

PROLOGUE

WHEN YOUR EX HOOKS UP WITH A BOND GIRL

Yep, that was awesome.

Two weeks before my 40th birthday, the wheels unexpectedly fell off my marriage. This is the story of how I got both those wheels and ‘me’ back.

Hiya, I’m Cathrine.

I’m an English, curly-haired Capricorn. A publicist by trade, who never leaves the house without a red lip. I’ve called Sydney home for the past 21 years after moving from the UK in 2000, in part on the advice of a horoscope column. I’m a self-confessed oversharer whose only filter is the one I use on my Instagram photos.

Google me and you’ll discover I was married to former

rugby league player and TV commentator Andrew Johns. Actually, don't google me, as there are a whole host of horrendous photos on offer – and a reminder that I really should have grown my pencil thin eyebrows out ahead of our wedding!

Despite what you may have read about our marriage – and, well, what you will read in this book, too – this isn't a rant about men or my ex, or marriage in general. I loved being married, I love being in love and despite this particular one not working out, we managed to create a perfect human together and not bugger that up, so hey, things aren't all that bad.

But this is the book I wish I could have read when my marriage went tits up.

I wanted to read a book about other people in a similar situation to me and I wanted to know it got better. There is life after divorce, I promise, and laughter and tears and disastrous first dates and more vodka than soda and, best of all, happiness. This is not a self help book – I am still in therapy – but I do hope it's helpful to someone else.

It's a book about me, how I ended up married to one of Australia's most famous sportsmen and how I've tried to get over a very public marriage split without breaking down (too much) in public. And no, despite what Chris Martin and Gwyneth Paltrow managed to achieve, there certainly wasn't a scrap of 'conscious uncoupling' in our separation.

What I hope you will get from reading my story is a bloody good laugh, maybe a cry, to feel like you aren't the

only one feeling desperate about going through the trauma of a break-up and to know that there is always light at the end of the tunnel – even if you have to bring your own torch!

There are six truths I now know about break-ups:

1. It will take time to feel better. It just will. It takes longer than you want it to but less time than you fear it will. Honest.
2. Getting back out there can feel daunting but when you are ready it *is* worth the date nerves. (Being naked with someone who isn't your ex for the first time is bloody scary and you may need a stiff drink and – in my case – the lights out!)
3. You really need to eat something if you're drinking, but I'm not a health expert . . .
4. Friends will get you through this. Friends, chocolate, cornichons (those mini gherkin things), George Michael on high rotation, anything starring Idris Elba and vodka worked for me.
5. Being the bigger person is really hard at times but as Michelle Obama famously said, 'When they go low, we go high.'
6. Solo parents are superheroes. Word.

Now, enough of all that, let's get into it . . .

INTRODUCTION

ACTUALLY, I DON'T LIKE CRICKET OR BLOW JOBS

(And to be honest, I suck at both.)

Yes, that was what I originally wanted to call this book. But then I realised that some women like cricket. Also reading this in front of your inquisitive seven-year-old could lead to some awkward conversations. So, in stepped *Currently Between Husbands* to save the day and any blushes.

However, for the record, I did once give a ten out of ten, 'Best in Show', Olympic-gold-winning head job.

In a nutshell (as it were), I was starving. It was spring, we were off on a work trip to New York, and I'd enjoyed myself a bit too much over the winter months. I had said yes to all the pasta and cheese and a new local patisserie had popped

up that I had frequented way too much. I didn't fit into my stylish work threads and drastic measures were called for. I'd heard through the grapevine there was an option that would help me drop kilos that didn't involve surgery; I didn't have the stomach (no pun intended), time or money to go under the knife. So, option B it was – a 14-day detox involving ten days of Chinese herbs and acupuncture, then slowly introducing small amounts of 'clean' food from day 11–14, with the likes of cucumber and white fish on the menu.

The herbs tasted like . . . oh, how would I describe them? Growing up in South Wales our neighbours Mr & Mrs Thomas had a fishpond. It was difficult to see what fish they had as the water was covered in lily pads and was deep black with an emerald tinge. There was always a whiff about their 'water feature' but in the warmer months it was *really* on the nose. The herbs looked and tasted like they had been gathered from Mr & Mrs Thomas's pond.

As I was sat waiting for day ten's acupuncture session, I was dreaming of Christmas dinner with all the trimmings, burgers, pizza, cheese, cakes – anything that wasn't herbs. I was ravenous. I picked up a women's magazine in the waiting room to try to take my mind off food. One of the articles I started to read was about the benefits of coconut oil. As well as all the usual reasons to swap out other oils in the kitchen for coconut oil, the writer also divulged that she

had enjoyed using the oil in the bedroom with her boyfriend. Hmm, interesting . . . and tasty. It made sense I suppose – while I wouldn't want to be rubbed in olive oil and made to feel like a bird being basted for the oven, smelling of coconut oil sounded quite alluring. I would be the first to admit I'm not wildly creative in the bedroom (although, to any prospective partners reading this: I have my moments) but perhaps this was a 'new trick' I could pull out in the boudoir.

Later that evening I was putting some things away in the pantry and a three-quarter empty jar of coconut oil caught my eye and my imagination. Up the stairs the jar and I went to the bedroom and my partner. And, in my famished, food-deprived state it felt like the closest I had come to eating in a week and a half. He was a dessert . . . a coconut log you might say. It was delicious. I used the rest of the jar to finish off the 'job'. Both parties more than enjoyed the experience and left raving five-star reviews.

I returned home from work the next afternoon to find an industrial sized jar of coconut oil on the kitchen bench. Sadly, it was day 11 of the detox and I was on cucumbers!

But back to the book title . . .

Despite what you may think, this isn't a book about bashing sport and sportsmen (or about blow jobs). I was a sports publicist for a major TV network for years (legendary cricket commentators the likes of Richie Benaud were some of my favourite talent to work with), I was a regular at Old

Trafford to watch Man United play and yes, I even married a sportsman. Let me explain how the title came about . . .

The year before COVID struck, when travel was still a thing, my parents had been visiting me and my brother and our families in Sydney. It had been a cracking month together and I was taking Mum and Dad – Anne and Pete – back to the airport for their flight home to the UK.

The conversation had come around to my book. I had just spoken to a psychic from the UK who had predicted it would be a bestseller. As you read on you will find out how much I believe in mediums. I love a good ‘reading’ and never leave the house without a crystal in my bra. Neither of my parents carry crystals anywhere and are more than a little sceptical about ‘fortune tellers’. My dad was laughing along and said he just hoped he and Mum were still alive by the time my book hit #1.

At this point my folks had a rough idea of what I was going to be writing about. They knew that I wanted to share the highs and lows of life after a marriage breakdown, but I had still been very ‘big picture’ with them and hadn’t gone into too much detail. It was the ‘detail’ I wanted to bring up – a bit of an in-person parental warning sticker if you will.

I explained that there would be all sorts discussed in the book, including the weird and wonderful world of dating. I stated that there would be a lot that they both might want to skip, but especially my dad. There are some things a father

should never have to read about his daughter. I went on to say, for example, that they couldn't read the chapter about 'Cricket and Blow Jobs'.

The car went silent for a second. Anne and Pete laughed awkwardly. It isn't often we'd chat about blow jobs as a family. And then my mum, surrounded by suitcases and carry-on luggage in the back, piped up and said, 'What is cricket?'

'Cricket?!' I guffawed. 'The Ashes. The game men wear white to play on grass-stain-green-pitches and carry bats made from willow trees. Sir Ian Botham, Kevin Pietersen, Freddie Flintoff, David Gower! Cricket!'

Both my parents burst out laughing, saying that they thought 'cricket' was a new sex term they hadn't heard of!! It's not rimming – it's cricket. Bloody hell folks. We had a giggle for the rest of the trip to the airport.

I rambled on about how, as I'd gotten older and was now currently between husbands, I'd stopped bullshitting so much in new relationships. I'd decided to stop trying so hard to fit in around a potential partner and just be myself. In the early days of a new relationship, I give a good few blow jobs, and, depending on what the other half is into – cricket, for example – I pretend to love it!

Five months in, though, I'd rather go for a bikini wax and have a tooth removed without gas than watch a five-day Test match, and I skip extended fellatio as it equates to a sore jaw and the need to visit my chiropractor.

The car fell silent.

Mum began to tell me a story about my gran. Mary, my dad's mum, had been at the hairdressers for her usual colour and set (I always loved the purple rinse that she sported). The chat around the hooded hair dryers (the ones women would sit under for hours) had centred on a letter on the agony aunt page in a magazine. 'Joan' (guessing that wasn't the letter-writer's real name) was wondering if giving her husband oral pleasure was fattening? Were there calories in sperm? Because she didn't want to swallow if that was the case.

I always find saying goodbye to my parents hard – even after 20 odd years of living on the other side of the world, parting never gets easier. I had been starting to well up with tears as we turned off the freeway for the airport, but now I really was crying . . . crying with laughter. Dad agreed he would happily skip that section and most of the book, if I stopped talking about it and just got on with writing it. Roger that, Dad.

And so, back to the title: the PG version. I can assure you there will be plenty of oversharing and inappropriate content that isn't child- or Peter Mahoney- (or my brother James-) friendly – and the reason I went for *Currently Between Husbands* is because that's where I am. This is the story of how I got there, what I know I want in my future and what I don't want. And just to be clear, I don't mind a One Day International (that's also a cricket reference, Anne and Pete, not a new sex term).

CHAPTER 1

DOES MY ROCK BOTTOM LOOK BIG IN THIS?

Heavily intoxicated, sunglasses lopsided, slumped in a wheelchair. Head lolling from one side to the other as the chair is pushed through LAX. Holding on tightly to a bag with one hand, while the other is busy flipping the bird at random strangers. No, sadly this wasn't a scene from *Bridesmaids* or *Trainwreck*; this was me seven years ago. Yes, I was a bloody mess.

They say you know when you've hit rock bottom. Looking back, I hit it more than once when my marriage broke down. The airport incident was certainly up there (or rather down there) with some of my lowest points . . .

In hindsight, washing back a Valium with swigs of vodka in the Uber en route to the airport might not have been the smartest move! It was February, my husband Andrew Johns and I had separated in the previous December. Everything about the break-up was raw and surreal. I kept looking at my left hand in a panic, fearing I had lost my engagement ring, only to remember . . .

I was in LA for work and had spent the last ten days busying myself with meetings and in complete denial that my marriage was over. I also believed my husband when he said that the woman staying in our family home, who was visiting from the US, was just a friend. But we'll get to that . . .

Packing up the hotel room I noticed the half empty bottle of Grey Goose vodka next to the TV. I decided to bring it along rather than leave it at the hotel – ‘Waste not want not!’ as my mother often said. Although in this case I am sure she would have rather I left it. I popped a soft drink from the mini bar in my hand luggage, ready to act as a mixer. The ride out to the airport was 45 minutes and I planned to have a cheeky drink or two. The trip had been full of entertaining and parties and, quite frankly, as I was about to head back home to ‘reality’, I wanted to be numb.

As I hopped into the car with two of my colleagues an email pinged in my inbox. It was from my lawyer. For those of you reading this who haven't gone through the trauma of a divorce, it's a bit like going to war. Going to war against

the person you once loved the most in the world. It's brutal. Every time I read correspondence from the 'other side' it was like getting winded. I couldn't breathe. My lawyer had forwarded on the first of many emails from my ex's team. Those emails never got easier but the first one knocked me for six.

I'm an anxious flyer at the best of times, but my anxiety was through the roof once I had read and re-read the email. My doctor had given me Valium, and I planned on taking one once I was on the plane. Without really thinking about it I necked a swig of vodka straight from the bottle and washed the pill down right there and then. I didn't want to face the mess my life had become.

The drive out to the airport was bonkers enough without the added buzz of self-medication. Somehow, we had scored a rather unusual Uber. We had ordered a Tarago, but the driver arrived with what was basically a nightclub on wheels. As well as the usual soft drinks and refreshments you came to expect with an Uber there was a full disco light system and mini mirror ball set up. Only in Hollywood, hey.

Sia's *Chandelier* was playing through the sound system. The three of us were singing at the top of our lungs, with our hands in the air. Well, *I* had my hands in the air. I was clinging on to the last few moments of joy and silliness. I figured I had till we landed back in Sydney to ride the high of the trip and avoid all thoughts of what lay ahead.

The more my mind crept back to the lawyer's email, the more I drank to block it out.

It was a military operation weaving all our suitcases through the airport full of other travellers and finally to the Qantas check-in desk. I started to feel a bit wobbly, and I sat down on one of the cases. And that's the last thing I remember . . .