

Extract 1: A Memorable Incident

It was an ordinary school day; I'd arrived at school at the same time, put my bag in the same place and gone to play with the same friends in the same area I always went to.

I was seven at the time, and liked to think myself a bit of a budding artist. So when the playtime bell went, I went straight over to the corner where I always went. The corner with the box of Lego. The pieces shone at me like red, white and yellow treasure.

Within minutes I'd started putting the pieces together in order to resemble my new masterpiece: a glorious plane.

Soon after, I had created it. My piece of art. I beamed proudly as I showed my friends my new creation. Da Vinci would've been proud; I was sure of it! I put it carefully on the side *because* I wanted to make sure it didn't break.

Then, the ginger haired boy approached me. "Let me see that" he said. I looked at him suspiciously. "Go on, it's really good!" he exclaimed. So I passed it to him. 'He only wants to admire its beauty' I thought. "What's that meant to be?" he asked, baffled.

"It's a plane!" I replied. The next few minutes are vague in my memory, but I remember him wanting to help me make it look more like a plane, and me refusing his help because I thought it looked like a great plane as it was. Almost good enough to take off, I thought. He got frustrated. That's when it happened...

Extract 2: An Autobiography

London Road Primary School was a small collection of Victorian buildings, nestled cosily beside the town's larger and more modern comprehensive. To my bewildered, four-year-old eyes, it was a vast and frightening place.

Squeezed into my uncomfortable grey skirt and stiff white shirt, I tugged constantly on the unfamiliar green and gold tie as I stood in the playground, clutching my mum's hand on that first, frightening day. Around me, other small children clung to their parents, wide-eyed and fearful, waiting to be summoned through the doors of that great institution.

At nine o'clock exactly, Mrs Hargreaves arrived at the door to reception class and beckoned us forward. 'Single file, no talking,' she commanded. Meekly, we said goodbye to our parents and lined up like lambs to the slaughter. It took all my strength not to burst into tears.

Inside, the classroom was austere and forbidding. We were later to discover that Mrs Hargreaves had an aversion to electricity and very seldom allowed the overhead strip lights to be switched on. As a result, I spent the first two years of my education in a state of semi-gloom, both literally and metaphorically.

'Find your desk and sit in silence!'

Thirty trembling children wandered through the rows of desks, looking for their name, each of which had been written in a perfect, copperplate hand on small pieces of card, and then placed on the desks. Soon, most of us were sitting – save for five stragglers who found themselves standing at the front, under the gorgon's eye.

'Why are you not sitting down?'

The tallest girl, who I recognised from play group as Lisa Smith, piped up bravely.

'We can't read, Miss.'

'Idiots!' Her voice rang in our ears and the smallest boy at the front started crying.

Extract 3: The Missing Easter Egg

When I was six my Auntie May gave me the most beautiful Easter egg I had ever seen. It seemed enormous. The egg was covered with shiny paper and inside a special box. There was a hole cut out in the side of the box and through it you could see the curve of the egg shining in its silver paper. Seeing it shine through the hole in the box was like looking through a window and seeing the moon. It was still a week to go to Easter Sunday so I put the box on the high shelf in my bedroom and every morning and every night I looked up at the egg and dreamed of how good it was going to taste.

On Easter Sunday morning I woke up really early and the first thing I did was to stand on my bed and reach for my egg. As I picked it up something felt a bit strange, the box wasn't as heavy as I remembered it. But you could still see the shape of the egg in its wrapping inside the box so I wasn't worried. But when I pulled open the lid of the box and looked inside I couldn't believe my eyes. It was empty! Whoever had taken the egg had been really cunning – they had put the silver paper wrapping back in the box and pressed it into the shape of the egg, as though it was still inside.

I didn't have to wait to find out who the thief was. I heard laughing behind me and when I turned around there was my sister Diane standing in the doorway and laughing at me. I knew then who had played that terrible trick on me and who had eaten my Easter egg.

Extract 4: Jessica Ennis

I am crying. I am a Sheffield schoolgirl writing in her diary about the bullies awaiting me tomorrow.

They stand menacingly by the gates and lurk unseen in my head, mocking my size and status. They make a small girl shrink, and I feel insecure and frightened. I pour the feelings out into words on the page, as if exposing them in some way will help, but nobody sees my diary. It is kept in my room as a hidden tale of hurt.

Fast forward two decades and I am crying again. I am standing in a cavernous arena in London. Suddenly, the pain and suffering and frustration give way to a flood of overwhelming emotion. In the middle of this enormous arena I feel smaller than ever, but I puff out my chest, look to the flag and stand tall. It has been a long and winding road from the streets of Sheffield to the tunnel that feeds into the Olympic Stadium like an artery.

I am Jessica Ennis. I have been called many things, from tadpole to poster girl, but I have had to fight to make that progression. I smile and am polite and so people think it comes easily, but it doesn't. I am not one of those athletes who slap their thighs and snarl before a competition, but there is a competitive animal inside, waiting to get out and fight for survival and recognition.

Cover shoots and billboards are nice, but they are nothing without the work and I have left blood, sweat and tears on tracks all over the world. It is an age where young people are fed ideas of quick-fix fame and instant celebrity, but the tears mean more if the journey is hard. So I don't cry crocodile tears; I cry the real stuff.

In 1993 my parents sent me to Sharrow Junior School. In terms of academic results it was not the best, but Mum was keen for me to go somewhere that had a rich mix of races and cultures. I was the smallest in the class and I became more self-conscious about it as the years went by. Swimming was a particular ordeal, and in my mind now, I can still see this young, timid wisp standing by the side of a pool in her red swimming costume quaking with anxiety. I was small and scraggy and that was when the bullying started.

There were two girls who were really nasty to me. They did not hit me, but bullying can take on many forms and the abuse and name-calling hurt. The saying about sticks and stones breaking bones but words never hurting falls on deaf ears when you are a schoolkid in the throes of a verbal beating. At that age, girls can be almost paralysed by their self-consciousness, so each nasty little word cut deep wounds. I went home, cried and wrote in my diary. Perhaps it would be nice to say that one day I fought back and beat the bullies, but I didn't. It festered away and became a big thing in my life, leaving me wracked with fear about what they would say or do next. It got to the point that I dreaded seeing them at school.

And then we moved on to secondary school and I found out that they were going there too. The dread got deeper. Later, I did tell my mum. 'They are only jealous of you,' she replied. But jealous of what? I could not understand it. I tried to deal with it myself, but that was impossible. I would rely on my diary and hope for the best, but that was not much of a defence against these scary girls who were dominating my thoughts.

And then, around that time, my mum saw an advert for a summer sports camp at the Don Valley Stadium in Sheffield. It was my first taste of sport and it would be the first tentative step towards

fighting back and getting my own quiet revenge on the bullies. I started at King Egbert's School in the little village of Dore in South Sheffield in September 1997. I was still terrified on the first day. I was not a confident child and almost froze when my dad asked me to go and get the paper from the corner shop one day.

'On my own?'

Dad barely looked at me. 'Yes, here's the money.' He knew I needed to shed some of my inhibitions, but I still remember going to big school and being frightened. There were two buildings, Wessex and Mercia, separated by a changeover path, and as I was edging along it one day, I heard an older girl say: 'Oh, look at her, she's so tiny and cute.' That made me feel 10 times worse.

Sport, though, was becoming an outlet for the insecurities and I found I was good at it. Gradually, I became more popular. The two bullies were still there, but if I was talking to anyone going through something similar I would stress things change quickly.

It does not seem like it at the time, of course, with every week an endless agony of groundhog days, but it soon fades. I slowly made friends and the tide turned. The same girls who had bullied me now wanted to be friends.

It was all part of that whirlpool of hormones and petty jealousies that is part of being a young girl. Now I do not think they were nasty people, but I know what I have done with my life and I think I am in a better position.

Extract 5: I Am Malala

The ride to school was quick, just five minutes up the road and along the river. I arrived on time, and exam day passed as it always did. The chaos of Mingora city surrounded us with its honking horns and factory noises while we worked silently, bent over our papers in hushed concentration.

By day's end I was tired but happy; I knew I'd done well on my test. "Let's stay on for the second trip," said Moniba, my best friend. "That way we can chat a little longer." We always liked to stay on for the late pickup.

For days I'd had a strange, gnawing feeling that something bad was going to happen. One night I'd found myself wondering about death. What is being dead really like? I wanted to know. I was alone in my room, so I turned toward Mecca and asked God. "What happens when you die?" I said. "How would it feel?"

If I died, I wanted to be able to tell people what it felt like. "Malala, you silly girl," I said to myself then, "you'd be dead and you couldn't tell people what it was like."

Before I went to bed, I asked God for one more thing. Can I die a little bit and come back, so I can tell people about it?

But the next day had dawned bright and sunny, and so had the next one and the one after that. And now I knew I'd done well on my exam. Whatever cloud had been hanging over my head had begun to clear away. So Moniba and I did what we always did: We had a good gossip. What face cream was she using? Had one of the male teachers gone for a baldness cure? And, now that the first exam was over, how difficult would the next one be?

When our bus was called, we ran down the steps. As usual, Moniba and the other girls covered their heads and faces before we stepped outside the gate and got into the waiting duna, the white truck that was our Khushal School "bus." And, as usual, our driver was ready with a magic trick to amuse us. That day, he made a pebble disappear. No matter how hard we tried, we couldn't figure out his secret.

We piled inside, twenty girls and two teachers crammed into the three rows of benches stretching down the length of the duna. It was hot and sticky, and there were no windows, just a yellowed plastic sheet that flapped against the side as we bounced along Mingora's crowded rush-hour streets.

Haji Baba Road was a jumble of brightly colored rickshaws, women in flowing robes, men on scooters, honking and zigzagging through the traffic. We passed a shopkeeper butchering chickens. A boy selling ice-cream cones. A billboard for Dr. Humayun's Hair Transplant Institute. Moniba and I were deep in conversation. I had many friends, but she was the friend of my heart, the one with whom I shared everything. That day, when we were talking about who would get the highest marks this term, one of the other girls started a song, and the rest of us joined in.

Extract 6: Christmas Cake

Mum never was much of a cook. Meals arrived on the table as much by happy accident as by domestic science. She was a chops-and-peas sort of a cook, occasionally going so far as to make a rice pudding, exasperated by the highs and lows of a temperamental cream-and-black Aga and a finicky little son. She found it all a bit of an ordeal, and wished she could have left the cooking, like the washing, ironing, and dusting, to Mrs. P., her “woman what does.”

Once a year there were Christmas puddings and cakes to be made. They were made with neither love nor joy. They simply had to be done. “I suppose I had better DO THE CAKE,” she would sigh. The food mixer—she was not the sort of woman to use her hands—was an ancient, heavy Kenwood that lived in a deep, secret hole in the kitchen work surface. My father had, in a rare moment of do-it-yourselfery, fitted a heavy industrial spring under the mixer so that when you lifted the lid to the cupboard the mixer slowly rose like a corpse from a coffin. All of which was slightly too much for my mother, my father’s quaint Heath Robinson craftsmanship taking her by surprise every year, the huge mixer bouncing up like a jack-in-the-box and making her clap her hands to her chest. “Oh heck!” she would gasp. It was the nearest my mother ever got to swearing.

She never quite got the hang of the mixer. I can picture her now, desperately trying to harness her wayward Kenwood, bits of cake mixture flying out of the bowl like something from an I Love Lucy sketch. The cake recipe was written in green biro on a piece of blue Basildon Bond and was kept, crisply folded into four, in the spineless Aga Cookbook that lived for the rest of the year in the bowl of the mixer. The awkward, though ingenious, mixer cupboard was impossible to clean properly, and in among the layers of flour and icing sugar lived tiny black flour weevils. I was the only one who could see them darting around. None of which, I suppose, mattered if you were making Christmas pudding, with its gritty currants and hours of boiling. But this was cake.

Cooks know to butter and line the cake tins before they start the creaming and beating. My mother would remember just before she put the final spoonful of brandy into the cake mixture, then take half an hour to find them. They always turned up in a drawer, rusty and full of fluff. Then there was the annual scrabble to find the brown paper, the scissors, the string. However much she hated making the cake we both loved the sound of the raw cake mixture falling into the tin. “Shhh, listen to the cake mixture,” she would say, and the two of us would listen to the slow plop of the dollops of fruit and butter and sugar falling into the paper-lined cake tin. The kitchen would be warmer than usual and my mother would have that I’ve-just-baked-a-cake glow. “Oh, put the gram on, will you, dear? Put some carols on,” she would say as she put the cake in the top oven of the Aga. Carols or not, it always sank in the middle. The embarrassing hollow, sometimes as deep as your fist, having to be filled in with marzipan.

Forget scented candles and freshly brewed coffee. Every home should smell of baking Christmas cake. That, and warm freshly ironed tea towels hanging on the rail in front of the Aga. It was a pity we had Auntie Fanny living with us. Her incontinence could take the edge off the smell of a chicken curry, let alone a baking cake. No matter how many mince pies were being made, or pine logs burning in the grate, or how many orange-and-clove pomanders my mother had made, there was always the faintest whiff of Auntie Fanny.

Warm sweet fruit, a cake in the oven, woodsmoke, warm ironing, hot retriever curled up by the Aga, mince pies, Mum’s 4711. Every child’s Christmas memories should smell like that. Mine did. It is a pity that there was always a passing breeze of ammonia. Cake holds a family together. I really believed it did. My father was a different man when there was cake in the house. Warm. The sort of man I wanted to hug rather than shy away from. If he had a plate of cake in his hand I knew it would be all right to climb up onto his lap. There was something about the way my mother put a cake on the table that made me feel that all was well. Safe. Secure. Unshakable. Even when she got to the

point where she carried her Ventolin inhaler in her left hand all the time. Unshakable. Even when she and my father used to go for long walks, walking ahead of me and talking in hushed tones and he would come back with tears in his eyes.

When I was eight my mother's annual attempt at icing the family Christmas cake was handed over to me. "I've had enough of this lark, dear, you're old enough now." She had started to sit down a lot. I made only marginally less of a mess than she did, but at least I didn't cover the table, the floor, the dog with icing sugar. To be honest, it was a relief to get it out of her hands. I followed the Slater house style of snowy peaks brought up with the flat of a knife and a red ribbon. Even then I wasn't one to rock the boat. The idea behind the wave effect of her icing was simply to hide the fact that her attempt at covering the cake in marzipan resembled nothing more than an unmade bed. Folds and lumps, creases and tears. A few patches stuck on with a bit of apricot jam.

I knew I could have probably have flat-iced a cake to perfection, but to have done so would have hurt her feelings. So waves it was. There was also a chipped Father Christmas, complete with a jagged lump of last year's marzipan around his feet, and the dusty bristle tree with its snowy tips of icing. I drew the line at the fluffy yellow Easter chick.

Baking a cake for your family to share, the stirring of cherries, currants, raisins, peel and brandy, brown sugar, butter, eggs, and flour, for me the ultimate symbol of a mother's love for her husband and kids, was reduced to something that "simply has to be done." Like cleaning the loo or polishing the shoes. My mother knew nothing of putting glycerine in with the sugar to keep the icing soft, so her rock-hard cake was always the butt of jokes for the entire Christmas. My father once set about it with a hammer and chisel from the shed. So the sad, yellowing cake sat around until about the end of February, the dog giving it the occasional lick as he passed, until it was thrown, much to everyone's relief, onto the lawn for the birds.

Extract 7: 'Writing Home'

At St Peter's, Sunday morning was letter-writing time. At nine o'clock the whole school had to go to their desks and spend one hour writing a letter home to their parents. At ten-fifteen we put on our caps and coats and formed up outside the school in a long crocodile and marched a couple of miles down into Weston-super-Mare for church, and we didn't get back until lunchtime. Church-going never became a habit with me. Letter writing did.

Here is the very first letter I wrote home from St Peter's. From that very first Sunday at St Peter's until the day my mother died thirty-two years later, I wrote to her once a week, sometimes more often, whenever I was away from home. I wrote to her every week from St Peter's (I had to), and every week from my next school, Repton, and every week from Dar es Salaam in East Africa, where I went on my first job after leaving school, and then every week during the war from Kenya and Iraq and Egypt when I was flying with the RAF.

My mother, for her part, kept every one of these letters, binding them carefully in neat bundles with green tape, but this was her own secret. She never told me she was doing it. In 1957, when she knew she was dying, I was in hospital in Oxford having a serious operation on my spine and I was unable to write to her. So she had a telephone specially installed beside her bed in order that she might have one last conversation with me. She didn't tell me she was dying nor did anyone else for that matter because I was in a fairly serious condition myself at the time. She simply asked me how I was and hoped I would get better soon and sent me her love. I had no idea that she would die the next day, but she knew all right and she wanted to reach out and speak to me for the last time.

When I recovered and went home, I was given this vast collection of my letters, all so neatly bound with green tape, more than six hundred of them altogether, dating from 1925 to 1945, each one in its original envelope with the old stamps still on them. I am awfully lucky to have something like this to refer to in my old age.

Extract 8: From *Becoming* by Michelle Obama (2018)

Personally, as a kid, I preferred The Mary Tyler Moore Show, which I absorbed with fascination. Mary had a job, a snappy wardrobe, and really great hair. She was independent and funny, and unlike those of the other ladies on TV, her problems were interesting. She had conversations that weren't about children or homemaking. She didn't let Lou Grant boss her around, and she wasn't fixated on finding a husband. She was youthful and at the same time grown-up. In the pre- pre- pre-internet landscape, when the world came packaged almost exclusively through three channels of network TV, this stuff mattered. If you were a girl with a brain and a dawning sense that you wanted to grow into something more than a wife, Mary Tyler Moore was your goddess.

And here I was now, 29 years old, sitting in the very same apartment where I'd watched all that TV and consumed all those meals dished up by the patient and selfless Marian Robinson. I had so much – an education, a healthy sense of self, a deep arsenal of ambition – and I was wise enough to credit my mother, in particular, with instilling it in me.

She'd taught me how to read before I started kindergarten, helping me sound out words as I sat curled like a kitten in her lap, studying a library copy of Dick and Jane. She'd cooked for us with care, putting broccoli and brussels sprouts on our plates and requiring that we eat them. She'd hand sewn my prom dress, for God's sake. The point was, she'd given diligently and she'd given everything. She'd let our family define her. I was old enough now to realize that all the hours she gave to me and my brother, Craig, were hours she didn't spend on herself.

My considerable blessings in life were now causing a kind of psychic whiplash. I'd been raised to be confident and see no limits, to believe I could go after and get absolutely anything I wanted. And I wanted everything. I wanted to live with the hat-tossing, independent-career-woman zest of Mary Tyler Moore, and at the same time I gravitated toward the stabilizing, self-sacrificing, seemingly bland normalcy of being a wife and mother. I wanted to have a work life and a home life, but with some promise that one would never fully squelch the other. I hoped to be exactly like my own mother and at the same time nothing like her at all. It was an odd and confounding thing to ponder. Could I have everything? Would I have everything? I had no idea.

Extract 9: From *Faster Than Lightning My Story* by Usain Bolt (2013)

There's an old photo at home that makes me laugh whenever I see it. It's of me as a kid. I'm maybe seven years old, and I'm standing in the street alongside my mom, Jennifer. Even then I was nearly shoulder high against her. I'm looking 'silk' in skinny black jeans and a red T-shirt. I'm clutching Mom's hand tight, leaning in close, and the look on my face says, 'To get to me you've gotta get through her first.' It's a happy time, a happy place.

I was a mommy's boy back then, still am, and the only time I ever cry today is when something makes my mom sad. I hate to see her upset. Me and Pops were close, I love him dearly, but Mom and me had a special bond, probably because I was her only child and she spoiled me rotten.

Home was Coxearth, a small village near Waldensia Primary and Sherwood Content and, man, it was beautiful, a village among the lush trees and wild bush. Not a huge amount of people lived in the area; there was a house or two every few hundred metres and our old home was a simple, single-storey building rented by Dad. The pace of life was slow, real slow. Cars rarely passed through and the road was always empty. The closest thing to a traffic jam in Coxearth took place when a friend waved out in the street.

To give an idea of how remote it was, back in the day they named the whole area Cockpit Country because it was once a defensive stronghold in Jamaica used by Maroons, the runaway West Indian slaves that had settled there during the 1700s. The Maroons used the area as a base and would attack the English forts during colonial times. If their lives hadn't been so violent, Coxearth and Sherwood Content would have been a pretty blissful place. The weather was always beautiful, the sun was hot, and even if the sky turned slightly grey, it was a tranquil spot. I remember we called the rain 'liquid sunshine'.

Despite the climate, tourists rarely swung by, and anyone reading a guidebook would see the same thing in their travel directions: 'Yo, you can only get there by car and the drive is pretty scary. The road winds through some heavy vegetation over a track full of potholes. On one side there's a fast-flowing river; trees and jungle hangs down from the other and a crazy-assed chicken might run out on you at any time, so watch your step. About 30 minutes along the way is Coxearth, a small village set in the valley...' It's worth the effort, though. That place is my paradise.

It won't come as a surprise to learn that the way I lived when I was young had everything to do with how I came to be an Olympic legend. There was adventure everywhere, even in my own house, and from the minute I could walk I was tearing about the home, because I was the most hyperactive kid ever. Not that anyone would have imagined that happening when I was born because, man, I came out *big* - nine and a half pounds big. I was such a weight that Pops later told me one of the nurses in the hospital had even made a joke about my bulk when I'd arrived.

'My, that child looks like he's been walking around the earth for a long time already,' she said, holding me up in the air.

If physical size had been the first gift from Him upstairs, then the second was my unstoppable energy. From the minute I arrived, I was fast. I did not stop moving, and after I was able to crawl

around as a toddler I just wanted to explore. No sofa was safe, no cupboard was out of reach and the best furniture at home became a climbing frame for me to play on. I wouldn't sit still; I couldn't stand in one place for longer than a second. I was always up to something, climbing on everything, and I had way too much enthusiasm for my folks to handle. At one point, probably after I'd banged my head or crashed into a door for the hundredth time, they took me to the doctors to find out what was wrong with me.

'The boy won't stop moving,' cussed Pops. 'He's got too much energy! There must be something wrong with him.'

The doc told them that my condition was hyperactivity and there was nothing that could be done; I would grow out of it, he said. But I guess it must have been tough on them at the time, tiring even, and nobody could figure out where I'd got that crazy power from. My mom wasn't an athlete when she was younger, nor was Pops. Sure, they used to run in school, but not to the standard I would later reach, and the only time I ever saw either one of them sprint was when Mom once chased a fowl down the street when it ran into our kitchen. It had grabbed a fish that was about to be thrown into a pot of dinner. *Woah!* It was like watching the American 200 and 400 Olympic gold medallist Michael Johnson tearing down the track. Mom chased that bird until it dropped the fish and ran into the woods, fearing for its feathers. I always joked that I'd got my physique from Dad (he's over six foot tall and stick thin like me), but Mom had given me all the talent I needed.

Extract 10: From *My Story* by Steven Gerrard (2015)

I sat in the back of the car and felt the tears rolling down my face. I hadn't cried for years but, on the way home, I couldn't stop. The tears kept coming on a sunlit evening in Liverpool. It was very quiet as we moved further and further away from Anfield. I can't remember now how long that journey lasted. I can't even tell you if the streets were thick with traffic or as empty as I was on the inside. It was killing me.

An hour earlier, after the Chelsea game, I'd wanted to disappear down a dark hole. Our second-last home match of the season was meant to have been the title-clincher. We had beaten our closest rivals, Manchester City, in the previous game at Anfield. We had just reeled off our eleventh straight win. One more victory and we would be almost certain to win the league for the first time since May 1990.

Twenty-four years earlier, in the month I turned ten, that team of me and my dad's dreams had been managed by Kenny Dalglish and captained by Alan Hansen. It was also the team of McMahon and Molby, of Beardsley and Rush, of Whelan and Barnes.

I was dreaming of today even then, as a boy who had joined the Liverpool Academy at the age of eight and wished and prayed that, one day, he might also win the league in front of the Kop. My first-team debut came in 1998, when I was eighteen and I had no idea how it might feel to be a thirty-three-year-old man crying in the back of a car.

I felt numb, like I had lost someone in my family.

It was as if my whole quarter of a century at this football club poured out of me. I did not even try to stem the silent tears as the events of the afternoon played over and over again in my head.

In the last minute of the first half against a cagey Chelsea, set up to stop our rush to glory by José Mourinho, it happened. A simple pass rolled towards me near the halfway line. It was a nothing moment, a lull in our surge to the title. I moved to meet the ball. It slid under my foot.

The twist came then. I slipped. I fell to the ground.

The ball was swept away and the devastating Chelsea attack began. I clambered to my feet and ran with all my heart. I chased Demba Ba as though my life depended on it. I knew the outcome if I couldn't catch him. But it was hopeless. I couldn't stop him.

Ba scored. It was over. My slip had been costly.

I was in the car with Alex, my wife, and Gratty, Paul McGratten, one of my closest friends. Alex and Gratty were trying hard to help me, to console me. They were saying words like, 'Look, it can still change, there're still a few games to go...'

But I knew. The fate of the title was now in Manchester City's hands and they would not blow it. There would be no comeback for Liverpool. There would be no Miracle of Istanbul - a repeat of that Champions League final when, in 2005, we were 3-0 down at half-time against AC Milan, the Italian masters of defence, and yet we fought back and won the game on penalties. I had been at the heart of the team. I was already Liverpool captain all those years ago. I scored the first goal in our long climb

back against Milan. I kissed and held the Champions League trophy, and kissed it again, before anyone else on that magical night in Istanbul.