

# **AUTOBIOGRAPHY**

**a coming of age 1958 - 1978 AD**



The   
DRUNKARDS   


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Original 1978 Drunkards' play *'Autobiography'* written Gary Mitchell except for *'Consequences Of Conversion'*, *'Sixth Form Blues'* and *'An Obtuse Explanation'* written by Andrew Batchelor; *'Take 627'* and *'Nottingham'* written by Harry Holland; and *'The Rape Scene'* written by Graham King.

Also scripts *'Bed-Sit Sally (A Story Of Our Time)'* & *'Maybe... If I'm Dead And Gone'* by Gary Mitchell and *'The Next Step'* by Andrew Batchelor, originals from *'Somewhere In Britain'* (1979) and *'Flatmates'* by Gary Mitchell, original from *'The Bromsgrove City Council Escape Committee'* (1980). *'Glad To Be Gay?'* & *'The Female Paradox'* by Gary Mitchell, 2019; *'The Big Musical Finale'* by Gary Mitchell and Al Gorithm, 2019.

2020 hindsight re-envisioning & novelisation by Gary Mitchell.



TRANSLATOR'S NOTE: *'Autobiography'* was originally conceived by The Drunkards as a play, both radio and stage. It was never intended to be a film. In this novelisation we have therefore decided to steer near to that format. Since they grew up near Stratford-Upon-Avon... imagine it being performed on the stage of The Globe Theatre, and simultaneously broadcast on Radio 3.



## Prologue

"Laugh and the world laughs with you. Cry, and you cry alone", Dave Chorus spaketh down from the stage gallery to address the gathered throng in the audience pit below, and also in the galleries. Dressed all in black – in doublet, hose and cloak, he looked all the world like in a widowed crow. "This said, 'tis but an inescapable F.O.L. all follow we must".

"F.O.L. means 'fact of life'..." also sprach his sidekick, Professor Schultz as he too entered to stand beside his compatriot on the other side of the gallery. Dressed in suit and tie he resembled the archetypical – nay *stereotypical* – early twentieth century mid-European professor, old bespectacled, and Teutonic of tongue and gait.

"But nevertheless a true saying for all the same", Chorus but bid him brief acknowledgment, then continued unabated.

"You ask of me who I be? 'Ere I am? I am Chorus, you humble narrator to this tale", he bowed, "for so I am bound to be - to be and not to be - by true commission of our gracious Lady, Queen Elizabeth".

"Ja!" the good scholar likewise affirmed. ". His first name Dave is being. Because everyone knows someone called, Dave right?"

"Indeed", Chorus agreed to proglomate their double-act.

"Unt I, "Shultz continued, "a professor of psychology am being".

"An expert in the labyrinthine workings of the mind", Chorus explained. "In a white room with no curtains, well versed within the science and lore of man", he forced himself make a grudging compliment as a trap-door opened to the stage below to reveal a callow youth centre-front, dressed in habitual jeans, jumper and scruffy shoes.

"This then is our morality tale tonight, our great yarn of coming of age", Chorus pointed down to the non-descript youth, standing like a statue, part of the machine. "His name is Edward Bromsgrove. But age nearly twenty he be, for want of a better phrase, the 'hero' of our tale, For please, excuse the terminology; because as you get more into this story you'll discover he's not so much a hero, as a big drip".

"He has eina grossen hangups", the Teutonic professor helpfully elaborated.

"Edward Bromsgrove smokes. Anything", Chorus now cast further dark judgement. "Drinks. Anything. Fornicates whenever possible... and supports his local team Queens Park Rangers... Difficult when one lives in London, but not impossible".

"He says that's not the official reason for his continually extraordinary anti-social behaviour", Schultz made it clear he was – in effect - Chorus' panel of experts.

"There are four main faces to Bromsgrove", Chorus turned inward to produce and engage the audience with a swingometer, wheeled on stage by two overcalled stage hands. "Failed musician!" a badly tuned guitar was heard to sound.

"Painful, isn't it?" Chorus persisted unabated.

"Failed actor!" Schultz exclaimed as a window shattered in a badly executed audio stunt. "Failed artist!" he displayed a child-like drawing.

"Oh - and above all failed human being", Chorus permitted himself a rare smile. "The only person to ever start at the bottom and progressively work his way down in life. So unlucky was he that - as a triplet son of pneumatic actress Rachael Squelch, he'd have been bottle fed - the quiet one in the middle".

He smiled – and the camera angle changed to hide a probably necessary film edit. "Ladies and gentlemen!" Chorus exclaimed like a smarmy game-show host on speed. "My esteemed colleague, Professor Grundel Von Schultz-Hapsburg-Hapsburg Von Berightwithyou of Emperor's college, University Of Mayerling, takes up the story. Professor!"

To a polite round of applause from watching stage minions Professor Schultz was now picked out by a spotlight, the rest of the stage illuminations dimming as a screen dropped behind Edward – and a silent film projector began to run what – for all the world – looked like a rich uncle's eight-millimetre home movie.

"Here, on zir film here, vee can gee our subject Edward Bromsgrove", Schultz used a pointer to indicate down, "or, *Homo Westlondonus*, as he is known to us scientists. He ist venting all his frustrations of life in the fourth quarter of the 20th century int zer form of protracted acts of neo-mindless violence, on this, a typical unsuspecting wall, wot's not done no one, no harm, no time, no how".

He paused for effect as, on the silent screen, Edward symbolically beat his head against a brick wall. "Now", he continued, "let us see what happens when – yes - you've got it, when, we turn zer volume up!"

Continuing his head-banging Edward's film now had sound added. "*I feel better*", the screen version suddenly exclaimed. "*Destruction is good for the soul! What was it Einstein said?  $E=MC^2$ ? Profound, very profound. Not that know what it means, of course. It just sounds good, right?*"

"And so, looking very relaxed now, our hero makes big way home, across field and dale, street and town, totally pissed out of, his tiny, microscopic, little

mind", Chorus continued in a very jovial voice as the audience watched events of screen, the real Edward Bromsgrove standing at the front of the stage, mute and passive. "Just like oh so many times before. And just look at him go! Dribbling past the milk bottles, falling into ditches, avoiding policemen and stray dogs: he struggles home and struggles into bed; and goes sleep; the sleep of the just". He paused. "Or is that, the 'just after'"

Indeed there now responded, from the projector, drunken snoring sounds.

"Unt zen", Professor Schultz took up the narrative, "five and thirty minutes unt one hour later precisely – his system rebels!"

"*We ain't standing for this Brothers!*" Edward's biological system could be seen on screen as akin to a gang of militant trade unionists.

"He wakes up, struggles to his feet, rushes into the bathroom, unt, in the time honoured ways of his ancestors, instantly..."

As the real Edward stood inert... on the projected screen there was vomit all over the lavatory. "And then he collapses in a heap on his bathroom floor", Chorus was jovially amused, "unconscious until the first rays of a brand new, action-packed, God-given, pearly fingered dawn..."

"....isn't that rude?" Schultz interrupted.

"Sush!" Chorus stilled. "Unconscious until the first rays of a brand new, action-packed, God-given, pearly fingered dawn awakes him from his slumbers, clutching that most prized of all human possessions, a king-sized hangover".

"Ja!" Schultz commentated his expertise. "Unt that's wot comes of being god's gift to boozing. I myself, also, occasionally suffer from an overdose of administering der cold Heineken too much am suffering; at least once a month. Even at my age..."

"Ninety seven", Chorus illuminated the audience. "Me too. But not as bad as our hero, and certainly not as often. The wife'd kill me..."

The audience laughed - at which point the real Edward woke up and the projection ceased.

"Ow my head!" he exclaimed that old familiar feeling. "I feel like there's an angry stegosaurus trapped inside it - and trying to get out!"

"Yes, we've all been through it. Life", Chorus amused down from the balcony. "And here it is – *life!* Life, Jim, but *not* as we know it".

"Yes tonight, Edward Bromsgrove!" Eammon Andrews<sup>1</sup> suddenly appeared on stage with his big red book. "This is your life!"

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<sup>1</sup> Then *'This Is Your Life'* TV presenter (*Translator*)

"Well I don't want it! You keep it!" for a moment Edward thought he'd prefer *'Chairman Mao's Little Red Book'*.

But his protest was all to no avail. "I am your God!" spaketh a heavily reverberated voice throughout the theatre. "I gave you your life and I say you're stuck with it. So hard, bloody, cheddar!"

"You know God?" Edward interjected to rail back against the universe. "You can be a right bastard when you want! Take a look at Chelsea FC", he now for the first time addressed his audience. "hey nobody else does", he then attempted to crack a joke. "They keep demanding an audience with the Queen - and that's only because they can't get one of their own!"

"You're digressing onto football again, Dave", like HAL in *'2001'* Professor Schultz advised.

And then there was blackout.

## **CONSEQUENCES OF CONVERSION**

In best Shakespearian style Chorus strode across the stage, ignoring passer-by 'extras' to point at a cardboard cut-out of Edward Bromsgrove, to deliver the rhyme:-

"His name is unimportant  
He is but average, intellectuality speaking  
But mentally he is unique  
Apathetic, morose and cynical  
for he cannot envisage a future  
and without a future, what matters the present?

Superficially converted by experts  
at emotional entanglement  
Naive, uncertain and gullible  
fallible weaknesses and one's fully exploited  
by the fanatics  
He was netted!

But there came a bitter battle in his mind  
his doubts and logic clashed coruscatingly  
on the desperate need for a reason  
The battle lasted aeons, but, inevitably,  
logic won.

but his mind was different  
Warped.  
Ravaged internally by colossally rabid forces  
By-products of warfare invaded his mind  
causing depression and penultimate pessimism

He mastered the art of self-analysis  
but learnt intolerable knowledge  
Inescapable facts, no-one should face  
embittered, ironic, inescapably doomed,  
to a life of unbearable solitude

His mind cracked  
Splintered under the hammer blows of an implacable fate  
The fragmentary remnants of his mind  
Flew apart  
Multi-coloured madness filled his brain  
but subsided into apathy

So listen oh ye happy sinner  
Do not change, you're on a winner

As Chorus wandered off to agog views from passers-by... the stage again  
fade to black.

## **EJECTION ! (PART ONE)**

"Edward Bromsgrove was unemployed when he left school", now back on the balcony Chorus continued his spiel in conventional prose. "He was still unemployed when he left college two years later..." he laid his scene – the lights on the stage brightening to reveal Edward, sat at a table, in every conceivable sense of the word opposite a much older man...

As the stage lights brightened, those upon Chorus dimmed, ready for the action to begin...

"Why don't you get a job son?" for the umpteenth and oneth time Mr Bromsgrove (senior) harangued his only child, seated before him. "Your mother'd appreciate that something rotten. Any job'd do. Just for our peace of mind, there's a good boy", having shouted at his carrying on wayward son he was so desperate... he now thought peaceful persuasion worth a try.

"I ain't got no qualifications, 'ave I?" Edward again employed his habitual cop-out counter. "I can't get a job even if I tried. Can't even be a ruddy dustman, can I?" one of his most effective defensive mechanisms was to answer a question with a further rhetorical one.

"Well whose faults *that*?" despite his best efforts at calm Mr Bromsgrove again felt his anger rise to the boil. "*Yours!*" his inherent bile once again surfaced. "You don't work hard enough - you lazy little bugger! You spend far more time down that f'ing pub than's good for you. I surprised your girl allows you to!"

"She don't", Edward quasi-comedically blocked.

"Go down the pub!" his father again exasperated. "You know what I *mean!* You should be at night school, studying!"

"I could be at night school drinking?" seeing as it was going to be 'one of those' conversations Edward happily retorted, the better to up the anti<sup>2</sup>.

"Enough of your lip!" Bromsgrove senior's contra-reaction was pretty inevitable. "You should be there working. Working for those exams you missed. *If* you know what's good for you, which, if you ask me, you don't seem to. Make up for the time you wasted at college. Night schools the place for you my boy".

"But I don't want to be a knight?" Edward long knew by keeping calm he'd irritate the Bromsgrove *paterfamilias* even more.

"Don't be flippant - you silly little bugger!" (it indeed did the trick). "You're not too big to thump! I'm surprised she don't keep a tighter rein on you!"

"She's your wife, Dad?" (this one genuinely confused Edward).

"Not your mother - damn you! Julie! Your young lady".

"What's it to do with her?" the bitter truth dawned on Ed that his 'olds' saw Julie Nixon as a stabilising and adulting force upon him.

"You're walking out with her, aren't you? She's your steady?"

"She falls over sometimes..." Ed again chose to deflect.

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<sup>2</sup> Deliberate mis-spelling (*Translator*)



"Don't be bloody flippant! All I'm saying, all I'm saying *is*... if you don't get a job by this time next week... Well, either I find you one, or you're out. Out of this house - for good! Were not putting up with you - or your bloody skylarking - anymore. Coming in drunk at all hours - every blinking night of the week!"

It was quite a tirade... and if his Dad wasn't from Yorkshire... Ed felt he ruddy well should have been. "Oh shut up..." he therefore mumbled quietly to himself.

"What did you say!"

It clearly hadn't been quiet *enough*. "Nothing Dad, nothing..." Ed decided to test the old man's hearing. "Ponce..." he whispered under his breath.

"*What?*"

"Nothing, nothing..." having found the right level he whispered, "Deaf ponce..." for his own amusement, as he rose from the chair.

"And where d'you think you're going *now*?" Mr Bromsgrove's tone suggested he'd somehow expected an instant reformation of character in his son.

"Out mate!" Ed retorted as he stormed for the exit. "Bloody *out*! Get some peace and quiet".

"Come back here!"

But all there was as Ed left the stage was a slamming door – for as one opens another one surely shuts.

"And in a bound Edward was out!" Chorus explained, the stage lighting blackening and the spotlight upon our narrator glowing. "Out! Out for the evening, down the pub as per usual... But tonight - when he returned in his usual state of post-UB40 payday Giro inebriation, he found his bags packed and waiting for him the front doorstep. He was so drunk he only found them when he fell over them".

The lights again switch back to the stage as Ed was shown falling over his bags.

"It's a lockout, Son", explained his father. "Just like what was done to your grandfather at mill in 1926".

"Fuck you!" Edward exclaimed that (and other expletives).

The lights again switched back. "But what could he do?" Chorus continued. "Edward decided to leave London: and run away to Britain's exotic, new, improved, sin city of the south, Milton Keynes!"

A short, ironic, cheer was heard to arise from some of the audience.

"Trouble was", Chorus opined to camera, "he hadn't the price of a one-stop London Underground Tube return fare - let alone passage to Milton ruddy Keynes. Plus the fact he still owed the pub 87 ½ p and three packets of nuts".

"Ja", Professor Schultz now joined in to hog some of Chorus' limelight, "walking the streets not fun when you're only five foot one".

"Quite. But it doesn't apply because he's five foot eleven", Chorus promptly shot him down.

"He claims he's six foot though?"

"Vanity, thy name is woman".

"He's a man?"

"He acts like a big woman though", Chorus delivered his (sexist) punchline, the paused. "There were, it is a truth universally acknowledged, other downsides existing in an ongoing no fixed abode situation. Edward got picked up and stopped by the pigs at least three times that very first night".

"It's my hair!" Ed complained to the audience as the lights switched back to him. "It's too long. They bloody pick on me. Just because I'm the youngest. Just 'cause I'm short and other purely arbitrary reasons I use to blame others for everything. You know", he paused to draw in the audience and consider, "it's like they think I'm ant-social. Mind you, I take drugs too. Pill-popping's like second hobby to me. Oh, *and* I'm on their records for D&D".

A spotlight switched on to the balcony. "'Dungeons And Dragons'?" Professor Schultz confused.

"No", Chorus clarified as down on the stage a police car duly pulled up. "Drunk and disorderly..."

Out again went the balcony light.

"Oi! What you up to?" an angry looking policeman alighted from his 'jam sandwich' Panda car.

"Nothing Officer?" since he actually was 'up to nothing' Edward Bromsgrove played the innocent he genuinely was.

"Don't be so bloody cheeky", came the trite response. "What are you *doing*?"

"Walkin', ain't I?"

"With a suitcase? At three O'clock in the morning? Unlikely isn't it? *Sir*?" the 'Bobby' sneered, reckoned that alone a *cause celebre* for 'stop and search'.

"I've been kicked out of me home, ain't I?" the prospect of arrest and holding in a nice warm cell, with a cup of strong, sweet, tea was starting to appeal to Ed. "*Officer*", he therefore counter-sneered.

"Where d'you live?" another copper appeared to play 'nice cop' to his oppo's 'nasty'.

"Shepherds Bush", Ed was honest. "Least, I did until this evening".

"Oh aye?" Nasty Cop didn't sound at all convinced. "It's on our way. We'll check. Get in the car, *Sir*", like uncontrolled sneezing he sneered again as his buddy quickly conducted a cursory search of Ed's person.

"He's clean", Nice Cop confirmed. "No smack, weapons, nothin'".

"Must have dumped it then..." Nasty (meanwhile) was still contemplating arrest. "That right *Sir*?"

"I've never ever had any. Officer", Ed knew (since he was white) actual evidence was required unless he 'resisted arrest' (always technically possible to initiate). "Never had any Officer... *Tonight*..." he then after-thoughted a Shakespearian style aside to the audience. "Never in my life", returning to Nasty Cop he instead went for the plausible lie. "I wouldn't ever know that it looks like horse dung..."

"Very funny", said nasty. "We'll check it out..."

The stage blanked before Chorus strode in from the wings, followed in a spotlight. "And so we must achange our scene!" he exclaimed. "To return our principal to the home of his birth, whence by the Peelers he was taken, the veritable truth of his story to be verified by ancestors his!"

The lights changed again to reveal Ed, Mr Bromsgrove Senior, and Nice Cop locked in conversation. "He's nineteen and bloody useless. An adult!" Ed's Dad protested. "It's not against the law for him to move out"

"You made me move out!" Ed protested.

"Besides, I've already changed the locks", ignoring him his father spoke to the Bobby on the beat.

"Take this", seeing as he was getting nowhere – and desirous of clearing the case with minimal paperwork – he wrote out Ed a chitty. "Thank you both for your time", he then sighed resignedly – and departed – all the lights cutting as the other actors vacated the stage...

### THE RAPE SCENE<sup>3</sup>

The '*Match Of The Day*' theme was now heard. "Hello and welcome to, '*Rape Of The Day*'!" over this music spaketh Chorus. "As all modern latter day plays, this two-hour traffic of our stage, contains a rape scene to generate controversy, get bums on seats as they say in the theatre business – and to upset Mary Whitehouse and all the other 'keep filth off TV' campaigners..."

The music ends. "And this", continued Chorus, "is ours..."

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<sup>3</sup> Written as a satirical response to the 1978 TV production of Dennis Potter's then controversial '*Pennies From Heaven*' (Translator)

As the stage darkened footsteps were heard as an obviously female figure moved from stage right toward stage left. The spotlight then went on to illuminate – not the figure – but our heroine Julie Nixon – standing stage right – grasping a cushion to her face that she is peering over as the footsteps halt.

“Hello little girl. Want a good time?” from the pitch black a decidedly unsavoury voice spoke; Albert Steptoe on steroids.

“Go away you silly old man!” the hidden female voice retorted as – across the stage – Julie gripped her pillow tightly with tension. “Pick on someone your own age. I don’t know what the world’s coming to, really I don’t...”

“Dirty old men need love too”, the voice intimated. “Especially if they ride bikes and can fruit, and are retired Post Office employees”.

“Look”, the female voice sighed resignedly, “if this is the rape scene, let’s get on with it. I’ve got to be home for ten as it’s during the week”.

“Won’t your boyfriend mind me de-flowering you?” the evil voice queried as – across the stage – Julie startled in televisual watching fear.

“Ha!” the female amused. “He won’t even notice the difference. As long as he’s got his football and it’s past the watershed he’s happy. Let’s just get on with it”.

“That doorway suit you?” the voice grunted.

“It’s as good as any...”

“It’s the bank?”

“It’s not my branch”, she considered. “Anyway, the critics will see it as symbolic of the destructive dehumanisation of international capitalism”.

“Isn’t that... *sociology*?” (for the dark assailant this was clearly taboo).

“Bit late to worry about that now, isn’t it? Let’s just get on with it”.

“Hang on a sec. Give me a chance to get ready...” the sound of a zipper was heard.

“It’s alright Mum!” Julie removed her cushion and shouted offstage. “It’s a comedy!”

The stage went black. “Scene missing, consenting actress wanted”, Chorus boomed from the balcony. “But meanwhile, back at the ranch...”

## **EJECTION ! (PART TWO)**

All the lights cut – save a spotlight on Ed. “I pre-suppose, it’s me own fault”, ‘arrest’ over Edward halted briefly to appeal to the audience. “I’m eternally being stopped. I always am. I attract police like dog muck attracts flies. No comparison intended with the former, of course. I’m just naturally unlucky. If I

go to a party, we always get busted. If I miss the last tube and walk, I'm stopped. It's my own fault. I'm just too iconoclastic for my own good", he also made a (typical) malapropism.

"It's just one of the handicaps of always being right about everything, I suppose", girlfriend Julie Nixon sarcastically intervened, walking in from the wings a spotlight upon her as the audience applauded her arrival, her arms folded in sarcastically repressed annoyance.

"And we'll have I less of your cheek too young lady", being basically insecure Ed decided he needed to assert himself with her, against female criticism.

"Why?" knowing him as she did Julie was more than able to give as good as she got. "You're not perfect! You may *think* you are, but you not. You're not right on all matters, an expert on everything. Despite the fact that you're *my* man. You're not perfect by any stretch of the imagination".

"Silence woman! Silence!" Ed now veered towards half serious, half joke bathos. "Leave things to me. I can look after myself. I'm old enough. I'm seven".

"Is that why you're off to see George then?" Julie knowingly parried with scathing mild sarcasm. "Sponge on him? Sponge off your best friend? Is that allowed then, under your peculiar warped sense of neo-medieval honour?"

She had him there. "I'll pay my way in life, don't you worry. I *always do*".

"Pay your way! *Pay your way*? Like hell you do!" this assertion was like a red-rag to her cow. "I *always* have to pay when we go out! How are you gonna pay? With rubber cheques?"

"Rubber cheques?"

"One's that keep bouncing", she theatrically turned her back on him.

"I can't", Bromsgrove was defensive – raced around before her to implore. "I haven't a cheque guarantee card".

"Lucky bank then", Julie retorted, "lucky bank",

"Cheeky bitch", as he frequently did in a jam... Ed now got mildly abusive. "In my great, great, great, grandfather's day women were seen and not heard, snogged and not asked, did as they were told".

"Oh grow up won't you!" Ed's sham machismo (based upon a weak bargaining position) frequently terminally irritated Ms Nixon; who now acted with great use of aggressive body-language. "This is *today* we're living in! The 1970s! Not the day before the day before the day before yesterday".

"A woman's place is in the wrong", Ed now tried to pass it all off as wit.

"Oh shut up!" Julie wasn't in the mood for his humour.

"Why should I?" Bromsgrove was immediately contrary for contrary's sake.

"Why shouldn't you?" came the obvious reply. "Go - if you're bored with me".

A direct challenge to Edward's perceived sense of 'male authority'? "I am - and *I will!*" Ed promptly left the stage the effect of a symbolic door heard slamming behind him.

"I think I've upset somebody there", alone and centre-stage Julie spoke to camera. "Childish behaviour? That's him all over. Like the time he went to the Reading Rock Festival. He came home, a day late, drunk, and spent all week telling everyone about the vast amounts of grass he saw there. It turned out, in the end, it was only the stuff the cows eat, and he'd been sitting on it. So you see; he never actually tells *complete*, bare-faced, lies. He just tells you half the truth - which he can quite easily square with his conscience - and he leaves it at that. Which is just as bad and misleading and manipulating in a way as plain straight, fibbing, if you ask me..." She paused for effect. "Same on our wedding night".

"The bed bust", Ed returned to the stage in a following spotlight to interject. "I had to stand up for my conjugated rights".

"Half-truth again", she observed as he departed the stage. "We used a mattress on the floor. You can't blame his parents for getting rid of him can you? I'd too - if there was widow's pension and if I didn't love him".

It was at this point that Julie became emotional – and walked into the arms of her comforting mother, who'd sneaked on stage. "He's more trouble than he's worth, I'm sure of it. And so's me mum!"

"More trouble than *she's* worth?" a confused Professor Shultz interjected from the balcony.

"No you stupid Hun!" being basically a cultural stereotype Julie suddenly lashed out. "He is! Eddy Bags! My dearest darling Eddy Bags! I *meant* my mum agrees with me", she spoke as Ed waved to audience for sympathy. "I love him so much I - I - I - I would even vote Conservative to keep him, I'm so desperately in love with him".

"Well, at least you don't take drugs. *Yet*", the professor opined. "Interesting... I'll just add you to my case notes", he got out a pad and pen.

"Oh yes I do", Julie denied. "take drugs, I mean I'm on the pill you know? I wasn't born yesterday. *I'm* not stupid".

"Or pregnant..." Chorus stepped forward to add.

"You mean, you and him, are, you know, eh?" like many of his psycho-psychiatric profession Professor Schultz was intrigued by any possible sexual content. "At your age?"

"Certainly not!" Julie was most affronted as she retorted up to him in the balcony. "*I* wouldn't dream of it. *I'm* not that sort of girl. *I* listen to *my* mother". She turned to confide in the audience. "I only take them to impress my friends. They all do".

"Take them?" wondered the professor

"Yes, and the other".

"In my day, it allowed would not have been", Schultz *blitzkrieged* the moral high ground.

"Is Germany more moral than us?" Chorus promptly cheekily wondered.

"Germany?" Schultz was promptly affronted. "How should *I* know? I am Austrian! Austrian - do you hear me! *Austrian!* I nothing had to do with Hitler! I opposed him all the way! Do you hear me, *all the way!* I never once stopped opposing him - in all my years in the Wehrmacht... oh what a give-away! *Schizer, shiezer!*"

"So, the truths out at last!" Chorus amused as – on the back wall of the stage – below the balcony – was projected a picture of the young Professor Schultz riding a panzer.

"In your day we wouldn't have had the opportunity", Julie was meanwhile caustic. "Even in England".

"We'?" Chorus pounced.

"Sorry, I mean 'they'".

"Was that slip intentional?" he probed.

"Mind it!" Julie angrily warned him off.

"Freudian, even?"

"Ja!" Schultz joined in. "Everything is Freudian for the Jung at heart! Mien little psychiatrist's joke there..."

"Mind it..." Julie warned him off too.

"It was, wasn't it?" Chorus both amused and teased. "An unconscious slip of the tongue?"

"I'm not *saying*", Julie was blushily emphatic. "*I've* my reputation to think of".

"So's the Manchester United Supporters Club<sup>4</sup>", Chorus scythed. "But it doesn't do them any good. What's done is done. Virgins are like balloons, one..."

"And we'll have less of that language - *if* you've quite finished!" Julie interrupted the uncouthness. "I get enough of that from *him*". She paused. "Where's he gone by the way?"

"He's gone to the doctors - I think".

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<sup>4</sup> Then 'enjoying' a reputation for football violence (*Translator*)

"Doctors! *Doctors!*" Chorus chided. "Psychiatrist's more like!"

"I *am* a doctor?" Schultz defended.

"Don't you talk about my boyfriend like that!" like a lioness Julie defended her mate from Chorus' accusation. "You pig! Bloody nerve you've got - talking about my Edward like that! Putting him down in front of all these people!"

"'Tis a fell truth not yet a truth?" Chorus parried.

"That's got *nothing* to do with it! No one's got the right say that about him. Except me, of course... Just because he's a bit rebellious and won't do what other people tell him to..."

"Even you?" Chorus was wise.

"Even me..." Julie sighed. "Yes - he is disobeying orders rather a lot lately, isn't he? I'm gonna fix the little rat!" she exulted to the sound of a slamming door and a blackout...

## THE NEXT STEP

The lights came up and Ed walked onstage to kneel, as if in prayer. Then he spoke:-

"Last night I saw infinity  
I grasped it's vastness from my room  
That vision still remains with me  
Illuminates my inner gloom

While this numbed my comprehension  
I had no misapprehension  
for I knew, despite disasters  
the stars would soon know men as masters

For outlook changes with the times  
and men have changed to homo sap  
who understands the now plain signs  
that spaceship Earth's become a trap!

The answer lies in Exodus  
for this world can't take much more  
someone, must find a way, for us  
to go where no man's gone before!"



Blackout!

## TAKE FIVE

"Take five, at the doctors", the voice of Professor Schultz was heard from the balcony... followed by a clapperboard and Edward Bromsgrove walking on stage under a spotlight, which moves to reveal a man in a suit, sat at a desk, writing papers as he gestures Ed to sit down.

"Well, er, it's like this Father", Bromsgrove began.

"Doctor", he established his professional credentials.

"Well, it's, er, like this Doctor. Now Punk's over, and I hate Disco... Well, er, I've been thinking of becoming a Mod for some time now recently... And, er, I wonder if you can give me any advice on how to go about it?"

"I see", the Doctor was severe. "Have you seen a specialist?"

"Yes. I saw one in the butchers the other day, buying his veg".

"Good, fine. Nice to know there are still some about. Are we talking private, or NHS?"

"NHS please", Ed knew he couldn't afford a cup of tea at the moment.

"Right", the doctor pulled a chess-clock out of his desk and set it running down to zero. "So Mr Bromsgrove, you want to join the Mod's do you?"

"Well, I'm *thinking* about it. I missed being one first time round, so see. What with my being too young..."

"A sad accident of history", the GP agreed. "Can you ride a Lambretta?"

"I should think so..."

"Wear a parka?"

"Easily".

"Smash things up? Buy old Who records? Snog Cathy McGowen - if you tried?"

"I suppose so..."

"Wear flashy clothes?"

"Maybe".

"Dance to old Motown records?"

"At a pinch".

"Fight people on the beach at Margate?"

"I'd rather not..." Ed knew he wasn't very good at violence... indeed had lost every fight he'd ever been in.

"Shock old people?"

"I do it all the time with my parents..."

"Take endless amphetamines on forged prescriptions?"

"Yes, yes!" at this offer of an escape from drab reality Ed was especially enthusiastic.

"Work for '*Woolworths*' and live in Ealing?"

"You must be joking!" Edward balked at the prospect of both; being an inhabitant of Shepherd's Bush knew nothing of lands far to the West, where few supported Queen's Park Rangers. "What do you think I am?" he took more of a gate, than offence (geddit?).

"A millipede?" the man with the Hippocratic oath considered.

"No try again", Ed was now starting to get angry.

"Give up", since he had the Doc implicitly suggested Ed should probably do the same as well.

"Well, if *you* don't know what species I am! Go back to medical school!" Ed angrily stormed off. "Git!"

"And, er, that's where you fade it?" Professor Shultz suggested from the balcony

"Ok, got it", the muffled voice of an unseen sound engineer faded the stage to black...

## **MAN TO MAN**

"Nowhere to go. Poor Edward!" still in his doublet and hose Dave Chorus came back on stage in a spotlight. "Big 'ah' for Edward everybody!" audience sympathy notwithstanding a sound effect was hastily pressed into service to amplify.

"So", Chorus continued, "though this too, too, solid flesh will out – didst Edward Bromsgrove now venture forth to go inflicteth himself on friend George's family – George this stalwart, stout, man of letters, this jewel of English moderation, this thrice valiant bosom pal", he paused for effect. "Without the bosom... obviously..."

This generated a small titter from the audience. "Oh, listen, ooh, Missus..." Chorus therefore went for the '*Carry On*' market. "No!" he returned then to his neo-Shakespearian persona. "Time for a serious chat between the two, man to man, an attempt to end all the excrement. To this end they repasted to a different pub from that usually inhabited by their, inverted commas" – and here he mimed them - "'gang'. Invariably they hung out at '*The Pig And Accountant*' – so instead we must away to whence we set out scene – to the '*Duck And Transvestite*'!"

"Ja, ja, das ist good pub der D and T", from up in the balcony Professor Schultz enjoined as Chorus departed the stage right, the spotlight falling on Ed and George, sat at a pub table, stage left...

"How long you gonna be at our house then Ed?" George cagily (if directly) asked.

"Oh.... Er... Don't know?" as was his wont Ed prevaricated with a question of his own. "Why?"

"Well... Well Mum's pleased to have you. Help you out like", George was (as usual) too nice for his own good. "In your 'hour of need' as it were", he too mimed the inverted commas. "But, er, her patience is wearing a bit thin. Wears thin I'm afraid..."

"Oh..." as was also his wont Ed decided to continue to play the victim kitten.

"It's er, not that we want you to go or anything", big-hearted George was accordingly remorseful. "But, er, you know... you know, how it is. You've parents yourself..."

"Yeah sure", Ed agreed. "I think I still have some somewhere..."

This but caused an awkward silence. "Er", George broke it, "yeah, er, sorry to bring up the subject again, but, like, how long? A *date* would help a lot? She, er", he was Britishly diffident, "she'd really like to know. Asked me to mention. Like".

"Er, er", seeing he was cornered Ed responded. "Er, dunno. Ok? Couple Of weeks. Maybe? Then I'll stay at Julie's for a bit – er – a while, *while - stay for a while*", he realised that might indeed be his best backstop. "Then, er. Well, I'll find somewhere. Get a bed-sit or something", the awful truth dawned on Ed's face this might require some form of *income*: and with it the tyranny of paid employment.

"You know, sorry", George again habitually apologised. "But that's how it is. Wouldn't be so bad if you had a job and could pay a bit. For your keep like. Towards it. You could stay for quite a time then, in that case?" he was hopeful.

"Aha! The money issue again!" Ed now asided to the audience. "Yeah, sure. I understand", he returned back to converse with 'bestie' George. "Want another drink?" he then rose in distraction for the bar.

"Yeah! Sure, Great. Sure", George brightened from his embarrassment.

"Er, your round", Ed took a false step and remembered. "I've no money".

"Oh, er, sure", social conformity pressures made George respond, also rise for his seat. Ed promptly sat down. "We could go to a party later?" George suggested. "Dave's got one on".

"I'm not too keen on my cousin Dave", Ed dithered on the idea. "Party politics. Every party I see him at all we do is argue fucking politics. No thanks. I enjoy a quiet evening in the pub much more".

Exit George stage left to instantly return with two pints of frothing unreal ale. "Ugh!" he took a sip of one as he sat down, pushed the other towards Ed. "Watneys! Local brewery makes bad. It gets worse every week, I swear it does..."

"Politics?" Ed questioned as he and George's Pinteresque dialogue continued to its illogical extent.

"No, the beer", George swilled a mouthful. "It's a sign of the times. A sign of our age as well. It's politics instead of football now. Thatcher and Callaghan have taken over where Greaves and Keegan left off".

"Yeah", bemoaning the fate of his beloved Queen's Park Rangers – known as 'QPR' to their mates - Ed was forced to agree. "Sometimes I just feel like giving it all up, chucking it all in for good..."

"Chuckling in what, prey?" his ire aroused by this... even the rarely sarcastic George reactively responded. "Chuckling all *what* in? You've no job. You've no responsibilities to start with. What *on earth* have you got to give up? To lose?"

"Julie?" Ed realised his anchor in life could well be the rock dragging him under.

"Materially?" George blocked instead. "You can't count human relationships as material possessions".

"Why?"

"S'not allowed".

"Then I guess I've got *nothing* then", Ed countered with a resigned shrug and a swill of brew.

"And where can you go?" likewise taking a draught of beer (geddit?) George emphatically persisted. "You're at the bottom in life. The only way you can go - is up!"

"Naw..." Ed wasn't so sure. "I may have had my best years but..."

"Rubbish!" George dismissed such defeatism. "My advice to you is..."

"I know, I know", Ed attempted to sever the inevitable logical conclusion. "Get a job? You're all the same. 'Get a job, get a job...'" Ed raged against the machine.

"No. For once 'no'", George promptly marinated in a rare moment of tactical superiority. "You *haven't* read my thoughts for once. What *I was* going to suggest is university. Or polytechnic. Or college. Go and find yourself at the taxpayers' expense<sup>5</sup>".

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<sup>5</sup> In those days there were statutory higher education grants (*Translator*)

"With my exams?" if the idea appealed to Ed it was practically impossible. "Two CSE's and a twenty-five yards breaststroke certificate? Impossible! Bastard life..." Ed habitually blamed his indolence and lack of success upon others (the universe included).

"I'm sorry, I forgot", George apologised for his clinical assumption.

"We're not all educationally well endowed like you", Ed almost snarled back. "We haven't all got it easy in this bloody life like you have? Some of us life kicks in the teeth. Every day in some way or other". He paused. "Before breakfast, usually..."

"I said I was sorry, didn't I?" English social conditioning made George yet again habitually apologise.

"For some of us it's all a fucking uphill struggle. Existence is. An everyday problem. *Got it?*" Ed vented dark fumes.

"Yeah, but, you don't make it any easier for yourself do you?" George now objectively deployed Ockham's Razor to cut through that particular Gordian Knot. "We. *Us*. Your family and friends. We can only help you so far. The rest is up to you. You've got to do yourself".

"That's a good approximation of my father you're impersonating there", however it was varnished Ed really hated the ugly truth. "You're *even* beginning to look a bit like him".

The result of *that* discharge was an awkward silence in which to sup more beer.

"Oh this is ridiculous..." it was good-natured George who broke it. "We shouldn't argue like this. We're old friends. Too old to disagree..."

Silence again fell. "True enough", this time it was Ed who broke it to meet his pal's emotional support halfway.

More silence. What to do? "Let's get pissed?" George suggested a default solution.

"Good idea", Ed brightened at the prospect. "At times of trouble, if in doubt, get smashed. You feel better for it".

"Years this has been going on", George agreed a wryly resigned smile.

"If ever there's a problem... Down the pub, man to man, talk it out..."

"Then get drunk..."

"And that's what friends are for..." Ed sang, he and George clinking together their glasses to raised a cheer – like the starship '*Enterprise*' their course that night into the wide blue yonder, irrevocably plotted and locked-in...

Stage blackout.

## BOY TO GIRL

"To be or not to be – that is the question?" Chorus returned from stage right, followed by a dancing spotlight, worthy of a Broadway show. "Or, in Bromsgrove's case – to get off your bum and do something – or wallow once more in self-pity – *that* was his dilemma. Needless to say, within a week George's folks had prevailed, and he our Edward – I use the possessive term loosely – was once again on his travels. This time into the vortex of the Nixons. Perhaps – perchance – for it is a truth universally acknowledged – an answer might lie in that which makes man complete?"

Exiting Chorus raised his arm – his spotlight fading to raise another – to show stage left Ed and Julie, sitting together at a table; minimalist Pinter stuff...

"...ha, ha", Edward habitually laughed at his own joke recollection, "and then he said, 'now over to British Rail, mission control, Euston'".

And, because it was genuinely funny, Julie too giggled in empathy. Then she paused – decided this was indeed the moment. '*Der tag*', as the Krouts have it.

"Ed?" she flat out asked him in a feigned, girly, sing-song voice. "Do you love me? Being serious for a moment?"

"Of course I do", Ed's autopilot responded to this unexpected assault while his guard was down. "Is that an objective or subjective question?" he then launched a counter-attack of his own.

"Seriously" (Julie easily fielded that one). "Do you?"

"Seriously, I do".

"Only, if you *really* loved *me*, you'd get a job".

"I see, I see", reacting badly to this latest variation on a theme... Ed reverted to a neo-Pythonesque voice persona. "I get the picture. Like that is it? I see, I bloody see!" he also didn't take so much offence as an entire hedgerow. "I most fervently apologise, Miss Nixon", he now became a character out of nineteenth century literature. "I had not hitherto appreciated the extent to which our relationship was primarily materially orientated. If, indeed, this is the case, and this is so, peradventure, Miss Nixon... I regret I might be obliged to reconsider our personal situation..."

"Are you being paid by the word?" Julie was ominously calm and scathing.

"*What?*" (Ed felt he was being outmanoeuvred).

"Oh give over", she sighed resignedly. "Look, it's not 'material' as you put it. But *if you were* to get some work, and somewhere proper to stay, I'd feel a lot happier about everything, that's all. You can't stop at our house for ever and a day. Mum wouldn't like it. As it is, the neighbours *talk*. Especially with Mum and Dad going away next week..."

"Well I didn't think they were all deaf mutes down your street", Ed retorted. "They complain about your record player often enough".

"And I thought *everyone* liked The Bee Gees", Julie opined to the audience. "No, really you should get a job", she turned back to her errant boyfriend. "Despite what they say in the papers there are plenty around. You've got the brains for it mum says. You're quite clever. You could easily pass some exams if you *really* wanted to. The easier ones, that is..."

"But I don't *really* want to though", Ed blocked. "Who needs meaningless bits of paper? I don't! You might just as well judge people by the length of their hair, the clothes they wear or... the colour of their skin. Or even their inside leg measurement".

"Yes, but people *do*. Whatever you think. It's wrong I know, but people *do*. Employers and that. My Dad says..."

"Dad says, dad says'!" Julie's parents were now as much the bane of Ed's life as his own had been, whilst living at home.

"He does, *yes*".

"Well, he should know. After all - *he's* one of the worst offenders".

"Dad's alright", Julie felt duty-bound to defend the Nixon *paterfamilias*. "He was in the war, that's all. Anyway, I don't feel very well at the moment".

"That's the drink that is, my girl".

"No. I don't *feel well*", she rolled her eyes to obliquely *reference*. "It's that time of the, er, week", embarrassed Julie coughed, hoped he'd take the hint that way.

"Have you been to any very large railway stations recently, like Paddington or Euston?" Ed furrowed his brow in concern.

"No?" Julie confused.

"Good!" Ed hit the punchline. "It can't be terminal then. Hey, er, Jule", he now saw and opening, "when you folks are away, why don't we spend the night together? Just for a change..."

"No!" Miss Nixon's sense of sensibility was justly outraged. "Not until *after* the engagement! You're not stirring me up from the inside; not just yet thank you very much".

"Everybody else does these days?" Ed defended his indecent proposal.

"I'm not like 'everybody else'", Julie blocked to (unconsciously) quote The Kinks.

"I've noticed", Ed grinned. "You're bigger than that".

"I know you want to try everything at least once before you get old and past it at twenty – your words - but you're not practising on me. Boyfriend or no".

"And if I practise on anyone else, you'd leave me?" he clearly saw her negotiating position.

"And I'd kill you. And so would my Dad".

"And you know I can't win this argument if I still want you? Which I do", Ed now tried charm – considered too the probability of homelessness.

"Not until we're engaged you can't, no", Julie remained emphatic.

"How very enigmatic of you", Ed appraised. "And you won't get engaged until I'm in a 'secure position'. To quote you, this time?"

"That's it!" she agreed.

"I wonder which position?" in the best tradition of musical theatre Ed now asided to the audience,

"A job, yes", Julie too did the same. "Any job with prospects would suffice", she too turned back from breaking the 'fourth wall' to re-address Ed.

"That's blackmail, my Dear?" he frankly gave a damn.

"Yes", she was most precise.

"Cow".

"Unfeeling pig".

"If you feel like that then, leave?" Edward now suggested.

"Don't think I might not just do that", upping the anti Julie Nixon refused to be browbeaten by anyone.

"I think, maybe, we'd better split up for a while? Just to see how it goes", Ed too escalated.

"That's fine by me", Julie knew she held the ultimate (metaphorical) whip hand on the matter. "Be out the house by Monday".

"You don't really *mean* that", knowing when he was beaten... Ed saw it was time to back-track...

"I do! *If* we stop going out together..."

Reality check? A momentary moment of reason? "You actually do, don't you?" Ed insighted.

"I *do*", she confirmed. "I'm serious this time. It's time someone told you what's what and put her foot down! It does men good to be kept in line".

"And you're the man to do it?"

"Watch it!" having won her point Julie was keen he not get too cocky.

"Ok, Ok..." hen-pecked and browbeaten into oblivion by circumstance... Ed sighed his unconditional surrender. "You win. I'll get a job then..."

As the spotlight faded on the table Julie moved forward to the front of the stage. "Women rule men, Ok?" she addressed the audience. "'Sneaky is best'" she quoted an old Nixon family motto.



"Ja!" a second spotlight now opened up onto the balcony to reveal Professor Schultz. "Only one woman could have done that, because Julie Nixon reaches the parts of Edward Bromsgrove, that other wenches cannot reach!"

"Oh!" as Shultz spoke another spotlight illuminated Mrs Jones<sup>6</sup>, stage right, Julie's elderly neighbour and her mother's friend. "Isn't that sweet! True love! He does as he's told!"

"My ulcers playing me up again. And know who gave it to me too", her aged husband too stepped into the light. "She did. What a Christmas present!"

"Ja, ja, ja!" Professor Schultz professionally excited. "It has been scientifically proven, again and again and over again..."

"Love hurts!" the omnes on the stage chorused as one.

Fade to black...

## THE FEMALE PARADOX

The lights came up to reveal two overalled stage hands theatrically placing, at separate ends of the proscenium arch, two life-sized cardboard cut-outs. One was of Olivia Newton-John, as the pre-transformed 'Sandy' from 'Grease'; the other Siouxsie Sioux, of Siouxsie And The Banshees fame.

"You know", Julie walked on stage with a similar cardboard cut-out of Kate Bush, which she placed halfway between the two others and stood beside, "it's not *easy* being a girl in 1978. The shackles of sociological conformity are finally starting to come off us girls. But with that power comes a responsibility for self-definement. Oh", she moved to sit on the front of the stage, "it's all very well having broken some of the constraints of society in the years since the war. We've got a Sex Discrimination Act now. But with great choice comes great responsibility. 'To be or not to be' is no longer the question. The question *now* is also how to know who you are *to be*..."

"And to get your boyfriend to accept that?" Professor Schultz spoke down from the balcony.

"Well exactly", Julie sighed back. "Breaking stereotypes removes boundaries – but how do you know where you are on a sliding scale? 'I am woman, hear me roar, in numbers too big to ignore'<sup>7</sup>. But how loud do you want to roar?"

"You got the vote? Equal pay laws?" Chorus now walked on stage. "What *more* do you want?"

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<sup>6</sup> Always envisioned at a Monty Python style 'Pepperpot' (*Translator*)

<sup>7</sup> Helen Reddy quote –protest song 'I Am Woman', released 1972 it took about four years to bubble-up due to broadcasters hostility (*Translator*)

"That was *first wave* feminism", Julie rolled her eyes in annoyance as Chorus departed. "Overturning legal obstacles to gender inequalities is all well and good. But there's still *de facto* inequalities and prejudices. In work, in society, and the arts. At least these two", here she pointed to the cut-outs of Kate and Siouxsie, "are making a difference to oppression in the arts. On some things I'm here", she stood next to the Kate Bush cut-out. "On others, I'm here", she moved next to the Sandy one.

"I guess there's often a feminist moral to every story", Chorus came back on stage to replace the 'Sandy' cut-out with a post-transformation version.

"Thank you!" Julie appreciated. "You see, it's all about role-models. And getting *the boys* to take you seriously. Realise that you're not just there to make the tea and be ornamental. That you too can do the best jobs".

"Hey!" Professor Schultz complained. "That's not fair! The Leader of your Opposition in parliament is a woman! You can get the pill on the NHS? Abortion and stuff".

"There's more to it than *that*!" Julie declared – and looked upwards. "The glass ceiling isn't going to shatter just like that!"

"Oi!" our Ed was heard to shout from offstage. "This play's s'posed to be about me!"

"See what I mean?" Julie complained to the audience.

At which point the stage blacked out.

## **SIXTH FORM BLUES**

"Eddy had a bad time at school in the sixth form college", Chorus returned to the stage amidst general illumination. "This was because he was thick, and all his classmates had at least average IQ. Mind you, he still learnt. He learned to hate it. He learned some big words to describe it too..."

At this point two female nurses, dressed as if for a scene in '*Carry On, The Benny Hill Show*', wheeled on a hospital bed, upon which was sat Edward Bromsgrove. As they exited, he spoke:-

"You float on an ocean of insecurity  
Drowning in doubts, clutching at stability  
Grasping in desperation an iceberg of meaning  
Which melts in the light of experience

You cannot know love, happiness and hope  
are all too rare, merely insubstantial words  
in an optimist's dreaming vocabulary  
But are you not human, have you no human desires?"

"That's good for him. Very good", from the balcony Professor Schultz approved. "Usually his poetry is rubbish".

"Pity he didn't write it", Julie strode on to stand behind Ed's hospital bed.

"*Nein?* Who did?" asked the surprised by still learned Professor.

"Me, me!" Julie exclaimed. "I'm a secret poet, but *don't* tell anybody. Ssh!"  
The stage blacked out...

## **WORK, WORK, WORK**

"Next stop, naturally enough for the pressurised Edward Bromsgrove", Chorus strode on from stage right, under a spotlight, now dressed as a tacky quiz show host, "was – yes, you guessed it - a job interview!" He paused, then laughed. "Oh, dear me, that's a good one! Hod carrier for Lego - or bouncer at '*Mothercare*' is about his limit. Still, he was determined, I'll give him that", Chorus paused to wink at the audience. "Determinedly reluctant, that is..."

He waltzed off, stage left, to a snatch of deliberately cheesy link music, the lights coming on to see Edward in front a desk, behind which is an old man in overalls, Mr Huggett, supermarket proprietor of this parish, a sign saying '*Testes Supermarket*' hanging above...

"So?" Huggett fired the first shot. "Why do you want to work in a supermarket then, Mr Bromsgrove?"

"I don't", Ed turned to the audience to aside. "It's a job isn't it? It'll do..." he turned back to in interlocutor. "Well, er, er, really Mr Huggett, it's because, er, I'm after a job in the retail trade, and er, yours came up, so, you know, I applied..."

Huggett nodded sagely. "I got told to", Ed again asides to the audience. "The word 'lie' is in 'apply', right?"

"Ok, fine then, you've got the job", Huggett sighed. "We've no other applicants", he too now asided to the audience – then returned to smile falsely at our 'hero'. "Go and see Mr, Wilson, the manager, and he'll kit you out. You might as well start right away".

"Shit!" Edward again asided. "I was hoping he'd turn me down. Bastard!" He turned back to his interviewer, now employer. "Great, thanks", he falsehooded through his teeth. "It'll feel really good to get back to work again", he turned to again aside. "Even if this is the first job I've ever had in my entire mega existence..."

"By the way, we pay weekly..." Huggett informed.

"Very weakly, I bet..." Ed continued to aside.

"...in cash", Huggett continued. "But I advise you to open a bank account anyway. It'll help you to save. Good thing saving. We encourage it, here at '*Testes*'".

"Yes, thank you for your advice", Ed forced himself to be polite. "Why doesn't he mind his own bloody business?" he then asided to the audience – stood to go into 'stand-up comedian' mode. "Wish I'd taken that social worker job now. They're known for their industrial relations here as '*Testes*'. They can always find a high-up job for one of their relations. Still, I guess nepotism's Ok..." he paused for his timing. "As long as you keep it in the family. Oh - and they never ignore the views of their employees, here at '*Testes*'. They *do* listen to their staff first. And then, and *only then*, do they ignore them. Give them their due, they do listen... Especially if it's a rich, powerful and autocratic trade union..."

Rant over, Edward turned back to Huggett. "This is Miss Annie Baines. She'll be in charge of you", a pretty and smiling young woman walked on stage in a '*Testes*' uniform.

"God, she fancies me!" Edward's ego turned to the audience to aside. "Ho, ho, Jules will be pleased..."

"Don't pride yourself sunshine", Annie too asided to the throng. "I'm only doing my bloody job".

"Time for unt flashback I think", Professor Schultz amused from the gallery.

On stage the actors froze – moved backwards to the sound effect of a tape recording being speedily rewound... all of which activity resulted in a set comprising at pub bar; at which was stood a clearly drunk Edward and George.

"Why don't, why don't you... get a job with a bank. That'd be funny".

"A bank! A bank!" amused and intoxicated Ed rose to the bait. "A fucking bank! I wouldn't work for a bank if they paid me, even if they fucking paid me!"

They both laughed. "I told 'em straight, I said", Ed continued – to make his point pointed his loaded finger at George. "'Approve my job appointment', I said, 'or I resign', I said that, I did".

"What happened?" George questioned incredulously.

"They sacked me. They fucking sacked me! *Me!*" Ed's outrage was palpable.

"I don't blame them", George (however) remained objective.

"Nor do I", Ed shared a rare moment of realism. "I'd only been there a year after all".

"Meanwhile" Professor Schultz again interjected, "in the far distant future..." from offstage a cardboard prop of hundreds of tins of baked beans fell into the audience's view – and the stage blacked out; a single spotlight focusing on Chorus, up on the balcony...

"Bromsgrove left *'Testes'* the same day", he explained. "Four hours was all they could stick of each other. His next port of call, as we can see quite clearly from this map here", he pointed with a stick to a lowered map of London, "was, *naturallment*, the pub. From there he progressed to the Labour Exchange here" (he continued to extrapolate), "then back to the pub, here, and from thence, in a pincer movement, here, onto his next job with London Transport. Mucking out the buses and tubes at their Chiswick depot".

"He managed to hold that one down for a week", Julie primly entered from stage left. "And at this moment in time, that's still his record. I didn't even know whether I was doing right, forcing him to work. I had doubts. But he *had* to bring some money home somehow. He had to pay for the room he was renting at our house. Nothing in this life is free, right? Ten quid a week's very reasonable in this day and age. I wouldn't have had it any other way. Nor would mum. She put her foot down, and so did I. It absolutely *ruined* the carpet..."

"I warned him she'd turn out just like her mother, but he never listened", ED's dad now entered as a counterpoint, stage right. "He never does. The only person ever to have meaningful dialogue with him is Kevin. And he's a bleedin' goldfish!"

"I've been following the story so far – and I agree with that", Mrs Jones now came back on, centre back of the stage.

"Then one fateful day, a day when the sun was out, the birds singing, and all was well with the world..." Chorus took back control of the narrative, "it started chucking it down. And Edward Bromsgrove, spinster of this parish, got very, very *wet*, indeed. He was resigned to his fate, so managed to get a reasonably well paid job; he actually *condescended to like*".

"It was in the python house at London Zoo", Julie explained, "if you've ever heard of such a thing, It's embarrassing. People ask you..."

"What's your boyfriend *do*?" Claire now stepped on stage.

"Then what do you say?" Julie opined. "It's so embarrassing. I lie. I say..." (and here she turned towards the interloper). "He works in an office".

"Oh!" Claire departed. "That's good, isn't it?"

"An office is sufficiently ambiguous to hide a modicum of sins", Julie turned back to the audience. "The python house at the zoo! I never heard of such a thing. Why he couldn't get a job with prospects I'll never know. The only promotion he gets is new brush every six months".

"Ah Ja!" Professor Schultz here interjected. "See how zer priorities of the story's heroine – zer female of the species, have changed over zer last three pages. First, she wanted him to have job. Now it's got to be a, quote, 'job with prospects'", the good professor here mimed the inverted commas. "Therefore, behind every great man there is a woman, pushing him on, QED".

"See now which way the plot's going kiddies?" still in his game show host mode Chorus reinforced. "And if it hasn't happened to you in real life yet; don't worry, because, it will, it will... It's an inevitable as night and day. Sooner or later, they'll screw you too..."

"Another job I'd like", Ed returned to speaking, "is Jumbo Jet pilot. Or lumberjack, student, laboratory technician, librarian, fruit canner or brain specialist. *Anything* to escape from the girlfriend for a while. After all", he adopted here a swanky accent, "with my phenomenal talent; it's easy".

"I wouldn't bet on it", his father too reactivated. "You're no good. I never thought I'd say it about my own son, but it's true. He's no good. He's a right little bastard. He should get a job in politics full time. He's a rat. Politics would suit him down to the ground. He's a swine. Get's it from his mother's side of course. Bound to".

"And so", Chorus suggested, "maybe, just maybe, the system is winning. Edward Bromsgrove nil, System one at half-time – and everything to play for!"

"Which is more than you can say fro QPR these days", Ed let his darkness show.

Blackout.

## **GLAD TO BE GAY ?**

"This is a great period of social change", Chorus walked back on stage, followed by a spotlight. "Despite what he might personally *think*, the world doesn't revolve around Edward Bromsgrove. And is girlfriend Julie's nascent feminism isn't the *only* big change on today's sociological menu..."

Chorus strode offstage followed by the spot – and the stage lights came up to reveal the record counter of *'Woolworths'*.

"I'll miss this job when I leave college", Sarah Thorpe stared reflectively at her sometime chum, Julie Nixon.

"I won't miss the uniforms when I go", she countered.

Enter Claire, stage right, carrying a copy of the *'Saturday Night Fever'* soundtrack album. "Hi Julie!" she smiled sweetly as she skipped up to the counter. "Can I have this, please?"

"Sure", Julie smiled back. "That'll be £2.99. Did you save up your pocket money?" she then casually patronised as they completed the transaction.

"No", Claire was emphatic. "I've a Saturday job at the bakers. See you!" having given as good as she got... she sauntered off.

"Hey!" Sarah suddenly moved like a cat to furtively check they weren't being watched by management – darted to pull an unsold record off the shelves.

"You know what you were saying the other day".

"What?"

"About us girls deserving better", Sarah was semi-smug. "Well, case in point here".

Julie peered at the record furtively. "Tom Robinson Band..." she saw. "That's the one they don't play on radio, isn't it?"

"The BBC *don't* but Capital *do*<sup>8</sup>", Sarah triumphed. "Borrow it", she looked around to check they remained unseen. "*They* won't know. Play it and bring it back. I do it all the time. Tape them for free. Perk of the job. Play *'Right On Sister'*. All about how we feminists should stand up for ourselves more".

"I've heard this song", Julie now checked they weren't being monitored for shirking off, pointed to the sleeve. "*'Sing If You're Glad To Be Gay'*", she tunelessly chimed and grinned. "Very catchy. I found myself singing it the other day. Though, of course", she looked around again, "I'm *not*. Gay", she almost mouthed.

"I wouldn't care if you were", Sarah amused her friend's habitual coy gaucheness. "I think it's great they take the piss out of bad attitudes to gay people. All the piss-taking on the media. Like he says in the song, 'the buggers are legal now, what more are they after'. Have been for eleven years now. And *still* not treated fairly".

"Nor are black and brown people", Julie added sadly. "Or us girls".

"Don't get me started on that either..." Sarah sighed.

There then fell and awkward pause. "Are you..." Julie surreptitiously mouthed. "Gay?"

"Naw!" Sarah dismissed with amusement. "Least, I don't *think* I am. *But*, according to my sociology lecturer at college, Mr Venables, everyone's not actually gay *or* straight – but actually bit of each. Like on a line", she physically

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<sup>8</sup> Fact-checked (*Translator*)

demonstrated the concept with a stray twelve-inch ruler. "Most here, some there – and some a bit in the middle".

"I don't know about that", this was a bit much for Julie's liberalism. "Is he a bit... 'on the line'?" she mimed the inverted commas. "Your teacher?"

"As a nine-bob note", Sarah confirmed. "He says you have to be careful still not to get beaten up on the Tube. 'Don't try to kid us that if you're discreet - You're perfectly safe as you walk down the street'", she further quoted. "He says you have to pick apart the hypocrisy of a society whose wider attitudes had yet to catch up with its own legislation".

"Does *he* have... a boyfriend?" the intrigued Julie wondered.

"*Several*", Sarah grinned. "But that's his business, isn't it? 'Judge not, that you be not judged / For with what judgment you shall be judged / and with what measure you mete, it shall be measured to you again'".

"Is *that* on this record as well?" Julie looked at the sleeve for the absent printed lyrics.

"No. That's Jesus. In '*The Bible*'".

"Oh yeah!" Julie inspired. "I *forgot* your Dad was a Vicar".

Blackout.

# INTERMISSION



## TAKE 627

"Oh mien Gott!" Professor Shultz rushed centre-stage in a heat of panicky Teutonic animation. "How can vee write part two, when I haven't read part one?"

"Indeed!" not really bothered Chorus joined him, still in his quiz-show mode. "A lot's happened during the Intermission. Edward was disenchanted, homeless, friendless, penniless... and jobless after feeding the zoo's kittens to his pythons and – needless to say - just a teeny weeny bit fed up".

"He's lost the room at Julie's?" Shultz enquired.

"I'm afraid her mum insisted", Chorus amused (as one does with the plights of others one secretly despises). "As he was lugging his suitcase, Otto, along the road, wallowing in habitual self pity, he saw an old man hobbling along on crutches".

As he spoke this tableau was now enacted on the other side of the stage.

"Ed's eyes followed the old man down the road", Chorus explained as the action unfolded.

"Thank heavens I've still got my health..." Ed asided to the audience.

"...he thought to himself", Chorus elaborated. "And it was at this point that Ed fell down an open manhole".

On stage Ed now took a step forward to fall through a trapdoor.

"He should have looked where he was going, the moron", the disabled old man tutted as he hobbled off.

Blackout. "Act Two, Scene Two!" Professor Schultz was heard "The hospital!"

As a clapperboard effect sounded the lights came back up to show Ed in an NHS bed, Julie by his side.

"Oh Ed!" she exclaimed her concern. "Your poor broken leg!"

"But I haven't got a broken leg?" he confused.

"You *will have* if you *don't* pull yourself together!" Julie Nixon now showed her steel. "Why don't you go out and get a job and car like Jane's boyfriend Peter? He doesn't go tearing off", her voice started to fade, become quieter and quieter as Ed began to zone-out in a way that was very obvious to the audience as Julie continued, "to Milton Keynes or wherever it was, he's got a steady job in the bank, a car - one that works - and they're going to get engaged *and* then married then have children..." she faded to the almost silent, but was clearly continuing to rant and harangue her boyfriend as she faded to total mime...

"Well, this is likely to go on for some time", Chorus returned to the stage, "so let's have Professor Schultz' expert opinion. It *can't* be more boring. Can it?"

"...so, anyway, I offered them my malice back guarantee, and he told me to... Oh, what? Oh sorry. Ahem!" coughing the Professor realised he was back 'on'; had been caught out *not* paying attention. "Er yes, well", he prevaricated, "a professional opinion... Ahem, well as we can see, if we were watching, which, er, I of course *was*..."

"Your opinion Professor?" seeing he had him caught and bowled Chorus insisted.

"Yes... er, my opinion..." the expert realised all his credibility was now on the line. "Yes, well, well, I *think* Edward is suffering from a distorted psycho-cosmetic illness known as Oppenheimer's reverse adiabolic syndrome".

"And what does that mean?" Chorus persisted. "In layman's terms? Without the sociologist's snake-oil?"

"Well... oh dear", Shultz hated having his professional judgement and gobbledegook challenged, "er, Julie seems to be running out of breath", he inspired, "so back to the story..."

Julie was loudly heard on stage to pant for air. She has now finished her fade-out rant.

Blackout on stage – apart from Chorus.

"And this is me", Chorus smarmed to the audience like the game show host he now was. "Well, we haven't had time to finish this, but here's the rest of the plot. Edward leaves hospital after two days and goes to George's house to convalesce. He decides to turn over a new leaf and get a job. He decides to join the Army but is talked out of this foolish act, partly by George and partly by a TV series then showing, about the harsh realities of life in *camp*. He goes back to Huggett's supermarket, but Huggett won't employ him. As a result Huggett's business at '*Testes*' thrives. Anyway, in the end Edward Bromsgrove becomes – by a cruel twist of fate - a VAT inspector - or secret policeman as they are known in Russia. Then", he smarmed to the audience, "then, one day, Ed was frightened away from a post box by an aardvark, but then he remembered, 'aardvark never killed anybody'".

Audience laughter. "Oh dear!" Dave Chorus theatrically looked offstage. "Ed's just had his leg bitten off by an aardvark".

Enter Professor Schultz. "And what is this aardvark character's name?"

"Dunno", it was Chorus' turn to be confused. "Er, for the sake of argument, er, Edward. No!" he asided to the audience. "Think hard about that one. Confusing. Too much resemblance, eh? Well, not to much?"

"And where does he reside?" Schultz saw that, for once, he might have his nemesis on the run. "West London is a little different to Redditch or Nottingham".

"I won't say anything", Chorus confided in the audience.

"Why are we stalling?" Schultz returned to addressing his colleague.

"Get on with it brain. Testing, testing, one, two, three..." Chorus blew into a microphone.

"Ja!" Professor Schultz agreed to progression. "Zer story we are about to relate is true. Only zer socks have been changed - to protect the planet".

"As well all know", Chorus took up the conversational baton, "Edward is a shy retiring extrovert, a fatalist, always ready to take what the world could throw at him on the chin. Oh, and prone to occasional depressions. Always a success with the ladies, he was far too shy and unsure of himself to chat up *any* of the girls he met".

"Boy oh boy, has he got problems!" the professor commentated. "Paradox City, Arizona!"

"Yes indeedy!" Chorus now moved further into 'stand-up' mode. "He was an uncoordinated wreck who moved like a cat. Edward as you can see, still has problems, lots of them, oodles and oodles of problems, I haven't even begun to mention his problems, acne, dandruff, *'The Tony Blackburn Show'*, all these and more are causing Edward sleepless nights. And sleepless days. As a matter of fact he's rather more concerned about the sleepless days than the sleepless nights..."

"*'Goon Show'* joke, 1957"; the good professor interjected.

"Oh yes indeedy!" Chorus continued uninhibited. "Little known fact – Edward also collects moss for the BBC. After all, he can always blame his sleepless nights on next doors dead cat. His neighbour, fifteen year old Clare, Clair, or is it Claire? How *do* you spell it? So many ways!" he then paused to get back on track as Claire, carrying a poster of the three variations of spelling her name, walked on stage.

"No body ever gets it right", she opined.

"Anyways, Chums, fifteen year old Clare is a nuisance", Chorus pointed at her. "The observant amongst you may have noticed her start to gradually worm her way into our story. You see, Edward once spurned Claire. Claire has never forgiven Edward. It was at Claire's birthday party, and the fact that a gatecrasher friend of Edward's had been taken ill with appendicitis during the party, and had to be rushed to hospital, hadn't helped heal the breach. This was good for Edward's credibility - Claire is a trifle younger than could honestly be called socially acceptable - but it was also bad for his health especially if her

parents caught him. Or Julie caught him. Or big-hearted George – who'd feel honour bound to tell Julie. Or her brother, or anybody else for that matter".

"Unt zis matters *because*?" asked Professor Schultz.

"Well..." Chorus shrugged. "Claire doesn't like to admit defeat".

"No I do *not*", Claire agreed.

"And, as the most learned Gerry Francis of QPR once said, 'is not the truth not that which is believed, not that which may be'?"

"I do not now know what to believe?" Professor Schultz remarked.

"Welcome to the real-life world of Orwellian doublethink" Chorus theatrically winked at the audience, who (being educated) got the gag. "All good stuff this", he continued again in stand-up mode, "I don't know where I get the ideas from? Pure genius I suppose. Anyway... to continue", he performed to the (literal) audience and (metaphorical) gallery, "because now you've had all of the case history my team of researchers and private detectives from the papers could uncover. Bloody cost me too it did!"

"But it is tax-deductible, Ja!" Professor Schultz observed.

"Don't tarnish my image", Chorus chided. "And now – on with the revels!" he walked offstage to a blackout and exunt of all...

## **BED-SIT SALLY (A STORY OF OUR TIME)**

Mrs Lever moved to the front of the stage and sat down in a '*Jackanory*' style comfy armchair placed there. "Sally agreed to ring her parents back home in Yorkshire once a week, every Friday night, without fail", leaning over to engage the audience she began her tale in her distinctive Australian accent. 'Yes, I'm having a great time"', she aped speaking on a telephone. "'Yes, going out with, er, er, Steve tonight to a film and then a disco – and on Saturday we've got a party. Where? Oh, er Hampstead. No, it's somebody from work – and on Sunday I'm going to a charity football match with my friend from next door. I'm back to work on Monday – but on Thursday I'm going out. Er, er, for a meal – oh – look! – there's the pips! Yes! Yes! Phone next Friday! Yes, bye! Love to everyone – and to all my friends at the...'"

Mrs Lever shifted in her seat. "And then the pips went, and Sally exchanged The semi-warm of the public call box for the cold of a January on the Earl's Court Road. She's given a good performance tonight - one of her best. She'd always been a good lair, even at school. They'd only worry if they knew things weren't too good at the minute. Might as well keep it to herself for the time being. Bottle it up until she went home next. No harm in that..."

Mrs Lever smiled at the audience. "Avoiding a group of drunken rugby supporters, down for tomorrow's game, she made her way back 'home', to her bed-sit in Earl's Court – fifteen pounds all in, no parties, supply your own food and pay your own electric and no guests overnight *or* past eleven. It would be a typical quiet weekend for Sally. She was staying in London. Get up at ten - 'Capital Radio' and LBC then lunch at 'McDonalds'. Science Museum in the afternoon and then back to the flat and BBC1 until midnight", she paused for effect. "Sunday was pretty much the same – only 'Capital' wasn't worth bothering with so she'd substitute the 'Observer' colour supplement and 'The Noel Edmonds Show'".

Mrs Lever now stood up to pace and speak. "Then Monday to Friday work, typing out requisition documents for the GLC. And then back to Friday night again and 'the weekend starts here' on LWT".

Mrs Lever now moved to the front of the stage to directly address the audience. "It wasn't that Sally found it *difficult* to make friends here. She didn't. After all, she'd never had any trouble when she was at home in Yorkshire. Well it was just, well, you know... *London*. You know what I mean? If you went anywhere on your own *people*, well... people would *think*, wouldn't they? Think that she was out just to get picked up. Which, naturally enough being a nicely brought up middle-class girl young lady, she wasn't. Not that she cared what people would think of course... She just, well... She had her *standards*. She'd been to grammar school after all. There were accepted and *set* ways of meeting people. It was just, well, you know. Just London... Wasn't it? Just London? It was like that down here, in the South. *She* wasn't an introvert after all... She was just used to things being *different*, that's all. Back home they were. Not like London at all".

Mrs Lever paced again. "She had thought of one of those introduction agencies that you see advertised on the Tube – you know the sort of thing – 'are you sitting opposite the new man in your life?' But they were for peculiar people, weren't they?" she opined. "Inadequate, lonely people. Perverts, basically. People she looked down on. She'd been to a couple – just for something to do of course. Once was enough. A friend at work had said they are like cattle markets. She'd guessed it would be too. She'd never go again. What else was – oh yes, that was it... Once she'd tried one of the firm's social club sections. She'd had to go on her own of course. And true to form everyone ignored her. All too busy to notice her. Nobody came over to talk to her. It wasn't as if she'd been shy or anything. She'd have chatted away quite happily. She just preferred it if other people introduced themselves first. That was the accepted way..."

Distracted and fretful Mrs Lever went back to sit in her chair. "Still, why should *she* get depressed? It wasn't her fault, she had a lot to be thankful for. She had her health, a good job, a good family and... She was just a bit plain; but so were most of the girls she knew. And they seemed to get on Ok..."

Mrs Lever shrugged. "This discussion was getting her nowhere".

She then got up and began pacing again. "Letters from home didn't help much either. All her school friends were now all married or engaged – one was even pregnant! But that didn't count because she wasn't married. Compare *that* with all the things she'd done in her life. She'd been the first to leave home, and she'd proved she could look after herself Ok. Really! All the same, she still felt a bit on the shelf. Silly wasn't it? She was only nineteen. Plenty of time yet. Plenty of time for – let's daydream for a second – for a twenty-two year old executive with a car called Roger – that's him of course, not the car – plenty of time for him to come along and whisk her off her feet, so to speak", she paused, then hopefully re-started. "He'd miraculously appear anytime now, so her mother assured her. Her sister met James when she was twenty after all. Even if they were temporarily separated..."

Mrs Lever sat down again. "She was bored. Ten 'O' levels and an IQ of ninety and *she* was bored. Who could she phone? Nobody in London, she didn't know anyone's number. And long distance they'd all be out. Friday night, see. It was a bit depressing, really..."

Mrs Lever leant forward. "Strange how being on your own can become compulsive after a while. You didn't get to enjoy it or anything like that – you just got so *used to it* you became afraid of company and other people you didn't know. No, not *afraid*. *Apprehensive* was a better word. You know, butterflies-in-the-stomach sort of thing. Scared you'd offend them and they'd go. Silly, really".

The nervous Mrs Lever again got up to pace – then spoke to the audience. "Sally spent the next half hour day-dreaming of her ex-boyfriends".

She sat down again. "Nine O'clock. Might as well have a drink while the news was on. Not much of that gin left. Half a bottle. Might as well finish it up. It was the weekend after all".

Mrs Lever got up again. "She felt depressed for some reason. Better have some of those tablets her doctor gave her for when she felt a bit *low*. Take a couple yes – and an extra three or four – who's going to know? Might as well get a good night's sleep and she'll feel better in the morning. Might as well be comfortable, turn up the heating as well. Keep herself warm. Go mad! Bugger the fuel bill! Whoops – language!"

The old woman sat down again. "She started yawning – felt sleepy!" she got up again, agitated. "Tomorrow would be a better day. She'd go to a film or something like that in the evening. She yawned again. She felt very sleepy. If she felt the same in a few weeks more she'd pack up and go home".

Mrs Lever sat down again. "Sally fell asleep almost as soon as her head touched the pillow. It was *Tuesday* before they discovered her body".

And door knock was heard offstage – and all the lights came back up. "Mr Bromsgrove?" she went to the wings, stage left. "Well your employer reference checks out", Mrs Lever led Edward on stage.

"Good. I've only just got the job for '*Amalgamated Hydrocarbons*'", he cheered. "office junior".

"Well you're lucky", Mrs Lever ingratiated, "I've just had a room become vacant", she smiled like a malevolent Granny. "Here's the key", she passed it over. "Rent a week in advance. Fifteen quid. Cash. No parties, supply your own food and pay your own electric and no guests overnight *or* past eleven".

"No problem!" Ed buoyed and stepped inside the bed-sit – off stage right.

As he exited inside – Mrs Lever stepped off stage to a total blackout.

## THE DREAM SEQUENCE

The rumbling *son et luminaire* effects of a storm were seen and heard. Through the thunder and lightning the audience were able to see a traumatised Edward Bromsgrove, tossing and turning in his bed.

Then the storm abated and the lights came up.

"Well, basically, what basically happened was, well basically, what we did was", Chorus strode back onstage, "was we taped one of the traumatised young Edward dreams. And, basically, the basic result was, we agree with Dr Schultz. He's completely lost his marbles. Bromsgrove that is".

"Ja!" coming on stage Schultz too wanted to make that clear. "No confusion there, Dave. I'm no loony. I'm a fully qualified heart surgeon. I only do this so I can be my own boss, you know? I don't *have* to".

"Just shut up and listen to the dream!" Chorus tisked.

"Englander pig-dog-rabbit-pelican", Schultz muttered under his breath.

"What was that?" Chorus challenged.

"Nothing, nothing..." Schultz sheepishly responded.

"Well please be quiet now, I'm running the film..." they both exited.

Indeed, the sound effect of a cine projector was heard, followed by five seconds of grainy Elizabethan style music before light illuminated the balcony, whereon was stood a lamenting Julie Nixon, the rest of the stage dark.

"Oh Romeo, Romeo, wherefor art thou my love?" she theatrically opined. "Someday my prince will come to take me away from all this washing up!"

The sound effect of a motorbike was heard pulling-up... and stage prop motorcycle was wheeled on stage by Edward.

"Hello Darlin'", he grinned

"Have you come to save me?" Julie questioned.

"Nice isn't it?" as was to be expected Ed was far more interested in the motorbike. "It's a Norton".

"You're all I've ever wanted - a man like you!" Julie (meanwhile) quite literally read from her own script. "Its heaven come true!"

"It's all I've ever wanted — a bike like that!" Ed too was in a world of his own. "Nice isn't it?"

"Sometimes I think you think more of that flipping bike then you do of me!" reality finally made Julie twig they were living at cross-purposes.

"You'd be right too", Ed joked up at her. "You *won't* ever do seventy, *flat out*".

"You bastard!" Julie took much more a hedge than offence. "This is a rotten dream. I'm not cold. *Frigid*. Least, I don't *think* I am?"

"It's my dream!" Ed defended. "I can dream what I like".

"No one else does", Julie haughtily refuted. "We all have nightmares instead!"

Impasse? The stage bed was not suddenly re-illuminated. "Oh yes!" George was now in lying in it; mumbling in deep slumber. "Oh yes! More whip! More whip! Now read me the news! Read the news!"

"Ignore him", Ed embarrassingly addressed the audience. "He'll go away in time. He's drunk..."

"My dream, would be different!" Julie now inspired to run down from the balcony to the stage – where a team of dressers, uniformed as a Formula One pit crew, hastily put her into a wedding dress – upon which she waltzed up to take Ed firmly by the scruff of his arm as Chorus entered, wearing a clerical 'dog collar'.

"Doesn't the vicar say anything?" Ed whispered as the clerical Dave Chorus silently genuflected a whole series of rituals. "Is he *deaf*?"

"He doesn't have to", Julie happily whispered back. "We're on our way out. It's all over. Signed, sealed and delivered. We're married. We are as one in the eyes of God".



"But God doesn't exist?" Ed seemed decidedly confused.

"You have to spoil everything for me, don't you?" Julie tutted. "Even our wedding day".

"Woe, woe and thrice woe!" dressed as a soothsayer from *'Up Pompeii!'* Claire now entered and crossed the stage to lament. "All for me is lost, all is lost..."

"On the other hand", Julie grinned, "Some of it's worked out alright..."

"Where to now?" Ed shrugged on the possibilities of lost quantum pathway events as Claire exited. "And I really am sorry..."

"The reception", Julie explained as if it was as obvious as night following day. "All our families and friends are there. It'll be lovely".

As soon as she said it the stage went dark. "Look", Ed protested, "this is my dream. I'm not marrying until I'm at least twenty-eight".

"That's a very arbitrary date?" Julie protested.

"No, it's a long way off", her 'intended' explained. "Kick the can down the road, I say. Er..." he paused. "Let's go to bed instead?"

"No! Certainly not!" Julie was (as usual) outraged.

"But we've just got married?" Bromsgrove sought to use her twisted logic against her. "So, where's the harm?"

"That's only in a dream, Silly", to her the paradox was blindingly obvious.

"Yeah!" Edward retorted in retaliation. "And that's all it's ever going to be too if I have any say in it".

"You haven't", Julie asserted. "I've already spoken to your parents. You always did fancy yourself as the world's greatest lover anyway?"

"I'm not sure that's how it works..." Ed pursed his brow in thought.

"Isn't it?"

"No", Ed reacted as the lights came fully back up. "Anyway, I always was".

"Was what?" Julie blinked unwillingly into the light.

"The world's greatest lover".

"When?"

"Before I met you", Ed opined and protested. "Before you *tamed* me. If you don't believe me - ask George".

"I already have", Julie smirked she retained the upper hand. You used to write poetry too, didn't you?" she giggled at the mere and very thought of it. "Come on, if you're so romantic. Do us a poem then?"

"I used to write lots of it", Ed now rather bashfully defended. "Nothing wrong with that. Lots of people write poetry", he paused to think. "Keats, Wordsworth, Lord Byron... Spike Milligan..."

"And Pam Ayres – that funny lady on the telly".

"Oh yeah!"

"And you had it published too, didn't you, clever clogs?" Julie now took pride in her *beau*.

"That's my artistic side coming out", Ed too wallowed in a little postcode celebrity.

"Artistic side?" Julie confused. "Three small amphet<sup>9</sup> and some scribbled lines and you think you Lord Byron!"

"Well, like me he got about a bit... But with you at my side Julie I'm..."

"...don't tell me, *you're*?" expecting to be *told* she was special... she was expecting something *romantic*.

"...Eddie Waring?" Ed suggested the infamous idiosyncratic northern sports commentator.

Needless to say Julie was not impressed. "This dream is going from bad to worse", addressing the audience she hid her disappointment behind a giggle.

"The next thing you know, it'll turn into one of *those* dreams", George got off the bed to join them. "You know? The ones where you wake up in the middle?"

"Well it's not happening with you standing round", Ed denied.

"I'll go. Let you get on with it then. Bye!" George exulted – as he did so the lights extinguishing and an explosion sounding.

"And for my next trick, I shall..." Ed was heard to cackle in the darkness like Sid James in '*Carry On, Being Unemployed*'.

Silence fell. "Scene censored, curtesy of the Whitehouse lady, Washington D.C." Professor Shultz was heard.

"Can you edit that bit out?" Ed was heard.

"Yeah, no problem", was heard the muffled voice of the sound engineer.

Then there was more silence. Clearly an ambitious stage director, familiar with the works of Pink Floyd, was at work, because this was then followed by the sound effect of an alarm ringing.

"Sod it!" the stage lights came back up to show Edward Bromsgrove lying on the bed. "I'm not getting up. I don't care if it is Monday and I've got to go to work. I'm not missing this dream. I'm actually *liking it*".

"Wake up!" Julie walked back on stage.

"No!" Ed defied her.

"If you don't wake up", Julie retorted, "I'm leaving this dream!" She paused for breath. "What's *that*?"

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<sup>9</sup> Slang term for 'uppers' (*Translator*)

"Birds chirping", Ed sat up in bed to explain. "Since I'm still asleep we've changed location. We're now out of grimy London - and into the grimy English countryside. Sussex to be exact".

"Why Sussex?" Julia confused.

"Why *not* Sussex?" Ed employed logical positivism. "You're not prejudiced *against* Sussex, are you?"

"No, no, no..." Julie found herself pushed back even further on the defensive by this

"Good. Sussex it is then!" Ed now sang:-

"Sussex, good old Sussex by the sea  
Sussex, good old Sussex by the sea  
You can tell it by the smell  
'Cause it stinks like hell  
It's Sussex by the sea!"

"Are you sure this is Sussex, and not Wessex?" Julie now habitually doubted her boyfriend.

"Yes. Why?"

"I've just seen Thomas Hardy".

"Did he have his scrumpy with him?"

"A whole tanker of it..."

"You see all sorts of famous people in dreams when you work at the BBC", Ed elucidated. "Or is it *for* the BBC?"

"Which you don't", Julie suggested as – offstage - was heard the sound of crashing boxes. "What's that noise?" she instantly alarmed.

"Only the orchestra", Ed explained.

"What orchestra?"

"The famous LSD. The London Symphony Disco. They're tuning up..."

"That sounds like a cue for a song and dance routine to me?" Julie was promptly hopeful.

"Oh..." Ed (instead) alarmed.

"Isn't it then?" Julie's voice let her disappointment show.

"No, er, actually, it is *not*".

"What a let down!" Julie exasperated. "There I was, expecting you to romantically serenade me with full orchestral backing, and all I get is... Well, not a lot. The so-called 'smiling no'. It's all very un-Hollywoodish..."

"But don't worry Princess!" Ed interjected. "I'll make it up to you - you *shall* go to the ball! Never fear, Bromsgrove's here!"

"Here?" Julie confused. "Methinks he's not all there..." she asided to the audience.

"No here! Just outside Maidenhead!" Ed now produced a map to point to as he too grinned and asided to the audience.

"Ok, how?" Julie now tasked.

"Sorry?" Ed confused.

"How?" his long suffering girlfriend persisted. "*How* are you going to make it up to me? I'm so excited - I can't wait!"

"In that case", Ed agreed. "Nor can I. See that spreading yew tree?"

"Yes..." Julie was obviously suspicious and mistrusting.

"We're going to have it under its romantic and symbolially spreading boughs. What do you say to *that*?"

"I say 'oh no we're *not*!'"

"I meant the picnic sandwiches".

"Oh, *that's* Ok then..."

"We can do that as well..." Ed waggled his eyes at the audience.

"No, no, it's alright thank you", Julie firmly refuted. "I can wait 'til we're married for *that*. I'm in no hurry to conjugate *that* particular verb".

"Little does she know, I can't, and won't, be thwarted. Aha!" Ed promptly twirled an imaginary stage villain's moustache and laughed leeringly at the audience...

As he did so the stage blacked out.

"Following strict legal consultations with their lawyers, the entrepreneurs and impresarios behind this extravaganza, have decided that the following scene", Chorus strode on in a spotlight, "where Bromsgrove, er, er..." he paused as he became embarrassed, "er, er..."

"Careful!" Professor Schultz shouted down from the balcony. "We're before the broadcasters' self-justifying so-called 'watershed'".

"Ok, right then kiddiwinks", Chorus continued. "Following strict legal consultations with their lawyers, the entrepreneurs and impresarios behind this extravaganza, have decided that the following scene where Bromsgrove makes love to the love of his life, shall not be performed". Here he paused for effect. "We are sorry for any inconvenience caused by this to the mack-on-the-lap brigade; but we can justify it".

"Can we?" Professor Schultz interjected. "As a free-thinking liberal *Austrian* – Austrian Ok? - *not* German – and mostly in Switzerland all the time during the war – I would challenge any and all censorship?"

"Oh we can justify it my Teutonic chum", Chorus explained. "We need the censors' approval before it can be broadcast. Oh, and Mary Whitehouse is also my auntie. Oh *and*", he moved to confide in the audience, "not only *that*, but the offending scene is on the bootleg copy - which puts the price of them up

and makes us all just that little bit older, a little bit wiser, and a hell of a lot richer. A well-known accountant's ploy... Oh", he then turned to re-address his colleague in the balcony, "what's the definition of a supersonic rabbit?"

"That I am not knowing?" Schultz was confused. "What ist zer definition of a supersonic rabbit?"

"A fast buck!" Chorus delivered the punchline.

"That's bad. This is bad", the professor lamented. "With jokes like that, no wonder you lost the world war..."

"No, no, no?" Chorus confused. "We *won* the war?"

"Yeah, but we – I mean *they* - won the peace..."

"Methinks he doth protest too much!" Chorus again engaged the audience. "Ok, so let's not argue", he returned to address his counterpart. "It was thirty-five years ago today. Let's just let bygones be bygones, bury the hatchet and all that. If we *must* argue about the relative merits of our two countries, let's take it into an area of seriousness!"

"Football!" Chorus and Schultz spoke together.

"You got it!" Ed now walked back on stage. "By the way, did you know that the minister of transport can't even drive!"

And with that the lights went out – all over Europe!

## THE PERFORMER

"But all is not lost for our hero!" Chorus walked across the stage from right to left. "Although he hates his very financially necessary job with '*Amalgamated Hydrocarbons*'... with London's stand-up comedy scene starting to burgeon, Edward decided to try his luck in the Shepherd's Bush pubs<sup>10</sup>".

"Let's face it", Professor Schultz passed him going the other way, "he's not literate enough for sketch-based comedy..."

The lights faded up to reveal a blindingly white toothed and be-suited American – looking much like a superannuated Donny Osmond. "Ladies and gentlemen!" he exclaimed as he grabbed a solitary microphone stand. "And I mean that most sincerely! Here he is - Eddy - Bromsgrove!"

Polite by subdued applause was heard as Edward walked on stage. "Good evening", Ed grabbed the mic. Resounding laughter was the result. "Take my girlfriend. Please". More laughter. "She's the only girl I know who'll get a

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<sup>10</sup> The famous 'Comedy Store' opened in 1979. The movement, ignored by The Drunkards as 'not their thing' started in an ad-hoc way mid Seventies (*Translator*)

guaranteed job as a test pilot on her eightieth birthday. In a broomstick factory”.

More laughter. Then Julie Nixon stepped on stage, Chorus and professor Schultz a few steps behind, and everyone else theatrically *froze*...

“This is all in his mind, isn’t it?” Julie question the good narrator.

“Where else would it be?” Chorus sighed. “And he probably doesn’t mean it. Probably just saying it for effect”.

The laughter (and action) restarted. “Ugly?” Ed continued his routine. “I won’t say she’s ugly, but she calls ‘*Wimpey*’ the builders for her foundation every time she changes her make-up in the morning... and the oil slick disaster teams to take it off, last thing at night”.

More laughter. “I’m not saying she’s fat or anything, but she kick starts Jumbo jets”.

Laughter – more too as Julie looked at herself to prove she wasn’t actually overweight.

“No, I’m quite fond of her really”, he continued. “I’ve always had a soft spot for her”, Ed paused for the punchline. “It’s a bog in the west of Ireland...”

More laughter – for this is his best joke – as opposed to the ones stolen from acts on the telly. “We all have pet names for them, our ladies, don’t we men@ Me, I call mine the ‘Sahara Desert’ — because she’s flat and uninteresting”.

Laughter. “I think he has issues with you?” Chorus whispered to Julie.

“I’ll have ‘issues’ with him alright”, she vowed revenge was a dish best served cold.

“Me”, the oblivious Ed meanwhile continued his act, “I love a happy ending me. Like World War Two – that’s my kind of ending”. Laughter. “Even if vee did only come second”, Ed adopted a cod German accent, which got even more amused laughter – poking fun at the Nazis a British pastime since 1939.

“Are you offended by that, professor?” Julie asked.

“Nein! I am *Austrian* I am being!”

“Methinks he dost protest too much”, Julie suggested as – across the stage – her boyfriend continued his act...

“I saw, Bjorn Borg – you know, the tennis player - down the pub the other day”, Ed meanwhile continued to perfect his timing. Laughter. “No, straight up, I *did*. He’s a great mate of mine. I asked him straight, I said, ‘Bjorn’, I said, ‘cos that’s his name...”

This but got a small guffaw – but Edward continued undaunted. “‘Bjorn’ I said, ‘do you prefer playing on grass or asphalt?’ ‘Dunno’, he replied. ‘I’ve never smoked asphalt’”

Laughter at this punchline. "It's high tar, I think", Bromsgrove then followed up to more audience amusement. "Folks, I actually I used to work for the BBC", having never actually held down a job there in his life Ed lied for comedic effect... and got a guffaw for his pains. "It's true, it's true. Really it is", he followed up, his timing visibly improving as Chorus, Julie and the Prof looked on. "A BBC ID card says more about you than cash, or even talking to your ex-girlfriends ever can" (guffaw). "We recommend you join now – brag about who of the famous I almost actually met..."

"He's losing it with over-specialist humour", the one-man panel of experts that was Professor Schultz provided action-analysis.

Did Ed hear? "Mind you two thousand people have left BBC television in the last six weeks. No one knows why. Personally I think it's because they haven't got carpet on the floors, like the radio offices have. You know radio? It's like TV - only more visual..."

This at last provoked some laughter. "In my day", Edward immediately followed up, "people used to care about things like that, God help us. Did you, er, did you see that piece in the paper the other day about the Judge who fined two Rabbis? In a case brought against them by British Rail? He's ruled that although they *can* claim to be the Children of Israel, this didn't entitle them to travel half-fare on public transport".

More laughter. "Can you hear me at the back there, Mother?" in the time-honoured way Ed now flippantly decided to develop a comedic catchphrase.

A small laugh was the audience response. "My family are all here by the way", Ed continued undaunted. "They come every night. I want you to know where they are; they're the ones at the back, with the sub-machine guns, stopping you leaving..."

Laughter! "My name's Edward Bromsgrove – and yours *isn't!*" he provoked applause to his exit from the stage...

"He hasn't improved since he was seven", Julie interacted with the audience.

"You consider zis a threat to the stability of your relationship?" Professor Schultz queried.

"Amongst other things", Julie was cryptically ambiguous.

"Indeed!" Chorus now bounded centre-stage forward, "for now I switch to iambic pentameter mode..."

Upon good media - let us our lives, our souls,  
Our debts, our careful wives,  
Our children, and our sins lay!  
O Ceremony, show me but thy worth!  
What is thy soul of adoration?

Art thou aught else but place, degree, and form?  
Creating awe and envy in other men?  
To flash years forward let us go!  
For 'tis now Edward Bromsgrove on!  
The sainted 'South Bank Show'!"<sup>11</sup>

A snatch of the show's distinctive theme was heard as the lights came back up to reveal Ed – aged and fifty years hence - sat at a table across from iconic presenter Melvyn Bragg, a solitary TV camera in attendance.

"Gerday", Mr Bragg spoke the camera. "One Phantom aircraft, registered trademark fighter-bomber, as used by Britain's very own Royal Air Force, can carry a greater warload than any one single aircraft of second world war vintage, put together. This is just one of the many staggeringly useless facts, available in a new book, published today, *'The Guinness Book Of Useless Facts And Figures'*. With me in the studio today I have the compiler of that particular new volume, Mr Edward Bromsgrove". He paused. "Gerday Mr Bromsgrove. Can I ask you first *why* does one bother to compile a book of useless facts in the first place? What exactly stimulated you into, er, doing it?"

"Well Norman", Ed was clearly confused, "Guinness offered me money to do it, so I did it".

"No other reason than that?" the presenter seemed unphased by being mis-named. "No higher motivation?"

"No. Just the money", Ed shrugged. "What higher motivation *can* there be?"

"Yes, er", Melvyn shifted listlessly in his seat, "I mean to say, you didn't, at any time, feel that the literature of mankind would be, er, how can I put it; *enriched* by your book in any way?"

"No?" Ed looked confused. "Just the money. I only did it for the money..."

"And Guinness paid you?"

"Yes. By cheque, of course. Not in actual Guinness... even *I* couldn't drink that much. They discovered me when I was doing a stand-up ventriloquists act in Milton Keynes. What they noticed, and particularly *liked* about me, was all the free advertising my act gave them".

"How come?" Mr Bragg seemed encouraged his guest was at last starting to open up.

"Well, I used to say to my dummy, "Arnold", I'd say to him, because I called him Arnold see..."

"May I ask why?"

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<sup>11</sup> Popular ITV arts show of the time, eclectic and every Sunday night, presented by the distinctively nasal Melvyn Bragg (*Translator.*)



"Well Peter, mainly, because that was his name, see? I'd say, 'Arnold' I'd say, 'say a bottle of beer'. And rather than say, 'gottle of gear' because I wasn't very good, I'd say - or rather Arnold would say, 'Guinness', because wasn't a very exacting voice-thrower at the time. Hence the free advertising".

"I'm not *absolutely* sure Mr. Bromsgrove", Melv reflected, "but I *think* you're quite possibly the stupidest person we've ever had on this programme. Next too Cardinal Sicola, of course?"

"Cardinal Sicola?" (it was now Ed's turn to be confused).

"He later became Pope. His pontifical name was then - Pope Sicola".

"That's easily the worst religious gag I've ever been told".

"In your book", Mr Bragg ignored Ed, "there's rather a lot of unnecessary foul language. Why is that?"

"Two reasons mainly", Ed responded. "I have a very limited vocabulary, and also because I use it to make up for what I couldn't achieve literaturally. By using a sheer volume of bad language and swearing to blag it. Not only that, but I was heavily influenced in this book by a mystical experience had when I was ten. I felt that God was guiding my very typewriter, as I wrote".

"A religiously mystical experience?" the presenter was intrigued.

"Mm", Ed cagily confirmed. "The total meaning of conceptionual earthly life was revealed unto me", he mal-appropriated. "Running through a wheat field with a local girl, of no fixed physical development, when, as I've already said, I was ten".

"That's amazing!"

"Yes it is, isn't it. And even more amazing when you consider the fact that it's all true..."

The lights came down upon *that* particular revelation...

## **DAY-TRIP**

"With a secure income from '*Amalgamated Hydrocarbons*' to back him... Bromsgrove next tried drugs as a way of discovering the uncountable mysteries and mystical meaning of life", back in his doublet and hose, and followed by a spotlight Chorus walked back on stage to further extrapolate. "Dope, acid, smack, tea - you name it, he tried it. And like everything else he did - he went completely over the top".

"He overdid it again, silly boy", similarly in spotlight Julie's elderly neighbour Mrs Jones returned to the stage. Still, adolescents will be adolescents, I suppose. Boys will be boys. You grow up and learn from your mistakes, that's

what my late husband used to say. Mind you, he was just as bad. You wouldn't get a *girl* doing anything as daft as that..."

"Well, quite", Chorus did a double-take at her interruption. "Luckily for us music fans, hidden away in the largest record collection in the world: that of a guy from our house-share who's got access to the BBC's, is a very rare recording of Edward's first encounter of the dopey kind with certain illegal substances, at a party of a friend of his cousin Dave", called 'Mystic Pete', that he gatecrashed in Highgate..."

As Mrs Jones exited stage left... anachronistic late Sixties acid rock music played softly in the background. The lights came back up to reveal Ed bent over double in front of a 'suburban night exterior' set, being comforted and helped by the long-suffering Julie.

"Ed. Ed? You alright? Ed, what was in that?" in her inherently sheltered naivety Julie sniffed. "Oh er it's, er, thingy? Isn't it Dear?" she made her best uninformed guess. "Ed? You look ill love. Do you need to be sick?"

"Why's the fridge blue, Mummy?" used and disorientated by what he'd ingested Ed was now totally confused as to the speaking female's true role.

"It *isn't*, you stupid fool... It's a *garden fence*!"

"And why's that dream ferret licking Angel Delight off the top of the potato peeler?" Ed was now totally gone.

"Are you feeling well, Ed? You're not, are you? Oh dear..." Julie hated having this responsibility thrust upon her. "You've done it this time! You've *really* done it this time! Oh my God - I'll die of embarrassment if anyone from home find's out. At least we're on the other side of London..."

"And why's Jim wearing a bald wig and cat suit, Mummy? Why's Dad?"

"You mean 'where's Dad'?" Julie confused. "Or is it making you all existential?"

"Don't touch the blotting paper cheesecake..." Ed rallied somewhat. "And that chair moved!" he next complained. "They shouldn't do that. Not on their own".

"What chair?" Julie confused.

"That chair. There. On the floor. It moved".

Julie looked but – as The Beatles once famously said – 'noticed there wasn't a chair'. "I don't think so?", she wondered what to do next. Not on its own. They don't usually..."

"It did, did it, it did, it soddin' did! I saw it I did Auntie Doris! I *did*".

"You're not well, Edward. You're seeing things", Julie realised he was so far gone he hadn't noticed she was calling him 'Edward', which she only ever did if

he was really, really angry. "Good job I'm not your parents", she decided someone here had to act like a grown-up. "We're going!"

"I'll get the bike..." Ed referenced his trust moped steed they'd arrived on.

"We're not going by bike", Julie denied. "You're not safe at the best of times. Let alone *now*".

"We'll fly then. It's easy".

"The bike and helmets are locked", Julie admonished. "I'll call a taxi instead..."

"Too expensive", Ed persisted in his flight of fantasy. "Flying's cheaper - and more fun".

"Or Dave can take us in his car... No bad idea. Or I can ring Dad..."

"I don't want to go", Ed complained. "Please, Julie, just *think*", from somewhere inside his befuddled brain Ed somehow rationalised. "For the first time in my life, I'm having fun. *I'm* actually enjoying myself. I'm *living*! Hooray!"

"You're not well", Julie began to drag him away. "Shut up..."

"You're a nagging old bag".

"You're drunk".

"I'm stoned..."

"No", Julie went into her habitual denial, "you're *not well*. And you're a disgrace to everyone who knows you", she yet lifted a veil of partial truth.

"I've been done for gross indecency!" Ed now rambled off again. "That's one hundred forty-four indecencies! That's a lot of flashing! Bad karma man! Ha ha! Just like my cousin Dennis He's a menace... Rat tat tat!" he next proceeded to ape a machine gun as Julie rushed off stage right...

"The bike seems Ok. Here's your coat", she rapidly returned. "I re-locked the top-box. Help me on with mine please!"

"Dum-diddy-dum. I'm a teapot. Ha-ha..." Ed remained incomprehensible. "I haven't felt as good as this since Fulham last got relegated<sup>12</sup>. Way-hey! We-hee!"

"We're going now Ali", Julie moved to the edge of stage left, to talk to an imaginary hostess. "Thanks for a lovely party. We really enjoyed it. Apart from, *this*..." he derisively pointed to the 'thing' that was her boyfriend.

"I still am!" Ed injected. "Wa-ha! Yes, thanks Ali. Fucking good party. Re-arrange it and it becomes, 'good party fucking'!" he began to run around like an aeroplane.

"*Edward!*" Julie admonished. "Language! How *could* you?"

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<sup>12</sup> Local rivals to Ed's QPR (*Translator*)

"It's easy. Smoke one of Pete's ciggys – and have a blotter. They're incredible! 'We'll meet again'", he now sang in a punk-style voice.

"Don't know where,  
don't know when!  
But I know we'll meet again  
some sunny day!  
And we don't *care*..."

"Stop it! Stop it! *Stop it!*" Julie Nixon was now very angry *indeed*. "You're embarrassing me in front of everyone!" she began to physically berate his back and shoulders.

At which point a random passer-by began to cross the stage. "Hi there, sorry, excuse him, er, he's not very well..." Julie adopted her 'sweetness and light and all things nice' voice as she waited for the stranger to pass. "Stop it!" she then returned to hiss her 'hell hath no fury' voice to address her errant boyfriend.

"Oh I like *that!*" rallying somewhat Ed retaliated. "Take you out for the evening and then you start hitting me. I like *that!* Bloody cheek! Bloody slut! Bloody Amazon! We'll... we'll... see how you like it!" he moved to hit Julie – she running around the stage to avoid him.

At which point George and Dave too left the party. "Come at me you bastards!" as Julie was too fleet of foot Ed then directly challenged them.

"If you don't stop Bromsgrove - I'll call the fuzz!" George seemed to recall blessed are the peacemakers. But as he spoke... Ed suddenly lunged at Dave – who defended himself. "Now, just break it up!" George moved to separate them.

"Dick-head!" Dave swore as Ed staggered offstage and Julie began to cry.

"It'll be Ok in the end", big-hearted George went to put a light arm around, to reassuringly comfort her.

The stage went blackout and the music stopped.

"Next day..." Chorus narrated from up in the balcony.

"I won't try that again in a hurry", Ed was heard to say.

"You'd better not either", George was also heard but not seen. "If you lost any more friends you won't have any left".

"I'm not talking to him at the moment!" Julie too was emphatic on audio only...

## NOTTINGHAM

The lights came back up to reveal Julie on stage, sitting and watching a TV, the screen of which the audience cannot see.

"Hey Jules!" Ed walked onstage carrying a cassette player. "Your folks out?" he asked, hopefully.

"Upstairs!" she gestured upwards, towards heaven. "Not that it matters. You're still in the doghouse, you know?"

"Oh?" Ed was inevitable crestfallen. "What have I done?" he incredulously defended.

"Yes, even *he's* starting to realise he's got to get his life together", up in the balcony Chorus observed to Professor Schultz.

"Anyway Jules", back on stage Ed continued unabated. "We've got a letter!"

"You mean *you* have", she was dismissive. "I *speak* to my friends. Who from?" her curiosity was nevertheless piqued.

"My cousin Harry. Harry Holland. The one in The Midlands. Up North. He's at Trent Poly in Nottingham<sup>13</sup>".

"Well at least he's making something of himself", Julie was caustic as she reached to drowse the TV. What's he say?"

"It starts..." Ed pressed 'play' on the device – which boomed.

"Dear Pineapple Features", Harry's voice was clearly heard<sup>14</sup>. "Edward Bromsgrove rampaging through his native Shepherds Bush? This horrifying piece of information gleaned from an inebriated Andrew Jenkins on the train up here, has heralded the start of a panic in the London area; holiday dates are being changed, shutters are up on the windows, and on the womenfolk".

"He's sarcastic?" Julie observed as she reached to press 'pause'.

"He prefers the term 'irony'", Ed promptly hit 'play'.

"It's your own bloody fault", Harry's dulcet tones continued. "In your last letter, which I have recovered and held up to the mirror to check for secret lemon juice writing like you're Mary, Queen of Scots, you said *nothing*. I didn't have time to phone home and raise the alarm. No one was prepared".

"What's he mean?" asked Julie, pressing 'pause'.

"I'm being uncommunicative..." Ed explained.

"Chance'd be a fine thing", Julie grumpily re-pressed 'play'.

"And now, your questions unanswered about our shared cousins. Has Spock managed to chat anyone up yet? Answer: of course not, so look him up now you're back in the Bush. He's in '*The Wellington*' most evenings. Is Geoff

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<sup>13</sup> Harry is the only Drunkard to be mentioned as himself (*Translator*)

<sup>14</sup> A recording is assumed here - but it could be the real McCoy. I mean, 'Holland' (*Translator*)

married yet? Answer; her mummy won't let him. Sensible woman. Now *my* question. How's your sex life, and, tut tut, what's this place like you've moved into, and who with? What's the sex - that naughty word again - ratio, how much is it going to cost, and who made the sandwiches?"

"He means my block", wary of Julie's reaction Ed pressed 'pause'. "'How's my sex life?' he asks. In sunny West London? He can't have forgotten his last visit already..."

"Read on", Julie deflected all *that stuff* to press 'play'.

"My flat ain't as good as yours reputedly is", the disembodied Harry continued. "Then again it's better than most. I've got a room to myself, and it costs seven pound twenty-five a week, gas and electric included. We've also got our own built in dentist; a rarity in these parts. I have it (the flat) to share with two blokes of known trustworthiness... and there will be another party just at the beginning of October, so be ready to move at a moment's notice, bring bottles and birds with you up to sunny Nottingham-On-Sea. Love, Harry..."

"Nottingham isn't on the sea?" Julie quizzically pressed 'pause'.

"It's called humour?" Ed sexistly dismissed her interrogative to re-press 'play'.

"Post answer", Harry's faintly endearing Brummie accent kicked-in again. "And Tracy made the sandwiches. Tracy is the reason Roger now knocks before going into Paul's room. Post post answer. I don't knock. I'm a swine. Question. Who's doing who? William Hickey eat your heart out... Answer. Marek is doing Alice in his 1975 VW Beetle, which he bought with his premium bonds. No, he didn't win, he just cashed in one thousand five hundred's worth. Alice has taken to not wearing a bra from what I could see through Pete, who *was* sitting next to her, and has taken to drink, ha!"

"Oughtn't be allowed..." Julie interjected without pausing the machine. "Bloody studnets..."

"This is unconfirmed", Harry continued, "but H and A had spent all day having a picnic - shock, horror - in Sherwood Forest. Horror? No, they didn't see Robin Hood. *He* actually said 'no' to *her*. How times change from when I was that age, ie next week. The car has obviously done him good".

"Oughtn't be allowed..." Julie again muttered her mantra, again without pausing the machine.

Ed, however, did. "If you believe him life's better away from London. I don't see how it can be though?" he ruminated. "But then he's always lived in the Midlands..."

"That's almost *Scotland?*" this time it was his girlfriend who repressed ('sorry *re-pressed*') 'play'.

"Oh, by the way, I passed my exam" Harry's phantom voice continued. "My rearguards to the family at number seventy-seven, and beware the pleasures of the flesh. Now, what's this about rumours about shared cousin Dave? I'd like to know what the general opinion was on that fiasco".

"I told him Annette sprang the old 'steady boyfriend' bit on him", Ed pressed pause. "Still the knowing looks were fun", he hit 'play' again.

"Give my regards to your hippy friend Mystic Pete, and get him to repair a few satellites while he's high up there. Bob Willis is now vice-captain of the England touring side, good stuff eh? I know you can't stand cricket, so that's why I mentioned it – and no one knows more about vice than Bob Willis!<sup>15</sup> And so to bed, goodnight z z z - z. Snores. Harry. Signing off at eleven forty-four precisely..."

"He'll miss the shipping forecast", Ed observed as the epistle terminated with the tape clicking off.

"You all ought to grow up", Julie dismissed.

"You're tolerating me, aren't you?" Ed suspected.

"You've got some making up to do for Highgate", she replied as the lights faded to black. "My patience is only spread so far..."

"Ooh, er,, Matron", for Ed *everything* has to be a joke...

## **FLATMATES**

"Although I have room of my own, I have to share a bathroom and bog", Ed wandered on stage to complain to the audience as the lights came back up. "Bit like my cousin, Harry. Only without the shared cooking. I reckon", Ed then began to pontificate, "flatmates should be selected on the basis of their non-irritating qualities as individuals. No chronic complainers, no hypochondriacs, no bugs on cleanliness – particularly no one-man parties. I speak from bitter experience. And the need for privacy", he moved stage left.

"As a young man, a mere lad of almost twenty, out of the parental home for the first time, I went to work for '*Amalgamated Hydrocarbons*'. In London, natch. I now share a house of bed-sits with one other guy and two girls, in Earl's Court. Our landlady Mrs Lever was of antipodean origin, so fairly

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<sup>15</sup> This is a joke Bob's lawyers, Ok? (*Translator*)

tolerant, as befits one so descended from convicts", he moved to stage right to engage the other side of the audience.

"It was an up-and-down sort of existence. Our house-warming party after I moved in was gatecrashed, and we barely escaped alive, but the only upshot was one complaining neighbour and an unwanted pregnancy – not one of ours I add – as well as the statutory hangovers and stained carpets. After that early high-watermark this started to go steadily downwardsville".

With this revelation Ed moved back centre-stage.

We suffered eternal arguments over bill-paying and noise, petty squabbling over cleaning the bog, shares of bins-out duties and stuff. You name it – we found a way to argue over it. Sometimes we had to really stretch ourselves to do it, but we always managed to somehow bring home the bacon of grievous discontent. On every imaginable where there wasn't instant apathy there was too much over-enthusiasm for any healthy accomplishment to take place – and where there was neither of these, from one or the other of us, as the case may be, it only succeeded in estranging the rest. If you ever see three flatmates gossiping, always feel sorry for the one that leaves first..."

With this Ed next sat down on the stage.

"Choosing flatmates is difficult", he continued to lecture. "Even if you have your own room. It's a form or marriage really, communal living with non-familiars. The first governing factor when choosing shares, more often than not, is the number of people allowed in the flat in the first place. The next is, 'who wants to live with you' – the next who *you* want to live with... and the final is 'who's looking'. Factors after that are secondary. Money hardly an object in my dumpy price-bracket. I mean, we'd all like to live with a continually good-humoured responsible saint if we could, but most of us in the end have to settle for other human beings".

"Ok", Ed sprang back up to his feet, "my top tips. First, draw up a duty roster for shared household chores. Second, ignore it. Third, have regular air-clearing discussions. Fourth, forget these and settle for long, petty, silences instead. Alternatively", he gesticulated to emphasise, "resort to slanderous innuendo or sly sarcastic insult. Either is equally appropriate as the circumstances require, so simply delete to taste".

He paused for effect. "So, there you go. And if you *are* sharing a place... good luck, Mate, with your flatmates", he moved to saunter of stage. "You'll need it!" he added a Pathian shot. "And I need to go away and re-think my life..."



## ANOTHER GIRL, ANOTHER SCENE

"So..." Chorus waltzed upon stage like he was dancing with an invisible partner, "the way Ed figured it, a change is as good as a rest. After all, Cousin Harry was doing very nicely thank you up there in Nottingham..."

"He must be *living* great", the spotlight came up to show Ed, now stood centre-back stage, kneeling as if in prayer. "He always says he is. So why can't I, Edward Leslie Bromsgrove, do the same?"

"He never liked his middle name", Chorus objectively added.

"Perhaps it's the company I keep?" Edward now seemed to seek divine inspiration. "Change scenes, that could so it?" he reflected his options. "Change girls - that would *certainly* work. And it also has the advantage of a better sex life. Ditch Julie and try that Sarah Thorpe? She's been giving me the come on for years, she has..."

"Possibly", Professor Schultz looked down from the balcony. "Or, zat could just be his superego's 'confirmation bias' – as the arcane craft of the sociologist has it".

"'Super' as in the sense of 'big' not 'great'", Chorus caustically elaborated.

"After all", Ed reflected. "She'd already said in scene three that she might anyway, so why not? I don't care what Julie Nixon thinks anyway. I've nothing to apologise for. I'm a free agent, my own boss..."

"What is she to me?" Chorus predicted what was coming next.

"What is she to me?" Ed duly echoed.

"I just said that", Chorus engaged with the audience. "I can read him like a book..."

"A lot", Professor Schultz urged.

"'A lot' what?" a confused Chorus asked up to the balcony.

"A lot what, she is to him, I mean", the expert professed his opinion. "His trouble is, he is being, he don't know a bargain when he sees one. *Komm gie mie ter tag* and all that jazz!"

"I'd agree with that", Chorus winked at the audience. "If I knew what it meant..."

"Get on with it for Christ's sake, will you!" the muffled voice of the director came from offstage. Instantly the lights dimmed to black and loudly was heard a snatch of the theme to BBC Radio's *'The Archers'*...

The lights came back up to reveal a London Transport bus stop, with a queue of four beside it.

"But soft!" Ed wandered on stage to engage the audience. "What bus stop on yonder A3220 dost lie? It is the main road south – and Sarah Thorpe is

awaiting an omnibus! Methinks this random chance be the work of divine providence!" he wandered off to join the queue. "What could *possibly* go wrong?" he engaged the audience in rhetoric.

"Hi Ed!" second in the line Sarah recognised him – spoke past the other two random civilians. "Haven't seen you in ages?"

"No", he grinned back to ingratiate. "We'll have to meet up. Catch up. What, er, um, what are you doing Saturday?"

"Nothing with you *alone*", Sarah cagily checked his honourable intentions.

"Why's that then?" Ed's grin promptly sought to make light.

"I thought you was engaged to, er, Julie Whatsername?"

"Nixon?" rumbled he offered.

"Yeah, Julie Nixon?"

"No. No. We've got this agreement, see. Nothing serious".

"Have you told her yet?" Sarah seemed to have heard that one before.

"Yes, yes, yes, of course", Edward grinned. "Would I lie to you?"

"Quite probably", Sarah flirted in return.

"I'm not", Ed duplicitously assured.

"Not *what*?"

"Not lying".

"I'll think about it", Sarah was canny. "You working now?"

"Yeah. '*Amalgamated Hydrocarbons*'".

"I've thought about it. 'Yes' and 'no'".

"Yes and no?" (the paradox confused poor Edward).

"Yes I will", she declared, "and 'no', not until I've asked her if it's 'Ok'. We both work for '*Woolworths*' see, and I don't like making waves. But if this 'thing' you've not got is real... maybe you're *on*".

A bus-bell sounded, and the queue - Sarah included but Ed excluded - duly shuffled offstage.

"Shit! That's torn it!" Ed moved to engage the audience as the stage lights changed. "I've blown it this time. Damn! I'm done for..."

"You could always leave town?" Chorus returned to the stage to casually lean on the surviving bus stop.

"No, no. I'm not ready for that yet. Not *yet*".

"Go home and deny it?" Chorus suggested. "You usually manage to blag your way out of things?"

"I *am* a good liar...." Ed indeed duly considered.

"Julie'll understand if you explain. Pass it off as a misunderstanding?" Chorus encouraged. "Perhaps she hasn't read the script yet? Or written it?"

"No", Ed had second thoughts about the feasibility of that. "She knows what I'm like. She'd never never in a million years believe both of us..."

"You mean George as well?" Chorus then turned to the audience. "He always has his best mate lie for him..."

"Yeah..." Ed cogitated on that conundrum. "*That* partnership'd have the opposite effect though. We're *too* notorious. She knows what we're like on that score. Anyway, *they're both* getting very pally these days... so I don't think he can help me... No!" Ed suddenly galvanised as he too went to address the audience. "If I'm to change my scene, George has gotta be out. Man, he's my best friend", he apologised. "We've been together for years. Since school! But we've gotta split if I'm to make it in another scene..."

"Julie as well?" Chorus challenged.

"Julie as well. Definitely. That's a must. Clean break!"

"You could have blown it there already, *ja*?" Professor Schulz now joined in from the balcony.

"He'd be a bastard to do it though?" Dave Chorus questioned the expert. "After all she's done for him?"

"Ja..." the learned 'Austrian' merely shrugged resignedly.

"You're a bastard to do it", Chorus now turned back to Ed. "After all she's done for you? You've lost your family. Why lose your friends as well?"

"*Javoll!*" Professor Schultz agreed. "As you Englishers say, 'to cut off your nose to spite your face', *ja*?"

"Shut up - you'll only make things worse!" Chorus snapped back. "I care, you see, about him, deep down", he then addressed the audience.

"Yeah, whadda you know about it?" Ed too responded. "Fifteen bob for a bottle of Viennese claret?" he paused, turned to the audience. "Yeah, another girl *is* the answer..."

"Another girl is *not* the answer", Chorus disagreed, "and you know it too".

"Well *something's* gotta be the bloody answer!" Ed nearly exploded in angst. "Something *must*, has gotta be able to, cure my apathy for life. Somebody, somehow, somewhere, sometime, something..."

"That's a lot of 'somes'", Professor Schultz observed.

"Get married", Mrs Jones stepped on stage to harangue. "It'll make a man of you.

"He's gotta find someone to have him first", Chorus observed.

"Julie?" Ed hesitated.

"After Highgate?"

As the lights dimmed all eyes turned to a projection screen at the back<sup>16</sup>. Crackly film trailer music began to play in the background. "Coming, next week, to this cinema", Chorus narrated in his best movie trailer style as Ed scampered off stage. "'*Death Waltz*' – certificate Z. Edward Bromsgrove stars in this spectacular spectacular as the Emperor Carl, the last of the great world shattering dynasty of Austro-Hungarian monarchs... and Julie Nixon, his girlfriend, stars as his wife and Empress; Margaretta Von Upmanship. See them preside over the final death pangs of one of the greatest Empires that television has ever seen..." he paused for effect. "This is no film for children... even if there is no smut. It may even, make you cry..."

"You must abdicate your majesty", the lights came back up to see George dressed in an ornate field marshal's uniform.

"Shut your gob Von Hertzendorf", dressed as the Empress Julie was uncharacteristically spikey.

"No, no my dear, he is right", playing the Emperor Carl Ed now spoke, one hand behind his back. "I must abdicate. When in Austria-Hungary, one must do as the Austro-Hungarians do. I have the future of the Dual Monarchy to think of..."

"What do you mean your overwhelming Majesty?" (George now grossly over-acted).

"I don't know... but it's on the script", Ed now produced it from behind his back as evidence. "Page three. And it sounds good too..." he elected to return to the matter in hand. "If... if I abdicate..."

"Yes?" Julie and George were all ears.

"It will mean that..."

"Yes, yes?" they again simultaneously interjected.

"Will you stop bloody interrupting!" Ed's patience snapped. "If I abdicate", he collected himself, "it will mean... the break-up of my empire".

"Our empire", Julie remained possessive.

"The old way of life will die, and in its place - rising like a phoenix from the ashes - will be... in the place of my once great nation will be..."

"Yes?" chirped George and Julie.

"Will be..." Ed anguished.

"Yes?" they asked again.

"We're not going *there* again", Ed asided to the audience. "The old way of life will die!" he too now over-acted. "And in its place - rising like a phoenix

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<sup>16</sup> The idea of using an actual film insert was left open (*Translator*)

from the ashes - will be - lots of new little countries, for all the big one's to pick on, just like at home".

"Well even *I* knew *that!*" George exclaimed. "And I'm only the Dual Monarchy's fucking Chancellor! Don't bother to clue me in on what's going on, thank you very much!"

"Now look here..." Ed protested – and stormed offstage. "You're s'posed to be my best friend!"

"So did I?" Julie confused. "Knew that too, I mean. *Everyone* knows *that!*"

"Well, if that's all you can come up with, perhaps you *had* better abdicate", George suggested. "If it's the final whistle, and all. Better for all that way, I say..."

At this cue the stage blacked out and music built up to a crescendo, then ended. The lights came back up to show Ed, back in his normal clothes, sat before a desk manned by a dull looking civil servant.

"I'd like to abdicate please", Ed was cheery. "Everything. *All responsibility*".

"Oh yeah?" the government operative was totally disinterested, this for him but another day at the paper face. "Fill in the form first. Age, date of birth, qualifications (if any), name, address, previous convictions (if any) and blood group and shoe size".

"What about this section here. Sex?"

"Put down either, 'yes please', or tick 'M' for monthly, 'F' for frequently", he paused for a beat. "Everybody else seems to..."

"There!" Ed hastily filled in the form. "Finished!"

"Right", the civil servant took the form and filed it in the waste-paper bin. "We'll be in touch then Sir".

"Is that it?" Ed looked at the wasted form.

"Yeah?" came the annoyed reply. "What d'you want? A medal? Next!"

"But that's my life there?" Ed was confused as he pointed at the waste-paper receptacle.

"Where?"

"You just put it in the your bin?"

"And you're naïve enough to *think* the universe *cares?*" the anonymous civil servant responded.

"No", Ed was honest.

"Well bugger off then! The universe is going to die. Everything's pointless anyway. So why bother? So why worry?"

"Right..." as Ed got up to walk away a spotlight followed him and all other lights faded. "Don't worry' he says", Ed next addressed the audience. "Of

course I worry. I worry what Jules will do when she finds out about Sharon... I mean 'Sarah?'"

"*This!* This's what I'll *do!*" Julie stormed on stage screaming and hitting Ed. "*That!* What did you expect? *Flowers?* A kiss and a cuddle and a quick grope down in the dark of the Northern Line?"

"I would have preferred it..." If meek Ed yet made the cardinal error of trying to engage in humorous rational conversation with an angry female.

"Saz told me everything – so don't even *try* to deny it! You try *that* again with another woman, *Edward!* Or if you try leaving town, or, or..." she paused to catch her breath. "Or if I even so *much* as even *catch* you applying for a passport I'll brain you!" she paused. "Now get out and don't let me have to speak to you again!"

"Sorry Miss", Ed felt like he was back at school, being chastised. "It won't happen again Miss, promise".

"It had better not either", Julie seethed – and stormed off stage.

"Going one stop on the tube is a great ride for tenpence", George now ambled on stage.

"Oh! Ed was sarcastic. "You've met the girlfriend?"

"You better shape up, 'cos she needs a man", George responded by ironically quoting '*Grease*'.

Blackout.

## **POLITICS**

"It's true", Edward Bromsgrove voice was heard emanating from a darkened centre-stage. "I admit it", a spotlight came up on him, sitting on a stool. "I am totally, in no way, totally committed to humanity. But that doesn't mean I have to go all religious all of a sudden. It'd do me good to put all my energies into worrying about higher things and other people for a change. Other than myself", Ed stood up. "Perhaps that's where I'm wrong? Perhaps I'm too selfish. 'To be or not to be, that is the question'?"

"That's my line..." a grumpily Brummie Williams Shakespeare strode across the stage. "Everyone keeps nicking it!"

"And politics is *the* religion of today. True?" Ed carried on regardless. "But what *is* my stance on it? My bloody stance - and not what I'm told to think by some berk on the telly who gets his orders from Head Office and doesn't know his marxist from his fascist".

Ed paused. "So what am I? Marxist? Fascist? Democrat? Liberal? Reactionary? Monarchist, republican or orthodox anarchist cum C of E? God forbid *all of them*! But then you've got to be one, haven't you? No man can stand alone in late twentieth century politics. Hey - you can't sit on the fence. Do that and someone will soon push you off..."

Offstage was heard the sound effect of a person falling on a fence, into the abyss of hell.

"I mean", Ed engaged the audience, "you've got to support a recognised party; or you have to form your own. The Edward Bromsgrove Party for the Liberation of Shepherds Bush. Bring bottle and ballot box..." he paused. "No, it doesn't sound right. Politics is more... is more..."

"You're talking your usual load of old drivel", waiting in the wings Julie emerged to decry; her arms folded in final-straw like disgust.

"No, no he's *not*", George followed her.

"Yes I am..." the depressed Edward disagreed.

"No, you're not!" George encouraged. "Carry on! Reach for the sky! Climb every mountain! Ford every stream!"

"Follow every rainbow!" Julie now joined in with jazz-hands with George, "Till you find your dream!"

"Yes I am..." Ed was again despondent as they finished. "Depressed, I mean. That's the whole *point* of my argument. British politics is *boring*. It's all padded out with lots of irrelevant mush. Always has been. It's too... too *gentlemanly*<sup>17</sup>. Apart from the IRA and the National Front of course... There's no opening for people like me. *Bastards* like me. Machiavellian schemers like me... If this was Russia I'd have a job no trouble. I could be a dissident. I'd make good dissident, me".

"You're full of wind", Julie dismissed.

"And you'd spend ten years in a Siberian loony-bin cum salt mine", George cautioned. "I'm sure you'd enjoy *that*!"

"Yeah, yeah, yeah..." Ed cogitated like an early Beatles' chorus.

"It'd be like being at school again?" Julie hypothesised.

"You're not seriously suggesting you want Britain to end up like *that*? Like Russia?" George protested. "All violence and intolerance? You're off your chummy..."

"No, no, *no*!" Ed insisted that wasn't what he'd meant *at all*.

"Well then, what *are* you trying to say?" George was as usual confused by his friend's ramblings.

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<sup>17</sup> These were the days before 'the Thatcher Revolution' (*Translator*)

"I don't know, really?" Ed suffered a moment of self-reflection.

"*You don't know?*" George was sarcastic. "Brilliant! If you don't know what you mean – who does?"

"You see", Ed reflected, "it's not what *I* want, or would *like* that matters. It's what's best in life. All life - not just politics".

"You ought to see a psychiatrist", emphatically re-folding her arms Julie decided. "You're a loony".

"A matter of opinion", since she was his girlfriend Ed was used to her abuse. "What *I* think is best is not necessarily best. I want PR..."

"That's Proportional Representation to you, Jules", George was helpful.

"*What?*" (it flew above her head like a jet-plane).

"It's a fairer voting system..."

"Oh..."

"But who's to say it's best?" Ed continued to agonise. "If you agree with the two party first-past-the-post system, it's not. Or the three party system, whichever it is now, I forget..."

"The Liberal party are holding their annual congress near here", George jested. "In the phone box, round the corner".

At *that* bit of light relief Julie laughed.

"It's just that I lack a purpose in life", Ed (meanwhile) continued to agonise. "A mission. A goal. A grail..."

"You think too much, that's your trouble", George now divined a fundamental truth. "You only lack a purpose because you *think* you do. If it took all your time to make a proper living and watch telly like the rest of us, buy your own food, clean your room, you wouldn't have time to worry about, so-called, 'higher matters'".

"He's right!" Julie heartily approved.

"Sense of purpose - my eye!" George continued his diatribe. "You only worry about life because you think about it too much".

"But there's *got* to be more to the circle of life than 'birth, school, work, death'?" Ed reasoned his contra-argument.

"Take this, Hamlet", Shakespeare again walked across the stage to pass Ed a skull.

"Thanks..." Ed regarded it carefully. "'To be, or not to be...'"

"Oh *please!*" George exasperated. "You've tried drugs, fornication, drink, transcendental meditation etc, etc, *ad infinitum*. And none of its done you one iota of good. You're old before your time you are! Grow up!"

"*Me?*" Ed was truly shocked at such an accurate attack from his best friend.

"And it's all self-inflicted too", George had started (so he'd finish).



"God!" Edward protested such betrayal. "It's all coming out now, isn't it?"

"You might as well get it of your chest George!" Julie encouraged him. "Once and for all!"

"You think you're a martyr, when you're not", he indeed continued to berate Edward. "You're an ordinary guy. No better and no worse than the rest of us".

"Yes, yes!" Julie endorsed.

"You live in a world that died ten years ago! And only existed *then* in the warped imagination of the cheap Sunday newspapers!" George indeed continued. "Grow up mate!"

Massive taped applause was now heard. "That's the best speech in the whole damn play, folks", up in the balcony Professor Schultz figuratively applauded.

"I wish I'd said that", stood beside him Dave Chorus happily agreed.

"Ja", the Prof explained. "That's when you know something is art. When you see or hear it, think it's good, and wish you'd written it yourself".

"It's alright for you!" Ed scoffed up at the balcony. "I hate *everybody* and *everything*! I hope I die before I get old! And I mean that *metaphorically*..." he then asided to the audience. "I just don't want to get old in my head, set in my ways, boring, a silly old git..."

"Like your father?" George suggested.

"Like my Dad", Ed agreed.

"None of us want to", Julie sighed. "But it comes to all of us in the end. *That's* what we've been trying to tell you – cloth-ears! Come on George..." she grabbed him by the hand to walk offstage. "I've *finally* had enough of this..."

"She's snapped", Ed kicked the skull off into the wings – and then looked to the audience – and shrugged his hopelessness.

Blackout.

## **MAYBE... IF I'M DEAD AND GONE?**

The lights came up to reveal Edward Bromsgrove, lying on his bed with a pad and pen.

"Maybe if I'm dead and gone  
Then, perhaps, they'll see  
The pain and the suffering  
Born into being me"

He read back. "The past seven years have been shit", he sighed. "When I was seventeen I was changing people's worlds – the world view of people around

me. I had a chance. At eighteen I was never fooled", he moved to pick up and address – upon reflection - a convenient hand mirror. "Victory, fame, fortune, girls... Everything I ever needed seemed within my easy grasp. Just one more push and I'd be free – never have to nine-to-five... For '*Amalgamated Hydrocarbons*' or anyone else".

"I know what you're saying", he looked at the mirror. "I need the job at '*AH*' to pay for everything. Yes, I *know*, lucky break getting it. Yes, I *know*, I owe her big time for her getting her Dad to take me on".

"The job stays – for now", Ed got up to pace and look out of his small room. "Society's sanctions bit my street credibility out of the window. '*The World*' – mammon – has got me for now – grabbed this golden opportunity to make me conform – crept up on me with both hands and grabbed me by the throat. Domestication! *Me*? The net result was I fell like Rome. Soft from too much good living. The will to fight, to *suffer*, gone. Boredom has numbed. A new destiny has claimed and called me, and consequently, my conception and touch of reality has dimmed".

Ed sat back down on his bed. "My parents – I'm back in touch now by the way – phone calls from work and Sunday lunch once a fortnight. Anyway, they began to say I was growing up... so I knew then it was the end. I began to lose my feel for life. It all seems so... so *mass-produced*. Not up to its usual quality so everyone says. It's lost that little extra life sparkle that makes it worth doing. Its relevance, influence and validity have all gone. My world shaken by the fall of my own God-like ego. 'So', I thought, 'this is what being twenty is all about'..."

Ed rolled on his bed like a caged animal, to face the other way. "I'd at last realised an awful fact. I'd blown my last chance. I was a failure. It's taken me years to admit it to myself, that's all. My legacy remains, sure enough, but the only way to liberate it is escape from this planet. And the only way to escape this planet is the termination of my own existence".

Ed stood up in his dismay and angst. "'Maybe when I'm dead and gone'", he self-quoted. "Maybe *then* The World will listen for a change? And if not – who cares? I won't be around to see my final degradation. Wounded men get desperate. Either that or they live off the fading glories of their past... I'm having a bloody mid-life crisis at twenty!"

At this point a knock at the door was heard. "On the other hand", Ed looked at his hand mirror, "I could all just be talking a load of old bollocks..." he moved to answer it at the edge of the stage.

"Hi!" who should step on stage but a bubbly, bright and breezy Claire. "Dad said you were ever so *helpful* at work today. So I thought I'd pop round and see

you for an hour or two. He really likes you, you know?" she turned to make a 'thumbs-up' gesture to the audience as Ed moved to put the kettle on...

Blackout.

## DECISIONS, DECISIONS

The lights came back up. "One of, if not *the* chief use for passports in the western world today", Dave Chorus ambled on stage carrying a microphone, suited and bespectacled, like a wandering TV reporter, "is increasingly, to facilitate travel between one nation state and another. Bromsgrove may be stupid, but he's nobody's fool. He cottoned on to this quite quickly. To condense this thought process, here's the lad himself..."

As Chorus excited George walked on stage "'To be or not to be, that is the question'? I feel like escape. Escape to where nobody can get at me. My family, my work, Jules, Claire, *nobody*. George, my mates down the pub, the record company, *nobody*".

"You don't have a record company?" Chorus stuck his head back on stage to challenge.

"It's the principle of the thing", Edward retorted. "I need to *go*. Go! Leave to where nobody knows me", he attempted to engage the audience of sympathy. "To start my life again from scratch. Even get a new name if I want. New identity; new life - *New Zealand*! Hey - they're crying out for people there. So's South Africa, but I think we'll skip that one<sup>18</sup>..."

He paused. "Or could I take the girlfriend? No, no, no, can't do that", he quickly relented. "She's part of the problem. Good idea though... No it wasn't", his indecision racked. "It was a rotten idea. Here am I, twenty minutes away from Heathrow airport. Twenty minutes away from eternal *escape*! What my father would call, 'the cowards way out'!"

He paused again. "Or *is* it? Or could he indeed be right for once? I never considered, in all these years; never once; never considered that my old man could be right about life sometimes. But just – for once - maybe he could... *be*... correct..."

He halted again. "No. He can't *possibly* be right. Of *course* he can't be. Preposterous! He's merely a silly old git - warped by time and too much Watneys. I don't think I'll get what I'm after in life until the day I go six feet under..."

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<sup>18</sup> Apartheid reference, obviously (*Translator*)

"Go on then, go. If your heart's get on it – go!" a second Edward Bromsgrove now stepped on stage to underlie to the audience the essential schizophrenic nature of Ed's personal trauma.

"Can't you see he doesn't really want to?" a third now entered to likewise personify Ed's indecision.

"What? A new life. Fresh start? Start again? Of course he does!" a fourth variant of Ed now joined in the debate. "Who wouldn't.

"What? And *lose*? Lose his security? All his loved ones?" Edward the third denied. "The world he's always known? Never! He'd be a fool!"

"Shut up all three of you!" Bromsgrove Prime shot back. "Let me make my own bloody mind up!"

"But you won't, will you?" Number Three knew him too well. "You'll just delay, delay and delay the decision, again and again. Keep putting it off. You always *do*".

"This time you can't put it off!" Number Two agreed (and Number Four nodded a rare consensus). "You must say. *Now!*"

"For once I agree", Number Three sighed. "That's him all over. If you're left to yourself you'll postpone it again, and plod on as before. Once a week you'll think about copping out, regular as clockwork you will. But you'll never actually dare to *do it*".

"You haven't got the guts", Four dismissed.

"That's not fair", Two suggested. "He's got the guts. He just hasn't got the will to sacrifice his life and past achievements".

"What 'achievements'?" (Three).

"Good point" (Four).

"His family and friends?" Two rationalised. "His work, his world. Anyway, you can always come back?"

"Can I?" Edward Prime wondered.

"Yes", Two now played to the audience. "People love him don't they? Need him? Like having him around. *That's* an achievement".

"But it doesn't pay the rent, does it?" Three considered.

"It pays the soul - and that's more important", Two turned on him to justify. "'Man does not live by bread alone'..."

"Yes, we *all* know that one..." Four sarcastically dismissed.

And then all four froze...

"What *will* Bromsgrove decide?" Chorus ambled back on stage in his TV reporter mode. "Well, we'll let you decide. Yes you, the man in the street. In fact, if you want you can write your own ending..." he sat on the edge of the stage to dangle his feet. "For the more adventurous and volatile amongst you,

he'll leave on a jet-plane, start afresh, get rich, have mucho power, material possessions, and all the rest of that which we are told to want, and expect, from life".

Climbing to his feet Chorus continued to weave in and out of the four frozen Edwards. "Alternatively, for the more home-loving of you, he'll get married, have kids, and live happily ever after..."

"Or you could if you want combine the two endings?" Professor Schultz now joined him. "He leaves, starts again and gets married: or, he could stay, get married, and then leave. Works out the same really that one. *Or*, he could stay, and regret it, or leave; and regret that too?"

"Life's what you make it, really?" Chorus bantered. "It's what you make it when you've no script to follow!"

"Or", the Professor speculated, "he *could* carry on undecided as before, and regret *that*. Or, instead, carry on undecided as before and *not* regret it..."

"In this", Chorus suggested, "the choice is *yours*! So, as you leave tonight, have a chat about it. Then write down the ending you 'd most like to see - preferably on paper as clay tablets are a bit too bulky - and send it in to us. We'll then do a Gallup poll, and calculate the average, and therefore the most *popular* ending by general consensus of opinion, will become the *real* ending of this story in one, foul, swoop. Yes, the ending, the way you, the public, want and not, as usual the arty-crafty, symbolic, allegorically revealing way ending the authors want to finish with".

"Ja!" Schultz agreed. "That's democracy, folks!"

"And the address to send your entry to is", Chorus began, "'The Autobiography Ending Competition', The West Somerset And District Theatre And Operatic Society, Taunton, Northants..."

"I'm sure that's not right?" Shultz checked.

"Well that's what it says here", Chorus drew a piece of paper from his pocket.

"Right you ist too", Schultz likewise peered at it. "A misprint it must be gerbeing..."

Blackout.

## THE BIG MUSICAL FINALE

At this point upbeat music struck up – the kind of finale song one tends to expect in Broadway style musicals. Edward Bromsgrove walked on stage; and

began to sing, backed by a (*bracketed*) chorus made up of George, Julia and Claire, all clustered around a single microphone...

"I'm not afraid (*I'm not afraid*)  
To take a final stand (*to take a stand*)  
Everybody (*everybody*)  
Come take my hand (*come take my hand*)  
We'll walk together through West London (*West London*)  
Walk through the storm (*walk through the storm*)  
Whatever the weather, cold or warm  
To the broad sunlit uplands of a brand new day...

My hands are ready, my feet are go, my eyes they water  
There's food in my belly, I've had my chips  
I'm nervous, but on the surface, I look calm  
Ready to take a stand,  
But I keep on forgetting what I wrote down...

(*You'd better conform*)  
(*You better own it, never let go*)  
(*You only get one shot – don't miss your chance to take a stand*)  
(*Existence comes but once a lifetime*)

So let's get back  
Follow that yellow brick road  
Go boldly onto next week's episode  
Journey with me as I take you through London  
Where once I called home, sweet, home...

(*You'd better conform*)  
(*You better own it, never let go*)  
(*You only get one shot – don't miss your chance to take a stand*)  
(*Existence comes but once a lifetime*)

Well, I gotta go now, I'm almost in The Tower  
And when I'm gone, just take a stand, don't mourn  
Rejoice when you think of me  
Don't cry or look for any false dawn  
Just know that I'm looking down on you, shouting  
And I didn't feel a thing  
So don't you don't feel no pain  
Rage against the light – and make your gain!”

As the music swells up to a he finale climax the entire cast come on stage to sing the next section - as Edward slowly walks off...

“Well, he's gotta go now, he's almost in The Tower  
And when he's gone, just take a stand, don't mourn  
Rejoice when you think of him  
Just know he's looking down on us, shouting  
And didn't feel a thing  
So don't you don't feel no pain  
Just conform!  
Just conform!  
Just con – for – orm!”

There was now a big 'jazz hands' musical climax – followed by lavish applause and curtain calls from the entire cast (except Edward); a daintily dressed small child coming on to present a lavish bouquet to Julie as everyone applauded her as the true star of the show – she taking the curtain-calls in a very *'Morecombe And Wise'* way - the cast bowing as the stage faded to black, followed by a pause...

## **AN OBTUSE EXPLANATION**

As the lights came back up Julie walked back on stage.

“*'My Boyfriend'*”, she cleared her throat. “A retrospective poem by Julie Nixon. Aged seventeen years, three months, two days”. She sighed. “He even forgot my birthday”, she pulled out her paper to read...

"Is it all you wanted Ed,  
to gain some new attention  
If so, you missed one vital hitch,  
Biased misapprehension:

You cannot express, the this rage you  
are longing to communicate  
For those who listen are go few  
And this world is ruled by callous fate.

And though you try, it seems to them  
Your attempts are merely vanity  
They have decided to condemn  
Your intransient insanity

You cannot delve the inner deeps  
to find elusive happiness  
Your soul is cracked and through it seeps  
all hope, for you, of love's caress

For your disguise is all too good  
Your mask slips not upon your soul  
Tragic, but it must be stood  
For who'd believe your inner role".

"Thank you for listening, and goodnight", Julie bowed to the audience.

"You did great!" George walked on stage to hug her – before they walked off together – hand-in-hand into the sunset – now clearly an item - the plot before the storm...

**FIN**