

all over the shop

THE CULT SHOP

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WRY SOCIETY

the posh builder

Can Clara keep her cool as Josh prioritises painting the town red between Polzeath and Ibiza over her country refurb?

Clara is beginning to seriously regret being friends with her builder on Facebook. This summer Josh seems to have expended much more energy knocking back strawberry daiquiris in Ibiza than he has knocking down the kitchen wall in their new house.

It was a simple job, or so he said. Just a bish-bash-bosh, bit-a-dust, lick-er-paint and Bob's-yer-uncle. Except Bob isn't her uncle. Edward's her uncle and he is meant to be coming to stay next

weekend, en route to a 70th birthday party in Cornwall (a downside of living in the southwest is that you double up as an upmarket Travelodge).

Edward is a man who lunches at Boodle's twice a week and has suits made at Anderson & Sheppard. He can't possibly tuck into a microwavable lasagne (even if it is from M&S) on a tin plate in the utility room where, several long weeks ago, Clara had the genius idea of arranging five stools around the tumble dryer in lieu of a table. There was something rather Famous Five

about it all then. Now it's much more One Direction: a case of smiling sweetly as she, Damian and their three dust-coated children hurtle towards oblivion.

Three weeks, Josh had said at their first meeting. Four at most. Beardedly handsome, with a pencil firmly behind his ear, he had prowled their new home like a lion surveying his kingdom, knocking aimlessly on any wall he happened to pass and opening cupboard doors for no apparent reason. "Great place this," he finally decreed, taking an authoritative sip from his takeaway cappuccino. "Are you guys going to Glastonbury this weekend?"

Glastonbury? They were barely going to the dry cleaners. All the money they had in the world had now been sunk into this beautiful, ramshackle, stuff-of-dreams house (not to mention the 47 Farrow & Ball sample pots). Who needed to send their children to public school

He prowled the house like a lion surveying his kingdom

anyway? Private schools were full of oligarch offspring. State schools were the smart way forward. Just look at the idyllic, totally free, local village primary school where Clara's Jago and Josh's Herbert had made best friends on day one. And this house, with its bendy walls and outmoded plumbing system, was firmly "in catchment" for the next step.

"Sorry guys. Suze dragging me off to Bryanston open day. You know the score! Me and the boys will be with you bright and early Monday morning. Jx" And so it began. A long, rain-filled summer full of elaborate excuses and unpacked boxes. At first, it had been faintly amusing. Josh and his pretty-boy team with screwdrivers, ripping their house to shreds to a pumping Radio 6 soundtrack and then disappearing for days on end.

Existing on a steady evening diet of cider, cigarettes and cherry tomatoes, Clara and Damian would laugh as they compared Josh's explanatory text messages with his social media feed: "Waiting on materials" (#surfinginPolzeath); "Let down by plumber" (#boozydinnerinLondon).

But Ibiza was the final straw. Because Ibiza was warm. And Josh and Suze and their four gorgeous blond children looked so happy there. And Clara, who had spent the entire summer holidays at the soft-play centre, keeping out of their nail-strewn hellhole of a house – where costs were mounting quicker than a BA business class "hop" to the Balearics – suddenly saw red. Strawberry daiquiri red.

Next time Josh deigned to turn up, she would put her children in front of their umpteenth viewing of *Grease* on her laptop and get tough. But first, she must bite the bullet and cancel Uncle Edward,

whose visit had been in the diary since 2014. She was young then, she thinks wistfully, as she trudges to the only place in the bottom of her (overgrown) new garden where she gets mobile phone reception and wonders what their kitchen

sink is doing in the vegetable patch.

Edward is terribly understanding, of course, promising to be in touch soon to make a fresh arrangement. "Met a super friend of yours at the party," her voicemail crackles a week later. "Cappy's grandson, Josh. Builder apparently. Said he'd retile our bathroom next week for a case of Pomerol. Wondered if we might come and stay to keep out of his way?" **CHLOE FOX**