

# STAG

a two-hander one act play

by Joseph Hawkins

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## Stag

### The Characters:

JOHN – a man in his mid-thirties, nondescript in voice and appearance

DAVVO – a man in his early forties, posh, wearing pyjama jacket and jeans

THE STAGNIGHTERS – drunken revellers

### Scene:

A hotel room in a minor capital city in Eastern Europe. There are twin beds with a coffee table between them, and large, curtained windows to the rear. A television set, a cracked mirror, tumblers and an ashtray. Overall, the décor is extremely dilapidated, in Soviet style, with heavy floral patterns in brown, beige and red and cheap dark wood. Dim electric light.

### Time:

The present day. The action takes place over the course of a spring evening and the next morning.

### Scene 1

*John is mooching around the room, drinking from a bottle of Volvic mineral water.*

JOHN: Christ, back here again. Who'd have thought it? I mean, who'd have thought it? Back in this very same room... *(Pause)* But where is he? It's gone six and we were supposed to... *(Pulls out his mobile to make a call, then stops.)* But of course. Davenport. The last person in Europe not to have a mobile phone. The last person, possibly on the planet... Well, there's nothing to do but wait. *(Leans back a little)* And what do they stuff these mattresses with, bricks? Unchanged. *(He picks up the remote control and starts channel hopping. There is the sound of different channels – something in German, an idiotic advert, porn.)* Unchanged.

*John's mobile goes off.*

JOHN: Oh, darling! Hi, Hi! Yeah, yeah, fine. Haven't yet, no. No, I'll be back tomorrow. I did tell you. Hotel Spartak. Spartak. Yeah, it's weird. It must be the only hotel here that hasn't had a revamp or an upgrade or anything. The rest of the city is...completely unrecognisable. Davvo. You remember Davvo. Well, he's going to be my Best Man. Yes, the one who broke the Susie Cooper. Yeah, well, he paid for it, didn't he? Offered to pay. I'm sure he offered. No...no....and I'm not going to get stripped naked and handcuffed to a lamppost, either. It's not going to be

that kind of stag night. Low key. Just two old friends, having a drink and a reminisce.

*There is a knocking at the door.*

JOHN: (Cont'd) Anyway, how's Millie? Is she? Bless. *(Pause)* Page boys? *(Pause)* Mauve, I guess. I mean, does it matter? Mauve or leaf green? You choose. No, but I... Well, I'm going to be wearing that one you picked out, aren't I...

*More knocking on the door, becoming louder.*

JOHN: Anyway, gotta go. Sorry darling, there's someone here for me. Yeah. Love you. Yeah. Big kiss.

*He rises to answer the door, but as he does, there is a rattling of the door-handle, then the door is flung open, almost in his face. Enter DAVVO, dressed in a pyjama jacket roughly tucked into a pair of jeans, clutching a backpack.*

DAVVO: Sedge!

JOHN: Davvo!

*They embrace roughly.*

DAVVO: Howdy doo-dee!

JOHN: Howdy doe-dee!

DAVVO: Ha ha! How *are* you?

JOHN: I'm good. I'm really good. You?

DAVVO: Fine! Nightmare getting here, though.

JOHN: What happened?

DAVVO: Flight from Riyadh was via Moscow. Got delayed, of course. Fortunately I put the time to good use by chatting up this Aeroflot trolley dolly in the airport bar. Then, when I finally managed to get on board a connecting flight, who should be doing the whole "tea or coffee? chai ili kofye?" routine but her? Svetlana. *(Moved his head as though he has a crick in the neck)* God they make those aircraft toilets small. Very little room for manoeuvre.

JOHN: So am I right to assume there's no one permanent in your life at the moment?

DAVVO: God, no. Not like you. Little Johnny Sedgegrove, all grown up and getting hitched. And wanting me to be your Best Man. Well, I'm touched, John, really I am.

JOHN: Well, you are my oldest friend.

DAVVO: And you're a dark horse. Ha ha! Who is she?

JOHN: Well, Ann of course.

DAVVO: Who?

JOHN: Ann. You must remember Ann.

DAVVO: The Venezuelan one?

JOHN: No!

DAVVO: The one with the lazy eye!

JOHN: Of course not - since when was there... You must remember Ann. Dark hair. Five foot five-ish. Come on, I've lived with her for eight years. You visited, remember?

DAVVO: Oh, Ann! Yes, it all comes back!

JOHN: *(Good-naturedly)* You came to stay about six years ago. Came for a night and stayed for a week.

DAVVO: Did I?

JOHN: And I didn't even know about it till afterwards.

DAVVO: So where were you?

JOHN: Oh, off on some work thing in L.A.

DAVVO: Of course!

JOHN: Ann says you spent most of the time lying on the sofa in your boxers watching women's beach volleyball on Eurosport.

DAVVO: I was jetlagged.

JOHN: Then broke her Susie Cooper coffee pot. She still hasn't entirely forgiven you for that, bless her!

DAVVO: Ann! *(Pause)* Shame it's not the Venezuelan one. I was banking on being able to rhapsodise about the beauties of Caracas in the springtime in my Best Man's speech. But anyway, as your Best Man, I've assembled a little stag night comfort package for the two of us. *(From his bag he extracts a bottle of vodka, three packs of Gitanes Blondes cigarettes, and two sets of stag's antlers)* Litre of duty free blue label. Fags, of course. *(Flourishing the antlers)* And look at these beauties.

JOHN: What the hell are those?

DAVVO: Family heirlooms. Been hanging on my wall in Saudi ever since Uncle Ossian died.

JOHN: I didn't know you had an Uncle Ossian.

DAVVO: There's Icelandic blood flowing in these veins.

JOHN: As well as copious quantities of vodka.

DAVVO: Well, you know the old Icelandic tradition, don't you? On the night before the wedding, the groom and his chosen clansmen don the horns and become Lords of the Forest once more. Come on, get strapped in!

*They don the antlers. Davvo pours two shots of vodka.*

DAVVO: *(Cont'd)* Time to christen these antlers! Cheers!

JOHN: Cheers!

*They drink the vodka down in one go.*

DAVVO: I'm afraid I didn't organise bungee jumping because I can't stand heights and I didn't go for paint-balling because, well, that's for wankers.

JOHN: This is perfect, Dav, really.

DAVVO: Glad you approve. I've never been anyone's Best Man before, but from what I hear, the opportunities for having your wicked way with the assembled female throng at the wedding are second to none. All those women, salivating at the prospect of emotional commitment. Well, congratulations, John, congratulations! *(Offering a cigarette)* Have a cigar!

JOHN: No thanks, I've given up.

DAVVO: Have you? Oh yes, you have. Well, let's keep it here on top of the Brezhnev-era TV for later (*He puts a cigarette on the TV*) Might turn out to be the dying man's last request.

JOHN: I see you're still smoking Gitane Blondes.

DAVVO: Yes. Do you know, I was first offered a Gitane Blonde by our French au pair, Rochelle, when I was thirteen. (*Lights up*) She gave me my first glimpse of female pubic hair, as well. Been smoking these ever since, as a sort of perpetual homage to Gallic bush.

JOHN: It's good to see you, Davvo. Still the same old Davvo/ You haven't changed a bit

DAVVO: Good to see you, too, John.

JOHN: You're a breath of fresh air nowadays, let me tell you.

DAVVO: I suppose this is your last night of freedom, more or less?

JOHN: More or less. The sands of bachelorhood are running out.

DAVVO: Well, don't worry, because we're going to give you a damn good send off. Just you and me.

JOHN: Just you and me. In this place.

DAVVO: This old place. We always did say we'd come back, didn't we? In ten years or something. Is it ten years already? Can't be.

JOHN: Eleven years. In fact, eleven years and eighteen days.

DAVVO: Eleven years and eighteen days, eh? The blink of an eye. Where does the time go, eh?

JOHN: Frightening, mate, frightening.

DAVVO: And here we are, back in Room 17 of Hotel Spartak.

JOHN: The scene of our first week here.

DAVVO: Which by the looks of things hasn't changed a bit. Christ, this old place, eh? *(He strokes the faded wallpaper lovingly)* Just the same as the day we arrived. I wonder. *(Finds the crack in the mirror)* It's still here!

JOHN: What?

DAVVO: The crack is still here from that time we played indoor cricket.

JOHN: Is it? Fucking hell!

DAVVO: I tell you, John, never let an Old Harrovian loose with an umbrella, a tennis ball and a bottle of vodka.

JOHN: Hotel Spartak's about the only place that hasn't changed, though, Dav. You seen the Square?

DAVVO: Haven't had a chance. I was delayed.

JOHN: Oh, of course – the air stewardess.

DAVVO: Svetlana. Didn't get in until about seven a.m. this morning, and of course I hadn't sleep a wink on the plane, so I took a couple of downers as soon as I got to my room. Only woke up about half an hour ago. What time is it now?

JOHN: Half past six.

DAVVO: Half past six. The cocktail hour! Time for another drink!

DAVVO *(Pours another round. JOHN baulks at the new drink)*

DAVVO: Uh, uh! No shirking. Remember, remember – once the bottle's been opened, it's got to be finished. There's a certain wisdom in these old Slavic customs.

JOHN: What can I say? I'm forgetting myself. We can't go around changing old habits now.

DAVVO: And tonight, my dear Sedgegrove, is devoted to those old habits.

JOHN: *(Raising his glass)* To the old days.

DAVVO: The old days.

JOHN: We were the first set of teachers to come here.

DAVVO: The first, and the best.

JOHN: The first to reply to that advert in The Guardian.

DAVVO: Quite so.

JOHN and DAVVO together: “Teach English in Eastern Europe...

JOHN: Beautiful city, friendly people...

DAVVO: Enjoyable work...

JOHN and DAVVO together: Excellent rates of pay....”

JOHN: We should have that advert framed. Tell me – what were you doing when you saw it?

DAVVO: Me? Probably scouring around for work at the British Council in Barcelona.

JOHN: Oh, yeah, you did do Spain, didn't you?

DAVVO: Got pretty tired of it, too. Barcelona lost its edge years ago. They sanitised the whole place for the 92 Olympics. Do you know it was getting so you could walk down the whole of Las Ramblas without getting propositioned by a transsexual hooker once. Disgusting. So I thought, time to head east. And what about you?

JOHN: Oh, I was at my folks' place. Fresh out of uni and gradually beginning to realise that my English degree didn't count for quite as much in the jobs market as I hoped it would. Penguin said no. The Guardian said no. Even the Civil Service said no. Pretty soon I found myself flogging advertising space on a publication called Waste Disposal and Recycling Monthly – for lo, such a magazine does truly exist...

DAVVO: So TEFL it was.

JOHN: I wanted to go to Brazil originally, but all the jobs wanted someone with experience. Saw the advert for this place and thought, give it a shot.

DAVVO: A hiding to nothing, some might say, this place, but you gave it a shot. Drink? *(He pours another two glasses).*

JOHN: Sure – why not.

*They drink, gasping in satisfaction afterwards.*



DAVVO: Ahh! healthsome, refreshing vodka.

JOHN: Who was it used to say that?

DAVVO: Dog.

JOHN: Dog! I haven't thought about Dog in years.

DAVVO: He used to get quite reverential about alcohol, didn't he?

JOHN: *(Assuming an American accent)* Breakfast Wines in the Abattoir – remember that? The title of his great novel, never to be written: Breakfast Wines in the Abattoir... He used to like to limber up with a Breakfast Wine or two, didn't he, back in the old days?

DAVVO: He did. He'd uncork the bottle every morning – well, every weekend morning, when I lived with him in that flat.

JOHN: That flat!

DAVVO: No furniture, no heating, no hot water. But cheap. Cheaper than God. D'you know, we paid 50 quid a month for that place, until they booted us out. Fifty quid a month and a bottle of vodka. That was the deal.

JOHN: And how was living with Dog?

DAVVO: Not wholly savoury. He used to pee in an old Evian bottle.

JOHN: But there was a toilet, wasn't there?

DAVVO: Oh, yeah. Just he preferred the bottle. When I quizzed him on it, he said he had no objection to water, just couldn't see the point in buying the stuff when he could make his own.

JOHN: He didn't drink his own piss, did he?

DAVVO: That I never quite fathomed. Although I never saw him empty it anywhere.

JOHN: God! Dog! Remember that bar we used to go to with him?

DAVVO: Que Sera Sera.

JOHN: Que Sera Sera, eh? What a place...

DAVVO: Great place. A madman at every table – that’s what they used to say.

JOHN: Dog certainly helped push up the insanity quotient.

DAVVO: Then there was old Beardy (*Strokes an imaginary long beard*). Looked a bit like Rasputin.

JOHN: Oh yeah, claimed he was best mates with Vaclav Havel. Spent all day picking up other people’s old beer bottles to take them back to the shop to cash in the reclaim value...

DAVVO: Yeah, used to go round to everyone saying: “What is your idea of love?”

JOHN: What a chat-up line!

DAVVO: (*Mimicking the voice*) What is your idea of love?

JOHN: Mind you, he had a hell of a time with people telling him “a hot breakfast and a blow job.”

DAVVO: And they were plentiful. Remember those guys who worked at the car plant!

JOHN All looked like extras in an Eisenstein movie, didn’t they? Blue overalls, heavy moustaches, broken teeth. But the funny thing was how nice they were, how delighted to meet us. Kept buying us beers and slapping us on the back. (*In heavy accent*) You good Englishman! English good! You drink. You, me drink!

DAVVO: They were nice, weren’t they? Hospitable.

JOHN: Hilariously, suffocatingly hospitable. Buy you vodka till you couldn’t stand up, take you home and fill you with fried veal and cabbage, then offer you their daughters. (*In accent*) You want my daughter? Very good. She make good wife. Good childrens.

DAVVO: Ah, the days, the days.

JOHN: They were good days, though, weren’t they?

DAVVO: Bloody good days. Remember Kaya?

JOHN: Hmm?

DAVVO: Kaya, the barmaid, at Que Sera.

JOHN: Oh, God, yeah, Kaya. Now she was quite something.

DAVVO: She was everything. Like a vision of spring amid the beer taps. A young goddess.

JOHN: You really do remember her, don't you?

DAVVO: You know, the first time I saw Kaya is still absolutely clear in my mind, as clear as day.

JOHN: Go on.

DAVVO: I went up to the bar to order a beer and there she was, all lit up somehow, that wispy blonde hair of hers and the down of her cheek, golden in the yellow morning light.

JOHN: Sure that wasn't just the glare from the Camel cigarettes sign?

DAVVO: She glowed, unbeliever. Glowed. So delicate, so young. I don't think I've ever seen anything so...so... before or after. And then she turned to me to ask me what I wanted. She was wearing that black T-shirt, and across the front in bright pink lettering it said: 'THIS BITCH BITES'. How astonishing that girl was...how exquisite.

JOHN: And what a collection of T-shirts.

DAVVO: This bitch bites!

JOHN: "Don't even think about it" - wasn't that another one?

DAVVO: "Don't even think about it" - what a depressing slogan to see pasted across a girl's tits.

JOHN: Although in her defence, she couldn't speak a word of English.

DAVVO: Not a word. Not so much as yes or no. 'It breaks my tongue,' she used to say. But I loved her, Sedgemoor. Do you realise that? I loved her.

JOHN: You loved her?

DAVVO: I worshipped her, Sedgemoor. Worshipped at her shrine.

JOHN: But you never actually went out with her or anything, did you?

DAVVO: Did you? I mean, you liked her too, right?

JOHN: Yeah, but...

DAVVO: And you never actually got anywhere with her, either.

JOHN: And neither did you.

*Pause.*

DAVVO: Well, who wants to get anywhere with a girl like that anyway? That's not the point. She was too beautiful, too beautiful to touch. Pity the man who laid his hand on her. There's pain that way, nothing but pain. Better to stand back, worship from afar, marvel. Just think - God has put such wondrous things as Kaya on the planet. We build Renaissance cathedrals and... He gives us Kaya. There's no competition. *(Pause)* Let's go John, let's go.

*DAVVO gets up, makes to leave.*

JOHN: Go? Go where?

DAVVO: To Que Sera. Why not, for God's sake? Couple of quick drinks. Cut the vodka with a litre or two of beer? We're only here for one night, you know, and I could do with washing away the taste of Saudi.

JOHN: But we haven't finished our vodka. What about the old Slavic customs?

DAVVO: The old Slavic customs are made to be broken. A successful stag night has to run on spontaneity. Why not you and me give this town a run for its money, one last time? After all, we're only here for the night. *(He goes to the window, drawing back the curtains with a flourish)* Look – feast your eyes on that! You could always see the Square from this window, remember? And there it is. Freedom Square! Freedom Square and the fountains of Pan-Slavic Brotherhood, into which as I recall a particularly tired and emotional young John Sedgewood tried to relieve himself after a heavy night at Que Sera Sera.

JOHN: Did I?

DAVVO: Of course you bloody did! Almost got arrested for it as well, if I hadn't spoken enough German to persuade the cops to overlook your youthful exuberance. "I demand to see the British Ambassador," you kept shrieking.

JOHN: No!

DAVVO: They had to put you in a half nelson. Don't deny it. You've got a wild side, too, John. And tonight we're going to let it rip. *(Raising a toast)* Here's to pissing in the fountains of freedom square!

JOHN: To pissing! Long may it continue.

DAVVO: *(Moving to the window)* Come over here, John, let's recce the territory. There's a killer aerial view to be had before we get within grappling range of a couple of cold beers. *(Peers out of the window.)* Now, where's the Que Sera Sera?

JOHN: *(Without rising from his seat)* I'm warning you, though, this place has changed. When I went out this afternoon...

DAVVO: Where is it? Used to be right next to the Cathedral. Unless memory deceives. Jesus Christ! They've got a Benneton now there on the corner. Just where there used to be that grim little Tourist Information bureau. The one that never opened. And there's a KFC. A KFC in Freedom Square, John! This place appears to have turned into some Eastern European version of Slough. And what about Que Sera?

JOHN: Take a look, Davvo.

DAVVO: All I can see is KFC, Benneton, an amber shop and... a branch of Starbucks.

JOHN: That's it, Davvo. That's Que Sera Sera.

DAVVO: What do you...Jesus! The fuckers! The absolute bastards! They can't have. They have. They've turned Que Sera Sera into a branch of Starbucks. *(Turns to face the audience, drinks his drink.)* This place is done for.

JOHN: I didn't want to tell you.

DAVVO: It's the end, John. The end. *(slumps down, hugely subdued.)*

JOHN: Oh, come on Davvo. Things move on.

DAVVO: Things move on? Is that what they said with the barbarians at the gates of Rome? Things move on?

JOHN: It was only a bar.

DAVVO: Only a bar? Only a bar? You're not exactly doing a brilliant job of consoling me here, Johnny. That place – that place was the reason I came here.

JOHN: Oh, come on, I knew you liked the joint, but...

DAVVO: You felt it too, didn't you? I mean, Isn't that why we're here, now? That place was like...an escape...a tiny chink of light...a hint that other things were possible.

JOHN: But what other things?

DAVVO: Other things than the way things are in the UK. That warmed-over Thatcherism, house prices and the FTSE 100 Index don't have to rule our lives. Didn't you know that, John? Don't you remember how it was, when we were here? It was different, remember? The crumbling churches and the gypsies with their piano accordians and the cigarettes at 20p a pack. And wise old fuckers like Janek propping up the bar at Que Sera Sera. There was a kind of seriousness about living here which you just don't get in England. And in a weird way at the same time they didn't give a fuck about anything. It was a...feeling for life.

JOHN: A seriousness about living?

DAVVO: Yeah.

JOHN: A feeling for life? *(Pause)* OK, Davvo, OK. I agree. This place has something. Or had something. A certain battered charm, I'd be the first to agree, but you couldn't buy proper toilet paper, or fruit for 6 months of the year.

DAVVO: Fruit? Who gives a fuck about fruit? The point was, people talked. About philosophy. About love. About life. And, besides, there might not have been fruit in the shops, but there was always vodka. These people – these people, they've survived war and invasion and famine and Christ knows what else. And when you've been through that, you live. You really fucking know how to live.

JOHN: And now they've got a Starbucks.

DAVVO: And now they've got a Starbucks.

JOHN: They obviously just like frothy coffee.

DAVVO: Christ, did it mean nothing at all, all of that, did it mean nothing at all?

JOHN: Of course it meant something, Davvo, and I take your point – I do take your point. But this is economic development – market forces. It's inevitable.

DAVVO: But it wasn't inevitable, John, I swear to you it wasn't. At least it didn't *feel* inevitable. I thought I'd found another way of living. (*Almost in tears*) I thought I had escaped!

*Long pause. Then the sound of the stag-nighters: a large group of men outside drunkenly singing "Agadoo".*

DAVVO: God, what the hell is that? (*He goes to the window, opens it, and looks out*) They're all wearing....Elvis gear.

JOHN: Elvis gear?

DAVVO: Yeah, wigs all quaffed up and sideburns and gold-rimmed shades. And singing that awful song. They must be...English. (*Shuts window, sits down on one of the beds*).

JOHN: They're stag-nighters.

DAVVO: Stag-nighters? Where are their horns?

JOHN: We don't all have Icelandic uncles, Dav.

DAVVO: And there was me thinking we were being original coming here. Bastards!

JOHN: We were original, once.

DAVVO: Once! God, Johnny, we've become parodies of our former selves.

*They lie back on their beds, strip off their stag night gear, sigh. DAVVO lights up. A long pause. The sound of Agadoo becomes audible again, then fades.*

JOHN: You know, I wish you wouldn't smoke those things.

DAVVO: Why not?

JOHN: Because it's making me want one.

DAVVO: John, where's your moral fortitude?

*JOHN sighs. A pause.*

JOHN: Mind you, there always used to be a fair bit of lying on our beds, smoking and sighing. Back in the old days, I mean. Remember our first week here, before we got our own flats, lying here, staring up at the ceiling...

DAVVO: Awaiting our fate.

JOHN: Wondering if it wouldn't be better to get on the next flight home...

DAVVO: Or the night train to Budapest.

DAVVO: The night train to Budapest!

JOHN: But we didn't do either, did we. Just waited. Played cards.

DAVVO: And indoor cricket.

JOHN: Waited for Dorota to call.

DAVVO: Dorota Kalinkova! The esteemed Director of the Bona Fide School of English!

JOHN: In her silver raincoat and that fur hat with the feather in the front.

DAVVO: And those starchy blouses, and those huge tits.

JOHN: What was it she used to say - the Bona Fide School of English has set a certain standard here...a certain what was it?

DAVVO: We boast a certain *Je ne sais quoi*.

JOHN: That was it – that was the actual phrase she used.

DAVVO: A certain *Je ne sais quoi*.

JOHN: I mean, who says that, who the fuck would say that, except Dorota?

DAVVO: Funny you should ask, because you were the one who tried to proposition her, using that very phrase.

JOHN: Me?

DAVVO: You did, you know. I can see the two of you now, at that Christmas party she held here – downstairs, I mean, in the restaurant...

JOHN: I may have...



DAVVO: You may have – you fucking did! I have an abiding image of you and her, in front of that hideous Socialist Realist mural, with a big muscly worker wielding a hammer on one side of her, and another shovelling something into a furnace on the other. And there was her and you in the middle. She still wearing that fur hat with the feather in the front, and you, so full of vodka you practically had steam coming out of your ears, saying: “Dorota, to me you have a certain *Je ne sais quoi*.”

JOHN: I fucking did not!

DAVVO: Good luck to you, I say! Good luck! You rose in my estimation that night. Just a shame you didn’t quite seal the deal. Unlike others of us who are present here today.

JOHN: What’s that supposed to mean?

DAVVO: Just that where others faltered, I won through.

JOHN: You mean you fucked Dorota?

DAVVO: There’s no need to put it quite so crudely.

JOHN: But where? When? You kept all this pretty bloody quiet.

DAVVO: Oh, it was a couple of nights after that party as it happens. She left her briefcase here at the hotel. So I went round to her flat to return it. With a little seduction bottle.

JOHN: You dirty devil.

DAVVO: Don’t pretend you didn’t want her too. Think of that fur hat. Those huge tits.

JOHN: She was a big girl alright.

DAVVO: You never saw her naked. Must have been eighteen stone if she was an ounce. Mind you, I quite like fat. There’s something rather comforting about it. And at the same time forbidden. Like...like heroin, actually.

JOHN: Have you taken heroin?

DAVVO: Dabbled. When I was at Cambridge.

JOHN: There’s so many things I don’t know about you, Davvo.

DAVVO: And what about you, John? There's so little I know about you. I mean, I only found out about you getting married when we last talked on the phone. And that was what, February time?

JOHN: Me and Ann have been an item for a while, though.

DAVVO: Yes, who could forget the Susie Cooper coffee pot. *(He pours drinks and offers JOHN one)* So what's so special about this Ann? As opposed to the Venezuelan one, I mean, or Kaya?

*They drink.*

JOHN: I'm not sure I want to tell you.

DAVVO: Why not?

JOHN: I've got a feeling you might just take the piss.

DAVVO: Would I?

JOHN: I know you, Davvo.

DAVVO: Do you? You just said you didn't. Just said there were so many things you didn't know about me.

JOHN: Well, it's true I don't know anything about you taking heroin, or what you do now in Saudi.

DAVVO: What do you want to know? I teach English. Same gig, different decade, higher rate of pay.

JOHN: Apart from that, though.

DAVVO: OK, OK, let's make a deal. I'll tell you all about heroin if you tell me all about Ann.

JOHN: Deal.

DAVVO: Deal. *(They shake hands. There's a pause.)* Come on, then.

JOHN: Well, there isn't too much to tell. Where should I start?

DAVVO: The last time I saw Ann, it was at that flat you had, somewhere in the bowels of South London. *(Disdainfully)* East Dulwich, was it called?

JOHN: That's right. We're still there.

DAVVO: And how are things between you, apart from getting married, I mean?

JOHN: Things are good. Really good.

DAVVO: Oh really?

JOHN: Yeah, and it feels good, actually, doing the decent thing. And it makes a hell of a lot of sense, after 8 years of living together.

DAVVO: Eight years! You must be like two woolly old socks in a drawer together.

JOHN: Well, not quite like that. We try to keep the spark alive. Do “dates”, take each other out to the movies. But with a wedding six weeks away, it’s all apt to get a bit stressy. I mean, there’s so much to organise – the DJ, the invitations, the flower arrangements, the cars... Half the time we’re at daggers drawn.

DAVVO: But it’s fun, isn’t it, getting married?

JOHN: It’s stressful.

DAVVO: Aren’t you excited, John, about your own wedding?

JOHN: Kind of. I’m nervous.

DAVVO: *(Teasingly)* But don’t you love her?

JOHN: Oh, piss off.

DAVVO: No, no – come on – it’s a serious question.

JOHN: You don’t know how to be serious.

DAVVO: I’m being serious now. I was serious about Kaya. You be serious about Ann. Do you love her?

JOHN: Give me a cigarette.

DAVVO: Here.

*JOHN lights the cigarette.*

DAVVO Well, what have you got to say?

JOHN: Thank you. For the cigarette.

DAVVO: Don't try to be clever, John, it doesn't suit you. Tell me, what have you got to say to my question – about Ann. Do you love Ann?

JOHN: No. Yeah – yeah, I do. But I mean, what is love, anyway?

DAVVO: *(Enormously quickly)* Yes, I did do heroin at university, actually. It was with a guy called Baron Alexander Hertz von Bluggenfeldt, who was an absolute bastard for the stuff. Used to call him Smacky. *(Slower)* Initially I took it after I'd done too much coke. Takes the edge off, you see. But then it makes you so dopey that you need to take a line of coke, just to pull yourself out of bed. But fear not for the soul of Lawrence Davenport. Moral desuetude on that scale no longer haunts me. For me, now, vodka. Healthsome, refreshing vodka...won't you have a glass, while I tell you about how a particularly high Baron Smacky once shot a light aeroplane out of the sky by cannoning a frozen chicken through its fuselage...? *(He pours drinks.)*

JOHN: Davvo, why are you talking such complete bollocks?

DAVVO: Well you are, aren't you? *(Mimicking JOHN)* No. Yeah. What's that all about? Do you or don't you love her? Come on – out with it. D'you think I agreed to be your Best Man, organised this lavish stag do, and came all the way from Riyadh via Moscow just to hear 'No, Yeah'.

JOHN: Give us a drink. *(He drinks)* I just feel...disgusted. Disgusted.

DAVVO: Disgusted? About what?

JOHN: About us, our time here. What we did.

DAVVO: But you're the one who wanted to come back here for your stag night. You're the one who wanted it to be you and me, the Two Musketeers.

JOHN: I know I did. This place meant something to me, too, you know. It had a certain battered charm, and it was part of my youth. My wild days.

DAVVO: Your Nam, as Dog would say.

JOHN: My Nam. This was my Nam. And yet now I come back and I wonder what all the fuss was about. I mean, it was all so small, so petty. We were the first native English speakers here – the very first. I could have written a novel, started a company, changed things, made my mark. And what did I actually do, with an opportunity like that? What did either of us do? We just drank the beer and gawped at the girls. Spent our hard currency. Did our bit to drive up prices. We were the English mob, right? The guys who

couldn't speak more than fifty words of the language and got all tongue tied round a certain pretty barmaid. Like the other stag-nighters you so despise, just with slightly better timing.

DAVVO: What nonsense you talk! We were pioneers, John, discovering uncharted territory. In new places, for the first time. We were like... like Edmund Hillary, or somebody. Captain Scott. We could say "My God, this is a terrible place," knowing there was no one else on earth who could contradict us...

JOHN: But what did we do?

DAVVO: We didn't do anything. Why should we do things?

JOHN: We were like little boys, little boys running out into the garden the morning after it's snowed, wanting to be first. And now we're pissed off that other people have come, and the garden's all churned up with footprints.

DAVVO: We were pioneers.

JOHN: We were little boys.

DAVVO: And this disgust, that's what prompted you to get married and settle down, is it? In East Dulwich. And take that job at, where was it, again?

JOHN: Kelvin Cleaver Camberley.

DAVVO: Writing adverts for the Conservative Party and Kraft cheese spread...

JOHN: There's no need to say it with such contempt. It's how the world works, Dav, and I do handle other accounts, you know. We do pro bono work. Charity stuff. Sponsor-a-walrus-dot-com – you heard of them?

DAVVO: No, I don't think...

JOHN: "Discover the warmth of a walrus". That was me – I came up with that slogan, and we got a 17% sales spike on the back of it.

DAVVO: So you go home each night on the Tube, do you, full of the warmth of a walrus, and into the loving arms of Ann – is that it? Home for a stiff drink after a hard day? Or does Ann worry about your alcohol consumption? Does she extend a restraining hand and hint quietly that a glass of Volvic might be a better idea?

JOHN: If she does it's because she cares about me.

DAVVO: But do you care about her? That's the million dollar question. Do you love her?

JOHN: I...

DAVVO: Do you love her?

*No reply*

DAVVO: Oh, come on – you managed to turn the question back on me a minute ago.

JOHN: I don't know about love, OK? It's not a concept I really understand.

DAVVO: Is that what you're going to say in your wedding speech? Love is a concept I don't really understand.

JOHN: And what do you know about it, anyway? What exactly qualifies you for this grand inquisition on love? Getting the hots for an eighteen-year-old barmaid who doesn't even speak English?

DAVVO: At least I felt some passion for Kaya. Whereas your relationship with Ann seems to have all the emotional power of a wet tea bag.

JOHN: Ann is my rock.

DAVVO: What do you want a rock for? What are you, a mollusc? You know what I think?

JOHN: What?

DAVVO: I was about to say I think you've gone soft. But you haven't. You've just given up.

JOHN: Given up? What do you mean, given up? Given up on what?

DAVVO: On life. I mean, what is this? You spend all day writing slogans about walruses, then go home to a woman you've been with for the best part of 10 years and you're getting ready to marry only there's one slight hitch: you don't love her. But on the other hand you're disgusted by your bachelor past, so you decide to go through with it....

JOHN: It's not like that.

DAVVO: But you don't love her, John....

