

—D'yeh do the Facebook thing?

—Wha' d'yeh mean?

They were in the pub, in their corner. It wasn't unusual any more, having a pint with his father. In the early evening, before he went home after work. He'd phone, or his da would phone. It wasn't an organised, regular thing.

It had started the day his da got his first mobile. His first call was to Jimmy.

—How's it goin'?

—Da?

—Yeah, me.

—How are yeh?

—Not too bad. I'm after gettin' one o' the mobiles.

—Great.

—I'm usin' it now, like.

—Congratulations.

—Will we go for a pint? To celebrate.

—Grand. Good. Yeah.

Jimmy's da had still been working when he got the phone. But he'd retired a while back.

—There's fuck-all work, he'd told everyone when he'd made the announcement on Stephen's Day, when Jimmy had dragged the kids to his parents' house to collect the presents and kiss their granny.—So I might as well just stop an' call it retirement.

Jimmy's own job was safe – he thought.

—Well, said his da now in the pub.—Facebook. Yeh know it, yeah?

—I do, yeah, said Jimmy.

—What d'you make of it?

—I don't know.

—Yeh don't know?

—No, said Jimmy.—Not really.

—But you've kids.

—I know tha', said Jimmy.—I've four of them.

—Is it the four you have? said his da.—I thought it was three.

—No, said Jimmy.—It's been four for a good while. Ten years, like.

This was what Jimmy liked. It was why he phoned his da every couple of weeks. His da was messing, pretending he didn't know how many grandchildren he had. It was the way he'd always been. A pain in the hole at times but, today, exactly what Jimmy wanted.

—It's Darren has the three, is it? said his da.

His name was Jimmy as well.

—No, said Jimmy, the son.—Darren has two. Far as I know.

Darren was one of Jimmy's brothers.

—Ah now, yeh see but, said Jimmy Sr.—I knew there was somethin'.

He put his pint down.

—She's pregnant.

Fuck, thought Jimmy. Fuck fuck fuck it.

—Is she? he said.—That's brilliant.

—Yeah, said Jimmy Sr.—Darren phoned your mother this mornin' to tell her. She's three months gone.

—Ma is?

—Fuck off. Melanie.

Melanie was Darren's wife – although they'd never got married. His fuckin' *life* partner. They'd been trying for another baby for years. There'd been so many miscarriages, it had become a rule between Jimmy and his da: no more jokes about Melanie's miscarriages. Their other two kids —

—The two that managed to hang on in there.

They'd broken the rule once or twice.

The other two kids were twelve and ten.

—She's well on her way so, Jimmy said now.

—Yeah, said his da.—Fingers crossed.

He sniffed the top of his pint.

—I don't think I could cope with another miscarriage, he said.

He drank.

—Anyway, he said.—Facebook.

—Yeah.

—What is it? Exactly.

—I don't know much about it, said Jimmy.

His da had a laptop at home. He knew how to google. He'd booked flights online. He'd backed a few horses, although he preferred the walk to the bookie's. He'd bought a second-hand book online, about Dublin during the War of Independence. He'd nearly bought an apartment in Turkey but that had been a bit of an accident. He'd thought he was clicking to see inside the place – a tour – but he'd stopped when the laptop asked him for his credit card details. He knew he'd gone wrong or it was a scam. But the point was, his da knew his way around the internet. So Jimmy didn't know why he was pretending to be completely thick.

—Why d'yeh want to know? he asked.

—Ah, for fuck sake, said his da.—Every time I ask a fuckin' question.

—What's wrong with yeh?

—I ask a fuckin' question and some cunt says why d'yeh want to know.

—You're askin' the wrong cunts, said Jimmy.

—Must be.

—Wha' questions?

—Wha'?

—What questions have yeh been askin'?

—Well, said his da.—I asked a fella in Woodie's where the duck-tape was. An', granted, he didn't say why d'yeh want to know. He said, wha' d'yeh want it for. I told him I wanted to fuckin' buy it.

—He just wanted to help.

—That's not the fuckin' point. There was a time when he'd have just said, over there or I haven't a clue. He wouldn't have asked me why I wanted it. That's the problem. Somehow or other he's become an expert on duck-tape. The shops are full of experts. The country's full of fuckin' experts. Tha' haven't a fuckin' clue.

—Facebook.

—Yeah.

—It's a social network.

—What's tha'?

—How come every time I say somethin' some cunt asks me a question?

—Tou-fuckin'-shay, said Jimmy Sr.

—Listen, said Jimmy.—Your phone there. Your mobile.

—Yeah.

—Your contacts. Your friends an' their numbers. Your kids. All the numbers yeh'd want. Facebook's a bit like tha', except with pictures.

—So it's just a list o' people's numbers an' emails?

—No, said Jimmy.—There's more to it than tha'. But that's the start. The foundation of it, I suppose. Friends. You're going for a pint, d'yeh phone the lads to see if they're goin'?

—No point, said Jimmy Sr.—I know the answer.

—Just go with me on this one, Da, said Jimmy.—I'm tryin' to educate yeh.

—Go on.

—You're goin' for a pint, like. An' you want to know if your buddy, Bertie, will be there. D'yeh phone him?

—No, said Jimmy Sr.—Not anny more.

—Yeh text him, yeah?

—Yeah.

—An' he texts back.

—He never fuckin' stops.

His mobile buzzed and crawled an eighth of an inch across the table.

—There's the cunt now.

He picked up the phone and stared at it. He took his reading glasses out of his shirt pocket, put them on and stared at it again.

—Your mother, he said.—She wants milk.

He put the phone down and took off his glasses.

—She used to be able to walk to the shops herself, he said.

—She was very good at it.

—He texts yeh back, said Jimmy.—Yeah, or somethin'. An' you text him. Grand.

—That's righ', said Jimmy Sr.—Tha' sounds like a day in my life.

—Well, that's social networkin', said Jimmy.—More or less. It's like a club but yeh have your own room, for the people yeh want to meet. Except there's no room an' yeh meet no one. Unless yeh want to.

—A club.

—That's the best way to see it.

—Grand.

—Why?

—Why wha'?

Jimmy watched his da look across to the bar, squint, wait, and lift his hand, one finger up.

—Did he see me?

—Think so.

Jimmy Sr was having another pint. He knew Jimmy wasn't.

—Why did yeh ask about Facebook?

—Somethin' Bertie told me, said Jimmy Sr.—Somethin' he heard.

—It's illegal if it's Bertie.

—No, said Jimmy Sr.—It's not. It's fuckin' immoral but.

—You'll have to tell me now.

—I'm goin' to tell yeh. I've every intention of tellin' yeh. Is he workin' on my pint over there?

Jimmy pretended to look across at the bar and the barman he didn't know behind it.

—He is, yeah, he told his da.

—Grand.

—Are yeh goin' blind?

—No. But – no. It's like everythin' else.

Jimmy knew what his da meant and it was a good place to give him his own news. But he couldn't do it. He wasn't ready.

—Bertie, he said.

—Fuckin' Bertie, said his da.—He told me his youngest fella, Gary I think it is. He's about the same age as your Marvin.

—Seventeen.

—Abou' tha', yeah. A year or two older. A little fucker, by all accounts. Annyway, he told Bertie and Bertie told me that he – Gary, like – gets off with older women on Facebook.

—I heard abou' that alrigh'.

—Did yeh?

—I did, yeah.

—Wha' sort of a fuckin' club is tha'?

—A good one, said Jimmy.—If it's what you're into. They're called cougars.

—What are?

—The older women tha' prey on the younger men.

—Jesus, said Jimmy Sr.—Veronica watches tha' one.

—Wha'?

—*Cougar Town*. On the telly. And that's what it's about, is it? I thought it was like *Born Free* or somethin'.

—What's *Born Free*?

—A film, said Jimmy Sr.—Before you were born. One o' those nature things. Africa, lions, a load of shite. Andy Williams sang the song. Where's tha' cunt with my pint?

He was squinting across at the bar again.

—Does he know he's supposed to be bringin' it down? Jimmy asked.

—He should.

—Stay there.

Jimmy went up to the bar, paid for the pint, waited for his change, and brought the pint back to his father.

—Good man.

He waited till Jimmy was sitting again.

—So, he said.—This *Cougar Town* thing is abou' oul' ones chasin' after young lads?

—I think so, said Jimmy.—I've never seen it.

He was lying. He loved it. Courteney Cox still gave him the horn.

—Yeh don't think Ma's up to anythin' like tha', do yeh? he asked.

—This conversation isn't goin' the way I wanted it to, said Jimmy Sr.—No, I don't. She'd tell me.

—Would she?

—No.

—You're safe enough, I'd say, said Jimmy.

—She's seventy-one, for fuck sake.

—That's not old.

—Ah, it is. The cougars, they're late 30s, early 40s.

—You've seen it.

—No, I haven't – fuck off. Just the pictures in the paper. Anyway. This Facebook thing. It's the young lads, Gary an' tha', who're chasin' the older birds.

—The older birds are chasin' them as well. That's what I meant by social networkin'. Are yeh thinkin' of givin' it a go yourself?

—No, I'm not.

He smiled.

—But —

—Because, if you are, said Jimmy.—I have to tell yeh. Most o' the women older than you are actually dead.

—Well, at least I wouldn't have to talk to them. An' just so yeh know.

He sat up, moved his pint an inch.

—What I said earlier. Abou' goin' blind an' tha'. Everythin' deterioratin' when yeh get older.

He waited, made sure Jimmy was paying proper attention.