

# COMPLAINT DEPARTMENT

## By Bobby Keniston

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## COMPLAINT DEPARTMENT

*A Ten Minute Comedy Duet*

**By Bobby Keniston**

**SYNOPSIS:** Jeffrey Butter just wants to return his cell phone. Unfortunately, the Returns department at this store is run by a very bizarre young woman named Helen, who insists on calling it the Complaint Department. Mild-mannered Jeffrey just wants to return the phone and be done with it, but Helen has other plans, mainly to goad Jeffrey into complaining by any means necessary. This ten minute duet sets out to hilariously examine if complaining is actually good for the soul!

### CAST OF CHARACTERS

HELEN (f) ..... Manager of what she calls the “complaint” department. She is lively and bizarre, prone to mood swings. (50 lines)

JEFFREY BUTTER (m) ..... A mild-mannered fellow, doing his best to return a cell phone he doesn't want. (50 Lines)

### PROPS

- CELL PHONE (Jeffrey)
- TABLOID (Helen)
- CLIPBOARD (Helen)

### SETTING

A desk and a chair. Either on or near the desk is a sign reading “RETURNS”. On the desk, there is a small bell, as well as a sign reading “RING BELL FOR ASSISTANCE”.

*Dedication*

*For Tracy Sue, my Ideal Reader*

**AT RISE:** HELEN sits behind the desk. She is reading a tabloid magazine which, at present, hides her face. She hums quietly to herself as she reads. Presently, JEFFREY BUTTER enters, holding a cell phone in his hand, and approaches the desk.

**JEFFREY:** Excuse me, is this where I'm supposed to be to return an item? *(No response.)* The cashier upfront told me to see Helen in Returns. *(No response.)* Are you Helen?

**HELEN:** *(Without lowering her magazine.)* Read the sign.

**JEFFREY:** Uh... yes, it says "Returns", so I must be in the right...

**HELEN:** *(Still behind her magazine, sighing.)* The OTHER sign.

**JEFFREY:** *(Noticing the sign on the desk.)* Oh. Sorry.

*He rings the bell. Immediately, HELEN drops the tabloid, sits up straight, and plasters on a big smile.*

**HELEN:** Good afternoon, sir, my name is Helen. Welcome to the complaint department. How can I help you today?

**JEFFREY:** Complaint department?

**HELEN:** That's correct sir. Bonus for you! You passed your hearing test!

**JEFFREY:** But the sign says "Returns".

**HELEN:** Yes, and I say it's the complaint department. Who are you going to believe, sir? A lifeless, drab sign, or me, a vibrant, exciting woman?

**JEFFREY:** Well, naturally I believe you, it's just that...

**HELEN:** *(Retrieving a clipboard and pen from her desk, and speaking very quickly.)* Good! I'm glad we're on the same page! Name?

**JEFFREY:** Sorry?

**HELEN:** *(Writing it down.)* All right, Mr. Sorry. First name?

**JEFFREY:** What? No...

**HELEN:** *(Writing it down.)* Very good, Mr. What-no Sorry. Please explain the nature of your complaint, ideally in thirty words or less. I have a short attention span.

**JEFFREY:** Excuse me, but you've got my name wrong.

**HELEN:** *(Looking at her clipboard.)* I don't believe so, Mr. Sorry. I wrote it down.

**JEFFREY:** Please don't call me Mr. Sorry.

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**HELEN:** Do you prefer What-no?

**JEFFREY:** My name is Jeffrey Butter.

**HELEN:** (*Looking at her clipboard again.*) Not according to this form.  
Sorry.

**JEFFREY:** Believe me, ma'am, it's been Jeffrey Butter my entire life.

**HELEN:** Jeffrey Butter, huh? Ha! That sounds like a command.  
(*Doing an authoritative voice.*) Jeffrey! Butter! Now! My toast is getting cold! (*She laughs hysterically.*) Jeffrey! Butter! I can't eat my baked potato without it! (*Laughs even more.*)

**JEFFREY:** (*Attempting a polite laugh.*) Ha, ha. Yes, I suppose...

**HELEN:** So, Mr. Jeffrey Butter-My-Toast-Now, please tell me the nature of your complaint, preferably in thirty words or less.

**JEFFREY:** Well, the thing is...

**HELEN:** (*Loudly interrupting.*) ON SECOND THOUGHT, try to make it twenty. My mind can't stop wandering today.

**JEFFREY:** (*A little loud himself.*) I don't have a complaint!

**HELEN:** No? Not one?

**JEFFREY:** No!

**HELEN:** Not even a little, tiny one?

**JEFFREY:** No! I just want to return...

**HELEN:** Hold on for a second, fella. Let's just back up a step. You don't have one complaint? Are you honestly trying to suggest to me that your life is perfect? Is that what you're saying?

**JEFFREY:** Of course not, but...

**HELEN:** Then let go, man. Unburden yourself. Complain! Complain away!

**JEFFREY:** That's not necessary, I just want to...

**HELEN:** Do you even know what I'm offering you? Can you even begin to fathom the magnitude of the gift I am laying at your feet?

**JEFFREY:** (*After a slight pause.*) I have no idea what you're talking about.

**HELEN:** (*Getting very dramatic.*) How often in this world are we invited, nay, ENCOURAGED, to complain? By and large in civilized society, we are expected to hold on to our grievances silently, carrying them throughout our lives like a great stone in our stomachs. We smile and shrug, we say that “nothing's wrong”, that “everything is fine.” But deep within each and every one of us, in that secret place we're scared to talk about, we know different. Everything isn't fine. And no, not one single thing is perfect. In fact, most of our lives could be improved. Greatly improved.

**JEFFREY:** I hear what you're saying, and it's all well and good, but...

**HELEN:** (*Almost begging.*) Jeffrey! Do not miss this opportunity! I implore you! Complaining relieves stress and cleanses the soul! It improves quality and quantity of life! Pass this offer up, and you truly will be Mr. Sorry! Can't you see, Butter Man? Life is too short...everyone NEEDS to complain at some time or another. This is your chance!

*Pause. JEFFREY looks at her pleading eyes and sighs.*

**JEFFREY:** What I want, what I really, really want, is to return this cell phone. That's all that I want to do.

**HELEN:** (*Prompting.*) Because...?

**JEFFREY:** It's just not working very well for me.

**HELEN:** Come on, Butter, you can do better than that!

**JEFFREY:** Well... I just don't think it's very well-designed.

**HELEN:** (*Encouraging.*) Right, right. Go on.

**JEFFREY:** The battery barely holds a charge.

**HELEN:** (*Smiling.*) What else?

**JEFFREY:** (*Starting to get into it.*) It drops calls constantly! Constantly! My girlfriend called me up just to say “I love you”, and before I could say it back to her, the stupid line went dead! She thought I hung up on her! It was awful! She didn't speak to me for two days! I had to buy her two dozen roses and a hot stone massage before she'd even hear me out!

**HELEN:** Oh, no! That must have made you REALLY mad!

**JEFFREY:** (*Strongly worked up at this point.*) You bet it did! And to top it all off, the keypad sticks!

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**HELEN:** No!

**JEFFREY:** Yes! It's almost impossible to punch in a number or send a text. All of a sudden, you've got four sevens, or six letter "Qs". It is a constant source of frustration!

**HELEN:** I bet it is! I can FEEL the frustration oozing out of your pores!

**JEFFREY:** I mean, seriously? With the technology available today, how hard is it to make a keypad that doesn't stick? Why should that be such a herculean task? It's not rocket science, am I right?

**HELEN:** You're absolutely right, good sir!

**JEFFREY:** I know I am!

**HELEN:** If you had to describe this phone in one sentence, what would that sentence be?

**JEFFREY:** Umm... well... I don't know...

**HELEN:** Sure you do! Go ahead! How would you describe your phone if a friend of yours asked you for your honest opinion of it? You can do it, Jeffrey! Just let yourself go!

**JEFFREY:** *(Almost shouting.)* I'd say it's a piece of garbage!

**HELEN:** I don't believe you! Say it like you mean it!

**JEFFREY:** *(Shouting.)* IT'S A PIECE OF GARBAGE!

**HELEN:** Once more, with feeling!

**JEFFREY:** IT'S A PIECE OF GARBAGE!

**HELEN:** You did it!

**JEFFREY:** *(Still shouting.)* I HATE THIS PHONE!

*Pause. HELEN smiles softly. JEFFREY is exhilarated.*

**HELEN:** See? I bet you feel better now, don't you?

**JEFFREY:** Yes! I do! I feel like a million bucks!

**HELEN:** I told you! Didn't I?

**JEFFREY:** I feel great! Better than I have in years! It's like, all of sudden, I'm ALIVE. WHOO!

**HELEN:** *(Tiniest hint of sarcasm.)* That's good, Mr. Butter. I'm glad for you. Truly.

**JEFFREY:** *(Not picking up the sarcasm.)* Thanks!

*Slight pause.*

**HELEN:** *(Almost in an accusing tone.)* Of course, the people who make these phones are practically children. Did you know that?

**JEFFREY:** Excuse me?

**HELEN:** It's true. They're all like little Oliver Twists, working until their fingers bleed for only pennies an hour. And the factory they work in is like a dark, scary cave with heavy, oppressive heat and no air conditioning. Sweaty, scared, mirthless little Oliver Twists, or, Orphan Annies if you prefer, slaving away, making your phone.

**JEFFREY:** Are you serious?

**HELEN:** Deadly, just like the conditions these poor children work in. They have to suspend nets outside the window, because these poor, overworked kids keep trying to jump out of them! Poor little guys are just so unhappy! And I can't blame them, either!

**JEFFREY:** I had no idea! That's... that's... criminal!

**HELEN:** Sadly, it's not criminal where they come from. *(Heavy sarcasm.)* But, by all means, complain! After all, what a terrible inconvenience it must be to have a few dropped calls and a sticky keypad! Yes, these children are working for nineteen hours a day, with only one half-hour break, but that's no excuse for such shoddy workmanship! How dare they put out such garbage!? How disgraceful! Don't they take any pride in their work!?

**JEFFREY:** Wait! Hold on a second! I didn't know any of this when I said those things...

**HELEN:** I imagine that some people might have a bit more compassion, but, honestly, I am so very happy you feel better after letting your true feelings out. Good for you! I mean, after all, you lost a call from your GIRLFRIEND! The kids who made your phone will never know what it means to have someone love them, even without promises of a hot stone massage, but, hey, that's not your problem, is it Mr. Butter? Your problems are dropped calls and a sticky keypad! Your problems are the only ones in the world! *(Slight pause. JEFFREY looks ashamed. HELEN goes back to her clipboard.)* Very well, let's process your return, shall we? Would you prefer cash or a store credit?

*COMPLAINT DEPARTMENT*

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