

Mrs Lintott For your information they're a size seven court shoe, broad fitting.

Irwin goes into the study.

Scrapps I attended Eucharist in the college chapel where, apart from a girl from a school in West Bromwich, I was the only communicant. It was a genuine act of worship, though I knew it would do me no harm with the college, the self-servingness of my devotions in this instance leaving me untroubled. I really wanted to get in. I have never particularly liked myself but the boy I was, kneeling in that cold and empty chapel that winter mornings, fills me now with longing and pity.

Dakin The guy whose room I had seemed a bit of a pillock. There was a *Lord of the Rings* poster for a start and an Arsenal scarf draped round a photograph of Virginia Woolf, only I think maybe this was irony. No books much, except he had a book with lists of everybody who'd been at other colleges, so I looked at that for a bit. Oh, and I went and looked at Corpus where Irwin was. No sex.

Posner I sat in the room most of the time or trailed around the streets. I can see why they make a fuss about it. Every college is like a stately home; my parents would love it. There was a question on the Holocaust. And I did play it down.

They asked me about it at the interview. Praised what they called my sense of detachment.
Said it was the foundation of writing history.
I think I did well.

The boys erupt onto the stage.

Headmaster Splendid news! Posner a scholarship, Dakin an exhibition and places for everyone else. It's more than one could ever have hoped for. Irwin, you are to be congratulated, a remarkable achievement. And you too, Dorothy, of course, who laid the foundations.

Mrs Lintott Not Rudge, Headmaster.

Headmaster Not Rudge? Oh dear.

Irwin He has said nothing. The others have all had letters.

Headmaster It was always an outside chance. I felt we were indulging him by allowing him to enter at all. That college must think we're fools. A pity. It would have been good to have a clean sweep.

Ah, Rudge.

You . . . you haven't heard from Oxford?

Rudge No, sir.

Mrs Lintott Perhaps you'll hear tomorrow.

Rudge Why should I? They told me when I was there.

Irwin I'm sorry.

Rudge What for? I got in.

Irwin How come?

Rudge How come they told me or how come they took a thick sod like me?

I had family connections.

Headmaster Somebody in your family went to Christ Church?

Rudge In a manner of speaking.

My dad. Before he got married he was a college servant there. This old parson guy was just sitting there for most

of the interview, suddenly said was I related to Bill Rudge who'd been a scout on Staircase 7 in the 1950s. So I said he was my dad and they said I was just the kind of candidate they were looking for, college servant's son, now an undergraduate, evidence of how far they had come, wheel come full circle and that.

Mind you, I did all the other stuff like Stalin was a sweetie and Wilfred Owen was a wuss. They said I was plainly someone who thought for himself and just what the college rigger team needed.

Dakin In the room I stayed in there was a handbook to the colleges, list of previous undergraduates and that.

I looked you up only you weren't there.

Irwin I'm surprised you were interested.

Dakin I was kind of lonely. I thought it would be nice to see your name.

Irwin You maybe looked at the wrong list.

Dakin Corpus?

Irwin No, I said I was at Jesus.

Dakin You said you were at Corpus.

Irwin No.

Dakin You did.

Irwin Corpus, Jesus. What does it matter?

Dakin Because I went round to look at the fucking college, that's why it matters.

Because I imagined you there.

Pause.

Irwin I never got in.

I was at Bristol.

I did go to Oxford, but it was just to do a teaching diploma.

Does that make a difference?

Dakin To what? To me? (*He shrugs.*)

At least you lied. And lying's good, isn't it? We've established that.

Lying works.

Except you ought to learn to do it properly.

Pause.

Anybody else, I'd say we could have a drink.

Irwin Yes?

I can't tonight.

Dakin Tomorrow then?

Irwin That's bad, too.

Dakin Is that a euphemism? It is, isn't it?

Have a drink.

Saying 'a drink' when you mean something else.

Only a euphemism is a nice way of saying something nasty. Whereas a drink is a nice way of saying something nice.

Irwin I think that's a euphemism, too.

Dakin Actually, forget the euphemism.

I'm just kicking the tyres on this one but, further to the drink, what I was really wondering was whether there were any circumstances in which there was any chance of your sucking me off.

Pause.

Or something similar.

Pause.

Actually that would please Hector:

Irwin What?

Dakin 'Your sucking me off.'

It's a gerund. He likes gerunds.

And your being scared shitless, that's another gerund.

Irwin I didn't know you were that way inclined.

Dakin I'm not, but it's the end of terms; I've got into

Oxford; I thought we might push the boat out.

Pause.

Anyway, I'll leave it on the table. (*He is ready to go but turns back.*) I don't understand this.

Reckless; impulsive; immoral . . . how come there's such a difference between the way you teach and the way you live?

Irwin Actually, it's amoral.

Dakin Is it fuck. 'No need to tell the truth.' That's immoral.

Irwin I could dispute that with you.

Dakin Over a drink? Or whatever? No.

Why are you so bold in argument and talking but when it comes to the point, when it's something that's actually happening, I mean now, you're so fucking careful?

Is it because you're a teacher and I'm . . . a boy?

Irwin Obviously that . . .

Dakin Why? Who cares? I don't.

Irwin You've already had to cope with one master who touches you up. I don't . . .

Dakin Is that what it is?

Is it that you don't want to be like Hector?

You won't be.

You can't be.

How can you be?

Hector's a joke.

Irwin No he isn't. He isn't.

Dakin That side of him is.

Irwin This . . . it's . . . it's such a cliché.

Dakin Right. And you abhor clichés, don't you?

And you teach us to avoid them. Nothing worse.

Nothing more likely to put the examiners off.

But in this subject there are no examiners.

And I'll tell you something. Clichés can be quite fun.

That's how they got to be clichés.

So give yourself a break. Be like everybody else for a change. On this one you don't have to be different.

Irwin All right.

Dakin All right what?

Irwin All right, let's have a drink. (*He takes out his diary.*)

Dakin No. Don't take out your sodding diary.

Keep it in your head.

Or here. (*He points to his heart.*)

Irwin Maybe next week.

Dakin Get this man. Next week? You can suck me off next week. I've heard of a crowded schedule but this is ridiculous. I bet you have a purse, don't you?

Irwin Yes, I do, actually.

Dakin God, we've got a long way to go.

Do you ever take your glasses off?

Irwin Why?

Dakin It's a start.

Irwin Not with me. Taking off my glasses is the last thing I do.

Dakin Yes? I'll look forward to it.

What do you do on a Sunday afternoon?

What are you doing this Sunday afternoon?

Irwin I was going to be working, going through the accounts of Roche Abbey. It was a Cistercian house just to the south of Doncaster. Only I think I just had a better offer.

Dakin I think you did. And we're not in the subjunctive either. It is going to happen.

Dakin I just wanted to say thank you.

Scripps So? Give him a subscription to *The Spectator* or a box of Black Magic. Just because you've got a scholarship doesn't mean you've got to give him unfettered access to your dick.

Dakin So how would you say thank you?

Scripps Same as you, probably. On my knees.

Dakin Also – this is the big triumph – I had a session with Felix. I asked him what the difference was between Hector touching us up on the bike and him trying to feel up Fiona.

Scripps You are insane.

Dakin He was upset naturally, and the language was shocking, but eventually he took the point, and the upshot is, Hector is reprimanded. He stays.

Scripps So everybody's happy.

Dakin I hadn't realised how easy it is to make things happen. You know?

Scripps No.

Actually I shouldn't have said everybody's happy, as just saying the words meant, like in a play, that the laws of irony were thereby activated and things began to unravel pretty quickly after that.

Dakin Now look, everybody. This is known as Posner's reward.

He bugs Posner.

Posner Is that it?

The longed-for moment?

Dakin What's wrong with it?

Posner Too fucking brief. I was looking for something more . . . lingering.

The boys hoot for more so Dakin does it again.

Posner And is that Hector's reward?

Dakin I thought I would. (*putting on the motorcycle helmet*) It's only polite. Just for old times' sake.

Scripps Just don't let him go past the charity shop.

Hector comes in, clad in his leathers and cheerful now that he has been reprimanded.

Rudge Sir. Is the jackpot still going?

Hector Why?

Rudge I've got something.

Hector Just you?

Rudge Yes.

Hector I'm listening.

Rudge sings a verse of a song (The Pet Shop Boys' 'It's a Sin').

Rudge (*sings*)

'At school they taught me how to be
So pure in thought and word and deed
They didn't quite succeed
For everything I long to do
No matter when or where or who
Has one thing in common too
It's a, it's a, it's a, it's a sin
It's a sin.'

Timms He doesn't know that.

You can't expect him to know that.

Rudge I do.

Timms And anyway it's crap.

Rudge So is Gracie Fields. Only that's his crap. This is our crap.

Hector Excuse me, children. Easy though I am to overlook, I am here. Unsurprisingly, I do not know the song in question.

Akthar Pop is the new literacy, sir. I read it.

Hector In which case, I am now illiterate. But Rudge is right . . . his crap or my crap, it makes no difference. So, in another reference to our ancient popular culture, I say, 'Give him the money, Barney!'

Headmaster comes in.

Headmaster What is this?

A boy in a motorcycle helmet?

Who is it? Dakin?

No, no, no.

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Under no circumstances.

Hector, I thought I'd made this plain.

Hector (whose fault it isn't, after all) just shrugs.

Take somebody else . . . take . . .

Scripts And here history rattled over the points . . .

Irwin has come in.

Headmaster Take Irwin.

Hector Irwin?

Irwin Sure, why not?

Dakin gives him the helmet.

Dakin Hang on to your briefcase.

Irwin Fuck.

Off. Fuck right off.

Scripts There are various theories about what happened, why he came off. It's inconceivable he ever touched Irwin, who would in any case have been clutching his briefcase. Or it may be Hector was so used to driving with one hand while the other was busy behind him that driving with two made him put on speed.

These explanations are a touch obvious which, if he taught us anything, Irwin taught us not to be. So I think that, since Irwin had never been on the back of a bike before, going round the corner he leaned out instead of in and so unbalanced Hector. That would be appropriate, too. Trust Irwin to lean the opposite way to everyone else.

Irwin (*now in a wheelchair*) With no memory of what happened I am of no help. I only know what I have been told, my last memory Dakin asking me for a drink.

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Something we never did, incidentally.

Dakin No. It was the wheelchair. That's terrible, isn't it? Afterwards I couldn't face the wheelchair. Still. At least I asked him. And barring accidents it would have happened.

Rudge There is no barring accidents. It's what I said. History is just one fucking thing after another.

Scrpps Someone dies at school and you remember it all your life.

The staff, Irwin in his wheelchair and the boys, who sing a verse of 'Bye Bye, Blackbird', during which we see on the video screen photographs of Hector as a young man.

Headmaster If I speak of Hector it is of enthusiasm shared, passion conveyed and seeds sown of future harvest. He loved language. He loved words. For each and every one of you, his pupils, he opened a deposit account in the bank of literature and made you all shareholders in that wonderful world of words.

Timmis Some of the things he said . . . or quoted anyway, you never knew when it was which:

'We are mulched by the dead, though one person's death will tell you more than a thousand.'

Lockwood There was the time he put his head down on the desk and said, 'What am I doing teaching in this god-forsaken school?' It was the first time I realised a teacher was a human being.

Akthar There was a contract between him and his class. Quite what the contract was or what it involved would be hard to say. But it was there.

Crowther He was stained and shabby and did unforgivable things but he led you to expect the best. Even his death was a lesson and added to the store.

Mrs Lintott Hector never bothered with what he was educating these boys for. They become solicitors, chartered accountants, teachers even, members of what used to be called the professional classes. Two of these boys become magistrates.

Crowther and Lockwood put up their hands.

One a headmaster.

Akthar puts up hand.

Pillars of a community that no longer has much use for pillars.

One puts together a chain of dry-cleaners and takes drugs at the weekend.

Timmis puts up hand.

Another is a tax lawyer, telling highly paid fbs and making frequent trips to the Gulf States.

Dakin acknowledges.

Dakin I like money. It's fun.

Mrs Lintott One is a builder who carpets the Dales in handy homes.

Rudge does not put his hand up.

Rudge Is that meant to be me? I'm not putting my hand up to that. Like them or not, Rudge Homes are at least affordable homes for first-time buyers.

Mrs Lintott All right, Rudge.

Rudge Death, it's just one more excuse to patronise. I had years of that.

Mrs Lintott Same here.

If I may proceed?

Hector had seen Irwin turning his boys into journalists but in the event there is only one . . . and on a better class of paper, a career he is always threatening to abandon in order, as he puts it, 'really to write'.

Scripps puts up his hand.

Irwin Hector said I was a journalist.

Mrs Lintott And so you were. Briefly at the school and then on TV. I enjoyed your programmes but they were more journalism than history. What you call yourself now you're in politics I'm not sure.

Irwin I'm not in politics. Who's in politics? I'm in government.

Mrs Lintott Well you're not in monastic history, that's for sure. Hector would have been surprised and gratified too, to find himself regularly recalled in the *Old Boys'* *Letter* few of them can otherwise be bothered to read.

Still, of all Hector's boys, there is only one who truly took everything to heart, remembers everything he was ever taught . . . the songs, the poems, the sayings, the endings; the words of Hector never forgotten.

Posner looks at boys on either side before putting his hand up.

He lives alone in a cottage he has renovated himself, has an allotment and periodic breakdowns.

He haunts the local library and keeps a scrapbook of the achievements of his one-time classmates and has a host of friends . . . though only on the internet, and none in his right name or even gender. He has long since stopped asking himself where it went wrong.

Hector Finish, good lady, the bright day is done and we are for the dark.

Irwin He was a good man but I do not think there is time for his kind of teaching any more.

Scripps No. Love apart, it is the only education worth having.

Hector Pass the parcel.

That's sometimes all you can do.

Take it, feel it and pass it on.

Not for me, not for you, but for someone, somewhere,

one day.

Pass it on, boys.

That's the game I wanted you to learn.

Pass it on.

End.