

SCENE ONE: INTERIOR: Warren's flat.

Audio: *a knock on the door followed by door opening*

WARREN: Jan! Hi! Great to see you. Thanks for coming 'round to help me out. Again!

JAN: Hi Warren, not a problem. Great to see you too. Though I haven't got long so, if we're going to practise getting you match-fit for this designer dating group you've joined, let's get into it shall we?

WARREN: Match-fit? That's one way of putting it I suppose!

JAN: Cats Tragic that you are I thought you'd appreciate the football analogy.

WARREN: Funny. Very. Drink? No? Okay, let's start the role play then. We're in a restaurant. You've arrived first. You seem more relaxed because of that. Go:

JAN: Hello. Nice to meet you. I'm Jan. So, you found the place all right?

WARREN: Well, I'm here.

JAN: Oh yes, of course, silly thing to say ... icebreaker comment really.

WARREN: Sorry. I'm Warren ... just a bit on-edge. A bit unsure about doing this.

JAN: Me too. Want to talk about it or just want to (*adopts an American Game Show Host's fake bonhomie*) "play the game and distract the brain" ?

WARREN: (*sighs gratefully*) The latter. Definitely the latter.

JAN: Okay. Let me start the conversational ball rolling. Do you ... prefer red wine or white?

WARREN: Depends on what I'm eating.

JAN: Fish?

WARREN: White.

JAN: Mmmm ... safe. Predictable. Steak?

WARREN: Then it would have to be red. (*a smile in his voice, he's clearly flirting*) A very safe, predictable ... red.

JAN: Surf and turf? (*pause*) Need more time? (*gentle, teasing tone*)

WARREN: Rosé ?

JAN: (*laughs*) Not bad!

WARREN: OK. Your turn under the grill: Lamb or *(laughs a little at his own joke)* Lambie ?

JAN: *(mock groan)* Lamb.

WARREN: Carrots or pumpkin ?

JAN: *(light, amused tone)* Mmm ... tricky. Both orange. One helps you see in the dark, one likes to be the scary night light ... Pumpkin ?

WARREN: Good choice. But this is the decider: Drum roll, please.

Audio: sounds of hands slapping a table top in an enthusiastic drumroll

WARREN: Ice cream or Gelati? *(laughs playfully)*

JAN: Both?

WARREN: Not allowed.

JAN: Frozen yoghurt.

WARREN: Clever. But no. You have to give an answer.

JAN: *(cooler)* I have given one.

WARREN: *(hasn't picked up on her change of mood)* But you have to answer in terms of the alternatives I gave.

JAN: Why ?

WARREN: Why ? *(incredulous)* OMG ... you sound like a child.

JAN: *(not so much sotto but voce)* Patronising.

WARREN: What ? No. Sorry. But ...

JAN: But ?

WARREN: I'm still not accepting your answer. *(seeking to explain)* It's not correct.

JAN: What do you mean it's not correct? It's MY answer.

WARREN: No no no ! We are playing in terms of the game. *(on a roll now)* When you play a game you have to follow the rules of the game. I gave you the choice of ice cream or gelati, therefore you have to choose either ice cream or gelati.

JAN: Is this an example of mansplaining or just you being a pain?

WARREN: *(insulted)* Oh nice ! God, you're so typical !

JAN: *(voice is dangerously sweet)* Typical ?

WARREN: Of so many women I know: can't stick to the point, can't follow the rules, can't do as you're told.

JAN: Do as I'm told?! What century are you living in? What country? This isn't Afghan ...

WARREN: *(cutting over her)* Don't say it! You shouldn't even think it! How could you compare me to ... No, don't accept it. You're just getting super-sensitive, all because I'm not letting you get away with it.

JAN: IT? What IT? IT might be being unreasonable to be so aggressive? My cue to leave I think. Good night.

WARREN: *(tone is cajoling, penitent.)* No! No! Hang on, Jan. Hang on a second. What did I say that was so very wrong? She wouldn't play the game! *(pause)* Don't look at me like that. *(a second pause as he continues to look at her)*

JAN: *(still frustrated)* You know you were in the wrong, Warren. It WAS all going fine until you became a jerk about *(heavily sarcastic)* "the game" and "the rules". What was all that about?

WARREN: Divorce stuff. Threw up my default ... tangential tunnel vision fueled by man rage. Look, let's forget that and move on. One more practice?

JAN: Sorry no. Got to go. I've got a date! Ciao.

SCENE TWO: INTERIOR: Jan on the phone to friend, Misha who's at their regular café

Audio: *background noise of a busy busy city café mid-morning. A mobile rings:*

JAN: Hi Misha, Jan here.

MISHA: Hi! How's it going?

JAN: Good.. You at Pertuccis?

MISHA: Yes, it's so busy this morning. I'm indulging in a second cappuccino to deal with the pressures of modern life ...

JAN: Or that's your excuse!

MISHA: You know me too well. Well? *(Sips coffee)* How did Warren go last night? Did he pass?

JAN: No! We didn't even get to ordering entrées. It's so frustrating, Mish. He's a nice guy but he's hard work just now.

MISHA: Ohhh! *(she laughs in faux sympathy)* Not good. But you had a drink at least?

JAN: *(mildly ironic)* We TALKED about drinks. Well, wine.

MISHA: Not a lot of progress there then.

JAN: No. AND I told him I had a date and had to rush off so couldn't do another dry run.

MISHA: What? No way. You go girl! How did he take it?

JAN: Stunned.

MISHA: Good! You know, I think you've done all you can: been a shoulder to cry on through the divorce, been a saint in trying to help him find (*adopts an American twang*) "lurve" again. He's a big boy, Jan. Cut him loose. Focus on you!

JAN: Easy to say. Warren's a friend. We go way back. We were young together. We went travelling you know? 1978: A.U.S. Flight to London via Bangkok, Bombay

MISHA: Mumbai.

JAN: Mumbai. And Moscow. Thirty or more hours with stops in those days. We were wrecked but London was so good, then we travelled by train to Italy: Venice, Florence and Rome each city more magical.

MISHA: Jan? (*hesitates*) You know it's you he likes. He always did.

JAN: (*astonished*) What? No. That was years ago! We were kids ...

MISHA: And YOU like HIM.

SCENE THREE: EXTERIOR On the back verandah of Charles Eastman's weatherboard home in the country.

Audio: *background noise of a radio playing; the cricket is on. In the foreground sounds of a kettle whistling, two mugs being set on a tray, milk poured in a jug, biscuits arranged on a plate.*

CHARLES: Not too cold on the verandah for you?

WARREN: Not at all. Here, let me help you with the tray. You're looking well, Charles. The move to the country was the right one, despite dad's warnings that you'd miss city life.

CHARLES: Ah, your dad and I were young guns together and the city was our playground, but now peace and quiet is just the ticket. I'm doing okay for eighty. No complaints. Good that you could stop by, it's been a while. Here you go, tea and Walkers shortbread. A little bit of Mary's Scottish heritage.

WARREN: I remember. You took her back there didn't you, on a tour?

CHARLES: (*eager and happy*) That I did. Started off in Edinburgh then Stirling and its castle with the huge statue of William Wallace. All those places we visited, they're probably just a list of place names on a map to most people, but she loved the country. Knew the history. Understood the people. Made it live for me.

WARREN: Remember Sunday lunches? Huge roasts with potatoes, pumpkin and cauliflower from the garden.

CHARLES: (*cutting in*) And a good Yorkshire pudding ... you've got to get the batter right, the oven hot and heat up the beef dripping before you pour Result? A crispy and light Yorkshire Heaven.

WARREN: And after lunch, we'd go for a long walk on the beach with the dogs, then come home and talk and talk.

CHARLES: We always loved to listen to YOUR stories, Lad. Mary kept all your letters when you were overseas. She wasn't sentimental and she didn't suffer fools but, if you were important to her she gave her love and strength. She was the capstone that kept life in place.

WARREN: I know. I'm sorry, Charlie.

CHARLES: Thank you, Son. (*pause*) But, what about you? Anyone in your life? What about Jan, that girl you used to go out with at the University? We were so fond of her, Mary and I, and she seemed to share your outlook on life. Do you still see her?

WARREN : Funny you should say that, Charlie

Audio: Piano music plays; youthful, hopeful

SCENE FOUR: INTERIOR at a recently opened Italian restaurant, mid-way between Warren and Jan's homes

Audio: Background noise of a restaurant, early evening. Maybe the low hubbub of other diners, movement of glass, cutlery and crockery. Soft music plays.

JAN: So, an invitation to dinner at a new Italian restaurant. This IS nice, Warren. Unexpected, I have to say but perhaps I shouldn't; you were always generous .

WARREN: I wanted to thank you for all you help, Jan. And your patience. You've been a great support to me, these past eighteen months especially, and I do appreciate it.

JAN (*gently*) No problem, Warren. (*pause*) Really.

WARREN: And after all our rehearsals, and the couple of disastrous dinner dates via "The Agency", I asked myself, who would I REALLY like to go out to dinner with.

JAN: ME! Well that's very flattering. And you know how I like Italian food.

WARREN: That's right. (*chuckles, then tone becomes serious*) Jan ...

JAN: (*cutting across Warren, as if to avoid what might come next*) Mmmm ... we'll Tagliatelle Marinara's always my old stand-by. I wonder if they have it (*peruses menu, then exclaims in triumph*) Yes! That's me sorted.

WARREN: No starter?

JAN: Umm ... Share one?

BOTH: Grilled prawns!

WARREN: For sure. And a bottle of Pinot? Great. *(pause as he reads the menu)* And I'll go the Veal Scallopini for main. Or should I say, "Scallopine di vitella"?

JAN: *(laughs)* Well, whatever you call it, cooked right, veal's delicious.

Audio: Creak of chairs as they both settle back comfortably.

WARREN: *(back to his serious tone)* Jan, before the waiter gets here, as I say, I've been thinking a lot about us and how great we are together and well, I'm hoping that this can be more than just a friendly 'thank you'.

JAN: Are you?

WARREN: Yes. *(pauses.)* I really like you, Jan. I always have, but when we went out back-in-the-day we were really young and had so much of life before us. I didn't want things to get too serious. When we got home after Europe, I wasn't looking for kids and marriage straight away.

JAN: Woa! Stop. You don't have to go all over this again Warren. What's past is past. Don't worry about it. Let's just enjoy the night. Two old friends who enjoy each other's company.

WARREN: But ...

JAN: *(cutting across him, not aggressively, just wanting to say it)* I was okay with us breaking up too, Warren. I didn't want my life to stop just because I had a relationship with someone.

WARREN: I know but ...

JAN: *(talking over him)* I had plans and dreams and ambitions like you. And I fulfilled them. I've not been sitting around waiting for you to complete me, Warren, you know? You didn't 'have me at hello' to quote Renée Zellweger. ... I don't think we really know each other anymore.

WARREN: But we do! We did once and we could again. Couldn't that be the adventure? To get to share this precious time of life without all the other stuff getting in the way?

JAN: Other stuff?

WARREN: Come on Jan. You know what I mean: climbing the corporate ladder, getting a toehold on the property ladder, marriage and kids ... *(trying to make light of it)* D.I.Y. and more ladders.

JAN: You're so blasé about it all.

WARREN: No no, I'm not Jan, or I don't mean to be. That was all important, of course it was. But it's the past; and it really has passed. What I'm talking about is the present and the future. I want a future with you (*pause as Jan remains silent.*) Could we see this as a real date? With us as a couple? (*longer pause as Jan remains silent*) What do you think?

JAN: You're serious.

WARREN: I am.

JAN: And we start from right now, from our next sip of wine? Taking it slowly? No pressure? No baggage?

WARREN: Yes. Do we have a chance together, Jan?

JAN: Yes. Yes Warren, I think maybe we do.

(Both laugh softly and happily)

Audio: *upbeat romantic music plays*

THE END