

The Prison Father

A drama for Radio 4

By Caspar Walsh

Draft 4

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13th May 2002

Tony Geneva

HMP Blundeston.

MP0815 – GENEVA

14th April 1981

I can see the beginning of a sunset. I am listening to a beautiful flamenco on my radio. The sky is deep blue with fast moving clouds and occasional flocks of swallows flying home? I no longer have one. A home that is. Why does this please me? Looking at the clouds I suddenly see the shape of a pelican, which changes to the shape of a sea dragon. All this in less than a minute. All the beauty I could wish for when I choose to look.

Audio: Fade up Bond theme music. Battering ram smashing repeatedly into front door, shouting, falling in sync with music. Fade and run under following dialogue.

Jake Geneva 35 V/O

Now let me see, it was on the box recently but the first time I saw Live and Let Die I was 13 years old. I remember it clearly. It was a school night and my dad let me stay up, but then he always let me stay up, it drove mum mad. There was a strange woman sitting with me in the telly room. I think she was drunk or something?

Audio: Battering ram continues

My dad told me later that she was there to look after me. She was pretty useless. She kept leaning over me and telling me: *'Everything's going to be all right'*. And I was sitting there thinking 'No it's not, leave me alone and stop trying to hug me. I don't even know you! And anyway, you tried to snog my dad right *in front of me*. She just sat there smiling at me.

Audio: Battering ram breaks through the door. Police officers running into house and shouting orders – chaos and panic. Fade and run under following dialogue.

Jake 35 V/O

So I turned up the telly to drown out the noise. I pretended I didn't really understand what was happening. My dad and his weird friends were running around in blind

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panic hiding the 'goods' in the stupidest of places.

Audio: Police Officers shouting. Fade out.

Jake 35 V/O

And when they finally got in? It was actually a relief. Like a rite of passage or something. I know it sounds crazy but I wasn't scared I was excited. A policewoman came in and asked the mad smiling woman to wait outside. The policewoman turned the telly off! I think I swore at her. I wanted to give her a kick but she was actually quite nice, pretty too. She started talking to me really calmly. Strange. I felt safe. And after everything had calmed down upstairs she gave me a hug. (beat) I think I even started crying. I let a strange Policewoman give me a hug and I liked it.

Audio: Prison door shutting.

Music: Miles Davis – Kind of Blue

Tony

Actually I wrote about the sunset and the pelican shaped clouds yesterday, in my journal. What's the difference? Yesterday, today, tomorrow all much the same here. But it seems to illustrate how things are for me at the moment. I would like to get out of here soon. I want to walk instead of shuffle round some small yard with a couple of hundred others.

Oh well, patience I suppose.

Jake 35 years old V/O

In the privacy of my head I imagined myself as a Bond super baddie. Hardworking, well-liked St Christopher's pupil by day, the son of a convicted criminal by night! I lived in a carefully constructed fantasy world ... I guess at least half of it was true. I'd just bought my first single, Dire Straits you must remember it, Private Investigations? I was serving my last few weeks at school and my dad was serving 5 years in HMP Blundestone. The most frustrating thing of all was that I couldn't talk to anyone about it. Well that's something that hasn't changed much in the last twenty years.

Audio: Kitchen. Preparation and cooking of food.

Jake 35

(Mock Yorkshire)

By 'eck petal, you smell gorgeous tonight. What you got cooking in there ... for ar dinner?

Silence

Jake 35

Hello! Is there anyone in there? (beat) You haven't still got the hump have you?

Natalie

Please don't patronise me Jake. I've had a bad day.

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Jake 35

Don't I even get a kiss?

Silence

Jake 35

Where's Alex?

Natalie

Playing Harry Potter. How was work?

Jake 35

Oh you know.

Natalie

(Anger quickly rising) That's the problem in a nutshell really, isn't it? I don't. I need you to talk to me! I still want to know what's happening Jake?

Jake 35

(flippant) You're tenacious; I'll give you that.

Natalie

You do nothing but rattle on about the office in unbelievable detail and then all of a sudden out of the blue you just stop talking about it altogether, like I wouldn't notice.

Jake 35

I've just walked in the door Nat. Give me a minute.

Natalie

I want to know what it is?

Jake 35

What what is?

Natalie

(more anger) Will you stop talking to me like I'm a ten year old! You know exactly what I'm talking about. The cloak and dagger is starting to do my head in and getting boring. Even Alex has said your being weird.

Jake 35

What did he say?

Natalie

Daddies being weird.

Jake 35

Come here and give us a hug.

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Natalie

Dinner's at 7.

Jake 35 walks into TV room. Background: Harry Potter video game.

Jake 35

Good evening young mister Potter and what pray tell are the scores on the enchanted doors tonight?

Alex (7 years old)

I got the Snitch and knocked three Slitherin nasties off their sticks.

Jake 35

Good lad. (beat) I've got you a little something for being such a cool wizard.

Audio: Video game stops abruptly.

Alex

What! What did you get me dad! What!

JG 35

Something for doing such a good job in St Christopher's version of the Wizard of Oz.

Audio: Alex unwrapping the present.

Alex

Shrek on DVD. COOL! Thanks dad.

JG 35

Because you are a...

Alex

Donkey on the edge!!

Jake 35

Come on then. Give your big bad dad a hug!

JG 35 V/O

HMP Blundeston.

MP0815 – GENEVA

22nd April 1981

Tony

21st April 1981

Dear Jake,

Sorry about all this. About the cock up I've made with everything. I tried my hardest believe me.

Jake 35 V/O

He was arrested on the 13th of March 1981, that part is etched in here, deep in the old memory bank. I watched him being piled into the Black Mariah and I remember thinking how cool it was. (Pause) But still cried into my pillow that night. (Pause) I didn't hear from him for the best part of a week, a month, I forget. Then the first letter
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came through the door of my mum's house in Acton. He'd used green ink. Green was my favourite colour. He remembered. They were always on standard issue prison paper, his prison number and address rubber stamped in the top left hand corner. For some reason he always wrote in block capitals.

Tony

Whatever traumatic situations we've been through in the last ten years or so can only be understood and resolved by the two of us. So maybe soon we can really sit down and talk it all out. I'd really like you to come down for a visit, on your own ... soon.

JG 35 V/O

Traumatic situations? I was 13 years old for god sake! He loved all that Jungian psycho babble. He was good at that. You know what it's like ... I just wanted him to talk to me ... in English!

Audio: Prison visiting room

Tony

All right son. How's it going in the big bad world?

Jake 13

(teasing) Nice shirt dad.

Tony

Wotchit. (Beat) Any snout?

Jake 13

Course not. What took you so long? I've been waiting for ages. That prison officer standing behind the pillar was starting to freak me out. He's got really small eyes.

Audio: Tony lighting cigarette

Tony

Take no notice of him Kid, he's just bored. (Beat) I know the feeling, believe me.

Jake 13

Well?

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Tony

What?

Jake 13

(teenage exasperation) Where were you then?

Tony

Jogging. Conversing with nature. I get to do a circuit just outside the gates and around the two fields out the back there.

Jake 13

You mean they let you out ... on the road?

Tony

This is a category D prison, which means it's open, do you listen to anything I tell you? I'm no axe murderer or drug baron, not this time round anyway. I get to go into the wilds twice a week – for good behaviour but they always get their dates mixed up so I go out most days. Couldn't find me for an hour. Mugs thought I'd done a real runner. (beat) How's school then? Head down books out and the honey chickalinas lining up?

Jake 13

I hate it.

Tony

A mixed, forward thinking school like St Mathias? You love it. It's written all over your spotty face.

Jake 13

Yeah thanks dad. (beat) What have you been doing then?

Tony

Oh you know, trip to the opera, bit o grub down Langan's. Took this bird out the other night.

Jake 13

Stop teasing me. Got any more of those cool stories!?

Tony

Oh there's always stories. Stories are everywhere mate. Freezer Fred's been at it again. Found himself another boyfriend. I'm doing classes in French. Few deals. Met up with an old mate from Fulham. (reflective) It's funny really; this is the only place I ever see him. (beat) You got yourself a girlfriend yet?

Jake 13

I'm 13 dad. I'm into Batman and motorbikes. Girls just want to talk about horses and shoes. (beat) Why do they call him Freezer Fred?

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Tony

You don't want to know, believe me. Your attitude to the fairer sex will change very shortly. A good-looking lad like you. Play it nice and easy and you'll have them at your feet in no time.

Audio: Visiting room fades.