



MAGDA OLCHAWSKA

# School Runs

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## **CONTENTS**

- Chapter 1: The First Week of School**
- Chapter 2: My Knee Is In Pain Again**
- Chapter 3: So The Drama Begins**
- Chapter 4: The Investigation**
- Chapter 5: The Brief History**
- Chapter 6: Passive Aggressive parents**
- Chapter 7: Playdates**
- Chapter 8: The Networking**
- Chapter 9: The Different Groups of Parents**
- Chapter 10: The Christmas Preparation**
- Chapter 11: New Year, New Me**
- Chapter 12: The Meetings**
- Chapter 13: The Workshops**
- Chapter 14: The Change Is Coming**
- Chapter 15: My Baby Brother to The Rescue**
- Chapter 16: School Runs**
- Chapter 17: Going Dancing**
- Chapter 18: My First Date In Years**
- Chapter 19: The Date and Other Things on My Mind**
- Chapter 20: Homeschooling Efforts**
- Chapter 21: Taking A Break**
- Chapter 22: Jim Wants to Talk**
- Chapter 23: Pushing Through the Comfort Zone**

**Chapter 24: Saying Yes Is an Art Form**

**Chapter 25: Getting Ready to Move**

**Chapter 26: It Is Finally Happening**

**Chapter 27: One Door Closes Another Door Opens**

**Chapter 28: Epilogue**

## Chapter 1

### The First Week of School

**September 18th, 2018**

As every year, the first week of school is fucking stressful. Kids are already tired and cranky in the afternoons, the traffic is driving me ballistic, and the money goes out in doubles. There are the arts and crafts lessons, singing, music, Spanish ... and the shoes and the wellies and the raincoats and anything and everything else you can think of we, the parents, have to pay for in September.

Of course, I don't mind investing in my kid's education, quite the opposite. I believe every penny spend on education is worth it. But I would still like to know why everything must be so bloody expensive when it comes to kids and their education?!?

Jim, my husband doesn't share my enthusiasm about investment in education. His educational belief system is pretty limited. According to him, kids ought to work hard at school and learn everything there, not at the after-school clubs or during extra tutorials or activities. He believes that a child should show some interest in a particular subject before extra help, or additional lessons are offered.

In reality, education is just one of many fundamental values we disagree on. At the start of any relationship, no one wants to see how opposing beliefs can break that relationship.

Even once we were married, I still hoped he would change his mind and see what I see. But unfortunately, it never happened.

Another "frustration he constantly experiences with me" – these are his words, not mine, is that I bring zero money in. He's already forgotten that it was his idea for me to stay at home with the girls.

Instead of paying someone else to look after our kids, I was going to look after them. Apparently, it was cheaper than having a nanny and a cleaner and pay for my travel to work.

Leaving my career to be a full-time stay at home, mum was a huge mistake, to put it mildly... Somehow it slips his mind that I was the breadwinner before we had kids. I was the one who supported his crazy startup ideas and always believed that he was going to succeed.

I still don't understand how insane I must have been to think it was a good idea to give up my career in my prime to become... a perfect nobody.

Unfortunately, after having two kids, I'm not considered a valuable asset to the majority of employers. They look at me and see a liability. Yes, our modern, advanced society seems to believe that the moment a woman becomes a mother, she loses all abilities to think, work, and be productive. The small fact that dudes run most companies doesn't help our cause. The prejudice against working mothers is massive and growing stronger.

Every single year during the first week of school, Jim and I argue a ton. The tension between us doesn't help with my physical and mental exhaustion. Our constant arguments leave me drained and wishing I could dissolve into nothingness. He always knows, which buttons to push and words to use to make me feel small and insignificant. The sad truth is that I've only recently realised how much his words and actions affect my self-esteem. Most of the days, I feel small and irrelevant.

I feel like I completely lost myself just to please, Jim, who doesn't even see me as a person any longer.

Shake it off... shake it off.. enough of self-pity.

My girls are always happy to be back at school with all their friends. I also love that my coffee mornings with other mums are back. We usually don't see each other over the summer. The community takes a break from being a community; maybe it's for the best and helps to avoid unnecessary conflicts.

Both of my girls go to an independent school, which I feel is a perfect fit for their needs. It costs shit lots of money, but money is irrelevant to me when it comes to education. The girls like the school, love their teachers and each morning are happy to put their shoes on, pick up their school bags and go off.

I love the freedom of the summer holidays offer the late nights and lazy mornings. But there is nothing like a quiet house after a hot, humid, and sticky summer. I treasure the space and the quietness that falls upon the house when September arrives.

I know that if you asked Jim about what I do during the time the girls are at school, he would most likely say: "nothing".

But the reality is very different. I cook, clean, do the shopping, do the laundry, look after the garden, sell stuff we don't need any more on eBay and most importantly I'm a writer. Or I should rather say that I try to write. I was a writer in my previous life. For some reason, words don't come to me as easily as they used to.

My previous job BC (before children) involved lots of writing. I was a senior copywriter in a fancy ad agency which didn't believe my motherhood could add any value to their company once my maternity leave was over. Fuck them and the dude in charge. Sorry, the creep would love that so no. I'm just gonna fuck his narrow-minded teeny-tiny brain.

After years of procrastination, I'm back to writing... I'm trying to write again and possibly in the process get my working life back. I didn't tell anyone that I was writing again. First of all, I don't need more pressure than I already have; secondly, I don't want to get my hopes up too high. It's writing, it's highly competitive, personal and I'm starting from scratch. With creativity and creative life, you can't plan that much ahead.

At the moment I'm silently excited that I'm opening a new chapter in the middle of my old life.

## Chapter 2

### My Knee Is In Pain Again

**September 25th, 2018**

After weeks of resting and a half a dozen physiotherapy sessions, my knee, in theory, should be as good as new. I didn't exercise or walk as much as I planned over the summer. I wanted my knee to be ready for all the physical activities a new school year always throws my way.

However, the moment I started driving a little bit more than I did during the summer, my knee gave in. I honestly don't know if this was the driving, the colder weather, or more physical strain, but my knee was screaming for attention. As soon as I could, I made yet another appointment with Jim's friend, a physiotherapist who gave me sessions in the summer. I had no particular problems with him before that last session, or possibly I failed to notice that he was a fucking moron.

His asshole-like attitude was noticeable from the moment I walked through the door. I was two minutes late; it happens, it's London. Sometimes you can't get on time to places regardless of how early you leave. Besides, the moment school is back in session, driving across the capital becomes challenging.

Of course, I was apologetic and explained that I got stuck in traffic. He clearly didn't appreciate that and right away began bombarding me with pretty personal questions, which made me feel incredibly uncomfortable. After our brief Q&A session, the rest of the visit became nightmarish.

During the last session we had, he gave me a strengthening exercise, which I did daily for a few weeks. But according to him, I was doing the whole exercise wrong. Even though it was precisely the way, he demonstrated.

After pointing out that I just wasted my time doing the exercise, he proceeded with more criticism, but this time he decided to insult my diet. Believe me; he knows very little about food. Once he was done pointing out how my vegan diet was unhealthy, he couldn't stop himself from insisting that joining the gym is stupid and pointless. According to him, I should be interacting with my environment, and going to the gym will never offer that. I live in London, at times the pollution is so fucking high that I have difficulties breathing while in the car.

But the most out of place and in some respect humiliating was when out of the blue he announced that I was getting old and I must be going through early menopause because I experienced a heat stroke over the summer.

Since he is an expert and knows all about heat strokes and menopause, he couldn't spare me his opinion. He just blurted it all out with no consideration of how insensitive and out of place his words and comments were. I don't give a fuck that he is Jim's mate. The chauvinistic pig will see none of my money ever again. How dare he or anyone else judge me by my age, pains or family history. Who does that?

I should have left right then and there, but I didn't. I guess being a "nice girl" sticks to grown women too, as much as it does to the young girls. This is undoubtedly not the way I'm teaching my daughters to be like. If someone or something makes them uncomfortable, they will need to speak up or leave. Life is too short to accept and put up with other's bullshit.

Since I don't like leaving things on a negative note with people at the end of the session, I asked him about specific exercise I could do as a part of my training. He quickly scanned the front page of my training program, and looked at, looked at the clock above his head. He didn't even know how to answer my question and was in such a rush to get me out that it was painful to watch. In conclusion, I didn't matter the moment the hour was over. What kind of customer service is that?

After my session with the asshole, I headed off to pick up the girls. I was trying to calm myself down; I didn't cry, no asshole of such a small proportion could make me cry, but I was unkind to my girls and didn't allow them to play in the park with their friends after school. I was so pre-occupied with my inner anger that I didn't even listen to their stories on our way back.

Women put up with a lot of passive-aggressive behaviour from blokes who feel entitled to give us their opinions about ourselves and our life choices. However, I have to say that on that very day, something has changed in me. I can't put my finger on what that was, but I'm more than certain that I will never again allow any man make me feel uncomfortable, walk all over me, or make me feel like I don't matter. I didn't say anything to Jim. I doubt he would have understood. Most likely, he would have laughed it off and put it down to my vivid imagination and seeing problems where they don't exist. Besides, I haven't spoken to him for at least a week. I know he is around, but he gets in when I'm already asleep and in the morning he is the first one to leave the house. He must be working on something big, I guess.

## **Chapter 3**

### **So The Drama Begins**

**October 4th, 2018**

I've been pretty unhappy recently. Maybe my dissatisfaction with life has always been there, I just never saw it up close like that. The constant anger I carry

around is consuming every muscle of my body and every cell of my brain. I've been trying to find the reason for my unhappiness for weeks, and the only thing I can come up with is that the girls are growing up fast and fairly soon they won't need me as much as they used to. I guess that, on some level, I've started wondering what shall I do with my life now and how could I arrange my working life, if I was to go back to work, around the girl's school? I have this strong gut feeling that I need to decide fairly soon how I want the rest of my life to look like.

Jim has been working so late for the past few weeks. When the house is all quiet wine has been keeping me company. On the one hand, it's nice to have evenings to myself. Still, on the other, the pickups from the afternoon activities, homework, play dates and bedtime fall all on me, which at times is overwhelming, especially when the girls had a bad day at school and are unsettled.

Luckily, tomorrow I'm seeing my girlfriends. Would you believe if I told you that I hadn't had a chance to have a morning coffee with them since we started school? Already a month has gone by!

The four of us have known each other since our kids were in the playgroup together. We like to call ourselves The Kids and the City gang, you know like the Sex and the City but with much less sex and nearly non-existing social life, which has been taken over by the kid's activities and the stream of birthday parties.

I love spending time with my girlfriends. Our coffee mornings always fill me with positive and refreshing energy allowing me to forget all the shit I have going on in my life.

### **October 5th, 2018**

My little monsters decided that having a tantrum over who is wearing what to school is the best way to start the day. I wonder if they do it to see how much they can piss me off.

Jim left when I was in the shower long before the tantrum took over our morning. I've always found it hard to handle the screaming kids. Jim is so much better at calming them down.

They were so upset with one another that neither of them spoke in the car all the way to school.

In comparison to the morning drama, the drop off felt unusually uneventful. For a change, even the gate was opened on time. I didn't see Christina, which is always nice. She is the leader of the "mean girls club". School parental politics are very much like the high school political landscape. You must belong to a group and immune yourself to the waterfall of gossips, talking behind people's back and countless passive-aggressive behaviour parental communities engage in.

Since I didn't feel like waiting by the gate for my girlfriends to arrive, I made my

way to the cafe. Over the summer the cafe had a makeover. There are a new owner and a new menu. I like the newly updated cafe as much as I loved the old one (The only local cafe I don't like is the one that served me a latte with a hair in it. When I asked for a new one, it wasn't well received. Of course I don't go there any more.).

I was so ready to talk, drink coffee and eat brownies.

The moment I sat down, I started thinking about our life stories and how our current lives seem to be alike. Before we had kids, we all had careers and highly paid jobs. But after kids and maternity leaves, it's been hard to get back to work and keep our pre-kids high paying jobs.

Currently, most of us either have part times jobs, freelance or started businesses in hope to turn a profit at some point.

The whole experience of shunting mothers aside from a workplace is humiliating. We are all resourceful, creative problem solvers, who can multitask but most of us can't seem to be able to find well-paid full-time employment because apparently being a mother makes us for some reason unemployable, especially in the decision making positions.

I try to stay positive and not get affected by the gloom of our situation, but pretty often, I feel resentful and depressed that nobody wants to see what I can offer. My girlfriends and I are real-life examples of inequality in the workplace and life.

I was halfway through my brownie when my girls arrived. The moment I saw them, I knew something was seriously off; all three of them were... distressed, the way I haven't seen them in a long time.

I didn't even manage to ask what happened when Jenny blurted out.

- "We were late... because... we... love you... and... you need to know...that...that...that..."

- "That what Jenny? Spill it out!!!" - I almost screamed; I was getting this sick feeling in my stomach. It happens every time I feel something terrible is about to happen.

She took a deep breath and finally said.

-"Jim... Jim... has been seen a couple of times cosying up to Christina in the city in the past week".

At first, I had no idea what Jenny was all about, and I just looked at her for a few seconds while trying to figure out how could Jim see Christina if he was working late.

But soon enough, I understood.

## Chapter 4

### The Investigation

**October 9th, 2018**

I still don't know if I feel sad, perhaps shocked, or merely disappointed that Jim has been seeing someone behind my back. I know I should be outraged, but it's not in me, I can't find it. I knew I wasn't happy, but I didn't realise that we, as a couple, weren't happy either. In reality, I don't think we have spoken in... I can't even remember when was the last time we did talk about something else than the school runs, children, and the school community.

I guess the romance died down at some point for us. But seeing Christina behind my back is humiliating. He always knew how much I hate that woman, all her petty conflicts, unkindness, and general bitchiness. She is everything I'm not. She is focused on her own career and social progress, something Jim repetitively said he didn't like women focusing on once they become mothers. In Jim's book on motherhood, there was never anything in the middle; everything was either black or white.

He always kept bragging to anyone who would listen that he worked hard so I could be home with the children. But at home, he slowly began increasing the pressure on me to start to bring in the income.

He wasn't always money and status-driven. He used to be supportive, especially when he was starting, and we had to live off my single salary. However, over the past two years, he's changed. He became easily irritated, demanding and unforgiving when it came to making mistakes. I put this outrageous behaviour on pressure and work-related stress, but maybe there was something much more to it than that.

I don't think I can point out to one moment when we drifted apart. There must have been many small moments that added up.

But seeing HER is a shitty move. I can't understand why, from all the women on Earth, he decided to go out with her. She is fucking the worst, patronising and superior to the rest of us. I HATE HER; I HATE HER; I HATE HER!!!

Katy suggested that I should spy on Jim. According to her, I should investigate (believe me she has heaps of experience investigating her partners) what that thing between the two of them is. Is it a beginning of romance or a full-blown up affair? And what that means for us: a divorce, a separation, a re-union (no way!!!)?

As for me, I don't know what I should do. I must confront him, but for now, I'm too scared to hear the truth. Besides, I'm very worried that I'm not able to provide for the girls. I'm entirely and fully dependent on Jim financially. How did I get myself into that I still don't know? I was always so independent, pioneering women in every place I worked and now... I'll have to start all over again.

How does one start all over again after turning 40 and being out of the workforce for years?

### **October 10th, 2018**

Since yet again, Jim “worked late” last night, I’ve decided to take Katy’s advice and investigate how far that “thing” with Christina has gone. How long the two of them have been making a fool of me and how long I have been a laughing stock of the entire school? This situation is so humiliating on every possible level.

When I don’t think about the two of them, I feel pretty good, but the moment I start thinking about the shame, I can feel my anger growing. When the anger subsides, it makes room for the agonising pain that follows right after. I don’t know if the pain is caused by the realisation that our relationship may be over or that my pride has taken a serious hit.

Every time I go through emotional upheaval, I stop eating, but I guess losing a bit of weight will do me good. Maybe I’ll be able to fit into some of my fancy pre-pregnancy clothes and skinny jeans. Skinny jeans and heels would be nice for starting all over again.

Jim didn’t know that I was still awake when he got back last night. I could hear his every move. It’s sickening to know that your partner is lying to you every morning when he leaves the house and every night when he gets back. It’s not even the fear that our life together is coming to an end; it’s the blatant lying, the fact that after all those years together he has no respect for me and chooses to be with someone opposite to who I’m and to what I represent.

I know myself well enough to know that the odds of me being able to carry on our relationship the way it was before I found out are non-existing. Despite all the fear and anxiety, I experience regarding the financial aspect of my new life.

However, before I make any long-term, life revolting decisions, I just need to know for sure what he’s been doing, how far the thing has gone, and why he is doing it with her!!! Christina and I have always openly hated one another. He can certainly forget about seeing his kids if she is around.

I also won’t allow her to make me feel like a victim. I’m not a victim; I’m choosing... I’m choosing me. She wants him, she can have him, but not before I’m done taking every single bit of what is mine.

But I do need to investigate to stop the anxiety from spreading and taking over my body and mind.

This morning I told my girlfriends that I was ready to investigate Jim and Christina and whatever is going on between them.

However, our conversation got quickly interrupted when Christina and the rest of her gang strode in. She can have Jim, but she is surely not going to take my cafe. The fight is on.

## Chapter 5

### The Brief History

**October 30th, 2018**

It's a day before yet another Halloween, which usually marks the end of the warm weather and the start of the frantic Christmas preparation. Jim is "working late" again tonight. I still haven't found enough courage to confront him. I'm just scared, and the longer I think about having to talk to him, the bigger my anxiety becomes. What if he really is in a relationship with her and has been sleeping with her behind my back for months? What then, what do I do after I know the truth? (So far my investigation hasn't been going well. I found zero evidence, or maybe I don't know how to look.)

I wasn't always scared; there were times when I was brave, willing to talk, ask and live my life to the fullest. But it all seems like another lifetime, or rather like a life that belonged to someone else, of which I was just a passive observer.

Before I became a mum, and I love being a mum, I had a successful career in the corporate world. I started as a journalist, but within a few years, I moved onto writing for corporations and working with PR teams before I ended up as a senior copywriter in an ad agency.

The corporate jobs were never as fulfilling as being a journalist, but the money was much better. Since we only had one income, Jim was still building his company; it was a logical step for me to take to make our future together better.

The moment Jim's company turned a profit, and he was able to pay himself, we decided it was time for us to have children. We already had a lovely house in a good neighbourhood with good private and state schools around. So now I just needed to get pregnant. The plan for me was to work for as long as I could, and then do freelance jobs once my maternity leave was over. Well, the plan was perfect on paper, and what possibly could have gone wrong with a perfect plan, right?

While pregnant, I was sick all the time. There were days I couldn't even get out of bed. All the worldly smells were making me throw up, and I needed to stop working earlier than I planned. I did try to be upbeat, regardless of the pregnancy sickness, but some days it was hard. Not to lose my mind completely, I read a lot of books, stayed in bed till late, and tried to move as little as I possibly could.

As soon as my daughter was born, I wanted to go back to work, by the time my baby was three months old, I was working again. My new job wasn't as well paid as the one that got shipped to India, but I had an income coming in, and the company seemed to be much less rigorous than the previous one. However, soon enough, I found out that I was pregnant again. It was a

mixture of happiness and fear. I wanted to have another child, but not so soon.

I stayed with this company for as long as I could before another maternity leave. After I had my second daughter, I decided to stay home for at least a year before returning to full-time work.

I loved every moment and every minute of being home with the girls. Jim loved it, too; we used to have long breakfasts or go for long lunches or coffee breaks in the middle of the day. It was so much fun.

But something somehow must have gone very wrong for us.

## Chapter 6

### Passive Aggressive Parents

**November 07th, 2018**

Since I'm tired of feeling sorry for myself and obsessing about what to do about Jim, let me tell you a little bit more about the passive-aggressive parents from the girl's school. (I bet other schools have those too.)

We chose this independent school for our girls because we (Jim and I) liked the school's approach to a child's development. I particularly liked that there were no exams and no grades. Back then, we both thought that this kind of environment was going to be perfect for our girls to become independent thinkers.

We started school when our oldest turned four. From the first moment, we entered the school community; all school-related matters became my responsibility only.

From the first day of school, the managers expected a lot from the parents. Over the years, I've given away a lot of my time and knowledge to help improve the finances and running of the school. Unfortunately, my hard work has never been recognized or appreciated in any way. Nonetheless, I always managed to convince myself that if my girls were happy, I didn't care that much about recognition, either my precious time.

You cannot buy more time once it's gone it's gone.

The longer we were at school, and the more I was getting involved within the school community, the more I became aware of parents judgment towards one another, gossips, and recurring passive-aggressive behaviour.

To my horror, all that conduct was entirely acceptable and very common, amongst the most "enlightened school community in London". Ok. that's a big fat lie; they aren't that enlightened, even though they (the community) strongly desire to be.

Over the first weeks and months at school, I discovered that not all parents were nice and even wanted to be nice. Some were plain straight horrible bullies, with some sick “political” agendas attached to their names. To progress their agenda, those parents used passive-aggressive tactics as part of their game.

I knew that kind of behaviour very well from my corporate jobs. But I didn't realize that it was also popular in the school, which pride itself for putting child's wellbeing first.

Those freaking bullies tried to take control of the school, regardless of the implications and costs to the community. I still have a tough time understanding why play aggressive games just to become a trustee.

Christina has always been one of those passive-aggressive parents who tormented others just for the pure pleasure of it. At times, she would pretend to be overly friendly and attentive, then the next morning, she would cross the road to avoid saying good morning to me. It's become a pattern with her. I still don't know the root of her meanness towards me, but I guess she's always had her eyes on Jim and simply treated me as her competition, even though I was married to him, and still am, regardless of what they are doing together.

With each passing year, the Queen Bee of Meanness was becoming more unpleasant and disrespectful towards me. For instance, she saw no problems in interrupting me and hijacking the conversation while I was talking to someone. If we were in the same group of people, she would talk to anyone and greet everyone but me. The only time she acknowledged my existence was when I was with Jim, and she was talking to him. At first, I tried not to pay attention to her behaviour, but the longer we were at school, the more unbearable it became to me. I'm not going to lie to you; she got to me more often than I would like to admit.

Of course, she wasn't the only one playing a passive-aggressive game. If you disagreed on any social, emotional, or even cooking issues, with a parent who got kicks from passive-aggressive behaviour, you got shunt away for good by certain parenting groups.

The parent you disagreed on always made sure others knew that you were merely a savage and knew nothing or very little, even if you were an expert on that subject.

However, in my eyes, Christina has always been the Queen Bee of Meanness, and she has exercised her passive-aggressive technics over other mums and me, she was always annoyingly sweet to the dads, as much and as often as she could.

Don't get me wrong I'm mad and furious at Jim. He always knew how I felt about Christina. She always tried her hardest to make my school runs and school community outings and gatherings as unpleasant as possible.

Somehow she was always at the top of her game ready to attack when I didn't expect her to. Now, it turns out that she is also good at sleeping with other people's husbands.

PS. I need to get my shit together. I cannot keep on being so miserable and indecisive for much longer.

PS2. I looked at my pre-pregnancy clothes today and decided to fit in them once again.

PS3. I signed up with my local gym. That will show him... or maybe help me find someone for revenge sex. Either way, I'll get my revenge.

## Chapter 7

### Playdates

**November 14th, 2018**

I've been really good this week and went to the gym every morning after the drop-off. Jim doesn't know I'm exercising and juicing. I've done juicing before, but it's as hard as the first time. In my case, cleansing is always a good start before cutting down on carbs (my mortal enemies).

I know that from the outside, it may look like I'm re-inventing myself for Jim. But for a change, I want to go back to being healthy for me. Of course, I'm secretly hoping to fit into my skinny jeans once again. If in the process, my shattered confidence goes up a notch that would be fantastic.

My looks have always had a massive influence over my confidence. Ever since I was a teenager and started understanding that supermodels were something else altogether (in my teenage eyes, they were immortal goddesses), I became ashamed of my short legs and broad hips. For years I hated every bit of food I put in my mouth.

After my second child was born, my body became so hideous that I started hiding in baggy, shapeless clothes.

The less confident I felt, the less sex I wanted to have. At some point, Jim and I even stopped trying to pretend that we want to do it. In all honesty, I don't think our marriage is saveable. But whatever has happened between us isn't an excuse for his affair with Christina.

With each day, the school runs are becoming more challenging. Christina is working overtime to make sure I feel uncomfortable and out of place at school.

Over the past few weeks, she became more cocky and unpleasant towards me than she used to be. She's always been a bully, but now she took her bullying tactics to an entirely new level.

A lot of my energy goes towards not kicking her fucking stupid skinny ass. The rest goes towards pretending that I still have some dignity left, which I'm not too sure I do.

However, not everything seems to be going down the hill for me. I started saying 'no' more often to parents, who asked me if I could have their kids over after the school for a play date. I used to oblige to every single request and often the girls, and I, wouldn't have a free afternoon together for weeks. But I can't any more. I can't pretend that I enjoy being taken advantage of. Looking after my own kids is exhausting enough. Besides I'm more than certain, the whole school knows about my beloved, and his "new found love". It makes me even angrier that in a school that praises the community spirit so much, no one said anything to me.

Playdates have always been encouraged by the class teachers. Most parents have always gone along with that, giving a lot, and expecting very little in return. At first, I didn't mind having other kids over. I wanted my girls to make friends, especially outside the school settings. But with time, I noticed that some parents took advantage of the whole notion more often than others and never offered to look after my girls.

Since I wanted and needed to be liked, I went along agreeing to every single play date, even though I was unhappy with myself for not being able to say "no".

However, since the start of the new school year, I've tried my hardest not to go out of my way to accommodate everyone's requests. Besides, the girls have a solid small group of friends and those people matter. I must teach them that doing stuff for others just to be liked is a massive mistake.

Small steps usually lead to a big change, so, hopefully, my tinny steps will lead me out of the darkness.

### **November 16th, 2018**

Today, right after the pick-up, the girls and I decided to go out for tea. The daily routine (school runs, shopping, housework, writing just for a bit, and cooking) is driving me crazy. There is only so much of that boring day-to-day reality one person can take.

My new gym and eating regime has given me the will power to do more outside of the house. Breaking with the routine is my new motto. Both of my girls are big pizza fans, so we ended up going for pizza just off Covent Garden.

We took our time eating; as a family, we usually rush with everything, but there was no time pressure.

Jim kept calling me, but I didn't care. I didn't pick up the phone, neither texted him to let him know where we were. He always tells lies anyway, so why should I listen to it.

Halfway through our ice cream, Emily, our younger daughter, who is turning nine next year, asked: “Are you going to divorce daddy?”

I was caught off guard, and since I didn’t know what to say, I just dismissed her concerns with a stupid: “Don’t be silly, dear”.

I wonder what she knows. Does it show that we are together but not really together, or maybe Christina’s monster child has been saying some shitty stupid bullshit around the school?

## Chapter 8

### The Networking

#### November 21th, 2018

Once a month “we”, by that I mean I, organise a networking event in our house. Jim came up with this neat idea years ago when his business was just a startup.

Instead of going out weekly or even daily (BC - before children) to network, we decided to invite people to our house once a month. I thought it was a splendid idea, and as a supportive wife, I was all for it until the networking event became my thing. According to Jim, he couldn’t do anything more than he was already doing and couldn’t also be in charge of organising the party. He already had too much on his plate as it was.

Unwilling, I became the sole organiser of the monthly networking event that my “beloved husband” is a sole beneficiary of.

It takes me about a month to get the party-ready. First of all, I need to track all the guests we want to invite. I try to rotate the guest list, so it’s not the same people every time; I design or sometimes hand-make the invitations myself, I set the menu and the drinks list as well as come up with exciting ideas to keep the kids busy and occupied while the parents talk.

Oh, did I say that the budget for those get-togethers is tiny? To save money, I usually do all the cooking and baking myself; it takes me days to have all the food ready. Looking after the kids, the house, the school community and be the head of the networking party for Jim has become my reality.

At first, I didn’t mind; I wanted to be involved in his business, and I’ve always been very proud of his achievements. But the circumstances have changed so dramatically that I’m finding it hard to muster the strength to get anything done for that bloody party.

#### November 25th, 2018

You will never believe what happened!

Yesterday morning Jim refused to help me pick up the food for the party and to rearrange our living room for the event. He announced that he was too tired and needed to relax a bit more before all the guests started arriving.

Last weekend he promised the girls to take them bike riding to the park today. But of course, he made some lame excuse for not doing that too, which made me mad beyond mad and the girls very sad.

As an emergency, I asked Kiara if she could look after the girls. While talking to her, I could feel that under the surface, I was fucking boiling.

I've been patient; I've waited for only God knows what to happen. But after not seeing the girls for a week, he couldn't even find a couple of hours for them? That was unacceptable!!!

I dropped the girls with Kiara, who as always was kind and understanding; then I went to pick up the party food. Two weeks ago I decided to indulge myself and overspend on food for a change. I ordered every single item from Waitrose. As I was putting the food in the car, somehow I swung one of the boxes, and my car keys flew few stores down landing somewhere in the bushes. Having no other choice, I unpacked all the food and went to look for the car keys. Of course, I couldn't find them.

I called Jim. At first, he didn't pick up the phone. Then I called again, and he turned my call off. When I was on my way up, Jim called. I picked up the phone, but all I could hear was her fucking high-pitched shroud voice, which I would even recognise from Mars.

That very moment something broke in me. He didn't want to take his kids to the park but had no problems spending the morning with her? What kind of person does that?

I called mini-cab. The driver was kind enough to help me put all the food inside and helped me carry the food back to the house. I tipped him generously.

Once I got home, I called Kiara and told her what happened. She suggested that the girls stay for the sleepover. After putting the phone down, I instantly felt sad thinking about the past fifteen years and how little that meant to Jim. I left all the unpacked and unwrapped food on the kitchen table. The first guests were supposed to arrive in two hours. Jim still wasn't home.

I jumped in a shower before getting ready for a night out. Jim got home half an hour before the party was meant to start.

When he came upstairs, I was writing. He looked at me and was about to say something, but I got in first.

- "I want separation, and I want you to move out tomorrow the latest."

- "Why is the food not ready?" – he ignored me, completely ignored me. "You know I've been crazed all day for you and the girls."

- "Oh, have you?" – I passed him the phone, showing him the time and the length of his butt call. "I guess Christina is one of your clients now, right?"

- "I...I..." he started, but I didn't let him finish. I was done being the "good wife".

- "You have until tomorrow to get the fuck out of my house. Have an awesome party." I said and banged the bedroom door behind.

I took the train to London, and in twenty minutes I was standing in the middle of Charing Cross wondering what to do next.

I decided to have a drink and dinner on my own before booking a hotel room. Kiara re-assured me that the girls were doing fine and didn't suspect anything.

Of course, Christina attended the party. And how I know this? She fucking posted the pictures from my house and my garden all over her bloody Instagram. I will either have to burn down the house or redecorate. He didn't text or call me even once to find out where we were. This is how a marriage ends with no champagne, no flowers or china patterns.

### **November 26th, 2018**

I made Jim tell the girls that he was moving out and why. He wanted to talk to me and explain, but I said 'no'. Everything has happened so fast that I'm still digesting my bravery. In all honesty, I didn't think I had it in me. Now I need to focus on my girls and finding a job that could support the three of us.

## **Chapter 9**

### **The Different Groups of Parents**

#### **November 30th, 2018**

When you are a parent on daily school runs over the years, you will inevitably encounter various groups of parents. During my school runs career, I've managed to identify the following groups:

- Mean parents (Christina is the queen bee of that group) – they take enormous pleasure at making other parents feel uncomfortable. They usually try to be the best at everything and anything such as cooking, arts and crafts, organising the best playdates and B-day parties (most expensive as well), the best "friend", and the most devoted parent to the school community... and on and on it goes.

No one can ever best the mean parents and if anyone ever tries an avalanche of nasty judgment comes rolling. Because whatever you do it will never be good enough for them. The mean gang will always judge you harshly and then talk about you behind your back.

- Passive-aggressive parents (I already covered that extensively) – a lot of them are proud members of the mean parents' group. It's easy to recognise a passive-aggressive parent; they can often be seen in the mornings not replying to the morning greetings. If I say "Good morning", nothing comes back. However, at times, as if by the touch of a magic wand, they reply and sometimes they even want to have a small talk. However, it's always hard to say when that will happen and what triggers the sudden "friendliness", but it never lasts longer than a few days.

- 'Poor me' parents – those parents are fucking draining. Life is always just one big drama for them. Whatever happens, they take it all out of proportion, often turning the smallest incidents into a big monstrous catastrophe. Some of them stay 'friends' with other parents for as long as that people/person is

willing to give unconditionally; when the giving stops, they move on to another victim.

- Wealthy parents with shit lots of money that everyone wants to be friends with. Of course, there are many mystical gossips about them circling the school. The school management usually tries to "encourage" them to help out the school financially as much as possible. At times it works, but often it doesn't. I usually try to stay away from that kind of people. Keeping up with their spending ratio isn't for humble mortals.

- Parents who like to mix it up – this group of parents is pretty dishonest towards other parents, often using others for their sick petty political games. They usually want to become more "influential"; yes, you read that right, influential in the school community. You would be surprised how many parents practice politics at the drop-offs and pick-ups. You cannot trust those people, because they are internally dishonest and unethical, always representing their own interest only, whatever that interest may be. However, they aren't as mean as the mean parents, because they have to keep up appearances. They try to be helpful and friendly, but all that "generosity" is interest led only.

- 'The school and the community come first' – those parents are always ready and willing to help the school. I think I tried to be part of this group. This is a fucking time-consuming job that is undervalued and underappreciated. Your life, aspirations and ambitions are put aside. Because you are so consumed with everything that goes on in the school that very little energy is devoted to your career or life outside of the school. Not worth it.

- The parents who don't give a shit – usually the parents with high-flying careers, who just come and go, and don't really talk to anyone' cos they don't give a shit or simply feel too important to talk to the little folks.

- The selfish parents – talk only about themselves and pay attention to their own needs only, disregarding everyone else; at times even put their own needs ahead of their children's'. You would be surprised to see how many of those people exist within the school community. I am.

- Attention seekers – those parents behave erratically and try to be as controversial as possible, often getting involved in other people's business, sometimes even breaking relationships. They are ready to do anything for the sake of getting a bit of attention.

- The helpful parents – usually try to help as much as possible, often attracting the "poor me parents" who feed off their good, upbeat, positive attitude and energy. Those poor souls are forever givers, asking for not much in return.

All these groups mentioned above are divided into smaller sub-groups. In a daily school reality, all of those groups mix, trying to "peacefully" co-exist within the school community while at the same time attempting to gain in importance and prominence. Honestly, the high school is back in session the moment you enter the school runs game.

I must say that, at various times in my life, I've been "friends" with parents from different groups. It took me a long time to settle at mine 'The school and the community come first' parents group, which I decided to leave anyway.

Since Jim moved out and officially started dating my mortal enemy, I lost interest in building or even being part of the school community.

The fact that my life, as I knew it, is over and not even one of the so-called community members asked me if I was ok. or perhaps if I needed any help. It made me realise that most of those people are fucking full of shit posers with no empathy or compassion behind the facade.

Luckily, I still have my girls, and we are a very exclusive club that no one else is allowed in.

## Chapter 10

### The Christmas Preparation

**December 12th, 2018**

Somehow the girls found out that their dad has moved on and is seeing another mum from our school. I surely didn't say anything to them. However, they are both intelligent beasts and can add two and two.

I'm a bit troubled that they haven't asked me any questions so far; I know I need to talk to them but don't know how to begin, where to start, or what to say.

How do I explain the end of our marriage to two people who are going to be affected by that the most? I've been trying to write a perfect script for that, but no such thing exists.

I know that chaos is often used as a positive force, so I've been trying to use this time to decide what I want for myself and the girls and what steps to take to get that. However, the confusion isn't making me productive even one bit.

To take my mind of thinking, deciding and immersing in chaos, I decided to clean the house from top to bottom.

To my greatest surprise, as I was cleaning the office, I discovered that my successful husband's company was going down (welcome to the Brexit UK).

To my most profound horror, I found piles of unpaid bills and invoices. I think I know what all that means, but I don't know what to do with it. I indeed will have to confront him about whatever that mess means to our girls. I haven't said anything to any of my girlfriends, neither to my brother. I don't think I can deal with more shame this year.

I have some savings and a couple of small investments I made before we were married. I'm not as helpless as Jim thought I was, but I'm scared of what will happen next.

All this sudden financial turmoil isn't helping with my Christmas preparation. I haven't done any shopping so far and have no idea what I should get for the girls. I've also been considering not cooking at all. We will have to wait and see how that pans out.

One stress adds to another.

In the past few weeks, I've become disillusioned by the school community. As a protest, I didn't help out during the Christmas Fair, neither went to the fair with the girls. Seeing Jim with her all over him would be just too much for me right now. (She did post all their selfies on Instagram.)

I'm trying to keep the girls as busy as I possibly can. We go for walks; nature has soothing effects on broken souls, and watch a lot of old, new, scary and funny movies. Stories seem to have bonding effects on us.

Since Jim and I still haven't even started talking about co-parenting, or rather my parenting, as I won't agree to any bloody parenting by her, I'm "fake" trying to be accommodating towards him.

One never knows what one may need for her divorce proceedings. Secretly, in the darkest parts of my heart, I want him to keep away from us. Currently, lots of my life energy and life force goes towards playing cool and being cool, so I'm not seen as "this angry ex-wife", who is seeking revenge.

I'll get my revenge on my terms, and in my own time. It will happen, I know it will.

But for the Christmas period, I'm putting my revenge plans on hold and focusing on writing my 2019 wish list, full of hopes, wishes and dreams so the Goddess of 2019 can hear me out.

## **Chapter 11**

### **New Year, New Me**

**January 10th, 2019**

I'm so glad that the Christmas break is over. I always find this time both: mentally and financially exhausting. I feel that Christmas has become an epicentre for consumerism and spending.

Looking at my current financial situation, I've started seriously wondering if we should stay in this country. The UK doesn't seem to be family-friendly of lately, and it surely isn't friendly towards single mother's who want to go back to work. Childcare became unaffordable for the majority of the population regardless of your marital status.

As a single parent, I experience daily financial insecurity and anxiety related to money.

If I had kept my high profile and high paying job after having my girls, I wouldn't have experienced financial difficulties now. I would have missed out on being a mum, but that is the price the British government asks parents to pay for wanting to be a parent.

Unfortunately, a lot of women don't go back to full-time employment, choosing parenting instead of financial independence and stability.

Sometimes women decide to have one child after another, hoping that it could help their careers in the long run. But it's a risky choice.

I left my full-time job to care for my children, and I shouldn't be punished for that in the market place now.

As you can imagine, the last few months have been pretty intense on my end since my immune system was busy dealing with the emotional upheavals I caught a nasty virus over Christmas, which lasted well past the New Year's.

My illness was a perfect excuse not to have a traditional Christmas food, and instead, we celebrated with pizza, sweets, and a lot of Netflix. While at the same time, I was fighting off a massive headache, cough and tiredness that overwhelmed my body like the monsoon rain overwhelm the lands and rivers when it finally arrives.

Our New Years celebration was also low key. It was important to me that the three of us were together, even though the girls had a couple of sleepover invitations. I was grateful that instead, they decided to stay with me.

However, I'm determined to turn my life around in 2019.

In 2019 I'm going to get as far away from perfect as I possibly can, regardless of how far that will be or will take me. I cannot waste my life's precious energy any longer on pretending that I'm someone I'm not. (I'm not perfect and never was.)

The first step for me is to sort out my finances; financially dependent women cannot make their own, fully independent decisions.

My local library runs financial workshops for women, who want to rebuild their lives from the ashes up.

Since the financial mess Jim left me with, keeps me awake in the middle of the night, I thought that starting a year with a better understanding of finances would be a good start.

Jim still hasn't said anything to me about business going under, but at the same time, he also didn't say that he was going to spend Christmas holidays with his " lady love" in the Austrian Alps.

He didn't see the girls over the Christmas and New Year. I have a tough time understanding why he stopped caring for his kids so quickly and gave up on them without a fight. I guess this is another question in my life that will go unanswered.

To tackle my financial fears I also made appointments for next week to see my bank manager and my brother's business lawyer (I felt so low and trapped over Christmas that I told my brother about Jim.). They hopefully will be able to shed some more light on Jim's and my financial situation.

My only hope at this point is that Jim at least has been paying for the girls' school.

PS. I've managed to lose some weight, both because I was sick and because I stopped eating crappy food and drinking tons of sugary drinks. Part of my 2019 reinvention plan is to fit in my pre-pregnancy skinny jeans. Yes, I still keep those, just in case I need to rediscover the fun-loving me I once was.

## Chapter 12

### The Meetings

**January 22nd, 2019**

Well, what can I say? My big scary meetings didn't go that well for me at all. I don't know what I expected. But all the details of Jim's financial mismanagement were so farfetched from what I anticipated that even the lawyer asked me where I was hiding for all those years. To answer his very subtle question, I was looking after my kids while playing the role of a loving mother and supportive wife. I took that role upon myself after I lost my working woman's identity.

The bank manager didn't have much better news for me than the lawyer, regarding Jim's/mine debts. Even though I'm not financially involved in his business, I will still have to fork off thousands and thousands of pounds for unpaid credit cards bills and at least a dozen personal loans Jim took.

In reality, Jim's "successful" company was never that successful, and he never was earning as much money as he bragged he was. For years, he operated under the profit margin. The most amusing part was that he filed for bankruptcy when we were still together, without telling me anything. According to my bank manager, it was my well-paid full-time job that allowed Jim to take business loans. However, when I left my job, we started living on borrowed money and borrowed time.

The lawyer said that I would have to pay the credit cards off since most of them were in my name. Once again, I thought that Jim was taking care of our credit cards. But for the past year, he only made minimum payments, while applying for a larger credit allowance or moving the money around from one credit card to another.

I never checked my bank account, I fully trusted him. He had unlimited access to my account and could apply for personal loans, personal credit cards, and even for higher limits on my existing credit cards.

Everything is done online, nowadays so he could have applied for whatever he wanted on my behalf.

Even though I had my meetings in the morning and it's well after 10.00 pm, I'm still struggling to understand why and how I didn't see what he was up to. I wonder what made me so detached from the reality of our financial and family life? Is it possible that wanting to be a "perfect" wife and a "perfect" mother for the outside world, I lost the sight of my day-to-day reality?

If any young woman is reading this blog, please think twice and think hard before you give any man in your life total control over your finances. If you are a working woman, you need your own bank account that only you can access regardless of how much you think you love your partner. Money gives independence, which allows you to make your own decisions and choices.

Luckily, the house was bought in my name only (he wasn't earning much back then and having just my name on the mortgage was easier), and he couldn't re-mortgage the property without me signing tonnes of documents. All the mortgage payments have been made on time but not by Jim, only by my parents. Why and how? I need to get to the bottom of this and find out what they know and why none of them said anything to me.

The house won't be repossessed. I guess the car will go, but I won't be financially eligible to pay off Jim's company's debts.

I can handle the credit card debts. I can always sell the house and buy something smaller, but when the lawyer said that Jim hasn't paid for the school in over a year, I was horrified. The shame attached to not paying for the school, while living such a lavish, middle-class life is fucking petrifying. I would judge any family that didn't pay the school fees but at the same time spend thousands on Christmas getaways. I know the school community will judge me even more than they judging me already.

The meetings left me drained and sad; just the sinking realization that so much of my life with Jim was merely a lie. For now, I know that going back to that free-spending middle-class lifestyle, which wasn't even real, will be impossible, at least not for a very, very long time.

The first thing I did after walking through my front door was to make myself double gin and tonic, which I finished in one go. In none of my 5-year and 10-year plans, I thought I would have to start all over at the ripe age of 40 with two kids, piles of debts and a pending divorce.

I'm happy I signed up for the financial workshop in the library. I have high hopes that... something... some answers, ideas and solution will come up.

PS. I'm filing for divorce as soon as I have the energy to deal with it.

PS.2. I won't give up and give in; it's New Year, and New Me. The New Me doesn't despair and give up easily.

## Chapter 13

### The Workshops

**February 6th, 2019**

It's already February, and another half term is looming around the corner. Where does the time go? Do I live in some time speeding vacuum? I was just shopping for Christmas, for Pete's sake.

I still haven't challenged Jim about the mess he made, neither I faced the school's financial department. I need to be much stronger than I'm now. I don't want to cry the moment I open my mouth.

Christina the Destroyer has been bouncing around the school like there was no tomorrow, and no karma was coming after her. Oh, stupid girl, you can't even imagine how hard karma will kick your skinny ass because at the end it always does. The other day she even tried to talk to my girls before I told her in my nicest and the sweetest possible voice I could master to "Fuck off and never talk to my kids again". She seemed surprised and shocked that I was able to stand up to her. Even I didn't think I had it in me. Perhaps I'm stronger than I think I'm.

I was always scared to stand up for myself and tried to avoid confrontation at all cost. But someone has to put a stop to her cockiness. She's never been nice to me, but now she goes way out of her way to make my life in the school community unbearable.

On the positive side, I attended my local library financial workshops this week, and that day was just incredible. Lesley, the lady who run the workshops, was what I needed. She was honest, direct and wasn't sugarcoating it for us. She said: that it wasn't going to be easy to come back from the debts; that it would take a lot of hard work and sacrifices; cutting down on shopping at Waitrose and going to Lidl instead; no take away coffees and expensive outings. She kept repeating that we need to stay focused on finding paid jobs that will allow us to become, financially independent.

After very harsh, but much needed and sobering introduction, Lesley took each participant's case individually, analyzed it and gave each one of us some ideas on how to start moving forward. There were lots of tears, but at the same time, we felt a lot of support for each other.

When I shared my situation with Lesley and when I told her what all my assets were, she immediately suggested that I should divide my house; yes, it's still my house, to either rooms or two studio flats that I could rent out. In theory, that would give me enough money to cover the basics, plus allow me to pay off the minimum payments on all the credit cards and loans. I've been so distressed with all my debts that I don't even know how much I would need to pay back monthly.

She also proposed that to boost my confidence; I should find a job, part-time if possible, even if it's low-paid, to put me back on the job market. That will allow me to meet people from outside of my current circle and will minimize the anxiety connected to looking for a job. That could help to trick my brain into thinking that I already have a job so I won't be looking for a job, just be moving up.

The downside of the workshops was my realization that I wouldn't be able to pay for the school, neither for the mortgage. I guess, until I'm in full-time employment I will need to talk to my parents about covering my mortgage. To get money to divide my house into two studios, Lesley suggested that I should sell all the crap my husband collected over the years, which is only taking up space in my garage. I think it's a brilliant idea; he has lots of high-end shit lying around, that he left behind, which I'd be delighted to sell.

I'll ask my baby brother to help me out with the renovation work. This way I won't have to pay for the labour, just for the building materials.

The New Me loved Lesley and her robust approach; no more sitting around and waiting for something magical to happen.

PS. Last week I changed my bank account and blocked Jim's access to the other one. That felt incredibly good.

## Chapter 14

### The Change Is Coming

**February 12th, 2019**

This week the spring made a very much welcome return to London. After days of heavy greyness, even half an hour of the sunny sky makes such a huge difference. I love spring, and this refreshing morning smell the spring carries with her. It always gets my senses all perked up.

At the weekend I started cleaning up the house. All the unwanted and unused stuff is going to be sold. All the money made from all the sales goes to my renovation budget.

I started with my closet. Everything I haven't been wearing for two years goes; everything that I hate in my closet goes.

The following weekend I have my first car boot sale. I can't wait to lift myself from that cold and dark place I somehow ended up in. I've also started putting Jim's high-end stuff on eBay; and that includes all of his expensive designer's clothes, his two bikes (yes, he needed two bikes but never used them), skiing and snowboarding gear. Whatever is going to get me to my £10000, I will sell it.

My brother is coming over on Friday to measure the upstairs and see what building materials I'll need to buy. He seemed pretty excited about the project. He always liked doing stuff with his hands and was always good at this. The new addition to the house means that I'll have to move my bedroom downstairs, leaving level one for the girls' bedrooms and level two for the two studios I will be renting out.

Since I need time and space to figure out what I want to do with my life, the rental income will give me some space to do that. I've also decided that once Jim's shit is gone from our garage, I'm going to turn it into a shared co-working space for freelancers who work look for a cosy studio space that isn't a coffee shop.

I can't wait for the ball to start rolling. I'm so tired of feeling helpless.

After two days of solid cleaning and trying out clothes, I put aside four boxes of unwanted clothing that I will never wear again in my life. I should surely label it: "What was I thinking?" While looking at Jim's half of the closet, I can surely say it will be more than four boxes. I have no idea why he still hasn't picked up his shit. It's my house, and his crap is invading and polluting my space.

The cleaning made me feel like I'm finally taking back control of my life.

One of the teachers from the girls' school suggested that I look up Marisa Peer. Her hypnotherapy helped her sister move on from a very nasty divorce. I guess it's worth a try. In fact, from the whole school community, one teacher seems to be the only person who truly wants to know how I'm doing. Every time she sees me, she offers help. Everyone else, including my girlfriends, the women I've shared the past five years with, don't want to be around me that much. Only now I'm able to see what is hiding behind all those masks of fake kindness and it's surely not pretty.

I know that in this new reality, I cannot afford to have coffee with the gang every morning, but being pushed aside this way is heartbreaking. I may not have much money, but I'm still the same me.

Since I told Christina to fuck off and leave my girls alone, she hasn't approached them again (I'm certain that she is working on a plan to make them like her). However, as a punishment for my "emotionally overcharged outburst of an ex-wife" (his words, not mine), Jim cancelled the weekend with the girls. I can't say they were disappointed. Instead, they had fun tidying up their bedrooms and getting rid of all the things they don't wear or use anymore. I promised that they could keep all the money for whatever they sold at the car boot sale. Since we are busy for the next two weekends, I have no idea when Jim will see the girls again. So far we've been managing pretty well without him around. He can do whatever he wants with his new family and leave us alone.

PS. Since I'm on a roll, I've also decided to add up all of the debts to see how much money I need monthly to start slowly paying it all off.

PS.2 I need to go dancing. I badly need to go dancing.

## Chapter 15

### My Baby Brother to The Rescue

**March 5th, 2019**

I'm so very sorry that I've been silent for such a long time. I got sick just before the half-term begun. Being sick and trying to entertain two kids, while having your head down the toilet, isn't an experience I would recommend.

Luckily for me, the girls attended some last-minute half-term workshops, which turned out to be a lifesaver. Also, my brother had to postpone the building works for a week because I was sick as a cat.

Dave, my brother, kindly offered to pay for all the materials and appliances if he didn't have them already (he tends to collect a lot of junk). He said that he didn't want me to even think about repaying him. But of course, I will, as soon as I can find my feet couple of inches above the ground.

I was 11 when Dave was born, so we never had the real chance to bond. At that age, I already had my friends, my school, my hobbies and all the gazillion after school activities I had to attend. Of course, I loved him and looked after him when he was tinny.

To me, he will always be my baby brother, who woke me up in the middle of the night or walked into my bedroom without knocking, while I was having a super-secret meeting with my girlfriends.

I left home when I was nineteen. I did go back to visit my family at least once a month but when my parents decided to retire and move to New Zealand; yep, you heard that right, I hardly ever saw Dave.

Besides, our lifestyles were always very different. I had a feeling that for him, my life was too politically correct and very PG-13, and he was right. My life with Jim, especially once we had the girls, was as dull as it gets.

However, the moment I told Dave what happened, he wanted to kick Jim's ass back up North. In all honesty, I won't stop Dave if this is what he chooses to do at some point.

Now Dave is my rock. He made all the designs and plans for the building work, got all the permits sorted. He also bought everything he needed for the renovation (I'm gonna give him the money back for all that), and of course, helped the girls and me move downstairs before demolishing the upstairs.

I must say that the change is happening pretty fast and when I can't sleep at night, my mind keeps wondering if by any chance I'm not making a mistake.

As for my baby brother, he's never been scared of change; he welcomes and thrives on change.

Dave runs his own gaming company. I don't know much about gaming business, but from what I understand, a lot of people play his games. He came up with his first gaming idea when he was 15, and because I was the grown-up earning money, I was his early seed investor. From that point, his business took off.

His job allows him to travel around the world, meet interesting people and live his life to the fullest, just like he always wanted. He is a pretty charming and genuine guy, which is a massive bonus in his industry. When he's not travelling or coming up with new crazy game ideas, he works with charities that teach kids how to code and make games.

The progress on the flats is going smoothly despite having to stop for a week.

He also got one of his friends involved, and he is ... is... so fucking hot. If it wasn't for the fact that he is so young, I think he is even younger than Dave, I would so do him. I'm in my early forties, and I certainly have my needs.

I know I need to stay focused, I just recovered from feeling washed down, I'm moving on and ... and... I'm so bloody horny.

PS. Our car boot sale was super successful, and in one weekend I managed to sell stuff worth £500. Jim's things on eBay are also flying off like hot buns. I'm probably selling everything too cheap, but I don't care. I want his shit out of my house! I did get a couple of abusively angry texts from Mr Jim but told him to fuck off. He really believed that I was going to store all of his crap, while he was looking for a new place with his new love. He is out of his mind. I hope not all men are as deluded as he is

PS. 2 Jim still hasn't told me anything about the company going under and the piling up debts. I wonder what his end game is.

## Chapter 16

### School Runs

**March 20th, 2019**

Since my separation from Jim, the school runs have become increasingly stressful. It's not the public transport that gets on my nerves, which honestly is much better than it was some 20 years ago; back then you never even knew if the bus was going to arrive or not. But the sheer stress and pressure of facing all those parents, who love whispering, gossiping, and pointing fingers at others.

The cold isolation I've experienced within the school community is incredibly painful when I think of how much energy, time, and money I had devoted to

caring for this community.

The problem the school community seems to be having with me is the unpaid tuition fees. Jim hasn't paid the school fees for over a year. Many other school families don't pay the school fees on time or sometimes don't pay at all and just move on. I helped the school on many occasions to close the gap with fundraising and reaching out to suppliers for donations. But thanks to Christina's sickening spin on reality and her highly successful black PR, I'm the one who spent all the school tuition money on our over the top lifestyle. This sneaky little cunt is so obsessed with ruining my life that she will stop at nothing to reach her goal.

All friends I had in the school community (community BUAHAHAHA!!!! – what a fancy word for a bunch of cockroaches, who suck every last drop of your blood, until you are left bleeding out and struggling to breath), even my 'girlfriends' turned away from me without ever asking if the lies Christina conceived had any base in reality. Instead, three of my, who I used to consider best friends, based their judgement on one woman's made-up opinion of me and my life.

At first, it seemed like my girlfriends did support me with the initial upheavals of Jim's affair, his moving out, my difficulties, financial situation, or my daughters being unusually quiet about the whole massive change that was befalling on our family. But this support and years of friendship are forever gone.

For some reason, I'm the bad guy. I'm the one, who didn't want to go back to work and help my husband (fuck... he never said anything, so how was I supposed to know he had any financial hardships). In Christina's spin, I was the one chasing upper-middle-class lifestyle, which isn't true. My Instagram feed has no pictures of my breakfast, lunch or dinner in fancy places or long shopping trips. I can't even remember when was the last time I ate out or spent more than £20 on clothes for myself. Jim wanted and needed that kind of lifestyle more than anything else. I wanted and needed a family and a good education for the girls.

Don't get me wrong. I don't feel sorry for myself, quite the opposite. I'm making all the positive changes, and 2019 is going to be my transformation year.

I guess getting rid of the energy-sucking narcissistic vampires is one way of celebrating. But I feel heartbroken about my girls losing their friends. They've known some of the kids since they started in the KG or even earlier from various parent-child groups. All those friendships and relationships have been taken away from them because of one insecure, controlling cow that couldn't stomach that a father should stay a father always and forever.

The morning drop-offs are most stressful, especially when we come to a tad too early, and the gate is still closed. I always try to get to school later to avoid all the stares and whispers the righteous group of holy cows conducts on those occasions, but sometimes it's just unavoidable.

Girls can feel it too, even though they don't talk about this.

For the pickups, I learned to come later, much later than everyone else does. Once again, to avoid the waiting and staring. I need to protect myself, I'm not made of stone, and I do have feelings. I'm still trying to scramble my shattered confidence back, and I don't need negativity, name-calling and general hostility from the community that got so much out of me and was so willing to take as long as I was giving without limits.

I have no idea how much longer we will be able to go to that school before they kick us out. But for now, since I cannot think of any alternative, we are sticking with what is familiar. I have a sneaky feeling that another massive unplanned change could tip me over in the wrong direction.

## Chapter 17

### Going Dancing

**April 2nd, 2019**

The exciting news this week is that my studio flats are ready and I've already started looking for tenants. I feel a mixture of thrill and nervousness since I've never been a landlady before and, in reality, I'll be admitting strangers into my own house. But what must be done must be done.

When Jim found out, what I was doing, he went ballistic, yelling at me over the phone, telling me how much value I had knocked off his house, when he was just about to put it on the market. Yes, you heard it right; a person I was married to for so long and had two kids with was about to put my house, for which my parents are still paying, on the market. I have a feeling that he is really pissed with me that I didn't crawl back in. Instead, I'm able to find ways to look after myself and the girls. Finally, when the yelling stopped, I harshly reminded him that his name isn't near the house ownership, and as long as I own it, I can do with it whatever I feel like. I also added casually that if there is something he doesn't understand, he should take it up with his attorney. I quickly put the phone down, not wanting to get dragged into another screaming session. My heart was racing fast; I could feel my neck getting stiff, but I stood up to him, and that made me delighted.

For me, this was a small victory, which I'll treasure and cherish. However, I know that Jim will get his revenge in the lowest possible way: by the school, gate using his minion Christina to his dirty work. By now, I'm used to being ignored and talked about at the school. I don't need negativity and life-sucking vampires in my life, which means that I don't need all those school "community" people in my life. But it still hurts to be the outcast.

Since I'm still incredibly horny (I'm not doing Tinder or anything else like that, at least not at the moment), to control my longings and to keep away from my brother's friend, I decided to go dancing. I nearly forgot how much I loved

dancing. I hadn't been clubbing or going to dance classes for years. This is how much money I wanted to spend on myself. Not doing stuff for yourself, while being married and focusing solely on either your kids or your husband, is a recipe for everything but happiness.

Since now I'm single, I went dancing to one of those dancing get-togethers. Those raves can last a whole day, and for £20 you can join for as long as you feel like it.

I danced the whole Saturday with short breaks for drinks; I hadn't felt that good in years. It was nice to be anonymous and surrounded by strangers, who knew nothing about me and my past. I was fully relaxed, without feeling that my every move was observed or judged.

To my delight, I met a lovely woman, who just like me, has recently separated from her husband, but unlike me, she never left her job when she had her kids. We arranged to have lunch together on Friday. Her name is Annie, and I can't wait to get to know someone outside of the miserable group of people I already know.

This week is the last week of the Spring term, and I should find out soon if the girls are going to be allowed to come back for the Summer term. I received a very strongly worded letter and email demanding that I make all the back payments immediately and a failure to do so will result in the girls being expelled. OMG, I'm sooo disillusioned with this bullshit misleading concept of the community this school is pretending to be. From my experience, when you fall on hard times, the community that should be supporting you, leaves you to rot. Especially if you dared to do something unusual or crazy by their standards. Maybe being kicked out of the school wouldn't be such a terrible thing after all.

## **Chapter 18**

### **My First Date In Years**

**April 22nd, 2019**

Over the Easter Break in between the CV re-writing, job search, and preparing my writing samples, I've tried my best to keep the girls entertained. Again, last minute I managed to sign them up to the arts and crafts Easter classes. As always, the girls loved it.

It came with a price, but it was worth it, giving me some breathing room and enough extra time to keep up with the job search and ideas brainstorming. Yes, job searching is my priority at the moment and finding something that fits my current unpredictably crazy life isn't as easy as I hoped, the search continues.

I have to admit that ever since I have two tenants living upstairs, the financial pressure of providing the basics has been lifted. The girls are still adjusting to

these new circumstances, but so far they've been preciously good about all the latest changes and challenges.

I finally heard back from the school and to my biggest surprise, or maybe I knew it was coming, but as always preferred to exist in my favourite space of denial, the school told us to go. Yes, you heard it right; because we cannot pay the back fees at the moment, we are just taking up space for the people who could be paying the school fees. This is what the school letter said. The so-called management team (our school's structure isn't like the mainstream system. Gosh I have to stop using word "our".) didn't even have the guts to tell me that in person. I felt like shit when I finished reading the letter. After all these years, all this work and time invested in building the "community", I'm told to go because I'm financially struggling. What kind of signal does that send to kids? What kind of supportive community is that supposed to be?

Of course, my brother suggested that he would pay the fees off, but I couldn't agree to that. He's already helped me out enough with the flats, with the loan to pay off all the debts and credit cards; I cannot take more from him. It's going to take me most of the rest of my life to pay him back. I know we are a family, but still, I should be able to take care of myself and my family.

Besides, I don't want to be a part of the community that isn't really a community but only prays on people's vulnerabilities, enthusiasm, and kindness, while betraying the school's ethos the moment it does suit their agenda. So we are out of the school, out of the community, happily embracing a new chapter in life.

I've already told the girls that they aren't going back to school and we will have to do homeschooling until we figure out what is next for us. We have lots of projects to catch up on. This term will be all about projects, museums, and all the fun stuff London has to offer for kids. Getting out of SE for a change will be a relief. The three of us will somehow manage. Women are all about multitasking.

As I see it, currently, I have two choices. First is to move out of London and sell the house to pay off all the debts I have. I'll keep the two small flats for the girls as their inheritance. They need some security and independence in life. Or another possibility is to get a corporate job and try to get into one of the good mainstream school.

I would hardly ever see them if I take a corporate job and will struggle for years to pay off the debts (a bit of a daunting future).

The little money I would have leftover from the sale of the house would allow us to start over somewhere else. Maybe somewhere else is what we need. A fresh start, new place, new people, and build from the ground up.

My new friend Annie is so much fun. We had a long lunch the other week and made plans for our kids to play. She is on top of things much more than I am. I need someone like her in my life who is a doer and isn't afraid all the time.

My brother's friend, the one who helped him with my flats, asked me out. It

was very unexpected, but it made me feel good about myself and excited that someone can find me attractive, even though I don't feel I am.

Ben is hot, kind and much younger than me. Besides, I haven't been on a date for years. I don't even know when was the last time I was on a date with Jim without the kids or friends or other people continually hanging around with us. I should have known back then that things weren't moving in the right direction. If your other half avoids spending time alone with you, something must be in the air.

I said 'yes' to the date, and I can't wait!. I also can't wait to put my skinny jeans back on because my walking has finally paid off.

## Chapter 19

### The Date and Other Things on My Mind

**May 15th, 2019**

My date with Ben was terrific. Oh My God, I sooooo needed to relax, leave the crazy busy everyday reality behind, and have a little fun that didn't involve the usual family activities.

I've almost forgotten how awesome it feels to be wined and dined. Jim and I stopped making an effort a long time ago. We focused solely on 'family' life and business, in his case. Yeah, 'family life' my ass. Spending time together stopped being important, or maybe we both had changed so much that we didn't want to be alone together. Growing apart so much and so fast is never a good sign.

But Ben is fun, full of energy, and so, so young ☺. He is hot, looks after himself and enjoys life's simple pleasures. Sitting across the table from him, hearing his enthusiasm made me feel like I was 25 again, full of dreams and with "can do" attitude that I thought was never going to expire.

I didn't end up taking him home, even though I wanted, and sex was on my mind most of the night. We did a bit of kissing, but I couldn't go any further than that. Well, maybe next time with someone more of a stranger, so that I wouldn't feel so self-conscious about myself, and of the fact how much he already knows about my family and me.

I think, damn I hope (!) Ben was a bit disappointed at the end of the evening, but you know what? I stopped caring what men think and want. The break-up with Jim made me more selfish and self-focused (my recommendation for every woman, especially mums, is one daily selfishness act). I was way too giving in my previous wife-mother reincarnation. Life can change in an instant, and one terrible break-up can make you stronger than you ever thought you could be.

\*

I've been reading a lot about basic income recently and started wondering how much effort it will require for me to create basic income for us right here,

in London. Being outside of London scares me to bits, but in reality, what choice do I have? Maybe life in the slow lane won't be that scary after getting used to the slow lane.

\*

I've been having a tough time sleeping. I don't have problems falling asleep, but then, all of a sudden, I wake up in the middle of the night and can't go back to sleep until early morning hours. I keep tossing and turning before finally putting lights on. Unfortunately, reading doesn't put me to sleep either, nor does listening to calming music or meditation. There is so much on my mind that pinning one major issue that keeps me awake seems like an impossible task. I need to get more sleep; otherwise, I'll be impossible in a few short days.

\*

I've sent my CV and sample work to every publication I could think of. Now the waiting game begins. I'm not the most patient person on the planet, and if I don't know what is happening and I can't plan, I feel lost. So, this particular exercise in waiting is draining my energy resources.

\*

I finally managed to watch the Brene Brown talk on Netflix. I forgot how much I loved her. So much of what she was saying made sense. However, the implementation of the stuff she talked about will take me ages. I spend a lot of my life trying to be in control or trying to have the illusion of control, so a mere thought of having none of that freaks me out.

For quite some time now, I've tried my best to convince myself that I'm exactly where I'm supposed to be. However, it's hard to comprehend that I could be in such a mess so late in life.

\*

None of the people I had known in the girls' school has been in touch with me. Once again, I hoped that at least Jenny (I've known her the longest, and we always seemed to be connected on a different level) was going to be different and not allow the crowd dictate what to do. But I guess, being part of the group is more important than relationships and friendships. Just thinking about all this makes me very sad.

Since I needed to cut off from the school (I felt I was suffocated just thinking about this bloody place), I had to borrow more money from my brother to pay off all the fees. I closed the door on this failed experiment, and the three of us can finally embrace the home-schooling for as long as I have the energy for it.

I've already started researching schools for the girls, and we may go and visit a couple before the half term. Yes, another half-term is just around the corner. Parent's life is all about manoeuvring around half-terms and holidays. Honestly, if you don't have a good support system or enough money to pay for the support, you are royally fucked.

## Chapter 20

### Homeschooling Efforts

**May 24th, 2019**

Since I didn't have much time to plan our homeschooling curriculum and couldn't get prepared as well as I would like, I decided to focus mainly on doing various projects with the girls. Last-minute (that seems to be my mantra of lately) I signed up my girls to arts and crafts classes, as well as coding and animation. All take place once a week and luckily in the same centre. Both of them like coding and coming up with different ideas and creative solutions to human problems. I've always encouraged their entrepreneur artistic nature.

The girls' previous school wasn't that keen on field trips (London is a mecca for field trips that one can take – so many places to visit and most of that for free!), so we decided that our other focus for this term would be learning about all London attractions. Of course, we have a few books to read together and a vast list of documentaries to watch. As you can see, the plan is simple and easy to follow.

I guess having a child-led education for a while won't harm them. Hopefully, it will open their minds and teach them how to research, look for information, find what they need, and most importantly follow their passion.

The girls understand perfectly well that once we are done with schooling, I need to dive into work. I've been getting small jobs consistently for the past month, which makes me not only happy but also my confidence levels go up a notch each time I have a new assignment. To be honest, I didn't know how I was going to pull this off, even IF I was going to pull anything off. It's hard to believe in yourself and your abilities after years of sitting on the sidelines.

\*

I'm still trying to figure out what would be and could be the best for the girls and me in the long run. It's not an easy decision. On the one hand, all my adult life has been spent in London; on the other hand, the political ugliness and how the country is turning out at the moment isn't something I want my girls to be a part of.

If I could figure out how to make everything work for us?!

## Chapter 21

### Taking A Break

**May 31st, 2019**

Girls and I have decided to be spontaneous for a change and take a well-deserved half-term break from our current unpredictable London life. I badly

needed a change of scenery and go somewhere where I wouldn't worry about the money, the job, CV sending (all that I worry about every day). I just wanted to disappear for a week. I was feeling somehow liberated from following Jim's timetable, which was always packed with meetings, some more meetings and projects that often took forever to finish. I finally realized that I'm the boss of me and I'm able to do whatever I want and whenever I want.

Luckily for my shoestring budget, my least favourite airlines, Ryanair, had a flash sale. As I said, I was spontaneous, so we went to a place I've never been to before. Of course, the price of the ticket was a huge bonus but also this nagging longing for something different played a massive part in my decision. So, the girls and I ended up in Poland.

We flew to Bydgoszcz, which has the tiniest airport I've ever seen. The airport was surrounded by forest, and I swear to God I could smell the cow manure when we got off. Going through the customs and picking up our bag didn't take longer than 15 minutes. What a great experience, right?

From the airport, I arranged a taxi collection, which dropped us off at the train station. The train station was newly decorated with shiny, freshly painted walls and just like the airport, it was small and compact. I must be having some London syndrome and expect everything to be gigantic and packed with thousands of people.

We managed to catch an earlier train to a small town called Wabrzezno. This word is unpronounceable, just like a lot of other Polish words; luckily, I booked the tickets online. The train journey took us only under 90 minutes. At Wabrzezno, the B&B's owner's daughter picked us up. On the way there, I learnt that she was also visiting for the half term with her ten-year-old son.

After 15 minutes of driving, she took a sharp left turn and immediately we ended up on a country dirt road with fields on both sides. I have to admit I was a bit scared for a second or two, wondering "What the fuck have I done?" But the moment the small red brick building surrounded by flowers emerged, my anxiety vanished. When we approached the driveway, I knew it was just the place I wanted to be in.

When I got off, I immediately started walking around. I found two small ponds, a park full of tall old trees, a bonfire place and amongst many things, a colourful wooden treehouse.

The owners also had an organic garden from where most of the ingredients for their divine home cooking came from.

The B&B interiors was a mixture of old and new, with a comfy red sofa in the middle of the guest room.

We were literally in the middle of nowhere; the nearest shop was about a mile away. We had no transport, no TV and only the nature that surrounded us to keep the three of us entertained.

However, neither of us ran out of things to do. I managed to learn how to make bread, jam and sour pickles and cabbage. The owner ran cooking

classes, which I happily joined. I finished reading two books and started on the third one (I must have been at the Uni. the last time I read two books in a week).

The girls were in and out, mostly playing with the owner's grandson, who also lived in London.

I didn't experience my usual fear over the girl's safety; the place was secure, and hardly any cars passed by. That's how remotely located we were.

Quite, peace, nature and time to be with myself and for myself was what I needed. I never thought I would ever in my life enjoy such an isolated setting, far away from the city's hustle. I'm a city girl who loves the flashy lights, ambient noise, and the fact that the city never sleeps.

Each morning chirping birds woke me up. I never pay attention to chirping birds when I'm in London. The daily delicious home cooking included the most heavenly pies, made me put some weight back on. But I didn't care anymore. Bring it on! Besides, I was confident I was going to lose all those extra kilograms once back in the hassle of my reality.

The quietness and peace that I was immersed in made my thoughts much clearer. Still feeling spontaneous and brave, I applied for a teaching job in Tenerife. I haven't done teaching for a very long time but maybe teaching abroad is what would open the door to our future.

The girls said they wouldn't mind moving to Tenerife and learning Spanish, making new friends, and getting to know new customs. Maybe that kind of compromise is the right solution for the three of us at the moment. We'll see what life brings.

But for now, instead of my typical obsessing about the job, which I usually do after I send my CV out, I will just enjoy the quietness and stillness of the moment.

## **Chapter 22**

### **Jim Wants to Talk**

**June 7th, 2019**

The half term is already finished, and the three of us are back to our crazy, busy London life. While being away, I wasn't concerned with job hunting, money stretching and imagining what the future had in store for us.

That short break had a healing effect on my mind, body, and soul. I was so relaxed and didn't have to focus on what I needed or didn't have in life.

While I was in the state of happiness, the Universe did some pairing up for me, and I picked up two more weekly content writing jobs. The jobs are small, but it's always some extra income.

Two days after our return from Poland, unexpectedly out of the blue, Jim

called me and wanted to meet up for a chat. I was gobsmacked to hear from him. He didn't text me or asked to see the girls for weeks; he completely cut us out when I challenged him about not paying for the school.

He suggested we meet without the girls and talk. My ex-hubby (we aren't officially divorced, just officially seriously separated), who made sure that the past seven months were a nightmare for me, all of a sudden wants to talk. I have to admit that a part of me is pretty curious to find out what he wants, but another part wants to give him the silent treatment he deserves.

Since I don't have anyone to look after the girls while we talk (he made sure I was left with no support system), I suggested we meet in the playground. Besides, if he tries to pull some shit (you never know what is brewing in his sick mind), he may think twice not to do it in front of the girls and other families (with his recent thought processing you never know what to expect from him, even in public spaces).

I agreed to meet him because of the girls, not because I'm desperate to see him. My kind and gentle nature believe that as a father, he should have contact with his kids, regardless of how little I think of him.

### **June 8th, 2019**

The weather hasn't been the best for the playground exploration on that particular Saturday but not too unusual for the London summer. The four of us met in the Greenwich playground. The girls know that space very well, and the place is big enough for them to keep busy for longer than five minutes before getting bored.

Jim was a bit late, very unlike Jim; he used to be always on time or way ahead of time. He looked nervous (I'm not surprised after being a dickhead for months) and seemed to have a hard time knowing what to do with his hands. He wasn't too sure whether he should kiss me, hug me, or shake my hand. To rescue him from his misery, I moved far enough from him, so his embrace wouldn't reach me. The girls gave him hugs, kids are so forgiving, before running off to play. Once they were gone, it became clear that the tension between the two of us was high.

Ahead of our meeting, I promised myself that I wasn't going to speak first. Why should I? As my little revenge, I was planning to make him feel as uncomfortable as I could. I also wore my skinny jeans (all the cakes I ate in Poland didn't make such a huge difference). Of course, I wanted him to see how good I look and that I've moved on from the mess he so graciously bestowed on me. After nearly eternal silence, he finally spoke and what he said made me utterly speechless.

My ex, the person who put me through hell, left me hanging on life support (without my family I don't think I would have managed), wants to get back together. When he said those words, my brain shut down, and I stopped thinking for a moment before I started wondering "why".

Fast enough, I reasoned with myself that I didn't need to know his why's and

how's and I surely didn't want to get back together with him. I knew that deep down in my heart, but words failed me. As a woman, I've been trained pretty well to keep quiet, don't express my opinions just in case my too opinionated views would hurt someone. The longer I was silent; the more impatient Jim was growing. I tried to focus on catching a glimpse of girls' jackets while composing my reply, but the girls moved too fast for my eyes. When, after a couple of minutes, I still didn't say anything, the reply turned out to be harder than I anticipated. Jim started talking again and telling me how much he's changed and grown and how much he misses the family and the girls and what a big mistake it was to leave us and be with Christina. BLA... BLA...BLA...

I know I was listening, but something in me was broken, and he was the very reason that it was broken. I didn't believe even one word he said. Finally, I stopped him and bluntly said: "no, thank you, but no, we are doing fine without you".

I could see how angry he suddenly became. All the stuff he said about change and being a different person was just another lie. All of a sudden, I remembered that when we were still together, we always did what he wanted, because he could never stomach a refusal or someone having a different opinion than him.

The man that was standing next to me wasn't any different from the one I knew for years. He was still the same Jim, who always put his interest ahead of everyone else's, which unfortunately I didn't see until our separation. My best guess is that something had gone wrong between him and Christina and he was desperately trying to find a rescue boat. He wanted to be back because it's always more comfortable to be with someone familiar than start your life all over again on your own.

I knew I needed to be strong for my girls, who must learn how to respect themselves and not let men walk all over them (I still have quite a lot of making up to do in the respect department). When his speech patter became quite fast, I stopped him, put the good girl's image aside, and blurted out everything I hold against him deep down in my heart. At the end of my monologue, I simply asked him how on Earth, after putting us through hell, he expected from the girls and me to take him back.

He tried to blame Christina and her possessive nature for not being in touch with the girls, but I didn't care. His first responsibility in the event of a broken relationship should be his children, not other women and their fucking egos. He clearly wasn't happy with the way the conversation went. I guess he expected me to welcome him with open arms and heart no way that will never happen. The woman he was married to doesn't exist anymore. He stayed at the playground for a few more minutes before making some clumsy excuse and left. The girls were a bit disappointed that dad didn't hang around long enough to play with them. However, I can't say I was surprised; dodging responsibility seems to be one of his talents.

The girls and I stayed in the playground a little bit longer. While they were

running around, I tried to collect my thoughts and digest what just happened. It was surely not what I expected at all, not in a million years.

## Chapter 23

### Pushing Through the Comfort Zone

**June 15th, 2019**

The past two weeks have been exceedingly intense. At first, I decided to let go of my need to control every single aspect of my life, which led me to some highly unexpected results. First of all, I travelled with the girls to a place I never thought I would and could have enjoyed. For a city girl like me, spending a week in a rural countryside was surely pushing my comfort zone way out.

Last week Jim surprised me with a meet-up request and asked if we could get back together. I'm still having a hard time trying to figure out what he hoped was going to happen. I try to devote as little time to this wondering as I humanly can, but I do wonder. And just today I got an email from the teaching company I applied to, while in Poland. They want to hold a Skype interview with me. I know it's excellent news, even though I still don't know what my answer would be if they offered me the job.

In the past week, I've been thinking a lot about being afraid of making decisions, while cultivating the art of painfully prolonged periods of indecisiveness. Unfortunately, my indecisiveness has dominated most of the past ten years of my life, leading me to falsely hoping life or circumstances could undeniably decide for me, instead of making the conscious decision myself.

When I look back at my life, I can honestly admit that I've been too comfortable in my comfort zone to venture outside, the fear of the unknown was too strong to concur. The anxiety and fear of expanding my comfort zone kept me safe and unchallenged in the same place for years.

Since I feel calmer on the inside and somehow rested, I can see that the answer to my prayers isn't a bag of "magic beans" but pro-activity.

I finally decided to stop doing the same stuff over and over again. I tend to get stuck on a loop for years before I finally have enough courage to redirect my focus into different activities.

In the past, I began a lot of projects, which I often abandoned halfway through, believing that because it didn't work out right away, that particular idea wasn't good enough. Now I can see that the fear and anxiety were taking over my thinking process.

The "safe" and "secure" ways of the old me wouldn't even dream of pushing my comfort zone. The artificial busyness created by lists and tasks made my brain, soul and body believe in my pretend pro-activity. But whatever that

was, it wasn't real. At the beginning of this year, I promised myself to dare greatly. I'm willing to take the risk, be pro-active even if it feels scary at first.

Taking a hard, critical look at my life and myself was way overdue. I've been caught up in the catch 22 for way too long. What the future will hold, I have no idea. Alas, for now, I feel that standing still, while trying to absorb my new emerging personality while learning how to dare greatly is the right decision.

I got in touch with one of the schools I thought would be suitable for the girls. However, getting into a mainstream school isn't as straightforward as I remembered from when I was young, or at least this is how I remember that time, maybe my parents see it differently.

The process seems unnecessarily long and bureaucratic. It feels disheartening and depressing in all honesty.

The worst part to me is that I'm not even dealing with the school directly, but with the council. Anyone who has ever had any dealings with any local authority will know that the process is painfully long and often one-sided.

The whole concept of going through the application process scares me immensely. But I guess this is where the new me should come in and not be afraid to step out of my comfort zone.

## Chapter 24

### Saying Yes Is an Art Form

**June 24th, 2019**

I finally had my Skype interview for the teaching job in Tenerife. The interview went much better than I expected, and they offered me the job right away. The offer is perfect for now, and I wouldn't have to sign the contract for longer than a year, which in our case is ideal. After a year, I could either stay for another year, move onto something else or come back to London.

I have to say I'm tempted. I would have some steady income and financial security, something I've been aiming for. That would be a much welcome breather I feel my life desperately needs.

However, while thinking about the offer, my life and the girls, I've realized that it's not easy to say 'yes', even when it seems and feels like the right decision and an excellent opportunity. It appears that saying 'yes' is much harder than I thought it ever could be. It should be easy; you say 'yes' and move on. In my case, so much fear and negative emotions are attached to this phrase. It almost feels like the worst-case scenario.

Over the years, I kept putting my needs at the back burner, always accommodating someone else's instead.

Saying 'yes' to myself inevitably pushes me out of my comfort zone. Even buying a new outfit or a pair of shoes don't come easy.

The spiritual gurus preach that until you start saying 'yes' to yourself, it might be incredibly hard to magic some magic into your life.

So the magic word for me in 2019 is 'yes'. I feel that I owe it to myself and need to try to better my life, even if it feels scary at times. The girls are on board with the move and admitted that they would like to meet new friends. I cannot blame them. The situation with the school and their friends touched them deeply, even if they don't talk about this.

I certainly won't ask Jim for permission to move. We are legally still married, but he has been absent from the girls' lives for the past several months. From his behaviour, it's clear that it doesn't really matter for him where we live. It could be even better for him if we were far enough, so he won't feel the social pressure to be a present father.

The move would allow me to rent our house out, which of course would additionally help with paying off some of the debts that unfortunately are this nagging voice in my head, keeping me awake in the middle of the night.

\*

The other day, the three of us bumped into Christina and her nasty gang of cheerleaders in the park. She didn't know what to do with herself when she saw us approaching. In reality, I didn't expect anything from her.

But to cover her embarrassment, she turned her head the other way. I found this most amusing. This is what children do when they try to hide and believe that by turning away, they can be invisible. Well, she was well visible and somehow not as self-confident as I remember her being; or maybe I've changed so much, and her annoying persona doesn't bother me any more.

## **June 25th, 2019**

After much deliberation, talking to my girls and to my brother, who promised to take care of the house and the flats, I decided to take the job and fully embrace the power of saying 'yes' to the new adventure that awaits the three of us.

I'm taking the job, which means that in the next month I'll have to move my stuff out of the house, find new tenants and make a move overseas to start all over again. I just hope I won't change my mind halfway through when things start getting harder.

## Chapter 25

### Getting Ready to Move

**July 1st, 2019**

I'm excited that we are going to try something new, but at the same time, the idea of such a significant change fills me with the usual anxiety. Of course, my mind wanders. What if the job isn't what I expected; what if I won't be able to manage the job, the school, the new life; what if the girls don't like it. My mind loves being preoccupied with the usual worst-case scenarios. However, despite all the "ifs" I'm still willing to push my boundaries to allow myself to grow beyond who I was in my previous life. I was so over comfortable in that other life that feeling a bit of discomfort should have a positive impact on my life.

The girls have already begun packing their bedrooms. I haven't even started thinking about packing mine. In all honesty, I'm not even sure where to begin. Even after clearing my house and all the car boot sales, I still have so much unwanted stuff. I genuinely hope this move will clear the house, and my life, of the rest of all the shit I managed to accumulate over the years and was never intending on using (the bonus of living in small spaces is that you don't buy what you don't use). Now, with the move and the new life, the new philosophy started slowly making its way into my life. The minimalistic lifestyle with a sustainable approach to every item I'm going to buy has become much more important to me than it was in the past.

I want my life to be as simple as possible, and accumulating unnecessary shit isn't going to help with that. Also, the state of our planet, the pollution, global warming, and melting ice troubles me deeply. I don't want to be the reason why my kids have to live in the world devoid of beauty, clean water and food. I want to be part of the solution and show my girls that life isn't all about consumption.

I want my new life to have as little impact on the environment as possible. I do sincerely hope that the new me can pull such a change off.

The other day I had a specialist hospital appointment, and after waiting for an hour, my name was finally called. The appointment lasted a whole five minutes! Yes, five minutes of a blissful time with a doctor (I hope), who asked me series of 'yes' and 'no' questions, while copying notes from another doctor onto yet another piece of paper. It was an epic waste of my precious time.

This week I also got a letter from the council saying that the girls didn't get into any of the schools I chose for them. Apparently, there are no spaces. Even though an email I got from the council a week before confirmed that at least one of the schools had spaces. Of course, the council didn't offer any alternatives. Now I can appeal their decision, or I can be added to the waiting list. The council's "no space, no alternative" policy is quite shocking, taking

into consideration how obsessed the authorities are in the UK when it comes to school attendance. This is just another aspect of the hostile environment the Tory government has been pursuing.

The hostile environment, when it comes to schooling, especially kids with educational needs (my both girls are dyslexic) has gotten out of hand. The schools can't cope with the kids they already have, who require extra assistance and admitting more is too expensive for already stretched budgets. I've read about schools systematic "off-rolling" kids with learning difficulties.

For a lot of families, homeschooling became the only alternative to provide education for their kids. The alternatives are very limited: you either have enough money to send your child to a private school, or you have no other choice but to accept what is given to you and if the council gives you nothing, tough shit.

Luckily, we will be gone well before September starts, which means that I don't have to deal with the council's shitty approach to solving problems instead of finding solutions.

## Chapter 26

### It's Finally Happening

**July 14th, 2019**

Last week I told Jim that girls and I were moving out of the UK. He was his "old" self and started screaming his head off. At the end of his tantrum, he screamed that he wouldn't allow the move and was prepared to take me to court over that. As a father, he feels fully obliged to take part in the girls' upbringing. According to him, he should have been included in the decision-making process, before I agreed to take up any jobs and signed on the dotted line.

Over the years, I learned that the best way to deal with his tantrums is to let him have his unstoppable screaming session. Once the screaming is over, kill him with logic and reason.

I had lots of arguments up my sleeves to prove to anyone willing to listen that Jim left his family without caring what would happen to us once he decided to move on with his life.

What surprised me the most was that he didn't even think that leaving us with no financial support was beyond wrong. For some reason, he didn't see that not paying for school, the credit cards or for all the loans he took up, nearly destroyed me.

If it weren't for my family, he would have pushed me over the cliff. Dividing the house and finally taking up the teaching job is the only way out for me from the mountain of debts.

Somehow, he didn't think it was any of his responsibilities to look after us when he decided to change his life while all of my life was wrapped around him and the girls.

However, I'm still not convinced that my arguments weren't lost on him. Finally, to my greatest astonishment, he said that in that case, he was going to move back to the house to look after the property. He thought that living in my property rent-free was going to be his compensation for not being able to see the girls as often as he would like to (he hardly ever saw them before, so I doubt he would see more of them now).

I laughed long and hard at his daydream. I just couldn't stop. The longer I laughed, the more his anger grew, and I could almost see the invisible smoke coming out of his ears.

Once I composed myself and stopped laughing, I informed him, again, that the house is in my name, reminded him that my parents have been paying the mortgage for years and it was already rented out. Of course, I didn't miss the opportunity to mention that all the income from the house was going towards paying off his debts. Once again, he seemed not to hear what I was saying and tried really hard to ignore the facts. After the initial discontent, protest and tantrum, Jim had no choice but to accept my decision. He promised to girls that he would come and visit, but in all honesty, I wouldn't count on that. His priorities are somewhere else now, surely not with his children.

A year ago, that kind of scenario wasn't even a possibility in my wildest worst-case scenario forecast. However, life tends to change rapidly, and one must either accept the changes and adjust, or allow life to walk all over you. Under no circumstances

I was going to be thrown under the bus. I needed to be strong for my girls. I desperately wanted them to see that being a woman doesn't mean you should give up when life throws you lemons.

Once Jim knew we were off, I started furiously packing. My bedroom was first to go, and once again, I was terrified by the amount of stuff I still had. Some of the clothes I have I'm keeping for the girls but some others I'm not even sure any charity would be able to sell. So much money has been wasted on all that unnecessary stuff. Minimalistic lifestyle is the key to a sustainable lifestyle, and that is what I'm aiming for.

Since I'm renting the house unfurnished, all of our furniture will go to storage. Luckily we don't have that many pieces of furniture I want to keep and the rest I'm giving away to a charity.

I didn't manage to do our garage up enough to rent it out as an office space. But this is something I can do when/if we are back to London. For now, I'm going to use the garage as storage for the toys, bikes and winter clothing (won't need those in Tenerife).

Our new start has to be clean, without the unwanted baggage from the past polluting our present and the future.

My girls have already packed up and put quite a lot of their childhood toys in boxes. I don't think they are ready to let go of their childhood as yet.

I have to admit I'm in awe of them how smoothly they are handling the whole move and the new start.

I need to be good as well and show them that moving on is good, exciting and nothing to fear.

We only have two more weeks left in London before the big day arrives.

I'm planning to see a few friends from my networking circle. (I've joined one just to meet new, more pro-active people than the ones I knew from the girl's school.) and Annie and her daughters. My girls had a couple of playdates with Annie's daughters, and all four of them got on pretty well.

It would be a good distraction for them while we are waiting for the moving day.

Dave is going to help with the move, and we will stay with him for a couple of days before taking off. I'm not too certain the girls will see Jim before we go; he really is unreliable and unpredictable in his current incarnation.

As for me, I'm feeling a bit nostalgic and sad, and some part of me is scared of the move, but I try hard to focus on the exciting adventure the three of us are about to embark on.

## Chapter 27

### One Door Closes Another Door Opens

**July 22nd, 2019**

The day of our moving out finally arrived. I didn't realize how sad I was going to feel when I handed over the keys of my castle to another family. It was our family home for so many years, filled with countless happy and precious memories. A place where my girls did a lot of things for the first time: first steps, first words, first playdates, first homework.

I don't think I believed it was really going to be the end of an era for the girls and me up until today. But life goes on, and we are moving on as graciously as we can under the circumstances we are in.

I ended up giving away to different charities much more of our stuff than I had initially anticipated. I'm still trying to process how much-unnecessary things we managed to collect over all those years. Consumption-based lifestyle is destructive on so many levels and overbuying while overspending doesn't give lasting and genuine happiness at all.

The past ten days were busy with packing, arranging things such as billing address, forwarding mail and saying goodbye to the people I became close to over the past few months. I didn't want to have a big goodbye party, since it's not a real goodbye in my eyes. I'll come back to London at some point, or at least this is what I think I'll do, all depends on how I feel about that idea down the line. For now, or for at least another year, another family will live in our house, and I genuinely hope they will be happy here.

The girls have been both excited and anxious. I could see from their behaviour and how fast they were able to wind each other up that they

started feeling the pressure of moving to a totally unknown and unfamiliar environment. I did get the occasional question about friends and the school, which for kids their age is of the highest importance. I tried to answer as well as I could, but a long time ago I promised to myself that, if I didn't know something I would say so. In this case, there are so many unknowns that my answer often was simple "I don't know."

What I know for sure is that their hearts had also been broken by Jim's sudden disappearance and by the fact that people they grew up with vanished from their lives all of a sudden without explanation. I moved on from my failed school experiment, and I learned my lessons along the way. However, it's easier for a grown-up to reason the unreasonable situation, than it's for young kids, are honest and without underlying agendas.

A part of my heart is still broken, because of what my girls experienced; the other part is mad that grown women could have been so easily manipulated by someone as flaky and untrustworthy as Christina.

As predicted, Jim has been too busy with his new "business venture" to see the girls. He gave them one of his empty promises that he will come and visit. I don't think I should be too surprised by Jim's behaviour. Parenting became my job and my job only.

I need to stop focusing on all that negativity for now. The three of us are just about to embark on an exciting adventure that could as well turn our lives upside down in the long run, and this is what counts.

For the next two days, we are crashing at my brother's house. I planned to make those two days fun and exciting for the girls. They don't know, but I've arranged quite a lot of outings for them, which include two West End shows. They've been so wonderful and understanding; I don't think I would have pulled it through all those dark moments without them by my side. So, the next two days are going to be days to remember, remember London as a fun place, not only a place that broke their hearts.

Before the house disappeared from our view, I turned around to look at it one last time, at least for a while. To my surprise, I didn't cry; I guess I was ready to find my happiness somewhere else.

## Chapter 28

### Epilogue

#### Rachel

The girls careless jumping over the waves puts a smile on Rachel's face. The beach is overflowing with tourists. However, for the first time in her life, she doesn't mind the crowds or the fact that the black sand will permanently stay in her bikini. African sellers try hard to push their merchandise. Now and then one of them asks Rachel if she would like to buy a blanket or a pair of fake designer sunglasses. But even those pushy sales can't make her cranky. She is in a state of happiness and prepared to do whatever it takes to prolong

that moment.

Luckily the middle of the summer heat isn't as scorching hot as during the London recent summers. The breeze that comes from the Ocean turns the simple experience of sitting in the sun into a profoundly pleasurable one.

All of a sudden, Rachel's phone beeps, bringing her back to reality. She finds the phone at the bottom of the basket. An email that just came in confirms another writing assignment she managed to book in the past week.

"Sometimes letting go of control is the only logical choice." – she thinks to herself. Once her phone is back in the basket, Rachel walks to the edge of the Ocean and joins the girls jumping over the waves. As for Rachel, nothing else but that moment could exist for eternity.

## **Jim**

Jim is unpacking. The size of his new apartment is tiny and trying to fit all of his belongings in will be a challenge. With each unpacked item, he sinks deeper into his sadness. He never thought that Rachel had enough strength and will power to become independent so fast. Her newfound confidence and determination impressed him enormously. They reminded him why he fell in love with her all those years ago – something he quickly forgot when the reality of everyday life took over.

He doesn't want to start all over again but knows that going back to his old life is an impossible dream. All that is left from his good life are those boxes that wouldn't be able to contain all his shame and immense regret of his stupidity.

He unpacks one of the girl's pictures and touches it with great tenderness when all of a sudden, his phone rings. He picks it up somewhat automatically, but after seeing Christina's number, he turns it off.

**THE END**