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# Jeffrey Bernard is Unwell

A play by

**KEITH WATERHOUSE**

based on the life and writings of  
Jeffrey Bernard

Samuel French - London  
New York - Toronto - Hollywood



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Crown of Thorns. For Jeff. © 1987 by Fran Landesman (See page 21)

Elizabeth Smart's verses © 1985 by Elizabeth Smart (See pages 1, 20 and 37)

## JEFFREY BERNARD IS UNWELL

Presented by Michael Redington at the Apollo Theatre,  
London, on 18th October, 1989, with the following cast  
of characters:

**Jeffrey Bernard**

Peter O'Toole

**Poets**  
**Hacks**  
**Wives**  
**Girlfriends**  
**Thespians**  
**Publicans**  
**Sinners**  
**Policemen**  
**Waiters**  
**Friends**  
**Neighbours**  
**Jockeys**  
**Trainers**  
**Bores**  
**Artists**  
**Doctors**  
**Nurses**  
**Customs and Excise Officials**  
**Magistrate**  
**Drunks**  
**Tarts**

played by:  
Timothy Ackroyd  
Sarah Berger  
Annabel Leventon  
Royce Mills

Directed by Ned Sherrin  
Settings by John Gunter  
Costumes by Stephen Brimson-Lewis

The play is set in the *Coach and Horses*, Soho, London

Time—the present, with excursions into the past

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(See also page ii)

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### **PRODUCTION NOTE**

The frequent entrances and exits of the various characters are not usually indicated in the stage directions. The characters may enter and exit from any point except the street door, which remains ostentatiously locked throughout.

For the sake of pace, many of the "one-liners" in the London production were delivered from a serving hatch with a sliding door over the bar. Others were delivered as simple crossover lines as the characters crossed to any one of six exit points.

Plays by Keith Waterhouse and Willis Hall  
published by Samuel French Ltd:

All Things Bright and Beautiful  
Billy Liar  
Celebration  
Children's Day  
Say Who You Are  
Sponge Room *and* Squat Betty  
Who's Who  
Whoops-a-Daisy  
Worzel Gummidge

## ACT I

*The set is the "Coach and Horses" pub in Soho. Getting on towards dawn*

*As the CURTAIN rises, the stage is in darkness*

*The poet, Elizabeth Smart, appears in a spot*

**Smart**

My dear Jeff,  
I can't say enough  
how much I admire  
the way you have  
conducted your entire  
life, and the way you have  
used your marvellous Muse.  
And how right she was to  
choose you. Because  
she's a Rare Bird who would  
have retired or died  
if you hadn't known how  
to amuse  
her, and her you  
That's one non-bogus  
marriage made  
on Parnassus  
and *true*.

*She* knew  
exactly what and who  
she was letting herself  
in for: the real You.  
Drink, betting shops and pubs  
are the sort of thing that rubs  
her up the right way;  
she'll always stay  
and make you more beautiful  
and witty  
every day.

This is a loose love  
Ode, owed  
to one of my friends  
who is in my special  
collection of people  
who make amends

for endless excruciating  
 boring hours  
 so often lived  
 when foolishly pursuing  
 stimulation,  
 and none occurs.  
 Sterne, Benchley, Leacock  
 Carroll, and Nash, and Lear  
 are not more dear  
 to me than bedrock  
 Bernard . . .

*Her voice fades as we lose the spot*

*Pause. Then a groan, a stirring, and the sound of a head hitting a piece of furniture in the darkness*

**Jeff Shit!**

*Another pause as he searches his pockets for matches. Finding a box, he up-tips it in the dark*

Fuck.

*But finally he finds one of the spilled matches on the floor, strikes it, and finds that he is lying under a pub table. As the match goes out we hear him blundering about until he switches on a single wall light. He is in shirtsleeves and has been using his jacket for a pillow. He picks up the jacket, brushes it down, and puts it on. Lighting a cigarette, he crosses unsteadily to the street door and tries to open it. Then he looks up at the pub clock.*

Five in the morning. Mark you, that's pub time. It's only ten to really . . .

*He rattles the door ineffectively then, switching on another light, goes behind the bar and is about to pour himself a large vodka when he pauses*

*(Crying feebly) Help . . . ! (Pouring the vodka) And answer came there none, as they say in the saloon bars. So nobody can say I didn't try to get out . . . Still, there are worse places to find yourself locked in for the night than a pub, I suppose. I know a bloke who woke up at dawn in the back stalls of a cinema in Dover. All he could remember was a poster for *High Noon* in the foyer and the fact that he'd got married at twelve o'clock the previous day in the Marylebone Road Registry Office. He's divorced now. He can't even bring his ex-wife's name to mind but he does remain a very great fan of Gary Cooper . . .*

*He sits on a bar stool, nursing his drink, and broods for a while*

At least the *Coach and Horses* has a roof. One night, when I was working on the *Sporting Life*, I woke up in a field outside Pontefract and I still have no idea how I got there. Come to that, I've no idea how I got here. I must have come in for the one, then gone down to the bog and crashed out till well after closing time, then I suppose I came back up here for the other one and quietly dozed off. It does happen. Another time when I was

on the *Sporting Life* I remember opening my eyes to find myself in bed with Barry Brogan—a great jockey, true, but not my idea of a desirable bed companion. Then, on yet another occasion, I wasn't on the *Sporting Life* any longer.

*The entrances and exits of the various characters who populate Jeff's life are not indicated. They appear as required and then fade back into the shadows*

**Editor** Dear Mr Bernard, It will come as no surprise to you that following your unpardonable exhibition at the point-to-point dinner, which you attended as a representative of the *Sporting Life* on Friday evening, it is no longer possible for you to continue in our employ . . .

**Jeff** Oh, God. I was supposed to be making a speech—something I'd never done before. I was so nervous, I went down to the *Sporting Life* office at crack of dawn to work on it. Smithfield Market was open, so I thought if I had a couple of drinks to get me going I'd probably write rather a good one.

**Editor** . . . This was not, you will agree, the first time your behaviour has compromised us, and to protect myself and all connected with the *Sporting Life* from further embarrassment, I have no alternative but to terminate your engagement forthwith . . .

**Jeff** I drank steadily from six in the morning to seven in the evening, at which time I arrived at the hotel where I was proposing to speak and immediately passed out. Two waiters had to carry me upstairs and put me to bed.

**Editor** . . . I am sorry this has become necessary, but you will agree you were given every chance. I would be obliged if you would return to me your metal Press badge at your earliest convenience. Yours faithfully, Editor, *Sporting Life*.

**Jeff** From the Jeffrey Bernard collection of letters from the editor. Some people are in the habit of writing angry letters to the Press. I get it the other way round. The Press is in the habit of writing angry letters to me.

**Kington** Dear Jeffrey, Are you going to do the fucking article or aren't you? Yours, Miles Kington, Literary Editor, *Punch*.

**Jeff** One day I was asked to write my autobiography and I put a letter in the *Spectator* asking if anyone could tell me what I was doing between nineteen sixty and nineteen seventy-four.

**Molloy** Dear Mr Bernard, I read with interest your letter asking for information as to your behaviour and whereabouts between the years nineteen sixty to nineteen seventy-four. On a certain evening in September nineteen sixty-nine, you rang my mother to inform her that you were going to murder her only son. If you would like further information, I can put you in touch with many people who have enjoyed similar bizarre experiences in your company. Yours sincerely, Michael J. Molloy, Editor, *Daily Mirror*.

*Jeff goes behind the bar and pours himself another stiff vodka*

**Jeff** I could die here. It's a good thing I can hold this stuff tolerably well. I mean, if I were a job or a Hurrah Henry, by the time the pub opens again

I could be one of those cases found by the coroner to have choked on their own vomit. Disgusting phrase. When did you hear of anyone choking on someone else's vomit? I'm putting these on the slate, by the way. I don't believe in freeloading.

*Carrying his drink, he comes round from behind the bar and prowls around the pub*

Dear Sir, May I add a few words to your excellent obituary of Jeffrey Bernard who has regrettably died from choking. I knew him intimately for over fifty years and I feel that many of his more remarkable qualities were left unsung in your otherwise comprehensive review of his messy life. He was born in nineteen thirty-two—probably by mistake—covered from head to foot in eczema. One of the first things he did was to wet the bed and he continued to do so until he was fifteen. A weak, thin-skinned and over-sensitive boy, he had few friends at school. He usually chose to sit at the very back of the classroom so that he could play with himself unobserved. His early obsession with sex prevented him from obtaining any worthwhile academic honours. By the time he left school he had become a chain smoker and compulsive writer of fan letters to Veronica Lake.

In nineteen forty-six he paid his first visit to Soho and from that point he was never to look forward. It was here in the cafés and pubs of Dean Street and Old Compton Street that he was to develop his remarkable sloth, envy and self-pity. It was about this time we began to realize that Jeffrey was not cut out for a career as a naval officer as his mother had hoped.

He drifted from job to job and, between jobs, he spent months at a time accepting small sums of money from homosexuals and friends. He began to develop a greed for unearned money and the growing conviction that he was cut out for better things. After a short, undistinguished spell in the army, from which he was given a medical discharge with his pay-book marked "Mental stability nil", he returned to Soho, got married for the first time out of four, and split up with his wife a few weeks later.

It was during this period that he first became involved with horse-racing and gambling, and the feelings of infantile omnipotence, that this activity prompted were to last him for the rest of his life. These feelings were particularly noticeable in his dealings with women and some even said that his life was a never-ending cliché of a search for his mother. His drinking began to escalate to such an extent that he was unable to hold down the most ordinary of jobs and he was consequently advised to take up journalism. Even in this field he was never offered a staff appointment, and he gradually drifted into writing a series of personal and, at times, embarrassing columns about his own wretched experiences.

After a spell in the alcohol and drug-addiction unit at St Bernard's Hospital (no relation), Hanwell, he developed the fantasy that, starting tomorrow, it would all be different. My last memory of Bernard is of

seeing him staring at his typewriter and fighting yet another battle against his chronic amnesia. He leaves two unwritten books and a circle of detached acquaintances.

*His perambulations have taken him back to the bar where there is a telephone. He is about to pick it up when his extemporized self-obituary reminds him*

Did you know, by the way, there's a bloke in America who sells talking tombstones? Before someone pegs out, as it might be a wife, they record a message on tape, then, when the husband comes to put a jar of dandelions on her grave on Sunday, he presses a button and lo, it's the same old story again.

**Wife** So there you are. I'm amazed you managed to tear yourself away from the pub. Your dinner's in the oven. You're drunk again, aren't you? You make me sick. Honestly, I thought you'd change and settle down. Don't you ever think of the future? Christ, this headache's killing me. And stop staring at that woman in the next grave. You needn't bother to come next Sunday. I'll be all right. Don't worry about me—you never did before so why start now? Always thinking of yourself. Me, me, me. Good-bloody-bye and where do you think you're taking those flowers? You make me sick!

*Jeff picks up the receiver*

**Jeff** I'll try giving old Norman a bell. The landlord—maybe he'll come and bail me out. Old Norman. He likes being called old Norman, that's why I do it, sycophant that I am. He slings down a vodka, snarls "There you are, get your own fucking ice, haven't you got anything smaller?" and we all say good old Norman. Fancies himself as a "bit of a character". Most landlords do, have you noticed? And if they're not bits of characters themselves, they know plenty of people who are . . .

*Forgetting his phone call for the time being, he puts the receiver down*

One time when I was working as a barman, the publican was one of those dreadful men who call you "squire" and think of themselves as "your genial host". On my first day, he came up to me where I was polishing the Smirnoff bottle and said—

**Landlord** You see that bloke going out? Now *he's* a bit of a character.

**Jeff** (*yawning*) Oh, yes? Well, Guvnor, you mustn't keep me from my work.

**Landlord** Yes. Would you believe that man must lose at least six umbrellas a year?

**Jeff** Well, well. (*Resuming his narrative*) I mean, I know the shortage of eccentrics is acute these days, but you'd think a pub landlord of all people could come up with someone slightly more interesting than an umbrella loser. Even I can do better than that. For instance, an antique dealer I know who was once voted Rat of the Week by the old *Sunday Pictorial*, a doctor who's had a cold for five years, and an ex-embassy press attaché who now writes the flagellation column for a seedy magazine, and that's just off the top of my head.

*He picks up the telephone again, is about to dial, then remembers something else*

Dennis Shaw. Does that name mean anything? Now there *was* a character. The face that closed a thousand cinemas. He used to play villains and Gestapo men in those wonderfully-awful British B pictures. Twenty stone and encrusted in warts—imagine a toad wearing a dinner jacket and that was Dennis Shaw, or Den-Den as he called himself. One night that dear, sweet man John Le Mesurier—now there was another character—one night, John Le Mes was walking along Piccadilly when he saw Dennis Shaw being bundled into a Black Maria for drunk and disorderly. John Le Mes gave him one of his affable smiles and said—

**John Le Mes** Hello, Dennis. Working?

**Jeff** He must have been drunker and even more disorderly than usual because the police didn't like taking him in very much, as I found once when I tried to get him arrested for being boring. He'd gatecrashed my table in a restaurant and thoroughly spoiled my dinner by just sitting there being Dennis Shaw, then he got into my cab and wouldn't get out so I made the driver take us to Tottenham Court Road police station. Whereupon, he bounded into the nick, reappearing a moment later with four policemen and booming—

**Shaw** Gentlemen, I'd like you to meet Jeffrey Bernard, the biggest idiot in Soho.

**Jeff** He then sat down on the pavement and refused to budge. But all the desk sergeant said was—

**Sergeant** We'd rather not arrest Mr Shaw, sir, if you don't mind. He's a bit difficult in the cells, you see.

**Jeff** One night I was out on the piss with Den-Den—a rather difficult enterprise, considering he was barred from every pub within a six-mile radius of Charing Cross—and we finished up in the *Stork Club* where we went through the card. Dinner, the full works, a bottle of champagne for me and a bottle of Gordon's gin for Den-Den. Now, I'd been paying all evening and in any case the bugger owed me for enough dinners to feed the five thousand, so when the bill came I refrained from picking it up. So did Den-Den. After a while the waiters started stacking chairs on the tables and after another while the cleaners arrived and started vacuuming the floor, but still we sat there finishing Den-Den's gin with the bill untouched and unread on the table. Finally, the head waiter came over and even in the cold, grey light of dawn you could see his face turn white as he saw who it was.

*By now Jeff and Shaw are sitting at a table*

**Waiter** Good-morning, Mr Shaw.

**Shaw** So you remember me.

**Waiter** I do indeed, Mr Shaw.

**Shaw** Tell this gentleman where we last met.

**Waiter** At the *Pigalle*, Mr Shaw, when I was head waiter there.

**Shaw** Under what circumstances did we become acquainted?

**Waiter** You refused to pay your bill, Mr Shaw.

**Shaw** Tell this gentleman what your response was to that.

**Waiter** I called the police, Mr Shaw.

**Shaw** (*thumping the table*) Call the bastards again!

**Jeff** (*rising*) He was a collector's item, was Den-Den. And never lost an umbrella in his life. He found quite a few, though.

*He crosses to the telephone again. Lighting a cigarette, he finally dials*

(*After a while*) He's got to be home, so he must be out for the count. I wonder if I put a call through the engineers whether they could somehow make it ring louder . . .

*Cradling the phone on his shoulder, he idly picks up a discarded copy of "The Times" from a bar stool*

(*After reading for a moment*) I think this has been left here for my benefit. One of those crappy features on the subject of alcoholism . . .

*Putting the paper down again, he jiggles the telephone receiver impatiently against his ear*

Whatever the opposite of insomnia is, Norman has got it. An enviable talent. The only time I get a good sleep is face down in the blueberry pie over lunch at the *Groucho Club* . . .

*Giving up on his phone call he replaces the receiver and picks up "The Times" again*

"Have you a drinking problem?"—the usual list of odd questions, and if you answer yes, it shows there's "serious cause for alarm". The trouble is, the more I look at these questions the less alarmed I feel. In fact, I've just this minute come to the conclusion that I don't drink enough . . .

*He moves behind the bar where he pours himself another stiff one*

I wish someone'd pay *me* to write a quiz on boozing—I'd be laughing all the way to the *Groucho* . . . I wonder if they'd pay me to supply the answers?

*"The Times" Questioner is a very starchy, disapproving-looking lady*

**Questioner** Do you have time off from work because of drinking, or has your work performance suffered because of alcohol?

**Jeff** The situation is very much the reverse. Work frequently interferes with my drinking. Besides, drinking *is* my work. I was once paid five hundred pounds for an article on this very subject.

**Questioner** Do your family—

**Jeff** Just a minute, I haven't finished. I'll have you know I once fired my agent for being pissed all the time. I told her, "One of us has to be sober, and it isn't going to be me."

**Questioner** Have there been family quarrels because of your drinking?

**Jeff** I believe there was a tremendous row in nineteen thirty-four as to whether I should be fed Nestlé's or Cow and Gate.

**Questioner** And are you becoming difficult, irritable and testy after drinking?

**Jeff** You must be joking. I'm impossible. After closing time last Tuesday I hit a Greek greengrocer in Goodge Street who asked me not to feel his cucumbers.

**Questioner** Do you find your memory is getting worse?

**Jeff** Could you repeat the question?

**Questioner** Have you ever had loss of memory after a heavy drinking session?

**Jeff** Quite honestly I can't remember ever having had a heavy drinking session.

**Questioner** Do you order yourself a double when the rest of your party are drinking singles, or do you order yourself a quick extra drink while collecting an order from the bar?

**Jeff** None of my "party" drinks singles. They do have some style, you know. As to ordering a quick drink, I can tell you there's no such thing in this fucking place. It takes longer to get a drink in here than it takes to get a refund out of the Inland Revenue.

**Questioner** Has your sexual drive and ability suffered because of your drinking?

**Jeff** Mind your own fucking business.

**Questioner** And finally, do you—?

**Jeff** Sorry—no more questions. It'll soon be opening time in Billingsgate.

**Questioner** You make me sick!

*Jeff speaks confidentially as the Questioner departs*

**Jeff** In fact, I didn't want to say this in front of *The Times*, but owing to some tablets I've been taking in conjunction with a small port, to which I am not accustomed—that's what drunk chartered accountants always claim when hauled up at Bow Street—I find myself on the verge of suffering from impotence, or incompetence as some women call it. Though suffering's the wrong word—impotence has its drawbacks: like you stand no chance of being held down and raped by three nubile girls, which is what once happened to a bloke on Malibu Beach and the next night you couldn't see the sea for the entire male population of Southern California. But it's not in the least uncommon, you know. There are fifty-five thousand impotent men in the Avon and Somerset area alone—that's what I read in the *Daily Telegraph*. I wonder how they know. Were they shopped to the medical authorities by fifty-five thousand disgruntled women? And why is the West Country so heavily afflicted? Could it be the cider? No—apparently the causes of impotence are given as stemming from diabetes, alcohol, pelvic injuries, drugs and psychological problems. (*Lighting a cigarette*) If smoking sixty of these things a day counts as a drug then I'm holding a full house for the first time since I played poker in the army. But I personally welcome impotence and wish it would hurry up and come, so to speak. I raise my glass to it, though not much else. What a release—for the first time since the age of fourteen, when I formed an ambition to be a sex object instead of a good seam bowler, I will no longer

be led about by my prick. When I ponder the fact that my life lies in ruins solely because I have always followed the direction in which my various erections were pointing, I wish to God I'd been born a girl. Which reminds me. In the steam bath one day I found Solly, a seventy-year-old taxi driver, staring at his private member and moaning—

**Solly** We were born together. We grew up together. We went courting together. We got married together. We had children together. Why, oh why, oh why did you have to die before me?

**Jeff** Another of the delights of impotence is that I should set fire to the bed a bit less often. You see, I am somewhat in the habit of being asked for cigarettes by ladies while lying in my bed. Not after the event—that's always been the man's prerogative—but before it. Usually what's happened is that I've jumped the gun by getting into bed in the belief I was being followed. But what these ladies do is light up a cigarette and then give you a hundred specious reasons for having to go home.

**1st Girl** My husband may be phoning from Paris.

**2nd Girl** My cat can't bear to be left alone.

**3rd Girl** But we've only known each other for a day . . .

**4th Girl** Half a day . . .

**5th Girl** Half an hour . . .

**6th Girl** The baby-sitter will go mad if I'm late.

**7th Girl** But people simply don't *do* it in broad daylight, do they?

**Jeff** One more advantage, by the way. Not having to wrestle with one-liners like those any more means not having to put up with one-liners like these any more, after they've moved in.

**1st Girl** And where do you think you're going?

**2nd Girl** You've been drinking.

**3rd Girl** Can we go home now, please?

**4th Girl** Your dinner's in the oven.

**5th Girl** You make me sick.

**Jeff** But to get back to the bedside manner . . .

**8th Girl** I like you, Jeff, I like you a lot. But not in that way.

**Jeff** So. I resign myself to the situation, take a Valium, fall asleep with the last fag in my mouth and wake up to find the bedspread in flames. I started keeping a fire extinguisher by my bed but I never really knew whether to aim it at the mattress, the lady—if she was still there—or my private parts.

*Once more he crosses to the telephone, picks it up and dials*

*(After listening for a while)* Maybe he's taken a Valium too. Perhaps I should call the fire brigade . . . Come on, Norman, some of us have got homes to go to, as you landlords so often remind us . . . *(Recollecting with a frown)* Though now that I come to think about it, some of us haven't.

*He replaces the telephone and, during the following, brings out a suitcase and a couple of carrier bags, stuffed with possessions, from behind the bar where they have been stored*

Women again. Why haven't they got labels on their heads saying "Danger, Government health warning: women can seriously damage your brains, genitals, current account, confidence, razor blades and good standing among your friends"? Sometimes they walk out on you, sometimes they throw you out, all depending on whose bed you were in when you set it on fire. This was a throwing-out job. At least I was allowed access to my worldly goods. Love locked out is one thing, but when it's love plus your books and Mozart tapes, all your spare clothes and shoes, plus your framed photograph of yourself with Lester Piggott, it can be well nigh unbearable while it lasts.

*Rummaging among his belongings he locates the Lester Piggott picture and puts it on a table*

No-one would ever call Lester a laugh a minute but don't let anybody tell you he has no sense of humour. He even sends up his own legendary meanness. There's a story about the time years and years ago when he'd ridden another winner and the stable lad was kept waiting for the customary tip.

**Lad** Excuse me, Lester, but do you think you could drop me a pound for that winner I did you?

**Piggott** (*cocking a hand to his ear*) What?

**Lad** That winner I did you. You were going to drop me a pound.

**Piggott** Can't hear you. That's my bad ear.

**Lad** (*close up to the other ear*) What about a couple of quid for that winner I did for you?

**Piggott** Still can't hear. Try the one pound ear again.

*Rummaging again, after a reflective moment, Jeff unearths a bundle of letters and riffles through them*

**Jeff** Some letters tied with barbed wire. I don't know why I bother keeping them. Or why they bother writing them. They're all identical.

**Mistress** Dear Jeffrey, It was madness from the start. You must have known as well as I did that it could never work. Why on earth did we ever start it? Your moods crushed me. I put out a hand, but you never took it. Well, you did take. My God, that's all you ever did—take, take, take. You say you like women, but I really think you hate them. Not once did you ever listen to me when I wanted to talk about me. You were just waiting for me to stop talking and get my clothes off. Then, in that Chinese restaurant in Gerrard Street, you finally did it. You insulted everything I hold sacred. The family unit. Carshalton Beeches. *Cosmopolitan*, and money. No, I'm sorry, it's all over. I hope you find true happiness, as I have.

**Jeff** No doubt with a film-maker aged about thirty who drives a Ferrari coupé with one bronze arm leaning nonchalantly over the offside door, and who lives in a riverside penthouse with a Burmese cat, several gold medallions, a bottle of after shave, an extremely expensive hi-fi set and no self-doubt whatsoever.

**Mistress** PS. You make me sick.

**Jeff** She could have been the fifth Mrs Bernard if I'd played my cards wrong. Trouble was, she had the most extraordinary ideas about what's called "settling down". This is a very curious phrase used only by women. I've seen feathered birds settling down and I've seen dust settling down and I've seen bookmakers settling *up* even, but what do all these women mean by settling down? I suspect they mean that life is no laughing matter. You could have fooled me. But what puzzles me is what on earth did my four wives think they were getting when they married me? I mean, you can see a train when it's coming. But they thought I'd change and settle down.

*He unearths framed photographs of himself with various ladies and displays them on one of the pub tables*

As a matter of fact, I think I *have* settled down insofar as I'm pretty set in my ways. I have come to terms with the fact that my dinner is in the oven and always will be. I have also learned to accept the fact that——

**Bore** You only get out of life what you put into it.

**Jeff** The sagacious prick who gave me that piece of information would have had his teeth knocked out if I hadn't been in an alcoholic and diabetic coma at the time, but he meant well. And bless my soul, don't the ladies mean well when they ask you to change and settle down? Never trust people who mean well. Hitler probably meant well and Cromwell certainly hoped we'd change and settle down.

Anyway, I was tremendously flattered when this girl said to me——

**Mistress** When I first saw you in the pub I thought to myself, what's this handsome man doing surrounded by rogues?

**Jeff** Apart from her suspect eyesight, she's answered her own question, if you see what I mean. Surrounded by rogues. Say no more. But for her, I'd try to change and settle down. "Darling, I've asked a few rogues to Sunday lunch. No Knickers Joyce says she'll weed the border, Maltese Laurie's going to mow the lawn and Norman says he'll carve the joint. We could play bridge in the evening and perhaps we might splash out on a bottle of sherry."

**Mistress** "Oh, Jeffrey, you're an absolute poppet. I'm so glad you've changed and settled down. You don't miss Soho and all those awful people, do you, darling?"

**Jeff** "Of course not, my angel. Take your knickers off. Oops, sorry. Forgot. We're married and settled down in Chislehurst."

*Jeff finds in his belongings a photograph of the Mistress. Smoking pensively, he sets it on a table of its own and looks at it reflectively*

But if I never change, neither do they. When they leave you, for instance. I wonder who writes their scripts?

**Mistress** It's over. You've snapped at me for the last time. As far as I'm concerned, anything there was is finished.

**Jeff** (*still narrating*) I can't say I was surprised but I still couldn't get on to her wavelength. You might know that strange thought process. It's got

nothing to do with arrogance or conceit—simply a dull amazement at the fact that someone can't see how truly wonderful you are. I mean, there you are, standing right in front of them, the never-to-be-repeated offer of a lifetime, in your prime and only a short climb away from your peak, and the fools can't see it. It never fails to amaze me.

**Mistress** I don't mind going to the cinema with you, or going dutch for a meal—but so far as anything else is concerned, it's over.

**Jeff** She waited for me to say something. I stood there thinking of about six different things at once.

**Mistress** Aren't you going to say anything?

**Jeff** I couldn't. I was miles away. That business about going dutch had really got me. I had a vision of us drifting in and out of cinemas and restaurants, and me—or worse still, her—always saying to the management—

**Mistress** Do you mind if we have separate bills? You see, I don't sleep with him any more.

**Jeff** Also, I was thinking how very hard she was going to be to replace. She still stood staring at me, her brown eyes flecked with malice and realistic thinking.

**Mistress** Well?

**Jeff** I still couldn't think of anything to say memorable enough to haunt her for the rest of her days, so I put on my mask of tragedy and went through the usual motions of offering up the late, late prayer. It's one all hopeless punters mutter in betting shops and it goes—

**Punter** Please, God, let's start again. I know I've been a fool, but if this horse wins the last race I promise I'll never have another bet again. Ever.

**Jeff** But it doesn't work with women. Come to that, it doesn't work with horses either.

**Mistress** Very well . . .

**Jeff** Suddenly I saw that picture from my schooldays of Napoleon on the deck of the *Bellerophon* saying farewell to Europe—only it wasn't Napoleon, it was me. Actually, more post Charing Cross than post Waterloo so far as I was concerned. I was upset, yes—no-one likes their sweets taken away—but I wasn't heartbroken.

**Mistress** So it's goodbye, then.

**Jeff** Then she shrugged her mouth and left. I found myself thinking: it's just like they say it is in novels. Women really do turn on their heels when they go. I watched her down the stairs and heard the front door close and then I heard her nasty, tinny little Renault starting up below. I waited for her to crash the gears but she didn't. It's bloody fantastic, I thought while I made some tea. After a scene like that she remains so icy cold that for once she doesn't make a mess of the gears. I mean, I ask you—would a man remain so utterly cool after closing a rhapsodical chapter in his life? Not him—he'd drive straight into a wall blinded by tears at a moderately safe fifteen miles an hour and she'd come running down the stairs and out into the street deliciously blaming herself.

*The sound of screeching brakes. Jeff smiles malevolently*

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