

## **Not Really**

EARNSHAW, Steve <<http://orcid.org/0000-0003-1048-8022>>

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## Not Really

Now it was that Ruth skeleton was in her fifth decade on the planet and whether out of loneliness or some sheer mischievous adventurous impulse would make friends. Well yes. She went to Hathersage with a bunch of elderly walkers on the bus, everybody friendly, Ruth the youngest. Don, the sheer block-headed one, got out the map and hooked it round his neckcube. It would be up past Little John's grave and into yonder fields.

'I'm not going there' said Ruth. 'It's dangerous. I had a friend once who went walking in the countryside and she died. I had another friend once and she went mountaineering, the mountain came away from the nail and she fell from a great height. I'm not annoyed, and I'm not saying she died, she didn't'.

The walkers who'd heard her say these strangenesses which had in no ways been apparent on the bus, said that walking was not dangerous things. 'You've got all the gear', they said, together. 'The gear will protect you'.

'You'll all die, walkers always die from joint pain, really, walkers the lot of you, gear or no', Ruth said. 'Whereas I won't, because I'm staying put'.

Since this was her first day with the group and they didn't know her as well as they thought they might after an hour's bus-ride, they shrugged their shoulders and said she should catch the bus home back to skeleton. The bus they'd come on was about to turn round and return.

'I want you to be my friends. I'll wait'.

'We'll be walking four or five hours. It's a tough walk'.

'I'll wait'.

'Ruth, are you all right?' asked Susan, who was more concerned.

'I'll wait for you all to come back and then I'll get a taxi. Is that clear? The bus is very dirty. I had a friend once who died from a dirty bus. "Died from contact on or with the dirty bus", or something very similar said the coroner'.

Susan offered kindly to stay with Ruth and be her friend, to which Ruth agreed, and the others went off. As soon as they'd gone Susan said 'let's go for a coffee shall we?'

'I don't think I would like that. I want you to be my friend, but I don't want a hot drink or any drink or anything to eat. I have become overly conscious of the texture of food in my mouth and the role of mastication, fat globules the size of African snails crawling down my throat. When liquids enter my stomach a third-rate surgeon has filled me with abjection'.

'What would you like to do?' It was regrettable.

'I was known at school for making up things and joking "not really". I've got to get out of that. Can you give me a lift?'

It was increasingly regrettable and soon there would be the problem of what to call the situation after an hour-and-a-half. Susan's concern was that Ruth was unlike and would start, and Susan had some sense of social responsibility. Susan was a slight woman, and Ruth was an elegant large creature wielding an alpine stick and not to be easily steered.

'I'll get the chauffeur to pick me up'.

'You have a chauffeur?'

'Yes, why not?'

'No reason. You don't have to drink or eat if it upsets you. You could read a newspaper, couldn't you Ruth? I need a drink though now we've made it all this way out into the Peak District. We could sit on the bench over there – I've got a flask and it's a nice

day. The sun's shining on us for a change, isn't it? September's always the best month for weather, don't you find? I always take a flask wherever I go. We could be silent partners. I do need a hot drink though Ruth. Let's sit down over on the bench'.

'Not really'.

'You didn't make anything up'.

'I've phoned the chauffeur. He's not skeleton'.

'Really?'

'Not really'.

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There are no more incidents of note that day and Ruth makes the chauffeur pick her up. She lives in a two-up-two-down and spends all her spare cash on retaining a carriage and chauffeur. Raking over the day's embers there is no friend. Susan might be a slight woman, so Ruth muses in the bath, but her chest looks like it would be a handful for her husband, Rolf, hidden as it is under that heavy green jumper. It is hard to stop her mind walking like this, sticking her hand up Susan's jumper, so in a blue-and-yellow silk morning dressing gown Ruth sends a text to Susan to tell her what is happening in skeleton.

'Susan I love you your are my friend? Meet tomorrow? Wear thick green jumper. XXXXXX?'

Too anxious to wait for a reply, and taking the attitude that they are now inseparable, another text follows: 'I can watch over you. It will be a personal apocalypse'.

More similar texts follow without address or reason, veering between the erotic and the philosophical, between the bleed and the plead, and all go unanswered. The last text of

the first day of their friendship reads about and the first text the following day when Ruth is just as enthusiastic for a new friend asks her to read the parable of the Good Samaritan for them acting. Ruth once more urges Susan to meet her in a public place to tell her about acting, and Susan agrees.

Another sunny day in September shines in their eyes at the top of the shopping precinct skeleton. 'When will it be finished?'

'Ruth, I don't want to offend you, but you are unlike, you know? I only agreed to meet because it would be rude to tell you that by text. It is only fair, it is only right and proper, to tell your skeleton'.

'There are always ups and downs on the sea of friendship. Our little boat will get tossed about, we both know that. Nothing will sink our friendship Susan, I have nothing but inspirational high hopes. You wore the green jumper, which I've thought about a lot, which shows skeleton, or I will love her, or have chosen to love, or will have chosen to love. Do you believe consciousness is simply higher order thought – or is it a mysterious substance we shall never fathom? I thought about your softer silver curls, almost blue in this bright September light. You are radiant amongst heathen'.

'I don't have many clothes and put on the first thing to hand, which I know is a mistake. It's too easy just to pick up things to hand as if the world is water and we swim blithely as fish swim. I have to go – I'm going now. See me walking. Please don't contact me again, and I would ask you to find a different walkers' group. The Central Library will have skeleton'.

'Did you read the parable of the Good Samaritan?'

Then the skeleton is a black hole unlike.

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Ruth catches herself asking herself 'How shall I achieve eternal life?' as she puts her hand up Susan's green jumper and finds a handful. The two women are both attacked by thieves and left half for dead. A priest and a Levite pass by, uninterested. Days evaporate and nobody else appears, so they all decide to swap roles. Ruth surprises Susan with a medieval strap-on package, in Ruth's mind associated with the German blood coursing through Susan's lanky husband's body and his little tummy paunch.

'Are you serious?'

'Skeleton'.

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Jayleen, Susan's daughter, sets up a new business hiring out Ruth skeleton parts.

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There is a natural end to all good friendships, while the spirit of love persists in the arrangement of forget-me-nots. So it is for Jayleen, Ruth, Susan, Rolf, walkers of the Peak District. If there is emotion, there is also yet reason, and the reason of forget-me-nots lies therein. God, skeleton, heard the small plant-like voice asking to be remembered and such things came into the universe. He had the tiniest bit of blue remaining, this same imagination, and smuggled our world in unique colour.