

5a

“So, what do we know about this guy?” I ask Billingsworth.

“Oh, he’s a big hitter.” Billingsworth affects a batting stance. It could be baseball or it could be cricket. For the sake of business and international diplomacy, it may be both. That’s Billingsworth. He makes a popping noise with his lips as he smacks an unseen ball into the hereafter. “Biiiiiiig hitter.”

The elevator is one of those old ones with the steel grate for a door. It arrives with the sort of thump and clatter that finds you searching for a stairwell. Billingsworth grips the cage like he’s about to compete in a strong man competition. His face reddens as he pulls. The steel grate gathers momentum and compresses piano-accordion-style, with a similarly disagreeable noise.

“All aboard,” says Billingsworth, his face returning to a normal shade of pale.

The elevator grinds slowly up. It’s hard to tell how many floors. Sometimes it’s hard to tell if it’s moving. Billingsworth stares through the dim light to where the numbers would be if there were any. When he speaks, his eyes stay glued to the upper middle distance.

“How are we feeling Mortlock? I mean, really, how are we feeling? This is a big opportunity. Big moment. We land this fish, whooooey, they’ll be lining up at the door. *Knock Knock.* Hello, can I help you? *Yes, we’re future clients, where can we park these*

wheelbarrows full of money?" Billingsworth breathes deeply through his nose, distracted by his own vision. "Big opportunity Mortlock."

"I don't even know who this client is."

"Potential client, Mortlock. Soon-to-be client, even. Anyway, just go with your instincts. You're a good marketing man. A big game player. Five seconds to go, two down, who do I look for? Mortlock."

Billingsworth looks down to adjust his tie, then returns to the invisible numbers. The elevator clatters on.

"Did you read about the latest trouble in the Middle West?" I ask.

Billingsworth looks away from the ghost numbers for a moment, curls his long black fringe back behind his ear. "Eh? Er, the fundamentalists? At it again are they?"

"Such a hopeless situation. How can something so sweet and fizzy be so divisive?"

"Come on Mortlock, human nature, man. Cola's just the handiest way to pick teams, to draw a line in the sand. If it wasn't Coke and Pepsi, they'd be rumbling over... over skin colour, religion, or some such. You know that. 'Ts why you're a good marketing man. Now come on, focus. Eyes down, clickety clicks."

The elevator stops, or it may have been stopped for some time. Billingsworth grips the grate. His cheeks puff, his face reddens again, and we step into the hallway.

The hall runner is faded maroon with a floral pattern, worn very thin and dark in front of the elevator. At each end of the hallway it piles up in gentle waves, having somehow found an extra yard or so during its long life.

“This way, Mortlock, mind on the job,” says Billingsworth, setting off over the thin carpet, his face a normal shade of pale again.

The office is very low key. No name on the door, just a number; 5a.

“Good morning, may I help you?”

I jump slightly. The receptionist seems to have appeared from nowhere, short and thin, her cardigan not quite fitting properly around the shoulders. She encourages her glasses back up her large nose and smiles expectantly.

“Billingsworth and Mortlock,” says Billingsworth, “from Blunt Stick Marketing. Here to see the man, the head honcho, the big cheese.”

The receptionist looks towards a closed door and smiles, “I’ll let Him know you’re here.

Please take a seat.”

The two chairs sag in the middle like retired maths teachers. Billingsworth takes the green one, leaving me the blue one with the padding escaping from a crack in the side.

“What’s on the agenda?” I ask Billingsworth.

“No agenda, Mortlock. Shoot from the hip. Pow!”

“You may go in now,” says the receptionist, although she doesn’t appear to have attended to, or consulted with, anyone in particular.

The door closes gently behind us, as gently as it opened, and seemingly of its own accord. The room has been wallpapered to look like wood. It’s not a bad job, as wood-panelled wallpaper goes, but some sheets are coming unstuck, leaving telltale gaps.

“Mr Billingsworth, Mr Mortlock, ever so glad you could make it,” says a small man, say five-foot-two with the brogues. He smoothes his jacket, pats down his obvious comb over. “Nice to meet you.”

“God, God, a pleasure,” says Billingsworth taking the Lord’s small hand in his own meaty fingers and pumping it furiously. “Great to finally meet you. Heard an awful lot about you.”

“All good, I hope.”

“Well, depends on who you talk to, hey.”

The two chortle, while I shake the hand of God.

“So what can we do for you, Lord?” says Billingsworth, repositioning his fringe over his other ear. “What’s the story?”

“Well,” says the Creator, retaking his seat, his small feet swinging back and forth under his chair, “I believe it’s time I worked on my image. I have no brand presence.”

“Hmm,” says Billingsworth, “hmmm. Well, you’ve come to the right place, teed up on the right fairway. Mortlock here is a genius. Got his finger on the pulse, ear to the ground. He’ll sort you. Where’s your pencil Mortlock?”

Both men watch closely as I open my briefcase and remove a notepad and a brand new 2B. I lick the tip and position it above a clean page. “Umm... so... can you tell me what you’re thinking?” I ask the Lord.

God turns his tiny hands over and over on themselves. “Well, it seems the world is a pretty mixed up place these days. I can’t help but think that a brand like mine could do really well. If I could just get it out there. Get it known. You see, the Cola fundamentalists have taken things too far. People are disillusioned. Who gets up at 4am to bow to Atlanta anymore? I think they’re looking for something else. Something fresh. My brand values are peace and love and happiness. That’s something I can really own, right?”

“Hmm,” says Billingsworth, “hmm. Not the sexiest brand personality. What do you think Mortlock? That something you can work with?”

I write down the words ‘peace’, ‘love’ and ‘happiness’. Then I draw a circle around them. This seems to please the Lord. “Here’s a little test,” I say to God. “If your brand were to get out of a limousine, which Hollywood star would it be? Nike might be Will Smith for example. Smirnoff, Pierce Brosnan.”

God stops turning his hands over and thinks hard, his bushy eyebrows rising and falling. “John Gielgud?”

“Hmm,” says Billingsworth, “hmm. What about Johnny Depp? Seems a pretty decent chap, into peace, love and... eh... happiness. Got something for the ladies too.”

God starts turning his hands over again. “Well, I suppose...”

“Maybe we should try something else,” I say. “What about a logo? All the great brands have a logo. Like McDonalds’ golden arches.”

God brightens and reaches for a powdery manila folder with upturned corners. “Well, I did have this one done up some time ago by a firm in Timbuktu.” He removes a sheet of paper and slides it across the table. It’s a drawing of a hand coming out of cloud clutching a lightning bolt, ready to throw. “It was back when I was toying with a vengeful sort of thing. A fear campaign, like the road safety ones.”

“Hmm. Billingsworth?”

“Well, er, personally I have my reservations about shock campaigns. They’re wanting in longevity, you see. Besides, I think simplicity is the key to a great logo. What if we did this?” I cup my hands and cover all of the logo except where God’s finger intersects with the lightening bolt.

“Looks like the letter ‘t’ Mortlock. You lost your marbles, man?”

“Well, of course you have to give it some meaning, inject it with drama.” I turn to God, “That’s what we do at Blunt Stick Marketing.”

God blinks hard behind his spectacles, checks his comb over and nods encouragingly.

“I mean, the letter ‘t’ is a good thing to have. As far as letters go, it’s very handy.

Possibly the handiest of all the consonants. Lots of words need a ‘t’.

“That’s right,” says Billingsworth, spreading forward across the table like a wave of tweed paint. “Pistachio, hippopotamus, chihuahua... well not so much chihuahua.”

“I’m not so sure,” says God. “You don’t find a ‘t’ in peace, love or happiness.”

“Hmm,” says Billingsworth, “hmmm. The Lord’s got a point, Mortlock. Not one of your brightest. What else have you got, man?”

“But I like the simplicity,” says God quickly, smiling apologetically. “In a crowded market place, a simple logo would be good, right?”

Billingsworth rebounds from his spread-forward position like a stretched balloon. “Nail on the head your Godness! Whack! Watch out for this one, Mortlock, got his eyes on your job, man.”

“Well, perhaps we can keep the shape, but use it as something else,” I say. “An intersection, where peace and love meet.”

“Mortlock, don’t be daft. It’s peace, love *and* happiness. You’d need a bloody round-a-bout. Say goodbye to the pensioners. Take them a month to work the blooming logo out. Come on man, sizzle for the Lord.”

“Well, perhaps we should try a different approach. What about a spokesperson? Someone to front the campaign, to spread the word, so to speak?”

God’s tiny feet start going double time, swinging under his chair. His hands turn over extra quickly. “You know, I was thinking that I could do it. Like the Home Loans chap who’s always on the television, or that Richard Branson.”

Billingsworth wheezes like he’s been hit. “Bloody hell! I mean... you don’t want that, for your own sake. All that smiling and the hand shaking. Leave it for the politicians. Besides, you’re too short.”

God frowns a small frown and scratches at his ear where a few wiry hairs are making a very slow bid for escape. “Well, I do have a son.” He takes his scarred and tangled wallet from his thin trousers and removes a photograph.

“Stop the search!” yells Billingsworth, snatching the photo and springing to his feet. “What a lad! Look at those cheekbones, that rock star hair. A father and son operation. It says trust, it says reliability. Somebody put the sausages in, I think we’re cooking. Cook with me, Mortlock.”

“Well, he certainly is handsome. Photogenic. I can see the women responding favourably to him, but the men might find him a little threatening. Tell me, God, has...er...”

“Jesus.”

“...has Jesus had any media experience?”

“Well, no, not as such. He’s a carpenter.”

“Don’t be such a naysayer, Mortlock,” says Billingsworth, pacing the room with purpose. “No room for negative Nancies here, right Yahweh? No, this is the ticket, the winning number. He’s got charisma, your lad, I can tell. I can see his face on t-shirts, posters, bumper stickers. Oh the possibilities. Quick, Mortlock, jingles? Got any jingles up that trusty sleeve of yours?”

“Well, there was that one that the Fijian Vegetable Board didn’t buy, er... Our starchy vegetable... who art in the earth... taro be thy name...”

“Hmm,” says Billingsworth, “Hmmm. Not ringing any bells, sing if for me, man.”

“Ahem... thy carbohydrates come, thy will say yum...”

“Hmm. Not so sure about that one. Still, pen to paper Mortlock, see what you can do with it. Now, how are we going to walk this puppy? What’s the angle? Any thoughts oh Lord?”

God leans forward, chewing on his bottom lip. “Well, it is his birthday in December, perhaps we could incorporate that?”

“Birthday hey?” says Billingsworth, replacing his excitable fringe back behind his ear. “Gotta say, I’m a little hesitant. Every man and his dog does a birthday promotion. Don’t know how else to say this Lord, but, well, as your ideas go, that one’s up there with coconuts. Still, jot it down Mortlock, who knows?”

Billingsworth and the Lord watch as I take my pencil and write down the word ‘Birthday’. I give it an exclamation mark to make the Lord feel better. Then, when there is nothing else to write, we all stare at different things.

“Yes God, shoot,” says Billingsworth when he spies the Lord tiptoeing around an announcement.

“Well, it’s just that he can do a bit of magic,” says the Lord. “My boy. He can do card tricks, disappearing coins, that sort of thing.”

Billingsworth's head jerks up, hung by an invisible noose. "Good God, you're a genius! Abracadabra. Hocus Pocus. Rabbit from a hat. What's not to love? What do you think, Mortlock? Pick a card any card?"

"People sure do love magic."

"Slam dunk Holiness. Cracked it like a nut. Now, we need a trick, big trick, something spectacular to tell the world you're a player. Mortlock?"

"What about walking through the Great Wall of China?"

"Bzzzzzt! Done. Next?"

"Walk on water?"

"Maybe. What else you got?"

"Make the Statue of Liberty disappear?"

"Bloody hell, Mortlock, drag yourself into this century, the weather's lovely. We need something with a bit of zing, some balls, man."

“Well, surely the biggest trick is to be dead, actually stone cold dead, and then come back to life. Not even that David Blaine chap’s done that.”

Billingsworth throws his arms in the air, give-me-a-Y style. “What a team! Mortlock and God. God and Mortlock. Oh to be blessed with such brainstorming brilliance. Keep going, keep going.”

I pick up my pencil and start scribbling at a furious pace. “We could build a whole story around it, like David Copperfield does. Not just a trick, a whole extravaganza. A multi-media marketing campaign. Lots of drama, a bit of whodunit. Jesus gets killed. Then locked away, dead. And... and... and then someone goes to the vault, but he’s gone. Jesus is gone! What’s happened to him? Who took him? Then we find out he’s actually returned from the dead. And let *himself* out! Like Houdini.”

Billingsworth is dancing up and down the room, pausing to explode into star jumps. “Oh this is good. This is great. This may be our best yet, Mortlock. Don’t stop.”

“Er... er... we need a villain, and a reason for the death, and a setting. Umm. Atlantis. No, no, ancient Rome; lots of violence. And, and... and here is this person – Jesus – in the ancient Roman Empire, the very heartland of violence, and he’s preaching peace, love and happiness! Yes, so the emperor feels threatened, he doesn’t like it; enter the villain, boxer type, er, Punches...Punches Pilate. So he kills Jesus, he, he... oh yes, he nails him to a cross – just like the logo!”

“Somebody get some water, Mortlock’s on fire.”

“We can build a whole cast. Friends, allies, spies, betrayal, a little bit of everything. I’ll need to story board it. Twelve frames tops. There’s our launch. Then we roll out the logo and... and a book – a biography!”

“Oh Mortlock, this is enormous, stupendous! On brief, on time, on budget. You’ve done it again, man. What do you think, God? Are we your agency or are we your agency?”

God’s little hands stop turning and his breath whistles out his nose. “Well, I appreciate your enthusiasm chaps, I really do.” A furrow forms in the brow of God. He scratches at his ear again. “But I’m just not sure anyone would believe such a far-fetched story?”