

# MORE THAN A WOMAN



‘Buy it  
immediately’

**Claudia  
Winkleman**

‘Exceptionally  
brilliant and  
powerful’

**Marina Hyde**

THE  
**SUNDAY TIMES  
BESTSELLER**

A portrait of Caitlin Moran, a woman with dark hair and a slight smile, wearing a leopard-print fur collar. She is looking towards the camera.

# CAITLIN MORAN

**Caitlin Moran** became a columnist at *The Times* at eighteen and has gone on to be named Columnist of the Year six times. At one point, she was also Interviewer and Critic of the Year – which is good going for someone who still regularly mistypes ‘the’ as ‘hte’. Her multi-award winning bestseller *How to Be A Woman* has been published in 28 countries, and won the British Book Awards’ Book of the Year 2011. Her two volumes of collected journalism, *Moranthology* and *Moranifesto*, were *Sunday Times* bestsellers. Her first novel, *How to Build a Girl*, debuted at number one, and was adapted for screen and released in 2020. Find out more at her website [www.caitlinmoran.co.uk](http://www.caitlinmoran.co.uk) and follow her on Twitter @caitlinmoran.

### Praise for *More Than A Woman*

‘This book is a hilarious memoir, a passionate polemic, and a moving manifesto on how to be a decent person and try, in the face of countless stresses, to live a full open-hearted, joyous life’ *Sunday Times*

‘Superbly funny’ *Guardian*

‘Funny, life-affirming and wise’ *Observer*

‘There are drop-dead funny lines in Caitlin Moran’s fiercely honest new book on being a fortysomething woman’ *The Times*

‘*More Than a Woman* examines middle age, motherhood, sex and, of course, feminism all with Moran’s signature wit’ *Evening Standard*

‘She writes with such heartening VIM and warmth about all the important stuff. *More Than A Woman* is my FRIEND, untangling a lot of my confusion about doing feminism right’ *Marian Keyes*

‘Ten years ago *How To Be A Woman* changed lives. The follow up could SAVE lives’ *Nina Stibbe*

‘Exceptionally brilliant and powerful. Her new book is incredible – I shrieked with laughter throughout and probably cried solidly for the last 30 pages. She is simply one of the most significant people of her generation. Her writing has helped so many’ *Marina Hyde*

‘A fantastic book ... searingly honest ... I will dip into this book for the rest of my life. Every woman has got to have this on her bedside table’ *Lorraine Kelly*

‘Caitlin has helped so many girls find confidence and articulate their experiences, and I’m full of glee & hope this book will do the same for the middle-aged’ *Hadley Freeman*

‘Wonderful’ *Kate Mosse*

‘Warning – you won’t sleep until you’ve inhaled every single word ... BUY IT IMMEDIATELY’ *Claudia Winkleman*

‘Caitlin Moran’s new book is out now. It is everything we hoped. Midlife explained in a smart, witty way. YOU ARE NOT ALONE AND YOU ARE NOT GOING MAD!’ *Lorraine Candy*

‘I wish I’d read Caitlin Moran’s *More Than A Woman* 40 years ago. But like with the tree-planting, the second best time is now. You just have to.’ *Hugh Laurie*

‘One of very few who can write inspirationally without becoming platitudinous. Her prose is so lucid and personal and funny you don’t even notice that what you’re reading is a manifesto’ *David Baddiel*

**MORE  
THAN A  
WOMAN**

**CAITLIN  
MORAN**





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*For Sal, Loz and Nadia – Team Tits. The wind beneath my bingo wings. Except bingo wings don't exist. See: Chapter Five.*



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# Prologue: September 2010

I am in the spare room, which doubles as my office, and I have just finished my day's work. Typing the last full stop with a flourish, I light a cigarette, and lean back in my chair. Today is the day I finished writing *How To Be A Woman*, and I am exhausted – but jubilant. Like a salmon that's just spawned a super-chunky hardback through its mental vent.

I have tried to put every conceivable female wisdom into a single, 220-page volume – spanning the entirety of a straight, white, working-class woman's experience in a mere 89,000 words. I have thoroughly chronicled the most difficult years of a woman's life: thirteen to thirty. The painful years of constructing yourself. The messy, panicky, scared, brave years, where you have to invent, and then reinvent, yourself, over and over, until you finally find peace in the bones you're in.

Those are the *dark* decades, I muse. Thank God that once a woman gets to thirty, she knows the worst bit is over! She is strong in herself, and ready to enjoy the next epoch. *I* am ready to enjoy the next epoch! This is the beginning of my *true*, real, great life – right *now*!

By way of celebration, I try to blow a smoke ring. I fail. Oh well – plenty of time to practise in the coming, empty weeks! Now I’ve achieved perfection! I’m going to have time for all *kinds* of amazing hobbies!

There is a small commotion behind me.

‘Oh my GOD – *press “save”*! You’re making me *anxious*. Why would you finish a document and not press “save”? Do you not remember how much work you’ve lost over the years?’

I turn around – and there, sitting on the bed, is what I would describe as an ‘elderly’ woman in a leopard-print coat, with messy hair, regarding me with a sigh. I stare.

‘Nanna?’ I say, eventually.

For it appears to be – my nan. But wearing Doc Marten boots. *My* Doc Marten boots. Why is my dead grandmother here, dressed like an ageing indie-kid? Is her ghost having a breakdown in Heaven? Whoever she is, she seems preternaturally peeved by my reaction.

“Nanna”? “Nanna”? You cheeky cow – it’s *me*. *You*. I’m *you*. From the future. “Nanna”? Jesus Christ, I’m only forty-fucking-four.’

I look again. Oh God – it *is* me. Me – but *much more grey*. Future Me is looking at me like she’s expecting me to freak out – but, obviously, I’m not going to give her the satisfaction. We’ve all seen *all* the *Back to the Futures*. We all know how this stuff works. I’m going to act cool.

‘Oh, yeah,’ I shrug. ‘You *are* me. From the future. Sweet. Fag?’

I offer her a cigarette, politely.

‘No,’ she says, primly. ‘I’ve given up. It’s so bad for you, and it really starts *hurting* once you get to thirty-eight. It’s a disgusting habit.’

‘Suit yourself.’

I drag on my fag. She hesitates for a minute – and then reaches over for the packet.

‘I still have the odd one here or there, though. At parties. They don’t count.’

She lights it up. We both exhale together.

‘So,’ I say, looking at her. Yeah – it does look like me. Her hair’s shorter. She’s got *two* grey streaks in it. Her adult acne, I note, is still present – suggesting the new serum I bought only the other week is a fucking liar. And her nose – her nose seems bigger than my nose? How has that happened?

‘*It keeps growing all your life,*’ we say, in synchronisation. And then, still in synch: ‘*Like grandad’s.*’

We both sigh.

‘So, I presume you’re here because of some cataclysmic future event, which you’ve come to warn me of?’ I say, casually, pressing ‘save’, in case losing this document *is* the future cataclysmic event. If it is, this is the worst *Terminator*-inspired plot ever. It’s all backed up on my external hard drive, for a start.

‘No, not really,’ she says. ‘I’m here for a laugh.’

‘What?’

‘Well, things are a bit ... *lively*, in 2020, and I could do with a light-hearted giggle, so I’ve come to bask in a more ... *innocent* me.’

She reclines on the bed. There’s an odd cracking sound.

‘That’s my back,’ she says, still prone. ‘Well, my back *and* my pelvis. You won’t *believe* what happens to them as you get into your forties.’

‘What have you done to my back?!’ I ask. ‘I *need* that!’

‘Oh, the back’s *nothing*,’ she says, sitting back up again with a series of ‘Ooof!’ sounds. ‘Look at *this*.’

She points to her neck. There’s something hanging off it.

‘A wattle. *Our* wattle. Touch it.’

I tentatively wobble the stalactite of loose skin, like a turkey’s neck, with my finger. It keeps swaying for a good ten seconds after I finish. I wince. She tuts at me.

‘I’ve grown to kind of love it, to be honest,’ she says. ‘I wobble it on difficult days. It’s like an enjoyable stress-toy.’

Now I'm near her, I look at her more closely. Yes, she has a wattle, and seems endlessly programmed to complain – but she still looks pretty fresh and cheerful. Why?

'Botox, mate,' she says, reclining again. 'Sorry – I'm just going to stay here for a bit. I am *knackered*.'

'*Botox!* You have Botox! But – you *can't*! It's not feminist! I've just written a whole chapter on why it's a betrayal of every value I have!'

I gesture to my laptop.

'Yeah,' she says, dragging on her fag. 'That's one of the reasons I've come back for a laugh. It's really *funny*,' she says, beginning to giggle. 'It's really *funny* how you think you've got everything figured out. You think –' and here, she becomes hysterical, '– you think you've done the hard bit, don't you? You're thirty-four, with two small kids and you think – HAAAAA! – that you know *everything*.'

By now, she's coughing and wheezing. I can see why she's tried to cut down on the fags – her lungs sound like bagpipes.

'Well, I kind of think I *do*,' I say, briskly. 'Let me remind you – I have just gone through adolescence and my twenties, beset by bullshit on all sides, which I have nobly battled, and eventually triumphed over. Periods, pubic hair, masturbation, losing my virginity, battling an eating disorder, discovering feminism, living through an abusive relationship, shunning an expensive wedding, taking Ecstasy, having an *incredibly* painful first birth, and a perfect second one. I've had an abortion, I've been to a sex-club with Lady Gaga, discovered what true love is, confronted sexism, worked out my position on pornography, raised my children into strong capable people, and, finally, found some jeans that fit. Whistles Barrel Leg, £59. I'm thirty-four, and I *know* that all the statistics say that *this – this* is about to be the best period *of my life*. Not an actual *period*-period. No. An *era*. I'm about to enter the Era of Supremacy, because I am a grown-ass feminist woman who's worked out *all* her shit, and is mere *weeks* away from my *proper* life beginning: one where I will be confident and elegant, like Gillian

Anderson in everything, at the height of my attractiveness, with a capsule wardrobe, and probably going on walking holidays where I do emotional oil paintings of the best fells I've scaled.'

She stares at me.

'I've done all the hard stuff,' I reiterate. *'I know how to be a woman.'* This is where it all gets *good*.'

There's a pause – and then she comes over, and hugs me.

'Mate,' she says, with impossible tenderness. 'Mate, mate, *mate*.'

'What?' I say, face muffled in her bosom. She's wearing a cashmere jumper. Things can't be *that* bad in the future! Cashmere is a luxury fabric! In the future, am I – am I a *millionaire*?

'No. £39.99, Uniqlo,' she says, still crushing my face into her tits. 'Look. It's great you're optimistic. I *love* that energy. Keep it coming! It's just – it's just that, "being a woman" isn't enough for the next part of your life.'

'What? What do you mean?'

'Well, you're just about to enter middle age, bab. Your previous problems were all problems with *yourself*. Young woman problems. But when you enter middle age, you'll know you're middle-aged, because all your problems are ... other *people's* problems.'

'I don't get you.'

'A sorted, middle-aged woman isn't just a woman, any more. You have to become – *more* than "a woman".'

She squats down in front of me and takes my hands in hers. She makes another 'Oooof' sound.

'Just stretching my glutes,' she explains. 'Look, obviously I can't be specific, because, like, *time will explode*, but your thirties, forties and fifties: that's when you start dealing with real Big Woman Shit. That's when all your friends start divorcing. It's where you and your partner's careers clash with each other. It's where sex becomes almost impossible. It's where your parents suddenly get old, and need caring for. It's where, God help you, your kids become teenagers.'

‘But surely that’s the *easy* bit! I can’t wait! They can make their own breakfast! I’m going to be *free*!’

‘Haven’t you just written 20,000 words on how fucking awful your teenage years were?’

I nod.

*‘Imagine being your parents.’*

My heart stops for a minute. Oh.

‘Mate, forget the AA, *you’re* just about to become the Fourth Emergency Service,’ she continues. ‘Your life’s about to become a call-centre for people who are *exploding*.’

She mimes being the operator on a switchboard: “‘Hello? Caller One? You’re my mum, you live 200 miles away, and you’ve fallen down some stairs? Oh my God, I’m so sorry! Hang on – I’m going to have to put you on hold; I’ve got another call coming through. Caller Two – how can I help you? You’re my best friend, and you’ve just seen your husband getting off with the babysitter in Costa? Get in a cab and come straight over here – I’m quickly going to talk to Caller Three. Caller Three – CALM DOWN! You’re my teenage daughter, and you’ve just realised you’re not beautiful, and your life is meaningless? OH GOD.’”

She mimes putting the phone down again.

‘You know your husband?’

My heart leaps.

‘IN THE FUTURE, IS IT MARK RUFFALO? OH MY GOD – I KNEW IT!!!’

She puts her hand up, to cancel my spiralling hope: ‘No. No – it’s still the same one.’

We look at each other.

‘Ah. Well, I *suppose* that’s ... good.’

‘You know how when you’re trying to get someone in customer services to e.g., mend your telly, and they keep fobbing you off with some arse called Simon or Dev, who just fucks it up even more? And your husband always says—’

‘He always says, “You need to keep asking to be transferred until you get put through to a middle-aged Scottish woman called Janet – because she’s *always* the one who goes, Ach, what a pickle. I’ll sort this out in two minutes.” And – she does!’

‘Yes. *The Janet Theory*.’

‘*The Janet Theory*.’

‘Yes. Well.’

She points at me.

‘*You’re* Janet, now. You’re the Janet in everyone’s lives. If anything’s going to get sorted out, *you’re* the one who’s going to have to do it. No more messy nights out, or voyages of self-discovery. You are about to be required hold the fabric of society together. For no pay. That’s what being a middle-aged woman is.’

We fall into a silence. There’s a lot to digest.

‘So – no fell-walking holidays, or oil paintings, then?’ I ask, sadly.

‘No.’

I can’t deny it – it’s a bit of a downer. I’ve met my future self, and she’s Captain Buzzkill. I instinctively massage my neck, to relieve my stress. Ah, yes – I can see where that wattle will form. It’s already starting to *yield*. I can see how it will be a comfort, in the years to come.

‘Still,’ I say, brightening. ‘The good news is, you’re now doubtless about to give me some manner of enchanted amulet, or crucial spell – the one that got you through those hard times.’

For the first time, Future Me looks shift.

‘Er, no.’

‘Well – how *did* you get through those hard times?’

Future Me looks even more shift. I feel the first stirrings of panic.

‘Hang on – you *have* got through this bad bit, haven’t you? You’ve come back to see me now because you succeeded in your quest, and everything’s okay again?’

Future Me stands up.



‘Well, I must be going – the time machine portal thingy is running out. Just remember, Caitlin – *follow your heart!*’

She disappears. Now I’m just *furious*. *She* knows that *I* know the answer is *never* to ‘Follow your heart’. Your heart’s a fucking *idiot* – it just wants to sit on the sofa and watch *Say Yes to the Dress*. The true answer is always ‘Make a fucking brilliant plan, and then endure with it beyond all normal parameters of exhaustion, until you eventually triumph.’

Why is Me *lying* to me? What should I prepare for? *I have so many questions!*

There’s another commotion, and Future Me reappears.

‘Oh, thank God!’ I say. ‘You’re back! I knew me wouldn’t let me down! Quick! Tell me things! What stocks should I invest in? Should I do neck exercises? Did you even *try* to marry Mark Ruffalo? TELL ME WHAT I NEED TO PREPARE FOR!!!!!!’

Future Me looks at me, stricken.

‘I just came back for these,’ she said, taking my fags. ‘And – and – ’  
I stare at her. Just one wisdom. *Just one.*

‘And ... drink as much as you can now – because once you get to forty, you can’t drink any more. All your enzymes give up, and the hangovers kill you.’

‘I CAN’T EVEN DRINK????’

‘Bye. And – good luck. I love you. You’re a good kid.’

She fist-bumps me, and disappears.

“‘More than a woman’?” I say, disconsolately. ‘I have to become “*more* than a woman”? What – *two* women?’

I hear a voice, calling through the ether: ‘That would be useful. Because *it gets so much fucking worse.*’

‘A human being should be able to change a diaper, plan an invasion, butcher a hog, conn a ship, design a building, write a sonnet, balance accounts, build a wall, set a bone, comfort the dying, take orders, give orders, cooperate, act alone, solve equations, analyze a new problem, pitch manure, program a computer, cook a tasty meal, fight efficiently, die gallantly.’

*Robert. A. Heinlein, describing the average day of a middle-aged woman.*

‘Providence has an appointed hour for everything. We cannot command results – we can only strive.’

*Mahatma Gandhi, describing in greater and more efficient detail the average day of a middle-aged woman.*



# Chapter One

## 7am: The Hour of ‘The List’

### **Some years later**

The alarm clock goes off. I wake.

I am a modern woman, and I do modern things, so I have set the alarm to go off five minutes before the kids’ do. This is so I can spend the first five minutes of every day Being Thankful.

I learned about Being Thankful a couple of years ago, from some experts – a conversation on Facebook – and now I do it every day; like in the way you’re supposed to do yoga every day, but I don’t, because the idea of yoga, perversely, makes me tense.

By way of contrast, Being Thankful is quite relaxing. You simply make sure you’re comfortable – and then mentally list all the things in your life that make you happy. I like lists, and I like being happy, and I’m extremely good at lying down, so it immediately appealed to me. I now do it every day. It’s very satisfying.

Today’s list runs as follows:

- 1) I’m not homeless.
- 2) I’m not ill.

- 3) My family isn't ill.
- 4) My husband is a pleasant and amusing man.
- 5) I still haven't been fired.
- 6) Time for coffee!

I get out of bed. I have started to feel a bit stiff in the mornings – but nothing that heartily saying ‘Oooooof!’ out loud won’t cure.

‘Oooooof!’ I say, tottering over to the toilet. I do a satisfying wee, check the loo roll to see if I’ve started my period – for a woman, toilet paper is by way of a print-out, or receipt, on all your internal doings – note that I haven’t, and pick up my phone; Being Thankful that I have a phone. I want to see what the weather’s going to be today, so I can work out if I need a jumper or not, and then Be Thankful for the invention of ‘layering’. But, when I look at the screen, I see the last thing I looked at last night: The List.

I instantly de-relax. The List is the one constant in my life. In many ways, The List *is* my life. The List is the eternal note I keep open on my phone – the running totaliser of all the jobs that need doing, but which I haven’t got round to yet. Some of the items have been on there since I got pregnant. My youngest child is now seven. The List is the shadow-self of Being Thankful. Being Thankful is about rejoicing in what you *are*. The List is, essentially, a running apology for what you are *not*, yet. All middle-aged women have a list like this:

*Blind for bedroom.*

*Kids’ passports.*

*Cut cats’ claws.*

*Clean gutters.*

*Tax return.*

*START RUNNING.*

*Stick tarpaulin on broken windowsill.*

*Buy coat-hooks.*

*Moth repellent.*  
*Lightbulbs: bathroom, hall, bedroom*  
*Lino basement*  
*Caz birthday present*  
*MEDITATE???*  
*BOOK HOLIDAY.*  
*PELVIC FLOOR EXERCISES.*  
*Doctor allergies Nancy?*  
*Pension*  
*Replace IUD*  
*Leak toilet fix*  
*Broken basin replace*  
*Read Das Kapital*  
*Fleas*  
*Secondary schools Lizzie?*  
*Driving lessons*  
*Yoga????? STRETCHING????? New leggings?????*  
*INVOICES!*  
*Order new fucking online banking dongle that actually works.*  
*Cervical smear*

That's only the first page. There are five.

These are all the things that stand between me and a perfect life.

I choose to view this list with what I call 'spirited determination' – it is the twenty-first century, so I am grateful this list does not include 'agitate for women's votes', or 'discover radiation, then, ironically, die of it'. I am a grafter who believes in hard work. I know that, unless you are a spirited and beautiful heiress, life is, essentially, a To-Do List, which begins with 'escape this vagina', and ends with 'escape this Earth' – and so there's no point in moaning about it. However onerous The List might seem, it will, eventually, set me free – for I am one five-page list away from becoming a happy, accomplished

woman with a perfect house, exemplary accounts, excellent capsule wardrobe, well-brought-up family, fabulous job, and a pelvic floor so redoubtable, every trampoline will fear me.

I decide to give a moment of Thankfulness for The List. I refuse to see the list as a burden. No. The List is my *guide to life*. All I need to do is carefully apportion each hour of the day to a specific task, in order to maximise my productivity – and then I reckon I will have ticked *everything* off it by, say, 2020. I'll have *definitely* done it by 2020. And then my *real* life can, finally, begin. I can buy a trampoline!

I put on my dressing gown – which has never been washed. It has face-pack crust on the neck. I must wash this dressing gown! I put 'wash dressing gown' on The List – and go downstairs.

Because I am married to a good and amusing man who is also an early riser, Pete is downstairs, getting the kids ready.

The kitchen is very bright. Very bright.

This is because I have a hangover, which I haven't mentioned so far, as it's entirely my fault, and I am being brave and noble.

'How was last night?' Pete asks, cheerfully, putting cereal on the table for the kids. Because they are now nine and seven, we don't need to put plastic sheeting on the floor any more. That's one job off The List!

'Oh, very good. We got a lot of important work done,' I say, discreetly palming two Berocca tablets into a glass, and filling it with water.

The 'important work' was me and three siblings sitting on my patio until 4am, discussing the impending divorce of our parents. Things are escalatingly grim between them, and it can only end one way. This conversation was deemed to be 'gin work'. For reasons I can't quite remember now, it involved, around 11pm, me standing on a chair

and crying as I sang ‘Everything’s Alright’ from *Jesus Christ Superstar*. However much I tried, no one else would join in with me.

‘Yeah – I saw you ‘working’ on Twitter,’ Pete says.

I don’t remember posting anything on Twitter. I look on my phone, and scroll down my timeline.

Oh. That’s interesting. At midnight, I appear to have posted a picture of my bare feet, with a Jacob’s Cream Cracker wedged between each toe. I see this ostensibly light-hearted piece of drunken tomfoolery has gathered, so far, two rape threats and someone calling my feet ‘unfuckable’. My *feet*.

Whilst buttering toast for the kids – in order to establish, through a selfless action, that I am not drunk now, and am a good person, underneath it all – I ring my sister, Caz.

‘Hey hey. Dude, why did you let me go on Twitter and post a picture of my bare feet with a Jacob’s Cream Cracker between each toe?’ I ask her.

‘We spent half an hour trying to stop you,’ she replies. ‘You were obdurate. Then you fell over. You feeling that this morning?’

I touch the bump on the back of my head. Ah, yes. I remember now. That cupboard took a hell of a wallop on the way down. I look out on to the patio. It’s covered in empty glasses and bottles. In the centre of the table is Nancy’s special Little Mermaid plate. It is heaped with cigarette butts. I close the blind, so she won’t see it.

‘Mum! How do you clean shoes?’

Lizzie has put her trainers on the table. They used to be white – but they are now caked in mud. The laces look like oomska filth-snakes. I stare at them. Christ – they look how the inside of my head feels.

‘I’ll do them later, bab. Wear something else today.’

‘I don’t have anything else! My feet have grown! You *said* you’d get me new shoes!’

Ah yes. Yesterday’s shoe-buying expedition that got cancelled, when we had to flea bomb the house. It all seemed to be going so



well until the cat – who sneaked back into the house through an open window – inhaled the flea bomb, went ‘all weird’, and started acting like a Vietnam veteran who’d taken too much acid. We had to take her to the vet – they put her in a cage overnight, to ‘come down’. That was £100. Jesus. We could have bought six new cats for that. *Better* ones. Betty very much views my herb garden as ‘a luxuriously-scented cat-litter tray’.

I start cleaning the shoes. Then I realise the sponge scourer I’m cleaning them with is covered in lamb fat, and is making the issue much, much worse. I get the Shoe Cleaning tin out of the cupboard, and Google ‘cleaning white trainers’.

‘So, Cate – you remember what the final conclusion of last night’s meeting was?’ Caz asks, tentatively, still on the phone.

Following the instructions of a man on YouTube, I start scrubbing the trainers with my special shoe brush. *Why* are the most popular shoes for children and young adults white trainers? *Why* would we invent a system of clothing whereby the item that comes *constantly into contact with the ground* is generally made of white fabric? It’s entirely impractical – the worst possible outcome, footwear-wise. This is a con by capitalism to make us buy new white trainers every four months.

‘Last night,’ Caz says, on the phone, slightly more urgently. ‘You do remember what you said last night? It was a brave conclusion, man – but we’re all behind you.’

There are few things more terrifying than someone praising you for being ‘brave’. Caz once called a haircut of mine – where I’d tried to get a black bob, like one of The Corrs – ‘brave’. I simply wore a hat for the next three months.

‘*What* did I say?’ I ask.

Pete is pointing at the kitchen clock. It’s time for the kids to go. I hand Lizzie her half-scrubbed, damp trainers.

‘Sit near a radiator,’ I say, kindly, as she puts them on, and squelches off to the bus. Nancy follows her. I wave goodbye, distractedly.

‘We talked it over,’ Caz continues, ‘and we all agreed that, while the parents are divorcing, Andrew can’t live with them. It’s disrupting his A-Level revision. So you said he’d move in with you.’

‘I said that?’ I ask, faintly.

“‘I’m already parent to two children – a third will be easy!’ you said,” Caz recalls. “‘It will be cool to have a brother in the house! The more Morans, the merrier!’”

‘I said that to *you*?’ I ask, sitting down. Pete is looking at me, mouthing, ‘What’s happening?’

‘No – you said that to *him*. You rang Andrew and *told* him he has to move in with you. “Fuck the parents’ bullshit,” you said. “You have a haven of peace in our house. Come live in our spare room.” Then you fell over.’

‘We don’t have a spare room!’ I cry.

‘I think you meant the loft,’ Caz says.

The loft! The one perfect thing in my life? The room with all my Ordnance Survey maps of Wales pinned on the wall, and the complete works of Sue Townsend on the shelves, and where – most importantly – I can lock the door, and smoke out of the Velux window?

‘Andrew was *super* happy,’ Caz says. ‘He said, “Finally – I can get my nieces into *Red Dwarf*. It’s going to be smegging *awesome*!”’

I sit, staring at the table. I notice Nancy has left her packed lunch. I’ll have to go and drop it off. I strongly dislike going to the kids’ school. As a working mother, I so rarely go, and people can be so judgemental. There’s always one mum at the gates, beaming, ‘Oh! We haven’t seen *you* here for a while! Is everything *okay*?’

Last time one said that, I replied, ‘They’ve let me out on electronic tag!’, but her humour was very weak, and she didn’t appreciate it. She never spoke to me again. So, in a way – result!

I stare at the bloody lunchbox. Oh, God. My teenage brother Andrew, living with us. I haven’t even asked Pete! Or the girls! We *really* should have had a family meeting about this. One without gin.

I start quietly singing ‘Everything’s Alright’ from *Jesus Christ Superstar*, for comfort.

‘Ah. You’re remembering now,’ Caz says, then hangs up.

The phone rings again. It’s Andrew.

‘Hey, *roommate*,’ he says. ‘You’re a pal. I’m all packed. I’ll be over around lunchtime?’

A second call is coming through. I see it’s from the vet. Fuck! We forgot to pick up the cat! Two nights now! *Another* £100. I hate that cat.

Enraged, I do my pelvic-floor exercises. Then I realise I’m just clenching my bum, give in, have a fag, and order some moth repellent online.

I *will* tick something off The List today! I *will* be triumphant! I WILL END TODAY THANKFUL. THESE ARE THE BEST YEARS OF MY LIFE.

# Chapter Two

## 8am: The Hour of Married Sex

Pete stands by the window.

‘Wait for it; *wait for it*,’ he says, watching the kids at the bus stop.

I hover tensely in the doorway.

‘Aaaaaaand – they’re on the bus!’ he says. Still watching the departing bus, he takes his trousers off. It’s *on*.

With the children gone, it’s time to start the day with a vital part of our To Do List: The Maintenance Shag.

My friend Sali came up with the concept of the Maintenance Shag – it’s the shag middle-aged people have to schedule because they’re so busy, and have such small children, that if it wasn’t written on the calendar using a special, child-proof code – ours is ‘Wukka wukka wukka!’, in tribute to Fozzie Bear – it might not happen for months; possibly years. One is still free, of course, to have spontaneous, care-free sex as and when one wishes, but the Maintenance Shag is there just to keep the wheels of commerce oiled, as it were. I think every person in a long-term relationship knows the feeling when it’s been

so long since you've done it that the whole concept seems like some madly improbable dream you once had – like being Barack Obama, or suddenly flying, or being Barack Obama and flying.

As we're both freelance, we can schedule the Maintenance Shag for Fridays, 8am – as soon as the kids have left for school. We have learned to wait until we have visual confirmation that they're actually on the bus after The Incident of 2009, wherein someone returning for their netball kit heard the screamed injunction, 'DON'T COME IN THE KITCHEN – WE'RE TRYING TO CATCH A RAT!', and possibly had their sex education put back five years.

I run upstairs, to 'prepare' myself. In the early days of our courtship, my 'preparation' would have included washing, leg-shaving, teeth-brushing, flossing, the application of hold-up stockings, and the lighting of mood-enhancing candles. We might start with an hour of fruity chat, and then gradually slide into a long, languorous sheet-tangling hump lasting many, many hours; with seconds, and then pudding, for all.

Fifteen years later, and my preparation entails swilling a blob of Colgate round my mouth, then spitting it out, taking off my pyjamas, and fluffing up my pubes so they look a bit less like an old coir doormat, and a bit more like, well, a *new* coir doormat. I then shout, 'COME ON, SEXY – LET'S DO IT! BEFORE THE WINDOW CLEANER COMES!'

Pete runs up the stairs, trouserless, taking off his t-shirt, and stands by the bed.

'So – the delicate dance of seduction begins,' he says.

In a marriage, it's essential to keep the sexual spark going. Every source agrees on this – from *Woman & Home*, to an overly frank Uber driver I had once. It acts as a vital memory bridge to why you got together in the first place – to the two giddy young people who once fell in love. For, in almost every respect, those two people will have now disap-