

CONTROL



1981

1981

CEREMONY

I don't like that photo. I didn't want to wear a white dress, I wasn't comfortable in it. I saw a nice cream dress in Allders and asked them to keep it—and then he does that kind of tantrum thing he does, because he's Christian he wants a white wedding. So he was already getting his way. That's just a minor bit, but by December I had already seen a side of his personality that was quite dastardly. There are some things I can't discuss with you, Chris. It's inappropriate and it's too painful.

My mother had come for the wedding and to spend Christmas and New Years' with us. I told her I wanted to call off the wedding and her face went stone-like and said, "*Meh can't bear the shame to go back and seh deh wedding nah happen.*" I had also already left my job. He put a lot of work into that, saying he earns enough for the three of us to live on. So, I was already feeling trapped.

I didn't know there was a photographer coming—nothing was discussed. When he handed me the photos he said something like, "*the photographer had to doctor your face.*" I don't remember the exact words but sometimes the feeling is just as important the exact words.

We had a little reception at our flat. After the cake was cut, Noel asked Dorothy for the first dance and all eyes looked at me. They were pitying. If I didn't feel bad about that, I would feel ashamed with people looking so sorry for me.

1981

DINNER GUESTS

Noel invited the priest and his wife for dinner, David and Mary. He'd give us five pounds to cook a meal. "*Make sure you've got pudding,*" he would say. Me and Sabina would go buy ingredients, then I'd cook and wash up—that was my purpose. He would do the entertaining of course, you know that. He springs into action then.

Whilst we were eating he was reflecting on riding a motorcycle. One of his stories was that he ran into an old woman—his laugh came when he said, "*she didn't see me!*" David didn't see the humour and replied, "*you must not have seen her either.*"

Back then, I knew what happened to Maya [Mum's grandmother], but I didn't know who did it. At the time Noel would ride around Boxton with a mandolin. I told you that Auntie Julie asked for you recently. On the same call, she was reflecting on the pain of that incident. When she was talking, I learnt something I didn't know before: the person that hit my grandmother didn't stop to see if she was ok—they just rode off.

You learn more and more about this person.

1982

DOROTHY

Dorothy was a friend from Queen's [hospital]. She was the only visitor of mine who was welcome at the flat.

One Saturday I invited her round and she declined, then afterwards a late shift turned up and I went. I returned home to find her there. Noel invited her and she took up the offer for the same afternoon. By then it was clear who she came to visit and it wasn't me.

I told them that one of the patients who I tended to complimented me that I was beautiful and Dorothy suggested that the woman must have had poor eyesight. Yeah, those two were chummy together.

Claude saw them leaving Marston Way. "*When you went [evicted] to Guyana I saw so-and-so coming out of the flat and getting into his car. Don't trust him.*" She said he's the one that turned up at her place because he was, 'cold and lonely.' He's a bragger so there are times when he doesn't know he's giving out information—the things he let out you wouldn't know by just looking at a clothed person. You're my son, there's only so much I can say. That one was so gross I've only told two of my councillors.

Dot was the one that pointed out that Sabrina was scared of him. Before she got on his side, she asked me, "*why do you let him talk to you like that?*" when he was mocking. You see how people change? You can only trust a few.

1983

EVICTION N^o2

Jaisingh had passed away. I was in deep grief.
“What are you bothered about? He’s not your real brother.”

Days later I receive a letter out of the blue from a solicitor on behalf of Noel dated 29th March 1983.

It said he wanted me and Sabrina to vacate his house and offered to pay me £1,050 for ‘*a clean break*.’ This is the first I’ve heard of this discussion. Keep in mind, I was pregnant with you at the time, Chris. I feel like I let you down because I didn’t care for myself or my unborn. I felt gutted and helplessness. And a proper damnfool person. You can’t go on about wanting a family and ask for a clean break less than three months after.

Later he complained that he had to pay £80 for the solicitor’s letter. I couldn’t afford to buy Sabrina school clothes for Ryelands or a single piece of garment during my pregnancy.

I tried to get help from the Housing Department and Social Services, but doors kept being slammed shut—everyone I spoke to said it’s a legal matter. I think it must have been June when you were taken up two flights of stairs to see a solicitor. His name was Mr. Watts.

1983

DARKNESS

We were living in a blur. I was still doing grocery shopping for everyone—whether he ate it or not I can't remember. When I was pregnant he complained, "*She doesn't wash the dishes straight after, she leaves it to the morning.*"

Sabrina remembered it being very heavy. Seeing me crying all the time without knowing what to do. Noel was living in the back room—the room he promised Sabrina.

He said, "*Go and see your doctor.*" He was in a state of denial. He didn't think the child was his. By the time I visited the GP's surgery I was 5 months pregnant with you and suffering from depression. Sabrina became even more confused and subdued.

When he came back from work we would literally see him walk past the window and would have to turn the record player off and pretend we weren't having fun. Do you remember those couches we had? A 3-seater and two 1-seaters? Mum would have the two 1-seaters pushed together and she would be lying there, resting the plate on her belly unable to do anything, just picking at food occasionally. The curtains were always drawn. I felt sadness but not understanding. I felt like I was always holding my breath. I have such vivid memories of that time. It was so dark. I don't remember any light, any sunlight, just darkness.

1983

DOUBLE DUTCH

By August, the intense grief has eased. You can't stay in ruts can you? We started playing. I do like play. The reason being it generates positive energy. The three of us spent a lot of time together. Sabrina and her sibling to be. Whereas before we were just sitting there in darkness, you were playing with us from the inside.

On the ninth of September, me and Sabrina bought a single record, Double Dutch, which was popular at the time. We were blasting the song and dancing in the front room. Skipping and dancing like in the video. I joined her in between. Sabrina wanted you to be born on double-numbers, 9th of the 9th. "*Christopher is going to come with us.*" Although you weren't Christopher then. Those days you didn't know if you're having a boy or a girl, you don't want to do names before.

Noel must have heard the noise as he approached the house because the evil look he shot was chilling. I can't remember if I turned the music off but he walked past us in his signature sulk and went about his business.

1983

LABOUR DAY

When I started going into labour he asked if he could come to the hospital. In spite of all the neglect and ill-treatment, I conceded. He was not present before this.

When you just go in, they put you in the pre-labour room and you can hear women around balling and he was complaining about the noise. I got support like that.

Noel came along to the labour room on his own accord, standing tense at the side of the bed. It was a short labour. I was practising yoga when I was pregnant with you. I borrowed a book from the library.

Slapped to breath. There was no baby-blanket in the room and the midwife had to go and get a clean blanket for you. She used a draw sheet to cover you temporarily and you kicked it off your body minutes after you were born—the midwife said she hadn't seen that before!

When the nurse came back, she said, "*Where is he?*" I said, "*He's gone.*" By half-an-hour he was gone. I think she recognised how distant he was too, that's why she showed compassion. And now he can brag for the rest of his life that he was there at your birth. He would of course say that he came back for Sabrina, but Sabrina was in safe hands.

ADVERSARIA

Wealth is not a bad word, it just means different things to different people. When he goes to Guyana, he's a very big man—he probably sends them cars and all that. That's where they get the idea that he's so rich. Luckily, my idea of wealth doesn't correspond with Noel's, and I don't have to brag. Wealth is knowledge and self-care.

No matter what he does, he'll get in there and make himself look vulnerable and us look like culprits.

"Look how much I done fah dem. I starve myself on Christmas Day, an' none a dem ah know me now. I'm walking like an ole man an' nobody dah know me."

Can you hear it?

You can't fault his performances—with my family too. Months before Vedo died, she was telling me to ring Noel. They already think that I don't like men. They already think I like books more.

When people like that are eroding you, they leave just enough of you that you can still support their cause, until one day you run out yourself. It takes up so much energy when you have to deal with pathology. Physical, emotional, spiritual. They all take up energy. And on the other side, it could lift you. When it's positive. Energise and lift you.



1984

DAD'S A PIG, BUT THAT'S INSULTING TO PIGS

She would have been about seven. In a rage, she wrote a notice in chalk on the cupboard in her room when he was really horrible to her. And I didn't speak up, no shouting, no whisper, no nothing from my gob. It's around that time Charlotte took her under her wing. Charlotte is one of the people I thank, even though she can't hear me.

Sabrina knew things were not right and that she felt weird. She wanted to ring Esther's line [Childline] but she didn't know how to describe her feelings. When you're a child, you don't know the adults on the other side will be able to speak to you in a way that you can express it.

Yeah, I remember when that was launched on That's Life. There was a phone box between Ryelands and home, and I stopped in it a couple of times being like, 'I feel like I want to call, but don't know what I need to call about.' It's like, you know this isn't good, but you just don't have the language for all of that as a child. But you know, that's very imprinted in me and part of the reason why I ended up at NSPCC. So all the things that were really stressful in that childhood, I've worked in charities that have tried to alleviate that—you know, like, we were very poor and our housing situation was appalling too. As a 20 year old, NSPCC, UNICEF, and Shelter were the three charities I wanted to work for. Understanding something is not right but not understanding what—all of that shaped my career.

1985

AUNTIE MALA

I pleaded with Mala to come to help me when I was having Anthony. After my experience with you, I wouldn't allow him to do that again. I wanted someone that could give support, and she did give support. We also had rightful stay in the house. He didn't have the same power.

She agreed to come on the condition Noel wouldn't be staying in the same house as her. At the time, I thought it was because of what he said to the priest which made her run to the toilet to vomit—that would have been a good enough reason—but when I visited in '98, she told me, "*Juliet, you were in the house at the time when he's trying to kiss me(!)*" She was horrified. The lack of respect. For both me and her. Apart from Sabrina, Mala was the closest person to me at the time. The other ones were outside the house but this was my sister. It was different.

I had seen him do that with Dorothy. I rang her, and later she told me that because I upset her so much—because I wrongfully accused her—that she mistreated a patient and he was now at-risk. The blame was on me. So ever since then I don't give a fuck who comes to the house, and for what. So when he's standing out there saying he'll kill himself and, "*You don't want these children to have a father because you don't have a father,*" I fucking-well took a lot of abuses for my children to have a father who wasn't even being one. He used my children to father him. You were the father to him.



1985

HEALTH & SAFETY

You were very safety-conscious even as a toddler. “*Mum, the baby is on the windowsill.*” It was very hard having two small children. That’s partly why I kept believing his lies. The last counsellor I had said to me, “*How many times did you believe him?*” Like, by the fifth or sixth time, she lost track. And they’re all big things to forgive. But what support was he giving? I would have managed a lot better without him there grinding me down. He makes it harder. Sabrina was already a second parent by then.

In those days, my career dream was to be a teacher, so I think I used you guys to sort of play teacher sometimes. I encouraged drawing a lot. We used to record Cartoon Club and do that together—that sort of stuff. I enjoyed it too, so it wasn’t just because of you. I enjoyed art too.

I remember this really well. I was in Class Six with Miss Boot. I don’t think there’s a teacher I’ve adored more than Miss Boot. She was just—she was amazing to me, and so encouraging, and really brought out the best in me. We were doing the five senses, and as part of that we had to draw this really detailed diagram of the eye and label everything in it. I would have just come back and blurred out everything I had learned to you, even though you were way too young to be listening to that kind of detail. I still remember all of that detail, 35-odd years later, because I just loved the class so much. And I still have the picture. I still know exactly where it is.

1986

KING'S COLLEGE

My eardrum punctured. Dr. Elliott referred me to King's College and Noel stayed with the three of you for the week while I was in hospital. He visited twice and on the second visit he arrived enraged, greeting me saying he can't do anything to get Anthony to stop crying—obviously, Anthony didn't know where I was, he just turned one.

When the doctor came to do his ward-round the following day I asked to be (self-)discharged. He had to remove the gauze pack from my ear days before it should have been. My ear was still bleeding when I came home. When we got back, Noel was in a rush to leave the house and said he was going to Susan's. Like, I just come to soothe the baby, not to cook dinner and all that. I called him, "*Mother's Boy*."

Before I knew it my head was moving from side to side with the palm of his right hand beating me from ear to ear. I put Anthony down on the chair. You and Sabrina were playing in the front room and ran in to see what the noise was about. He stopped, and not only that, he was so quick to hold my arms down as if he's protecting himself from me. You have to be a psychopath to be that quick. Then he sat down and said, "*You can call the police if you want*." That was after the two of you came in.

For a long time Anthony wouldn't go near him. He cried a lot. It took him a long time to get out of that mode.

ADVERSARIA

I used to love that picture you gave me [The Twits drawn by Quentin Blake]. I had it up there. I'm thinking Sabrina, Christopher, Anthony were brought up by two twits. I include myself in it. Yeah, I thought that was appropriate.

I have got my own madness. I mean, I had a breakdown—that was mad. Pulling my own hair out in clumps; banging my head against the wall. How much I self-loathed for letting him treat us like that. There was no way he could have treated us so disrespectfully without my help. That's what I mean, I'm not that hapless person anymore. I got back my core-self. But that doesn't mean there isn't any madness around me, there will still be some. And I'm unconventional, which would make it even worse.

Once you have a child your heart is not totally your own anymore. Some of your heart you share with your children. That's why they say you're as happy as your unhappiest child. These two years, all three of my children have been so unhappy—so I'm triply unhappy. Except for moments.

I know I made many mistakes. I wasn't that skilful and some of the skills I had were stripped, so it made it harder. But I think on the whole, considering my circumstances, I think I had strength. And it took a lot of strength to heal from that breakdown. So yeah, I give myself that credit. What did I do well? I had the strength to recover.



CONTROL

5th December 2022

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MARGINS Imprint, London