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A BUNCH OF AMATEURS

A Play

by Ian Hislop and Nick Newman

|| SAMUEL FRENCH ||

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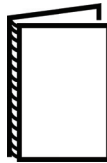


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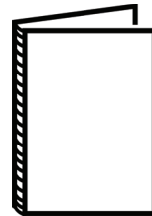
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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

IAN HISLOP

Ian Hislop is a writer and broadcaster and has been editor of *Private Eye* since 1986. He has been a columnist for *The Listener* and *The Sunday Telegraph*, and TV critic for *The Spectator*. As a scriptwriter with Nick Newman, his work includes five years on *Spitting Image*, *Harry Enfield and Chums*, and *My Dad's the Prime Minister*, as well as the film and play *A Bunch of Amateurs*. He has written and presented many documentaries for TV and radio including: Radio 4's *The Real Patron Saints*, *A Brief History of Tax*, *Are We Being As Offensive As We Might Be*, *Lord Kitchener's Image*, *The Six Faces of Henry VIII* and *I've Never Seen Star Wars*. He also presented TV's *Great Railway Journeys – East to West*, *Scouting for Boys, Not Forgotten*, *Ian Hislop Goes Off The Rails*, *Ian Hislop's Changing of the Bard*, *Age of the Do-Gooders*, *When Bankers Were Good*, *Stiff Upper Lip: An Emotional History of Britain*, *Ian Hislop's Olden Days* and *Victorian Benefits: Workers and Shirkers*. He has appeared frequently on *Question Time* and since 1990 has been team captain on BBC's *Have I Got News For You* – which has won many awards including the BAFTA for Best Comedy 2016. Most recently he and Nick Newman wrote the critically acclaimed 2016 Radio 4 comedy drama *Trial By Laughter*. In 2016 their play *The Wipers Times* was premiered and had a successful run at The Watermill Theatre, before a sell-out tour and transfer to the West End.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

NICK NEWMAN

Nick Newman is an award-winning cartoonist and writer. He has worked for *Private Eye* since 1981 and has been pocket cartoonist for *The Sunday Times* since 1989. His cartoons have appeared in many other publications including *The Guardian*, *Punch* and *The Spectator*. He was The Cartoon Art Trust's Pocket/Gag Cartoonist of the Year in 1997, 1998, 2005 and 2016. He won the Sports Journalists' Association's Cartoonist of the Year award in 2005, 2007 and 2009. In 2013 he edited the humour bestseller *Private Eye: A Cartoon History*. His scriptwriting career with Ian Hislop began with *Spitting Image*, and continued with Dawn French's *Murder Most Horrid* and *The Harry Enfield Show* – with the creation of Tim Nice-But-Dim. They also wrote the BBC1 film *Gobble* and the sitcom *My Dad's the Prime Minister*. In 2008 their film *A Bunch of Amateurs* starring Burt Reynolds was chosen for the Royal Film Performance, before being adapted for the stage at the Watermill Theatre. In 2014 their film *The Wipers Times* won the Broadcast Press Guild Award for best single drama, and was nominated for a BAFTA, before its stage adaptation and sell-out tour. Radio credits include many series of *Dave Podmore* for Radio 4 with Christopher Douglas and Andrew Nickolds, along with *Mastering the Universe*, starring Dawn French. With Ian Hislop, he also wrote Radio 4's *Gush*, *Greed All About It*, *What Went Wrong With the Olympics?* *The News at Bedtime* and *Trial by Laughter*.

AUTHOR'S NOTE

Amateurs and professionals

A Bunch of Amateurs is a love-letter to amateur dramatics. It's a world with which both Ian Hislop and I are very familiar – from disastrous school productions to hilarious village hall Victorian melodramas. We also owe our writing partnership to the amateur stage – as a result of a truly terrible school production of *The Peterloo Massacre* Ian and I began performing revues and writing sketches. As we ourselves turned from amateurs to so-called professionals, we never forgot the excitement, terrors, passion and sheer fun of am-drams – along with the rivalries, bitchiness and pratfalls. If you want to see pomposity pricked – go and see an amateur production, in which the high and mighty have to play the lowliest parts, and career success gives way to acting ability. It is, like having children, a great leveller.

The story of the play *A Bunch of Amateurs* began in 2004, when we were approached by our old friend David Parfitt (a shy Oscar-winning producer) to look at a film script he had in development, which had stalled. Based on an original story by John Ross and Jonathan Gershfield, *Amateurs* was a fish-out-of-water tale set against the backdrop of an amateur dramatic production of *King Lear*, in which a failing Hollywood star arrives to create mayhem. We had, till then, enjoyed an amazingly lucky and varied career writing for some of the funniest people ever to appear on television. This was a departure – a film – and, moreover, a film in which a theatre had already expressed an interest. From the outset, the Watermill Theatre near Newbury had been keen on the idea of a play – but that was to come many years and many, many rewrites later.

Before then, we had the task of turning a terrific idea into a sellable cinematic script – and while we were comfortable working for radio and television, we had never actually written a film for general release. We were the amateurs. We had begun as sketch-writers. In the early 1980s we began collaborating on the satirical puppet show *Spitting Image*. Ian was fresh out of

university and working at *Private Eye* magazine whilst teaching at a sixth form crammer. I had been working as a business journalist, writing extremely boring, chin-stroking articles about the future of the aerospace industry for *Management Today*. In my spare time, I drew cartoons – contributing first to *Yachting Monthly*, then *Private Eye* and *Punch*. When Ian got a call from *Spitting Image* producer John Lloyd, he suggested I come along to look at the pilot show. It was brilliant. We had a sketch in the very first episode (the Reverend Ian Paisley having an argument with God) but unlike the pilot show, the first series was not at all brilliant, and was slaughtered by the critics. However, by series three it was getting audiences of fifteen million (and critics were saying it wasn't as sharp as the brilliant first series!).

Five years later we were *Spitting Image's* chief writers, commissioned to write twenty-five minutes of material a week. We reached the zenith of our career in rubber with the 1987 election show (broadcast live just as the polls had closed), with a parody of *Tomorrow Belongs to Me* from *Cabaret*, performed by Maggie Thatcher and the Tory cabinet. The song, recorded weeks before the election, happily proved to be right on the night; so we despaired and rejoiced at the election result in equal measure. We had also co-written specials for David Frost and NBC (a horrified US executive said, "Are you suggesting that President Reagan is an ASSHOLE?") – as well as UK one-offs: *The Sound of Maggie* celebrated Thatcher's tenth anniversary in power, and marked our first foray into the theatre. I dimly remember Maggie as Lady Bracknell exclaiming to Neil Kinnock, "A windbag?!"

But by then we were utterly burned out as topical sketch writers and running on empty. Ian was now editor of *Private Eye*, and beginning his career as a TV presenter and panel show contestant. I had packed in my job as a business journalist and was about to begin a career as pocket cartoonist at *The Sunday Times*. There was no obvious reason why either of us should carry on working together – except that we enjoyed it. So carry on we did. We wrote a TV play, *Briefcase Encounter*, for Maureen Lipman and the late Simon Cadell; a Radio 4 series, *Gush*, starring Martin Jarvis, Caroline Quentin and Felicity

Montague; and we were asked to write sketches for Harry Enfield's new eponymous TV show *Harry Enfield's Television Programme*. We came up with a character based on old school chums. He was called Tim Nice-But-Dim.

We were always lucky that *Private Eye's* bi-weekly production cycle meant that every other week is an "off" week in which to write. So we were able to write for all series of Dawn French's *Murder Most Horrid* and had the joy of seeing our words performed by some of the best comic actors in the business, including Timothy Spall, Hugh Bonneville, Philip Jackson and, of course, Dawn herself. The episode starring the future Lord Grantham was directed by the infant Edgar Wright, who went on to film such comic masterpieces as *Shaun of the Dead*.

Lest you should think that it's a relentless joyride, I would point to the skip-loads of rejected scripts we have produced, the reams of unproduced treatments and sheds-full of receipts for ultimately futile "ideas" sessions in Clapham wine bars. Along the way there have been disastrous pilot shows, empty promises by producers and dashed hopes aplenty.

But then once in the bluest of moons we have written something of which we have been truly proud – such as *My Dad's the Prime Minister* for BBC1, with Robert Bathurst, Carla Mendonça and Joe Prospero; or Radio 4's *The News at Bedtime*, starring Peter Capaldi and Jack Dee; and, more recently, our BBC2 BAFTA-nominated World War One comedy drama *The Wipers Times*, with Ben Chaplin, Julian Rhind-Tutt and Michael Palin (also subsequently turned into a stage play, which premiered at the Watermill Theatre in 2016).

In the midst of this scriptorial rollercoaster ride of success and failure came the call from David Parfitt to have a look at the film script of *A Bunch of Amateurs*. We suggested some changes – with which David happily agreed, and suddenly we were plunged into writing a screenplay. Three years and countless rewrites later we were on the red carpet in Leicester Square, enjoying the unexpected honour of being presented to the Queen. Starring Burt Reynolds, Samantha Bond,

Sir Derek Jacobi and Imelda Staunton, *A Bunch of Amateurs* was chosen as 2008's Royal Film Performance. Her Majesty apparently enjoyed it so much that she requested a screening at Sandringham that Christmas.

The experience of making the film was to have a direct impact on the writing of the subsequent play. Whereas the film was written purely from the imagination, the play was based far more on our experience of working with a *bona fide* Hollywood star. Like our hero the former Hollywood legend Jefferson Steel, Burt Reynolds was looking to reboot his career. Like Steel, Reynolds was surrounded by actors more versed in Shakespeare than he. Like Jefferson, Burt had a problem remembering some of his lines. The words "I can do it with a look" saw a page of dialogue disappear on screen. So when the Watermill finally commissioned us to write *Amateurs* for the stage, we knew we could make it much richer and more realistic.

Writing for the theatre was yet another new experience, and meant tearing up the screenplay to produce a new script to reflect the story's theatricality: a smaller cast, but more Shakespeare, more am-drams and more jokes about Hollywood stardom – now that we'd actually worked with a "movie legend" in the tautly-honed flesh. That was a truly bizarre experience, which we've tried to capture in the play. A strange case of art imitating life imitating art. The Watermill production also featured a unique combination of professionals and amateurs – members of the community theatre appearing in key scenes to bolster the action. In reality, as in the play, the worlds of the amateurs and professionals collided.

As a piece about the redemptive power of theatre, *Amateurs* is more appropriate on the stage than on the screen. As our hero, the fading Hollywood legend Jefferson Steel would say, misquoting King Lear, "The play's the thing". And nowhere is the play more the thing, than when being performed by a bunch of amateurs.

Nick Newman

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Produced by The Watermill Theatre on Thursday 22 May
2014 in association with Trademark Films.
With the following cast (in order of appearance):

Jackie Morrison **Dorothy Nettle**
Michael Hadley **Nigel Dewbury**
Sarah Moyle **Mary Plunkett**
Damian Myerscough **Denis Dobbins**
Mitchell Mullen **Jefferson Steel**
Emily Bowker **Lauren Bell**
Eleanor Brown **Jessica Steel**

Director **Caroline Leslie**
Designer **Tom Rogers**
Composer **Paul Herbert**
Assistant Director **Neil Bull**
Lighting Designer **Tim Lutkin**

CHARACTERS

Jefferson Steel – a fading Hollywood star who is arrogant, insecure, brash, gauche, demanding, vulnerable and ultimately aware of his own absurdity.

Dorothy Nettle – director of the Stratford Players and the moving force behind keeping the theatre alive. Her sweet and accommodating manner conceals her inner steel.

Jessica Steel – Jefferson's teenage daughter, who has been neglected by her Hollywood star father and now wants to make him pay for it.

Nigel Dewbury – solicitor and leading light of the Stratford Players. Pompous, stuck-up and self-regarding, he believes he is the star of the show, and should play all the leading roles. He also fancies his romantic chances with Dorothy.

Mary Plunkett – owner of the Rectory bed and breakfast. Jolly, generous and an unashamedly adoring Jefferson Steel fan – although somewhat confused about which roles he played in his films, and how keen he is on her.

Denis Dobbins – handyman and village Mr Fixit. Avuncular though slightly dull, Denis is star-struck by Jefferson and fancies heading up his entourage of one.

Lauren Bell – thirty-something marketing executive former physiotherapist and the sponsor's wife. Passionate about the arts and smarter than her husband allows her to be, she's treated as a bimbo because of her looks.

Journalists – we only hear them offstage.

The action takes place mainly in the barn which the Stratford Players use for rehearsals and performances of their amateur productions. The barn has a door and a window. Throughout the play the barn will be transformed gradually into a stage set for King Lear. There are some scenes in the local bed and breakfast. Scene changes are accompanied changes of lighting and musical accompaniment of the Fool's Song delivered in various permutations.

ACT ONE

Scene One

DOROTHY, MARY and NIGEL at a trestle table on the stage of the Barn Theatre. **DOROTHY NETTLE** is an attractive, middle-class English woman in her late thirties who takes little care over her appearance. She is friendly, good natured but nobody's fool. **DOROTHY** is on her feet appearing to address a crucial public meeting.

DOROTHY Thank you all so much for coming. You are the most important people in any theatre. Without you there is no play. Without you there is no drama. Without you there is only silence. You may think you are sitting in an old barn with uncomfortable seats and inadequate heating. But you are not. You are sitting in the court at Elsinore, you are in the forest of Arden. You are on the steps of the senate in Rome. This humble theatre is a portal, a door to a world of imagination that can transport us from our humdrum existence and allow us to take part in the greatest stories ever told. And this door is about to be closed. The council has withdrawn its grant and unless we can raise fifty thousand pounds it is going to sell the building to be turned into executive homes. I know executives need homes but they also need dreams. Which is why I implore you, I beg you to take this last chance to save our theatre. If not, the community will not just lose its theatre. It will lose its soul.

MARY and NIGEL applaud.

NIGEL Very eloquent Dorothy. I couldn't have put it better myself – well I could probably, the emotion was perhaps a touch overwrought at the end...

MARY Oh do shut up Nigel. I thought it was bloody marvellous
– honest Dot I’m welling up here.

DOROTHY But will it work?

MARY Only one way to find out.

NIGEL Let’s let the public in. That is the point of a public
meeting after all. Denis if you would be so kind as to open
the doors.

We hear a VOICE from the back.

DENIS I have opened the doors.

DENIS walks down to the front.

I’m afraid no one’s come.

DOROTHY What? No one?

DENIS Well it’s a cold night and you’re up against Strictly...

Pause as the bad news sinks in.

DOROTHY So that’s it then. There is to be no last appeal.

MARY Maybe people felt the last “Last appeal” was one last
appeal too many?

DOROTHY They’ve given up on us.

NIGEL And so the final curtain descends...la commedia e finita...

DENIS Don’t be so dramatic, Nigel.

NIGEL I thought that was the whole point?

MARY Maybe we should give it ten minutes.

DOROTHY I have given it ten years, Mary. Not to mention a
second mortgage.

NIGEL If you need a shoulder to cry on.

*NIGEL places a consoling arm around DOROTHY’s
shoulders which she deftly removes.*

DOROTHY Thanks Nigel, but perhaps what I really need is to face the truth. Who am I kidding? Maybe no one wants to see us prancing about in fancy dress spouting words written hundreds of years ago.

DENIS Shall we all go home then? We could catch the end of Strictly...

MARY If we had a star people would come.

NIGEL Well actually I was described as the star of our Toad of Toad Hall...

MARY A real star Nigel. Someone who has been on telly or in films.

DOROTHY Mary might have a point.

NIGEL Is there no escaping celebrity culture?

MARY And if we got a star we could get publicity.

DOROTHY And if we got publicity we could get sponsorship.

DENIS That's sorted then.

MARY So who are we going to get?

NIGEL How about...nobody in their right mind?

Scene Two

We are at a press conference at Heathrow Airport featuring JEFFERSON STEEL. JEFFERSON is an ageing Hollywood star, good looking, charming, arrogant and insecure. He is good at being a celebrity and enjoys the showbiz spotlight. During the conference flash bulbs pop and the JOURNALISTS shout his name to try and get his attention.

JEFFERSON It's great to be back. I love this place.

FIRST JOURNALIST (*o.s.*) What, Heathrow?

JEFFERSON And your crazy English sense of humour! You guys slay me.

SECOND JOURNALIST (*o.s.*) Mr. Steel, Mr. Steel – this is a pretty big departure for your career isn't it?

JEFFERSON Not really. I'm an actor. Acting's what I do. Theatre has always been my first love. And deep down I've always wanted to repay my debt to the muse.

FIRST JOURNALIST (*o.s.*) Ever since they cancelled your last movie?

JEFFERSON (*laughs without amusement*) No...the Ultimate Finality franchise had reached the end of its natural life and I had been looking for fresh challenges.

SECOND JOURNALIST (*o.s.*) What made you say "yes" to Shakespeare?

JEFFERSON I get sent hundreds of scripts every week. This one stood out.

THIRD JOURNALIST (*o.s.*) Why?

JEFFERSON The writing. Showed real talent.

FIRST JOURNALIST (*o.s.*) But can an American action hero really *be* King Lear?

JEFFERSON To be, or not to be. That is the question.

JEFFERSON is pleased with himself despite getting the wrong play.

Besides, my agent tells me I get all the good lines and I'm in every scene.

FIRST JOURNALIST (o.s.) Yeah. But isn't it going to be a bit of a comedown for a star like yourself performing in such a small theatre?

JEFFERSON If there's only one person out there, then I'll play to them. And I follow in illustrious theatrical footsteps. Many fellow Hollywood stars have performed in England. Nicole, Dustin, Gwyneth, Spacey. But none before have performed Shakespeare in... Stratford. This marks the pinnacle of my career. Jefferson Steel is at the top of his game.

SECOND JOURNALIST (o.s.) But you'll be acting with amateurs.

JEFFERSON You guys are too hard on yourselves. Some British actors aren't so bad.

THIRD JOURNALIST (o.s.) So are you really going to save the theatre?

JEFFERSON gives them a big Hollywood smile.

JEFFERSON It's a tall order, but as Jack Finality says to the president at the end of Ultimate Finality Four – I'll give it my best shot.

STEEL mimes shooting a gun and blowing away the smoke. Press conference footage ends. Darkness.

Scene Three

Suddenly the door opens, DOROTHY stands at the door, laden with luggage.

DOROTHY Ladies and gentlemen I give you Mr. Jefferson Steel!

JEFFERSON enters and the cast of four all stand up and applaud. JEFFERSON takes stock of the scene and goes into phoney actor mode.

JEFFERSON Thank you guys. You are too kind.

More applause.

DOROTHY May I say on behalf of us all that it is a privilege and an honour to share a stage with you. You were our first choice and the very top of our wish list.

More applause.

JEFFERSON Thank you. There is nothing more humbling for an actor than to receive the approbation of his peers.

DOROTHY So first, allow me to present our valiant stage management team, who will also be taking some of the smaller roles.

TEAM (*shy, nervous*) Hello!

DOROTHY And may I introduce you to your fellow players? Denis Dobbins who is taking the role of the Earl of Gloucester.

DENIS is an overweight, middle-aged man wearing overalls.

DENIS Wotcha.

He does a matey thumbs up. DOROTHY continues the introductions.

DOROTHY Mary Plunkett who is playing Goneril. And probably Regan. There is a certain amount of doubling up but I think it could be interesting theatrically...

MARY is flushed and curtsies. JEFFERSON is unsure what is going on.

MARY It's an honour Mr. Steel. And can I say that you're so much younger than you look in your films.

JEFFERSON is not amused.

Not that you look old in them. You look young, very young...

Struggling.

...especially the old ones...

JEFFERSON Thank you.

MARY I love all your films. Particularly The Fugitive.

JEFFERSON That wasn't me.

MARY Are you sure?

JEFFERSON Yah, I think I'd remember.

DOROTHY hurries on with introductions.

DOROTHY And of course Nigel Dewbury who will be giving us his Earl of Kent.

NIGEL is the classic am-dram performer, more luvvie than the genuine article. He is middle-aged and wears a smart blazer and bow tie. NIGEL gives an ironic and elaborate Shakespearean bow.

NIGEL The privilege is all mine.

He clearly does not mean this.

DENIS has come round again for another introduction.

DOROTHY ...and this is Denis, again, who is also playing Edgar...

DENIS Yeah, Jeff – I wonder if you would mind being in a selfie?

He holds out mobile phone to take it and is told off by
DOROTHY.

DOROTHY Denis...

JEFFERSON Whoa, whoa. Excuse me...

Pulls DOROTHY aside.

...but I've never heard of any of these people...where's Judi Dench, Kenny Branagh, Maggie Smith?

JEFFERSON *looks up to see the cast are listening intently.*

DOROTHY All otherwise engaged I'm afraid!

JEFFERSON We've got a problem here. I need to talk to the director.

DOROTHY You are.

JEFFERSON *You're* the director?

DOROTHY Yes I am.

JEFFERSON I thought you were the driver.

DOROTHY I'm that too.

JEFFERSON *is beginning to panic. What has he let himself in for?*

MARY She's also playing the Fool. She's very good – she used to be in the business...

JEFFERSON What?

DOROTHY But as the *director* I would quite like to have a gentle read-through, just to get an initial feel for the play, OK?

JEFFERSON *is losing it.*

JEFFERSON Jefferson Steel does not do read-throughs. I am not sitting around listening to everyone else's lines. And don't tell me this dump is the rehearsal room!

DOROTHY Oh no.

JEFFERSON Thank God!

DOROTHY *This* is our theatre.

JEFFERSON (*incredulous*) Here?!

DOROTHY Yes.

NIGEL "A poor thing but our own..."

JEFFERSON Jeez! What has the Royal Shakespeare Company come to?

NIGEL The Royal Shakespeare Company?

JEFFERSON My agent said I was playing Lear at Stratford.

DOROTHY And so you are.

NIGEL We are the Stratford Players.

JEFFERSON Stratford, right – where Shakespeare was born?

DOROTHY Er...not exactly. This is Stratford. But it isn't on Avon.

It's Stratford St. John...in Suffolk. We're just a small amateur drama group.

JEFFERSON realises that the people in front of him are not professional actors at all but local people. He nods calmly taking it all in – and then screams...

JEFFERSON AAAAAARRRRRRGHHHH!!!

JEFFERSON is ballistic, trying to get a response from his cell phone. The cast follow him round the theatre, keen to watch a celebrity in action.

I am going to kill my agent. Charlie Rosen is a dead man.

DOROTHY I did explain all this in my letter to Mr. Rosen. The council has cut off our funding so unless we raise the money we have to close.

JEFFERSON And when I have killed Charlie Rosen, I am going to dig him up and kill him again...

DOROTHY You see, a big name means big sponsorship and big publicity. You're going to save our little theatre.

JEFFERSON I'm sorry to disappoint you lady, but Jefferson Steel is not so washed up he has to do charity gigs.

MARY But you promised. It was on the news. You were really inspiring.

DENIS "Theatre is in my blood" and all that stuff. Very moving.

JEFFERSON I was *acting* you idiot!

He keeps punching numbers into his cell phone.

(On phone) Charlie Rosen, you moron, you booked me into the wrong goddam Stratford! This is Stratford on Pigshit in Nowheresville...

NIGEL Really!

JEFFERSON *(on phone)* What do you mean you knew? No I won't calm down, I am going to rip out your vital organs and stuff them down your throat...

NIGEL Charming!

JEFFERSON *(on phone)* You've got to get me out of here. Charlie.
Now!

Pause.

It can't be too late. It was just one lousy press conference. No one saw it.

DENIS Six o'clock news over here.

JEFFERSON *(on phone)* ...and every network in the States...oh great... No Charlie I am NOT PLEASED!

DENIS *is looking at his mobile.*

DENIS Oh look you're trending on Twitter – and the press conference is on YouTube...

JEFFERSON *(to Charlie on mobile)* No, you halfwit I am not making a noble sacrifice and going back to my theatrical roots – I'm stuck in Loserville with a bunch of amateurs. Hello? Hello? Holy crap!

NIGEL I'm afraid we have a "save the theatre" swear box...

He produces swear box.

JEFFERSON I don't give a *fuck*. And I am not saving your *fucking* theatre!

Enter LAUREN, an attractive trophy wife of the brewer sponsor who is not taken seriously because of her looks. She is nervous about the project because the sponsorship was her idea.

LAUREN Everything all right?

DOROTHY Mr. Steel, may I introduce Lauren Bell who is the public relations director of our sponsor who very kindly paid for your flights and is meeting a lot of the production costs.

LAUREN Mr. Steel I'm a big, big fan of yours.

JEFFERSON *clocks that she is quite good looking.*

JEFFERSON That makes two of us. So who is this sponsor? Global bank? Blue chip multinational?

LAUREN It's Bell Ales – Suffolk's premier independent brewery.

JEFFERSON So we're talking chicken feed.

LAUREN *looks hurt at this rudeness.*

DOROTHY Mr. Steel is a bit upset as there has been something of a misunderstanding. He thought he was playing Lear in Stratford on Avon...

LAUREN Oh dear. That's not going to be a problem is it?

JEFFERSON *is a broken man.*

DENIS No it's an easy mistake to make...there are several Stratfords in Britain. There's Stratford in East London...

NIGEL Stratford Tony in Wiltshire...

DENIS Stratford St. Agnes in Somerset...

DOROTHY OK. I think Mr. Steel gets the picture.

DENIS ...Stratford St. Andrew and Stratford St. Mary, Stratford St. Peter, Stratford St. Bernard...

JEFFERSON Can you do me a favour...?

JEFFERSON *cannot remember DENIS's name. DENIS supplies it.*

DENIS Denis.

JEFFERSON Right, Denis. Can you do me a favour Denis...and shut the fuck up?

DOROTHY I think Mr. Steel is probably very tired from his flight. Perhaps he would like to go and have a rest.

JEFFERSON Good idea. Just take me to the hotel.

DOROTHY You're not in a hotel as such Mr. Steel. We are putting you up in Mary's bed and breakfast.

JEFFERSON This cannot be happening to me!

LAUREN We thought you would prefer somewhere unpretentious.

JEFFERSON Well you were wrong! I definitely prefer pretentious.

JEFFERSON *walks out of the door and on the way shouts.*

MARY Mr. Steel you've forgotten your bags.

JEFFERSON *returns.*

JEFFERSON No, *you've* forgotten my bags.

He exits again. DOROTHY and MARY look at each other and then pick up his bags.

DOROTHY sings the FOOL's song to cover the scene change.

DOROTHY/FOOL

HE THAT HAS AND A LITTLE TINY WIT -
WITH HEY, HO, THE WIND AND THE RAIN -
MUST MAKE CONTENT WITH HIS FORTUNES FIT,
FOR THE RAIN IT RAINETH EVERY DAY.

Scene Four

MARY's bed and breakfast. We see a table with a small checkered tablecloth.

JEFFERSON sits at the table, tired and grumpy. MARY flounces in with a marked coquettishness holding notepad.

MARY Good morning Mr. Steel.

Takes pad and pen from her hand as though it is an autograph.

JEFFERSON All right! Just this once. Who shall I make it to?

MARY Actually, I was going to take your order. Not that I am not a big fan which I am. Die Hard was one of my all time favourites.

JEFFERSON That was Bruce Willis. And he is bald.

MARY Well you are just like him – except not bald of course.

JEFFERSON hands back pad.

So. What can I get you?

JEFFERSON How about a room at the Four Seasons?

MARY Would you like a full English breakfast?

JEFFERSON That's a no. I want guava juice, egg-white fritata with brocollini rice cheese and peppers.

A beat as MARY takes in what he is saying.

MARY I've got toast...

JEFFERSON Forget it. Just get me a skinny latte decaf with soya milk and an extra shot...

MARY Nescafe OK?

JEFFERSON I give up. Can you do water? Do you have water here? Has drinking water arrived in England?

MARY One lovely glass of fresh water coming up...

She goes off to the kitchen. JEFFERSON gets out a big box of pills of various colours which he arranges in a line. MARY reappears with a glass of water.

Do you feel alright Mr. Steel?

JEFFERSON I will when I've got these inside me...

MARY That's a lot of pills.

JEFFERSON Not compared to what I used to take. Just your regular multi-vits. A few uppers, a few downers to counteract the uppers, more uppers to counteract the downers, omega oil, pro-biotics, anti-oxidants...

MARY What's the little blue one?

JEFFERSON That's Jefferson's bedroom buddy...

MARY is a bit flustered. JEFFERSON chugs down all the pills.

MARY You certainly look after yourself Mr. Steel.

JEFFERSON My body is a temple...

MARY ...though it looks more like a pharmacy...but in a good way.

JEFFERSON Thanks for breakfast I'll go pack my bags.

MARY Why?

JEFFERSON I'm checking out.

MARY Oh...

MARY looks crestfallen. JEFFERSON exits. DOROTHY enters.

DOROTHY (to **MARY**) So? What's King Lear like this morning? Still grumpy?

MARY He says he wants to check out.

DOROTHY Well he's a real charmer isn't he?

MARY It's how these big stars get into their characters. It's what they call method acting. You see King Lear is really grumpy...

DOROTHY (*sarcastically*) And if he was playing Romeo he'd be a real sweetie.

MARY I'd love to see him playing Romeo. He'd look good in tights...and a codpiece...

DOROTHY Mary...too much detail...

MARY I am just saying that he would be very good as a romantic lead.

DOROTHY He's had enough practise in real life. Apparently he's a sexaholic. I read it in a magazine. He's insatiable. Anything in a skirt.

MARY *smooths down her dress hopefully.*

MARY Really?

JEFFERSON *re-enters.*

JEFFERSON Can you tell the concierge my bags are ready?

DOROTHY Good morning Mr. Steel.

JEFFERSON *You again?*

JEFFERSON *can't remember her name.*

DOROTHY Dorothy.

JEFFERSON Dorothy. I want you to tell your people that I'm not happy with the accommodation.

DOROTHY *turns to MARY in a very formal way.*

DOROTHY Mary. Apparently Mr. Steel isn't happy with the accommodation.

MARY *is crestfallen.*

MARY (*to DOROTHY*) I'm very sorry. He's in the best room I've got.

DOROTHY *turns back to JEFFERSON in the same formal way.*

DOROTHY The management is very sorry Mr. Steel but you are occupying the best room available.

JEFFERSON You're kidding, right?

DOROTHY (*to MARY*) Mary. Are you kidding?

DOROTHY *looks at MARY's face then turns back to JEFFERSON.*

She's not kidding.

JEFFERSON But the room doesn't have an en-suite.

MARY The facilities are only just down the hall.

JEFFERSON I found them. Eventually. Only after stumbling into some broad's room who was snoring like a foghorn...

MARY Yes well I am terribly sorry that room is all I have.

JEFFERSON Come on. Next you'll be telling me you don't have a health club!

DOROTHY Nor does Mary have a banqueting suite or conferencing facilities. The clue is in the words "bed" and "breakfast". I am afraid this job will require you to make a few compromises.

JEFFERSON *is getting increasingly panicky.*

JEFFERSON I am not an unreasonable man. I can do compromise. Ask my ex-wife. She got everything. But as a Hollywood A-lister you must understand that I have to maintain my status.

MARY I can see that, yes.

JEFFERSON Otherwise the rest of the cast won't respect me.
It's a natural hierarchy.

So as the guy at the top of the food chain I do have a few very basic requirements.

DOROTHY Of course you do.

DOROTHY gets out her notebook.

JEFFERSON I want a minibar, home cinema, pool table, jukebox...

DOROTHY scribbles.

DOROTHY Is that all?

JEFFERSON No. I also want fresh flowers daily, oh and a dietician and a personal trainer.

DOROTHY Well that's certainly not unreasonable. We will certainly see what we can do won't we Mary? In the meantime shall I take you to the rehearsal?

MARY I'll catch up with you later.

MARY clears table.

JEFFERSON OK - where's the car?

DOROTHY There isn't a car, sorry, and unfortunately the helicopter is out of service so I am afraid we are going to have to walk.

JEFFERSON Nobody walks in L.A.

DOROTHY Oh you'll find its really very easy. You just put one foot in front of the other. You'll soon get the hang of it.

They begin walking away from the bed and breakfast round the back of the set (or across the auditorium).

JEFFERSON Add that to my list. I want a limo to take me to and from the set.

DOROTHY It really isn't very far.

JEFFERSON I don't care how far it is, it is totally unreasonable to expect your leading actor on top of all his other responsibilities and commitments to have to trek all the way...

DOROTHY We are here.

JEFFERSON Oh.

They are now at the barn/rehearsal room. They enter to find that DENIS is already there.

DENIS Morning Dorothy. Morning Mr. Steel.

DOROTHY Morning Denis.

DENIS How was your journey?

JEFFERSON Unacceptably long.

DENIS I know what you mean. I got held up on Crackett's Lane, they've got one of them big hedge-cutters and the traffic has backed up beyond the silage depot and you wouldn't believe Mr. Steel...

JEFFERSON Denis. It is Denis isn't it? Can we just get one thing straight here?

DENIS Yeah. Sure.

JEFFERSON Denis – you're mistaking me for someone who gives a shit.

DENIS Fair enough.

DOROTHY trying to make amends for this rudeness.

DOROTHY Anyway you are here now Denis which is the main thing. Ready and keen to rehearse. Which is always a bonus when you are putting on a play.

Looks at JEFFERSON.

DENIS Now just checking, Dorothy, am I Gloucester today? Or Albany? Or Edgar? I wasn't sure whether to bring the beard.

He has fake beard in his hand.

DOROTHY It's a bit early for costume, Denis. You are Gloucester today.

Enter NIGEL with a flourish.

NIGEL Enter the Earl of Kent, centre stage.

DOROTHY Hello Nigel. OK. That's all of us I think. Apologies from Rupert who is the Duke of Cornwall amongst others – and from Janice who *would* be playing Cordelia but isn't – so I am.

JEFFERSON This sounds kind of desperate.

DOROTHY No this is actually quite a good turnout. And doubling up is part of the fun.

JEFFERSON Fun?

DOROTHY That's the idea.

Enter MARY.

MARY Sorry everyone. Mr. Steel you left your glasses in your room.

JEFFERSON I don't wear glasses.

MARY They were by your bed.

JEFFERSON You must be mistaken. Jefferson Steel has twenty twenty vision.

MARY Of course. And you had infra red eyes in the Terminator... that was a good film...

JEFFERSON That was Schwarzenegger.

DOROTHY *hands* **JEFFERSON** *his script.*

DOROTHY Good well that's cleared that up. So shall we take it from Lear's first big speech. On page five.

WAIT, THERE'S MORE!

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