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INK JOCKEY COMMISSION  
THE END OF THE LINE PODCAST

CHELSEA  
BY MICHELLE PAYNE

When did we get so old?

No seriously?

I've got people telling me I look 21... Okay at a push 25. And I ain't even had any filler.

Serious! Swear down.

I get my eyelashes and nails done and have an at home laser hair removal but that is it.

Au natural, baby.

And that's well rare in Essex...

Is it though?

Rare?

Is it rare though?

Or just the ...

...

I'm shagging a 24 year old.

Footballer.

He's non-league but still he's fit. He speaks three languages and reads! He reads loads... I've loaned him books and that. I've got this video of him... he's in a towel and... Look, so fucking sexy. Mmmm.

What?

Oh fuck, what? You think I'm... Your face says it all. Yeah, naa. I'm only 31. Sorry, sorry.

I maybe shouldn't have...

...

I'm happy for Cassie. I mean, it's just like a little squiggle on a photo right now right? Like no face or thumbs or nothing? Its ages before she pops. She's still my best friend, that won't ever change. I've got time to work out how I feel about it... The situ... The squiggle.

Yeah I do think Laura's baby is cute. Her specific baby is cute. If you say to me baby I immediately think erm, noisy but then I also think, a pit to throw money into and set alight and WOAHH, what happened to my vagina... and tits and house and free time and personality and career and...

So do I like babies? Like, no. I prefer when they've had a few years and grow a little personality. At like four? Would you say they get funny and less annoying at like four?

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Do I prefer cats, dogs... chinchillas? Like, yeah, of course. Do I think it's a bit cringe when 30-somethings say "my fur babies"? Yeah, sure. But it's each to their own, init.

...

I am dating.

As well as the football —

Never mind.

Saturday

Just gone. Saturday, just gone.

I'm on a date. Ray. Not the footballer. He's 31, my age, and sexy, but in a got-my-shit-together kind of way, and I'm definitely not looking for like a meal ticket, as my job is good, but also it's just nice to be like "*oooooh you invest in stocks and shares*" it just feels really adult, it feels like you're talking with someone who really has got their shit together and understands all of that...

Finance.

Sexy.

Well, I think boring. But work with me.

We're shotting tequila. Actually sexy. We're laughing and flirting. He tells me I've got 'Bunda' which is apparently post-lockdown slang for having an appealing and full butt. But I've always known that... Just not that it's called that... Bunda.

...

*"Do you want kids?"*

First dates when you're thirty are... WOAH. You know, the works, sussing it out, what do we want, do core values align, aspirations, morals... Are you a narcissist?

*"Here's a list of my non-negotiables"*

...

Oh.

...

Cool...

Listen.

Digest.

*"Non negotiable 1. Don't fucking lie to me."*

Right yes. A bit severely worded but yes. Honesty. Of course. And same babes.

*"Non negotiable 2. Keep in reasonable shape".*

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I had an eating disorder for the best part of my 20s so way to be a trigger, but yeah sure... I do my 10,000 steps... And women's boxing on a Monday night.

*"Non negotiable 3. Order. Be somewhat organised - I don't want to walk into chaos."*

Chaos.

...

Chaos?

Who isn't at least a little chaotic?

*"Do you want kids?"*

It's only a first date.

And can we tell the difference between the good tequila and the cheap shit?

He buys them both so we can taste test.

Salt. Shot. Lemon.

Salt. Shot. Lemon.

I'm like

*"First one - Spenny-Henny. Second one cheap shite."*

Barmaid's like

*"Correct"*

There and then she confirms my inner connoisseur. I am a superior Essex girl. I have succeeded my youth of cherry Lambrini on park benches, vodka in working man clubs... I can tell these tequilas apart and that makes me classy as fuck.

Even if we are in Boom Battle Bar, Lakeside Shopping Centre.

*"Shall we leave our cars here and go and get high at mine?"*

I NEVER go back on a first date.

I NEVER.

I never.

Never...

He rolls and we kiss - it's a skill I admit.

He's sexy. In the got-his-shit-together way.

We hang out of his flat window,

Inhale

Exhale

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We blow smoke into each others mouths.

The sexy sorta shit you do when you're drunk and maybe too old to be getting high?

*"Do you want kids?"*

*"Erm... No..."*

The look he gives me.

Now you can't be fussy when you're thirty.

The voice of EVERY other adult in my life rings in my ears.

His face.

I change my tact.

*"Erm... I think I'd probably foster".*

...

*"Abortions?"*

Woah, how did we get here? ... I find myself talking... Drunk. High. No filter.

*"Like I'm not pro-life, but I am vegetarian and that's gotta stand for something?"*

**I cannot have a child.**

*"You wouldn't get an abortion?"*

This is a first date.

Hun.

A first date.

I never go back on a first date.

*"Like I can't have a child right now, but if I was with someone for a long-ish time and it happened... I dunno... It's a conversation. It's nuanced... It's two people..."*

*"I want children but I can't be trapped into a relationship"*

Erm...

...

He's still talking but I hear... Broken sentences. Sounds... Words? I hear divorce, I hear trauma and weirdly I hear South America.

This guy okay?

...

*"I don't think this is going to work."*

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...

What did I..?

...

Minefield.

And I have seemingly stepped on something.

Ka-Boom.

...

Sniff back the drunken-high tears.

Hold it together.

Maybe I should've had the filler, cos he wouldn't see how sad I am right now.

I book the Uber.