



ABOUT YOU

Answer the questions and talk about your ideas.

- 1 When people are at the hairdresser's or barber's, what do you think they talk about?
- 2 Can you think of any other situations where we talk to strangers?
- 3 How easy is it to start a conversation with a stranger?

The scene is a barber's shop in the USA some years ago. Barbers cut hair, but sometimes they also shave people using a sharp razor, which looks like a long knife. The extract is from a short play. The barber is sitting alone in his shop. A well-dressed man enters the shop. He looks impatient.

- 1 Read the text. As you read, think about this question. Do you think these men have met before?

The Reckoning (1930) Percival Wilde

BARBER: Good afternoon, sir.

CUSTOMER: Is that clock right?

BARBER: Yes, sir.

CUSTOMER: Now, I've got just five minutes. Can you shave

- 5 me in that time?

BARBER: Five minutes, sir? Easy! Sit!

CUSTOMER: All right. Go ahead.

BARBER: Yes, sir. **In a hurry**, sir?

CUSTOMER: Yes. Attending a **critical** meeting at three.

- 10 (*He glances at the clock.*)

BARBER: Don't worry, sir. There's lots of time . . . From the country, sir?

CUSTOMER: Yes. **Southerner**.

BARBER: I'm from the country myself.

- 15 CUSTOMER: What part?

BARBER: Oh, that would be difficult to say. I've moved around so much. I lived in a little town near Savannah.

CUSTOMER: Did you? Why, so did I.

BARBER: Yes, indeed. I used to see you – quite frequently –

- 20 though you never came into my shop. Then I went to Philadelphia.

CUSTOMER: What year?

BARBER: Let me think. It was twelve years ago.



CUSTOMER: Twelve years ago? I went to Philadelphia the

- 25 same year!

BARBER: I saw you there, too, sir.

(*He lowers the chair suddenly.*)

CUSTOMER: (**Startled**) What are you doing?

BARBER: I'm hurrying, sir. From Philadelphia I went

- 30 to Newark.

CUSTOMER: To Newark?

BARBER: And from Newark to Indianapolis.

CUSTOMER: What?

BARBER: And then Muscatine – briefly – and Chicago –

- 35 and Louisville.

CUSTOMER: Anyone might think you've been **following me about!** I've lived in all those places.

BARBER: Have you, sir? **It's a small world**, isn't it?

CUSTOMER: You've been a barber always?

- 40 BARBER: Yes sir.

CUSTOMER: (*Smiling*) Well, this is the first time you ever shaved me.

BARBER: Curious, isn't it? But it may be the last.

GLOSSARY

in a hurry

if you are in a hurry, you want or need to do something very quickly

critical

very important for the way things will happen in the future

southerner

someone from the south part of a country

lowers

moves something to a lower position

startled

suddenly surprised or frightened

following me about

going behind someone and going where they go, sometimes secretly

it's a small world

expression to show surprise at meeting someone or discovering a personal connection in a far-away place or unlikely situation

