

8B COMMUNICATIVE Predict the story



THE FIRING LINE by Henry Slesar

Part 1

Sheldon Keeler, marketing manager of Walford International, knew from experience that company meetings could be called at any time and in any place, even in the lifts. As he was going up to his office on Wednesday morning, Cliff Bowles, the head of Personnel, got into the lift with him. 'We had a meeting last night, Sheldon...', he said.

1 What do you think the meeting was about?

'One of your guys is out.'

'Oh?' Keeler said. 'Who?'

'Macauley. He's not the right man for the job. Tell him as soon as you can.'

'Of course,' Keeler said, desperately trying to remember who Macauley was of the 67 people in his department. 'I'll tell him right now.'

'No,' said Bowles. 'It will be better if you wait until Friday.'

2 Why does Bowles want to wait until Friday to fire Macauley?

And do it late in the afternoon, when most people have gone home. It's not good for the company to have employees who've been fired complaining to everyone. They might even go on strike.'

3 How do you think Keeler feels about having to fire a member of his department?

Keeler wasn't pleased. It wasn't the first time he'd had to tell someone to go, but he didn't enjoy it. And sometimes there were unpleasant scenes. Even the carefully-written company document. (*How to Fire a Walford Employee*) wasn't much help when the victim became emotional. The lift stopped and Keeler got out. 'Right,' he said. 'I'll tell him as soon as I get back from lunch on Friday.'

Part 2

Thursday was a busy day for Keeler, and he completely forgot that he had to fire one of his men. But on Friday, he returned from lunch feeling tense. He knew the moment had come, and couldn't wait any longer. He called Eve, his secretary, and told her to tell Bob Macnally to come to his office. Macnally arrived promptly, a slim young man with a sensitive face.

4 What do you think might be the first question Keeler asks Macnally?

'Sit down,' Keeler said with a friendly smile. 'How long have you been working here, Macnally?' This was the standard first question, recommended by the company document.

'Almost two years,' the young man said. 'Let's see, it'll be exactly two years this November.'

Keeler smiled. 'And how do you feel about these two years?'

'Fine,' the young man said, 'Just fine, Mr Keeler.'

The manager sighed deeply. 'Well, I suppose it must be our fault then,' he said sadly.

'Your fault? What do you mean?'

'Look, Bob,' Keeler said confidentially. 'You're a good man and you've got great potential. When you leave here, your experience with Walford will be a really good recommendation. We'll give you a good reference. You can be sure of that.'

5 Do you think Macnally knows now that he's going to lose his job?



'But I wasn't thinking of leaving, Mr Keeler.'

'Bob,' Keeler said sadly, 'Sometimes a man has to think about leaving.'

Macnally suddenly realized the truth. 'You mean I'm fired?' he said incredulously.

'Look Bob...'

'Don't call me Bob. You've never called me Bob in your life, Keeler. I bet you never even knew my first name until now.'

'I'm only trying to make this easy for you...'

'I'm the best marketing man you've ever had, you told me that yourself.'

'Did I?'

'You certainly did. Last year. You sent me an email, remember? Or didn't you know who you were sending it to? I've got the best record in the department, and now you're firing me! I don't believe it!'

'There are a few factors,' Keeler said seriously. 'The Personnel department...'

'To hell with them!' the young man said furiously, standing up. 'And to hell with you!' he shouted.

'You're just a puppet!' He turned and walked towards the door.

6 Who do you think he's going to speak to and why?

'I'm going to see the MD. I'm going to get some answers. I won't accept it unless he gives me a really good reason.'

'Wait a minute!' Keeler shouted. 'You'll only make things worse if you go and see Mr Walford...'

But he couldn't stop him. Keeler sighed deeply and went back to the letter he was writing. At 5.10 he filled his briefcase with unread documents and went home.

Part 3

On Monday morning Evelyn arrived at the office before him. She looked up as he entered. 'Oh, Mr Keeler, Mr Walford called at nine and asked you to go and see him as soon as you got here.'

7 Why do you think Mr Walford wants to see Keeler?

Keeler got the lift to the executive floor and went to Mr Walford's office at the end of the corridor.

'Sit down, Keeler,' said Mr Walford. 'This man of yours, Macnally...'

'Sorry about that, Mr Walford. So he came to see you...'

'Yes, he did,' said Mr Walford. 'A very emotional young man. A good man, too. I asked Mr Bowles in the Personnel Department about him. He said he was the best young man in your department. I didn't want to lose him. But after the things he said to me, I couldn't let him stay. He called me an old... What a pity.'

'Yes,' said Keeler, 'It is a pity, I didn't want to fire him, Mr Walford. But the Personnel Department knows best...'

'Did you get the order from Mr Bowles?'

'Yes, sir.'

'When?'

'On Wednesday. It was in the lift, actually. He told me that Macauley wasn't the right man for the job...'

He stopped.

'Macauley,' he whispered.

'Yes,' Walford said quietly. 'Macauley. Tell me something, Keeler... How long have you been working here?'

8 Why does Mr Walford ask Keeler the last question? What do you think is going to happen to Keeler?

