

NSFW

Lucy Kirkwood

Characters

CHARLOTTE, *twenty-five*

RUPERT, *twenty-eight*

SAM, *twenty-four*

AIDAN, *early forties*

MR BRADSHAW, *late forties*

MIRANDA, *late forties/early fifties*

Note on Text

A forward slash indicates interrupted speech.

A comma on its own line indicates a beat; a silence shorter than a pause, or a shift in thought or rhythm.

Thanks

I would like to thank Simon Godwin, Dominic Cooke, Mel Kenyon and Ed Hime. There are also a number of people who generously gave of their time, knowledge and experience who do not want to be named, but they know who they are and I thank them too.

L.K.

This text went to press before the end of rehearsals and so may differ slightly from the play as performed.

1.

The editor's office of Doghouse magazine, a weekly publication for young men. The magazine's name appears in neon on the wall. Beyond the door, an open-plan office.

There is a pool table, a fridge of drinks. A dartboard. The editor's desk has a desktop Apple computer on it. There are framed prints of topless photo shoots on the walls. A cricket bat in the corner. An enormous Liverpool FC flag strung from the ceiling. The pool table is strewn with toys and gadgets and computer games that the magazine has reviewed or is reviewing.

CHARLOTTE, a middle-class girl from outside of London who now lives in Tooting, is sitting on a chair, a folder in her lap, furiously writing notes. She has other files on the floor which she consults from time to time.

RUPERT, an upper-class boy from Berkshire who now lives in Hoxton, watches her. Bored, he yawns, looks about the office. Wanders over to the pool table and gives it a kick.

RUPERT. When I first started here, we used to play on that all the time.

This place has gone to the fucking dogs.

He sits down on the floor at CHARLOTTE's feet.

Scratch my head.

Without looking away from her work, or stopping writing, CHARLOTTE reaches a hand out and scratches RUPERT's head. He groans in pleasure.

SAM, a working-class, university-educated boy from outside of London who now lives in Archway, enters, juggling a cardboard tray of coffees. He's sweaty and frantic.

SAM. Am I late? Is he here?

CHARLOTTE *takes one of the coffees.* RUPERT *takes another.*

CHARLOTTE. He's in a meeting with finance. Running late.

SAM. There was this woman in Starbucks, and she couldn't make up her mind, she kept saying 'There's so much *choice*, isn't there!' and *laughing*, / I nearly –

CHARLOTTE. Sam? Calm down.

SAM. No just the thing is, is I was late on Monday too and I can't, / I just can't –

RUPERT. Mate. Last year I was reviewing absinthe for the June issue. I got completely munted, walked in here, Aidan's taking a meeting with Roger fucking Highsmith, yeah? I don't remember a thing but apparently I took out my cock and balls, jiggled them in my hand, said 'How d'you like them apples?' and threw up on his folding bicycle. I'm still here, aren't I? It's media. You're not going to get fired for being late with some coffees.

CHARLOTTE. Yeah well, it's different for you, isn't it.

RUPERT. How is it different for me? I am a member of the workforce.

CHARLOTTE *stares at him.*

CHARLOTTE. D'you know how Rupert got this job, / Sam?

RUPERT. Classy. Really fucking classy, Charlotte.

CHARLOTTE. D'you think he did an interview? D'you think he spent hours checking the font on his CV?

RUPERT. Century Gothic ç thank you and actually yes I did an interview and FYI, I di'd't conduct it on my knees, like some / people we COULD MENTION –

CHARLOTTE. He got a / THIRD. In ART HISTORY.

RUPERT *sings, in a rather beautiful baritone, to the tune of 'Mandy' by Barry Manilow:*

RUPERT. 'Oh Charlotte, you came, and you gave me chlamydia.'

CHARLOTTE. Shut up! What's wrong with you?

RUPERT. What? I'm just messing with you.

CHARLOTTE. Sam doesn't know that.

RUPERT. Sam, I was messing about. It was jokes.

CHARLOTTE. I did not give him chlamydia.

RUPERT. No. Of course she didn't. Of course.

Of course.

He winks at SAM, scratches his crotch. Mouths the sentence 'It was crabs' at him, shielding his mouth from CHARLOTTE's view.

CHARLOTTE. What did you say?

RUPERT. I said IT WAS CRABS.

CHARLOTTE throws down her files, goes for him, he dodges her, laughing.

Her Secret Garden's crawling with pests, Sam! Omnem relinquitte spem, o vos intrantes!

She catches him, puts him in a headlock, sinks him to his knees.

CHARLOTTE. Where's your copy? Aidan's going to ask, what am I going to tell him?

RUPERT. You'll think of something! / *(Laughs.)* Ow!

CHARLOTTE. Do I look like your mother? Do I look like your / fucking mother, bitch?

RUPERT. Oh, don't let's fight, darling! Not in front of the child!

CHARLOTTE. I'm serious, you fucking waste of space –

RUPERT. Sam, she's flirting with me! You're a witness, she's flirting and it's hurting!

AIDAN enters. A middle-class, educated, good-looking man. He is carrying a large oblong item, covered in brown paper and protective wrapping.

He stops, stares at the scene. CHARLOTTE and RUPERT disentangle themselves. Beat. AIDAN carries on across the room to his desk, takes his jacket off, dumps his bag.

AIDAN. Great issue. I really mean that.

SAM rushes to bring AIDAN his coffee.

(No, I'm alright, Sam, had one upstairs.)

SAM takes the lid off the coffee, knocks it back in one go.

The circulation's finally taken a leap, it's early days, but the heart monitor is flickering, it's definitely flickering. Print journalism lives to fight another day.

A half-hearted cheer from the others. He holds up the parcel.

Just arrived from the print shop.

He pulls off the wrapping to reveal a large framed print of a topless girl, kneeling on an unmade bed. It's not a professional-standard image, it's been taken by an amateur. The girl has very large breasts, and is in a pose that emphasises this, arching her back, presenting her arse. A sexy face, lips apart, a finger in her mouth. She is undoubtedly beautiful, but also very natural, her make-up is a little crudely applied, her hair is a little wild, she wears a white-cotton pair of everyday pants, chipped blue nail varnish, plastic bangles on her wrists. AIDAN takes down last year's winner from where it hangs on the wall, and places the new print in its place.

Lady and gentlemen, meet Doghouse's Local Lovely, 2012.

They all look at it.

CHARLOTTE (reading from the caption). 'Carrie, eighteen, likes Twilight books and theme parks.'

RUPERT. Chestington World of Adventures!

CHARLOTTE. It's retarded. At least last year's had the reading age of a grown-up.

RUPERT. Charlotte was reading Proust when she was eighteen.

CHARLOTTE. Rupert was playing soggy biscuit when he was eighteen.

RUPERT. Still do. Lovely end to an evening, a good round of old SB.

CHARLOTTE. What were you doing when you were eighteen, Sam?

SAM. Revising.

CHARLOTTE. No but for fun.

SAM. Revising. Pretty much from when I was sixteen, to when I came here, I was revising.

AIDAN's looking up at the print on the wall.

AIDAN. I really like this.

RUPERT. Carrie, meet Humbert Humbert.

AIDAN. No, I do, I mean. Aesthetically. I think this is what we should be going for. Much more natural than last year's. Natural's good. There was a sort of, plastic quality to last year's, around her –

CHARLOTTE. Tits.

AIDAN. No, I meant more in her / energy –

CHARLOTTE. Tits.

AIDAN. I mean, there was a quality, an overall quality that I found a bit, intimidating. But this is good, it's very real very next-door very normal. How many entries did we have this year?

SAM. Nine hundred and sixty-nine.

RUPERT *laughs*. CHARLOTTE *gives him a look*.

RUPERT. Sixty-nine.

AIDAN. Not bad. Up on last year.

CHARLOTTE. It was Sam's choice.

AIDAN. Yes, I know. It's an excellent choice, Sam.

SAM. I thought she looked friendly. Sort of, approachable.

They all look at the print.

CHARLOTTE. Yeah, that's the word. Approachable.

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AIDAN. Once more unto the breach.

AIDAN sits behind his desk. RUPERT and CHARLOTTE grab the two other chairs in the office, SAM has to make do with a beanbag.

I just want to start by saying thank you. I know how hard you've all worked, these last few issues, and I want you to know it's been noted, and appreciated. Charlotte, I'll send round an email, but if you could pass on my gratitude to the rest of the staff?

CHARLOTTE *notes this down.*

However, there's a long way to go. The climate is very hostile. As you know, two of the publications in our demographic have gone under in the last three months.

Half-hearted cheer from CHARLOTTE, RUPERT and SAM.

We've gained a little from their readership, but not as much as we'd like. And this is an opportunity, I don't think we've fully grasped that yet, I mean we've got the C2DEs, they're with us, but if we're clever we can broaden our appeal, scoop up some of those ABC1s – you don't look excited.

Everyone tries to look excited.

This is exciting. We're not talking about editorial overhaul, but a tactical *repositioning*. There's an existing mission statement, no one's saying touch the statement, Roger's certainly not saying *that*, but I'm giving you licence here to

be *bold*, guys, be brave, yeah? There's always room for jokes, there's always room for boobs, that's a given, but what else is there room for?

RUPERT *puts his hand up*.

Rupert?

RUPERT. Bums?

AIDAN. Bums don't sell, what I'm saying is, is let's really *live* in the spaces *between* the boobs, yeah? Let's not let them outgrow us, I want you all to keep putting yourselves in the head of that eighteen- to thirty-five-year-old man. Thinking about who he is and what he wants to spend his disposable income on, what does he talk about with his mates, what makes him laugh, what *Doghouse* magazine can give him that he can't get anywhere else.

So, on that note.

Our next Man Challenge.

The others groan.

Who wants to go to the Arctic for a week? Charlotte?

CHARLOTTE. Survey says uh-uh.

AIDAN. Rupes?

RUPERT. Already been.

AIDAN. When?

RUPERT. School trip.

SAM. What's it like?

RUPERT. Pretty cold.

AIDAN. We'll get you some mittens.

RUPERT. No. I'm sorry but no, I did the diet. You said, if I did the diet I didn't have to do any more Man Challenges for at least six months, you said.

AIDAN. But this one will be fun.

RUPERT. I ate nothing but meat for six weeks, Aidan.

AIDAN. The readers loved it.

RUPERT. I had to go to the hospital to get my bowel medically dis-impacted.

AIDAN. The message boards went crazy.

RUPERT. And before that I did the sleep deprivation, I was hallucinating for five days. I saw pixies in my soup. Do you know what that's like? To be eating a bowl of minestrone and see evil pixies frolicking on your spoon?

CHARLOTTE. Is that a Nigella?

RUPERT. You promised. No more Man Challenges.

AIDAN. Okay. Sam?

SAM. Yes?

AIDAN. Do you want to go to the Arctic?

SAM. When?

AIDAN. Next week.

SAM. It's my girlfriend's birthday.

AIDAN. Take her! See how many times you can have sex in sub-zero temperatures.

RUPERT. Before it goes black and falls off.

AIDAN. We'll call it 'Love in a Cold Climate'.

CHARLOTTE. It's what Nancy Mitford would have wanted, Sam.

SAM. No, I'd, really like that, it's just – I've booked a thing. For my girlfriend's birthday, it's her thirtieth / and –

RUPERT. Harold and Maude.

SAM. And I want to make it special so I booked this thing, I've been saving up my holiday time – I did clear it with Sarah.

AIDAN. What is it?

SAM. It's just, a thing.

CHARLOTTE. A thing.

SAM. A thing, a treat a, surprise.

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CHARLOTTE. Yeah?

SAM. No I'm just. It's a bit.

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Well, she's called Rona. My girlfriend. Her parents named her after this island, in Scotland, which was where, well, they always said that's where they fell in love, and they always promised to take her, but they never did and now, well, they both died, her mum last year, her dad like, five years ago.

And I've booked a sleeper train to Glasgow. And I've hired a car and, we're going to drive out there, you have to go on a ferry and I found this, tiny little house on the beach that used to be a shepherd's hut only someone did it up, it's in the middle of a bird sanctuary and – she's got this thing about puffins, she just –

Well, she really loves puffins, like if you ever need to get her a present, you just get her something with a puffin on it, like a mug or a T-shirt and she just, that just makes her day, and you can see them, the puffins, from this house and we both, we really like swimming in the sea, especially when it's cold, that's one of our things. And. And.

And I bought a ring.

So when we get to the island, and we've seen the birds, and we've swum in the sea –

I'm going to ask her.

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So if it's alright, I'd rather not go to the Arctic.

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RUPERT. I think I'm in love.

CHARLOTTE. That's very... that's, / very lovely, Sam.

RUPERT *rubs at his eyes, tearful.*

RUPERT. I've gone. I've actually gone.

AIDAN. Write it. Write about that for us.

SAM. You want me to –

AIDAN. You want to be a writer or not?

CHARLOTTE. No, he wants to spend another nine months fetching your cappuccinos and judging tit shots. That's why you did your MA, isn't it, Sam?

AIDAN *stands, excited.*

AIDAN. No see this is what I'm talking about. We have an opportunity here, to move the readership on. The boys who started reading us ten years ago, they're grown-ups now, they're not out on the pull every Friday, they're settling down, they've got mortgages, girlfriends they love. The climate is changing. They're not just reading us for the tits any more.

RUPERT. Uh, I think the tits are quite a big part of it.

AIDAN. Okay, but they want to find a pair of tits to grow old with.

RUPERT. Again, I think they want to get old, while the tits stay the same age.

AIDAN. 'How I Proposed to My Girlfriend.' Seven hundred and fifty words. What do you think, Sam?

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SAM. Wow.

AIDAN. Great.

SAM. Yeah, but –

AIDAN. What?

SAM. Just not sure –

AIDAN. You're nervous, don't be –

SAM. I'm not but –

AIDAN. I've read your samples.

SAM. I just / don't think I want to.

AIDAN. You're a good writer, what?

SAM. I don't want to write about it.

AIDAN. Why?

SAM. Because it's private.

AIDAN. The proposal?

SAM. Yeah.

AIDAN. But you just told us about it.

SAM. Yeah / but –

RUPERT. You did just tell us about it, mate.

SAM. But you're my friends.

AIDAN. I'm not your friend.

SAM. No, sure but –

AIDAN. We're your colleagues, I'm your boss. That's why I'm asking you to – anyway, you don't have to write the reality, you write the *Doghouse* version. When Rupert wrote the piece on being dumped by Pippa Middleton, that wasn't you know that wasn't gospel that wasn't, you know, *vérité*, was it?

RUPERT. No. For a start, okay, it was *me* that dumped *her* –

The others groan, they've heard this grievance rehearsed before.

CHARLOTTE. Yeah yeah, we know, you're too good for her –

RUPERT. For the party planner? Yes, / as a matter of fact –

AIDAN. What I'm saying is, this isn't, I'm not asking for gonzo journalism here. I mean, hopefully the real thing won't go

wrong but it would be good, wouldn't it, Charlotte, if when Sam writes about it, it goes wrong? A little / bit –

SAM. Wrong?

AIDAN. You know, awry.

RUPERT. Tits up.

CHARLOTTE. Just, structurally, if there were some obstacles –

AIDAN. You might forget the ring.

RUPERT. Or you might get cold feet.

CHARLOTTE. The island might've been used for chemical-weapons testing and the beach might be littered with the bodies of dead puffins.

AIDAN. Keep it light.

RUPERT. Get pictures.

AIDAN. Yes, get pictures, Charlotte, can we loan Sam a decent camera?

CHARLOTTE *nods, writes a note.* RUPERT *looks to* AIDAN.

RUPERT. Although. I mean. What's your girlfriend look like?

SAM *laughs.*

SAM. Well, this is really funny actually because I always say she reminds / me of –

RUPERT. You got a picture?

SAM. Oh. Yeah.

SAM *whips out his phone, finds a picture on it, gives the phone to RUPERT. Turns back to AIDAN as RUPERT examines the picture.*

It's not that I'm not very grateful for the opportunity.

RUPERT *makes a face and behind SAM's back mimes the words 'big girl' to AIDAN. SAM turns, RUPERT cuts the mime and hands the phone back to him.*

RUPERT. Beautiful. Bet you wouldn't like her when she's angry though.

SAM. What?

AIDAN. You came to me, Sam, you sat in that chair during interview and claimed you wanted to be a journalist, on this publication –

SAM. I did, I do –

AIDAN. And I was very clear about / what that entailed, we're –

SAM. I know –

AIDAN. – interested in your life, we need to know, / about your life –

SAM. Yeah, no I will, just –

AIDAN. What?

SAM. Just not about this one thing.

AIDAN. Why not?

SAM. Because –

AIDAN. I'm not trying to bully you, I just don't / understand the problem here –

SAM. Because it doesn't just belong to me, it belongs to her as well.

RUPERT. Stop talking about your herpes, Sam!

CHARLOTTE. Have you actually got an STD?

RUPERT. Fuck off.

CHARLOTTE. Just you go on about them all the time.

RUPERT. Actually, Charlotte, yeah, I think I've got like, AIDS, really really badly, cos I feel really tired and it stings when I wee. Actually I did get thrush in my mouth once from this girl so God knows what else she was harbouring. It worked in a Budgens.

CHARLOTTE. So not Pippa then.

RUPERT. No, not Pippa, God, I think her name was... I want to say Francesca? I mean, fuck, I hope not Pippa because I was hacking bareback that summer, if you catch my –

AIDAN *sharply shushes* RUPERT.

Rude.

AIDAN. Sam?

SAM. No I just feel. This is a, it's a private thing. For me and her. And it's, I mean I hope it's something that will only ever happen once to us. Which is. You can't say that about a lot of things. Can you, so I don't want anyone else to...

I mean, it's none of their business.

The public.

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AIDAN *regards SAM for some moments.*

I'm really sorry. I could write a sort of general piece on –

AIDAN. I was really looking for a personal angle. Just that's our house style.

SAM. Okay, well... thank you, anyway. / For asking –

AIDAN *stands behind his desk, starts glancing through the layouts left there for his approval.*

AIDAN. No, I mean. I think it's a shame for you, cos it's an opportunity, isn't it, but if you don't want it then. Can I get some coffee please?

SAM *hesitates, AIDAN looks up at him.*

Sam?

SAM. Yeah.

SAM, *uncertain, grabs his jacket, leaves the room.*

AIDAN. Where are the gaming reviews?

CHARLOTTE *looks at RUPERT.*

RUPERT. I'm just polishing.

AIDAN. Well, go and polish then.

RUPERT *starts to leave*.

Actually, one minute.

RUPERT *turns back*.

RUPERT. Yes, boss?

AIDAN. Do you own such a thing as a pair of snow shoes?

RUPERT *gradually realises what he is implying*.

RUPERT. No. No. You can fuck off. You can fuck right off. I'm not going.

AIDAN. Pack a few books. Kendal Mint Cake. You may be some time.

RUPERT. This is discrimination!

AIDAN. Against what?

RUPERT. Against privilege! You only make me do this stuff because of my dad!

AIDAN. No, I do it because it's funny.

RUPERT. I'm not doing it. I'm just not. There is absolutely no way I'm freezing my bollocks off in the Arctic for your sadistic pleasure, no, I'm just not, you can fire me, I don't care, that's what a trust fund means, not having to take this sort of shit from people like you. There is no way, Aidan, I'm serious. Absolutely no way.

AIDAN. I'll let you do the Louise Mensch interview.

RUPERT (*panicked*). You have to let me do that anyway, that's my contact, Aidan, mate, don't fuck about, / I set that *up* – !

AIDAN. Charlotte, would you like to interview Louise Mensch?

CHARLOTTE. Wow, / thank you, I'd love to.

RUPERT. That's my contact – alright! All-fucking-right I'll go to the Arctic! Fuck's sake.

RUPERT goes. CHARLOTTE smiles at AIDAN, gets up to follow RUPERT.

AIDAN. Charlotte, wait a moment.

He crosses to her, shuts the door, they are standing very close, he looks at her.

You alright?

CHARLOTTE. Yeah.

She smiles.

You alright?

AIDAN nods. Smiles.

AIDAN. Bit tired.

CHARLOTTE. Yeah?

AIDAN. Didn't get much sleep last night.

CHARLOTTE. No?

AIDAN. What about you?

CHARLOTTE. What?

AIDAN. Did you get much?

CHARLOTTE. Sleep?

AIDAN. Yeah.

CHARLOTTE. No. But I'm that much younger than you though, aren't I? You don't need it the same way. Not when you're my age.

CHARLOTTE smiles. AIDAN, amused. They look at each other... but this is not the time or place. AIDAN smiles. Gestures to a chair.

AIDAN. Have a seat.

She sits. He sits in his desk chair.

I hope you don't think I'm interfering.

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CHARLOTTE. Okay?

AIDAN. I've got you an interview.

CHARLOTTE. Who's it with this time? The naked yoga teacher?

AIDAN. No, *for* you. At the Indie.

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CHARLOTTE. Are you – am I being fired?

AIDAN. No, no it's not – it's on the arts desk. I thought you might want a crack at it.

CHARLOTTE. Well. Yeah. But –

AIDAN. If you don't get it, there's still a job for you here. But I think you will get it.

CHARLOTTE. Okay. Thanks. I think. Sorry, just it does feel a bit like I'm getting fired –

AIDAN. I think you're very talented. I think you should succeed, on your own terms.

CHARLOTTE. But is my work not –

AIDAN. Your work is fine. Excellent even, within the parameters of – but do you actually want to be working here? In this environment?

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CHARLOTTE. Can I be honest?

AIDAN. Please.

CHARLOTTE. I just like working. Getting paid. I got a First, you know.

AIDAN. I do.

CHARLOTTE. When I first came down to London I couldn't get arrested. I did three years of unpaid work placements and internships before I came here and that's fucking shit. Slave labour. And then I spent three months getting screamed at by

Trinny and Susannah because I didn't know what a gilet was, and then I came here, which, yeah, it's not like my *dream* or anything but it's on my CV and I can pay my rent and yeah. I mean I actually – I haven't actually told you this but I am actually part of a group, a women's group and I sort of. Lie to them. About what I do. But the way things are, right now. All my mates are on benefits and I don't. I don't want that. So if it means I'm working, for money then –

Then I can deal with a few tits here and there.

RUPERT *runs in.*

RUPERT. Aidan.

AIDAN. I've told you, knock.

RUPERT. Carrie.

AIDAN. Who?

RUPERT *gestures to the photo of the Local Lovely on the wall.*

What about her?

RUPERT. I've got her father on the line.

AIDAN *and CHARLOTTE look at each other, smile.*

AIDAN. Uh-oh. Daddy's had a wake-up call.

They laugh.

RUPERT. Yeah. He says she didn't send the picture in.

AIDAN. No, of course – that's not how it works. The boyfriend takes the picture, the boyfriend sends it in.

RUPERT. Yeah but she doesn't know anything about it.

AIDAN. Right. But the consent forms would have been –

RUPERT. Yeah but her dad's saying that she's saying that she didn't sign any form –

AIDAN. Who dealt with this? Sam!

SAM comes running in, in his jacket.

SAM. I was just going, I forgot / my wallet –

AIDAN. Forget the coffee.

SAM. No, it won't take / a minute –

AIDAN. Do we have consent forms on file for the Local Lovely shots of Carrie?

SAM. Yeah. I think – yeah, do you want me to get them?

AIDAN. Who sent them in?

SAM. Her boyfriend. Think his name was Mark... something. I can get you the forms.

RUPERT. Yeah well, they're not together any more, and she didn't know he sent it in, and her dad's on the phone having a fucking aneurysm.

SAM. What? But the form – there's a photocopy of her passport –

RUPERT. The boyfriend must have forged it.

AIDAN. Or she's lying.

CHARLOTTE. Yeah but how did her dad find out? You wouldn't tell your dad.

RUPERT. He bought the magazine. She didn't even know she was in it till he saw it. He's pretty fucking raw about it. He's really, you know, really like...

AIDAN. What?

RUPERT. Northern. I tried to change my accent to make him like me more but I think he thought I was Jamaican.

AIDAN. Charlotte, go and field this, will you? Calm him down, use your – soft skills or / whatever they call –

CHARLOTTE gets up but RUPERT pulls her back.

RUPERT. No, wait, before you – there's something else.

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AIDAN. What is it?

RUPERT. You're going to pop a bollock.

AIDAN. Rupert.

RUPERT *gestures to the print on the wall.*

RUPERT. She's fourteen.

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SAM. What? What?

SAM *grasps for a chair.*

RUPERT. She is. She's fucking fourteen.

AIDAN. No. No, no, this is not –

RUPERT. The boyfriend's only fifteen.

AIDAN. What's a fifteen-year-old boy doing taking pictures like that of a young girl?

RUPERT. He thought she could win the competition.

AIDAN. It's disgusting.

RUPERT. She did win the competition.

AIDAN. Fuck. Fuck. No, it's alright.

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RUPERT. Aidan?

AIDAN. Thinking, I'm thinking. What does he want?

RUPERT. Well, he probably wants his fourteen-year-old daughter to keep her bra on, but it's a bit late for that.

AIDAN. Charlotte? What do you think he wants?

CHARLOTTE. Your head on a stick?

AIDAN. Call the distributors. We need to pull this from the shelves.

CHARLOTTE. It's already been out three days.

AIDAN. Put a plaster on it. Get on to Online Content, get them to remove it from the site – no wait, first go and talk to him, do what you can to calm him down, then put him through. Fuck. I need to speak to a lawyer, get legal on the phone too.

CHARLOTTE *goes*. SAM *is curled up on the floor, trying to breathe*.

SAM. I didn't know.

AIDAN. Come on, Sam, mate, get up, it's alright, it's okay.

SAM. I'm not – I feel so – am I a...

AIDAN. *No*.

SAM. No because she's – I mean I picked her – I found her the most – I spent hours looking at those – choosing which one to – like, if I close my eyes, I can still see her, that's in my brain now, that's actually stored in my – I can't erase that – I think I might. I think I might be a paedophile.

AIDAN. We can contain this. This can be contained.

RUPERT *is looking at the print in wonder*.

RUPERT. I just can't believe it.

AIDAN. I know.

RUPERT. No but I mean, fourteen?

AIDAN. I know. I know.

RUPERT. Cos I'm not being funny but –

AIDAN. What?

RUPERT. Well, sorry, but have you seen the balcony on it?

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AIDAN *stares at him*.

AIDAN. Get out.

RUPERT. What?

AIDAN. Seriously. I won't have that. What's wrong with you? She's a child, go and slam your head in a door.

RUPERT. Sorry. Sorry but why am I / getting the –

AIDAN. You were supposed to be watching Sam, mentoring his, you have to protect people, if you don't protect them this is what happens!

RUPERT. This is my fault? Mate, ten minutes ago you were basically rubbing yourself off to her, suddenly her tits are out of bounds? Talking to me / like that, what's your damage?

SAM begins to groan loudly and continually.

AIDAN. Of course they are, can you hear your – she's fourteen, my 'damage'? My damage is we're all about to get fired. My *damage* is you're a stuck-up little prick who thinks he's somehow / above what is happening here –

RUPERT pulls out a Dictaphone from his pocket, switches it on, holds it in AIDAN's face.

RUPERT. Go on. Go on. Come on, mate, bring it on –

AIDAN. Get that out of my, what is that?

RUPERT. That's my fucking *dossier*, mate, you pushed me to this, I've worked here three fucking years, you take every chance you can to *shit* on me, from a *height*, just cos you think being born in a *coal hole* somehow gives you / the right to –

AIDAN grabs the Dictaphone from RUPERT, throws it down.

AIDAN. Get the fuck out of my office, you fucking Eton mess!

RUPERT runs out as CHARLOTTE looks in.

CHARLOTTE. Aidan, her father's on line two.

AIDAN. What's his name?

CHARLOTTE. Mr Bradshaw.

AIDAN. Mr Bradshaw. Where do they live?

CHARLOTTE. Manchester.

AIDAN. Will he come to London?

CHARLOTTE. I'll ask.

AIDAN. Great just just just (Sam, be quiet) just keep him talking, give me a, give me a moment to think, Sam, mate, please!

CHARLOTTE *runs out*. SAM *stops groaning and starts to cry*.

Wait, Charlotte?

She runs in again.

I'm going to need you to book a, a hotel (shut up, Sam) somewhere really, a suite, just, blow the hospitality budget, do you mind?

CHARLOTTE. On it.

He gestures to the Liverpool FC flag on the wall.

AIDAN. Take the Liverpool flag down. And I need a photograph of a girl.

CHARLOTTE. Topless?

AIDAN. No, not – fucking hell, Charlotte, a fourteen-, a fifteen-year-old girl, with all her clothes on, in a garden or something, you know, bucolic. Call the picture library.

CHARLOTTE. Right.

AIDAN. Print it. Frame it. Put it on my desk.

CHARLOTTE. Okay.

AIDAN. Charlotte? I'm really sorry about this.

CHARLOTTE. I don't care.

AIDAN. No but. I'd hate for you to feel like I think this is okay.

CHARLOTTE. I don't.

AIDAN. It's not okay. This is not okay.

CHARLOTTE. I know. She's fucking fourteen.

AIDAN. This is not that sort of publication. We have nothing but the deepest respect for the women, the legally adult women, that we feature on our pages. I don't want you to feel uncomfortable working here.

CHARLOTTE. I don't feel uncomfortable.

AIDAN. Good. That's good.

CHARLOTTE. I just feel really sad.

They look at each other. CHARLOTTE goes. SAM is still on the floor.

AIDAN. Sam, get up.

SAM. I can't.

AIDAN. We didn't know.

SAM. I chose the photo.

AIDAN. These things happen. It's not your fault.

SAM. No but I think it, I think maybe it is, because, because...

,

AIDAN. Because what, Sam?

SAM. No I just. I did, I had a feeling, I had this, quite, a deep feeling of deep, unease, or

AIDAN. A feeling is not, there was no / reason for you to –

SAM. Dread. Actually, but I get that quite a lot, feelings of dread.

AIDAN. I'm sorry, but your feelings are not my priority / right now –

SAM. No but when I rang him up, the boyfriend, to tell him, she'd won, I had to, talk him through the consent form and his voice was a bit, croaky a bit sort of –

AIDAN. Shit. Okay. Shit.

SAM. Yeah, like breaking, but he said he had a cold, and after, he made a request. To be friends with me. On Facebook / and I –

AIDAN. You didn't, please tell me / you did not –

SAM. No, I thought it'd be, crossing a line and also, also I'd talked to him, on the phone and to be honest, I honestly thought –

AIDAN. Yes?

SAM. I thought he was a bit of a twat, sorry, so I didn't, accept his – but I did have a look at his photos, and there was, this one folder called 'Year 8 go to the Somme', and there were pictures of him, with her, with Carrie or it looked like her standing in a field of white gravestones, you know the ones like teeth with poppies growing, and she was doing that 'V' sign, that peace sign girls always do and, he was behind her sort of laughing, sort of grabbing her, like –

He grabs, with two hands, where his breasts would be.

They were in uniform. School uniform, not.

And, and I had quite a big wave of it then, the dread, but. But then I always get that when I think about the Somme because.

AIDAN. Sam. This isn't.

SAM. Because it's the Somme and what else can you think.

SAM leans over, hands on his knees, hyperventilating.

AIDAN rubs his back.

AIDAN. Because there's no way they can know this, is there? / They don't know you saw those photographs.

SAM. When I was sixteen, me and my girlfriend Michelle Berry, we watched a documentary about men who'd had their faces blown off in Ypres. After the plastic surgery they looked worse, all these boys deformed like little slitty mouths and trunks for noses and I said to Michelle, would you love me if I looked like that?

AIDAN. Can we just focus / please?

SAM. And she said no. She said no, that fucking turns my stomach, you'd rather be dead, wouldn't you?

AIDAN. Carrie was, she was in school uniform, and you didn't think to –

SAM. No I just thought, it's old, it's just, people have their whole lives on there, don't they?

AIDAN. No that's. Understandable. And there is a consent form.

SAM. There are photos of me from when I was thirteen on there, I look like a foetus, I didn't think – it never crossed my mind that she might not be –

AIDAN. The consent form has been signed.

SAM. Except now I can remember very clearly. There was, I did have –

AIDAN. What we are talking about is forgery –

SAM. There was this feeling of dread.

AIDAN. – that's what we're talking about.

SAM. Which eventually passed.

But she's a little girl. I picked a little girl. Out of nearly a thousand a little girl I picked a little girl –

AIDAN. You didn't know.

SAM. She likes *Twilight* and going to theme parks!

AIDAN. Don't mention this to anyone. It's alright, but don't.

SAM. Rona's going to kill me.

AIDAN. Are you listening to me?

CHARLOTTE (*off*). Aidan! He wants to talk to you, line two!

AIDAN. Here. Go and have a cigarette, get some air, wash your face.

AIDAN *takes out his cigarettes, offers them to SAM.*

SAM. I don't smoke.

AIDAN. It'll make you feel better, just – Rupert!

SAM. Cigarettes give you cancer. Heart disease.

AIDAN *shows him the packet.*

AIDAN. Not these ones, these just harm your unborn child,
Rupert, get in here!

RUPERT *enters*. AIDAN *gestures to SAM, who is rocking back and forth*.

Take him to the pub, sort him out.

RUPERT. Say please.

AIDAN. Rupert, *please* stop being a fucking prick and help me out here.

RUPERT *pulls down his trousers and pants, drags his bare arse across AIDAN's desk and walks out again*.

You're – that is not – that's strike one!

RUPERT *(off)*. Stick it up your arse, you fucking prole.

CHARLOTTE *(off)*. Aidan! Line two!

AIDAN. Thank you, yes!

AIDAN *races round to the phone*.

SAM. Aidan?

AIDAN. What.

SAM. I'm having another one.

AIDAN. Right.

SAM. A feeling of dread.

AIDAN. I'm sorry, Sam. I have to take this.

SAM *nods*. *He stumbles out of the room*. AIDAN *takes a deep breath*. *Picks up the phone*. *Pushes a button*.

Mr Bradshaw.

Sudden black.

2.

The next day. MR BRADSHAW in AIDAN's office. He is holding a blue plastic bag with his book, reading glasses and some papers in it. AIDAN shakes his hand.

AIDAN. You found it okay?

BRADSHAW. The taxi brought me right to the door.

AIDAN. You didn't have any problems?

BRADSHAW. No.

CHARLOTTE *enters*.

AIDAN. This is Charlotte.

BRADSHAW. Hello, Charlotte.

CHARLOTTE. Great to meet you, Mr Bradshaw.

She shakes his hand.

AIDAN. Can we get you anything, Mr Bradshaw? Tea? Coffee? Beer?

BRADSHAW. Bit early for that.

AIDAN. We can send out for anything you like. Have you eaten?

BRADSHAW. I had breakfast at the hotel.

AIDAN. Full English?

BRADSHAW. Continental.

AIDAN. It's on us, you know. Go for your life.

BRADSHAW. I have angina.

AIDAN. I'm sorry to hear that.

BRADSHAW. Have to watch my diet.

AIDAN. Lots of exercise.

BRADSHAW. I play golf sometimes.

AIDAN. A man after my own heart! What's your handicap, can I ask?

BRADSHAW. Three.

AIDAN. Three! Mine's – mine's – much higher than that, okay. Okay. Please. Take a seat.

MR BRADSHAW *sits. Looks round. His eyes land on the dartboard.*

You like darts?

BRADSHAW. No.

AIDAN. Okay. We'll reimburse your travel costs, of course. You've come from Manchester, yes?

AIDAN *sits behind his desk.*

BRADSHAW. That's right.

AIDAN. Great city. Great city. I'm a Man U fan myself actually.

BRADSHAW. I don't follow football.

AIDAN. No. Waste of time. Just talk to Charlotte, she'll take it from petty cash. The train fare. And the taxis. Anything you like. Wouldn't want you out of pocket.

BRADSHAW. That's very generous.

AIDAN. The hotel is alright?

BRADSHAW. It's very nice.

AIDAN. Good. No, I'm glad about that. I looked it up myself, of course, but five stars, what does that even mean nowadays?

BRADSHAW. It's a very generous gesture.

AIDAN. Not at all, not at all. Least we could do. You sure you don't want a tea, coffee? We can send out for / anything you like –

BRADSHAW. Can I have a glass of water?

AIDAN. Water sure. Still, sparkling?

BRADSHAW. Just tap is fine.

AIDAN. Charlotte, a water for Mr Bradshaw. Tap. You want ice? Lemon?

BRADSHAW. No thank you.

AIDAN. No ice, no lemon.

CHARLOTTE *goes. Beat.*

She'll just be a moment.

A long pause.

BRADSHAW. I'd like to start by –

CHARLOTTE *returns with the water. She remains, standing, throughout.*

AIDAN. Here she is! One water. No ice, no lemon!

BRADSHAW. Thank you.

AIDAN. Cold enough?

MR BRADSHAW *nods.*

Because the tap runs a bit warm sometimes and it's a hot, I mean, this climate.

BRADSHAW. Yes.

AIDAN. This heat. In March. Bloody mental, isn't it? Is it like this up north?

BRADSHAW. No it's more. Cloudy.

AIDAN. It's a different world, isn't it?

CHARLOTTE. Can I get you anything else?

AIDAN. Would you like anything else, Mr Bradshaw?

BRADSHAW. The water is fine, thank you.

AIDAN. Charlotte's my lifeline. I wouldn't make it through the day without Charlotte. She went to Oxford, you know.

BRADSHAW. Congratulations.

AIDAN. Very clever girl, Charlotte. Sorry, Char, is that a bit patronising?

CHARLOTTE. No.

AIDAN. No, cos I'd hate to make you feel – Charlotte should be patronising me, Mr Bradshaw, / she's that –

BRADSHAW. Can we get down to it?

AIDAN. Sure. Sure.

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Shall I start or –

BRADSHAW. I'd like to –

AIDAN. No, right, fire away.

BRADSHAW. Okay. Well, obviously I'll be taking this to court.

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AIDAN. Right.

BRADSHAW. That can't be a surprise to you.

AIDAN. No, well, obviously, you're angry. And –

BRADSHAW. I think what you've done is disgusting.

AIDAN. Uh-huh.

BRADSHAW. And I think that should be recognised, and someone should be called to account for that.

AIDAN. Absolutely, but –

BRADSHAW. You agree.

AIDAN. Oh I do. One hundred per cent. I've already fired the employee who was responsible for signing off on the picture.

BRADSHAW. Well, I'll have to take that on trust.

AIDAN. You can see his P45 if you like? Charlotte, can you show Mr Bradshaw a copy of Sam's P45?

CHARLOTTE *goes to a filing cabinet, takes out a sheet of paper, shows MR BRADSHAW. He scans the paper.*

BRADSHAW. Good. Well. Good.

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That's a start.

AIDAN. We're taking this very seriously, Mr Bradshaw.

BRADSHAW. Should hope so.

AIDAN. But I have to tell you.

BRADSHAW. Should hope you were, taking it seriously, but what does that mean from people like you?

AIDAN. I have to tell you, you don't have a case.

BRADSHAW. I'm speaking with a solicitor.

AIDAN. You're wasting your money.

BRADSHAW. That's my business, isn't it, my money, my business, he's quietly confident.

AIDAN. Is he.

BRADSHAW. Yes, it's early days but he's quietly confident.

AIDAN. I'm sorry to. But we have good lawyers. Expensive lawyers, we have to. You're not special, I'm afraid. This sort of thing happens all the time. I've run this by our legal team, they're very clear on this, the legality of this, we are not liable. They laughed, actually – but I said to them, hold on, guys, come on, let's just have some human bloody compassion here, let's think about this man, this innocent man who's had to deal with the fact that his fourteen-year-old daughter has got herself in a situation whereby her body has been put on show for all to see I mean come on. Let's be sensitive to that. So we put our heads together, we crunched the numbers and what we want to do for you, for the worry,

for the inconvenience, for the shock, is we want to offer you twenty-five thousand pounds.

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BRADSHAW. I don't want any money.

AIDAN. I'm offering you twenty-five thousand pounds. You can take that now, we have the cheque already – show him the cheque, Charlotte.

CHARLOTTE *shows him the cheque.*

That's yours, that's signed off, you can bank it today.

BRADSHAW. I want it to be recognised that your magazine broke the law.

AIDAN. Tax-free.

BRADSHAW. It's not the money.

AIDAN. This is done. The magazine is in the shops, it's being bought as we speak, we can't change that. What we can change is the life of that girl, your daughter. We can give you enough money to see her through university. Enough money to get her on the property ladder. What we're talking about here is her future.

BRADSHAW. Her future is fine, thank you, she doesn't need you to finance her future.

AIDAN. Then what do you want? Because this won't even make it to trial. This is an open-and-shut case of forgery, a forgery perpetrated *against* us. You have no recourse here.

BRADSHAW. Yes but he said you'd say that.

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AIDAN. I'm sorry, who?

BRADSHAW. Your employee, the black chappy.

AIDAN. I beg your pardon?

BRADSHAW. No, I'm not like that. It was just to distinguish, because I spoke to him, on the phone.

AIDAN. There's no one of that description working here.

BRADSHAW. He was West Indian or, Jamaican, he had a funny accent, I'm not an expert.

AIDAN and CHARLOTTE look at each other.

He rang me back, last night. He said if it didn't stand up in court I should go to the press. He said I could sell the story, that the papers would print this –

AIDAN. I'm afraid you've been the victim of a disgruntled employee.

BRADSHAW. And they'd print your photo, next to it, and your name, and that this would destroy you, and this magazine, and everyone would know what a grubby, diseased, perverted man you are. He said I could cut you out like a cancer.

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AIDAN. He said that.

BRADSHAW. He did. He did say that and he has given me the, contact details, of a number of big editors at big newspapers, who he says would be very interested in this story.

AIDAN. And you intend to –

BRADSHAW. Yes.

AIDAN. And there's nothing I can –

BRADSHAW. No. I'm sorry but there it is.

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AIDAN. Can I ask, I'm sorry, I know this is a very difficult thing to, but can I just ask how you became aware of the –

BRADSHAW. Indecent photographs of my child?

AIDAN. Exactly, because your daughter didn't tell you about this incident, did she? No, I don't blame her, it's an awkward conversation.

BRADSHAW. She's absolutely beside herself.

AIDAN. Is she? That's awful, but what I'm getting at is, this came to light because well, you saw it, didn't you?

BRADSHAW. I don't follow.

AIDAN. You saw it yourself. In the magazine. In the magazine which you bought.

BRADSHAW. Not a crime. Buying a magazine.

AIDAN. Of course it's not. You're entitled.

BRADSHAW. Just a magazine.

AIDAN. Just a magazine, absolutely, just a men's magazine that you, as a consumer, are completely entitled to buy. I mean, we're not living in bloody Abu Dhabi, are we!

BRADSHAW. I don't usually look at the pictures, if that's what you're getting at.

AIDAN. Sorry!

BRADSHAW. What?

AIDAN. No. Nothing.

AIDAN picks up an old copy of Doghouse, leafs through it.

BRADSHAW. I like the articles.

AIDAN. You like the – no, sorry, I'm just wondering which ones in – is it 'How to Upgrade Your Girlfriend'? Or 'Travels with my Erection'?

BRADSHAW. It's the articles, all of the, I read them on the bus or sometimes in the pub –

AIDAN. The articles are shit. No offence, Charlotte. But no one buys our publication principally for the literature. I think it's important to acknowledge that.

BRADSHAW. If you're suggesting –

AIDAN. I'm not suggesting anything except that you, like all of us here, appreciate certain types of images, that happen to be of beautiful girls in a state of undress.

BRADSHAW. Not young girls.

AIDAN. That's simply human. That's just aesthetics.

BRADSHAW. Not young girls.

AIDAN. No. But eighteen, nineteen, twenty. Young compared to us old codgers, eh, Mr Bradshaw!

BRADSHAW. Not fucking fourteen. Sorry.

AIDAN. No, of course. Four years older than fourteen.

BRADSHAW. Eighteen's different to fourteen.

AIDAN. But you can see our dilemma? Your daughter *looks* like an eighteen-year-old.

BRADSHAW. But she's not eighteen, is she, she's –

AIDAN. And she's got a boyfriend, with whom, I'm sorry to, but with whom I think we can take it as read she is having a, well, a sexual relationship?

BRADSHAW....

AIDAN. Okay, and that boyfriend has taken photographs of her, and sent them to us, on the premise, the deceptive premise that she is eighteen. That those breasts were the breasts of a legal adult.

BRADSHAW....

AIDAN. And to be honest, there was probably a moment, wasn't there, when your eyes went over this photograph and for a minute –

BRADSHAW. No.

AIDAN. No, come on, let's, in the spirit of – there would have been a moment, before you saw the face, before you, recognised the face and the feelings became more complicated, there would have been a moment where your feelings about this picture were in fact, very simple, because you're looking at this picture and what you're experiencing is –

BRADSHAW. No.

AIDAN. Very simply, very purely, an aesthetic experience of, what?

BRADSHAW. I didn't look.

AIDAN. Of very simply, very purely, a beautiful pair of firm, young breasts.

BRADSHAW. I didn't see.

AIDAN. I'm sorry, Mr Bradshaw, but that's a bit, I find that quite confusing because if you didn't look at the picture, in the magazine that you bought, how did you come to make the phone call and be sitting here?

BRADSHAW. A friend.

AIDAN. A friend.

BRADSHAW. That's right.

AIDAN. A friend recognised her.

BRADSHAW. Yes.

AIDAN. Good friend?

BRADSHAW. Yes.

AIDAN. Old friend?

BRADSHAW. Yes.

AIDAN. Recognised her... face, did he?

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BRADSHAW. I'm not being funny, son, but you want to watch your fucking mouth.

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AIDAN. I'm so sorry, Mr Bradshaw. That was callous of me. I was only trying to prove a point, I went too far, I should have known. I'm a father. I've got a daughter. Like you, Isobel, she's fifteen. See. She plays the flute.

He shows MR BRADSHAW the framed photo on his desk. It's of a teenage girl in a garden. Looks at it himself, fondly.

God knows how I'd feel if I was in your position right now. If... Isobel was, doing that sort of – doesn't bear thinking about. The idea that I just hadn't noticed that my fourteen-year-old child was having a sexual relationship under my nose.

BRADSHAW. You can't watch them the whole time, can you?

AIDAN. I'll be honest with you, it would break me. It would actually break me. Is that how you feel?

BRADSHAW. Yes.

AIDAN. Of course you do. You feel broken. At the idea that these pictures even existed. If I'm honest, I think that's what's really upset you here. The idea of another man's hands all over your little girl's body. Right under your nose. Am I right?

BRADSHAW. This isn't the issue.

AIDAN. No. No. But actually it is, isn't it? It isn't and it is. A man's hands on her body. And other men, men like you, looking at her.

BRADSHAW. The issue is that she is underage, and you published without her consent.

AIDAN. But we didn't. We have the form. The form is signed.

BRADSHAW. Not by her.

AIDAN. But how were we to know that?

BRADSHAW. By checking, you have to check these –

AIDAN. But her lover forged the information. Her passport –

BRADSHAW. He's not her lover.

AIDAN. And the fact remains that she allowed herself to be photographed, in this manner.

BRADSHAW. In private, she allowed it, / not –

AIDAN. Kids today, right! When I was fourteen, I was still climbing trees! Going camping with my mates, hanging round the shopping centre. Not covering myself with baby oil and reclining on a waterbed so my lover could photograph me!

BRADSHAW. Don't use that – he's not her – he's taken advantage, you've all, taken advantage of a young, of my – it's criminal. You should be in prison, all of you –

AIDAN. Her lover is who should be in prison. He's the liable party here.

BRADSHAW. He is, he's already in – he stole a car, he was drunk, he's a fucking simpleton.

AIDAN. He's not good enough for her.

BRADSHAW. No he's bloody not, she's well shot.

AIDAN. But then who would be! I know there's not a man in the world good enough for my Isobel! A man laid a finger on her I'd, I'm talking about any sort of man here, he laid a finger on her, I'd set fire to him! You just want to wrap them in cotton wool, don't you? Wrap them up in cotton wool and keep them safe from harm.

BRADSHAW. Yes. Yes. Exactly.

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AIDAN. Yes. Exactly. And twenty-five thousand pounds. Buys a lot of cotton wool.

MR BRADSHAW *stands*.

BRADSHAW. I don't want the money. Making me sick, going on about the bloody money! I didn't come for that, that's / not why I –

AIDAN. Then why did you come?

AIDAN *picks up a sheet of paper from his desk, scans it*.

BRADSHAW. Well, for one I came to, I came to, come here, and see, I wanted to see who, would, the face of the man

who has ruined my girl's, dragged her through the, I wanted to see his, see your face and smash it in, smash it into the –

BRADSHAW *advances on AIDAN.*

AIDAN. Smash it into the what, Mr Bradshaw?

BRADSHAW. Just – smash it in, smash your bloody face in.

AIDAN. You're unemployed, is that correct?

BRADSHAW. What?

AIDAN. You're unemployed, is that correct?

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BRADSHAW. I'm a jobseeker.

AIDAN. Without a job, is that correct?

BRADSHAW....

AIDAN. Yes, that's correct. You live off a jobseeker's allowance and your daughter permanently resides with your ex-wife?

BRADSHAW *sits.*

BRADSHAW. How do you know this?

AIDAN. Oh, we're very resourceful here. How many times do you see her in a month, your daughter, sorry, Carrie?

BRADSHAW. Depends, doesn't it?

AIDAN. But not on a daily basis?

BRADSHAW. No, because –

AIDAN. So we can say, largely speaking, on a week-by-week basis, you are largely absent from Carrie's life?

BRADSHAW. We speak, on the phone and we go to the cinema or for a walk.

AIDAN. Every week? Twice a month?

BRADSHAW. Yes. But we speak on the –

AIDAN. You see your daughter for a few hours, twice a month?

BRADSHAW. This is none of your business.

AIDAN. But it's not surprising then, is it?

BRADSHAW. What isn't?

AIDAN. Do you know what magazine I subscribe to? *New Scientist*. I love it! I am such a geek at heart, aren't I, Charlotte?

CHARLOTTE. Yeah.

AIDAN. Charlotte will tell you. I'm a total nerd. My idea of fun is sitting on my roof terrace, with a beer, reading *New Scientist* magazine.

I like this magazine because I never fail to find something of interest in it. Every time I read an issue of *New Scientist*, I understand the world that I am living in a little better.

He gets up, looks for a particular copy of the magazine in a pile, flicks through it.

Blows your mind, some of this stuff. Completely blows your –

He finds the article he is looking for, shows it to MR BRADSHAW.

– for example, look at this.

He waits while MR BRADSHAW reads the article. After a moment, AIDAN turns to CHARLOTTE.

What this particular article says, Charlotte, is that girls who grow up with absent fathers begin menstruating years earlier than girls whose fathers are present, as primary-care givers. That's just a scientific fact. Puberty starts at a young age when the father is not around.

I suppose this must be something very primal, very hard-wired, to do with abandoned young girls needing to be able to attract a mate at an earlier age, in order for that mate to provide the protection, the male influence that she should, by rights, be receiving from her father.

When the father is absent, she is endocrinally forced to become sexually available.

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My Isobel's flat as a board, thank God!

MR BRADSHAW *offers the magazine back.*

You can keep that if you like. I subscribe electronically now –

MR BRADSHAW *drops the magazine on the floor.*

BRADSHAW. I'm sorry. I'm sorry, but what are you trying to –

AIDAN. Your daughter is very developed for a fourteen-year-old. I'm sorry to speak so bluntly, but the point is, those two facts, your... absence, as a father, and her, accelerated development, biologically speaking (which of course has led to this unfortunate mix-up in the first place), those two things are, well, they're linked, aren't they?

BRADSHAW. No, I don't accept that.

AIDAN. It's in the *New Scientist*, Mr Bradshaw. It's not up for debate. So you can understand, can't you? I mean, obviously the anger, the hurt you feel clouds any rational – but you can see how the mistake was made?

BRADSHAW. I don't accept this, what you're –

AIDAN. How we ourselves were deceived? And that you, as a father, your actions, your – I'm so sorry – your failures as a parent have biologically impacted on your daughter, to the extent that at fourteen years old, her body has given her commands, hormonal commands, that she had no choice but to obey.

BRADSHAW. We're very close, we speak on the phone, we read vampire stories.

AIDAN. This is a, it's a mistake, it's unfortunate, but it's done. It can't be undone.

BRADSHAW. We go to Alton Towers. She's my girl. She's my girl –

AIDAN. Shh. It's okay.

BRADSHAW. She was my little, you've taken that away, my little funny wriggly creature, you've stolen her, scabs on her knees and the brace on her teeth – I used to do metal-detecting, and she'd get me to run the metal detector over the brace and she'd just, scream with laughter when it beeped and make me do it again.

AIDAN. And she's got lovely teeth to show for it.

BRADSHAW. She had a special brush. To get in the, because when she ate, specially cabbage or, crisps, it would get stuck in the brace, and she'd do it on purpose, grin at me and this grin, it would, it would just cripple me, this grin, the food stuck in it, and you've taken it you've, spoilt it, the sound of her breathing, when she fell asleep on me on the sofa, we used to watch *Only Fools and Horses* videos, that was what we liked, and I wouldn't move all night just listen to her breath whistle through the metal till it was morning and her mum came to take her away again.

He breathes through his teeth so it whistles.

It was that sort of sound.

AIDAN. Was it?

BRADSHAW. Yes. It was like that.

,

AIDAN *looks at* CHARLOTTE. AIDAN *looks back at* MR BRADSHAW.

AIDAN (*gentle*). And when you go home later? Will you tell Carrie what happened here today?

,

Will you tell her you were offered twenty-five thousand pounds, and that you turned it down because of what a decent bloke you are?

,

And when you tell her, will she put her arms around you, her thin, white arms covered in plastic bracelets, chipped blue nail varnish, will she kiss you on that shining bald spot and say 'Well done, Daddy. You're my hero'? Is that what you think she'll do?

,

MR BRADSHAW *stares at him.*

Or will she smile at you sadly, pity you, hate you even. And go back to getting them out for the lads because what else has she got to offer the world?

A pause. Then MR BRADSHAW suddenly laughs.

BRADSHAW. Bloody hell, what's it like being you? Do you even like girls? Or is it water water everywhere and not a drop to drink? (*To CHARLOTTE.*) Bet he's a right laugh, is he, sweetheart, when he's not busy soliciting children?

AIDAN. WE DID NOT COERCE YOUR DAUGHTER. We did not go round to her house, with a gun, threatening violence, we don't go *out* with a *net* to find girls like Carrie. We don't have to. Why? Because they queue up. They come to us.

He glances at CHARLOTTE. She is standing very still, staring straight ahead.

That's what girls like Charlotte here don't like because it doesn't fit, you see, it doesn't fit. It's not her idea of freedom, I'm sorry, Charlotte, but that's what it is, it's a choice. It is a freedom. So you see, don't you, Mr Bradshaw? The truth of it is, we're only leading your daughter around the town square because –

Well –

– in one way or another –

– she wants to be led.

CHARLOTTE *quietly steps out of the room.* BRADSHAW *registers this. Looks back at AIDAN. Beat.*

BRADSHAW. She seems a nice girl.

AIDAN. She's a very nice girl.

BRADSHAW. Yeah?

AIDAN. Yes.

BRADSHAW stands, picks up the framed photograph from the desk, examines it.

BRADSHAW. Must be nice working in an environment with girls like that about. I used to work in pest control, all I saw was wasps' nests and molehills all day.

MR BRADSHAW replaces the framed photograph on the desk, takes his phone out, takes a picture of AIDAN.

AIDAN, disquieted by this.

AIDAN. Mr Bradshaw –

BRADSHAW. You think I just stepped off the boat, you can't tell me anything about my Carrie I don't already know. I would die for that girl, cos she's mine, but she's a pain in the arse. She's had more opportunity than anyone ever gave me. Teachers offering to coach her, books, trips, computers. Her mother's got her own business, killed herself so she could have French lessons, ballet, all that. She doesn't want for nothing except the things we won't give her. Took her to see Father Christmas at the Arndale Centre three years ago, he takes her on his knee, says 'And what do you want for Christmas?' She says 'I want a Labradoodle and a boob job,' I just about died of shame cos I drink with Graham sometimes, and he looked up at me, over his white beard and I could see him thinking 'What the bloody hell have I got on my lap?' Her friends are bright young women, don't give a toss about anything but shopping. But she's a nice-looking girl and she's worked out how to get on with it, that's not stupid, to my mind, that's canny. Her cousin's got four A Levels, works in a Greggs. Speaks fluent German, all she gets for it is a discount on sausage plaits. I'm well aware that all you've done is give her the rope to hang herself with, but I don't want any part of it.

AIDAN. Then what do you want, Mr Bradshaw?

BRADSHAW. I want to destroy you. Not this magazine, but you, personally. I want every man or woman who ever thinks about doing your job to know there are men like me who will see to it that they are exterminated.

,

CHARLOTTE *steps back in quietly, closes the door.*

Did anyone ever tell you your daughter looks exactly like the girl in the orange-squash adverts?

He takes AIDAN's picture again. AIDAN looks at CHARLOTTE.

AIDAN. No.

BRADSHAW. Well, she's the spit.

AIDAN. Mr Bradshaw –

BRADSHAW. I think we're done here, don't you?

AIDAN. Your bravado is embarrassing. You've already accepted free travel, accommodation, perks, spoils, whatever you / want to call it –

BRADSHAW. The least you could do.

AIDAN. The least we could do and we did it, but truth of it is your daughter is, sorry but there it is. She's fourteen. And this is what she wants.

BRADSHAW. I'm going to the papers, / I'm going to the BBC, my MP, I'm going to tell them, because this is, a man stands up, a man has to stand up, someone has to stop this because is this normal? Because it makes me feel like we're, the world is mentally ill, oi, I'm talking – I'M TALKING don't and – financial! Did you think I'd? Stuff your bloody cheque, keep it, you'll need it cos I'm going to put you on the streets, d'you hear me, I'm going to put you on the bloody streets! Oh, for –

AIDAN. We are the victims here. We have gone out of our way to take care of you, even in the knowledge that should this

go to court you haven't got a chance in hell, we have considered your feelings, we have offered you financial, very generous financial restoration, for what? For your moral outrage? To compensate you for your failing to educate your child how / not to be an exhibitionist little tramp?

MR BRADSHAW *fumbles for his bag, knocks over his water.*

BRADSHAW. I'm going now.

AIDAN. Don't forget your plastic bag.

BRADSHAW. This is not finished.

AIDAN. Charlotte, show Mr Bradshaw out.

CHARLOTTE *starts to guide MR BRADSHAW to the door.*

CHARLOTTE. This way, Mr Bradshaw. That's it.

BRADSHAW. I am not finished.

AIDAN. I am. Goodbye.

AIDAN *sits down at his desk, busies himself with papers. Does not look up.*

BRADSHAW. You'll hear from my solicitor.

AIDAN. Looking forward to it, goodbye.

BRADSHAW. Don't – dismissing me, I won't be, / dismissed –

AIDAN. I said goodbye.

BRADSHAW. You can't throw me out.

AIDAN. I'm not. I mean I could, but I'm not.

AIDAN *finds the cheque on his desk, casually tears it up.*

BRADSHAW. I know what you're doing. I know what this is.

MR BRADSHAW *shakes CHARLOTTE off.*

AIDAN. This is nothing. This is simply the end of our meeting, and I have a busy morning ahead. If you want a car, we'll call you a car –

BRADSHAW. I don't want a car, I want –

AIDAN. Or the bus stop's over the road. Outside the chip shop, Charlotte will show you. Charlotte, show Mr Bradshaw to the chip shop. Don't let him go in though! He's got angina.

CHARLOTTE *tries to guide him out again, he shakes her off roughly.*

BRADSHAW. Wait.

Wait.

,

Forty.

CHARLOTTE. No.

AIDAN *looks up. Laughs.*

BRADSHAW. I won't beg, forty.

AIDAN. I'm offering you twenty-five.

BRADSHAW. Forty thousand pounds.

CHARLOTTE. Mr Bradshaw, please.

AIDAN. I'm offering you twenty-five.

BRADSHAW. Fifty.

AIDAN. I don't think you understand how this works.

BRADSHAW. Okay, forty.

AIDAN. Twenty.

BRADSHAW. You said twenty-five.

AIDAN. Fine.

BRADSHAW. You tore up the cheque.

AIDAN. We'll issue a new one. We'll post it today.

BRADSHAW. I can't trust that.

AIDAN. I have the papers already drawn up. I have the contract right here.

He goes to a desk drawer, takes out the contract. Puts it on the desk. MR BRADSHAW cautiously flicks through it. Looks up.

BRADSHAW. Can I think about it?

AIDAN. Take your time.

I mean, we do have to resolve this today but. Take as long as you want.

A long pause. As long as possible. MR BRADSHAW makes a low, animal sound.

BRADSHAW. Okay.

AIDAN. Okay?

BRADSHAW. Okay.

AIDAN. Okay! No, that's wonderful, that's really – that was tough, wasn't it? But we got there! I feel like Churchill at Versailles –

MR BRADSHAW stares at AIDAN. His fist twitches.

– you're doing the right thing. Isn't he, Charlotte?

CHARLOTTE....

AIDAN. You are, Charlotte agrees, you are doing the right thing. Charlotte belongs to a group, Mr Bradshaw, a women's group so you see she knows about these things, she cares about them, so you can take it from her, can't you?

AIDAN offers him a pen. He takes it. MR BRADSHAW stares at the pen.

BRADSHAW. This is, this is, filth. I feel, you're, you're a, I feel mucky.

AIDAN. Go back to the hotel. Your five-star hotel. Run yourself a bath. Wash it off.

BRADSHAW. Fuck you.

AIDAN. The papers, Charlotte.

,

Show Mr Bradshaw the papers please.

CHARLOTTE *shows MR BRADSHAW to the papers. He leans on the desk to sign them. As he does:*

Did they give you the room with the view over Regent's Park, like I asked?

BRADSHAW. Yes.

AIDAN. You can see the zoo from there, can't you? I like the bird enclosure. Do you like the bird enclosure, Charlotte?

,

Charlotte, I said do you like the bird enclosure?

,

CHARLOTTE. I like the monkeys.

AIDAN. Charlotte likes the monkeys. I like the bird enclosure. There's something for everyone at the zoo.

,

MR BRADSHAW *gives AIDAN his pen back.*

Thank you. Charlotte, give him the cheque.

CHARLOTTE *doesn't move. AIDAN fetches the cheque himself, hands it over.*

There you are. We'll call you a car.

BRADSHAW. I'll get the bus.

AIDAN. You don't want to be on public transport on a day like today. Not in this heat. Not in this climate.

BRADSHAW. I want to get the bus.

AIDAN. Okay. But before you. I just want to tell you. I don't expect you to believe me but.

My heart is breaking for you. Really. Honestly truly.

AIDAN puts out a hand. MR BRADSHAW looks at it. Takes the hand, pulls AIDAN towards him, squeezing hard, he backs AIDAN towards the desk. He is surprisingly strong.

BRADSHAW. I hope you rot in hell.

He spits in AIDAN's face. AIDAN manages to pull himself free, wipes his face. Retreats behind his desk.

AIDAN. Okay.

MR BRADSHAW goes to exit. CHARLOTTE catches him by the arm.

CHARLOTTE. Mr Bradshaw?

Listen.

When she reaches eighteen.

When she's old enough to access that money.

Tell her.

Tell her to call us.

And if they still look like that.

We'll put her on the cover.

He stares at her for a moment. Nods at AIDAN.

BRADSHAW. He's too old for you.

BRADSHAW goes. CHARLOTTE shuts the door.

AIDAN. That was unnecessary.

CHARLOTTE. You can talk.

AIDAN. That was, necessary force, that was, the ends justify the means, I have to protect jobs. He could have damaged us, you do know that? I'm just doing my best, Char, this is, we're on the ropes as it is. Lawsuit like that, in this climate –

CHARLOTTE. I know. But I couldn't help it.

AIDAN. You don't think I'd actually talk to a man like that if I had any choice in the matter, do you? When he started on

about the metal detector, I nearly broke then. I nearly actually broke.

CHARLOTTE. Embarrassing.

AIDAN. You didn't have to say that.

CHARLOTTE. I'm sorry.

AIDAN. It's okay just –

CHARLOTTE. I just felt like I had to.

AIDAN. I need a shower.

CHARLOTTE. It's just he reminded me of my dad.

AIDAN. Did he?

CHARLOTTE. Yeah.

,

AIDAN. No harm done.

CHARLOTTE. I fucking hate my dad.

AIDAN. I know.

He touches her arm. She pulls away, goes to exit.

Sweetheart?

,

She looks back at him from the doorway.

CHARLOTTE. What?

AIDAN. Nothing. What do you tell them?

CHARLOTTE. What?

AIDAN. Your group. Your women. What do you tell them you do?

CHARLOTTE. I say I'm an estate agent.

Sudden black.

3.

Nine months later. The editor's office of Electra magazine, a weekly publication for young women. As before, the magazine's name in neon on the wall. Framed past covers. Healthy-looking women Photoshopped to perfection. There is a massage table to one side, strewn with products that the magazine is road-testing. Products are very important here.

MIRANDA, trendily but classically dressed in black. She sits on the edge of her desk, which holds papers, magazines, and a desktop Apple computer. SAM sits in a chair in front of her. In the background, the sound of heightened office chatter, female laughter, voices. They've knocked off early, the sounds of socialising rather than work. Maybe some faint strains of music.

MIRANDA. It's a fun office.

SAM. Great.

MIRANDA. Bit crazy.

SAM. Yeah?

MIRANDA. Yeah. You don't have to be mad to work here – but actually you do a bit!

They laugh. MIRANDA picks up a tube of moisturiser, moisturises her hands.

We often go for drinks after work.

SAM. Uh-huh.

MIRANDA. Do you like going for drinks after work?

SAM. Sure.

MIRANDA. Then you'll fit right in.

An eruption of female voices, laughter, screams, off.

You can hear, can't you? Lot of fun. Lot of laughs. Lots of work too of course.

SAM. No, of course.

MIRANDA. We don't always start drinking at three o'clock on a Friday afternoon.

SAM. I did wonder about the champagne!

MIRANDA. Yeah, it's not funny actually. Meredith, our Beauty Ed. She's having a really rotten time of it.

SAM. I'm sorry to hear that.

MIRANDA. Yeah, it's very upsetting. We're all very upset. She's been in chemo four weeks now. And she had this gorgeous hair, I mean advert hair, and I don't want you to think she's a vain woman, because she's not, but losing the hair has definitely hit her hard. But so what we were going to do tonight, was we were all going to shave our heads, bit of a you know little act of sort of solidarity.

SAM. Wow, that's. That's so nice, what a lovely –

MIRANDA. Yeah well, that's just sort of the atmosphere here.

SAM. So it's Dutch courage is it?

MIRANDA. What?

SAM. The champagne. For the big... shave.

MIRANDA. Yeah well, actually, in the end what happened was factors came in to play so what we're doing instead is throwing her a little party instead, just for her, and we're all dressing up as our personal heroines, because that's what Meri is, to us.

SAM. So you're – sorry, you're dressing up as her?

MIRANDA. No, different women, like Beyoncé or Catwoman. Or Isabella and Angela both wanted to come as Marilyn Monroe so we've got two of them and Fabienne's being a sexy Joan of Arc!

SAM. She's French is she?

MIRANDA. Well, French-Canadian. We do talk very freely here, about female issues. If that bothers you –

SAM. It doesn't bother me.

MIRANDA. Great. The pay's quite minimal at first, I'm sorry about that.

SAM. That's fine.

MIRANDA. No but I do feel really bad about that. I feel so sorry for you guys, coming out of uni now. I mean the climate.

SAM. Yeah.

MIRANDA. You really just have to take what you can get, don't you? And the perks are good. We often have free samples of products. A lot of what we do here is about product. Shampoo, moisturiser, low-calorie salad dressing. Bags. Anti-wrinkle bras, that sort of thing. You can take them home and use them.

SAM. Brilliant.

MIRANDA. Or give them to your girlfriend probably.

SAM. Oh. No.

MIRANDA. Boyfriend, even.

SAM. No, I'm – I did have a girlfriend but. We're not together any more.

MIRANDA. What happened? You don't have to tell me.

SAM. Okay.

MIRANDA. I'm not allowed to ask actually.

SAM. Right.

MIRANDA (*Nazi accent*). 'But we have ways of making you talk!'

They laugh.

No, what's important is you mustn't feel pressurised.

A long pause.

SAM. No, it's just –

MIRANDA. Yeah?

SAM. It was just a combination of things that had, built up for a while and sort of, came to a head recently.

MIRANDA. Because of the fourteen-year-old girl?

,

SAM. Aidan told you.

MIRANDA. It's the industry, isn't it? Word gets about. He feels very bad apparently.

SAM. I know.

MIRANDA. But you did sign it off. And there had to be some accountability, didn't there? Don't worry, I completely understand. My heart goes out to you, it really does. Specially in this climate.

SAM. Yeah.

MIRANDA. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Her or you?

SAM. Sorry?

MIRANDA. Who broke it off?

SAM. Uh, it was a mutual, a mutual sort of, both of us –

MIRANDA. Well, that's what people always say, isn't it?

SAM. No but it actually was –

MIRANDA. But who said the words?

SAM. Both of us.

MIRANDA. Both of you said the words! At exactly the same time?

SAM. No but –

MIRANDA. So who said the words?

SAM. She did, it was her, but that / was after –

MIRANDA. That's all I wanted to know. Simple question, lovely!

SAM. No but I pushed her to, I basically forced her to, I've not been myself, I, I've found it quite difficult, the last nine months, I've found it quite difficult to process what, what – happened. And what that means.

MIRANDA. I don't think it means anything, does it?

SAM. Well, that was her opinion, but –

MIRANDA *moisturises her hands.*

MIRANDA. It makes me laugh, your generation, you always want to find the meaning! Thought we'd got past all that! Shit happens! What does shit mean? Nothing, it's just shit!

SAM. Well, it did mean something actually, it meant I lost my job, it meant I spent some time thinking I might be arrested, it meant I sort of changed, as a person which made her sort of, change around me, it meant that she's moved out and the furniture was all hers so I'm sleeping on the floor, in a bag and eating dinner off an inflatable stool. Shit. Sorry I'm sorry, I didn't mean to say shit, that's just. Inappropriate, can I start again?

MIRANDA. And that's it, is it? You and her?

SAM. The interview. Can I start again?

MIRANDA. Definitely dead in the water?

SAM. I'm still hopeful.

MIRANDA. Course you are. You'll sort it out. You're brilliant. You're a catch. I'd love to have you as my boyfriend!

SAM. Okay well. Thanks.

MIRANDA. I am seeing other people for the position.

SAM. I. Well, that's –

MIRANDA. For the job, I mean.

SAM. Oh! Of course. Yes.

MIRANDA. You thought I meant!

SAM. No, no I just –

MIRANDA. What, d'you think you're out of my league!

SAM. No of course not, I just –

MIRANDA. Menopausal old hag's coming on to me, argh!

SAM. No, no you're, you're very, I mean you're an attractive, /
a very –

MIRANDA. So Friday night? You want to get a drink?

,

No, I was joking anyway, that's how we roll in this office,
you'll get used to it. But I am seeing other people. I just want
to make sure you understand that. It's not fair otherwise.

SAM. No I appreciate your honesty.

MIRANDA. And I hope you don't mind me saying but you're
overqualified for the job.

SAM. Really?

MIRANDA. On paper. That surprises you? Aidan's given you
an excellent reference. What do you think of Aidan?

SAM. He's been an inspiration to me. It's been a, privilege, an
honour, to work with someone with such a, such a visionary
attitude towards print journalism.

MIRANDA. He's a troglodyte.

SAM. Right.

MIRANDA. Don't you think?

SAM. Yes.

MIRANDA. You agree that he is a troglodyte?

SAM. A bit.

MIRANDA. I'm not completely naive, I do understand that C2DEs make different demands to ABC1s, I do understand that while he might belong in the latter he has to cater for the former so there's maybe some degree of, whatever, conflict for him there, and of course the market dictates content so I do understand, yeah, that that's just his job, that's the climate but still.

She takes a sip of water.

He's a piece-of-shit troglodyte.

MIRANDA *moisturises her hands.*

SAM. Well. I wouldn't be sitting here if it wasn't for Aidan, so.

MIRANDA. He didn't get you this interview.

SAM. But. When you called. You said I'd been recommended, I assumed he –

MIRANDA. Aidan wouldn't piss on you if you were on fire, lovely, one of our present employees recommended you.

She picks up SAM's CV, scans it.

SAM. Who?

MIRANDA. What?

SAM. Who recommended me?

MIRANDA. You've got a very good degree.

SAM. One of your employees –

MIRANDA. From a good university.

SAM. Doesn't mean anything though, does it? These days.

MIRANDA. No. *Electra* is a largely female-run publication.

That's just how it is. You won't mind being at the bottom of the ladder in an office full of women?

SAM. Of course not.

MIRANDA. This is just a question I ask all of our male applicants.

SAM. I won't mind.

MIRANDA. You might. Over time.

SAM. I won't.

MIRANDA. Others have.

SAM. I need this job. I really really need it.

MIRANDA. The climate.

SAM. I've been out of work nine months. I'm about to lose my flat.

A knock at the door.

MIRANDA. We're all about to lose our flats, lovely. Metaphorically speaking, come in!

RUPERT enters with a tray; a cafetière, two mugs, milk. His face is expressionless, but his eyes are very wide open, his forehead is stretched taut, plastic-looking. His eyebrows plucked into neat arches. SAM stands, surprised.

It's Miss Havisham!

SAM. What?

MIRANDA. Your mysterious benefactor! When Rupert heard how Aidan treated you, he said, you've got to get this guy in, kept nagging and nagging us! He's your biggest fan!

SAM. Oh right. No it's just, sorry, I got – because Magwitch is the – in *Great Expectations*, Miss Havisham isn't Pip's benefactor, it's Abel Magwitch.

,

I mean he thinks it's her, but it's not.

,

It's Abel Magwitch.

,

The convict.

,

MIRANDA. Say thank you then!

SAM. Sorry, yes, thanks, Rupert. This was – really decent of you.

He shakes RUPERT's hand. RUPERT makes a small sound. Tries to smile.

MIRANDA. Poor sausage, he's been having a time of it. His dad cut him off. Just like that. Said it would be character-building, didn't he? You know who his dad is, yeah?

SAM. Um. Yeah.

MIRANDA. Yeah see, to me, that's child abuse. To bring a child up in a certain way then pull the rug like that. Anyway, what would I know, he's alright, aren't you, babe?

A small sound from RUPERT.

Yeah. Rupert's been with us five months now. The girls love him. Embarrassing, the way Aidan treated him, but that's Aidan. He's a stranger to human dignity.

RUPERT makes a small sound. MIRANDA holds his face, examines it.

Bloody hell, babe, how much did they give you?

Rupert had Botox injections this morning, Sam. It's this new feature we're doing, 'What it Feels Like for a Girl'. Each week we get a man, well, Rupert, to investigate a different aspect of normal female experience. He walked down Oxford Street in a miniskirt, he's had his eyebrows threaded, / he's –

SAM. Threaded.

MIRANDA. Threaded, exactly, he's been on the Atkins since October! Nothing but meat for two months, his breath stinks! It's just part of our feminist agenda.

SAM. Right. It's like 'Man Challenges'.

MIRANDA. No, it's nothing like that. He's off to Brazil next week, aren't you?

RUPERT *makes a small sound.*

SAM. Oh, wow. That sounds, is it Rio? I've always wanted to see Mardis Gras.

MIRANDA *laughs.*

MIRANDA. Different kind of Brazil, lovely. Rupes, your eyes are watering. Shazia's got some hankies, off you pop, babe.

RUPERT *makes a small sound, nods, exits.* MIRANDA *smiles at SAM.*

Black?

SAM. Sorry?

MIRANDA. Coffee?

MIRANDA *plunges the cafetière, pours two mugs out.*

SAM. Oh. Yes. Thanks.

MIRANDA. Milky one for me, naughty! No, it's skimmed, it's alright, do you mind if I just give you a trial exercise?

SAM. No. Of course.

MIRANDA. Lovely. Okay. I'm going to pop you down here.

She steers him up from his chair, seats him in her chair, behind the desk, leans over him to operate the mouse on her computer.

This is something we do with everyone, just open this up...

She clicks on a file.

Three JPEGs of three women.

SAM. Famous or normal?

The file is opened. She leans back.

MIRANDA. Famous, obviously. Beach shots. You know how to use Photoshop I take it?

SAM. Yeah.

MIRANDA. You know how to draw a red circle using Photoshop?

SAM. Well. Yeah.

MIRANDA. Good. Show me.

SAM. Sorry?

MIRANDA. This one. Show me on this one.

SAM. Show you what?

MIRANDA. Show me how you can put red circles around the flaws on this woman's body, and then caption them.

SAM. This woman?

MIRANDA. Yes.

SAM. Her?

MIRANDA. Yes.

SAM. Is this a trick?

MIRANDA. That would be a waste of my time.

SAM. No of course but –

MIRANDA. It's just a simple exercise we ask / everyone to –

SAM. She was number three in our 'Hottest Hollywood Honeys' last year.

MIRANDA. Our?

SAM. Sorry. *Doghouse*. She was number three.

MIRANDA. Okay well, we're not small boys drooling over girls that wouldn't look twice at us now, are we?

SAM. No.

MIRANDA. We're confident, modern, media-literate women between the ages of twenty-five and forty-five who earn upwards of twenty thousand pounds a year, aren't we?

SAM. Yes.

MIRANDA. We're leaders, thinkers, dreamers, shoppers, upscale ABC1 women with upscale ABC1 purchasing habits (we're not cold-calling Ginsters pasties for a problem-page sponsorship here). We care about achieving a two-state solution in the Middle East and we think female genital mutilation is totally out of order but actually you know that's not all we want to think about when we've had a long day and that's not a crime, is it?

SAM. No. Of course not.

MIRANDA. We love shoes! LOVE LOVE LOVE!

SAM. Who doesn't?

MIRANDA. You understand I'm speaking synecdochally here, don't you? That's what our readership is so that's what we are, yes?

SAM. Yes. But –

MIRANDA *moisturises her hands.*

MIRANDA. So that's how we have to think now, lovely. With our brains, not our genitalia. So, just have a little look at the picture and show me where her flaws are.

SAM. But she's perfect.

She sighs.

No, I don't mean – for normal women, for normal women she's a, a –

He thinks he is saying what she wants to hear.

She's an unhealthy role model – projecting, well, damaging standards of unnatural physical, you know. Perfection.

MIRANDA *laughs.*

MIRANDA. Sorry, lovely, does this look like the *Guardian*?

SAM. Sorry?

MIRANDA. She's not perfect.

SAM. No but. I mean, she's an actress. She's a film star. It's her job to be perfect.

MIRANDA. She's not perfect. Nobody is perfect. I'm not perfect. Our readers aren't perfect. I need you to point out the ways in which this woman is not perfect.

SAM. But she is.

MIRANDA. Have you got a girlfriend?

SAM. No. I told you –

MIRANDA. I'm sorry, you did, I was listening, I just, right now I'm a bit all over the place, I've got the painters in.

SAM. Sure.

MIRANDA. That wasn't a metaphor for my menstrual cycle, I do actually have people in, painting my flat and it means everything is covered in dust sheets and I can't find anything, it's a fucking nightmare, so I'm a bit distracted.

So you said, I'm sorry, you did, you did have a girlfriend but you don't any more.

SAM. Yes.

MIRANDA. And did you love her, this girlfriend?

Did you love her?

SAM. Yes.

MIRANDA. But properly. Properly love her. Not just because you're – what, twenty-one, twenty-two?

SAM. Twenty-four.

MIRANDA. Twenty-four, right, and even though she wasn't actually The One, as in you couldn't see her as a long-term life partner, the mother of your children, et cetera, for the time being she would do, you liked her enough so that when she said 'I love you' it was easier just to say it back than open up a whole hornet's nest of hurt feelings and recrimination, so you allowed her to think that you loved her, that this was actually going somewhere, and you allowed her to think this for, say, five-and-a-half years, even though during that time you were, well, not actively on the look-out for other, but certainly, entertaining other, certainly open to, certainly keeping, you know, one eye on the market, you don't mean you loved her in that way?

SAM. No.

MIRANDA. No!

She laughs.

Just me then!

MIRANDA *moisturises her hands.*

So you loved her? Properly loved her?

SAM. Yes.

MIRANDA. You found her sexually attractive?

SAM. Well, yeah. Of course. Very.

MIRANDA. But sometimes I expect, you noticed something, a little thing perhaps and that thing brought you up short, perhaps you noticed it when she was in the shower, washing herself, or maybe after sex, when you were lying in bed together naked.

SAM. I don't – I'm not sure what you're –

MIRANDA. A small thing. A mole that made you feel sick to look at it. Or a fungal infection in the toenails.

SAM. No. No I don't –

MIRANDA. Not even something as noticeable as that even, just maybe, a sagging, somewhere. Or a texture.

SAM. A texture?

MIRANDA. To the skin, a roughness or a dimpling.

SAM. Yeah well, that's just – skin, isn't it?

MIRANDA. And once you'd noticed it, you couldn't stop noticing it.

SAM. That's just what skin does.

MIRANDA. In effect I'm asking you to think about the moment when you realised that the girl you were in love with was not perfect. What the physical detail was that prompted that moment.

SAM. There wasn't. There wasn't a moment.

MIRANDA. For example. Have you noticed that one of my breasts is significantly larger than the other?

SAM. No.

MIRANDA. Don't kiss my arse.

SAM. I'm not.

MIRANDA. Sorry, but if you kiss my arse I don't want you in this office. I'm sharing my physical flaw with you in the spirit of trust, of understanding. I know it sounds a bit bloody Greenham Common but that's what I've brought to this publication, as editor. The idea that any dream, any desire, any anxiety is valid, and chances are there's a woman out there who shares those dreams. Those desires. Those anxieties. And they should be able to read about those dreams, desires and anxieties in a magazine. *Electra* is that magazine.

SAM. Miranda. Can I just?

MIRANDA. For example, sometimes I'll come in and Yolenthe will be there, at her desk, and I'll just fire at her, straight away, I'll just throw a thought at her, like 'I'm worried about

ovarian cancer,' or 'I'm really scared I'm boring in bed.' Or whatever, and she'll catch that thought and run with it and three hours later, I've got a thousand words of insightful, gently humorous copy on my desk, and I publish that copy, and do you know what happens? We get letters. We get emails. From women. From the women who read our magazine and they say 'Thank you. Thank you, *Electra*. I thought I was alone and then I read an article in your magazine and I realised that I wasn't.'

SAM. All the letters at *Doghouse* were written by us.

MIRANDA. Yes well, that'll be part of your job here too. But sometimes, we get actual letters, genuine letters from the genuine public who are genuinely affected by what they read in our pages.

SAM. How many?

MIRANDA. Well, it's a dying form of communication, the letter, so. That's something we're working on too. Social media, making it easier for real women to connect with us on their terms. Because we want to give them what they want. If they don't like something, we can change it. We can be anything they want us to be.

But that starts with the honesty between us, here in this office. So what I'm doing, is I'm asking you to be honest, I'm asking you to share something personal with me, not for the sake of it, not because I'm especially interested, or because I'm a creepy old cow!

She laughs.

But because this office runs on healthy discourse, on a back-and-forth of shared vulnerabilities. Your ability to share your personal life with us is a litmus test of your commitment to the larger mission statement here. We want to connect. We want to provoke. We want to know what it was about your girlfriend that made you pause for a moment and wish she'd just get it together and sort it out. What was that thing?

SAM. I can't think of anything.

MIRANDA. You can.

SAM. Honestly I can't.

MIRANDA. One thing.

SAM. There wasn't.

MIRANDA. One thing about your girlfriend that physically repulsed you.

SAM. If there was something, I'd tell you but –

MIRANDA. Was your girlfriend a supermodel?

SAM. What?

MIRANDA. Was your girlfriend a supermodel?

SAM. No.

MIRANDA. Your girlfriend was not a supermodel.

SAM. No she was a. She was a chef, a / sous chef, she preps the veg –

MIRANDA. The only way she could have been physically flawless is if she was a supermodel, and you're saying to me she was not a supermodel, so a priori, there must be something.

And frankly, I've met Naomi Campbell, and even there, you wouldn't believe the crow's feet on it so.

She laughs.

Sorry. I'm being silly now, that's me, you'll get to know my sense of humour.

SAM. I can't think of anything. I'm sorry.

,

I'd like to be able to but. I loved her. I do love her. I actually can't right now deal with the idea that she's gone, that I might not ever wake up with her again, or go on holiday, because I think, sorry if this is a bit, but I think she's my soulmate. Stupid things like I love watching her eat, the way she eats is

so... and she's funny and beautiful and. Brave and – like, we were on the Tube once, it was really crushed and there was this man, he wasn't like a tramp, he was in a suit, he had a briefcase, and she realised this man had taken his, you know – his... penis, out, through his flies, and he was sort of, rubbing it on her but the Tube was so packed you know, so people didn't notice, but when she saw it, she started shouting really loud, 'Look at his chipolata!', till everyone was looking at them – and you'd think that would be really embarrassing, wouldn't you? But I just loved that, she's just, fearless and what happened is the whole Tube, together, starting chanting at him, we're all chanting together at this man, 'Chipolata! Chipolata!' and I thought: I actually feel like part of something, you know? For the first time in my life I feel like I'm part of something, like we, people, together, can change things. People can stand up and stop shit things happening. Because that's what it was like when I was with her, I felt... connected to the world, and all the things the world could be if we were just, better versions of ourselves, so it's like that better world was sort of a shared space that existed in both our heads, so there was like a world, that we lived in together, that we'd helped to make and it was just for us, it was our secret. We had a secret and we lived in it together and –

– and that's it, really.

I just really –

– love her.

,

MIRANDA. Do you know what the irony of that story is, Sam?

SAM. Yes.

MIRANDA. No you don't. The irony of that story is that one day your ex-girlfriend will no longer be twenty-two and slim and smooth. There will come a day when builders don't whistle. When schoolboys at bus stops no longer whisper as she passes. When men on Tube trains no longer want to rub their genitalia on her.

And when that day comes, do you know how she'll feel?

SAM. She's not twenty-two. She's thirty.

MIRANDA. She'll feel like a fucking ghost.

A pause. MIRANDA takes a sip of water.

Thank you so much for coming in. We'll be in touch.

SAM. That's, is that it? Are we –

MIRANDA. That's it, lovely. Shazia will show you out.

MIRANDA moisturises her hands.

SAM. I've got lots of ideas.

SAM picks up the portfolio case resting against his chair.

I made a mood board, I don't know if you want to –

MIRANDA. We'll let you know.

SAM. Okay, when do you / think that'll –

MIRANDA. Like I said, I'm seeing other people.

MIRANDA takes an electronic cigarette out of her bag, draws on it. SAM is on the verge of tears.

SAM. But sort of, / ballpark –

MIRANDA. There's a process here, we have to / process you all –

SAM. Yeah I get that, I know, I'm just asking I'm just because I can't spend another weekend like that if I'm just going to get a phone call on Monday then just, you could just, couldn't you, because it would save us all, it would save us all –

SAM starts to cry. He battles it fiercely. MIRANDA offers him her electronic cigarette.

MIRANDA. It's just vapour.

SAM takes it, gathers himself. MIRANDA withdraws to her desk, starts typing.

You should do some more internships. Work experience, pad your CV out a bit.

SAM. I can't afford to work for free any more.

MIRANDA. Then you're not hungry enough.

MIRANDA keeps typing. SAM watches her work.

SAM. How do you do that?

MIRANDA. What?

SAM. Type and talk at the same time.

,

MIRANDA keeps typing.

MIRANDA. It took me a very long time to learn.

She glances at him, keeps typing.

You take care now, lovely.

SAM leaves, closes the door behind him. MIRANDA stops typing. She stares at the screen, her fingers hovering over the keys. She breathes. A long time. Then brisk, she picks up her phone, presses an extension. Waits.

Shazia, I'm just finishing up here. Yeah he's just come out, poor love. Meri alright? Yeah, is she yeah? Tell her I'll be out in a sec – yeah, that's right, 'Tonight Matthew...!' Okay. Okay, cheers, babe.

RUPERT enters. He has changed into his costume, is dressed as Margaret Thatcher. RUPERT clears the coffee things and goes. As the door opens, we hear that the party beyond is getting going. Loud synthetic R&B/pop comes through the door. MIRANDA makes a face, shuts the door.

She puts on some music through her computer. As she gets ready for the party she sings along to music, dances a little. She strips down to bra, knickers and tights. She applies a line of hair-removal cream to her top lip. She pulls on a tight pair of Spanx over her existing underwear. She runs a straightener through her hair. She reapplies her make-up. She pulls on a pair of exfoliating gloves and rubs at her upper arms. She moisturises her upper arms. She soaks some

cotton wool in orange juice and eats it. She unzips a garment bag hanging on the back of her door, takes her costume out and puts it on: a neat-waisted jacket with some corsetry and leg-of-mutton sleeves, but low-cut in the front, a straight high-waisted Edwardian skirt. She slips two chicken fillets into her bra. She pulls from under her desk a plastic Waitrose bag. Takes out a pair of stilettos from it, puts them on. She opens a drawer. Takes out a hammer. A knock on the door. MIRANDA sighs. She goes to get the door, remembers, quickly wipes the hair-removal cream off her lip with a tissue. Another knock at the door.

Come in!

SAM is standing there. He doesn't speak or move.

Oh. Hi, Sam.

He doesn't move. As if the will to return to this room is a delicate thing, and might be punctured by sudden movement.

Can I help you?

,

You look a bit peaky, d'you want to... sit down, would you like a glass of water?

,

Sam?

,

She turns off the music. SAM stares straight ahead.

Lovely?

,

Can I –

SAM. She had very large nipples.

,

MIRANDA. Did she?

SAM. Yes.

,

Yes they were very large.

,

MIRANDA. I've only got a minute.

SAM. Please.

MIRANDA nods. Guides SAM to her desk.

MIRANDA. Sit down, lovely.

She pulls out her chair. He sits down in her chair behind the desk.

You were saying.

SAM breathes. Looks down.

SAM. Yes they were very large they were completely disproportionate to her actual breasts.

MIRANDA. And you didn't like that?

SAM. Well, I loved her so.

MIRANDA. But it repulsed you a little bit.

SAM. No, not repulsed, not –

MIRANDA. But if you could have changed that, that detail about her, you would?

,

Lovely? If you could, you / probably –

SAM. I spose. Maybe. Yes. If I had to.

MIRANDA. I don't blame you. That sort of thing, if I saw her, your girlfriend, if I used the same gym as her and I saw her in the showers I would notice that too and, can I be honest with you, something like that would probably make me a bit queasy.

SAM. It wasn't a thing, / I liked her breasts, it wasn't like a –

MIRANDA. You know and of course she was probably crippled internally by the knowledge of her deformity.

SAM. She never mentioned it.

MIRANDA. Well, she wouldn't, lovely. Not to you. Seriously, you wouldn't believe the letters / we get on this topic.

SAM. She's quite confident.

MIRANDA. The emails. You know, the whole time you were making love, she was probably consumed by this. By the desperate hope that you hadn't noticed.

SAM. It really didn't affect her. Us.

MIRANDA. But it did affect you, lovely. You broke up. Because you had noticed, hadn't you? You had / noticed.

SAM. Yes. But that's not why we –

MIRANDA. Yes?

SAM. Yes. / I noticed.

MIRANDA. Yes, men do. Men do notice these things because, frankly, publications like the one you used to work for create a climate. They create a climate, and she would have known that – you said she was clever so trust me, she would've known that.

SAM. I hope not.

MIRANDA. No, lovely, she would.

,

She leans over him, clicks up the JPEGs on the screen again.

Look at the pictures. Examine the pictures. And do the same thing you did to your girlfriend. Just notice.

SAM. Notice what. In particular?

MIRANDA. Anything. Wrinkles. Acne. Crow's feet. Orange-peel skin. Thigh bulge. Sagging breasts. Flat chests. Double chins. Facial hair. Bad boob jobs. Misaligned toes. Caesarean scars. Visible pubic hair. Bingo wings. Varicose veins.

Yellow teeth. Tan lines. Muffin tops. Veined hands. Erect nipples. Bitten nails. Black roots. It's there if you look for it. I'm just asking you to look for it.

SAM. Erect nipples aren't really a flaw, as such, are they?

MIRANDA. Anything disgusting.

SAM. I mean, in cold water, in the sea, that's quite a natural –

MIRANDA. Anything unsightly.

SAM. We used to seek out erect nipples at *Doghouse!*

He laughs. She doesn't.

MIRANDA. Put a red circle around it. Caption it. Go on to the next one.

Can you do that?

,

Lovely?

,

Do you think you can do that?

,

Sam? I'm sorry, but the girls are waiting, do you think you / can –

SAM. Yes. I can do that.

,

MIRANDA. Go on then.

,

SAM puts his hand on the mouse. He starts to work on the images. She stands behind him, scrutinising his work over his shoulder. She moisturises her hands.

Good.

,

Very good.

,

This is great, Sam.

She keeps her eyes focused on the screen and his work as she reaches into her handbag, takes out a green, purple and white sash and slips it on.

This is wonderful.

,

This is exactly what I asked for.

Sudden black.

End.