

I Wish I Was An Only Child – Fireside Feuds – Rachel & Cathy
Mason, Jack Thorne & Frank Skinner

[Sleigh bells and Christmas music]

[Flute sounds]

[Crackling fire and jazz music]

FRANK SKINNER: Do we need to frame it – that's it's their partners' interviewing them, or will that be obvious?

RACHEL MASON: Alright, record! Have you pressed record, Cath? Press record.

FRANK: Is it – is it irrelevant that I can't hear anything through these headphones? [laughs]

CATHY MASON: Oh shit! Can you not?

FRANK: Is the other end of them your headphones? What's – you've plugged them into a stone!

CATHY: They're – no, look!

FRANK: I can't hear a thing through them.

CATHY: Why not?

FRANK: Do I need them? Can I just wear –

CATHY: Hang on, let me try that. Why is that not working?

FRANK: That's the big question.

CATHY: It is working!

FRANK: I can't hear anything through them!

CATHY: It's definitely working.

JACK THORNE: Hold on. Just wait, guys. Hello?

FRANK: Yeah, put the volume up. I'm 63.

CATHY: Can you – can you hear?

FRANK: Well, I mean... do they have them with a trumpet?

CATHY: Can you hear now?

FRANK: I can, yeah.

CATHY: Do you want me to pull it down a bit?

FRANK: No, it's fine. Just get off me.

[All laugh]

CATHY: Frank's got quite a lot of dinner in his teeth.

FRANK: Well, I'm going to be here for an hour. I thought I'd best bring some with me.

CATHY: Funny. Right, okay –

FRANK: As you get older, your teeth become a fabulous –

CATHY: Frank, stop it. Do you want to –

FRANK: I have a basically – I have a carbohydrate gum shield, which I'll be chewing at –

CATHY: Frank, stop it. Come on, this is about me and Rachel.

FRANK: Yes, sorry. It's not about us.

RACHEL: Yes.

CATHY: Yes.

FRANK: I don't think I've ever done less than an hour and a half in any context. But I will.

[All laugh]

CATHY: He's going to keep you going through it.

FRANK: I'll be good, especially as our child is downstairs, probably on fire. That might motivate me.

JACK: I've got an introduction. Do I – do I literally read it?

CATHY: Yes. Yes!

JACK: Because it's – if I were selling them, this is what I'd say.

RACHEL: You're shouting.

JACK: Am I shouting? Sorry. Yeah. I don't know –

CATHY: [laughs] I'm going to start crying.

FRANK: Yeah, I don't know if we should start with a slavery reference. 'If I was selling them, this is what I'd say', or

something – can't believe what you've said. Terrible starting off with this sort of pimping vibe.

JACK: I'm a bit embarrassed now. Do I read it –

CATHY: No!

FRANK: Don't be embarrassed. You look embarrassed! You're bright red!

JACK: Am I bright red?

CATHY: Yes, you are.

FRANK: There are traffic stopping outside our house.

RACHEL: That's not how –

CATHY: Frank, shut up.

FRANK: Okay.

JACK: Okay, this is what I'd say: uh, so, Rachel and Cath are two of the most impressive people I know. Uh, born in Cheltenham in the 1970s, they grew up in a single parent household. Everyone in TV always asks whether Rach – whether she went to Cheltenham Ladies. And she always says, 'no, I cleaned there.'

Uh, they worked together at Channel 4 before setting up the Mason Sisters, uh, management company. Their acts won three main Edinburgh comedy awards: Doc Brown, John Kearns, Sam Simmons, and two best newcomers: Daniel Simonsen and John Kearns again. Since then, they've become more boutique. And now they manage two clients, Daisy and Charlie Cooper, who have won seven BAFTAs for their work on 'This Country'. They

each have a child. They live in London. They talk to each other eight times a day. And when they argue, which they do, the world stops. I've lived through two ice ages when they weren't talking at all, and I think they were the darkest period in our marriage and possibly my life. They clearly love each other very much.

RACHEL: Aw, that was lovely!

CATHY: Aw, that's amazing! Frank, what's your introduction?

FRANK: Um, it wouldn't have been that. I don't know if any of our listeners, or rather your listeners, will be familiar with Samuel Beckett's 'Waiting for Godot.' But there are two – it's about two tramps who sit and wait for something to happen.

CATHY: Oh, thanks!

FRANK: Now I don't think you're them. There's another couple called Pozzo and Lucky and, uh, Pozzo is sort of served by Lucky, who's an eccentric tramp who's a slightly terrifying figure. And Pozzo – Pozzo is a very self-centred, bombastic, dominant, shouty person who seems to have a basic insecurity. That – that is – whenever I see 'Waiting for Godot', I just want to see Cath and Rachel play those parts.

[All laugh]

CATHY: Oh my god!

FRANK: Rachel on the end of a rope while Cath whips with relish.

CATHY: Hold on!

RACHEL: Yeah, I think I have to agree.

CATHY: Oh, okay. Really?

RACHEL: Yeah, I mean –

CATHY: I'm not that bad. You would've left me if I was that bad.

RACHEL: I can't, I'm your sister.

JACK: She can't leave you. She can't leave you.

FRANK: The idea of, 'you would've left me,' is not the thing one normally says to a sibling.

RACHEL: Yes, it's so true.

FRANK: I don't – I don't know if you're aware of this. We'll start asking you questions in a minute. We're still laying the land mines.

CATHY: Yeah, Frank's just going to slag me off for about an hour.

FRANK: No, I'm not going to slag you off for an hour. But I – god, I'll tell you what I'd like is an interview with genuine jeopardy. This could easily end with, uh, the end of –

RS Another ice age.

FRANK: At least one relationship

CATHY: We'll definitely split.

JACK: This is a Christmas episode, and it could finish off Christmas for all four of us if we're not careful. Because we are

very close to Christmas, and uh – and we are going to be together, supposedly.

CATHY: This is supposed to be a fireside chat.

FRANK: I was just going to say that on your – when you two got married, um, Jack and Rachel, Cath and I, um, obviously were invited. And we were in a hotel and I remember we got all dressed up to go to the ceremony. And as we, um, were leaving, Cath turned to me and said, ‘things aren’t going to be the same again, are they?’ Meaning that, ‘my sister now has got someone else who’s her important other, and I’ll always be a secondary figure.’ And she’s never been more wrong than she was about that!

CATHY: Jack is really –

FRANK: I think almost nothing has changed by Rachel getting married!

JACK: Absolutely. And if anyone is the secondary figure, it is I. And that is fine.

RACHEL: And you would never say that, Cath. You don’t see that at all.

CATHY: What do you mean? What don’t I say?

RACHEL: That any – Jack is saying – yeah, you can’t even hear it. If anyone’s the secondary figure, it’s Jack, not you. You don’t see that.

CATHY: No, I don’t see that.

RACHEL: You don’t actually understand the question.

FRANK: I bought in – when I started going out with Cath – we’re not actually married, Cath and I, to um, to the listeners. We are, um, what we used to call ‘living over the brush.’ But we’ve – we’ve been together a very long time, with breaks. And um, and we have a child, which in a way is a bigger commitment than anything. But during that time, Cath has said to me probably 50 times, ‘remember, I’ll always put my sister first.’

CATHY: Oh yeah, way in front of Frank.

FRANK: Um, it hasn’t been – I’ve never disputed it.

CATHY: Rachel, sitting there looking absolutely catatonic.

RACHEL: Terrified?

CATHY: Why are you frightened?

RACHEL: I’m not at all! I’m not at all!

FRANK: Anyway, I feel the –

RACHEL: My voice has gone really high.

FRANK: The blokes are talking too much, really.

CATHY: No, you’ve got to ask us questions.

FRANK: So we should ask – we should ask questions. I’m going to ask a question if you’ll just give me one moment. Um, do want to go first, Jack, or should I?

RACHEL: This is what it’s like, Frank, doing a podcast with her.

CATHY: Hold on, every meeting we have you interrupt. Today's meeting, I could've killed you. You didn't let anyone speak.

RACHEL: I did.

FRANK: I'm a Catholic, I'm alright with interruption.

RACHEL: Yeah, carry on, Frank.

FRANK: Okay, now you guys always start by asking who's the funniest, if I remember rightly. Um –

CATHY: You've listened to the podcast.

FRANK: I have listened to the podcast. And very fine it is, too.

JACK: Agreed.

FRANK: Yeah, so –

RACHEL: I think I can answer that very, very quickly, who's the funniest.

FRANK: Go on.

RACHEL: I think we know. And everyone would know it's definitely Cath. Without question.

CATHY: I don't agree! I know I'm funny –

RACHEL: Not always laughing – laughing at and laughing with. But –

CATHY: Oh, thanks.

RACHEL: You're definitely the funniest. Well, no. The time you opened the door – [laughs] you came to my flat, you and Frank. It was in the early days of your relationship. And I thought, 'what's that around your neck? That scarf?' It was a stocking around – or a pair of tights – around your neck. Do you remember that? I was probably trying to be really discreet about it.

CATHY: I think it was probably a stocking.

RACHEL: And I was like, 'what's this?' And I pulled out this black stocking from around her neck. She had no idea. So I mean –

CATHY: But I think Rachel's quietly –

FRANK: She had a tangerine in her mouth as well, at the time. But no, I mean it was our early days. We were very much in love.

RACHEL: I know, I mean, no, I don't think it was – I think it's chaos. Cath would've just grabbed her coat. That would've been picked up with it, you know, thrown on round her neck. But it was – it was –

CATHY: I think Rachel's hilarious, but sort of surprisingly hilarious. So I am always shocked. You're very funny, but it does shock me. Which sounds mean, but you just come out with – when you're angry –

RACHEL: Every now and then. When I'm angry?

CATHY: When you're angry you're hilarious.

RACHEL: Right. Jack, would you agree with that? No, actually, see –

JACK: When you're angry you're terrifying, in my opinion.

RACHEL: Yeah. Yeah.

JACK: But that's just, you know, we take it – we deal with anger in very different ways. Cath, you encourage it and I'm scared of it. But that's a very different line of work. But Cath's – Cath's best woman's speech at the – maid of honour speech, whatever you call it – at our wedding, was amazing. It was an amazing bit of stand-up, frankly.

CATHY: There you go, you're very proud of me.

FRANK: I remember you saying that when you grew up together, that Rachel was like, um, Tom Cruise and you were like Rain man.

CATHY: Yeah, totally. Well, Rachel's immaculate, really good looking, really together, really organised, sails through. I'm not.

RACHEL: Silence.

CATHY: Yeah, I was going to say –

RACHEL: Absolute silence.

CATHY: Why is – say something!

FRANK: Yeah, Cath said to me last night, 'I think I need to start dressing better.' I would say I've thought this would've been simmering since the 90s. And this morning she came down in leggings, both of which had enormous holes in the front of them. Like, um, she was off to the local panto as Robinson Crusoe. And I said, 'it's not, um, it's not going that well, the new look.' And she said, 'no, I'll ask Rach.'

CATHY: No, I'll ask you.

RACHEL: Ask me what? What you should wear?

CATHY: Well, I had a look online to see if I could find some nice clothes and I just had a panic attack. So I'm going to phone you and you can choose me some clothes.

RACHEL: Which means I'll have to do it. That's what that translates as. 'Oh, Rach will do it for me, yeah.'

FRANK: So how do you see your relationship, uh, Cath? Your relationship with, um –

CATHY: It's amazing. I think it's more amazing than Rachel thinks it is because, uh... I just find her –

FRANK: That's because it's more amazing for you than it is for her.

RACHEL: Why is that?

CATHY: Because you are the most generous, trustworthy, kind – I'll get emotional saying this – human being I've ever encountered. And I'm let down, sort of, by everybody else because you are so unusually kind and special.

RACHEL: Right.

CATHY: And so everyone else I meet – and interesting, and funny.

RACHEL: Occasionally funny.

CATHY: No, you – okay –

RACHEL: Surprisingly funny.

CATHY: When you're angry. But I think – so everyone else I meet just doesn't come close.

JACK: I'd agree with that. I'd agree with all you said there.

CATHY: Totally. You're a really hard act to follow.

FRANK: We had a conversation the other night, um, about how nice Rachel was.

CATHY: I mean, like –

FRANK: And Cath said to me, 'much nicer than us, isn't she?' And I said, 'yeah, she is.' And it's interesting to be in a relationship where not being nice is something that can be generally talked about.

CATHY: I'm not not nice.

FRANK: I actually think I am quite nice. But I was just trying to show a bit of –

CATHY: We are nice.

FRANK: Solidarity with Cath.

[All laugh]

CATHY: But we're nice!

FRANK: I didn't want to make her to feel too bad for being the only person in the family who isn't that nice.

CATHY: Well, where does Jack stand?

FRANK: Jack –

JACK: Are we doing a scale? Are we doing 1 2 3 4?

CATHY: Yeah, yeah.

RACHEL: Oh, I can see it, yeah.

JACK: With Rachel as one?

RACHEL: Jack's two.

JACK: So Cath's four. Where do me and Cath fit?

CATHY: Where's Frank?

FRANK: To be honest, I've always slightly been in awe of your relationship. I'm from a family where I've got two brothers and a sister. And I love them, but they are basically strangers to me. As soon as my mum and dad died –

CATHY: Oh, I thought you meant Jack and Rachel's relationship.

FRANK: No no, I'm talking about mine, um, I'm talking about the sibling thing.

CATHY: Oh, sorry.

FRANK: I've been in awe of you and Cath because I just – I had no experience in my past of siblings who are absolutely entwined

like you are. I would say to Cath, 'who are you calling again?' And she'd say, 'Rachel.' And I thought, 'calls 1, 4, 5, 6, and 9 were all Rachel.'

CATHY: Well, why would I phone anyone else? She's the most interesting –

RACHEL: But it also drives you two mad, doesn't it? Let's be honest.

JACK: Yeah, absolutely.

RACHEL: Frank, Jack, it drives you a bit mad.

CATHY: You're used to it now.

FRANK: Do you know what? I – I love it. I love how close you are. I feel some sympathy for Rachel, because I think she is unlucky in the relationship. But I think she must be – actually, can I ask that? What –

CATHY: Can you say something nice about me?

FRANK: I will. I will in a minute. It's not about me.

CATHY: No, it's about me!

FRANK: We will ask the questions! What would you say are Cath's good points, Rachel?

CATHY: Yeah Rach, go for it.

RACHEL: Oh, um –

FRANK: Don't worry, I've got another question ready if this one runs out.

CATHY: Frank! Fuck's sake!

RACHEL: Yeah, it will be – no. Cath is, um, charismatic, funny, um, loyal. She's just slightly addictive. I can't explain it, but there's something you want to be around her, unless she's depressed. Then you really don't want to be around her. Then there's a big dark cloud. But generally she's just funny and she has, um, well it's strange because you're really neurotic and anxious. But actually you've got a much more – I don't want to say 'fuck you' attitude.

CATHY: Oh no, I've got a very big 'fuck you' attitude.

RACHEL: Yeah, and you've got that in a way that I don't have that. But you're such a weird mix. And so am I in some ways. But yeah, I envy that in you. You just will – you're just much stronger in that way than I am. I'll play by the rules, I'll be more scared, more nervous of things. So I like that. You free me up.

JACK: Yeah, the Mason sisters wouldn't exist –

CATHY: How do I free you up? Make you –

RACHEL: Because you've got the attitude. You've got the attitude.

CATHY: Yeah.

RACHEL: I'm just much more square.

JACK: I think Rach would still be working in compliance if it wasn't for you.

CATHY: Absolutely would.

JACK: And she'd be very good at it. And she'd be absolutely highly valued by the channel and everyone would love her. But she wouldn't be making.

CATHY: She'd be wasted. Because she's got a brilliant head, she just doesn't know she's got a brilliant head.

RACHEL: Yeah.

JACK: Yeah. When I was at college, Will Hutton, the economist, came and spoke and said that, uh, in the future people are going to be employed to be guests at dinner parties. That that's going to be their job. And, uh, and if I knew anyone that I would say would be an ideal person to do that, it would be Cath.

RACHEL: Oh, absolutely not. Oh, I thought you were going to say me!

JACK: Oh no, not you.

[All laugh]

RACHEL: I thought you were going to say me! And I was going to say –

JACK: No, I love you but no.

RACHEL: 'No, that's wrong, Jack. What's gone wrong here?' But actually, the punchline – you're right, she would be.

CATHY: Can I just say – Rachel's face, you were ready to go, 'oh god, Jack, that's so amazing.' [laughs]

RACHEL: Story of my life! That's normally mum saying that. But no, absolutely, yeah.

CATHY: Oh Jack, that's brilliant.

RACHEL: Cath is the person that you want to wheel out, give it a –

CATHY: Thanks.

JACK: Yeah. It would be a really good three hours for everyone having dinner with Cath there. The difficulty is when you've got two weeks of it. But, you know, that's – or a lifetime. Frank knows.

FRANK: Try 20 years! I, um... when you say that, as a dinner guest, I have heard the angst over the phone when I've listed Cath's dietary requirements before we've gone to someone's house.

JACK: Yeah, that's true.

FRANK: You'd need a pretty good production team on this to make sure there wasn't any cream, oil, etc. etc. going on. But I – yeah, I worry about this. Because I think it's impossible to see the Mason sisters as individuals in a way because they're so entwined. And I think in some ways, um, Cath suffers because Rach is so kind and loving that Cath is always going to be selfish.

And then there's an old Groucho Marx story where someone said to him, 'the next film we're going to make is going to be an extravaganza. You know what an extravaganza is, don't you?' And he said, 'I should do, I married one.' And I always feel that I kind of, um, am living over the brush with an extravaganza. And I

think that's sometimes a bit difficult for Rachel. Because it is like – there are gigs that you do where it's like trying to be funny through a portcullis. And I think it's a bit like that with Rach. It's such a storm around Cath of activity and things. That sometimes I think Rachel falls into the – into the shadow.

RACHEL: Yes. Without question. Definitely.

FRANK: Which – we need to ask another question.

CATHY: Hang on, Rach. Does that make you sad?

RACHEL: No no no. I'm used to it.

CATHY: But used to it's not the right answer. What do you feel? Do you wish that was different?

RACHEL: No... no no. I don't suppose I do.

CATHY: 'No no no no!'

RACHEL: No. The most bland answer in the world. I don't suppose I do. I don't suppose I do.

CATHY: [laughs] Oh Rach, that's brilliant.

JACK: So here's a question in relation to that: when did that happen? Because the stories I hear of your childhood are you're in your white crimped shirt with a tie, and you dressed as Kate Bush.

FRANK: When Jack says, 'you and you', it's Rachel in the leather tie and Cath as Kate Bush.

JACK: Oh yeah, sorry. Sorry. [laughs]

FRANK: For those of you who have remembered, this is an audio
–

CATHY: Seasoned broadcaster.

FRANK: Can I say, by the way, in case you don't know, Jack, who's
um, who's – some of you might not know – is a massive, massive
writer who wrote –

CATHY: 6'7".

[All laugh]

FRANK: No, but he's also – but also metaphorically... yeah, he's
got a big biro. He wrote, um, 'His Dark Materials' the TV show
and the Harry Potter stage play and loads of movies and stuff. So
they both did very well.

[All laugh]

FRANK: In fact Cath's mum said to me once, 'I told her to marry a
rich man.' And I thought, 'hahaha, what a funny thing.' And then
I thought, 'hold on.'

RACHEL: That is so un-mum. Isn't it, Cath?

CATHY: She never said that.

JACK: She did say that!

CATHY: She did not say that! Mum would never say that.

JACK: She said that.

RACHEL: No, I believe Frank –

JACK: The first time I met Sandy, um, I was –

RACHEL: She asked to see your bank account?

JACK: No, she said – I'd stayed over at their house, and she said, 'is this the point where I can ask questions?' And I thought, 'oh my gosh, is this going to be, you know, "are you going to look after my daughter?"' Do you know what I mean, you know? And her question was, 'where do you get your ideas from?'

FRANK: Oh! [laughs]

JACK: I was like, 'bless her.'

RACHEL: She's brilliant. No, she's not – Mum is not materialistic.

CATHY: Not at all.

RACHEL: But I think that's her fear, because she felt she was left slightly high and dry. And without grandma and grandad leaving her the house –

FRANK: No, I can understand a single parent who struggled with two girls thinking, 'for god's sake, get some security.'

RACHEL: Yeah, but we – we got security and some.

FRANK: See how I've tidied that up, Jack, to avoid being beaten up by Cath later? 'I can't believe you said that about Mum! I know she said it, but so what?' Listen, I was told before we started that if we don't talk about Christmas, the whole thing's off.

RACHEL: Yeah.

JACK: Yes.

CATHY: Yep. Yeah, no, Jack's –

FRANK: That's it. I don't know if that qualifies as talking about Christmas. That moment. Come on.

RACHEL: But we might get onto it. Go on. You asked –

JACK: But when did that happen? When did you become these – the, you know, when did Rachel sort of start to sit in your shadow? When did you become this sort of double act? When did that happen?

CATHY: When, uh... I think Rachel was always very very cool and, uh, all the boys fancied her. I was very square and nobody was interested in me. I was weird. And I lived through Rach. So she moved to London and I just would talk about Rach. And Rachel was my access to cool. And then eventually I plucked up the courage, after going through all sorts of mental health issues, I think is the expression, I plucked up the courage to come to London. And, uh, I think because of Rachel I just – my confidence came from Rachel. And like I say, going back to what I said before, you just don't meet people like her.

RACHEL: Your confidence came from me?

CATHY: Yes, very much so. Rach, you were just so cool. And you used to go and travel around the world. And you had all this confidence and men fancied you. You were really like an amazing figure. And I was really not. And I wanted to be in your orbit and around you. And that's – yeah. And then I think I sort of – then I started working on telly and I basically dragged Rachel around to

every job I had because I wanted her around. I trust her. I don't trust many people. I don't trust anyone. I don't think – outside family. No, I don't – outside family.

FRANK: Can I remind you we're not married, so that includes me.

CATHY: Okay, well I trust you. Yeah, and Rachel's just – there isn't anybody better. There just isn't.

JACK: But when I look at pictures of you as kids –

CATHY: Yep.

JACK: You are sat there and you've got flowing hair, ridiculous lips, you do look like an 80s pop star.

CATHY: Yeah.

JACK: So there was some confidence there.

CATHY: No there wasn't!

JACK: And there was some power dynamic there. Because every photo, you're 2/3 of the frame and Rachel's 1/3 of the frame. It feels like.

CATHY: Really? No. Very much not Rach. You must've remembered that I –

RACHEL: No, I can see that. I can see that.

CATHY: Really?

RACHEL: But no, in terms of your confidence, no, I think that was make-up covering up.

CATHY: Yeah.

JACK: Right.

RACHEL: That was definitely make-up covering up insecurity.

CATHY: I remember going a whole year with my hair over my face because I didn't want anyone to see my face. I was – I had no confidence. But Rachel had loads. You know, she moved to London. She was like, you know, we come from –

RACHEL: I went to New York for a year.

CATHY: You went to New York, you went to London. That was the shit people at my school and where we come from didn't do. So she was like the cool – she was my access to cool.

RACHEL: And actually, me running away.

JACK: Yeah.

RACHEL: In many ways it was me wanting to get away from the trauma of the house.

CATHY: Hm.

RACHEL: Because you were having so many problems, really.

CATHY: Hm.

JACK: Can I ask one question in relation to that to Rach? Which is: the saddest thing I think I've heard is we were having New Year's dinner at your place and, um, and Sandy was talking. And

Rachel turned to me and said, 'when she says "we", she means her and Cath, not –'

RACHEL: The two of us.

JACK: Not her and Cath and Rach. So what – what was – when did that become a thing? When did that become – was it the eating disorders? When did that become a thing where it was Sandy and Cath and then Rach?

RACHEL: Well, it could be to do with the divorce. Our parents divorcing and me seeing Dad and Cath didn't. And then Cath's mental health problems. Not – school phobia –

JACK: But that wouldn't have happened because your dad would've left when you were four. When did that sort of thing of that being –

RACHEL: Yeah, but that setting –

JACK: Clear that it was those two as a unit and you separate?

RACHEL: Well, that can set that up. That's what I mean. Because Dad there –

CATHY: Because Rach –

RACHEL: I carried on seeing Dad, Cath didn't. And then she went through all these emotional problems and she was a bit older, understood it, perhaps felt more – sided with Mum? Not sided, that's not true, but you know, watched what Mum was going through.

CATHY: I was very much more protective. And I felt that Rachel, um, was, you know, uh –

RACHEL: Being disloyal seeing Dad.

CATHY: I was protecting – yes. You were betraying Mum and I was protecting Mum. And that’s where the rift started. Absolutely.

RACHEL: And then you got, you know, mental health problems.

CATHY: Yeah yeah.

RACHEL: And of course Mum had to put all her energy into looking after Cath. Understandably.

CATHY: Yeah, I got very severe depression and it was very frightening for – for Mum because also she had to keep it secret. I didn’t want anyone – I didn’t really have many friends, but I didn’t want people knowing about it. So she kept it as a secret. And poor Rachel – sorry, we’ve got to talk about Christmas.

FRANK: Yeah, I think there’s a natural segway from this into Christmas.

RACHEL: Yeah, you’re right. It always goes heavy, sorry. We need to like –

JACK: I think it’s interesting.

FRANK: Oh, I think a bit of – Christmas – the truth is, Christmas is a phenomenally heavy time, generally speaking.

RACHEL: Yeah, it is. And also –

FRANK: We used to go to Christmas at, um – Sandy, I should say, is Rachel and Cath’s mum. We would go to Christmas and we

used to have this thing after dinner where we would sit and talk in heart-wrenching ways about our year, our relationships and all that, you know. We had paper hats. Okay. But other than that.

RACHEL: But that's –

FRANK: It was like a Fellini movie. It was – there was nothing sort of jolly about it.

RACHEL: Before, when we were younger, before your time and before – certainly before you, Jack, we didn't celebrate Christmas, if you remember, Cath. I mean, we – promise, promise we will lighten this up in a minute. But we didn't. You wouldn't let us celebrate. You didn't want to celebrate Christmas.

CATHY: No, I didn't. No, no.

RACHEL: So I would always spend Christmas elsewhere. So now the joy of having children and Christmas and family is amazing.

CATHY: And I love Christmas more than anybody in the world now. Except this year.

RACHEL: Yeah, and there were years when we didn't celebrate Christmas. And I would certainly go – I would go abroad. I would go anywhere but have Christmas with Mum and Cath. And now it's just brilliant because we all get on so fantastically and Christmas is really special. And then Covid comes along.

CATHY: What are we going to do? I know. It's a disaster.

RACHEL: Our Christmases are just – I just –

JACK: So most memorable Christmas in the Mason household? Is it asthma attack?

RACHEL: Probably.

CATHY: Oh god. We're trying to make this a really cosy, lovely fireside chat.

JACK: No, but this is good! I think this is true.

CATHY: So when, uh, when we were very tiny –

RACHEL: We need the Christmas music on in the background.

CATHY: We need Christmas music and a crackling fire.

RACHEL: 'Better watch out'...

CATHY: Uh, when we were very tiny, um, I was just waiting for Santa Claus to come. And Rachel had an asthma attack. And I was livid. So they were phoning the doctor up and I went absolutely ballistic. Because I thought by her having an asthma attack, Father Christmas would bypass the house. He wouldn't come in. So I –

RACHEL: Or are you sure you didn't think that maybe I would get more presents because he might feel sorry for me?

CATHY: Nope. I just thought he wouldn't come if we – you know, you've got to go to sleep for him to come.

RACHEL: Right, that's true.

CATHY: So you know, I was being kept awake, right? And uh, Rachel was having a – I was furious! Furious!

RACHEL: None of these stories make you sound at all nice, Cath, by the way. I mean frankly, if I were – in your defence in a minute.

CATHY: No! I mean, this is making me sound terrible!

FRANK: I think the losing of Christmas, though, would bring out the worst in any child. I had given up on Christmas when I met Cath. I was, um, just to keep it bubbling over, I'm a recovering alcoholic. And I hated Christmas because it was so hard to get served. All these part-time drinkers appeared in the pub and blocked the bar. And I hated Christmas and New Year. I like the bread and butter of heavy drinking. In a half empty bar and half past six at night. And then Cath said to me, 'oh god, I love Christmas!' Like in a – and she completely re – before we had a child, completely reinvigorated Christmas for me.

CATHY: I love Christmas!

FRANK: It wasn't just the day. She wanted like a week either side of it to be as – we have to get our tree now, like we got it before December this year.

CATHY: Yeah, mid-November.

FRANK: For some reason –

CATHY: It's dead now.

FRANK: For some reason – there was some Covid reasoning behind that of some kind.

CATHY: And I want four trees in the house, but Frank allows me one.

FRANK: Yeah, well I – yeah. The word is normally Christmas tree rather than trees. I think that’s fair. So yeah, so Cath – I was – I didn’t know Cath didn’t like Christmas. I was unaware of that. It’s a constant learning process.

RACHEL: Well, that’s why she’s making up now.

FRANK: Yeah, but that’s – well, whenever I’ve asked Rachel about their childhood, Rachel said, ‘well I’ve got a blank between age 10 and about age 14’ or something like that.

RACHEL: No, longer than that. No, that’s most of it, but listen: this is still going down a dark wormhole.

FRANK: Well, no. I mean –

JACK: Why do you always have to have Christmas in Cheltenham? Because the argument every year is Cath wants Christmas in Cheltenham. And we’re like, you know –

FRANK: Their mum lives in Cheltenham, I should say.

JACK: Yes. I’m not very good at this, you may notice.

FRANK: No, you are, you are good at it. It’s just that, um, every now and again I’ll just point you in the right direction. Like a fabulous wind-up toy soldier.

[All laugh]

CATHY: Um, I just love it. It just – I suppose it’s because childhood was so horrid I – I don’t know. I don’t know whether I’m trying to wipe that out. I just love it. I love being around Mum, I love the house. I love – I like the simpleness of it and the

smallness. I absolutely love the hills around Mum's house. I love it.

RACHEL: But it's also home. For that – for me, that place was a dark place for so many years. I didn't like going back there. I mean – and now it's literally dark because of all the hoarding. No, and now it's just going back – it's –

CATHY: She can't fit a Christmas tree in this year. Literally can't fit one in.

JACK: Were there any lodgers there? What was Christmas like? Was Bob – was Bob there for Christmas? There's a famous Bob you hear about from childhood.

RACHEL: Oh, Bob's around. Bob's around. Yeah, we had lodgers, um, for a time. I can't remember. See, I have no anecdotes because I can't remember. All I know is this legacy of Bob's room. We still have Bob's room.

CATHY: Yeah, it's still Bob's room. No, we just always had strangers in the – we had a spare room, and we – because Mum had to get money from somewhere, so she would have these lodgers in. But I don't remember them at Christmas.

RACHEL: I don't remember them. They wouldn't have been around at Christmas, I don't think.

CATHY: Not at all.

RACHEL: I can't give anything on childhood Christmases.

CATHY: You do remember we used to go to Grandma and Grandad's. That's what we did every year.

RACHEL: Oh yes, up north.

CATHY: And that was special. That was amazing. Because –

FRANK: In Yorkshire?

CATHY: In Aldham.

FRANK: Yeah.

RACHEL: That was lovely. They were amazing.

CATHY: That was really special because they were amazing.

RACHEL: But I can't think of any traditions. I mean, it's terrible – traditions, Cath? Nothing. Useless.

CATHY: No, we had a huge pillowcase that would be – where our presents would go. And it wouldn't be stockings, it would just be a pillowcase. But no, I don't think there was anything unusual at Christmas. God, we'd be much better doing a depression podcast.

FRANK: I bet there was. I bet there was a lot that was very, very unusual.

CATHY: Like what?

FRANK: Well, the fact that Rachel has blanked out about six years –

[All laugh]

FRANK: Doesn't suggest that you were out carol singing and out passing around the, uh, Christmas pudding.

RACHEL: Did we buy each other presents, Cath? I can't remember.

CATHY: No, never. No, we never did that.

FRANK: Did you open your stockings together? Because in my house, we brought – we had four kids and we'd all gather on my big sister's bed and do our stockings bit by bit, counting 1 to 3.

RACHEL: Yeah, we'd –

FRANK: And then we'd pull one out. Did you guys do that?

CATHY: No, we didn't do that. We just – we scrambled it all open first thing in the morning. End of the bed, pillowcase, presents out, open. And then I suppose we just played –

FRANK: But were you together? Did you stay in your rooms or did you go –

RACHEL: No, together. We would be –

CATHY: Together, yeah. But it was in the attic room in Grandma's house in Aldham.

RACHEL: Yeah. Yeah.

CATHY: So yeah, no we did that. And then, uh, god I can't remember. Um, I probably had a breakdown at the meal because it was involving all the foods that I couldn't eat.

RACHEL: Yeah.

CATHY: So we probably – I probably had a plate of boiled veg.

FRANK: You have a couple of times eaten my turkey.

CATHY: No, your turkey – [laughs]

FRANK: No, we're not – when I met Cath – when I met Cath 20 years ago, she literally lived on boiled rice and vegetables. And I gently teased her towards fish and then chicken. Partly because, as I said to her at the time, she smelled like a derelict house. There's something – if you don't eat – if you don't eat certain –

CATHY: Can I just say, if Jack said this shit about Rach, she'd get it all cut out.

FRANK: Well, it might be cut out. I'm just saying, you know, I was never a lady's man.

CATHY: You so were!

FRANK: Um, I didn't have the chat-up lines, though. No, so – people who don't eat those things, they start –

CATHY: 'You look like Michael Jackson' was another.

FRANK: That was a compliment. He was very big at the time. We didn't know. Um, but Cath, uh, started eating that stuff and then it opened up. The eating thing is a problem.

CATHY: And poor Rachel's been at the end of that. But we've moved away from Christmas again.

FRANK: We don't have to just talk about Christmas, for goodness sake.

RACHEL: No.

JACK: We could talk about our Christmas now. You know, we could talk about what we do at Christmas now, considering the childhood is this great big black hole.

FRANK: But I think we should make – a point that Jack refers – we are very close as a foursome. Our kids are very close.

CATHY: Rachel's yawning!

FRANK: And the parents and whatever. Yeah, well it's a dull point. But trust me.

RACHEL: No, we are.

FRANK: And I think it's because you two – I mean, I agree with Jack. There's been a couple of periods where Cath is saying to me, 'you know what? I'm going to distance myself from Rachel.' And saying bad stuff. And it's broken my heart. I need you two to be together because it feels now, because my family is quite distant, that you are the glue that's given me this new family.

CATHY: But also, I think – Rach, do you agree with this? I don't think we're ever going to have a big fall out again. I think we'll have hundreds of rows. But I don't think we'll have –

[All laugh]

CATHY: No! Why is that weird?

FRANK: Oh, my chest has tightened. I could barely – I think you are. That's my vote.

JACK: If I was to guess I'd say yeah, within the next year.

CATHY: I don't feel that's going to happen again. I don't think we're going to have an ice age. I think we fight, drive each other mad –

RACHEL: Yeah, but I fear. I fear from you, definitely.

CATHY: What?

RACHEL: I always feel like it could be around the corner. Definitely.

CATHY: No, I don't think it is.

FRANK: Me too.

CATHY: I don't think –

FRANK: I'm terrified of it. Can I make that clear? Without going into details of what happened, this summer came very close to another ice age.

RACHEL: That's true.

CATHY: Oh yes, it did. Oh no, hold on. Really?

FRANK: Yes.

JACK: [laughs] You didn't talk to her for two weeks!

CATHY: Okay, so can I say post this summer? From now I don't think there's going to be another –

JACK: And then we had to go on holiday together.

CATHY: Oh, we did, yes. We had to have a holiday together. Awkward.

RACHEL: Are you aware – are you not aware that we're all saying the same thing? That we all fear an ice age? But I love Cath's like, 'no, there's no way! Absolutely not!'

CATHY: I don't think there will be!

RACHEL: And we're all saying – no, I know, but there's something in that. And I think that's why we're doing this podcast, because we're looking at other sibling relationships, as I say so clearly and beautifully in my intros, to see where we're going wrong. I think it's really interesting what we're finding. Ugh, I hate that word. But it's – I'm discovering so much in terms of – but I'm sort of wanting to go to Cath, 'look, look, this is how people work.' It's –

JACK: But I wouldn't have you any other way.

RACHEL: No –

JACK: So this idea that you're doing it to be educated is silly because you've got a beautiful relationship.

RACHEL: We have, but it could, you know, it could do with a little bit of nail filing.

FRANK: I love the bits in the podcast where – it's like people who go into the Amazon forest and meet these tribes that have been hidden away. And say, 'yes, they haven't been around any civilisation, but they have so much in common with us.' Whereas Cath and Rach will go, 'oh, no, we're nothing like that.' We haven't met – I haven't heard anyone else on the podcast who, um, who sound anywhere near as dysfunctional.

CATHY: No, we haven't. I cannot believe how everyone – Rach, we need to find – but the dysfunctional relationship people are not going to do the podcast.

RACHEL: And also can we qualify dysfunctional? It's a good – it's dysfunctional, but we're very close.

CATHY: Good dysfunctional.

JACK: And you're truthful. You're passionate and that's lovely.

RACHEL: Yeah, that's true.

JACK: Do we need to talk about how you celebrate Christmas now? Or is that not interesting?

RACHEL: Well, it's not interesting because we don't really –

JACK: It's quite bland, isn't it?

RACHEL: Yeah, it's nice.

CATHY: This is the Christmas podcast!

FRANK: It actually isn't that bland, though.

CATHY: Why?

FRANK: Because whenever we're together – what I like about this group, about these two, is that you encourage... me and Cath had couples counselling a few times. And the guy said the one thing – he said to me, 'how do you feel about the relationship?' And I don't know if you can identify with this, Rach. I said, 'do you know what? I've really put my heart and soul into this relationship for 10 years and I feel now I might be flogging a

dead horse.’ And he said to Cath, ‘what do you think about him saying that?’ And she said, ‘yeah, yeah, I can see where he’s coming from.’ And he said, ‘but don’t you two realise that that is the definition of intimacy? The fact that you can have that conversation and no one’s in tears or screaming?’ And I think we forget – you two talk in the most frank and open way about your relationship, your prejudices against each other, whatever it might be. It’s all out there. Nothing is secret.

CATHY: I still think Rachel – no, Rachel is still slightly uptight. And I suppose I would like to break that down.

FRANK: Only compared to you, though.

CATHY: Okay. But I would like to slightly break that down. I wish she was – yeah. I don’t, actually, no. Because that’s why it works, I guess.

RACHEL: Yeah, exactly. You don’t. If I’m less uptight, anything could happen.

FRANK: I think Rachel – the Victorian poet Coventry Patmore put it, is the angel in the house.

CATHY: Can we have something nice about me?

FRANK: Readers can vote on what that makes you. [laughs]

CATHY: Oh, what am I?

FRANK: Look, um, we all love you.

RACHEL: An extravaganza. An extravaganza.

FRANK: Can I say I'm very – we'll wrap up in a minute, but having said all this about how much they love each other and how much they love their mum, I have never seen –

CATHY: Our mum is special.

FRANK: I've never seen Cath and Rachel hug.

CATHY: No.

JACK: No.

FRANK: Ever.

CATHY: No, I would never touch her. I don't hug Mum. I do because I sort of have to, but I won't hug Rachel or Mum. No. No way.

JACK: I think we've hugged once, Cath.

CATHY: No.

JACK: Because neither of us likes hugging.

CATHY: Really? When did we do that?

JACK: We hugged once. We did hug once. It was awkward.

FRANK: You were asleep.

CATHY: Have I hugged you?

FRANK: Yes you've hugged me! We've been together 20 years!

JACK: You – when I – one of my memories of Christmas is, um, when we were in Cheltenham and walking behind the two of you. And there'd been all this talk, and I told Rachel that it was rubbish, that you two were about to split up. And then you two were just holding hands, walking across that park on the way to the town centre in Cheltenham. And I do remember that very clearly.

FRANK: When you're saying, 'you two were about to split up,' do you mean me and Cath or Rachel and Cath?

JACK: Yeah, no, sorry, Frank and Cath. Sorry, I'm not very good at this. Um, Frank and Cath were supposedly about to split up and that was the talk before Christmas – was, 'oh no, it's all heading towards a crisis.' And then you two – we were walking to Cheltenham to do some Christmas shopping or something, and you two were just walking across that park bit, and you just gently held hands with each other. And I went, 'oh, phew. It's going to be alright.'

FRANK: Well, yeah. Cath ends our relationship. I'm not exaggerating. Ends our relationship seven or eight times a year.

CATHY: This is not about our relationship!

FRANK: You do not do that – I can only think of two ice ages, as Jack puts it, with Rachel.

CATHY: Yeah, no. I will not end my relationship with Rach.

FRANK: When she celebrated your loyalty at the beginning, I was slightly shaken. But I think your loyalty to Rachel is – is limitless.

CATHY: Yeah, no. My loyalty to Mum is limitless. Because I think we grew up as a threesome, and it was an unusual, very intense

threesome. And I wonder if you hadn't seen Dad, what would that've been like? Would it have been even more intense? Would you have been like me? Would I have been like you? That's weird.

RACHEL: That's true. Should we end there?

CATHY: Merry Christmas, everyone!

FRANK: I like that bit that you normally end on, though. When you say to the guests, 'what would you like to say to the other person?'

CATHY: Oh, very good.

JACK: Oh, yes.

FRANK: Can we just do that and then wrap up? Would that be okay?

RACHEL: Okay, yep.

FRANK: So, um, do you want to go first, Rach? What do you want to say to Cath that you never say?

RACHEL: Yeah, um... that I never say? Do I go funny or do I go serious?

CATHY: Both.

RACHEL: Um... I can't do funny. You'll do funny, I'll do serious. No, I just don't think we say – we never – Jack's looking at me because he's a writer so he's giving me that like, 'this is going to be moving, pressure is on.'

FRANK: I'm looking at Cath like, 'this had better be funny.'

RACHEL: Yeah, so true. No, I'm just proud of Cath. I think she's amazing, um, yeah. See I can't do it. Yeah, I think Cath is brilliant. We never say it to each other, we're not tactile with each other. But clearly, as strange as our relationship is, I value – and as I get older, more and more – how close we are. And that being able to pick up the phone to her, as you say, six to eight times a day. But just having that person there that I can talk to about pretty much everything. And that's really special. And we do work together. And we do drive each other mad, but somebody's always going to drive you mad. Better if it's your sister. That's what I think. Is that –

JACK: I was looking at you. I was waiting for you to say, 'I love you' to her.

RACHEL: Oh, no, no. We don't do that.

CATHY: I hate –

FRANK: Where'd you get that crazy idea?

RACHEL: No, if you were in hospital dying, it might sneak out. But other than that, it wouldn't be said.

FRANK: I think if Cath were in hospital dying, you wouldn't get a word in.

RACHEL: That's true.

FS: Anyway, Cath, what would you say to Rach that you've never said?

RACHEL: Yeah.

CATHY: I – no, she knows everything. Because there’s nothing I wouldn’t say to her. But I think I’ve spent my whole life with her trying to run away from me, me forcing her to be with me. And I think she’s finally – finally quite liking being with me.

RACHEL: Yeah.

CATHY: Which is – I sort of always knew that, uh, that’s what I feel. Is that terrible?

FRANK: Yes.

RACHEL: I think that’s really true.

[All laugh]

CATHY: No, but it is! Frank, shut up. Do you agree with that, Rach?

RACHEL: Yes, I think I do. Yeah.

CATHY: And I will just say: most amazing person. If anyone knows Rachel, you’re lucky. She’s amazing. If I could be a tenth of her, I’d be – you know, I’d way rather be her than me.

JACK: It’s so interesting because on that – on the Daisy podcast where you talk about the similarity between you and Daisy, and the question – they said, ‘what do you want to say to the other person that you haven’t said to them?’, Daisy’s question was, ‘do you like me?’

RACHEL: Yeah.

CATHY: Yeah yeah yeah, no.

JACK: And you're very similar. Very similar response to what Daisy said.

RACHEL: I did want – I was hoping something about hair would come up. We have covered that in a podcast. She has pubic hair, I have nice hair.

CATHY: Rachel looks – Rachel's got great skin, great hair, great eyes –

RACHEL: No no no no no.

CATHY: All going on. I have nothing.

RACHEL: Right, that didn't work.

FRANK: Oh, no, that's not true.

RACHEL: To end of –

JACK: Merry Christmas.

RACHEL: Merry – should we say it all together?

ALL: Merry Christmas!

CATHY: Mister Lawrence.

[Sleigh bells and Christmas music]

[Flute sounds]

RACHEL: So this will go out when?

CATHY: Christmas.