

a little more.) Mm. *(He takes a proper bite.)* Not bad for paper. Bit dry. Could do with a bit more ink. I didn't know paper could taste this good. I might go back to Communion. *(Really eats the letter. Stanley enters from the pub.)*

STANLEY. Henshall! Did you get the letters?

FRANCIS. Yes, guvnor. Yeah, they're all here.

STANLEY. How many? Just the one, I guess.

FRANCIS. Er ... Let's have a look. *(He goes through the letters.)*

There's nothing here for you guvnor.

STANLEY. What are those letters then?

FRANCIS. These are ... decoy letters.

STANLEY. Decoy letters?

FRANCIS. The post office releases them like homing pigeons. They record how many find their way back and how many get shot down and run over. *(Stanley grabs him by the ear and by the balls.)*

STANLEY. The truth, Henshall! Or you'll never wrestle the dolphin again!

FRANCIS. *(In pain.)* These are Paddy's letters.

STANLEY. Paddy?

FRANCIS. An old friend of mine, he was collecting letters for his boss, but he hadn't had any LUNCH, yet, so I picked his letters up for him, so he could go and have HADDOCK AND CHIPS AND MUSHY PEAS!

STANLEY. This letter is for my intended, Rachel Crabbe! *(Stanley releases his grip on Francis' testicles and takes the letters.)*

FRANCIS. You can't open other people's letters!

STANLEY. Why not?

FRANCIS. It's a very deep human thing that's really basic and doesn't need explaining.

STANLEY. At boarding school we opened each other's post all the time.

FRANCIS. Yes, but you also held masturbation relay races. Which is not normal either.

STANLEY. No?

FRANCIS. No.

STANLEY. Mmm. It felt pretty good at the time. *(Stanley walks away from Francis to share the contents with the audience. Aside.)* It's from Jackie, Rachel's best friend. *(Reading.)* Dear Rachel, The police know you fled to Brighton dressed as a man so *The Evening News* carried an artist's impression of what you might look like in men's

clothes. You ended up looking a bit like Ringo Starr, who's already been arrested twice. *(Aside.)* Rachel, the woman I love is in Brighton disguised as the percussionist of a popular beat combo! *(Reading.)* They also carried a boxing photo of Stanley — *(Aside.)* — That's me! *(Reading.)* It's so awful that you have to go to Australia. Love, Jackie. Three kisses. *(Aside.)* Three kisses? That's a bit girls-only-Greek-island. *(To Francis.)* Henshall! Have you met Paddy's boss?

FRANCIS. No.

STANLEY. Find Paddy, tell him to tell his employer I'm staying here. *(Stanley exits into the pub.)*

FRANCIS. I'll look for Paddy after LUNCH!

STANLEY. NO! Now! This is a matter of life or death. *(Stanley sneaks back into the pub. Francis addresses the audience from the stage.)*

FRANCIS. Has anyone got a SANDWICH?! *(Beat.)* There's a thousand people here and no one's got a York ham and mustard? Bacon, lettuce, tomato? *(Pleading.)* Cheese? Anyone? What? Has he got one...?

AUDIENCE PLANT. Yeah!

FRANCIS. *(Improvisation along the lines of "I don't believe it;" "You know you're at the theatre;" "Do you always do this at the theatre;" "Have you always got a sandwich ready, you know if King Lear/Willy Loman's a bit peckish?" etc., etc.)* OK, what kind of sandwich is it?

AUDIENCE PLANT. *(Quietly.)* Hummus.

FRANCIS. Hummus?! No wonder you haven't eaten it! *(Enter barman.)*

BARMAN. — I got a minute, if you want a hand with that trunk of yours.

FRANCIS. Yes, but ... *(Laughs. To audience.)* This is Clarence, *(Or whatever the name of the actor.)* he's only got three lines in this play and you've just ruined two of them. *(Clarence glares aggressively at Plant. To Plant.)* You may not realise it now but you have seriously screwed with the rest of the play. *(To Clarence.)* Alright! Let's do it! Let's get the trunk out of the motor. *(To Plant.)* Hang on to that hummus sandwich. *(He and the barman head off upstage left, with filthy looks from Clarence to Plant. Enter Rachel.)*

RACHEL. Oi! Francis! Have you got my letters mate? *(He hands over the opened letter to Rachel, plus one other.)*

FRANCIS. There you go guv, none of yours have been eaten. I'm going to get your trunk — *(Francis heads off quickly with the barman.)*

RACHEL. — Oi! Francis! This letter has been opened!

FRANCIS. *(Aside.)* Oh no, I need a convincing excuse here.

START

(To Rachel.) I had to open it because I realised that there was a small, distressed frog trapped inside. (Aside.) Yes! Come on!

RACHEL. How did you know there was a small distressed frog trapped inside a sealed envelope?

FRANCIS. (Aside.) Shit! (To Rachel.) There was no frog, actually. I had a letter for me, which I hadn't yet opened, and I opened yours by mistake. (Francis backs out nervously.)

RACHEL. I wish I could talk to Jackie, but she doesn't have a telephone at home. I bet one day, in the future, everyone will have their own telephone that they carry around with them. Oh God no, it would be hell wouldn't it. Wherever you are, your mum might ring. Work. People trying to sell you stuff. It might ring in the theatre. (Francis and the barman enter. The barman is carrying the trunk on his own.)

FRANCIS. (To barman.) ... Yeah, it's a condition of the spine, they call it ankylosin spondilitis, basically if I lift anything heavier than a knife and fork I go blind. (Barman in, and door closed.)

RACHEL. Are you stupid?

FRANCIS. No. I could've gone to university, if I'd got the qualifications.

RACHEL. I need a clean shirt. I smell like a doctor's finger. What's your ironing like?

FRANCIS. *Magna cum laude.*

RACHEL. My shirts are in the trunk. Here's the key. (Rachel gives Francis the key.) Has Charlie the Duck been here with the money?

FRANCIS. No.

RACHEL. I better go chase him up. (Exit Rachel stage right.)

FRANCIS. (Aside.) He didn't say the shirts needed ironing urgently. Maybe I could go to the High Street and beg for some food. (Francis heads off but is stopped by Charlie. Enter Charlie Clench from stage left. He is dressed for the bank and wearing a trilby. He is carrying a large bulky envelope.)

CHARLIE. Is your guvnor in? I've got his bangers here.

FRANCIS. His sausages?

CHARLIE. Bangers and mash. (Francis does a look to the audience as if to say my prayers have been answered.)

FRANCIS. (Aside.) Sausage and mash in an envelope?! I've just seen the future.

CHARLIE. It's cockney rhyming slang. Bangers and mash — cash.

FRANCIS. Agh! It's not food then?!

CHARLIE. It's two hundred pounds for your guvnor. Don't let muvver ... me down.

FRANCIS. WHEN AM I GOING TO EAT! (Charlie exits. Enter Stanley.)

STANLEY. Henshall! Did you find your friend, Paddy?

FRANCIS. Er ... I've arranged to meet him later, on the pier.

STANLEY. What's that?

FRANCIS. It's an envelope full of money, for my guvnor.

STANLEY. I'm your guvnor.

FRANCIS. You are, aren't you. Go on, take it. I don't care anymore.

STANLEY. Must be that pawnbroker down the road. Did he have a hearing aid, a wig, and a glass eye?

FRANCIS. For sale?

STANLEY. No, as functioning parts of his anatomy.

FRANCIS. He was wearing a hat.

STANLEY. Must be him. I left a pocket watch with him, earlier. I like Brighton! Pubs with food, cash delivered, it's a better kind of England!

FRANCIS. I'm going to go in now and get on with your ironing.

STANLEY. Initiative. I like it.

FRANCIS. I thought we'd already agreed I'd iron your shirts.

STANLEY. No. But have a go. I never understood how irons work. I bunked off physics, spent every lesson in the radiation cupboard trying to make my penis glow. (They go in. Scene change with the skiffle band playing "Bangers and Mash" and Francis returns to the stage to do the xylophone solo.)

Scene 3

Charlie Clench's house. Charlie. Pauline is crying.

PAULINE. I can't marry that tiny, weird-looking, vicious, homosexual, short-arsed, runt of a criminal.

CHARLIE. Why not, what you got against him?

PAULINE. I want to marry for love.

CHARLIE. Trust me. You don't wanna marry for love! When your ... (Breaks up slightly.) ... when she left me, I ... I ... (Breaks up.)

PAULINE. — Don't upset yourself, Dad. What you tryna say?
 CHARLIE. I'm tryna say that love passes through marriage quicker than shit through a small dog.
 PAULINE. But I love Alan.
 CHARLIE. Marry Roscoe and you get a detached house in Essex and he won't ever touch you. You just gotta go to the boxing on his arm, show the world he ain't a nine-bob note, and at two thousand a year he's paying you more than Paul McCartney's getting.
 PAULINE. I didn't know he was living with Paul McCartney.
 CHARLIE. *(Aside.)* They've tried, but they can't make bricks thicker. *(To Pauline.)* Five years ago, you agreed to this agreement.
 PAULINE. Five years ago I was young and stupid.
 CHARLIE. So what's changed?
 PAULINE. I'm a lot older now. *(Dolly enters.)*
 DOLLY. Roscoe's back. *(Pauline starts wailing. Enter Rachel.)*
 CHARLIE. Hello Roscoe! Come in, son. Did you get your bangers?
 RACHEL. I did not get my bangers, no. And I didn't get no cashier's cheque neither.
 CHARLIE. I give the bangers to that geezer of yours. The two hundred.
 RACHEL. And the six thousand?
 CHARLIE. Let's have lunch, at The Cricketers', I'll have it all signed off by then.
 RACHEL. I'd like a word with Pauline, if that's alright. Alone.
 CHARLIE. Alright, Roscoe. Take your time. *(Charlie exits.)*
 RACHEL. Pauline —
 PAULINE. — Piss off! I hate you! You've ruined my life.
 RACHEL. I know what would make you feel better.
 PAULINE. You bleeding well touch me, and I'll scream!
 RACHEL. I have a secret.
 PAULINE. I don't want to know anything about your life, I wish you were dead.
 RACHEL. *(Aside.)* I can't bear to see her suffer any longer. *(To Pauline.)* I am dead.
 PAULINE. Are you? No! Really? What's it like?
 RACHEL. Roscoe, my brother is dead.
 PAULINE. You're Roscoe's brother?!
 RACHEL. Sister.
 PAULINE. I don't understand!
 RACHEL. All you need to know is that I am a woman.

PAULINE. So, hang on, that means, I can't marry you, dunnit.
 RACHEL. More importantly it means you can marry Alan.
 PAULINE. Can I?!
 RACHEL. In the near future.
 PAULINE. I'd better go tell him. *(Pauline makes for the door, but Rachel stops her, grabbing her sleeve.)*
 RACHEL. No! My identity must remain a secret. I need your help.
 PAULINE. I'll do anything to marry Alan. I love him.
 RACHEL. I too am in love.
 PAULINE. With Alan?
 RACHEL. No. His name's Stanley.
 PAULINE. It's weird, innit. Love. It's like being mad.
 RACHEL. Insane. Look at me. Dressed in my dead brother's clothes.
 PAULINE. Maybe this is your way of grieving for him.
 RACHEL. Yes. I hadn't thought of that. *(They hold hands, consoling each other.)* We girls have to help each other. *(They hug spontaneously. Enter Charlie.)*
 CHARLIE. Sorry, shoulda knocked.
 RACHEL. Charlie, you can go ahead with plans for our wedding.
 CHARLIE. Right?!
 PAULINE. But I need time ... to choose a dress.
 RACHEL. And the cashier's cheque is —
 CHARLIE. — Roscoe, trust me, the money's no problem. I'd better go tell Laurence Olivier it's definitely off. **Charlie exits.**
 PAULINE. What if Dad tells Alan, Alan might think we've had it off.
 RACHEL. What would Alan do, if he were to think that?
 PAULINE. He'd go into one. He's known as a dangerous actor.
 RACHEL. I can look after myself.
 PAULINE. I know, but still, I'd better get to him before Dad does. *(Pauline heads for the door. But is held by the arm by Rachel.)*
 RACHEL. You swore to keep my secret.
 PAULINE. How long do I have to go along wiv this lie?
 RACHEL. Stanley and I are going to have to live in Australia.
 PAULINE. Oh no! Australia?! Oh no! Oh my God! Australia? Uurgh! How awful!
 RACHEL. It'll be a terrible outdoorsie life, sustained by lager, barbecues, and opera.
 PAULINE. I sympathise wiv yer, but my Alan, he's suffering right now.
 RACHEL. Trust me. My plan will deliver to you the husband of your choice —

PAULINE. — Alan?

RACHEL. Yes, Alan. And the pain you feel now will be forgotten in a couple of weeks' time. The night always seems darkest just before dawn.

PAULINE. What?

RACHEL. That bit of the night, you know, just before dawn, always seems really dark, although it isn't, it's just the contrast with the light of morning.

PAULINE. I don't understand! *(Scene change in which the skiffle band plays "My Old Man's a Gannet.")*

END

Scene 4

A first-floor aperitif bar squeezed between two private dining rooms. The rooms are called Dennis Compton, stage right, and Donald Bradman, stage left. They both have photographs of their heroes fixed to the door or above the door. Upstage centre the stairs go down to the ground floor and the kitchens. There are autographed cricket bats on the wall. Upstage left is a life-sized plywood cut-out representation of W.G. Grace with the face cut away. Francis enters from the stairs, in a panic. Goes to the door of the Compton suite.

FRANCIS. Roscoe has insisted on having lunch with Charlie, up here, in private. Mr. Stubbers is having a lie down, which I guess you have to do a lot of when you're *lying low*. I've been nil by mouth for sixteen hours. I'm only alive 'cause me gall bladder's worked out a way of eating me kidneys. But! The good news is it's lunch time. There's gonna be food everywhere, and all I've got to do is organise a stash, you know, leftovers, the odd whole course going missing. Hide it under here maybe. *(He looks under the table. Comes up with a mouse trap.)* A mouse trap with a chunk of CHESHIRE CHEESE! My favourite. All white and crumbly. And this bit's only slightly nibbled. *(He licks the cheese with an extended tongue. Enter Stanley.)*

STANLEY. Henshall! *(Francis jumps in fright, the mouse trap goes off on his tongue. He takes the trap off his tongue.)*

FRANCIS. Aaaargh!

STANLEY. How come a mouse trap went off on your tongue?

FRANCIS. It's a personal thing guv.

STANLEY. Understand! I too enjoy pain. Have you found Paddy?

FRANCIS. I've arranged to meet him after LUNCH.

STANLEY. I've got no time to waste on lunch. I'm going down to the pier to look for him myself.

FRANCIS. *(Aside.)* Now this suits me! Get this guvnor out the way while I serve the other one.

STANLEY. By the way, what does Paddy look like?

FRANCIS. He's a big lad, smells of horses.

STANLEY. Smells of horses? Or smells *like* a horse? The former is respectable and an indication of family money, the latter is just poor hygiene.

FRANCIS. At the end of the day, it's the same thing ain't it.

STANLEY. *(A mini epiphany.)* Good point.

FRANCIS. Now take your time guv. There's two piers, I can't remember which pier he said now. Do you want me to order food for you, for later?

STANLEY. Order what you like. When I dine I need to eat in private, waited on by you and you alone. What's this Don Bradman room like? *(He looks into Bradman room.)* Perfect. I'll eat in there. *(Takes out envelope of money.)* I don't want to take all this cash with me. Can I trust you with it, Henshall?

FRANCIS. Is it edible?

STANLEY. I doubt it.

FRANCIS. It's safe with me then guv.

STANLEY. I'll slip out the back. *(Stanley slopes off down the service stairs. Enter Gareth and Alfie. Gareth is thirty-something, and a trained Head waiter type. Alfie is old, slow and dodgy.)*

GARETH. My name's Gareth. I'm the head waiter. This is Alfie.

ALFIE. I'm eighty-six.

GARETH. No you're not. You're eighty-seven.

ALFIE. I thought I was eighty-six.

GARETH. No. That was last year. Be patient with Alfie, please, he's a bit deaf, so don't turn your back, he's gonna lip read.

ALFIE. I ain't never going back there! *(To Francis.)* It was a bloody massacre.

GARETH. During the First World War he was at Gallipoli. He has balance problems, he is waiting for a cataract operation, and he's got one of them newfangled pacemakers for his heart.