

The scene is set in Room 201, East Block, on a Monday morning earlier this fall. As the overture is being played the Minister's Secretary, Miss Jones, comes on stage and busies herself dusting and arranging things on his desk while she awaits his arrival. As the overture fades away the Minister walks on stage and Miss Jones goes forward to meet him.

SCENE I

Miss Jones: Good morning, sir. Welcome on your first day in the office. *(Hands him cigarette on long black holder)*

Minister: Thank you. *(Looks around)*. Well this is nice. *(Adds confidentially)*. By the way Miss Jones, can you tell me what I'm supposed to do?

Miss Jones: - *(Shocked)* Oh no sir. One of the fundamental rules of the Department is that you should never play the ball in your own court when it's in someone else's court.

Minister: Oh, I see. Well, I suppose I shall have to play everything by ear, then. I am sure that this Department would never approve of that principle. So what I said had better remain between these four walls.

Miss Jones: Why, you've got the hang of the language already, sir. And don't you worry about those files, everyone here plays it by ear.

(Telephone rings and the Minister goes to his desk to answer it).

Minister: Hello, Oh is that you Mike? How are you? Good. Yes I'm just fine thanks. What can I do for you? You say you think you left your rubbers in the desk? Just a moment and I'll look. Oh yes here they are. No, no, don't you bother, I'll get my secretary to take them over. Or if she's busy I'll get the Under-Secretary to do it. Right. So long Mike.

Miss Jones, would you have someone take these over to the Centre Block. *(As she starts out he calls her back and says)*. You had better take this bow tie along as well. We won't be needing it any more.

SCENE II

(The Under-Secretary enters unannounced).

Under-Secretary: Good morning, my Lord, Je suis de votre Excellence le très humble et très obéissant serviteur.

Minister: Good morning. May I know who you are? My private secretary, I suppose?

Under-Secretary: No, my Lord: your UNDER-Secretary.

Minister: OH! How do you do?

Under-Secretary: Oh! I do pretty well, sir. And you, sir?

Minister: The very same way as you do, I believe...

Under-Secretary: Well, sir, I am sorry to bother you with such an important matter on your first day in the office, but before my Assistants pop in you may wish to consider this urgent memorandum. As you may know, a quite influential group of taxpayers' disinterested friends would be very grateful if we could save a few pennies more...

Minister: *(nodding)* mm..mm.. I believe I know whom you are referring to...

Under-Secretary: Well, sir, the Paper-Clip sub-committee of the Fight-Waste-and-Unessential-Expenditures committee reports here that out of 100,000 paper clips distributed in our Department since the 1st of January, only 65,002 are still in circulation. That means, sir, that the remaining has been lost or borrowed.

Minister: Shocking!

Under-Secretary: To cope with such a frightful and shameful waste, sir, E. & O. and S. & P. suggest here that every stenographer, secretary and officer in this Department be obliged to sign a form for every clip they take, and fill another form each month explaining the disappearance of every vanished clip...