

## LOCKDOWN MONOLOGUES

Matthew Turner

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### A TEAR

JULIA, 42, female

JULIA

*[Briskly.]* It was like a smudge of dirt, just under the eye. Thomas had taken her to Sylvia's so naturally I stayed home – I saw it as soon as she skipped into the room, no one notices like a mother, a hair out of place, you could pluck out a single eyelash and I'd know. That's the curse of motherhood, an obsession with detail – and no one else will ever see your child the way you do. So they tell me to chill out, but I can't not see, can I? I can't not see that my four-year-old has a long filthy smear on her cheek.

And when she jumps in my lap I give her cheek a quick rub with my thumb – a dry thumb, I'm not one of those mums who thinks their own saliva has antibacterial properties. It doesn't come off but I think, it's nearly bathtime, I'll get it later. See? See how chilled out I am?

*Beat.*

You know how a tortoise, not really but in cartoons a tortoise will leave its shell and it's just a skinny little thing, well it's how I picture Thomas as a child, a tortoise without a shell. I can't imagine what it's like, losing one parent as a child is bad enough, but losing both within

a year, and that's when he went to live with Sylvia, his mother's older sister. A new home for the little lost soul.

I always assumed, with my amateur hour psychiatry, that was why he has to make a joke of everything, can never face anything head-on. The sort of person you have to take their feelings as read because they'll never actually come out and say it.

*Beat.*

We hadn't even brought Megan home from the hospital and she's there, claiming first hugs. I'm lying in bed trying to work out what the fuck has happened to my insides and Sylvia's cooing to Megan, right in my face, 'I'm going to spoil you rotten' – so anyway, no you're not, just give me a minute to get my shit together, and I look at Thomas and he doesn't get it. She thinks she's gonna spoil my daughter?

She said, 'I want Megan to call me Grandma.' How it was only right for Megan to feel she wasn't missing out, especially with my mum being over in Portugal. Never misses a trick. It's not a lie, she said, because she fills the grandmother function. And if we say no we won't have a babysitter.

*Beat.*

I rubbed her face with a flannel but the mark didn't come off. I thought maybe I could see some of the dirt giving way but still there's this clear tear shape. I rubbed again, but Megan started to cry and her cheek was red so I stopped. I didn't know what to think but I didn't sleep that night.

In the morning it's still there. More than a freckle – it's a good inch long, but Thomas says sometimes they get birthmarks later in life, as though he's an expert on this and hasn't just googled it five minutes ago. I rub a little harder each day but Thomas says I'll make her self-conscious, like I don't already know what life will be like for a girl with

a birthmark on her face. Ever since the tear appeared we'd get sympathetic looks or one time a cousin of his saying 'What's that on her face?' – it's like they think she can't hear. Like she doesn't count now she's disfigured.

*Beat.*

Apparently that's overly dramatic and doesn't help matters.

*Beat.*

But I wasn't there. How could I know? Traumatic experiences make their mark on our bodies. We know this. Strong emotions leave us scarred.

This only made Thomas angry. I shouldn't be talking about Sylvia's decisions. He was there. He was in charge, not Sylvia.

*Beat.*

Finally we had a summit meeting, with Thomas as Switzerland. He said to Sylvia, I have to give him some credit for this, he said 'I think all Julia wants is, not all the time but sometimes, is to hear that she's doing a good job. You know, that she's a good mother.'

Sylvia says, 'Yes, but I'm Megan's grandmother. If something's being done the wrong way I can't simply stand by. It's my duty to step in.' I'm laying my soul on the line and she starts 'Yes, but'. 'Yes, but I don't give the slightest fuck about you and how you feel. You're simply an obstacle I have to endure to see Megan.'

I rang my mum in Portugal and she's saying I must remember Megan is Sylvia's first grandchild, it's only natural she'll want to be involved. Well actually, a, Sylvia's not her grandmother and, b, she's your first grandchild too, Mum, and you didn't even see her for nine months.

It felt like they were staging an intervention, trying to surgically remove me from my daughter's life, erase the mad bitch from existence. So I played my trump card. 'Right, Thomas,' I said. 'It's time to decide. Sylvia or me. You can only have one of us in your life.'

*Beat.*

Megan says if she keeps a happy face then people don't see it. She's 14 now and carefree. I only see her Sundays. I asked her, 'Do you remember what happened, the day your tear appeared?' She says it's not my face to worry about. She can't recall a time the mark wasn't there. To her it's part of who she is.

Only her mother minds, and it has taken everything I ever had in life from me. *[Laughs.]* Dramatic again. But you see, when Thomas chose Sylvia I was outnumbered, outgunned. It seemed pointless to fight for custody, the floor having fallen from my world.

And now today I hear – not directly from Thomas of course – that she's dead, Sylvia that is. Heart failure – ha! And naturally I feel sad for Megan and even a little for him, and perhaps I should be thinking how this changes the custody picture, but really all I can think is that now I'll never know. The truth has died with her.

And I'm left here alone.

*End.*

## PRUDENCE

CORAL,78, Jamaican female

CORAL

A plain girl's a mother's blessing. Prudence she a gift from the Lord.  
Some girls are made to stay at their mother right hand, not for dance  
and flirt and get name for themselves.

She never run after no man and them say she a lesbian but me know  
she just full a love for her mother.

Me know she not a lesbian 'cause a Mrs Crawford's boy, with him lazy  
eye and him buck tooth, him only fit for scare away mongoose. And  
her dressing up for that. The shame!

Me see how she a pine, write him name in her book. Me see her  
cheeks a flush red when she see him at church. But loving nah same as  
getting love back.

*Beat.*

It take two hand for clap, you know? Mr Powell, him never make  
peace with me, only take what him want, take take take, fill me up  
with pickney to glut him urge, what now them call deviant, back then  
we just haffi put up and shut up.

I was a good clean girl, you know, the pastor son wanted to marry me  
and him was a fine handsome boy and I went to me Auntie Vi an' me  
Auntie Pearl but them say him too dark. So Nanny Constance say look  
at them two gentlemen from church, them sit on the front row, take  
one a them, take one a them but me nah listen. So you know Mr  
Powell him take advantage, him take me in with him silky hair and him  
pretty face. What a mistake! If I'd a known then what I know now me

would a done it different for sure. All him can think 'bout is sex and having children. Ungrateful children so cut up an' grieving their father an' their mother can rot. Is only Prudence I keep for meself.

But me nah scared. Me glad to go when me Saviour call, for me know me passing to glory and sit up at Him side, somewhere that man won't ever see or catch me.

*Beat.*

You think me nah know me own children? Me know Prudence tell the world me gone senile and away with the fairy. She still cry for that buck-tooth boy who come look for her with him tail between him legs and me think, 'Truly the Lord make a pair for e'en the plainest face.' Me tell him: 'Boy you must be mistaken, Prudence isn't one for running 'round, she got too many chores to do at home for that botheration. Now please don't come calling again.'

And me know she a sit a top step a peek. But me nuh care for me *want* her to see. Me *want* her to see it was her mother send the boy away.

*Beat.*

*CORAL giggles.*

Ah! You get one a me nice picture down now. An' open your laptop thing there. Them say I can meet a new husband online.

*End.*

## KICKING IN EDDIE

MARK, 42, white male

MARK

So, no, not the send-off Kit wanted, I'm sure, four floors up a deserted car park gathering his resolve to beat up a tramp. But here we are.

Everyone has an Eddie Flynn story. How Eddie torched a petrol station. How Eddie hospitalised a PE teacher. How Eddie held his own grandma's hand under the grill until the skin bubbled like cheese on toast. A personal favourite of mine.

We pass the stories around the pub table, cowboys around the campfire, because somewhere around our late-twenties we stopped searching for anything new and switched from living to reminiscing. Everyone gets married or moves away or has children and the only link we have to the time when the world spread before us, our options truly limitless, is the fact that we all remember Eddie Flynn.

And when Paul, five pints in, came up with the idea I ran with the joke. How this could be the next big thing for middle-class white boys keen to prove they've made it in the grown-up world, a way to erase the memory of the scared little defenceless child within. The urban safari – 'you hated him, now hunt him!'

You can picture it, the gym-fit dudes in combat fatigues handing out maps to Eddie's lair, the backslapping laugh that says 'you're one of us, bro' and then they lean in with the sincere eyes and the serious-for-a-second talk about keeping all hits to the body and only blunt objects please before they make you sign a disclaimer absolving themselves of all responsibility.

And four hours later I'm still running with the joke – cos it is a joke isn't it? – and I'm looking at Paul and Ben and the rest of them and seeing something dull and ugly in their eyes. And we're trudging down a road we don't know at three in the morning, trying to find Gedge Street which is where Ben said someone had told him Eddie was holed up these days, and how can you not find a multi-storey car park, it can't exactly hide, but we've walked six different ways since leaving the taxi and no one's got any bars on their phones.

I know Kit can't want this, and I'm begging him to exercise the stag's prerogative, to say 'Enough's enough, let's call it a night boys.' And I'm so dead tired of walking I'm trying to close my eyes and wish myself back in my warm bed. I'm only there for Kit's sake, only there to make sure there's no trouble, cos isn't that what friends do?

On the empty fourth floor we find a sleeping heap of rags next to a radio playing the graveyard shift. The local DJ muttering away to no one about nothing, his voice bouncing off the walls as we step up to the figure on the floor, thinking is this him then? Is this Eddie? And shouldn't this cold reality break the spell?

I open my mouth to say this but hear someone else's voice instead, someone behind us saying 'Let me guess. You gentlemen are here to supply some long-due retribution.'

He's a ragged dude in a dirty blue blazer over a Hard Rock Café T-shirt, a torn hole somewhere near the navel. He says 'What always amuses me is how you imagine yourselves the first.'

He comes to stand in our way, in front of Eddie, and Paul tries to give him the full Phil Mitchell, fists bunched, teeth bared, getting up in his face, but the guy doesn't blink. I'm edging myself away from the others but he turns to me and says, 'Hey Ishmael, you think you're



better than them but you're not. You're just the one we leave behind to tell the tale.'

And then my heart drops as I see more of them, shadows emerging from the far corners, shadows closing in.

*Beat.*

I think the normal thing would be for me to feel bad. But what is it with us, collecting football stickers when we're 36, clinging on to our childhood bogeymen and desperate to avenge ourselves on moments long since passed? You have to let these things go, this pathetic yearning to live our lives over again, correcting the errors.

But I guess I should feel bad.

I found some pictures the other day, on Facebook, pictures of the wedding. Kit with the remains of a black eye and two missing teeth. Paul with an arm in plaster. Ben's best man charm marred by a swollen face and broken nose.

The last time I saw any of them was at the door to the stairwell. A knee creasing Paul in two, Kit running but not fast enough, pleading eyes catching my own as I closed the door.

You have to let things go.

*End.*