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IRVINE WELSH



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IRVINE WELSH

Irvine Welsh was born and raised in Edinburgh. His first novel, *Trainspotting*, has sold over one million copies in the UK and was adapted into an era-defining film. He has written thirteen further novels, including the number one bestseller *Dead Men's Trousers*, four books of shorter fiction and numerous plays and screenplays. *Crime* and *The Long Knives* have been adapted into a television series starring Dougray Scott as Ray Lennox. Irvine Welsh currently lives between London, Edinburgh and Miami.

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For Emma,
with all the love on this green Earth and beyond.
You shine in the light and glow in the dark.

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The past is never dead. It's not even past.
William Faulkner

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Day One

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1

TUNNEL DREAMS

You cannot move.

Holding you, those men are: those monsters. One of them – man or big boy – this demon, has gripped your hair in its fist, grinding your burning face into the gravel. A pain so intense, you're certain your scalp will be ripped off your head and held triumphantly aloft by this ogre. Its thick, rancid smell of stale alcohol and cigarettes in your nostrils and throat chokes you. Your heart is thrashing. The blood is rime in your veins . . .

. . . the impotent snarling threats of your friend, also seized by the monsters, give way to desperate, defeated pleas for mercy, then high-pitched, disbelieving screams of torment. The headlight on your blue Raleigh bike, on its side, provides the only illumination in the dark tunnel.

— Noice boike!

The battery will soon run down. But you've ceased fretting that it will be stolen, stopped worrying about your parents' wrath. The eleven-year-old you is already aware that something devastating and profoundly life-changing is happening to you both, and that things might never be good again.

— Open yawr fookin mouth . . .

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2

SLEEPING TOGETHER

— *Open yawr fookin mouth or I'll carve yawr fookin face up . . .*

. . . the searing voice recedes into silence as the pain deep in the core of him retreats through his flesh, scuttling into the air. Its departure is so swift and emphatic that Ray Lennox can't detect its source, as he blinks awake into columns of glittering dust trapped in the beams of light shooting between the blinds. Where did this winter sunlight come from? His large bedroom slowly pulls into focus. The archway leading to the en suite bathroom he is inordinately proud of. The sliding wardrobes: functional, but perhaps a bit too modern for the high-ceilinged Regency building.

He feels the heat, then its source: the form next to him. Leans over into the mop of collar-length brown-blonde hair, filling his nostrils with her scent. Nuzzling into Carmel Devereaux, he enjoys her waking murmurs as the erection he becomes aware of rakes up her spine. Hears a giggle, feels her hand going around her back. Patting his cock in appreciation. — Good morning . . . a low, throaty purr exacerbated by the cigarettes she smokes.

Listening to her is sexier than kissing her.

Guilt at that thought.

— Morning to you too. Can I do anything for you?

Carmel rolls around and arches a solitary brow. — Very tempting. She pulls back the duvet, her gaze sweeping Lennox. — God, you look good . . .

It is balm to the ego to be furnished with such information

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by a lover almost fifteen years younger, and Ray Lennox lets it seep appreciatively into him, on this Friday morning, on the cusp of a weekend awash with possibility. He is in more than decent shape. The south coast has been good to him. His obsessive-compulsive mindset facilitated a determined switch from harmful fixations like alcohol and cocaine to the beneficial ones offered by a fitness regime. He works out most mornings at a local gym he accesses after a run along the beachfront from his elegant flat in Kemptown's Sussex Square. Has graduated from kickboxing classes to expensive but rewarding one-on-one sparring with Tom Tracy, a former marine and British champion. Drinking is now enjoyably controlled: he and Carmel have taken to splitting a bottle of wine over dinner maybe once a week, with a solitary glass and Netflix at either his or hers at the weekend. Also, the odd couple of pints of Stella with his business partner, George Marsden, over some pub grub. It will only get out of hand again if it's not controlled.

Lennox hopefully reaches out, but Carmel pushes him firmly in the chest. — You can make me a cup of tea. I don't have time for anything else. We have to do our run. Then I've a seminar to teach on the production of phenethylamine in the human body.

— Is that some kind of sex chemical?

— Nice try, Ray, but kindly fuck off and get me some tea please, Carmel cheerfully instructs, throwing the duvet from her, doubling it over him, as she springs off the bed towards the bathroom.

Lennox lets cheerful defeat mould his features. Besides, he likes to run, and he has a morning inspection in Eastbourne with George. Carmel finishes teaching early afternoon at the university on a Friday.

Perhaps later . . . or maybe you're pushing too hard.

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Last night was only the fifth time they'd slept together. They have entered that zone of exalted bliss, the dopamine smash isolating them from the myriad problems he knew they'd soon encounter; age difference, conflicting career demands, potential lifestyle clashes, those melodrama-prone family members and friends who always had a stake – but never a big enough one for their liking – in new relationships. They would also learn that they were both a little more complicated, baggage-laden and *real* on the inside than what was chirpily emblazoned on the tin.

Let that shit slide for now. Don't borrow trouble.

He gets out of bed, walking through to the large open-plan kitchen-lounge conversion to switch on the electric kettle. Peers out those big windows on the north side of the square that look across the gardens to the English Channel; it's a squally morning, and the sea is turbulent. In the reflection, his eyes seem baggier, the laughter lines deeper than he recalls. His hair receding at the front, but combed-back buzz cut in *don't give a fuck* style. Looks through his image to the circling gulls, their squawking muted by the replacement windows, which fairly seal in the heat. From the bedroom, Carmel sings as she changes into the running clothes she brought over yesterday.

The flat also has a smaller boudoir, and a long hallway. Too much of Lennox's income goes on the mortgage and all of his assets are tied up in it, but it is luxurious, and he has long believed that living well is the best revenge. He looks over his black leather couch and chairs, which Carmel describes as 'too nineties man', and runs his finger over the top of his stylish vintage 1960s cocktail cabinet. It needs dusting and polishing.

It's the second time he and Carmel have gone on a run together. The first was more competitive than either acknowledged. He was dissonantly torn between chivalrously hanging

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back and taking no prisoners. Both seemed inept responses: one patronising, the other bullying, enjoying the advantage of a more powerful physiology. While he hesitated, she went for it. Lennox is a non-smoker but Carmel has youth on her side, and it will be a close-fought affair.

After a sparkling water and cup of tea, they set off, stepping out into the vanilla of the ornately pillared Regency square, to be swatted by a gelid, bracing winter gale. Carmel sets the pace, but Lennox feels he has her measure. Then, as they pass the tunnel at the bottom of the square, all the energy drains from his legs and he stumbles to a halt.

Aware of him seizing up, Carmel stops and turns to find him gaping at the black mouth of the underpass. — Ray?

His skin seems to be slithering away from him and he shudders to try and stop it. — Where does that go?

— It used to go under the road to the beach, and she wraps her arms around herself, jumping on the spot. — It's a tunnel, long blocked up. Lewis Carroll was inspired by it to write *Alice in Wonderland*. C'mon! It's fucking freezing!

She tears off, and Lennox follows, his pursuit compelled by the need to run off a deeper cold than the one from the air that prickles his skin.

The one that shivers his marrow.

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3

EASTBOURNE

If the traffic is kind, Eastbourne is just under a fifty-minute drive away from Ray Lennox's flat. Underdressed for winter's bite in bomber jacket, jeans and T-shirt, he shivers, the Scot in him unable to comprehend that the south of England can get cold too. But the Alfa Romeo's heating satisfyingly kicks in, and his body relaxes as he lets his eyes flicker lazily in the weak but welcome December sun.

Then he's jolted: an angry toot from a BMW tearing past him. He lowers his sun visor, and in the absence of the chewing gum he likes to keep in supply, sucks on his bottom lip.

The seaside resort retains a crusty air of decline. Unlike Bournemouth or Hastings, it's yet to be injected with new life by an influx of the artists priced out of Brighton. But the town's traditional old retirees are his bread and butter. Lennox has keyed the address into the GPS, and he turns into town past the golden-domed pier, gleaming in defiance as it sucks shards of radiance from a murky sky. Heading north, he halts at a set of lights.

A crowd of children mill around outside an old theatre with their parents. Lennox notices a board advertising Santa's grotto. The waving Santa lumbers through a cheering crowd, a fat reality TV star, calibrated for disposable fame. Probably some nonce, Lennox scorns.

Fucking nonce bloaters everywhere; yo ho ho, yo ho ho . . . ah'll yo ho ho ye, ya fucking paedo cunt.

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Another blaring horn makes Lennox start before he pulls off, as a bus driver behind him shakes his head.

The centre beckons, a chalky, sprawling, low-rise structure, and he pulls into the sparsely filled car park in front of it. Lennox clocks George's motor, as its driver exits. A six-foot-four mass of square-jawed, baton-backed imposition, his partner, sixty-two years young, full head of wavy grey hair, rugby-player build only reluctantly going to seed, is sensibly but stylishly clad in a long black cashmere coat, woollen scarf and leather gloves. The vehicle is a BMW and it crosses Lennox's mind that it might have been George that tooted him.

Though an unlikely duo in many ways, representing the archetypal sensibilities of two men fashioned from English boarding school and Scottish housing scheme, the friendship and partnership nonetheless worked. George was another maverick ex-cop, driven by something other than salary cheque and a diffuse notion of service. In his world, things had to be done absolutely right. He exhibited little patience for a warped criminal justice and legal system that served up fudge, corruption and compromise, protecting wealth and power, dressed in shabby, bad-faith realpolitik clothing. In his world if you were guilty, you were guilty. It was as straightforward as that.

The two men regard the white pebbled-dashed building, replete with incongruous mock-Tudor sign:

ROSE GARDEN RETIREMENT COMMUNITY

Bordering a yard of paved flagstones is a strip of compacted earth, from which trellises run up the wall. They are entwined with dry, cracking twigs, presumably resurrecting in the summer to bloom roses. Ray Lennox doesn't care where he dies, but knows he will never want to live one day of his allotted life span in such a place.

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— Let's get this done, George barks, as if endorsing his sentiment. — Leave the manager to me. Polly Ives. I saw her at the security trade conference. Dishy, he says, and Lennox has never heard anyone use that phrase outside of old Ealing comedies. — Have my beady eye on her. He rolls a brow.

A slight unease grips Lennox, as he recalls an intervention he was required to make, after relocating from Edinburgh to join up in business with George. His partner was having an affair with Millicent Freeson, one of their first clients. He opts to let it slide as they enter a musty reception hall, its central heating like the blast of a furnace. It feels like walking into a sauna, the mugginess extending into a lounge area bedecked with tables and chairs. Lennox waves his hand across his face in acknowledgement of the humidity, as the pungent trace of old sweat and piss permeates the air.

He suspects the staff and inmates (a veteran associate of closed institutions, he can't stop thinking of the residents like that) will now be oblivious to this odour. A wheezing man on a walking frame stumbles by them, bellicose eyes bulging implausibly. A withering plant sits in a pot. At a table by a window, three old boys sit playing cards. One, as much due to his pompous, bombastic manner as his glasses and chubby frame, Lennox thinks of as Captain Mainwaring from *Dad's Army*. He loudly pontificates about foreigners of some designation or another. — We got to get 'em out. We can't even look after our own! Right, Brian?

Mainwaring has turned to an outsized but frail and buckled pyjama-clad man crushed into a wheelchair, the last of the flesh on his gargantuan shoulder bones wasting away as his feet steep in a basin of warm water. Something about his eyes deeply troubles Lennox, who decides it must be the utter defeat and hopelessness in them. The other card player, a skeletal man with a liver-spotted scalp, studies his hand intently.

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— Look at the poor old bastards, Lennox spins to George as they wait for somebody to appear at the reception desk. — It's all fear. Foreigners who want to take their jobs, even now they're long past their working lives, socialists who want to give the homeless their money, even though they're skint . . . what a fucking way to live.

— Of course, you do know their fear is our friend, Raymond, George observes. — Without it, we aren't in business!

— Does it ever bother you? Lennox asks, noting the panting Zimmer Frame Man being joined by a toilet-emerging cohort on a similar contraption.

— Not at all. Compared to police work it's a positively noble trade, George advances. — This is the south of England, Raymond. There are council estate dwellers here who would literally part with their life savings for the honour of having their offspring buggered by an Old Etonian, while wishing to set fire to a Pakistani who sat too close to one of them on public transport, he cheerfully observes, looking back over to the card-playing men, obliging Lennox to do the same.

Captain Mainwaring is on a roll. — They shouldn't be allowed to wear those bloody veils. Let them go back to their own country if they want to dress like that, and he rubs at his reddening neck. Mainwaring looks close to seizure, but the big man disturbs Lennox more; to have carried the strength that frame suggests, and now manifest as little more than a vegetable . . . But perhaps the alternatives are worse. He trembles, fleetingly thinking of his mother in her slow but inexorable decline in his sister's spare room in Edinburgh.

— Besides, George elaborates, — those tight, hoarding old bastards are my people. We need to be separated from our money: just give the lot to the banks so it becomes meaningless and we're finally liberated!

Lennox's head swivels, concerned that George's booming

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tones have carried. — Fuck sake, you're buoyant today. How did you get on last night?

— Left leg first, Raymond, George takes the hint, lowering his voice and winking, — Viagra is the best thing that's happened to me. I'm praying it sufficiently weakens the heart in order that I can die on the job. To think I'd resigned myself to only having a couple of women on the go. Now I can manage a handful once again! Happy days!

Lennox is about to interject, but George's urging eyes tell him that the centre manager has appeared. Polly Ives looks the epitome of stress. A nervous aspect and dowdiness cling to her, embodied in the shapeless pullover she wears, drawing attention from her fine features and cheekbones. Her half-shut eyes jump around, and a slight but visible tremor shakes her body. She ushers them to sit at one of the vacant tables in the lounge, close to the card school. — I'm afraid the office is being redecorated. They made rather a mess with the break-in.

While failing to see the Venusian attraction George insinuated, Lennox is grateful for Polly's potential business. It was she who had called in Horsham Security Solutions after a second burglary inside a month had spooked the residents. — We believe it's a gang from Brighton, or maybe even . . . she whispers the word as if it was Hades, — *London*.

As the two men with the Zimmers move past them, the wheezer man now upping his pace in the competition, Lennox tries to place her on his social matrix: a leftist social worker type or right-wing Christian do-gooder? Polly seems to straddle both camps. He can somehow picture her at both church and radical feminist group meetings.

— This used to be such a nice place, she ruefully muses.

It's a fucking death camp, Lennox thinks, as Mainwaring, having run out of steam, lets his head slump into his chest. He surmises that Polly's penchant for cheap fake nostalgia fixes

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probably places her on the right. Despite now being in this business over eighteen months, Lennox elects to remain silent, knowing to let George do the talking in such situations. His partner carries the air of empathetic authority that plays well with the old and, more importantly, their carers. A truculent joviality that stops short of buffoonery and pomp, George delivers his lines in refined public-school vowels given clipped urgency by employ in the Special Boat Service, the naval equivalent of the SAS, and the police force. — Alas, changing times, he nods, looking around in a sweep, before making strong eye contact with Polly. — It's obviously of paramount importance that your residents, and his eyes flash across to the card school, then back to Polly, — *and their relatives* feel safe and secure.

Polly's bug-eyed nod of affirmation indicates that George has hit the spot. The families are the paymasters and two break-ins constitute a terrible end to the year and not good for business. Confidence needs restoring immediately. — Yes, we're all very concerned.

George casts his eye back over to the front door and the windows. — Well, I've only partaken in a cursory glance, but already I can see that this place is a soft touch for burglars. Of course, you do know this, right?

As Lennox looks around to watch the Zimmer combatants strike out across the hall for the corridor, Polly's hand reflexively goes to the chest of her knitted sweater. — What are you suggesting?

— Well, *Ms* Ives . . . may I call you Polly?

— Yes . . . yes, please do, she responds.

George falls silent but raises a prompting eyebrow as if to say: *are you quite sure?*

Lennox breaks his enthralment of the old shagger's performance to enjoy the two Zimmer frames taking the corner

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and vanishing from sight. He feels cheer glowing through him at their surprisingly formidable burst.

— Then Polly, George lets his tone slide back into business gravitas, — let me ask: do you plan to finance the installation of any new security system as a one-off from an existing fund, or will you be levying some sort of additional charge from the residents in order to pay for it?

— Well, that all depends. Polly looks nervously to the card school. An orderly has arrived and is carefully drying the big man's feet. Mainwaring is animated again, trying to draw the young carer into the conversation. He's resisting with diplomacy, staying cheerful as the captain derides him as a remoaner. Polly seems to be making a quick calculation of their offsprings' means and commitment levels. — What kind of money are we talking about here?

Two elderly women come into the hall and sit at a nearby table. One has bat-wing flesh wobbling off the upper arms, illustrated by a sleeveless dress, which, far from implausible, seems practical in this cranked-up heat. It's as if she's sucked all the life from her pale, anaemic, stick-thin friend, who huddles up in a cardigan, with a coat draped over her shoulders. They start knitting. As Lennox looks them over, one waves at the card men.

Wonder if there's shagging going on in these gaffs . . . dirty old bastards cowping, it fucks everything up. The old girl . . . fucking rampant auld hoor . . .

. . . yes, you certainly mind when you were a kid and you got up in the night for a piss and heard noises coming from the bedroom. You pushed the door gently and looked through the crack between the edge of it and the frame. He was on top of her, fucking her.

Was it your dad?

Was it that cunt of a mate? Were they at it when your father was on backshift?

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No. It doesn't fit the time frame. You are imagining things.

The cold air.

The shining moonlight.

— Well, let me say firstly that any system we install won't be a one-size-fits-all effort, simply pulled off the shelf, George declares to an all-ears Polly. — Those are absolutely useless, and I guarantee if you go cheap, no burglars worth their salt will be deterred. He whips to Lennox. — Ray?

— Indeed, George. Lennox is happy to be pulled back into the room. — In fact, I'd go further; some of those systems are so inadequate that they serve as a marker, a sign that says to the real pros: *please break in*.

Polly's brows knot, her expression crumbling into undisguised gloom.

— Quite. And this is the crux of the problem, George nods. — With many of them you really are literally better off with no security at all. They may deter kids, but will be a magnet for the seasoned players from . . . he hesitates slightly, — *London*, whom you believe may have targeted you.

— Oh gosh, Polly murmurs under her breath.

Lennox is tuning out again, as George says something reassuring.

Mainwaring in a threesome with those two old girls . . . maybe the poor old bastard in the wheelchair getting his numb cock sucked . . . fuck me, what a place . . .

. . . the wheel on your bicycle, the way it stuck when you pushed it into the garden shed. You had just got it that Christmas. What a goofy, innocent kid you were, still practically believing in Santa Claus, or maybe just wanting to, right up to your eleventh birthday. But after the tunnel, you knew there was no Santa Claus. There was none of that fucking crap.

He hears the briefcase snap open to see his partner sliding brochures across the table to Polly, followed by George

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scooting his chair round alongside her, letting her get the scent of his aftershave and pheromones. His voice lowers to a warm background buzz. Lennox doesn't know about Polly Ives but it is certainly having a soothing effect on him.

You tried to tell your mum what happened in the tunnel, but she didn't listen. Why the fuck didn't she pay attention? It was down to that cunt she was shagging. Sex stupefies us all.

Then George rises, urging Polly to escort him round the centre. Lennox makes to follow, but his partner waves him down. And he sees it: that light touch on the woman's arm, as George points to a skylight, his other hand waving his iPad, the one with the digital forms on it. His eyes follow them outside, then lazily scan the room. Mainwaring is back in his pomp at card school, holding court. The orderly wheels the huge, stooped-shouldered gent away, as the two women move across to join the other men. Lennox tunes into the lulling hum of the strip lights.

Mainwaring has pulled, the cunt . . . now that big wheels has fucked off . . . your wheels, the bike you grabbed and frantically rode out of that dark tunnel, leaving Les behind . . . you somehow got away . . . how did you do that? Then you came back home, but there was something that made you go right outside again. Back out to wander those cruel streets of monsters, away from the refuge of your house, before you returned late for your tea . . .

Again, the click of George's briefcase fractures Lennox from his line of thought, marking the onset of a low rattle in his chest that disconcerts him. Polly holds a copy of the printed-out contract, lowering it to the desk and signing it, handing it to George. Lennox had barely even noticed them returning. *Always get the perishers to sign the bloody contract,* George would say, *life is too fucking short*.

As they say their goodbyes and walk out the centre, George

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rubs his hands together. Out in the cold, he chuckles, — That's twelve grand's worth of kit sold, Raymond. Right from the catalogue! Money for old rope!

— Nice work, Lennox concedes, looking at the hard ground and wondering whether the rose garden will bloom again. The strange rasp in his chest seems to have subsided.

— And I've a dinner date into the bargain. What do you think of pretty Polly, Raymond?

— Looked a bit starchy to me. Like, a wee bit of a cold fish.

— All the more satisfying, George bellows, with an almost imperceptible sashay of the hips. — Of course, you do know that she will go off like a fucking alarm clock when touched in the right spots, Raymond. You really are terrible at reading women, and he shakes his head in mock disdain. — How is your new squeeze, by the by? The scientist, right?

— We're squeezing, Ray Lennox purrs in anticipation of this afternoon's rendezvous with Carmel Devereaux.

— Good form. George bleeps open the doors on his BMW. He thrusts the hard copies of the contract and specifications at Lennox. — Will you drop this bumpf off to Ria in the office?

Lennox nods, takes the papers and unlocks the Alfa Romeo, saying goodbye to George. Gets in and blows on his hands, keying the ignition and switching on the heater. Thinks about investing in a beanie hat, scarf and gloves. It was hard to sanction George's behaviour around women, though he hadn't detected this Lothario tendency when they first met, over twenty years ago, at a forensics workshop in Harrogate. But what was quickly evident was the connection between the two men.

Penny, his then girlfriend, was a Buddhist, and had told Lennox that sometimes you get a strong sense that you know someone *before* you know them, perhaps, she'd ventured, from a past life. That had been too much of a stretch for Lennox,

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but when he'd extended his hand to George and said 'I'm Ray Lennox' the response of 'Indeed you are' seemed particularly knowing. And then George had been Lennox's guardian angel, convincing him he had the wrong person arrested in the case of the child murderer known as Mr Confectioner. Finally, he had taken the broken, burnt-out Lennox from Edinburgh, and the force, to this new life in Brighton. Fortunately, for Ray Lennox's material world view, his straight-backed partner was just as cynical as he about any spiritual dimension to life.

He heads back to the offices of Horsham Security Solutions in Seven Dials, an area taking its name from the road intersection at its epicentre. The company moniker indicates its origins in the town where George was a short-lived resident, evacuating after the woman he was living with caught him canoodling with her sister. George moved to Eastbourne briefly, 'no, no, just no . . .', and Brighton followed. After teaming up with Lennox he resisted changing the company name to something more apposite, dubiously contending that the existing moniker had 'premium-brand cache' in the local security industry.

Lennox swerves past a group of oval-mouthed carol singers who have gathered on the busy street outside his office. As they chant in slightly distressed tones, replete with the crestfallen wide-eyed stares that Lennox associates with nonce victimhood, he climbs several steps from pavement level to access the ground floor of the Victorian building.

In a reception area, her back to the big support pillar that divides the room in two, assisted by bookcases and filing cabinets, Ria Thomson sits at her desk, battering a computer keyboard. — Hi, Ray, she says breezily. Still a teenager, she has only been at Horsham Security Solutions a few months. Lennox has warmed to this efficient, conscientious and buoyant young woman. Feels he should talk to her more; find out

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what makes her tick. A few weeks back he wouldn't have even thought about this, but his liaison with Carmel has made him feel youthful to the extent he now almost sees Ria as a peer. Lennox hands her the paperwork, then examines the clock on his phone. He has to be somewhere else. Doesn't even stop to go into his own small office, situated next to George's identical space.

While the high ceilings and big windows made his Sussex Square summers such a blessing, at this time of the year it could feel fridge-like if you tended to be overly careful with the central heating, as he did. Fighting his inner Calvinist, Lennox cranks it up hoping the temperature will rise to clothes-shedding levels by the time Carmel arrives. When she appears and he makes that point to her, Carmel replies, — I'm horned up to the max, so it could be fucking arctic in here for all I care, and she jostles him towards the bedroom, pulling off her garments as she goes, commandingly barking, — Get them off, Lennox!

He complies and they tumble onto the bed. Carmel's eyes blaze as she mounts Lennox with an athletic smoothness, lowering herself slowly onto him, letting him fill her. His big hands go to her waist, shocking him at the way his fingertips almost touch at its thinnest point. The fuck is slow and intense, Carmel controlling the pace, him going with it. The vehemence builds and he's happy to let her climax in a low growl before her light bones seem to dissolve and she collapses onto him. Lennox tries to get her off him, keen to shag her in a different position. His preference is for a woman to have several orgasms before he blows his load, as that generally means game over for him, at least for a few hours. But she insists, — No, I want you to come, and he does, as in unity she jerks and thrashes herself into a second climax.

Afterwards they reflect how the *good in bed* construct for

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experienced adults is largely about chemistry and communication. As a research chemist and university lecturer on the subject, Carmel knows about both. She believes that love and life is simply about chemicals: dopamine, oxytocin and serotonin. High on them all, she talks about how their sex life may develop, sharing views on the things she wants to explore with him: bondage, spanking, anal, threesomes and swinging. It's a salty conversation, yet one that gives Lennox the disconcerting feeling he's the *older guy project*. Is glad to receive a distracting call from his friend and former colleague Ally Notman in Edinburgh. — Got to take this, he apologises.

Carmel's *I see you* look.

Hits the green button and coughs, — Ally.

The returning voice seems to have to fight through crackles and hisses before it reaches him. — Raymondo! Notman sounds half cut already. — So ye up for Doogie Gillman's retirement do the morn?

Gillman? Not a fucking chance. Nothing in the world could induce me to come to that cunt's send-off. — Couldnae get the time off, Lennox winks at Carmel. Her hand slides under the covers towards his cock. He feels a piece of cord become an iron rod. Circumstances alter cases. — Listen, Ally, something's come up . . . have to get back to you.

— Ray, I –

— Later, Ally, and Lennox switches off the phone and chucks it across the bed.

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4

A CHATTERING CLASS

Expensively fitted and swish of decor, the wine bar, its walls bedecked with the efforts of local artists, is noisy and boisterous. Clustered groups cluck contentedly over Greg Lake's hopeful declaration 'I Believe in Father Christmas', as Ray Lennox, walking in with Carmel Devereaux, senses that after the Rose Garden home, he is now firmly in 'remain' territory. He watches Carmel, dressed in Friday-evening casual elegance in a tight-ribbed purple jumper and long checked skirt, nimbly flutter through ensembles of her university colleagues, some of whom he has met previously. He wonders if those academic types scorn him as an ex-cop, now working in security, exploiting the fears of scared retirees? Looks at the sleeve of his black leather Hugo Boss jacket, the tailor of the Nazis and also his off-the-peg choice. Glances up, unable to see Angela, whom he had chatted to extensively on the night he and Carmel met in that Hove pub.

Only stopping in for a quick beer after his kickboxing training, he had struck up an easy conversation with his new girlfriend and her workmates at the bar. The mutual attraction had been evident from the off, and both Lennox and Carmel immediately understood that they would pursue it. It led slowly but inexorably from coffee to dinner to bed, all within the context of regular dates.

Carmel introduces him to Gilbert Mason, a tall, fine-featured man with an exotic quiff and camp mannerisms. Soon

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they are talking shop and Lennox is bamboozled. — The major technological issue for the setting of the geopolymer, Carmel declares, — is facilitating it in volume through the polycondensation of potassium oligo or sialate-siloxo into the cross-linked potassium poly or sialate-siloxo network . . . Oh, sorry, Ray, I'm being incredibly dull!

Gilbert smiles tightly at Lennox and excuses himself.

— You've even blinded your fellow scientists with science, Lennox laughs, watching him depart. — Layperson's terms please? I was shit at chemistry at school.

— Oh, okay, I'll stop being a science dick. But this is more construction technology, which should be up your street, Lennox; the Scots were great contributors to civil engineering.

— The ones I came into contact with specialised more in uncivil disobedience. So how is this newfangled cement better than the old-school stuff?

— Geopolymer concrete versus Portland cement? Oh, more durable, quicker setting, takes between ten minutes and an hour, as opposed to half an hour and five hours; and environmentally better, uses less water, energy and CO2 emissions per tonnage. See her, she points to a woman in a light blue business suit, — she was a builder's daughter.

— Yes?

— Cement a lot to him.

Lennox draws in a breath. — Oh, Jesus Christ . . .

She pulls him to her. — Kiss me. Then excuse me for roughly five minutes.

Lennox dutifully complies then watches her glide off.

Now she is talking to a man, whom even with his back to him, Lennox is cheered to see is older, with a bland south of England accent that dips into a pleasantly performative ersatz cockney. The man wears flannels, a corduroy jacket and cravat. His greying blond locks curl around a bald spot on his slightly

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egg-shaped head. His hands move in a robust, confident manner, as he jabs a finger in the air, while shrugging with wide, powerful shoulders. Their conversation seems intense and animated, and Carmel appears excited and highly engaged. Then she spies Lennox and waves. And as the man turns round displaying caterpillar brows and a lopsided grin, Ray Lennox feels the blood ice up in his veins as his head spins dementedly.

What the fuck . . .

He has to look away, and collapses to the floor on one knee, fiddling at a non-existent loose shoelace. Heart thrashing as he fights to get breath into his lungs, Lennox's first reaction, through the blood swelling and pounding in his head: *it can't be*.

Carmel is over by his side. Her hand is on his shoulder. — Are you okay, Ray?

— Aye, Lennox coughs out. He is staying down, like a boxer taking the full eight count, giving himself time to recover from the devastating blow. For as long as it takes to get in control and process what is happening, he will remain on the floor. — Something in my shoe . . .

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5

TUNNEL VISION

You had taken your bikes, you and your best friend, Les Brodie, down the Water of Leith walkway, like you did most Saturday mornings. That ritual you had: getting up before the dog walkers. The sun was already climbing and it was really hot. You could feel it on your legs, especially your shins. You both wore khaki shorts and you had a white T-shirt with a maroon heart on it, while Les had one that was reverbing brown and green stripes, which made you feel sick to look at when you'd drunk too much juice. You were glad of the shade from the overhead trees as you walked on, now pushing the bicycles, as the path was too uneven to cycle. In any case, Les had gotten a flat tyre earlier from a puncture, and you had debated about turning back but decided against it because some big lads were meant to have put a barry Tarzan swing up on the other side of the railway tunnel on that disused single-track line from the defunct Caledonian station to Currie. The trail was practically deserted as you got to the dank Victorian passageway, with its towering, foreboding brick face covered in a rash of ivy.

That impenetrable darkness ahead.

Les and you did what you always did: gave each other a wee look to show you werenae feart, then edged the bikes and yourselves into the gloaming. You couldn't see much, especially as you got further in. You'd look above, at those weak, orangey-yellow overhead lights, which showed up the wet gravel under your feet. Then, at the middle of the tunnel, that dreaded blind spot, where no light at either end was visible.

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The voices . . . and then . . .

And then his face . . . that hair . . . those snidey feeble, manipulative, cruel eyes . . . cunt was thaire . . . cunt was thaire . . . then what, then what the fuck . . .

Nothing.

Why can't you see?

You were running; no, you were on your Raleigh, cycling. He was coming after you . . . Les was still in there with the other two.

He was trying to pull you back in . . .

But after the tunnel . . .

What happened after the tunnel, when you got help from those walkers and went back with them? As you got there, you saw the broken ghost of Les emerge into the light, pushing his bike.

Nae polis.

That was what he commanded through his pain.

Nae polis.

You went hame.

Where you saw your ma.

Your ma and Uncle Jock.

You came in with your precious blue Raleigh, ready to tell her that something had happened. Something bad. But then, coming downstairs: the family friend, Jock Allardyce. The fucker looked at you and said something like: — Aye, pal.

Your mum was in the kitchen. She had been cutting vegetables on a chopping board, and started washing up. — Jock's toilet is broken; he's just been using ours, she told you, as she looked around anxiously from you to him. You thought she was looking at you as if you had done something wrong. But it was her who had done something wrong. — What's wrong, son, you okay?

— Nowt, you mumbled, heading back outside. Home was now different. It had changed in an imperceptible way. The light in the kitchen seemed blinding. The sound of the dishes

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clattering together as your mum washed them, like duelling swords. There was no refuge here.

You went down to the shops. Wondered if you could get a bus. Somewhere. Anywhere. You walked around until it got dark and you became scared, worrying you would somehow run into those monsters from the tunnel again. Maybe they would try to get you into a car. You backed away from every motor that slowly passed you on that main road, terrified if there was a group of men in one.

When you finally got back home again, your mum, dad, baby brother Stuart and big sister Jackie were eating at the table. — Late for yir tea again, Raymond, your dad was laughing. — These gannets have got most ay the tatties. C'mon, son, fill yir boots!

You didn't know it then, and you would only find out after your dad's death years later, that your mother had been filling her boots with Jock Allardyce.

You left. Went up to your room. You never went to bed early but this time you did. Kept the light on in case the monsters came back.

And now the monster is back . . .

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6

THE MONSTER

Get up off the floor. You're making a cunt of yourself. You can rise. You can stand. Do it. You are a man. Not a wee boy. You don't know it's him. It was forty fucking years ago! Get a grip. Your memory is playing tricks on you: too much nonce hunting. This guy is no old lag . . . that fucking beasts' register . . . first on paper, then on the screen. All those faces: a sea of perverts, some confused, others knowing, all fucking deviants.

Ray Lennox has no awareness of his legs, just the giddiness in his head and nausea in his abdomen, but he is suddenly standing. The big smile he forces at Carmel feels like nothing less than pathetic, idiotic resistance. Yet he sucks in air and enquires as to what she's drinking. But no response; her head whiplashes away following a distracting shoulder tap from someone in her group of colleagues.

And a shaky-legged Lennox walks past the man, *the monster*. He can only force stolen glimpses at it, each one slapping more dizziness into his head, making the sickness soar through him, hammering his teeth together.

Get a fucking grip.

It is chatting to somebody else now.

He tugs in a breath, and tags Carmel's arm gently. — Hey you.

— Oh, Ray . . . so you're back in our line of sight!

— Damn laces, Lennox looks at his shoes, — always working loose. Going to hit the bar, what are you for?

— Red wine, you select, but not Merlot, Carmel says. He

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smiles in forced lightness, then a chilling blast: sabotaging, rending, as he nods at *the monster*. It is impossible to avoid each other's eyes. The brief acknowledgement is reciprocated by a cold, tight grin but not one of recognition. Yet the full fat lips have registered something in Lennox.

But I was just a boy. Why would he identify that young kid as me?

Lennox permits himself another glance at *the monster* in passing. It has turned back to Carmel.

It has the puffed-frog under-chin that many men develop with age. Its eyes dart in a startled way that hints at timidity, before blazing into a rapaciousness that intimidates. Lennox knows that one of them is an act, a pose. In a successful businessman, it could be either.

There's nae mistaking that reptilian profile. A small tongue, playing on those tight lips. The beady eye, with those thick brows. Tunnel tunnel tunnel . . .

Carmel leaves her company and follows Lennox over to the bar, just as he's caught the pressured barmaid's attention. As he orders two glasses of Shiraz, he feels perspiration on his collar and down his back. Picks one glass up. Hand shakes so badly, has to lower it to the marble bar top without taking a sip in case she notices.

— This mine? Carmel's crimson nails click around the glass, like a fairground arcade claw grabbing a trinket, raising it from the polished surface.

— Aye.

— Be honest: you're not too bored?

— No . . . not at all. Funny though, and I didn't want to make a thing of it in front of your mates, but I came over a bit queasy there: like I'd eaten something that didn't agree with me, and his ticklish cough is not contrived. It came back at times like these.

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— Oh, how horrible. You okay now?

— Yes, the worst of it seems to have passed, Lennox sings, fighting a low asthmatic croak as he looks back towards *the monster.*

Why here? Who the fuck is he?

Another Geiger counter surge in Lennox's heartbeat, as a choking rage wells up in his chest. He heaves in some air. Now he feels compromised; a fraud. All those years in Serious Crimes, trying to interview people who would be in a similar state as he is at this moment: undermined by a visceral fear and rage. Nothing prepared you for it. It was crazy. It was a drug. A poison. — Who . . . who is that guy you were talking to?

— Mathew Cardingworth; a very big patron of the university and of my department in particular. He's funding our new chemical research facility, and a big project I'm heading up, Carmel purrs in appreciation.

Lennox nods. Recalls that Carmel had driven him past the new laboratories' development site, en route to the university, near the Brighton & Hove Albion Football Club stadium.

— Very well known in these parts. He's a local businessman. Owns this place, also has an auction room and a share in several nightclubs. But his real wealth comes from property development. He's absolutely minted, she contends in discernible respect, even awe.

Lennox darts his tongue across his lips, buoyed by this knowledge. *The monster* has a name: Mathew Cardingworth.

It is real. It can be hurt. It can feel pain. And now it will feel all the fucking pain of the world. You will see to that.

Lennox looks over at Cardingworth again. Feels his body in revolt against himself: the sweating, the increased heartbeat and, most of all, the jaw spasms. Fights it down.

Fear is no longer an option: you arenae the wee laddie in the tunnel now. This is a pathetic old has-been. You have him; he's

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yours now. Stalk him. Hunt him down slowly. Savour every fucking second of this forthcoming revenge – you've waited long enough! Now he's here!

Suddenly, Ray Lennox has never felt so excited or alive. Bells ring in his head. Chemicals surge through his body. This is stronger than new love. This is his quest. His hunger. His destiny. And it has finally fallen into his lap. His gaze beams on Mathew Cardingworth.

Will people not notice? Stay cool.

Cardingworth heads off in the direction of the toilets.

— Are you sure you're okay, Ray? Carmel asks.

— Yes, just going to take a leak.

Carmel nods as Lennox follows Mathew Cardingworth's retreating figure to the back of the room and into the toilets. He stands two latrines away. Looks ahead. How easy to smash Cardingworth now, the element of surprise over an out-of-shape man, probably in his early sixties.

His shoulders are big and broad but his gut hangs over those scabby nonce genitals he now huds in his hand . . .

A crimson mist leaks from the back of Lennox's brain into his vision. Obliterating this monster is essential. But it is also insufficient. *This beast has to hurt. Like the one in Miami. This is my chance. It has to feel so much pain that it will welcome the respite of death.*

But this is self-indulgent psycho shit. Stay calm. Breathe. You must think this through.

Lennox knows his reaction means a hugely significant *something*, but he still has to ascertain *what*. Those blurred faces in the tunnel. Three men in that long, stone passageway of torture. Which one was Cardingworth?

He hears the businessman expel the last of his urine. Peripherally watches him shake out his penis . . . *was that the cock that I was made to . . .* Hears *the monster* zip up. As it

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