

*Conversations from
a Long Marriage*

Conversations from a Long Marriage

Jan Etherington



SOUVENIR
PRESS

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For GAVIN
Still my hot date, after forty years

Author's Note

The idea for my comedy *Conversations from a Long Marriage* was born, bizarrely, out of fury. I was angry about the way older women were portrayed in drama and comedy. Either as miserably married interfering mothers-in-law, bitter ex-wives, tetchy, spiteful control freaks – or as technophobic grannies in pinnies, patronised by the whole family.

‘Come on!’ I’d shout at my radio and TV. ‘Where are my contemporaries? The strong, smart, funny women who have laughed and loved their way through life since the Summer of Love and might still be married to the sexy hippy they met at Glastonbury ’71?’

We may be Senior Railcard holders but we turn up the car radio, sing along with Marvin Gaye and are still dancing in the street with Martha and the Vandellas. Yet we were nowhere represented. So I wrote a series myself, about a woman who I recognised, who had my references. I placed her in a long marriage that still fizzed with passion for life, music, wine and, yes, sex – and I knew who I wanted to play her.

Joanna Lumley epitomises how we all want to grow older. Not just beautiful but engaged, curious, warm, clever and funny. Thank God she said yes, because I didn’t have a back-up choice! I asked her who she wanted as her husband – and held my breath. Joanna said, ‘All my friends want to

be married to Roger Allam.’ Hurrah! My choice too! And the Dream Team was born – dazzling actors, with two of the best voices in broadcasting.

In 2017, we recorded a pilot episode and when I first saw those two at the microphone, I couldn’t stop smiling. I have a schoolgirl crush on them both – as do many of the listeners. Their chemistry was obvious; they genuinely like each other. There is much banter, flirting and laughter in the studio – and that’s before we even start – but our calm and confident producer, Claire Jones, miraculously manages to pull it all together.

I always planned *Conversations from a Long Marriage* as a two-hander, about a couple talking when no one else can hear. There are the occasional one-sided phone chats but no other characters and definitely no neighbours bursting in, uninvited. It’s sometimes mundane, as they bicker about the bins, dishwasher loading and the etiquette of waving goodbye at the front door, but scattered through the eighteen episodes of the three series so far, we learn their history. A tragic miscarriage soon after they met has left them childless, they have each taken detours off the marital motorway – split up, come back together – and even now, there are jealousies and dramas which fuel the passion and the humour.

I wanted the series to be optimistic, aspirational, warm and funny. The responses have been extraordinary. One listener said, ‘It makes me want to work harder at my own marriage.’ Another said, ‘You say this is about older people but I’ve had this conversation with my girlfriend this morning,’ and a

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young couple told me, 'We're newly married but what is so encouraging is that these two have obviously been through separations, crises and lived apart and yet love and passion have survived. That's very heartening to know, when so many give up too easily on marriage.'

I've been writing comedy for over thirty-five years, often with my husband, Gavin Petrie. We were both journalists when we submitted our first script to the *Radio Times* 'Sounds Funny' competition in 1987. The judges were Victoria Wood, Prunella Scales and Douglas Adams (creator of *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*). We won! The prize was £2,000, which we spent on a stair carpet and a juicer. As Gavin was then Features Editor of *RT's* rival, *TVTimes*, it provided a lot of merriment.

Gavin and I have written many more radio and TV series together and although I wrote *Conversations from a Long Marriage* on my own, I asked Gavin's advice and opinion. 'What do you think is the secret of a long, happy marriage?' He answered swiftly, 'You tell me and I'll agree.' That made me laugh – which is probably why we're still together.

Do I draw on my own marriage for ideas? Of course – but everyone else's as well. It's also a work of imagination, inspired by the magical pairing of Joanna and Roger, their speech rhythms and, sometimes, their own observations about marriage. Roger and I have discussed the ritual of 'non-drinking days' and Joanna told me, 'You've been listening at my window, Jan,' when she read the first episode, about how ageing is so infuriating because you feel the same inside.

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Choosing a favourite episode would be like choosing a favourite child, but perhaps the episodes where they are revisiting their past or facing their own mortality when a good friend dies have an added poignancy. Sometimes, I end up in tears when I'm writing!

I'm thrilled at the ecstatic reception to *Conversations* from both critics and listeners – and now readers. And I'd like to share with you one final, very important thing I've learned from this show: when a photo is being taken, never, *ever* stand next to Joanna Lumley.

Jan Etherington, 2022

So? Cappuccino? Flat White? Latte? Oatmilk
Double Decaff Dishwater? What do you want to
DRINK!!? Love you xx

Answer me! I'm in the queue at the counter and ...
Too late. Bye!

Where are you? I'm bored. Hurry up. Place is
heaving. If you can't see me, do not whistle when
you come in. I am not a Labrador. Still love you.
Just! xx

It's in His Kiss

OPENING MUSIC

The Shoop Shoop Song (It's in His Kiss) – Cher

SCENE 1: *Café. Roger is just paying for two coffees at the café counter when Joanna approaches*

Roger Hi. I've got you a latte with an extra shot.

Joanna Oh, OK.

Roger What's wrong with that?

Joanna Nothing. I fancied a cappuccino, that's all.

Roger I knew it. Even when I think I've got it right, I haven't.

Joanna A latte is fine. Where are we sitting?

Roger Wherever you say. I would never choose a table without your approval.

Joanna This one's fine.

Roger Are you absolutely certain it ticks all the boxes? Right position, away from the loos, no small children nearby ...

Joanna [*laughs*] Stop it! Although maybe over there ...
Roger sighs.

Joanna I'm joking.

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A clatter as chairs are pulled back, cups are put down and they sit down.

Joanna So. What do you think?

Roger I think this place is going downhill. They used to clean the tables immediately. I mean, look at this! Have you got a wet wipe?

Joanna I'm not talking about the café!

Roger No?

Joanna Notice anything different about me?

Silence.

Roger Oh, I hate it when you do that! Last time you'd had your eyebrows threaded. That was pretty obscure.

Joanna Well, this time it's obvious!

Roger You've had your hair cut! I like it that length.

Joanna I'm not having it cut till Friday.

Roger So ... it's ...

Joanna Look at my face.

Roger I am.

Joanna I'm wearing glasses! How could you miss that?

Roger Well, of course I knew about the glasses. I thought you meant something else.

Joanna Why would I mean something else?

Roger Because the glasses aren't a surprise. I knew you were getting the glasses ...

Joanna You didn't actually know that I was picking them up today because I didn't expect them to be ready. But I popped in on the off chance – and they were there.

Roger So I see. Good.

Joanna What do you think?

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Roger They're fine.

Joanna Fine is a weather forecast – not a compliment!

Roger You want a compliment? OK. You look very nice.
But ...

Joanna But?

Roger But ... different.

Joanna Funny that you didn't notice I look *different* till now. And what does different mean?

Roger It means ... it makes you look quite ... serious ... purposeful.

Joanna You hate them.

Roger No. I don't. They make you look like someone to be reckoned with. Tough.

Joanna Not sexy, then?

Roger [*an instinctive reaction*] God, no! I mean ... Yes! If you like the Miss Discipline look. Which I'm quite keen on. Fortunately.

Joanna So are you saying I look like a social worker or Miss Whiplash?

Roger I'm not saying anything else at all. Just drink your coffee.

A small pause while she takes a sip of coffee.

Joanna I hate them, too.

Roger I didn't say I hated them. I'll get used to them and so will you.

Joanna I don't think I even need them.

Roger Well, you do. You're having trouble night driving ... But you resent them. That's why you're being so incredibly snippy.

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- Joanna** No. Shall I tell you why I'm being snippy? Because I went up to the reception at the optician and this ... twelve-year-old bellowed out in a ship-launching voice, 'Date of birth?' I suggested I give him my address instead but he said it's company policy. Can you believe it? The company actually has a policy of shouting people's ages across the shop!
- Roger** I'm sure they'll be reviewing it after your visit.
- Joanna** I told him I'd write it down –
- Roger** A reasonable compromise.
- Joanna** – so I did and he said, 'Wow! You certainly don't look that old!'
- Roger** Which is a compliment.
- Joanna** No, it's patronising and he said that out loud so that everyone knows I am quite old.
- Roger** Did you call for the manager?
- Joanna** Obviously not. I don't want to start discussing my age in front of everyone.
- Roger** OK. You've just had a bit of a life-marker moment.
- Joanna** Is that what it's called?
- Roger** One of those 'firsts' that come with age. Remember when you got all doomy when you found your first grey hair and dived head first into a bowl of jet-black dye?
- Joanna** And you called me Morticia for a month, which was cruel.
- Roger** But spot on. You always said my honesty was one of the things you loved about me.

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- Joanna** That was in the early days when you only said nice things.
- Roger** I've been quite nice about your first trifocals.
- Joanna** What's next? My first mobility scooter?
- Roger** Think of it this way. We're lucky: we've got the chance to get older together.
- Joanna** Really?
- Roger** Well, what's the alternative?
- Joanna** Divorce?
- Roger** No! *Not* getting older ... shuffling off this mortal coil, pushing up daisies, joining the choir invisible ...
- Joanna** Are you going to do the entire parrot sketch?
- Roger** Oh, cheer up!
- Joanna** That's the most depressing phrase in the English language.
- Roger** Look, why don't we go to the bedding department at Barrett's?
- Joanna** Why?
- Roger** Fondling their 800-thread-count Egyptian cotton sheets never fails to lift your spirits. Or we could dent their memory mattresses ...
- Joanna** Actually, I would like to check out their single beds.
- Roger** [*appalled*] What? Why?
- Joanna** A very high percentage of married couples sleep in separate rooms, y'know.
- Roger** Who do we know who does?
- Joanna** Sally and Peter.
- Roger** Obviously. They've split up.
- Joanna** Yes but they've slept apart for a while.

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Roger Maybe that's why he had an affair. If she wasn't ...
y'know ... up for it.

Joanna I can't believe you said that! They slept apart
because of his deafening snoring!

Roger She could have just thumped him, like you do
with me.

Joanna He snored through the thumps. But Sally said
now he's left, she's getting a decent night's sleep.
She's trying to be positive about the break-up.

Roger Good. Maybe she's turned a corner.

Joanna You'd be the first to know. Sally is always phoning
you up.

Roger She's labouring under the delusion that Peter talks
to me.

Joanna And you don't disillusion her?

Roger No.

Joanna Because you're flattered that an attractive woman
chooses you as her confidant?

Roger Yes.

Joanna Right. Single beds it is.

Roger I wouldn't like to sleep on my own all the time.

Joanna But it's nice to have ... options. I like having the
bed to myself now and then.

Roger Me too. If you've got a cold, or restless legs ...

Joanna Or we've had a row ...

Roger And you huff off to the spare room, I sleep
fantastically well.

Joanna I know. I can hear you snoring. With both doors
shut.

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Roger There's a theory that single beds are more romantic. Because you can visit each other in the night. Creep in, like illicit lovers.

Joanna But you've never done that, have you?

Roger I aim to disappoint.

They laugh. Joanna scrapes back her chair.

Joanna Oh, quick! That window table's free!

Roger I thought you were happy with this one.

Joanna You know me better than that. Hurry up!

Roger Just once it would be nice to have a coffee without changing tables.

Joanna calls back at him.

Joanna Come on! Bring the cups!

They move tables. Sit down.

Joanna That's better.

Roger [astounded] Is it? *Why?!*

She looks out of the window.

Joanna Look at those two, by the bus stop. I bet they're not talking about single beds. Those early days of passion, when you're welded together with lust ... We used to be just like that.

Roger No we didn't. I'd never wear brown shoes with jeans.

Joanna These horrible glasses keep slipping down. Do they look straight?

Roger Yes. But that's enough about you! How am I?

Joanna Oh, sorry. How did your check-up go?

Roger Blood pressure OK. The pills are working. But definitely need a knee op.

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- Joanna** Did you ask him about your memory?
- Roger** No. You know what it's like, bit of a rush. Doctor's busy.
- Joanna** I don't think you asked him because you don't think it's a problem.
- Roger** You're right.
- Joanna** But you have trouble remembering things. You used to be sharper.
- Roger** So did you.
- Joanna** Nothing wrong with my brain. I do crosswords and watch *University Challenge*. You have to exercise the brain like any other part of your body.
- Roger** Are you quoting from an NHS pamphlet? You'll be asking me next how many units I drink.
- Joanna** I know exactly. Too many. I think we should have at least two days a week without alcohol.
- Roger** Those glasses are definitely making you bossier.
- Joanna** *And* I think we should go for a really long walk at least twice a week.
- Roger** In opposite directions?
- Joanna** Since Bonzo Dog died, we haven't been on long walks. I miss walking with a purpose. Don't you?
- Roger** No. I'm in favour of aimless ambling. Do you want another coffee?
- Joanna** Better not.
- Roger** Why? Is coffee bad for you as well?
- Joanna** No, coffee's quite good. In moderation.
- Roger** I hate that word. Moderation.

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Joanna It just means be sensible. Which is a good idea.

Roger Can you hear yourself? You threw a plate of spaghetti at me once for saying you were sensible. You said it was a huge insult.

Joanna It was. It is. Oh, I don't know. I'm just in a bad mood. It's intimations of mortality.

Roger Oh, good. For once, it's not my fault.

Joanna drains her coffee.

Joanna I'm off.

Roger Where're you going?

Joanna I've got to be at the dentist in ten minutes.

Roger Of course. I forgot.

Joanna You see? That's what I'm saying. You definitely need to train your memory.

Roger Right. Take those glasses off!

Joanna takes them off.

Joanna OK. Why?

Roger Oh, Miss Money Penny. You're ravishing!

Joanna Why do you always try to change the subject with a joke?

Roger Put them back on. I thought maybe the glasses were making you so tetchy but no, it's just you.

Joanna Thank you. Now, I'm off to another lecture on flossing and gum recession. My gums used to be even. Now they're like the Swiss Alps. Why aren't yours? You don't even floss!

Roger Well, obviously, flossing is what's causing the problem. It's not natural, rubbing string between your teeth. And not necessary. See?

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Joanna Shut your mouth. I don't want to see your perfect gums.

Roger Did you say I was perfect?

Joanna Just your gums. See you later.

Roger Do you want me to wait for you?

Joanna Well, you've got the car ...

Roger I know but I thought I might walk home.

Joanna Good. Walk briskly and swing your arms.

Roger I'm not doing it to keep fit. It's so I don't have to go home with you.

Joanna If you're walking, could you stop by the post office and get a dozen first-class stamps?

Roger Right.

Joanna Oh and we need some dishwasher salt ...

Roger Two things? That's a shopping trip!

Joanna No. A shopping trip is a loaded trolley – and the dry cleaning.

Roger But I'm walking.

Joanna Exactly. And you can get them both in the precinct.

Roger I might fancy going through the park.

Joanna Well, don't.

Roger But if I'm getting shopping, I'll have to carry it all.

Joanna Stamps aren't heavy.

Roger Dishwasher salt is. Can't you get them?

Joanna No!

Roger Well, I'd better get going then, if I've got all this shopping to do!

He stands up.

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Joanna Fine. I'll take the car home, then.

She stands up.

Roger What are you waiting for?

Joanna You have the car keys!

Roger Oh, sorry ...

Joanna You forgot?

Roger All right, Miss Point Scorer.

He hands over the car keys.

Joanna Bye!

Roger Hang on, you *forgot* to ask me where the car's parked. Admit it!

Joanna Oh, I'm sure you're loving this.

Roger Very much indeed.

MUSIC BREAK

The Shoop Shoop Song – Cher

SCENE 2: *The kitchen at their house. Joanna is stirring soup.*

Roger enters with no shopping bag.

Roger Mmmm ... Minestrone. You've been busy.

Joanna No I haven't. Defrosted it. Not quite ready.
What've you been doing? I thought you'd be home ages before me.

Roger I had to get all this shopping, remember?

Joanna [*laughs*] That must have taken seconds.

Roger Here's the stamps.

Joanna turns as he takes them out of his pocket and puts them on the table.

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Joanna Second class? We never buy second-class stamps. I wanted first class.

Roger There was a queue in the post office, so I got them at the newsagent's. I used my initiative. Found an alternative supplier. But that's all they had.

He reaches in the other pocket and takes out a small packet of dishwasher salt.

Joanna And what's that?

Roger What does it look like?

Joanna It looks like a giveaway sample of dishwasher salt. I didn't know they sold it in such small amounts.

Roger Well, now you've learned something.

Joanna Why didn't you get a normal size?

Roger Because I had to carry it. I didn't fancy staggering down the street with fifteen kilos of salt on my back.

Joanna This won't even make the light go out.

Roger The what?

Joanna The 'out of salt' warning light. This titchy little trickle is not going to register.

Roger You asked for stamps and dishwasher salt. I got what you wanted.

Joanna You didn't. You got a sample of what I wanted, in both cases. I'll have to go and get some more tomorrow.

Roger You wouldn't want it any other way.

Joanna It wasn't a lot to ask, was it?

Roger Just accept that you're married to a man who

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never quite gets it right. It'll stop you being continually disappointed.

Joanna Call me an optimist but I still believe one day you'll come home with the right kind of bread.

Roger I can't be brilliant at everything but I do have astounding observational skills. I notice, for instance, you're not wearing the new glasses. Where are they?

Joanna I've put them down somewhere ...

Roger Aren't you supposed to wear them all the time?

Joanna No. Just for driving, reading, TV, crosswords, computers, cooking ...

Roger You should put them on one of those gold chains.

Joanna I'll pretend you didn't say that.

Roger I'm sure there's a Track My Glasses app for your phone. If you could find your glasses, you could look it up. Or, here's another possibility ...

Joanna What?

Roger Maybe you really want to lose them. You deliberately can't find your glasses because you hate them.

Joanna That doesn't even make sense and anyway, it's not true because I really love my new glasses now.

Roger Marvellous. That didn't take long. So you had no problems driving home in them?

Joanna Quite the reverse. It was very ... enlightening.

Roger Oh, good.

Joanna I didn't realise how much my eyes had deteriorated. I used to walk along without really

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noticing things. They were sometimes a bit blurry, if I'm honest.

Roger [*genuinely pleased*] I'm happy that you can see things so clearly now.

Joanna Oh, I can. As I was driving, everything was much brighter, properly in focus ...

Roger That's a result, then.

Joanna I saw a lot of people I knew. Including you.

Roger Me?

Joanna And Sally. Together.

Roger When?

Joanna I was driving down Castle Street. On my way home.

Roger Why didn't you pick me up?

Joanna I actually thought of running you over.

Roger What have I done now?

Joanna I saw you kiss Sally.

Roger She kissed me!

Joanna Oh, the instant response of the obviously guilty!

Roger I'm not guilty of anything!

Joanna Snogging Sally?

Roger It wasn't a snog. It was a peck. On the cheek. We all do it. In fact, you started it. I never used to kiss friends. You made me. You said I was stand-offish.

Joanna There's a difference between an air-kiss and ... you were entwined!

Roger She got her earring caught in my sweater. Look, here's where the thread was pulled.

Joanna Convenient.

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- Roger** Oh, for goodness' sake! I just bumped into her and we had a chat.
- Joanna** What about?
- Roger** I said I'd booked a hotel room for Friday and could she ask for Mr Smith at the desk.
- Joanna** Hilarious. It's odd. That you didn't come in and say you'd met Sally straight away. I waited for you to say it. But obviously, you didn't want to tell me.
- Roger** Give me a chance. I had to unload all this shopping!
- Joanna** So you can't speak while you put six stamps on the table?
- Roger** OK. Well, I also saw Terry, Val and her cockerpool, the bloke who comes round with the fish and Brian's dad. It's a very small town. Do you want a list of everyone I met?
- Joanna** Only the ones you snogged.
- Roger** Oh, I saw Peter as well!
- Joanna** Where?
- Roger** Outside the post office, just after I left you.
- Joanna** Why didn't you tell me?
- Roger** I forgot ... I just remembered.
- Joanna** How did he look?
- Roger** Like ... Peter.
- Joanna** Did he look guilty?
- Roger** What does guilty look like?
- Joanna** Shifty. You know, pretending not to see you.
- Roger** No, he smiled. Raised a manly arm in greeting. So did I. We went our separate ways.

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- Joanna** Didn't you speak to him?!
- Roger** Why would I speak to him?
- Joanna** Because you know him!
- Roger** And I acknowledged that fact – and moved on.
- Joanna** Didn't you ask him how he was?
- Roger** No.
- Joanna** Why not?!
- Roger** Because he would have thought I was barmy.
- Joanna** It's a perfectly reasonable question.
- Roger** Oh, if you'd seen Sally, I'm sure you would have run across the road, arms outstretched. Big hug. Concerned expression. 'How have you been? I've been worried about you ...'
- Joanna** Course. That's normal.
- Roger** It most definitely isn't for blokes. We respect each other's privacy. We do not pry. We do not tell another bloke his hair looks nice, or ask him if he's lost weight ...
- Joanna** I don't see why it should be any different for men or women. If you care about your friends—
- Roger** [*cuts in*] You keep a respectful distance. You share a pint or a kebab. But there's an invisible line we don't cross.
- Joanna** So you had no idea Peter was seeing this girl?
- Roger** Course I didn't. The last conversation we had, of any length, was about gutter clearance.
- Joanna** Did he sound as if he was going to be around to clear his gutters? In the long term?
- Roger** You're asking me if I thought he was about to do

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a runner? I've no idea. If Peter was in trouble and wanted to talk to me, he'd tell me directly and I'd listen ...

Joanna And then you'd slap him on the back and tell him to keep his chin up?

Roger There's far too much said about talking things over. Most things go away if you ignore them.

Joanna I'll stick that on your headstone.

Roger You're assuming I'll go first.

Joanna Statistically, you will.

Roger Exhausted by my wife's demands.

Joanna Do you want to be buried or cremated?

Roger [*saintly*] Whatever's easiest for you, dear.

Joanna I'll scatter your ashes beside the Pyramid Stage at Glastonbury.

Roger That'll muck up the sound system.

Joanna Of course, we might split up before you die.

Roger There is that to look forward to.

Joanna At least Sally hasn't got to worry about Peter's funeral now.

Roger I'm sure that'll be a great comfort.

Joanna Unless they get back together ... Is this affair serious? I wish you'd had a proper talk with him. Why didn't you take him for a coffee?

Roger I'd only just had a coffee with you. I didn't want another coffee.

Joanna You could have pretended you did. It's not much to ask. I'm sure Sally would have been grateful.

Roger Oh, so I was supposed to pump Peter for

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information about his new girlfriend and report back to Sally?

Joanna Yes. She doesn't know what's going on.

Roger She's not supposed to. He's left her.

Joanna You are her link with Peter.

Roger No I'm not. She's got her own link with Peter. She's got his mobile and his email. He's on Facebook if she wants to know anything.

Joanna But he doesn't want to talk to her. He'd rather talk to you.

Roger You're just making that up.

Joanna You could help them get back together again. You could support him.

Roger He doesn't need my support. He's got a new girlfriend who's a fitness instructor. She can support him. With one hand. She does push-ups.

Joanna [*laughs*] You're jealous! Do you wish you were Peter?

Roger Certainly not. He's losing his hair and he suffers from acid reflux.

Joanna But he's got a new, young partner. Don't you wish you had?

Roger I need the loo.

He gets up and goes to the downstairs cloakroom. Joanna raises her voice so he can hear her.

Joanna You mean you need some thinking time!

Roger I don't need to think!

Joanna Have a look at the cold water tap while you're there. It's dripping!

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Roger I don't do plumbing on an empty stomach.

Where's the soup?

Sound of distant humming.

Joanna You're humming again! Stop humming!

Sound of a text coming through for Joanna as Roger comes back.

Roger Who's texting?

Joanna My lover. He wants me to meet him by the
Co-op.

Roger Get some loo rolls while you're there.

Joanna Actually, it was Sally. Wondering if we'd heard
from Peter. I'll tell her you saw him this morning
but you didn't speak because you have a very
strange idea of the duties of friendship, shall I?

Roger Sure.

Joanna She'll be upset. That you missed an opportunity.

Roger What does she expect me to do? Trip him up?

Joanna You could have just strolled up and said 'hello'.
You talked to Sally, why didn't you talk to Peter?

Roger He was running.

Joanna For a bus?

Roger No. Running. In trainers and shorts. And a
headband.

Joanna laughs.

Joanna Peter! Running? In a headband? You didn't say he
was running.

Roger Well, I'm saying it now. He was running.

Joanna What did he look like?

Roger He looked like Peter. Running.

Joanna *She's got him doing that.* You should tell Sally that

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you saw Peter running. It would cheer her up, knowing he's not enjoying himself ...

Roger He looked perfectly happy.

Joanna Red-faced and panting, wearing a rock band T-shirt, no doubt, with a heart monitor on his wrist. Did you tell her that?

Roger No. Because it's not true. He looked quite cool and fit.

Joanna That's annoying. She still loves him, you know. It's so sad, when friends split up, isn't it?

Roger Sometimes. But now and then it's a really good idea.

Joanna You mean like Steph and Terry?

Roger Exactly.

Joanna You remember that barbecue when Steph got completely hammered and gave him the ultimatum – 'It's me or the koi carp!'

Roger He really loved those fish.

Joanna You wouldn't do that, would you? Leave me for carp?

Roger Never say never. They come in attractive colours.

Joanna We know so many people that are splitting up. [*sighs*] Oh, it's been a horrible day, hasn't it?

Roger That's because all we've done is maintenance.

Joanna Maintenance?

Roger Yes. Doc, dentist, optician.

Joanna We used to be out all the time at parties, outings, suppers with friends.

Roger Now we don't have invitations, just appointments.

CONVERSATIONS FROM A LONG MARRIAGE

Our social circle revolves around the physio and the practice nurse. I thought I might ask the physio to come to Istanbul with us. Be handy, with my knee ...

Joanna blows her nose.

Joanna It's our fault.

Roger What is?

Joanna Sally and Peter's break-up. If we hadn't introduced them all those years ago, they wouldn't be splitting up now.

Roger That's technically true but somehow barking mad.

Joanna We had lots of lovely holidays with them, didn't we? Remember Tuscany? That rooftop dinner we had in Florence?

Roger When I got bitten by mosquitos?

Joanna And the South of France, when it did nothing but rain. But we laughed all the time ...

Roger I don't remember laughing ...

Joanna Especially when you fell off that boat.

Roger That was the start of my knee problems.

Joanna All those memories. All that history. It seems so stupid to throw that away for some gym instructor.

Roger Half his age.

Joanna You sound wistful.

Roger It's those new tablets. They make my throat dry.

Joanna No. I think you're wistful. Have you thought about having an affair?

Roger Of course I have.

IT'S IN HIS KISS

- Joanna** This is one of those moments when lying is the kinder option.
- Roger** Everyone who's been married for more than five minutes has wondered what it would be like with someone else.
- Joanna** Who else?
- Roger** Just ... people you see on a train ... sometimes, someone you know.
- Joanna** You mean friends? You fancy some of our friends?
- Roger** Just a fleeting 'what if' thought ...
- Joanna** Lusting after someone else?
- Roger** Not lusting ... just daydreaming.
- Joanna** When do you have these thoughts? All the time?
- Roger** No. Just now and then. You know what I mean. When we're all sitting round having dinner with friends and the wine's flowing and ...
- Joanna** And what?!
- Roger** And some attractive woman laughs at my joke ...
- Joanna** I've never seen that happen.
- Roger** People exchange glances. You flirt with friends. You and Peter are quite flirty together.
- Joanna** He's just like a brother. We get on well.
- Roger** Yes, I know. So well, he put his hand on your thigh.
- Joanna** When?
- Roger** At Tony's sixtieth. You were sitting next to him on the sofa and ...
- Joanna** He was helping himself up. That sofa was pretty low.
- Roger** He could have used the chair arm.

CONVERSATIONS FROM A LONG MARRIAGE

Joanna You never mentioned that you noticed. Or that it bothered you.

Roger I didn't say it bothered me.

Joanna Well, it obviously did. If you're making such a big thing about it.

Roger I just said that I'd seen it happen.

Joanna Oh, I just wish Peter and Sally would get back together.

Roger Then you'd stop being jealous of me fancying her, would you?

Joanna Sounds like you're jealous of me and Peter.

Roger Sometimes I am and sometimes I think he's welcome to you.

Joanna You know what I said about honesty? Forget it!

Roger I think jealousy is quite healthy, providing it doesn't become homicidal.

Joanna And I think you'd like Peter and Sal to get back together as well.

Roger Then it must be true.

Joanna Do you think they will?

Roger Who knows?

Joanna I know we don't know, I'm just speculating.

Roger Well, I don't like speculating. They're our friends ...

Joanna He might be your friend but he's not my friend any more. He left Sally. And she's my friend. Or she was. Even though she's got a crush on you ...

Roger A crush? Where are we? The school playground? You can't cut off a friend just because he falls for someone else.

IT'S IN HIS KISS

Joanna Yes I can! How can you be friends with someone who has done that?

Roger You're completely inconsistent! You just said he was like a brother to you and that I should talk to him. Now suddenly I'm not supposed to be his friend!

Joanna I'm saying you can talk to him but make it clear you don't approve and you're very ... disappointed in him.

Roger Oh, please. I'm not disappointed. Well, I am disappointed because we rely on his camper van for Latitude but they've been married a long time. Things change. People grow apart ...

Joanna Have we grown apart?

Roger Right at this minute. Yes. Miles apart.

Joanna An affair doesn't have to be a marriage breaker.

Roger Maybe not, but it changes everything. Whether you decide to stay together is up to you but it will never be the same again, even if you say you forgive each other. Now stop waving that ladle around and give it to me. I'll do the soup.

Joanna I'm sorry, I'm just feeling ... a bit ... low. The dentist didn't help.

Roger Why?

Joanna Banging on about gum recession. 'You have to expect it, at your age.' I don't expect *anything* to be different! Why should I? I feel the same inside as I did when I fell in love with Mick Jagger! He's older than me but nobody tells the Stones

to stop doing what they've been doing all their lives!

Roger Actually, quite a few people do.

Joanna It really is different for men. When I look in the mirror, I want to shout, 'OK, this is the outside but inside, I'm still dancing in the street with Martha and the Vandellas!'

Roger Sounds like you're working yourself up to writing a feature. Good idea to write about getting older but feeling the same. And you've got quite a big birthday coming up; you could link it with that ...

Joanna Yes, thank you! I know. And by the way, don't buy me a National Trust membership or a cardigan.

Roger Thanks for the heads-up.

Joanna I want to go clubbing in Ibiza.

Roger Not an ideal holiday, if I'm waiting for a knee replacement.

Joanna You don't have to come. Lots of couples have separate holidays.

Roger Is this some perverse reaction to Peter and Sally splitting up?

Joanna What do you mean?

Roger When friends split, it's supposed to bring you closer ... grateful for what you've got. But not you. You want a single bed and separate holidays? Thanks very much!

Joanna I didn't say that. But there's a bit of you that's envious, isn't there? They're free again. Just to take off. Not to have to worry about ... someone else.

IT'S IN HIS KISS

Roger With a dodgy knee?

Joanna Obviously, that restricts what we can do ... together.

Roger [*hurt*] I didn't realise I was cramping your rampage round the nightspots of Europe.

Joanna I'm just talking about the things I've always done. Like dancing.

Roger Clubbing, you said. When have you been clubbing in Ibiza?

Joanna Not Ibiza but Greece. After A levels. There weren't any clubs but a crowd of us went together – dancing on the sand, sleeping on the beach ... It was the Summer of Love.

Roger And did Cliff Richard drive up in his double-decker bus, with Una Stubbs?

Joanna We never thought we'd have to worry about grey hair and reading glasses ...

Small pause.

Roger Anyway, you're wrong. It's not different for men. We feel the same, too, and it hurts when some youngster pushes past and says, 'Scuse me, granddad!' A young woman was sitting on the train last week and she looked up at me and smiled and I smiled back and I had just a fleeting feeling of ...

Joanna Lust?

Roger More like the warmth of a stranger liking the look of you. Then she put her hand on my arm ...

Joanna Oh?

CONVERSATIONS FROM A LONG MARRIAGE

Roger ... And said, 'Would you like my seat?'

Joanna Did you accept?

Roger No, I said thanks but I was getting off at the next stop. I wasn't but I had to leave the carriage because I was very close to crying.

Silence.

Roger Soup's ready.

Small silence again.

Joanna Thank you. For unblocking the sink.

Roger Is that a euphemism? And if so, for what?

Joanna No. I forgot to say at the time. I noticed you'd unblocked it and I'm very grateful.

Roger I also put the bins out.

Joanna Yes, but you always do that.

Roger So, no Brownie points for the bins but you like me because I've unblocked the sink?

Joanna Well, I thought we'd have to get the plumber in. That was a nasty blockage.

Roger It certainly was.

Joanna So thank you.

She gives him a kiss on the cheek.

Roger Woah!

Joanna It's just a kiss.

Roger It's never just a kiss. There's always a reason.

Joanna OK. When I saw you kiss Sally –

Roger *She kissed me.*

Joanna – I just thought it would be nice if we kissed each other, just for no reason. It's a nice habit to get into.

Roger A habit? You mean we'll have to do it all the time?

IT'S IN HIS KISS

Joanna Why not? It's the first thing couples stop doing, after a long marriage. Kiss each other on the lips. And what it says in 'The Shoop Shoop Song' is so true. It *is* in his kiss!

Roger So Cher is your marriage counsellor, is she?

They laugh.

Joanna [*struck by a sudden thought*] We could wake up with a kiss as well. That would be nice.

Roger One step at a time.

Joanna Carol says she always knows when Ben wants sex because he cleans his teeth before coming to bed.

Roger Fascinating.

Joanna I always brush my teeth before I go to bed.

Roger I know. The soundtrack of my dreams is you gargling with the mouthwash as I drop off.

Joanna Which reminds me, you squeezed the tube in the middle again.

Roger Add it to my list of shortcomings.

Joanna [*persisting*] You don't always do it. Clean your teeth.

Roger I do. But not necessarily at the same time as you do.

Joanna You mean you do it secretly?

Roger You are so unsubtle. What you're saying is you've decided we should kiss each other goodnight and good morning but only if I've cleaned my teeth ...?

Joanna Yup. That's what I'm saying.

Roger Maybe I don't need to clean my teeth as much as you because I have perfect gums. Remember?

CONVERSATIONS FROM A LONG MARRIAGE

- Joanna** You can have perfect gums and stale breath ...
- Roger** You're not making me want to kiss you at the moment. Just saying.
- Joanna** I just think sometimes we could make more effort.
- Roger** Are you writing my school report?
- Joanna** I don't want us to drift on, ignoring each other ...
- Roger** I find it impossible to ignore you.
- Joanna** The first time we made love, you lit candles round the bed and put Dylan's 'Lay Lady Lay' on the stereo.
- Roger** I was trying to get you to have sex with me.
- Joanna** I'd have done that anyway. But I could see you'd taken such trouble. Everything looked very warm and inviting ...
- Roger** And the sheets were clean.
- Joanna** You read me Kerouac, in an American drawl ...
- Roger** 'With the coming of Dean Moriarty began the part of my life you could call my life on the road ...'
Never fails.
- Joanna** What do you mean 'never fails'?!
- Roger** Are we having bread with this soup?
- Joanna** You don't do things like that any more.
- Roger** The first time you cooked me breakfast you were wearing a bikini with flowers in your hair ...
- Joanna** Isle of Wight Festival.
- Roger** You don't do things like that any more either.
- Joanna** I'm sad we're not [*treads carefully*] like that ... now.
- Roger** Show me any couple who've been married for forty years who are.

IT'S IN HIS KISS

Joanna Steve and Emma. They haven't changed. They travelled the world in a Love Bus. And they were Rainbow Warriors for Greenpeace.

Roger And now he's on the Village Hall committee and they go on cruises. I'd say they've changed.

Joanna I mean romantically. They renewed their vows last summer.

Roger And you told me, 'What a nauseatingly tedious thing to do. We'll never do that.'

Joanna Maybe I was wrong.

Roger You're never wrong. You told me that as well. Now stop talking, sit down and eat your soup.

Joanna Thanks. That chair's got a wobbly leg.

Roger Tell me something I don't know.

Roger pulls out the chair. Joanna sighs.

Joanna I was quite happy when I woke up this morning but now I'm really fed up.

There's a crunch, as of someone sitting on a pair of new glasses.

Roger Well, here's something to cheer you up. I've just found your glasses.

END MUSIC

The Shoop Shoop Song – Cher

Just got this text from Sally. 'Gone to get my nails done, darling. Bertie won't be any trouble xxx Sal!' I'm still at the pool. Are you home yet? xx

I am. And guess what? Bertie's learned how to open the fridge! What a clever dog! We're now out of lamb chops. And he's ravaged the halloumi ...

This can't go on! Have you told him off? Put him in the garden!

Tried that. He's having lupins and geraniums for dessert. Going for a pint with Al

No! Stay there!

You'd better still be there when I get back ...

Or what?

I mean it!

Oooh ... Scared!