

## Room 911

'Cabin crew, doors to manual.'

'At last,' sighed Paul as he undid his seatbelt. The two and a half hour flight to Malaga had been a veritable endurance test. Three seats right on the back row of the cabin next to the toilets, the initial climb out of Gatwick had been scarily turbulent, both the pilot and co-pilot were women, the stewards were all emphatically gay, two businessmen (*were they Dutch?*) had spent much of the flight standing in the aisle loudly exchanging their corporate business plans in a most irritating, highly accented English and an obese bald man had snored his way from take-off to landing in the seat directly in front.

*How the hell did he not manage to wake himself up, snoring that loudly?* Paul kept thinking to himself as he deliberately coughed and pushed his knees into the back of the man's seat. In vain.

*Still, at least Jamie has been good,* he consoled himself.

Yes indeed, Jamie, Paul's seven-year-old son, had been the perfect child. He had fallen asleep in the car on the way to Gatwick Airport, and he had been so quietly content during the flight as he played *Angry Birds* on his dad's iPad, eating Pringles and drinking his J2O.

'Have you got everything, Jamie?' asked Maddie as she took her coat and suitcase out of the overhead locker. Jamie nodded, his bright, chocolate-brown eyes reflecting tiny triangles of the white sun that was blazing in through the aeroplane windows.

Maddie had met Paul six months ago in the tube. One morning on the Northern Line they had been pushed tightly up against one another amongst the rush-hour rabble. As she turned her head away to avoid eye contact with him, he was taken aback by the smell of her citrus-woody perfume and the deep sheen of her brown, bobbed hair.

She too was very conscious of Paul: the striking mixture of minty toothpaste and teenage-boy deodorant made it hard for her to ignore him. As the tube came to an abrupt halt at Elephant and Castle, Maddie's curved, slim body pressed for a brief moment intimately against Paul's torso. Maddy frowned with embarrassment, drew away from him and apologised with a tense smile. Paul had not received such trenchant sexual signals from anyone since the death of his wife six months earlier.

This rush-hour encounter had led to an increasingly stable relationship. They got along well and enjoyed the same movies and music. Now, these ten days in Spain were to be their first holiday as a threesome. A vicarious attempt at being a happy family.

As Paul led the way down the aisle of the plane, the air suddenly became thick with the smell of rotten eggs. The obese man had broken wind.

'Oh dad!' whispered Jamie, 'is that *you*'?

His father frowned and pointed to the overweight man in front who was giving instructions, evidently in German, to his very slim and sporty son. As he got his bulging suitcase down from the overhead locker, his bright green Adidas t-shirt slid up over his stomach and Jamie glimpsed the enormous balloon of pink fat that hung over his belt.

Finally, the passengers moved off the plane and Paul, Maddie and Jamie walked up the hot gangway into the spacious glass terminal. The sky was pure blue and the sun beamed through the high windows, full with the promise of lazy days on the beach, refreshing dips in the pool and evening meals outside in the warmth of the summer evenings.

Jamie looked back down at the Airbus 320. He noticed what looked like thick, black oil dripping from one of the engines. Three men in overalls and the pilot were standing around pointing with agitated gestures up at the engine. He thought they look stressed, as if they were having an argument. As his mum and dad used to do.

The three of them collected their baggage and walked out of the building. They decided to take a taxi to the hotel. Within seconds they felt the sun burning their skin.

'El hotel Don Pablo, por favor,' said Paul, proudly.

The taxi sped along the melting tarmac past the beer factory and the airport runway and turned left down the steep hill to the tideless Mediterranean. In front of the Don Pablo the palm trees were swaying gently between the bustling chiringuitos as couples sauntered along the promenade. Now and then Jamie noticed some children a little older than him skating along the cycle lane.

'You're going to love it here, Jamie,' said Maddie. 'There are loads of other children here too. You are bound to make some good friends.'

They checked in and took the lift to the ninth floor, Room 911. Jamie used the electronic key to open the door with the excitement of a child on Christmas morning.

Paul immediately recognised the smell of the room from his own childhood family holidays: a reassuring mixture of stale suncream, invisible dust, mahogany warmed in the sun and a faint smell of bleach from the bathroom.

Above the double bed was a large tapestry with a scene from the Last Supper.

'Is that Jesus, dad?' asked Jamie.

'Yes,' said Paul.

'It's when Jesus is having his last meal with his disciples. The one leaning on him there is Judas, the friend who betrayed him for 30 pieces of silver.'

'No,' corrected Maddie gently, 'the one leaning on him is John, his best friend. Judas is the one with the bag of money in his hand.'

'Really? Whatever ...' replied Paul nonchalantly.

'If Jesus was God, dad, why did he have to die?' asked Jamie, who was always inquisitive whenever he wasn't tired.

'I don't really know.'

'Maybe it's because he wanted to show how much he loves us? Like mum,' added Jamie.

Paul glanced quickly at Maddie.

Jamie sensed that he had said the wrong thing so he rushed to the door that opened from the inside on to the balcony, picking up Terence, his *Angry Birds* cuddly toy, from the bed as he went. Full of anticipation, Jamie showed Terrance the view of the sea. Below you could see families around the swimming pool. Most of the children were in the water while their parents lay half asleep on sun-beds. Opposite the hotel he could see the beach and the sea. The waves seemed rough and tall as they came crashing on to the wet sand.

'Dad, why is the sea so rough when it's not that windy?' he asked.

'It's due to the powerful effect of the moon on the tide,' suggested his father.

'Because the moon works like a magnet on the sea, right?' asked Jamie.

'Yes, son. Exactly,' replied Paul, confidently.

They unpacked their cases, got changed and went down to the swimming pool for a drink. On the next table sat the obese German man and his slim son. With them were a blonde woman (his wife?) with very masculine features and broad, square shoulders, and a very pretty girl in a bikini. Paul guessed from her incipient breasts that she must have been about eleven years old. When she smiled, she tipped her head to one side and flicked her long blonde hair back over her shoulder.

The son finished his drink, picked up a light plastic football and, as he went to the pool, suddenly turned round and walked back up to Jamie.

'Would you like to play?' he asked.

'Erm, yes, okay,' said Jamie, surprised by the sudden invitation.

'I am Lukas. We are German but we live in London since five years now. My dad is a doctor and works with people in Africa when they get sick.'

'I'm nine,' he added, as they went towards the pool. 'How old are you?'

'I'm seven,' shouted Jamie as they both jumped into the freezing-cold water.

In the evening Jamie went out with Paul and Maddie who were looking forward to a cocktail in the chiringuito across the road from the hotel. Jamie had a non-alcoholic Piña Colada with lots of ice, two large straws and a sparkler. He felt like putting some of the ice cubes down the back of his t-shirt as he was already sunburnt from his afternoon in the pool with Lukas. Maddy felt guilty

about not putting enough sunscreen on his back and shoulders but she had simply fallen asleep as a result of the early start.

Paul ordered some more cocktails and Jamie felt happy inside to see that his dad and Maddie were also happy. Very happy, in fact.

After dinner Jamie watched TV in their room before getting undressed for bed. Everything was in Spanish, but he managed to find a programme showing funny clips from home-made videos. His favourite was one where a man was hurtling down the waterslide in an aqua park and he slid out of control into the next lane and his swimming trunks came off in front of all the people. He was still smiling about it when Maddie came and stroked his cheek and wished him good night. Even though his shoulders now felt as if they were on fire, he turned on to his side with Terence in his arms and fell into a deep, intoxicating sleep within minutes.

Paul took a shower and flossed his teeth. He got into bed beside Maddie. He sensed a tingling between his legs. He could feel his heart throbbing in his chest and a dry feeling in his throat. He looked across at Jamie.

He moved his arm gently over Maddie's shoulders and allowed it to glide down smoothly, as if by accident, over her tight, smooth breasts. They reminded him of the German man's daughter's.

'We can't,' whispered Maddy, glancing across at Jamie.

Paul kissed her briefly on the lips, turned on to his back and quietly and quickly brought his frustration to an intense, messy climax. Maddie always pretended not to notice.

During the night Jamie had a dream. He was on a plane sitting next to Lukas and his overweight father. They were together in the back row of the cabin. Paul and Maddie had had to fly on a different plane due to over-booking. Suddenly, the engine caught fire and thick, black oil spurted out along the wing and fuselage. Their window went dark as the plane plummeted towards the sea. Everyone was screaming with panic at first, but then, it went suddenly quiet. An eerie silence dominated the cabin. Lukas reached across and grabbed Jamie's hand. Then there was total darkness. Nothing.

As Jamie woke up, Maddie was stroking his hand gently, telling him that it was time for breakfast.

Later they went again to the swimming pool and Jamie was really pleased that Lukas was there. They played again together for most of the day. Sometimes Lukas's sister, Carla, came to join them. She loved telling jokes. Jamie thought that the funniest ones were the ones that weren't funny at all. At one point he laughed so much that he had a little accident in his swimming trunks. Fortunately, they were still wet from the swimming pool so no one noticed.

In the days that followed the two families also went down to the beach together where they rented sun-beds for a few hours. Lukas's family was always there first. Sometimes other British children, mainly from the north of England, came and played with them.

One day Lukas's family joined Jamie, Maddie and Paul for lunch in the chiringuito opposite their hotel. Maddie seemed to like Petra, Lukas's mum. They talked about holidays, living abroad and bringing up children.

'Jamie seems to be a bright little thing,' commented Petra.

'Yes. He's very inquisitive. Lukas is very good for him,' replied Maddie.

Paul also enjoyed Dominik's fascinating and moving stories about the people in Africa whose lives he had either saved or failed to save. It made Paul's life in the head office of Shell in London seem very boring and even slightly selfish. Paul was also surprised as to how little Dominik ate, given that he was such a large man. Dominik explained, however, that he had a rare, incurable glandular disease that made him fat, no matter how much sport he did or how careful he was with his diet. Paul drank a second liqueur and Dominik paid for the entire meal.

'Thanks,' said Paul. 'I'll pay next time, OK? When are you going back, by the way?'

'The day after tomorrow, unfortunately, and you?'

'We're staying till next Sunday,' replied Paul. 'I hope the weather stays this good. It's raining in London.'

'Dad, does Lukas's dad know why the sea is so rough here when there's no wind?' asked Jamie.

Dominik filled the saucer from his coffee cup with some left-over mineral water, picked it up in his large hand and swayed it around until the water started to swell and spill over the rim.

'The Mediterranean is a basin and the sea slops around in it due to the rotation of the earth, just like the water in this saucer,' explained Dominik. 'And some big waves start out many kilometres away, where the wind is much stronger than it is here.'

'Oh,' replied Jamie, rather disappointed that he and his dad had been wrong.

The next day Paul and Maddie were tired and decided to stay by the hotel pool. Jamie asked his father if he could go and play on the beach with Lukas.

'Please, dad. It's their last day.'

Paul said no. But then he glanced across at Maddie and realised that this might be their best chance to make love.

'Okay, then. But be careful, okay?' adjusted his father.

Jamie smiled broadly. He gave his father a tight, grateful hug around the neck and said, 'Love, you, dad.'

Jamie grabbed his towel and his wallet and flip-flops and made his way quickly to the beach. He liked to Spain very much and really hoped to come back one day.

Paul bought a couple of cold beers and Maddie picked up their bag and the electronic key. Within a few minutes back in their hotel room, they took off each other's clothes, both trembling with pent-up anticipation.

Meanwhile Jamie had reached the beach. Lukas wasn't there, though Jamie recognised the four towels of the German family already laid out over the sun-beds.

*Maybe they are getting a drink?* Jamie thought to himself and decided to wait a while.

Maddy's kisses alternated rapidly from deep, bilingual pleasure to gentle pecks on Paul's neck and under his ear. She knew his body very well.

Their mutual excitement was already at fever pitch as Mandy then rolled a Durex over his over-tense erection. He penetrated her, pushing his penis to that deepest point where he felt he was at his biggest. Like a real man. In control.

Jamie took off his flip-flops and wandered down towards the sea. He thought about the illustration of the saucer with the water.

Maddie moaned and moaned as Paul moved faster and faster and then suddenly more slowly as he feared his pleasure would be over too soon.

For the next five minutes, at least, they were intensely at one. With their focus on orgasm, everything else faded into the background.

Jamie thought he heard Lukas shouting his name. He turned round, but he was mistaken. He ventured into the waves instead.

And for his father and his girlfriend, their pleasure now also came in waves. Breath-taking waves, larger and larger and louder and louder.

Finally, came the largest and loudest wave of all, not unlike the one that, at that very moment, came crashing over Jamie and carried his boyish body indifferently out into the sea.