too-clean cloth. Ava his daughter is sitting at a table right filing her nails. It is just before 11.00 a.m. His wife Sybil is dusting pork pies and replacing them in a perspex case.

Sybil It's very quiet this morning.

Ted *(Looking at his watch)* It's nearly eleven - they'll be in soon.

Sybil What's happened to Jack? He's normally in for his elevenses by ten.

Ted What -do you mean Jack the Plumber from Hell?

Sybil You're right. I don't know why the Council employ him. He never does a stroke you know and what little he does do leaks. Mrs Turner had terrible trouble with her toilet after Jack had supposedly repaired it.

Ted Yes they were up to their necks in....

Sybil Ted! That'll do. I tell you this much - I wouldn't let him anywhere near my pipes.

Ted *(Under his breath)* I can believe that.

Sybil What did you say?

Ted Nothing.

Sybil You're mumbling again. You're always doing that these days. It's a very bad habit to get into.

Ted One of the few bad habits I've got left.

Sybil There you go again - speak up if you've got something to say.

Ava Oh give it a rest you two - you're always at it these days.

Sybil Don't you be so cheeky Ava. And have you filled those cruets?

Ava What?

Sybil You heard.

Ava I didn't know they were empty.

Sybil They've been empty since yesterday morning. I don't know how you expect our customers to season their food. I thought Mr. Parkinson was having a funny turn over his Welsh Rarebit until I realised the salt was empty!

Ava Well nobody said anything to me.

Sybil They shouldn't have to say anything - you should notice - use your initiative. (*Ted sniggers*) Be quiet Ted! She wants encouragement not ridicule!

Ted (*Under his breath*) I know what she wants.

Sybil What?

Ted Nothing. I was just agreeing with you.

Sybil You want to think yourself lucky young lady. We've made you Head Waitress here - a position of responsibility with prospects. Most of your mates are working in Woolworths!

Ava I wouldn't mind working in Woollies. My friend Sylvia's just bought Sgt Pepper at 25% discount.

Sylvia Never mind Sgt. Pepper - you worry about our pepper - and fill the cruets!

Ava Sgt. Pepper's brilliant!

Ted Who's Sgt. Pepper when he's at home.

Ava It's an L.P.

Ted What - marching band is it?

Ava Oh dad - it's the Beatles. You're so far behind the times. We're in the 70's!

Ted 70's what are you talking about? I'll have you know I'm still in me prime.

Ava You know what I mean and you know who the Beatles are – you're just trying to be funny and failing - as usual.

Ted Oh them! I know them. She loves you yah yah yah. I'll give 'em six months and then nobody'll know who they were.

Ava I'll remember Paul for ever.

Sybil Ava! Cruets!

Ava I'm going! I'm going!

Sybil If you took as much care of the tables as you do of your nails we'd all be better off. (*Ava exits into kitchen. Sybil follows her and they can be heard arguing in the kitchen*)

Ted I sometimes wish I'd been born a eunuch - then I'd have stayed with me Mother and never got married. What a lovely life I'd have had.

Sybil (*Poking her head through the hatch*) What did you say?

Ted I was just saying what a lovely life I had. Every day a new adventure in Paradise with my perfect family.

Sybil You're going funny you are - talking to yourself like that. You'll end up in a looney bin if you're not careful.

Ted I look forward to the day.

Sybil I heard that – aren't you happy with things the way they are?.

Ted I was happy when the war finished. I was happy when we won the World Cup five years ago and when your mother fell in the boating lake at Skegness – but this morning.....?

Sybil I tell you this much Ted Jarvis.....(*Jack enters*).... Oh morning Jack.

Ted Saved by the bell.

Jack What a rotten earwiggin' day I've had so far!

Ted Join the club. (*Sybil glares at him*) Sorry. What's your problem then Jack? Fixed any good toilets lately?

Jack Don't keep going on about that. I told you it was an earwiggin' Japanese ballcock. Anyway I've got bigger problems than that.

Ted What's wrong then mate?

Jack I've been inspected - that's what. Bloody earwig!

Ted What - for infestations?

Sybil Ted! Go on Jack.

Jack Bloody earwig just stood there looking at me. Half an hour he stood there. I didn't know who he was. They never told me I was being inspected. They shouldn't be doing that now Harold Wilson's at number 10.

Ted What were you doing then?

Jack Reading the paper.

Ted Is that all?

Jack No. I was doing the crossword. Like I always do before my elevenses....

Ted At ten o'clock.

Jack Exactly.

Sybil What did he say to you then?

Jack It was very disturbing - very disturbing indeed - gave me a nasty turn I can tell you. It was a deliberate attack on a working man's values. I mean - standing there in his earwiggin' suit and collar and tie - I bet he's never done a decent day's graft in his life - never got his hands dirty. Bloody earwig!

Ted He didn't use that dreaded four letter word did he?

Sybil Ted! I'm sure he wouldn't - not if he was wearing a suit.

Ted I meant that dreaded four letter word "work".

Jack You can jest brother. He said there was gonna be earwiggin' quotas at the end of each month and if we didn't meet them - no earwiggin' bonuses! I mean - me and the Missus have booked for Majorca in August - they'll be no earwiggin' Majorca if I don't get me bonus. She'll go mad!

Sybil Oh dear - shall I get you your usual Jack? I'll put three spoonfuls of sugar in - you know - for shock.

Jack Ta Syb. I won't have me usual fry-up. That earwig's spoilt my appetite.

Ted Now let's get this straight. You're putting bathrooms in twenty Council Houses in Jubilee Street aren't you?

Jack That's right.

Ted And when did you start this job?

Jack Ah - now - I remember that. It was April 1st.

Ted Ah yes - how very apt.

Jack What?

Ted Nothing. So now it's June - how many bathrooms have you finished in the last three months?

Jack Finished? Ah well now let me see. Of course my plumber's mate Wesley was off with flu for three weeks - that put me back. Then of course we had that trouble with the gas boilers....

Ted Oh yes. Did you ever find that cat?

Jack Only his tail - I think the rest of him's in orbit..... of course the earwiggin' firemen soaked everything which held us up ... so it's hard to say exactly how many of them are actually finished.

Ted Make a rough guess.

Jack What approximately?

Ted Yes

Jack Well - taking all things into consideration - and what with the chippies and the electricians working to rule - actually finished - I think there's one.

Ted Only one?

Jack Almost. We were hoping to finish it this Sunday.

Ted You work Sundays?

Jack It's double time. *(Sybil enters and puts a cup of tea in front of him)* Ta Syb.

Ted So in fact none of those bathrooms are completely finished?

Jack Well if you want to split hairs..... No.

Sybil So you'll have to start working harder then.

Jack No - not really - as of *(he looks at his watch)* ten minutes ago we're all out on strike - except for the electricians - they're on a "go-slow".

Ted I thought you said they already were.

Jack No - I said they was working to rule - a very different thing in industrial relations terms.

Sybil Well if you haven't got to go back to work - can I tempt you to have a little nibble?

Ted That's the best offer you'll get today Jack.

Sybil Ted! What about beans on toast?

Jack Oh no - no beans - we've got a union meeting at two o'clock - that's a very small room. I'll just have a toasted cheese sandwich to keep body and soul together.

Sybil Right you are. Cheese on toast with extra coming up. *(As she exits)*
Don't just stand there Ted - get him a knife and fork. *(Ava enters)*

Ava Oh hello Mr. Johnson - you're late today - waiting for your fry-up?

Ted Not today Ava - he's had a terrible shock.

Ava Oh - I'm sorry to hear that Mr. Johnson - *(she leans over the table displaying far too much cleavage)* Is there anything I can do?

Ted Don't say things like that when you're bending over Ava - you'll get the place a bad name.

Ava What?

Ted Just put the cruets out will you?

Jack I'll tell you another thing about those earwigs at the Town Hall.....

Ted Yes well - fascinating as this conversation is Jack - I must get on with my executive duties namely emptying the bins *(he beats a hasty retreat)* ... you fortify the inner man and finish your crossword.

Jack *(Shouting after Ted)* I perhaps will have that fry up after all.

Sybil *(Poking her head through the hatch)* Right you are I heard that, do you want your toast and cheese as well?

Jack Might as well - I've got nothing else to do. By the way - I've left my Shop Steward this number if he wants to contact me. Is that alright?

Sybil Yes that'll be alright. *(She comes into the cafe)* Ava where's your father?

Ava Who?

Sybil Your father - do you remember him? Big chap, beard, no hair - he hangs around here a lot.

Ava There's no need to be nasty - he's not here.

Sybil I can see that - where is he?

Jack He said he was going to empty the bins.

Sybil It's not bin day today. It was bin day yesterday. *(She pokes her head out of the door)* Ted? Ted! Where is he? I'm sure he's up to something - he's been in a funny mood today. Ted! Ted! *(Meanwhile Ted is looking through the hatch from the kitchen - he sees her and disappears. Jack notices this. Ava is filing her nails again).*

Jack It's none of my earwiggin' business of course but he just poked his head through the hatch.

Sybil He did what? What's he playing at? Ted! Ted! *(She exits into the kitchen. Ted instantly appears through the main door carrying a large covered birdcage).*

Jack Is this an attempt on the lap record?

Ted It's a surprise. Where's Sybil?

Jack I just told her you was in the earwiggin' kitchen so she's gone in there.

Ted Splitter!

Jack No need to take that attitude.

Ted I was only joking. It's a surprise for her.

Jack What is it?

Ted *(Whipping off the cover to reveal a parrot)* Ta dah! Look at that - an African Green.

Jack An earwiggin' parrot! Blimey - does she like parrots then?

Ted She's always wanted one. It cost a fortune. I've been saving up for this.

Ava What you got there Dad?

Ted Ah - the undead speaks.

Ava What?

Ted Nothing - it's a parrot for your mum.

Ava Oo-er! Does it talk?

Ted Well the bloke in the pet shop said it does but I haven't heard it say anything yet.

Jack They don't talk when the cover's on.

Ted Oh don't they? I might get a cover for Sybil then.

Jack I knew a bloke what had a parrot once. Bit his earwiggin finger off.

Ted I'd better not keep it in the bathroom then - no telling what I might lose.

Ava My friends got a hamster. *(They both wait expectantly)*

Ted Ye - es

Ava Well - she has.

Ted Fascinating! I dunno who she takes after.

Ava What?

Ted Nothing. Here - you weren't around here 18 years ago were you Jack?

Jack No mate - in fact 18 years ago - let me see - I was just finishing my apprenticeship in Worksop. It was a good apprenticeship, taught me a lot about the work ethic, not like today.....

Ted Never mind Jack - it was just one of my merry, sardonic, little quips.

Ava I dunno what he's on about half the time.

Ted Only half the time - you must be improving. *(Sybil enters with the toast)*

Sybil Here we are then. You be getting on with that. *(She puts it down on Jack's table turns and sees Ted by the parrot's cage)* Aagh! There you are! Where've you been? What's that?

Ted Ta da! *(He reveals the parrot. Sybil is speechless)* Well what do you think to it? It is what you wanted isn't it or have I got it wrong as usual?

Sybil Oh Teddy. It's lovely - it's just what I always wanted. Is it for me?

Ted What? No! It's for Jack - I thought it would liven up his union meetings. Course it's for you.

Sybil Oh Teddy. He's lovely. What's his name?

Ted They didn't tell me at the shop so it's up to you love.

Ava My friend's Hamster is called Ringo - you could call him Paul.

Ted Paul the Parrot - I don't think so. Anyway it's up to your Mum - it's her parrot.

Sybil Penryn!

Jack Penryn? What sort of name's that?

Sybil It was the name of one of my teachers at school. I always liked it. He taught English - you should have heard him read - especially Hamlet - all of us thought he was lovely. We didn't understand any of it but he had such a lovely voice.

Ted Well he's your parrot so Penryn the Parrot it is. Perhaps we should have settled for Paul.

Ava See - I told you.

Sybil Oh thank you Teddy (*she kisses him*) Is it an early birthday present?

Ted It's an early birthday, anniversary, Christmas, Easter and anything else you can think of present. It cost me a bomb.

Sybil Does he talk? (*as if talking to a little baby*) Do you speak Penryn my baby? Say something to Mummy then? Come on now - just a little word - just one.

Ted I should be careful if I were you - he might know one.

Jack Yeah - they always pick up the bad words.

Sybil Not my Penryn - he wouldn't say naughty words to his mummy would you?

Ted I think I could regret this. Where are you going to put him?

Sybil I think he should stay out here where our customers can admire him and he can hear the spoken word to help him in his education.

Jack That's what I meant.

Sybil I can assure you Jack there is no language in here that you wouldn't hear in Buckingham Palace.

Ted Yes I understand the Duke of Edinburgh can be a bit blue.

Sybil Ted! How dare you!

Ava Who's gonna clean it out? I bet it's me.

Ted That's the first time you've been right in months - or perhaps ever.

Ava I don't think a Head Waitress should have to clean out a birdcage. Anyway I don't think it likes me. Look at how its looking at me.

Ted Obviously a bird of some taste.

Ava What?

Sybil Shut up Ted! Take no notice of him Ava - he's just trying to be clever. We'll get a proper stand but meanwhile we'll pop him on the counter next to the pork pies. *(She positions the parrot and exits to the kitchen)*. I'll get your fry-up Jack.

Ava Do you think he might reach through and eat one of those pork pies?

Ted He'd better not. That bird cost me a fortune.

Jack Do you think that's hygienic having an earwiggin' parrot next to the food?

Ted Don't be daft. Mind you while we're on the subject Ava - your damned cat was asleep in the bread bin again this morning. I had to brush cat hairs off all the rolls.

Jack Ugh! *(Jack is just taking a mouthful of toast)*

Ted Oh don't worry mate. This was the roll bin - not the toasting bread bin.

Jack Oh!

Ted Well - as far as I know.

Ava He likes the warmth you see. He's quite clean. He's always licking himself.

Jack Yes - that's what earwiggin' worries me. I've seen where he licks!

Ted Could the day get any worse Jack?

Jack I doubt it.....*(Madge and Hilda burst in with much noise and laughter. Jack immediately begins sprucing himself up)*

Ted Then again I could be wrong.

Hilda ...so I said to her "you should watch what you throw away in your wastepaper bin".

Madge You didn't!

Hilda I did. You should have seen her face.

Madge Thinks she's Lady Muck don't she?

Hilda That'll bring her down a peg or two. Hello Jack. Morning Ted.

Ted)
Jack)

Hilda Hello Ada

Ava Ava!

Hilda Oh yes - like Ava Gardner - they say she's the most beautiful woman in the world.

Madge Why did they call you that?