

SWITCHBACK

A full-length play

by

Peter Bridge

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Cast

- Andy Barlow Ageing, laid back to lazy, boozy and cantankerous part time lavatory cleaner. Witty/Good sense of humour.
- Freda Andy's sister. Loud, showy, malleable and naïve. She is a divorcee, and the mother of Kylie.
- Kylie Freda's daughter...She lives with her father. Dreamy, childishly romantic idealist.
- Margo Freda's next door neighbour. She lives upstairs in the upper part of Freda's maisonette...fairly gormless and spectacularly naïve.
- Emma Andy's fantasy figure, a young working colleague (a sales rep) at Andy's place of work.
- Laura A completely 'over the top', loud, booming voiced character...should have a good talent for comedy...Laura is a con artist.
- Laurence A clean-cut, ultra religious type. Married with two children and he is a sales rep at Andy's firm.
- Louise Another sales rep...slightly neurotic...she has had a brief fling with her aging boss, Keeble.
- Keeble Ageing smoothy, the boss of CLB. ...devious, cautious and vengeful.

Mel	Tough nut security officer. She gives Andy a rough time whilst he is being questioned about a robbery. Unyielding and uncompromising.
Kathy	Hearty Advertising agent from the Zesto company...she should have a reasonable tolerance for having a cake pushed into her face!
WPC Fox	Dogmatic police constable. Inscrutable, unemotional type.
Radio Announcer	Personality plus ego-maniac type. He does not appear

The Set

The play is set in the living room of a downstairs maisonette. Items used are: a settee...and another easy chair positioned opposite. There should be a small side table beside the settee. There should be an entrance to a kitchen, preferably stage right. A main front door entrance should be approx mid stage. There are no other essential items of furniture. Props to include about 8 cans of Fosters beer, a newspaper, a birthday cake...and one or two 'party' items of food for distribution during the penultimate scene. Also required are bundles of facsimile bank notes, a handbag and a large green bag/case.

Synopsis

Andy Barlow is an aging part time worker who has little drive or ambition. His earlier hopes of acquiring a more prestigious occupation have long been left behind...as he now sinks slowly into an abyss of betting shops and booze. His long fancied fantasy girl, Emma approaches him to ask for his assistance in a scheme to extricate her from a tricky situation. Andy reluctantly agrees to help out...but in doing so, puts himself into an even bigger mess.

Act One

(In the living room of 25 Steve Biko Street, West Molesey, 8-30am Wednesday Morning. Freda is in discussion with her near neighbour Margo. Both are standing).

Freda (reading the paper) Listen to this, Margo...they say that half of the people claiming sickness benefit are fit enough to go to work.

Margo Only half of them?

Freda Some are claiming due to bad backs, being too fat or through Alcoholism.

Margo Your Andy doesn't get benefit, does he?

Freda No....but on that basis, he could claim on all three counts.

Margo Where's Andy this morning?

Freda Still in bed...and he's due into work at nine o'clock. He's probably still pie eyed from yesterday.

Margo Was he celebrating something?

Freda Only 'Freedom from Thirst' week.

Margo You've got some letters on the mat.

Freda (while walking over to collect the mail) It'll be the usual boring mixture of bills and unsolicited sales pitches again.

Margo Nobody ever writes to you these days.

Freda Naaa....look at these....(thumbing through the mail) bill, bill, advert, advert....ooo what's this, a hand written envelope.

Margo Might be a birthday card.

Freda (opening the envelope) That's not till Saturday...and this is too flimsy.

Margo What's it say?

Freda (reads) You've been recommended to us by Mr Patrick Daley...(off text) Oh no...here we go...it's another of cousin Pat's stupid practical jokes again. It's so bloody obvious. Look at this letter Margo. (hands letter to Margo)

Margo (studying the letter) It doesn't look right somehow.

Freda Not even proper letter heading.

Margo Or even a telephone number.(gives the letter back to Freda)

Freda What does he take me for?

Margo So what's it about anyway?

Freda Just listen to this. 'Mr Daley has stated that you would be willing to be used as a model for our new health supplement, 'Zesto'. (Off text) Where did he get *that* name from....

Margo I've never heard of it.

Freda 'After successful runs in Northamptonshire and Derbyshire, this product is shortly due to be marketed in the South of England. I have arranged for a photographer to come to you on Saturday Morning'...(now out of text) Which just happens to be my birthday....what a coincidence, (cynically) He's such a laugh, cousin Pat....Listen to this, 'We would like to get a picture of you dancing to fit our caption, 'Still dancing at seventy' Oh no. (Freda laughs...before considering...) Seventy! ... the cheeky bugger...I'm...I'm nowhere near that age.

Margo What's the next bit?

Freda 'We would like picture of you skipping' ...(off text) I'll bet he would. (laughs in advance) 'for our caption, 'Zesto puts elastic in your step' . Oh this is rubbish.

Margo What *is* Zesto?

Freda No, he's just made it up. He wants me to go round all the shops searching for it.

Margo Why bother to look?

Freda So we can have some in the house when the so called 'representative' calls round here.

Margo You don't even know what Zesto is.

Freda That's the whole point. He'll expect me to trail round the shops, not knowing whether it comes in a tin, packet or bottle...or whether I should have to swallow it, rub it in...or shove it up my backside....Funny man...I'm not falling for it.

Margo Supposing somebody *does* call though.

Freda Oh, if they do, it'll be one of Pat's mates in on the gag...and of course, he'll be only too keen to get pictures of me skipping and dancing like a two year old. I've had all this with him before.

Margo What a weird sense of humour...and he won't even be here to see the joke.

Freda Yes and the more inconvenience he can create, the funnier he finds it.

Margo Sounds like a right.... Jeremy Beadle.

Freda Yes and look at this 'so called' representative's name, K. Joint....I mean, that's got to be short for 'knee joint' isn't it. Typical of Pat.

(Andy emerges from another room...half asleep...only just risen)

Andy (calls out) Freda!

Freda I'm right here Andy.

Andy Where's the paper?

Freda On the table.

Andy (spotting Margo) Oh it's Margo. I thought it was somebody important.

Freda Andy!

Margo Good morning Andy.

Andy Is it?

Margo (trying to lighten the mood) My Ted's off to Lords this morning.

Andy Serves him right. (retreats back in the kitchen).

Freda Don't bother with him, Margo. He doesn't become human until the afternoon...and even then, it's difficult to tell.

(Andy fetches the paper from the kitchen Andy slumps onto the sofa and starts to read the paper)

Freda (to Margo) How did you get on with that painter yesterday?

Margo Oo terrible...what a cheek. He said he wanted three hundred pounds just for painting the kitchen.....so I turned round to him and I said, "I'm not made of money you know"...and d'you know what he had the cheek to turn round to me and say?.....

Andy (anticipating the painter's reply, interrupts) Why the hell don't you face me.

Freda Keep out of it Andy.

Andy All this turning round.

Margo I suppose I'd better go, then.

Andy That's right Margo. Don't let me keep you. I'm sure you've got lots to do.

Freda Don't let him dictate to you, Margo.

Margo No...I'd better be going Freda. I'll see you later.

Freda All right Margo.

(Margo exits)

Freda I 'spose you're happy now.

Andy Moderately.

Freda Well I'm going out now. I'll leave you in your miserable state.

Andy Where' you going?

Freda I'm going to get abottle....of Zesto.

Andy Oh.

Freda I'll be off then. (Andy just grunts)

(Freda exits)

Andy (looks up, bewildered) Zesto?

(Andy now lays full length on the settee. A newspaper is over his face. He goes into a deep doze. The door bell rings. After three rings, eventually, Andy looks up...obviously confused...but then irritated. He gets up after a struggle and slouches to the door. He opens the door and Kylie runs past him and collapses on the settee, weeping. Andy watches her with surprise and then looks out of his door, looking both to the left and right. He then walks over to Kylie...and goes to look for somewhere to sit beside her, but Kylie is taking up the whole length of the settee)

Andy 'Ere...shift over. You're 'oggin the whole couch. (Kylie shifts her feet up slightly to allow Andy to take a seat at the end of the settee).

Kylie He left me.

Andy 'Oo did?

Kylie (turning to Andy) Harry....Six months ago, he wanted to get engaged...but today, he gave me the brush off.

Andy Don't worry love...There's plenty more fish in the sea.

Kylie But he was my soul mate.

Andy (gives a questionable look...scratches his chin)...Soul mate? Not your rock then?

Kylie He was like part of me.

Andy Which part?

Kylie At this rate, I don't think I'll ever meet 'Mr Right'

Andy Perhaps you should lower your sights a bit...Y'know...go for Mr 'Nearly Right' or something.

Kylie Where can I find someone like Harry?

Andy (wryly) That wouldn't be difficult. Just pop round to the nearest Job Centre.

Kylie Andy...Harry was special. I'd have to go a long way to find someone like him.

Andy I don't think so if you look at statistics: that tells you 'Mr Right' will almost always be found living within half a mile of your home...and more often than not, he'll turn out to be someone you've met at work. *That's* not a long way.

Kylie Don't you believe in fate?

Andy (thinks about it)..... No.

Kylie (dreamily) Don't you believe that two people with similar minds can be fated to meet some day, somewhere in the world.

Andy Not really...'cos you could perm *any* two people from twenty million throughout the country and still attain a harmonious union....(considers) for a short time anyway....

Kylie I want somebody special.

Andy D'you really believe that there's one solitary 'Mr Perfect' lurking around the planet somewhere ...doing nothing but waiting for *you* to pounce on him.

Kylie Oh... but he's got to be the right one. Someone who'll care for me till the end of our days.

Andy Now that *is* ambitious...'cos the odds on that, my girl, are no better than fifty-fifty. Look at the divorce rate....that tells yer'and another twenty per cent of the marriages that *do* survive are only being held together by a mortgage, children and emotional blackmail.....(then considers) and possibly the lack of opportunity of either one of 'em to find an alternative bit on the side along the way.

Kylie Andy....You're just not romantic. You shouldn't be so cynical and twisted.

Andy Actually I *am* romantic...but I just believe that, romance. passion ... ardour...call it what you like is all locked in with that sensation you have when the hormones are raging and the libido is screaming for attention.

Kylie But doesn't that feeling stay with you forever?

Andy Not really...these days, with me, it usually goes after half an hour.

Kylie Didn't you like Harry?

Andy Harry, I did not like. Far too familiar...and those affected hip little statements. (now into Harry mode)'I don't do respect, man. Hey, you know what... I think you're awesome...like, really wicked.... Am I bovvered?....End of'....that's all in one bloody sentence.

Kylie It's the way young people talk these days.

Andy Well let's hope they soon grow out of it.....it's stupid.

Kylie I'd like to try some internet contacts. There's got to be someone out there with similar tastes to me.

Andy What someone who likes to lay in bed all day and only emerges when Justin Beiber shows up on the telly.

Kylie No...someone uncomplicated, loving, loyal and trustworthy.

Andy I think you're looking for a cross between the Pope and Cliff Richard...except you might find those two a little bit deficient in the passion department.

Kylie You're disheartening me completely, Andy...I'm getting out. (getting up)

Andy Where yer going, then?

Kylie To see Olivia

Andy (Mock posh voice) Olivia is it?

Kylie Yes and she's a good mate. she'll buck me up.

Andy Yeah, something like that.

Kylie Oi!...watch it you. (Digs Andy in the ribs) See yer later, then. (before walking to the door).

(Kylie exits)

Andy Flippin' kids. Idle work-shy layabouts. (before resuming his full length lounge onto the settee with the newspaper).

(The door bell rings)

Andy I'll bet it's that dotty bird from upstairs again.

(He walks painfully to the door: Newspaper still in his hand. He opens it to behold the said dotty bird, Margo from next door)

Andy Oh, it's you again.

Margo Yes...I don't want to disturb you.

Andy Well you have.

Margo It was just that I can't find Arthur. He didn't wander into your door by mistake, did he?

Andy No he didn't Margo. cos' if he had've done, he'd've felt the toe of my boot right up his backside double quick.

Margo I'm sure you don't mean that. It's just that he's been missing since six o'clock this morning...and he should be due for his chunky meat by now.

Andy Don't worry Margo, he'll come home when he's ready. He's probably polished off a couple of starlings and a rat

in the course of the morning. His chunky meat doesn't offer the same challenge of pursuit as live game. He'll be back when he's eliminated the entire wild life out there in your herbaceous border.

Margo I do hope so.

Andy Now if you'll excuse me, I've got things to do,

Margo I'm so sorry, Andy...I didn't know you were busy.

Andy Yes I am a bit busy. I'll see yer later.

Andy (closes the door)...(tuts) Ruddy cat.

(He then sinks back into a full length lounge on the settee. After a few seconds, he finds he's unable to relax...and he gets up, turns on the radio which is playing the end part of the music, 'Fair at Sorochyntsi'. Andy cavorts back to his settee resting place affecting a ballet like dance to this tune. He then lays back on the settee.

(The radio announcer then states)

Announcer And now it's time for 'Corpulent Combat'...the moment in the show when we ask you to, 'Get off that comfy chair'. Come on then. Don't just sit there. You're piling on those pounds. Get up... and get that body *back* into shape.

(Andy thinks about it...and reluctantly gets to his feet, facing forwards, waiting for the fitness instructions)

Announcer Right, are you ready?... (Andy nods) We'll start with some simple arms stretching. Now, come on, stretch those arms out slowly...come on...as far as they'll go.

(Andy stretches out both his arms. His right arm is now above the table where his can of Fosters is situated. He lowers his arm so that he can scoop up the can and deliver this to his lips for a quick gulp before returning the can to the table)

Announcer And now for something a bit more ambitious...something we probably haven't done for a long time. I haven't tried it since I was a schoolboy... (Andy looks questionably at the radio) No, not that...I mean touching your toes. Everyone should be able to do it, so away we go...come on really go for it. Stretch down and reach outAre you there yet?

(As Andy is bending, a loud wind breaking noise can be heard)

Announcer Ah, I bet that feels better, doesn't it.

(Andy nods in agreement)

Announcer Now up everyone. I want you now to stand on one leg.
Let's see how long you can stay like that (Andy tries this
stance)...all right...I know you're doing it...and you're
looking good. Keep that leg off the ground...don't
wobble...and we'll now play a recording by Cheryl
Cole while you try and hold that position for the whole song..

(Andy immediately frowns at this piece of news. While the
music commences, Andy hops over to the radio as fast as he
can to turn it off)

Andy Phew...(wipes his brow)

(He starts to hop back to the settee before resuming a
walk...and then he lounges back on the seat)