

"Well, then I ask you this Mrs... Crooooooome.  
Is your family more important to you than the  
future of this country?"

That was a toughie. There was a pause during  
which a civilization could rise and fall.

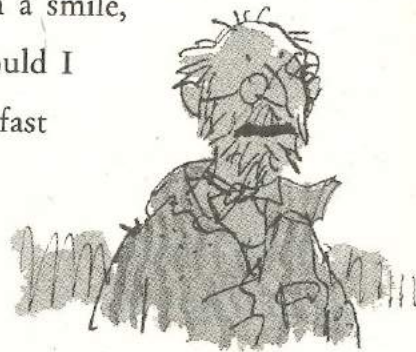
"Well, Mr. Stern..." Mother said.

"Yes, Mrs Croooooooooooooome...?"

"Well, Mr Stern..."

"Yes, Mrs Crooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooo  
ooooome...?"

At that moment there was a little rat-tat-tat on  
the window. "Excuse me for interrupting," said  
Mr Stink with a smile,  
"but please could I  
have my breakfast  
now?"



## Shut your Face!

"Who on earth is *he*?" enquired Mr Stern as  
Mr Stink trudged around in his filthy striped  
pyjamas to the backdoor.

There was silence for a moment. Mother's  
eyes bulged out of their sockets and Annabelle  
looked like she was about to shriek or vomit or  
both.

"Oh, he's the tramp who lives in our shed,"  
said Chloe.

"The tramp who lives in our shed?" repeated  
Mother incredulously. She looked at her husband  
with black fire in her eyes.

He gulped.

"I told you she was hiding something in there, Mother!" exclaimed Annabelle.

"He wasn't there when I looked!" protested Dad. "He must have concealed himself behind a trowel!"

"What a wonderful woman you are, Mrs Croooooooooooooome," said Mr Stern. "I read about your policies on the homeless. About driving them off the streets. I had no idea you meant we should drive them into our homes and let them come and *live* with us."

"Well I..." spluttered Mother, lost for words.

"I can assure you I am going to write an absolutely glowing piece about you now. This will make the front page. You could be the next Prime Minister of the country!"

"My sausages?" said Mr Stink, as he entered the dining room.

"Excuse me?" said Mother, before putting her hand over her mouth in horror at the smell.

"Forgive me," said Mr Stink. "It's just that I asked your daughter Chloe for some sausages two hours ago, and my sincerest apologies, but I am getting rather peckish!"

"You say I could be the next Prime Minister of the country, Mr Stern?" said Mother, thoughtfully.

"Yes. It's so kind of you. Allowing a dirty old smelly tramp like this – I mean, no offence –"

"None taken," replied Mr Stink without hesitation.

"—to come and live with you. How could you *not* be elected as an MP now?"

Mother smiled. "In that case," she said, turning to Mr Stink, "how many sausages would you like my very good friend who lives in my shed and hardly stinks at all?"



"No more than nine, please," replied Mr Stink.

"Nine sausages coming right up!"

"With poached eggs, bacon, mushrooms, grilled tomatoes, bread and butter and brown sauce on the side, please."

"Certainly, my extremely close and beloved friend!" came the voice from the kitchen.

"You smell so rank I think I'm going to die," said Annabelle.

"That's not nice, Annabelle," said Mother breezily from the kitchen. "Now come and help me in here, darling, there's a good girl!"

Annabelle ran to the sanctuary of the kitchen.

"It stinks in here now as well!" she screamed.

"Shut your face!" snapped Mother.

"So, tell me... tramp," said Mr Stern, leaning in towards Mr Stink before the smell got to him and he leaned back. "Is it just you living in the shed?"

"Yes, just me. And of course my dog, the Duchess..."

"HE'S GOT A DOG?" cried Mother anxiously from next door.

"And how do you find living here?" continued Mr Stern.

"Nice," said Mr Stink. "But I warn you, the service is painfully slow..."

## Lady and the Tramp

'LADY AND THE TRAMP' was the headline.

Mr Stern had been true to his word and the story had made the front page of *The Times*. A large photograph of Mother and Mr Stink accompanied the piece. Mr Stink was smiling broadly, showing his blackened teeth. Mother was trying to smile, but because of the smell she had to keep her mouth firmly closed. As soon as the paperboy put the paper through the letterbox, the Crumbs pounced upon it and devoured it in a frenzy. Mother was famous! She read the article out loud with pride.

*Mrs Crumb may not look like a political revolutionary in her smart blue suits and pearls, but she could well change the way we live our lives. She is standing for MP in her local town and, although her policies read as very hard line, she has taken the extraordinary step of inviting a tramp to live with her family.*

*"It was all my idea," said Mrs Crumb (pronounced 'Croooooooooooooooooome'). "At first my family was dead against it, but I just had to give this poor filthy flea-ridden dirt-encrusted stomach-turningly smelly beggar-man and his abhorrent hound a home. I love them both dearly. They're part of the family now. I couldn't imagine life without them. If only other people were as beautifully kind-hearted as me. A modern day saint, some people are saying. If every family in this country was to let a tramp*



*live with them it could solve the problem of homelessness forever. Oh, and don't forget to vote for me in the forthcoming election."*

*It's a genius idea, and could put Mrs Crumb in line to be the next Prime Minister.*

*The tramp, known only as 'Mr Stink' had this to say. "Please could I trouble you for another sausage?"*

"It wasn't your idea, Mother," snapped Chloe, too angry to merely sulk.

"Not strictly speaking, dearest, no..."

Chloe glared at her, but at that moment the telephone tinkled.

"Get that will you, someone? It's probably for me," said Mother, grandly.

Annabelle dutifully picked up the phone. "Crooombe residence. Who is speaking please?" she asked, just as her mother had instructed her

to. Mother even had a special telephone voice, a note posher than her usual one.

"Who is it, dear?" said Mother.

"It's the Prime Minister," replied Annabelle, putting her hand over the mouthpiece.

"The Prime Minister?" squealed Mother.

She hurled herself towards the telephone.

"Mrs Crooombe speaking!" said Mother in a truly ridiculous voice, a good note posher than even her usual telephone one. "Yes, thank you, Prime Minister. It was a super piece in the newspaper, Prime Minister."

Mother was drooling again. Dad rolled his eyes.

"I would be delighted to be a guest on *Question Time* tonight, Prime Minister," said Mother.

Then she went quiet. Chloe could hear a murmur from the other end of the line, followed by silence.

Mother's jaw dropped open.

"What?" she growled into the phone, losing her poise and dignity for an instant.

Chloe looked at Dad questioningly and he shrugged.

"What do you mean, you want the tramp to go on as well?" said Mother, incredulous.

Dad grinned. *Question Time* was a serious political discussion programme hosted by a Sir. It was Mother's big chance to shine, and she obviously didn't want it ruined by a malodorous old tramp.

"Well, yes," went on Mother, "I know it makes a good story, but does he really have to be on too? He reeks!"

There was another pause while the Prime Minister spoke, the murmur getting a little bit louder. Chloe was impressed with the man. Anyone who could get Mother to stop talking

for a moment *deserved* to run the country.

"Yes, yes, well, if that's what you really want Prime Minister, then yes, of course I will bring Mr Stink along. Thank you so much for calling. By the way I make a very moist Lemon Drizzle Cake. If you are ever passing by on your battle bus I would be delighted to offer you a slice or two. No? Well, goodbye... Goodbye... Goodbye..." She checked one last time that he had definitely gone. "Goodbye."

Chloe rushed into the garden to tell Mr Stink the news. She heard a "Grrrrrr" and assumed it must be the Duchess. However, it was actually Elizabeth the cat who was growling. She was looking up at the roof of the shed, where a trembling Duchess was hiding. The little black dog was yelping softly. Chloe chased Elizabeth away, and eventually coaxed the Duchess down. She patted her.



"There, there," she said. "That nasty puss has gone now."

Elizabeth flew out of the bushes and through the air like a kung-fu kitten. A terrified Duchess rocketed up the apple tree to safety. Elizabeth prowled around the trunk, hissing malevolently.

Chloe knocked on the shed door. "Hello?"

"Is that you, Duchess?" came Mr Stink's voice from inside.

"No, it's Chloe," said Chloe. *He's nuts!* she thought.

"Oh, lovely Chloe! Do come in, dear heart."

Mr Stink upturned a bucket. "Please, please take a seat. So did your mother and I make the newspaper?"

"You're on the front page. Look!"

She held up the paper and he let out a little chuckle. "Fame at last!"



"And that's not all. We just had a call from the Prime Minister."

"Winston Churchill?"

"No, we've got a new one now, and he wants you and mother to go on this programme called *Question Time* tonight."

"On the televisual box?"

"The TV? Yes. And I was thinking, before you go on..." Chloe looked at Mr Stink hopefully.

"It might be a good idea if you had a..."

"Yes, child?"

"Well a..."

"Yes...?"

"A..." She finally plucked up the courage to say it, "...bath?"

Mr Stink looked at her suspiciously for a few seconds.

"Chloe?" he asked at last.

"Yes, Mr Stink?"

"I don't smell, do I?"

How could she answer that? She didn't want to hurt Mr Stink's feelings, but then again it would be much easier to be around him if he were introduced to Mr Soap and his charming wife, Mrs Water...

"No, no, no, of course you don't smell," said Chloe, gulping the biggest gulp that had ever been gulped.

"Thank you, my dear," said Mr Stink, seeming almost convinced. "Then why do people call me Mr Stink?"

In her head, Chloe heard the intensely dramatic music from *Who Wants to be a Millionaire*? This could in fact have been the million pound question. But Chloe had no '50/50', no 'ask the audience' and not even a 'phone a friend' at her disposal. After a long pause, in which you could have watched all three *Lord of the Rings* films in their specially extended director's cuts, words started to form in Chloe's mouth.

"It's a joke," she heard herself saying.

"A joke?" asked Mr Stink.

"Yes, because you actually smell really nice so everyone calls you Mr Stink as a joke."

"Really?" His suspicion seemed to be thawing a little.



"Yes, like calling a really small man 'Mr Big' or a very thin person 'Fatso'."

"Oh, yes, I understand, most amusing!" chuckled Mr Stink.

The Duchess looked at Chloe with a look that said, *You had the chance to tell him, but you chose to carry on the lie.*

How do I know that the Duchess's look said this? Because there is an excellent book in my local library entitled *One Thousand Doggy Expressions Explained* by Professor L. Stone.

I digress.

"But," said Chloe, "you might like to have a bath, well, just for fun..."

## Bath time

This was no ordinary bath time. Chloe realised this had to be run like a military operation.

Hot water? Check.

Towels? Check.

Bubble bath? Check.

Rubber duck or similar animal-based bath toy? Check.

Soap? Was there enough soap in the house? Or in the town? Or indeed in the whole of Europe, to make Mr Stink clean? He hadn't had a bath since – well, he claimed last year, but it might as well have been since dinosaurs ruled the earth.

Chloe turned on the taps, running them both together so the temperature would be just right. If it was too hot or too cold it might scare Mr Stink off baths for ever. She poured in some bubble bath, and gave it a swirl. Then she laid out some neatly folded towels, pleasingly warm from the airing cupboard, on a little stool by the bath. In the cabinet she found a multi-pack of soaps. It was all going perfectly according to plan, until...

"He's escaped!" said Dad, poking his head around the bathroom door.

"What do you mean, 'escaped'?" said Chloe.

"He's not in the shed, he's not in the house, I couldn't see him in the garden. I don't know where he is."

"Start the car!" said Chloe.

They sped off out of their street. This was exciting. Dad was driving faster than usual, although still one mile an hour less than the

speed limit, and Chloe sat in the front seat, which she hardly ever did. All they needed were some doughnuts and coffee to go, and they could be two mismatched cops in a Hollywood action movie. Chloe had a hunch that if Mr Stink was anywhere he would be back sat on his bench where she had first talked to him.

"Stop the car!" she said, as they passed the bench.

"But it's a double yellow line," pleaded Dad.

"I said, stop the car!"

Dad stamped on the brake. The tyres screeched as the car stopped. They were both propelled forward a little in their seats. They smiled at each other at the excitement of it all – it was as if they had just ridden a rollercoaster. Chloe sprang out of the car and slammed the door shut, something she would never dare do if her mother were around.



But the bench was empty. Mr Stink wasn't there. Chloe sniffed the air. There was a faint whiff of him, but she couldn't really tell if this was a recent one or a lingering odour from a week or so ago.

Dad drove around the town for another hour. Chloe checked all the places she thought her tramp friend might be – under bridges, in the park, in the coffee shop, even behind bins. But it seemed as though he really had disappeared. Chloe felt like crying. Maybe he had left the town – he was a wanderer, after all.

"We'd better head home now, darling," said Dad softly.

"Yep," said Chloe, trying to be brave.

"I'll put the kettle on," said Dad as they walked indoors.

In Britain, a cup of tea is the answer to every problem.

Fallen off your bicycle? Nice cup of tea.

Your house has been destroyed by a meteorite?

Nice cup of tea and a biscuit.

Your entire family has been eaten by a Tyrannosaurus Rex that has travelled through a space/time portal? Nice cup of tea and a piece of cake. Possibly a savoury option would be welcome here too, for example a Scotch egg or a sausage roll.

Chloe picked up the kettle and went to the sink to fill it. She looked out of the window.

Just then, Mr Stink's head popped up from the pond. He gave her a little wave. Chloe screamed.

When they'd got over their shock, Chloe and Dad walked slowly towards the pond. Mr Stink was humming the song 'Row row row your boat' to himself. As he sang, he rubbed algae into himself with a water lily. A number of goldfish floated upside down on the water's surface.



"Good afternoon, Miss Chloe, good afternoon, Mr Crumb," said Mr Stink brightly. "I won't be too long. I don't want to get too wrinkled in here!"

"What... what... what are you doing?" asked Dad.

"The Duchess and I are having a bath of course, as young Chloe suggested."

At that moment the Duchess appeared out of the murky depths, covered in weeds. As if it wasn't enough that he was having a bath in a pond, Mr Stink had to share it with his dog too. After a few moments the Duchess clambered out of the pond, leaving behind a large black scum layer floating on the water. She shook herself dry and Chloe stared at her in surprise. It turned out she wasn't a little black dog after all, but a little white one.

"Mr Crumb, sir?" said Mr Stink. "Would you mind awfully passing me a towel? Thank you so much. Ah! I am as clean as a whistle now!"



## Rule Britannia

Mother sniffed. And sniffed again. Her nose wrinkled with disgust.

"Are you sure you had a bath, Mr Stink?" she enquired, as Dad drove all the family and Mr Stink to the television studio.

"Yes, I did, Madam."

"Well, there is a funny smell of pond in this car. And dog," pronounced Mother from the front seat.

"I think I'm going to puke," pronounced Annabelle from the back seat.

"I've told you before, darling. We don't say

'puke' in this family," corrected Mother. "We say we are feeling very slightly nauseous."

Chloe opened the window discreetly, so as not to hurt Mr Stink's feelings.

"Do you mind if we keep the window closed?" asked Mr Stink. "I am a little chilly."

The window went up again.

"Thank you so much," said Mr Stink. "Such unimaginable kindness."

They stopped at some traffic lights and Dad reached for one of his hard rock CDs. Mother slapped his hand, and he put it back on the steering wheel. She then put her favourite CD on the car stereo, and the old couple in the next car looked at the Crumb family strangely as 'Rule Britannia, Britannia rules the waves' came blaring out of their car.

"Mmm, no no no, that won't do at all..." said the

TV producer as he studied Mr Stink. "Can we put some dirt on him? He doesn't look trampy enough. Make-up? Where's make-up?"

A lady with far too much make-up on appeared from around a corridor, scoffing a croissant and holding a powder-puff.

"Darling, have you got any grime?" asked the producer.

"Come this way, Mr..." said the make-up lady.

"Stink," said Mr Stink proudly. "Mr Stink. And I am going to star on the television tonight."

Mother scowled.

Chloe, Annabelle and Dad were led to a little room with a television, half a bottle of warm white wine and some stale crisps, to watch the show being broadcast live.

The thunderous title music started, there was polite applause from the audience and the

pompous-looking presenter, Sir David Squirt addressed the camera. "Tonight on *Question Time* it's an election special. We have representatives from all the major political parties, and also a tramp who goes by the name of Mr Stink. Welcome to the programme, everyone."

Everyone around the table nodded, apart from Mr Stink who proclaimed loudly, "May I say what a delight it is for me to be on your show tonight?"

"Thank you," said the presenter uncertainly.

"Being homeless I have never seen it," said Mr Stink. "In fact, I have absolutely no idea who you are. But I am sure you are wildly famous. Please continue, Sir Donald."

The audience laughed uncertainly. Mother looked displeased. The presenter coughed nervously and tried to continue.

"So the first question tonight..."





"Are you wearing make-up, Sir Declan?"  
enquired Mr Stink innocently.

"A little, yes. For the lights of course."

"Of course," agreed Mr Stink. "Foundation?"

"Yes."

"Eye liner?"

"A little."



"Lip-gloss?"

"A smidge."

"Looks nice. I wish I'd had some now.  
Blusher?"

The audience chuckled throughout this exchange. Sir David moved on rapidly. "I should explain that Mr Stink is here tonight as

he has been invited to live with Mrs Crumb..."

"Croooooombe," corrected Mother.

"Oh," said Sir David. "I do apologise. We checked the pronunciation with your husband, and he said it was Crumb."

Mother went red with embarrassment. Sir David turned his attention back to his notes. "Later on in the programme," he said, "we will be discussing the difficult topic of homelessness."

Mr Stink put his hand up.

"Yes, Mr Stink?" asked the presenter.

"May I just pop to the lavatory, Sir Duncan?"

The audience laughed louder this time.

"I should have gone before we started, but I asked the make-up lady to do my hair and it took forever. Don't get me wrong, I am thrilled with the results; she gave me a wash and blow-dry. They even put something called gel in it, but I didn't get a chance to go to the little boy's room."

"Of course, if you need to go, go..."

"Thank you so, so much," said Mr Stink. He rose to his feet and started to potter off the set. "I shouldn't be too long, I think it's just a number one."

The audience howled again with laughter. In the little room with the stale crisps and the television Chloe and Dad were laughing too. Chloe looked at Annabelle. She was trying not to laugh, but a smile was definitely creeping up her face.

"My apologies!" exclaimed Mr Stink as he crossed the stage again in the opposite direction.

"I am told the lavatory is this way...!"



## Collapsed Bouffant

"And that's why I feel that there should be a curfew on all people under thirty." Mother was in full flow now, and she smiled as she received a smattering of applause for this comment from the people over thirty in the audience. "They should all be in bed by eight o'clock at the latest..."

"Sorry I was a while," said Mr Stink as he ambled back on to the set. "I thought it was just a number one, but while I was standing there I suddenly got the urge to have a number two." The audience erupted into laughter, some even

applauding in delight as this serious show descended into a discussion of an old tramp's toilet habits. "I mean, I usually do my number twos in the mornings, between 9:07 and 9:08, but I had an egg sandwich backstage before I came on the show tonight. I don't know if you made the sandwiches, Sir Derek?"

"No, I don't make the sandwiches, Mr Stink. Now please can we get back to the question of curfews for young—"

"Well, it was a delicious sandwich, don't get me wrong," said Mr Stink. "But egg can sometimes make me want to go. And I don't always get that much of a warning, especially at my age. Do you ever have that problem, Sir Doris? Or do you have the bum of a much younger man?"

Another massive wave of laughter crashed on to the stage. In the stale crisps room even Annabelle was laughing now.

"We are here to discuss the serious topics of the day, Mr Stink," continued Sir David. His face was redder than red with anger as his serious political programme, a programme he had presented for forty tedious years, was rapidly turning into a comedy show starring an old tramp. The audience was enjoying it immensely though, and booed Sir David a little as he tried to steer the show back to politics. He shot them a steely stare before turning to the new star of the show. "And my name is Sir David. Not Sir Derek, or Sir Doris. *Sir David*. Now, let's move on to the question of homelessness, Mr Stink. I have a statistic here which says that there are over 100,000 homeless people in the UK today. Why do you think so many people are living on the streets?"

Mr Stink cleared his throat a little. "Well, if I may be so bold, I would venture that part of the

problem stems from the fact that we are seen as statistics rather than people." The audience applauded and Sir David leaned forward with interest. Perhaps Mr Stink wasn't the clown he had taken him for.

"We all have different reasons for being homeless," continued Mr Stink. "Each homeless person has a different story to tell. Perhaps if people in the audience tonight, or out there watching at home, stopped to *talk* to the homeless people in their town, they would realise that."

The audience were applauding even louder now, but Mrs Crumb leaped in. "That's what I did!" she exclaimed. "I just stopped to talk to this tramp one day and then asked him to come and live with my family. I've always put others before myself. I suppose that's always been my downfall," she said, tilting her head to the side



and smiling at the audience as if she were an angel sent down from heaven.

"Well, that's not really true is it, Mrs Crumb?" said Mr Stink.

There was silence. Mother stared at Mr Stink in horror. The audience shifted excitedly in their seats. Dad, Annabelle and Chloe all leaned forward closer to the television. Even Sir David's moustache twitched in anticipation.

"I don't know what you mean, my very close friend..." squirmed Mrs Crumb.

"I think you do," said Mr Stink. "The fact is, it wasn't *you* who invited me in, was it?"

Sir David's eyes gleamed. "Then who *did* invite you to stay with the Crumb family, Mr Stink?" he enquired, back in his stride now.

"Mrs Crumb's daughter, Chloe. She's only twelve but she's an absolutely fantastic girl. One of the sweetest, kindest people I have ever met."

These words fell on Chloe like an enormous YES. Then everyone in the stale crisps room looked towards her and she was overcome by embarrassment. She hid her face in her hands. Dad stroked her back proudly. Annabelle pretended not to be interested, and helped herself to another stale crisp.

"She should really come out here and take a bow," announced Mr Stink.

"No, no, no," snapped Mother.

"No, Mrs Crumb," said Sir David. "I think we'd all like to meet this extraordinary little girl."

The audience applauded his suggestion. But Chloe felt glued to her seat. She couldn't even speak out loud in front of the class. She didn't want to be on television in front of millions of people!

What would she say? What would she do? She

didn't know any tricks. This was going to be the most embarrassing moment of her life, even worse than when she threw up her macaroni cheese all over Miss Spratt in the language lab. But the applause was getting louder and louder, and eventually Dad took her hand and gently pulled her to her feet.



"You're feeling shy, aren't you?" whispered Dad.

Chloe nodded.

"Well you shouldn't. You're a fantastic girl. You should be proud of what you've done. Now come on. Enjoy your moment in the limelight!"

Hand in hand they raced down the corridor towards the set. Just out of sight of the cameras Dad let her hand go, and smiled supportively as she stepped out into the light. The audience applauded wildly. Mr Stink beamed over at her, and she tried to beam back. Mother was the only person not applauding, so Chloe's eyes were drawn towards her. Chloe tried to meet her gaze, but Mother turned her head sharply to look the other way. This made Chloe even more uncomfortable, and she tried to do a curtsy but didn't really know how to, and then



ran off the stage, back into the safety of the stale crisps room.

"What a charming child," said Sir David. He turned to Mother. "Now I have to ask you, Mrs Crumb. Why did you lie? Was it purely to further your own political ambitions?"

The other guests from rival political parties looked at Mrs Crumb and tutted. As if *they* would ever dream of doing anything so immoral! Mother started to perspire. Her hair lacquer began to melt and her make-up ran slowly down her face. Dad, Chloe and Annabelle sat and watched her squirm, unable to help.

"Well, as if anyone would want that old tramp in their house," she shouted finally. "Look at him! You lot watching this at home can't smell him, but take it from me, he stinks! He stinks of dirt and sweat and poo and pond and dog. I wish that great stinky stinker would just

stink off out of my home for ever!"

There was shocked silence for a moment. Then the boos started, getting louder and louder. Mother looked at the audience in panic. At that moment her bouffant collapsed.



## Rabbit Droppings

"WE WANT STINK! WE WANT STINK!"

Chloe peeked through a gap in the curtains. There was a huge crowd of people outside their house. News reporters, camera crews, and hundreds and hundreds of local people waving large pieces of cardboard emblazoned with slogans.



Mr Stink's appearance on television the previous night had obviously had an enormous effect on people. Overnight he had gone from being an unknown smelly tramp to a hugely famous smelly tramp.

Chloe put on her dressing gown and raced down to the shed.

"Is it time for Lily to meet the flesh-eating zombie teachers?" enquired Mr Stink as she entered.

"No, no, no, Mr Stink! Can't you hear the crowds outside?!"

"I'm sorry, I can't hear you properly," he said. "I found these rabbit droppings in the garden. They make excellent earplugs." He popped out the two little brown pellets as Chloe looked on with a curious mixture of disgust and admiration at his ingenuity. For those of you who may find yourself out in the wild and in need of earplugs,



just follow this easy step-by-step guide.



Fig A

First find a friendly rabbit.



Fig B

Wait patiently for it to deposit some droppings for you.



Fig C

Insert one in each ear. Larger ears will require bigger droppings and possibly even a bigger rabbit.



Fig D

Enjoy a great night's sleep only slightly marred by the smell of rabbit poo.

The Duchess sniffed at the droppings in the vain hope that they might be a couple of rogue Maltesers or at the very worst some of Raj's despised coffee Revels, but quickly turned up her nose when she realised they were poo, and went back to her makeshift basket.

"That's better," said Mr Stink. "You know, I had the strangest dream last night, Miss Chloe. I was on television discussing all the important issues of the day! Your mother was there too! It was hilarious!"

"That was no dream, Mr Stink. That really happened."

"Oh, dear," said the tramp. "Maybe it wasn't so funny after all."

"It was *hilarious*, Mr Stink. You were the star of the show. And now there's hundreds of people camped outside the house."

"What on earth do they want, child?"

"You!" said Chloe. "They want to interview you I think. And some people want you to be the Prime Minister!"

The crowd was getting louder and louder now. "WE WANT STINK! WE WANT STINK! WE WANT STINK!"

"Oh my word, yes I can hear them. They want me as Prime Minister, you say? Ha ha! I must remember to appear on television more often! Maybe I can be king next too!"

"You'd better get up, Mr Stink. Now!"

"Yes, of course, Miss Chloe. Right, I want to look smart for my fans."

He bumbled around the shed sniffing his clothes and grimacing. *If even he thinks they're smelly*, thought Chloe, *they must be really bad.*

"I could put some clothes on a quick wash and dry for you," she offered hopefully.

"No, thank you, my dear. I don't think washing machines are hygienic. I'll just get the Duchess to chew some of the particularly nasty stains out."

He dug through a pile of his clothes and pulled out a pair of spectacularly dirt-encrusted brown trousers. Whether they had been brown when they started their life was now anybody's guess. He passed them to the Duchess, who began her task of a reluctant dry cleaner and started munching on the stains.

Chloe cleared her throat. "Um... Mr Stink. You said on the TV show how every homeless person has a different story to tell. Well, can you tell me your story? I mean, why did you end up on the streets?"

"Why do you think, my dear?"

"I don't know. I've got millions of theories. Maybe you were abandoned in a forest as a baby



and raised by a pack of wolves?"

"No!" he chuckled.

"Or I reckon you were a world-famous rock star who faked your own death as you couldn't handle all the adulation."

"I wish I was!"

"All right then, you were a top scientist who invented the most powerful bomb in the world and then, realising its dangers, went on the run from the military."

"Well, those are all very imaginative guesses," he said. "But I am sorry, none of them are right. You're not even close, I'm afraid."

"I thought not."

"I will tell you when the time is right, Chloe."

"Promise?"

"I promise. Now please give me a few minutes, my dear. I must get ready to greet my public!"

## Supertramp

"I AM NOT APOLOGISING TO HIM!"

"YOU HAVE TO!"

Mr Stink sat at the head of the kitchen table reading all about himself in the newspapers as Chloe stood at the stove frying some sausages for him. Her parents were arguing again in the next room. It wasn't a conversation that their house guest was meant to hear, but they were so angry their voices were becoming louder and louder.

"BUT HE DOES SMELL!"

"I KNOW HE SMELLS BUT YOU DIDN'T NEED TO SAY IT ON THE TELEVISION."