
Closer

Patrick Marber

Act 1, scene 1. Hospital. Early morning. London. 1993.

Alice (early 20s) is 'a girl from the town'. She has been working in New York as a stripper and has recently returned to London. She is an independent free spirit but refers to herself as a 'waif'. In the school of hard knocks she has learned to be tough, aggressive and purposeful. She wants everything and expects nothing. Dan (30s) is 'a man from the suburbs'. He is a frustrated writer who works for one of the London papers writing obituaries. Dan is a cynical and watchful wise guy. His life has become somewhat aimless and he drifts along from day to day barely aware of what he wants or expects from life. This scene opens the play.

(ALICE is sitting. She is wearing a black coat. She has a rucksack by her side. Also a brown leather briefcase. She rolls down one sock. She has a cut on her leg. Quite bloody. She looks at it. She picks some strands of wool from the wound. ALICE looks in her rucksack and finds a box of matches. She lights a match, watches it burn, blows it out. She looks at the briefcase. Thinks. Looks around. Opens it. She searches inside. She pulls out some sandwiches in silver foil and a green apple. She opens the sandwiches and looks at the contents, smiles, puts them back. She shines the apple. She bites into it. As she starts to chew DAN enters. He wears a suit and an overcoat. He stops, watches her eating his apple. He is holding two hot drinks in styrofoam cups.)

ALICE. Sorry. I was looking for a cigarette.

DAN. I gave up.

ALICE. Well, try harder.

(DAN hands her a drink.)

ALICE. Have you got to be somewhere?

DAN. Work. Didn't fancy my sandwiches?

ALICE. I don't eat fish.

DAN. Why not?

ALICE. Fish piss in the sea.

DAN. So do children.

ALICE. I don't eat children either. What's your work?

DAN. Journalism.

ALICE. What sort?

DAN. Obituaries.

ALICE. Do you like it . . . in the dying business?

DAN. *Everyone's* in the dying business.

ALICE. Dead people aren't.

(Beat.)

Do you think a doctor will come?

DAN. Eventually. Does it hurt?

ALICE. I'll live.

DAN. Shall I put your leg up?

ALICE. Why?

DAN. That's what people do in these situations.

ALICE. What is this 'situation'?

(Beat.)

DAN. Do you want me to put your leg up?

ALICE. Yes, please.

(He lifts her leg onto a chair.)

Who cut off your crusts?

DAN. Me.

ALICE. Did your mother cut off your crusts when you were a little boy?

DAN. I believe she did, yes.

ALICE. You should eat your crusts.

DAN. You should stop smoking.

(Beat.)

I've got a mobile, is there anyone you'd like to phone?

ALICE. I don't know anyone.

(Beat.)

Thank you for scraping me off the road.

DAN. My pleasure.

ALICE. You knight.

(DAN looks at her.)

DAN. You damsel.

(Beat.)

Why didn't you look?

ALICE. I never look where I'm going.

DAN. I looked into your eyes and then you stepped into the road.

ALICE. Then what?

DAN. You were lying on the ground, you focused on me, you said, 'Hallo, stranger.'

ALICE. What a slut.

DAN. I noticed your leg was cut.

ALICE. Did you notice my legs?

DAN. In what sense?

ALICE. In the sense of 'nice legs'?

DAN. Quite possibly.

ALICE. Then what?

DAN. The cabbie got out. He crossed himself. He said, 'Thank fuck, I thought I'd killed her.' I said, 'Let's get her to a hospital.' He hesitated, I think he thought there'd be paperwork and he'd be held responsible. So I said, with a slight sneer, 'Please, just drop us at the hospital.'

ALICE. Show me the sneer.

(DAN sneers.)

ALICE. Very good.

DAN. We put you in the cab and came here.

ALICE. What was I doing?

DAN. You were murmuring, 'I'm very sorry for all the inconvenience.' I had my arm round you, your head was on my shoulder.

ALICE. Was my head . . . 'lolling'?

DAN. That's exactly what it was doing.

(Pause.)

ALICE. You have the saddest looking bun I've ever seen. Can I have it?

(DAN opens his briefcase.)

ALICE. You'll be late for work.

DAN. Are you saying you want me to go?

ALICE. No.

(She puts her hand in the briefcase.)

DAN. You can have half.

(She removes the bun, tears it in two and begins to eat.)

Why were you at Blackfriars Bridge?

ALICE. I'd been dancing at a club near Smithfield. I went for a walk. I went to see the meat being unloaded.

DAN. The carcasses?

ALICE. Yes.

DAN. Why?

ALICE. Because they're repulsive. Then I found a tiny park . . . it's a graveyard too. Postman's Park. Do you know it?

(DAN shakes his head.)

ALICE. There's a memorial to ordinary people who died saving the lives of others. It's most curious. Then I decided to go to Borough . . . so I went to Blackfriars Bridge to cross the river.

(Pause. DAN offers her the other half of the bun.)

ALICE. Are you sure?

DAN. Yeah, it's yesterday's sad bun.

(Beat.)

That park . . . it's near here?

(ALICE nods.)

DAN. Is there a statue?

ALICE. A Minotaur.

DAN. I do know it . . . we sat there . . . (my mother's dead) . . . my father and I sat there the afternoon she died. She died here actually . . . she was a smoker. My father . . . ate . . . an egg sandwich . . . I remember his hands shaking with grief . . . pieces of egg falling onto the grass . . . butter on his top lip . . . but I don't remember . . . a memorial.

(Pause.)

ALICE. Is your father still alive?

DAN. Just. He's in a home.

ALICE. How did you end up writing obituaries? What did you really want to be?

(Pause.)

DAN. Oh . . . I had dreams of being a writer but I had no voice – no talent. So . . . I ended up in the 'Siberia' of journalism.

ALICE. Tell me what you do. I want to imagine you in . . . Siberia.

DAN. Really?

ALICE. Yes.

DAN. Well . . . we call it 'the obits page'. There's three of us; me, Harry and Graham. The first thing someone will say (usually Graham) is 'Who's on the slab?' Meaning did anyone important die overnight. Are you sure you want to know?

ALICE. Yes.

DAN. If someone did die we go to the 'deep freeze' which is a computer containing all the obituaries and we'll find the dead person's life.

ALICE. People's obituaries are already written when they're still alive?

DAN. Mmhmm. If no one important has died then Harry – he's the editor – decides who we lead with and we check facts, make calls, polish the prose. Some days I might be