

Three Months to the Day

A Play

Peter Chell

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Cast of Characters

Alan Franks

A man in his middle 20s.

John Dean

A man in his middle 20s.

Jan Whiles

A woman in her middle 20s.

Helen Cummings

A female student in her early 20s.

Scene 1:

John wanders into the spot, carrying a photo album and a rucksack on his back. He takes the rucksack off and puts it down to open the album. He addresses the audience.

JOHN

I remember when I took that . . . (shows the audience) He was trying to impress me, hanging off a tree branch, asking, 'What has Tarzan got that I don't?' I said, 'How long have you got?' (laughs and pauses) It is strange, don't you think? That sometimes some of the most painful things in life are the ones that make us who we are. It's perverse, really, but true.

I never did see him again after he married. Didn't seem right, and I needed to move on. Truthfully . . . he was my first love. Slushy? Come on. Don't tell me you can't remember that first rush of excitement, that first touch. It's never quite the same the second time. It's at that first moment in love when we know who we really are. I also hated him more than I have ever hated anyone before. Yes, I know I'm contrary. Now . . . (looks around him) It all seems a lifetime ago, a bit of a dream . . . or possibly a nightmare. (closes the album and moves upstage, looks and picks up a bag)

He moves one step back to audience.

JOHN

All the magazines and experts say that being a gay man these days is easy. No one cares anymore. At that time, I cared. I wanted not to be because it seemed easier for me. I wanted to blame everyone else for what I thought was my demise. My answer was to lie to myself. Never lie to yourself. It always comes back to bite you on the bum. It wasn't the outside world that had stopped me from being honest about who I was. It was me. The world concentrates on telling everyone they can be what they want to be and give their approval. I thought that was important. If I did what I was supposed to do, I would be . . . liked or approved of. 'Hey, there's John. He's a sound guy'. It's your own approval that counts. The knowledge that I can cast my world in a shape and colour that makes me feel good about who I am. He did that. I grant you, he did that in a somewhat roundabout and painful way, but he made me understand the shape and colour I was meant to be, and maybe that's love. I don't know. But I now love myself, and that's so new. It's . . . well, it's just so new.

Have you ever noticed how life seems to move at different speeds at different times? Strange, isn't it? This bit of my life is about to stop, and I am about to move on to another. Wonder how long the next episode will last. (about to exit) But you know something? For all that happened, I'd still do it again. (disappears into the dark)

Blackout

Music

Scene 2:

During the late 1980s. We are in John's top-floor flat living room. Upstage centre is the front door. The flat contains an old settee, a TV, a set of draws, and a small table. The room is shabbily decorated.

We are in John's flat four months earlier. At lights up, we see Helen, John's partner of three years. She is seen packing her rucksack and collecting her knick-knacks and tapes. She looks around the room as if this is the last time she will see it. She sits and sighs. After a time, John enters and sees her packing.

JOHN

(stops at the door and stares) I see you haven't changed your mind then. (takes off his coat as she carries on packing)

There is an awkward silence.

JOHN

Hoping to get out before I came back, perhaps?

HELEN

(doesn't stop packing) Please don't start. I don't want to argue anymore. I told you this morning that I would be gone by tonight. I'm sorry. I meant to be out by the time you got home.

JOHN

Oh! Apologies. I would have stayed away longer had I known. Sorry to inconvenience your plans.

HELEN

(stops packing and faces John) Can we not do this again? For the last time, I am leaving you, leaving here . . . I'm leaving for good. How many more ways do you want me to say it? We have nothing more to say. How many more times before it sinks in? (sighs and sits) I'm sorry. I didn't mean to snap. I just don't want any more arguments. I'm tired. I can't understand why you are being so hostile. (pauses) Look, you said yourself something wasn't working. It ran its course. Please. I don't want us to part with bad feelings.

JOHN

I know what I said. You needn't remind me. I was upset, but look. We can make this work. I know I haven't been what you wanted me to be. If you tell me what you want, I will try. That's a promise. (moves towards her)

HELEN

(backs away) Please understand. I care about you, but . . .

JOHN

But what?

HELEN

Not like that . . . anymore. This is for the best. You know it is, deep down.

JOHN

What you really mean to say is you don't love me anymore. (laughs sarcastically) And pardon me, but when did you start telling me what is 'best' for me? I still don't understand. Why won't you give us a chance?

HELEN

(stares at him, shakes her head, and carries on packing) I don't want any more 'chances', and I can't make it 'work'. It's love. It's us we're talking about, not a busted washing machine.

JOHN

(walks over to her, grabs her, and turns her towards him, calmer) Please tell me – what do I need to do? I can't lose you. I keep thinking this is just a nightmare and I'll wake up. You say you're going? Where are you going – and to do what? Why, for fuck's sake? Why?

HELEN

(zips up the bag and faces him) Truly, I'm sorry. I don't want you to change anything for me. You are kind and gentle, and I will always care about you, but . . . I need more. What, I don't know. I just know.

JOHN

(tearful) I love you. You know I do. You're my life.

HELEN

I know you do, and you can stop the 'you're my life' drama queen stuff. It doesn't suit you. You'll be fine. You deserve better, and I'm truly sorry. I never wanted this, but hey. Maybe . . . (touches his face) The future is a big place. But I can't carry on like this. I know how much I'm hurting you, and . . . (pauses and turns her gaze from him) And in answer to your question, no, I don't love you. (resigned) It's not fair on either of us. You know too, don't you? I think maybe this will do you some kind of good, make you face up to who you are or who you want to be. I don't hate you. On the contrary, I'm leaving for you too. You need to fly on your own for a while. I just think that I'm not the right person for you. You need to love someone in a way that makes you relax, whereas you and I are always . . . well, trying. Face up to who you want to be, John, and stop being the person you think you should be. I will always like you. What's not to like? You're kind, generous, a gentle soul I will always love . . . Well, anyway, got to go.

JOHN

Did you ever *love* me, I mean?

HELEN

Really, I tried. I wanted to, but—

JOHN

Did you ever love me? It's a simple question.

HELEN

Honestly? No, I don't think I did. You were kind and supportive and lots of things I thought I needed, but things change . . . I'm sorry. (finishes packing whilst John sits, goes over and kneels in front of John and takes his hand) You are kind, funny, and caring, and anyone would be lucky to have you around.

JOHN

But not you.

HELEN

Yes, not me. (resigned) You'll find someone else. I know you will; but, John, I want more. That's selfish, I know, and after the last three months, I need to change my life.

JOHN

Is that why you are leaving? I told you, we can get through it. You just need time. Please give it time. You're depressed.

HELEN

(moves away from him sharply and goes back to sealing her rucksack up, angry) No, I'm not depressed, and it's not all about that, although it's part of why I'm leaving. John, it should never have happened, and whatever you think, I'm not running away. There have been days when I wanted to just blot it out and pretend it never happened. Unfortunately, life isn't like that. I so wish it was. I'm sorry for me and for you and even him, but it wasn't meant to be. We weren't ready for it, either of us. If you need a reason for me leaving, then yes, it is the reason, not because we lost it, but it has changed me, and I need to go and . . . I don't know yet . . . but I need to just go.

JOHN

(angry) The 'it' had a name. Christian. He was called Christian. (angry, hitting back). Yes, you're right. Maybe it was for the best he didn't survive, as you say, as his mother seems to be glad he didn't survive so she can go find herself. So inconvenient of him – or, should I say, us – to get in the way, and now it appears it provides the perfect excuse to get out of this sham of a relationship. Pardon us for being such an inconvenience.

HELEN

(controlled anger) You bastard . . . you self-centred bastard. Do you know what I went through? Do you know how I feel inside? I ache and twist every day of my life. (crying) It was my child. I carried our child! Nine months of being sick in and out of hospital. (composes herself and carries on) Look, I can't do this again, this continual bickering. It gets us nowhere. I can't be with you anymore, and I can't be around you anymore. It just makes it worse, and by the way, I know what his name was . . . is. I'll never forget it, so please don't make that guiltless child the focus for your inadequacies as a human being and a man.

Silence falls.

HELEN

Right. That's everything; I'm off. (pauses and look at John) I just wanted to quietly disappear, but obviously, that was not meant to be. I've left the keys on the table and some bits on the bed. If you find anything, just send it on to my parents. (goes towards the door)

JOHN

(grabs her) I'm sorry . . . I shouldn't have said what I said. I just don't know what else to say to make you stay. Please. I'm begging you. Whatever you need me to do, I'll change.

HELEN

But I don't want you to change . . . but you need to work out what you want, who you want to be, and be happy. That is never going to happen with us.

JOHN

Please . . . Please. (starts to sob)

HELEN

(kisses him on his forehead, kindly speaks) Hey, fella, pull it in. You'll be fine. We'll both be fine. (takes a final look at the room) Where did those three years go? (looks at John) Bye, John. (leaves, closes the door)

JOHN

(shouts after her) Please! Please . . . Please . . . (slides down the back of the door, crying)

Blackout

Music

Scene 3:

John's flat, three hours later. John is sitting on the chair with a can of beer in his hand, and there is a knock at the door. He rushes to the door and opens it. Alan is standing there.

JOHN

Helen! Oh, sorry. I thought you were—

ALAN

(jokingly) Sorry! That's me, always a disappointment, but you get what you get. (to himself) Well, hello, Alan. Nice to see you!

JOHN

Um . . . this is not a good time, Alan. Can I call down later maybe?

ALAN

Sure. Are you OK? I saw Helen go out earlier. I said hi, but she seemed upset and shot out of the door. Is everything between . . . (stops as John starts to break down, grabs him by the shoulders and brings him into the room). Hey, mate, what's going on? Look, sit down. (goes to a whiskey bottle on the table and pours a glass and knocks it back, pours another for John and gives it to him)

John swallows it and winces.

ALAN

Better?

JOHN

No. I hate whiskey.

ALAN

Well, they do say what doesn't kill you cures you . . . or something like that. I don't want to pry, mate, but, well, you seem . . . well, distraught, to say the least.

JOHN

Master of understatement. Alan, she's left me.

ALAN

Who, Helen? No, no. (pauses, sees John's face) Bugger. I'm sure it's not that bad. You know what women are like, the other species. I mean, I know how it goes. It's the same with Jan and me. I'm a prat, she makes me suffer for a bit, and then we start over. She'll be back, and you can make it right.

JOHN

Not this time. There is nothing to make right.

ALAN

You sure it's not just a tiff? Jan has them all the time. Some days, I don't know whether I'm coming or going. You and Helen always seem to be so happy. Jan says you never stop talking about her at work. She reckons you are the best unmarried married couple she knows.

JOHN

How wrong can she be? I don't know what I did wrong. I asked her to stay. I told her we could work it out, but then cold as you like, she just said she didn't love me anymore . . . and wanted out. (starts to break down again)

ALAN

(sits on the chair arm and puts his hand on his shoulder) I'm really sorry, mate. You're certain she isn't coming back?

John looks at him.

ALAN

Yes, sorry. You already said she's not coming back. Stop asking stupid questions, Alan.

JOHN

She made it very plain. I begged.

Alan gives him a stare.

JOHN

Yes, I know. What a price for dignity. But I don't know what I'll do without her. She is . . . was my life. I lived for her. Worked all the hours God sends for her to keep her at college. I thought that was what she wanted. I just wanted her to be happy. Oh shit. Oh shit.

(gets up and paces the room, gets himself another whiskey)

ALAN

I wish I could say something useful, but I'll be honest. I'm crap at times like this. Jan says I have the emotional range that stretches from A all the way to B. (looking at his watch quickly) Look, I am really sorry. Bad timing on my part, but I have to go. I'm due to meet Jan in half an hour. If I'm late, I'll be in the dog house big time. Will you be OK?

JOHN

Yes, fine. I'm not the suicidal type.

ALAN

Ah, shame. I've had my eye on this flat for ages, but you win some, you lose some.

JOHN

(laughs) Jan's right. You are an emotional moron.

ALAN

Oh, I'm wounded. Tell you what, fella. I have a free night tomorrow. Why don't you come down to mine? We can have a few cans and a takeaway and a video. What's your poison? Romance? Sorry, possibly not a good idea. Horror, sci-fi, or adventure?

JOHN

No, honestly, you don't have to do that, but thanks for taking pity.

ALAN

I'm sorry. I don't do pity. I asked because I would like you to come down. You can bring the whiskey too! Sorry. Look, I could do with the company. Jan is going to her mum's, and that is somewhere I'm happy to have any excuse not to go to. You will be doing me a favour. Seven thirty. No arguments. Now are you going to be OK? Promise?

JOHN

Promise. Thanks for the tea and sympathy.

ALAN

Hey, all in a day's work for Counsellor Alan. Take care, mate, and don't forget – seven thirty sharp. Don't want my gourmet fish and chip supper to go cold. (leaves)

John grabs another whiskey, carries it towards the bedroom, and switches off the room light. He is silhouetted in the door. Then he exits.

Blackout

Music

Scene 4:

Alan's flat. It is a similar room to John's, but upstage is a large window that looks out on to a car park. The bedsit flat has the bed in the corner, a dining table, a settee, a coffee table, and a TV, and the room is decorated in 1970s wallpaper. There is a door stage left to the outside hall. The scene opens with Alan vaguely tidying up and putting beers on the table, listening to a Genesis album and singing along. There is a knock on the door, and Alan turns down the music and opens the door to John. The time is 7:30 p.m.

ALAN

Well, hello to you. (looks at watch) On time as well. You are already in my good books. Come in.

John enters and stands vaguely in the middle of the room, surveying it, clutching a bottle of wine.

ALAN

Wine! Oh god. I didn't know you were a sophisticated man, and here is me with beer and chips. Damn, no caviar in either.

John looks distraught.

ALAN

I'm joking! Would you like me to put that in the fridge, sir, and bring it to a proper temperature? Oh, I see. It's a Riesling, a very good year. It will go excellent with the mushy peas, sir. I wish you could see your face. 'Stunned mullet' would be a good description. Just sit. Mi casa, su casa. See? I'm a sophisticated linguist. Bet you didn't know that. You open the beers, and I'll fetch the grub in. (leaves the room and goes into the kitchenette, stage right)

Alan is singing along in the kitchen. John sits on the settee but gets up immediately as he is tense. He goes and looks out of the window and starts banging on the window as Alan re-enters.

JOHN

Bastard! You bastard! Get off! (sees Alan and panics) Sorry, not you. It's the cat. It's sat on my car bonnet. It scratches, you know.

ALAN

(looks out of the window, where the cat has now gone, and then at John and signals him to the settee, to which John moves) Yes . . . Nurse, fetch the hypodermic. Patient hallucinating.

JOHN

No, I—

ALAN

It's a joke. Lighten up a bit. It's a fish-and-chip supper, not an interview. So how you doing today? If that is not an insensitive question . . . which I suppose it is.

They sit, and Alan grabs a beer.

ALAN

Oh, forgot the dinner. What am I like? (goes towards the kitchen and stops as John speaks)

JOHN

You know, it's not really sunk in yet, if you know what I mean. I keep getting a fit of the downers.

ALAN

Hey, you don't have to explain or justify anything to me. I've no idea what I would do if Jan abandoned me. So what do I know? (disappears into the kitchen and comes out with two plates of fish, chips, and peas). Fish, chips, and peas are the cure for all ills, or that's what my mother used to say, and she knew a thing or two about heartbreak. Dad left when I was one and ran off to the circus. Actually, that is what Mum said. He actually ran off with a lady from the launderette called Margery. Mum always said he was fussy about having clean clothes, so maybe it was a match made in heaven. Eat up before they go cold. Such wonderful cuisine needs to be quaffed at speed to get the full effect and that delightful bloated feeling.

JOHN

Please tell me you're not in marketing.

They laugh and eat.

JOHN

Thanks for this. I really appreciate it.

ALAN

Quite right too. (turns the TV on)

We hear the start of a film.

Fade to black

Music

Scene 5:

Alan's flat. The meal is finished and cleared away, and they have just finished watching the end of a film. The music and titles are playing. Alan turns off the TV. They are both sitting on the settee. They both look at each other.

JOHN

I'm still not sure why she killed him. I thought she loved him.

ALAN

I got lost after the opening credits, but I thought you were enjoying it, so I persevered. How wrong can a person be?

They laugh.

ALAN

Coffee or tea? (goes into the kitchen)

JOHN

Coffee is fine . . . but tea's fine or whatever you are having.

ALAN

(enters from the kitchen) Are you always this indecisive?

JOHN
Coffee, please.

ALAN
(from the kitchen) Milk?

JOHN
Erm . . . yes, please, although I can drink it without.

Alan sticks his head out of the kitchen and stares at John with a 'Really?' type of look.

JOHN
Milk. Lovely, thanks.

ALAN
(enters with the coffees) Do you mind me asking? Sorry. I'm compulsively nosy. How long were you and Helen together?

JOHN
Three years. We met at a party in this very flat with her former boyfriend. We were playing spin the bottle, and I lost. I lost all my clothes, that is. She always said she liked the fact she could see my ribs. Yes, I know what you're thinking. I've put a little on since that time. I'm not deluded quite yet. Anyway, to cut a long story short, she liked what she saw. We went out a few times and hit it off, and then she moved in with me. I've never been one to hang about. My mother used to say I was born in a hurry and have been in one ever since. She was looking to move out of halls anyway, and we thought it would save us both money. It was one of those bank account moments.

ALAN
Make note. Mother was an oracle. Son is an unconscionable skin flint.

JOHN
Do you want to hear this or not, smart-arse?

Alan does a silent zip on his mouth.

JOHN
Well, as I said, we didn't hang about. We just seemed to hit it off, so after a couple of weeks, we moved into my current flat together. She went to college, and I went to work. We were quite work-a-day about life. The former boyfriend did a moonlight flit, so he was out of the picture. We went to college dos, she went out with her friends, and life seemed to be fine. She enjoyed college and seemed to be content. I worked at the sports centre. Sorry, you know that bit, of course. We had a baby, and he died at three hours old, and that, as they say, is that.

ALAN
(shocked) You just dropped into the conversation that you had a baby. I'm sorry. I don't know what I am . . . How come you can make something like that so matter of fact? Feeling embarrassed that I don't know what to say about your baby.

John gives him a 'shut up' look, and Alan does.

JOHN
There is nothing to say or be embarrassed about. One minute, we were ecstatic. The next, we hated each other. Previous to the baby . . . By the way, his name was Christian.

Alan nods with a weak smile.

JOHN

We seemed to hum along OK – or so I thought. As time went by, she met my parents. They were fine. I think they were happy to see me with a girlfriend. After ten minutes, I could see the look of impending grandchildren in my mother's eyes. On the flip side, when I met Helen's parents, I realised I had re-entered the Spanish Inquisition. What can you say when parents think you defiled their good Catholic daughter who, in their eyes, is akin to the Virgin Mary? Her parents considered me to be on a par with the Antichrist – if not the Antichrist himself! The only saving grace that took me up a notch with the father, who saw me as Satan's son, was that I had been a choir boy in my teenage years. Think this moved me from hell to purgatory – just. Helen was a lapsed Catholic girl. She said she loved me, and I couldn't believe my luck. She was smart, cute, and fun. I immersed myself in her up to my neck. It was like swimming in tropical waters. It was like living in a Thomson holiday brochure, all sun and sea and . . . well, definitely sun and sea.

ALAN

(mock impressed) Very good. You ever thought of making a living writing funeral eulogies? Very concise, strange but concise. Certainly sounds . . .

JOHN

What? Idiotic?

ALAN

No, not at all, but that's a lot of, if I might say, 'need' to put on someone.

JOHN

(a little put out) Oh, you think I was desperate?

ALAN

I didn't say that, but, well . . .

JOHN

(resigned) No, you're right. I was desperate. I would have done anything for her. I just wanted her to know how much I loved her. She was no saint, and I wasn't blind to her occasional hikes. I knew she saw other men behind my back.

Alan stops the cup at his mouth, a little entranced.

JOHN

You look shocked.

ALAN

Oh god. You don't mean she played away . . . Sorry, that wasn't meant to come out like that. You must have had your reasons for allowing it. Well, I don't mean *allowing*. I mean . . . I don't know what I mean. She was sleeping around whilst with you? My life is so stunted.

JOHN

Yep. Sick, isn't it? First with the lodger who used to stay with us and then with her ex.

ALAN

Hey, look. This is not my business, and I don't think you're sick. Maybe misguided? Look, forget it. I shouldn't have put you on the spot. I didn't mean you to drag up your past. I'm sure it's painful. Honest. It's not necessary. How about more coffee?

He leaves the room, a bit embarrassed, and goes into the kitchen. John keeps talking. Alan comes back in and stands by the door and, during the following dialogue, moves back to the settee.

JOHN

Helen was very confident and very beautiful, and I couldn't imagine what she saw in me. The problems arose because she had a voracious appetite, and we are not talking about food. The first night we slept together, I was terrified. I had never had sex with anyone before. I mean, I had done all the preliminary groping stuff with other girls in my teenage years, but I'm from a family where there was no sex until you'd been vetted by the mother-in-law and they'd booked the church. I knew the sex technical details but knew nothing about how to put the plans into practice. I didn't know what being a man meant in terms of all that stuff. I mean, in the movies, the passionate lover takes her in his arms, they fall back onto the bed, and . . . they cut to music. Well, isn't that just helpful to a growing lad? I'd watched the odd porno movie, but that was no help. Plus, I couldn't stop laughing. Helen was very understanding and kind at first, but that made it worse. No wonder she left. Even the basic human instinct of sex seemed to be beyond my meagre abilities. You would have thought someone who could follow IKEA instructions could manage the simple practice of intercourse. Not so, it appears. Anyway, she held on in there, and we became very close and very passionate. Believe me, practice is great fun and so after a slow start I thought we were good. (looks at Alan, resigned and defeated) You're right. I was desperate.

ALAN

Wow. I'm not sure what to say. Your honesty is frankly a bit frightening. You need to think better of yourself.

JOHN

I still feel that if I had tried harder, she might have stayed. I was happy to ignore her other men as long as she stayed with me.

ALAN

Shit! (surprised)

JOHN

Hey, that's me. I'm an old pair of purple Y-fronts in a world of Calvin Kleins. I was in love – or thought I was.

ALAN

(laughs) Oh, shut up, you miserable sod, or I'll have me fish and chips back. Look, I *am* sorry about all this, but it happens, so you only have two options. One, get over it, or two . . . and remember, if you do choose option two, the suicide, you need to leave a reference for the landlord so I get your flat. (smiles) Look, me and you together, we will get you over this. You'll be back on the flesh markets of Sheffield before you know it. OK? Deal?

JOHN

Why is everything you say related to food or meat?

ALAN

I said deal?

JOHN

OK, deal.

They shake on it.

ALAN

Be warned. From this point on, any more than ten minutes moaning, and I'll subject you to my entire Genesis collection, and that's a promise.

JOHN
You old hippie.

ALAN
How dare you insult the godly Peter Gabriel! Wash your mouth out with soap.

They both laugh, and Alan yawns.

ALAN
Sorry. Look, mate, I am knackered. Would you be upset if I called it a night? I've to be up at seven for work. The bank waits for no man. This has been great. We'll do it again. Thanks.

JOHN
I'm really sorry. I've been going on for ages. I apologise. (bounces out of the settee, embarrassed)

ALAN
(walks over to John and grabs his arms gently) If you say sorry or apologise once more, I'll throw you out myself. I have enjoyed the night, your company, your friendship. So don't push it. Now politely bugger off to your bed.

JOHN
(moves to the door and opens it) Really, thanks a lot. (hugs Alan, who smiles)

ALAN
Now go!

The door shuts. Alan goes over and slumps in the chair, gently laughs, and drinks his coffee.

Fade to black

Music

Scene 6:

Alan's flat. Three weeks later, 8:00 p.m. John sits cross-legged on the settee, looking through tapes. Alan is in the kitchen, cooking.

JOHN
Are you grilling that meat or cremating it? It smells like burning in here.

ALAN
(from the kitchen) Back seat cooks should remain quiet. I never said I could cook. You, if you remember, forced me into this.

JOHN
The last three weeks have been nothing but takeaways. They are fattening and not good for you.

ALAN

Has anyone told you you are a boring old fart?

JOHN

Oy! Less of the old.

ALAN

(enters in an apron, embarrassed) Sorry, I didn't mean you were boring like with the Helen thing and all that.

JOHN

It's OK. I am, as you so subtly put it, over myself – well, for most of the time. I still dribble into my cocoa some nights.

ALAN

Too much. Stop. And if you remember, I wasn't that subtle. The statement was 'Stop being up your own arse'.

JOHN

Charming friend, you are. Where is this food?

ALAN

It's coming. Sit and open the wine. Note, not beer. You see? Your sophisticated tastes are rubbing off on me.

Alan brings the food in, and they sit at the table.

JOHN

Great . . . Thanks again, Alan. It's been brilliant these last three weeks. You've been a really good mate – no, friend.

They eat.

JOHN

How is Jan? She must be missing you. Hope she doesn't think I'm keeping you from her.

Alan stares at John, puts his knife and fork down with intent, and uncomfortably gets up and puts some music on.

JOHN

Peter Gabriel. I should have guessed.

ALAN

(a little coldly) It's my flat, my music. Listen and learn. The man is a prophet. (sits back at the table)

JOHN

Is Jan well? I have missed her the last few weeks. We have been on opposite shifts.

ALAN

(puts his knife and fork down again and changes mood, lengthily chewing his food) Hey, what's with the third degree? Just because you splurged your life out to me doesn't mean I have to do the same. OK? Just eat.

JOHN

(taken aback) Wow. Sorry, I wasn't being nosy. I . . .

ALAN

Hey, hey, no . . . Look. Sorry. I didn't mean to sound off at you. Reckon I'm just tired. It's been a long week. (smiles at John) Forgiven?

JOHN

Sure, no problem. That's OK. I forget you have a high-powered job, unlike me, whose highlight of the day is bleaching the bogs. Bet Jan tells you all the gossip from the centre.

ALAN

High-powered job! Bank cashier is not high-powered. Boring, yes, but needs must. The future and all that. And yes, Jan has mentioned you are king of the urinals.

JOHN

Sounds faintly kinky, but I know what she means. You two make a great couple, and she's really something.

ALAN

(distantly) Yes, really something.

JOHN

I'm going to tell her tomorrow that her fella is not a half-bad cook as well.

ALAN

Well, maybe not, eh? This is a lads' night. We have to have our secrets, we men, or where would we be? (seriously) Promise.

JOHN

(laughs a little nervously) Yes, fine, if that's what you want.

Silence falls.

ALAN

Who is for pudding? Plátanos y natillas. You didn't realise I was a man of culinary sophistication!

JOHN

What is it?

ALAN

Bananas and custard to you, pleb.

They both laugh. Alan leaves the room, and John leans back in the chair, drinking his beer with a comfortable sigh.

Fade to black

Music

Scene 7:

Alan's flat. Sunday afternoon. Jan enters through the front door. She goes over to Alan, grabs him around the waist, and kisses him.

JAN

So, lover boy, have you missed me? Because I've missed you.

Alan yawns.

JAN

You know, you have to stop working so hard. You are no good to woman nor beast. Tell them your woman has needs. Speaking of which . . . (pulls him over to the bed and starts to take his T-shirt off)

There is a knock on the door, and Alan pulls his shirt back on. Jan straightens herself up and goes to the door.

JAN

Oh. Hi, John. Come in. Alan, it's John.

Alan comes out of the bedroom in his boxers and T-vest.

JOHN

Oh! Erm . . . (embarrassed) Sorry. Is this an inconvenient time? I can come back.

JAN

Eh? Oh, no, John. We were not having sex. It's Sunday. Alan is a weekday man. Well, most weeks anyway. (laughs)

ALAN

Charming.

JOHN

Look, I'll come back later.

JAN

No, stay. I'm just off to work. I only popped in to see if lover boy here was still alive. He's a rubbish fiancé. Don't you just hate Sunday afternoon, John? Everyone full of Sunday dinner. It's like the death shift. Nobody in. Ah, well. I'm sure there is yet more scrubbing to be done, as our wonderful manager keeps on and on about. (sarcastically) A sports centre attendant is always at the ready, as we both know, do we not, John?

ALAN

Well, you do make such a wonderful scrubber, dear. (kisses her on the head)

JAN

Charming to you too. With that, John, I will leave you with this coarse creature. I've no idea how such a wonderful human being such as you puts up with this lout.

ALAN

(chases her to the door and kisses her) You know you love it when I talk dirty.

JAN

Hmmm. See you later, and have a good time. Don't do anything I wouldn't do.

ALAN

Hear that, John? We have free range to engage in an endless orgy of pleasure.

JAN

You really are not right. See you both. I'll see you later, Alan. Don't forget – we are going to Mum's for tea.

ALAN
How could I forget?

JAN
Less of that if you know what is good for you. See you at work next week, John. Have fun, boys.
(leaves)

JOHN
(jokingly moves to Alan and tweaks his cheek) Lovely tea with Mummy-yummy!

ALAN
I have been known to go off people, you know.

JOHN
Look, I'll let you get on. I can see you are busy.

ALAN
Doing what? I'll get beers.

JOHN
So delightfully put. How could I refuse?

John sits, and Alan comes back carrying two beers. He lies back on the settee next to John and sighs.

ALAN
Do you know sometimes I wish every day could be Sunday?

JOHN
Why?

ALAN
Because you could just spend every day with friends.

JOHN
You're just a softy at heart. Saint Alan of Sheffield, known across the world as the saviour of the downhearted and culinary disaster area. (pauses) And a bloody good mate.

ALAN
Just a mate? (sarcastically)

JOHN
Yes, the best.

ALAN
That means a lot to me. Thank you. Now! Beers. You start. I'll get changed (goes and is heard from the bedroom) I reckon the reason we get on is I'm mad and you're crazy (puts his head out of the door).

JOHN
Speak for yourself. I am not crazy. I'm . . .

Alan looks at John.

JOHN

Yep, crazy will do.

ALAN

It's strange, but you might not know this about me. I don't find it that easy to make friends normally. Oh god, I sound like you. We are morphing.

JOHN

Oi, you! I'm a new man, me. Suave , sophisticated, and—

ALAN

A bullshitter! No, it's true. I don't find most people easy. Can't think why with my winning personality. It is legendary, you know.

JOHN

Ever thought that your delusional problems get in the way of making friends?

ALAN

Unlike you, John, the women find me strangely attractive.

JOHN

Sure. You don't mean they find you strange, full stop.

ALAN

Jealousy is so unbecoming, John.

JOHN

You cheeky bastard (throws a cushion at the door). Mr. Popular, you are – and a lovely woman behind you. You have it all and more. You're just too daft to see it.

Alan comes in wearing jogging bottoms and a top.

JOHN

Looking cool, Mr. Franks. Going to a race?

ALAN

What? Oh. Ha ha. This is my relaxed Sunday afternoon. When you are in a suit all week, this is heaven.

JOHN

In my case, I spend all week in a tracksuit and look forward to normal clothes at the weekend.

ALAN

Heap it on! So my clothes are abnormal, are they? (picks up the cushion and starts to playfully beat John with it)

JOHN

Well, *compadre*, what shall we do this glorious . . . (looks out of the window) grey and rainy day?

ALAN

Want to watch a video? Or we could listen to music.

JOHN

Please, god, not Peter Gabriel.

ALAN

You really are cruising for a bruising. Why don't we sit here and drink? If I have to put up with Jan's mum and dad later, a liberal amount of alcohol will need to be consumed to dull the pain.

JOHN

You see, that's what I like about us. We are mad and bad brothers.

There is a silence. John gets up and walks to the window.

ALAN

Hey, you OK? Oh god, have I said something I shouldn't again?

John turns and has tears in his eyes.

ALAN

Hey, mate, what's the matter? Come on, sit down. I know it's been hard on you, but honest, it'll get better.

JOHN

Sorry. I just don't know what's going on in this mad head of mine.

ALAN

Try me.

JOHN

Can I tell you something I've been thinking about? And I don't want you to get the wrong idea.

ALAN

Sounds serious.

JOHN

Suppose it is. (pulls himself together). I've been thinking about me over the last few days, been trying hard to work something out. Helen kept saying that I needed to find my own shape and colour, and I never really knew what she was talking about, but I've had time to think. I think that . . .

ALAN

Yes?

JOHN

Well, I think that I might be . . . you know.

ALAN

No, still not getting there.

JOHN

OK. I'll just say it straight out.

ALAN

Please do. I'm ageing sitting here.

JOHN

(pauses) I might be gay. I'm sorry. I don't mean to shock you. Not that I mean you . . . You know us. I . . . Your lack of tact is rubbing off on me.

ALAN

I'll ignore that. You say 'might'. Not quite sure you can be a 'might'. I think you are or you are not. Well, you sure know how to throw the odd curveball, don't you? But if you are asking me, can I say I'm not truly shocked? I kind of felt you might be. Hey, it's not my business. But if it makes you happy, you be gay. Your time with Helen and your story did add up a bit. Do any of us really know who we are? Oh! Listen to me. I'm a philosopher. How about that.

JOHN

(laughs) I've just said the most difficult thing I've ever said to anyone, and all you can say is 'Felt you might be'. I don't know why I bother. I was trying to be heartfelt. This is my life we are talking about. I am . . . gay.

ALAN

Sorry. I tend to disappoint at the worst times. It's genetic I think. You tell me this now why?

JOHN

I just needed to say it. The cliché that I've always known doesn't really apply to me.

ALAN

You've lost me.

JOHN

Sorry. Before she left, Helen said I wasn't being the person I really am and I should follow my feelings. You know how they say people are repressed until they come out. Well, in my case, I wasn't repressed. I just didn't apply myself.

ALAN

(laughs gently) You are unique. So let me get this right. You've come out to me. I'm flattered. However, you've only just done this because you forgot to 'apply yourself'. Somebody will write a play about this.

JOHN

Don't take the piss.

ALAN

So are you or are you not gay? I have to clear this up before I go to bed tonight because I hate stories with no proper end. I'll fret.

JOHN

Well, I think that . . .

ALAN

Answer the bollocking question.

JOHN

(thinking) Suppose I am.

Silence falls.

JOHN
Now what?

ALAN
Now what what?

JOHN
Do you want me to leave? I'll understand if you do.

ALAN
You know, for a bright guy, you aren't half thick. No, I'll correct that. You are too wrapped up in yourself. Why would I want you to leave? We're friends. Nothing changes as far as I'm concerned. Can't speak for you, of course.

JOHN
So you're OK for us to stay mates?

ALAN
On one condition.

JOHN
(hesitant) Oh. What's that?

ALAN
No kitten heels. I can't abide them. (laughs)

JOHN
Piss off, cretin.

ALAN
Look. Seriously, thanks for trusting me enough to tell me something which wasn't easy. Hey, the worst part is over. You said it, and look. The ceiling hasn't come in, and the world is still spinning.

JOHN
Thanks.

ALAN
You're welcome. Fancy a cup of tea?

JOHN
That would be good.

ALAN
(goes into the kitchen and makes tea) You know, when I first met Jan, I told her she wasn't the first person I'd had a relationship with. She was fine with that.

JOHN
So who was the lucky girl who suffered your charms before Jan?

ALAN
(comes back in by the door and goes out again) Chris.

JOHN
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So what went wrong with you and Chris? Who finished the relationship?

ALAN

(comes in with tea) I think it was a mutual decision. We were not, as they say, compatible.

JOHN

Relationships are not easy. Don't I know it. What did she say when you decided to finish it?

ALAN

He said I was shit and hoped I went to hell. He was not one to mince his words.

JOHN

Sorry. You said 'he'. You meant Christine.

ALAN

No, John. You said that. I didn't. Chris was a man of the male gender. Assumption, as they say, is the mother of all fuck-ups. Touché.

JOHN

So you mean you're . . . but Jan . . . I—

ALAN

Spit it out, John, or drink your tea before it goes cold.

JOHN

Are you bisexual?

ALAN

No, I'm Alan. Pleased to meet you. Don't be a dimmock, John. Labelling things shows a closed mind.

JOHN

But does Jan know?

ALAN

Know what? That my relationship before her was a man? No. It's my business, my life.

JOHN

Shit! I can honestly say I've never had a Sunday afternoon like this in my life. There was me thinking I would make a life-changing statement, and you go and trump it. You are unbearable.

ALAN

I have some cake. Would you like some?

JOHN

What?

ALAN

Well, you have some tea, and I have some cake. Sunday afternoon with tea and cake. Come on. Catch up.

JOHN

This is definitely a day for the diary. I come out, and you top it.

ALAN

Well, it only goes to show you how exciting life is, and let's be honest. You're not a miserable shit anymore, so job done. So would you like some cake?

JOHN

Yes, please.

ALAN

What a well-brought-up young man you are.

They both settle back on the settee and drink their tea. John is dumbfounded.

Fade to black

Music

Scene 8:

Alan's flat a few days later. Alan and John are playing cards on the coffee table.

ALAN

Snap!

JOHN

Cheat.

ALAN

Why? When I win, am I a cheat? When you win, it's all hunky-dory.

JOHN

Hunky-dory? You can be quite quaint when you want.

They put the cards away. John gets up and stretches, and Alan goes to the kitchen with glasses.

JOHN

You know, since me spilling my guts the other day, I have to say I feel relaxed, like . . . well, like . . .

ALAN

(enters) You? Spilling one's guts? Hmmm, crude but descriptive in a loutish sort of way. So you think you might be the right colour and shape now? Have to say I still don't understand any of that shit. I didn't tell you about my ex to shock, you know. I just wanted you to understand that if you like yourself, you can be who you want when you want. Don't let other people decide your life for you or label you.

JOHN

Yes, I know I shouldn't let people decide things like that, but I was brought up to care about what other people think, right or wrong. Can't help it.

ALAN

Ah! You're just an old-fashioned boy at heart.

They sit on the settee.

JOHN

Piss taker!

ALAN

Hey, we all have our lives, our secrets, but life, as they say, is for living. You are who you are, and I am fantastic.

JOHN

Modest, you are not.

ALAN

(sits by John) Look, I'm going to say some things now, and I don't want you to go freaky. Promise.

JOHN

Me? Freaky?

ALAN

Yes, you. Turn your self-awareness volume up a bit. OK?

JOHN

OK.

ALAN

John, you said a while ago that you and me were like brothers, and that meant a lot to me. What would you say if I said I would like us to be more than brothers?

JOHN

I'm not with you. I've never had a friend like you. I can tell you anything, and I can be me around you, and I'm grateful.

ALAN

I don't want you to be grateful.

He moves across the settee to John and lightly kisses him on the lips. John backs away quickly, shocked and disorientated.

JOHN

What are you doing?

ALAN

Unless I'm mistaken, I'm kissing you.

JOHN

But why? Why did you do that?

ALAN

Because I wanted to. Because I can. Can I do it again?

JOHN

But why me?

ALAN

Erm, because you are the only other person in the room, and I've nothing better to do on a rainy afternoon. Why do you think I kissed you?

JOHN

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Can you stop saying that?

ALAN
What?

JOHN
The kissing bit.

ALAN
You are in the room. You're quite handsome in a kinda way. It seemed a good reason to kiss you.

JOHN
Well, that's not an excuse.

ALAN
It's not an excuse. It's a reason. For god's sake, John, just kiss me back. Otherwise, I'll feel a right prat.

JOHN
Alan, this is no laughing matter. I'm sorry. I don't know . . . I mean, you have Jan. Does she know you . . . do this?

ALAN
She isn't here. You are. And no, it's not a topic of conversation we have regularly, if that's what you mean.

JOHN
Well, yes, of course. I mean, no, we can't. (panics) Sorry, I have to go.

ALAN
OK, OK, calm down. That was stupid of me. I promise I won't molest you again if you sit down and calm down. I just thought that was what you wanted. Where's the harm? (moves towards John, who moves away) Oh, for fuck's sake, John. I'm not about to attack you. Is that who you think I am? (angry) Stop being so screwed up, you wimp—

John starts to look like he is going to cry. Alan tries to reach out to him, but John is on the way to the door.

ALAN
Oh god, no. Please, I didn't mean that. Don't listen to me. Just come back, please. I'll explain.

JOHN
I need to go. Sorry, this is . . . just . . . I have to go.

John opens the door and goes. Alan stands looking at the door and cries out in frustration.

ALAN
Argh! Why do I always screw things up? (sits on the settee, sighs, and puts his head in his hands)

Scene 9:

Alan's room. Two days later. Alan is sitting, listening to music, and reading a magazine with a drink. The door is slightly open. There is a noise, and Alan shouts.

ALAN

Door's open, Jan! It's on the latch. Thought you were coming later this afternoon.

He turns around, and John is standing in the doorway. There is an awkward silence.

ALAN

Hi. Sorry, I thought you were Jan . . . Good to see you though.

JOHN

Hi. Yes, I . . . erm, I wanted to . . .

A silence falls between them, slightly awkward.

ALAN

Look, let me first. I'm sorry. I know I've upset you. I am a thoughtless, crass shit. I shouldn't have done what I did. Well, not without asking first. It was bad manners.

JOHN

Alan, this wasn't a faux pas over dinner. You kissed me. I'd be lying to say it wasn't a shock.

ALAN

I know you've been avoiding me, and I know it's my fault.

JOHN

I needed time to think. I haven't been avoiding you, honest.

ALAN

Oh, come on. You have been avoiding me for the last two days. I knocked on your door, and I knew you were in because I saw your eye at the peephole.

JOHN

You've been stalking me.

ALAN

It's me, Alan, not Jack the sodding Ripper.

JOHN

Sorry, that was childish of me. I was just busy doing things, and I . . . Well, if you really want to know, I didn't know what to say to you.

ALAN

What things? You said you had things to do.

JOHN

Just things . . .

ALAN

Did your 'just things' include sneaking past my door this morning? Not very adult.

JOHN

You shouldn't spy on me. That is creepy.

