

EXTRACTS FROM

FITTING UP THE GENTLEMEN

A COMEDY IN TWO ACTS

By Christopher Owen.

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The year is 1973, Edward Heath has just won the election from Harold Wilson, inflation is 8%, the unions are striking.

The staff in the formal wear hire department of Webber and Son, West End of London Branch continue to fit out the gentlemen with outfits for Ascot and the Derby and with formal evening wear. As they discover, their world is fast changing.

SETS: There are 2 sets:

1. The large store room for the formal wear outfits.
2. The fitting area with four fitting rooms and a cash register on stage – and two fitting rooms and a cash register off stage.

CHARACTERS:

JACK METCALF. 54 years of age. Formal Wear Hire Staff.

VINCE PETTIT. 51 years of age. Formal Wear Hire Staff.

HARRY KENT. 57 years of age. Formal Wear Hire Staff.

TEDDY HARRIS. 43 years of age. Formal Wear Hire Staff.

MRS FRESHWATER.

CUSTOMERS (*possibly actors playing more than one part*):

Messrs Penrose, Rogers, Johnson, Evans, Smith, Simmons, Binstead, Jimmy and punter, Taylor, Barton, Duncan, Stevens, Rowlandson, Norris, Yates, Williams, Deaken.

FIRST EXTRACT:

ACT ONE.

1. THE STORE ROOM:

JACK METCALF IS HANGING UP MORNING COATS AND PUTTING AWAY TROUSERS, THEN WAISTCOATS, SHIRTS, CRAVATS, AND ACCESSORIES. THESE GARMENTS ARE THOSE OF A 'GREYS' OUTFIT FOR THE DERBY AND ASCOT.

VINCE, WITH 'GREYS' MORNING COAT OUTFIT GARMENTS ENTERS AND MAKES HIS WAY TO THE RAILS ON WHICH MORNING COATS ARE HANGING.

HE PROCEEDS TO HANG UP THE COATS AND PUT AWAY THE TROUSERS, WAISTCOAT AND SHIRTS AND ACCESSORIES.

VINCE: The gentleman, he comes in, he wants to hire right through to Ascot, hire just the once for the Derby and Ascot. I say to him I'm sorry to say we don't do that, sir, I say. Against Company policy.

JACK: (AS HE HANGS UP AND PUTS AWAY GARMENTS): Trying it on, eh? Eh, Vince? Everyone making out they're feeling the pinch. Eh?

VINCE: (AS HE HANGS UP AND PUTS AWAY GARMENTS): I say to him. Tell you what, sir, I say, you'll not be saying anything to management, it being you, sir, I'll chuck in the top hat for nothing. Thanks very much, the gentleman says – he slips me a couple of quid. He saves himself no more than a couple of quid on the hire of the topper - but he reckons he's got something for nothing. He goes off very happy about it. Two quid in my pocket, I'm not too down in the dumps about it myself. Eh? Eh, Jack?

TEDDY HARRIS ENTERS TO SELECT AN OUTFIT. ('GREYS' – MORNING COAT, WAISTCOAT, TROUSERS, ETC) FOR HIS CUSTOMER MR JOHNSON.

VINCE: Hello – Teddy Harris on the move. Eh, Teddy? His two boys at private – private school, eh? – got to pay their school fees, eh, Teddy? Got to drum up the commission to pay the school fees. (UNDER HIS BREATH): Arsehole. (TO JACK): Eh, Jack? Teddy. Mrs Harris breathing down his neck.

TEDDY: We can't all afford to buy property in Spain, Vince.

VINCE: No. Careful financial accounting, that's me. Don't live above my means – my station in life.

HARRY ENTERS TO SELECT A SHIRT, CRAVAT AND ACCESSORIES (COLLAR STUDS, CUFFLINKS,) FOR HIS 'GREYS' MORNING COAT OUTFIT FOR HIS CUSTOMER MR EVANS. (HE HAS ALREADY FITTED HIM WITH THE COAT, AND HAS LEFT HIM IN FITTING ROOM 1 TO TRY ON THE TROUSERS.) HARRY HAS TROUBLE WITH HIS KNEES WHICH PHYSICALLY IMPEDE HIM.

JACK: All right, Harry? Eh?

HARRY: Hanging in there, Jack. Shirt, collar, cravat. Never say die. That's it.

JACK: That's it.

WE HEAR ALEC OUT IN RECEPTION SPEAKING ON THE TANNOY SYSTEM.

ALEC (VO – ON THE TANNOY): Mr Harris to reception, please.

TEDDY: Yes, yes. All right. All right.

ALEC (VO – ON THE TANNOY): Mr Harris, your customer Mr Johnson is here for you, please.

TEDDY: I'm fitting him – the stupid sod. The bloody man doesn't know who's come in and who hasn't.

HARRY: Tell us a new one, Teddy.

ALEC (VO – ON TANNOY): Mr Harris, your customer Mr Johnson is here, thank you.

TEDDY: Bugger off.

(JACK AND VINCE: (WITHOUT EMOTION): Shut up.)

(HARRY: (WITHOUT EMOTION): Shut up.)

JACK: They get rid of Fred. They stick him in – Alec - down from accounts on the second - making a balls up of it. They say they're getting in a new departmental manager out there – supposed to be a new departmental manager – coming in today, Alec says. Where is he? Eh?

HARRY: He's coming in today, Alec says.

JACK: Well, I don't see him. If he was coming in today he'd have come in this morning. Come in this morning.

HARRY: He'd have come in this morning, Vince.

JACK: That's it.

VINCE: If anyone, if any of my regulars come in, I'll be paying a visit to Ladbrokes.

ALEC (VO ON TANNOY): Mr Metcalf to reception please – your customer Mr Penrose has arrived.

JACK: Hello. My Mr Penrose. Off we go. ‘Good afternoon, very good to see you, sir. If you’d kindly pop in to the cubicle here, sir. Thank you, sir.’

JACK EXITS (TO GO TO RECEPTION).

VINCE: Right. I’m off. Back in five, ten minutes. Don’t you go fitting out any of my regulars, Teddy Harris. Right? You’ll have my knee hard into your bollocks, chum - your Mrs Harris, it isn’t likely she’d appreciate the consequences of that. Eh? On the other hand, come to think of it, maybe it won’t make any difference, it won’t bother her at all. Right.

VINCE EXITS TO LEAVE PREMISES.

TEDDY: (OUT OF VINCE’S HEARING): Fuck off.

AFTER A WHILE:

ALEC (V.O ON TANNOY): Mr Harris your customer Mr Johnson is here, thank you.

TEDDY: Jesus. The sooner they put him back in Accounts, the better.

2. FITTING AREA.

JACK LEADS MR PENROSE INTO THE FITTING AREA – AND TO FITTING ROOM 2.

JACK: Here we are, sir. If you’d kindly pop into the cubicle here, sir. Hope you had a pleasant weekend.

PENROSE: Yes, thank you.

JACK: Have you fitted up in no time at all, very smart as you'd expect, sir. Thank you, Mr Penrose, sir.

PENROSE: Thank you, Mr Metcalf.

JACK: May I take your jacket, sir? It's the Derby, is it? Thank you. I haven't had the pleasure of seeing you here for a quite a long time now, have I, sir?

PENROSE: I've been in the New York – this past six months - work.

JACK: Ah, yes. We've had a few changes over here while you've been away. Mr Wilson out, Mr Heath in, sir. The unions going mad. Terrible.

PENROSE: The country is a damnable mess, that's for sure.

JACK: So it would verily seem, sir. (JACK IS HANGING UP MR PENROSE'S JACKET.) The Unions. NUM. The miners, the trains, and the rest of them – bringing the Country to her knees. Inflation over 8%. It's the Arabs – holding onto the oil – got us by the goolies, if you'll pardon the phraseology.

PENROSE: You're right, Mr Metcalf – no doubt about it. Ted Heath, I don't know how he is going to do any better than Harold Wilson.

JACK: Exactly, sir. The changes, as I say - it's the same here, sir, at Webber and Son. You may have read. We've been taken over by Johansen Perry. The big white chief Sammy Webber sold out to Johansen Perry. It's a date I'll never forget – 21st January 1973 – last January, Mr Penrose, sir. Johansen Perry take over, they bring in new terms of employment. Reduced basic pay, increased commission.

ALEC (VO ON THE TANNOY): Member of staff to reception, please.

JACK: That's Alec Garfield, Mr Penrose, sir. He's down from accounts. Deputising in reception till we get a new department manager out there. New department manager who we're all told to expect. Alec Garfield, he's not cut out for the job. We'll be glad when he gets back to where he comes from. Just take your measurements, if I may. Thank you. They get rid of Mr Roy, Edmund Roy – you remember him, Mr Penrose - him in his smart grey suit. (JACK PROCEEDS TO MEASURE PENROSE'S CHEST.) Edmund Roy, he wore a tie, a nice blue, same as the rest of us, only Edmund Roy, his tie had a red dot on it. He liked to stand out from the crowd. Lovely smile. Breath of fresh air. His regular gentlemen, they loved him. Chest: 44 – thank you. (ESTIMATING THE ARM LENGTH): Arm length: regular. You'd hear him singing. Mr Roy. Not over loud. Not so as to frighten the horses. You may remember, sir.

PENROSE: Short chap. Very jolly.

JACK: That's him. Waist, if you allow me. (JACK PROCEEDS TO MEASURE PENROSE'S WAIST) Johansen Perry comes in, they get rid of Mr Roy.

THE END OF THE FIRST EXTRACT.

SECOND EXTRACT:

PENROSE: The unions, the TUC – Jack Jones and that lot – the NUM, ASLEF – they've been infiltrated, they're run by the communists.

JACK: Well, all I can say is, let's thank the good lord we here haven't been infiltrated by them. (REFERRING TO THE COAT): Yes, nice.

PENROSE: The Russians - word has it – from a very reliable source – you can trust me on this – the Russian Embassy is secretly delivering funds, cash, to the British Communist Party every month.

JACK: Is that so, sir?

PENROSE: In a brown leather holdall.

JACK: A holdall, you say? Well, I never. (REFERRING TO THE MORNING COAT): That looks nice. (TO PAUL): How about that young Mr Whiteley? The state of the nation, eh? We're having to make a stand here – holding out against the enemy within. A brown leather holdall, you say – well.

HARRY ENTERS. HE GOES TO MR EVANS IN FITTING ROOM 1.

JACK: (TO PENROSE): The collar sitting nicely. Thank you. The fall of the coat, Mr Whiteley. Neat. Not too tight. That's the thing to watch. Looks very good, I think, don't you, sir? To tell you the truth, you'd got the figure for morning coats, if I may say. Some gentlemen have the figure, some haven't. You have, sir. Thank the Lord.

HARRY: (TO EVANS WHO IS GETTING INTO HIS CIVIES): Here we are, Mr Evans, sir. How you getting on, sir? Ah. There we are. If it's agreeable with you, we'll make our way to the cash register. Pack this lot up.

JACK: (TO MR PENROSE): Now then, if you try the trousers on, try the waistcoat, Mr Whiteley and I'll pop off and select a shirt, a cravat, studs. You'll not be wanting shoes? No. No hurry.

HARRY EMERGES FROM THE CUBICLE TO BE FOLLOWED BY MR EVANS.

HARRY: (TO MR EVANS): Let's hope it's nice for the Derby. We need a nice warm sunny day. Not like last year as I recall.

TEDDY ENTERS FROM RECEPTION WITH MR SIMMONS WHO IS ONE OF VINCE'S REGULARS AND STARTS TO CROSS TO THE FITTING ROOMS OFF STAGE LEFT.

JACK LEAVES MR PENROSE'S FITTING ROOM 2. AS HE DOES SO, HE SEES TEDDY WITH MR SIMMONS, ONE OF VINCE'S CUSTOMERS.

THE END OF THE SECOND EXTRACT.

THIRD EXTRACT:

WOMAN: (V.O. ON THE TANNOY): Mr Kent to reception, please, thank you.

JACK AND HARRY AND MR PENROSE FREEZE, ALARMED. MR SMITH APPEARS AT THE ENTRANCE OF HIS FITTING ROOM 3. TEDDY APPEARS FROM THE OFF STAGE FITTING ROOM 5.

WHERE HE HAS BEEN SERVING MR SIMMONS. HE TOO IS ALARMED. MR JIMMY POPS HIS HEAD OVER THE FITTING ROOM CURTAIN. PAUL IS ALSO PRESENT.

JACK: Who's that?

HARRY: It's a woman, Jack.

JACK: I know it's a woman. It's not Alec. Not unless he's had the operation.

TEDDY: They've put a woman in reception.

JACK: All right, Mr Jimmy.

MR JIMMY DISAPPEARS BEHIND THE FITTING ROOM CURTAIN.

HARRY: That'll be the new Department Manager.

JACK: No.

WOMAN: (V.O. ON THE TANNOY): Would Mr Kent please come to reception for your customer, please, thank you.

JACK: Dear God. A woman calling for you, Harry.

VINCE ENTERS WITH A SHIRT, COLLAR, CRAVAT, ETC FOR MR SMITH.

AS VINCE ENTERS:

TEDDY, SEEING VINCE, HURRIEDLY RETURNS TO VINCE'S REGULAR MR SIMMONS IN FITTING ROOM 5.

JACK: (TO VINCE): There's a woman in reception, Mr Pettit.

VINCE: So I've heard. No woman is coming between me and my gentlemen. (TO MR SMITH WHO IS IN HIS CIVVIES): Not to worry yourself, Mr Smith, sir. Here we are. Ah – you've got back into your own suit – the morning trousers fitted? Very good. Off we go then. Settle up, shall we, sir?

JACK: We're going to have to look into this, Mr Pettit.

VINCE: All in good time, Mr Metcalf.

JACK: (TO PENROSE): We'll pack this lot away, Mr Penrose, shall we? Then I'll make out the bill. (SEEING VINCE AND MR SMITH AT THE CASH REGISTER AND OUTFIT CASES): We'll go along to the cash register just round by fitting room 6, Mr Penrose, sir. (TO PAUL): Come along, Mr Whiteley. Cashing up. (TO PENROSE): Thank you, sir.

PENROSE: I am in rather a hurry, Mr Metcalf. Got a lot behind.

JACK: You have indeed, sir.

END OF THIRD EXTRACT.

FOURTH EXTRACT:

THE STORE ROOM.

JACK AND PAUL ARE ENTERING.

JACK: Dear God. A woman. In all my years. Since Webbers came into being, you can believe me. Sammy Webber, he's turning in his grave.

PAUL: You want me to go and have a look?

JACK: What? No. What for? I don't want anything to do with her. I'm not going out, that's for sure. I go out there – I'm not taking any responsibility for my actions.

HARRY ENTERS TO SELECT A 'GREYS' MORNING COAT OUTFIT AND A SECOND MORNING COAT FOR MR TAYLOR IN FITTING ROOM 1.

JACK: I've never known – anything - not like this, Harry. I can't believe it.

HARRY: Never known anything. My Mr Taylor here. 'Greys'.

JACK: Mrs Who?

HARRY: Mrs Freshwater. She doesn't look too good to me, Jack. A big woman. Powerful looking. She must be all of 13 stone. Rough estimate: Chest 40, regular arm, waist 38 – inside leg 32. As I say, chest 40, cup double D / G – the cup not being a thing I have the appropriate professional expertise by what to make an accurate estimate.

JACK: No, of course not. Neither of us, that's for certain, Harry.

HARRY: You and me being in the gentlemen's formal wear hire, us not having no experience of the ladies' formal wear.

JACK: Dear God. A woman. Department Manager. Formal Wear Hire.

HARRY: Nevertheless-

JACK: What?

HARRY: Mrs Freshwater's chest: 50 - her cup, however you look at it, substantial. Her length of arm regular, the waist 38. Inside leg, at a guess, 32. Speaking conservatively, I have to say there's a great deal of Mrs Freshwater. She's big. And she has a handbag, Jack.

VINCE ENTERS TO SELECT AN OUTFIT FOR A CUSTOMER MR BARTON.

HARRY: She's got a handbag, Vince.

VINCE: The woman?

HARRY: Mrs Freshwater. She's a big-un, Vince.

JACK: I don't know, I really don't know what the hell the customers, the gentlemen are going to say. I don't.

VINCE: I got a gentleman come in. Mr Barton. Snooty bugger. Very full of his own importance. A suitable case for The Dry Cleaners in Villiers Street, I think. Eh?

HARRY: The Dry Cleaners In Villiers Street.

JACK: This the time for Villiers Street, is it? I mean with her.

VINCE: I'm not letting no fucking woman putting me off, Jack Metcalf. I've been here 23 years – right? Webber and Son for 23 years – this fucking lot Johansen Perry can stick a fucking woman in – that's up to them – I'm doing The Dry Cleaners in Villiers Street. (HAVING SELECTED A FRAYED, SHABBY AND ILL-FITTING MORNING COAT): Here we are. This should do the trick. Quasimado here. Get the tea on.

VINCE EXITS WITH THE MORNING COAT TO THE FITTING AREA.

END OF FOURTH EXTRACT

FIFTH EXTRACT:

MRS FRESHWATER EXITS.

JACK: Cameras? Cameras everywhere. Dear God. Dear God in Heaven. What's going on? The cash registers taken away. Well, that's goodbye to the gratuities, isn't it? Eh? How are we to get tips when the gentlemen are paying up to her out there in reception? Eh? What the fuck is going on?

TEDDY IS ON HIS WAY TO EXIT WITH THE OUTFIT FOR MR DUNCAN WHO IS IN FITTING ROOM 6.

VINCE: Set back for you, eh, Teddy? Gratuities. Teddy, he's going to have to take on a newspaper round on top of everything, eh? That's it.

TEDDY EXITS WITH THE OUTFIT FOR MR DUNCAN WHO IS IN FITTING ROOM 6.

JACK: Cameras, cash registers – bloody music. What’s all this about music? The gentlemen don’t want music. We’ve never had music. Never. Not once.

MUSIC PLAYS.

VINCE: We have now, Jack.

JACK: She’s not wasting any time. Is she? How are we going to work, fit up the gentlemen with that bloody row going on? They’ll be a rebellion. Turn it down.

END OF FIFTH EXTRACT.

SIXTH EXTRACT:

VINCE COMES OUT OF ROWLANDSON’S FITTING ROOM 3 AND CLOSES THE CURTAIN.

TEDDY ENTERS FROM THE OFFSTAGE LEFT FITTING ROOM 6 WITH AN EVENING TAIL COAT AND A WHITE WAISTCOAT TO RETURN TO THE STORE ROOM.

VINCE: (TO ROWLANDSON): I might be a little while. (TO TEDDY): Ah. That’s it. Teddy Harris. Don’t say I didn’t warn you, Teddy.

VINCE BANGS HIM UP AGAINST THE WALL, KNEES HIM IN THE BOLLOCKS AND PROCEEDS TO PHYSICALLY ASSAULT HIM.

AT SOME POINT DURING THIS, ROWLANDSON, ALERTED BY THE NOISE, PEERS ROUND THE CURTAIN OF HIS CUBICLE.

VINCE: (AS HE BEATS HIM UP): I told you, didn’t I. Eh? You don’t fucking fit up my regulars. I’m not having anyone fucking me up. Right. Mr Simmonds, eh? You think I’m fucking blind, fucking stupid?! You

keep your hands to yourself, you spineless little turd, you and your fucking private boarding school. Eh? Going up in the fucking world are you, fucking Teddy Harris. Ideas above your station. Your fucking wife, eh? All lah-di-dah. Steve Carter, you remember Steve Carter, Steve Carter, he fucked your wife, eh? – fucked her, saw it for myself, at Sammy Webber's farewell party, fucked her in the store, back of morning coats 42 long, stretched out there with her legs apart on trouser drawer 38, 33. Steve Carter not the only one, Teddy. You prat. Keep your fucking hands off my gentlemen!

VINCE STEPS BACK FROM THE FALLEN TEDDY.

ROWLANDSON: (AT THE ENTRANCE TO HIS FITTING ROOM 3 – CONCERNED THAT VINCE HAS NOT FORGOTTEN ABOUT THE OUTFIT FOR HIS PUNTER): Vince.

MRS FRESHWATER ENTERS.

ROWLANDSON DUCKS BACK INTO HIS FITTING ROOM 3.

FRESHWATER: Mr Pettit. You're to report to Personnel on the third floor.

VINCE: (REFERRING TO TEDDY): This is a staff relations matter.

FRESHWATER: Mr Pettit, what has been happening between you and Mr Harris – I assume it is Mr Harris – is not something into which I am prepared to enquire or investigate at this moment in time. However, Personnel informs me they require you to see them immediately. Thank you.

VINCE: Right. I enjoyed our little chat, Mr Teddy Harris.

VINCE PICKS UP THE GARMENTS TEDDY HAD WITH HIM.

VINCE: (HANDING THE GARMENTS TO MRS FRESHWATER): They may need cleaning – try Villiers Street.

VINCE EXITS TO GO TO PERSONNEL.

TEDDY STRUGGLES TO HIS FEET AND IS IN A BAD WAY.

FRESHWATER: Mr Harris. Do you need a doctor? I believe there's a first aid box on the 2nd floor. Do you need any help, Mr Harris?

TEDDY: I'm all right.

FRESHWATER: Well, may I suggest you go and clean yourself up.

TEDDY: I'm all right.

FRESHWATER: If you want the rest of the afternoon off, I suppose, under the circumstances, you best do so.

TEDDY EXITS STAGE RIGHT.

END OF SIXTH EXTRACT.

SEVENTH EXTRACT:

STORE ROOM.

PAUL IS PUTTING AWAY GARMENTS – MR BINSTED CONTINUING TO SING.

PAUL: All right, Mr Binstead?

FRESHWATER: (V.O. ON THE TANNOY): Mr Whiteley.

PAUL STARTLED, LOOKS TOWARDS A TANNOY SPEAKER.

PAUL: Yes.

FRESHWATER: (V.O. ON THE TANNOY): We're focusing the security cameras.
Would you please move a little to your left.

PAUL: Left?

PAUL MOVES A LITTLE TO HIS LEFT.

FRESHWATER: (V.O. ON THE TANNOY): Bit further – three paces more.

PAUL MOVES AS REQUESTED.

FRESHWATER: (V.O. ON THE TANNOY): Back a bit.

PAUL MOVES AS REQUESTED.

FRESHWATER: (V.O. ON THE TANNOY): The other security camera now. Mr
Whiteley, move ten paces to your right. More. Two more. Good, that's about right.
We've covered the whole area now. Thank you.

PAUL STARES AT THE TANNOY SPEAKER.

END OF THE EXTRACTS