

Sub Contract

A One Act Play

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Bob Davidson

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Sub Contract - Bob Davidson

Cast

Dougie - self employed joiner.

Jessie - Dougie's wife and secretary.

Cooper - man from the government.

Running time 25 minutes.

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The set is simple. A table/work desk is centre stage. It has a typewriter and a stack of in-trays, out-trays etc, a phone and piles of untidy and chaotic paperwork. It is Dougie and Jessie's office, from where they run their ailing joinery business. Dougie is the joiner, Jessie is supposed to do the books, invoices etc, look after the office and answer the phone. Upstage centre is the exit to Dougie's workshop. Stage left there is an exit to their house and stage right there is an exit to the outside world. There is a sound of electric woodworking tools and when the curtains open Jessie is seated at the desk, varnishing her nails. There is a couple of thumps from a hammer offstage and Dougie enters from the workshop. He is quite excited and is carrying something behind his back...

DOUGIE

Right, dae a trumpet, dae a trumpet...

JESSIE looks up, purses her lips together and fakes a trumpet fanfare... with a flourish DOUGIE produces a cartoon style moose head made from MDF from behind his back...

JESSIE

Aye very good... what is it?

DOUGIE

What d'ye mean what is it? Is it no' obvious? It's a moose heid.

JESSIE

It's awfy big...

DOUGIE

Canadian, moose heid...

JESSIE

Oh aye, them. It's awfy flat is it no'? Two dimensional?

DOUGIE

Cartoonesque I would say. It's friendly, unthreatening, dissnae ask too many questions, beautifully designed by masel' and skilfully hand crafted by my own two fair hands out of six millimetre medium density fibreboard better kent by its generic title, MDF.

JESSIE

... what d'ye mean dissnae ask too many questions? What questions does a moose ask.

DOUGIE

Well, tae me, a real moose heid asks a lot of questions. A hell o' a lot of questions. Like how did that heid come to be there? What happened tae the rest o' the moose? Why would anybody, one, want tae kill such a braw beast, two, then cut it's heid off? and finally three, stick it up on their wa'? Whereas the Dougie designed, some would say two dimensional, I would prefer to say cartoonesque, MDF moose heid, asks none of those questions. It's modern, fun, clean and ye can hing yer bunnet on it's antlers...

JESSIE

Uh huh... and how much did it cost tae make?

DOUGIE

... about a fiver?

JESSIE

How much dae ye think ye could sell it fur?

DOUGIE

... about a fiver?

JESSIE

Well Dougie, I jist dinnae see how that is going tae make us rich... bonnie though it is. Folk are jist no needing MDF moose heids, cartoonesque or otherwise.

DOUGIE

No' even at Christmas? I thocht I could knock a few o' them up...

JESSIE

What? The traditional Christmas moose? What are ye talking about man?

DOUGIE

What's thae big things?

JESSIE

Reindeer are ye meaning?

DOUGIE

Aye...

JESSIE

Well I suppose ye could ay gi'e it's nose a splodge o' red paint.

DOUGIE

Well at least I'm no' jist sitting here gi'eing ma nails a splodge o' varnish...

JESSIE

Dinnae you be yaising that tone o' voice wae me, Dougie MacDonald. I've bugger all tae dae. If you dinnae work, I dinnae work it's as simple as that.

DOUGIE

I made a moose heid...

JESSIE

I mean real work. When did ye last dae any real work? When did ye last pit a kitchen in for onybody? Or box in a bath, or pit up a shelf even...?

DOUGIE

Aye, I suppose... no' for ages. Thing is Jessie, folk dinnae need joiners like they used tae. No us independent lads anyway. Ken who I blame? Ikea. Noo a'body thinks they're a jiner just cos they can put some Ikea flat pack the gither... Here, maybe I could make flat pack self assembly moose heids?

JESSIE

Forget the moose hieds, Dougie. The moose heid idea is a bummer. It's deid in the water... I like yer prototype, it's fine, ye can pit it up in the bathroom, if ye can mind how tae dae it, I can hing ma dressing gown on it, but as a far as a runaway commercial success jist waiting tae happen, it's a no, no... and besides, it's flat a'ready...

DOUGIE

... two dimensional.

JESSIE

Cartoonesque... Now if we were tae set up a facility in China, churn them oot at tuppence a throw and still sell them fur a fiver...

DOUGIE

... aye, we'd make about twenty quid... You're right, naebody wants an MDF moose heid. I was bored...

JESSIE

... I ken how ye feel. If a varnish ma nails ony mair I'll no' get ma gloves on. But what can ye dae? Folk are no' needin' moose heids. They're no' needin' anything. A'body's got a'thing they need and plenty o' stuff they dinnae need. Folk have either got enough money for a new kitchen every twa years fae the big lads or they huvnae enough to mak a pot o' soup. It's an ill divided world and nane o' it is coming oor way...

The phone rings... DOUGIE and JESSIE stare at each other.

DOUGIE

That's the phone, Jess, look...

JESSIE

I'm looking... God, I'd forgot what it sooned like...

DOUGIE

Ur ye gonnae answer it?

JESSIE

What dae ye think?

DOUGIE

Well... It might be a job eh?

JESSIE

A real job?

DOUGIE

Aye... maybe. What dae ye think...

JESSIE

You get it...

DOUGIE

What? I dinnae dae the phone stuff. I'm a joiner. I jine bits o wid the gither... you're the receptionist...

JESSIE

Receptionist?

DOUGIE

Well, among other things...

The phone stops ringing...

JESSIE

Aw...

DOUGIE

Damn...

JESSIE

Wonder who it was eh?

DOUGIE

Aye...

JESSIE

Aye... maybe we should have answered it.

DOUGIE

Maybe, Jessie, maybe... If it rings again...

It rings again...

Aaagh! Get it Jess...

She rummages in amongst the papers on the desk, finds the phone waits a second then grabs the receiver...

JESSIE

MacDonald's Independent Joinery, Jessie speaking, how may I help you? Mr Cooper.... aye... The government?

DOUGIE

Oh my god, Jessie, it'll be the revenue...

JESSIE

Wheesht... eh, no' you Mr Cooper I was speaking tae ma husband... if it's about our books, the reason fur the delay is that a dog ate a big bunch o' receipts... oh it's not about the books... different department, I see... huh huh... huh huh... well I'm quite happy to discuss anything the now on

the phone if you like... well we're equal partners, me and ma husband...

DOUGIE

...since when?

JESSIE

Will ye shut up... no, no' you Mr Cooper... oh I see, you'd like tae speak tae us both... I could maybe pit you on speaker phone, if I can mind how tae work it... Ye-es of course ye can visit, ye'll just hae tae take us as ye find us, we've nae airs and graces and we're a bit remote fae you government types...

DOUGIE

... ask what government...

JESSIE

Eh?

DOUGIE

Ask him what government? Nicola's or Theresa's

JESSIE

... eh, who is it ye actually work fur, Mr Cooper?... aye but whit government? Oh, her majesty's... HMG...

DOUGIE

...OMG.

JESSIE

... this efternin'll dae fine... two o'clock, if that suits you, fair enough, we're no' exactly snawed under... righto, now dae ye need directions... oh ye've a satnav huv ye, aye bit I dinnae think it'll ken whaur we are, we're a wee bit on the road tae naewhere... oh ye've already programmed us in, very good. Right ye are then... Bye the noo, Mr Cooper... aye looking forward tae meeting you tae.

DOUGIE

What the hell did ye invite him here fur?

JESSIE

I didnae invite him anywhaur, he invited himsel'

DOUGIE

We ken nothin' aboot that man. He could be the biggest gangster or swindler goin'...

JESSIE

Well, aye, he did say he worked for the government...

DOUGIE

What's he wanting?

JESSIE

Didnae say... wouldnae discuss it. Wanted tae see us baith the gither in person. He sounded a'right, no posh nor nothin'...

DOUGIE

What does he want wae us, Jessie? Jist what does Her Majesty's Government want wae MacDonald's Independent Joinery? I dinnae like it, I dinnae like it at a'...

JESSIE

Och, you dinnae like anything... when wis the last time you liked something?

DOUGIE

I cannae mind...

The lights fade... When they fade up again DOUGIE is pacing about nervously JESSIE is putting on some lipstick...

JESSIE

Will ye stop pacing about. You're making me nervous...

DOUGIE

He said he'd been here at two o'clock...

JESSIE

Well, it isnae two o'clock yet, it's only five to...

DOUGIE

I thocht he'd be early... if it was me, A'd be early...

JESSIE

Och aye,, but you're ay early. Oor one and only ever foreign holiday and we were at Edinburgh airport that early in the morning, it wisnae even open... hud tae get the cleaner tae open up and let us in...

DOUGIE

I was just following the recommended check-in advice...

JESSIE

What an embarrassment... then we missed the plane anyway cos you were locked in the lavvie...

DOUGIE

It was defective lock...

JESSIE

...wisnae the lock that was defective. Then there was a two hour stand-off wae armed Police and efter they realised they were dealing with an idiot, they called oot?... A joiner... Oh, dae ye think I should hide the SNP pen?

DOUGIE

Aye, ye'd better till we see what the lie o' the land is... see what the blighter wants. Better hide a' oor pens just in

case... He's here, he's here... I heard a car on the gravel.
Let me dae all the talking Jess...

JESSIE

I'll dae a' the talking...

DOUGIE

You dae a' the talking, Jess...

JESSIE

Well we can maybe dae a wee bit each... just relax, it'll be fine.

There is a knock at the door...

Let me dae the talking, till ye get comfy... relax...

JESSIE exits stage right and returns almost immediately with COOPER.

...this is ma husband, Dougie...

DOUGIE

(dropping to his knees)

I'm due twenty one thousand pounds in tax. It 's fae a few years ago A built twa timber framed hooses at the head o' the loch... A did the kitchens and a'thing, it's just that we were hard up eh? and it's no' easy making a living noo a days specially awa up here and I wis gonnae pay it honest A wis but wan thing led tae anither an' afore A kent it was a' gone A mean A've got overheids and there's food and electric tae buy and diesel for the Transit and Jess here husnae hud a new dress for aboot fifty year and A'll pay it back, honest A will... A've no' got the money on me the now, obviously but A will pay it back... wid ye dae a deal for cash?

There is a stunned silence...

JESSIE

Would you like a cup of tea, Mr Cooper?

COOPER

Mmm, that would be lovely, Mrs MacDonald.

JESSIE

Och, ca' me Jessie...

She exits stage left skelping DOUGIE on the head as she passes...

COOPER

It's a complicated old thing the UK tax system, Mr MacDonald. What with tax avoidance, tax evasion, creative accounting, off-shore tax havens, it's a minefield. I wouldn't worry about it if I were you. You're not exactly Amazon or Google are you? Twenty One thousand? A drop in the ocean. I myself have a rather creative accountant, tells more tales than Hans Christian Andersen, saved me a lot more than twenty one thousand over the years, I can tell you. No, take it from me, nobody's going to chase you for that.

COOPER smiles re-assuringly and DOUGIE faints just as JESSIE returns with COOPER's tea...

Oh, gosh... Mrs MacDonald! I think we might need a glass of water...

JESSIE

No, no... I'll sort it, Mr Cooper, there's your tea...

She gives DOUGIE a sly kick and he comes round...

DOUGIE

Oh... A feel strangely liberated...

JESSIE

I'll liberate ye, you big idiot, get up, sit doon and shut up...
Excuse ma husband, Mr Cooper, we dinnae get many
visitors.

COOPER

Mmm, that tea is lovely, Mrs MacDonald, just what I was
needing. I see what you mean about the road to no-where.
This type of place always looks nearer when you look at a
map, but your location is perfect for what I'd like to
discuss.

JESSIE

And just what is it you'd like to discuss with us, Mr
Cooper? Must be awfy important if you couldnae talk
about it on the phone eh?

COOPER

Well, telephones have never been the most secure of
things, Mrs MacDonald. One can never trust them,
especially nowadays when every journalist in the land can
hack into any phone in the land or at least knows someone
who can. Before we start though, I just need a little
signature from each of you on this form...

DOUGIE

(slightly slurred)

A'm no' signing anything, till A see ma solicitor...

COOPER

Is he concussed?

JESSIE

He will be in a minute... sign the form, Dougie...

*She puts the pen in his hand and guides him while he
signs. She then signs the form...*

Oh, an "I'm with Nicola" pen...

COOPER

(examining the form)

Ye-es... it was a freebee, came through the door... That's fine. Now, having signed this form, you agree to keep everything that we discuss here to yourselves. It must be kept absolutely secret, do you understand? I'm sure you'll comply, but it is my duty to inform you that very robust measures would be taken if you were to share any of the information I'm about to tell you with anyone, and I mean, anyone. You must only discuss it between yourselves and only in the privacy of this house, not in public. Do I make myself absolutely clear?

JESSIE

Yes, Mr Cooper...

COOPER

Mr MacDonald?

DOUGIE

(a bit more with it)

Aye... no' a word tae anybody.

COOPER

Good.

JESSIE

Have we just signed the official secrets act?

COOPER

Eh... no, not quite, but something similar... but you can still go to jail for a long time if you fail to comply, but I'm sure it won't come to that. I like the look of you both. I checked out your on-line presence and I liked what I saw...

JESSIE

Oor on-line presence? I didnae ken we hud one.

COOPER

You don't, and that's what I liked about you. No website...

JESSIE

... we prefer leaflets. And we got some business cards done in a machine in Inverness railway station... a hundred cards for just three pounds.

COOPER

Mmm... good value. No Facebook, no twitter, snapchat, instagram, you don't even have an email address, is that right?

JESSIE

Eh... no... no' yet. but we are in the yellow pages...

DOUGIE

...and we've a card up in the Spar.

COOPER

Excellent. Okay... Now, have you heard of such a thing as Trident II?

DOUGIE

Is that no' the missiles? Aye, the missiles... and the sooner they're off Scottish soil the better.

COOPER

Couldn't agree more old chap. Couldn't agree more... Trident II is the UK's submarine launched nuclear deterrent. It replaced Polaris a few years back. The UK deploys 16 missiles on each of four Vanguard class submarines, based here in Scotland, at Faslane. Each of these missiles has a range of about seven and a half thousand miles, pretty good eh? and is accurate to within a

few feet... and that's something which has about the same power as eight Hiroshimas. Each missile can carry up to a dozen nuclear warheads, but we generally only carry forty eight in each sub. So we're just shy of a couple of hundred of these things... Anyway a missile gets fired from the sub, goes up into space...

JESSIE

Space?

COOPER

Yea, space... amazing eh? And when it's in space it checks its position from the stars and heads off towards the target, where ever that happens to be. Within two minutes from launch this thing is travelling at six thousand metres... a second. Can you imagine that? Six thousand metres, what's that... about four miles every second! Now that is pretty damned quick, you have to admit? Once it reaches the rough target area, it checks it's position from the stars again, just to be on the safe side, can't be too careful, and then all the wee nuclear warheads are released over their individual targets and it's goodnight Vienna.

DOUGIE

That is sick...

COOPER

I would tend to agree... but technologically speaking, it is quite clever... but, yea you're right, it's immoral.

JESSIE

What is all this to do with us Mr Cooper?

COOPER

I was just coming to that. We've now got two problems, Jessie and Dougie MacDonald, and these are... One, Trident II is reaching the end of its useful life, if indeed its life was ever useful. and Two... the cost of the replacement,

which is bloody expensive, if you'll pardon my French. Current estimates are sitting at one hundred billion pounds, and that is a lot of money. Do you know the difference between a million and a billion?

They shake their heads...

No? Oh, I love telling people this... Well, a million seconds is about eleven days... and billion seconds is?... thirty three years. So, one hundred billion pounds is quite a lot of cash. And of course these estimates usually have a habit of doubling, or trebling as the years go by and all for something some would argue we don't need and a lot more would agree that we'll never use.

COOPER moves over to DOUGIE's side and puts his arm around his shoulder...

So... Dougie... do you think you'd manage to build me a submarine out of MDF?

DOUGIE

Eh?

COOPER

Well, when I say me, I mean her majesty's government?

DOUGIE

Are you havin' me on like?

COOPER

No. No... never been more serious.

DOUGIE

A submarine?

COOPER

Well, four altogether...

DOUGIE

Four? Oot o' MDF? Four submarines oot o' MDF?

JESSIE

Aye, I think you've got it, Dougie.

COOPER

Mmm... that's the idea.

DOUGIE

You want me tae build four submarines oot o' MDF? Away ye go man...

COOPER

I don't see your problem...

DOUGIE

Is this some sort o' joke?

COOPER

We would pay you...

JESSIE

He'll do it...

DOUGIE

Noo, jist haud on, Jessie... jist haud on. I'm no' doing it, and that's final.

JESSIE

Dougie, he said he'd pay us...

DOUGIE

A'm no' caring... A've got ma reputation as a joiner tae think o'.

COOPER

Your reputation would be safe with us, Dougie.

DOUGIE

A'm no' doing it...

COOPER

In what way do you think your reputation would be compromised?

DOUGIE

Because it cannae be done...

COOPER

Oh, I'm sure it could.

DOUGIE

Ye cannae, build a submarine oot o' MDF.

COOPER

Why ever not?

DOUGIE

Cos it would sink!

COOPER

Huh huh... So?

DOUGIE

MDF isnae waterproof... the water would seep in, no matter how many coats o' varnish ye gave it, the water would soak through... and down it would go...

COOPER

Sounds good to me.

DOUGIE

Eh? Are you mad?

COOPER

Very probably, Dougie... listen, all we need is something which looks like a new submarine, we tow it out the Clyde,

with the Queen waving it off and the band of the Royal Marines playing "Don't Cry For Me Argentina" or something and... it sinks, or to use another word, submerges. To all intents and purposes, to the cheering, Union Jack waving crowds and assembled media, away on its patrol of the murky depths representing Britannia at the worlds top table of nuclear states...

JESSIE

But in actual fact it's turning to mush just below the surface and getting washed out tae sea?

COOPER

Exactly, Jessie. I like your thinking. What do you think, Dougie?

DOUGIE

It would take a hell o' a MDF... A've only got a Transit pick-up...

COOPER

Could you maybe build it in sections?

DOUGIE

Aye... aye... that would be the way tae do it right enough...

COOPER

Think of it, Dougie... your submarine would be a sub and a half. The most sophisticated stealth submarine ever. Once it submerges... it's gone, there's not a satellite, or radar, or sonar system that'll ever find it again...

DOUGIE

Aye... aye, bloody brilliant eh?

COOPER

You'll do it?

DOUGIE

A jist might...

JESSIE

Oh, come on , Dougie... it's no' as if we've got anything else on. How much will you pay us Mr Cooper?

DOUGIE

How big are these things?

COOPER

Em they're about a hundred and fifty long.

DOUGIE

A hundred and fifty feet?

COOPER

Metres I think...

DOUGIE

Eh? Metres? What's that in yerds?

COOPER

About the same?

DOUGIE

That's about four hunder and fifty feet long!

JESSIE

Naw, Dougie, ye build it in sections, like Mr Cooper said...

DOUGIE

Even so, A can only get an eight foot board on the back o' the Transit.

COOPER

You could possibly invest in a larger vehicle, Dougie? The Mercedes Sprinter would seem a good option.

DOUGIE

Oh, aye... it's a braw van right enough, especially the long wheelbase, but we're no' made o' money.

JESSIE

Would we have to make the whole sub, Mr Cooper? I mean surely a sort of flat raft but wae a bit o' the top o' the hull showing and the big bit that pokes up...

COOPER

... the conning tower?

JESSIE

...aye, the conning tower... would that no' dae?

COOPER

Yes, yes, I see what you mean, Jessie. Damn it, that's brilliant... no-one sees the bit that's underwater anyway... the iceberg principal. That would bring the length down to... about a hundred feet, or five twenty foot sections...

DOUGIE

We could maybe fit it oot wae some periscopes and stuff, ken... oot o' some plastic piping...

JESSIE

Paint it a' matt grey...

DOUGIE

Aye and emulsion would dae, for a' the time it's gonnae be needed. Pre-paint each o' the sections here... bolt them the gither on site... How about a wee Perkins diesel, Mr Cooper, they're ten a penny and it wouldnae need towed then, it would glide oot the Clyde under it's own power. We could just start it up, point it in the right direction and let it go...

JESSIE

If we did this, would folk no' loose their jobs? The folk that make real submarines, I mean?

COOPER

I wouldn't worry too much about them, Jessie. We can get the Barrow-in-Furness workforce to build some new car ferries or something or my preferred option would be some sort of tidal power infrastructure. Renewables, that's the way to go. The submariner crews could all be found jobs on surface ships, and as for the mob at Aldermaston... well who cares about them? Not me. Do you know what they've said in the past when the future of their facility was in doubt? Close us down and the rural economy of Berkshire will suffer. The ultimate irony... stop us making nuclear warheads and our local pub might be forced to close... You do this, Dougie and you will be unilaterally removing nuclear weapons from Scottish soil.

DOUGIE

I'll dae it...

JESSIE

Yea!!

COOPER

Well done, man. I have every confidence in you and it's a win, win, win! No nuclear weapons on Scottish soil, we can't fire the damned things at anybody and a saving to the Treasury of at least one hundred billion pounds.

JESSIE

Talking o' money...

COOPER

Oh yes... I have complete control of the purse on this one and I was going to offer you a million?

JESSIE
Pounds?

COOPER
That's the idea...

JESSIE
Wow!

COOPER
...that's per sub.

JESSIE
Wow!

DOUGIE
So, that's four million?

COOPER
Mmm... plus over overheads of course.

DOUGIE
Aye, well it'll take a good few sheets o' MDF... screws, PVA, varnish, emulsion, probably need a new blade for ma jigsaw ...

COOPER
Shall we say ten million and you buy all the stuff? Would ten million be enough? As far as I'm concerned, it's jolly good value.

DOUGIE
(to Jessie)
What dae ye think, Jess?

JESSIE
Aye!

DOUGIE

We'll do it Mr Cooper.

They shake hands...

COOPER

A pleasure doing business with you, Dougie... Jessie...

JESSIE

... and you, Mr Cooper.

COOPER

Okay, well I'll get some paperwork sorted out over the next few days... I'm going to leave you this cheque for a million in the meantime. The balance will be paid in maybe three, three million pound instalments if that's convenient. We'll sort out delivery dates etc in the coming weeks... and remember, mum's the word eh?

JESSIE

We'll no' tell a soul, Mr Cooper...

DOUGIE

Aye, ye can rely on us... I'll maybe get a start to some basic plans the now.

COOPER

Jolly good. Well, goodbye to you both and I'll be in touch soon... oh you could maybe take your card down in the Spar... for the duration?

JESSIE

Will do...

COOPER

Oh... I say... I like the Moose Head. I like that a lot... Did you make that, Dougie?

DOUGIE

I did indeed.

COOPER

I like that... is it for sale?

JESSIE

It is, Mr Cooper... eh, it's ten pounds.

COOPER

Ten pounds, really, is that all? I think I'll have to have it...

Rummages in his pocket for a tenner

I've got a bit of a shed... at the bottom of the garden. My man cave, my wife calls it. I like to sit there with a beer and a good book sometimes. This'll look super up on the wall... you're awfully clever, Dougie... and so much nicer than a real one, doesn't ask any questions... Ten pounds you say? There you go. I'll see myself out. Cheerio...

DOUGIE/JESSIE

Cheerio, Mr Cooper...

He exits and Dougie and Jessie are in the middle of a high five when he pokes his head back in...

COOPER

Next time I see you, remind me to ask you about aircraft carriers... I think we might need two.

Curtain.

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