

The 11:08 Brighton -- The Oldest Established Permanent Floating Cast Party
By G.L. Horton copyright 2004

A first class compartment on the 11:08pm South Central commuter train to Brighton from London's Victoria Station. Two men, no longer young but appearing boyish in black jeans and black T shirts with old West End show logos on them, are seated facing each other, drinking beer from a collection of six packs piled on the seats beside them and at their feet. Jackets, caps, a couple of packages of crisps, a duffle bag and a backpack or two also litter the area. BRICK is burley, ALFIE lean and wiry. CAROL, a colorfully dressed but otherwise unremarkable American woman of approximately the same age as the two men, opens the half glass door of the compartment, but hesitates in the corridor outside. The men spot the theatre program Carol is carrying and after a whispered consultation urge her to join them in their compartment.

BRICK: Come in. Come on in, love! Join us in a beer. (*sweeping debris off the seat beside him*)

ALFIE: Plenty of room. (*ALFIE makes an even greater effort to be hospitable, rising and stowing the "stuff" neatly, indicating that there is room beside him, too.*)

BRICK: And good company. Best of the Best.

CAROL: This is first class, isn't it? (*steps inside as the train readies for departure*)

STATIONMASTER LOUDSPEAKER: "11:08 train for Brighton departing on track 15"

BRICK: First class accommodation. Just what you deserve, love. Never travel any other way.

ALFIE: Not on the 11:08. (*indicates to CAROL the space DS of his seat*)

CAROL: But I don't have a first class ticket.

ALFIE: Neither do we. (*CAROL pulls the door shut behind her, the train sound fades*)

BRICK: Any class.

ALFIE: Yes we do, Brick. We bought tickets. At least, I did. (*pats the seat beside him again. CAROL is persuaded, sits down next to ALFIE, where she can keep an eye on BRICK*)

BRICK: Right. We both did, Alfie. Tonight. But ninety percent of the time on the Show Train run you don't need one. Nobody comes by to check, and the gate will be open at the other end.

ALFIE: It's too late, too few passengers. Not worth paying somebody to man it.

BRICK: If they do come round, you can bluff your way. Pinch you, they'd have to fill out the paperwork.

ALFIE: Unless you run into the same guard twice in a row. Then you might have a problem.

BRICK: The worst they can do is throw you off the train.

CAROL: But it's the last train! You'd be stranded.

ALFIE: Not the last. There's a 12:22.

BRICK: Never be stranded. Inconvenienced, maybe. Detoured. But stranded? I'm resourceful.

ALFIE: Brick is. Resourceful's the word for him.

BRICK: England, the States, Europe, everywhere people are eager to shelter me--- for the sheer pleasure of my company.

ALFIE: And that's only a slight exaggeration.

CAROL: I can believe it.

BRICK: So relax, enjoy. Have a beer.

CAROL: Thanks, but no, thank you.

ALFIE: We brought plenty. (*kicks pile of beer*)

CAROL: So I see.

ALFIE: Have a crisp, then? (*holds out two or three different bags. CAROL looks skeptical, but chooses the most familiar, a potato chip*)

CAROL: Thanks.

BRICK: Don't you drink?

CAROL: Not much, and not beer. Besides, I'm so tired a few sips would put me to sleep. I might sleep through my stop and be-- stranded. There it is -- the American tourist's nightmare.

ALFIE: You are American. Right?

CAROL: Right.

ALFIE: I thought so from the first.

BRICK: But Americans all drink beer! Or at least the cold piss you call beer.

CAROL: Nearly all.

ALFIE: Typically.

CAROL: I'm not quite typical. Is that all right?

ALFIE: No reason you should be, love.

BRICK: You're all right. You're our guest.

ALFIE: The sleep business is why Brick bought a ticket. We're exhausted, we're planning to drink. Don't want to pass out before Brighton without a ticket on us. Might get us pinched.

BRICK: By the Brighton constabulary, not the railroad. The railroad doesn't give a shite.

ALFIE: Just running the trains is enough for them.

BRICK: More than enough. Far more.

ALFIE: Barely an aspiration, I'd say.

BRICK: Come along and throw us out? I'd like to see em try! Not after what they've bolloxed up already today.

ALFIE: Every 3rd train canceled.

BRICK: All the fast ones. No express, just locals.

CAROL: But this is an express. (*BRICK and ALF shake their heads*)
It said so on the board....

ALFIE: This is a local, love!

BRICK: Alas, tis all too true. This is a local, this is. Every wee stop between London and Brighton. You see now, innit? Why I'm not prepared to enjoy this trip in anything less than first class comfort--- nor should you be, my girl.

CAROL: You'd think they'd at least announce it! Call the stops....

ALFIE: They're supposed to, but this time of night they're off to themselves, having a little rest. Ever seen a conductor on the 11:08, Brick?

BRICK: Never.

ALFIE: Not even when they might be useful. After a football match, with yobs bouncing out the windows.

BRICK: They might get the police on, but they stay least in sight.

ALFIE: Why should they give a shite?

CAROL: Well, they could lose their jobs.

BRICK: Whoo! She is an American!

ALFIE: Must be.

BRICK: This is England, madam. A 4th world country.

ALFIE: First world, like Germany, they do the thing efficiently.

BRICK: Bugger-all! A train in Germany is 30 seconds behind, your German looks at his schedule and begins to grumble. You ever been on a German train?

CAROL: Once. 10 or 12 years ago.

BRICK: They were good then, but they've got even better.

ALFIE: Germans have the technology. Everything's automated, the latest.

CAROL: Even the French run perfect trains.

BRICK: Especially the French. It's worth taking pains for a matter of comfort and pleasure.

ALFIE: 2nd world would be the old Soviet block, where they've gone from the KGB to the Mafia without any time to think things through....

CAROL: And in the 3rd world countries....?

ALFIE: They haven't the technology, but they try harder.

BRICK: They care, they make do-- they bring you little luxuries by why of apology.

ALFIE: Brick's the travel expert here.

BRICK: In England it's you're out of luck chum, and why should I pretend to care?

ALFIE: He knows trains everywhere. He's off on tour whenever a tour's on offer. He's worked enough in America he should qualify for a pension.

BRICK: If Americans still had pensions.

ALFIE: Brick can pass for a Yank in Australia, or even in Germany. Citizen of the world, he is.

BRICK While Alf has to stay close to home, keep an eye on his old Mum.

ALFIE: If you'll excuse me for a mo--

BRICK: Weak bladder's another reason. Off for a wee stroll to the WC for a wee wee?

ALFIE: Oui.

BRICK: Non, monsieur. In France, perchance. But this is your 4th world facility you're headed for. If I were you, I'd try to keep it in my britches.

ALFIE: You're not me, Brick. Never were.

BRICK: True. I'm way ahead of you. Four beers to your two, and master of me house.

ALFIE: Piss off, mate. Pardon our French, love.

BRICK: Don't mind us. We're used to traveling with all our mates, you see. The whole crew of us making this trip together. But the whirligig of time brings in his revenges, and work's a bit short this season, so it's down to Alfie and me to keep up the revelry. Plenty of beer, but not the cream of the company-- present company excepted, of course.

CAROL: Of course.

BRICK: Sure you won't join me in a beer.

CAROL: It'd be a tight fit.

BRICK: Not once we get tight enough.

CAROL: Sorry. Rather not.

BRICK: Well, someone must keep up the tradition. Honor of the bon companions.

CAROL: That's you and Alfie?

BRICK: Oh, we're just the remnant. You might say the dregs, or might be we're the bright burning beacons, but tonight we're all that's rolling home of the Brighton Crew, and the oldest established permanent rolling backstage revel in the old Blime. Welcome to it, Madame.

CAROL: Thank you. Pleased to be here.

BRICK: You like traveling?

CAROL: On trains, at least. Not so common back home in the States.

BRICK: Everybody drives, right? Addicted to the automobile, hooked on petrol. S'why you've got to meddle in the Middle East, innit? Trains are lovely, though. I do enjoy this trip. Not as much as flying, however. I love to fly. Frustrated pilot, Alf says.

CAROL: You love flying as a passenger? All that standing in line and the hassles? Boredom mixed with a little tickle of fear?

BRICK: Love it.

CAROL: You love Airports, even?

BRICK: You Yanks have a jaundiced view because of your corner cutting customer abusing airlines. But I'm used to civil aeronautics; and I like the whole experience. Going to the airport, checking in, watching the planes taking off and landing. Sitting in the VIP lounge having drinks. Watching people, chatting them up. Flying above it all. Being waited on. Even the food.

CAROL: You like the food?

BRICK: Not all of it. But food in first class can really be something. Swiss Air had chefs, 4 chefs. And they took pride. Show that you care about what they do and they'd do anything at all to please you. I ask the chef to come out and I discuss sauces. I order my steak blue--

CAROL: Blue?

BRICK: That means barely seared.

CAROL: Bloody.

BRICK: Alf says it's disgusting, but it's not. It's lovely. Individual. The chef comes over and says, "yours will take a little longer, sir. Have this wine while you're waiting".

CAROL: How could raw take longer than well done?

BRICK: The actual cooking is done on the ground, they just keep it hot. Can't do that for blue-- the chef has to start fresh, I suppose. Yum! The first class chairs-- they're recliners, huge and cuddle comfy! The extra leg room! The drinks! A library of movies-- they'll put on any one you want, just for you. What could be better than all this attention while you look out the window and see the world spread out below you, just for you to enjoy?

CAROL: You make it sound very attractive.

BRICK: Like a blooming commercial, innit? I grab at the chance whenever I can. Sept. 11th-- I watched that like an action movie, sure I'd wake up the next morning to find it was all special effects. But I'm from Belfast. Ho hum, bombs. So what? Bombs are business as usual. Nine-eleven is a chance to grab some low air fares, see the world-- or at least the States. They practically paid you to fly there. I flew into Miami for two days, staggering around in the sun. Went to Fresno, San Francisco, L.A. Sometime in there I decided to take the bus, see the country from the ground. What a difference! Like a horror show. Refugees from an insane asylum. Raggedy, smelly, stoned on dope, and stark raving mad. If the US has the biggest number of people in jail in the entire world, what are all these misfits doing on my bus?

CAROL: We don't have the dole, we don't have National Health. Where are the misfits to going to go? They're taking the bus to somewhere else, somewhere they hope will take them in.

BRICK: Innit the only people who don't drive in America are people who can't get a license-- innit the way?

CAROL: Pretty much. Though not in New York, and not where I live.

BRICK: You aren't telling me you don't drive?

CAROL: I drive. But I don't own a car.

BRICK: No car? Isn't that un-American?

CAROL: Not around Boston.

BRICK: Boston? Nine eleven I flew to Boston. Went to Boston for a day, went to see the bar that was Cheers-- what a nothing that is! Nothing to do with the show except a picture of the outside.

CAROL: So I've heard.

BRICK: You haven't seen it?

CAROL: Not really.

BRICK: Not really? Talking about the show or the bar?

CAROL: Whatever. I've surfed past the show, walked past the bar. Can't say anything worth hearing about either.

BRICK: Say, are you from Boston's evil twin? The People's Republik of Cambridge?

CAROL: Nope. More suburban, I'm afraid.

BRICK: That's what David Hare calls Cambridge-- the People's Republik. Only place in the States to do Hare's early plays. Only place with enough socialists to fill a 50 seat theatre.

CAROL: Well, the People's Theatre in Cambridge is where I saw an early Hare: "Fanshen": "Who benefits, comrade?" 50 seats sounds right, too-- although there were only about a dozen of us sitting in them.

BRICK: Don't tell me you're a socialist!

CAROL: I wouldn't dare. You may actually know some socialists. Socially, at least. At home "socialist" is extinct, except as name-calling. The joke about how many socialists it takes to change a light bulb? Five-- one fool and four undercover agents.

BRICK: Have you read this book? (*gets Moore's book out of bag*) "Stupid White Men". This is my 3rd copy, and I gave a dozen away besides the 2 that were stolen from me. Full of stuff about your generalissimo Bush -- Dubya and friends, looting the wages and pensions of workers everywhere. Moore's written another book about the latest round of lunatic power grabs, but this is the one! Dubya and his gang have it all in the bag and sewed up for the foreseeable future, just like his dictator pals in Saudi and South America. King George the tyrannical: and this time you picked him.

CAROL: Me?

BRICK: Innit?

CAROL: I canvased for Kerry.

BRICK: Another rich guy from Skull and Bones.

CAROL: I've never even sat in first class before.

BRICK: A bird told me once I reminded her of Michael Moore. You think?

CAROL: Was it a compliment?

BRICK: A better looking Michael Moore, she said actually.

(holds up Moore's picture on the back of his book... ALFIE enters.)

ALFIE: Are you into your Michael Moore routine again?

CAROL: *(smiling)* Oh! You're back.

BRICK: The lost sheep to the fold. Everything come out all right, Alfie?

ALFIE: You're not going to believe this! *(ready to enjoy telling the story)*

CAROL: Try us.

BRICK: You're not a playwright, Alf. Not a politician. Nor even an actor. You've not put in enough practice to tell really entertaining lies.

CAROL: Did you have an adventure?

BRICK: A cock up, maybe. A disaster. But adventures only come to Alfie when he's out along with me.

ALFIE: Aye. So you keep telling me. *(subsides into his seat, sulking. Pause.)*

CAROL: Tell us, please! I want to hear it.

ALFIE: *(rises)* Well, then: when I got to the WC it had the door closed, so I just waited a bit, just in case. Didn't want to embarrass anyone. *(uses the compartment door to represent the*

door of the WC, illustrates what happened) Didn't seem to be locked, but then some people are careless, so--- well, after a while I give the door a little push, just a tentative kind of "is anybody in there?" kind of push, and I see some cloth material inside. Striped material, sort of like a sleeve, say. A very colorful sleeve, it could be. Like on a clown, it could be. But there's reaction, no sound. Fella doesn't say "Be out in a minute", or anything. So I wait some more, but I'm getting pretty uncomfortable. Finally, I give the door a good push-- find it stuck like--, but I can see what it is in there now, what you'd never in a million years believe!

CAROL: What?

ALFIE: A rabbit!

BRICK: What?

ALFIE: A giant rabbit ---in the men's loo!

BRICK: Coo!

CAROL: A giant rabbit?

ALFIE: O, much larger than me--than me and Brick both. I could scarcely squeeze by it to --

BRICK: Pay Alfie no mind. His Mum took him to see the play "Harvey" when he was a wee lad, and he's never got over it. Six foot rabbits he sees, when a normal bloke sees a pink elephant.

ALFIE: I am not delusional.

BRICK: That's what they all say. It's their prime delusion.

ALFIE: It was like from a carnival or something, but twice the size. Costume like clothes, but not like any I've ever seen. Takes up the whole bloody loo.

BRICK: Harvey.

ALFIE: It's not Harvey!

BRICK: Who is it then? Were you formally introduced?

ALFIE: It's just stuffed, Brick. In the loo.

BRICK: Did it make a pass at you?

ALFIE: No, it's bloody waiting for you, you shite!

CAROL: I would love to see that.

BRICK: Alfie, why don't you go back and ask your new friend to come and meet the lady.

ALFIE: You ask him.

BRICK: I don't do delusions.

ALFIE: Hell you don't. That dolly you said you were meeting back of the Pavilion Pier last week? That was a delusion if ever I heard of one.

BRICK: Dream on, Macduff.

ALFIE: I'm not dreaming. There's a giant six foot rabbit in the loo, and if you're calling me a liar but are too lazy to go look at it yourself, then good luck to you. That's all I have to say. (*sits*)

CAROL: Show me, please.

ALFIE: What?

CAROL: I want to see it.

ALFIE: You can't go in there. Men Only.

BRICK: Sure she can.

CAROL: Couldn't you open the door and make sure nobody else's there and then I could give it a quick peek?

ALFIE: Never mind.

BRICK: Harvey's invisible, remember? Except to his buddy here.

ALFIE: I'm done.

BRICK: (*stands*) You want a look at it? Let's have a look at it.

ALFIE: It may be gone. Somebody else may be in there. Let Brick go himself: if he says the coast is clear, I'll go up there with you. Will that do?

BRICK: All right. (*BRICK exits. CAROL gets up and watches him out the door*)

ALFIE: You mustn't think we're having you on.

CAROL: Aren't you?

ALFIE: I'm not. Brick may try--- That's Brick. .

CAROL: Brick?

ALFIE: Not his name, that's Branford O'Reilly, but everyone calls him Brick. Cause of how he's built. Thick as a brick. Like a brick shite house.

CAROL: Oh. (*pause, turns back*) I'm Carol. Carol Martin.

ALFIE: Alfred Edgerton. (*shakes hands*) Pleased. Brick, he'll do anything, if the mood's on him. But I'm not in with him-- I really did see a rabbit.

CAROL: Brick's gone inside, down at the end.

ALFIE: He has?

CAROL: (*nods*) Shut the door behind him.

ALFIE: Probably needs to wee himself. But there oughtn't to be room. Great hulking lunk of a thing the rabbit was, took up all the space. Brick's bigger than me.

CAROL: He's coming out. (*puts head out, waves, turns back in*) Shaking his head. But now he's going on the other way, into the next car.

ALFIE: Search and destroy.

CAROL: You think he'll find your rabbit?

ALFIE: He'd better have done, or I'll never hear the last. But it was in there.

CAROL: I believe you.

ALFIE: You do? Carol?

CAROL: I do, Alfred.

ALFIE: That's nice. Makes a change.

CAROL: People don't usually believe you?

ALFIE: O, most people do. At work and like that. But not women. Not if Brick's chatting them up, too.

CAROL: Is that what you're up to? The two of you?

ALFIE: Not now. Well, it might be that Brick is, he's like on automatic pilot. But I'm saying what happens when we're all together, the whole Brighton crew, here or crawling the pubs and such, is he rags on me. Undermines anything I say, especially if we're talking to a bird. I don't understand it, after all these years. What's he got to be afraid of, if it comes to me?

CAROL: So it's like a gang kind of thing?

ALFIE: More like a blooming tradition.

CAROL: Calling yourselves a crew.

ALFIE: No. We are a crew, that's for real. Backstage crew. But there are actors and the like, too; box office people, even, that all go back and forth to work in London on the train. From way back, before I was born, even, always have. It's like our Brighton thing. Sort of sad to see it come down to no more than Brick and me and one tourist lady. When it used to be cars full of stars and show folk, packed with all their friends and admirers.

CAROL: Wow. (*BRICK enters*)

BRICK: Alf, either you're a deluded twit, or you finally outmaneuvered me.

CAROL: You didn't find the rabbit?

BRICK: There is no rabbit. Alf made it up.

ALFIE: I did not.

BRICK: Rabbit's a ruse.

ALFIE: Is not.

BRICK: To make himself interesting. Just proves how pale and wan he truly is, dunnit?

CAROL: Not to me.

BRICK: If there were a six foot rabbit, somebody would have seen it besides Alf. I asked. Nobody has. Why's he done it, then? What's Alfie been saying about me?

CAROL: Nothing, really. Telling me about the train. The theatrical tradition.

BRICK: Ah, yes. (sings) "Tradition!"

ALFIE: About all the good mates.

BRICK: Work hard, unwind on board, then party till sunrise in Brighton.

ALFIE: We get together even when we're not working together. 'Course now, so many of us is married or out of the business, we're as like to have picnics on the beach as a pub crawl.

BRICK: The lads are good company.

ALFIE: Women in the crew too, these days.

BRICK: All lads. Honorary lads. From the train station to the pubs, when we close the pubs on to the after-hours joints.

CAROL: A progressive cast party.

BRICK: If you ever get to Brighton, we'll take you out and show you the town. Plenty of vintage theatre lore there-- even a ghost or two.

CAROL: I'm staying in Brighton. With a friend.

BRICK: Girlfriend or boyfriend?

CAROL: Girlfriend.

BRICK: All the better. Bring her along.

CAROL: She's married.

BRICK: Like you. (*indicates the ring CAROL wears*)

CAROL: (*nods*) Like me.

ALFIE: That's all right. Bring your blokes along too.

CAROL: Our husbands aren't here. Seeing London theatre isn't their idea of a vacation.

BRICK: All the more reason you and your friend should take advantage.

ALFIE: We'll show you how the backstage lads unwind.

CAROL: We've seen a bit of it before.

BRICK: Broadway, Brighton, Belfast, -- there's no people like show people.

ALFIE & BRICK: (*sing*) "They smile when they are low"

BRICK: (sings) "They giggle when they have blow".

ALFIE: None of that on this show.

BRICK: No. Very straight director.

ALFIE: She's a peach, that one, though.

CAROL: The director's a woman?

ALFIE: A Mum, yet.

BRICK: Knows her business, straight off.

ALFIE: Knows what she wants.

BRICK: Asks for it nicely, even if she is a feminist..

CAROL: Even if.

BRICK: Not a bitch like the big M.

ALFIE: He gets away with it now, but one of these days...

BRICK: Let him pull his crap in Hollywood! We deserve better.

ALFIE: Our mates are good, and also willing. Go the extra mile, if that's what it takes.

BRICK: Union rules are fine, but when it means getting the show up most of us will go over the clock and keep it under wraps. When word gets around a director's abusing... watch out.

ALFIE: Those rules can kill you.

CAROL: I can imagine.

BRICK: Like water torture.

ALFIE: Course they can dink us in return.

BRICK: Not as a crew.

ALFIE: Dick one at a time.

BRICK: Be fools to. A crew that works as a crew is worth twice a bunch of strangers who have to make it up as they go along. We're the best.

ALFIE: They'd all say, "Let's get the Brightons on".

BRICK: On a big show there'd be 8 or 10 of us, all partying home.

ALFIE: "Mum"'s simple, though. Don't really need me, even, but for one ticky bit in the second act. (*sees rabbit*) Uh, excuse me. (*exits to catch it*)

BRICK: Off to the loo again? Never could hold his liquor. You want to hear conscientious? Alfie never even has a drink at dinner, in case the urge to piss should hit him at an inopportune moment. The lad's a prince. (*ALFIE appears outside the compartment door*) Back already? Must be a new record.

ALFIE: I'm ready for another beer.

BRICK: I'll drink to that! (*offers beer to CAROL, who refuses it*)
You're sure?

CAROL: Sure. Now if you had champagne---.

BRICK: We could drink to the Brightons' sad falling off, from posh to not so.

ALFIE: Well, it's not like the old days, innit?

BRICK: As if you'd know.

ALFIE: More'n you. I grew up in Brighton, heard it all from me mum. Larry Olivier used to take the 9:15 or the 5:40 to London. Had a flat in Brighton, in the Royal Crescent. He'd have breakfast or dinner or whatever on the inbound to. First class, full service meals, just the right length ride to dine in comfort. Me Mum says he'd have kippers and toast tray in the morning, steak or a chop with champagne after the show on the return. He gave up the Brighton flat when they stopped the meal service, though, Larry did.

CAROL: And how did your mother know all this?

ALFIE: She knew Sir Larry. Did for him herself, sometimes. Knew Terrence Rattigan, too. It's a small town for a city, is Brighton.

BRICK: S'why Alf landed his plush berth in the theatre, his Mum's connections.

ALFIE: Screw off, Brick. A cat may look at a queen.

BRICK: And a lovelier lot of queens you've never seen, than that lot. "We're in the theatah!" Smelling like a rose. Best pick up line in the world. Whichever sex its aimed at.

ALFIE: Sure fire conversation. Every body on the train from London loves the theatre.

BRICK: Course, nobody goes much any more. But they still want that ol razzle dazzle, still hope that some of it will rub off onto their boring lives.

CAROL: How long have you been in the business?

BRICK: Too long.

ALFIE: Both of us.

BRICK: Hard to believe it about Alf, innit? But he is. Was in it before I was, even. He was gophering for the stars when I was a simple country lad, pitching rocks at the lobs in Belfast.

CAROL: Me, too.

ALFIE: In the theatre?

CAROL: Well, not IN the theatre, not really. But in pageants and plays and hanging around gophering for my town's community Players. From the time I was old enough to ride a bus downtown on my own. Stage struck. Do you call it that too?

BRICK: Like dumbstruck.

ALFIE: And you still are.

CAROL: It's why I'm here. Squeezing in as many London shows as I can. When I get back I'll describe them to all my theatre-loving friends--- and watch them drool.

ALFIE: We noticed you had the program when you got on.

BRICK: Singled you out.

ALFIE: Though if you had a friend would be nice, too.

BRICK: What'd you think of the show? (*indicates program*)

CAROL: Well....

BRICK: Buggered, innit?

CAROL: I'd-- go along with that. Some good acting. Some moments.

BRICK: Rotten director. Weak writing. What else've you seen?

CAROL: My Fair Lady, Much Ado About Nothing--

BRICK: Is that any good?

CAROL: I give it an 8. Better than all but one I've seen in the States but not as good as at the Globe some seasons back.

ALFIE: I saw that one. This' not as good?

CAROL: I loved some of the minor roles. I can't imagine a better Verges.

BRICK: I can't imagine a good one! Verges is a dud role. Wave your arms, put on a putty nose--

CAROL: Come on, I've seen good ones! Natural old clowns, who would've been vaudeville stars in the old days. But Americans tend to cast just anybody in a role so small. London productions draw from a very deep talent pool.

ALFIE: For Shakespeare, aye. Everybody's done their Shakespeare, at least in school.

BRICK: The God of our Bardolatry.

ALFIE: The best actors in the world-- that's our boast, anyway.

BRICK: Tell it to the tourists.

ALFIE: I think it's true, though. Innit?

BRICK: Half of the best are really Irish.

ALFIE: And that's true, too.

BRICK: I'll drink to that!

ALFIE: But for pure talent, they don't come better than Brando. How do you account for Brando?

CAROL: Talent.

BRICK: Talent's just for starters. You need discipline and practice. Americans piss it away!

CAROL: There's something to that. It's hell of a life, back home. An actor literally can't make a living. I mean, most of what New York actors get paid to do isn't what we go to the theatre to see. I don't want to call it acting at all.

ALFIE: You mean commercials?

BRICK: You don't think it takes talent to slobber all over a can of deodorant?

CAROL: Sure it takes talent. But it's more like a con game than a proper use.

ALFIE: Are you an actress?

CAROL: I used to be, now and then. Strictly amateur.

ALFIE: Told you straight away she had the look of an actress.

CAROL: Me? I always get the parts where you're not supposed to look actress-y. The neighbor. The loyal friend. And this was in church basements, where even the leads are not exactly glamorous.

ALFIE: I can see that, but there's something.

BRICK: Presence.

ALFIE: Right.

BRICK: You sort of have control over your space. You can make yourself almost invisible, or fill it. That's the actor in you.

ALFIE: It's how we always tell who's what at a cast party.

CAROL: Coming from pros, I'm flattered.

BRICK: Oh, we're pros right enough.

ALFIE: But don't be too flattered. If you should hear some of the opinions about the talent that comes over from Brick's headset!

BRICK: The crew has its revenges. If the talent's not worth all the attention they get--

CAROL: I'd have picked you as an actor. You certainly fill your space.

BRICK: That's the Irish in me.

ALFIE: That's the Brick in ye.

BRICK: Blest with the blarney. I thought about being an actor, once. But I could never master the invisibility thing.

ALFIE: He's afraid if he's not the center of attention, he'll wink out of existence. Once he's invisible, it's all over.

BRICK: I'll be all over you in a minute, you nothing. You pinprick. You rabbit see-er. Are we a team here, or are we not?

ALFIE: I dunno. Are we?

BRICK: Honor of the regiment. Best actors, best crews.

CAROL: All around better than back home, at least. Used to be you were better at everything but Broadway musicals-- but now you're even better at that.

BRICK: Oh, we're fucking top of the line. Alfie-- where are we?

ALFIE: Well outside Burgess Hill.

BRICK: Haven't passed Molloy's? (*scrambles for empty beer bottle, searches in duffle bag for writing supplies*)

ALFIE: Not yet.

BRICK: Bottle, paper, pencil--- can't find my thick pencil! Got a pen?

ALFIE: I'm looking. (*searches his pocket, his own bag*)

CAROL: (*takes pen from purse*) Here's one.

BRICK: Thanks. What to say?

ALFIE: You're the comedian.

BRICK: Then what are you, eh?

ALFIE: The clown?

BRICK: "Send in the clowns"?

ALFIE: Don't care for it.

BRICK: What, then? How long have we got?

ALFIE: Less'n a minute, I make it.

BRICK: Shite. No time for more than the usual. (*writes a phrase on the paper, rolls it up and puts it into the bottle. Meanwhile, ALFIE opens the window. Track sounds*)

CAROL: What are you doing?

BRICK: (*at window*) Sending a message to Molloy. Lives right over there--

ALFIE: Ready. Steady. Now!

BRICK: (*throws bottle*) Got it!

ALFIE: Are ya sure? I don't think--

BRICK: I got it! Perfect bulls eye. Shattered against his shed. (*they high-five, cheer*)

CAROL: What are you doing?

ALFIE: Message to Molloy.

BRICK: "Wish you were here, Killjoy"

ALFIE: One of the old crew.

BRICK: Deserter under fire. Letting him know we're still in the party business.

CAROL: Breaking bottles in his back garden?

BRICK: Feel left out if we didn't. Wild glamour of the theatah.

ALFIE: No so glam at the moment, are we? The two of us.

BRICK: Last show we'd have impressed you: Macbeth. Not a great production, but you'd be impressed, wouldn't ya? Shakespeare, our biggest export. Or Alfie's -- I'm from Belfast, where we've writers of our own, more recent ones.

CAROL: So, what is it that you do backstage?

ALFIE: Do? I'm a carpenter. Brick's lighting.

BRICK: Master electrician.

ALFIE: The whole Brighton crew of us try to hire on to the same shows. Not much luck with that, lately.

BRICK: At the moment, "Mum's the Word"

CAROL: It's a secret?

BRICK: Not a secret, it's our show. In a manner of speaking.

ALFIE: All of them women, Canadians. Feminists I guess they are, but they're funny too: about being Mums and all that..

BRICK: Nice little show. You'd probably enjoy it even if you aren't a Mum.

CAROL: I am a Mum. I also had a Mum, of course.

BRICK: Everybody did, which I suppose is why the show's so bloody funny. I've seen it 22 times, and I'm still laughing.

ALFIE: Pleasant people to work with, too--- except that they aren't in charge.

BRICK: The management brings in a show, hires a crew separate. As small a crew as possible, and never the same ones twice.

ALFIE: Brick? It just occurred. Molloy doesn't live there no more.

BRICK: What?

ALFIE: Back outside Burgess? He sold up and moved.

BRICK: Piss off.

ALFIE: No. You remember-- you must. Molloy told Mr. Puff to stuff it, and Puff threatened him with never work again--- so Molloy threw it all in.

BRICK: Good man, Molloy.

ALFIE: The best. But that's not his back garden.

BRICK: What do you expect, when they package the work like bangers?

ALFIE: *(to Carol)* Sausages, to you.

BRICK: What?

ALFIE: Americans say "sausages", Brick. They don't know "bangers".

BRICK: Bugger off! Who cares? I've lost my train of --

ALFIE: Management wants to package, innit?

CAROL: Right.

ALFIE: Turn us into units. Commodities. Brick's recurrent theme.

BRICK: Like bloody sausages, so it's the same every night, every city, the show might as well be on a DVD.

ALFIE: But DVD's you can interact. Push pause, or reverse--

(BRICK stands belligerently in front of the compartment door, through which ALFIE thinks he sees a flash of the Rabbit's costume. ALFIE rises and weaves to try to make sure of what he thinks he saw, but Brick pushes him back into his seat)

BRICK: Will you shut the fuck up? I can't hear myself think. As I was saying. When I started doing lights, there was some art to running a board. Knowing exactly the right moment to "go" a cue, and determining the speed of it. But now it's all on computer: you go when the stage manager calls "go", and the computer does the rest.

(ALFIE concentrates intently on the door's window)

CAROL: Doesn't that force the actors to conform to the light plot? No pregnant pauses, no unexpected floods of feeling---

(ALFIE sees the merest fragment of the Rabbit's costume, and rises)

ALFIE: Brick,-- *(BRICK glares at ALFIE, who sits down again)*

BRICK: O, there's been some great cock-ups. The turntable misses its stop and carries all the actors back into the previous scene of "Les Miz", while the lighting goes on into the next scene ahead. Vocal enhancements, too-- but there's nobody on stage to lip sync.

ALFIE: If you'd just-- *(The Rabbit passes by the door, ALFIE rises to give chase, but BRICK pushes him back into his seat and continues his speech)*

BRICK: But the harm that doesn't show is the worst. Whether the show's paced the same as last night or not, the lights are the same. Not live theatre at all.

ALFIE: Carol?

CAROL: Hmm?

BRICK: Dead. Deadened. Buried.

CAROL: That must be very frustrating for you. Your artistic--

ALFIE: -- the rabbit.

BRICK: What?

ALFIE: I'm not talking to you.

CAROL: You saw the rabbit again?

ALFIE: Walking up the corridor.

BRICK: Walking? You're out of your fucking mind!

ALFIE: He was carried, all right? Had to be carried! But I couldn't see that part, the person carrying him, so he looked like he was walking-- are you satisfied? Cause by now he's gone out of sight again.

BRICK: Of course he's gone, you nitwit! He was never there!

ALFIE: Was too. You'd have seen it yourself if you hadn't kept shutting me up.

BRICK: I'll really shut you up if you don't get off this.

ALFIE: Threatening me doesn't change anything. There's a man size rabbit on this train. It exists. I didn't imagine it.

BRICK: You couldn't! You have no imagination. You stumbled into the memory of Mary Bloody Playwright Chase's imagination, stashed in that cobwebby old nostalgia cupboard you call a brain.

ALFIE: I'm not talking to you.

BRICK: Idiot.

ALFIE: I'm talking to Carol.

BRICK: On a first name basis now, are we?

ALFIE: Carol at least listens.

BRICK: To old sound and fury? What kind of idiots listen to an idiot?

ALFIE: Mates. Mates do.

BRICK: Even your mates come to a point!

ALFIE: Ah. You've noticed that, have you? I didn't want to say it. Did you notice that Ian MacMaster bought himself a car, just so he wouldn't have to ride train with you? And Sam-- Sam's good and proper fed up, too--

(As she watches the men argue, CAROL catches a glimpse of the Rabbit in the corridor)

CAROL: Alfred?

ALFIE: Carol?

CAROL: I think I saw--- I can't be sure, it was just a flash of blue stripes, but...

ALFIE: Blue stripes! *(ALFIE dashes out the door, in pursuit of the Rabbit. CAROL goes to the door, watches, then returns to her seat, puzzled)*

BRICK: Now that you so cleverly got rid of Alf--. *(sits next to CAROL)*

CAROL: I didn't. *(stands and fends off BRICK)*

But you seem to be trying to. If you've been friends so long--

BRICK: He'll be back. He always--

CAROL: *(points up corridor)* There it is again!

BRICK dashes out, CAROL watches from outside the door. BRICK'S cry of triumph echoes down the corridor)

BRICK: Got it! *(BRICK carries the huge clown-costumed Rabbit into the compartment. It scarcely fits through the door. BRICK props it up on a seat, stands contemplating)*

CAROL: *(re-enters)* But where's its owner?

BRICK: Damned if I know. It was sitting in a compartment, big as you please.

CAROL: Big is right. *(sits next to rabbit)*

BRICK: A six foot rabbit.

CAROL: With a life of its own. *(puts a friendly arm around rabbit. There's a movement in the corridor outside, as if someone is ducking past the compartment, which Carol alone sees.)*

BRICK: I've had enough of this nonsense. To hell with Harvey.

(Opens the compartment's window, letting in track noise)

CAROL: What are you doing?

BRICK: Gonna chuck him out! *(BRICK grabs on to the Rabbit. CAROL holds on too.)*

CAROL: Don't you dare! He doesn't belong to you.

BRICK: It's abandoned. Flotsam. Some bloke won him at a carney, and is as sick of the sight of him already as I am. *(CAROL and BRICK struggle. BRICK wins control of the Rabbit, but CAROL blocks the window, preventing his throwing it out)*

CAROL: You don't know that.

BRICK: We're coming in to Hassock's. Imagine the scene! Some bumpkin who sees this, this mystery figure getting chucked off the train, and dum da dum dum, it's Agatha Christie! Weeks of excitement, in a place like Hassocks.

CAROL: You can't do it. It might belong to a mate.

BRICK: Coo.

CAROL: A prop, or part of an act. It doesn't look like a carnival prize, does it? It looks like a Harvey, theatrical. A theatre rabbit. On the Show Train.

BRICK: Bloody Harvey was invisible!

CAROL: Nevertheless. Chances are he belongs to one of your own.

BRICK: Well, I'm certainly not going to keep it. Not so Alf can come back and go into Alt. I won't eat crow for Alfie, no way.

CAROL: He's your friend.

BRICK: I won't eat crow for him.

CAROL: Take the rabbit back then. Put it where you found it. So the owner can find it. Or get off and leave it till the end of the line, if that's what he wants. *(opens the compartment door.)*

BRICK: If it has an owner.

CAROL: Well, it's not yours, is it?

BRICK: Alf---

CAROL: (*looks both ways*) Alf's not out there.

BRICK: (*rising*) Are you gonna tell him?

CAROL: For God's sake, go!

(*BRICK exits with Rabbit. After a pause, ALFIE enters from the opposite direction*)

ALFIE: All clear?

CAROL: Was that you?

ALFIE: Few minutes ago? Aye. Hid in the next compartment.

CAROL: And earlier?

ALFIE: Not me. I went chasing nearly up to the engine.

CONDUCTOR LOUDSPEAKER: "Brighton Station last stop. This train terminates at Brighton Station. Please gather your parcels and take personal items as you exit the train. Brighton Station. Last stop Brighton."

CAROL: So how in the world did the rabbit--? (*BRICK returns carrying the rabbit*)

ALFIE: On it's own? Dunno. I have a theory, though.

BRICK: What theory? (*pause*)

CAROL: Does it involve smoke and mirrors?

ALFIE: Just the mirror held up to human nature. (*begins to pack up his gear*)

BRICK: Let's hear your so called theory.

ALFIE: Sorry. Innit well enough? Got nothing to say to you.

BRICK: You got nothing?!

CAROL: Brick! Why did you bring it back here?

BRICK: Too late for Harvey to meet up with his own kind, alas. He might as well have a beer with us now and try to find his mates when we get in to Brighton.

CAROL: But how will you---? (*CAROL begins to laugh*)

BRICK: Actually, I brought him back for Alfie. The lad's in love. Haven't seen Alf so excited in years. Has the hots for Harvey, Alf does. Expect they'll set up housekeeping.

ALFIE: Fuck the both of you! Sorry, Carol-- I didn't mean.....

CAROL: (*Still laughing*) I know you didn't, Alf. Brick would try the patience of a saint.

BRICK: Fuck the three of you! (*throws rabbit at ALF and CAROL*) You make a fine trio.

CAROL: Harvey, my hero! (*hugs rabbit*) International Rabbit of Mystery!

ALFIE: Some things are best left in mystery. That's what me Mum always said, and I think she may be right. (*opens 2 beers, offers one to BRICK, who continues to look hostile*) Innit, Brick?

CAROL: I think Harvey and I could split one. (*ALFIE holds out the beer to CAROL, who uses the rabbit's hand to take it and holds it up toast-fashion, smiling an invitation to BRICK. ALFIE opens another beer to offer to BRICK, who decides to make peace by taking it and toasting.*)

ALFIE: (*smile*) Cheers.

BRICK: Cheers.

CAROL: Cheers. (*CAROL winces at the taste when she drinks, but then begins to laugh as she mimes a drink for Harvey, and tries out a rabbity English voice for Harvey's toast*)

CAROL AS HARVEY: Break a leg, mates!

BRICK: No! (*using the rabbit as a puppet and doing it French*) AS HARVEY: Merde, mates!

The train has stopped at the Brighton Station, and they are all laughing as they gather up their gear to get off the train, treating the rabbit as if he were a drunken companion who had to be helped out by his friends. As they leave, ALFIE turns at the door and waves goodbye with the rabbit's paw, and bids farewell in his version of the rabbit voice.

ALFIE AS HARVEY: Cheery-bye!

END of PLAY.