

Bruce

SCENE ONE.

BRUCE RENSHAW (45), toned, stylishly dressed, sits hunched alone at a table in a bar. An almost finished bottle of red wine rests on the table in front of him as he cradles a half filled wine glass. His demeanor and characteristics are not stereotypically gay.

He swirls the wine as he stares contemplatively into the glass. After a moment he gathers himself and addresses the audience.

BRUCE

I should've listened! She always had a word of wisdom my mum... still does. She's the one you go to when you're in the shit. That hug she gives you. Makes you think you can get through anything...

Mind you, there's some things you wouldn't talk about. Some things are too hard. The disappointment cuts you to your heart. Never says anything to show it, but... but you can see it in her eyes.

'Actions have consequences...' - that's what she kept saying - when I were a kid. Did my head in! But now I understand...

She'd been through it. Not 'cos of anything *she'd* done, but growing up, as a kid, she had it hard. Her mum and dad. Mum says he was an alcoholic, my grandad. I never met him - nan left him when mum were a kid... bit too handy with his fists. Nan got out before he could do something that couldn't be undone if you get my drift. So mum and nan were literally living hand to mouth. Mum's never touched a drop. She hates seeing people getting drunk...

Bruce raises his wine glass and looks around as if searching for his mother.

Sorry mum. But sometimes you just have to. Cheers.

Bruce takes a mouthful then places the glass on the table.

It was only when she met dad, it was only then she started having something good in her life. Something stable. Something reliable. 'cos if you want a word to describe my dad, that's it. Reliable. He worked at the Co Op - the one in the centre of town - next to the Forum. He started stacking shelves when it opened, then went to work for the ASDA when it changed hands... stayed there 'til he retired. Wont one for change my dad.

So, life weren't rich for me, but we had enough, and I never, not for one minute thought I'd ever be without my mum and dad... 'til he died. Couple of weeks ago. Nothing out the ordinary - he were 73. I mean, I s'pose some say that's still young these days, but point is, it weren't like he were in his fifties, or owt like that. Heart attack. At least it were quick.

It kind of gets you thinking. Thinking about your own life. I know he loved me. But I know he never really understood me being gay. He thought it were a choice. Couldn't get his head round it. So he never talked about. Never said anything to his mates, or at work. Which is fine I guess, 'cos I know that he loved me. But it was always there - something hanging there, between us. I kept my life away from him. Never talked about boyfriends. Just kept to the usual stuff about work. He was proud of that. When I went to college - got my diploma - Patisserie and Confectionary, he were dead proud of that. Getting a qualification'n'all. And then when I was working in the hotels... the big ones in Piccadilly, he loved that. Especially the stories I told him about famous people that stayed. The thought of them eating my petit fours! I could see him literally swell up in front of me.

I love working in the city. Especially when I were younger. I did my shift at the hotel, then head to Canal Street. Never short of attention. It was fun. It was great. You hook up, have fun, then move on. No ties, no questions.

It wasn't *just* that though. I've got friends... and we'd hang out. That's where I met Lydia. We hit it off, became friends... good friends. Then she met Charlotte, and *she* became part of the group as well. Charlotte did change Lydia.

Bruce takes a moment to process his sadness at Charlotte interfering in his friendship with Lydia.

They moved in together - it was serious. Took some of the fun away. I saw less of Lydia. But Charlotte made her happy so I guess that's fine. Still, I weren't prepared for what they were gonna ask! They wanted a family and asked me if I would give them my sperm... they were so matter of fact. Like they were asking to borrow a DVD or something! I didn't really think about it - what it really meant... thought it was a laugh! So I said yeah. Sure. I were 26, all sounded like some crazy spontaneous thing to do, and what the heck - it'd be something to talk about. So we did it. I don't mean 'did it'! I mean I went through with it. The whole thing was a bit underwhelming. Not a grand event like you think it'll be. I was in the bathroom, jizzed in this cup and that were it! I mean that weren't it... it was more involved than that - they'd sterilized the cup and everything. Then they took it in the bedroom, and - well, I don't know what they did... don't want to either! But it worked... after a couple of goes. Yeah... Lydia was pregnant. It's funny the affect something like that can have on you... I felt like the only person who'd ever got someone pregnant! Like some cocky king! Strutting around... big smile on my face...

But it was then that I thought about all the things I should've thought about before agreeing to it. They said up front they didn't want me to be involved in any way... it would all be anonymous, and there wouldn't be any 'financial liability' - Charlotte kept coming out with all the formal stuff - good job really, 'cos I've never had any money... spare money... nowt to support a kid. But there were other things as well. I mean, why me??? Why ask me?!? Apparently I'm quite good looking. Fit and healthy. And I'm reasonably intelligent. That's what they said. Oh, and I'm not camp! As if that was a factor. But why didn't they go to a sperm bank? If they wanted no involvement, just go there... there's no way the father would be involved. Charlotte did her usual coming out with all this stuff about paperwork, legal stuff, and cost. Lydia just said she wanted to know what the person was like. The person whose child she was going to carry... she wanted to know that they were a good person. And everything went according to plan, and was fine... until he was born. A boy. They called him Tyler. I never met him. But Lydia would meet me for coffee, and she'd bring pictures, tell me what he was doing, when he sat up, walked, was teething... all the usual stuff.

Thing is as you get older, you change. What you want changes. Stopped cruising. Started looking for someone to be with. Met a few guys... a few boyfriends - never lasted more than a few years - five at most. But Tyler appeared about the same time I started wanting something more. And when Lydia met me and was telling me all about what he was doing, I started getting upset - not in front of her... but on my way home... then it all went tits up. Tyler was four. They decided they wanted a brother or a sister for him, and Charlotte decided it should be her. She wanted to get pregnant. So they came knocking, asking me for more sperm... like they were shopping in Sainsbury's! That way Tyler would be blood related to his brother or sister. But I couldn't do it. I couldn't go through it again - excluded from a child's life... again... a child I'd fathered. So I said no.

Fuck me! The rage! Charlotte! It was like she were possessed! Shouting, swearing - came at me couple of times... Lydia had to step in between us. I mean, I can look after myself, but she was scary! Then they left. And I never heard from them ever again. No more updates on Tyler - how he was doing, what he was up to. It's like he were dead to me. But today... today is his 18th birthday. And you see, the thing is, it's all different now... for me. Dad died. And it makes you think. It makes you think about what you've left behind. And my dad... he never knew he were a grandad. He would've been an amazing grandad. He would've adored Tyler. But he never knew him. And that makes me feel a bit shit. That I stopped him from having that. Same for mum... I've never told her - those eyes... her eyes... that look - I couldn't bear that - telling her, then saying she could never meet him.

So I did something.

Bruce cradles his head in his hands and loses himself in his thoughts for a moment.

Was it stupid? I... I don't know. I just don't know...

Bruce ponders for another moment.

I went round to see him... Tyler. Lydia answered the door. She let me in. I think she were in a state of shock! But she let me in, and there he was. Tyler. Eighteen. And oh my word... what a handsome, amazing young man he's turned out to be... we chatted - I didn't let on who I was... but he told me all about himself - he's doing 'A' Levels! My son! English Lit... Government and Politics!?! History, and Photography. Wow! And he was so polite, and spoke well, and... and... he's amazing! And Lydia told me all about his girlfriend - Tyler was pissed off about that... he went red as anything! But he just came across as such an amazing young man. And as I listened to him I was so proud, and so sad, both at the same time. Sad that I'd missed out on all this stuff that had happened in his life, and that I couldn't tell him who I was...

But then Charlotte got home. And it went nuclear! So much anger - like she'd been storing it up for the last 14 years... building and building... and she let it all out. In one go. And aimed it all at me. Blamed me that she missed out on her chance to be a mum. Don't get why it's my fault, but that's how she saw it. But worse than anything was the look on Tyler's face - he'd never seen Charlotte like this. And of course he put two and two together and realised who I was. Man! It's like his whole world was turned upside down. His 18th birthday, and all this happening in front of him. He certainly won't ever forget this day!

So, I get thrown out. I never intended this - this wasn't supposed to happen. I didn't plan for Tyler to know who I was... I just wanted to see him. Meet him. Then go on my way. Maybe build bridges with Lydia so I could get updates again. But that ain't gonna happen now is it! Not now.

That's why I ended up here. Sorry mum. I know you hate people getting pissed, but I just needed to. Tonight. Something to blur out everything that happened. And yes, you're right - actions have consequences. We need to make wise choices. But sometimes it's hard to know if a choice is wise or not - if I hadn't done what I'd done, jizzed in a cup! The world would never have known Tyler. Still... seems like *I'm* not going to know him anyway...

Bruce drains the remnants of the wine bottle into his glass, swirls his glass, then stares into it lost in thought.