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Grow Up

Written by Ben Brooks

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GROW UP

BEN BROOKS



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Oh, WE KID OURSELVES THERE'S FUTURE
IN THE FUCKING, BUT THERE IS NO
FUCKING FUTURE

– 'We Are Beautiful, We Are Doomed',
Los Campesinos!

PART 1

Red Sex and Small Deaths

1

It is 2:46 a.m. and I am not asleep. Insomnia can result from an overactive thyroid gland, diabetes, violent muscle twitching, eating a heavy meal or excessive caffeine consumption. It can also result from stress. I am stressed because I am thinking of Keith and how he murdered his ex-wife.

I go to www.girlsoncam.com, enter my nickname as 'Mr Hard' and click 'enter room'.

You: hey
Sexythai: hi babe, feelin horny?

Sexythai is short and very thin. Her skin is the colour of weak tea and her olive eyes are disproportionately wide. She is lying on a moth-eaten chaise longue that quivers as her pelvis gyrates.

You: sure

Sexythai: wanna go private?

Private is where you pay money to see the girl just you and her, and you can tell her to finger herself or repeatedly shout your name or pretend to be your art teacher. I do not pay to go private with girls. If you are tactful you can sometimes elicit nipple-flashes or quick glimpses of clit from them without paying anything.

Sexythai: baby?

Pause.

Sexythai is using her hands to draw my attention to her crotch. She is selling herself to me because, despite rapid industrialisation, Thailand remains a poverty-stricken country.

I don't know what I am doing.

I am bored.

I am a large, empty grain silo.

You: are you a Buddhist?

She definitely is. 95% of all Thais are Buddhist.

Sexythai: yes

I knew it.

You: Theravada?

Pause.

Sexythai: yes, private babe
You: i could just look this up on Wikipedia.

Pause.

Sexythai: look this

She pulls a decidedly un-erect nipple from its bra cup and begins to squeeze the teat in my direction. I feel vaguely intimidated but willing to continue.

You: what is your name?

Pause.

Sexythai: i want you in me baby
You: don't say that, don't ruin the mood
Sexythai: come in private
You: I like it here, it's less expensive

Pause.

You: how many baht to the pound?

She logs off.

I write down 'Mr Hard' and 'Sexythai' on a piece of paper because I feel as though we have developed a 'special connection' and I would like to talk with her again one evening. Perhaps I will rescue her from poverty in Thailand and we will marry. I bookmark the 'oriental' category as a favourite. You should not have favourites. Dad was my favourite.

Keith is a murderer.

Dad was not.

2

Morning. 8:35 a.m. I am stood at my window looking into the garden. Keith is in the garden massaging the soil. He is probably imagining that the soil is the cleavage of a human cadaver. He is probably going to rub his face in the soil.

Above him the sky is stratified like Neopolitan ice cream. Salmon. Amber. Sepia. They fall and fade into each other. Salmoanmbesrepia. It smells of beer and tobacco and paper in my room. The glass smells of dust and old, trapped sun. Birds are flirting in the clouds.

I turn on my laptop and log on to Facebook. It says that Georgia Treely is online on Facebook chat. Georgia Treely probably isn't online on Facebook chat. Facebook chat is tricking me.

Georgia Treely is in my Psychology class. I want to

have a sexual relationship with Georgia Treely but I can't because she believes in Jesus and her mum shops at Waitrose. The best I can hope for is teenage rebellion against the values of her home environment. If ever this happens I will offer myself up as a medium for revolt. When my penis enters her vagina she will be thinking of how much she hates her mum and how unreasonable her curfews are.

I have never spoken to Georgia Treely.

I open a chat window.

Me: hello
Me: hello
Me: hello
Me: hello
Me: sorry
Me: hello
Me: hello
Me: you aren't there
Me: will you still read this
Me: maybe not
Me: no
Me: hello
Me: okay
Me: sh

Georgia Treely is offline.

I close the laptop and pick some clothes off the floor. Keith strokes weeds in the garden. It is almost time to meet Tenaya.

+

I am certain that Keith is a murderer. If you look at his history close enough, you can see that his ex-wife seems to just disappear, benefiting him in the process. Margaret Clamwell. May she Rest In Peace.

This is how I know that Keith is a murderer:

1. Divorce Settlements
   When Keith 'left' Margaret Clamwell there was no vicious court case and he came out of the marriage having lost nothing. Keith got all of the liquid and all of the illiquid assets. This means that he kept his house and his 1968 Triumph TR 250 as well as the retirement plans and brokerage accounts (what are these?). This is not how divorce settlements work. In a marriage that does not end in murder, one partner will get the liquid assets and one partner will get the illiquid assets. Keith could only get both by murdering Margaret Clamwell. Which he definitely did.

2. Suspicious Mound
   Keith used to live in a suburb called Sarahdale. The house he shared with Margaret Clamwell was number

7 Huntington Lane. If you go to this house late at night with a balaclava over your head and a torch in your hand, you will find a highly suspicious mound beneath an unenthusiastic apple tree. You will also be chased away and threatened by the current residents. This is where Keith buried Margaret Clamwell.

3. Body Type

   Keith has the body type Mesomorph; he is muscular and hard. William Sheldon did studies in the 1940s that showed how the temperament of Mesomorphs may lead them to carry out crimes. Keith also has a handlebar moustache and could easily find employment in a gay bar. Gay people do murders a lot, like 'The Doctor of Death'. Keith is a Doctor of Death. Keith is a murderer.

4. Upbringing

   Keith came from a 'broken home'. His dad beat him and his mother used heroin and his sister ran away to be a fake prostitute in a gothic circus. I know this because Keith enjoys telling me how easy my life is by talking about his childhood immediately after anything pleasant happens. I sometimes get the impression that he would like to break my home to teach me a lesson. Keith is also noticeably unintelligent. Both of these are risk factors in developing criminal tendencies. This means that you shouldn't blame Keith for what he did

but you should be scared of him because he might murder you. This is why I need to get Keith away from Mum.

5. Confessions
   Keith enjoys dropping subtle hints about how he murdered his wife through using clichéd phrases that relate to homicide. Some things he has said when discussing Margaret Clamwell are 'It's all dead and buried now' and 'I could have killed her'. I know you killed her, Keith. Keith is a murderer.

+

I am trying to explain all of these evidences to Tenaya, again. It is Friday and we are sat in Lily's, on the comfy patched-up sofas by the bay window. It looks out onto a slim patchwork backstreet that holds a shop selling lavender soap and bath bombs, and a shop that sells Ouija boards, Buddhist books, and incense. There is a pot of tea leaking steam between us and we are not holding cigarettes because the Government have banned that. This year has been a bad year for good things.

'You can't be certain,' she says. 'Not yet. Wait a while, gather more evidence.'

'This is enough evidence,' I say. 'He definitely did it.'

Tenaya is a very practically minded person. She thinks things through very thoroughly. For this reason, Tenaya is

either not entirely convinced of Keith's guilt or she is not entirely convinced that the police will be entirely convinced of Keith's guilt. Either one or both of these thoughts has prevented her from fully committing to my cause.

'We could exhume her?' Tenaya says.

I stare at her. My eyes are wide and excited. I can't understand why I didn't think of this. This is the perfect solution to the problem of incriminating Keith. We will dig up the body, call the police, and then Mum will be safe and Keith will be securely imprisoned.

'Fuck,' I say. 'Yes. I should have thought of that. When?'

'It will have to be a Saturday or a Sunday. It can't be tomorrow because of your party and it can't be next weekend because of the Psychology trip. That makes it either the 24th or the 25th, I think.'

I am grinning at her now. I am excited about seeing justice done and also about getting to hold a dead body. A real dead human. A human that Keith killed, maybe with his bare hands or with a kitchen knife or a sawn-off shotgun or poison. There will maybe be a crater in Margaret Clamwell's skull where he hit her with a lamp or his trombone and she will maybe have fractured legs from where he broke them so she couldn't run away. The police will find out all of these things in the post mortem but I will find them out first.

We pay for our tea and walk to Imran's. Imran's is a corner shop run by several Indian men who all claim to

be called Imran. We go there to buy alcohol and cigarettes because they always either fail to ask for ID or are susceptible to being convinced that we are over-age. We are seventeen. Secret weapon: breasts.

Today it is the slovenly man with distinctly veined and protruding eyes. He is 'reading' a men's magazine behind the counter, hurriedly tidying when we come in.

'Hello,' Tenaya says. 'Twenty-five grams of Gold Leaf and a litre of Chekhov, please.'

The slovenly man examines us both. His eyes crawl even further out of his skull. I consider leaning forward, forcing them back in, and telling him that he is now free to lead a normal life.

'You got ID?' He asks. His voice is like the motor of an old Citroën.

'Sorry?'

'EYE DEE?'

'Oh, okay. Right. I'll have a look.' Tenaya rummages in her pockets for the driving licence that she does not have. 'I don't have it. Fuck. I must have left it in the car. Are you going to make me go all the way back and get it?'

The man looks extremely uneasy.

He glances at me.

'EYE DEE?' he shouts.

'Sorry, I don't believe in carrying identification. Doing so means you are willingly embracing a totalitarian state.'

The man blinks.

I have failed to abate his unease.

He turns back to Tenaya. Tenaya leans forward over the counter and presses her breasts together with her upper arms. She runs her tongue over her upper lip. I laugh. I bend the laugh into a cough. The cough climbs back out of my throat as more laughter.

The man sighs.

'You bring ID next time. You promise Imran this. Never again I do this, you hear?'

We nod. Greed defeats social responsibility. Everyone wins.

He puts the vodka into a blue plastic bag and passes Tenaya the tobacco.

We pay and leave.

So far the day's plans are unfolding well. As long as Ping gets the drugs for tomorrow and all the right people turn up then the party will go well. If something has gone well it means that I have had sex, gotten drunk and taken enough of a drug to feel the effects described to us by Mr Gates during Personal Social Health Education. I feel quietly confident that all of these criteria will be fulfilled. The only criterion that is at all out of my control is the former, though this will be relatively easy to ensure, provided enough girls attend. If you fire enough shots then at least one will make contact, maybe more. Always exciting.

With the necessary personal supplies on board, we get the bus to Elsmere, where Mum and Keith are preparing

for their visit to Keith's parents in Cornwall. They are having a pub party to celebrate their 50th wedding anniversary. They probably wouldn't want their son there if they knew the truth about him being a murderer. Then Mum wouldn't have to go either, which would be good for her because it will probably be shit. Keith will get drunk, say he loves her, convince her to do anal sex with him and then kill her. I hope he doesn't kill her. If he does, I will have concrete proof of his guilt. Ambivalence. Maybe he will try to worm his way out of the murder charge by claiming that her death was the result of an experimental sexual act gone wrong. People do that sometimes, I have seen it on the news.

'Hello, Jasper. Tenaya, dear, how are you?' Mum says. She is wrestling a suitcase into the boot of our mustard Volvo.

'Very well thank you, Mrs Wolf,' Tenaya says. When she speaks to my mum, Tenaya uses a voice she has stolen from a young girl in the television adaptation of a Dickens novel.

'Glad to hear it,' Mum says. 'Jasper, have you written out a schedule for your day tomorrow?'

Mum likes to write schedules. Tenaya says this is because she is a lawyer. I do not know if she is a lawyer or not. She has a briefcase and a BlackBerry. In Psychology we learned that retentive character traits are the result of under-indulgence at the Anal Stage of Psychosexual Development. Mum constructs hugely detailed schedules

and then suffers panic attacks when they are delayed because she needs the toilet or receives a phone call. By the time these panic attacks have subsided, her schedules have been so severely thwarted that she feels it necessary to write out new ones. Our house is littered with extremely dull schedules.

Here is a hypothetical example:

8:00–8:03 a.m.: Wake up, climb out of bed, tell Keith to get up.

8:03–8:10 a.m.: Brush teeth, go to the toilet, make a conscious effort to produce reeking faeces.

8:10–8:45 a.m.: Eat breakfast. Encourage Jasper to write a schedule for the day. Incessantly quiz Jasper about school work, girls, drugs and smoking. Attempt to dissuade Jasper from putting over one teaspoon of sugar into his tea. Inform Jasper that he is a colossal disappointment. Go to work.

This is a morning schedule. Mum will write three schedules every day: a work schedule, an evening schedule and a schedule for the following morning.

She constantly urges me to write schedules. During exam times and times when she is away I am *made* to write schedules. Both of these things are happening now. The writing of a schedule is unavoidable. I write two so as to keep us both content.

Here is the schedule that I show to Mum:

Revision Schedule (for Mum)

7:00 a.m. – Wake up, good morning! Breakfast of 2 Weetabix (sugarless)

7:30 a.m. – Revise, I will thank Mum one day!

11:00 a.m. – Therapy

12:30 a.m. – Further revision

6:00 p.m. – Dinner of lasagne and beans, get high on drugs (only joking, Mum!)

7:00 p.m. + Watch the History Channel/National Geographic/Discovery/other educational but exciting television channels in order to wind down before bedtime at 10:00 p.m.

Repeat.

Here is the schedule that I write for myself:

Revision Schedule (for me)

8:00 a.m. – Wake up if can be bothered. Breakfast of tea, four sugars, and cigarette

9:00 a.m. – Watch *Jeremy Kyle*

10:00 a.m. – Bath. Read *Mein Kampf* whilst bathing, try not to drop it!

11:00 a.m. – Therapy

12:15 a.m. – Collect Ping

12:30 a.m. – Talk over party details with Tenaya. Sit around.

4:00 p.m. – Move breakable objects. Deposit ashtrays on various surfaces. Leave plastic bowls beside beds and settees.

6:00 p.m. – Dine on curry flavour Pot Noodles. Get high on drugs (sorry, Mum!)

8:00 p.m. – Graciously welcome guests and accept free cans of beer and cigarettes.

9:00 p.m. + Unstructured fun

Do not repeat.

'Are you staying over tonight, Tenaya?' Mum asks.

'If that's all right.'

'Of course, just make sure your parents know where you are.'

'Yes, Mrs Wolf.'

'And no one else is to come over.'

'Yes, Mum.'

Mum kisses me on the forehead and says that she loves me.

'Have a good time and make sure you two behave yourselves,' she says, getting into our car.

'See you later, big man,' Keith says.

'Yea.'

Keith often chooses to use oddly positive and patronising colloquialisms when addressing me. On the occasions when he does address me, my internal monologue runs in overdrive, continually repeating the word MURDERER in the voice of a petrified middle-aged housewife. It is ironic that Keith uses so many friendly terms because actually he is brutal and heartless.

Mum told me once that I don't understand irony, which

was ironic because she was holding a packet of fish fingers at the time.

Not really, that was a joke. I was trying to lighten the mood.

Me and Tenaya watch the car shrink to nothing, then she rolls us both cigarettes and we go inside.

'Are the Layton Hill kids coming?' she asks. I shrug.

'Is Tom coming?' I ask. She shrugs.

'He said he would.'

Tom is Tenaya's boyfriend. He wears knitted jumpers ironically and has oversized black plastic glasses. Sometimes, when Tom speaks, I can empathise with Keith and begin to believe that he may have had a valid reason for murdering Margaret Clamwell with his trombone. Tenaya only likes him because he has cheekbones like protractor edges.

'You had best be civil this time, Jasper,' I am warned. Last time we were at a party with Tom, I put date-rape drug in his vodka and Tenaya had to carry him home. I later confessed under duress, because Tenaya was fretting that the vodka had been meant for her. She told me she was scared for her life.

'Of course,' I promise. I have better plans for Tom this time.

We both begin to prepare the house for Saturday. We hide ornaments beneath the stairs and distribute ashtrays and buckets.

'Do you think people will feel compelled to break things?' I say.

'Depends.'

'We should have some sort of system in place for dealing with offenders,' I say. 'If the house gets trashed, Mum will not let me get my nipple pierced.'

'Your what?'

'Never mind.'

'Did you say your nipple pierced, Jasper?'

'Do you still have that rape spray?'

'Your nipple?'

'Okay, we will rape-spray people in the eyes if they do anything wrong. You will trip them over and I will sit on their chests and spray them in their stupid vandal faces.'

I throw some plastic bags around the room. They will save the family home my mother has worked so hard to provide for me.

'That should be fine,' Tenaya says. 'Do you have Julia tomorrow?'

'Yea, you can stay here the whole day or meet me and Ping in town after, it's up to you.'

'I'll decide in the morning.'

Tenaya has enough ketamine left for us both to have a line. Mild relaxation ensues. We fall asleep watching a Royal Philharmonic rendition of Stravinsky's *Firebird*.