

Violence is the Answer



Mr If

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Introduction

When I wrote my first collection, *Entertainment*, I didn't feel the need to change the names of the people I was writing about. I have no intention of revealing my real name, so there's no reason why any of my friends will discover that I've betrayed them. To be honest, I quite like the idea of getting caught – of my friends reading *Entertainment* and reeling back in horror and the secrets I've disclosed. But, as I say, it's highly unlikely my friends will inadvertently stumble across the Philistine Press website, and even if they do, the poems in *Entertainment* are just poems, and could have been written by anyone.

In this, my second collection of mashed-up prose and verse, I've made the decision to change names in order to protect the identity of the two friends to whom this collection is dedicated.

The first friend I will call Marilyn. We are lovers, and I am learning to love her.

The second friend is usually known by his surname, which I'm going to pretend is Nettles. He is Marilyn's husband, and an old friend of mine from school. As I write these words, Nettles is serving for the British armed forces in Afghanistan, and needs to come home before he gets killed for no reason.

Mr If, 2011.

To Marilyn and Nettles.

What we are

Nettles is away fighting in Afghanistan.
I am in England having sex with his wife.
In our own tried and tested ways,
The pair of us are proving
That we are men.

Conquests

Iraq is not a conquest.
The 'Stan is not a conquest.
Marilyn is not a conquest either.
Please don't let her be that.
Whatever my feelings,
She is more than a notch on a bedpost.
She will never be comparable to some military victory,
Not least of all because our affair, if you want to call it that,
Has been a failure.

Iraq is a failure.
The 'Stan is a failure.
I don't want Marilyn to be a failure too.
Please let her be more than that.
I promise you, Nettles, I am trying to make it more than that,
In each of our misjudged meetings,
I am trying to make this mean something.

Are you doing the same out there,
Wherever it is you are?
Do you dwell on your reasons for being there
As much as I do?

I don't like what the army are doing in Iraq.
I don't like what the army are doing in Afghanistan.
But somehow I can't bring myself to hate it.
Hatred is a bad thing.

I like Marilyn. Really I do.
I like the way she dances to her own private groove when she's pleased about something.
I like the way she reads trashy magazines and watches crap on the TV,
Indulging in her guilty pleasures like a connoisseur.
I like the way her crows feet compliment her face,
I like her bleached blond hair with the black roots.
I like the perfection of the wonky smile.
But somehow I can't bring myself to love her.
And believe me, I've tried.

The Army Wives

She lives nowhere near a military town.
Still the Army Wives emerge from the woodwork
With their kids and their cups of tea
On unexpected afternoons.

They are all lovely girls.
They care about each other, and about Marilyn.
They care about their husbands, and Our Boys.
They make me think about the expression “salt of the earth”.

It’s comforting to have them around. It makes me feel nostalgic for some imagined past when everyone participated in their community. I remember sitting in a cafe in London once listening to people talking, thinking that in a strange way this place was better off in the Blitz. I wondered if that’s what we needed to bring people together, and make people care about each other. Will another conflict, yet more death and destruction, somehow restore people’s faith?

I was sitting with Marilyn and the Army Wives out in the garden, watching the stationary leaves and petals. Marilyn told them how much she missed Nettles. The others chimed in with similar sentiments.

I said, “They should come home then. They should come home before they get killed and before anyone else gets killed.”

“That’s such a selfish attitude,” one of them said.

“No it isn’t,” I said. “I’m saying because I care about other people.”

She spouted the usual paradox about being against the war but supporting the troops.

I said, “That makes no sense. If you’re against the war, you have to be against the troops, by definition. These people are there by choice. They’re not just following orders, or “doing their job”. If they want a job, they can quit, and go and sell stereos in Currys. I’d respect that.”

She called me selfish again.

“It’s true,” I said. “I’m the most selfish person you’ll ever meet. I can only say what I think and feel. Perhaps I only say that I’m against the war and against the troops because I miss my friend, and I don’t want him to die.”

“He’s not going to die,” said Marilyn, holding my hand. “Nothing’s going to happen to our Nettles.”

The Army Wives didn’t really know me. They certainly didn’t know that I was sleeping with Marilyn. But that day, without meaning to, I somehow gained their respect.

I'm sure there will be plenty of opportunities in the future for me to destroy it again.

Call me a cunt

Call me a cunt,
But instead of wasting our breath
Debating whether the war was legal or illegal
Or somewhere in between,
Why don't we just make all wars illegal and have done with it?
That would solve a few fucking problems.

She pays my train fare

Nettles, I have a confession to make,
In addition to the confession that I'm sleeping with your wife.
As you know, I live in a different part of the country,
So when I stay over at your house, I have to get the train.
I don't have a job, so Marilyn pays my train fare.
She pays my train fare with the money you make from being in the army.
I know she works part time in that primary school,
But what's yours is hers, and all that.

I don't feel guilty about sleeping with Marilyn,
Because sleeping with me is a choice she's made.
I feel like I'm doing you a favour.
If anyone's going to fuck your wife, it should be me.
I'm preventing her from sleeping with some moron
Who's just going to use her for her body.

But what mortifies me is that she pays my train fare.
I'm like some crooked MP claiming on expenses.
There's no real justification.
And if you survive this conflict that you've chosen to involve yourself in,
I promise that in time I'll pay you back.
Although, like my relationship with Marilyn,
I'm afraid it might have to be in irregular instalments.

Violence is the answer

Violence is the answer.
Violence can get you anything you want.
Violence can buy you love.
Violence can buy you money.

I feel it in my fingers,
I feel it in my toes,
Violence is all around me,
And so the feeling grows.

All you need is violence.
Violence, violence, violence.

A new commandment I give unto you,
That you are violent to one another,
As I have been violent to you.

You are my violence,
My only violence,
You make me violent
When skies are grey.

If you're violent and you know it clap your hands.

I violence you,
You violence me,
We violence everyone,
Forever.

Nettles

They called you by your surname in school,
Because it's kind of funny
It's ironic that unlike the unwanted plant that is your namesake,
You have no sting,
Or at least you didn't when you were a boy.

Now they call you by your surname at work.
All part of being a squaddie.
I expect they all laugh about your slightly odd moniker,
But it could've been worse. You could've been called Fuckwit.
Sergeant Fuckwit, they'd call you
(Or whatever your rank is. I've never bothered to find out.
It doesn't really interest me.)

Of course you're not really called Nettles.
This is a name I've invented to protect your identity
From the twenty-seven or so people who'll read this shit book.

You're not a fuckwit either.
That's what makes this whole thing
So tragic.

Brotherly lust

The first time I met the Army Wives, I'd been sleeping over. I'd slept in late, and wandered down the stairs in my t-shirt and boxers to find a huddle of women around the breakfast table. A proper mother's meeting. It's lucky I didn't have my cock out.

All eyes turned to Marilyn, mine included.

"This is my brother," she said, quickly.

Straight away they all chorused, "Yes, I can see the family resemblance," which really freaked me out.

Skeleton

There must be something deeply wrong with her,
This beautiful woman with a twenty-four carat heart,
Who understands everything in the world,
Who teaches me things about myself,
Who can only teach me good.
There must be some skeletons in her closet somewhere.

That's what I thought, until I realised.
I caught sight of my bony body in the mirror
While I was on top of her,
With her legs wrapped around me
Crossing her feet over my tiny arse,
Running her pink painted nails over the hairs on my back.

It's me, I realised.
Sitting in Marilyn's empty closet,
Wishing I wasn't alone.

Up Marilyn's Arse

I found myself
I found myself
Up Marilyn's arse
Up Marilyn's arse

I found Marilyn there too.
I saw everything she was.
I saw everything I was.
I saw everything we could be together.

There was no going back from this point on,
Not after I'd been where no man had been before.
She told me just before we did it,
That Nettles had never fucked her up the arse.
I wasn't sure if it was meant to make me feel special.
I wanted to tell her that I loved her,
But considering the circumstances,
It didn't feel entirely appropriate.

I found myself
I found myself
Up Marilyn's arse
Up Marilyn's arse

I realised she would never be mine,
That I was just looking after her while Nettles was away.
I was her friend and her protector,
But mainly I was her entertainment.

Up Marilyn's arse,
I didn't want to touch another woman or man again.
I would never have another experience like this again,
So I should enjoy it while it lasts,
Be grateful for this pointless, meaningless conflict
That's brought us together.

Up Marilyn's arse
I was torn between my love for this woman,
My love for her husband
And my love for the world,
But caught up in the moment as I was,
I decided not to worry about it,
I should just enjoy myself,
We should just enjoy our time together,
While it lasts.

Cracked black pepper

Cracked black pepper
Cracked black pepper
She eats so much her pussy tastes of cracked black pepper.

She eats it on salads.
She eats it on cheese on toast.
She eats it on sandwiches.
She eats it on spag boll.
(You get the idea.)

Cracked black pepper
Cracked black pepper
She eats so much her pussy tastes of cracked black pepper.

Not just any old black pepper.
This is *cracked* black pepper,
The finest, most upmarket black pepper money can buy.
And it's not because she's pretentious
Or that she's desperately trying to be middle class.
She is a wonderful woman
Without an ounce of fakery anywhere on her person.

And when I lick her,
When I suck up her juices,
When I "drink from her fountain" (if I may be so fucking vulgar),
She tastes good
Because I like cracked black pepper too.

And I am not degrading her by writing about this,
Or by referring to her vagina as her pussy,
And although she doesn't know that I've written these words,
If she ever finds out, I hope she will appreciate the sentiment.

Benefits

She always hurries me into the house before the neighbours see.
When we sit in the garden, it's always out the back,
Away from prying eyes.
She tells me off when I speak too loudly,
Or if I stand near the window while I'm half dressed.

I enjoy those moments when she forgets about people listening,
And screams my name out with all the breath in her gasping lungs.

I don't know why she worries about the neighbours anyway.
They barely say hello on the rare occasions our paths happen to cross.
They probably don't even know our names.
There are benefits to living in a society where no one gives a fuck about anyone else.

Sometimes

I don't like the word "sometimes".
It makes me anxious and unhappy.
It reminds me that the moments we share together
Are temporary and transient.

I want to feel your skin pressed against mine
Every moment of every hour
For the rest of our hours and the rest of our moments.

I want us to disappear together harmoniously into the ether
And forget about everything that has ever happened.

Pretending to be Americans

There are kids in the street
Pretending to be Americans.
There are people on the TV
Pretending to be Americans.
There are people in America
Pretending to be Americans.
My friend Nettles is in Western Asia
Pretending to be American.

It would be easy to say we're all victims of the Dream,
That every single person in the world stands united
In their love and in their hatred of one nation,
But America doesn't really exist.
The war isn't really taking place at all.
It's a game we're all playing.

No one wins or loses.
Eventually we'll all turn into Americans,
And if that finally unites us all,
If we can stop all the fighting and say,
"We're all Americans now. We're all on the same side,"
That would be fine with me,
If only that could happen
In real life.

I have nothing to say

I turned up at the train station as usual on a Friday afternoon, and called Marilyn from the phone box. She didn't answer the first couple of times. When she did answer, she told me not to say anything. Don't say anything at all, she said. I'm sorry you've come all this way for nothing. I just can't do this anymore. She said goodbye and hung up the phone. I sat by the phone box for an hour.

I'm usually quite good at disguising my emotions but I must've looked like I needed cheering up because a man came and sat down next to me. People never sit next to me. I didn't think anyone sat next to anyone anymore.

I understand he was only trying to be nice. He was a nice man.

He tried talking to me about the football, but I had to admit that I didn't know anything about football, or any other sport.

So he started talking about cars, and I nodded along for a while, but again I had to be honest and admit his words meant nothing to me. I don't know anything about cars.

So he started telling me jokes. Nothing offensive – he was a nice man, after all. They were just silly puns. I tried to laugh along, but I couldn't help thinking about Marilyn and her sexy crows feet and her bleached blonde hair with the roots showing through and her mysterious crooked smile, and I couldn't help telling him that I hate fucking jokes. All jokes of any kind. Stop fucking telling them to me. I like it when humorous things happen naturally in life. Stop trying to force it. It's a zero-tolerance policy. I told him that all comedians should be fucking shot.

It wasn't his fault. He was a nice man, and I was a horrible man with nothing to say.

Then Marilyn arrived in the car. Her makeup had run, and she'd smudged it away. She opened the passenger door and I got in. I kissed her gently on the cheek, and as we left the car park I didn't say anything.

88 Minutes with Al Pacino

Marilyn has a DVD account. She likes watching DVDs and I like watching them with her, even when the DVDs she watches are total rubbish.

One time we nearly watched three DVDs in a row.

The first one was called *Up in the Air*. It was about a guy who gets paid to fire people. He flies all over America collecting air miles, making lots of money from firing people and generally being a smug rich bastard. Then he meets this woman – don't tell me you can see where this is going already. Shut up and listen. He meets this woman who makes him realise that his smug rich lifestyle isn't all it's cracked up to be when he takes her to visit his family in small-town America, which to the audience ought to be the ideal, the real way to live your life, not some fantasy lifestyle, smugly drinking scotch, firing people for a living and collecting air miles. This would all be very nice, very Hollywood, very American, if it weren't for the fact that the central character was played the multimillionaire, George Clooney.

The next DVD starred Al Pacino. It was called *88 Minutes*. It was about this serial killer who went around murdering these really fit women. The killer hung the corpses upside-down from the ceiling and slit their throats. Coincidentally, they were all wearing skirts. I was so conflicted emotionally, I wasn't sure whether to cry or masturbate. All I could think was, *I really want to fuck that corpse*. Tactfully, I didn't mention any of this to Marilyn.

Al Pacino wasn't the killer. Al Pacino was the FBI agent-stroke-university-lecturer who was responsible for tracking the killer. That's right. Al Pacino was an FBI agent, and a university lecturer. And the suspects were all students in his class. Coincidentally most of them were really fit women, who Al was secretly fucking on the side.

Al Pacino, the greatest actor of his generation, who's now had so much plastic surgery, his face doesn't move, thereby removing his ability to act. Al Pacino, the guy from *The Godfather*, *Scarface* and *Dog Day Afternoon*. How, you might ask, did a man of his calibre end up participating in this utterly shameless carnival of misogyny? Your question is answered when the serial killer *turns out to be a woman!* So it isn't glorifying violence against women at all!

The film ends happily when the female serial killer is shot in the back of the head by a male FBI agent.

The next DVD was a war film. I refused to watch it. "I'm not interested in war," I told her.

"It's an Oscar winner," she told me.

"I'm still not watching it," I said. "It's just going to glorify the whole thing."

"I'm pretty sure it's an anti-war film," she said.

“There’s no such thing as an anti-war film. You only watch films if you’re interested in war. Surely film makers must know that people who are interested in war are pro-war.”

“I’m not pro-war,” she said.

“Then why are you married to a soldier?”

“I’m not against the army.”

“That doesn’t make any sense. If you’re anti-war you must be against the army as well.”

“Well, I’m not against the army,” she said.

“It’s like all these people who claim to be against America’s gun laws, but they’re happy to sit down and watch Hollywood glorifying them in load-of-bollocks films like *88 Minutes* with Al Pacino.”

“So everyone is a hypocrite apart from you?” she said.

“Yes. Everyone is a hypocrite apart from me.”

The argument wore on for a while, until we kissed, and then went upstairs and fucked. We were charged with something. I don’t know what it was. It wasn’t anger, it wasn’t lust, it was something mysterious that came out of nowhere and wouldn’t leave us alone.

The Queen's a Bitch

I tried to add an extra dimension to this collection by writing a poem about the monarchy, but I only got halfway through. This was partly because the poem rhymed, and I don't enjoy writing poems that rhyme. I was also rather critical of the tone of the poem, particularly the regular repetition of its title, *The Queen's a Bitch*.

Here is how the poem started:

I don't know why the poor's so poor
Or why the rich are so rich
The Queen's a bitch.

I was worried about appearing sexist by using the word "bitch," but then I couldn't think of another appropriate word. I also worried that I was passing a moral judgement on a person I've never met, but I suppose if you're going to be fully committed to your opposition to the monarchy, and if you truly believe the system is wrong, you have to embrace your hatred of the reigning monarch just as much as you embrace your love of liberty and peace.

The second stanza went:

Some wear diamond-encrusted coats
Others don't have a stitch.
The Queen's a bitch.

Then I really lost interest. What was I trying to say with the poem anyway? Surely the reader will already be fully aware that there are many unjustifiable inequalities in society, and no doubt they already have an opinion on the Queen.

Still, I agonised over this poem, even though saying "the Queen's a bitch" isn't in any way intelligent or poetic, or shocking in any meaningful way.

In any case, the Queen will probably be dead soon, and anyone reading this after that's happened will think I'm a right wanker.

People just don't want to hear this

I was walking down the quaint High Street in the inoffensive little town where Nettles and Marilyn live when I was accosted by some wanker from the *Help For Heroes* charity. I say "accosted" but all he was actually doing was standing in a shop doorway rattling a box of coppers. And I say "wanker" but of course I don't know this man well enough to make any real assumptions about his personality type. But I was in a bad mood at the time, and frankly as I write this, I'm also in a bad mood, so let's just call him a wanker and let that be the end of the matter.

"*Help For Heroes*" said the wanker.

I'd like to think I'd never dream of gratuitously insulting someone but as I say, I was in a bad fucking mood. So I turned to the wanker and I said, "So what the fuck is your definition of a "hero"? A trained fucking killer?"

The wanker ignored me. (But of course he wasn't a wanker. He wasn't a hero either. He was just a man.) Perhaps he didn't possess the intellectual skills to argue against an alternative viewpoint. Or perhaps the man had mistaken me for a psycho and didn't want to make the situation worse. Or perhaps he didn't want to argue because, like me, he was a man of peace.

"Tell you what," I said. "They should change the name of your charity from *Help For Heroes* to *Fuck 'Em, They're Not Worth it.*"

I understand this was a deeply unintelligent thing to say, but it's what I felt, and it's what I still feel. I've just been running through this encounter in my mind trying to rewrite what I might have said to the man if I'd have been feeling a little more reasonable. I could have said I wholeheartedly disagree with the concept of supporting the troops in spite of the fact that they're out there killing in the name of fucking oil. I could have said that it's the support of the fucking public that's keeping these fuckers going. They're fuckers because they're making a moral fucking choice, choosing violence, greed and hatred over peace and fucking love. *Fuck 'Em* is what I really think and what I really feel, because soldiers are just as responsible as the fucking politicians. Because they aren't innocent. Because they have blood on their hands regardless of whether or not they've taken a life, and regardless of whose life they've taken. Because by the principles on which wars are fought – of eyes for eyes and teeth for teeth – *they deserve to fucking die*. These aren't my principles, you understand. These are the principles on which wars are fought. Fucked-up principles, based on hatred, greed and fear.

But I said none of this, and the man didn't say anything either, because he was a man – a real man – a man of dignity and peace – a man I'd verbally abused for no good reason, which made me the wanker and the sinner.

I didn't say any of this, because people don't want to hear it. The man didn't want to hear it, just as you, dear reader, don't want to hear it either. Especially you fucking doublefaced pseudo-liberals going on your trendy marches, blaming the government for everything when we should be blaming

ourselves. We should blame anyone who voted the fuckers in. We should blame anyone who drives a car or uses public transport or consumes products with plastic packaging. We should blame the soldiers who've agreed to go out there and fight. We should blame the factory workers who manufacture the weapons. And heartless as it may seem we should blame the well-meaning people collecting money in the street.

You probably think I'm an amoral cunt for saying such blasphemous fucking things but can't you see I'm saying this because I believe in peace and I believe in love and I just want all these people to stop getting killed?

Consequences

What are we all to do when everyone's too busy worrying about themselves and their selfish families to even think about building a world in which we can all be happy? You can work in a factory, producing products that are of no consequence. Or you could work in an office and shuffle papers around for no good reason. Or you could join the army and fight in a war that's of no consequence. I've chosen to do none of these things. I've chosen to write words on bits of paper, words that are of no consequence; no consequence at all.

Hatred

I heard the Army Wives talking about one of their friends who isn't married to some bloke from the army. They were talking about how she needs a man, and listing the reasons why she doesn't have a man. Apparently she doesn't dress properly, she's got a fat arse and she's too focussed on her career.

I wondered why these women hate other women so much, and I wondered if they appreciated the irony of being women who hate women.

I wondered if I myself appreciated the irony that I'm a man who hates men. Yes, I'll admit, I am the ultimate hypocrite – the perfect self-loather. I hate men so much, sometimes I wish I was a lesbian. I can't hang around with men for too long. They make me physically sick. We are the scum of the earth, polluting the atmosphere, fighting wars and sticking our cocks into anything with a fucking hole.

Even as the Army Wives were talking and I was having all these high minded thoughts about irony and equality, another part of my brain was wondering if it would be possible to meet this woman and fuck her (as though that was what she needed).

A warning voice that comes in the night and repeats, repeats in my ear

This woman is no good for you.
She is no good for Nettles.
She has tricked you into loving her,
By being nice to you, and by being a nice person.
She used the same underhand tactics
When she tricked Nettles into marrying her.
It's strange how you trust this woman,
This bitch who has betrayed her husband,
Even though you yourself are part of that betrayal.
You forgive her, and she forgives you.
That's why you're still here.
That's why you didn't jump ship like you usually do.
She knows everything about you.
She knows you've done this too many times before.
She knows you're pathetic .
She knows you're one of life's natural losers.
And she forgives you.
That's why you're caught in her evil trap.
She's tricked you into loving her by loving you,
And by forgiving you for everything you've ever done wrong.

Is it wrong?

Is it wrong that I've had fantasies about fucking Nettles
While he's in his uniform?
He's behind me, slamming it home, hard,
Firing his gun in the air like an insane cowboy.
I'm telling him about all the things I've done with his wife,
The lies we've told, the positions we've assumed,
The rooms in his house we've occupied,
And it's turning him on.
He's slamming me harder until it hurts,
And howling as he shoots bullets at the sun.
I tell him to stop, but he doesn't stop.
He says he will make me pay,
Make me beg for his forgiveness,
And I say yes.
Make me pay. Make me pay.
I would say I'm sorry,
But I wouldn't have it any other way.

Fantasy

I have a fantasy about fucking Marilyn in the bedroom
When Nettles comes home unexpectedly.
He's having a few days leave, and wants to surprise her.
We hear him opening the front door.
My dick is still inside her as he ascends the stairs.
He hasn't said anything yet, but we both know it's him.
We recognise his footsteps.

Nettles opens the bedroom door, just in time to miss me.
I'm in the wardrobe.
Marilyn is naked in the bed.
Nettles rips off his clothes and jumps into her arms.
She acts like she's pleased to see him.

I listen to them fucking
And I wonder if she's thinking about me.
I'm listening to her panting, her moaning and her wailing,
And I'm egging her on to accidentally say my name.
My dick is in my hand, still solid as a rock.
After a while, I realise I'm crouching next to the laundry basket.
I fish out three pairs of Marilyn's knickers, and a couple of bras.
I put the bras on, one on top of the other.
I wrap one of them over my face, breathing in that warm scent.
I clutch another pair in my left hand,
While my right hand wanks into the third pair.

Meanwhile, Nettles is growling like a caveman.
I try to time my orgasm to coincide with his.

When it's all over, Marilyn lets out one long, sweet breath and says,
"What a surprise. What an amazing surprise."

And that's the point at which I jump out of the wardrobe still dressed in her
underwear,
Shouting "Not as amazing as this one, fuckers!"

The first time

I don't know why I decided to call her. I think it was because I had no way of contacting Nettles. For a change, I didn't actually want to have sex with my friend's wife. I just wanted to talk.

So we talked on the phone. We got chatting about everything – her friends, her job, how she's coping without Nettles.

Out of the blue, she suggested maybe we should go out for a drink some time. Not in *that* way, obviously. We laughed.

The following weekend I took the train up to where she lives, and we went for a drink. She said she'd never heard of anyone ordering herbal tea in a pub before.

I told her I don't drink alcohol, and I object to drinking Coca Cola.

She said I sounded very political. I said I'm not political. Politics bores me.

Me too, she said.

I watched her drink a bottle and a half of wine and escorted her home.

She could hardly walk straight, so I took her up to the bedroom and helped her out of her clothes. She kept giggling and asking if I was taking advantage of her.

I said, do you want me to?

She giggled some more, and she didn't object when I climbed out of my clothes and lay down with her in the dark.

I don't know whether to take this as a compliment or not, but by the time we were finished she was stone cold sober.

She made a cup of tea for the two of us and brought it upstairs. She had her dressing gown on, but it was open so I could still see her body underneath. I realised for the first time how fucking beautiful she was, and what a lucky bastard her husband was.

We talked for an hour or so. I decided to be completely honest with her. I told her I've slept with the partners of friends before, not just once, but several times. Sometimes I sleep with men, but mainly it's women.

That's OK, she said.

I said, you mean it's OK me being bisexual, or it's OK me sleeping with other people's partners?

Both, she said. I'm glad you told me.

I tried to make some terrible joke about being “trisexual” because I’ll “try anything once” then I realised what a cheesy line it was. I managed to dig the hole deeper by attempting to clarify that I had no intention of having sex with animals any time soon.

Luckily she found it funny, and thankfully not in a “that’s really funny” way, but in a “that was an awful thing to say but at least he realises it” way.

I kissed her.

As the conversation went on, she started revealing some secrets of her own. Maybe she was still a bit drunk, or maybe the fact that we’d been physically intimate made her feel comfortable opening up.

She told me about some of the problems her and Nettles had had a couple of years ago. They used to have raging arguments, and he slapped her around a couple of times.

I was fucking furious. I wanted to leap out of the bed and start ripping up the curtains but that would have been stooping to *his* level.

Why the fuck are you still with him? I said. You don’t deserve to be treated like that by anyone, least of all your fucking husband.

Apparently Nettles had done all the right things. He literally got down on his knees and begged for forgiveness. He quit drinking and went to anger management.

I don’t care, I said. You may have forgiven the fucker, but I can’t. I told her I wanted to hurt him. I wanted to get back at him somehow for what he’d done to her.

Well, you just fucked his wife, she said. There’s a start.

I laughed, and she laughed, and I kissed her, and we fucked again. It was better the second time.

And while we were doing it, I saw our whole future together opening up before me. I knew that I’d continue to come here whenever I was allowed. I knew that the sex would keep getting better. I knew that I’d eventually fall arse over tit in love with her.

But I knew it wouldn’t last. I knew that in the end she’d never leave Nettles.

I knew that I’d eventually forgive Nettles for what he’d done to her, and I’d feel vaguely guilty about seeing her.

I knew that the whole time I’d be helplessly conflicted, not because of any half-hearted feelings of loyalty towards my childhood friend, but because I knew –

even on that first night – that the only way I could ever have a future with Marilyn would be for Nettles to get killed.

And of course I didn't want Nettles to get killed. That was the last thing any of us wanted. I want him to come home and be with his wife, and treat her nicely. Maybe have a couple of kids.

And I can carry on doing what I do: enjoying myself while being unhappy, and ultimately searching for some kind of peace.