

EXTRACT 1 Chewing Gum Dreams by Michaela Coel

His lips are thin, and soft, and very pink and one time we kissed for eight minutes, I know coz we started kissing when Craig David's album was on, and it was like Walking Away, which is three minutes 27 seconds and then we kept kissing after that when Time to Party came on which is like four minutes and six seconds so all together that's like eight minutes. Eight minutes.

If I look at him for more than like six seconds he starts squinting – he's not going blind or anything coz they sort of get bigger at the same time, sort of like – I think it's coz he really likes the way my face is. He says I'm like a little firecracker and he's like... I dunno, someone smart.

He's not like those boys that take you cinema just so they can kiss you in the dark, we walk outside holding hands. And he likes the way my face is.

Right now I am looking at the sea for the first time in my life. He blindfolded me and took me all the way to a beach.

I've never seen so much water before, and it's not the water it's just, I've never seen anything like this in the whole course of my life.

"Where are we?"

"Margate"

"Mah... Gate..."

I don't actually know where Margate is but I'm guessing it must be like... past Enfield coz we ain't got anything like this in my borough or in any of the neighbouring boroughs I'm sure.

"Gosh, it goes back for ages. It goes so far, it joins with the sky."

I feel like crying, but not from sadness. "Thank you."

EXTRACT 2 People Places and Things by Duncan MacMillan

EMMA: I find reality pretty difficult.

I find the business of getting out of bed and getting on with the day really hard. I find picking up my phone to be a mammoth fucking struggle. The number on my inbox. The friends who won't see me anymore. The food pictures and porn videos, the bombings and beheadings, the moral ambivalence you have to have to just be able to carry on with your day. I find the knowledge that we're all just atoms and one day will just stop and be dirt in the ground, I find that overwhelmingly disappointing.

And I wish I could feel otherwise. I wish I could be like you. Or my mother. To feel that some things are predetermined and meaningful and that we're somewhere on a track between the start and finish lines. But I can't because I care about what's true, what's actually verifiably true. You're able to forfeit rationality for a comforting untruth so how are you supposed to help me? You're looking at the world through such a tight filter you're barely living in it. You're barely alive.'

Drugs and alcohol have never let me down.

They have always loved me. There are substances I can put into my bloodstream that make the world perfect. That is the only absolute truth in the universe.

I am being difficult because you want to take it away from me. So. Sorry.

EXTRACT 3 Laughing Wild by Christopher Durang

WOMAN: I want to talk to you about life. It's just too difficult to be alive, isn't it, and try to function? There are all these people to deal with. I tried to buy a can of tuna fish in the supermarket, and there was this person standing right in front of where I wanted to reach out to get the tuna fish, and I waited a while, to see if they'd move, and they didn't—they were looking at tuna fish too, but they were taking a real long time on it, reading the ingredients on each can like they were a book, a pretty boring book if you ask me, but nobody has; so I waited a long while, and they didn't move, and I couldn't get to the tuna fish cans; and I thought about asking them to move, but then they seemed so stupid not to have sensed that I needed to get by them that I had this awful fear that it would do no good, no good at all, to ask them, they'd probably say something like, "We'll move when we're goddam ready you nagging bitch" and then what would I do? And so then I started to cry out of frustration, quietly, so as not to disturb anyone, and still, even though I was softly sobbing, this stupid person didn't grasp that I needed to get by them, and so I reached over with my fist, and I brought it down real hard on his head and screamed: "Would you kindly move asshole!!!" And the person fell to the ground, and looked totally startled, and some child nearby started to cry, and I was still crying, and I couldn't imagine making use of the tuna fish now anyway, and so I shouted at the child to stop crying—I mean, it was drawing too much attention to me—and I ran out of the supermarket, and I thought, I'll take a taxi to the Metropolitan Museum of Art, I need to be surrounded with culture right now, not tuna fish.

EXTRACT 4 Wink By Phoebe Eclair-Powell

MARK: When dad died he had this shit blog he was really proud of – before Tumblr was even a thing and you would've thought he had just invented space travel cos he was beaming for days, going upstairs to put another post on – “gotta keep my views up, son,” and he would look at me like “see, we understand each other” but I told him that no fucker in their right mind wanted to know about middle-aged running clubs and he said “that's where you're wrong, son, that's where you are so very wrong.” He would say that a lot, and try not to let me get to him, because for some reason I used to like to undermine him even though I loved him.

When he signed up for the London Marathon he linked it to his JustGiving page and it was like he had landed on the moon.

Mum said it was unfair that a man that fit should just drop down dead and her friend said – “it's always the ones you least suspect.” And I told her to go fuck herself in my head but not out loud because everyone looks at you really hard when it's your father's funeral.

Shannon did a lot of fainting which was annoying, and Mum kept holding my hand saying “thank you for keeping it together – we need you to keep us all together” and so I decided that I wasn't going to be what they needed.

Online there are people who create Facebook pages for dead people, loved ones, relatives, pets. My mum wanted me to make a page on his blog to tell people what had happened – “they need to know” she said, “they're not pen pals, Mum, that's not how it works, they'll just think he gave up blogging for a bit” and I rolled my eyes at her for a full stop. Sometimes I did check it, just to see if he'd had any more views, but then I realised I was the one making the counter go up.

EXTRACT 5 Narrative by Anthony Neilson

BRIAN: What the FUCK do you know about love? Hmm? Oh no, wait a minute, I know: your mother loved you. That's why you're so secure, right? That's why you have panic attacks and hide under the bed all day: That's why you're in therapy: That's why you fucked another man! Because you're so secure! Because your Mother fucking loved you so fucking much!

But what if she didn't? What if she didn't love you?

Come on – like you said: You've got to ask the question sometimes. What if you're wrong?

Because tell me this – who did your mother learn it from? You told me she was treated like shit. So where did she learn how to love? I'll tell you: from books. From the TV. From fucking Hollywood. She gave you stuff, she showered you with unqualified praise, she told you you'd inherit the fucking Earth and it was all fucking bullshit! A simulation; a cheap, superficial imitation of love by someone who didn't know the meaning of the word. And thirty years later, what's the result? You. You. A fucking – Easter Egg of a person.

You don't know who you are, you don't know what you want, you don't know what you think – Life throws shit at you and you collapse and you know why? Because there's no core to you, no foundation, none of the things that real love – genuine, complex, awkward love – builds. Your mother loved you like a child loves a doll. She didn't know any other way. And you know what? Neither do you.

I don't know if I was loved. But I can sleep, you know? I can spend more than ten minutes in silence. I can look in a fucking mirror.

EXTRACT 6 Rosencrantz & Guildenstern Are Dead by Tom Stoppard

Do you ever think of yourself as actually dead, laying in a box with a lid on it? Nor do I really. Seems silly to be depressed by it. I mean, one thinks of it like being alive in a box. One keeps forgetting to take into account that fact that one is dead. Which should make all the difference. Shouldn't it? I mean, you'd never know you were in a box would you? It would be just like you're asleep in a box. Not that I'd like to sleep in a box mind you. Not without any air. You'd wake up dead for a start and then where would you be? In a box. That's the bit I don't like frankly. That's why I don't think of it. Because you'd be helpless wouldn't you? Stuffed in a box like that. I mean you'd be in there forever. Even taking into account that fact that you're dead, it isn't a pleasant thought. Especially if you're dead really. Ask yourself: if I asked you straight off I'm going to stuff you in this box right now - would you rather be alive or dead?

Naturally you'd prefer to be alive. Life in a box is better than no life at all. I expect. You'd have a chance at least. You could lay there thinking well, at least I'm not dead. In a minute somebody's going to bang on the lid and tell me to come out.

(makes knocking sound)

Hey you! Whatsyername! Come out of there!