

SMALL TALK

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CHARACTERS:

SHEILA – The owner of the hairdressing salon.

HECTOR – A young male hairdresser.

CATHY – A female customer, 38 years old.

SETTING: *A hairdressing salon.*

(Sheila shows Cathy to a chair and calls Hector over.)

SHEILA: Cathy, this is Hector. He'll be looking after you today.

CATHY: Hello, Hector.

HECTOR: Hi.

SHEILA: Cup of tea or coffee?

CATHY: No thanks, I'm fine.

SHEILA: I'll leave you to it, then.

(Sheila exits. Hector drapes a towel/cape around Sheila and grabs some scissors.)

HECTOR: So, how are we today?

CATHY: Fine thanks.

HECTOR: Just a trim?

CATHY: Yes, thanks.

(He runs his fingers through her hair as he speaks.)

HECTOR: How much would you like off?

CATHY: An inch all over, thanks.

HECTOR: Just get rid of those nasty split ends, will we?

CATHY: Yes and a tidy-up.

HECTOR: Keep the layers in?

CATHY: Yes please.

HECTOR: How would you like your fringe?

CATHY: Just the same, thanks.

HECTOR: No colour today?

CATHY: No colour.

HECTOR: Not covering up the greys?

CATHY: *(A little annoyed)* No colour, thanks.

HECTOR: Should I cut it wet or dry?

CATHY: They usually do it dry.

HECTOR: Oh, really?

CATHY: Whatever's easiest for you.

HECTOR: Either way.

CATHY: Dry will do.

HECTOR: Probably better wet.

CATHY: *(A little impatient)* Wet then.

HECTOR: So blow dry?

CATHY: I guess.

HECTOR: That's five dollars extra.

CATHY: For a blow dry!

HECTOR: Extra time and power.

CATHY: What are you using, nuclear energy?

(She laughs but Hector doesn't get the joke.)

HECTOR: No, just electricity.

CATHY: Just cut it dry, thanks.

HECTOR: Okay then, if you're happy with that.

(He snips in the air around her head for a while.)

HECTOR: So you been busy today?

CATHY: Just shopping.

HECTOR: Anything special?

CATHY: My daughter's birthday.

HECTOR: Oh really? How old is she going to be?

CATHY: Nineteen.

HECTOR: Wow, you must have been young when you had her.

CATHY: Well, thank you. I was, actually.

HECTOR: What are you now, about forty-five?

CATHY: *(Obviously insulted)* I'm thirty-eight.

HECTOR: So you were...sixteen.

CATHY: Nineteen.

HECTOR: No, I think it's sixteen.

CATHY: I think I should know when I had my daughter.

HECTOR: Thirty-eight minus nineteen is...*(he does some mental arithmetic)*...oh, sorry...

CATHY: *(Laughing politely)* That's okay.

HECTOR: So you were eighteen.

CATHY: Nineteen! I was nineteen when I had my daughter, now she's nineteen and I'm thirty-eight.

HECTOR: *(Doubtful)* Okay...if you say so.

(He continues to cut for a while in silence.)

So were you married?

CATHY: Excuse me?

HECTOR: Were you married when you had your kid?

CATHY: Isn't that a rather personal question?

HECTOR: Oh, sorry. I was just trying to make conversation. The boss likes it when we do that.

CATHY: Conversation is okay, but I think she means small talk.

HECTOR: Oh right...so I should talk softer?

CATHY: No...small talk. Talking about the weather, how busy you've been...that sort of thing.

HECTOR: Oh, I get it.

(Pause)

Sorry.

CATHY: That's okay.

(Pause)

Have you been busy today?

HECTOR: Yeah, pretty busy.

CATHY: You're new here, aren't you?

HECTOR: Yeah, started last week.

CATHY: Enjoying it?

HECTOR: So far.

(Pause)

So you weren't married, then?

CATHY: *(Angrily)* I told you that conversation wasn't appropriate!

HECTOR: Yeah, but it's more interesting than small talk.

CATHY: Then don't say anything.

HECTOR: *(On the verge of hysteria)* But my boss will think I'm not doing my job...you don't know what she's like. She'll sack me and I'll be out of work again!

CATHY: Okay, okay, I was married when I had my daughter. Can we drop it now?

HECTOR: Well, why didn't you just say that?

CATHY: Because it's none of your business!

HECTOR: I thought you must have had a bastard, the way you were carrying on.

CATHY: Okay, that's it.

(She starts to stand up.)

HECTOR: No, no, please don't go. I can't afford to lose this job. Please...I didn't mean it, really. I'm sorry, please...!

(She sits down reluctantly.)

CATHY: All right, but no more questions.

HECTOR: Okay, okay. No questions.

(Long pause.)

Could I just try some small talk? Just to please the boss?

CATHY: Do we have to?

HECTOR: She's watching.

CATHY: Fine. Small talk.

(He thinks for a while.)

HECTOR: Is it getting warm outside?

CATHY: Yes, it is. A bit windy too.

HECTOR: Have you finished your shopping?

CATHY: Yes, I'll be heading home after this.

HECTOR: What did you get your daughter for her birthday? Sorry...is that too personal?

CATHY: No, that's okay. I bought her a bracelet and some perfume.

HECTOR: Oh, nice. What's her name?

CATHY: Lisa.

HECTOR: Is she having a party?

CATHY: She is, as a matter of fact. Just a few friends at home.

HECTOR: She lives with you?

CATHY: Yes, she does.

HECTOR: Is she still studying?

CATHY: She's at Uni.

HECTOR: What course?

CATHY: Science.

HECTOR: What major?

CATHY: Psychology.

HECTOR: And what does she want to be?

CATHY: A psychologist, probably.

HECTOR: Ahh...cool. Does she have a boyfriend?

CATHY: Ah...yes.

HECTOR: What's his name?

CATHY: His name?

HECTOR: Yeah.

CATHY: Brett.

HECTOR: Brett...nice name.

CATHY: Yes, he's a nice boy.

HECTOR: Bit of a spunk?

CATHY: Very good looking, yes.

HECTOR: So Lisa's the same age as you when she was born.

CATHY: That's right.

HECTOR: Better watch her then.

CATHY: Pardon?

HECTOR: Her and spunky Brett. Y'know, young love and all that.

CATHY: I think she's more sensible than I was.

HECTOR: So you regret having your baby?

CATHY: I didn't say that. Of course not/...

HECTOR: But she was an accident.

CATHY: She was not an accident! Lisa intends having a career, that's all.

HECTOR: Yeah, you probably said that too, huh.

CATHY: It was different for me.

HECTOR: Really?

CATHY: Times were different. I had different priorities.

HECTOR: And you weren't on the pill, like her.

CATHY: Well, I/...

HECTOR: Or maybe Brett uses condoms. If it's not on, it's not on, right?

CATHY: I wouldn't know/...

HECTOR: Yeah, kids are sneaky like that. They think their parents don't know they're going at it like dogs on heat in the car outside your house/...

CATHY: What happened to our small talk, Hector?

HECTOR: Oh...sorry. Wasn't that small enough?

CATHY: Hardly.

HECTOR: Sorry...

CATHY: I think we should stop talking about my family now.

HECTOR: Okay...

(Pause)

Can I talk about me?

CATHY: Of course.

HECTOR: I used to go out with a Brett once.

CATHY: Oh, really?

HECTOR: He was a real hunk. Buns of steel and hung like a horse. He could pick up a ping pong ball with his/...

CATHY: Hector!

HECTOR: Yeah? Oh...sorry.

(Pause)

I don't see him anymore. Some cow stole him away from me.

CATHY: Sorry to hear that.

HECTOR: That's okay. I'm over it.

CATHY: That's the way. Plenty more fish in the sea.

HECTOR: Yeah, but I was angry for a while. Used to stalk him all the time, steal his mail, key his car, that sort of thing. Then I realised he wasn't to blame. It was that bitch that stole him away – she was the one I should be targeting.

CATHY: *(A little nervous)* Have we nearly finished? It's just...I have to get home.

HECTOR: To Lisa's birthday party?

CATHY: I have a cake to ice and finger food to prepare...

HECTOR: Gifts to wrap, drinks to put on ice...

CATHY: That's right.

HECTOR: She'd be really excited by now, I bet.

CATHY: She's looking forward to it.

HECTOR: She's lucky to have a mother like you.

CATHY: Well...thank you.

HECTOR: I used to have a mother like you.

CATHY: Oh?

HECTOR: She died.

CATHY: Oh, I'm sorry to hear that.

HECTOR: She ate rat poison.

CATHY: Dear God!

HECTOR: She didn't mean to, of course.

CATHY: Of course not.

HECTOR: Just a terrible accident.

CATHY: Terrible!

HECTOR: Yeah

(Pause)

How was I to know she'd come home and start pigging out on the pie I'd made for Brett?

CATHY: I'm afraid I have to go...

(She tries to rise but is stopped by Hector.)

HECTOR: My father blamed me, of course. So when they put me away I never saw him again. I heard he died from alcohol poisoning – probably never got over my mother's accident - but he'd cut me out of the will so I didn't see a penny. I was a destitute orphan all because of Brett's little whore. So you know what I did?

CATHY: *(Almost too scared to ask)* What did you do?

HECTOR: I escaped.

CATHY: Sounds like a brilliant idea...if I could just pay now, you don't have to finish –I can take it from here.

HECTOR: I escaped and I became an apprentice hairdresser.

CATHY: How enterprising of you, now I really must/...

HECTOR: And the salon I chose to work at was the one I knew that bitch's mother came to every single week. I figured if I'm an orphan then she should be too!

(He waves the scissors menacingly. Cathy screams and runs from the salon. Sheila enters.)

SHEILA: What in God's name is going on?

HECTOR: That lady just left without paying...

SHEILA: It's okay, she's a regular...always pays with credit card. We'll be able to track her down.

HECTOR: Seems a bit psycho to me – maybe we should contact the police.

SHEILA: What did you say to set her off?

HECTOR: Nothing!

(He grins to himself and grabs a broom to sweep.)

Just making small talk.

(split) END