

Applicant (1961) by Harold Pinter

An office. LAMB, a young man, eager, cheerful, enthusiastic, is striding nervously, alone. The door opens. Miss PIFFS comes in. She is the essence of efficiency.

PIFFS. Ah, good morning.

LAMB. Oh, good morning, miss.

PIFFS. Are you Mr Lamb?

LAMB. That's right.

PIFFS *[studying a sheet of paper]*. Yes. You're applying for this vacant post, aren't you?

LAMB. I am actually, yes.

PIFFS. Are you a physicist?

LAMB. Oh yes, indeed. It's my whole life.

PIFFS *[slowly and indifferently]*. Good. Now our procedure is, that before we discuss the applicant's qualifications, we like to subject him to a little test to determine his psychological suitability. You've no objection?

LAMB. Oh, good heavens, no.

PIFFS. Jolly good.

[MISS PIFFS has taken some objects out of a drawer and goes to LAMB. She places a chair for him.]

PIFFS. Please sit down. *[He sits.]* Can I fit these to your palms?

LAMB *[pleasantly]*. What are they?

PIFFS. Electrodes.

LAMB. Oh yes, of course. Funny little things. *[She attaches them to his palms].*

PIFFS. Now the earphones. *[She attaches earphones to his head.]*

LAMB. I say how amusing.

PIFFS. Now I plug in. *[She plugs in to the wall.]*

LAMB *[a little nervously]*. Plug in, do you? Oh yes, of course. Yes you'd have to, wouldn't you?

[MISS PIFFS perches on a right stool and looks down on LAMB.]

LAMB. This helps to determine my ...my suitability does it?

PIFFS. Unquestionably. Now relax. Just relax. Don't think about a thing.

LAMB. No.

PIFFS. Relax completely. Rela-a-a-x. Quite relaxed?

[LAMB nods. Miss PIFFS presses a button on the side of her stool. A piercing high pitched buzz-hum is heard. LAMB jolts rigid. His hands go to his earphones. He is propelled from the chair. He tries to crawl under the chair. MISS PIFFS watches, impassive. The noise stops. LAMB peeps out from under the chair; crawl out, stands, twitches, emits a short chuckle and collapses in the chair.]

PIFFS. Would you say you were an excitable person?

LAMB. Not- not unduly, no. Of course, I –

PIFFS. Would you say you were a moody person?

LAMB. Moody? No, I wouldn't say I was moody -well, sometimes occasionally I –

PIFFS. Do you ever get fits of depression?

LAMB. Well, I wouldn't call them depression exactly.

PIFFS. Do you often do things you regret in the morning?

LAMB. Regret? Things I regret? Well, it depends what you mean by often, really -I mean when you say often...

PIFFS. Are you often puzzled by women?

LAMB. Women?

PIFFS. Men.

LAMB. Men? Well, I was just going to answer the question about women –

PIFFS. Do you often feel puzzled?

LAMB. Puzzled?

PIFFS. By women.

LAMB. Women?

PIFFS. Men.

LAMB. Oh, now just a minute, I... Look, do you want separate answers or a joint answer?

PIFFS. After your day's work do you ever feel tired? Edgy? Fretty? Irritable? At a loose end? Morose? Frustrated? Morbid?

Unable to concentrate? Unable to sleep? Unable to eat? [...] *[Pause]*.

LAMB *[thinking]*. Well, it's difficult to say really...

PIFFS. Are you a good mixer?

LAMB. Well, you've touched on quite an interesting point there –

PIFFS. Do you suffer from eczema¹, listlessness, or falling coat?

LAMB. Er...

PIFFS. Are you virgo intacta²?

LAMB. I beg your pardon?

PIFFS. Are you virgo intacta?

LAMB. Oh, I say, that's rather embarrassing. I mean -in front of a lady –

PIFFS. Are you virgo intacta?

LAMB. Yes, I am actually. I'll make no secret of it.

PIFFS. Have you always been virgo intacta?

LAMB. Oh yes, always. Always.

PIFFS. From the word go?

LAMB. Go? Oh, yes, from the word go.

PIFFS. Do women frighten you?

[She presses a button on the other side of her stool. The stage is plunged into redness, which flashes on and off in time with her questions.]

PIFFS *[building]*. Their clothes? Their shoes? Their voices? Their laughter? *[pause]* Their knees? Their eyes? Their *[Drumbeat]* Their *[Drumbeat.]* Their *[Cymbal bang]* Their *[Trombone chord]* Their *[Bass note]*

LAMB *[in a high voice]*. Well it depends what you mean really –

[The light still flashes. She presses the other button and the piercing buzz-hum is heard again. LAMB'S hands go to his earphones. He is propelled from the chair, falls, rolls, crawls, totters and collapses. Silence. He lies face upwards. Miss PIFFS looks at him then walks to LAMB and bends over him.]

PIFFS. Thank you very much, Mr. Lamb. We'll let you know.

1: **eczema**: a skin rash disorder

2: **virgo intacta**: a virgin