

The Dead Dad Show
by Annalisa Dinnella

MUSIC - STEVE REICH, SIX MARIMBAS 0.00 --

FX APPLAUSE FROM A COMEDY CLUB AUDIENCE

Hello Edinburgh Chortle Awards, thank you for having me. My name is James and I'm..

(HESITATES)

And I'm...

(HESITATES)

I'm...

(A BEAT OF AWFUL SILENCE)

FX A SHARP MECHANICAL SCREECH AND MUSIC STOPS ABRUPTLY
AT 0.37

I wake up, this time, because I'm thrown against the wall.

I'm somewhere between midnight and six am, somewhere between London Paddington and Edinburgh Waverly.

FX THE ROAR AND RATTLE OF A SLEEPER TRAIN

I flip my pillow and fumble around for my water bottle but it must have rolled off the mattress. I'll never find it. I emptied my rucksack all over the floor last night -- spreading myself out to fit all the available space.

I told the organizers I had to have my own cabin on account of my sleep issues. They accepted without question. Some of the others had to share.

I don't really have sleep issues.

I'm lying. I do have sleep issues. I mean historically. I have historical sleep issues. They can reappear in times of stress. And this is a time of stress.

I go through my set – Reasons Why It's OK For Me To Love Hugh Grant, Annoying Doorbells, Things You Learn About Your Mates In An Escape Room, New And Better Names For All The Classic Haribos ... I'm going to die on my arse tomorrow if I don't sleep. I can't die on my arse. I can't die in front of everyone.

I feel across the wall behind my head for the A/C switch and turn it off. Cold air is still blowing at me so I sit up and feel for the switch by the top bunk but there's something in the way. Don't remember putting anything up there. It's heavy, round, sort of warm. I try and move it.

.. and realize that I am cupping the heel of a human foot.

My hand is on a human foot.

The foot springs away from me. I spring away from it and, above me, a body begins very slowly to shift its weight.

FX A WHEEZY SORT OF SIGH, SHEETS RUSTLE

There's a body in my cabin.

FX LIGHT SNORING

There's a body in my cabin.

I locked my door. (I can be a bit obsessive about these things and I remember locking my door) I locked my door.

Could I have gone for a piss and left it unlocked? Don't remember doing that. Did I sleepwalk? Haven't done that since I was six years old. Haven't wet myself since I was six either. And, no, I haven't wet myself. But thanks for asking.

I'm breathing – just breathing - and thinking that probably the best thing to do in this situation is to.... pretend it's not happening. Just pretend it's not happening. I'm going to go back to sleep because that's the priority here - sleep. The most important thing is sleep. I'll deal with this douchbag (CONSIDERS Douchbag?). I'll deal with this douchbag in the morning. It could be a funny story. Could be material. I mean he might be a nice guy. He might be a dick. He's probably a dick. Right. Come on. Sleep. Sleep now.

FX WHEEZY BREATHING, LIP SMACHING

Sleep.

FX WHEEZY BREATHING, A BODY MOVING UNDER BEDSHEETS

Sleep.

He's a dick.

FX A FART

I am not making this up. This is a sealed cabin. The windows don't open.

FX ANOTHER FART

I'm not in the mood for this. This is not the time. This is not the moment.

"Hey buddy" I hear myself saying.. Not too loudly. "You got the wrong cabin mate. Excuse me, mate. But you're in my cabin."

FX BREATHING CONTINUES

"I've got a gig tomorrow. I need to sleep. Can you hear me?"

FX BREATHING CONTINUES

So I'm on my feet now, flicking the lights on. Turns out douchbag bunk invader is a man with grey-hair. He's wearing an eye-mask and green tartan pyjamas. He's sleeping like the dead. Foetal position.

FX MORE BREATHING

I prod him on the arm. No dice. Prod him again. (EXASPERATED SIGH)

MUSIC - STEVE REICH, SIX MARIMBAS 8.44 -- 8.54

FX A DOOR SHUTTING, THE ROAR OF THE TRAIN FROM THE HALLWAY, FOOTSTEPS

I'm outside the cabin. Barefoot. Boxers. Puffa jacket for the sake of modesty. I need water. And a piss. I'm going to find the conductor and get him to rid me of my bunk invader. I wouldn't normally do this. You know I wouldn't normally do this. Go crying for help. Not my style at all. But tonight's different. If I don't sleep tonight I could die on my arse tomorrow. And I can't do that. I can't die in front of everyone.

I'm being extra quiet out of consideration to my immediate neighbours, which is good of me because my immediate neighbours are also my immediate competition. The Chortle Comedy Newcomer Awards. Sponsored by Sky. I've been gigging for twelve years and this is my

first big break. I'm in with a chance. My 'People Who Exercise In Public' material always gets the biggest laugh of the night. No matter who else is on the bill. That, and my bit about the 'Ripen-at-Home Plums'.

There's an agent interested. Mel. She wears statement earrings and her twitter biog says 'comedy agent, but nice..'

She told me last week that she worried I might be too 'surface level'. What she means by that is I don't do Dead Dad Shows. They're all the rage these days, Dead Dad Shows. Everyone's doing confessional, vulnerable. Everyone's like: "I tried to kill myself when I was a gay teenager in the 90s and now you will laugh loudly because I've made you feel weird and uncomfortable."

I don't need sympathy to get my audience on side -- unlike Trans Alice, Intrusive-Thoughts Laura and Jason With The Miscarriage (it wasn't even his miscarriage).

I don't want pity. Never did. That's how I got funny. So none of Mum's friends would ever look at me – or her - like that again. Mum's never seen me perform. She and Becca are flying up in the morning. I invited them. They seemed surprised.

When I'm on stage it's like throwing grenades. Boom. Laughter bombs. Set up, punch, set up, punch. Boom. Power. I only enjoy rooms full of people if I can control all the noises they make.

Intrusive-Thoughts Laura likes me. We haven't had sex yet. I put my arm around her once – as an experiment - and I could feel her purring, like every molecule of her skin was directing itself up into my arm. Every molecule of her needed my touch even though her face was pretending she didn't care. It makes me feel sad when I think about it so I'm not going to.

MUSIC - STEVE REICH, SIX MARIMBAS 8.44 — 8.54FX FOOTSTEPS AND TRAIN RATTLES

The bogs are occupied so I head through the seated carriage. Families are sleeping – kids piled on top of their parents. A bloke with a blonde beard eyes me with recognition I don't understand. He looks like he wants a fight. He nearly says something. I nearly say something back but I don't.

FX TOILET DOOR LOCKING

In the toilet mirror, an addled person stares back at me. It's Becca. We've always looked alike, me and Becca. And the Becca in my mind is always addled. Even though (you'll be pleased to know) she's not addled anymore. She's a regular people person now is Becca – now that she's with-child and happy.

And now she's expecting a grandchild, Mum is also happy. I am aware that Mum had a Not-Depressed-Life at some point in the past but I don't remember it so it's like meeting a stranger. Turns out Mum's a people person too. Traitor.

It takes zero skill to get pregnant. A walrus can get pregnant. I work an office job, get a pension, get a mortgage without as much as a 'well done, son'. Becca lets Brian from Gourmet Burger Kitchen inseminate her and suddenly she's the Second Coming.

Brian grows geraniums on his windowsill, which is apparently why Becca fell in love with him.

Mum doesn't know I've quit my job to become a full-time comedian. I'm going to tell her after the show - after she's seen me up there killing it.

FX TRAIN NOISES, FOOTSTEPS

When I get there, the bar carriage is deserted. Clock on the counter says 3:42am. Panic. Don't panic. I call out. "Excuse me, hello" like a prick. The grill is down on the bar so I unpick the lock. Need water. Won't sleep without water. There's cans of soda water. I nail one. I would have paid for it if someone had been here. I'm not a criminal.

Becca has started ringing me up and telling me stories. Her stories aren't funny stories like yours used to be. Her stories are 'allegorical'. What Becca is trying to tell me, with all her stories, is that I don't have to be such a prick all the time.

But I do have to be a prick. You die suddenly of an undiagnosed heart defect when I'm six years old. That means I have to be prick. I was six. She was nine. She got three more years of you than I did. Three whole years.

Becca and Brian have a joint email address. They're going to go on family holidays and sleep with their kids piled on top of them. She's going to start saying things like "show me you're listening" and "drat".

I'm on my third elderflower tonic water when Blonde Beard from the seated carriage comes in, followed by the Guard who looks exhausted and weary. Blond Beard is pointing at me. What is his problem? I'm the victim here. Weary Guard asks what I'm doing. I explain that the bar was unmanned. Weary Guard has a pimple between his eyebrows. He seems too young for this level of responsibility. I want to ask his name but he tells me to empty my pockets. I produce seven

miniature bottles of Glenfiddich, three packets of shortbread and a bag of salted almonds.

Turns out Blonde Beard is a copper. "Always on duty, sometimes off shift". He offers to radio the BTP at the next station stop. They can arrest me there. I tell Wallander to piss off. He tries to grab me. Is he serious? I dodge him. He tries again. I'm considering a headbutt when the train lurches and we both end up on the floor.

MUSIC - STEVE REICH, SIX MARIMBAS 8.44 — 8.54

FX FOOTSTEPS, TRAIN RATTLES

I'm being escorted back to my cabin by Weary Guard who, despite exposure to all this hot-blooded violence, still seems like he can't be arsed. He has agreed to come and find my bunk invader. He sees no need to stop at York but I "will have some explaining to do to the British Transport Police when we get to Edinburgh in the morning". We left Wallander in the bar holding ice to his head.

FX A DOOR RATTLING, KEY IN THE LOCK

We're outside my cabin now. I don't have my keys. Weary Guard has a skeleton because he's the Daddy. We open the door.

FX LIGHT SWTICHES ON.

Top bunk is empty. No bunk invader. Where in God's name is bunk invader? My stuff is exactly where I left it - all over the floor. Weary Guard just shakes his head like he's seen it all before. 'No more of this' he says as though he fully expects more of this. 'No more of this. Do you understand?

I lock the door after he's gone. I slip under the covers. Sleep time. I go through my set – Reasons Why It's OK To Love Hugh Grant, Annoying Doorbells... I am going to die on my arse tomorrow if I don't sleep now.

I think of Intrusive-Thoughts Laura and her rainbow rollneck jumper and her dick jokes. She's funny. And brave. She is brave. I do see that. Mum will prefer her to me. I prefer her to me.

FX LIGHT SNORING

MUSIC – SIX MARIMBAS 0.00--

FX A SNATCH OF COMEDY CLUB ATMOS AND APPLAUSE

Hello Edinburgh Chortle Awards, thank you for having me. My name's James and I'm...

(HESITATES)

I'm...

(HESITATES)

I'm dying on my arse.

FX A FART. MUSIC STOPS ABRUPTLY AT 0.37

FX A WHEEZY SORT OF SIGH

FX ANOTHER FART

I'm on my feet. I'm turning on the light. He's here. The bunk invader is here again. How can he be here again?

Wake up. Just wake up. (LOUDER) I don't have time for this. This is not the moment. This is not the time.

THIS IS NOT THE TIME.

I'm too little.

I'm too young.

FX JAMES IS SHAKING THE MAN WITH INCREASING VIOLENCE

Six is too young to find a dead body. I was six years old when I climbed into your side of the bed like I did every morning. Mum slept through your last breath. It was me who found you. Not Becca. Not Mum. Me.

And, still, I have to be the good boy, while everyone else has 'breakdowns' and 'addiction issues' and 'depressive episodes'. I have to be the good boy who pretends to be 'happy' all day and who pisses his bed all night, who lives in fear of his dreams, who wakes up every night screaming for his Dad,... who wakes up every night screaming.

FX A DOOR BURSTS OPEN, A SCUFFLE

Weary Guard and Wallander are trying to pull me off the top bunk. They're shouting at me to stop. 'You've had us up and down this train all night' whines Weary Guard. 'You've woken half the carriage. There's nobody in that bed, mate. There's nobody there.'

Wallander lunges at me but I elbow him and tell him if he does it again, I'll kick him in the face. He says "I am arresting you on suspicion of using threatening words with intent to cause fear of violence contrary to section 4 of the public order act 1986' And I say 'fuck off'.

Then I start crying. And I can't seem to stop.