

THE PROBLEM OF SEX, OR: WHY ARE WE IN AFGHANISTAN?

by Kieron Barry

from Scene 2

Jason So admiration or money, but not both.

Peter No, I'm not saying / that...

Jason / But I can't have both.

Peter I'm not saying that, / I'm saying –

Jason / What *are* you saying, then, / because –

Peter / I'm saying... but you're making it sound like it's a choice I'm making.

Jason Well isn't it?

Peter But how *can* I admire you when I'm simply giving you all this money?

Jason But I still need the money, Dad.

Peter Jason, have you not been listening to / what I've said?

Jason / Yes I've been listening.

Peter Do you not recognise what I've done for you?

Jason Of course I do.

Peter In the past?

Jason Of course. But I still need the money.

Peter Look at me, Jason. I support you, I support Gramps in River Meadows... Am I a multi-millionaire? Am I an investment banker? Do I even have a second home?

Jason Yes you have a second home; / the apartment.

Peter / The apartment is not a home, it's a pied-à-terre.

Jason / How about the beach / house?

Peter / I'm obviously not counting the beach house.

Jason So I can't have the money.

Peter No you cannot.

Jason Fine.

Peter Work for it.

Jason Fine.

Peter And next time you're feeling sorry for yourself I suggest you think about life under the Taliban.

Jason I don't want to hear your Afghanistan stuff, Dad.

Peter You have the privilege of finding Afghanistan boring. I'd enjoy that if I were you. You're all the same, your generation. Bail-out after bail-out. No ethics. That's the difference between me and you, Jason. I do what I say I'll do.

Jason Really?

Peter Yeah.

Jason Really?

Peter Yeah.

Jason Is that why you're seeing someone called Elizabeth Douglas?

A long, long pause.

Peter You were on my computer, I'm presuming.

You had no right.

Jason Didn't think you'd have anything to hide. I was actually looking for Dave Lawrence's address because I thought you might turn me down over the money.

Peter You have no / right –

Jason / And you *did* turn me down over the money, so...

Peter You have no right to prowl around someone's computer.

Jason I wasn't prowling, / I was trying to –

Peter / You should know better.

Jason / I should know better?!

Peter If you want to talk about it I'm prepared to talk about it, but talk about it sensibly. You should *not* use someone else's computer.

Jason So who is she? Elizabeth Douglas.

Beat.

Peter A colleague.

Jason Really.

Peter She's a junior partner.

Jason And you're seeing her.

Peter If you want to talk to me, talk to me, but do it properly.

Jason *(beat)* Are you... fine... I don't... Is she your mistress?, I guess.

Peter And you should *not* use someone else's computer.

Jason Fine. We've established that.

Peter Not without asking.

Jason I understand. Is she?

Peter Yes she is.

Jason Your mistress.

Peter That's right, yes.

Jason That's all I wanted to know. Thank you.

Peter Yes, Jason, welcome to the real world.

Jason Does Mom know?

Peter No.

Jason What's she going to do? What's going to happen when she finds out?

Peter Jason. Jason.

(he may make some clicking or tutting noise for a while, almost unconsciously, as if in thought)

We're two men. You and me. Yeah?

Jason Yeah... but don't you think she should know?

Peter Jason, I'm gonna say something I haven't said to you before.

Jason OK?

Peter In some senses of the word... I'm *proud* of you.

Sometimes I feel it. Despite everything, it's there.

And you're doing reasonably well. Working out there must be nearly as difficult as making it here in New York, so you've got the thumbs up for that.

Jason Thank you.

Peter Always professional, Jason, that's you. Punctual, fairly well-dressed... often polite.

Jason Thanks.

Peter I know that sounds –

Jason No.

Peter – this is your father going on. / Like it's...

Jason / Not at all.

Peter But I mean it. Fine, you're not in the top five per cent. Who is? So what. We can't all be in the top five per cent.

Jason By definition.

Peter You're in the top 10 to 15 per cent, easily. Ten to twenty per cent no problem.

Jason OK.

Peter Anyone who says you're not in the top 50% doesn't know what they're talking about.

Jason Right.

Peter Anyone who says you're not in the top 50% is talking bullshit. Am I right?

Jason I don't...

Peter Am I right?!

Jason I... I guess so.

Peter (*really hectoring and gauche now*) What are they talking? Bullshit! Yeah? Bullshit! Am I right?

Jason Yeah.

Peter So a lot of admiration for you. You're in the upper half.

Jason That's... (*sincere, but really weakly*) a dream come true.

Peter Sometimes, son, I almost feel like hugging you. I know that sounds like madness, but...

Jason No, not at all. I would like that.

Peter Because I'm proud of you.

Jason I'm proud of you too.

Peter So here we are, two guys, proud of each other, like each other, trust each other, yeah?, and this one (*pointing to himself*) has gone out and got himself some what? He's gone and got himself some... *pussy*. (*we sense he's never used the word before and he's trying to fit in and be on his son's level but it doesn't quite work.*) Am... I... *right?*

Yeah?

(loudly) Yeah?

Jason Yeah. I guess.

Peter Big fucking deal, yeah? *(the awful laugh is briefly back)* 'Pussy'! Ha!

(This is crazy talk.)

Are you happy for me?

Jason *(agonisingly)* Ye-eeah(?)

Peter Course you are. Because we're men. This is stuff between men. And we keep it between ourselves, yeah? Cos that's what men do.

Jason Uh...

Peter Yeah?

Jason I... guess.

Peter Yeah?

Jason Yeah.

Peter You promise?

Jason Yeah, OK, Dad.

Peter Promise?

Jason I promise.

Peter I tell you, Jason. She's beautiful. *(kisses his fingers)*

Ask me.

Jason What do you mean?

Peter Whatever you wanna know. You name it, you bet.

Go on.

Ask me.

Jason ...Have I met her?

Peter As a matter of fact, Jason, yes, you have. Aha! Those emails you chanced across were from an old account of hers. Douglas is her maiden name. She's actually Elizabeth Leary.

Jason Ugh! Fuck me, Dad!

Peter What's wrong?

Jason She's *my* age, Dad.

Peter She's not your age.

Jason Elizabeth Leary? / Ugh!

Peter / She's not your age.

Jason Oh come on. / Pretty much.

Peter / I've got no control over how old / she is, Jason.

Jason / But you *do* have control
over who you have sex with, / presumably.

Peter / Why are you getting emotional?

Jason I'm not getting / emotional.

Peter / Why are you getting emotional?

Jason I'm not.

Peter I think these feelings of yours relate to an odd fact. Elizabeth mentioned
you went through a stage of contacting her. Contacting her a great deal.

Jason That's not true.

Peter Really?

Jason No.

Peter Some time ago.

Jason No.

Peter She said you / did.

Jason / Maybe once or twice. Not 'a / great deal'.

Peter / A little inappropriately, she
said.

Jason A long / time ago.

Peter / She showed me the texts –

Jason What did she do that for?

Peter – and in my opinion they constitute sexual harassment.

Jason (*suddenly very angry*) Oh that's bullshit.

Peter Just my opinion.

Jason That's fucking / bullshit.

Peter / Just my professional / opinion.

Jason / Total fucking / bullshit.

Peter / My expert professional opinion, Jason. See; you're getting emotional again! What's the problem? You wanted her, I wanted her; I don't blame you, she's an attractive girl. You were probably on Euphoriax at the time.

Jason You're fucking disgusting, know that?

Peter Try not to embarrass me, Jason, / if you can.

Jason / Woh! *You're* embarrassed of *me*? If I was born into a different class I'd take a rifle and shoot up the whole fucking town. You think that doesn't happen? You think that doesn't happen any more?

Peter Why don't you quieten down.

Jason I hope it was worth it. Cos when I tell Mom / she's gonna –

Peter / Oh *what a surprise!*

Jason – drop dead in the snow.

Peter You're gonna tell her.

Jason That's right, / yeah.

Peter / Another promise broken, Jason. Another little / failure.

Jason / You can think whatever you wanna think, / I'm –

Peter / Correct.

Jason / – gonna tell her.

Peter Tell her what? We both fucked the same woman?

Jason We did not!

Peter Not for want of trying. No prize for second place, Jason. Ha! (*the awful laugh*)

(*Jason is gathering his things to leave.*)

Oh; not staying for dinner?

Jason (*sighs with disbelief*) Of course I'm n-... How'm I gonna stay for dinner? (*loudly*) WELL?!

(*He is at the door.*)

Know what you are? A reptile. You know that?

Peter OK.

Jason You're a slug.

Peter A slug is a gastropod mollusc, not a / reptile.

Jason / (*shouting*) WHY DON'T YOU GO FUCK YOURSELF?!

Peter Off you go, Jason. Go and tell your mother.

Jason That's right.

Peter Well done as / always.

Jason / I am telling her.

Peter Hope she believes you.

Jason W-... Why wouldn't she / believe me?

Peter / She didn't believe *me* at first.

Jason Fuck you.

Peter When I told her about the Euphoriax.

Jason is stopped in his tracks.

Jason When d- (*beat*) (*slowly*) You *told* her? But you said...

Peter Doesn't matter what I said.

Jason But... you promised.

Peter 'You promised'! GROW UP!!

cont'd...