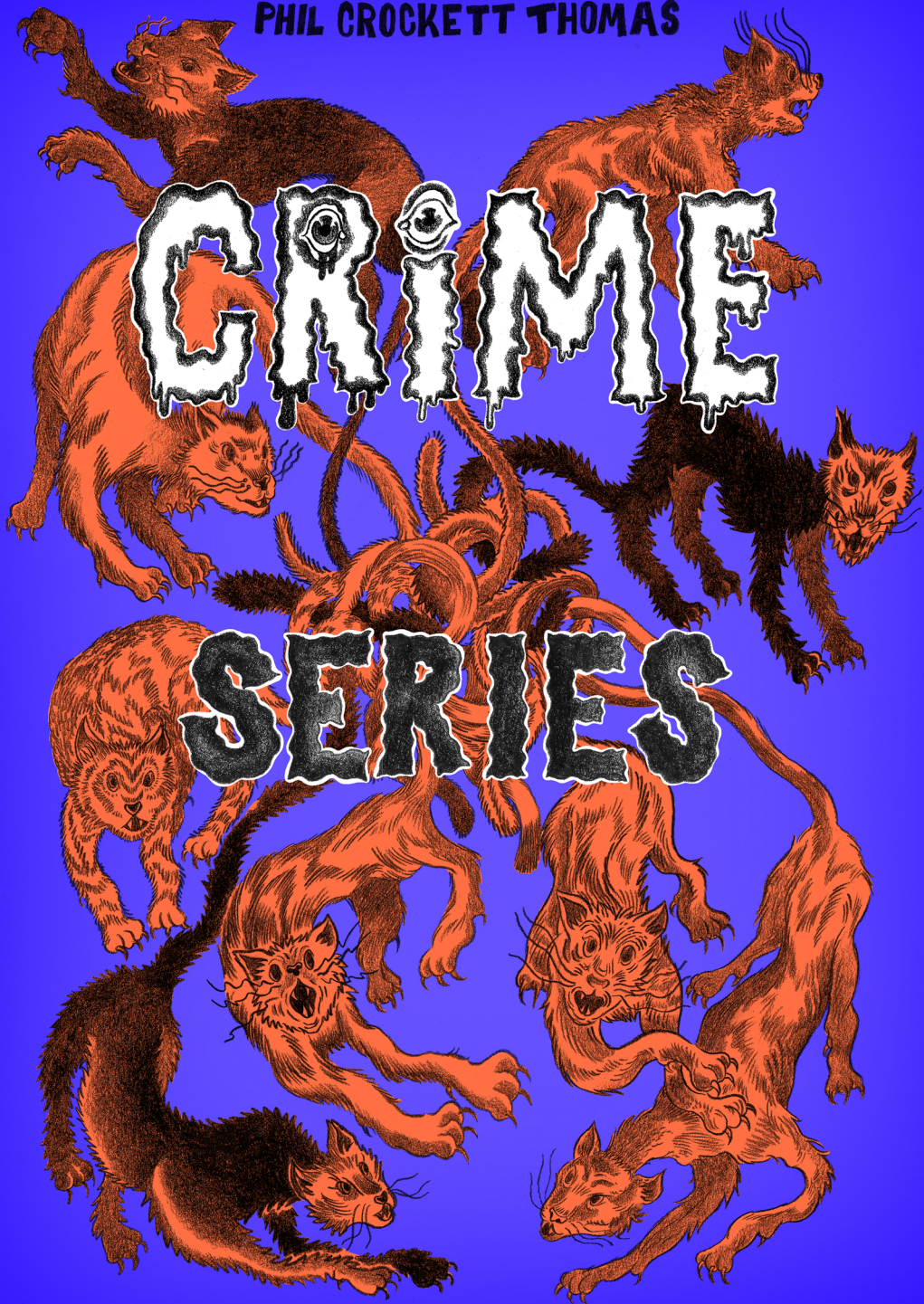


PHIL CROCKETT THOMAS

CRIME

SERIES



CRIME SERIES

**Phil
Crockett
Thomas**

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GRAND DESIGNS

Upon our time, a widower there was in rural France, who had strangers crossfingered to claim his home when he died. Neither had squeezed, softly skulled from his wife's belly, their gym-bodies were hard from a different sort of labour. City of Londoners. Roast Beef.

With manicures clamped around his writ, searching a flailing pulse, they had made a Viager on his certain death.¹ They told their friends, "it's not morbid, it's like sponsoring a child in Africa, or buying them a goat for Christmas. We get a picture of our old man every year to see how he is looking." 84 for women, 78 for men, and ours is slightly overdue. The heart at his age, might just...

But he is looking well, sits dancing his legs under the kitchen table. Spoon drips to mouth, fattened arms blue with mountain ranges. He's marbling on their monthly stipend and making home improvements. He thinks about the end, if he could just sit death out and keep it all. They send him a bottle of good port on each birthday, which he will not drink (you hear wild stories about Viager).

Still, nature had its way, and how. The earth sucked at the little old man, loosening his collar. And just as they were preparing to bound tit-first over the threshold, his lawyer informed them of a late insertion in his will. The old man had been buried under the stone flagged kitchen floor of their new summer house—another late insertion if you will.

¹ Viager is an act of French property law that allows elderly homeowners to sell their house whilst retaining the right to use and live in it until their death. The new owners must pay a monthly sum (*rente viagère*) to the previous owner based on the elderly house-seller's life expectancy. Of course, death could come at any time to both parties. Thus, it is a legal arrangement that appeals to gamblers and those with undeserving children.

—we could not have, imagine it, my dad to dinner and imagine him dangling over the grave, mouth whistling joy about the heft of cheese, the saucisson: so frenchified! We'd have to tell him. It'd be like that flick, the Hitchcock with those gay guys, what's that film with the body under the table? This is not the death we signed for.

How would we do the washing up with him behind us, his hair growing ever after. It might creep up and push through loose floorboards, providing warmth underfoot in winter. Not that we'd be living there in winter—

She pushed off down an overgrown path to where, just listening, water pounded rocks, buttoning-up her blood. She had wanted to know all of this, have all stinking jubilant nature to herself. It was to have been her project, her sympathetic design in keeping with the local flora. An army of local boys to help them build, learning English with grateful tongues, then leave at dusk on quad bikes.

They sat together at the gate and drank the port. Of course they wouldn't go through with it. The male, an old choirboy, had already spent his childhood sliding his feet along the cracks between tombstones on the church floor to avoid musing the noses of the dead.

Nature had its way again; corpse-confident, powdery walls fell apart in its clinch. Word got out and it became a popular spot for suicides, gallows making a feature of those stunning old wooden beams. The wild boars pass unremarked on prehistoric pins, or else are stuffed into sausages. Eyes blackened pits, like absented apples. The man under the floor grins through receded lips.

RANK OUTSIDER

On the steps of the council office he lays under the cardboard and over. His bulk straightened out by his sleeping bag—a soldier, supreme with stillness, dreaming of trout. He is a cat with whiskers black like flies, bending the surface at their tiny bodies.

And I'm here behind glass, tapping my teeth against The World's Best Boss mug (my boss's mug). I do this daily so that when he arrives he'll find it, warm and washed, and wet, like his toothbrush has been borrowed. He can't make a fuss about it because it would seem petty, and Mister R is not a petty man.

When we get a housing applicant with a criminal record he googles their name, sighing, eyes scrolling. He takes me off the case if it's a juicy one. He will wink, and slide into the warmth I've tried to make with the client. First, he lets them ramble on, explaining their need and how they couldn't apply in prison. He cracks a space open in the first silence for thoughts of their family to crowd in after the years of pain and absence, and the shock of being a familiar body returned strange into strange tenderness. Then he leans in towards them confidently, enjoying how this movement draws a tense calm and says,

"I know all about you." These words pull the panic of thought

[]

and then he lets them have it, purple—sovereign in social virtue, "you dare to ask us to help you now?!"

His triumph to be dead right, to be able to measure the fire, not like them—bleating.

And all this time I have my back to them, the applicants. They see me

shift and stick, a theatrical click of neck in back. They're thinking—is she the secret weapon? For or against him: the perfect bastard. A heel? The hard man introduced towards the end of the movie. Brought in only to be defeated by the hero and mercifully forgotten by the next scene.

I try to play it down, empty my body of gestures, dodge the fight, and refuse to recognise their drama. My face betrays my sleepy grief, just an itch around the eyes. This makes them hate me more. I know it.

But not this one, the step sleeper—a stalking horse. We're developing something like an understanding. I put his bottles in the recycling and he opens the door for me in the morning. Jokes about the state of the place and that if he'd known I was coming he'd have cleaned up, we laugh shyly at that. He's here every day now since we turned him down, sitting looking at my chair, sometimes arguing with my boss but it's regular. He's coming into my time. Slowing down to the pace of form filling and background checking and being put on hold. And he's waiting.

One day when my boss is off work sick with stress, I bring him a coffee on the steps and ask how he learnt to be so patient.

He says, “fishing, babe, and prison.”

It's been going on too long. We've fucked him up, rough justice—up-chuck reflex, upper-cut and spooling blood, shovel-hooking and bearded now. He's a single man, has no priority, well would you rather have a family sleeping rough? Better him than them. He doesn't lie plumb now but prawned, hooked nose meets chin like Mr Punch, fists up to the eyes—peekaboo, awaiting boots all night long.

He looks at me. Branded. The word I tried to measure across his face. Apparently unforgiveable, change you forever, monster? His hands especially not. Just like I'd never managed to believe that homes housed the hauntings told of them. They wear their age, their strange auras, and the smells and hum of doorways, but not the dead.

He is the same way. He hugs the measure of me when I'm crying out my cigarette. He is the same way,

“can’t you help me Paula? Come on girl!”

He helps the others with their applications. He reads well and proud of it. He spends too much time on them, and then I get it—he has no priority, but thinks *they’re* fucked, not him. And then we got his note, posted under the door, tucked in for the night:

I’ve tried it the nice way and not got anywhere, I’m only asking the same as anybody else. So now for bad cop—do you really want a man like me, with my criminal record sleeping on your steps, getting drunk and walking up and down the street night and day? Be smart, Mr. Richardson.

*Yours Sincerely,
Pete*

Mister R locked it in his drawer, “pathetic. Once a thug eh?”

They had a fight. I sort of saw it coming. Our captain (not a morning person) kicked or fell over him on his way into the building. Pete retched awake, wriggling out of his sleeping bag, an enormous grub transformed into a hungover moth. He lay into Mister R, quite weakly considering his size and legend. All tangled in his arms. Someone shouted,

“Paula!” and then they were all shouting “Paula! Paula!”

The police came and cuffed him. I was sent home for the day. I said I didn’t want to wear my name badge anymore. My boss’s boss smiled,

“You’re front line Paula. You need to be accountable. Imagine the outrage if a police officer removed his number badge? Anyway, that’s hardly the problem. You shouldn’t have encouraged him, don’t look at me like that—you know what I mean. We girls have to be especially careful with these people.”

Mister R didn’t press charges, said he couldn’t see the point. He told me to find him a flat and spare me the details. It would be a mercy not to see his face every morning. I walked over with a cup of sweet tea and put it down onto his desk.

PRESSED SUIT

Two screws
wrists on
cuffs on tight
hands about yours
not holding.
Mum in the gallery
your new suit bought
cries silent
sobs blotch white
the suit so tight
around upper arms and thighs
they strain against
the seams are showing—grey teeth
on grey a little lighter.

Your mum is thinking
Where is my son?
When did he get so big?
What did they do to in
feed him in there?

But it was you, who hoisted,
dragged muscles out of flesh
always a big lad but stupid strong
buried under your own weight all these years.

The jail gym has been your school
when you were waiting for your trial.

Acceptable to howl
when bench pressed under weights
when you can't pull up
knees bent
to sniff the metal bar that tangles hands.

It was you right?
You did this
but it seemed to make them proud to see you
taking responsibility for yourself
your flesh.

A shame about the other guy
but he was always pushing
daring you, out of his eyes
smashed the fucking TV set!
Only way out of the room.

Your mates said:

ignore it
he's in with the screws
don't give them the excuse
you don't want to be in the dock with *them*.

But nothing felt so good as your fist in his mouth
all the cheering was just bees inside the head
cuffs on
we've got you now
they think
they do.

LODGER

Last night I woke, wet with it, to find her standing over me. Not you, her. Over by our bed, *our* bed and she said, “she’s gone,” just like that, and made to touch me.

She’ll take this place when I’m gone, our place Sylv, and her not even blood. “Squatters rights,” I think she said. What does she take me for?

A dead man. Nothing I do might surprise her.

She has the manner of someone who wouldn’t return your books. Sitting by me as schtum as a cat that’s completed its lick rounds of self-love. Her always eating slightly, mechanically. Displaying silly trinkets she’s “discovered” in the day. She: the lodger never asks to change the channel. Says she’s a sociologist, thinks herself quite the intellectual. I know she’s studying me, that I’m material; white fish, food for thought. Spoilt brat. In my day you learnt a trade and minded your own business.

I could have been a great artist. She thinks she knows about art, so I showed her my photographs.

Photography used to need more than a good eye, you needed to be a scientist too. “Little da Vinci” is what my ma used to call me. She was sensitive, knew I had talent, persuaded dad to get me on the property ladder early.

The sociologist offered nothing much, only asked me, “where did you take this one?”—a photograph of a toxic waste sign.

I say, “no-one’s ever seemed to want to buy it”, she suggests I should try again, the market loves this kind of thing now,

“Banksy” she says. I nod and have no idea what she’s talking about. I guess “Bansky” is slang for money now. I think she is taking the

Michael. She thinks of herself as an artist too, has had a few screenings, well, it's not what you know. Her art doesn't seem to have made her any "Banksy" either.

Always at the same time, the school on the corner spits out its kids and they begin their torment. Lopsided lanky boys *pretend* to be walking home, but I see them fiddling with the gate. Ruffling little messages into my hedge and pushing girls into the springing sticks. Palms flush against their flat chests. They draw symbols again and again, a looping or blocking script. I haven't worked out the pattern yet, but I know they're marking this place out for some mischief. I stand with my fingers flexed above the 9, tap three times, sometimes I make contact. It's good to talk.

(When I'm sure they're gone I slip out to inspect their rubbish with my feet. Cigarettes, sweet wrappers, plastic things. Nothing conclusive but crucial to keep a proper record).

Oftentimes I only become aware that she's in the flat at some foreign sound, a boy she's smuggled in, or her stealing my grub from the fridge again. She sees with her hands, leaving the food at eye level to sour.

I remind the girl over *EastEnders* and Dot's dilemma, that I'm undecided about death. It's nice to know that it's an option but I probably won't get round to it. She'd presumably offer to help though—make a good story for her. I had a pal, Bob, whose wife loved to dance almost as much as mine loved to read; Sylv was always reading. Bob and Edna got into *Strictly Come Dancing* on the telly and decided they would start going to socials, like in the old times. It was there that merrily Edna had tripped and broken her neck. Bob went home and hung himself, his scruff stretched like smoothed out newspaper. Why live? And that's what she needs to understand, with her tray-baked head of correct opinions. To love. To love someone like my Sylvia, the heart can't hold any distractions.

When the bastards phone me up to ask about Sylv's money and what I want doing with it, like they do every day, every single day they make me tell them,

"my wife's dead, she's dead, gone—now leave me alone!" and they

say a stiff sorry like I'm being rude, and then they call AGAIN the very next day, some other grasping voice. She looks at the floor so I can't see the pity in her leaking, shining eyes. She can't believe it's real, thinks I've lost it.

But it's true.

Always keep a knife for the lodgers, that's what my dad taught me, so they know what they are. Know where they stand in the household. Great man my father, local magistrate—Justice till he died.

Always make sure that the lodgers know you have a knife for them, that you know how to use it, that the police have better things to do than deal with such domestics, would give us a little talking to, and you would make your way snot stained and blundering back to your bedroom to sleep the nights over with a chair rammed under the doorknob. Oh yes and never put a lock on their door to discourage a sense of ownership.

It was Sylv who asked if we could stop taking lodgers,

“well we have another two properties after dad's death and wouldn't it be lovely to have our own space and to not be worried, peering at a stranger across the table, and maybe we could try for a baby you know use the space for a new room paint it up lemon, good for a boy or a girl?”

Baby came, all yellowed, ha ha I cried silently by his window.

There is a hotness when she is here, and in the corner of my eye like cataracts. She uses men like doorstops, never introduces us, we sit sharing what she imagines is my sense of disapproval, as if she invented sex.

She dresses like her Nanna did, all these girls do now, because they don't understand the fresh thickness of flesh, how the heat from young bodies reshapes old clothes. I've seen her eye-up Sylv's things too, her little Polish blouses and brocades as well as the nylon tea dresses.

She says, “it's *such* a shame not to wear it,” as if it were for the sake of the clothes.

There's still some of her hair on the collar of the blue one with the off-white flowers. Not a curled keepsake wrapped in ribbon but just a pinch of the body's debris: stuff swept into corners and wiped out of eyes.

The lodger makes me watch *Strictly* on Saturday night. Assumes I will enjoy it because I'm an old fart, but we were never ones for dancing. Sylv loved to read. When I see Bruce Forsyth I think he must be hollow inside that suit. Glitter, drainpipe legs and a bobble head bouncing with old age and innuendo. Why's my Sylvia, Bob and Edna gone and him gurning and flattering into immortality.

None of that for me, for us. No winking at the band.

YOU WILL HAVE YOUR DAY IN COURT

*“To paraphrase T.E Lawrence:
All men dream—it only becomes
dangerous when those dreams
turn into reality.”*

- Paul Bint,
Daily Mail, 2011.

*“Is he pleading not guilty? Is he
definite that he is Keir Starmer?
And if he gets acquitted, where do
I stand?”*

- Keir Starmer,
Evening Standard, 2012.

Paul Bint (1962-) impersonated Keir Starmer in 2009, whilst Starmer was the Director of Public Prosecutions. He was caught out by charging a large taxi fare to Starmer’s chambers. As Keir Starmer he was involved with several women. He had previously presented himself as a ballet dancer, a doctor, a policeman and an aristocrat among other identities. He has spent at least 8 years of his life in prison.

Keir Starmer (1962-) is a barrister, and was the Director of Public Prosecutions (2008-2013) when impersonated by Paul Bint. In 2015 he was elected as a Labour MP for the London constituency of Holborn and St Pancras. When I started writing this piece in 2015 Starmer was about to be elected as Labour Party MP for Holborn and St Pancras. Since April 2020 he has been leader of the Labour Party. He is rumoured to be the inspiration behind the character of Mark Darcy in Helen Fielding’s Bridget Jones’s Diary.

KEIR 2:

She's not as young as

DRINKING COMPANIONS:

A cracking girl

She's not exactly as young as

Gorgeous smile

She's not as young as

Really good teeth actually, has she had
them done?

No spring chicken

"Last orders at the bar!"

But

What?

Are you complaining mate? I'd be after
her m'self if I could

But I

But I bet you get all the girls right?
What with being a barrister and all...
all the girls. Smart girls too, educated...

Lend me your little wig some time mate!
You've got it sussed though, wish I'd
been switched on like you Keir, law
school and that
how many years is it?

Um

And!
You kip above the pub I hear. Nice and
central,
bring the ladies back for a nightcap
like it's your own public lounge.
Her eyes as big as your cock sounds
when you shake notes at the staff.
The barman rolling his olives at your
smooth moves.
Then it's wink, wink boys
I'm turning in for the night.
Hand on her arse all the way up the stairs,
finger on her bumhole.
We. See. You.

KEIR 1:

Keir leaves the pub and pushes up his
shoulders past the cold and fume of that
old man there, outside the church. His
spine inclined like split cheese strings
from his white stick. Is he really blind? Is
it a crutch or a prop? The sage's speech
echoes around the square:

THE BIRD OF ILL OMEN:

"Crime is the end-point of a continuum
of disorder! It is not separate from other
forms of aggravation and breakdown.
It is the run-down council estate where
music blares out of windows early in the
morning; it is the graffiti on the walls; it
is aggression in the shops; it is bins that
are never emptied; oil stains across the
streets; it is kids that show no respect;

it is large trucks racing through your
roads; it is streets you do not dare walk
down at night; it is always being careful;
it is a symbol of a world falling apart. It
is a lack of respect for humanity and for
fundamental human decency.”

A sweet disorder in address, and words
that spittle down his chin.
It holds and hurts.

Keir turning,
pockets all this mess and walks on—
dangerous to stop too long, it would seem
like an endorsement.

He cannot be seen to listen as if he did not
already know the answers.
He is the D.P.P, soon he will be the Labour
candidate. He is heartily endorsed.
Back patted and it's a safe seat, just need
to get on, get in, and sort it all out.

Actually—
it looks quite bad with that man standing
there, brings down the tone of the area
somewhat. This is the home of the legal
profession after all...
it now seems accusatory.

Perhaps he should call somebody?

In the morning,

“King’s Head?”

another then.

Just a half...

“Night Bill!”

And tripping on his exit.

Body erupting happily with the plant
inside him, belly stretched with beer, his
fish-guts now the filter. His throat caught
against the scratching scarf, he crosses
the street and takes the first left, a ditch, a
broken fence into
a yard, a piss?

And tosses his nose towards the darkness
proud, with more a turn of the neck than
needed,
“fuckafox!”

Stop.

So close,

and poised with leg raised,
is Keir imagining, photographing?
A sarky stare into his eyes, the D.P.P,
the stare out sickens him, the look,
I know you asshole—from this fox,
a brazen look: you’re just a larger animal.
Keir changes up the pace, strides on,
a different route home to unstick the
brain.

The fox’s eyes, the brazen.

Boxy hedges with wandering hands,
solitary workman’s gloves, trick
pavements.

Keir wishes suddenly that he could
just have a drink with the guy, this man
pretending to be him, it was just so odd
and sad.

His shit teeth.

The fox, the look the cab driver gave him
seeking “Keir’s” fare was: and what’s so
special about you mate? Just another
posh lawyer with a clear baritone and a
generous forehead.

‘kafox! Again!

But how had “Keir” picked him out,
selected him for skin. Was it the McLibel
stuff or Tomlinson? Did he like his face,
fancy him? Had he met him, shook his
hand? Shit, had he represented him in
court?

All the girls, the women he’s fucked or
tried it on with in his name.

A life’s work on a cocktail stick,
Keir’s resume muttered into slurry
breasts.

Where’d she come from!

Not lost at least, and happy drunk or
purposive, her phone a flame in mitts.

Carol concert girl.

Still young enough to get dragged to
church and sit glowering under a greasy
fringe, whilst all the fathers around notice
how grown up she's becoming.
Flesh trembling on her pretty legs, skirt
thumping a lift off her thunderous butt,
winnowing her way.

A live body to follow home.

She turns her face towards him,
just a hint, a blink of fear.

He thinks better to cross the road as we're
going the same way.
I'll accelerate out of her unease.

A hard case to prosecute, pubescent child
abuse often is. The defendant seemed
confused by the barely-illegal, and seeing
how the jury judged those girls and their
fat, feral mothers:

No good girls,
tiny future-sluts,
skinny now but
look at that
body on the mum:
drama spilling out
and written up her arms.

But Keir knows better. Not bad girls, poor
girls, and not without charm. Remember
who's on trial here.

He wants to shake the jury by its necks, all
high on CSI and photographs. And photos?

But they had seen the footage too, that
showed how scared they were the
morning after. Giving statements in
tracksuits and long rat-tailing hair, their
story straight and credible despite their
youth.

Their terror made them beautiful—
Kate Moss topless on a beach circa
1990something, coaxed out of a bra by a
kindly female photographer.

Scared of him,
and blonde police women
with their hats off and recorders on.

Another pub, a drink, alone?
How famous am I really?

The lights are passed now, don't double
back, it's late, but why did the pub, life
pressed to windows like hands on glass
make him feel so reeled about?

He looks back at the dark figure, a smooth
point of nowt beyond the bins, walk on.

And just be glad they came.

Imagine girls at court whose mothers
stay away, and girls are not their mothers

anyway.

Silent night.
A nation of shopkeepers now artisanal
bread-makers, just itching to do
something with their hands. Their
blackboards tucked up for the night, in
painful carefree modern calligraphy.

Ah! Excepting the 24hrs. Pop in, ask
Shafique for a pint, to make pancakes
for the morning, and mark the light
extravagantly.

“Hi Shaq, I’m making pancakes for the
wife, just milk no mix, I’m doing it the old
fashioned way, how’s things?”

SHAFIQUE:

“The loitering and thieving,
they think it’s cowboys and Indians,”

“they’re just kids,” his joke not Keir’s,
(they both know he’s from Pakistan).

“Night!”

“Night mate.”

And sleep.

KEIR 2:

And sleep—

I am Keir

Sleepwalker.

I'm on the sand shifting, a boy's own,
choose your own adventure.

Out here in the desert I am of Arabia,
both of and not of the desert.

All that can be sure is that I might
deign to have dealings with you. That in
doing so I would have the fairness of a
landscape in a timer.

You please me and sand piles dimpled
round your feet, you disappoint me and I
wiggle off a sand-snake frown.
Soft simplicity.

I would bring you stories of other
worlds, trickled detail at first and then
pouring out—an unchecked wound.

Always a note deliberately off-key,
like the tiled floor of a madrasa.
No one could pity me my stories.

Anyhow, you seem to soak them up like
moss.

KIER 1

Keir is free-skiing gracefully, effortlessly,
doing star jumps and
smashing into triangular trees that burst into flames.
He accumulates no injuries,
is not fatigued,
yet the yeti always runs out to get him after 2000 metres.

KEIR 2:

So long inside the bird.

Don't believe it when they tell you
that one can go anywhere in the mind.

If I could have folded myself
inside her I would have.
Me: the mirror snapping shut,
hers: the handbag I'd get lost in.
But as long as she's always looking for
me, doesn't forget about all my shyness.
I would be safe in her,

belonging among the things.
Depended-upon, woman's things.

I sing she's gonna love me forever.
Just the thought of being alone, of dying
alone with drink and black fingernails,
it's an absolute killer.

My father with black fingernails.

Elbow steady on table,
microphone in hand
Face is cheekbones,
mic in mouth.
Elbow steady on table,
mic in hand,
right hand pen en pointe.

No! that's too much,
too aggressive.
Put the pen down
Face is cheekbones,
mic in mouth.

Face not moving from the jury,
never,
not even when addressing/dismissing—
“an outrageous claim,”
his competition.

He's edifying.
Carving himself into the seat,
the hulk of justice in a navy suit.

Coming to in 1984,
wake me up before you go go

Gradual detail disappointing—
prison again.

GUARDS:

“Come on mate, you can handle this,
it's not like you've not been here before.”

I'm never gonna dance again.

“It's not like you won't be here again.”

KEIR 1:

Believe you me—
once we slip down the slippery slope of
presumption, away from the snug ski
lodge of neutrality, we will quickly lose the
scent of justice, warm as pies and rising
high above the pines.
There will be no beautiful Bavarian
barmaids, blindfolded and dispensing

beer to every man who sprouts a glass.

Justine the partially-sighted alpine, gives
herself freely to all that ask.

It is true that some are shy of Justine and
do not know how to enquire, and, for the
same complaint cannot ask the others
how to make an approach.

Just offer them the full range of books to
swear on, to make them feel at home.

We must fight for the retention and state-
funded maintenance of the ski-lift of legal
aid, without which some will never be able
to scale Justine's vertiginous bar.

But many will argue, why do the poor
aspire to go skiing anyway?
It is a luxury leisure pursuit.
Why would they need to pay for Justine's
services when they're always at it from
what we hear? If they're really serious
they will do it the old-fashioned way, pull
themselves up by their snow straps.

KEIR 2:

Because I am a good bloke, I really am.
I really, really liked these girls
and I wanted them to like me too.

It's hard though, once you've felt that on
you—

the gaze of a beautiful woman. She's so
impressed with you, and she's glowing,
so lovely because you could have had
anyone but you're learning her and she
feels like a fraud—all women do, that's
the rub, she can't believe she's good
enough—

Like Baby Spice: understated and not
flashy. Sexy but in a really secret way.
All grown up but smelling of damp sugar.

A colleague once suggested:

“Like Hitler,
but a few shades lighter.”

Public speaking:
keep the passion
but show a little less
Make them lean in.

How far are your wrists thrown
from their sleeves by that gesture?
With cufflinks?

Now imagine them there,
at the notch of the wrist,
the arm's instep—
their small diamonds will
slow you down in future.

Now.
Walk slow and talk slower.
Always walk more slowly
than you normally would
and then slow down even more,
dropping to child level,
just glide to knees,
a stoop so subtle.
Like a buzzard
landing in a field
to snatch
a graceful victory—
this is how you politic.

Make them feel that it's not an effort
for you to meet them at their level,
LITERALLY.
But, don't touch them or use their knees
as leverage, or groan
as you stand back up.

And,
if you speak with them—
no more than five minutes,
you've got to work the room.

When I see pictures of the Spice
Girls looking happy and tidy in
Hello Magazine I always cry a little.

Deserved happiness.
Especially Geri.

Staring into the eyes of the middle-
distance, as if you and she share an
understanding.

Stepping smoothly off his horse
(someone silently leads it away),
nodding slowly to Mr Bingley.
Wishing all the people would leave now
or stop looking at him.

Why had he thrown this party?
Walking too abruptly from the room.

Sometimes you don't need a great big
stick, you just need a forum.

I made a rod for my own back and I
accept that.

How do you tell a girl you really like that
you've been inside?

They don't like it, not the nice girls, the lovelies: ones that make you feel better just by being near them, elevated, if you know what I mean!?

But seriously, you're with a beautiful girl, you treat her right, she's hanging on your every word. This could be the start of something big...

How you gonna tell her:

"Darling, I'm not the D.P.P, I'm a con?!"

It's just not going to happen and anyway, you are a barrister for her, you are that guy. You're giving her free legal advice for Pete's sake, it's real advice, good advice.

That's what you are, sitting there, having a lovely meal together, you're a barrister for you too. You need to believe it to do it right, this is my perfect moment—it's not going to fall apart just because I don't have some posh certificate. Because my mum and dad didn't care enough to set me on the right path.

You're not hurting anyone—they want to believe.

Isn't all love a con if you think about it?
A willing suspension of disbelief?

MR. DARCY:

“In vain have I struggled. It will not do. My feelings will not be repressed. You must allow me to tell you how ardently I admire and love you.”

I loved that bit!
I know, I'm really soppy.
You're probably the most interesting man
they've met.
A man who is what he says,
a man who lives,
a dangerous man.
There's a little mystery about me,
it's not big-headed if it's the truth!
So how do you make them believe?
You just don't give them a moment to
think otherwise,
throw them something,
if it doesn't carry,
forget it,
throw them something else.

KEIR 1:

Keir is dreaming about sex.
The libidinal voter—he appeals to them.
Is that a problem? Crass, to play on that?

To be dynamic but concerned,
to take their pulses under pressure.

They search out his wedding ring
(pity, a daddy too) in conversation.
He has that thing, erotic capital. And
prosecution is a tease.

You know what you've got,
you're the only one who does,
they're waiting, but unwitting.
They know you know the law intimately,
and that is enough for them.
It is for the jury anyway.

Softer option Labour.
Parents who cycle with babies
but feel guilty about it,
balanced on the back,
so close to the wheel.
Hardworking families, I appeal to you.

If you're looking for a reason
it's not hard
I'd go back to when I was twelve.
Not much love lost in my family,
not much.

I mean my mum, she didn't encourage
me much, didn't stand up for me/
to me either when I needed it.

So you see, not much choice

It's okay.
I had
few friends,
real friends. I think they were jealous.

The girls loved me though, even then!
They can always spot a bad boy, a true
romantic.

My step dad hit me though,
knocked me, when I was twelve.

JOURNALIST:

“Where did you get that fur coat?”

This is all for you.
There's no one left
and now I'll be
unwatched forever.
Write that down—

He lit his Cuban cigar, I offered him
a match. He smoked it slowly his
oversized Omega watch slipping back
down his skinny wrist into the fur after
each puff.

“Are you getting all this?
Do you want me to show
how it's done, the con?
What are you into? Girls? Cars?”

Stubble smile, lips putting forth
snaggleteeth.

Shit teeth.

“You’re a car man I can tell.”

Too thin for his padded shoulders.

“Let’s get us a ride.
People in glass showrooms shouldn’t,
heh, there’s a joke in there somewhere.
That one’s free.
I could have been a journalist.”

I curse my littleness as
they all look on expecting me.

“Keir do something!”

Wake me up in a crisis,
not to get broken glass in my feet,
a tea towel to stem the bleeding.

My words bubble in my mouth,
they crane their necks
to read—repeat them
flickering on the film, before I even.

All my folly is larger now and fit for
recollection.

“I am sorry about your result, I am so, so
sorry.
The case was solid, but you can never tell
with juries.”

Lying beside them.
Breath misting up their skin between
shoulder blades and not being able to
bite, to nip only with these teeth, this
touch, what’s realer than that?

That’s what I tell them,
when they asked me why—
you asked me to hold you.

It made me just so happy to be sat
beside them, just watching rubbish telly.
Rubbing feet and ribbing on the passing
scenes, but them thinking he is so clever
and this is how a smart guy watches telly.

It made them feel good I knew it. Better,
that I had chosen them, to share with this
sweet time.

I honestly loved them all.
They’d tell their friends,
“Oh I forget the details, but Keir always
remembers that [politics] kind of stuff.”

They were smart girls. I could tell,
they wanted the secrets of the Big Man,
the famous barrister and that I needed
them—that was the secret and it made
them love me more.

Perhaps I shouldn't have done it but
I know I made them happy,
their dream.

It was for the girls really.

All rise.

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‘You Will Have Your Day in Court’: direct quotations:

On page 16: John Lea and Yock Young, *What is to be done about Law and Order?* (London: Penguin, 1984), 55. On page 28: Jane Austen, *Pride and Prejudice* (London: Penguin, 2002) chapter 34.

