

DAD. Never. Your mother bought this the first Christmas of our marriage, just before you were born. I suppose some people would call that an omen.

JEFF. She's looking a bit tatty, Dad. We should get a star, or something.

DAD. Not as long as I'm alive. When I'm gone, you can do what you like, but your mother loved this. It was our first Christmas together, and you were on the way. We didn't have a lot of money to throw around, but we were determined to make the best of it. We went into town, and oh, we had such a day! You wouldn't believe the fun we had that day. Your mum looked bright and alive, so pretty, and full of you. I think I was the happiest man on earth that day. My heart hurt.

We had roast pork for Christmas dinner, that year. Not a leg, we couldn't afford that, a nice bit of loin. With crackling. Nobody could make crackling crackle like your mum. It was about the only thing she could cook, of course. Your mother was a wonderful woman, but she was a terrible cook.

JEFF. I miss her, Dad. I miss her like stink.

DAD. Not half as much as I do, lad. It isn't possible.

JEFF. Yeh, I know, mate. Sorry.

*(THEY drink in silence.)*

DAD. I tell a lie. Your Gran could make good crackling.

JEFF. Had enough practise with Mary, didn't she? *(HE gives a dirty chuckle.)*

DAD. *(Glares at him.)* I'll thank you not to make coarse comments about my mother.

JEFF. Ah, come on, Dad, just a bit of a laugh.

DAD. It's not an easy thing for a man to accept that his mother was doing it with another woman for forty years. I used to wonder what they got up to that could be so wonderful, that the love between them must be extraordinary if they were prepared to risk everything—what people thought about them, what they said about them—for love. That's when I started to think about blokes and other blokes, I'd never thought of it before, wasn't interested in it, but if what Mum and Mary had was so amazing, maybe it was the same for men, too.

JEFF. But you never tried it, Dad?

DAD. No. I couldn't bring myself to it somehow. I think it was the idea of hairy bums that put me off. Anyway, I met your mum. Then there was you. Ah, well, I thought, it's in the blood, just skipped a generation from my mother to you. And I made up my mind that no matter what, you were going to be your own man, and I knew I'd love you. *(A slow burning anger starts in him.)* So do it.

JEFF. Do what?

DAD. Be it. Be the man you ought to be.

JEFF. I am—

DAD. Sitting round here every night feeling sorry for yourself, getting stoned, when you should be out making some contribution to life, seeing the world, sewing your oats, falling in love, going mad, something wonderful—

JEFF. I make a contribution. I look after people's drains. That's a very important thing. Life would be pretty shitty without plumbers, I can tell you. *(HE laughs smugly at his own joke.)*

DAD. Not very romantic, is it? Not like planting a forest.

JEFF. Ah, fair go. I'm just me—

DAD. I know you are. I gave you that freedom. So go on, prove to me that the way I've brought you up wasn't wrong. Prove to me that my mother wasn't wrong, that what she found was wonderful, worth everything, all for love.

JEFF. It's not that flaming easy, it doesn't just happen to order. The choice is a bit more limited, for one thing. Well, maybe some places. San Francisco, all the blokes wear their dicks on their sleeves there, they reckon—

DAD. Ever thought of going there for a holiday?

JEFF. I don't want to live like that, Dad. I don't want to live in a world that begins and ends with being gay. I like having all sorts of people around and every sort of person there is. I like it at work or the footy when the other blokes rag me about what I am. I like knowing I can cope with all that. And I don't want to live in a world without women. I like women. Me and the girls at the office get on great. I've even fancied some of them, done it with a couple of 'em, just to make sure I wasn't missing out on anything.

DAD. (*Deeply shocked.*) You've done it with girls? You've never told me!

JEFF. Yeh, well, I didn't want to get your hopes up.

DAD. Did you like it?

JEFF. See what I mean?

DAD. But was it all right, I mean, oh, bugger it, you got it up?

JEFF. Course I did, it's not exactly an obstacle course, not once you're in the cot. Quite enjoyed it, actually, something different. But they just don't turn me on like

blokes do. They're a bit too soft and squashy for me. And they think different to blokes.

DAD. Wouldn't you like to try it again?

JEFF. No, Dad, not off the top of me head. That's what I mean about getting your hopes up. I like doing it with blokes, Dad, and I don't think it's ever going to change, because I don't want it to. But I don't want to be limited by other people's ideas of who I am, yours, or anyone else's.

DAD. I didn't think I've ever tried to put limits on you, Jeffrey.

JEFF. No, Dad, I know. I didn't mean—you've been beaut, mate, the best dad in the world, I reckon, the fairest, that's a certain fact. I don't often say it, but it's Christmas and I'm a bit stoned, so, well, thanks, mate, for everything. You give me the first class shits at times, and I suppose I do you, but I don't think there's many got a father like you.

DAD. And I've been a very lucky man to have a son like you. (*HE can't resist it.*) But there's gotta be someone out there fancies you, surely? That young Gary, he seemed keen enough—

JEFF. Greg.

DAD. You ought to see him again. Ring him up.

JEFF. I have seen him—couple of times—at the pub. Quite a few times, actually.

DAD. And?

JEFF. And what?

DAD. Well—have you asked him out? Taken him to the pictures, or a walk in the park? I don't know how these things work out between blokes, but you know, chatting him up, courting—

JEFF. I can look after that side of my life, Dad—

DAD. Haven't done too bloody well at it up to now. You need a poker up your bum.

JEFF. (*Grins.*) Don't think I'd fancy that.

DAD. (*Grins too.*) Perhaps not. But take him out for tea, somewhere nice, somewhere splosh. Y'know, candle light and soft romantic music, good tucker and a few bottles of wine. That'd soon open his legs.

JEFF. (*Shoots a look of apology at the audience.*) Ah, you're really off sometimes, you know that? How can I, after what happened here before—gave me the brush off then, dead set he did. Be a right galah going back for more of the same treatment, wouldn't I?

DAD. If at first you don't succeed. Grab the chance, rush him off his feet. Get him away from his place, get him away from here, from me. If you're short of a few quid, I can lend you some. It'd get you out of my hair for a weekend, at least.

JEFF. All right, stuff you then, if that's how you feel. I'll do it.

DAD. Have you got his number?

JEFF. Yeh, as a matter of fact I have.

DAD. Call him, do it now.

JEFF. Yeh, well, next time I see him, maybe tomorrer—

DAD. Don't say that!

JEFF. What?

DAD. Tomorrow, I'll do it tomorrow, that's been the story of your life, my boy, always putting off till tomorrow what you should have done today. Well, you're in for a very rude shock in the not too distant future, because one day you're going to wake up and it will be

tomorrow, and there won't be too many other damn tomorrows left. And the rest of your life is like a whole lot of yesterdays, the past, all those wasted days of your life are gone in the blinking of an eye, like some half forgotten dream. Do it now, boy, whatever it is, don't put it off till tomorrow, because suddenly you'll find that you're old and wishing it was yesterday and all you'll be left with is a terrible regret that you didn't make a bit more of your life. It's very hard work being tolerant about you, sometimes.

JEFF. Being like me is hard work, sometimes.

DAD. Being anybody is hard work sometimes.

JEFF. Now, put a sock in it, Dad! I'm me, just me, that's all, whoever that is. You reckon you made me, well, all right, you've got to put up with me, the rough and the smooth. I want to fall in love again, dead set I do, I want that more'n anything. And I'm scared of it, too. I don't want it to hurt like last time, but if that's the price I've gotta pay, well, all right, but please, let it happen soon. I know I've got you, and all my mates, and everything, and that's great, but there's a part of my heart that's empty, Dad, and it's a very important part. I know you're a bit disappointed in me sometimes. I'm not one of your big explorers, discovering new countries, I'm never going to win any cups or prizes or be rich and famous. I'm never even gonna win Lotto, with my luck. And I'm never even gonna give you grandchildren, which is the least that most blokes can do. But I'm trying to do the best I can. And I'm sorry if that's not good enough for you, then I'll find somewhere else.

DAD. Oh, don't be daft, you silly bugger. I just want you to be happy.

JEFF. (*Still somewhat angry.*) I am happy. Sort of.