

MISSING PERSON (8 minutes; approx)

A Police Station. Two characters.

Classic Desk Sergeant, DS (laconic, dry)

Member of the Public, MP (a regular Joe)

The MP sheepishly enters and approaches the DS.

DS: Good morning, Sir, how can I help you?

MP: I'd like to report a missing person.

DS: Oh, I'm sorry to hear that. May I ask how long has this person been missing?

MP: Hard to say, exactly. About two years. (Thinks) No, come to think about it; more like three.

DS: Three years? How come you have not reported this earlier?

MP: Yes, absolutely. Should've. Hard to explain, but I suppose I just thought the problem would resolve itself, that they would return. But, they haven't, and well, after three years... I felt I had to report it. It would be remiss not to.

DS: Indeed. (He gets out a form). Always a form. I do apologise. Bane of our lives! Now, this missing person. Is this a family member, or a friend?

MP: Family.

DS: Very good, Sir. The name of the missing person, if you would...

MP: Bunden. Geoffrey Bunden.

DS: Age?

MP : 37

DS: Missing since?

MP: Hard to say exactly, but around ... late 2021.

DS: I see. Any known 'last address'?

MP: Oh yes, very much so. 6 Watermill Lane, Camberwell Park.

DS: Oh, so local?

MP: Yes, the park is a short walk from here.

DS: I know it well Sir. I realise this must be all very distressing, but I do need some further details. Could I take your name, Sir.

MP: Yes, of course. Bunden, Geoffrey Bunden.

DS: Thank you. (Pause, a realisation). That's the same name as the missing person. Are you related?

MP: Very much so.

DS: I see. In what way.

MP: I'm not sure I understand what you mean?

DS: Well, in what way are you related. To Mr Geoffrey Bunden.

MP: Well, by the same name.

DS: We do need to be clear, Sir. On this point. Forms, you know ... bane of my life. Is Mr Geoffrey Bunden a relation? Father ... child, cousin ... a nephew?

MP: Oh no, much closer than that.

DS: I see. Then In what way is this relative – related - to you?

MP: (Abashed) Well related to me, obviously, by being ... me.

(Pause)

DS: Sorry sir, I don't understand.

MP: What don't you understand?

DS: The missing person is a Mr Geoffrey Bunden?

MP: Yes. I thought I made that clear.

DS: And your name is Geoffrey Bunden.

MP: Yes.

DS: And he's a family member?

MP: Who?

DS: Geoffrey Bunden.

MP: Yes.

(It is all becoming very exasperating)

DS: I am trying to establish who ... is Geoffrey Bunden?!

MP: Well, me! I'm Geoffrey Bunden!

DS: You? You're Geoffrey Bunden.

MP: So ... who's missing?!

MP: Me! I'm missing..!

DS: *You* are missing. (Pause) *You* are the missing person?

MP: Yes. Me.

DS: How can you be the missing person?

MP: Well, I'm missing. I've been missed for some time. As I said, for about three years. (Pause). No one has contacted me, written, called. No one has even visited. And they all know where I live. It's as if I have fallen completely off the radar. It is very distressing and I felt a very natural urge to report this. Of course, I feel I should have come earlier and I realise my delay will make things much more difficult for you. I apologise for that.

DS: But you can't be missing. Can you. Because you're here.

MP: Well, that may be easy for you to say. And please don't think you're the first one to suggest that. Oh no, not by a long chalk. And to be fair, as I don't want to cause offence, for a long time I would have agreed with you. But over time, when your friends and colleagues allow you to disappear, your wife and even your two children for goodness' sake, allow you to disappear, without so much as a care in the world, well, you start realising something is amiss. Very amiss. Something is afoot! I can tell you, our once busy family home is now like – a library! Not only quiet - but with no visitors! No contact. From anyone. Whatsoever. It's like they have all completely vanished. Never existed. Like they were never there. Invisible, if you please!

DS: I hate to become too pedantic, technical even, upon this matter, Sir. As much as I wouldn't like to stick too firmly to the rule book, bane of my life, but wouldn't that make them ... missing. Not you.

MP: I can see where you're going with this. That they are the 'missing persons'.

DS: Yes Sir. Sort of.

MP: It's an easy mistake to make.

DS: Mine or yours, Sir?

MP: Yours, obviously.

DS: Well, yes. Perhaps so. But in my experience people don't go missing ... in such large numbers. Groups. Families. All of your friends. Can we agree on that?

MP: Yes, we can. And of course, you're right. They are not 'missing'. I see the children regularly. From a distance. Playing, in the park. Without a care in the world. I saw my wife, she attended her book club just last week. Across the road.

DS: (Curious) What was the book, Sir?

MP: That's not important. Most of my family, and my extended family, I see around town, you know, here and there. They walk straight past me – not so much as a nod or a wave. I could hardly report them as *missing*, could I!

DS: No, Sir. So, let's try and work this out shall we. Who, exactly ... is missing?

MP: Well, clearly; me. They *miss me* all the time.

DS: Mmm. I think I'm getting my head around this, slowly, Sir. In the fact that they don't visit you. They don't see you. They don't contact you. They don't speak to you. (Carefully...) Not even the kids.

MP: Exactly! They glide pass like I'm not even there. It's like I've become a complete stranger to them! The Invisible man. Mr Cellophane!

DS: Yes indeed. It all does sound rather peculiar. Unique, even. Distressing, naturally. However. I don't think, according to the forms, bane of my life, that you qualify as a *missing* person.

MP: Oh really, that's your *professional* opinion is it; as a Police Officer.

DS: Yes Sir.

MP: Well, if that doesn't make me a 'missing person'; what, in your *professional* opinion, as a 'Police Officer', does it make me?

DS: Well, difficult to say, Sir? (As if trying to make a joke) And way beyond my pay grade. (Joke falls flat, DS thinks...). Perhaps it makes you somebody who people are (treading carefully) um ... *avoiding*?

MP: I don't think you are going to find a form in your desk which is entitled *Avoided Persons*.

DS: No Sir. Equally, there is also no form for *Silly Person*. Or *Persons We No Longer Wish To See*. Or *Twat Persons*. Or, and though it would make it rather a long title which would even present a challenge just to fit upon the page; *Persons We Used To Like But Perhaps We don't Like These Persons Anymore And We Will Just Stay Very Clear From Them; From Now On*.

MP: Well, that's just ridiculous. And not the response I would have expected from the Duty Police Officer of such an established Police Station.

(Long pause).

But. If you did have such a form ... is that the one you would want to fill out. With me.

DS: I do feel that's a distinct possibility. Yes Sir.

MP: (Making exaggerated comma quotes) "*People We Used To Like*". "*Don't Anymore*". "*Silly*". "*Stay Clear Of*". "*Twat*"?

DS: Yes, Sir. Especially "*Twat*". Well, along those lines.

MP: And not ... *Missing*.

DS: No. It is complex, I appreciate. Perhaps, if we engage with the bigger picture here, and I just offer this up as an observation, nothing more, perhaps it is *you* who are *missing* them.

MP: Me. *Missing* them.

DS: Yes, Sir. And *they* ... not missing *you*.

MP: Oh. Food for thought.

DS: Yes, Sir.

(Pause)

MP: Do you have a form for that?

DS: No Sir.

MP: Gosh, I really don't know what to say. I rather feel I've been wasting your time.

DS: So do I, Sir. But we're here to help. No enquiry is too much trouble. Usually.

MP: Mmm. So, what do you think I should do next.

DS: Well. I'm a Police Officer. And (another joke...) not a *Psychotherapeutic Counsellor*. But I would perhaps suggest you find new friends, and a new ... family even. As all your current friends – and family – don't seem to want you anymore.

MP: Yes. I see. Very accurate.

(Pause)

Do you have a form for that?

DS: Well, I can only look, Sir... Bane of my life.

(He rumbles in his desk, arbitrarily, killing time, making it look good. He then startles himself by making a discovery. He pulls out a form).

Mmm... this is a new one for me...

(Reads form)

For Persons Who Have Been Continually Ignored By Their Family And Friends And Who Have Confused This Rather With Themselves As Being The "Missing Person" When In Fact They Are Not Missing At All - Or Missed - By Their Family Or Friends And Would Like To Start All Over Again And Hopefully Make A Better Job Of It This time. Titles, eh? Look, they've had a job even to fit those lines in on the page! Paperwork don't you love it. Bane of my life!

MP: Well, thanks. That's the from for me., all right. Can we fill out that one?

DS: I supposed so. So, Sir... name?

MP: Burdon. Geoffrey Burdon.

DS: Age ...

(Fade to black)