

Chapter One
"21 Manchester Square"

"Why couldn't she be quiet, for once... Fuck..."

Five hours ago, I left that bloody house five hours ago and her screams are still ringing in my ears, the same sort of maddening beep I used to get all those years ago after being out clubbing for three days in a row, and that would follow me around like a needy yapping dog for the rest of the week. Tinnitus hell. Come to think of it, I'd much rather be back there, playing the role of miserable sales assistant in stolen Dries Van Noten gear, fighting off the shakes on a Tuesday afternoon while attempting to flog over-priced-and-over-hyped red heeled stilettos to frigid SW1 ladies, than to be here, walking aimlessly around Marylebone Highstreet at four in the morning, stinking of piss and Estée Lauder body powder, stone cold sober.

I honestly never thought you could wet yourself with fear, I always believed that only cartoon characters did that, but here we are, and in the middle of fucking winter.

"Why couldn't she just give me the money... the tight-fisted bitch..."

She did say she would always be there for me.

Every time I mentioned, in passing, that I was late with the rent, or that my ex-husband's solicitor was harassing me about yet another bounced cheque, she would mumble "I am here to help sweet boy, should you need a hand". She said that every time, I am not making it up, and I'm ashamed to admit that I wanted to trust her. I am ashamed because I am a grown up man who feels like a 36-year-old baby, and I believed her, what a fool. Once a leading lady always a leading lady, I guess.

Oh, but how I would give acting a go myself. The same old YouTube clips she would play me each time I visited her (who the fuck uses YouTube in 2035), the same old stuffy award ceremony... "And the Oscar goes to... Ivy Jung!" ... Every. Damn. Time. "Gosh you look so glamorous there Mrs Jung! And to think back then there weren't any stylists or makeup artists around!". This brown-nosing exercise was so rehearsed, so tired and so wooden, I could have passed as one of her now long-gone leading men. I hated myself each time I said shit like that, I couldn't care less.

“Darling you make it sound like it was the Dark Ages! It was only 1965, you know?”. I did know, it was right there in the title. “... but yes, I did it all by myself, not that I needed much makeup to be fair, “The perfect Russian complexion”, or so they kept saying...”. And they did, even though everyone knew that she arrived in England on a train after the war as a Polish orphan... There’s no business like show business.

“More tea dear?... Oh, and call me Ivy for goodness sake. I know we haven’t seen each other in eons, but we are still practically family!” We both knew full well she didn’t mean any of that, not for a second. Calling her by her name would have made us equal, and that was never an option. She also knew that I would say yes to as many lukewarm cups of tea as she would offer me. Her loneliness reigned over my neediness, and she could smell despair.

I guess deep inside I was always longing for grandma, for her warmth, I miss her. And so I made myself believe that someone who vaguely resembled her, and who also knew her well, would be second best, but I was wrong. This weekly pantomime was dementing. I used to feel dirty each time after seeing her, as if I had been inappropriately touched.

As I reach the top of Duke Street for the tenth (perhaps eleventh?) time I can see a crowd gathering on the north-east side of the square, in front of the pristine white Georgian building I abandoned hurriedly and in a panic a few hours ago. A BBC van screeches by and parks itself right in front of the Wallace Collection. “That’ll be a hefty ticket...” the thought hits me out of nowhere. Then an ambulance arrives, and for some unknown reason the crew forgets to switch the siren off. Why that would not happen automatically, I will never know. Also, why can’t London sirens be softer, like the ones in Paris? They are just as effective! But I am grateful for the paramedics’ negligence, for Ivy’s screams still inhabiting my head seem somehow overpowered by the shrieking, albeit temporarily, as all of a sudden, a short, chubby and embarrassed ambulance driver rushes out of the building and kills the noise... Damn.

Only a couple of minutes after I join the mass I hear someone call my name, “Jay? Is that you?”. I turn around to discover someone I struggle to recognise, and it seems that my face gives my confusion away. “It’s Giles you idiot! Ivy’s grandson? Mate I haven’t seen you in eons!” That word again, maybe a family heirloom. My exhausted brain finally computes, and I see it’s him, a childhood friend whose body has ballooned so grotesquely, surely as a direct consequence of a diet consisting exclusively of charcuterie

and a daily bottle and a half of red wine, that if it wasn't for his disturbingly grey eyes, I would not have believed him. Sporting a fraying tweed blazer and crusty looking burgundy corduroy trousers, bloodshot eyes and stained teeth, he is a walking Tory cliché, just how I remember his grandfather. "How the hell are you!" he oinks overenthusiastically as he removes his pathetic tiny sunglasses.

I am not given the chance to reply. "It seems like the witch is dead, ha! Or at least that's what I heard on the radio on my way here..." he whispers to me naughtily, like when he told me he had seen his sister's breasts in year ten. My disgust well and truly as excited then as it is now. "You can't just say that!" I whisper back, "Your grandmother was always so kind to me" I conclude indignantly. "Well, that makes one of us! And don't be so fucking sanctimonious dude" his tone drastically changed, "Everyone hated her guts, good riddance I say". Dude?... What is he now, American?. "Anyway", he resumes "I just came to collect some post, and now that I don't have to avoid her, I am going in to see what has actually happened, and then get the hell out of here. You know what they say about murderers knowing their victims and then returning to the crime scene, don't you. I wouldn't want to raise any suspicions you know? Wink wink!" he says proudly, thinking himself a stand-up comedian. I wonder what the Rt. Honourable Speaker Lord Henry Jung would make of his only grandson's tragic witticisms. "Ha... ha..." I fake a laugh knowing perfectly well I should be the one "getting the hell out of here".

Before we have a chance to bring our reunion to an end, I notice a man in familiar concierge uniform standing by the entrance of the building talking to another man in a rather boring grey suit, and pointing at us. The man starts walking in our direction, parting the sea of people with his elbows. I think of Moses, and then I start to shiver. "Mister Giles Thomas Jung?" he asks as he places himself between us, giving me his back. "Yes" Giles replies. "Detective Watson". Really?. "I am sorry to inform you that your grandmother has been seriously injured...". Injured?. "... in a vicious attack that took place at her home at approximately a quarter past midnight". Giles lets out an Oscar worthy "What?". I begin to turn my body slowly towards the Hinde Street exit of the square when the siren starts again. As the ambulance leaves our sight, Watson resumes his delivery. "We understand that a man called James Manuel Williamson has been visiting the property on a weekly basis for the past three months, and was seen leaving the building a few hours ago. Do you know him?", "Of course I know him!" Giles answers as I feel a fresh warm stream of urine rolling down my left leg. "Jay!". He pauses, on purpose. "A childhood friend, good chap. Did you say on a weekly basis?". He asks, his eyes now fixed on mine. "Yes sir, in and out regularly, sometimes twice a week, we have strong reasons to believe he is involved in your

grandmother's assault". "I own you" Giles says to me with his stare. "The slimy bastard! We were always so good to him! Please do anything in your power to catch him and to bring him to justice. Poor granny, we love her so much, this is just awful!". He starts to weep. "What hospital did you say she's been taken to?".

... Fuck.

Chapter Two
"Shit Sandwich"

Dame Ivy Jung CH DBE FRSA
21 Manchester Square
London, W1U 3PT

London, 25th July 2035

Dear Peter,

Hope this finds you and your family well. As you might already suspect I am writing in a state of utter shock after I became aware, not only of the outcome of the so called "Male Pregnancy" debate at Parliament, but also that you voted in favour? I feel horrified beyond words, Peter. What would your dear father say? Poor old Theo must be turning in his grave! Have you even considered the implications of your vote? How children will feel when they start seeing pregnant men casually walking down the street? How will that reflect on us as a country and on our traditional values? Absolute confusion and madness!

Whilst I applaud your liberal views and conviction, personally, I was under the impression we were seeing eye to eye on this matter. In truth, I always counted on the fact that you had decided to vote against the abominable bill, something you actually reassured me was a given during your campaign fundraiser at the Savoy in December. I am sad to say I do feel this is a personal betrayal, Peter, especially after I contributed so generously to your cause. Did your people even tell you I was the biggest contributor of the evening? Because I was.

Sadly no one, except me of course, noted that the debate on this issue was extended for far too long, given too much room to fester, especially by the media. I do believe that it all started when that ghastly multiple partner marriage bill was passed nearly five years ago, a law which, if you will allow me to remind you, you voted against, and rightly so! Both these bills are against nature and anything that is good under the eyes of the Lord! I do wonder, Peter, why and how have you allowed your mind to be changed in such a drastic fashion? This worries me immensely, not only as a

constituent, but also as a family friend. I trust you will reply to this letter at your earliest convenience, indicating your plan to stop this appalling bill from ever becoming law.

Lastly, may I congratulate you on your recent re-election, it is an honour to be part of your ongoing success, may that continue. Please send my love to Caroline and the children.

Yours,

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“Don’t look but Dementing Dame is walking towards us, eleven o’clock” murmured Caroline Timms while preparing to pick up Charlie’s freshly dropped semi-solid turds. The idea of greeting “that miserable hag”, as she often called her in the privacy of her kitchen, somehow felt exponentially more off-putting than the task at hand. “This is the last thing we need today. Why can’t we just have a relaxing, uninterrupted Sunday afternoon stroll just like anybody else? Serves me right for marrying a career politician...” She continued, grumbling as she collected her beloved miniature Schnauzer’s steamy offering. “Just relax OK?” replied an already exasperated Peter Timms, Westminster’s youngest ever appointed MP. “Let me handle it this time, you know what happened last time we saw her, and there are more potential witnesses around now...” he continued as he started to gradually lower his voice. “OK, OK!” Caroline agreed through gritted teeth, “But you also remember we’re not in her drawing room, this is Regent’s Park, and we can leave as and when we please... and I suggest we do, or else I...”, “Peter, what a marvellous surprise!” interrupts Ivy, “Caroline” she pauses before looking down on Mrs Timms who is clearly taking longer than necessary to rid the pavement of any excess excrement. “Mrs Jung” a flustered Caroline replies, intentionally avoiding eye contact.

“Mrs Jung how are you” says Peter with no real desire to get an answer, “Hello” he continues as he greets Ivy’s companion, “Oh, yes, this is Jay Jay” she interjects, pointing at James as if he was her dog, and as if it wasn’t clear who the greeting was aimed at. She can’t bear the thought of the spotlight being put onto someone else. A “It is James, hello” comes out of James’ mouth, slowly choking him as he attempts to assert himself. “Ha! Just call him Jay Jay, he loves that” Ivy barges in. “Anyway, I do need to have a word with you, I am yet to get an answer to my letters, have you

received them?" her eyes fixed on Peter's. "I have, all of them" replies Mr Timms "And I would much rather you send them directly to my office and not to my private address, please", he puts emphasis on "private", looking right back at her, choosing not to blink. "So why haven't you replied then!" Ivy's voice slightly raised as she insists on ignoring his, and everyone else's boundaries. Somehow, she believes this to be a sign of power, if only she realised that the opposite it's true. "Mrs Jung this is not the right time, we are having a terrible time at home and...", "This is an important matter, Peter!", she interrupts with a sudden screech, startling everyone in the rose garden, even stopping some people in their leisurely walk to turn around and check that she has not actually been attacked.

She loves this, she loves every single second of it.

"I am sorry you feel that way Mrs Jung, the vote at parliament was nearly unanimous, and even if I had voted against it, the bill would have gone through... I am trying to be reasonable here" says Peter in a final attempt to appease the ruffled harpy, "I am under a lot of pressure right now with family matters as you probably know, this really is not the right moment... please don't make me...", "Don't make me what!" Ivy interrupts again, her voice now back to a normal pitch, if it wasn't for the fact that it is now a whole octave lower. "I have known your family for nearly three generations, I have known you since you were born, I have contributed generously and consistently to your stupid campaigns even when I never got a thank you note, or even a bunch of flowers, and now you expect me to make a fucking appointment?" Her claws clutching James' arm so tightly he starts to pull her away, instinctively, and without realising it. "Now you listen to me" Peter starts again, still with a measured tone but this time leaning dangerously close to Ivy's face, so close in fact that for a short moment he feels overwhelmed by the smell of her body powder, the same body powder his grandmother used to wear. "If you think for a second that I am intimidated by you, you are sadly mistaken". Peter takes half a second to breathe in. "Yes, you have known me and my family forever, and yes, you have donated some money to my party, but that doesn't mean that you own me, Ivy..." Caroline starts to move to shield the foursome with her body, strategically, as if on cue. Not only does she want people to look away and to prevent gossip, but it also seems that her husband has finally found his balls, and she wants this moment all to herself. "The influence and power you pride yourself on having are now gone, they are no more" he informs the Dame, as if she didn't know this already. "Have you not read the news about your husband? Ivy? Those boys are now grown-up men and even though he is dead they are ready to talk. So, do us all a favour and stop trying to contact me or my family, it is kind of creepy. And if you have anything else to say call my secretary during working hours, and yes, make a fucking appointment...". "Peter

this is uncalled for! I don't know what the hell you are talking about!" Ivy Jung shrieks again as she starts to appear frailer than she was only a couple of minutes ago. "I am only a concerned constituent who wants the best for the community!". "No, you are not, and you are not fooling anyone", concludes Peter as he takes Charlie's leash from his wife and puts his arm around her, visibly shaking but determined to get them all out alive.

As the Timms start to walk towards the garden's exit, Ivy softly mumbles, just loudly enough so they can hear her... "Oh, and I am so sorry to hear about little Archie's readmission at Great Ormond's, ghastly... ghastly illness, he is in my prayers... good day Peter, Caroline".