

## Happiness in a bowl

The last time I thought about killing myself was this morning. I was at the gym. And that's not why. I got through that barrier years ago. It's quite nice, my gym. Council owns it. Did it up a couple of years ago, they did, and it's got all new kit. Loads of people use it. OAPs in seersucker shorts, belted up, and hush puppies. Guys with nothing else to do but train for hours and strain out of their vests. Mummies who are yummy, and those who want to be. Much more impressive than when I grew up round here.

Schoolkids. If you go just before 4, when the cheap membership rate loses its access rights, which I do sometimes, if I haven't been able to get out of the house or even the bedroom that morning, you see them, whorls of girls around the treadmills and the lighter weights rack. Pony tails, pink or pale blue lycra, like, omgyoullneverguesswhathejustlikesaidtoCatherinenoIswearandlikegetthissheneverwentwiththatTonynoshelikenever. Boys with floppy fringes and short back and sides just too short for uniform-conformity, daring, too long for coolness. Backne on some of them. You can see the pimples through the vests. T-shirts aren't hip enough, and their arms are too scrawny for the vest they nonetheless insist on. Bless. Grunts and shuffling, pretending not to ogle. 'Twas ever thus. Performing masculinity.

All of human life. Even the occasional person of colour. Not too many, mind. This is still the land of the Daily Heil, and The Telegraph for those collecting grandkids from school in the Porsche that was new three years ago when Gamgam got his redundancy, Jemmie darling, don't fuss so.

Maybe it was Gamgam's, the cause of it all. A grey pube, right next to my head when I lay back on the crunch machine. All on its own. And I thought, that's like me. All on my own. And old. Since you left. Lesbian divorce! How I laughed. Supposed to be like black swans, that. Ha. Well you live, you learn. Sometimes.

It wasn't so bad at first. Told myself these things happen. People fall in love with other people. Can't be helped. But then I thought: no. It *can* be helped. You can weigh up what you feel for one person and what you owe another, who's fed and clothed and housed you for twenty years, and who still loves you, and you can make a choice.

You said you didn't want any of the furniture. Made out it was generosity. Really it was avoiding transport costs. And selfishness. One more thing for me to sort out before the house sold and you could get your share of my earnings. More things for me to keep around as reminders of our time together. Nice.

So, Gamgam's pube had me plotting a course. Around all the pharmacies. One good thing about this place, so many OAPs here you can't move for chemists' shops. I counted them up in my head, and I reckon there's fourteen. Easily enough places to buy one pack in each, and go back three days later for more, no questions asked, no alarm bells rung. I was thinking paracetamol. Cheap. Quick-ish. Easy to find.

But then I thought, no. I was all set, I was. But then it came to me. I needed to live to tell people who you really are.

So I made a start. I've sent a copy of my dissertation to your publisher, showing the bits you stole from me. It's logged at the British Library, so they can check the dates. I did the same to the publishers of your articles. Enjoy.

And you know that casserole dish you made such a fuss of, but couldn't find space for in your new place with *her*? Your bowl of happiness, you used to call it, full of lesbian lentil heaven. Turns out that wasn't your phrase either, was it? Suzie told me. It was hers. We still Skype, you know. Anyway, that bowl. Pristine, you liked it kept, used only for the dinner parties that were the only times you cooked. It did look good on the table. I grant you that. Anyway, I saw it yesterday, lurking with the paint pots in the coal hole, and today I found a use for it. Pristine, the birds'll keep it, as it sits by the back door. And I did need somewhere to keep all Eddie's bags of shit until bin day.