

BLANK VERSE

"I'm just not sure I see the point in it" said Jane. "Well, I'm not buying it unless the colours are changed. They're going to clash with my suit" said Jack. "I don't mean to sound ungrateful..." started Ben "but if there's no Volvic I swear I'll fucking wreck the place". "This new sun tan lotion is pretty good, but it doesn't smell as fresh as my usual brand" said Jane. "It was hilarious" said Ben. "The cameraman – the fucking *cameraman* – checked me out and asked if I'd go out for dinner with him. I said, no offence, but are you *fucking mad*? I'd have to be on some pretty heavy drugs to agree to that. And he said, well, I happen to have some pretty heavy drugs".

Jane shrugged, "Do it". Jack finished his drink.

"I've found I had some success ignoring the instructions on the bottle" said Jane.

Jack asked the waiter for the bill. Jane put on her sunglasses and checked her reflection in a compact mirror. Ben said 'Did you hear about Tom and Sally?' and shot a sly glance to Ben. 'I mean, when you keep on turning up to places with bruises and black eyes then it's not rocket science to work out what's going on' and sniggered. Jane grimaced and carried on checking out her reflection. 'Do you think I look better with the glasses like this, or like this?' she asked, changing the angle of them very slightly. Ben laughed and said 'Fuck me, what a *cunt*'. Jane said, 'I mean previously I only wore neutrals but this girl in wardrobe pointed out I could carry off bold if I wanted, and so I gave it a go and you know I really think it works'. Jack saw an old colleague, Sean in the corner of the restaurant and waved, motioned to him to come over.

'Hi Sean' 'Hi Ben, Jack'. He paused; 'Hi Jane'. Jane looked over the top of her sunglasses and drawled 'Oh hiii' and motioned two air kisses. Sean waved, just once. 'So Sean I heard you were involved in the Bear-Shaw deal?'. Jane said 'Fucking business is so fucking boring'. Ben said 'You're on form today Jane!'. 'The wine you recommended was great Sean', said Jack ignoring Jane. Sean nodded excitedly, 'I knew you'd like it'.

Jane said 'The thing about good service is, is the wait staff have to be *around* and efficient, but not get themselves anywhere near *involved*'. Ben said 'I'm rehearsing for this great show at the moment'. Sean looked at him. Without emotion: 'It sounds incredible'.

Jane laughed. Sean looked at her as though he wanted to say something but said nothing. 'Sorry, I just got a really funny text message' said Jane. Sean shook his head dismissively: 'Well listen, I'd love to stand and chat all day, obviously, but I've got my family over there' and he looked over and waved at a blonde woman and two smallish children. Jack said 'Sure, see you next week anyway, we'll catch up then'. Sean walked off. 'It would be incredible to tell his wife what he's really up to wouldn't it' said Ben. Jack laughed.

Jane put her phone down and said 'I tried almond butter the other day, for the first time. Really not that impressive'. Ben said 'Even if the show goes well I'm still not going to cancel my holiday for it'.

The waiter came over and Jack paid the bill, with an additional generous tip. 'Did you hear what Mike said about his family?' asked Ben. 'Have you ever thought about getting a proper job, Jane?' said Jack. 'I mean, I suspect the almond butter would taste better on a croissant or something. I had it on a plain cracker... I think I should get new sunglasses,' said Jane.

Jack said if they were staying there longer then he was going to order another drink. Ben said, 'I've finished for the day and if you're buying then a drink would be great; or maybe a bottle of wine?'. Jane said 'I've been so

depressed some days recently I've struggled to make it out of bed'. Jack motioned to the waiter and ordered more wine. To Jane; 'I heard about you getting fired from the modelling job with Candice; I laughed when I heard about it'.

Jane laughed and took off her sunglasses dramatically. 'I'm going to say something to Tom when I see him next'. Jack smirked, 'Yeah'. Ben said 'And there's always the chance of a long run; if it captures the public's imagination... or if the marketing budget is big enough.'

The waiter brought the wine over. Jack asked to pay for the bill so he could settle up now. The waiter said no problem. The waiter poured the wine out and Jane took a big gulp.

Ben said 'I saw an advert that was so good the other day, that I literally went straight out and bought the product they were promoting; I mean, I literally *had* to have one'. Jack laughed, 'You prick'. Jane said 'The thing about depression is that the medication really *does not help*' and she swirled the wine around her glass and looked sort of nowhere. Jack said, 'When you were married to me you weren't as depressed'. Jane laughed; 'Don't be so sure'. Ben said, 'It was a particular type of cereal, if you must know; an apple and cinnamon crunch. I knew I wouldn't be able to *sleep* until I had a box and I felt nervous and anxious and I started to sweat at the thought of having to wait any more and I knew the best thing to do was to go out and just *buy some*'.

Jack shifted restlessly in his chair and poured more wine for himself, and Jane pointed at her glass too. Jack said 'What TV show were you watching?' and Ben said 'Uh... funny, I can't remember. I find that I watch TV to watch adverts... I mean, I hum the jingles, I know the scripts and the timing; I like seeing the pictures and the familiar logos and hearing the voices, it's very reassuring'.

Jane said 'I've been trying to get more work but I think Candice has been telling everyone about why she fired me'. Jack looked up at Ben. 'You really should have known that was going to happen'. Jane said 'I got tired of doing what I was told - I'm only surprised I managed to hold it down for so long'. Jane said 'I'll be back in a minute' and heads off. Ben leans forward conspiratorially, 'We know better than that don't we Jacky'.

Ben growled but inaudibly. 'I just didn't think it was the right job for her'. Ben laughed. Jack took another sip of wine. Ben said 'You better hope she doesn't find out' and looked at Jack meaningfully for a second, maintaining eye contact and then looked absently past Jack. Jack mumbled, 'Don't' and leaned forward moodily. Ben said 'Don't worry – I heard the stories about you and your brother. And about Jane's replacement and some pretty outrageous ...rumours' and he laughed a short nervous laugh.

'You don't know anything' said Jack.

Jane came back and had applied fresh makeup but had not exactly been careful and the lipstick is sort of really heavily applied, and her eyelids look heavy and uneven and too dark. Jack looked up and looked very faintly visibly shocked at the sight of her. Jane said, 'The lighting in the toilets seems a bit strange to me'.

Ben said 'I wonder if I should call the cameraman'. Jack said 'Sean came back over, Jane, and he reckoned that Tom and Sally are "on a break"'. Jane drawled a little, 'On again; off again'. Ben said 'Was that directed at me?'. Jane said, 'Violent people are such a drag to be around'. Ben looked at Jack. Jack rolled his eyes. Jack said 'I heard a funny story the other day from an agent I was dealing with. So this guy takes his kids – two kids – to a park on a Saturday. This guy spends like an hour a week with his kids, he pretty much doesn't have anything to do with them. They're both under ten years old'.

Jane has her mirror out and tried surreptitiously to check her appearance. Jack continued '...so there's a guy there making balloon animals and a crowd are watching him and naturally his kids also want to see what's happening. So they're there watching the show and some of the kids are yelling out, and some of the parents are chipping in and the mood is light and summery. The balloon guy starts a sort of mock puppet show and at some point he's looking around for someone to be 'part of the fun'. The usual thing is that he faintly humiliates someone and the kids laugh and it's all great fun. The balloon guy puts a balloon hat shaped like a swan on the guy's head and the agent guy says 'Don't do that again' and the balloon guy isn't really listening and starts into his usual routine and the agent guy reaches to take the balloon hat off and his kids are watching him, looking

up at him'. So the balloon guy starts poking fun at the agent guy and all of a sudden the agent twists it hard and bursts the balloons and yells 'I SAID NO THANKS' and the balloon guy, who is threatened by this but not really expecting anything to go wrong – especially as it's a *family audience* and everything - says 'What happened, your wife didn't pump up your balloon last night?' and winks campily and theatrically at a couple of the other parents and the agent guy leans forward and pushes this guy really hard in the shoulder and then catches a fierce glancing blow across his face and the other parents get involved really quickly to break it up and the kids are genuinely shocked and the park security guard storms over pretty quick and the guy – and his two fucking kids – are escorted from the zoo! AHAHAHAHAHAHAHA!

Ben took out his phone and checked his emails. Jane said 'I'll be back in a minute'. Jack had another drink. Ben said 'Was that supposed to be funny?' and Jack didn't say anything.

Jane came back and had applied *even more make-up* and it was even more exaggeratedly bad and it looked *too much*. Ben said 'Ok, I'm going to text him'. Jack finished his drink. There was a pause. Two policemen in uniform appeared in the bar. Jack looked up and stared hard as though he was trying to hear what they were saying and the head bartender and the Maitre d' were talking and one of them nodded in Jack's direction. Jack sat there as the Police approached and Ben noticed something was up and Jack said 'You don't know anything' and his face was flushed, his heart raced, and the Police asked him if he wouldn't mind coming with them and Jack got up and looked confidently at the others, 'I'm sure it's some sort of mistake'.