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PRIVATE FEARS IN PUBLIC PLACES

by Alan Ayckbourn

SAMUEL FRENCH

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First performance at the Stephen Joseph Theatre, Scarborough, (Round auditorium) on 17 August 2004, with the following cast:

Nicola	Melanie Gutteridge
Stewart	Paul Kemp
Dan	Stephen Beckett
Ambrose	Adrian McLoughlin
Charlotte	Billie-Claire Wright
Imogen	Sarah Moyle

Director: Alan Ayckbourn
Design: Pip Leckenby
Lighting: Mick Hughes
Costumes: Christine Wall
Music: John Pattison

The production was later presented at the Orange Tree Theatre, Richmond, opening on 5 May 2005, then presented as part of the Brits Off Broadway Festival at 59e59 Theaters, New York, opening on 9 June 2005, with the part of Dan being played by Paul Thornley and Charlotte played by Alexandra Mathie.

CHARACTERS

NICOLA
STEWART
DAN
AMBROSE
CHARLOTTE
IMOGEN
ARTHUR (offstage voice)

SETTING

Various flats, an office, a sitting room, a kitchen, a cafe and a hotel bar.

TIME

Now. A period of several days.

ACT I

Scene One

A large, unfurnished London flat.

NICOLA *and* **STEWART.**

NICOLA It's rather small, isn't it?

STEWART *(anxiously)* You think so?

NICOLA Well, yes, I do. I mean, your brochure says a three bedroomed flat, doesn't it?

STEWART There are. There are three, surely?

NICOLA No, I beg your pardon, there are actually two. One large-ish, master bedroom and one other bedroom which might also have been quite large, except it's been divided into two for some reason. So what you end up with is one large-ish bedroom and two half bedrooms, don't you?

STEWART Ah, you think the other was divided...?

NICOLA You could see it was. The ceiling cornice stopped halfway round.

STEWART Ah.

NICOLA And the window was clearly split down the middle. I think you'd have described it more accurately in your brochure if you'd said two half bedrooms with a three quarter cornice and one divided window...

STEWART Yes, well, as I say, it's only recently come on the market.

NICOLA What if there were two people sleeping in those two different rooms and one of them wanted the window open and the other didn't?

STEWART As I say, we did get the description out in a little bit of a –

NICOLA They'd both have to have it open, wouldn't they? Or closed? Whether they liked it or not.

STEWART And of course it is a very desirable area –

NICOLA It is. It's a lovely area. No one's complaining about the area –

STEWART I mean, with the West End just round the corner, there –

NICOLA In a manner of speaking, yes. No, it's simply the bedrooms, they're the drawback. I repeat, what my fiancé and I are looking for is one main bedroom for us with en suite bathroom; a second bedroom, which could be smaller but certainly not that small, which could serve as a guest room; and a third one of a reasonable size which my fiancé can use as a study. He certainly couldn't use that room as a study, could he?

STEWART Oh, no, it's certainly not a study.

NICOLA It's not even a bedroom. I think it could only be termed a box room.

STEWART Right. Point taken. I do understand. If your fiancé requires a study for his work.

NICOLA No, it's not for his work. He just needs a study. Well, he says he does, anyway.

STEWART Ah. What work is he in exactly, may I ask?

NICOLA He's – between jobs.

STEWART Oh, I see.

NICOLA Just at present.

STEWART I see. Looking around?

NICOLA I hope so. *(Looking at her watch)* He should be here. He said he'd be here. I don't know why on earth he isn't here.

STEWART I don't mind hanging on a few moments more. In case he's been held up? I don't mind.

NICOLA I do. It's my lunch hour. I only get an hour for lunch, as it is. I've got better things to do than hang around for him.

STEWART Quite.

NICOLA *(starting to leave)* I haven't even had lunch…

STEWART *(following her)* You need your lunch, everyone needs lunch…

NICOLA I do. I don't know about anyone else.

STEWART Have you far to go? Do you work nearby?

NICOLA Oh, yes. Literally round the corner, there. In Sloane Street.

STEWART Sloane Street. This would be convenient for that, wouldn't it?

NICOLA Very possibly. But I don't intend to work there for ever, I can tell you that. No, I'm sorry, I don't think this place is right at all…

STEWART Never mind. Plenty more. We'll keep looking. We'll find you something, never fear. After you…

They go out.

The lights cross-fade.

Scene Two

The Hotel Bar.

Discreet music. **DAN** *seated on a stool at the bar.* **AMBROSE**, *the barman, in attendance.*

DAN Very quiet today isn't it, Ambrose?

AMBROSE Very quiet, sir.

DAN Why's it so quiet? Do you know?

AMBROSE No idea, sir. Tuesday, possibly.

DAN Oh, yes.

AMBROSE Always slow on Tuesdays for some reason, this hotel.

DAN Wonder why that is?

AMBROSE No idea, sir.

DAN You'd think, Tuesday. People would be up and about by then. I mean, Monday. You can understand a Monday.

AMBROSE Oh, yes.

DAN Being the day after Sunday, you know. I mean, Saturday night and all that. You'd expect that on Mondays. But Tuesday – I can't think why – *(Slight pause)* Did you say it was Tuesday?

AMBROSE Yes. Tuesday all day, sir.

DAN Oh, shit!

AMBROSE Something wrong, sir?

DAN No, I was supposed to be somewhere, that's all. It – doesn't matter. Too late now, isn't it? *(He gets off the bar stool)* What is the time?

AMBROSE *(with a glance at the clock)* Half past two, sir. Do you need to be somewhere?

DAN Nevermind. I'm just off to the men's room. Same again, Ambrose.

AMBROSE Same again, sir.

__DAN__ goes off. __AMBROSE__ stares after him for a moment then, taking __DAN__'s empty glass, moves along the bar to pour the refill.

The lights cross-fade.

Scene Three

The Estate Agent's Office.

STEWART *enters from the street as* **CHARLOTTE** *is returning to her desk with a folder.*

CHARLOTTE Looks cold out there, Stewart. Is it cold?

STEWART Little nippy, Charlotte. It's a little nippy. Everything quiet here?

CHARLOTTE At the moment, yes. Mr Ratcliffe called for you.

STEWART Oh, Mr Ratcliffe.

CHARLOTTE I said you'd call him back.

STEWART Right.

CHARLOTTE When you had a minute.

STEWART Right. If I must.

CHARLOTTE You ought to call him back, Stewart. You really ought to.

STEWART Yes, you're quite right, Charlotte. As always.

CHARLOTTE You do owe him a call.

STEWART I do.

CHARLOTTE There's a little bit of sadness there, I think.

STEWART Yes.

Slight pause.

CHARLOTTE So, did she like it?

STEWART Sorry?

CHARLOTTE Ms Tressler? Did she like the flat?

STEWART I think she found it a trifle small.

CHARLOTTE Small? It sounded enormous. From the brochure.

STEWART It is. It's very spacious. I think basically she found fault with bedrooms two and three.

CHARLOTTE Oh, dear. Were they poky? A little, poky, were they?

STEWART I wouldn't call them poky. Compact.

CHARLOTTE Compact? Well, that's no bad thing in some ways, is it?

STEWART Depends what you intend to get up to in there. *(He laughs)*

CHARLOTTE *(laughing)* I meant the heating. I meant for the heating.

STEWART *(laughing)* So did I.

They laugh together for a bit.

CHARLOTTE Stewart! *(Pulling herself together, finally)* Well, I must get on.

STEWART *(making to leave)* So must I. Phone Mr Ratcliffe.

CHARLOTTE Well done.

STEWART You have a lovely laugh, you know, Charlotte.

CHARLOTTE *(rather coyly)* Do I?

STEWART When you laugh. You should laugh a bit more, you know.

CHARLOTTE I'll try to do that. *(Calling him back)* Oh, Stewart, I...

STEWART Yes?

CHARLOTTE I recorded that programme for you. On my video. On Sunday.

STEWART Oh, yes?

CHARLOTTE *Songs That Changed My Life*. You remember I was telling you about it –

STEWART Oh, yes, of course –

CHARLOTTE I mean, you don't, if you'd rather not...

STEWART No, I'd love to see it, Charlotte, I really would.

CHARLOTTE If you're sure. I wouldn't want to... *(Producing a video from her desk)* Here. I hope it's recorded alright. My machine's so complicated. I don't know why they have to make them so complicated.

STEWART They do, they do. I don't know why they do that, either.

CHARLOTTE I mean, I really wanted a simple basic one. Only the man in the shop went on and on...

STEWART They do, they do. *(Taking the video)* I'll watch this. It sounds really fascinating. I'll let you have it back.

CHARLOTTE No hurry. If you like it, it's a series. It's on every Sunday evening.

STEWART Yes, I've always missed. it I've always meant to catch it but Sunday evenings are not always the ideal time in our house. Imogen – my sister and I – we tend to play Scrabble.

CHARLOTTE Do you?

STEWART It's become a tradition, rather. Occasionally it's Canasta or, on rare occasions, German Whist, but I have to admit we've both become rather addicted to Scrabble these days. We used to play Bridge fairly regularly with the couple next door. Only they moved away...

CHARLOTTE Shame.

STEWART ...and the family who are there now - they're not *very* suitable or forthcoming...

CHARLOTTE Oh, dear.

STEWART And you can't play Bridge with just anyone, can you? Still. I'll certainly take a look at this.

CHARLOTTE I hope you like it. I find it quite life-enhancing.

STEWART Well, I could do with that.

CHARLOTTE We all could.

STEWART A little enhancement wouldn't come amiss – *(He laughs)*

CHARLOTTE *(laughing)* Yes. There's so little on television these days, isn't there? At least nothing that's at all –?

STEWART Life enhancing, no. See you later then, Charlotte.

CHARLOTTE See you later, Stewart.

STEWART *goes off.* **CHARLOTTE** *sits for a second, smiling to herself, a habit she has. In a moment, she gets up with her folder and goes off to return it to its cabinet.*

The lights cross-fade.

Scene Four

NICOLA*'s Flat.*

DAN *slumped in a chair,* **NICOLA** *being busy.*

NICOLA ...no, as I say, I was hanging around for ages. With this man. This wretched house agent. I mean, I have far better things to do in my lunch hour. Having lunch, for one thing. I mean all I got in the end was a roll. I'm starving.

DAN You can't survive on a roll.

NICOLA I certainly can't. I don't know about anyone else. So. Where were you?

DAN Oh, I was, you know, mooching about.

NICOLA Drinking.

DAN No. Not really. Well, a bit of drinking. Not a lot of drinking, you know.

NICOLA I thought you were supposed to be looking for a job.

DAN Come on, give us a chance.

NICOLA Have you any more interviews?

DAN *(vaguely)* I've got one on Thursday, I think. For a brewery.

NICOLA That should suit you down to the ground.

DAN I think it's only in the office. Doesn't sound very promising.

NICOLA Look, Dan, just find some work, for goodness sake. Any work. Because once you're in work, you'll be working with other people who are working, you see. Who'll know other people who are working. And, that way, you get yourself on the network. But you'll never get anywhere, will you, sitting in bars or lying here in bed with the curtains drawn all day?

DAN No, point taken. I'll get it together. I'll get it together, I promise. What was it like, anyway?

NICOLA What?

DAN The flat? The one you saw today?

NICOLA Oh. Hopeless. You'd have hated it. Tiny, weeny bedrooms. I mean, the one for your study, you couldn't even get a bed in there. Let alone a desk.

DAN Oh, well. No way, then.

NICOLA Mind you, frankly, I don't know why you need a study.

DAN I've said, I'd just like a study, that's all.

NICOLA Then why don't I have a study? You're going to have a study, I should have a study.

DAN You can if you want to, I'm not stopping you.

NICOLA No, I can't possibly have a study because then we'd be looking for a four bedroom flat. That would be ridiculous. Anyway, I don't need a study.

DAN Well, I do need one.

NICOLA Only because your wretched father has one.

DAN That's good enough for me.

NICOLA Anyway, what do you intend to do in there all day, may I ask?

DAN I don't know. Sit around a bit. Have a think. Write a few letters.

NICOLA What letters? You never write letters. I'm the one who writes the letters. You've never written a letter in your life. Well, not recently. You used to write lovely letters. To me.

DAN I'd probably write you some more if I had a study.

NICOLA I hope you're going to be slightly more dynamic, once we're married.

DAN Come on, give us a chance.

NICOLA It's been six months now, Dan. I mean, you've got to find a job eventually, haven't you? I mean, if we – once we've – started something – well, I couldn't carry on working indefinitely, could I?

DAN How do you mean –

NICOLA Well, if I was – *(Indicating)* – you know.

DAN Oh, God, yes.

NICOLA We have to think about these things, don't we? That's all I'm saying.

NICOLA *goes out.* **DAN** *considers this.*

DAN Oh. Right. See what you mean.

In a moment **DAN** *mooches off after her.*

The lights cross-fade.

Scene Five

STEWART *and* **IMOGEN***'s Sitting Room.*

STEWART *enters with his briefcase.*

In a moment **IMOGEN** *enters, wearing her coat.*

IMOGEN Oh. There you are. I was afraid I'd miss you. Tube trouble?

STEWART The usual. You know. Off out again, are you?

IMOGEN Just for an hour or two, yes.

STEWART I don't know. Regular gadabout these days, aren't you?

IMOGEN Well...

STEWART Out with the girls, I suppose.

IMOGEN One or two of them.

STEWART I'm amazed that firm of yours ever gets any work done. You lot living it up till all hours.

IMOGEN We don't!

STEWART Seems like it to me. You read about them. Drunken girl gangs...

IMOGEN I don't even drink, you know that. Listen, did you buy yourself any supper? Only there's that left-over cold meat in the fridge...

STEWART No, it's alright I popped in the supermarket. Got myself an instant.

IMOGEN Oh, fine. There is the meat, otherwise. You know, from Sunday. We need to eat it sometime...

STEWART I'm sure it'll keep another day.

IMOGEN Maybe we can have it tomorrow.

STEWART If you're not off out again. Clubbing.

IMOGEN Oh! What are you doing tonight, anyway?

STEWART I don't know, cooking my supper, maybe watch a bit of television.

IMOGEN There's not much on...

STEWART Well, I can watch my video. Charlotte lent me a video.

IMOGEN Who?

STEWART Charlotte. You remember Charlotte at work?

IMOGEN Oh, yes. Vaguely. Rather shy woman.

STEWART Is she? I suppose she is a bit shy, yes. Till you get to know her.

IMOGEN Private. I remember at that party, she hardly said a word all evening.

STEWART No, she's not very gregarious, I have to say.

IMOGEN What's the video she's lent you? A movie?

STEWART *(a little embarrassed)* No, it's just something she's recorded for me. A programme she enjoyed. She was telling me about it and I happened to say, oh, that sounds interesting, you know, the way you do, and the next thing she's recorded an episode for me. It's one of those, you know, religious programmes. Charlotte's – she's – quite religious. You know.

IMOGEN *(looking at him, smiling)* I think she fancies you.

STEWART Rubbish.

IMOGEN You're quite keen on her, aren't you?

STEWART Never.

IMOGEN You went a bit pink when you talked about her just now.

STEWART Rubbish. Nonsense. Rubbish.

IMOGEN I remember, you used to do that when you were sixteen whenever you talked about Mandy Morton.

STEWART I did not. Anyway, you were far too young to remember that.

IMOGEN We used to watch you with her through the fence.

STEWART Stop that! You stop it at once! Just you get on out, you.

IMOGEN Woo! Hoo! Hoo! I won't be late. Have a nice evening.

STEWART Thank you! And you!

IMOGEN Enjoy your video! Woo hoo!

IMOGEN *goes.*

STEWART *(smiling)* Sisters! I don't know! Really!

He takes the video out of his briefcase and studies it. He goes off to the kitchen.

The lights cross-fade.

Scene Six

AMBROSE*'s Kitchen.*

CHARLOTTE *and* **AMBROSE** *enter.*

She is wearing her coat.

AMBROSE *(as they enter)* Just through here...

CHARLOTTE Thank you.

AMBROSE I'm afraid you're in the kitchen. We had to convert the front room into a bedroom for him...

CHARLOTTE Yes.

AMBROSE With my father being...

CHARLOTTE Quite.

AMBROSE And with the stairs, of course...

CHARLOTTE Obviously, yes.

From the front room we hear the testy voice of **AMBROSE***'s father,* **ARTHUR.**

ARTHUR *(offstage)* Who's that out there now, Ambrose? Who've you got out there?

AMBROSE *(calling)* It's OK, Dad, not to worry. *(Sotto, to* **CHARLOTTE***)* My father.

CHARLOTTE Yes.

ARTHUR *(offstage)* Is that another one of those bloody women, is it?

AMBROSE I'm sorry, I'm afraid he does get very...

CHARLOTTE That's alright...

ARTHUR *(offstage)* I hope she's got a decent arse on her. Not like the last one...

AMBROSE Please, try to ignore him.

CHARLOTTE It's alright, I do understand. I'm quite used to it. Old people can get quite angry sometimes, can't they?

AMBROSE My father certainly does. We get through that many carers, you've no idea. Most of them can only put up with him a couple of times.

CHARLOTTE You can't blame them really though, can you?

AMBROSE No, I don't blame them at all. I think carers are all angels in disguise.

CHARLOTTE No, I meant old people. You can't blame them, most of them. It's partly fear, isn't it? Fear of being alone. Fear of helplessness. Fear of the Darkness.

AMBROSE Yes, actually I should mention it, normally we do leave the light on for him all night. It's expensive but if you can –

CHARLOTTE No, I meant Darkness. The Darkness.

AMBROSE Oh. Yes, I see. The Darkness.

ARTHUR *(offstage)* Has she got decent tits, Ambrose? I hope she's got decent tits on her this time.

AMBROSE I'm so sorry, I really am.

CHARLOTTE Listen, I'll be fine. You mustn't worry about me.

AMBROSE Yes. Well, I'll introduce you both then, shall I?

CHARLOTTE Then you go. I can manage, don't worry. I'm quite used to it.

AMBROSE Really?

CHARLOTTE I nursed my own mother for some years.

AMBROSE Did you? Same as me. I did the same. Was she very ill, your mother?

CHARLOTTE She was – in an accident.

AMBROSE Ah. A road accident, was it?

CHARLOTTE No.

AMBROSE *decides this is not a topic to pursue further.*

AMBROSE Yes, now I've got the list here, you see, that I leave for people. It's all fairly obvious. All his regular medicines are by his bed. Just make sure he can't reach them. Or he tends to throw them at you. And I've also put my own mobile number here in case of real emergency. I work at the Mulberry, incidentally. The big hotel, you know, just off the Strand. Chief Barman.

ARTHUR *(offstage)* I hope she's a decent looker, Ambrose. Not another of those old bats you usually get me...

AMBROSE *(indicating the door)* Yes, well, shall we...?

CHARLOTTE After you.

AMBROSE Mrs? Miss – er –

CHARLOTTE Charlotte. Do call me Charlotte, please.

AMBROSE Charlotte. Right. Ambrose. My father's Arthur, by the way. He likes it if you call him Arthur. This way...

They go out, **AMBROSE** *leading.*

(offstage, as they go) Here we are, father. This is Charlotte, who's come to look after you this evening...

CHARLOTTE *(offstage)* Hallo, Arthur, I'm so pleased to meet you...

ARTHUR *(offstage)* Oh, bloody hell!

The lights cross-fade.

Scene Seven

STEWART *and* **IMOGEN***'s Sitting Room.*

STEWART*, now in his apron, is preparing his instant supper. He lays out his place on his TV side-tray. He picks up the remote control and points it at the TV.*

He goes off.

The video recorder slurs into life.

ANNOUNCER ...and now it's seven o'clock and time for another edition of *Songs That Changed My Life*. Introduced as usual by Marilyn Dimchurch. And her guest this week is the architect and journalist, Martin Sale.

Some rather grand organ music.

As this plays, **STEWART** *returns with the salt and pepper. He stops to watch for a second.*

MARILYN *(from the TV)* Good evening. My guest works primarily and is probably best known as an architect. He also finds time not only to write a regular newspaper column, actively campaign for a number of charitable organisations, in particular for the homeless and underprivileged, but also he has recently qualified as a lay preacher. Martin Sale, my first question has to be, where on earth do you find enough hours in the day?

STEWART Where indeed?

MARTIN *(from the TV)* Well, Marilyn, I think the answer I normally give to that question is that if you love what you do and you feel an unswerving need to do it, then God will invariably find you the time. It's really as simple as that.

STEWART *(dubious)* Well...

He goes out again to the kitchen.

The lights cross-fade.

Scene Eight

A Café.

Loud music and lively chatter.

IMOGEN *enters from the counter and moves to an empty table with a cup of coffee.*

She sits.

She looks around but evidently sees no one she recognises.

In a moment, she opens her bag and brings out an artificial flower which, making sure not too many people are watching, she then pins to her coat.

She sits and waits, sipping her coffee.

The lights cross-fade.