

## 7

Mum said I didn't have a good sense of responsibility.  
That what happened was in one way or the other  
because of me, I should just accept it.  
She did.

Dad had a hard time of it in the salmon-farming business.  
Even the fish thought he was a dick,  
didn't want to be around him either.  
First sniff of a sea change related infection  
and they were like 'yeh, see you later',  
took it on and dropped,  
floated up to the top.  
Let's remember  
he was an army man, an angry man  
definitely not much of a family man.  
Mum said he had seen deaths undeserved  
on the side of the road  
and maybe he had killed.  
I thought he had definitely killed.  
His eyes had that capability to reflect  
everything he was seeing so it never really had to go in,  
defence mechanism for those who do things  
beyond vision, beyond retelling.  
Imagine something so bad it could never be retold,  
that's the look his whole being owned.  
I always hoped he hadn't passed it on to me.

The fish died.  
I never got to ask him,  
but I guess that made him think about his own death,  
the blood and guts mess he'd made of his life.  
So he came to London, to find me, my mum,  
apologise, start a new life with new lies.

I was closing up, mid-week quiet night.  
There was mud on his boots,  
it hadn't rained for a while.  
He stood there

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like he should be there,  
as if he could never be unwelcome.  
There wasn't one bit of his bobbled skin  
that I wanted to let in,  
this was my kitchen,  
my fucking kitchen,  
his boots his mud his muck wasn't welcome.  
*Come in, he said,*  
*can I come in?*  
I ignored him.  
It was late,  
I was cleaning,  
scrubbing silver to lake-lit moonlight,  
the last night before the first night off in ten days.  
Swaying with tiredness,  
the tonelessness of his voice  
fighting with the memory I had of its bite.  
What for,  
what do you wanna come in for?  
I didn't even look up,  
kept scrubbing,  
wiping.  
*See,*  
*I want to see you.*  
I'm here, you've seen.  
What do you want from me?  
*Nothing, I want nothing.*  
You should leave.  
*I need you to see me.*  
I won't look.  
Wiping still, I wonder if my cooking  
will be spoilt by this intrusion,  
will this memory infuse all my soft fruits,  
plait itself into my pastry?  
Just leave me and my kitchen.  
*I let you run your first one.*  
Bullshit.  
*On the ship, I did.*

Yeh, then you tried to twist all the breath outta me,  
leave me be.

I'm not giving in.

Go. You're too slow.

It's all over, no daughter for you.

*If you don't let me,*

*I mean it's all that's keeping me going really,*

*it's all I want, it's all I –*

don't give a shit.

Now I look.

He's got broken eyes

and a starry heart stuck in thunderclouds.

The sight makes my soul quiet but my voice loud  
and I shout.

Now you ain't proud?

You wanna come to love me,  
come to get loved by me?

See where I am? Do you see?

There will be a Michelin star on this window.

I cook here, create here,

make here be as much of life as I can  
because outside of this

I'm not safe,

I don't know the way.

Your way was where you went  
and there wasn't any space there for me.

You bring flesh and blood to air  
and expect it to what?

Live without love for so long that it moulds its own,  
saving all that for the day you decide to come back?

My life has been made up of days waiting  
to discover darker parts of myself.

Digging inside skin until I can pull out  
exactly what is so bad about me that makes everyone leave,  
believing that those parts are the markings  
that map the outlines of my life,  
of who I can be

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and so of course off I go to find those  
that stretch that, scratch that  
tell me to forget that,  
those thoughts are of no importance  
based in no truth whatsoever –  
but then do you know what they do?  
Of course you do cos it's what you did,  
what you do.

Everyone fucking leaves.  
So I will not mend your broken eyes  
with stitches of moisture  
from my soaked-through scrapbook.  
No, no, that's not me,  
that's not who you made.  
This is the last thing I'll ever say to you,  
who threw my limbs into circuses of swimming pools  
never teaching me to swim,  
painting only hell into the word 'him',  
please, Dad, just fucking leave.

And he did.  
And there was that sinking part of me  
that wanted him to refuse,  
to use his helicopter voice,  
cut through the density of pre-dawn London  
and tell me no,  
I will stay here until you let me speak with you,  
about things that those who come  
from someone's insides should probably at least try out.  
Like, what TV shows do you watch?  
Do you get to go out much? Did you study?  
Who broke your heart? Did you cry?  
What song do you want played when you've died?  
But there was none of that.  
Just the back of an old man,  
leaving one last time.

A few months later I was round Mum's for Sunday dinner.  
She liked to cook for me in front of her friends,  
so she could say,

*See, even the famous local chef can't say no to my roasties!*

And it's true, they were the best,

I always took my own gravy though.

When everyone had left that day she told me,

*Your dad's dying you know,*

*he's not got long.*

Oh.

I don't want to talk about –

*Everyone deserves a bit of forgiveness.*

He got a bit.

Two years went past.

The phone rang,

he was raspy on the other end, no anger now,  
quiet.

*I can't leave the flat anymore.*

*I've got you on speakerphone because I can't hold it anymore.*

*At night time when there's no carer,*

*I get stuck in the toilet and I sleep there,  
in my shit, bathroom floor cool on my skin.*

*They will take me to a home soon,*

*I've never had a home, I won't go.*

He had not one person in the world,

he wanted to pass away,

stop being a burden to himself,

to the memories of everyone else.

He knew it was a lot to ask,

but he thought I might enjoy it,

do us both the biggest favour.

He had it all figured out,

he wanted me to inject a lethal dose of something into him  
so it worked quicker, nicer.

He'd be gone so quick, so nice.

I said, how can I do that, Dad?

The phone dropped, went dead.

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I went round, picked it up for him.  
Against my better judgement yes,  
but when I saw him so helpless  
I felt –

*\* (This memory of the past is now interspersed with more recent questioning about Candice.*

*As the scene progresses, in amongst reliving the court trial she faced for her dad's murder, in which she was found guilty, she is also faced with the questioning from prison officials over Candice's apparent suicide.)*

Glad,  
maybe you were glad when Candice asked you for help,  
like your dad did?  
Maybe this is it, you've found your calling,  
helping people who want to die, die.  
Although you can never prove they wanted to, can you?  
No, no my calling is cooking.  
Take a look at my CV it's clear for whoever wishes to see.  
What exactly did she say to you?  
She said,  
the grey here creates a never-ending hurricane of dust  
inside her mind.  
I want to find the sea.  
Will you help me?  
I just said, 'How you doing, Candice?'  
And that's what she said, she asked me to help her.  
To find the sea?  
Metaphorically.  
You knew what she meant?  
I knew what she meant, yes.  
She was looking for death to lap up  
the in consequence of this existence.  
She had tried so many times,  
always got it wrong, got everything wrong.  
You're the closest thing I've ever had to a friend, Chef.  
She wanted me to help her go,  
like she said she knew I'd done with him.

I said 'no, no, no'.  
 I would never do that,  
 I had never done that with him, they were wrong,  
 she was wrong, I had never done that. I –

Of course the fingerprints were mine,  
 it was my knife,  
 my kitchen,  
 it was in my hand,  
 she took it,  
 I'm telling you she took it,  
 have a look at her history,  
 her history isn't pretty,  
 she wanted to die.  
 She did.

\* He did,  
 what's it got to do with me?  
 He wanted to die.  
 Check his history,  
 his history ain't pretty.  
 Domestic violence, PTSD  
 Iraq, fish farms,  
 rings all the alarms.  
*Do you accept that you didn't like your father much?*  
*We accept that he didn't appear to like you.*  
*Beat you, left you,*  
*one time it looks like you almost died.*  
*Can't have been nice, can it?*  
*Can it?*  
*We, the prosecution, put forward that revenge is a clear motive.*  
*The defendant wanted her father dead,*  
*using his disability*  
*as a cover-up for her premeditated murder –*  
 Objection!  
 Do you care at all what I have to say?  
 It wasn't me.  
 He wanted to die cos he lived a crap life.  
 He was a terrible example of a man and yes,

**Chef**

**he's dead. Yes, I wanted him out of my life  
but that doesn't mean I needed him to die.**

*Well we, and we venture the jury too,  
wholeheartedly disagree.*

*Goodbye.*

*Chef wipes the previous title off the board and writes  
'Red berries with hibiscus jasmine sorbet'.*

It can be messy this one.

Red berries.

They're very soft,  
leave trails of their sweet insides on the plate  
if you don't treat them delicately enough.

They're everyone's favourite,  
even when they're not real,

'Give me the red one please!'

We used to shout for fruit gums, Opal Fruits,  
whatever, those things with no fruit in them whatsoever.

The sorbet is difficult but delicious.  
I wouldn't say it's for the amateurs,

but I'm hoping  
that those who get to this point in the book  
have a certain amount of skill  
and most importantly determination.

For the sorbet, you will need eggs, caster sugar,  
jasmine tea leaves and hibiscus flowers –  
fresh, if possible.

Candice said her favourite drink was hibiscus tea.  
Strange as she struck me as a PG Tips girl,  
but you can never tell really, can you?

She died, they said.

*Fatal penetrating injury to the lower left quadrant of the chest,  
suggesting she aimed for the heart.*

She missed, she always did.

The knife perforated the lower lobe of her left lung,  
causing traumatic internal bleeding.

*She must have grabbed your hand extremely hard  
for the angle to remain at a lateral aspect  
but we guess she was determined.*

*And between you and me,  
we would far rather deal with a suicide fine*

## Chef

*than get marked down with murder in the annual report,  
nobody wants that, do they?*

She would have loved a little sorbet  
flavoured with her favourite tea flower.  
Doesn't taste too sweet too soapy, just right for sorbet  
Just right for summer days.

When you put the berries on the plate  
use a clean spoon for each one,  
be gentle,  
their red insides,  
so sweet.

Don't let them creep onto the plate.  
It's up to whoever eats the dish to decide  
if the berries go inside the sorbet  
or stay divided –  
give them the choice.  
There should always be a choice,  
shouldn't there?