

PSYCHOTIKA

by

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"You know, a long time ago, being crazy meant something."

- Charles Manson

Chapter 1

THE ARTIFACT OF AN OPTIMISTIC PAST

INT. ROCK BAR - NIGHT

Heavy metal music dominates the dark venue as BEN (25), a handsome young man in stylish attire, falls to his knees at the foot of the stage in a drunken stupor.

The bulky thumb of the performer before him, soaked in fake blood, draws a crude inverted cross upon his forehead.

The pulsating hiss of the hi-hats. The piston-like onslaught of the kick drum. Ben struggles back to his feet, so intoxicated he can barely stand.

The melodic wailing of the lead guitar gives way to grinding riffs so monstrously distorted through the amps that it sounds like Satan himself is pulling at the strings.

The audience is nothing more than a collection of anonymous shadows in the haze of the smoke machine, through which blurry lights cast tunnels of majestic light.

Lost in the turbulent sea of noise, Ben moves around the dancefloor like an angry ballet dancer, riding on the fluctuating frequencies and strutting to the tempo changes.

The heavyweight bass pushes the low range of the speakers to depths more movement than sound, rattling their frames and the skulls of the feverish crowd.

Ben's a one-man moshpit, throwing his fists and beating up only himself as beads of sweat take to the air with every bang of his head.

It's a dirty bath of acoustic evil that leaves everyone stained with its horrendous magnificence, branding them lost to a doom-ridden underworld driven by nihilism.

At mercy to the rhythm, Ben takes a long, refreshing swig from the pint in his hand, causing foam to spill down to his stamping feet.

He gazes up longingly to the heavens as the relentless beat thunders on.

An ecstatic smile grows across his face, but at the same time, sorrowful tears stream from his eyes.

Despite all this chaos, despite all this carnage, despite the clear juxtaposition of sheer pleasure and tormenting pain, it is clear that Ben, right now, in this fleeting moment pure mania, could not be any more at peace.

INT. WAREHOUSE - DAY

Ben trudges through a labyrinth of towering metal shelves heaving with assorted sized boxes and littered with health and safety notices as the local radio station crackles through tinny speakers.

Clearly not wanting to be there, he checks a printout in his hand and turns down an aisle before crouching down and hunting for the correct item.

As he sorts through boxes, the fluorescent lights go out for a moment and flicker back on in sequence.

Ben pauses, peering up confused at what just happened, and goes back to searching.

Immaculately polished boots squeak along the resin-coated floor and turn to an abrupt halt at the top of the aisle.

The MANAGER, wearing a shirt and tie and with far too much gel in his hair, stares down at Ben with a mixture of frustration and resentment.

MANAGER

Ben.

Ben snaps around instinctively, ready for a scolding.

MANAGER (CONT'D)

Pick up the pace.

Ben just stares back vacantly.

MANAGER (CONT'D)

Get your head in the game. You're at sixty percent at best and we're getting swamped with orders.

Ben frowns a little as the Manager takes off, tutting to himself as he shakes his head.

MANAGER (O.C.) (CONT'D)

And you're replaceable. We're all very, very replaceable.

Finally finding what he's looking for, Ben lets out a deep sigh and paces his way back through the maze, the aisles sweeping rhythmically past him.

He suddenly passes what looks like a feminine silhouette and stops, confused, before backing up a little.

JORDAN (20s), seemingly far too pretty and petite for a soulless place like this, stares hopelessly at the wall of boxes before her.

Before she can spot him looking, Ben takes off with purpose, keeping his head down.

JORDAN (O.C.)
Hey! Help!

Frantic footsteps approach. Ben pauses and looks back to see she's following him, her heavily made up eyes perilous as she jabs at a printout.

JORDAN (CONT'D)
Where the fuck is this?

He warily scans around for the Manager and takes a look at the picking slip before nodding ahead.

BEN
It's, umm-

JORDAN
-Dude, I can't find anything, and that asshole's already been on my case twice this morning. Show me!

Reluctantly, Ben submits and leads her in the opposite direction to where he was headed.

JORDAN (CONT'D)
I'm Jordan, by the way. I'm new.

BEN
We keep all the AYBs back there, but all the AYCs are up here. Don't ask why. Nothing makes sense. You'll soon get used to it.

He plucks what she's looking for from the shelf and hands it over. She rests her hand on his chest and stares up at him.

JORDAN
And you are?

BEN
Ben.

JORDAN
Ben, you are totally my hero.

She slowly slides her hand away and lets the eye contact linger for as long as possible as she leaves.

Ben lets out a deep, anxious sigh.

INT. DOCTOR'S OFFICE - DAY

Ben winces uncomfortably in the cramped office while the DOCTOR taps rapidly at their keyboard.

DOCTOR
This is good progress. We're moving forward.

BEN
I'm still not sleeping.

DOCTOR
Are you stretching before bed? Are you remembering to eat properly?

BEN
Nothing works.

The Doctor sits back, taking the matter seriously.

DOCTOR
This new medication will make a big difference. Just give it time.

BEN
It's been eighteen months!

DOCTOR
And I'm asking you to give it just a couple more weeks.

INT. APARTMENT, LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Gunfire and explosions blast through a soundbar as Ben plays a military third-person shooter, his flat screen almost filling the tiny room.

He takes the opportunity to vape between every respawn and chugs on an energy drink before laying it back down within a heap of highly processed junk food wrappers, the ingredients nothing more than a list of mysterious chemicals.

JOHN and KYLE, both also in their 20s, can be heard through the speaker as machine guns cackle.

JOHN (O.S.)
Flag! Flag! Flag! I am a complete legend.

KYLE (O.S.)

No, you're a big camping gay, and I couldn't have selected a worse primary for this.

BEN

Where the hell are you guys?

JOHN (O.S.)

Ben, I just shouted, "Flag! Flag! Flag!" What part of "flag" don't you understand? I'll give you a clue, I'm by the big fuck off flag!

KYLE (O.S.)

You know, John, some of us are actually defending the perimeter.

JOHN (O.S.)

Yeah, and some of us have a KD over two, Kyle.

They lose the game and groan as the stats screen comes up.

BEN

Well, well, well, boys, look who's come bottom once again.

KYLE (O.S.)

What's that, Ben? You always cum when a bottom?

BEN

Now, did I say that?

JOHN (O.S.)

He's right, Kyle. He didn't say, "cums when a bottom", he was talking about his "cum button."

KYLE (O.S.)

Ah! Busy fingering his cum button. That'll explain how he plays.

As they snigger with laughter, Ben forces a smile through the defeat and banter.

INT. APARTMENT, BEDROOM - LATER

A dozen dating apps litter the screen of a smartphone.

Lying in bed, Ben swipes through profile after profile, mainly to the right, and with a vacant look in his eyes as he reaches the daily limit. He robotically moves to the next app, and continues the process.

A message appears from a LIZZY (20s).

Lizzy: *How r u?*

A smile draws across this face as he taps away quickly with his thumbs.

Ben: *Not bad. Tough day at work. Just in bed. Looking forward to the weekend. You good?*

He goes back to swiping dating profiles for a bit and rechecks the message. No reply.

Ben scrolls back through the thread, showing a pattern of Lizzy reaching out, him replying, and then nothing back.

He brings up her profile and flicks through her photos. She's attractive and knows it. She always seems to be alone with lots of pictures of her bare thighs on show or her cleavage on display.

With still no reply, Ben reaches under the covers and starts jerking off.

INT. WAREHOUSE - DAY

A grubby spoon clinks against a stained cup as Ben makes himself a very strong and equally sugary coffee.

JORDAN (O.C.)
Well, hello again.

Ben looks around to see Jordan approaching with a big, friendly smile and flirtatious look in her eyes.

BEN
Hey, how's it going?

She rests her back against the counter next to him and folds her arms, letting out a deep sigh.

JORDAN
How is it going? Well, I'm broke. I hate my body.
(MORE)

JORDAN (CONT'D)

I have, no offense, the shittiest job on the entire planet, despite having a masters degree, that, I might add, I'll be paying off for the rest of my life, and, just to make things even better, I haven't had sex in over six months. That's how it's going, Ben. Thanks for bringing it up.

Ben doesn't know how to react. She leans over him to try and get at a coffee mug.

JORDAN (CONT'D)

Plus, I'm being forced to wear a uniform where the trousers don't want to stay above my scrawny waist, and the shirt barely contains my ridiculous tits.

She adjusts her shirt while still against him, causing a button to pop open and reveal that "ridiculous" is a gross understatement.

JORDAN (CONT'D)

Hey you! Quit looking!

Jordan reels back and smiles playfully as she buttons herself back up.

BEN

Umm, I can make you a coffee. How do you like it?

JORDAN

I like it hot, wet, sweet, and creamy.

(beat)

And female, because I'm a massive lesbian.

BEN

Oh... right.

Ben isn't sure where to look or think, but he does a good job of hiding his disappointment as he makes another coffee.

JORDAN

Yep, just love pussy. The smell. The taste. The energy. Like a fine wine.

She wafts air toward her nose like a tasting connoisseur.

JORDAN (CONT'D)
Smell that, Ben? No pussy!

EXT. STREET - NIGHT

Ben paces down the street with purpose, his earbuds playing metal music and his expression frustrated.

JORDAN (O.S.)
(whispering)
Ben.

He stops in his tracks and looks around in the darkness. Not a single person in sight.

Pausing the track, he's drawn to stare at the house next to him, No.17, the only building on the street without any lights on and seemingly empty.

He takes an earbud out.

JORDAN (O.S.) (CONT'D)
(whispering)
Ben.

Ben can't tell if the voice is coming from around him, the house, or his remaining earbud.

He stands in silence for a few moments.

ROAR! The metal music suddenly cuts back in at full volume, causing Ben to jolt.

Ben pops the earbud back in, takes another confused look at No.17, and continues walking.

EXT. BEER GARDEN - NIGHT

Under the golden glow of string lights and space heaters with pop music in the air, Ben, John, and Kyle sit at a table, knocking back beer.

KYLE
So, Claire, she's mad at me because
I couldn't go round last weekend.
Proper bee up her arse about it.
Laura, she's mad at me because she
found out I was doing coke all day
Saturday while we were out
together.

(MORE)

KYLE (CONT'D)

She's probably going to grass me up to Claire about that, and then she'll know why I couldn't come around.

JOHN

Because you were out shagging Laura?

Kyle nods.

KYLE

So, I'm pretty fucked. However, there is a silver lining; both of 'em absolutely love make-up sex, and I mean, fucking love it.

BEN

Really don't need to hear about this right now.

KYLE

I'm in for a right ragging, but it'll be worth it like.

JOHN

You see, Kyle, some of us have had the common sense to fuck women off entirely and get to live in peace as a result.

KYLE

You might get no mither, but you're not getting laid that way either, are you, kiddo?

Kyle scoffs with laughter at that thought.

BEN

At least John has been laid.

JOHN

Are we having this again all night? You crying about still carrying your v-card?

BEN

I'm twenty-five!

JOHN

Then, if it bothers you so much, get an escort. Job done. It'll probaby cost you less than he spends per shag anyway.

(MORE)

JOHN (CONT'D)

Probably walk away with more
dignity too, and fewer STDs.

KYLE

You're probably right, actually.

BEN

I'm not losing my virginity to a
prostitute. I don't even want to
have sex with a prostitute.

Kyle shuffles up next to Ben and whips out his phone to show
him something.

KYLE

Nah, you're right, this is what you
want, mate. New app. Fuck all this
Tinder bollocks.

Kyle shows him an app named 'GetFckd' with a distinctive red
logo depicting a devil's grinning face.

KYLE (CONT'D)

(sniggering)

It's pronounced "Get Fucked". It's
not spelt that way, but that's what
they really mean.

BEN

Yeah, I get it, Kyle.

KYLE

It's purely for hookups. No dating
bullshit. Your profile picture is
literally just a body part.

JOHN

And who says romance is dead, aye?

BEN

You wanna know what my picture's
of?

JOHN

Is it, perchance, your cock, Kyle.

Kyle cackles deviously and looks to Ben.

BEN

Excuse the phrasing here, but I'm
also going to go with your cock.

Kyle lets a long, unnecessary suspense build before cracking
up with laughter.

KYLE

Yeah, it's my cock. It's dead good though. You can't even use a picture of your face. They won't allow it.

JOHN

Which is, of course, why you're recommending it to Ben.

BEN

Hey! You're so mean to me. I'm not interested in hookups anyway. What I want, guys, is intimacy. That's so much more than sex.

KYLE

Well, if you don't mind me saying, how's that working out for ya?

Ben shakes his head wistfully.

BEN

I only have to be good enough for one woman. That'll be all it takes.

JOHN

All it takes? There's no point in being good enough for any woman, because, the second you are, their expectations increase beyond your means. Hypergamy, look it up. It's in their blood.

KYLE

Bollocks. You pair are the ones with the high standards. There's more than enough women to go around, especially if you're willing to spunk a little cash on them, take them out, maybe chuck couple of grams at them too, if you know what I mean.

Ben winces at the thought.

BEN

Am I the only person left who still wants a wife and kids and a normal fucking relationship?

The question goes unanswered as they silently neck back the dregs of their drinks.

BEN (CONT'D)
Another round it is then, boys.

INT. PUB - CONTINUOUS

Ben makes his way slowly toward the bar, squeezing his way through DRINKERS who ignore his requests to make way and bump into him like he's not there.

He avoids eye contact with everyone and eventually finds salvation by the gleaming hand pulls, where he gathers his breath and returns his empties.

Bodies clear to reveal IRIS (20s), bright-eyed and smiley, leaning against the other side of the bar, staring back at him while bathed in a rainbow of light reflected from the optics.

Ben doesn't recognise her and struggles to hide his immediate attraction. She chuckles, almost just as self-conscious as him.

IRIS
Soooooo.... what can I get you?

BEN
Three more. No. Wait. You got any coffee rum?

IRIS
Of course! I has wares, if you have coin.

Ben is taken aback with the geeky reference. She selects a bottle of coffee rum and poses with it. Ben holds out his wallet, clenched in his fist.

BEN
Shut up and take my money!

IRIS
Single or double?

BEN
Double, please, with coke.

IRIS
This guy rums.

He watches her carefully pour measures and takes in her eclectic but flattering bohemian like attire while plucking up the courage to continue chatting.

BEN

I'm just drinking it for science.

IRIS

Right. Sure. Tell me you share
memes all day without telling me
you share memes all day.

She tops off the glass with coke and offers it over, their fingers touching for a moment as he takes it, both a little shy but drawn to connect.

He has a sip and raises the glass to her.

BEN

Nine out of ten, would drink again.

She feigns offense.

IRIS

Only nine out of ten?

BEN

Some men just want to watch the
world burn.

Iris nods amused and continues smiling and staring.

EXT. STREET - NIGHT

Ben staggers along the pavement with his hands in his pockets and a rare satisfied smile on his face.

He gazes around drunkenly at the houses outlined by moonlight while a cat dashes across the road into a garden.

As he passes No.17, something suddenly catches his eye. The glimpse of a half-naked female body in an upstairs window, no lights on inside, getting undressed.

He can't help but stare, and as the person turns their head a little and strokes back their hair, their side profile looks just like Jordan's.

Ben slows his pace as he watches her remove the clasp on her bra while staring into a mirror.

She suddenly looks back and glances at him. In the split second before he averts his gaze, she looks exactly like Jordan, but he speeds up and avoids looking back to check.

Chapter 2

JUST WHAT THE DOCTOR DIDN'T ORDER

INT. APARTMENT, BEDROOM - MORNING

An alarm screeches within darkness. Ben throws the covers off himself and picks up his phone to shut it off.

As he hits stop, the screen clears to reveal a "*someone has winked at you*" notification.

He stares at it, confused. It's from the GetFckd app.

Ben rubs his eyes, wincing from a hangover, and tries to focus as he unlocks his phone.

He swipes through apps to find that he indeed does have GetFckd installed, the red icon grinning back at him.

BEN
(to self)
What the?

Ben opens the app to see that he has a profile under the name "BenFrankly" with a picture of a collarbone.

He touches his collarbone instinctively.

Ben goes to delete the app, but a new notification suddenly comes through, reading, "J wants to entwine."

His thumb hovers over the Remove App and Open App options for a few moments before eventually selecting the latter.

GetFckd opens to reveal this mysterious J's profile, which features a crotch tattoo depicting the tail of a snake and no other information.

Ben thinks as he stares at the big red ENTWINE button.

He hits it, keeps the app installed, and climbs out of bed to get ready for work.

INT. WAREHOUSE - DAY

A knife penetrates parcel tape and slices effortlessly through it as Ben and Jordan unpack inbound goods, break down the boxes, and attempt to volley them into a skip.

Jordan takes a shot and nails it.

JORDAN
Nothing. But. Net.

Ben shoots, but it bounces off the edge. She playfully gives him the loser sign.

BEN
I have, like, zero hand-to-eye
coordination.

JORDAN
Always good to hear from someone
holding a knife.

BEN
You should see me driving a car.

JORDAN
In which case, I will not be asking
for a lift into work.

BEN
I get the bus. Affording a car is a
wild and distant dream to me.

Ben spies his opportunity to see if it was her he saw last
night in the window.

BEN (CONT'D)
Do you have to come in far?

She tosses balled-up paper and lands it directly in the skip.

JORDAN
Kinda. I walk all the way though.
Keeps me out the house longer.

BEN
Like I say, I'm right on the bus
route. You know Gallowstree at all?

Jordan looks directly at him, turning serious.

JORDAN
I don't like buses. You get creeps
on buses. Creeps who like to feel
little girl's legs and make them
too scared to scream for help.

Ben doesn't know how to react to that.

JORDAN (CONT'D)
Although, if this dry spell with my
sex life continues any longer, I
may have to buy a daysaver ticket
just to get some action.

They both laugh a little.

BEN
You know there's apps for that?

She turns a little dark again and stares at the ground.

JORDAN
You mean for bus tickets or hooking
up?

Ben dare not clarify.

JORDAN (CONT'D)
I know about the apps. I know about
ALL the fucking apps.

Jordan kicks a box hard, and, by sheer luck, it lands right
in the skip.

Ben gives her a high-five, their fingers entwining before
they let them fall away.

JORDAN (CONT'D)
What can I say? I naturally migrate
toward dumpsters.

Ben grabs a box and swings it across the depot. It looks
destined for the skip but catches enough air to fall short,
as if bouncing off a forcefield.

JORDAN (CONT'D)
I don't think your hands and eyes
are even connected, never mind
coordinated.

BEN
(confused)
That should have gone in.

Jordan wrestles with the waistband of her trousers.

JORDAN
For fuck's sake! This fucking
uniform!

As she adjusts her clothes, Ben catches a glimpse of her
toned, bare midriff and the tail end of a serpent tattoo.

He freezes at what he's just seen.

BEN
You have interesting tattoos.

Jordan, not realising which tattoo he's talking about, reveals random spiritual symbols all up her arm, some religious, some astrological.

JORDAN

You think? It's a fucking mess. I need to get it all covered up and turned into a proper sleeve.

He reaches out and lightly strokes her bare skin as he inspects them, savoring a rare hit of oxytocin.

BEN

They're cool.
(beat)
You got any others?

Jordan shakes her head, lying, and covers herself back up.

JORDAN

So, yeah, anyway, no buses, no creeps, a long walk to work, and as little time at home as possible.

BEN

You should come round to mine sometime. Give me some tattoo advice.

Jordan goes to leave to do something else.

JORDAN

No, I'm gonna make you come round to mine.
(turning back)
And that's a threat, not a promise.

Ben doesn't know what to think as he watches her disappear.

EXT. STREET - NIGHT

As Ben trudges down the street, he glances warily at No.17, which once again appears empty.

He looks back to the ground as he passes.

KNOCK-KNOCK-KNOCK----KNOCK-KNOCK-KNOCK

Ben's shoe scrapes to a halt, and he stares at the disheveled, black front door.

KNOCK-KNOCK-KNOCK----KNOCK-KNOCK-KNOCK

The knocking seems to be coming from the inside.

KNOCK-KNOCK-KNOCK----KNOCK-KNOCK-KNOCK

Ben hurries away, pretending he never heard anything.

INT. APARTMENT, LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Ben opens his front door to find a bulky black figure sitting in the corner, looking at the floor.

This is the BEAST, with the face of a man, the piercing eyes of an eagle, the broad bone structure of a lion, and the barbed horns of an ox. He is masculine and magnificent, with a body akin to a silver-back gorilla and the posture of a Navy SEAL, all covered head to toe in a thick, glossy coat of jet-black hair.

Oddly enough, Ben barely reacts and instead takes his coat and shoes off as usual before heading for the kitchen.

INT. APARTMENT, KITCHEN - NIGHT

The Beast is already standing in the kitchen and staring into nowhere when Ben enters.

Ben makes a cup of tea while occasionally glancing at the Beast, showing little concern or fear.

INT. APARTMENT, LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Ben reenters to find the Beast sitting back in the original place and takes a seat himself in his usual spot.

Neither of them look at the other as Ben slowly sips tea.

BEAST

Stop talking to me with your head
and speak to me with your voice.

Ben warily looks at the Beast.

BEN

Do you really exist?

The Beast is calm but intimidating, still not looking back.

BEAST

Do you really exist?

BEN
People act like I don't.

BEAST
Maybe it is all an act.

Ben takes that in for a moment.

BEN
Who are you?

BEAST
Who are you?

BEN
I'm Ben.

The Beast lets out a long, growling sigh.

BEAST
I know what you're called, Ben. I
asked, who are you?

Ben thinks that over carefully before turning dour.

BEN
Well, I guess I'm just a guy who
plays computer games too much, and
picks things at a shitty warehouse
because I'm stupid, and lives in a
crummy apartment I don't clean
enough, and goes drinking all the
time because-

BEAST
-Why don't you have a girlfriend,
Ben?

Ben smiles to himself sarcastically.

BEN
You tell me. I guess I'm just not
that desirable.

BEAST
You got that right. You're a
fucking loser.

Ben glares venomously at the Beast.

BEAST (CONT'D)
You did ask me to tell you. Because
you need to hear the truth, don't
you, Ben?

Ben, while chagrined, accepts that.

BEAST (CONT'D)

So, how are we going to deal with
it?

Ben grinds his jaw as he thinks.

EXT. BEER GARDEN - NIGHT

Ben gulps back a pint and knocks back a shot with John and Kyle, bleary-eyed and swaying.

KYLE

So, now she's angry I can't do
Thursday and it's her only night
off, but I have a date Thursday, so
I told her I'm working.

JOHN

Wait, this is Laura?

KYLE

No.

JOHN

Claire.

KYLE

No. This is Jo.

JOHN

Who's Jo?

Kyle winces as he thinks hard.

KYLE

The one with glasses... I think.

IRIS (O.C.)

You mind if I sit with you guys?

They all look around to see Iris fishing out a pack of tobacco from her pocket with an innocent, hopeful smile.

Ben's eyes light up at the sight of her.

BEN

(slurring)

Yeah... Sure.

He shuffles along so she can scoot in next to him and roll a cigarette.

John, almost as drunk as Ben, looks at her with disdain while Kyle shoots her an impish grin.

JOHN

Just as a warning, we are drinking heavily, and may be prone to acts of rampant debauchery.

IRIS

Oooh, only "may be prone"? And here's me looking for guaranteed debauchery.

She rolls paper unfazed while John sneers.

KYLE

Speaking of which, another round, lads?

JOHN

Now, that sounds like a jolly fine idea.

They look to Ben, who keenly slams his glass down on the table and smiles drunkenly.

KYLE

I'll take that as a yes.

JOHN

The man has spoken.

Kyle elbows John and nods to the pub as a signal they should leave Ben and Iris alone. John takes the hint.

Just before they leave, Kyle sweeps back into Iris's eyeline.

KYLE

Sorry flower. Bit rude of me. You having one?

IRIS

You doing pints or shots?

KYLE

What would you prefer?

She licks across the rolled cigarette paper.

IRIS

I could do a Fireball.

KYLE

Nice.

Kyle and John make their way into the pub, leaving Ben and Iris in awkward silence while she lights her roll-up.

IRIS

You're allowed to talk to me when I'm off duty, you know?

BEN

What would a guy like me talk to a girl like you about?

IRIS

What's that supposed to mean? Have you failed to notice we're both a pair of complete geeks?

BEN

Nah, you're way too pretty to be a geek.

IRIS

(flattered)

Why thank you, kind stranger.

She takes a long draw and blows smoke.

IRIS (CONT'D)

That's the thing, right? Nobody's what they appear to be. Others may match my wisdom, but not my dumbness.

That phrase rings a bell with Ben.

BEN

Wait... I know that saying... Con... Con... Confucius.

IRIS

Wow! I'm impressed. You studied philosophy? I did, hence why I now work here, in a pub.

BEN

I just watch stuff on YouTube.

IRIS

Yeah? I really respect that, actually. So, who's your favorite philosopher right now? Who are you digging?

Ben tries to search through his drunken mind.

BEN
I mean, if you have to ask.

IRIS
And I ask I did.

BEN
Marcus Aurelius?

IRIS
You're asking me that like it's a question. Is he your favourite?

BEN
Well, I think he makes a good point or two.

Iris chuckles to herself as she taps away some ash.

IRIS
So, you're doing the whole stoic thing then? Very fashionable. How's that working out for you?

BEN
Not great.

IRIS
Right.

BEN
But there's no point getting too upset about it.

He draws a devious grin as she bursts out laughing.

IRIS
Oh, I love that, actually! I fucking love that!

She raises her hand for a hi-five, which he sloppily returns, that last shot now really kicking in.

IRIS (CONT'D)
I don't think we've formally met.
I'm Iris. Ben, right?

BEN
(joking)
You don't need to tell me your name, Iris. I already know it, because I'm part of the simulation.

Iris does not take the joke well and fumes to herself.

IRIS
Don't say that.

BEN
What? That we all actually live in
a simulation?

IRIS
Seriously, don't do that to me. I'm
only just hanging onto the belief I
exist by a thread. Which is
ironically proof I do exist, if you
believe Descartes.

She looks at Ben a little troubled, lost, and vulnerable. He
just smiles warmly back, comforted by intoxication as he
points at her playfully.

BEN
I'm pretty sure you exist. I can
see you.

Iris trembles as she exhales more smoke.

IRIS
Thanks. You've no idea how much I
needed to hear that. The problem
with studying philosophy is it
leaves you feeling directionless.

She rubs his thigh reassuringly.

IRIS (CONT'D)
And, I'm pretty sure you exist too.

BEN
Not for much longer, hopefully.

She frowns concerned as Kyle and John reappear behind her.

JOHN
Top tip, don't go trying to buy a
round when half the bar staff are
on their smoking break.

John gives Iris a resentful look as she stares sincerely into
Ben's dilated pupils.

IRIS
Don't, okay? I haven't gotten to
know you yet.

Ben gives her the weary smile of a man who knows he can't
make any promises.

BEN
Well, if you insist.

EXT. STREET - NIGHT

Barely able to walk straight, Ben follows the curb to help stay on course, his face illuminated by his phone.

He flicks through various girls named Iris on Facebook, searching for the woman he's just been talking to.

Giving up, he checks messenger for any new messages.

As he passes No.17, a green dot appears by Lizzy's picture, showing she's active.

As soon as he's passed, she goes offline again.

Ben stops and turns to No.17, looking up at the window he thought he saw Jordan in.

He takes a few steps back for a better view, and Lizzy becomes active on his phone again.

Ben takes a step forward, and the green dot disappears.

A little perturbed, he repeats the process, watching her status change as he moves back and forth.

No.17, once again, appears not only empty but abandoned.

Ben drunkenly taps away at his screen, autocorrect working overtime.

Ben: *Hey, how are you on this fine evening?*

He waits a few moments but watches as the message gets no reply, despite Lizzy being online.

Ben gives up and walks on.

INT. APARTMENT, LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Ben flicks the light on to find the Beast waiting for him in the corner.

Trying to ignore him, Ben fights his way out of his coat and tosses it on the sofa.

INT. APARTMENT, BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Illuminated only by light in the hallway, Ben stumbles into the room and wrestles with his shoes while the Beast waits solemnly at the foot of the bed.

Ben crashes onto the sheets, still mostly dressed, and slithers toward a pillow, his head spinning.

BEAST

We need to talk about Iris.

Ben rolls onto his back and stares at the ceiling.

BEN

Why? I already know what you're thinking.

BEAST

Probably already in the friend-zone with that one.

BEN

(sarcastically)
Thanks, I really, really needed that pointing out to me.

BEAST

Then, while we're at it, Lizzy is an attention seeker.

BEN

I know that. I was actually trying to be stoic about it.

The Beast roars with laughter.

BEAST

Stoic! Stoic? You're anything but stoic, you sniveling little sissy!

Ben rolls over and puts his back to him.

BEAST (CONT'D)

You're paranoid and neurotic! You have an ego so fragile it makes a soap bubble look like a wrecking ball! EVERYTHING cuts deep with you! Stoic? You're only chance of being anything close to stoic is to numb yourself with drink to the point you no longer overthink every minor thing and appear to be putting on a brave face!

(MORE)

BEAST (CONT'D)

Do you not realise they all see
just how pathetic you really are?

Ben crawls into the fetal position,
his eyes glistening. BEN
Why are you doing this to me?

BEAST

For your own good! For their good!

Ben closes his eyes and covers his ears.

BEAST (CONT'D)

It's the hope that hurts, doesn't
it? Not the pain! You can get used
to the pain! How did it feel when
Jordan told you she prefers women
over men? You believed for a moment
before that, didn't you? You
believed it could all change! You
made that mistake! And you know
you'll make that mistake again and
again and again and again!

Ben breaks down into streams of tears and buries his face
into the pillow as he lets out a tormented howl.

BEAST (CONT'D)

You believed it again tonight! Why
don't you ever learn, Ben? What's
wrong with you? You're repulsive,
weak, unstable! You have nothing to
offer! They all laugh at you behind
your back! They all see it! How are
you going to stop this? How are you
ever going to stop this happening
over and over and over and over?

Ben sobs and covers his ears as the Beast's muffled voice
gradually gives way to unconsciousness.

INT. THEATRE - NIGHT - DREAM

Audience laughter erupts over the loop of an engine revving
hard. Ben, holding a lollipop and sporting a propeller hat,
grins like a child while framed by the crudely made wooden
outline of a car window.

BEN

Are we going to the beach, mummy?

Sitting in the front, holding a fake steering wheel erratically, his MOTHER gasps back tears while wiping her eyes, her mascara smeared down her cheeks.

BEN (CONT'D)

Where are we going, mummy?

The audience laughs again and cheers when a PERSON DRESSED AS A ROCK appears on stage, just their legs poking out the bottom of the cheaply made paper mache creation.

Ben's mother screams wildly, grips the wheel tight, and focuses on the rock. Ben clenches his eyes shut.

A drumroll starts. The audience lets out a long rising woaah of anticipation as the Rock moves closer and closer.

It collides with the car, which folds in the middle as cymbals crash and the audience cheers. Smoke fills the stage.

Ben staggers out confused, wearing a pair of dungarees and with his propeller hat knocked askew.

He searches around for his Mother.

AUDIENCE

SHE'S BEHIND YOU!

Ben can't find her anywhere.

BEN

Oh no, she isn't!

AUDIENCE

OH YES, SHE IS!

Some of the smoke clears to reveal a very real crashed car with the front end completely crushed in and his badly injured Mother hanging part way out of the shattered window.

MOTHER

Get me out of here, Ben.

Ben tries the door but it's jammed. The audience laughs.

MOTHER (CONT'D)

Please! Get me out!

She reaches out her arms, and he pulls as hard as he can, but to the audience's amusement, he can't budge her at all.

Ben tries over and over while more smoke starts to fill the stage and light flickers from within the car.

His Mother starts to writhe desperately as the flickering light gets brighter.

MOTHER (CONT'D)
HELP ME! GET ME OUT OF HERE!

She lets out a bloodcurdling scream as Ben runs off stage and returns with a big red bucket.

Another drum roll starts.

He throws the contents over his Mother to reveal it contains glittering confetti.

BA DUM TISH! The audience howls with laughter as he tries over and over, while the screams from his Mother get louder and higher pitched.

Ben turns to the audience with tears in his eyes.

BEN
The water's working!

AUDIENCE
OH NO, IT ISN'T!

Ben stamps his feet like an angry child.

BEN
OH YES IT IS!

AUDIENCE
OH NO, IT ISN'T!

Smoke fills the stage to the point the crashed car can no longer be seen, and blue strobe lights cut through it.

The band breaks into a high-paced, comedic-sounding tune as two PANTOMIME POLICE OFFICERS chase Ben around the stage with truncheons, weaving in and out of the smoke with the audience in fits of laughter.

Eventually, one of the Police Officers manages to hit Ben with a custard pie in the face, causing him to fall over.

The audience erupts into riotous applause.

Chapter 3

STOP EXERCISING YOUR DEMONS

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

Ben jolts awake alone, the covers of his bed strewn across the floor and most of his clothes still on.

He checks his phone: the time 03:00.

Habitually, he opens Messenger to find his message to Lizzy has still not been replied to.

Suddenly, a notification pops up, reading, "*You have a new correspondence*" from GetFckd.

Ben opens the app.

J: *U awake?*

Ben looks again at J's profile to see it's the same snake tattoo picture, but this time, it also says they are less than 500ft away.

Ben wipes his eyes as he debates replying.

Ben: *Yeah.*

J: *U ok?*

Ben: *Just woke up. You?*

J: *Can't sleep. 2 horny LOL.*

Dots animate to show J is still typing.

J: *U wanna meet?*

Ben takes a sharp intake of breath and sits staring at the phone, unsure what to do. He checks the profile again. The tattoo. The location.

Ben: *When?*

J: *Now.*

The mysterious J's reply is near instantaneous. Ben swallows deeply and sits upright, his breathing rapid. As he goes to reply, his phone becomes slow and unresponsive.

Ben: *You want to come to mine?*

J: *Has to be my place.*

Ben: *Where's that?*

J: *U know Gallowstree Lane?*

Ben: *That's my street.*

Dots as J types, and then...

J: *Number 17.*

Ben reels back and looks like he's going to be sick with nerves. He looks around the room and the state of himself.

Ben: *Can be ready in 30mins.*

J: *Sweet. Msg when ur on your way.*

Ben tosses his phone down and rubs his head in shock.

INT. APARTMENT, BATHROOM - MINUTES LATER

Ben showers as rapidly as he can, fumbling with everything he touches due to fear and excitement. He drops the shower gel over and over, nearly trips over on his way out, and can barely operate a towel.

INT. APARTMENT, LIVING ROOM - MINUTES LATER

A liquor cabinet opens, and Ben takes out a bottle of rum before necking a slug directly from it.

He checks GetFckd. The app takes forever to load as he taps over and over, but J is still online and showing as nearby.

Ben inspects himself in the mirror and takes out his wallet, unsure if he should take it. He retrieves a couple of tattered condom packets and puts those in his pocket.

Ben: *Headed over now.*

J: *Sweet.*

EXT. STREET - NIGHT

As Ben makes his way up the street, he can see a single red light glowing from upstairs of No.17. He pauses warily at the bottom of the path.

He tries to unlock his phone and it's painfully slow again, often not responding to the taps of his thumb and taking forever to load the GetFckd app.

Ben: *I'm here.*

J: *Door's open.*

Ben: *You want me to come in?*

He stares timidly at the door with the rusted No.17 on it.

J: *Waiting upstairs.*

The bedroom light flicks off and on a couple of times.

Swallowing his fear, Ben makes his way slowly up the path, his feet crunching on unswept leaves and dirt.

As he gets closer, he can see a line of light around the door, which is not only unlocked but slightly ajar.

Ben lightly pushes the door, and it freely swings open.

INT. NO.17, HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

The hallway is lit by a dim, bare lightbulb, and the flesh-coloured walls are soaked with what appears to be damp.

Ben makes his way in, each step tentative. Peering up the staircase, he can see the red glow.

He can't tell if it's his own pounding heart, but a deep, throbbing beat pulses rhythmically.

Ben passes the closed doorway to the living room and approaches the open kitchen door.

A faint sniffing and whimpering draws his attention into the kitchen, in which a fluorescent tube hums.

INT. NO.17, KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

The floor and walls clad with grubby white tiles. The cupboards and counter tops all heavy duty aluminium. Glistening meat hooks hang from the ceiling.

The whimpering turns to crying as Ben looks in concerned and sees a scrawny figure sitting on the floor against the wall with their legs drawn in.

It's an OLD WOMAN in a grubby old frock, her grey hair over her face and arms thin to the bone.

Ben is drawn toward her and, just as he gets close, she suddenly points to a windowless oven, causing him to jolt.

Her finger quivers in the air.

OLD WOMAN

The oven.
(beat)
Please.

He looks to the thick metal door.

OLD WOMAN (CONT'D)

There's something in it.

Going against every rational instinct in his body, Ben clutches the handle and pulls hard.

The heavy door swings open, and he looks in to see--

--The bare feet of a dead body, wrapped within a white bag and affixed with a toe tag.

Ben reels. The Old Woman starts sobbing and wailing.

He backs away, nearly catching a meat hook with his head, and hurries out of the house.

EXT. STREET - CONTINUOUS

Ben exits down the path and looks up at the upstairs window to find no light from it at all.

His pacing becomes a jog and then a sprint as he dashes down the street to his front door and looks back up the road wide-eyed, gathering his breath.

INT. APARTMENT, LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Ben lets himself in to find the Beast no longer there. He crosses to where he left his wallet and, still shellshocked, puts the condoms back in it.

He pauses for a few moments, takes out his phone, and opens the GetFckd app. All of J's messages and their account have now completely disappeared.

INT. APARTMENT, BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Still illuminated only by light in the hallway, Ben gets into his bed, fully clothed, and pulls the covers over him.

EXT. STREET - MORNING

Ben exits his place with his head down and hands in pockets.

He refuses to even look at No.17 as he passes by, which appears just as empty and abandoned as it does every day.

INT. WAREHOUSE - DAY

Ben trudges through the loading dock to find the Manager standing there waiting for him, hands on his hips.

MANAGER

Ben. Disciplinary. Now.

The Manager takes off with Ben in tow, headed for an office.

As Ben glances down an aisle, he spots Jordan, who ignores his tentative wave hello and looks the other way.

INT. WAREHOUSE, OFFICE - MOMENTS LATER

Sitting at his makeshift desk with Ben opposite, the Manager sighs as he sorts through various paperwork.

MANAGER

I don't have time for this. I really don't.

The Manager finally finds a form and starts filling it in.

MANAGER (CONT'D)

Do you know what "invasive behavior" is?

He looks up at Ben for a response. Ben winces.

BEN

No.

MANAGER

It's creepy, Ben. That's what it is. I've got people saying you "don't respect boundaries". That you "ask inappropriate questions".

BEN

People?

The Manager goes back to form filling.

MANAGER

I can't tell you who. Victim protection, company policy, and all that.

BEN
Victim?!

MANAGER
Can you just not?

BEN
Not what?

MANAGER
Be you. For five minutes, can you
just not be you?

Ben shakes his head, confused.

MANAGER (CONT'D)
Do you want to go back to whatever
it was you did before this?

Ben has a flashback to being outside an old barn, fixing a chain around the leg of a dead cow, blood all over the apron and gloves he's wearing.

BEN
Not really.

MANAGER
This is what I need you to do, Ben,
and it's pretty simple. I need you
to come in, forget you're a human
being for eight hours, and pick
products-

While the Manager rants, Ben continues his flashback to him hooking up the chain to the back of a tractor, the old diesel engine clattering away.

MANAGER (CONT'D)
-I just need you to be a machine.
That's the deal. It's not asking
too much. No socialising. No
fraternising. No making people
uncomfortable. No wasting my time.
No wasting company time either.

Ben's flashback cuts to the tractor revving up and the chain going taught. The dead cow's empty eyes staring back at him.

MANAGER (CONT'D)
Ben.

Ben snaps back out of his daydream to see the Manager looking at him frankly.

MANAGER (CONT'D)

This is your second warning. Don't fuck up on me again.

Ben nods and goes to leave.

MANAGER (CONT'D)

Oh, and Ben.

Ben stops and looks back at the Manager, who turns a little sincere and sympathetic to his plight.

MANAGER (CONT'D)

I wouldn't have women working here if I knew HR weren't going to have a shitfit over discrimination. They're a distraction, and they'll make themselves your distraction just to get attention. But it's on you to see through that and get on with the job. You get me?

Ben nods slowly in agreement.

INT. WAREHOUSE - LATER

Ben and Jordan stack opposing shelves with their backs to one another, staring ahead as they talk.

BEN

Hey, I'm sorry if I've done anything to offend you.

JORDAN

Why? You haven't.

BEN

Do you find me invasive at all?

JORDAN

I see how you look at me, at my body.

She smiles to herself.

JORDAN (CONT'D)

I wouldn't call that invasive, though. Truth is, I like it.

Ben winces, relieved and confused at the same time.

JORDAN (CONT'D)

In fact, I'll tell you a little secret. You're the first guy to make me question if it's really just girls I'm into.

Ben doesn't know how to react.

JORDAN (CONT'D)

Well, don't go fucking silent on me! Did I just overshare? I don't want to get in trouble too.

BEN

Sorry, I'm just tired.

(beat)

I had the craziest dream last night.

EXT. BEER GARDEN - NIGHT

Ben walks into the beer garden to a jubilant applause, John, Kyle, and Iris already there, somewhat merry, and with a pint ready and waiting for him.

KYLE

Here he finally is!

JOHN

What time do you call this?

Ben grabs the pint and knocks back half of it in one stress-relieving chug.

IRIS

I was hoping you'd show. I finished early.

KYLE

Go on. Ask him the same questions.

Ben takes a seat beside Iris and looks at them, confused.

JOHN

We're being psychologically analysed.

KYLE

Probably hypnotised too, I reckon.

IRIS

Look into my eyes!

Kyle shares a flirtatious laugh with Iris.

BEN

After the day I've had, I'm up for whatever.

IRIS

Okay, so, you have to be honest with me; what did you want to be when you were little?

Ben looks across at them all with an amused smile.

BEN

Is this some kind of windup?

IRIS

Why would it be a windup?

JOHN

Because he knows that we know what he wanted to be, that's why.

KYLE

Yeah, tell her, Ben.

Ben looks sincerely at Iris.

BEN

Well, up until an embarrassingly late age, I really wanted to be a fire engine.

IRIS

Wait, you mean firefighter? You wanted to be a firefighter.

JOHN

Nope, he very much meant what he said.

Kyle cracks up in the background.

IRIS

Do you mean like, an anthropomorphic fire engine? Like, half human, half truck. Or maybe robotic, like a Transformer?

BEN

No, an actual all-metal, all-truck, fire engine fire engine.

Iris doesn't know what to say.

IRIS
Well, that's a first.

KYLE
Analyse that, I dare ya!

JOHN
You used to pretend to be one at school, didn't you, Ben?

BEN
(rolling eyes)
Yes.

KYLE
And you used to go around pretending to put fires out during break time, right Ben?

BEN
Also yes. There were a lot of fictional fires at my school.

Kyle cracks up even more.

JOHN
I mean, given how the libtards are telling us anyone can be anything they want to be now, you could simply just identify as a fire engine and change your pronouns.

KYLE
Yeah, they could be "nee/naw".

Iris squeals with laughter and clutches Kyle's arm.

IRIS
Oh, stop it! This is too much! Is that true though, that you actually wanted to be a fire engine?

Ben nods, a little embarrassed. She dances in her seat with delight and claps her hands.

IRIS (CONT'D)
That's so adorable!

JOHN
Anyway, when are we gonna see you back online? We're a two-man squad most nights lately. Did someone release Fire Engine Simulator and you'd rather play that?

BEN

Nah. What's the point of even playing? I always lose. I WILL always lose.

Iris starts rubbing Ben's thigh under the table.

KYLE

Cool, can I have all your purchased skins, then?

BEN

You can fuck right off.

IRIS

Hey! Enough stupid boy talk. I haven't finished my questions.

(focusing on Ben)

So, what's your biggest fear of death? You don't have to answer if you don't want to.

BEN

Well, I grew up wanting to be a fire engine, so I don't know, burning to death, maybe?

IRIS

Okay, well, my biggest fear is being kidnapped, but I've never wanted to be like, a hostage negotiator or anything.

KYLE

Wait, you told us you went solo traveling around Thailand, and your greatest fear is being kidnapped?

IRIS

I don't pretend to make any sense.

BEN

You've been to Thailand?

IRIS

Yeah, have you?

BEN

I've never even left the country. How was it?

Iris narrows her eyes as she passionately explains.

IRIS

So, I went to this place in the north. An ancient Buddhist temple built upon three existing even more ancient temples. As you walk into the main entrance, there's a Buddha statue that was cast over six hundred years ago. Monks host chats there every day and tourists can ask them whatever they want. I'd wanted to visit this place my entire adult life and you know what I felt once I finally got there?

Ben shakes his head, unsure.

IRIS (CONT'D)

Nothing. Absolutely nothing. How crazy is that?

BEN

I don't think that's crazy at all. What did you ask the monks?

IRIS

I... I didn't ask them anything. I couldn't think of an interesting enough question.

JOHN

You should have asked them if any of them ever wanted to be a fire engine.

Everyone laughs, but Iris has a tear in her eye, and Ben can see it as she retreats into her own head.

KYLE

Speaking of which, I'm going to extinguish my thirst with another round.

JOHN

And I am going to get my hose out and douse the urinals.

As Kyle and John leave, Ben watches Iris lost in thought.

BEN

You okay?

Iris shakes her head defeated.

IRIS

No, and I don't think I ever will be. We act like this, whatever this is, existence, life, whatever, is this incredible privilege, but, when I apply logic, I just can't see it like that at all. I mean, describe something worse? Try it.

BEN

Worse than being alive?

IRIS

Worse than existence, human existence that is. We spend our time regretting the past, resenting the present, and fearing the future. We're born into is this huge psychological torture device that drip-feeds us hope and sucker punches us with trauma on a daily basis, meaning every single one of us goes to bed tormented by this piece of meat in our heads that's part lizard and can't cope with a modern day's stress, never mind a lifetime's, all while trying to see things out in these bodies that are decaying around us day by day. And apparently, we're supposed to treasure that and find some sort of meaning in it. Well, maybe there is no meaning, and this is actually Hell we're living in right now. Like I say, describe something worse. You can't. They say the devil's greatest trick is to convince the world he doesn't exist. I say the devil's greatest trick is to convince us we're not already living under his rule.

She punctuates her rant with a deep sigh and looks at Ben forlorn before forcing a resigned smile.

IRIS (CONT'D)

I'm tired, neurotic, and I've had far too much to drink.

BEN

You said describe something worse.

IRIS

Yeah, I dare you. I double dare you.

BEN

Well, how about all that you just said, but me and you had never met.

She laughs, flattered, and gathers up her things.

IRIS

I'm glad you see it like that.
That's a good take.

Iris gets up to leave and stares down at him admiringly before rubbing his hair.

IRIS (CONT'D)

How the fuck have you not got a girlfriend?

She kisses him on the head.

IRIS (CONT'D)

Night.

Iris leaves, skidding her feet along the ground she's so tired, and leaving Ben sitting there confused.

He goes back to drinking and getting lost in his thoughts as John and Kyle return with another round.

JOHN

NEE NAW, NEW NAW!!!

KYLE

WOO, WOO, WOO, WOO!!!

JOHN

We've decided, I'm going to identify as a police car and Kyle's gonna be an ambulance, which means he's slow, top heavy, and basically just a crap ice-cream van that only plays repetitive rave music.

KYLE

Nah, ambulance is best choice, mate.

JOHN

How, in any world, is being an ambulance the best choice when compared to a police car and fire engine?

KYLE

Paramedics. Highest rate of infidelity in any profession.

Kyle winks at John and gives him the finger guns.

JOHN

I worry about you sometimes.

BEN

Sometimes! You only worry about him sometimes?

EXT. STREET - NIGHT

As Ben makes his way home, he hears a familiar scraping sound ahead of him.

He closes in on the silhouette of a girl walking ahead, who's skidding her feet along the floor just like Iris.

As he gets closer, he can see she's wearing the same clothes and carrying the same bag.

She turns and heads up the path to No.17 before unlocking the door and heading inside, leaving it open behind her.

Ben stops and stares down the path into the house, the hallway completely different from what he thought he saw the previous night.

He waits for her to return and close the door, but she doesn't, exposing the house to intruders.

BEN

(to self)

The girl who apparently doesn't want to be kidnapped.

Ben makes his way up the path, looking for her.

BEN (CONT'D)

Hello?

INT. NO.17, HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

The walls clad with gothic wooden paneling and decorative earth-colored tiles, all lit by candles and an old ornate cast iron chandelier.

Ben peers in through the doorway.

BEN

Hello? Hey! Your door's open!

He waits for a response but gets none.

CRASH! From inside. Ben draws closer as he gets more concerned.

BEN (CONT'D)

Hello? Is everything okay?

The somber tone of a choir emits from the living room.

Ben finds himself drawn to enter, his steps cautious but his expression curious.

INT. NO.17, LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Ben enters to find the walls, ceiling, and floor bare stone, flickering in the light of dozens of candles arranged on an altar, the windows stained glass.

He looks around to see white statues of people frozen in torment, weeping with their hands outstretched.

Ben becomes moved and emotional as he begins to recognise them. He's drawn to one in particular, that looks just like his mother.

He raises a hand and instinctively goes to cradle her head, but even the tenderest touch causes the thin shell of marble to crack.

Ben reels back, upset and then horrified, as he sees a piece fall away around the eye to reveal a living one inside, twitching and looking around the room.

The choir moves up an octave as a towering PRIEST enters the room, his skin white, eyes black, and a metal cross embedded in his face, forming the bridge of his nose and the brow of his forehead.

PRIEST

How dare you enter this place.

Unable to talk with fear and shivering intensely, Ben shakes his head apologetically.

The Priest points his long, withered finger at him.

PRIEST (CONT'D)

Take a look at yourself.

His finger directs to a large mirror above the altar, in which Ben sees his perfectly framed reflection.

However, as Ben stares, the mirror starts to distort, forcing his expression into a smile.

As the smile grows, his own face mirrors the mirror, a reluctant grin being pulled across it.

Ben's reflection and posture in the mirror becomes more and more magnificent and proud while he himself winces in pain as the smile becomes unbearable, but he's unable to look away.

He screams in agony, unable to take any more. The mirror cracks around the smile and suddenly explodes, sending shards of glass everywhere.

The Priest stares down at Ben disgusted and furious, the Old Woman from the kitchen appearing behind him with a scowl on her face.

BEN

Grandma?

PRIEST

See what your ego has done? This is not yours to destroy!

The choir begins to cry in unison as blood trickles from the eyes of the statues.

OLD WOMAN

(chanting to self)

The day of wrath, that day will
dissolve the world in ashes. The
day of wrath, that day will
dissolve the world in ashes.

Ben looks to the Priest, lost and terrified.

PRIEST

Why do you refuse to cry like
everyone else?

BEN

I-I-I don't want to cry.

The Priest takes a large piece of shattered glass from the floor and offers it to Ben.

PRIEST

Then make yourself weep.

Ben takes the glistening shard, and the Priest draws across his own eyes with his finger, instructing him on what to do.

Ben nods and brings the glass to his eye, his hand trembling and reluctant to pull closer.

PRIEST (CONT'D)

Make. Yourself. Weep.

OLD WOMAN

(chanting to self)

The day of wrath, that day will
dissolve the world in ashes. The
day of wrath, that day will
dissolve the world in ashes.

The choir's crying gets louder and distorts into a howling.

Ben gasps with fear as he struggles to move his hand any closer. The Priest smiles contently.

PRIEST

Make. Yourself. Weep.

Ben suddenly drops his head and jabs the glass into the bottom of his eye, screaming along with the choir as he saws away at flesh and tissue.

The Priest watches without emotion as Ben moves to the other eye, blood running down his arm and dripping from the elbow.

As the choir reaches its shrieking climax, Ben outstretches his arms and looks back up with a huge, blissful smile, presenting his mutilated eye sockets, blood streaming down his face.

Chapter 4

SOMETHING SORROWED AND SOMETHING BLUE

EXT. WAREHOUSE - MORNING

Jordan exhales a huge cloud of smoke from her vape as she talks to the blurred figure of a CO-WORKER.

Ben idly watches her while he leans against a wall and vapes too, a little out of it.

JORDAN
(rambling to co-worker)
No, dude, it's not a cover. It's
literally their fucking song. Look
it up. I don't give a shit.

Not yet changed for work and wearing very little under her leather jacket, Jordan starts adjusting her bra.

Ben watches as lace battles with flesh, and she accidentally flashes a nipple in the process.

She covers herself back up and catches him looking before he can avert his eyes.

He looks back to see her smiling. She raises her eyebrows and turns her attention back to her co-worker.

JORDAN (CONT'D)
See, fuck you for doubting me. Next
time, take my fucking word for it,
okay? I know this shit...

INT. WAREHOUSE - LATER

Zombie-like in his motions, Ben counts products and writes on a clipboard as he does a routine stocktake.

Jordan appears carrying a metal kick step.

JORDAN
I need you.

Ben looks up, confused, as she disappears and reappears.

JORDAN (CONT'D)
Help me.

He places the clipboard down and follows her down an aisle.

JORDAN (CONT'D)
I do not feel safe using one of
these things. Hold me.

She steps up onto the kick step in an attempt to reach a box on the top shelf. Faced with her ass pretty much in his face, Ben doesn't know what to hold.

JORDAN (CONT'D)
Fucking hold me!

Ben holds her by the waist and melts a little in the process, knowing he really shouldn't.

BEN
We have ladders.

JORDAN
Hold me tighter.

She stretches and struggles, revealing her lower back as he grips onto her thighs and she pushes her ass into him.

JORDAN (CONT'D)
Tighter. I don't want to fucking
fall!

Ben winces, conflicted, as he steadies her as best he can.

She suddenly freezes, disgusted by something.

JORDAN (CONT'D)
What the fuck?!

Ben freezes too.

JORDAN (CONT'D)
Get THE FUCK off me!

He immediately takes his hands away as she carefully steps down and around him like he's made of plutonium.

JORDAN (CONT'D)
Don't ever touch me like that
again! Just stay away from me, you
fucking creep!

She leaves, disgusted, as he stands there confused.

EXT. BEER GARDEN - NIGHT

John takes a confident sip of beer and looks at Ben and Kyle with a wise expression while he lectures them.

JOHN
Women are inherently parasitic
beings. Think about it.
(MORE)

JOHN (CONT'D)

They flock to a resource, hog them, bleed them dry, and move on to the next host as soon as it suits them. A rich man is their Adonis, a poor man is their leper. That's why I always say, I love women, I just hate what they really are.

BEN

You do have a mother, you know, and I don't think you'd appreciate someone calling her a parasite.

JOHN

I maintain I was created as an experiment in a lab. That's why I see through all this bullshit.

BEN

You're being a bit harsh though. I don't think it's fair to say, every woman ever born is some sort of two-faced gold digger.

Kyle idly looks for something in his wallet as he talks.

KYLE

Not being harsh enough, in my opinion. Women are there to be used. Simple as. They know it too. That's why they offer themselves up to be used over and over again. The mistake guys make is getting attached.

BEN

Would be a fine chance to have at least something to attach too.

KYLE

Anyway, speaking of "using".

Kyle discretely leaves to empty his bladder and fill his nose.

JOHN

You see, Kyle may think he's using women, but really, they're using him. That's what they're naturally masterful at, manipulation.

BEN

I don't know. Kyle does pretty well.

JOHN

Granted, but how much does it cost him? He doesn't share that side, but you've heard the stories. It all adds up.

BEN

Kyle can easily afford it though.

JOHN

That's kinda my point. He can afford it, and those women know he can afford it. That's why he gets targeted.

BEN

You make it sound like he's the victim. You know he has sex with these women, right? Pretty much all of them.

JOHN

That's your issue, you're jealous of the one bit of pleasure he gets despite all that cost.

BEN

I'm not jealous of the sex.

JOHN

Well, if not the sex, then what? What's your point? You certainly can't be jealous of wasting all that money.

BEN

I'm jealous of being wanted.

John takes that statement in, perhaps agreeing with it deep down in his soul.

BEN (CONT'D)

I understand why you feel some women should be turned down, and I get why you want to go your own way, but how can I even say no to something when there are zero options there in the first place?

John doesn't have a rebuttal.

BEN (CONT'D)

And I don't want to just BE loved either. I want TO love.

(MORE)

BEN (CONT'D)

I want to provide. I want to have purpose. It's what I'm built to do.

Ben's frustrations turn the mood somber, but that's quickly cut through when Kyle reappears coked out of his head.

KYLE

Oy oy! Watch this fuckin' cartwheel!

Before anyone can stop him, Kyle performs a remarkably competent cartwheel... into a table of empties.

KYLE (CONT'D)

Now, you've all heard of the caterpillar, but have you ever heard of the slug?

John and Ben wince as they watch Kyle slide his face and torso along the ground as he shuffles along on his front.

JOHN

I think someone's going to deeply regret that in the morning.

Iris suddenly exits the pub in a bluster and desperately gathers empties before Kyle can do more damage.

IRIS

Guys, what the fuck is going on?

Kyle hops to his feet and steadies himself.

KYLE

Here's what's going on, love, watch this, the fucking splits are going on.

Iris looks to John and Ben.

IRIS

Can he do the splits?

They shrug back.

Kyle cheers himself on in a big build-up, then leaps into the air and drops into the splits. He looks at them just as surprised as they look at him.

KYLE

Ta-da!

IRIS
Stop it. You're gonna hurt
yourself.

KYLE
No, okay, watch this.

He hops onto a low wall next to a line of ferns in pots.

KYLE (CONT'D)
Who wants to see a magic trick?

BEN
Literally, none of us.

KYLE
Now you see me-

Kyle lets himself fall back off the wall, disappearing into the ferns and plant pots with a crash.

KYLE (CONT'D)
(pained)
-Now you don't.

Iris puts down the empties she's gathered and dashes to Kyle's aid.

IRIS
That's enough! Stop it now!

She helps Kyle up and sits him down beside her with a comforting arm around him and a stern look straight into his dilated eyes.

IRIS (CONT'D)
Look, you're just the kind of guy I
go for, okay?

Ben has to do a double-take.

IRIS (CONT'D)
You're my kind of guy, but this
type of behavior ruins it for me.
There's no need.

She grabs him by the shoulders and looks at him sincerely while Ben watches on, heartbroken.

IRIS (CONT'D)

You're confident, brash, assertive.
You don't give a fuck what people
think, you party, hell you ARE the
party! You're out there, you're
exciting.

All the things Ben isn't.

IRIS (CONT'D)

This shit you're taking, you don't
need it in your system.

Ben looks around to John, who looks sagely back.

JOHN

And it begins.

Iris rests Kyles's head on her chest as she hugs him tight.

IRIS

You are MORE than enough.

Buried in cleavage, Kyle grins and raises his eyebrows at Ben
and John.

Ben necks back his pint and gets up to leave.

BEN

I gotta go.

JOHN

Wait, why?

BEN

I got places to be.

Without saying goodbye, Ben marches straight out of the beer
garden gate and trudges up the road.

Iris steadies Kyle and looks to John.

IRIS

Keep an eye on him, okay?

She jogs across the beer garden and out of the gate.

IRIS (CONT'D)

Ben? Ben?

While Ben is nowhere to be seen, Kyle sits there, reflecting
on what Iris has told him.

INT. APARTMENT, KITCHEN - NIGHT

Ben crashes into the kitchen with his coat still on and braces himself against the counter, his breathing heavy and face a mixture of emotions.

The Beast appears in the doorway.

BEAST

Bad time to say I told you so?

Ben glares back.

BEN

Okay, if you're so wise, tell me what to fucking do?

BEAST

I can't do that, Ben. You must act for yourself.

BEN

How convenient. You should listen to what John has to say about the whole dating situation. He makes some VERY compelling points.

BEAST

John has his own demons to face.

Ben rolls his eyes.

BEN

What do you want from me?

BEAST

I want you to find a righteous path.

BEN

Oh, a pound of flesh? Is that what you want?

BEAST

I did not say that.

Furious and at the end of his tether, Ben slides a kitchen knife out of the block and holds it to his face.

BEN

Well, how about I take it from my fucking face?!

For a rare moment, The Beast actually looks Ben in the eye, the knife to his temple, drawing a speck of blood.

BEAST

Go ahead, that will really improve your chance with the ladies.

Ben doesn't laugh, but the quip does cause him to calm down.

BEAST (CONT'D)

I'm not your enemy, but I'm also not your friend.

BEN

Fine. Whatever.

Ben reflects for a few long moments before taking out his phone and opening the message thread with Lizzy.

He taps away while The Beast watches indifferently.

Ben: Hey, are we actually going to go out sometime? Seems this conversation keeps going around and around in circles. I really like you and I'd like to get to know you better... In person x

EXT. APARTMENT, LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Ben slumps down on the sofa while The Beast carefully takes a seat nearby.

Opening up a dating app, Ben starts swiping like crazy, the girls' profiles becoming increasingly more posed, and indecent until they start to look like flyers for escorts.

He keeps going and the profiles become cartoonish, to the point the girls look like anime characters.

BEAST

I appreciate you've been waiting a long time already.

Ben hits the swipe limit.

BEAST (CONT'D)

But none of this feels like an answer.

BEN

(exploding)

I'm twenty-five years old, and I haven't had sex or a girlfriend!

Ben has to wipe drool from his mouth due to snarling.

BEN (CONT'D)

Give me a fucking answer!

The Beast has nothing. Ben shakes his head and goes to open up another dating app, but a miracle happens.

Lizzy: *Hey you, I'd love to go out sometime. When would be a good time? x*

Ben can't believe what he's seeing and wastes no time in typing out a reply.

Ben: *Not to sound too keen, but as soon as possible LOL! x*

Lizzy: *Come meet me then :) x*

Ben glances at the Beast, who seems unimpressed, and focuses back on his phone.

Ben: *What, now? x*

Lizzy: *Yes please :) x*

Ben: *Where are you x*

Lizzy: *You know exactly where xxx*

Ben, now completely out of patience and showing zero fear, gets up and heads for the door.

BEAST

You're a fool, you hear me? A fool!

INT. NO.17, HALLWAY - NIGHT

Ben stares into the brightly lit hallway, the door already wide open for him.

This time, there's parquet flooring, brightly coloured doors, and beige walls covered with large notice boards.

As Ben makes his way in, he can see all the items pinned to the notice boards relate to school activities.

The doors to the living room and kitchen are shut, everything leading toward the stairs ahead.

RIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIING!!! From a bell upstairs.

Ben looks up, confused, and then back to see he's now wearing a school uniform, complete with blazer and tie.

He hears a door squeak open and heels click along the floor above until he can see a pair of black stilettos behind the bars of the bannister.

IRIS (O.C.)
Time for class, Ben.

The stilettos disappear, and Ben makes his way up the stairs to see all the bedroom doors are those to classrooms, complete with numbers and glass panels, only one of which is lit.

He opens that door.

INT. NO.17, SPARE BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Ben peers in to be presented with Iris standing sternly in front of a blackboard, wearing a leather skirt and white blouse while holding a long ruler.

The room is that of a tiny old classroom, but on the wood-paneled walls hang whips, chains, and a bondage cross.

IRIS
Sit. Down.

Ben sees there are two small wooden desks in front of him, at one of which is sitting a fully grown adult DUNCE, complete with a pointy hat that completely covers his head.

Ben carefully eases onto the small chair at the empty desk, the wood creaking under his weight.

IRIS (CONT'D)
Good. Let's get started with some easy questions, shall we?

She writes on the board in chalk: $2 + 2 =$

IRIS (CONT'D)
Two plus two equals what?

Ben raises his hand tentatively.

IRIS (CONT'D)
Yes Ben?

BEN
Umm... Four?

Iris turns a little angry, and the Dunce starts guffawing to himself under his hat, his bulky body shaking.

She crosses to Ben's desk and BANG! She smacks the ruler against it hard, causing him to jolt back.

IRIS

Wrong!

She stands over Ben, powerful and dominant.

IRIS (CONT'D)

Two plus two equals?

The Dunce starts mumbling and whispering something incoherent, and Iris leans in close to listen.

She looks back at Ben, impressed at what she's heard.

IRIS (CONT'D)

Yes! That's correct!

She proudly wraps her arms around the Dunce and rubs him.

IRIS (CONT'D)

Well done you, you little smarty pants.

BEN

(incredulous)

I said four!

Iris grabs Ben by the tie, pulling it up tight and glaring into his eyes.

IRIS

Silence! You imbecile!

Ben gasps for air, and even after she lets go and paces back and forth in front of the desks, he cannot loosen it enough to breathe properly.

IRIS (CONT'D)

Let's try again. Five plus five?

(beat)

Ben?

Ben goes to reply but can barely speak.

BEN

(wheezing)

Ten.

IRIS

Speak up!

The Dunce chuckles mockingly at Ben unable to speak while trying to loosen his tie.

BEN
(gasping)
Ten!

Iris walks around Ben's desk, straddles him, and grabs his tie once more.

IRIS
Answer me!

Ben shakes his head, unable to talk, his eyes watering.

Iris grits her teeth and pulls the tie even tighter, causing the Dunce to howl uncontrollably with laughter.

IRIS (CONT'D)
Answer! Me!

She pulls the tie again, and Ben's eyes turn bloodshot. He claws at his neck and stares up at the ceiling as everything turns blurry and his ears fill with white noise.

INT. NO.17, BATHROOM - CONTINUOUS

Ben surfaces naked, gasping for air and gradually calming his breathing as he takes in the surroundings.

He's in a hot tub, the bathroom dark and tranquil with the crackle of flames from medieval wall sconces and the trickle of running water.

He comes to his senses and spots something else in the water with him, just above the surface.

As he wipes his eyes and focuses, he picks out hair and the top of a human head in the darkness.

The eyes suddenly open, the whites bright, and the head rises to reveal it's Jordan staring right back at him.

BEN
Hey?

Jordan raises a finger to her lips and, still looking him dead in the eye, raises out of the water to reveal she's naked, glistening droplets running down her curves.

She wades seductively toward him and stands there, the reflected light of the rippling water dancing across her smooth skin.

Taking his hands and meshing them with hers, Jordan raises them up high as she leans in close and tenderly kisses him on the lips.

Ben melts and shivers with nerves and excitement as she places his hands on her bare hips and kisses him again, leaning her body into him as she does so.

One of Ben's trembling hands runs up to one of her breasts and cups it.

BEN (CONT'D)

Argh!

He suddenly snaps his hand away as if bitten and finds blood running down his arm.

JORDAN

What the fuck?

They go back to kissing and his other hand gradually works it's way down to her ass.

BEN

Ow!

Ben pulls his hand away to find blood pouring down his other arm and quickly tainting the water.

JORDAN

What the fuck? What have you done?

They both look down to see the whole hot tub turning red, the water thickening into blood.

Jordan looks at Ben hurt and offended, appalled at what's happening, her eyes sharp with betrayal.

She moves away, and Ben goes to comfort her, but the blood thickens further and further until he's writhing within a sea of red serpents, unable to move.

Ben can hear Jordan's petrified screams but he cannot see her as the snakes wrap around his body.

He struggles as hard as he can, thrashing around desperately, his strength rapidly depleting as his muscles are crushed.

INT. NO.17, MAIN BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Ben fights with thick red bedsheets as if waking up from a dream, and realises he's in a huge four-poster bed within a beautiful crypt-like bedroom lit with flickering candles.

He rolls over, now wearing striped pajamas, to see he's lying next to LIZZY, who's curled up with her back to him and her eyes closed.

LIZZY
How are you?

BEN
I... I really don't know anymore.

She wriggles back into him so they're spooning.

LIZZY
How are you?

BEN
I'm just so tired.

LIZZY
How are you?

BEN
Why do you keep asking me that?

LIZZY
You ate all the sweets.

Ben looks around to see a half-empty bowl of red M&Ms.

BEN
I... don't remember.

LIZZY
Don't go to sleep. Please don't go to sleep.

He struggles to keep his eyes open and couldn't look more peaceful as he settles back into the comfy pillows and slowly sinks into the mattress.

LIZZY (CONT'D)
Wake up.

Ben lies motionless.

LIZZY (CONT'D)
Wake up!

She rolls over and starts shaking him hard.

LIZZY (CONT'D)
Wake up!

Ben jolts awake, but she keeps on shaking him, getting more and more angry as she does so.

SMACK! She slaps him around the face.

He tries to back away, but the heavy duvet makes it almost impossible as Lizzy smacks him hard around the chops over and over. SMACK! SMACK! SMACK!

LIZZY (CONT'D)

Wake up! Wake up! Wake up!

Ben manages to slither free and crashes to the floor on his back. He looks up to find Lizzy glaring at him from above.

LIZZY (CONT'D)

You've done it now!

She looks up to the ceiling, and his eyes follow to see the plaster creaking and cracking, something incredibly heavy moving around up there.

He looks back to see Lizzy gone and flees to the landing.

INT. NO.17, LANDING - CONTINUOUS

Ben exits the bedroom in his original clothes with the roof distorting above him, the walls just painted breeze blocks.

He walks slowly backward, watching the cracks follow him until he stops under the open loft hatch.

From within the shadows above him, the huge yellow eye of a MONSTER appears and focuses on him.

Ben turns and runs, hurrying down the stairs as fast as he can without tripping.

INT. NO.17, HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

The front door now solid steel. Ben rushes up to it and tries the heavy-duty handle. It's locked.

He sees a huge bunch of keys hanging next to it and grabs them.

BOOM! The thunderous sound of the Monster's footstep shakes the entire building.

Ben fumbles with the keys, trying to find the right one, his hands and the building shaking as he struggles to get them in the keyhole.

BOOM! Another footstep, even louder. Dust drops from the ceiling onto Ben.

He tries another key. Nothing. Then another. Still nothing.

BOOM! Chunks of plaster fall, the footsteps getting closer.

Then silence.

Ben stops, a key in the lock, and looks back. A long, deep primal growl rattles everything around him.

He tries the key. It turns effortlessly, unlocking the heavy bolt with a triumphant clunk.

Ben sweeps open the door and flees, slamming it behind him as he sprints down the path.

INT. WAREHOUSE - DAY

An old dot-matrix printer whirrs and buzzes as it shunts paper through line by line and spits it out on the roll.

Ben tears the sheet off and idly looks at it before robotically making his way down the aisles until he finds the section he's looking for.

He scans through the assorted boxes while glancing at the sheet to check and recheck the part number he's looking for.

Ben slides out a box labeled "42-15-33" and checks the picking slip, which also clearly reads "42-15-33".

He checks the box. It's noticeably marked, with oil smeared across one corner, but it's intact.

The Manager clears his throat, and Ben turns to find him leaning against the shelves, keeping an eye on him.

MANAGER

Drivers are waiting and you're standing there like it's the first time you've ever seen a box. Let's get things moving.

CLAP! CLAP! The Manager claps his hands as he strolls away.

MANAGER (CONT'D)

(to whole warehouse)

C'mon guys, this is simple work! Read a number, find a number, pick a number! Enjoy it while it lasts.

(MORE)

MANAGER (CONT'D)

They are literally reprogramming
robot vacuum cleaners to replace
you as we speak!

Ben checks the box and the picking slip again, the grease
from the box now on his fingers, smearing the slip with a big
black fingerprint.

INT. WAREHOUSE - LATER

Ben struggles to carry a bunch of boxes and manages to drop
them all on the floor. Flustered and in a bit of a panic, he
starts gathering them back up.

MANAGER (O.C.)

Ben! Over here now!

Ben winces and warily makes his way out of the aisles to find
the Manager standing by the order bins holding a box and a
picking slip.

MANAGER (CONT'D)

Why do you have to do this to me,
Ben? Why do you have to do this to
all of us?

The Manager holds out a box to Ben.

MANAGER (CONT'D)

What does that say?

BEN

(reading label)
Forty-two, fifteen, thirty-three.

MANAGER

And what does this say?

He thrusts the picking slip in Ben's face. His eyes sink when
he sees what it says.

MANAGER (CONT'D)

Read it! C'mon!

BEN

Thirty-three, fifteen, forty-two.

MANAGER

So you can read then, and you can
retain the information you've read
at least long enough to recite it.

(MORE)

MANAGER (CONT'D)

It's just that, for some reason,
you refuse to do that for me, Ben.
Why is that?

BEN

I-I-I-checked. I double-checked.

MANAGER

Well then, here's a wild
suggestion, triple-check in the
future. Now go fix it.

The Manager shoves the box and picking slip into Ben's hands. Ben looks at the box, the same patch of grease and the fingerprint on the picking slip there as before.

Ben winces with pained confusion and betrayal as he stares at the mismatched numbers.

MANAGER (CONT'D)

Fix it now, Ben. I'm starting to
get an eye-twitch.

Ben walks away in a state of confusion and paranoia with the Manager calling out after him.

MANAGER (CONT'D)

Just what are we going to do with
you, Ben? This is first for me!

The Manager shakes his head, at the end of his wits and in complete disbelief.

MANAGER (CONT'D)

You're useless! You hear that?
You're actually genuinely
completely bloody useless!

The words hit hard, lumbering Ben with even more self-hate to carry.

EXT. STREET - EVENING

Ben paces home with a look of pure evil in his eyes, not even glancing at No.17 as he passes it, despite the sound of rampant knocking from what sounds like half a dozen fists on the other side of the door.

INT. APARTMENT, LIVING ROOM - EVENING

Ben enters and slams the door to find The Beast sitting in his spot looking a little guilty with a game controller in his hands, an energy drink on the table, and the third-person shooter up on the screen.

BEAST

Bad day?

Ben starts chuckling manically to himself.

BEN

(rambling)

Bad day? Bad day? Let's see.

Ben gets in The Beast's face and screams so ferociously it blows back his fur before pacing around the room and screaming over-and-over at the top of his lungs.

BEN (CONT'D)

BAD DAY! BAD DAY!

Snapping out of his shock, The Beast gets up and grabs Ben by the shoulders, trying to shake some sense into him.

BEAST

WHAT HAPPENED?

BEN

I! HAVE! NO! PURPOSE!

The Beast wraps his thick arms around Ben and comforts him until he's eventually subdued.

BEN (CONT'D)

I have no purpose. I have no purpose. I have no purpose. I have no purpose. I have no purpose.

Ben repeats himself over and over until he becomes so emotionally exhausted that he drifts off to sleep.

The Beast keeps tight hold of him, sorrow in his eyes.

Chapter 5

REACH OUT AND HUG DEATH

INT. APARTMENT, BEDROOM - MORNING

An alarm wails. Ben lazily picks up his phone and switches it off before returning into the fetal position, nestled against the Beast with a solemn look on his face.

BEAST

What are we going to do, Ben?

BEN

(staring into distance)

I think I might need you to come into work with me today.

INT. WAREHOUSE, OFFICE - DAY

From one side of the desk, the Manager glares across at Ben, who stares indifferently back from the other.

MANAGER

What's your major malfunction, Ben?
Are you like, schizophrenic or something?

Ben looks across to the Beast, who's sitting on the end of the desk wearing the same shirt and tie as the Manager.

BEAST

You're not schizophrenic.

Ben looks back to the Manager.

BEN

I just want to be left alone.

MANAGER

Well, that's kinda the problem, Ben. I wish I could leave you alone. In fact, I yearn for a life where I'd never have to talk to you or look at your face ever again. However, everytime I leave you alone, you somehow seem to screw up.

Ben looks again to the Beast.

BEAST

(thumbing to Manager)

I'm with him on that one.

MANAGER

I just think we've reached the end of the road here. I don't see what else I can do to help. This clearly isn't the right place for you.

BEN

Nowhere's the right place for me.

MANAGER

Well, you said it.

Ben looks to the Beast and gets an apathetic look back.

MANAGER (CONT'D)

Is this what you want, for me to fire you? Because I can and I will.

BEAST

If I may interject, I think perhaps now would be a good time to put emotions aside and find some sort of middle ground, a compromise that ensures both parties-

BEN

-No.

(to Manager)

What I want you to do, ummm, what I really want you to do is... I want you to kiss my fucking arse, mate.

Ben stares deadpan at the astonished manager.

BEAST

(sighing)

Or, we could go this route.

MANAGER

Okay, you're done. You're over. You got your wish. I can't help you. Nobody can help you. Get your stuff and leave, and do so quietly.

Ben gets up to go and grins deviously.

BEN

Oh, I will absolutely not be doing that.

INT. WAREHOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Ben strolls out of the warehouse with a dark, machiavellian, glower, the Beast and Manager in tow.

He grabs random boxes and starts hurtling them across the warehouse as hard as he can, knocking over other stacks.

MANAGER

No! Stop that now!

As Ben walks, he holds his arm out and sweeps an entire line of products onto the floor.

MANAGER (CONT'D)

I'm warning you.

Ben turns and looks at the Beast, disappointed.

The Beast lets out a deep, resigned sigh. CRACK! He elbows the Manager in the face, knocking him out.

With that, Ben and the Beast proceed to go ape shit, messing up and destroying everything they can.

The Beast lobs heavy boxes across the building, taking out entire racks like cannonballs while Ben grabs a long bar and starts swinging at everything he can, turning cardboard and its contents into shreds.

Metal music blasts in Ben's head as he drops the bar and climbs up the racks, scrabbling over the "do not climb" warning sign in the process.

He gets to the top and starts rocking the whole set of shelves back and forth like a raging chimp.

The Beast joins in, helping rock it from the bottom.

The tall metal structure creaks and bends, eventually succumbing to gravity and crashing onto the next set of shelves like giant domino pieces, boxes raining down within them, filling up the gaps.

Ben paces around the warehouse with a mean stare.

BEN

Jordan! Jordan?

He can't find her.

BEN (CONT'D)

Jordan!? I'm going!

Jordan is nowhere to be found.

MANAGER (O.C.)

Ben!

Ben turns to see the Manager standing there, covering his bloody nose, his eyes streaming.

MANAGER (CONT'D)

What are you talking about? Just go!

EXT. WAREHOUSE - CONTINUOUS

As Ben walks away, with STAFF MEMBERS emerging from the warehouse behind him, he makes sure to kick every car he passes, setting off their alarms one by one.

EXT. TOWN - DAY

Riddled with anger and despair, Ben guzzles from the neck of a rum bottle as he sits alone on a curb watching the pigeons and crows fighting over scraps of waste near bins.

His phone rings. He takes it out of his pocket and throws it at the birds, destroying it and causing them to scatter.

EXT. PARK - DAY

As Ben staggers through the park, he becomes increasingly aware of how drunk he looks to the other PARK GOERS and retreats shamefully into the bushes.

EXT. LAKESIDE - CONTINUOUS

Piss trickles and splatters as Ben relieves himself against a tree before making his way through the foliage.

He breaks out into a tiny hidden oasis next to a tranquil part of a lake, tall reeds creating a screen of privacy, where EVA, a naturally beautiful, solemn-looking woman sitting curled up on the shore looks back forlornly.

BEN

Are you okay?

EVA

Yeah, why?

BEN
You don't look okay.

EVA
I'll be alright.

Eva laughs to herself a little, as if that statement is far from true and their eye contact lingers.

EVA (CONT'D)
I have to come here sometimes.

BEN
Why?

EVA
Because it's real and certain things aren't.

BEN
Like what?

EVA
People, mainly.

BEN
I'm real.

Eva scoffs at that.

EVA
You're the last thing that's real.

Ben doesn't know what to say.

EVA (CONT'D)
Like I say. I'll be alright. Shame I can't live out here. Just me and the squirrels, living in a tree. Alone. That's the mistake I keep making. It's easier to stay alone.

BEN
Well, for me, alone is the only option.

EVA
Good for you. Means you get no mither.

BEN
It's hell.

EVA
 Try getting lied to and let down
 over and over. That's all men do.

BEN
 No. I just want to love.

EVA
 Oh, I got a lot of love to offer
 too, just means you get used more.

Ben nods in somber agreement.

BEN
 It's easier for you though. You're
 beautiful.

EVA
 Believe me, it isn't, and believe
 me, I'm not.

Eva stares back with hurt and sincerity in her eyes. Ben is
 saddened to see it.

BEN
 You should believe in yourself
 more.

EVA
 Do you believe in yourself?

BEN
 I don't know. Do you believe in
 men?

EVA
 Not anymore. Do you believe in
 women?

He doesn't want to answer that and makes his way back into
 the bushes, making sure to take a lingering look back at her
 as they part ways.

EVA (CONT'D)
 Take care.

BEN
 You too.

As he leaves, he hears water sloshing, and looks back to see
 what looks like Eva wading slowly into the water.

EXT. BEER GARDEN - NIGHT

Ben barges his way through PUNTERS like he's invincible as he stumbles his way over to a bench and slumps down beside John and Kyle.

JOHN

Here you are! I've been ringing you all afternoon! Where've you been?

BEN

Well, I quit my job.

JOHN

We heard. And for the remaining eight hours?

BEN

Rum!

JOHN

Excellent! A career shift into piracy, I see.

BEN

Fuck you, John. Always talking down to me.

Ben sways as he scowls.

JOHN

As a friend, I suggest you wind your neck in.

BEN

As a friend? As a friend? Oh well, if you're saying it as a friend, apparently, you can say whatever you fucking want!

Not rising to it, John swigs on his drink, allowing Ben to turn his drunken attention to Kyle.

BEN (CONT'D)

And what's up with you, Kyle? You're unusually quiet tonight.

Kyle sits there like a naughty school kid.

JOHN

Ah, well, you see, Kyle has been a very naughty boy. Haven't you, Kyle?

Kyle nods. Ben gazes around, looking for someone.

BEN
Where's Iris? She should be working
tonight.

JOHN
She's left.

KYLE
Gone back to Ireland.

Ben looks at them, accusingly.

BEN
What did you do to her?

KYLE
(sheepishly)
Well, I fucked her, didn't I?

Ben turns red with rage, his teeth gritted.

KYLE (CONT'D)
She thought there was more to it,
but, in all fairness, I was adamant
from the start it was just a one-
night stand.

JOHN
Turns out Iris really liked Kyle.

KYLE
(chuckling)
"Liked" being the operative word.
She certainly doesn't like me
anymore.

BEN
Well, "in all fairness", I really
"liked" Iris.

KYLE
What's that supposed to mean?

BEN
It means what it means. That I
liked her, and now she's gone,
because you've done what you always
do. You've lied to her, slept with
her, and you've broken her heart.
So, now, she hates all of us.

Kyle looks Ben in the eye sincerely.

KYLE

Honest to God, I did not lie to this one. She brought it all on herself. Between you and me, she's a bit tapped in the head.

JOHN

Of course she's a bit tapped, she's a woman, and she knew full well what she was doing when she claimed she "thought" you were more than just friends with benefits. Her plan was to guilt trip you.

BEN

Which is kind of working, if I'm honest. Fair play to her on that one.

JOHN

She probably hasn't even gone back to Ireland. That's a test to see if you'll try to win her back. That's what women do, they-

SMASH! A pint glass explodes as Ben hurls it in a fit of rage and sits there seething as DRINKERS leave the area.

As Ben sits there staring at John and Kyle, their faces distort into those of demons.

JOHN (CONT'D)

Ben-

BEN

-No! Shut up! We get it, John, you hate women! You hate women because you can't get one, never mind keep one, and you want everyone else to hate women just as much as you do so they won't get one either! But I don't, you see, and I never will! I will never be like you!

KYLE

Steady on.

BEN

How about you steady on? You're no better than him! I stood a chance with Iris! You.. you steal every woman that comes anywhere near us, and then you ruin them so they'll never come back!

(MORE)

BEN (CONT'D)
 You're like a fucking virus.
 (pointing at John)
 I'm not becoming you!
 (pointing at Kyle)
 And I'm not becoming you!

They sit in a long, awkward silence as Ben glares at them vindictively, pure evil in his eyes.

BEN (CONT'D)
 That's how it is.

By now, a CROWD of onlookers has gathered outside the pub. Ben looks around at them and smiles to himself.

BEN (CONT'D)
 And just look at that. Now, I'm suddenly worth everybody's attention.

Ben gets up and slowly staggers out of the beer garden, leaving John and Kyle sitting there in stunned silence.

JOHN
 I don't hate women.

KYLE
 Yeah, you fucking do, John.

INT. APARTMENT, LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Ben crashes through his front door and falls onto his sofa, where he lies there thinking as the Beast eases down onto a seat beside him.

BEAST
 I know where you think they are,
 and what you think you have to do.

BEN
 You underestimate me. I can get past this. I just need to be more stoic or something.

BEAST
 I appreciate the intent, I really do, but you already left.

Ben looks to the Beast confused, who nods to the window.

Pulling back the curtain, Ben looks down the street, his face turning to horror when he sees himself walking up the path of No.17.

Ben snaps the curtain shut and runs into the bedroom.

INT. APARTMENT, BEDROOM - NIGHT

Leaping onto the bed, Ben wraps himself tightly in the duvet, trying to shut himself out from the world, but cables fire through the fabric into his hands and limbs, lifting him out like a human-sized puppet.

The Beast enters the room and looks up at him.

BEN
Get this thing off me.

BEAST
It's not me who put it there.

Ben's struggling subsides as the contraption puppeteering him absorbs into his skin, leaving him comatose.

BEAST (CONT'D)
What you're feeling right now, it
isn't peace, Ben.

BEN
I have to save them.

BEAST
From what exactly?

Ben looks at the Beast as if he doesn't want to even think about answering that question and motions to leave.

The Beast respectfully moves aside so Ben can pass.

As Ben leaves, the Beast stands there motionless, tears slowly welling in his eyes.

BANG! The front door slams shut.

EXT. STREET - NIGHT

Ben marches up the street determined. As he approaches No.17, he can see all the lights are on and the curtains drawn, looking very much lived in.

INT. NO.17, HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

The door slowly swings open, and Ben stares into the nicely decorated and well-kept entrance.

Taking a few steps in, he studies pictures on the wall. They're of a happy family, himself the father and Eva, the beautiful girl beside the lake, as his wife.

INT. NO.17, LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

The ticking of an old grandfather clock greets Ben as he walks in. The fireplace is roaring and lamps are on as if someone was just there.

Again, the pictures on the wall depict him and his family life in and around this beautiful home.

EVA (O.C.)
(from other room)
Hey you! You're finally home!

Bewildered, Ben keeps staring at a family portrait hanging above the fireplace.

BEN
(idly)
Hey.

He sits on the sofa and gradually takes in how incredibly peaceful it all is.

Tik tok, tik tok, tik tok.

ARRRRRRRRGGGGHHHHHHH!!!! A blood-curdling scream screeches from the back garden, causing Ben to snap round.

JORDAN (O.C.)
Help me! Somebody, please help me!

Ben dashes through the room and out of the patio doors.

EXT. NO.17, GARDEN - CONTINUOUS

Ben dashes into the garden to find it's like something from an alien world; a rocky landscape with tall flickering tiki torches lining a winding path.

Tribal voices chant in the background over the rhythm of heavy drums.

JORDAN (O.C.)
Help! Help me!

Sprinting toward the cries, Ben finds Jordan scantily clad in furs and struggling while chained to a rock, her oiled skin glistening in the flames that tower around her.

JORDAN (CONT'D)
Help me, Ben! Get me out of here!

Ben pulls at the thick chains that are firmly embedded into the boulders.

JORDAN (CONT'D)
Ben, look!

He looks around to see the Monster crawl from around the corner, its demonic eyes glowing in the night and long matted fur whipping in the wind.

Jordan moans with fear, her chest heaving.

JORDAN (CONT'D)
No! No!

The bulky feet of the monster move in, step by step, the huge claws scraping up the ground.

Jordan looks to Ben, their faces close.

JORDAN (CONT'D)
(panting)
Save me, Ben! Save me!

Unable to break the chains free and with the Monster closing in, Ben pauses for a minute and thinks of something crazy.

He takes a length of links and bites into them hard.

Jordan can't believe it, but it works. He manages to chew through the metal and free her, limb by limb.

JORDAN (CONT'D)
Thank you! Thank you!

She goes limp as he releases her completely and cradles her away to safety as the Monster dashes away.

Jordan kisses Ben passionately all over his face and neck, caressing him as she does so.

JORDAN (CONT'D)
Oh my god! You're my fucking hero!
My fucking hero!

However, another scream can be heard nearby, this time a different female voice. Then, the shriek whistle far away.

Ben looks down the garden to the fence and back to Jordan.

JORDAN (CONT'D)

Go! Go!

Ben turns and runs toward the gate and the commotion that lies behind it.

EXT. NO.17, REAR ACCESS ROAD - CONTINUOUS

Ben crashes through the gate to find that, rather than an access road, there are train tracks behind the house.

He sees movement in the darkness and suddenly the Monster sprints at him. Ben dodges it and the Monster crashes through the fence back toward the house.

A thundering sound in the distance then a bright light emerges over the horizon, illuminating Lizzy, who's tied to the tracks wearing a nightgown with a gag over her mouth.

Her glistening eyes perilous in the moonlight, she mumbles as she calls out for help.

Ben runs to her aid and pulls at the ropes, which just like the chains before, seem impossible to break or untie.

The rhythmic thundering gets louder as the light closes in, then another high-pitched shriek of a train whistle.

Ben tries biting the thick, coarse rope as Lizzy writhes desperately, but no luck, no matter how hard he tries.

He thinks to himself and, once again, attempts the impossible. Ben grabs the track next to Lizzy and heaves as hard as he can, his teeth gritted.

Defying physics, the girder-like steel bends and snaps.

The train closes in, a huge fountain of smoke and sparks erupting from the stack.

Ben works his way around Lizzy, lifting, bending, and breaking the tracks on each side.

Just before the locomotive hits them, he's able to slide her ropes around the severed steel and pull her out of harm's way, shielding her as coaches thunder by.

Screeching, banging, crashing. They wince as the sound of thousands of tons of steel meets hundreds of thick trees.

Once silence descends, Ben tugs down Lizzy's gag and they stare into each other's eyes.

LIZZY

You were there for me.

Before he can respond, she leans in and kisses him romantically, and they return to staring.

CRASH! They both look around to see a broken dormer window on the roof of No.17 and Iris, dressed in a princess's gown, waving for help.

IRIS

Ben! Ben! He's got me! Help!

Ben looks to Lizzy who nods for him to go ahead, which he does, running back through the rocks of the garden toward the back door of the house.

INT. NO.17, KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

Ben hurries into the kitchen and opens drawers looking for something. He pulls out a knife and pauses to take in what's around him.

The countertops are neatly laid out with various guns, ammo, and grenades, the cabinet lights pulsing.

All too familiar with what he's looking at, Ben grabs an SMG and smacks in a round before strapping on a bullet-proof vest and donning a helmet.

He flicks off the safety and cocks the charging handle, and, just before he is about to go, he spots something glowing in the corner.

It's a can of energy drink and a hypodermic needle.

Ben knows what he needs to do. He stabs the needle into the can, draws out a full dose, retrieves it, and jabs it into his arm, releasing the energy into his veins.

He takes his vape and clamps it between his teeth like a cigar as metal music kicks in and thrashes hard.

Adopting a perfect shooting stance, Ben advances into the living room while staring down the sights.

INT. NO.17, LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

The room now war-torn, pictures hanging off the walls and the lights flickering as explosions echo outside.

Ben scans side to side. A SOLDIER leaps out of hiding. BANG!
BANG! BANG! Ben returns fire and takes him out.

RATATATATATATATATAT!!! Another Soldier pops up from behind the
sofa in a flurry of muzzle flash.

BANG! BANG! BANG! Ben shoots him in the head.

Looking at the door to the hallway and stairs, Ben knows not
to rush into what might be a trap.

BOOM! BOOM! A Soldier suddenly dashes in with a shotgun. Ben
ducks, tracks him, and fires, killing him before moving to
the doorway and bracing himself against the frame.

THUD! THUD! THUD! Against the front door.

EXT. NO.17 - CONTINUOUS

John and Kyle, armed and wearing combat gear, try to barge
the door open to no effect, the sound of jets screaming by
overhead and bombs going off nearby.

John opens up the letterbox flap and peers in.

JOHN

Ben, you're entering a chokepoint!

BEN

I know what I'm doing!

KYLE

Open the door!

BEN

Don't try and stop me!

JOHN

You won't come back from this!

INT. NO.17, STAIRS - CONTINUOUS

Ben flicks the SMG to full auto, takes a moment to gather his
breath, and lunges to the bottom of the staircase, firing up
as he does, the walls bullet-riddled concrete.

SPECIAL FORCES come running down the stairs, spraying bullets
at Ben, who grits his teeth and fires back relentlessly,
taking them out and causing them to tumble to his feet.

They just keep coming, but Ben remains undefeated, gradually making his way up the stairs, climbing over dead bodies as he does so and using some as a shield.

Reaching the top, Ben is confronted by one last Soldier. He goes to fire. Click! He's out of bullets. Before his enemy can shoot him, he grabs their gun, pulls out a knife and stabs him over and over before slitting his neck and throwing him down the stairs.

He sees the ladder to the attic.

INT. NO.17, ATTIC - CONTINUOUS

Ben climbs into the empty wooden attic just in time to see the Monster escape out of the window.

Iris stands there amazed as he gradually catches his breath, his skin covered in sweat and dirt.

Ben smirks confidently.

She rushes over, relieved, and places her forehead against his while stroking his hair.

They chuckle as they decompress.

IRIS
Now THAT was fucking impressive!

BEN
I've got a few moves.

IRIS
Don't go after him.

BEN
I don't really have an option.

IRIS
You do, Ben. Believe me, you do.

BEN
It was great getting to know you.

The Monster reaches in with its huge claw and pulls Iris out onto the roof.

IRIS
Don't, Ben! No!

With a mean stare, Ben crosses to the window and climbs out, lifting himself onto the rooftop.

EXT. NO.17, ROOF - CONTINUOUS

Ben climbs onto the tiles of the rooftop and steadies himself, the lights of the city all around him.

He stares across at the huge monster standing on the edge with Iris in his grasp.

Ben clutches the knife and glowers.

IRIS

Ben! There's a better way!

BEN

It's time to finish this.

Ben stares into the eyes of the Monster.

BEN (CONT'D)

Just you and me.

The Monster pushes Iris aside, and instead of falling from the rooftop, the air fills her gown, causing her to float down daintily and land safely beside Jordan and Lizzy.

Ben draws an evil grin across his face. The Monster smiles back. WHOOOOMPH! It bursts into flames, lighting up the sky in a huge fireball that reflects in Ben's tear-soaked eyes.

Ben takes a big breath, screams, and runs as hard as he can, picking up speed down the seemingly endless slope of the roof before leaping and carrying as much inertia as he can.

He hits the bulky body of the Monster and stops dead, but it's just enough to tip the balance.

The Monster keels back as Ben clutches tightly onto the burning hair and beds himself in.

On the ground stand Jordan, Lizzy, and Iris, stare up in astonishment as the Monster and Ben tumble back into the air.

Ben rides the Monster down, fire and embers all around him fueled by the rush of air. He takes one last look at Iris, Jordan, and Lizzy and draws the knife back as far as he can.

John and Kyle rush out just in time to witness the spectacle.

With all his might, Ben stabs the Monster in the centre of its chest and smiles peacefully as white noise fills his ears during their gradual descent.

Everyone watches as the ground closes in and BANG, they snap their eyes shut at the moment of impact.

When they slowly open them, smoke clears to reveal Ben lying on the floor silhouetted by black ash, a satisfied smile on his face, and the Monster nowhere to be seen.

Iris, Jordan, Lizzy, John, and Kyle stare down with zero emotion. Just complete indifference for a few long moments.

A thick red velvet curtain suddenly descends.

INT. THEATRE - NIGHT

Bright music from a live band plays, and the curtain pulls up to reveal Ben lying in the centre of the stage, the set decor a clumsy interpretation of No.17.

Jordan walks out in a cheap and nasty version of the rags she was wearing previously. She takes a bow while forcing a wide smile, tears in her eyes as the music cheerfully plays, and all to zero applause.

As she walks back, Lizzy comes out, again in a cheap version of her last costume and to the same reception, despite the pomp and ceremony of the band.

As she leaves, out walks Iris, who goes through the same motions, straining a smile as tears run down her cheeks.

The music remains jubilant as John walks out to a smattering of claps. He nods and makes way for Kyle, who runs out to cheers as he performs the splits and clowns around.

Once Kyle completes a poor moonwalk into the wings, the Beast strolls out to whoops and cheers before giving a wave and presenting the Manager.

Boos drown out the band as the Manager goads the audience, playing up to being the villain and leaving with a smug smile as the music peters out into silence.

Just Ben lying on the stage, motionless and silent.

The Doctor idly walks out with a clipboard, as if this is routine, and makes his way to a lever on the wall, revealing there's nobody sitting in the seats.

The theatre is, in fact, empty.

He switches off the lights.

THE END