

HARRY'S BIRD

by

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HARRY'S BIRD

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HARRY'S BIRD

CHARACTERS

Harry Moss	Middle-aged, intelligent, but very bitter towards his wife. Suffering from an unnamed terminal illness.
Moira	Harry's wife, of similar age but unable to relate to him because of some past trauma
McCluskey	Quietly efficient nurse who distances herself in order to preserve her sanity
Debbie	Sixteen year old tearaway from the Probation Hostel next door who's been in trouble all her life

The characters are entirely fictitious and are not based on any person either living or dead.

HARRY'S BIRD

(Interior and exterior views of large Victorian house - front door, hallway, reception desk, staircase with chairlift leading to upper bedroom (or ramp to indicate upper room) - outside there's a patio with walled garden . . . the song "Harry" is played ... we hear a taxi arrive, its door slam and as it drives off in comes Harry carrying a suitcase while his wife tries to take it from him. He is obviously unwell but putting on a brave front)

Moira Here, let me help you

Harry I can manage, I'm not completely useless

Moira Have it your own way

(She is about to ring the bell)

Harry Wait - I want to look at it

Moira What for?

Harry I want to remember what it looks like – from the outside ... O.K. ring the bell

(She does so and a woman appears in neat clothes wearing a badge)

Sister M Mr Moss?

Harry (Sarcastically) Is this the Seaview Guest House?

Moira Ignore him – it's his idea of a joke

Harry We've booked a double room overlooking the sea - with single beds of course

Sister Come in

Harry Do I have to?

Moira Go on

(They enter)

Harry You might have the wrong name - can you check your records?

Sister (Checking book) Harry Moss?

Harry Damn, they got me again

Sister You must be Mrs Moss

HARRY'S BIRD

Harry (Indicating nurse) She's good isn't she? (To nurse) Have you ever thought of becoming a police-woman?

Sister I cant say I have

Harry Instead of a nurse - you are a nurse I presume?

Sister Yes, we don't wear uniform

Harry I see - low profile - (confidentially) How do they know then who's who?

Sister The badge

Harry I see (He peers close to read it) Sister...

Sister McCluskey (Offers her hand) Pleased to meet you

Harry (Ignoring it) Would you be awfully offended Sister if I don't reciprocate the sentiment on this occasion - I'm sure under normal circumstances you're a simply wonderful person but you'll know what I mean when I say that at this particular moment I wish we'd never actually met

Sister (Unperturbed shaking hands with Moira) Mrs Moss

Harry What's the procedure then? Do I have to register? Leave my gold teeth with reception?

Sister Have you got any valuables?

Harry The only thing I value now is time

Sister Yes - well we can sort out the details later - would you like to see your room?

Harry (Falsely) That would be nice

Sister This way - you can leave your case till later

Harry That's all right, I can manage
(They go towards the stairs)
It doesn't look like a hospice

Sister Doesn't it? What does it look like?

Harry I don't know, I imagined echoing corridors and the smell of disinfectant

Moira Harry, why do you have to be so hurtful? It's hard enough as it is

Harry (With venom) It's hard for you is it? Having a husband who's on the way out? Well how do you think it feels for the bloody husband?

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- Moira If only you'd think before you speak
- Harry I've done my share of thinking - caring about other people - look where it got me... I think you'd better go
- Moira Bye then
- (She approaches him to kiss goodbye but there is a moment's hesitation because of the psychological gap between them and instead she turns to go)
- I'll see you tomorrow
- Harry You wont - if you think I'm putting up with you every day you've got another thing coming - you can come every other day and once on Sundays
- Moira They don't mind visitors
- Harry No, but I do
- Moira I'll pray for you Harry
- Harry You wont - if you so much as say one Hail Mary that will be it - it's not too late for a divorce you know
- Moira If only you'd try to believe, it'd be such a weight off your mind
- Harry It would wouldn't it? All the problems handed over to "He who knows everything." I could walk round then with one of those silly grins all over my face like your Christian friends
- Moira It helps
- Harry Not to me it doesn't – I stopped believing in God the same time I stopped believing in Santa Claus
- Moira It's burning you up Harry
- Harry (Pointedly) No love, the burning comes later
(She is upset and turns to go as the nurse arrives with two cups of tea)
- Sister Aren't you staying for a cuppa Mrs Moss?
- Moira I'd better be going – it's all right, I can see myself out
- (She exits tearfully)
- Sister She's very upset
- Harry What do you expect? She's leaving her husband to waste away in a hospice bed
- Sister Do you enjoy it Mr Moss?
- Harry What?

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Sister Making your wife suffer? It's hard enough as it is for the relatives

Harry Oh she loves it really - she'll be there at church tonight – "Please God, make Harry better" - and then when it doesn't work – "Ah well, it must have been Gods will" – nice really - either way she cant lose

Sister There's a lot of bitterness there

Harry Don't I have the right to be bitter?

Sister No

Harry How would you know? You've never been here

Sister I have, Mr Moss, I've been to the door many times

Harry But never gone through...

 (She turns to go)

 Sister... can I ask you something?

Sister Ask away

Harry Will you be honest with me?

Sister In what way?

Harry I want to know - as it happens - I want to know what to expect next

Sister We don't normally -

Harry I know you don't, but you could make an exception - for me

Sister I'll speak to the doctor

Harry Is there much pain?

Sister We try to keep that to a minimum

Harry Not that I'm afraid of it you understand - I just want to know what to expect

Sister I'll try and keep you fully informed

Harry Scouts honour?

Sister (Saluting) Scouts honour

 (Scene change - music - the lights rise to find Harry in dressing gown and pyjamas sitting on a bench in the garden writing in his diary. Behind the birdsong there is a mixture of distant traffic and teenage girls laughing nearby whilst playing an outdoor game)

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Harry (Either voice-over or as he writes) It's ages since I kept a diary - not since I was a child - never seen the reason for it till now ... Why am I writing this? To put things into perspective, to get things into place - perhaps someone will read it after I've gone - someone may benefit - I hope so - "He gave his life" and all that ... the place is quite nice really, if you like that sort of thing - everything very casual - home from home almost - only it's not home - better this than being fussed over by her every day, I couldn't stand that ... They leave you pretty much to your own devices, though there are the obvious hints - "Don't you want to join in our discussion group Mr Moss?" What's the point?

Everyone has their own bit of territory, their own place, so I've claimed mine - out here in the garden where I can listen to the birds singing - I never noticed them much before

It's a nice garden, well kept, but gardening's never been one of my strong points so don't ask me to name any of the flowers ... around the house there's a wall to keep the outside world at bay or is it to keep the clients inside? - it must have been owned by someone very rich at one time - probably bequeathed

As I sit here I can hear the noise of the traffic going up the hill - the wagons have to change gear just a little further up - I can hear children playing and next door there must be some sort of school - a girls school by the sound of it - I never knew female laughter could be so annoying

(At this moment a plastic throwing disc comes flying to his feet. He picks it up and is about to throw it back when a girl of about sixteen dashes in - she is common, gum-chewing but full of vitality)

Debbie Sorry

Harry That's OK

Debbie Bloody useless they are - can I have it back?

Harry Yes - yes of course

(Gives it to her and she throws it back over the wall)

Harry Don't go

Debbie Eh?

Harry Stay for a minute

Debbie You what?

Harry Sit down - have a cigarette or something

Debbie What's this place? An 'ospital or something?

Harry Yes - a hospital - I've not got anything catching though

Debbie Doesn't bother at if you have - we've all got to go sometime haven't we

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(They sit on the bench - he offers her a cigarette and lights it for her)

Debbie What've you got?

Harry Nothing time wont cure

Debbie I 'ate 'ospitals, they always smell funny

Harry That's the disinfectant - this one isn't bad ... You are old enough to smoke?

Debbie Course I am

Harry Only I don't went to get you into any kind of trouble

(She laughs)

What's so funny?

Debbie If only you knew

Harry What've I said

Debbie Nothing

Harry (Indicating where she's come from) That place, what is it ? - A school?

Debbie Nah - its an 'ostel

Harry A hostel?

Debbie Probation 'ostel

Harry Oh, so you've been in trouble already.

Debbie You might say - I ain't been done for smoking under age though

Harry What are you in for?

Debbie Nicking - what about you?

Harry Life... what did you nick - I mean steal?

Debbie Just some gear from a shop

Harry That sounds a bit steep, putting you in a hostel for shoplifting

Debbie It weren't the first time - its while they do reports on you

Harry What did your parents say?

Debbie Not a lot - been in care since I was eight

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Harry Oh, I'm sorry

Debbie Nothing to be sorry about

Harry So how long do you have to stay in the hostel?

Debbie Till the court case - you've got to keep your nose clean for a couple of weeks then back to court for sentencing

Harry What'll they do with you?

Debbie Not much they can do - they don't like locking girls up see - 'ere, why am I telling you all this?

Harry Because I asked

Debbie You're not a copper are you?

Harry No

Debbie What do you do then when you're not in 'ere?

Harry I'm - I used to be a teacher

Debbie A teacher? I hate teachers

Harry Really?

Debbie Not all of them - you do get some nice ones what do you teach?

Harry English - Drama

Debbie That's not so bad then - as long as its not maths or science - I can't stand maths

Harry Which school do you go to?

Debbie I don't - I got expelled

Harry For nicking?

Debbie Fighting

Harry You're quite a girl aren't you.

Debbie You taking the piss?

Harry No, not at all - what else have you been in trouble for?

Debbie You name it, I've done it - burglary - TWOC

Harry TWOC?

Debbie Taking without the owners consent

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Harry Oh I see

Debbie Assault - robbery -

Harry You have been busy

Debbie Stupid really, never again

Harry Going straight now are you?

Debbie I didn't say that - I wont get caught next time

Harry Can I ask you something? Don't you ever feel any remorse taking things that don't belong to you?

Debbie Come off it - you're talking like a vicar

Harry No, I'm interested - when you take something from a shop, say, doesn't it bother you?

Debbie Why should it?

Harry It's not yours to take

Debbie It is after I've taken it

Harry But its illegal, its wrong

Debbie It might be to you - what do you want me to do?

Harry You're supposed to pay for what you take

Debbie You mean get a job, join the system? Nah, tried it once - stacking shelves - not worth the 'assle

Harry Don't you want to go straight?

Debbie Its harder than you think... anyway I'd better be going

Harry Will you - ?

Debbie What?

Harry Will you come again another day - for a chat?

Debbie I don't know - I just about done myself in on that wall

Harry I'd appreciate it

Debbie I'll think about it - see you

(She is gone as quickly as she came)

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Sister (Coming in with a tray) Who was that?
Harry Just some girl from next door

Sister I hope you weren't encouraging her - they can be an awful nuisance

Harry She was all right - quite refreshing really

(Scene change - Harry's bedroom at night where he sits writing his diary)

Harry The strangest thing happened - there I was sitting in the garden feeling very sorry for myself when this - this nymphet appeared over the wall - she's a girl from the probation hostel next door - a bit common really but interesting nevertheless - a very unusual young lady . . . what interested me was her complete disregard for all social values - she doesn't seem to give a damn for anyone else except herself - unlike Moira who's constantly worrying about the starving millions in deprived countries and doing bugger all about it ... talking to her was like a breath of fresh air ... I don't know if she'll come again - I hope so - I asked her to...

(Scene change - lights fade and return to morning in Harry's bedroom where Moira is doing one of her welfare visits)

Moira (Unloading bag)...And I made you some cakes in case you feel peckish

Harry Moira, the food in here is quite sufficient, there's no need to go to all this trouble

Moira It's no trouble - and a chap from your school came round with this (produces card in envelope)

Harry What is it? Oh God! A get-well card – don't they know I'm not going to get well soon, the prats

Moira You never know Harry, miracles do happen

Harry Do they?

Moira Its been signed by everyone - they're all very concerned

Harry Which is more than they were when I worked amongst them... (he reads card)
What's this? "Chin up - Mike Benson" - that bastard cant wait for me to snuff it so he can have my job

Moira Don't Harry

Harry Why not? Its true

Moira And I brought you some books to read

Harry Not long ones are they? "Gardening for beginners" - great - and "How to get your point across in thirty seconds or less" - Well that should be very useful when I meet Saint Peter at the pearly gates!

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Moira Have you got everything you need?

Harry Yes – everything's hunky-dory

Moira Only I didn't know what I might have forgotten

Harry You haven't forgotten anything Moira, you've thought of everything - you feed my body but not my soul

Moira I don't know what you mean

Harry No, love

Moira Have you made any friends?

Harry No

Moira No?

Harry Why should I? They're not going to be lasting ones . . . what would we have to talk about? "Oh you've got six months left, have you? I've got eight" Yes, we'll have a lot in common

Moira There's no need to be sarcastic

Harry Have you any idea what its like Moira watching people sitting round waiting to die? It's not a pretty sight

Moira Some of the others seem very cheerful

Harry They do don't they? I find that particularly annoying - especially the Christians amongst them - "Take me to your arms Lord, for I am ready"

Moira Perhaps if you believed -

Harry Don't start all that crap again

 (Pause while she thinks of something else to say)

Moira Are the staff all right?

Harry Brilliant - God knows what I'd do working in a place like this. Why do they bother? It'd drive me bananas. Sister McCluskey's the one you've got to watch out for - she runs the place like an army camp

Moira Are you... are you happy here Harry?

Harry "Happy"? I'm bloody delirious. Moira I'm sitting here waiting for my body to pack in and you ask am I happy - are you serious?

Moira You know what I mean. I want you to feel contented

Harry I'm over the moon, never felt better

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Moira (Uncomfortable) If you don't want the cakes perhaps I'll take them to the office
(She is about to go)
Harry?

Harry Yes Moira?

Moira I'm frightened

Harry You're frightened. How the hell do you think I feel?

Moira I don't know if I can cope

Harry Cant you go to your sisters or something?

Moira I don't want to, they've got their own problems

Harry I'm a problem to you am I?

Moira No

Harry Well I'll soon be out of your hair and then you can collect a nice widows pension - you'll be well provided for

Moira I don't want providing for, Harry, I want you

Harry What for?

Moira What do you mean "What for?" You're my husband

Harry What you really want Moira isn't a husband, its a cardboard-cut-out-man-about-the-house to do for you and work for you - an odd job man, somebody to knock nails in now and again - you don't need me - anybody will do - as soon as I'm gone you'll find yourself another odd-job man

Moira That's not true

Harry Isn't it? You don't need me Moira - you need a husband - any one will do... I thought you said you were going?

(Scene change - Harry is out in the garden. Sister McCluskey is checking his pulse)

Harry And then we moved down here... its a wonderful thing, unemployment, a great social and geographical motivator - either you look for work or you starve - they've got you by the short and curlies ... do you realise it wasn't till people like Arkwright invented the Spinning Jenny that the population became enslaved - until then everyone did their own thing, worked in their own homes and then industrialization meant they all had to join the rat race, travel to the factory each day

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Sister But not you, you trained to be a teacher

Harry I was still enslaved, make no bones about it - teachers go to the factory each day only its a different type of product they turn out - I used to stand in front of that class and think to myself "Here we go again, another load of sausages to be processed through the educational machine"

Sister Are you a good teacher?

Harry Was I you mean

Sister I mean "Are you"?

Harry I don't know, you'll have to ask some of my ex-pupils - I sometimes think children learn in spite of us not because of us

Sister I'm sure you' re very modest ... you do a bit of writing as well don't you?

Harry Who told you that?

Sister A little bird - have you had anything published?

Harry Nothing worth talking about

Sister Why don't you try writing here?

Harry I am, I've started a diary - but don't you dare look until... well you know what I mean ... You know what? I wanted to be an actor once but I never had the courage to give it a try - always clinging to the safe number and then when you realise what you want in life it's too late

Sister It's never too late

Harry Isn't it? There's only one place I'm going from here ... can I ask you something?

Sister Ask away

Harry Have you ever stolen anything?

Sister Are you serious?

Harry Yes - have you ever taken anything without paying?

Sister (After thinking) I once went shopping with my parents and asked them for a packet of those chocolate coins - they wouldn't let me have them so when nobody was watching I slipped them in my pocket - when we got home they found out and gave me an awful telling off

Harry How old were you?

Sister Only about five - what about you?

Harry No - all my life I've been an honest upright citizen

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Sister Why do you ask?

Harry I just wondered

(Sister McCluskey exits. Harry returns to his paper then Debbie comes in, in a temper)

Debbie You bloody liar!

Harry I beg your pardon?

Debbie Its not a bloody 'ospital its an 'ospice

Harry So?

Debbie So there's a bloody difference i'n't there?

Harry Yes

Debbie Why didn't you tell me?

Harry There didn't seem to be any point

Debbie You had me here under false pretences

Harry It is a hospital of sorts

Debbie Only no bugger's going to get better

Harry You could put it like that

Debbie I felt a right burke, I can tell you - all my mates thought I was thick

Harry You're not thick

Debbie I know I'm not but that's how I felt - you should have told me

Harry What do you want me to say "Hello there, my names Harry - by the way I'm dying"

Debbie At least it would have been honest

Harry You're a fine one to talk about honesty... I thought you weren't coming back

Debbie I wasn't going to but when they told me about this place -

Harry You took pity on me

Debbie I bloody didn't - I came to tell you not to try and con me in future. I can't stand bloody liars

Harry That's good coming from you - anyway I didn't tell you any lies

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Debbie You didn't tell the whole truth neither

Harry You know what that is do you?

Debbie Course I do and if there's any more porky pies that's it

Harry Honour among thieves

 (Beat)

Debbie Anyway, how are you feeling?

Harry Great, never felt better

Debbie Does it hurt?

Harry Only when I laugh

Debbie What've you got?

Harry Nothing fashionable I'm afraid

Debbie What does it do to you?

Harry It wastes you away until you can't control yourself - not very nice really

Debbie You married?

Harry Yes

Debbie Any kids?

Harry No

Debbie Why not?

Harry We couldn't have any - probably just as well looking at the state I'm in ... we almost had one once - a girl - she'd have been about your age

Debbie What happened?

Harry She lost it - end of story

Debbie I'm going to have loads of kids when I grow up, hundreds of them and a big house in the country

Harry A little bit optimistic aren't we?

Debbie You've got to be ain't you - you've got to think positive - eat drink and be merry -

Harry For tomorrow...

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Debbie I didn't mean that

Harry I know what you meant

(Pause)

Debbie Got any ciggies?

Harry Yes, of course

(Gives her a cigarette)

Debbie They don't let us smoke in the 'ostel

Harry I'm not supposed to either - smoking can damage your health you know!

Debbie So can crossing the road... 'Ere, is there anything you need?

Harry How d'you mean?

Debbie Anything I can get you?

Harry No, my wife sees to all that, brings me absolutely all kinds of food

Debbie I meant ciggies or anything

Harry You know what I'd really like? A bloody good drink of whiskey - its ages since I had a good glass of malt

Debbie I don't know if I can run to that

Harry Never mind ... you've not heard anything about the court case?

Debbie Its been adjourned till next month

Harry It must be strange living in a home

Debbie You get used to it

Harry Don't you have any parents?

Debbie I've got a mum but I ain't seen her since I got put in care - she used to argue like mad with dad then he left and we got a bit of peace

Harry Why did she put you in care?

Debbie She wanted us off her hands - we cramped her style - then when she tried to get us back they wouldn't let her

Harry And you've been in homes ever since?

Debbie Of one sort or another - shunted from one foster parent to the next. It was my fault really, I was a little sod

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Harry And what are you now?

Debbie A big one!

Harry You know what I would like? Something to read, something more exciting than gardening or psychology books - can you see what you can find?

Debbie I'll do my best - why don't you ask your wife?

Harry Her idea of excitement is watching paint dry - she's not happy unless she's decorating

Debbie Don't you get on?

Harry We exist, that's all we do - we live together in the same house, each of us in our own little world but it isn't a marriage, it's cohabitation - that reminds me, have you seen this story about the chap with two wives?

 (He shows her the newspaper)

Debbie (Dully) No

Harry Here, have a look

 (Gives her the paper)

 Amazing isn't it?

Debbie Yeah

Harry "Yeah" - is that all you can say? Have you read the bottom bit?

Debbie I can't read

Harry Eh?

Debbie I cant read - all right?

Harry I'm sorry - I didn't mean to.... that's all right, lots of people cant read, you're probably dyslexic

Debbie What's that when it's at home?

Harry Word blindness

Debbie All I know is I've never been able to - can't write neither

Harry That must present you with one or two problems

Debbie Yeah

 (He has an idea)

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Harry Listen, why don't I try and teach you?

Debbie You what?

Harry To read?

Debbie You're wasting your time

Harry Perhaps but it'd give me something to do

Debbie (Nodding towards the house) What about them?

Harry Leave them to me

Debbie I've always wanted to be able to - there was this programme on the tele once about a woman who wrote books and I thought "If only I could do that"

Harry I'll have you know you're sitting next to an author

Debbie You've had something published?

Harry Just one play - I don't think anybody ever performed it - I thought I was going places then I went through a bad patch and the well dried up

Debbie What d'you mean?

Harry Writers block, the thing every writer dreads. You reach a point where nothing seems to work any more

Debbie I'm not surprised in your state

Harry No, it happened a long time ago

Debbie What does your wife say about you writing?

Harry She was probably the reason for it - she doesn't actually understand the process. She'll quite happily read a book but won't let you write one

Debbie How can she stop you?

Harry It's a very subtle process, a wearing down. "You're not going to leave me on my own again?" and so on

Debbie She doesn't encourage you?

Harry No

Debbie She should if you've got a talent

Harry You don't know what it's like living with a writer, the ups and downs, the moods - even I've got to admit I'm hell to live with sometimes

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Debbie I'd let you write if I was married to you

Harry That's very kind of you - I'll remember that next time round ... did you know the Hindus believe that when you die you come back as something else depending on how you've been in your present life - if you've been good you go up one and if you've been bad -

Debbie I'll come back as a beetle then or a creepy crawlie - what would you be?

Harry Perhaps a bluebottle so I could annoy Moira or a passing bird to drop something from a great height

(They laugh)

Debbie We had this bird once that came down the chimney - there was soot everywhere everybody was screaming and it was flapping about against the window - I went and got hold of it and took it outside and then when I put it down on the grass you know what happened?

Harry It flew away?

Debbie You'd think so wouldn't you but it just sat there without moving and when I went up to it I couldn't believe it - it was dead

Harry Shock

Debbie Something like that

Harry There's one here that will end up like that, a one-legged blackbird that hops around all day - don't ask me how it lost the other one

Debbie Probably a cat

Harry Probably - and you know what surprises me? It never sings, never makes a sound, just keeps hopping around on its one leg

Debbie Perhaps it can't sing

Harry Or doesn't know how to - it seems such a waste of an existence - all that beauty and not making use of it ... you should learn to write you know

Debbie Why?

Harry The way you described that bird of yours - you're a natural writer or you could be if you put your mind to it

Debbie Nah!

Harry Why not?

Debbie You need brains to be a writer

Harry You don't, you need sensitivity and you've got that

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Debbie You'll make me blush

Harry Please yourself

Debbie Do you think I could?

Harry I know you could - all you've got to do is apply yourself

Debbie Will you teach me?

Harry How quickly do you learn?

(Scene change - music - lights up on Harry's bedroom at night as Sister McCluskey tucks him in)

Harry We must stop meeting like this

(She continues with the bed then takes his pulse)

Has anyone ever told you you've got beautiful eyes?

Sister (Having none of it) Many times

Harry Sister. Why do you do this?

Sister What?

Harry Working here in this place - what kind of person spends their lives looking after the terminally ill? Are you some kind of a saint or what?

Sister Do you really want to know?

Harry I do

Sister It's convenient - I could do something more interesting but it would mean more travelling

Harry (Laughing) And I had you down for an angel of mercy and all the time you're just - just -

Sister Just what?

Harry Human

(She smiles and leaves him to sit in bed writing in his diary)

Harry I had another visit today from young Debbie - she came and sat beside me and - I don't quite know how to say this - especially in the knowledge that this may be read after I'm gone - she came and sat beside me and she was wearing this perfume, cheap perfume - I could feel her arm touching mine through the material, feel the warmth and ... I wanted her - I know it sounds silly, a man old enough to be her father and in my condition but I've got to tell the truth - I

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wanted her physically, mentally, spiritually - all my life I've been surrounded by young girls and never until now have I felt the desire so strongly - I know it sounds foolish but there you are

Time is running short and I'm becoming increasingly aware of the time that I've wasted. When I think of all the things I could have done with my life instead of which I did the right thing, stuck to the social rules and where did it get me?

I've promised to teach Debbie to read - my one last act of beneficence - I don't know why I offered - yes I do - because I wanted to see her again

You must be thinking Moira "How can he do this to me? How, at this moment in his life, can he turn away from the one who's stood by him all these years for a young girl from the hostel next door?" Do you want to know why? I'll tell you - she's everything you aren't Moira, she's young, vibrant, exciting - you don't know from one minute to the next what she's going to say or do - all this time I've resisted the temptation and now I don't know if I can ...

(Scene change - music - Harry is in the garden when Debbie approaches)

Debbie I've brought you a present

Harry You shouldn't have

Debbie Aren't you going to open it?

Harry Of course (he does so) This reminds me of Christmas... cigarettes! And so many - they must have cost you a bit

Debbie Not really

Harry You didn't? ... (meaning "steal them")

Debbie What if I did?

Harry But that makes me a receiver of stolen goods

Debbie If you like

Harry I've never done anything like that before what if somebody found out?

Debbie What can they do to you?

Harry That's true (Then fear changes his mind) No, no I can't (he gives them back)

Debbie What do you mean you can't?

Harry I can't accept them, I wouldn't sleep

Debbie Listen, I went to a great deal of trouble getting these and now you don't want them?

HARRY'S BIRD

Harry I do but you don't understand - it goes against everything I've grown up with

Debbie I took a big risk - d'you know what it would mean if they'd caught me?

Harry I really appreciate it but I just cant

Debbie (Shortly) Fair enough

Harry I suppose you think I'm silly

Debbie Yes

Harry All my life I've conformed and now when I get the opportunity to break the rules I cant do it - I do appreciate the chance you took, honest

Debbie Yeah, yeah

Harry You'll find a use for them

(Pause)

What about this reading lesson?

Debbie What about it?

Harry Are you ready to start?

Debbie Yeah, you're wasting your time though

Harry We'll see

(He unfolds the paper and she comes close to him to read - he smells the perfume and pauses)

Debbie What's up?

Harry Nothing ... where shall we start?

(The lights fade and when they come up Moira has taken the place of Debbie but now she's at the other end of the bench reading the paper while Harry reads a book)

Moira Some of the things you read in the papers - a person cant walk the streets today for fear of being attacked

Harry Really?

Moira There's a story here about a girl who was assaulted

Harry You mean sexually?

Moira Yes - they need locking up

HARRY'S BIRD

Harry What happened?

Moira It says she got off the bus and this man followed her - held been on the bus watching her it seems

Harry Yes?

Moira And then he walked up behind her and -

Harry Yes?

Moira He touched her

Harry Where?

Moira On her private parts

Harry Which parts?

Debbie What do you mean "which parts"?

Harry Do you mean her breasts or her vagina?

Moira Does it matter?

Harry Of course it matters - a breast isn't a vagina

Moira They're both private... then he tried to force her to the ground but she screamed and he ran off

Harry How sad, it was just getting interesting ... tell me Moira, has anyone ever touched your private parts?

Moira I beg your pardon?

Harry Or forced you to the ground? (she looks aghast) No, maybe not - it could be arranged you know - I've still got some life left in me - How about it?

 (He moves towards her on the bench and she moves away)

Moira What?

Harry How about some unbridled passion in the herbaceous borders?

Moira Don't be silly

Harry I am, aren't I? You don't know the meaning of the word

Moira There's a time and place for everything

Harry Which in your case means eleven o'clock on a Saturday night immediately after the drinking chocolate ... tell me Moira, have you ever made love outdoors?

Moira You know we haven't

HARRY'S BIRD

Harry I don't mean with me, I mean with anybody

Moira Of course not

Harry We could now if you like – it's supposed to be more exciting if there's a chance of getting caught

Moira No

Harry Why not? Come on

Moira No

Harry Why not?

Moira Well the grass is damp for a start

Harry God, you're so exciting! I don't know how I put up with it

Moira You could catch a chill or something

Harry That's good. Haven't you ever felt like living dangerously?

Moira No

Harry Or having a fling with another man?

Moira Why should I?

Harry It would prove there was more to you than fairisle pullovers, drinking chocolate and woolly slippers... can I ask you something Moira? Have you ever broken the law?

Moira Of course not - what do you think I am?

Harry Not even in a small way?

Moira No

Harry How about sweets from a shop when you were young?

Moira No

Harry Or keeping library books when they're overdue?

Moira No

Harry Getting off a bus without paying?

Moira No - what are you trying to prove?

HARRY'S BIRD

Harry I'm just wondering if there's a spark, the tiniest spark of non-conformity deep down below that conformist surface of yours or do you always live by the rules

Moira I try to - there are some things you can't change

Harry Like dying

Moira Even that if its God's will

Harry Gods will my arse! You know Moira I sometimes wonder what I ever saw in you

Moira It works both ways

Harry You meekly accept the most onerous of things fitting everything in as if it all has its place - class distinction - nuclear warheads - racial discrimination - you accept them all as if they don't matter

Moira Of course they matter but what can I do about them?

Harry You can stand up and be counted, make your views known - how else are things going to change if everybody just accepts them?

Moira "Change what you can -"

Harry "Accept what you cant" - your father's motto - well if you ask me it was the motto of a defeated man

Moira I'd rather you didn't -

Harry Well I'm not going to fade away quietly like he did, I'm going to fight it

Moira Harry...

Harry Some people do - you hear these things - the power of will power - why should I accept what they say just because they've got qualifications and white coats? They don't know everything

Moira But you heard what they said

Harry They might be wrong - bloody doctors! What do they know? Some of them don't know one end of a stethoscope from the other - sitting on their behinds all day getting fat consultants fees - I don't feel ill - all these pills they keep giving me - I don't even know why I should stay here

(Begins to get up)

Nurse!

Moira What are you doing?

Harry I'm going to get dressed - sitting here all day in a dressing gown like a bloody invalid

HARRY'S BIRD

(The nurse comes on)

Sister Yes Mr Moss?

Harry I'm going to get dressed - call me a taxi

Sister You can't do that - you're not well

Harry I'm all right - I've never felt better in my life - you know what I think? I think you've got me here under false pretences, that's what you've done - and you thought I'd just crawl into a hole and accept it - well I wont

Sister Please Mr Moss

Harry "Do not go gentle into that good night,
Old age should burn and rave at close of day;"
I'm not even old, damn it!

Sister I think you should come and sit down

(She approaches him)

Harry I don't want to sit down - take your hands off me! Bloody nurses - you're as bad as that lot in there - simple old men sitting back waiting for it to hit them - well I wont sit back - I'm getting out of here and under my own steam - you can stick your bloody hospice with its tender loving care where the monkey sticks his nuts!

(He begins to storm up the stairs but is overcome and collapses halfway)

Moirra (Running to him) Harry!

Sister (Bending over him) Get the doctor, woman - don't just stand there!

(Blackout - end of Act One)