

EXAMINE YOUR ZIP

Fergus Anthony

"Bawdy, witty, observant. Great Performances."
"Great show. Hearty laughs and heartfelt moments."



Examine Your Zip

Written by
Fergus Anthony



Examine Your Zip

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Cover Photograph: Selfie in the Theatre

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Examine Your Zip was first performed at The International Bar, Dublin, April 3, with the following Cast:

Martin: Fergus Anthony

James: Blaise Reid

It was directed by Paul Winters

Note

This script comes with a free licence for community groups. If your community theatre stages Examine Your Zip, please send me a jpeg of the poster and I'll add it to my blog.

There are links in the back of this script to my other books, and to the T-shirt.

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Scene 1

A knock at the door.

Martin enters the office. He's nervous and tired and his polyester suit looks like he's been sleeping in it. There's a Louis Copeland label on the sleeve of his jacket. There's a stain, possibly tomato sauce, on the collar of his shirt.

Lights up!

Martin: Oh Jesus, they're going to kill me. Bastard! He's just been looking for an excuse. *(He takes out his wallet and flips it open)* I'll fix this. Don't worry. We will be together. I promise you. They didn't have a sign up or anything. It was an accident. It was a misunderstanding. I'll fix it. I promise you.'

Martin stands there, absorbed by a photograph in the wallet.

James enters. He has a document folder in his hand.

James: Martin, thanks for coming in. Martin? Martin? Martin?

Martin: We will be together.

James: Martin? Martin?

Martin kisses the photo.

James: Martin?

Now Martin notices. And as he puts the wallet away-

Martin: James? James?

Freeze for a beat or two. And now we jump back in time.

Scene 2

The same, two years earlier. Martin is full of confidence, and James is here for a job interview.

- James: Hello, I'm James Monroe-
- Martin: James Monroe? Tell me something, James Monroe, did you know that you share a name with the fifth President of the United States of America?
- James: No, I didn't know that.
- Martin: It's interesting, isn't it.
- James: I suppose so.
- Martin: So, what can I do for you, Mr. President?
- James: I'm looking for Goldstar Advertising.
- Martin: Oh the job, good man yer-self. Come in. Have a seat.
- James sits down on the smaller of the boxes.*
- James: These are my-
- Martin: Never mind about that for the minute. *(pause)* Tell me something, James, do you know how you know when you're getting old?
- James: I suppose, when you notice that the language younger people use has started to change, and you don't know what they're talking about.
- Martin: Interesting, but, no. No. Don't worry, I didn't think you would. I'll tell you how you know. You know you're getting old, when you go to a job interview dressed, like, that!
- James: I don't see-
- Martin: That's not a Louis Copeland suit, is it?
- James: No, it's-
- Martin: I didn't think it was. Where did you get it? Tesco?
- James: This is Paul Costello.
- Martin: You bought it in Dunnes? Right. That won't do at all. There's nothing wrong with it now, nothing wrong with it, but it just won't do. Not in this job. Not if you want to make the right impression. Because that's what we do here: impressions. You see that label? What does that label tell you about my suit?
- James: That it's a Louis Copeland suit?

Martin: No, it doesn't. I'll tell you what it tells you. Not a damn thing. It's a trick I picked up from these ones that buy their clothes in charity shops and put them into Arnott's bags, so people they don't know and will never meet, will think, they're posh. Gobshites!

James: You bought it in a charity shop?

Martin: That label taps into people's aspirations! Makes them feel good. *(beat)* And that's what we want. We want people to feel, not think, feel! We want them to feel that they want to possess what we want to help them to buy.

James: It's a matter of perception.

Martin: It's a matter of perception. What do people see when they look at me? What do you see when you look at me? I'll tell you what you see. You see, a tiger, a tiger, galloping, like an antelope, across the wild Sargasso.

James: Right. *(beat)* I thought the Saragasso was a sea?
(pause)

Martin: And what does that tell you? It tells you how fast, the tiger, is, galloping. That's what you have to be.

James: A galloping Tiger?

(pause)

Martin: How many pockets do you have on that thing?

James: Y'know, I've never actually counted.

Martin: Do it now.

James: Seriously?

Martin: Stand up there now and count your pockets.

James slowly stands and starts to silently count his pockets.

Martin: Can't hear you.

James starts again, calling out each number as he goes.

Martin: Ten. Do you know how many pockets I have on my suit? Eleven. What do you think of that? You see, you will, sometimes, come across a client who thinks that you're a salesman, and that you should be able to give them change. But we don't do that. So you need to be able to turn out your pockets and show them that you don't have any money on you.

James: I applied for a copywriting job.

Martin: Don't worry; you can have the suit altered.

James: Sorry, the ad said you were an advertising agency?

Martin: Never mind what the ad said.

James: Is this advertising or sales?

Martin: What did Karen tell you?

James: Who's Karen?

Martin: Karen. Karen. The fuckin' Umpa-lumpa that interviewed you.

James: I wasn't interviewed. That's what I'm here for.

Martin: But this isn't... I don't interview people. *(beat)* This is training. I'm here to train you. *(pause)* I didn't just call Karen an Umpa-lumpa, OK?

James: Look, I was called for an interview, for a copywriting job.

(pause)

Martin: Not by me! Look, I'll tell you what I'll do, I will interview you. I'll have a word with Karen later on, we'll sort everything out. *(pause)* How does that sound?

James: Great.

Martin: Right. I want you to do something for me. I want you to go out that door, knock on the door, come in again, and we'll do the interview. Ok? Off you go.

James: Seriously?

Martin: Wipe the slate clean.

James: Look, I think maybe we should leave this.

Martin: Y'know, Dublin is a very small town, and the business community is even smaller.

James: What do you mean?

Martin: If a bad word gets out about you.

James: You can't do that.

Martin: It's the culture we live in.

(pause)

James: Right.

Martin: Good man, off you go. Leave your CV here.

James gives Martin his CV, and then leaves, pulling the door closed behind him.

A knock at the door.

Martin: Don't come in until I tell you. *(pause)* Oh Jesus Christ, how the fuck do you interview somebody? *(pause)* Let's see what we have here. Bachelor of, Bachelor of Bullshit! Secretary to a Secretary. What? What the fuck did he take notes about?

(pause)

Martin: Come in.

James enters.

Martin: Hello, I'm Martin, and you are?

James: James Monroe.

Martin: James Monroe? Tell me something, James Monroe, did you know that you share a name with the fifth President of the United States of America?

James: Well, yes, you just-

Martin: You did? Right. Well, sit down, Mr. President. *(pause)* So, you want to join our little community of advertising executives. Good good. Now, it says here that you studied advertising at the Dublin Institute of Technology.

James: Yes, I did the degree-

Martin: Do you know what your first mistake was?

James: My first mistake?

Martin: You should have gone to a business school.

James: But it is a business-

Martin: We had a fella in here a few years ago, and he wanted to be an art director. *(beat)* Well, we are not in the art racket; we, are in, the advertising business. And, like him, you are coming to us with a degree that is, no disrespect to yourself or your teachers, but you're coming in here with a bit of paper that isn't worth the paper it's written on!

James: I don't think that's true.

Martin: I'll tell you what I'm going to do for you. I'm going to administer a test.

James: OK.

Martin: First of all, do you know what your greatest talent is?

(Pause)

James: My ability to learn.

Martin: No. Your greatest talent is your imagination.

James: Isn't that a bit like saying a musician's greatest talent is his piano?

Martin: Not if he can't play the piano. You see, James, nobody ever composed a pop song with a piano. They may have written it on a piano, but they composed it, where? In their imagination.

James: Right. Is this more advertising jargon?

Martin draws a cardboard tube from behind his seat He holds it up, admiring it.

Martin: D'you know what that is? (pause) That is the key to the land of pure imagination, and I give it to you.

James: Right.

Martin: I want you to name for me, five different uses for that key. Do it now. Stand up.

James: Sorry?

Martin: Stand up. Walk around. Be in the moment.

James: OK.

James gets up and walks around.

Martin: Right, come on. First thing that comes into your head.

James acts out each of the five uses as he names them.

James: A baseball bat.

Martin: A baseball bat. Brilliant. Well done. Come on, give me another one. Anything at all.

James: A spyglass.

Martin: A spyglass. Excellent. You're on your way now. What's the next one? Don't even think about it.

James: A Lightsabre.

Martin: A Light... sabre... right... Right. Star trekking, off we go! Ok, Give me another one. Off the top of your head.

James: A hair curler for a fifty-foot woman!

Martin freezes, dumbfounded.

(pause)

- James: A rifle?
- Martin: A rifle! Good! Good, excellent, well done. You better give me that back now in case you shoot someone. Sit down. Right James, now we know two things about you. We know what kind of imagination you have and we know where you're grossly deficient.
- James: Deficient?
- Martin: You could also have said a pole for a tiny stripper. But you didn't think of that, did you? No, you didn't!
- James: Well, no.
- Martin: Now, can you name, for me, five different types of advertising?
- James: Billboards. Newspaper. Radio. Television. Online.
- Martin: Good man yerself. Excellent, well done. Now, can you tell me what those five forms of advertising have in common?
- James: Well, they each have their own-
- Martin: They're not worth a thundering fuck! That's what they have in common, and I'll tell you why. Billboard advertising. (pause) Do you remember the Men in Black?
- James: Yes, that was a great movie. In fact that was one of those rare occasions where the sequel was better than the original.
- Martin: No, you see? Now that's what you would think. That's what anybody would think. But, picture this: Two little squares of white, like Hitler moustaches in negative.
- James: What were they advertising?
- Martin: The very fuckin question. What were they advertising? (pause) I'll tell you what they were advertising. They were advertising jobs in the Priesthood.
- James: The Priesthood?
- Martin: On billboards and bus stops. And this was at a time when all of their shenanigans were coming out.
- James: Who were they trying to attract?
- Martin: That, now, James, is the sixty-five thousand dollar question.

James: Right.

Martin: So, billboard advertising – not worth a thundering fuck. *(pause)* Now, tell me, why do you think newspaper advertising is good?

James: I don't necessarily think it's good.

Martin: You're learning. What would you say are the benefits of newspaper advertising?

James: I suppose it depends on your target audience.

(pause)

Martin: Let's say McDonald's put an ad in the paper for a tasty new hamburger treat. A nice big picture, and it's all bright and colourful and, and, mouth-watering. And beside that picture, there's a story about a kitten. You know the kitten they used to put on tins of biscuits, at Christmas time?

James: Yeah.

Martin: That kitten. And that kitten has crabs.

James: Crabs?

Martin: It's just an example. So anyway, there you are reading this, very sad story about this, lovely cute little kitten that got crabs from, somewhere, and while you're reading that story you're seeing a bright colourful ad for this tasty new hamburger treat, and in your mind you're associating the two of them, together, and then you go into one of these places, and you're afraid to eat the food, because somewhere in your head there's this message: Eating at McDonald's Will Give You Crabs. *(pause)* And it might not be true at all.

James: I don't eat at McDonald's.

Martin: No. Well, I wouldn't eat there all that often myself now. But you know, once a week or so, it's a nice treat. Makes a nice change from sitting at home with a plate of chips. It's nice now, y'know, nice, talking to the young people, and you never know what might happen. *(beat)* So, anyway, newspaper advertising. Not Worth a Thundering-

(pause)

James: Fuck?

Martin: Excellent. Well done. Now, what were the other ones?

James: Radio, television and Online.

Martin: Right, let's take radio. Who listens to the radio nowadays? *(pause)* Well?

James: What? Oh, I'm sorry, I thought that was a rhetorical question.

Martin: Who listens to the radio nowadays?

James: It depends on the -

Martin: There are two types of people who listen to the radio. Auld wans who ring up to whinge to Joe Duffy. And young wans listening to the BAM-BAM-BAM stations. The auld wans haven't two pennies to rub together, and the young wans? They wouldn't give you the steam off their piss. So we don't concern ourselves with any of them. So, radio advertising. Not Worth a -

(pause)

Both: Thundering Fuck!

Martin: Excellent. Now, online advertising. What is the benefit of online advertising?

James: It allows you to target a-

Martin: There is no benefit to online advertising! And I'll tell you why. Pornography! You can't go on the internet nowadays without seeing some young one shaking her arse like it was a paint-mixer. Oh! God! Oh! Oh! Oh! Oh it's disgraceful! *(pause)* So, online advertising. Not Worth -

(pause)

Both: a Thundering Fuck!

Martin: Now, one more, and then I'll give you the good news. Television. The goggle-box. The idiot-box! Most television programmes are made for, who?

James: Housewives?

Martin: Angry...

James: Angry Housewives?

Martin: Angry young...

James: Angry young Housewives?

Martin: No. Angry young loners. To keep them quiet. And after a while they begin to look the same. The ads.

James: The programmes too.

Martin: Well, most of them. And now you can programme the telly to skip past the ads anyway.

James: And, there's no guarantee that you're going to get the right angry loner. *(pause)* Didn't Henry Ford say something-

Martin: Henry Ford said a lot of things, James, but they don't concern us here today.

James: No, no, it's about advertising.

Martin: It's all about advertising, James. Companies spend a fortune on the off chance, the off chance, that they might sell a bar of chocolate to some fucker who's the size of a couch. At least half that money is wasted.

James: Imagine if they knew which half.

Martin: Well, they probably wouldn't spend it then, would they, James? *(pause)* The coffee ads were good though. D'you remember the coffee ads?

James: Which one? There's so-

Martin: Yer'man out of Buffy the Vampire Slayer?

James: I've never seen that show.

Martin: He liked jazz? He was trying to ride this bird who liked opera? She didn't like modern art!

James: Oh yes. I remember those.

Martin: And what did you think of them?

James: They were a fun way to-

Martin: How many jars of coffee did you buy because of them?

James: I don't drink instant coffee.

Martin: And that makes them shite! *(pause)* And Nicole, remember her? Oh God, oh God, oh, that was a ride in a car. But d'you know something; I didn't buy a single car because of her.

James: Neither did I.

Martin: And do you know what that makes them?

Both: Shite!

Martin: So, Television Advertising. Not

(pause)

Both: Worth a Thundering Fuck!

Martin: And again. Stand up there!

Both: Not worth a Thundering Fuck!

Martin: One more time!

Both: Not Worth a Thundering Fuck!

Martin: I bet they didn't teach you that at the Dublin Institute of Technology?

James: No, they didn't.

Martin: And in all of those cases, in all of those cases, you're working for someone else; you're a foot-soldier in the armies of the damned. *(beat)* I'll tell you what it's like. All these different types of advertising. D'you know the statue of Molly Malone that used to be at the bottom of Grafton Street?

James: Yes.

Martin: What does she look like?

(pause)

James: I don't know. Oh, I know, Nancy, from Oliver?
(pause) Oom-pa-pa, Oom-pa-pa, that's how it goes, Oom-pa-pa, oom-pa-pa, everyone knows-

Martin: No. *(sings)* In Dublin's fair city, where the girls are so pretty, I first set my eyes on sweet Molly Malone, She wheels her wheelbarrow, through streets broad and narrow, crying cockles and mussels, alive, alive oh!

James has joined in and now continues on his own.

James: Alive, alive oh, alive... alive... oh! crying... cockles... and... muscels... alive... alive...oh!

Martin: Lady Muck!

James: What?

Martin: Lady Muck! Her fancy dress and rosy cheeks. How does someone flogging fish from a handcart afford to look like that?

James: Oh yeah. I never thought of that. D'you know you're right.

Martin: Fuckin' right, I'm right. It's not cockles and mussels she's selling. It's young wan's from the flats! And drugs! Sex and drugs. That's what she's selling, sex and drugs! And that's the image of Dublin that goes around the world. It's great craic sometimes watching the Yanks taking pictures: "This is us with Molly Ma-lone. She was a drug dealing whore monger! Doesn't she look nice? I wish Odel could meet a nice girl like that." *(pause)* I wonder now, was that part of the brief? "We want a statue for the bottom of Grafton Street. Something tasteful. Something that says 'Dublin'. We were thinking maybe a drug-dealing whore-monger, but nice!" *(pause)* You don't get too many people taking photos of themselves with the statues of the Living Dead outside the Irish Famine Supper Club."

James: Yeah. Wait. The Irish Famine Supper Club?

Martin: The I F S C.

James: Oh, right.

Martin: Now, the good news. Work hard at this job and you can write your own ticket. How does that sound?

James: Sounds good.

Martin: Look at me. I've been doing this job for twenty years. I have trained every senior member of this company. They came in here, like you, not knowing their arse from their elbow. I took them under my wing, I showed them the ropes, and they all climbed the ladder to success. And sess was in! *(pause)* One of those lads is now my boss. He earns over a thousand Euros a week, because of me. He drives a Jag, because of me.

James: Very good.

Martin: I have a flat with a view of Temple Bar. I'm engaged to be married to a twenty year-old girl.

James: Oh, congratulations. When's the big day?

Martin: It'll be a few years yet. She's in America at the moment. Studying law.

James: Oh right.

Martin: We write to each other.

James: Ok.

Martin: In the meantime I'm free to come and go as I please.

James: Right.

Martin: If I wanted I could go to the pub every night of the week.

James: That'll all end when you have kids.

Martin: Oh I have a son. I have a thirty year old son. He works for a bank out in Hong Kong. But he got in before that was a dirty word.

James: Right.

(pause)

Martin: Anyway, in this job, you'll be your own boss, and what that means is that you don't have to pay one red cent in tax. How does that sound?

James: Can you do that?

Martin: You've got a lot to learn about business.

James: How do you get around the taxman?

Martin: What you do is, you set up a company, taking advantage of any tax breaks there are, then, when you get to the point where the taxman takes an interest, you close the company down and start a new one on the same terms. All you really have to do is change the name and you'll be grand.

James: Why don't you just keep the company going and make money that way?

Martin: Sure that would make us like every other advertising agency out there. We're not like that. We're young. We're vibrant. Not everyone can handle that. There was a fella here one day and guess how long he lasted? Go on. Give a guess.
(pause) Give a fuckin' guess.

James: A month?

Martin: No.

James: Two months?

Martin: Two hours. Two fuckin' hours he lasted. Two hours and he was gone. Now why do you think that was?

James: He quit.

Martin: Well of course he quit, but why did he quit?

James: I really couldn't say.

Martin: I'll tell you why. He didn't understand the nature of advertising. He thought we were out there hustling people to buy overpriced crap that they didn't need. And those were his very words. And the thing is, it's not overpriced. And you know, we're hustling ourselves much more than we're hustling other people.

James: So it is a hustle?

Martin: Everything's a hustle. But we do something more. *(pause)* Can you tell me what that something more is?

James: You make people feel!

Martin: Yeah! We touch people. We touch people. Not in a creepy way - in a nice way. There's not enough human contact nowadays. So that's what we do. We touch people. And I guarantee you, someone who's touched will buy fuckin' anything.

James: Well I would hope to last more than two hours. I'm looking to build a career.

Martin: That's the spirit. *(pause)* And remember what I said. This is a very small town. Everybody knows everybody.

James: That's OK. Nothing bad in my employment history.

Martin: Are you sure about that? I'm going to have to investigate your CV. So if you have lied on it, now is the time to tell me.

James: Why would I lie on my CV?

Martin: Everybody lies on their CV.

James: I haven't.

Martin: Do you not want the job?

James: Of course I want the job.

Martin: But, how is an employer supposed to trust you if they haven't got anything on you?

James: What?

Martin: What do you think is going to happen? Do you think I'm going to throw you out? There are only three occasions when lying on your CV is a firing offence: if you're not making enough money; if you get caught riding the boss's daughter; if nobody likes you. But they might get you fired anyway, or you might have to get married.

James: I'm not going to get caught with the boss's daughter.

Martin: That's the idea.

James: That wasn't what I meant.

Martin: We get a lot of people coming in thinking that just because they're qualified to do the job, that somehow qualifies them to have the job.

James: And it doesn't?

Martin: Jesus, no. Some of them aren't even qualified! We had a fella in here once from Trinity College – *Trinity Fucking College* – he spent four years studying English. He said he wanted to perfect the short story. Didn't fuckin' Chekov do that! *(pause)* Do you not know who Chekov was?

James: Of course I know who Chekov was.

Martin: Well?

James: What? Chekov?

Martin: Yes! Chekov! Who else?

James: He was in Star Trek.

Martin: Anton Chekov. Russian playwright and short story writer.

James: Oh, ok.

Martin: And do you know what he's doing now?

James: Writing movies?

Martin: Not Chekov, he's dead. The fuckin' Trinity College gobshite.

James: What's he doing now?

Martin: He's on the radio. Can you believe that? On the radio playing records by these talentless... If he wanted to be on the radio he could have done that without wasting his parent's money. He could have got a job down the country playing Declan Nerney records. At least he'd be supporting his own.

James: Who's Declan Nerney?

Martin: Doesn't matter. We have more important things to think about. We have to help people to buy this shit. *(pause)* Let me show you what you'll be advertising.

Martin pulls over the sports bag and opens it. He takes out an egg and spoon race.

Martin: Look at that. Egg and Spoon Race.

James: Where are the eggs?

Martin: They're sold separately. (*Martin wanders across the stage, admiring the egg and spoon race set*) Children love these things. If you're dealing with a mother and child, or a father and child is better, show them this. The father doesn't know that the child needs it, but the child knows, and the child will kick up an awful stink if they don't get it.

James picks up a My Little Pony knock-off.

James: Oh look, My Little Pony!

Martin: Wooh, wooh. Hold your horses there now bucko, I didn't say you could touch them.

James: Sorry.

Martin: You don't get to touch the merchandise until you've completed your manual handling.

James: Manual what?

Martin: They didn't teach you a lot at the Dublin Institute of Technology, did they? (*pause*) If you had dropped that horse, and slipped on it...

James: Are you afraid I'm going to put in a claim?

Martin: We do not use the 'C' word around here. (*pause*) Look, normally, you'd have to do this with an empty cardboard box, but we don't have one so I'll use a chair.

James: Do what?

Martin: Manual handling.

James: Are you sure a chair will be alright?

Martin: If you can do this with a chair, you'll have no problem doing it with an empty cardboard box.

James: Right so.

Martin: Now, in a moment, I'm going to pick that chair up, carry it over to the other side of the room, turn around, come back, and put it down.

James: OK.

Martin: Now the first thing you have to do is, you have to address the chair. So how do you do that?

James: Hello, chair?

Martin: No, you take up a position behind it. Watch what I do now. You plant your feet firmly on the ground, keep your back straight, your head up. Can you see that my back is straight?

James: Yes.

Martin: My head is up.

James: Yes.

Martin: Good. Now, breathing in and breathing out. First you breath in, do it with me, and as you breath out you bend your knees. (*pause*) Bend your knees. Good. Now I'm going to grip the chair, and I want you to watch how I do it. Did you see that? Look at me, my knees are bent, but my back is straight. (*He reaches out and grips the box.*) I am now gripping the chair. Can you see that my back is still straight?

James: Yes.

Martin: I am now standing up. Did you see what I did there?

James: Yes.

Martin: What did I do?

James: You stood up.

Martin: I straightened my legs! I kept my back straight and I straightened my legs. That's how to lift something. I am now going to walk over there, and I want you to observe how I do it. One foot in front of the other. A nice even pace. Ok? The other side of the room isn't going to go anywhere. (*He walks across the room, right up to the wall.*) Huston, we have a problem. Can you tell me what that problem is?

James: You've hit a wall.

Martin: No. It's the need to turn around. How do I do that?

James: Just twist around.

Martin: Listen, Chubby Checker, if you want to break your spine you can do it somewhere else. The correct way to turn around is to use your feet. Watch my feet. Did you see that?

James: Yes.

Martin: I repositioned my feet to orientate them in the correct direction. Now, watch what I do now. Can you see I'm walking?

James: Yes. You're definitely walking.

Martin: Check my back. Is my back straight? (pause) Feel it. Run your hand along my spine.

James feels along Martin's spine.

James: Yes. Your spine is straight.

Martin: Is my head up?

James goes to feel Martin's head.

Martin: Don't get familiar

James: Yes, your head is still up.

Martin: Good. And we're walking. Breathing in and breathing out, and walking across the room. Now, watch what I do now. (*He puts the box down.*) Did you see that? I bent my knees, thus lowering my body and the chair until the legs of the chair were flush with the floor.

James: Right.

Martin: You should practice that at home. You have to pass it; you have to get your certificate. But once you've done that, you'll never have to do it again.

James: Should I practice with a chair or an empty cardboard box?

Martin: That's right.

James picks up the bell.

Martin: Don't touch that!

James: Sorry. Sorry.

Martin: You don't get to ring the bell until you have earned the bell.

James: What do you mean?

Martin: Do you not know what that is?

James: It's a bell.

Martin: No. That is not *a* bell. It is *the* bell.

James: *The Bell*?

Martin: That is the bell by which we are all judged.

James: Really? Why?

(Pause)

Martin: Have you ever created an immortal work of art?

James: It's too soon to say.

Martin: Did you ever ... did you ever make twenty quid in a single day?

James: Of course.

Martin: You did? Good man yer'self. So you know that feeling – you've worked your bollocks off and you've got twenty quid burning a hole in your pocket? That's what it's like. Well, you see, Michelangelo, he'd been painting the ceiling for the Pope, and the Pope came to him said: "Mickey, I've got a bit of marble and I want you to make something for the hallway, something that will make people feel – glorious, and – insignificant. I was thinking, maybe, a giant woman, cradling the lifeless corpse of her dead child in her arms - but nice!"

James: Glorious and insignificant?

Martin: That's it! So Michelangelo went off, and he was a bit annoyed, because he hadn't been paid for the ceiling. But he made the statue anyway, and then he got paid, he got paid twenty quid, for both jobs, that's twenty quid in their money, old-time Roman money, twenty gold coins, I suppose. It was a lot back then. But you wouldn't get much for those same gold coins today. Anyway, he got paid and...

James: I'm sorry, how does this relate-

Martin: Don't worry! Nobody expects you to create masterpiece of the Italian Renaissance on your first day, but that's the level you'll be operating on.

James: The Italian Renaissance?

Martin: Our top advertising executive made a thousand euro in one week, I told you about him, a thousand euro, that's a thousand euro tax free, in one week.

James: How does this relate to the bell?

Martin: Only Michelangelo gets to ring that bell.

James: What?

Martin: You'll be standing on a chair, everyone gathered around, you're The Man - in a good way! And when you see that bell being rung... you think: one day... *(for a moment he's lost in a dream, then he recovers himself)* Then we all go to the pub.

James: The guy who made a thousand in one week, what was his basic?

Martin: What? Oh, yes, yes, good point. Now, you read the ad. Basic plus commission. Right?

James: Right. What is the basic pay?

Martin: Seven percent.

James: So it's all commission?

Martin: Off the top!

James: That is commission. I'm asking you what is the basic pay for this job?

Martin: I'm telling you, if you'd listen to me for a minute. 7% of every euro that you bring in, goes into your pocket.

James: I understand that, but-

Martin: Ok, let's say, for the sake of illustrating the point, let's say that somebody buys something, from you, for one euro, now they won't because we don't deal in that sort of stuff. OK? Now, there are one hundred cent in one euro, so 1% of one euro is,

James: One cent.

Martin: Exactly, so 7% of one euro is?

James: Seven cent.

Martin: So, your basic pay for that day would be seven cent. After that it's all gravy.

James: OK. So, it's a straight seven percent on everything I sell.

Martin: Help people to buy!

They stand there, looking at each other for a minute.

Martin: Let me show you how it works.

Martin crouches down like he's sitting on a toilet, and looks up at James.

Martin: Now, where am I?

(pause)

James: Well, it looks like you're... em, well, you're... like you're, on, the, em...

Martin: I'm in, the distance!

James: Oh thank God for that.

Martin: Crouch down here now you beside me and we'll get going.

A moment and James crouches down beside Martin.

Martin: Right, we're in the field. Tell me what you see.

James: Grass?

Martin: Not a field, the field. No grass in the field. D'you remember I got you to imagine what you could do with a cardboard tube?

James: Yes.

Martin: Well if you use that same power of imagination now, you can practice your advertising technique, so that when you come to do it for real, everything will take care of itself.

James: (Standing up, laughing) This is ridiculous.

Martin: (Standing up) This is a tried and trusted technique to encode the experience of advertising into your muscles.

James: Ah, come on?

Martin: How do you think Benedict Cumberbatch does it?

James: Does what?

Martin: Help people to buy shit.

James: Benedict Cumer-thingy yer'man, that fella, he's not a door-to-door salesman.

Martin: Doesn't he have to get the audience to buy his performance? There's no difference between what we do and what Benedict Cumberbatch does, except, if we fuck up, we don't get a second take. That's called life! (*pause*) So, you can crouch down here now, and take this seriously, or you can fuck off. And remember what I told you – there's no blacklist in Dublin.

He watches James crouch down, then gets down beside him.

Martin: Now, as I said, we're in the distance. So let's go.

Martin starts off walking, getting a little taller with each step. He stops and looks back.

Martin: Come on, keep up. You have to take this shit seriously, if you want a life like mine.

Martin continues walking, slowly getting taller, until he's finally standing up.

Martin: Right, story?

James: Well I thought I was going for an interview for a copywriting job, but it turned into-

Martin: Not, *story?* Story. You have to have a story to engage the client with. Comment on the weather. Tell them they look great. Anything. The point is to create a rapport, make them trust you, then you can fleece the fuckers. Right?

James: Right.

Martin: So, off you go.

(pause)

James: Oh, right. Good morning.

Martin: Good Morning.

James: Isn't it a beautiful day?

Martin: It's a gorgeous day.

James: I like that suit.

Martin: I'm not a girl.

James: What?

Martin: If I was a girl you could talk about clothes; tell her she's wearing a nice dress; a nice pair of jeans. You might even be able to tell her she's got a nice bum.

James: Would that really be appropriate?

Martin: Well it's the sort of judgement call you have to make on the spot.

James: I don't think I'll be saying anything like that.

Martin: If you work your territory you might have to.

James: Right.

Martin: And by the way, you're right! It's a very nice suit: Louis Copeland. Where did you get that thing you're wearing? Tesco?

James: You know where I got it.

Martin: I'm in character.

James: Oh, right.

Martin: But did you see what I did there? I took your compliment and I turned it back on you. Now I'm in a position of power, and you're out the door. So now let me show you something. *(pause)* Do you like magic tricks, James?

James: Yeah.

Martin: Because I have a magic trick for you now.

Martin takes a purse out of the sports bag and presents it to James.

Martin: What do you think this is?

James: It's a purse.

Martin: Are you sure about that?

James: Yes.

Martin: Watch this.

He unzips the purse. Holds it up. There's another purse inside!

Martin: What do you see?

James: A zip.

Martin unzips that, and holds it up.

James: Another zip.

Martin unzips that and holds it up!

Martin: Now, what does that remind you of?

(pause)

James: A shark's mouth!

Martin: What? It's a fanny! Have you never seen a fanny before?

James: That looks more like a shark's mouth.

Martin: It does not look like... Oh, well spotted! But young lads nowadays, they wouldn't know the difference.

James: I think they might.

Martin: Well we're not, suggesting, he ride, the fucking, purse. We're presenting it as an opportunity for some young lad to have a laugh in the pub.

James: And people really buy this?

Martin: I promise you, if you show that to a bunch of lads, they love it. But, on no account should you do that in a hairdressers, or any kind of... women's place.

James: Who would?

Martin: You'd be surprised.

James: Someone did that? *(pause)* What happened?

Martin: It was one of those places where they get their bikini line done. He went in: "Ladies, allow me to introduce you: this is your clitoris!" Yer'woman threw a spatula at him, some young one's short and curlies all over it.

James: God, it's amazing she didn't sue?

Martin: Y'know, I'm getting a bit sick of your attitude.
(pause) Do you want a life like mine or don't you?
(pause) I know the name of everyone who works here. I don't even know my own father's name.
(pause) This isn't just a business. This is a family. We have a ... a shared vision. And every member of this family is dedicated to that vision. *(pause)* I can see the Clarence Hotel from my bedroom window. One night, I was with this young one, and we were getting down to business. I looked out the window, and who did I see?

James: Bono?

Martin: No. Why the fuck would I be looking at Bono?

James: Doesn't he own the Clarence?

Martin: Eva Langoria. I saw Eva Langoria. Guess what she was doing?

James: Trying on, sexy underwear.

Martin: She was in the Jacuzzi, not a stitch on her. That could be you.

James: In the Jacuzzi?

Martin: God, no. Looking at her! *(pause)* Eva Langoria.
(pause) She's from Texas. *(pause)* My Girlfriend is in Texas.

Martin takes out his wallet. He flashes the picture at James,

Martin: Isn't she beautiful.

Looking at the picture, Martin wanders over to where he stood at the start of the play.

Martin: I'm going to marry her.

He freezes in that position. Pause.

Scene 3

Back in the present, we pick up where scene 1 left off.

James: Martin? Martin?

Martin kisses the photograph.

James: Martin?

Martin: James?

James: Are you OK?

Martin: Yeah.

James: Take a seat.

Martin sits on the box James had been sitting on in scene 2.

(pause)

James: Have you heard from your son?

Martin: My son?

James: Is he coming home?

Martin: Well, he is and he isn't, y'know? The girlfriend lives in Galway. *(pause)* Sure, if that's what he wants...

(pause)

James: Martin, we need to talk about the incident.

Martin: What incident? *(pause)* Ah, well now, you're not going to take the word of some auld biddy over me, are you?

James: Martin-

Martin: They didn't have a sign up: Ladies, make your fanny attractive to child molesters!

James: Martin, I need you to tell me exactly what happened, and I need you to think before you speak. Do you understand?

Martin: I went in and passed a few minutes with them.

James: And then?

Martin: I showed them a cuddly toy, y'know, a little kitten, and I asked them: "Ladies, wouldn't you love to have a little pussy like this?"

James: Jesus!

Martin: They were laughing.

James: They were laughing at you Martin, not with you.

Martin: I thought we were having the criac.

James: What about the purse?

Martin: The purse?

James: Think, Martin. Be very careful about what you say.

Martin: What? No. No. I did not introduce that woman to her clitoris!

James: Oh Jesus.

Martin: She threw a fucking spatula at me.

James: She's claiming sexual harassment.

Martin: What? We were just having the criac. I was just trying to make them feel good.

James: Well you should have been thinking! You went into this woman's business. You made inappropriate comments to her customers. One of those women had seven children, and she's saying that you said her fanny must be only massive, in those words.

Martin: Yeah, but I didn't mean it like that.

James: She called the Guards.

Martin: She just wants money.

James: And she's going to get it.

Martin: I'm the one who had to pick some young one's short and curlies out of my teeth.

James: You put the future of this company in jeopardy.

Martin: How? You'll be closing down in two months.

James: And the new company will be different.

Martin: What are we going to do?

James: You won't be coming with us. *(pause)* Martin, I've been instructed to let you go. *(pause)* It's out of my hands.

Martin: But you did worse, and I covered for you.

James: There's nothing you can do about that now.

(pause)

Martin: I'm fifty years of age.

James: I'm sorry.

Martin: But I'm getting married. How am I going to support a wife without a job? Look, *(He takes out his wallet and shows a picture to James)*. Look how beautiful she is. How can I tell her the marriage is off because I can't support her? Look. Look at her. LOOK!

James: Is that a prison-

Martin: She didn't do it. *(pause)* She just needs money for the appeal. *(pause)* She didn't do it. *(pause)* She told me!

James: You haven't been sending her money, have you?

Martin: That's none of your business.

(pause)

James: I have your P45 here, and here's a letter for the DSP.

Martin: You fucking shite! I trained you. *(pause)* Dublin Institute of Technology, my arse! I told you I'd check it out. But I still gave you a job. *(pause)* I introduced you to your wife. And now you think you're too good for me? *(pause)* You're a fucking door-to-door salesman. A door-to-door salesman selling overpriced shite to people who think you're a ... shite! *(pause)* I'm calling the President.

James: Martin, I am the President.

Martin: What?

James: I'm the President of the new company. And, I'm not firing you. *(pause)* Martin, the reason your son is coming home is, he bought the company.

Martin: My son?

James: Jesus Martin, do I have to spell it out for you? *(pause)* Your son wants you fired. *(pause)* It was one of the conditions of the sale.

Martin: What?

James: I'm afraid, Martin, you're no longer economically viable. *(pause)* Do you remember teaching your son about geography? *(pause)* China?

Martin: China?

James: China.

Martin: China?

James: China.

Martin: Oh, China.

James: I'm sorry.

James leaves. Martin sits there, the photograph of his beloved and the letter for the DSP on this lap.

BLACKOUT.

[About the Author](#)

Fergus Anthony was born in Ireland in 1969. He works as an actor and lives in Dublin.

His second play, *Godot*, was staged as part of *Scene + Heard* 2018 at Smock Alley Theatre, Dublin, Ireland.

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The logo is called Heart&Mind and is based on a woodcarving I made in the 1990's.

It's available on a T-shirt from
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