

Character

ADAM FREEMAN, *thirty-one*

Scene One

Nobody on stage. A chair with a jacket thrown over it. 'The Power of Goodbye' by Madonna plays over and over again on a thirty-second loop.

ADAM FREEMAN, *thirty-one*, comes on, adjusting his belt. He notices the music and rushes over to grab his phone out of his jacket pocket. He presses a button. The music stops.

Awkward pause.

Haha, sorry about that, that er

Haha

Did that, um

Was that playing for long?

He checks the screen.

Oh, eight missed calls. That's good. Just eight. Just eight looped choruses of 'The Power of Goodbye'

Which, is clearly

My ringtone

Bet you didn't know people still had songs as their ringtones, but, yep. Still very popular amongst thirteen-year-old girls and... me.

It reminds me of Holly

...I thought that would be a good excuse but actually it's just made it even sadder hasn't it

Got to keep it on silent. Last week it started playing in the dairy aisle at Tesco. I just acted like it wasn't me and pretended to be very interested in the soft cheeses.

Nice loos

By the way

Very nice. Cowshed. You can tell a lot about a company from the quality of their hand soap.

Sometimes it *looks* like fancy soap then you inspect it and you realise it's like, Morrison's own brand and you think, what are these people trying to hide

Anyway, sorry about that, I just suddenly realised that if I didn't go for a wee immediately something bad was going to happen. Crept up on me.

You were saying, er, what you were saying, sounds good. Very... good. Encouraging, even. I'm, er, I'm not that um

It's funny being here

Not funny, ha-ha, it's funny, unexpected. I'm not totally sure what to say, I'm usually great at talking, I talk a lot, Holly used to say I could talk my way out of an al-Qaeda beheading, nice image

Holly was the one who got me deeply into Madonna's back catalogue, specifically the *Ray of Light* album, which before you judge, is really

She told me one night that it was her favourite album of *all time*, and I really took the piss, so she made me get stoned with her and listen to it on repeat, and it turned out she was right, it is incredible and I was wrong. 'Frozen', mate. 'Frozen' is so good. *You're frozen... when your heart's not open* yeah I'm going to stop singing Madonna at you now, definitely. Yep.

She liked weird things, unpopular things, like she had this really hideous jumper with the Heinz Baked Beans logo on it. Which she would wear in public, like a weird hipster billboard with boobs. She wore it all the time even though she knew I hated it. She's quite, she's funny with stuff, she'd get attached to things, she once made me buy her a wonky lamp from a boot sale because it 'looked sad'. I've still got the bloody thing, can't seem to chuck it out.

I'm not talking about anything proper, am I

Sorry I'm just going to check my

He looks at his phone.

God, all those missed calls were from Neil. My flatmate. He moved in after

He's a bit of a cretin. Not really... my usual type, friendship-wise. But it was getting sort of quiet and depressing and he was one of the only people who

I'm very aware that I'm thirty-one and I have a flatmate, by the way. It's not that I necessarily need one. Although there is a

mortgage that needs paying, and I'm not, you know, not working at the moment, er

Anyway everyone in *Friends* had a flatmate and they were ancient.

Oh god, were they ancient? Or were they my age?

Shit. How old was Frasier?

No he actually was ancient. I need to calm down.

He looks at his phone again.

He's left a voicemail. Why? Who leaves voicemails any more? Delete...

He puts his phone away. Pause.

You know how on weekends London suddenly becomes packed full of smug couples? You know. Nicely dressed people holding Whole Foods bags, snogging on park benches. Usually with a dog. We were one of those couples. Me and Holly. Adam and Holly. It even *sounds* right.

I'm just... not *meant* to be single.

Look – being honest, and not doing that faux-humble thing the British love so much: I'm good looking, and I smell nice, and I have a good job, a great, an interesting job. And I'm funny, ish, or as funny as you need to be when you're already a nice-smelling good-looking bloke, which as it turns out is not very. People will laugh anyway.

I'm not trying to be a

I'm just being honest. Which is... what you wanted?

Yeah.

I live in Stoke Newington. Gorgeous garden flat. Preferred living there with Holly, nothing spoils a gorgeous flat like seeing Neil in his boxers every morning, but

I bought the flat about a year after I met Holly. My uncle died – the only way anyone under forty buys property in London is if a rich relative dies – my uncle died and I got money and I bought the flat. And Holly wasn't interested, at first, in being involved. She didn't like the idea of depending on anyone. Because she wouldn't have been able to give very much to the mortgage, she was an intern, and she was twenty-three and liked living with her mates. Seemed very set on not moving in but then I showed

her round the place, you know... actual garden in London, fireplace in the bedroom, a *skylight* – everyone loves a skylight – and she changed her mind.

Anyone can be swayed by a nice skylight. Even Holly. Who never appears to care about anything... material, aesthetic.

She's very clever. She's

It could get quite

Girls like Holly are – I mean, it's exciting, it's interesting, always interesting, but they're never off, you know? Never quiet. You come home and you're knackered and they're never up for watching *Take Me Out*, which you know is shit but is still your favourite thing on telly. Holly would always be buzzing about something – the plight of the Syrian refugees or middle America's attitude to vaccinations – she's so clever, I wouldn't change that about her – but she didn't have that thing most of us have, where we pretend we're clever at work or when we're with other 'clever' people, but then when we get home we stop pretending and we start voting for *Celebrity Big Brother* on the iPhone app. She doesn't have that, her intelligence isn't a cover-up for anything, and the curse of that is she cares about *everything*, she is constantly outraged, she's like a human version of left-wing Twitter, always quoting articles and signing petitions and radiating indignation.

But she wrote for one of those magazines, those crap magazines that always have pictures of female celebrities in bikinis from bad angles on the front, the kind of magazine that Holly hated, hates, the kind of magazine she once ranted about for hours, but then she started writing for one

Because we say we won't compromise but then we have to pay deposits and bills and student loans and then

I mean she's also fun

I'm making her sound crap, she's not crap, she's fucking fun.

On my thirtieth birthday last year – god last year, is it that

Anyway we'd, well, we'd been having a rough time and if I'm honest I sort of wanted to pretend I wasn't turning thirty because I just felt

Feel

Felt that I hadn't done loads of the stuff that I
I mean, start a family and

Oh, you know.

I was going to ignore it, I thought that would be welcomed by my mates actually 'cause when you're my age you spend literally every weekend at a thirtieth. Or a wedding, or a baby shower, or a housewarming. Your social life is completely taken out of your hands. Anyway I said this to Holly, repeatedly, so she didn't feel compelled to book a pub function room somewhere

It got to the night before and she told me to take an overnight bag to work with me the next day
And it turned out she'd booked a weekend in Barcelona, at the W Hotel, that amazing one that's shaped like a big glass wave. So cool. Three days of sangria and tapas and sex and we Really got back to our old

It was the best thirtieth. And she made every moment of it fun and cool and I forgot about my

My

What's the male equivalent of a biological clock? Is there one? Biological... screwdriver?

Anyway.

I like your office. It's nice. Soothing. Smart. You seem to know what you're doing.

I think we can work together.

Scene Two

ADAM is eating an *M&S chicken-and-sweetcorn sandwich*.

I'm thirty-one. Same age my dad was when he left me and my mum and my little sister Ella. I thought maybe when I got to thirty-one, when I was, you know, *there*, I'd understand why he did it. I'd have empathy or something. I'd think oh yeah I'm still quite young and the idea of having kids is scary.

Nope.

I feel the opposite. I'm desperate to have kids. When I see my mates' babies I go all weird and broody. It used to freak Holly out. It freaks me out. It's quite a feminine attribute, isn't it? Shouldn't I be more into getting my dick wet or like, buying cars or punching or something

Do you want a bit of this? I'm only going to have half.

So I can't empathise with my dad. I can't understand why he did what he did. And I don't speak to him. He came crawling out of the woodwork about five years ago. He turned up at Ella's uni halls, Ella... Ella's always been a lot more... into the idea of finding him than I have. I couldn't care less. Fuck him. Don't want to exacerbate any possible daddy issues I have even further by attempting to forge an adult relationship with him. Tearful recriminations in a Caffè Nero. Throwing a ball to each other, making up for lost years. I'm alright without, thanks.

Holly would be the best mum. I think. I used to fantasise about lying in bed with her and her bump, rubbing her feet. Holly didn't exactly feel the same way. She used to make me watch *One Born Every Minute* to try and change my mind but none of it bothered me. She'd really stare me out every time the voice-over lady used the term 'mucus plug'.

Holly got pregnant for the first time when we'd been together three months. She was on the pill. It happens. She was twenty-two, I was twenty-seven, she was interning at *The Times* by day and writing for no money by night, I was still freelancing. Graphic design.

I do it for a catalogue now, full time, bit less interesting but a lot more stable, anyway that's irrelevant

It would have been insane to have had the baby.

That didn't stop me wanting it.

When she told me, over the phone, crying in a toilet stall at work, I thought – fuck it, let's just keep it.

Let's just

ADAM takes a moment.

I met Holly, er... four years ago. My friend Sarah had a barbecue, and the theme was the Baz Luhrmann film *Romeo + Juliet*? The one with Leo DiCaprio and Claire Danes? When you got to the barbecue, you drew a character out of a hat, and then you were handed the corresponding mask for that character... Sarah is mental. Anyway I'm sure you can guess what happened. Holly got Juliet, and I got... Quindon Tarver,

the little boy who sings the cover of 'When Doves Cry'. I was one of the last to arrive. I held up my mask and this girl, this kind of striking brunette girl wearing a green dress and waving her Juliet mask around like a wand, she started pissing herself. She went, sing the song!

And I had to sing 'When Doves Cry' in the style of that little boy, because she'd said it in front of everyone and I'd have looked like a tosser if I didn't

So I sang it

I really went for it

And she was dying laughing, and she came up and grabbed my wrist and said thank you like I'd given her a really amazing present.

And she smelt like sun cream and grass and fags and she was fucking hilarious and she ate so much food. Other girls there were picking at salad and every time I saw her she had a burger or a sausage in her hand, she didn't have that social-anxiety thing loads of girls get about eating in public

And there was this inflatable flamingo in the corner, a really big, obnoxiously big inflatable flamingo, and Sarah told me that Holly had brought that with her.

Which was just

Funny.

And weird.

And six beers later I was desperate to shag her.

I could lie and say 'six beers later I was desperate to get into a committed relationship with her'

But

No, I wanted to shag her. She was – is – so fit. She's got this soft, chocolate-coloured hair that sort of rolls past her shoulders like a fucking painting or something. And her body is like, I mean, I don't want to be, let's just say she

Anyway, it got later and I managed to sit next to her as she rolled a cigarette and I asked if I could have one and dropped all the tobacco in my lap and she laughed and rolled one for me

And two hours later we were in my bedroom, and her green dress was up around her waist, and she tugged her knickers off so hard that they pinged off her ankle and into my face, and I didn't have time to find that hilarious because she was

The next morning was weird. I'm not great at that bit. I like to be on my own, have a think. She left and she seemed annoyed. I texted her saying that I'd had a good night. She replied saying her too, we should have a drink next week. I didn't reply, because... that's what you do.

And two days later she called me.

Why do men do this? Do you think because you've fucked me a spell has been broken? Why aren't you texting me back? It's so boring. It's predictable and boring. I'm fucking great. You should get that into your head. I'm great. I'm giving you one more chance. Okay?

And she hung up.

Anyone else, mate, anyone else, that would have sent me running for the hills.

But

Two days later we had our first proper date. I took her to a Greek place in Primrose Hill that I love. We shared a mezeze and she wrapped her ankle around my calf under the table. She told me about her parents and her sister and growing up in Warwick. She made me laugh more than I'd like to on a first date, it ruined my composure, you know, the first-date veneer of cool. And you know, I can't tell you what happened next, which date was next, what the next step was because from then on was

We were just in love and it was fluid and easy and we were the smuggest couple in London, walking through Sunday sunshine with that look, that aura, that says we are happy and perfect and impenetrable.

And then we got pregnant.

Holly said she hadn't gone to Cambridge University to become a mum at twenty-two.

I went to Roehampton. Not the same is it. Still

She wouldn't even let me go with her to the
Her sister took her instead

So on a wet Wednesday morning in November I sat at the desk in my bedroom while, a couple of miles away, Holly removed our mistake, two fingers pinching a lit candle – extinguished.

I got over it. There was no other option. And I loved Holly. I love Holly. You don't stop loving someone like her. The love changes, it bends to move past obstacles, it becomes more or less easy and more or less pleasurable but it doesn't go away.

And even then I looked at the behaviour of my father and marvelled at his lack of gratitude, his unacceptable response to what is such a
Such a gift

Scene Three

ADAM is on his phone.

But my card is linked to the account

...

I see

...

Yes but the person who

Mm-hmm

Mmm

But

But the person with the

The person

...

No, yeah, it's

Surely

Surely you've had this situation before

...

No

That's not an option.

...

Yes.

And when will that be?

Fine. Okay. Thanks.

He hangs up the phone.

Sorry about that

I'm having a Netflix issue
I'm still paying for mine and Holly's Netflix account but I don't
have the password.
So I can't watch it.

It's a very modern break-up problem.

I've asked her to change it to her card details, I mean I don't
have her new number and she's blocked me most places but I
still have her on LinkedIn so I had to ask her on there which
was weird

She didn't reply

You never think you'll have to resort to messaging someone
who's seen you cry during sex on LinkedIn

It's so pointedly impersonal, I mean it's the sort of thing she'd
find funny

Maybe she did

That's alright, isn't it? Messaging her on LinkedIn? Or do you...?

Crying during sex wasn't a regular thing, by the way. Just
something that happens when you've been together for a while
and you get that need to be intimate and connect with each other
even after some bad news or whatever. It's kind of pathetic but
it's also an indicator of how the relationship is doing. If someone
doesn't mind you getting actual tears on them mid-penetration
then they're probably in it for the long haul.

I suppose I wasn't great at explaining how I felt or telling her I
was sad. Sort of the way I was brought up. After my dad left my
mum just wouldn't mention him. She's quite cold, my mum.
We're not a close family. I mean, me and Ella are, were, well I
always try with her, but she can be really
We're not a tight family unit. Unlike Holly's family, who are all
harmonious and love each other and stuff, which I find
disconcerting. When you go to their house everyone's happy to
see each other. Nobody's bitchy or nagging or
I used to love going to Holly's for Christmas because it was like
being in a film, a nice film, or a John Lewis advert.

We started doing things like Christmas and stuff like that
together pretty quickly, I think because we moved in together
after a year. Which was great, I loved having her then, but

She liked the flat, she liked living with me, but she didn't like
the fact that she couldn't put much money in

She was still an intern, unpaid, writing anything in the evenings
– copy for websites, speeches for people, literally anything –
and tutoring kids at the weekend. She was barely scraping by,
and she'd been at *The Times* for over a year with no full-time
job in sight. And her mate worked for this magazine, and she'd
always say Holly could work for them for a bit, just for a bit,
and Holly would tell her to fuck off, but then one Saturday I
was repainting the living room – we'd just moved in – and
Holly came in and sat down, and said

Melissa offered me another job.

And I took it.

Her face was a picture of disappointment.

And

I was pleased.

Is that wrong? I wanted her to be successful. I wanted her to
shake free of the shackles of her prosecco socialism and enjoy
herself. Be happy. Get paid.

She wanted me to say, Holly no, those magazines are
disgusting, you'll be supporting the patriarchy, think of the
refugees!

But I didn't.

I said I thought she'd made a sensible decision and she could
just do it for a couple of years.

Of course, now, now I wish she'd never

Obviously

God

I just wanted everybody to be happy

I think I'm more caring than people expect me to be. My sister
Ella thinks I'm some kind of lads'-mag-reading arsehole,
always accusing me of some slight against her or her mates or
even my own girlfriends, like she assumes all men are out to get
her. Or maybe it's just how I come across. Even Neil expressed
surprise the other day when I said I'd never cheated on anyone.
Because I haven't.

On Holly

Or anyone. Anyone ever

About two years into my relationship with Holly, I started working at the catalogue. Like I said. Good money, nice and stable. Not as cool as some of the stuff I'd done, but

Quite soon after, one of the buyers had an intern in, this eighteen-year-old girl who looked a bit like Jennifer Lawrence, and one night she kissed my neck. Right *here*.

It was weird, rather than sexy.

We were both working really late, like 11 p.m. or something – come to think of it, I suppose she was just pretending to work – and she came over with a beer for me that she'd got from the Tesco's round the corner, and then she watched me work for a bit, then she bent over me and kissed my neck

And then she looked at me and I think that was when I was meant to throw her onto the desk and rip off her pants and in another world I would have but I just stared at her

Then I shook my head

And she got her coat and left.

And I said: have a nice weekend!

It was the most awkward couple of minutes of my life.

I told Holly about it, and she laughed and said she thought it was funny, but when she saw the girl at the Christmas party she 'accidentally' brushed her lit cigarette against her bare arm.

It was striking sometimes, this distance between open, honest Holly and secretive, closed-off Holly. Like this situation with Fake Jennifer Lawrence. She was obviously upset about it, and I had absolutely no idea until she'd burnt a little bit of skin off a girl's arm.

You don't know anyone. You don't actually know their thoughts and feelings, there's no way you ever will. And yet we move in with people and let them find out our deepest secrets and PIN numbers. We don't know them. Your skinny blonde fiancée could have murdered a man and tossed the body in the Thames.

Sorry. Making assumptions.

You might have a large husband and four kids. What do I know?

You're definitely not single though. Men like us...

I'm very bitter about being forced onto Tinder.

Tinder is a lot for me to take in. It became a thing when I was still with Holly. Now that I'm single I feel like I have to be on it but the experience is unpleasant. My flatmate Neil swears by it, but he definitely needs that kind of platform because he's unattractive.

The constant struggle about how to present yourself – do you use the topless Ibiza picture from when you were really toned or not – what the fuck do you write as the bio – why do you have to put your height? I'm five-eleven and that little five pisses me off. I mean what's the difference, really, between five-eleven and six? One inch, is the answer, but what I mean is girls really like there to be a six in there. So I've left mine out, but now I worry that people will think I'm freakishly short and hiding it.

She cheated, you know.

Holly.

She cheated on me.

I may seem the type but it was her, who

Ultimately

My girlfriend from school cheated on me as well. Rosie Jameson. We were that annoying golden couple. We were too cool to be head boy and girl but we were both voted rear of the year twice in a row. My school was weird.

Anyway we were great together. Her dad was American and that made her ridiculously exotic, she ate cool cereal like Lucky Charms for breakfast which blew everyone's minds, and she always went to L.A. in the school holidays. L.A! She was effortlessly popular. I'd had to work a bit harder, put the hours in, get good at football and finger just enough girls at parties to seem like a sexy playboy but not a scumbag. Rosie and I were the teenage dream. We lost our virginities to each other in her parents' bed one night when they were away, and the next day we walked around school in a daze, ridiculously amazed and impressed by what we'd done. We went to the leavers' dance – it's not a prom, this is England – we went to the leavers' dance in perfectly coordinated black and white. Like Justin and Briney. And like Justin and Briney, it wasn't perfect – Rosie was actually cripplingly boring, and we had basically nothing in common – but we looked so *good*.

Then the night before my Spanish GCSE Rosie called me and told me she'd been shagging one of the teaching assistants. Not even one of my peers, an actual adult, risking imprisonment and unemployment for quickies in the disabled loo. I couldn't compete with that kind of romance. When people asked why we'd broken up, I said – 'exams and that'. Which everyone accepted.

I could have got that teaching assistant fired and worse. But I didn't. It's not like I loved her.

But Holly
Holly was

Can I smoke out of your window?

Scene Four

ADAM is *flicking a lighter on and off*.

Thanks for that

I am quitting
I only started because of Holly

She made it look so cool

I think it makes me look a bit dodgy

I don't know how to quit though

I considered getting a vape, but is it ever possible to use a vape and not look like a raging twat?

I think if I can barely pull off actual cigarettes, I've got very little hope with vapes.

Do you do that thing, where every day, you get dressed with the possibility of bumping into an ex at the back of your mind?

I totally do

The other day I wanted to go and get some milk, literally five minutes down the road, and I was wearing this horrible jumper and jogging bottoms, and I opened the front door to go

And I thought hang on

I look like a disgraced PE teacher

What if Holly sees me?

Actually not just Holly

Anyone I've ever slept with
But mainly Holly

It's actually a ridiculous concern because she doesn't live here any more. She's moved back to Warwick. With her parents.

Bit extreme.

Anyway now I only leave my house if I look good. Because I'm a grown-up.

Holly didn't care about that. You know. Things required of an adult

I would constantly forget that she was younger than me
By five years. Not that much, at first. Just five years. But it turns out to be quite a gap.

I mean she was very mature. Much cleverer than me, in some ways.

It's not even that she wanted to go out all the time, anything like that. It's just that our timelines were a little off.

The, what I mentioned, about getting to the age with all the wedding invites and babies and

That was just from my end. She got pissed off about it. All her mates were still shagging around or going travelling or living with their parents. And mine were building investment

portfolios and thinking about school districts. Not that I wanted that, I didn't want to move to the suburbs or stop being fun, we could have done it our way, kept our

Maybe that's naive

I was always very committed to her. And she didn't necessarily seem as

You don't think about it though, do you. Practically. When presented with a fit, cool twenty-two-year-old girl who thinks you're funny and gives great head and makes you feel amazing you don't think about, do we match up, does she want kids young, does she think weddings are stupid
Because she did. Think weddings are stupid.
She'd wear black to them.

And roll her eyes and laugh at the wrong bits of speeches which could be embarrassing for me

She came from such a stable, loving home. She didn't understand the value of love. That's it, I think. She'd never

wanted for it so she didn't get how precious Urgh, precious
But yeah, how precious it is. She didn't get it.

I'm talking about her in the past tense. I don't know why. I'm sure she hasn't changed. I'm sure everything I'm saying about her is still true. People don't change. They don't. I've had to argue that point before, and it's always with someone who's recently taken something up – like veganism or vague spirituality or charity work, something worthy but ultimately meaningless, and they want you to recognise that the change they've made is a deep, visceral, soul-defining shift in personality. When actually, doing that, jumping on a moral bandwagon like that, is just a reflection of their existing narcissism. But they want you to watch a video on Instagram of them doing complicated yoga poses on a beach in India and think, wow – so-and-so has *really* changed. That's amazing. Namaste.

When Holly took the job at the magazine, it wasn't because she had changed. She hadn't. She was completely the same person, but the circumstances were different. I think she probably thought about it this way – do I stick by my principles and refuse to work for a magazine that patronises and insults women on a daily basis? Or do I stick by my... principles and live in a flat that I contribute to as much as my boyfriend does?

And it took a toll on her. Working at the magazine. It was gradual. She went into it with a sort of Blitz spirit, make the most of the situation. She was writing for the telly section anyway, so mainly what she did was review episodes of *The Voice* or interview Gregg Wallace. She was kept apart from the nasty, circles-around-cellulite bit of the business.

But, as any job does, it started taking up more of her time and mind. She had to do a liveblog – do you know what that is? It's like, a

She had to do a liveblog for the final of *The X Factor*, which meant she had to be in the office, blogging for hours, because that thing goes on for hours. I know because I was watching it at home. Anyway she came home when it was done and she went on this rant about it like she... like she cared. Like she really cared. And when she noticed, she stopped, shocked at what had come out of her mouth.

God, Adam. I sound like one of *them*.

The thing is, I would rather talk about *The X Factor* than the situation in Syria. I think almost anyone would, whether they'd admit it or not. It was easier for me. It was hard on her – at first – but it was just so easy for me. She read *Gone Girl* and quite liked it – a year before she would have completely trashed it, actually a year before she'd never have considered reading it. She came with me to a Chelsea game and only complained once. She wore a pink dress to a wedding.

I fell in love with Holly because she was complicated and difficult and interesting. But falling in love and being in a relationship require different feelings. Different qualities. So the fact that she was – I mean she was still all of those things, but – but the fact that those things were becoming less – that worked. For me. And her. It worked for us.

And if things had stayed like that forever. If she'd accepted that. If she'd kept her head down

That sounds bad

If we'd kept going like that we'd be planning a wedding right now. Instead of doing this.

That's

That's frustrating.

Scene Five

ADAM is wearing a coat and holding a wet umbrella.

I'm never late, this is so

Annoying

I'm never late. This is, isn't, a
I hope I didn't

You weren't waiting too long?

Pissing it down out there.

I was with my dad, actually

...

Long day. Could do without this, today. But I know

We're on a
Schedule.

Normally, of course, I'd have told him to fuck off when he got in touch, that's what I usually do. Ella's the only one of us that actually bothers with him. But Ella isn't answering my texts because she's got it into her
Female solidarity. Fucking annoying.

So I don't know, I'm tired, I'm stressed, I said yes, this was a few weeks ago

He got in touch

I said okay fine. This is getting to be, I mean, I'm getting to be quite

Sorry. Can I just take a minute.

...

Thanks

I wish he behaved more like a villain

He's just

Some old bloke

He's boring, if I'm honest.

He's obviously, you know, he's older and feeling guilty about what he

Trying to make amends

All so predictable it's

It's not interesting

You want the people who have fucked with parts of your life, of yourself, you want them to be obvious baddies. You want them sitting on a scary armchair stroking a white cat and laughing as servants torture babies in front of them. You at least want sinister. Nasty. Unpleasant. Give me unpleasant, at least

He's just some boring old bloke. He drives a Volvo and he wears jumpers from Next. He's a property surveyor. He has a wife. They don't have children. They're members of the National Trust.

He's just a

He took me for dinner a few weeks ago. He told me about his life, which was fairly boring but mercifully short, and he asked

me about Holly, and my job, and it was fine. Nobody cried or shouted, nobody threw crockery across the room. It was just so pedestrian.

Then after that we've played squash a few times. I don't know why, really. We haven't once mentioned the fact that he is the man who abandoned me. I haven't asked him why he did it, how he can live with himself, anything like that. We seem to be pretending that we're acquaintances, like we used to work together or something.

But today he wanted to talk. Hence being late. He wanted to talk about

I've tolerated him so far, but my life is none of his business. That was his choice. He can't turn up and start giving me advice

now, like he has any idea, like he's the kind of man I would want to emulate anyway

I don't care what he thinks about

I don't

I don't require his opinion. Relationship advice from my dad would be like getting empathy lessons from George Osborne.

He isn't an

Appropriate

I'm sorry. This isn't my day. I'm tired. Neil dragged me out last night to this tragic fucking singles' night organised by some drippy girl he works with or went to school with or something. It was utterly pathetic.

I am not the kind of man that has to go to a singles' night. I refuse to let what's happened turn me into one of those men. I might as well develop a bald spot and a stutter. Pathetic. I am a proper
I am a

And the only way to cope with it was to drink, a lot, and so I drank a lot, and ended up pulling some girl who I wouldn't be able to pick out of a line-up now, got back late, all so fucking depressing
It's

All so fucking depressing at the moment. Everything
Ah, I

I miss Holly. I really miss her. I miss everything about her, even the stuff I hated. I miss her body and her mouth and her hands. I miss how angry she would get if she didn't like a film we watched and I miss the way she would bite my lip when we kissed and I miss her stupid fucking Heinz jumper and god this is embarrassing
Like you give a shit
You shouldn't give a shit, it's

I just miss her, mate.

Don't you think if I just called her and Or if I could see her

...

Never mind.

I've taken to reading old articles she wrote. Not the serious ones. The ones from the magazine. Totally vacuous stuff about series ten of *Strictly* and that reality show where the boyband Blue tried to start a nightclub in Ibiza.

If I read those articles I can hear her voice. And she's in the room with me because I can remember her telling me about writing them. So when I can't sleep I just read those

I mean that has to count for something.

You would hope.

Don't you - ?

I mean in your

She got into the swing of it, you know. At work. She started to enjoy it. She found some other imposters, other writers who couldn't give two shits about Kim Kardashian's arse workout but had ended up working there by accident, similar to her, you know. And one of them was Ashley.

Nice lad.

He had a girlfriend, Ellie? Or Emily? Or something, I did meet her, we went for dinner with them. Smug couple summit. Let's have a bottle of Pinot Noir and revel in our life choices. We went to their housewarming party as well, they were freshly moved in together, all proud of their new Le Creuset and two-bedroom shithole above a newsagent in Clapton.

Holly would say, thank God for Ashley. He's the only one who gets how stupid it all is. Someone to sit next to in meetings. Someone to get lunch with. Yeah. Thank God for Ashley.

I went on a Tinder date last week, and I only did it because the girl looked vaguely like Holly. Similar hair colour, sort of the same body, dark brown eyes like Holly's. I took this girl out for drinks and sweet-talked her into coming home with me so I could fuck her and pretend I was fucking Holly. If I squinted it was her, you know? If I covered this girl's face with a pillow it was her.

Isn't that just the

Saddest fucking thing you've ever heard.

Scene Six

ADAM sits on the chair, silent, thinking. When he speaks, it's from nowhere.

If office parties didn't exist, there would be a lot less infidelity.

Don't you think?

They're breeding grounds for mad behaviour. Sensible people lose their minds over cheap wine and fake Christmas trees and suddenly they're photocopying their own arsehole and fucking Dave from Accounts in the stationary cupboard.

I have a friend who used to work at an upmarket restaurant in Covent Garden. One year a big, famous company had their Christmas party there. They were loud and rowdy and didn't tip. At 3 a.m., my mate went to check the loos. Inside he found this woman, this fucking executive, passed out mid-piss. Covered in her own vomit. She must have been late forties, early fifties, power suit, seriously well-to-do woman, and she was passed out in her own sick like an eighteen-year-old fresher. Anyway he woke her up, and as she staggered out of the door, a human shit fell out of her hair. Honestly. A human turd. Most of the time that woman is probably shouting about stocks in conference calls and taking oil barons out for business lunches but because it was the office Christmas party, she became the woman with shit in her hair.

People go mad. They go mad. They must pump every office Christmas party with some kind of airborne drug that drives people to drink far too much and flash their tits and cheat on their partners.

It's the only explanation for why Holly

Alright, full disclosure. Things hadn't been fantastic. There's no point in me lying about that. But every relationship goes through rough patches. That's just... love. That's relationships.

I thought she'd calmed down, and when she started to exhibit signs that maybe she hadn't, I suppose I didn't take it very well. I mean, look at it from

For me
I thought she'd just accepted where she was. She had a good job, Jesus, there are people who would kill for that job. She was a working writer, even if it wasn't for the

The exact
And she had a boyfriend who adored her, and a nice house, and attractive friends, and a good fucking life. This is what people aspire to, isn't it? We weren't skint or fat or ill. I mean what else What else is there?

And it seemed to me like she had mellowed, like people do as they get older, like you're meant to, because life isn't one massive uni common room where you can shout your feelings about abortion and female genital mutilation all day long

You grow up
You can't make a difference. Sit down and shut up.

And you know, I wanted to get married and have kids and I couldn't do that with her wanting to go to protests and sit-ins and fucking gay-pride parades

And it seemed like she got that, like she'd

But

Ashley

Even his fucking name is inadequate
It only takes one person, you know, to
Ashley also hated the magazine. Ashley also wanted to write about the important stuff. Ashley also thought he was worth something more.

He wrote for a satirical website and one day asked Holly if she'd write something with him for it, because 'she'd said something so funny about Putin the other day' and 'she's so wasted writing for this magazine'. And she came home all excited, saying she was writing this thing with Ashley, and it was like she'd 'woken up' and she'd forgotten why she'd wanted to be a journalist, she'd been blinded by money and living comfortably – by me, was the subtext, she'd been blinded by me – and wasn't it cool that Ashley had asked her to do it?

And I said, so you're leaving a good job at a magazine that actually manages to stay in print for some blog?
No, I didn't say I was leaving anything. It's just one article.

And of course it wasn't one article, because what have I told you about Holly? She's funny and clever and talented. Ashley's editor loved her writing and then we were back, like no time had passed, to her up all night writing and reading and that buzz was back, her background noise was turned all the way up again and off she went. She'd come home and ask if I'd watched Prime Minister's Question Time? Or had I seen the thing about HSBC in the *Independent*? Or that documentary about ISIS on BBC 4? And I wanted to scream, no Holly, I haven't fucking as much as glanced at any of that stuff because I'm not interested. And you shouldn't be either. Let's go to the pub. Let's order throws from John Lewis. Let's talk about starting a family, you know that's what I want, you know that's all I want

I couldn't feign interest. I was irritated.
We were back where we started, but we had a mortgage now, you know? We had nice normal friends who didn't want to listen to her ranting on and on. We were on our way to a proper life.

She was throwing a lit match onto the warm bed that was our life. She was filling it with smoke.

I was anxious.

I mean, can you blame me?

So yes. We were arguing. We weren't really having sex. We were doing less things together.

I wanted her

To stop.

And she would scream at me, god, she would go absolutely insane at me if I tried to make my feelings known, if I tried to make her be quiet, calm down, relax.

She was exhausted and run down and up all hours. She got sick. I would hear her being sick in the mornings and late at night. She became impossible to live with and when I tried to say that, you know, as her partner, as the person she was meant to love and be with she would

It would drive anyone to do strange things. That kind of tension, day in, day out. It would lead anyone to

I cared about her so much

Anyway

Four years we'd been together, and everything fell away in two horrible, horrible weeks, hinged on two nights that I will never forget, that she'll never forget, that

Haunt me

Is it clichéd to say that? Because they do. Haunt me. They follow me around, those nights

Of course, the first night was Holly's Christmas party.

December 17th. I'd asked to go with her, isn't that what you do? She'd come with me to mine, she always came with me to mine. We were Holly and Adam. But – no, Adam you'll hate it. Everyone is such a dick, it'll be so boring, let me go alone. I won't be back late.

I prowled the flat like a caged animal that night. I felt on edge. I didn't trust

I just had a bad feeling

I

Yeah, I looked through her stuff. Laptop first. Nothing. Then I looked through her drawers and boxes and that's when

Well

I found

The pregnancy test. A tiny pink plus sign that

Pause.

She hadn't told me.

I thought maybe she was waiting to see the doctor before telling me. Something like that.

I went to bed. I felt sort of
Because she would have to slow down. She would have to give up and relax and be with me.

Her key turned in the lock at about 3 a.m. I pretended to be asleep. She stumbled in, pulling her tights off, falling into the chest of drawers. She got into bed next to me. A few minutes later she was snoring, drunk snores. Last night of boozing for a while, I thought. I rolled over, put my arm around her.

The unmistakable scent of aftershave that isn't yours.

I could have shaken her awake, demanded answers. Tears. Begging forgiveness. A quickly packed bag. A slammed door.

I ignored it. She was pregnant. I had her. The aftershave hit the back of my throat. I could taste it.

And I'm the bad guy.

Scene Seven

ADAM seems animated and positive.

Oh god, we'd absolutely been drinking yeah

Drugs too

Is that not

I thought I'd mentioned that?

Oh yeah. I mean it was New Year's Eve. It's not like either of us are like, mad addicts or anything

I mean, I'm thirty-one, I take it easy

Or I

When we were younger, both of us, we, you know. Nothing hardcore. Just the stuff that everyone does. And I do mean everyone. As we got older, we did it less and less until I decided we'd only do drugs at festivals or on New Year's. And we don't really go to festivals any more.

So yeah, god yeah. Not a lot, but yeah. I thought I'd mentioned that?

I mean that was the whole point, the er, the cornerstone of that

What I mean was, that was the tell. For me.

I'm not making

Basically

It was New Year's Eve. I'd found the pregnancy test two weeks before.

And things were

Holly had gone home for Christmas. I always went with her.

But she just announced she was going on her own

That I should spend time with my mum

With my *mum*, what the

And she went away on the

Must have been 20th? Something like that

Still hadn't told me about the

Hard Christmas. Hard for me. I'd call her every day, you know,

and she'd be so fucking

So distant and weird

I suppose you're thinking, why didn't I say something?

Confront her about the

The truth is she had hidden it, the test, you know, it's not like I found it in the bin and I didn't want her thinking I was spying on her or anything like that and

And like I said last time, I thought she was keeping it from me for a reason and that reason would become clear

So

She came home on New Year's Eve.

We were going to a house party, Sarah's party, Sarah of *Romeo + Juliet* barbecue fame

The theme this time was Disney because as previously

mentioned Sarah is fucking weird but luckily we were allowed to choose our own characters this time

I'd totally forgotten that we had to dress up, to be honest, but

Holly got home on the 31st with bags of crap from her mum's

house and declared that we were going as *The Incredibles*.

She'd got red spandex leggings and leotards. There's a picture,

did I give it to you?

You have a copy, right?

Yeah

Yeah, well things had been weird, strained, I don't know, and

obviously we hadn't seen each other

But she pitched up at ours all... normal. She seemed happy.

With these stupid fucking costumes

That normally I'd probably have argued about, I wasn't hugely keen on going out in red spandex, but she seemed really, you know

I was surprised she wanted to go out. With the baby, the pregnancy, I.

I thought maybe she was going to tell me that night. I mean, I would notice her not drinking

But she did drink

A lot

She did not stop drinking, actually. I was sweating in my stupid spandex as I watched her at the party, all chatty, calm, cool, and drinking. Vodka and soda. By the pint.

Then she went off to the loo with her mate and came back doing the, you know, sniffing thing

I felt sick, mate. Sick.

But we were at a party. I couldn't

I just kept drinking. Kept going. But it built up and eventually I took her aside, 1 a.m. or something, and just went – Holly, we need to go home

We need to go home.

She was pissed and I was sort of pissed and she didn't want to come with me but I booked an Uber and sort of shepherded her into it

And in the car she sang along to that stupid 'Happy' song on the radio and I got tighter and tighter inside, thinking over and over again – she's pregnant and she's been drinking, she's pregnant and she's been drinking, she's pregnant and she's been drinking, until the first bit fell away – she's been drinking, she's been drinking, she's been drinking. And it was like

Like a fog

Everything went dark and we got home and out of the taxi and into the flat and she was still singing

Because I'm happy

She was really fucked. All over the place. I was, I don't know, I felt drunk of course, but I was also quite

She was in our bedroom, getting changed, she was just in her underwear

I stared at her stomach, as if I could see through the skin and the muscle and right inside

Holly
What happened to the baby?

She looked at me, a bit shocked, too drunk to cover that up, then shrugged it off
What are you on about?

Now this is where it gets a bit
I mean, it was not a nice
It was awful. For both of us. That conversation.

Anyway I sort of grabbed her, shook her, trying to wake her up, sober her up, I don't know
What happened to the baby?

And she kept saying I don't know what you mean, I don't know what you mean

So I

I grabbed her chin, like this
So I could look her right in the eyes, so she couldn't avoid me, you know, so she couldn't

And I said, something along the lines of
Tell me right now what happened or I will hurt you.
Moment-of-madness stuff. You know. I was, I'm sure you can understand, I was beside myself.

And she looked at me, finally, in the eyes, all bleary, all pissed and

And went,

Adam, I got rid of it.

I don't love you any more. We can't have a baby.

Then she pushed me off her.

Just the worst words I've ever heard.

I don't love you any more. We can't have a baby.

I got rid of it in Warwick.

This isn't working. I wasn't going to say any of this tonight but you've made me.

And then she said,
You stifled me.

She was crying.

You make me feel invisible.
I loved you and you stifled me.

She was crying and drunk and half-naked and I was crying and drunk

And I reacted

Out of the

I just thought about the baby

I got rid of it in Warwick

I got rid of it in Warwick?

I deserved that baby. I deserved it. We were meant to have a baby and be happy and normal

I hadn't worked on her for

I hadn't

I hadn't put *years* into her to

And I said, this is because of Ashley then, is it? You're fucking him behind my back and

And she denied it, of course she denied it

Ashley's my friend, it's not like that

Yeah, yeah.

I kind of screamed at her to, you know, admit it, admit that she'd been sneaking around with that poncey little cunt, fucking him at work and coming home to me, but it was all wide eyes and no, no, you're wrong

It happened really quickly, I think, and like I said we were both drunk.

I wanted her near me and I wanted to convince her to change her mind and I wanted to beat Ashley and I wanted our baby and I wanted to give her another chance to go back on what she'd done

So I pulled her onto the bed, and can I just say, she didn't tell me to stop, she was just crying

Like I said before, sometimes couples cry during
I wanted her, it was, I don't know, but through the fog of anger and distress I felt this huge pull towards her and I wanted to be inside, as close, as close as I could get, as close as

She didn't say no

I don't think she said no

I probably was quite rough. I didn't notice, it wasn't intentional, but it was very emotional, and yeah I think I was probably quite rough

And she was crying

And no, I mean, in terms of 'consent' – you don't get written consent from your live-in girlfriend every time you have sex

I suppose, uh, I suppose I had her arms pinned back, maybe. But that's quite

I mean, come on. We'd been together for three years, and this was obviously an extremely difficult piece of news for me to hear, and I was upset, I was past upset, I was distraught

She had betrayed me, seriously betrayed me, and I could have done worse, I mean, you'd understand if

If I'd hit her or

I didn't hit her. I just

We just

I stopped when I saw she was bleeding. From

I

Obviously I'd been quite rough. Rougher than I meant to be

But, yes, it's not a nice, it wasn't a nice, I can see that, but to call it

What *she's* calling it

I mean

You can see it from my

...

I was worried about her, I mean, because of the bleeding and, and she was drunk and

But I was also extremely angry so I just

Walked out, got in the car

Don't mention that in

I mean that looks bad

I was drunk, slightly, no, very drunk, er

Very irresponsible, I'll admit, that isn't okay. But anyway I drove, to Hampstead Heath, and just sort of walked around for hours

Sobering up

Thinking about

Thinking about what she'd done to me.

She had been brutal.

And when I got home the next morning she'd left, most of her stuff gone, and at first I was glad, you know. I didn't want to see her or speak to her, I was furious, I was hurt, god I felt like I'd been stabbed in the gut

So I didn't call her, that's why I didn't call her, I was just so angry

And a week passed

And then I got the call from the police.

And here we are.

So, what do you think?

Scene Eight

ADAM is dressed in a dark (but not black) suit. He's drinking a bottle of San Miguel.

I'm not like my dad. I'm resilient. I stick with things, even if it's hard. I stick with people. I'm not going to hold it against my mates. Or Ella. Or Holly, even. I'm going to accept apologies.

He drinks.

When I get back in the office, I'm going to celebrate by getting a mini-fridge. Yours is great.

Cheers.

He drinks.

In a way it was a shame I didn't get to, I don't know

Explain what actually happened

It's sort of anti-climactic for it to be just based on a lack of forensic evidence, that's what it's, forensic evidence, yeah?

Sort of saying well it could have happened but we can't prove it I'd rather have had it kind of laid out that it just wasn't true, but

I don't want to complain
 You did what was easiest, I'm not criticising, I'm just worried
 that it won't reflect well on me
 But it was good you mentioned that we'd been out, and she'd
 been drinking, and the rest
 I think it was important to point that out
 I just hope that's enough to

Although, I had texts from a couple of the lads earlier, actually.
 Haven't heard from them in months, but a couple have
 apologised and that. Hopefully Ella will get in touch soon and
 we can just get over this weird

Silly

Situation.

And everything will just

I mean I honestly think if I'd been allowed to just talk to Holly,
 face to face, at some point in the last few months it wouldn't
 have got this far. I think she just got caught up in the

The feelings and the

And she couldn't speak to me, so it all just got
 I still miss her, I'm not angry with her, I, you know, I can see
 how this got so big and messy

I still love her

You know, there have been benefits, for her. She left her job.
 She hated that job. I wonder how positive a change that's been.

I wonder if she misses it

I wonder if she misses me

It just seems so harsh if she doesn't, so cold, I don't, that
 doesn't seem like Holly

My reaction, what happened, is just an indication of how
 strongly I felt, still feel, about her.

Like, when I told you about my girlfriend from school? And
 how little I reacted when she fucked the teaching assistant? I
 mean that shows, doesn't it, that I don't react badly to things in
 general, I don't have any kind of

I'm not violent or
 I just love her and she hurt me. It was a weird fucking evening,
 mate. That's all it was.

ADAM's phone gets a text. He reads it.

Neil.

'Well done mate, knew it would be okay'
 Yeah cheers mate
 I can probably ditch him now, I know that's mean, bless him
 and everything. But he is a cretin.

And I want my old life back. Old mates.

...

When Ella found out, I mean

When it all came out, you know

She came over to my house

And she was crying

And she said that she wasn't surprised. Can you believe that?

She said I hated women, always had.

Couldn't be further from the truth. I love women. I was brought
 up by a woman. Ellie's my little sister, for

She was obviously just, I don't know, reacting to something,

god knows, whatever, but it really hurt me, and I

I'm looking forward to seeing her and

I love women. After all, everything I did, depending on how
 you, but actually everything that happened was
 I was trying to help Holly.

I was just trying to give her a good life.

From day one. Maybe not day one. From the day we sat in the
 Greek restaurant, I thought - I want to look after you. I want to
 make you mine.

How anyone can see that as hate, is

Can I smoke out of your window?

Blackout.

End.