

THEN WHAT

A Play

By

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ONE

AN OFFICE OVER A GREEK RESTAURANT IN SOHO. A BATTERED SOFA. A DESK, A SWIVEL CHAIR. ON THE DESK, A COMPUTER, PRINTER AND PHONE. SOME SHELVES BUT VERY FEW BOOKS. SOMEWHERE ON THE SHELVES, A KITSCH CHUNK OF ABSTRACT PLASTIC MOUNTED ON A WOODEN BLOCK. A DOOR WHICH OPENS ONTO A LANDING. WHOEVER'S WORKING AT THE DESK HAS HIS BACK TO THE DOOR.

ALAN IS SITTING AT THE DESK. HE IS TALKING ON THE PHONE.

ALAN

Really? He said that?

(BEAT)

Did he? Great!

(BEAT)

That's great! I had a feeling, you know, that it was really beginning to work, but you never know until someone -

(BEAT)

Exactly. Absolutely.

FOOTSTEPS ON THE STAIRS.

ALAN

(URGENT)

He's coming, I can hear him. Okay, okay, talk to you later, bye.

ALAN HANGS UP AS BRIAN COMES IN. BRIAN GOES STRAIGHT TO THE PHONE. TALKING AS HE DIALS.

BRIAN

What was that about last night, then? We're in the Italian restaurant right, it's Mandy's birthday, everyone singing 'Happy Birthday dear Mandy', then the waiters bring on this huge cake, they wheel it on right, we cut to Henry's reaction - this cake is huge,

I didn't order a cake this big! -
but we know there's been a cock-up,
it's someone else's cake-

(INTO PHONE)

Hallo, Brian Tucker for Sue
please.

(TO ALAN)

- so then what happens? We cut to
a shot that -

(INTO PHONE)

Hi Sue, Alan was wondering, has
that BBC cheque come in?

ALAN REACTS IRRITABLY.

BRIAN

(INTO PHONE)

The repeat fee for 'Not on my Lawn
Sidney'. Could you look, doll?

(TO BRIAN)

So then what happens? We cut to a
shot that's supposed to be, I
don't know, what? The camera's on
the cake, and here we go, wobbling
over to Mandy's table, Point of
View the cake! That must be a
television first, life seen from
the Point of View of a fucking
cake.

ALAN

It's P.O.V. the male stripper in
the cake, obviously.

BRIAN

(INTO PHONE)

What? Okay, no sweat. Alan says,
could you chase them up?

(BEAT)

No, I don't know what he spends it
on either. Okay, 'bye.

BRIAN HANGS UP THE PHONE, SLUMPS ONTO THE SOFA. IT FITS
HIM LIKE A GLOVE.

BRIAN

P.O.V. the fucking cake!

ALAN

It got a big laugh. The studio
audience loved it.

BRIAN

Of course they did. The senile,
the incontinent. They'd laugh at a
dead dog. As we have frequently
demonstrated.

ALAN

I wish you wouldn't do that -

BRIAN

The phone was warm, who were you talking to?

ALAN

Emma, as it happens. I wish you wouldn't do that, by the way.

BRIAN

Do what?

ALAN

Ask Sue to chase up cheques -

BRIAN

She's our agent, it's her job -

ALAN

- and say it's on my behalf.

BRIAN

Don't tell me you're not interested in your share of £3000.

ALAN

That's not the point -

BRIAN

P.O.V. the fucking cake!

ALAN

It's no good moaning the day after the show's gone out. Come to the studio when we record the show, sit in the control room with me and the director -

BRIAN

With you and the director and Emma.

ALAN

- with me and the director, and then we'd have the benefit of your input.

BRIAN

Yeah, I'd like to give that director some input - input my fist in his smug chops.

ALAN

As it happens, Dominic is a very bright, very talented young director -

BRIAN

He's a wanker -

ALAN

- who is extremely receptive to intelligent suggestions -

BRIAN

He's a master of self-abuse.

ALAN

Well, I disagree.

BRIAN

I've seen his work. I'm familiar with his oeuvre. Particularly his ground-breaking camera angles from moving cakes.

ALAN

Look, Dominic is a -

BRIAN

I tell you what I don't understand. You go home, you see Emma. You get up, you see Emma. You have breakfast, you see Emma. You come here, and what's the first thing you do? You phone Emma. Tell me what occurs on the journey between here and Muswell Hill that makes this necessary.

ALAN

I got here at seven, it's now ...
(CHECKS WATCH)
... eleven-twenty. So you see, a considerable amount of time has elapsed since my breakfast sighting of Emma -

BRIAN

You've been here since seven?
You've done some work, then.
Faaantastic.

ALAN

It is Monday, we have until Friday to write an episode of 'My Darling on Probation', and you promised me, you promised me, Brian, that you would come in early today, so that we could make a start -

BRIAN

Come on, Monday will do, we've got the whole weekend.

ALAN

It's no good, Brian, they go into

the studio on the thirtieth!

BRIAN
(GROANS)
Shit.

ALAN
David phoned.

BRIAN
What did he say?

ALAN
He said we have to have the script
in by Friday or he'll get Bucksey
and Sixsmith in to do it.

BRIAN
Good, it's their crappy show, they
can fucking write it.

ALAN
Brian, can I just say that getting
sacked off a show like 'My
Darling' would not look good.

BRIAN
Alan, can I just say that 'My
Darling on Probation' is the
direst fucking sit-com on British
television, it's writing it that
doesn't look good.

ALAN
Alright, we won't do it.

BRIAN
Yeah, fuck 'em. Let Huckster and
Pissmith do it, it's their fucking
show.

ALAN
We'd better ring Sue.

BRIAN
Why?

ALAN
Tell her we're not doing another
episode of 'My Darling'. We'll
have to give the signature payment
back.

BRIAN
Jesus! They'll take our money and
give it to Bucksey and Sixsmith!

ALAN
Of course, if we haven't done any

work, we can hardly call it our money, can we?

BRIAN

I can, I've spent it! Come on Al, the writer's first commandment - never give the money back.

ALAN

Well, we'll have to write the script then.

BRIAN

(GROANS)

Oh jesus, I'm in hell.

ALAN

Make your mind up. It's okay with me either way.

(PICKS UP PHONE)

Shall I ring Sue?

BRIAN

Okay, okay, we'll write the script.

ALAN

Fine.

(HANGS UP PHONE)

BRIAN

After lunch.

ALAN

No lunch.

BRIAN

Come on, Alan -

ALAN

We'll get Costas to send up a sandwich.

BRIAN

Fuck, I've died and gone to hell. Fuckit.

ALAN

Let's make a start.

ALAN TURNS TO THE COMPUTER.

BRIAN

We can't start, we haven't got a story.

ALAN

David wants us to bring that vicar back.

BRIAN
What vicar?

ALAN
He was in a Bucksey and Sixsmith episode in series three. The trendy vicar. Pierced nipples, doesn't believe in God -

BRIAN
(GROANS)
Oh fucking hell -

ALAN
And his randy mother, the aging hippy -

BRIAN
Oh please -

ALAN
Anyway, we've got to work them in somehow -

BRIAN
(GROANS)
I'm in hell, I'm in hell.

ALAN
Stop moaning, let's think about this. Okay, the golden rule. When in doubt, go back to the basics. So let's think about the original premise of the show -

BRIAN
The what?

ALAN
Alright, Brian -

BRIAN
The what?

ALAN
We've got to do this, so you might as well stop whinging -

BRIAN'S ANGER HAS PROPELLED HIM TO HIS FEET.

BRIAN
The original premise? Oh yes, let's go back to that, shall we? Gorgeous cockney bird Mandy's poor old dad dies of a broken heart when his pie and mash shop burns down, so Mandy

takes up shop-lifting to support her poor old mum, gets nicked, ends up on probation, and guess what, her probation officer, hunky middle-class Henry, owner of a thousand naff pullovers, moves in, wait for it, next door!

ALAN
Alright, alright -

BRIAN
Cue twenty-eight episodes of unresolved sexual tension and (MIDDLE-CLASS)
'I say Mandy, where exactly did that CD player come from?'
(COCKNEY)
'Oh cor blimey Ennery, I didn't nick it not never I didn't, I bought it for your berrfday, honest!'

BRIAN REELS AROUND THE OFFICE MAKING RETCHING NOISES.

ALAN
Finished?

BRIAN
Premise? That is not a premise!
It's an abomination, it's a crime against mankind!

BRIAN COLLAPSES ON THE SOFA. ALAN FIDDLES WITH THE COMPUTER, UNMOVED.

ALAN
Yes, well, I agree with absolutely everything you say, unequivocally, now can we get on please.

BRIAN GROANS.

ALAN
Okay, how about this. James the trendy vicar, he's just moved into the parish right, so he goes round to Henry's to introduce himself and, and Mandy's there, she's, she's - it's Henry's birthday and she's preparing a surprise candle-lit dinner! Then what? Then the vicar thinks that Mandy's the probation officer! Brian? That could be funny, couldn't it?

BRIAN
No it couldn't.

ALAN
Come on, it's a start.

BRIAN
Oh fuck off.

ALAN
Alright, you think of something better.

BRIAN
I need solids. Get on the dog to Costas.

ALAN
You get on the dog, I'm trying to write this script.

BRIAN GROANS, HAULS HIMSELF OFF THE SOFA. GOES TO THE PHONE, DIALS.

ALAN
(WRITING)
Let's call it 'The God Squad'.

BRIAN
Oh fuck off -
(INTO PHONE)
Costas? Kalimera, my dear chap, it's Brian upstairs. We'd like a couple of your delicious sandwiches. Our usual, the old oven gloves stuffed with grass cuttings ... that's right, the pitta bread with Greek salad. And meat, any old meat, just cook it a lot. Thankyou so much.
(HANGS UP)
Come on, shift over.

ALAN
What?

BRIAN
Move over, I want to work the computer.

ALAN
Oh for God's sake Brian -

BRIAN
It's my computer too -

ALAN
There's nothing to write yet, we haven't got the story -

BRIAN

I can rewrite your poxy title for a start. Come on, we need a change, you be me, I'll be you.

ALAN GIVES UP, GETS OFF THE SWIVEL CHAIR. BRIAN SITS.

ALAN

Great, fine by me. I'll be the one who lies on the sofa and says 'Oh fuck off' to every suggestion.

BRIAN

Oh fuck off.

ALAN

You be the one at the computer who actually writes it. Great, I'm looking forward to this.

ALAN SLUMPS ON THE SOFA. BRIAN ATTACKS THE KEYBOARD.

BRIAN

Let's call it 'The Virgin Mirth' -

ALAN

(BRIAN'S VOICE)
Oh fuck off.

BRIAN

Fuck off, Al.

ALAN

(BRIAN'S VOICE)
I'm in hell!

BRIAN

Yeah, yeah.

ALAN

(BRIAN'S VOICE AND GROAN)
I've died and gone to hell!

BRIAN

Oh fuck off.

ALAN

(BRIAN'S VOICE)
I want my lunch! I want oral gratification now!

BRIAN

Shit, what the fuck's it done now?

REFERRING TO THE COMPUTER. IT HAS ALAN ON HIS FEET AND STANDING AT BRIAN'S SHOULDER IMMEDIATELY. BRIAN STABS AT THE KEYBOARD.

ALAN
What? What have you done?

BRIAN
It's okay, I'll sort it.

ALAN
You exited the document -

BRIAN
No, I just -

ALAN
Move the cursor down and -

BRIAN
Okayokay, stop looming -

ALAN
Jesus, let me do it -

BRIAN
I can do it!

BRIAN PUMMELS THE KEYBOARD.

BRIAN
There!

ALAN
No you prat, you retrieved the document into itself.

BRIAN
Don't start all that gobbledygook, just tell me what to do -

ALAN LEANS OVER AND TRIES TO GET AT THE KEYBOARD. BRIAN SHOVES HIM AWAY.

ALAN
Just press f5, will you?

BRIAN
Hey, it's all coming back to me.
'Save document?' 'No'
(PRESSES KEY)
Now I exit - wait a minute, what's this?

BRIAN PEERS AT THE VDU IN BEMUSEMENT. ALAN, PANICKY, TRIES ONCE MORE TO GET AT THE KEYBOARD. BRIAN PUSHES HIM AWAY, QUITE VIOLENTLY THIS TIME.

BRIAN
(READS FROM SCREEN)
'Exterior, Night, the Caprice Restaurant' - what the fuck is this? - 'Stanhope's Mercedes - '

Stanhope? ' - Stanhope's Mercedes
pulls up outside the restaurant - '

ALAN
Get away from that -

BRIAN HOLDS OFF ALAN, TAPS AWAY AT THE KEYBOARD WITH HIS
FREE HAND AS HE SCANS WHATEVER IS ON THE SCREEN.

BRIAN
'Exterior Bond Street ...
Interior, The Ritz - '

ALAN
I'm warning you, Brian -

ALAN MAKES ANOTHER ATTEMPT TO GET AT THE COMPUTER. BRIAN
SHOVES HIM AWAY.

BRIAN
(READS)
'Interior, Sotheby's' - Alan,
what the fuck is this?

ALAN
It's nothing, just something I've
been writing.

BRIAN
Something you've been writing?

ALAN IS STILL TRYING TO GET AT THE COMPUTER, BRIAN STILL
FENDING HIM OFF.

ALAN
Yes, Brian! In the mornings, while
I'm waiting for you to show up.
Now leave it!

BRIAN
(READS)
'Interior, Sotheby's, Day. Daisy
breaks away from Roberto's
embrace. "Not yet, Roberto, not
until the Picasso has been
authenticated. I'm meeting Argyle
- "' Argyle? - "' at the gallery
this afternoon"'.
'

ALAN
I'm serious, Brian -

BRIAN
Argyle?

ALAN
Please leave it alone -

BRIAN
Roberto?

ALAN
It's none of your business, Brian.

BRIAN
So what's it about?

ALAN
I don't want to talk about it.

BRIAN
Tell me what it's about.

ALAN
I said I don't want to talk about it.

BRIAN
Tell me the fucking story, Al.

ALAN
It's not that kind of script.

BRIAN
What do you mean?

ALAN
There isn't a story in the sense that you mean it.

BRIAN
What?

ALAN
It's a love story, alright?

BRIAN
A love story.

ALAN
Yes.

BRIAN
Story.

ALAN
Yes!

BRIAN
So what is it?

ALAN
Four people meet in London, they fall in love -

BRIAN
What, everybody falls in love with

everybody else?

ALAN

Yes - no - not exactly - please,
Brian -

ALAN MAKES ANOTHER ATTEMPT TO GET AT THE KEYBOARD. BRIAN
SHOVES HIM AWAY.

BRIAN

Tell me the story and I'll get
away from the computer.

ALAN

Okay, okay. Alright.

(RELUCTANTLY)

The central character is a Geordie
girl called Daisy, she's
beautiful, intelligent but
completely unsophisticated, and
out of the blue she inherits a
Picasso painting from her
grandfather who she never met -

(GETTING INTO IT NOW)

- there's an important back story
about the family rift which pays
off in the third act - a painting
which, if genuine, is worth a
fortune, so she comes to London -
for the first time Brian, on her
own! - where she knows nobody, to
have the painting authenticated
and then sold at auction and in
the course of this meets various
very different men -

BRIAN

Stanhope, Argyle and Roberto -

ALAN

- so it's about this unlikely
group of people -

BRIAN

Fabulous names, by the way.

ALAN

- how they meet, and how their
lives are irrevocably changed, by
love or the loss of love, by
money, by art, by... anyway,
that's it. The narrative, the
story, the arc of the story is the
charting of the emotions.

PAUSE.

ALAN

Of these various relationships.

And obviously, there's, you know,
a soupcon of sub-text. I hope.

PAUSE.

ALAN

The Picasso. Is it real? Are the
relationships real. Life and art.
And then there's London. The city
as a character. You know that's
one of my things.

LONG PAUSE.

BRIAN

Right, got it. It's crap.

ALAN

I knew you'd -

BRIAN

It sounds like absolute shit to
me.

ALAN

Get away from that computer -

BRIAN

It sounds like the biggest wank
I've ever heard. What do you know
about Picasso, or Sotheby's or
blokes called Roberto? All you
know is, all your horizons are,
are this office, Muswell Hill, and
the Groucho Club -

ALAN

Well, Sue liked it! In fact, she
liked it so much, she sent it to
Michael Hutton!

BRIAN

Sue? Sue our agent has read this?

ALAN

I wanted to know what she thought,
that's all.

BRIAN

She must have been surprised.

ALAN

How do you mean?

BRIAN

When you suddenly produced a
script out of nowhere. Ta dah!

ALAN

Well, you know.

BRIAN
It was a surprise, I take it.

ALAN
Well, in a way.

PAUSE.

BRIAN
She knew, didn't she? You told her you were writing it.

ALAN
I might have mentioned it -

BRIAN
You might have mentioned it. I see. How long did it take you to write it?

ALAN
Oh, I don't know. I started some time in March, I think. Five months?

BRIAN
She knew from the word go, didn't she? You two have been having little chats about it, little phone calls when I'm not in the office, little chats over the weekend - 'Oh Sue, I've done the big Sotheby's scene, I think it works rather well actually, Roberto knobs Belinda - '

ALAN
Daisy -

BRIAN
- knobs Daisy behind a Henry Moore, I think there's a real, how shall I say, soupcon, a soupcon of a je ne sais fucking quoi - '

ALAN
Alright, alright -

BRIAN
- but don't tell Brian, he'll throw a wobbler - '

ALAN
Look, I'm sorry you're upset but you must see that it's entirely separate from our collaborative work -

BRIAN

And this has been going on for
five months!

ALAN

Get away from that computer,
Brian. I mean it.

BRIAN

You treacherous bastard! My oldest
friend, plotting with my agent,
plotting behind my back -

ALAN

Don't be so melodramatic -

BRIAN

Treachery, fucking treachery,
writing scripts in secret for
Michael Hutton, you treacherous
bastard - !

BRIAN POUNDS THE KEYBOARD IN TIME WITH HIS EXPLETIVES.

ALAN

No! Brian, *jesus*, stop it!

ALAN GRABS THE KEYBOARD OFF THE DESK. BRIAN HANGS ON TO IT. A TUG-OF-WAR ENSUES WHICH ALAN FINALLY WINS. HE WHACKS BRIAN OVER THE HEAD WITH THE KEYBOARD. BRIAN GOES OVER WITH THE SWIVEL CHAIR. ALAN BECOMES ENTANGLED WITH THE CHAIR LEGS, THE COMPUTER LEADS AND SO ON, FALLS ON TOP OF BRIAN. BOTH CRYING OUT IN PAIN.

ALAN

My leg!

BRIAN

My head!

BRIAN

My god, blood! I'm bleeding!

ALAN

You maniac!

THE PHONE RINGS. THIS SHUTS THEM UP. THEY REGARD THE PHONE WITH APPREHENSION.

BRIAN

Go on then, answer it!

ALAN

I can't, you've broken my leg.

BRIAN

Oh God, I'm in hell!

BRIAN GETS TO HIS FEET. BLOOD IS STREAMING DOWN ONE SIDE OF HIS FACE. HE ANSWERS THE PHONE.

BRIAN
 (ANGRY)
 Yes?
 (BEAT)
 Oh hallo David.

ALAN INSTANTLY ALERT. FOLLOWS BRIAN'S SIDE OF THE FOLLOWING CONVERSATION WITH CLOSE ATTENTION.

BRIAN
 No, I'm alright, it's Alan, he's driving me round the twist. Prattling around when I want to get on with the script -

ALAN: IRRITATION.

BRIAN
 No, don't worry, we're -
 (BEAT)
 No, we're really motoring, we're on course to deliver Friday -
 (BEAT)
 The story? You want to hear the story? I thought Alan ran it by you -
 (BEAT)
 He didn't? Okay, I'll put him on, he's right here ...

BRIAN HOLDS OUT THE PHONE FOR ALAN WHO WAVES IT AWAY, HORRIFIED.

BRIAN
 (INTO PHONE)
 Would you believe it, he's just slipped out. Probably having lunch at the Caprice.

ALAN: MORE IRRITATION.

BRIAN
 You've never seen Alan at the Caprice? He practically lives there, David. So handy for Sotheby's, don't you know -
 (BEAT)
 Yes, a little dark horse, isn't he just, so cute but you never know what he's going to get up to next. Anyway, David, delightful talking to you as always - sorry? Oh, the story. Of course, yes, if you really want me to. This episode is about, it's about ...

ALAN GOES THROUGH VARIOUS MIMES - A DOG COLLAR, A HALO, PRAYING, PIERCED NIPPLES.

BRIAN

... James the trendy young vicar. He's going to, he's going to hold this ... big Harvest Festival service at St Ethelred's -

ALAN: WHAT?

BRIAN

No, David, they don't grow much wheat in Hackney, that's the whole point, right, it's an Inner City Harvest Festival, celebrating local businesses, sweat shops and exhaust fitters and, and crack dealers -

ALAN: ALARMED.

BRIAN

Joke, David. Anyway, James the groovy vicar and his mum Gladys the aging hippy turn up at Henry's to enlist his support for the Festival and guess what, they both fall head over heels in love with him!

ALAN: WAIT A -

BRIAN

Yeah, the vicar's gay, why not? They've got 'em in all the soaps now, why not us?

(BEAT)

No, no, nothing camp.

(BEAT)

That's right, a blokey sort of gay, exactly. Alan was a little worried, but I said David will let us run with this, properly handled it could kick the show into a whole new gear.

(WANKING GESTURE)

Okay, so Henry is now being pursued by James the gay vicar and his sex-starved mum. Mandy, of course, wants to impress James by getting some really good stuff for the Harvest Festival, so she borrows some VCR's off Spike the market trader, right, but guess what, it's all stolen gear, and who's been tipped off? Our old friend Detective Sergeant Bullock,

that's who! He's finally going to nick Mandy, but good old Henry finds out from one of his snivelling probationers, and warns Mandy, but it's too late, she's already put it on display in the church! So Mandy and Henry have to break into the church to retrieve the gear, then you've got this great scene in the church at night, with Mandy trying to grope Henry in the sacristy, but the vicar hears someone in the church, so he phones - Sergeant Bullock! Exactly! Anyway, Henry and Mandy get the VCR'S away in the nick of time, but then David, then, guess what - Gladys the vicar's mum and Bullock! Love at first sight David, in the worst possible way! So we finish with the Inner City Harvest Festival Service, all our characters are there, Bullock in seventh heaven cos he's getting his rocks off with Gladys, Mandy's saved from the nick once again by gorgeous Henry, who's getting sultry looks from James the vicar up in the pulpit - what?

ALAN: WHAT? APPREHENSIVE.

BRIAN

No, no, no -

(BEAT)

Yes, I see that ... of course not, David ... yes, I understand. Okay ... cheers.

BRIAN HANGS UP. MAKES AN ATTEMPT TO CLEAN UP THE BLOOD ON HIS FACE.

ALAN

Well? What did he say? He hates it, we're off the show. Brian?

BRIAN

He likes it.

ALAN

Really? He thought it was alright?

BRIAN

He loves it, the arsehole.

ALAN

Where are you going?

BRIAN IS PUTTING HIS COAT ON.

BRIAN

I'm going to have my head seen to,
you maniac, then I'm going out to
lunch.

ALAN

You can't, we've got the script to
write!

BRIAN

You write it. Jesus, I've given
you a story haven't I? Just word
it in. Anyway, it's right up your
street, isn't it? Everybody falls
in love with everybody else,
right? Chart the emotions on that,
you cunt!

BRIAN EXITS, SLAMMING THE DOOR.

ALAN

Brian!

BLACKOUT

TWO

THE SAME, FOUR DAYS LATER, MIDDAY. ALAN IS AT THE COMPUTER, TYPING FAST. FOOTSTEPS ON THE STAIRS, AND BRIAN ENTERS.

ALAN
Hi.

BRIAN
Hi.

BRIAN AMBLES ABOUT LISTLESSLY, THEN SITS ON THE SOFA.

ALAN
(AS HE WORKS)
That 'Not on my Lawn' cheque came in.

BRIAN
Right.

ALAN
(LOOKING UP BRIEFLY)
You alright? Your head.
(GESTURES)

BRIAN
Yeah yeah. You?

ALAN
Fine.

ALAN WORKS, BRIAN SITS.

ALAN
And yes thanks, I've had a great week, sitting here working.

BRIAN
How's it going?

ALAN
I've finished, as it happens. Just
doing some cutting.

BRIAN GRUNTS.

ALAN
The night scene in the church
worked out well, I think, with
Mandy and Henry hiding behind the
altar. There's a bit of business
with the P.A. You know, they
accidently switch it on. Henry's
cursing Mandy - 'You and your
schemes, you have ruined my life,
damn you to hell'. Sergeant
Bullock thinks it's the voice of
God.

BRIAN
Hilarious.

ALAN
Bri, I think we ought to talk.

BRIAN
Not that, please, anything but
that.

ALAN
The fact of the matter is -

BRIAN
'I think we ought to talk'. Do me
a favour Bri, I am feeling very,
very fragile today.

ALAN
Yes, well, that just about sums it
up, doesn't it? We never sort
anything out because there's never
a good time to talk. You're
hungover or you're depressed or
you've got some terminal disease
or other -

BRIAN
Talking's the curse of our times,
Al. Everyone's at it, counsellors,
therapists, all those sad bastards
on daytime TV. I'm going to start
a new kind of counselling -
counsel people how to shut the

fuck up.

ALAN

Well, I'm not going to shut up,
because there are a couple of
things I want to say -

BRIAN

Look, we're already talking. Look
at my jaw, look, going up and
down, air coming out, noises

coming out ooooooooooahooo, we're
talking, Al, isn't it great? And
you know what, I feel so much
better for it!

ALAN DOESN'T RESPOND.

BRIAN

Okay, you want to talk about your
fucking script. Okay, fine. Here's
what I think. I think you've been
a complete asshole, going behind
my back, conniving with our agent,
tip-tapping away on your ownio,
but I forgive you, I hereby let
you off, okay?

ALAN

Really? You don't mind about the
script?

BRIAN

I minded, alright. For a
nanosecond, I minded just the
teeniest bit, but now I think we
can draw a line under the whole
sorry affair.

ALAN

Okay, but -

BRIAN

What I mean is, let's not talk
about it anymore. Let's just
pretend it didn't happen.

ALAN

I can't pretend it didn't happen,
I've written the script -

BRIAN

- yes, well done, you wrote a
script all on your own, great
stuff, you've let off steam,
better out than in as my dear old
mum used to say, so now you can
stick it in your bottom drawer and

forget about it, okay Al? And if you want to get it out now and then and hold it and look at it and savour the odd frisson, fine, just make sure I'm not around, because I don't want to see it, hear about, think about it, or discuss it ONE SECOND LONGER!

ALAN

I see.

BRIAN

That's the deal, Al. Then we can get back to normal.

ALAN

Maybe I don't want to get back to normal.

BRIAN

Well, that's where we are now, sweetie, like it or not.

ALAN

Not necessarily. The thing is, Brian, we can't overlook the possibility that this script is going to change things.

LONG PAUSE.

BRIAN

Oh no. Oh God. Oh Alan. You poor bastard. You sad, sad man.

ALAN

What?

BRIAN

Jesus, this is awful.

ALAN

What?

BRIAN

You think it's actually going to be made, don't you?

ALAN

The fact of the matter is -

BRIAN

You think your script is going to be made! Jesus!

ALAN

The fact of the matter is -

BRIAN

Alan, nobody's going to read it, never mind make it! Michael Hutton? Don't make me laugh! We once had a script on his desk for a year -

ALAN

A year and two months -

BRIAN

- and he never read it! Why should he? He doesn't make single plays anymore! Nobody does! There are no one-off plays on TV anymore, Alan, or hadn't you noticed?

ALAN

It's not for TV.

BRIAN

What? I didn't catch that. What?

ALAN

It's not for TV. It's a screenplay for a feature film. A theatrical release feature film.

BRIAN

A feature film. Well, why didn't you say so in the first place. That's different.

ALAN

And not only has Michael read it, he likes it very much. He's also read the second draft, which he likes even more. I am now waiting to hear his notes on the third draft.

LONG PAUSE.

BRIAN

The third draft? You have been a busy little beaver, haven't you?

ALAN

The thing is, what I wanted to tell you is, Michael was having dinner with Bertolucci a couple of months ago -

BRIAN

Bertolucci? Bertolucci?

ALAN

Michael's girlfriend worked on the Sheltering Sky or something. Anyway, John Malkovitch was there-

BRIAN

John Malkovitch? Bertolucci and John Malkovitch?

ALAN

Bertolucci's making a film in Berlin with Malkovitch and when

that's finished, Malkovitch wants to spend some time in London, and he was saying how he would like to make a movie in London and Michael said, well, I've got this terrific script.

PAUSE.

ALAN

So Michael gave Malkovitch my script. And he loves it. He wants to do it, Brian! He thinks Stanhope's perfect for him!

PAUSE.

ALAN

Stanhope's American.

GREG

Oh well, he's perfect then, isn't he?

ALAN

Michael's got some Channel Four money, and some German money, and he's got to find a bit more, but with Malkovitch on board ...

BRIAN

John Malkovitch wants to do your script?

ALAN

Okay, I know, these things go wrong all the time, but whatever happens, I don't really care actually, because it's like I've been in prison for the last five years, and suddenly I can see a chink of light -

BRIAN

Five years in prison, thanks a lot.

ALAN

What have we done in the last five years, Brian? First there was 'X Squad', then there was 'Sierra One' and 'Blagger', and having done the cop shows, suddenly - and to this day I do not know how it happened - suddenly we're writing sitcoms! 'Keep Left' and 'Not On My Lawn Sidney'! and finally, our crowning achievement, 'My Darling on Probation'.

BRIAN

Five years in prison.

ALAN

You know what I mean!

BRIAN

That's very nice.

ALAN

Brian, 'My Darling on Probation' is not what I had in mind when I set out to be a writer!

BRIAN

May I remind you, ever so politely, what we were doing five years ago? Five years ago, we were sitting here trying to write a script for Michael Hutton when he was still at the BBC. Not only did he never get round to reading it, he never got round to telling us he was leaving the BBC -

ALAN

Can I just say something about Michael -

BRIAN

May I also remind you what we had achieved prior to this humiliation?

ALAN

Can I just say that Michael Hutton is actually -

BRIAN

A play upstairs at the Drum and Monkey, a shared credit on one episode of 'Casualty' and a drawerful of scripts that came back like homing pigeons -

ALAN

You don't understand, Brian -

BRIAN

May I remind you of the morning I walked in here and told you about how I'd met this producer called David at a party and he wondered if we'd be interested in writing an episode of 'X Squad'? Do you recall, because I certainly do, how you blushed with excitement? 'Really?' you squeaked. 'Really?'

ALAN

Oh God.

BRIAN

Remember?

ALAN

You just don't get it.

BRIAN

Picture, if you will, the scene as we wrote that script, me here, reclining, you there, fingers dancing merrily over the keyboard, and you turning to me every ten minutes or so, eager little face alight, saying 'Do you think he'll ask us to do another? Will he? Will he?' And he did! And weren't you pleased!

ALAN

Of course I was.

BRIAN

Of course you were! Because then what? Then there was the nearly new BMW, and then there was the bijou flat in Muswell Hill with the fitted kitchen and the leather sofa, and then there was the wife to go in the flat, wasn't there?

ALAN

Don't drag Emma into it, Brian.

BRIAN

It was on 'Keep Left' you met Emma, wasn't it? What was she playing? 'Upset girl in laundrette' wasn't it? And what a marvellous performance she gave, as I recall. Best Supporting Actress in a Laundrette Scene, eh? Good thing we did that show, eh?

Else you wouldn't have met the missus.

ALAN

I said, don't drag Emma into it, Brian.

BRIAN

I didn't. You did!

LONG PAUSE.

BRIAN

So. A flat, a car and a wife. Not a bad return for five years in prison.

PAUSE.

BRIAN

A flat which I have been invited to once in three years.

ALAN

Here we go.

BRIAN

Yes, here we go, Alan! Because this is the problem, isn't it?

ALAN

I'm warning you, Brian -

BRIAN

She resents me, she resents the fact that you and me go back way before she ever showed up!

ALAN

You've got Emma completely wrong.

BRIAN

No I haven't.

ALAN

Emma is actually very fond of you.

BRIAN

Bullshit!

ALAN

You don't know what Emma's really like -

BRIAN

Hardly surprising -

ALAN

She's actually a very bright, very affectionate woman -

BRIAN
- since I've only clapped eyes on her once in the last three years!

ALAN
And that didn't go very well, did it?

BRIAN
It wasn't meant to, was it?

ALAN
What do you mean?

BRIAN
You know what I mean.

ALAN
You were pissed.

BRIAN
So what?

ALAN
The fact of the matter is -

BRIAN
The fact of the matter is, I could've turned up stone cold sober with Mother Theresa on my arm and the evening would still have been a disaster because that's what Emma wanted.

ALAN SHAKES HIS HEAD SADLY.

ALAN
That is just ... that is so ...

BRIAN
What? What?

ALAN
Paranoid, Brian.

BRIAN
Look at you. Little pouty face all screwed up with concern. 'Oh poor Brian, he's really in a bad way, I think he needs help'. Bullshit!

ALAN SWITCHES OFF THE COMPUTER. MAKES GREAT PLAY OF PACKING UP FOR THE DAY.

ALAN

I don't want to work with you any more, Brian.

(BEAT)

That's what I wanted to talk about.

(BEAT)

I think it's time we went our separate ways. I thought we might be able to do this sensibly, over a period of time, maybe even do a couple more scripts together, but I can see that would be impossible.

BRIAN

Oh you smug bastard. Millions of people watch the shows we work on. Millions!

ALAN

Right. Millions watch so the shows must be good. Of course.

BRIAN

And you despise them, you piss on them because you're a writer, you're an artist, you're going to tell them what shit their lives are! Is the Picasso fake or real? Oh my God, it doesn't matter because life is shit, we're all doomed! Hey Al, I've got news for you! They already know that! They don't need you to tell them, Mr Smug Git with a Fitted Kitchen, they know they're doomed, that's why they watch our shows!

ALAN

Thankyou for that spirited defense of mediocrity, Brian. So good to hear it trotted out again.

BRIAN

My pleasure. Now you can fuck off.

ALAN IS ON HIS FEET, PUTTING HIS COAT ON.

ALAN

I'm going to be working at home from now on. Keep the office on if you want. I'll pay my share of the rent up to the end of the month.

BRIAN

Fine. Great.

ALAN

I'll come for the rest of my

things during the week.

BRIAN
You'd better make sure I'm not
around.

ALAN
Oh don't worry, I'll come before
lunch.

ALAN MOVES TO THE DOOR.

BRIAN
Wait.

BRIAN TAKES DOWN THE MOUNTED CHUNK OF PLASTIC FROM THE
SHELF. STANDS BETWEEN ALAN AND THE DOOR.

BRIAN
Take the award.

ALAN
Brian -

BRIAN
'Best Episode of a Returning Crime
Series'. Remember the night we won
this?

ALAN
Of course I do.

BRIAN
As soon as we got backstage after
the presentation, you grabbed it
out of my hands, you practically
ripped my fingers off, you
clutched it all through the party
at the Groucho -

ALAN
Yes! Because I wrote that episode!
You were on the sofa, pissed!
Whatever it said on the credits,
that was my script, Brian! I won
the award! Not us, ME!

BRIAN
You'd better take it home then.
Take it home to Emma.

ALAN
I said I'll come back for my stuff
later.

BRIAN
Alan, I swear to God, if you don't
take this with you now, I'm going

to bury it in your skull.

BRIAN WIELDS THE AWARD IN A THREATENING MANNER. LONG PAUSE. THEN ALAN HOLDS OUT HIS HAND. BRIAN GIVES HIM THE AWARD, STANDS TO ONE SIDE AND OPENS THE DOOR.

ALAN

The thing you don't get is ...

BRIAN

What don't I get, Alan? Tell me, then fuck off out of here.

ALAN

It's not just the work, it's not just writing crappy scripts for crappy shows, it's you. And even then, it's not what you think. It's not the drinking and the hangovers, it's not the bitchiness or the complaining, it's not even the fact you hardly do any work anymore ...

BRIAN

What is it then?

PAUSE.

ALAN

That night you came to the flat. After you'd gone, Emma and I were sitting there. You know, recovering. And I started to defend you, make excuses for you, and Emma said 'It's alright, I like Brian. I can see he's a good person. He's just very jealous of you'. And I thought she meant because of my relationship with her, but she said 'No, Alan, it's nothing to do with us. Brian is jealous of your talent. Brian is jealous because you are the better writer, and he's never, ever going to forgive you for it'.

BEAT. ALAN HANDS THE AWARD BACK TO BRIAN AND EXITS.

BLACKOUT

THREE

THAT NIGHT. BLACKOUT. HEAVY FOOTSTEPS ON THE STAIRS. A STUMBLE FOLLOWED BY SWEARING. THE DOOR OPENS AND THE LIGHT IS SWITCHED ON. IT'S BRIAN. THE ROOM AS AT THE END OF THE PREVIOUS SCENE. BRIAN STANDS UNSTEADILY CENTRE, FUMBLES IN HIS POCKET, PRODUCES A SCRAP OF PAPER. GOES TO THE DESK, SITS.

BRIAN

Right. Let's get this show on the road.

BRIAN PEERS AGAIN AT THE SCRAP OF PAPER, DIALS A LONG NUMBER. THEN LEANS BACK PERILOUSLY ON THE CHAIR, PUTS HIS FEET UP ON THE DESK.

BRIAN

(INTO PHONE)

Hallo? I would like, if I may, to speak to Dawn Gretski, please.

(BEAT)

My name is Alan Huxtable and I'm calling from London, England.

(BEAT)

It's concerning John Malkovitch. Dawn Gretski is John Malkovitch's agent, is she not?

(BEAT)

She's in a meeting, I see. Well, it is rather important ...

(BEAT)

When I say 'rather', that's good old British understatement. You johnnies probably don't hear much of that ...

(BEAT)

Her assistant? Well, I suppose that will suffice pro tem ...

A PAUSE. BRIAN LEANS BACK DANGEROUSLY IN THE CHAIR.

BRIAN

(INTO PHONE)

Hallo? To whom am I speaking, please? Cindy. I see. Cindy my dear, it's Alan Huxtable, the English writer here. Calling from London, England. Huxtable. John Malkovitch is currently considering a script of mine, called ...

(CONSULTS PAPER)

... 'Pablo and Daisy'.

(BEAT)

Oh you're familiar with it.

(BEAT)

You love it. I see. Jesus, there's no accounting for taste.

(BEAT)

I said you're obviously a woman of taste, and I'm glad you're so excited about the script, but I'm afraid I'm going to have to chuck some cold water on things at this point.

(BEAT)

I mean I'm having second thoughts about your client. I just don't think he's right for Stanhope. Firstly, I think he's too old. Secondly, his last film, whatsitcalled, well frankly darling, he was looking a tad porky. So, fat and old, not exactly a win double is it? But the real problem I have is - how can I put this diplomatically? - the real problem, Cindy my love, is I think he's crap -

AND BRIAN FINALLY LEANS BACK TOO FAR AND FALLS OFF THE CHAIR. STILL CLINGING TO THE PHONE.

BRIAN

What? Am I drunk? Of course I'm drunk! I'm an English writer and it's two o'clock in the morning, of course I'm fucking drunk! Writers still know how to behave over here, you know!

BRIAN HANGS UP ANGRILY, HAULS HIMSELF UPRIGHT.

BRIAN

Fucking Yanks ...

BRIAN DIALS, WAITS.

BRIAN

(ALAN'S VOICE, FACETIOUSLY)

'Alan and Emma can't come to the phone at the moment, but please don't hang up' Nyah nyah nyah ...
Hallo, it's Brian at ... two-oh-five a.m., so I expect you're both curled up under the duvet. The duvet is speculation on my part, by the way. Having never clapped eyes on your inner sanctum. My one and only dinner invitation did not include a guided tour of the bedroom. So I must depend on my imagination. What, then? A duvet, neatly folded jim-jams for two, a stripped pine chest of drawers. A framed black and white photograph of ... Muswell Hill on V.E. Day ... no, something by David Hockney. The poster for an opera neither of you went to. By the way, Emma, I don't believe I ever thanked you for the absolutely delicious dinner you produced that night. Absolutely first rate. And I'm very sorry about the incident with the ... what was it? A dip. A greenish dip. Aubergine-based. Guacamole, perhaps. Yes, guacamole. I have a problem with authority, you see. And a problem with food. Combine the two, and, well. Authority in a food context, and I tend to see red. I blame my mother. 'Eat it all up!' 'Don't play with your food!' You see? The red mist descends. You might bear this in mind should you become a mother yourself.

(BEAT)

As I'm sure you will. In the fullness of time.

(BEAT)

Under the duvet.

(BEAT)

Anyway, my apologies. So. Moving on. Alan. You realise we must discuss the forwarding of your mail and so on. The new arrangement with Sue. Money, and all that. The script meeting with David next week. Surely we can sort this out face to face. Over lunch. You realise we're commissioned to write another episode of 'My Darling'. I take it you're happy to leave this to me. To write on my own.

LONG PAUSE.

BRIAN

I can't. I can't do it, Al. You know I can't. I can't sit here on my own, I'm not that kind of writer. Hour after hour, day after day, sat here on my own. Jesus! I'm not a writer Al, you know that. I'll clean up my act. The booze, everything. You can write your film. We could work part-time. Three days a week. What about that idea we had, the talking police dog. Remember? It was fucking funny, Al! We were on the floor, we were pissing ourselves! Let's write a pilot. Take it to David. Please, Al. Okay? I'll talk to you in the morning. Please, Al. Okay? Only I'm a bit, you know ... Okay, 'bye. Night. See you. 'Bye.

BRIAN HANGS UP.

BRIAN

Then what?

BLACKOUT

FOUR

THE SAME, SIX MONTHS LATER. BRIAN IS SITTING AT THE COMPUTER, TYPING FAST. NEW SUIT, NEW SOFA.

THE DOOR OPENS QUIETLY. BRIAN DOESN'T HEAR. ALAN STANDS ON THE THRESHOLD. WATCHING BRIAN WORK. FINALLY:

ALAN

Hi.

BRIAN TURNS. A LONG PAUSE AS HE LOOKS AT ALAN.

BRIAN

Hi.

ALAN

Okay if I come in?

BRIAN

Sure.

ALAN

If you're busy, just say the word and I'll -

BRIAN

No, come in, I was just finishing.

ALAN

New sofa.

BRIAN

I threw up on the old one. It had to go. So. I've turned over a new sofa.

ALAN CIRCLES THE OFFICE, DISTRACTED, TWITCHY. BRIAN SWIVELS IN HIS CHAIR, TRACKING HIM.

BRIAN

Actually, you'll be amazed to hear that I haven't had a drink in six months -

ALAN
(EYEING THE COMPUTER)
'My Darling on Probation'?

BRIAN
Yes, series seven, would you believe.

ALAN CIRCLES.

BRIAN
Guess what. The end of this series, Mandy and Henry get married.

ALAN
Right, right.

BRIAN
Big splash. We should get the cover of the T.V. Times.

ALAN
Great, great.

BRIAN
(INDICATES COMPUTER)
Mind you, they're not talking at the moment.

ALAN
Uh-uh, uh-uh.

BRIAN
Henry's called it off because Mandy pawned the engagement ring so she can have her tattoo removed-

ALAN
You heard what happened to 'Daisy and Pablo'?

BRIAN
What?

ALAN
My film.

BRIAN
I heard you ... weren't on it anymore.

ALAN DOESN'T ANSWER IMMEDIATELY. DURING THE FOLLOWING, HE SITS, STANDS, PACES, SITS AGAIN AND SO ON.

ALAN

It was unbelievable, Bri.

BRIAN

Nightmare, right?

ALAN

Total, total nightmare! You know why?

BRIAN

It was the fucking director.

ALAN

It was the fucking director! Everything was going so well, Malkovitch loved the script, we had money from Channel Four, we had money from Germany, then Michael comes up with Sid Morris -

BRIAN

Who?

ALAN

Exactly! Who? Some kid off the soaps with a stainless steel bolt through his nose, that's who! Sid Morris!

BRIAN

So what happened?

ALAN

Michael arranged this lunch at the Ivy, okay. There was Malkovitch, Malkovitch's agent, me, Michael, and Sid Morris. This was the first time we'd all met, but I'd been on the phone a lot with Malkovitch - forget whatever you've heard by the way, Malkovitch is great, very bright, very unstarry - so I felt completely relaxed but Sid Morris was awful - pushy, aggressive, nervous, starstruck -

BRIAN

Can I just ask, did Sid Morris remove the steel bolt from his nose in deference to the Ivy?

ALAN

Yes! He did!

BRIAN

There you have it. The true man

revealed. Essence of wanker.

ALAN

Okay, so Sid Morris bullies Malkovitch into drinking this very expensive white burgundy and I happen to know Malkovitch only drinks red, we talked about it on the phone, then, then, out of nowhere, Sid Morris starts talking about English movies in the sixties, he's talking about 'The Knack' and 'Hard Day's Night', he's talking about how he'd love to do something Dick Lestery-

BRIAN

Dick Lestery?

ALAN

I mean, Michael and I just look at each other and I can see Malkovitch thinking, 'Whooah, what is this?' 'I love that sixties energy' says Sid Morris, 'I love that sixties humour'. Then he turns to me and says 'You write that 'Darling on Probation' thing, don't you?' 'Yes' I say, not that I see what that's got to do with anything. 'Okay' he says 'How about writing some gags?'

BRIAN

Bastard!

ALAN

'Darling what?' says Malkovitch. 'It's this sitcom he writes' says Sid Morris.

BRIAN

Bastard!

ALAN

Then Malkovitch does this brilliant thing, I'll never forget this, he turns his head away from Sid Morris ever so slightly, and a waiter's there immediately of course, and Malkovitch says, very gently, 'Would you please bring me a very large glass of your house red'.

BRIAN

Brilliant.

ALAN

It was just beautiful, and you know what? It went right over Sid Morris's head. Anyway, by now I'm a little upset -

BRIAN
Of course you fucking are!

ALAN
- so I start defending my script, my script, and this woman who's been staring at me all lunch, Dawn something, Malkovitch's agent, this woman suddenly says 'You're drunk'!

BRIAN
What?

ALAN
I've had one glass of wine, Brian!

BRIAN
Fucking yanks.

ALAN
She tells me I'm drunk! Then she says 'You should get help, it might improve your manners on the phone!'

BEAT.

ALAN
I'm just devastated! Obviously Malkovitch said something to her about our phone conversations which I thought went really, really well!

ALAN IS NOW SITTING ON THE SOFA. A BEAT OR TWO.

ALAN
Michael didn't return my calls for two weeks. He didn't have the balls to tell me. In the end, he got Sue to do it.

BRIAN
Do what?

ALAN
Tell me that I was sacked! That I was off the picture! That some mate of Sid Morris's was coming in to start again from scratch!

BEAT.

ALAN
 I came so close, Bri. So close.
 (BEAT)
 We put the flat on the market.
 (BEAT)
 We were going to get something
 bigger.
 (BEAT)
 Emma was going to give up work.
 (BEAT)
 Shit shit shit.
 Fuck fuck fuck.

BRIAN GETS TO HIS FEET, GOES TO ALAN.

BRIAN
 Hey, Al. Come on. Jesus -

ALAN
 FUCK FUCK FUCK!

ALAN, HEAD IN HANDS, IS ON THE VERGE OF TEARS. BRIAN
 TENTATIVELY PLACES A COMFORTING HAND ON HIS SHOULDER.
 AFTER SOME TIME:

BRIAN
 It's Picasso.

ALAN
 What?

BRIAN
 It's down to Picasso.

ALAN
 What do you mean?

BRIAN
 She inherits a painting? Whooooosh!
 There goes half your audience. A
 painting by Picasso? Schoooom!
 There goes the other half.

ALAN TRIES TO PULL HIMSELF TOGETHER.

ALAN
 Why?

BRIAN
 It's just a painting, Al. Okay,
 maybe it's worth a trillion quid,
 maybe it isn't, so what? People
 can't relate to it, they don't
 know what they're looking at. A
 painting just isn't ... visual.

BEAT OR TWO.

ALAN
(IN SPITE OF HIMSELF)
Okay, what should she inherit?

BRIAN
Oh, I don't know, a house maybe.

ALAN
A house?

BRIAN
A fucking great house in Mayfair,
or Belgravia.

ALAN
A house is a house, Brian! She
sells it, end of story.

BRIAN
Maybe she can't sell it.

ALAN
Why can't she sell it?

BRIAN
There are debts. And it's falling
down, it's been neglected for
years. She's broke, with a fucking
mansion she can't sell. Which,
maybe, she doesn't want to sell.

ALAN
Why not?

BRIAN
What, and slink back to
Geordieland with her tail between
her legs? She's lives in Eaton
Square now! She goes to parties!
She meets Roberto and Argyle and -
and Stanhope. She's had a taste,
there's no going back!

BEAT.

ALAN
The house is - the house is
interesting. Holes in the roof,
broken windows, pigeons in the
ballroom. Dust, decay -

BRIAN
Hey, the old man's servants are
still living there!

ALAN
Yes, the butler and his wife -

BRIAN

Pair of right shagnasties -

ALAN

Been in service all their lives.
Old England!

BRIAN

He's a grumpy old git, always
whinging about his ailments -

ALAN

- clinging to the old certainties,

BRIAN

She's a raging snob -

ALAN

The days when people knew their
place -

BRIAN

- and they haven't been paid in
years! They're not moving out till
they get paid!

ALAN

- they're not moving out because
there's nowhere for them to go,
the world has changed -

BRIAN

Wait, there's a son -

ALAN

Ah, the son! Now he's got real
problems -

BRIAN

A good-looking kid -

ALAN

A criminal -

BRIAN

No, bit of an entrepreneur -

ALAN

Violent, unpredictable-

BRIAN

A bit dodgy, Al, that's all. A bit
of a rogue -

ALAN

He's New England, that's what he
is!

BRIAN

He fancies whatsername -

ALAN

He falls in love with Daisy -

BRIAN

He fancies her rotten, and she fancies him back, but -

ALAN

- but she's in love with Roberto -

BRIAN

- and Argyle!

ALAN

- and Stanhope!

BRIAN

Poor cow, she doesn't know what she wants!

ALAN

She doesn't know who she is, Brian, that's what it's about!

PAUSE.

ALAN

I'm getting a real taste of something here, there's, I don't know, there's a darkness to this.

BRIAN

It's dark alright.

ALAN

It's very end of millenium, isn't it?

BRIAN

It's a fucking metaphor, sweetie, that's what it is.

ALAN

And I tell you what, even with these changes, it's basically the same film!

BRIAN

And I tell you what, cast this right, it could be funny.

ALAN DOESN'T ANSWER. BRIAN MOVES AWAY, PUTTING THE DESK BETWEEN HIM AND ALAN.

BRIAN

I happen to know David has nothing in development for next year.

ALAN STILL DOESN'T ANSWER. LOOKING AT BRIAN.

BRIAN

We write a halfway decent
treatment, I guarantee he'll
commission a pilot.

BEAT.

BRIAN

We should get something down on
paper.

BRIAN HITS A COUPLE OF KEYS ON THE KEYBOARD, CLEARING THE
SCREEN. ANGLES THE CHAIR INVITINGLY FOR BRIAN.

BRIAN

It's dark and it's funny and it's
got legs, Al.

ALAN WALKS SLOWLY OVER TO THE DESK, SITS. STARES AT THE
SCREEN. BRIAN WATCHES FOR A SECOND OR TWO, GAUGING HIS
MOOD, THEN GOES OVER TO THE SOFA, FLOPS DOWN ON IT.

BRIAN

Are you hungry? I'm starving. Get
on the dog to Costas.

ALAN DOESN'T MOVE FOR A BEAT OR TWO. LOOKS AT THE SCREEN,
LOOKS AT THE PHONE. PICKS IT UP.

ALAN

(INTO PHONE)

Costas? It's Alan upstairs. Could
we have the usual please?

(BEAT)

Oh, and two beers.

BRIAN ISN'T LISTENING, HE'S TRYING TO MAKE HIMSELF
COMFORTABLE ON THE SOFA. IT DOESN'T FIT HIM LIKE A GLOVE.
YET.

ALAN

And a bottle of white wine.

(BEAT)

Yeah, exactly, you only live once.
Thanks, Costas.

ALAN HANGS UP. ADJUSTS THE CHAIR, MOVES A STAPLER BACK
WHERE IT USED TO BE.

ALAN

We need a title.

BRIAN

I'm thinking, for fuck's sake.

PAUSE. BOTH THINKING. THEN ALAN TURNS TO BRIAN, SUDDENLY ANIMATED.

ALAN

Got it!

AND, AS ALAN HITS THE KEYBOARD:

BLACKOUT