

# Girls & Boys

by Dennis Kelly

CHAT ONE

I met my husband in the queue to board an easyJet flight and I have to say I took an instant dislike to the man.

This was in Italy. I'd been traveling – not with any real sense of purpose or 'see the world' but more because I didn't know what the fuck I was doing with my life and I just could not face getting another job I hated back home. So I handed in my notice, took my last month's pay along with the deposit I got back from my flat, a brand spanking new credit card and I stuck a pin in a map of the world, determined to go wherever it landed, be it Paris, Calcutta, New York or Dubai.

I got Southampton.

An entire planet to choose from and I got Southampton. But I thought 'fate – follow fate. This could be the start of the rest of my life' which is how I found myself in Southampton.

For three days.

After which time I thought 'fuck you fate' and got on a train to Paris.

Paris is a dump.

I'm sorry, it is, and it's time we all started talking about this.

France is beautiful, I have been all over France and it is something, but Paris? Call that a world city? It's Leeds with wider streets.

I really, really, *really* was not on the lookout for someone. You see the travelling phase of my life had followed hot on the heels of what I now refer to as my drinky, druggy, slaggy phase: and I mean slaggy, by the way, not slutty, it was not some kind of *Sex and the City* shag fest that you could gossip with your gay pals about, it was dirty, messy and slaggy.

I'd been with the same bloke for four years – six months of passion followed by six months of warm bickering followed by three years of a slow decline into sub-zero tedium, and when we finally took it out the back and shot it in the head there was blood, mess, tears and recriminations for... well, months, actually.

It was not nice.

But at that point I realized I was twenty-five and I'd had exactly three sexual partners in my entire life; the first for one night, the second for six months and the last for four years. So I put all this information onto a spreadsheet and was shocked to discover that on current trends I'd be with the next guy for 326 years. I decided to go a different way.

I had fun.

Drink, drugs, a fair amount of cocaine and different partners – it was fun and a laugh and also destructive and slightly depressing and oddly callous and upsetting as well as energizing – confusing. It was confusing.

The end of it came when I was having extremely drunk, doggy style sex with my flatmate on this grimy, suicide-beige carpet in our flat in – of all places – Wood Green. We had developed this unhealthy 'let's not have a relationship but fuck when drunk enough' thing and at this moment I was so drunk that I'd just thrown up – and we were *still* doing it. I mean I'd just puked, the sick was right there, I'd just folluped it up on the carpet. And the force of the thrusting is kind of nudging me towards it, towards this, well, towards this puddle of puke and I remember thinking 'if he doesn't come soon, he's going to fuck me right into that puddle of puke.'

That exact thought.

That exact sentence materialized inside my brain.

Let me repeat it for you.

'If he doesn't come soon...

he's going to fuck me right into that puddle of puke.'

Let me tell you something – when a sentence like that appears in your life, you know it's time to start looking at your choices.

That was the end of my drinky, druggy, slaggy phase. I quit my job, took my cash and went to Europe.

*Beat.*

So I'm queuing. And this is an easyJet flight. And it's been delayed and they're not saying anything, so everyone in this queue is just standing there quietly hating anything within our hate radius.

And this is in Italy.

And let me be clear – I love Italians. Italians are great, Italy is great: but Italians do not like queuing. Italians have an extremely lax attitude to the whole concept of the queue in general.

And this wasn't just Italy, this was Naples – and I fucking love Naples, Naples is incredible, but if Italians don't respect the queue, then Neapolitans outright despise the queue. Neapolitans have a complicated relationship to rules – it's part of their charm. So for example everywhere else in the world a red light means 'Stop.' But in Naples a red light means '*Stop...?*'

So needless to say this queue is tense. Everyone is on edge waiting for the cut-ins, everyone is looking daggers at everyone else like 'is that guy moving up, is he fucking sneaking up...?' or 'I swear to Christ, if that old bitch tries to cut in I will drop her and stomp on her neck.'

But by some miracle the integrity of the queue is staying intact. We *are* queuing, it has not become the last helicopter out of Saigon that we all know at any moment it could turn into.

But this guy in front of me...

I mean he is just standing there, not a care in the world, reading – reading a fucking *book*, head lost in it, casually shunting his bag forward with his foot every so often, taking his own sweet, allowing a gap to open up – I mean a gap? Here? In this queue?

And I'm just fuming. I mean you moron, you idiot, you thick brained, lard-synapsed cock-head, do you not get what's going on here? Do you not know what it is taking for these people to keep this queue together? They are fighting every instinct in their bodies and are somehow winning and here you are just letting gaps open up? Gaps?

And then...

These two

models, I mean they had to have been models, they were gorgeous, these girls, god knows what they were doing *here* – must've had a flight suddenly cancelled because they were looking around and thinking '*where are we? I don't like it, where's the VIP lounge?*'

And you know when you see proper expensive clothes, but *proper* expensive – and the hair and the grooming... it was like being visited from another dimension. I swear people were taking photos.

And they go straight up to this guy

Idiot face. They go right up to idiot face and the brunette goes

*Hi there, how are you?*

(And he looks up and he's like '*huh?!? What?*' I mean he doesn't say that, he doesn't say anything, he's just staring with his mouth open like Scooby fucking Dooby because no one of this genus has ever spoken to him before, and he's actually looks slightly scared, like he's thinking '*what is this? What's happening to me?*')

*Is it okay if we talk to you for a bit?*

(this is the blonde)

*Er... excuse me? What me?*

*Yeah. We just wanna stay here with you and chat for a bit. Here.*

And suddenly I get it and I'm thinking 'oh, no, no, no, you bitch, you conniving, long legged, no, no, no, no, no...'

But this guy, this idiot, this moron, he is already done. He is dead, he is finished, he is prey, I mean they are shining, it's as if they've already been airbrushed before stepping into life.

*You wanna stand... here? And talk... to me?*

(wheels clunking into place in his skull, like he knows no words and language has never actually cluttered his mouth before this second)

*Yeah. Is that okay?*

And she pulls out this smile... and I swear to Christ if she threw that smile it could cut heads off statues, the sound of harps accompany that smile and I'm actually admiring her a bit, though I'm not because I want to cut her into tiny pieces and feed her to an ant-eater.

And he's just like

*Well, of course.*

(brilliant. Brilliant, just...)

*But I get to sleep with one of you, right?*

Hold on. Hold the fuck on...

*Excuse me?*

*I get to sleep with one of you? I mean that is what's going on here?*

*Er...*

*Because otherwise there really is no point to me letting you cut in to this queue in front of all these good people who have been patiently waiting for the last hour and fifteen minutes to board this plane and who want to get on it every bit as much as you do, is there?*

And suddenly I realize that this creepy little slack-jawed simpleton is actually a genius with the physique of a Greek god.

And the blonde is just staring, stunned – this does not compute, not this, not from a *normal*. And the brunette is sort of horrified almost in shock – so much so in fact that she then says the most funniest thing that I have ever heard anyone say in my entire life ever. She says...

*But... we're models.*

It just came out. Like a silent thought that suddenly wanders into your mouth without permission. And my day has flipped, this is a great day, this is a lovely day, they will write songs about this day.

And fucking Odysseus here does not miss a beat, he smiles sweet as beetroot and says *'Well you'll still be models at the back of the queue.'*

Blondie suddenly wakes up and pipes in – she's not having this...

*Look, there's no need to be rude! We were just trying to be friendly.*

*No, you weren't. What you were doing the opposite of friendly. You were hoping I'd fall for you so you could get something you wanted and the moment we got on that plane you would've abandoned me and I would've felt shitty about myself. What you were doing wasn't being friendly, it was being... well, excuse me, but you were being bitches.*

And now people are listening, some are even laughing, and it's being translated to others and even in translation it's funny because let's face it no one really likes the gorgeous, and these girls... well they're sensing it: the first few moments of revolution, the peasants mumbling about

freedom, the apes learning speech. The brunette decides this has gone far enough – so she leans in and goes

*Oh, and by the way: we would never, ever sleep with you. Ever. Okay?*

And... I think this has actually got him. Because, well, it's true. He is looking at something some part of him *has* to want and what they're saying is 'No: not now, not ever – you will never, ever touch anything like this, ever.' And something in him changes. And when he speaks it's with a softer voice, more delicate, no charm, just... honesty.

*No. No, you wouldn't. And I know you wouldn't. But it is my firm belief that the act of making love is the highest expression of our humanity. It is the union of two souls, it is a celebration –*

(– this is verbatim, by the way; this is *exactly* what he said –)

*– of our love of being alive. But in you, I do not see that love. I do not see that spark of life, I really don't. Therefore sex with you would be an act of necrophilia – it would be like wanking into a pretty dress.*

*Beat.*

Bit harsh, that last bit.

But tell me that you don't just love him, a little bit.

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## SCENE TWO

What's that?

Mud?

A bucket of mud? And where are you going with a bucket of mud?

No, young lady, you are not coming into the house with a bucket of mud.

Because it's a bucket of mud.

I don't care if you've got a plastic sheet down, you are not coming into my house with a big bucket of wet –

Yes it is my house and you are not coming in with that because it's going to get everywhere, isn't it? And where were you going to take it anyway?

Right, well first off, the Shard made of mud does sound fantastic and I would like to see that, but secondly you are not taking a bucket of mud into your bedroom, that is never going to happen, so go outside please, you can do it in the garden.

What?

Well, you don't have planning permission to do it in your bedroom either do you, so come on, out.

That's it, out; go on, you can –

Hey! What did you say?

Come back here, what did you just –

*But elsewhere...*

Oh, Danny!

Oh, no, no, Danny, Danny, Danny, what are you doing? You're supposed to eat it, not wear it, I'm gonna have to clean...

*She cleans him.*

Why don't you just... put it in your mouth, for god's sake, you put everything else in your bloody mouth, why can't you just...

It's not funny.

Don't laugh, you little... I'm cleaning this!

Yeah, I'm scolding you. This is scolding, the least you can do is not laugh at me when I'm –

Alright, that's enough!

Christ's sake, not the floor, your mouth, put it in your f...

*But Leanne is coming back...*

Oh, no, no, no, no, no. I said no.

What do you mean, it's different? It's the same bucket with the same mud in it, I can see it.

*Listens. Looks in the bucket as requested.*

Well, it looks the same to me. And it doesn't matter because it's still mud.

Yes it is, I can see it's mud.

*A long complicated answer that almost makes her laugh. But she still manages to hold onto the sternness.*

Well wet earth with water in it is still mud, young lady, and you are not bringing it in here. And excuse me but what did you just say to me before you went out? I haven't forgotten that.

What did you say?

What did you say?

Leanne, what did you say?

Right, well I think you did say something and I'm gonna tell your dad when he gets home and I don't think you're going to be going to the city farm this afternoon do you?

Well, I am gonna tell him.

Well, I am –

Leanne, that is enough, you are making me very angry now...

No, I am not always angry, I am just angry when you act like a little... *(wants to say bitch)*

Like a little... *(wants to say fucking bitch)*

Don't you dare say that to me! Don't you dare... come here!

I said come here, you come here when I –

*But...*

Danny!

Oh for Christ's sake, what are you... in your mouth! In your... fucking mouth!

No alright, sorry, sorry, sorry, shhh, come on...

*Picks him up.*

I'm sorry, I'm sorry...

*Walks him around.*

Yeah, I know, I know, mummy's horrible, I know. I'm sorry, darling. Let's get buggy, you want buggy?

*She gets his dummy, gives it to him.*

Here you go, here's buggy, have buggy.

*He accepts it. She walks around, bouncing him a little.*

Oh, I know, I know. I'm a terrible mother. I'm evil, I am, I'm the worst mother in the world, I know, I know.

*Leanne comes back in.*

*Comes up to her.*

*Stands in front of her. Silence.*

Well?

Do you have something you want to say to me?

*She listens.*

Yeah, well. It's very hurtful when you say things like that you know.

I know, but you're getting to be a big girl now so you need to think about what you're saying.

Yes, well, I'm very glad you've said sorry, I'm very proud of you for doing that, but you need to think, Leanne.

Yeah, well I'm sorry too.

Come on, no tears...

*Crouches, brings her into the hug.*

No, I won't tell daddy.

Yes, you can go to the city farm.

What?

Honey, well I'm sure you can make the Shard in the garden just as well as in the bedroom. Why can't you make it in the garden?

Well, if it keeps falling down you can just put a stick in it, can't you?

Don't worry, the people can move around the stick and it can support your building at the same time.

*Smiles, almost laughs.*

Yes, that's right – exactly like a lift shaft.

Do I get a kiss?

Not even one?

*She gets a kiss.*

Thank you.

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## CHAT THREE

Belief is an incredible thing.

*Beat.*

I went away with a vague, fuzzy, candy-floss interest in getting a career in ‘media-stroke-TV-stroke-creative industries-stroke-celebrity life coach’ – but when I came back all this guffle had coalesced into an intensely focused, laser-like ambition to be a development executive in documentary filmmaking.

(Where this general leaning to do something in that direction had come from, I’ve no idea. There was nothing in my background that suggested anything like that: I mean where I was brought up that was *not* what people did. You can probably tell from the accent – though in all honesty it’s become diluted and drifts in and out these days...)

But now I was just desperate to get into that industry and after six months trying to scrabble my way in like a rat in a chip shop, I’d finally managed to get an interview for a job as a development executive’s assistant’s PA.

Now. Do you know what a development executive is? No? Don’t worry – no one does. A development executive is the person in the filmmaking process who doesn’t ever get to do any *actual* filmmaking. They’re someone in the room whose name the real creatives can’t quite remember. They are the first stage of the rocket, unglamorous lumps of metal doomed to be jettisoned mere seconds after lift-off, left to tumble down and crash into a thousand pieces in the Nevada desert, as the really interesting stuff shoots off into the cosmos.

And let me be clear – this *was not* an interview to be a development executive. It wasn’t even an interview to be a development executive’s assistant. It was an interview to be a development executive’s assistant’s... PA.

And I wanted it *so* bad. I wanted nothing on this earth more.

But when I walked into that room to see all those people waiting, those young talented fop-haired boys or those super smart young women who looked like they’d grown up riding horses and quaffing wine... oh my god.

So as I gave my name, maybe to mask my fear or whatever I kind of joked a stupid little joke:

*Wow. And I thought I was special.*

And this receptionist looks at me like I’d just cupped a fart in front of him and asked him to smell it and he says

*This is day five?*

I had no chance. I was dead.

Which by then, for me had become an interesting place to fight from.

So when my turn comes and I’m sat in there in front of the most bored woman on the planet – a woman who is a legend, by the way, a woman who has spent twenty-five years in the most dangerous, difficult places on this earth documenting all of the awful, appalling, terrifying, shocking, surprising, beautiful and generous things that human beings do to other human beings – but who now looks like if she hears the word ‘passionate’ one more time she will scoop out her own eyes with a fucking melon baller, well... I knew I had to get creative.

She’s peering at my CV on her desk like it was one half of a rat...

*And... what is it you have that all those others out there don’t?*

(Talk about direct.)

All or nothing... So I just said

*Well at least with me you won’t have to worry about where to park my fucking horse.*

And just for good measure, just for good fuckety fuck, I hit 'horse', like you know 'orse.'

And she looked up and me  
and pissed her pants laughing.

And that laugh...

Oh my god.

And I just thought I want to work for you more than I want to live, if I walk out of here without that job I will shoot myself in the face so I said 'and I may as well tell you that there's no point in looking at that CV coz it's all a pack of fucking lies.'

Her smile fades.

She's still curious...

But the second 'fucking' *might* have been too much – she's not a clown; she's not going to be played.

*Explain.*

Deep breath...

*You asked for a minimum of two years experience, which means being a runner which means working for free for two years which means a mother and father that can support you while you don't get paid, which I don't have and will never have.*

She's staring at me like a psychopath weighing up which ear to slice off first.

*No one's going to give you a job in this business without doing that; you do know that, don't you? That is how this works.*

And I just keep staring at her and hope she doesn't notice that I've started crying inside, because actually what she has just said is the truth and I know that it is the truth.

*I'm curious, then. How do you plan to surmount this insurmountable problem?*

*Well, I'm going to keep coming into rooms like this, amongst people like that, writing lies like those until it works. I will keep banging my head against the wall until the wall breaks or until my neck is a bloody stump.*

*Beat.*

It is generally not advisable in an interview to use the phrase 'until my neck is a bloody stump'. Generally.

I got the job.

*Smiles.*

Belief, you see. I never *really* had that until I met him. I was too scared. Back then I just dipped my toe in, constantly trying to figure out the temperature of life before eeking my body in, millimetre by panicked millimetre. Even going abroad, my great journey into the unknown came out of fear: the dread of being given the gift of life and then spending the next seventy years on the sofa in my pyjamas, eating crisps and watching *Broadchurch*.

But when I whispered my little secret hopes to him, these tiny precious blasphemies that I could actually *do* something, he would terrify me by saying 'Why not? Other people do it, why not you – you can do anything, look at you.'

You see the thing about him was he was doer.

Wanna know what he was up to in Italy?

He had a business importing French and Italian antique wardrobes into the UK.

Now his background – not dissimilar to my own, maybe a bit more... But there was nothing in there that pointed to antique wardrobes – I mean his dad did accounts for a car showroom in Bromley.

But he'd been on a stag do with some mates in the south of France, and where they were staying this wardrobe gets delivered – huge, beautiful, big old farmhouse thing it is,

but it's never gonna get in the door. An hour later this tiny old fella with a rubber mallet turns up, and without even taking the roll-up out of his mouth he steps inside – knocks here, bangs there and suddenly it's planks. He takes them inside – minutes later he's walking out, leaving the thing looking absolutely perfect and still smoking the same rollie.

And he's watching this. And he just goes 'I'm gonna sell those.' And he does. For a fortune to all those rar-rar shops in Chelsea. And his business is born. *That's* his doing thing.

*Beat. Smiles.*

Our love was intense.

(Actually, it was insane. I mean I'm sure I don't need to explain, I'm sure you've all been through that at least once.

I hope so. I mean if not... what the fuck have you been doing? I mean it, if you haven't felt that at least one time then break up with your partner immediately. Go home, jack them in, do not waste this.

Or kill yourself.)

*Laughs. Beat.*

And I'm not saying the insane part lasted forever, god no – in fact thank god no, who can live like that. But it was there. We had it.

I had to make a conscious effort not to talk about him, because he was the only subject I was really interested in. I was obsessed with his hands. He was a big guy, a lump of a man – which I have to say, I liked a lot – but he had these ridiculously articulate hands like they'd been sewn on and had belonged to a surgeon or... a concert pianist.

And he was funny.

Not quite as funny as me. But he was fine with that, which I also loved because a lot of men, especially the smart ones,

they just cannot *not* be the funny one, even if they really aren't. But he was fine with it.

The sex was outrageous.

I mean fucking hell, at first – oh my god! We went mental.

Real gold medal stuff, pleased as punch with ourselves we were.

Then we sort of calmed and you know what – that was fine. It wasn't like a panic, like 'oh shit, we haven't done it in three weeks, what does that say about us as a couple' we were just fine. I don't know, I think we just knew that this thing that we were having was about way more than the bit where we rubbed parts of our bodies against each other.

I hated his family. But so did he, so that was fine.

And I'm not gonna talk about mine.

*Beat. A smile.*

He loved my new job by the way – loved it! He was always going on about it to his mates and the lads at work, his boys. Yeah, he was a bit like 'look at us.'

I suppose he was a bit... well a bit showy. Like look at my perfect family, look at my partner, look at what she does, look at us. But fuck it, d'you know what – I loved it. I did, I loved it because he was proud. He was proud of us, he was proud of... well he was proud of me.

*Beat.*

I did do one thing that was a bit...

He had this friend. This female friend – Emma...

And it's not that I was jealous, because first off, that's not what I'm like. I don't do that. But the moment I met Emma, I just thought – No.

Not this. This is not on. No way. And it wasn't a conscious thing, it was just somewhere deep within my gut, it was just... there. So, I...

How to say this without sounding...

I destroyed their friendship.

There. I did. And for no real reason, but I wasn't gonna have... that.

And it wasn't dramatic or anything, I didn't make up lies about her or stalk her or frame her for a crime she didn't commit, it was just a general chipping away. A change of mood when she turned up. The odd filthy look and general disapproval, a just 'making things more awkward and unpleasant' and in the end, well these things mounted up and they just... fell away from each other, drifted. And I do feel bad about that. Because she was actually a lovely person.

*Beat.*

You know what's odd? I think he knew. And I think he liked it.

*A pause.*

When I found out I was pregnant I knew this was bad. So by now he's doing really well – twelve lads working for him, three vans and a warehouse. And I kind of knew that he didn't want kids. We hadn't talked about it, but I just knew. I mean fuck it, you know, don't you.

And what was hard was that I had started to want it. Badly. Because of him. Now that his child was in me I wanted it so much.

*Hesitates.*

When I actually said the words... it was like the stuff that his muscles were made of suddenly became liquid. He started... wobbling, just gently wobbling. And then he sort of... folded down, he just concertinaed down onto the sofa,

collapsing in on himself. Crumbling. And then he starts... to shake. Like the fear, the not wanting, the 'no, no, no' is so profound it's actually coming out through his muscles.

And as I stood there watching this, I decided there and then to have an abortion. I was gonna get rid of, well... of my child, because in my mind it had already become a child. To me it was now, definitely a child, and a child I had started to want. But I was going to kill it. To keep him.

That's how intense this was.

*Pause.*

And slowly... he looks up.

And the

grin

on his face is huge. And I realize he's fucking laughing, this twat is laughing like an idiot, he's laughing his big beautiful idiot head off.

And we're both just standing there laughing.

\* \* \*

#### SCENE FOUR

Danny!

What were you thinking?

But it's broken! It's completely broken, you broke it into a thousand... why would you do that, why would you –

*To Leanne.*

Leanne, stop crying please.

*To Danny.*

You've broken it into a thousand pieces, why would you do that?

What?

No, it is not better like this is it?

Because Leanne worked really hard on that, she went to a lot of trouble in her pottery class and now it's in a thousand pieces because of you? She spent nearly a whole week making that dinosaur and –

*Leanne interrupts.*

What?

Oh. I thought it was a dinosaur.

*To Danny.*

Right, well, she spent a week making that chicken and now you just –

How? How is it better like this?

No it does not mean there's more chickens, it means there is one that is in lots of pieces, it's really, really naughty, you have really –

*To Leanne.*

Leanne, alright, please just stop because that's getting a bit...

*To Danny.*

Why? I want to know why you did it, I want to know why you smashed your sister's work.

Because I'm trying to understand why you do these things and I know you love your sister so why would you do something like this?

I beg your pardon?

*To Leanne.*

Leanne, stop that, please, it's not helping.

*To Danny.*

What did you just say?

How is it funny? Don't say it's funny because that will really –

Danny, if you start laughing there is going to be a lot of trouble, do you understand me?

*To Leanne.*

Leanne, please!

Because to be honest darling you're being a bit of a baby now, it's just a clay chicken, it's not the end of the world.

Yes, I know it's the end of your chicken, but I think humanity is going to find a way to soldier on without it, don't you?

*To Danny.*

Stop laughing! Now I want you to apologise to your sister and I want you to promise you won't break anything else she makes.

Yes, you do have to promise!

Because I said you have to promise.

What?

Yes, a promise is still a promise when someone else makes you do it, and look I'm not getting into a philosophical debate with you here, Danny, apologise to your sister and promise you won't break any more of her things.

*A lengthy speech from Danny...*

And...?

*Some more...*

Right. Thank you. And I want you to keep that or there will be serious, serious, *serious* consequences, do you understand?

Consequences means trouble, alright?

*To Leanne.*

Okay, right. It's over. So Leanne...? The waterworks, maybe...?

Because he's said he's sorry, so you know let's... all move on with our lives.

Because you're beginning to be a bit annoying: he's said sorry, it's over, what more do you want?

Well, I'm not going to punch him in the face and I don't think you would want that, so –

No I do not treat him differently from you!

No I am not a sexist, do you even know what that means?

You are going to be going to your room very soon young lady, if you do not –

Leanne....

Leanne!

\* \* \*

## CHAT FIVE

I think a lot about violence.

Not because I want to or anything. I just think it's such a fundamental part of our species that how can you understand us without understanding it? Cows don't live

violent lives. Unless it's something eating them. And even carnivores – yeah, there's a lot of hunting and chasing and rending, but war? Murder? Torture?

And please don't misunderstand, I'm not negative about... *us* – I think we're incredible. The things we've done. The things we do.

I mean if I collapse right here, tonight – you'll all look after me.

You will. *You* will do that.

And it's not just you – there's this whole system in place out there that will kick into life just to keep me breathing. And that system is there to help me if I get robbed, or lose my job or get attacked in the street, and god knows it is not perfect, god knows it has been neglected and degraded, but it is there. And we did that, we had that idea – we created this incredible thing called society just for this purpose, just to... keep us alive and stop us hurting each other.

Sometimes I would look at him and think 'you're a father, a husband, a man and you have reached a certain age and you have never had to kill anyone. You have never had to defend your home, you have never had to flee into the mountains with your family, you have never had to destroy another human life – at what other time in history could that be said? In other parts of this planet that is happening right now, but here, in this bubble, it is not, and isn't that some kind of miracle?'

And you look at these fucked up ideologies.

And you think how come they manage to be so proud of that and we walk around being so ashamed and cynical about this, and in a way how dare we, I mean how fucking dare we?

*Pause.*

I rose quick.

(I didn't expect that, that was a surprise. Like I'd reckoned before that I *might* be smart but I also knew there was a good chance that I was just an idiot who could talk. But now... )

I'd discovered throwing myself at things. I'd find myself in a room with people, these filmmakers, smart, driven fuckers and every one of them always spoke better than me, was more coherent, way better educated and I'd get paranoid and quiet for two minutes and then I'd think 'shove it up your balls' and I'd boulder in.

I would actually think that, by the way, that exact sentence – 'shove it up your balls' I have no idea why, it's such a stupid thing to have as your battle cry.

And if it was a woman I'd think 'shove it up your flaps'.

*Laughs. Beat.*

I think I liked the vulgarity. I think I used the vulgarity to get me over the top, or... something.

*Beat.*

These were the good times. When everything just felt... right. I mean we had difficulties, arguments of course we did, sometimes proper intercontinental dingdongs – but nothing you couldn't get over.

He used to get frustrated at stupid things and I found that really funny. Like not being able to open stuff, and I'd be in fits of laughter – I mean why can't you open a packet of cornflakes, for Christ's sake?

*Laughs.*

I was always, always asleep before him and always, always awake before him. I think I just found him very comfy – I've not ever found anyone else that comfy. I'd lie on his shoulder and bang: that was it, I was out. Then he'd watch TV or read so there was this whole part of our night I wasn't party to. But in the morning it was my turn and if it

was before the kids woke I'd just mooch in bed, or... just watch him.

*Smiles. Beat.*

(Sometimes he used to talk in his sleep, but really lucid whilst making absolutely no sense, and I used to love that because I could talk back to him and he'd reply. But just this weird gibberish and I could keep it going for ages. So he'd be like –

*Because I put them in the back?*

And I'd be

*What did you put in the back?*

*Those animals.*

*What animals?*

*Those animals that have got the things on them and are going to the cricket.*

*The cricket?*

*Yeah. It's a game with balloons, and there's keys there as well, but I don't think the keys are falling.*

I mean *what!?!* And this'd go on for ages, and then his eyes would just snap open and he'd be like a rabbit in the headlights for just a second or two before he realized then he'd see me and know instantly what I was up to and he'd call me a bitch and roll over and I'd just crack up.)

*Beat.*

At weddings someone always fancied him. *Always.*

He looked good in a suit. And sometimes they'd get flirty with him. And occasionally – just occasionally he'd flirt back, the prick. Yeah, he had a bit of an eye for the ladies. Which was... fine, I mean, we all like a look, right? So... so yeah, no, fine. Whatever.

*Beat.*

I remember this one huge row – it was about a mass shooting of all things. An American one. And in fairness this was a *really* bad one. One that you'd remember if I told you – everyone was watching this unfold, it was horrific.

And so we're watching this. And he's venting about gun control and congress and whatnot and we're talking and we're watching, and of course the twenty-four-hour news cycle – it's pain porn, you know? And I find myself saying why are we all so shocked? I mean it just seems to be a thing that we do, this... incomprehensible violence thing.

And then I'm talking about those lads who blow themselves up for Islamic State or prison gangs or football hooligans or Ukrainian Nationalists or family killers or Viking fucking ravishers for that matter, and isn't it all part of the same, well male impulse, because in general, they are all – in general – well male.

And he is just ... outraged. I mean just... outraged.

*How can you say that... what kind of person says... people are dead...*

You know? All of that... And I'm just like *fuck you* – huge row, just huge. Over something so...

And I don't think it was the male thing. I don't think he was offended coz of that. I think it was more what it might of... looked like? Does that make sense? Like my dirty little thoughts polluting our perfect nuclear family, infecting it with a darkness that it should not have...

And that genuinely upset him. It genuinely did.

*Pause.*

When Veronica announced that she was leaving the company it –

*Beat.*

Ah shit. Shit!

Shit, I didn't want to use her real name.

*Pause. Thinks...*

Fuck it, you know who she is now.

When Veronica, the woman who interviewed me and owned the company announced that she was leaving, the place went nuts. It was like this gossip cloud just descended. And it wasn't actually because she was leaving...

See she'd sold the company to a larger company for a stinking fortune and part of that deal was that she stays running the place for a certain amount of years and those years were ending. And meanwhile the larger company had since been sold to a huge company which had then been sold to a colossal company owned by a well-known media baron who owned everything in the world except this pen

*Has a pen.*

so we all expected that once she was free of the contract she would be off, she'd set up on her own, and it was only a matter of time.

What we didn't expect was that she'd adopt a child and get out of the business altogether. No one expected that.

But that's what she did. Fifty-two years old and she adopts this beautiful, beautiful little girl and gets the hell out.

You should've heard what people said. The shit people say...

And I just thought you fucking... You know, the judging – men and women, by the way – the judging...

First you snide about her for being tough. Then you snide about her for being tough and childless. Then you snide about her for getting a child, it was disgusting.

*Beat.*

She only mentioned it once to me. Like we were in the middle of a meeting, just me and her and suddenly she looks up at me and says.

*I know what they're saying about me.*

And I was shocked. But with this woman you didn't deny, you didn't not tell the truth so I said

*Does it bother you?*

And without even blinking she comes straight back.

*Yes. But not as much as living my life unhappy.*

And I thought you are now and you always will be my hero.

But in amongst all the turmoil...

There was this colleague of mine, Liam, a mental little bundle of energy from Northern Ireland: looked like he was fifteen, talked like he had ginger up his arse and laughed like a hyena being tickled – he was great Liam, I loved Liam. And we'd worked on some stuff together and it had gone really well. Well, we sort of found ourselves talking about starting up together. A company. Me and Crazy Liam. The idea just sort of... grew into existence, it just emerged from the void.

And look, we were just talking about it. I mean who the fuck were we? But... talking about it led to pondering about it. Which led to *finding out* about it. Which kind of led to preparing to actually do it – which seemed utter batshit loopdiloop, because who the fuck were we?

So when I took this idea home and tentatively broached the subject with the father of my children, perhaps half of me was hoping he was gonna say 'are you mad? Now? In this climate? With two kids, what about the two kids?'

But he was just bang on it, no hesitation.

Do it, do it, do it, do it, do it. That was him.

And this hadn't come at the best of times, by the way. Because his business had hit a patch, things were... not hard, exactly but there was a change I suppose, trends or people going for fitted... or modern, or something?

But he just said 'Do it, do it, do it.'

So I did it.

*Smiles. Beat...*

What came as a shock was that the doing of it, wasn't actually that difficult.

Now I'm not saying it wasn't hard work. Oh Christ, me and Liam worked *so* hard. But it wasn't ever actually... difficult. So you'd get into some situation – like finding premises or negotiating residual rights with central American distributors and your brain would scream at you 'What the shit do we do?' but then you'd just... figure it out. You didn't need some special something, , you'd just... figure stuff out.

This was a surprise. And you begin to realise that the terrible secret of all human endeavour might just be that it's not really *that* hard. When you get right down to it. And all these people running these multi-nationals and getting tens of millions a year – yeah, they work hard, but who doesn't? You do. You work as hard as them. They're not special, no one's special, we're all just weird looking chimps.

Not that we were getting tens of millions.

*Laughs.*

We were broke. I mean, Jesus, Liam and I spent six months banging our heads against a massive wall of 'who the fuck are you?'

Then suddenly, this film, this... incredible film just lands in our laps – out of the blue. BAFTA-winning, Oscar-nominated director making a film about the rise of the far right in Europe. And she's had a terrible time with a bunch of producers who say she's difficult – and yes, *male* producers – and one day she walks in to our office and goes –

*I hear you two aren't complete cunts. I want you to make my film.*

And we did. We made it. And it worked. And everything changed.

Suddenly doors opened up. Suddenly people wanted us. And because our tastes were so varied, we were able to do wildly different projects. So while making a film about corruption in the American Military industrial complex we were also able to do one about turf wars between ice cream men in south London.

It was a mad time. And we just rolled with it. Like part of you is thinking 'what am I doing? Is this me doing this? *Me?*' and another part just goes 'ah bollocks, have a go'.

And you know what – I was good at it. I was. I was really good at it.

*Pause.*

(I always remember this one project, because it was just so...

Basically it was all about this bizarre, obscure academic who for the past twenty-five years had been working out a system that would make it harder for men to gain power. The whole thing was based on one underlying assumption – that society has been created for men; to enable men, to empower men, for men to run and for men to tend. And yet any objective look at our world would have to conclude that men are, in general, absolutely cocking awful at being in power: *in general.*

So he'd worked out this entire thing where – depending on how much damage you could do in the job – it would be anything from 10-95% harder for a man to get the position. And it was in all aspects of life: politics, business, military, the arts – he had classifications in place for local councils in the American South or organized labour movements in Sub-Saharan Africa, I mean the detail. And he'd partnered up with this statistician and they'd spent years on this.

So we're thinking 'great – what a lovely old nutter. This'll be a fun one' BBC4 at the weekend; late night, you know. But the funny thing was, when you went in to talk to him... You kind of start believing. You go in thinking 'what dingbattery is he gonna come out with today' and you'd come out thinking 'So when are we gonna implement this?'

Or you'd go – look, women in power, not always good: Margaret Thatcher, Queen Isabella of Spain, Katie Hopkins. And he'd reply "yes, I will take your Margaret Thatcher and I will raise you a Pol Pot, a Stalin, a Franco, a Genghis Khan, a Vlad the Impaler."

Or you'd say what about where that testosterone aggression is useful, like the stock market? But the statistician would whip in with a bunch of statistics showing that if you took into account all the times those Wall Street Boys fucked up as well as succeeded it was really no better than just flipping a coin. I mean it was... it was interesting stuff.

Only slightly marred when he tried to cop off with me.

I mean he was seventy-three.

Seventy-three. And Katherine, our eighteen-year-old researcher was right outside. I said to him 'what are you doing, you're seventy-three and Katherine our eighteen-year-old researcher is right outside.' And you know what he said?

*'Why not invite her in?'*

Dirty old fucker.

We didn't get to finish that one. Funding fell through. And then, you know... he died.

Seventy-three. God love him for trying though, eh?)

\* \* \*

SCENE SIX

Right.

Right.

Right, okay, look, please stop, not together, because I can't hear –

Right.

Alright, alright, here's what we're going to do; we're going to play for ten minutes and then –

No *ten* minutes, because Mummy's very tired and –

No, I'm not always tired, don't say that, I'm just tired now so –

No, not twenty minutes, ten.

No not an hour, ten minutes, I said ten minutes and we're doing ten minutes or no minutes at all, so which do you want?

Right, good. Okay, what are we gonna –

Okay, okay, okay, stop! What are we playing?

*Listens to them both.*

Well playing war and playing architects are two very different games, aren't they?

Alright, no, no, no, no, peace please! Let's try and... keep the peace.

Here's what we're going to do – first we're going to play Leanne's game and then we're going to play Danny's and we'll do it for an even amount of –

Stop shouting, please! No, Leanne's first because I said so and because she's the oldest and then yours and that's it, please.

Okay, right, Leanne: architects, let's go?

*Leanne explains. It is complex.*

Right.

Right.

*Listens more, even more detailed.*

Right. So I go here then, do I?

*She gets it wrong, is moved away.*

Oh, excuse me; well if that's the biogas storage facility I definitely don't want to step on that then do I.

And who's Danny, then?

Okay, good, the carpenter – Danny you be the –

No, darling, you haven't got a gun, carpenters don't have guns.

Well, we'll do yours in a minute, this is Leanne's.

And what is it I have to say?

'Is this all up to code?'

Right. That's a bit American, isn't it?

Well I just don't think people say that here do they?

Oh, Chicago? Nice.

So I say that and you're gonna...?

And then I just say it's fine then do I?

...fill in a form, and...?

... and a passing grade, right, got it.

No, Danny, no anthrax – not in this game.

No, it's not boring and it's Leanne's game so be nice.  
Right, here we go.

*She gets into character.*

Oh hello, I'm the building inspector and I'm just wondering if all this is done to the proper specifica –

Sorry, sorry, sorry.

I'm just wondering if all this is up to code.

*She listens to the answer.*

Uh-huh.

*Listens. Is taken by the hand and shown something else.*

Uh-huh.

Okay.

*More explanations.*

Right, well that is very good. I think I'm going to give you a –

*But there are more explanations.*

Oh, right. Yes, yes, sorry, of course.

*She is taken to see something else.*

Oh, well this is very good, very creative. I very much like all this, particularly the oak cladding in the lobby, you get a passing grade.

*Beat.*

What?

Er... I don't know. I think you have to file it by... five pm?

Erm... at city hall?

Okay, good. Well that was a brilliant game so now let's –

No, it's Danny's turn now.

No, it's Danny's turn and yes it was five minutes and look, if it wasn't five minutes well it really felt like it was, so you, know let's... move on.

Okay, so what am I...?

Alright, calm down Danny, please...

Yes, I understand, you're a Stealth Bomber that's great but what am –

A what?

A Death Star?

Okay, alright, and what are you gonna –

Look, please calm down, stop running because that's –  
Chicago?

*Leanne is concerned.*

No, darling, he's not gonna bomb your skyscraper because –

Oh Danny! Why are you bombing your sister's skyscraper?

Well can't you bomb another one?

Well can't the terrorists be somewhere else?

*To Leanne...*

I'm sorry honey, it's where the terrorists are.

*To Danny...*

And what do you want me to...

Right, so the whole planet, you just want me to...

*But he does. She shrugs and fires on the earth, probably destroying it all.*

And what about Leanne, who's she?

Godzilla? She's Godzilla?

Don't run so fast, Danny! And less screaming please!

Well, it's too late honey, he's already bombing...

Danny, that is a bit violent, I don't think all the people need to be burning...

Well that's even worse if it's just their heads burning, isn't it...

*Leanne is not happy.*

Yeah, but it's his game now...

Yeah, I know but he just dropped a nuclear bomb and I've just destroyed the entire planet so I don't think it matters.

Alright, Danny, that's enough! I don't think sending in the Taliban is very nice, do you?

Leanne, don't start because it's not even real it's not –

Danny?

Danny, please, stop that!

Danny!

*Beat. She looks at the audience.*

*A moment. Then...*

I know they're not here by the way.

My children.

It's not like...

I mean it's not like I think they're actually here. I know they're not. I know they're not here, I know they're

dead.

*Beat.*

I don't know why when I do this it's always moments of conflict. Like when they were being a bit naughty, or I was not so great, or... I mean it's my imagination so you'd think I'd go for beautiful moments. Like... like just sitting quietly with Danny asleep up against me. And Leanne lying in my lap watching TV. Me playing with her hair... or something.

Maybe it's because these moments happened just as much. And they are just as important as other, more...

Or maybe I don't deserve... yet. Or earned? Or something...

\* \* \*

## CHAT SEVEN

I don't remember exactly when things with us started to go properly wrong – I just remember suddenly finding myself in it.

Our arguments had morphed into something... well, brutal.

We'd always argued, but there were places we wouldn't go. Like some part of you was taking care of the person you loved most even though at that exact moment you wanted to smash their stupid teeth in with a ball-pin hammer. But now it was like a brake had been taken off and you were careering down a hill and you just *wanted* to hurt.

What you wanted them to feel was pain.

*Beat.*

He had become so moody.

Sometimes it was like he didn't want me in the same room, like my presence was an offense. And his responses became... diminishing, like everything was as if he was talking to a moron. It would be all...

*I've just said... etc, etc.*

or

*I have just told you... blah, blah, blah.*

Like a fucking capuchin monkey was trying his patience.

I tried a mix of reactions to this: sometimes I'd be quiet and ignore it and sometimes I'd just let rip, flip out and really let him have it. And sometimes I even came back with positivity like 'oh, ha, ha, look at us'.

You know?

'Ha, ha, this is really hurting me to the soft parts of my soul with electrified knives, ha ha'

But the thing was

my reaction didn't matter. The response from him was always the same. It was always a quiet, barely concealed... disgust.

And at the same time this all coincided with a general sprucing up of himself. Suddenly he was dressing smart. Wearing suits. Even got his teeth whitened. Teeth? I mean what the fuck?

At the time I just put all that down to the House and Garden offensive.

The House and Garden offensive was what I secretly named his plan to save his business. You see for some time now things had been going from bad to worse to awful to 'oh shit, is this about to get serious?' The trend for modern

had continued and more and more of the shops that took his farmhouse gear were closing or diversifying.

I kept waiting for him to notice. Because he's smart, right? But he just didn't seem to see. And if I so much as hinted that something might be afoot – oh my god, the betrayal. So I kept quiet while a part of my mind was going 'what are you doing, what the fuck are you waiting for?'

But then we're round his mate, Jason's – who, despite being a rampant alcoholic and an utter twat was considered a genius. Couple of bottles of wine in, Scotch now disappearing Jason lays it out, slurring.

*You're barking up the wrong tree, mate. That's all over, dude...*

'Dude' – such a twat. But he's actually listening...

*You're Blockbuster, dude. You're a blacksmith after the invention of the motorcar, you're selling fucking pagers, man...*

And he's nodding and nodding and this is really going in and I bite back my desire to scream 'that's what I've been telling you for the last six months, dickhead!' because this actually might be working.

The next few days he's pondering, I can see it. Pondering that wisdom dispensed on high from a whisky flavoured teat.

And suddenly he announces his plan. He is *not* gonna do what everyone expects: he is not gonna get out of the business or diversify or change – he is going to double down. He is going on an all-out war against the tide. He tells me about this trade fair, and he is going to do it: he's gonna get the biggest, most expensive stand – fuck it, two stands jammed together, right at the front as everyone comes in. And there'll be adverts, marketing, double page spreads in glossy mags...

The House and Garden Offensive.

*Pause.*

I remember turning up on the first day, seeing that colossal stand, staffed by fifteen people, vast sums of money we did not have sunk into its design and thinking – ‘what in god’s name have you done?’

I mean it was just so... wrong, so misguided, misjudged. In amongst all of that mid-century modern, people were actually walking around it, like it was diseased, like it was... a corpse or something.

That night I woke at four in the morning and he wasn’t in bed. And for a second I didn’t know what was going on. Then I saw.

He was sat in the chair. Just sitting in it, still in his suit. Staring at me.

*What are you doing?*

He says nothing

*Are you alright?*

Nothing.

*What? What is it?*

Again, nothing, nothing at all – he just keeps staring at me.

*What are you doing, why are you staring at me?*

And then... and then he just gets up and walks out of the room.

*Beat.*

The kids reacted differently to all this. Danny was four at that time and he didn’t even notice. Which I was grateful for, even though some part of me thought ‘Jesus Christ, come on!’

Leanne was the opposite. She picked up on every slight change of temperature. No matter how much you tried to keep it from her, she knew and she took my side, 100%. Which I did not want. But... she became protective of

me. Her attitude towards her dad was one of constant rebuke. She even scolded him for his teeth-whitening and newfound prettiness. She said it made him ugly.

(What was odd, was it got to him. Like he cared for this little girl’s good opinion of him in a way he no longer cared for mine.)

*Beat.*

I am, of course, just giving you one side. My side. But there you go, that’s what happens when you have just one person talking.

I was definitely no angel. And let me be clear, this was hurting both of us. And in all honesty I was a little distracted because... well, we were doing the festivals. And we had three films that we thought had a good chance of getting some awards – and that was exciting. I mean it really was – us getting awards. Our company: me... even.

*Beat.*

On November the 28<sup>th</sup>, I was in this all-day strategy meeting with these consultants we’d hired. And I came out, turned my phone on and found fourteen messages, all from him.

His company had folded.

So the first one was in the morning and he was saying the banks had scheduled an emergency meeting. The next was just before the meeting, saying it was getting worse, then it was one about the lawyers, one about a last-minute attempt to raise capital, one about receivers, a message saying I shouldn’t worry because we wouldn’t lose the house which of course made me shit myself because I hadn’t even thought of that. Then oddly a long one about his office desk and how he didn’t want to sell it. He loved that desk.

And then the last one was actually quite sanguine. He was even laughing a bit and he said... it was all over. He was

sorry. There was nothing else he could do and he felt a bit relieved, but he was sorry. He was taking the lads out for one last drink, so he'd be late – but he just felt he needed to be with the boys.

*Beat.*

And things start to make a bit more sense. This last year – the moods, the suit, the teeth and the grooming.

And I'd just not been there for him. I'd been wrapped up in me, my career, chasing what – a fucking BAFTA?

I cancelled everything. Got in a car, went to the warehouse to see if anyone knew where they'd gone, went to three different pubs, I even asked a complete stranger in the street, and eventually I found him.

Standing at the bar. Surrounded by his lads. The boys.

And I walked up. And he hasn't noticed I'm there yet. But one of them does, and he follows his gaze, turns around and sees... me. His wife.

And... the surprise.

He didn't expect that.

And I didn't even acknowledge the others, didn't even say hello, even though I knew some of them quite well, I just went right up to him

and I threw my arms around him.

And I held him. I just held him.

And he leaned down...

and he whispered into my ear, so no one but us could hear.

*Get your fucking hands off me.*

*Pause.*

And that's when I had my moment of clarity.

That's when it dawned on me.

The moods, the suit, the teeth, the grooming.

That's when I knew he was having an affair.

\* \* \*

## SCENE EIGHT

*She is holding Danny by the hand, but also searching in a bag.*

Yes, yes, hang on! I'm getting it.

*But it is really hard managing the bag and the child and the toy.*

Yes, Danny, alright, please! I am getting Spider, I am getting it for you. If you would care to wait for just one nano-second then I might just be able to –

*Suddenly notices something.*

*Looks around.*

*Again. Can't see.*

Leanne?

*Nothing. Can't see her – can't see her at all.*

Leanne? Leanne!

*Nothing.*

*Fuck.*

*She stops, turns down to Danny.*

Did you see where she went?

Danny, did you see where your sister went?

Stop that, stop that now!

*Grabs him, suddenly serious, scaring him silent.*

Listen to me – there are a lot of people here, did you see where your sister went?

*He didn't.*

*For a minute she might press the matter.*

*Doesn't. Instead she stands...*

Leanne? Leanne!

*But there is no answer. She cannot see her.*

Excuse me, excuse me, erm... did you see a little girl?

She was here, she was here just a minute ago, a little girl...

No, no, she was just standing here, right here –

Er, we were just getting shoes and we came out and I turned to get the toy out for him because he was being, and I couldn't find it so I was looking, and I turned and she was...

... not there, she was not...

*Someone else joins.*

Yeah, my daughter, it's my daughter, have you seen –

*A question.*

She's er... seven, she's got red hair, she's wearing a blue, a blue er top and shorts, she was here, she was right here and...

Leanne! Leanne!

What?

Er... I don't know, I don't...

Should we call, you think we should...

Danny, stop that!

Should we call them, should we...?

*She is hit with the thought...*

Oh my god... oh my god...

*Panic rising, dread now.*

Oh, no, no, no, I don't believe this, this is not, this isn't, I mean this can't –

Leanne! Leanne!

Oh Jesus. Oh Jesus Christ, oh my god, please...

Leanne!

Please, help me! Help me, please, she's –

Leanne!

*Then...*

What? Where?

*Sees.*

*Runs to her...*

Oh my god, oh my god...

*...grabs her, hugs her.*

oh my god, oh my god, oh my god...

*Pulls her close.*

Oh my god, oh my god...

*Beat. Pulls away.*

Don't you ever do that again! Okay? Don't you ever, ever –

Danny, come here, now!

*He does, immediately, terrified. Back to Leanne.*

Don't you ever do that again, do you hear me?

*Shakes her.*

Listen to me! You listen to me! Don't you ever do that again! It is dangerous. There are thousands of people here, I may never have –

*An interruption. But –*

No! I want her to be scared, she needs to hear this, she should cry.

*Back to Leanne.*

You could have been, someone could've...

*Suddenly she sits on the floor, almost collapsing – anger, panic, relief, fear, relief. Relief.*

What?

No, no, I'm fine, thank you I'm just...

*Grabs Leanne, hugs her.*

Come here.

*Hugs her.*

I've got you.

It's okay, I've got you. I'm sorry. I'm sorry.

*Holds her.*

I've got you now. I'll never let you go.

*Holds her.*

\* \* \*

It's much harder to kill a human being than you think.

And, oddly, it's also much easier as well.

Someone I went to school with was killed by a tennis ball. A woman in Canada died choking on a marshmallow.

The real trick though, is not the physical doing; it's the mental doing. The real trick is that you have to put yourself outside of all *this*, into a place where the people, the ideas, the conversations, morality and the family connections you've nurtured for years no longer matter. And once you have put yourself past those things...

Once you do that...

*Pause.*

So as I'm going home my first thought about this whole infidelity was

Oh. Okay.

Which surprised me. I did not expect to be so calm. And I was even slightly impressed with myself – 'Look at me, so cool.'

And at home that evening I was irritated, yes, but with a slight smirk in it, like 'oh, so that's it, is it? That's what this whole thing has been about, your need to fuck something new: well done'

But then, just before I fell asleep this sort of... colour of hurt bled into that. It just crept up on me, this pain. And oddly when sentences formed in my mind like 'I wonder how tall she is' I would hear them in my head it would surprise me by being utterly agonizing.

The next morning I woke to find that this had multiplied in my sleep and had transformed into a burning, ferocious

white-hot anger that was so intense I could actually feel my skin sizzling.

*Beat.*

I didn't say anything. Not for a good five or six weeks – I needed to get my head straight. Form a plan. And at work we had been nominated for some awards, so that was a big thing and it needed attention.

He became unreachable. He just... spiralled. There was a load of stuff to be sorted out with the company and he just didn't do it, he just didn't do anything. In the end they were calling me.

He drank a bit, but not much. But he really overate and unhealthily too, which before he had never –

And computer games. He got back into computer games. And he just did not... he just didn't get up and go at it, you know? I thought he would've dusted himself off, but he didn't. And it began to occur to me, as he sat there getting fatter and smellier and living in a world that was not real, that maybe he wasn't the doer I thought he was.

His personal hygiene went. Gone were the suits and the sprucing up and now he went in completely the other direction and became... well, disgusting, if I'm honest. And actually that really confused me. I mean I kept thinking 'Is she putting up with this? This talking, moving dirty-puddle of a man?'

*Beat.*

The plan was to go to him, say I knew everything and I want a divorce. And I've been totally honest with you so far, so I'm going to continue and tell you that despite all that had happened, despite what I told myself, despite what I wanted to believe... the divorce was a hope. It was a hope that if he understood what was at stake he would snap out of everything. And that somewhere in there,

buried under the self-pity and Häagen-Dazs and stupid, sad little infidelity was the man I married.

*Long pause. Difficult, but...*

The kids were with their gran – my mum, who for once was actually acting like a human being for once.

And I got home, had a bath, got ready and went down and saw him.

*I want a divorce.*

*No.*

He hadn't even looked up from his computer game.

*I said I want a –*

*I heard what you said.*

He's registering me now, just a bit more.

*This isn't your choice.*

*Yes it is. This is my life, these are my kids, this is all still mine.*

And I'm kind of shocked by this, you know; 'mine'?

*You are not leaving. You are never taking my kids from me, understand?*

*You're not being rational, you're not –*

*You are never taking my kids!*

And now he's standing up facing me, the game abandoned and it's not aggressive, not physically, but emotionally, Jesus Christ, emotionally it is brutal, it is warfare, it is unrestrained genocide.

*Look, you don't... you don't love me anymore.*

*I love you with all my heart.*

And weirdly... that wasn't a lie, he meant it, in some kind of way. I could see that. But rather than a declaration

of something wonderful it was an accusation, a kind of indictment. Like it was something I was doing to him, something appalling. Of all the ways I'd played this out...

*Look, you're not happy, I'm not happy, we are not –*

*Oh, you're not happy? Well I don't fucking care. I don't fucking care if you're fucking happy, I don't fucking care if you're never fucking happy again, that doesn't fucking matter to me at all.*

Of all of the ways I had played this out in my head, this was not –

*I want you to listen to me – there will never come a time when you have my kids and I don't. You are not taking them from me as well, that will never happen, I will never let that happen, do you understand that?*

'As well'? As well? As well as what, what was he... Okay. Fine...

*I know you're with someone else.*

Silence. He's saying nothing. Then...

*What?*

*I know. Alright? I know you've been having an affair, so just stop the lying and listen to me – I know.*

He's staring at me. Shocked...

*What are you talking about?*

And

what was strange about his shock was it was not the shock I'd expected. It was different, more genuine, an unperformable shock. Not the shock of discovery but rather shock at the notion.

*What are you talking about? I'm not having an affair.*

And in that moment, in that exact moment, I realised I'd gotten this all wrong. Totally and completely wrong.

*Beat.*

*Then... then what is all this?*

*All this?*

*The last year. You. This.*

And he goes quiet. Very quiet. Considers. And then...

And then he lets me in on the truth. The deep down, dark, secret, brooding truth, he finally drags it up from the depths of his soul and lays it out in front of me like a dissected animal.

*Don't you have an award speech to prepare or something?*

And then he goes back to his game.

And that is it. I get it. I finally get it.

I finally get what all this is about, what had been going on with him, the reason he was destroying our life together. Our love.

Thing is, you can understand an affair. As much as it hurts like agony, you can actually understand it. But this? This, what – jealousy? This fear that I might outshine, this need for him to be better than... than me?

I had thought that the man I loved had changed. But this was so much worse. This was realizing that he had never existed in the first place.

*A pause. She changes her position...*

In the morning I went to my mum's, collected the kids and then went straight to a hotel – I didn't want to stay with friends. I filed for divorce that afternoon and started looking for a flat the next day. Within a week we were in a new home.

Danny – for the first time in his life – noticed something. I don't just mean the fact that we'd moved but the pain. He noticed the pain and it really upset him and he acted out;

he was a real little prick, in fact. I bribed him a lot with toys and sweets and trips but he didn't really calm down until I got him a puppy. He named it Optimus Prime.

Leanne as always, was complicated.

I knew she missed her dad. I knew she was hurting. But she went into looking-after mode. You know?

She kept trying to make me sandwiches. And she even started looking after Optimus Prime – let's face it, if it was left to Danny the little bugger would've been dead within a week.

But she... she was amazing. She was so amazing.

He didn't come round to see them. Not once. I mean I tried to arrange it, I tried to talk about weekends or whatever because I wanted them in contact with their dad, of course I did. But nothing for two, three, four months. And it wasn't that he was contesting anything, not at all, I mean he signed all the papers, agreed to everything, but he just... melted away out of the world we knew. He just... you know, he just...

And yeah, part of me thought 'That's odd. That is... I mean what's going on with him, something must be...'

But then I began to think – oh, okay then. Okay.

\* \* \*

#### SCENE TEN

*Danny lies, leaning up against her. She is careful, quiet, not moving, so as not to wake him.*

Leanne? Is he asleep?

Is he asleep?

He's asleep, is he? He's sleeping?

*Leanne confirms he is.*

Are you okay?

Alright. Good.

Why don't you come over here and lie down with us?

Well, because... I want you to. I'd like you to.

Don't you want to? Don't you want to come over here with me?

No, don't worry, you won't wake him. A bomb wouldn't wake him.

\* \* \*

#### CHAT ELEVEN

Right. This is the hard bit. This is the bit that's been coming and I think maybe you've known it's been coming, but it is here now.

And I am going to say it. I am.

But if it gets difficult – and it will get difficult – I want you to remember two things: remember that this did not happen to you, and that it is not happening now. Alright?

*A pause...*

My children were stabbed to death.

The knife was a Kandar GX208 hunting knife especially purchased for that purpose. They're incredibly sharp when first bought. Incredibly...

sharp.

*Pause.*

Danny probably didn't know much about it.

He was lying on his bed when it happened so they think he thought it might have been a game or something?

There was a slight thumb bruise on his rib cage here...

*Shows.*

... just here, see? Just at the base where the ribs start?

But it was a very slight bruise and they said it wouldn't've caused him any noticeable pain as it would've happened at the exact same moment as the knife went in.

So he'd put his thumb there to find out where the bone ended and the soft, open parts of my son's chest began then he put the tip of the knife with the back edge to the nail of his thumb to make sure it went in in the right place, to guide it in.

Then he pushed with all his weight, twisting it up so that the blade went up behind the ribs and into his son's heart.

I mean it was well thought out.

*Beat.*

The wound to the heart was enormous, especially for a heart of that size, leading to a catastrophic loss of blood almost instantaneously. They said that Danny might not really have even registered any pain – it would've been shock, confusion, maybe a sense that something was wrong but he would've started to black out within four to five seconds and within a minute he would almost certainly have been dead.

The blood would have been shocking. The sheer amount of it so quick, where only seconds before there was just clean sheets, it would have been like taking a large wooden salad bowl full of blood and pouring it out onto the bed. I think it would've shocked him even as he did it.

I will admit to being obsessed with what was going through his mind as he deliberately pushed that knife up into his own son's heart.

I will admit to that.

*Long pause.*

They don't know if Leanne was in the room at the same time. This seems not very likely as it just doesn't feel... efficient.

What seems more likely is that Leanne came in. I tend to think that she was concerned; she was always very smart and perceptive and I think she would've sensed something was wrong when he came in.

She would've been worried for her little brother.

So I think she came in the room and saw it.

*Beat.*

We know she ran because she was found at the front door, and as he went after her he left a bloody hand-mark, a smear on the bedroom door-frame consistent with someone moving at speed.

He

*Beat.*

stabbed her eight times.

Here

*Back of the left shoulder...*

here

*Top of the left shoulder, near the neck...*

here

*Palm of the right hand between the second and third fingers...*

twice here

*Lower right side...*

here

*Upper stomach...*

here

*Lower chest, right of heart...*

and here.

*Upper chest, right of heart. Pause.*

And then he slit her throat to make sure.

They actually don't know what the fatal blow was, but there were several that could've killed her without immediate attention.

They are incredibly sharp, those knives.

He didn't kill the dog. He did not kill Optimus Prime. Which is unusual, normally they do, normally they...

*Beat.*

Then he took a shower and washed the blood off, but he had to put his bloody clothes back on, because of course he had no clothes in that flat.

And then there is this twenty-three-minute period where no one really knows what he did. But he was in that flat with the bodies of his kids.

That's a long time, twenty-three minutes.

Measure it out.

It takes ages, it takes a long time.

I have no idea what he did.

But at the end of those twenty-three minutes he went out onto the balcony, looked down at the concrete road four floors below and threw himself off.

*Pause.*

And he survived.

\* \* \*

## CHAT TWELVE

It's called family annihilation.

I know a lot about it now.

*A lot.* A lot of facts.

*A lot of facts...*

*Beat.*

There's more of it than you think. Much more. It's far more likely for a child to die at the hands of a parent than to be killed by a stranger – nearly three times more likely. It happens every ten days.

We only hear about the really juicy ones, you know.

And family annihilation itself is becoming more frequent; it's doubled since the year two thousand. It's nearly always men. That's not an opinion or a viewpoint or a controversial statement for you to ponder, it is just a cold, hard fact – 95% of the people who do this are men. Sometimes they've a history of violence; there are warning signs that are all too often ignored by the criminal justice system. But actually in the majority of cases they are completely unknown to the police and the authorities. They don't have records, they're not being watched or in the system – they're just... dads.

It is considered that there are four types of family annihilator. These are the paranoid (where the perpetrator perceives a threat to the family), the disappointed (where he feels his family has let him down), the self-righteous (really just a kind of revenge on the mother) and the anomic (where he does it for economic reasons or other reasons linked to a shattered self-worth).

But do you want know what it's really about? I'm gonna tell you what it's really about – what it's really about is control.

It's about losing control.

It's about exerting control.

It's about denying control to others.

*I want you to listen to me – there will never come a time when you have my kids and I don't.*

We often talk about these men as having snapped. In the papers, the news, amongst ourselves. But nothing could be further from the truth. They do not snap. They plan. They know what they are doing.

Those four months with not a peep out of him? Planning.

*A long pause.*

He had just turned up and convinced the baby sitter that he was going to look after them. And of course for the longest time that was really a source of fury for me, because she could've just fucking called me...

But then I realised how much pain she was in and that she was only seventeen. So I contacted her and told her I understood; even though I didn't.

When I saw him going into court he was broken.

I mean physically yes, he needed crutches, but actually it was the emotional damage that was most shocking. He was

racked with sobbing, drowning in tears and pain, I mean he almost couldn't walk.

And I looked at him and I just thought

you're not broken enough.

You are not shattered enough, you will never be broken enough, you cannot ever be broken enough for what you did. For what you did...?

*Beat.*

He'd hit a car. He landed on the roof of a car and survived. Like in a joke, you know like in a sketch comedy, or...

He broke both legs, his arms, nearly all of his ribs, several vertebrae and punctured a lung, he was on life support for three weeks.

I was in a meeting when they told me. I saw the police outside and I thought it was to do with the guys in the building next door because there'd been this stupid fight two days before, just some squabble over parking, but it had got quite nasty – these two respectable men in their fifties in suits, you know, squaring up to each other, like...

But they called me out

and there's these officers, two of them, both men, quite big fellas, forties – maybe thirties but seemed older, the uniform perhaps, or...?

And the bigger and possibly older of the two came forward to me and his expression was so

gentle, you know? On a big guy, it was... you know?

And he says

*Would you like to sit down?*

Which is normal enough, but as he does it he reaches out and gently touches my arm.

And that gesture...

It's not pre-planned, you see.

It's not training or dealing with or managing; it is a rational human response, it just happens, he cannot help it. It's sympathy.

But when he does it something in me shifts and I know a thing like the shadow of the worst thing in the world has happened.

I'm told I attacked him.

Which is really strange for me, I've never attacked anyone, but I don't remember, it is honestly a blank for the next few days.

I went to see him after, to apologise, because I felt terrible and he was honestly the sweetest

*A long pause.*

man, he was so generous. He told me not to worry and that that response is more common than you might think, which is why they send big blokes like him. Now I don't know if that's true. But the kindness of him saying that to me... It just blew me away.

You know, people... people are just so...

*Beat.*

I went through a stage where I thought I could pull back time. If I just tried hard enough, if I just... tried, I could pull back time.

I mean I knew I couldn't, I wasn't losing it, but some part of me thought if I just really tried I could work it out and I could pull back time and then I'd go to him and beg him not to, or give him whatever he wanted, or be with him forever, docile, whatever he needed, or kill him, I could've killed him before he did it, you know I could've...

*Beat.*

While on remand he was on permanent suicide watch and during that time he reached out to make contact with me three times. The first time made me incandescent with rage, I mean fucking nuclear, the second time made me think 'you sad, ridiculous, pathetic thing, just rot' and the third time made me think absolutely nothing at all.

Because I had stopped thinking about him.

Despite what he wanted.

And when they told me that he had killed himself by swallowing the broken end of a plastic spoon and forcing bread into his own gullet I thought about him then... and then I never thought about him again.

Because why?

*Beat.*

What I do now is I carry on.

I put one foot in front of the other.

I meet other people who have been through the same loss, men and women, and I talk with them, help them, get help from them.

And I am stunned by the courage of these people.

I am overwhelmed by their bravery and their generosity, their generosity towards life. Because I know that after *that*, just continuing to draw breath is an act of heroism. And these people, many of them, they continue to love, they continue to live in love, they never forget but they continue to live in and with love.

Optimus Prime is still with me. He's a great comfort when he's not shitting all over the hall. He loves shitting in the hall.

*She half-laughs. Small pause.*

One of the surprising losses is the memories. Because you have so many that he is in with them. And memories are happy for me, they are a beautiful place. And I cannot have him, that man, that negation of happiness in there. I cannot have him in there with me and my kids.

So what I do is I rewrite them. I rewrite those memories, but with him not in them. That's what I do, and it works. Let me tell you, it works and I think soon I'll have him out of all of them. I think soon it will be just me and my children, my beautiful children and then –

Oh god, then... well, that will be something, it really will.

*Beat.*

I have photos of them in every room. Except one. Because you know: you need at least one place where you can laugh without feeling guilt.

*Silence.*

*Then...*

I think a lot about Danny. About what kind of person he would've become. About whether I would have been able to have an effect on certain parts of him. About what kind of man he would've become.

I think he would've been a decent man. I do. I really, really do.

But you never can tell, can you.

Leanne would've been great.

*Laughs.*

Leanne would've been incredible.

*Starts to go. Stops.*

One thing that keeps coming back to me is what that crazy academic said – the one we were gonna do that film on? That society – this incredibly, amazing, bizarre, wonderful

and complex construction we have made out of human interaction and co-operation – has been created for men. To enable men, to empower men, for men to run and tend. I've been thinking a lot about that.

And I don't think that's true, you know.

I really don't think it is.

We didn't create society *for* men.

We created it to stop men.

\* \* \*

END SCENE

*Danny asleep, cradled up against her.*

*Leanne is lying in her lap.*

*Enjoying having her hair played with by her mum.*

Hmmm? What's that?

No, he's sleeping, honey.

Yeah, he's sleeping.

I don't know.

Nice ones, I hope.

*Silence.*

*End.*