

FROM ME TO 3792

By David Hendon

NO PERFORMANCE OF THIS SCRIPT MAY BE UNDERTAKEN WITHOUT
THE APPROPRIATE FEE BEING PAID AND A LICENCE GRANTED.
FOR FURTHER INFORMATION PLEASE CONTACT SMITH SCRIPTS -
INFO@SMITHSCRIPTS.CO.UK

The centrepiece of the bare stage is a desk and chair. On the desk there are various pieces of paper and a number of envelopes.

DIANE, 44, is standing as she addresses the audience.

DIANE: It started with Sue Nicholson's leaking toilet. It was a Thursday morning. Nothing special about it. I was vacuuming the living room and thinking about what to get the twins for their birthdays when I heard a banging on the window. I switched the Hoover off, turned round and saw Sue stood there, her face all screwed up like she'd had an attack of chronic constipation. She was mouthing something but I couldn't make it out. I knew it would be some life threatening trauma or another, like the time she developed that rash on her neck and thought she'd caught rabies off next door's dog. Quite how a docile golden retriever who'd never been further afield than Coventry was supposed to catch rabies, I've no idea, but that was Sue: drama followed her round like a permanent rain cloud.

I went to the front door.

DIANE adopts a snooty voice to imitate Sue.

'There's water everywhere,' she said, her voice several octaves higher than usual.

I looked around and couldn't see any. Did Sue drink in the mornings?

‘In the bathroom,’ she squeaked. ‘My toilet’s leaked everywhere.’

I looked at Sue and wondered what she expected me to do about it. I wasn’t a qualified plumber. I’m still not. But there she was, jogging back towards her house and clearly imagining that I should follow behind, as if I was the answer to all her problems. Sue lived four doors down with her husband, Barry, a physics teacher and head stickybeak of the street through his chairmanship of the local Neighbourhood Watch, which appeared to have been achieved without anything so diverting and pointless as an election. A bit like Robert Mugabe but with a clipboard. Vigilance, that was to be our watchword, he’d said. ‘Always keep an eye out.’ His words took on a certain irony when he suffered that misfortune with the umbrella outside Superdrug in town but luckily for him the treatment worked and he got compensation. They went on a walking tour of the Lake District with the money if I remember rightly. Shame he hadn’t been able to see the great flood coming in his own house. There was a crack in the outflow pipe of their toilet. It was tiny at first and they hadn’t heard the dripping but when it cracked properly it sent gushing water all over the floor and out onto the landing. Sue, I knew only too well, wasn’t equipped for a crisis. She’d been convinced the slight tremor from a minor earthquake we’d had a decade ago was someone flying an aeroplane into the spare room.

‘It’s that Bin Laden!’ she’d apparently shrieked, as if Osama and his boys had thought: ‘right, we’ve knocked down the commercial centre of New York,

now for that three bedroom semi in Sutton Coldfield.’ She was a nervous woman at the best of times and this, for Sue, was very much the worst of times.

‘What am I going to do, Diane?’ she asked me, her eyes pleading for guidance.

‘Have you got anything to absorb the water?’ I said and she opened the airing cupboard out of which a tsunami of towelling fell spread the floor. I did my best to mop up the water and told Sue to find a large saucepan to put under the toilet. I covered the floor with the towels and found a plumber in the Yellow Pages. He said he’d be round within two hours. Sue beamed at me.

‘I don’t know what I’d have done without you,’ she said.

I felt like saying ‘drowned with any luck’ but I thought it too cruel. I’d say it behind her back later when relating the story to Richard. I was going to leave but Sue insisted I stay so that she could express her gratitude. She did what the English always do when catastrophe has been averted: she put the kettle on. While I waited for the tea I picked up her Daily Mail, and that’s where it began. In amongst the usual stuff about government incompetence, royal party plans and a particularly violent spate of muggings in Tewkesbury was a two page spread about British women who write to men on death row in America. I started to read it, mainly to block out Sue’s incessant twittering from the kitchen about what might have happened if she’d been out of the house, as if

she'd return from Tesco to a modern day Atlantis, and there was something about the story I found completely compelling, because all the time I read those words I was thinking one thing: why?

Why would a normal, everyday British woman in middle age – as they all seemed to be – write letters to appalling criminals in a country they'd never visited; men so evil that they were being put to death for what they'd done? Why on earth would some of them get married to these murderers? There was a website you could join, the article said, if you were interested: [www dot write to an inmate dot com](http://www.write-to-an-inmate.com). The whole business seemed slightly seedy and I shut the paper when Sue entered with the tea, which she'd poured in the sort of posh cups that are only used twice a year for really special occasions.

I told Richard all about the leak drama over dinner that night but he was tired from work or just tired of talking and didn't show much interest. I put the plates in the dishwasher and sat in the living room while he watched a programme about the Chelsea Flower Show and something with David Jason in it and then announced he was turning in. It was only half past nine but he said he'd had a long day and that he needed to get his head down. I sat and read for a while and then found myself on the computer with a glass of wine beside me. I checked my emails – nothing from the twins – looked for bargains at amazon and then before I knew it I was typing the address. I was actually typing it: [www dot write to an inmate dot com](http://www.write-to-an-inmate.com).

The front page came up. There was a big American flag and a burly looking man smiling while reading a letter. He didn't look like a killer but I suppose he must have been one. Or maybe he'd just shot and wounded someone. It was hard to tell from the smile. I mooched around the site and read various testimonies. There was a wife murderer from Minnesota who was ever so grateful for all the letters he'd received. There was a man from California who'd shot and killed three men in a bank raid who said the letters made his life worth living. It was all so jolly and friendly, as if this was about a bunch of teenagers in Middlesex swapping letters with a penpal in Marseille. The crimes were mentioned in passing, like you might casually remark about how your son had been picked for the school football team. I clicked off the site. It seemed to me to be morally dubious to say the least. I took a drink of wine but dropped the glass and it smashed on the floor. I started to sweep up the debris, thinking back to Sue Nicholson and her toilet trauma with a smile.

'What's all that noise? I said I needed sleep,' said Richard, emerging from the bedroom wearing those ugly pyjamas his mother had bought him for Christmas. He was scowling sourly in the half light of the landing.

'Sorry,' I said. 'I knocked over a...' but he was already walking away, shaking his head. I sat down...it's hard to explain but I felt something rising within me. It was a feeling of...that tone of voice he'd used. The feeling started deep down but was slowly, surely coming to the surface. And as it reached its zenith I focussed again on the computer and registered for write to an inmate. It was that casual. I didn't think about it at all. I typed my name, my address,

my phone number, my email address – all the things they say you have to be so careful about divulging. Pick an inmate you'd be interested in writing to, the join-up instructions said. I wasn't fussy. I had a quick scroll through them and went for a Texan bloke on death row for first degree homicide. Inmate number three-seven-nine-two. Chuck. What can I say? I liked his moustache. Chuck the murderer with the moustache. In that moment I didn't care. I didn't care at all.

DIANE goes to her desk, pen in hand, and starts to write a letter.