

The Collector

1 August 1st

Yes, this is a supermarket. It's big. There aren't any supermarkets at home. We don't need them now. Everything is very cheap here. Well, it's all new. Look at this! Kellogg's Cornflakes, J1.79! I can sell this packet at home for 5,000 units, maybe 6,000. But I don't want this one. It's got a picture from *Star Trek* on it.

I'm looking for a Kellogg's Cornflakes packet, but I need the 500 gram packet with a picture of a dinosaur on the back. Those packets are from July and August 1993.

It's August 1st, 1993 today. The twentieth-century film *Jurassic Park* is in the cinemas this week. It's a new film, and the pictures of dinosaurs are on everything. They're on packets of cornflakes, magazines, comics. All these packets here have got the *Star Trek* picture.

Maybe I can ask. There's a young woman near the packets of coffee. She's taking more packets of coffee from a box. She's wearing a green coat. She works in this supermarket. I can ask her.

Me Excuse me, madam.

Woman Sorry?

Me Excuse me, madam. I'm looking for the cornflakes.

Woman They're over there. You're standing next to them.

Me You don't understand. I want a packet with a dinosaur picture. A 500 gram packet.

Woman Oh! For your children. They all love *Jurassic Park*.

Me Yes. That's right. For my children. They love the film.

Woman We haven't got any. We're going to get some tomorrow. Come back then.

Me Tomorrow? What time?

Woman The food arrives at six o'clock or seven o'clock in the morning. We open at eight.

Me Thank you, madam.

Woman Are you English?

Me Er ... no. I'm ... I'm ... a visitor. Why?

Woman You say strange things. 'Madam'. No one says 'madam' in a supermarket...

This is terrible. Can I wait for tomorrow? I don't like it here. It's cold and dirty. And my arm is hurting. But I need that packet. I can get 300,000 units for that packet at home. The dinosaur picture on that packet is by Kate Hermann. She's a very famous artist at home. Many people collect food packets with her pictures on them, but they haven't got the dinosaur picture. No one has got that picture. Kate Hermann's picture is famous, because the colours of the dinosaurs are correct. Dinosaur pictures usually have all the colours wrong. We know that now.

2 What is she doing here?

I know her. Tilda Birdsong. What is she doing here? I don't like her. Does she want a cornflakes packet, too?

Tilda Clinton! Hi. How are you?

Me I'm fine, thanks. How are you, Tilda?

Tilda You're looking for something, Clinton. What is it this time?

Me Nothing.

Tilda You can tell me! We're friends.

Me Friends? Are we?

Tilda Well, our jobs are the same. We buy and sell things.

Me Why are you here?

Tilda Why not? It's a twentieth-century supermarket. It's an interesting place.

Me But why today? Why on August 1st, 1993?

Tilda Maybe I'm hungry. Or thirsty.

Me What do you want?

Tilda I've got it. It's here.

There's a packet of tea in her hand. What make is it? Ah, yes. Twinings tea. 99 pence. Expensive, yes. It's a beautiful packet. It's green, grey and gold. Maybe she can get 10,000 units for that packet. But no more. Many people have got 1990s Twinings tea packets. But why is she here on the same day, and in the same place?

Tilda When are you going home?

Me I don't know. Tomorrow, I think.

Tilda You're going to sleep here? Here in Britain?

Me Yes. I think so.

Tilda Have you got all the right vaccinations?

My arm is hurting badly. Yes, I have all the vaccinations. You need twenty-three vaccinations for twentieth-century Britain. That's not too bad. What about the sixteenth century? The time of William Shakespeare? Don't ask! You don't want to know! Tilda is looking at me.

Tilda But where are you going to sleep, Clinton?

Me In a hotel.

Tilda Have you got fifty pounds in British money? She's laughing. She's laughing at me. Of course we can't get British banknotes. There aren't any at home. I have two one-pound coins. That's all. You pay about 1,000 units for a pound coin. That's why we can buy only one or two things in the supermarket.

Me It's August. I can sleep outside.

Tilda It's raining, Clinton. Why don't you go home today and come back tomorrow?

She knows the answer. Travelling is expensive, and always a little dangerous. We can only travel one day in every month. And we always need to travel home between destinations.

Tilda You're waiting for something. Something important. And it's going to be here tomorrow. I don't want to tell her about the packet and the Kate Hermann picture of a dinosaur. It's *my* information. I work for days to find information like this - the correct time and place for expensive antiques.

Tilda OK, Clinton. Don't tell me. You can tell me next week.

Me Next week?

Tilda Clinton! Next week is the Antiques Festival! You're going to be there!

Me Oh, yes. I'm going to be there. And I'm going to have a very special antique with me. A 1993 Kellogg's Cornflakes packet with *the Jurassic Park* picture. 300,000 units! Maybe more. Tilda's going.

Tilda Well, goodbye. Don't get too cold tonight!

3 I need some money

I walk out of the supermarket. There are hundreds of cars in the car park. A 1993 car is fifty million units at home. But they're all too big. You can't take them with you. Some of them are very beautiful... Toyota Corollas, Ford Escorts, Nissan Sunnys, Fiat Unos, Renault Clios, Rover Minis. They're the expensive ones, the everyday cars. You can find Rolls Royces, Mercedes, Ferraris and Porsches at home - people are very careful with old cars like those. But you can't find the everyday cars.

It's raining hard, and I haven't got a coat. And I haven't got any money. Only two pounds. And I need that for the cornflakes tomorrow. The rain is cold.

A young man is sitting on the ground outside the supermarket. He's wearing old, dirty jeans and an old T-shirt. There's a hat in front of him, and a sign. The sign says, 'No home. Cold, hungry and thirsty. Please help.' A young woman walks past. She stops, and puts a fifty-pence coin in the hat. Then an old man puts a few twenty-pence coins in the hat. That's the answer! A woman is walking along the street. I stop her.

Me Excuse me. I'm hungry and thirsty. And I'm cold. Please help.

The woman is looking at my clothes. They're very good clothes. I always get good clothes. I'm wearing an expensive blue suit, new black shoes and a clean white shirt. The woman doesn't say anything. She walks away. Then the young man stands up. His jeans are very dirty. He's angry.

Young man Hey! You! This is my place! I'm here every day. Go away!

Me I'm sorry. Don't be angry. I need some money, too.

Young man Go on! Go away!

He's very angry. And he's a strong young man, too. What can I do? I go away. I walk between the cars in the car park. An old man is opening his car door.

Me Excuse me, sir. I need some money.

The man is afraid. Why?

Me Could you give me some money, please?

Man Don't hurt me!

Me I don't want to hurt you. I'm only asking a question. Could I have some money, please?

Man Help! Police! Help!

People are looking at me. The man is running away between the cars. He's shouting. Now a police car is stopping outside the supermarket. Two police officers get out, a man and a woman. The man is talking to them. They're all looking at me. I don't want to talk to the police officers. I run fast between the cars. I can run very fast. I run out of the car park and along a road. There are some trees on my left. Quickly, I go behind a tree and stop. The police car goes past. The police officers are in the front and the man is in the back. They're looking out of the windows. They're looking for me.

4 Fast food

Half an hour later. The police car isn't here now. And it isn't raining. It's afternoon. I'm hungry. Where can I get some food? There's a restaurant near the supermarket. It has big red and yellow signs outside. They say 'Fast Food'. Maybe I can get some food there.

The restaurant is expensive. Well, it's expensive for me. It sells hamburgers. I need to be careful about twentieth-century food. Maybe I can't eat hamburgers. My arm is still hurting from the vaccinations, but the vaccinations don't work for bad food. Usually you don't eat in the twentieth century. My two one-pound coins are in my hand. I need J1.79 for tomorrow. What can I buy for twenty-one pence? The menu is short. Hamburger, cheeseburger, egg and cheeseburger, chips, tea, coffee, chocolate milkshake, cola, milk, ice-cream. There's nothing for twenty-one pence. Well, there's ketchup for ten pence. But I can't eat only ketchup! There's a small sign in the window.

WANTED
TABLE CLEANERS
\$ 4.00 PER HOUR

Four pounds for one hour! That's fantastic! Maybe I can work for one or two hours. Then I can buy some chips - a lot of chips. Chips and ketchup and ice-cream! And tomorrow I can buy *two* packets of cornflakes, or maybe three! I walk into the restaurant. There's a young woman near the door. She's wearing a white coat. There's ketchup on the coat ... and chocolate milkshake and tea. There's a sign on her coat, too. It says, 'Linda. Manager'.

Me Excuse me. Are you Linda Manager?

Linda Well, my name's Linda, and I'm the manager. Can I help you?

Me Yes. I want a job. And four pounds an hour. I can work for two hours or maybe three.

Linda You? You're not a table cleaner! Not in that suit!

I look down at my suit. Maybe an expensive suit isn't the right thing for 1993.

Me I can clean tables very well.

Linda But the job's for a week. Four pounds an hour. Thirty-five hours a week. That's J140. We need a table cleaner for a week ... not for two or three hours. A week! In this cold, dirty country! How can they live here?

Linda But we are busy today ... do you want two hours' work?

Me Oh, yes, please! Very much!

Linda OK. Come and get a coat.

We go into a small room. There are a lot of white coats. I take my jacket off, and I put it on a chair. I put on a white coat. It isn't very clean. There's ketchup and milkshake and some egg and hamburger on it.

Linda You put the dirty things in there, and clean the tables. That's all.

The first table is very dirty. There are some dirty paper cups, and there's some tea and coffee and sugar and ketchup on the table. There's something under my shoe. It's a chip. I'm cleaning the table very carefully.

Linda What are you doing?

Me I'm cleaning the table. It's hard work.

Linda Just take the dirty things off the table and clean it quickly. Like this!

Me It isn't very clean.

Linda It's OK!

I put the dirty things in black bags. It's strange. Some of the things are very expensive at home. There are packets and cups with pictures. I put one ketchup packet in my pocket. I work for two hours. Linda isn't happy with me.

Linda You can go. We aren't very busy now. Here's five pounds.

Me The sign says, 'four pounds an hour'.

Linda That's for a week. Then you pay tax and insurance and everything. Five pounds is all I'm going to pay you. And you can have a hamburger.

We're in the small room. It's Linda's office. Linda is giving me a blue banknote. A banknote! I take the dirty white coat off.

Me Where's my jacket? It isn't on the chair.

Linda No, it isn't. Anyone can come in here. And it's an expensive jacket. It's in the cupboard. It's over there. I go to the cupboard and open it. I take my jacket, and put it on. Linda is watching me.

Linda OK. You can go and get a hamburger.

Me Can I have chips, too? All right. Chips, too.

5 Outside

I'm outside under the trees. It's evening. The hamburger isn't very good, but I'm going to eat it. I hope it's OK. The chips are cold. I don't like them. Twentieth-century food is terrible. But I've got the blue banknote. I can buy three packets of cornflakes. I'm rich!

I can't sleep. It's three o'clock in the morning, and I can't sleep. I can hear a dog. It's angry. I'm afraid of dogs. We don't have dogs at home. Not now. It's cold under the trees. I'm standing up and walking around. I'm very tired. The supermarket opens at eight o'clock. Five more hours!

Three packets of cornflakes. And a green, grey and gold packet of Twinings tea (maybe Tilda knows something). And some Cadbury's chocolate. And it's only eight thirty in the morning. I've got *two* supermarket bags (they're blue and red with the 'Tesco' name), and some small coins. The bags are 5,000 units at home. Now, I'm going back to my time machine. In ten minutes I'm going to be back at home in 2561. In 2561 it's always hot, and everything is clean, and there aren't any dogs. In 2561 we don't eat hamburgers - ergh!

So, where's my time machine? You can't see it. I can't see it, but it's here. I leave the time machine just one minute into the future. It's here, under the trees, but it's always just one minute in front of us in time. That's why you can't see it. It's waiting for me. I have a small remote control. The control stops the time machine. Then I wait for one minute, and the time machine is here! Then I can go home!

Right, take the remote control... but it isn't here! It isn't in my jacket pocket. But why? It isn't in any of the pockets. It's lost! No remote control, no time machine! I'm here, in cold, dirty 1993 and I can't leave.

In 2561 my three packets of cornflakes are nearly a million units. Here? They're just breakfast, that's all. Just breakfast, and I haven't got any milk!