

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.



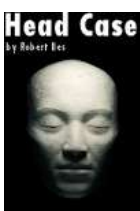
The Chip Van Plays Dixie

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 Chip Van Plays Dixie

by

Robert Iles

CHARACTERS

GARY

BABS

ACT I

SCENE 1

THE STAGING CONSISTS OF A PARK-STYLE BENCH WITH A BRASS PLAQUE, IT IS SITUATED OUTSIDE A COUNCIL CEMETERY BUT THERE IS NO NEED TO INDICATE THIS WITH RAILINGS OR SIGNS OR ANYTHING. THERE IS A COUNCIL WASTE BIN SLIGHTLY UPSTAGE BEHIND THE BENCH. THEY ARE WEARING COATS BECAUSE IT IS EVENING, RATHER THAN BECAUSE ITS COLD, A WARMISH EARLY AUTUMN.

GARY ENTERS STAGE LEFT, HE HAS A COAT ON AND IS CARRYING A REASONABLE SIZED RED, WHITE AND BLUE STRIPED PLASTIC BAG OF THE TYPE SOLD ON MARKET STALLS. HE TAKES IN THE VIEW, HEAVES A BIT OF A SIGH THEN GOES AND SITS ON ONE END OF THE BENCH. HE OPENS A PACK OF TWO SCOTCH EGGS, TAKES ONE OUT AND TAKES A BITE.

BABS ENTERS STAGE RIGHT, A BIT DISTRACTED, SHE IS WEARING A COAT AND CARRYING A LARGE BUNCH OF SUPERMARKET FLOWERS SHE WALKS ACROSS TO STAGE LEFT, PAUSES, THINKS, WALKS BACK AND LOOKS AROUND

GARY: You going in?

BABS: Mmm

GARY: Only it closes soon.

BABS: Does it? I didn't know they closed

GARY: Well, not as in "barred and shuttered", more like they close the gate and put up a sign.

BABS: So you can't get in

GARY: Unless you go through a hole in the fence, but it gets pretty dark

BABS: Right

GARY: And spooky

BABS: I'm not easily spooked

GARY: And you'll get your shoes wet in the grass and probably trip over something and get lost

BABS: But its still open at the moment

PAUSE - BABS DOESN'T MOVE

GARY: Want some scotch egg?

BABS: Sorry?

GARY: Scotch egg, want some?

SHE LOOKS AT THE HALF EATEN ONE HE IS HOLDING WITH SOME DISGUST TILL HE HOLDS OUT THE PACKET WITH OTHER ONE IN - SHE SHAKES HER HEAD. SHE SITS, OBVIOUSLY DISTRACTED AND TRYING TO COME TO A DECISION ABOUT WHETHER TO LEAVE OR GO IN, SHE PUTS HER HANDBAG DOWN BESIDE HER ON THE FLOOR.

Come a long way?

BABS: Not really, quarter of an hour, took almost as long to find somewhere to park. That's why I'm late.

GARY: Quite appropriate really

BABS: Sorry?

GARY: Everyone's *late* where you're going

BABS: Oh. I see. Yes.

GARY: First visit?

BABS: What? Err Yes. Sorry, do you mind if we don't, I mean, I'm not really in the mood.

PAUSE

GARY: Peaceful isn't it

BABS LOOKS AT HIM, ANNOYED BY THE
INTERRUPTION AND GETS UP TO GO,
TAKING HER BAG

GARY: Sorry. Didn't meant to I'll shut up.

BABS: It's ok, I need to [SHE INDICATES SHE HAS TO
GO] ... I'll ...

SHE STARTS TO GO, LEAVING THE FLOWERS

GARY: They're too long

BABS: (A little annoyed) What? What are too long? Too
long for what?

GARY: The flower stems, way too long. Waitrose are
they?

REALISING SHE'S LEFT THEM, BABS
STARTS TO COME BACK

BABS: Tesco. Finest if you must know. What do you
mean they're too long?

GARY: Long stem flowers are no good. Firstly, they
wont stand up in the vases, especially if
there's some wind which there usually is up
here and secondly they often get nicked by
drunks on their way home from the pub who want
to make a good impression as they crash through
the door and throw up on the Welcome mat.
[BEAT] There is a vase on the grave I suppose?

BABS: No idea, my first visit

GARY: Recent was it?

BABS: Two years.

GARY: Someone close?

BABS: Not really. My husband.

GARY: (slightly mocking) A good man, taken too soon

BABS: Did you know him? What am I saying, you don't
even know who he was.

GARY: Its what people say, dying somehow seems to make everyone into a "good person", especially if they died before their time. I often wonder whether you'd live longer by being a really bad person

BABS: No, you wouldn't, we just never speak ill of the dead. [BEAT] He was an absolute shit and I would happily have killed him

GARY: But

BABS: But what?

GARY: I was hoping there was a "but" as in "I would happily have killed him, but"

BABS: But he died anyway. [BEAT] He was a shit.
[BEAT] "But nothing" I guess, it's also just something people say, we don't do it. Normal people don't kill people.

GARY: And we're normal.

BABS: The jury's out

PAUSE

BABS GOES TO LEAVE

GARY: How do you know I don't know you?

BABS: Do you?

GARY: I don't know, I might, I know a lot of people, who are you?

BABS: Goodbye

BABS GOES TO LEAVE AGAIN

GARY: Here ...

GARY TAKES A VASE AND A PAIR OF SCISSORS FROM HIS BAG AND PUTS THEM ON THE BENCH BETWEEN THEM. BABS LOOKS AT THEM FOR A SHORT WHILE, APPARENTLY CONFUSED.

BABS: You just happen to have a spare?

GARY: Always. They get stolen, or broken, or moved to another grave by someone too lazy, mean or forgetful to get their own. Just a hint for next time, simpler flowers last longer.

BABS: Thanks but there wont be a next time.

SHE STARTS HALF HEARTEDLY CUTTING AND
PLONKING THE FLOWERS IN THE VASE,
AFTER A WHILE, HE TAKES OVER

Have you been visiting someone?

GARY: My wife, every friday

BABS: That's nice ... I mean that you visit, not that she's um...

GARY: Part habit, part tradition if I'm honest.
[BEAT] A bit of quiet time, spend a couple of hours with her. [BEAT] I come up here on a friday afternoon, tidy the grave, fresh flowers from our garden, sit on this bench till they close, enjoy the view a bit, pick up some chips and home.

BABS: Chips. Proper chips. I shall miss them.

GARY: No need, I get them from a travelling chip van, he'll be here soon, struggling up the hill, horn blaring Dixie to announce his arrival, a bit unnecessary given the waft of fried fish smells that precede him everywhere ...

BABS: Still, she is ... she was a lucky woman

GARY: Not Lucky, not really, cancer, rather unpleasant but swift

BABS: I mean to have you, still spending time like this every week for her

GARY: For me. I do it for me.

BABS: Of course ...

GARY: Too little and definitely too late for her

BABS: (Beat - Looks at her watch) Damn, when does it close?

GARY: (Looking at his watch) Now!

BABS: Shit.

GARY: Missed it I'm afraid

BABS: Yes, thank you, I realise that. Its your fault

BABS STARTS GATHERING HER THINGS TO
LEAVE

GARY: You can come back tomorrow

BABS: I can't actually.

GARY: The day after.

BABS: No.

GARY: (BEAT) Same time next Friday?

BABS: I'm leaving

GARY: I can see

BABS: No, I mean, tomorrow, I'm leaving

GARY: Going away?

BABS: Precisely

GARY: Anywhere nice

BABS: Australia. New start.

GARY: Off to find your own little Ramsey Street.

BABS: (Getting up to go) Listen, its been, well, I'm not sure, 'something' talking with you, I must go.

GARY: Goodbye

BABS: Yes

GARY: Don't forget your flowers

BABS: I've no where to put them, the house is all closed up, sold and shipped out. You have them, put them on your wife's grave, I'm sure she deserved them more than he did, I was stupid to bring them, some dumb idea about laying the ghost and leaving the past behind. I'd have felt guilty if I hadn't, like he won, now I just feel guilty that I tried and couldn't even get that right

GARY: You a catholic by any chance?

BABS: No. Why?

GARY: You seem to do a good line in guilt that's all

BABS: Guilty as charged

GARY: (Smiles) I'll put them there for you. Tomorrow.

BABS: Why?

GARY: Why not ... a gesture ... where is he?

BABS: (Sitting again, a bit unsure, getting a scrap of paper from her pocket) That's good of you, not sure its the same, still, for the look of the thing. It's ... Jones, Peter Jones, NW146, wherever that is

GARY: It's his new post code, each plot is marked with a post with a code on it ... he's near the back on the right. It slopes down towards the farm. Nice spot.

BABS: (She hands him the paper) You seem very familiar with the place?

GARY: When I was still at school my first job was here, summer holiday work to earn some money and buy some hi-fi, I'd have preferred an indoor job actually but the crem turned me down so I applied here - I lied about my age and cried at the interview when I was found out ... I got the job.

BABS: Grave digger?

GARY: No. Grass cutter, we cut between the graves with shears then, down on our knees. When it rained we washed pots in the greenhouse, sometimes we'd help out with a particularly awkward dig. A whole summer, turned out it was really rather pleasant, plenty of breaks as we weren't allowed to work during an actual funeral. The diggers were all wiry old men, hard muscled, soft in heart and head, good people, curiously kind to an out of his depth school boy sampling the working world

BABS: My first job was in Higgs Bakers, down in the town, Saturday girl working the counter. God I was naive, had an affair with the boss, bloody stupid, he was old enough to be my father

GARY: He was my father

BABS: (shocked) Sorry?

GARY: (Holding out his hand) Gary Higgs

BABS: (Getting up to go, deeply embarrassed) Babs Jones. Barbara Wallis as was then. Listen, I'm ...

GARY: Sit, Stay. I thought you seemed familiar

BABS: I don't know what to say

GARY: You weren't the only one. He was a randy baker, very kneady, always up for a roll

BABS: Do you make a joke about everything?

GARY: No, just the more awkward stuff, lightens the moment don't you think

BABS: No

GARY: I don't think we ever actually met, I didn't come into the shop much then

BABS: I'm sorry ...

GARY: Don't be, well, not on my account, nor mum's. They're both gone now anyway

BABS: I didn't know that.

GARY: No reason why you should

BABS: When?

GARY: A good few years ago now, together

BABS: Crikey, that's terrible,

GARY: Inevitable really, if you drive your car off the top of a cliff. They didn't leave a note but apparently they must have meant to do it. The police recovered the SatNav, straight from our house to the cliff car park ... no other reason to go there.

BABS: Wow.

GARY: They said that the SatNav was still screaming "Turn Around When Possible"

BABS: Another joke, why do you do that? Its so inappropriate. Are they actually alive and well somewhere?

GARY: Why? Want to get together with Dad again?

BABS: God no ... no, absolutely not, just ... I don't know whether to feel sympathy or not ..

GARY: Cliff, plummet, death, all that's true - the SatNav is a little colour I added to make the story flow better.

PAUSE

BABS: I knew an actress who used to do that

GARY: Drive off cliffs?

BABS: No record those voices for automated systems. One day she'd be doing "I'm Barbie, let's party" and the next "please hold, your call is important to us" or "pull up, you are about to stall"

GARY: Someone has to I suppose. It might have been her voice they last heard ... "You have reached your destination" .. they probably thought it was St Peter

BABS: You don't seem very upset

GARY: I did upset, it didn't help. I had my own troubles and I didn't end it all. I inherited early but I lost my parents twice, once because they died and once because their end proved I knew almost nothing important about either of them - it might as well have been the death of strangers

PAUSE

BABS: Any idea why they did it?

GARY: Fear of old age, Thelma and Louise fixation who knows - just here today, Dorset beach tomorrow.

BABS: Wow.

GARY: You said

BABS: (Getting up) I should probably ...

GARY: Stay. It makes a change to have someone to talk to

BABS: You should join a club or something, meet new people, make friends

GARY: I've got friends, lots, and I am in plenty of clubs. Say hello to the immediate past president of the local Rotary and the membership secretary of the pub darts team, want to join?

BABS: No. Thank you.

GARY: I meant it made a change to have someone to talk to here. On a Friday, waiting for the sound of Dixie and the smell of unidentified frying objects to waft up the hill.

BABS: Any family?

GARY: A son, married, very successful, or so he tells me, too successful to come here with me more than once a year apparently. He emails me. So he says. I actually don't do email even though he set it up for me. I don't, well, it just didn't seem worth the effort, he never said anything interesting and the rest of the time it just seemed to be fabulous false offers, larger penis, Nigerian fortunes, unbelievable earning opportunities and young girls desperate to meet me for strange and never fully explained reasons.

BABS: You should try, email I mean, not meeting the girls, its a good way of keeping in touch when you're far apart

GARY: He only lives ten miles away

BABS: Perhaps if you sent him the odd email, you know, something interesting, he might open up, be more forthcoming, more ...

GARY: Interesting .. or odd

BABS: Worth a try?

GARY: I'll add it to my list of things needing doing. It's a long list, a "write only" list in that I write things on it but never bother to read it back - I find that the act of writing it down "to be done" gives me the same sort of satisfaction as actually doing it.

BABS: Very convenient

GARY: Thank you. Do you have family?

BABS: Two daughters, well, three if you include my son. He was three years younger than the twins and they spent his entire childhood dressing him up and treating him like a doll, or a sister, something he rather took to if I'm honest - they're all very close. To each other I mean. Close to each other.

GARY: But not to you

BABS: To me? No. He's turned out nice though, a somewhat confused personality and strange dress sense, but really ... nice.

GARY: "Nice" is not a nice way to describe anyone, let alone your own son, at best it's a non-description for someone nondescript. You'll be saying he's harmless next

BABS: Mostly, he's mostly harmless

GARY: And they are in Australia?

BABS: (Emphatically bringing conversation to an end)
No.

PAUSE. GARY GETS UP AND GOES
DOWNSTAGE TO LOOK AT THE VIEW, BABS
PREPARES TO LEAVE.

GARY: I love this view

BABS: (Frustrated, too polite to go) Really? It's not much to look at is it ... I mean, hardly a picture postcard

GARY: True, but that's my home, my memories. My whole life can be taken in with one sweep of your hand. School, work, marriage, everything all there, laid out in front of me like a memory board.

BABS: I suppose, if you've never moved away

GARY: No, never did. That house over there, you see the market square, and just behind that the old town houses

BABS: Very nice

GARY: Well, behind that are the ex-council properties, mine's the one on the far right and the bakers is round the corner, just behind the high street

BABS: Clonmell Road, I remember, did you take it over?

GARY: No, Dad sold it, did rather well actually, its an artisan bakery coffee shop now, very twee, except that they don't bake they buy in ... I became an international courier instead

BABS: Really, interesting I expect, all that travel - but I thought you said you'd never left?

GARY: Well, when I say "International courier" what I really mean, in all honesty, is I became a postman - but I did deliver postcards from far off places, before people stopped sending postcards

BABS: And you're retired?

GARY: Redundant. Apparently. So they said. [BEAT] Where do you live?

BABS: I was born in Manchester, we moved here when I was eight and lived in the boxy little terraces near the station. After we married we moved back to Manchester for a while then, just before Peter died back here onto the development down by the river

GARY: The estate, what are they like?

BABS: We prefer "development", they're nice, but the gardens flood quite often, the house too sometimes

GARY: Knew they would, dumb place to build anything if you ask me - only no one did. Wouldn't do for me, I like my garden, its not big but it does the flowers for here, sprouts for christmas, a few herbs and some raspberries - keeps me happy. Must be nice being down near the fields, having just the sheep as your neighbours

BABS: So people say, but I hate sheep, nasty eyes, shifty animals, can't bear them.

GARY: I always thought of them more along the wooly, slightly daft, nursery rhyme line myself, not sure I've ever met anyone who actually hates sheep.

BABS: When I was young we holidayed on a farm one year and they had a few sheep in the yard, treated them more like pets than future food. One night, I woke with a start and opened my eyes to be confronted, barely inches away, almost nose to nose, by a sheep chewing in that bizarre way they have and staring at me with the night light reflecting in those devil eyes of his

GARY: hers

BABS: Hers, his, whatever, it had come up the stairs, crept into my room and was ready to pounce

GARY: I'm not sure sheep can pounce

BABS: I screamed, we cut the holiday short and it turned me vegetarian over night, I've had a complete phobia about sheep ever since.

GARY: Really?

BABS: Yes. It's not funny you know, ovinaphobia

GARY: Is that what its called?

BABS: I think so, its not very common so I don't know if it has a real name

GARY: I'm not sure Australia is a good destination for you .. what with all the sheep

BABS: I plan on staying in the city

PAUSE

GARY: Can I kiss you?

BABS: What? No!

GARY: (shrugs) Ok

BABS: Why would you ask that?

GARY: I don't get to kiss so many people now. I miss it.

BABS: So you want to kiss strangers?

GARY: You're no stranger than most, I've not asked anyone before

BABS: Strangers don't kiss, I mean, I don't kiss strangers, its ... weird

GARY: We're not really strangers, we grew up in the same area, you slept with my father, I'd say we were at least distantly acquainted

BABS: You have a knack of being quite charmingly unpleasant

GARY: Sorry

HE SITS BACK ON THE BENCH, SHE GOES TO WALK AWAY, REALISES SHE'S LEFT HER BAG AND COMES BACK TO THE BENCH

Have you seen the plaque?

BABS: What plaque?

GARY: Here, on the bench

BABS: (Reading) "Ain't it Grand to be Bloomin' Well Dead"

GARY: It's an old Victorian music hall song

BABS: I know, "Look at the coffin, bloomin' great Handles"

TOGETHER: (Sing) "Ain't it grand to be bloomin well dead"

BABS: Why would someone put that on a public bench by a cemetery?

GARY: It's the work of the Ninja Memorialists

BABS: Who?

GARY: A secretive organisation which sneak around at night screwing made-up plaques to public objects. There's quite a few of them around here if you look

BABS: You made that up. Was it you?

GARY: No I didn't and no it wasn't ... if you weren't leaving for the grand old land of Aus I would take you on a tour of their work

BABS: Thanks, but no thanks ...

PAUSE

"Look at the neighbours, bloomin' delighted"

GARY: You wouldn't get away with songs like that now, death and sex have swapped places in comedy since then

BABS: Just made me think, that's all, I didn't go to my husband's funeral, the neighbours had a field day and the kids haven't forgiven me

GARY: "Look at the Missus, bloomin' well laughin'" ... Is that the reason for the clean break and fresh start

BABS: It's a part of the story. [BEAT] Are you going to end up here?

GARY: Every Friday, regular as tax demands

BABS: No, I mean buried here, with your wife

GARY: God no, I'm off to Crematia, the land beyond the crematorium ... no worm's going to eat my flesh thank you very much

BABS: Do you think your wife will be waiting for you?

GARY: "Dead's dead deary" as my old neighbour used to say. I've never been much of an afterlife sort of a person - it always seemed a bit ill thought out to me, I mean what would an Egyptian tomb builder do in the afterlife? Anyway, I wasn't planning on going anytime soon, not ready yet

BABS: Are you ever ready?

GARY: I think so, like when you're on holiday, day one you just want to stay there forever but by the end of a holiday you're ready to go home, it's "done"

BABS: I never want to come home from holiday

GARY: Maybe you will, when you get there. [BEAT] Old age for me, a natural death

BABS: That's not natural

GARY: What isn't?

BABS: Dying of old age, its not what nature does. Animals die being eaten alive or through disease or accident, only humans and their pets have "old age" as a possible outcome and pets usually go when their owners decide. We have cursed ourselves with long, lingering decay

GARY: My my, very QI, where did that come from?

BABS: It's just always bothered me, I mean, arsenic poisoning, malaria, shark attack these could all be described as natural, "nature red in tooth and claw", whereas lying in a bed dying of organ failure while machines breathe for you, how can that be natural

GARY: Thank you David Attenborough, I shall write to the Health Secretary tomorrow and suggest a radical shake-up, we'll call it the Babs Protocol in honour of its founder, who has scarpered to the other side of the world to be eaten by Dingbats

BABS: Dingos, Dingbats is a computer font

GARY: I was being symbolic

BABS: (Laughing - once she gets it) Ha ha

GARY: Made you laugh

BABS: Thank you.

GARY: Don't mention it.

IT STARTS TO DIM, EVENING IS
APPROACHING, AT SOME POINT A BRIGHT
OVERHEAD LIGHT COMES ON (THE STREET
LAMP JUST ABOVE THEM, JUST OUT OF
SIGHT) AND EVENTUALLY THEY ARE BATHED
IN A POOL OF LIGHT WHILE THE
SURROUNDING STAGE IS DARK ...

GARY: Your turn

BABS: What?

GARY: Make me laugh

BABS: How?

GARY: I don't know, a funny story, an amusing fact, a
little known rhetorical conundrum. You could
even try a joke.

BABS: I don't know any jokes

GARY: I can believe that

PAUSE

BABS: I read, a while ago, Reader's Digest I think,
or an airline magazine, that somewhere in China

GARY: Very big, China

BABS: Somewhere in China there was a tradition that
the more people who attended your funeral the
better a person you were, in the end, the
police had to ban the practice of using
strippers to attract extra mourners

GARY: I had an aunt who did that once

BABS: Was a stripper?

GARY: Not exactly, she streaked through a friends
funeral, she was in her 70s, apparently it was
a promise they'd made each other when they were
teenagers, the last to die would streak at the
other's wake.

BABS: Good for her

GARY: Well that was the excuse she gave to the stricken widow anyway. Quite put me off my ham sandwich

BABS: I didn't make you laugh though

GARY: Inwardly, I smiled inwardly, it counts

PAUSE

You never said why you needed a fresh start.

BABS: No. No I didn't

GARY: So, have you committed some heinous crime and decide to go join your fellow convicts? It seems like I have less to keep me here than you do but I can't imagine anything so terrible as to make me go, give up family, friends and country. What's your secret

BABS: It's a secret.

GARY: You don't seem like a bad person, not to me, and really bad people can't get a visa to Australia, so, if you wont tell me why you're going, tell me why they have decided to let you in. What have you offered them?

BABS: I was good at art at school, really good by their standards, I could draw and paint better than anyone there, even better than the art teachers we had. They encouraged me to make a go of it once I left, trouble was, their standards were so low that I soon discovered I was somewhat third rate in the real world.

GARY: Was it you who did the drawings in the shop?

BABS: The ones around the till and the price board, yes, that was me

GARY: I always wondered who did them, you didn't sign them, they're still there, in the coffee shop, all framed on the wall now

BABS: They shall count as my legacy, probably my only exhibition. [BEAT] Is the one of your dad still there?

GARY: No. It's at home, I kept that one

BABS: (PAUSE) In the end, after a sympathy commission from a local vet I made a niche for myself doing anthropomorphic portraits of cats and dogs with slightly enlarged eyes for doting owners, who fortunately only ever saw the drawings through misty eyes as they'd recently had Rover or Tigger or whoever put down.

GARY: And that's what Australia wants is it?

BABS: No, that only really lasted until we came back here as it was a word of mouth kind of a business and I just couldn't get re-started once we'd moved. In the end I decided to teach, converted the garage into a small studio and advertised life drawing classes - I thought that the most catchy approach.

GARY: I like your thinking

BABS: Trouble was, I signed up a small class before I signed up a model so, in desperation I asked my niece, I knew she'd be game but we had to keep it secret from my sister, who's one of those people who thinks nudity and sex are inseparable, she once complained to the BBC about the nudity in a radio play.

GARY: I'm sensing this story doesn't end well

BABS: Shut up and listen. Please. This isn't easy

GARY: Sorry Ma'm

BABS: Anyway, there we were, in the studio, with my niece all Kate Winslett, you know, that scene from Titanic, anyway, there she was draped naked across a chaise longue made up of some old plastic crates and a dusty throw and in walks Peter

GARY: Your husband

BABS: My husband, who'd never been in my studio or shown an interest in my work before and took way too long apologising and backing out.

GARY: Subtle

BABS: Shut up. Really. Anyway, after the class, I'm stuck talking to the, well, let's be nice and call them students, and Peter offers to take my niece home and, without thinking I say thanks and carry on.

GARY: And so to the secret

BABS: Actually it was widely reported at the time

GARY: I don't read the local paper, the threshold for what they call news is too low for me

BABS: On the way home, he

GARY: Tried it on?

BABS: That's what she says, though not how she says it

GARY: No offence. Do you believe her?

BABS: Yes, of course I do, why would she lie about it, he was old enough ...

GARY: Was old enough to be her father? What did he say?

BABS: He was ... "distracted", swerved, hit a tree, ended up here

GARY: And your niece?

BABS: Lost a leg and the sight in one eye, has a lot of facial scarring and blames me. Her mother blames me. My kids, blame me and the newspapers blamed me. In fact, as I walk these streets and hear the whispers it would seem that everyone blames me.

GARY: Even you

BABS: Those are the memories that I have locked in that view you seem to love so much.

GARY: You need to move on, not move away

BABS: You need to keep your advice to yourself.

PAUSE

TOGETHER: Sorry.

PAUSE

GARY: Your husband, he was a shit, the blame is his not yours

BABS: Your father, he was, you know, kind, a kind man

GARY: He took advantage

BABS: It wasn't like that ...

GARY: Yes, yes it was. If it was your idea he should have simply said 'no' if it was his, well, he should have known better. A lot better. Don't add that to the pile of blame you've heaped on yourself

BABS: I don't

GARY: Well I shalln't lavish my forgiveness on you then

BABS: I don't need it. Do I?

GARY: Not in my book

BABS: I'm going because, well, just because its all got too much

GARY: That's a reason to stomp out and slam the door, not to emigrate. You should make a scene then creep back in later looking a bit sheepish, sorry, erm, quiet. It might not have blown over, but the heat will have gone out of it and your family will still be your family

BABS: And will still blame me. I'm hoping distance might heal some of the scars that time wont touch ...

PAUSE

GARY: Thank you

BABS: What for?

GARY: For saying my father was kind

BABS: He was

GARY: I thought so, it wasn't a popular opinion around here

BABS: Thank you too

GARY: For?

BABS: For .. just thank you

PAUSE

GARY: I could visit you. In Australia

BABS: You wont though, will you

GARY: No

BABS: I could email

GARY: We could email

BABS: Could you do me a favour

GARY: What?

BABS: Send me a copy of that drawing I did of your Dad ...

GARY: I don't know how

BABS: I bet your son does, speak to him

(She grabs a pen from here bag, he takes out the scrap of paper she'd given him and she writes down her address) Here. I mean it.

GARY: Ok.

BY NOW THE STAGE IS ESSENTIALLY DARK WITH JUST THE OVERHEAD LIGHT FROM THE STREET LIGHT.

BABS: I must go

GARY: You said. How about dinner?

BABS: I leave tomorrow, remember?

GARY: Tonight

BABS: With you?

GARY: Yes

BABS: Just dinner?

GARY: Just dinner

BABS: (Picking up her bag) Ok, why not, my car is just over

HE TAKES HER BAG AND PUTS IT BACK DOWN, TAKES OFF HIS COAT AND LAYS IT ON THE BENCH AS A "TABLE CLOTH" PUTS THE FLOWERS ON THE BIN BEHIND THE BENCH AND INVITES HER TO SIT AS IF HE WERE A WAITER ... SHE COMES OVER, PAUSES, KISSES HIM ON THE CHEEK AND SITS, HE SITS ON HIS END OF THE BENCH, THE CHIP VAN PLAYS DIXIE OFF, THEY STARE AT THE VIEW WITHOUT LOOKING AT EACH OTHER

CURTAIN