

I didn't want to be this woman, Mum. But I can't leave. I won't. Eventually, he will have to make a choice and it probably won't be me. But for now... well, for now, I am this woman.

'Thanks for taking the trouble from her eyes'. Do you remember that line from the song? That is what this man has done for me. And I'm wondering if there was someone who could have done it for you, if you let them.

My love, Pip.

FRAN *sits in the silence of the garden. BOB has come out of the house and is watching.*

BOB. Is everything all right?

FRAN. It's fine.

BOB. What does she say?

FRAN. She says it's cold in Vancouver.

Winter

Mark

The roses are bare and the sky is grey. FRAN is in the garden smoking a cigarette.

MARK. On the weekends when Dad wanted help in the garden I would climb the gum tree and hide. From up there, I could see the world.

At least I could see our world. Pip singing to a song on the radio and checking her split ends at the patio table. Ben kicking the football from one end of the yard to the other. Always running. Dad pushing a wheelbarrow of dirt around with Rosie following him with her plastic shovel ready to help. And Mum hanging out the washing before sneaking a cheeky fag behind the shed, thinking that no one knows she's there.

They didn't know I was up in the tree watching and seeing everything. Not really a part of the picture and not really even knowing why.

There were two occasions on which Mum would smoke. The first was if she'd had more than two glasses of wine. She wasn't a big drinker so this was rare. It usually happened on New Year's Eve. She would light up after two glasses of sparkling wine and only ever smoke the one. She was also known to dance with Dad's undies on her head, after he had taken them off for God knows what reason, so New Year's Eve was always an ordeal for us kids. The other occasion was when she thought that one of us had a problem that she couldn't solve, which was also rare, Mum having a solution for most problems in life. And on these occasions she could go through a pack, one after another until a solution was found. I suspect that of all of us, she smoked the most cigarettes on account of me.

BOB is pushing a load of dirt across the yard when he finds FRAN.

BOB. What the hell are you doing?

FRAN. Sssh, I don't want Rosie to see.

BOB. Well, give me a puff?

FRAN. No. One puff for you and you'd be back on a pack a day. Mark called. He's coming over.

BOB. Good... I'll get him to help me shift the garden furniture. There's a storm coming in.

FRAN. He says he needs to talk to us.

BOB. What about?

FRAN. Now you're not to go on but I think he might be gay.

BOB. Bloody hell!

FRAN. See... there you go.

BOB. Well, it's a bit out of the blue!

FRAN. He doesn't know we know so you'll have to act surprised.

BOB. Well, I am. I mean why hasn't he told us before?

FRAN. It takes some men longer, that's all.

BOB. So this is why Taylor up and left, you think?

FRAN. I'd say so... Are you all right with it?

BOB. Yes... if he is. If it's the way he wants to go.

FRAN. It's not a way you go, Bob. It's not a direction you take.

BOB. I didn't mean that. I mean he's thirt... how old is he?

FRAN. Thirty-two.

BOB. Exactly! He's thirty-two. His life is his own.

FRAN. That's right.

BOB. And you? Are you all right with it?

FRAN. Yes!... I think so. I mean it's not what you think you're going to get when you have kids.

BOB. No.

FRAN. I mean a part of me thinks Not My Son. Please God not my son. Let it be some other woman's son. But apart from that, no, I'm fine with it.

They share a moment, a laugh.

BOB. Anyway, no matter what, he's still going to be our boy... It's starting to rain.

The storm breaks.

A little later that night. MARK's at the back door, wet from the rain. BOB and FRAN are fussing over him.

FRAN. You're soaked through.

MARK. I walked over.

BOB. In this weather?

FRAN. Rosie, get a towel.

BOB. You'll catch your death.

MARK. It wasn't raining when I left.

BOB. Why didn't you take an umbrella?

MARK. I told you it wasn't raining.

BOB. It's the middle of winter, son. You go for a walk the chances are you're going to get wet.

FRAN takes the towel from ROSIE and starts to dry MARK's hair.

MARK. I'll do it, Mum.

BOB. Take that shirt off. Rosie, get him a shirt from my drawer. What about your pants?

MARK. They're fine, thanks.

FRAN is starting to take MARK's shirt off.

Mum!

FRAN. You think I haven't seen you naked before?

He removes his own shirt.

Would you look at the colour of him? When's the last time you saw any sun? That's your fault, Bob. White as a bloody ghost. Both of you. And have you had that mole checked out? I don't like the look of that.

ROSIE (*entering with shirt*). Is blue okay?

MARK. Right now polka dots would be fine.

He takes the shirt and puts it on.

BOB. So are you hungry?

MARK. I'm fine.

BOB. I could fix you something.

MARK. I've eaten.

FRAN. What exactly? Because you're as skinny as a rake.

BOB. There's your mum's stew in the fridge. I'll heat it up.

MARK. What's the matter with you two? I said I've eaten. I'm fine. And I'm not too skinny and I'm not too white. And I haven't got skin cancer. Can we have a conversation for once that doesn't begin with you making a list of everything that's wrong with me? And could you stand still for half a minute because I'm trying to tell you something here and it's not easy.

FRAN. Look, Mark, there's nothing you could tell us that would shock us or make us feel any different about you. I just want to say that.

BOB. Unless you told us you had decided to become a woman. Then I would be shocked.

BOB laughs at his joke. He's the only one though. It's a terrible silence as they realise what's just been inelegantly revealed.

MARK. That's not how this was meant to go.

They are silent. Shocked.

I need you to say something.

FRAN. We thought you were gay.

MARK. Right.

FRAN. Are you?

MARK. What the hell does that matter?

FRAN. I don't know.

MARK. Well, I'm not.

FRAN. Okay.

MARK. Are you relieved?

FRAN. No... no, that's not what I'm feeling right now.

MARK. What are you feeling, Mum?

FRAN. I'm... I can't... begin... Are you sure about this?

MARK. Yes.

FRAN. Then what are you feeling?

MARK. Afraid... confused... A little ashamed. No. Not ashamed. I'm finished with feeling that. But embarrassed. I guess. Telling you. And angry. Yeah. Angry. I had a whole speech prepared. I've been practising it for twenty years.

BOB. And I put my foot in it.

MARK. You did, Dad, yeah.

BOB. Are you telling us that you're one of those men who wants to be a woman?

MARK. That's the gist of it.

BOB. Is it that you like to put on women's clothing in the privacy of your own home because there was Uncle Trevor on my mother's side or are you talking about the whole shebang here?

MARK. Okay. This is something that I have known about myself for many years. It is something I have fought and hidden. It has made me very unhappy. And it has cost me a relationship with a woman I loved very much.

FRAN. Well, you can understand her point of view.

MARK. Yes, Mum. I can. Taylor's point of view is very clear. But right now we're talking about mine... This is hard, you know. This is so fucking hard. This was never a conversation I wanted to have.

FRAN. It's not high on my list either.

MARK. I wanted to be normal, Mum. Whatever that is. I wanted to grow up, get married and have my own kids. Just like you and Dad. I wanted to love and to be loved. That's all I ever wanted.

He looks to ROSIE for reassurance.

Say something, Rosie?

ROSIE. What... What should I say?

MARK. I don't know. Go read a book. Work it out for yourself.

ROSIE. Why didn't you tell me?

MARK. What?

ROSIE. I tell you everything.

MARK. I'm telling you now.

ROSIE. I thought you trusted me.

MARK. This is not about you... You understand that? Right now, I need you to be a grown-up, Rosie.

FRAN. Stop it.

MARK. What?

FRAN. Stop thinking that we can handle this because maybe we can't.

There is so much that needs to be said.

MARK. Okay... Yeah. Maybe I was expecting too much. Too soon. I get that. So. I've been seeing a psychologist for a year now. I have met people who have gone through this. I'm ready to start hormone treatment. It's a long process but eventually I hope to live as a woman.

FRAN. Does that involve surgery?

MARK. It might... That's a choice I'll make later.

BOB. Christ!

MARK. I'm sorry, Dad.

BOB. You could do that to your body?

MARK. This is not the right body for me.

BOB. It's the one you got. There's a reason for that.

MARK. Then whoever or whatever decides that is fucking cruel.

BOB. You can give the language a miss.

MARK. Oh, Jesus Fucking Christ!

ROSIE. Dad, it doesn't matter.

BOB. I don't know what to say to him.

MARK. You never have.

Beat – BOB turns away.

I've got books for you to read...

BOB. I need to think this through.

MARK. And websites for you to look up.

BOB. The wind's getting up. I should move that furniture into the shed.

BOB retreats into the yard.

ROSIE. Dad.

MARK. There goes my fair-weather father.

FRAN. Don't say that.

MARK. Come on, Mum. We all know that you steer this ship in a storm. He's a great dad. He coached us in the Under 15s. He was terrific at that. Anything more complex and he's a little lost.

FRAN. It might be me you see shouting the orders but it's always your father making the phone calls behind the scenes, making sure things happen. He and I are a good team. But we never saw this one coming. Don't expect us to be good at it, right away.