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# Close to Croydon

A play

Gillian Plowman

Samuel French—London  
New York-Toronto-Hollywood



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## **CLOSE TO CROYDON**

First performed by the The Flat Four Players with the following cast:

**Hugo Morgan**  
**Martha Morgan**  
**George Townsend**  
**Anthea**

**David Flint**  
**Gillian Plowman**  
**Robert Iles**  
**Frances Iles**

## **CHARACTERS**

**Hugo Morgan;** a PR consultant

**Martha Morgan;** Museum Education Officer

**George Townsend;** voice only

**Anthea;** voice only

The action of the play takes place in the interior of an overturned railway carriage

Time — the present

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Cecily  
David's Birthday  
The Janna Years  
A Kind of Vesuvius  
Me and My Friend  
Tippers  
Two Summers  
Umjana Land



## CLOSE TO CROYDON

*The interior of an overturned railway carriage*

*The play opens in darkness; a disjointed world. The Lights come up slightly. Silence. The Lights come up more, to reveal Martha and Hugo trapped in the railway carriage. They are both sitting on the floor (the ceiling of the train, originally) and are bruised and dishevelled. Martha's case is hidden in the debris*

*Hugo starts to sing "Rave On", the Buddy Holly song, in its Steeleye Span version*

**Martha** (*angrily*) Do you always sing in a crisis?

**Hugo** I don't know. I've never been in a crisis before.

**Martha** Well, you're lucky then.

**Hugo** Done this lots of times, have you?

**Martha** Don't be stupid. (*She rubs one shoulder and flexes it*)

**Hugo** Still all right?

**Martha** Yes. You?

**Hugo** Brilliant. Considering.

**Martha** We're quite close to Croydon.

**Hugo** Close. Yes. Almost there. Probably.

**Martha** Almost but not quite.

**Hugo** Story of my life.

**Martha** Really?

**Hugo** My love life.

**Martha** Really.

**Hugo** Do you want to hear about my love life?

**Martha** Not really. All right. No.

**Hugo** That's it. You've summed up my love life.

**Martha** What?

**Hugo** I ask a beautiful woman — I love beautiful women — out for dinner — very conventional, yes I know — or to the theatre. And that's it.

"Are you free ... ? Would you like to ... ?"

"Not really."

Make 'em laugh. (*He sings*) "Make 'em laugh, make 'em laugh ..."

"All right."

"Really?"

"No."

And there you have it. Not really. All right. No.

*Pause*

They say you can laugh a woman into bed.

*Martha laughs very briefly*

**Martha** That wasn't a laugh.

**Hugo** It wasn't much of one.

**Martha** Not one at all.

**Hugo** Still ...

**Martha** You can't laugh a man into bed.

**Hugo** You've tried?

**Martha** No. I can't be funny. I've got no sense of humour.

**Hugo** Of course you have. It's the circumstances.

**Martha** No. I haven't. So please stop trying to amuse me.

*Pause*

**Hugo** Don't you find anything funny?

**Martha** Sometimes I think there's nothing funnier than a man with no clothes on, but you can't laugh, can you? You have to be beautiful. You said.

**Hugo** What was the last thing you laughed at?

**Martha** A man with no clothes on.

**Hugo** (*defensively*) What's funny about that?

**Martha** See. See.

**Hugo** Joke. You've got no sense of humour.

**Martha** My watch has stopped.

*Hugo laughs. Martha looks at him in amazement*

**Hugo** It's the way you tell 'em.

**Martha** It wasn't a joke.

**Hugo** Drunk makes a phone call. "Hallo. Is that Alcoholics Anonymous?" "Yes. Do you want to join?" "No, I want to resign."

*Pause*

**Martha** What time is it?

**Hugo** Eleven forty-three.

**Martha** Mine stopped at five past eleven.

**Hugo** Does it need winding up?

**Martha** It's broken. It obviously broke when ...

**Hugo** Joke.

**Martha** That's over half an hour. How can you joke about it?  
Songs. Jokes. You'll break into a tap dance next.

**Hugo** Thirty-eight minutes.

*Pause*

**Martha** Thirty-nine!

**Hugo** Thirty-nine minutes. Groucho Marx taking Harpo's pulse.  
"Either he is dead or my watch has stopped."

**Martha** Shut up!

*Pause*

Somebody probably is dead. Have you thought of that?

**Hugo** They'll come soon.

**Martha** How do you know? (*She shivers*)

**Hugo** Are you cold?

**Martha** The heating's gone off.

**Hugo** Perhaps it's just as well.

**Martha** Why?

**Hugo** We could have gone up in flames.

**Martha** Oh for goodness' sake.

**Hugo** Have you got anything else to wear? In your case?

**Martha** How do you know I've got a case?

**Hugo** I sat opposite you for an hour. Remember? When we were the right way up? Dark blue leather case. Must have a jumper in.

**Martha** No. It's full of money. I've just robbed a bank.

**Hugo** And this is your getaway train?

**Martha** Yes.

**Hugo** Bad choice. Didn't get far. Where is it? Your case?

*They search for the case. Hugo limps*

**Martha** (*finding the case*) There it is. What's happened to your leg?

**Hugo** Old Irish fellow goes to the doctor. "Doctor, doctor, I've got a tirrible pain in me right leg." "I'm afraid it's age, Mickey," the doctor told him. "Now, that can't be true, doctor, for me left leg's exactly the same age and it's perfectly all right."

**Martha** Stop it!

**Hugo** It's not easy for me either you know — being here. I'm reacting. I can't help it. I'm doing it my way.

**Martha** (*quickly*) Don't sing.

**Hugo** No.

**Martha** I suppose you wouldn't be walking on it if it was broken.

**Hugo** Bruised, I expect. Now (*he repeats the Irish accent*) if we cover you all over with banknotes, you'll be as warm as toast. And wantin' for nothin'.

**Martha** Liberty bodices.

**Hugo** What?

**Martha** In the case.

**Hugo** What are they? They sound exciting ...

**Martha** Things you wore in the war to keep you warm between your vest and your dress, with rubber buttons on.

**Hugo** Why liberty?

**Martha** I don't know. Ask your mother.

**Hugo** Perhaps because if you lasted out the war without freezing to death, there'd be liberty at the end of it.

**Martha** They were first made at the beginning of the twentieth century without whalebones in them. So they were flexible and comfy to wear. Gave you more liberty.

**Hugo** And you've got some in your case?

**Martha** In between the banknotes.

**Hugo** (*getting the case*) There you are.

**Martha** I'm taking them to an exhibition.

**Hugo** The banknotes?

**Martha** The liberty bodices. Educational. You know. I've got grey trousers as well. Short ones. Rites of passage going from short trousers to long trousers. Fair isle pullovers, smocked dresses. Today's kids can wear them and know what yesterday's kids ... I'll never get there. We can't get out. Get out at all. Do you suffer from claustrophobia? I don't. Do you? I don't. Phew, it's hot.

**Hugo** It's cold.

**Martha** Oh yes.

**Hugo** So you're a teacher?

**Martha** Museum education. History. Past stuff. You know. What do you suffer from? Apart from a broken leg? (*She sniffs*)

**Hugo** Bruised. Open your case.

**Martha** Halitosis?

**Hugo** You tell me. (*He leans towards her and breathes out*)

**Martha** No. God, it's something else. Gas. Do you think there's gas leaking, or chemicals or something.

**Hugo** It's an electric train.

**Martha** Electricity. Does electricity leak?

**Hugo** No.

**Martha** What do you think it is then? The train's upside down!

**Hugo** I don't know. Scorching.

**Martha** Scorching?

**Hugo** Brakes. Oil. I don't know. You thought it was my breath? Thank you very much.

**Martha** No. I didn't. Scorching? Brakes? Oil?

**Hugo** Show me the liberty bodices.

**Martha** I can't get my case open.

**Hugo** Here ...

**Martha** It's locked.

**Hugo** It would be, with all that money inside. Did you do it on your own?

**Martha** What?

**Hugo** Rob the bank?

**Martha** Yes. Women can, you know.

**Hugo** It's not the women bit I'm amazed at, it's the on your own bit. No accomplices?

**Martha** No. It only leads to arguments. (*She shivers*)

*Hugo takes his jacket off and puts it round Martha's shoulders*

**Hugo** Here. Have my jacket.

**Martha** I don't know where my key is.

**Hugo** Where did you put it?

**Martha** In my bag. I don't know where my bag is.

**Hugo** It'll be here somewhere.

*They search for Martha's handbag*

**Martha** It's not. It's gone. How? How? How can it have got out and gone? And we can't. We can't.

**Hugo** You're not going to cry, are you?

**Martha** How long is it now?

**Hugo** Fifty-one minutes.

**Martha** No. I might do when it's sixty minutes. Oh God. Oh God. I don't know what to do. We can't help anybody, can we? Do you think people are dead? And ... and ... the driver. Do you think he's dead? (*She sinks to the ground*)

**Hugo** (*sitting beside Martha and putting his arm round her*) There's no reason to believe that anybody's dead.

**Martha** I don't panic normally.

**Hugo** You do it on a skidpan with a bunch of bananas on your head.

**Martha** No, I don't.

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