

Tiny Acts of Love by Lucy Lawrie

Extract from Chapter 17

When I got home, at around half past five, Sophie had just woken up for the day and Jonathan was crashing around the kitchen trying to heat up her bottle.

‘Hello!’ He came over to give me a stubbly kiss. ‘How’s my favourite wife this morning? How was the vigil?’

I’d decided in the car on the way home that I had to tell Jonathan about what had happened with Malkie, and immediately, before I lost my nerve. Once there was one lie nestling in the space between two people, there was always just enough room to tuck in another one, and then another.

I followed him into the living room and told him while he gave Sophie her bottle. The extreme tiredness helped. It made me feel distanced from myself, as though I was telling somebody else’s story, as though that tangled mess of emotions didn’t really belong to me.

Jonathan kept his eyes on Sophie throughout my account. His eyebrows went up and the left corner of his mouth went down. When I’d finished he paused, as though assessing the evidence.

‘So.’ He rubbed his nose with the back of his free hand. ‘A litigation lawyer and an employment lawyer dancing to “Drugs Don’t Work”, one of the most depressing songs of the last century, in an undertaker’s car park.’

He paused again, narrowed his eyes and shook his head. ‘You know, I just can’t get excited about that.’

A giggle bubbled up. ‘It’s not the most cheerful song in the world, is it?’

‘A dirge, definitely.’

‘I’m sorry, Jonathan. I wasn’t myself. It was just a really odd night.’

But he was already getting up out of the chair, holding Sophie against his chest.

‘Why don’t you go to bed for an hour or two?’ he said. ‘Mum can look after Sophie. Do you definitely have to go into the office today? It’s not one of your usual days.’

‘Unfortunately, yes,’ I said to his retreating back. I’m doing a lunchtime seminar which Radcliffe wouldn’t let me out of. And I’ve got to finish a report too, because the client’s going on holiday on Friday.’

I went back to bed, but I couldn’t sleep. My confession hadn’t damped down the adrenalin that was coursing through my body, jerking me awake every time I started to drop off.

Possibly because that confession hadn’t been quite complete. Wrong-footed by Jonathan’s low-key reaction to my story, I’d lost my nerve to tell him the last thing. When Malkie had pulled up at the house to drop me off, he’d grabbed my hand and asked me to meet him for a drink after work tomorrow. ‘Just to talk everything through,’ he’d said.

I told myself now that it was irrelevant, as far as Jonathan was concerned – Malkie just wanted to clear the air, to make sure things weren’t awkward around the office.

But something about the look in his eyes, and the feel of his hand as he’d grabbed mine, rather tended to suggest otherwise.