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Opening Extract from...

All She Wants

Written by Jonathan Harvey

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JONATHAN
HARVEY

All She
WANTS

PAN BOOKS



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*This book is dedicated to anyone who ever woke up
with the horrors, the morning after the night before,
and thought 'Oh God. What did I do last night?'*

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PROLOGUE

1994

We must have looked an odd sight, the three of us: me, Our Joey and Mum, scuttling along the pavement of an industrial estate in South Liverpool carrying deckchairs and packed lunch boxes in the middle of December.

‘Jodie, your shoes are really getting on my tits,’ moaned Our Joey.

‘Don’t say tits, Joey,’ Mum said sternly.

‘Why not?’

He knew why not. ‘It’s not becoming for an eight-year-old.’

‘Can I say it?’ I asked. I was ten. AKA dead grown up.

‘No.’

Our Joey tried again. ‘Jodie your shoes are really getting on my *nerves*.’

He meant the noise they were making. I’d recently looped some *Friends* fridge magnets into the laces of my shoes, so with every hurried step I took, Chandler and Joey clunked against my burgundy patent leather T-bars.

The air was heavy with the acrid tang of chemicals wafting on the breeze from the Mersey. We passed the cigarette factory where Mum worked. We passed the boarded-up bank. We

passed the faded old sign that said, 'Welcome To Liverpool, A Socialist Council', onto which someone had graffitied 'anti' before the 'socialist' and then crossed out the 'ist'. Hilarious. And then suddenly Mum stopped, snapped her deckchair out and sat down. Me and Our Joey followed suit, and wondered what on earth was going on.

We appeared to be sitting outside some gates. There was a barrier that looked like it might go up to let traffic through, a glass-fronted booth with a security guard in it and two brick walls on either side. It looked just like the entrance to Mum's work, except there were a few purple flags on each side of the gates, which I felt was a bit showy offy for a factory.

'Mum? Why are we here?'

'Shut up and have a sandwich, Jodie.'

I opened the red plastic *Friends* lunchbox I held in my shivering hand and prised apart the Slimcea slices within to inspect their contents. Tuna paste. I pulled a face and looked at Mum. She smiled apologetically.

'I haven't had time to go up Kwik Save,' she explained.

I rolled my eyes and shut the box in disgust.

'Where are we, Mum?' moaned Our Joey, toying with the clasp on his Polly Pocket lunchbox. 'I don't understand.'

Mum allowed herself a mischievous chuckle and my heart sank.

'This, kids' – I rolled my eyes again and tutted. I wasn't a kid. I was TEN – 'is where dreams are made!'

I looked at her like she was mad.

Let me explain. This was meant to be a Big Day Out for us. It was the school holidays, and to spare the monotony of just 'playing out' each day, Mum would occasionally wake us up with the thrilling announcement, 'Right! We're having a day . . . out!' At which me and my brother would squeal, jump

like lemmings from our bunk beds, then run to the bathroom to wash and brush our teeth together, fizzing with excitement. We did everything together, me and Our Joey, bar going to the loo. Mind you, we did that too sometimes, just to wind Mum up.

‘Get out of there, the pair of you! It’s not natural!’ she’d holler, banging on the door. ‘If you’re showing each other your bits I’ll hit the roof,’ which, bearing in mind she always wore impossibly high heels, was not outside the realms of possibility. Though she needn’t have worried. We never showed each other our bits. For my part I’d already seen Sean McEvoy’s todger when he waggled it around in show and tell, and whenever I mentioned fannies to Our Joey he went a bit pale, said, ‘I feel sick,’ and waggled his hand around, which was drama queen sign language for ‘change the subject’.

Anyway. Where was I? Oh yes! Big Days Out. So there’s me and Our Joey, full of the joys of spring, or summer, or Christmas, or whichever half term it might be. But then, within an hour or so, as reality set in, we’d become less enamoured with what constituted Mum’s idea of ‘a holiday in a day’:

One day in the summer holidays we went to watch the planes take off at Liverpool airport.

One day in the Easter half term we got a train to Southport to go and see some red squirrels in a forest, only instead we found a trampy bloke playing with himself and ended up catching the first train back. When Our Joey asked Mum what he was doing, she kept saying he was ‘very itchy’.

Another day Mum took us to the local cats’ home to stare at a bunch of moggies lying behind Perspex. At the end of the visit me and Our Joey wanted to take one home, but Mum claimed Dad was allergic.

So as you can imagine, my hopes weren’t high for this

particular day out. Particularly as we were sitting in deckchairs outside a factory three bus stops away from home.

However, the next thing she said made my heart literally skip a beat.

‘This, kids, is where they film *Acacia Avenue*.’

‘WHAT?!’ That was me and Our Joey speaking in unison.

We looked at each other, then peered back at the gates. It was now I realized that written on the purple flags on either side of the gates were the words ‘Crystal TV’. I had seen those words before. They came up on the telly at the end of every episode of our favourite soap opera.

Every Monday and Wednesday *Acacia Avenue* was religious viewing in our house. Me, Our Joey, Mum and Dad would sit watching it through a fog of smoke, courtesy of the free cigarettes Mum got from work, Mum and Dad sucking away like they were getting the elixir of youth from every little drag; me and Our Joey hacking our guts up and wafting the smoke away dramatically. We were completely gripped when Nona Newman from the corner shop began her illicit affair with Harry from the factory behind her street-sweeper hubby Tex’s back. And there was that heart-stopping moment when Tex saw Nona’s handbag on the back seat of Harry’s Ford Capri. But when he referred to it as ‘My Nona’s handbag’, Our Joey hit the roof.

‘It’s not a handbag it’s a clutchbag!’ he screamed, knocking some Wotsits onto the carpet and getting an arched-eyebrow glare from my dad. It really wasn’t becoming for an eight-year-old boy in Liverpool to know the difference between a handbag and a clutchbag. Our Joey caught the glare, looked wounded and muttered to himself, ‘Any idiot can see that.’ Mum seemed to consider this, then nodded her head in agreement. Not knowing what to say, Dad just pointed to the Wotsits on the floor and Our Joey curtly picked them up.

Our Joey and me used to play *Acacia Avenue* in the bedroom of our dormer bungalow. My dressing table became the counter of the Sleepy Trout pub and I was sneering barmaid Sorrel while Our Joey was her ditzy sidekick Cheryl. Together we'd serve imaginary pints of bitter to a selection of Barbies, Tiny Tears and teddy bears. Sometimes our back garden became the avenue itself and we'd re-enact one of the catfights that regularly ensued after kicking-out time. Mum and Dad had often commented that it was filmed 'just down the road', but I'd never quite believed them. To me it was a real world, real life; it just happened to take place inside a box in the corner of our lounge with really little people twice a week.

'Can we go in and look?' asked Joey, peering at the security guard.

'No.'

'Ah go on, Mum,' I joined in.

'No, Jodie. It's against the law.' And she clicked out the nib of her twelve-colour biro and started having a crack at a wordsearch in her *Puzzler* magazine. I looked at her, and in that instant decided she was the most brilliant, most lovely, most beautiful mum in the whole wide world. For once I thought it was fab the way she thought she looked a bit like Princess Di, side-flicking her hair accordingly, peeking out from behind her bottle-blond fringe with an air of coyness that didn't quite suit her. I thought – possibly for the first time – that it was great she still took care of herself and her figure and that, at the grand old age of thirty-two, she still got wolf whistles whenever she past a building site. 'Best legs in Liverpool,' my dad always said. I looked at them now, resplendent in their morello cherry woollen tights. I'd always been slightly mortified by her propensity to show them off all the time by wearing skirts that were far too short for her, but today I decided she had

every right. Those legs were just so . . . leggy. Both of them. So why not wear miniskirts at the really old age of thirty-two and make a show of yourself and your family? She was my mum. She could do anything she wanted. She had brought me and Our Joey to *Acacia Avenue*!

I looked at Our Joey and it seemed like he was having similar thoughts. His little snub nose with the smattering of freckles, which I had too but covered in the powder from Mum's compact whenever she wasn't looking, rose skyward, like one of the Bisto kids smelling something wonderful on the other side of the gates. It was as if the magic of *Acacia Avenue* was wafting towards us in a glittery line of fairy dust, completely blocking out the smell from the factories. His green eyes, which I hated with an envy only a sibling can understand – one of mine was blue, the other brown; I was a freak – were half closed in an affectation of contentment that he usually only saved for the Eurovision Song Contest and whenever Madonna was on *Top of the Pops*. While I watched him, his eyes flicked open like a startled china doll as a shadow crossed our path. Someone else had joined our party.

A fat man in a dirty parka with matted fur trim and a plaster on his glasses was standing nearer the gates than our deck-chairs. He had a camera in one hand and an autograph book in the other. At first I thought he was the trampy bloke from the forest near Southport, but when Mum gave him a cheery, 'Hiya!' I thought he mustn't be. There was definitely something weird about him, though. If he lived on our street, Mum would probably have told us to hurry past his house whenever we went by. The fat man nodded and started flicking through his autograph book.

'Who's that?' asked Joey. But Mum gave him one of her looks, so he tutted and looked away, muttering, 'Well you were talking to him,' under his breath.

The fat guy had a weird habit of licking his thumb and turning the pages of his autograph book quickly, almost tearing the paper in his brusqueness. I could tell he was showing off, so I ignored him. I saw Joey looking at the weird guy, so I coughed and he looked at me.

‘He loves that book,’ I said quietly, cocking my head in the direction of the fat bloke.

Joey giggled. ‘I know.’

‘He’s made up with it.’

‘I know.’

‘He’s like, going with it.’

‘I know.’

Our Joey could hardly get his words out because he was laughing so much. I loved it when I made Our Joey laugh. But then we jumped as Fat Bloke said something.

‘How long you been here?’ he was talking to Mum.

‘Just got here, love.’ Mum was calling him love. I looked to Our Joey.

‘She fancies him,’ he mouthed to me and I giggled.

‘Seen anyone?’

‘Not yet, love.’

And because she said love again, me and Our Joey creased up. Mum gave us a look, so we settled down.

‘I’ve seen them all here,’ the bloke carried on, and reeled off a list of names that meant nothing to me but everything to my mum, because she ood and ah’d throughout the extensive list. When he finished she took a cigarette out of her handbag and lit up, like she did after a good movie or a long phone conversation. She breathed the smoke out of her nose like a dragon and shook her head, impressed. I was just about to ask her who all those people were when Fat Bloke jumped to attention and Mum swivelled her head to look down the street. I looked. Our Joey looked.

A car was approaching. I'm not sure what sort of car it was – I've never been into cars – but it was black and the windows were black, too. Fat Bloke was getting very excited, hopping from one foot to the other like some sort of sumo morris dancer.

'It's Yvonne Carsgrove! It's Yvonne Carsgrove!' he squealed. 'That's her car, I'd know it anywhere!' Mum stood up, letting her *Puzzler* fall into her deckchair.

'Go'way, you're joking!' she was getting excited, too. She flicked her ciggie into the road and reflicked her hair with her hands. 'Get up, kids!'

Kids! I was TEN! I got up anyway as the black car slowed down as it approached the gates. Fat Bloke was waving at it like we were stranded in the desert and he was flagging down the first vehicle in ages that might take us to the next town. As the car ground to a halt – it had little choice as Fat Bloke had flung himself into its path, so it was either stop or the fat guy gets it – the driver's window lowered. I looked in.

All I could see was a head. Not severed or anything, but a woman's head. She had a fur hat thing on and *massive* sunglasses. And it wasn't even sunny. For a second I thought it was Shirley Bassey, because that's what she looked like on the back of one of my dad's LPs (the one that described her as 'the Lily of Tiger Bay'), but as Fat Bloke was rushing to the open car window waggling his autograph book in this vision's face, I realized it must be someone from *Acacia Avenue*. But who? He thrust the book through the open window and I saw the vision scribble something inside.

Mum started poking me. 'Say hello, Jodie!' And she pushed me forward. Our Joey fell in alongside me: she must have been poking him, too.

'Who is it?' Our Joey asked.

Mum rolled her eyes like he was stupid. 'It's Nona Newman!'

I gulped and looked again. Could it really be? No! Nona Newman? The lady who worked in the corner shop who'd had an affair with the factory foreman behind her street-sweeper husband's back? That wasn't Nona Newman. Nona Newman was dead ordinary looking. She worked in a shop. She wore a mac when it rained and always moaned that she 'didn't have enough money for a pair of shoes that wouldn't let the rain in'. Why would she be driving round in a big black car, wearing fur hats and sunglasses? Nona was a bit . . . dull. So dull me and Our Joey used to row over who would play her when we were playing corner shop in our bedroom. But this lady. Well, this lady looked like a star!

'Excuse me, Nona,' I heard Mum saying. 'Only these are my kids. Our Jodie and Our Joey. And they're both big fans of yours.'

At which the vision slipped off her sunglasses to reveal that – oh my God, Mum was right – it was indeed Nona Newman. She smiled. We both stood there in stunned silence. She was a lot bigger than when she was in the corner of our lounge.

'But he said your name was something else,' I said, confused.

The vision smiled, like a kindly teacher who was going to teach you a big word you didn't understand but they did and they loved showing off about it.

'Darling, I'm an actress. My real name is Yvonne, but I play Nona. It's my job.'

I nodded.

'Kids, eh?' Fat Bloke muttered. Nona shot him a look of contempt, which made me warm to her.

'Anyway,' said Nona. She sounded posher than she did on the telly. 'Have you two cherubs decided what you want for Christmas yet?'

I had. I'd written to Santa and asked for a night of passion with Joey from *Friends*. I had no idea what it meant, but I'd heard Mum's friend Maureen saying she'd had a night of passion with Ged from the Elephant and not to tell their Tony. Something told me that if I said this now Mum'd protest that it wasn't becoming for a ten-year-old, so I just shook my head and shrugged. Our Joey stepped forward and opened his mouth. Surely he wasn't going to tell her the truth, was he? He'd confided in me only the night before that all he wanted for Christmas was a horse-riding Barbie. He'd sworn me to secrecy over it, because if anyone found out he would a) get his head kicked in and b) get his head kicked in again. But he opened his mouth and instead of telling the truth and saying, 'I might only be eight, but I'm the biggest poofter on the block and would therefore like a horse-riding Barbie with a poseable body and moveable arms,' he said:

'All I want for Christmas is a kiss from Nona Newman.'

Oh God. I actually felt physically sick. My brother, much as I loved him, and much as he was kind of my best friend in the whole wide world, always knew which buttons to press to get people on his side. I knew now that Nona Newman would be putty in his hands.

And indeed she was. She stretched out both her arms – no mean feat through a car window – and beckoned my little brother towards her with a very theatrical cry of, 'Come here, my little soldier!' Which he did. Though how many soldiers were known to skip rather than march I didn't know. Mum was bubbling with excitement and pride as she watched her youngest being kissed by none other than Nona Newman. Problem was, Our Joey was a bit too tiny to reach up through her window.

'Lift him up, Mum,' Nona encouraged. Mum stepped for-

ward and hoisted Our Joey aloft so he came in line with Nona's lips, and when she eventually put him down again he had an orange lip mark on his forehead. I jealously saw that she was now holding his hand through the window. It looked quite awkward, but neither of them seemed to mind. She had this weird black velvet coat thing on with a wizard's sleeve effect, which would have looked hideous on Mum or me, but sort of worked on her.

'What do you want to be when you grow up, kid?' Nona asked.

'Like you,' he bleated. And again I felt sick. He didn't want to be her. He wanted to be Madonna in her 'True Blue' outfits. But Nona nodded as if it was perfectly normal.

'Well, kid. If I can offer you one piece of advice, it's this.'

I glanced over at Fat Bloke. He was seething with jealousy. Nona Newman had obviously never kissed him or given him advice. Mum was almost crying by now.

'What, Nona?' asked Our Joey. Blimey, he was on first-name terms with her now.

'That's not her real name!' barked Fat Bloke. 'That's her character's name. Her real name's Yvonne Carsgrove, God! GET IT RIGHT!'

Mum looked like she might punch him and said, 'All right, Tubby love. Wind your neck in!'

Nona clasped Our Joey's hand so tight I could see the colour draining out of her knuckles, then she offered her words of wisdom.

'Reach for the stars, kid. But remember, be nice to the people you meet on the way up, coz you only meet the same people on the way back down. OK?'

Our Joey nodded, though I could tell he had no idea what she was on about. Mum was nodding her head vehemently, as

if she'd been entrusted with the meaning of life itself. I saw her lips move as she mouthed the words back to herself, in case she was asked to repeat it at a later date.

And then Nona's hand slipped away from Our Joey's and disappeared back into the car. As the colour returned to Our Joey's hand, so the window silently slid closed and the car started up again. Nona Newman/Yvonne Carsgrove drove through the gates into Crystal TV and Our Joey stood on the pavement gloating like the cat who'd got the cream.

We hung around for another hour. A few cars came and went, but no one else stopped to say hello and Fat Bloke was convinced they were 'only extras' – whatever that meant – then when it started to rain Mum decided it was time to go home. As we dragged our deckchairs to the bus stop Mum kept wittering on about what a special day it had been and how lovely Nona Newman was. Our Joey kept his mouth shut, which was almost more irritating than if he'd not shut up about his 'special moment'. I thought he was still gloating until he said, 'Nona Newman's breath smells of poo.'

'Joey!' snapped Mum.

'What?'

'That's very unbecoming!'

'Why? I never said shite!'

'JOEY!'

We carried on walking. God the deckchairs were heavy.

'Nona Newman was lovely to you then and that's how you repay her? Joey McGee I am disappointed in you. Very disappointed in you. You had to go and spoil an otherwise perfect day.'

As we waited at the bus stop, Mum took out a cigarette and lit it up. Again the dragon nose. She saw me staring and smiled. I smiled back.

‘Mum?’

‘What?’

‘When I grow up,’ I said, ‘I’m gonna be an actress. And I’m gonna be in *Acacia Avenue*.’

Mum chuckled, letting the ciggie hang out of the corner of her mouth as she looked in her handbag for her little compact mirror. She got it out and checked her face.

‘You daft sod,’ she said, but she said it fondly.

I looked out at the empty street. There was nothing to be seen for miles but factory gates and boarded-up buildings. And I thought, Why not? It was only three bus stops away. Why shouldn’t I? The teachers at school were always asking us what we wanted to be when we grew up. Everyone else in my class used to say they wanted to work at the ciggie factory like their mams and dads, but I was going to be different. From now on I’d say I was going to be like Nona Newman and be an actress in *Acacia Avenue*. What was so weird about that?

And maybe, if I wished for it hard enough, one day it would actually come true.