

# 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.

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 couldn't pin nuffing on me Guv.

Jessica: (Not amused.) You were referred to us under the terms of the Mental Health Act. (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 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 thought they'd let me go then.

Jessica: But 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 lest the country, never entered it, never been to school, university, never worked, never voted...

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

Jessica: But you were naked. Confused.

Nathan: **(Fingering his paper overall.)** Nakedness is... temporary embarrassment. Now my modesty is covered I would offend nobody. And I can resolve your 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 don't appear to 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 paper 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.)**

Nathan: If I gave you an address you would let me walk out in my paper suit?

Jessica: 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: Just a little information, is all I need.

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

Jessica: Can you at least explain why not?

Nathan: That would tell you all you need to know.

Jessica: Why is that a bad thing?

Nathan: Awww – Bumble, bumble.

Jessica: If you carry on like this 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: And you don't appear to have any possessions.

Nathan: Got no pockets.

Jessica: If we don't have a serious exchange I can't help you, I can't 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? Did your friends dump you naked in the centre of London?

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. **(To Nathan.)** 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 moves towards the door.)** 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 indicates Nathan's seat.)**

**(Nathan sits.)**

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: That does pose a small problem.

Jessica: Yes?

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

Jessica: 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 sanity they are all delusional states.

Nathan: I could make an argument for sanity being a form of delusion. And 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. How would that grab you?

Jessica: Go on. **(She begins taking notes.)**

Nathan: **(To David.)** She's writing it down. **(To Jessica.)** You're pretty cool, I'll say that for you.

David: We've heard it all before.

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.)** So you went this way and your clothes went – whoosh...

Jessica: David, please.

Nathan: It's nothing to laugh at I've lost a very nice suit. Perhaps I should have gone for Napoleon.

Jessica: Carry on.

Nathan: Background: It's a history project. I am part of a team sent to study this period of our history. For example, we study the problems faced by the United States of America as they tried to resolve the racial problems that society faced.

Jessica: You mean slavery and segregation?

Nathan: Yes.

Jessica: But those things are resolved.

Nathan: For you, in this time yes, they appear to have been resolved. But from our perspective, there were many years of racial conflict that led to...

Jessica: Led to what?

Nathan: **(Pause.)** I work in what you would call a university. We have a continuous programme of history projects. Each one takes years of preparation. We have to pass unnoticed. This means we must master your language, social habits – everything about the way you live.

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

Nathan: **(Smiles.)** You mean do I hear voices in my head telling me what to do? The answer is no. We can only communicate by sending written messages through time. There are no voices in my head. **(He considers Jessica for a moment.)** I can see you want to go on with this. Is it possible to do it in a different hospital please - outside London?

Jessica: Nearer your home?

Nathan: Something is going to happen in London tomorrow. A major disaster. 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?

Nathan: I can't tell you. But from a patient care perspective this move is essential.

Jessica: What you are saying is... part of your personal reality - not grounds for a transfer.

Nathan: What have you got to lose? You transfer me for a couple of days and if there's no disaster your diagnosis is confirmed....

Jessica: We don't normally treat our patients by negotiation.

Nathan: (Fake French accent.) My big problem was the Russian winter. My soldiers were not equipped for the cold. Ooh La! La!

**(A pause, Jessica is impassive.)**

Nathan: Okay, I'll stick with time traveller.

Jessica: If your prediction...

Nathan: It's not a prediction. It is history.

**(Nathan jerks forward taking Jessica's wrist – she stands and tries to pull away.)**

**(David rushes forward to rescue Jessica. There is a brief tussle.)**

**Nathan:** You must believe me. For your own safety and mine you have to take this seriously.

David: Come on Nathan, this isn't going to get you released.

**(Jessica gets free. Nathan is restrained by David.)**

Jessica: Don't hurt him.

Nathan: You have to believe me.

Jessica: I'm going to ask David to release you if you calm down.

Nathan: I am calm, I am calm. Look. I will be calm.

Jessica: Okay. **(She rubs her hurt wrist.)** Let him go David.

David: **(Carefully releasing Nathan.)** Sit in that chair and don't make a move.

Jessica: **(She takes an envelope and paper from the desk.)** Nathan I want you to write down the nature of your prediction.

Nathan: It's not... **(He gives up in frustration.)**

Jessica: I will seal it in an envelope and we will open it together tomorrow.

Nathan: Tomorrow will be too late for us all. We need to be away from here.

Jessica: Have you considered the effect of what you say on the people around you? I have a husband and a daughter. We live in London. My daughter goes to school near our home. Do you realise how it makes me feel when you talk about a major disaster that could include my family? People dying?

Nathan: Go sick. Take your child and your husband away from London. A picnic in the country. Anything. Please.

Jessica: **(Looks hard at Nathan.)** You are frightening me with this... I can't just run away.

Nathan: **(Taking up Jessica's pen.)** You must keep your promise.

Jessica: I won't look, I promise.

Nathan: **(He stares at Jessica for a moment.)** I trust you. **(He writes and seals the paper in the envelope.)** Here.

**(Jessica takes the envelope.)**

Jessica: Things are a bit heated at the moment so I suggest we end the session for today.

David: **(Leading Nathan out.)** Come along.

Nathan: **(To Jessica.)** You promised, I trust you.

Jessica: I will keep my promise. Look. **(She makes a show of putting the envelope safely in her folder.)**

Nathan: I understand that for you it is all about the balance of probability. I can see that. If you were going on a train journey and I was to point out that... let's say, for example... the train *could* crash. There *could* be a derailment, the carriages *could* crash into a stream – turn upside down. People trapped. Drowned. You know this is possible but you still take the train.

Jessica: A calculated risk. A balance of probabilities

Nathan: **(He stares at Jessica for a beat – then slowly nods his head.)** At least ask your husband to take your daughter on that picnic tomorrow.

Jessica: Please don't do this Nathan. It frightens me.

**(David and Nathan exit. Jessica collects her papers and sits thoughtfully at the table. She takes out the envelope and almost opens it but decides not to.)**

**(David returns.)**

David: Are you okay?

Jessica: Fine, don't worry. **(Holds up the envelope.)** Perhaps this will help him see the way things really are. I expect he'll find some mechanism to get himself off the hook. I am expecting he'll start back-tracking over this prediction in the morning.

**(Exit David and Jessica.)**

## **Scene Two- Day Two. The interview room.**

**(Enter David with Nathan who is very agitated.)**

Nathan: She promised me. I would be transferred this morning. Now. It cannot wait.

David: The doctor will explain.

Nathan: Where is she?

David: You're not her only patient.

**(Enter Jessica with the folder.)**

David: Sorry to page you but Nathan...

Jessica: **(To Nathan.)** Our session is not until this afternoon...

Nathan: That's too late – we will all be....

Jessica: What Nathan? What will happen to us this afternoon?

Nathan: **(Suddenly calm.)** Do you have a car?

Jessica: Yes.

Nathan: The three of us can go for a drive – call it part of my therapy if you like. We can drive away from London.

Jessica: You know I can't just disappear for the day.

Nathan: We cannot stay here.

Jessica: Will you leave us please David.

David: Are you sure? Yesterday...

Jessica: Wait outside the door.

David: Okay, but take care.

**Exit David.**

Jessica: Please sit.

**(Nathan does not move.)**

Jessica: **(Firmly.)** Sit down.

**(Nathan Sits.)**

Jessica: Yesterday you talked about a train derailment in which two carriages crashed into a stream.

Nathan: Okay.

Jessica: The carriages were upside down, you said.

Nathan: I did.

Jessica: People drowned before they could be rescued. Ambulances can't reach the scene because it's too isolated. There are helicopters taking the injured away.

Nathan: I didn't give that much detail.

Jessica: How did you know?

Nathan: It is history.

Jessica: **(She stares at him for a moment, not sure, then she makes her mind up.)**  
No, it is some kind of a trick.

Nathan: How can it be a trick? I told you it would happen.

Jessica: But only in conversation – there were no witnesses, you waited until we were alone. You got lucky, that's all.

Nathan: Do you honestly believe that? I warned you about the train crash – I am warning you about a major disaster. What about your daughter, your husband? You can still save them.

Jessica: Don't keep saying that!

Nathan: It is the truth. It's in the envelope.

Jessica: Do you want me to open the envelope?

Nathan: You must not know in advance. We should be away from here.

Jessica: **(She takes the envelope out.)** Would it help if we forget about this particular prediction - a major disaster? Perhaps you could try something simpler.

Nathan: Like a railway accident?

Jessica: Don't mention that again please – people have died, are dying. It's been on the news all morning.

Nathan: But I told you...

Jessica: It was a fluke. A trick. Illusionists do it all the time. You led me on. Tricked me.

Nathan: You ask for proof. I warn you about a train crash but you don't like that because people are dying. Would you believe if I gave you the lottery numbers? A horse race winner?

Jessica: I need something measurable.

Nathan: You don't want to believe me, you want to prove me wrong. I can't tell you trivial details. History is not like that. I know what will happen today as historic fact – chapters in a history book. You want me to... predict the winner of a horse race. But a horse race is not history – it's... it's just an irrelevance. I know what will be done today but I don't know the colour of the eyes of the man who...

Jessica: The man who what?

**(Nathan only stares at Jessica.)**

Jessica: What does this man do Nathan? Does it happen in this hospital? **(Pause.)** So this... event is initiated by one man. You make it sound like a deliberate act. Is it a terrorist bomb? Is it a bomb Nathan? **(Pause.)** Do you feel this bomb is intended especially for you?

Nathan: Of course I don't. **(Jabbing a finger at his own head.)** There is nothing wrong with me! This is typical of the way your people act – you refuse to deal with evidence – with facts.

Jessica: What exactly are we failing to deal with Nathan?

Nathan: There is so much. A man will plant a bomb today – sacrifice his life. Kill thousands of your citizens. Do you ever really try to understand why he feels so angry? Would you ever be prepared to share your wealth and prosperity with his people – his family – his children? History says you will not. History says you will turn your backs. Condemn him as a terrorist. He is a terrorist. But you will never face the question of why!

Jessica: Do you feel a responsibility to warn us of these dangers?

Nathan: You don't listen to warnings. You have Ignored warnings of the one thing that will bring total disaster to the human race. You call it global warming. Soon the planet will simply shrug you off its surface. It has had enough. The human race will be just another extinct species. You have done too much damage.

**(A pause.)**

Jessica: You say the human race becomes extinct.

Nathan: It is historic fact.

Jessica: But you also say you are a human from the future. If we become extinct...?

Nathan: **(Frustrated again.)** Small pockets of humans survived. It took nearly eight thousand years before the planet began to regain its balance and it is not right yet.

Jessica I see.

**(Pause.)**

Jessica The terrorist bomb. Do you know where it goes off?

Nathan Not the street, not the room, I've tried to explain: these are details I cannot know.

Jessica Then how are you so certain that you will be harmed. A bomb would be a terrible thing but London is a big city.

Nathan **(He considers his answer...)** It is what you know as a dirty bomb – a crude nuclear device. Thousands die at the site of the explosion and thousands more are affected by contamination. Radiation. Do you see why I must be moved?

**(Enter David in a state of suppressed agitation.)**

David **(Staring at Nathan.)** There is a bomb alert.

Jessica Where?

David Not known. The police are saying terrorists have planted several bombs in London. **(To Nathan.)** Is this your disaster? **(Now to Jessica.)** What does he know about it? What's in that fucking envelope?

**(David grabs the folder. Jessica tries to resist him but he takes the envelope and rips it open.)**

David **(Reading the note.)** What's this? What does this mean?

**(David crumples and throws it at Nathan. Jessica scrambles to retrieve the paper.)**

David What do you know about these bombs?

Jessica **(Reading the paper. Confused.)** Eleven fifty-six?

David What is it? What does it mean?

Jessica The time. It's the time. Is it Nathan? The time the bomb goes off?

David He's no fucking time traveller. He's not fucking mad either – he's a fucking terrorist. Trying it on are you? Trying to get off by pleading insanity? **(David attacks Nathan.)** Where's the bomb terror boy – where's it going off. Come on, talk.

Jessica Three minutes.

David What.

Jessica **(Screaming.)** Three minutes. We've only got three minutes.

Nathan **(Breaking away.)** You believe me don't you?

**(Jessica begins dialling her mobile phone.)**

David Believe what? What's he told you?

Jessica He said – it's not just a bomb.

David What?

Nathan It's history. And you believe me.

Jessica It's some sort of nuclear device.

David You bastard. You'd do this in London. **(Now talking over Jessica's next line.)** And you knew, you fucking knew all about it. You murdering bastard.

Jessica: **(Shouting into her phone.)** Phillip – don't ask any questions – get to the school fast. Pick up Chloe and get out of town. **(Phillip is obviously interrupting.)** Just do it. **(She closes her phone.)** Call the police, David – call the police.

David Of course I've called the police.

Jessica Two minutes.

Nathan I tried to warn you.  
David If we'd believed you at the beginning, you'd have been long gone and there would be no warnings.  
Jessica The car! Let's get in the car – at least if we're travelling....  
David No! He just wants to get out of here so he can make a run for it.  
Nathan She's right – we should go. You can tie me up, anything but please we must get away.  
David We wait for the police.  
Jessica One minute.  
**(Nathan slumps in a chair, resigned.)**  
David Look at that. Look at the time. He's sick. There's no nuclear bomb. He's just a sad sick madman.  
Nathan I tried to warn you.  
Jessica For God's sake Nathan, don't go on with this. Not now. I have a family – a daughter. What you've said is so frightening – so cruel...  
Nathan: I have family too. I'll never see them again...  
David **(He grabs Jessica's wrist to see her watch.)** Look. Look at the time. Eleven fifty-six. There's no bomb. You sick bastard.  
**(The stage floods with light then blacks out.)**  
Curtain.