

THE TOO HARD BASKET

A play in one act

by Bruce Hoogendoorn

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4 Eton Place
Kambah ACT 2902
PH) (02) 6231 5021
bruce.hoog@hotmail.com

CAST

GORDON: A man in his forties.

ADRIAN: A man in his early thirties.

COURIER: A man of twenty.

TRAMP 1: A man in his seventies.

TRAMP 2: A man in his seventies.

An office: two desks with computers, both have empty out-trays, and in-trays overflowing with files. One window, one door and a shredder. A table with an urn, coffee, mugs and biscuits. Next to it is a lounge chair and a coffee table with papers on it (the relaxation area). Nearby is a coat stand with a jacket on it. ADRIAN is sitting at his desk, writing frantically. His clothing - business shirt, tie and slacks - is rumpled. He finishes writing, reads it over, is pleased with it. He looks up and addresses the audience directly.

ADRIAN: *(inspirational)* You must not dwell on your past. You must not dwell on your failures. It will suffocate you, fix you to the spot. Forget your life up until now - we'll put it down to a learning experience. You must move forward. The way to move forward is to identify your dream. Once you identify your dream, and you do everything you can to realise it, then, more likely than not, it will come true. Live your dream, become who you want to be. That is the answer to your problems.

GORDON: Get your hand off it, Adrian. You'll have to do better than that.

GORDON is leaning unsteadily on the door-frame. He is dishevelled: tie loose, jacket thrown over his shoulder. He is smoking a cigarette.)

ADRIAN: Thanks for that, Gordon. Very helpful, very constructive.

GORDON drops his cigarette on the floor and stubs it out. He collapses in the lounge chair.

GORDON: Sorry to be so blunt, but -

ADRIAN: At least I'm trying!

GORDON: I will be too in a minute.

ADRIAN: And I don't think a little bit of encouragement is too much to expect.

GORDON: You're trying your guts out, I can see that. But you're barking up the wrong tree. They don't have any dreams.

ADRIAN: They must. We just haven't found them yet.

GORDON: There's nothing to find.

ADRIAN: Why are you talking like this? Yesterday you were so certain we'd work out how to help them. But now...you haven't given up, have you? Gordon, these people have nothing. They live on the side of a road. We have to get their lives back on track!

GORDON: I haven't given up. I'm tired, that's all. I'll be fine after I have a coffee.

GORDON staggers to the table and begins to make coffee.

ADRIAN: Where have you been, anyway? I was worried sick.

GORDON: Yeah, sorry I went to the...I slept in. Forgot to set the alarm.

ADRIAN: Slept in?

GORDON: Yes. Don't know why. Had a very quiet night.

ADRIAN: How can you treat me like that?

GORDON: What? What have I done?

ADRIAN: You were out having a good time, weren't you? While I've been here all night, slaving away -

GORDON: All night? You were here all night?

ADRIAN: Yes.

GORDON: This is getting out of hand. They've taken over your life.

ADRIAN: The audit is in two weeks! If we don't resolve this case and all these others -

GORDON: I know, but you can't achieve anything if you're exhausted. You need to be rested, relaxed. You really need to get out.

ADRIAN: So you were out having a good time! How could you do that with them still waiting out there?

GORDON: I did not have a good time. I woke up in someone's front yard clutching this!

He pulls an empty bottle of scotch out of his jacket pocket.

ADRIAN: That's a very good time!

GORDON: Good time? It is a clear sign that I'm not coping either.

ADRIAN: That is such...let me see that.

ADRIAN snatches the empty bottle from him.

ADRIAN: How could you? That was mine! From that nice young policeman. His gift to me for helping him.

GORDON: Yeah? What did you do for him?

ADRIAN: I referred him to a counsellor. Not just any old counsellor. I thought long and hard about who would best meet his needs. And it came to me in a flash of inspiration - Jessie Smith!

GORDON: Good old Jessie. What ever happened to her?

ADRIAN: Into oblivion like the rest of them. But she did the trick for that young policeman. Now he's soaring up the ladder. Not a trace of depression left.

GORDON: When was that?

ADRIAN: Oh, three, four years ago.

GORDON: The good old days. When we were just old-fashioned administrators. Closest we came to the clients was the odd referral: 'This counsellor will cheer you up; this financial adviser will put you on the straight and narrow; and this cooking class will raise your self-esteem'. And off they went with a hopeful stride, and off we went for a two hour liquid lunch. Great days.

ADRIAN: Yeah.

GORDON: But those days are gone, thanks to those bloody consultants. What a great idea it was cutting the counsellors and getting us to do it instead.

ADRIAN: It saved a lot of money.

GORDON: And it will save a lot more if we stuff up and they have an excuse to cut us too.

ADRIAN: Then we better not give them one. Let's get on with it.

ADRIAN races to his desk and sits down and starts clicking on the computer mouse.

GORDON: Maybe we should wait until the courier turns up. Work on another case for a while.

ADRIAN: Why?

GORDON: They might have left.

ADRIAN: Why would they?

GORDON: I don't know. Maybe they got sick of waiting.

ADRIAN: But there's nowhere for them to go.

GORDON: I don't know how they can stand it. The same thing day after day.

ADRIAN: Neither do I. They must be in so much pain. And we're adding to it by chatting away when we should be hard at it.

GORDON grabs his chair and sits next to him. He points at the computer.

GORDON: You're not gonna send out this shit, are you?

ADRIAN: What?

GORDON: This message, to that pathetic, wimp of a student.

ADRIAN: He is not a wimp. He's a very sensitive young man who has trouble facing his fears.

GORDON: All he has to do is give a five minute talk to his three-student Sociology tute. And you write, 'to achieve anything in life you have to swallow your fear and be brave. It's time to be brave. You can do it'.

ADRIAN: What's wrong with it?

GORDON: It's just a variation on the dozen other messages you've sent him. He needs something tougher, something to get him going.

ADRIAN: Then you come up with something better instead of criticising all the time.

GORDON: All right, I will.

GORDON starts to type. During the following dialogue ADRIAN tries to look over his shoulder to see what he's writing, but GORDON manoeuvres in his chair to block his view.

ADRIAN: Remember, he's sensitive.

GORDON: Yeah, yeah.

ADRIAN: Very sensitive.

GORDON: Uh huh.

ADRIAN: He writes poetry.

GORDON: I'll keep that in mind.

GORDON finishes typing.

GORDON: There.

ADRIAN: *(reads)* "Dear poetry-writing wimp! You know what you have to do so have a go for once, you pathetic, whining, Nancy-boy, soft cock!" You can't send that out!

GORDON: Bullshit.

GORDON tries to press the return button. ADRIAN grabs his hand and struggles with him.

ADRIAN: Don't you dare!

GORDON: Let go!

ADRIAN: It could send him into an irreversible depression.

GORDON: Stop treating these losers with kid gloves. They need to be told.

ADRIAN: You insensitive, callous....

GORDON *pushes ADRIAN away and hits the return button.*

ADRIAN: No!

GORDON: It'll do him the world of good, you'll see.

ADRIAN: You absolute creep. He'll lose all hope. I'm going to send another one. Tell him yours was only a childish joke.

GORDON *restrains him.*

GORDON: Why don't we see what happens. It can't do any worse than what we've already sent him.

ADRIAN: What if he complains to the minister?

GORDON: He's not the sort. If he was he would have already done it.

ADRIAN: If it makes him worse, I'll -

Suddenly the door bursts open and the COURIER, wearing torn, ratty cycling clothing, storms in. He unclips his helmet and violently throws it onto the floor and yells...

COURIER: Fuck this bullshit!

They stare at him.)

COURIER: Fuck it!

GORDON: Were they still there?

COURIER: Were they there? Look at me! They ripped my shirt! Kept grabbing me, making me listen to their boring questions: 'He'll come tomorrow, won't he? You won't come tomorrow and say you've never seen us before, will you?' 'No,' I said very patiently, 'I know very well who you are, and he'll be here tomorrow, so let go of my fuckin' shirt.' Christ! It was my favourite. I want reimbursement.

GORDON: How much did it cost?

COURIER: Two hundred bucks.

GORDON: How much?

COURIER: Twenty bucks.

GORDON: Hang on.

GORDON *goes to the desk and takes a cash box out of the drawer and opens it.*

ADRIAN: Why did they ask you if you'll say you've never seen them before?

COURIER: I didn't say that.

ADRIAN: Yes you did. Didn't he, Gordon?

GORDON: He did.

COURIER: Did I? Must have got confused.

ADRIAN: No you didn't. What have you said to them?

COURIER: *(pause)* It's nothing really. It's just...

ADRIAN: What?

COURIER: Well...come on, it gets pretty boring going out there day after day, saying the same things over and over. So I like to mix it up, vary it a little. It's just a bit of fun, doesn't do any harm. I just, you know, pretend I've never seen them before. That it's the first time I've been out there.

ADRIAN: You little twerp! Do you have any idea of the psychological damage you've probably done to them?

COURIER: What about the damage they did to my shirt! I'm not going back there unarmed. I think they're on the verge of some real violence. I want a weapon. A cricket bat! In fact I want a cricket bat with spikes in it, to give me that extra confidence.

ADRIAN: What good will beating do them?

COURIER: I don't give a shit what it does to them as long as my two hundred dollar shirts aren't ripped.

GORDON: Here you are, twenty bucks.

COURIER: Thanks. What about the cricket bat?

ADRIAN: You're not getting one!

COURIER: All right, some mace then. And make it scented. They stink like dead animals.

ADRIAN: You're not getting anything!

GORDON *returns the cash box to the drawer and takes out a spray can.*

COURIER: If you don't give me something you can get yourself another courier.

GORDON: Here you are.

GORDON *hands him the spray can.*

COURIER: Hey, thanks.

ADRIAN: You can't give him -

COURIER: Air freshener!

GORDON: For the smell. You like lavender?

COURIER: Yeah, it's nice, but -

ADRIAN: You're not getting any weapons!

COURIER: Then you better go and counsel them today. They'll go berserk if I go out there again and say you're still putting the final touches on their case. Christ, you've been at it two months, you should have helped them by now.

ADRIAN: It's not that easy! It's a unique case.

COURIER: They're just a couple of old deros. How hard can they be to please?

ADRIAN: You know bloody-well how hard they are to please. We've sent all the information we have: application forms for government housing, a budgeting plan, a book on economical cooking, and the schedule of a walking group. They didn't want a bar of them.

COURIER: They used the housing forms for toilet paper.

ADRIAN: Exactly. They want more than just a roof over their heads and activities to pass the time. They want lives worth living! That's not an easy thing to produce.

COURIER: Well...just tell them anything. If it doesn't help, too bad. At least the case will be closed.

GORDON: We can't, because the bloody auditors will swoop on any failures like vultures on carrion.

COURIER: Aren't you over-reacting just a -

GORDON: The minister didn't ask for an audit to verify what a great job we're doing. He's in the midst of cost-cutting and he's looking for any excuse to start slashing.

COURIER: Well, how about -

GORDON: Give it a rest for a while. Relax, have a coffee. Go on.

The COURIER heads to the table when he suddenly turns.

COURIER: Hey, I saw you out last night. Looked like you were having a good time.
Mind you that stripper taught you a lesson (*chuckles*).

GORDON: Have your coffee.

The COURIER goes to the table, puts down the air freshener and makes a coffee.

ADRIAN: Stripper? Good time?

GORDON: Ignore him. He's too immature to understand the complexities of stress.

ADRIAN: Little prick.

GORDON: Yeah, but you can understand his frustration.

ADRIAN: His frustration? We're the ones with all the pressure on us.

GORDON: His shirt got ripped.

ADRIAN: Yes, but not his guts, his insides.

GORDON: Don't be melodramatic.

ADRIAN: Why not? We've got two lost, homeless old people out there relying on us, but we've got nothing to tell them.

GORDON: We'll come up with something.

ADRIAN: We've been trying for two months and come up with nothing! (*looks at the COURIER*) He knows something.

GORDON: What?

ADRIAN: He sees them every day. I bet he knows what can help them. (*shouts at him*)
Don't you?

GORDON: Adrian, calm down.

ADRIAN: Don't you?

COURIER: What?

ADRIAN: You see them every day. You must know how we can help them.

COURIER: I don't know anything about them. I pass on your apology then piss off.

ADRIAN: You must know something else about them that can help us. Surely they've confided something in you?

COURIER: Well...

ADRIAN: Yes?

COURIER: I once overheard them talking about suicide.

ADRIAN: Liar!

COURIER: I am not.

ADRIAN: You are! You're just saying that to upset me. Now tell me the truth. Something positive this time.

COURIER: Well...they like carrots and turnips.

ADRIAN: And?

COURIER: It's not much of a diet, but at least they're not starving. That's it.

ADRIAN: You must know more than that?

COURIER: I do not.

ADRIAN: You tell the truth!

ADRIAN shakes him. The coffee goes flying.

GORDON: Hey!

The COURIER grabs the air freshener and sprays it in ADRIAN'S face.

ADRIAN: Shit!

ADRIAN reels away, clutching his face.

COURIER: That worked pretty well.

GORDON snatches the spray can from him and slams it back on the desk.

GORDON: Make yourself another coffee.

The COURIER does so and then sits in the lounge chair and reads a paper.

GORDON: Are you all right?

ADRIAN: I'd like to hurt that little prick.

GORDON: Forget him, he's not what's upsetting you.

ADRIAN: No, it's -

GORDON: No, no. Try to forget about it for a while.

ADRIAN: I can't. He said they're talking about suicide. We have to come up with something today.

ADRIAN moves towards the computer. GORDON takes his arm.

GORDON: Why don't you go for a walk? Get some fresh air.

COURIER: *(shouts out)* He just had some.

GORDON: Shut up! *(to ADRIAN)* Come on. You need to get out of the office for a while.

ADRIAN: But we have to -

GORDON: Then when you come back we'll get stuck into it and - I'm positive of this - we'll crack it.

GORDON puts his arm around ADRIAN'S shoulders and walks him to the door. He takes ADRIAN'S coat from the coat rack and puts it around his shoulders.

ADRIAN: Do you really think so?

GORDON: No doubt at all.

ADRIAN: You're sure?

GORDON: How can we fail? - you and I knocking the ideas back and forth, we'll have the answer before we know it. Remember: never give up, never ever give up.

ADRIAN: Okay. But while I'm away, could you...hurt him a little.

GORDON: Adrian, come on, off you go.

ADRIAN: All right. But if he gives you any cheek... *(he throws a pretend punch)*

ADRIAN goes out. GORDON turns to the COURIER.

GORDON: How's the coffee?

COURIER: Shitouse. The air freshener's nice, though. *(he sniffs)* Adrian's gone off his head, hasn't he? What's his problem?

GORDON: Stress.

COURIER: Well he's got no reason to take it out on me. I'm just the courier.

GORDON: He's all right, I've had a talk to him.

COURIER: Good. Hey that stripper last night -

GORDON: So you reckon your shirt's worth two hundred bucks?

COURIER: Yeah, right. How could I afford that on my wage?

GORDON: Would you like to own a two hundred dollar shirt?

COURIER: Course. Get this shit off my back.

GORDON: What do you reckon you'd be willing to do for a two hundred dollar shirt?

COURIER: Jesus, Gordon, you're not about to leap out of the closet on me, are you?

GORDON: Pull yourself together.

COURIER: Sorry.

GORDON: I want to show you something.

GORDON goes to his desk. He pulls a gun out of the drawer and points it at the COURIER.

COURIER: Shit!

GORDON: I gather you know what this is.

COURIER: Yeah, I do. Can you point it somewhere else?

GORDON points it at his groin.

COURIER: Anywhere but there.

GORDON lowers it to his side.

COURIER: Look, if this is about that crack I made about the stripper, I'm really [sorry] -

GORDON: Do you know how to use it?

COURIER: Yeah. I used to shoot on my Uncle's farm. Rabbits and stuff.

GORDON: Good. So you can shoot.

COURIER: Yeah.

GORDON: And you like flashy shirts?

COURIER: Love 'em.

GORDON: Then I'll get you one. In fact, I'll get you two.

COURIER: Two!

GORDON: Two.

COURIER: (*thoughtful*) I could go out twice a week.

GORDON: Three if you mix and match.

COURIER: Yeah, I never thought of that.

GORDON: And all you have to do is kill the tramps.

COURIER: (*Stunned pause*) Kill them? I thought you wanted to help them?

GORDON: I do want to help them. I've put a lot of thought into this and, unfortunately, it's the only way I can help them.

COURIER: By killing them?

GORDON: They want help, they have it. It's probably not what they were hoping for, but it's the best we can do.

COURIER: (*pause*) Oh, I get it. Very funny, Gordon. You had me going for a minute.

GORDON: This is not a joke! They are miserable! All they have is the hope that we'll magically transform their lives. That is impossible! And we, by keeping them waiting, by keeping them hoping, are adding to their pain. That is not fair on them. In fact, it is cruel of us. The only answer is to put them out of their misery. And even if they are not conscious of it, this is the answer they have wanted all along.

COURIER: They want to die?

GORDON: Yes.

COURIER: I find that hard to -

GORDON: Don't you have any feelings? Don't you care that they're in pain?

COURIER: It's not that, it just seems a bit [extreme] -

GORDON: And what about us? You saw how stressed Adrian is. He can't sleep at night because of those two. And this morning I woke up in someone's rose bed clutching an empty bottle of scotch. That's not my normal behaviour.

COURIER: Isn't it?

GORDON: Don't get smart. We're stressed. All of us, including you.

COURIER: Yes, but -

GORDON: And they're putting the section in jeopardy. Our jobs, your job, in jeopardy.

COURIER: Well...why don't you just give them some shithouse counselling. Something that'll depress the Hell out of them. They're bound to kill themselves. They've been talking about it. Then you can shred the file, delete the computer records, the audit won't be a problem.

GORDON: But what if they don't kill themselves? What if instead they complain to the minister? We'd be finished for certain. We can't take that chance.

COURIER: But -

GORDON: And they ripped your vile shirt.

COURIER: Yes...

GORDON: But they'll never have an opportunity to rip your *three* two hundred dollar shirts.

COURIER: Three!

GORDON: You can go out almost every night of the week. Will you do it?

GORDON holds out the gun. The COURIER hesitates.

COURIER: Look, it isn't even in my job description. I'll have to check with the union first.

GORDON: Oh come on! Haven't you ever heard of multi-skilling?

The COURIER thinks.

GORDON: You're not a Nancy-boy soft cock, are you?

COURIER: No!

GORDON: *(re-offers gun)* Well?

COURIER: *(pause)* Three shirts?

GORDON: Three.

The COURIER takes the gun.

GORDON: Good.

The door bursts open and ADRIAN bounces in. The COURIER hides the gun behind his back.

ADRIAN: I've done it!

ADRIAN whips off his jacket and flings it onto the coat rack.

GORDON: *(To COURIER)* See you later.

The COURIER grabs his helmet and walks past ADRIAN. He sniffs him.

COURIER: Mm. Lovely fragrance.

ADRIAN glares at him. The COURIER exits.

GORDON: How are you feeling?

ADRIAN: Fantastic. For the first time in months I feel alive.

GORDON: You've cracked it, have you?

ADRIAN: Smashed it wide open.

GORDON: All right, let's hear it.

ADRIAN: Okay, but remember, it's only a first draft, still fairly rough, but I think the essence is right.

GORDON: Fine.

ADRIAN: So don't be too critical.

GORDON: I won't. I'll be looking for the essence.

ADRIAN: All right.

He takes a deep breath then speaks directly to the audience.

ADRIAN: Gentleman, I've been through your file and I noticed that we know very little about your employment history. The odd hint is dropped, the odd remembrance, but it's all very vague. However, it does suggest a life-time of short-term positions, which eventually ran dry and left you leading aimless, transitory lives. However, this need not continue if you will allow us to help you discover the one thing that will transform your lives into rich and fulfilling ones - your vocations.

GORDON: Their vocations?

ADRIAN: Yes.

GORDON: They're over seventy years old!

ADRIAN: It's never too late.

GORDON: It's way too late.

ADRIAN: That's ageist!

GORDON: Adrian! Even if they found their vocations, they wouldn't have the energy to pursue them.

ADRIAN: They have the energy to attack the courier. I'm sure a vocation would energise them even more.

GORDON *waves him away disparagingly.*

ADRIAN: No, give it a chance. We do all these tests on them, find out what skills they have, and with a bit of luck they'll stumble onto their vocations.

GORDON: They don't want to be part of society. They've seen what it has to offer and they've turned their backs on it.

ADRIAN: Only because they were never part of it in the first place. They've probably spent their lives feeling like outsiders, unable to fit in. They most likely come from poor families with limited access to what society has to offer. But if we -

GORDON: Are you saying it's society's fault?

ADRIAN: Well -

GORDON: Because I hate it when people blame society.

ADRIAN: Why?

GORDON: Because I'm part of society and I won't accept responsibility for something that had nothing to do with me.

ADRIAN: Fair enough.

GORDON: Then are you saying it's their parents' fault?

ADRIAN: No.

GORDON: Because I hate it when parents are blamed. It's a bloody hard job being a parent.

ADRIAN: So I've heard.

GORDON: That's why I've never become one.

ADRIAN: I respect your choice.

GORDON: So are you saying it's their *own* fault?

ADRIAN: No.

GORDON: Well, that's what *I'm* saying! They're living by the side of the road waiting for us to give their meaningless lives meaning because they never had a go, the fuckin' wimps! They're cowards! Do you agree with that?

ADRIAN: Well...

GORDON: Do you?

ADRIAN: *(pause)* How did you find your vocation?

GORDON: What?

ADRIAN: How did you end up here? Was it passion that led you here?

GORDON: *(pause)* Two weeks after I left school I did a test. Six months later I got a call telling me to show up at the department for work.

ADRIAN: You see, you were lucky - you stumbled across your vocation. They too could stumble across theirs.

Frustrated, GORDON strides to the desk. He picks up file after file, flinging them away as he goes.

GORDON: Look at all these people seeking help? All of them have to wait because of those no-hopers.

GORDON looks for a specific file and finds it.

GORDON: A vocation, you reckon? Read it! They are fit for nothing.

He gives him the file. ADRIAN flicks through it.

ADRIAN: Look at the file note - they've been up the Eiffel Tower. Maybe they could work in the tourism industry! *(he turns a page)* And look! They've done some grape-picking. Perhaps they could get involved in marketing for the wine industry! *(flicks to another page)* And there - one of them is obsessed with his shoes. He could be a shoe salesman!

GORDON snatches the file and slams it on the desk.

GORDON: Adrian, you're a passionate and sympathetic man. You want to help people, give them a reason to go on living. I admire that in you, it's a wonderful quality to possess. But it's destroying your judgment, and it's destroying you.

ADRIAN: No, no, I'm fine, I - they could move in with me!

GORDON: What?

ADRIAN: I could work on them far more intensely than any case before. Do every test possible on them until they find their vocations.

GORDON: Stop it! For two months we've tried to come up with something for these losers. We've devoted our lives to them. But what have they done for themselves? Nothing! They loiter on the side of the road accosting members of the public, terrorising our courier, eating carrots and turnips, having, as far as I can see, the time of their lives. It is not fair, on either of us.

ADRIAN: But it's not about what's fair. It's our job.

GORDON: Jobs we might soon lose because of those two. Is that fair? Is it fair that you can't sleep at night? Is it fair that you're on the verge of a nervous breakdown? Is it fair that they place their lives in our hands? Is it fair that we must bear such responsibility, such pressure? Is it? Is it?

ADRIAN. *(pause)* No.

GORDON: Of course it isn't.

ADRIAN: You're right. I can't sleep at night.

GORDON: And you look terrible. You've lost your looks.

ADRIAN: I have. I used to be handsome.

GORDON: Don't be modest, you were gorgeous.

ADRIAN: And I haven't had an erection in weeks.

GORDON: They have emasculated you.

ADRIAN: They have castrated me!

GORDON: And for that, they deserve to die!

ADRIAN: Yes! Yes, they...well, I don't know about -

GORDON: And that is why I have ordered the courier to kill them.

ADRIAN: *(pause)* Kill them?

GORDON: That's right. *(looks at watch)* In fact, they should be dead by now.

ADRIAN: Gordon, you're not serious?

GORDON: Adrian, I did it for you. For us. For them. It was time for all of us to be put out of our misery.

ADRIAN: Gordon...you're not well. It's the stress. I'll get you help. I'll find Jessie and she'll get you back on the -

GORDON *picks up a bunch of files.*

GORDON: How can we justify helping those two at the expense of all these others? We cannot afford to waste any more time on them.

ADRIAN *stands stunned for a moment then faints.*

GORDON: Adrian!

GORDON *helps him up.*

GORDON: Come on, sit down. I know it's a shock for a sensitive person like you.

GORDON *leads him to the seat behind the computer.*

ADRIAN: Gordon, you can't -

GORDON: Adrian, it's too late. Instead of dwelling on the past, think about what you can do for these people.

GORDON *opens a file and shows ADRIAN.*

GORDON: Look. This woman was made redundant and she hasn't got out of bed for three months. I bet you can get her out. Perhaps by offering her some free retraining.

GORDON *gives him the file. ADRIAN stares at it numbly. GORDON tears some pages out of the Tramps' file and shreds it.)*

ADRIAN: What are you doing?

GORDON: Just neatening up their file. Concentrate on your case.

Suddenly the shredder starts to whine and splutter then stops.

GORDON: Shit!

GORDON *turns it off. He tries to yank the paper out, but it's stuck.*

GORDON: Adrian, give us a hand.

ADRIAN'S *eye is caught by the computer screen. He double clicks on the mouse. GORDON starts to yank on the paper again.*

GORDON: Adrian, give us a bloody hand!

ADRIAN: Oh my God.

GORDON: What is it?

ADRIAN: He's going to kill himself.

GORDON: Who?

ADRIAN: The student poet. It's a suicide note!

GORDON reads it.

GORDON: Huh. Not very poetic.

ADRIAN: Not very poetic! You killed him!

GORDON: He was weak. He would have done it eventually anyway.

ADRIAN: I was getting through to him.

GORDON: Look, after we fix the shredder we'll shred his file too. No-one'll ever know.

ADRIAN: I'll know.

GORDON: Oh grow up, you fucking little... Help me with the shredder, please, Adrian.

ADRIAN: You murderer!

GORDON: You sentimental, impractical, little...

ADRIAN puts his head on the desk and begins to sob.

GORDON: Adrian, don't be so pathetic.

ADRIAN: Piss off! I can still save him. I can!

ADRIAN begins to type frantically.

GORDON: What are you writing? More of the same crap: 'Don't let fear run your life. Be brave and face it head on. Never give up, never ever give up'. The same old shit!

ADRIAN stands and defiantly looks at GORDON. He then, very deliberately, raises his hand and hits the return button. At the exact moment he hits the button there is a gunshot off stage.

GORDON: What the fuck was that!

The door bursts open and the COURIER rides in on his bike holding the gun. His shirt is completely mangled.

COURIER: The fuckin' tramps have followed me here!

GORDON: They're not dead?

COURIER: No, and don't have a go at me! It's bloody hard to shoot and cycle at the same time.

The COURIER flings his bike aside, races to the window, opens it and starts firing.

COURIER: Stand still! You're not taking my shirts away from me!

GORDON: Aim higher! You're shooting the ground.

ADRIAN grabs for the gun.

ADRIAN: Stop it!

GORDON: Adrian, you cool it!

ADRIAN: Give me the gun.

GORDON: Shut up and have a coffee.

He leaps on the COURIER.

ADRIAN: They never hurt anyone!

COURIER: What are you doing, you idiot?

ADRIAN: I can save them!

GORDON: You can't. Let go of the gun!

The door swings open and two filthy TRAMPS wearing bowler hats run in. They see the gun and start lurching around the room, trying to avoid the line of fire, bumping into each other, losing their hats, putting on the wrongs ones, exchanging them with each other, a very clown-like routine.

ADRIAN: Run for your lives!

GORDON: Shut-up and let go!

Suddenly GORDON reefs the gun free and points it at the tramps.

ADRIAN: No!

The TRAMPS dive behind the desk. GORDON fires...nothing. He tries again. Still nothing. He hides the gun behind his back and tucks it into his pant. The TRAMPS slowly look over the desk.

GORDON: Good afternoon, Gentleman. How can we help you?

The TRAMPS slowly come out from behind the desk and approach GORDON reverentially. They look at him carefully.

TRAMP 1: Mr Godot?

GORDON: Godot?

TRAMP 1: Yes. You're not Mr Godot, sir?

GORDON: No, I'm Gordon.

TRAMP 2: (*Points at ADRIAN*) Then is he, Mr Godot?

GORDON: No, that's Adrian.

TRAMP 2: Then where is Mr Godot? (*points to COURIER*) He said -

COURIER: I didn't say anything! I've never seen you two before in my life.

GORDON: Excuse me for a moment, gentleman, I have to consult with my colleague.

GORDON goes to the COURIER. ADRIAN follows. The TRAMPS wait patiently.

GORDON: What's this Godot bullshit?

COURIER: Well...come on, it gets pretty boring going out there day after day, saying the same things over and over. So I like to mix it up, vary it a little. It's just a bit of fun, it doesn't do any harm. I just change your name occasionally: Gordon, Grodin, Godin, Godot. So what?

GORDON: Christ you're juvenile.

GORDON rubs his head, thinking.

GORDON: Right, we've got no choice. Adrian, you're going to have to counsel them.

ADRIAN: What!

GORDON: We've run out of bullets, it's our only option.

ADRIAN: But I'm not ready.

GORDON: Too bad. Our jobs are on the line.

ADRIAN: But-

GORDON: You're the one who stopped us shooting them. It's your responsibility. Now get going.

ADRIAN: But I've only got a rough draft. I can't do it!

GORDON: 'I can't, I can't'. Stop being such a cry baby and have a go you pathetic, whining, Nancy-boy, soft cock!

GORDON *drags him over to the TRAMPS.*

GORDON: This is Godot.

ADRIAN *is speechless.* GORDON *rejoins the COURIER.*

TRAMP 1: Mr Godot. Finally. We're sorry to barge in like this, but we're very keen to hear what you have to say.

TRAMP 2: To find out where we stand.

TRAMP 1: To hear what you have to offer.

TRAMP 2: Then we'll take it or leave it.

ADRIAN: *(pause)* Yes...yes...and I - we - apologise for the delay. Things kept getting in the way like...computer problems...meetings...lunch, things like that, you know what it's like.

Pause. They clearly don't.

ADRIAN: Gentlemen...

ADRIAN *suddenly sniffs the air and gags.*

ADRIAN: Oh God.

He covers his nose with a handkerchief. The TRAMPS sniff each other, look appalled, and move a step or two away from each other.

ADRIAN: Gentlemen, if you could just talk amongst yourselves for a moment, I'll be right with you.

ADRIAN *lurches away and gags.*

GORDON: What's wrong?

ADRIAN: They stink!

GORDON: What did you expect? - Jolly little grandpas smelling of Old Spice?

ADRIAN: I can't work under these conditions.

GORDON *grabs the air freshener and shoves it into his hand.*

GORDON: Take this and get stuck into it. No more procrastinating.

ADRIAN looks around at the Tramps, sniffs the air and then moves as far away from them as possible, to the wall. He sniffs the air again, pulls a face and gives a couple of sprays of the air freshener.

ADRIAN: Gentlemen...life is...life is...can you hear me?

The TRAMPS nod.

ADRIAN: Gentlemen, life is...hard. We overcome one obstacle only to find an even larger one awaits us. And then another, and another, and another. It can be soul-destroying. If we let it! It all comes down to our attitude. Once you change your attitude you change the size of the obstacles. Anything then becomes scalable. And remember, those obstacles are not there to deter us. They are there to challenge us, to spur us on to reach our potential, for the ultimate purpose of making us happy and fulfilled human beings.

ADRIAN is now inspired and starts moving towards them.

ADRIAN: We must be brave and take on those obstacles. We must not give up. We must not wander aimlessly. We must not loiter in public places hoping for a saviour. We must provide our own answers, be our own saviours.

Then the smell hits him again and he gags. He sprays the air. The TRAMPS gag. His inspiration returns and as he slowly moves towards them.

ADRIAN: To achieve this we must find our vocation. What we were put here to do. I put it to you that neither of you gentlemen has yet been lucky enough to stumble across your vocation. This may not be your fault. Many factors, such as social, economic, political, and sexual, may have been against you. But I say to you that is all in the past. You are now about to enter the future where your vocations await! And I offer you, for a nominal fee, an intensive one week course covering skill testing, career counselling, re-training and personal hygiene. This will be followed by two weeks of work experience. *(he gives them each a spray of the air freshener)* What do you say to that?

The TRAMPS are stunned. They scratch their heads, look at each other, look at the ground, look at the ceiling and start to pace around the room, thinking. Finally they stop in the middle of the stage, side-by-side. TRAMP 2 pulls out a carrot and nibbles thoughtfully. TRAMP 1 takes off his hat, peers inside it, feels about inside it, shakes it and puts it on again. ADRIAN watches expectantly.

TRAMP 1: Let's hang ourselves.

TRAMP 2: Let's.

They do not move. ADRIAN stands stunned. After a moment...

GORDON: Go on then, piss off.

GORDON pushes them out of the office. He yells from the doorway.

GORDON: Don't just stand there, get going. *(pause)* What are you, a pair of soft cocks?
(pause) That's the way. Don't stuff it up!

GORDON *returns and closes the door.*

GORDON: Thank Christ for that. *(To the COURIER.)* Do you know anything about shredders?

COURIER: Nuh.

GORDON: Oh well, give us a hand anyway. It's jammed.

They begin to muck around with the shredder.

ADRIAN: They're going to hang themselves?

GORDON: About bloody time.

ADRIAN: But I...I thought I got through to them.

GORDON: There was nothing you could have said.

ADRIAN: They're going to hang themselves!

GORDON *goes to ADRIAN.*

GORDON: And nothing could have stopped that. The simple truth of the matter is this: we kept them going, we gave them hope for two months by *not* counselling them. But now they have been, it wasn't enough. It was never going to be.

ADRIAN: But -

GORDON: Adrian, it wasn't your fault. It was first class counselling.

COURIER: Yeah, it was fuckin' funny.

GORDON: See? It's a pity you wasted it on them.

ADRIAN: But -

GORDON: Come on, forget them. Work on the clients you can help.

GORDON guides ADRIAN to his desk and sits him down. He gives him a file. He doesn't look at it, just sits numbly.

GORDON: Here.

The COURIER kicks the shredder. It starts.

COURIER: Hey! Does that get me a shirt?

GORDON: Yeah, why not. But only one.

COURIER: You beauty! Can I get it today? We can go to the strip club after and celebrate. You can get that stripper back. See how she likes having *her* g-string pulled off.

GORDON: All right, give it a rest. Pass me that file.

The COURIER picks up the file, opens it and starts to read. He snorts.

COURIER: These are always good for a laugh.

GORDON snatches it from him and shreds some more pages. The COURIER, unperturbed, grabs another file and starts to read. Suddenly ADRIAN lurches forward in his seat and stares at the computer. He double clicks on the mouse.

ADRIAN: Look at this.

GORDON: What is it?

GORDON: The student poet. He's alive and well! He thanked me for my advice. He's going to do his talk. He's looking forward to it! I knew I was right!

ADRIAN races to the coat rack and puts on his jacket and heads for the door.

GORDON: Where are you going?

GORDON steps in front of the door and ADRIAN tries to go around him. GORDON grabs him.

GORDON: Adrian, where are you going?

ADRIAN tries to push him away.

ADRIAN: Let me go! I can save them.

GORDON: With what? What are you going to try that you haven't already tried? Do you really think after all this time you'll suddenly come up with the perfect lie?

ADRIAN: Lie?

GORDON: Yes. A lie. What do you think we've been trying to do for the last two months? Invent a lie that will somehow make their lives seem worth living. But that lie isn't for them - it's for us. Because telling them the truth won't save our jobs.

ADRIAN: I wasn't trying to make up a lie.

GORDON: *(pause)* Go then. Forget about the audit. Forget about our jobs. Forget that we could end up just like them!

GORDON opens the door. ADRIAN heads for it when he is pulled up short...

COURIER: *(reading a file)* Hey, Gordon, listen to this one. This bloke tried to kill himself just because he didn't get straight A's in year twelve. He failed PE. Probably one of them pigeon-chested spazzos who can't catch.

GORDON: Give us a look.

GORDON *takes the file and reads.*

GORDON: Oh God, I'll sort him out.

GORDON *sits at the computer and starts typing. The COURIER watches. ADRIAN looks over concerned, torn between staying and going. The COURIER starts laughing.*

COURIER: That's it, Gordon, get into him. *(reads)* 'Dear Dickhead,' - good start - 'you're the most pathetic loser I've ever had the misfortune to deal with in my entire career'. Love it, Gordon. Give him some more.

ADRIAN: You can't write that!

GORDON: Well, what do you suggest, Adrian?

ADRIAN: *(pause)* Let me see the file.

ADRIAN *comes over and takes the file. He reads.*

ADRIAN: Of course - he's a perfectionist. Move.

GORDON *gets up. ADRIAN sits down and starts typing. The COURIER and GORDON read over his shoulder.*

COURIER: You understand how he feels? That's too soft. Gordon's was much better than [that] -

GORDON *whacks him in the arm, shushing him. ADRIAN glares at the COURIER.*

GORDON: Don't worry about him, Adrian, it's excellent. Keep going. Go on.

ADRIAN *slowly resumes typing. GORDON smiles, the COURIER shakes his head with disgust. The lights slowly fade to black.*

THE END