

INTERMISSION XXIV - THE FELIX CHRONICLES (FULL SERIES)

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[BEGIN Intermission XXIV.]

[Short chime.]

FELIX *[narrating]*: This morning, my mother called me before work. This was no great surprise, as she calls me *every* morning before work. She's really quite clingy. She never got over the fact that I left our little town in the southeast of England as soon as I could, and went off to university as far away as possible. I wanted a bigger life. I couldn't bear to hang around any longer. The only exciting thing that ever happened in my town is the very public rumor that an exceedingly minor member of the royal family once disgraced himself in the local pizza restaurant.

But there's a downside for moving away from home. It means that your mother wants to speak to you *all* the time. And after university, I moved really far away. To the other side of the continent. So she wants to speak to me *all* of *all* of the time. And so she calls me every morning before I start work, which is just super.

This morning, I had nothing to tell her, absolutely nothing. So she started getting all worked up about a new story that's been taking the U.K. by storm... Turns out that about a month ago, a body washed up on the coast of Wales on some rocks just outside of a town called Holyhead. A teenager, apparently; the police tried to identify him. But he wasn't on any of the records. No fingerprints, no D.N.A., no dental records. Just a run-of-the-mill corpse. My mother muttered something about the tidal floods from Ireland washing it across the sea, but... I lost the will to live. A couple of weeks later, some fishermen found another body in exactly the same place. Slightly older man, maybe in his 20s or 30s. But this is when my mother got really excited. Because the police did all the same tests, and... this time, there was a match. A D.N.A. match with the teenager who'd washed up before. One-in-a-billion, apparently... And now. Yes. That's right, a few days ago, they found another washed-up old corpse. This time, an elderly man. Again, with identical D.N.A. The tabloids have been going crazy. Holyhead started attracting all sorts of weirdos. Most people think it's just some kind of hoax. I told my mother not to believe everything that she sees on the Internet.

In truth, I just didn't want to discuss it with her. No one really likes talking about their job with their parents. Especially parents who gossip too much. But happily, just as she was getting into her flow, my boss called me over the tannoy. He always has excellent timing. I just wish he wouldn't call me Fe. "Fe" is short for Fiona! And my name is not Fiona. My name is Felix.

And this is WOE.BEGONE.

[Short chime.]

FELIX *[narrating]*: I think I started making a new friend today. One of the clients at work has been feeling a bit down lately. Been off his food. Feeling trapped. Directionless. Like he's not really going anywhere... Standard stuff, you know? I wanted to do something nice for him. But it's always a bit tricky here. Getting too close to our guests is always frowned upon. But I do sometimes feel sorry for them. It can get really boring. The same faces day after day. Can't be easy for them. So! I asked Ty if I could try to boost his morale a bit. Maybe lend him my old MP3 player. And Ty was very happy for me to do so! All he wanted to do was to check all of the music choices first, to make sure it wouldn't interfere with any of his projects.

I spent so long putting that playlist together. *[Short laugh.]* I really wanted to cheer him up. It took a little longer than expected, because I've... never been particularly good with some of those tech interfaces. I mean, I *[Puffs.]* could use a computer well enough. It's vital for some of the work we do! But I... sometimes slip up a little. Nothing major! Just the odd copy-and-paste issue in Excel when all of the formatting goes wrong, and the columns aren't big enough, and everything disappears, and then you realize you actually hid the columns, and you don't really know what "freeze panes" means. And what on earth does "con-cat-e-nate", or... is it "con-cer-teen-ate"? Ugh, I don't know. What does that mean!? *[Huffs.]* Sorry. MP3 players.

It took a whole evening. But I filled it with some of my absolute favorite stuff, and I'm really pleased with it. And, the next morning, my boss looked at the track listing, and said, "Oh, this is *just perfect*," in that sort of extra self-satisfied voice of his that means he's absolutely delighted by something. I think it went pretty well. Mi– M-My– Uh, my friend? said that the music was fine! I think maybe he'd have liked a little more variety, but it seemed to go down pretty well in the end. And you know what? I didn't even mind when my mother called. I was actually quite excited to tell her about the kind thing I'd done! But once again, all she wanted to talk about was some rumor she'd heard from one of the morons who she speaks to online. That the police were finally going to release pictures of the bodies that washed up in Wales.

...Oh, dear. That would not be good for my long-term employment prospects. I think I'm going to have to deal with it.

[Short chime.]

FELIX *[narrating]*: It's always nice to try new things. A lot of jobs at my level don't come with perks. But we actually have a very generous travel policy. The company has its own transportation, and as long as you're signed off by a manager, you can basically jump off to wherever you want. Likewise, the lunches are *really* good! You can order in basically *any* world food you want, and it arrives in no time at all. And I was having a bit of a chat with my new friend the other day about food. And he got so enthusiastic about some curious American dish called "biscuits and gravy." He said it was worth dying for a hundred times over, and... I've always enjoyed that sort of sweet-and-savory-mixed flavors in some of those Asian cuisines, so it made perfect sense! I *had* to try it.

I thought I'd head down to the kitchen and, you know, do it for real. See if I could rustle something up. Unfortunately, the only biscuits they had in stock were Oreos. And I'd have much preferred a jammie dodger. And they didn't have proper gravy, just some beef flavored instant granules. But I gave it a whirl! Boiled the kettle, stirred up the gravy. But how to serve it? Hmm. I didn't really know the correct biscuit-versus-gravy ratio, and I didn't want soggy Oreos, so dunking seemed to make most sense. And you know what? It was actually really pleasant.

The sticky, salty, beefy goodness of the gravy mixed with the sweet chocolatey delight of the biscuit and its creamy filling. What's not to like? It put me in mind of those party snacks that used to be everywhere, back when I was a kid, with pineapple and cheddar cheese on a cocktail stick. I honestly had no idea that Americans had such refined palates. And when my mother called, I asked her if she remembered the pineapple and cheese on a stick things. And I wanted to tell her *all* about biscuits and gravy...

But. She was in no mood, because I had forgotten. Today is the anniversary of the day my dad died. It's curious, really. Regardless of what's going on in her life, regardless of how happy she might be the day before, the very moment midnight ticks around, she sinks into a well of despondency. She might not have thought about him in days or weeks or even months. But the date comes round, and it's fresh for her all again. And then! 24 hours later, she'll bounce back, back to her bloody obsession with those bodies in Wales. I hadn't thought about him in quite some time. I was 16 when he died, just finished my GCSEs, a couple years from university. There was a time until very recently, when I'd have given a limb just to lay in my childhood bed, and hear the sound of him snoring through the wall, even for a few seconds...

Ah, well. I know my friend's been having a rough time with loss recently as well. I really want to help... I know! I'll make him some biscuits and gravy! Ha! That'll do the trick!

[Short chime.]

FELIX [narrating]: I'm not sure if I mentioned it before, but my new friend is from America. And I've definitely not mentioned that he is really into cowboy movies. Now, until this week, I had only ever seen two cowboy films before. When I was six, I saw *An American Tail Two: Fievel Goes West*, and then a few years later, I saw *Back to the Future Three*. Both absolute masterpieces in their way. And clearly superior to their predecessors. ...And I remembered, when I shared my iPod with him, my friend was really excited to listen to all of my music. So I thought it'd be nice to return the favor, and maybe try one of his westerns!

I asked him about which one to watch, and he told me all his favorite films and directors. But I honestly can't remember them. So I decided to look online at the "Top List of the Greatest 50 Western Movies Ever Made Ever." And got stuck. You see, if I watched the *best* cowboy movie ever, the number one, all other cowboy movies would be terrible in comparison afterwards. So I can't watch that. And if I choose something too far down, say number 50, then it would probably be awful, as there can't be that many westerns anyway. So watching a rubbish one would be a complete waste of time. And then I wouldn't really have anything to talk to him about.

So. Top 10, but not too near the top. I settled for number eight. *Rio Bravo*. I looked it up, and immediately got excited. You see, before he died, my dad's favorite ever singer was Dean Martin. You know, the Rat Pack guy with Sinatra. My dad told stories of being on national service with the Air Force in the 1950s, and listening to "Deano," as he used to call him, on the radio in his barracks. And guess what? Dean Martin was one of the main actors in this film. A complete stroke of luck! And I quite enjoyed it! I mean, *[Sighs.]* there's some pretty cringey stuff, looking back. But it wasn't too bad overall.

My favorite bit was right towards the end. Our heroes know they're under the cosh. The baddies are coming for them. They're waiting quietly, patiently in the sheriff's office. Right next to the jail. They know that, in an hour or two, they could be killed. But they're calm... And then, from nowhere, Dean Martin, half asleep on a bed in the corner, begins a song, called "My Rifle, My Pony and Me." A sort of wistful song of memory, but looking forward to what may be coming round the bend. Hopeful, not entirely joyful, thinking about everything they have to fight for, but everything they may also lose. And simultaneously distracting themselves from what they're about to face. Since I saw the film, I must have listened to the song 50 times since. I've probably listened to the song *too* many times.

The song is the... calm before the storm. Before they face... what may be the end. ...You see, tomorrow, I have to drive to England. I *have* to get to my mother before the newspapers publish the photos from Wales. I can't take company transport all the way. I can't have my boss know where I'm going. I'm going to get the firm to drop me as far as Paris, and I've told them that I'm going to go to Disneyland for a day's holiday. But then I'm going to rent a car, drive across France, get a ferry to Dover, and then home. I should get to my mother just as she's making her morning cup of tea. ...But I have to wait. I can't go yet. Like the cowboys in *Rio Bravo*, I can't escape the consequences of my decisions.

But first, and most importantly, a good night's sleep. ...So, I guess, like Deano... *[Singing.]* It's time for a cowboy to dream! *[Normal voice.]* Good night.

[Short chime.]

[Ambience of a moving car. Felix sounds like he's recording with his phone's speaker.]

FELIX *[narrating]*: I really like Disneyland Paris. I mean. It's not... like proper Disney. But it's still really fun Disney? And it's still got the rides, and you still get to... cuddle... Goofy? And I-I really love Goofy. And... amazingly, I told Ty that I- *[Stammers.]* I wanted... a-a day at EuroDisney. And he said, "Why not have *two*? Go and explore, Fe-!" Felix. Felix! My name is *Felix*, Ty! "Go and explore, Fe-! Have a lovely time!" ...So, I did. Um... And it was marvelous.

Today will be less marvelous. After the M25, I have to drive... down the A320. To go past Six Ways Roundabout. Down Woodham Lane. And then, down a little side road... is my mother's house. *[Momentary silence with car ambience.]* And in four minute's time, my mother is going to

set out for the news agent. Because she believes that the very greatest news is *fresh* news. She likes to be the first person through the door. Getting the paper. And then she likes to call me about it for an hour. And then complains that I haven't read the paper yet. So I've got that to look forward to. But... first. I am... *[Sighs.]* six minutes away. From Mum's house. And she's gonna leave the house in three minute's time. So I'm going to call her, and tell her I am nearby. Tell her to stick the kettle on. And tell her that the news can wait? ...And we will have a lovely chat... *[Mutters under his breath. Sighs.]* See how we go.

[A cell phone dials through the car speaker. Someone picks up.]

FELIX'S DAD *[through the car speaker]:* 8732, good morning?

FELIX: *[Pause.]* Oh, sorry! I, um... I think I've got the, um... the wrong number... Um... I— So— So— What number did you say?

FELIX'S DAD *[through the car speaker]:* ...87...32... *[Stammers.]* Hang on, is that Fe?

FELIX: ...Fe—? This is Felix...?

FELIX'S DAD *[through the car speaker]:* ...Fe. **[FELIX: Who's—?]** Fe, what are you doing, it's nearly six o'clock in the morning, why are you calling so early?

FELIX: Sor— *[Stammers.]* Who's that?

FELIX'S DAD *[through the car speaker]:* *[While laughing.]* ...Fe. Fe, it's Dad.

FELIX: *[Pause.]* ...Dad. *[Stammers.]* Um...

FELIX'S DAD *[through the car speaker]:* Fe, is everything okay? *[Felix struggles to speak.]* You sound... You don't sound yourself.

FELIX: *[Coughs loudly.]* Um... *[Stammers for a while, panicking.]* I—um—I—I've got the... I've got the day off... I'm— I'm nearly home! I—!

FELIX'S DAD *[through the car speaker]:* ...I'm sorry, you're nearly home? As in... As in, this home.

FELIX: I— I'm nearly... I'm nearly... there... wi— *[Felix's Dad tries to speak.]* there with you, Da— Um... Sor—!

FELIX'S DAD *[through the car speaker]:* Th— That's great, Fe! *[Felix audibly breathes.]* Um... Uh, I-I'll put the kettle on, um... It— It'll be lovely to see you, I probably haven't seen you for a f— for a while now! Uh... Uh... I-I'm glad you're coming, actually, cause I... was woken up about five minutes ago by this very... odd chap called Ty, I believe he said. **[FELIX: C—? T— Ty!?!]** He

said he was your boss? ...Yes. **[FELIX: Um...]** I was hoping you would be able to **[FELIX: W-?]** shed some light on what he said to me, cause... **[FELIX: He called you five minu-?]** very... he's very odd guy.

FELIX: Fi- Five minutes ago? He called you. He called *you*.

FELIX'S DAD *[through the car speaker]:* That's right, yes? Uh... *[Felix sighs.]* Is everything okay?

FELIX: Um... *[Repeats himself several times.]* No, it's fine! Dad, It's fine... I, um... *[Struggles to speak.]*

FELIX'S DAD *[through the car speaker]:* Fe, you- you sound very distressed. D- Are you- Are you okay? Are you driving?

FELIX *[stammering]:* I'm five minutes away, Dad, um... *[Felix's Dad tries to speak.]* Is Mum there, Dad?

FELIX'S DAD *[through the car speaker]:* *[Pause.]* ...Fe, what do you mean?

FELIX: *[Struggles to speak for a moment.]* Mum, is- is she there? Is she with you?

FELIX'S DAD *[through the car speaker]:* ... *[Sighs.]* Fe. Fe, Mum's dead, you know this. I'm very worried about you, yo- ... You really don't sound well. *[Felix struggles to speak.]* I- If you're driving, please be safe. Please get here soon.

FELIX: I-I'll be the-! I'll-! *[Stammers.]* I'm five minutes away, Dad. I... *[Exhales.]* **[FELIX'S DAD:** Okay.] I've got to go. I... Dad, I love you, I... I... **[FELIX'S DAD:** I-I love you, too. Be careful, son.] I'll see you soon! Okay, by- bye. Bye. Bye bye. Bye bye... *[There's a light thud. He breathes heavily. He laughs hysterically.]* Ty... Ty, what on earth have you done!?

[Short chime.]

[A cell phone dials. Felix's Dad picks up.]

FELIX'S DAD *[through the car speaker]:* Fe. Fe, is that you, Fe?

FELIX: Yes. Yes, Dad, it's me.

FELIX'S DAD *[through the car speaker]:* *[Sighs.]* Where on earth are you? Your tea is stone cold, you **[FELIX:** Dad, I'm-] told me you were five minutes away.

FELIX: I'm sorry.

FELIX'S DAD *[through the car speaker]*: It's been over an hour! Wh— I've been incredibly worried about you. What's happening!? **[FELIX: D— Dad, I just—]** Where are you? Do you need me to come and get you?

FELIX: Dad—!

FELIX'S DAD *[through the car speaker]*: Look— Are you safe? *[Felix sighs.]* I don't think you're safe to drive, right. Stay where you are, I'm getting in the car, and I'm **[FELIX: Dad—]** coming to find you.

FELIX: Dad, listen! *[Pause.]* I'm fine. I've pulled over; I'm just around the corner.

FELIX'S DAD *[through the car speaker]*: Around the corner? Why aren't you here!?

FELIX: Dad, I have to be... extremely careful... about what I say. I need to explain some things to you. Things that will sound *[Sighs.]* ...well, mad. Actually, quite mad. I've had to spend... quite some time trying to... work out... how to explain it to you? I... I've written some stuff down—

FELIX'S DAD: Does this have something to do with that man who called me? Your boss?

FELIX: Yes, yes it is. I, um... it's everything to do with him, I, um, I've made some notes, and I... I— Dad, please can I just say what I need to say? I know you'll have a lot of questions, but... please can you just wait until I'm done. And then I'll answer, whatever you need me to. Um, honestly, *[Stammers.]* I don't... think you'll believe a word of it, and you'll try to get me sectioned, but please. Just give me *one* chance to try to explain.

FELIX'S DAD: Please, Fe, just... please. Of course I'll listen, but please, are you safe?

FELIX: Yes, Dad, I'm— I'm— I'm perfectly fine. I'm... quite confused... and I've behaved *horrendously* at work, but I'm fine.

FELIX'S DAD:Alright. Carry on?

FELIX: *[Sighs.]* Okay, um, here goes. *[Shuffles papers and mutters to himself.]* Dad. I don't have an ordinary job. I work in quite a specialist field, whe—

FELIX'S DAD: Time travel.

FELIX: *[Stutters.]* What? *[Brief chuckle.]* What did you just say?

FELIX'S DAD: Well, time travel. Your company, you... conduct research in time travel, and its various practical uses.

FELIX: I– [*Chuckles in disbelief.*] I– wha– you– uh... T-Time travel! Uh, who, uh, who told you that?

FELIX'S DAD: Fe, you did. We discussed it. Many, many times.

FELIX: [*Shuffles paper.*] Jesus! Um, heh... Okay...

FELIX'S DAD: So... I guess we're in Contingency Six territory, are we?

FELIX: Contingency... Six? I... I have no idea what you're talking about.

FELIX'S DAD: ...Ah. [*Sharp inhale.*] Definitely Contingency Six by the sounds of things. Look, when you first started working at your organization, you set up various scenarios that might occur. Things that might go wrong, and the steps you'd like me to take if any of them occurred. Contingency One was for a situation where I could remember you, but nobody else could. Contingency Two was for if two of you turned up at once. Contingency Three was–

FELIX: D-Dad? Dad, Dad, Dad, Dad. What's– What's Contingency Six?

FELIX'S DAD: It's where you turn up asking for your mother. [*Felix shuffles papers.*] It's happened before, but this is a particularly extreme case.

FELIX: [*Stammers.*] Okay, what– [*He nervously claps.*] Um... What did you say to Ty? D-Did you tell him that you know any of this, that I told you any of this?

FELIX'S DAD: Of course not. I wasn't sure exactly what was going on an hour ago, you had me very worried, but I'm not stupid.

FELIX: Um... Okay, um. How much have I told you?

FELIX'S DAD: Beyond a rough outline of your work? Not very much. You explained that things sometimes go wrong. You explained timelines, and how to solve problems.

FELIX: T-Timelines? That's... that's not something that I, um... What did I say?

FELIX'S DAD: Well... you didn't tell me exactly how things worked, but you gave me a sort of... analogy for it. [*Laughs.*] You were at great pains to explain that it doesn't strictly work this way. Great pain. ...But in effect, you asked me to imagine a tree diagram. For every decision we make, the tree branches into two, or three, or... a hundred, depending on the complexity of the decision. On every branch, there is a Felix, and a me, and... a post office, and... You get the idea. Every branch is a copy of its neighbor, but with very slight difference. Similar decisions lead to very similar branches, but significant variety leads to... wildly different outcomes. You said that sometimes people get, uh, well... lost. They end up on the wrong branch. Sometimes

they replace *their* copy on the new branch. Sometimes there are two versions on the same branch; one who is in the right place, and... one who really is not.

FELIX: Wow...

FELIX'S DAD: And, so I can only assume that... you are lost. Horribly lost, by the sounds of it. I'm so sorry, my darling.

FELIX: I, uh... *[Exhales and sniffles.]* Yes, that's, um, that's about the sum of it. Um... I just– I just can't believe how close you are to your Felix. How much he's... told you! That means your Felix is probably asleep somewhere, back in his bunk at work, or um... *[Chuckles.]* Maybe he's gone to Euro Disney! *[Bursts into laughter.]*

FELIX'S DAD: To Euro Disney?

FELIX: Uh no, ah... No, um... *[Stammers.]* No, um. Listen, Dad, um... Dad, this is important. Uh, the news, uh... last few weeks. How many strange bodies have washed up in Wales? Has, um, anyone said anything to you about it?

FELIX'S DAD: Um... I'm afraid you've lost me again.

FELIX: No... strange bodies, identical twins, triplets, washing up weeks apart just outside of Hollyhead?

FELIX'S DAD: No, nothing of the sort.

FELIX: *[Soft exhale.]* Well, thank heavens for that, um... It's been causing Mum a great deal of excitement!

FELIX'S DAD: Mum... So Mum *is* alive on your branch.

FELIX: ...Uh, yes, she's alive...

FELIX'S DAD: Ah! Fe, that's wonderful news! How are we getting on over there? Do you have any photos? I have to see them when you get here.

FELIX: She's, um... We're, uh, we're fine. It's– It's not always easy.

FELIX'S DAD: ...Felix.

FELIX: *[Hesitantly.]* Uh, yes?

FELIX'S DAD: How long have I been dead?

FELIX: Since I... was 15.

FELIX'S DAD: ...Ah.

FELIX: [*Inhales.*] It's, um... It's been a long time, Dad, I, um... It's not suited Mum to be a widow.

FELIX'S DAD: [*Chuckles.*] Ah... No. I can't imagine it has. [*Felix exhales.*] Fe, come home. We can talk about this *properly* on the sofa. I– I'll stick the kettle back on. Please.

FELIX: Um... [*Shuffles papers.*] Um, al– alright. Um, I, um... [*Car starts.*] I'm only just parked round the corner. I, um... I'm 30 seconds away.

FELIX'S DAD: ...Alright. I'll see you shortly, Fe.

FELIX: Alright, I'll, um– I'll see you in a minute, Dad. Buh-bye.

[*Ambience of a moving car.*]

FELIX [*angrily*]: I can't believe... that his Fe has told him all of this! I mean– ah... Is this what I'm like when I'm happy? When I've got my dad? Am I a *complete* bloody moron? [*Groans.*] His Ty is gonna kill him. My Ty's gonna kill me! [*Quietly.*] How much does he know? Here's Dad's. Um, oh... Oh, look who's here...

[*Engine stops. Sounds of Felix exiting the car.*]

TY: Ah! Fe, good morning! Your father has a lovely home. I-I wonder, can I join you both inside for a quick, ah, tête-à-tête?

[*Short chime.*]

FELIX [*narrating*]: It's been quite a week. I knew that I would have to speak to Ty about all of this eventually... But I honestly was not expecting to find him sitting outside of my mum's house. Or my dad's house, or whoever's house it was when I arrived there early that morning. Yes, I was trying to cover up a huge mistake; yes, I had lied to the whole team about going to Euro Disney, but I thought it would buy me some time.

TY: Oh, Fe. Fe, Fe Fe. [*Felix sighs.*] Oh, uh, can I check? Can you hear me? [**FELIX:** Hello Ty.] Hello? Am I coming through loud and clear? [**FELIX:** Ty, I can hear you.] Ah! Excellent, sorry I'm a little late, how far have we got? Are we onto EuroDisney already? Was it fun? [**FELIX:** Ty, please.] Everything you could possibly want? [**FELIX:** Ple–] All the magic in the universe [**FELIX:** Ty?] or least the Euroverse.

FELIX: Really?

TY: Very well, very well, I'll wait a moment before my grand reveal. I can hold on.

FELIX: Thank you. *[Narrating.]* ...I wasn't expecting to see Ty at what I guess I have to call my dad's house? And—

TY Oh, I really can't wait, this is delicious! Felix is *terrible* at spreadsheets, truly terrible. Excel, sheets, numbers! I even got him a copy of Lotus 1-2-3 from 1984, and he still absolutely butchered it, even in VGA. Abysmal. Poor chap, he tries his best, but he has no idea what he's doing at all, and it caused a massive anomaly, and I had to fix it, and then give him a little treat. And now he's acting as if he's all traumatized for having to—

FELIX: Alright. Ty? I'm cutting your feed now. I'll let you back in later if you can behave. *[Narrating.]* He means well. And he's right, of course. I did make a quite unforgivable series of errors. I think it's perfectly clear by now that I have not always found it easy to be my mother's son.

It was different with my dad. We were easy in each other's company. I could never remember a time when he wasn't my best friend, my... idol, the center of my universe. Long car trips would seem to last minutes as he'd just chat to me the whole time, explaining some new thing he'd read recently, some idea, some concept. We dominated the house. We rolled our eyes whenever my mother sought to join in with our little world. We were truly awful to her. But she seemed happy enough back then. She had her two boys to love and protect, she almost encouraged it. She loved my father, and I think she loved the idea that I was growing and developing and turning into him.

Of course, she wasn't always so needy. She took his death terribly badly. And I was the last thing she had to cling onto. Suddenly every time I wanted to leave the house, she needed to know exactly where I was going; who with, why I was going, how I was getting there, what time I'd be back. Not the usual protectiveness of a parent of a teenager. Something stronger. A desperate fear and a need to control, a need to know everything.

Our relationship had never been strong. That was my fault. I was obsessed with my dad. Every parent says they don't have a favorite child. I have no idea whether or not that's true but I can assure you that every single child has a favorite parent. My mother knew that my dad was the chosen one, of course she did!

By the time I was sixteen or seventeen and only a couple years away from leaving for university, she was all that I had left. But we'd never started developing anything other than the most perfunctory mother-son relationship. She tried her best. And I pulled away. Very, very, far away. To university the other side of the country, and then to a job the other side of the continent. I threw myself into our work. The only distractions were the daily phone calls with my mother. And I grew resentful of her, and pitied her.

It sounds awful to say it out loud, but at one point at work I began to see our visitors, real people, as something akin to cattle. I could watch people die dozens of times a day in the name of our research, and I became quite immune to their suffering. But something was scratching away at my core. Every morning I would speak to my mother, and hear the desperation in her voice. Hear the hope that today we would really connect about something. The hope that she would, a couple of days later, start to get as close to me as my father once had.

But in time I began to appreciate that, apart from my... psychopathic boss, she was the only real human connection I had left. And so I found myself becoming particularly attached to one of our guests. I saw experiments of separation and consolidation. I saw three different versions of him at different stages of his life. I wanted to understand what it felt like for him to have different versions of himself running around. To understand how it might feel to have such different experiences, and then amalgamate them back into one mind.

My plan was this: I needed three new Felixes. Three Felixes that could experience the life that I never had the chance to lead. First, a Felix who had both of his parents. Second, a Felix whose father survived and mother died. And third, a control, a carbon copy of me, whose father died, and who I could test out alongside the others, and assess for any unexpected changes. A canary, I guess.

TY: And what a remarkable trio they made! Ah, oh, don't worry, Fe! Uh, everything's under control. Have you explained what a kind and loving man I am yet? ...Fe? Oh, ah, yes, I've muted you. Well nevermind. So! As far as I can piece together from the device logs and my own conversations with the, uh, relevant parties, Fe's plans started off swimmingly. I was completely unaware at the time he made his little copies, and sent them off into the ether, and intended to check on them from time to time to see how they were getting on. But then a few things started happening at once. First, he became *incredibly* jealous of the Felix who grew up with *both* parents. Secondly, he couldn't bear to witness once again the grief of the Felix who lost his father. Thirdly, he couldn't bring himself to even look at the Felix who was happily growing up *with* his father. And lastly, he was worried about me... Weren't you, Fe? Fe? Ah, yes. Uh...

FELIX: Oh, you [*Ty clears his throat.*] found your way back in, well done. Yes, Ty, our jobs are not simple. On an average day, we have to keep a dozen contradictory ideas in our minds all at once. All of which are provably incorrect when compared against the others. And yet, all of which are completely undeniably true. I can't begin to explain the power that our technology can have over a person. It makes you feel like... a god.

TY: Ah, yes, it does create a certain *frisson*, doesn't it? Although, I can't say it has ever caused *me* to seek to clone and then murder myself on multiple occasions.

FELIX [*narrating*]: The tech allows you to lose sight of the fact that, at your core, you're still a terrified teenager grieving for his daddy. I knew Ty would discover what I had been up to eventually, so I decided to cut my losses. The exercise had to end. The clones had to go. Creating so many little pocket timelines was dangerous. There was too much to keep track of. I

thought I'd planned it perfectly. Yellow's section are always very accommodating. If someone appears in their waiting room unannounced, they know it's time to get out the bolt gun, and—

TY: The *metaphorical* bolt gun, I think you mean. I like to think we're a little more sophisticated than that.

FELIX: They know it's time to get out the metaphorical bolt gun, and then send them off to the metaphorical woodchipper.

TY: I have actually seen Yellow use a non-metaphorical woodchipper on occasion. He gets terribly bored of the furnace. [*Felix chuckles.*] And the lye. [*Felix chuckles a bit louder.*] And the acid.

FELIX: [*laughs.*] Okay. [*Narrating.*] ...I didn't want to be cruel to the Felixes. They deserved as full a life as possible. I hated the Felix who grew up with both parents. He was so remarkably well adjusted, so happy... The prick. But I couldn't prematurely terminate the enjoyment of the only happy version of me in existence anywhere. So I let him live to old age. The carbon copy whose dad died young was far easier. I remembered too well the pain that he had to go through. So he could be removed straight away as a teenager. The motherless Felix was trickier. He was happy with his father, but... still not complete. But I thought I'd let him have until his father died of natural causes some years later. So he'd get to live 'til middle-age. And so I arranged to transport each of those Felixes from the appropriate point in their lives straight to Yellow, a couple of weeks apart. I thought I'd planned it really well. Yellow would become suspicious if three different Felixes turned up all at once in the same instant. So I was careful.

TY: Were you? Were you really? Go on, Felix, tell them. [*Felix exhales heavily in the background.*] Tell them how brilliant you are with spreadsheets, and how marvelously you planned.

FELIX: When we have to perform a particularly complex set of maneuvers with the technology, our standard practice is to input it all into a spreadsheet, and then save it as a CBS file—

TY: A CSV file.

FELIX: Okay, a-a CSV file. And then input that into the program. And then just press go, and it performs everything all at once. It means we can spend an awful lot of time planning each step of the process, inputting extraction points, dates, times, one by one. Account for movement, acceleration, everything. And then work out where everything is going, and not worry about the execution. Just the planning. I came very, very close to getting it all right! But, in a way, it really was Ty's fault that I got it wrong.

TY: That is an outrageous slander, Fe. How exactly was it my fault?

FELIX: Well. Remember that special “All Tys on Deck” weekend away on the yacht off the coast of the Seychelles?

TY: W– Uh– Yes?

FELIX: You may remember you asked me to arrange transport. It wasn't strictly approved, and you asked me to do it off-book. A whole spreadsheet of transporting lots of Tys all to the same time and place for your little jolly! It played havoc with my Felix spreadsheet. To cut a long story short, when I eventually finalized the Felix operation I may have reused the Ty Boat Party spreadsheet, forgot to replace the destination location, and then maybe reversed some columns. So instead of -454 for the Seychelles, it became 54-4, a point in the middle of the Irish seas, slap bang in the middle of the sea current to Holyhead.

TY: Now. *[Clears throat.]* As Felix is perfectly aware, we have several delightful women called Samantha, who carry out all sorts of media monitoring for us. Given the nature of our work, strange occurrences, coincidences, accidents, can be an early warning sign that someone unauthorized has got a hold of the tech. Can't be too careful, especially these days. The “Holyhead Triplets” were all over the news in the UK, of course we noticed it. Within minutes of the second corpse, I knew exactly what had happened, how it had happened, and who was responsible. But I didn't know why, exactly, Felix had decided to go on some sort of auto-rampage. I thought it might have been fun to see how it played out. I very much enjoyed your visit to Disneyland Paris! I'm not entirely convinced you needed to go on “It's a Small World” *eleven* times though.

FELIX: *[Stammers.]* It– It's a magical world where everyone is friendly, Ty!

TY: I'm afraid I can't see the attraction, but... not to worry!

FELIX: *[Stammers.]* Anyway, it wasn't *our* Disneyland Paris, was it? Because when you transported me to France, you sent me to another timeline where my mother was dead!

TY: I thought you might be happier! You've always seemed so frustrated at your mother.

FELIX: We both know that wasn't the reason. You wanted to teach me a lesson. Never to mess around with the tech again. Never to use it for my own purposes. Only ever to follow the plan. *[Sighing.]* And you were right. And I'm sorry. *[Pauses.]* But, Ty...

TY: But?

FELIX: But, Ty, you didn't have to make me *choose*. You didn't have to do that to me. You turned up to my father's home, unannounced. It was the first time I'd seen him in decades! I knew you'd done something, but god knows what, and you sat there, and you made me choose in front of him! You told my father everything you knew. You told my father everything I had done, every mistake I had made. Do you have any idea of the shame that made me feel? That I

was sitting there while you explained my inability over decades to deal with his death? That it had led me to murder three people! That it had led to the eradication of my mother? He said it, Ty, but I could see it in his eyes. Do you have any idea how disappointed he was in me? Can you imagine how that felt, to finally see him? The man I have missed? And to look at him, and only feel shame. I think it may be the most awful thing you've ever done.

TY: There was no other way, Fe. I'm sorry, but it's true. What would've happened if you'd got your mother? How would you have redeemed this situation? What would you have done? "Oh don't buy a paper mum." "Why not?" "Uh, I don't know."

FELIX: I— I would've been fine. It's true I had choices to make, but they would've been my choices. Instead, you gave me *your* choices.

TY: And what lovely choices they were? One, amalgamate with your father's Felix; live a life with both sets of happy happy memories. Two, have me undo everything back to the point where you set off for France; never remember that you met your father. Or three, Just come back to work, leave your father to his Felix, and carry on dealing with your mother. And I must remind you that you still have not made your choice. It's been the best part of two weeks now, and your poor father must be quite worried wondering if and how he might suddenly pop out of existence.

FELIX: [*Stammers.*] The problem with your oh-so-special choices, Ty, is that none of them actually deal with the bodies in Wales. Nothing you've done sorts any of that out. The whole country's still in hysteria about this insane mystery!

TY: Are they? [*Scoffs.*] Do you really think I would let that happen? That I would risk our little project coming under *any* scrutiny? Oh, Fe, surely it must've been obvious to you by now that the bodies were the very first thing I resolved.

FELIX: Th— [*Stammers.*] Wh— What?

TY: I let you stew on it for a little while, but as I sent you to France, I simultaneously moved all of the bodies in your original transfer. I didn't want to interfere too much. As we speak there are three corpses decomposing on my yacht in the Indian Ocean. And I shall hold you responsible for cleaning it in due course. But check the papers. The "Holyhead Triplets" never existed.

FELIX: [*Stammers.*] So— What was this. All some kind of—?

TY: Honestly, a bit of a prank. Fe, you know I care for you very, very dearly, but you really shouldn't have messed around with things the way you did! You are the last person on earth that I would wish to punish, and I can't do without you around here. So I had to find some way of regaining your concentration without destroying you completely. [*Sighs.*] But I do need you now to make a choice. Which Felix do you want to be?

FELIX: I-I want to be me. I want to be Felix.

TY: We both know that's meaningless, Felix.

FELIX: I know we disagree on this philosophically, but... you know what I believe. I am *this* Felix because of the experiences I have had as *this* Felix. Another very similar Felix will not and cannot be me, only I can be me. It's true that the last two months have been absolutely hell, but they have been my hell, so I'm stuck with them! I can't choose to be anyone else; that would be impossible. Another Felix might have a very different taste in music, or— or perhaps... not have discovered the recipe for English biscuits and gravy!

TY: That was perhaps even more moronic than our adventures in space and time. *Bourbons and bisto*. I ask h—

FELIX: You have no idea; they were *delicious*. But... I might not have made the decisions... about our cowboy friend. I'm me because I'm me, as trite as that sounds. And I cocked up, and I tried to fix it, and I failed, and I met my dad, and I suffered his disappointment, and I tried to fix it, and I failed, and I couldn't. And then you fixed it, and in your own entirely *warped* way, I-I think... you tried to help? And you may be one of the most terrible men on Earth. And you have caused me untold, unnecessary suffering in recent days for your own amusement.

TY [*cheerfully*]: I know. It's been a pleasure.

FELIX: But the sum of all that is me. Felix. Fe. Your friend... So, um, should we just crack on?

[*Short chime.*]

[*END Intermission XXIV.*]