

HOW
YOU
SEE
ME

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First published in 2015 by

Myriad Editions
59 Lansdowne Place
Brighton BN3 1FL

www.myriadeditions.com

1 3 5 7 9 10 8 6 4 2

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A CIP catalogue record for this book
is available from the British Library

ISBN (pbk): 978-1-908434-56-2

ISBN (ebk): 978-1-908434-57-9

Designed and typeset in Palatino
by Linda McQueen, London

Printed by CPI Group (UK) Ltd
Croydon CR0 4YY

10th September 2005

Manchester

Dear Mab –

I tried to phone the hospital, but the ward sister couldn't track you down. This should arrive just before me. I'm on my way, so don't – either of you – go anywhere. If Dad gets moved or anything just leave word at the desk – or whatever they have – and I'll find you. Do the same if he gets any better and decides not to see me.

I phoned the 'charlatan' (I told Aubrey you call him that, by the way). He's given me time off work to visit Dad. He said that, on consulting his notes, I appeared to have all the tools I needed to watch my father die. Perhaps we could replace 'charlatan' with 'arsehole'? I held my temper by imagining your response. Still, I'm coming.

I'm probably pulling into the car park now. Find a window and wave.

Daniel

From the pillow next to yours

Dear Alice –

You are sleeping while I write this.

You were sleeping when I opened the letter from my sister. I picked up the post from my flat on my way here

tonight. My father is very ill and I have to leave right away. You'll say I should have woken you, but there's too much to say. Too much I haven't said. A father and a sister. A whole life to explain. I'm sorry I've not told you about any of this before; we've had so little time together. I've probably lied to you. That's habit. I lie to everyone about my family.

You are the only person I have ever seen sleep fiercely. Aren't we meant to look our most innocent when we sleep? Like little children. You look as though you're defending something. Your hands are curled into fists and you're frowning, as if you're ready to fight. But your lips are soft.

You were sleeping when I kissed you goodbye.

I'm not sure how long I'll be gone. I'll write when I know what's happening. I wish I could stay. I wish I could gather you up and take you with me. My sleeping warrior. You'd make an excellent talisman. I think I might need one.

Missing you already, my darling,

Your Daniel

12th September

Dad's hospital bed

Dear Mab –

What you didn't have to do was run out on me! I only saw you for two minutes, and you disappeared. I am here. I turned up, just like I said I would. I didn't want to be here, but I was ready to do – I was already *doing* – anything you wanted me to do. And you vanish!

To tell you the truth – and what point is there in telling you anything else? – I’m so angry I can barely write. And I’m *writing*, for Christ’s sake! With a *pen*! No number! Not even an email address! Who leaves a PO Box address for their own brother?

I hope this scrawl reaches you. If I could find the tools, I would have cut the words into the page. But, instead, I borrowed a pen from the nurse and was told not to damage it. Observant, these nurses – I must look murderous. Get back here, before they have me arrested!

I’m not the person to do this, Mab. Please don’t make me.

Daniel

PS Eleven down was *jug*.

13th September

Hospital

Dear Alice –

Yesterday, I met my sister for the first time in nine years. Actually I met her feet. They were crossed, propped up on my father’s hospital bed. She was wearing a pair of those knitted slipper socks they ship over from Tibet or somewhere like that, leather soles clumsily stitched to the feet. I could see the imprint of each toe on those dirty leather soles and a well-trodden sticky patch of what looked like gum. She looked up from her crossword and smirked.

‘You look as if you’re waiting to be announced.’

Her daughter, Freya, wasn’t with her and Mab avoided my questions about her. I would have sat in the chair next

to her but she moved her feet over from the bed and started up some yogic stretching. I sat on the edge of Dad's bed to watch her. I had to shift his legs; they felt like nothing more than fallen branches.

Mab's looking old. She's only thirty-four, yet there are wrinkles and grey hairs and even glasses on a ribbon round her neck. She caught me staring. 'Watching my wickedness catch up with me?' She gathered up a pile of jumpers and scarves from her chair – more woollens. 'I can't make anything of eleven down; do what you can. I need coffee.'

She brushed my hair and Dad's arm with the same gesture and left. That was last night; I'm still waiting for her to come back.

I wish I were writing you love letters, instead of all this garbage about my family. I wish I could call you, but I think if I heard your voice I'd run home right now. Are you seeing Aubrey? I know your session is booked for today. It's usually the highlight of my week. I hate to think of you sitting in that office. I hate to think any of it can exist without me there to witness it.

Your Daniel xx

PS And she lied about the crossword. Even Mab could have got the Keats reference.