

COMEDY OF ERRORS

Being a ONESHOT OFF-SHOOT of INCHMERY FANDOM and one other. Produced on Sunday May 11th, 1958, at 7, Inchmery Road, Catford, London S E 6. Credit to Joy Clarke.

Some time ago Jim Caughran wrote to say he was coming over to England on his way back home to America and could we help him in the matter of a hotel. This we did. Then there came another letter saying the trip from Pakistan had been delayed by a week. We switched the hotel booking to cover this but couldn't reach Jim in time to tell him. It didn't matter tho' because he said he would phone us as soon as he landed.

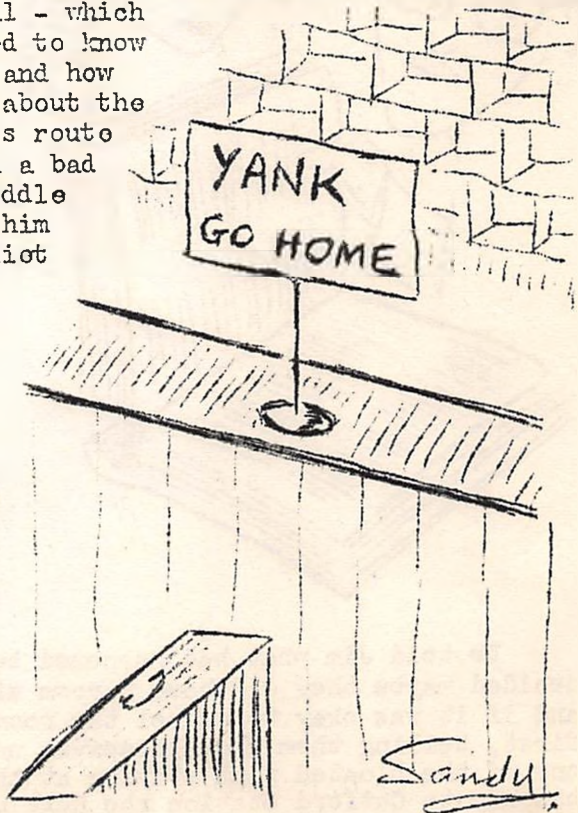
It was Saturday, May 10th, and the phone rang. I (I being Sandy) jumped down the stairs and picked it up. "Hello, Jim," I said.

There was a silence lasting several seconds and then a cool female voice asked if Vinç was around. Quick as a flash I figured out the situation. This wasn't Jim Caughran. I can be clever like this at times. I called to Vinç who came to the phone and when he had finished it appeared the female was someone from America who had just landed in UK and had been given Vinç's name by a mutual acquaintance. Said mutual acquaintance had last heard from Vinç some years ago but the memories of fen are long.

Later the same day the phone rang again. This time it was Jim but there was a hell of a lot of noise in the background and it was almost impossible to hear him. It appeared that he was at the BOAC air terminal - which accounted for most of the noise. What he wanted to know was whether or not the hotel had been fixed up and how to get there. We told him it had -- explained about the bus strike and gave as good a description of his route to the hotel as it was possible to do over such a bad phone. I think it must have been out in the middle of the tarmac. To be on the safe side we told him to ring again from the comparative peace and quiet of the hotel.

Later still the phone rang a third time. I almost broke my neck getting down stairs, picked it up, panting, and said hello. There was no reply. "Jim?" I said again. Still no reply. I put the phone down again. Halfway up the stairs it rang a fourth time. Again there was no reply when I said hello and again I asked if it was Jim. Then came one of those brilliant flashes of logic that would make the Goon proud of me. "Press button 'A', Jim," I said. There was a clunk and then an American accent burst through.

"Sandy?" said the accent. "I hate to mention it but I've just been told there's no room at the hotel." I turned to Joy.....



There was a horrified, long-drawn-out silence downstairs. What's up with Sandy, I wondered. I being Joy. I called down the stairs. A pale, owl-like disembodied face looked up the stairwell.



"The hotel told Jim there isn't a room for him!"

"There isn't a what? But I rang them myself - twice." Hasty, "Hold on a minute, Jim," and a hurried conference. If they've not got a room for him we've got to get one somewhere else. What's the nearest, better hotel, that we can ring right away? Strand Palace...gawd but that will be expensive, and we'll have to get Jim to ring off and call him back.

We got Jim to check first with the advance booking again...they admitted that "Oh, yes, I'd booked it for him all right but that they hadn't received a confirmation, so they'd cancelled it".

Poor Jim would have to wait. We told him to hang around and that we'd call him back in ten minutes. We got on to the Strand Palace where they blithely informed us that the price of a room was 37/6 a night. The phone wasn't very good and I couldn't be sure if they said 37 or 27 and 6, so I repeated the figures - 3, 7, and 6. Vine gazed at me horrified. "£3:7:6?" he screamed. "Tarts included?" He, "No, ordinary English breakfast." We reserved a room temporarily in case Jim could not get a room cheaper elsewhere, while Vine fished out the Coronation map and looked for another hotel in the vicinity. There was one just down the road from where Jim was so we tried to get on to it by phone.



For what seemed like hours a horrible 'Engaged' signal reached our ears. This did not seem logical. At least not for a hotel in the middle of London, so we called the local telephone operator and told him. He agreed with us, and rang Temple Bar Exchange to find out what was up. What was up, or rather off, appeared to be the telephone receiver.

Feeling worse than useless we rang back to the hotel where Jim was waiting and asked in my best Belfast-inspired fashion for Mr. Cochran. We could hear at the other end the manager paging Jim over the Tannoy "Telephone call for Mr Cochran." Meanwhile Sandy had informed me of the correct pronunciation and I asked the manager if he would try in this fashion. Two seconds later Jim came to the telephone.

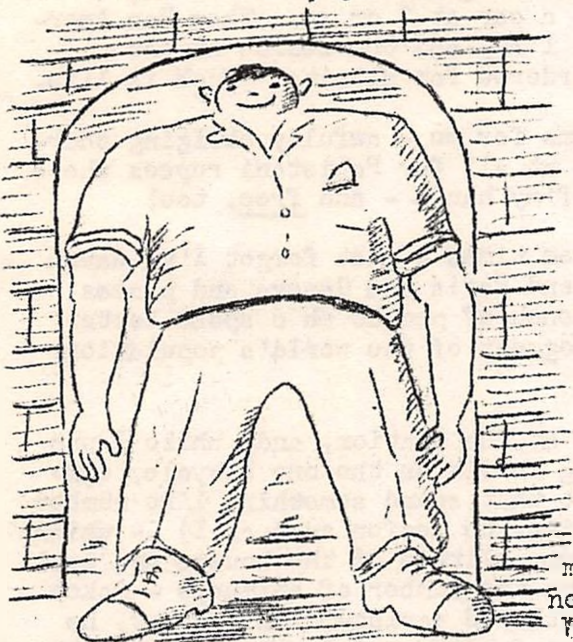
We told Jim what had happened but meanwhile, apparently, the hotel had decided maybe they did have a room after all, so we suggested that Jim check up and if it was okay to cancel the room at the Strand and if not to try the St. Martins first, telling them there receiver was off the hook, or as a last resort, to become one of the bloated rich staying at the Strand Palace. Finally we told him to make his way to Catford Station the next morning, ring from there, and Vine would take over.....

I, Ving, was vacuum-cleaning on Sunday morning when the telephone rang again. It sounded kinda weary. So was I. I'd been up so early that the early birds had spent their time cursing me for disturbing their sleep instead of searching for worms. I ran hurriedly downstairs. Then I ran back upstairs and put the vacuum-cleaner down. Then I ran down-stairs again. Keep up your typically English sang-froid, Clarke. I snatched up the phone and gasped our number into it.

"Hello? Jim?" almost said a voice.

"Hello? Jim?"

" just said a voice.



"Jim?" I screamed. Whenever anybody sounds faint on the phone I've always the tendency to raise my own voice...encouragement, example, and a feeling that if the line is bad for them then it must be the same for me. This is logic. I've deafened more people that way. An inspiration struck me. Reeling, I screamed again. "Push Button A!" I don't know why I thought I could hear him at all if he hadn't pushed Button A. I was losing my grip. Taking a firmer one I pressed the phone into my ear with a grinding motion, and through the bursting veins heard...a voice, speaking with decibels!

"Ving Clarke?"

"Yes!! Is that Jim?"

"Yes."

We were getting along fine. Old friends. The only trouble was, Jim sounded like a small midget. Not an ordinary midget, but one who'd neglected to take his nice spinach when young.

Well...maybe he'd taken the wrong train and was speaking from Aberdeen. "Where are you, Jim?"

"At the station."

He hadn't qualified it. Nothing about "Edinburgh", "Lands End" "Arran." He must be at the Local Station. Poor fellow!! Vividly I visualised him standing on a pile of telephone directories, and barely reaching the phone.

"Keep there, Jim. I'll be with you in 10 minutes!"

I shot upstairs. "It's him" I hissed as I screamed past Sandy. "It's him" I screamed as I hissed past Joy. Sandy galloped into the kitchen and put the coffee percolator on. I galloped into the bedroom and began throwing clothes on. I galloped out again, shouting for bicycle clips...the Rolls Royce was around at the cleaners and the Cadillac was out-of-date...I was using my bicycle.

I didn't find the clips. Someone...I'm naming no names but watch my eyes... always hides my bicycle clips when I want them. I'm thinking of writing to the Fortean Society about it.

"Curse the bus-strike" I snarled. A bus-service from the station passes the end of the road, but the strike meant that a circuitous 12-minute walk lay between us and that poor, bewildered, foreign-fan-type midget. Joy hadn't trusted herself to tell him the way over the phone, so I'd said I would cycle to the station and walk back with Jim.

I never did find the clips...they were only found directly I arrived back. I tucked my trouser-ends into my socks, hoping Jim would take them for plus-fours (do they have plus-fours in the US?), and pedalled madly away.

Three minutes later, after having executed a sharp 'u'-turn in the main road which earned me a snarl from an oncoming motor-cyclist I swooped down to the station entrance. In the doorway of the station stood a young giant, filling the doorway from post to post. I braked in front of him. I know it, even without the look of consternation on his face. I remembered we'd forgotten to tell him about my board. I looked up at him. "Hello, Jim" I said.

You know, I didn't push button A this morning - at least I don't remember it at all. The worst of it is, I didn't push button B after I left to get my 4d back - such a waste.

But things like that hotel mixup are usual with me -- if I'm not wholly without something, I've got too much of it. For instance, my plane left Karachi at 2:30 or some such ungodly hour of the morning, and I couldn't see hanging around the Metropole downtown doing nothing until midnite or so, I therefore asked the ICA in Karachi to send me a car at 7 or so. Then Pan American told me they had one to take me there at 1 AM, and the fellow at the travel section of the ICA told me he had one ordered for midnite. Such is life.

But the driver solved a few of my problems for me - awfully obliging character. As he figured I wouldn't have any use at all for Pakistani rupees where I was going, he offered to take what I had off my hands - and free, too!

I've been known to eat the same meal three times - just forget I've eaten it, and I'm always hungry. And in Brussels, and Paris and Geneva and places between, I was always asking directions in French of people who spoke better English than I -- which includes a sizeable segment of the world's population, now that I think about it.

Anyway, Vinç met me at the station, and, while I was trying to figure out how both of us were going to fit on the one bicycle, commenced to walk to number 7 Inchmery (if I make that sound something like number 10 Downing, that's a trifle how it seems at times to neofon such as I) -- which suited me fine, as it gave me more chance to see a little of the houses and such present. The thing which impressed me most was the number of chimneys - makes the houses look somehow more interesting than the US variety. On the way, he plied me with such questions as how did I enter fandom, and I returned with twice as many on fanhistory and such.

Anyway, as you probably noticed, we arrived, and afterwards ate a wonderful meal. (Not being familiar with the English eating system, I don't know just what meal it was, but it was awfully good, nonetheless.) In the midst of being deluged with Mad-type music, fan pictures, and other interesting things, like Joy, Vinç and Sandy, someone shouted "Lot's put o ut a one-shot!" No, not me -- not only does anything I write, spontaneously or otherwise, come out lousy, but it takes me hours to produce. Thus far, I'll bot I've put in at least as mush time as the other three together, and the stencil is so red with correction fluid, one would think the contents were Russian propaganda ...

And so the project began ... Sandy was to write the first page, Joy the second, Vinç the third, and me the fourth. As each one in turn turned out brilliant pieces of humor with apparently no effort at all, while I looked through the Hyphon, Quandry, and Slant collections, worrying all the time what I was to write. I still don't know, after stalling most of the page out with boring nothings. And you?

And so, after wasting a page, we turn next to - what? There's no one left? You're not going to leave everyone with my writing as a last impression!? (Note: I suggest you all go back and read the first three pages, ignoring this, to make up for it all)

Jim Caughran, ~~Sandy~~, Joy K. Clarke, Vinç Clarke