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**Opening Extract from...**

# **Three in a Bed**

Written by Andrew Croker

Published by Unbound

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# THREE IN A BED

ANDREW CROKER

unbound

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Unbound

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*For Joanna, who let(s) me get on with it.*

Dear Reader,

The book you are holding came about in a rather different way to most others. It was funded directly by readers through a new website: Unbound.

Unbound is the creation of three writers. We started the company because we believed there had to be a better deal for both writers and readers. On the Unbound website, authors share the ideas for the books they want to write directly with readers. If enough of you support the book by pledging for it in advance, we produce a beautifully bound special subscribers' edition and distribute a regular edition and e-book wherever books are sold, in shops and online.

This new way of publishing is actually a very old idea (Samuel Johnson funded his dictionary this way). We're just using the internet to build each writer a network of patrons. Here, at the back of this book, you'll find the names of all the people who made it happen.

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Thank you for your support,

Three handwritten signatures in black ink, arranged horizontally. The first signature is 'Dan', the second is 'Justin', and the third is 'John'. The signatures are fluid and cursive.

Dan, Justin and John  
Founders, Unbound

# THREE IN A BED

ANDREW CROKER

*People want to know that three things are going to happen. One: action will be taken to get to the bottom of these specific revelations and allegations – about police investigations and all the rest of it. Two: action will be taken to learn wider lessons for the future of the press in this country. And three: that there will be clarity, real clarity, about how all this has come to pass, and the responsibilities we all have for the future. That's what the country expects – and I want to make sure that everything that needs to be done will be done.*

**DAVID CAMERON**

*I only take Viagra when I'm with more than one woman.*

**JACK NICHOLSON**

# THE FRONT PAGE

*Three in a Bed* is entirely a work of fiction, though set against the background of real events. The newspaper headlines are genuine (and beyond parody anyway), and when real people do appear, their actions and words are entirely imagined – any similarity between them and the fictional characters is entirely coincidental, but it does add to the fun.

Vivienne Mather led me to Unbound, completely sidestepping the ritual humiliation of serial rejection, where Dan Kieran, John Mitchinson and their delightful team gave me this chance. Two of those in particular helped me with the heavy lifting: my wonderful editor Liz Garner – who was endlessly patient and skilful – and Mathew Clayton – who came up with countless good ideas, including the title.

I also want to thank those fourth estate insiders who read and commented on various drafts, including Mark Austin, Paul Kelso, Frances Coverdale, Tim Willcox, Tom Latchem, and others who, given the subject matter, must remain anonymous.

Finally, crowdfunding only works (the clue is there) with a crowd. I am indebted to all those who supported me – all listed here – and made this possible.

**Andrew Croker**

London, 2015



**Sunday 22nd June 2014**

***The Sunday Times:* BOSSES DAMN PM'S FAILURE TO CURB EU**

***Mail on Sunday:* I LEFT MY HUSBAND AND  
CHILDREN FOR OUR GAY AU PAIR**

***Sun on Sunday:* ENGLAND ACE LUKE  
BEGGED ME FOR THREESOME**

**Monday 23rd June 2014**

***The Daily Express:* HAYFEVER HELL AS BRITAIN HOTS UP**

***The Daily Mail:* DID THIS PREACHER  
GROOM JIHADI BRITONS?**

***Daily Star:* KEEP CALM AND HAVE SEX**

**Tuesday 24th June 2014**

***The Guardian:* JAILED: REPORTERS PAY  
PRICE FOR EGYPT'S CRACKDOWN**

***The Times:* QUEEN TO VISIT GAME OF THRONES SET**

***The Sun:* HEAD'S TWO-WEEK BRAZIL WORLD CUP BUNK-OFF**

**Wednesday 25th June 2014**

***The Independent:* COULSON GUILTY OF PHONE HACKING**

***The Sun:* GREAT DAY FOR RED TOPS.  
REBEKAH BROOKS NOT GUILTY**

***The Daily Star:* SUMMER PLAGUE OF FLEAS FROM HELL**

**Thursday 26th June 2014**

***The Times:* MET FORCED TO DEFEND  
ROLE IN £100m HACKING TRIAL**

***The Independent:* THE WONGA CONSPIRACY**

***The Daily Mirror:* WATSON CRASHES OUT OF WIMBLEDON**

**Friday 27th June 2014**

***The Daily Telegraph:* EU: FEARS OVER JUNCKER'S DRINKING**

***The Daily Mirror:* SHOCK NHS SAVILE  
REPORT: CHILD KILLER?**

***The Daily Star:* MONSTER RATS THE SIZE OF COWS**

# CHAPTER 1

**SATURDAY 28th June 2014 – DAY 1**

***The Times*: BRITAIN NEARS EU EXIT**

***The Guardian*: CAN A FEMINIST  
GET MARRIED?**

***The Sun*: SCHOOL FURY AS  
BOY 7 DOES A SUAREZ**

One was standing, hands on hips, her toes curled over the end of the diving board. The other was lying on a sun-bed, her back arched, laughing. Bent over her in pink turtle-covered shorts, clutching a beer, the man was planting a raspberry on her flat stomach.

‘Don’t be daft.’

‘I’m serious.’

‘So am I.’

Frank leaned back in his chair, pushing his glasses up onto his forehead. ‘Look at the contrast, the blue sky, the white villa, the little splash of colour from the umbrella, the olive trees. And Burke’s shorts. And those bloody girls.’ He spread his arms. ‘I’m telling you, Sam, that is art.’

‘Can I remind you we don’t have a culture section? Last Sunday we gave *X-Men* five stars.’

Sam was standing at the sliding glass doors that could open to the terrace, looking out and back up the Thames. If it had been a normal summer's day he'd have been able to see over the Eye and all the way to Heathrow. 'They're Vilebrequins.'

'Who's he?'

'His shorts are, Cameron wears them. Don't go all Brian Sewell, they're just pictures that tell a story.'

'But it's a classic, all four in focus, pin sharp.'

Sam came over, looking over Frank's shoulder at the layouts on his desk. 'How do you get four?'

'Nipples.'

'Very funny.' He leaned on the desk, thinking about all the options. He could see how each image could be cropped, what headline would work best. 'That one.' He pointed at the shot where Burke was on his back on the lounge this time, propped up, with the blonde one astride him, again in just the tiniest of bikini bottoms.

'Face?'

'Exactly. We need to see it is him.'

'But the big wobbly gut hanging over his shorts is good, and then I can't use the RASPBERRY NIPPLE headline,' said Frank.

'Exactly.'

Sam walked across the office, looking to his right through the long glass wall, past Mary, Frank's PA, typing away, and across the packed newsroom. At the horseshoe of sofas he sat down and looked up at the muted wall of TV monitors that showed what was happening in the world. 'Good job Wimbledon built that roof. Nadal's killing this guy now.'

Frank played with one of the remotes. 'Lost the first set. Football's on in a minute. But I'm still not sure you're right about this.'

'Give me strength.' Sam pushed himself up and went back. 'This is a serious story, Frank.' He stood next to him again. 'That one's going on five.' Looking at it all laid out, it was the best story they'd done for years.

'You sure we can use THREE IN A BED with it?'

'Housekeeper's affidavit. Says he did.'

'Lucky bastard.'

Through the glass Mary was now waving, two fingers raised, mouthing 'Lomax, line two.' Frank put him on speakerphone.

'Hi Carson, I'm with Sam. Where are you?'

'The boat's going back to Monaco, we're taking the jet to Nice in a minute.'

Sam resisted saying 'Of course you are' and said, 'Good trip?'

'Yeah, really good. But Caroline needs to get back. All under control?'

Frank said, 'Yes, fine, we're leading with your mate Lord Nigel Burke.'

'Good. Hi Sam. Anything new on it?'

Sam perched on the edge of the desk. 'No, we tried again today, it's still just no comment through his lawyers. No denial. There's nothing new on the story.'

'And guys, he isn't my mate.'

'Doesn't he come to your big summer party?'

'Hell, who doesn't?'

'Well, we don't,' said Sam.

'If you fellas came nobody else would.'

They exchanged a look, both imagining their owner, Carson Lomax, padding round the deck of his yacht with a cigar in one hand and the photos in the other, probably in similar shorts. Given his wealth, the *Hic Salta* was fairly modest at two hundred odd feet. As owners went he was fine, but he wasn't a newspaper man at heart. He was interested, helped when he could, but Sam reckoned most of the time he was just doing what he thought Rupert Murdoch would do.

'Anyway, there's more at stake than any friendship I might have. What's your intro? I haven't got that.'

Sam picked up the layout – 'MARRIED Tory Peer Lord Nigel Burke can today be exposed as a sleazy love-rat who took part in a tryst with a pair of stunning Ukrainian women a THIRD his

age. As our shocking exclusive photos reveal, the 61-year-old dad of three was caught red-handed romping with two girls in their TWENTIES in a Black Sea love nest – behind the back of his loyal wife SARAH.

‘Love it,’ said Lomax. ‘What’s the headline?’

Frank said it as if he was announcing a royal birth. ‘It’s RASPBERRY NIPPLED.’

‘What?’

‘Raspberry Ripple. It’s ice cream,’ said Sam, with no enthusiasm.

‘I can’t see any ice cream.’

‘He’s giving her a raspberry,’ said Frank, looking at Sam for support, not getting it, and giving him a thumbs down.

‘In what I’m looking at he’s giving her a beer.’

‘It’s an English expression, blowing a raspberry.’

‘Caroline, you have to listen to this, Frank’s telling me that in England you blow raspberries.’

Sam suppressed a laugh, knowing that Caroline wouldn’t.

‘Oh, she says you do.’

Frank didn’t want to give in. ‘It’s cockney rhyming slang, ripple nipple. As in she’s got great raspberries. Which they have.’

‘Stay there, Carson,’ said Sam, putting Lomax on hold to talk to Frank. ‘Actually that’s wrong. Raspberry ripple is a cripple, not nipple... you berk.’

Frank went back, ‘We also like YOU BURKE.’

‘That even I get. Your choice of course. By the way, best photos we’ve had for ages – collector’s items, like that German guy.’

‘Helmut Newton,’ said Sam.

‘That’s the guy. What else you got?’

‘An eight page pull out on Scottish devolution.’

‘Very funny, Sam. Birds and soccer then. This guy Sánchez really bite somebody?’

‘Suarez. Oh yes. You supporting USA?’

‘Hell no. Canadians don’t do that, it’d be like you guys supporting the Welsh. OK, and how’s your new boss doing?’

‘Fine, good, great’ said Frank, looking at Sam and shrugging as if to say, ‘What am I supposed to say?’

‘Listen guys, got to go, you know what’s at stake, this is huge. Hold on.’

They could hear Lomax having some sort of discussion in the background. He came back on, ‘Sam, Caroline says are you at the usual place later?’

‘I will be. So you OK with it?’

‘Guys, you two run the paper, you know I never make those calls, that’s why I pay you the big bucks.’

Frank hung up and said, ‘Thanks for that.’

‘Come on, for years we worked for a chinless wonder trapped in the past, then you moaned about the aggressive venture capitalists, and now we’ve got a fairly laid back billionaire who basically lets us get on with it.’

‘I know, I know. And I guess you can’t dislike somebody who makes your soulmate Caroline happy.’

‘True. But we have now got the boy wonder,’ said Sam, pointing at the ceiling.

‘One year making tea at the *Calgary Herald*, and he thinks he’s Citizen Kane.’

‘Anyway, what are we supposed to say to him? Carson, your son Jay’s an irritating little shit and when he’s not playing golf or out on the pull he’s interfering, and trying to show he’s in charge, while we put the paper to bed, yet again?’

‘It’s a small price to pay.’

Frank went out and asked Mary to fetch the new girl.

Mary gave him a filthy look. ‘She does have a name.’

‘Sorry.’

She waited.

‘Remind me.’

‘It’s Justine. Walker. Try and remember.’

Sam looked at it all again. There really was a lot at stake here. For weeks they’d been running on empty. BGT, Bieber, Plebgate, lizard-face Farage, the World Cup, Murray mania, endless

muslim scaremongering, royal babies. The irony was that the real political significance of nailing Burke would be lost on their readers. It annoyed him that the so-called serious newspapers would have the field day with the story.

Frank came back and sat on one of the sofas next to Sam, who had his feet up, scrolling through the shots on his laptop of the girls cavorting – maybe frolicking was better – by the pool.

‘He’s right. They are a bit Helmut,’ said Sam.

‘Gary will be flattered by the comparison. How did Boris describe the Olympic beach volleyball girls?’

‘Glistening like wet otters.’

‘Sure it wasn’t beavers?’

‘It wasn’t.’

‘Think that might be lost on our readers anyway,’ said Frank, trying to get some volume on the football.

Sam switched to the website version of the Burke story. ‘What do you think?’

Frank said, ‘I can look at the paper and tell you what’s wrong with it in five seconds. That? I’ve just got no idea, it’s a mystery.’

‘Well, this is the only place that this story will be real news.’

‘Yes, but it’s not a paper, is it?’

Sam looked around at Frank’s time-warp office. Papers piled everywhere – the massive oak desk, the filing cabinets. Frank was old school. He admired his insistence on still coming to work in a suit, usually pinstriped, and a bright silk tie and cufflinks, his last defiant stand against the brave new digital world. Sam looked out into the newsroom where their senior crime writer was working away head to toe in lycra, a fluorescent yellow cycling jacket hanging on his chair, and thought maybe Frank had a point.

‘The paper that drops on the doormat is about seven hours out of date, it might as well be seven days. It’s reviews and previews.’

Frank looked at the web page. ‘Who are all these women I’ve never heard of? Billi Mucklow. Iggy Azalea. Are they real people?’

‘Sure are.’ Sam scrolled down. ‘Look at this.’

‘Christ, that must be Photoshopped.’

‘No, that’s Kim Kardashian. Plan was that her arse would break the internet.’

‘I like her already.’

\*

They’d joined the paper on the same Monday in May 1980, both just twenty. At their Friday induction session the Sports Editor Rhod Boughton asked them to critique that day’s *Sun* preview of the FA Cup Final where West Ham would play Arsenal.

Frank interrupted from the back row, ‘That’s bollocks.’

Boughton said, ‘What? Who said that?’

Sam and everybody else in the room turned to look at Frank.

‘That’s not the team, Devonshire and Pearson will both play.’

Sam tried desperately not to laugh.

‘You don’t know that, son.’

‘Want to bet?’

Boughton, a notorious Welsh Fleet Street drinker and punter, said, ‘Go on then.’

‘If I get the West Ham starting eleven right then I start in sport for you on Monday.’

‘OK, Billy big bollocks, you’re on. But if you’re fucking wrong you’re fired.’

‘You’re on too, Rhod.’

Frank got up, marched to the front, and shook on it. Late the next night Sam found Frank in the pub. ‘That was ballsy. How did you do that?’

‘My cousin’s in the youth team. Trevor Brooking told him, he cleans his boots.’

‘You could have been fired before you were hired.’

‘Exactly. A bet to nothing.’

And that was it, they were mates. And living proof that opposites attract. Sam was drawn to the front page, Frank to the back – though Frank had somehow completed the journey before Sam had even started. Sam took a little longer.



Frank outlasted most of the managers he knew on first name terms and became Sports Editor. From there it was a small step to be Editor twenty years later, helped by Sam telling the then chinless proprietor Viscount Woodbury that he couldn't see anyone else he could work for, and refusing to do it himself.

Sam knew that in theory it was simple now. They were too expensive to fire, and too good at what they did to replace. Sam had steered them clear of phone hacking and all the scandal that went with it. But he found himself increasingly wondering after all this time if this was all they'd ever know or do, or whether they were earning too much to do what they really wanted to, whatever that was. The last time they'd talked about it properly Frank had said, 'Cheer up, you make it sound like we're in the waiting room at Dignitas.'

Sam looked out across the office and something caught his eye. Way across the office, a girl was talking to somebody on magazines, both laughing. Then she turned and started heading their way. He didn't see a single person of either sex she walked past who didn't turn to look. And while she knew it, there wasn't a hint of self-consciousness. She seemed to be feeding off it, weaving through the desks. The way she moved reminded him of someone or something. No, he couldn't place it.

'Who's that?'

Frank looked up. 'Who?'

'Who do you think? The girl who looks like she's lost and looking for the Vogue offices.'

'That's the new girl. Justine, I think.'

'Bloody hell.'

\*

Mary showed her in. Sam took his feet off the table, stood up, and slipped on his shoes.

Frank said 'Sam Plummer, this is Justine....'

She filled the gap, 'Walker.' He couldn't help thinking she

could hold her own with the two girls he'd just been looking at. Then he caught himself as he always did when he looked at a girl who he knew wasn't much older than his daughter.

'Justine's joined the legal team. She's on today,' said Frank.

'I thought Charlie was dealing with this?'

'I've been working for him, he's at a wedding today.'

Sam said, 'Are you new?' knowing she had to be. He would have noticed.

'Yes. I've been seconded, from the group.'

Sam turned to Frank. 'So where's the big white chief?'

'Donald? The Lomax's have got him in Canada, some huge group legal issue.'

'Has he signed off on Burke?'

'He told Charlie to deal with it. I hear he sorted the problem and Lomax told him to go fishing, so you know what Don's like, he'll be in some salmon river in the middle of nowhere.'

Way back when Sam had been in the front line he earned a reputation for being able to read people straight off, particularly women. He couldn't ever remember being wrong. She looked nervous but at the same time confident, determined even, and finally trying hard to look more businesslike than sexy – on that one Sam thought she was failing. Yes, she was in a suit but the skirt was cut just that bit tighter and shorter than most would try. He knew she was a lawyer, but if it had been his birthday he'd still not have been surprised if she'd turned out to be a strippergram. He tried hard not to stare.

They sat down. 'Has there been anything more?' she asked, looking at her notes.

Frank intimidated a lot of people, but Sam liked the way she was cool with him. He said, 'We've had this for nearly two weeks, we can't wait any longer. Burke's had his chance.'

Mary was now semaphoring and it was enough to get Frank out of the room.

Sam carried on, 'Not really. Been trying for a good follow up for next week, but it's a bit thin, no ex-boyfriends or pimps for the girls,

they've never left Ukraine, I expect, and he's snow white – but that's why it's a good story. We do have more good pictures.'

'The one with the ice cubes is great,' she said with a straight face. He found the way she maintained eye contact interesting, almost unnerving.

'Isn't it likely somebody else he's slept with will come to us for a kiss and tell?' He was impressed she'd made an effort to understand the business.

'True. Our man on the ground, Damir, is still out in Odessa, babysitting the housekeeper. She's key. We've got her affidavit – saw all of it, him in bed with the two of them, cleared up the condoms. We paid her. More than she'd earn in a year.'

'Where is she now?'

'He's got her in a hotel, apparently she wants to go back to Kiev. It's one of those stories that unfolds very quickly – sometimes they take months – but it's watertight.'

'So what is the most likely follow up?'

'Burke will speak to somebody after this breaks. I'd like it to be us, but that's unlikely now. He'll use somebody, a fixer.'

'Like Max Clifford?'

'If he wasn't in jail, yes. What we can do is find the two girls – we've got a head start, and they'll be good value. Get the gory details, if we're lucky they took pictures.'

She smiled and said, 'Everybody seems to these days.'

He let that go. 'Burke has a huge amount of public support. All those years on TV, everybody likes him, sort of Michael Palin meets Jon Snow. But fatter.'

'But you don't.'

'Like him? No, we all hate him. What he's proposing, more regulation, is a disaster.'

She picked up the draft pages. 'That doesn't seem to be in here.'

'Our readers want sleaze, not politics.'

'So basically you're doing the heavy lifting for the broadsheets?'

She was impressing him more now than when she'd sashayed across the newsroom floor as if she was in a shampoo commercial.

'You don't know for a fact that he's actually had penetrative sex with either or both of them though, do you?'

She looked him in the eye as she said it, then crossed her legs. Sam was sure he blushed. She seemed awfully sure of herself.

'We don't actually say bonk or shag. All we say is "love rat, love triangle, unfaithful, two-timing, usual stuff."

'If three in a bed is true, three-timing even. Well, he probably just wants a show, doesn't he? He is sixty-one after all.'

He let that go, too. 'Video is the best, but stuff like Colin Farrell and Paris Hilton ends up on line. And you get sued – and we don't often get pictures of actual sex acts, unless it's a honeytrap or blackmail – or you get very lucky with CCTV.'

He couldn't help hoping the Lomaxes would keep Donald waist-deep salmon fishing a bit longer. Don didn't come to meetings in Louboutins. Justine gave the impression she wouldn't be intimidated easily, not by men anyway. Frank had once said, 'Why have you got this pathetic weakness for strong intelligent women?'

Sam had said, 'Sorry, how would that be a weakness?'

She carried on. 'Have you seen the Tulisa video?'

'I have. Crazy. And it was the guy who took that.'

'That was fairly obvious. Doesn't justify what they did to her.'

'Mazher? That was another story, but I agree. Look, the media coverage of the last year or so paints us all as monsters, we're not. There are a lot of good people in our business.'

'Well, considering you write it, you get a pretty bad press.'

'If you only read the *Guardian* and *Private Eye*, that's true.'

'So where do you draw the line?'

'Well, I have some rules, but that comes down to values, judgement.'

'I'd like to hear the rules some time.'

Sam thought that was a toss-up between genuine interest, patronising him, or just taking the piss. He quite liked it.

And he hated being compared with Mazher Mahmood. The

Fake Sheikh had carried on at the *Sun* where he left off on the *News of the World*. As far as Sam was concerned, claiming a story was in the public interest simply didn't always wash. And he knew right now at the Old Bailey a judge was hopefully agreeing. Ironically, they just weren't allowed to write about it.

She said, 'So back to Burke. Why not just deny it, rather than just say "no comment"?'

'Because it's true, why else? You with us next week?' He hoped she was.

'Yes, I was seconded for a couple of months. I'm on this group fast-track programme.'

'Enjoying it?'

'Yes, very lively, rather fun. If you need to contact me here's my card.' She slid it across the table. As she leant forward he tried not to look down her shirt. 'My mobile's on all the time. Do you need help on the follow-up?'

He ran his thumb across the card. 'Hope so, we need a good one.'

'What will the Government do?'

'Drop him like a hot potato. Another really daft appointment.'

He thought they were done but she went over to the wall behind Frank's desk and said, 'So will this one go up there?'

He looked at the framed front pages, four rows of six, that covered nearly the whole wall.

'The Wall of Shame? Sure.'

'All yours?'

'All since Frank and I ran things, so about fifteen years' worth.'

She looked at them all, noticing how the masthead had subtly changed over the years, the acres of flesh and screaming headlines. SHAME was the most common word, closely followed by DRUGS and SEX.

'Will you start another row?'

'No, we keep it at twenty-four. Somebody will go. Probably the Hamiltons, fed up with them.'

'Which are your favourites?'

'I like the real ones. Politics is fun, Paddy Pantsdown, John Major. Mandelson, I loved doing him.'

'Not the showbiz?'

'The Hugh Grant one was good. Prescott, bought that off Max Clifford. We all called him Max Factor.'

'Why?'

'The make-up artist.'

She laughed. 'Any entrapment up there?'

Sam scanned them. 'No. Look, I've done it but I'm not a big fan.'

'Why not?'

'Well, if you get a hooker to tell some B-lister in a nightclub it's £500 for a quickie and you can snort coke off my tits and he goes for it, fine. But you can't say you'll give somebody a few million for a bit part in a movie, then badger them for sex and to score some drugs that you then supply.'

'Still naive to fall for it.'

'Staggering, but people do. And I simply don't believe it's real journalism. We're supposed to report stories, not create them.'

She stood looking up at them, with her back to him. The shirt was white, and looked new, cut narrow at the waist. The skirt could not have been a better fit. She was reading all the short punchy headlines, the photographs with acres of flesh. 'Dominant theme really.'

He was looking at her legs, not the stories. 'You can't have Watergate every week.'

She turned back. 'Do you put "gate" on everything now?'

'If we wrote Watergate now, our readers would think it actually was a story about water.'

She picked up the layout from Frank's desk, looking at the three pages. He went over and stood next to her.

'We call that a 1-4-5.'

'What's that?'

'Classic format, front page splash, double page spread on four and five.'

'Are you really allowed to put nipples on a front page?'

‘No, we’d blank them out or cover them with text, that’s easy. There’s loads we can use though.’

‘But you can show them inside?’

‘Try not to, but in this case it’s justified, so yes.’

She put it back down. ‘With this story, these two Ukrainian girls look amazing, but isn’t it just stereotypical to talk about them as bimbos? I read the notes – they seem pretty hard-working and well educated.’

Sam really was surprised and impressed that she’d read all the research behind the story. He sat down in Frank’s chair.

‘We don’t call them bimbos. Nobody’s used that word for a couple of years.’

‘You know what I’m saying, sex objects.’

‘I know one of them’s at university, but then so’s every girl in Ukraine, eying a way out, flirting with the escape committee, trading favours for a visa if they’re good, and a black Amex if they’re bad. They learn French and English so they can do the summer circuit in Monaco and winter in Courchevel.’

As she sat on the edge of the desk and looked down at him, he thought if she turned up in either place she could start a turf war.

‘That’s just cynical.’

She was right but he said, ‘Unless incentivised, beautiful young women tend not to go to bed with middle-aged men.’

‘If you say so.’

Before Sam had a chance to respond, Frank strode back in.

‘How are you two getting along?’

‘Emily Pankhurst is ahead on points.’

Justine laughed and stood up. ‘Sam’s been very helpful, yes. What would you like me to do?’

‘You’ve not done much of this before?’

‘A little in the group but to be honest we don’t get many political sex scandals at *Auto Trader*.’

‘Don’t worry, we’ve done this a thousand times. It’s just process. You’ll need to stay until it’s ready to go. Keep your phone on if you go out.’

Sam said, 'On-line is the issue. Once we put it up, it's out there. All over the world there are so-called journalists and all they do is look at social media and recycle it.'

'It's a joke,' said Frank.

'So what we often do, and we'll do tonight, is spoof the first edition with something else – that stops other papers getting it in their first editions. Frank, what are we using?'

'Nurses or Suarez.' Frank held up the layout, turning serious. 'Do you know why this is a great story, not just good, but great?'

She thought about it. 'Major political figure, sort of. Happily married, we think, or thought. Ukraine. Sex. Drugs. Exclusive?'

Frank signalled for Mary to come in, and he held up the front page mock-up. 'Mary Cheetham, your specialist subject is tabloid journalism. Your time starts now. What makes this a great story?'

'It's "c", Chris. The tits in focus. All of them.'

'Final answer?'

'Final answer.'

'You are funny, Mary, don't humour him,' said Sam.

She carried on, 'It's because Lord bloody Nigel Burke is the architect of the proposed bloody daft Tory media reforms, and for some bizarre reason Cameron and his cronies listen to him. But now it's another huge error of judgement, like Andy Coulson. If we nail him you two'll never have to buy another drink in Fleet Street or Wapping.'

'You're wasted out there, Mary, wasted.'

Justine said, 'Is that really what this is all about?'

Sam was on his feet, wanting it to finish on the right note. 'Yes, but not for our readers. They've mostly got double digit IQs and the attention span of Russell Brand. Both answers are actually right. If we ran that story with no pictures, you wouldn't believe it. It's like the Fergie toe-sucking, you just couldn't picture it yourself. It wouldn't have any credibility.'

'Anyway,' said Frank in closing, dropping the layout on his desk, 'you get Sam's point: it's irrefutable, the camera never lies.'



'Clearly,' said Justine, following Mary, closing the door on her way out.

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Frank was looking at the story again. 'THREE IN A BED is a bit of a cliché, when did we last use it?'

Sam had to think. 'Couple of years ago, that darts player and the women, wasn't one a traffic warden? Or did we go with double top? Or double yellow?'

Frank leaned back. 'OK. Beautiful girl, that Justine.'

'One ugly flaw, sadly.'

'Really?' Frank seemed surprised.

'She was wearing an engagement ring.'

'Ah. Well, that never stopped you.'

'That's wedding rings.'