

BETWEEN TWO PEOPLE AT 3AM

By Kieran Carroll
2/34 Keith Ave Edithvale 3196
Melbourne, Victoria, Australia
Tel: 0061397731210
kierancarroll@hotmail.com

CHARACTERS

ANNABELLE – 32, *lawyer, upper class upbringing*

JUSTIN – 32, *lawyer, lower middle class upbringing*

The year of the play is 2004.

ACT 1

SCENE 1

A bedroom sparsely decorated: a wall painting, a lamp on each bedside table. There is no evidence of clothes or any mess on the floor except for a worn t-shirt on Justin's side. As Justin and Annabelle enter, they are both laughing uncontrollably whilst physically flirting with one another. Justin is holding a beer. They have both had more alcohol than they normally would. It is 3am. Annabelle's bedside lamp is on.

A: So much for her self-righteous morals.

J: The most conservative couple on the planet. What happened?

A: Well Prue's finally discovered alcohol, fifteen years too late. She's so suggestive now.

J: Suggestive! She makes Courtney Love seem like a nun! Was she serious tonight about couple swapping? She actually went for my keys.

A: Who would you have chosen?

J: Luck of the draw, baby.

Justin throws Annabelle onto the bed and then climbs onto it himself.

A: Justin, shoes.

They both begin to undress in preparation for sleeping. Justin strips down to boxer shorts while Annabelle wears a slip.

A: That was fun tonight, wasn't it? We needed to go out.

J (*Sarcastically*): Yeah we did.

A: Sorry.

J: Oh you know, how things are.

A: I didn't think there was a problem.

J: Forget it.

A: Fine. *(Pause)* How do we go from a laugh like the one we just had to another tense situation in world record time?

J: Sorry.

A: No you're not. Not really.

J: It's three in the morning Annabelle. *(Pause)* Hot chocolate. Would you like one? Look, why don't we forget sleeping and drive down to the beach? We could walk, watch the sun come up, have a swim, breakfast -

A: That's the wildest idea you've had in years but I can't this morning.

J: Why not?

A: I have to take mother's schnauzer to the salon.

J: That's obscene. What have our Sunday mornings become?

A: I promised mother.

J: That schnauzer lives better than 99% of the human race. Tell her you're going away for the day.

A: It's not that simple. We owe them things.

J: I'd like to throw the affected old socialite in a public high rise for a cold month or two.

A: Drop it Justin. I'm taking Alfred in the morning and that's that.

J: Have they bought him a holiday house yet with spa and sauna?
(Pause) I'll shut up if you will.

A: Best you do.

J: Could you turn off the light?

Annabelle switches off light. Darkness. Long Pause.

J: I've never disliked you, you know.

Annabelle puts light back on.

A: Where's that coming from?

J: Remember that night -

A: Let's not romanticize our university days as you always do after a few drinks. You drank too much beer, made some unforgivable sexual blunders, vomited -

J: That's a lie -

A: And somehow scraped through law because I helped you.

J: It was alright for you Miss Australia 1990. Taxis everywhere. Your mother taking the phone off the hook so you wouldn't be disturbed. Delectable meals. Holidays by the sea.

A: Where's all this social status jealousy coming from?

J: Annabelle, look, it's time you distanced yourself from your mother's upper echelon fakery. I don't want a life of endlessly dull dinners at their WASP's only golf club.

A: I happen to like my family and if that's how you feel about their generosity -

J: Generosity! The only thing they're generous with is their criticisms.

A: My family has grown to love you and I don't appreciate your -

J: Grown to love is a bit strong though I suppose tolerate is a bit unfair. I'd say luke-warmed too. I know I'm not quite what they had in mind.

A: Admit it. You're a slack lawyer. You barely raise a sweat. You're practically part-time. You shirk anything that might become all consuming.

J: I'm so sick of your moral high ground. At least I'm not flirting with Marcus -

A: Flirting. Let's not go there. I've been driving with you in the car and I've watched you spying on other women at the traffic lights.

J: Okay, okay – but it's not like I'm tearing off clothes in some sleazy motel.

A: First step.

J: Rubbish.

A: It's mental undressing.

J: If I look at a woman on the train, I don't go through the remainder of the trip thinking of her without clothes!

A: What if you see her, day after day? Surely it starts leading that way.

J: Well then you'd look for another seat.

A: And if you don't?

J: Well, you probably finish up behind a Coke machine! Christ! I wasn't expecting this tonight.

Pause

A: A woman at work today told me a story of how for her husband's 40th birthday, she hired a woman to fly out of a cake and flirt with him. This was a deeply embarrassing thing for many people there: grandparents, young kids. Anyway, furious about it, two of the

husband's sisters cornered the wife and demanded an explanation. She coolly replied that he'd been fantasizing about other women their whole marriage and that it was about time it became public knowledge.

J: Wow.

A: So how much acting have you done on your numerous and elaborate fantasies?

J: Christ, Annabelle, I don't know.

A: Oh you know.

J: What do I know, Annabelle?

A: I've got a big house all to myself, all weekend, come over and clean my pool. Sootyxxx

J: So you're reading my text messages?

A: Well your phone kept going off while you were jogging yesterday. Your inbox is full.

J: There's a concept called privacy, Annabelle.

A: There's an institution called marriage, Justin. (*Pause*) Are you cheating on me? Is this number three?

J: Annabelle, the other two were before we were married. And Sooty's Caroline -

A: The stalker.

J: You know she's obsessed. Annabelle, this stuff doesn't matter. We're thirty-two. It's 2004 not 1992.

A: Don't tell me it doesn't matter. Have many other times have you cheated?

J: Annabelle, let it go.

A: And who are ‘The Friends of AJ?’ They got a mention tonight and everybody went very quiet.

J: The Friends of AJ were a group of us who gave money to *Unicef* over a number of years.

A: Is that a fact?

J: Yes. That’s right.

A: Oh, because when I asked Graham in the kitchen tonight, he said they were an Al Jolson Appreciation Society.

J: Well there were a couple of factions.

A: Who’s AJ?

J: AJ was a girl I knew for awhile – before we were married. It was over within three weeks. We’ve had no contact since.

A: And where did you meet this AJ?

J: At a party. Ah, that’s not quite true. Um, ah, in a brothel, actually.

A: I beg your pardon.

J: Graham introduced me. She was our age, a graphic design student. She just did that stuff for some extra cash on weekends.

A: Get out! Get out!

J: Just hold on. You wanted the truth and now you’re getting it. I only went three or four times. A few of us would visit. You knew them all at the time. We’d go in separately. A couple of times afterwards we all went out together and saw a band.

A: So you didn’t feel a twinge of guilt that you were seeing a prostitute when we started dating?

J: She was a graphic design student!

A: But you paid her, didn't you?

J: Yeah...but...

A: What was her real name?

J: Annabelle, it was just AJ. (*Pause*) Amelia Jackson.

A: The Amelia Jackson I went to school with?

J: I'd say so – yes.

A: What luck for you. Okay. Just let me calculate this. I estimate you probably owe me at least \$50,000 dollars.

J: What for?

A: Remember back to how much she was and multiply that by how many times you think you've had sex with me since 1990. I expect the money in my account tomorrow. I've spent all this time thinking we were monogamous except for a couple of those early affairs and now I find out that that's a sham. And what were you paying her with? You didn't have a job. You were paying Amelia Jackson for sex with money I was lending you.

J: Well it wasn't your money. It was your parents -

A: And that's justifiable is it, because it was -

J: Don't make out you were working in a sweat shop to pay for my education.

A: You'll be heading back to the brothels anyway. You won't be coming near me.

J: As if you ever let me. I can't remember what your breasts and thighs look like.

Go to sleep.

Justin goes to turn his light out but realizes it isn't on. Annabelle turns hers off. Long Pause.

J: Are you alright? (*Long Pause*) Annabelle.

A: Just go to sleep.

J: I can't sleep if I think you hate me.

Justin turns his light back on. Annabelle follows.

J: You were always a lot sexier than Amelia Jackson, you know. In fact, she was always jealous of your looks. It all happened when Stuart Martin lived in the house for a month or two.

A: Stuart.

J: Don't you ever wonder what our twenties would have been like if we hadn't of got together?

A: No, I don't.

J: But you must, occasionally, surely?

A: Do you want me to get angrier than I already am?

J: No I just thought -

A: Of course I've wondered what other men would be like.

J: Is the AJ thing that big a deal really?

A: Can you imagine me telling other people that story? And don't ever say anything against my parents after what you've admitted tonight.

J: We should have just gone to the beach.

A: So you can keep your little secret for the next fifty years.

J: I really don't think it's made any difference to our marriage.

A: No difference. How can you sleep honestly with someone every night of your life and keep a secret like that?

J: Tell me Annabelle. How do you do it?

A: Pardon.

J: You've never been unfaithful. C'mon Miss Australia 1990, spill the beans while we're on the subject.

A: Don't try and turn this around.

J: Hasn't something crept to the surface, Annabelle? Something you could never tell me that you should of? Well, how about this to jog the memory. Stuart Martin at a discotheque in Sydney, late '95. When I asked you why the trip back took two days you said you had car battery trouble then a shattered windscreen.

A: This is crazy. You're crazy.

J: Stuart confessed to me one night last year.

A: We were both drunk. That's all.

J: So you booked a hotel room together?

A: We booked single rooms.

J: But you wound up in his.

A: In a matter of speaking.

J: Objection!

A: We just did it in a park. It got so cold.

Justin starts to laugh.

A: How can you laugh about it?

J: It kind of evens up our misdemeanors, don't you think? A one all draw. Shall we leave it at that?

A: Paying someone and what I did are not quite the same.

J: I don't know if differentiating is terribly wise.

A: One's a transaction, the other's a one night stand between two people who knew each other very well. There's trust involved.

J: What a load of prim private school nonsense!

A: At least I didn't have to pay. Oh Amelia, can I stay another twenty minutes? Here's another fifty.

J: You're really pushing it. I've bit my tongue about Stuart Martin for years. So don't push the AJ thing or I'll start doing whatever I want.

A: Well you'll be looking for your own apartment pretty quickly if you do. Go and sleep on the couch Justin. Ring Amelia Jackson for all I care.

J: You sleep on the couch.

Long Pause

J: Annabelle. *(Pause)* Kiss me.

A: No way.

J: Sex would do us good.

A: I'd have to be drunker.

Justin reaches for the beer he brought into the room and gulps down half of it.

J: We haven't had an argument like this for a long time. We're pretty temperate people, wouldn't you say? I can't imagine we argue as much as other couples.

I actually think arguments like tonight are pretty healthy. They clear the air. They allow -

A: My head's starting to spin and I can't work out whether it's the alcohol or all your shallow philosophizing.

J: I'm just trying to say we've done well in keeping it all together.
(*Pause*) Do you think silence makes me nervous? (*Pause*) Annabelle, Annabelle, do you think silence makes me nervous?

Long Pause

A: I think silence has its place at times you don't understand.

J: Maybe you're right.

Both turn over and are restless. Annabelle eventually turns towards him and sits up.

A: Do you want children? No, let me rephrase that. Do you want children soon?

J: Annabelle, let's not go there now.

A: You don't want the responsibility, do you? A part of you doesn't want to stand up, admit our youth is over, that a new phase should start, that the love a child could bring would enhance our marriage, not confuse or damage it. Honestly, with a child, we wouldn't be treading over old ground like tonight. It wouldn't surface anymore but we're still suspended, even with our well paid careers, in an anxious state of perpetual adolescence!

J: How melodramatic. Besides, it's not about responsibility. I...I'm going to the couch.

A: C'mon you coward. Do you want to be a father or not?

J: I've got nothing left -

A: You don't want children. I knew it. I've married a man -

J: (*Extremely firmly while getting out of bed*): It was you up until now that kept delaying the process. All those glossy articles about women putting their careers first. You encouraged the modern business woman in yourself! Now you're blaming me because the biological clock's starting to tick more quickly. I would have done it years ago – with your encouragement and persuasion. It's the same with all your friends. The lot of you thought you could have it all and now all your single friends are whining about a generation of men who won't commit, who've let them down. A lack of commitment didn't all run one way. I'm sick to death of that argument. If it's a problem, find a younger man!

A: (*Furiously getting out of bed*): Let's not worry about my friends or a general overview of our generation. This is simply about us. You've always been, and in the early days rightly so, paranoid about getting me pregnant. We're not ready for this. We've got our careers. We're not financial enough. Listen. Either I fall pregnant soon or this marriage is over. Finito! (*Pause*) I haven't got time to waste my 30s on you. I'm not hanging around for a motherless middle age.

J: So the ball's in my court?

A: It sure is.

J: Okay, let's go for it now.

A: No way. I don't know where you've been.

J: Well I haven't been to a discotheque in Sydney with Stuart Martin.

A: Coward.

J: Shut up Annabelle. Just shut up!

A: God, I feel like strangling you. You just want quiet nights on the couch for the rest of your life. I'll just wait on you hand and foot -

J: You can't even wait for a bus -

A: Bring you your slippers, meals and once a year you can drag me to the cave!

J: I don't want kids right now. This argument is a waste of -

A: I want to turn the clock back. I wish I'd had a child ten years ago. The hard work would all be out of the way. Impossible with you, of course.

J: Don't blame me for your childlessness!

A: Of course, you're to blame.

J: No I'm not.

A: You're a coward.

J: You're repeating yourself, talking from the bottom of your glass.

A: There's a plain fact at work. You have a fear of bringing children into the world and I can't be a part of that fear. I want a child and I want one soon.

Justin paces around the room and lightly head-butts the wall. He goes to smash his hand against it but then thinks better of it at the last moment.

J: I've been thinking about it a lot over the last year. This isn't going anywhere. You must feel the same. (*Long Pause*) Should we split up?

A: I don't know. Probably.

J: What a potential mess though. Dividing up property, telling friends, your family -

A: Ah the practicalities. Frightfully annoying!

J: Well there are -

A (*Pacing the room*): Right, it's becoming clear where this marriage is headed. Later on this morning, I'm going to go for a long walk and I'm going to make a decision about what I want from -

J: What you want. What you want. What you want. What you want. You've just been never said no to. That's it. That's your major personality trait. Spoilt little rich girl. What a discovery after all this time! What you want. What you want. Mummy, can I have this? Daddy, can I have that?

He moves closer to her with a finger pointed towards her face while softly singing Rich Girl by Hall & Oates.

A: (*Over the top of him*): How dare you. I wasn't given everything I wanted. My parents were very careful about what I could and couldn't have.

J: You were denied nothing.

A: We're getting so far from the point.

J: No, this is the point. It's still all about you. Do you really think you'd change by having a child? The poor kid would be booked into day-care before the umbilical cord was cut.

A: And you for a father! What a joke! Pretending you're happily married while trying to fuck the new nineteen year old PA.

J: At least a nineteen year old PA has a pulse!

A: (*Screaming*): Shut up!

J: What do you expect Miss Ice-Queen with your libido that froze over at the turn of the century.

He throws her down on the bed. Long Pause. He moves across to attempt to comfort her, regretful at his action.

J: Annabelle, I'm sorry. I really am. I'll try harder from now on.

A: It's no good. It's just no good anymore.

J: It can...

A: Let me finish.

J: Alright.

A: We've been together fourteen years and the only thing we can consistently do now is argue. You haven't paid me a compliment in years. You don't know how to be nice to me. And you don't care.

J: Annabelle...that's...

A: You're hopeless. Distant. You never have time for me. When was the last time you suggested dinner and talking things through?

J: We're talking now. We talk all the time.

A: We don't ever talk properly.

J: Yes we do.

A: What swells your heart Justin?

J: What?

A: How do you feel about the death of your brother twenty years ago?

J: I can't believe your bringing that into it.

A: You've never opened up to me about that, after fourteen years. Don't you think, I'd like to know and to try and help you deal with something that traumatic? But you close off. You're always closing off and that's at the core of all your escapist, Peter Pan ways.

J: Just because I still subscribe to *Rolling Stone* doesn't make me...look, unlike you, I don't live to be legal. You're the lawyer, baby. I just passed the exams.

A: Well you've got to look for a career change then.

J: (*Walking away*): You'd think we'd have these things worked out by now, wouldn't you? We're not twenty-four. We're getting towards the half-way point in our lives. Alright. We'll try for a child.

A: Not if you don't want to.

J: Sorry. I do want to. Really. I don't want you to leave me.

A: Us having a child shouldn't be out of a fear of me leaving you?

J: I didn't mean it that way. Look, it's probably a great thing to do. It will bring us closer together. I can be a good father.

A: You could be. (*Pause*) But I don't know if it's what I want either – with you I mean.

J: What?

A: Look I want to be besotted every day with the man who fathers my child.

J: You've lost it.

A: I can just see the years taking on too many familiar routines. They already have.
We'd just push unhappily through it.

J: Why haven't you said all these things earlier?

A: I couldn't face it, I suppose.

J: (*Irate again*): Look Annabelle, I can't answer all that stuff you've mentioned but I do know one thing. (*Pause*) I find monogamy extremely difficult. I just want sex!

A: Well I want more than that. (*Pause*) I think we've run our race. It's good there's not a child involved.

J: I want to stay, I think -

A: No Justin. I haven't wanted to confront all of this and then there were times when I didn't think we needed to. We should end it. I don't care what anybody else thinks. I may have been looking for a way out anyway. In fact, I think I have been.

J: Me too.

A: I'm exhausted.

J: We should let it go for now. Let it go until we've had some rest.

A: It's not that easy to let go.

J: Fall asleep. C'mon. We need to get some sleep.

Justin gets back into bed and she follows.

A: It will take a bit of time to get used to, you know. Waking up and not seeing you there. Climbing into an empty bed. I'll probably have terrible urges to call you up. We'll have to be strong about it or else it will get very messy.

J: Yeah I might have the same problem.

A: It's probably natural. People break up then feel the urge to call their ex and both parties become really nervous again, finding it hard to dial the number. Just like early dates. It's absurd!

Long Pause

J: If this is going to happen, when should I go?

A: I don't know. A week or two.

J: Hold on. Why do I have to go anyway?

A: That should be obvious.

J: Is it? Sure your parents helped out with the mortgage initially but after that it's been pretty fifty-fifty. I think you're underestimating what I put in financially.

A: But what about emotional investment? Maybe not the bedroom, but the other rooms are my designs. You weren't interested. They have my taste and work all over them. Sure we shared the finances -

J: Are we going to get some lawyers?

A: I'm sure we can defend ourselves.

Justin and Annabelle both become restless in bed. They turn one way and then the other moving in unison.

J: I'm going to the toilet.

As Justin leaves the room, he finishes his beer. Annabelle gets up and sits on the bed. She walks around the room and then sits again on the edge of the bed. Justin returns and sits next to her but they struggle for words.

A: I might do the same. Without the beer.

Annabelle leaves the room. Justin lies back down with his hands behind his head. When Annabelle returns, she gets back into bed. They cannot look at one another.

J: So this is it?

A: I guess so.

J: These things can happen quickly, can't they?

A: It hasn't been that quick.

J: Your family will be relieved. They'll probably take you shopping for a doctor or merchant banker.

A: That's ridiculous.

J: Annabelle, do you still think I'm physically attractive?

A: What sort of question is that right now?

J: Just wondering, that's all.

A: No, I don't really. Well, yes, sometimes. God, I don't know.

J: Thought so. (*Pause*) It's been an amazing time with you. You know that, don't you, honestly? I wouldn't have wanted things any other way.

A: Well, we'll never know, will we?

J: Annabelle.

Long Pause

A (*Half-getting up*): Oh God, this is hard.

J: Will you hug me?

Annabelle moves closer and they have a hug that lasts a few seconds before she moves away from him.

A: Whatever happens to us from now, it's inescapable the mark we have left on one another. It will always be impossible to completely forget one another. We've been together...

J: I know. I know...

A: But that doesn't mean there isn't greater happiness for us both in the future. That's why we have to stop. Because we can both be happier than this.

J: Or more miserable.

A: I don't think so.

J: I've never been alone, ever.

A: Look, it's just about the same for me.

J: I might go over and stay at Derek's place tonight. Give us some space.

A: I'll keep the schnauzer appointment. Be the considerate daughter.

J: Thank God it's Sunday morning. Couldn't have got through a day's work with this happening. *(Pause)* I might go to the couch.

Justin gets up to leave the room but Annabelle moves around the bed and takes his hand. They hug again. He releases himself first and they stare at one another.

A: Goodbye.

J: It's not goodbye, not really.

A: Yes it is. It's goodbye to the way we were.

J: Okay. Goodbye. Have we talked this through enough?

A: We might need to talk some more tonight.

J: I'm not too enthusiastic about the prospect.

Justin departs. Annabelle sits back on the bed and begins to cry, softly at first, then uncontrollably. Justin comes back into the room. He goes to hug her and she slowly reciprocates. He moves slightly away.

J: Funny, isn't it, how talking in bed used to be a lot of fun. The way we used to keep each other up, rambling on about things.

A: Yeah, I remember. I was always telling you to shut up.

J: And I never did.

A: I miss that, those talks.

J: It seems so long ago now.

A: It is. We can't deny it.

J: I might take off back to the couch.

A: Okay. There's a blanket.

J: I'll see you this afternoon or tonight.

A: Yeah okay.

J: We'll have a talk then.

A: Okay, but not in bed.

J: No, not in bed.

A: No, not in bed. Not in bed, ever again.

Justin departs. Annabelle begins to sob, her cries getting louder as the lights fade slowly to black.

The End