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SF PERUSALS

Donkeys' Years

A play

Michael Frayn

Samuel French — London
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DONKEYS' YEARS

First presented by Michael Codron, at the Globe Theatre, London, on July 15th, 1976, with the cast listed in the programme as follows:

COLLEGE NOTES

Mr S. Birkett — A.J. Brown
Head Porter, completes fifty years' service with the College this October

C.D.P.B. Headingley, MA, MP — Peter Barkworth
Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State at the Department of Education and Science

D.J. Buckle, MB, FRCS — Peter Jeffrey
Assistant Chief Surgeon in the Department of Urology, Royal Wessex Hospital, Southampton

K. Snell, MA — Andrew Robertson
Engaged in research in parasitology at British Alkalis (Pharmaceutical Division), Rotherham

A.V. Quine, BA — Julian Curry
Now in the grade of Assistant Secretary at the Department of Education and Science

The Rev. R. D. Sainsbury, MA — Harold Innocent
Curate-in-Charge at St Columba's, Small Heath, Birmingham

N.O.P. Tate, MA — Jeffry Wickham
Has recently published *The Complete Home Encyclopaedia of Japanese Flower Arrangement* and *A Boys' and Girls' Guide to Overseas Development*

W.R. Taylor, MA PhD — John Harding
Research Fellow and College Lecturer in English, has published *Mythopoeic Structures in the Metonymy of Two Jacobean Children's Rhymes* (*Revue des Etudes Sémiologiques, Toulouse*)

Lady Driver, MA — Penelope Keith
The Master's wife (formerly Rosemary Gilbert), has been appointed a member of the Royal Commission on Obesity

The play directed by Michael Rudman
Settings by Alan Tagg

This revised version was first presented by Sonia Friedman Productions, Tulbart Productions, Michael Linnit, Lee Menzies, TEG Productions and Boyett Otstar Productions at the Comedy Theatre on 9th May 2006 with the following cast:

Mr S. Birkett	Edward Petherbridge
C.D.P.B. Headingley, MA, MP	David Haig
D.J.Buckle, MB, FRCS	Michael Simkins
K. Snell, MA	Mark Addy
A.V. Quine, BA	James Dreyfus
The Rev. R. D. Sainsbury, MA	Michael Fitzgerald
N.O.P. Tate, MA	Jonathan Coy
W.R.Taylor, MA PhD	Chris Moran
Lady Driver, MA	Samantha Bond

Directed by Jeremy Sams
Settings by Peter McKintosh

SYNOPSIS OF SCENES

The action of the play takes place in one of the smaller courts, in one of the lesser colleges, at one of the older universities; and in two students' rooms

ACT I
SCENE 1 The courtyard
SCENE 2 Snell's room

ACT II Headingley's room

Time — the present

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ACT I

SCENE 1

One of the smaller courts, in one of the lesser colleges, at one of the older universities. Day

There are arched entrances to other courts L *and* R, *and to "G Staircase"* US. *Windows on the ground and first floors look out over the court. The front wall of the college, with a gate set in it, stands before the court; the gate is open and the court can be glimpsed through it*

The CURTAIN *rises. The wall and court are lit with bright sunshine. After a moment the wall moves out to reveal the whole of the court*

Birkett and Headingley enter L. *Birkett, the Head Porter, is a spry, precise man in his sixties, who, like a head waiter, expresses his air of command as a mannered deference. He is wearing black jacket, striped trousers, and bowler hat, and is carrying a clipboard. Headingley, a successful public man in his mid-forties, is carrying a weekend bag*

Birkett This way, Mr Headingley, sir, if you please. I've put you in G2. Your old rooms, Mr Headingley, sir.

Headingley Look at the old place!

Birkett Doesn't change very much, does it, sir?

Headingley Doesn't change at all, Mr Birkett. The mulberry tree in the Fellows' Garden ... King Henry ... The smell of the river ... And that Victorian bath-house ...

Birkett No, they all say the same thing when they come back. "The old place doesn't change very much, Mr Birkett," they say. We've our new block down by the river, of course. We've had one or two sit-ins. They've painted King Henry red a few times. But there we are. That's the world we live in. And that's one thing you could say for the gentlemen of your generation. They wouldn't have dreamed of defacing the College. Not when they were sober. That's the difference, you see. Never mind, we always knew you'd do well for us.

Headingley Snakes and ladders, Mr Birkett. Snake next move, for all I know.

Birkett Anyway, we've certainly picked the right day for it.

Headingley We certainly have, Mr Birkett.

Birkett We can't complain about the weather today. Come along, then, Mr Headingley, sir. You mustn't hold me up, you know. Because they're all coming tonight. Mr Sims, Mr Buckle, Mr Rogers — all your year. I'll tell you one thing, though. The College rowing has never been the same since you went down.

Headingley I'm not completely forgotten, then, Mr Birkett?

Birkett Not forgotten by any means, Mr Headingley, sir. Climbing in and out at all hours.

Headingley Surely not.

Birkett Yes, indeed, Mr Headingley, sir. Ladies in till breakfast more than once.

Headingley Never.

Birkett Oh, yes. We don't miss much, Mr Headingley, sir — but we do miss you. Sherry at seven-thirty, Mr Headingley. Dinner at eight. And you haven't forgotten the step, have you, Mr Headingley, sir?

Headingley I haven't forgotten anything, Mr Birkett. It's curious. I feel as if I'd never been away.

Birkett That's what they all say, Mr Headingley.

Headingley In fact I feel rather — rather moved. Well, I'd better go and change.

Headingley exits into the US *staircase. There is a crash, off*

Birkett The step, Mr Headingley, sir, the step!

Buckle enters R, *wearing a dinner jacket. He is a ponderous man of great loyalty, character, independence, and presence, who thinks everything out for himself and is a very impressive father to his children*

Birkett Mr Buckle.

Buckle Is there, Mr Birkett, somewhere in this vicinity, a gentleman who goes by name of Christopher Headingley?

Birkett In his old rooms, Mr Buckle, sir. G2. Arrived scarcely one moment past.

Buckle In his old rooms. We're all in our old rooms, are we, Mr Birkett?

Birkett You are, Mr Buckle, sir.

Buckle In his old rooms. What a curiously pleasant sound those words have! I rather think I should like them carved on my grave.

A window of one of the ground floor rooms opens and Headingley leans out

Headingley David Buckle!

Buckle Christopher Headingley!

Headingley vanishes from the window

Birkett And what a day we have for it, Mr Buckle!
Buckle What a day indeed, Mr Birkett.

Birkett exits L. *Headingley enters from the staircase door with a towel round his shoulders*

Headingley Good heavens!
Buckle My word!
Headingley Well, well, well!
Buckle Great Scott!
Headingley Good God!
Buckle How very odd to see you again like this, Christopher!
Headingley How very odd to see *you*.
Buckle Goodness me.
Headingley Well, how are you, and so on?
Buckle Well, all right, Christopher. Not too bad. In quite good working order. And you?
Headingley Fine. Fine, fine, fine.
Buckle Good, good, good.
Headingley Yes, fine. And you're — sawing people up?
Buckle Whhht! Out with their waterworks!
Headingley My word.
Buckle And you're — Parliamentary Under-Secretary, is that what they call it, at the Department of — isn't it in fact Education?
Headingley Whhht! Off with their heads!
Buckle Goodness me.
Headingley Tell the Vice-Chancellor where he gets off.
Buckle Well, well, well. It's funny, you know. You haven't changed at all.
Headingley Nor have you! Isn't it odd?
Buckle I ran into Tubby Rogers in First Court. He hasn't changed, either. It's curious. You don't expect people to have changed. But when you meet them and they haven't, you're somehow surprised.
Headingley Isn't it odd?
Buckle I mean, we all *have* changed.
Headingley There's rather more of us.
Buckle More of us?
Headingley In some ways. (*He pats his stomach*)
Buckle Yes, though of course in other ways rather less of us.
Headingley Yes. Poor old Ted.

Buckle Poor old Jimmy.
Headingley Jimmy?
Buckle Jimmy McBride.
Headingley No!
Buckle Heart.
Headingley I didn't know that.
Buckle And drink, of course.
Headingley Then there's poor old Arthur.
Buckle Yes, poor old Arthur.
Headingley Shock of my life.
Buckle Never have imagined.
Headingley Never have dreamt.
Buckle What was it, in the end?
Headingley Five years.
Buckle Such rotten luck.
Headingley But how funny being back here!
Buckle The things you remember and the things you don't.
Headingley Like the way the bird-droppings catch old Henry's nose.
Buckle Green man with a white nose.
Headingley They stand on his head.
Buckle Pigeons, mostly.
Headingley Always arse-about-face, for some reason.
Buckle Then, suddenly ——
Headingley Woomph.
Buckle Bombs away.
Headingley Used to watch them for hours, sometimes. I'd think, I'll just watch one load go, then I'll get down to work. I'd wait ... Wait ... Wait... Then at the crucial moment I'd blink.
Buckle But there was time for those things then.
Headingley You know, I can't help wondering if one didn't learn quite a lot from that kind of thing.
Buckle One had time to really look closely at something.
Headingley Even if it was only a pigeon crapping. Funny. I haven't thought about those pigeon-droppings for twenty years.
Buckle But as soon as you saw them ...
Headingley I just kind of went on from where I'd left off.

Snell enters L. *He is an anxious man with a beard, an open-necked shirt, bicycle-clips on his trousers, a rucksack on his back, and a camera round his neck*

Snell Excuse me.
Buckle Can we help you?

Snell What do you do, exactly?
Headingley What, here?
Buckle In College?
Snell I'm sorry to trouble you.
Headingley That's all right. What do we do, David?
Buckle Watch the pigeons?
Headingley That kind of thing. Reflect on life.
Buckle Slosh about the river after lunch.
Headingley I seem to remember going to some things called lectures.
Buckle Come on, now, Chris, no boasting.
Headingley (*to Snell*) And don't forget to look in the Chapel.
Buckle There's a painting in there by some fearfully famous painter.
Headingley Beethoven or somebody.

Headingley and Buckle resume their conversation with each other

(*To Buckle*) I nearly didn't come, you know. Terrible idea usually, reunions.

Snell exits uncertainly through an archway, UL

Buckle I had the odd qualm.
Headingley But now I've actually got here, and seen the old place again ...
Buckle Seen you, and Tubby Rogers ...
Headingley And old Birkett. And King Henry ...
Buckle And Jock Stewart, and ... (*He glances off* L. *His tone changes*) And Alan Quine.
Headingley Oh, no!

Quine and Birkett enter L. *Quine, also carrying a weekend bag, is a man of conservative appearance, sardonic manner, and anarchic character, whose chief pleasure in life is making others feel ill at ease*

Birkett This way, Mr Quine, sir, if you please.
Buckle Hallo, Alan! Remember me?
Quine Yes.
Buckle David Buckle.
Quine Yes.
Headingley Hallo, Alan.
Quine Minister.
Headingley Oh balls. None of that nonsense here.
Buckle How are you these days, Alan?
Quine Fine. (*He looks around*)
Birkett Doesn't change much, does it, Mr Quine, sir?

Quine It doesn't change at all, Mr Birkett.
Birkett Mr Headingley said the same thing.
Buckle I think I made the same remark.
Quine It still looks — as much like Wormwood Scrubs as ever.
Headingley Well done, Alan.
Birkett Always a joke on his lips, always a humorous remark. I said to the Master, as soon as I saw Mr Quine's name on the list, I said, "Oh, he'll be making a crack or two about us before the weekend's out!" You're not forgotten, you see, Mr Quine.
Quine Dead but not forgotten.
Buckle You married, Alan?
Quine Occasionally.
Headingley Children?
Quine Every other Sunday.
Birkett Oh, Mr Quine does pull our legs, doesn't he, Mr Headingley? Now, Mr Quine, I've put you in G4. Your old rooms, Mr Quine, sir.
Quine My old rooms? Haven't they made a start on slum-clearance here yet?
Birkett Anyway, we've a beautiful day for it. Not even you can deny that, Mr Quine.
Quine The trouble about having a beautiful day for something, Mr Birkett, is that it would be just as beautiful for something else.
Birkett Where should we be without you to put us all in our places, Mr Quine?

Quine exits into the staircase

We might all start enjoying ourselves.

Birkett exits L

Buckle I'd forgotten Quine, I must admit.
Headingley I hadn't. He's in my department. He's one of my civil servants.
Buckle Oh dear. In the Department of Education? In charge of educating people?
Headingley I don't know what he does. Puts the splinters in schoolroom benches, probably.
Buckle Oh, I dare say he's grown up a bit since we knew him.
Headingley He was very immature.
Buckle Callow.
Headingley Out to shock.
Buckle I always thought he might have been all right if one could have got him on his own.
Headingley He was in a rather nasty set.

Buckle What was that appalling little man called?
Headingley That ghastly camp little man?

Sainsbury enters R, *wearing a dinner jacket and a clerical collar*

Sainsbury Look at you both! With the mulberry tree in the background! What a picture!
Buckle Dicky Sainsbury.
Headingley We were just talking about you.
Sainsbury How flattering. And you're both looking radiant. Isn't it all wonderful, being back? All those embarrassingly familiar faces, like the old shoes at the bottom of the wardrobe. Isn't it just absolutely frightful? So what's the score?
Buckle I think it's about one hundred and eighty for five.
Sainsbury Children! How many children!
Headingley Oh.
Sainsbury You want to tell me about your children, don't you?
Buckle Two. Two boys.
Headingley Three boys.
Sainsbury Oh, well done! Five more members of the Boat Club on their way!

Snell enters UL

Snell No, sorry, I mean, where do you go?
Buckle Where do you ... ?
Sainsbury I'll show you. This way. It's next to the Porter's Lodge. (*To Headingley and Buckle, indicating his collar*) My pastoral role!

Sainsbury and Snell exit L

Buckle Dicky Sainsbury.
Headingley Dicky Sainsbury.
Buckle It all comes back to one, doesn't it?
Headingley With a rush.
Buckle I suppose he might have changed.
Headingley It hardly looks like it.
Buckle You mean the pretend dog collar?
Headingley We're supposed to be shocked, are we?
Buckle I expect when he sees we're not he'll go and take it off.
Headingley Yes, probably. Take everything off.
Buckle You're thinking of that show that he and Quine got up.
Headingley The time the Queen Mother came.

Buckle And he came prancing on in nothing but false eyelashes and a coat of gold paint.
Headingley And we all found ourselves on page one of the Sunday papers.
Buckle He's coming back.

Sainsbury enters L

Headingley and Buckle start to go off R

Sainsbury Someone told me you were the Prime Minister.
Headingley Not quite, I'm afraid.
Sainsbury No? Oh, well, it must have been someone else.

Headingley and Buckle exit R. *Quine enters from the staircase with a towel*

Alan!
Quine God Almighty!
Sainsbury No, but what a flattering mistake.
Quine What's that thing round your neck?
Sainsbury Oh, I thought no-one was ever going to ask! You don't think it makes me look old?
Quine It makes you look like a clergyman.
Sainsbury Only I keep catching sight of myself in shop windows and thinking I just look like someone dressed up as a clergyman.
Quine You are someone dressed up as a clergyman.
Sainsbury Yes, but underneath I am in fact a clergyman!
Quine No, you're not.
Sainsbury Yes, I am! It's in my passport!
Quine You read Geography.
Sainsbury I'm a late vocation! Honestly! I solemnize weddings!
Quine You couldn't solemnize a boiled egg.
Sainsbury I baptize babies! I church women!
Quine I should never have come. I knew it would be a disaster.
Sainsbury Alan, why didn't you keep in touch? Why didn't you write? I wrote to you. I wrote and wrote. Told you how I was going mad at home. How I was going to emigrate to Canada and become a lumberjack. But not a word back from you.
Quine There wasn't anything to say.
Sainsbury Nothing's happened to you? In quarter of a century? Nothing at all?
Quine Well ...
Sainsbury Ah! There *was* something!
Quine One day ...
Sainsbury Yes?
Quine About five years ago ...

WAIT, THERE'S MORE!

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