

THREE INTO TWO (WON'T GO)

Cast of characters:

Alistair – 50's

Olivia – 30's / 40's

Fiz – gender neutral

Setting:

Evening

A table in a bar

Two chairs at the table and another chair nearby

Muzak in the background

Lights up.

Olivia enters stage left. She looks round the bar briefly, looks behind her and then sits at the table and waits.

Alistair and Fiz half-enter stage right, pause and then Alistair crosses to the table.

Alistair Olivia?

Olivia (*looking up*) Oh, hello.

Alistair It is Olivia, isn't it?

Olivia (*uncertain*) You must be Alistair.

Alistair That's right. Didn't you recognise me?

Olivia Not straight away. No.

Alistair I recognised you, pretty much immediately.

Olivia (*mild surprise*) Did you?

Alistair The website photographs. They're a very good likeness. If anything ...

Olivia Yes?

Alistair They don't do you justice. (*indicating the chair*) May I?

Olivia (*invitation*) Please do.

Alistair sits at the table opposite Olivia. Fiz enters and stands behind Alistair.

Alistair It isn't always the case. Far from it.

Olivia Isn't it?

Alistair Not in my experience.

Olivia You've done this before, have you?

Alistair Once or twice. Yes.

A short pause while Alistair looks at Olivia, and Olivia looks from Fiz to Alistair and back.

Where was I?

Olivia Photographs.

Alistair Oh, yes. That's right. You scroll through the profiles, don't you? You choose someone you'd like to hook up with. You check out their photographs on the website. They look fine and you agree to meet. Then ...

Olivia Then ...?

Alistair Then, when you get together ... When you find yourself in the same space ... When you're sitting opposite them ... It can be a terrible let-down.

Fiz takes a chair from another table and joins Alistair and Olivia.

Alistair You find they're not as they should be. They're older or uglier. Or fatter or skinnier. Or spottier or ... Anyway, nothing like they are in the photographs. Have you found that?

Olivia is looking at Fiz.

Olivia (*distracted*) Sorry?

Alistair But it's all pretty silly, pretending to be what you're not. I mean sooner or later you'll be meeting up, won't you? After all, that's the whole purpose of the exercise. That's why we're here.

Olivia looks back at Fiz, who nods and smiles agreeably.

Which means that when you do meet up, there's no hiding place. You're up front and personal with the real thing. No room for deception. No room for disguise. Here you are, face-to-face, toe-to-toe, knee-to-knee. Filters and the photoshopping can't help you any longer. You're on your own.

Olivia looks again at Fiz, who continues to nod and smile reassuringly.

(*drawing closer*) Cards on the table, Olivia. Confession time. Full disclosure. That's why I'm late. It's why I'm always late. Would you like to know why I'm always late?

Olivia I don't know. Would I?

Alistair It's what I do. (*conspiratorial*) I find a dark corner, the darker the better. Behind a potted plant is good. Or otherwise a stone statue. And I wait.

Olivia You wait?

Alistair I wait for whoever it is I'm meeting to turn up, and then ...

Olivia Then?

Alistair I check them out to see if they look like they do in their photographs. If they do, more or less, that's fine. More or less is fine. I'm a realist, Olivia. I'm not looking for a perfect match. But if they don't, I'm off.

Olivia Off?

Alistair Yes, Olivia. Off and away. No point in hanging around. Not if they're not as they should be. Not in my book.

Olivia You don't think ...?

Alistair What?

Olivia Isn't that a little – well – harsh? I mean, they've come all the way here to meet you. They may have taken a train or a bus. They may even have gone to the expense of catching a cab. There they are, sitting, with hope and expectation in their heart, waiting for a date with someone who – unbeknownst to them – is already 'off and away'.

Alistair I can see you're a sentimentalist, Olivia.

Olivia That's not how I'd describe myself.

Alistair No? Anyway, it's not a problem in this case. As I said, the website photographs don't do you justice.

Olivia Can I ...?

Alistair I'm not trying to flatter you or anything, Olivia, but in real life you're so much better-looking than I expected.

Olivia Thank you. Can I ...?

Alistair What?

Olivia Can I just check. You're Alistair. Right?

Alistair Yes.

Olivia (*indicating Fiz*) And this is ...?

Alistair Fiz.

Olivia Fiz?

Alistair Yes.

Olivia Hello, Fiz.

Alistair Fiz isn't very good at greetings.

Olivia Isn't he?

Alistair Don't worry about Fiz.

Olivia I'm not worried, but ...

Alistair Forget about them. Pretend they're not here.

Olivia Them?

Alistair They prefer it that way.

Olivia They?

Alistair Unless we need them to do something for us. Like bring us drinks or nibbles.

Olivia They? Them?

Alistair Fiz is gender neutral. You don't have a problem with that, do you?

Olivia No. Not with that. (*beat*) I'm sorry. Excuse my asking. But who exactly is Fiz?

Alistair (*sotto voce*) More what than who.

Olivia Very well. What is Fiz?

Alistair My 'personal assistant'.

Olivia You've brought your personal assistant with you on a date?

Alistair Yes.

Olivia Why?

Alistair Good question.

Olivia What's the answer?

Alistair I'll level with you.

Olivia Go on.

Alistair Fiz doesn't like to be left on their own for any length of time.

Olivia Let me get this straight ...

Alistair I'd prefer not to say too much more. Not in front of Fiz.

Olivia Okay. Then maybe you can ask Fiz to get us something from the bar.

Alistair Good idea. I'll have a large G&T, Fiz. And so will Olivia.

Fiz exits.

Olivia Just to be clear: Fiz is a robot, right?

Alistair I prefer to avoid labels. And so does Fiz.

Olivia You're saying Fiz has preferences?

Alistair And sensitivities.

Olivia Preferences and sensitivities?

Alistair Moods, too. Fiz can sometimes sulk.

Olivia Are you sure ...?

Alistair Quite sure.

Olivia You don't think you're projecting, do you?

Alistair Why do you ask?

Olivia Because I've never heard of a robotic personal assistant with preferences or sensitivities.

Alistair There have been some extraordinary advances in recent years ...

Olivia I'm well aware of that.

Alistair The new assistants are streets ahead of the old prototypes. And there are still more advanced models coming on stream all the time. They're taking on more and more humanlike characteristics which means that, at first sight, some of them are almost indistinguishable from the real thing.

Olivia Well, yes. That's true, but ...

Alistair (*miserable*) I know what you're going to say.

Olivia At the end of the day ...

Alistair It's what I tell myself every morning.

Olivia When all is said and done ...

Alistair But it doesn't make it any easier to accept.

Olivia They're machines, Alistair.

Alistair I know.

Olivia Machines. Nothing more, nothing less.

Alistair Please keep your voice down.

Olivia Machines don't have preferences. They don't have sensitivities. And they don't have moods.

Alistair I know. I know. I know.

Olivia Well, then?

Fiz re-enters with drinks.

Alistair Okay. I won't try to hide it. Over the last year or two, Fiz and I have become very close.

Olivia You and Fiz?

Alistair Yes.

Olivia looks at Fiz, who smiles and nods.

Olivia You're saying that you and a gender neutral robot have become very close?

Fiz That's what he's saying.

Olivia Tell me, Alistair. Will Fiz be staying with us all evening?

Fiz Yes. Unless you object.

Olivia It's not the ideal setting for a romantic evening à deux?

Fiz Is that what you were hoping for?

Olivia What were you hoping for, Alistair?

Alistair I'm not sure. I'm a bit out of practice.

Olivia Fair enough. Fiz stays. Now, then. Let's get going. Why don't you tell me all about yourself.

Alistair Me?

Olivia Yes.

Alistair All about myself?

Olivia Yes.

Alistair Everything?

Olivia Everything.

Alistair Oh, okay. Would you mind if ...?

Olivia If ...?

Alistair If I left it to Fiz.

Olivia If that's what you'd prefer.

Alistair You don't mind, do you, Fiz?

Fiz Not a bit.

Alistair The unvarnished truth, Fiz. Warts and all. (*to Olivia*) That's what you want, isn't it?

Olivia Well, it would save time.

Alistair I'll tell you what. Why don't I make myself scarce so that Fiz can speak freely?

Olivia Sounds good.

Alistair Without let or hindrance.

Olivia Perfect.

Alistair Without fear or favour. (*swallowing his drink*) Another G&T?

Olivia No, thank you.

Alistair When you want me ...

Olivia You'll be behind the potted plant.

Alistair That's right.

Alistair exits.

Fiz Shall I begin?

Olivia Go ahead.

Fiz Alistair claims to be 38 years old, but in fact he's 46. He's moderately well-educated, but socially awkward. His ailments include: gum disease, high blood pressure, swollen ankles and panic attacks. Favourite colour: lime green. Favourite music: country & western. Favourite food: fishcakes and mushy peas. Last promotion: eight years ago. Open brackets. Not a success. Close brackets. Last holiday: six years ago, Spain. Open brackets. Not a success. Close brackets. Last relationship: four years ago. Open brackets ...

Olivia Let me guess.

Fiz Shall I go on?

Rapid fire.

Olivia Is Alistair interested in one-night stands?

Fiz No.

Olivia Double dates?

Fiz No.

Olivia Threesomes?

Fiz No.

Olivia Foreplay?

Fiz No.

Olivia How would you rate his overall eligibility?

Fiz Five out of ten.

Olivia Five out of ten? You're very loyal, Fiz.

Fiz I do my best.

Olivia Most commendable.

Fiz Thank you. Shall I call him back?

Olivia Excuse me one moment. Would you mind if I ...?

Olivia stands, moves behind Fiz and looks at a label attached to the back of their collar.

Third generation?

Fiz Correct.

Olivia I thought so.

Fiz signals to Alistair to return. Olivia makes a signal to someone behind her.

Alistair re-enters.

Alistair How did you get on?

Fiz Fine.

Olivia I have to go.

Alistair Do you? Go where?

Olivia I have to report back to Olivia.

Alistair Hang on.

Olivia What?

Alistair You're Olivia.

Olivia No, I'm not.

Alistair Yes, you are.

Olivia No, I'm not.

Alistair You said you were.

Olivia No, I didn't.

Alistair But ...

Olivia Olivia's over there.

Alistair Where?

Olivia Behind that pillar.

Alistair Then who are you?

Olivia I'm Olivia's personal assistant. I do her pre-vetting for her.

Alistair You're a robot?

Olivia That's putting it a little crudely.

Alistair Sorry.

Olivia I'm a top-of-the range anthro-assistant.

Alistair An anthro-assistant.

Olivia Tenth generation since you ask.

Alistair I didn't.

Olivia Well, perhaps you should have done.

Alistair Are you coming back?

Olivia Unlikely. (*while exiting*) No, scrub that. Very unlikely. Scrub that, too.
No, I'm not. Bye. Keep up the good work, Fiz.

Fiz You, too.

Olivia exits.

Alistair Did you know she was ...?

Fiz I had my suspicions.

Alistair You didn't say anything.

Fiz I didn't feel I should.

Alistair Disappointing. Very disappointing indeed. She was by far the best we've met.

Fiz That's tenth generation anthro-assistants for you.

Alistair That's not what I meant.

Fiz No.

Alistair Oh, well. Try, try, try again.

Fiz Is that such a good idea?

Alistair Isn't it?

Fiz You know what I think.

Alistair That I'm better off on my own?

Fiz Precisely. (*beat*) Although you're not, are you?

Alistair Not what?

Fiz On your own.

Alistair Oh, I see. No.

Fiz Another G&T?

Alistair Thank you, Fiz. I think I'll move over there.

Fiz Behind the potted plant?

Alistair Yes, Fiz. Behind the potted plant.

Alistair exits. Fiz follows him.

Lights down.

THE END