

'My Friend Johnnie'

A MONOLOGUE

By

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(Cast)

John Beasley - Brown

Present day. The Monologue takes place on a park bench on a summer's day.

Present day. It's a warm Saturday morning. A park bench is situated centre stage. The backdrop is a scene of lush grass and trees fading into the distance. The sun shines brightly. John Beasley-Brown is a well educated, middle aged man; a 'character'. He's an alcoholic and a regular user of the park bench. In fact he considers it home. He's had a colourful past life and spends most of his waking hours telling his story to anyone willing to listen. His mood swings across the spectrum of emotions. For most of the time the dialogue is punctuated with him drinking from a bottle of whisky concealed in a paper bag. In the main John is a sensitive, intelligent and articulate man but alcohol creates rapid mood swings. On the grass next to the bench are his worldly possessions: an old bike, a sleeping bag, a few blankets, a fold up canvass chair and a fedora which he puts on and takes off on a regular basis. He's shabbily dressed. When he takes his shoes off his socks reveal more holes than material.

As the curtain opens, John is lying back on the bench. He's asleep partially covered by a scruffy old blanket. He clutches a bottle in his right hand. His head is resting on the back of the bench and his legs are outstretched. He snores noisily. His snoring continues for sometime before he wakes suddenly not quite knowing where he is. He jumps up, bottle still in hand and shouts and gestures at the audience in an almost incoherent way believing they are mocking him. His speech is slurred.

My Friend Johnnie

John Beasley- Brown

(Standing and agitated)

What...what's the matter?

(As if someone had asked him a question. He takes a swig from the bottle and stares into the distance in a hazy silence trying to think clearly)

Yeah. I stood where you are. I also mocked. I was bloody annoyed: Annoyed to see a no body like me sleeping here.

(Scratches himself and wipes his eyes)

Why am I here, why can't I get a job and pay taxes like the rest of you? Drunkard bastard!

(Sits on bench and stares into distance and gets up quickly but unstably and remonstrates with audience)

It wasn't always like this you know. I had a life. I had dreams. Yes, just like you

(Mocking and pointing into the audience)

I was excited about my future, with everything around me. I had ambitions, things I wanted to do.

(In a reflective mood)

My old man found it difficult.....difficult to understand me that is. My dear old Mum was on a wave -length, at least I think she was. They tried god bless them. I know they tried. I'd spend hours inventing things, trying to figure out how things worked... Yeah I was on my own most of the time but it didn't bother me... Then there was school. I was bullied all the time, but I just got on with it. You see I didn't need people around me like the others; they were bastards!

My Friend Johnnie

Despite all that I did well in exams without really trying.

(Breaking out of the reflective mode and becoming more assertive)

Oh yeah, I can hear you thinking. Educated I don't think so? Yeah I went to Uni. Not just any Uni... I went up to Oxford and read Physics! My Mum encouraged me. They didn't have much money but they knew I was bright. Thought it would reflect well upon them if I did. Oxford? Rubbish! I can read your mind.

(He sits back down on the bench, takes a swig and sinks his head into his lap. Following a short pause he jumps to his feet and remonstrates with the audience believing someone was muttering)

I was told by my Professor all those years ago I was an "original thinker, someone who had the ability to think differently from others.

What? So why am I dossing here? Oh that's original. Not interested in the detail just want to know why I'm spoiling the view: taking up a bench that someone could sit on: making the place look untidy: frightening the children. If you really want to know I'll tell you... Haven't got the time? No. Just bugger off then.

(Agitated)

What the hell, what do I know?

(Sits back on the bench and swigs from the bottle)

Yeah we were bright and we knew it. Soaked it up, but just couldn't quite get on with others outside our group. Used to go to the student union as often as possible and drank until the cows came home. Literally! That's when I met my lifelong friend... Come on use your imagination if you've got one! Johnnie.

Johnnie Walker. We've shared so much together, including our names. I'm John by the way... You could say we've had a long and intimate relationship. There's not much I don't know about Johnnie. We've sailed the seas together, flown to the moon and back on more than one occasion, we've cried, we've laughed until we could laugh no more. We've had the power to change absolutely everything and the will to do nothing.

Why don't I give up Johnnie? Are you serious? We're together night and day; here's to you Johnnie!

(Takes a long swig and stares momentarily)

It hasn't always been good together. You know what it's like. You fall out with friends from time to time. I remember the first time I decided to have nothing to do with Johnnie. A decision I've made on so many occasions since.... When I did, I found myself awake, awake during the daytime! Now that's an experience. Aw your head hurts, oh does it hurt, your eyes are sore, red raw, your legs feel like lead and ache, and your belly groans. Not a good place to be. But you see, despite my friendship with Johnnie that started all those years ago, I was still able to get by, to think rationally, intelligently. We all did. But my relationship was different from the others. They didn't return day after day as I did to crave Johnnie's company... but it didn't seem to matter.

It was love at first sight. I knew I'd found a soul mate.

The trouble is you can argue 'til your blue in the face, but you can't outwit Johnnie. He has an answer for everything! He's that voice in your head that says everything and nothing is possible at the same time.

My Friend Johnnie

(Gets up shakily. The following dialogue is said affectionately)

When the adrenalin rush comes and it always does, the feeling is indescribable. Anything, literally anything is possible. You share your innermost thoughts with everyone around whether they want to listen or not.

In one sense you're oblivious of your surroundings but at the same time acutely aware of everything and everybody. A volcano erupts in your head and everything explodes. Boom!

(Pace slows)

You know what I mean. Drunks shout and scream; they want to ask you questions, to tell you what's in their head. Then the depression sets in, and it always does. The pain is unbearable. Not the head pains but the mind pains. You get used to the head pains. The feeling, the loathing of what you've become. The uncontrollability of emotions, the futility of life; the ever tightening bond you've cemented with Johnnie. You love him and hate him at the same time. The intensity of that love and hate is hard to explain. What's real, what's fantasy?

(Pause)

I need to know I'm not so different from everyone else. We all have our demons. Don't we?

(Animated with anger building)

Can you relate to what I'm saying? Oh really? I'm not crazy all the time you know. That's the problem in a way. If I were I wouldn't suffer in this way. It wouldn't be so painful. It's like taking drugs....the other types. I know booze is a drug; but hard drugs are something else.

My Friend Johnnie

(Asks the audience)

Have I tried them? What do you think? Have I?
I have but I didn't fall in love. I didn't
find another Johnnie; there could never be
another Johnnie.

*(Covers his eyes and sits motionless for a time then
gets up and in an obvious state of emotion)*

You see. Well. I don't know if I should tell
you this ...but I don't think I could carry on
without Jonnie! You know what I'm saying! What
would be the point?

Do you ever feel that way? The difference
between you and me is that I've seen beyond the
High Street. What's that? It's a saying I have.
It means doing or thinking things that others
consider odd or strange. I know how fragile
people can be. But you...you can't imagine how
desperate life could be. But be warned, none of
you are that far removed from chaos and
hopelessness.

(Sits back on bench takes another swig)

He's an expensive friend too. Johnnie! It's
always me that ends up paying and in more ways
than one. But a friend, a lover he is. Don't get
me wrong, we're the best of friends and I do love
Johnnie, but he's so, so hard to live with.

(Reflective)

He doesn't like me to have other friends. The
moment he sees I'm getting close to anyone, he
makes me say or do something I regret.

You see he's always by my side and before
long he takes over. He's not good with people. He
does and says things that..... I just can't stop
him. I know what he wants to say but somehow,
just somehow, it all gets confused and ugly.

I can see and hear it happening, but I can't do anything to stop him. Of course, people get upset; they shout and scream and walk away and it's over. It's all over. You can't expect to have relationships with people when you constantly abuse them? They won't stand for it. Why should they? Of course word spreads. Before you know it everyone avoids you. No one wants to have anything to do with you no matter how hard you try. Your reputation, if ever you had one, is in shreds and people have memories. Long, long memories!

They remember when you said this or said that, when you were going to do this or do that, when you promised over and over you would change your ways but never did. They remember, and who can blame them?

(Pauses and more upbeat)

It doesn't matter now. I've got used to him. He won't change. It's easy when you only have yourself to think about, but not so easy when you have Johnnie as a friend. You just have to get on with life. Get on and make the most of it. I got talking to an old man who said he knew me from years ago. He said we'd played tennis together. He knows me. Yeah! Well what did I say to him, any idea?

(In a desperate aggressive way he stands and shouts at the audience)

'Fuck off and leave me alone you stupid twat'.

(He stands quite still staring at the audience eyes bulging for a few moments and then sits back down and rubs his hands violently through his hair. Eventually he sits up and stares again at the audience)

Of course it wasn't me that said it. Why would I say that to a friend I couldn't remember? He was shocked and looked at me terrified.

My Friend Johnnie

What had he done to deserve that? I remember mumbling an apology but it was too late he walked away. But you see that's what happens when Johnnie gets jealous. He just didn't want to think I had another friend. Jealousy; it's corrosive... an awful thing.

No, when I reflect I would have done things differently, of course I would, but that's life isn't it? The future...? I have to believe there's a future. I have to believe that I have a purpose. I just have to believe...

(Takes a swig from the bottle returns to the bench and lies down. There's a brief silence before he starts humming to himself before falling asleep)

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