

Benny

I ran. I ran as quickly as the bullet had entered her body while the banging rang in my ears and I shook my head to get rid of it. The gun. The gun lying beside her on the floor and her hand twitching as she fell into unconsciousness. Only yesterday she had been out with me laughing and joking and then she was just lying there. So peaceful. I had to run but they came with accusing words and took me in the back of the van. They wanted to put me away but the only thing I wanted to do was go back to her and be beside her again like I was when it happened. I can hear her crying again in my ears like the times when she got sad and I can see her when I close my eyes. I can see her face and her lips saying sorry to me and I can see the pain in her eyes as the trigger came back and I can see her lying there beside me. I hadn't wanted this to happen. I wanted us to be perfect again but it was what she had wanted me to do, so I did. I look at her now in my picture book she gave me, with all the days we had together combined into frames and stuck down. She has written captions under them like 'Benny on the swings', and she smiles in all of them and I smile with her:

'Benny in the accident'

Benny sits in the car smiling. He is five and wearing blue dungarees with a stripy T-shirt. Two proud parents sit in front of him. A strong man called David with a kind smile sits with his hands on the wheel. A woman with flowing blonde hair sits at the window, a dazed but knowing look in her eyes. Her name is Elisabeth. She is looking back at her son. They are all laughing. It is a holiday. May 1988.

Elisabeth handed Benny a mint from her handbag and told him they would be at the river any minute now. Benny gave an excited giggle, the mint falling out of his mouth and the spittle dribbling down his chin. David sighed and passed him a blue handkerchief. Placing his hands on the wheel, he smiled at his wife and carried on driving. Benny stared out of the car window, his smiling eyes catching the light from the sun. They parked up at the river bank and Elisabeth lifted a picnic out of the car. There was a sound of laughter and three teenage boys dived into the water at the other side of the river. David told Benny a story about himself as a young boy, spending summers down at the river with his friends. Benny listened quietly to his father reliving his youth and played happily in the water with his mother.

By the time he was tired out, it was already dark. David packed up the car again, blowing out the campfire they had made. Elisabeth picked up Benny and put him in the back of the car. It was a clear night and, as they began to drive home, Benny woke up to watch the stars. Suddenly there was a loud revving and a car pulled out fast from the river bank further down. David swerved to avoid getting hit and shouted something out of the window. He looked at the car in his mirror, cursing to his wife. A young couple smirked back. A broad, dark haired boy sat at the wheel. David recognised him from the football team. Beside the boy sat a pretty young girl with glossy light brown hair and deep hazel eyes. She told the boy to hurry, her words slurred, and the boy revved up the car again. This time the car reversed back to the

river bank, the young girl shouting obscenely at the driver. Elisabeth pleaded with David to leave and Benny started to cry.

David started to drive off quickly but, within five minutes of the country road, the car came up behind them once more. The car started to go faster behind them as David tried to move out of the way. The driver of the car behind laughed loudly; his eyes glazed, and looked round at his girlfriend. There was a loud smash and the car swerved to the edge of the road and collided with the one in front. Elisabeth screamed and tried to grab Benny from behind her. The windscreen smashed and, with another crash behind them, Elisabeth was thrown forward. She was killed instantly.

They've got me in an office now, a big office, with a big mirror at the back. I really wish they would stop asking me these questions, their eyes bearing into me, cold and accusing. I try to cover my face with my hand but it's forcefully taken off by an officer. He's muttering something to his colleague and they laugh. The laughing. I can't stand it. I get up and start to shout. I don't want to listen anymore. I want to get out of here. I run to the door, banging on it and screaming, but the officer pulls me back. He presses a button and the beeping starts. The noise. I want to leave. I scream. The laughing. I want to run away again. The beeping. Everyone stops talking and I sit back down. I breathe heavily and the officers are backing away...

'Benny in the hospital'

Benny is lying in a bed, wires weaving in and out of his skin, an oxygen mask smothering his face. He is pale and lifeless. Beside him sits a machine, the lines making patterns of his heartbeat, slowly. His hand hangs over the side of the bed.

The doctors came into the room Benny was in. He had been in a coma for two months after the accident. His father had died in hospital. A social worker followed them in. Benny stirred and the doctor spoke softly to him, bending down beside the bed. The social worker leaned over him and spoke reassuringly. Benny asked in a hoarse voice for his mother...

'Benny meets Fiona'

Benny is sitting nervously in his bedroom, his bare walls painted an off-pink colour. He is clutching a small blue teddy bear. The neatly made bed is tucked in so tightly, it does not crease under the tiny child's weight. It is June 1992; he is 9.

A woman walked into the room and sat on the bed next to Benny. Her glossy hair was wound in a loose bun and tucked behind her ears. She introduced herself as Fiona Harling. She was young, in her early twenties. She told Benny that she was his new helper. Benny sat in silence. Fiona began to talk to him and, knowing what they called a 'special case', gave him plenty of space. His head was bowed and his floppy dark hair covered his eyes. Fiona talked to him in a calm voice, asking what he would like to do. He looked up at her. His big green eyes were full of sadness Fiona suddenly felt an overwhelming fear.

I told them. I told them I did not do it. I cried and I shouted and I told them that I was not a bad person. She told me that. I wish she was here now. I close my eyes and I can still see her. Her beautiful hair dyed a deep ruby red and her hand on mine. Before I ran I had wrapped her long slender fingers around mine and I had told her that I loved her. She had said once, anything you do because you love someone will always be right. That's why I did it. I loved her more than anyone in the world. I am trying to tell the officer but I am on my own again. This room is cold and unwelcoming. I want to be with her more than anything...

'Benny feeds the ducks'

Benny is standing at the edge of a pond with a bread roll in his hand. He is gingerly using the other hand to offer a piece to a hungry duck. Fiona is standing against a tree behind him, smiling lovingly.

It wasn't Fiona's job to take Benny out as much as she did. She was only employed to visit him once in a while and give him his medication at his room. She couldn't leave him though. To see him smile was the only thing she wanted. Benny squealed as a greedy duck nipped at his finger and Fiona rushed over, taking out a blue handkerchief and wrapping it round his hand. Benny giggled through his tears and held onto Fiona's hand. A young couple walked past with their baby in a buggy and Fiona turned Benny's head. She knew that Benny got upset when he saw families together. She turned her own head and closed her eyes, taking a deep breath...

‘Benny at the cemetery’

It is a cloudy day and Fiona stands at a grave in the cemetery. Benny stands behind her holding a few sad looking white flowers. He looks confused and Fiona is turned away from him to the gravestone. She is gazing at the engraving. ‘Dave Smith 1988’

Fiona walked slowly over to Benny with tears in her eyes. She laid the flowers beside the grave and asked him to go to the bench behind her. She knelt beside the grave and looked back at Benny bowing her head. She had been told by the social workers that Benny would be a hard case. But she’d never thought it would be as hard as this.

I didn’t want this to happen. She said everything would work out for me that day when I came back from the hospital. She said everything was going well. I could see she was lying though. That’s when it started, when she started getting sad. I don’t know what went on and I don’t think I want to know. She was wrong. Everything went bad then...

‘Benny at the doctor’s’

Benny and Fiona are sitting in the waiting room of a hospital. The clock above them reads 5.30 p.m. Fiona looks anxious and Benny is flicking through a magazine on his knee. They both look tired and restless, as if they have been waiting a long time. It is April 1998.

The doctor entered the room and asked Fiona for a word outside. Fiona’s grip tightened on Benny’s hand and, when she released it, her palms were sweaty and she felt hot. Her woolly suddenly seemed to be smothering her. She took deep breaths. The doctor told her that she had been wonderful in helping Benny but his condition was deteriorating. She nodded, biting her lip. He told her they would have to keep Benny in for a while. With every word the doctor said, Fiona’s heart beat faster. He told her she should bring Benny’s things to the hospital that evening. Tears welled up in her eyes. Her knees felt weak and she crumpled like a piece of paper onto the corridor’s floor, tears streaming from her beautiful hazel eyes.

'Benny watches a movie'

Benny is sitting on the edge of a sofa, Fiona perched beside him. A movie case lies on Fiona's knee and she is scooping out ice cream from a tub and feeding it to Benny. They are smiling but Fiona's eyes are red and Benny, who looks a little anxious, is clutching his arm, covered by a stained sleeve. Broken glass sits by Fiona's feet.

Fiona was going to take Benny home after the movie. Benny had picked a film about high school. Benny had never been to high school as he had 'left' halfway through primary school but she knew he loved films about school. Fiona was singing along with a song on the film in the kitchen and Benny laughed. Fiona told Benny she was getting him a drink and to yell if he needed her. She poured some orange juice into a tall glass and shuffled through in her slippers. As she opened the living room door, she froze. Four teenagers on screen were laughing and joking in a car on a country road. They started speeding, faster and faster. Fiona's heart raced and she gripped onto the glass. She told Benny to turn it off but he didn't listen. She asked again. Benny reached for the remote and clumsily knocked it off the polished surface of the coffee table. She told him again, this time shouting it; 'FOR GOD'S SAKE TURN IT OFF, BENNY!'

She ran toward the table, smashing the glass on the sharp edge. Benny stuck his hand out to catch it and a large shard sliced into his arm. He screamed but Fiona took no notice. She fumbled on the floor, still screaming to turn it off and the sounds of the car chase echoed round the room. Benny yelled at her to stop screaming. She screamed more. Then she found the button. Suddenly everything went silent. The video stopped. Fiona stopped. Benny stopped. They froze and Fiona burst into tears. Hot, black tears stained her cheeks as she sat helplessly behind the coffee table. Benny rose and, squatting down beside her, began to pick up the broken glass, his arm seeping blood through his rolled down sleeve. Fiona didn't look up.

They've got me in orange clothes now, I never liked orange. It's because I had an accident in my old clothes. I need my medicine. I need her. They all laugh at me here and make rude jokes. I am trying to stay calm but the men keep coming in and out and I don't know them. I don't like strangers. I don't like these men. I just want to get out. I bang on the walls screaming her name but no one listens. Some more men are coming and I can't let them. I hit the walls harder, my knuckles starting to bleed. I look at the blood. I think of her. I stop. The men have stopped coming in. They are outside the room but I don't care. I can hear myself breathing now. I can hear her voice too. I can hear her that time she shouted at me. I didn't like her then. I got angry ...

'Fiona in the accident'

Fiona is 18. She is sitting at the river on a hot summer day with her friends and her long-term boyfriend. Her head rests on his broad shoulder, her hair tickling his face; he is looking down at her, smiling lovingly.

Another girl walked over with another round of drinks and the others came and sat at the water side. A couple of the boys started to have a play fight which ended in them jumping into that water, splashing the river up around them. Fiona jumped up complaining about her hair and a little boy across the river caught her eye. The boy's mother came over with a picnic and the little boy clapped his hands, making him fall over. The father took out a blue handkerchief and wiped the mud from his hands, passing him a sandwich. Fiona watched this young family for a while, smiling and nodding at the conversation around her.

It soon got dark and one of the girls, checking her watch, decided they must leave. Fiona's boyfriend offered to drive them but one of the other boys suggested they just walk. The others started to walk off but Fiona laughed at the idea, insisting they were fine. She stumbled into the car, complaining about the cold and reached for her boyfriend's football jersey. She snuggled into it, reading the writing on it, 'Dave Smith 1988'. Dave began talking to her about another 'big game' and started to rev up the car, reversing at a huge speed. Fiona screamed. She giggled nervously and told Dave to slow down but that made him go faster. He sped along the road laughing manically. Fiona was getting scared. He didn't stop.

A car pulled out beside them. The boy. She screamed. The driver shouted. His young wife clung to him. Their son in the back began to cry. She was taking sharp breaths and yelling at Dave to stop but he wouldn't. She tried to force his hands off the wheel, making the car swerve. They reversed. They hit the riverbank and Fiona started to cry. Dave pushed the accelerator and the car sped forward. Fiona was screaming at him to stop. They were getting too close to the other car. Dave kept accelerating. She screamed and yelled. He laughed. Suddenly he looked around at his girlfriend and, when he looked back, his eyes widened. Fiona shrieked and frantically looked ahead of her. There was a crash. Dave was flung through the windscreen. Fiona was hurtled forward, the football sweater acting as a cushion for her head. There was a deadly silence and Fiona looked up, squinting. Blood ran down her head, her hair dyed a deep ruby red. Blood and tears ran down her face and she yelled for some help. Dave's body lay in front of her. He was still moving but his legs looked so out of place. She started to feel dizzy and the wreckage around her started to spin. She blacked out.

'Benny and the gun'

Benny is kneeling on the kitchen floor beside Fiona. A pool of blood surrounds him and he is hand in hand with her, crying. A gun lies beside Fiona's body. Macaroni and cheese is going cold on the kitchen table.

Fiona had invited Benny round for tea. She had cooked him macaroni and cheese because she had some bad news. They sat in her little kitchen, the TV on, a dull roar in an awkward silence. Fiona hadn't been handling Benny very well lately and he didn't want to come round tonight. They had argued and Benny had demanded to go home. They sat in silent argument. Benny flicked cheese onto Fiona's jumper and she got up, shouting. Benny hated when Fiona shouted; he covered his head with his hands and shouted back at her. Fiona was getting frustrated. Her voice rose and she grabbed at Benny's hands, forcing them onto the table. He screamed and pushed her away, getting out of his chair quickly.

Fiona left the room and sat in her room, crying. Benny paced the kitchen. She collapsed onto her bed, angrily banging her head onto her pillow. She threw the photo of Benny to the wall and the glass shattered. Bending down to his distant grin, tear drops soaked into her carpet. She sat there for some time, unable to go back to Benny, but she didn't know what to do. She fumbled for a bottle of whisky under her dresser, discarding the empties that lay beside it. Unscrewing the lid and blowing away dust, she wiped tears from her eyes and took a bitter sip, her lips pursed. The drink burned her throat and she spluttered through tears and mascara ran down her cheeks. There was one more thing underneath her dresser; a glint of metal caught her eye. In a frenzy of blurred vision and sharp breaths she slid a gun out, the cool metal, soft on her slender hands.

She stumbled into the kitchen toward Benny, holding the gun above her head. She shouted at him for being bad. She shouted at him for hurting her. She shouted at him for everything that went wrong in her life. Everything was getting so loud in her ears. The television seemed to scream out at her. She yelled and yelled. The room was spinning and tears streamed down her face, burning her cheeks. Benny got scared and crouched down feeling vulnerable. Fiona's eyes were spinning back in her head. Then she looked down at the crumpled Benny. Suddenly Fiona stopped yelling. She told Benny she was sorry, sharp breaths drying her mouth. She told him to run away now and she told him she loved him. Tears fell onto the floor and she held him close to her for some time. She said she loved him more than anything in the world. She apologised one last time and, with that, she held the gun to her head and pulled the trigger. Benny screamed. Fiona's body fell to the ground and a pool of blood leaked out around him.

Benny muttered to himself. He couldn't think clearly. He paced the kitchen again, leaving red footprints on the white kitchen tiles. Fiona had told him to run away but he loved her too much to leave her. He wrapped her fingers round his, feeling her soft touch again. He begged her to come back because he was so scared, his tears falling onto her matted red hair. He dropped her hand and he ran, ran out of the house, shaking his head loose of the gunshot sounds. Then they came for him...

I can still see the gun in her hand. the shiny metal catching the light above her head. I can't stop the sounds replaying in my ears, even with these people talking around me. They are talking about me. They say that I killed her. I beg and plead that I didn't, that I didn't kill her. My tears soak my new orange clothes. I thanked them for the clothes before and I wasn't sure if they heard so I do it again. I ask to leave, my voice shaking and my lip trembling. I am so scared. I wish I could feel her hair again, her beautiful, soft hair. I reach out for my blue handkerchief but the pockets of the orange clothes are empty. I shout at them, I shout for my clothes back, I shout to be let go. She said 'yell if you need me' ... so I do ...