



DO YOU TAKE THIS MAN?

By Sarah Quick



In the blackout a news announcement is heard on the radio (football, weather etc) as the intro to Boomtown Rats 'I don't Like Mondays' plays under it.

Lights up as lyrics start. We see Murray and Joanna in various stages of undress 'getting ready' in separate playing areas. Her bedroom, his bedroom. Minimal furniture.

She picks up her phone to look at it. Puts it down.

He picks up the phone to make a call. Bottles it.

She picks up her phone and flicks through it. Her emotions are all over the place. She puts down the phone and leaves.

He takes a deep breath and picks up the phone to make the call. Turns down the music in his area.

Her phone rings, she is not there to answer it. It buzzes on the table.

He is relieved, he braces himself and leaves a message. As lights fade on her side and music goes out.

MURRAY *(in to phone)* Hi Joanna, Jo. Hi erm, yeah. *(pause)* Big day! *(beat)* But you know that. Better than anyone. So *(searching hopelessly for the right words)* erm, just wanted to er, to er, touch base. You know, before the er, before the er, *church*. And er, and er...say what? Right, exactly...what is there to say? Except that...I'm here. You know, anything you need...because I erm, I am...the best mate...you know, David's best. Best man, best mate, best...you know *(beat)* person. *(Idiot!)* Sorry...just. I'm er...here...if you want to...*(gives up)* yeah. Bye.
(To himself) Muppet. Best person?! Best bloody idiot. *(to audience)* Best bloody person to mess up today's best made plans.

Music resumes as lights fade down on him and up on Joanna's side. We hear the sound of something being dropped or a toe being stubbed etc

JOANNA Shit! Bollocks

She enters and turns off the radio.

She addresses the audience. Throughout the play the characters are telling their story to the audience. Sometimes alone, sometimes together but always to the audience.

I like Mondays.

Always have. They're like a fresh start, the first page of a new chapter.

That's why we organized it for a Monday.

"But Saturday's traditional" everyone kept saying, "people can travel up on a Friday and no-one has to miss work".

Except people that work on a Saturday, I couldn't resist pointing out. Besides, if people want to be there they'll come whatever day.

We both decided. Monday.

Uncle Frank wasn't too happy. For a change. "I'm going to have to reschedule my departmental briefing" he says "The culmination of a very important fact-finding experiment. I have to be at the helm or it'll be the Norwich air vent fiasco all over again".

I didn't worry. Frank loves things to be difficult. If it'd have been on a Saturday he'd only have had to cancel some important golf do or miss out on the annual North East bloody round-table ramble.

We had talked about not inviting him but I thought that was a bit harsh. And a damn sight more trouble than it's worth.

That's the trouble with these things. People. I mean, really it should be the people that you love and who love you. But mention a hot buffet and they're on their way from all over. Monday or not.

Everything's organized. Well we've been planning it for months. Right down to the last detail. There's so much to think about. And yet, really, all I can think about is David. Which is how it should be I suppose.

She looks at her phone again. Smiles. She sees the missed call and phones the voice mail. Lights down on her and up on Murray.

MURRAY Whoever organized it for a Monday should have been shot. And I'll bet you a pound to a penny is wasn't David. Monday's lad's night you see. Well, one of them. We play a league match for the pub side and then carefully dissect the game from start to

finish over a few libations at a number of welcoming hostelrys. That's Monday. That's what David should be doing today. Not this.

But, Joanna is a force to be reckoned with. Monday it is. And everyone likes her, all the lads. And David, well...he's always been there for all of us. The best mate anyone could wish for – we'll see him proud today.

We're gonna have a kick about before the er, before the church. But I've promised Jo no drinking until after the ceremony. And she knows she can trust me. I've known her since before the two of them got together.

JOANNA Murray. He's...well, Murray was the reason I met David. Ironically.

MURRAY I met her at a dinner party.

JOANNA Murray was my blind date at a dinner party where we were the token singles in a sea of happily entwined couples.

MURRAY It's a good job I didn't have my charm turned up full that night or things could have been very different!

JOANNA Louise invited me. She used to be in the next cubicle to me at work. And had been my pulling partner for the best part of two years. Until she met Luke and exchanged pints for white wine spritzers.

MURRAY A lad from work invited me – said him and his girlfriend had taken to having dinner parties.

JOANNA and having dinner parties – on a Saturday night.

MURRAY Proper ones!

JOANNA Not a six pack and a takeaway.

MURRAY Starters

JOANNA Main Course

MURRAY Dessert

JOANNA And Marks and Spencers' nibbles

MURRAY I hate all that. Having to speak to people you have nothing in common with. Feigning an interest in computer technology with a software specialist.

JOANNA I hate computers. I think I should have been born in the pre-chip era. Micro, obviously, not fried. Anyway, Luke had invited Murray as his 'project to be saved from a life of singledom' and Murray it turned out was David's best mate. Of course I didn't know that at the time. I just thought of him as a great big lump with an obsession for football and questionable table manners.

MURRAY Oh, yeah, she definitely fancied me. But I don't like those situations. You know, being fixed up. I find myself on the defensive. I mean if I'm out and about and a lady is attracted, enticed if you will, by my good looks and natural Northern charm then hey! I can take it or leave it. Same way, if I'm on the pull, sharking, ready with the old 'kedagadang' *then* I'm offensive...as in, not defensive. I'm ready. Poised for action. But not at a dinner party with everyone discussing tofu and Rachmaninov...which, in my defense, did sound similar to the two strikers Arsenal had just signed.

JOANNA Last time I was invited to one of her 'dos' there was an unfortunate incident when I became unwittingly embroiled in a debate over the superiority of wind power as opposed to nuclear with an environmentalist.

MURRAY Environmentalists. You know the type. Harps on about everyone should stop polluting the atmosphere whilst she chain-smokes herbal cigarettes.

JOANNA Marlboro I wouldn't have minded but those herbal ones smell like burning knickers.

MURRAY 'How do you get to work' Joanna asks

JOANNA ‘Sorry?’ she says. I say ‘do you walk, cycle or favour the train?’

MURRAY There’s an uncomfortable silence.

JOANNA Everybody stops their conversations. And big gob Murray at the other end of the table says, almost gleefully,

MURRAY ‘Actually, Sonia has a jaguar.’

JOANNA I realized then he was the sort of bloke that only watched sport to see people fall over.

MURRAY ‘Well’

JOANNA Sonia says, turning the colour of her love beads

MURRAY ‘the office is miles away and the state of the trains these days...

JOANNA better to arrive alive (nervous laugh)’.

MURRAY/ JOANNA Matter of opinion.

MURRAY ‘But’ she says

JOANNA ‘I think we’re all rather missing the big picture. It’s the government who should be leading by example.

MURRAY ‘There is no need for nuclear power when *wind* can do the job just as well’.

JOANNA And wind’ she says ‘is something we have rather a lot of in this country.’

MURRAY I said ‘Yes. Having sat down-wind from your husband all night I can vouch for you on that one.’
I was never invited back. Luke said they were going to “stick to couples” in the future.

JOANNA Which left me at home on a Saturday night with a family sized bag of crisps and a bottle of California's cheapest, addicted to 'Barely Anyone's got Talent' and the X-factor.

MURRAY Couples. Not for me that. I'm a lone wolf. I mean, I get it – for other people. I can see why they do it, the 'couples' thing. I can see why David would want to settle down, with Jo. They made each other laugh, right from the start. And I definitely want that...would want it, you know, if I was thinking about settling down. But not me nooo. They say marriage 'completes' you – which I suppose is the same as saying 'you're finished'. David said I should bring a plus one today. He was adamant but I said no...didn't think Jo would appreciate some random bird there, not today. Anyway I've got enough to concentrate on with the flowers and the cars and that...a right bloody long list to get cracking on with.

JOANNA Anyway Louise spends all of each working day trumpeting the joys of coupledness and saying 'Joanne honest, you should try it' what's that' I say 'A relationship'. Louise' I said' I have a relationship'. 'Oh really, who with?' 'With the pizza delivery boy. It's not sexual yet but last week he didn't charge me for my extra cheese.

She said 'Jo he's twelve!' I said 'He's a mature 21 and besides he's the only bloke I have any contact with. Unless, you want me to begin a meaningful relationship with Old Mr. Gordon who, by the way, I think might be interested judging by the closeness of proximity everytime we're in the lift together...'

'Well we'll go out' Louise says 'Luke is seeing some clients so I am free to find you a man!'

It meant missing a Corrie double bill but I thought 'well, that's why God invented the PVR... And I've never been one to turn down the excuse to get rat-arsed!'

I can't quite believe I'm sitting here actually. Doesn't seem real somehow. The last few years have flown by. I can remember the day we met as if it were yesterday. And yet everything before I met him seems like a blur. Four and a half years ago it was. On a Monday.

MURRAY I remember the night they met as clear as day. Out with the lads – pub league match straight after work and then off to the Ox and Partridge for some post-game shandies. The sun’s cracking the pavement so the tops are off and we’re cooling down by jumping into the locks...impressing the ladies. Not a care in the world did we have then. Not a care in the world. Beer, birds and best mates...I wish it had never had to change.

JOANNA We, Louise and I, pub-crawled along the canal. It was the first really nice evening of summer and in true English style, everyone had gone to the pub to celebrate. All of the blokes had their t-shirts off, except for a few who were sensible enough to realize that white, slightly goose-pimpled flesh and beer bellies are not summers’ most attractive look. We were sat on the patio enjoying the cocktails that Louise assured me would make us feel like we were in Ibiza “We’ll have a slow comfortable screw and a screaming orgasm” Louise had simpered to the waiter “If you can manage both at the same time! Oh and could I swap my cherry for a pineapple chunk?” Pure class is our Louise.

I spotted one bloke, in a man-u top watching his friends jump off the locks and obviously not feeling the need to join in with their potentially suicidal pastime. I recognized one of the kamikaze fools as Murray, from the dinner party, and thought maybe it would be worth saying hello again so he could introduce me to his gorgeous friend. I was just admiring the way his hair curled up where it had got too long and the muscles in his arms where his football shirt ended, when he looked up and caught me staring. He smiled, a huge smile that made his entire face break into lines, and then he winked. I smiled back and then looked away still grinning stupidly. “What’s so funny”? Louise says turning to look over her shoulder. “Phwooorrr, Bloody hell! He’s well fit. And he’s totally looking over here! Hang on a mo!” And before I have a chance to stop her she leaps up and races over to him. They talked for a few seconds and then they were both walking over to me. “Hi!” “Jo, this is David, David Joanne. Right well I’d best be off, have fun...” and with a huge thumbs up and a rather obscene thrust of the hips she was gone...

DAVID Can I join you? Or should I go back over there and throw myself in?

JOANNA Oh god no! I wouldn't want to be responsible for the death of someone as handsome as yourself.
The cocktails were beginning to take effect.
He pulled up a chair, so close that his muscular, if slightly bandy, legs were pressed closely alongside mine. We chatted about football, families and jobs, obviously in the order of his priorities. He told me he was a banker type person.

DAVID Don't hold it against me. It's a good job. In that it pays the bills and allows me Wednesday afternoons off to travel to away matches.

JOANNA He'd been to every world cup since he was 11, was beside himself at the prospect of following 'the lads' to South Africa in a matter of weeks and wanted to know if I'd be up for a trip to see the boys in action in Brazil, in 2014.

DAVID Do you mind if I smoke?

JOANNA I may have looked a tad reluctant (a look I have been trying to rid myself of ever since becoming a non-smoker and not ever wanting sanctimonious but before the term) 'No, No, go ahead, god I used to be on a pack a day! I just couldn't stand the thought of, you know...'

DAVID Oh bloody hell, I know! ...Do you fancy a bag of chips?'

JOANNA That was always our favourite meal out. Chips, curry sauce and a battered sausage.
Later, as we staggered out of the chip shop he said,

DAVID So what you're saying is that if I don't quit you won't marry me?

JOANNA You what?

DAVID You won't marry me if I don't quit?

JOANNA “No” I said “Absolutely not”. He grinned, crushed his packet of Marlborough light and he quit that night.

He was a right charmer that night. Always seemed to know how to express himself. But not for one second then did I think I’d be sat here now.

And, sometimes, when I sit here and I think that I’ve made the wrong decision...that perhaps I shouldn’t be here. I remember the words he used to convince me. The most sincere, heartfelt words I’ve ever heard. “Do it, for me. I love you so much. If you love me, make me happy, make yourself happy. I promise I will always look after you. Say you will.”

And that was the one thing I knew for sure. I’d known it since that first day we met.

“He talked about marriage!” Louise squealed at me the next day promptly jamming the photocopier, “How exciting!” “Oh God no” I said, “I don’t want to get married yet...well, not this year!

MURRAY I just assumed he was having a summer fling! A bit of ‘how’s your father’ to break up the monotony of endless cricket matches before the football started up again. On no. I knew it was serious when he told me he was going to her grandmother’s 80th birthday on September 19th.

DAVID “September 19th?” He said “September 19th? But-

MURRAY -We’re at home to the scousers on the 19th!

DAVID Liverpool at home.

MURRAY The highlight of every season!

DAVID Someone once said “Football is life, the rest is just a game” And it’s easy to get swept up in that sentiment, that passion. And then something happens that changes the rules. (*pause*) Not that I wouldn’t have loved to have been at that game. 3 – 2 Utd.

MURRAY 3 – 2 Utd – a Berbatov hatrick. The first hatrick against Liverpool since 1946 and he missed it coz he’s all loved up.

(shakes head) I said to him, I said “She has got you by the Jackson’s mate”

DAVID The Jackson Pollocks

MURRAY Bollocks.

DAVID Balls. It’s funny isn’t it – you don’t know how much they mean to you until you put them in somebody else’s hands.

MURRAY Between football and my family jewels my life is pretty much dictated to by spherical objects. Well spherical-ish. Like walnuts.

DAVID Nuts.

MURRAY Gonads.

DAVID Tackle.

MURRAY Love Spuds.

DAVID Plums.

MURRAY Goolies.

DAVID Goolies? I was always told by my granny not to “get scared by the ghosties and grabbed by the ghoulies” In hindsight a very salient life lesson.

MURRAY Testicles.

DAVID From the Latin ‘testiculous’

MURRAY Diminutive of ‘testis’

DAVID Meaning ‘witness’. To ‘testify’ one must ‘bear witness’.

MURRAY In the olden days, when swearing to something, you held your balls or the balls of the person to whom you were testifying!

DAVID You can *protest*

MURRAY I would have mate, believe me!

DAVID You can *protest*

MURRAY Oh! Bear witness *for*

DAVID *Detest*

MURRAY Bear witness *against*

DAVID And *contest*

MURRAY Bear witness *competitively*...there's a bloke on our team that we call Jonny big-bollocks.

DAVID The testicles are there to testify to a man's virility.

MURRAY I don't even know his real name. He strips stark bollock naked at every social function and then fills a pint glass by dropping them into it.

DAVID To testify to a man's ... manhood. To testify to his existence.

(beat)

MURRAY I like Bollocks. I mean, I don't like-...let me clarify, as a word, I like 'bollocks'. It has so many meanings.

DAVID A variety of inference.

MURRAY Ohhhh Booollocccccks

DAVID (*translating*) Oh no

MURRAY "Oi, four-eyes, that was never offside – what a load of bollocks"

DAVID *(translates)* “I disagree with your decision Mr. bespectacled referee, sir”

MURRAY It can end a discussion when debating a topic is no longer preferable.

DAVID *(as annoying woman)* “I believe that football garners far too much media coverage and has a detrimental effect on society as a whole”

MURRAY Bollocks.

DAVID In Ireland it’s a term of endearment.

MURRAY “How are yer, yer big bollix?”

DAVID Here, if something’s good it’s the dog’s bollocks.

MURRAY The mutt’s nuts.

DAVID And conversely it can be used to show complete contempt of a situation.

MURRAY It’s bollocks mate.

DAVID It’s utter –

TOGETHER -Utter bollocks.

Lights down on Murray

DAVID I remember when Mackers came with me to pick out the buttonholes for the wedding. Orchids Joanna wanted. The florist was a rather flamboyant chap “Oh orchids! Fabulous, fabulous! Did you know, gentlemen, that Orchid comes from the Greek word Orchis meaning testicle”
Well Mackers drops the thing like its scorching hot, looks around in a panic and says “Have you got any daffodils?”
He says to me later “I love you man but I am not wearing a bollock on my blazer”

Course daffs aren't in season now. So we went for orchids for today. Just simple we went with. I told Joanna to let him know he didn't have to wear one!

JOANNA I'd never really thought about marriage. Too busy having a good time. A string of unsuitable suitors. I was a bridesmaid once, well twice actually. Once when I was four and then again, a couple of years ago, for my best friend. I cried all day, so much so that the vicar had to pause just before the "do you take this man part" and shush me. That was when I was four. Last year wasn't much better. There were two of us, rosemary, 7ft tall and a shapely size eight, with legs that Naomi Campbell would have envied...and me! It was never going to be the greatest of experiences. I was squeezed into my dress by the mother of the bride, the lady that had come to do the flowers and a passing usher who clearly felt that nowhere in his list of responsibilities had it mentioned a job that was about as successful as trying to pour a pint of beer into a wine glass. The flower lady then had to hastily restructure the bouquets so that I could use mine to disguise the spillage. And I received strict instructions from the bride's mother to forget tradition and hold mine here at all times. I understood the delicacy of the situation as my soon-to-be-married friend had spent the previous night, gulping crème de menthe and bemoaning her erm, lack of assets, as future husband had admitted, like a fool, to spending his last week as a free man in Amsterdam and becoming a regular fixture at (big and bouncy). I learned from the usher that another reluctantly carried out responsibility had been to sit with the remorseful stag as he spent his last night of singledom, or so he hoped in (the gu clinic) praying that the itch he should have been feeling 7 years after the marriage and not seven hours before was an unfortunate coincidence.

MURRAY I remember when David asked me to be his Best Man. I was so proud. I told him that I loved him and I'd do anything for him. I would have. I was well chuffed for him, for them. Marriage just isn't for me. Seems a bit unfair on the rest of the female population to you know, shackle this to one lucky girl.

... it's a helluva commitment. Settling for one partner for the rest of your life! When I went to write my speech you know, being Best Man and all, I wanted to do a bit of research. You know, I wanted to talk about marriage as a wonderful institution...not just focus on the embarrassing stories. Well, I went to Wikipedia, I looked up marriage and, I kid you not, it said "this page has issues". I thought "You are not bloody wrong mate, you are not bloody wrong." But, I suppose, you meet someone like Joanna and it suddenly makes sense. Lovely girl that makes you laugh, do anything for you...and sexy and all – well, what's not to love?!

They were always so right for each other. Right from the start. Not only could she name both goal scorers that won us the treble in Barcelona but she could spell Ole Gunnar Solskjaer. I said to Dave "You don't let go of a woman like that". (*deep thoughts*) Life takes funny turns. It's not always on your side, is it? Still, better to have loved and lost and all that. Unless you're 4 – 1 down at Ipswich...

JOANNA Choosing my dress for today was a bloody nightmare. And it was entirely up to me. Well, David made a few suggestions, which I encouraged. Well, I'm supposed to be making him proud aren't I?

Unfortunately he wanted a style reminiscent of the sundress I wore on our first holiday together. A floaty, low cut sleeveless number, which was gorgeous 28 pounds ago. Bless him; he hadn't noticed the love handles turning into armrests. And when I mentioned my yearly inflation he just said he was happy, coz there was more of me to love. The last few weeks haven't helped. I've heard most people lose weight but looks like I'm the exception to the rule.

And everyone's going to be looking at me, of course. I found a divine little number in a boutique near here. You know the 'if you wear that your prince will definitely come' type of get up. In the end I settled on something more demure.

DAVID I wanted to help with the planning as much as possible. I did! I know some people stick their head in the sand and think 'it'll happen regardless' but not me. I knew that I wanted as much stuff as possible taken care of before the day itself. And the

decisions were easy for me, which is weird because I'm usually crap at choosing things. I remember wanting to buy a gift for Joanna...fairly early on, wanting to buy her perfume but without a clue of how to choose one. I spent hours sniffing women's magazines – people probably thought I was a pervert. They all smelt good in there, in the magazine, but then I'd go into Selfridges and get a little sample and I didn't like them at all! I think I just liked the smell of glossy paper...or glue?! But because these decisions I was making for today were big ones, because they were important I guess, I found it easy. I found a clarity of vision. Readings? No problem. Flowers? Done. What to wear? Sorted. Car? Ha! An Escort XR3 i. Red of course. The first car I ever owned. The car that signaled my journey into adulthood. Freedom. The car that led me into a world of adventures. Not the traditional vehicle one might choose but 'fitting' as Jo said. The car should be *my* choice. The car should be the right car to lead me into my next great adventure. Not sure she'd have been quite so amenable if she knew some of the early adventures took me no further than the back seat.

JOANNA Everything's organized. I guess you could say I'm lucky. He wanted to help me plan the whole thing. Most people don't get that do they? Have to do the whole bloody thing on their own...I couldn't think of anything more bloody horrendous. But David wanted to make sure it was what we both wanted. He was very keen.

With his dress choice vetoed David settled for choosing my underwear. Said it would make him happy to know what I was wearing even if he couldn't see it. I was worried he might opt for something entirely inappropriate that would spend the entire day creeping its way into crevices uncharted by mankind. But we settled on a nice set from marks'. The first one I've ever come across. It's quite difficult to match knickers with scaffolding structure. Of course anyone who wanted to see the pretty knickers would need to crow bar my tummy tuckers off first. What a fantastic invention! Of course they should come with a government health warning. "Please ensure the removal of this garment prior to passing out after consumption of alcohol or circulation to the legs is likely to be impeded." I've

learnt that from experience. And they're expensive to. Especially in my, erm, younger days. I used to wear them on a night out and end up abandoning them in the nearest loo in case whoever my intended was on that particular evening should not be quite as big a fan of them as myself. I went through dozens.

David says I won't have to worry about money from now on. Which is always nice but not exactly the first thing on my mind. We were both skint when we first met. Lots of walks and picnics in the park, and sex, of course! In every inconceivable position.

DAVID Of course, with the finances comes all the bloody paperwork. I spent the last few weeks filling in form after form. Her dad helped. He's a "dab-hand when it comes to all things financial" but he's also a right scary bastard. Ex-headmaster. Very proud of the fact that there were no incidences of bullying in his school unless he was directly involved! Still, at least he found some way of being helpful...I think it was important for Jo to have them involved.

I sorted out all the bills for today. So the caterers have already been paid and the church and everything's sorted. We put together the traditional announcement for the newspaper. Keep the local gossips fully up to date! We chose the wording together and I picked out a photo. A very casual one. Relaxed, joking, probably inebriated. At a party, my sister's 30th I think.

MURRAY Invites, flowers, travelling arrangements, music. (*reads*) "Pick up flowers at 11.30" (*looks at watch*) Shit! "1 bouquet of bollocks...don't worry, you're not wearing them!" (*laughs, then catches himself*)
So much to do – such a big responsibility - I can't let him down, not today. It'll have taken them ages to plan it all. David was always crap at making decisions. Had me choose a perfume for Joanna's (*thinks*) birthday, I think. I was on a booze cruise across to Dublin so I picked some up for him in Duty Free. I didn't know which one to go for – most of the birds I pull on a Saturday night have a faint whiff of kebab and cider. I'm not

saying that's a bad thing! Just chose the one that made me feel happy - I did alright, she still wears it.

DAVID Invites, flowers, travelling arrangements, music.
One of the hardest things was figuring out who to have come. I mean it's a personal day, there's the people that you love and who love you, the 'no-brainers' as it were – which sounds like an awful insult when you put it at the top of a list.
Then there's others who you don't want to assume give a crap about stuff like this but on the other hand could be mortally offended if they're not informed.
And then there's those who just want a nosey and some free grub – whom I was less inclined to have there but who are rather tricky to say no to.
And then there's the dilemma of how to invite people.
Apparently, according to Jo's mum, a mass posting on facebook is not the 'done thing'.

JOANNA David's sister is supposed to be coming to pick me up. Milly. We've become really good friends. Reminds me of myself before I met David. Always got a bloke, never anything serious, just using them for what she can. She's seeing this fella at the moment. Right slimy bastard but he owns a beauty Salon so she doesn't want to finish with him until she's finished her free course of sunbed treatments. She says to me the other day "Jesus, Joanne, he's always bloody asking me where I'm off and demanding to know if there's someone else. I told him, of course there's bleeding not, do you think I'd be going with a dickhead like you if there was!?" She offered to have me booked in for today for an all over pamper, feet, nails hair, the works. I told her I didn't really have the time, which is true, but really I didn't want anyone in there messing with my hair or I'd end up looking like I'd stepped straight out of the 80's. My hair is the bane of my life. I'm the only one who can get it even slightly under control. And I'd never had a gray hair until a few weeks ago. Now I've got dozens. A bubble bath and a squirt of perfume'll do me. David bought me this for my first anniversary. I wasn't sure about it at first it had a sort of Middle

Eastern aroma underscored with the scent of apples but it made me feel exotic and it reminds me of him. (*looks at phone again*)

Of course everyone wanted to know if I wanted help getting ready. “You can’t do it all yourself, what if you start panicking, or you need someone to talk to?” Well, I’ve been panicking all bloody week! And if I need someone to talk to...I talk to David. And he promises me it’s all going to be fine.

I mean, Lucy’s idea of a comforting chat is regaling me with tales of her disastrous relationships. And there’s been a fair few I can tell you. We call her the volcano. As hot as Vesuvius and definitely about to blow.

And then there’s Nicola who is convinced that any situation can be overcome by positive thinking and healthy eating. “It’s never too late to start treating your body like a temple”. “You What”? Louise says “You mean getting men to take their shoes off before they walk all over you?”

She has been somewhat preoccupied by the breakup of her seemingly perfect relationship. Turns out Luke wasn’t so much seeing clients as being one!

No, I decided I wanted to get ready by myself. Give myself some thinking time. Give myself time to run away and never go out in public again. Maybe.

Oh God, I don’t know why I’m so scared. We talked about all of this.

I told him I wasn’t sure I could do it, when push came to shove. But I’ve never heard him more adamant about anything in his life. He was so positive, so determined. It must be awful when they’re not.

And he’s going to be there, he promised. But it’s a big day, isn’t it?

The trick is not to think too much. If I start thinking about it I know I won’t be able to go through with it. Keeping busy, that’s the key. Invites, flowers, traveling arrangements, music.

DAVID Invites

MURRAY Flowers,

JOANNA Travelling arrangements –

DAVID/JOANNA/MURRAY music.

JOANNA We decided we didn't want anything too sappy.

DAVID No point in having everyone bawling before the ceremony's even started.

MURRAY Nothing more off putting than the sound of sinuses unblocking.

DAVID Everyone seems to have their own opinion about the 'perfect' song.

JOANNA There were suggestions along the lines of your traditional Whitney/Celine numbers

MURRAY 'Anything by Clapton'

DAVID And even one request for the Golden girls theme tune.

MURRAY That was from his Auntie Mollie.

JOANNA We concluded that any choice would be satisfactory so long as it kept her in her seat.

DAVID She has a penchant for dancing.

MURRAY Lap dancing mainly.

DAVID Unfortunately.

JOANNA I remember David taking me to one of his family 'dos' for the first time. There was Aunt Mol, 80 years old dressed head to toe in gold lame with leopard print detail. "I brought 147 men to orgasm last week" she was telling everyone that would listen

“I’ve done 83 this week and it’s only Tuesday. Well I say they all achieved climax but they could have been faking it. It’s hard to tell when they’re on the other end of the phone. No wet patch, just a quick gasp, a few grunts and then the line goes dead.”

There were a few horrified faces. And you could see several men making mental notes never again to phone an 0898 number.

DAVID I think Murray would have been up for serenading people as they arrived.

MURRAY Masters of the Karaoke, me and David. A dream team.

JOANNA But he wouldn’t have sung without David and clearly that wasn’t going to happen.

MURRAY There was a time when no evening out was complete without our rendition of ‘A Whole New World’. Him as Aladdin, me as the Princess. Obviously.

JOANNA He wooed me with Karaoke, David. Well, they both did I suppose. I was mortified at the time but now, every time I think about it, it makes me smile. Every time. Pair of daft apeths. We were at a pub, unsurprisingly. It was about our third official ‘date’ and Murray was with us. I didn’t mind. He was a laugh and the two of them were pretty inseparable, I learnt that very quickly. I had stated categorically that there was no way I was getting up to sing but David wasn’t taking no for an answer. “We’ll do a duet” He says and the next thing I knew the DJ was announcing us as Kenny and Dolly.

Backing track begins ‘Islands in the Stream’

It was my worst nightmare. There was no way I was leaving my seat...

I could’ve killed him!

David begins to sing and when Jo refuses to get up to be Dolly Murray saves the day with a great Dolly impersonation!

As the boys sing Joanna slowly goes to put on her dress, revealing it to be black.

As the music fades out...

JOANNA We settled on “You’ll never walk alone” an unusual choice for a United fan as it’s most commonly heard being yelled by a bunch of sweaty alcoholics with a proclivity for the c word at Liverpool football matches. But it kind of summed up our feelings for each other. The optimism, and the determination. It was the song that ended our wedding reception. Everyone in a drunken, swaying circle, arms raised, singing as if their lives depended on it.

God that was a great day. We both said that it was something we’d remember for the rest of our lives.

The DJ arrived late having traveled from Liverpool to Manchester via Wales, so by the time we had our first dance I was fairly paralytic.

Auntie Mollie was there on that day too. Kept on making toasts so that she could refill her glass and insisted on leading everyone in the ‘Hokey Cokey’ at least half a dozen times.

Start to finish the day seemed to last about 45 minutes and then we were on the plane heading for warmer climes on a journey that lasted about three weeks!

But god was it worth it. The hotel was gorgeous with every amenity known to man and we spent the first few days in a bed the size of our living room. On about the fifth day we said goodbye to the room service waiter, our new best friend and headed down to the strip of restaurants along the sea front.

We sat at a restaurant on the beach feeling like we were in a movie. Gorgeous food and the sun setting in the distance, sipping champagne. David turns to me all serious and says ‘I could murder a pint’. We found a little place that served Boddies and it felt like we were in heaven. We had no idea how lucky we were. So much in love. So happy, with the sand between our toes, walking along the windy path up the hillside to our hotel. Not a care in the world.

Neither of us heard them coming. They moved too quickly. One minute I was on my feet and the next I felt an almighty shove and I was rolling through the prickly undergrowth. Struggling to slow myself down and cutting my arms and hands on the dry shrubbery that whizzed past me. The whole time I was aware of David. And the three men, punching him and screaming “Dollar!” “Photo!”

I came to an abrupt stop as my elbow made contact with a rock that wasn't going anywhere and by the time I'd looked back up the steep slope they were gone. “David” I screamed and I saw him limping towards me.” I'm fine, I'm so fine, Bastards. Did they hurt you?” “No, just my elbow. But they were kicking you, hard!” “Aye, they were that but they were wearing flip flops. I get more punishment than that during a Saturday morning kick about with the lads. Mind you one of them was well on target with his knee in my bollocks. If you're feeling up to it we could go back to the room and rub them better!”

“But they stole the camera!” I said thinking of all the memories that had been captured on film and were now gone. “Ah bollocks” he says “I take shite photos anyway” And then he promised me that we would come back again the moment our memories of our wonderful holiday began to fade. And so the incident was put to the back of our minds. My cut up arm bothered me only in so much as it ruined my rather fabulous tan and David's balls got more attention than they had for the first half of the holidays.

The rest of the holiday passed without incident. We swam and baked ourselves in the sun and ate too much and loved each other until we were exhausted. Exhilarated, satisfied, relaxed and ecstatic.

Of course everyone was madly jealous on our return.

MURRAY Sounded bloody great.

DAVID It was

MURRAY Apart from the kicking of course.

DAVID Right in the orchestra stalls mate.

MURRAY 6 of them there were.

DAVID Maybe more, it was difficult to see.

MURRAY Battered David and er, nicked their camera.

JOANNA And all were probably thankful about the lack of photos.

MURRAY Result!

JOANNA Everything went back to normal.

DAVID Weekends were spent getting the house spruced up and Jo would come and cheer us on in our pub league matches.

MURRAY They were quite nauseatingly content.

DAVID It was about a month later that I made an appointment with the hospital.

MURRAY I said to him “What’s all that about mate?”

DAVID I knew he wouldn’t really want to know.

MURRAY “Course I do – I’m your mate, your best mate.”

DAVID “I know you are mate, but believe me you don’t want to know”

MURRAY “I do mate”

DAVID “You do?”

MURRAY “I do”

DAVID “Alright...I’m getting a lot of pain in my testicles and the left one is swollen and looks like-

MURRAY “Whoa, whoa, whoa.” I said “Too much information!”

DAVID “You said you wanted to know!”

MURRAY “Yeah, not that!” He said Joanna had told him to go and see a doctor. I said “She is not wrong fella. You need to talk to someone about that...someone that isn’t me!”

JOANNA He said he might have picked up a groin strain and that his bollocks were still giving him jip.

DAVID Stuart, our Goalie had had groin strain and they’d sent him to this excellent physio in town.

JOANNA What do you think they’re gonna do I said, put them in a sling!? They’ll just tell you to rest that area for a bit.

DAVID Yeah well, there’s bugger all chance of that happening!

MURRAY “Come with me” he says

DAVID And we’ll go to that new bar on Deansgate after.

JOANNA It has 163 different flavours of Vodka.

MURRAY Cinnamon, mint, caramel, coffee, apple, aniseed, curry.

DAVID And you can get all these different shots, buttery nipples, slippery nipples.

JOANNA I was in there with the girls once and we had so many we had a competition to see who could suck their own nipples.

DAVID We waited in the waiting room with all the other patients and flicked through the copies of ‘Hello’ and ‘OK’. I managed to refrain from sniffing the pages.

MURRAY Eventually they call David in and two minutes later he’s out again.

DAVID “I have to go up a floor” I told them. “They want to do some tests. Just, you know, standard procedure and all that. They took some blood and a urine sample”.

MURRAY “Sounds like they were taking the piss, mate”.

DAVID Then they took like a photo of them with this tiny, little instrument thing. You were nervous weren't you lads. Bit bloody embarrassing to tell you the truth.

MURRAY I think we were all a bit scared when we saw where they'd sent him. But we didn't say a word. I mean David was the picture of health. And, as they had said, this was just procedure. As we waited again we got chatting to this lad, Simon, who plays in our league. Recognized me from having run rings around him in a 4-nil thrashing last November.

Simon had broken his ankle helping a mate move house. He didn't have a clue what they wanted with him on that floor. “I just want one of them bloody great casts” he said “Me mate knows Wayne Rooney, reckons he can get the whole of United to sign it!”

“You lucky bastard” Says David “Maybe I could get them to put a cast on me nads”

I said “Depends whose signature you want, mate. If it's Ryan Giggs' maybe. But I wouldn't count on Robin Van Persie or Antonio Valencia having enough room!”

Simon went in first to see a Dr. Cameron -

JOANNA - and almost immediately Dr. Cowling called David into her room.

We waited for what seemed like forever and then David came out looking petrified and asked me to come in. Turns out Dr Cowling was an Urologist. There was some serious news apparently. We weren't to worry. Further tests would be more conclusive.

We left the hospital in a daze. It was surreal. I held onto David's hand so tightly as we walked down the endless corridors, the hospital noises merging to create a deafening buzz. We walked into the sunlight and looked around at the outside world as if seeing it for the first time. Their mate,

Simon, sat on a bench. Staring intently at the ornate fountain that sprayed no water into a pool that contained none. He looked up at us. I'd seen men cry before, but never without looking embarrassed, never so openly. Turned out he had bone cancer. Everywhere. Had done for ages. Had three weeks to live. The doctor told us that we were lucky we found it when we did. You should be very thankful. To who? To them? Thanks for kneeing my husband in the nads. Our life was perfect but thanks to you I've now discovered that it may never be again! The three boys hugged. Then they offered each other support in the only way they knew how. We went to the new bar on Deansgate and drank at least half of their flavours. Until we couldn't think or see straight. Trying, I think to kill the poison that had a grip of their bodies.
Cancer.

DAVID Testicular cancer.

MURRAY Bollock rot.

DAVID None of us knew fuck all about it.

JOANNA There were leaflets, of course.

MURRAY 'The testicle – What do you really know about it?'

JOANNA My answer did not correlate with the information provided! I looked up one of the websites. Read a list of the symptoms and was convinced I had it!

DAVID Starts off in the testicles and is easily curable - if caught in time.

MURRAY If not caught in time it can spread to other organs and eventually,

JOANNA In rare and severe cases,

MURRAY Or if you're a really unlucky bastard,

DAVID It can spread to the brain.

JOANNA So this is commitment I thought. In sickness and in health and all that. People have no idea. Not until it happens.
I didn't know what to do. All these questions kept darting through my mind. I even thought at one point that it could have been my fault. See, the first night we met we were in bed together...well not the first night! And he goes 'squeeze my balls. Harder. Harder. Harder. Not that hard!'
The doctor told me this would not have been a determining factor.
The orchiectomy confirmed that the tumour was cancerous.

DAVID Stage 2 cancer. "Cancer cells have spread to nearby lymph nodes".

JOANNA Some small nodes putting it in the 2A category but some larger ones indicating it could, more likely, be 2B stage.

DAVID 2B or not 2B that was the question.

MURRAY Stage 2 cancer is harder to treat.

DAVID But not impossible. Even advanced testicular cancer is curable.

JOANNA And so David began treatment.

MURRAY A course of radiation that left him weak from the diarrhea and vomiting;

JOANNA and then Chemo.

MURRAY His hair fell out, his mouth was covered in sores and on top of everything he got every cough and cold that was going.

JOANNA Yet throughout the whole thing he was always worried more about what I was going through than his own pain.

MURRAY He'd come down to watch us play, cheer us on...apologise for not being able to be on the team anymore.

DAVID As soon as the treatment started we decided we had to let people know. What a mistake. Coping with their reactions was just too much on top of everything else. Especially as we hadn't quite got our head around the situation yet. People would phone and I'd spend the entire time comforting them and telling them it would be o.k. My mum dissolved into tears every time anybody mentioned the word Cancer and my arsehole stepfather just kept on telling everyone "If they chopped my balls off I'd kill myself. No point in living without these bad boys." He told me once that he was really glad I had got married before we found out, which I thought was nice, until he followed it up with, "Yeah, at least being wed shows you're not a bender. They get that ball cancer you know. They might as well just chop their bollocks off straight away." What? The first time they buy an ABBA record or show a lack of interest in the world cup?

JOANNA It was awful. His Aunt would call daily with his horoscope and go on and on ad nauseous about the planets being sufficiently linear for a full recovery. "He's going to be fine. I read it in my astrology weekly. 'Make the water, fire and earth signs move for you'. And I asked Pascal; he's my psychic advisor, and he said I wasn't going to lose anyone in the near future. He does tarot and the crystal ball and he's an excellent mind reader...although he prefers to read my palm" Presumably because he can find it. .

MURRAY He were in and out of the hospital. Jo and I made sure he never had to go alone. I'd go with him one day and Jo the next. Work weren't too happy but there was no way I wasn't gonna be there for him. We developed a sort of routine.

JOANNA It became our way of life and everything outside of it carried on as normal. It was just a blip, an irritation.

DAVID Something that we needed to overcome so that we could carry on with everything we had planned. As the leaflets said "Testicular cancer offers good odds for survival."