THE BOTANIST

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What is there that is not poison? All things are poison and nothing is without poison. Solely the dose determines that a thing is poison.

Paracelsus (1493–1541)

Chapter 1

Iriomote Island, Japan

There were bastard trees and there were wait-awhile trees and there was a building that didn't exist.

The bastard trees had masses of six-inch thorns protecting their trunks. Touch one of those and you'd learn a sharp lesson. The wait-awhile trees were less stabby, but equally annoying. Their thin, hook-tipped vines dangled from branches, catching, entangling and immobilising the unwary.

But it was the building, not the flesh-piercing thorns, that held everyone's attention. It was squat and grey and had been reclaimed by nature. Thick roots had prised apart stonework and collapsed one of the walls. Guano from the fruit bats roosting in the tree canopy had painted the roof white.

The group stared in astonishment.

'What is it?' Dora, a woman in her early twenties, asked. She was halfway through her gap year. In six months she would do what her father wanted and take a job in the City, then marry her portfolio manager fiancé and knock out a brood of zestless children.

'I'm not sure,' their guide replied. He was called Andrew Trescothic and he had trained in the black art of jungle navigation with the British Army in Belize. 'Probably left over from the war. There are supposed to be some Operation Ketsu-Go buildings on the island somewhere.'

'Ketsu-Go?'

'The suicidal defensive strategy designed after the Emperor realised he could no longer win. Called for the entire Japanese population to resist an invasion under the banner "The Glorious Death of One Hundred Million". He thought if the Americans were facing

catastrophic casualties it might undermine their will to fight for an unconditional surrender. Maybe opt for an armistice instead, one that didn't involve occupation of the Japanese mainland. Part of the strategy was to build inland fortifications to store fuel and ammunition. This building's not accessible for fuel, so I suspect it was used as an ammo dump. The allies emptied them after Japan's surrender, but most of the buildings were left intact.'

'Wow,' Dora said. 'So nobody's seen this since the war?'

'It's possible.'

It wasn't. Trescothic was a no-frills kind of guide and he had been leading groups across the jungle island for five years now. He knew where all the Operation Ketsu-Go fortifications were, and he made sure each group 'discovered' one on every trip. After they had taken their photographs and had a poke around, he would leave it a year or so. In an environment as harsh as this it wasn't long before the building looked as though it hadn't been touched in decades. He figured it was a harmless deception and it certainly increased the size of his tips when they got back to base camp.

'Can we go in?' Dora asked.

Trescothic shrugged.

'Don't see why not,' he said.

'Cool!'

'But watch for snakes.'

All that remained of the wooden door were rusty hinges. Dora and most of the others entered cautiously.

The last one, a man wearing an unacceptable hat, turned and said, 'Aren't you coming, Andrew?'

He shook his head.

'Maybe later.' Andrew knew what was in there. A boxy room and a large underground storage area. Japanese signs on the walls and animal scat on the floor. Same as all the others. He reckoned they'd be inside for fifteen minutes or so. Five upstairs, five in the underground storage room and five more for happy snaps. Plenty of time to get a brew on.

He hadn't even had time to pop in a teabag when he heard Dora scream. He sighed. They'd probably stumbled across a dead animal.

It had happened in a different building a couple of years earlier. A group discovered the decomposed body of an Iriomote cat, a subspecies of leopard only found on the island. It had fallen through a hole in the roof and trapped itself. Poor thing had starved to death.

Trescothic got to his feet and entered the old fortification. He could hear the group. They were in the underground storage area. He jogged down the stairs but was met by Dora running back up.

'I think I'm going to be sick,' she said.

He sighed again. These city slickers really needed to toughen up. The same thought crossed his mind at least once a trip. These modern-day explorers weren't as robust as the squaddies he had trained with all those years ago. The slightest thing upset them. A dead animal, a mean comment on Twitter, a dodgy statue . . .

He fixed his face into the stern, no-nonsense ex-soldier the group expected him to be, and entered the storage area.

Thirty seconds later he was back outside, panting heavily, scrambling for the satellite phone in his rucksack.

It wasn't a dead animal that had caused Dora to scream.

This was something else entirely.

Something monstrous.

At the same time as Trescothic was on his satellite phone, a nondescript man wearing unremarkable clothes stepped out of a plain white van in a car park on an industrial estate on the outskirts of Glasgow. He walked into Banner Chemical Supplies and approached the counter.

'I'd like two hundred litres of acetone, please,' he said to the man wearing a polo shirt bearing the company insignia – a stylised B, underscored with a test tube.

'You got photo ID?' the man said. 'Acetone is a category three precursor chemical as it can be used to make explosives. Company policy is we take IDs.'

The nondescript man produced a driver's licence bearing an instantly forgettable name. The man behind the counter entered the details into his computer. After the acetone had been paid for, he said, 'You parked outside?'

'I am.'

'The guys will bring it out for you. Help you load it.'

'Thank you.'

'Oh, one last thing. I need to put down something in the "reason for purchase" field on the computer.'

'I have a vermin problem,' the nondescript man said.

Chapter 2

Eighteen months later. The Morgan Soames Hour television studio, London

The lights were set to run hot, the interview was running hotter.

Too hot.

Far hotter than had been anticipated.

'It's too controversial,' the studio owner had said all those weeks ago.

'I prefer "provocative",' the director, a woman called Justine Webb, had replied.

'We'll get hundreds, maybe thousands of complaints.'

'It'll be a ratings smash.'

'I'm not sure.'

'And I have the final say on editorial content. We're doing this.'

There'd been meetings and committees long before the director and the owner had had their dance, of course. Where Kane Hunt was involved, this was to be expected. Controversy – all of it carefully curated – followed Hunt wherever he went. Live TV appearances were increasingly rare.

But *The Morgan Soames Hour* had never shied from controversy.

In the end it came down to two things: their commitment to balanced news and whether or not their presenter, Morgan Soames, would be able to handle him.

The argument for balance went like this: Saffron Phipps was due on the week before the proposed Hunt interview, and her views, albeit from the opposite end of the spectrum, were equally as extreme. Phipps argued that Valerie Solanas, the author of the 1967 *SCUM Manifesto,* had been on to something. Phipps wasn't suggesting, as Solanas had, that men should be eliminated. But she *was*

arguing that Solanas had been correct when she wrote that, because men only had one X chromosome, they were genetically deficient, incomplete females. This deficiency explained why males were emotionally limited, egocentric, lacking in empathy and unable to relate to anything other than their own physical sensations. Kane Hunt was the anti-Phipps, the counterpoint to the *SCUM Manifesto*. He would provide the balance *The Morgan Soames Hour* prided itself on.

For those *against*, the argument was far less nuanced – Kane Hunt was a misogynist who spouted his vile philosophy, not because he genuinely believed that men had a fundamental right to sex, but because it sold books. Having him on the show would give his new book a major marketing boost.

On the second point, whether Morgan Soames would be able to handle him, there had been no disagreement. She had the biggest pair of balls in any room she was in.

It was settled with a vote – the first one the production team had ever had over a guest. Justine, the director, voted no. She was responsible for the way the show was shot and it would be her dealing with the inevitable fallout. The head writer said no, too. He didn't want to put his staff in the lion's mouth if Morgan ended up looking foolish.

The social media manager couldn't say yes fast enough, of course. She knew an upcoming Twitter storm when she saw one. The television channel said yes, too. Ratings would rocket and they would cash in.

The rest of the production team was evenly split. Allan, the show's producer, had had the casting vote. In his heart he'd wanted to say yes. Whatever that little twerp Kane Hunt's views were on women, Morgan was an apex predator. She would eat Hunt alive and 99.9 per cent of the country would rejoice when she did. And it *would* be relevant – for too long Hunt had been getting a free ride. His claim of media censorship was a calculated strategy. If he were outrageous enough, he could never appear on television, and if he were never on television his views couldn't be challenged. Censorship was the shield he cowered behind. He coveted it because he relied on it.

But Morgan had been taunting him for months. Every opening monologue of her show began with a dig at him. Every closing piece ended with him being the butt of a joke.

She had been daring him to appear.

To the surprise of everyone, Hunt had said yes. Publicly. He would appear on her show as long as it was one-to-one and he was given the questions beforehand. Morgan didn't play that way, though. She would give him time to answer, but he didn't get to dictate the direction. Hunt had reluctantly agreed. If he backtracked now, he knew Morgan would laugh about it for years.

So Allan had wanted Kane Hunt on the show.

But he had voted no. Allan's surname was Webb, the same as Justine's, and that was because they were married. They had worked together for twenty years and had been husband and wife for ten. They were a team both on and off the pitch. Professionally and personally, his job was to have her back.

It fell to Justine to let Morgan know. She had decided to tell her shortly before that night's show, hoping it might limit the amount of time for abuse. Morgan had interviewed impeached presidents and disgraced prime ministers. She'd trapped royals in lies and reduced war criminals to tears. She wasn't a woman to mess with.

Justine had knocked on her dressing-room door and entered. Morgan had been in makeup, her stylist, and long-time sounding board, fussing around her hair with a tiny brush and a small bottle of spray. Tissue wedged between her neck and the collar protected her two-thousand-pound navy blue Oscar de la Renta bell-sleeve blazer from the harsh studio makeup she had to wear. Off camera she looked like a supervillain, *on* camera she would look perfect.

Morgan had turned, fixed Justine with those steely grey eyes and gave her a reverse head nod. Her auburn hair, rich and glowing, didn't move.

'Quick word, Morgs?' Justine had said.

'Shoot,' she'd said. 'Just rehearsing tonight's monologue. Want to get in one more joke about the PM standing in dog shit yesterday.'

'I don't know why she's bothering – it's pretty funny already,' her makeup artist had said.

'It's about Kane Hunt,' Justine had said. 'We can't make it work.'

'Oh?' Morgan had said, her voice edged like a razor.

'Production are in agreement. There's just too much risk. If it's any consolation, the vote was very close.'

Morgan had turned back to her makeup. Started touching up her hair. She eyed Justine in the mirror.

'Fuck your vote,' she'd said.

And that was that. Justine had slunk out to find the studio owner.

'He looks hot,' Justine said.

'Hot?' Allan replied.

'Not "sexy" hot, I mean he's sweating.'

'I'm not surprised, he's only five feet away from the quartz lamp.'

'Quartz? I didn't know we had any left. Why aren't we using LEDs?'

Quartz lamps had been an industry staple for years, but they gave off a lot of heat and used a lot of juice. They'd been superseded by LED lights, which essentially did the same job but without the excessive heat or drain on the electricity budget.

'Morgan wanted them,' Allan said. 'Only on Hunt's side, though. She wanted him pale and sweaty.'

Justine considered that for a moment. 'Damn, she's good,' she said.

They were in the gallery, the room where the composition of *The Morgan Soames Hour* took place. The 'glass cockpit' – the virtual monitor wall displaying multiple sources of information – dominated the room. Justine and Allan preferred being on the studio floor, leaving one of the assistant directors to oversee the gallery, but tonight they wanted to be near the vision mixer. He was called Yosef and he was seated in front of his control panel, selecting which camera to use. Justine and Allan usually let him work with minimal oversight. Morgan trusted Yosef to get the right mix of her and her guest, to know when she wanted to be on screen when she asked a question, or whether it was the guest's reaction that was more important.

Tonight was different. Justine, as the only person with the authority to shut down a live show mid-broadcast, had to be there to give Yosef the instruction, and Allan wanted to be with her in case she needed to talk it through. Shutting down a live show was the biggest decision a director could make.

They were half an hour in, and it had been so far so good. Morgan had kept it tight and Kane Hunt had been fairly uncontroversial.

They watched as Morgan reached behind her desk and brought out the only prop she was scheduled to use. It was a book. Independently published, but with high production values.

'He doesn't look well, does he?' Justine said.

Hunt was over-gelled and under-dressed. He wore a pilot's jacket and ripped jeans, like he was auditioning for an amateur production of *Rebel Without a Cause* rather than appearing on the most prestigious chat show on television.

'He doesn't, actually,' Allan agreed. 'He's drinking a lot of water and he can't stop rubbing his eyes.'

'As long as he doesn't die during the next thirty minutes,' Justine said.

'Tell me about your new book, Kane,' Morgan said. 'It's called *The Chad Manifesto*. I understand "Chad" refers to attractive, popular men who are sexually successful with women?'

'That's right,' Hunt said. 'Chads are the sheer dumb-luck winners of the genetic lottery and a recent study suggests that although they make up just twenty per cent of men, they're having eighty per cent of all sex. That's a mathematical problem for the rest of us – there simply aren't enough women left. *The Chad Manifesto* aims to redress this rigged game.'

'I see,' Morgan said. 'And this theory forms part of the incel movement?'

'Yes. Involuntarily celibate.'

'The ideology that women's bodies are natural resources?'

'Exactly.' Hunt leaned forward, looked engaged. 'At the minute, men, through no fault of their own, are finding themselves locked out of what is now a deregulated sexual marketplace. *The Chad Manifesto* advocates a fairer distribution system. No man in the twenty-first century should be deprived of sex.'

'Deprived of sex?' Morgan deadpanned.

'You don't seem convinced.'

'I'm not. To me, your position that women are little more than

inconveniently sentient bodies is plainly ridiculous.'

'Is it though?' Hunt countered. 'You have to remember, for ninety-nine per cent of human history women didn't get to choose their sexual partners. There was no such thing as dating. Women were given to men in arranged marriages or seized as spoils of war. This relatively recent cultural shift has left some men disenfranchised.'

Morgan picked up the book and flicked through it.

'I understand you have a solution?' she said.

Back in the gallery, Justine said, 'She's giving him an easier ride than I thought she would.'

'She is,' her husband replied. 'That's what's worrying me.'

'Me too.'

'And she wouldn't tell you what she has planned?'

Justine shook her head.

Allan stepped closer to the button that stopped the live transmission.

'Our solution is simple,' Hunt said. 'We propose a complete overhaul of the Sexual Offences Act, specifically the sections relating to prostitution.'

'That's it?' Morgan said. 'You want to legalise brothels?'

'No, but changing this draconian law is necessary for what's to come. For our proposal to work we would need the sections relating to paying for sexual services, soliciting, advertising and controlling prostitution for gain, scrapped completely.'

'So you *do* want to legalise brothels?'

'Not at all,' Hunt said. 'But we do want to revolutionise the sex market.'

'I think you'd better explain.'

'Monetising the sexual marketplace makes complete sense in this day and age. Everything else is for sale, why not sex? And given how much money is spent courting women, there would also be a steady and sizeable revenue stream for the government.'

'You're suggesting state-run prostitution?'

'I most certainly am not. The government bungles even the

simplest of tasks. What we need is the invisible hand of the free market. This country's strength has always been its entrepreneurs and we want them running the sexual marketplace.'

'How would it work, Kane?' Morgan asked. 'Mega brothels? Legalised kerb crawling?'

'A subscription sex service,' Hunt replied. 'Similar to Netflix or Amazon Prime. Men would pay a monthly fee and the women would get a stipend. The same way you might select a movie or a TV show now, depending on the package you've subscribed to, you would simply select the woman you want. They would be rated from one to five and the higher-rated ones would use up more of your credit. For example, a basic package might get a subscriber three hours of sex a month with a two-star woman, or five hours with a one-star. Not in a brothel, but in their homes. The premium packages would obviously attract longer hours with women of a higher rating.'

'And who would rate the women? People like you?'

'The market,' Hunt explained. 'And the subscribers would be rated too. The same way Uber drivers and customers rate each other. The lower your rating, the more you pay. Lower-rated women would obviously earn less than higher-rated ones, so it's in everyone's financial interests to make each session as satisfying as possible.' Hunt picked up his glass and drank half the water. 'And once the private sector gets involved, with their expertise in marketing, it will quickly become progressive and mainstream,' he continued. 'And although initially conceived as a service for incels, we would expect to see subscription sex services for the whole LGBTXYZ alphabet within two years.'

'How commendable.'

'You're sceptical, but remember this: people said the same thing about internet dating. Now the market's worth billions. And not only will this bring the government millions of pounds in tax revenue, it's also a public health issue.'

'How so?'

'Women have to understand, if they keep kicking good dogs, eventually they'll turn into bad dogs. We believe men being

disenfranchised in the sexual marketplace is the leading cause of rape in the UK, and in the US it's been linked to mass shootings. The policies contained within the manifesto address all this.'

'You want to go to a break?' Allan asked Justine. 'Let Morgan regroup. Hunt kinda won that exchange. Internet dating *is* mainstream now. Who's to say this wouldn't work?'

'I say it,' Justine replied. 'All women say it. Anyone with a shred of decency should say it.'

'Absolutely right,' Allan said, recognising a minefield when he'd stepped into one. 'It's a vile idea.'

His wife smiled. 'Don't worry,' she said. 'Morgan's got this.'

'I'd like to move on to you personally, if I can, Kane?' Morgan said.

'Shoot.'

'Are you lactose intolerant?'

'Excuse me?'

'It's a simple question. Are you able to digest dairy products?'

Hunt frowned. 'I'm not sure where you're going with this, Morgan,' he said.

'You're not the only one,' Justine said to her husband.

He shrugged.

'What the hell is she up to?' she added.

'No, I'm not lactose intolerant,' Hunt said. 'Why would you think I am?'

'Because you get a lot of milkshakes thrown over you and I was wondering if that's why you felt you needed a bodyguard tonight.'

'I have a high profile. I get death threats.'

'I wasn't aware of this. Have you reported any of them to the police?'

'Half the police force are women,' Hunt sneered. 'How seriously do you think they're going to take a threat against me?'

'About as seriously as the rest of us, I'd imagine.'

Hunt reached into his inside pocket and withdrew a folded piece

of paper. 'Here, have a look,' he said. 'This is the latest one – it came a few days ago.'

He passed it across. Morgan opened it. Something fell on her lap. She picked it up.

'Close up on that,' Justine said.

Yosef did his thing and the master screen was filled with Morgan's hand.

'What the hell . . .?' Allan said.

It was a pressed flower. Delicate lilac. Star-shaped with five pointed petals. Pretty. Non-threatening.

'It's a flower,' Morgan said. 'So what?'

'Read the note,' Hunt replied.

Morgan was too much of a pro to read out loud something she'd only just been handed. She scanned it for anything tricky, but there was nothing. It was a poem.

'It's an octave,' she said. 'An eight-line stanza, if I'm not mistaken.'

She tilted it so camera three could pick it up, then read it out.

> Under the hanged man's hood,
> Beneath his dripping blood,
> Below the yellow fruit,
> Lies the screaming root.
> Close your ears, tear it from the ground,
> Dry it out and start to pound,
> And when you start your endless sleep,
> Beside your casket, none will weep.

'I don't understand,' Morgan said after she'd finished. 'Why do you think this is a death threat?'

'Are you saying it isn't? It mentions a casket.'

'It's a pretty flower tucked inside some bad poetry. I don't think we need to bother the SAS just yet.'

Hunt said nothing. The sweat on his brow was rolling down his

face now. Morgan hoped Yosef was picking it up. She was scheduled to go to a commercial break, but she decided to press ahead. 'Although, I'm not surprised you feel you need protection,' she continued.

'I'm not sure I follow.'

'Does the name Anita Fowles mean anything to you?'

'I don't recollect—'

'She's the law student who unsuccessfully sued you after a picture of her naked found its way on to your website.'

Hunt shrugged. Smirked a little. 'The courts have already ruled on that matter.'

'Yes, they have,' Morgan confirmed. She paused a beat then added, 'Are you scared of women, Kane?'

Hunt laughed. A bead of sweat dropped off his nose and he hacked out a cough. 'Of course not. What's there to be scared of?'

'You tell me?'

'Women aren't scary, Morgan. Not even you. But not everyone's in as fortunate a position as me; some men *do* feel intimidated. It's why I wrote *The Chad Manifesto*.'

'But my understanding is whenever you think of women your little thing shrivels in on itself. It doesn't matter that you're popping Viagra like they're chocolate-coated peanuts, your soldier no longer stands to attention.'

'Oh my giddy aunt,' Justine said. 'Camera one on Hunt's face. Now, Yosef!'

'On it.'

Even the glare of the quartz lamps couldn't hide the flush that started at Hunt's neck then quickly ran up his face. He clenched his jaw. A vein on his forehead began ticking.

'Beautiful,' Justine said.

'What the hell are you talking about?' Hunt cried. 'I've never used Viagra! Every woman I hook up with, and there have been hundreds, has an evening they never forget. And it's one hundred per cent natural.'

'I think that's the first truthful thing you've said all night,' Morgan said, her voice dangerously sweet. 'The women you take home *do* have an evening they can never forget. Even after professional therapy.'

'I really don't know where you got that from, but if I were you I'd sack your researchers. You might find yourself in serious legal . . .'

He trailed off when Morgan revealed the prop she'd been holding back from everyone, even Justine. She upended a tote bag and something fell on the glass table.

It was penis-shaped, made of black silicone and attached to a harness. It looked both sleazy and pitiful in equal measure.

'What the hell is that?' Allan asked, his eyes glued to the monitor.

'Oh my God, it's a penile sleeve!' Justine replied. 'It fits over an impotent guy's dick and it's secured with those straps. Means they can have penetrative sex. Sort of. What's she doing with it on live television?'

'How would you know—?'

'I did that documentary on erectile dysfunction a few years back, remember?'

Allan did. It hadn't been cutting-edge television, but it hadn't been a bad programme.

'Should we cut to a break?' he said, his fingers hovering over the red button.

'Seriously? You want to cut Morgan off now? She'll skin us and wear us as hats.'

'Fair enough.'

'But get ready,' Justine said. 'Hunt looks like he's about to have a heart attack.'

Justine wasn't exaggerating. Hunt didn't look well. Morgan pushed the penile sleeve across the table. She used a paper tissue.

'You left this at Anita Fowles's flat,' she said. 'She asked if I could return it to you.'

'Th-th-that's not mine!'

'It isn't?'

'Of course not!'

'But it *looks* like yours.'

'It looks like . . . What the hell do you mean it *looks* like mine?'

'Oh sorry, didn't I say? Unbeknown to you, Anita filmed you stuffing your flaccid little thing into this contraption. When she asked why you were wearing a strap-on, you burst into tears.'

'She signed a non-disclosure agreement,' Hunt said. 'Even if there were a video, which of course there isn't, she couldn't show it to anyone.'

'You're right, of course, Anita did sign an NDA,' Morgan agreed. 'They *all* signed NDAs. It's why to date nothing's surfaced on the internet. Unfortunately for you, Anita's a law student, and the video she took also has you performing your party trick: lighting a cigarette with an electronic stun gun. Does that ring a bell, Kane?'

Hunt said nothing. He began to hyperventilate.

'Now, you may not know this, but like all contracts, NDAs cannot be used to protect illegal activities. We've taken legal advice and your possession and use of an illegal weapon appears to have rendered the NDA null and void.'

'I don't feel well,' Hunt said.

'No?' Morgan said. 'Well, I don't think this will make you feel any better. Because you'd already shared a picture of Anita online, she felt it only fair to reciprocate. The moment we went on air, Anita sent her video to a bunch of websites and newspaper editors and—'

'No, really, I don't feel . . .'

Hunt slumped in his seat. He stayed there a moment then collapsed on to the polished studio floor. Unconscious, he vomited.

Justine stared in horror at the monitor. Yosef had switched the live feed to Morgan's stricken face, but camera three was still on Hunt's. It was beetroot red. Vomit dribbled from the corner of his mouth.

'Go to a break!' Justine screamed.

Allan punched the cut button and the live feed went dead.

And on the studio floor, Kane Hunt got on with the business of dying . . .

Chapter 3

'Poe, why would someone want to buy my toenails?'

Most of Detective Sergeant Washington Poe's tea squirted out of his nose. The rest he spat over his chin and T-shirt. Beside him, her eyes glued to high-tech binoculars, Detective Inspector Stephanie Flynn sniggered.

It wasn't the strangest thing Matilda 'Tilly' Bradshaw had said to him. It didn't even make the top five, but without warning or context, it probably crept into his top ten. Maybe number nine. Weirder than when she'd asked him to rank his favourite cloud formations, but definitely not as bad as the time she asked him to check the mole on her bottom.

'You taking this one, boss?' Poe sighed, glancing down at his T-shirt. He was down to his last clean one.

Flynn shook her head but kept her eyes trained through the binoculars. Her blonde hair was tied back and it swung like a horse's tail.

'Not a chance,' she said. 'She asked you, and I've just sat through an hour of why I should still be breastfeeding.'

'You *should* still be breastfeeding, DI Flynn,' Bradshaw said. 'The World Health Organization is very clear on this: breastfeeding for eighteen months gives babies additional nutrition and illness protection. It helps fight disease all the way through the second year.'

'Yeah? Well, they aren't your nipples he's chewing on.'

'Are they cracked? Have you tried using breast milk as a moisturiser?'

This time it was Poe's turn to snigger. Bradshaw had yet to encounter a social situation she couldn't make more awkward.

'No, thank you, Tilly,' Flynn replied. 'And I've spoken to my doctor. He's quite happy for me to start weaning.'

Bradshaw frowned. Doctors were only one step above dentists, as far as she was concerned. Barely functioning morons.

'Anyway,' Flynn continued, 'weren't you trying to sell Poe your toenails . . .?'