



In My Bottom Drawer

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IN THE BOTTOM DRAWER of my desk there are screws, nails, broken spectacles, broken spectacle cases, plugs, repeat prescriptions, bottle tops, picture hooks, staples, pens, tangled electric wires, leaflets, playing cards, receipts, old birthday cards, floppy discs, pills, chargers, photos, old notebooks... I don't like to open that drawer very often; it makes me feel a bit ill when I do. Occasionally I might gird my loins to clear it out, keeping only what is 'useful', throwing everything else out, but I always give up half way through and end up with a slightly less cluttered drawer, which then has space for other things I don't know what to do with.

The bottom drawer in my writing is similarly cluttered – some of it to be found in those old notebooks – with unfinished poems, beginnings of stories, ideas for plays, an abandoned novel, pieces for radio which never were aired, articles which never were published, which weren't even sent out for publication, and copious, seemingly random notes, thoughts, quotes, things observed, things read in a newspaper, things overheard... I don't like to open that drawer very often either, and it's equally impossible to clear out, but sometimes, just occasionally, when I try to do so, I come across something which might turn out to be useful.

A relatively recent example of this was when I came across a line of dialogue jotted down in an old notebook. The line was: 'Men will fuck anything. Men will fuck mud'. I remembered where this line had come from. It was from years ago, from a time when my wife and I had young kids and we used to meet up for Sunday dinners with some other young



couples and their young kids. It was a way of having some sort of a social life at the time, and it was a solution to Sunday. But sometimes at these dinners we would drink quite a lot of wine and talk about the trials and tribulations of being parents of young kids, and sometimes the strain that a couple were feeling would surface in the form of an argument, perhaps about the division of labour between them or, more tellingly, the share of parental responsibilities. And at one of these dinners a woman had got a bit drunk and had come out with that line, 'Men will fuck anything. Men will fuck mud', much to the embarrassment of her partner. And I thought, *I have to use that line somehow*, so I wrote it in my notebook, but I couldn't see what to do with it at the time. Coming across it years later, I could see exactly what to do with it in fictional terms. It became the premise and the opening line of a story which was eventually entitled 'Mud', and the setting of the story was one of those Sunday afternoon dinners with young parents and young kids. It's often easier to write about an experience, I find, some considerable time after you've had it, rather than at the time. And that is why that bottom drawer has to be there and why it has to remain cluttered.