**Nice Work**

**Chapter2, part 2, pages 72-80**

In this part of the chapter Vic Wilcox, Managing Director of Pringle’s industrial company, finally decides to meet his unexpected shadow, “Doctor Robyn Penrose”, a lecturer in English Literature at Rummidge University. Indeed, he hadn’t expected his shadow to be a woman and this fact throws him into a state of both panic and deep anger: he’s going to meet a person who belongs to a completely different world from his (Robyn belongs to the other sex, she comes from the academic world, she doesn’t know anything about industry and she has got strong feminist beliefs) and he feels very uncomfortable in front of “the other”.

After having spied her through a spyhole on a painted glass panel (the narrator uses this narrative technique to give the reader a description of Robyn’s physical appearance from Vic Wilcox’s point of view), he asks emphatically to his marketing Brian Everthorpe to “Show the woman in!”. It’s interesting to notice Vic’s change of attitude when he speaks to Brian and Shirley, who are submitted to him; it seems as if he needed to show his superiority in front of the others because actually he is in panic, he doesn’t know how to manage the unexpected situation and he feels unprepared in front of a character like Robyn.

Brian Everthorpe shows Robyn the way to Vic’s office and introduces her as “Doctor Robyn Penrose” (which is in deep contrast with the way he approached her in the previous part of the chapter, where he called her “My love”). Robyn is somehow surprised by Vic’s physical appearance; the name “Manager Director” had suggested her “some figure more grand and gross, with plump, flushed cheeks and wings of silver hair, a rotund torso sheathed in expensively tailored suiting, a gold tiepin and cufflinks, and a cigar wedged between manicured fingers”. On the contrary, Vic is “smaller and more ordinary-looking that she had expected”, even though the strength of his handshake suggested Robyn not to underestimate him.

Brian Everthorpe leaves the office with a certain reluctance; this is underlined by what he tells Robyn: “See you later, I hope”. Then Vic takes Robyn’s coat, like a real gentleman, he offers her a coffee and invites her to have a seat. This apparent gentleness by Vic is in contrast with his strict words about the fact that Robyn arrived a week later and that because of her he had to cancel a meeting. During the first part of the dialogue Vic is surrounded by a cloud of smoke (he is smoking a cigarette), and this cloud seems to have the function to create a sort of barrier between Robyn a Vic, that represent the two worlds of academy and industry. It’s clear that Vic doesn’t feel comfortable and needs to overcome his fear by being strict with Robyn and by creating a physical barrier of smoke that doesn’t make eye-contact possible.

As a consequence of Vic’s rudeness, Robyn feels resented but, at the same time, she is aware that her conduct hasn’t been entirely blameless. Indeed, she decided not to come to the meeting at Pringle’s because, if she had done it, she would have broken the strike, being the “Shadow Scheme” a university project. So she “punched her head with her fist in self-reproach”, but she feels at the same time relieved to have an excuse to present to Vic. When she tells him the reason of her absence, Vic remembers where has seen her before and points his finger at her “like a gun”, judging what she did something unpleasant.

The following part of the text deals with Robyn and Vic’s discussion about the motives of the university strike. The problem is: who pays for university? Robyn asserts that if England spent less on defence, the country could reduce cuts but, on the other side, if Vic’s factory had to cancel all the defence contracts, the academic cuts would become the industrial ones. Robyn’s answer to Vic’s consideration is that factories could produce something else, something peaceful, even if she doesn’t know exactly what. This moment of tension is broken by the arrival of a secretary who brings the two coffees “in a pregnant silence, shooting curious, covert glances at each of them”. Then the verbal battle goes on; Vic asks Robyn against whom they were demonstrating, but the young English lecturer doesn’t know what to answer, saying that it was simply a demonstration. In a second moment the discussions goes on strikes in the industrial world.

This moment is followed by a discussion about English Literature and about what Robyn teaches at the university; Vic tells her that he hated “Julius Caesar” when he did it for the O-Level and expresses a sort of disdain for Robyn’s subject (“You give degrees for that?”), that is “The representation of women in literature, feminist critical theory”, considering it a “soft option”. Furthermore, he considers Feminist Critical Theory to be a subject for girls; this allows the reader to make up an idea about his strong traditionalism and close-mentality, a mentality that belongs to a world that today is still characterised by several stereotypes regarding, among other things, the relation between men and women. Indeed, he is surprised to hear that also boys are interested in study, and not “nancy boys” (as he defined them), but “Perfectly normal, decent, intelligent young men”. However, Vic is convinced that “There is no such thing as a free lunch” and keeps bringing all back to money. The essential question is “Who pays?” and the criteria of happiness doesn’t matter to him, in Vic’s opinion people should do something more useful than studying literature and feminist criticism. In this case, the struggle between the two characters somehow represents the struggle between the principles of utilitarianism (Vic) and those of the academic world (Robyn), which seem completely incompatible and give birth to a real clash between two very different points of view that don’t know anything about each other.

The situation ends up quite comically: Vic is to leave his office and Robyn is going to follow him, but, even if she is supposed to go with him everywhere, she can’t obviously follow Vic to the toilet. She blushes, feeling a bit embarrassed, and then she goes with Shirley, who is supposed to show her the way to the Ladies.