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## Akustan *by Jonathan North*

*Cast: 2M / 1F or other mix if preferred*

*Two people in an office: JB and GEORGE (or GEORGINA if preferred)*

GEORGE – The Akustan office? What happened to Carruthers?

JB – Chucked it. Faxed in to say he was off to a kibbutz.

GEORGE – But he's not even Jewish.

JB – That's the fifth this year.

GEORGE – Gone to a kibbutz?

JB – No, legged it from Akustan.

GEORGE – Maybe it's something in the water?

JB – So what do we do, George?

GEORGE – Close down the operation?

JB – With all those juicy oil concessions? No way, Jose. Could be a regular goldmine.  
Licence to print money.

GEORGE – Not if we can't keep it staffed, JB.

JB – Actually, I was thinking about that ...

GEORGE – Yes?

JB – How about young Thackeray?

GEORGE – Her? The original stay-at-home girl? She got homesick when we sent her  
to that management weekend in Auchtermuchty. Mind, I went there once ...  
wouldn't blame her.

JB – I'll persuade her, you'll see.

GEORGE – Hmm. Anyway, she won't leave that drippy boyfriend – the one in the  
Foreign Office.

JB – Watch this space. I've a way with people. Charm the pants off the trees, that's  
me.

GEORGE – Well, now's your chance. She wants to see me about something, so I told  
her to come right up.

*There is a knock at the door*

GEORGE – Right on cue. Come!

*THACKERAY enters*

JB – Hello, Thack ... er, Jean.

THACKERAY – Jane.

JB – Pardon?

THACKERAY – Actually, it's Jane. Not Jean.

JB – Jane. Yup. Terrific. Look, I won't beat about the point. Get straight to the bush. One in the hand's worth two in the bird, what?

THACKERAY – Sorry, I don't quite follow ...

JB – Firm like ours, got a good solid core business, yes? Basis of our success. Rock of Gibraltar, right, Joan?

THACKERAY – Jane.

JB – Sure. But, thing is ... mustn't stagnate, get complacent. That way, we're down the Swanee without the proverbial, right? Can't rest on our horizons, gotta seek out new laurels. Cast the net far and wide, root out the golden eggs and grab them by the horns.

*THACKERAY tries to interrupt but JB waves his hand dismissively*

JB – But – and here's the point – needs a special type to do it. Not just a ... who's that spotty bloke from Accounts? Simpkins? Pimpkins? Anyway, George and I, we keep our eyes open, we can sort out the sheep from the wolves' clothing, eh, George? So when the time's right, we cut 'em in on a slice of the action. (*he taps his nose*) Select few, inner sanctum, know what I mean? Now (*he beckons confidentially to THACKERAY*) listen. What if I said .... Akustan?

THACKERAY – What! I ...

JB – No, hear me out. Goldmine of a place, no kidding. Really going some. Think Auchtermuchty but with half-decent weather. Keep this under your titfer but, just happens, right now, window of opportunity for the right person to run the show. Terrific chance, eh? Go myself, of course, but someone's got to stay and mind the shop. So I thought ... er, we thought, George and I ... who could pull it off? Course, every Tom Dick and Harriet will be clamouring but, no, sometimes you got to be cruel to be kind. That's why I called you in. (*in messianic tones*) I see skill, talent, courage, determination, a vision of the future. Ahead of the pack. What do you say, Jean? Er, Joan, Jane? Are you man enough?

THACKERAY – Hold on. You're not asking me to take charge of the Akustan office?

JB – Hole in one. Spot on. We know you can do it. George and me, we can tell a blind horse when we see one. (*seeing her hesitate*) And of course, there's a 50% rise.

THACKERAY – You're not serious?

JB – 50? I meant 80. 3-year contract, with a guaranteed berth here on return.

THACKERAY (*choosing her words carefully*) – Look, I can see that, for the good of the firm ... but with those prospects, doesn't it need someone important, not just a Girl Friday, to send out the right message?

GEORGE – She's right, JB. Lot of big players out there.

JB – Sure. The grandes fromages, what? You'd be promoted ...

THACKERAY – And there's lots of expenses ...

JB – Meal-deal Vouchers for McDonald's?

THACKERAY – In Akustan? I was thinking more like, a partnership?

JB – What? Er ... (*he looks at GEORGE for guidance. GEORGE shrugs. JB swallows hard*) Yeah, why not.

THACKERAY – Guaranteed basic salary twice my present? Plus bonuses and 10 per-cent of all new business?

JB – Sure. No problem. (*in surprise*) Hold on! You'll take it?

THACKERAY – Yes, JB, I'll take it.

JB – Good girl! What a relief. Er, privilege. I'll leave you with George to sort out the details, OK. Phew!

(*as he leaves he turns to GEORGE, gives a thumbs up and silently mouths "Yes!"*)

GEORGE – I'll get Legal to draw up the partnership agreement this afternoon. Oh, and Jane, what did you want to see me about?

THACKERAY – Er, it's not important.

GEORGE – Go on. You can tell Uncle George.

THACKERAY – You won't breathe a word to JB?

GEORGE – Promise. Cross my heart and hope to die.

THACKERAY – Well, my boyfriend, he's in the Foreign Office, you know, and he was offered this posting to the Embassy in Akustan, so I was going to ask if there was any chance of a job in our office there. I would even have taken a cut in pay if needs be. Remember now, you promised, not a word to JB ...

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*First Performed 5/7/1999 at the Traverse Lizard Lounge by Rikki Callan (JB); Colin Brown (George); Elaine Ellis (Jane)*

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