SAMUEL FRENCH SAMPLE PERUSAL

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SF PERUSALS

Keeping Down with the Joneses

A Comedy

by John Chapman
and Jeremy Lloyd

A Samuel French Acting Edition

SAMUEL FRENCH
FOUNDED 1830

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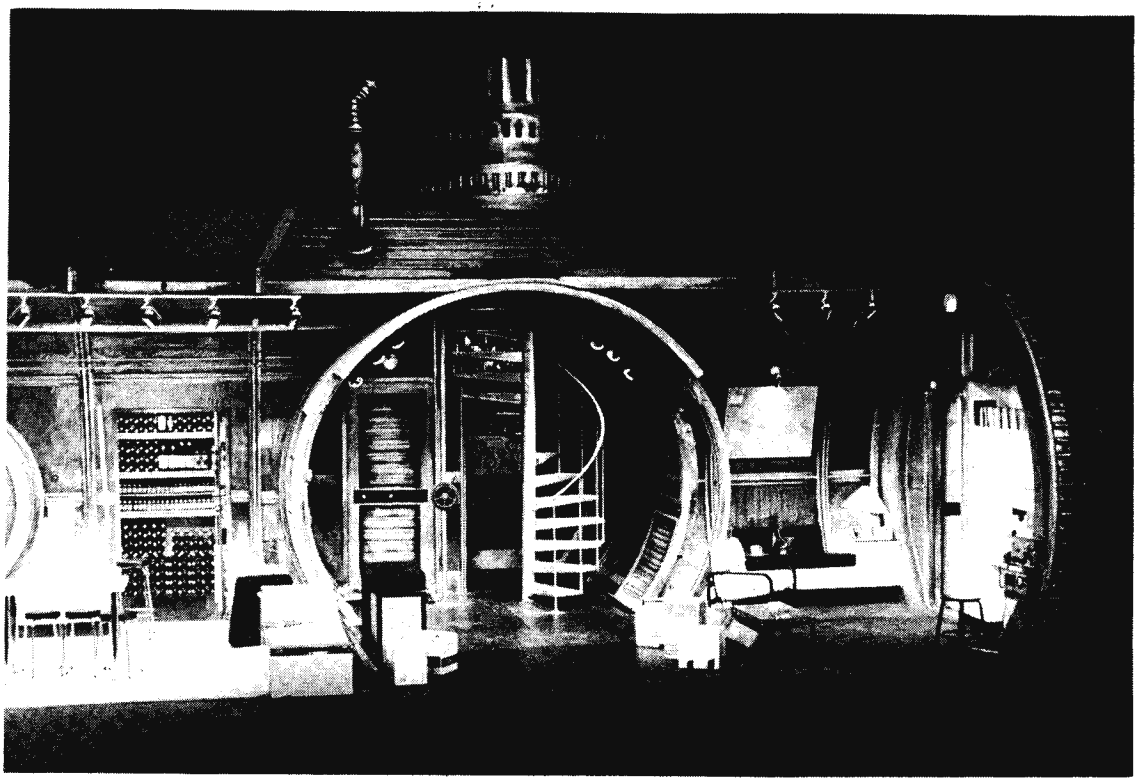

Photo by Richard M. Parker © 1984

CAST

(in order of appearance)

DEIRDRE JONES
JOE
GEOFFREY JONES
GRINDLE
MRS. WAYNEFLETE
CLIVE PATEL
RAYMOND BLAKE
SONIA BLAKE
BOBBY

PLACE

The action of the play takes place in the underground atomic shelter beneath the back garden of a house in Northolt.

TIME

The present

KEEPING DOWN WITH THE JONESES

ACT ONE
Scene One

The set is a fully equipped underground atomic shelter. It is tastefully furnished something in the manner of a suburban submarine. The pipe is "T" shaped with a centre hallway with a spiral staircase going up to the entrance hatch, right of the hallway is a dining-room-cum-kitchen & to the left a recreation & radio communications room. Other rooms are at the left end of the pipe, U.S.C. at the back of the hallway is a door leading to bathroom & lavatory.

The curtain rises on a blacked-out stage. After a second there is the sound of a heavy metal hatch opening.

DEIRDRE. These stairs are very steep.

JOE. I can't see a thing.

DEIRDRE. Don't worry, there's a light switch here somewhere.

(Suddenly the set is bathed in light.)

JOE. Bloody 'ell!

(DEIRDRE JONES comes to the bottom of the stairs followed by JOE. DEIRDRE JONES is smartly & sensibly dressed. JOE is a good-looking young man wearing denims, training shoes & a leather jacket.)

DEIRDRE. That's where I want the phone, over there in the lounge. *(They walk through.)*

JOE. Mrs. Jones, when you asked for an extension you forgot to mention that it was halfway through to Australia.

DEIRDRE. Don't be silly, we're only 25 feet below ground.

JOE. But I've only brought six foot of cable. You'll need another hundred feet to go from here to the main box on your house.

DEIRDRE. I thought you carried a big roll around with you and cut off whatever you needed.

JOE. Yeah, but it's not in my pocket. It's in the van.

DEIRDRE. Can I have the phone or not?

JOE. Yes, now don't get excited. I'll get another hundred foot, connect it to that little box there, connect that to the phone and you'll be talking your head off in no time.

DEIRDRE. Thank you.

JOE. Pretty sprauncey, this shelter, is it for the whole road?

DEIRDRE. No, it's private, my husband's motto is "Be Prepared."

JOE. What's he expecting? World War Three?

DEIRDRE. Frankly yes.

(A figure comes down the stairs wearing wellingtons, a mackintosh, rubber gloves & a bathing cap, and a gas mask.)

JOE. *(in mock horror)* Blimy, it's started. *(There is a muffled sound from behind the gas mask.)*

DEIRDRE. Darling, we can't hear a word you're saying.

GEOFFREY. *(Removes his gas mask. He is earnest & over-efficient.)* Sorry Deirdre.

JOE. You expecting bad weather down here?

GEOFFREY. No, no, this is my nerve gas equipment.

JOE. Do you know something I don't.

GEOFFREY. One only has to read the papers.

JOE. There was nothing about it in "The Sun" this morning.

DEIRDRE. I think you can assume that my husband, being an M.P. knows a bit more than the newspapers.

JOE. An M.P.?

GEOFFREY. Of course I am, I'm your local M.P.

JOE. I've never seen you before.

DEIRDRE. Take off your bathing cap, Geoffrey.

GEOFFREY. What? Oh yes. *(He removes it.)* There you are.

DEIRDRE. Now do you recognize him?

JOE. No.

GEOFFREY. I'm Geoffrey Jones.

JOE. *(Looks at him.)* Cor, so you are. You look quite normal on your poster.

GEOFFREY. Who exactly are you?!

JOE. *(Holds up the phone.)* I'll give you a clue.

GEOFFREY. Ah, telephone engineer.

JOE. Got it in one, it's easy to see why you got the job.

DEIRDRE. Would you hurry up and connect that.

JOE. *(taking out form)* While I'm at it, how do you want your entry to be put in the phone book?

DEIRDRE. I don't, we'd like to be ex-directory.

JOE. Ah. You don't want anyone phoning for a reservation if things get nasty?

DEIRDRE. Well, we've already got the au pair girl, and of course my mother — apart from little Charles and my husband.

(GRINDLE, a beautiful Scandinavian au pair, appears at the top of the stairs in a short skirt. GRINDLE gingerly takes a step at a time down the spiral staircase with a carry cot.)

DEIRDRE. *(Walks out into the hall.)* Be careful, Grindle, you shouldn't wear stiletto heels to come down those stairs.

GRINDLE. I will take them off next time.

DEIRDRE. Yes, please do.

GRINDLE. *(By now she has arrived at the foot of stairs.)* Where am I putting the baby?

DEIRDRE. Straight through there *(indicating recreation room)* into the bedroom.

GEOFFREY. Give little Charles to me. *(GEOFFREY takes the cot into bedroom, GRINDLE walks past JOE & stops to adjust her ankle strap, then follows GEOFFREY.)*

JOE. *(admiringly)* Roll on World War Three.

DEIRDRE. Are you a married man?

JOE. No, but if I was I'd still fancy other birds.

DEIRDRE. I've seen too many marriages break down for that very reason.

JOE. Is that your problem then?

DEIRDRE. No, no, I'm speaking as a Marriage Guidance Councillor, my marriage has been particularly fortunate, my husband would never look at another woman.

JOE. *(looking at GRINDLE)* Who chose her then?

DEIRDRE. It was a joint decision, my husband agreed with me that she was the most promising girl we'd seen.

JOE. I'll go along with that.

DEIRDRE. You men are extraordinary, just from your tone of voice it's clear that all you are thinking about is sex.

JOE. Well we all do, let's face it.

DEIRDRE. My husband's beyond that stage of ogling a pretty girl, he looks at what's underneath.

JOE. *(with a wink)* Good place to start.

DEIRDRE. I have a lot to do, would you just finish the wiring?

JOE. First bit's done. Now what colour phone would you like? Black or white?

(GEOFFREY enters dressed normally.)

DEIRDRE. What colour phone, Geoffrey?

GEOFFREY. I think we'd like green.

DEIRDRE. Yes, that would match beautifully.

JOE. I'll have to go back to the depot for that.

GEOFFREY. Be as quick as you can old chap, we batten down the hatch at midday sharp.

JOE. What do I do if I'm a bit late, knock?

GEOFFREY. No. Once that lid's down, it stays down.

JOE. How long for?

GEOFFREY. Well to make the trial as authentic as possible we'll all be down for 3 weeks.

JOE. Three weeks?!

DEIRDRE. All but a day.

GEOFFREY. Unfortunately we have to come up a day early as my office manager is getting married.

DEIRDRE. And my husband is the best man.

JOE. Hang on, if you're an M.P. what are you doing with an office?

GEOFFREY. I'm also an architect.

JOE. Oh, moon-lighting, eh?

GEOFFREY. Most M.P.'s have other jobs.

DEIRDRE. My husband's responsible for quite a lot of the architecture in this area.

JOE. Oh is he? Didn't have a hand in the Waverley Estate did he, by any chance?

DEIRDRE. Yes.

GEOFFREY. One of my first jobs, I won an Award for it.

JOE. You ought to try living in it mate.

DEIRDRE. I think it's very prettty, for what it is.

JOE. Pretty yes.

DEIRDRE. I was driving through it the other day and I noticed a lot of the houses had window boxes.

JOE. That's weeds growing out of the wet wood. Those houses were built on reclaimed land and on a quiet night

you can hear them sucking it up like huge concrete sponges.

GEOFFREY. You're exaggerating.

JOE. Once I tell all my neighbors where you live, you'll be hiding down here a lot longer than three weeks. So long. *(He exits up the stairs.)*

DEIRDRE. Perhaps you shouldn't have told him about your award.

GEOFFREY. Why not? I was proud of it. I'm also proud of the fact that I put in this shelter and had the foresight to save the entire family and your mother from possible oblivion.

DEIRDRE. What do you mean "entire family *and* my mother?" Let's not forget that my mother paid for a good deal of this.

GEOFFREY. It's not exactly one-way traffic, is it? She's had our roof over her head for the past ten years and let's face it, it's not been too easy sharing a house with somebody who's living in another world.

DEIRDRE. She's perfectly coherent.

GEOFFREY. She's dotty. I don't see why, for the purpose of this exercise, your mother should come down here at all.

DEIRDRE. Darling, if we leave her up there in the house for three weeks on her own, anything could happen to her.

GEOFFREY. The 'daily' pops in from time to time.

DEIRDRE. An elderly lady, in mother's condition could go in the night.

GEOFFREY. My God, supposing she pops off down here? Very jolly.

DEIRDRE. Well if she does, which God forbid, we'll just have to call this off and make the funeral arrangements.

GEOFFREY. But the whole point of this exercise is to make it as near the real thing as possible. Now, in the middle of the Third World War with three feet of radioactive dust covering the garden, and most of Northolt, one doesn't open the hatch to try and dispose of your mother!

DEIRDRE. But Geoffrey, if it was the real thing, what would we do with her?

GEOFFREY. I suppose we'd have to put her in the deep freeze here.

DEIRDRE. But that's all our rations in there, if we take them out they'll go off.

GEOFFREY. But not as quickly as your mother.

DEIRDRE. I don't think you've thought this thing through properly. Just tell me what we would do if you kicked the bucket.

GEOFFREY. Well you couldn't use the deep freeze for reasons already mentioned. Ah but wait — there is another solution. At the end of this pipe, behind that cupboard, there is a metal door, which opens inwards — now once you've opened this door you can dig your way into the garden.

DEIRDRE. What do I dig with?

GEOFFREY. Good thinking Deirdre — must bring a shovel down. Anyway you dig about six feet or thereabouts into that bank or in the case of your mother, five foot-three.

(MRS. WAYNEFLETE rattles her stick at the top of the stairs.)

MRS. W. *(off)* Deirdre, are you there?

DEIRDRE. Yes mother.

MRS. W. I'm coming down. *(DEIRDRE goes into the hall followed by GEOFFREY.)*

DEIRDRE. No, wait, you could hurt yourself, it's a very tricky staircase.

MRS. W. *(Calls down.)* I'll be all right, as long as the sea remains calm. *(GEOFFREY & DEIRDRE look at each other.)*

GEOFFREY. *(puzzled)* "The sea remains calm?" What in heaven's name have you told her?

DEIRDRE. I didn't want to upset her. You can't tell a seventy-year-old woman you're planning for Armageddon, so I said we were going on a little holiday.

GEOFFREY. To the bottom of the garden?

DEIRDRE. I didn't specify anywhere in particular.

MRS. W. Steward!

GEOFFREY. She thinks she's on a cruise, dear.

DEIRDRE. As long as she's happy.

(MRS. W. reaches the hall. She is elderly, autocratic, dominating with odd moments of sanity, but this isn't one of them. She comes down the stairs with a parasol & a holdall.)

MRS. W. I didn't see them putting my trunk on board.

DEIRDRE. No mother dear, I've brought down your things, you'll find them in your bedroom, under your bunk.

MRS. W. Bunk? I want a cabin on the port side.

GEOFFREY. Certainly. Welcome aboard, Madam, I'm

the Purser.

MRS. W. Geoffrey, why do you behave like a buffoon all the time?

GEOFFREY. Just a little joke, Mother.

DEIRDRE. This way, Mother.

GEOFFREY. Let me take that. *(He takes her holdall.)*

DEIRDRE. Come and sit down, Mother. *(Leads her into recreation room.)*

MRS. W. *(looking around)* I suppose it'll be all right, but it's one of the smallest boats I've ever been on, not Japanese is it?

GEOFFREY. No Mother, British through and through.

MRS. W. Oh, how very comforting.

DEIRDRE. You didn't have to come aboard yet, I'd've fetched you when it was time.

MRS. W. I had a terrible dream last night that you'd sailed away without me.

DEIRDRE. *(Puts an arm around her.)* I'd never do that.

MRS. W. No, but he would.

GEOFFREY. *(Ignores her.)* I'm just going up top. Still got one or two things to bring down.

DEIRDRE. If you see that phone man, tell him to hurry up.

GEOFFREY. Yes, will do. *(He rushes up the staircase.)*

MRS. W. I brought *The Forsyte Saga* with me, I always enjoy that.

DEIRDRE. I know you do, Mummy.

MRS. W. The world was so civilised and elegant in those days. I know one shouldn't live in the past, but then the past was so much more attractive to live in.

DEIRDRE. We do try to make the present as bearable for

you as possible, Mummy. We've got all your favourite things here, food, drink and entertainment.

MRS. W. Really?

DEIRDRE. Yes.

MRS. W. Video tapes?

DEIRDRE. Of course, and your favourite one of all — "Mrs Miniver."

MRS. W. Oh Greer Garson, she was so good. I can see I'm going to enjoy myself after all.

DEIRDRE. There, you see, I knew you would.

MRS. W. It's just that one doesn't meet one's own type of person on a package holiday, er, have you met any of the others?

DEIRDRE. No Mummy, there aren't any others, it's just us.

MRS. W. *(reaching for her holdall & producing a book)* Oh good, I think I'll settle down and have a little read.

(GRINDLE appears.)

GRINDLE. I think the baby does not want to sleep.

DEIRDRE. Babies are so sensitive to new surroundings. I'll see if I can get him off. *(DEIRDRE exits into bedroom. GRINDLE makes to follow but is stopped by MRS. W.)*

MRS. W. Are you looking forward to the cruise?

GRINDLE. Cruise?

MRS. W. On this boat.

GRINDLE. Oh yes, very much.

MRS. W. What is our first port of call?

GRINDLE. I think it's Rotterdam.

MRS. W. And then?

GRINDLE. Casablanca.

MRS. W. Casablanca? Surely we're not missing out Tangiers.

GRINDLE. You want to go to Tangiers?

MRS. W. Tangiers? Why certainly, the Bazaar there can be most rewarding. I bought a very nice Jellabi there 35 years ago.

GRINDLE. All right, we'll go.

MRS. W. I'm glad we're going back because unfortunately, it shrank and I'd like to have a word with them.

GRINDLE. Would you like a cup of coffee, or something?

MRS. W. No, no, no. I'll wait, then perhaps I'll take a beef tea on the main deck.

GRINDLE. I'll see you later, Mrs Wayneflete. *(GRINDLE leaves the recreation room as JOE appears down the stairs, he carries a canvas bag, a green phone & is paying out a roll of cable behind him.)*

GRINDLE. *(Crosses into kitchen. To JOE.)* I'm just going to make some coffee, would you like one? *(She switches on electric kettle.)*

JOE. That's very kind of you, darling. I'd be very grateful for anything you've got going. *(Follows her into kitchen.)* How long have you been over here, darling?

GRINDLE. Three months.

JOE. You've picked up the lingo toute suite.

GRINDLE. What?

JOE. You learned our language very quickly.

GRINDLE. Oh, I could speak before I came. I learned at school.

JOE. You must have better schools than what we got. I still have trouble with English.

GRINDLE. Yes, my ears tell me this.

JOE. And what do your eyes tell you? *(JOE looks very macho.)*

GRINDLE. That you would like to kiss me.

JOE. *(thrown)* Oh, well I wasn't going to come on that strong, that quick.

GRINDLE. I think it is good when you want to do something that you should do it.

JOE. Well I can't just do it like that.

GRINDLE. Why?

JOE. Because you make it sound about as exciting as licking a stamp. *(Looks around anxiously.)* Apart from which there are people about.

GRINDLE. Only Mrs. Wayneflete, and she wouldn't notice anything.

JOE. If it's all right with you I'll just settle for the coffee.

GRINDLE. White with sugar?

JOE. Yes, that's right. *(to himself)* I'll have the sauna and massage later. *(JOE takes his bag into recreation room where MRS. W. is reading. He goes to the junction box.)*

MRS. W. Who are you?

JOE. I'm the engineer.

MRS. W. Ah, of course, I should have known.

JOE. I'm putting it in for Mrs. Green. I mean Jones, she wanted green.

MRS. W. What?

JOE. She wanted green.

MRS. W. I heard that bit, what was the first bit?

JOE. I'm putting this phone in for Mrs. Jones.

MRS. W. That's my daughter.

JOE. Very nice lady.

MRS. W. Thank you.

JOE. Are you joining them for the duration?

MRS. W. Of course.

JOE. Rather you than me.

MRS. W. At my time of life three weeks seems very little. When you're young of course it could be an eternity.

JOE. It's the boredom that would get me. See I'm very active, I'd miss the football and the Pub.

MRS. W. We have plenty to pass the time, we have music, films and books.

JOE. You sound as if you're quite looking forward to it.

MRS. W. I am, and do you know it'll be the first time in 35 years that I've stepped ashore at Tangiers?

JOE. *(reacts)* Hang on a minute. What did they tell you you were on?

MRS. W. It's a winter cruise.

JOE. I see, and where's it going to?

MRS. W. Well you ought to know, if you're the engineer.

JOE. Excuse me. *(JOE goes into the hall & picks up the reel of cable, He calls to GRINDLE.)* I've changed my mind, strong black and no sugar. *(He returns to the job.)*

MRS. W. What are you doing down there?

JOE. Fixing the phone, Madam. This cable here is connected to the junction box outside.

MRS. W. Would you mind if I made an observation?

JOE. Feel free.

MRS. W. As soon as we cast off that'll snap.

JOE. Yes, I daresay it would.

MRS. W. Well, don't say I didn't warn you.

JOE. No Madam. As a matter of interest, what are you — er — er — aiming to do in Tangiers?

MRS. W. Go straight to the Bazaar and change my Jellabi.

JOE. Well, that would be a natural thing to do, wouldn't it.

(DEIRDRE enters.)

DEIRDRE. Thank goodness I've got him to sleep at last. Ah, that's just the colour I wanted. It tones in very nicely.

JOE. I'm relieved about that as it's the only green we've got.

DEIRDRE. May I suggest you ask your people to delay the bill for 3 weeks, otherwise it'll just lie on the mat unpaid, and we wouldn't like to be cut off.

JOE. Well you can always get out at Gibralter and pop a cheque in the post.

DEIRDRE. Gibralter?

JOE. Or Tangiers. Of course you could get lucky, I mean if they press the button in Moscow you won't have to pay at all.

MRS. W. I didn't know we were going to Moscow.

DEIRDRE. We're not, Mother.

MRS. W. It'll be freezing and I've only got summer clothes.

JOE. Don't worry, we're cruising around in the Med.

MRS. W. You didn't know where we were going just now.

JOE. Well down in the engine room — stripped to the waist, shovelling coal, sweat pouring off us, we got no clue where we're going. It's *(sings)*

TOTE THAT BARGE, LIFT THAT BALE,
GET A LITTLE DRUNK AND YOU LAND IN GAOL.....

DEIRDRE. *(interrupting)* I gather you've had a chat with Mother.

JOE. Yes, we touched lightly on the trip ahead.

DEIRDRE. Mother, you are a chatterbox.

MRS. W. I never think it does any harm to be friendly with the crew.

JOE. Excuse me, I'm just going to make a test call to the Bridge. *(Dials number.)*

DEIRDRE. Ask them how they'd like us to pay the bill.

JOE. That's "Accounts." *(into phone)* Mr. Bearstead? Joe here, just testing the connection on Docket no. 12, 5, 4, 3, 2, 1. Alpha, Beta, Gamma, Delta. Mary had a little lamb, the doctor was surprised — over — *(He pauses & listens.)* Your response is clear.

MRS. W. Ask him what the weather forecast is.

JOE. Eh?

MRS. W. You're through to the Bridge, aren't you?

JOE. Oh yes — it's the Captain himself.

MRS. W. Well, go on, ask him.

JOE. *(into phone)* Lady down here wants to know about

the weather.... I see, *(Puts phone down.)* Portland Bill, Ronaldsway and Rockall — ten degrees falling. Visibility clear to moderate on the Western Avenue. *(He winks at DEIRDRE.)*

MRS. W. That sounds hopeful.

DEIRDRE. I should get on with your book, dear.

MRS. W. It would be nice to have some music. Perhaps a little Mantovani.

DEIRDRE. We haven't unpacked yet.

MRS. W. Let me know when we're going to cast off — I always like to wave goodbye to England.

DEIRDRE. I will, dear.

JOE. I only wish I could hang around, I wouldn't mind seeing that myself. *(During the above, GRINDLE has made a coffee & is seated reading a magazine in the kitchen.)*

DEIRDRE. *(to JOE)* Well, thank you very much for being so obliging.

JOE. All part of the service.

DEIRDRE. *(Starts up the stairs, then feeling insecure, she turns & comes down again.)* After you.

JOE. As a matter of fact, a very attractive lady offered me a coffee a while back.

DEIRDRE. *(flattered)* Oh, I don't remember doing that.

JOE. Not you, darling, the Nordic Nanny.

DEIRDRE. Well, I've got one or two last minute things to see to up top.

JOE. Be my guest.

DEIRDRE. *(Walks cautiously up the stairs, then stops & turns.)* These stairs are very awkward.

JOE. Mind how you go then.

DEIRDRE. Why don't you go and have your coffee?

JOE. I want to be here to catch you in my arms in case you fall.

DEIRDRE. I shan't fall, I'm in no danger of falling. *(She goes up the stairs.)*

GRINDLE. I still have it hot if you want it.

JOE. Spoilt for choice. *(Goes into kitchen. GRINDLE takes saucer off a cup of coffee for JOE. He sits down at table.)* Ta. Are you going to be able to stand this?

GRINDLE. What?

JOE. Being trapped down here with a family of lunatics.

GRINDLE. The Jones are very nice people. I am very happy with them.

JOE. When you're free to walk out on them, yes, but not encased in steel, 25 feet under the garden, it's a bit macabre isn't it?

GRINDLE. What?

JOE. Weird. Living down here. I mean it's creepy.

GRINDLE. It would not be very pleasant to be dying of radiation.

JOE. Nobody's going to die, if they've got the bomb and we've got the bomb nobody's going to use it.

GRINDLE. If, like me, you'd come from near Eastern Europe, you would not feel so safe.

JOE. Well you're not in Eastern Europe now, dear, you're in Northolt.

GRINDLE. And I shall tell you why I'm in Northolt. The main reason I took this job is because they advertised — "Own room, T.V. and atomic bomb shelter."

JOE. I don't believe this. How can people get so

hysterical.

GRINDLE. I am not hysterical, do I look hysterical?

JOE. Maybe not yet, but once that door shuts you'll be halfway to claustrophobism, I mean you won't see daylight for 3 weeks. God, how can you take it all so calmly?

GRINDLE. I have my books and plenty of music.

JOE. Mantovani? You call that music? I'd go crazy, I'd go bananas.

MRS. W. *(calling)* I'll have my beef tea now.

JOE. Oh God, imagine what it could do to her. I mean she's got a headstart on everybody already.

(GEOFFREY appears at the top of the stairs with a set of golf clubs.)

GEOFFREY. Anyone around to give me a hand?

JOE. I'm still here, what is it?

GEOFFREY. Rather heavy, golf clubs.

JOE. *(to GRINDLE)* Golf clubs, you still telling me they're sane?

GRINDLE. *(Goes into hall.)* Can I help you Mr. Jones?

GEOFFREY. It's all right, Grindle, I'll just put them here for now. *(GRINDLE returns to kitchen.)*

JOE. By my reckoning this whole pipe is about forty feet from end to end. I should hardly think you'd need a set of irons just for a long putt.

GEOFFREY. No, you see they're brand new.

JOE. Gold or platinum?

GEOFFREY. Being metal, they would retain radioactive properties for years to come, if they are exposed to a

nuclear explosion. That, of course, is if they hadn't already melted in the blast.

JOE. You take this whole thing very seriously don't you?

GEOFFREY. One has to treat this operation in the firm belief that it could happen.

JOE. I can see it now. It's finally happened — Wham!! Two or three months go by while the dust settles. Then one bright morning a smartly dressed figure steps onto the first tee at Northolt Golf Club and shouts — "If there's anyone left in the world, 'fore.' "

MRS. W. *(Calls out.)* Have we cast off?

GEOFFREY. No mother. *(Calls out.)* All ashore those who are going ashore.

JOE. While we're waiting for the big bang, I'll settle for a pint in the local until someone calls out "Time" in that great pub in the sky. *(He starts up the stairs.)*

GEOFFREY. *(stopping him)* Mr. Parker, it's people like you who make light of the future of Britain.

JOE. And because people like me can't afford one of your de-luxe shelters, all that's going to be left of Britain is twits like you. *(Exits up the stairs.)*

GEOFFREY. *(to himself)* Thank you very much. I'm rather glad he didn't vote for me.

GRINDLE. *(Comes out of the kitchen with a cup of Bovril.)* Would you like a cup of something hot Mr. Jones?

GEOFFREY. No thank you, Grindle, I think I could do with something a little stronger.

GRINDLE. A whisky maybe?

GEOFFREY. Yes.

GRINDLE. I will get it for you when I've given this to

Mrs. Wayneflete.

GEOFFREY. Quite all right, I'll do it myself.

MRS. W. I'm still waiting.

GRINDLE. Coming. *(GRINDLE goes into recreation room. GEOFFREY goes into kitchen.)* Here we are Mrs. Wayneflete, a nice hot cup of beef tea.

MRS. W. Thank you, my dear. *(GEOFFREY is getting ice from the fridge & refilling the ice trays.)*

(The baby cries.)

MRS. W. *(irritated)* I hope we shan't have too much of that. If he's like that now, what's he going to be like crossing the Bay of Biscay?

GRINDLE. I think the motion of the ship will lull him to sleep.

MRS. W. I hope so. That can ruin a cruise. Go in and give him a comforter, or a rusk, or something.

GRINDLE. OK, Mrs. Wayneflete. *(She exits to bedroom. The baby stops crying.)*

GEOFFREY. *(Puts the ice trays in the fridge, dries his hands & looks at his watch.)* I think there's just time for a quick one. *(He presses a button on the wall above the sink & bar door opens. It is as vast as possible and stocked from floor to ceiling like a wine cellar. He goes into the bar.)*

(DEIRDRE comes down the stairs with a bunch of cut daffodils and some letters.)

DEIRDRE. *(calling)* Grindle .... Grindle dear.

MRS. W. She's in with that baby.

DEIRDRE. Oh. I just wanted her to put these in water. Never mind, I'll do it myself. *(She goes into kitchen & sees GEOFFREY in the bar.)* Starting a little early aren't we, dear?

GEOFFREY. Just making sure that it's all in working order.

DEIRDRE. The second post's arrived.

GEOFFREY. Read it later, give us something to do. Care to join me in a snifter, darling?

DEIRDRE. Oh well, all right. *(Looks in.)* What have you got?

GEOFFREY. Well, if you've got an hour to spare, I'll tell you.

DEIRDRE. I think just a little gin, dear.

GEOFFREY. Can do. Pink? Tonic? Bitter lemon? Lime? Orange?

DEIRDRE. Yes.

GEOFFREY. Yes what?

DEIRDRE. Whatever you said — I don't mind, surprise me. *(She takes the daffodils to sink.)*

GEOFFREY. What are you doing with those flowers?

DEIRDRE. I'm just going to put them in water. *(She turns on the tap.)*

GEOFFREY. *(Ducks hurriedly under the flap with his whisky & turns the tap off.)* Lesson one. Water is our most precious commodity, our life blood, without it we perish and we only have two and a half thousand gallons. Now that has to last 5 people probably for as many months. We can only use it for things that are absolutely essential. *(He casually turns on the tap to top up his whisky.)* Flowers are out, I

can't think why you brought them down. They are lethal in an enclosed space. Even as I speak those flowers are using up the air in the room.

DEIRDRE. Well I didn't want to leave them in the garden for the neighbours to pinch.

GEOFFREY. The Blakes? Do you think they'd do that?

DEIRDRE. I'm sure of it. When we went on our Spring Holiday last year they ravaged the daffodils.

GEOFFREY. You can't prove that.

DEIRDRE. I don't know why they don't plant some themselves, they have copied everything else we've got.

GEOFFREY. Have they?

DEIRDRE. Of course. Haven't you noticed?

GEOFFREY. Not particularly.

DEIRDRE. We get a barbecue — they get a barbecue. We get a Flymo — they get one. We go over to Gas Central Heating, and a week later they've got it. I didn't realize there was so much money in the scrap metal business.

GEOFFREY. He also makes dodgy videos.

DEIRDRE. Dodgy?

GEOFFREY. "X" certificate stuff.

DEIRDRE. That's only a rumour, dear.

GEOFFREY. No, a chap at the Golf Club told me he'd seen one, starring Mrs. Blake.

DEIRDRE. No.

GEOFFREY. Yes.

DEIRDRE. Did she have a big part?

GEOFFREY. Apparently enormous.

DEIRDRE. Thay don't quite fit into Oswald Crescent.

GEOFFREY. No. I knew what we were in for when they changed the name of their house from Mandalay to Cobblers.

DEIRDRE. What's wrong with Cobblers? It's rather quaint, it has an old-world ring to it.

GEOFFREY. Think about it, darling, he's in Pornography!

DEIRDRE. What. Cobblers? .... Of course, I hadn't put the two together.

GEOFFREY. Here's your drink, darling.

DEIRDRE. Cheers!!

(A pair of black-trousered legs appear on the staircase & a voice calls out.)

VOICE. Can I have a word with you, Mrs. Jones?

GEOFFREY. Who's that?

DEIRDRE. It's only the milkman. *(She goes into hall.)* What is it milkman?

VOICE. I got your note stopping the milk but you haven't paid the bill.

DEIRDRE. I'm not sure where my bag is.

(An Indian milkman, CLIVE PATEL comes down the stairs wearing Express Dairy uniform & a peaked cap.)

PATEL. So this is the day of days, Mr. Jones, three weeks isn't it you're going to be down here?

GEOFFREY. How did you work that out?

PATEL. *(Produces note.)* Because on this note it says "two

pints and a dozen eggs on the fourteenth."

GEOFFREY. I'm surprised you didn't put a notice up on the window, Deirdre, — "Jones's gone to ground for 3 weeks."

DEIRDRE. Darling, the milkman saw it being built, you can hardly keep it a secret for a month, with an earth mover and a crane in the drive.

PATEL. I will never forget the morning I saw this whole edifice hoisted in the air, it blotted out the sun like a huge galactic chariot, then down it sank deep into the bowels of the earth, like a dead whale.

GEOFFREY. You could have chosen a slightly cheerier simile.

PATEL. Ah forgive me, Mr. Jones. That is what I am thinking before I am coming down these stairs and seeing this most desirable maisonette.

GEOFFREY. Well I wouldn't quarrel with that description — Mr. er — er—

PATEL. Patel. Clive Patel.

GEOFFREY. Mr. Patel. It has all mod. cons. and sophisticated electric controls for oxygen, cooking, refridgeration and sleeps six in comfort.

PATEL. Would I be rising above my station if I ask the price of all this?

GEOFFREY. Not at all, there are cheaper versions than this, but what you are standing in now costs around fifteen thousand pounds.

PATEL. Well, I'll go to the foot of Anaratapura. I can hardly believe it. To think that I paid twice that for a rat-infested leaking hovel, on the Waverley Estate.

DEIRDRE. Oh come along now, Mr. Patel, they're not

that bad.

PATEL. I felt safer when I was flooded out every year on the Ganges.

GEOFFREY. Steady on, there's a little thing known as slander, my firm designed that estate and if the people on it have let it go to rack and ruin that's not our fault.

PATEL. Well, I'm telling you this. If you could sell my house again and get me one of these I would be a very happy man.

GEOFFREY. Come on, Mr. Patel, would you really fancy living underground?

PATEL. If it is the difference of living underground and dying above it, it is the only sensible thing to do.

DEIRDRE. Do you mean you're one of the few people who believe that we're in danger of being annihilated?

PATEL. I feel it with a deep certainity. The Russians are in Afghanistan, the only logical reason for their presence is that they are going to sweep down through India like a bush fire.

GEOFFREY. What would they want India for?

PATEL. Seven hundred million people ripe for conquering and conversion. That's not counting the one's in Hounslow.

DEIRDRE. I can't see the Indians fighting for the Russians.

PATEL. Why not? There is a very good precedent, you conquered us and we fought for you. Why else would I be speaking a ruddy difficult language like English and working for the Express Dairy company?

GEOFFREY. Hadn't thought of it like that. We're indebted to you.

PATEL. And you to me, eight pounds, thirty-five.

DEIRDRE. Have you got any money, darling?

GEOFFREY. I've already given you the house-keeping.

DEIRDRE. Oh yes. I'll just see if my bag's in the bedroom. *(She goes to bedroom.)*

GEOFFREY. Won't keep you a jiffy, Mr. Patel.

PATEL. That's quite all right. I've almost finished my round.

GEOFFREY. Short day eh? Not a bad life.

PATEL. I was up at four, Mr. Jones.

GEOFFREY. Ah.

PATEL. And I will be working until nine o'clock tonight in my brother's supermarket in Hounslow.

GEOFFREY. God, you must be rolling in it. What are you doing with all the money?

PATEL. Underpinning my house. *(DEIRDRE comes back into recreation room from bedroom.)*

GEOFFREY. *(calls)* Got your bag yet, dear?

DEIRDRE. No, darling.

GEOFFREY. Mr. Patel wants to go.

DEIRDRE. *(to MRS. W.)* Mother, Mother, dear.

MRS. W. *(Wakes up.)* What is it?

DEIRDRE. Your bag, dear, I want to borrow some money.

MRS. W. Have we cast off yet?

DEIRDRE. No. *(Takes Mrs. W's bag.)*

MRS. W. You will let me know won't you? Because I want to be on deck when we pass the Isle of Wight.

PATEL. *(overhearing)* Pass the Isle of Wight. What? What? *(to GEOFFREY)* Pass the Isle of Wight?

GEOFFREY. Um — it's my mother-in-law, she's not

entirely with us at the moment. She thinks she's on a cruise.

PATEL. Well it is good to revere the aged. You are not seeing that often in this country.

GEOFFREY. Well, we're not the sort to leave her up there to perish in the blast.

DEIRDRE. Thank you, Mother.

MRS. W. That beef tea's gone straight through me.

DEIRDRE. Well go to the bathroom, dear.

MRS. W. I haven't the faintest idea where it is.

DEIRDRE. I'll show you, Mother, it's this way.

MRS. W. Is it all right to use it while we're still in harbour?

DEIRDRE. Of course, dear.

GEOFFREY. It's beside the stairs, Mother.

MRS. W. *(seeing PATEL)* Oh good morning, Captain.

GEOFFREY. Here we go again.

MRS. W. Making your final rounds?

PATEL. Oh yes, this is definitely my final round.

MRS. W. I wonder if I could prevail on your kindness?

PATEL. Yes.

MRS. W. I would be honoured if I could sit at your table for dinner.

PATEL. *(somewhat thrown)* Oh. What? What?

GEOFFREY. The Captain hasn't made up his table yet.

PATEL. I haven't what?

GEOFFREY. I'm sure the Captain *(nudging PATEL)* the Captain will bear you in mind.

PATEL. Most certainly. See you at the second sitting.

DEIRDRE. *(to MRS. W.)* It's just around the corner, dear. Just press the button, it's an electric flush.

MRS. W. Thank you, it's not a banana boat is it?

DEIRDRE. No. Why?

MRS. W. *(in a loud whisper)* It's just that the Captain looks rather dark. *(She exits into bathroom.)*

GEOFFREY. God, that woman.

DEIRDRE. I'm awfully sorry, Mr. Patel.

PATEL. Don't apologise. I am quite flattered to be thought of as someone as elevated as a Captain of a banana boat.

GEOFFREY. *(changing the subject)* Thanks for popping down.

DEIRDRE. *(paying him)* Here's your money, Mr. Patel.

PATEL. Ah. Thank you. *(He takes two fivers.)* Here is your change. Thirty five, forty, fifty, nine pounds and a picture of the Queen.

GEOFFREY. See you again in 3 weeks.

PATEL. God willing. I know this is only a trial run you are having but if things do get worse, and war breaks out, would it be all right if I came and knocked on your door for shelter?

GEOFFREY. Ah yes — well the point is, you see, if it does come to the crunch we'll have a lot of relatives, close relatives, billetting themselves on us. Isn't that so, Deirdre?

DEIRDRE. Yes, there's my aunt in Folkestone.

GEOFFREY. And I've got a very close cousin in — er — where does whatsis-name live?

DEIRDRE. Cornwall.

GEOFFREY. Yes — Cornwall.

PATEL. After the four-minute warning goes, your cousin could be very short of breath by the time he reaches this shelter.

GEOFFREY. We also have people nearer.

DEIRDRE. Were it not for all these close relatives you would, of course, be more than welcome.

PATEL. Well it's the thought that counts.

GEOFFREY. Can you let yourself out?

PATEL. *(Goes to the foot of the stairs & trips on the bottom one.)* I hope if the bomb comes, you will be able to climb quickly up this very awkward staircase to shut the door.

GEOFFREY. No problem. All we have to do is pull this lever here and half a ton of metal slams down and locks itself into position.

PATEL. Oh, you have thought of everything, Mr. Jones.

GEOFFREY. Well we hope so, and if we haven't we'll know more about it at the end of 3 weeks time.

(The lights go down & then slowly up & then down again & up.)

DEIRDRE. What's happening?

GEOFFREY. It's that damn flush, it's shorting the circuit.

(The lights go down.)

GEOFFREY. *(Goes to the door & bangs on it.)* Mother! Stop pushing that button.

(The lights come up, then go down & up very quickly.)

DEIRDRE. You'd better check this, Geoffrey. I mean this is just one cup of beef tea.

PATEL. At this rate, one dodgy curry and you could all be living in the dark.

(JOE comes down the stairs.)

JOE. Ah, I'm glad I caught you before you closed.

GEOFFREY. Only just.

JOE. I left my bag of equipment in there.

GEOFFREY. Good job you remembered, or you'd've been without it for 3 weeks. *(Exits into kitchen for the bag.)*

JOE. *(eyeing PATEL)* 'Ere don't you live on the Waverley Estate?

PATEL. If you can call it living.

JOE. Thought so, corner of Kenilworth and Talisman?

PATEL. That's right.

JOE. I'm just up the road from you, number 18.

PATEL. Well goodness me, what a small world.

GEOFFREY. *(Comes out of kitchen with JOE's tool bag.)* Quite a weight, what've you got in there?

JOE. A vandalised telephone call box. *(He takes his bag.)*

DEIRDRE. I wonder there are any left.

JOE. So long all.

GEOFFREY. Goodbye.

DEIRDRE. Goodbye.

JOE. *(Starts up the stairs, stops suddenly & comes back down.)* Oh sorry, I forgot to get you to sign for the installation.

GEOFFREY. Oh, all right, have you got a pen?

JOE. Oh yes. *(He casually hangs his tool bag on the lever which has a large red knob on the end.)*

(The lever slowly tilts down & as it comes to a stop there is a metallic clang as the hatch slams shut, thereby shutting out the shaft of sunlight & cutting the telephone cable which drops to the floor. They all look up & then towards each other.)

GEOFFREY. Your bag did that.

JOE. Sorry Squire. *(He removes his bag from the lever.)*

PATEL. Well we know it works.

DEIRDRE. At least we won't hear the bomb, dear, we'll all be deaf.

PATEL. Pardon?

GEOFFREY. *(Grasps the lever.)* Just open it and let off the visitors and then we'll weigh anchor.

DEIRDRE. Geoffrey please! You're sounding like Mother.

GEOFFREY. *(heaving on the immovable lever)* It's stuck, it's stuck!

DEIRDRE. Oh don't be ridiculous.

JOE. It better not be. *(He grabs it along side GEOFFREY.)* Come on push!

GEOFFREY. I am pushing!

DEIRDRE. Help them, Milkman.

PATEL. Yes, Madam.

JOE. Come on. *(All three men strain with grunts & groans to push the lever up, but instead it snaps off in GEOFFREY's hands.)*

GEOFFREY. My God.

DEIRDRE. What's happened?

PATEL. Bloody British workmanship. That is what's happened!

CURTAIN

ACT ONE
Scene Two

The same. The action is continuous. JOE & GEOFFREY have run up the stairs. JOE is banging loudly on the hatch with the broken lever. DEIRDRE & PATEL are at the foot of the stairs. PATEL grabs GEOFFREY's driver from the golf bag & bangs it on the hand rail of the stairs.

PATEL. Help! Help!

GEOFFREY. Have you gone mad?

PATEL. No but I am on the way.

GEOFFREY. Give me that club.

PATEL. Why?

GEOFFREY. You're not even holding it properly. *(GEOFFREY grabs it from PATEL, and puts it back in the bag.)*

(GRINDLE enters from the bedroom & runs into hall.)

GRINDLE. The baby cannot sleep with such a terrible noise.

GEOFFREY. *(shouting)* Half a dozen sticks of dynamite couldn't open that hatch.

JOE. I'm not trying to open it, I'm trying to attract attention.

GEOFFREY. Whose attention?

JOE. Passers by.

GEOFFREY. Strange as it may seem, we get very few passers by strolling through our back garden.

GRINDLE. Is something the matter?

DEIRDRE. Just a hitch — my husband is dealing with it.

GEOFFREY. There's not a damn thing your husband can do.

JOE. *(Comes down the stairs looking dejected and holding the lever.)* Well, this is very jolly, isn't it?

PATEL. How can you be so calm? *(Fans himself with his cap.)* I am already having the claustrophobia.

GEOFFREY. Absolute nonsense, Patel, it's all in the mind.

DEIRDRE. Well where else would it be, you fool. *(to PATEL)* Now it's all right, Mr. Patel, come along with me.

PATEL. Thank you, thank you.

DEIRDRE. Come and sit down. *(He does.)* Just relax and take a few deep breaths. *(PATEL sits gasping.)* Mr. Patel, relax.

PATEL. How can I relax when my brain is telling me that we are trapped like rats in a sewer?

GEOFFREY. That's absolute rubbish.

PATEL. But you've just said there's not a damn thing you can do.

GEOFFREY. How can I think clearly with you having hysterics?

PATEL. I tell you we are doomed to die.

GEOFFREY. *(Puts PATEL's cap firmly on PATEL's head.)* Pull yourself together man, and remember you belong to the

Express Dairy Company.

PATEL. *(calmly)* Yes, I'm sorry, but this is the first time in my ten years as a Roundsman that I have been trapped 25 feet beneath a customer's back garden.

DEIRDRE. I think we'd all feel better if we had a nice cup of tea.

(The lights dim & go up again.)

GEOFFREY. Not beef tea.

DEIRDRE. Grindle, tea please.

GRINDLE. Does everyone take milk and sugar?

JOE. You can put some brandy in mine, girl.

(MRS. WAYNEFLETE enters from bathroom.)

MRS. W. I heard a bang, does that mean we're at sea?

DEIRDRE. Very much so, Mother. *(to GEOFFREY)* Darling, you implied earlier that you'd covered every eventuality.

GEOFFREY. All bar one.

JOE. The 'andle coming off in your hand.

GEOFFREY. Exactly.

DEIRDRE. Why can't you phone for another one?

GEOFFREY. Of course, I knew I couldn't have been that stupid, that's why I had the phone put in.

JOE. *(Holds up the severed end of the cable.)* Where d'you want me to put the end of the cable, in your ear, or in your mouth?

GEOFFREY. What happened?

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