

PLAYS BY ROBERT ILES

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Towpath

Four strangers meet on a canal bank, each has a story to tell and a history to share. A popular, award-winning, one-act play for 4F.



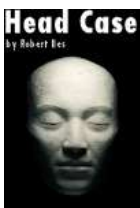
The Chip Van Plays Dixie

A poignant slice of life comedy set on a bench by a cemetery where two strangers find that they have more in common than they thought, more even than a love of chips, real chips. A very popular and successful one-act play for 1M, 1F.



The Bus Stop At The End Of The World

A retired bus driver finds himself on a cliff top at sunrise talking to a father & daughter. Past is revealed & futures planned as this poignant comedy unfolds. One-act play for 2M, 2F.



Head Case

An all female three hander one-act play script. A blind sculptress models a head on an unknown skull for her police detective sister. An award-winning ghost story. One-act play for 3F.

The Bus Stop at the End of the World

by

Robert Iles

CHARACTERS

MARTIN

Retired
Male
Ex-bus driver, no longer lives in
this area.

STEVE

Middle aged
Male
Father of Claire, estranged from wife
Jenny

JENNY

Middle aged
Female
Wife of Steve

CLAIRE

20 years old
Female
Daughter of Steve and Jenny, dying of
cancer.

ALL

ACT I

SCENE 1

ONE OR TWO BENCHES ON A CLIFF PATH OVERLOOKING THE SEA. A LAMP, A BUS STOP (REMOTE RURAL) AND A BIN. WE ARE ON A REMOTE ROAD AT THE END OF THE BUS ROUTE WHERE BUSES STOP, TAKE A BREAK AND TURN AROUND - THINK THE CAR PARK NEAR LANDS END OR ON A PENINSULAR IN SUFFOLK. THERE IS NOTHING MUCH FOR MILES EXCEPT A CAR PARK AND BEAUTIFUL VIEWS AND CLIFF WALKS.

IT IS VERY EARLY MORNING, STILL BEFORE DAWN, THE LAMP IS LIT, MORNING BIRDSONG, POSSIBLY QUITE WINDY. MAMMAS AND PAPPAS "DREAM A LITTLE DREAM". IT GETS LIGHTER AS THE PLAY GOES ON, ENDING AT DAWN

STEVE ENTERS CARRYING HIS DAUGHTER CLAIRE WRAPPED IN A BLANKET, SHE IS DYING OF CANCER - THOUGH SHE IS LUCID IT IS HOURS TO DAYS RATHER THAN DAYS TO WEEKS. HE CHECKS SHE IS OK THEN RUSHES OFF INDICATING SILENTLY THAT HE WILL BE BACK QUICKLY.

MARTIN ENTERS FROM THE OTHER DIRECTION, HE IS SINGING "DREAM A LITTLE DREAM" TO HIMSELF, MUSIC FADES INTO HIS VOICE. HE SEES CLAIRE, SEEMS CONFUSED, LOOKS AROUND, CROUCHES IN FRONT OF HER, GENTLY PULLS THE BLANKET FROM HER FACE, LOOKS AROUND AGAIN ...

MARTIN: Hello

NO ANSWER

Are you alright?

NO ANSWER

MARTIN: Are you cold?

CLAIRE: Not yet

MARTIN: But you will be

CLAIRE: Soon

MARTIN: I mean, if you sit here like that for long

CLAIRE: Whatever

MARTIN: I'm... I mean, are you alright?

CLAIRE: I'm ok. Thanks for asking.

MARTIN: That's ok, but you don't look ok, if you don't mind me saying

CLAIRE: I do

MARTIN: Sorry. [BEAT] What are you doing here?

CLAIRE: God knows. [LOOKING AROUND] We just arrived.

MARTIN: We?

CLAIRE: I bloody hope so. [LOOKING AROUND] My father?
[PAUSE, WEAKLY] Dad? [STRONGER BUT STILL WEAK]
Dad?

MARTIN: [LOUD]Dad?

CLAIRE: What are you doing?

MARTIN: Sorry, I ... helping, I just thought ... He just left you?

CLAIRE: Nothing new there

MARTIN: Here, I mean, he left you here? [BEAT] Just now?

CLAIRE: Here. Just now. Home, when I was a baby, boarding school, twice, once when we were on holiday. Spain. Just upped and left us

MARTIN: Us?

CLAIRE: Mum and me. Took off with the cash, passports

MARTIN: A bit unreliable then

CLAIRE: Not really, we could always rely on him to bugger off at some point

MARTIN: Is he coming back?

CLAIRE: He usually does

STEVE RETURNS CARRYING A COOL BOX OF
MEDICINES AND BITS AND ANOTHER
BLANKET, HE SEES MARTIN WHO GETS UP
AND STEPS BACK

Dad, what are we doing here?

STEVE: We're having a holiday, daddy-daughter time, like we used to, remember

CLAIRE: Only this man was asking

MARTIN: [PUTTING OUT HIS HAND] Martin

STEVE: [IGNORING IT] Why?

MARTIN: Because that's my name?

STEVE: Why were you asking?

MARTIN: Just curious, I saw your daughter here, she looked cold, lost, I was concerned

STEVE: She's fine

MARTIN: She said

STEVE: So?

CLAIRE: I'm fine

MARTIN: Ok, I was just asking

STEVE: And you are?

MARTIN: Martin

STEVE: I mean, you are here for why?

MARTIN: Watching the sun rise

STEVE: Its very early

MARTIN: Sunrise often is

STEVE: You do this regularly?

MARTIN: Yes

STEVE: Bad sleeper then

MARTIN: Regularly, not frequently

CLAIRE: Reliably even

STEVE: Sorry?

MARTIN: Once a year, I do this once a year. Regularly.
Not every day. Frequently.

STEVE: Really. I didn't know there was anyone else
here

MARTIN: Neither did I. There usually isn't.

STEVE: We didn't see you

MARTIN: I was walking. Over there. You must have just
arrived

STEVE: Hours of driving to be alone in the back of
beyond only to find someone here

MARTIN: You've driven all night? Keen to start your
holiday, you wont even be able to get into your
hotel at this time

CLAIRE: Are we staying then?

STEVE: Yes. No. I'm not sure. We can stay, I mean if
you'd like that, we could stay at the Anchor,
you remember, we used to like it there [HE
POINTS]

MARTIN: There [HE POINTS IN A DIFFERENT DIRECTION]

STEVE: Wherever

MARTIN: You can't

STEVE: Can't what?

MARTIN: Stay at the Anchor

STEVE: We have in the past, B and B

MARTIN: That was then and this is now

STEVE: Well, we'll have a meal there, find somewhere else to stay

MARTIN: No meals either, like I said

STEVE: The Anchor? In the village? We passed it on the way in

MARTIN: It's shut

STEVE: Well obviously, at this time of day, it's shut. Remember it Claire?

CLAIRE: Not really

STEVE: We used to have dinner there, every holiday, always booked so we could sit round the old well with the glass table over it

MARTIN: Not recently you didn't

STEVE: Well no, not recently, but "regularly", in the past, when we had family holidays here

CLAIRE: When we were a family

STEVE: We've always been a family

CLAIRE: Mr and Mrs Dysfunctional

STEVE: Still a family

CLAIRE: And their drop dead gorgeous daughter

STEVE: Not funny.

CLAIRE: You're the expert

STEVE: In dysfunctional?

CLAIRE: In "not funny"

[BEAT]

STEVE: I need to get something from the car

MARTIN: Of course

STEVE: Claire?

CLAIRE: Fine dad

STEVE: ok

CLAIRE: Just

STEVE: Yes? Claire?

MARTIN: I'll be here

CLAIRE: Its ok

STEVE LEAVES, THERE IS A PAUSE AND A
SILENCE, JUST THE SOUND OF WIND AND
DISTANT WAVES.

MARTIN: Its beautiful isn't it, quiet, just the sound
of the birds, the wind and the waves

CLAIRE: And you.

MARTIN: I can be quiet

CLAIRE: I doubt it. [BEAT] And the faint humming of the
lamp, is it on all night?

MARTIN: No idea, I mean, I haven't spent the night.
[BEAT] I never noticed it before. The hum I
mean. Never noticed the hum.

CLAIRE: I can almost make out a tune

MARTIN: "Poor Johnny One Note"

CLAIRE: You're like my dad

MARTIN: In what way?

CLAIRE: You're not funny. [BEAT] It's beautiful here.

MARTIN: I always thought this was an odd place to have a lamppost, it seems a bit lost in the middle of nowhere

CLAIRE: I keep expecting to see Mr Tumnus

MARTIN: There's no snow, or wardrobe.

CLAIRE: Just a stranger who talks too much. [BEAT]

MARTIN: Yes

CLAIRE: And I love the sound of the sea, the waves against the cliff. I can feel the tide pulling at me, gently tugging me away

MARTIN: It's coming in. The tide.

CLAIRE: A pedantic stranger who talks too much

MARTIN: Sorry

CLAIRE: And the stars, fading into the light, melting away

MARTIN: They're always there, we just can't see them in the day

CLAIRE: An annoying pedantic stranger who talks too much

MARTIN: You can call me Martin

CLAIRE: Are you always so annoying Martin?

MARTIN: Not always, most of the time, but not absolutely always [HE SMILES]

CLAIRE: Very funny

MARTIN: It only takes one white crow to prove that not *all* crows are black

CLAIRE: [TURNING AWAY] You have no imagination, no romance in your soul

MARTIN: Not sure I, well any of us, have a soul, as such, not in the commonly accepted sense

CLAIRE: I didn't know there was a "commonly accepted sense"

STEVE RETURNS, CARRYING A COOL BOX,
PUTS IT DOWN, GETS OUT A BEER AND
OPENS IT, HE DOESN'T OFFER MARTIN OR
CLAIRE ONE HE DRINKS SEVERAL
BEERS OVER THE REST OF THE PLAY

STEVE: Sense of what?

MARTIN: Soul

STEVE: Ours is the only car in the car park

MARTIN: "The Sole Car" one might say

CLAIRE: Please don't

STEVE: So where's yours?

MARTIN: I walked

STEVE: Walked?

MARTIN: From the village

STEVE: Its miles

MARTIN: Two point seven

STEVE: Roughly

CLAIRE: Precisely, if Martin says, he has no imagination

MARTIN: Not that far, one stop

STEVE: Stop?

CLAIRE: This is a bus stop.

STEVE: I'm glad someone's following this. Why didn't you take the bus then

MARTIN: Too early

STEVE: Really

MARTIN: 8:32, the first one arrives at 8:32, has a 13 minute break and leaves at 8:45 back to the village, round the estate and on to the rest of the route changing drivers back at the terminus.

CLAIRE: Mr Tumnus!

STEVE: Who?

MARTIN: "Terminus". Route 4A. I'll catch that one back. I always catch the first bus of the day back.

STEVE: Fascinating. Really,. I have never been so enthralled. Knocks drying paint into ... somewhere else. Now, if you don't mind

MARTIN: No, carry on, I'll just ... well, I'll just sit here

HE SITS ON THE BENCH

STEVE: Listen, ...

CLAIRE: Martin

STEVE: Listen Martin, my daughter and I would like to be alone

MARTIN: I understand

STEVE: Well?

MARTIN: Me too, I'd like to be alone, I usually am

STEVE: I can believe that

MARTIN: When I'm here.

STEVE: This really isn't going the way I expected. I have just driven 5 hours to get here, to have some time

MARTIN: Daddy-daughter time

STEVE: Not daddy, daughter and Martin time

MARTIN: I'll just sit quietly, you wont know I'm here

STEVE: But you are there

MARTIN: Yes

STEVE: So I do know you're there, I can't unknow that you're there. Look, there you are!

MARTIN: Yes

STEVE: Can't you go somewhere else

MARTIN: No

STEVE: You have to be here?

MARTIN: Yes

STEVE: Then could you not come back later?

MARTIN: I always come on June 5th, walk out from the village, watch the sunrise then go home. It's what I do.

CLAIRE: Regularly

MARTIN: Regularly

CLAIRE: And reliably

STEVE: Some kind of anniversary?

MARTIN: Some kind

STEVE: Well this is great

CLAIRE: It doesn't matter Dad

MARTIN: I'll be going at 8:45

STEVE: Which is not for another 4 hours, by which time we'll also have had a visit from a bus, bus driver and whatever passengers are awake at this time of day

MARTIN: We'll all be gone at 8:45

CLAIRE: I might be too at this rate

STEVE: Not funny Claire

CLAIRE: Dad

STEVE: Hang on

CLAIRE: Dad

STEVE: Martin, this really is ...

CLAIRE: Dad!

STEVE: What?

CLAIRE: Pain ...

STEVE: Christ darling, sorry, yes sorry, of course.
Here ... let me ... [HE RUMMAGES THROUGH THE
DRUGS] these?

CLAIRE: No

STEVE: Sorry, these?

CLAIRE: Yes. Just one

STEVE: Do you need a drink?

HE LOOKS AROUND, THEN OFFERS HER HIS
BEER

CLAIRE: Water?

MARTIN FINDS THE WATER

MARTIN: Hang on, here, drink

CLAIRE: Just wet my lips

STEVE: Sorry, I didn't think, I'm not used to
I'll look after you

CLAIRE: Bit late

STEVE: I'm trying

CLAIRE: You're telling me

STEVE: I, wouldn't ...

MARTIN: Are you alright

STEVE: She's fine, we're doing fine

CLAIRE: He's lying

MARTIN: Can I do something else?

STEVE: Yes. Fuck off?

MARTIN: I'm ... I'm sorry, listen, I'll go

STEVE: I thought you *had* to be here

MARTIN: It's not that important, I mean, it is important, to me at least, but I can see that I can sit on the cliff steps. Over there. Or something. I mean I can be out of your way.

STEVE: Thank you

MARTIN: Can I ask, I mean, what the, what has Claire ...

STEVE: Cancer

MARTIN: Where?

CLAIRE: Where the sun don't shine, even after sunrise

MARTIN: I'm sorry. Serious?

STEVE: Terminal

CLAIRE: Tumnus, Terminus, Terminal - fourth conjunction reflexive verb, to be killed by your own arse hole

STEVE: Claire!

MARTIN: I never did Latin

CLAIRE: You didn't miss much, still it might be useful where I'm going

MARTIN: The angels might speak it I suppose

CLAIRE: Shut up Martin

MARTIN: I'm sorry. Can I ask? How long?

CLAIRE: I reckon I've had my last Sunday roast

MARTIN: You seem very

STEVE: Ill, she's very ill, now do you mind

MARTIN: Its none of my business, but should you really be here?

STEVE: No its not and yes we should.

CLAIRE: Even though no one else seems to agree

MARTIN: And you?

PAUSE

CLAIRE: Where else should I be?

MARTIN: In hospital?

CLAIRE: Tried that

MARTIN: At home?

STEVE: I just liberated her from there

MARTIN: Hospice?

PAUSE

CLAIRE: Soon, if I make it that far after this bloody road trip

STEVE: [A BIT DESPERATE] This was always our happy place, remember, all those holidays, I thought it'd do you good just to be here

CLAIRE: Kill or cure

STEVE: Claire

CLAIRE: What Dad? What? Perhaps if I don't mention it it wont happen? Is that it?

PAUSE

MARTIN: I used to drive buses

STEVE: I'm thrilled for you

MARTIN: I drove this route for years

STEVE: You forgot your bus

MARTIN: I don't drive here anymore, I don't drive anymore

CLAIRE: Dad, its ok, I don't mind, if he's here, it doesn't matter, don't waste time being angry

STEVE: I'll be quick

CLAIRE: No time for anger

STEVE: I just had this plan in my head

CLAIRE: No time for plans

STEVE: Of course, perhaps if we ...

CLAIRE: Just be honest? You said you'd be honest

STEVE: Right. Its hard

CLAIRE: It never was your strong point, not sure what is

STEVE: You sound like your mother

CLAIRE: And that's a bad thing right?

STEVE: That's not what I meant

CLAIRE: No, just what you said. She'll know by now you know.

STEVE: It's 4:30, we've a while yet

CLAIRE: She'll have called the house to check

STEVE: We're a long way from home

CLAIRE: Where is she?

STEVE: I don't know, she just called and asked me to look after you, said she needed some time off

CLAIRE: From looking after me

STEVE: I guess, a day, she just asked me to look in on you for a day. Well, a day and a bit

CLAIRE: So that she could do what?

STEVE: As your mother so kindly put it, none of my fucking business

MARTIN: Well that was rude

STEVE'S PHONE RINGS, THE ADDAMS
FAMILY THEME

CLAIRE: Mum?

MARTIN: Funny ring tone

STEVE: Its a compliment

MARTIN: Really?

STEVE: I used to really fancy Morticia .. the original one from the TV ...

MARTIN: Caroyln Jones, died of cancer you know

CLAIRE: Its very fashionable

STEVE: That's not why I fancied her

HE TAKES OUT HIS PHONE AND CANCELS
THE CALL

CLAIRE: Dad

STEVE: 5, 4, 3, 2, 1, ...

STEVE POINTS AT CLAIRE'S PHONE WHICH
STARTS TO RING, HE GIVES A SMUG
SMILE, SHE TAKES IT OUT AND ANSWERS

CLAIRE: Mum

STEVE: Thunderbirds are go!

CLAIRE: I know I'm not I'm not ... How did you know? You did? She did? I'm with Dad .. He ... no, wait, he wanted us to have some time ... sunrise by the beach ... the beach, where we used to holiday I know its early, sunrise often is ... mum

CLAIRE COVERS THE PHONE WITH HER HAND

STEVE: Well?

CLAIRE: She asked Auntie Eve to look in on her way to work, she found I wasn't there and called mum. She wants to talk to you

HE TAKES THE PHONE AND CANCELS THE CALL

STEVE: No she doesn't

SHE HOLDS OUT HER HAND AND HE HANDS THE PHONE BACK TO HER

MARTIN: She sounded angry

STEVE: If you met her you'd think she was lovely, like those orange juice dispensers in high class hotel buffets- all chrome, glass and style, until you notice someone filling them with cheap cartons of Aldi reconstituted orange.

CLAIRE: Dad means she's only classy on the outside

MARTIN: So she didn't know you were here?

STEVE: We're on the run ...

CLAIRE: Thelma and Louise. He's Thelma

MARTIN: Best not to drive off the cliff here, you might survive

CLAIRE: It was a bloody stupid idea, Dad, bringing me here

MARTIN: A holiday is never a stupid idea

CLAIRE: We're not on holiday

STEVE: Of course we are

CLAIRE: When Dad came to see me he bundled me out and into the car and we headed off here

MARTIN: Without telling anyone?

CLAIRE: Without telling anyone

MARTIN: But you're not well

STEVE: She's ok

CLAIRE: Except for the cancer

STEVE: Yes, apart from that

CLAIRE: My little demon

MARTIN: And that's why you're here?

STEVE: Its where we always holidayed as a family

CLAIRE: I'm surprised you remember

STEVE: Nostalgia really, my parents brought me here too, for years. I honeymooned here, with Claire's mother, our first holiday was here just after we met ... we always came here at important times

CLAIRE: He doesn't need to know that

STEVE: Here, give me your phone, we'll get Martin to take a selfie of us on holiday that we can send to your mum, that'll really piss her off

CLAIRE: Dad ...

MARTIN: I thought the point of a selfie was to take it yourself

STEVE: I thought he was one of the seven Dwarves.

CLAIRE: Please stop

MARTIN: I thought it was an abbreviation of "selfish"

CLAIRE: You're as bad as each other

STEVE: Come on Claire, your phone

CLAIRE: Use yours, you'll have the photo then, I wont need it

STEVE: My phone's rubbish, takes rubbish photos

CLAIRE: You take rubbish photos, don't blame the phone

STEVE: True, every photo comes out looking like a 'before' in a before and after advert

MARTIN: I'm not sure I'll be any better

CLAIRE: You can't be worse, believe me

STEVE: [TAKING CLAIRE'S CAMERA] Here, let me just ...

CLAIRE: Give it here, ok, right here, its set up just press the shutter icon

MARTIN: Ok

CLAIRE: And remember what you promised

STEVE: What?

MARTIN: I better do another if that's ok

CLAIRE: About the phone.

MARTIN: There you are

STEVE: Send it to your mother then, "Having a Wonderful time"

CLAIRE: I'm serious, you promised. Get the phone to Pete, he'll tidy it up, there's stuff on there you wouldn't want to see,

STEVE: I'm sure I'd cope

CLAIRE: Stuff I wouldn't want you to see

STEVE: I can delete photos, I know how to do that, sometimes I even do it by accident. Is Pete in the photos?

CLAIRE: No

STEVE: But he's seen them?

CLAIRE: No

STEVE: So why do I send it to him again?

CLAIRE: Because I trust him to do this. Completely.

STEVE: More than your boyfriend

CLAIRE: Definitely, way more than my boyfriend, wherever he's gone

STEVE: This is very hard for him

CLAIRE: Fuck him

STEVE: Have you known him long?

CLAIRE: Since school

STEVE: An old friend then

CLAIRE: You could say that

STEVE: Classmate

CLAIRE: Teacher

STEVE: Teacher?

CLAIRE: Don't look at me like that, he taught us art and photography. He's a friend, that's all, someone I trust, who I turn to when I need someone to talk to.

MARTIN: A father figure

CLAIRE: Not really, he's always there for me, unlike my father

STEVE: You can thank your mother for that

CLAIRE: You promised remember, you'd have to see them to delete them, I don't want that

STEVE: But its ok for your old teacher?

CLAIRE: Don't act all surprised, I don't want you or mum, especially not mum, seeing them, ever. I want to know that they're as gone as I will be. Gone from the phone, from the internet and from the cloud

MARTIN: I imagine all these precious memories all wrapped up and protected in fluffy clouds, safe from harm, somewhere in heaven

CLAIRE: You read that somewhere Martin, we know you have no imagination

MARTIN: Yes. I did. [BEAT] Perhaps the filenames will be in Latin?

CLAIRE: Dad?

STEVE: I'll remember. Clear the phone, burn your diaries, unlock the My Little Pony stables and free your Barbies

CLAIRE: Shut up

STEVE: You shouldn't speak to me like that

CLAIRE: There are some privileges to my condition

MARTIN: Why don't you delete them yourself

CLAIRE: I want them by me, till, well, till I can't look at them anymore and I might not actually care if they are deleted by then but I do care at the moment so I want to put plans for their destruction in place

MARTIN: Aren't the memories themselves enough

CLAIRE: Photos are just 'there', no effort, I don't have time to go through the effort of remembering

STEVE: Sometimes memories are better, softer, cleaned up

MARTIN: I sometimes wish we could record real life, you know, the emotions and feelings, re-run actual bits of life as if we were living them again feeling those feelings for real

CLAIRE: There's barely enough time to do everything once, why repeat things?

MARTIN: Perhaps to help us to understand how things got the way they are, the opportunities we missed

STEVE: God what a horrendous idea

MARTIN: Well, yes, if you recorded everything, but you'd only record things you might want to relive

STEVE: What would you record then

MARTIN: Not much if I'm honest

STEVE: Well you must have something to remember, something that drags you out here regularly once a year

MARTIN: Something I'd rather forget, but as I can't I have to acknowledge

STEVE: A pilgrimage

MARTIN: If you like,

CLAIRE: You used to live here?

MARTIN: Up the road, a bus driver

STEVE: We got that and it wasn't very interesting the first time

MARTIN: This was my route. We used to call this the End of the World, nothing past here but car park, cliffs, beach and miles of cold flat sea, well on a calm day. I swear it is the most beautiful route in England and I got to stop here for a 15 minute break at the mid point of each journey. Stop. Sit. Take in the view, listen to the sea, watch the children laughing and playing and thinking how lucky I was that I got every day what their parents gave them just one week in the year

STEVE: Why wouldn't you want to remember that?

MARTIN: Times changed. The view was as beautiful but sitting on this bench for my break, became well, less comfortable. It got to the stage where a lone man, sitting where children were playing, even if he wasn't looking at them, was treated with suspicion or even open hostility. I certainly wouldn't get out my phone, even though it didn't have a camera on it, just in case.

CLAIRE: People aren't like that

MARTIN: What did you think when you came back from the car and saw me with Claire?

STEVE: I thought "there's a nice stranger trying to be friendly and helpful"

CLAIRE: Really?

STEVE: I ... ok ... point taken ... Hardly a reason to give up and go

MARTIN: One summer's day, afternoon route, I'd got here a bit early so had over 20 minutes to wait and was settling back, on this bench, relaxing, I even bought myself an ice cream and had taken off my uniform hat and jacket - just another middle aged man by the sea. There was a family, well, a young mother with a little girl and a baby, they looked like they'd had a day on the beach and mum was trying to get them changed, back into some warm dry clothes so they could go back to town. They were over there, on the grass, behind the bus, I'd seen them when I got my 99.

CLAIRE: You don't have to tell us

MARTIN: Well, the mother had got the toddler to start to undress herself so turned her attentions to the baby and didn't notice when the little girl ran off.

CLAIRE: In fact I'd rather you didn't

MARTIN: First I knew was catching sight of this laughing little girl as she rounded the back of the bus, my instinct was to leap up and catch her, return her safely but ...

STEVE: But you didn't

MARTIN: If her mother had turned, seen her naked daughter being scooped up by a stranger, worse if she had already realised her daughter was missing and then seen me carrying her ...

CLAIRE: She'd have been grateful

MARTIN: She'd have screamed and there is no point in being innocent in the presence of a screaming mother

CLAIRE: Really

STEVE: She'd have turned the families into a mob; pitchforks, flaming torches and all. People have been attacked for less, the mob can't tell a paedophile from a Pokemon at the best of times, and a mob once started is impossible to stop

CLAIRE: And you feel bad

MARTIN: The driver should have been paying attention, overtaking the parked bus he was apparently distracted by his own child spreading chocolate over the car seat ... he was only doing about 10 miles an hour ... still ...

CLAIRE: Oh god

STEVE: The girl?

MARTIN: It happened in a flash, well, in a flash in slow motion, I can see it in my mind, like an old black and white silent film on a continuous loop. Except when I'm here, then its in colour and the seagulls scream and ...

CLAIRE: Unimaginable

MARTIN: I try not to have an imagination

CLAIRE: I'm sorry

MARTIN: So I come back every June 5th. I watch the sun rise, quietly, by myself. Well, usually by myself. Reflect.

STEVE: And if you had ...

MARTIN: Yes. Thank you.

CLAIRE: What happened?

MARTIN: I left the bus there, walked home, I said I didn't see anything, didn't see her till it was too late. It wasn't true but no one had noticed me, just some guy sat on a bench, just another witness to a stupid accident

CLAIRE: Do you still live around here?

MARTIN: I moved away, live up North, Yorkshire, in a box in a block of boxes, all the same, Schrödinger's OAP

STEVE: You have a cat

MARTIN: My neighbours have no idea if I'm alive or dead so I might as well be both, anyway I couldn't have a cat

CLAIRE: Why not?

MARTIN: I breed canaries.

STEVE: That would put the cat amongst the ...

CLAIRE: Caged birds, yuk, always hated the idea

MARTIN: Yorkshire canaries are famous

STEVE: For?

MARTIN: Their song, the way they sing, a good pair can fetch £400. A couple of years ago, at a canary conference in Italy, a pair of Yorkshire birds went for over 600 Euros.

CLAIRE: Canary Conference?

MARTIN: Mine don't fetch so much

STEVE: When you say "famous"?

MARTIN: World famous

STEVE: Have you always had an interest in birds?

CLAIRE: Dad

STEVE: What? I was just asking

CLAIRE: You were taking the piss

MARTIN: Since I was young, you remember "Trill makes budgies bounce with health"? Well, I was about 10 and there was this really lovely young teacher and I used to bounce into her classroom at the end of each day and offer to walk her home. At the end of term she bought me a box of Trill ... I ate some for effect then got my mum to get me a budgerigar to eat the rest

STEVE: So you're a budgie fancier

MARTIN: Budgerigar, I never abbreviate it, people shouldn't, Geoff Capes doesn't

STEVE: You're losing me again

CLAIRE: It's not that complicated

STEVE: Its not that interesting

MARTIN: I kept budgerigars for years, but switched to breeding and training canaries when I moved up North

STEVE: Training?

MARTIN: They have to be taught their song. I teach them

STEVE: Kiri te Canary with a Yorkshire accent

CLAIRE: Martin doesn't have a Yorkshire accent, he's from here, remember

MARTIN: I'm from Worthing actually, moved here when I was a teenager

STEVE: Your life story amazes me, do please tell me more

CLAIRE: Ignore him, how do you train a canary to sing?

MARTIN: Well, I start with a trim phone then I whistle to them, till they can repeat after me

STEVE: I really wish I could give half a flying fuck, I honestly do, but I need a piss, so 'scuse me, please carry on in my absence

STEVE LEAVES

SILENCE, NO COMMENT FROM CLAIRE,
MARTIN LOOKS WORRIED

MARTIN: Are you ok? Claire?

CLAIRE: He's not coping well

MARTIN: I guess he finds it hard

CLAIRE: Mum's worse

MARTIN: And you

CLAIRE: A week ago it would have been far too soon, I wasn't ready, but now, I don't know, I'm ok. Then I would have given anything for a day more, now I'd swap quite a lot for it to be over

MARTIN: You can have some of my time if you like, I really don't need it anymore

CLAIRE: No thanks

MARTIN: I wouldn't miss it

CLAIRE: No family?

MARTIN: No, never quite got around to it, you? Sorry, daft question

CLAIRE: No, engaged but he ran a mile when I got diagnosed, couldn't handle it, blamed himself for, you know, "going there". I guess the wedding's off

MARTIN: In France they have ghost brides, so long as you had planned the wedding it can go ahead even if you die

CLAIRE: Really?

MARTIN: I always wondered about the honeymoon

CLAIRE: Gross

MARTIN: Strange people, the French.

CLAIRE: Unlike Yorkshire canary trainers

MARTIN: Breeder really, and I was born in ...

CLAIRE: Worthing, yes, I know

MARTIN: Sorry

CLAIRE: Who's looking after your canaries at the moment?

MARTIN: A friend, well, fellow breeder, he has a key,
in case I don't come back

CLAIRE: Why wouldn't you go back

Yet each time you do

MARTIN: So far yes, I do

CLAIRE: Because?

MARTIN: I stand on the cliff top, in the silence and
the pre-dawn light waiting to ...

CLAIRE: Jump?

MARTIN: In my mind I just fall, silently, in slow
motion, but then the sun comes up, and I look
out there and ... well, its beautiful, and I
feel ok

CLAIRE: Every year

MARTIN: For eleven years

CLAIRE: Regularly

MARTIN: Regularly

MARTIN OFFERS CLAIRE SOME WATER,
HOLDS THE BOTTLE TO HER LIPS. JENNY
COMES IN

JENNY: Claire? Is that you? God it is. [ANGRY] You,
whoever you are, get away from my daughter,
what the hell are you doing, leave her alone

MARTIN: I was only, I mean

CLAIRE: Martin, its ok. [BEAT] Mum, this is Canary
Martin, the last new person I shall ever meet.
Canary Martin, meet the angry mob

JENNY: What?

CLAIRE: Private joke, you left your pitchfork behind

JENNY: This is no time to be funny, do you know how worried I've been? How selfish running away was?

CLAIRE: Hardly running mum, and you were the one having "a day off"

JENNY: I needed a break, you have no idea how terrible this has been for me

CLAIRE: Shame, my arse bleeds for you

JENNY: [SHOCKED] Where's your sodding father? This is all his doing you need to be at home not out here, you need proper care not your damned madman of an idiot father dragging you around the countryside in the middle of the night

CLAIRE: He is having a piss, somewhere, and yes thanks Mum, I've been doing ok

JENNY: No you haven't, what the fuck did he bring you here for

CLAIRE: He wants me to see the sunrise

JENNY: He needs locking up

CLAIRE: I want to see a sunrise, this sunrise, I want to see this sunrise, possibly my last, and I want to see it from here.

JENNY: No you don't, you want to come home where I can care for you properly

CLAIRE: Why?

JENNY: Why? Because you're ill Claire, very ill, you need caring for

CLAIRE: I'm not ill, I'm dying, ill is something you get better from

JENNY: That's not fair

CLAIRE: And the only way I'll stop dying is by being dead

JENNY: Stop it

CLAIRE: Why should I, this is my time, what's left of it

JENNY: That's your father speaking

CLAIRE: So, what I need ...

JENNY: Is medical care

CLAIRE: Is this sunrise

JENNY: When did you decide this?

CLAIRE: Just now

JENNY: When your father suggested it you mean

CLAIRE: When you arrived and started trying to take over what little is left of my life

JENNY: I'll put you in my car and take you home

CLAIRE: What will going home do for me? I might not even make it that far. At least here I will see a proper sunrise over the sea

JENNY: Will that make you better?

CLAIRE: It'll make me feel better

SHE GOES TO LIFT HER

JENNY: I can't lift you, you're a dead weight

SHE REALISE WHAT SHE SAID, STOPS,
SITS AND BURIES HER HEAD IN HER HANDS
CRYING

Oh god, I'm sorry

CLAIRE: Its ok mum

JENNY: It's not, it's not "ok", its so bloody, fucking not ok, it couldn't be less ok. Why you, Claire?

CLAIRE: That's what people say about every cancer sufferer, "Why Them?"

MARTIN: And lottery winner

STEVE RETURNS

STEVE: Who's won the lottery? Jenny? How did you get here

JENNY: I drove

STEVE: What, a guided missile? I mean how did you get here so fast, you only called a few minutes ago

JENNY: I was in the area

STEVE: In the area? Really? You just happened to be around here?

JENNY: Having a day off, remember

CLAIRE: From looking after me

JENNY: That's not what I yes, from looking after you. I just needed a break, a night away, one night's break. And a bit either side

STEVE: Fair enough, but here?

CLAIRE: You'll have a lifetime's break shortly

JENNY: Don't fucking judge me ok

CLAIRE: I'm not

JENNY: I needed some quiet time in a familiar place I suppose. [BEAT] I was already here, in the village, I'm staying at the Anchor, remember it

STEVE: I don't think so

JENNY: You must remember, we always went there

STEVE: I mean, I don't think you're staying there

JENNY: Sorry, are you calling me a liar?

STEVE: Possibly. Martin, why can't she be staying at The Anchor?

MARTIN: Because The Anchor has been closed for years.

JENNY: But I just drove past it

STEVE: Not quite the same as staying there

JENNY: It looked open

MARTIN: Interesting story that. You remember the well

JENNY: Yes, of course

MARTIN: Well, one night, a good few years ago now, the publican slid the glass top off, tied a fire extinguisher to his back and leapt down head first

JENNY: He drowned?

MARTIN: Not sure he was in a fit state to drown by the time he got to the bottom. Anyway, his wife shut the pub and has never opened it again. She still lives there and the bar is still stocked, but the front door is never open and the lights are never on.

STEVE: Spooky, who you gonna call?

CLAIRE: Ghostbusters!

STEVE: More like Scooby Doo

JENNY: Ok, so I'm not there, so what

CLAIRE: You're with Peter aren't you?

JENNY: [RELUCTANTLY] Yes

STEVE: Your teacher?

CLAIRE: No, that's Pete. Mum was with Peter. Her Peter.

STEVE: Sorry, who the hell is Peter when he's at home, wherever that is?

JENNY: Just the other side of the village

STEVE: Amazing, and Peter is?

CLAIRE: Mum's FWB

JENNY: You know that I hate that

STEVE: FWB?

MARTIN: Friend with benefits

STEVE AND CLAIRE LOOK AT HIM IN
SURPRISE

So I believe

JENNY: And his home is about five miles from here, he
has a cottage, I came here for a break

STEVE: With benefits?

JENNY: I'm not sure that's any of your business

STEVE: Neither am I, but I asked anyway

JENNY: Drop it

STEVE: How long has this been going on?

JENNY: We're not together, remember, this is my life

CLAIRE: Admit it Mum, be honest for once

STEVE: Yes go on Jenny, try some honesty

JENNY: Since our first holiday together

STEVE: Our first holiday was here

JENNY: And that's when I met him

STEVE: And you've been seeing him ever since

JENNY: Off and on, when you were busy, or fishing down
on the beach, endless hours of bloody fishing

STEVE: And you going for long walks ... oh wait, you
weren't walking

JENNY: Well done Sherlock

STEVE: Hang on. Was he the one you told me had chatted you up one holiday, tried to get you up to his room, but you said you refused

JENNY: Yes, we'd been having an affair for years by then but I was trying to call it off

STEVE: You lied to me

JENNY: I sort of tried to tell you, it just all came out wrong and then I couldn't go back and change the story

STEVE: Well you have now. So you didn't call it off

JENNY: I cooled it off, for a while, a few years, those years we didn't come here for a break, but you kept insisting we came back

STEVE: I'm lost for words

JENNY: Sorry

STEVE: No you're not

JENNY: No

STEVE: I used to want to come here because I thought all our happiest memories were here. Just down there, in that hidden cove, where I carved your name into a bit of driftwood and we had uncomfortable sex on the stones, a naked picnic and a skinny dip

CLAIRE: Too much information

MARTIN: You shouldn't swim after eating

JENNY: Hardlya picnic, you only provided beer

MARTIN: Or drinking

STEVE: I still have that photo of you juggling the empty bottles

CLAIRE: Way too much information

STEVE: You were there

CLAIRE: I don't remember it, mercifully

JENNY: She was a baby

STEVE: Your mother was fun, a free spirit, she used to cook Sunday lunch wearing nothing but high heels

CLAIRE: [COVERING HER EARS] la la la la la

JENNY: Stopped you going to the pub with your mates

CLAIRE: Shall I tell you about my sex life? See who grosses who out first

STEVE: Is that what's on your phone?

JENNY: I suggest you stop now ...

STEVE: Seems like that free spirit was freer than I thought, I didn't know we had an open relationship

JENNY: Don't tell me you never had an affair

STEVE: No

JENNY: Not one?

STEVE: No.

JENNY: Not Sam? Or that midget of a Mandi woman?

STEVE: Never

JENNY: Shit, I was sure you Shit

STEVE: I wonder if that carving I did will still be down in the cove

JENNY: It was driftwood, it will have drifted

STEVE: Like us

JENNY: We haven't so much drifted as ... what's the opposite of drifting?

STEVE: Sunk without trace?

PAUSE

JENNY: You can help me carry Claire to the car

STEVE: She'll miss the dawn

JENNY: Your car will be easier for her, its bigger,
I'll bring her stuff

PAUSE

STEVE: I've been drinking

JENNY: What? Its not even dawn yet

STEVE: I know, want some? We weren't planning on going
anywhere and it'd been a long night

CLAIRE: Mum

JENNY: Wait a minute Claire, she'll have to go in my
car, or I can call Peter, he has a bigger one

CLAIRE: Don't you dare

JENNY: Why not, he wont mind

CLAIRE: Dad will. I will. This is not time for
outsiders

JENNY: [POINTING AT MARTIN] You mean like him?

CLAIRE LOOKS AT MARTIN AND HOLDS HIS
HAND.

CLAIRE: Mum, I don't want to go home

JENNY: You'll be safe there

CLAIRE: Safe from what?

JENNY: From ... just safe, with friends and family
looking after you

STEVE: A-weeping and a-wailing and a-wringing of their
hands

JENNY: We do not

CLAIRE: No, but it feels like you might at any moment

STEVE: And she has her family here

CLAIRE: Safe in the bosom of my family surrounded by love?

JENNY: That's not fair

CLAIRE: at least here its quiet and I can hear the sea and feel the wind and see the stars

STEVE: We are all made of stardust

JENNY: You just can't stop yourself talking bollocks can you

STEVE: It's technically true

JENNY: Its the sort of hing you see painted on a dayglow dreamcatcher

CLAIRE: Can't you two be nice, just for me, for the next few hours

JENNY: We're not staying here a few hours, that's for certain

CLAIRE: Then be nice while I'm here

JENNY: What do you mean "While You're here", where are you going?

MARTIN: A destination without a journey, or the other way around

JENNY: Oh Christ

CLAIRE: Just be nice, who knows, you might find you like each other

JENNY: We can't just start liking each other now after all these years, grief isn't some kind of glue for patching up failed relationships,

STEVE: But we could pretend

CLAIRE: Don't put yourselves out on my account

JENNY: And after that?

STEVE: Back to distant loathing

MARTIN: Do you care what happens after, I mean, when you're, [HE INDICATES "GONE" WITH A GESTURE]

CLAIRE: Of course I do

MARTIN: Only once you're gone it's no longer ... well, nothing really affects you

CLAIRE: I don't care about big things, just the people I know ... knew ... when I wasn't [SHE COPIES THE GESTURE]

MARTIN: But you do care?

CLAIRE: Actually, in all honesty, I'm too tired to care about anything much right now - I'm just glad I don't have to decide who to spend Christmas with this year. I'm tired. Talk to me about the Canaries

JENNY: You're not going to the Canaries

STEVE: Singing canaries. Birds. Martin here is an expert

JENNY: Great, her last memories will be about bloody birds

CLAIRE: I wont remember, remembering is your job

JENNY: And I don't want to remember you like this, in pain, on a bloody bench on a cliff top at night being lectured on canaries by a stranger

STEVE: I'm happy to remember her any and every way I can

CLAIRE: I'm not dead yet, talk to me not about me. I'm just tired, Martin can talk me to sleep

STEVE: He can, or into a coma, believe me, I've only known him a few minutes and I can barely stay awake

JENNY: We need to get going

STEVE: She wont sleep long, I mean, if she wakes

CLAIRE PUTS HER HEAD ON MARTIN
(SHOULDER OR LAP OR WHATEVER) AND
LISTENS. STEVE TAKES JENNY BY THE ARM
AND PULLS HER AWAY.

JENNY: Where on earth did you dig him up?

STEVE: Martin? He's here on a, well, its a long story, he's a man with an enviable lack of imagination

JENNY: Why did you bring him here?

STEVE: I didn't, we just met him

JENNY: You mean he really is a stranger?

STEVE: Claire seems to like him, he's good with her, seems to know what to say to her when I don't

JENNY: You never did

STEVE: When she was young, very young, we were very close, we went everywhere together, talked to her all the time, loved her, looked after her, then she grew up and ...

JENNY: And learned what a little shit you were

STEVE: What a little shit you told her I was, and she believed you, because you're her mother

JENNY: And because it was true

STEVE: Maybe, to you, but not to her, we'd been spending time together recently, she'd been trying to form her own opinion of me, new, fresh, not handed down ... we were just beginning to think of a future and bam ... it was me she took with her to the hospital you know

JENNY: I thought she went with a friend

STEVE: She did. Me. [BEAT] Are you and Peter "a couple"?

JENNY: No, we couldn't live together, he's just ...
Something I need

STEVE: Someone?

JENNY: Something. An outlet, I never thought of him as
a threat to us, just something I needed for me,
like a hobby.

STEVE: How does Peter feel about that?

JENNY: I'm not sure I've ever asked him

STEVE: I'm sure you haven't, why would you, it's your
life and the rest of us are just there to be
used. Perhaps Claire would eventually have
formed a new opinion of you

JENNY: I'm sure you'd have guided her

STEVE: No, she was pretty good at working people out,
she *is* pretty good

THEY LOOK OVER AT CLAIRE AND MARTIN

JENNY: Despite everything, we made a beautiful child

STEVE: We had very little to do with it

JENNY: If I had my time over again there's some things
I'd do differently but this is where my world
ends, when she dies

STEVE: I'm not sure going first or being left behind
is worse

JENNY: What a waste of a life

STEVE: No life is a waste is it?

JENNY: She could have been anything

STEVE: Now who's talking bollocks, that's just an idea
to spur kids on, she could never have been a
top opera singer, Olympic champion, spaceman,
however much she'd wanted it

JENNY: Did she want to be any of those?

STEVE: No, she ... shit, I forgot, shit shit shit

JENNY: Forgot what

STEVE: I brought ...

STEVE GOES TO HIS BOXES AND GETS OUT
A RANGE OF THINGS; EASTER EGG, CARDS,
CRACKERS AND A SMALL TREE AND A
BIRTHDAY CAKE

JENNY: What the hell is all this

STEVE: She wanted to be 21, I mean, she wanted to make
it to 21, ...

JENNY: Next April ... she wont

STEVE: She bloody will, we'll get her there in one
quick party, Christmas, Easter, birthday. 21
[PAUSE] dah dah!

STEVE IS GETTING OUT HATS AND POPPERS
AND OTHER PARTY BITS; CHRISTMAS AND
BIRTHDAY HATS, HE FORCES ONE OF EACH
ONTO EVERYONE

JENNY: You're a fucking idiot

STEVE: That's the nicest thing you've said to me in
years

JENNY: It's the only thing I've said to you in years

STEVE: And now we sing

JENNY: What?

STEVE: Jingle Bells and Happy Birthday

JENNY: You forgot Easter

MARTIN: Hot Cross Buns?

CLAIRE DOESN'T SING, JENNY IS VERY
HALF HEARTED, STEVE IS ENTHUSIASTIC
AND MARTIN JOINS IN

ALL: Jingle Bells, jingle bells, jingle all the way,
oh what fun it is to ride in a one horse open
sleigh. Hot cross buns, hot cross buns, one a
penny, two a penny hot cross buns.

MARTIN: If you haven't any daughters give 'em to your
sons. [BEAT] sorry,

ALL: Happy birthday to you, happy birthday to you,
happy birthday dear Claire, happy birthday to
you.

MARTIN: 21 today, 21 today, you've got... well, you've
got ...

STEVE: Christmas Cake. Birthday Cake. And an Easter
Egg, here, help yourselves

JENNY: All you're missing is some ham sandwiches for
the funeral and you could have done the whole
bloody lot

STEVE: [TOASTING HER IN BEER] Happy Birthday beautiful

CLAIRE: [WEAKLY] Thank you Dad

PAUSE

MARTIN: Thank you. I should be ... Thank you

STEVE: What on earth for?

MARTIN: Giving me a new memory, here, 5th June

STEVE: Replacing a dead girl with a dying girl, you
really know how to have a good time

MARTIN: I never said she died, the toddler

JENNY: What toddler?

STEVE: Didn't she?

MARTIN: It was very bad, but she didn't die

JENNY: Claire will

MARTIN: I know, I'm sorry. In future when I come here every year to watch the sunrise I shall just sit here and remember her

JENNY: You're joking of course

STEVE: He's not

MARTIN: And I shall name my best canary Claire and teach it a new song full of the sounds of the sunrise

STEVE: My god you do have a bloody imagination after all

MARTIN: Goodbye Claire

STEVE: Aren't you going to wait for the sunrise?

MARTIN: Not this time, I'll leave it, three's a family, four's a crowd eh

MARTIN LEAVES

JENNY: Can we please go now, get Claire home, she'll be getting cold

STEVE: Not yet. It's almost dawn ...

STEVE SITS BESIDE CLAIRE AND AFTER A PAUSE JENNY SITS THE OTHER SIDE.
STEVE PULLS A PARTY POPPER AND THEY WATCH THE SUNRISE

CURTAIN