

## ELEVEN FIFTY-SIX

By Michael Percy

### Characters:

**Dr Jessica Caulfield** is a psychiatrist.

**Nathan Protheroe** is a patient. He wears a white disposable paper suit.

**David Ellis** is a nurse in the secure wing of the hospital.

### Scene One - Day One

(The stark interview room of a secure mental hospital. There is a table and two chairs. Nathan Protheroe is sitting on one of the chairs with his arms and head resting on the table. He is wearing a paper all-in-one suit. Nathan appears to be asleep. David Ellis in nurses' uniform is on a third chair some distance away from the table.)

(Enter Doctor Jessica Caulfield. She has a slim folder which she puts on the table. She coughs to gain Nathan's attention. Nothing. She glances at David and shrugs. David smiles and shrugs. She taps quietly on the table.)

**Jessica:** Hello. (No response. She taps louder.) Hello, Mr Protheroe. (No response.)

(Jessica reaches out to touch Nathan but he sits up with a start. Jessica steps back in shock. Nurse David stands ready to spring to her defence but she waves him away.)

**Jessica:** It's alright, alright. My fault, I must have startled you.

**Nathan:** Don't apologise. I wake like that sometimes. Quickly. In a flash.

**Jessica:** My name is Jessica Caulfield. (She offers her hand.)

**Nathan:** (Standing and shaking her hand.) Nathan Protheroe. And this is nurse David Ellis.

**Jessica:** (Exchanges a look with David.) We've met. As you may imagine.

**Nathan:** Of course. You're colleagues. Silly of me.

(They sit.)

**Jessica:** (After a moment in which no one speaks.) Do you understand why you are here?

**Nathan:** (Cod London Accent) The coppers can't pin nuffing on me Guv.

**Jessica:** That sums it up I suppose.

**Nathan:** And they think I'm potty.

**Jessica:** Not so keen on that summary but... **(Pause)** You were referred to us under the terms of the Mental Health Act.

**Nathan:** So when can I leave?

**Jessica:** **(She opens the folder and holds up the only sheet of paper it contains.)** We don't know much about you do we? When you were arrested you were walking naked along Bayswater Road in broad daylight. The officer reports that you appeared confused and would not give your name.

**Nathan:** Confused, I didn't know which bit to cover up first. But I did tell him my name. Later. In his car.

**Jessica:** And after two days of police questioning that is still all we know about you.

**(Nathan nods.)**

**Jessica:** Finger print and DNA checks revealed... nothing.

**Nathan:** I know. I told them that would be the case. I thought they'd let me go then.

**Jessica:** It wasn't simply a lack of any criminal record - you don't register anywhere - on any system, in none of the records. National Insurance, DVLA, HNS, Border Controls. According to the records you weren't born, never been sick, never driven a car - legally - never entered the country, never been to school, never worked, never voted...

**Nathan:** Never inconvenienced the authorities with the need to track me. Why not just let me slip back into my quiet life?

**Jessica:** But you were naked. Confused.

**Nathan:** **(Fingering his paper overall.)** Nakedness is over - a temporary embarrassment. Not only for me, I do understand that. There was a poor lady who... well, let's say she didn't know where to look for best. Now my modesty is covered I would offend nobody. And I can resolve the problem very quickly if you let me leave.

**Jessica:** But how? You obviously had no cash or credit cards.

**Nathan:** Nowhere to keep them. I can think of one place where I could slip a credit card but your policemen looked there.

**Jessica:** You haven't shown us that you have a family to go to. No house to live in. No visible means of support. That's how the police describe a tramp or vagrant and you are obviously not that. You are in excellent health. Well nourished. Very healthy in fact. But the problem of how you would acquire a set of clothes remains.

**Nathan:** A set of clothes? Set? How would I acquire a set of clothes. **(He seems to be testing the word 'set'.)** In my simple all-in-one suit I will pass unnoticed in the London throng. Just say the word and I'm gone. Poof, like a fart in the breeze.

**(Short Silence in which Jessica and Nathan regard each another. Nathan tries a smile. Jessica remains blank.)**

**Jessica:** But first I have to establish your mental state. That's quite a lot of work - tests, reports, meetings. It would help me enormously if you gave your home address or a person who could verify your identity. Then this would all be over and I could return to my other patients.

**Nathan:** So if I gave you an address you would let me walk out of this place in my paper suit?

**Jessica:** I should think so, once certain checks are made.

**Nathan:** But I might be loopy-loo. Would you really let a madman go free just because he tells you his address?

**Jessica:** Believe me, there are lots of people on the streets right now showing more signs of mental instability than you. Just give us a little information about yourself and you're on your way.

**Nathan:** Tricky. I can go if I tell you but I can't tell you.

**David:** Catch twenty-two.

**Nathan:** Twenty-two what?

**David:** You know, catch twenty-two?

**Nathan:** Noop.

**Jessica:** It's not quite a catch twenty-two. That was built around a desire to prove insanity. Here Nathan needs to prove the opposite.

**David:** It's similar though - the point was that a man must be insane to fight in a war.

**Nathan:** Oh definitely.

**David:** So you cannot get out of the army by claiming insanity because only a sane person would refuse to fight a war. Get it?

**Nathan:** Mmmm. Yeah. Got it.

**David:** Catch twenty-two.

**Jessica:** Thanks David. I think we should get on.

**Nathan:** **(To David)** I can see the irony in what you say but this is not in a catch twenty-two situation. I agree with Jessica – Dr Caulfield

**David:** It's similar.

**Jessica:** **(impatiently)** Thank you David.

**Nathan:** Is catch twenty-two part of the mental health act?

**Jessica:** No it's a book.

**David:** And a film. **(He makes the charades mime for a film.)** It's very famous – from the sixties I think. The title became part of the language.

**Nathan:** **(To David.)** Kushty. Do you have the book? I'd like to read it. **(He makes the charades mime for a book.)**

**David:** I'm sure I can find a copy.

**Jessica:** **(Firmly, to regain control.)** Nathan, what sort of reading do you like?

**Nathan:** Mmm, lots.

**Jessica:** Have you read much from the sixties?

**Nathan:** A bit.

**Jessica:** But not Catch Twenty-Two?

**Nathan:** New to me. **(To David)** Don't forget to let me have that book.

**David:** And I'll see if I can get hold of the DVD for you.

**Nathan:** Thanks mucker.

**Jessica:** You are an intelligent man, well read I imagine. What's wrong with listing a few books that you've enjoyed?

**Nathan:** How can I retain my air of mystery if you know all about me?

**Jessica:** I'm asking you to mention a few books – where's the harm?

**Nathan:** Bumble, bumble.

**Jessica:** What do you mean by that?

**Nathan:** That I'm lost for words.

**Jessica:** Do you want to try naming your favourite authors?

**(Nathan grins at Jessica.)**

**Jessica:** Okay, I accept you're not ready to give any personal information but can you at least explain why not?

**Nathan:** Because that would tell you all you need to know.

**Jessica:** Why is that a bad thing?

**Nathan:** Awww – Bumble bumble.

**Jessica:** You must see my problem. By refusing to offer proof of your identity or even explain why you can't, we are left with just one big question mark.

**Nathan:** No, you're left with an innocent man who wants a quiet life.

**Jessica:** Who doesn't wear clothes in a busy London Street.

**Nathan:** Got me bang to rights there guv'.

**Jessica:** Are you trying to exist outside the rat race - Is that why you don't have any credit cards or bank accounts?

**Nathan:** Got no pockets.

**Jessica:** If we don't have a serious exchange I can't build a picture of your state of mind and therefore I cannot comment on your mental condition.

**Nathan:** But what grounds do you have for doubting my mental condition?

**Jessica:** Query naked in The Bayswater Road – Query missing identity.

**Nathan:** But I know who I am and the nakedness could have been... a practical joke. A drunken prank.

**Jessica:** Is that it? Is this a stag night joke? Were you left tied to a lamp post naked by your friends?

**David:** That would explain it.

**Nathan:** These friends of mine, what can I say...?

**David:** I remember my stag night...

**Jessica:** **(Closing her folder)** Thank you David, not now. A simple explanation, I'm glad we got there in the end.

**Nathan:** Me too. I'll be off now then. **(Stands, shakes Jessica's hand and then goes to David.)** Bye Doctor, thanks for your help with this.

**Jessica:** No problem. So, what is your address?

**Nathan:** **(Stops in his tracks.)** Ah. Thought I had you there.

**Jessica:** Like to resume your seat?

**Nathan:** That would be a pleasure doctor, thank you.

**Jessica:** I have concerns about your mental health considering the way you were found and our conversation so far. And I am empowered to keep you in this secure unit for up to twenty-eight days.

**Nathan:** Catch twenty-eight.

**Jessica:** If you like.

**Nathan:** And after twenty-eight days?

**Jessica:** If matters remain unresolved anything may happen. You could be held here for a very long time.

**Nathan:** That does pose a small problem.

**Jessica:** Yes?

**Nathan:** Do I have to stay here? In this particular hospital?

**Jessica:** The police may want access to you. **(Pause.)** What kind of problem are we talking about?

**Nathan:** I'm not quite sure what to tell you. Or how to present it. Let's try multiple choice. Option one - I am actually a re-incarnation of Napoleon. Bit taller but that's down to good food and plenty of rest. **(Pause.)** You don't look impressed. Option two - have I introduced you to my friend George? He's had to stand all this time – perhaps we could fetch him a chair. **(Pause.)** No? Option three - I am a time traveller from eighteen thousand years in the future. Which explanation do you fancy?

**Jessica:** Which suits you best?

**Nathan:** I forgot option four – sanity. So, to sum up we have to choose between Napoleon, my invisible friend, time travel or plain boring sanity.

**Jessica:** With the exception of option four they are all delusional states.

**Nathan:** I could make an argument for sanity being a form of delusion but I don't know you well enough. Weighing up the various states of mind we are discussing I would say I'm too tall for Napoleon; I've not given consistent evidence of an invisible friend – get off – and sanity is in doubt.

**Jessica:** You missed out time traveller.

**Nathan:** I did, didn't I.

**Jessica:** What are you saying to me?

**Nathan:** Tricky.

**Jessica:** Try.

**Nathan:** Suppose. Just suppose, for a brief moment, I was a time traveller. **(Pause)** And suppose that I needed urgently to be elsewhere in two days time. How would that grab you?

**Jessica:** Go on.

**Nathan:** This is a two-way street here buddy. I need feedback.

**(Jessica smiles at this.)**

**Nathan:** What does your smile mean?

**Jessica:** I'm listening. **(She begins taking notes.)**

**Nathan:** You're pretty cool, I'll say that for you.

**Jessica:** Let's go with time traveller for the moment - why were you naked?

**Nathan:** Ah that's a bit embarrassing. You see, the movement in time of material objects and people - live matter - requires very different technical approaches. There was a processing error.

**David:** **(Laughing out loud.)** I'm sorry about this. It's just.... I can't help wondering where your clothes ended up. **(Laughs again.)** I've got this vision of...

**Jessica:** David, please.

**Nathan:** It's nothing to laugh at I've lost a very nice suit.

**David:** **(Recovering.)** Sorry.

**Nathan:** Perhaps I should have gone for Napoleon.

**Jessica:** Carry on.

**Nathan:** It is a history project. I am part of a team sent to study this period of our history.

**Jessica:** So are you a history student?

**Nathan:** No, I am a researcher. I was a student years ago.

**Jessica:** Where did you study?

**Nathan:** You won't be able to phone my university and check my identity – and if you could you'd run up one heck of a phone bill.

**Jessica:** Okay, go on.

**Nathan:** There are many periods of history which we study, basically to avoid making the same mistakes you have. In one sense we are very lucky, we can avoid most of the problems you've had as we rebuild our society.

**Jessica:** Why is your society being rebuilt? What happened?

**Nathan:** Forget I said that – about a catastrophe.

**Jessica:** Too late I'm afraid. But what does it matter – the whole of history can be summed up as one catastrophe after another.

**Nathan:** Okay, there was a catastrophe in the past, a long way back. Well, from my perspective it's a long way back but for you it's happening right now. Beginning to happen right now.

**Jessica:** So you are here to study this catastrophe.

**Nathan:** I am following the earliest stages of the catastrophe. It's surprisingly difficult to pinpoint what could be described as the beginning of something in an historical context.

**Jessica:** Will this happen in my lifetime?

**Nathan:** No, no. Don't worry about that.

**Jessica:** So why have you got to be somewhere else in two days' time?

**Nathan:** Because of... an event. I really cannot say any more than that.

**Jessica:** Okay, let's discuss your project in general.

**Nathan:** That should be alright, I think. Amongst many other things we are studying the conflict between Islam and Christianity. How it feeds into the final catastrophe.

**Jessica:** Are you... is the new society opposed to religion.

**Nathan:** I'm not opposed to anything, I'm a researcher. But we are determined to avoid those kinds of clashing ideologies. Causes far too many problems.

**Jessica:** Are you building a Utopia?

**Nathan:** I doubt that. Nobody's perfect.

**Jessica:** Do we ever manage to sort out our religious differences?

**Nathan:** You are overtaken by events.

**Jessica:** So we don't.

**Nathan:** In the grand scheme of things it becomes irrelevant.

**Jessica:** Okay, who sent you on this mission?

**Nathan:** I work in what you would call a university. We have a number of study projects running at any one time but it takes years of preparation for each mission. A big problem is language and current idiom. I specialise in your country in this time. How am I doing?

**Jessica:** Fine. Except nobody says "Got me bang to rights there guv" - trust me on this. So, specifically, what are you studying on this visit?

**Nathan:** Ahh. A no-go area has been reached.

**Jessica:** Okay. Do you receive instructions while you're here?

**Nathan:** If you mean do I hear voices in my head telling me what to do, the answer is no. We can only communicate by literally transmitting written messages through time. Crude but effective. There are no voices in my head, sorry.

**Jessica:** Is there some kind of machine that you use to travel in time?

**Nathan:** This is pretty good, it's like you believe me. There is no machine as such. We arrive through a time sector called the Continuum Vent. It is an area of physics that you guys didn't quite get. Yet.

**Jessica:** So Einstein missed a beat.

**Nathan:** But he set you on the right road. He is still revered for what he achieved.

**(A pause while Jessica finishes a note.)**

**Nathan:** **(To David.)** I'm making progress – she's writing it all down.

**Jessica:** **(Looks at her watch.)** This is as far as I can go today. We can meet again tomorrow at the same time. Please return to the ward and I'll see you again tomorrow.

**Nathan:** **(Leaving with David.)** Is that it?

**Jessica:** For today. We've made a good start.

**Nathan:** Fine, then good evening Dr Caulfield.

**Jessica:** Good evening Nathan.

**Nathan:** We did alright didn't we?

**Jessica:** We made progress, yes.

**Nathan:** Something for you to chew over tonight. Difficult telling you this stuff but I'm buggered if I don't and buggered if I do.

**David:** Catch twenty-two.

**Nathan:** In the sense that I am buggered every-which-way, this is a catch twenty-two.

**(Exit David and Nathan. Jessica collects her folder from the table, considers the conversation for a moment and then exits.)**

## **Scene Two - Day Two**

**(Jessica enters carrying the folder. She is followed by David.)**

**Jessica:** How was he on the ward last night?

**David:** Quite relaxed considering. Avoids conversations and doesn't mention this time travel story. I have to say he's not displaying any of the usual delusional characteristics.

**Jessica:** **(Playful - mock horror.)** You don't think he's telling the truth do you?

**David:** He's very consistent – tells a good story, fascinating. Looking forward to the next instalment.

**Jessica:** My guess is he'll need treatment as an out-patient but no more than that. I'm going to recommend that he stays for observation for another week mainly so social services can find him somewhere to live. Go and get him please David. I agree he's a fascinating case – if he wasn't claiming to be a time traveller I would say he is very well adjusted.

**David:** Well adjusted to being a time traveller. The man in the street would call him bonkers. Polite but bonkers.

**Jessica:** Sadly I cannot use 'bonkers' as a diagnosis – not unless there's a Latin equivalent.

**David:** That's the penalty of too much education doctor, you are not allowed to see the wood for the trees.

**(There is a knock on the door before David can leave the room. )**

**Jessica:** Come in.

**(Enter Nathan carrying a copy of The Time Traveller's Wife.)**

**Nathan:** I hope you don't mind, I thought I'd come down. Save time.

**Jessica:** That's fine, nice to see you've settled into our routine. Take a seat.

**Nathan:** I assume you've had a good natter about me.

**Jessica:** Yes, I wouldn't make a secret of it.

**Nathan:** What's the current thinking?

**Jessica:** It would be good to chat a little more.

**Nathan:** So the time traveller thing didn't do it for you?

**Jessica:** I do not have an opinion about what you believe but sometimes we need to help people come to terms with their beliefs.

**Nathan:** Make them see sense?

**Jessica:** No, provide clarification.

**Nathan:** Do you believe me?

**Jessica:** I think we are in a loop of questions.

**Nathan:** Found this book in the little library. **(Holds it up for Jessica to read the title.)**

**Jessica:** The Time Traveller's Wife. Good read?

**Nathan:** I thought so.

**Jessica:** It's fiction.

**Nathan:** Is it?

**Jessica:** You tell me.

**(They stare at each other. Silence for a few beats. )**

**Nathan:** Okay, given that I need treatment can I be treated in a different hospital please - outside London?

**Jessica:** Nearer your home?

**Nathan:** I wish. No, anywhere will do.

**Jessica:** Are you unhappy with your treatment here?

**Nathan:** No, I'd like to take this whole establishment and move it bodily, complete with all the people, to a different location. **(Becoming serious.)** I mean that Jessica. Something is going to happen in London tomorrow. A major disaster. Major. It is the primary reason we are here – to study the effects of this disaster and the way your society reacts to it. If you move me you will save my life.

**Jessica:** What kind of disaster?

**Nathan:** If you come with me...

**Jessica:** What kind of disaster?

**Nathan:** You will save your own life.

**Jessica:** What kind of disaster?

**End of Sample – 13 pages of 25**