

An office in the solicitors firm of “REAMS & RAMSBOTTOM” in London. MISS PERKINS, a rather highly-strung secretary, sits at a desk typing at a keyboard. Atop the desk are the usual items one might expect to find: a computer monitor, a telephone, various trays and stacks of paper, etc. Presently the telephone rings – a very loud ring – causing MISS PERKINS to almost jump out of her skin.

MISS PERKINS

(With great alarm.)

Arghh!

(She puts her hand to her chest for a moment in order to catch her breath and calm herself. Then, brightly.)

Good morning, Reams and Ramsbottom?...Oh, Shelley – Oh, thank ‘eavens it’s you...You what?...Nah, nah, I’m alright – ‘cept for ‘im, o’ course...No, not ‘im, ‘im – ‘is ribs – Mr. Reams...Yeah, just the same...I know ya did, Shell, an’ I tried that, but it don’t make no difference, does it? ‘E’s all over me...it’s all sex, sex, sex with ‘im...Well, no, not yet, but...well, it’s what ‘e says all the time, innit, and the way ‘e says it...Yeah, that’s right...exactly, Shell...I know, but what can I say? It’s not like ‘e’s done anythin’ – it’s just the way ‘e acts, ‘n...I dunno...Yeah, I s’pose you’re right...Yeah, I’m gonna tell ‘im today...I know, ‘n I will, but Gawd knows what ‘e’s gonna say – I’m the third in four months...I know, you’re right, I can’t, ‘onestly I can’t, Shell. I’m on tenter ‘ooks ‘ere, I am – tenter ‘ooks...Exactly, ‘n what with this phone goin’ off like a bloody fire alarm every five minutes, it’s a wonder I’ve not ‘ad a nervous breakdown...What?...There is no volume thing, I looked. An’ anyway – Ooh, look out, I think I can ‘ear ‘im...Alright, Shell, cheers then.

(She hangs up the telephone as MR. REAMS enters R.)

REAMS

Good morning, Miss Perkins. I do so hope that I haven’t just blundered in and cut short an important business call?

MISS PERKINS

(Without thinking.)

Oh no, Mr. Reams, it was just me frie-

REAMS

I’m sorry, my dear, just your what?

MISS PERKINS

(A little embarrassed.)

Well, it was just me friend Shelley. She was just ringin' to see if I was alright.

REAMS

Alright? Is something a matter, Miss Perkins?

MISS PERKINS

Yeah, well no...No, it's just that...Well, I've got a bit of a cough, see, and...well, she was worried.

REAMS

Oh yes, I do see. Shelley was quite right to call you. A bit of a cough, you say? Dear, oh dear, that *is* cause for concern. The female chest is, without question, a most fragile instrument, and should on no account be left unattended. Of course, ideally, it should be treated gently by the skilled hands of a seasoned professional, and, whilst I can't lay claim to any formalized certification, I can – as luck would have it – boast to having a substantial number of first aid classes under my belt. I would be only too happy, Miss Perkins – in the interests of public health – to give you a quick once over.

MISS PERKINS

No, I, I-

REAMS

Now, if you'd just like to slip off your top?

MISS PERKINS

No! No, thank you, Mr. Reams. That won't be necessary. I took some syrup earlier, before I came in. From what it said on the box I should be feeling as right as rain in no time. No time at all.

REAMS

(Moving closer to her.)

Irrespective, Miss Perkins, when it comes to the upper torso – especially that of the softer sex – one should never tempt fate. Perhaps it might help if I stroked your nipples?

MISS PERKINS

(Aghast.)

I beg your pardon, Mr. Reams?

REAMS

Hmm?...I said...perhaps it might help if I spoke to Nichols...Young Nichols in personnel? I'm sure he could arrange for you to have the afternoon off. Without financial compensation, of course, your length of tenure at R & R being what it is. But one's health must come first, Miss Perkins, and I will not have it said that I have neglected my own secretary's perky chest.

MISS PERKINS

What did you say?

REAMS

Err...peaky...peaky chest.

MISS PERKINS

You said perky.

REAMS

I believe I said peaky, Miss Perkins.

MISS PERKINS

You didn't - you said perky, not peaky.

REAMS

No, no, Miss Perkins, I said peaky.

MISS PERKINS

It sounded like perky.

REAMS

Miss Peakins, it was perky.

MISS PERKINS

What?

REAMS

I beg your pardon?

MISS PERKINS

I know you said perky.

REAMS

Are you sure, my dear?

MISS PERKINS

Positive.

REAMS

Good heavens, I do so apologize. A slip of the tongue, naturally. I'm afraid as the years advance, Miss Perkins, the rest of me sometimes has a little trouble keeping up. Not every part, of course. There are parts of me that can still keep it up for...well, for as long as circumstances require. The truth is, Miss Perkins, I remain a very potent force when it comes to the ins and outs of Reams and Ramsbottom, as I hope you will have the pleasure of discovering for yourself.