

‘Entrepreneurial Spirit’

A MONOLOGUE

By

Paul Howard Surridge

(Cast)

John Beasley - Brown

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 spirits concealed in a paper bag. In the main John is a sensitive, intelligent and articulate man but the alcohol invariably sends him off at a tangent. On the grass next to the bench are his worldly possessions, comprising an old bike, a sleeping bag, a few blankets and a fedora which he puts on and takes off on a random 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. 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 as though they were staring at him. He speaks to and involves the audience throughout the monologue)

Yeah. Can I help you? Why are you staring at me? Can't a man get some rest...it's not too much to ask is it? We all need somewhere to go to switch off, to escape the world; a place of our own, somewhere where we can be alone with our thoughts. What am I thinking? Who am I? Do you know who I am? Do you know why I'm here? Do you care? *(He sits back on the bench and just stares in the distance)*

I once stood where you are. I used to stare. I was bloody annoyed. Yes, annoyed like you to see a no body like me sleeping on this very bench, this very bench *(pats the bench as if a treasured possession)* Why is he here you're thinking, hasn't he got a home? Drunkard bastard, what does he do all day long? What does he think about? You see, it's all about thinking, thinking and wondering, wondering what comes next.

(Gets up and moves forward) Let me tell you, it wasn't always like this. I had a life just like you. I had dreams. Yes, just like you *(pointing into the audience)*. As a small boy I was excited with life, with everything around me. I was

inquisitive...now that's a big word. I had ambitions, things I wanted to do. I wasn't like everyone else.

(In a reflective mood) My old man found it difficult....difficult to understand me. My Mother was on a wavelength, at least I think she was. They tried god bless them. I know they tried but they gave up in the end. I found it hard to find people that understood me, or wanted to. I'd spend hours on my own inventing things, trying to figure out how things worked. I was a loner I suppose but it didn't bother me. Then there was school. I liked it, really liked it in an odd kind of way. I was bullied all the time but it didn't really get to me. You see I didn't need people around me. I didn't need to be friends with anyone.

I did pretty well at school without really trying if I'm honest. *(Breaking out of the reflective mode)* Oh yes I can hear you thinking. Him educated? I think not! Well, let me tell you I went to University. Not just any University, I went up to Oxford! The one thing my parents did for me. They got me into Oxford. They didn't have much money but my father knew I was bright and I think he thought it would reflect well upon him if I did. Oxford? Rubbish! I can read your mind. Don't try and deny it. You don't believe me. Why would you? Why should you? Does it matter anyway? *(He sits down on the bench. Responds as if he heard someone in the audience muttering)* What was that? If I went to Oxford why am I sleeping on a bench and dressed like this? Not exactly the most original question to ask is it! Do you think you're the first person to ask that question? How original! We need people like you. Original thinkers! That's what I was told by my Professor all those years ago: original thinker, someone who had the ability to think differently from others: someone who could articulate his thoughts in a creative way that made sense.

What? So why am I sleeping here? Oh that old chestnut. Not interested in the background just want to know why I'm spoiling the view: taking up a bench that you 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. Sneer as much as you like I don't give a damn. *(Thinks he identifies someone who is prepared to listen)* You want to know about Oxford do you? What do you want to know? I fitted in strangely enough, met a lot of students like me. You see we all shared an inability, a disability as some saw it, to see the world as others did. Disability! Why do people mock others they don't understand? Everyone has their challenges in life. Some mental, some physical! I often look at those poor buggers that didn't ask to be born with physical abnormalities and think to myself... 'there for the grace of god...' but hang on those very same people don't look at themselves in this way. Of course they struggle, of course life is difficult but those you get to know have an inner strength. They overcome their problems by making the most of what they have. It's a humbling experience. The next time you start to moan because you

haven't got the latest mobile phone, TV, iPod, car, washing machine etc etc think on. Someone I knew years ago who had made a lot of money and lost it in business said to me that he was the unhappiest he could be when he had the most money. The strain of devoting every waking hour to his master – the business – put enormous strain on his marriage and family life and eventually the same week his business failed and the receivers were called in, his wife filed for divorce. He's often said 'It's not about being rich; it's about having enough money not to worry about money. It's about life in balance. The Yin and Yang of life as the Chinese say'. So the next time you start moralising about people 'different' from you, people that see things differently just ... You see, I can see it in your eyes. You're looking at me now thinking 'who the hell does he think he is giving me a lecture. Look at him. If he knows so much why is he in that state?' You see, you don't see. You can't see. (*Agitated*) What the hell, what do I know? (*Sits back on the bench and swigs from the bottle*)

We were called weirdo's you know. At Oxford! Of course we were bright and we knew it. Soaked up the tutorials but just couldn't quite click with others outside the 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. Which friend is that? Come on use your imagination if you've got one! Johnnie. Johnnie Walker. We've shared so much of our lives together. You could say we've had a long and intimate relationship. There's not much I don't know about Johnnie and vice versa. We've sailed the seas together, flown to the moon on more than one occasion, we've cried, we've laughed until we could laugh no more. We've had the power to change everything and the will to do nothing. My relationship with Johnnie has been all consuming. Ha. All consuming! Consuming all!

Why don't I give up my friendship with 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 your friends from time to time. I remember the first time I made a conscious decision to have nothing to do with Johnnie. A decision I've made on so many occasions since.... When I did, I found myself awake, yes awake during the daytime! Now that's an experience that takes me back. Your head hurts, oh does it hurt, your eyes are sore, red raw, your limbs feel like lead and ache continuously and your belly groans. Not a good feeling I can tell you. But you see, despite my love affair with Johnnie that started all those years ago I was still able to get by, to think rationally, intelligently. We all did. But my affair 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.

Eventually I graduated, not with the best of degrees I admit but I graduated. When I reflect I realise that my love for Johnnie all those years ago was instant. They say we are all alcoholics but it takes years of serious drinking to realise it. Not with me. It was love at first sight. I knew I had found a soul mate. After the first drink I was smitten. The trouble is, as I've discovered, you can argue 'til your blue in the face, but you can't outwit Johnnie. He has an answer for everything! He's that nagging voice in your head that says everything and nothing is possible at the same time, and challenges you to act accordingly. When the adrenalin rush comes and it always does, the feeling is indescribable. Anything, literally anything is possible. You are compelled to share your innermost thoughts with everyone around you whether they want to listen or not. In one sense you are oblivious of your surroundings but at the same time acutely aware of everything and everybody. A volcano erupts within your head and everything becomes exaggerated. You know what I mean. The drunks shout and scream, they want to ask you questions, to tell you what's in their head and of course your natural reaction is to recoil and move away fast. Then the depression sets in, and it always does. The pain is excruciating. Not in a headache sense but within your mind. The abhorrence of what you have become. The uncontrollability of your emotions, the futility of your life, the ever tightening bond you have cemented with him. You love him and hate him at the same time. The intensity of that love and hate cannot be understood by rational people. *(Gets up and gestures)* That's you! Are you rational? What's rational anyway? What's the criteria for rational. Asking that question over and over again in my head keeps me sane, at least some of the time. One needs to know that you are not so different from everyone else. We all have our demons. Don't we? Can you relate to what I'm saying? Do you have a love in your life, a demon? I'm not crazy all the time. That's the problem in a way. If I was it wouldn't be necessary to think 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. Have I tried them? What do you think? Have I? *(Asks the audience)* 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 with my life if we were parted for good! You know what I'm saying! How could life continue? Why should it? What would the purpose be? Do you ever feel that way? I'm looking at you now and I'm reading your mind. You know how fragile life is. You know that it wouldn't take much in your life to trip you up, to make you seriously think if it's all worth it. The difference between you and me is that I've seen beyond the High Street, metaphorically speaking. I know what's beyond the everyday routine and expectations if things

go wrong. But you...you can't imagine what life could be like without all those things and people that protect you from the real world. But believe me, despite your antipathy toward me, you are not so far away from walking beyond the High Street, that place that turns into a thoroughfare of unfamiliarity and hopelessness. None of us are strong enough to always be alone, alone with only our thoughts and thoughts that are often alien. (*Sits back on bench*)

But Jonnie, (*Takes another swig*) He's an expensive friend too. It's always me who ends up paying for the round 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 in a different way to all those beautiful women I've had in my life. OK, correction. All those beautiful women that have passed through my life!

(*Reflective*) Of course Johnnie doesn't like me to have friends of any kind. The moment he senses that I'm getting close to anyone, he makes me say or do something I regret. It always ends up that way. You see Johnnie insists he's always with me and before long he takes over the conversation. He's not good with people. He does and says things that....well, I can't believe, but I just can't stop him. I know what he wants to say but somehow, just somehow, it all gets confused and ugly. He's not unkind. He's not wicked (in the old fashioned sense). He's not violent or rude but that's how it all comes out. I can see and hear it happening but I can do nothing to stop him. Of course, people get upset, they shout and scream and walk away and soon enough 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 it doesn't take long for word to spread. 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 anymore though. I've got used to him. He's not going to change no matter how much I beg. 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 and be thankful for what you've got. Not always the best option, but you get on and make the most of it. A couple of weeks ago....although it could have been yesterday, I really don't know, I got talking to an old man who said he knew me from years ago. We'd played tennis together at a club in St. Albans. As hard as I tried I couldn't remember him, nor could I remember playing tennis with him but he was insistent we had. Now what do you say, after all he's shown interest in me. He knows me. Yeah! Perhaps he could be my salvation. If he can take me back in my head to when

things were normal perhaps I'd see things differently? 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 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. What had he done to deserve that? I looked at him, held out my hand and mumbled an apology but it was too late he started to walk away. He turned back every now and then to see if I was following him or something I don't know. 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 an awful thing you know.

No, when I think back I would have done things differently, of course I would, but what would I have done and why. Too much to comprehend! The future...? I have to believe in the future. I have to believe that I have a purpose. I 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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