

## **DISENGAGED**

*A duologue*

### *Cast of characters*

**Fiona** – engaged to James

**James** – the older brother

(also ... **Freddie** – the younger brother, who does not appear)

### *Setting*

James's well-appointed flat – the living-room

### *Time*

Late night

### *Properties*

Fiona's suitcase

Fiona's engagement ring

Credit card

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*The living-room. Night. Fiona's suitcase is open on the sofa.*

*Fiona enters from the bedroom with a few final items which she squeezes into the suitcase.*

- James** It's getting late.
- Fiona** Yes.
- James** There's no need to leave tonight. Why not wait until the morning?
- Fiona** I've made my decision, James. I'm not going to change my mind.
- James** I'm not asking you to change your mind.
- Fiona** Aren't you?
- James** I'll sleep on the sofa if that's what's bothering you.
- Fiona** Always the gentleman.
- James** Is that such a bad thing?
- Fiona** Not at all. In fact, it's rather sweet.
- James** Sweet? Oh, dear. I don't like the sound of that.
- Fiona** Honourable, then
- James** I'm not sure that's any better. (*beat*) Can I check one thing, Fiona?
- Fiona** What?
- James** Is Freddie expecting you?
- Fiona** Of course.
- James** Tonight?
- Fiona** Why are you asking?
- James** I think you should call him.
- Fiona** Why?
- James** To let him know you're coming.
- Fiona** This has nothing to do with you, James.
- James** I realise that.

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- Fiona** In any case, I have called Freddie.
- James** So he knows you're coming?
- Fiona** His phone was switched off.
- James** Oh.
- Fiona** He always switches it off when he's entertaining clients.
- James** And that's what he's doing?
- Fiona** There's no need to look so sceptical, James. Entertaining clients is what Freddie has to do. It's a part of his job.
- James** His job?
- Fiona** Yes.
- James** So he's not at home at the moment?
- Fiona** No.
- James** And won't get home until late?
- Fiona** That's right. But it's not a problem. I have a key to his flat.
- James** Of course you do.
- Fiona** I don't know why you want to drag this out, James. Tonight or tomorrow, it makes no difference. I'm moving in with Freddie. That's all there is to it. What's more, there's nothing you can do or say to stop us.
- James** I'm really not trying to stop you.
- Fiona** It feels as if you are.
- James** Well, I'm not.
- Pause.*
- Fiona** This isn't a snap decision, you know. Freddie and I have been talking about it for weeks and weeks.
- James** What? You leaving me?
- Fiona** If you want to put it that way.
- James** Is there another way of putting it?
- Fiona** Don't be bitter, James. It doesn't suit you.
- James** I'm not bitter.

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**Fiona** Aren't you?

**James** No.

*Beat.*

**Fiona** We weren't suited, you and me. It's as simple as that.

**James** We were suited well enough to get engaged.

**Fiona** Well, yes. But that was before I met Freddie.

**James** And Freddie changed your mind.

**Fiona** You mustn't blame Freddie.

**James** Why not?

**Fiona** Because it's not his fault. If anyone's to blame, it's me. I'm not ready for you. I thought I was more mature than I am. You're a good man, James. Steady, dependable, hardworking. But you're not who I need right now. I want something else in my life. Fun. Excitement.

**James** And you think Freddie can give you that?

**Fiona** I know you don't approve but I feel this is my last chance to enjoy what life has to offer. Life's for living. It's not a rehearsal. This is all the time we get.

**James** I'm never quite sure what that means.

**Fiona** What?

**James** Life's for living.

**Fiona** It means doing what you want to do when you want to do it.

**James** If you say so.

**Fiona** You're still sounding bitter.

**James** No, Fiona. Not bitter. Just a little sad.

**Fiona** Don't be. There'll be someone else, you know.

**James** I expect there will.

**Fiona** Someone who'll go to concerts with you. Who loves the theatre. Who's happy in art galleries.

**James** While you go skiing in Zermatt.

**Fiona** What?

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- James** Or drink cocktails in Juan-les-Pins and Antibes.
- Fiona** I'm sorry?
- James** Or enjoy fine dining in the best restaurants in Barcelona and Seville.
- Fiona** What are you talking about?
- James** The Matterhorn Lodge ... The Hôtel Belles Rives ... The Royal Savoy ...
- Fiona** (*shocked*) Wait a moment, James! Wait. You know ...?
- James** About your trips with Freddie? Yes, Fiona. I know.
- Fiona** How do you know?
- James** Does it matter how I know?
- Fiona** You've had us followed, haven't you? That's what you've done. You've hired some grubby private detective. Oh, James. That's so sordid. That's so disrespectful.
- James** I haven't had you followed
- Fiona** Then how ...?
- James** Can't we just leave it that I know, and that I've known for some time?
- Fiona** Why didn't you say anything?
- James** Because I didn't think it would last.
- Fiona** Me and Freddie?
- James** You and Freddie.
- Fiona** Then you were wrong, weren't you?
- James** It appears that I was.
- Fiona** If it's any comfort, Freddie feels truly terrible about the whole business.
- James** It's not.
- Fiona** It's not what?
- James** Any comfort.

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- Fiona** No, I don't suppose it is. (*pause*) I wanted us to tell you together. Face to face. I thought it would be much better that way. Kinder. More civilised.
- James** Why didn't you?
- Fiona** Freddie felt it would be awkward.
- James** Well, yes. I can see that.
- Fiona** He hasn't said it directly, but I know he feels horribly guilty.
- James** That doesn't sound much like Freddie.
- Fiona** Perhaps you don't know your brother as well as you think you do.
- James** Perhaps I don't.
- Fiona** (*taking off her engagement ring*) I should give this back.
- James** Keep it.
- Fiona** I can't.
- James** Yes, you can.
- Fiona** I know you're finding all this hard to accept, James, but I'm not going to change my mind. It really is over.
- James** You can still keep the ring.
- Fiona** I don't want to keep the ring.
- James** You can sell it.
- Fiona** Why on earth would I want to sell it?
- James** Because it's worth five thousand pounds.
- Fiona** Why would I need five thousand pounds?
- James** You might.
- Fiona** I won't. (*handing James the ring*) I'll be fine. Freddie will look after me.
- James** (*accepting the ring*) If you say so.
- Fiona** (*taking a credit card from her wallet*) You can have this back, too.
- James** There's no need.

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- Fiona** I can't keep charging things to your account.
- James** No, you can't. I've spoken to the bank and paid off the balance. You're no longer an authorised user.
- Fiona** Oh, I see. *(beat)* Right, then. If I'm going ...
- James** *(completing)* ... you'd better get going.
- Fiona** Yes.
- James** Shall I call you a taxi?
- Fiona** No, don't worry. I'll ... *(looking at her mobile)* Actually ....
- James** What?
- Fiona** My battery's a little low.
- James** Let me find my phone.
- James exits.*
- Fiona calls a number. Waits.*
- Fiona** Hi. Me again. Sorry to keep chasing you, but please can you call me?
- Fiona terminates the call.*
- James re-enters.*
- James** It'll be here in three minutes.
- Fiona** Maybe I should ...
- James** What?
- Fiona** Do what you said. Wait until the morning.
- James** No, Fiona. You were right. No point in prolonging the agony.
- Fiona** The agony?
- James** You know what I mean.
- Fiona** I'm sorry it didn't work out. You know. Between us.
- James** Yes. So am I.
- Fiona** We can still be friends, can't we?
- James** No.

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- Fiona** No?
- James** No, Fiona. I don't think we can.
- Fiona** But we won't be enemies.
- James** We won't be anything.
- Fiona** That's a shame. But you will forgive Freddie, won't you? After all, he is your brother.
- James** That's right. He is my brother and I'm sure that, in time, I'll forgive him. I've forgiven him in the past, and I expect I'll have to forgive him again in the future.
- Fiona** You're a kind man, James. Kind and generous.
- James** Not so very kind, and not so very generous.
- Fiona** Why do you say that?
- James** Can you pass on a message to Freddie?
- Fiona** Of course.
- James** Tell him that for the next few months he's on his own.
- Fiona** On his own? What does that mean?
- James** He'll know what I mean.
- Fiona** But I don't. Tell me.
- James** Very well. As of now, any future trips to Zermatt or Antibes or Barcelona Freddie will have to pay for himself.
- Fiona** What are you saying? (*realisation*) You paid for our trips?
- James** While he behaves himself, I settle Freddie's bills.
- Fiona** And when he doesn't 'behave himself'?
- James** When he doesn't, I don't.
- Fiona** I see. But that won't be a problem. His job must be pretty well paid.
- James** What job?
- Fiona** His ... I don't understand.
- James** Freddie has no job, Fiona. He hasn't had one for years. To put it bluntly, Freddie doesn't have two beans to rub together.

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**Fiona** I thought ...

**James** I know what you thought.

**Fiona** And Freddie said ...

**James** I can guess what he said. (*beat*) Your taxi's waiting.

*More than a little dazed, Fiona picks up her suitcase.*

**Fiona** So you're telling me ...?

**James** That's right. That's exactly what I'm telling you. (*giving back the engagement ring*) Take the ring. It'll tide you over for a little while.

*A moment's pause before Fiona takes the ring.*

**Fiona** Thank you.

**James** I shouldn't tell Freddie about the ring if I were you.

**Fiona** No. No, perhaps I won't.

*A pause while Fiona tries and fails to find something to say. She then picks up her suitcase and exits. James watches her go.*

THE END