

Extract from *The Edible Woman* by Margaret Atwood

I had to return from lunch and was licking and stamping envelopes for the coast-to-coast instant pudding-sauce study, behind schedule because someone in mimeo had run one of the questions sheets backwards, when Mrs. Bogue came out of her cubicle.

'Marian,' she said with a sigh of resignation, 'I'm afraid Mrs. Dodge in Kamloops will have to be removed. She's pregnant.' Mrs. Bogue frowned slightly: she regards pregnancy as an act of disloyalty to the company.

'That's too bad,' I said. The huge wall-map of the country, sprinkled with red thumbtacks like measles, is directly above my desk, which means that the subtraction and addition of interviewers seems to have become part of my job. I climbed up on the desk, located Kamloops, and took out the thumbtack with the paper flag marked DODGE.

'While you're up there,' Mrs. Bogue said, 'could you just take off Mrs. Ellis in Blind River? I hope it's only temporary, she's always done good work, but she writes that some lady chased her out of the house with a meat cleaver and she fell on the steps and broke her leg. Oh, and add this new one - a Mrs. Gauthier in Charlottetown. I certainly hope she's better than the last one there; Charlottetown is always so difficult.'

When I had climbed down she smiled at me pleasantly, which put me on guard. Mrs. Bogue has a friendly, almost cosy manner that equips her perfectly for dealing with the interviewers, and she is at her most genial when she wants something. 'Marian,' she said, 'we have a little problem. We're running a beer study next week - you know which one, it's the telephone-thing one - and they've decided upstairs that we need to do a pre-test this weekend. They're worried about the questionnaire. Now, we could get Mrs. Pilcher, she's a dependable interviewer, but it *is* the long weekend and we don't like to ask her. You're going to be in town, aren't you?'

'Does it have to be this weekend?' I asked, somewhat pointlessly.

'Well, we absolutely have to have the results Tuesday. You only need to get seven or eight men.'

My lateness that morning had given her leverage. 'Fine,' I said, 'I'll do them tomorrow.'

'You'll get overtime, of course,' Mrs. Bogue said as she walked away, leaving me wondering whether that had been a snide remark. Her voice is always so bland it's hard to tell.

I finished licking the envelopes, then got the beer questionnaires from Millie and went through the questions, looking for trouble-spots. The initial selection questions were designed to test listener response to a radio jingle, part of the advertising campaign for a new brand of beer one of the large companies was about to launch on the market. At a certain point the interviewer had to ask the respondent to pick up the telephone and dial a given number, whereupon the jingle would play itself to him over the phone. Then there were a number of questions asking the man how he liked the commercial, whether he thought it might influence his buying habits, and so on.

I dialled the phone number. Since the survey wasn't actually being conducted till the next week, someone might have forgotten to hook up the record, and I didn't want to make an idiot of myself.

After a preliminary ringing, buzzing and clicking a deep bass voice, accompanied by what sounded like an electric guitar, sang:

*Moose, Moose,  
From the land of pine and spruce,  
Tingly, heady, rough-and-ready....*