

# Iris Explains Lance Parkin

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"Doctor, hello. Darling."

The Doctor didn't notice the bus. Not at first. In a few seconds time, he would see it - a huge gleaming old-fashioned red London double-decker bus sitting on his drive, as resplendent as all those adjectives would suggest. It would be later still, almost an hour, before it occurred to him that it couldn't possibly have fit through the iron gates to get onto the drive. And it would be a day or two later, after the bus had gone, that he would notice that there were no tyre tracks in the gravel. Such a state of affairs would have seemed impossible to most people. But even as he didn't see the tracks, if you get my drift, the Doctor would come up with three perfectly good theories as to how the bus had got, then how it had ungot, there.

The least likely explanation - that the bus had just appeared out of thin air - was the only plausible one. Where was the crane?

*Why* would a bus just fall out of the sky? But that didn't a the Doctor at that moment, and it needn't concern us. His attention was drawn to the woman, for reasons which will soon become apparent.

When Miranda saw her - which wasn't for a minute or two - she would immediately recognise the woman. It was, after all, the mid-eighties, give or take a year. Jane Fonda's workout book sat unread on four million coffee tables. And this woman looked remarkably like Jane Fonda. In all the universe of time and space there weren't actually that many places where people would remark on the similarity. A few decades of Earth's history. Even then, not everyone on Earth would make the connection.

But Miranda would.

When Iris saw Miranda, by coincidence, she would also see a strong resemblance to a film star. At sixteen, Miranda bore a striking resemblance to the young Jodie Foster. Miranda often got told she looked like her, although she was taller, and had blonde hair.

Fortunately, for the sake of all concerned and the maintenance of the suspension of disbelief, neither Iris nor Miranda had seen *The Monocled Mutineer*, and none of them watched BBC1 on Saturday evenings. The Doctor looked the woman up and down. She had cascades of golden hair, big brown eyes and full lips. But even the Doctor was paying more attention to her outfit. It looked like it was made from crocodile skin, but - for a very good reason - that the crocodile in question had come from a place where the crocodiles were made from florescent PVC. Perhaps with a nod to animal rights, there wasn't very much to the outfit. Her arms were bare and the skirt stopped... well, not to be indelicate, but it ended with a fringed hem that petered out barely below her waist, making her long legs look almost unreasonably long. Most men would have noticed that the skirt hardly concealed her rather special knickers, but the Doctor may not have done - who can say what he thinks? She wore matching calf-length green boots, which looked relatively practical by comparison.

"Do I know you?' the Doctor asked.

Had anyone else asked, this would have been a rhetorical question. But for reasons that will shortly become transparent, the Doctor genuinely didn't know the answer.

Iris Wildthyme laughed warmly, then introduced herself.

"You had better come in,' he suggested. It was only then that he noticed her suitcase.

She dragged it into the hall. 'This is a lovely place,' she told him. "Still got the police box, I notice.' She jerked a thumb over her shoulder back towards the garden.

"You know about that? What is it?"

"Oh dear, it really is serious amnesia, isn't it? You're prone to it, aren't you, m'dear?"

"Am I? I've forgotten.'

Iris clapped her hands together and laughed. "But you've not lost your gift for a witty comeback. Excellent! Oh yes, this is the - what? - "third time you've lost your memory, isn't it? Or is it ? I forget. You'll get a reputation, you know. People like a quick description: 'the one with a shock of white hair", 'the one with the recorder', 'the one who was only in a vharity thing for a few seconds but was the best of the damn lot'. You'll be 'the one who loses his memory all the time' if you're not careful. I say ... who's this?"

It was Miranda. She'd come downstairs from her room after hearing the commotion. And you know what she looked like, because I've already described her.

"School uniform,' Iris said, nudging the Doctor. 'You always had a thing for it. All those companions dressed to look half their age. This one's no different. How old are you, love? Twenty seven going on fifteen? You don't have to do what this horrid man says, you know. What's your name?"

"I'm Miranda."

Iris shook her hand vigorously. 'Pleased to meet you. Do you have a surname, or are you one of the ones that doesn't?"

Miranda told Iris her surname. Now, don't get upset, or write letters, but what she said was: 'I'm Miranda Who. The Doctor's daughter. I'm wearing a school uniform because I've just got in from school."

Iris looked at her, then looked at the Doctor. 'Great Gallifrey!' she said, then clamped her hand on her mouth. 'Sorry. Not allowed any more. Rassilon's Rod! No ... er ... gorbliney fliping eck, professor. Does that count as one?' she asked, looking up at the ceiling.

The Doctor frowned. "One what?"

Iris shushed him. and hesitated for a moment. "No. Got away with it. Daughter. eh? That's got to be quite a story. One unsuited to the short story medium, I would wager."

"It would take a whole book,' the Doctor agreed. 'Or at least the first hundred and twenty nine pages or so of one, to get to this bit. I'll explain later."

Iris beamed. 'I'm sure you will. I was forgetting your other reputation. You know,' she nudged him. 'The one that ... y'know.'

"I'm afraid I don't know what you're talking about."

Iris tapped her nose. 'Mum's the word about her mum. I'm not here so you can explain things to me, I'm here to sort a few things out for you. Tie up any loose ends. Jog the memory. You're caught on Earth at the mo, aren't you? Have you got the note?"

"You know about the note?"

"I know the man who wrote it. I fact I very nearly had carnal knowledge of him. He spent a very long time trying to get into my knickers."

"Perhaps he was just after the diamonds,' said Miranda, who had noticed, even if the Doctor hadn't, that Iris's pants were black satin, studded with just the right number of gemstones, whatever that number may be."

"Oh no, his intentions were entirely dishonourable," Iris told Miranda, making her blush. She was so embarrassed, in fact, that she didn't ask her next question - why are the diamonds arranged in a question mark? — and so she never discovered that they'd been a gift from a gentleman admirer. Neither did Miranda ask her third question, but that was just a flippant one about washing instructions and garment care.

Iris returned her full attention to the Doctor. "I can tell you everything you're a bit hazy on."

"Er ... will that take long?"

"Oh yes. Weeks, probably. Have you got a spare room?"

"Six."

"Oh. Shame. Come on, then, let's get cracking."

Ten minutes later. Miranda brought a tray full of tea things into the front room. On it were an antique pot, cups and saucers in the finest bone china, and some Kipling cakes, which the Doctor was rather partial to. Don't worry, that's not a continuity reference or an in-joke, no need to look it up. He just liked the taste.

The Doctor and Iris were on the sofa, and while most men would be looking up Iris's skirt, the Doctor was just looking puzzled.

"So did that happen or not?" the Doctor asked.

"Did what happen?"

"Well, if time wasn't allowed to run its true course, then that means—"

"Do you honestly not know what a paradox is?" Iris asked, exasperated. "They were *called* Paradox. Wasn't that a big enough clue? Really, I didn't think I'd have to explain all the big and difficult words to you."

"A self-contradictory or seemingly absurd statement," Miranda declared.

"Exactly," Iris concluded smugly.

"So you're saying what happened was self-contradictory?"

"Yes. Unequivocally."

"Unequivocally paradoxical?" Miranda asked. "Isn't that itself a paradox?"

Iris beamed. "She understands, you see?"

"I don't," Miranda admitted.

"But you do. Don't you see? It makes no sense, it makes sense, get used to it."

The Doctor scowled. "Look can we go back a bit?"

"If you want. How far back do you go. Doctor? I'll take you back. Back to your beginning! Back! Back!"

"Why are you waving your arms like that?"

"Just adding to the atmosphere, Miranda, dear."

"Why did I lose my memory?" the Doctor asked.

"Ah." Iris shut up, for possibly the first time since she'd arrived.

"That's all I want to know,' said the Doctor. "A blow to the head? A psychological trauma? Some sort of machine that worked as a mind rubber?"

"Well, none of the above. You just sort of did."

"*Just sort of did?*" the Doctor echoed. "That's not an explanation at all."

"Look, I don't know about that bit, to be honest. I'd got confused by then, and I think I might have skipped a few bits. It's something to do with the choice you made. When you fought the Grandfather."

Miranda laughed. "My dad beat up a pensioner?"

"No." the Doctor said, 'he wasn't really a grandfather. He was me, but me with short hair. I think."

"For the last time, it wasn't just the hair. He was a future you. An evil you. Only that future doesn't happen, now. He might have been you from a parallel universe. Obviously he was from a parallel timestream, one that no longer happened, but he may have been a you from a parallel timestream *within* a parallel universe where things happened differently, until, of course, you did whatever you did so that they happened the same. But that itself may have originally been a distinct parallel continuity, one where you lived at home and mourned for your dead wife, if the Grandfather wasn't that you, then he certainly went to the same barbers. But if that status of that you is still up in the air. I had thought he was a future you, but events have ruled that out. Unless someone went to restore, y'know, *things*. But if that happened that you would almost certainly not be you any more. You'd be that new you. But that you wasn't an evil you. So that you may have have been a *version* of one of the origin story ones, you know, the one where Borusa's your spirit guide. That would make him - you, that is, or rather that particular you, not you you - a pre-canonical you, rather than a post-canonical one. Assuming of course that he's canonical in the first place. But we have to assume that, otherwise you might as well say that nothing need make any sense at all." Iris clarified helpfully.

"Heaven forfend," the Doctor replied. "So who's Izzy again?"

Iris rolled her eyes. "Forget Izzy. Forget Charley. Forget Benny ... no, wait, remember Benny."

"I don't remember Benny," the Doctor said.

"Right. Well which one don't you remember?"

"Pardon?"

"It's OK if you don't remember the one that went to Guernsey without you. It's OK if you don't remember the one that travelled with you you, except for that one time in 1997, who you dropped off at Dellah in 2593. I'm not sure where the one who fought the Scourge with you fits in. You can probably remember that one if you want, I doubt it really matters.' Iris turned to Miranda. 'I've just had a terrible thought. Your mum wasn't called Benny, was she?"

"Benny's a woman?" the Doctor asked.

"Doctor, you had thirteen children with her, and you don't even - forget I said that. You didn't do that. You didn't even ... oh wait, you did. The once. Or was that in a different bottle altogether?"

"Bottle?" Miranda asked.

"I'll explain later," Iris said cheerfully. Then her face fell. "No, sod that, I never understood all that business with the bottles. Forget the bottles. Forget most of the Bennys. A quick rule of thumb - if she doesn't look like Emma Thompson, you can forget it."

"Well, that certainly helps," the Doctor said sardonically.

"That's what I'm here for," Iris replied. "Miranda dear, could you pour that tea? I think we're in for a long night.2