



*I did, I do*

Samuel Vines

**12:11 - 3rd September 2021**

'He's here,' Will's voice comes through the toilet door. 'Just now. They've just arrived. You ready, skip?'

The sink is cold against Jamie's palms. He lets it drain some of the heat from them. He looks up to the mirror. His face is a damp tissue; his eyes are specks of blood.

'Jamie?' Will bangs on the door. 'If you've got the shits you're just gonna have to hold it.'

The bathroom light begins to make a long wincing sound and the man in the mirror doesn't move. This is a hollow place, Jamie realises, an air bubble in the ocean. His eyes fall to the orange flower in his buttonhole. He thinks about screaming.

**08:22 - 3rd September 2021**

'Morning, cunt.'

'It's eight o'clock,' Jamie said, turning from the front door.

'Big day. Don't want you late now, do we?' Will, wearing a pale grey suit, followed Jamie through to the kitchen.

'It doesn't start 'til twelve.'

'I brought breakfast,' Will said, upturning a plastic bag onto the counter: three packs of pop-tarts and a jar of nutella.

'I'm not hungry.'

'Gotta 'ave something.'

'I will. Later.'

'There's nowt wrong with being early,' Will leaned against the counter.

'There's early, then there's you,' Jamie whispered, reaching behind the fridge for the ironing board.

'Y'wot?'

'I said: you're quite right. I'd much rather have you three hours early than on time.'

The ironing board cracked as Jamie stretched out its legs. He set it straight, then checked the iron he'd left to heat. He stepped into the living room to fetch his shirt. The carpet was soft on his bare feet and the curtains were still drawn. When he came back into the kitchen, Will was fiddling with a loose thread on his tie, the toaster now humming quietly behind him.

'I thought I could run some of me speech past you,' Will said.

'What?'

'Me best man speech. Thought maybe you'd wanna—'

'Why?'

'Dunno.'

'Is it bad?'

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'Nah, I—'  
 'It better be clean.'  
 'It is.'  
 'It's not that kind of wedding.'  
 'Mostly,' Will tapped the heel of his shoe against the kitchen floor. 'What kind of wedding?'

'Y'know,' Jamie slid his shirt along the ironing board.  
 'Chavvy?'  
 'No.'  
 'Cheap?'  
 'No.'  
 'So it were expensive?'  
 'No, it was—'  
 'Little David want all the flowers n shite?'  
 The iron hissed. 'Why do you call him that?'  
 'Little David?'  
 'He's taller than you.'  
 Will was chewing on his thumbnail; his eyes flashed. 'You keep on thinking that.'  
 Jamie slid his shirt onto the back of a dining chair.  
 'He's arriving on a horse, int he? Little D?'  
 'In a carriage,' Jamie reached behind Will to turn off the iron at the socket and his dressing-gown brushed against the other man's suit. 'It's what he wanted.'  
 'And you're stuck with me n my Peugeot?' Will grinned. Jamie noticed the man's hair was still damp from a shower. His face was pale and clean. There was a familiar smell in the inches of air between them.  
 'Are you wearing Lynx Africa?' Jamie whispered.  
 'It was free,' Will said as Jamie stepped away, laughing. 'I got it for Christmas. I'm not *not* going to wear it.'  
 'You sod,' Jamie shook his head as he picked up his shirt and left the room. He heard the toaster spring up.  
 'I'll bring you up a pop-tart,' Will called from behind.

**12:13 - 3rd September 2021**

In the bathroom, his trousers buzz and the door bangs again.

'Is it the shits?' Will says. 'Or have you got a migraine starting? I brought some of yer tablets if you need 'em.'

Jamie pulls a hand from the sink and takes out his phone, standing straight in the process. *Ready, Orange?* The text reads.

'Jamie, m'dere,' there's a woman's voice outside now. *Laura*, Jamie realises. 'You're not menna be feelin' relaxed. It's yer wedding day. That's the whole bleedin' point. Dave's 'bout to wet 'imself so get yer sorry ass outta there n come soil the floor together.'

Soon, they're walking down the hall of the registry office. Laura walks in front, hair bouncing, dark shoulders swinging out of her dress. Jamie and Will follow behind. Will elbows him in the arm. The feeling of the pressure through his suit, on his skin, makes Jamie swallow suddenly. He looks to his left, where the touch had come from and, as they walk, Will holds out a foil tray of tablets pinched between his fore and middle finger, casually, like the offer of a cigarette. Jamie shakes his head.

### Samuel Vines

'OI, OI!' Laura's voice rings out in front of them. 'What's the crack, D-Man?'

David stands in the hallway. He rubs his ring finger subconsciously with his right hand and leans from foot to foot. There's a purple flower in his buttonhole. Laura slaps him on the arm and points between him and Jamie.

'Knock yourselves out, you two,' she says. Then she takes Will at the elbow and they disappear into the hall together.

'This is it then,' David says, reaching up and shifting Jamie's tie a little.

Jamie nods. 'I guess so.'

### August 2020

'If you were a colour, what would you be?' David asked.

Jamie shrugged. They lay on the grass somewhere he didn't know. David had brought them here. Jamie hadn't driven for three years now, ever since his sister, Alice, had died in a road accident. The sky above them was a pale, powdery white and, when neither of them spoke, the only sound was of the trees shaking against each other. Jamie could feel a root from one of them digging into his back.

'C'mon', David elbowed him.

'Blue,' Jamie said.

'Really?'

'Yeah.'

'Why?'

'I dunno. Maybe I just feel a bit like a blue person.'

David rolled his head to look at Jamie and frowned.

'I don't mean,' Jamie began. 'Not sad. Just, like, I don't know.'

'Mm,' David looked back to the sky. 'I think you're orange.'

Jamie blew a laugh from his nose. 'Orange?'

'Yeah,' David's voice squeaked slightly. 'It suits you.'

'And here was me thinking I was pale.'

David thumped him lightly on the stomach. He kept his hand there and began to rub Jamie's t-shirt.

'Nothing rhymes with it. Nothing rhymes with you,' David said. 'You're unique.'

Jamie tightened his brow, feeling his lips tense in suppressed laughter. 'Yeah?' his voice sounded frayed and he swallowed.

'Maybe I could be purple,' David said. 'Nothing rhymes with that, either.'

Jamie tried to shift his spine slightly. 'That could work,' he said.

They lay for a while. Jamie mostly thought about other places and other people; David kept his hand on top of him. At one point, a bird flew out from one of the trees above them and the branches started squawking loudly. Jamie wondered where it had gone.

'Do you know what day it is?' David asked.

'Sunday?'

'It's nine months. Our nine-month anniversary,' it sounded as though David was smiling. 'We could've had a baby.'

He tapped Jamie's stomach again. Jamie sat up.

'Well done us,' he said.

David sat up too then and placed his hand on one of Jamie's thighs. 'We should move in together.'

Jamie felt the open air move awkwardly in his mouth for a moment.

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'Yeah?' he thinks he asked.

'We should,' David repeated. 'Do you want to?'

Above them, the bird flew back into the tree. The squawking stopped.

'Yeah,' Jamie found himself saying. 'No, we should. It'd be great.'

**19:46 - 3rd September 2021**

Will's speech is fine. Actually, it's rather good. He ends by telling everyone how happy he is for Jamie and David and everyone claps loudly. Jamie's mother stands up then and brings down the house with a few sharp lines. She smiles to herself as she passes the microphone down the table to David's father whose chin wobbles as he speaks.

'Is everything alright?' his mother asks, later.

'Mm?' Jamie pretends to have been distracted. There's a slow song playing and they're dancing with many people around them.

'Has somebody said something?'

'Like what?'

'Was it my sister? Has she said something?'

'No, no one's-'

'You didn't have to invite her.'

'She's alright.'

'In fact, I don't think you should have. I'm surprised she came.'

Jamie starts smiling slightly.

'Why did you invite her?'

'Do you mind?'

'Well, I wouldn't have if I were you.'

They stop dancing; she hugs him.

'I love you,' she says.

'I love you, too.'

'I just want you to be happy.'

'I am,' Jamie says.

'It was awfully quick. All of this.'

'I am. I am happy,' he feels her mouth open again. 'And no one,' he pulls from the hug and faces her, 'has said anything.'

'I'm sorry your father... You know.'

Jamie nods.

'And Alice.'

'Yeah.'

'She'd have loved this. She'd have loved seeing you.'

Jamie nods again. His mother strokes his cheek. 'I'm just going to...' she sniffs, pointing to somewhere over Jamie's shoulder, and goes.

**June 2017**

It was fifty-seven days since Jamie had heard his mother scream from the kitchen. He'd been home for Easter, studying for his final year exams. As he had come downstairs he felt a tightness in his chest and a clicking in his head that told him to turn around and find somewhere to hide. His legs had kept moving, his body accepting that it had to live through what was about to happen. His mother had been on all fours on the floor, shaking and whimpering and spitting like a rabid animal. The landline phone had been next to her on the

white tiles and Jamie had heard his father's voice coming from it. He had known then that it was Alice.

He was on the phone with Will now, who he hadn't seen for three months.

'America?' Will said.

'New York, yeah,' Jamie said. 'A post-grad course. Literature.'

'Alright for some,' Will said. Jamie knew Will had been anxious about finding work after finishing his engineering degree. Jamie thought about asking if he'd found anything. 'I'm messing,' Will said. 'I'm pleased for ya.'

There was a silence then and Jamie found himself blinking uncomfortably.

'How's Harry?' he asked.

'Yeah,' Will said. 'No, we're good, thanks.'

Jamie heard a doorbell ring down the phone.

'That's actually him just now, I think,' Will said. 'I better go. But, good luck n all.'

Jamie nodded, then said: 'Yeah.'

'And ring me. If you need owt.'

'Bye.'

He hung up. He noticed he had three missed calls from his father. Something about Alice's death and the grief they supposedly shared seemed to have made Jamie's father think his son might wish to talk to him. Jamie hadn't spoken to Ian regularly since he was nine when it had come out that he had been having an affair for almost eleven months.

Jamie felt his forehead tense and a sharp heat rising at the usual place behind his left eye. He took one of the tablets he'd been prescribed and went to bed. He wouldn't wake up for fourteen hours.

### 21:29 - 3rd September 2021

'He told you then,' Laura says. She's found him on a landing that overlooks the reception hall from one side. She looks at his face.

'Not this mornin?'

'In the car. Driving me to the registry,' Jamie hears his words begin to slur. He takes another swig of drink.

'Never. Fuuuucking hell, Will,' Laura says. 'And he didn't think that might have been why you locked yourself in the toilet? I told him not to tell you. I told him. He's such a pillock, y'know. I think he thinks he's more capable than he is. But then,' she burps loudly, 'every time it reaches a point where he just can't stand it anymore and that's when it all fucking falls the fuck apart.'

Jamie runs his thumb around the lip of his glass.

'Sorry. Shit,' Laura says. 'How are ya?'

They can see everyone from where they stand. Jamie's mother is chatting to some relatives; Laura's young daughter, Emma, stands on a table while an older woman watches nervously. David is talking to Jamie's aunt, which should panic him more than it does. He can't spot Will and doesn't know whether or not he cares.

'Do you love him?' Laura asks. Jamie turns to look at her too quickly, realising too late how forced the look of confusion is on his face. Laura grins.

'I always thought you had it all together,' she says. 'So quiet and sloooooow. When I was divorcing Peter... Well, it were shit, weren't it? But worth it, in the end. Not just for her,' she gestures her glass to where Emma stands on the table, 'but for me, too.'

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She puts her free hand around Jamie's shoulders in a gruff, brotherly fashion. 'It's early days yet, I know, but— You're only twenty-eight, Jay. We're all gonna cock up from time to time but at least for now,' she turns to face him, 'we've got time to fix things. If we want. If that's what we want doooo. He might be a pillock, but— I dunno. He's one of the good ones. Like you.'

She puts her hand on his face and slaps him a little harder than gently. 'I need another drink,' she says. 'Love ya, mate.'

**December 2016**

Jamie let the door open when he heard Alice knock. He leaned back against it once she was inside and she sat opposite him, leaning against his bed. There was a bowl of ice cream in her hands which she had mixed into a softer consistency.

'Well, would you have wanted some?' she had seen him eyeing the bowl. He smirked a little, realising he wouldn't have.

'She's just going. Just now,' Alice said. 'I thought mum was going to slap her for a moment there.'

It was two days after Christmas and Linda, their mother's sister, had come for dinner because that was still something Jamie's family decided to endure. Jamie remembered the last time she had visited on Christmas day itself. In the kitchen, Linda had told his mother that she thought Jamie's father was probably having an affair. He wasn't, then, but it had led to a big argument and soon Linda was demoted to visiting on the twenty-seventh instead.

Today, she had made sure to ask if Jamie was yet to find a girlfriend at university and, when he said he hadn't, she demonstrated how certain she was that he would find one soon by spitting slightly as she spoke.

'Did you know that there are thirty-two muscles in a cat's ear?' Alice asked.

'You get that from a cracker?'

'No,' she smiled. 'I just know it from somewhere.'

While Jamie's hair had descended from blond to brown as he passed through puberty, Alice's had stayed bright. It gave her a kind but efficient look, like the person who'd be quickest to call an ambulance if they saw a stranger faint in the street.

'Maybe that's why they can hear so well,' Jamie said.

'You'd think it'd help somewhat,' Alice licked the last of the ice cream from her spoon and placed the bowl on the carpet.

'Is there anyone?' she asked. 'At uni?'

Jamie looked up at her.

'You aren't still speaking to that Will guy, are you?'

'Well, we're friends so—'

She smiled at him in a sad way then. Jamie had mentioned Will's name a few too many times last summer. So much so that apparently even his mother had noticed.

'He's got a boyfriend,' Jamie added, aware Alice already knew this. 'I'm not— I'm not doing *that*, we're just friends.'

'I know. I know you're not doing anything... *y'know...*' she scooted over and spun around so she was sat next to her brother. She knew about the anxieties Jamie had about becoming a replica of his father. About how, when he was fifteen, he had stopped talking to one of his closest friends because she had gotten a boyfriend. Of course, that just led to everyone thinking that Jamie did in fact have a crush on Hannah Braithwait. He didn't, of

course. But then, because of how everyone was acting, he wondered if maybe he did. Or if, at least, he was supposed to.

'You can't help how you feel. It's fine,' she nudged him slightly. 'Maybe you should just, y'know, give yourself some space from him for a while. It might be easier to get on with things.'

She didn't make the suggestion that he might meet someone else, and he appreciated that. He leaned his head to one side and it knocked gently against hers. He felt warm, then. He felt still.

'C'mon,' she said after a moment, jumping up quickly and holding down her hand. 'Back downstairs we go.'

### 22:36 - 3rd September 2021

Jamie is in the bathroom when Will finds him. He's looking into the mirror. Jamie does this a lot, Will knew. But not in an arrogant way. More the opposite, as if he wants to scream at himself but is too afraid to make a noise.

Will isn't drunk and, despite being very aware of what his legs are doing, is able to walk mostly in a straight line up to the sink next to his friend. He leans on it, facing away from the mirror. 'You good, skip?'

Jamie wipes his nose, turns, and walks to the door. He stops, his hand on the handle. Will had lowered his head to the floor but looks up now to watch.

'Why today?' Jamie asks. One of the taps behind Will is dripping.

'I dunno,' he says. He hears Jamie breathe in sharply.

'I mean,' Will begins. 'I guess I just thought, like, if I didn't now then that'd be it, y'know. Like a last chance kind of-'

'No, no, no,' Jamie turns from the door with his eyes closed and head shaking and walks back over to Will. His shoes are sharp on the tiles and his eyes are red and even though he stops a few feet away, Will can feel the heat from him. 'Not that. Not, *why not tomorrow?* Why not before? If you felt like this back-' Jamie is pinching his thumb and index finger together like a politician. 'You said you felt like this all the way back when we met.'

'I mean--'

'Why the fuck didn't you say anything?'

'When we met?'

'Anytime. Literally, all of the past six years.'

'Why didn't you?'

'Because you had a boyfriend--'

'Who I broke up with years--'

'--and I'm not the kind of prick,' Jamie steps closer now, 'who tries to wreck other people's relationships.'

'Who I broke up with years ago,' Will repeats, 'because of you.'

'Oh fuck off with that shit,' Jamie runs his hand through his hair, stumbling into half a spin before turning back again, 'we were hardly even speaking when you and Harry broke up.'

'You're so arrogant.' Will shakes his head and realises how much he wants to cry.

'I'm the arrogant one? The one whose wedding has been pissing,' he fumbles about with his hands looking for a word, 'hijacked by--'

'You shouldn't care. If you love that man out there like you say you do you shouldn't fucking care what I say.'

*I did, I do*

'But I do care. That's the whole point,' Jamie turns then and kicks open a cubicle door. It makes a loud, bashing noise as it strikes the wall, and the sound riles angrily in the room for a few seconds before the dripping of the tap returns.

'You're right. When your sister died—'

'No, no, no, no,' the words come out of Jamie's mouth in choking breaths, 'you don't get to bring her up now.'

'You're right,' Will says loudly. 'We weren't talking much. And I worried about you. All the fucking time. And I think Harry picked up on that and I think he realised things that I knew but didn't— He told me I cared too much, y'know, that you're just my friend, why was I so invested? You didn't even know I was the one who broke up with him, did you? I'm sorry. I didn't mean for— I don't know what I wanted, to be honest. I don't know if I wanted anything. I just needed you to know before you became someone I couldn't tell. I don't know if it's love or—'

Jamie comes over, nodding. He stands too close, Will thinks. He looks at Jamie's skin and feels his throat tense.

'I'm married now,' Jamie says. 'I'm a husband. I love David and that's why I married him,' Jamie scrunches up his eyes, digging his palms into them. Then he brings down his hands, opens his eyes: 'David and I are gone for two weeks now. When we're back, we're going to be pretty busy. You've got to get over this. The same way I did.'

He turns. He leaves the bathroom. The tap continues to drip.