

What We Talk About

EXT. LAKESIDE PICNIC AREA - DAY

Four barking dogs race down to the water's edge, tails windmilling.

Two vehicles on the crest of the slope, one a shabby station wagon, the other a Jeep, are being unloaded by two couples.

EXT. PARKING AREA - CONTINUOUS

MURRAY (early 40s) withdraws a wicker picnic basket from the station wagon and stops to watch the dogs plunge into the water.

MURRAY

(laughing)

Look at that lot. The water must be freezing.

His wife, KATRINA (early 40s), does not look up from the boot where she is gathering together shopping bags of food and French bread.

KATRINA

(muttering)

They're going to get muddy paws over everything.

A heated but muted discussion is going on next door by the Jeep between FRANK (40s) and JO (late 30s).

FRANK

You had one thing to remember, Jo, *one* thing.

JO

It wasn't the *only* thing, Frank. I'm sorry.

With an irritable sigh, FRANK turns to MURRAY and KATRINA.

FRANK

I don't suppose you brought a blanket with you, did you?

KATRINA

We always keep a blanket in the back. Need to be prepared. Especially in this heap of scrap metal. (muttering)
I still don't see how it was a fair trade for the Merc...

PICNIC AREA - CONTINUOUS

MURRAY carelessly lays out the blanket on a patch of grass overlooking the water and watches the dogs gamboling in the shallows.

The others approach from behind.

KATRINA

That's a lovely sweater, Frank. Where did you get it?

FRANK beams proudly as he snaps open four folding chairs.

FRANK

It was a gift. For my birthday.

KATRINA

It's beautiful. Jo, where did you get it?

FRANK

No, not from Jo. From - er - the team at the office.

MURRAY throws a stick for one of the dogs to fetch, chuckles.

MURRAY

Oscar and Holly would love a puppy.

KATRINA

No, they wouldn't.

She smooths out the blanket corners and discreetly moves the chairs back so they're not resting on the fabric. Sandals off, she kneels on the blanket and starts unpacking the picnic basket.

MURRAY

'Course they would. All I ever wanted as a kid was a dog.

KATRINA

They'll get bored of it after a few weeks then who's left to take it for walks and clean up its mess?

MURRAY

I-

KATRINA

Me, that's who. You're working all the time so you wouldn't be much help.

MURRAY looks shifty.

MURRAY

I'll open some beers. Frank, Jo, you want a cold one?

FRANK sits down on a chair while JO sits cross-legged on the blanket at his feet. KATRINA eyes her muddy hiking boots.

FRANK

Jo, did you at least remember the bottle opener?

JO opens her mouth to reply but no sound comes out.

MURRAY

No worries, it's not a train smash.

He opens the bottles using another bottle and hands them around. Katrina bins the bottle-tops in a plastic bag marked "WASTE".

KATRINA

Did you buy any champagne?

MURRAY sits.

MURRAY

Kat, we're having a picnic, not a royal banquet.

KATRINA

But Jo and I wanted champagne.

JO glances fearfully up at FRANK and buries her trembling hands in her lap.

JO

Not for me. I'll just have a Coke or something.

KATRINA gives her an odd look.

MURRAY

You sure? There's plenty of beers here.

JO gulps.

JO
Thank you. No.

KATRINA gasps.

KATRINA
You're not... *pregnant*, are you?

JO darts a look at FRANK who is reading on his phone, smiling to himself and appears not to have heard. She shakes her head, doesn't make eye contact.

JO
No. Not pregnant.

KATRINA
Honey, you're running out of time. And it's honestly not as scary as you think. I loved being pregnant. I want another, but Mr Grumpy here says we can't-

MURRAY
Kids aren't cheap.

JO
I know. That's not the issue. We just-

She looks up at FRANK imploringly, but he's still on his phone.

KATRINA
Oscar and Holly are the best things that ever happened to us.

JO
We have the dogs at least.

KATRINA gives MURRAY a discreet look to show she doesn't think much of that consolation prize.

MURRAY's mobile phone rings as they get busy with the food.

MURRAY
Sorry, I've got to take this. It's work.

KATRINA

On a weekend? I thought we said this was going to be our time.

MURRAY

I won't be long.

He gets up and wanders a short way away to answer the call.

JO

Why didn't you bring Oscar and Holly?
I was looking forward to seeing them.

KATRINA

Both at friends' houses. You sure you don't want a beer? I've never known you to refuse a tippie.

FRANK

Not a good idea, eh, Jo?

JO shakes her head, doesn't make eye contact. FRANK laughs.

FRANK

Should've seen her at the Christmas party last year. Completely legless. Laura, my PA, had to babysit her the rest of the night. So embarrassing.

KATRINA stops paté-ing rolls to pat JO on the knee in a brief gesture of sisterhood. She hands around the rolls on paper plates and places a packet of wet wipes in the middle of the blanket where everyone can see it.

Behind them can be seen MURRAY pacing back and forth, massaging the back of his neck.

KATRINA

Talking of babysitters, I wanted to get Sara, you know the girl who lives at number 12, to watch Oscar and Megan today. But Murray says she's too expensive. Forces me to ring up their friends, see if they'll have them 'round for the day. Now that's an embarrassment.

MURRAY's raised voice drifts over.

MURRAY(O.S.)

But we're not allowed to move assets

at this point. And we can't pay Sweeneys and forget the others. That's preferential...

JO

You could have brought them along.

KATRINA

We wanted some adult time, not having to be on the lookout for Oscar digging in the dirt or Holly getting wet and catching a cold. They're a full-time job, you know. You'll probably have to quit the shop if you're going to have kids, Jo.

JO gives a weak smile then looks sadly down at the ground.

FRANK

Laura seems to manage okay. And she's a single mother.

MURRAY returns from his phone call. He sits down and gulps down half a beer. KATRINA hands him a hot dog and a wet wipe. MURRAY rests his half drunk beer on the blanket so he can eat.

FRANK

Everything okay?

MURRAY

Yeah. Just... agh, I won't bore you with the details.

KATRINA

Murray's been working day and night these past six months on this merger thing.

MURRAY looks at KATRINA and hesitates. He looks away, a man in crisis and recrosses his legs. He kicks over the beer and it froths over the blanket.

KATRINA

Murray! Look what you're doing! Christ, you're worse than the kids sometimes!

Tutting, she rights the bottle and dabs at the blanket with a wet wipe.

MURRAY
(beaten)
Sorry.

JO
You should have a holiday, Murray.
Give yourself some R and R.

MURRAY shakes his head with a mirthless laugh.

MURRAY
No rest for the wicked...

JO
We were looking at a trip to Greece in
the autumn. Maybe you could all come?
The kids too.

FRANK
Jo, will you stop going on about the
bloody kids?

MURRAY runs a hand through his hair.

MURRAY
I-I-

FRANK
Forget it. Don't mind Jo. It was an
idea that was thrown up months ago. We
never made any solid plans.

JO
But Frank, you said we could go.

FRANK
Plans change, things come up.

He subtly twiddles his bottle of beer at her and raises a stern eyebrow. She looks away guiltily.

FRANK
Besides, I've got that Rome conference
in October.

MURRAY
Well, why don't you make a holiday of
that? Jo looks like she could do with
one too.

FRANK shifts uneasily in his chair.

FRANK

Company won't cover extra tickets. Besides, it wouldn't be any fun for you, Jo. You'd be bored stiff. Me and - and - the team'll be working all the time.

KATRINA

Since the kids I haven't had time to be bored.

JO

It's okay. Someone needs to look after the dogs, anyway.

She looks sadly out towards the lakeside where the dogs are playing, and heaves a big sigh. Her gaze drifts back to KATRINA's beer on the blanket. She closes her eyes to block it out. No one notices.

FRANK is back on his phone, smirking. MURRAY looks out over the lake, chewing his lip anxiously. KATRINA brushes crumbs off the blanket.