

ROSS O'CARROLL-KELLY

Rhino
what **You** did
Last Summer



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Rhino What You Did Last Summer
by
Ross O'Carroll-Kelly

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Prologue

The old man looks up at us, over the top of his reading glasses, and says the *cunillo* is wonderful.

Erika lifts her glass and goes, ‘Happy New Year,’ but I’m too in shock to return the toast. So her and the old man end up just clinking glasses.

‘It will be,’ he goes. ‘It will be now.’

I look at *him*, then back at her. I don’t see it. I don’t see any resemblance at all. Or maybe I don’t want to see it. It’s one of those shocks that’s, like, too big to take in all at once.

I stand up. Except I don’t actually *remember* standing up? Let’s just say I find myself suddenly standing up.

He turns to her and goes, ‘Oh, here comes the waiter – have you decided what you’re going to have?’

She’s practically popping out of that black satin bustier, but of course I’m not allowed to even notice shit like that anymore.

I’ve got to get out of here. I start walking. I hear *him* call me. I hear *her* call me as well. But I keep going.

I walk out of the restaurant, out of the hotel and out onto the street. It’s snowing – coming down pretty heavy, in fact.

I get in the cor, turn the key – still in a daze – and point her in the direction of actual Barcelona.

I put my foot down and I’m suddenly tearing along all these narrow cliff roads in the pitch dark with the snow blinding me, not giving a fuck – if I’m being honest – whether I even crash?

But then my phone suddenly beeps. It’s, like, a text message

from Sorcha, saying that she and Honor are thinking about me and that they're hoping that we beat Ireland A. She obviously knows fock-all about rugby, but it's still an amazing message to get and I kill my speed, suddenly remembering everything I have to live for, and realizing at that moment exactly where I'm headed.

What happened back there in the restaurant has made me realize that I need to be with my family. I need to see my own daughter and I need to find out if there's still a chance with Sorcha. I focked things up there like only I know how. But I need to know if there's still something there. Because it's with her and Honor that I actually belong.

I notice a set of lights in my rearview and somehow I *know* they belong to Erika.

Soon I arrive at the border crossing. The dude operating the barrier can't believe it's me. His eyes are out on practically stalks. 'I hear eet on the reddie,' he goes. 'It hees true? We score a try hagainst Island?'

I nod. 'We also kept them to less than a hundred points,' I go, which *is* the bigger achievement.

'A try hagainst Island!' he goes. 'You are hero to all of Handorra!'

He waves away my passport. No interest in even seeing it. I look in the mirror and watch Erika's lights approach.

'Dude,' I go, 'can you do me a favour? I'm trying to give this bird behind me the slip . . .'

He's there, 'Ha crezzy fan, yes?'

I'm like, 'Something like that. Can you make sure there's some kind of paperwork she's got to fill in? As in, a lot of it?'

'For you,' he goes, lifting the barrier for me, 'effery theeng hees poseeble.'

I put the foot down and off I go again, snaking through the Pyrenees, and I'm suddenly having one of my world-famous

intellectual moments, thinking about how much your life can change in the space of an hour. It's like, there I was earlier tonight, being carried around the pitch shoulder-high, the hero of a – pretty much – country, which I've now left behind and will probably never see again. *And* it turns out that Erika's my sister.

My mind drifts back to a day, whatever, six, seven years ago, the day her old dear's divorce from Tim became final. Erika was majorly upset. I called around, supposedly to offer my sympathies, and we ended up going at it like two jailbirds on a conjugal visit.

I snap back to reality, realizing, very suddenly, that the border guard won't be able to hold her for long – not with her charms. And not in that bustier.

I put the foot down again.

It takes, like, two and a half hours, but I finally reach the airport. It's, like, two o'clock in the morning when I pull up outside the main terminal building, throwing the rental car in a set-down area, not even bothering my hole to return it, just leaving the keys in the basically ignition.

I realize that I don't even have any baggage. All my clobber's still back at the apartment.

I peg it in and check the departures board, my eyes going up and down what to me is just a mass of letters, waiting for two words to jump out at me: Los Angeles. There they are.

LA. The Windy City. Call it what you want – but that's where I'm headed.

I miss Honor so much that when I think about her, it feels like I'm having a hort attack. And, if I'm being honest, Sorcha too, even *if* she's with an auditor now.

The flight leaves at, like, 7.00 a.m. I order a first-class ticket using my old man's credit card – the least he owes me in the circumstances.

There's, like, a major crowd hanging around the actual departure gate. As I get closer, I realize that it's the Ireland A team. They must be going out on a charter.

Suddenly, roysh, they're all turned around, looking straight at me, all in their blazers and chinos. We're talking Keith Earls. We're talking Jeremy Staunton. We're talking Johnny Sexton. I'm expecting words like *traitor* to be suddenly banded around like there's *no* actual tomorrow? But someone – might even be Roger Wilson – starts clapping, roysh, then one by one they all join in and before I know it the sea of Ireland A players has suddenly ported, and I'm being given a guard of honour through the departures gate.

It's actually just what I need.

But it's as I'm reaching the end of the line that I hear her voice. 'Ross!' she goes.

Of course, I should keep walking – I don't know *why* I don't? Maybe because I hear one or two wolf-whistles from the Ireland A goys. I turn around. She's obviously been crying, from the state of her boat.

She goes, 'Please don't go!'

I'm there, 'I need to get my head around this – time, space, blahdy blahdy blah.'

'Do you think *I'm* not confused?' she goes. 'Do you think *I'm* not angry? How can I ever trust my mum again?'

I go to turn around. 'I'm going to spend some time with my daughter and my – still – wife.'

'I could come with you,' she goes. 'We could get to know each other.'

I'm there, 'Maybe down the line. Right now, I need to get my head straight – see Sorcha, maybe find out if there's still . . .'

'A chance?'

'I was going to say a sniff. But yeah.'

She suddenly throws her arms around me, buries her head in my chest, then on go the waterworks. Out of the corner of my eye, I can see one or two of the Ireland A players looking at me, obviously thinking, whoa, rather you than me, Dude.

I rub her bare back and tell her she should be wearing more. She pulls away and looks at me, rivers of mascara running down her face, and says she left the restaurant in such a hurry, she forgot her coat.

I kiss her on the forehead and her hair smells of, I don't know, almonds and dandelions. I feel a sudden and familiar tightening in my trousers and, hating myself, I quickly turn away from her and tell her that I'd love to stay longer, but I've got, like, a plane to catch?

1. Right back where we started from

‘How do you like them babies?’ he goes, pointing at his shoes with a rolled-up copy of the *Wall Street Journal*. ‘John Lobb custom brogues. Want to know what they cost?’

I actually *don't*?

‘Four! Thousand! Dollars!’ he goes anyway.

Of course, I just shrug, because it doesn't matter *how* good the Toms are – a man wearing a bluetooth earpiece is only five-eighths of a man.

Still, it's not up to me to tell him.

‘Cillian!’ Sorcha goes. ‘We're supposed to be showing Ross around the house – *not* what you're wearing?’

This isn't, like, jealousy or anything, but I've never worked out what she sees in this tosspot.

I mention – being nice more than anything – that it's some pile of stones and straight away he has to mention that Beechwood Canyon is one of *the* most prestigious addresses *in* the Hollywood Hills.

It's only fucking rented anyway.

‘Madonna used to live, like, up the road?’ Sorcha goes. ‘*And* Forest Whitaker. And who else, Pookie?’

Pookie? Jesus!

He's there, ‘Aldous Huxley – *if* that name means anything to you, Ross,’ pretty much *looking* to be decked?

They lead me out into this, like, huge entrance hallway. ‘It's essentially a classic, 1930s-style Spanish villa,’ *he* goes. ‘Ten thousand square feet. Twelve bedrooms. Sixteen bathrooms.

Eight-car garage. Pool. Spa. Home theatre. *Four* bars. Three-hundred-and-sixty-degree views . . .’

I pull a face as if to say, you know – wouldn’t exactly be *my* cup of tea?

Then they lead me into the kitchen, which Sorcha mentions is – oh my God! – the kitchen she’s, like, *always* wanted?

The whole gaff is like something off *MTV Cribs*, in fairness to it.

She’s there, ‘It’s got, like, a gourmet centre island,’ which I can see for myself, ‘with, like, three Sub-Zero refrigerators, an *actual* chef’s Morice stove, a Fisher and Paykel double-drawer dishwasher *and* a built-in Nespresso . . .’

‘It’s a limited edition one as well,’ *he* goes. ‘You can’t buy them in the shops,’ and then, for no reason at all, he starts doing these, like, stretching exercises. This is a goy, bear in mind, who never played rugby.

‘Oh my God,’ Sorcha goes, ‘I haven’t even asked you about your flight.’

I’m like, ‘Yeah, the flight was fine,’ pulling up a high stool. ‘Bit wrecked after it.’

‘Have you decided yet what you’re going to do for a carbon offset?’

It’s amazing. I’ve known Sorcha for, like, ten years – been married to her for, what, three and a bit? – and she still knocks me sideways with questions like that.

‘Because what you *can* do,’ she goes, ‘to pay off your emission debt, is set up a standing order with one of those companies that plant trees on your behalf. That way you can fly *and* drive with no, like, guilt at all.’

‘I already do,’ would be the wrong thing to say, so instead I just go, ‘Cool,’ cracking on to actually *give* a fuck about, I suppose, world affairs.

She asks me if I fancy a coffee and I tell her I'd actually prefer to see Honor, if I could.

'Bad news,' *he* suddenly goes, 'we've just put her down.'

Sorcha's like, 'Cillian!' and he's there, 'Sorcha, if you wake her now, she'll be awake for the night. And I told you I've got that report to read on the high default rates on subprime and adjustable rate mortgages and their likely impact on the US economy.'

Adjustable rate mortgages? I'm thinking, he's *getting* decked – I don't give a fuck how much Sorcha likes him.

But then *she* goes, 'Ross hasn't seen his daughter for, like, three months, Cillian. He's just flown for ten hours,' and then she turns around to me and she's like, 'Ross, come on . . .' and she leads me back out into the hall and up this big, winding staircase.

Honor's is the fourth bedroom on the right. I push the door, but when I catch, like, a glimpse of her curls in the light from the window, I end up just, like, filling up with tears and I have to actually turn away. All I want to do – I don't know why – is peg it back down the stairs and out of there. But Sorcha grabs me in, like, a clinch and whispers that it's okay, I suppose I'd have to say soothingly, in my ear. 'Take your time,' she goes, running her hand through my hair, so I take a few seconds to, like, compose myself, then I turn around and, with her arm around me, Sorcha sort of, like, slow-walks me over to the bed.

I get down on my knees and watch her tiny sleeping face. She's so beautiful. 'I can't believe how much she's changed,' I go, 'even in that time.'

Sorcha tells me that she still looks like me, which she doesn't. She's actually a ringer for Sorcha, but it's still, like, a really nice thing for her to say?

I stroke her little cheek and go, 'I've missed you so much,'

and she actually opens her eyes for, like, two or three seconds, then closes them again.

I turn around to Sorcha and go, ‘I better let her sleep,’ and Sorcha’s like, ‘Why don’t you come back in the morning? You can take her for the day?’

I ask her if she’s sure and she’s like, ‘Ross, I feel – oh my God – *so* guilty for taking her away from you,’ and I tell her not to be stupid, then I tell her – because I obviously didn’t want to say it in front of *him* – that she looks well herself, as in *really* well, as in really well to the point of pretty much incredible?

She says it’s possible to be practically vegan in LA and that she’s been pretty much existing on mango slices and tempeh sausage patties. She says she also can’t believe how much she underestimated the power of the blender.

I tell her I’m not just talking weight-wise. I’m there, ‘You’re, I don’t know, *glowing*? The States has always suited you,’ remembering how well she always looked when she came back from her J1er and how it always made me feel guilty for doing the dirt on her while she was away.

She smiles and says thank you. She smells of buttermilk moisturizer and in normal circumstances – you *know* me – I’d try to throw the lips on her there and then. But I don’t, because, well, I think deep down I know that the reason she looks so amazing is that *I* haven’t been in her life.

‘Hey, what are you doing tonight?’ she suddenly goes.

I’m there, ‘I was just going to head back to the hotel – basically crash.’

She’s like, ‘Okay, you’re *not*? I’m going to take you to, like, *the* best hot dog place in – oh my God – the actual world.’

See, she knows I’m a focker for the hot dogs.

‘You haven’t lived until you’ve tasted these,’ she goes.

We head downstairs and she tells Cillian she’s taking me to Pink’s. And even though he tries to play it cool, roysh, you

can tell he's *not* a happy bunny? 'I thought you were tired,' he goes to me, showing me his entire hand. It's like playing poker with your fucking granny.

I'm there, 'I think I'm getting my actual second wind.'

'Well, I'll come as well,' he goes, but Sorcha's there, 'Er – and leave Honor on her own? Cillian, you said you had work to do. We'll only be, like, an hour. Two at the most,' and I make sure to give him a big shit-eating smile on the way out the door.

We're heading for, like, North La Brea, but Sorcha tells me I can switch off the SatNav because she, like, *knows* the way? I ask her what she thinks of the cor – we're talking a BMW 650 convertible – and she goes, 'How did you even rent this – you don't have, like, a licence?' and I laugh and tell her that I borrowed JP's.

She's there, 'Oh my God, you could get into *so* much trouble for that,' then she shakes her head, *roysh*, as if to say, same old Ross, he's never going to change – thank God.

The queue for hot dogs is up the fucking street and around the corner, but it's good because it gives us, like, an hour to catch up. 'Like, *all* the celebrities come here?' Sorcha goes. 'I saw Famke Janssen here a few weeks ago and I'm pretty sure Mila Kunis. And my really, really good friend Elodine – Honor goes on, like, playdates with her daughter, Jagger? – she saw Brody Jenner ordering a pastrami reuben. It's like, *Oh! My God!*'

I laugh. 'Don't take this the wrong way,' I go, 'because I mean it as an actual compliment – you've become, like, so American. You just seem really at home here.'

She smiles, I suppose you'd say, warmly. 'The only thing I don't like about LA,' she goes, 'is that the water is – oh my God – *so* hard. Look, my hair's frizzy – and that's even *after* an hour with my GHD . . .'

I give her, like, a sympathetic look.

‘That’s why all of the stars are getting Evian filtered into their boilers. It said in *People* that Rhea Durham’s doing it – even though she’s denied it.’

I tell her I can’t believe the size of the gaff they’ve ended up in. ‘Are Pricewaterhouse actually paying for it?’

‘No – it’s, like, a weird one?’ she goes. ‘Bob Soto, who’s, like, the head of the department that Cillian’s been seconded to, his wife is, like, an attorney and it’s one of her clients who owns it. They’ve gone on, like, a cruise for a year and they needed someone to just, like, house-sit? When we saw it, we were just like, Oh my God!’

I’m there, ‘I’d say you were.’

‘I can’t believe you won’t stay with us,’ she goes. ‘You’ve seen it, Ross – there’s loads of room.’

I’m there, ‘No, I’m Kool and the Gang in the Viceroy. Hey, did I tell you I’m in the exact same room where Christopher Moltisanti stayed in *The Sopranos*?’

‘Oh my God,’ she goes, ‘that must be, like, *so* expensive.’

I’m there, ‘Fock it – the old man’s paying. The least he owes me when you think about it.’

It’s at that point that I probably should mention Erika. But I don’t – maybe I’m enjoying being around Sorcha too much. Instead, I ask her about work.

‘Well, work-wise,’ she goes, ‘the last few months have been, like, a fact-finding mission for me? Even just walking around Melrose or Robertson, I’ve got – oh my God – *so* many ideas for the shop back home. Betsey Johnson’s got, like, vertical TV screens playing actual catwalk footage? It’s like, oh my God – why has no one in Ireland even *thought* about that? Except BTs, obviously.’

‘And I’m thinking of having, like, a seating area with huge pink couches – PVC, obviously, not leather. If people are

relaxed, they *will* spend. Elodine told me that and she studied actual retail.

‘And even just the way they talk to you in the shops, Ross. If they see you with, like, two or three items, they come over to you and go, “Do you want me to start a room for you?” And then they, like, compliment you? They’re like, “Oh my God, that is *such* a good look for you!” I’m going to start saying *all* of those.’

Then she asks me what’s been happening in *my* life. I’m there, ‘Well, you know about the whole Andorra thing – a try against Ireland A, blahdy blahdy blah. Let’s just say there’s going to be a lot of teams all of a sudden interested in my services . . .’

Sorcha’s phone beeps. Except it’s not a phone – it’s, like, a pink BlackBerry? I presume it’s a text from Cillian – still bullying – but she reads it with, like, her mouth open, then tells me that members of the National Restaurant Association are furious with Kevin Federline for appearing in a commercial as a fast-food worker dreaming of becoming a rapper. They say it demeans low-wage restaurant workers.

Of course, I’m left just shaking my head.

‘Oh,’ she goes, ‘it’s this, like, celebrity alert service – Cillian got me a subscription for Christmas. You get, like, *all* the news and gossip, straight to your phone, as it happens. Even photographs. Oh my God, I *have* to show you the giraffe-print Escada halter that Jada Pinkett Smith wore to the New York Fashion Fête.’

Luckily, roysh, it doesn’t come to that, because we’re suddenly at the top of the queue. I order, like, a chilli cheese dog with, obviously, fries and I persuade Sorcha to have, like, a Patt Morrison Baja Veggie, even though she says she’s trying to steer clear of guacamole.

We end up sitting in this little, I suppose, yord at the back of

the place, at a little white plastic table, wolfing down what I would have to say is the most incredible hot dog I've ever tasted.

Sorcha mentions that she's going to buy Ayaan Hirsi Ali's autobiography again. 'I was only talking to Elodine the other night about her whole struggle?' she goes. 'And I thought, oh my God, I *have* to re-read it.'

I swat away a mosquito the size of a small bird, then I tell her it's great to see her. She smiles at me – like old times – and says it's great to see me, too.

The ugly munter – what is she, following me now?

She's all, 'What you're asking me, I think, is why do I write? And the answer to that is that I can't imagine *not* writing . . .'

I'm, like, shouting at the TV, going, 'You swamp donkey! You total fucking mong!'

'I know this is going to sound, oh, impossibly celestial,' she's giving it, 'but sometimes it's as if my fingers are being directed – that I'm merely a cipher for this wonderful story that the universe has determined *must* be told.'

'*Karma Suits You*,' the dude interviewing her goes. 'Hey, what a crazy title – what's it about?'

'Well, it's the story of a fifty-something Irish woman who experiences a sexual reawakening – a re-blossoming, if you like – after going through the menopause. She abandons her old, rather repressed life *in* Ireland and comes to America, where she experiences this rebirth, which is where the idea of karma comes in. And of course she meets all these wonderful men – a fireman, obviously, a two-hundred-pound NBA star, even an elevator repairman – and has all these wonderfully erotic experiences, some of which she would have considered impossible without recourse to heavy pain medication . . .'

I'm, like, screaming now. 'You're a fucking disgrace! You absolute fucking manatee!'

'Of course, the full title,' the other interviewer – who's, like, a woman – goes, 'is *Karma Suits You – States of Ecstasy*. Because during the course of her year, she has – let's just say – *relations* with fifty men in fifty different states. And, controversially, fifty different positions. Can I just read out a line from one of my favourites, which is Alaska? This is the scene that ends with the kneeling lotus.

'He said he was a whale fisherman. She looked at him askance, studying his leathery face, his commanding, callused hands, his entire bearing, straight as a longboat. Her resistance melted like the polar ice cap. Soon, he was exploring her Inside Passage and she was groaning like an age-worn sled dog.'

The audience claps – they actually clap. 'You're a fucking shambles!' I'm going.

Suddenly there's, like, a loud knock on the door, then it bursts open before I get a chance to even get out of the sack. There's all of a sudden a man stood at the foot of my bed – black, if the truth be told – and he's wearing, like, a uniform. At first, roysh, I think he's a cop, but then he says he's, like, hotel security.

'Sir,' he goes, 'we've had a complaint from one or two guests about a ruckus coming from this suite.'

'A ruckus?'

'A ruckus, Sir.'

I nod in the direction of the old Savalas. 'Well, can you actually blame me?'

He turns around, looks at the screen. '*Regis and Kelly*,' he goes. 'My wife never misses it. Though I gotta tell you, I *think* she preferred Kathie Lee . . .'

'I'm talking about *her*, the guest – fucking so-called – they've got on . . .'

He sits on the end of the bed. ‘She’s kinda pretty,’ he goes. ‘She Irish?’

I’m like, ‘Pretty? You’ve got to be shitting me – that’s a double-bagger if ever I saw one.’

He’s there, ‘Got nice pins, too. What *you* got against this lady?’

‘What I’ve got against her is that she *happens* to be my old dear.’

‘Old what?’

‘It’s, like, our word for mother? And it’s, like, how would you like to see *your* mother up on the wall there talking filth?’

‘I wouldn’t, I guess. But I gotta tell you, you gotta keep it down, my man. You in the Viceroy now – not the Y. You hearing me?’

I tell him I am.

‘I’m Carl,’ he goes.

A high-five in LA, I’m happy to say, is exactly the same as a high-five back home.

‘No more ruckus – know what I’m saying?’

I’m there, ‘Kool and the Gang, my friend. Kool *and* the Gang.’

Then he’s suddenly gone.

My phone beeps – a text from, like, Sorcha: OMG ur mum is on live with regis n kelly! u must be omg SO proud.

‘Because I think it’s our duty,’ the stupid hound’s going, ‘and I don’t use that word lightly, *as* writers to challenge norms, be they sexual, be they . . . whatever.’

‘Yeah,’ this Kelly one’s going, ‘back in the, er, Emerald Isle . . .’

‘The Old Sod,’ Regis or whatever he’s called goes.

‘. . . you’re considered something of an Irish Catherine Millet – would that be fair to say?’

‘I think it would,’ the old dear goes, ‘insofar as we’re both libertines. We both believe in free expression *in* a sexual context. *And* in all its forms, whether that’s nihilism, sadomasochism, autoerotic asphyxiation . . .’

I can’t actually listen to any more of this. I reach down, grab one of my Dubes off the floor and fock it straight at the TV. It bounces off, roysh, and I’m lying there thinking, it’s a good job *I* don’t wear John Lobb custom brogues, otherwise it would have probably cracked the . . .

The next thing, roysh – pretty unexpected, I have to say – the TV just, like, falls off the wall and there’s what would have to be described as a loud explosion, we’re talking sparks everywhere.

I’m like, ‘Holy fock!’

I pick up the phone, dial zero for reception. I’m there, ‘Listen, tell Carl not to bother his orse coming back up – everything’s cool. By the way, I’ve pretty much broken the TV. Is that likely to show up on the Harry Hill?’

I was convinced that Sorcha was shitting me when I saw them first.

Stiletos for babies.

I asked her was it not, like, dangerous, but she said that girls eventually *have* to learn to wear designer heels and it’s best if they stort young.

I could have pointed out that Chloe back home has been told she has to have both hips replaced, the result of a lifetime wearing designer heels, but it’s, like, no – I’m actually over here to chill. So I said nothing while she put on Honor’s little red patent pumps – ‘*so* like my *actual* Roger Viviers’ – and warned me not to let her walk more than a few steps unassisted.

So we’re sitting in, like, Bornes and Noble in Santa Monica – in the little Storbucks in there? – and it’s nice, roysh, just

the two of us, me and my daughter, spending some QT together, watching all the comings and goings.

Sorcha, I should mention, feels it's important for Honor to get a good grasp of conversational Spanish and Mandarin while she's still young. She said I wouldn't believe how important multi-ethnicity is over here. Every time someone passes our table, Honor's either like, '*Hola,*' or she's like, '*Ni hao,*' and the thing is, roysh, I haven't heard her say a word in actual English yet.

I'm there, trying to get her to say, 'Daddy,' going, 'Can you say, "Daddy"?' "Daddy"! "Daddy"!

'*Ni hao,*' she just goes. '*Ni hao ma.*'

She's also, by the way, trying desperately to get her hands on my grande triple shot *dulce de leche* mocha and I'm thinking, she's definitely my daughter. I end up giving her one or two little sips, thinking, you know, coffee can't be any worse for a baby than Toms that cut off the circulation in her feet.

So I'm sitting there, roysh, basically chilling, taking in the whole California experience, when all of a sudden there's a bird, we're talking one or two tables away – a ringer for Mandy Moore and that is *not* an exaggeration? – staring over, which is no big deal actually, because I *am* looking well at the moment and, as we all know, *every* bird is a sucker for a man with a baby.

'Oh my God!' she goes at the top of her voice. 'I *love* her!' which is always nice for a father to hear.

I'm there, 'Thanks. She's basically eighteen months old now – maybe a little bit more.'

It's only when she goes, 'She is such an inspiration to me,' that I realize that who she's *actually* talking about is Ayaan Hirsi Ali and the book I'm considering buying for Sorcha but am currently using as a coaster. 'Have you, like, read it?' she goes.

'Yeah,' I go, thinking on my feet as usual. 'Matter of fact,

I'm re-reading it? It's just I was talking to someone the other day about her whole, I suppose you'd have to say, struggle and I was thinking, Dude, you owe it to yourself to re-read it. And maybe re-read it again after that.'

She smiles at me. She's got teeth like Chiclets and she's interested in me – that much she's making pretty obvious. 'The bit where she's forcibly circumcised,' she goes, 'I was thinking, oh my God, if I could get my hands on those tribal elders . . . ?'

'Don't get me storted,' I go, then of course I haven't a clue what to say next – I don't know what the book's even about? – so I flip it over subtly and stort feeding her lines off the back cover.

'My own personal feeling,' I go, 'is that she has an open mind that has released itself from the old straitjacketed frame of reference of Right and Wrong. I mean, there's no doubt she is instinctively, deeply anti-authoritarian and – you'd have to say – unlikely to stick to straight ideological themes and shit? She will go on asking difficult questions. I could be wrong – that's just what I think.'

I thump the table then, just for effect.

No bird has ever looked at me the way she looks at me then – not even Sorcha on our wedding day. She wants me, and she wants me in a major way.

She goes, 'I know a guy who's hoping to turn her story into a Broadway musical. I would *so* love to play her.'

She sort of, like, indicates the chair beside me to ask if she can join me. I'm there, 'Yeah, coola boola,' because, like I told you, she's hot – and wearing half-nothing as well.

'I'm Sahara,' she goes, offering me her hand, the one that's *not* holding her frap?

I'm there, 'Sahara? What a beautiful name,' which it's not, of course – it's the name of a casino.

‘It’s actually Sarah?’ she goes. ‘But my agent thought it would help get me roles.’

I tell her I know a bird called Sophie who started spelling her name Seauphie as a way of, like, pissing off her old pair when they were getting divorced. It helps to get, like, a rap-
port going? Then I’m like, ‘Hang on – did you say agent?’

‘I’m an actress,’ she goes.

I’m like, ‘An actress?’ showing an actual interest, which is something I’m going to start doing more of. ‘What are the chances! Well, without blowing my own trumpet here, I’m a pretty big deal myself back home.’

‘Back home?’ she goes. ‘You mean you’re not from California?’

I’m there, ‘Er, my *accent?*’

She’s like, ‘You don’t have an accent.’

‘Are you shitting me?’

‘No – where are you from?’

‘I’m, like, Irish?’

‘Oh my God, that is *so* random. I would never have known. So what are you, like, famous for in Ireland?’

‘Well, not *just* Ireland, I could say. Have you ever heard of a certain game called rugby?’

‘Rug . . .’

‘Rugby?’

‘I don’t think so.’

I crack my hole laughing. ‘Now I *know* you’re shitting me.’

She has un-fucking-believable Jakki Deggs, in fairness to her, smooth and tanned, and the way she’s dangling her Havaiana on the end of her foot is doing it for me in a big-time way.

I’m there, ‘Would it be rude of me to ask you for your number?’

She opens her mouth, only cracking on to be shocked. ‘I’ll

say this for you,' she goes, 'you're confident,' and I'm there, 'It *has* been said,' flirting my orse off majorly.

She's there, 'I bet it has. I only stopped by your table because I've just finished reading the same book,' playing the innocent, of course.

'You stopped by my table because you were attracted,' I go. 'You liked what you saw and you went for it – no one's judging you.'

She slaps me, sort of, like, playfully? You always know you're in when they do that. I'm there, 'So, what are doing Friday night?'

'What am I doing Friday night?' she goes, actually embarrassed. 'Oh my God, I can't believe I'm having this conversation. I'm having some of my girlfriends over. It's, like, my television debut? This thing I worked on . . . I don't know, do you want to come over?'

I'm there, 'Well, I've no other plans – plus I've broken the TV in my hotel room.'

I whip out my phone and she gives me her digits. She says it'll be me and, like, three girls there and I tell her I like those odds. She laughs. I put my hand on her knee, then she's suddenly serious again, fanning her face with her hand and saying *oh my God* over and over again, unable to believe her actual luck here.

But, like I said, think Mandy Moore.

I tell her I hoped she didn't get the wrong idea when she saw me with my daughter. 'Don't worry,' I go, 'I'm happily separated – on the way to being divorced. Yeah, *she's* with, like, a complete tosser now – he's, like, an auditor.'

Of course, I end up nearly falling off the chair when she turns around and goes, 'What daughter?'

I look beside me. My coffee has gone and, more importantly, so has Honor and I pretty much crap my board shorts. It's like, No! No! No!

The next thing, roysh, I'm literally running around the shop, calling her name at, like, the top of my voice, while at the same time kacking it – and who can blame me? I check, like, Crafts and Hobbies, Architecture, even Humanities and she's, like, nowhere to be seen.

On the outside, I'm trying to stay calm. I tell Sahara that she couldn't have gone far – she isn't walking that long. *And* she's in, like, high heels. But then I remember that she's had a coffee – the guts of a triple espresso – and I realize that she could be anywhere.

Then of course the guilt starts to kick in. I'm thinking about all the people down through the years who told me that this pretty face would eventually be my undoing and how they'd love to see me now, frantically running around Recommended, Judaism and Judaica and – this'll give you a laugh – Parenting, looking for my actual daughter, who wandered off while I was busy playing Mr Lover Lover.

Sahara, in fairness to her, keeps her head. She asks me for, like, a description, then says she'll tell security to lock down the store. 'If she's in here,' she goes, 'we'll find her – you go check outside.'

Outside? I hadn't even thought! I literally burst through the doors, out onto Third Street, and stort pegging it up the promenade like an actual lunatic. Every baby I see, I run, like, straight up to them, going, 'Honor!' and of course when it's not her, the parents are looking at me as if to say, 'Er, *weirdo?*'

It must be, like, half-a-mile up the promenade that I decide to give up, thinking, there's no way she could have got this actual far. That's when I notice this, like, ruck of people gathered around this crowd of buskers playing, like, salsa music. It's actually out of the corner of my eye that I *think* I spot a mop of blonde curls somewhere in the

middle and I'm literally throwing people out of the way to get in there.

It's her! She's standing in front of the band, in her little red shoes, dancing away. And everyone's laughing and clapping, like they think she's part of the act?

'That's my daughter!' I go. 'That's my actual daughter!' and I sweep her up in my orms.

'Hey, Man, I was enjoying that,' someone shouts and then someone else goes, 'Asshole,' but I don't give a fock now that I've got her back, unhormed as well, although her body *is* sort of, like, twitching in my orms and she keeps, I don't know, clenching and unclenching her teeth.

'Is she okay?' this bird asks me. She's not that unlike Trista Rehn. 'Her eyes look kind of spacey.'

'Yeah, she's had a coffee,' I go, then she looks at me like I'm some kind of, I don't know, monster.

I carry her back up the street, promising to buy her all sorts of shit and grateful, I suppose, that she doesn't have the words yet to tell Sorcha what happened – certainly not in any language that her mother could understand.

Sahara – Sarah, whatever – is waiting for me at the door of Bornes and Noble. 'You found her!' she goes and then, 'Oh my God, she's *so* beautiful!'

I'm shaking my head going, 'If anything ever happened to her, I'd . . . well, I don't know what I'd do.'

She smiles, then leans forward and gives me the most unbelievable kiss on the lips, to the point where I'm suddenly feeling a bit spacey myself. 'You are *such* a sweet guy,' she goes. Then she hands me, like, a bag. 'I hope you don't mind – I bought that book *for* you?'

Sorcha asks me how Honor was yesterday and I tell her fine.

That's one of the good things about being a lady's man my entire life – I can lie without even thinking about it?

'It's just that it took me – oh my God – hours to get her to sleep last night,' she goes.

I pull a face like I'm trying to come up with, I don't know, the answer to a really hard crossword question? Then I shake my head. 'I don't know what that could have been.'

I'm just there, bouncing Honor up and down on my knee, going, 'I think it was just the excitement of seeing your Daddy again, wasn't it?'

'*Xing qi yi . . .*'

'Can you say, "Daddy"?''

'*Xing qi er, xing qi san . . .*'

Sorcha suddenly gets a text. She says that – oh my God – actress Julia Roberts and husband filmmaker Danny Moder are going to have a little brother or sister for Hazel and Phin. I just shrug. Then she goes, 'Oh my God, there's one about your mum, too,' and I have to admit, roys, she suddenly has my attention. 'Oprah was spotted reading a copy of her book in *The Rosebud in Chicago*. Oh! My God! That is *such* a huge deal, Ross.'

I crack on not to be impressed. 'It's, like, who even *is* Oprah – I'm talking in the big scheme of things?'

She laughs and says that an endorsement from Oprah can turn a book into a million-seller overnight.

I shrug my shoulders. I'm like, 'The thing I don't understand is when did she even write it? She's only been in the States, like, a fortnight.'

'She wrote it when she was in, like, her twenties.'

'It's more of her usual porn.'

'It's *so* not, Ross. In fact, I was the one who told her to send it to an American publisher.'

'You?'

‘About two years ago. I was the first one she ever let read it.’
She always was a crawler when it came to my old dear.

‘She has this amazing line about Florida. *He exploded inside her like a first-phase rocket . . .*’

I suddenly cover Honor’s ears. I’m there, ‘Too much information, Sorcha! Too much information!’

She laughs, then takes Honor from me. She says that Cillian’s late, meaning late home from work. I’m thinking that maybe now is the time to tell her about Erika. We’re relaxing beside the pool with a couple of appletinis and I feel like I could say anything to her at this moment.

But I don’t.

Instead, I end up talking about *him*. ‘I think he feels threatened by me,’ I go.

She’s there, ‘Cillian? Cillian has no reason to feel threatened by you,’ except she says it a little bit *too* defensively?

I’m like, ‘Some would disagree. What was all that shit the other night about his shoes? John fucking Lobb.’

‘Oh my God,’ she goes, ‘there’s nothing wrong with wanting to look your best, Ross.’

‘But he’s an accountant.’

‘Don’t give me that – he happens to be a senior adviser in international risk assessment.’

‘*Whatever!* It’s not just the shoes anyway. It’s the gaff – he thought he was Puffy showing me around his crib. All he was short of saying was, “This is where the magic happens!” which, I reckon, would have been bullshit anyway.’

She looks at me, suddenly embarrassed, and I immediately know it’s a touchy subject. ‘What do you mean by that?’ she goes.

I’m there, ‘Well, I couldn’t help but notice *Prison Break*, Season One, on the bedside locker. Boxsets in the bedroom are a definite sign of somebody who’s not getting any.’

‘That’s none of your business,’ she goes, pointing at me, which she only ever does when I’ve hit the nail on the head. ‘You’ve no right to even talk to me about that side of my life. We’re both free agents, can I just remind you? We’ve both moved on.’

Now it’s my turn to laugh. I think she’s just made it obvious that she still misses me in at least one department. ‘All I’m saying,’ I go, ‘is that Cillian shouldn’t feel under pressure with me here. He shouldn’t feel like he has to compete with me.’

‘Oh, believe me,’ she goes, ‘he doesn’t.’

The next thing we hear, roysh, is a cor pulling up outside, except it’s obviously not the fucking Prius Nerdster that Cillian drove to work this morning – you can tell from the sound of the engine. We walk around to the front of the gaff and I end up actually laughing out loud when I see him – this dude who’s supposedly *not* threatened by me? – getting out of a brand new, red Murciélago.

He’s still wearing his Magee suit, bear in mind – fucking D’Arcy’s crowd.

Sorcha’s jaw is practically on the ground and not in a good way. She’s like, ‘Cillian, where did you get this?’

He’s there, ‘I bought it.’

It’s an unbelievable cor, in fairness – totally fucking wasted on him. We’re talking six-point-two litre engine, we’re talking four-wheel drive, we’re talking six-speed sequential automatic transmission. We’re also talking three hundred Ks and possibly more. She goes, ‘How much did you pay for this?’

He immediately looks at me. I pull a face that says, basically, rather you than me, mate, listening to that.

‘Does it matter?’ he goes. ‘I got a loan.’

‘A loan?’

He’s there, ‘Yeah. I’m earning unbelievable money, remem-

ber,' which is an attempted dig at me – except I've never been interested in earning money, only spending it.

'More to the point,' Sorcha goes, 'how fuel-efficient is it?'

I just, like, snigger, kiss Honor goodbye, then leave them to it.

'This particular table,' he goes, 'has been meticulously engineered *and* crafted. Solid oak construction. One-inch diamond-honed slate. These pockets – genuine leather, hand-tooled.'

I run my hand across the felt.

'Heirloom quality, Man. You play?'

I shrug. 'It was pretty much *all* I did in college,' I go. 'But it's actually a present for my son?'

'Well,' he goes, 'not only will your son enjoy it, so will his son, and his son after that. Don't let anybody tell you any different – pool tables are a very sophisticated piece of equipment. There's no MDF in this thing. You hear what I'm saying? Solid! Oak! That's why you got to pay that little bit more . . .'

'I don't care,' I go. 'It's not even me paying.'

My phone suddenly rings. It's like, speak of the devil. 'What do *you* want?' I go.

He's like, 'Where are you, Kicker?'

I'm there, 'Los Angeles – what's it to you?'

'Oh,' he goes. 'Well, I'm still in Andorra. It's just that, well, you left in a bit of a hurry.'

'Is there any chance you could stop babbling for five seconds?' I go. 'Is your credit card still good – the one with the 1982 Triple Crown-winning team on it?'

'Actually, no,' he goes. 'I've just this minute discovered it's been stolen.'

I'm there, 'Well, *actually* it hasn't? *I* took it. So don't cancel

it. You're about to become the proud owner of a state-of-the-ort pool table,' and I tip the nod to the shop dude, who immediately starts filling in the shipping documents, happy in his pants.

At the top of my voice, I'm like, 'I'm going to take the jukebox as well – the big Wurlitzer jobby,' and, then into the phone, I go, 'Seven focking grand – I presume you're good for it.'

Of course, he doesn't even *give* a shit. 'I *hope* it's vinyl,' he goes. 'Oh, even the mention of the word Wurlitzer brings me back, Ross, back to the old days. The Rainbow what's-it on O'Connell Street. "There's No Other Like My Baby". That was our song – Helen and I . . .'

Helen as in Erika's old dear.

I'm there, 'I don't actually *give* a fock? I bought, like, a jacuzzi an hour ago – are you not even curious as to why?'

'Well, I expect you felt your *old dad* owed you a present after the heroics at the Camp d'Esports del M.I. Consell General . . .'

'No, that's *not* it. Do you remember when I was kid, the bomb shelter we found at the bottom of the gorden?'

'Oh, yes – chap we bought the house from was absolutely convinced that Truman was going to drop the big one on China, unleashing hell and what-not.'

'Whatever. Do you remember saying to me we were going to turn it into a boys' room and then never actually doing it?'

'Well,' he goes, 'if I said it, I'm sure it would have been in the context of – wouldn't it be wonderful if . . .'

'Oh, but you were too busy with work, weren't you? Doing all the dodgy shit they eventually put you away for. So now *I'm* turning it into a boys' room – for me and *my* son.'

'What a wonderful idea,' he goes.

It's, like, impossible to hurt this focker. I try to come in from a different angle. 'By the way, when are you going to do something about that scabrous animal?'

'Your mother?' he goes. Isn't it funny how he immediately knows? 'Yes, I hear she's making something of a splash, inverted commas, stateside.'

'She was on TV yesterday, making a holy fucking show of me.'

'Well, this is the book she wrote during her famous Paris years. She was only in her twenties, Ross. They say it's her *magnum opus* – pardon the French.'

I'm there, 'Why are you defending her? You're supposed to be getting divorced. Why can't you, like, hate each other?'

'Hate each other?'

'Yeah, like *normal* parents?'

'We were married for thirty years,' he goes, like *that's* any kind of excuse. 'Your mother and I will always be friends. We care about each other very much.'

'Well, I just think that's fucked up, that's all.'

He doesn't even respond to that, just goes, 'Erika's gone back to Ireland . . .'

I'm there, 'Er, did I *ask* you about Erika?'

'I think after the initial euphoria, the anger's starting to kick in. Helen called me today – seems that Erika said some hurtful things to her.'

'I said, I don't remember asking about her,' and then I just hang up.

'I can't believe you're actually shopping with me,' Sorcha goes. She has to shout it over a seriously loud disco version of 'Can You Feel The Love Tonight?', which means we're obviously in Abercrombie. 'You used to hate shopping.'

I'm there, 'If you must know, I was shopping all yesterday

afternoon. I picked up, like, a jukebox, pool table, a few other bits and pieces for Ro.'

She looks at me like, well, like she did the night she first took advantage of me when I'd a few beers on board in the Wez. 'You are *so* a good father,' she goes. 'Anyone who says you're not is, like – oh my God – *so* wrong . . .'

Having said that, if she finds out I let Honor wander around Santa Monica on her Tobler for half an hour, she'll redecorate this shop with my fucking intestines.

'I know,' I go. 'I think it's very much a case of, you know, give a dog a bad name . . .'

My fucking eardrums are bursting in here.

A changing room finally comes free. I automatically follow Sorcha in and the funny thing is that neither of us actually considers it weird – as in, her stripping down to basically her bra and knickers in front of me?

The bird in charge of the changing rooms does, though – she knocks on the door and goes, 'It's only *one* person per changing room?' and I end up just going, 'Yeah – *whatever!*' to which there's *no* comeback, of course.

Sorcha's, like, examining her orse in the mirror. 'Do you think these jeans make my legs look thinner than my Citizens of Humanity ones?' she goes.

It's one of those questions where she already *knows* the answer she wants? So I make what I have to admit is a guess, 'Yes.'

'What about my Sevens?' she goes. 'Are *they* more slimming?'

I go, 'No,' solely on the basis that last time I said yes. It's like Junior Cert. foundation maths all over again.

She considers my answers while striking, I suppose, different poses in the mirror – one hand on her hip, one foot in front of the other, then pouting, whatever the fuck difference

that makes – and finally decides that she doesn't want them. So they come off again.

'You don't mind?' I go. 'As in, me staring at you pretty much naked?'

She's like, 'I *have* underwear on, Ross? And anyway, it's nothing you haven't seen before, right?'

She looks unbelievable. A Peter Pan's always suited her.

I'm there, 'I wonder would Cillian see it like that.'

She pulls her sea blue Tart Grace dress over her head and goes, 'Cillian would be fine with it. I'm sorry about the other night, by the way.'

I'm there, 'Is he keeping it? As in, the Lamborghini?'

'Well, he's bought it now. Or signed the finance papers. I think he's just very stressed with work at the moment.'

'I'm saying nothing,' I go. 'But I still think it's me.'

She laughs. 'Oh my God, Ross, he *knows* that you and I are more like Best Friends Forever these days?' and I'm thinking, yeah, you just keep telling yourself that lie, girl.

She steps into her Uggs, fixes her hair, then puts her sunglasses back on her head, and I open the changing-room door. The bird outside is bulling. She's a last word freak as well. 'Only *one* customer per changing room?' she goes, pointing at a sign on the wall.

You actually *should* have seen her face when I pretended to do up my fly.

On the way out of the shop, out of the corner of her mouth, Sorcha's going, 'I can't *actually* believe you did that!' but she's also smiling, as if to say, I can't actually control this dude – might as well just sit back and enjoy the show.

Back in the cor, she checks her texts and says that Lindsay Lohan was spotted dancing with Blink-182 drummer Travis Barker at a West Hollywood party two days after having her appendix out!

‘My kind of bird,’ I go.

‘And Angelina has dropped the broadest hint yet that she might like to work with Billy Bob Thornton again one day . . .’

To which there’s no real answer.

I tell her I’m storving. I’d eat the orse out of a roadkill raccoon. She says okay, we’ll collect Honor from crèche, then she’s going to bring me – her treat – to Ketchup, as in Ketchup from *The Hills*? As in, the place where Lauren and Heidi ran into each other for the first time after the big fight? And Spencer sent over a drink for Lauren and Jason, being – oh my God – *such* a wanker?

I have to say, Spencer’s always been my kind of goy.

Ketchup turns out to be a pretty amazing spot. I order a pepper-seared Kobe with fries, Sorcha has a twenty-first-century cobb without the chicken, the bacon or the blue cheese – a grassbox, in other words – and Honor has a plate of sweet potato tater tots, which I’m pretty taken aback to see her eating with chopsticks – as in, her own personal set?

I can’t even eat with chopsticks.

‘I can’t believe you have her eating with those things,’ I go and Sorcha ends up nearly biting my head off. She tells me I don’t live here, so I have no idea how important the whole diversity thing is. She goes. ‘Poet, one of Honor’s playdates, is actually part Asian-American, Ross.’

I’d forgotten how sexy she can be when she loses it. But I’m also thinking how *nice* this actually is? As in, the three of us sitting here, back together as, like, a family again.

I’m there, ‘How would you feel if I told you I had a date tomorrow night?’

She looks all of a sudden serious. ‘Oh,’ she goes. ‘I mean, that was quick. Can I ask who?’

‘You’re not jealous, are you?’

‘No, it’s just – you only arrived, what, three days ago.’

‘I’ve always been a fast mover – *you* know that. And if you must know, she’s an actress.’

‘An actress? Oh my God, what’s she been in?’

She’s bulling – as in, seriously bulling.

‘Well, it’s early days yet. Obviously, we want to keep things below the radar for now.’

Honor all of a sudden starts crying, for no actual reason at all. Some people would say that’s women for you. She’s not only crying, roysh, she’s pretty much screaming the roof off, to the point where Sorcha has to take her out of her baby chair and sort of, like, bounce her on her knee.

‘Okay,’ she goes, ‘just answer me this, is it Jessica Stroup?’

‘I can tell you it’s definitely not Jessica Stroup.’

‘Torrey DeVitto?’

‘No, it’s not Torrey DeVitto.’

‘Hilarie Burton?’

‘Whoa, enough with the guessing already!’

‘I’m sorry,’ she goes. ‘But if it’d been any of those, I *would* have been jealous . . . Come on, Honor, what’s wrong?’

She offers her everything from her bottle to her Dora the Explorer doll to a spicy tuna roll, but there’s no calming her.

‘You’re saying you’re *not* jealous?’ I go.

She shrugs. ‘You’re a free agent,’ she goes, then she stares into space, obviously surprised at how badly it’s affecting her.

She stands up very suddenly and says she has to go to the restroom – and she actually uses that word. ‘See if you can do anything with her,’ she goes, plonking this bundle of basically noise in my lap. ‘You know, she’s been so irritable the last couple of days, which isn’t like her at all.’

That gets me suddenly thinking. I follow Honor’s line of vision and realize that, yeah, she’s staring straight at my Americano. All she basically wants is a sip of my coffee. So

when Sorcha hits the jacks, I check that no one's looking, then I hold the mug up to her lips. She immediately stops crying. She has, like, three or four sips – five at the very most – and she's suddenly happy like you wouldn't believe.

'Oh my God!' Sorcha goes, suddenly back from the can. 'What did you do?'

I'm there, 'I don't know. Maybe I've just got, like, a way with her.'

She's like, 'You certainly do. I am, like, *so* impressed. So what do you want to do – do you want to hit one or two more shops in the afternoon?'

I'm there, 'Hey, I'm easy like a Sunday morning.'

'I am *so* excited about my plans for the shop,' she goes. 'Oh my God, I'm going to blow Coast and Reiss out of the water with the dresses I'm going to be bringing in. We're talking Literature. We're talking Bailey. We're talking KLS. We're talking Cash Lords. And a simple question – why is no one in Ireland doing Antik and Taverniti jeans?'

On the spur of the moment – and this is totally unrehearsed – I decide that that's my cue to bring up, like, the whole Erika situation? It's only a matter of time before she rings her anyway.

'Speaking of antics,' I go, 'the major news back home involves Erika.'

'Erika?'

'Exactly.'

'As in, my best friend Erika?'

She definitely thinks I'm going to tell her I was, like, with her – as in, *with* with? – so this might even turn out to be a bit of a relief to her. 'Before you say it, it's not what you think,' I go. 'No, the thing is, it turns out – now *how* random is this? – that she's kind of, well, my sister . . .'

‘Your sister?’

‘Well, half-sister really. She found out that that dude Tim was never her old man . . .’

‘Hang on, Ross. I can’t take this in. Erika . . . is your sister?’

‘Yeah, her old dear came clean. Told her that her old man was a goy she had, like, a fling with in the seventies, eighties, whatever . . .’

‘Er, I know that, Ross? I talked to her at Christmas?’

‘Well, the goy she had the fling with turns out to be my old man . . .’

‘Oh! My God!

‘Exactly – poor fucking girl. How would you feel finding that out?’

Sorcha suddenly bursts into tears. ‘Drive us home,’ she goes without even looking at me. ‘Now.’

‘I thought you’d love the story,’ I make the mistake of going. ‘Especially with all those soaps you watch . . .’

She totally flips at that.

‘She was, like, my Best *Best* Friend!’ she practically screams at me.

I’m there, ‘I dare say she still will be.’

‘How *could* you, Ross?’

‘What do you mean, how could *I*?’

‘How could you do it?’

There’s, like, silence in the restaurant. First Spencer and Heidi, now me and Sorcha – the drama never fucking ends in this place.

I’m there, ‘Er, this is one of those things that *isn’t* my actual fault?’

‘And you kept it to yourself this long?’

‘Whoa,’ I go, ‘I only found out myself, like, four days ago.’

‘Why didn’t you say something the night you arrived?’

‘Because I knew I had to get the timing right. And you *were* pretty keen for me to try those hot dogs. Which I thought were amazing, I don’t know if I mentioned.’

Sorcha’s shouting is drawing quite a lot of attention our way now. ‘I never want to see you again,’ she goes, standing up and pretty much snatching Honor out of my orms.

‘Fair enough,’ I go. ‘Here, I’ll give you a lift home.’

She’s like, ‘Actually, don’t bother, Ross. We’ll get a cab,’ and then, just before she storms off, she takes one last look at me, narrows her eyes and goes, ‘And whoever it is you’re meeting tomorrow, she’s welcome to you!’

Then she’s suddenly gone, leaving me sitting there, picking my way through what’s left of her salad, looking for something edible and at the same time thinking, that could have gone a *hell* of a lot worse.