

THE LAST PICNIC

(A 50 minute black comedy)

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CHARACTERS

Richard Jenkins	A City actuary in his 30s or 40s.
Juliette	His wife. A social worker.
Dan Crisp	Richard's old school friend.
Aunt Dot	Juliette's eccentric aunt.
Berenice	An attractive young French girl.
Tramp	A woman of indefinite age and dubious table manners.

SET

The action takes place in summer on the beach at Littlehampton. It requires a simple set to represent an open beach. An inflatable dingy, some flotsam, seaweed and beach accessories complete the scene. A sandcastle required in subsequent scenes may be hidden behind the windbreak in scene one.

SCENE ONE

Juliette and Berenice are sunning themselves in deckchairs, whilst Dan and Richard battle it out on the ground doing press-ups. Aunt Dot is engrossed in a book entitled 'Cosmic Catastrophe - the Fate of the Universe'. She wears a sou'wester and plastic mac.

Rich (out of breath and trailing) Twenty six, twenty seven . . .

Dan (vigorously) Thirty five, thirty six . . .

Rich He's bending his arms!

Dan Thirty seven, thirty eight . . .

Bere (spurring him on) Vas-y Daniel!

Rich He's cheating, Juju.

Juli Oh for heaven's sake.

Dan Thirty nine, forty. Yo! (jumps up and makes a victory salute)

Bere Magnifique! (she squeezes his biceps) Look, all the muscle.

Rich He cheated, Juju.

Dan Still a bad loser, eh?

Rich Still a bloody cheat.

Juli Richard, please. We're on holiday.

Rich He was bending his arms. (mobile phone rings) Oh, what now? (into phone)
Yes?

Bere Daniel. Come and do my back now? I am very hot.

Dan That's just how I like you. (Berenice giggles as Dan applies suntan oil to her back)

Rich (into the phone) Tweny five percent? Are you mad? (shakes phone) Jack, I'm
losing you, Jack . . . (shakes it again, exasperated) The man's an idiot. (dials
again) I'm surrounded by idiots.

Dot That smell.

Juli It's the sea, Dot.

Dot Horrible fishy aroma.

Juli You'll be fine. Just carry on reading.

Dot (Points towards audience in horror) Look. There!

Juli Remember breathe out (sotto voce to Richard) I think she's going to have one of her turns. (to Dot) your breathing, Dot. (to Richard) Quick, a paper bag. (to Dot) Count one, slowly, hold it and count to five . . .

Dot It's a very flat beach. No natural defences at all.

Rich (to Dot) I give you my word as an Actuary that we're in no danger of drowning whatsoever. (hands her a paper bag)

Dot How can you be so sure?

Rich Well, of course strictly speaking one can't be absolutely . . .

Juli Richard!

Rich Point taken. (into phone) Ah, you're there, Jack. (he stands away from the others whilst conversing on his mobile)

Juli Breathe out slowly, Dot. Slowly . . . (puts a paper bag to Dot's face) . . . counting all the way.

Bere You must not worry, Dot. The sea it is long, long way. I cannot even see it.

Tramp (enters, carrying two metal buckets containing sand, and singing to herself) Seagulls for breakfast, seagulls for tea, seagulls for breakfast, seagulls for tea . . . (talking to the buckets) Ok there, Win? Easy she goes. (she settles herself down. The others look unsettled) Wherever I roam, there's no place like home.

Richard (noticing tramp) Oh, just what we need.

Tramp The sea's out, the sun's up, there's seagulls for tea - if I can catch the blighters.

Rich Make her go away, Juju. You're good like that.

Bere She is smelling - oof.

Rich Don't look, Berenice. She'll start asking for money.

Bere (rummaging in her pockets) Maybe if we give her a little bit . . .

Rich No. No eye contact.

Juli Richard, she's doing no harm. Just leave her alone. (the tramp opens up a black

umbrella and shades the two buckets)

Bere I feel sad for the old lady.

Dan Can't have you feeling sad, my hot little croissant.

Bere Kissy wissy?

Dan Kissy wissy indeed. (he pulls her to him for a long kiss)

Richard Oh, bollocks. They're not going to do that all week.

Juli I vaguely remember how it feels.

Rich (to Dan) Let her up for air.

Juli Not being able to keep your hands off someone. (observes them) He's very fit
for his age.

Rich So am I. Look. (jogging on the spot) Never felt fitter in my life. Hup, hup, hup,
hup . . . (he screams out in pain and clutches his stomach) Aggh!

Juli Do you need your tablets?

Rich Yes.

Dot (pulls her face out of paper bag) What's happening?

Juli Nothing. It's his ulcer. He'll be fine. (searches for tablets)

Rich I shouldn't have had that kipper for breakfast. (Richard takes a mouthful of tablets)

Bere (Berenice squeals with delight as Dan grabs her feet) Non, non. Not the piggies.
Daniel. Non, not the piggies!

Rich (groans in pain) Lucky bastard.

Dan (Berenice honks like a baby pig, as Dan plays with her toes) This little piggy
'went' to market, this little piggy 'stayed' at home. (the seduction hots up) This
little piggy 'had' roast beef. This little piggy 'had' none. (climaxing) And this
little piggy . . . (Dan slowly lets his fingers travel up her leg. Berenice giggles). . .
'went', wee, wee, wee, all the way home.

Bere (she wiggles her other foot) And the other little piggies? They want to go to market too.

Dan She adores the English language. (they kiss passionately)

Dot (looking out to sea) It's out there. Creeping up slowly. Gaining ground.

Juli Remember your positive affirmations, Dot.

Dot I try.

Juli 'The inexpressible joy of being Dorothy'.

Dot It's not my fault the polar ice caps are melting. You can hear them at night. Drip, drip, drip. . .

Juli (to Rich) You still haven't fixed that tap.

Dot Drip, drip, drip they go, bringing the sea relentlessly up to neck level. Only the other day, I was reading about how . . .

Rich Try reading less, Dot.

Dot Out of the question. I can barely keep pace with all the disasters that threaten the human race as it is. (pause) If only there was something one could do.

Dan There is.

Dot Really?

Dan Come on. Give us your hand. We're going sailing.

Dot (horrified) Sailing?

Juli That's a ridiculous idea.

Dan (indicates the dinghy that lies stage right) We'll be as safe as houses in there. Nicely padded too.

Dot I . . . I haven't sat in a boat for years.

Dan Well, you're going to sit in this one. If Noah's flood's on its way, you'll be grateful for some solid plastic under your buttocks (pats her bottom).

Dot Oh! (he helps her into the boat) What a firm arm. (she feels it) Good for bailing out.

Dan Has anyone ever told you, you suit a sou'wester?

Dot No. (pause) Well, do I?

Dan Knock out.

Dot (smiles happily as they sit in the dinghy) Ah, this reminds me of the Serpentine, 1953. Happy, happy days.

Dan I'll cast off.

Dot (lets her hands trail overboard) Splish, splosh; splish, splosh. Oars carving through the water. My whole life ahead of me. (she lies back dreamily)

Dan (singing quietly as she speaks) I am sailing, I am sailing . . .

Dot He was tall, dark and not altogether unhandsome. He was a sailor too, you know.

Dan (still singing). . . to be near you, to be free . . .

Rich You ok Juju?

Juli Yep. You?

Rich I mean really ok?

Dot (sighs) Oh, I've had my moment of carnal knowledge, Mr Crisp. There was a time when I was kissed. Kissed with such passion and frequency that all attempts to re-touch my lipstick were rendered utterly futile. (sighs deeply) He promised me everything.

Juli He really knows how to handle her.

Rich Aren't you a bit too hot in those boots, Dot?

Juli Don't touch her boots.

Dot Don't touch my boots!

Dan No-one is touching your boots, Dorothy. (seductively) A lady's feet are her sublime treasure.

Dot (flattered) Oh, well of course . . . so perceptive of you, Mr Crisp . . . It's just that one must be prepared for everything, you know. Even sharks.

Dan Sharks? You'd be lucky to have your toes nibbled by a sprat out there. (more for Berenice and Juliette's benefit) Now the great white, that's a different ball game. Had a pretty nasty tussle with one off the Great Barrier Reef.

Dot Oh my Lord.

Dan I was lucky. The Aussie doctors managed to stitch up my leg - without anaesthetic, of course. I bit on a coke can and thought of England.

Dot Is that the scar? (looking at his knee)

Dan Yes. Starts from there, goes right up to the groin. (he lifts his shorts to show her) See?

Dot (inspects it with admiration) Oh. Yes. Do come and have a look, Juju.

Rich (to Juliette) Well I had a pretty nasty moment off the coast of Mallorca, didn't I? Attacked by a huge shoal of . . . how would you describe them?

Juli Anchovies.

Rich Vicious little brutes. Homed in on the smell of my sun tan lotion. Got some pretty nasty nips on my leg, I can tell you.

Dot Oh dear. The sea is an awfully big thing to confront. Even King Canute couldn't stop the waves.

Dan That's because he got his tides mixed up. We could sit you down on this side of that line of flotsam, and your toes would be drier than a nun's . . . (just stops himself).

Dot What did he say?

Juli Dan's right. The tide never goes beyond that point.

Dan We could build anything we want there. A house, a sandcastle.

Juli A sandcastle. That's a great idea.

Rich What's so great about a sandcastle?

Bere A chateau?

Dan A magnificent chateau, guarding the sea.

Dot A sandcastle, you say? (cheering up) Would it have turrets?

Dan Turrets. A portcullis, beautifully decorated with sea shells and mother of pearl.

Rich There's been a run on mother of pearl.

Juli It's a brilliant idea.

Rich We don't even have buckets.

Dan (to the others) Come on, let's do it. Let's build Dot a castle that'll bring the English channel to its knees.

Bere I go find bucket . . . and spade.

Dan And most important of all - inspiration. We can't do it without you, Dot.

Dot Four turrets. Ramparts a foot thick. Crenellations along the top. And a Union Jack planted four square at the highest point.

Rich It'll all end in tears, mark my words.

Bere (notices tramp's buckets. The tramp is snoozing) Ah, two buckets. (heads towards tramp)

Rich Don't wind her up, Berenice!

Dan She won't notice.

Rich Let sleeping dogs lie.

Dan Chill out, Dick. We're on holiday.

Bere (picks up one of the buckets, whispering) I just borrow. Thank you very much. (the tramp turns over in her sleep but doesn't wake)

Dan So, Dot? Where shall we lay the foundations?

Dot Ah, yes, the foundations. Crucial. (she moves around until satisfied) Absolutely crucial.

Bere (returning with bucket full of sand) It is already full of sand.

Dot Here. On this spot here. (takes the bucket from Berenice) I lay the foundation stone. (she empties the bucket ceremoniously. Everyone applauds)

Bere Bravo!

SCENE TWO

A sandcastle stands up stage flying a Union Jack. The emptied bucket lies beside it. The deck chairs and towels are out. There is a large picnic hamper by the chairs. Aunt Dot stands down stage, straining her eyes towards the sea. She carries a pair of binoculars strung around her neck.

Dot (looking at the audience through her binoculars) How can anyone in their right minds immerse themselves in fish and raw sewage? (Dot doesn't notice the tramp who has entered stage left, carrying one bucket of sand and a large wreath. The tramp takes no notice of Dot, but moves to the castle and places the wreath over it. The tramp then goes to the picnic hamper and starts ferreting around in it)

(still looking through the binoculars) Oh, no! Man overboard! Man overboard! Juju! Someone save her, please. (the tramp eats one of the sandwiches and watches Dot) Oh, thank God. Mr Crisp has reached her. He's pulling her from the water. He's bearing her up in his arms. He's . . . oh, very thorough resuscitation. In my day, one gave heart massage to the centre of the chest. Still, it seems to be working. She's managing to arch her back and cling on tightly. Richard will be relieved.

Tramp You're off your trolley.

Dot (suddenly noticing tramp) Oh!

Tramp Beserk, barmy, out-of-your pram bonkers.

Dot What are you doing with our sandwiches?

Tramp Eating them.

Dot I can see that.

Tramp Want one?

Dot Well, of all the nerve.

Tramp (checking the sandwiches) There's ham. Cheese. (sniffs, licks, then tastes, one of the sandwiches) Egg mayonnaise. Mm. A bit off, I think. (offering the sandwich she's just licked) Here, have this one. I've only licked it once.

Dot Ugh.

Tramp (searches) Got any Coleman's?

Dot Will you kindly move on.

Tramp Can't hear you.

Dot (points towards the sea) That's my niece over there. She's a social worker. She does things for unfortunate people. If you stay here any longer, she'll do something for you.

Tramp (addressing the bucket) Did you hear that Win? A social worker. (spits in disgust)

Dot Did you just address that bucket?

Tramp What do you think I am – an head case? I don't talk to buckets. I was talking to my mate Winnie inside the bucket.

Dot (approaches the bucket) Your mate Winnie appears to be a pile of sand, then.

Tramp Sand? Just because she's dead doesn't mean she has to take lip from the likes of you. (to the bucket) Take no notice, Win. (indicating the castle) We haven't forgotten what you've done to her old man.

Dot What old man?

Tramp Arthur. (points to the upturned bucket) Clean emptied out. (addressing the sandcastle) Sorry, Art. I was just having a little kip. (to Dot) He was a good bloke. A class act, wasn't he Win? Never hogged the best pitch. Always shared his last drop with a friend.

Dot (approaching the castle) You're not seriously suggesting . . .

Tramp And now you've stuck a Union Jack up his arse.

Dot Look, I don't know what kind of lunatic asylum you've just escaped from . . .

Tramp Who's calling me a lunatic?

Dot Don't you come near me!

Tramp Arthur can get very nasty when he's narked.

Dot I have an alarm, and I'm not afraid to use it.

Tramp He pisses on the feet of bureaucracy. (the tramp plucks out the Union Jack)

Dot My flag! Leave my flag alone!

Tramp Catch me if you can't! (the tramp runs off stage right laughing and swearing, leaving behind the second bucket of sand. Dot chases after her and exits)

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