



# Death by *Eating*

by Cenarth Fox

Playwright of *Agatha Crispie*, *The Real Sherlock Holmes*, *Saucy Pat* and *Shakespeare in Saigon*

A play about Big Food, money and more money

*“Dr. Francine Kaufman coined the term diabesity (diabetes + obesity) to describe these conditions. It’s almost impossible to overstate how serious and far-reaching a problem diabesity is. It affects more than **one billion** people worldwide. Recent statistics suggest that diabesity may already be the leading cause of chronic disease and death in the world, and its impact is expected to rise dramatically in the next 25 years.”*

**Chris Kresser**

*Duncan Selbie, the head of Public Health England, said it was a national “tragedy” that a third of 11-year-olds were overweight and warned that unless they ate less and exercised more, millions would suffer in later life.*

**The Telegraph 5 September 2014**

*The heavier you are in middle age the more likely you are to have difficulty taking care of yourself in older age, a major analysis shows, with problems bathing and dressing increasing as people become more overweight.*

**Sydney Morning Herald 6 July 2014**

*Companies are manipulating children into wanting food and drinks that are high in salt, sugar and fat. New evidence suggests that children are being regularly targeted by advertisers on the internet. Coca-Cola, which developed games with McDonald’s, said they were aimed at children aged 13 or over.”* **The Telegraph 5 September 2014**

# Death by *Eating*

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## **Synopsis**

*Death by Eating* is about how Big Food has manufactured, promoted and sold their products despite loud and louder warnings from experts that millions of people are suffering health issues and will continue to suffer in the future as a result of bad diets and overeating. The play begins in the boardroom of Big Tobacco and morphs into the boardroom of Big Food. The issues both industries faced/face and the tactics each company used/use may be similar if not identical.

The setting is the modern boardroom of a multinational company. The play begins in the late 20th century and works through to the early 21st century.

The same four characters appear throughout. Their personalities are the same because they are doing the same job only in different industries. The only thing which changes is the product they are selling. It is tobacco at first but later becomes food and drink. Cheers.

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### Characters

All four characters can be male or female. Any reference to *he* or *him* can just as easily be *she* and *her*.

**JB**—50+, bombastic, hard-nosed, successful CEO, solely interested in profit

**Heap**—younger version of JB but clever, a narcissist and schemer

**Tix**—30+, aggressive marketing guru, advertising tycoon, smart, clever and ruthless

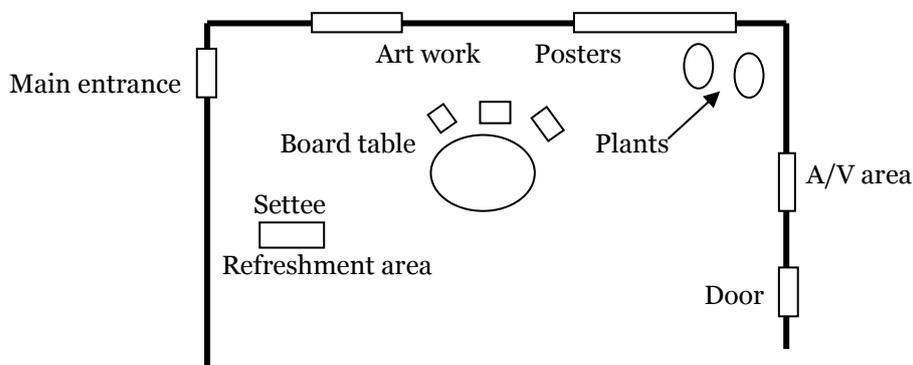
**Shadow**—30+, political lobbyist, smooth, super salesperson, a chameleon

### Costumes

**JB** is an executive and traditionalist. **Heap** is a narcissist and fussy. **Tix** is a rebel and dresses casually hoping to create some sort of fashion trend. **Shadow** is formal but cool and blends into the background.

### Suggested Stage Setting

It's a spacious boardroom. Display/demo area LC, coffee/relaxation area RC. Board table and chairs C/UC. There is art work upstage which could be interchangeable posters - tobacco then food/drink. The posters simply spin around.



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### Act 1 Scene 1

*(Curtain rises on a large executive boardroom of a successful international company. It's Big Tobacco at its most opulent. There's a trendy round table C/UC with chairs. There's a telephone on the table and another by the A/V area LC. This is where new marketing ideas are explained. RC is a relaxation area where coffee and snacks are available. The walls, particularly upstage, have pictures of modern art and/or trendy people, celebrities all smoking)*

**FX** *Phone rings as curtain rises*  
*(HEAP enters UR and goes to phone on table, checking his appearance as he does so)*

**HEAP** *(Answering phone)* BT, JB's PA.

**Caller** *(Unheard)* Is JB there?

**HEAP** I'm sorry, the chairman's not in.  
*(JB enters and heads to coffee)*

**HEAP** No wait, you're in luck.

**JB** *(Angry)* I'm not in.

**HEAP** *(Without missing a beat)* You've reached the ideal person. How may I help?

**Caller** *(Unheard)* I want JB. *(Slams down phone)*

**HEAP** *(Holds phone away from ear)* And the same to you, pal. *(Replacing phone)*

**JB** *(Snaps)* What did you call me?

**HEAP** Not you, JB—the creep on the phone.

**JB** *(Throws or hits HEAP with newspaper)* Well speaking of creeps, have you seen this?  
*(HEAP reads front page. JB still angry)* And it's on the front page! The front friggin' page!

**HEAP** *(Reading paper, shrugs)* So what? Today's news, tomorrow's trash.

**JB** Why haven't *our* scientists discovered this stuff?

**HEAP** They have.

**JB** God knows we pay them enough. *(Stops)* Wadda ya mean 'they have'?

**HEAP** We've known all this stuff for years. We're way ahead when it comes to the harmful effects of passive smoking.

**JB** *(Threatens)* Don't use that word. I never wanna hear that word in this office again—ever!

**HEAP** Passive?

**JB** No.

**HEAP** Oh, sorry, smoking.

**JB** *(Loud)* Harmful!

**HEAP** Okay, okay. *(Puts paper away)* But really, JB, how many times do I have to tell you? Nobody knows the facts about smoking better than Big Tobacco. We know the dangers, costs and consequences and we're all over passive smoking.

**JB** Like those damn scientists in the paper.

**HEAP** So, we'll get our scientists to do the usual.

**JB** Not the usual. This time I wanna see our guys directly challenge their argument—*directly*.

**HEAP** *(Exasperated)* JB, how many times? We never ever directly challenge claims about tobacco. Every time some do-gooder sounds off and ...

**JB** *(Realises)* Yes, yes, all right. We just ...

**BOTH** ... muddying the waters.

**HEAP** We raise doubt, give our political mates ammunition and put the brakes on government proposals. Delay is our middle name. They're proven tactics, JB so let's not change a winning way.

**JB** God I miss the old days.

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- HEAP** *(Aside)* Here we go.
- JB** We could advertise anywhere, say anything to anyone. Restrictions—what restrictions? You know we used to tell people smoking was cool.
- HEAP** As in sophisticated?
- JB** Yeah but we'd also hint that it was literally cool. Can you believe that?
- HEAP** Surely not literally?
- JB** Smokers would put a burning cigarette in their mouth and believe it was actually cool. Now that took marketing genius.
- HEAP** The bigger the lie.
- JB** *(Has no idea)* What?
- HEAP** Goebbels. *(JB has no idea)* The bigger the lie, the more likely it will be believed.
- JB** Goebbels? Is he some modern marketing guru?
- HEAP** *(Thinking)* Ahhh, yeah, in a way.
- JB** And filters. I mean what they hell were they? We made billions of filter-free fags until smoking risks bobbed up so we went mad on filters.
- HEAP** Brilliant marketing.
- JB** No more cough, forget that sore throat and puff away knowing any possible nasties were stopped by your friendly and fashionable filter.
- HEAP** We should get on, JB.
- JB** *(No way he's finished)* The irony being the filter stopped the sore throat but meant smokers then took longer drags sending smoke deeper into their lungs. Cancers started in new places and the super irony was that filters were made with asbestos.
- HEAP** I didn't know you did irony.
- JB** *(Is lost in reminiscing)* But the placement caper, now that was the best. My god, it was unbelievable. Movie stars, sporting stars, royalty, politicians, celebrities, even bloody criminals were all photographed smoking. We'd send VIPs cartons of free smokes and they'd oblige by puffing away in public for all the world to see. It was wall-to-wall human advertising—and free. *(Suddenly wants to cry)* Now you can't advertise nowhere.
- HEAP** *(Correcting him)* Anywhere.
- JB** *(Miles away)* What?
- HEAP** You can still advertise in some countries.
- JB** *(Ignores HEAP, still maudlin)* Smoking's become some kind of social disease. *(Mimics a boss telling off an imaginary worker who smokes)* 'Hey you, get outside. You can't smoke in here.' *(Back at HEAP)* The world's gone mad. We're drowning in political correctness. Smokers are now pariahs.
- HEAP** That's a big word for you, JB.
- JB** *(Is fuming, pauses)* What did you say?
- HEAP** That's a big *world* for you, JB—billions of new customers for you to entice.
- JB** *(Grumbling)* Sometimes I hate this industry. I now spend ages defending my right to produce a legal product. We need to fight back. *(Gets idea)* We need a good-news story. Where's Tix?
- HEAP** *(Looking at watch)* Ah, he's due at 10.
- JB** 10! What is it with these marketing people? They don't get out of bed till lunchtime.
- HEAP** Haven't you heard? Marketing people are the new brides.
- JB** *(Angry again)* New brides? What are you talking about?
- HEAP** It's fashionable to be late. *(JB unimpressed. HEAP hands document to JB)* Now you need to approve these latest donations.

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- JB** *(Reading, sarcastic)* Oh goody, Big Tobacco is Santa Claus. Free cash anyone?
- HEAP** It's not free, JB. You know there's no such thing as a condition-free handout.
- JB** Yes, yes, and the real reason we give to reputable institutions is to develop innocence through association. So donations to *(Reading list)* sport, science, charities, medical causes, cultural groups, not-for-profits oh, and of course, bloody politicians—they all want the almighty tobacco dollar.
- HEAP** Listen JB, I've got some good and some bad news.
- JB** I hate it when you say that. The good's never good and the bad is absolute crap.
- HEAP** Our advertising costs are about to fall—dramatically.
- JB** *(Suspicious)* Oh yeah, why?
- HEAP** Word is the government's definitely going to ban *all* tobacco advertising.
- JB** *(Sarcastic)* Great. We donate squillions to both sides of politics and then they shaft us. How much are we paying that damn lobbyist?
- HEAP** We pay the most to get the best. We just need to work smarter.
- JB** It's a free country, we sell a legal product and the money the government takes in tobacco taxes is outrageous. We should move to all those rat-infested countries where some bastard dictator lets us do what we like.
- HEAP** We have already.
- JB** Have what already?
- HEAP** Moved to all those rat-infested countries.
- JB** Good. And what are profits like?
- HEAP** Not bad; lots of corruption of course.
- JB** Of course. All dictators are corrupt.
- HEAP** No, here. There's more corruption here with *our* politicians.
- JB** Here? *More* corruption?
- HEAP** And in the Third world, a bribed politician always keeps their word. Not here. We donate big bucks to our pollies who tip us the wink then support whatever anti-smoking scheme is hot to trot.
- JB** Bastards—do-gooders and politicians—I hate 'em all.
- HEAP** But at least in the Third World we can set up cigarette stalls outside schools.
- JB** Schools?
- HEAP** Yes apparently we get the best response from 8 to 10 year olds.  
*(They look at one another and then speak as one)*
- BOTH** "The tobacco industry never markets its products to children." *(They laugh)*
- SHADOW** *(Enters with briefcase)* Hello, hello. Is this a private bonding session or can anyone join?
- JB** I'm surprised you show your face in here.
- SHADOW** Now don't be like that.
- JB** Front page story attacking Big Tobacco and now the pollies, having taken your bribes, give us the bird. *(Gives the bird salute)*
- HEAP** We knew it was coming JB.
- JB** Oh and that makes it all right?
- SHADOW** *(Goes and sits DR)* How many times have I told you? Lose the battle—win the war.
- JB** Perhaps it's time we had a good hard look at your contract *(Looks at HEAP)* — and the organ-grinder.  
*(Pause. HEAP and SHADOW exchange glances)*
- HEAP** *(Exiting)* I'll chase up marketing. *(Exits UR)*  
*(SHADOW takes out papers and JB joins him)*

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**SHADOW** You do know your advertising budget is about to go up.  
**JB** No it's not. The government's banning our ads.  
**SHADOW** Oh JB, please. As one door closes another screams, "Come on down". There are so many ways to promote this booming industry.  
**JB** I thought *I* was full of it.  
**SHADOW** Trust me. I work with politicians.  
**JB** So what's the latest from our sneaky government?  
**SHADOW** They're talking about health warnings on all packs.  
**JB** Oh f'cryin' out loud. It's a legal product.  
**SHADOW** And there's even a whisper about plain packaging.  
**JB** (*Furious*) Over my dead body. That's restraint of trade. Our lawyers'll tie 'em up in court for decades.  
**SHADOW** Which is just what we want.  
**JB** Bloody lawyers; they're worse than you lobbyists. It'll cost us an arm and a leg.  
**SHADOW** It'll cost the enemy too but that's not the point. We need to make this a restraint of trade issue, because the more the media cover the court case, the less time they devote to the one issue we never want anyone to discuss.  
**JB** (*Threatens*) Don't you say it.  
**SHADOW** (*Whispers*) Smoking kills.  
**JB** I told you not to say it.  
**SHADOW** I keep telling you, we'll only win the war if we fight it on our terms. If we argue against cancer, strokes and amputations we lose. So we fight on grounds we can win like ... restraint of trade.  
**JB** Freedom of speech.  
**SHADOW** Element of doubt.  
**JB** Freedom of choice.  
**SHADOW** Exactly and on those grounds even if we don't win at least we break even.  
**JB** Meaning all the media coverage will be just where we want it—ignoring the health issues.  
**SHADOW** (*Tapping nose*) You're not just a pretty face, JB.  
**JB** True but I do need to powder my nose. (*Exiting DL*) I'll be back. We need to talk. (*Good timing as JB exits and TIX enters with HEAP UR*)  
**HEAP** Where's JB? (*SHADOW points. HEAPS and TIX move to table UC*) Good, we three need to talk.  
**SHADOW** That's what he said.  
**HEAP** Over here. (*HEAP and TIX sit. SHADOW doesn't move*) If JB comes in it'll look like we're having a proper meeting.  
**SHADOW** You're suggesting an improper meeting?  
**HEAP** Here.  
**SHADOW** No, here. C'mon, stretch out, relax.  
**TIX** Hey, surveys reveal that 87% of all conspiracy meetings take place beside or near the water cooler.  
**SHADOW** Conspiracy meetings?  
**HEAP** Just shut up and get here.  
**SHADOW** (*Shakes head then moves to table speaking into wrist a la secret service*) Alpha One, this is Moon Doggy moving to Code Red. Over and out. (*Sits with others*)  
**HEAP** If JB comes in we switch to discussing plain packaging.  
**SHADOW** Switch from what?

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- HEAP** Look the situation is serious for you two and super serious for me. (*They're hooked*) I've decided to pull the pin.
- TIX** (*Shrugs*) Good for you. When a better offer comes along, you take it.
- HEAP** I haven't had a better offer—yet.
- SHADOW** So why are you leaving?
- HEAP** You're kidding. Everyone knows the war on tobacco's about to go feral. Public opinion, anti-smoking zealots, tough new laws and now holier-than-thou politicians are conspiring to bring us down.
- SHADOW** Strange, I had you down as a fighter. C'mon, stick around. Stick it up 'em.
- HEAP** How can I fight when I'm working for a boss who doubles as a lunatic?
- TIX** JB's all right.
- HEAP** All right? He's insane.
- TIX** He can't be insane. He's a CEO.
- SHADOW** I agree. You cannot put *capitalism* and *insanity* in the same sentence.
- HEAP** (*Warns them*) I'd take this seriously if I were you. (*Pause. This is serious*) If you don't, believe me, you're both gonna get hurt.
- SHADOW** So what's good old JB done this time?
- HEAP** Where do I start? He's living in the past, can't handle pressure and can't or won't change. He's tomorrow's train wreck. So with this massive firestorm about to hit and JB a loose cannon, I just have to quit. If I stay in Big Tobacco, no-one'll touch me. I'll be used goods.
- SHADOW** Well if you feel that way, leave.
- TIX** Yeah, just resign; walk away.
- HEAP** And you know what'll happen when I do?
- SHADOW** Big Tobacco will keep on keeping on.
- HEAP** True but if I go, you go.
- SHADOW** What?
- TIX** Whoa, whoa, whoa. I've got a contract—watertight.
- SHADOW** Ditto.
- HEAP** Yes but our lawyers are richer than your lawyers. The day I quit (*To TIX*) you'll be back flogging loo paper (*To SHADOW*) and you'll be lobbying to save the whales.
- TIX** Not gonna happen. JB likes me. He knows I'm the best.
- SHADOW** Exactly. (*Indicating TIX*) What he said.
- HEAP** JB likes you because I told him to like you. You were both hired on my say so. You both *stay* hired on my say so. And every time you stuff up, turn up late, blow your budget or get rolled, I cover your arse. You're here because of me.
- TIX** I can get other clients.
- HEAP** Who pay peanuts. Big Tobacco has the deepest pockets and pays way over the odds. You won't find another job like this anywhere.  
(*Pause*)
- TIX** Fair enough.
- SHADOW** And the point of this conversation is ...?
- HEAP** I'm calling in the favours. It's reciprocity time.
- TIX** No probs. I'll put the word out you're looking for work.
- SHADOW** Me too.

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- HEAP** (*Angry*) Put the word out! I don't want some friendly recommendation. (*Mimics, mocks them*) 'Oh he's a great guy. Give him a call.' Stuff that. I want a rock-solid, 24 carat guarantee. Get me a top job in one of your industries—anywhere but Big Tobacco.
- SHADOW** (*Shocked*) You don't want to become a lobbyist?
- HEAP** Why? You saying I'm not up to it?
- SHADOW** No, no, it's just that ...
- HEAP** Listen Chummy, I can do anything—even marketing.
- TIX** (*Sucks in breath*) Whoa, dunno about that. People in marketing are born not made.
- SHADOW** And lobbyists need at least a hint of credibility.
- HEAP** I'm a successful executive with a multi-national corporation.
- SHADOW** You work for Big Tobacco.
- HEAP** So?
- SHADOW** Big Tobacco and credibility ... (*Draws breath*) bit dodgy there mate. I'm mean, to be honest, they're not even on the same planet.
- TIX** Not even in the same universe.
- HEAP** (*Looks at them*) Ah, so that's the reward I get for looking after my *mates*. You do know that what goes around, comes around? (*Angry starts to exit*) I might even stay long enough to oversee your contract renewals. And I reckon *renewal* and *contract* are (*Mimics*) not even on the same planet. (*Stops at DL door. Mimics*) Not even in the same universe. (*Exits*)
- TIX** (*Meaning HEAP*) Idiot.
- SHADOW** He has got a point. He did get us these jobs.
- TIX** We keep these jobs because we're the best.
- SHADOW** But he's dead right about the money—Big Tobacco, big bucks.
- TIX** True—pity about the crap product.
- SHADOW** (*Thinking*) You don't really think he'd shaft us?
- TIX** Who cares? I can work in any industry. I've got desperate clients all over town.
- SHADOW** Me too—tobacco today, coal or renewable energy tomorrow. (*Pause. They're thinking*) So do you reckon there's anything to this loyalty caper?
- TIX** Loyalty? What's loyalty?
- SHADOW** (*Gets the joke*) Gotcha. We've never heard of it.
- TIX** Anyway I can't recommend him for a marketing job. I mean what can he do?
- SHADOW** Actually he's really good at lying and making money.
- TIX** (*Thinks*) Y'right and that sounds like a very good fit for marketing. What about you?
- SHADOW** Nah, lobbyists are a special breed. For starters we need a huge supply of principles. And as Groucho once said, (*Imitating Groucho Marx*) 'Those are my principles and if you don't like them, well .....
- BOTH** (*TIX joins the gag*) 'I have others'. (*They laugh*)
- JB** (*Enters DL*) What have you two got to laugh about? (*OTHERS stop laughing*) You think having to justify a legal product every goddamn day is funny.
- SHADOW** No JB.
- JB** You think spending mega-bucks on fighting court cases against Nanny-state morons is funny?
- TIX** No JB.
- JB** Nor do I. So stop laughing. (*Looking around*) And where's that overpaid executive?
- SHADOW** I think he went looking for you.

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**JB** (Roars) Heap!

**TIX** You do know he's the most loyal PA you could ever find.

**SHADOW** You do know he's got principles to burn.

**HEAP** (Enters DL) JB.

**JB** I hear you're our most loyal employee with principles to burn.  
(Pause. HEAP looks at the TIX and SHADOW and moves to join them)

**HEAP** Sorry?

**JB** Get in and sit down. (TRIO sit, JB uptight. HEAP angry with OTHERS) I've just spoken with the President and boy is he pissed. The Board's been told the war on tobacco's about to go feral. Public opinion, anti-smoking zealots, tough new laws and now holier-than-thou politicians are all conspiring to bring us down.

**HEAP** (JB is repeating HEAP's lines) Really?

**JB** Yes, really. God I wish you'd keep up. We're facing a crisis and I need to know if you lot are ready for one hell of a fight.

**SHADOW** I'm right behind you, JB.

**TIX** One hundred per cent JB.

**JB** (Looks at HEAP) I don't need to ask you. Apparently you've got *loyalty* tattooed on your arse.

**SHADOW** (Sotto voce to HEAP) Oooo, I'd like to see that.

**HEAP** You know me, JB.

**TIX** (Sotto voce to HEAP) He means the tatt.

**JB** Big Tobacco's going to be hit with lawsuits, political correctness and legislation the like of which we ain't never seen before. It's total war. So I need fantastic marketing and brilliant lobbying proposals to fight fire with fire.

**SHADOW** You've got it, JB.

**TIX** One hundred and ten per cent, JB.

**JB** (Pause. Looks at the silent HEAP) Well?

**HEAP** Oh absolutely JB. I've never been more enthusiastic to fight for Big Tobacco.

**JB** The Board want strategies. I want strategies—detailed plans of how we'll hit these bastards who wanna harm our totally legal, mega-tax-paying business.  
(At HEAP) You—co-ordinate.

**HEAP** Of course, JB.

**JB** So come on, surprise me. Tell me how we're gunna win. Who's going first?

**SHADOW** (Surprised) Just like that?

**JB** Yeah, just like that.

**TIX** But JB, marketing can't be rushed. We need to research, review, profile and brainstorm.

**JB** What am I paying you for?

**TIX** To set goals, test ideas, check cycles and forecasts.

**JB** If I want a bloody forecast I'll look out the window.

**SHADOW** We need to be on the same page, JB. Great campaigns take time.

**JB** We haven't got time. That's the bloody point. The world has finally twigged to smoking's massive health risks and is about to crap all over us. So unless we invent new strategies and fast, our profits will disappear down the pan and certain people—(Looking at certain people in particular)—not looking at anyone in particular, will hop aboard the lavatory express. So shape up or shit out. Comprendi?

**SHADOW** Well I'm sorry, JB but I can't just lobby polities unless I know the line the company wants me to spin. You have to give directions.

**JB** I'll give you directions. Get off your arse and start creating.

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- HEAP** I have a suggestion JB.
- JB** Oh, you're still here.
- HEAP** You're the one with all the experience. You worked for Big Tobacco in the good old days.
- JB** And what's that got to do with the price of fish?
- HEAP** Perhaps if you told us about your old tactics and how you kept profits high, we might get inspired.
- JB** But the old tactics are history. The smoking goalposts have moved so far they're on another planet!
- SHADOW** I think it's a good idea.
- JB** What's a good idea?
- SHADOW** You telling us the old tricks of the trade.
- JB** Hey you get paid to tell *me* stuff.
- TIX** But new ideas can come from old ideas. This is basic brainstorming, JB. Your ancient tactics could be tweaked to suit the new world order.
- JB** You're gunna have to do better than that. Big Tobacco pays way over the odds. For that I expect mind-boggling ideas. If you can't deliver, *any* of you, now's the time to walk.
- HEAP** I think what we're trying to say, JB is that we should never dismiss a good idea just because it's old. And as you're a veteran of the early tobacco wars, we'll benefit by hearing from someone who was in the thick of things way back when. (*Soft-soaping at its best*) It'd be great to hear why you were so successful. (*Pause. JB calms down a little. He's being soft-soaped*)
- SHADOW** We'd love to be inspired by the warrior, the highly-decorated soldier.
- TIX** Yeah, c'mon General, tell us how you won the war and then we'll return the favour. (*JB relents and moves to A/V area LC. OTHERS move chairs and become audience as JB uses whiteboard*)
- JB** This had better work. I can't face the Board without a heap of goddamn bullets. (*JB can't get the marker pen to write*)
- HEAP** Need some help JB?
- JB** No, piss off. (*HEAP retreats*) Useless technology—I'll just tell you. (*They settle as JB remembers*)  
In the 50s, as more people started asking questions about the risks of smoking, Big Tobacco came up with brilliant strategies. We made safety statements, donated funds and promised to cooperate. (*The OTHERS are taking notes*)
- TIX** Clever.
- SHADOW** And did they work?
- JB** Absolutely.
- HEAP** How?
- JB** (*Snaps at HEAP*) Stop interrupting. (*Back to storytelling*) We grabbed some moral high ground with safety statements. (*Quotes*) 'If we in the tobacco business ever believed that smoking was harmful we would stop production tomorrow.'
- HEAP** (*Amazed*) No—you didn't actually say that?
- JB** Proudly—and more. (*Quotes*) 'As good corporate citizens we believe it's our duty to make public health our top priority.'
- SHADOW** But surely you didn't believe that?
- JB** Oh course we didn't believe it. It was a strategy designed to portray Big Tobacco as caring and responsible.

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- TIX** I'm not sure that'd work today.
- JB** *(Decides this is a waste of time)* Right, this is a waste of time. You lot get creating.
- SHADOW** No JB. Please, I need to know how you tackled politicians back then.
- HEAP** Yes, and what about those other strategies—funds and promises?
- JB** *(Pause. Reluctant)* This had better be worth it. *(Tells them)* We funded a bunch of health experts to investigate tobacco and health.
- HEAP** You mean you paid scientists to tell you what you wanted to hear?
- JB** Exactly.
- TIX** How specific were the aims?
- JB** Oh we nailed it. The major topics were cancer and heart disease.
- SHADOW** Wow, that's risky. Politicians have taught me to never support a project until you know the outcome before you start.
- JB** You were taught good. We only picked researchers who were sympathetic to Big Tobacco and we never carried out research using animals because naturally they don't smoke.
- HEAP** And because it's cruel.
- JB** And ... shut up. And we never investigated things like cigarette smoke because there was no proof it was carcinogenic.
- TIX** So the whole research scheme was just one big smoke screen?
- (Pause. Will JB laugh? He accepts the wisecrack allowing the OTHERS to laugh)*
- JB** Very funny. And the findings were plastered worldwide years before social media. We announced, *(Imitates spruiker)* 'Look what Big Tobacco is doing. We research smoking and health and then announce our findings in full.'
- SHADOW** Impressive.
- JB** And of course we used blatant fraud.
- TIX** I like it, I like it a lot.
- JB** We ran tests on the safety of new 'light' cigarettes by using machines. But machines didn't replicate humans and so the results were misleading and false.
- SHADOW** But perfect for your aim of promoting safer cigarettes.
- JB** Give that man a cigar. So here was Big Tobacco on the front foot. That's important. You have to be *seen* to be doing the right thing.
- HEAP** When in fact you're doing the exact opposite.
- FX** *(You might use special lighting for this speech. Dim lighting but spot JB)*
- JB** I was so proud of our big claim to fame. *(Big speech with crescendo)* 'We care about public health. We care about smokers. Our highly qualified doctors and scientists constantly examine smoking and your health. Now here are the results and it's all good news. *(Knockout line)* We are the good guys.'  
*(Lighting crossfades back to normal. OTHERS applaud. They are inspired and convinced)*
- HEAP** With you leading us JB, Big Tobacco's gunna not just survive but thrive.  
*(OTHERS agree)*
- JB** If any of the boffins discovered anything even remotely suggesting that smoking was harmful, we buried their findings.
- TIX** Y'mean the results went up in smoke.  
*(This time JB doesn't laugh and silence reigns. HEAP rescues the situation)*
- HEAP** What about that third strategy, JB? You mentioned promises.
- JB** Oh yeah, now that was the killer. The government set up public health bodies to check on the dangers of smoking. We went over the top in promising to help. 'We will cooperate closely with anyone working in the interests of public health.'

## Death by Eating 13

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**SHADOW** I like the wording.

**JB** Naturally we did exactly the opposite. We coached executives on how to look and sound sincere. We told the world how honest we were and nobody could lie and fake sincerity like Big Tobacco.

**TIX** Listen, JB, there's a job in marketing for you whenever you want it.

**JB** (*Lapping up the adulation*) Ah, but there's more. We promised to support public health bodies as we secretly undermined everything they did.

**SHADOW** Lies and broken promises—you should have been a politician, JB.

**JB** We had two secret rules. Never deny the findings of public health boards but always cast doubt. And never urge people to smoke but go gangbusters over the right of the individual to choose.

**HEAP** Brilliant.

**JB** And that's how Big Tobacco once made squillions. But that was yesterday. Today the war on smoking is bigger, smarter and much more powerful. We need new frauds, new lies and dirty tricks to keep people addicted.

**TIX** You make me proud to come to work, JB.

**SHADOW** What he said, JB.

**JB** (*At HEAP*) Well? What about you?

**HEAP** (*Unsure*) Me JB?

**JB** Everyone else is pissing in my pocket.\*

(\**To say flattering or fawning things to a person in the hope of gaining favour with them*)

**HEAP** (*Twigs*) Oh, yes, JB. You've given me new inspiration to work in this glorious industry.

**JB** Good, you're getting better at faking sincerity. (*Preparing to exit*) So now it's your turn. I'm gunna tell the Board you three are creating a truckload of new strategies to destroy this anti-smoking crusade. (*Heading DL*) And when I come back, (*At door—threatening*) I don't wanna be disappointed. (*Exits*) (*OTHERS let off steam. That was difficult but now the pressure is really on*)

**TIX** Loser. And they called that marketing.

**HEAP** Yes all right. But you heard our beloved leader. We need new strategies.

**SHADOW** You've changed y'tune. Five minutes ago you were outa here.

**HEAP** I'm still leaving just as soon as I get a decent offer. And unless you two come up with something sensational, guess who'll be joining me? So c'mon—ideas.

**TIX** We can't use any of JB's dinosaur strategies.

**SHADOW** Not necessarily. I mean death, taxes and bribing politicians will always be with us.

**HEAP** I was thinking we could distract JB with new markets? If we can't win the war in First World countries, we can launch massively in Second and Third World joints.

**SHADOW** You mean the poor have no smoking bans and allow full-on advertising.

**HEAP** Exactly and if we show JB the massive profit potential in overseas markets, maybe he'll be distracted.

**TIX** Yeah, for a nanosecond. Then he'll want to know how we're going to fight the propaganda war here on home soil.

(*Pause. Silence. It's tough*)

**HEAP** I reckon we're stuffed.

**SHADOW** We could push the government revenue line; how anti-smoking laws reduce government income—fewer smokers, less tax.

**TIX** That's not new. Big Tobacco has long claimed smokers pay billions in tax.

- HEAP** Look, we're in trouble. Smokers will never again be able to light up on public transport or inside public buildings.
- TIX** And soon they'll ban smoking in outdoor restaurants.
- HEAP** The goalposts haven't been shifted, they've disappeared. We've got no new strategies and all we can do is keep tobacco legal and taxes as low as possible.
- SHADOW** I dare you to say that to JB.
- TIX** Heap's right although there is one tiny glimmer of hope. (*OTHERS look at TIX*) E-cigarettes. (*OTHERS scoff*)
- HEAP** Are you mad? JB hates e-cigarettes. Big Tobacco hates e-cigarettes. And if they ever fluke a health tick the government will tax them to death.  
(*Pause. Again they realise their situation may be hopeless*)
- TIX** This isn't working. JB's gunna bone us the minute he walks through that door.  
(*Pause. Silence. It's still tough*)
- SHADOW** How about jobs? Big Tobacco employs hordes directly and more indirectly. Kill the industry and you kill jobs.
- HEAP** That ain't new.
- TIX** Well how about we leak details of politicians who've taken money from Big Tobacco?
- SHADOW** What, and bite the hand that feeds us? If polliies think they'll be exposed, they won't take our (*Indicates quote marks*) donations.
- TIX** But it'll cause a distraction—one of our main strategies. The media will cover the squabbling polliies and steer clear of health issues.
- SHADOW** And give us lobbyists a bad name. (*OTHERS look at SHADOW*) What?
- TIX** You think you might get a bad name?
- SHADOW** All right, a *really* bad name.
- HEAP** This is going nowhere.
- SHADOW** Well you suggest something.
- HEAP** I can't. Smoking's changed. We can't advertise or sponsor. Product placement's dead. The evidence against smoking, even secondary smoking is overwhelming. All we've got left is the 'it's legal' line. Face it, JB's set us an impossible task and we're all dead men walking.  
(*Pause. Silence. They see this as an impossible task*)
- TIX** I should join the opposition.
- HEAP** What?
- TIX** Well if cigarette packs have to have health warnings and gruesome photos, I could design the artwork.
- HEAP** And you called me a turncoat.
- SHADOW** I could work for the anti-smoking lobby.
- HEAP** (*Amused*) Oh dear, the rats desert the smoking ship.
- TIX** In fact it's far worse for me. If they bring in plain packaging I'll have no work. How can I design a cigarette box with nothing on it?
- SHADOW** Haven't you heard of modern art?  
(*Pause. What can they do?*)
- HEAP** (*Fetching paper and pen*) Well I'm not gunna sit around and wait for JB to fire me. I won't give that prick the satisfaction, and I do not want the dreaded words 'sacked', 'fired' or 'let go' anywhere near my CV. (*Writes*) Dear JB.
- SHADOW** He won't sack me. I've got too many secrets. I know stuff.
- TIX** I'm too valuable, far too valuable. I've won five marketing awards.

## Death by Eating 15

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- HEAP** (*Writing his resignation letter speaking as he writes. TIX and SHADOW progressively more worried*) I hereby tender my resignation effective immediately. Yours faithfully ... (*Big flourish of signature*)  
(*TIX and SHADOW look at one another then as one suddenly scamper to copy HEAP. The OTHERS grab paper and pen, or laptops/tablet, sit and write their resignation letters*)
- SHADOW** (*Preparing to write*) What's his title? (*Writes/types in a flurry*) What's his surname?
- TIX** (*Preparing to write*) How do you spell his surname? (*Writes/types in a flurry*)
- HEAP** Welcome to the club—we who escaped Big Tobacco and lived to tell the tale. (*Goes to collect his coat or bag*) I'm not waiting for JB. He can find my resignation letter with me halfway to the moon. (*Places letter on table*)
- SHADOW** (*Writing/typing faster*) Don't go yet. Please, wait for me.
- TIX** (*Writing/typing faster*) Yeah, don't leave me alone with JB—please.
- HEAP** But aren't you the two best buddies who (*Nasty*) refused to find me a job?
- SHADOW** (*Panicking—writing and apologising*) You're in, my friend, definitely, anything.
- TIX** (*Panicking—writing and apologising*) Heapie, two jobs, *three* jobs, I swear.  
(*HEAP enjoying their distress. Both finish their letters, print them and place them on table with HEAP's*)
- HEAP** Well that oughta give JB's blood pressure a handy boost. C'mon, let's go.  
(*TRIO mutter, grab their belongings and head to the door UR. They open door and start to exit when door DL opens and JB enters. He is animated and carries a box*)
- JB** Hey! Hold y'mother's horses! (*TRIO freeze and are worried*) Where the hell are you lot going?
- HEAP** (*Trying to be defiant*) Sorry, JB but we're off—permanently.  
(*OTHERS agree but JB ignores them and moves to table and puts down basket/box*)
- JB** Get back in here before I sack the lot of you.  
(*TRIO doubly worried. He hasn't seen let alone accepted their resignation letters so if they don't return they might be sacked rather than resign. They creep back into the boardroom*)
- HEAP** Something up, JB?
- JB** More than something. I've just been told the most unbelievable news.
- SHADOW** You're leaving?
- JB** What?
- TIX** You're leaving us to do the work?
- JB** (*Sees letters*) Ah, your brilliant new ideas.  
(*TRIO panic. HEAP moves to table to rescue letters but JB picks them up a split second beforehand*)
- HEAP** They're not ready yet, JB. (*Holds out hand*) Please, let me finish mine properly.
- TIX** Yes JB, they're only sketches.
- SHADOW** Preliminary ideas, JB.
- JB** (*Brandishing letters*) I don't care if they're the best strategies in the history of capitalism. (*OTHERS shocked*) This is what I think of your ideas.  
(*Pause. What will he do? Suddenly he rips them in half or quarters and tosses them onto table*) You can forget about winning the war for Big Tobacco—all of you.
- HEAP** (*Almost begging*) Oh please JB, don't sack me. There's no more room on my CV.
- TIX** (*Almost begging*) Have mercy, JB. I've got a family and a cocaine habit.
- SHADOW** (*Almost begging*) JB, I swear I can bribe the last remaining holier-than-thou politician.
- JB** You're finished—the lot of you. You and Big Tobacco are no more.  
(*TRIO despairing*)
- HEAP** (*Annoyed his resignation letter was destroyed—sotto voce*) You bastard.
- JB** (*Grinning*) It's change career time, folks. Say bye bye to Big Tobacco.
- HEAP** (*Angry he didn't quit*) Damn.
- JB** And say hello ... to Big Food.

## Death by Eating 16

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*(TRIO stunned)*

**SHADOW** Say hello?

**TIX** To Big Food?

**HEAP** You mean we're not sacked?

**JB** This wonderful tobacco multinational has just bought one of the world's largest Big Food multinationals and we are now into food!

*(TRIO hugely relieved and now excited)*

**FX** *Music begins with snazzy lighting changes*

*(Major technical event takes place. It lasts 20-30 seconds. Music plays - suggest a Sousa march - and JB produces party hats, whistles, flags on sticks from box. Everyone dresses up and they march around in time to the music blowing party whistles and waving flags. They could do a conga-line dance.*

*They celebrate doubly because not only are they not sacked but they're into a brand new industry without the restrictions of their previous one. The artwork or posters upstage are turned around revealing food and beverage pictures or people eating and drinking. If you can afford it a scrolling digital message flows across the upstage wall with message 'Big Food!' or similar. It's a hoot. Is there a ticker tape parade upstage? Once their brief celebration is over the QUARTET settles, the music fades, the lighting returns to normal and the dialogue resumes as if the 'event' never took place. The party props are returned to the box along with the torn up resignation letters. The TRIO members are buzzing and JB too is on a high)*

**HEAP** Oh JB, this is fantastic news.

**JB** It's better than fantastic. We can advertise anywhere, sponsor anything and market openly and directly to kids. *(TRIO thrilled)*

**TRIO** "The food industry proudly markets its products to children." *(They laugh)*

**SHADOW** I love it. I can lobby for food.

**TIX** I can market for food.

**HEAP** I can ... I can eat food. *(Laughter as their excitement bubbles over)*

**JB** I've been made CEO of the Big Food Company and you lot, you measly minions are all on the new payroll.

**HEAP** Oh thank you, JB. What an honour, hey guys?

**TIX** Absolutely.

**SHADOW** JB, you're a credit to humankind.

**JB** But the more we change, the more we stay the same. So I want you lot to research, review, profile and brainstorm.

**TIX** Oh JB, I think I love you.

**JB** I want you to set goals, test ideas, check cycles and forecasts.

**HEAP** *(Cheeky, mimics the boss)* If I want a bloody forecast I'll look out the window. *(Laughter but JB glares at HEAP)*

**SHADOW** It's a privilege to lie for you, JB. *(OTHERS agree)*

**JB** Settle down, settle down because today the war on Big Food is bigger, smarter and much more powerful. We need new frauds, new lies and new dirty tricks to keep people eating and more importantly, eating more.

**TIX** You make me proud to come to work, JB.

**SHADOW** What he said, JB.

**JB** *(At HEAP)* Well? What about you?

**HEAP** *(Unsure)* Me JB?

**JB** Everyone else is pissing in my pocket.

## Death by Eating 17

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- HEAP** *(Twigs)* Oh, yes, JB. Ah, *(Thinking)* you've given me new inspiration to work in this glorious industry.
- JB** Good, you're getting better at faking sincerity. *(Preparing to exit)* So now it's your turn. I'm gunna tell the Board you three are creating a truckload of new strategies to destroy this healthy eating crusade. *(Heading DL)* And when I come back, *(At door—threatening)* I don't wanna be disappointed. *(Exits)*  
*(OTHERS hugely relieved)*
- HEAP** Wow, I reckon we just dodged a bullet.
- TIX** I reckon we just landed the dream career. Legally, only a small percentage of adults can smoke. With Big Food everyone's a customer, even kids!
- HEAP** *Epecially kids. (Enthusiasm all round)*
- SHADOW** Do you realise I can now bribe politicians without a shred of shame or guilt?
- HEAP** Yes, yes, but we've still got a job to do. What do we know about Big Food?
- TIX** It's a marketing dream. Have you seen the billboards all over town? Eat this, drink that, supersize yourself. The world is awash with Big Food.
- HEAP** But what are our products? Who's our competition? What are the laws?
- SHADOW** I know a heap of pollies who'll bend over backwards to support Big Food. This is literally snouts in the trough.
- HEAP** *(Angry)* Hey! Listen! *(That gets their attention)* What about that truckload of new strategies? Nothing's changed. If we can't give JB some earth-shattering ideas, we'll have the shortest careers in the history of Big Food.  
*(Pause. Silence. It's still tough)*
- SHADOW** You're right. But I can't rush this. I need time.
- HEAP** We haven't got time.  
*(Another pause. They're stuck)*
- TIX** How about this for an idea? *(Pause. They look at TIX)* We copy Big Tobacco!

**BLACKOUT**

### Act 1 Scene 2

*(Music begins—it could be the same music used for the recent 'event'—and all actors exit. Fifteen seconds later lights come up and we have moved forward a few years. Subtle lighting changes can give the Big Food office a slightly different look. HEAP has next to no time to change appearance whereas the other three do have a little time. Something basic and simple for HEAP perhaps even new headwear, he could remove jacket, lose tie, etc.)*

- FX** *Phone rings as lights come up*  
*(HEAP enters UR and goes to phone on table, checking his appearance as he does so)*
- HEAP** *(Answering phone)* BF, JB's PA.
- Caller** *(Unheard)* Is JB there?
- HEAP** I'm sorry, the chairman's not in.  
*(JB enters and heads to coffee)*
- HEAP** No wait, you're in luck.
- JB** *(Angry)* I'm not in.
- HEAP** *(Without missing a beat)* You've reached the ideal person. How may I help?
- Caller** *(Unheard)* I want JB. *(Slams down phone)*
- HEAP** *(Holds phone away from ear)* And the same to you, pal. *(Replacing phone)*
- JB** *(Snaps)* What did you call me?
- HEAP** Not you, JB—the creep on the phone.

## Death by Eating 18

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- JB** *(Throws or hits HEAP with newspaper)* Well speaking of creeps, have you seen this? *(HEAP reads front page. JB still angry)* And it's on the front page! The front friggin' page!
- HEAP** *(Reading paper. shrugs)* So what? Today's news, tomorrow's trash.
- JB** Why haven't *our* scientists discovered this stuff?
- HEAP** They have.
- JB** God knows we pay them enough. *(Stops)* Wadda ya mean 'they have'?
- HEAP** We've known all this stuff for years. We're way ahead when it comes to the link between saturated fat and obesity.
- JB** *(Threatens)* Don't use that word. I never wanna hear that word in this office again—ever!
- HEAP** Obesity?
- JB** No.
- HEAP** Oh, sorry, saturated.
- JB** *(Loud)* Fat!
- HEAP** Okay, okay. *(Puts paper away)* But really, JB, how many times do I have to tell you? Nobody knows the facts about obesity better than Big Food. We know the dangers, costs and consequences and we're all over diabetesity.
- JB** Like those damn scientists in the paper.
- HEAP** So, we'll get our scientists to do the usual.
- JB** Not the usual. This time I wanna see our guys directly challenge their argument—*directly*.
- HEAP** *(Exasperated)* JB, how many times? We never ever directly challenge claims about a lousy diet. Every do-gooder sounds off and ...
- JB** *(Realises)* Yes, yes, all right. We just ...
- BOTH** ... muddy the waters.
- HEAP** We raise doubt, give our political mates ammunition and put the brakes on government proposals. Delay is our middle name. They're proven tactics, JB so let's not change a winning way.
- JB** God I miss the old days.
- HEAP** *(Aside)* Here we go.
- JB** Once we could put anything in food and not even declare the contents. Now the world's gone regulation mad. How many calories? How much salt and sugar? Is it free-range or organic? What size gumboots does the bloody farmer wear on a Wednesday? I mean it's just food for god's sake. Buy the food with the snazziest package or the cheapest price tag.
- HEAP** *(HEAP hands document to JB)* I hate to spoil your good mood, JB but you need to approve these latest donations.
- JB** Later. Where are those damn gurus? The meeting started ten minutes ago. *(SHADOW and TIX enter with materials)* Oh and about time.
- TIX** Sorry JB. Had to drop the son and heir at child care.
- SHADOW** Conference call with London and New York, JB.
- JB** I've got a board meeting in an hour and I need some seriously good data. So c'mon, who's on first?
- HEAP** No, Who's on second. *(JB doesn't do irony or old gags)*
- JB** *(Angry)* Come on, talk to me.
- TIX** My turn, JB. *(Setting up LC at display area. OTHERS pull chairs across/around)* We've got a new angle on breakfast cereals and it's aimed unashamedly at kids.

## Death by Eating 19

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- JB** I like it.
- TIX** (*Holding up poster or showing items on a screen if that is used*) We're going for colour, cartoons and cuddly characters. Kids love their favourite critters and the colour, light and movement draws them straight to the product.
- JB** Beautiful.
- TIX** To win over the parents we throw in healthy ingredients such as whole grains.
- JB** Whoa, whole grains—they sound like they're expensive.
- HEAP** It's cool, JB, we only put in a tiny amount of whole grains but it legally allows us to trumpet the fact that our cereal has healthy ingredients.
- SHADOW** Busy parents see the screaming headline and think, 'Oh, whole grains, that's what I want for my family'.
- TIX** The parents haven't got time or can't be bothered to read the miniscule label.
- HEAP** And they don't know or care that we flood the cereal with sugar.
- SHADOW** Parents have their kids begging for more of those wonderful whole grains not realising it's the massive sugar hit which has them hooked.
- JB** God I love sugar. It's white gold. I thought tobacco was beautiful but sugar is something else. It's cheap, accessible and fills everything we make. I love it. (*OTHERS look at him. Is he insane?*) Okay I'm liking all this but what about Big Food's mantra of position, ...
- OTHERS** (*They join JB*) ... position, position.
- TIX** It's ideal, JB. We position the colourful cereal packets smack-bang at the kids' eye level. (*He bobs down to become a six year-old*) Right here. They see it immediately and start pestering the parent to buy, buy, buy. (*Mimics little child, pointing*) 'There, there, that's what I want. Please, oh please'.
- SHADOW** Kids control the parents.
- JB** God bless those kiddies. And that shelf position is guaranteed?
- HEAP** It better be; we've paid the supermarkets top dollar for the privilege. A couple of chains have set up a bidding war so we'll have to pay over the odds to gazump our greedy competitors.
- JB** Just spend the money.
- HEAP** Will do.
- JB** Right, now the board will discuss those nut cases screaming about unhealthy foods. So what's happening there?
- HEAP** (*Swapping places with TIX*) All under control, JB. We've put together a group of nutritionists who believe there is no such thing as good or bad food just food. Their mantra is 'Everything in moderation'. We fund their research which shows no link between Big Food and the small overall increase in people's weight.
- SHADOW** (*Can't believe their use of the word*) Do they really use the word 'small'?
- JB** Shut up.
- HEAP** Then we've set up several groups as a front for Big Food. They have names like *Good Food Association* and *Feed Your Family*. We pay these groups to publish stuff about freedom of choice and the dangers of governments telling us what to eat.
- JB** Beautiful.
- HEAP** And these groups recommend delicious family recipes naturally using our wonderful products.
- JB** Naturally.
- HEAP** Of course we fund these fronts so we control what they say and do.
- SHADOW** Just like the good old days, JB.

## Death by Eating 20

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- JB** (*Reminiscing*) Ah, Big Tobacco—we had groups telling the world that smoking was their choice and there was doubt about the evidence produced by those whacky anti-tobacco scientists. Nothing proved, nothing proved, nothing proved.
- TIX** You told ‘em, JB.
- HEAP** Yes but you didn’t have today’s social media mercenaries.
- JB** What’s that in English?
- HEAP** We employ individuals, people who operate as a lone wolf. They work from home and scan the Net for articles and blogs which are critical of Big Food. These individuals use a pseudonym and post comments on the so-called healthy sites.
- JB** What sort of comments?
- HEAP** Nothing stupid. They’re always measured and polite but they question the claims of the food police. Every so-called healthy blog gets a reminder that Big Food is misunderstood and moderation is the key to healthy living.
- SHADOW** Every little comment counts.
- TIX** We’ve got many different ways of getting the message across.
- JB** I like it.
- HEAP** But there’s more, JB. I bet you didn’t know that we now operate a fifth column.
- JB** A what?
- HEAP** We have spies who infiltrate health groups to find out what they’re saying and doing.
- JB** You’re kidding. What are we, Big Food or the CIA?
- SHADOW** Oh we’re far more sophisticated than the government.
- HEAP** We hire brilliant actors, JB. They pretend to be pro-organic, anti-pesticide, save-the-whale vegans when really they like nothing more than a steak ‘n soda.
- TIX** They’re out-of-work character actors, JB, desperate to avoid resting.
- JB** In my day they were called snitches.
- SHADOW** They wear plastic shoes and cotton clothes made after the weevils have been spoon fed and given an organic massage by the cotton pickin’ cotton pickers.
- JB** I haven’t got a bloody clue what you’re talkin’ about but I’m impressed.
- HEAP** Our spies get wind of new research, about reports claiming that Big Food is making people fatter and more prone to illness and premature death.
- JB** Wash your mouth out.
- TIX** To be forewarned, JB, is to be forearmed.
- HEAP** The spies report back, keeping us one step ahead of the opposition.
- JB** Okay, it all sounds great. But I can’t tell the board about this illegal stuff. They’re like the three wise monkeys.
- HEAP** It’s not illegal, JB.
- JB** The board is only interested in profits; how we make them is none of their business.
- HEAP** But JB, we only use everyday business practices. Phoney associations, misleading research and spying on your competitors is the norm today.
- TIX** It’s the only way to run a successful business.
- SHADOW** You must know that coming from Big Tobacco.
- JB** (*Reminiscing*) It seems so long ago. The good old days - spread misinformation, sabotage science and withhold data.
- HEAP** You taught us well, JB.
- JB** (*Snaps out it*) Right, enough. Who’s next?

## Death by Eating 21

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- SHADOW** (*Replaces HEAP*) My turn, JB. I've got a deep throat contact in the Health Department. They say the government has been copping it big time from the do-gooders.
- JB** (*Furious*) What? I told you to find the weak politicians and bribe them.
- SHADOW** Done already, JB.
- JB** And if that doesn't work, threaten them with losing pre-selection. Tell 'em we'll branch stack their seats and fund their rivals.
- SHADOW** Now I don't want you to take this the wrong way, JB.
- JB** Why am I worried?
- SHADOW** It's only a rumour, but some pollies are pushing for new food labels.
- JB** No problem. Bribe or threaten them and push for weaker alternatives.
- SHADOW** (*Is nervous*) And one of the codes has traffic lights.
- JB** (*Explodes*) Traffic lights! No way! Over my dead body.
- TIX** It's not definite JB.
- JB** That's the one labelling system we can't have. It's simple. People understand simple and worse, it features the colour red. People see red and stop buying.
- SHADOW** It's still not definite.
- JB** We kill anything that reduces profit. D'you understand?
- SHADOW** Yes JB.
- HEAP** But if it does come in, JB, there's a simple way to avoid getting a red label.
- JB** Meaning?
- HEAP** We could change our products.
- JB** Waddya mean, 'change our products'? That costs money.
- HEAP** Well by making them a tiny bit more healthy, we'll avoid the red label.
- JB** Make them healthy! What are we, a gymnasium, a friggin' health farm?
- SHADOW** Of course not, JB, but ...
- JB** The sole purpose of Big Food and Big Tobacco is to make more money. We don't force people to buy our products. We don't care what happens to them. (*Pause. Tad softer*) Well obviously we don't want them to die.
- TIX** Obviously.
- HEAP** Very noble of you, JB.
- JB** We want them to keep living so they can keep spending. (*Pause. TRIO not sure what to say*) Look healthy foods don't appeal to the masses. They're hooked on sugar and salt. Just kill these traffic lights. So c'mon, tell me how. (*Pause. TRIO look at one another*) Well?
- SHADOW** We can push really hard for a vague labelling system which is full of data. People find all that information time-consuming and confusing.
- JB** (*A little calmer*) Yeah, not bad. What else?
- HEAP** We can 'encourage' the government to hold an enquiry into food labelling. Remember the old delay tactics from Big Tobacco?
- JB** I sure do. What else?
- TIX** We can sponsor favourable research which suggests simplistic judgements are bad for the health of families.
- JB** Good. You've got that marketing guru Goebbels' touch. I like it.
- HEAP** (*Nervous*) But there's one more item, JB.
- JB** I hate it when you're insipid.
- HEAP** There's a new documentary which talks about the massive increase in chronic disease linked to obesity linked to Big Food. (*TRIO expecting fury JB but he remains calm. TRIO look at one another - 'What's going on'*)

## Death by Eating 22

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**JB** I've been expecting this.

**SHADOW** *(Pause. Speaks for OTHERS)* JB?

**JB** So what lies are they peddling this time?

**TIX** We're not sure they are lies, JB.

**JB** Oh yeah, and how would you know?

**TIX** I'm in marketing, JB. Lying is my *raison d'être*.

**HEAP** It's the medical data, JB. Hospitals are spending squillions on treating people with preventable diseases caused by eating processed food packed with sugar.

**JB** *(Thinking)* Can we bribe the hospitals? Haven't some of them got fast food restaurants in their foyers?

**SHADOW** They have JB but the problem today is the data. The science statistics are pretty damning.

**JB** Lies, damn lies and statistics. Okay, go ahead, ruin my day.

**HEAP** The biggest change to the human diet started around the end of the 20th century.

**JB** *(Thinks he knows)* I know. Genetically-modified food. *(TRIO shake heads or remain still)* Of course, cheap junk food. *(No response from TRIO)* Okay, cut-price, deep-fried Mars Bars. *(No response from TRIO)* All right. I give up. Tell me.

**TIX** Sugar consumption.

**JB** No way.

**TIX** It's true.

**JB** The biggest dietary change ever is consuming more sugar?

**SHADOW** Either side of the new millennium our average daily sugar consumption doubled, tripled and sometimes quadrupled.

**JB** Garbage.

**HEAP** It's true, JB. It's the biggest change in diet since Adam took up apple eating.

**TIX** And as a result some countries have gone from having 1 person in 40 diagnosed with type 2 diabetes to one person in 10.

**JB** Bullshit.

**HEAP** On planet Earth today there are now more obese people than starving people.

**JB** It's propaganda.

**SHADOW** 'Fraid not, JB. It's a fact and it's all coming to a YouTube channel near you. *(Pause. How will JB react)* Millions of hits. *(Still no response from JB. Will he explode?)*

**HEAP** We can make a counter-argument film in a couple of days, JB. We've got the footage. We're ready to roll. *(JB silent)*

**TIX** I can set up a campaign associating our food and drink with happiness and good-looking young people. We're ready to roll. *(When will JB respond?)*

**SHADOW** We could donate more to hospitals and have polities announce our generosity.

**JB** *(Pause. Finally speaks)* Do nothing. *(TRIO shocked)*

**HEAP** JB?

**JB** The best response is no response.

**SHADOW** Not even a denial?

**JB** Especially not a denial. If there's one thing I've learnt from Big Tobacco it's to never sink to the level of our opponents.

**HEAP** It's hard to sink when you're already on the bottom.

**JB** *(Ignores HEAP's remark)* Don't give them any oxygen. Ignore them. It's business as usual. *(Pause)* Well, go on, get back to work.

## Death by Eating 23

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*(TRIO look at one another. They shrug and start to exit. HEAP is the last to leave. He turns to speak to JB and all three stop)*

**HEAP** You okay, JB?

**JB** Of course I'm okay. *(He's not. TRIO return)*

**HEAP** Can I get you something? Coffee? Scotch? *(Pause)* Sugar hit?

**JB** Do you think I'm worried? I'm not. I survived Big Tobacco so surviving Big Food's a soda.

**TIX** Perhaps not an apt choice of words, JB.

**JB** *(Ignores them and is on a roll)* If people get fat or o/d on sugar that's their bloody fault. Don't hang their pathetic lack of self-control on Big Food. Nobody's forcing them to consume sugar-saturated cereal or fruit drinks. It's their choice ... schmucks!

**HEAP** *(Pause)* I have to admire your ... courage, JB. *(OTHERS agree)*

**SHADOW** You would've made a great politician, JB. You stand up for what you believe in. You fight to the last. You're cunning and you've turned lying into an art form.

**JB** *(Looks at them)* You think I'm a heartless bastard.

**TIX** No, JB.

**SHADOW** Not at all; never.

**JB** *(Pause. At HEAP)* And what about you? What do you think?

**HEAP** I don't think you're a heartless bastard, JB. I know you are. *(Tension. Will JB explode)*

**JB** Let me tell you a story, a true story.

**FX** *Emotional music begins softly*  
*(Lights slowly dim but concentrate on JB)*

**JB** Many years ago I was a young executive in Big Tobacco. We had our AGM and I was in the audience watching and learning. A shareholder stood up, a woman, and asked a question.

*(Slowly music volume rises)*

'Mr Chairman,' she said. 'Would you be happy to let your young grandchildren remain in a room full of people smoking?' You could hear a pin drop. At the time Big Tobacco was starting to cop scientific criticism. It was easy to ignore or deny it. But this was different. This was criticism from a member of the family. The Chairman paused and spoke calmly. 'Madam, my young grandchildren have legs and the ability to make decisions. They can walk.'

*(Lights continue to dim but a spot remains on JB. Long music crescendo continues)*

God I was impressed. A tough question batted away with dignity. But the woman wasn't finished. She stood again.

'Mr Chairman,' she called. 'What if your grandchild was a babe in arms?'

Wow. Talk about an electric atmosphere. How the hell could he answer without saying that smoking was dangerous? But he did. *(Shaking head as JB remembers)* It was bloody brilliant. The chairman's reply made me the ... *(uses their words)* courageous, cunning, lying, heartless bastard I am today.

*(Lighting now just a spot on JB. Music nearing its climax)*

'Madam,' he said, 'I would put the infant on the floor. Put them on their belly and let them *(Fiery)* damn well crawl.'

**BLACKOUT**

*(Music swells and plays to its end. House lights up. INTERVAL)*

## Death by Eating 24

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### Act 2 Scene 1

*(Curtain rises on dark set. JB is seated at the table with an overhead light the main lighting. There is little or no spill of light. An EXIT sign above a door could give the room an eerie glow. It's not a desk lamp but the lighting above serves that purpose. JB is working late. It's hard to know it's him. He groans or moans. We hear footsteps or door key sounds offstage UR. JB hears them and panics. He hits an unseen light switch on the table and the room is almost in darkness. JB ducks down behind/beneath the table. The UR door opens and HEAP enters quietly. It's hard to know who it is. HEAP moves to table and looks for something. JB creeps/crawls out and to one side, stands and points weapon at the unsuspecting HEAP. HEAP hits the imaginary light switch and overhead light comes back on. HEAP senses someone is there and nearly dies.*

**HEAP** *(Screams in fright)* Don't shoot, please don't shoot.  
**JB** Hands! Let me see your hands.  
**HEAP** *(Twigs)* JB?  
**JB** What are you doing here at this time of night?  
**HEAP** *(Hugely relieved)* Oh JB, thank god. You scared the shit out of me.  
**JB** *(Still pointing)* Answer the bloody question.  
**HEAP** JB? *(Pointing)*  
**JB** Tell me. *(The finger pointing registers)* What?  
**HEAP** You're ... you're holding a banana.  
**JB** *(Realises and lowers fruit)* I know that.  
**HEAP** It's not loaded is it?  
**JB** What are you doing here?  
**HEAP** Are you okay?  
**JB** Of course I'm okay. I'm always okay. Why shouldn't I be?  
**HEAP** Well I'm finding it hard to believe the CEO of Big Food is holding a piece of real food and in the form of *fresh fruit*.  
**JB** *(Tosses fruit on table)* Bloody quacks.  
**HEAP** Sorry?  
**JB** Some zealot in a white coat told me I have inner fat. Can you believe that? Inner fat! What the hell is that?  
**HEAP** *(Shrugs)* I dunno. Inside fat? Invisible fat?  
**JB** On the outside I'm good, normal for my age but oh no. They have to come up with something new. Bloody medicos. Half the time I reckon they make up stuff just to take your money.  
**HEAP** Hence the banana?  
**JB** What? Oh yeah. Apparently I have to *(Makes quotation marks sign)* 'improve my diet'.  
**HEAP** That's not good, JB.  
**JB** *(Contradicts him)* Yes it is. God, don't you know anything? Fresh fruit and vegetables are actually good for you.  
**HEAP** No, I mean eating real food and not processed food is bad for Big Food's bottom line.  
**JB** Shut up. *(Back to his original demand)* And answer my question. What are you doing sneaking around here at night?  
**HEAP** I wasn't sneaking. I've lost a credit card and thought it might be here.  
**JB** You're lying?  
**HEAP** Lying?  
**JB** And spying.

## Death by Eating 25

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- HEAP** Well make up your mind. Am I lying or spying?  
**JB** Both and you're definitely spying on me.  
**HEAP** JB, why on earth would I spy on you?  
**JB** Even back in the Big Tobacco days you spied on me, you white-anted me.  
**HEAP** Oh and you treated me with the utmost respect and kindness.  
**JB** I treated you the way I was treated by my CEO. Being bullied and abused made me the ruthless bastard I am today. You should thank me for giving you a hard time.  
**HEAP** Oh silly me. All those years of humiliation have made me a better executive.  
**JB** Exactly.  
**HEAP** Have you been drinking?  
**JB** And now you go behind my back saying I'm past it.  
**HEAP** Well if you go round pointing bananas at people then you obviously *are* past it. In fact I reckon you're *well* past it.  
**JB** I should have sacked you years ago.  
**HEAP** I should have resigned years ago.  
**JB** And you didn't because you're gutless.  
**HEAP** That—and friendless.  
**JB** Listen matey, the reason why Big Tobacco and Big Food are so successful is down to ball-busting CEOs like me. My middle name's Ruthless. And you, you're just a hanger-on, a leech. I've carried you for years.  
**HEAP** You don't really believe that.  
**JB** Despite all the crap those scientists and do-gooders throw at me, I stand tall. Me, I'm a survivor.  
**HEAP** JB, the sadistic survivor, who wouldn't know an original idea if he fell over it.  
*(Pause. HEAP speaks the truth)*  
**JB** Do you know how hard it is to lie for a living; every day denying the bleeding obvious; every day promoting products which make people sick and die? Do you know how hard that is?  
**HEAP** *(Softer)* I'd keep it down, if I were you, JB. Around here that kind of talk attracts the death penalty.  
**JB** The board with their fancy lunches and executive bathroom have no idea. You and your buddies with your digital toys and coke in a wrapper, have no idea. It's only me—the heart and soul of Big Tobacco and now Big Food. I'm the reason we make pots of money regardless of the crap we sell. I'm the ...  
*(He stops suddenly and appears vulnerable)*  
**HEAP** JB?  
**JB** *(Recovers momentarily)* I'm the one person ...  
*(He can't speak. Leans on table)*  
**HEAP** *(Pause)* JB? What's the matter? *(Moves to help)*  
**JB** Stay away! Don't you come near me. *(Points at HEAP)* You're a coward. You wait till I'm vulnerable, till I can't return fire and then you stab me in the back.  
**HEAP** Well you'll have to turn around.  
**JB** What?  
**HEAP** You're facing me. I can't stab you in the back till you turn around.  
**JB** Smart arse. *(Shakes head, furious)* You ... *(He looks ill and again leans on table)*  
**HEAP** C'mon, sit down. *(Crosses to cooler)* I'll get you some water.  
*(JB is not well. He moves to RC area and collapses. HEAP offers glass of water which JB takes and drinks. Long pause)*  
**JB** He's not even three.

## Death by Eating 26

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**HEAP** Breathe slowly.  
**JB** Three.  
**HEAP** *(Has no idea)* Who?  
**JB** *(Suddenly angry)* He's not even three!  
**HEAP** JB, I don't know who or what you're talking about.  
**JB** My grandson, my beautiful little man. *(Opens wallet)* Here, I've got a picture.  
*(Shows photo to HEAP)*  
**HEAP** Lovely. *(Wallet put away. Pause)* So something's obviously wrong.  
**JB** *(Regains composure. Pause)* My son is the kid's father. He and the mother are divorced. My son gets limited access. I get almost none. And that bitch of a woman has let it come to this. *(Screams in frustration)* Ahhhh!  
**HEAP** Do you want an ambulance? Do you need a doctor?  
**JB** He's not dying. And neither am I.  
**HEAP** Well can I help? Do you want to talk about it?  
**JB** *(Needs to let it all out)* How can this happen to a three year old kid? To my grandson!  
**HEAP** I gather he's not well.  
**JB** His mother doesn't care; too busy shopping and screwing her latest toy-boy. It's neglect. How the hell did she get custody? Bloody lawyers.  
**HEAP** What's wrong with the little boy?  
**JB** *(Sarcastic)* Nothing, minor matter, absolutely trivial—*(Angry)* he's only got to have his teeth pulled. And he's not even three!  
**HEAP** God that seems young.  
**JB** It's outrageously young! His grandfather has all his own teeth. *(Indicates mouth)* Look, not an implant in sight.  
**HEAP** Can you get another opinion, see another dentist, a specialist?  
**JB** He's got the best. I saw to that. It's the least I could do. And I've instructed my solicitor to start custody proceedings. Poor little kid.  
**HEAP** *(Pause)* So how did it happen?  
**JB** His useless mother filled his bottle with fruit juice and even fizzy drinks. Can you believe that? He'd lie in his cot and guzzle poison. That's child abuse. The poor little mite's teeth just rotted away.  
**HEAP** I'm really sorry, JB.  
**JB** My son reckons the dentist scraped the gums and there's almost nothing there. Nothing! *(He buries his face in his hands. HEAP tentatively offers some sympathy)* How's that going to affect his speech? How can he chew properly? What'll it do to his self-confidence?  
**HEAP** I guess the right diet begins when we're very young.  
**JB** *(Suddenly angry)* Don't you dare start that crap about too much sugar. It's a clear case of parental neglect. One lousy adult caused all this. It was human error—end of story.  
**HEAP** *(Sotto voce)* Some error.  
**JB** This should never have happened to my family.  
**HEAP** It should never happen to any family.  
**JB** I'm rich. My son's rich. His useless ex-wife's got money. It's only the poor who make crap decisions about raising their kids.  
**HEAP** Obviously not.

## Death by Eating 27

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**JB** You hear about one-parent families on benefits who bung a frozen pizza in the microwave and call it cooking. Fresh food—what's that? The kids eat garbage. Put 'em in front of the telly with crisps and a soda. They're fat, unhealthy with teeth turning to mush! So why my grandson? *(Plaintive cry)* My family's not poor!  
*(He silently cries again)*

**HEAP** *(Waits for JB to settle)* JB, is your car here?

**JB** *(Is not listening)* What?

**HEAP** Let me call you a cab. *(Pause. JB needs help)* Come on. *(Takes his arm and helps him to stand)* Let's get you home.

**FX** *Scene change music begins softly, lights dim slowly*  
*(HEAP leads JB out via UR door)*

**JB** *(Muttering)* He turns three next month. Three.

**HEAP** I know. Come on. Homeski. *(They exit, music swells)*  
**BLACKOUT**

### Act 2 Scene 2

*(After a few seconds MUSIC fades and lights come up. It's later the next morning. We're back in the office in daylight. TIX is showing SHADOW a new marketing document)*

**TIX** We've gone for the gorgeous, mouth-watering pictures. What do you reckon?

**SHADOW** I'm hungry just looking at them.

**TIX** The way we doctor photos today is amazing. Technology turns food into art and with my packaging and the company's low prices, it's no wonder we shift a ton of this stuff.

**SHADOW** Pity the contents rarely match the cover.

**TIX** Well if they don't it's the fault of the customer. This picture shows what you can make if you know the basics of cooking.

**SHADOW** God you're good. I can't tell if you believe your own lies.

**TIX** Okay so a Cordon Bleu chef might struggle but hey, my job is simply to hook the client.

**SHADOW** Well you've certainly hooked me.

**TIX** *(Shocked)* You're not serious?

**SHADOW** Of course I'm serious. Would I lie to a professional liar?

**TIX** You mean you'd actually eat this stuff?

**SHADOW** *(Shocked)* Good god, no. Do I look insane?

**TIX** You just said you were hooked.

**SHADOW** On the picture, the packaging, not on the bloody contents. What do you take me for? Listen, I know what's inside. I wouldn't eat that stuff in a fit. There's enough salt and sugar in there to give my arteries nightmares. People who eat this junk on a regular basis have livers that run away from home.

**TIX** True—but I'm still proud of my artwork.

**SHADOW** And I'm still proud of persuading politicians to support Big Food but none of that changes the fact that our processed food is making millions of our deluded customers fat or fatter.

**TIX** Sorry?

**SHADOW** You heard.

**TIX** Have you found religion? Is your conscience off life-support? *(Intimate)* Are you mad?

## Death by Eating 28

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- SHADOW** Relax, no-one's listening. Look it's not all bad news. Big Food's success has created some of the world's happiest people.
- TIX** Obviously—our shareholders.
- SHADOW** Obviously, but also Big Fat and Big Pharma.
- TIX** *(Confused)* Big what?
- SHADOW** Two of today's top growth industries are gastric band surgery and slimming pills. The more people consume Big Food products, the more hospital procedures and weight-loss formulas are required. The government loves Big Food—we create new jobs.
- TIX** *(Is chuffed)* Well I guess it's nice to know we're doing something positive for the economy.
- SHADOW** Yeah but it ain't all beer and skittles. I've got a public relations nightmare.
- TIX** Don't follow.
- SHADOW** I'm pushing a ban on tough food labels, promoting junk food advertising to kids and telling the world that sugar is not the great Satan.
- TIX** Yeah but don't forget your squillion dollar salary.
- SHADOW** Even a professional fixer like me is finding it hard to bury the truth.
- TIX** What truth?
- SHADOW** Aw come on; you must know. Hospital beds are groaning with obese patients.
- TIX** *(Shrugs)* So, shove in a few more beds.
- SHADOW** The floors aren't strong enough. And do you know how expensive and time-consuming one kidney dialysis is?
- TIX** No but I could produce a TV clip promoting the best one in town. *(Mimics ad)* 'For a great kidney deal, check out Hospital Obese.'
- SHADOW** Does it ever occur to you that we might be beyond cynical?
- TIX** Not me; you can't work in advertising without a cynicism implant.  
*(UR door opens and HEAP enters)*
- SHADOW** I think we're eating ourselves to death.
- HEAP** I don't like the sound of that. *(He joins them)*
- TIX** Here's a first. You're late.
- HEAP** And with good reason. I have news.
- SHADOW** JB's dead and you've murdered him.
- HEAP** JB's grandson has serious health problems and his tough old grandpa is taking it hard. I was here last night and saw a very emotional CEO.
- TIX** *(Incredulous)* JB has feelings? No way.
- HEAP** It was incredible; I tell you I actually saw him crying. *(OTHERS shocked)*
- SHADOW** Yeah but they would've been fake tears.
- HEAP** *Real* tears.
- TIX** *(Scoffing)* He can't cry, he's a CEO. He's had compassion surgically removed.
- SHADOW** Did you say his grandson was crook?
- HEAP** Yeah, the little mite's in a bad way. JB was angry, upset and even depressed.  
*(The mood is sombre)*
- TIX** Wow.
- HEAP** So when JB comes in, don't ask about his health or that of his grandson.
- SHADOW** *His* health? Is he crook too?
- HEAP** Apparently he's got too much inner fat. He's on a diet and, wait for it, he's eating fresh fruit. *(OTHERS shocked)*
- TIX** You're kidding.
- SHADOW** The CEO of Big Food cries and eats fresh fruit. Get me the tabloids.

## Death by Eating 29

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**HEAP** Just be prepared for a man with serious depression. If he wants to talk, fine but otherwise ignore his misery. Understand?

**TIX** Sure, fine.

**SHADOW** So what's wrong with the grandson?

**HEAP** Would you believe rotten teeth due to sugary drinks.

**TIX** *(Shocked)* Jeez he'll wanna keep that quiet.

**HEAP** Naturally he's really cut up about it.

**SHADOW** Who wouldn't be?

**HEAP** *(Warning them)* Just don't mention the war.  
*(They hear sounds DL)*

**TIX** That sounds like him now.

**HEAP** Now remember, no fuss. The guy is seriously depressed. Okay?

**OTHERS** Yes, yes, okay. *(They huddle over TIX's photos)*  
*(DL door flies open and spotlight hits JB. He is wearing a funny hat, wearing Groucho nose and glasses and blowing a novelty whistle. JB has never been so energetic)*

**JB** *(Imitating Robyn Williams)* Good morning, Vietnam. Yow! *(OTHERS stunned)*

**FX** *(Lighting flashes and sparkles. Brief burst of same martial music used before as JB enters. It's Professor Harold Hill on speed. After a lap of the room, music fades and JB confronts the frozen and gobsmacked TRIO)*

**JB** Am I hot to trot or what? *(TRIO unfreeze but have no idea what to say)*

**HEAP** *(Trying to be normal)* JB, good morning.

**JB** And isn't it just a beautiful mornin'!

**HEAP** *(Tentative)* Is something up, JB?

**JB** You could say that. I've just been told the most unbelievable news.  
*(He removes hat, mask and places them and whistle RC)*

**SHADOW** *(To HEAP)* Don't ever audition for CSI.

**TIX** So that's what depression looks like.

**JB** *(Delighted back at TRIO)* Great news, guys; great, great news. *(Pause)* I am on the board.  
*(TRIO relieved, excited, now understand his unusual behaviour)*

**TIX** Oh well done, JB *(Shakes his hand)*

**SHADOW** Congratulations, JB, well deserved.

**JB** Yes, all right, I'm not the President—yet.

**SHADOW** And may I say it's not before time, JB.

**TIX** Big Food will never have a finer board member.

**JB** *(Pause. At HEAP)* Well? What about you?

**HEAP** *(Unsure)* Me JB?

**JB** Everyone else is pissing in my pocket.

**HEAP** Well JB, I'm torn between celebrating the fact I'll never have to work for a pompous prick again while wondering what pathetic excuse you'll use to prevent me becoming the new CEO.  
*(Pause. Will JB explode at HEAP's crude and rude comments?)*

**JB** *(Pleased and almost embracing HEAP)* Now that is beautiful. Finally you're a cynical bastard. Finally you're ready to bully and abuse the workers.

**HEAP** *(Thinks he's been promoted)* You're not serious?

**JB** I've trained you well.

**HEAP** You're offering me the CEO job?

**TIX** *(Anxious)* Hang on. I've been here almost as long as Heap.

**SHADOW** *(Agitated)* Exactly and what he said.

## Death by Eating 30

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- JB** Not so fast. Nobody's got my old job—yet. I'm recommending promotion to just one of you three and here's the deal. What's your best Big Food strategy? Convince me it's the best and the winner's the new CEO. Sound fair?  
*(TRIO look at one another. Pause. Then they speak at once)*
- TRIO** Great JB ... Sounds absolutely fair ... couldn't be happier, JB ... excellent test, JB ... terrific idea ... more than fair, JB *etc.*
- JB** *(Clapping)* Enough already! *(They settle)* I'm looking for outrageous manipulation of the truth, simple fraud and phoney schemes all of which help Big Food make truckloads of cash. *(a la officer)* Is that clear?
- TRIO** *(a la the military)* Clear, sir, clear.
- JB** Right, who's first?  
*(TRIO members immediately raise a hand. They're like eager school kids wanting desperately to be chosen by their teacher. JB ponders the three applicants then points to TIX who beams with delight as the other two groan and look miserable. TIX moves to presentation area and the OTHERS to the viewing area. Lights change accordingly and TIX is highlighted. The next scene becomes a knock-out final. It's a selling shoot-out. Each member of the trio tries to out-sell their competitor. Technically speaking you can make this a special scene. Each 'contestant' could add a boater or bowler hat. It's show time, folks. Each 'applicant' is like a spruiker, a barker at a fair ground wanting passers-by to buy a ticket. Each applicant desperately wants to be the next CEO of Big Food)*

### Act 2 Scene 3

- FX** *Short dramatic music to prepare the scene*  
*(Major LIGHTING change. The spruiker is lit and the others in the 'audience' can be seen but dimly. Once TIX is lit he lets rip)*
- TIX** Ladies and gentlemen, welcome to the wonderful world of Big Food where everything and everyone is filled with love. Here at Big Food we have love in spades. Love for our products, our marketing and above all, love for you our dearest and most treasured of customers. Our message to you is the greatest message the world has ever heard. Three little words, folks—I love you.
- For millennia those three little words have thrilled the hearts and minds of humankind. But now Big Food has taken that timeless expression, refined and rebooted it to make your life even sweeter. How good is that? Greater love hath no company than this. Big Food has converted 'I love to' you to a far, far greater saying. We have so much love for the world we want to improve those three little words. 'I love you' is not enough. Now we can express our heartfelt compassion with Big Food's new three little words—'No added sugar!'
- You cannot imagine our pride. You cannot imagine the passion we have for you our dearly beloved customers. We want to declare our love in actions bold and bright. We want to shout our love from the rooftops. And so we do.  
*(Proudly declares undying love)* 'No added sugar!'
- Look at our products. Look at our big, bright, bold declaration. There on the pack from Big Food to you—'no added sugar!'
- (Switches to sneaky. Now addressing Big Food)*

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Ah, but the true beauty of the declaration ‘lies’ within. It’s the con of the century, the trick of our times. You see some of the ‘no added sugar’ slogan products have something special inside— (*Intimate*) more sugar. Yes, *more* sugar.

(*Rubbing hands with delight*) Oh the thrill of conning cretins. Those millions of sweet-toothed customers see our ‘no added sugar’ sign and immediately think, ‘that’s for me’. Suckers! You see there is actually *more* sugar in some products with those magical three little words than comparable products *without* the special sign. It’s a con, dummy. And a con that just keeps on conning.

Punters buy the ‘no added sugar’ product not knowing it’s got more sugar than the comparable product without the slogan. It tastes great because of all that sugar. The customer thinks happy thoughts. ‘I’m consuming less sugar’ when in reality they’re consuming more and so they go back and buy, buy, buy.

It’s deception, duplicity and dirty deeds. (*Big finish*) And so my pledge to Big Food is to con all customers with ... ‘No added sugar!’

(*Lighting returns to normal. Applause from the OTHERS although SHADOW and HEAP are rivals so will not be so enthusiastic. TIX removes his props and JB addresses the other two candidates*)

**JB**

Excellent, excellent work. I love misleading promotions. Deception is delicious. You’ve set the bar very high, young Tix. Now, who is next?

(*SHADOW and HEAP are sitting ever so straight with a ‘Pick me, pick me’ look on their faces. HEAP strokes his chin then points to SHADOW. He is delighted and moves to prepare. HEAP annoyed. TIX sits with the others as lighting changes. SHADOW is lit*)

**SHADOW** (*As academic perhaps with gown*) Pay attention students. Our lecture today is on the history of food. (*Groans from dimly-lit audience*) Oh trust me, boring it ain’t.

Way back in time, man was a hunter/gatherer. No burgers, chippies or diet sodas in ancient history. There were no farmers’ fields, crops or supermarkets. And if the animals ran, swam or flew faster we went hungry. If food could not be found, we starved. But here’s the rub. When we ate, what we ate was good. We ate fibre with no preservatives or added sugar. It was nutritious. If the Heart Foundation had been around it would have given us all a big red tick.

Life was simple. Food was natural. In fact if you wanted dessert you went scrumping although apple trees were not yet in rows.

But then came the tsunami. Then came the massive change in life and living—agriculture. (*Could sing*) ‘We plough the fields and scatter, the good seed on the land’.

The world of eating changed—forever. No longer did we have to fish, hunt and trap. No longer did we have to keep moving always on the lookout for today’s tucker. Now we could *grow* our food. Now we could put down roots—literally, and we did. We discovered farming.

And again our diet was good. Lots of healthy ticks all round. The grains were natural, full of fibre and we did little to them before eating. If a nutritionist had dropped in they'd be pleased with our two fruits and five veg. And if a dessert took our fancy then fruit was the perfect pudding. We had natural sugar, no added sugar and it was good for the body including our waistline.

But then came the best tsunami, the greatest food revolution ever—sugar; easy to grow, cheap to produce and a taste to die for. It goes in and with everything. Now we're cooking. Now we have the magic formula. Taste is king. There's even a new word—*palatability*. And suddenly Big Food has a new aim—make food for the palate. Forget the health of the human, the well-being of their vital organs; just give food a great taste.

The population kept growing as did the demand for cheap, tasty food. But hang on, what about nutrition; you know, healthy eating? Ah, now here's the genius of Big Food propaganda. People want to eat healthy so let's trick 'em.

Let's equate nutrition with taste. If it tastes great it's nutritious. It's the mantra. It's the lie and the bigger the lie the more likely it will be believed. Go taste, go flavour and fool the masses. (*Imitates gullible human*) 'Look! The word *fruit's* on the label so it must be healthy.'

(*Big finish*) O Big Food, how crafty are thy cheesy thoughts. Taste equates to nutrition and goodness. It's *palatability!*

(*Lighting returns to normal. Applause from the OTHERS although TIX and HEAP are not so enthusiastic. SHADOW removes his props and returns to the group. JB addresses them*)

**JB**

Where some are led by the nose, we at Big Food proudly lead the masses by their tongue. If it tastes good it *is* good. God it does my heart proud to see such devious behaviour. Is sneaky, is good. Now, lucky last; (*Indicating HEAP*) the man who would be king.

(*HEAP rises and moves to prepare. His rivals could growl or murmur a la a melodrama. Lights crossfade and OTHERS dimly lit as HEAP is lit. He is a budding CEO fronting the world. He raises his hand as if stating an oath of allegiance and giving evidence*)

**HEAP**

I believe that nicotine is not addictive.

I believe the moon is made of green cheese.

I believe in Santa Claus and the tooth fairy

I believe that politicians never lie and always keep their word.

I believe in the right to have bare arms ... and bare legs.

I believe saying 'Rabbits' on the first day of the month brings good luck.

I believe there is no connection between sugar and obesity.

(*Switches to enthusiastic politician*)

If we in the food business ever believed that sugar was harmful we would stop production tomorrow.

As good corporate citizens we believe it's our duty to make public health our top priority

Here at Big Food we will cooperate closely with anyone working in the interests of public health.

(*Pause. No expression or movement. Suddenly he doubles up with laughter*)

(*Returns to being serious addressing Big Food executives*)

## Death by Eating 33

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Big Food is famous for inventing slogans with three little words—*No added sugar* and *taste equals nutritious*. But I have a third slogan and my three little words are what have made and will continue to make Big Food big bucks.

Delay, delay, delay.

The do-gooders scream loud and long for regulation and we at Big Food support their demands—but with a twist. We support *self*-regulation. Who alone has an intimate knowledge of the manufacture of food and drink? We do. Who alone knows the best way to make food taste great, look great and cost as little as possible? We do. Big Food is the perfect choice to draw up regulations for the food and beverage industry.

Our raucous critics claim this equates to putting the fox in charge of the hen house with Dracula running the blood bank.

*(Pause. No expression or movement. Suddenly he doubles up with laughter)*

*(Returns to being serious addressing Big Food executives)*

They're only saying that because it's true. But all we really want, apart from self-regulation, is to delay, delay, delay. Suggest alternative food labelling models, agree to running detailed surveys on the health risks of sugar ... but always with an end result decades down the track.

Of course we support a survey. Let's track the health of 2,000 young people some with a normal sugar intake and some with a diet four times the recommended daily sugar intake. And let's study the results and respond immediately—in fifty years' time!

Let's fiddle while Rome burns. Let's make games for kids. Let's make massive profits as diabesity makes massive misery. C'mon Big Food, it's time to delay, delay, delay!

**FX** *Triumphant music used at beginning of Act 2 Scene 3 is repeated. Lights flash. TRIO rise and applaud. If possible a ticker tape parade happens with confetti floating down from above.*

*(After a brief celebration everything winds down. Lighting returns to normal and JB addresses the trio. They are tense waiting for his verdict. Who will be chosen as the new CEO?)*

### Act 2 Scene 4

**JB** Very, very interesting. I'm proud, extremely proud of each and every one of you. I love your dedication to the one and only goal of Big Food—making money. You all nailed it. We boost bottoms to boost our bottom line.

**HEAP** Are you auditioning for your own job or choosing your replacement?

**JB** Ah, giving cheek to a member of the board; whatever happened to Mister Obsequious?

**SHADOW** Just put us out of our misery. *(JB looks at SHADOW who suddenly weakens)* Please.

**JB** There are three things I need to do here.

**TIX** Delay, delay, delay.

## Death by Eating 34

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- JB** *(Clapping)* Well done. *(Preparing to exit)* But first I'll retire to consider my verdict. *(Exiting but stops at door DL, grinning)* Just talk quietly amongst yourselves. *(Exits)*  
*(TRIO break up and spread out. They're frustrated and on edge. Each wants the promotion. They are not in a hurry to speak. There is often a pause between lines)*
- TIX** Once a bastard, always a bastard.
- SHADOW** He's chosen the winner already. He just wants to see us suffer.
- HEAP** I liked your three-word slogans.
- TIX** Mine?
- HEAP** Both of you.
- SHADOW** Yours was good too.  
*(The pausing continues. It contrasts with the helter-skelter delivery of the previous scene)*
- TIX** *(To HEAP)* You'll get the job. He likes you.
- HEAP** Likes me? Are you kidding? He's hated me for years.
- SHADOW** You've been here the longest; seniority and all that jazz.
- HEAP** You do know he could choose someone from outside? *(OTHERS shocked)* Aw come on. Is there anyone more cruel and two-faced than JB? He'd love to bring in an outsider and watch our faces when we all miss out.  
*(Silence. They hadn't considered that. They could all miss out)*
- TIX** I should have gone harder, pushed a bigger lie.
- SHADOW** Yeah me too. I squibbed it.
- HEAP** We all did. I know stuff which is deadset scary.
- SHADOW** Bet I know more scary than you.
- TIX** Listen, in marketing we see all the data. I have the best Big Food secrets—ever; the nastiest, most frightening, most dangerous.
- HEAP** Right, a hundred bucks says I've got the biggest and best Big Food lie.
- SHADOW** *(Keen)* You're on. *(They shake hands)*
- TIX** I'm in but who's the judge?
- HEAP** *(Pause)* We vote at the end.
- SHADOW** So what if it's a three-way tie?
- TIX** Let's just do it. Who's first?
- HEAP** Me. Let's do it in reverse order from the last time.  
*(They move to places as audience or speaker)*
- SHADOW** Oh great. And here's me; still Piggy in the Middle.
- TIX** *(Child-like chant as sitting)* My lie's bigger than your lie.  
*(You could use a less extravagant version of lighting. The presentations are less theatrical but still need a lighting change to accent each soloist)*
- HEAP** If you want scary, try death by eating. Ever since economists and sociologists have run surveys, every generation has outlived their folks. Our parents lived longer than our grandparents and we'll live longer than *our* parents. But here's the scary bit. Our kids may be the first generation to die young. Our kids may die younger than us.

The phenomenal rise in childhood obesity means massive health problems for today's kids when they hit middle and old age—and that's assuming they make it that far. By allowing kids to get fat and remain fat, we markedly increase their risk of chronic diseases—cardio, diabetes, cancer, strokes and dementia.

The massive increase in overweight children and adults equates exactly and directly to the massive increase in sugar consumption. Big Food knows this as do governments but both say nothing, deny the facts or spread misinformation.

## Death by Eating 35

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*(Quoting Big Food)* “Food is neither good nor bad. We can enjoy everything in moderation.”

The Big Food lie is that obesity is a lifestyle choice and has nothing to do with Big Food. The way we’re going, our kids will die younger than us.

*(HEAP sits and SHADOW prepares to speak)*

**SHADOW** The scariest lie supported by Big Food is called, ‘Calories in, calories out’. It’s scary because it’s wrong and responsible for millions of people eating the wrong amounts of the wrong types of food. They think their diet is fine. They are dangerously misled.

The screaming flaw in the argument is that all calories are not the same. Big Food suggests that if you consume X amount of calories, all you need do is exercise and burn off those calories. Pardon my French, Mesdames et Messieurs, but that is undiluted bovine droppings. It’s complete and utter bullshit.

Firstly a thousand calories from a can of soda and a thousand calories from a plate of salad are a million miles apart. All calories are *not* the same. Calories from an overdose of sugar give some of your organs a panic attack. They can’t deal with the sugar hit and your body gets fat or fatter.

Secondly burning calories through exercise is far from simple. If you devour a block of chocolate, you’ll need to run a marathon or three to burn off those calories. The calories in, calories out message from Big Food is super misleading and adds fuel to the obesity fire.

*(SHADOW sits and TIX prepares to speak)*

**TIX** You want scary, I can give you scary. There is an old saying—to be forewarned is to be forearmed. But sugar gives no warning. It sneaks up on you and is chipping away at your organs without telling you. Sugar’s a real sneaky bastard.

Now Big Food packs sugar into hundreds of common grocery items—sauce, cereal, soup, juice, frozen dinners, yogurt even hamburger buns. Of course fizzy drinks and so-called fruit drinks are really just flavoured sugar. There is so much sugar in some colas you could stand a spoon up in them.

And here’s the rub. Big Food markets these sugar-laden products with a message of fun. Look at the ads. The people enjoying processed food are happy. They’re young and cute and beautiful and laughing. Happiness goes with sugar-packed products.

*(Cups hand to ear)* Can you hear it? *(Hand to forehead looking)* Can you see it? *(Pats stomach)* Can you feel it? No, a thousand times no. And that’s the sneaky, scary fact that Big Food deliberately ignores. Too much sugar does serious damage but gives you no warning. Sugar is sneaky.

## Death by Eating 36

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Every day around the world, thousands of people are diagnosed with Type 2 Diabetes and for everyone diagnosed twice as many, *more* than twice as many have the disease and don't know it. It's a pandemic and the scariest untold Big Food secret is that too much sugar is a sneaky, silent killer.

*(Lighting returns to normal. TRIO deflated. They've each told a tale which, if true, is frightening. It's doubly so because they are all intimately involved in the industry. They are reflective and again there are pauses)*

**HEAP** I don't wanna win this bet.

**SHADOW** I wish I'd stayed working for Big Tobacco.

**TIX** You have. We all have. I mean what's the difference between Big Food and Big Tobacco?

**SHADOW** Mind you, if JB walks through that door right now and tells me I'm the new Big Food CEO, I'll celebrate long and hard.

**HEAP** I need a career change. *(OTHERS amused)* What?

**TIX** Talk about Groundhog Day.

**SHADOW** *(Mimics HEAP)* "I've decided to pull the pin. I'm a successful executive with a multi-national corporation."

**HEAP** Yeah, all right.

**TIX** If JB promotes you, you'll be all over Big Food and mislead, lie and delay like the rest of us. *(HEAP nods)*

**SHADOW** It's called greed. We're in it for the money. If tobacco and sugar are legal, let people consume them. If they make people sick or kills them, it's their choice.

*(Looks at them)* Agreed?

*(Silence. Pause)*

**HEAP** God, I'm too old to get a conscience. *(Frustrated)* What's keeping JB?

**TIX** I need a new challenge. I've done everything in tobacco and food. What else is there?

**SHADOW** Nothing that pays like them.

**HEAP** *(Gets an idea)* Of course, consultancy. Have you seen the money they make? Governments engage consultants who charge the earth. That's what I'll be—a consultant. *(Sits at table and starts to write a resignation letter)* Dear JB. I hereby tender my resignation *(OTHERS scoff)* ... effective immediately. Yours faithfully.

**TIX** *(Plays a game)* Look out, it's JB.

*(HEAP panics and hides letter. OTHERS laugh at HEAP's discomfort. Just as the laughter reaches its peak, JB enters DL. TRIO freeze)*

**JB** Laughter? What have you lot got to laugh about? *(Silence)* Whoa, laughter and silence.

**HEAP** Have you made a decision?

**JB** I have.

**SHADOW** And?

**JB** It's good news and it's bad news.

**TIX** *(Loses it)* Look stop pissing around and tell us who got the job. *(Pause. Everyone looks at TIX who is embarrassed)* Sorry.

**JB** You're finished—the lot of you. You and Big Food are no more. *(TRIO despairing)*

**HEAP** You bastard. You've appointed someone from outside.

**JB** That's the bad news. The good news is it's change career time, folks. Say bye bye to Big Food.

**SHADOW** Not again.

## Death by Eating 37

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- JB** And say hello ... to Big Weight Loss.  
*(TRIO stunned)*
- SHADOW** Big Weight Loss?
- TIX** You mean we're not sacked?
- HEAP** 'Say hello to Big Big Weight Loss'?
- JB** This wonderful food multinational has just bought one of the world's largest slimming companies and we are now into weight loss.  
*(TRIO a mixture of relief and confusion)*
- SHADOW** Hang on. So none of us got the Big Food CEO gig and the consolation prize is flogging 'healthy' meals and hunger suppression pills?
- JB** It's a booming business.
- TIX** I like it. We get 'em both ways. They buy our high-calorie food and pile on the pounds then buy our low-calorie food when they join our weight loss programs.
- HEAP** So Big Tobacco buys into Big Food who buys into Big Weight Loss.
- TIX** So what's next? Big medicine?
- JB** *(Excited)* Now that's what I like—forward thinking. Cause and effect. So c'mon. How does it work?
- SHADOW** We should be looking at Big Pharma. With smoking and sugar causing massive health problems, we need drugs to try and fix the problems.
- HEAP** Yeah but with an emphasis on the word 'try'.
- TIX** We sure as hell don't wanna cure the problems we've made in the first place.
- SHADOW** I can get every politician in the land to back drugs designed to fight self-inflicted health problems.
- HEAP** Tell them we can cut the health budget.
- TIX** We can promise almost anything.  
*(JB steps to one side grinning as the TRIO get excited and bounce ideas of one another. They ad lib their ideas as JB moves to door DL then addresses the audience)*
- JB** It's beautiful.  
**BLACKOUT**
- (Music begins, lights come up and the performers take their bows)*

*Ends*

### Other New Shows from Fox Plays

*As Farce as You Can* is an eight-hander (4M and 4F) where the action is so fast and furious it becomes a marathon sprint. Tom Kindly rings his work and feigns being ill. That one little lie gets him into more trouble than George Custer. There's a gorgeous neighbour, snobbish girlfriend, lunatic whistleblower, wealthy nonagenarian aunt, idiotic actor, bumbling policeman and a boss called Atilla the Hon. She's a she. This farce is exhausting for both cast and audience.

[www.foxplays.com](http://www.foxplays.com)