

Scene One

A cake-shop at midnight. A clock amongst the display strikes. An array of quality cakes are displayed in glass cases and glass shelves. The shelves are lit. There is also a shop counter with a door behind and a large glazed shop front with glass door. The cake-shop has aspirations to up-market retailing.

A very large figure is seen outside the shop front. The shape is shadowy and distorted by the light from the displays. The figure is very close to the glass, its forehead touching the surface. Breathe on the glass. The figure is looking into the shop. This image holds for a long time.

The figure jerks away from the window suddenly. Then seems to roll away to the end of the window and out of view as a second figure, McGregor, steps up to the door, rattles a large bunch of keys, opens the door and enters.

McGregor walks with a slightly drunken gait. He is moving furtively through the shop, trying to be quiet. His eye is caught by the cakes. He looks around at the stock. He picks up a cake with the tips of his fingers and places it with reverence on a flat palm. He lifts it to the audience, showing them. Smiles. He begins in a whisper.

McGregor

Cake. Would you look at it! Cake. A beautiful word; cake. Say it. To speak the word is to eat. Say it. It's alright, missus, the word has no calories. Our cake is a highly prized item. Would you have it off me? (He steps into the audience and giving the cake to a member of the audience....) Show me a flat palm. Display it with grace. Man's sweetest achievement. This man's achievement. Only. You mustn't eat it. Not until the end. And then, only if you still want to.

He continues his journey across the shop. As he exits behind the counter, to the audience....

Welcome, to the cakeshop.

The figure at the window rolls back into view. He crosses slowly to the door and tries the handle. It is open. He pushes the door open. He leans slightly over the threshold but does not enter.

Blackout.

Scene Two

The cake-shop. Morning. Kelly and Susan, the young cakeshop staff, are cleaning surfaces. Margaret, the manageress, is buzzing around the shop. Susan is making Kelly laugh by scrubbing very hard when Margaret is not looking. This earns Kelly hard looks. Margaret exits behind the counters.

Kelly Stop it, Susan.

Susan scrubs manically.

Kelly You'll get us in trouble.

Susan pulls contorted faces with the fake exertion.

Susan What's the matter, Kell? You know it must be clean. You saw that flea leave those great big shitty footprints. **(She stops.)**

Kelly You'll break the glass.

Susan You scared we'll get sacked?

Kelly It's a good placement.

Susan You scared you'll get sacked and not get to stuff your face all day.

Kelly I don't stuff me face.

Susan Cost you a weeks wages for a box of these cakes. No wonder they don't sell many.

Margaret returns. She is carrying a tray of prepared sheets of icing and equipment.

Margaret Ladies. Time for study.

Susan I'm sorry, Margaret. We're still cleaning.

Margaret Yes, and a lovely job you're making of it too. I shall be a little pressed today. **(Susan looks at Kelly with a smirk on 'pressed'. Kelly snorts. Margaret gives a sharp look but continues.)** a little pressed for time... Mr McGregor and I need to go over the accounts... so I would prefer if we could reschedule training to this morning **(Sharply.)** Now, in fact. You do have competencies to master. You have responsibilities to master. I have responsibilities to your future employers.. and your future customers. So. Clean hands. Clean cakes.

This is a routine pronouncement. At the words Susan and Kelly put down cleaning equipment and go to wash their

hands. Unseen by Margaret Susan continues to 'misbehave' as the two girls was up to their elbows at the sink.

Meanwhile Margaret puts out three boards on the counter. Her own, the demonstration set, in the middle. As she does so.....

Margaret Kelly. I have left meringues in the large oven. They need only eight minutes more. 12 noon. They are your responsibility.

The girls come to their own sets. Margaret begins with drama.

Margaret So, ladies. Today we shall attempt a new creation. **(She picks up a sheet of icing. It breaks.)** Damn. **(She picks up a second. It also breaks.)** Ambient temperature and humidity can cause flexibility issues which may hinder manipulation of the ice sheeting. Note it. **(Kelly does so.)**

Susan deftly takes a sheet of icing, twirls it with aplomb, places it correctly and attains the correct shape to complete the cake.

A quiet.

Margaret Did I ask you to begin? I haven't completed my demonstration! All the angles are wrong! **(It is perfect.)**

Susan I....

Margaret Do it again. When I've finished my demonstration! Now.

She picks up a sheet. It breaks. She looks at it wordlessly, blankly.

Quiet.

Taking up her tray.

Carry on girls.

Margaret exits.

Susan makes another cake, then she makes a cake on Kelly's tray. Both are perfect.

Margaret returns. Sprightly and authoritatively again. She sees but ignores the cakes.

Margaret Please write up today's demonstration by Thursday for inclusion in your portfolios. Boards away.

The girls put their trays beneath the counter.

Margaret **(Glancing at watch.)** I take it you have not yet completed the 'special' order.

Kelly No, miss, I mean, Margaret.
Margaret 'Miss' is acceptable, Kelly.
Kelly Yes, miss.
Susan We were about to do it before the 'demonstration.' The order's picked up at midday. Like clockwork. Clock strikes. Door opens. Very weird.
Margaret Efficient, Susan, efficient.
Susan I'm sure you're right.
Margaret Could we box the order. Now, ladies. No time like the present. You know the order.
Kelly I could do it with me eyes shut.
Margaret **(Too sharply)** Well don't, Kelly. Eyes open. You are dealing with our most valuable customer. And cakes which demand your utmost respect and attention.
Kelly Yes, Miss Margaret.

Margaret exits.

Susan 'Yes, Miss Margaret'
Kelly Shut up, Susan.
Susan Get a box.

Kelly makes up a white cake box.

Kelly Anyway, how do you know how to make them cakes.
Susan Nimble fingers, Kelly love, nimble fingers. It's a gift.

They move around the shop taking up cakes from a variety of displays to make up the order.

Susan Who eats all these, Kell? Every day? **(Smiles to herself.)** You know what? They don't eat them. I know. It's a sect. She's in it. 'Marilyn'. And what this sect does... everyday, at midnight, by animal-fat candles, they line all the cakes up.... On a shiney, steel bench.... And they.... They smash them, one at a time, with steel hammers. These kind o' cakes explode. In a puff of sugar... and sparks from the smash of steel on steel. It's like a powdery blacksmiths in there. Bang. And these ones, custard and cream ones, Kell... you know what she does?... Cos she's the high-priestess of the sect... she squirts the custard and cream out over the fat old men... and gets her pet mongrel dogs to lick it off! Well, she can't eat 'em all every day, can she?
Kelly I think she's a nurse in an old people's home.
Susan Maybe the order's a bequest from an old bid who croaked!
Kelly Could be.
Susan Never, does 'Marilyn' look like she spends all day up to her elbows in shitty bedpans?
Kelly She could.
Susan Never Kelly. You have a look at her. See if you can see it.

The box is full. Susan seals it.

Kelly Maybe she does eat them all herself.
Susan There's not an ounce on her.
Kelly She might take them home for her old dad who scoffs them all watching children's television.
Susan Prefer the sect, Kelly.

The clock on the display cabinet chimes twelve.

Kelly yelps, remembering the meringues, and exits behind the counter.

As second chime sounds the door opens and Veronica enters. She is heavily covered like an incognito film-star.

Marilyn. She is very beautiful.

Margaret steps into the back door-way and watches Veronica.

Off stage, a clatter of baking ware and Kelly screams in agony over and over again.

Veronica doesn't speak. She places cash on the counter.

Susan pushes the box of cakes towards her and slides the money away.

Veronica lifts the cakes and exits without a glance towards them.

A quiet.

Kelly runs on.

Kelly I'm sorry. I'm sorry. Burnt my fingers. Cakes're alright. Water. Cold water.

She runs to Susan. Who gets a wet cloth and tends to her fingers.

Margaret You stupid girl.
Susan She's burnt her fingers.
Margaret Presentation. Presentation. Presentation. You are the faces of this establishment. And what is our face saying today? It is saying 'slum girls' Out of town estate girls. It is saying un-aired, yeasty teenage bedrooms. It is saying dirty-nailed, empty-headed gawpiness. It is saying hysterical. I am on the brink of calling your college mentors.

Susan Margaret, could you get a bowl of cold water.

Margaret I heard everything. I saw you, Susan. As customer-friendly as a.... as a 'shitty bedpan'!

Kelly Please, Margaret. We're sorry. You're sorry, aren't you Susan?

Susan Her fingers tips are blistering.

Margaret Let me see. **(Looks briefly.)** It's nothing. Part of the training.

Susan Toughen the hands up.

Susan It's alright, Kelly.

Margaret Your fantasies abhor me. The lady is a customer. That's all you need to know. A customer... and god knows, we need customers. I am very disappointed. Again. Let me see your finger-nails. Both of you. **(A quiet. Kelly, then Susan, put their hands out.)** I have bought you both a new nail-brush. Please use it. **(A pause.)**

Margaret I mean now!

The girls exit.

Margaret looks around the shop. Adjusts a display. Glances around guiltily and steals a crumb from a cake.

She looks towards the window. She sees the greasy mark left by the stranger's head last night. She takes a piece of kitchen roll and attempts to clean it. It is on the outside. She goes outside, finds the spot and rubs it rigorously as the girls return to an empty shop. She continues to other spots on the window.

Susan has a small bowl of water and cotton wool.

Kelly They're all right.

Susan I know. Let me wash them. Where she can see.

Susan moves to the customer side of the counter and tends Kelly's fingers.

Margaret re-enters the shop, tutts at the scene and exits. A quiet.

Kelly Really. It's stopped hurting.

Susan continues. After a while....

Susan Did you do it on purpose? Just before you grabbed.. did you... did you know? **(Wait.)** Sometimes you do things just to see what will happen. Or you're on the edge of doing something... the very edge... something terrible. It flashes through your head. You don't know why you don't. **(Wait.)** About six, I think. Caravan holiday. Next to a beach. There's a concrete sea wall. I'm standing on the flat top of it. Pink, flowery wellies. I should like them. It's getting dark. The sea's at the wall. Rough. Boiling like a pan of milk just below me feet. Foam splashing up at me. I'm six. And I'm thinking...what happens now? Now. If I take another step. What happens? Where's mum? I hate these pink wellies. Salt in me mouth. What happens? Now. What happens?

Kelly **(Stopping her tending.)** I didn't, Susie. I was just flustered. Not thinking.

Susan There. **(Withdraws her hands.)**

Black.