

# Eric Idle

## Pass the Butler



Rushton




# PASS THE BUTLER

"Inspector, you are right off the track. Sir Robert could never have been Nigel's mother. How could he? In 1956 his political career was in full bud. He could never have become pregnant. It would have looked ridiculous for a male junior minister. Even in the Liberal party."

Eric Idle's first stage play, *Pass the Butler*, is a triumph of outrageous logic and death-defying ingenuity, as might be expected from the author of *Hello Sailor* and *The Rutland Dirty Weekend Book*.

As the action of the play moves forward inexorably from breakfast to sherry and what follows, it becomes rapidly clear that all within the country home of Sir Robert Charles, Minister of Defence, is not as it seems. And not only is Sir Robert no longer an active force in politics, his inactivity has become a well-nigh insoluble problem. Furthermore, the relationship between his daughter Annabelle and the butler, Butler, is mysterious to say the least. And after what follows sherry it seems that life in the Charles household will never be the same again. By the time the denouement is reached hardly any of our worst suspicions have been left unconfirmed.

*Pass the Butler* is a very funny, savagely elegant play, which opened in London in January 1982.




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Eric Idle

# PASS THE BUTLER

METHUEN

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Any comedy owes a far larger debt to its actors than most authors would care to admit and so in keeping with this convention I shall say nothing in gratitude to a splendid cast except to thank them for dinner at Poole. To Jonathan Lynn, the director, who read the first draft and forced me to rewrite for weeks, a particular thank you is due for dinner in Hampstead. To Michael White, the producer, thanks are due for dinners in Knightsbridge and St Tropez. To Eyre Methuen, publishers, thanks for dinner in Covent Garden, and to Geoffrey Strachan, editor, thanks for the sandwiches. Finally I should like to thank my wife, not only for the dinners she cooked, but for forcing me to retrieve this play from a shack in the woods to read to her, shortly before a forest fire destroyed both the shack and the woods. To you, Tania, this play is dedicated.

E.I.

*Pass the Butler* was first presented by the Cambridge Theatre Company Ltd. (by arrangement with Michael White) at the Arts Centre, University of Warwick, Coventry, on 3 November 1981 and in London by Michael White (by arrangement with the Cambridge Theatre Company Ltd.) at the Globe Theatre on 26 January 1982 with the following cast:

HUGO	William Rushton
ANNABELLE	Annie Lambert
NIGEL	Andrew C. Wadsworth
KITTY	Beryl Cooke
BUTLER	John Fortune
LADY CHARLES	Madge Ryan
HARRIS	Peter Jones
RONNIE	John Saunders
SLATER	Terence Bayler

*Directed by* Jonathan Lynn  
*Designed by* Saul Radomsky  
*Lighting by* Mark Pritchard

## ACT ONE

*Blackness.*

*An electronic heartbeat beeps out of the darkness, tracing a peaked line across the green glare of a medical TV screen. The heartbeat is slow but regular. After a few moments, the lights come up full and we will observe that the heartbeat is emanating from a control panel on a large coffin-like piece of modern medical machinery which lies horizontally at about waist height on its own legs. It is the length of a human body, and is indeed occupied.*

*The occupant is unseen but there is a hinged top which opens towards the audience so that they may not see inside. Complicated controls and emergency warnings complete the picture of the most modern life assistance machine, which is hooked up in the drawing room of a large old-fashioned house. It occupies the centre but upstage. SIR ROBERT CHARLES is inside, permanently present, but not in the way.*

*There is a main entrance way backstage centre with exits right and left. Above this is a balcony with stairs descending from it stage left. By the foot of the stairs stage left a door leads off towards the morning room. Opposite this stage right a door leads into a Butler's Pantry. Further along this wall there is a large mullioned window. Set in the rear wall stage right is a cupboard large enough to hide Hoovers and policemen. In short your typical country house drawing room scene.*

*Number thirty-four in the stage designer's manual.*

*Seated, engrossed in different newspapers are HUGO (a portly aristocratic figure, who wears a cricket sweater and sports a jaunty bow tie to show that he is eccentric and does not care), his twin sister, ANNABELLE, who wears only a robe, his younger brother NIGEL, who is dressed and looks very contemporary with highlighted hair, and a white-haired, sprightly nanny of sixty-ish (KITTY).*

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NIGEL *has an adding machine, a piece of paper and a pencil. They are all scanning the columns avidly. There seems to be some kind of race on.*

SIR ROBERT'S *heartbeat remains visible throughout in the background, though the volume may increase and decrease.*

HUGO (*confidently*). Fourteen found dead in Tangier.

NIGEL *reacts by adding numbers and making a mark on the paper.*

ANNABELLE. Two killed in small private aeroplane.

NIGEL. Two?

ANNABELLE. Yes, just two I'm afraid.

NIGEL. Sixteen feared dead in mini coup in Morocco.

HUGO. Feared dead?

NIGEL. Yes.

HUGO. Doesn't count.

NIGEL. What?

HUGO. Feared dead doesn't count. Otherwise the whole thing's pointless.

KITTY. Two hundred and thirty-seven!

NIGEL. Dead?

KITTY. Six hundred and forty-eight wounded.

HUGO (*disbelieving*). Where?

KITTY. Argentina.

NIGEL. Earthquake?

KITTY. Football match.

HUGO. Some people have all the luck. Why is it always you, Nanny? The best I've got so far is a failed suicide in Helsinki. When the Scandinavians fail to commit suicide there really is something rotten in the state of Denmark.

- NIGEL. You don't concentrate, Hugo. You just read the gossip.
- ANNABELLE. Thirty-eight killed near Honolulu.
- NIGEL. How?
- ANNABELLE. Shipping disaster. (*Reading.*) "The Greek crew shot passengers trying to use the life rafts".
- KITTY. And they say chivalry's dead.
- HUGO. Oh goody: another nuclear reactor disaster in France.
- NIGEL. Anybody dead?
- HUGO. Not officially. It says here, however, the sale of coffins has risen sharply locally.
- NIGEL. Doesn't count. They have to be officially dead.
- HUGO. That could take years in France.
- NIGEL. If I can't have feared dead you can't have French coffins.
- HUGO. We'll never catch Nanny anyway. (*Scans desperately.*) Really there must be more than this, what's the Ayatollah up to?
- NIGEL. It's a very dry day for deaths.
- HUGO. Anything Annabelle?
- ANNABELLE. A man dying in Canada.
- HUGO. What of, boredom?
- ANNABELLE (*reading*). Wilkinson's Disease. Apparently the only antidote is the vomit from a small Italian bird.
- HUGO. Now how on earth would they find that out?
- KITTY. Trial and error.

HUGO *gives her a look.*

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NIGEL. Well as he's dying *and* Canadian I'll give you half a point for wounded.

*Enter quite swiftly a BUTLER, fussily tying his green baize apron.*

BUTLER. Morning, everybody.

HUGO. Morning Butler.

NIGEL. 'ning.

BUTLER. Sorry I'm a little late. It was such a fine morning I decided to exercise my discretion.

*He moves over to and addresses the medical cabinet.*

Good morning, Sir Robert.

HUGO. It's no use you know, he can't hear you.

BUTLER. It's worth a try, sir. Nobody likes to be ignored. Especially on their birthday. (*Sings.*)  
Happy birthday to you,  
Happy birthday to you,  
HAPPY BIRTHDAY . . .

HUGO. Butler, please.

BUTLER. I have taken the liberty of buying him a little something, sir.

*He places a small package reverently on top of the casket.*

HUGO. Oh, Butler. Really. (*Going over to the casket.*) Daddy, Butler's bought you a birthday present. (*Opens it up.*) A tie. Oh how nice.

ANNABELLE. Really, Butler . . .

BUTLER. A sentimental gesture. It's really of no value. I paid remarkably little for it.

*HUGO has draped it over the saline drip support.*

HUGO. Ah, fits him perfectly.

BUTLER. I like to see my gentlemen properly dressed, sir.

- KITTY. Really, Butler, you're as mad as Hugo.
- HUGO. Why should I be the norm for insanity in this household?
- NIGEL. Hugo's not mad.
- HUGO. Thank you very much.
- NIGEL. He's just paranoid.
- HUGO. I'm not paranoid either.
- NIGEL. You are. You have a false sense of insecurity.
- HUGO. One look at my bank balance would convince you that I have a very real sense of insecurity.
- NIGEL. You're an eccentric.
- HUGO. I'm not mad, paranoid, or eccentric. I'm British. I'm certainly not as odd as Butler. I don't buy ties for machines.
- BUTLER. This machine is your father, sir.
- HUGO. Was my father.
- BUTLER. *Is your father, sir. Surely a sentimental gesture in a savage world is not yet evidence of insanity.*
- HUGO. Butler, don't mutter. If you're going to bicker then speak up.
- ANNABELLE. Hugo, everyone knows you're a loonie. It's part of your aristocratic charm.
- HUGO. Thank you, dear sister.
- ANNABELLE. You're the only man I know who's been rejected by a psychiatrist.
- NIGEL. What? Who rejected you?
- ANNABELLE. A psychiatrist in New York.
- HUGO. He asked me to stop going. He said I was driving him bonkers.
- ANNABELLE. You should have got along perfectly.

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- HUGO. I would remind you, my dear twin, that you and I shared a womb together.
- ANNABELLE. That was the last thing you shared with anybody. With the exception of your wife.
- HUGO. Oh, thank you very much. Very nice.
- ANNABELLE. I'm sorry.
- HUGO. Fair comment. My wife has worked long and unsocial hours to achieve her reputation.
- NIGEL. I rather like Sarah.
- HUGO. Everybody rather likes Sarah. That's the problem.
- NIGEL. Where is she?
- HUGO. She's gone to New York to find herself.
- NIGEL. She'll come back.
- HUGO. I doubt it. Behind every great woman there's a queue.
- NIGEL. What's she doing in New York?
- HUGO. Soliciting lawyers. We're having a trial separation. At the moment we're fighting over who gets custody of my overdraft.
- NIGEL. Is this marriage officially on the rocks?
- HUGO. Yes. Don't tell mummy.
- ANNABELLE. Why ever not? She laughed at your wedding.
- HUGO. Not today.
- NIGEL. I'm sorry, Hugo.
- HUGO. It's all right. It wasn't exactly working recently. Every time I kissed her she got a yeast infection. I haven't been able to look at a yoghurt since.
- NIGEL. What are you going to do?
- HUGO. I'd have a mid-life crisis but I can't afford it.

- ANNABELLE. What about the hover hedger?
- NIGEL. The what?
- ANNABELLE. Hugo is developing a hover hedger, doubles as a lawn edger. He's calling it the Hugo after himself.
- HUGO. Not any more.
- ANNABELLE. Why not.
- HUGO. It doesn't work.
- ANNABELLE. A perfect name.
- HUGO. I work very hard. Trouble is, it doesn't.
- ANNABELLE. You said it won an award.
- HUGO. A design award. Doesn't mean it works. Fifty thousand quid on development. I ask you.
- NIGEL. It hovers, does it?
- ANNABELLE. Sort of hovers.
- HUGO. We tested it last week. The bugger wouldn't start. When it did, it cut my foot, took off, hovered away, whistled across the North Circular, terrified a man in a Ford Cortina and finally shot through the window of a hairdressing salon. You've never seen such chaos. They thought the Martians had landed. The High Street was stiff with little old ladies running up and down with their hair driers on shouting: "They're here, they're here."

*BUTLER goes out to the kitchen.*

- I had to pay Monsieur André a small fortune to shut him up.
- NIGEL. Fifty thousand quid?
- HUGO. Straight down the drain.
- ANNABELLE. Is that why Sarah left you?

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- HUGO. Yes, it was her money.
- NIGEL. So what are you going to do with this thing?
- HUGO. I'm going to try and sell it to the military as an anti-personnel weapon.
- ANNABELLE. So you're broke again.
- HUGO. I'm always broke again.
- ANNABELLE. Really Hugo, you're quite impossible.
- HUGO. Don't give me gyp, Annabelle. All you do for a living is take baths. You are the Jacques Cousteau of the bathroom.
- ANNABELLE. I don't blame Sarah leaving you.
- HUGO. England made me the way I am. It should maintain me. I should be on the National Trust.
- KITTY. Have you tried prayer?
- HUGO. Not since Prep School.

*Enter* LADY CHARLES.

- LADY CHARLES (*from the landing*). I do hope you're not becoming an atheist, Hugo. One in the family is quite enough.
- ANNABELLE. Morning Mummy.
- LADY CHARLES. Morning everybody.
- HUGO. Don't worry, Mummy, I've lost all my faith in atheism. One simply cannot be certain that God does not exist.
- LADY CHARLES. I'm glad to hear it Hugo, you were brought up a good Catholic. (*Descends.*)
- HUGO. That's true. I was taught not only to die for Christ but to kill for him whenever necessary.
- LADY CHARLES. It's bad enough having a Buddhist for a son.

- HUGO. I agree, let's put a Pope on the moon before the end of the eighties.
- LADY CHARLES. Good morning Kitty.
- KITTY. Morning dear.
- NIGEL. If the Universe is expanding its Creator must be diminishing.
- HUGO. For me the big question in the Universe is still is there life after debt.
- LADY CHARLES. Nigel, nice to see you. Did you arrive last night?
- NIGEL. Around the late weather forecast.
- LADY CHARLES. How is it?
- NIGEL. Changeable.
- HUGO. Means they don't know.
- LADY CHARLES. Who's winning?
- NIGEL. Kitty.

*She gives him a kiss on the head. He sort of swots it, a bit like a fly, while still reading.*

- She found the holiday camp fire first.
- LADY CHARLES. Oh, dear, not another one. How many?
- NIGEL. More than five hundred dead.
- LADY CHARLES. That's terrible.
- NIGEL. Yes, we'll never catch her now.

*BUTLER enters from the kitchen.*

- LADY CHARLES. Five hundred!
- NIGEL (*he and HUGO both scanning away*). Yes. None of the fire fighting equipment worked. Exit doors locked. Many drowned in cafeteria fire.
- LADY CHARLES. Drowned?
- NIGEL. The indoor swimming pool fell into the underwater cafeteria — extinguishing the

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fire but drowning the occupants.

HUGO. It's the biggest holiday camp fire this year.

BUTLER. What would you like for breakfast this morning, madam?

LADY CHARLES. What have you got?

BUTLER. *Guardian. Express. Mail.*

LADY CHARLES. Nothing, thank you. Just coffee.

HUGO. You can't ignore the newspapers you know, Mummy.

LADY CHARLES. Hugo, your father was always very against people writing things in the newspapers.

HUGO. He was a snob.

BUTLER. *Is a snob, sir.*

HUGO. What?

BUTLER. Your father is a snob, sir, not was a snob, sir, he's still alive.

HUGO. Well, technically yes. But not for very long. As we know.

*A slight uncomfortable feeling. They avoid each other's eyes.*

LADY CHARLES. Your father was not a snob, he was boring. They're not the same thing at all.

HUGO. He was not boring.

LADY CHARLES. He was tremendously boring. He was rather proud of it. Isn't that right, Kitty?

KITTY. He once told me he'd met Bertrand Russell at Cambridge, who told him frankly that he was one of the most boring men he'd ever met.

LADY CHARLES. He was clearly ideal for politics.

HUGO. I never realised you despised his profession, mother.

- LADY CHARLES. A lot of things have been said about politics, Hugo. Some of it complimentary, but most of it accurate.
- KITTY. I never really understood why he went into politics. But then to me he was always an enema.
- BUTLER. Might I please ask everyone to refer to Sir Robert in the present tense? At least until this afternoon.
- HUGO. Oh, Butler.
- BUTLER. It may seem a small thing, but it makes me nervous to hear my current employer continually referred to in the past tense.
- HUGO. Particularly when he's rather more current than employer.
- BUTLER *goes off.*
- LADY CHARLES. Hugo.
- HUGO. I'm sorry Mummy, but he does go on a bit.
- NIGEL. Aha! Twelve killed in Saudi Arabia.
- HUGO. How?
- NIGEL. Police raided a suspected liquor party. Apparently in the panic twelve people accidentally fell out of the window.
- HUGO. I do hope there's intelligent life in the Universe, because there's bugger all down here on earth.
- NIGEL. If God exists why hasn't he been on television?
- LADY CHARLES. It's time you gave up all this Zen nonsense, Nigel, and settled down.
- KITTY. Father Clinton thinks you are internally damned.
- HUGO. Father Clinton is a raving loonie. He still



- BUTLER. It's a tie, madam.
- LADY CHARLES. Isn't it, though.
- HUGO. Butler's bought Daddy a birthday present.
- LADY CHARLES. Oh, I see. Very thoughtful of you, Butler.
- BUTLER. Thank you, m'lady. I know he hates red, but that was the only colour they had, in the sale.
- LADY CHARLES. Very kind.
- BUTLER. And as he can't see the colour.
- LADY CHAREES. Absolutely. Suits him perfectly. Robert was always a shabby dresser. Thank you, Butler.
- BUTLER. Thank you, m'lady.
- LADY CHARLES. Morning, Robert. (*She plants a kiss, touching her fingers to her lips, then to the machine.*) How is he this morning?
- BUTLER. His level was down, madam. I took the liberty of topping him up. There should be plenty of liquid until you er . . . until . . . it's time for er . . .
- LADY CHARLES. Quite.
- BUTLER. I thought I might arrange his birthday cards on top of the box m'lady. Make it a little less . . . grim.
- LADY CHARLES. Please do.
- BUTLER. And might I er . . . be present at . . . the occasion? Or will it be purely family?
- LADY CHARLES. I'm sure Sir Robert would want you to be present.
- BUTLER. Thank you, m'lady. It's a very sad day for me particularly.
- LADY CHARLES. I do hope you're not going to be maudlin, Butler.

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- BUTLER. It's just the manner of his going, madam, switching him off like an old cooker.
- LADY CHARLES. Quite. I'm afraid we have no option.
- HUGO. Of course we have no option. Two thousand quid a week to keep him like this. Good Lord! He's not even tax deductible.
- NIGEL. How do you know?
- HUGO. I tried, didn't I? I put him down as a dependent relative, one hundred and four thousand quid a year. They threw it straight out at once. God I hate those bastards. They keep sending me letters in red with prison gates stamped all over them. I don't go pestering Her Majesty for money every six months. I tell you this, if the meek ever inherit the earth you can be sure the bloody Inland Revenue will be there making them pay death duties.
- NIGEL. Why did they throw it out?
- HUGO. As far as they're concerned he's not a dependent relative. He's still working. And as long as he's still Minister of Defence then there's nothing they can do.
- ANNABELLE. He doesn't *do* anything.
- HUGO. He does as much as any Minister of Defence.
- NIGEL. The main task of the Minister of Defence these days seems to be preventing Nato policy leaking to the Government.
- HUGO. Well he's in the perfect place for that.
- ANNABELLE. Do you think the Russians know he's in there.
- HUGO. I imagine they're probably bugging him. Even now some poor sod in Moscow Central is trying to decipher his beep, beep, beep, beep.

- ANNABELLE. Mightn't they be tempted to invade?
- HUGO. I wouldn't worry, Annabelle, the Russians are usually far too busy invading their allies.
- BUTLER. It's a rotten business.
- HUGO. You've seen the bills, Butler.
- LADY CHARLES. It's a preposterous situation. It cannot continue.
- BUTLER. This man holds an important post in the government of Great Britain. The least they could do is pay for his electricity.
- LADY CHARLES. It has to stop. The Opposition are complaining. Even the Press has noticed. If he weren't a Conservative it would be a scandal.
- KITTY. They ought never to have tried to cover it up. You can't be away from the House for a whole year without somebody noticing. Even if you are Minister of Defence.
- LADY CHARLES. They never publicly admitted the extent of his injuries. It was a perfectly understandable decision. A matter of public confidence. However, since they are buying two hundred missiles from the Americans they need someone to go to Washington and see if they actually work. Well your father could hardly be wheeled into the White House like this.
- HUGO. They've wheeled in far worse.
- LADY CHARLES. Higgins is to be Defence Minister from Monday. We cannot afford to keep your father alive like this and I *know* he would prefer to die in office. Now if we can all get through the day as calmly as possible I would appreciate it very much.

*She goes out quickly. A slight feeling of stress.*

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BUTLER *who has all this time been near the machine, opening cards and placing them on top, now switches on a portable tape recorder which he places on the box. It's Vera Lynn singing "We'll Meet Again."*

HUGO. Butler! Please!

BUTLER. It's his favourite song sir.

HUGO. Every bloody day.

BUTLER. Well it might just work. After all it's his last chance.

HUGO. Why should Dame Vera work where modern technology has totally failed?

BUTLER. Because she was a symbol of hope in a darker time, sir.

HUGO. Bosh!

*Enter LADY CHARLES.*

LADY CHARLES. Butler will you *please* switch that off.

BUTLER. Very well, m'lady. And will *you* be switching off Sir Robert?

LADY CHARLES. Yes, Butler.

BUTLER. And would you like me to serve the sherry before or after the switching off ceremony, madam?

LADY CHARLES. Before *and* after, Butler.

BUTLER. Very well madam.

LADY CHARLES. And I should like a word with you in private.

LADY CHARLES *goes out followed by BUTLER.*

KITTY. Well I'm going to go and get ready. Time and tide wait for Onan. I do hope you're all going to concede defeat.

HUGO. Yes, you win again, Nanny.

KITTY. Don't be bitter, Hugo. You can't make omelettes without breaking wind.

KITTY *goes off into the morning room.* HUGO *picks up a birthday card from off the machine.*

- HUGO.                   Tasteful card from Central Office. I should have gone into politics. I'd have made a small fortune.
- NIGEL.                   As it is you just made a fortune small.
- HUGO.                   Thank you very much. *(Pause.)* What do you think of death?
- NIGEL.                   Personally?
- HUGO.                   Mm.
- NIGEL.                   I'm against it.
- HUGO.                   Me too.
- NIGEL.                   But I'm very much in favour of it for others.
- HUGO.                   Oh absolutely.
- NIGEL.                   You know some doctors did a survey last year into the most common cause of death. Turned out to be doctors. Is there a ceremony for this event?
- HUGO.                   I don't know. There should be a form of Service. Prayers for the Switching Off of an elderly relative. Click.
- NIGEL.                   Do you know Heisenberg's Uncertainty Theory?
- HUGO.                   No.
- NIGEL.                   I'm unsure of it myself, but it seems that thanks to modern physics there is now a real possibility that we don't exist at all.
- HUGO.                   Really.
- NIGEL.                   That's what they say.
- HUGO.                   But if we don't exist at all . . .
- NIGEL.                   Yeah.
- HUGO.                   Who's Heisenberg?

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- NIGEL. Nice point. You've restored my faith in doubt.
- ANNABELLE. These philosophical conversations get on my wick.
- HUGO. Unless I've misread my Freud Annabelle, you do not have a wick. According to him it's been replaced in your sex by envy.
- ANNABELLE. The envy in your case, Hugo, is rather small.
- NIGEL. I mean what are we, just a premature ejaculation in space?
- HUGO. Now I've never seen what was wrong with premature ejaculation. It gets it over with nice and quick and there's still bags of time to get to the cinema.
- ANNABELLE. Honestly sometimes I can't imagine we're even related, let alone twins.

*Enter BUTLER. He just stands inside the door and coughs, clearing his throat loudly.*

- HUGO. What is it, Butler?
- BUTLER. There are two small lads at the door, sir.
- HUGO. What do they want?
- BUTLER. They are doing a research paper for the Boys Brigade. They wish you to answer the question "What is the role of the Boys Brigade in modern society?"
- HUGO. Well give them a pound and tell them to fuck off.
- BUTLER. Thank you, sir. Your charity does you credit.

*He goes out.*

- NIGEL. Why is Butler being so snotty?
- HUGO. I think Mummy just gave him his cards.
- ANNABELLE. What?

- HUGO. Well we can hardly afford to keep him on.
- ANNABELLE. Well what will he do? Where will he go?
- HUGO. How should I know.
- ANNABELLE. Couldn't *you* find him a job?
- HUGO. My dear sister, my entire financial future lies in that box.
- ANNABELLE. What do you mean?
- HUGO. For the past year I have been telling my creditors that I am not so much losing a father as gaining a cash flow.
- NIGEL. You what?
- HUGO. The inheritance.
- NIGEL. You must be joking.
- HUGO. What? There must be something left.
- NIGEL. My dear Hugo, I think you're in for a big disappointment.
- HUGO. I sincerely hope not. Otherwise I'm in the same boat as Butler.
- NIGEL. Another middle-aged unemployment statistic.
- HUGO. I am *not* middle-aged. I'm exactly the same age as Annabelle. She's quite clearly not middle-aged.
- NIGEL. Nobody would believe you were twins. You're ridiculously overweight.
- HUGO. I am extremely fit for my age. I could still beat you to the front gates and back.
- NIGEL. Nonsense. You haven't been able to beat me since I was eight.
- HUGO. Well?
- NIGEL. You were twenty.

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- HUGO. I could still beat you.
- ANNABELLE. You'd have a heart attack.
- HUGO. Nonsense. I'll bet you a case of scotch to a jar of salmon mousse.
- NIGEL. You're mad.
- HUGO. They said Hitler was mad.
- NIGEL. Hitler *was* mad.
- HUGO. Ha! You're fudging it.
- NIGEL. I'm not.
- HUGO. Come on then.
- ANNABELLE. This I have to see.

*They go out via the pantry door.*

- ANNABELLE (*off*). On your marks, get set, GO!
- NIGEL (*off*). OOH! . . . CHEAT!

*Enter BUTLER with HARRIS.*

- BUTLER. You will have to wait here, sir. I'm afraid Lady Charles never speaks to the Press. She doesn't approve of people speaking to the Press.
- HARRIS. Freedom of speech. The right to know. The desire to communicate honestly.
- BUTLER. All these things she approves of, sir. It's the Press she dislikes.
- HARRIS. I see. Well perhaps I might see Sir Robert?
- BUTLER. You *can* see him, sir.
- HARRIS. Thank you.
- BUTLER. Not at all.

*HARRIS waits for BUTLER to leave in search of SIR ROBERT.*

*Pause.*

- HARRIS. Well, will you tell him I'm here.

- BUTLER. Certainly, sir. (*Clears his throat.*) A Mr Harris to see you, sir.
- HARRIS. Are you taking the piss?
- BUTLER. No, sir.
- HARRIS. Well where is he?
- BUTLER. He's in here, sir.
- HARRIS. Good grief. I'd heard he was ill. This is more serious than I thought. What is this?
- BUTLER. It's an American life support machine, sir, a Wendell Hobbes. One of the first in this country. Apparently America is full of them.
- HARRIS. I suppose there's more demand for these things over there.
- BUTLER. Oh yes sir. In America they have a far more liberal attitude towards violent death.
- HARRIS. Over here we're still a little squeamish about arming civilians. Quite unnecessarily so in my view with the present population problem.
- BUTLER. Might I offer you a light refreshment, sir?
- HARRIS. Not on duty, no.
- BUTLER. On duty?
- HARRIS. While working.
- BUTLER. A non-drinking journalist. How quaint.
- HARRIS. It's a living.
- BUTLER. Drinking?
- HARRIS. Journalism.
- BUTLER. Ah. Sir Robert used to say "Journalism is to writing, what whistling is to Mozart."
- HARRIS. He didn't approve?
- BUTLER. On the contrary. He hated Mozart.

## 22 PASS THE BUTLER

- HARRIS. You're very epigrammatic.
- BUTLER. It's a professional weakness, sir. People expect it of butlers.
- HARRIS. How long have you been a butler?
- BUTLER. I have been serving Sir Robert, man and machine, for eighteen years. No trouble. Very easy to keep clean. Just a little flick of the duster these days. Not many elderly politicians you can say that about.
- HARRIS. Why do they call you "Butler"?
- BUTLER. It's my name, sir. Butler. Mr Butler.
- HARRIS. How very convenient.
- BUTLER. Life is occasionally very well written.
- HARRIS. Did you say that?
- BUTLER. Unless there's some sort of strange echo in here . . .
- HARRIS. No, I mean did you just make that up?
- BUTLER. . . . yes?
- HARRIS. You're very intelligent for a butler.
- BUTLER. You're very perceptive for a journalist.
- HARRIS. Do you always answer a compliment with an insult?
- BUTLER. Whenever possible, sir.
- HARRIS. You don't like journalists.
- BUTLER. Superman was a journalist sir. Of course it was *the* perfect disguise.
- HARRIS. I don't follow you.
- BUTLER. A man of supreme powers posing as a man of complete ignorance, sir.
- HARRIS. You should have been a writer not a butler.
- BUTLER. Writers are ten a penny these days. At least a butler has a certain social cachet.

HARRIS (*picks up a card*). It's his birthday?

BUTLER. Yes, sir.

HARRIS. Which one?

BUTLER. His last.

HARRIS. I don't follow you.

BUTLER. Lady Charles thought it would be appropriate, Wimbledon, Henley Regatta, his birthday . . . If they could just keep him alive on off-peak hours it would be different, but, alas, you can't keep a man on night storage.

HARRIS. Quite. I gather you don't approve.

BUTLER. Naturally when a gentleman is being switched off a gentleman's gentleman is bound to feel somewhat redundant.

HARRIS. What do you mean switched off?

BUTLER. It has been decided to cut back on Sir Robert.

HARRIS. You mean switch him off?

BUTLER. Precisely.

HARRIS. Good grief.

BUTLER. They *do* have a doctor's certificate.

HARRIS. I don't like this. I don't like this at all. It reeks of murder. You can't go around switching off members of the Cabinet even if they are virtually cabbages. It's a dangerous precedent.

BUTLER. He won't be a member of the Cabinet, sir. There is going to be a reshuffle. Lady Charles thought he would prefer to die in office.

HARRIS. I see.

BUTLER. And the pension's much better.

## 24 PASS THE BUTLER

- HARRIS. Always the taxpayer pays.
- BUTLER. He *has* left his organs to the British people, sir.
- HARRIS. How very kind. Still, I don't like this switching off business at all. I shall have to report it.
- BUTLER. Report it — ?
- HARRIS. Well . . . I am a reporter.
- BUTLER. Just now you sounded like a policeman.
- HARRIS. Investigative journalism is very close to police work.
- BUTLER. Yes, though the journalist has more freedom to invent things.
- HARRIS. That is the traditional freedom of the Press, the poor old Police are still hampered in their work by having to stick occasionally to the facts.
- BUTLER. Yes, it's not considered half so important in journalism.
- HARRIS. Personally I'd like to see the Force liberated from this Victorian dependence on evidence.
- BUTLER. Indeed, sir.
- HARRIS. These days far too much emphasis is placed on catching the right man. If some darky rioter smashes an unarmed defender of democracy around the head with a broken half brick, it's more important to catch someone who looks as though he might have done it. Don't you agree?
- BUTLER. It's a novel form of jurisprudence, certainly. How come you know so much about it?
- HARRIS. In my line of work (*Heads upstage towards the box*) as an officer of the Press I have made a complete study of the law.

*He slaps the box to emphasise his point. It sets off the alarm.*

HARRIS *starts back in surprise.*

- BUTLER. Stand aside, sir.
- HARRIS. You know what to do?
- BUTLER. They sent me on a training course.
- HARRIS. To America?
- BUTLER. To Luton, sir. They have a service department there.
- HARRIS. What's wrong?
- BUTLER. The electrocardiogram, sir. It's fighting with the respirator. These days even the machines are divided. (*Pause.*) There we are, sir.

LADY CHARLES *appears at the top of the stairs.*

- LADY CHARLES. Butler?
- BUTLER. Yes, m'lady.
- LADY CHARLES. Is anything the matter?
- BUTLER. Just a slight technological hiccup, m'lady. Nothing to worry about.
- LADY CHARLES. Who is that man?
- BUTLER. This is a gentleman from the Press.
- LADY CHARLES. There is no such thing as a gentleman from the Press. Please show him into the morning room and offer him a biscuit.
- BUTLER. Very well, m'lady.

LADY CHARLES *goes off.*

*Enter ANNABELLE and NIGEL, supporting HUGO. He is red faced with exhaustion and breathing heavily. ANNABELLE is vastly amused.*

- HUGO. I was winning for quite a while.
- NIGEL. Don't speak, just breathe.

26 PASS THE BUTLER

HUGO. Butler?

BUTLER. Yes sir?

HUGO. Is there any room in the box?

BUTLER. No, sir.

ANNABELLE. You did very well for our age.

NIGEL. Come on, upstairs.

*He starts to help him upstairs. HUGO is exhausted. He spots HARRIS.*

HUGO. Who's that?

BUTLER. A journalist, sir.

HUGO. Good God. I hate the Press. I had to sue them last year for saying I was going bankrupt.

NIGEL. Were you?

HUGO. Not after I'd sued them.

*NIGEL and HUGO go off.*

ANNABELLE. You're a journalist?

HARRIS. Yes. Oh, yes. The name's Harris. You will be Miss Annabelle.

ANNABELLE. Yes. What are you doing here? What do you want?

HARRIS. Your father is a very famous man. In his own way perhaps the most famous man in Surrey. My superiors are naturally interested.

ANNABELLE. Your superiors?

HARRIS. My readers. Might I have a photograph of you and the er . . . your father?

ANNABELLE. I'm not dressed.

HARRIS. That's all right, our readers like a little human interest.

- ANNABELLE. Human interest?
- BUTLER. Tits, madam.
- HARRIS. Would you be prepared to reveal your breasts for the sake of our circulation?
- ANNABELLE. Certainly not.
- HARRIS. Nothing salacious, everything strictly above the waterline.
- ANNABELLE. Under no circumstances. You must be mad. Butler, please ask him to leave.
- BUTLER. Yes madam, would you wait in the morning room, sir?
- HARRIS. Yes but please tell Lady Charles that I must have a word with her . . . it's a matter of some urgency.
- BUTLER. Please feel at liberty to read the magazines, there's a dictionary over on the right.

HARRIS *goes into the morning room.*

- ANNABELLE. What does he want?
- BUTLER. I've no idea, madam.
- ANNABELLE. Come here.

BUTLER *walks towards her. She kisses him passionately. His hand strays inside her dressing gown. He pulls himself away.*

- BUTLER. Somebody may come in.
- ANNABELLE. Are you ashamed of me?
- BUTLER. Of course not.
- ANNABELLE. You're leaving me.
- BUTLER. I've been dismissed.
- ANNABELLE. Where will you go?
- BUTLER. There is an elderly General near Wantage. He is half blind and mad and in charge of Britain's nuclear secrets.

28 PASS THE BUTLER

- ANNABELLE. I'll come with you.
- BUTLER. Impossible.
- ANNABELLE. We could marry.
- BUTLER. It's out of the question.
- ANNABELLE. Why?
- BUTLER. It would kill your mother. In your class of society it is simply not done to marry one's butler.
- ANNABELLE. You're tired of me.
- BUTLER. Of course I'm not, sweetie.
- ANNABELLE. Prove it.
- BUTLER. How?
- ANNABELLE. Come to my room.
- BUTLER. When?
- ANNABELLE. Now.
- BUTLER. It's dangerous.
- ANNABELLE. I want you (*She starts to ascend the stairs*). I warn you. You'd better come. I'll make it worth your while. (*She slips off her robe at the top of the stairs.*)
- BUTLER. I'll do what I can.
- She goes off.*
- Jesus Christ!
- He looks around. There is no one about. He moves softly up the stairs, but is surprised by the voice of RONNIE entering.*
- RONNIE. Ah there you are, Butler.
- BUTLER *starts guiltily.*
- Where is everyone? I thought I'd push on in.
- BUTLER. Quite so, sir.
- RONNIE. The deed's not done?

- BUTLER. No. Oh no, sir. Sir Robert is with us. Just.
- RONNIE. I thought I might be too late.
- BUTLER. We thought you weren't coming, sir.
- RONNIE. Yes, I had to attend an important public function.
- BUTLER. Wimbledon, sir?
- RONNIE. Yes. Er purely in the line of duty, you understand.
- BUTLER. Of course, sir.
- RONNIE. After all I am Deputy Joint Chairman of the House of Commons All Party Parliamentary Tennis Club.
- BUTLER. Your modesty does you credit, sir.
- RONNIE. What do you mean?
- BUTLER. A lesser man might have been content with more.
- RONNIE. Oh, thank you.
- BUTLER. Not at all, sir.
- RONNIE. Depressing business eh?
- BUTLER. Tennis, oh yes sir.
- RONNIE. No er . . . this.
- BUTLER. Oh indeed, I shall miss the friendly hum of his machinery.
- RONNIE. It's funny, you know, I was *on* my way to Wimbledon when I thought "No, turn again Whittington". I can't just sit on the Centre Court while my old friend is being er . . .
- BUTLER. Eliminated.
- RONNIE. Exactly. So I popped into a garage, reversed the Rover and here I am.
- BUTLER. Lady Charles, at least, will be very pleased, sir.

### 30 PASS THE BUTLER

- RONNIE.                   What's the form then?
- BUTLER.                   A glass of sherry and then click. Sir Robert gets the dry sack.
- RONNIE.                   No, I mean, where's the telly?
- BUTLER.                   The telly?
- RONNIE.                   Yes, keep an eye on the tennis. Just while we're waiting.
- BUTLER.                   Oh, I moved it into the morning room, sir.
- RONNIE.                   Good, good.
- BUTLER.                   I should warn you, sir, there's a journalist in there.
- RONNIE.                   A journalist. What does he want?
- BUTLER.                   A punch on the nose in my opinion sir.
- RONNIE.                   Same old Butler. Violently literal. Where would they be without you?

*He goes off.*

- BUTLER.                   Up shit creek, sir.

*BUTLER raises his eyes. He begins to nip up the stairs. At the top he meets HUGO and NIGEL coming along the landing.*

- HUGO.                    Ah! Butler there you are. Where are you off to?
- BUTLER.                   To Miss Annabelle, sir, to fiddle with her fuse.
- HUGO.                    What?
- BUTLER.                   Her hairdryer is on the blink, sir, she's asked me to run my fingers over it.
- HUGO.                    Ah.

*BUTLER goes off towards ANNABELLE's room. NIGEL helps HUGO to descend, like a wounded soldier.*

- NIGEL.                    Are you sure you're all right now?

- HUGO. Never felt better. (*Feels his back.*) Fit as a fiddle.
- NIGEL. Fit as a tax fiddle in your case. Whatever will you try next?
- HUGO. I don't know. I can't make up my mind whether to become gay or have a vasectomy.
- NIGEL. A vasectomy at your age would only be showing off.
- He dumps HUGO on the sofa.*
- HUGO. There are *some* things I can still manage unassisted.
- NIGEL. That's not what Sarah said.
- HUGO. Sarah has a heart of gold. Hard and continually going up in price.
- NIGEL. What will you do if she doesn't come back?
- HUGO. I was going to live with this bird in Hampstead.
- NIGEL. What happened?
- HUGO. It died . . . How's Oxford?
- NIGEL. I've been sent down.
- HUGO. Whatever for?
- NIGEL. Arguing with my tutor.
- HUGO. Surely that is the very basis of an Oxford education?
- NIGEL. It is. Unfortunately I went too far.
- HUGO. How so?
- NIGEL. We were arguing about non-violence. I took the position that it never worked.
- HUGO. Well?
- NIGEL. To prove my point I kicked his head in.
- HUGO. Really you're very violent for a Buddhist.

32 PASS THE BUTLER

- NIGEL. I think I've lapsed.
- HUGO. Are you still a vegetarian?
- NIGEL. Sort of. I eat fish.
- HUGO. Hardly vegetables, fish.
- NIGEL. No. Morally I don't *like* eating fish but physically I love it.
- HUGO. Quite a dilemma. What are you going to do about it?
- NIGEL. I've decided to be buried at sea to make up for it.
- HUGO. You should have stayed a Catholic, it's all the rage again. Buddhism is very sixties.
- NIGEL. I can't work up any enthusiasm for life after death.
- HUGO. No. We should stamp out death.
- NIGEL. How?
- HUGO. Get the Civil Service to run it.
- NIGEL. You know I read the other day that we're sixty-five per cent water.
- HUGO. Good Lord. (*Gestures across his chest.*) That's up to here.
- NIGEL. Amazing, isn't it?
- HUGO. It's unbelievable. If it wasn't for gravity we'd probably drown.

*Enter* RONNIE.

- RONNIE. Ah hello. Thought I heard voices.
- HUGO. Ronnie.
- NIGEL. Christ what are you doing here?
- RONNIE. Just watching the tennis.
- HUGO. How's it going?
- RONNIE. No play I'm afraid.

- HUGO. Raining?
- RONNIE. Fighting.
- HUGO. I think violence has improved tennis as a spectator sport.
- NIGEL. We thought you weren't coming today.
- RONNIE. Well I wasn't . . .
- NIGEL. Heard you were too busy.
- RONNIE. You don't have to be unpleasant Nigel.
- NIGEL. I prefer it.
- HUGO. His current ambition is to be a Buddhist skinhead.
- NIGEL. Sometimes you can only tell the English have a sense of humour by looking at the people they elect.
- RONNIE. I never realised you despised your father's profession.
- NIGEL. I was referring to yours.
- RONNIE. Did you ask that journalist to come here?
- HUGO. Does one ask a journalist into one's home?
- RONNIE. I would have thought that today of all days was not for publicity.
- HUGO. Absolutely. What does he want?
- RONNIE. He kept on asking me about Robert's heart attack. Says he'll have to report it in detail.
- NIGEL. Did you tell him it was your fault?
- HUGO. Nigel!
- RONNIE. It was not my fault he had a heart attack.
- NIGEL. You were by his side, when he collapsed in the Commons. If you'd taken him directly to hospital he would be alive now.
- RONNIE. He is alive now.

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- NIGEL. But, no. You have to insist he's carried through the Lobby so his vote can be registered. Your best friend. Having a heart attack.
- RONNIE. We had no option. It was a life or death vote.
- NIGEL. Exactly.
- RONNIE. He'd have done exactly the same with me. He saved the Government, single handedly.
- NIGEL. I don't care about your bloody government, I care about my father.
- RONNIE. Oh, *do* you?
- NIGEL. What do you mean by that?
- RONNIE. Nothing.
- NIGEL. I ought to punch your bloody teeth in. Matter of fact I think I will.

*NIGEL takes a swing at RONNIE. RONNIE moves away. HUGO who has stood up to prevent violence is accidentally hit by NIGEL and knocked over.*

HUGO. Stop it. Nigel. Ah!

*RONNIE runs round the machine, setting off the emergency sound. He is pursued by NIGEL, who catches him at the foot of the stairs and prepares to thump him. The morning room door opens and HARRIS appears. He swiftly and very effectively karate chops NIGEL to his knees.*

- HARRIS. What the fuck's going on here?
- NIGEL. What the hell's it got to do with you?
- HARRIS. You mind your language.

*BUTLER comes racing down from upstairs. He is slightly disbevelled. He thumps the machine. The emergency alarm stops.*

- HUGO. Blessed are the pacemakers.
- HARRIS. Just what is going on in this house? It's

like a madhouse.

HUGO. Just a family argument.

RONNIE. We're all a little overwrought.

HARRIS. Overwrought? I've seen drunken Scottish football fans behave better.

*NIGEL is still on his knees, ruefully rubbing his neck.*

NIGEL. That bastard thumped me.

HUGO. You did ask for it. You really are the most violent Buddhist I've ever met.

*Enter KITTY at the top of the stairs. HARRIS jumps violently to face this new threat.*

KITTY. Ronnie. The fatted calf returns! How lovely to see you.

RONNIE. Hello, Kitty.

*They embrace.*

BUTLER. Shall I serve the sherry now, sir?

HUGO. Good idea. I think we could all do with a drink. Oh and Butler.

BUTLER. Yes, sir?

HUGO. Your flies are undone.

BUTLER. Oh. Thank you, sir.

*BUTLER hurries out to the pantry.*

KITTY. What's the matter? Why is everyone so odd?

HARRIS. Well, if you two have quite finished, I'll just carry on with my waiting.

KITTY. Who is that man?

RONNIE. He's a journalist.

KITTY. Where from?

NIGEL. Feels like *Karate Weekly*.

HUGO. We should throw him out.

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- NIGEL. After you.
- HUGO. You know, I think you owe Ronnie an apology.
- NIGEL. That's nothing. He owes me a parent.
- KITTY. I thought you were at Chequers.
- RONNIE. I was.
- KITTY. How's the P.M.?
- RONNIE. Same as ever, an inspiration to us all. They're all going to Wimbledon.
- KITTY. What fun!
- RONNIE. Yes, you know the P.M.
- NIGEL. Yes, any chance to get near Royalty.
- RONNIE. I'm continually appalled at the growing indifference of the English towards their betters.

BUTLER *enters with drinks.*

- HUGO. Our betters have rarely been worse.
- RONNIE. Well really!
- BUTLER. Sherry, sir.
- HUGO. Thank God for that.
- RONNIE. Who's doing the er . . .
- KITTY. The what?
- RONNIE. The honours.
- KITTY. The what?
- RONNIE. The switching off.
- KITTY. Why, do you want to do it?
- RONNIE. Oh good heavens, no.
- NIGEL. It would be very appropriate. You might as well finish the job.
- HUGO. Nigel.

KITTY. Lady Charles is doing it. She's taken medical advice. And here she is: dressed to kill.

LADY CHARLES *comes down the stairs. Very formally dressed.*

LADY CHARLES. Hello, everyone. I do hope I haven't kept you waiting. Ronnie! How splendid. Now the whole family's here.

RONNIE. Hello, my dear. (*Embraces her.*)

LADY CHARLES. How nice of you to come. Are we missing anyone?

HUGO. Only my sister but then she's always late. Annabelle. Come on down here you slut! She'll be late for her own funeral. Oh. Sorry mummy.

LADY CHARLES. That's all right dear. This isn't really a funeral. It's more . . . more er . . .

KITTY. More sherry?

LADY CHARLES. No thank you, Kitty.

KITTY. It's nice to see Ronnie here isn't it?

LADY CHARLES. Oh yes. He and Robert were such good friends.

KITTY. At one point they were almost insufferable.

*Enter ANNABELLE.*

HUGO. Ah, my dear sister. You're worth your wait in minutes. I knew it wouldn't take long for the scent of sherry to prize you out.

ANNABELLE *makes a face at him.*

RONNIE. My dear Annabelle.

ANNABELLE. Hello Ronnie.

*She heads for the sherry.*

- HUGO. Well what's the form for this event, Mummy?  
Where do we stand?
- KITTY. How about a toast first?
- LADY CHARLES. Good idea.
- RONNIE. Let's all drink to Robert's health.
- HUGO. Bit late for that, isn't it?
- RONNIE. To Sir Robert.
- KITTY. Sir Robert!
- LADY CHARLES. Robert.
- NIGEL. Daddy.
- ANNABELLE. Father.
- HUGO. Down the hatch.
- KITTY. Well er . . . what now?
- LADY CHARLES. Perhaps we should . . . would you all  
gather round . . . ? Hugo perhaps you'd say  
a prayer.
- HUGO. Me?
- LADY CHARLES. Please.
- HUGO. O Lord . . . O Lord . . . O Lord send down  
thy avenging fire to chasten the ways of  
the ungodly, but for Christ's sake leave the  
rest of us alone. Amen.
- ALL. Amen.

*There is a terrible crackling from the machine. Their attention is distracted. A voice comes over the air, a mini cab firm.*

- MALE VOICE. Sheila, can you get me the number on  
Ralston Road?
- FEMALE VOICE. Roger 89. There's a 41 Ralston Road. A  
Mrs Humble.
- MALE VOICE. Thanks love.
- FEMALE VOICE. I've got a Sheffield Estate request. Going  
to the station. Yes, Ninety-one?

- RONNIE. What on earth?
- BUTLER. It's the local minicab firm, sir. There's not much one can do. Doesn't last long.
- MALE VOICE. I wish I had you in the back of my cab darling. I'd show you how to race the meter.
- FEMALE VOICE. Oh you are awful, Ninety-one.
- BUTLER. It's the weather, sir. Sometimes we can pick up Dorking.
- HUGO. It's a pity we can't get Wimbledon.
- LADY CHARLES. Well perhaps we could continue. Ronnie would you say a word or two.
- RONNIE. Oh . . . what about?
- LADY CHARLES. Well, about Robert.
- RONNIE. Oh, I see. A speech.
- LADY CHARLES. A short one.
- RONNIE. Well. (*Clears his throat.*) We all know why we're gathered here today . . . to er say farewell to an old friend. In my case, that is. More than that to most of you. A relative, indeed. I think it's typical of Robert that his last action did save the Government — albeit unconsciously.
- LADY CHARLES. Oh, dear.
- RONNIE. What? What did I say? Did I say something wrong?
- LADY CHARLES. No, no. It's rather embarrassing. Would everybody mind hiding for a moment.
- RONNIE. Hiding?
- LADY CHARLES. Yes. Just crouch down. Only for a few minutes. You too, Kitty, please get down.

*Everybody rather puzzled, but they react to her insistence. They start to crouch down.*

- RONNIE. Why are we doing this?

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KITTY. Are we praying?

LADY CHARLES. It's the Electricity Board. Nigel, please stay away from the window. A small matter of a very large bill. Their computer has probably made an error, but they keep pestering us. They send these dreadful little inspectors round at weekends.

*The doorbell rings.*

HUGO. When the Electricity Board comes to the front door, there is a terrible rent in the fabric of society.

LADY CHARLES. Shh. Hugo. Please.

*The doorbell rings again.*

ANNABELLE. Do you think he knows we're here?

HUGO. There are only eight cars parked in the drive.

*HARRIS appears at the door of the morning room. Reacts. Looks very puzzled.*

HARRIS. Has somebody lost something?

LADY CHARLES. Please get down.

HARRIS. What?

LADY CHARLES. On your knees.

HARRIS. I'm a Non-conformist.

LADY CHARLES. This is no time for sectarianism.

HUGO. Get down, man.

*HARRIS reluctantly kneels.*

HARRIS. Is this a prayer meeting?

RONNIE. We're hiding.

HARRIS. Some sort of family game? I haven't got time to muck about.

RONNIE. Please feel free to leave.

HUGO. What do you want anyway?

HARRIS. Might I have a sandwich?

HUGO. A what?

HARRIS. A sandwich.

*Everybody looks at him.*

Two slices of bread with a piece of cheese  
or ham with . . . .

HUGO. We do know what a sandwich is, thank you  
very much.

HARRIS. Might I have one?

HUGO. Why?

HARRIS. I'm hungry.

HUGO. This is not a Snackarama, it's a private  
house.

HARRIS. I thought since Lady Charles did offer me a  
biscuit . . . and as you've got a butler . . .

BUTLER. I'm afraid we're all rather busy at the  
moment, sir. (*On his knees.*)

HARRIS. I see. I shan't forget this. (*The car drives off.*)

LADY CHARLES. I'm so sorry everybody, this sort of thing  
would never have happened in the old days.

*They are rising.*

HARRIS. Lady Charles I must have a word with you.

LADY CHARLES. I'm afraid I can't see you.

HARRIS. I'm right here.

LADY CHARLES. I'm afraid I'm *too busy* to see you now.

HARRIS. Why what's going on?

LADY CHARLES. Please leave us alone, this is a family matter.

HARRIS. Here. Are you doing it now?

RONNIE. What?

- HARRIS. You are, aren't you?
- RONNIE. Are what?
- HARRIS. About to switch him off.
- RONNIE. I must ask you to please leave this room.
- HARRIS. I don't like this at all.
- NIGEL. Who asked your opinion?
- HARRIS. I must warn you that murder is still quite a serious business in this country. Can I use the phone?
- RONNIE. In the morning room.
- HARRIS *goes off.*
- LADY CHARLES. Can't we get rid of him?
- HUGO. We have tried to starve him out.
- RONNIE. As soon as this is over I promise you.
- NIGEL. He's right, you know.
- RONNIE. What do you mean?
- NIGEL. Well turning somebody off is murder. If I were to do it, it would be patricide.
- LADY CHARLES. Nigel, you know the lengths we've been to. We have a medical certificate and the blessing of Rome, Kitty wrote specially to Cardinal Freely. He said providing Robert dies in the faith they have no legal objection.
- NIGEL. Canonically you may be in the clear but ethically you're on very thin water.
- HUGO. Ice.
- LADY CHARLES. We have medical opinions saying he cannot recover, we have legal opinions stating that he is legally dead; the Church considers that keeping him alive is a sin against God and the Central Electricity Board has decreed that we cannot afford it. Now do you suppose

it's easy to come downstairs to someone you've lived with for thirty-five years and switch him off like an old refrigerator? Well do you?

NIGEL. No.

LADY CHARLES. Very well, now has anybody else anything they would like to say? *(Pause.)* Good. Well . . .

BUTLER. I should like to say . . .

LADY CHARLES. Yes, Butler?

BUTLER. Well just that your husband in many ways will still be alive thanks to his generosity.

LADY CHARLES. What do you mean?

BUTLER. A kidney machine will have fresh kidneys tonight thanks to Sir Robert's bequest. His eyeballs will provide sight for an elderly lady near Glasgow, his liver awaits insertion into the malfunctioning body of a registrar near Newquay and most of the rest of him is being distributed around the National Health Service.

LADY CHARLES. I'm sure you mean to be kind. Well does anybody else have anything . . . enlightening to say? All right.

*They all gather round the box.*

Well, goodbye Robert, from all your family, Hugo, Nigel, Annabelle and Kitty. And Ronnie.

BUTLER. And Butler.

LADY CHARLES. We'll just say goodnight, sleep tight.

LADY CHARLES *reaches for the switch.*

HARRIS *appears at the door, agitated.*

HARRIS. Lady Charles don't touch that switch!

- LADY CHARLES. How dare you interrupt us!
- RONNIE. Really this is monstrous, you have no right to do this.
- HARRIS. I have every right, I have just spoken to Head Office.
- LADY CHARLES. This is purely a family matter.
- HARRIS. This is no longer a family matter. I'm afraid I have some odd news for you all. By a strange quirk of fate, the bizarre has taken a sudden turn for the worse. This afternoon the Prime Minister's car left Chequers for Wimbledon. It never arrived. Just outside New Malden it swerved to avoid a small child's ball, skidded into a new housing estate and fell into an uncompleted sewer.
- NIGEL. Shit.
- HARRIS. Loss of life was, I am afraid, total.
- RONNIE. Good grief.
- LADY CHARLES. I hardly see what this has to do with us.
- HARRIS. I'm afraid you fail to appreciate the full constitutional significance, Lady Charles. Until the reshuffle on Monday your husband is still deputy leader of his party.
- LADY CHARLES. What's that?
- HARRIS. In that box lies the current Prime Minister of Great Britain.
- RONNIE. Oh, God help us!

*Curtain.*

## ACT TWO

*The scene is the same. A few moments later, HARRIS stands guard over the casket as it to prevent further attempts to switch it off, RONNIE is on the phone. It's clearly a bad line. Only BUTLER is off stage.*

- HARRIS                    It's most unsatisfactory, but we seem to have a machine for a leader.
- KITTY.                    How wonderful for Robert, Prime Minister of Great Britain.
- HARRIS.                   It's purely temporary.
- HUGO.                    That's what they said about the licensing laws.
- RONNIE.                   What? Speak up. No don't tell the Press anything. But you don't understand. Damn. *(Puts the phone down.)* He's run out of change. There'll have to be a switch over. The Government of this country cannot be left in the hands of a machine.
- NIGEL.                    Might be an improvement.
- HUGO.                    In a sense this is a very real achievement for the disabled.
- ANNABELLE.            I would have thought the Japanese would have been the first to computerise their leaders.
- LADY CHARLES.        Oh dear, this is horrid.
- HUGO.                    Come on, Mummy, you're the Prime Minister's wife.
- KITTY.                    So wonderful for Robert, Prime Minister of Great Britain.

- HARRIS. It is just for the weekend.
- HUGO. We should switch him off then.
- HARRIS. Your creditors will wait.
- LADY CHARLES. No, Hugo's right. It's going to mean police and reporters swarming all over the place, we should switch him off at once. Ronnie!
- HARRIS. Lady Charles, I must warn you about making threats against the life of the leader of this country.
- LADY CHARLES. But really it will save so much trouble and embarrassment.
- HARRIS. One can turn a blind eye to a certain amount of personal violence within the family, but what you are suggesting is political assassination.
- LADY CHARLES. But who's to know?
- HARRIS. Lady Charles, in this box lies the direct descendant of Pitt, Peel, Walpole . . .
- NIGEL. Wilson.
- HARRIS. Even so, I *still* don't think you should switch him off.
- HUGO. Be sensible, we must.
- HARRIS. Over my dead body.
- HUGO. How much do you want then?
- HARRIS. Bribing a journalist is a serious offence.
- HUGO. Rubbish.
- HARRIS. It's more 'n my job's worth.
- HUGO. Your job's worth bugger all.
- HARRIS. You people terrify me. I've never seen such a murderous assembly.

*The phone rings. ANNABELLE picks it up.*

ANNABELLE. Hello. It's for you Ronnie.

RONNIE. I'll take it next door.

*He goes off into the morning room.*

HARRIS. Is that man reliable?

NIGEL. Reliable? He's a politician.

HARRIS. Worse than I thought. I shall have to keep an eye on him.

*Enter BUTLER.*

BUTLER. There is a Police Inspector to see you, madam.

HARRIS (*starts*). A what?

BUTLER. A Police Inspector.

HARRIS. By what name? Of which division? Who sent him?

BUTLER. I've no idea. Shall I make enquiries, madam?

HARRIS. No, send him in.

*BUTLER goes off.*

I'll deal with this.

HUGO. I'm afraid you won't my old beauty.

HARRIS. What do you mean?

HUGO. There's going to be a little discreet form of censorship of the Press, just for the moment. Nothing personal. O.K., Nigel?

*HUGO nods at NIGEL, HARRIS is grabbed.*

HARRIS. Wait, I have something very important to say . . .

HUGO. Save it for your editor.

*NIGEL shoves a handkerchief in his mouth and HUGO uses his bow tie to secure it. They pull him into the cupboard and NIGEL secures his hands.*

HUGO. And stop going 'Mm m m mm'. It's very irritating. If you don't we'll put the light out on you.

*They shut the door.*

NIGEL and HUGO *shake hands.*

NIGEL. We've just muzzled the Press.

HUGO. How deeply satisfying.

NIGEL. He tried to bite me.

HUGO. Typical.

*Enter RONNIE.*

RONNIE. They don't seem to understand the situation at all. They want him to form an emergency cabinet.

HUGO. He already *is* an emergency cabinet.

RONNIE. The whole thing is dangerously absurd.

LADY CHARLES. We should switch him off at once.

RONNIE. It's too late for that. Two Prime Ministers in one day is a little much even for this country.

NIGEL. So what's happening?

RONNIE. They want to send a lorry to pick him up.

LADY CHARLES. Out of the question.

RONNIE. That's what I told them. They asked if I could patch him in to the phone.

HUGO. Oh marvellous. Five minutes from the grave and they're tapping his wires.

RONNIE. One careless motorist near New Malden and the whole country is plunged into confusion.

*NIGEL has adopted a yoga position centre stage.*

LADY CHARLES. Nigel, how can you remain so calm?

NIGEL. Practice.

*BUTLER enters.*

- BUTLER. The Police Inspector, madam.
- SLATER *enters*. BUTLER *takes his hat and remains holding it*.
- SLATER. Lady Charles?
- LADY CHARLES. What can I do for you, Inspector?
- SLATER. Just a few routine questions if you don't mind.
- LADY CHARLES. Please do what you have to.
- SLATER. First of all (*Notices NIGEL.*) would you mind telling me who these people are?
- LADY CHARLES. Certainly. This is my son Nigel. He's at Oxford.
- SLATER. This is term time.
- LADY CHARLES. Yes.
- SLATER. Why isn't he there now?
- LADY CHARLES. He's studying Zen. Apparently if you turn up they fail you.
- SLATER. And these two?
- LADY CHARLES. Those are the twins. Hugo and Annabelle.
- HUGO and ANNABELLE. Good afternoon.
- SLATER. How old are you, sir?
- HUGO. Thirty-eight.
- SLATER. And you, Miss?
- ANNABELLE. Twenty-nine.
- SLATER. It was a very long labour.
- HUGO. It's not done to question a lady's age, Inspector.
- SLATER. Forgive me, I'm from the lower classes.
- LADY CHARLES. Oh, that's hardly your fault.
- SLATER. And who are these two?

- LADY CHARLES. A leading backbencher and the children's nanny.
- SLATER. Which is which?
- RONNIE. I beg your pardon!
- HUGO. That's Nanny.
- LADY CHARLES. Now, would you like to see the Prime Minister?
- SLATER. The what?
- LADY CHARLES. The Prime Minister.
- SLATER. Yes.
- LADY CHARLES. Would you like to see him?
- SLATER. Where is he?
- LADY CHARLES. In there.
- SLATER. In here?
- LADY CHARLES. Yes.
- SLATER. What's he doing, hiding?
- LADY CHARLES. I beg your pardon.
- SLATER. I understood your *husband* was in there.
- LADY CHARLES. That is correct.
- SLATER. So where is the Prime Minister?
- LADY CHARLES. In here.
- SLATER. Let me get this clear. You're telling me the Prime Minister is in this box.
- LADY CHARLES. Yes.
- SLATER. Right now.
- LADY CHARLES. Yes.
- SLATER. Hiding, with your husband.
- LADY CHARLES. No, no, no.
- SLATER. Well, what *are* they doing in there?

- LADY CHARLES. They're not doing anything in there.
- SLATER. I'm afraid your mother is a loonie.
- RONNIE. How dare you speak like that!
- SLATER. What's it to do with you?
- RONNIE. I am Sir Robert's best friend.
- SLATER. And where exactly *is* Sir Robert?
- RONNIE. In there.
- SLATER. With the Prime Minister?
- RONNIE. No. No.
- SLATER. Aha. So the Prime Minister *isn't* in there.
- RONNIE. Yes he is.
- SLATER. This is Henshall House?
- RONNIE. Yes.
- SLATER. Not some kind of private sanatorium?
- RONNIE. What do you mean?
- SLATER. I was given to understand that this was a private house. Not a loonie bin.
- HUGO. Be very careful what you say, Inspector. The Police are allowed wide powers, but they may only use slander in court.
- SLATER. *She* told me the Prime Minister was in that box.
- HUGO. Yes.
- SLATER. *He* told me his best friend was in there.
- HUGO. Yes.
- SLATER. Either somebody is lying, or you're all mad.
- RONNIE. Inspector.
- SLATER. Yes.
- RONNIE. What's your name?
- SLATER. Watt.

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- RONNIE.                   What's your name?
- SLATER.                   Watt is.
- RONNIE.                   Yes. What is your name?
- SLATER.                   Exactly. Watt is my name. Inspector Watt.
- RONNIE.                   I see. Didn't they tell you about the Prime Minister?
- SLATER.                   Who?
- RONNIE.                   Whoever sent you here.
- SLATER.                   Who sent me here?
- RONNIE.                   Precisely.
- SLATER.                   My superiors.
- RONNIE.                   Don't be evasive. How much don't you know?
- SLATER.                   I'm uncertain of almost everything.
- BUTLER.                   You say your name is Watt?
- SLATER.                   Yes.
- BUTLER.                   Your hat says Slater.
- SLATER.                   I changed it.
- BUTLER.                   Your name?
- SLATER.                   No. My hat.
- BUTLER.                   Why?
- SLATER.                   It's a disguise.
- BUTLER.                   You disguised your hat?
- SLATER.                   Is there a doctor here?
- RONNIE.                   Why?
- SLATER.                   I should like a private room.
- KITTY.                   Oh no! (KITTY notices the machine is off.)
- HUGO.                   What is it, Nanny?
- SLATER.                   Is she having a fit?

- KITTY. Oh, God, no!
- ANNABELLE. Are you unwell?
- SLATER. Is she dangerous?
- RONNIE. Will you be quiet, Inspector. What's the matter, Kitty?
- KITTY. It's Robert.
- RONNIE. What about him?
- KITTY. He's stopped.
- BUTLER. What? Stand aside, madam.
- SLATER. Who's stopped?
- LADY CHARLES. Sir Robert's stopped.
- SLATER. Sir Robert's stopped what?
- RONNIE. Living, Inspector.
- SLATER. Hardly surprising — it must be crowded in there.
- RONNIE. Stand aside. This is an emergency.
- BUTLER *moves into action under the machine.*
- RONNIE. Butler.
- BUTLER. Yes, sir? (*Pops up from behind the machine.*)
- RONNIE. Can you restart him?
- BUTLER. I'm trying, sir.
- RONNIE. Two Prime Ministers in one day, whatever will the Americans think?
- SLATER. Which Americans?
- RONNIE. Any Americans.
- SLATER. Are there any Americans here?
- RONNIE. Of course not.
- SLATER. Then who cares what they think.
- RONNIE. I care what they think.
- SLATER. But there aren't any here!

- BUTLER. It's no good. It's too late.
- RONNIE. I thought you were an expert.
- BUTLER. They only sent me on a weekend course, sir.
- RONNIE. What did they teach you?
- BUTLER. Maintenance, not miracles. M'lady, I'm afraid the machine is quite dead. Sir Robert has passed on.
- RONNIE. I don't believe this.
- SLATER. Are you sure he's dead?
- BUTLER. Quite sure, sir.
- SLATER. Then where's the Prime Minister?
- HUGO. Dead.
- SLATER. As well? We'd better call the Police.
- HUGO. You *are* the Police.
- SLATER. Er, not in fact, no.
- HUGO. Then who the hell are you?
- SLATER. I'm from the Press.
- HUGO. A journalist?
- RONNIE. Oh my God.
- HUGO. Another one. Right Nigel.
- NIGEL. Definitely.
- HUGO. Into the cupboard with him, we can sort this out later.

*They grab* SLATER.

- SLATER. Please — I can explain.
- RONNIE. You're in big trouble now, sonny. If one word of this leaks out you are going to go to jail.
- SLATER. I know nothing about everything.
- HUGO. The last cry of the journalist.

NIGEL. Quite a little Press box in here.

*They open the door of the closet.*

SLATER. My God, who's that?

HUGO. Another of your colleagues.

SLATER. Inspector Harris, urgh.

*HUGO slaps his hat over SLATER's mouth.*

HUGO. What did he say?

NIGEL. I think he said "Inspector Harris urghh".

HUGO (*removing the hat*). What precisely did you mean by saying "Inspector Harris urghh"?

SLATER. This is Inspector Harris.

*HARRIS pushes out of the cupboard. We see NIGEL has roped his hands behind his back with the Hoover lead. It trails along behind him.*

HUGO. He's a policeman?

NIGEL. That's convenient.

HUGO. Yes there's never usually one around when you want one. Is this true?

SLATER. Yes.

NIGEL. You're quite sure?

SLATER. Without question.

RONNIE. Are you a Police Inspector, Harris?

*HARRIS nods and mumbles vigorously.*

Release him at once.

*NIGEL unties his hands.*

*HUGO removes the gag.*

HUGO. It seems that we owe you an apology, Inspector.

HARRIS. I owe you more than that, sonny.

NIGEL. Impersonating a journalist is a serious offence.

- HARRIS.                   And as for you . . .
- RONNIE.                   No time for this, Inspector. We have a crisis on our hands. You see while you were in there . . .
- HARRIS.                   He's stopped. He's fucking stopped!
- RONNIE.                   Yes. That's the point.
- HARRIS.                   Right. Nobody is to touch everything. This is murder.
- KITTY.                    Murder? But we were all here.
- HARRIS.                   Then one of you murdered him.
- KITTY.                    Not necessarily.
- HARRIS.                   I'll be the judge of that. All right. No one is to leave this room! Where are you going?
- KITTY.                    I'm just getting my spectacles. (*Goes off.*)
- LADY CHARLES.         And I must powder my nose if this is going to take a little while. (*Goes off.*)
- HUGO.                    I'll get some drinks. (*Goes off.*)
- NIGEL.                    Good idea — I'll give you a hand. (*Goes off.*)
- RONNIE.                   I've got just one call to make. (*Goes off.*)
- ANNABELLE.             Butler, can you give me some help?
- BUTLER.                  Yes m'lady. (*They both go off.*)

SLATER *slips into the cupboard.*

HARRIS *is left completely alone. He is flabbergasted.*

- HARRIS.                   Respect for the law in this country is rapidly diminishing. But I'll get to the bottom of this if it takes me all night. But first I need a sandwich.

*He goes off upstage right.*

*Empty stage. SLATER opens the cupboard door, peeps out, closes it quickly as simultaneously the door to the morning room and the door to the pantry pop open and HUGO and BUTLER peer out. They notice each other.*

- HUGO. Ah Butler. Has he gone?
- BUTLER. Who sir?
- HUGO. The Inspector.
- BUTLER. He can't be far.
- HUGO. He can't be far enough for me.
- BUTLER. Of course.
- HUGO. Nasty piece of work. We should have thrown him out earlier.
- BUTLER. Would have saved you a lot of trouble, sir.
- HUGO. What?
- BUTLER. Congratulations. You're a wealthy man again.
- HUGO. Oh, thank you. My fourth time actually. Look, I can let you have a few quid if that's what you mean?
- BUTLER. I wouldn't dream of blackmailing you, sir.
- HUGO. What exactly do you mean?
- BUTLER (*going over to the casket*). Nearly a nasty moment for you there, sir. He almost survived.
- HUGO (*at the other end of the casket*). What exactly are you implying Butler?
- BUTLER. You couldn't wait to get your hands on his money.
- HUGO. I need it.
- BUTLER. You certainly do. You're nothing without it.
- HUGO. Envy is a very middle-class vice Butler.
- BUTLER. I'm not envious. I don't want your money.

- HUGO. Just my sister eh?
- BUTLER. I beg your pardon?
- HUGO. You've been sleeping with my sister.
- BUTLER. Not *sleeping* sir.
- HUGO. You're a randy little sod aren't you. A regular kitchen Casanova.
- BUTLER. I thought envy was a middle-class vice, sir.
- HUGO. I suppose you got your leg over my wife as well.
- BUTLER. Yes, sir.
- HUGO. Terrific.
- BUTLER. Not particularly, sir.
- HUGO. You'd do very well in America Butler, social climbing is a national sport.
- BUTLER. You always were a snob.
- HUGO. I'm *not* working-class and proud of it.
- BUTLER. Yes you're very versatile. You're no good at everything.
- HUGO. I don't care what you say.
- BUTLER. That's what your wife said, sir.
- HUGO. I see. Is there anybody in this household you haven't had?

SLATER *pops his head out. Listens.*

- BUTLER. Master Nigel sir.
- HUGO. Not your sort?
- BUTLER. No sir. He's gay.
- HUGO. What, Nigel?
- BUTLER. You always were very naive, sir.
- HUGO. I think you'd better leave.
- BUTLER. Oh no, sir. I wouldn't dream of leaving

before they catch the murderer.

*Enter HARRIS with a banana.*

HARRIS. Or murderers, Butler.

*SLATER pops back in again.*

BUTLER. What?

HARRIS. What exactly are you two up to?

HUGO. Nothing.

HARRIS. I see, the pair of you doing nothing. Together. That's very suspicious.

BUTLER. Oh, really, Inspector, the Police in this country are far too keen on conspiracy theories.

HARRIS. It's hardly surprising. One glance at the Establishment and they can see how well it works. Would it surprise you to learn that there is a mole in this household?

BUTLER. It wouldn't surprise me at all, sir. There are several in the lawn.

HARRIS. I'm talking about a leak.

BUTLER. It's a very old roof sir.

HARRIS. Skip the one-liners, sonny. I must warn you that British Intelligence strongly suspects you of spying on your late employer.

HUGO. What? On Daddy?

HARRIS. Well, your father was Minister of Defence, and there are certain secrets no gentlemen can conceal from their butlers.

HUGO. Good God. Are you saying Butler's a traitor?

HARRIS. Should be good news for you, sir. A working-class traitor makes a nice change.

BUTLER. I deny it.

*The cupboard door has opened.*

SLATER *creeps out.*

HARRIS. Naturally. However, since I first set foot in this house, somebody has killed a Prime Minister, and I'm still sufficiently sadistic enough to want to find out who.

SLATER *is trying to sidle out of the room, very slowly. They all become aware of him and watch his painfully slow movements. He has his back to them. They watch him for a while.*

HARRIS. Not so fast Slater! Where are you going?

SLATER. I thought you might prefer to be alone.

HARRIS. What were you doing in that cupboard?

SLATER. Wrong door.

HARRIS. Took you a long time to decide it was the wrong door.

SLATER. I couldn't find the light.

HARRIS. Lurking about in cupboards is very odd behaviour, when everybody is under suspicion. Come on in. Incidentally Slater, I owe you this.

*He knees him suddenly in the crotch. SLATER doubles up.*

Nothing personal. If you hadn't come poking in here, pretending to be a Police Inspector none of this would have happened. No hard feelings.

SLATER (*from the floor*). No feelings at all, Inspector.

HARRIS. I have a great respect for the Popular Press, normally they are most co-operative. They'll never let you use this story, you know.

SLATER. You can't always get what you want.

HARRIS. True. I wanted to be a customs officer. But I was too intelligent. I have had to serve society in a different guise. I can't grumble. Police work is quite funny. There's always

somebody worse off than yourself. Know what I mean? I shall retire quite soon. A newspaper has expressed interest in my memoirs. It may surprise you to know that amongst my friends I number one or two on the other side.

SLATER. Dead?

HARRIS. No. Criminals.

SLATER. Oh, I thought you meant the other side of the grave.

HARRIS. The other side of the Thames.

SLATER. I hadn't put you down as a spiritualist.

*ANNABELLE walks across behind, trying not to be seen. She is carrying a suitcase with the initials T.D.B. on.*

HARRIS. Hey. Just a moment, where are you going?

ANNABELLE. Oh just going for a walk.

HARRIS. For a walk?

ANNABELLE. A bit of fresh air.

HARRIS. With a suitcase?

ANNABELLE. Oh! *(She looks at it, as though she's just noticed she's carrying it.)*

HARRIS. Come down, come and join us. It looks very bad going for a walk in the middle of a murder investigation with a suitcase. Just what exactly is in this suitcase? *(He opens it and pulls out clothing.)* Gentlemen's clothing. Kinky.

BUTLER. It's *my* suitcase Inspector.

HARRIS. Oh. *(Thinks.)* You live in this house?

BUTLER. No.

HARRIS. Are these your clothes?

ANNABELLE. I was doing his washing for him.

HARRIS. Forgive my ignorance but is it customary in these circles for the lady of the house to do the butler's washing?

ANNABELLE. Er . . .

HARRIS. Giving his suit a bit of a rinse were you? S'hardly drip dry.

*Enter RONNIE.*

*And KITTY.*

*And NIGEL.*

HARRIS. Oh do come in. That is unless you have anything else on.

RONNIE. Sorry.

HARRIS. That's all right, I'm a Civil Servant. I've got all day.

*Enter LADY CHARLES.*

Oh hello. I'm sorry to bother you with all these piddling details of your husband's death. But I'm old-fashioned about murder. I don't like it.

RONNIE. We don't know that it's murder Inspector. You leap to the wildest conclusions.

HARRIS. You think it might be suicide? Did you do yourself in then? Terrified of the cares of office did you abdicate responsibility? "No thank you, I don't want to be Prime Minister". Click.

LADY CHARLES. No one's suggesting that.

HARRIS. Someone in this house is responsible.

LADY CHARLES. In my experience no one in this house is very responsible.

HARRIS. You're taking this death very calmly.

LADY CHARLES. It is if anything a relief.

HARRIS. Why do the Upper Classes always assume they are above the law?

- HUGO. Experience, Inspector.
- HARRIS. Don't get smart with me, laddie. Seems to me you stand to gain a great deal from the death of a man whose life you were heard publicly threatening not twenty minutes ago. In this box, there is an ex-Prime Minister, dead as mutton, and where I come from that is a serious crime. Murder.
- RONNIE. Do stop saying that Inspector. What evidence do you have?
- HARRIS. Now we're getting somewhere. Evidence. Very well. For a start, this cut cable lead. Cut by a common kitchen knife or a butler's all-purpose Swiss Army knife such as this one.

*He reaches into BUTLER's pocket and fiddles. BUTLER produces a knife from his other pocket and holds it up.*

Is that yours?

- BUTLER. Yes, sir.
- HARRIS. Well?
- BUTLER. I did cut the cable, sir.
- HARRIS. Aha. You all heard that. So you murdered him.
- BUTLER. No, it's the television aerial, sir.
- HARRIS. What?
- BUTLER. For the television. I moved it into the other room. For Wimbledon, sir.
- NIGEL. It's true, Inspector. I helped him carry it.

*HUGO laughs.*

- HUGO. New balls!
- HARRIS. Be careful sonny, how you laugh at a Police Inspector in pursuit of his duty or you'll need new balls.

- HUGO. It was an amusing false lead, Inspector.
- HARRIS. You think it amusing that I should accuse Butler here of murder?
- BUTLER. Why should I wish to murder him today of all days, in front of all these witnesses, when I've had ample opportunity over the past twelve months.
- HARRIS. A good question. Do you deny that your next post is as butler to an elderly General in Wantage?
- BUTLER. No.
- HARRIS. A man who has his ancient fingers on Britain's nuclear secrets.
- BUTLER. He is a military gentleman, yes.
- HARRIS. So, the mole moves on. From spying on his late employer he now sells British nuclear secrets to the Russians.
- RONNIE. An absurd suggestion. Britain's nuclear secrets are very well known to the Russians. They are a secret only to the British.
- HARRIS. So he's a high-minded sort. He sells them to a newspaper.
- RONNIE. Who would print it?
- HARRIS. Some radical rag would find room.
- LADY CHARLES. Inspector, are you telling us that Butler has been selling our secrets to the Russians.
- BUTLER. No m'lady I . . . *(They all look at him.)* I did some part time work for Spies for Peace.
- LADY CHARLES. You're a Nuclear Disarmer?
- BUTLER. Yes m'lady.
- LADY CHARLES. Oh how horrid.

- RONNIE. If this leaks out we will be the laughing stock of Europe.
- NIGEL. We already are the laughing stock of Europe.
- HARRIS. I must ask you to confine your Oxford cynicism to High Table. It beats me why anybody in their right minds wants to run this country.
- HUGO. Very few of those who do are in their right minds, Inspector.
- HARRIS. The question I have to resolve is "What is the point of death".
- LADY CHARLES. What is the point of death?
- HARRIS. Yes.
- LADY CHARLES. Surely that is a question for the Church.
- HARRIS. The *moment* of death.
- LADY CHARLES. Oh I'm sorry I thought you were straying into theology.
- HARRIS. Detection is not dissimilar. Now who first noticed this machine had stopped?
- KITTY. I did, Inspector.
- HARRIS. Right. I want each and every one of you to get into the exact positions you were in at that precise moment.

*Everyone moves a very long way away from the box and adopts very artificially innocent poses. Only KITTY is in her right position.*

- HARRIS. I see. It looks as though Kitty did it.

*KITTY looks around open-mouthed.*

Perhaps their memories are a little faulty?

*KITTY nods.*

- HARRIS. Clouded by grief I shouldn't wonder. All right, you can all sit down. I've noticed this happen before, people suddenly get very forgetful when the Police are around. Very well. I have no choice. I'll have to open the box.
- HUGO. Take the money.
- LADY CHARLES. What do you mean?
- HARRIS. I must examine the deceased.
- LADY CHARLES. You can't do that. Stop him. Please, Ronnie.
- HARRIS. Lady Charles, I have little choice. I am rapidly running out of theories.
- LADY CHARLES. I forbid you to touch him. You have no right.
- HARRIS (*opens the box, is feeling around inside*). I'm afraid you are quite wrong. Were he still breathing I must respect your wishes, to the letter. But since his respiratory system has ceased his body is now the property of the authorities, whose sworn representative I am, good lord. (HARRIS *disappears under the lid*.)
- RONNIE. What is it?
- HARRIS *appears looking startled*.
- HARRIS. Lady Charles, did your husband have tits?
- LADY CHARLES (*starts*). Inspector I must insist that we remove the journalist.
- HARRIS. I think that's reasonable. Slater, please wait outside.
- SLATER. One moment Inspector. May I remind you of the Iranian student, the left wing correspondent and Night Nurse McQuickly?

- HARRIS. I see. That's naughty, Stanley. But I think I take your point. You may remain.
- RONNIE. Is he blackmailing you?
- HARRIS. Blackmail is a dirty word. But for the record, yes.
- RONNIE. This is preposterous.
- HARRIS. I agree. Let us just note in passing that this man here is none other than Sluice, *the* gossip columnist of Fleet Street. Not all of his information gets into print. Some of it he saves up for a rainy day. Today it's pissing down.
- KITTY. Did you say "Sluice", Inspector?
- HARRIS. Yes. It is of no consequence.
- KITTY. It is of very great consequence, Inspector. My dear Sluice, what a pleasure to meet you.
- SLATER. I don't understand.
- KITTY. Does the name "Hot Line" mean anything to you?
- SLATER. Why yes. He has given me some of my best information over the years. Why do you ask?
- KITTY. Not he, dear Sluice, but she.
- SLATER. Hot Line?
- KITTY. The same.
- SLATER. Dear Hot Line. How *do* you do.
- KITTY. Dear Sluice.
- They embrace.*
- HARRIS. What a touching reunion between grass and snake.
- LADY CHARLES. Kitty! Are we to understand that you have been feeding information to the Press, all these years?

- KITTY. Just titbits, Lady Charles. I never sold anything dull or harmless.
- LADY CHARLES. How could you?
- KITTY. For a rainy day. I have a small bungalow near Bognor entirely paid for by the Daily Press. Thanks to Sluice, dear Sluice, I shall be very comfortable in my reclining years.
- LADY CHARLES. This is monstrous. That you should be involved in journalism. The last resort of the unemployable.
- SLATER. People like journalism, Lady Charles. Life is largely misleading. Journalism helps them misunderstand it better.
- LADY CHARLES. I really must insist that this man leaves the room at once, Inspector.
- SLATER. You have nothing to fear Lady Charles. Sluice is dead. I am off to America. You can all sleep soundly in each other's beds tonight. New York doesn't give a fart for the indiscretions of the English aristocracy.
- HARRIS. A sentiment many of us share, Slater. And now Lady Charles, if we can come back to the matter in hand: viz. the breasts on the body of your late husband.
- LADY CHARLES. Yes Inspector?
- HARRIS. Whose are they?
- LADY CHARLES. They are his. Or perhaps I should say "hers".
- HUGO. Mummy? What are you saying?
- LADY CHARLES. Many years ago, in the forties, things were not quite so "muddled up". In my day transvestism was a hindrance to a political career. Nowadays almost anything goes.
- RONNIE. Are you telling us that Sir Robert was a woman?

- LADY CHARLES. Yes.
- RONNIE. Good grief!
- HARRIS (*closing the lid*). *Cherchez la femme.*
- HARRIS. Now Lady Charles, who exactly *is* this woman?
- LADY CHARLES. The woman lying there was for a moment Prime Minister. The first practising transvestite to achieve that position. As far as we know.
- RONNIE. This is an important moment in British history, and, as such, it must be completely hushed up.
- HARRIS. Did no one ever suspect?
- LADY CHARLES. After his heart attack they found out at the hospital. They could tell she was a woman.
- HARRIS. They are trained in these matters.
- LADY CHARLES. Fortunately most of the nurses couldn't speak English, and doctors are easily bribed.
- HARRIS. A double murder.
- RONNIE. What?
- HARRIS. I am concerned with the sudden death of this lady and the disappearance of an elderly knight. Just where exactly *is* Sir Robert Charles?

*Pause, LADY CHARLES stands.*

- LADY CHARLES. Right here, Inspector.

*General amazement.*

We simply swapped roles.

- HUGO. Mummy . . . ?
- HARRIS. *You* are Sir Robert Charles?
- LADY CHARLES. Yes. To be fair I am just plain Robert Charles. It was she who received the kiss of

her sovereign's sword on her shoulder.  
A proud day for me, I can tell you.

HARRIS. Did no one else know all of this?

LADY CHARLES. Just Kitty. Dear Kitty. You cannot fool a midwife.

HARRIS. You have deceived the Nation.

LADY CHARLES. The Nation is constantly deceived. Besides I did no harm. I've always enjoyed women's clothing, ever since Oxford. I was very happy here at home, raising the children, running the W.I.

HARRIS. You led them in a chorus of Jerusalem?

LADY CHARLES. Time without mention.

HARRIS. Is nothing sacred?

LADY CHARLES. But for this unfortunate occurrence no one would have been any the wiser.

NIGEL. Mummy . . .

ANNABELLE. Mummy . . .

HUGO. Mummy . . . ? or do we call you Daddy now?

HARRIS (*has an idea*). Just a minute. When exactly did you begin to impersonate a woman?

LADY CHARLES. In 1944. Shortly after their father gave birth to the twins. I was severely wounded the same night.

HARRIS. Where exactly were you wounded?

LADY CHARLES. In Staines.

HARRIS. So you could no longer be a father.

LADY CHARLES. A visit to Morocco completed the process.

HARRIS. But where is the proof that you were a man?

LADY CHARLES. In a jar on a shelf, in a hospital in Marrakesh. Amongst the first of its kind to be so honoured.

- HARRIS. The name of the hospital?
- LADY CHARLES. The Sidi Mansour. They specialise in discreet removals.
- HARRIS. Like Pickfords.
- LADY CHARLES. I'm afraid I miss the reference.
- HARRIS. Is there any way I might verify this story?
- LADY CHARLES. You could write to the hospital. They might send a recent photograph. It's used extensively in lecturing, throughout the Arab world.
- HARRIS. How would I recognise it was in fact yours?
- LADY CHARLES. It was circumcised and very small.
- HARRIS. There must be millions like it.
- HUGO. It runs in the family.
- LADY CHARLES. My husband kept a photo of it in the desk drawer, as a souvenir.

*HARRIS opens the bureau, examines the photo.*

- HARRIS. Is this it?
- LADY CHARLES. Yes.
- HARRIS pulls out a magnifying glass.*
- HARRIS. To think that Freud based an entire theory on so little.
- HUGO. He was a brilliant man.
- HARRIS. When was this taken?
- LADY CHARLES. 1947.
- HARRIS (to NIGEL). When were you born?
- NIGEL. 1957.
- HARRIS. Lady Charles *who* exactly is his father?
- LADY CHARLES. I hardly see that is relevant.

HARRIS. This is a murder investigation, you must answer. Who is his father?

RONNIE. I am, Inspector.

NIGEL. You are? Shit.

LADY CHARLES *nods confirmation.*

HARRIS *rubs his head.*

HARRIS (to RONNIE). You committed adultery with your best friend, whom you claim never to have noticed was a woman.

RONNIE. No.

HARRIS. There is a name for this kind of thing, although at the moment it escapes me.

SLATER. Something in Latin.

HARRIS. Or Greek, I wouldn't be surprised. I'm afraid young Nigel you have gained a father, but lost two mothers.

LADY CHARLES. Inspector you are right off the track, Sir Robert could never have been Nigel's mother. How could he? In 1956 his political career was in full bud. He could never have become pregnant. It would have looked ridiculous for a male junior minister. Even in the Liberal party.

NIGEL. Then who *is* my mother?

KITTY. I am.

NIGEL. Kitty!

KITTY. Yes. You were an accident, Nigel. Conceived in a wild fit of passion one wet weekend during the Suez crisis.

RONNIE. The world trembled on the brink. We were young and crossed it.

HARRIS. A weekend in politics is a long time.

KITTY. So is a weekend in Bognor. Ronnie was a

married man, and I was an ex-midwife. We could not afford a scandal. Lady Charles and Sir Robert kindly offered to adopt you. It seemed the best solution. That way you were always near me.

NIGEL. Mummy?

*They embrace.*

HARRIS *looks across at* HUGO.

HARRIS. Lady Charles, be very careful how you answer. Is Hugo your son?

LADY CHARLES (*pause*). I'm not sure.

HUGO. What?

HARRIS. The upper classes have a reputation for vagueness but this goes too far. You must know.

LADY CHARLES. Alas no.

HARRIS. I feel my own identity is at risk. Nothing is certain any more. Please explain.

LADY CHARLES. On the night of the birth of the twins I was on fire watching duty on the roof of a mental home near Staines. I was, needless to say, still a male and I might add a happy one. My wife was in labour in a Maternity Hospital near Brent Cross. The first child arrived with the Luftwaffe. The second as the bombs began to fall. The hospital suffered a direct hit. In the darkness and confusion Sir Robert lay wounded and exhausted. She needed blood urgently so they rushed her to a local clearing station. The new-born twins were despatched by public transport to a nursing home in Sevenoaks. Moments later they bombed the mental home near Staines. It was a madhouse. I was rescued from the wreckage by a pair of Scottish paranoids, who refused

to take me to hospital lest they be blamed for the bombing.

HARRIS. The swines. And where were you in all of this?

KITTY (*indicates the box*). By Sir Robert's side. I was her midwife. It was I who delivered her twins.

HARRIS. And then?

KITTY. I received a British Empire Medal and a headwound from the same explosive. As I was being carried out I recognised a young man, much in demand in the Ministry of Supply. I begged him to find the babies. He promised me he would.

HARRIS. Who was that man?

RONNIE. It was I, Inspector. My task was not an easy one. I was searching for a pair of new-born twins recently evacuated somewhere in the Home Counties. I eventually traced a likely pair to a nursing home in Sevenoaks. I commandeered a vehicle and drove down there at once. When I arrived it was in flames. A crippled plane, limping home from Dortmund, had crash landed in the neighbouring allotments.

HARRIS. One of ours?

RONNIE. An American.

HARRIS. Typical.

RONNIE. They made up for it.

HARRIS. In what way?

RONNIE. Each child received some chewing gum, a pair of nylons and a picture of Roy Rogers.

HARRIS. What of the twins?

RONNIE. There was chaos. But they had survived. I

waited until every child was claimed. There were three left over.

- HARRIS. Three, twins?
- RONNIE. A girl and two boys. The girl is Annabelle.
- HARRIS. And Hugo?
- RONNIE. Is *one* of the two boys.
- HARRIS. And the other child?
- RONNIE. Was a miner's son from Didsbury.
- BUTLER. Didsbury.
- HARRIS. Did nobody know which child was which?
- RONNIE. How could they tell? I chose the one most likely. Hugo is an informed guess.
- HARRIS. And the other?
- RONNIE. Was sent up for adoption.
- HARRIS. Really this is monstrous, that children of their class should have been handled with so little care.
- RONNIE. It was wartime, an egalitarian spirit was abroad.
- HARRIS. Thank Christ for peace and an end to all that nonsense.
- LADY CHARLES. So you see, Inspector, there is no way I can be sure that Hugo is who he thinks he is.
- KITTY. There *is* one way of proving this. In the delivery room, shortly before the lights went out, I observed the first-born baby had a tiny heart-shaped blemish on his left hand buttock.
- HARRIS. Are you sure?
- KITTY. Quite sure. It's a feature found in all male Charles's.
- HARRIS. Did you never think to check?

- KITTY. I never knew there was some doubt till now. I presume the blemish is still there.
- HARRIS. Hugo, is there a mole on your left buttock?
- HUGO. I have no idea, Inspector. It's not a thing one easily notices. (*Attempting to look at his own buttock.*)
- HARRIS. In the interests of this investigation I must ask to see your backside.
- HUGO. No.
- HARRIS. Come lad, don't be shy.
- HUGO. I demand that Father Clinton be present.
- HARRIS. I can assure you that as far as the Police are concerned anal rape is virtually a thing of the past.

*He produces a magnifying glass. HUGO reluctantly bares his backside upstage. NIGEL comes to have a look. HUGO pushes him away.*

- Quite clear. This buttock is unblemished. There is no mole.
- HUGO. I'm ruined, again!
- ANNABELLE. You said a blemish on the left hand buttock?
- KITTY. A heart-shaped blemish.
- ANNABELLE. Like a mole.
- KITTY. Yes.
- ANNABELLE. Butler.
- BUTLER. Yes, m'lady.
- ANNABELLE. When exactly were you born?
- BUTLER. In the blitz. I outlived my birth certificate.
- ANNABELLE. And where exactly were you raised?
- BUTLER. In Sevenoaks. I was adopted.
- RONNIE. An orphan.

- ANNABELLE. Your suitcase.
- BUTLER. Yes, m'lady.
- ANNABELLE. It has the initials T.D.B. What do they stand for?
- BUTLER. Terence Butler.
- ANNABELLE. And the D?
- BUTLER (*a pause*). Didsbury.
- Consternation.*
- HARRIS. Didsbury?
- BUTLER. They said it was a family name, sir.
- HARRIS. I must ask to see your bottom sir?
- BUTLER. Certainly sir. (BUTLER *complies*.) Excuse me, m'lady.
- HARRIS *emerges from behind him with his magnifying glass.*
- HARRIS. There is a heart shaped mole on this gentleman's left buttock.
- KITTY. Good God.
- HARRIS. This is the missing lad.
- LADY CHARLES. Annabelle, there is only one sure way a lady can obtain such intimate knowledge of a gentleman's backside.
- BUTLER. She was training to be a masseuse, madam. I used to let her practise on my body. The towel must have slipped.
- ANNABELLE. We have been occasional lovers for nearly twenty years. His body is as familiar to me as my own.
- BUTLER. I beg your pardon, madam.
- LADY CHARLES. Butler you have been sleeping with my daughter under my own roof. I could have you shot for this.

- HARRIS. I'm afraid you are rather missing the point. Unless we are the victims of a particularly unsavoury practical joke, Butler is your son.
- HUGO. And heir.
- LADY CHARLES. Good grief.
- KITTY. The strange is truer than fiction.
- NIGEL. Rarely has one witnessed such a bloodless victory for the proletariat.
- HUGO. I've lost a wife, a brother, a sister, parents of various sexes, a bloody great fortune. All I've got left is fifty thousand quidsworth of hover hedger that doesn't work. And they call this a comedy.
- NIGEL. *And you're a miner's son.*
- HUGO. Working-class after all these years.
- SLATER. Congratulations, old son.
- HUGO. Oh. Thank you, very much.
- SLATER. The future belongs to you.
- HUGO. Terrific. I'm probably not even a Catholic any more.
- NIGEL. You can always convert.
- HUGO. Hardly worth the candle.
- NIGEL. Dad.
- RONNIE. Son.
- NIGEL (to KITTY). Mother. (*They embrace.*)
- LADY CHARLES (to BUTLER). Son. (*They embrace.*)
- BUTLER. Daddy!

*An emotional scene. Hand shaking. Nodding, etc. . . .*

- HARRIS. Oy, oy, oy. I hate to be the kipper in the stockpot, but there remains one small unattended matter.

- LADY CHARLES. And what is that, Inspector?
- HARRIS. The recent murder of your spouse.
- RONNIE. Whoever had a motive?
- HARRIS. In this mess who the hell didn't. Compared to you lot Oedipus was a beginner. Butler, I was going to book you for spying on your late employer, but since it appears you are now the heir to this estate I shall refrain. In this country espionage among the upper classes is more easily forgiven.
- BUTLER. Thank you, Inspector.
- HARRIS. But with regard to the murder of your late employer, recently revealed to be your mother, the finger of suspicion falls heavily across your shoulders. Have you anything to say before I charge you with matricide?
- BUTLER. Yes, Inspector.
- HARRIS. Well?
- BUTLER. Turn on the light.
- HARRIS. I beg your pardon.
- BUTLER. Please do as I ask.
- HARRIS. Very well. *(He walks across to the light switch. Turns it on. Nothing happens. There is a pause.)*
- BUTLER. As I suspected.
- HARRIS *(smiles)*. Very clever. My congratulations, Butler. You're a free man.
- LADY CHARLES. But who is the murderer, Inspector?
- HARRIS. The Central Electricity Board. I'm afraid your husband, wife, spouse, has been cut off for non payment.
- RONNIE. Killed by an Act of God.
- HARRIS. An Act of Parliament.

- KITTY. It's like an electrocution in reverse.
- HARRIS. A very unique case. The first Prime Minister to be killed by his own Electricity Board. So once again we have vindicated the British system of justice: trial and error. This case has been worse than an encounter group. I shall resign at once.
- LADY CHARLES. What will you do?
- HARRIS. I have been offered a telly job encouraging kiddies to grass on their elders. Easy hours, good money and a modicum of personal fame. I shall be the envy of the Force.
- HUGO. What will you do, Butler, now you're me?
- BUTLER. I shall exploit your background, sir, and join the Labour Party. Would you care to be *my* butler?
- HUGO. Nothing would give me greater pleasure, so that's what I shall do — nothing.
- KITTY. As a socialist, Butler, will you keep this house?
- BUTLER. Of course.
- LADY CHARLES. I'm very sorry to inform you, Butler, that this house has been sold.
- HUGO. What?
- KITTY. Who to?
- LADY CHARLES. A firm of investors from Bromsgrove. They're going to knock it down and build a cherry orchard.
- BUTLER. But it's a listed building.
- LADY CHARLES. They'll do it at weekends.
- KITTY. How about you, Annabelle?
- ANNABELLE. I shall live with Butler, if he'll have me.
- HARRIS. That's incest.

- ANNABELLE. Amongst our class it's usually called good breeding.
- KITTY. But your children. They could be idiots.
- HUGO. They can go to Public School.
- HARRIS. This is what comes of no sandwiches, free thinking and the breakdown of marriage.
- BUTLER. We must all let bygones be hasbeens  
Inspector. Life qualifies us only for living.  
Just as we get used to it it kills us.  
Remember Sir Robert: a victim of the cuts.  
One minute here, the next curtains.

*Curtain.*

## *Methuen's Modern Plays*

- Jean Anouilh      *Antigone*  
                         *Becket*  
                         *The Lark*
- John Arden        *Serjeant Musgrave's Dance*  
                         *The Workhouse Donkey*  
                         *Armstrong's Last Goodnight*
- John Arden and  
Margaretta D'Arcy      *The Business of Good Government*  
                         *The Royal Pardon*  
                         *The Hero Rises Up*  
                         *The Island of the Mighty*  
                         *Vandaleur's Folly*
- Wolfgang Bauer      *Shakespeare the Sadist*
- Rainer Werner  
Fassbinder              *Bremen Coffee,*  
Peter Handke        *My Foot My Tutor,*  
Frank Xaver Kroetz      *Stallerhof*  
Brendan Behan        *The Quare Fellow*  
                         *The Hostage*  
                         *Richard's Cork Leg*
- Edward Bond        *A-A-America! and Stone*  
                         *Saved*  
                         *Narrow Road to the Deep North*  
                         *The Pope's Wedding*  
                         *Lear*  
                         *The Sea*  
                         *Bingo*  
                         *The Fool and We Come to the River*  
                         *Theatre Poems and Songs*  
                         *The Bundle*  
                         *The Woman*  
                         *The Worlds with The Activists Papers*  
                         *Restoration and The Cat*  
                         *Summer*
- Bertolt Brecht      *Mother Courage and Her Children*  
                         *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*  
                         *The Good Person of Szechwan*  
                         *The Life of Galileo*  
                         *The Threepenny Opera*  
                         *Saint Joan of the Stockyards*  
                         *The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui*  
                         *The Mother*

- Mr Puntila and His Man Matti*  
*The Measures Taken and other*  
*Lehrstücke*  
*The Days of the Commune*  
*The Messingkauf Dialogues*  
*Man Equals Man and The Elephant Calf*  
*The Rise and Fall of the City of*  
*Mahagonny and The Seven Deadly sins*  
*Baal*  
*A Respectable Wedding and other one-*  
*act plays*  
*Drums in the Night*  
*In the Jungle of Cities*  
 Howard Brenton *The Churchill Play*  
*Weapons of Happiness*  
*Epsom Downs*  
*The Romans in Britain*  
*Plays for the Poor Theatre*  
*Magnificence*  
*Revenge*  
*Hitler Dances*
- Howard Brenton and  
 David Hare *Brassneck*  
 Shelagh Delaney *A Taste of Honey*  
*The Lion in Love*
- David Edgar *Destiny*  
*Mary Barnes*
- Michael Frayn *Clouds*  
*Alphabetical Order and Donkey's Years*  
*Make and Break*
- Max Frisch *The Fire Raisers*  
*Andorra*  
*Triptych*
- Simon Gray *Butley*  
*Otherwise Engaged and other plays*  
*Dog Days*  
*The Rear Column and other plays*  
*Close of Play and Pig in a Poke*  
*Stage Struck*  
*Quartermaine's Terms*
- Peter Handke *Offending the Audience and Self-*  
*Accusation*  
*Kaspar*

- Barrie Keeffe *The Ride Across Lake Constance*  
*They Are Dying Out*  
*Gimme Shelter (Gem, Gotcha, Getaway)*  
*Barbarians (Killing Time, Abide With Me, In the City)*  
*A Mad World, My Masters*
- Arthur Kopit *Indians*  
*Wings*
- John McGrath *The Cheviot, the Stag and the Black, Black Oil*
- David Mercer *After Haggerty*  
*The Bankrupt and other plays*  
*Cousin Vladimir and Shooting the Chandelier*  
*Duck Song*  
*The Monster of Karlovy Vary and Then and Now*  
*No Limits To Love*
- Peter Nichols *Passion Play*  
*Poppy*
- Joe Orton *Loot*  
*What the Butler Saw*  
*Funeral Games and The Good and Faithful Servant*  
*Entertaining Mr Sloane*  
*Up Against It*
- Harold Pinter *The Birthday Party*  
*The Room and The Dumb Waiter*  
*The Caretaker*  
*A Slight Ache and other plays*  
*The Collection and The Lover*  
*The Homecoming*  
*Tea Party and other plays*  
*Landscape and Silence*  
*Old Times*  
*No Man's Land*  
*Betrayal*  
*The Hothouse*
- Luigi Pirandello *Henry IV*  
*Six Characters in Search of an Author*
- Stephen Poliakoff *Hitting Town and City Sugar*
- David Rudkin *The Sons of Light*  
*The Triumph of Death*

- Jean-Paul Sartre  
Wole Soyinka
- C.P. Taylor
- Nigel Williams
- Charles Wood  
Theatre Workshop  
Various authors
- Crime Passionnel*  
*Madmen and Specialists*  
*The Jero Plays*  
*Death and the King's Horseman*  
*And a Nightingale Sang . . .*  
*Good*  
*Line 'Em*  
*Class Enemy*  
*Veterans*  
*Oh What a Lovely War!*  
*Best Radio Plays of 1978* (Don Haworth:  
*Episode on a Thursday Evening*;  
Tom Mallin: *Halt! Who Goes There?*;  
Jennifer Phillips: *Daughters of Men*;  
Fay Weldon: *Polaris*; Jill Hyem:  
*Remember Me*; Richard Harris: *Is It*  
*Something I Said?*)  
*Best Radio Plays of 1979* (Shirley Gee:  
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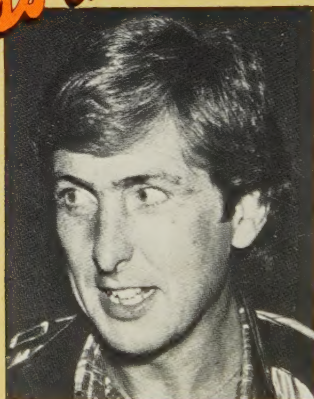






# *Eric Idle*

## *Pass the Butler*



**ERIC IDLE** was born in South Shields in 1943, educated in Wolverhampton and at Pembroke College Cambridge, where he was President of Footlights 1964/5. He has written for and appeared in many TV shows including **Do Not Adjust Your Set**, **Frost Report**, **Monty Python's Flying Circus**, **Rutland Weekend Television**, **The Rutles** and **Saturday Night Live**. He has appeared in three Monty Python films and in addition to the best-selling Python books he has also published **Hello Sailor** and **The Rutland Dirty Weekend Book**. **Pass the Butler** is his first stage play.

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