

To Bee Or Not To Bee

A One Act Play



Bob Davidson

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By
Bob Davidson

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written between 1st and 14th April 2014

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Cast

DAVIE - retired farm worker, 80 years old, still living in his tied cottage. A man of the land, a keen gardener, not so able to get about these days, and... he keeps bees.

RACHEL - A young, cheery, vibrant, practical, lady who possibly has a degree in biology but in any case has just started working as a home help/carer, which is how she met Davie.

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The curtains open on a set which portrays a cottage garden. The door to the cottage is stage right and there is a gate into the garden upstage left. There is a beehive somewhere down stage left. There is also a man lying sprawled out centre stage. He is DAVIE and he is motionless. After a moment or two RACHEL enters stage right, pushing a bicycle. On seeing DAVIE, she quickly lays the bike down and rushes through the gate and over to him. She hesitates for a moment...

RACHEL

(touching Davie gently on the shoulder)

Hello?

DAVIE stirs a little...

Oh, you're alive...

DAVIE

... aye, I'm afraid so...

RACHEL

... only I thought maybe...

DAVIE

... but only just... you thought maybe what?

RACHEL

Em...

DAVIE

Did ye think I was deid?

RACHEL

No, no, of course not...

DAVIE

Well I'm no' far fae it... it's this damned knee o' mine. Gives way just when ye least expect it. It'll be the death o' me one o' these days.

RACHEL

... can you wiggle your toes?

DAVIE

Ma toes? What the hell d'ye want tae ken that for?

RACHEL

... well, it's what people normally ask.

DAVIE

Is it? Bloody daft thing to ask.

RACHEL

Well, I think if you can wiggle them, it means there's nothing broken.

DAVIE

Oh well, I'd better give it a try I suppose...

Pause...

Aye they're wiggling fine...

RACHEL

Good, that's fine then... no broken bones....

DAVIE

... can you wiggle yours?

RACHEL

Em, I dunno... I'll give them a try... *(pause)* yep, all present and correct. How are you feeling?

DAVIE

A bitty better, hen...

RACHEL

... it's Rachel... I'm one of your new carers.

DAVIE

Rachel, that's a braw name... Well it's nice tae meet you, Rachel. You're aboot the hundredth one I've had...

RACHEL

Aye, well I'm sure there's maybe a hundred more to come... what's your name?

DAVIE

Mr Taylor.

RACHEL

I know you're Mr Taylor... what's your first name?

DAVIE

Och, I've never been asked for that afore. I didnae think you were allowed to call me by ma first name...

RACHEL

I'm not...

DAVIE

... I usually get "Pet" or "Darlin" or some bloody rubbish... "how are we today sweetheart?" Uh!

RACHEL

So what is it?

DAVIE

It's Davie.

RACHEL

Right, well is it okay for me to call you Davie?

DAVIE

Aye.

RACHEL

Okay, Davie, what would you like me to do, if anything at all? Do you want to lie there, or do you want to get up?

DAVIE

I think I'd like to get up...

RACHEL

Thought you might...

DAVIE

I'll probably manage by masel' You just bide there, and be ready to call the fire brigade...

RACHEL

... you going to burst into flames?

DAVIE

Ah, ye never know what might happen when I get going...

He starts struggling to his feet....

There's a seat there, Rachel... bring it o'er will ye?

She brings over a plastic garden chair and he sits down...

Ah, that's a bitty better.

RACHEL

Are you fine?

DAVIE

I'm fine.

RACHEL

I'll make you a cup of tea.

DAVIE

I didnae think you were allowed to make me a cup of tea...

RACHEL

I'm not... do you take milk and sugar?

DAVIE

... just a wee spot o' milk.

She exits, into the house...

I huvnae had a home help like you afore...

RACHEL (*Off*)

Aye well, I'm one in a million. Have you got any biscuits?

DAVIE

I'm no' allowed biscuits...

RACHEL

(appearing back on stage)

No' allowed biscuits? No' allowed? Who's no' allowing ye?

DAVIE

The doctor...

RACHEL

Oh, Davie... you dinnae want tae listen tae them. Doctors.... what do they know? I think I've got a Twix somewhere... we'll half it.

DAVIE

God, I huvnae had a biscuit in years. It's shear purgatory, life's no' worth livin'. A Twix eh?

RACHEL

How old are you, Davie, if you don't mind me asking?

DAVIE

I'm eighty.

RACHEL

Well, if ye cannae hae a Twix when your eighty, when can ye have one?

DAVIE

Are you writing me aff?

RACHEL

Not at all. All I'm saying is a little bit o' what you fancy does you good..

Rachel's phone goes...

... excuse me a minute, Davie. It's ma boy. *(She answers the call)*
Hello, Jack... oh no.... I'm sorry... oh dear, did you have to swim in your pants?... oh, no towel... of course. I'm sorry, Jack... what if I make macaroni cheese for tea tonight to make up for it?... I know I was going make it anyway!... okay.... okay. I'm sorry, Jack. I'm sorry... I'll see you later eh?... I love you too...

DAVIE

I huvnae had macaroni cheese for years either. Another thing I'm no' allowed. It's like being in prison.

RACHEL

I'll bring you some tomorrow and you can fling it in your microwave... how are you feeling now?

DAVIE

I'm fine. In fact I'm fine enough to do the job I was on my way to do when this old knee o' mine let me doon. D'ye ken anything about bees?

RACHEL

Em, just that they sting you, and that they make marmalade...

DAVIE

Marmalade!

RACHEL

I meant honey!

DAVIE

Aye, well... mine urnae making honey... or marmalade or raspberry jam either for that matter. There's something going on wae the wee devils and I don't know what it is... Come and hae a look...

RACHEL

Em... I'd rather not...

DAVIE

... come on, they'll no' sting ye, well no' a' o' them anyway...

DAVIE crosses to the hive and slowly removes the lid and lays it gently on the ground. He peers in. RACHEL remains at a safe distance...

DAVIE

Mmm.... (*tuts*) Oh dear, oh dear... I just cannae understand it...

RACHEL

What's the matter?

DAVIE

There's some more deid anes, Rachel.... that's what's the matter. Every day now. Five or ten... near twenty one day.

RACHEL

A virus maybe?

DAVIE

God, you're as bad as my doctor. If they dinnae ken what's wrong wae ye, they just say it's a virus, and tell ye tae stop eating chocolate éclairs...

RACHEL

Well it could be, Davie. You never know. There's got to be something behind it.

DAVIE

I cannae understand it. I just cannae understand it at a'... Oh, no... it's J.C. I thought she was a survivor...

He stoops and picks up a dead bee from just outside the hive...

Poor wee blighter, she'll no' sting you noo...

RACHEL

That is so sad.

DAVIE

She's been murdered!

RACHEL

Murdered? But who would want to murder a bee?

DAVIE

Another bee. Or bees more like. They've murdered her and kicked her oot the door. That's how she was lying there...

He has another look into the hive...

Ah, I see Sizewell's still going strong. She'll outlive us all.

RACHEL

Sizewell? Isn't that a nuclear power station?

DAVIE

Aye, doon in England somewhere. East Anglia I think... Suffolk maybe.

RACHEL

Why do you call your bee after a nuclear power station?

DAVIE

Well, there's Sizewell "A" and that's Sizewell "B"... it's a kindo a joke, a play on words. Like J.C. here... J.C.B.

RACHEL

Ah, I see now...

DAVIE

(pointing into the hive)

That's Plan "B"... that one's Saturn 5 "B"... that one's Vitamin, that one's...

RACHEL

... Flybe?

DAVIE

... Flybe, what's that?

RACHEL

Em, it's an airline...

DAVIE

Oh, right, I'll remember that... that one's bewitched, that's bejiggered a that one's bewildered... and so am I.

RACHEL

(pointing)

And who's that one?

DAVIE

(squinting slightly)

Eh... that's Derek.

RACHEL

Derek B?

DAVIE

Now, you're just being daft.

They smile at each other. DAVIE has another keek into the hive...

DAVIE

See, that one there? That's the queen... she came all the way from Hungary...

RACHEL

She didn't *fly* all the way from Hungary?

DAVIE

No, no... she came in a van. In a box, wae some sugar in it, for her to eat.

RACHEL

Can you really tell them all apart?

DAVIE

Na, the only way I can really tell them apart is by writing their names on their bums, wae a pencil.

RACHEL

Davie, I've got to go, but is there anything I can do for you before I do?

Have you got something for tea? I noticed you'd plenty milk and porridge oats...

DAVIE

... aye I've got some soup in the fridge. I like tae hae a pot o' soup on the go. That'll dae me fine.

RACHEL

Right, you take it easy... no more falling over. I'll see you tomorrow eh?

DAVIE

Aye fine that.

RACHEL exits through the garden gate and pushes her bike off stage right. DAVIE replaces the lid on the hive after removing another handful of dead bees. He looks at them in his hand for a moment or two before dropping them at the foot of the garden wall. He wanders over to a watering can and is watering the ground as the lights fade.

The lights come up and DAVIE is lying sprawled out on the ground again. RACHEL arrives with her bike, sees him, and rushes over...

RACHEL

Davie!

DAVIE
(stirring slightly)

Wha's that?

RACHEL
It's Rachel, remember, I was here yesterday... what did I tell you about falling over?

DAVIE
Oh aye, Rachel... wae the Twix, I've got you noo.

RACHEL
Come on, up ye get... *(she gets the chair for him)* Sit ye doon and tell me what happened.

DAVIE
Well... I'd just checked the hive, not good news by the way, and I was on my way back, then before I knew what was happening I was flat oot doon there *(points to the ground)*.

RACHEL
God, you're a man for the adventures...

DAVIE
Adventures? No' me! I'm the maist unadventurous bugger in the whole world. Even ma national service was spent in Aldershot. Nae foreign parts for me. Two years changing lorry tyres.

RACHEL
Did it do you any good, Davie... was it the making of ye?

DAVIE
Well, I learned how to change lorry tyres, if that's what you mean. Fat lot o' good that's done me. I huvnae changed one since. The maist adventurous I've been since then, is setting a new ploo or driving the combine...

RACHEL

I think we should maybe bring back national service.

DAVIE

Dae ye think so, Rachel? I dinnae think ye'd get folk to go...

RACHEL

Oh, no' a military thing, Davie, that's not what I mean. Two or three years where young folk are given a bit of opportunity, bit o' routine... wee bit o' discipline, aye sure, but a chance to do some good. Get some guidance away from the normal day to day stuff and a feeling that there's a future for them. Cause the painful truth, Davie, is that there's no future for a lot of them. A whole generation lost. Wee lost souls living in a grey world. That's what they need, Davie... a bit o' colour.

DAVIE

Aye... well... we all need a bit o' colour in oor lives. I've had it lucky living here, nothing to complain about. Plenty o' colour when you live in the country. And variety too, the seasons see to that. Never twa days the same. It can get a bit grey in the winter, but that doesnae last long... especially as ye get aulder.

RACHEL

I planned loads o' adventures when I was at school. I was pretty bright. Laziness was my problem. Stay on till sixth year and then University... after a gap year of course. That's when the adventures would start.

DAVIE

What's a gap year?

RACHEL

Oh, a' us bright folk hae them, Davie. It's because we think we're worth it. We deserve it. A year out to go travelling... but it's really just a year off to go on holiday. India, Thailand, Australia... they're the favourites. New Zealand...

DAVIE

Oh, I've got a cousin oot there... worked in a dairy.

RACHEL

South America, but usually just to the touristy bits, you know, the safe bits, somewhere they can email for more cash from their anxious parents, who are delighted to be asked for it... gives them a bit of control, a wee lever, bribe the offspring to remain friends and to remain reliant on them. And they tell their friends "Oh yes, Charlie's trekking in Ecuador at the moment..."

DAVIE

Judge not, Rachel, lest ye be judged...

RACHEL

I know... I'm a bitch eh? But the only trekking some youngsters get to do is between the broo and the mobile phone shops...

DAVIE

So nae, trekking in Brazil for you?

RACHEL

Didn't happen, Davie. None of it happened. It's amazing the difference an hour can make. An hour and a bottle of cider. One minute you're chancing your arm, lying about your age in the local SPAR... an hour later you're both drunk and pregnant... and fifteen... and the talk o' the town... but bringing up Jack's been an adventure. Never a dull moment, oh... I've got macaroni cheese for you, in fact I could never have imagined an adventure like it. Just wasn't quite what I'd planned really... but it's a million times better than lying on a beach in Goa.

DAVIE

Maybe the unplanned ones are the best eh?

RACHEL

Maybe... (*phone goes*) Oh... speak o' the devil... Hello, Jack... What? Was that today?... this isn't Wednesday... what?... Is it?... was yesterday Tuesday? Oh, Jack, I'm sorry.... yea I know... and you've no eggs... or flour. I'm sorry... Look we'll make pancakes when you come home... me and you... I know it won't be the same. I forgot, Jack, I'm sorry. Okay, see you later... I love you too. (*she hangs up*) I

am the world's most awful mum. Who ever heard of making pancakes on a Wednesday?

DAVIE

Shrove Wednesday!

RACHEL

Exactly... one disappointed nine year old.

DAVIE

Ma wee lass never reached nine...

RACHEL

... Davie, I never knew you had family...

DAVIE

It was a long time ago. A hell o' a long time ago. God, it doesnae bear thinking about. You said it's amazing the difference an hour can make. Well, a lot can happen in a minute... half a minute... seconds even. I was harrowing a field no long sewn oot wae barley at the time. One o' thae dry dusty days ye get in Spring. I was using a wee Massey 135 but it was daeing the job fine, a great going wee tractor. Anyway as I was going towards the ferm road, I saw them. Heather, walking wae her red hair, and her red coat. Pushing the bairn in the pushchair. Rattling doon the ferm road, a' lined wae daffies, tae get the bus for the messages. Even efter I turned, I could see them o'er ma shoulder, no' a care in the world. Well I came tae the far end and by the time I got turned in the end rig, the bus was in the field, richt across the ditch and through the fence. I was off that tractor and running... running like a daftie, like I'd never stop. Ma jecket flappin' at ma back and ma bunnet blawing aff in the wind... Baith them. The bairn wissnae even twa year auld...

RACHEL

Oh, Davie... I'm so sorry... what rotten luck.

DAVIE

Aye, well. That was that. It was meant to be... probably.

RACHEL

What was your wee girl's name?

DAVIE

Rachel... wissnae my choice, it was Heather's, but I liked it a' the same. I jist looked efter cattle and sheep efter that... pigs, sometimes. And bees... and noo they're a' dying. It'll be me next.

RACHEL

Ah, you've a few more adventures left in you yet. What's the news from the hive?

DAVIE

Not good. Another dozen or so deid anes... including Derek. I think I'm going to lose them all.

RACHEL

Sizewell okay?

DAVIE

Aye, she's fine. She seems to get stronger by the day.

RACHEL

Yep, she's a survivor that one.

DAVIE

I think she's bumping off the others. I just dinnae understand why? I'm fair flummoxed.

RACHEL

I did some checking, on the internet. It's quite a big problem apparently. All sorts of theories going around but the most popular one is that it's a virus.

DAVIE

Ah, you were right?

RACHEL

I was just guessing... I'll google some more tonight...

DAVIE

... you'll what?

RACHEL

Check on the internet.

DAVIE

Oh, I ken nothing aboot that thing...

RACHEL

You're the lucky one, Davie, but there's a' kinds o' stuff on there...

DAVIE

Some good, some bad...

RACHEL

Aye well...

DAVIE

Well if it can tell you why my bees are dying then I'll let it off.

RACHEL brings out a plate with a dollop of macaroni cheese thereon, covered in Clingfilm. She hands it to DAVIE...

RACHEL

That's for you... *(she spies the watering can)* what have you been watering?

DAVIE

Oh, nothing, I was doing my paths wae weed-killer. It's easier than hoeing them.

RACHEL

Can I have a wee look at the packet?

DAVIE

... aye, it's o'er there.

RACHEL

(studying the label)

Mmm... lots of nasty looking stuff on there... Okay, I'll check it out. Right, four minutes at full throttle on the micro for the macaroni and I'll see you tomorrow eh? And I don't want to find you sprawled out on the deck when I arrive. I'll maybe see about getting you an alarm thing for round your neck...

DAVIE

I wouldnae bother, thanks a' the same. Guid luck wae the pancakes... em, if there's any left over...

RACHEL

I'll bring you some tomorrow...

She exits and the lights fade... when they come up again, DAVIE is wearing a tie! He is pottering about checking the hive and checking the gate, and along the road, but there is no sign of RACHEL. He potters some more and checks for RACHEL some more but there is still no sign. The lights fade again and when they come back up DAVIE is dozing on a seat by the house. RACHEL arrives at break neck speed, skidding to a halt by the gate. She shakes him gently and he comes round...

RACHEL

(producing a cake)

Chocolate éclair...

DAVIE

God, you'll get me the jail.

RACHEL

Aye, you and me both... where's the weed-killer?

DAVIE

I huvnae had a chocolate éclair for years...

RACHEL

The weed-killer, Davie, where is it?

DAVIE

eh, it's just in ahint the backdoor there...

She runs inside and returns with the packet and begins to read the label...

DAVIE

... I huvnae seen ye for a couple o' days?

RACHEL

(engrossed)

Mmm...?

DAVIE

I was looking forward tae a pancake...

RACHEL

(still engrossed)

They were a disaster I'm afraid... ended up in the bin...

DAVIE

I said I huvnae seen ye for a couple o' days?

RACHEL

There's a good reason for that, Davie. I got the sack. Well technically I resigned just before she gave me the sack.

DAVIE

You've been hived off...

RACHEL

... I have indeed. I'm not a team player apparently and I should have been booking in by phone every time I visit a service user... that's you, Davie... you're a service user...

DAVIE

Am I?... jings... makes me sound awfy important...

RACHEL

You *are* awfy important, Davie... you're the reason I'm here... Anyway I should have been booking in when I arrived here, when I left here, when I blew my nose, scratched my bum, oh I don't know... I got hounded from pillar to post, more and more folk to see in less and less time. Wasn't filling up the appropriate forms, writing up enough reports... and too much talking with the clients...

DAVIE

Service users...

RACHEL

... service users...

DAVIE

The talking's the best bit...

RACHEL

I think so, Davie... (*she double takes*) ...are you wearing a tie?

DAVIE

(*slightly bashful*)

Aye, I just thocht I'd tidy masel up a bit...

RACHEL

It suits you... a shave wouldn't have gone a miss...

DAVIE

Aye, well... I didnae want tae get carried away. Anyway, it's their loss.

RACHEL

I think so too... Davie, you're going to have to stop using this... Well, it's too late now I suppose. I've been reading all sorts of interesting stuff. I was up till two in the morning. There's a chemical in this which is very, very bad.

DAVIE

Na, no' in that! I made sure. I order oot o' ma seed catalogue and that... is bee friendly. Look it's got the sticker on it.

RACHEL

Yea, I see that, but I'm afraid it's not bee friendly at all...

DAVIE

... it's got the sticker.

RACHEL

Yea, it's got the sticker, but the sticker comes from the British Bees Society...

DAVIE

... aye?

RACHEL

... and they receive donations from all sorts, and do you know who makes the biggest donation of all? Ten times more than all their other income put together?

DAVIE shakes his head...

RACHEL

The folk that make this weed-killer...

DAVIE

Really?

RACHEL

Yep, only it's not a donation at all, that's the worst of it, It's a bribe. They hand out all this cash so that they can stick the bee friendly badge on. People buy it in their local big posh garden centres, spray it all over the place and it's goodbye bees...

DAVIE

I just bought it tae keep the weeds doon. I cannae believe it would hurt ma bees. But why would they want to say it was bee friendly if it wissnae?

RACHEL

To get people to buy it.

DAVIE

But it's the weeds they want to kill, no' the bees...

RACHEL

Well, Davie, that all depends on how much you want to believe. And some of the stuff I was reading... it's unbelievable.

DAVIE

They're all dead by the way. All bar one... Sizewell. She's still in there. Poor wee brute, the whole hive tae herself. I don't know why she doesn't just fly off somewhere, to a nice big field o' clover or a big patch o' heather. The most loyal bee I've ever had. When *she* dies, I'll hack the hive up for kindling. The next one to die after that'll be me.

RACHEL

Less o' that talk, Davie boy. Some folk believe, now I know there's all sorts of daft theories going about, especially on the internet, but some folk believe it's deliberate. Big business is killing bees...

DAVIE

What the hell would they want to do that for?

RACHEL

So they can become even bigger business, I suppose. Greed. That can be the only reason... Now, you've been about farms all your life. Did you know that some places, they no longer plough the fields before sowing? They just spray them with weed-killer and drill the seed straight in?

DAVIE

Withoot plooin'?

RACHEL

Yep.

DAVIE

But ye've got tae ploo the grund. God, we've been plooin' for thousands o' years... a'body kens that...

RACHEL

They claim it saves time.

DAVIE

TIME! My faither used tae ploo wae a pair o' horse wae a wee single furrow ploo this big (*gestures with his hands*). If he was lucky he managed an acre a day and there was still plenty o' time. He kept bees tae, and they didnae a' die, if fact he used tae end up wae o'er many. Nae time for plooin', I've never heard such shite...

RACHEL

The stuff in the weed-killer stays in the ground for years and the bee population decreases then vanishes altogether. Now, you know better than anybody that plants need bees for pollination. No bees, no pollination. No pollination and sooner or later you won't be able to buy an English apple, because there won't be any.

DAVIE

Nae mair apples?

RACHEL

Oh yea, there'll be apples but they'll all be grown by big business in Africa. They're at it already. Square miles of orchards, the ground between the trees so toxic, there's no bugs, no birds, no bees. The trees all artificially pollinated until the ground can give no more and then they up sticks and move on. It's all to do with controlling global food production. Do you know what the worst thing is, Davie? They can't lose. There's people in the commodity markets making fortunes on these crops before they're even planted. They even hedge their bets so they profit if the crops fail.

DAVIE

But a' we're trying to do is grow food for folk to eat and hopefully make a bob or two while we're at it...

RACHEL

A bob or two is no longer enough for some people...

DAVIE

Greed eh? Deary, dear, it's an ill divided world right enough.

RACHEL

How do you fancy an adventure, Davie?

DAVIE

Oh! I'm eighty, Rachel... I telt ye, ma adventuring days are well and truly over. No' that there's ever been any...

RACHEL

I'll take that as a yes!

She rummages in her bag and produces a piece of paper...

If you like what you've read so far and would like to buy a copy of the complete script or would like to perform the play, please get in touch.

Thanks for reading,

Bob Davidson



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