

"School Runs"

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Sample Pages

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Chapter 1

The First Week of School

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As every year, the first week of school is fucking stressful. Kids are already tired and cranky in the afternoons, the traffic is driving me ballistic, and the money goes out in doubles. There are the arts and crafts lessons, singing, music, Spanish ... and the shoes and the wellies and the raincoats and anything and everything else you can think of we, the parents, have to pay for in September.

Of course, I don't mind investing in my kid's education, quite the opposite. I believe every penny spend on education is worth it. But I would still like to know why everything must be so bloody expensive when it comes to kids and their education?!?

Jim, my husband doesn't share my enthusiasm about investment in education. His educational belief system is pretty limited. According to him, kids ought to work hard at school and learn everything there, not at the after-school clubs or during extra tutorials or activities. He believes that a child should show some interest in a particular subject before extra help, or additional lessons are offered.

In reality, education is just one of many fundamental values we disagree on.

At the start of any relationship, no one wants to see how opposing beliefs can break that relationship.

Even once we were married, I still hoped he would change

his mind and see what I see. But unfortunately, it never happened.

Another "frustration he constantly experiences with me" – these are his words, not mine, is that I bring zero money in. He's already forgotten that it was his idea for me to stay at home with the girls.

Instead of paying someone else to look after our kids, I was going to look after them. Apparently, it was cheaper than having a nanny and a cleaner and pay for my travel to work.

Leaving my career to be a full-time stay at home, mum was a huge mistake, to put it mildly... Somehow it slips his mind that I was the breadwinner before we had kids. I was the one who supported his crazy startup ideas and always believed that he was going to succeed.

I still don't understand how insane I must have been to think it was a good idea to give up my career in my prime to become... a perfect nobody.

Unfortunately, after having two kids, I'm not considered a valuable asset to the majority of employers. They look at me and see a liability. Yes, our modern, advanced society seems to believe that the moment a woman becomes a mother, she loses all abilities to think, work, and be productive. The small fact that dudes run most companies doesn't help our cause. The prejudice against working mothers is massive and growing stronger.

Every single year during the first week of school, Jim and I argue a ton. The tension between us doesn't help with my physical and mental exhaustion. Our constant arguments leave me to drain and wishing I could dissolve into nothingness. He always knows, which buttons to push and words to use to make me feel small and insignificant. The sad truth is that I've only recently realised how much his words and actions affect my self-esteem. Most of the days, I feel small and irrelevant.

I feel like I completely lost myself just to please, Jim, who doesn't even see me as a person any longer.

Shake it off... shake it off.. enough of self-pity.

My girls are always happy to be back at school with all their friends. I also love that my coffee mornings with other mums are back. We usually don't see each other over the summer. The community takes a break from being a

community; maybe it's for the best and helps to avoid unnecessary conflicts.

Both of my girls go to an independent school, which I feel is a perfect fit for their needs. It costs shit lots of money, but money is irrelevant to me when it comes to education. The girls like the school, love their teachers and each morning are happy to put their shoes on, pick up their school bags and go off.

I love the freedom of the summer holidays offer the late nights and lazy mornings. But there is nothing like a quiet house after a hot, humid, and sticky summer. I treasure the space and the quietness that falls upon the house when September arrives.

I know that if you asked Jim about what I do during the time the girls are at school, he would most likely say: "nothing".

But the reality is very different. I cook, clean, do the shopping, do the laundry, look after the garden, sell stuff we don't need any more on eBay and most importantly I'm a writer. Or I should rather say that I try to write. I was a writer in my previous life. For some reason, words don't come to me as easily as they used to.

My previous job BC (before children) involved lots of writing. I was a senior copywriter in a fancy ad agency which didn't believe my motherhood could add any value to their company once my maternity leave was over. Fuck them and the dude in charge. Sorry, the creep would love that so no. I'm just gonna fuck his narrow-minded teeny-tiny brain.

After years of procrastination, I'm back to writing... I'm trying to write again and possibly in the process get my working life back. I didn't tell anyone that I was writing again. First of all, I don't need more pressure than I already have; secondly, I don't want to get my hopes up too high. It's writing, it's highly competitive, personal and I'm starting from scratch. With creativity and creative life, you can't plan that much ahead.

At the moment I'm silently excited that I'm opening a new chapter in the middle of my old life.

Chapter

My Knee Is In Pain Again

September 25, 2018

After weeks of resting and a half a dozen physiotherapy sessions, my knee, in theory, should be as good as new. I didn't exercise or walk as much as I planned over the summer. I wanted my knee to be ready for all the physical activities a new school year always throws my way.

However, the moment I started driving a little bit more than I did during the summer, my knee gave in. I honestly don't know if this was the driving, the colder weather, or more physical strain, but my knee was screaming for attention. As soon as I could, I made yet another appointment with Jim's friend, a physiotherapist who gave me sessions in the summer. I had no particular problems with him before that last session, or possibly I failed to notice that he was a fucking moron.

His asshole-like attitude was noticeable from the moment I walked through the door. I was two minutes late; it happens, it's London. Sometimes you can't get on time to places regardless of how early you leave. Besides, the moment school is back in session, driving across the capital becomes challenging.

Of course, I was apologetic and explained that I got stuck in traffic. He clearly didn't appreciate that and right away began bombarding me with pretty personal questions, which made me feel incredibly uncomfortable. After our brief Q&A session, the rest of the visit became nightmarish.

During the last session we had, he gave me a strengthening exercise, which I did daily for a few weeks. But according to him, I was doing the whole exercise wrong. Even though it was precisely the way, he demonstrated.

After pointing out that I just wasted my time doing the exercise, he proceeded with more criticism, but this time he decided to insult my diet. Believe me; he knows very

little about food. Once he was done pointing out how my vegan diet was unhealthy, he couldn't stop himself from insisting that joining the gym is stupid and pointless. According to him, I should be interacting with my environment, and going to the gym will never offer that. I live in London, at times the pollution is so fucking high that I have difficulties breathing while in the car. But the most out of place and in some respect humiliating was when out of the blue he announced that I was getting old and I must be going through early menopause because I experienced a heat stroke over the summer. Since he is an expert and knows all about heat strokes and menopause, he couldn't spare me his opinion. He just blurted it all out with no consideration of how insensitive and out of place his words and comments were. I don't give a fuck that he is Jim's mate. The chauvinistic pig will see none of my money ever again. How dare he or anyone else judge me by my age, pains or family history. Who does that?

I should have left right then and there, but I didn't. I guess being a "nice girl" sticks to grown women too, as much as it does to the young girls. This is undoubtedly not the way I'm teaching my daughters to be like. If someone or something makes them uncomfortable, they will need to speak up or leave. Life is too short to accept and put up with other's bullshit.

Since I don't like leaving things on a negative note with people at the end of the session, I asked him about specific exercise I could do as a part of my training. He quickly scanned the front page of my training program, and looked at, looked at the clock above his head. He didn't even know how to answer my question and was in such a rush to get me out that it was painful to watch. In conclusion, I didn't matter the moment the hour was over. What kind of customer service is that?

After my session with the asshole, I headed off to pick up the girls. I was trying to calm myself down; I didn't cry, no asshole of such a small proportion could make me cry, but I was unkind to my girls and didn't allow them to play in the park with their friends after school. I was so pre-occupied with my inner anger that I didn't even listen to their stories on our way back.

Women put up with a lot of passive-aggressive behaviour from blokes who feel entitled to give us their opinions about ourselves and our life choices. However, I have to say that on that very day, something has changed in me. I

can't put my finger on what that was, but I'm more than certain that I will never again allow any man make me feel uncomfortable, walk all over me, or make me feel like I don't matter. I didn't say anything to Jim. I doubt he would have understood. Most likely, he would have laughed it off and put it down to my vivid imagination and seeing problems where they don't exist. Besides, I haven't spoken to him for at least a week. I know he is around, but he gets in when I'm already asleep and in the morning he is the first one to leave the house. He must be working on something big, I guess.

Chapter 3

So The Drama Begins

October 4th, 2018

I've been pretty unhappy recently. Maybe my dissatisfaction with life has always been there, I just never saw it up close like that. The constant anger I carry around is consuming every muscle of my body and every cell of my brain.

I've been trying to find the reason for my unhappiness for weeks, and the only thing I can come up with is that the girls are growing up fast and fairly soon they won't need me as much as they used to.

I guess that, on some level, I've started wondering what shall I do with my life now and how could I arrange my working life, if I was to go back to work, around the girl's school?

I have this strong gut feeling that I need to decide fairly soon how I want the rest of my life to look like.

Jim has been working so late for the past few weeks. When the house is all quiet wine has been keeping me company. On the one hand, it's nice to have evenings to myself. Still, on the other, the pickups from the afternoon activities, homework, play dates and bedtime fall all on me, which at times is overwhelming, especially when the girls had a bad day at school and are unsettled.

Luckily, tomorrow I'm seeing my girlfriends. Would you believe if I told you that I hadn't had a chance to have a morning

coffee with them since we started school? Already a month has gone by!

The four of us have known each other since our kids were in the playgroup together. We like to call ourselves The Kids and the City gang, you know like the Sex and the City but with much less sex and nearly non-existing social life, which has been taken over by the kid's activities and the stream of birthday parties.

I love spending time with my girlfriends. Our coffee mornings always fill me with positive and refreshing energy allowing me to forget all the shit I have going on in my life.

October 5th, 2018

My little monsters decided that having a tantrum over who is wearing what to school is the best way to start the day. I wonder if they do it to see how much they can piss me off. Jim left when I was in the shower long before the tantrum took over our morning. I've always found it hard to handle the screaming kids. Jim is so much better at calming them down. They were so upset with one another that neither of them spoke in the car all the way to school.

In comparison to the morning drama, the drop off felt unusually uneventful. For a change, even the gate was opened on time. I didn't see Christina, which is always nice. She is the leader of the "mean girls club". School parental politics are very much like the high school political landscape. You must belong to a group and immune yourself to the waterfall of gossips, talking behind people's back and countless passive-aggressive behaviour parental communities engage in.

Since I didn't feel like waiting by the gate for my girlfriends to arrive, I made my way to the cafe. Over the summer the cafe had a makeover. There are a new owner and a new menu. I like the newly updated cafe as much as I loved the old one (The only local cafe I don't like is the one that served me a latte with a hair in it. When I asked for a new one, it wasn't well received. Of course I don't go there any more.).

I was so ready to talk, drink coffee and eat brownies.

The moment I sat down, I started thinking about our life stories and how our current lives seem to be alike. Before we had kids, we all had careers and highly paid jobs. But after kids and maternity leaves, it's been hard to get back to work

and keep our pre-kids high paying jobs. Currently, most of us either have part times jobs, freelance or started businesses in hope to turn a profit at some point. The whole experience of shunting mothers aside from a workplace is humiliating. We are all resourceful, creative problem solvers, who can multitask but most of us can't seem to be able to find well-paid full-time employment because apparently being a mother makes us for some reason unemployable, especially in the decision making positions. I try to stay positive and not get affected by the gloom of our situation, but pretty often, I feel resentful and depressed that nobody wants to see what I can offer. My girlfriends and I are real-life examples of inequality in the workplace and life.

I was halfway through my brownie when my girls arrived. The moment I saw them, I knew something was seriously off; all three of them were... distressed, the way I haven't seen them in a long time.

I didn't even manage to ask what happened when Jenny blurted out.

- "We were late... because... we... love you... and... you need to know...that...that...that..."

- "That what Jenny? Spill it out!!!" - I almost screamed; I was getting this sick feeling in my stomach. It happens every time I feel something terrible is about to happen.

She took a deep breath and finally said.

- "Jim... Jim... has been seen a couple of times cosying up to Christina in the city in the past week".

At first, I had no idea what Jenny was all about, and I just looked at her for a few seconds while trying to figure out how could Jim see Christina if he was working late. But soon enough, I understood.