

I

‘I should get going,’ Patrick says. I’m hardly going to argue.

I pull my red hoody on. Zip it up. Cross my arms to form a barrier.

Patrick is adjusting his clothing too. We are both looking everywhere but at each other. To be honest I can’t get him out of the flat fast enough. He’s fumbling about with his shoes and I have to stop myself from leaning over and helping him tie his laces. Keeping my distance is probably a good idea at this point.

‘Michelle . . .’ He stops himself, but the word hangs there like a flag fluttering in the breeze.

‘Of course.’

I should explain. Michelle is my best friend. Has been for twenty-odd years. More even. Twenty-five. Patrick is her husband.

And what just happened was a terrible mistake.

For the sake of my own sanity I have decided I am going to make a Bill Clinton-esque distinction. ‘I did not have sex with that man.’ Yes, there were tongues and hands and heavy breathing involved. Clothing rearranged. Sound effects worthy of a cheap porno. OK, so I had sex with him. But, thankfully we stopped short. Came to our senses before we – technically – went all the way. It’s not much of a consolation, but at the moment it’s all I’ve got.

Pretty much the worst thing I could ever do, I think you'll agree.

But it's not how it sounds. Actually, if you look at the bare facts I suppose it is. Strictly speaking it happened. It's just that it wasn't meant to. I didn't set out to do it and, I'm fairly certain, neither did he. There was no big seduction, no making eyes across their distressed oak kitchen table the last time I spent the evening round at theirs and Michelle turned away to pour us both another glass of wine.

It's not like I've ever even thought about it. Never had a guilty fantasy that left me unable to look Michelle in the eye the next day. Not since before they met anyway. It simply didn't occur to me to view Patrick in that way. He was – is – my best friend's husband, end of story. And yet here we are, at a quarter past seven on a mundane work-day Tuesday evening, entwined on my cream sofa with bits of my clothing where they shouldn't be, and I'm trying to make sense of what just occurred. But my mind is fogged by the wine I've drunk and the enormity of what just happened.

'Shit,' I say.

'I know,' Patrick mutters. Who says the art of conversation is dead?

I feel as if I should say something profound, but I can't find the words that would be adequate for the momentousness of the occasion. I want to tell him this isn't like me, I'm not the kind of person who would ever do what we have just done, but apparently that's exactly who I am now. I'm that woman. So I keep quiet. Wait. Maybe he can make some sense of it.

On the scale of how meaningful things are, this rates higher than the day I set up my own production company. Or when I first got Ron, my rescue fox terrier/Jack Russell/something-hairy cross (who I now notice is sitting in a corner of the room staring at me judgementally, his big sad eyes letting me know that I've let him down in a hundred more ways than even I can imagine). Or the time one of the shows my company makes got nominated for an award. OK, so it was for Best Sound Editing, which is hardly prestigious, and the awards were the Television Technical Awards, which no one has ever heard of, and in the end it didn't even win, but still, that was a good day in the office.

Today will not go down in history as such a good day.

I feel the need to explain myself. To go back to the beginning and try to put into words how I ended up here. I know I started out with good intentions – which is the story of my life, by the way. I meant well. Michelle needed my help and I have never not been there to help her. At least I thought she needed my help. Maybe that was my first mistake. Lesson One: leave well alone. You really don't need to interfere, to take over and try to sort out someone else's life for them.

But that's the way it's always been. I'm the decisive one, the doer. Michelle is more easy-going. She's happy for me to take charge.

I'm completely aware that my need to create order in other people's lives is some kind of diversion from the fact that my own personal life is chaotic, to say the least. It's the waving handkerchief that's meant to ensure you

don't notice the magician is palming your card. I've left a string of disastrous relationships in my wake. Sometimes it's me, sometimes it's them. Actually, technically, it's always me because I could avoid the bad ones if I wanted to, but convincing me of the merits of that would be like trying to persuade a heroin addict that he would be better off having a nice cup of tea.

Nothing I have ever done comes close to this though. I've never been a husband-stealer. Not my worst enemy's, let alone my best friend's.

'You won't tell her, will you?' I turn back to Patrick who half raises an eyebrow at me.

'No. Of course not,' he says and I breathe a small sigh of relief, although I didn't really think he was going to suggest Face Timing her right now and staging a re-enactment.

Anyway, back to my attempt to justify the unjustifiable. Here goes.

Give me a chance.

At least hear me out.