

MISSING CHAPTERS

Written by

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INT. 'THE OLD GOAT' PUB, HACKNEY, EAST LONDON - DAY

A pint glass. Half empty.

Sitting and staring morosely into the 'glass half empty' is MICHAEL, mid 40s, attractive but crumpled looking. We're in a loser-boozer; peeling paintwork, tatty red velvet stools.

MICHAEL

So what is it you wanted to talk about? I haven't been able to get hold of you in weeks, and now all of a sudden you need to talk?

Opposite sits ED with an identical pint glass. He's the same age as Michael, but beer bellied and balding.

ED

I know. I'm sorry. I've just been really busy.

MICHAEL

Ed, it's me.

Awkward silence while Ed struggles to find the next word.

ED

I've been offered a job.

MICHAEL

That's great news. Here you had me thinking it was something awful, like cancer, or Jennie had finally left you, or God forbid something *really* terrible like your Groucho membership revoked. So what is it?

ED

It's a re-write job. A thriller.

MICHAEL

Really? A re-write? I know we're desperate, but...

ED

It's in L.A. And it's just me, I'm afraid -

MICHAEL

L.A? Jesus. How did we even get this?

ED

Not we, Michael. Just me.

MICHAEL

Oh. (Shock as it sinks in). Oh.

ED

Look I'm really sorry, I should have mentioned it before.

MICHAEL

No no, sounds great. If it happens.

ED

What do you mean, if?

MICHAEL

It's L.A., that's all I'm saying... One day toast of the town, the next day just toast. And not in a good way. They hate carbs. But, you're a good writer, I'm sure it'll happen for you.

ED

It is happening. Contract's signed, I leave on Monday.

Michael nearly chokes on his beer.

MICHAEL

Monday? THIS Monday?

Ed nods.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

I see.

Ed reaches down and heaves a large box onto the table.

ED

So I'm renting out the flat and -

MICHAEL

You're not moving out there.

ED

I have to.

MICHAEL

Jesus, Ed, you can't move out to L.A. It's for the young and naive and surgically enhanced, not for you! What about your mid-life crisis? You can't have that in L.A...

ED

I think this will be good for me. Things haven't exactly been busy for us recently. Don't tell me you don't feel the same.

Michael stares at him. Then downs the rest of his pint, suddenly casual.

MICHAEL

Oh absolutely. Absolutely. I've been working on some of my own stuff too actually.

ED

Really?

MICHAEL

My novel.

Ed doesn't look convinced.

ED

Well this is great. We're both moving on. So, as I was saying, I've been clearing out all the rubbish from my flat, but these are yours - notes from our first few scripts - so I didn't feel they were mine to chuck.

Michael stares at the box.

MICHAEL

What makes you think I want them?

Ed pushes the box over to Michael.

ED

I know how you like to hold on to these things.

Michael says nothing. Pushes the box back over to Ed's side of the table. Ed pushes it back.

ED (CONT'D)

Just take the damn box, will you Michael?

MICHAEL

So this is why you called up for a drink? To get rid of all the crap weighing you down?

ED

I'm sorry, I know this seems sudden.

MICHAEL

Sudden? Try brutal! Twenty years we've been writing together.

ED
I know I should have told you
before. I kept meaning to.

MICHAEL
Well why didn't you?

ED
Because I knew you'd react like
this.

MICHAEL
I'm only reacting like this because
you've been so damn secretive about
it. Jesus.

ED
I'm sorry.

MICHAEL
Stop saying that.

Michael drains his pint, takes the box, and gets up.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)
All the best, mate.

He walks off, carrying the unwieldy box. Ed calls after him.

ED
Michael. Michael!

He follows Michael out through the doors, and makes a half-hearted attempt to go after him, but then stops and watches as Michael carries the box across the pavement to a bin.

EXT. THE OLD GOAT - CONTINUOUS

Making sure Ed can see, Michael stuffs the box into the bin but it's too big and gets stuck. He gives it a huge shove, but it's well and truly jammed. He marches off.

Turns into a block of flats across the road, sandwiched between rows of scruffy Victorian terraces. Buzzes himself in and goes inside.

INT. MICHAEL'S LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Clutter everywhere; piles of papers, books, newspapers.

- Michael stares at his computer. An old, boxy, desktop. A thick layer of dust on the keyboard.

- Michael sits at the computer. Stares at a blank page.

- Michael sits on his sofa, notepad in hand. Stares at a blank page.

EXT. THE OLD GOAT - NIGHT

The box juts out of the bin, casting a shadow across the pavement in the yellow street light. Michael re-appears in the darkness, and after a few tugs he pulls the box free. Walks off with it, dressing gown flapping in the breeze.

INT. MICHAEL'S LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Michael sifts through the piles of notes and scripts, interlaced with detritus such as the odd beer mat and phone numbers scribbled on empty cigarette packets.

He finds a VHS tape. Looks puzzled.

IN THE CELLAR

Rummages around among all the junk to find an old VHS player.

BACK IN THE LIVING ROOM

Michael puts the tape in. It's an amateur recording of an interview he gave with Ed years ago.

ON THE SCREEN

They both look ten years younger. Talking about their 'method'.

YOUNGER ED

...yeah, he doesn't do any work. Lazy bastard. He's never out of bed before midday. We knock around a few ideas, then he feels overworked, so we have to go to the pub...

YOUNGER MICHAEL

Then for a curry.

YOUNGER ED

...then I go home and write it all.

YOUNGER MICHAEL

Yeah, but I do all the thinking, the inspiration. Theme, character, then he just types it up. Copy typist really.

The easy rapport and piss-taking is in complete contrast to the strained conversation they just had at the pub.

He turns it off. In an instant the smiling faces are replaced by his current, sombre, reflection in the blank screen.

INT. MICHAEL'S LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Michael rifles through the remaining papers in the box. Pulls out a few pages with very dense, long-hand writing on. Reads it, interested.

Goes through all the notes - finds several more of these pages. Lays them out in order. There are big gaps.

Michael searches his overladen bookshelves... Checks every book in the piles on the floor... Frowns, can't find what he's looking for.

IN THE CELLAR

Michael finds a box by the radiator. Opens it - it's full of several copies of the same book. He lifts out a copy, but the front cover falls apart in his hands, and the pages are all gummed together, from a water leak.

He empties the box; not a single copy intact... all papier mache. A few surviving pages here and there, including a back cover. He picks this out and looks at it - a photo of him, the author.

He stares down at his handsome, confident-looking younger self, staring straight back at him.

INT. MICHAEL'S LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Against a mountain of books now on the floor, Michael makes a phone call. A female voice (VICKI) answers.

MICHAEL

Hi Vicki, it's Michael.

VICKI

Hello stranger. God, it's been a while.

MICHAEL

Sorry to call so late.

VICKI

No problem. So what's up?

MICHAEL

I was wondering if you had a copy of my novel knocking around?

VICKI

Your novel?

MICHAEL

I just thought you might have copies of all the books you've worked on?

VICKI

Um, possibly, somewhere. Wasn't it optioned? Shame nothing happened with that. It was very visual, I remember.

MICHAEL

Could you have a look for it?

VICKI

Sure.

Michael waits.

VICKI (CONT'D)

What, right now?

MICHAEL

Um, I suppose it could wait til morning.

VICKI

Is that all you wanted? I thought this was a booty call.

MICHAEL

A booty call?

VICKI

That's what the kids are calling it now. You know, when you used to call me this late, it meant you were horny.

Michael's mood brightens.

MICHAEL

Do you want this to be a booty call?

VICKI

Don't call it that, it sounds funny coming from you.

MICHAEL

I can make it a booty call. How does a booty call work, exactly? Do I just come out and say I'd like to screw you senseless, for old times' sake?

INT. VICKI'S FLAT, LUXURY NEW DEVELOPMENT, CENTRAL LONDON

Vicki opens the door to Michael. She's early forties, incredibly lithe, and wearing underwear that leaves little to the imagination. She pulls him inside, kissing him hungrily.

He responds, and she gets so passionate she practically devours his lower face.

INT. VICKI'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Vicki and Michael are in bed having noisy sex. She rolls off him. They lie side by side.

VICKI

Oh my God I forgot how good we were at this. Why did we stop again?

She reaches down into a drawer on her bedside table and brings out a small pretty box. She opens it, pulls out a cigarette paper and starts to roll a joint.

VICKI (CONT'D)

So are you working on anything at the moment?

MICHAEL

Oh, this and that.

VICKI

Want to join me on the balcony?

MICHAEL

No. Do you mind if I have a look for my novel?

VICKI'S KITCHEN/LIVING AREA

A spacious, airy open-plan living area. Michael looks over the shelves. Mostly photos and artwork tastefully displayed.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

Where are all your books?

VICKI (O.S.)

On my Kindle. Don't tell me - you don't have one.

MICHAEL

But your old books?

VICKI (O.S.)

I had a clear out.

MICHAEL

Why is everyone 'clearing out?' Twenty years, Ed and I.

VICKI (O.S.)

What's that?

Michael calls out.

MICHAEL

I said it's been twenty years.

BACK IN THE BEDROOM

Vicki opens the glass doors to the balcony.

VICKI

Has it been that long? Isn't it more like fifteen? I remember we first slept together after I got promoted to assistant ed...

She steps out onto the balcony to have a smoke, and can't hear Michael from out there.

IN THE LIVING AREA

MICHAEL

I meant me and Ed. Can you believe it?

He continues to browse the shelves. Photos of Vicki mountain climbing; ski-ing with glamorous friends. Glossy hardbacks; 'Diving in the Red Sea,' 'The History of Art.'

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

I was about to start my second novel when we met. So that took a back seat. And now he's the one who's going off to develop his own voice?

ON THE BALCONY Vicki takes a final toke, then comes back inside the bedroom just in time to catch the tail end of Michael's ramblings.

MICHAEL (O.S.) (CONT'D)

...it was the most significant relationship of my life.

Vicki looks surprised. And touched.

VICKI (CALLING OUT)

Really? I never got that impression.

MICHAEL (O.S.)

Well, obviously I'd never say that out loud.

Something in Vicki's demeanour softens, and her face lights up. She can't believe what she's hearing.

INT. CLASSROOM, ADULT EDUCATION CENTRE - DAY

A pencil vibrates across a formica table, as a fidgety student jiggles his knee against the table leg, causing it to shake.

A manicured hand reaches out to steady the table, firm and deliberate. It belongs to SHANNA, a smartly dressed Black woman, early 20s, who reads from her laptop.

SHANNA

...before finally realising...

Her other hand re-aligns her mobile perfectly in line with her laptop, without interrupting the flow of her reading.

SHANNA (CONT'D)

...he was not so much her knight in shining armour, as her knight in shiny Armani.

The rest of the class - an eclectic bunch - laugh and clap. Michael stands at the front, doing a bad job of hiding his boredom. Shanna opens her mouth to continue but Michael puts his hand up.

MICHAEL

Thank you Shanna. Always very generous about sharing your work. But how about we hear from someone else?

All the other students look down, avoiding his eye. He sighs and gestures to Shanna to continue. Just as she takes a breath to continue, Michael's phone BEEPS on the table. He looks at the clock on the wall - midday exactly.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

It'll have to wait til next week.

The class pack up. Shanna approaches him, holding a manuscript, but Michael disappears out the door.

EXT. ADULT EDUCATION CENTRE - DAY

Shanna catches up with Michael.

SHANNA

I just wanted to show you my three chapters.

MICHAEL

What three chapters?

SHANNA

You said last week that agents won't listen to a verbal pitch from an unknown writer. That they need at least three chapters and an outline.

MICHAEL

Yes, but I didn't mean you should just write three chapters off the top of your head. It'll still be an unsolicited submission from an unknown writer. Straight on the slush pile.

Shanna presses the manuscript into his hands anyway.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

You wrote all this in a week?

SHANNA

Yep. Booked a few days off work, banged it out.

MICHAEL

But that's not how it works. Things need to ferment in your head, bubble up, it takes time.

INT. TUBE - DAY

Michael sits on the tube, Shanna's chapters lie on top of his bag on the empty seat beside him. The person in the next seat cranes her neck to read them, engrossed.

INT. MICHAEL'S LIVING ROOM - DAY

Shanna's chapters discarded on a pile of clutter. Michael stares at his own pulped novel beside it. Picks up his phone. Hesitates. Pours himself a Scotch. Takes a gulp. Then makes a call.

VOICE ON THE END OF THE LINE

Hello, this is Caroline, leave a message.

Michael hangs up. Downs his Scotch. Then heads out the door.

EXT. SUBURBAN STREET, SOUTH LONDON - DAY

A large townhouse on a wide, tree-lined street. It's slightly shabby compared to its neighbours, but bright and tidy. Michael rings the doorbell. No answer. Rings again. Knocks loudly. Looks through the windows. Sees bookshelves crammed with books.

Hesitates. Looks around to make sure no-one is about. Then he goes around to the side, hooks his hand over the tall wooden gate, and unlocks it. Goes through.

EXT. GARDEN

The garden is well kept, with pots of colourful flowers everywhere. Michael looks at the pots one after another, then knows exactly which one to go for. He lifts it up - underneath is a key.

INT. LIVING ROOM

Michael looks through the books on the shelves. No novel. He passes over a photo of an attractive, middle-aged woman with what looks like her husband and young teenage daughter.

INT. STUDY

He looks through more bookcases. Tucked in between two books is a tatty old unframed photo of Michael and the same woman, years younger than in the previous photo, holding a baby girl. He picks it up, smiles.

He then startles as he hears voices outside. He looks out the window to see CAROLINE and CHARLOTTE (CHARLIE) coming up the path. Caroline is early 40s, elegant (the woman in the photo). Charlie is a younger (early 20s) long-haired version of her mother.

Caroline carries a huge cake box. She opens the front door and puts it on the hall table.

CHARLIE (O.S.)
Mum they're already here!

Michael watches as a car pulls up outside the house and a family get out, as Charlie rushes up to meet them; ASHRAF, mid 20s, his older brother YUCEF, his younger sister AYESHA, and their parents.

Michael hides as they all pile in noisily, taking off coats, greeting each other.

INT. HALLWAY, CAROLINE'S HOUSE

Michael waits until everyone has gone through to the living room. Then creeps out into the hallway, and silently opens the front door. Then a voice makes him jump.

CHARLIE
Michael?

He freezes, hand on the open door. Turns to see Charlie standing behind him with a pile of coats.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)

What are you doing here?

He closes the door, so it looks like he's coming in instead of sneaking out.

MICHAEL

Just, thought I'd come over and...

CHARLIE

Seriously. Did mum invite you?

MICHAEL

Would you be angry if she did?

CHARLIE

Well, it'd be a bit... weird, but no, I wouldn't be angry.

MICHAEL

Well yes, she did invite me.

CHARLIE

Really? And... you're okay with it all?

MICHAEL

Er, yes?

CHARLIE

Really?

MICHAEL

Really.

Charlie looks surprised. And wary.

CHARLIE

Okay. Well. I'd better introduce you. I'll just take these upstairs.

She disappears up the stairs.

Caroline comes in, and stops abruptly.

CAROLINE

What are you doing here?

Michael smiles awkwardly.

CAROLINE (CONT'D)

Did Charlie invite you?

MICHAEL
 Would you be angry if she did? I
 can leave...

CAROLINE
 No no, not if she invited you. It's
 just odd she didn't mention it.

INT. CAROLINE'S LIVING ROOM - DAY

Michael finds himself engulfed in this large, noisy family,
 everyone introducing everyone and talking over everyone else -
 we catch snatches of introductions.

CHARLIE
 This is my... dad.

YOUCEF
 Hi, Derek, isn't it?

MICHAEL
 Michael.

YOUCEF (CONT'D)
 No, I'm Youcef. Derek, this
 is my sister Ayesha.

CHARLIE
 Michael, this is Ashraf's dad-

AYESHA
 (to Youcef)
 I thought her dad's name was
 Derek?

YOUCEF
 It is.

An increasingly confused Michael shakes hands with them all.

ASHRAF'S MOTHER
 (to Ashraf)
 So who is Derek?

ASHRAF'S FATHER
 (to Ashraf)
 Are you sure that's not Derek?

ASHRAF
 No, dad, I've met Derek, so I know
 that's not Derek. And the fact that
 his name is Michael, also tells me
 he's not Derek.

ASHRAF'S MOTHER
 So who is her dad?

ASHRAF'S FATHER
 Why you asking me? By now I'm not
 even sure whose dad I am!

Michael steps forward to greet Ashraf's father.

MICHAEL
 I'm Charlie's dad -

CHARLIE

This is Michael, my real dad. Him and mum got divorced when I was a baby. Derek is my step-dad. I call him dad because, well, he's been my dad since I was three. And him and mum got divorced -

CAROLINE

Amicably divorced.

CHARLIE

- when I was twelve.

They all nod.

CAROLINE

Well, now we've had a comprehensive trawl through my marital history, shall we go through to the garden?

She glares at Michael as they all traipse out, leaving Michael alone.

EXT. GARDEN, CAROLINE'S HOUSE

More guests; everyone chatting; drinks being poured.

DEREK, early 50s, burly, in a slick suit, is chatting with Ashraf and his family. From the way Derek laughs and thumps Ashraf on the back they are obviously familiar.

Ashraf's father sees Michael standing outside the group.

ASHRAF'S FATHER

Ah, Michael, we're just talking about the current health service reforms. Must be affecting you greatly?

MICHAEL

Em, well, yes, in as much as it affects everyone I suppose.

ASHRAF'S MOTHER

G.P.s will bear the brunt of it though, no?

MICHAEL

Oh, I'm not a G.P. That's Derek.

DEREK

Actually not any longer - I run my own pharma market research company.

CHARLIE

Ashraf's dad works six months here, six months in India pro-bono. The surgical work he does there, it's life changing for his patients.

ASHRAF

How do you hide a five pound note from a General Surgeon? Hide it in the patient's notes.

Youcef high fives him, as all the others laugh.

YOUCEF

How do you hide a five pound note from an Orthopaedic Surgeon? Hide it in a text book.

More laughter.

ASHRAF'S FATHER

My sons the comedians. You want to hear something properly funny? And true? I remember when one of my former residents was taking down the history of a patient, he wrote, "Patient has no history of cock - spelt C-O-C-K - or cock's contact." I tried so hard not to laugh, you know.

Everyone collapses with laughter at this, apart from Michael, who looks bewildered.

ASHRAF

Michael, ignore my dad. Tuberculosis is also called Koch's disease. In India people tend to use that name because it's shorter. But it's Koch spelt K-O-C-H.

They all look at Michael, for his reaction. He laughs a forced laugh, which sounds very strange. Awkward silence.

ASHRAF (CONT'D)

So, Michael, you're a writer?

MICHAEL

Yes.

ASHRAF

What are you working on?

MICHAEL

This and that.

ASHRAF

I'm fascinated by the life of a writer.

MICHAEL

It's not that interesting. Mostly hanging around the house all day in your pyjamas. And that's when it's going well.

DEREK

This morning he put a semi-colon in a sentence. Then this afternoon he took it out again, right?

Derek laughs loudly and slaps Michael on the back.

CHARLIE

Actually Michael wrote a hit sitcom in the nineties.

MICHAEL

Co-wrote. And not so much 'hit', more of a cult following. I also wrote a novel.

CHARLIE

Really? I never knew that.

MICHAEL

Long time ago now.

CHARLIE

An actual published one?

MICHAEL

Yes, an actual published one.

CHARLIE

So you can like walk into a bookshop and buy it?

MICHAEL

Well, it's out of print now.

CHARLIE

Can I read it?

MICHAEL

I don't have a copy.

CHARLIE

I didn't mean right now this second.

MICHAEL

I meant I don't have a copy at all.

CHARLIE
You must have a copy of your own
novel.

MICHAEL
I really don't.

Charlie taps something into her phone.

CHARLIE
What's it called?

MICHAEL
The Reck -

CHARLIE
Oh - here you are! "The Reckoning",
by Michael O'Neill.

MICHAEL
Can you order it?

CHARLIE
Says it's unavailable. Sorry.

She sees how disappointed he looks.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)
But there's a review. "This
thriller starts off well, but..."

She trails off. Looks embarrassed. Derek reads over her
shoulder.

DEREK
"This thriller starts off well, but
fails to live up to its early
promise...' Oh well, critics, eh?"

Everyone turns as Caroline steps out, carrying the cake on a
tray. Charlie puts her phone down.

CAROLINE
Can I have your attention everyone!

Michael picks up Charlie's phone. He clicks on MORE REVIEWS.

MICHAEL
Ah, "I enjoyed this novel and so
did my wife." So did his wife! Says
(peers closely) John in Indiana.

He looks around, pleased, but no-one else is listening. They
are all crowding around Caroline as she sets the cake down.

CAROLINE

As we all know, due to Ashraf's exciting news everything has had to be moved forward.

She opens a bottle of Champagne and pours everyone a glass.

CAROLINE (CONT'D)

A lot to organise in six weeks, but if anyone can do it, my daughter can!

Michael is still on Charlie's phone; clicks on 'ORDER'. Gets 'UNAVAILABLE.' Caroline notices he's on the phone and frowns.

CAROLINE (CONT'D)

Now I'm going to hand over to Michael, who I'm sure would like to say a few words on this momentous occasion. Michael?

Michael panics.

MICHAEL

Yes. What a momentous occasion. Caroline, you do the first speech, while I gather my thoughts.

CAROLINE

You're a wordsmith, just smithy up a few words.

His panic turns to alarm.

MICHAEL

Momentous occasions. Like all momentous occasions...

As he struggles, Caroline manoeuvres the cake around so he gets a clear view - the icing says *"Congratulations Charlotte and Ashraf on your engagement!"*

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

Engaged! Of course! Engagement party! At twenty, you're engaged! I did not see that coming! I mean, being asked to give a toast, Caroline, you... you... Engaged...

CAROLINE

You did know, right?

MICHAEL

Yes! Of course I did. Why else would I be here?

CAROLINE

So, is that it?

MICHAEL

No. Yes. No. Charlie, and Ashraf, yes Ashraf, well, you seem like a good bloke, congratulations. Congratulations.

He downs his Champagne.

INT. CAROLINE'S LIVING ROOM

Everyone mingling, relaxed, but Michael stands rooted to the spot, his cake untouched on his plate.

Ashraf clocks him from the other side of the room, and nudges Charlie. She comes over to Michael.

CHARLIE

Want to check if there's a copy of your novel in the basement?

INT. BASEMENT

Charlie and Michael look at stacks of neatly ordered boxes, carefully labelled. Charlie's pre-school. Charlie's ballet. Charlie's karate. Charlie's GCSEs. Various others.

MICHAEL

So... engaged at twenty.

CHARLIE

I know it seems we're rushing in to it, but we're sure. We just found out about Ashraf's scholarship in the U.S., which will start straight after our volunteer year abroad. So it makes sense to do it now, instead of waiting. For all sorts of reasons.

MICHAEL

You really do have it all planned out.

CHARLIE

(gestures to the boxes)
Well. Mum's been a big influence.

They find a box labelled 'MISC'

CHARLIE (CONT'D)

Ah, MISC! This might give us hope.

MICHAEL

Misc? I didn't know your mother had room for 'misc' in her life.

Charlie giggles.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

Is misc allowed? Misc is dangerous,
is it not?

CHARLIE

She's not that bad!

MICHAEL

Stop, don't open it, who knows what
disorder we'll find, don't let the
misc out!

Charlie, laughing, opens the box.

CHARLIE

Nope, no books here.

They continue hunting through boxes. No book.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)

None of this stuff is yours, sorry
Michael, I don't think it's here.
All the books are either on the
shelves or given away. Mum's not
one for hoarding.

But Michael has found something. He unfolds a large map.

MICHAEL

(to himself)

Shit.

CHARLIE

What?

MICHAEL

Just, this map. Look.

He shows her a pin prick in 'Spain.'

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

This was the summer I met your
mother. I'd just got the advance
for my novel, and wanted to
disappear off somewhere. So rather
romantically I stuck a pin in a
map.

CHARLIE

Must have been fate.

MICHAEL

Not really. My first two attempts
were Alaska and...

He takes a closer look at other pin pricks on the map.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)
 ... Waigeo, a tiny island off
 Indonesia.

CHARLIE
 Mum never talks about that summer.
 Obviously it was a mistake.

MICHAEL
 Course it wasn't a mistake. I mean,
 it was a mistake at the time, but
 YOU aren't a mistake. Look at you!

CHARLIE
 (smiling)
 Okay I'd stop there.

Ashraf sticks his head around the doorway at the bottom of
 the stairs.

ASHRAF
 Not interrupting am I? Any luck?

CHARLIE
 No.

ASHRAF
 I'd love to have been a writer.

MICHAEL
 Really? Very frivolous, compared to
 what you do.

ASHRAF
 We tend to bodies. You tend to
 souls. That's not frivolous.

EXT. GARDEN, CAROLINE'S HOUSE

Michael knocking back the wine, and re-filling. On the other
 side of the garden, Charlie and Ashraf have their heads bent
 together, in deep discussion about something. Then they make
 their way over to Michael.

CHARLIE
 Actually Michael, Ashraf and I have
 something we want to ask you. About
 the wedding.

ASHRAF
 Yes, we've been discussing, and
 Charlie and I would both really
 like it if you would take on a more
 formal role.

Charlie gets nervous.

CHARLIE

I was wondering, if, well, I know we haven't been close recently, but you're still my dad...

Charlie struggles to find the words.

MICHAEL

I'd be honoured. Are you sure?

CHARLIE

Yes, but you don't know what you're saying yes to yet?

MICHAEL

Give you away? I'd love to! I know you think I'm an old cynic, but I'd be honoured.

CHARLIE

Oh, no, sorry, I meant, by a role I meant, we thought...

ASHRAF

Michael we thought it would be great if you would be in charge of the readings.

MICHAEL

Readings? Oh, sorry, I assumed, yes. Of course Derek's giving you away.

Silence.

CHARLIE

So will you?

MICHAEL

Do you really need someone in charge of readings? Sounds like a made up role, and you know me, I'm not much of a God-botherer.

DEREK

Charlie was just trying to be nice, didn't want you to feel offended at not having a role -

MICHAEL

I'm not offended, I don't even believe in these things.

DEREK

"These things?"

MICHAEL

You know, pomp and circumstance,
ceremonies, weddings.

DEREK

You don't believe in marriage?

MICHAEL

No, I don't believe in weddings,
there's a difference -

DEREK

You don't believe in two people
standing up and declaring their
love in front of friends and
family?

MICHAEL

I don't believe in over-
commercialised rituals celebrating
an outdated institution that has a
forty percent chance of failing
anyway.

He realises everyone is silent and listening. Staring at him.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

Charlie - I didn't mean that - I'm
just arguing semantics here - the
difference between weddings and
marriage, or rather love -

CHARLIE

Everyone's entitled to their
opinion.

MICHAEL

But that's not my opinion - I've
just had too much to drink -

CHARLIE

It's FINE!

Charlie forces a bright smile.

INT. KITCHEN, CAROLINE'S HOUSE

A scattering of empty glasses. Michael picks up an empty
bottle, drains the last bit into his glass. Does the same
with several more bottles, until his glass is half full.
Downs it.

Caroline marches in with more empties; Michael hurriedly puts
his glass down.

CAROLINE

You know you shouldn't be surprised she wants Derek to give her away.

MICHAEL

I know.

CAROLINE

He has been a father to her since she was -

MICHAEL

Since she was three. Absolutely.

CAROLINE

They're still very close. He made a huge effort to maintain that bond after the divorce. Huge.

She marches out again. Michael can see through to the living room, where Charlie is opening Derek's present. She looks delighted, throws her arms around him.

Michael, drunkenly swaying, walks to the door-frame and leans against it for support. Watches Charlie surrounded by this big happy family, now arguing good-naturedly.

DEREK

Of course I'm paying, I won't hear of anything else.

ASHRAF'S FATHER

I want to pay for half. I insist.

CAROLINE

We've decided to be very traditional -

ASHRAF'S MOTHER

But the Indian side gets very expensive, we don't expect you to foot the bill -

DEREK

She's my daughter, of course I'm footing the bill -

ASHRAF'S FATHER

But she's like a daughter to me. If I had a daughter - I would want her to be just like Charlie.

AYESHA

(rolling her eyes)

You DO have a daughter dad!

Michael picks up a fork and bangs it against his glass. Everyone looks at him. He looks at Charlie. Waits for silence.

MICHAEL

I don't think marriage is a mistake. Or maybe what I mean is, mistakes can be a good thing.

(MORE)

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

Like you, best mistake your mother
and I ever made.

He catches Caroline's eye. She looks away.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

And that's a compliment coming from
me, because I have made a LOT of
mistakes.

Charlie smiles.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

And I know it's too late to make up
for them all. But I, would very
much like, to pay for your wedding.
All of it. If you will allow me to.

Charlie looks at Michael, overcome. Silence. Then she nods.
And smiles. He smiles back, delighted.

EXT. STREET - DAY

A black screen with neon figures flashing:

insufficient funds in your account 647 overdrawn

Michael stares at the cashpoint. Leans his head on the wall
above it, banging his forehead repeatedly in frustration.

EXT. CLASSROOM, ADULT EDUCATION CENTRE - DAY

Fewer students than last time. Michael stands at the front as
Shanna finishes reading.

SHANNA

And that's the end of chapter six.

Michael glances at the clock - five minutes to midday.

MICHAEL

Okay. That's it for this week.

Shanna puts her hand up.

SHANNA

We still have five minutes. Could
you take some questions?

MICHAEL

Sure.

Shanna puts her hand up.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

Yes Shanna.

SHANNA

Who is your agent?

MICHAEL

Why do you want to know that? How can that piece of information possibly help you be a better writer?

SHANNA

I just thought it would be helpful to find out how you got your agent.

MICHAEL

I slept my way into the industry. Anyone else got any questions?

No-one says anything. Shanna puts her hand up.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

You don't have to keep putting your hand up Shanna. It's not that kind of class.

SHANNA

How do you get published?

MICHAEL

You write something. And if it's good enough someone publishes it.

SHANNA

You're being facetious.

MICHAEL

I am indeed.

Looks at the clock. Two minutes to eight.

SHANNA

I feel like you're not getting this. We're really after some kind of insight into what it takes to be a professional writer.

MICHAEL

Ah, okay, a "professional" writer. Well. Let's have a think. There's, what, twenty of you in this class? And this is one of four creative writing classes running this term at this particular institution.

The screen splits into four; four other similar classes all filled with students tapping away on laptops.

MICHAEL (V.O.) (CONT'D)
 So eighty. And there's what, twenty
 other institutions running similar
 night classes in this city so
 that's what, one hundred and
 sixty...

Class after class of students tapping away. Michael talks
 faster and louder over these images:

MICHAEL (V.O.) (CONT'D)
 No... one thousand six hundred, and
 then there's all the full-time
 fiction writing courses this term,
 so let's double that figure then -

Students on computers, tablets, scribbling on paper...

MICHAEL (V.O.) (CONT'D)
 - a conservative estimate but for
 argument's sake, or rather
 brevity's sake - to three thousand
 two hundred hopeful writing
 students.

Writers on laptops; on the tube, in cafes, in libraries...

MICHAEL (V.O.) (CONT'D)
 Just this term. In just this city.
 Year in, year out. What are the
 chances you're all going to make
 it? And on top of that - NOBODY
 READS ANYMORE! So my "advice" that
 you're so keen to hear is - Don't
 give up the day job. And if you
 don't have a day job? Get a day
 job.

Back in the room, Michael's students look deflated, slumped
 in their seats. All except Shanna, perky as ever.

EXT. ADULT EDUCATION CENTRE - DAY

Michael hurries out of the building. Shanna pursues him out
 the door, running up behind him and making him jump.

MICHAEL
 Jesus.

SHANNA
 I've got the rest of my novel for
 you to read.

He looks at the heavy pile in dismay.

MICHAEL

Maybe you want to take a while to redraft, hone it a bit?

SHANNA

Take a look anyway. I'm pretty confident about it.

INT. MICHAEL'S LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Shanna's manuscript lies on a chair. An empty pizza box on top of it.

Michael sits beside a pile of unopened bank statements. As he opens each one and looks at it, he winces.

A loud KNOCK on the door makes him jump.

He opens the door. Vicki stands in the communal hallway.

MICHAEL

How did you get in?

VICKI

I remembered the code.

They both stand there.

VICKI (CONT'D)

You're pleased to see me right? Besides, I have some news.

MICHAEL

Course. I just - didn't realise... this was, you know, that we were starting up... a thing.

VICKI

A thing?

She leans in to kiss him. He leans back.

MICHAEL

You do know that - the other night - I called to find my novel. That's what that was about.

VICKI

Ok. Sure. Things you'd never actually say out loud. And all that.

MICHAEL

Huh?

She kisses him.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

As long as we're... on the same page here...

But she's already gone in.

VICKI

So, I tracked down the producer that optioned your novel way back in the day, to see if he had a copy, and guess what - he wants to renew the option.

MICHAEL

After twenty years?

VICKI

After twenty years! Exciting right?

He stares at her.

MICHAEL

Exciting? You have no idea. How much?

VICKI

What?

MICHAEL

How much do film rights go for these days?

VICKI

Well, it's not my area, but if it's a best-seller, then thousands, millions even, you bring a fan base, franchise possibilities -

MICHAEL

But even if it's not a best-seller you'd still get twenty, thirty grand?

VICKI

Oh God yes.

Michael picks her up and swings her round, whooping with excitement.

VICKI (CONT'D)

Hang on, I'm no expert, and he'll need to read the actual novel...

MICHAEL

Wait - he doesn't have a copy?

VICKI

No.

INT. MICHAEL'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Michael and Vicki in bed; she is propped up on her elbow, gazing at him.

VICKI

Why do you feel the need to pay for the wedding anyway?

MICHAEL

I just, really want to do this for her.

VICKI

Second chance at fatherhood?

MICHAEL

It's too late for a second chance.

VICKI

So if you could start over, you would?

MICHAEL

Without a doubt.

INT. MICHAEL'S BEDROOM - DAY

Michael asleep in bed. He opens his eyes. The bed is empty beside him. He rolls over and sees Vicki, dressed in running gear, in a chair reading Shanna's chapters.

VICKI

You stayed quiet about this.

MICHAEL

What?

VICKI

I'm impressed. This voice - it's so authentic. Very different from your other stuff. It's... energetic. Inventive. Ambitious.

MICHAEL

Oh, that, actually -

Vicki climbs across the bed and kisses him on the mouth.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

What's that for?

VICKI

You're writing again. Thank fuck. I was worried about you.

MICHAEL

Worried?

VICKI

Ed leaving, you lying about your second novel, wondering if you can write on your own...

MICHAEL

I'm not wondering that.

VICKI

Stuck in a rut. I didn't want to say it -

MICHAEL

So don't -

VICKI

- but at this point in our lives, you've got to turn a corner, otherwise you hit that brick wall.

Vicki bounds off the bed.

VICKI (CONT'D)

Come running with me.

Michael rolls over. Pulls the covers over his head.

MICHAEL

I don't run.

VICKI

Everyone should run.

MICHAEL

I'm not running.

EXT. PARK - DAY

Michael's face; red, puffed, pouring with sweat. Struggling to breathe, as he runs. Vicki next to him is cool and relaxed, maintaining an easy pace. Michael stops, doubles over, trying to catch his breath.

MICHAEL

(panting)

It's these shoes. Not proper - running - shoes.

VICKI

Right. It's the shoes.

Vicki continues to jog on the spot.

VICKI (CONT'D)

Just going to complete this lap.

She sprints off. Michael stands, puffed. Looks around. Beside him is a playground. Families with young kids.

A young girl waits with her bike, while her dad adjusts her helmet. She gets on the bike, wobbly, while her dad runs alongside, encouraging her. Michael watches.

Then suddenly WHOOSH from the other direction a kid on a scooter smashes into him, and goes flying over the handlebars; moments later his mum comes running up holding a screaming baby. Michael holds the baby while she lifts up the injured kid and comforts him.

Vicki comes back, to find Michael jiggling a baby on his hip, dappled sunlight streaming through the trees behind him, bathing him and the baby in a golden glow. The baby gurgles and grabs Michael's finger.

An older woman passes by and mistakenly assumes they are the parents.

OLDER WOMAN

Aw, she's a gorgeous wee thing. (To Vicki, gesturing to Michael) He's besotted isn't he? We had none of these hands on dads in our day.

Vicki stares at him, a picture perfect image of fatherhood. She smiles.

EXT. MICHAEL'S STREET - DAY

Michael, still red in the face, walks along the pavement, talking on his phone.

MICHAEL (ON THE PHONE)

Can I speak to Torquil - yes he is my agent - okay, tell him Michael O'Neill called, and it's urgent.

He is standing outside The Old Goat pub. He turns to go in, but when he pulls the door he finds it locked. A piece of paper tacked up on the door says:

"CLOSED DUE TO REFURBISHMENT"

INT. FUNCTION HALL, HOTEL - DAY

Caroline browses through different wedding brochures piled high on a table. Along one wall are several display stands, all advertising wedding photographers - photo after photo of different happy couples. Michael joins her.

CAROLINE

So what were you really doing at the house the other day?

MICHAEL

Charlie invited me.

CAROLINE

Strange. Because she thanked me for inviting you.

MICHAEL

Oh. I, um, just got the urge to see my daughter.

CAROLINE

I don't believe you.

MICHAEL

Okay. I wanted to see if there was a copy of my novel knocking around.

CAROLINE

Unbelievable!

They walk along; photos of loved up couples in the park; by a lake; on a balcony.

CAROLINE (CONT'D)

No wonder you looked so shocked.

MICHAEL

They're just very young.

CAROLINE

He's charming, he adores her, most importantly he's a decent bloke, and he's going to be a brilliant surgeon, youngest ever applicant to be awarded this internship -

MICHAEL

I'm very happy for him, but it still doesn't mean he needs to marry my daughter.

CAROLINE

Will you stop with all this 'my daughter' rubbish? You walked out of her life twenty years ago.

MICHAEL

I was kicked out.

CAROLINE

Are we really going to have this discussion now?

MICHAEL

No.

She is standing in front of a photo of a bride and groom holding Champagne flutes as they intertwine their arms to take a sip.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

Actually yes. I'm fed up of taking all the blame. I could have been a good dad.

CAROLINE

You could have been. Do you know how Derek managed to stay close? He stayed close. Literally. That's all it takes, Michael, you want to stay close to your kids? See lots of them, live close by.

MICHAEL

It's totally different. She was twelve when you and Derek divorced, they already had a relationship to hold on to. She was only a few months old when you kicked me out, and you didn't want me near her!

Through the windows Michael sees Derek coming up the path. He groans.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

What's he doing here?

CAROLINE

Derek's insisting on paying. I've persuaded him to settle for going halves -

MICHAEL

I said I was paying.

CAROLINE

Have you any idea how expensive these things get?

Derek comes in, and greets Michael enthusiastically.

DEREK

Took the afternoon off from staring out the window then? Good man.

MICHAEL

Derek.

DEREK

How many writers does it take to change a light-bulb?

(MORE)

DEREK (CONT'D)

Just one, but the light-bulb has to go on a journey of self-discovery before it finally changes.

He laughs.

DEREK (CONT'D)

How many mystery writers does it take to change a light-bulb? Two. One to screw it almost all the way in, and the other to give it a surprising twist at the end.

He laughs again.

MICHAEL

Do you look these up before coming to meet me?

DEREK

Listen, I want to pay for half the wedding.

MICHAEL

It's fine, I've got it.

CAROLINE

Derek just wants to help.

DEREK

And after years of school fees, this'll hardly make a dent.

MICHAEL

Really, I can pay -

CAROLINE

Don't feel obliged Michael, just because you made a big speech -

MICHAEL

I don't feel obliged -

DEREK

So it's settled. We'll go halves.

INT. RESTAURANT, HOTEL - DAY

The WEDDING CO-ORDINATOR hands out a chart of the different menu options to Michael, Caroline, Derek, and Charlie and Ashraf, who have joined them.

Michael's eyes widen in alarm as he takes in the choices:

Menu C - £11 per head; Menu B - £25; Menu A - £37.

On the long table in front of them all are rows of delicious morsels; smoked salmon, goats cheese, wild mushrooms. Everyone meanders along, tasting while studying their menus.

CHARLIE

Option B looks like a good compromise?

DEREK

Let's go for A.

MICHAEL

Well, we don't want to be ostentatious. 'C' looks rather tasty.

DEREK

But we want our guests to feel special don't we? "Carpaccio of tuna perfectly balanced atop a flamboyant concoction of - "

MICHAEL

Perfectly balanced? As opposed to sloppily chucked on? Who writes this stuff.

CHARLIE

Some of it does sound pretentious.

MICHAEL

A terrine of crabmeat nestled up against - 'nestled up'? Can crabmeat nestle? Once it's lost consciousness?

Charlie giggles.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

A 28-day hung dry-aged fillet of beef incarcerated - 'incarcerated?' - in a basket of Jerusalem artichoke bruised with - this is a post-mortem not a menu.

Caroline laughs, and chokes on her mouthful. She signals for water.

Derek picks up a glass and hands it to her, but Michael is already holding his glass to Caroline's lips. She takes a sip, then they both step back, suddenly awkward, as they realise his arm is on her shoulder. Derek clocks this.

Charlie and Ashraf continue along the table with the Wedding Co-Ordinator, leaving Michael, Caroline and Derek alone.

DEREK

Listen, we all know how financially insecure the life of a creative freelance is, but I don't want it to stop Charlie having the wedding she deserves. You contribute what you can, and I'll cover the rest. As far as Charlie knows, we're "going halves".

MICHAEL

Because we are going halves.

DEREK

I've just signed a very lucrative client -

MICHAEL

And I've got a big deal about to happen.

Derek laughs.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

What?

DEREK

No offence, but Caroline used to tell me how you were always *just about* to sign the "big deal."

Michael looks at her, clearly hurt. Caroline looks down.

INT. FOYER, HOTEL

Michael, Caroline and Derek join Charlie and Ashraf who are with the Wedding Co-Ordinator.

WEDDING CO-ORDINATOR

Have we made a decision on the menus?

DEREK

Option A.

CHARLIE

Are you sure? That's very generous, but -

MICHAEL

'A' it is.

Michael and Derek eye each other. On opposite sides of the group.

DEREK
 And drinks. We'll need some bubbly.
 The Cava's a bit cheap.

On the menu: £7 per glass.

MICHAEL
 I agree. The Prosecco?

He looks down at the menu again: £11 per glass.

DEREK
 Why not Champagne?

MICHAEL
 Absolutely.

Further down on the menu: £14 per glass. Derek looks at Michael. Michael doesn't flinch. Charlie looks uncomfortable.

CHARLIE
 Will anyone know the difference?

WEDDING CO-ORDINATOR
 Canapes? Three, six or nine per
 guest?

DEREK
 Nine.

MICHAEL
 Nine.

Charlie looks anxiously at Caroline, who rolls her eyes.

EXT. HOTEL GROUNDS - DAY

Michael and Charlie walk along, lagging behind the others.

CHARLIE
 I have a confession to make. I'm
 really not sure about all this -

MICHAEL
 Oh thank God - I was going to say
 something but I know it's not my
 place. There's no rush, and you're
 so young -

CHARLIE
 I meant the menus. Going for the
 most expensive options.

Michael realises his mistake. Goes quiet.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)
 So you don't think we should be
 getting married?

MICHAEL

No, I just meant...

CHARLIE

Because if you don't want to be part of it, why are you paying for it?

MICHAEL

I do want to be part of it. If you're sure.

CHARLIE

We are. You don't know Ashraf, you don't really know me, so you don't understand how this makes sense. I just meant that I don't want a big showy wedding. All that matters is we have a venue big enough to invite everyone. Family's very important. To Ashraf *and* me.

EXT. HOTEL - DAY

Michael makes a call.

MICHAEL

It's Michael - again - 5pm on Friday. I just want to speak to my agent. I'm not chasing him for work, I just really need to get hold of a copy of my novel.

EXT. MICHAEL'S FLAT - DAY

A box, wrapped up with a bow, on Michael's doorstep. He picks it up. Opens it. A pair of running shoes. He closes the box back up.

INT. MICHAEL'S BEDROOM - DAY

He flings the box right to the back of his cluttered wardrobe, and shuts the door.

INT. CLASSROOM, ADULT EDUCATION CENTRE - DAY

Even more empty seats than last time. Now down to just a handful of students.

SHANNA

So, I'm writing a thriller. And I know your novel was a thriller, and I wondered if you had any -

MICHAEL
I thought it was a romcom?

SHANNA
I've finished that.

MICHAEL
It's not finished.

SHANNA
Yes it is.

MICHAEL
No it's not.

SHANNA
So... back to my question. I've heard that publishers will only look at new writers if they write genre fiction, and -

MICHAEL
You're getting way ahead of yourself here. Publishers won't look at new writers full stop. Whether they write genre, or high lit, or lego instructions.

SHANNA
But new writers do get discovered. Someone, somewhere, must get through.

MICHAEL
Ah, what if you're the one, the ONE person, the exception to the rule, who's got enough talent to 'make it.' You get the publishing deal. Even then, chances are you - a first time writer - will struggle to even get reviewed.

A couple of students put their pens down, sit back.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)
Small print run, you'll sell a few hundred copies, half of which will just sit on a shelf unread, then your novel will disappear, like it never existed. One day you'll look around and realise you don't even own a copy of your novel.
(MORE)

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

And neither does your lover,
neither do your friends, your
editor can barely remember it, your
ex-wife threw all her copies out
and your daughter is getting
married and moving to Boston and
you'll probably never see her
again!

The students look confused. Michael is now shouting.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

Even if your novel sees the light
of day, it will be competing with
hundreds of other stories people
absorb every single day of their
modern lives. And every story worth
telling has already been told, so
what's the bloody point?

He looks at the clock. Only 11.30. Looks around, silence. The
few remaining students are slumped down, looking at the
floor. Apart from Shanna.

SHANNA

As I was saying, I've started a
thriller. I wondered if you had any
tips as -

MICHAEL

Why are you writing a thriller? Do
you read thrillers? Do you love the
genre?

SHANNA

I'm trying out different genres to
see what I write best.

MICHAEL

Or you could just write what you're
passionate about.

SHANNA

I can write about whatever I like.

MICHAEL

You CAN write about whatever you
like, but that's not the same as
writing about what you really WANT
to write about.

SHANNA

So I should be writing about
something "important?"

MICHAEL

No, it doesn't have to be
IMPORTANT, just... important to
you.

Shanna leans back in her chair. Arms crossed.

SHANNA

Like what?

MICHAEL

Well... where are you from? There
must be so much to mine there, so
much... cultural heritage.

SHANNA

My mum's from Manchester and my
dad's from Tottenham. THAT cultural
heritage?

MICHAEL

You know what I mean.

SHANNA

Oh I get it, you mean I should tell
the story of my great great
grandmother and her life in an
African village and the struggle
against patriarchy through the
generations? THAT cultural
heritage? You mean because I'm
Black and female, I should be
writing about being Black and
female? I know you write about
being White and male, but that's
probably why you've only got one
book in you.

Michael, for once, is speechless.

EXT. ADULT EDUCATION CENTRE - DAY

Michael hurries out of the building, breaks into a run.
Shanna comes straight out after him.

SHANNA

Hey. Hey! I hope I wasn't out of
line back there. Thought I may have
touched a nerve.

He stops and turns to her.

SHANNA (CONT'D)

Maybe you should try my approach
though, just bang it out, "get it
writ, then get it right."

MICHAEL

What do you want Shanna?

SHANNA

I was wondering if you had any contacts I could send my romcom to?

Michael stares at her. Thinks it over.

MICHAEL

No I don't. Sorry.

INT. MICHAEL'S LIVING ROOM - DAY

Early morning sun shines through the window, lighting up the dust on the piles of old newspapers and other clutter.

From the bedroom we hear grunts and gasps; Michael and Vicki having sex. Michael talks through the gasps.

MICHAEL

Nine hundred quid for non-alcoholic beverages. Can you believe it?

VICKI

What?

MICHAEL

I know. A grand for smoothies.

Vicki looks down towards his groin, under the covers. Michael then looks down, apologetically.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

Oh, sorry. (rolls off her)
I'm a bit preoccupied. Mind if we finish this later?

VICKI

Finish this later? Like it's a chore?

MICHAEL

No, I just mean -

VICKI

Don't worry about it.

She gets up and darts out of the bedroom.

IN THE LIVING ROOM

Vicki trips up over a pile of books and bashes her knee on the corner of the coffee table.

VICKI (CONT'D)

Shit!

She limps to the sofa, bumping into other piles as she goes, stubbing her toe.

VICKI (CONT'D)

Shit. Shit shit shit.

She rubs her toe. Picks up a newspaper on top of a pile. Looks at the date. 2011. Throws it down in exasperation. Then picks up the whole pile, and dumps them in the recycling box in the kitchen.

VICKI (CONT'D)

That producer called again. He's really keen, but he won't wait forever. If you don't get hold of your agent first thing Monday then you have to tell Charlie.

IN THE BEDROOM

Michael pulls the covers up over his head.

IN THE LIVING ROOM

Vicki looks at his old computer in the corner. Runs a finger over it - thick with dust.

VICKI (CONT'D)

How are the chapters coming along?

MICHAEL (O.S.)

What chapters?

Vicki unearths more newspapers, checks the dates. January 2007. July 2004. Shakes her head. Goes and gets the recycling box from the kitchen, as Michael appears in the doorway.

VICKI

It's time you had a spring clean.

He goes to the recycling box and takes the papers back out.

MICHAEL

I'm keeping these for a reason, for ideas, snippets -

VICKI

But these are whole newspapers, nothing even highlighted. If you want to keep a snippet, you cut it out. File it.

MICHAEL

Writers don't work like that. I like my snippets to stay in context.

VICKI

But that's why it's called a snippet. Because you SNIP IT out.

She continues to pile them up and throw them in the bin.

MICHAEL

Stop it - the idea for my next novel could be in there.

She puts them back in the recycling as fast as he pulls them back out.

VICKI

But you'd never find it. And you should concentrate on finishing the one you're working on -

MICHAEL

(grabbing her arm)
JUST STOP IT!

Vicki freezes, alarmed at his sudden explosion.

EXT. LITERARY AGENCY, WEST END - DAY

Michael steps off the bus. Looks up at the smart office building.

INT. RECEPTION, LITERARY AGENCY

Michael pleads with a Receptionist.

RECEPTIONIST

That's not how things work, you can't just pop in.

MICHAEL

I am his client. That's how it worked with Patrick, who used to represent me here.

RECEPTIONIST

I'm sorry. You need an appointment.

He sees her eyes dart across the expansive reception area, and he turns to see what she's looking at. TORQUIL, early 30s, steps into the lift. Michael crosses the lobby towards him, waving.

MICHAEL

Torquil? Hi, it's Michael.

Torquil jams his finger at the lift button.

TORQUIL

Michael?

MICHAEL

Yes, Michael!

TORQUIL

Oh, as in Ed and Michael, yes God, it's been a while. Listen, I'm on my way out, cab waiting outside, just popped back in to get something.

The lift doors close just as Michael gets there. He takes the stairs.

ON THE SECOND FLOOR

Michael gets to the lift just as Torquil steps out and heads to his desk.

MICHAEL

I was just after a copy of my novel actually.

TORQUIL

What novel?

MICHAEL

My novel that was published.

TORQUIL

When was that?

MICHAEL

Nearly twenty years ago now.

TORQUIL

Twenty years ago? Why would I have a copy, I wasn't your agent back then. I wasn't even an agent back then.

MICHAEL

But there must be a copy at the agency somewhere?

TORQUIL

Do you know how many times we've merged or been bought out since then?

He watches as Torquil hunts around for something on his oversized desk. Then Michael notices a framed photo on the wall of him, Ed, another man (PATRICK) and Spike Milligan, sitting at a table together at what looks like an award ceremony.

MICHAEL

Shit! I remember this night! God that was a great night. Spike bloody Milligan, we were tripping over ourselves.

Michael takes it off the wall and looks at it. Torquil takes the photo from him, but Michael won't let go.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

I think this belongs to Patrick, doesn't it?

TORQUIL

No, it belongs on my office wall.

MICHAEL

I'm in the damn photo -

TORQUIL

Doesn't give you ownership.

MICHAEL

... and I remember, Pat asked someone to take a photo of us. So it belongs to Pat.

TORQUIL

Legally it's company property.

He takes the photo with force and puts it back on the wall, then sweeps up a pile of stuff from his desk and walks out, Michael still staring at the photo.

TORQUIL (O.S.) (CONT'D)

I'm in a rush, we'll catch up some other time, ping me!

EXT. LITERARY AGENCY, WEST END

Torquil is hailing a cab. Looks the other way when Michael runs up.

MICHAEL

Also - I'm available for work. Not fussy about what it is. Can start straight away.

TORQUIL

I'm not sure I've got anything that you'd be interested in.

He steps out into the road, still trying to flag a cab. Michael puts his hand on his arm.

MICHAEL

I am your client, right? This feels like I'm trying to ambush you.

TORQUIL

Look. This is awkward. But I'll be honest with you Michael, I assumed you'd moved on.

MICHAEL

Moved on?

TORQUIL

Found another agent... found another career... got married and moved to the country... whatever people do when I don't hear from them for a while.

MICHAEL

No. No, I'm very much still, I mean, very committed to, look, what are you saying here?

TORQUIL

I feel I should be honest with you.

MICHAEL

You already said that.

TORQUIL

I need young new voices, with something relevant to say.

MICHAEL

That sounds like meaningless PR blurb.

TORQUIL

So what if it is? That's the position I'm in. It's tough out there. For all of us. You can't go AWOL for years, then just turn up and expect everything to be the same.

A cab stops and Torquil jumps in. It speeds away, splashing through a puddle, leaving Michael soaked, standing in the gutter.

EXT. EEL PIE ISLAND, RIVER THAMES, TWICKENHAM - DAY

Michael stands hunched, hands in his pockets, looking out over the river. Trees, mud-banks, riverboats. In the middle of the river is an island. Michael crosses over the footbridge to get there.

Walks past an eccentric array of bungalows. Rings the bell. No answer. He waits. Rings again.

PATRICK (PAT), early 60s, opens the door in his dressing gown. He's the man in the photo. He takes his glasses off, runs his hand over his eyes in disbelief.

PAT
Michael? Bloody hell! Come in!

MICHAEL
I'm sorry - I should have called -
bad time? Not well?

PAT
No I'm fine, come in!

INT. PAT'S LIVING ROOM

The amount of clutter is shocking, even by Michael's standards.

PAT (CONT'D)
It's good to see you Michael. How's
Ed?

MICHAEL
Ed's gone.

PAT
God Michael I'm so sorry. I hadn't
heard -

MICHAEL
No not "gone" - just in Hollywood.

PAT
Hollywood? Bloody hell!

Pat pours Michael a Scotch, Michael glances at the clock. Ten-thirty.

MICHAEL
I was wondering, if you'd have a
copy of my novel somewhere.

INT. PAT'S STUDY

Every inch of wall is covered with overladen bookshelves.

MICHAEL
Glad to see you haven't succumbed
to a paperless world.

PAT

You can't throw books out. They're like old friends - they're not going to tell you anything new, but it's still reassuring to have them around.

MICHAEL

Exactly. Vicki thinks I should get a Kindle.

PAT

Vicki's back on the scene? I always liked her.

SOME TIME LATER

Michael looks through the last pile of books on the floor. Then sits back. Forlorn. Pat re-fills Michael's glass and hands it to him.

INT. PAT'S LIVING ROOM - DAY

Half empty bottle of Scotch; Michael and Pat merry and noisy.

MICHAEL

They want relevant, Pat. We're no longer relevant.

PAT

What do they mean by "relevant" anyway? I mean, EVERYTHING is relevant to SOMETHING isn't it?

MICHAEL

Exactly.

PATRICK

And original. They want original.

MICHAEL

Originality only exists for those with short memories. And I'm quoting. That's not an original thought.

PATRICK

Bastards.

MICHAEL

Bastards.

INT. PAT'S LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Bottle now completely empty. Michael and Pat slumped on the table, staring at their glasses.

PATRICK (SLURRED)
 You know you've got to tell your
 daughter you can't pay for the
 wedding.

MICHAEL
 I know. I have to.

He looks across at Pat. Eyes closed, snoring.

INT. PAT'S LIVING ROOM - DAY

Michael wakes, slumped on the sofa. Looks at his watch,
 panics. Glances over at Pat, snoring loudly, face plastered
 to the sofa with his own dribble. He's right on the edge,
 about to fall off.

Michael gently shoves him back on, takes the glass from his
 hand, puts it on the table, then hurries out.

EXT. LUXURY HOTEL, CENTRAL LONDON - DAY

Liveried doormen open the doors for well-heeled guests.
 Michael sees his reflection in the polished black marble - a
 dishevelled mess. He goes in anyway.

INT. LOBBY, LUXURY HOTEL

He walks up to a stressed-looking Caroline, who is waiting by
 an over-sized vase of flowers bigger than she is.

CAROLINE
 You're late.

MICHAEL
 Bit O-T-T, this place?

CAROLINE
 This was one of the few that had
 last minute availability, Derek
 booked it, but -

MICHAEL
 Before you go any further, I need
 to talk to you about something.

CAROLINE
 Okay - we've had some news as well,
 bad news.

MICHAEL
 Oh?

CAROLINE

Well Derek's had some bad news.
That client - didn't happen. And
it's had a huge knock on effect.

MICHAEL

God that's awful, imagine, a "big
deal" that didn't go through.

CAROLINE

Don't be sarcastic. This could be
disastrous for him, a new company,
he could go bankrupt. I know he's
been hard to deal with, he's just
having a tough time with you
around. Feeling threatened.

MICHAEL

Really? Threatened?

CAROLINE

He's supported Charlie for the last
twenty years, not just financially
but emotionally. Then you just
sweep in out of nowhere announcing
you're paying for her wedding, and
Charlie loves you for it.

MICHAEL

She does?

CAROLINE

Well she loves that you're
involved.

MICHAEL

(beaming)
She does?

CAROLINE

Anyway - this means he can't
contribute to the wedding, so if
you can't pay for it all, then now
is the time to say.

MICHAEL

She loves that I'm involved.

Through the glass entrance Michael sees Charlie step off the
bus. He watches as she bumps into someone, and smiles
apologetically. Checks her phone. Shrugs her coat off as she
walks into the foyer. Waves to them, excited.

CAROLINE

Michael?

He seems entranced.

MICHAEL

I said I'd pay for her wedding. And I will.

A SERIES OF SHOTS as Michael, Charlie and Caroline tour the hotel; the rooftop bar, all glass... the restaurant, luxe banquette seating... huge canvases, gilt mirrors, opulence...

INT. BANQUETING HALL, LUXURY HOTEL

Charlie, Caroline and Michael are with yet another Wedding Co-Ordinator. Heads down, studying the brochure.

WEDDING CO-ORDINATOR

Will you be placing a deposit today to secure the date?

MICHAEL

Um...

He stares at 'MENU OPTIONS': price per head - £85.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

Er...

WEDDING CO-ORDINATOR

Any questions?

MICHAEL

There's a mistake here. This apostrophe is supposed to be after the 's', not before.

WEDDING CO-ORDINATOR

Oh. Well. I can assure you it doesn't affect the taste. And that's the grammatically correct affect rather than e-ffect.

MICHAEL

That's spelling. Not grammar.

CAROLINE

Can we move on?

MICHAEL

Sure.

WEDDING CO-ORDINATOR

Once you've paid the deposit -

MICHAEL

Actually no. This is grammatically incorrect. You can't be okay with that?

WEDDING CO-ORDINATOR
It doesn't keep me awake at night.

MICHAEL
This is what, a seven star venue?
Prides itself on attention to
detail, no?

WEDDING CO-ORDINATOR
As I said, it doesn't affect what's
important on your daughter's big
day.

MICHAEL
But that's not the point.

WEDDING CO-ORDINATOR
What is the point?

MICHAEL
It's shoddy. And it makes me wonder
what else is shoddy...

CHARLIE
You're being weird about this, it's
just an apostrophe -

MICHAEL
...AT NINETY BLOODY QUID A HEAD!

EXT. LUXURY HOTEL, CENTRAL LONDON

Charlie and Caroline stand outside with Michael, who is hyper-ventilating.

MICHAEL
I can't pay for this.

He sees Charlie's shocked expression. Calms down.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)
I mean, I can't pay for THIS. We
have to down-size.

CHARLIE
Well that's okay. We don't need
fancy, just somewhere big enough to
have everyone.

CAROLINE
But we're leaving it so late -
there's so much to do -

CHARLIE
So let's make the most of the time
we have this afternoon. Have you
got your outfit?

Caroline shakes her head.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)
And dad, do you have a suit?

Michael looks taken aback.

CAROLINE
He's never owned a suit in his
life.

CHARLIE
Come on then.

She turns and marches off. Michael, still surprised, grabs Caroline's arm.

MICHAEL
She called me dad.

Caroline smiles.

MONTAGE - SUIT SHOPPING

- Various of Michael in different suits in different shops.
- Caroline trying on gorgeous outfits.
- Michael looking ridiculous in a trendy hipster suit; Charlie shakes her head.
- Michael looking uncomfortable in a formal suit; Charlie has her head in her hands in despair.

INT. SUIT SHOP - DAY

Michael stands awkwardly in yet another ill-fitting suit, as Charlie tries not to laugh.

CHARLIE
I can see why you don't wear suits.

MICHAEL
The only suit that ever fitted
properly was my wedding suit.

CAROLINE
That did actually look okay on you.
I've probably still got it packed
away somewhere.

CHARLIE
Let's try it.

No.

CAROLINE

No.

MICHAEL

CHARLIE

Oh come on, you promised to show me
your wedding dress too remember?

INT. BASEMENT, CAROLINE'S HOUSE - DAY

Caroline opens a box, carefully. Under layers of tissue
paper, a suit. She lifts it out to show Michael and Charlie.

CHARLIE

Try it on.

He looks at Caroline. She shrugs.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)

Go on!

Michael traipses off into the other room.

Charlie finds another box and opens it. Inside is a wedding
dress. Simple, classic, under-stated. She holds it up.

Caroline stares at it. Michael comes back in, wearing the
suit. Stops when he sees the dress.

MICHAEL

I forgot how beautiful that was.

CHARLIE

And look at you dad. A suit that
actually looks okay.

Caroline goes closer to inspect it.

CAROLINE

A few holes.

She examines the cuffs. Their faces close together.

CAROLINE (CONT'D)

(raises an eyebrow)
A bit shabby but otherwise
perfectly functional.

Michael laughs.

MICHAEL

Thank you.

Charlie is leafing through a photo album. Michael and
Caroline in their wedding outfits, in Caroline's garden.

CHARLIE

You got married here?

In the photo: The garden is decked out in fairy lights,
muslin drapes, flowers everywhere; intimate, informal.

Michael takes out a small keepsake box.

CAROLINE

Oh, that's just silly stuff.

Michael carefully unwraps it - dried rose petals, a small candle holder, a blue garter.

MICHAEL

You kept all this?

Caroline looks embarrassed. Charlie finds a collection of place cards at the back of the photo album.

CHARLIE

What are these?

MICHAEL

Oh yes, each guest had a quote about love on the back of their place card.

Charlie holds one up.

CHARLIE

"You pierce my soul. I am half agony, half hope."

Michael turns it over and looks at the name on the front.

MICHAEL

Your aunt. Very appropriate.

Caroline laughs as Charlie reads another one.

CHARLIE

"By all means marry. If you get a good wife, you'll become happy. If you get a bad one, you'll become a philosopher." That was for your dad.

MICHAEL

Again, appropriate. Rest his soul.

CHARLIE

How lovely and writerly of you.

MICHAEL

No, that was your mum. Really thoughtful.

CAROLINE

(to Charlie)

Agonised for days over the quote for your father.

Michael picks up the card with his name on. Turns it over to read the quote. Goes quiet. Charlie looks at him, then at Caroline.

CHARLIE

It's late. Why don't you stay for supper dad?

CAROLINE

Yes, do.

MICHAEL

Okay. If you're sure.

Charlie then gets up, checks her phone theatrically.

CHARLIE

Oh actually, I forgot, Ashraf's expecting me tonight.

Michael and Caroline both look alarmed as she gets up to go.

MICHAEL

Well why don't you stay and have something to eat first -

CHARLIE

Sorry!

CAROLINE

What time will you be -

She heads up the stairs.

CHARLIE (O.S.)

Don't wait up!

INT. CAROLINE'S KITCHEN - NIGHT

Caroline takes leftovers out from the fridge. Michael hovers.

MICHAEL

I'm just popping out to get some wine.

EXT. OFF LICENCE - NIGHT

Michael looks in the window. Sees his reflection. Arranges and then re-arranges his hair. Turns sideways. Pulls in his stomach. Lets it out, pulls it in again.

INT. CAROLINE'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Caroline scans through her wardrobe, hanger after hanger.

EXT. CAROLINE'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Caroline opens the door; Michael stands there with a bottle of wine. Face strained with the effort of holding his gut in.

CAROLINE
Are you okay?

He notices her top. Tighter, low cut.

MICHAEL
You look nice.

CAROLINE
Oh, no, I mean, I didn't - I just
spilt something on the other...

She grabs a baggy cardi from the bannisters behind her and pulls it on.

INT. CAROLINE'S KITCHEN

Michael pours wine into two glasses.

CAROLINE
I'm glad you turned up that day.
When they got engaged. Even if it
was for the wrong reason.

They both take a sip. Caroline takes her baggy cardigan off.

MICHAEL
Out of interest, if I hadn't turned
up, when were you going to tell me
our daughter was getting married?

CAROLINE
Charlie asked me not to say
anything. She was embarrassed I
think, she knows they're young, she
knows what their friends think -

MICHAEL
I can see they're great together
but -

CAROLINE
They really are.

MICHAEL
But I still don't understand why
they have to get married?

CAROLINE
Partly practicalities, for the visa
stuff, but that's not really why.
(MORE)

CAROLINE (CONT'D)
They've both got these great
opportunities...

Caroline's voice starts to wobble.

CAROLINE (CONT'D)
...and I think they just both want
to go off on this adventure, this
new chapter in their lives,
together...

Caroline starts to cry. Michael gets up and puts his arms
around her.

CAROLINE (CONT'D)
...but you're right, they're so
young, and after the mistakes...you
know... that we made...

Michael pulls her close.

MICHAEL
(whispers)
I know.

Caroline pulls away, grabs a tissue and blows her nose.
Loudly.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)
I forgot you had that foghorn on
you. That's one advantage about
having been married. No social
niceties. I might just fart now,
instead of holding it in.

She laughs, through her tears. Then serious again. Looks up
at Michael.

CAROLINE
Do you think.

Takes a deep breath.

CAROLINE (CONT'D)
Do you think, if we had met later,
things would have worked out?

MICHAEL
I'd like to think so. I thought you
were great.

She takes another sip of wine. Won't look at him.

CAROLINE
So... if you thought I was great,
why did you leave?

MICHAEL

I didn't leave. You kicked me out.

CAROLINE

You left.

MICHAEL

I didn't - I just needed some time.

CAROLINE

Some 'time?' That's what men say when they haven't the courage to say they're leaving.

MICHAEL

I was coming back, but by then you'd moved on.

CAROLINE

I was scared that you weren't ready for marriage, for kids, so I pushed you away, but you weren't supposed to go. You were supposed to fight for it!

MICHAEL

How was I supposed to know that?

Smoke appears from the oven.

CAROLINE

Shit!

She opens it, coughing and spluttering as a cloud of smoke unfurls and the smoke alarm starts BLEEPING. Caroline dumps the dish in the sink, as Michael takes a broom and whacks it into the smoke alarm.

Silence.

Caroline has her back to him at the sink. He moves closer.

CAROLINE (CONT'D)

It's been a long day. Maybe you should just go.

He hesitates. Then leaves.

EXT. THE OLD GOAT PUB, MICHAEL'S STREET - NIGHT

The pub windows are white-washed and it is all boarded up. Michael stops to look at the advertising plastered across it as he walks past:

"Opening soon - London's newest innovative Tea Bar - offering over 40 blends of loose leaf tea, blended at our custom built tea bar."

Michael shakes his head. Walks away in disgust. Then goes back, takes a pen out of his pocket. Crosses out the word 'over' and replaces it with 'MORE THAN'.

INT. CAFE - DAY

A list, in messy hand-writing:
'Soft drinks - £400. Canapes - £250. Main course - £450'

Michael makes his way down the list with a pencil, crosses out the £250 next to 'canapes' and writes £150. Then crosses out canapes altogether.

Vicki sits down next to him.

VICKI

So what did they say when you told them?

Michael won't meet her eye.

MICHAEL

Hmmm?

VICKI

When you told Charlie you couldn't pay for the wedding. You did tell her right?

Michael looks at her.

VICKI (CONT'D)

Oh Michael. Really? You didn't tell them?

MICHAEL

Derek has just gone bust, and he can't pay.

VICKI

Even more reason to come clean!

MICHAEL

I can't now though - she's going to be so disappointed -

VICKI

So it's okay for Derek to disappoint her, but not you?

MICHAEL

Exactly.

VICKI

Michael, really, just tell them, while there's still time.

MICHAEL

Can't I sell the rights to the producer without the book?

VICKI

Can you sell the rights to a book you don't actually have? What do you think?

MICHAEL

I can re-tell the whole story. Most of it. The gist.

VICKI

"Hi there, do you want to buy the rights to the GIST of my story?" Listen to yourself! Have you called Ed? Wouldn't he have a copy?

He says nothing.

VICKI (CONT'D)

If you can't ask him, come clean about the wedding, and move on.

She gets out a laptop.

VICKI (CONT'D)

I have a present for you. I wanted to apologise for our argument this morning.

MICHAEL

What argument?

She places the laptop in front of him. Opens it up.

VICKI

This is so you can get writing. Finish those chapters. Or if you don't want to - start something else. It's a good time for new beginnings.

She's gazing at him, smiling. He shifts uncomfortably.

MICHAEL

Vicki, that's very thoughtful, but I already have a computer at home.

VICKI

But with this you can write anywhere. Maybe you could make a start this weekend, in Paris.

MICHAEL

Paris?

VICKI

You said you were free? Kings
Cross, 7pm tonight -

MICHAEL

I don't know Vicki. I'm thinking we
should slow things down a bit.

VICKI

Okay, sure, we'll do that.

MICHAEL

Why are you smiling like that?

VICKI

Because I know you don't mean it.

MICHAEL

No, I do, I do mean it.

VICKI

Okay. We will then. But not really.

MICHAEL

No, really, let's.

VICKI

Okay, we'll just say we are. I know
how things work with you. I know
it's complicated.

MICHAEL

What are you talking about? It's
not complicated, it's very very
simple. The laptop, the shoes,
Paris, it's all too much.

Vicki opens up a blank document on the laptop. Places it in
front of Michael. Passes him a latte.

VICKI

You're right, it is simple. I'm
going, and you are going to write.
Don't forget. 7pm.

She gives him a kiss, and with a swish of her long cashmere
cardigan she's gone.

He stares at the blank page. Then picks up his phone. Scrolls
through his contacts. Stops at "Ed". Hesitates. Then hits
"Call".

MICHAEL (ON THE PHONE)

I know you won't get this, but I
don't have your LA mobile. Or
"cell." I'm desperate to find a
copy of my novel. Doubt you have
one, just thought, worth a try.

He ends the call. Looks around, at others tapping away on their laptops. Stares at his blank page again. Takes a sip of the latte, gets a mouthful of froth.

BLEEP BLEEP BLEEP - suddenly Michael's mobile rings and buzzes across the table. 'ED CALLING' flashes up. Michael lifts up the mobile, stares at it incredulously, then answers.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

Ed! MATE!! You're in London? No no, I'm in a cafe, with loads of teenagers facebooking or whatever the hell the verb is, there must be a verb, right? (Laughs) You have? MATE! As soon as possible! Yeah, no I can come right now. I don't even like this frothy shit.

Slams the lid of the laptop down triumphantly. Beams. Absolutely delighted.

EXT. RESTAURANT TERRACE, SOUTH BANK - DAY

Bright sunshine. Michael turns up and scans the restaurant. Everyone looks poised and glamorous. Michael looks straight past a middle-aged tanned guy in a trendy suit. Then he does a double take.

MICHAEL

Jesus.

It's Ed. Transformed. Slimmer. Whiter teeth. Michael goes over to him. Ed takes his sunglasses off.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

My God, you look -

ED

I know, so LA, don't take the piss you bastard.

MICHAEL

No, you look, great, actually. So how awful was it?

ED

You know I'm only back to sell the flat?

MICHAEL

But you said you were having problems...

ED

Problems selling the flat. I've got a job out there, Michael, I live there. I actually like it.

MICHAEL

Really?

ED

Mock all you want, but what's not to like? Fresh air, swimming pools, the people are really friendly.

MICHAEL

But you're British. We hate all that stuff.

ED

The place is swarming with Brits. And they don't seem too unhappy.

MICHAEL

That's because they're all so Botoxed you can't tell.

ED

Seriously, if you stopped being so cynical, you might actually find something to be happy about.

MICHAEL

Jesus. They've really got to you.

Ed brings out the novel.

ED

So, here it is.

Michael takes it.

MICHAEL

Thank God! This - is going to pay for Charlie's wedding.

ED

Charlie's getting married?

MICHAEL

And I'm paying for the whole thing.

ED

But you're broke.

MICHAEL

Exactly! Film rights!

ED

Really?

MICHAEL

Vicki's got a producer who's desperate for it.

ED

(takes a card out)

If you need money give my manager a call. He loves the stuff we did together. He's asked about you, I just didn't think you'd be interested.

Michael doesn't take the card. Ed leaves it on the table in front of him. Michael looks around the restaurant.

MICHAEL

I hate these places. What's wrong with the pub?

ED

I don't drink any more.

MICHAEL

Course you don't. Can we get out of here anyway?

Ed shrugs his agreement. Gets up, and when his back is turned, Michael surreptitiously pockets the card.

EXT. SOUTH BANK - DAY

Ed and Michael walk along the Embankment, past the second hand book and print stalls. As they talk they make their way up onto Hungerford footbridge.

MICHAEL

The bastard just wouldn't call me back. I mean what kind of a name is Torquil anyway?

ED

He's a good bloke - just very busy, under a lot of pressure I think -

MICHAEL

And then the writing students, one actually asked why I don't blog.

ED

Might be worth thinking about.

MICHAEL

Blogs are like arse-holes. Everyone's got one and they're usually full of shit.

Michael looks at Ed for his reaction, but he barely cracks a smile.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)
Vicki's back on the scene. Although she's getting strangely clingy.

ED
I always liked her. She was good for you.

MICHAEL
And Caroline, God, she's stressed -

ED
Well weddings are stressful -

MICHAEL
But things are getting really complicated -

ED
OH WILL YOU SHUT THE FUCK UP!

MICHAEL
What??

ED
I cannot - cannot - listen to another second of this.

Michael is speechless.

ED (CONT'D)
God it felt good to finally say that, my therapist was right!

MICHAEL
Finally?

ED
Twenty years I've done this Michael, twenty years of listening to your constant moaning, griping, whingeing.

MICHAEL
What do you mean? We gripe together, that's what we do. Mutual griping.

ED
No - you griped. I listened. I didn't realise how toxic it was until I left London.

MICHAEL
Toxic?

ED

Look, either sort your life out,
or...

MICHAEL

Who uses words like toxic? Did you
and your therapist work that out
together? Cost you a few hundred
quid did it?

ED

...or stop moaning.

MICHAEL

Because here's some words you can
have for free - ungrateful,
bastard, hack, betrayal, bastard,
oh already said that one...

ED

Give my manager a call. Go out to
LA, work.

MICHAEL

I can't just go out to LA!

ED

Why not? I did! You just need a
shift in attitude.

MICHAEL

Ah, a shift in attitude. Maybe your
therapist could help me with that,
or your dentist, or your
lobotomist, or whoever the fuck it
is that's sucked your attitude out
and replaced it with platitudes. I
have real problems here to sort
out!

ED

These aren't problems Michael. Your
agent is too busy to call you? Big
deal. Vicki's getting intense? Big
deal! Caroline is cross? BIG
FUCKING DEAL! This is the stuff of
a life!

MICHAEL

So what were you doing for the last
twenty years? Humouring me? I could
have had a career as a novelist if
I hadn't met you.

ED

Yeah right!

MICHAEL

Right! I was all geared up to write my second novel, you distracted me -

ED

Rubbish! You were all out of ideas, you jumped at the chance to write together -

MICHAEL

You were always jealous that I was a real writer -

ED

Jealous?

MICHAEL

Yes -

ED

Of this??

Ed snatches the novel and holds it up.

MICHAEL

YES!

ED

This - was derivative, predictable -

MICHAEL

What do you know? You write one liners, sound-bites, you're a hack, a bloody hack -

ED

...formulaic, okay as a first novel but hardly heralded the arrival of an original new voice -

MICHAEL

And you wouldn't have been able to do any of it without me!

ED

Well I'm doing pretty well now! So take your precious fucking masterpiece -

He flings the novel at Michael, who is standing near the railings on the footbridge. He stumbles as he tries to catch the book. Watches in horror as the book slips through his fingers, falls through the railings, and down into the Thames. Down, down, down...

Hits the water with a splash. Michael rushes back along the bridge, down the steps, Ed follows him down onto the Embankment, Michael frantically searches for a gap in the railings and rushes down onto the dirty Thames sand.

He spots his book, bobbing, far in, and he starts flapping about at the edge of the water, but then a wave washes over it, and Michael watches helplessly as it sinks down, into the murky depths.

He wades in.

ED (CONT'D)

There's no point chasing it
Michael. It's gone.

Michael freezes. Takes a moment to digest what Ed has just said. Turns to Ed, pulls his arm back, and throws a punch right in Ed's face. Ed stumbles back, floored.

They go for each other, wildly throwing unskilled punches in each other's direction. They scuffle around on the sand, both yelling incoherently and grabbing at each other as twenty years of pent up rage and frustration comes flooding out.

Eventually, exhausted, they flop down on the muddy sand, side by side, trying to catch their breath.

MICHAEL

Jesus. We're too old for this.

More panting.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

And too unfit.

Pause.

ED

And I've got cancer.

Michael half laughs, then stops. Looks at Ed. Ed is serious. A long, long moment.

MICHAEL

What?

ED

Cancer. I've got cancer.

MICHAEL

What kind?

ED

Testicular.

Silence.

MICHAEL
What's the prognosis?

ED
They don't really tell you.
Could be months. Could be years.

MICHAEL
Ed...

ED
Could be years.

Silence.

MICHAEL
How long have you known? Is that
why you went?

ED
Nope, just found out.

MICHAEL
Are you coming back?

Ed looks out across the river. The brown, murky water. The overcast sky.

ED
Nah. I like it over there. Things
look different in the L.A.
sunshine. Anyway. Didn't mean to
tell you. Talking about it doesn't
help.

MICHAEL
No.

ED
Well look, I've got to be at the
airport in a few hours time.

MICHAEL
Sure.

Ed stands up, brushes himself down, pulls a stunned Michael to his feet.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)
I'll come out and see you.

ED
Sure.

Neither of them look convinced.

MICHAEL
I really will.

Ed nods. They embrace. First a man hug. Then cling to each other. Then spring apart again.

Michael watches as Ed walks away. Watches until he disappears from sight, lost in the crowd.

EXT. THAMES PATH - DAY

Michael walks along the Embankment. Walks and walks. Sun setting.

EXT. THAMES PATH - NIGHT

It's now dark. Michael is still walking.

INT. MICHAEL'S FLAT - NIGHT

Michael opens the door, goes inside, doesn't bother turning the lights on, and jumps out of his skin when he hears Vicki's voice.

VICKI

Where the fuck were you?

He switches the light on. She's sitting on the sofa.

MICHAEL

What?

VICKI

I called. And called and called and called.

Michael takes out his phone.

MICHAEL

Sorry, it's waterlogged - oh shit, Paris.

VICKI

Yes. Shit. Paris. I waited. And waited.

MICHAEL

I'm really sorry.

VICKI

And waited, and waited, AND WAITED!

MICHAEL

It's just Paris, we can go some other time -

VICKI
Just Paris? Just Paris? It's not
JUST PARIS!

He looks confused.

VICKI (CONT'D)
I'm pregnant.

Michael's mouth falls open in shock, but he can't find any words. He splutters.

MICHAEL
But how - when - I mean I assumed -

VICKI
Of course you did.

MICHAEL
No, I just mean -

VICKI
I was told I had started early
menopause.

Michael sits down beside her.

MICHAEL
How do you feel?

VICKI
Stunned. How do you feel?

MICHAEL
Stunned. Yes. That sums it up.

VICKI
And scared. And (whispers) -
completely over-joyed. If I'm
honest.

Michael doesn't say anything. Head in hands.

MICHAEL
Pregnant.

Vicki looks at him.

VICKI
You said you wanted a second chance
at fatherhood?

MICHAEL
I never said I wanted a baby -

VICKI
You said if you could start over,
you would!

MICHAEL

Yes, with Charlie, not start over with another family! Besides, you never wanted a relationship with me. Several times it could have happened, you always said no -

VICKI

I wasn't desperate then!

MICHAEL

Oh thanks very much.

VICKI

You know what I mean. It just felt different this time. You said I was the most significant relationship of your life.

MICHAEL

Did I?

VICKI

Well why did you call that night to start things up again?

MICHAEL

Because I was looking for my novel.

VICKI

Really? It really was just about the novel?

He nods. She stands up and pulls a book out of her bag.

VICKI (CONT'D)

Here's your stupid novel.

MICHAEL

Jesus.

VICKI

I was going to give it to you in Paris. It was going to be all romantic, I was going to tell you I was pregnant...

Michael tries to take the novel, she snatches it out of his grasp. Then throws it at him, collapses down on the sofa, and bursts into tears. He puts his arms around her.

MICHAEL

But you never wanted kids.

VICKI

I didn't want them or not want them.

She looks at him.

VICKI (CONT'D)
Haven't you got anything to say?

MICHAEL
I just don't know...

Vicki gets up.

VICKI
Don't worry then. I'll take care of it.

MICHAEL
"Take care" of it?

VICKI
Yes, one way or another, I'll take care of it!

She storms out and slams the front door.

INT. MICHAEL'S LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Michael stares out the window, Scotch in hand. Work has started on the pub across the road; its interiors stacked up outside on the pavement. Tables, chairs, and other junk.

INT. MICHAEL'S LIVING ROOM - DAY

Michael asleep on the sofa, empty glass in hand. Wakes with a start. His phone is on a towel in pieces - battery and sim card laid out. He re-assembles it. Calls Vicki. No answer.

He looks at his novel. The producer's business card is inside. Michael parcels up the novel, and addresses it to "DAN NICHOLSON" - copying the name from the card.

EXT. SEEDY PUB, LONDON - DAY

Michael, Charlie and Caroline stand on a 'roof terrace' on top of a run down pub. The view is of dilapidated tower blocks and motorway flyovers.

MICHAEL
Here? Really?

CAROLINE
We said we needed to scale down.

MICHAEL
I didn't mean to the depths of hell.

CAROLINE

The only two venues that can do it at short notice is this place, or some grand country house.

Michael's phone rings - "UNKNOWN CALLER" flashes up. He steps off to one side to answer.

DAN (O.S.)

I love it. Read it in one sitting, couldn't put it down. I want the rights.

MICHAEL (ON THE PHONE)

Fantastic! That's fantastic - how much are we -

DAN (O.S.)

Can't discuss now, just about to jump on a plane, I'll call you when I land, we'll meet as soon as.

MICHAEL (ON THE PHONE)

I just need to know - you definitely -

DAN (O.S.)

Definitely want the rights, don't talk to anyone else, gotta catch my flight!

Michael stares at his phone in disbelief, then impulsively grabs Caroline and gives her a kiss.

CAROLINE

A 'Big Deal?'

MICHAEL

Yes, a very big deal!

Charlie calls out from the other end of the roof terrace.

CHARLIE

Look, there's a balcony.

Charlie crouches down, crawls through the gap in the brickwork, to emerge on the other side. Looks out over a myriad of motorway intersections and flyovers. Michael and Caroline scramble through the opening, bits of plaster falling off.

Bags of rubbish piled up in one corner. A rat scurries across the floor. Charlie looks around in dismay.

MICHAEL

Fuck this.

EXT. COUNTRY HOUSE HOTEL, SURREY - DAY

A beautiful vista of landscaped gardens; a maze, fountains, sculptures...

MICHAEL (V.O.)

Now this is a balcony.

Michael, Charlie and Caroline stand on a huge, ornate balcony, part of a stunning stately home. They are with a smartly dressed Wedding Co-Ordinator.

WEDDING CO-ORDINATOR

Built in 1840 to mark the marriage of Queen Victoria and Albert.

Charlie looks at the sculptures of Cupids all along the balcony. Takes in the view; the Classical pillars, the stucco-fronted portico, the rose gardens.

CHARLIE

This is amazing! But can we afford -

MICHAEL

You want a venue big enough to invite everyone. This is it. You just concentrate on the guest list.

CAROLINE

And we can organise everything in our short time-scale?

WEDDING CO-ORDINATOR

I think so - as long as you're decisive and use our suppliers.

MICHAEL

(to Charlie)

What do you think?

Charlie jumps up and down with excitement. Then hugs him.

CHARLIE

I love it!

EXT. LANDSCAPED GARDENS, COUNTRY HOUSE HOTEL - DAY

Charlie and the Wedding Co-Ordinator dart around the grounds, discussing arrangements and pointing out different areas. Michael and Caroline walk slowly behind them.

CAROLINE

The other night - I wanted to ask if we could try that again. You coming over for dinner.

Michael stops and looks at her. Says nothing.

CAROLINE (CONT'D)
 Oh God, now I'm embarrassed, I
 thought we were, I mean, I thought -

MICHAEL
 It's not that.

He pauses.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)
 Vicki's pregnant.

Caroline takes a deep breath. Takes a step backwards.

CAROLINE
 Pregnant. Wow. I didn't know you
 and Vicki were -

MICHAEL
 We're not -

CAROLINE
 But none of my business. Wow.
 Congratulations.

MICHAEL
 I didn't mean to blurt it out like
 that -

CAROLINE
 Really, don't feel bad. What I said
 just now - crazy idea. We both know
 that. Forwards, not backwards,
 right? And wow. A baby. It's
 fantastic. Really pleased for you.

He doesn't say anything.

CAROLINE (CONT'D)
 (brisk)
 Well, lots still to organise here,
 so best crack on.

She walks off towards Charlie.

MICHAEL
 Caroline? I didn't plan this.

CAROLINE
 I know. You've never planned
 anything, at all, ever.

She turns back to him.

CAROLINE (CONT'D)
 But I get it. Don't make the same
 mistake twice.

MONTAGE:

- Michael with the Wedding Co-Ordinator, writing a cheque
- Charlie circling menu choices
- Michael at home, phone cradled to his ear, scribbling down 'Dan - Tues 2pm' on a piece of paper.
- Charlie and Ashraf at the hotel; an array of people showing them brochures with flower displays, tribute bands, wedding cakes. Charlie looks overwhelmed.
- Michael calling Vicki on his phone; no answer.
- Charlie and Ashraf arguing as they stand in front of a huge sheet of paper with diagrams entitled 'SEATING PLAN'

INT. OFFICE, FILM PRODUCTION COMPANY - DAY

Walls covered with over-sized film posters. Michael sits on a shiny red plastic stool, so teeteringly high, he looks like he's going to slip off. He constantly shifts to try and get comfortable, as he sits with DAN, early 50s, trendy.

DAN

Sorry it's taken so long to fix a meeting. But finally. Well, I love it. As I said. We want the rights.

MICHAEL

Great.

DAN

I love that you've taken a stereotype we've seen before and subverted it - I really want the screenplay to stay true to that.

MICHAEL

I don't mean to be rude, but I really don't mind what you do with it. I'm just here to take the money and run.

DAN

You're every producer's wet dream.

MICHAEL

So... how much... will I be taking and running with?

DAN

How does five hundred sound?

Michael falls off his stool. Scrambles to compose himself and re-appears back up at the table.

MICHAEL
Five hundred thousand. That sounds
bloody fantastic!

DAN
(laughing)
Who do you think I am? We're a
small indie, not bloody Universal.

Michael stares at him.

MICHAEL
Five hundred... quid??

EXT. COUNTRY HOUSE HOTEL, SURREY - DAY

Michael stands, watching, as guests arrive. Vans with various deliveries pull up. Staff run in and out. Michael finally plucks up the courage to go inside.

INT. BANQUETING HALL, COUNTRY HOUSE HOTEL

Michael stands at the edge. Staff bustle about with Charlie and Caroline, friends and family randomly wander in from the lobby. Caroline spots Michael and runs up to him.

CAROLINE
Guests are already arriving to stay
the night for tomorrow - they've
been told that one night's stay is
on you?

MICHAEL
Shit. Yes. I need to talk to
Charlie.

CAROLINE
Now's not the time - it's like the
stress of six month's wedding
planning has arrived in one
weekend.

A harried Charlie rushes over.

CHARLIE
Dad, you didn't hire a harpist did
you?

MICHAEL
Um...

CHARLIE
We already have a flautist!

A delivery man wheels a huge ice sculpture in.

DELIVERY MAN
Where shall I put this?

CHARLIE
That's not ours.

CAROLINE
(to Michael)
Did you order this?

MICHAEL
It came as part of the package -

CHARLIE
But it's naff, I don't want an ice
sculpture -

DELIVERY MAN
So where shall I put it?

CAROLINE
You can't deliver an ice sculpture
a day early -

MICHAEL
(exploding)
Forget about the bloody ice
sculpture!

They all freeze. The Delivery Man slowly tips the sculpture
on to the table, and quietly creeps away.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)
I can't pay for it.

CAROLINE
The ice sculpture?

MICHAEL
No, I mean, I can't -

CAROLINE
Don't say it.

MICHAEL
Can't pay -

CAROLINE
DON'T SAY IT.

He looks at her. Terrified.

CHARLIE
You can't pay... for the wedding?

MICHAEL
I'm so sorry -

CHARLIE
But... the wedding is tomorrow.

MICHAEL
I know...

CHARLIE
How can you just find this out now?

MICHAEL
The deal I had has fallen through -

CAROLINE
I cannot believe this!

Caroline is shaking with rage as he stands there helplessly. Charlie looks at him in disbelief.

CHARLIE
So you're saying you can't pay for
any of it?

Beside them, the abandoned ice sculpture starts to drip.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)
You're saying we can't get married
tomorrow. We actually can't get
married.

Charlie looks around at the huge banqueting hall. At the ice sculpture, forming a puddle.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)
Why did you insist on all this if
you didn't have the money?

He says nothing.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)
Why? WHY?

MICHAEL
I'm so sorry -

CHARLIE
You're sorry? You're SORRY? You
have RUINED THE BEST DAY OF MY
LIFE! I hate you! You and your
stupid bloody ice sculpture!

She sweeps the ice sculpture off the table in Michael's direction; it skids along the floor and smashes into the wall.

Everyone watches, in silence. Charlie bursts into tears and runs out.

EXT. COUNTRY HOUSE HOTEL

Michael rushes out the front entrance, with Caroline close behind. They see Charlie and Ashraf standing in the driveway, arguing, and run over to them.

ASHRAF

Yes it's an absolute disaster, but it doesn't mean we can't get married. We still have the registry office -

CHARLIE

I'm not getting married in a crappy registry office. We wanted a big family wedding!

ASHRAF

Then we throw a huge party for everyone when we're back from India.

CHARLIE

In a year? No! They have to be there when it actually happens, otherwise it's just a big party!

ASHRAF

You think I want a big family wedding - actually I just want to be married to you.

CHARLIE

You don't get it - this just shows -

ASHRAF

What?

CHARLIE

How different we are. We've got different ideas of family. I'm already apologising for my dad, and we're not even married yet.

ASHRAF

I don't care that he fucked up with this - I'm not marrying him -

CHARLIE

It's just all such a mess. I don't want to get married in a mess!

She turns to Michael.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)

It's all your fault!

Charlie runs off towards the car park, leaving Ashraf stunned.

CAROLINE
Go after her Michael.

MICHAEL
I don't think she -

CAROLINE
Go AFTER HER!

EXT. CAR PARK, COUNTRY HOUSE HOTEL

Michael runs after Charlie as she climbs into her car.

MICHAEL
Charlie! CHARLIE!

She starts the engine. He bangs on the window. She opens it.

CHARLIE
It's just not working with you
suddenly back in my life. I don't
hate you, it's just easier without
you. I'm sorry. Some people just
aren't cut out to be parents.

She drives off. Michael stands there helplessly.

INT. LOBBY, COUNTRY HOUSE HOTEL

Michael walks back inside to find everyone gathered in the lobby. He looks at them all; Ashraf's parents, worried. Guests, friends, family, all staring at him expectantly.

MICHAEL
I have an announcement to make.

He takes a nervous gulp.

EXT. MICHAEL'S STREET - NIGHT

Michael walks up to his building. Looks up at the windows of the flats that have lights on - couples, families inside, warm and cosy in the glow.

His window is dark and empty. Can't bring himself to go in. He walks back down the road, shoulders hunched against the wind.

EXT. VICKI'S DOORSTEP - NIGHT

He rings and rings the buzzer. No answer. Sits down on the step. A NEIGHBOUR passes him on her way in.

NEIGHBOUR
You looking for Vicki?

MICHAEL
Yes.

NEIGHBOUR
She was rushed to hospital -

Michael bolts up.

EXT. LONDON STREETS - NIGHT

Michael runs. Streets flash by in a blur.

INT. HOSPITAL - NIGHT

Michael charges in. Empty, no-one around. He races up to Reception. A nurse appears. Points him to the lifts.

Michael races up the stairs.

INT. HOSPITAL WAITING ROOM - NIGHT

Michael waits, alone, in the waiting room. Another nurse comes in.

NURSE
She's fine. And the baby's fine.
She said you can go in.

INT. PRIVATE ROOM, ANTE NATAL WARD - NIGHT

Michael stands at the door, a smiling, tear-stained Vicki beckons him in. He sits beside her, and she shows him the foetus on the scan monitor.

Michael stares at it - a grainy black and white blob, moving gently, suspended, alien-like, strange...

Tears start rolling down Michael's face. He sobs. Then weeps, not taking his eyes off the screen. Vicki reaches for his hand.

EXT. HOSPITAL - NIGHT

Michael helps Vicki into a cab.

INT. VICKI'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Vicki gets into bed, Michael hands her a cup of tea.

INT. VICKI'S KITCHEN - NIGHT

Michael washes the cup up. Then empties the bin. Looks in the fridge. No milk.

INT. SUPERMARKET - NIGHT

Michael picks up bread and milk. Then stops at the newsstand. Picks up a pregnancy magazine.

INT. VICKI'S LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Michael comes in with a bag of groceries. Vicki sits on the sofa. He sits beside her.

MICHAEL

I don't want to make the same
mistake twice. I want to be part of
this baby's life.

He pauses.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

But I don't think we should get
together just because we're having
a child together.

Vicki pauses. Takes a deep breath, and leans back.

VICKI

I agree.

MICHAEL

I'm sorry if this is hurtful...
(then, realising) What?

VICKI

I agree.

MICHAEL

Well, that was easy.

VICKI

For a while back there, I did
think, you and me, little nuclear
family, maybe it could work. But
that must have been hormones. We've
never been in-love. If it was going
to happen between us, it would have
happened by now.

MICHAEL

But -

VICKI

Let me finish. It's really important you hear me.

MICHAEL

Okay.

VICKI

I realised, in hospital, how much I want this baby.

She puts her hand on her belly.

VICKI (CONT'D)

So if you are going to be around, as a dad, you have to really be around. Otherwise I'd rather do it alone. It'll be hard, but I can do it.

MICHAEL

I'm here for the long haul.

VICKI

I just don't want you to promise more than you can deliver.

MICHAEL

I get it.

She smiles at him.

VICKI

Okay then.

INT. MICHAEL'S FLAT - NIGHT

Michael opens his door just as his land-line rings. He rushes to pick it up, tripping over clutter along the way. Grabs the phone.

MICHAEL

Charlie?

But the answer-phone has kicked in.

VOICE ON THE ANSWER-PHONE

Michael. Hey. It's Chad Black, Ed's manager. He says you're looking for work. I love what Ed's doing here, love what you've been doing with Ed over there, love what Ed's been saying about you.

(MORE)

VOICE ON THE ANSWER-PHONE (CONT'D)

So let me know when you're in town,
we'll do lunch.

The answer-phone bleeps as the call ends. Michael sits there, marooned in a sea of clutter. Looks around at the mess. Then goes into the

BEDROOM

And gets his suitcase down from the top of the wardrobe.

EXT. MICHAEL'S FLAT - NIGHT

Michael leaves his flat, lugging his suitcase.

EXT. REFUSE DUMP - NIGHT

Michael heaves his suitcase up the walkway to a row of huge recycling bins. He opens the suitcase, holding it up high above the bins, and newspapers come tumbling out. He watches as they fall through the air, coming loose and scattering.

MONTAGE:

- Michael at home, collecting up more papers and clutter.
- At the dump, emptying bin bags full of clutter.
- Back home; back at the dump, until his flat is clear.

INT. MICHAEL'S FLAT - DAWN

Michael takes his running shoes out from the back of the cupboard, puts them out in the hall, ready to use. Gets his laptop out, places it on the table. Sees Shanna's manuscript.

Looks at his suit, hanging on the cupboard door. Reaches into the pocket, takes out his place-card. Reads it.

Looks out the window, at the stacks of pub stools, discarded. Michael stares at them. Looks down at the place-card. Then springs into action, and runs out the door.

EXT. STREET - DAWN

Michael loads up all the stools into his car. Drives off.

EXT. DUAL CARRIAGEWAY - DAY

Sunrise. Michael swerves to a halt, gets out and picks handfuls of wildflowers growing on the central verge.

EXT. CAROLINE'S HOUSE - DAY

Michael scrambles over the tall side door, struggling the same way he did the last time he snuck in.

INT. SHED, CAROLINE'S GARDEN - DAY

Michael rummages around, pulls out a bag of fairy lights.

EXT. CAROLINE'S GARDEN - DAY

The garden is decorated with wildflowers everywhere. Rows of stools, arranged around a central aisle. Fairy lights draped on the fence.

Michael throws a stone up at Caroline's window. Then again. She appears, looking very cross. Then amazed. Opens the window and leans out.

INT. CHARLIE'S BEDROOM

Michael and Caroline knock on Charlie's door. No answer.

CAROLINE

She's been in there since yesterday.

CHARLIE (O.S.)

I can hear you.

CAROLINE

Sweetheart, your dad's here. He just wants a word.

CHARLIE (O.S.)

GO AWAY.

MICHAEL

Just give me one minute. That's all I ask.

Slowly, the door opens.

EXT. CAROLINE'S GARDEN

Charlie stands, surveying the garden. As beautiful as in the photos she saw. She turns to Michael, confused.

MICHAEL

I know this isn't how you planned it. But we can cram as many people in as we can.

Charlie looks around, wavering.

CHARLIE
But it's too late now.

MICHAEL
You get married at the registry office, but you have a blessing here, a proper ceremony, with everyone you want.

Charlie can't help a smile when she sees the fairy lights in the shape of a lop-sided heart.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)
Your mum and I, we didn't mess up because we were too young. We messed up because of me.

Michael takes out the card from his pocket. Hands it to Charlie. She opens it and looks at it. "Love fiercely".

MICHAEL (CONT'D)
I didn't understand this when your mum wrote it twenty years ago, but it's the best piece of advice that I've never listened to.

Charlie looks up at him.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)
I never had the guts to love as fiercely and bravely as I should. But you and Ashraf - I'm sorry I ruined all the arrangements - but that shouldn't stop you. If it's something you're sure about.

A sharp intake of breath from Charlie, as she tries to fight back the tears.

CHARLIE
I really do love him -

MICHAEL
Then what are we waiting for? Shall we do this?

Charlie looks at him. Looks at Caroline. Then bursts out -

CHARLIE
Yes!

They all explode, with relief, tears and joy.

MONTAGE:

- Caroline and Michael moving furniture

- Blowing up balloons
- Laying tea-lights along the 'aisle' in the garden
- Charlie and Ashraf signing the register at the registry office
- Dashing out down the steps and into a waiting cab
- Guests arriving at Caroline's house, each carrying a plate of food; samosas, ham sandwiches, Indian sweetmeats

EXT. GARDEN, CAROLINE'S HOUSE - DAY

Michael presses 'play' on a CD player and MUSIC PLAYS. He sits up in the front row, beside Caroline.

Ashraf's family, along with all the other guests, are crammed into the garden.

A collective murmur of excitement as Charlie enters, on Derek's arm. She walks up the aisle to where a nervous Ashraf stands in front of his brother, who is ready to conduct the blessing.

Michael grabs Caroline's hand, and she clasps it tightly. Both look straight ahead.

A SHORT TIME LATER

CLOSE UP on the rings on Charlie and Ashraf's fingers, as they have their first kiss. Everyone claps.

INT. CAROLINE'S LIVING ROOM - DAY

A packed house; thumping music, everyone dancing, eating, a party in full flow.

Charlie and Ashraf dance; then Charlie and Michael; then Michael and Caroline. Toasts; speeches; applause.

EXT. CAROLINE'S GARDEN - NIGHT

The music is now slower. Michael is down at the end of the garden, looking towards the house. Through the glass doors he can see couples slow dancing.

Caroline steps out, barefoot, holding two Champagne glasses and a bottle. She pads down the garden to join Michael.

MICHAEL

Vicki and I. We're having the baby.
I'm going to be involved. And I
want to be.

CAROLINE

That's great.

MICHAEL

But we're not going to be together just because we're having a child together. I can't make the same mistake twice.

Caroline nods.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

I think it's called the honest, grown up approach.

CAROLINE

I think it is.

He pours them both a glass of Champagne. Hands one to her, moves closer. She steps away.

CAROLINE (CONT'D)

Good time for new beginnings, for me too. I've been thinking, it's a good thing we move forward. Don't try and cover old ground.

MICHAEL

Old ground?

CAROLINE

I think we're in a good place, me and you. We're friends, properly friends. Friends are important.

MICHAEL

They are.

CAROLINE

Friendship's under-rated in life.

MICHAEL

It is.

CAROLINE

It's more than I ever thought we'd be. To friendship.

She holds her glass to his, they clink.

MICHAEL

To friendship.

They drink. But Michael's disappointment is clear.

EXT. CAROLINE'S HOUSE, STREET - NIGHT

Charlie and Ashraf stand beside a waiting cab, while everyone crowds outside to see them off.

Charlie holds up her bouquet - everyone counts down from ten - and she turns and throws it. The loosely tied bouquet comes apart and scatters everywhere... wildflowers tumbling through the air, falling over everyone, as they laugh in surprise.

Charlie and Ashraf move through the crowd, hugging and kissing everyone, as they wave goodbye. They get into the cab and drive off.

The guests move back inside. Only Caroline and Michael stand watching, as the car disappears from sight.

CAROLINE

I miss her already.

Michael brushes a flower out of her hair.

MICHAEL

You were right about everything you said. About moving forwards. And you're right about friendship. We all need friends in life. I just...

CAROLINE

What?

MICHAEL

I don't think we can be friends.

He kisses her. Pulls apart.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

Because I'm still in-love with you. And if you give me a second chance, I promise, I will fight for us every single day for the rest of my life.

She kisses him. This time they don't pull apart.

INT. TORQUIL'S OFFICE - DAY

Torquil is at his desk, head down. He looks up in surprise as Michael barges in and SLAPS Shanna's manuscript down in front of him.

MICHAEL

You want a strong, original, relevant voice?

TORQUIL

You can't just barge in here -

MICHAEL

Here it is. She's confident,
articulate, she'll give great TV,
there's an editor interested
already, so read this before
someone else does.

Torquil picks up Shanna's manuscript, interested.

Michael turns to leave - but turns back as he gets to the door. Rushes over and yanks the photograph from the wall, and runs out.

TORQUIL

Hey!

INT. LOBBY, TORQUIL'S OFFICE

Michael barges through Security, holding the photo under his jacket, rushes out the doors, and runs off down the street.

EXT. PAT'S HOUSE - DAY

Michael stands on the doorstep as Pat opens the door. In his dressing gown. Michael hands the framed photo to him. Pat looks at it in surprise.

CLOSE UP on the photo; Pat, Michael and Ed with Spike Milligan.

PATRICK

We had some good times didn't we.

Michael nods.

PATRICK (CONT'D)

Want to join me for a drink?

MICHAEL

No thanks. But take care of
yourself, Pat.

INT. PAT'S HOUSE

Pat carefully props the photo up on his mantelpiece. Steps back, picks his drink up, and toasts the photo.

INT. CLASSROOM, ADULT EDUCATION CENTRE - DAY

Michael stands at the front of his packed new class, as the fresh batch of students look through their course bumph.

MICHAEL

Any questions?

A KEEN STUDENT puts their hand up.

KEEN STUDENT
How do you get published?

MICHAEL
It's very simple. And very
difficult. Be the best writer you
can. Live life as best you can.

Michael looks around, making eye contact with his students as they sit up, lean forward, note-pads at the ready.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)
Embrace every opportunity. Be
realistic, but hopeful. And don't
listen to anyone, least of all me.
Who knows, the next big literary
sensation could be sitting in this
room.

KEEN STUDENT
So are you working on anything at
the moment?

MICHAEL
I - am working...

INT. TEA-BAR, (FORMERLY THE OLD GOAT), HACKNEY - DAY

Michael stands at the counter, selecting a blend of tea from the dozens on display, as he continues in VOICEOVER...

MICHAEL (V.O.)
...on the notoriously difficult
second novel...

EXT. TEA-BAR, HACKNEY - DAY

Michael at a window table, his laptop open in front of him. The light and airy interior completely transformed from the dark pub.

MICHAEL (V.O.)
... just twenty years after my
first. But sometimes, that's how
long it takes to figure out a new
story.

CLOSE UP on Michael's fingers, typing away, flying over the keyboard.

FADE OUT