

EISTEDDFOD CFFI CYMRU – 2011 – WALES YFC EISTEDDFOD

Monolog 26 or under



A talk in the park

Extract without being longer than 5 minutes out of 'A talk in the park' by Alan Ayckbourn.

A TALK IN THE PARK

A park

Four park benches, separated but not too distant from each other. On one sits Beryl, a peltigerent young girl at present engrossed in reading a long letter. On another sits Charles who looks what he is, a businessman dressed for the week-end. He is slowly thumbing his way through a thick report. On another sits Doreen, middle-aged, untidily dressed, feeding the birds from a bag of breadcrumbs. On the remaining bench sits Ernest, a younger man. He sits gazing into space. The birds sing. After a moment, Arthur enters. He is a bird-like man in a long mackintosh, obviously on the look-out for company. Eventually, he approaches Beryl's bench

Arthur Is this seat occupied, by any chance?

Beryl (stortly) No. (She continues to read)

Arthur Great, great. (He sits)

A pause. Arthur takes deep breaths and gives a few furtive glances in Beryl's direction

Student, I see?

Beryl What?

Arthur Student, I bet. You look like a student. Always tell a student.

Beryl No.

Arthur Ah. You look like one. You're young enough to be a student. Quite young enough. That's the life, isn't it? Being a student. Not a care in the world. Sitting in the park on a day like this. In the sunshine. Rare enough we see the sun, eh? Eh? Rare.

Beryl Yes. (She refuses to be drawn into conversation)

Arthur Mind you, I shouldn't be here. By rights, I should be at home. That's where I should be. Inside my front door. I've got plenty of things I should be doing. The kitchen shelves to name but three. Only you sit at home on a day like today. Sunday. Nothing to do. On your own—you think to yourself, this is no good, this won't get things done—and there you are talking to yourself. You know what they say about people who talk to themselves? Eh? Eh? Yes. So I thought it's outdoors for you, else they'll come and take you away. Mind you, I'm never at a loss. I'm a very fulfilled person. I have, for example, one of the biggest collections of cigarette cards of anyone alive or dead that I know of. And you don't get that by sitting on your behind all day. But I'll let you into a secret. Do you know what it is that's the most valuable thing there is you can hope to collect? People. I'm a collector of people. I look at them, I observe them, I hear them talk, I listen to their manner

of speaking and I think, hallo, here's another one. Different. Different again. Because I'll let you into a secret. They are like fingerprints. They are never quite the same. And I've met a number in my lifetime. Quite a number. Some good, some bad, all different. But the best of them, and I'm saying this to you quite frankly and openly, the best of them are women. They are superior people. They are better people. They are cleaner people. They are kinder-hearted people. If I had a choice, I'd be a woman. Now that makes you laugh, I expect, but it's the truth. When I choose to have a conversation, I can tell you it's with a woman every time. Because a woman is one of nature's listeners. Most men I wouldn't give the time of day to. Now I expect that shocks you but it's the truth. Trouble is, I don't get to meet as many women as I'd like to. My particular line of work does not bring me into contact with them as much as I would wish. Which is a pity.

Beryl gets up

Beryl Excuse me. (She moves off)

Arthur Are you going?

Beryl moves to Charles's bench

Beryl (to Charles) Excuse me, is this seat taken?

Charles (barely glancing up) No. (He moves along his bench)

Beryl (sitting) Thanks. Sorry, only the man over there won't stop talking. I wanted to read this in peace. I couldn't concentrate. He just kept going on and on about his collections or something. I normally don't mind too much, only if you get a letter like this, you need all your concentration. You can't have people talking in your ear—especially when you're trying to decipher writing like this. He must have been stoned out of his mind when he wrote it. It wouldn't be unusual. Look at it. He wants me to come back. Some hopes. To him. He's sorry, he didn't mean to do what he did, he won't do it again I promise, etc., etc. I seem to have heard that before. It's not the first time, I can tell you. And there's no excuse for it, is there? Violence. I mean, what am I supposed to do? Keep going back to that? Every time he loses his temper he . . . I mean, there's no excuse. A fracture, you know. It was nearly a compound fracture. That's what they told me. (Indicating her head) Right here. You can practically see it to this day. Two X-rays. I said to him when I got home, I said, "You bastard, you know what you did to my head?" He just stands there. The way he does. "Sorry," he says, "I'm ever so sorry." I told him, I said, "You're a bastard, that's what you are. A right, uncontrolled, violent, bad-tempered bastard." You know what he said? He says, "You call me a bastard again and I'll smash your stupid face in." That's what he says. I mean, you can't have a rational, civilized discussion with a man like that, can you? He's a right bastard. My friend Jenny, she says, "You're a looney, leave him for God's sake. You're a looney." Who needs that? You tell me one person who needs that? Only where do you go? I mean, there's all my things—my personal things. All my—everything. He's

even got my bloody Post Office book. I'll finish up back there, you wait and see. I must be out of my tiny mind. Eh. Sometimes I just want to jump down a deep hole and forget it. Only I know that bastard'll be waiting at the bottom. Waiting to thump the life out of me. Eh?

Charles Yes. Excuse me. (*He gets up*)

Beryl I'm sorry, I didn't mean to embarrass you.

Charles No, no.

Beryl I just had to . . .

Charles Quite all right. Quite all right.

Charles moves over to Doreen

(*To Doreen*) Nobody here, is there?

Doreen What?

Charles Nobody here?

Doreen Nobody where? (*She looks round*)

Charles Sitting here.

Doreen No, No.

Charles Sorry. Do you mind if I do? (*He sits*) I won't disturb you. Girl over there's got boy-friend trouble. Comes and pours it all out on me—as if I'm interested. I mean, we've all been through it at one time or another. Why she should think I should be interested. I mean, we've all got troubles no doubt. But we all don't sit on a bench and bore some poor innocent stranger to death. I mean, that in my book spells S for selfishness. And have you noticed that it's invariably the young? They think we haven't been through it. Can't imagine that perhaps we were young, too. Don't know where they think we all came from. I mean, five years ago I had a house in the country, a charming wife, two good children, couldn't imagine a happier family. My wife dies suddenly, my children can't stand the place a moment longer and emigrate to Canada so I sell the house and there I am in a flat I can hardly swing a cat in. But I don't go round boring other people with it. That's life. I've had twenty—no, more like twenty-five, good years. Who am I to complain if I get a few bad ones thrown in as well. Make no mistake, I know I'm in for some bad ones. Things are going to get worse before they get better. Bound to. And you know an interesting thing about trouble? I always think it's a bit like woodworm. Once you've got a dose, if you're not careful, it starts to spread. Starts in your family and, before you know it, it's into your business. Which explains why I'm sitting here reading a report that's been put together so badly that I've got to read it through on my one day off and condense it into another report before I can even be certain whether I'm bankrupt. I mean, I don't know if you're interested but just take a look at this page here, this is a typical page. Can you make head or tail . . .

Doreen gets up and moves away

(*Muttering*) Oh, I beg your pardon.

Doreen moves to Ernest's bench

Doreen Excuse me.

Ernest Eh?

Doreen Excuse me. May I sit here for a moment? (*She sits*) The man over there has been—you know—I didn't want to make a scene but he—you know. I mean, I suppose I should call the police—but they'd never catch him. I mean, most of the police are men as well, aren't they? Between you and me, I have heard that most of the police women are as well. Men dressed up, you know. Special Duties, so called. So my ex-husband informed me. I mean, it's terrible, you can't sit in a park these days without some men—you know—I mean, I'm on a fixed income—I don't want all that. That comes from my husband. My ex-husband. He runs a pub. In the country. But I had to leave him. We got to the stage when it was either that or—you know. I love dogs, you see, and he would never—he refused, point blank. And the day came when I knew I must have a dog. It became—you know—like an obsession. So I left. I usually have my dog here with me only he's at the vet's. He's only a puppy. They had to keep him in. He's being—you know—poor little thing. He'd have seen that man off. He's a loyal little dog. He understands every word I say to him. Every word. I said to him this morning, Ginger-boy, I said—you're coming down to the vet's with me this morning to be—you know, and his little ears pricked up and his tail wagged. He knew, you see. I think dogs are more intelligent than people. They're much better company and the wonderful thing is that once you've got a little dog, you meet other people with dogs. And what I always say is that people who have dogs they're the nicest sort of people. They're the ones I know I'd get on with.

Ernest gets up

Have you got a dog, by any chance?

Ernest ignores her and creeps behind the trees to Arthur

Ernest (*sitting down next to Arthur*) Excuse me. Just taking refuge. Nut case over there. Bloody woman prattling on about her dog. Ought to be locked up. Thinks every man's after her. I mean, look. Look at it. After her? She'd have to pay 'em. You know the sort though, don't you? If you let her talk to you long enough, she'll talk herself into thinking you've assaulted her. Before you know it, she's screaming blue murder, you'll be carried off by the fuzz and that's your lot. Two years if you're lucky. I mean, I came out here to get away from the wife. Don't want another one just like her, do I? I mean. That's why I'm in the park. Get away from the noise. You got kids? Don't have kids. Take my tip, don't get married. Looks all right, but believe me—nothing's your own. You've paid for it all but nothing's your own. Yap, yap, yap. Want, want, want. Never satisfied. I mean, no word of a lie, I look at her some mornings and I think, blimey, I must have won last prize in a raffle. Mind you, I dare say she's thinking the same. In fact, I know she is. Certainly keeps me at a distance. Hallo, dear, put your money on

the table and she's off out. Don't see her for dust. Sunday mornings, it's a race to see who can get out first. Loser keeps the baby. Well, this morning I made it first. Here I am in the quiet. Got away from the noise. You know something interesting? Most of our lives are noise, aren't they? Artificial man-made noise. But you sit out here and you can listen—and—well, there's a bit of traffic but apart from that—peace. Like my mother used to say. Shut your eyes in the country and you can hear God breathing. (*He shuts his eyes*)

Arthur (*leaning across to Beryl*) Hey—hey—psst! I've got a right one here. I think he's listening to God breathing . . . (*He laughs*)

Beryl (*leaning across to Charles*) He's talking again. To me. What do you do? (*She smiles*)

Charles (*leaning across to Doreen*) There she goes again. What did I tell you? Chapter Two of the boyfriend saga.

Doreen (*leaning across to Ernest*) He's talking to me. If he does it any more, I'll call the police . . .

Ernest (*to Arthur*) Oh, blimey. Why doesn't she go home? Hark at her. Can you hear her? Rabbitting on . . .

The following, final section, is played as a Round. Doreen finishes first, then Charles cuts out, followed by Beryl, Arthur, and then Ernest

Arthur (*to Beryl*) Hey—hey.

Beryl continues to ignore him

Oh, suit yourself.

Beryl (*to Charles*) Psst—psst.

Charles ignores her

Oh, be like that.

Charles (*to Doreen*) I say, I say.

Doreen ignores him

Oh, all right, don't then . . .

Doreen (*to Ernest*) Excuse me, excuse me, excuse me.

Ernest ignores her

Oh, really.

Ernest (*nudging Arthur*) Oy—oy.

Arthur ignores him

Oh, all right, then. Don't. Don't then. Might as well talk to yourself.

They all sit sulkily. The Lights fade to a Black-out, and—

the CURTAIN falls