

Dear World. . .

‘No I’m not alright. I don’t know if I can take any more of this.’

The cliché of the moment didn’t escape me, regardless of my emotional involvement. That’s the beauty of e-mail. It lends a sense of detachment to everything written.

‘I just need to escape.’

I loved her enough to do the right thing. That didn’t stop the ideas running through my head, though. I could take advantage of this, tell her to leave him. That wasn’t my style. Besides, if she was going to love me it had to be real. Not some false feeling spawned of a shattered relationship.

Maybe I could still do the right thing whilst playing it to my advantage. I’m only human after all. Let her end it in her own time and way. My show of support would make us all the closer.

Shakespeare could not have written such a carefully worded reply. Each sentence was deleted and rewritten several times. This was beginning to become a habit. I wished that just for once I could open my heart out, hang the consequences. If only I had the nerve. Why did I always act the coward towards the only thing that really mattered to me?

The message sent, I settled back to work. Going through the motions as usual. As if there was a job out there that took more than a handful of brain cells to do!

The afternoon drifted past in it’s usual daydream haze. The evening ahead had taken on a whole new reflection. I would have to tread with care.

The pub was nearly empty. A few old men around the bar trading stories, washed down with bitter. The couple sitting in the corner with the awkward body language of a tired relationship. The young man with the glum frown and the world on his shoulders. He was here already.

The beer was as expensive as ever. The music as tedious. My usual inner moan at the lack of atmosphere was vacant, however. My thoughts were spiralling in circles of complexity, intertwined with wild emotions.

We exchanged pleasantries. The usual football-related jibes that greet a couple of weeks apart. I would have to wait for the departure of sobriety before the expected heart spilling was to commence.

I was too thirsty. It became obvious when I had to start making supportive responses. I had already necked a few and it wasn’t likely to end there. The words were flowing freely but the mouth was struggling with the acts of dexterity. No matter. Meaning had become everything as my mind became one with my body, as my body became a slave to feeling.

The conversation turned into a heartfelt soliloquy, with myself as the privileged audience. Carried away with the moment and our alcohol-amplified friendship I couldn’t help but encourage it. I knew nothing else to do. The plan of sympathetic dissuasion was hopelessly drowned in a drunken haze. It didn’t seem to matter. I was doing the right thing after all. Everything would work out in the end.

The alarm had been going off for several minutes before I realised it wasn't mine. I kept my eyes closed, trying to recapture pleasant dreams, dispelled by the onset of consciousness. It never works. Memory drifted back in jumbled shards. The sofa was more comfortable than my bed.

Dehydration eventually forced me to my feet and into the kitchen. Three glasses of water later the thoughts had gathered in my jigsawed head enough to force me to work. I had showered, changed and driven six miles before I was sober enough to reflect on the previous night. I soon found myself sitting at my desk, lunchtime, with no memory of the morning's work, so deep was that reflection.

The rest of the day dragged. I must have checked my inbox a hundred times that afternoon. Nothing.

I have always been intrigued by the ebbs and flows of time. When surrounded by friends there is never enough. When alone there is never anything to fill it. My week flew past, except for a frozen moment every day. Phone in hand, thinking of what to say to her. Then it would ring, and the moment would pass. Tomorrow was soon enough. Time now to meet friends, hold the usual hollow conversations in the same dull places. Still, I'd rather be bored around friends. Anything to stave off another bout of introspection.

I think of her now and wonder what planet I was on, thinking like that. I threw my life away without thinking about it. My one chance of happiness gone without a thought, my cowardice ruining both our lives. If only she realised what I do now we might both be happy.

Too late to dwell on that now, though. What's done is done. The past can't be changed. It's difficult to understand how I have managed to lose what I never had. All I know is that it hurts all the more for it.

It was nearly two weeks later when I had the call. The news that sent a shiver through my being, that shook me to the core.

For once in my life I had been successful. The reconciliation was complete. In a way I had never thought possible. Like a channel five soap opera, the tidings were brought, the words pounded down with such clichéd significance it was hard to swallow.

He had phoned to organise a video session. Plenty of beers washed down with the Star Wars Trilogy, what could be better?. I had never imagined that Star Wars could be so painful.

'What wedding?' I questioned, as if I couldn't predict the answer.

I need not tell you the reply. I felt a spike be hammered through my spine. My inner voice gave a horror-movie scream. For once I found myself wishing for one of the memory blanks that so frequent my life. Yet it was not to be. There are no words to describe how I felt, how I feel to this day. Suffice it to be said that from that point onwards my life took an irreversible turn. The turn that eventually led to the note you hold in your hands.

'I'm so happy for you,' I lied. 'Congratulations!'

He talked a lot. He seemed overjoyed. I felt that he was just laughing at me. Taunting me for being so stupid and gutless. Who would have thought that one of my best friends would be the one to hurt me the most?

He talked for several minutes but when I put down the receiver I couldn't recall a word he had said after the initial revelation. It felt as if a white-hot steel shard had been driven through my heart. I felt worthless and dejected. Feelings that never left me.

I turned up late. And drunk. I am not ashamed to admit that I'm a Star Wars fanatic but this was one occasion when an end-to-end trilogy session didn't particularly excite me. My friends were in vociferous mood, and seemingly oblivious to my jaded demeanour. By the time 'Empire' had started things had really got out of hand. And with every foul joke, with every piece of raucous laughter, my blood increased another few degrees in temperature. Luke had barely reached Dagobah when I snapped.

'You think it's *so* funny, don't you?' I yelled.

I was greeted with quizzical looks.

'Well screw you all!' I kicked over the table supporting everyone's beers. That got their attention.

'What's wrong?' said one of them. The one phrase guaranteed to annoy anyone who does have something wrong.

'Wrong?' I stormed. 'I'll tell you what's wrong! I'm fed up with you all laughing at me, that's what's wrong.' The alcohol had taken hold of my emotions and I wasn't going to let off. I had screamed obscenities at each and every one of them before I stamped out in a red haze. No one followed. Not one of my so-called friends came after me to check if I was okay. I had expected as much.

I couldn't answer my phone the next morning, no matter how many times it rang. Morning-after embarrassment had taken hold. I was not just embarrassed, though. More so, I was angry with myself. Not so much for my unfettered outburst but for the fact that the only times I seemed to have the courage to speak my mind were when I was too drunk to convey my feelings. I felt trapped by my own inability to act or speak my mind. Even before my headache had subsided I decided to take radical action. It was time to confront her.

I clambered into my car and headed off with a sense of purpose that had been sorely lacking for a long time. My morning's lethargy was magically transformed into a supreme dedication that in other circumstances would be envied. I made a point of not wearing my seatbelt, as was my habit of late. It was not a good day to be a road user that day. At least, not on the route I was taking.

Each narrow miss served to wind me up still further. By the time I reached her house I was far from being in the best state of mind for such a heartfelt confrontation. I left my car to the stench of overworked brake pads. Many people take out their stresses on their cars, and I was no different. I pressed the buzzer for her flat and it was only at that moment that my nerves first started to jangle. But by the time she had let me in I felt my whole body trembling.

We sat down in her room. She had been having a lie in. She was dishevelled and lacking makeup but still beautiful as ever. From the moment I saw her I felt the familiar fire in my loins. I stammered as I spoke to her, trying desperately to make her

understand how I felt. When I finally got round to saying those words I was disgusted at how pathetic I sounded.

'I think I'm in love with you,' I choked. Then waited for the inevitable let down. When it came it was harder than I could possibly have imagined.

She sat in silence for what seemed like an age. 'I believe you,' was her response. She then waited for my reaction, knowing that my impatience would make me speak first.

I believe you. What was that supposed to mean? How was I supposed to respond? I would have known how to react to a brush-off. If she'd had simply said she didn't feel the same, that she didn't like me in that way, it wouldn't have been so hard. She was too kind for that. I was left speechless for several minutes as the thoughts churned through my head. I finally plucked up the courage to talk but the words were not my own. I told her it didn't matter, that I was wrong, but I don't know where those words came from. I was lost to the world from that moment. Whatever was controlling my voice from that moment wasn't me. I wanted to argue, to complain, to scream and shout but I couldn't. My heart and soul had died in that instance.

I don't know how I made it home. I have no memory of any subsequent events. I only know how I feel. I only know that it is over. There is nothing left of me. Nothing left of my life. It can't be right for someone to feel this way. There must be something wrong with me. As you read this note please do not feel sorry for me. I am only glad in the thought that she will have a happy life. He is a good person. He can give her whatever it is that I can't.

Please look after her.