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opening extract from

Killing God

written by

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published by

Penguin Books Ltd

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PENGUIN BOOKS

Published by the Penguin Group
Penguin Books Ltd, 80 Strand, London WC2R 0RL, England
Penguin Group (USA) Inc., 375 Hudson Street, New York, New York 10014, USA
Penguin Group (Canada), 90 Eglinton Avenue East, Suite 700, Toronto, Ontario, Canada M4P 2Y3
(a division of Pearson Penguin Canada Inc.)
Penguin Ireland, 25 St Stephen's Green, Dublin 2, Ireland (a division of Penguin Books Ltd)
Penguin Group (Australia), 250 Camberwell Road, Camberwell, Victoria 3124, Australia
(a division of Pearson Australia Group Pty Ltd)
Penguin Books India Pvt Ltd, 11 Community Centre, Panchsheel Park, New Delhi – 110 017, India
Penguin Group (NZ), 67 Apollo Drive, Rosedale, North Shore 0632, New Zealand
(a division of Pearson New Zealand Ltd)
Penguin Books (South Africa) (Pty) Ltd, 24 Sturdee Avenue, Rosebank, Johannesburg 2196, South Africa

Penguin Books Ltd, Registered Offices: 80 Strand, London WC2R 0RL, England

penguin.com

First published 2009
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Set in Sabon 11/15pt by Palimpsest Book Production Limited,
Grangemouth, Stirlingshire
Made and printed in England by Clays Ltd, St Ives plc

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British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A CIP catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN: 978–0–141–31912–4

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inside me (1)

This is a story about me, that's all.

(i take my time away
and i see something
and that's my story)

This is me.

head on

OK, first thing – my name is Dawn Bundy.

Second thing – I'm fifteen years (and seven days) old.

Third thing – I live with my mum in an ordinary house on an ordinary street in an ordinary town in England.

Fourth thing – I'm totally unattractive and I don't give a shit.

Fifth thing – I also tend to exaggerate sometimes, and this is probably one of those times. Which probably means that I *am* unattractive, but I'm not *totally* unattractive (i.e. I'm not eye-burstingly hideous or anything). I'm just kind of non-delectable, if you know what I mean. I have no discernible shape. No womanly, curvy, magazine-girly shape. Basically, I'm just kind of round and plain and lumpyish. So, yes, of course, I *do* give a shit that I'm not delectable. I'd *love* to be delectable – Little Miss Pretty, Little Miss Hot, Little Miss Look-At-Me-And-I'll-Make-You-Quiver. Who *wouldn't* want to be like that? I mean, beauty *isn't* just skin deep, is it? Beauty (and non-beauty) is belly deep, heart deep . . . it's life-de*fm*ingly deep.

Anyway, all I'm trying to say is that I know I'm not beautiful, and that's all there is to it.

Sixth thing – my mum's name is Sara and she's forty-nine years old.

Seventh thing – my dad's name is John and he disappeared two years ago.

And last thing – today is the first day of January, the start of a brand-new year. And tomorrow I'm going to start killing God.

my little underground

It doesn't mean anything, OK? Killing God – it doesn't mean anything. It's just a thing, that's all. Just an idea, something to do, something to keep me occupied. (And, no, it's not a New Year's Resolution either.) I just like doing things that keep my mind off the things I don't want to think about (or, to be more specific, the *thing* I don't want to think about). Last year, for example, towards the end of summer, I did this thing with painted snails. What it was, I was out in the back garden one night, picking up some dog poos (I'll tell you about my dogs later on), and it'd been raining all day, so everything was all wet and horrible, and I happened to notice that the garden path was covered in snails. There were loads of them – all sliming around on the rain-soaked concrete, snailing here and snailing there . . . and it got me thinking. I had no idea what I was thinking about, but I didn't really mind. I was happy enough just standing there in the rainy summer night, with a dog-poo bag in my hand, watching the slow-motion dance of the snails, just thinking, thinking, thinking . . . thinking about nothing in particular.

And then it hit me.

Letters.

Letters, words, messages.

Snail communication.

What would happen, I wondered, if I collected a load of snails, painted letters on their shells, and then released them back into the garden? I mean, what would I find when I went out into the garden the next night? Would the snails *know* they had letters on their backs? Would they arrange themselves so that the letters spelled out snaily messages to me? HULLO DAWN. WE LUV U (I imagine that snails are very poor spellers). Or maybe the painted snails would slope off into the gardens next door and spell out messages to my neighbours. U BAD. WE KIL U.

And so, with that in mind (and smiling to myself), I dropped the dog-poo bag into the bin, called my dogs, and went back inside to start working it all out. It didn't take long. All I needed was some fluorescent paint, a fine paintbrush, a cardboard box and some snails. The only tricky bit was trying to decide how many letters I should use to make it work – i.e. how many As, how many Bs, how many Cs, and so on. Like in Scrabble, you know? I mean, you don't just have equal numbers of every letter, do you? Because some letters get used a lot more than others. Anyway, after a lot of thinking, and a lot of counting up letters in books and stuff, I eventually realized (kind of dumbly) that it *was* just like Scrabble, so why not just copy the Scrabble letters (i.e. twelve Es, nine As, nine Is, 8 Ns, etc.)? So that's what I did. (Except there are one hundred letters in a Scrabble set, which would have meant collecting one hundred snails. Which is a lot of snails. So I just more or less halved the Scrabble numbers instead.)

Over the next two nights, I collected about fifty snails and painted fluorescent letters on their shells (which took me most of another night), and then I released them all back into the garden. And, yes, I know this all *sounds* pretty dull, but it was actually quite exciting – waiting for the next night to come round, wondering what was going to happen when I went out into the garden with my torch, wondering if the snails had anything to say . . .

Unfortunately, nothing much happened at all.

And the reason that nothing much happened at all was mainly that the fluorescent paint I'd used turned out to be poisonous (*Harmful if swallowed, inhaled, etc. May be fatal to aquatic organisms*). I have no idea how the poisonousness got through the snails' shells into the snails themselves, but it did. And the end result of my snail-communication experiment was:

a) four dead snails, their (still intact) shells spelling out – *MNEH*

b) twelve dead snails, their slimily crushed shells unreadable

c) thirty-four missing/presumed dead snails

and d) two dead thrushes.

Q. What's all this got to do with anything?

A. Nothing.

Like I said, I'm just trying to explain the kinds of things I do, that's all. The kinds of things I've been doing for the past two years to keep my mind off the other Dawn, the thirteen-year-old Dawn . . . the Dawn who lives in a cave inside my

head. (The cave is small and cold and it has no sound and I try to make it soft like a pillow but most of the time it's hard like stone. It has to be hard to keep out the monsters.)

Anyway, it's tomorrow now, and at this very moment I'm walking along through the covered walkways of the shopping precinct on my way to Waterstone's. (Some of the kids at school call the precinct 'the mall', like it's some kind of really cool place in Beverly Hills or somewhere. But it's not a mall, it's just a tunnel full of shops.) And here I am, walking along through the crowded walkways, with my head bowed down, my eyes fixed to the ground, my hands in my pockets, my dogs trotting along at my feet, and my iPod turned up loud enough to drown out the town-sound of passing voices and drifting muzak and hundreds and hundreds of shuffling feet . . .

And no one can see me, no one at all.

I'm completely invisible.

You know why? I'll tell you why. Because I'm wearing my Invisible Coat, that's why. And that's also why the bookshop's probably going to be closed when I get there. Because if there's one thing that's *guaranteed* to make you late for something, it's trying to find your Invisible Coat before you go out. I spent almost an hour looking for mine this afternoon. I *thought* I'd found it after about fifteen minutes, and it wasn't until I'd put it on and said goodbye to Mum and was halfway down the street that I realized I'd made a mistake. It wasn't my Invisible Coat after all – it was my Nothing Coat.

Mind you, it's an easy mistake to make.

They're both coats, they're both invisible.

The only real difference is that the invisibility of the Nothing Coat is entirely due to its not being there.

This is all crap, of course. I don't have an Invisible Coat. Invisible Coats don't exist. I *do* have a Nothing Coat, but that goes without saying. Everyone has a Nothing Coat. More than one, in fact. You can have as many Nothing Coats as you like – millions, billions, infinitillions – because not only is everything in the world that *isn't* a coat a Nothing Coat, but so is everything in the world that isn't *any*thing.

And that's a lot of things.

I have to shut up now. It's nearly four o'clock, and it's the second of January, which is probably some kind of Day-After-New-Year's-Day holiday or something, which means the shops probably close at four o'clock like they do on Bank Holidays and Sundays . . .

Q. Why do shops close at four o'clock on a Sunday?

A. God knows.

I don't know much about God. I mean, I know all the basic stuff, the kind of stuff they teach you in Religious Studies . . . although, to be honest, I've never paid that much attention in Religious Studies. But I know the kind of stuff that everyone knows – the Bible stories, the miracles, the whole idea of God and the Devil and Jesus and faith and heaven and hell and angels and everything. It's impossible *not* to know about that kind of stuff. It's everywhere – at school, on TV, in books and films and newspapers, in magazines and on CDs, on the streets, on posters, on those signs outside

churches that (inexplicably) advertise God (e.g. *WHEN WAS THE LAST TIME YOU TOLD GOD YOU LOVED HIM?* or *TODAY IS A GIFT FROM GOD*) . . . it's everywhere. You can't get away from it. So, yes, I know about all that kind of stuff, but I don't really know much else. You know, like what's the difference between Protestants and Catholics and Presbyterians and Methodists and Anglicans and Baptists and Quakers and Unitarians and Mormons and Jehovah's Witnesses and all the other brands of Christianity? Are they all about the same God? Or do different brands worship different Gods? Or maybe it's all about the same God, but with slightly different packaging – a bit like the packets of cereal you get in supermarkets. You know, like there's the *real* Kellogg's Corn Flakes, but you can also get Tesco Cornflakes, Honey Corn Flakes, Tesco Value Cornflakes, Golden Flakes, Organic Cornflakes . . . and they're all pretty much the same – i.e. they're all kind of corny and flakey, and they're all sold in boxes – but each brand tastes ever so slightly different, and each one is sold in a slightly different box.

I don't know . . .

Maybe it's nothing like that at all.

Not that it makes any difference, of course. Because, unlike Corn Flakes, there is no God. He doesn't exist. Which is why it's going to be kind of difficult to kill him.

i love rock 'n' roll

I'm in Waterstone's now, standing in front of the Bible section. I've got 'I Love Rock 'n' Roll' playing on my iPod, and it's raining outside (Waterstone's is in a little back street just outside the precinct), and it's almost dark, so I'm trying to be as quick as possible, because they don't let dogs in here, so I've had to leave mine outside, and they don't like the rain. Their names, by the way, are Jesus and Mary. And I promised I'd tell you about them later on, and I guess it's later on now. So here goes.

They're dachshunds. More specifically, they're smooth-haired black-and-tan dachshunds. Brother and sister, they're three years old, and I've had them since they were puppies. My dad gave them to me when I was twelve. I'm not sure where he got them from, but I think they were probably a bit too young to be separated from their mother, because they were both really clingy and insecure when I got them, and I suppose I became their surrogate mother. Which is why we've always been really close. We go just about everywhere together. We sleep together, we go shopping together, we watch TV together. The only time we can't be together

is when I'm at school. Which is one of the reasons I really hate going to school.

Q. Why are they called Jesus and Mary?
A. Well, actually, there are two answers to this one. The one I usually give is that I named them after my favourite band – The Jesus and Mary Chain. Although 'favourite' is probably the wrong word here. Because, as far as I'm concerned, The Jesus and Mary Chain are The *Only* Band In The World, The Best Band In The Universe, The Only Music Worth Listening To. Their songs are so dark and beautiful, so raw, so pure . . . it's the kind of music that makes you feel like you're sinking down into a big black nowhere.

And I like that.

I first heard them about four years ago when my dad brought home a CD called *Darklands*. He adored it, and for weeks and weeks it was the only thing he played, and the more he played it, the more I fell in love with it. And ever since then, The Jesus and Mary Chain have been THE only band for me. I've downloaded every song they've ever recorded, *and* I've got all their CDs – they're all I ever listen to – and I listen to them all the time. At home, on my PC, on my iPod, whenever and wherever . . . I listen to them so much that even when I'm not listening to them I'm hearing their songs in my head. Their music is the soundtrack to my life. Right now, for example, I've got 'I Love Rock 'n' Roll' on repeat (I play everything on repeat, usually for at least three or four times), and I'll probably keep listening to it until I get home.

So when people ask me why my dogs are called Jesus

and Mary, that's what I tell them – they're named after my favourite band. And it's true. But it's also true that when I first got Jesus and Mary, we had some Christians living next door to us called Mr and Mrs Garth (I knew they were Christians because they had an *I ❤ JESUS* sticker in the back of their car), and they were really horrible people. I mean, they used to treat us like we were nothing, like we didn't exist, we were invisible, you know? We'd try being friendly with them, but they just didn't want to know. They'd simply ignore us. For no reason at all. And that really annoyed me. So I called my dogs Jesus and Mary because I knew it would annoy *them*. And it did. Especially at night, when it was nice and quiet, and I'd let my dogs out for a wee, and then I'd have to stand at the back door whistling and calling them in – *JESUS! MARY! C'MON, JESUS! HURRY UP!* Nope, Mr and Mrs Garth didn't like that at all. And they liked it even less when I started calling out *Jeb*us instead of Jesus (I got the idea from an episode of *The Simpsons*). *JEEEBUS! HEY, JEEEB-USS!* For some reason, that *really* bothered the Garths. In fact, it bothered them so much that one night Mr Garth threw open his window and started yelling at me.

'How *dare* you!' he shouted (wimpishly). 'How dare you take Our Lord's name in vain!'

'Sorry?' I said, looking innocently at him.

'You're *despicable*. You really are. You stupid, pitiful little girl.'

Mr and Mrs Garth have moved now.

Thank God.

Have you seen how many Bibles there are in Waterstone's? There's shelves and shelves of them, and they all have different names and different covers. Right now, for example, I can see the *New King James Bible*, the *Authorized King James Bible*, the *New International Bible*, the *Holy Bible: Catholic Edition*, the *Youth Bible* . . . there's even something called the *Good News Bible*. I mean, come on . . . I've got two wet dogs waiting outside – I don't have time for all this.

In the end, I choose one called *Holy Bible: The New Revised Standard Version, With Apocrypha*. It's got the world-famous *Nelson's Unique Fan-Tab™ Index Reference System* (which, apparently, *Helps you find the books of the Bible in an instant!*). It's also got:

- Informative Section Introductions with Line Drawings and Maps
- Topical Subject Headings with Cross-Reference for Further Study
- Self-Pronouncing Text for Ease in Reading
- Textual and Explanatory Footnotes for Enhanced Understanding

and all for only £11.99.

It's a pretty hefty book (1,191 very thin pages), and it looks like it's got at least twenty billion very small words in it, so before I go to the pay desk I nip into the Children's section and get myself a much more accessible-looking *Children's Illustrated Bible* (£9.99).

I remove my earphones, take the Bibles up to the pay desk, and give them to the goateed bookseller guy.

He looks at them, turns them over, scans them with his barcode thing.

'Yeah, that's £21.98, please,' he says.

I dig in my pocket for some money, trying to separate a single £50 note from the rest of the notes I've got stuffed in there, but as I pull it out, the other notes come flopping out with it, and I drop the lot on the counter. There's a fair amount of cash there (which I'll explain in a while) – about £250 or so – and I can see the bookseller guy staring at it, and I can see him wondering what someone like me – i.e. a lumpyish and obviously not very rich fifteen-year-old girl – is doing with so much money.

I don't say anything to him, I just scoop up the notes, pass him the fifty, and jam the rest in my pocket. He hesitates for a moment, then he shrugs (like, who cares?), takes the fifty, holds it up to the light to make sure it's real, puts it in the till, puts the Bibles in a carrier bag, and gives me my change. I gaze at the notes and coins in my hand, momentarily tempted to pick out a £1 coin, hold it up to the light, and squint at it like the bookseller guy just squinted at my fifty, like I'm checking to make sure *it's* real . . . you know, just for a laugh. But I don't suppose he'd find it very funny, and I can't be bothered anyway.

'Do you want your receipt in the bag?' he says.

I nod.

He puts the receipt in the bag and passes it over.

'What time do you close?' I ask him.

'Eight o'clock,' he says, looking at his watch.

'I thought you closed at four?'

'No,' he says. 'Eight o'clock.'

'What time do you close on Sundays?'

'Yeah, four o'clock on a Sunday.'

'Why's that?'

He gives me an impatient look. 'What?'

'Why do you close at four on Sundays?'

He shrugs again. 'I don't know . . . we just do.'

I thank him, pick up my Bibles, go outside, collect Jesus and Mary, and head off into the winter-dark rain.