

ernie1.doc

ERNIE'S INCREDIBLE ILLUCINATIONS

At one side of the stage is a doctor's waiting-room. It is filled with an assortment of miserable-looking patients, coughing, wheezing, sneezing and moaning. Amongst them sit Mr and Mrs Fraser and their son, Ernie

Ernie *(to the Audience, after a second)* If you ever want to feel ill - just go and spend a happy half-hour in a doctor's waiting-room. If you're not ill when you get-there, you will be when you leave.

A man enters, having seen the doctor. He is moaning. He crosses the waiting room and goes out. The other patients look at him and sorrowfully shake their heads. The receptionist enters.

Receptionist Mr and Mrs Fraser ...

Mum and Dad rise

Doctor will see you now.

Mum Thank you. Come on, Ernie.

Mum and Dad and Ernie follow the Receptionist across the stage to the Doctor who sits behind a table

Morning, Doctor.

The Receptionist leaves

Doctor Ah. Ah. Mr and Mrs Fraser. Is that it?

Mum That's right. I'm Mrs Fraser - and this is my husband, Mr Fraser - and this is our son - Ernie.

Doctor Ah yes. Ernie. I've been hearing all sorts of things about you, young Ernie. Now, what have you been up to, eh?

Dad Illucinations.

Doctor I beg your pardon?

Dad Illucinations.

Doctor Oh, yes, illuci - quite, yes.

Mum What my husband means, Doctor, is that Ernie has been creating these illusions.

Doctor Ah.

Mum Well, they're more than illusions, really.

Dad I'll say.

Doctor Beg pardon?

Dad I'll say.

Mum He's been causing that much trouble. At school, at home, everywhere he goes. I mean we can't go on like this. His dad's not as strong as he was, are you, Albert?

Dad No.

Doctor What?

Dad No.

Doctor Perhaps it would be better if you told me a little more about it. When did you first notice this ... ?

Mum Ah well ...

Dad Ah.

Mum Now then...

Dad Now ...

Mum He'd have been ... well, it'd have been about ... near enough ... er ...

Doctor Go on.

Ernie steps forward. During his speech Mum and Dad remain seated. The doctor moves to the side of the stage, produces a notebook and makes note on what follows.

Ernie It started with these daydreams. You know, the sort everybody gets. Where you suddenly score a hat trick in the last five minutes of the Cup Final, or you bowl out the West Indies for ten runs - or saving your granny from a blazing helicopter, all that sort of rubbish. It was one wet Saturday afternoon and me and my mum and my dad were all sitting about in the happy home having one of those exciting afternoon rave-ups we usually have in our house.

Ernie sits at the table in the Doctor's chair and starts to read a book. Mum has started knitting and Dad just sits, gazing ahead of him. There is a long silence.

Ernie It was all go in our house.

Pause

Mum I thought you'd be at the match today, Albert.

Dad Not today.

Mum Not often you miss a game.

Dad They're playing away.

Mum Oh.

Dad In Birmingham. I'm damned if I'm going to Birmingham. Even for United.

Ernie Meanwhile - While this exciting discussion was in progress, I was reading this book about the French wartime resistance workers and of the dangers they faced - often arrested in their homes. I started wondering what would happen if a squad of soldiers turned up at our front door, having been tipped off about the secret radio transmitter hidden in our cistern - when suddenly ...

The tramp of feet, and a squad of soldiers comes marching on and up to their front door

Officer Halte! (*He bangs on the door*)

Pause

Dad That the door

Mum What?

Dad The door.

Mum Was it?

Officer Open zis door. Open the door! (*He knocks again*)

Mum Oh, that'll be the milkman wanting his money. He always comes round about now. Albert, have you got ten bob ... ?

Dad (*fumbling in his pockets*) Ah ...

Officer (*shouting*) Open zis door immediately. Or I shall order my men to break it down! (*He bangs on the door again*)

Mum Just a minute. Coming.

Dad Should have one somewhere ...

Officer We know you're in there, English spy! Come out with your hands up. . . !

Mum What's he shouting about? Oh, I'd better ask him for three pints next week, if Auntie May's coming. . .

Officer Zis is your last chance ... (*He knocks again*)

Mum Oh shut up ...

The Officer signals his men. Two of them step back, brace their shoulders and prepare to charge the door

I'm coming-I'm coming.

Ernie I shouldn't go out there, Mum ...

Mum What?

Ernie I said don't go out there.

Mum What ... ?

Ernie It's not the milkman. It's a squad of enemy soldiers.

Mum Who?

Ernie They've come for me ...

Mum Who has?

Ernie The soldiers. They've found out about the radio transmitter.

Mum What radio?

Dad Hey, here, that's a point. Have you paid our telly licence yet, Ethel? It might be the detector van.

Mum Oh, sit down, Albert. Stop worrying. It's just Ernie. Shut up, Ernie. **Ernie** But Mum...

Dad I think I'll take the telly upstairs. Just in case ...

The Soldiers charge at the door. A loud crash

Ernie Don't go out, Mum.

Mum Shut up!

Dad (*picking up the television, struggling, with it*) Just take it upstairs.

Ernie (*to Mum*) Don't go!

Mum I can't leave him out there. The way he's going he'll have the door off its hinges in a minute... .

(*She moves to the door*)

Dad Mind your backs. Out of my way ...

Ernie Mum...

Mum opens the door just as the two Soldiers are charging for the second time. They shoot past her, straight into the hall, collide with Dad and land in a heap with him. Dad manages to hold the television above his head and save it from breaking

Mum Hey...

Dad Oy!

The Officer and the other Soldiers enter. Ernie crouches behind the table

Officer Ah-ha! The house is surrounded.

Mum Who are you?

Officer Put up your hands. My men will search the house.

Dad (*feebly*) Hey ...

Officer (*shouting up the stairs*) We know you're hiding in here, you can't get away ...

Dad Hey-hey-HEY!

Officer Ah-ha. What have we here?

Dad Oh. It's the telly. The neighbour's telly. Not mine.

Officer Ah-ha.

Dad Just fixing it for him, you see ...

Officer Outside.

Dad Eh?

Officer You will come with me.

Dad What, in this? I'm not going out in this rain.

Officer Outside or I shoot.

Dad Here . . .
Mum Albert . . .
Ernie Hold it! Drop those guns!
Officer Ah, so ... (*He raises his gun*)
Ernie Da-da-da-da-da-da-da-da-da-da.

The Soldiers collapse and are strewn all over the hall. Mum screams. Then there is a silence

Mum Oh, Ernie. What have you done?
Ernie Sorry, Mum.
Dad Oh, lad ...
Mum-- Are they dead ?
Dad Yes.

Mum screams again

Steady, steady. This needs thinking about.
Mum What about the neighbours?
Dad Could create a bit of gossip, this could.
Mum What about the carpet? Look at it.
Dad Hasn't done that much good.
Mum What'll we do with them?
Dad Needs a bit of thinking about.

Ernie steps forward. As he speaks and during the next section, Dad and Mum carry off the bodies

Ernie Well, Mum and Dad decided that the best thing to do was to pretend it hadn't happened. That was usually the way they coped with all emergencies ...

The Doctor steps forward

Mum (*struggling with a body*) We waited till it got dark, you see ...
Doctor Yes? And then ... ?
Dad We dumped 'em.
Doctor I beg your pardon?
Dad We dumped 'em. Took 'em out and dumped 'em.
Doctor Dumped them? Where, for heaven's sake?
Dad Oh - bus shelters - park benches ...
Mum Corporation car-park.
Dad Left one in the all-night cafeteria.
Mum And one in the Garden of Rest.
Dad Caused a bit of a rumpus.
Doctor I'm not surprised.
Mum We had the police round our way for days - trying to sort it out ...
Dad They never did get to the bottom of it, though.
Doctor Extraordinary. And then?
Ernie (*stepping forward*) And then - Auntie May arrived to stay. I liked my Auntie May.

Auntie May enters. The Doctor steps back again

Auntie 'Ullo, Ernie lad. Have a sweetie.
Ernie Ta, Auntie. And Auntie May took me to the fair.

The stage is filled with jostling people, barkers and fairground music. The Barkers speak simultaneously

First Barker Yes, indeed, the world's tallest man! He's so tall, madam, his breakfast is still sliding down him at tea time. Come along now, sir. Come inside now ...

Second Barker Ladies and gentlemen. I am prepared to guarantee that you will never again, during your lifetimes, see anything as unbelievably amazing as the Incredible Porcupine Woman. See her quills and get your thrills. Direct from the unexplored South American Jungle ...

Third Barker Try your luck - come along, madam - leave your husband there, dear, he'll still be there when you come back - tell you what - if he isn't I can sell you a replacement -- five shots for sixpence - knock 'em all down and pick up what you like ...

Ernie Can I have a go on that, Auntie?

Auntie Not now, Ernie.

Ernie Oh go on, Auntie May.

Auntie I want a cup of tea.

Ernie Have an ice-cream.

Auntie I've had three. I can't have any more. It'll bring on my condition ...

Ernie What condition, Auntie?

Auntie Never you mind what. But I should never have had that candy floss as well. I'll suffer for it.

Fourth Barker Just about to start, ladies and gentlemen. A heavyweight boxing bout, featuring the one and only un-official challenger for the heavyweight championship of the world - Kid Saracen. The Kid will be fighting this afternoon, for the very first time, a demonstration contest against the new sensation from Tyneside, Eddie "Grinder" Edwards. In addition, ladies and gentlemen, the Kid is offering fifty pound - yes fifty pound - to any challenger who manages to last three three-minute rounds ...

Ernie Oh, come on, Auntie. Lets go in and watch.

Auntie What is it?

Ernie Boxing.

Auntie Boxing? I'm not watching any boxing. I don't mind wrestling but I'm not watching boxing. It's bloodthirsty.

Ernie Auntie ...

Auntie Nasty stuff, boxing ...

Fourth Barker Come along, lady. Bring in the young gentleman. Let him see the action ...

Auntie Oh no ...

'Fourth Barker Come along. Two is it?

Ernie Yes please. Two.

Fourth Barker Thank you, son.

Auntie Eh ?

Ernie This way, Auntie.

Before Auntie May can protest, she and Ernie are inside the boxing booth. The Crowd have formed a square around the ring in which stand Kid Saracen, Eddie Edwards and the Referee

Referee Ladies and gentlemen, introducing on my right, the - ex-unofficial challenger for the World Heavyweight Championship-KID SARACEN ...

Boos from the Crowd

And on my left, the challenger from Newcastle upon Tyne - EDDIE EDWARDS ...

The Crowd cheers

(*To the boxers*) Right, I want a good, clean fight, lads. No low blows and when I say "break"- stop boxing right away. Good luck.

Timekeeper Seconds out.

The bell rings. The Crowd cheers as the boxers size each other up. They mostly cheer on Edwards -" Come on, Eddie", "Murder him, Eddie", etc. The boxers swap a few punches

Auntie Ooh. I can't look.

The man next to her starts cheering

Man Flatten him, Eddie!

Auntie peers out from behind her hands in time to see the kid clout Eddie fairly hard

Auntie Hey, you stop that!

Man Get at him, Eddie ...

Auntie Yes, that's right, get at him!

Man Hit him!

Auntie Knock him down!

Man Smash him!

Auntie Batter him! (*She starts to wave her arms about in support of Eddie, throwing punches at the air*)

Man That's it, missis. You show 'em.

Auntie I would, I would.

Man Give 'em a run for their money, would you?

Auntie I'm not that old.. .

Man Eddie!

Auntie Come on, Eddie

Ernie Eddie!

In the ring the Kid throws a terrific blow which brings Eddie to his knees

Referee One-two-three-

Man Get up, Eddie...

Auntie Get up ... get up . .

Referee - four. . .

Eddie rises and blunders round the ring. The Kid knocks him clean out. The Referee counts him out. The Crowd boos wildly. The Kid walks smugly round the ring, his hands raised above his head in triumph

Auntie You brute.

Man Boo. Dirty fight...

Auntie Bully ...

Referee (*quietening the crowd*) And now, ladies and gentlemen, the Kid wishes to issue a challenge to any person here who would like to try his skill at lasting three rounds - any person here. Come along now - anybody care to try ...

Muttering from the Crowd

Auntie (*to the ,Man*) Go on then.

Man Who, me?

Auntie What are you frightened of, then?

Man I'm frightened of him ...

Referee Come along now. We're not asking you to do it for nothing. We're offering fifty pounds - fifty pounds, gentlemen.

Auntie Go on. Fifty quid.

Man I'd need that to pay the hospital bill. . .

Auntie Go on

Man It's all right for you, lady-just standing there telling other people to go and get their noses broken.

Auntie All right, then. I'll go in myself Excuse me. . . (*She starts to push through the Crowd towards the ring*)

Man Hey ...

Ernie Auntie, where are you going?

Auntie Out of my way ...

Man Hey, stop her - she's off her nut...

Ernie Auntie!

Auntie (hailing the Referee) Hey, you...

Referee Hallo, lady, what can we do for you? Come to challenge him, have you?

Laughter from the Crowd

Auntie That's right. Help me in.

Referee Just a minute, lady, you've come the wrong way for the jumble sale, this is a boxing-ring ...

Auntie I know what it is. Wipe that silly smile off your face. Come on then, rings out of your seconds ...

The Crowd cheers

Referee Just a minute. Just a minute. What do you think you're playing at ... ?

Auntie You said anyone could have a go, didn't you?

Woman That's right. Give her a go, then.

Referee (*getting worried*) Now, listen ...

Kid Saracen Go home. There's a nice old lady ...

The Crowd boos

Auntie You cheeky ha'porth.

Second Man Hit him, grandma.

The Crowd shouts agreement

Referee Tell you what, folks. Let's give the old lady fifty pence for being a good sport ...

Auntie I don't want your fifty pence. . . Come on.

Woman Get the gloves on, granny.

Auntie I don't need gloves. My hands have seen hard work. I was scrubbing floors before he was thought of ...

Woman That's right, love.

Ernie (*stepping forward*) And then suddenly I got this idea. Maybe Auntie May could be the new heavyweight champion of the world ...

The bell rings. Auntie May comes bouncing out of her corner flinging punches at the Kid, who looks startled. The Crowd cheers

Auntie Let's have you.

Kid Saracen Hey, come off it!

The Referee tries vainly to pull Auntie May back but she dances out o reach

Kid Saracen Somebody chuck her out.

The Kid turns to appeal to the Crowd. Auntie May punches him in the back

Auntie Gotcher!

Kid Saracen Ow!

Auntie May bombards the Kid with punches

Ernie (*commentator style*) And Auntie May moves in again and catches the Kid with a left and a right to the body and there's a right-cross to the head - and that really hurt him - and it looks from here as if the champ is in real trouble ... as this amazing sixty-eight-year-old challenger follows up with a series of sharp left-jabs-one, two, three, four jabs .

The Kid is reeling back

And then, bang, a right-hook and he's down ...!

The Kid goes down on his knees. The Crowd cheers

Auntie (*to the Referee*) Go on. Start counting.

Crowd One-two-three-four-five-six

The Kid gets up again

Ernie And the Kid's on his feet but he's no idea where he is - and there's that tremendous right uppercut - and he's down again . . .!

The Crowd counts him out. Auntie May dances round the ring with glee. The Crowd bursts into the ring and Auntie May is lifted on to their shoulders The Crowd go out with A untie May, singing "For She's a Jolly Good Fellow" The Referee and the Kid are left

Referee Come on. Get up – champ.

Kid Saracen. Ooooh. (*He staggers to his feet.*)

The Kid goes out, supported by the Referee

Ernie, Dad, Mum and the Doctor are left

Doctor (*still writing, excitedly*) Absolutely incredible!

Mum Terrible it was. It took it out of her, you know. She was laid up all Sunday.

Dad And we had all those fellows round from the Amateur Boxing Association trying to sign her up to fight for the Combined Services.

Mum So I told his dad on the Monday, seeing as it was half term, "Take him somewhere where he won't get into trouble, I said. "Take him somewhere quiet".

Dad So I took him down to the library.

The Doctor retires to the side of the stage again. Dad, Mum and Ernie exit

The scene becomes the Public Library. It is very quiet. Various people tip-toe about. At one end sits an intellectual-looking Lady with glasses, reading; at the other, an old Tramp eating his sandwiches from a piece of newspaper. One or two others. A uniformed Attendant walks up and down importantly. The Lady with glasses looks up at the lights. She frowns

Lady Excuse me ...

Attendant Sssshhh!

Lady Sorry. (*Mouthing silently*) The light's gone.

Attendant (*mouthing*) What?

Lady (*whispering*) I said the light's gone over here.

Attendant (*whispering*) What?

Lady New bulb.

The Attendant shakes his head, still not understanding

(*Loudly*) UP THERE! YOU NEED A NEW BULB - IT'S GONE. I CAN'T SEE!

People Sssshhhh!

Attendant (*whispering*) Right.

Lady (*whispering*) Thank you.

The Attendant tip-toes out as Dad and Ernie tip-toe in

Dad (*to Ernie*) Sssshhhh!

Ernie nods. They tip-toe and sit

Ernie (*to the Audience*) I didn't really think much of this idea of my mum's...

People Sssshhhh!

Ernie (*whispering*) I didn't really think much of this idea of my mum's. It was a bit like sitting in a graveyard only not as exciting. The trouble is, in library reading-rooms some bloke's pinched all the best magazines already and you're left with dynamic things like *The Pig Breeder's Monthly Gazette* and suchlike. I'd got stuck with *The Bell Ringer's Quarterly*. Which wasn't one of my hobbies. Nobody else seemed to be enjoying themselves either. Except the bloke eating his sandwiches in the corner. I reckoned he wasn't a tramp at all, but a secret agent heavily disguised, waiting to pass on some secret documents to his contact who he was to meet in the library and who was at this very moment lying dead in the Reference Section, a knife in his ribs. Realizing this, the tramp decides to pick on the most trustworthy-looking party in the room - my dad!

The Tramp gets up stealthily and moves over to Dad. As he passes him he knocks his magazine out of his hand

Dad Hey!

Tramp Beg pardon, mister. (*He bends to pick up the magazine and hands it back to Dad. As he does so he thrusts his newspaper parcel into Dad's hands*) Sssshhhh. Take this. Quickly! They're watching me. Guard it with your life.

Dad Eh?

The Tramp hurries away. A sinister man in a mackintosh gets up and follows him out

Who the heck was that?

Ernie Dunno, Dad.

Dad (*examining the parcel*) What's all this, then?

Ernie Dunno.

Dad I don't want his sandwiches. Spoil my dinner. *(As he unwraps the parcel)* Hey!

Ernie What is it?

Dad Looks like a lot of old blue-prints and things. Funny. This anything to do with you?

Ernie *(innocently)* No, Dad.

The Attendant enters with a step-ladder. He places it under the light. A Girl Librarian who has entered with him steadies the step-ladder. The Attendant produces a bulb from his pocket and starts to climb the step-ladder

(Watching the Attendant) And now, as Captain Williams nears the summit of this, the third highest mountain in the world, never before climbed by man ...

Wind noises start

He pauses for a moment through sheer exhaustion ...

The Attendant, feeling the effects of the wind, clings to the stepladder for dear life. It sways slightly

Attendant *(shouting down to the Librarian)* More slack. I need more slack on the rope ... !

Librarian *(shout it up to him)* More slack. Are you all right?

Attendant I – think - I can - make it.

Librarian Be careful. The rock looks treacherous just above you.

Attendant It's all right. It's-quite safe-if I - just aaaaaahhh!

(He slips and holds on with one hand)

Lady Captain! What's happened?

Attendant Damn it. I think I've broken my leg ...

Lady Oh, no.

Librarian How are we going to get him down?

Dad rises

Ernie And here comes Major Fraser, ace daredevil mountaineer, to the rescue.

Dad Give me a number three clambering-iron and a hydraulic drill-lever, will you? I'm going up.

Librarian Oh no, Major.

Dad It's the only way.

Lady Don't be a fool, Major.

Dad Someone's got to go. Give me plenty of line ... *(He starts to climb)*

Librarian Good luck.

Lady Good luck.

A sequence in which Dad clammers up the ladder, buffeted by the wind

Dad Can you hold on?

Attendant Not – much - longer.

Dad Try, man, try. Not much longer...

Lady Keep going, man.

Dad reaches the Attendant. People cheer. The two men slowly descend the ladder

Ernie And here comes the gallant Major Fraser, bringing the injured Captain Williams to safety ...

Dad and the Attendant reach the floor. More cheers and applause from the onlookers. The Attendant is still supported by Dad with one arm round his neck. There is a general shaking of hands. The wind noise stops

Attendant *(coming back to reality, suddenly)* Hey, hey! What's going on here? *(To Dad)* What do you think you're doing?

Dad Oh.

Attendant Let go of me.

Dad Sorry, I ...

Attendant Never known anything like it. This is a public building, you know ...

Dad Ernie . . .

Ernie Yes, Dad?

Dad Did you start this?

Ernie *(innocently)* Me, Dad?

Dad Now listen, lad ...

A Second Librarian enters, screaming

Second Librarian Oh, Mr Oats, Mr Oats...

Attendant What's the matter, girl? What's the matter?

Second Librarian There's a man in the Reference Section.

Attendant Well?

Second Librarian He's dead.

Lady Dead?

Second Librarian Yes. I think he's been killed. There's a knife sticking in his ribs ...

The First Librarian screams. The Attendant hurries out, followed by the others. Ernie and Dad are left

Dad Ernie!

Ernie Sorry, Dad.

The Doctor moves in. Mum joins them

Doctor Incredible.

Dad Embarrassing.

Doctor Yes, yes.

The scene is now back to where it was at the beginning, with the four in the Doctor's room on one side and the waiting-room full of patients on the other

Mum Can you do anything, Doctor?

Doctor Mmmm. Not much, I'm afraid.

Mum No?

Doctor You see, it's not really up to me at all. It's up to you. An interesting case. Very. In my twenty years as a general practitioner I've never heard anything quite like it. You see, this is a classic example of group hallucinations ...

Dad Illucinations, yes.

Doctor Starting with your son and finishing with you all being affected ...

Mum All?

Doctor All of you. You must understand that all this has happened only in your minds.

Dad Just a minute. Are you suggesting we're all off our onions?

Doctor Off your ... ?

Dad You know. Round the thing. Up the whatsit.

Doctor No ...

Dad My missis as well?

Doctor No. No.

Dad Then watch it.

Doctor I was just explaining...

Dad You don't need. It's Ernie here, that's all. He imagines things and they happen.

Doctor Oh, come now. I can't really accept that.

Dad Why not?

Doctor It's - impossible. He may *imagine* things ...

Dad He does.

Doctor But they don't *really* happen. They *appear* to, that's all.

Dad Is that so?

Doctor Of course.

A slight pause

Dad Ernie.

Ernie Yes, Dad.

Dad Imagine something. We'll see who's nutty.

Ernie What, Dad?

Dad Anything, son, anything. Just to show the doctor.

Mum Nothing nasty, Ernie. Something peaceful...

Dad How about a brass band? I like brass bands.

Mum Oh dear. Couldn't it be something quieter? Like-a mountain stream or something ...

Dad Don't be daft, Ethel. The doctor doesn't want a waterfall pouring through his surgery. Go on, lad. A brass band.

Ernie Right, Dad. (*He concentrates*)

A pause

Doctor Well?

Dad Give him a chance.

A pause

Mum Come on, Ernie. (*Pause*) He's 'usually Very good at it, Doctor.

Dad Come on, lad.

Ernie It's difficult, Dad, I can't picture them.

Doctor Yes, well I'm afraid I can't afford any more time just now, Mr and Mrs Fraser. I do have a surgery full of people waiting to see me-(*he calls*)-Miss Bates!-so you will understand I really must get on.

The Receptionist enters

Receptionist Yes, Doctor?

Doctor The next patient, please, Miss Bates.

Receptionist (*going*) Yes, Doctor.

The Receptionist exits

Doctor (*Getting up and pacing up and down as he speaks*) What I suggest we do is, I'll arrange an appointment with a specialist and-he'll be able to give you a better diagnosis – (*his steps*)

become more and more march like) - than I will. I'm quite sure – that – a – few – sessions - with a trained – psychiatrist - will –be – quite – sufficient – to – put – everything – right – right left – right – left –left – left – right - left ...

The Doctor marches to the door of his room, does a smart about turn and marches round his desk. The Patients from the waiting-room enter and follow him, some limping, some marching and all playing, or as if playing, brass instruments

L-e-e-e-ft ... Wheel ...

After a triumphal circuit of the room everyone marches out following the Doctor, who has assumed the role of drum major

Ernie *(just before he leaves)* It looks as though the Doctor suffers from illucinations as well. I hope you don't get 'em. Ta-ta.

Ernie marches out jauntily, following the band, as-

the CURTAIN falls