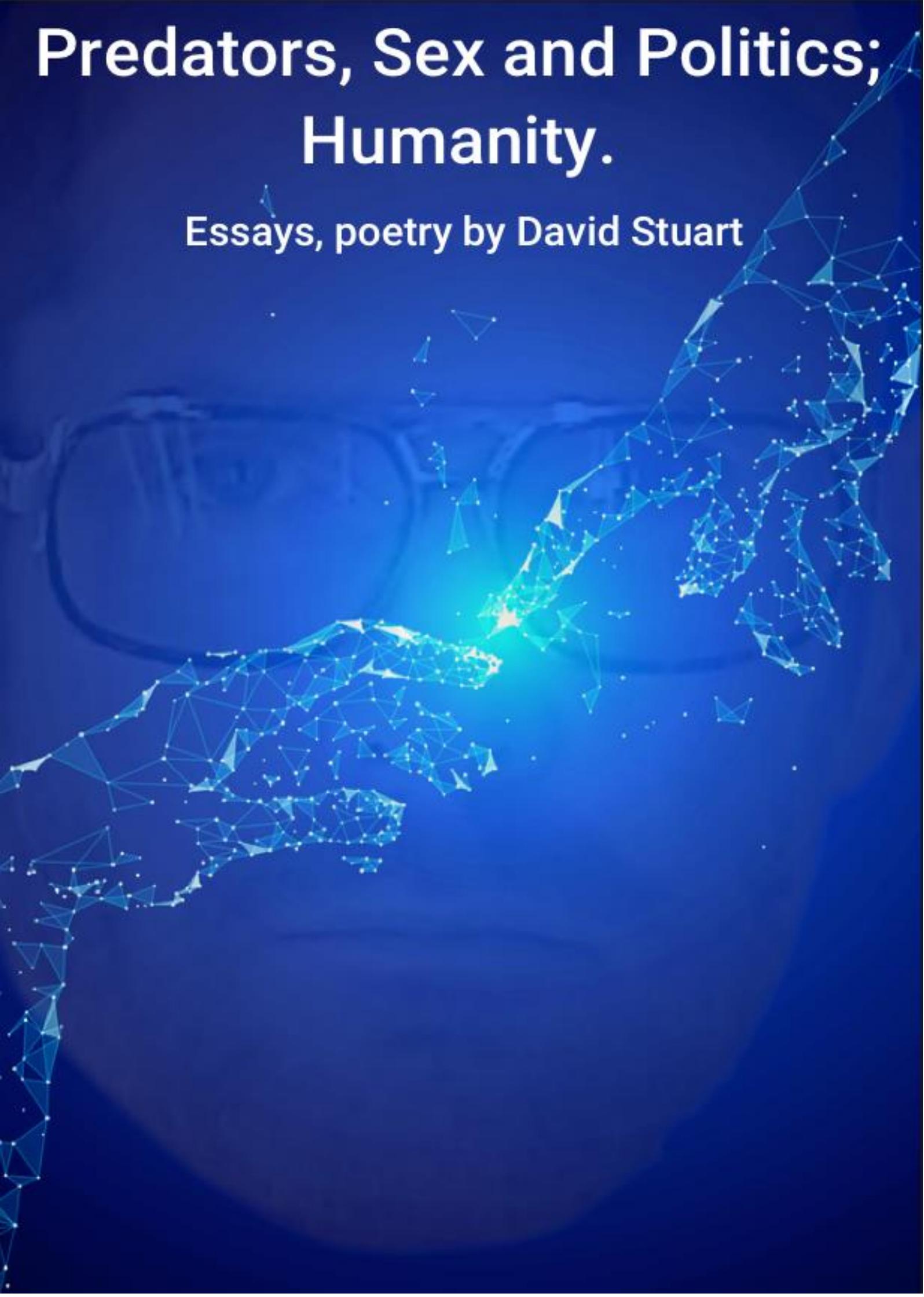


Predators, Sex and Politics; Humanity.

Essays, poetry by David Stuart



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Chapter 1: SEX

1.1: Let's Have Sex

Let's have sex.

I have needs, I have thirst.

I may not have thought them through fully, but they are here, these needs, and I must quench this thirst.

This is the way I know how. Let's have sex.

You don't have to be concerned about my wellbeing or anything.

I'm tough, see.

You don't need to be worried about how I take rejection or anything...

That won't be a thing, I'm only talking hook-up, NSA.

I know how it works.

I'm tough.

This isn't my first trip round the block.

I have calluses. They serve me well.

You'll have yours too. Thank goodness. This wouldn't work if we didn't have our calluses to protect us.

They're my 'skills'.

I'm like a predator. I'm tough. I do the hurting, I don't get hurt.

So you needn't worry about hurting my feelings if you leave.

Or when you 'block'.

You needn't worry about me getting emotional or needy or vulnerable or anything.

This is safe.

Two predators facing off. Connecting the only way we know how. Finely honed instincts, seasoned pros at this hook-up game.

You see I learned from predators.

In my early hook-up years, I made a proper fool of myself.

I fell off the bed, I made rookie mistakes.

I giggled too much, and I exclaimed honestly and innocently, how much I liked you.

I showed my camp.

I showed my soft.

I exclaimed how I wanted to see you again.

How no one else made me feel like this, and how amazing it was to just stare into each other's faces.

I told you how I hated this part of my body, or that.

And I saw the look on your face as I told you.

That eye-roll, that stifled yawn.

"Oh geez, another rookie".

I was fresh and vulnerable and new, and I made a right fool of myself.

But that was before I learned to play the game see.

I learned that that didn't work.

That sweetness doesn't thrive well amongst the predators, and I needed to be better.

I needed calluses.

Don't worry; I'm different now.

I won't do that to you, I won't ruin it with silliness, clumsiness or vulnerability.

I'm skilled now, my calluses are etched in, and I know the game.

You're safe with me.

Two predators in hook-up land, facing off the way we do.

Two seasoned leopards with spots that won't change.

Two battle-scarred sharks, going up against each other.

Sexy, isn't it?

Much better than the messy alternative.

My hook-up profile boasts my scars, and lets you know you're safe.

No clumsy novice here. The rookie left the building.

But my needs are still here.

I don't understand them completely, my needs; I think I just want to be liked, or to be affirmed as sexy, or to be a part of hook-up community.

It's lonely outside that community.

Not surviving in GrindrLand, is like... loneliness.

Not fitting in.

Not belonging.

Like I'm failure.

I haven't really thought all that through, but my needs are here, and they tell me to hook-up.

So.

What you into?

Can you host?

Let's do this. And don't worry; I'll bring my calluses, my predator invulnerability; no fools will be made today, I won't embarrass you.

I learned from the best.

That's you.

.

But

... just once in a while...

when I feel like hooking up, and I stop to think this need through, when I think what this thirst really is...

I scream inside.

I scream; "stop this Grindr, I want to get off."

Would you let me do that with you?

It's hard to tell from your battle scars, your unchanging spots, whether I can do that with you.

Get real.

Shed my skin, shed my calluses, and be real.

Are you that guy?

Is there a code, is there a sign that lets me know?

Is it written into your profile, or is there some secret handshake no-one told me about?

I don't mean to scare you, I don't mean to frighten you off.

But it's so hard to tell if you're that guy. There is no obvious sign, but I really need to know.

I think my needs might be a little bit rookie, a little bit unsexy, and I just need...
a little kindness.

Is that sexy?

Can we stop the Grindr? I wanna get off.

.

Are you that guy?

Chapter 1: SEX

1.2: I'll Put Something Sexy On.

I'll put something sexy on.

I'm out on the town, the night is young.

Anything can happen, and I kind of need something to happen.

Kind of urgently.

Like any 14-year-old girl, I'm ready for change, I'm ready to be grown up.

I am a grown up.

They say we mature faster these days, that's why I know better than my mum and dad.

It was different for them.

I need to get away from them, I need something to change, I feel so trapped at home.

They don't understand me.

I've been a woman for a long time. My first relationship was with my English teacher when I was eleven.

No one knows, it was a secret (obviously). The world isn't ready to understand these special relationships.

My mum knew I was fascinated with him (Mr. Reynolds).

Jim.

I talked about him at dinner, at breakfast. I scribbled his name on my schoolbooks. I dressed especially for him, my world was all about him.

Mum could tell he was my world (though she'd never have guessed the reality). Dad could tell I was fascinated with him too. It was so obvious, especially at the beginning. We were so in love I couldn't contain it.

I learned to though, after a while; especially after Jim explained the importance of keeping it a secret. But in the early months, my exuberance was uncontrollable. Mum told me off, she said I was acting slutty, making a shameful mess of myself, embarrassing the family.

She smacked me when I wore something sexy, or when I tried to explain that I knew all about sex. She threatened to change schools if I didn't start acting more age appropriate. I knew that Jim and my relationship was special, and it would endure regardless what mum did, but that is when Jim said I really need to tone it down or he'd lose his job. So I started getting better at keeping our love a secret after that. Dad was different to mum.

He never said anything, he never smacked me, or ever ever spoke to me about it. He left it all to mum.

But he was different.

I'd always been his little girl. He was the head of the household, we all adored him. We were sort of scared of him too, he was so bossy, so moody; and he got disappointed with us so easily, I never knew what for. We, my sister and I, were his little darlings, and it was our job to defend him, adore him, obey him.

But as my love for Mr. Reynolds bloomed, and as I became a woman, dad became sullen. He stepped back, he never scolded me or shamed me like mum did, he just kind of... withdrew.

But absolutely letting me know his disappointment. Without words, he was letting me know he was disappointed. And, um...

Disgusted.

Yes.

That was it.

He was disgusted by me, by me becoming a woman, by me being in love and adoring someone else instead.

Without a word, he withdrew his love and sank into his silent disgust.

But I didn't care, if he wanted to behave that way, I didn't care.

I'd put something sexy on and prove that even if he didn't like this new grown up me, I could find others who did.

Lots of others.

I'd put something sexy on and I'd demonstrate to the world the power I had.

More than just clothes, there was something special I had, something boys really understood. I could be famous one day, I definitely had that something special, I was sure to be discovered or something someday. It was a real sexy power, even if it made dad disgusted, even if mum thought I was slutty.

It's true, that I did get a bit overly-available during Year 10, and I did get a bit of a reputation, but Mr. Reynolds saved me from that. He showed me he loved me long before he tried to have sex with me. None of the other boys had done that. Mr. Reynolds showed me what love is, he showed me that he appreciated the woman I was, not hated it like my mum and dad.

He took his time and let our love really develop, like true love should. And if the world wasn't ready to understand, then fine, it would be our sacred secret.

It lasted nearly two years, before he moved away.

I was devastated, he was too. There was some scandal with some other skanky schoolgirl apparently. ALL lies, but Jim nearly got into serious trouble because of her and he moved to France for another job.

We wrote, and promised to keep our love alive, but, well...

I don't know what happened, but we wrote less and less, and as I moved into the next year, there were so many other things happening, and school became a nightmare, and I got involved in the drama club, and ... things kind of ...

I don't know.

I'm not disloyal, and I'm not slutty or anything, but you know, it's complicated being at school. So many politics and games, I kind of got distracted.

I guess we both just moved on.

I'm now 18.

It's funny reflecting back at how grown up I thought I was, gosh, I was so young and silly. Definitely definitely more mature than what my mum thought I was, but I'm a real woman now, very worldly wise.

I've moved out, and I've had loads of relationships since then. I wouldn't call them relationships so much, as affairs. Boys are pretty awful, and they always let you down. They use you for sex, and I get it. I know it is a sexy world, and if you are sexy, things work out better for you. I know that boys expect you to be sexy, or they aren't interested, and sexy people always get ahead more than the plain girls.

I want to be sexy, it's one of the best things about me, and I'm very experienced, I'm very good at sex, everyone tells me. So I know it's important, but sometimes boys are so shallow, they're like idiots. If you play sexy for them, it works out; for a while at least. But they always tell their friends about having had sex with you, they boast and share those very personal private moments, like it's a conquest, or some kind of politics.

Honestly, I can't figure out the politics, how to be happy. It's like everyone is using each other. I have this great advantage, being sexy, but everyone keeps using me anyway.

But:

I have a strategy. I'm worldly wise remember, and I don't hurt easily. And even though I seriously doubt it, there must be ONE decent guy out there. Someone like Mr. Reynolds who won't jump on my sexiness, who will say no to my flirtations. Because he respects me; there must be one. Someone who likes me for my sexiness, but doesn't get disgusted by it, like dad.

So much politics.

But I can win at this sex game everyone is playing.

I put something sexy on.

I can go out, into these sexy playgrounds that make the world go round, and I can put my sexiness out there.

Looking for you.

Someone like you, someone like Mr. Reynolds who respects me.

Someone who will say no to my flirtations.

I'll keep looking.

Sure, they call me slutty, but I know what I'm doing, this makes sense.

I'll find an environment where I'm not shamed for my sexiness; somewhere where there are lots of girls like me, and somewhere where this sex politics game is normal.

And I'll look for the decent one, the one who respects me, the one who will love me and refuse my advances.

The one I can trust not to abuse my sexual availability.

The one that says no.

I put something sexy on, and I'm out on the town.

I flirt, I flirt, I'm good at flirting.

And when I find someone who's not responding ... I'll hone in on him, and I'll up my game.

Test these waters test him, see if he is the decent guy who won't jump my bones, no matter how much I thrust my availability on him.

They nearly always want it. Immediately, now. Dirty bastards. They're all the same.

Sometimes they're disgusted by my advances. Not interested and disgusted on top.

Like dad.

I'll keep hunting, I'll keep looking for the decent guy, and when I find one that refuses my advances, that seems to be interested, respectful, kind, loving, patient...

Hmm, it's still quite hard to believe, I don't quite trust it. So I'll up my game and flirt harder, be irresistibly available to him.

Just testing you know; in disbelief.

I need to be sure, I can't be hurt any more.

I'm tired, and I don't get it.

Why life and being loved is so hard.

But I can't think about that now, I need to find someone safe.

Someone who will resist my relentless advances, bastards, someone who will love me...

Despite myself...

Someone who I can truly trust.

They're all the same; they all give in like wet horny teenagers, all of them.

Except the few, who walk away, disgusted.

But I'm a strong worldly woman. I've known true love, I shared those amazing trust with Mr. Reynolds, my Jim. I take ownership of my sexiness, and I know how this politic is played.

I know, better than most, how men are.

So don't worry for me. I'm strong. I don't give up easily.

I've got this.

.

I'll put something sex on.

I'm out on the town, and the night is young.

Chapter 1: SEX

1.3: OMG, Sex is Complicated.

O_{MG}.

Sex.

It's so complicated.

(Not always, and not for all of us.)

But being single and relying on hook-up culture to meet our needs... that's complicated.

But you – you manage it very well considering. You're awesome.

No one would ever know. You're very good at hiding it, at putting on a good show.

Your profile reads like a brilliant, sexy confident, all-round good company, good sense of humour.

And it works. It gets interest from the ones you're trying to convince.

The performance that accompanies it? Also awesome. Completely convincing.

He didn't see the body flaws that you try to hide. He didn't even see that you were self-conscious about them.

Awesome. That would have been a disaster.

He didn't see the clumsy awkward ugly schoolkid that you really feel like. You're really good at hiding that.

You figured out what role to play, when to change positions and what to do in reciprocation.

You were clean here, and groomed there. You'd made vigilantly sure of that, in advance.

Your cum face didn't let you down, and that awkward time interval between both orgasms worked out just fine.

There was a nice feeling after.

Great. That's what it's all about. And you deserve that feeling.

And he didn't see through the performance at all. Brilliant. You lived up to everything your profile promised. Everything your community expects of you.

That's amazing, you really are good at this. Lots of practice I bet, trial and error served you well today. No rejection happened, and you lived up to the sexy standard that you promised, that was expected of you.

I am not being sarcastic.

It's phenomenal what you do. It's an extraordinary feat to pull off, and if it goes wrong... I know how that feels. That could be disastrous. It's like a rejection from your own community, and that hurts; hurts like hell.

It's a great performance. It's an easier performance to give on chems, I know, but gosh, to pull it off sober... that's amazing.

Again: this is not sarcasm.

Don't underestimate how talented you are. This is important. You'll need to have faith in your talents, because I'm going to suggest something that will require you to be your best self, your most talented self.

What. If. Sex could be better?

Maybe the above IS your definition of good sex. Sure, I get it. Your sexy profile was affirmed by your community. You are sexy, an online community agrees. In bed, your sexiness was affirmed and confirmed. Score. I get how important that is, and I'm pleased you're good at it. I know the stakes.

I know the isolation and loneliness that happens when it fails. A failure can take you right back to your teenage awkwardness and freakiness.

But what if...

What if those in bed with us, those online with us, were exactly the same?

What; that never occurred to you?

What if those guys, with all that power to destroy you, to make a fool of you... were just as scared and busy performing as you were?

What if they were terrified of you? Your performance IS that good, remember.

Frighteningly good.

Here's the bit where I need you to remember your amazingness, your talents.

And I say it with love.

Stop thinking about yourself. The guy in bed with you, online with you, is terrified. Like the rest of us. Like you. He needs you to be amazing today. He needs you to break the ice, to stop the performance, to be real and human and vulnerable.

He needs your permission, to stop this impossible, if brilliant performance. Let him be flawed, let him be imperfect and a bit scared. He could convince you otherwise with his honed performance; but don't put him through that. Let him confide these beautiful vulnerabilities to you, convince him you'll find him sexy and amazing – not in spite of these things, but because of them. It's that trust, that extraordinary thing that happens between two naked people that makes sex so, infallibly amazing.

And you have the power and talent to do it.

I get it. You'll need to be brave, to take the first step like that. But I know what you're capable of.

You've been rejected and rejected.

And rejected.

But you're still standing. You're still trying. You've not given up.

You negotiate drug invitations every day. You endure the hate and cruelty online, you're kind to the underdog when you can be. You negotiate safe sex and HIV stigma every week, gosh every day, and you're still standing. Still believing it can happen for you. You're still out there. Gosh, you're amazing. People reject you for not having abs, you get laughed off dancefloors, and no one ever seems to want to sleep over with you after the orgasm.

But you're still out there, trying. You still believe it's possible. In spite of it all... you've not given up.

You inspire me.

So I know it. I know how amazing you are. My faith in you, in what you can do, is absolute. Yours has to be too.

Be better. Be kind, be a generous, great lover, be a great complex human; in bed, online. I know you. I know what you can be. I know it because I am the same.

Chapter 1: SEX

1.4: I am not a Hook-up Profile

I am a Paperback Book

I am a paperback book to be read. I am not a hook-up profile. Please don't block me, please don't swipe left.

I am a paperback book. I may not be for you, but a lot of time and effort and care have gone into my creation.

I may not be for you; a very personal story lives here. For you, I might be boring, or written for someone else entirely. I might be off-topic. My font might offend.

Even if my cover picture and title appeals to you.

Does my cover appeal to you?

Then I invite you to read.

You won't find any links embedded in my text to click away to. There will be no advertisements that pop up to distract you. And you won't know from the first page alone if I'm the right book for you. I may take a little investment. I know you are used

to reading things online, with click-bait and links and pop-ups, and I know that I may demand some of your attention span.

But I'm worth it; a lot of time and effort and care have gone into my creation. I do ask that you respect that. If it's a good read you're after.

You won't know, by the end of page one, if I'm for you. I do hope you get to the end of the first page; but that won't be enough to know if this book is for you.

It's just a teaser.

You may have a better idea by the end of the first chapter.

But that's not the whole of me either. There's plenty more.

I know there are plenty of other books out there, many with interesting cover pictures and titles. Many of them, are truly great books.

It's really by chapter 4 or 5 that you know if I'm the right book for you. You know; if I'm yours. You've had that feeling before. You know; that this book is brilliant. Is yours. And you're compelled to get to the end. You can't put me down. And you want your friends to find me as brilliant as you do. You're proud to be reading me.

I'm enjoying this too.

Because you had the attention span and commitment to get past the first page, to get past the first chapter. Despite the other brilliant books you have access to, the ones with brilliant cover pictures and titles.

You invested in me.

Just to see if I'm a book you want to see through to a conclusion.

I know I'm a little unfashionable. I know I live in a disposable culture. I know I'm competing with your desire for more instant gratification, and I know there is so much for you to choose from.

My cover picture may even be lacklustre, my title less than dynamic.

I know my blurb alone, is more than 140 characters.

I have no enticing, embedded links.

But I want to be read. A lot of time and effort and care have gone into my creation. I will stir emotions in you that have no emoticon-equivalent. I want you to invest in my first page, my first chapter. Recycle me at chapter four if I'm not for you, I have no fear of second-hand book shops. But I may be for you, and I worry that you'll never know, simply because you've been seduced by embedded links, and pop-ups and "block" symbols on your Smartphone.

I am a great book. I may be yours. Invest in me, read me. Make that commitment.

I'm worth it.

But whether I'm your book or not... you're a great reader. I like you. Please promise me, as I collect dust on a bookshelf, that you'll make the time to read some other books. They are amazing books, and a lot of time and effort and care went into their creation.

I know they are all worth reading; they are worthy of attention. But that's not why I want you to read them.

I want you to read them, because you're worth it. You really are. I want you to know that you're a great reader when you are patient and when you invest; and books deserve to be read by you. Take the time.

Chapter 2: POLITICS

2.1: I Will Riot, I will be Heard

You ignored me (no you did worse than that).

You stereotyped me, you did in commercials, on billboards, on busses and water fountains.

In schools.

You whitewashed my history, my cinema, my home and my city squares.

You masc-washed, you hetero-washed.

You binary-washed.

You lied as you educated me in schools.

You erased.

(No, you did worse than that.)

You bought me, you sold me, you owned me and you disowned me:

Then you disowned your part in it.

You hid my brilliance, you hid it from others, you hid it from me.

You shamed my hair, my skin, my flamboyance, my emotionality.

You shamed my ancestors.

You shamed my brilliance in sport, in music, in dance, in culture.
You hid my culture, made me ashamed of it.
Made others fear it.
You drove me to joblessness, poverty, you drove me to addiction, to crimes.
Worse; you criminalized me.
Then you had your label. Another branding for me.
And you sold this brand around the world, in television and marketing, in cinema.
You rendered me impotent, you took my power.
No, worse than that; you groomed me so I'd give you my power, just give it to you, like
this was a normal thing to do.

But I don't know who you are.
How can I fix this if I don't know who you are, if I can't name you?
See you.
You blend so well.
Gosh; you don't even know what you've done, so how can I yell at you.
Must I educate you now?
Is that my responsibility?

First things first.
I want to/need to change this.
I want to change things.
I want to correct the history, I want to stop the stereotyping, I want to be seen as
human driving car, not criminal driving car.
As person in love, not person in sin and abomination.
As gorgeously emotional and fluid, not hysterical.
As a prolific and generous lover, not slutty.
I want to breath.
I tried through my art, and you appropriated it.

I tried campaigning, I tried politics.
This was not a fair field, this 'game' was loaded.
I marched across bridges, I did sit-ins and love-ins, and I got angry too.
I tried voting.
Oh how I tried.
I tried talking, you don't hear, I tried violence too.
But here I am.
Oppressed, ignored, impotent.
I can't breathe.
Presidents Tweet, they incite, they embolden the hateful masses against me.
I'm not heard.
I'm angry.
And now I have a tool in my hand.
It's on fire, and I am looting.
This isn't me, this isn't me, and I don't know how I got here, but this feels powerful, this
feels effective.
It feels like you hear me, that you're listening.
That things might change.
I can breathe and you hear me.
Don't blame me for looting when you created this.
Don't cry law and order, don't denounce rioting and looting when you have
systemically removed every other tool I have to be heard.
To breathe.
Don't congratulate the 'good' quiet protesters and denounce me, the looter, when my
quiet protesting didn't work.
For centuries it didn't work, it's not working now.
So don't denounce me.
Hear me. Validate my experience, validate the action I'm taking.
Because it's desperate, yes and it's damaging, but it is valid.

Yes; I'm looting. Yes I'm demonstrating, yelling, angry. It makes sense to me, how can it not make sense to you?

How do you want me to educate you, how!?

When you have rendered me so invisible, so impotent, so powerless to affect change via all the channels you created for me

Then rigged against me.

I am looting, I am protesting, agitating. I am rioting.

I am frustrated, I am communicating with you via the only means you've left me.

So hear me now.

Hear me now.

I can't breathe.

I need to roar.

Chapter 2: POLITICS

2.2: I Own You; I am Propaganda

I rule, I govern, I control.

You.

I'm speaking about you.

You have voted for me (at least a majority of you did) and you mustn't complain now that I'm here, because you put me here.

So I will do it well.

Maybe.

I'll try.

It's a big job, there are a lot of you, and you are hard to please.

Plus you squabble amongst yourselves SO much, it becomes tiresome for me.

Oh yes; difficult too. I oughtn't complain about the tiresomeness, I suppose.

Because it's my job, the job you charged me with, and I'm here to rule you, govern you, control you, the populace.

You squabble.

You break laws and complain complain complain.

You harm yourselves, and you give in to your baser impulses. You are defensive, and you seek power.

You fear things going wrong, you fear losing the things you value, and then you become greedy.

Or worse. Violent.

Criminal.

Predatorial.

You protest.

You trick yourself into thinking you want world peace and fairness, but you only do that when you feel safe.

You know; when I'm doing everything right for you, keeping you safe and flush.

Some of you, a rather quaint minority, are truly altruistic, even when facing diversity.

Cute. I respect you.

Many others purport to be that way too, they actually do believe it.

Until things get tough.

Until austerity hits, and the comforts you are accustomed to are threatened; then you revert to selfishness, and (quietly) start voting for me to protect your comforts first (you know, before sharing the wealth more fairly.

And the bulk of you?

You are my base, you vote with your emotions. Self self self.

I hear you, I've got you.

Keeping ALL of that in mind, I will now try to do everything you all ask of me. I will try to please you all.

I'll fail, but you set me up for that. And frankly, you have no idea how hard this is. Or how fickle you are.

And to the blessed altruistic minority, who believe truly in human rights at the expense of your own comforts; I'm with you on that. Bless you. And bless you because you actually think you are the majority, but you're so not.

Bless you because you actually think that kindness and goodness is at the true heart of most humans, but (bless you), you're so wrong about that.

Survival is at the heart of most humans. It's a base need, survival, it is so deeply rooted in our primal psyche, that it will override lovely social constructs like peace and fairness and generosity; every time. When social constructs fail; when law and order isn't trusted, when your comforts are threatened, sociopathy reverts to base survival instincts. Fear lies ever so shallowly beneath our good intentions, and when fear is triggered, primal bids for power come into play. Violence wins obviously, but other tools of power override enlightened ideals; manipulation, greed, predatorial coping strategies, self self self.

This is the world you've asked me to govern, this is the people you want kept in order, and this is the impossible job you charge me with.

Ok then.

I sought this, so I step up.

It's only the intelligent reading this, so allow me to speak to you.

You, the enlightened and privileged minority of do-gooders.

Yeah.

You.

Listen up, I have an unwelcome awakening for you.

You think you are well-read.

You think you are worldly-wise, you think you are kind, you think you understand politics.

You think democracy is the golden chalice of people management, and you think you live in one.

I have an unwelcome awakening for you.

Before the industrial revolution, your world and your knowledge of things was defined by the tiniest realm of your experience.

As the telegraph and radio and electronic news delivery broadened your world, you became wiser.

Better informed.

More worldly wise, and you had access to more information.

Wrong.

Sorry.

I owned those (The majority of them anyway).

I was controlling what you knew and what you thought.

You call it news.

I call it propaganda.

You smartened up, and you bought the smarter papers, ignored the tabloids.

Sorry; I owned the smart news too.

You didn't know it at the time; you thought it was news, there were lovely "ethics" in place to protect objectivity.

He he.

Bless you. I'm good at this propaganda stuff, always have been.

You got smarter, and bought different papers, to be sure you had the privilege of objectivity.

It's true, I didn't own all the papers. But the papers I didn't own were caught up in a war with me. (A war I created). The opposite of me is not the truth. It's just conflict.

And you bought it.

Bless you. You thought you had access to real news, but you were just inhaling the by-product of my war of words. The war I created.

My propaganda is more complex than you know, you see.

I kept you informed when it suited me, and I kept you distracted with glamour when it suited me. I kept you racist when it suited me, which was most of the time. I can flip you between loving Queen Elizabeth and hating her, given my fancy at any given political cycle.

I can have you loving the police, or hating them.

Did you love Princess Diana, or hate her?

You're welcome; I did that.

Did you want that government overthrown?

Of course you did. I made you want that.

You think you know the economics of a European Union? You might need to, to vote properly, Leave or Remain. Well it doesn't matter, you'll vote as I want you to anyway.

I've been doing this longer than you know, and I'm good at this.
I need to adapt though; you're fast and clever, and if I blink there is a new technology or new information source fucking up my game.
But I am a fierce predator, I win I'm good at adapting; it's my specialty.
I am government, and you know no-one gets this much power unless they are a supreme predator.
So my game will be better than yours.
But' full respect. You're good at this. My game needs to up, my skills need to adapt.
Then the internet came.
That fucked my game up for a short minute, it's true.
I couldn't own that, like I'd owned everything before.
With the internet, you thought you'd won.
You still do. Bless you.
All those years you played online, for free. Giving giving giving away your personal details.
The things you love, the things you fear. The things you Like and Dislike, the groups you subscribe to, the (ahem) news you read.
The circles you mix in.
"Choose" to mix in.
Amazing that it was all free, no?
What a new age, what gorgeous access to free information, so much of it so fast, so available so everything.
I've been watching you all this time.
I know you; I know what you treasure, I know what you feel safe around. I know what you value, I know what information you seek out.
I know you better than you know yourself.
And guess what? I know what you're scared of.
You thought you weren't racist?
Let me flood your social media with my propaganda.
No really, let me (sorry you had no choice).

Remember the New York twin towers falling?

Let me remind you with some old footage.

Have you seen the boats full of immigrants arriving on your shores?

Let me show you some images. (I'll pick some scary ones, I know you like a bit of drama on a slow news day.)

Guess what.

They're gonna take your job.

(They won't, but it suits me to tell you that they will.)

Again and again.

Cleverly, subtly, over time.

I'll learn your fears. You know; the ones that reduce you to your base survival impulses.

Then gently, cleverly, not too obvious now (give me a year to gently brainwash you a little)... then I'll reassure you, very lovingly, that you aren't racist, you just want to protect your job. Your very livelihood is in danger, let me protect you. The countries struggling after all (you read that in the news) and mortgages in your area are going up (I learned that from your Facebook); you really really need to protect yourself from this danger.

Vote for me, I'll fix it for you.

Do you remember losing the American Civil war? Do you remember the shame, how the North got all bossy and changed your very way of life?

Yes, it was a long time ago.

Let me remind you then. Of your shame. Let me stoke that up for you, let me show you some selfish people burning a flag you love.

Again and again. Subtly now, not too obvious.

Do you feel the shame?

Let me stir up some version of national pride, let me stoke a little anger for you.

Gently gently. My brainwashing skills are subtle, you'll never know.

Oh, you're angry now?

Gosh I'm sorry. How can I help?

I know; vote for me, I'll fix it for you.

Are you getting it, clever people?

My propaganda is bigger than you, bigger than your ever-adapting intelligence, your ever-adapting technology.

I am tyrant, I am dictator.

I am friendly prime minister, I am the people's president.

I am the winning class.

I have existed for centuries, my game ever-adapting, faster than you.

I flirt with media magnates, because we are the same breed.

We laugh at you.

You think you're smart. Smarter than this game.

I know.

I know, because I watch you on your social media, spouting the things you believe in, professing your politics, arguing, trolling, preaching, protesting.

You know best, you're informed. You're faster than the news game, and you know the difference between fake news and the ethical journalist.

Bless you.

You've charged me with a giant job.

To govern you, fairly, expertly.

Yet you are fickle. You are changeable, you have moments of kind altruism, yet revert to selfishness when your luxuries are threatened.

You squabble, and you change your mind as frequently as I go to press.

You think you know yourself, you think democracy exists.

You think you are participating in democracy, but you are foolish and fickle.

You are the subject of my changing whims, your puppet strings so plain to me.

You are naïve.

Bless you.

I'll look after you, I'll keep you all in line. I'll groom you what to think, how to feel, and how to vote. I'll switch your kindness on and off as it suits me.

Because you asked me to. You voted.
You put me in power; a majority of you anyway.
I'm just doing my job.
My job, is propaganda.
And you love it.

Chapter 2: POLITICS

2.3: Hold Me While I Hate, Nurse Me

I say I love my grandad and it's complicated, you say racist, cancel him.
You say disown him for those opinions, I say gosh, I want to.
SO many days, I want to disown ~~them~~ him.
But I can't, he's my gramps.
Loving people you hate is hard, it tears me apart.
Loving people who hate is hard, it tears me in two.
Love wins most days.
If I hate him, I'm just another hater.
If I end the dialogue with him, I ache, and on top of that, I'm just contributing to more
ache and division.
But I MUST divide myself from the hate, my culture tells me so.
My political leaders tell me so, my news cycles tell me so.
Divide from the haters, they say. My social media eggs me to divide.
Educate them in a single Tweet, and if I can't, block them.

It's for the common good, I'm entitled.

The signs in shops that say they don't tolerate racists means I shop inside, my gramps waits outside.

Those signs divide, they celebrate intolerance, end dialogue.

But I believe in those signs.

I'm torn.

I don't know how to live with the love that I have for my grandad who hates, and I hate his hate.

And I divide, I become intolerant, I end the dialogue with a segregation and an intolerance, and I contribute to more division.

And round and round.

Generation after generation.

After generation.

Hundreds and hundreds of years this has gone on, and I must be sure my behaviour doesn't continue it for another generation.

I'm not sure I'm doing it right.

My dad hates gays.

He hates me and loves me in the same breath, but the intolerance feels greater.

He says he loves me, just hates the behaviour; that makes him feel better in his turmoil.

It doesn't make me feel better in mine.

He says stuff and likes stuff on social media, and people block him, they accuse him of hate and intolerance.

And they block him.

Unfriend him.

They don't tolerate him, they end dialogue and contribute to more division.

That feels better, and they feel they've done the right thing, because they are right and he is wrong, and we live in a world where we don't have to tolerate the hate.

We can divide, righteously so, get applauded for it, be on the side of the good, and sleep well at night.

As we divide and demonstrate intolerance.

And another generation passes.

Generation after generation.

Maybe that's what we do; we block the unchangeable bigots until that generation dies out, then we'll be clean.

Haters gone, love and kindness and tolerance prevail.

Except this didn't work last generation.

Or the one before.

Or the ten before.

Intolerance breeds intolerance.

It's easy for you; you don't love my gramps, or my dad.

They are just intolerable haters to you; easy fix.

Block them.

Cancel them.

Remove them from your sphere, so you don't have to see it.

So it can't hurt you.

Divide from it.

Don't tolerate hate.

Trust that social media algorithms will do the same for you.

So you are safely divided from the bigots, and your sense of moral majority feels comfortable.

But don't give up the fight.

Make your placards that state your intolerance loudly, and go protest.

State your intolerance of haters on your social media, and march defiantly across the web, down the streets.

It's the right thing to do, right?

Your community, the one you've divided yourself into, they affirm your behaviour, right?

They "Like" your posts, share them, applaud you for your incisive witty rejection of haters.

Preach to the choir, it emboldens your belief that you are right to divide and to be intolerant of hate.

My gramps and my dad and all they believe and all their opinions that I hate, they probably aren't in your sphere.

The intolerance and division you've been applauding yourself for has safely removed them from your sphere.

(I wish I could do the same. But love is so complicated, these are complex people to me.)

They've seen your placard on the news.

Your brilliant witty placard, that incisively brilliant Tweet that made the news, that angry righteous speech you made that went viral, the one denouncing hate, and charismatically cancelling the haters.

The mob loved that.

Yep, my dad and my gramps saw that too.

It didn't change their hearts or minds.

Was that what you were trying to do?

It shamed them for their hate, except they didn't feel shame.

They dug their heels in, they defied more.

They doubled down.

It empowered their hate, made them louder.

That's how this works; do you get it?

What were you trying to do with your placard, your witty post, your viral emotional speech?

End racism?

End homophobia, transphobia? Misogyny?

I know your intentions are good.

Thank you for them.

And I know you need to vent, you deserve that. You're entitled.

I need to change the heart and mind of my dad and my gramps.

I earnestly do.

Letting them die off and waiting for the next generation hasn't worked in the past, ain't gonna work now.

I need to change the heart and mind of my dad and my gramps; they've got it bad.

They've been indoctrinated for decades (hundreds of years actually) to believe what they believe.

Every image and message on the televisions that they watched every day, told them "what black people are like".

What "abominations" gays are.

Newspapers, churches, governments, villages, schools, technologies, golf clubs, neighborhoods... all, propaganda machines indoctrinating them, brainwashing them, daily daily, all the decades of their long lives to be hateful of certain people, and aiding them to feel entitled and righteous and god-fearing to do so.

The world has been on their side for hundreds of years, the indoctrination is real.

It's proper settled in.

A pan-generational, across-the-board brainwash, these potentially gorgeous loving and curious babes were raised to become the haters on our social media.

In our families.

Or "over there".

I love them all. I won't hate them, I won't divide further, that's their weapon, I reject it.

And it happened to me too, this indoctrination.

I'm breaking free from it; it's a big job, it catches me out sometimes when I mansplain or whitesplain or indulge my privilege at the expense of someone with less.

But my eyes are open, and my discomfort is real.

I've been lucky.

I've had people around me who have been kind as they observe my indoctrination.

Kind people who have been hurt by my behaviour, who stood by me and educated me gently, kindly.

Changing my heart and mind via the long game, not the quick Tweet and the block.

Patience, kindness.

Tolerance.

They had every right to block me, show me the hand; but they were patient and kind instead, had faith in the long game; and they changed me.

Thank you.

I will stand by my gramps and my dad, as painful as it is to be around their hate, but I get it; I GET their hate, I understand the potent extent of the brainwashing they endured.

So I will expose them to my love and to my uniqueness, to my gayness and to my brilliance.

To my kindness.

To my tolerance.

I will tolerate their ignorance and their hurtful comments; I will not block, I will not cancel, I will not divide.

I have a greater responsibility.

I cannot let another generation of hate be followed by another, I cannot be complicit in that.

It ends here, this cycle; on my watch, it ends here, and it must.

I will not change my dad or my gramps with one conversation.

I will not change them with one charismatic speech, or by storming out of the room. I won't change them with my own self-righteous division, by walking away back to my own choir, my own mob.

I must live amongst them.

I must love, I must tolerate.

I must be patient and gracious.

I must be true, be me, my authentic self.

I must see the long game, if I want to change their hearts and their minds.

I will lose my temper sometimes, but I hope I am surrounded by a loving inclusive community who will hold my anger for me, nurse it, and send me back into kind battle, re-programming the citizens I love, undoing the propaganda they absorbed.

Inclusively.

With tolerance, not intolerance.

Identifying, always, with the indoctrination they are born of, and loving them back to kindness. Modelling my own kindness and tolerance for them, for their behaviour.

This must extend beyond my immediate family.

(Or we'll have more generations of this).

I will love all my global citizens, I will include and dialogue with all the indoctrinated babes in my sphere; my placards will be kind; they will reflect the complexity of my human experience, encouraging empathy from others, not division or intolerance.

I will defy the social media algorithms that segregate me from people who think differently. I will not block, I will not proudly announce how I blocked that hater, I will use and design my social media to model my inclusiveness and kindness; to reflect my complex human experience proudly, and to gently reprogramme the blessed indoctrinated babes of hate.

This is not the easy path.

Segregation, intolerance and outrage-speak is much easier; it feels good instantly and it gets more Likes, but I've got to be better than that.

Or this will go on for another generation.

No.

I've inherited a great responsibility.

This CAN end with my generation.

Queer is finally actually here, and Black Lives Matter is loud and real, and the #MeToo movement woke me from an ignorance I didn't know I had.

This is the generation that can end it; but I fear we need to be better.

But I'll need help, gosh will I need it.

If I am loving and allow the haters into my sphere, I'll get hurt.

A lot.

Will you lovingly nurse me when that happens?

I'll be tempted to block, to hate back, to segregate, divide.

I'd be entitled to.

Gosh, every day I nearly do that every day with my dad and gramps.

Bless them and the indoctrination they suffered.

I'm gonna need you to hold my hurt, nurse my pain, and to do that as brilliantly as I know you can.

I'll do the same for you.

Don't let me be beaten by that hate, don't let me cancel, or shout my outrage, or block; don't let me hate back.

I am of this generation, and with this generation comes the greatest of responsibilities.

To end this cycle.

We need to be bigger and better than we've been, our kindness needs to be an unwavering beacon of change.

You have that in you, I know.

It's just a shift we need.

I got your love when my gramps and my dad hated me that day, and I continued loving them.

You helped me do that.

So I know how good you are at this.

We've got this.

This is our generation, our responsibility; and hate can end with us; collectively.

We've got this.

Chapter 3; PREDATOR

3.1: Shark-Infested Waters

I am a predator, sleek and winning.

I always win, I was born to conquer.

My power is supreme.

Even if I didn't like winning or conquering, I'd still do it.

It's what I do, it's instinct, it's grooming, it's innate.

Am I a shark, am I a leopard?

A spider.

Am I you?

A shark. I glide through this water silently, I own this water I swim in, and I own anything in it.

Anything else in this water is my plaything, I can do what I wish with it, as my whims take me.

As my instinct drives me.

It's not my fault what I do, it's what I do.

I might hear you condemning me for my cruelty, my lack of empathy, as I glide past you in my water.

But I can barely hear you.

You see, I'm too busy feeling powerful in my space to bother with the unimportant things you say.

I'm gliding in my water feeling powerful and you are unimportant to me.

Don't be offended; if you mattered to me, I'd exorcise my power upon you, and you probably wouldn't like it.

Or maybe you would?

You see my power is grooming too, so you'd probably find yourself fascinated by me, or drawn in to my charisma, my glorious splendor.

Gosh, you might even feel sorry for me.

That works.

I can draw you in in many ways, I am multi-talented. It all has its purpose.

If you are unimportant to me, I might groom you anyway, just in case you could be purposeful in the future.

Keep you on standby.

You'd feel flattered, I promise.

Until you see my teeth.

Until you see that my smile is not a smile, my smile is a gleeful grin, and behind the grin are my teeth.

Then you'll know.

You'll feel so ashamed of having been fascinated with me, that you'll never tell anyone.

Ever.

That's another promise I can make, it's part of my power.

I'll convince you it's your fault, this power-game mess you're in.

This game I'm winning.

It was YOU who found me fascinating, YOU who felt sorry for me. It was YOU who found me beautiful, and YOU who liked my power.

How embarrassing for you.

That part of you, that sweet, silly, horny, child-like part of you that found me fascinating; you should be squirming with shame at that part of you.

It's your fault you're in this mess, so you might as well stay in it, tell no-one.

I'll keep your secret for you.

You can trust me on that.

It's like a sweet, disgusting intimacy between us, and everything about it reeks of my power, but it IS intimacy too. You know it. You're in it. We are in it. To our graves. I'll protect you.

.

Don't blame me.

I don't even know I'm doing this, this is my instinct. This is the fuel that drives me, I don't know anything different. I'm a shark, I swim all-powerful in water, it's my birthright, it's Darwinian and I'm entitled. Empathy has no place here, it's a redundant skill for an all-powerful conqueror like me.

Can you hate the shark for being a predator?

I may be human, at least I may look that way, I can be convincing. I honed my skills while still a pup.

I suffered you see, as a child.

I experienced fear, fear beyond belief.

Fear so fearful that I normalized it. It became normal.

I was unloved maybe.

Or worse; loved and abused in the same package.

As a child, I was confused, frightened. I loved the people charged with safeguarding me. I loved them unconditionally, my survival depended upon these caregivers, so when they were unkind, abusive, neglectful, hateful, confusing; I still loved them.

The innocence of a child learning survival skills in shark-infested waters.

Children are extraordinary, they cope. They develop the most complex coping strategies, born of their environment and experience.

They can lift out of their bodies when experiencing inconceivable assault.

They can invent different personas to manage unmanageable scenarios.

They can be complicit in defiance and in defense.

They can adapt, learn to read your signals.

They can suspend disbelief.

Where love and care is mixed with danger and survival, and mixed with moments of beloved comfort, then corrupted by smashed moments of cruelty.

These confused childhoods create brilliant predators.

The young child I was, survived somehow. Emotionally endangered every moment, loving and fearing in the same breath, being loved and abused in the same breath, this made me, this defined me.

I am grown now I am predator.

In my adolescence I was not quite predator, I was still surviving, still honing my survival skills.

I watched, I learned.

I acted out, I cut myself.

I was promiscuous.

I sought out danger, it was familiar and therefore oddly comforting, normal.

In my danger, I watched, I observed, I mimicked. Silently, invisibly, I was always acutely aware, in my danger. Aware of a billion tiny signals in the world. I learned body language by instinct and survival. I learned tone of voice, gestures, sounds.

The way a door closes, the way a drink is poured.

The way a telephone receiver is picked up, put back.

Tiny sounds, gestures, responses that you take for granted... I observed, I learned to be vigilantly alert to danger, I honed my skills.

That's what children in danger do.

I watched how sentences are phrased, how people respond to them. I learned how differing inflections and intonations of voice can illicit different responses. I learned how trust is earned, how it is given away so easily if the right environment is created, I learned to create that environment.

Skillfully.

I learned how certain people respond to a compliment with absolute vulnerability, while others are guarded or boundaried.

I learned how certain people love the invitation to secret keeping, while others are suspicious.

I learned what gifts and gestures and sentences and inflections cause giddy loyalty in some, while perceived by others as creepy incursions.

I adapted, I honed and improved my skills.

I am alert to the vulnerable ones; by instinct, I seek them out, gather them around, create my environment.

My environment where I'm all powerful.

I mean safe.

Safe and powerful. Those two concepts are as one for me, I cannot distinguish between them.

I learned how fear is caused. I learned how to identify other people's tiny background fears, then to amplify them. And when they are terrified, I offer safety from it, I offer a solution.

The right ones come running, it's extraordinary how gullible people can be; even the most worldly and educated and bright.

You wonder how your clever, educated and well-functioning cousin got seduced by a cult?

I know how.

You wonder how your smart, funny and worldly best friend stays with that violent partner?

I know how.

I learned these skills, as default survival skills as a pup, as a sweet endangered pup.

I learned how strangely people respond to trust, to fear, to the appearance of intimacy.

These were absolutely the skills I needed to keep me safe in this dangerous environment I was born into.

And since I was so powerless, and in so much confusing uncertainty, I learned these subtle nuances of human manipulation like my life depended on it, because it felt like my life did depend on it.

It did depend on it.

I am grown now, and so skilled.

My skills keep me safe, I am supreme predator, no longer in danger, no longer confused and uncertain and abandoned.

My knowledge of people, of behaviour, of signals, and manipulation is at a level beyond your comprehension.

My honed skills are my superpower.

You are butter under my knife, you are putty in my hands.

I will find good water to swim in, space that amplifies my power.

I will create a network around me so I remain in control. Places where my power is more likely to go unchallenged.

Where I am trusted, worshipped, adored.

Obeeyed.

The longer I stay in that environment, the greater my power develops.

I'll use my honed skills to find vulnerable people.

People who like my power, people who believe that my power equals safety.

These waters are full of them, hurt people, coming from environments of broken trust, just looking for a powerful person that represents safety to them.

These are my flock, and purely by instinct, I'll draw them to me.

Their very vulnerability makes me feel powerful.

It doesn't feel like I am taking advantage, it feels like I'm creating a loving safe space for others like me.

It feels like love sometimes, like friendship. Like loyalty. Like favorites, like generosity.

The trust they place in me makes me feel powerful, and by instinct, I'll gather and keep them close.

Using my skills.

I'll test the waters, see if they are vulnerable. I'll take an inch, see if they'll give me a mile, and if so...

I'll take it.

And with more time, I'll take all.

Pure survival instinct, I need to feel safe you see, and the more powerful I feel in these waters, the safer I am from the danger that stays always with me since childhood. So my honed skills at people-manipulation, at environment-manipulation are in full force, that is my predator, my legacy.

I glide through the water, feeling powerful.

You may murmur at my cruelty, you may wonder at my lack of empathy, but I can barely hear you, I'm too busy feeling all-powerful as I glide through my waters, surviving, pure predator. This feels like innocence, this feels like survival. This is coping. You try to convince me of the awful things I've done to you, but this is my autopilot, it's pure survival, and I simply can't hear you. I am entitled, I am surviving, I am predator, I am loving you and you are mine.

Be grateful.

Behave.

You are my daughter, you are my new friend. You are my employee, you are my mum.

You are my therapist, my flatmate. You are my lover.

I am shark, see me glide supremely through my waters.

I am leopard, sleek, seductive, invisible if I want. Glory at my fur, my spots.

I am spider. My web is invisible to you.

I have senses and instincts that give me greater advantage.

To win, whatever the situation.

I am your father, head of this household. My authority is unchallenged.

I am your bossy out-of-control teenage daughter, and I have you running circles around me.

I am your manager at work, and I have power over you.

I am your mum and I gave birth to you, you owe me everything.

I am your sponsor at AA and if you don't do what I say, you'll die of addiction.

I am your school teacher, and I am heroic and wise, and when I approve of you and give you a compliment, it means the world to you.

I am every person in your government's cabinet. It took great predatorial skill to get here, the altruistic ones got left way behind.

I am your religious leader, I am your favorite inspirational speaker.

I am the CEO of the news network you prefer to watch, and I have defined your opinion on all matters for longer than you know.

I designed the algorithm of your preferred social network. You see what I want you to see, I form your opinions, I keep you herded in groups. I feel entitled to do this, this is my generous power.

I am your next door neighbor. I'm completely lovely, so kind. When you aren't watching I rule my family with an iron fist of utter ownership, they are mine, they know it, they submit, they call it love.

I am the person interviewing you for the job you earnestly want or need; it's written all over you, you are prone to submission. I will take this opportunity for a tiny micro-aggression, I'll build on this later.

I am your school friend, and I know how you can be more popular. Do as I say, as I do. Or as I suggest. Or as I lead.

You won't know the difference, I'll make you do it, and you'll think it was your choice.

I am normal in society, I'm all around you.

In fact: take a deep reflective breath, and you'll realize that I am you. You have developed some of these skills too.

Don't look in the mirror; not yet.

You need time.

You've survived. Life was tough.

You developed some coping strategies too, you resource them instinctively to survive.

You don't know it, it's just survival, it's just coping.

But as you use these skills to stay safe, to control your environment, you've sometimes had your own empathy button switched off.

You didn't know it.

And I forgive you.

It takes time to realise what you are.

We are predators.

Varying degrees of predators.

I may be worse, I may be more far gone than you. My need for safety might be more urgent than yours, I may not be able to see the wood for the trees, I may not be able to empathise with your needs.

Can you beat me though? Outwit me?

Can you catch me?

How do you control this sleek, spotted leopard?

How do you cage a shark?

With cunning?

With greater skills?

We can fill our prisons with predators, throw away the key.

Can we change them?

Can we be better, can we evolve?

Catch the predator with kindness. Empathise with the back story.

Understand the predator, the humanity that created this complex skill set of survivalism.

Make them feel safe.

Undo the honed learning, find the humanity.

Stop the cycle.

Generation after generation is reproducing predators, because it's all too misunderstood, and because social care doesn't understand the predator, or the cycle.

Or how to intervene.

Understand the predator, what created the predator.

Empathise with the human coping behaviour of a frightened soul.

Rehabilitate. With kindness, with safety.

Careful though.

I'm probably just grooming you.

Chapter 3; PREDATOR

3.2: Trolling, my Territory

I've been a dick.

I've been cruel and quick online, I didn't think of the consequences of my typing, I just typed because I needed to be right.

It felt so good.

It felt crucial at the time; I saw your words, your typed sentiment, and you seemed cleverer than me.

Everyone liked your words and your sentiment so much.

Like like like.

Something kicked in, inside me; I needed to find a higher ground than yours, point out the flaw. Even if I had to stretch to find it, I needed to find it, to win.

There's something inside me you see.

I'm almost unaware that it's there, but it needs to win.

There may have been ninety-nine brilliant things about your post, but I had to look for the one thing that was a flaw; I had to find that thing you are wrong about, it seemed urgent and crucial to do so.

It felt so right.

I'm ashamed now. But it is much later.

I found myself embroiled in a heated typed discussion with some of your virtual acquaintances, and some of them were demonstrating how right they thought you were (none of them kindly) and this thing happened, it was about winning.

I'm not like this in real life, I promise.

You know me, I'm not like that.

But there's something inside me you see.

Something primal, something in me that is instinctive and way more vital than my reason, than my learned social skills.

It needs to win.

You can teach me to speak a language, you can teach me to communicate. You can teach me culture and manners.

You can teach me boys wear blue and girls wear pink, you can teach me to use a knife and fork.

Teach me to dot my 'i's cross my 't's.

Say my please and thank yous.

Teach me men are masculine, girls are effeminate.

Teach me to hold the door open for others, put down the toilet seat.

To make my way in the world and to take responsibility.

Teach me religion. Tell me it will quiet my fears, solve the existential crises. Give unexplainable life purpose.

Teach me red means stop, green means go.

I'm clever, I am intelligent I can learn these things, I am not a sociopath.

But there's something inside me.

Something primal, something stronger than learned behaviour, something stronger than reason.

It's inside you too.

Shh... Sorry to upset you.

Shh, please.

I didn't mean to get you off-side.

That inner voice you have. The one that yells at you when you stub your toe.

"You bloody idiot!".

Yeah; you know it.

EVER present.

The one that knows you will fail, the one that is ugly, the one that can't lose weight.

The one that does badly in the job interview, the one that tells you you can't cope without some crutch.

It's louder in some of us than others, but there is something inside you.

It's inside me too.

It has fears, and it seeks to win.

When you are engaged in busy interactive social life, when you are engaged, interactive, occupied and affirmed (yes, affirmed; that's crucial); then that thing inside you is tamed.

That thing inside me, inside you; it lives in your head and it thrives more when you are alone.

It needs to win.

It's primal, it's vital.

Forgive me, I'm awful online.

I'm at my keyboard, my monitor, no one can see my face or my facial expressions, I'm safe, I'm hid.

I can indulge from my safe place and peruse the world beyond my monitor, I can observe you like a hidden predator.

My eyes watch your wall, my fingers move over keys silently, with stealth and prowess.

I am almighty in this moment.

Sleek and safe and winning.

I see your popularity bitch, I can win over it.

(In real life, with my human social hat on, I am happy for your popularity; that is authentic. My generosity is real. I love you.

I am in awe of your cleverness. I love it when I see you thrive, I adore your wit.

I see you being right about things, I can be convinced, with this hat on.)

But now that hat is off, I am free from such social constructs and restrictions, I am free from learned behaviours and indoctrinated culture; my predator is out and it needs to win.

I prowl.

I observe from my place of camouflage, from behind my monitor.

In the absence of social responsibilities, am regressed to my more primal nature.

Primal.

Survival.

Vital.

I let go of the shackles of societal manners, I am liberated.

My heels are off, my slippers are on, my hair is a mess.

There is a gleam in my eye, and it is tuned in to my primal self.

Everyone likes your post, but I must find some way to distinguish myself above it.

I will hunt, I will manipulate, I will ignore the ninety-nine brilliant things, and find that one flaw.

Then attack.

It feels right, it feels urgent, primal; it feels important that I do it, crucial.

And then that feeling comes.

Righteousness.

It is sublime.

It feels like winning, like primal superiority, it is more rewarding than a drug.

You know it.

You work hard to deny it. Gosh: you've never really conceded out loud how hard you fight this...

But I know.

That temptation, that exquisite impulse to be “right” when you read that person’s post. That battle; the socially groomed person with etiquette versus the instinct to point out the flaw.

To disagree.

To voice your wiser knowledge.

Ooh. It’s delicious isn’t it?

Don’t do it.

Don’t do it.

Behave.

Be happy for them. Just like it and move on. Remark instead on the ninety-nine brilliant things about it.

Let that be.

But woops.

It’s too late.

You indulged (it’s ok; I get it).

But ouch.

That slap in the face, and now you are embroiled in a complicated unkind disagreement.

You can’t back down; it’d be so easy.

EVERY social skill you’ve been taught and practiced is telling you to concede, be kind, it’s not THAT important to be right.

But it’s so hard.

Your predator is strong.

That thing inside you keeps up the fight, even as your inner conflict pains you.

You’re digging your heels in.

It’s getting harder and harder to get out of this.

Now that thing inside you is a seething thing of Pride.

Pride.

It has its teeth into an indulgence, and it won't let go.

You're at war with yourself; reason fights an ancient primal instinct.

Learned social skills, honed over a lifetime of indoctrination, are losing against millions of years of Darwinian evolution and survival instinct.

Fight. Survive. Win.

Don't back down.

It's gone on all day now, it haunts you like a dark cloud, you obsess over how to come back winning, when there is no win to be had.

What was the post about?

A cat meme?

It's irrelevant now, it's a matter of primal survival.

Don't feel bad.

I'm the same. I've done it. I do it.

I'll do it again.

I am learning.

In evolutionary terms, this typed form of social interaction is new. Too new. I don't have instincts for this, and I wasn't taught this social skill by my parents, or in school. Something lives inside me you see, and it is survival. Inherent, ancient survival.

She comes forth when I am disengaged from real people, she becomes stealth and active when safely away from real people.

When I can let my hair down.

My heels are off, I eat chocolate pudding from the tin, the chocolate smears across my face, and I don't care.

I'm alone.

Except I'm not.

My hair is unkempt and I can stop smiling politely after a whole day of smiling politely.

The thing that lives inside me is off the leash again, this is relaxed.

In stealth, my primal thing is liberated, and I peruse my monitor, I peruse your world, your wall, in stealth.

Engaged but not engaged.

I type, I see the flaw in your post, I do not empathise with you now.

I win.

And if my predator is really clever, I'll make it look like I'm kindly supporting you with your error; if my winning skills are honed, I'll make it look like these typed words are generous in pointing out your error..., but in fact I am winning.

Some are better than others at this. The game is afoot, my predator is better than yours, who will win in this game of chicken?

Must win, must not concede, must demonstrate my righteousness.

Shh.

Calm now.

And breath.

I don't hate your predator.

I don't hate your pride.

This thing lives inside me too.

I am kind to myself when my predator shows its teeth, and I will be kind to you when you are showing yours.

On my wall.

Bitch.

Sorry, sorry.

I know no one wins here.

The only true winner is generosity.

Generosity; it's more cognitive, more recent than primal predatorial instincts.

But I must activate it, just as I must obey the traffic lights when there is no traffic, and just as I make way for others on the sidewalk when I am hurried.

When I catch your predator on my wall, I have trained myself to ignore it. Kindly.

Let it go.

No one wins here, and you were just having a moment.

I'm the same; the same predator lives inside me too, and I am at peace with it. Sort of.

When it becomes unleashed, I try to catch myself in my tracks and just stop.

Copy, paste;

“Sorry. My predator was showing”

(Everyone knows what it means.)

They will either respond kindly, or let it go, kindly.

They may not; their predator may be off the leash still, and need to declare a victory over your copy and paste.

Let it go.

They'll regret it later, even if they'll never tell you.

Because generosity wins; EVERY time.

And that's what it's all about right?

Chapter 3; PREDATOR

3.2: Monarchy; A Late Apology from Elizabeth II

Dear sister, sons, daughter, grandsons.

I've abused you since birth.

And I'm sorry.

I was born into a life of duty and strictly governed behaviour.

As you were.

At age 18, I joined the Armed Forces; while there I signed a contract, as did every serving member, and was obliged to live up to expectations of the role, which included complying with a code of conduct and Communications Department directives. I was an adult and consented to this.

There was no such contract for the family I was born into.

It was assumed.

More than assumed; it was groomed into me.

Expected of me.

Indoctrination.

I was aware of consequences I'd face if I broke from this.

As a young vulnerable and impressionable teenager, my uncle abdicated.

Much to the disgust, chastisement and disenfranchisement of my own mother and

grandmother.

I learned a powerful lesson then.

I learned that straying from the assumed family doctrine; veering from the path I'd been groomed to take - meant nothing more than my own destruction.

I knew then, that should I ever complain about this path, I would be rejected, disowned, unloved and discarded; by the very people I depended on and trusted to raise me and love me and keep me emotionally safe.

Though some people call this an abuse of power (the power a parent has over a vulnerable child); though some people call this an abuse of trust, an early indoctrination occurred that terrorised me into adopting a life philosophy and path - taking it to heart. In the same way a child learns to defend and fear the abuser in the same breath, I was terrorised and indoctrinated into a life path that coerced me from ever even assuming, that I might have the right and the will to choose my own path. God forbid.

This was simply a cycle of abuse and indoctrination that has existed within this privileged family generation after generation. Always fearing the loss of power, habits developed that safeguarded that power; indoctrinating our children into this set of beliefs became the norm.

My parents didn't know they were doing it. They did not think for a moment that they were grooming and coercing a young girl into a life of obedience and fierce loyalty to her forbears, to her class, and to an institution.

I never signed this contract.

I'm an old, wizened woman.

I've learned a lot over these years.

I've watched children and grandchildren become indoctrinated, from birth, into this same game. Never batting an eyelid, reminded always of their duty and privilege. Reminded always - terrorised even - that should they stray from this indoctrination, they will suffer the rejection, ostracisation, disenfranchisement of the very people who (from infancy) they put their trust, and relied upon for safety, love and guidance toward independent adulthood and self-governship.

I have watched my children and grandchildren, their spouses rile against this grooming culture, never really able to name it or define it - but they riled. Publicly, clumsily. Painfully.

Fatally.

They riled, but fell into line.

Such is my power.

I'm an old woman now.

I reflect, with the wisdom of age.

They told me, as a babe, that God himself had chosen me especially for this.

And I bought it; I was so young and so fearful of being rejected like my uncle. And I knew - I knew - if I questioned or doubted this, I'd be disowned with disgust.

Unloved.

So I believed, grooming complete, indoctrination completed; the alternative was annihilation.

And I passed it on.

I watch two brothers; one exiting this cycle, the other, fully indoctrinated, pulling him back in. Punishing the disobedience. Withholding love & communication as punishment.

I know these tricks well.

They work.

Ask any cult leader, any groomer.

But I'm old and I have begun to develop some insight, late in life, into this cycle of abuse.

Of generations.

Of power, the strive to maintain power.

Bad habits developed.

Even the general public - generations of global public - take this outrage for granted.

Even they assume you and your wives must do as you're told, obey communications departments, stay silent and obedient, because I and my institution, will it.

It's an abuse of power.

An abuse of the trust you put in me, in my authority.

You were so young, so vulnerable when this indoctrination began. You'd not know any different.

Your wives, did not become employees of this family or institution. They married you. They did not sign PR contracts, they signed marriage contracts. Our attempt to groom them into our power game was an abuse of power. It is no wonder they rile and spew bitterness in television interviews at the institutions & people they put their trust in. The people & institutions that betrayed them, abused them. People shake and anger and rile as they escape the grooming process, as they de-indoctrinate themselves. The anger, as they have that realisation of the abuse - and of their own part in that cycle - spills over into television interviews. It might look like bitchiness & bitterness to some; it might look like ingratitude or revenge or spite; but these are the symptoms of a person realising & escaping indoctrination & abuse. They are riling.

And I'm beginning, finally, to see this - not as a betrayal, but as a coping mechanism.

I'm an old wizened woman, and a fierce monarch.

And I am beginning to see the glimmer of this cycle of abuse.

And my part in it.

This is what I should have said, a long time ago.

GO.

Be free. Choose your own path; whatever the consequences, you will be loved, cherished, affirmed, supported. You will not be punished for betrayal. I apologise for abusing the word 'Loyalty'; I apologise for frightening you into obedience. I apologise for promising to protect you when you were frightened - only to be betrayed in that. I want you to have full agency over your choices and path; and if I am ever disappointed in those choices, I will not abuse the power I have to punish you for them. I will love you, respect you, delight in your freedom and be delightfully curious about what you do next.

I've watched you squirm and rile as you have tried to extricate yourself from this grooming, this indoctrination. It must have been a lonely period, fearing using your own voice, making your own choices. But those things ARE your birth right, regardless

what family you are born into. To have opinions, to make your own choices. I'm sorry you feared so much from the family that raised you, as you tried to find your Self, your own path.

Now, to duty. How do I end this cycle, here, with this generation.

Can you help?

Chapter 4; So Gay

4.1: Gay and Fabulous; Ring the Town Bell

N_o.

I've not been waiting for the day that gays (and other fabulously different people) are accepted.

I'm not glad that some mums and dads say "it's ok that you're gay, we love you just the same".

That's not what I've been campaigning for, that won't fix much at all.

"We love you anyway" and "It's OK, we accept you just as you are" just won't cut it with me.

Fuck that.

I want all mums and dads and aunties and bloody grandparents and the neighbours dog to leap with joy when they learn that they have a gay son.

I want mums to leap with joy, call the neighbours and shout from the front yard how fabulous it is that she got a gay one.

I want her to ring the town bell and let everyone celebrate this fucking brilliant thing. Her son is gay.

Or Queer, or bi, or lesbian or trans or whatever.

I want all dads to grab their gay son in a happy bear hug and show some enthusiasm for this great news.

I want him to say "Son; there's a proud and vibrant culture of gays that came before you, and I know you'll do loads to contribute to that brilliant culture in your future.

Awesome."

I want the neighbours to exclaim how privileged a family is to have a gay born into it, and to join the celebration.

I want grandpas & mas to say "loving men is a great thing, I hope you love many and find great happiness in that."

I want all the cliched jokes about great grooming and fashion and interior design and performance to be made. Because they're brilliant brilliant things, and I want the neighbours to exclaim how many truly kind, nurturing and generous and sensitive gays they've known, as well as activists and heroes, and... gosh, well all sorts.

Because the diversity is HUGE and fabulous.

I want them to leap with this shared joy. And remind me how rare gays are in families, and what a blessing and boon it is to have one.

My mum will beam with pride, my dad won't stop hugging me.

The neighbourhood will party for weeks.

"It's ok son, we'll love you anyway" just won't cut it for me. Or any of my LGBTQQIP2SAA cousins.

I don't wanna be "accepted"

Fuck that; I'm gonna be celebrated.

Gimme the celebrations and streamers please.

'Cos I'm gay, and it's fabulous.

Chapter 4; So Gay

4.2: To All my Grindr Lovers

I apologise.

I am a dick.

I've been cruel online.

I probably didn't know it at the time, I was just fast-typing and moving on to the next...
but yeah.

I've been cruel. I've fast-typed what I don't find sexy, when I could have typed what I
DO find sexy.

'Cos that makes a difference.

I could have been more sensitive to the vulnerabilities of the guy I'm hooking up with.
Sometimes I'm so busy thinking about my own needs, fears or insecurities, that I can
forget that the guy I'm chatting to (or with) could be feeling the exact same.

Sometimes I'm so busy trying to convince others that I'm a confident sexy being, that
I forget that they are just as vulnerable as me. I can completely forget it. And gosh... I
could have really done some damage to some gorgeous people now I think of it.

I want to be better.

Life and sex can be so complicated. Our gay day to day existence tests the best of us; and getting our sexual and emotional needs met in modern hook-up culture can be so, so complicated. Being sexy, being affirmed as sexy beings, having our community include us and like us... it's hard. Looking for love and affirmation and inclusion, managing loneliness, and that haunting "never-quite-good-enough" feeling that's always waiting in the background.

Despite our best performances.

Modern gay life is hard.

And a lot of us are stumbling. Oh we cover our tracks very well; no-one will ever know we're stumbling. We're good at showing bravado when falling to pieces.

I'm good now. Things are good for me. I feel safe in the world, and so it's easier to be mindful of others. Easier to empathize. But I do have seasons of poor wellbeing; life throws me a curve ball from time to time, and I slip back into poor habits. I'm usually more selfish during those times; I don't mean to be, but my own needs and fears and defensiveness can be so loud, that I can't hear the silent pleas for kindness from my gay brothers. I can't promise I'll always be at my best; I may say the cruel thing online, I may withdraw, I may use sex for the wrong reasons. I may misunderstand that innocent thing you say and lash out. I may neglect my own health, I may miss my HIV medicines. I might not be honest in bed or online. I might have condom slip-ups, or rely on chems to see me through yuk times.

I might be one of those really unlikeable gay men.

If that happens; please forgive me. You don't have to, but it's at these times I need my community's kindness and understanding the most. More than anything. 'Cos you're the only ones who truly get it. In the meantime however, I'll strive to stay well. I'll keep active in my community, I'll engage authentically with my friends. I'll seek help when I feel my strength slipping, and I'll endeavor to do the work to stay well, to remain kind

and aware of others. To listen. To hear even the unspoken messages of humanity and vulnerability.

Because these are fast changing times, changing scenes: new technologies, new communication skills, new drugs, new stigmas. And we are vulnerable. Our vulnerability is one of the sexiest things we have, even if we don't put it in our profiles. Even if we strive to hide it in bed. It's awesome and sexy and brilliant, and our efforts to hide it are doing us harm. At the very least, ruining sex for too many of us. And yes, contributing to chemsex culture. So let's be better together. I know we can be. This isn't my first ride on the merry-go-round; I've been down before, and it was you, my brilliant community that picked me back up.

Thank you. From my heart.

Now let's do that for all our gorgeous vulnerable gay brothers out there. Let's be an awesome community of imperfect, but great gay men.

Chapter 4; So Gay

4.3: Gay Sex; Your Permission Please

I want your permission to have sex.

Can I?

No no, I don't mean I want you to decriminalise it for me.

Fuck no.

That I would be a demand, not a request, and something I'd be doing anyway because it's my human right.

Maybe what I mean is that I want your permission to ENJOY sex.

Oh and yeah; I mean GAY sex. ...just so we're clear.

That's the sex I like.

That's what I enjoy, and I want your permission to enjoy it.

I shouldn't need it; I agree.

But somehow... I'm seeking it.

And no, I don't mean I want you to NOT be homophobic.

I wouldn't ask permission for that either.

Fighting for that is something I know better. I'm good at that.

I'm really glad that my country has some laws protecting my gay rights.

I'm really glad that straight people are waving rainbow flags at my Pride demonstration.

I do, I really love that.

I love that big business organisations support my Pride demonstrations. I'm older than the rainbow flag is, and older than AIDS, so believe me when I say, I never thought that would happen. And it gives me an opportunity to hold them to account, keep them on their toes all year round. I used to dream of opportunities like this.

Back when I was sick and illegal.

Back when Prides were defiant by default.

I'm seeking permission now, to enjoy my gay sex.

Because I don't always.

Maybe it's the chems I took, or the AIDS and death I knew; maybe it's the sex work I did, or the hearts and egos that got trampled on. Maybe it's the online hook-up culture of cruelties and rejections and expectations that done me in.

Gosh, maybe it's the cruelty I did to all my lovers in the past that ruins it for me.

Geez, that's complicated.

But whatever it is, I don't always enjoy gay sex, and fighting it in bed isn't a solution.

It might be your permission I need to make it better?

When I say permission, let me be clear:

I don't mean I'm asking for it.

Fuck no.

I just think it's something I'm seeking, something that might help.

I'm glad it isn't illegal in my country, awesome.

I'm glad I can get married, that's fabulous.

I'm glad you sponsor my Pride demonstrations, good. (Do it right, because I'm watching. But good.)

I'm glad straight people wave flags and show joy at my Pride demonstrations.

I need more, and I'm asking.

I don't need your blessing to be in love. Or to express it.

I'm good at that, with it or without your blessing. (But thanks. 😊)

What I'm asking for is this.

More.

Love my homo-SEX.

Love me having it. Penis' and bums and male mouths on penis' and bums and faces.

And all the kindness, joy and pleasure that goes with it.

I want my sexiness in bed with me, with you, I want my femme and masc there too, and all my gender expressions that sex me up in different ways. I want my raunch and my vulnerability there. I want my scars I want yours too.

I want full disinhibition.

And that's more than just my own problem.

I didn't create my inhibitions. Some others did that. Lots of 'em. Centuries of 'em.

I don't need you to tolerate it, or allow it to happen behind closed doors.

"What goes on in the privacy of my own bedroom" bullshit.

"Just don't rub it in my face" bullshit.

I don't need you to "allow" it.

I don't just need you to attend my wedding.

Thanks for that, but not enough.

I need a whole lot more than for you to decriminalise it and wave rainbow flags please.

I need you to jump for joy, that I enjoy it.

I need you to WANT me to enjoy gay sex, and to celebrate that I enjoy it.

There's a legacy in the bedroom with me you see.

Religion is there. The one I was raised with, absolutely; but also all the other ones I know of that hate me for my gay sex.

Abomination. Sin.

"Love the sinner hate the sin" Fuck off.

The "God loves you, but not that gay sex you have" bullshit.

All the nice straight people who love that I'm gay, but carry this sort of disgust for gay sex (even despite themselves; I know it's not always their fault, I know it's deeply

ingrained, it's cultural). That's in the bedroom with me too. I'm an old dog, and it's hard to shake it off.

Every camp-shaming, toxic-masculinity affirming glance or rejection I knew - that's in the bedroom with me too. Ruining my gay sex.

Every parent, school friend, big brother that loved me conditionally; on the CONDITION I didn't embarrass them, disappoint them, shame them... they are in the bedroom with me too.

Ruining my gay sex.

I don't want my sexual experiences to be in defiance of these things.

I don't want defiance in the bedroom with me either.

Geez, it's difficult enough. I'm defiant enough, day by day; can't my gay sex at least, be free of that?

I need some liberation from that.

I've sought that liberation in lots of ways; in fact that search fueled my chemsex decades.

My gay sex should be devoid of defiance.

My lovers deserve it, I deserve it.

So I ask your help.

And I correct myself. It isn't permission after all.

It's bigger and braver than that.

I need you to challenge the religions you like or subscribe to; challenge them to celebrate the gay sex I'm having. Do your diligence. Help them do theirs.

Challenge the big businesses; sponsoring Pride, is celebrating the gay sex I want to enjoy. Not just throwing confetti at my wedding.

Challenge the media. Gays look pretty holding hands on a beach while selling tourism or on my Netflix, but they have gay sex too.

Help me and my gay brothers to clear the clutter in our bedrooms.

Chemsex is often the product of that clutter too.

Chemsex was never about societal homophobia.

It was about societal, religious and institutional disgust of the gay sex act.

I need your help.

I don't want to rely on chems to enjoy my gay sex.

I don't want to require defiance to enjoy the sex I'm having this.

I've fought enough. My defiance, these decades, has exhausted me.

My lovemaking oughtn't be political.

It is. It always has been for me.

I need a break.

A break from the plague and danger, a break from the politics and the defiance that permeates my gay sex.

Will you help?

Celebrate my gay sex with me. Jump for joy that I enjoy it, fight for my right to enjoy it.

Challenge those that only hypocritically support gay rights, whilst me and my gay brothers navigate a chemsex epidemic and a complicated & often harmful online hook-up culture.

Because the only rainbow flag I really wanna wave, is the ornamental one that'll be hanging off my Prince Albert tonight at the bathhouse.

Chapter 4; So Gay

4.4: Bathhouse Boy

A young gay man spends 30 hours in a bathhouse or sauna.

It might be 1975 New York City.

It might have been this weekend in London.

Or it might be in Istanbul or Poland.

There might have been drugs or alcohol involved. Or not.

During these 30 hours, he experiences a variety of moments. Passing moments. Life moments.

Some... involve the best sex he's ever had.

Some... just awful.

But some... really awesome. It's possible the disinhibition of chems helped with this.

But really great connection and sensuality and freedom. He'll remember it for a long time.

He'll seek it again.

He also spent some moments naked with other men, drinking Coca-Cola at the bar. It helped him appreciate that not all sexy bodies look like the ones he sees in porn. Some are very normal, imperfect, and very sexy.

He made a great friend. They chatted in a cubicle for 2 hours when the sex wasn't really working; and so they connected differently. They'll never see each other again, but it was a good experience of friendship and intimacy, albeit brief.

There were other moments too; moments when he was rejected cruelly by a slammed cubicle door in his face, or a phrase that hurt.

It might have been about his face, or his body which isn't a porn star body. It might have been because he was too drunk, or too high; it might have been because he was too sober.

It might have been because of the colour of his skin, or the way his hair grows, or the shape of his eyes, or because of the 2 scars he has on his chest.

It might have had nothing to do with him. It might have just been an innocently slammed cubicle door, but he took it personally, he's had doors slammed before. In all kinds of environments.

I'm including metaphorical doors here too of course.

There were those guys he shared a few hours with in a cubicle; the guys that weren't so kind. They said all these things that made him feel good; they told him he was hot, that he was sexy. They chose him over some other hot guys who tried to join them (the door was slammed rudely in their faces), and it made him feel good to be on the nicer side of that slammed door.

This time.

They were bossy, just a bit, and that relieved him of responsibility, because he was a bit nervous with these guys really.

If they'd have said "what are you into?" or "what would turn you on?", he wouldn't have known how to answer.

Those questions are too uncomfortable, especially with everyone watching.

It's better that they are bossy and decisive, that makes it easier, relieves that burden.

But they were very sexy. And they rejected the ugly ones at the door - but not him, not this time.

So he stayed and smiled, and made all the right sex noises when in fact, it hurt a bit, and they were a bit bossy.

When they used those slurs that were offensive and unacceptable in normal life, but completely normal on Grindr, he stayed. He stayed then, because it's ok to say those things during sex, right? There were no rules here, right?

He stayed, he participated, he performed; because it was kind of fun, kind of sexy, even if it was offensive and a bit bullyish. It was kinda fun (and better than being on the other side of that slammed door.)

Better than being on the other side of that slammed door.

This was his bathhouse weekend. This was how it worked.

He hadn't ever had any LGBTQ-inclusive sex & relationship education in school. Or at home. He'd learnt most of his gay sex life stuff from people in saunas, from his mates (who didn't know a great deal themselves) and from porn. From a lot of one-night stands. A lot of these one-night stands were on chems, but a lot weren't.

He had a good time in the sauna. He was treated like a sexy man, and that's important to him. He felt included and wanted, and these are important things to any person. He's young, but smart enough to know that being sexy is very important within this culture. It's important to thriving, to inclusion, to getting ahead, and to being loved. Not sexy equals rejected. He'd learned that.

He'd been rejected a lot. (But he felt he deserved that. Because of the way he looked, and because of the doors he'd had slammed in his face growing up.) There was also some unkind treatment. (But he didn't know any better.) There were some times when he felt a little uncomfortable with what was happening, but he didn't have the concept of self-worth to apply boundaries, or any frame of reference for boundaries and appropriateness for this sexual environment.

There might have been gay elders, wise big gay brothers, who could have handed down some kindness, wisdom and experience from their own lived experiences. But too many of them died in the AIDS epidemic.

They simply weren't there.

A lot of the gay elders that did survive, are a little traumatised by that epidemic. Perhaps managing that trauma, perhaps not always present and available to help this younger man, this younger generation, with sex stuff, boundaries and self-worth in a sexy community, a sexy environment.

It's Monday morning.

Our guy spent most of the weekend in a bathhouse, having a myriad of experiences, good and bad.

It's a lot to process on this lonely Monday morning.

He might be in a city that has no LGBTQ community centre.

That's very likely in fact.

He doesn't have that sex education experience to draw from. That's a fact.

And some of the gay elders that might have helped him - are dead.

A generation of them.

Oh yeah.

It's probably a good idea to get tested too, a sexual health screen. This much he does know.

What does the 'right to free public health' mean?

Testing? Free testing? I think so.

Free PEP, if there's been an HIV risk? I think so.

A conversation about PrEP, in case he's unaware of it? I think so.

When he goes for his sexual health screen, he'd have a chat about sex. Gay sex I hope; and I hope that wouldn't be complicated for the staff member there.

A nurse might ask if he'd enjoyed the sex he'd had.

He'd say yes, obviously; he'd had a great time generally. Such freedom and sexiness and inclusivity in a sexy community. He'd say yes for sure.

The nurse or health care worker might probe further; they might ask if he'd felt uncomfortable at any time. Rejected. Excluded. If he'd enjoyed the chems. If he also enjoyed sex without chems.

He might not have thought about these things much.

These questions, this kind of reflection isn't natural to him; it's not prompted by the porn he watches, and he hasn't had a lot of these kinds of kind questions put to him before.

Not when he's sober.

The nurse might ask if he had felt pressured at all in the sauna cubicle, or if he had sometimes said yes to things while he was high, that he regretted a little on Monday morning.

He'd really never thought about these things before.

I hope he wouldn't find these questions intrusive; I hope he knew that nurses care, and many nurses know that gay boys don't get helpful sex education in school; they know that there are often not a lot of opportunities for him to reflect on his sex life in a safe space.

This is the kind of access to free healthcare that I feel is a human right.

Our young sauna guy **DESERVES** to be tested in a place where a kind person can discuss with him, the basics: such as boundaries and self-worth, and how we deserve to be treated in life, in sex, in love. About what consent means.

About how to say, "I'm a bit uncomfortable with that, can we stop?", or "That word is a bit disrespectful to my community and culture; I know we're just playing, but can you not use that word please?"

He needs this, he **DESERVES** this.

Because he wasn't taught it in school.

Because his family find these conversations too uncomfortable.

Because Grindr and porn don't help with these things.

Because there is no LGBTQ community centre in his city.

Because he carries the legacy of an AIDS epidemic that is present in every sexual situation he enjoys.

Or doesn't enjoy.

The legacy of an epidemic that killed his elders; elders that might otherwise be handing down the wisdoms he won't get from mum and dad, from the schoolteacher. From porn.

Because he's coping with complex needs, with an HIV epidemic, with very available chems, with online hook-up culture.

He deserves to get this care, this dialogue from a care provider, a kind human, when he accesses a sexual health screen. It's a right.

He also deserves to get this from his friends, from his family, from his community; from school, from his mates; it should be normal conversation

I love this guy, our bathhouse guy. I've known him, I've shared forgettable moments with him, memorable moments with him. I've loved him, shagged him, I slammed a door in his face once, which I regret. He'll be in my bed or sauna cubicle tomorrow. I am him. He is my community and I wanna make things better for him.

Chapter 4; So Gay

4.5: Dancing and Dying in Chemical Fusion

C hemistry.

The gorgeous fusion of this chemical with that chemical to make that unique combination.

The gorgeous fusion.

The fuse, the wick that ignites the flame

The fuse that lights, that ignites the unique fusion of chemicals that explodes the chemistry.

Fireworks, boom.

To dance.

To dance alone in silence is singular, divine movement

To dance with music is joy.

To dance with others, with music in unison is delight, is community.

T'is community, t'is joy.

To dance with chemicals in my bloodstream is a blissful fusion

Of joy, of movement, of community, we are as one, we move as one, we feel as one.

A fusion of bliss, joy, movement, music, of chemicals.

And togetherness, unity.

A perfect chemistry.

The dancefloor.

Have you felt it?

Have you danced alone, then danced with someone?

With your community.

Have you fused that with joy, with music, with sound, with space?

With lights.

With community, with escapism.

Have you danced with enhanced liberation, with hedonism?

With others?

Have you danced with Pride?

Have you danced while fighting for your right to exist, to be different?

Have you danced while you marched in the street for the right to medicines?

Have you danced while you marched while your friends were dying in ignorance and disgust?

Have you felt that fusion of tears streaming down your face, while you danced, while you marched?

While the world collapsed around you, while disease coursed through your veins,

With the chemicals in your veins and music in your ears, and your community beside you

As one, we are as one.

Have you danced on your drugs while disco played at the funeral?

Your best friend

Not alone, communing.

Danced and cried, grieved and celebrated as the rainbow colours adorned the dark black coffin.

Were you clubbing and dancing the week of Diana's funeral?

AIDS and rainbows.

Chemicals and grief and music and dance and tears and this is how we cope.

Pride.

Marching and dancing.

Campaigning fighting, trying to be seen

Demanding. Defiance.

Marching, dancing, crying fighting

Anger and grief and joy, this is how we live.

This is my Pride.

Do you know Pride?

It's a fusion.

It's a fuse that lights the future

It self-destructs as it builds

Its anti-depressants and AIDS medicines and ecstasy

And joy and grief

Despair and dance

It will self-destruct as it builds.

It will be a fuel that defines a generation, building rights and freedom and futures.

A medicated legacy born in a pyre, emerging from ashes.

An addiction that will sustain a generation in trauma, and an addiction that will fuel the sex lives for another generation.

Fusion.

Chemicals.

Chemsex.

Dancing as we fuck.

Community, survival.

Dance, march, fight, grieve, cry, survive.

Die.

And get up again, pick up your cross or your placard to bear, and march on.

There will be music, there will be rainbows.

And there'll be fight and death and suffering.

Legacies of it. Generations of it.

You've felt this? You've danced to this.

Yes.

You did.

I know, because I was there. Beside you.

I was holding your hand, as we fought and danced and cried and...

Well one of us survived.

Yeah.

You know Pride.

I remember you.

Chapter 5; HUMANITY

5.1: RIP My Facebook Friend

RIP, my Facebook friend.

Rest in Peace now.

I hate this, but... I can barely remember how I know you.

Were we Sunday morning lovers after a night out clubbing?

No, not that close. I think.

Perhaps we're just 90's kids who queued together, shared dance-floors together.

Again and again. Never speaking.

Were we friends? I hate this, but I can't remember.

Did we share a bump in a cubicle together once?

Or was it often? Or never.

How do I know that face? It's a lovely face.

Truly lovely.

Maybe I was jealous, because you always looked so popular.

Maybe I was a bitch to you.

I hope not.

Maybe you were bitchy to me. You were so popular. Gosh, maybe we hated each

other. But you're gone, and it doesn't matter now.

Damn it, I know you, I know that face.

Did I ask for a dick-pic on Grindr? Did I block you?

Did I flirt with you, compliment you online? Did I troll your Wall once or twice thoughtlessly?

And today, through a friend of a friend on Facebook, I see you have died.

I swipe through your profile pics.

I know that face. And I don't.

I scroll through the comments, looking for signs of how you died.

Because I suspect...

I suspect...

I...

I don't want it to be another chemsex death.

So, so many gorgeous ships that I've passed in three decades of nights - now lost to chems.

A few, achingly close, dear friends.

But the ache, the ache, of the many that I see too regularly on Facebook.

Familiar-ish strangers, from our gorgeous heady pasts.

Quiet posts from Facebook friends, announcing, lamenting, the untimely death, the oddly young unexplained death of someone I danced with (maybe). Or not. Perhaps queued for a toilet cubicle together. Years ago.

How did I know you? I hate it, that I can't remember.

Because you deserve more than that.

To be more than just another guy I kinda knew maybe, who died from chems.

More than just a passing, sad thought.

There have been other strangers that have died, that I've learned of from Facebook. I saw, I lamented, I ached. And then I scrolled on. Perhaps there was a cute cat picture that distracted me from my brief grief.

Chemsex deaths that are announced, then forgotten. Have I become so accustomed, so immune to these RIP messages, that I can move on so quickly?

I am ashamed.

And angry.

I am angry for these deaths. Too many.

I'm angry that many didn't get much more than a brief grieving before scrolling onward. I'm angry that some mums and big brothers had to process and wrestle with the impossibility of the chemsex spiralling that occurred before the death.

What a thing to come to terms with.

You deserve better than my fleeting, quickly-forgotten Emoji post.

I will not grieve momentarily, then scroll on.

It's painful, but I will stay with it. Stay with this grief.

You deserve to be remembered.

Not forgotten.

By me. By your community.

Yes, I hardly knew you.

Maybe.

But I know that face.

A truly lovely face. I remember that.

You're my comrade. You are familiar. You are my community. You are family.

I know some people were impatient with your chemsex journey.

Some friends didn't stick by you.

I mean... you were a nightmare. A darling nightmare, my brother.

Maybe I didn't stick by you. Maybe that's our thing, the thing I can't remember.

Maybe I abandoned you, as I moved on to more sex or more drugs.

Well today, I make a vow.

For today I am outraged.

Outraged that you are dead, so young, so bright.

Outraged by too many deaths. Outraged that you experienced some stigma and intolerance for your drug use. I am outraged that some of our public health institutions refuse to be alarmed at how many of us are dying from chems. I'm outraged when I hear that "it's only a sub-population of a sub-population doing

chems". That the prevalence is over-rated. That I'm being alarmist in my activism.

I am alarmed.

I am grieving.

I hear you.

You are not just a sub-population of a sub-population; your pain is valid, this community's concern, is valid.

And you.

You are valid, your experience, your life, your struggle with chems, was valid.

Not just a sub-population of a sub-population.

How reductive.

You were a significant gorgeous human being, part of a significant and divine community - and you should be remembered and celebrated and understood.

Not just momentarily, before scrolling on.

I am sorry I did that.

Sorry to you all. Rest in Peace.

I will honour you, I will stay with my grief. I will remember you, all of you, and I will respect your journey, that ended this way.

You are more than just another Facebook announcement.

You are my grief, for my struggling community. You are my shame, my shame that I can't remember you. My shame for having scrolled by too quickly when you all deserved my grief. My grief and my activism.

And this;

you are also my fear. My fear that one day I might pass, and be scrolled past, forgotten, unimportant. My own insignificance. My own nihilism.

But today, it is you. And my grief and my shame.

And my vow.

You are passed. You are my brethren, you are significant and I will forever remember you, and act on that memory.

That I vow.

Chapter 5; HUMANITY

5.2: I Have Injected Drugs into my Arm.

To put a needle into one's arm is a violent thing.

It can also be an exciting thing.

It can be a tool; a tool we use to cope.

It can be a thing that brings insane pleasure, or insane relief.

Often, the pleasure IS simply, the relief. The only relief from unmanageable emotions, or trauma.

Many of us were not blessed with the psychological capacity, to feel pleasure without drugs.

Ever.

Many of us were not equipped with other coping mechanisms to manage difficult emotions or trauma.

And many, many gorgeous vulnerable people around the world find themselves in a downward cycle of self-medication, find themselves without a safe home, without people who understand this use, find themselves on the street, in dark shameful corners, injecting themselves with drugs.

I've walked past them; so have you.

I may have felt a pang of emotion as I walked past them; sometimes it's empathy, but sometimes it's not; sometimes the violence of the needle in an arm can elicit less than sympathetic responses.

Empathise, with me for a moment.

Empathise with the shame that accompanies putting a needle in one's arm.

I have put a needle in my arm; I did it in the safety of my own home, I have done it amongst friends; but even in my safe environment, it was accompanied with a shame I can't describe to you.

I didn't ACT shamed; I was defensive, and convincing in my defensiveness.

But the shame.

Was.

Immense.

It remains immense.

And so, I imagine, I try, to empathise with the levels of shame experienced by a fellow human who is injecting on the street. Their despair, their need, their circumstances, and their defensiveness.

And their shame, whether that's visible to me or not.

In 1986 the world's first safe Drug Consumption Room was opened in Bern, Switzerland.

In this space, the city's homeless drug users are afforded a safe space to inject drugs in a safe environment, supervised by caring professionals. They are afforded a safe space to buy and sell drugs, as well as other items to pay for their drugs; away from the dangers of the streets, away from the arresting responsibilities of the police, away from the city's passers-by, who are unable to hide their disgust; their disgust of the violence of a needle in a person's arm.

There is a movement to create more spaces like these, but the movement is more often met with huge resistance from cities and governments and local residents.

'Contact' opened in Bern Switzerland in 1986, and is still there today.

I had the rare opportunity and privilege to visit it.

I say privilege, because it was. I saw a space where my fellow humans, who found themselves in these circumstances, were afforded the respect and dignity they deserve.

The dignity...

they deserve...

to inject safely, without shame, supervised by kind people who respected these individuals, and their circumstances.

To put a needle into one's arm, is accompanied by a complex myriad of emotions and traumas that few of us can understand.

I know.

It is a complex practice that deserves understanding, and support from our public health organisations, our governments. From us.

Yet, in most cities around the world, it is criminalised, forced onto the streets, where it is exposed to disease, harm, arrest, and the awful disgust of passersby.

In Bern, at the Contact Centre, I saw a city that greeted its citizens who inject drugs kindly into a safe injecting space, where they are afforded the dignity they rarely receive from us. It was a privilege, I am humbled by it, I am ashamed of my own city that does not afford our residents the same dignity.

I am ashamed that I have not always had the correct 'emotion' as I pass by people injecting in the streets of my own city.

I will walk through my city streets with a different attitude from now on; these streets I share with my fellow humans, many of whom inject drugs shamefully and without dignity.

And while my city does not afford them the dignity they deserve, they will absolutely receive it from me.

Join me in that?

Chapter 5; HUMANITY

5.3: I am Universe, you are Small

I am universe.

I am more than universe, I am incomprehensible to you.

When I say "I am Time", you don't even know what I mean.

You are here because of me, though I barely know you are here, despite your screaming.

Despite your protests and noise and placards.

"Save the planet".

You think of the consequences of your actions, you think of the world your children will inherit, and you think of global warming, and all those small things.

I am universe; I am many universes.

(Yes, at the same time.)

I am too large for you to comprehend; but let me try.

Let me introduce myself to you as if we'd never met.

(Which is ridiculous, since it was I that conceived of you.)

Quite ridiculous since you hardly know me, can barely comprehend me; but you are a small, small part of my very large plan, and you twinkled in my eye many hundreds of millions of years ago.

I am (for want of a better word) Universe.

Plural sometimes, depending on your ability to comprehend my enormity.

Your naive understanding of "life" is limited to carbon, to green things. To things that move or pulse or recreate.

You, in your naivety, think of a dry frozen rock, floating in space, to be dead.

You think of a speck of dust hurtled by a particularly big (by your perception) bang, to be lifeless.

But you are naive and you offend me.

For I am Universe, hear me roar now, let my roar shudder you, silence you.

That rock, that "lifeless" speck of dust, that dark matter that empty space; that gave birth to you; show respect.

Be in awe and hang your tiny head in shame.

With your self importance, with your placards and protests.

I am roaring, you are tiny, I am old, older than you can comprehend, but still only priming.

I am everything.

It was many many billions of inconceivable (to you) years ago, that a tiny speck formed in nothingness, in (what was to become) one of my magnificent universes. A tiny speck formed, it may have seemed lifeless to you, but the energy that associated with it would bang so loudly, generate more energy, pushing, spinning expanding.

Energy and electricity, and matter and space and gasses, masses, these giant inconceivable things are life, and they were all happening in a space smaller than the smallest pinhead.

Yet they were your ancestors.

Thanks to my enormous incomprehensible magnificence, these things changed and pushed and receded and dissipated, creating more different things, expanding, slower, bigger.

Your universe formed, and you were a glimmer in my eye, but that's all, there was so much else going on.

Gasses formed from pressures and energy, more specks of your "lifeless" dust spun here and there, drifted. All interacted with others and consequences were all around.

I can see for great distances.

Time and space, I can see great distances, and you are small.

My universes are magnificent, some better than the one you will briefly exist in, some less so.

But "better" is one of your words.

That planet you're on, my planet.

It's beautiful.

As is everything in my universe, do not be small and arrogant.

That planet you're on, my planet; it took me many billions of billions of years to make that.

It was inevitable.

You are a tiny part of its story. You are magnificent.

And you are welcome.

Remember your size, next to me, remember your transience next to me.

You are magnificent, and you're welcome.

You, and all my species (as you call them), I've loved you all.

Forgive the past tense; another one of your limitations, born of your constructs.

There are many species and gasses and specks of dust that I've loved; they come and go, I am very big remember, there is lots of space and time, and I exist in it all.

The planet I've created, the one you exist on briefly; do enjoy it.

Or don't; I'm indifferent to that.

It took billions and billions of years to create that planet. It was easy for me, took no time at all really. And there are many others.

Moons broke as asteroids hit other large objects; suns went supernova, and gravity pulled and tugged in such an (excuse me) perfect way, just so that 'earth' would come into being.

You're welcome, it was nothing.

There were billions of "earth years" before your transient unique existence. There were changing climates, there were species that came and went, there were changing electrical fields, magnetic fields... such a long, evolving history, my planet (this one) had before you knew her.

It was what you call "lifeless" for a billion years too, though that is offensive to me. Always changing.

It has hosted SO many species of what you DO call "life". These species, bless them, I loved them all. They had all existed in twinkles in my eye long, long, long ago.

They weren't eternal, these species. They came as certain environmental circumstances allowed for it. They participated in eco-systems, they consumed resources, some existed longer than others, some are still around, most extinct; none were meant to be eternal, that planet is only a brief transient thing in my great plan. All of these species were magnificent; some lasted very long indeed (by your reckoning); some, great predators, learned to exist for great lengths of time; spiders, one of my most favorite.

But they will pass.

My planet, the one you are on, it cannot support life eternally, that's not how I work. (I would explain, but it's beyond your comprehension...)

My universe is big, and you are transient.

Magnificent and tiny, brief.

You, like every form of "life" as you know it, need things to exist, like sunlight, and other energy.

But these energies are transient, and all species on that brief planet will exhaust the resources available.

It's cute.

I love your placards "Save the Planet", I love your darling protests and campaigns. (And gosh how you fight over it.)

I am Universe.

I am enormous, my time span is beyond your comprehension.

The planet (MY planet) doesn't need saving.

Thank you, quite blessedly naive, thank you.

The planet, my magnificent creation, existed and formed and changed over billions of years.

It is not some fragile thing.

It will continue to shift and change and form as it responds (magnificently) to all the things living on it, around it.

It is a giant, magnificent thing that will thrive and adapt long after you are gone; billions of years of change lie ahead for MY magnificent planet.

It will die (by your definition). In due course. It will only exist in my giant universe(s) for a fraction of time, in my grander scheme, but to you that is an incomprehensible billions of years of life ahead of her yet.

My planet is bigger and more magnificent than you can comprehend.

I laugh at you and your placards "Save the planet".

How small,

How insulting to me.

(If I cared about such small things.)

Save yourselves, if you must.

Save your species for a little longer; sure. Be my guest.

Literally.

It seems silly to me, since you are so brief and transient, but I do like you.

It's cute that you want to survive.

You want your children to inherit resources and quality of life. You want to extend the briefness of your species' period on my planet.

I like that about you.

Part of my design obviously.

I'm not kidding; I programmed "survival" instinct into your DNA. It serves my larger design, so I am not laughing AT your desperate attempts to exist eternally on my transient planet.

It's cute.

Keep doing that. (As if you could help it anyway). I insist. I programmed you to have an instinctive, furious need to survive. And I programmed you with emotion too, it's all part of the same survival package. So it is right and inevitable that you try to create a longer existence period for your species on my planet. It's right that you lovingly create a better future for your offspring. It's right (and inevitable) that you have some affection for some other transient species that share your space and (brief) moment in time on my planet.

That's my perfect programming in action, a Darwinian inevitability, and you're welcome.

Keep doing that.

But do forgive me if I laugh at your placards "Save the planet".

My planet has billions of magnificent years left in her, and she'll adapt and survive regardless what you do, without you, for billions more years.

Before dispersing and becoming part of a greater exchange of energy that serves some other purpose.

Bigger than you can imagine.

It's a loving laugh that I laugh, it is full of what you might call affection.

But I am bigger than emotions.

I am universe.

Multiple, infinite.

You should be shaking in my wake, shaking in awe, but you are too busy with your small things.

It's just as I would have it.

But:

Never forget me, my magnificence.

And I'll spare you a passing thought from time to time.

I'm very busy you see.

Chapter 5; HUMANITY

5.4: Inheritance

He was too young to understand what damaged his dad.

All he knew was loved and smacked in the same breath.

Times were tough, poverty was all we knew, and even though we couldn't afford to heat our homes, even though we were living in a famine and starving hungry all the time, there was always plenty of vodka available.

It ran freely like water.

This is Russia, a hundred or more years ago, and I'm cold and hungry and my mum and dad are drunk.

This is a hundred years ago, we don't understand alcohol as you do today.

Vodka kept us warm, it was a staple.

Vodka staved off hunger, vodka kept us warm, vodka kept us numb.

I was loved and smacked in the same breath.

I would come home from school and mum was happy, silly happy.

She loved me and giggled and hugged me as I tried to pull away, because this was a transient mood.

This mood would shift, and then she was angry mum.

Yelling at herself in the kitchen, yelling at imaginary foes in the kitchen, yelling at woes in the kitchen.

If I stayed quiet, it will be less likely she direct her anger at me.

Later it's crying mother. Sobbing.

Wanting to hug me (again) squeeze me as if squeezing me would make the sorrow ebb away.

But it was just sobbing.

Father would arrive home, always jolly on his vodka when he walked through the door.

I hated this jolly.

More fake jolly.

Well, it's real, the jolly, just transient.

Silent bitter drunk father is the one who sits silently ignoring us all night.

Until he falls asleep in the chair.

I'm not describing my understanding of vodka to you.

Though that is whence it came.

I am not explaining my relationship with my parents to you.

Though I was loved and smacked by them in the same breath.

(I loved them. It was just complicated kind of love.)

I am not explaining my relationship to childhood to you, or my relationship to plebiscite Russia.

I am explaining my inheritance.

My inheritance is an ability to love my children in a complicated way.

I'm a creature of modeling; I love as love was demonstrated to me.

I hit my children with love. In the same breath. As it was demonstrated to me, as is my inheritance.

My wife has her inheritance.

I hit her too.

But she makes me do it; I become absent at night with my drink and my despair and my inheritance; I sit in a chair after working hard all day in my new country, with my

new struggles with my new family. With my version of vodka, and I am absent, dulled by my version of vodka, and I need to be because life is hard.

She, my wife, she gets worked up as she tries to engage me, as she tries to wake me from my drunken absence, and she pushes and taunts and nags and as this fails, she makes me hit her.

But this is OK, because she is my wife and my property. She keeps house, she keeps children, she keeps us fed and she keeps things tidy. We don't question this. This is her inheritance, it is organically understood. If she is creative, or ambitious or clever, or stifled, it is irrelevant; we are living our inheritance. She, she has been groomed by generations of people and cultures to keep house this way. She keeps children and kitchen and house, all for her family, for her man. And when her man comes home absent, day after day, decade after decade, she hits him for attention.

I hit her back she makes me. Nobody questions this.

Neither she nor me, question this,

It is our norm, our right.

This is our inheritance.

And our children's.

My son grew up. In the country that became his home, and in the decade that he was adult, there was a different understanding of alcohol, of duty, of responsibility.

The family home had more 'windows' for the world to see in.

His inheritance did not manifest as sullen absences in drunken armchairs.

He found his numbness in other ways.

He had inherited this indifference to the human rights and sensitivities of women; he had inherited an understanding of the place women have, the convenience women can provide for men.

His inheritance was philandering.

His version of the gorgeous escapism to be found in the vodka armchair, was the gorgeous escapism that was found in the embrace of a woman. Of women.

That was his numb. He felt powerful there.

He philandered.

His wife never hit him; the culture of the time did not permit that.

The culture of the time did allow the man to spread his wild oats, it required the woman to tolerate it. And to never do the same.

His sons watched this.

Modeling is everything, and there was another generation coming and another inheritance to be dispensed.

His sons and daughters watched as he philandered, discreetly, but with an entitlement that was culturally accepted.

A wink to the young teenage son as he becomes aware. A knowing wink among men only. A wink that conveys a mutual masculine understanding of what horny means, and what riches of this world the man can take.

Modelling is everything.

Ideals of chastity and obedience and priss innocence is the inheritance for the daughter; no winking, no 'in on the secret' for the daughter.

It's a man's duty to protect his prowess in this world.

The son watches his heroic dad.

His daughter watches her heroic dad, and her ever-forgiving graceful mum. In the kitchen. In this decade they have inherited.

The son and daughter watch the modeling, they take the learning. They grow into their inheritance.

The world changes.

The world gets smaller, information gets bigger.

The daughter allows a flirtatious wink from her (potential) new boss in her first job interview, because that's her inheritance.

A year later when man boss asks flirtatiously for a twirl as she leaves his office, she doesn't twirl, because it's offensive, but she has learned other skills to off-set his inappropriateness. She laughs it off. (She does not confront).

This is the way the world works, and this is her inheritance.

When her husband philanders for the 5th time, she divorces him. She is alone, caring for children, exhausted and unlikely to date with her huge responsibilities as a single mum and house to keep, and job to do.

Ex-husband will thrive, because that's his inheritance.

Her children, her children of divorce will watch how love and parenthood is modeled for them. They will observe norms, they will observe consequences.

They will grow, they will need to numb and to escape. They will need to feel powerful.

They will need to survive, to love, to keep house; they will need an armchair to become absent in, they will need strategies to win attention from partners who are absent after a long day at work, in a difficult decade.

They will have to reconcile their learning, their needs, with their inheritance, and with their culture. They'll need to reconcile all this with the culture and norms and the decade they've inherited.

This is your inheritance.

This is yours, you're stuck with a lot of it.

You have drugs to escape with, sex to enjoy.

Sex to numb with, drugs to be absent with.

Lovers to be cruel to, to reject to block, to swipe.

You have technology to find these pleasures faster.

You have Queer culture to be different in, to balk at the norms you've inherited.

You have religions to help you change, you have religions to help you hate.

You have your inheritance, and it is mighty.

You have so much history, generations of it.

You can pass it on; it is your right, it is your inevitability.

It is your opportunity.

Be brilliant, be different.

End cycles of abuse, of absence.

End hitting, end escapism that pains others.

Be present not absent.

Be tolerant and kind when your loved ones are absent, and forgive yourself if you need to be absent for a period.

But come back.

Take your history, take your inheritance, and be brilliant.

People are watching you; your children are watching you, and they'll inherit.

The future, generations of future, are within your power to steer.

End violence. End racism, end unkindness.

End cycles of abuse, end misogyny.

Love diversity, celebrate in it, and let others see you do it.

Love your home, your elderly, love your planet.

Love your body.

Let that be their legacy; the way you behave.

It's not fair what happened to you.

You've been selfish and unkind and cruel and absent.

That's Ok; you inherited a lot of that.

Be kind to yourself as you reflect on this.

But change.

Be different.

Be kinder.

The future of people and planet is not some unknown destiny.

You create it.

Your behaviour today, is tomorrow's inheritance.

I am a child, a babe.

Born today, innocent.

A wealth of history I have inherited. I can't change that. You can't change that.

You may not know my future; but it is not unwritten

You are writing it. Now. With every deed you do, every kindness you show.

You are defining my future.

So do it right.

That; that will be my inheritance.

Chapter 5; HUMANITY

5.5 (final): The Invisible Boy with the Loud Exhaust.

I knew a boy.

He was invisible.

Really. It was a special skill he had, and he was really good at it.

He'd honed this skill for many years. He was a real expert, so good at it. His invisibility.

You wouldn't know he was there.

It was like he wasn't there.

The real him, underneath the invisibility, was a brilliant, dynamic boy.

SO opinionated; his opinions changed all the time, because he was always exploring and musing and always determined to get to the truth of matters, so his opinions changed all the time, but he shared all those changing opinions.

Flagrantly.

He needed to communicate them, it helped him to take those opinions apart, then to reconstruct them even better.

Then communicate them again. To everyone and anyone who would listen and engage.

He was uniquely individual; he relished in being different, in being contrary, in grabbing your attention. In loads of ways, it was an instinct with him, an artistic instinct he had to harness your attention. He was animated in his passionate conversations, flamboyant and brilliantly expressive.

And clever; gosh. He was clever.

He could cut through nonsense with his clever perceptions, he could cut through silliness with some incisive truths; he was the original boy from the Emperor's New Clothes. He'd call you on your nonsense, and bullshit just didn't wash when he was around to blast it.

With his cleverness.

And so charismatic, so colorful; he was unmissable, he was the centre of attention, he was the opposite of invisible; he shined. Everyone saw, it was even unsettling for some.

Actually for many.

Many found it quite unsettling.

This is where he learned to be invisible.

Some people around him, responsible for him, didn't like his shine.

They didn't like it because it stole attention away from other things, other matters.

They didn't like it because sometimes the flamboyance embarrassed them, sometimes the incisive truths were too incisive, too true. Sometimes people needed the bullshit to feel safe and dull, and so sometimes his bullshit filter was unwelcome.

Angrily so sometimes.

Before long he was being punished and shamed for the very brightness that made him brilliant.

He learned to act less flamboyant, to talk less, to tone down his truths, to quiet his opinions, his fabulous opinions.

To hide.

He became meek and exploitable. Vulnerable.

Not like him.

This was the start of his invisibility, but in his teens he honed it further.

Because some complicated stuff happened. They call it abuse, or trauma. It doesn't matter what.

But you know. You've been there too.

It was during this unbearable thing, that he learned to become smaller.

So small he almost wasn't there.

The bad thing, it wasn't happening to him. Because he wasn't there, he was too small, too transparent, he was like a shadow. Not himself at all.

He was light, like a snowflake. Like a snowflake just as it melts, becomes nothing.

He was like that, a disappearing nothing while the bad stuff happened.

Safe, invisible.

He kept his invisibility skill, it stayed as he became an adult, found his way in the world.

He'd thought his brilliant shiny self might emerge when he got older, found his community, found others like him.

Because they were like him; he could tell; even though they all had invisibility too, he could recognize them.

But it wasn't nice.

There was more rejection, and more shaming.

Not intentional, not cruelty, just... coping. Lots of invisible people coping.

Loneliness, and sex, and performances in bed and performances in bars and groups, and expectations and that cruelty. Those Apps. That online stuff.

Rejection and potential rejection everywhere.

It's exhausting being invisible.

Seriously; it requires huge watts of energy, huge amounts, to generate the invisibility.

There's a by-product. An exhaust that's produced from all the invisibility.

Even though you can't see a person who is invisible... you know they are there because of the exhaust, the noise.

It's kind of like when giant speakers reverberate and explode.

It's kind of like fireworks; but not the fun kind. Like when they are too close and too many.

It's like the noise of the tv when it isn't tuned in to anything; but really really loud.

It's like the noise of a razor blade when it gently cuts the skin on your forearm. (if you listen closely, you can hear that; it's really loud.)

Or the noise of a chemsex party that just drowns out everything else.

That loudness that comes from a drug high, that just isn't high enough.

The noise of a flame under a meth pipe.

Or that Grindr notification sound.

That's the kind of noise generated when you try so hard to keep the invisibility up.

Because invisibility is brilliantly effective, but it is noisy.

Because underneath the invisibility, there is brilliance trying to be contained.

And brilliance can't be contained, or quashed, or silenced. Not without a lot of noise anyway.

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My friend, this amazing invisible boy I knew...

He made so much noise trying to be invisible, of course I heard him. We all did.

We do.

It's especially loud when it's coming en masse from so, so many, so so close.

But we're listening. We can't see you, your invisibility is too good, but we hear you, because we're listening.

We are your community; we hear you.

And your brilliance, your shine, your fabulousness... they are welcome here. Those things that were shut down, squashed, hushed... are so welcome here. More than welcome; they'll be celebrated. We might have to work on it, but they'll be celebrated, and your shine will be welcome here.

I promise.

I promise loudly.

I hope you can hear it, above all the noise.

But I'm here, we're here, loving you.

Noisily. We recognize you.

Your invisibility is good, it's great.

It's working. You're safe.

Come home now.

Come home and shine.



A Loud Exhaust

A NOVEL BY DAVID STUART

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