



TWELVE VIEWS
By Paul Smith

These scripts are protected by copyright laws.
No performance of these scripts – IN ANY MEDIA – may be undertaken without payment of the
appropriate fee and obtaining a licence.

For further information, please contact theatreplays@proton.me

This collection ©2024

CONTENTS

Note from writer	Page 3
A Thought	Page 4
A Plan	Page 9
A Pleasure	Page 15
A Break	Page 22
A Chance	Page 30
A Favour	Page 37
A Moment	Page 45
A Gift	Page 52
A Look	Page 61
A Pain	Page 67
A Laugh	Page 72
A Blast	Page 81

Note from the writer

These twelve plays are designed to be performed in any combination – singly or as a 2 together or any number together.

They can be performed in any order.

Staging should be as simple as they suggest – a single bench.

Props are minimal, with the belt used in A FAVOUR being the only complicated one.

The first six listed have been previously published singly and as a collection.

PS

A THOUGHT

by Paul Smith

CHARACTERS

A VICAR – mid 40's – in a jacket with dog collar

A NUN – mid-late 30's

A bench in a park overlooking a town. Secluded

The VICAR is seated on the bench looking at his smart phone and is obviously writing/replying to messages.

The NUN enters after a short time; she carries a small shoulder bag and sits down. The VICAR looks up at her and smiles. He puts his phone away. After a silence, they speak. It is stilted and awkward to begin with.

VICAR Lovely view.

NUN Yes. Yes it is. Warm evening too.

VICAR It is. Thought it might rain earlier. Seemed a little stormy. But it didn't. Rain. Decided to stay a nice day.

NUN Have you been here long?

VICAR About ten minutes. Was just catching up with some emails. You can never get away from them these days can you?

NUN I don't use a phone much. Just when I am out and about. Even then I try to have a natural down time. Lost in my own thoughts, rather than in anyone else's.

VICAR Good move. I hate it really. Terrible habit. Checking the phone all the time. Wish I could kick it. Anyway, it's in the pocket now and on silent. It's been a trying day and all the phone is doing is reminding me of it. Hope your day has been better.

NUN I think it could probably have been worse. Got all my usual chores done and out of the way early, so I could get on with the more important jobs and then was able to have a bit of time to relax before I came out this evening.

VICAR That's why I came up here. In fact, I come here fairly often. When I am stressed. Just love the view. Can see the office there and home over there (he points in different directions). Not a long journey. I cycle it. Anything to help the fitness.

NUN I like cycling too. I have to be careful with my asthma though, so can't overdo it.

VICAR My sister suffers from asthma. Nasty, but she copes.

NUN You learn how to manage it.

A PAUSE

NUN You are right, it is a lovely view. Relaxing. Peaceful. I don't know why I haven't found it before.

VICAR It's not easy to find. But once you have, you keep it a secret from only those you really want to share it with.

NUN Doubt I will tell anyone then.

VICAR Not even someone special to you?

NUN Not sure I know anyone special enough.

VICAR No one?

NUN I don't think so. Yet. Well....maybe....but....

VICAR I'm sorry.

NUN Don't be. I am happy enough now that I'm here. I will keep it a secret. My secret.

VICAR I don't have many secrets. I think I am too open with people to keep much hidden away. Unlike my Mother. She kept her secret going for many years. She spent so much effort covering her tracks, acting like everything was ok. Hiding things. Disguising. Pretending. It became her norm. But the effort involved must have been immense.

In a very bizarre sort of way, when it all came out and we looked back on everything we could suddenly realise why certain things happened and why certain things didn't. It was almost difficult not to admire her. She had only wanted to protect us from her own excess she said. For the whole of my childhood she was an alcoholic. I never knew the real her. The stroke saved her from death by alcohol.

A PAUSE

Goodness. I am sorry. No ideas why I'm telling you all this.

NUN It's fine.

VICAR It's this place. So relaxed I end up telling you the story of my life.

NUN Good place for a confessional.

VICAR Yes, Yes, you're right. Not many places you feel at ease doing that in the open air. A sympathetic ear is always helpful.

NUN Not sure we always have one so very close at hand the business we are in.

VICAR And you can't burden each other with problems really. Not fair. Deal with enough of these from the public.

NUN I have less experience of that in some ways. Hidden away. It's so quiet where I am. See so few people on an hour by hour basis. All the more reason to get out when I get the opportunity. See what's going on in the outside world. Funnily enough I am the direct opposite of my Mother too. I spend my life shut away in a clinical environment. She was an athlete. Represented Scotland in a Commonwealth Games. Long distance runner. Hill running champion too. She was never indoors. Always out. It was great watching her compete, but I always wanted her home. With the family. We coped. She still goes to the gym regularly. 75 now. Loves it.

VICAR Sounds an amazing woman.

NUN She was always worried whether I made the right career choice. But I knew it was. It's a calling I suppose.

VICAR Same with me. I knew that this was the path for me from an early age. It was a struggle though. Not that I regret it. But sometimes.... Iwell.....who knows what's around the corner.

NUN Yes. Yes, you're right.

A PAUSE

NUN It's funny. From here you see the church at a completely different angle. I had no idea the spire was slightly lop-sided.

VICAR Oh yes. First time I saw it I thought I was drunk. I wasn't, but apparently the builder was. The Victorians were going to take it down and straighten it out. But it was too expensive so they left it alone. Glad they did. Character. Not as mad as the one in Chesterfield. Like a corkscrew.

NUN Never seen that.

VICAR It's brilliant. A trip to Derbyshire some time. Well worth it. That was the fault of the architect I think. Rather than the builders.

NUN Well, this one is impressive enough.

VICAR One of the few older buildings left in the town.

NUN Even the library is no more. Well, the building is. Mobile one now. A pity. Have people given up reading books?

VICAR I don't think they have, Hope not.

He pauses and looks at his watch

VICAR 7.30. Might have to get going I suppose.

NUN Ah.

Long Pause

VICAR ***(Rising)*** I didn't think you would come.

NUN I wasn't sure whether you would either.

VICAR Oh, I was always going to be here. I wouldn't have shared the secret with you if I hadn't meant it.

NUN Secret?

VICAR This place.

NUN Yes, of course. Thank you. I appreciate that. It's lovely. ***(she stands)***

VICAR ***(looking at himself up and down)*** Well, makes a change from green scrubs I suppose.

NUN Or unflattering tunics.

VICAR You look very attractive in your habit.

NUN Why thank you kind Sir.

VICAR You'd look attractive in a black sack.

NUN I guess that's a compliment?

VICAR Oh it is.

NUN Thank you Dr Christie.

VICAR You are welcome Nurse Devlin.

They stand, looking at each other in silence. Then, they lean into each other and kiss.

VICAR I hate parties. Particularly fancy dress ones. But it's my sister, so I couldn't say no. You don't have to come you know. It was just a thought.

NUN No, it's fine. I quite like dressing up. Not my first nun this. I had the outfit in my wardrobe. It's my go-to fancy dress.

VICAR Well it suits you Sister Mary.

NUN Stop it Father Patrick.

They laugh and kiss again.

VICAR Come on then. The only way to get through tonight might be to get blind drunk.

NUN I don't drink.

VICAR I know. Neither do I. Come on. Grit your teeth. Hold my hand tight. Let's make the most of the weekend. The hospital will be calling out for us again on Monday morning.

They walk away hand in hand.

LIGHTS FADE

A PLAN

by Paul Smith

CHARACTERS

KENNY – mid-late 60's. Casually dressed.

CHARLIE – late 20's. Casually dressed.

A bench in a park overlooking a town. Secluded

KENNY is seated on the bench. He is filing his nails. CHARLIE is pacing about. Looking at the view with a lot of concentration.

KENNY 'The Big Job'.

CHARLIE What?

KENNY 'The Big Job'.

CHARLIE What you talking about?

KENNY It's a movie. 60's I think. Apropos of our little plan.

CHARLIE Still don't know what you're on about.

KENNY Sid James.

CHARLIE What about him?

KENNY He's in the film.

CHARLIE Ah.

KENNY Sid James and Joan Sims

CHARLIE 'Carry On' film is it?

KENNY No, no. No, it's about a bank robbery. 'The Big Job'.

CHARLIE Never heard of it.

KENNY These crooks. They rob a bank. As they try to get away, their leader runs across a field in the country and shoves the loot inside a hollowed-out tree. He gets caught. All go to prison. When they come out they go in search of the tree. They find it. But a housing estate has been built around it. The tree is in the back yard of the new police station. After various shenanigans they get hold of the bag with the money and guess what?

CHARLIE What?

KENNY The money has all been eaten by mice.

KENNY laughs

CHARLIE Sounds wonderful. Hope it's a comedy.

KENNY Of course. Priceless. Absolutely priceless. You must see it.

CHARLIE Not much point now is there? You told me the whole plot.

KENNY Still need to see it. So funny.

CHARLIE Not very helpful though, is it? I don't want to plan a robbery that fails. I want to get away with it.

KENNY Well, maybe it's not the best example.

CHARLIE No.

KENNY When I did the Midland in South Croydon we did everything right. Planned for months. On the day, we got to the bank...and it was closed. Staff sickness. Doors shut. Months of planning and we were stymied by a vomiting bug. So you see, bank robbery is not an exact science.

CHARLIE Yeah, well this one needs to be. So, let's get on with it. Take a look at the target.

KENNY gets up and joins CHARLIE looking at the view – they focus on the same place.

KENNY Lloyds Bank on Highway Corner. I think it's been done before. It's vulnerable you see. On a corner. Three possible exit routes. More complex the intersection, more chances of a clean getaway. So there's your first rule of bank robbery.

CHARLIE There are rules?

KENNY Well of course there are. A bank on a crossroads of course is your best bet in the main. More escape routes.

CHARLIE OK.

KENNY And your best route from there will be up North Lane.

CHARLIE Not down to the bypass by Devonshire Way?

KENNY Second rule of bank robbery, always avoid a route with schools. Place is choc -a-block with yummy mummies taking their precious treasures to and from. Plus, there are two crossings along there and you just can't barge past lollipops. No, North Lane is a virtually free ride out to the relief road and then onto the bypass.

CHARLIE Right.

KENNY One guy I knew, Ginger Potts - not sure why he was called Ginger, he was bald – anyway, Ginger Potts was doing a TSB in High Wycombe once and he made the mistake of going past a nursery school as he left the bank. Utter chaos – one of the mum's was trying a three-point and she broke down in the middle of the road. He had to get out of the Daimler and help her.

CHARLIE He get away ok?

KENNY Someone had called the police to help her – they did, and picked him and his mate up into the bargain. Five years. Good old Ginger.

CHARLIE Ok, so what about the timings.

KENNY Well, what is it now? Two o'clock. Look down there. See?

CHARLIE See what?

KENNY Quite. Nothing to see. It's quiet as a mouse. Those shops there, some even do a half day closing. No one about. Midweek lull. Perfect time for a hold up.

CHARLIE Ok, so Wednesday about 2pm. What about weapons?

KENNY Never used a shooter. Didn't trust myself with one. Nor should you. If you get caught with one it can add months, maybe years to the sentence. I knew a bloke once who used a banana – true. Another one only ever used a rolling pin. Mind you if you get clocked with one of them you would know it. Just bear in mind that using proper hardware ups the ante.

CHARLIE I don't know enough about firearms and would have no idea where to get one from. Maybe I will stick to something safer.

KENNY Just don't use a French stick – they fall apart too easily. Cucumbers are quite versatile....

CHARLIE Yeah ok, I get the idea. So, what would be your approach when you get inside.

KENNY Hold your horses. It's a long time till we get to that bit. You're ignoring all the groundwork.

CHARLIE Go on.

KENNY moves back to the bench and sits down. CHARLIE eventually joins him and takes out a notebook and jots things down as KENNY talks.

KENNY Well, before you even think about setting foot inside the building you have to do your research don't you? So, check bus timetables, train timetables, school term times, planned road works, planned diversions, planned road closures, planned events at the theatre, cinema, and sports grounds. Any special school events? Elections, demonstrations, shop openings, shop closures, movement of farm vehicles, movement of farm animals. Market days, town fairs, late-night openings, half day closing. Postal collections, security van pick-ups, security van drop offs, national security, bomb threats. Weather forecast, economic forecast, political forecast.
Once you've done all that you should have an idea whether you're good to go or not.

CHARLIE Did you research all that?

KENNY Course not. That's why I got nabbed so many times. No, that's the ultimate, but they could all have some impact on whether you get the job done cleanly or not.

CHARLIE Right. So, the one you got away with....

KENNY Spur of the moment. No planning. Decided that morning. Nat West, Parson's Green. Went in with a paper bag over my head and some sticks of rhubarb from the greengrocer down the street. Asked for the spare cash and stuffed 20 grand in my pockets. Easiest job ever. Luck though. They were held up by a gang 10 minutes after I left and the police caught 'em all red-handed as they had been called to get me.

CHARLIE Times have changed. Not as easy these days with all the technology. I mean you have to disable cameras inside and outside, internet, alarms, back-up alarms and so on.

KENNY Saw a film a while ago. Bunch of old people. Held up banks. Disabled the cameras by blasting them with paint guns. Nice.

CHARLIE Yeah, well obviously I'm not going to use that method. I think the security devices are a little more sophisticated than that.

KENNY Don't turn your back on tried and trusted techniques.

CHARLIE But I need it real, not something that's from a film.

KENNY Well I don't know all about the technology. That's why this one is a decent call. It's been crying out for a refit for years and so it's a bit tatty and, I guess, not got the latest technology. When did you last case the joint?

CHARLIE I was in there three days ago. I think I got the layout nailed down.

KENNY Fair enough. I'll test you. Cameras on the door outside?

CHARLIE Two

KENNY Three – you missed the one on the post across the street.

CHARLIE Ah.

KENNY How many inside?

CHARLIE Four that I could make out. One was one of those fish-eye lens ones.

KENNY Make that 6. Not very good are you.

CHARLIE Not sure how I missed 2.

KENNY Sunken into the ceiling above the fans.

CHARLIE Oh, missed them.

KENNY You see that's your problem. You can't come back with shoddy information. Lives depend on complete accuracy. Look, you need to get back there and make some serious notes. Use a discreet camera if you can. One of those Pro-Goes or whatever. You can't make much progress unless you got the layout all sorted.

CHARLIE Ok. Let's leave that for now. What about getaway vehicle?

KENNY Good old Daimler always served me well.

CHARLIE Was thinking of a bike.

KENNY You can't cycle away from a bank robbery.

CHARLIE No, motorbike. Someone already on it. Keeping it going. Speedier than a car.

KENNY Well, if you wanna be modern about it. One film I saw once, they used....

CHARLIE No, no more films. I got to get this right.

KENNY Sure. Ok. So, where are we at.

CHARLIE Well, I think I have an idea of time of day. A bike I think is the best bet and we will avoid the use of guns. Don't know enough about them.

KENNY Whereas a stick of rhubarb....

CHARLIE You've told me a million and one things to look out for which I will have to go away and work on, but I think I have a slightly better understanding. At the end of the day I'm only using this as an example. It doesn't have to be exact.

KENNY Yes, but by basing it on reality, you will have more authenticity in the writing.

CHARLIE Exactly, which is why I asked you.

KENNY It's funny, I've been out for 10 years, but I never mind chatting about the old days and I won't lie, the juices have started flowing again.

CHARLIE Fancy another crack?

KENNY Not on your life mate. I haven't changed with the times. Even those Hatton Garden lot had to bring in a youngster to deal with the computers and what not. I ain't no mug.

CHARLIE Well, thanks anyway Kenny, it's been really useful. My publisher will be impressed with the detail when I get it all down. Would you have a look over it for me before I submit it?

KENNY Course. Like to see how it turns out.

CHARLIE They always say you should write from personal experience, well if you can't, you might as well use someone else's.

KENNY Good luck with the book son. Got a name for it?

CHARLIE 'Got Yer'

KENNY Like it. Take care Charlie.

CHARLIE Bye Kenny. Thanks.

KENNY You're welcome my old son.

KENNY walks away

LIGHTS FADE

A PLEASURE

by Paul Smith

CHARACTERS

CLIFFORD – A MILITARY GENTLEMAN, 70S, VERY WELL DRESSED

STELLA – A LADY IN HER MID-60S, NEATLY DRESSED

A bench in a park overlooking a town. Secluded

CLIFFORD is sitting on the bench. Reading a copy of The Times. His attention is entirely taken by this.

STELLA gradually arrives pulling a laden shopping trolley. She sits on the bench and takes a Thermos flask from her bag and pours herself a drink from it. CLIFFORD doesn't acknowledge her presence in any way.

STELLA drinks and heaves a huge sigh of relief.

STELLA Oh I needed that.

CLIFFORD *(not looking up)* Mmmmm?

STELLA Always take one shopping with me.

CLIFFORD *(still not looking up)* I beg your pardon?

STELLA Thermos.

CLIFFORD Thermos?

STELLA Flask. I always take one out with me.

CLIFFORD Ah.

STELLA Need my coffee I do.

CLIFFORD Ah.

STELLA Would you like one? I have a spare cup.

CLIFFORD ***(Finally putting down his newspaper)*** What? Oh....oh...it's Mrs Cooper isn't it?

STELLA And you are Mr Warren. I thought that was you hiding behind your paper. I was right.

CLIFFORD You had the better of me then. Did you struggle up here with that?

STELLA I like the view and it's almost on my way home from the supermarket.

CLIFFORD Well.....but still. All that weight.

STELLA Oh, it's ok. I am stronger than I look. Coffee?

CLIFFORD Well, yes, that would be rather good. If you don't mind.

STELLA Don't be silly. Of course I don't mind. Nice to share.

CLIFFORD Thank you. This is a treat.

STELLA Nothing too special really. I always makes too much and anyway, it will make my bag lighter on the way home. Here you go. There's no sugar mind.

CLIFFORD Diabetic here.

STELLA Ah.

CLIFFORD So, it's fine. I don't take sweetener anyway.

STELLA Good.

They drink

STELLA So, you are just out for a walk?

CLIFFORD A nice day for a stroll. I am often here. Just like you, I appreciate the view. I can see much of my life from here.

STELLA You live in Woodside Hill don't you?

CLIFFORD For 30 years now.

STELLA Yes, I thought so. I am round the corner. The Pines. Number 11.

CLIFFORD The one with the pretty garden.

STELLA Yes. Thank you. How nice of you to notice.

CLIFFORD I have admired it for years.

STELLA I work hard at it.

CLIFFORD Well, it's very pretty. Very pretty. You should exhibit at Chelsea.

STELLA Oh my fingers aren't that green I don't think.

CLIFFORD Well you do a fine job.

STELLA Thank you. It gave me something to get my teeth into when Louis passed on.

CLIFFORD Ah.

STELLA He loved gardening, so there is a lot of him in that garden.

CLIFFORD He would be very proud.

STELLA I like to think so. He worked in the library.

CLIFFORD I remember.

STELLA No, library any more. Another coffee shop.

CLIFFORD My Gwen was a very keen library go-er. Spent hours there. She must have known your husband.

STELLA Oh, they were always chatting. Louis told me they had similar interests in books.

CLIFFORD Gwen liked her Charles Dickens.

STELLA Oh, so did Louis. He had so many copies of his books. He would read and re-read them. I always struggled a little. Found it difficult to pick the books up let alone read them.

CLIFFORD You and me both, but it obviously kept them very happy.

STELLA On his last night I read him some passages from 'Great Expectations'. That was his favourite. He lay there smiling. He fell asleep. Didn't wake again. Maybe that's the way to go.

CLIFFORD You can't easily choose your path to the world beyond, but if it's as peaceful as that sounds, then I would say you've done pretty well. Sadly Gwen would never have chosen the way she died.

STELLA Oh I am sorry. I shouldn't have mentioned it. That was just too insensitive of me.

CLIFFORD No, no, it's fine. I don't mind.

STELLA I read about it in the paper. Just so, so sad. I am sure, like me with Louis, you miss her so much.

CLIFFORD Every day. All day, every day. It hurts. Loneliness is rather cruel isn't it?

STELLA My daughter is always telling me to go dating. Did you know you can do it on the phone these days?

CLIFFORD Do what?

STELLA Meet people. Send them messages. Show them pictures. Tell them you want to meet. I mean, I ask you. What will they think of next?

CLIFFORD Bit of a luddite me. No technology. My son insists I carry a phone with me for emergencies. Then he has a go at me when he can't get through on it. I don't turn it on. That's why!

STELLA Oh, I have one, but I don't use it too much either. And anyway, if I was going to meet anyone I would want to do it the old-fashioned way. In person! I don't want to meet via a text message. How impersonal.

CLIFFORD Totally agree. I met Gwen at a ball when I was in the army. She was the daughter of the camp commander. I was a very lucky man.

STELLA So was she. Elegant man like yourself.

CLIFFORD Oh you are too kind.

STELLA There are not enough gentlemen in the world these days. You are one of a dying breed.

CLIFFORD Oh.

STELLA No, sorry. That came out all wrong. I meant to say...

CLIFFORD *(laughing)* It's nothing to apologise for. I know what you mean and I am very flattered.

STELLA Well, so long as you don't blame a silly old woman for getting things mixed up.

CLIFFORD Charming, not silly. And you are certainly not old.

STELLA Well..... Some more coffee?

CLIFFORD Please. You see the big house in the distance.

STELLA The Grange?

CLIFFORD Yes, of course you will know it.

STELLA Never been in it.

CLIFFORD Conference Centre or something now. Private house many years ago.

STELLA What a place to live.

CLIFFORD Indeed. My Grandfather *did* live there.

STELLA No. Oh he must have been very wealthy.

CLIFFORD Oh, he didn't own it. He was the butler to the family. Lord and Lady Blessingham. He was a very humble man. My Grandfather that is.

STELLA I am sure he had some stories.

CLIFFORD Oh many. Have you ever watched that Downton Abbey?

STELLA Oh I love that I do.

CLIFFORD It was a little like that I think. I went there a few times when I was very small. Only in the servants' quarters of course. I remember it well. Seems like yesterday. Nearly 70 years ago. The War put an end to the house as a home of course. But at least it is still standing.

STELLA It's very beautiful.

CLIFFORD As the view changes over time that place has been a constant. I think most of the land round about once belonged to the house. They still have splendid formal gardens there.

STELLA I didn't know.

CLIFFORD I think they open them for charity a couple of times a year. You should pop along some time.

STELLA I must.

CLIFFORD I really have to make the effort to get out sometimes. I think I would spend most of my time indoors if I could. It took a supreme effort to come out here today.

STELLA Well, you mustn't stay indoors. You must come out and enjoy the Lord's beautiful land.

CLIFFORD You are right. I must and I will. Meeting you today has really given me something of a boost. So, thank you Mrs Cooper.

STELLA Oh come on, you can call me Stella now I think.

CLIFFORD Well, thank you Stella, then.

STELLA My pleasure Mr Warren.

CLIFFORD Clifford.

STELLA Clifford. What a joy to have happened on you here today.

CLIFFORD You said this was on your way home.

STELLA Well, in a round about sort of way.

CLIFFORD But you have been to Tesco and this is a huge detour.

STELLA I said. I like the view!

CLIFFORD Mmmmm I am not at all sure you just happened on this bench today.

STELLA Awwww, no, maybe you are right. I knows you come up here from time to time and I saw you when you were making your way up here earlier. I have wanted to say hello so many times. Since you lost your wife. You looked so low. So, I said to myself. 'Stella, go and cheer that kind gentleman up'. So, that's what I decided.

CLIFFORD Well, you are a cheeky one. You have succeeded in your mission.

STELLA Good I am so glad.

CLIFFORD Well, thank you. Look, I have something to ask you. Please you may say no if you wish. I mentioned the Chelsea Flower Show earlier. Have you ever been to it?

STELLA Oh no, such a grand occasion and so beautiful, but no, I have never been.

CLIFFORD I go every year. Last few years has been alone and it's just not the same. Would you do me the pleasure of coming with me this year?

STELLA To London?

CLIFFORD Yes, my treat and I won't have another word said about that. My treat. My pleasure.

STELLA A real pleasure. That would be lovely Clifford. I would be so honoured.

CLIFFORD Good. I will get the tickets and let you know when. We can easily take the train. I don't drive up to town.

STELLA Oh, me, I am so pleased that I followed you today.

CLIFFORD As am I. You can see if your garden is up to standard.

STELLA *(laughing)* Oh, I don't think they will have much to worry about.

They both laugh as they look out on the view

CLIFFORD Well, this has turned out to be a rather good day hasn't it Stella?

STELLA It has Clifford. It certainly has.

As they look ahead into the distance their hands meet in the gap between them and they hold each other's hands. They don't look down or at each other – just ahead. Content.

LIGHTS FADE

A BREAK

by Paul Smith

CHARACTERS

JOE - 19yo – A Geek

JOSH – 24yo – Big muscular build. Very short hair.

A bench in a park overlooking a town. Secluded.

It is early evening. Spring.

JOE enters slightly furtively. Checking behind him. He has a small rucksack over his shoulder. He is 19 and wears glasses. He is small in height and slight of frame. He is a nerd; a geek. He sits on the bench and takes a thick book out of the rucksack and starts to read it.

After a short while JOSH appears. He is about 24. His head is shaved and he is tall and muscular. He is intimidating. He has a cigarette in his mouth and is slightly out of breath.

JOSH stares at JOE for a short time as he smokes and then turns to look at the view.

JOE is aware of his presence, but tries to ignore him as he continues to read his book.

JOSH I suppose you think it's funny.

JOE looks up from his book, but does not answer.

JOSH Giving me the slip.

While I was taking a piss.

Thought that was funny did you?

Fucking splashed me trainers.

Thought you would get away from me?

Well....one thing you can be sure of....I ain't fucking thick.

Might not have your brains, but that doesn't make me stupid you know.

I've a mind to give you a going over.

That what you want?

Yeah?

It's what you fucking deserve I'm telling you.

So don't try and disrespect me like that again. Alright?

You hearing me or what?

JOE ***(without looking up)*** I heard you.

JOSH slowly goes and sits next to JOE

JOSH But you see, I don't think you are listening.

JOE I am. Please leave me alone.

JOSH What you reading?

JOE A book.

JOSH Trying to be funny?

JOE No. It's a book. About the Russian Revolution

JOSH Fascinating.

JOE It is actually.

JOSH Oh, actually! Is it? Actually. Actually it is fascinating! Fuck off. Put it away.

JOE I'm trying to study.

JOSH Then why do you keep annoying me?

JOE I didn't know that I was.

JOSH Always there. In my eye. Fucking getting in my view.

JOE I live near you.

JOSH Don't I know it. Spying on me are yer?

JOE No.

JOSH Then why are you always there? Always. Copping a look?

JOE No. I'm not.

JOSH Then how do you explain it?

JOE Coincidence?

JOSH Bollocks.

JOE Please don't sit so close. You're making me nervous.

JOSH Don't tell me what to do. I'll sit on top of you if I want. What do you come up here for anyway?

JOE It's usually quiet and I like the view.

JOSH Long way to come for a view.

JOE It's only up the hill.

A pause

JOSH What you got in your bag?

JOE Just some books.

JOSH Let me see.

JOE pushes his bag towards JOSH who takes a look.

JOSH Aye aye. Look what we've got here.

JOE grabs the bag back

JOE Some sweets too.

JOSH Don't mind if I do. Here.

Reluctantly, JOE hands over the pack of Haribo sweets.

JOE I was leaving them till later.

JOSH Well, it's later now. Fuckin' love Haribo.

JOSH takes the bag and opens it. He takes a handful of the sweets and eats them. As he does so he gets up and walks forwards from the bench.

JOE closes his book and carefully puts it back into his rucksack and then gets up as if he is going to leave.

JOSH senses the movement, but doesn't turn round.

JOSH Where you off to?

JOE I was going to go to the library.

JOSH moves back to JOE

JOSH ***(laughing)*** I told you. I am not stupid. There is no library. It closed. It's a Starbucks. The van with the books only comes by once a month on Eastern Avenue. And if you hadn't noticed, it's nearly 7. So, the library would be closed anyway, if there was actually one there. So don't try and bullshit me, Mr.

JOE Well I've got to go anyway.

JOSH Why've you got to go when you only just got here?

JOE I don't feel comfortable.

JOSH ***(threateningly)*** What do you think I'm gonna do eh? No one about. All in their comfy little homes having tea! So, no one to disturb! What you think I'm gonna do?

JOE I don't know. That's why I feel uncomfortable.

JOSH Think I might beat you up?

JOE Maybe. I don't know. I hope not.

JOSH Quiet here. As I said. No one to hear us. Could get away with anything. Couldn't I?

JOE ***(flinching away as JOSH leans into him)*** Please don't.

JOSH ***(laughing)*** Yeah, I could get away with anything here. No eyes. No cameras. Nothing. Alone. At my mercy.

JOE Look, what do you want from me?

JOSH Isn't it more the other way round? You're the one who spends all his time stalking me. Always there. Spying on me.

JOE I don't stalk you. I don't spy. You're imagining it.

JOSH Oh am I? Imagining it? Those twitching curtains? Curtain twitcher. That's what you are. A little curtain twitcher.

JOE I'm not.

(A pause)

JOSH What else you got to eat? I'm starving.

JOE Nothing. That's it. Just the sweets.

JOSH Useless aren't you?

JOE Probably.

JOSH Fuck.

JOSH takes out his cigarettes and lights another.

JOSH Have to get some chips on the way home then. You can buy them for me to say sorry.

JOE I can't afford that.

JOSH Bet you fucking can. One lousy bag of sweets isn't enough. Chips!

JOE I haven't got the money. Sorry.

JOSH No fucking use apologising is it? What you gonna do about it? Go to the bank. Get the money. Eh? That's what you're gonna do isn't it? Eh?

JOE is silent

JOSH I said, isn't it?

JOE I can't.

JOSH Can't or won't?

JOE I would if I could, but I can't. I left my wallet at home. I haven't got it with me.

JOSH Show us.

JOE What?

JOSH Show me that your pockets are all empty.

JOE I'm going home.

JOE moves to go, but JOSH gets in his way.

JOSH Do it.

JOE turns out his pockets and empties his rucksack.

JOE Ok?

JOSH S'pose I'll have to buy them myself then. Wasting my time with you aren't I?

JOE I don't know.

JOSH Should be at home watching the footie with chips and beer.

JOE starts packing his stuff away.

JOSH What was wrong with your book?

JOE What?

JOSH You stopped reading.

JOE You put me off and anyway the light is beginning to go. I'll read it when I get home.

JOSH Back to Mummy and Daddy?

A silence

JOE Just Daddy.

JOSH Well, whatever.

JOSH walks away a little as JOE continues sorting his things.

JOSH Never been up here before. You can see my house. Can see yours too.

JOE I know.

A pause

JOSH What happened to your Mum?

JOE She died.

JOSH I saw her last week.

JOE She died at the weekend.

JOSH Fuck.

JOE She had a heart attack at work. And died.

JOSH Fuck.

A pause

JOSH Fuck.

A pause

JOSH Get fed up with you? Did she?

JOE ***(getting to his feet)*** I'm going home.

JOSH Nah. Wait.

JOE I'm going.

JOSH Hang on a moment or I'll have to make you.

JOE Leave me alone.

(JOE stands still as tears well up in his eyes and start rolling down his cheeks)

JOSH Oh, fuck.

Look....

JOE Just leave me.

You've got no idea.

No idea what it's like.

You have no..... nothing....I could do nothing.

One minuteshe is happy at home..... then off to work....and now....

....now she is nothing.

Gone.

She feels nothing.

She thinks nothing.

And on Monday we have to go to her funeral.

We stick her body. My lovely Mum....we stick her body in a box.

And we burn her.

My Mum.

My Mummy.

And you, you have no idea.

I can't bear it. I can't.

I came here to get away from things.

To get away from Dad.

Who hates me.

And now, you.

Just give me a break.

You.... just leave me, please.

Leave me alone.

Please just leave me.

JOE cries uncontrollably. JOSH looks at him. He throws away his cigarette and sits down beside JOE who has his head in his hands, shaking in grief.

Gently, JOSH takes JOE's hands from his face and then takes JOE's head in his own hands and turns it to him.

The tears subside a little as they look directly at each other. Deep into each other's eyes.

JOSH I'm not leaving you.

A pause

JOSH Because I fucking love you.

Their heads move together as they enjoy a long, deep, passionate kiss – both JOE and JOSH fully engaging with each other. They break and there follows the most tender embrace.

LIGHTS FADE

A CHANCE

by Paul Smith

CHARACTERS

LINDA – A WOMAN IN HER EARLY 30s

CAROLINE – A WOMAN IN HER EARLY 70s

A bench in a park overlooking a town. Secluded.

LINDA is standing talking on her mobile phone. She is wearing a light coat and has a small bag which she wears across the shoulder.

LINDA ...but I was waiting for you. No, I was here on time. Well I was. You weren't. It's taken me ages to get this sorted out. You have no idea the hassle it is.....well, that's up to you. And you know I need it now.

It's like the other day. I was waiting then. If I had been there any longer it would have got dark and people would have wondered whether I was looking to pick someone up. You know what it's like around there. Bad enough in the daytime, let alone at night.

During the following, CAROLINE enters carrying a shopping bag and goes and sits on the bench. She is a little out of breath. She takes a bottle of water from her bag and drinks. She takes in the view. LINDA is unaware of her.

LINDA Never mind, just let me know when she is next out of the way. And try to be on time. Hold on, I'll call you back I've got another call. It's the doctor. Love you too. Bye.

Hello? Yes. Oh. Oh no. Oh ok. Yes. Tomorrow. 10 is fine. Thank you.

She hangs up.

Shit. Shit. Shit.

She turns and sees she is not alone.

Sorry.

CAROLINE Pardon?

LINDA My outburst.

CAROLINE Oh, it doesn't matter.

LINDA Bad news.

CAROLINE Sorry to hear that.

LINDA That was my doctor.

CAROLINE Ah.

LINDA They just confirmed something.

CAROLINE Nothing serious I hope.

LINDA Well, serious to me, but not life and death.

CAROLINE That's something.

LINDA I might have to have a procedure.

CAROLINE Sorry.

LINDA Well, it will get it sorted out, at least.

CAROLINE Yes. Good.

LINDA I have an inverted uterus.

LINDA sits beside CAROLINE

CAROLINE Sounds painful.

LINDA Uncomfortable certainly.

CAROLINE I'm sure.

LINDA Hopefully they can ease the discomfort.

CAROLINE I am sure they will.

LINDA I blame it on having a child late. That's the penalty.

CAROLINE Recent birth?

LINDA Six months. I am just having a couple of hours to myself. First time for months really.

CAROLINE And a lovely day for it.

LINDA But I was meant to be meeting someone and they've let me down.

CAROLINE Oh dear.

LINDA Still....I get so tired.

CAROLINE It's not unusual. I have been tired most of my life since my children were born. You get used to it.

LINDA Do you? I'm not sure I will. He still wants sex all the time. It's so painful with this useless uterus of mine. I hope it can be sorted out. But he won't let up. I can't do it at the moment without wanting to cry out in pain.

Sorry, you don't want to hear all this. I just needed to get it off my chest.

CAROLINE This is such a calm and out of the way spot, it's quite a good place to let off steam.

LINDA Yes. Maybe it will help. I used to come here when I was a teenager. It's hardly changed. It was where I used to bring boys. *(She laughs)*

CAROLINE Many a couple I have seen here over the years. Either on this bench or hiding away in the bushes thinking they couldn't be seen. I love secret places.

LINDA I have had to find quite a few of them recently. Been spending a lot of time looking over my shoulder. Pretty sick of it now.

CAROLINE Oh dear.

LINDA I sound awful don't I? Sorry. I'm not really. Just going through a few problems at the moment.

CAROLINE With the baby?

LINDA No, no. Well, not really. It's not his fault. He's lovely. Love him to bits. But, well....nothing is easy these days is it?

CAROLINE No, I don't believe it is.

LINDA How many kids have you got?

CAROLINE We had three. Two girls and a boy. We lost the little boy.

LINDA He died?

CAROLINE When he was six. The apple of my husband's eye. He never got over it. Well, me neither. You don't.

LINDA Oh God I am so sorry.

CAROLINE We had two girls though. Lovely girls. But not another son. It would have been his birthday this week. 40 years old. Road accident. Chased the dog into the street. But you move on. Don't you? You move on. But he always wanted a son.

LINDA It must have been so awful for you.

CAROLINE Yes, it was. Yes. Terrible. Awful.

There is a silence

LINDA This weather!

CAROLINE Spring in the warmth. Always my favourite time of the year.

LINDA Do you see your daughters much?

CAROLINE Not as much as I would like. They both live abroad. But we talk on the phone and on Skype occasionally.

LINDA Skype's great isn't it? I use it on my phone all the time. Not sure what I would do without it. I wouldn't have met my man.

CAROLINE How did you meet?

LINDA Tinder.

CAROLINE Tinder?

LINDA It's a dating app on the phone.

CAROLINE Ah.

LINDA How long have you been married?

CAROLINE Nearly 50 years.

LINDA Wow. You must really love each other.

CAROLINE Well, we have our ups and downs. Like most people. Tolerance gets you through I think. I think. Eventually you get so used to things that you accept the bad and keep going. Oblivious really. But they do hurt. The bad things. They *really* hurt. The older you get the less strength you have for the fight.

LINDA You make it sound like a battle.

CAROLINE Marriage is only part of life and life itself is a battle. Sadly mine is one which I am finally losing.

LINDA Your life?

CAROLINE Partly. But that's because I am getting on. But it's ok. I am fine.

LINDA Your marriage?

CAROLINE Hanging on by a thread.

LINDA I'm sorry.

CAROLINE I'm sorry. But it's ok. I'm fine.

LINDA I'm not married.

CAROLINE Your son's Father?

LINDA I won't marry him. He wants me to, but I won't. Tommy will be ok with me.

CAROLINE That's good to hear.

LINDA Been coming here quite a lot recently. It's always quiet. I don't live far away. You?

CAROLINE A short bus ride. Just the other side of town. Near the recycling centre. Just along from where the mobile library stops.

LINDA Not sure where that is. Never used the library. Wasn't there one in town once.

CAROLINE Yes. It went two years ago. It's where Starbucks is now.

LINDA Oh, yes.

CAROLINE It's not the area it was. But we've been here since we got married. It's what you get used to isn't it? I don't like the house any more. Haven't done for years. My husband hates it too. He isn't there much. He goes out. I try and get out too when I can. I go to pilates on a Thursday and am taking classes in stained glass work. It's lovely. I make gifts for my friends.

LINDA I don't have time for anything like that anymore.

CAROLINE So, where's Tommy today?

LINDA With my sister. She's got two of her own, so she can only look after him every so often. But I needed to get away.

CAROLINE His Father help out?

LINDA Not often, always busy.

CAROLINE Men eh?

They laugh

LINDA Yes. You're right there. Not sure Tommy is going to see much of his Dad in his life. But you never know.

CAROLINE No, you never do.

LINDA Still he might surprise me.

CAROLINE Maybe. Give him a chance eh? Maybe he will give Tommy a chance.

LINDA Fat chance.

CAROLINE Well, we all need a chance in life and if it presents itself, then we need to take it. I have taken a chance. Let's see what the result is.

LINDA What chance did you take.

CAROLINE I came here today.

LINDA Oh. Sorry. Not sure I understand.

CAROLINE Maybe you will.

A silence

Ok. Well, I suppose I should be getting on my way. I have so many things I ought to be doing. It's been nice chatting to you.

LINDA And to you. Sorry to seem so miserable.

CAROLINE Don't be silly Linda. It is Linda isn't it?

LINDA Err.... Yes. How did you know?

CAROLINE It's ok. I think I stood behind you in the bank the other day. I thought I recognised you.

LINDA Oh, right. Yes. Lloyds. I am afraid they weren't very helpful. Money is so tight and I'm struggling a bit. So much for customer service. They couldn't care less.

CAROLINE I think they are all a bit fed up in that branch. It's closing down you know.

LINDA Really? Well, sod 'em.

CAROLINE You did seem a bit upset. Probably why I remembered you.

LINDA That was a few weeks ago though. You have a good memory.

CAROLINE One of the few parts of me that's working ok. I hope you get your uterus sorted out. Not nice.

LINDA Thanks.

CAROLINE And take care of young Tommy. I don't think he will see a great deal of his Father in his life, because I think the Father is quite a bit older than you isn't he?

LINDA Errrr. What makes you think that?

CAROLINE Oh Linda. Linda Planter. I know a lot about you and about the man who is the Father of Tommy. Whose birth resulted in your uteral issues. Because Tommy's Father is my husband of nearly 50 years and he is 74 years old. You and he have been having an affair for the last two years and you were here today to meet him so he could give you some money. But he is at home, throwing up. Food poisoning. My food. My poison.

So, I wish you luck with your child. Your life. Your uterus.

Good bye.

CAROLINE gathers herself, gets up and walks off. LINDA sits still, staring ahead.

LIGHTS FADE

A FAVOUR

by Paul Smith

CHARACTERS

HARRY – A MAN IN HIS EARLY 80s

JACK – A MAN IN HIS LATE TEENS/EARLY 20s

A bench in a park overlooking a town. Secluded.

HARRY is sitting on the bench reading an old hardback book. Beside him on the grass is a small shopping bag (not a carrier bag). In the bag is a parcel, as yet unseen.

JACK wanders towards the bench. He is wearing a suit and has a shoulder bag. JACK sits and takes some sandwiches, a small container of grapes and a bottle of fizzy drink from the bag. From inside his jacket he takes a small pill pot. He takes some pills from the pot and swallows them. He washes the pills down with the drink. He then begins to consume the sandwiches.

HARRY doesn't look up as JACK arrives. He continues to read the book which he has nearly finished. Eventually he looks up and closes the book.

HARRY Finished

JACK Mmmm?

HARRY I started reading this book over 70 years ago. Kept starting it and never seeing it through. Dozens of times. Never finished it. Until now.

JACK Cool. Was it good?

HARRY Actually something of a disappointment.

JACK Shame.

HARRY Bizarre. Peculiar. Like a bad dream. Still. It's finished. That's the main thing. I don't like incomplete things hanging over me. Tick that one off.

JACK Cool.
(Pause)

HARRY Not many people know about this spot. This view.

JACK Yes, I know. It's unusual to see anyone else here.

HARRY Yes, it is. Particularly on a week day. It's secluded. Not so accessible. Unknown. Far away from the main drags.

JACK Yes, it's a bit of a hike.

HARRY But worth it. Great view

JACK Definitely.

HARRY I think I might have seen you passing by here before.

JACK Sure, you might have. I come here whenever I get the chance to leave the office at lunch time. It's not always possible.

HARRY What line of business are you in?

JACK Banking.

HARRY Ah. Enjoy it?

JACK Not really if I'm honest.

HARRY Rather be doing something else?

JACK Yep.

HARRY Don't spend too long doing something you don't like. Life will fly by and regrets can overwhelm you eventually.

JACK You're probably right.

HARRY What's your dream?

JACK Love to go to university. Study medicine. Got the grades but not the cash.

HARRY It's expensive.

JACK Very. Mum and Dad can't afford to finance me. So, it's me saving or not going at all. Medicine is pricey.

HARRY I am sure. Well, don't give up your dreams.

JACK *(laughing)* Maybe I will win the lottery.

HARRY Maybe.

(Pause)

JACK I guess you are retired.

HARRY Oh yes. Over fifteen years now. Much more preferable to work. In some ways.

JACK What did you do?

HARRY I was a journalist. Just local stuff. After I left the army.

JACK Dad wanted me to join the army. It's not for me.

HARRY Not for everyone. I loved it.

JACK Did you see any action?

HARRY Not in the conventional sense. I was in munitions. Bomb disposal and so on.

JACK Wow. That must have been interesting. Nerve-wracking.

HARRY It had its moment certainly. But they were good times. Met some great people. Mostly gone now sadly.

JACK Diffusing bombs is one of those things they like in films. Creates tension. Which wire to cut and so on.

HARRY James Bond has a lot to answer for. He makes it look so easy. Rather more to it in reality.

JACK I'm sure. Great stuff though.

HARRY My wife didn't like it and so I started to write for the local rag.

JACK Cool. Your wife was less stressed I guess.

HARRY Somewhat. Bless her. Today would have been her 80th Birthday as it happens.

JACK Awww. You miss her I bet.

HARRY Over 50 years together with someone you do. The last couple of years have been very difficult. Loneliness is a cruel master. Most people end their lives lonely. It's just a sad fact of life.

JACK My Grandad is 85. He had a huge party when he was 80. He's still really active. Goes dancing. Plays bowls. Used to be a football referee until he was about 65. Being around young people he says..

HARRY Sounds like quite a man.

JACK I think when he goes he will go with a bang. He wants fireworks at his funeral.

HARRY Fabulous. Great idea.

JACK Yeah. He's great. I really respect him.

HARRY Sounds like he has been quite an influence on you.

JACK Definitely. **(Slight pause)** You have kids? Grandkids?

HARRY Sadly Eleanor – that's my wife – Eleanor was never able to have children.

JACK Pity.

HARRY Yes, it was a pity. A real pity. We considered adoption at one time, but we never went through with it.

JACK You regret it?

HARRY Oh no. Well, not now. Never regret. It takes up too much time when you should be enjoying yourself.

JACK **(laughing)** Yes. Yes, I guess you're right. Would you like a grape? **(he offers the box to HARRY)**

HARRY **(taking a grape)** Yes. That would be lovely. Thanks.

JACK I eat too many.

HARRY Can you? Eat too many grapes I mean.

JACK My veins probably run with wine.

(They both laugh)

HARRY I like me a good wine.

JACK Lager here.

HARRY Ah.

(There is a comfortable silence)

JACK What was the book you were reading?

HARRY Don't laugh. Alice's Adventures in Wonderland.

JACK Never read it. Seen the film.

HARRY ***(Handing the book to JACK)*** Here. Take it.

JACK What?

HARRY I've read it. I don't have a need for it any more.

JACK No, you're alright.

HARRY Please. I'd like that.

JACK ***(taking the book)*** Cool. Thanks.

HARRY Read it some time. But don't leave it 60 years!

JACK ***(laughing)*** No. I'll give it a go. Some time soon.

HARRY It's very bizarre. I think Lewis Carrol wrote it when he was on drugs.

JACK The film is really odd. Like a nightmare.

HARRY Well, enjoy it. Maybe.

JACK Thanks. Another grape? ***(he offers them to HARRY)***

HARRY **(He takes one)** Thankyou. Nice.

JACK Yeah.

HARRY What time do you go back to the office?

JACK **(checks the time on his phone)** About ten minutes.

HARRY Ah.

JACK But I have a hospital appointment at 3.30, so am leaving early.

HARRY Nothing serious I hope.

JACK No, just a check-up. I have Cystic Fibrosis.

HARRY I'm sorry to hear that.

JACK It's ok. Thanks. I manage it pretty well. It doesn't get in the way generally.

HARRY Pleased to hear it. It's not curable is it?

JACK Treatable, but not curable – well, not to my knowledge. But I'm ok.

HARRY Good. I have incurable cancer.

JACK Oh. I'm sorry about that.

HARRY No. No. I'm sorry. I apologise. That wasn't fair of me. I wasn't trying to outdo you on the incurable disease front!

JACK **(laughing)** No, it's ok. I'm cool.

HARRY I don't let it get in my way either. But I don't plan anything too far ahead.

JACK I see.

HARRY I'm Harry by the way. Harry Seymour.

JACK Jack Masters

(They shake hands)

HARRY Funny isn't it? Chatting to a stranger and waiting for some time before introducing yourself.

JACK Yeah.

HARRY Jack, I wonder if you would do me a real favour.

JACK Sure, if I can.

HARRY I've been meaning to ask a neighbour for help, but they are never in. I need someone to witness my will, I rewrote it. Things change. I just need a signature.

JACK Well. Sure. Of course. Happy to help.

HARRY That's grand.

(HARRY gets an envelope out of his coat pocket and removes a document. He takes the book to rest on. He offers JACK a pen.)

HARRY Just sign here and pop your address on the bottom. There's a good lad.

JACK Sure

(JACK writes on the document and hands it back to HARRY)

HARRY That's really good of you.

(HARRY takes a small parcel from his bag and, without JACK seeing, he writes on the parcel and on the document.)

JACK No worries. Never done that before.

HARRY Always a first time for everything. Would it be too bad of me to ask for a little more assistance? I need this parcel taking to a post office. Would you know of one that's not out of your way?

JACK There's one very near the office. I can pop it in on my way back.

HARRY Super. It's all paid for.

(HARRY puts the will back in the envelope and seals it and hands it to JACK)

HARRY And throw this in the post box for my solicitor while you're at it.

JACK Sure.

HARRY You're very kind. I don't have much to leave. Well a bit. But want to make sure it goes where it is going to be appreciated.

(HARRY puts the parcel back in the bag)

JACK Cool.

HARRY I think it is.

JACK That's good. Well, I had better be going so I can get your parcel off before going back to work.

HARRY Take it in this bag. I don't like it very much. Just throw it away after.

JACK Oh, ok. Well, goodbye Harry.

HARRY ***(getting up and offering his hand)*** Goodbye Jack.
Thanks for arranging my wishes.

JACK It's fine.

HARRY And you take care. Go for that medical career. You could do worse.

JACK Sure. Cheers. Might see you here again some time.

HARRY Our favourite place. Our favourite view. A good place to meet and say hello and goodbye. Cheerio young man.

JACK Bye

(JACK leaves with his shoulder bag and the bag given to him by HARRY. HARRY looks after him. He looks around at the view. Taking it in. He turns with his back to the audience and removes his coat. He turns back to the audience to reveal he is wearing a suicide vest. He takes a trigger switch out of his trouser pocket and fits it to a lead connected to the vest.)

HARRY Good luck Jack

(HARRY looks up and presses the trigger switch)

BLACKOUT

A MOMENT

by Paul Smith

CHARACTERS

GLENN— mid 30s

SELINA – mid 70s

A bench in a park overlooking a town. Secluded.

GLENN is in a sharp suit, got the latest mobile, Rolex, he is God's gift. He is pacing about while on a phone call.

GLENN *(on phone)*and the only thing getting in the way of the plan is the old folks home which is an eyesore anyway, so it's a win win for us I'd suggest.

Nah, we've already got the say so from the Council. They're not interested in further discussion. They want me out of their hair! *(he laughs)* All I wanna do is get to the YES and then I can rip the carpet out from under the pensioners and we have ourselves a tidy little investment in a prime location. If it's on the market for more than 48 hours I would be very surprised.

SELINA enters with a large carrier bag and wearing spectacles, a coat and a hat. She makes her way slowly to the bench and sits on it. GLENN sees her arrive and moves slightly away from her. He talks a little quieter. SELINA ignores him. She takes a small bottle of water from her bag and sips at it.

Don't worry, I have the planning team in my back pocket – been shagging one of the decision makers for ages to make sure it all goes through. She'd do anything for me and she's got influence into the bargain.

You mustn't listen to anyone else. This is ours, but you've got to give it 110% or else. You can't lose your nerve at this point.

Yes, well I wasn't gonna sit in the office and give you all that detail – just in a park overlooking the town. Nah, quiet as a mouse – apart from some old biddy. Probably lives in the home we're gonna rip down! *(he laughs)*

I'm looking down on the town at the moment; it's so fucking perfect, it's unbelievable. The local population can moan as much as they like but once the go ahead is given, then that's that. And while you're there we're also going to make a bid for the Memorial Hall – some hideous Victorian lavatory of a building – clear it out of the way for the car park; private one. Yeah amazing amount of money you can get from that if you pick the right company. Clamping can generate thousands.

Well it's a miserable town anyway, I'd clear the lot of it. Well, it's kinda what I'm doing..... *(he laughs)*.

Yes I'll take a few pics here and send them over and you can see.

I'm waiting for him to call me so I'm sticking about up here so I don't miss him.

Ok, see you later.

GLENN hangs up and then takes a few photos of the view. He goes and sits on the bench; texting while he does so. Eventually SELINA speaks...

SELINA Beautiful day.

GLENN ignores her.

SELINA Good view.

GLENN ***(half looking up)*** What? Oh, yeah. Well, it's ok.

SELINA I like it.

GLENN Good.

SELINA Hasn't changed much.

GLENN No?

SELINA Well, I don't think so.

GLENN Well don't get too used to it, cos time doesn't stand still for long. This town is in for some changes.

SELINA Oh that's a shame.

GLENN Can't live in the past. The town is dying. Needs get up to date or die.

SELINA That's not a very nice prospect.

GLENN Life Missus.

SELINA The inexorable march of time.

GLENN Yeah. Something like that.

SELINA Are you a builder?

GLENN Developer.

SELINA Is that a posh name for a builder?

GLENN No. I develop building projects. I don't stick bricks together.

SELINA Ah, makes it sound like Lego.

GLENN That's what building is, basically.

SELINA I suppose so. But I'm sure it's quite sophisticated these days. I often think though that modern architecture can't shine a light to the great designs of the past. The Victorians, now they knew how to make a building stand out.

GLENN Yeah? Whatever. Excuse me a moment.

GLENN rises and moves away from the bench. He is taking a call.

GLENN Max. Good thanks. You? No, I'm waiting to hear from him. He's got some inside knowledge that he said he would give me. It will help push the plan through much quicker. Well, let's just say it will compromise one of the members of the top brass and so we should

get a free path once its confirmed. No, not in the office – too many ears around. Don't trust anyone. I'm doing this for everyone, not just me, though that new Porsche is just a little closer to my driveway. Yeah, dream on! *(he laughs)* Ok, speak soon.

GLENN heads slowly back to the bench.

SELINA Lunch hour is it?

GLENN What?

SELINA I was wondering if it was your lunch hour.

GLENN Never take one. I work all day. Just taking some time out of the car and out of the office.

SELINA Fresh air helps clear the mind of the fug of life.

GLENN The what?

SELINA Fug. F. U. G. Fog, mists.

GLENN Not heard the word before.

SELINA Fug? Oh it's a good word.

GLENN Sure.

SELINA You must forgive me for rambling on. Old age.

GLENN Ok.

SELINA You seem a very busy person.

GLENN I am.

SELINA High-powered.

GLENN Yeah.

SELINA Impressive.

GLENN I know.

SELINA So you have plans for the town?

GLENN Some. You won't recognise the place in five years.

SELINA Sounds drastic.

GLENN As I say. It needs it.

SELINA Maybe.

GLENN Live here do you?

SELINA I used to. Just here to visit a friend. She lives in The Willows.

GLENN The old folks home?

SELINA Yes, she's a feisty one and 88 next month. Loves it there.

GLENN Does she?

SELINA Oh yes. Been there for nearly 20 years. Got lots of friends. Family not too far away.

GLENN Good for her.

SELINA Yes, it's very comfortable if a little bit dated, but the residents all love it.

GLENN Do they.

SELINA Yes. But, as I say, could do with a lick of paint here and there.

GLENN Sure.

SELINA We're going to see something at the Memorial Hall tonight. Not sure what. A variety show of some such. Anyway, Betty is looking forward to it.

GLENN Good.

SELINA So, it's not a bad town really.

GLENN Sure.

SELINA So don't go ruining it will you?

GLENN I'm not intending to. But its run down and old and non-functional. It needs a kick up the arse.

SELINA Sounds like me.

GLENN Well you know what I mean then. No offence.

SELINA None taken.

GLENN 'Scuse me. *(answers his phone and moves away again)* Where've you been? Hanging on waiting for ages. I can secure it once I know I'm getting something back in exchange. Yep. No not straight into the account – too suspicious. Cash would do fine. I know it's a lot, but safer. Good man. By six o'clock? Ok 'll see you there. He better not be pulling my chain or I won't be impressed, but he will get what he wants. She'll never know. Trusts me like I'm her pet puppy! *(he laughs)*. Good. Looks like we really have it sorted. A bottle or two for sure. Ok, see you.

GLENN puts his phone in his pocket and starts to leave. As he does so, SELINA tries to get up and can't.

SELINA Sorry, young man. Can you help me?

GLENN *(turning back)* What?

SELINA Sorry, my knees aren't playing ball, could you help pull me up?

GLENN Ok.

GLENN goes over to SELINA and helps her gradually but as she tries to straighten up, her knees really give way and she half collapses to the ground.

GLENN Hold on to me and I'll get you on your feet.

SELINA It's very kind of you.

SELINA puts both arms around GLENN and, in a very awkward and ungainly fashion, he lifts her to her feet.

SELINA Oh thank you, that is so very kind of you.

GLENN No worries. You ok?

SELINA Yes, I am fine thank you.

GLENN Yeah, well I've got to get back down that hill now. Have a nice day.

SELINA Yes. Thank you once again.

GLENN is soon gone.

SELINA

Nice young man.

SELINA looks after him as he goes.

Look at him run down that path. Always quicker getting down than up.

Well, as they say, it only takes a moment.

SELINA, suddenly very spry and able-bodied – almost business-like. She returns to the bench and from her coat she takes out the following; a wallet, a watch and a mobile phone.

One wallet – mmm what's that £200? – handy.

Not sure he will miss his Rolex – probably just wears it for effect.

And his phone. Which he will miss very soon. So better get on.

Pleased I haven't lost my old touch.

SELINA takes a rucksack out of the carrier bag and removes a woollen jacket from it as well as a scarf - which she puts on after removing her hat, overcoat, spectacles, which she puts in the rucksack, along with the carrier bag, the wallet, watch and the phone. The transformation complete – and it should she should appear very different – though not necessarily younger. She puts the rucksack on her back and strides off in a different direction to GLENN. As she goes she waves towards where he went.

SELINA

Have a nice day.

LIGHTS FADE

A GIFT

by Paul Smith

CHARACTERS

ALEC – mid 60s

LAURA – mid 60s

A bench in a park overlooking a town. Secluded.

ALEC is standing looking at the view. It is breezy. He takes in the whole horizon and his eyes sweep a full 180°. A small document case is on the bench.

LAURA runs in from the side. She is in a neat tracksuit with hat. As she stops by the bench she takes a look at her sports watch and clicks the button at the side. She bends over to catch her breath. She has been unnoticed by ALEC who continues surveying the scenery. LAURA takes a water bottle from a belt holder, or maybe she has one of those which you can hold, and has a healthy gulp of water. She sits down on the bench and shuts her eyes to take in the sunshine. ALEC moves backwards to the bench and inadvertently bumps into LAURA. ALEC speaks with an Edinburgh accent.

ALEC Oh I do beg your pardon. I had no idea you were there.

LAURA I just crept up behind you.

They laugh

ALEC You didn't just run up that hill did you?

LAURA I did.

ALEC Heavens. Rather you than me. It was as much as I could do to walk up it.

LAURA Practice. I come up here a few times a week. Just my way of trying to stave off the inevitable.

ALEC Far too unfit myself. But it's a nice day, if a bit breezy, and it's a good view from up here.

LAURA Yes I love it. Even after all the years I have lived here. It's a running challenge I don't mind too much. All downhill from here on!

ALEC Well good for you. I think I need some incentive of a kind.

LAURA Join me in running a marathon!

They laugh

ALEC Think that ship has probably sailed.

LAURA Fair enough. ***(pause)*** Are you looking for somewhere in particular?

ALEC Not really. Trying to get a better sense of the place.

LAURA Ah. Moving here?

ALEC No, no, just doing a bit of research. Nothing serious. Just personal.

LAURA Sounds interesting.

ALEC Well, we will see. Who knows?

LAURA I probably should be getting back before I get too cold.

ALEC Yes, it's very breezy today isn't it.

LAURA Very. Well, goodbye.

ALEC Cheerio.

LAURA starts to go when a gust of wind blows some dust into Alec's face and a grain ends up in his eye. He cries out in some discomfort. LAURA returns. ALEC clutches his face in pain.

LAURA Are you ok?

ALEC Yes, yes I am fine. I think. Just some dust or something. In my eye.

LAURA Come on over to the bench and I will take a look at it for you.

ALEC Thank you. It's not a problem. Thank you.

LAURA leads ALEC to the bench and they sit down. ALEC still clutches his eye.

LAURA Let me have a look.

ALEC Are you a doctor?

LAURA No. But I used to work in a school and often had to deal with pupils in a similar situation.

LAURA takes a handkerchief from her pocket and tries to remove the dust.

ALEC I am not a good patient I am afraid.

LAURA It's ok. I know how to deal with tricky customers.

They laugh.

ALEC Well I will try to be brave.

LAURA Good. Hold still, I think I have it.

ALEC Arrggh.

LAURA Be still.

LAURA slowly moves the handkerchief from ALEC's eye and holds it out for him to see.

LAURA There you are.

ALEC Oh, thank you. Thank you so much. How can so much pain be caused by something so miniscule?

LAURA Eyes are funny things!

ALEC They are indeed. Good job I've got a spare one!

They laugh.

LAURA I should bathe it in warm water when you get home.

ALEC I will. Thank you. Thank you so much.

LAURA Bit of a 'Brief Encounter' moment.

ALEC What? Oh, oh yes. Yes, of course. Goodness are we about to start an illicit affair?

LAURA Oh heavens. Well, it's alright. I am divorced.

ALEC And I'm a widower, so we're not fooling anyone.

They laugh. ALEC suddenly bends his head down.

ALEC Ooooo.

LAURA Are you ok?

ALEC Sorry, just a bit dizzy. The sunlight on my sore eye I think.

LAURA Just stay there for a while. I'll wait here.

ALEC You're very kind.

LAURA Not a problem, it's a nice day despite the wind.

ALEC What did you teach?

LAURA P.E.

ALEC Ah, hence the running.

LAURA Probably. I did a lot of that at school too. It stuck. Retired now of course.

ALEC Retired as well now. Was in brought up mainly in Edinburgh, but been working abroad for some years. Embassy work.

LAURA Interesting. Where?

ALEC Japan. Tokyo.

LAURA How fascinating.

ALEC It was yes. Came back for good last year. My parents both passed away.

LAURA I'm sorry.

ALEC Thank you, but they were both in their 90's so not much to complain about. I zipped back and forth to see them.

LAURA Always thought Japan must be quite a place to visit, but never got round to it.

ALEC You should go. It is a great country. Full of frustrations and wonderment in equal measure. Much like any country really. I never got used to all the quirks! But it's good to be back here.

LAURA Getting used to British quirks again eh?

ALEC Oh and there are many. The climate, the economy, the politics, the state of the roads.... But all far outweighed by the freedoms and the sense of humour. Well that's what I think anyway. Angry Scot that I am.

LAURA Are you?

ALEC What?

LAURA An angry Scot.

ALEC Not in the slightest. It's an affectation accompanied by a wry smile!

They laugh.

LAURA So, you have moved to the area?

ALEC Nope. I live in South London, but when my parents died I uncovered a few documents of great interest, so I embarked on the ancestor trail.

LAURA How wonderful.

ALEC Yes, it's been more than a little illuminating.

LAURA And you found connections with the town?

ALEC Yes, my parents were from here originally.

LAURA Before you were born?

ALEC Well, I moved away before I could remember it.

LAURA It's changed alot, but there are a few parts which are much as they have been for all the time I have lived here.

ALEC A long time?

LAURA For about 40 years.

ALEC Remarkable how a town develops over time.

LAURA Although the view has changed from here it has always been a quiet part of the area. Secluded. Even a bit romantic.

ALEC Perfect for a brief encounter eh?

LAURA Oh heavens. How are you feeling?

ALEC A lot better thank you. Thank you so much for your kindness.

LAURA That's ok. Happy to help and have a chat. I rarely meet anyone up here. It's a really nice change.

ALEC Look, I am sorry to sound a bit forward, but I am staying at the Park Hotel tonight, I am going to be dining alone. Would it be rude to ask if you are free this evening. I really could do with some company; just for the meal you understand.

LAURA Of course I do. And yes. Yes, that would be lovely.

ALEC Oh excellent. That's fantastic. Maybe that illicit affair is on the cards after all.

They both laugh.

ALEC I jest. I promise.

LAURA It's fine. I promise too.

ALEC I will be able to tell you a little more about my hunt for the truth.

LAURA The truth?

ALEC Oh, sorry, yes, the truth about my upbringing.

LAURA Ah.

ALEC You see some of the documents I found when my parents died revealed that they weren't actually my natural parents.

LAURA No?

ALEC They never told me and why would I have ever found out?

LAURA That must have been a real shock.

ALEC Totally. Blew my head off.

LAURA I can imagine. Especially learning so... well when you are that bit older.

ALEC It's difficult to put into words, but it has left me with a mystery to solve which is strangely addictive.

LAURA Well I wish you well in your quest. I had better go home and freshen up before dinner.

ALEC Shall we say 7?

LAURA Perfect. See you at 7.

ALEC I will.

LAURA starts to leave and then stops and turns back.

LAURA I may be able to give you some pointers on family history.

ALEC Oh?

LAURA I was adopted too.

ALEC Really?

LAURA I came back here when I found out it was where I was originally born.

ALEC Here?

LAURA Yes.

ALEC You were born here?

LAURA Yes, but my parents told me I was adopted. I was 8 when I found out. When I married, I somehow found myself living here. I love it.

ALEC Well.....

LAURA I haven't seen the world quite as you have.

ALEC Maybe not.

LAURA Anyway, I am sure we will speak more at dinner.

ALEC No, please. One moment. Just wait a moment.

LAURA Are you al....

ALEC ...no, it's fine. I am fine. I am perfectly ok. It's just that
When your parents told you of your adoption, did they say anything further about your biological family?

LAURA A little, but I never knew much about my real parents – just that they were called Reg and Rose – no surname. I never tried to track them down.

ALEC And you were an only child?

LAURA As far as I know yes.

ALEC Likewise

LAURA Ok.

ALEC Please take a look at this.

ALEC takes a document the case and hands it to LAURA.

ALEC It's ok, it's just a photocopy. It's my proper birth certificate.

LAURA Steven Richard Carnforth. Parents, Reginald and Rosemary Carnforth.

LAURA looks up at ALEC in amazement.

LAURA But.....

ALEC My biological parents. Now read this.

ALEC hands another document to LAURA

LAURA Alice May Carnforth. Parents, Reginald and Rosemary Carnforth.

ALEC and LAURA stare at each other.

LAURA But.... That's. My...date....of.....

LAURA is overwhelmed with emotion.

ALEC birth? Alice?

LAURA Laura. Steven?

ALEC Alec.

LAURA Hello Alec

ALEC Hello Laura. My sister?

LAURA My brother?

ALEC Dinner? Shall we? Shall we?

ALEC and LAURA embrace.

LIGHTS FADE

A LOOK

by Paul Smith

CHARACTERS

NED– mid 20s

PAM – mid 20s

A bench in a park overlooking a town. Secluded.

PAM enters slowly. Looks around and stares at the view. PAM is around 24yo. She is dressed unconventionally. She has noticeable piercings and tattoos. She is holding a small bunch of flowers.

At length, NED enters. He is around 25yo and is dressed similarly to PAM. He wears a hat pulled down over his head. He moves straight to the bench and sits.

There is a complete awkwardness between the two. Though they know each other, they don't communicate well. As will become obvious later in the play the uncomfortable nature of their chat has a reason behind it. So it is absolutely fine if the dialogue is very stilted.

NED I'm here.

PAM You're always here.

NED For you I am.

PAM Always here for me. Whatever.

NED Always.

PAM In the good times and the bad.

NED We've had quite a few of each.

PAM I prefer to think of the good times.

NED Oh me too.

PAM That day I saw you in the supermarket. Wow I said to myself. Just Wow!

NED Hehe. Yes, I thought the same.

PAM Your look. So me. Was like staring into the mirror.

NED Still is.

PAM Still is.

Pause

I just love it up here. The air is clearer, cleaner. Love it when, on cool mornings, the mist just hangs over the town – you feel you are up in the clouds. Floating. Alone. Untroubled. Unaffected by life. Living, but not living. Alive, but not. Sounds silly.

NED Not really.

PAM Wrote my first poem up here.

NED And many more since.

PAM On blades of grass
On broken leaves
On petals of rainbow hues
A drop of rain
A gift of life
A drink so very sweet
To creatures all
To big and small
The nectar of all living souls
The reason for life
The planets blood
This man destroys
This harsh future
This world, it withers

May sense be sought,
Nirvana found.

Pause

NED Wonderful.

PAM I was pleased with it. A bit naff now. More refined now. Fine-tuned.
Better for it. Started to work harder.

PAM moves to the bench and sits; she places the flowers beside NED

NED What's this?

PAM I bought you flowers.

NED Oh.

PAM I know, it's a bit silly.

NED It's great. No one has bought me flowers before. They're great. Thank
you.

PAM I just thought. Well, you know.... You're the little present giver. I
thought... well... hope you like them.

NED ***(picking up the flowers and smelling them, he places them down on
the bench again)*** They smell so good. Thank you Pammy.

PAM I could so do with a cuddle.

NED People about. Maybe not the right time.

PAM Used to be so quiet here. Think people have found our secret place.

NED No secrets are secret for long.

PAM We've had plenty of secrets from each other.

NED And gradually they have been revealed.

PAM And we ended up with just the one.

NED The biggest.

PAM I just wish you'd said something.

NED I couldn't.

PAM Always the silent one. Silent Ned.

NED Quite like that nickname.

PAM Not always silent though.

NED I've had my moments.

PAM That trip to London. You jumped in the lake in Hyde Park. Screamed at the top of your voice. Everyone turned to look. You. Silent Ned. Shy. Timid. Jumping around fully clothed. Splashing uncontrollably. People thought you were a right pisshead. But no...

NED Just joy. Got my first commission. 18 and a commission. £500.

PAM A celebration of your art. That painting was just awesome. Strange to think that it's still hanging on a wall somewhere six or so years later. There's a bit of you in that stranger's house. So love to see it again.

NED Should have made a print of it. Still. It was a springboard. Got me my next commission.

PAM So proud of you that day, though it was a little embarrassing. At least it was a hot day and you dried off. But you looked a right state. My parents weren't impressed – we had to go to the theatre that night and you hadn't brought much in the way of clean clothes with you. Slob.

NED You're Mum almost turned me to stone with her look! I had to apologise. Not sure I've done that very much.

PAM Always a mess. Except for your hair. Hours in front of the mirror. More passion spent on your hair than on any other part of you.

NED Don't diss a good head of hair. Years of cultivation and care. Like a garden, you need to water it regularly, keep it free of weeds, fertilise it and groom it regularly and then you reap the rewards. Makes an impression. An impact. Show off really. Despite the shyness.

PAM And all those hats.

NED Came in handy more recently. Trade-mark.

PAM I hated them all.

NED I know you did.

PAM I never told you.

NED No, but you made some fairly sharp comments about them.

PAM I tried to ignore them.

NED Bit tricky.

PAM But you had your reasons. Trivial to make a fuss about hats.

NED You were ok with this one though. This one you liked. This one you bought for me. So you can't have hated them so very much.

PAM gets up and looks out at the view and sits on the grass maybe.

NED You look so beautiful today. The sun is just picking out your hair so well. Like threads of gold. You're radiant. The sun is good for you. But then you look good in the pouring rain or in the thunder and lightning. A glimpse of you in any weather is to feed my soul. Providing me with inspiration. My muse.

PAM You always said I was your muse. It was me that helped you create your art.

NED And so you did.

PAM And all those sketches you made of me, the full-length portrait, that massive canvas. No wall in the house big enough. But my parents loved it. It's still there. In the stairwell. I am always in their house. So are you. You are in that portrait as much as I am.

NED And always will be. Unless your parents decide to get rid of the painting. But I don't think they will. In fact, I know they won't. You won't either. It is yours after all.

During the start of the following NED rises, looks at PAM and then slowly walks off; as he does so, he removes his hat to show he has no hair on his head – if this is not feasible, then the suggestion may be ignored.

PAM It will always remind me of you, as if I don't have hundreds of photos from everywhere we ever went, to the parties and celebrations. In all those weathers. In all our outfits. To the exhibitions of your paintings and the poetry evenings at which I performed. To our quiet times here – you, me and nature. Communing. Loving. In love. So loved. The

gifts we gave each other. The laughs we had together. To the fun I used to have with all that hair of yours. The shapes and styles I would create with it. Until, until you told me the secret. That your hair would disappear. That you would have your treatment but that it wasn't going to work. The day you decided time was so precious that you wanted to spend it with me. And you chose all those hats. You didn't want to catch a cold. Ned, you were so perfect to me; not to everyone of course, but you were to me. You still are. A year today. Your look stays in my mind's eye. You will always be seen. You will be everywhere I look.

I hold you in my eyes
A stolen moment
A split second
A snapshot.
Life defeated
Spirit triumphant
Soothe all pain
Agony thwarted
Look into mine
Eyes that hold you.
Look. A look,
That look.
Just look.

PAM goes to the bench. Takes some ribbon from her pocket. Ties the flowers to the side of the bench. She quietly leaves.

LIGHTS FADE

NOTE – It should not be obvious at any time that NED exists only in PAM's memory, until the very end. They should not look directly at each other.

A PAIN

by Paul Smith

CHARACTERS

MARY – mid 80s

DEREK – early 60s

A bench in a park overlooking a town. Secluded.

MARY, a lady in mid 80s struggles to get to the bench. She is carrying a heavy bag of shopping. She sits down and takes a half bottle of brandy from her bag, opens it and swigs. She does this intermittently throughout the following.

After a while DEREK enters. He is in full, flamboyant drag including a very unkempt colourful wig and a very short dress and various other items, similarly gaudy, including high heel shoes which he cannot walk in properly. A handbag over his shoulder. He carries a large number of supermarket carrier bags filled with clothes. He is huffing and puffing and drops his bags by the bench and sits down.

Very briefly MARY glances in his direction and then slightly turns away from him. Throughout the two do not acknowledge each other and DEREK speaks to the world in general. MARY ignores him as if he is not there.

DEREK Jeez.

Jeez.

DEREK hunts through the bags and brings out a blouse in very, very bright colours.

I mean I don't mind, but....

All I went in there for was a Sally Ann.

Sally Ann Howes. Blouse.

And they came up with this piece of Brad.

Brad Pitt. Shit.

It's not even my colour. I mean is it? I don't think so.

They just don't get it do they?

No sense of style.

I might not be Grace Kelly, but I'm no Munchkin.

Still, when you go for charity what can you expect.

I said, "I wanna stand out in the crowd. I wanna be colourful. I wanna be seen!" It's not much to ask is it? They probably thought I was a bit of a pain in the Gregory. Gregory Peck. Neck.

I mean, *do* I stand out in the crowd? No. I don't. And this colour isn't going to help. So that was the Oxfam for you. So, I popped into the Help For Hearts shop. Well, you do get a slightly better class in there and not everything is put on display with a strong Judi. Judi Dench. Stench. They actually clean their stock.

Some nice bits and bobs, but nothing shouted at me.

What's wrong with all the fashion designers out there? I mean what? I look around and see trinkets and trifles – nothing more substantial – I am so Harrison by it all. Harrison Ford. Bored.

Maybe I missed my vocation. Maybe I am meant to be Vivienne Westwood. I mean I have her hair after all. Maybe it's a sign. I mean it's something to Henry isn't it? Henry Fonda. Ponder.

Look at all this stuff. Bags of bags and more bags. Bags, that's what my life has come to. No longer the toast of Madame Jojo's, relegated to bag lady. Bags in my hands and under my eyes; look at them, they're not bags, they're ruddy suitcases!

Awww this Mae is really riding up. Mae West. Vest. I can feel my straps all digging in. Why is a bra so bloody uncomfortable? I mean there's more scaffolding holding me up than on Gaudi's flaming

Cathedral. I mean is a softer support too much to ask for. That woman in the Pet Rescue Shop looked at me as if I was asking the impossible. Maybe I am, but it's a real Michael. Michael Caine. Pain.

I should have popped into Starbucks. I need a caffeine fix. How did I get right up here without coffee? I mean why don't they have a wagon up here. Or a defibrillator – they don't think about those traipsing up the hill in heels do they? Look, these ankles are swollen. Swollen to the point of bursting. Look at them. I mean just look. That's bruising that is. Meryl. Meryl Streep. Deep. Deep to the core of my body. It's that bruised.

They don't care, the doctors don't. I went to see that Dr Grant the other day about my various veins. He had a go at me about my footwear. Jimmy Choos? I should be so lucky – you don't pick up them in the Help the Elderly Shop do you? I've scoured this town for decent heels, but no can do. I might just as well put these in the ruddy Errol. Errol Flynn. Bin.

Look at it down there. Miserable little backwater of a town. I should never have moved here. Couldn't wait to get out of Notting Hill and now I can't wait to get back there. Only problem is, no Russell. Russell Crowe. Dough. Stupid me. And look at the charity shops there? Chock a block with Alexander McQueen and Gucci; nearest you get to that down here are the dried berries you get in Waitrose. Can't stand them myself.

No one in the town down there gives a toss. About anything. Certainly not about me. I don't cry out for attention. Never have done. Not like Brian, back in the day. He was always braying like a donkey to get people to turn round and take a look. Mind you at 6ft 6 in 8 inch heels he didn't need to do anything. And that beehive he sported took him to nearly 8ft. He would get really Maggied if he was ignored. Maggie Smithed. Miffed.

Outrageous as he was. Brian. I miss him. Made me laugh. No one does that anymore. I do my best to make friends, to connect..... connect; what the hell does that mean? I just think I must be out of Johnny with most other people. Johnny Depp. Step.

Just a lonely old queen trolling around for something to bring a smile to my sagging jowls. I need to use a bit more tape around the back of me ears to tighten things up. Like Barbara Cartland. Oh yes she did. I'm telling you. She knew all the beauty tricks and pink is my colour too. Always has been. It's a strong colour. Says a lot about your personality. Not John, like yellow or beige. John Wayne. Lame.

DEREK takes a mirror from his handbag and looks into it.

Good God. What a state. It's Bette Davis to a tee – Baby Jane eat your heart out. Touch up the lippy.

DEREK takes out a very bright red lipstick and applies it – he blots it with a tissue.

Mmmmmm that's better. A smudge of Elizabeth Arden Legendary Red and I'm ready for action.

If only the action was something more than preparing a meal of flash fry steak and some oven chips. That and sitting in front of the TV – a diet of DIY and holiday programmes. My life is dull and boring and unglamorous.

64 and on the discard heap.

Nothing but aches and pains.

Broken heels and knickers riding up my arse.

It's no life is it?

What have I got to show for the day?

Rags.

Tat.

This and that.

I need some Tom.

Tom Cruise. Booze.

But I don't drink so that won't help my mood.

I need to Bruce.

Bruce Lee. Pee.

But I can't be bothered.

Have to wait till I get home.

Life.

You get no Tom for anything. Tom Hanks. Thanks.

It's just crap isn't it?

Life.

I mean, what's it all about?

MARY puts her bottle away and gets up as DEREK stares into the distance. She still doesn't look at DEREK.

MARY

Will you just shut the Donald up? Donald Duck. Fuck.

MARY picks up her shopping and walks off. DEREK rises with his bags and looks towards where MARY has gone and starts to follow her.

DEREK

Sorry Mum. Was I boring you? Steak and chips tonight.....

LIGHTS FADE

A LAUGH

by Paul Smith

CHARACTERS

FRED – 85ish

IRIS – 85ish

A bench in a park overlooking a town. Secluded.

FRED is pushing IRIS in a wheelchair to the bench.

FRED Blimey Iris. You've put on a bit of timber since I last did this.

IRIS Bloody cheek. Maybe you're a little less fit – must be 30 years since.

FRED I'm not that decrepit.

IRIS And I'm not that heavy.

FRED Well this chair must be made of iron then!

IRIS Don't blame Doris!

FRED Doris the Wheelchair. Have you ever heard the like?

IRIS Don't be rude. She has sensitive ears!

They both laugh. FRED parks the wheelchair beside the bench.

IRIS Wooo, well we've picked a good day to come up here. Just look.

FRED Well, we've waited long enough. Not too cold are you? Quite breezy.

IRIS I have so many layers on. I'm fine.

FRED Well I need a sit down, don't know about you!

They both laugh.

FRED Bit different to the first time we came up here.

IRIS The old bench has gone.

FRED It was past it even in 1961. So uncomfortable.

IRIS And you got a splinter in your bum.

FRED I did that!

They laugh.

FRED And some beautiful young maiden got it out for me.

IRIS With my sewing needle! Luckily it was quiet or people would have wondered what on earth we were up to.

They laugh.

FRED Tea?

IRIS Please.

FRED takes a Thermos flask from bag hanging on back of wheelchair as well and two tin mugs and pours tea.

IRIS Biscuit?

FRED Garibaldi?

IRIS Please. When we first met you had three sugars in your tea.

FRED passes a packet of biscuits to IRIS who takes one and eats it during..

FRED I know. I had sugar with everything. I'm sweet enough now.

IRIS Took you long enough.

They laugh.

FRED Did I tell you what that woman said in the Post Office the other day?

IRIS I don't know, did you?

FRED I can't remember. Shall I tell you again?

IRIS Probably best, because if you did tell me, I've almost certainly forgotten.

They laugh.

FRED She said she recognised me; she thought about it and said, she knew who I was. I was the man from the couple who are always laughing.

They laugh.

IRIS Well she was right. We are!

FRED She said it must be the secret of a long marriage and a long life.

IRIS She might be right again!

FRED Maybe she doesn't realise how exhausting it can be.

They laugh. Then look at the view.

IRIS That's our life down there.

FRED 'Tis indeed.

IRIS Where we met. Where we courted. Where we got married. Where we lived. Where we moved to. Where we shop. Where we spent time together. Where we brought up the children.

FRED Never thought of it like that. Shame that so much has changed.

IRIS Including us.

FRED We haven't changed that much.

IRIS We still laugh a lot!

They laugh.

IRIS I wish the library was still there.

FRED They should have a Blue Plaque there. 'Fred and Iris Met Here – 4 March 1961

IRIS I used to put all those new Dennis Wheatley books aside for you, hoping you would come in when I was on duty.

FRED I went in every day. Even on your days off. Just to make sure I saw you.

IRIS Love amongst the stacks! It's where we had our first kiss.

FRED Did we?

IRIS We did. So naughty. In the Science section which was furthest from the front desk and always the quietest!

FRED Heavens. How do you remember that?

IRIS Just stuck. It was special.

FRED We were brave.

They laugh.

FRED I'd wait for you in the Kardomah to have lunch.

IRIS Mmmmm they did some good cakes there.

FRED Funny to think that the library is now a coffee house itself.

IRIS And the Kardomah is a Vape Shop or something. It's been many things since it closed.

FRED Pity.

IRIS Times change.

FRED More tea?

IRIS No thanks.

FRED packs away the mugs and Thermos during...

IRIS The Memorial Hall is still there thank goodness. A bit battered and bruised, but still there. Can't forget what we did there.

FRED Pantomime.

IRIS Our first and last time. Jack and the Beanstalk.

FRED I thought it was Dick Whittington.

During the following they both laugh a lot.

IRIS Jack and the Beanstalk. You must remember the night the Dame ducked out of the way when she was getting a pie in the face and it landed all over you.

FRED I've still got the mental scars.

IRIS And it went all over the floor and I slipped over in it.

FRED Then I tried to help you up and I slipped over in it too.

IRIS Then the Dame tried to get us both up and she went head over heels as well and we were all desperately trying to get up out of the slippery gloop and we couldn't. I don't think we could stop laughing.

FRED Or the audience. Luckily it was just before the interval so they had a chance to clean up.

IRIS And so did we. And a chance to calm down.

FRED Oh I hadn't thought about that for years. I need to calm down myself now!!

IRIS Wasn't there something else about a pantomime which we loved?

FRED No idea.

IRIS Church with the wobbly spire still there.

FRED That was a day wasn't it?

IRIS Always say it was the best wedding I've ever been to.

FRED I should hope so too.

IRIS It was. Nothing can top that.

FRED My Mum used to say the same. Said it was far better than her wedding. Mind you hers was during the War so not surprised.

IRIS She was lovely your Mum. So gentle. So kind.

FRED You and her were peas in a pod. That's why we got along so well.

IRIS She would make me laugh.

FRED Anything makes you laugh.

They laugh.

IRIS I know. I can't help it.

FRED Despite everything you've been through over the last few years I have no idea how you still keep so chirpy.

IRIS It helps that you keep me that way. Might be a bit miserable if I didn't have my best friend with me all the time.

FRED Same goes for me.

IRIS We've been very lucky.

FRED Indeed we have. Think the kids would say the same. They're full of laughter too.

IRIS And the little ones. They are very funny.

FRED They are. Hang on a moment. Pantomime. It's that bit of music isn't it?

IRIS Is it?

FRED We heard it had a concert at the Memorial Hall. Lovely piece.

IRIS Was it called Pantomime?

FRED I think so or something like that. Hang on I'll Google it.

FRED continues to play with his phone – every so often a piece of music blares out – any number of genres can be included.

IRIS You'll be looking for hours.

FRED Patience.

IRIS This was the first place we walked Dottie.

FRED Ah, she was a grand dog.

IRIS Beautiful.

FRED And very lazy.

IRIS Everyone loved her.

FRED And everyone thought she needed loads of exercise.

IRIS So funny wasn't she?

FRED Fitted right in with us two. Made me laugh every day we had her.

IRIS Bonkers wasn't she?

They laugh.

FRED She was.

IRIS She was happy with a mad dash around the garden and a decent walk. Lovely she was. It devastated me when she went.

FRED Why didn't we ever get another?

IRIS Kids came along I suppose. Work. I don't know.

FRED Not too late now.

IRIS With me in this?

FRED It could help pull you along.

IRIS Can you imagine? A greyhound pulling Doris?

FRED The fastest wheelchair in the West!

They laugh.

IRIS Goodness me what is that racket you're making.

FRED Trying to find this music. This pantomime or whatever it is.

IRIS Don't worry on my account.

FRED You know me, won't give up.

IRIS Oh I know you alright Frederick Stanley Watkins!

FRED And I know you too Iris Maria Watkins. And whatsmore I love you too.

IRIS And I love you too.

FRED Ooooo oooo. I think I have it. Recognise this?

FRED plays the opening bars of the Pantomime from Zémire et Azor by André Grétry (preferably the recording by the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra under Thomas Beecham – 1959 remastered version) After a short while he speaks.

FRED That's it. Isn't it?

IRIS Oh Fred. Yes. Yes it is.

FRED I forgot it was from a ballet. This bit of it is called the pantomime – no Beanstalk there I don't think. Zémire et Azor by André Grétry, if I've said it right.

IRIS I remember now. About the ballet. It's a really beautiful love story. Wish we could have seen it some time.

FRED Wonder if anyone performs it.

IRIS I do hope so, it's just a perfect piece isn't it?

The following, to the end, should be delivered with a very gentle pace.

IRIS Beautiful.

FRED So pleased I found it.

IRIS You should get the CD.

FRED If there is one.

IRIS reaches out her hand to FRED who takes it and holds it.

IRIS I'm sure there must be.

FRED I'll have a search when we get home.

Amazon may have a copy.

Must be years since we heard it last. Beautiful.

Don't think they play it on the radio very often. Not sure I have ever heard it.

IRIS smiles and closes her eyes.

IRIS Nor me. It is so lovely.

FRED CD's aren't the thing any more. Someone was saying on the news that people are back to buying vinyl. 33 and a thirds! Can you believe it? Shouldn't have got rid of all of mine. Might have been worth a bob or two.

But CD's take up less room I suppose.

FRED closes his eyes briefly and listens. When he opens them up again..

Sun starting to go down.

Best think about making a move.

Well, this has been lovely hasn't it. And funny. Nothing like a bit of a laugh to clear away the cobwebs eh?

FRED looks at IRIS. He is still holding her hand.

Iris.

Iris my love.

There is no response from IRIS. FRED touches her cheek.

Oh no. Oh Iris. My Iris. My lovely Iris.

IRIS remains still. She has died. FRED leans to kiss her cheek, still holding her hand. He chokes up and weeps quietly for a short while.

Come on lovely. At least you finished with a laugh eh? A good old laugh for us both to remember. Let's get you home. You sleep. You sleep my Iris.

FRED pushes IRIS off.

LIGHTS FADE

A BLAST

by Paul Smith

CHARACTERS

GEORGE – mid 20s

MAURICE – early 50s

A bench in a park overlooking a town. Secluded.

MAURICE is sitting on the bench and reading a copy of THE TIMES. He has a briefcase beside him. He is wearing a business suit and an overcoat.

GEORGE enters, he is wearing a business suit and carrying a briefcase, very similar to the one beside MAURICE. MAURICE looks up briefly and then returns to his paper.

GEORGE sits, puts the briefcase on the ground beside him and looks at the view. He then takes a packet of cigarettes out of his pocket and searches around for a lighter.

Throughout their exchange they barely look at each other. Time should be taken over the lines.

GEORGE Do you have a light? (*proffers his cigarette*)

MAURICE Certainly. (*MAURICE offers a lighter which GEORGE takes*).

GEORGE Do you smoke this brand?

MAURICE No, I don't think I know that brand.

GEORGE Perhaps I might introduce it to you.

MAURICE Thank you.

MAURICE takes a cigarette and puts it in the breast pocket of his suit. GEORGE pockets the lighter and returns the cigarette to the packet.

GEORGE Do you come here often?

MAURICE Sometimes. Not often. No. Not often.

GEORGE It's a good view.

MAURICE That's why I come here. For the view.

GEORGE It's good. The view. It's a good view.

MAURICE It is.

GEORGE And quiet.

MAURICE Oh yes, it's quiet. Very quiet. Out of the way.

GEORGE Off the beaten track.

MAURICE Secluded.

GEORGE Away from prying eyes.

MAURICE Not overlooked.

GEORGE No curtain twitchers.

MAURICE Quiet.

PAUSE

MAURICE That church. The one with the wobbly spire.

GEORGE Yes I see it.

MAURICE I sometimes go there.

GEORGE For prayer?

MAURICE I'm sorry?

GEORGE Do you go to the church with the wobbly spire in order to pray?

MAURICE Oh no. No. I don't have any religious inclinations. Not me. Not personally I don't. Do you?

GEORGE Oh I never discuss religion.

MAURICE Ah.

GEORGE Never discuss religion nor politics.

MAURICE I see.

GEORGE Quickest way to end friendships.

MAURICE Yes. But we're not friends.

GEORGE No, and never will be.

MAURICE I don't suppose so.

GEORGE Keep our personal lives personal. Private.

MAURICE Yes.

GEORGE Don't want things to get messy.

MAURICE No.

GEORGE So why do you go to the church with the wobbly spire if not to indulge in sacred contemplation and singing praises to the Lord?

MAURICE Oh, I go there as its quiet there too.

GEORGE Secluded?

MAURICE Yes.

GEORGE Off the beaten track?

MAURICE It is.

GEORGE Away from prying eyes and curtain twitchers.

MAURICE Most definitely.

GEORGE You just go there for the quiet.

MAURICE In the churchyard.

GEORGE Ah.

MAURICE There's a nice bench there.

GEORGE Similar to this one?

MAURICE *(takes a look at the bench on which they sit)* Similar. Yes. It is similar. It's not the same. No. Not the same. But it is similar.

GEORGE Well, it couldn't be the same could it? Otherwise there would only be one of them and this one would have to be moved up and down the hill to and from the churchyard to where we find it now.

MAURICE That's very true and it is why I have described said bench as being similar to this one. It isn't the same one.

GEORGE Indeed. So what do you do on said bench?

MAURICE It can be a good place to meet. Like this bench.

GEORGE To meet?

MAURICE To meet, yes.

GEORGE To meet whom? Lovers?

MAURICE Oh no. Not lovers. I don't meet lovers in a church.

GEORGE Not even a church with a wobbly spire?

MAURICE Not even one with a straight and true spire.

GEORGE I see.

MAURICE No just to meet. Maybe meetings like this.

GEORGE I see. Unmentionable meetings.

MAURICE Well, certainly meetings I don't intend to elaborate on.

GEORGE Secret meetings.

MAURICE Maybe.

GEORGE Illicit ones.

MAURICE Maybe.

GEORGE But not with lovers.

MAURICE No. No, not with lovers.

PAUSE

MAURICE *(looking at his watch)* Well, time is pressing.

GEORGE It is.

MAURICE Is it safe?

GEORGE Oh yes I think so. I think it's safe enough.

MAURICE No, prying eyes?

GEORGE No, we're not overlooked.

MAURICE We are off the beaten track after all.

GEORGE We are.

MAURICE So, shall we?

GEORGE I think we should.

MAURICE Yes, especially as time is pressing.

GEORGE Indeed.

Almost totally in sync MAURICE and GEORGE swap briefcases. They place the swapped briefcase beside themselves. Still not looking at each other.

MAURICE You're not going to check the contents?

GEORGE I trust you.

MAURICE Oh I don't think that is ever wise.

GEORGE You don't?

MAURICE I don't. I may have removed the important contents.

GEORGE Really?

MAURICE I say 'may', but I think it would be good to check. After all, the contents are time sensitive.

GEORGE They are.

MAURICE Hence the requirement to deliver to you became my priority. I changed my schedule to accommodate the circumstances.

GEORGE I am grateful for your intervention.

MAURICE It is what was needed in the circumstances. Disaster needed to be averted.

GEORGE We are most grateful.

PAUSE

MAURICE I think you should check the contents.

GEORGE I think I should.

GEORGE picks up the briefcase and sets it on his lap. He clicks it open and looks inside. He leaves the case open on his lap.

GEORGE All appears to be in order.

MAURICE I knew it would be.

GEORGE You did ask me to check.

MAURICE Oh *I* knew it was all in order, but I wanted to make sure you knew it was all in order too.

GEORGE Thank you for your consideration.

MAURICE You are more than welcome. But now I feel that, time being of the essence, I should depart.

GEORGE Yes, you are right. Time is definitely of the essence.

MAURICE I suggest that time isn't wasted further.

GEORGE You would?

MAURICE I would.

GEORGE Mmmmmm.

MAURICE That said...

GEORGE What said?

MAURICE That. That which I just said. Viz a viz the wasting of time.

GEORGE Ah. Yes, well I cannot continue with this particular process whilst I am still in your company.

MAURICE What do you suggest then?

GEORGE I suggest that one of us should return from whence we came.

MAURICE From whence? Where's that?

GEORGE Where's what?

MAURICE Whence?

GEORGE You would know from your point of view as I may have come from somewhere else entirely.

MAURICE Indeed. Well on that note, as they say.

GEORGE Who are they?

MAURICE The ones who say 'well on that note'.

GEORGE Ah.

MAURICE Well, on that note, as they say, I will take my leave and allow you to complete the mission.

MAURICE stands.

MAURICE Goodbye then.

GEORGE Goodbye.

MAURICE Might see you later then.

GEORGE Might? You will.

MAURICE Good.

GEORGE removes a brown paper package from the briefcase which he closes. He leaves the package on the top.

MAURICE Why your Mother thought it sensible to give us the same briefcase I will never know. Enjoy your sandwiches. Cheese and chutney.

GEORGE Thanks Dad. What did you have?

MAURICE Ham and Mustard.

GEORGE Nice.

MAURICE See you for dinner.

GEORGE unwraps his sandwiches and starts to eat. MAURICE moves away and starts to laugh out loud. GEORGE tries to control his own laughter as he eats.

LIGHTS FADE