

The Listening Jar

By

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Cast of Characters

<u>SHOP OWNER:</u>	(F, 50s) A local with more insight than she lets on, solid in her beliefs. Her accent is in keeping with Mr B's, another local in this foreign place.
<u>MARGOT:</u>	(F, 20s-30s) Geoff's personal assistant. Professional, friendly, used to smoothing things over.
<u>GEOFF:</u>	(M, 40s-50s) An entrepreneur. Tough, boorish, entitled and opportunistic. No empathy, believes in hard work and cunning.
<u>BARBARA:</u>	(F, 30s-40s) Geoff's wife. Bitter, depressed, reflective, ghost-like. All of her lines are through the jar.
<u>MR B:</u>	(M, 30s-50s) A local factory owner. Business-like, and friendly. He is fluent in English, but accent similar to the shopkeeper's.
<u>DRIVER:</u>	(M/F, adult) A passing driver, speaks with local accent.
<u>U.S. WORKERS 1,2:</u>	(M, adult) Workers in the current factory. American accents.
<u>FUTURE WORKERS 1,2,3:</u>	(M/F, adult) Future workers in the outsourced factory. Local accents.

Time

Approx 10 minutes running time

THE LISTENING JAR

Scene: 1

(A GIFT SHOP IN A BUSY MARKET AREA IN A FOREIGN COUNTRY NOT FOUND ON ANY MAP. COOL AND CALM ATMOSPHERE)

MUSIC: GENTLE BACKGROUND MUSIC, FEELS LIKE TRADITIONAL, LOCAL MUSIC.

SOUND: A TINKLING OF BELLS AS A CUSTOMER ENTERS

SHOP OWNER
Francais? Espanol? English?

MARGOT
Oh, English? Do you speak it?

SHOP OWNER
Of course! English! Good afternoon Madam, can I help you?

MARGOT
Hello! I'm just looking thank you. (BEAT) You have such beautiful things! And it's so cool in here! Lovely!

SHOP OWNER
Beautiful things yes, and cool!

MARGOT
It's hard to choose just one souvenir...

SOUND: JAR SCRAPES SLIGHTLY AS IT IS PICKED UP

MARGOT
the detail of the painting on these...

SHOP OWNER
These jars? You like them? Does this one speak to you?

MARGOT
They're pretty.

SHOP OWNER
They are traditional here. The old people make them. In the home. Hand painted, every one loved.

MARGOT
How nice! They're... talented old folk!

SHOP OWNER
But not for you. (BEAT) Perhaps a necklace. Blue stone like your eyes...

SOUND: A TINKLING OF BELLS AS A CUSTOMER ENTERS

GEOFF

There you are! I was hunting all over for you. We don't have time for bazaars - Mr B is waiting on us to finalize the factoryk deal.

SHOP OWNER

Good afternoon Sir, can I help you?

GEOFF

No, I'm good thanks. What is this you've got there Margot? Give it here...

MARGOT

Careful with it! It's fragile!

GEOFF

(SOTTO)You're being ripped off. This is junk! My kids could make a pot better than this!

SHOP OWNER

Ah you like our Listening Jar?

GEOFF

Oh, yeah. Very nice. A 'listening jar', eh?

SHOP OWNER

It will listen...

GEOFF (ENTERTAINED, YELLS INTO IT)

How about a bit of rain sometime today, jar? And while you're at it give us some luck on our deal, okay?

BARBARA (DISTORT THROUGH JAR)

I miss you.

GEOFF

What... what's that you say?

BARBARA (DISTORT THROUGH JAR)

I wish I didn't.

GEOFF

You got a call going Margot?

MARGOT

Mr Scott?

GEOFF

Your phone. You've called someone, I can hear them. Don't wanna pay International rates for an butt-dial.

MARGOT

Er... no Mr Scott it's off, I...

SHOP OWNER
This one speaks to you? This jar?

GEOFF
No. We're on business. Not tourists. No souvenirs
thank you.
Come on Margot.

BARBARA (DISTORT THROUGH JAR)
I wish I hated you.

GEOFF
This is... (BEAT) Now Margot. Back to work.

SHOP OWNER
This is your jar. You must buy it.

GEOFF
I'm okay for vases thanks.

SHOP OWNER
You do not understand. You must buy it.

GEOFF
I need to get past Ma'am, hey /hands off!

SHOP OWNER
Do not make a terrible mistake!/ Buy it!

GEOFF
Step aside!

SHOP OWNER
You must buy it because if you do not...

GEOFF
(THREATENING)
You are selling to the diamond-hardest of sellers
Ma'am. I am not gonna fall for it. Now, forgive me,
but...(HE MOVES HER)

SOUND: FORCEFUL TINKLING OF BELLS AT DOORWAY STRUGGLE

SHOP OWNER
Madam! If you love him, tell him to buy it!

BARBARA (DISTORT THROUGH JAR)
But you always could buy your way out of everything,
couldn't you? / Even relationships.

MARGOT
I'm sorry!/ He's like this sometimes. Are you
alright?

SHOP OWNER
This jar is powerful. You tell him. He must buy it or
know madness!

MARGOT

Coming Mr Scott! (BEAT, MOVING OFF) I'll tell him!

SOUND: TINKLING OF BELLS AS MARGOT LEAVES

SCENE: 2

(A LARGE WAREHOUSE, SLIGHT INDUSTRIAL NOISE,
DISTANT CLANGS ETC)

GEOFF

Looking at your figures, you drive a hard bargain Mr B, but I think we may be able to work with your team!

MR B

Excuse me for one moment Mr Scott, Miss Rayne, (GOING OFF) I will get the paperwork.

BARBARA (DISTORT THROUGH JAR)

I don't know why I fell for it...

MARGOT

You're going through with it Mr Scott?

MUSIC: ATMOSPHERIC MUSIC, AT FIRST GENTLY OMINOUS, UNDER THIS SCENE. IT IS ALMOST INAUDIBLE AT FIRST, BUT GETS PROGRESSIVELY MORE INTENSE AS GEOFF STRUGGLES.

GEOFF

Look at this place! Ticks all our boxes. A hundred units a day Margot, and wage bill savings of two hundred thousand dollars a year!

BARBARA (DISTORT THROUGH JAR)

...Why I fall for it even now.

GEOFF

We'd... we'd be mad not to...

MARGOT

Mr Scott?

BARBARA (DISTORT THROUGH JAR)

I'm not real to you, I'm just one of your things.

MARGOT

Geoff? Geoff? You don't look well. Can we find a bathroom...?

GEOFF

Stop fussing Barbara... I mean Margot.

BARBARA (DISTORT THROUGH JAR)

Because who would you be if you didn't have a wife back at home?

GEOFF

I'm signing my biggest deal yet, woman!

MARGOT

(UPSET)

I didn't mean to be personal. You look so pale, and you're sweating...

GEOFF

I'm sorry Margot. I'm... I caught the sun running round that damn bazaar earlier...

BARBARA (DISTORT THROUGH JAR)

A suspicious bachelor

MARGOT

Sunstroke

BARBARA (DISTORT THROUGH JAR)

Or a man who never learnt to love.

GEOFF

Ridiculous! I married you, didn't I?

MARGOT

I'm Margot, Mr Scott. Barbara's at home. I'm gonna get you some water...

BARBARA (DISTORT THROUGH JAR)

What would all your important friends think?

GEOFF

No, stay with me Margot.

MARGOT

You're not well/ Geoffrey...

MR B (ENTERING)

Apologies for the delay!/ The main office is just up here. There is a good view of the workshop floor. Please follow me. We'll get this sealed and signed!

MUSIC: RISES AS THEY MOVE TO THE OFFICE, UNDER BARBARA.

SOUND: FOOTSTEPS ON METAL FACTORY STAIRCASE/WALKWAY

BARBARA (DISTORT THROUGH JAR)

Maybe you have a temper. Maybe you bottle it all up and then lash out when you get home. Maybe you just bottle it all up and say nothing...

SCENE: 3

(LARGE OFFICE ABOVE THE FACTORY FLOOR)
(AS THE MUSIC IS GETTING LOUDER, BARBARA'S JAR
COMMENTS MORE INTRUSIVE, GEOFF WILL BECOME
PROGRESSIVELY SHOUTIER THROUGH THIS SCENE)

MR B

Here we are!

GEOFF

Thank God!

MR B

We get used to all the stairs here!

BARBARA (DISTORT THROUGH JAR)

...Not even ask how your wife's day went.

GEOFF

Not here too! (PANICKING) It never stops!

MR B

Haha! Yes, it feels that way! But please rest your
tired legs!

MARGOT

I think Mr Scott maybe caught a bit too much sun...

BARBARA (DISTORT THROUGH JAR)

Maybe she left you.

GEOFF

(TO VOICE)

No! (BEAT, RECOVERS - TO MR B) No, no. I'm fine!
Let's get this done!

MR B

If you're still happy with the terms we discussed,
this is your copy of the contract I sent before...

SOUND: PAPERS SLIDE ACROSS A DESK

BARBARA (DISTORT THROUGH JAR)

Left you because she despises you.

GEOFF

(STRUGGLING TO STAY FOCUSED)

I am very happy with all of this Mr B.

MARGOT (SOTTO)

Mr Scott, you wanted to negotiate...

MUSIC: THE MUSIC IS STARTING TO REACH A CRESCENDO, UNDER.

GEOFF

Nope!

BARBARA (DISTORT THROUGH JAR)

And because she still had enough energy to leave you.

GEOFF

Mr B, you and I have discussed enough. I agree!

BARBARA (DISTORT THROUGH JAR)

It wasn't all drained away

GEOFF

Here! We have a deal!

BARBARA (DISTORT THROUGH JAR)

... in loneliness and... boredom.

GEOFF

(HASTILY, READYING TO LEAVE)

Thank you for your time Mr B...

MR B

So quick? I thought perhaps...

GEOFF

(EVEN MORE HASTY, DESPERATE TO GO)

Urgent appointment. I'll Skype you...

MARGOT

I'm so sorry Mr B...

MUSIC: ALMOST DROWNING OUT MARGOT'S APOLOGIES

MARGOT (CONTINUED)

...Thank you so much for your hospitality. We're delighted to be in partnership and I'll get back to you as soon as I can.

MUSIC: ABRUPTLY ENDS

SCENE: 4

(EXT. ROAD OUTSIDE THE FACTORY)

SOUND: TRAFFIC, STREET NOISE

GEOFF

(BREATHING HEAVILY, IN A PANIC)

MARGOT

(AS IF HE IS A CHILD)

Mr Scott, you are unwell. It is serious. I am ringing an ambulance.

BARBARA (DISTORT THROUGH JAR)
 Maybe she found out about your affair.

GEOFF
 Stop! (BEAT) No Margot! I need...

BARBARA (DISTORT THROUGH JAR)
 With your 'personal assistant', what's her name?

GEOFF
 That jar. I need to buy that jar.

BARBARA (DISTORT THROUGH JAR)
 Margot!/ Very continental! Very glamorous!

MARGOT
 Don't be silly. I'm calling... /(BEAT) wait...Mr
 Scott!
 You'll get run over!

GEOFF
 Taxi! Taxi!

SOUND: CAR BRAKING FAST

DRIVER
 I'm not taxi!

MARGOT
 That's not a taxi, Mr...

GEOFF
 (DESPERATE, TALKING OVER MARGOT)
 See this?! You drive me, you get all these notes!

DRIVER
 Get in! Get in!

SOUND: CAR DOORS OPEN AND SLAM AND THE CAR SPEEDS OFF.

SCENE: 5

(THE GIFT SHOP IN A BUSY MARKET AREA)

SOUND: FORCEFUL TINKLING OF BELLS AS CUSTOMER DASHES IN

SHOP OWNER
 Sir?

GEOFF
 I want to buy that jar!

BARBARA (DISTORT THROUGH JAR)
 I understand why, of course I do...

SOUND: RATTLING OF POTTERY AS ONE IS PICKED OUT FAST

GEOFF

How much?!

SHOP OWNER

Ten thousand.

GEOFF

What?! Ten thous...?

BARBARA (DISTORT THROUGH JAR)

But I can never forgive you.

SHOP OWNER

It will go to the sick and the poor and...

GEOFF

Okay, okay, whatever. You take cards?

SHOP OWNER

Let me wrap it for you...

BARBARA (DISTORT THROUGH JAR)

And so every time I see you...

GEOFF

No! Just take the money. Please!

SOUND: ELECTRONIC TILL NOISES

BARBARA (DISTORT THROUGH JAR)

...you will look into my eyes...

SHOP OWNER

This machine is slow.

BARBARA (DISTORT THROUGH JAR)

...and see nothing left. Because...

SHOP OWNER

...And it is paid. Thank you very much.
(SILENCE)

GEOFF

(SOBS WITH RELIEF, UNDER)

SOUND: A TINKLING OF BELLS AS A CUSTOMER ENTERS

MARGOT

Mr Scott! I'm sorry he's ill..

SHOP OWNER

He has given the money for the charity jar. It is over.

GEOFF

It's gone Margot!

MARGOT

And... what's gone, that's a good thing...?

GEOFF

We need to go back to the factory, see if we can chat to Mr B about the outsourcing and all our troubles will be over Margot. I'm sorry for worrying you. The sun...

U.S. WORKER 1 (DISTORTED THROUGH JAR)
Outsourced?

MUSIC: OMINOUS MUSIC COMING IN QUICKLY, UNDER, CRESCENDOING FAST TO END OF PLAY

MARGOT

Sunstroke. A nice sit down and... Mr Scott?

U.S. WORKER 2 (DISTORTED THROUGH JAR)
Redundancies all round!

MARGOT

Mr Scott? (BEAT) He needs an ambulance.

GEOFF

Two more? Two more of these things?!

U.S. WORKER 1 (DISTORTED THROUGH JAR)
I got a family to feed. I put my life into this company.

SHOP OWNER

You know the solution.

U.S. WORKER 2 (DISTORTED THROUGH JAR)
They're outsourcing the lot to some place where they can pay peanuts.

GEOFF

Witch!

SHOP OWNER

They are the listeners. Not me.

GEOFF

You'll bankrupt me!

MARGOT

What is going on?

GEOFF

Fine! Hold this Margot.

SOUND: RATTLING OF POTTERY AS TWO ARE PICKED OUT FAST

SHOP OWNER

Two thousand please.

MARGOT

What are you doing? (BEAT) He's ill!

FUTURE WORKER 1 (DISTORTED THROUGH JAR)

Twelve hours a day! Never a rest!

GEOFF

No! Not more!

FUTURE WORKER 2 (DISTORTED THROUGH JAR)

I need more overtime to keep food on the table.

GEOFF

It has to stop!

SHOP OWNER

That is your choice

FUTURE WORKER 3 (DISTORTED THROUGH JAR)

Three injuries this week! Keep your eyes on what you're doing people!

GEOFF

Please! Please!

FUTURE WORKER 1 (DISTORTED THROUGH JAR)

A hundred units a day. That's what the big boss wants or we all lose our jobs!

GEOFF

I can't...

(ALL THE WORKERS AND FUTURE WORKERS CONTINUE TALKING, OVERLAPPING EACH OTHER IN THEIR WORRIES AND FEARS, CRESCENDOING THROUGHOUT UNTIL THE MUSIC STOPS AND SILENCE)

GEOFF

(SCREAMING)

MARGOT

(ABOVE THE NOISE)

Hello? Yes, I need an ambulance... right now, please!

MUSIC: CRESCENDOS, MALEVOLENT, UNTIL IT REACHES A PEAK OF CHAOS - AND THEN SILENCE.