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Too Close for Comfort

Written by Clare Dowling

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Too Close
for
Comfort

CLARE
DOWLING

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Prologue

26 August 1991

Dear Ali,

Have you lost your mind?

Please, please say that this is just some stupid joke. Please say that you were drunk, and it seemed like a great idea to go ringing Dad up – reverse charge too; he was ripping – and tell him that you’re not coming home. He was in the middle of his dinner. His birthday dinner. Yes. Even Liam remembered, and got him one of those desk jobbies – you know the ones, where you get to drop a little silver ball against a row of other silver balls, and watch the domino effect? Dad was the happiest we’d ever seen him. Until the phone rang, that is.

Mam’s been crying all day. Dad can’t even speak. I know this isn’t what you want to hear. But we all just want you

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home. Me especially. It's been dead around here all summer without you. Worse than dead. Putrefying.

I'm going to keep this short, for maximum impact. Also, I know for a fact that you skip over bits in my longer letters, because you never once mentioned my Clairrol disaster.

PLEASE, COME HOME.

A very shocked Emma xx

PS. Don't go ballistic. But Mam asked me out of the side of her mouth if you wanted to 'tell her anything'.

31 August 1991

Emma –

Assure Mam that absolutely everybody over here practises safe sex, including me. Well, obviously don't tell her that. Tell her I haven't had sex since I arrived. Out of her womb, that is. Do not at any point mention Troy to her.

Has Dad calmed down at all? I really wanted to speak to you on the phone the other night but he wouldn't let me. He said that he'd wasted enough money on a college course for an ingrate degenerate (steady on, Dad!) without having to foot a massive telephone bill too. But honestly, at what point in my childhood did he actually think I would make a good dental hygienist?? He's a lovely man, and he was very kind to us when we were growing up, but he's completely delusional. You know you agree.

I didn't plan this whole thing. I just want you to know that. Otherwise I'd have brought my hairdryer out with me in June. Last weekend I dragged out that massive suitcase Mam made me bring, and started packing to go home and

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everything. I even went and had my final turkey sub in the deli down the road (six hundred calories each!!! Mental. I sent on those things to Mam, by the way. Could you please watch her the first few times to make sure she doesn't overdose? You know the way she needs glasses, only she won't admit it). But then I started thinking about college, and going back to sit in that awful, depressing lecture hall, looking down on Una Brady's roots, and listening to Horse Hannigan droning on about enamel and receding gums and God knows what else, and me usually having had no breakfast, and I just fell into the pits of depression. This wasn't my usual depression. This time I was actually crying and stuff, and having thoughts about 'ending it all'. I honestly think I'd be seriously tempted if I wasn't having such a good time over here.

I can't go back to college, Emma, I just can't. And, please, don't go on about my dyslexia – I think at this point I've got as much mileage out of that as I decently can. If I'm being straight with you, I'm not even sure I *have* dyslexia. I think I'm probably just slightly thick. And no, this is not a cry for help. There's no need to dash off a letter back giving me a massive pep talk about how great I am, if I'd only realise it. Because do you know something? I don't care any more. I've had enough of books. I mean it. I don't even fancy opening a *magazine* any more, that's how bad things are. (Although you would absolutely love the *National Enquirer* over here. Totally scurrilous. Also, curiously fixated with UFOs. Apparently, something like one in ten Americans has seen one. It makes our moving statues look completely normal.)

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While I'm on the subject of college, I'm going to give you some advice (brace yourself). When the time comes to fill out your application form, go off to Auntie Pat up in the mountains for the weekend – she'll put you up if you bring her a bottle of something – and ask her to leave the dogs out to keep Dad away. Then spend some time thinking about what you'd actually like to do, as opposed to what the last three generations of the Kenny family have achieved with the sweat of their brows. (And I'm not belittling it – Dad's very happy there – but a small dental practice in Blanchardstown?) If you haven't a clue, take a year off and work with the children in Calcutta – I think they would really appreciate it – and come back older and wiser. Or don't come back at all, like me. Although that would probably kill Mam and Dad altogether. With me, they kind of expect it. At least, I was the only one of us they ever put that kiddie harness on, even while I was only hanging around the house.

Tell Mam not to worry. Macy's seem to think I'm a productive employee, although I'm pretty sure they're mixing me up with Fiona, and have said they'll keep me on 'off the books'. Troy has heard about two Irish girls who have a room to rent long term in their apartment. Or it could have been that the apartment has only one room. But I've taken it anyway. So tell her I won't be on a street corner selling my wares or anything like that. Although if I had to, at least nobody would recognise me over here. Not like at home, where the first punter would probably be Davey Brennan, or Paddy Sheahan. Mental altogether.

I'm going to go now, because I'm starting to get very

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nostalgic. Apparently this is the constant scourge of the ex-pat, and you just have to grin and bear it. Right now I'm imagining you and me lying on our beds, our hair fanned out on the pillows like we've just tragically died (it was always drowning so there wouldn't be a mark, remember?) and being prayed over by hundreds of distraught people who cannot believe how flipping gorgeous we are, even in full rigor mortis, and I swear, I'm going to cry at any minute.

Keep my side of the room warm! And do not use my bed as a handy wardrobe for things you can't be bothered to hang up. I'll be coming back for a visit at some stage, you know, and will need somewhere to lay my weary head, not to mention that fabulous pair of leather trousers I got for half nothing due to my staff discount in Macy's.

Love and hugs!

Ali xxx

PS. Did Dad say anything about the birthday present I sent him? You might have reminded me in time, you lick-arse.

6 September 1991

Dear Ali,

I got your package (next time will you use plain brown wrapping so that I can face the postman). The information leaflet inside is very suspicious. You're supposed to take two at mealtimes, and they bind to the fat in the food, 'thus rendering it unavailable for absorption by the gut'. So far, so good. I'll still be able to fit into my wedding dress on my fiftieth birthday next year, says I. (Sophia Loren eat

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your heart out!) But then, turn over the page. There, in much *smaller* print, it tells you that they're only to be used as part of a calorie-controlled diet, and that, as in any weight-loss programme, you should *exercise* and consume a *low-fat diet*.

How much did you pay for these pills? Because I think we might have been sold a pup. But just as a test, I took two at lunchtime, and then ate a large toasted cheese and ham sandwich, followed by a couple of bourbon creams. Will keep you posted!

I have to go. Here's your father home. To be honest, it's very hard living with him since you threw your education back in his face, and I have to placate him constantly. If I could eat a few bars of chocolate and have the calories rendered unavailable for absorption by my gut it'd be a great bloody help.

That was Mam dictating the above, by the way. She feels she can't write to you separately, or it would be betraying Dad. He's insisting they have to show a strong, united front, like the time they found that six-pack of Heineken in the airing cupboard. And sorry about having to refuse your phone call on Friday, too (though it might help a bit if you didn't always try to reverse the charges). Dad was standing over me like some angel of death, his hand hovering near the wall plug. His genius plan is that if none of us has any contact with you, then you'll 'come to your senses'. The blank postcard you got of the spring lambs gambolling around lush, Irish fields is all part of the offensive too, by the way. The next one is going to be of the Cliffs of Moher.

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He's quite excited about it. Liam said he'd be better off sending one with a picture of Dublin's most popular pubs. Liam says hello, by the way. At least I think it was hello. You know the way he never really moves his mouth when he speaks. Anyway, I saw Dad come home yesterday with packets of Tayto crisps and a box of Barry's Tea, so don't be surprised if you get those in the post too.

I'd better tell you about Mam now. I know she's on about diet pills and pretending everything is fine, but underneath it she thinks that you're impressionable and have fallen in with the wrong crowd. That's what she told Auntie Alice on the phone, anyway, when Dad had gone to work and she could have a good cry over the whole thing without him looking for the nearest window to throw himself out of – you know what he's like around crying women. Anyway, Auntie Alice suggested that Mam talk to the parents of the other girls who went out with you in June, in case it was some kind of collective madness, and you'd *all* fallen in with the wrong crowd, probably a street gang or something. This cheered Mam up greatly, and she was beginning to make plans for all the fathers to go over en masse and drag the lot of you back by the hairs of your heads. Except, of course, that when she rang the other parents, she found out that their lovely, sensible, sane daughters were all coming home next Friday as planned, all ready to go back to dentistry/law/nursing after a lovely summer away experiencing a different culture. That it's only you.

'I'm ringing her this minute,' she told Dad with great determination. 'I don't care any more about your stupid plan to freeze her out. She won't even have noticed anyway.'

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‘Unhand that phone, Madam,’ he shouted back. (We’re doing *King Lear* in school at the moment. The whole class is going around saying to each other, ‘I do declare I fancy a Mars bar from the royal tuck shop, noble sir.’ Well, we think it’s funny. But then again we’re a whole two years younger than you, and so are much more immature.)

Anyway, there was a bit of a tussle over the phone, and Liam had to threaten them with a bucket of cold water unless they broke it up. Not that there was any danger of him getting off his behind. You can actually see the indentation in the couch from where he sits watching MTV all weekend. Dad keeps trying to see the news, but Liam always has the remote control, and Dad has to wait until Liam goes out to the loo to agonise over his spots before he can scramble to turn it over. Then Mam comes in and starts giving out that the television is on twenty-four hours a day, and that nobody speaks to each other any more, or at least no more than strictly necessary. She finishes up by saying that it was no wonder that you upped and left, and that if she had her own money (which she does, she just doesn’t want anyone to know about it), she’d be right there after you. This is just an idle threat, of course, but it’s enough to bring everybody down, and make us even more discontented with our little corner of the earth here in Dublin.

So, for the sake of us all, can you get some kind of coded message to her about the street gang thing? Just to cheer her up. It’s weird to see her and Dad fighting all the time. I can’t even go down the town any more to escape them because I have to study. We got the whole ‘you only get one lick of the lollipop’ speech from Sister Joan on Tuesday.

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She clearly doesn't have a clue about our class. Emily Hunt went to *grind school* during the summer – can you believe it? We don't even know where she found one. And Alison is already studying until eleven o'clock every night; she doesn't even break off for *Baywatch*. It's Valium Sister Joan should be handing out, not whipping us up into a further frenzy. I'm trying not to worry too much about the whole college applications thing yet. I'm just going to keep studying like a lunatic and hope that my life's path suddenly becomes clear the night before I have to fill the blooming thing in.

Can I ask something? If you hate your course so much, why not just jack it in? Why not change to one you *do* like? Is this a really stupid question? Dad will come to terms with it in time. In fact, he's already started grooming Liam; leaving dental moulds lying casually around the place, that kind of thing. Liam keeps looking at him suspiciously, and making his usual mutterings: 'No way . . . not going to . . . fucking hell . . . my life is terrible . . . leave me alone . . . hate everybody.' Mam says he must be going through the longest period of teenage angst in history. Then she says to Dad, thinking no one was listening, 'Thank God we've got one normal one.' And they both turn to look at me!

You can stop laughing. I need to make one thing crystal clear right now: there's no way I'm staying around to look after them in their old age. I saw the look in their eye. We either club together to put them in a nursing home, or else one of us is going to have to kill them.

I'd better go and post this before Dad comes home from

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work and sees me. Hopefully he'll come to his senses in time. I know I've been poking fun at him, but he's actually very upset about the whole thing. I know this because I caught him with one of the photo albums out the other night, and he was looking at a baby picture of you. God, you were fat.

Oh, would you not change your mind and come home? We'll all do our best to be happy and exciting and make you glad you did. Well, Dad will probably be the same, but Mam and I will try. Promise!

Love & hugs,
Emma xxx

PS. Dad hasn't put on the stetson yet. I don't think he's sure if it's a joke or if he's actually meant to wear it. Neither are we.

11 September 1991

Hi Emma,

Fiona's gone home! And Anne-Marie and Jo! Am distraught and upset! And, it has to be admitted, slightly squiffy. (Are you getting these letters, or is Dad ripping them up upon arrival? I hope he's not reading them first. Dad, you're despicable. And yes, the stetson was a cruel, cruel joke.)

I went to the airport earlier to see the girls off. Fiona was crying her eyes out, mostly because of Kyle (Texan, six foot two 9.7 on the Richter scale) who hadn't even shown up to say goodbye. Then didn't Anne-Marie start up about her job in Maud's Ice Cream Parlour, and the Puerto Ricans. (They all used to insult each other at work to pass

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the time – taking off each other’s accent, that kind of thing, and telling each other to feck off back to where they came from. It was vicious, but great fun.) I had to ease them all to the departures gates and hand out tissues, thinking, hang on, shouldn’t *they* be comforting *me*? Still, such is the cross I have to bear to remain in the land of sunshine and cheesy popcorn. Yum. Seriously, though, it was awful once they’d gone. I hadn’t really thought about it before, but there I was, in Logan Airport, knowing absolutely nobody. Not even Troy any more. That’s a long story, not worth repeating, and certainly not if Dad is intercepting these letters – I wouldn’t want to be the cause of any kind of cardiac incident. Anyway, I burst into tears too, big eejit that I was, right there in the airport. It wasn’t like at home, where ten people would be rushing forward to ask you where you’d hurt yourself. Here, everybody just walked around me in a wide circle, looking at me like I was mentally unstable, and that’s when I thought: we’re not in Kansas now.

You know the way I’ve always really wanted to say that line? If you want to know, it wasn’t all that satisfying in the end.

Guess who walks by then. Nobody other than Fiona’s fella, Kyle. He’d run all the way from the car park to the departure gates, and he was devastated to learn that he’d missed Fiona by seconds. We both stood there, quiet as anything, but we couldn’t even hear her bawling any more. I knew they’d probably headed straight for the bar on the other side for a few scoops and probably a basket of chips, but I didn’t say that to Kyle in case he thought Fiona didn’t care.

Finally he seemed to realise that I was completely on

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my own. ‘Y’ all look like you could do with a coffee,’ he said at last (a terrible crutch, the accent, but he seems to bear it bravely enough). So we went for one, and he gave me loads of tips on how to manage without a social security number, and he told me where all the expats drink. All good, useful information, and I really wish I’d written it down at the time. Then he was really sweet and dropped me off at the new apartment on his way home.

I’m sitting on my new bed right now. I use the term ‘bed’ loosely. There’s no furniture here either, so it’s sleeping bags again. The girls seem OK, but Eileen got really excited because I ate one of her cheese slices this evening. We all have a shelf in the fridge each and apparently aren’t allowed to share anything. This is a bit of a problem for me as I don’t get paid until Friday. And neither of them has mentioned yet the huge hole behind the sink in the bathroom, or the little bowl of pellets beside it . . . Any ideas??

I don’t suppose there’s any point in telling you to take it easy on the study front. You’re old enough at this stage to recognise your obsessive-compulsive streak, and your insane desire to make up for my and Liam’s shortcomings (joke! joke!). If you look in the top of my side of the wardrobe, you’ll find a bundle of study notes on *King Lear* that I was saving for you. In it is everything you ever wanted to know about the poxy man, including exam papers going right back to 1972, and loads of sample answers. You’ll hardly even need to read the play at all. I certainly didn’t.

Write back, won’t you? Please? Mam rebelled yesterday and made a sneaky phone call to me just before I left the

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old apartment. It was great to hear her voice, even if she spent most of the conversation advising me that a cooked chicken can last a whole week, if properly covered. And she wants more pills. She must be throwing them back like Smarties. The girls in work are on new ones. Apparently you can eat what you want, so that'll cheer her up. I'll send a batch on.

I'd better go. The girls have got in a crate of Bud Light to welcome me to the apartment – apparently we're allowed to share alcohol – but we're only halfway through it so have got some serious work to do. Also, am feeling *very* tipsy now.

Love Ali xxx

PS. A moral dilemma – would it be wrong to go out for a drink with Kyle? Just as friends, seeing as I haven't any left over here now. I haven't told him yes yet. Would Fiona take it The Wrong Way?

20 September 1991

Dear Ali,

Look, Dad was only trying to frighten you. I heard the whole thing in my bedroom. There are hundreds of thousands of illegal aliens in America. There's absolutely no reason why they should specifically target you, and 'hunt you down like an animal'. And they certainly wouldn't throw you in a maximum-security gaol to be carved up by the inmates. Mam told him that she thought the whole thing was very low of him. Now they're not talking. The flipping drama.

I think he's just in a bad mood because Mrs Meagher

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didn't go to him for Jenny's braces – you know Jenny, she's the one with teeth like Cilla Black's. Even Dad said that, and he's always really prim and proper about not commenting on people's teeth in public. Anyway, Mrs Meagher took Jenny to Jim Hegarty (I know, the butcher) instead. I think your phone call might have come in the middle of a rant Dad was enjoying about all the low-down, nasty, ungrateful people in his life. Also, it probably wasn't the best timing on your part to ask for a loan. I think he just flipped and thought that if he put the frighteners on you, then you'd pack up and come home.

Anyway, don't worry about it.

Love Emma xxx

11 October 1991

Dear Ali,

OK, you've made your point. And nobody can blame you for playing Dad at his own game. But at least think of poor Mam. She's in a terrible state. Every time the phone rings she runs to it like a crazy woman, and shouts into it, anguished, 'Is that you, my precious baby?' But it's nearly always Auntie Alice or someone from Dad's work, and we're having to try to get there before her now to avoid any further embarrassment.

It's been three weeks now without a word from you. Dad got on to the Embassy yesterday. They were very helpful until they realised that you weren't really missing at all, that the two of you had just had a row and that you were refusing to contact anybody. He was hoping that they could track you down at Macy's, or else send a 'cop' around

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to your apartment. They told him he'd been watching too much *Hill Street Blues*, and that he should chill out and give you some space. He's been going around the place very quiet and sad-looking since. I think it's pretty genuine.

Mam has started to lie on your bed for hours on end, sniffing your pillow, only I explained to her that it was difficult for me to get any studying done, what with all the noise, and so she only does it now during school hours. I don't want to steal your thunder or anything, but unless you want me to flunk my exams, would you ever cop on and give us all a ring?

Your (patient, sort of) sister

Emma

25 October 1991

Dear Ali,

This isn't even funny any more.

Emma x

29 October 1991

Dear Emma,

Just in case I didn't sound urgent enough on the phone earlier, I'm following it up with a plea to put a rocket under Dad. Things are desperate here. We think we have it cornered in the kitchen, but we're all so petrified that we're taking it in turns to stay awake and watch over the other two in case our toes get chewed off in our sleep.

Oh, I wish I was at home in my own bed, across from you. This is horrible.

Ali xx

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2 November 1991

Dear Emma,

Thank you, thank you, *thank you*. And to Dad. Whatever else I say about him, he always comes through in a crisis. I've sent him a pair of Levi's as a thank-you. I honestly think he would look good in them.

We're all slowly getting over the fright of things here. It was Eileen who was in the bath, shaving her legs, when it came out from under the sink. It wasn't even afraid, she said, just kind of lounged there while she screamed her lungs out. It was the size of a small cat. I am not exaggerating. American rats are bigger built than the ones back home. This lad had clearly been coming out to stuff himself with Eileen's bread and crackers every night in the kitchen, and all the time she'd been blaming me. Anyway, the sight of Eileen trying to squeeze out the bathroom window, buck naked, must have unsettled him because he eventually turned and headed for the living room, where me and June were trying to glue together some fake ID so that we could get into the bars over here. June actually fainted. I couldn't believe it. She just passed out cold and cracked her head on the mantelpiece, and had to go into work the next day with a chipped tooth and a big bandage wrapped around her head (she's an assistant at a beauty counter).

I was pretty scared but managed to hold on to my nerve, and draw upon my experience of finding a ferret in our prefab in school that time. I threw empty beer cans at him until he retreated to the kitchen – reluctantly, I might add, and June said he was hissing and spitting – and then we

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slammed the door on him and barricaded him in with a chair. 'All our food is in there,' Eileen raged. She meant hers, because June and I had only a box of cereal between us. She was still naked at this point. Anyway, I left the two of them armed with bottles of Mr Muscle in case he got out, and I went out to a phone box to get hold of the landlord. It just rang out, like usual. We think at this point he's probably emigrated because Eileen says he hasn't collected the rent in two months. Which is great, as we really need a television, and so we're going to spend the money on that instead, and a set of speakers as we're having a party next weekend. So all's well that ends well, really, on that front.

Will you tell Dad thanks again? We tried to get June's dad to help first, but he kept telling us to try and trap it in a wellie. As if any of us owned a pair of wellies. Eileen said we should call Pest-O-Kill ourselves, and wait until they'd trapped the rat before breaking the news that we didn't have the money to pay them. As she said, what were they going to do, *release* the thing? But then June started to look all watery again, and that's when I made the decision to swallow my pride and give Dad an opportunity to make amends for his vile threats. Anyway, Pest-O-Kill wouldn't come until someone had paid by credit card up front.

Tell him we'll pay him back, every cent. Obviously it'll have to be in instalments. I'm enclosing twenty dollars. He might want to wait until the exchange rate is a bit better before lodging it.

I'm really glad we're all speaking again. Tell Mam I'll give her a phone number as soon as we get a line installed.

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This is harder than you might think, because none of us has a social security number and they're really picky about things like that. But Eileen has some kind of plan. I'm not sure it's entirely legal, but anyway . . .

I keep thinking about the rat. I wish we'd given the wellie thing a go first before calling in the exterminators, but Eileen says I'm just soft.

Thanks again!

Love Ali xxxxx

2 December 1991

Dear Ali,

I've sent you a plum pudding in the post. I put it in a Roses tin with lots of foil around it and Styrofoam chips. Emma says it'll probably set off alarms in the post office!

We're still hoping you'll make it home for Christmas. But obviously not if you have to crawl back in on your belly over the Canadian border under cover of darkness. That image has stayed with me, by the way. The thing I want to know is, have you not had your fill of that place yet? I'm not trying to put pressure on you, darling. But your bed is still here for you, and I could keep an eye out for a job for you here, just until you get back on your feet. A nice little number in Dunnes Stores maybe . . . ? I'm not without contacts, you know.

All right, look, I know it's depressing here. The country is a shambles. Don't get me started. Your dad says that people are now leaving it up to fourteen months between their annual checkups, in the hopes of saving money on a visit further down the line. And three or four of the neighbours

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have organised ‘hair salon’ nights at each other’s houses – they dye each other’s hair to cut down on hairdressing bills. I haven’t signed up yet because they’re all looking a bit orange, if you know what I mean. Anyway, one of them made a crack along the lines that we must be loaded, what with the price your dad charges for a simple filling. Well, I wasn’t having that. I broke down the cost of it for her, and told her that hers were more expensive because she has such a big mouth. The look on her face! I’m laughing now even thinking about it.

But enough of all that. I need you to have a word with Emma about all the studying she’s doing. She’s so focused and determined, completely unlike the rest of us. Sometimes I wish she’d sneak out and find an unsuitable boyfriend, or take up drinking. At least we have some experience of *that*. Often when I look at her I get the impression that she has this whole business of life sussed, and it’s quite unnerving for your father and me. She doesn’t even openly disrespect us, although it’s not as if she hasn’t been set an example by you and Liam.

‘Come out to the cinema with us,’ we tried to encourage her the other night. There was some mindless action movie on that other, normal children enjoyed. ‘I’d love to,’ she said – sincerely – ‘but I have to do this essay on what role I think the media has in creating the news, as opposed to simply communicating it.’

‘What?’ said Noel. With a really dim expression on his face, I have to say.

‘It’s all right,’ she said. ‘I don’t understand it either.’ But she did! She was just being nice! Spraying our feelings.

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Let's face it; she's smarter than the rest of rolled into one, unless Liam is going to stun us all yet.

My main worry is that she's aiming for medicine, or law. Not that she would dream of letting us in on any future plans she might have for herself. But I'm just thinking, the *points* she'd need. Clever and all as she is, supposing she misses out by a fraction? What then? Knowing her, she'd doggedly repeat those exams over and over until she achieves what she wants, and frankly I don't think the rest of us are up to it. Anyway, she might listen to you. At this end, we're just not sure where we've gone *right* with her.

By the way, what's in those last diet pills you sent me? Don't get me wrong – I feel marvellous on them. Much better than the old ones. I have so much energy that I could Hoover the house all day long! In fact, I feel a bit jittery if I don't. And the weight is falling off. No, the only hiccup is that I find it hard to sleep at night – I'm writing this at three in the morning – and my heart goes like the clappers sometimes, like I was on speed or something. Anyway, I'm just wondering.

Much love,
Mam

2 February 1992

Dear Everybody,

I know this is going to come as a bit of a shock. But I'm getting married. So at least now you won't have to worry about me any more. Kyle is very, very nice, and he's a Christian, Mam, which I know is not the same as a Catholic, but it's close enough. Even though we haven't

Too Close for Comfort

known each other very long, I want to stress that we are both very happy about this. So are his parents. His family has a plastic packaging business in Texas and we're flying down so I can meet everybody over the weekend. We're going to stay in Boston for the moment, as Kyle is studying, but hopefully we'll move to a bigger apartment with a spare room if anybody wants to come over for a visit.

We've decided to get married as soon as possible – we both just want a quiet wedding, with no fuss – so there won't be a chance for you all to make it out in time. But maybe in the summer. Or else we will try to come home in the late autumn so that you can meet him. I'll be legal then, so there won't be any problem. All in all, everything has worked out well for me over here, so I don't want anyone to worry about me. I'm going to give you some time to digest all this, and then I'm going to ring on Saturday so that you can talk to Kyle. He really is very nice.

Lots of love,

Ali