

The Reluctant Witnesses

A drama in one act

by Les Clarke

Spotlight Publications

The Reluctant Witnesses

CAST (in order of appearance)

Robert Craig. Male. Early twenties. Smartly dressed in suit and tie. Reasonable.

Ruthie. Female. Late fifties/early sixties. Street-wise. Dressed in layers of mis-matched clothing. Carries plastic bag.

Patrick James Carter. Male. Late teens/early twenties. Dressed in jogging bottoms, trainers, hooded top and baseball cap. Aggressive, abusive. Hyped up with so much energy his hands, head and body are constantly in motion almost like a “rapper.” He says “yeah” at the end of most sentences but it is without emphasis or meaning.

Jeffrey Mount. Male. Mid fifties. Smartly dressed in suit and tie. Reasonable, firm and calm.

Happy Harry. Male. Early/mid thirties. Clown. He is dressed as a clown en route to do a kids party with a red afro wig, big white eyes, big sad red mouth and a bright suit in any colour. Although he earns his living as a clown underneath there is a hard side to the man.

PC Stanley. Male/Female. The part of the police officer can be played by a male or female. Thirties. Reasonable and understanding but firm when needs arise.

Time - the present

Place - an interview room in a police station

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The scene is a room in a police station in the centre of London. There are a few notices pinned on a wallboard. One of the notices is a No Smoking sign. The room is windowless. There is a red emergency buzzer on the wall and a number of plastic chairs spread around the room together with a small table and a waste bin

The only occupant is Robert, who is pacing up and down

The door opens and PC Stanley enters together with an elderly woman, Ruthie

PC Stanley (to Robert) Got some company for you. (To Ruthie) In you go then, love. He won't bite you.

Ruthie (enters & eyes Robert. Hard) If he does I'll bite the bugger back!

Robert sighs and throws his hands in the air

Robert (to PC Stanley) Have you any idea how much longer this is going to take?

PC Stanley No, I'm sorry I don't at the moment. There's a lot of people to sort out but as soon as I know something I'll let you know. It's an unusual situation as I'm sure you appreciate. Tell you what; I'll see if I can rustle up some tea for you.

Ruthie I don't take sugar! It's bad for me teeth.

PC Stanley smiles, nods at Ruthie and exits closing the door behind him

It's good here, innit? Nice and dry. It makes a change to have something solid over me head.

Robert nods and turns away. He flops down on a chair. Ruthie takes a short tour of the room then sits

Bastard what happened, wan' it? And I was having a good day an' all. This'll bugger things up for weeks! I've had three lots of sandwiches bought me today ...

Robert omits a short laugh

What? What you blooming laughing at? You laughing at me?

Robert (sits forward) No, no not at all. I was just thinking about the irony in what you just said about sandwiches.

Ruthie pulls a face confused

You see if I hadn't have popped out for a sandwich I wouldn't be stuck in here now. I'd still be at work. This is going to affect my targets something chronic. And my supervisor she'll be tearing her hair out wondering where the hell I've got to. (He straightens up) Oh this won't go down very well at all. Oh God! (He sighs)

Ruthie (dives in her plastic bag) I've still got a sandwich in here somewhere, you're welcome to it. I hid it after they'd had a poke about. (She nods) I've only eaten one half I ain't touched the other half. It's in one of them plastic cases.

Robert How come they let you keep a bag?

Ruthie (stops rummaging and cackles) It's me spares. Look. (She pulls her hand out the bag and holds up an assortment of old underwear. She holds a pair up in front of her and models them) If I've had a drop of drink see, I sometimes wets meself. So I keep me spares with me all the time. If I can't change me drawers straight away I gets a rash. Oow itches like mad, it do! So they let me keep me bag of drawers but I hid that sandwich when they wa'nt looking. (She starts rummaging again) I know it's in here somewhere.

Robert Look its okay. Don't bother on my account please ... I've lost me appetite.

Ruthie Suit yourself. (Pause) It's nice and warm in here though, innit? I might take a layer or two off ... but I don't want you peeking at me body! (Robert is appalled at the thought) You wanna take a look at your boat race! (She points at him and cackles) Oow be nice if they keep us here overnight. Looked like it might rain again it was clouding up. It's harder finding somewhere to bed down when it rains.

Robert (*shocked at the thought he may be kept overnight*) No, they wouldn't keep us overnight, surely! They can't. (*He stands and nervously starts pacing*) I mean I'm meeting my *fiancée* later for a meal. The table's booked and everything. Oh God this is getting worse by the minute!

Ruthie I was married. Spoiled for choice I was. I was quite a looker in me day, me. Men used to follow me round with their tongues hanging out. (*She cackles*) I had a great arse. (*She looks over her shoulder*) It's still there somewhere, lodged between me thighs and the back of me knees! (*She cackles*)

Robert Well there's no way I can stay here tonight. She'll go mad, she won't believe me. She'll think I made it up.

Ruthie Don't she trust you then? (*She starts to take her coat off*)

Robert (*he groans*) We've had a few rows lately. I'm under a lot of pressure at work and then there's all the planning for the wedding and everything. I wanted something simple but her side of the family wanted the whole works. The big white church wedding, you know! That's just so typical of her dad, that is. Her dad's quite well off and he likes to shove it in my face every chance he gets! I don't think he really approves of me. I don't think he thinks I'm good enough for his daughter. Huh! I don't think anyone would be! (*He looks up at Ruthie*)

Ruthie Oi you! No peeking!

Robert turns abruptly away. She cackles and puts her coat on the chair beside her

D'you love her?

Robert What kind of question's that!

Ruthie You ain't sure, are ya? If you was you would have said so outright. You'd have just come right out and said it. Pays to be sure. It's a big blooming step. I should know, I done it four times!

Robert Four times! You've had four husbands?

Ruthie (*snaps*) Well I ain't a bleeding dyke!

Robert No, no! I wasn't suggesting for one moment that you were. It's just the thought of getting married once is bad enough, but four times ...

Ruthie I've just been unlucky that's all. That's why I ain't never betted see. I ain't got no luck. Never have had. Me first husband was always down the bookies. (*Snorts*) At least I knowed where he was! Me second bugger only came back home when he wanted money or sex and he was mostly unlucky on both counts an' all!

Robert (*shakes his head*) God!

Ruthie Big step, marriage. (*Pause*) You sure about that sandwich?

He nods

The door opens and PC Stanley ushers Jeffrey Mount into the room

PC Stanley In you go then, sir.

Jeffrey enters

Ruthie Where's me tea then? You ain't come back empty handed, have ya?

PC Stanley Sorry, Ruthie, bit pushed at the moment. When I get a minute I'll try and get something organised for you. (*He turns to go*)

Jeffrey Constable?

PC Stanley (*turns*) Sir?

Jeffrey I have a full diary for this afternoon. I mean I don't know how all this works.

PC Stanley Well it's all a bit unusual for us as well, sir. As things stand we've got in excess of forty people to interview and that's not counting the casualties. Usually we'd keep you all separate from each other but we don't have the facilities or the manpower, I'm afraid. We've taken basic details from everyone and they're being logged onto our system, and we've got additional police officers being coached in from other stations and officers have been recalled from leave to assist, and in time you'll all be interviewed and then you'll be allowed home. Time-wise ... I just couldn't say. I'm sorry.

Jeffrey No, I see, thank you.

Robert But we won't be kept in here all night, will we? I mean I'm supposed to be taking my *fiancée* out

for a meal!

PC Stanley I'm very sorry, sir. I honestly couldn't say.

Ruthie clasps her hands together and gives a big smile

Robert But why can't I use a phone? If it's a problem why can't I have my mobile back?

PC Stanley I'm sorry, sir. In the current situation until you've been interviewed no phone calls are allowed.

Jeffrey But I thought when people were arrested they were allowed one phone call to a member of their family or a solicitor?

Robert Yeah, that's right!

PC Stanley No-one's under arrest, sir. You're all here voluntarily.

Robert (*moving forward*) That means I can go then if I want to.

PC Stanley No, sir, I'm afraid it doesn't.

Robert But you just said we weren't under arrest.

PC Stanley That's correct, sir. But these are extenuating circumstances and involve an act of terrorism, which give us additional powers. So although you're here voluntarily until such times as you've been interviewed I'm afraid you will have to remain with us. I'm sorry.

He nods and exits closing the door behind him

The Reluctant Witnesses

A fast-moving drama on a topical theme, with lively dialogue and good parts for four men and two women.

Plot Summary

During a terrorist bomb-scare, a number of people who witnessed the incident are assembled in the interview room of a police station. And they are a motley crowd: two businessmen, an elderly bag-lady, a clown en route to a kids' party, and an aggressive teenage hoodie with attitude. As conflicts arise, PC Stanley has his work cut out to prevent the tension spilling over into open hostility.