

KIM AND TEMPEST

A Day in the Life

25.07.08

I called by to set up the observation day a few weeks ago. I could have phoned but felt that I always had go through Gillian (mum) to get to Kim (daughter). Dropping by there was a chance that Kim would come to the door. She did. She agreed to participate in the second stage of the study straightaway. I hadn't seen her for a while and she didn't look great. I asked about her college course (floristry) and she said she was on a break and would be at home all the time. A few days beforehand I ring to confirm. Brian (stepfather) answers the phone and passes me on to Kim. Kim says that Tempest will be at nursery in the morning from 9 – 1.00 and is that OK. I say fine and we're all set.

Arriving at 9.30 the estate feels quiet considering it's the first week of the school holidays. Kim's house stands out as the one with pots of flowers and ornamental butterflies. Kim answers the door and looks a bit bewildered. I ask if it is still OK with her and she says yes, it's Friday isn't it, I'm in a world of my own. Going into the house I'm greeted by a dog I don't remember. The lively Shiatsu is Bob, bought for Liam the youngest of Gillian's children. Liam has a combination of conditions that affect his speech and make it difficult for him to form relationships. Liam's therapist thought a dog would be a good idea. Gillian is in the garden pegging out washing. The back door looking onto the garden is open.

The house feels unusually quiet, peaceful almost, airy and flooded with sunlight. Just Gillian and Kim and the television that doesn't have an audience. Kim has taken Tempest to pre-school. Tempest goes there everyday from 9-3 during term time. During the summer holidays it runs as a summer school and is open to other children at the school. Liam is also there for the summer. Sophie is at a gifted and talented group at school that runs events for other children and Brian is in bed as he's on the night shift as a security guard for Mercedes.

Gillian comes in from the garden and we have a catch up chat. Since last time Gillian has been in poor health. She's had heart trouble and was hospitalised on one occasion. She's been treated for angina, irregular heart beat, and other conditions before a final diagnosis settled on gall stones as the main problem. Gillian feels she has been misdiagnosed and badly treated by medical staff and is considering ways of pursuing this. Battles to secure medical and educational support for Liam continue. Experts say that he has a combination of different conditions, presenting with symptoms associated with autism, dyspraxia, OCD and ADHD. Gillian is bolstered by the view of his teacher that he needs one to one support. He is in mainstream school and has just been statemented so further support may become available. Liam likes routine and is well behaved at school, responding to the structure of the day and regular, planned activities. Out of school he is not so good. He can become distressed and demanding. During these moments he is prone to unpredictable behaviour, throwing things and kicking, pulling dummies out of other children's mouths. News on Tempest, reported by Kim and Gillian is that she is 'naughty'. At two and a half she wants her own way and will stop at nothing to get it. She 'copies' Liam's behaviour and adds to the pulling dummies repertoire by bullying other children and throwing

things at adults including Kim and Gillian. Nursery staff commonly report on Tempest's behaviour at pick up time. There have been several incidents. Kim was the same when she was that age.

Nancy (Gillian's mother) has been visiting more frequently now that she has retired from her job as a traffic warden. When Gillian was in hospital she stayed for six weeks causing much disruption in the household as she tried to organise everybody and 'take over'. She took control of the washing machine and all laundry routines. That was fine and she also got Tempest into a routine around eating breakfast, also fine, good in fact. Kim tried to continue that when Nancy left but Tempest was 'having none of it'. The worst thing was that she also tried to organise everyone in the house, telling them what to do and intervening in disputes and everyday interactions. Gillian reminds me that Nancy didn't bring up any of her own children and has outdated views on how children should behave. Demanding respect from everyone, giving instructions and saying don't speak to your mother/me like that didn't play well in a house where family drama is the norm. Kim wanted to move out. Even Gillian got thoroughly fed up and has since instigated a rule that Nancy can only visit for two weeks at a time.

Gillian says we have a new arrival in the family and Kim jumps up to show me a framed photograph of a baby boy in a brown playsuit with ginger hair. It's Brody's baby, Gillian's eldest child who was in the army and is now living nearby and working for as a security guard in the theatre/clubbing district of the city. The baby is four months old and Brody is no longer with the baby's mother, Kelly. The relationship ran into trouble as Kelly was depressed, self harmed and had financial problems. Brody got into debt trying to help her financially and Gillian is still helping him to sort out his finances. Brody has just moved in with new girlfriend Kate. She's the manager of a city centre restaurant in the theatre district where Brody works. Having a job, car and her own flat, she's a better prospect than Kelly but Gillian isn't sure about her. She told Brody that who he's with is his choice. Kim says she smells of garlic the whole time.

There are two other framed photographs they want me to see. Both of Kim in a sumptuous dark red evening dress, looking glamorous with beautifully styled hair and make up. The Young mothers project held a prom for girls who completed the E to E course. Kim helped to organise the event. It was hard work but she enjoyed it. In one of the photos Tempest is just behind Kim. The other is a close up of Kim looking beautiful and elegant. It's a rite of passage image, a marker of transition that preserves her youth.

Since dropping out of her floristry course Kim was on income support for several months and has recently taken a job as a debt collector. Gillian does this already and Kim learned the ropes by helping her. They heard of a vacancy and Kim now has her own round. Kim's Connexions worker didn't want Kim to take the job as it's commission only. Gillian struck a deal to ensure Kim earns a minimum of £60 per week, the same amount she was getting from income support. It suits Kim. They pick up the books on Thursday, collect all week and do the banking on the following Thursday ready for the next week. Most of the work is in the evening. They find out when clients get their benefit and call that night. They've got to know most people on the estate and know the 'good' clients and the risky ones. There's support for what

they do. They help people out. Gangs on the estate have said if you have any trouble let us know. All this and it's only 9.50.

Kim goes into the garden for a fag. There is a knock on the door. Gillian says it's probably Dave, a neighbour and one of her clients who is struggling to make ends meet. Gillian said if he did her gardening she would give him £20. Dave is very rock and roll. In his 40s, slim and tanned, wiry and wasted, wearing faded denims and a black vest top revealing his tattooed shapely arms. He sets to work on the garden. Gillian stays out there with him, talking. Kim comes back inside. Kim tells me more about what's going on for her. She left the floristry course because working with the flowers gave her allergies, she couldn't go on the course trips because of Tempest, she got behind with the work and she didn't fit in. In February she was diagnosed with depression for the second time. Kim had been seeing a counsellor but since turning 18 in December that service stopped seeing her and she had to register for adult counselling services. She is still waiting for an appointment. She was also having a difficult time in a relationship and ended that at about the same time. She doesn't say how long she was seeing Lewis for. She relates a long complicated story about meeting his family for the first time. His aunt asked them to look after the children while the extended family went out. She felt she couldn't say no. The family started drinking in the morning, then went out leaving four children with Kim and Lewis and were not back later that evening. Kim had to get back for Tempest and was not happy about being put in this position. She wanted to go home but also wanted to show respect to his family. Since splitting up with Lewis she has been single. It's better that way. She always picks the wrong blokes. Her ideal would be to meet a rich man with a job and a car, or even if they weren't rich but had a job and a car that would be OK.

10.30 Gillian goes to B & Q to buy some plants. The beds look bare now that they have been weeded. Dave is still working on the garden when she returns. Kim and I help her bring the plants in from the car. Gillian continues talking to Dave outside and Kim and I carry on chatting inside. Most of Kim's time is taken up with Tempest. Tempest has regular appointments with a dietician, paediatrician, speech therapist as well as seeing a health visitor and attending full time nursery. There is a concern that Tempest is overweight and is not speaking properly. The speech and language therapist is worried about Tempest's levels of understanding. Kim thinks Tempest's speech is influenced by Liam who has speech difficulties and is Tempest's main playmate/rival. Liam and Tempest interact as siblings. They play and fight, get jealous of each other and insist on being treated the same. If you buy something for Tempest you have to buy something for Liam.

That's how they come to have two toy lawnmowers that blow bubbles. Liam is rough with her but Tempest is strong willed and won't be beaten. Kim gives in to Tempest all the time. If she wants something it's easier to let her have it. Most of Kim's money goes on Tempest. She wants her to have nice things. Kim is quite good at managing her money. She doesn't go out much and apart from Tempest doesn't have a lot of expenses. Kim likes to have her hair and nails done and can't always afford to but sometimes has them done anyway and worries about the money later.

Kim has no contact with Jason (Tempest's father) now. He did see Tempest a couple of times in the early days but it was disastrous. He's never bought anything for Tempest or offered to support her in any way despite Gillian's various proposals –

paying weekly, monthly or buying things she needs on a regular basis. The only thing Jason has ever given Tempest is a couple of greetings cards. Kim tells me again about the cards. She sounds angry, hasn't forgotten, the cards symbolise Jason's neglect of

her and their daughter. She has kept the cards and imagines a scenario where Tempest asks about her father and Kim will show her the cards. She tells me again about his visits, leaving his girlfriend to look after Tempest and singing dirty nursery rhymes to Tempest. Then she tells me a story I haven't heard before. She bumps into Jason in the street and he tries to avoid her. Kim says you haven't seen your daughter for months and now you don't want to know her. He comes over to speak to them, takes Tempest out of her buggy, sits her on his lap and says, 'Tell your mommy to fuck off'. I ask Kim about her relationship with Jason, (in an attempt to tease out her conception story). She says the relationship was always abusive. He liked to control her, going through her mobile phone and monitoring what she did. He was nice at first but the relationship was never romantic. He only ever took her out once, to the pictures just before she found out she was pregnant. He wanted to go to a nightclub after the film but she said, no I won't get in. He grabbed her arm so hard it bruised and held her against a wall with his hand across her throat. Jason's father sees Tempest regularly when he calls round to see his brother Brian. Kim thinks that he may pass on news to Jason but no words come the other way. Gillian makes some sandwiches for her and Dave. I can hear them talking in low tones, sitting on the patio. Kim offers to make me a sandwich but I've brought my own. Kim says she's had a sandwich but I don't see her eat anything. She says she can only manage one meal a day.

12.50 Kim and I walk to the nursery to pick up Liam and Tempest. The ten minute walk takes us through the estate. There are a few people around. Kim exchanges a 'You alright?' with a couple of them. She lights another fag. I prompt her into saying more about Jason. She said that most people on her side of the family would say that he bullied her into having sex but she knows it takes two, and it does, she repeats. It was her first sexual experience. She was never alone with him in the house but late at night when everyone was in bed he came in from the pub and went to her room. Her room is downstairs by the front door so it was easy for them to have sex without disturbing the rest of the house. I want to ask how it started, how long it went on for and something about her own feelings but think, bloody hell this is more detail than I ever expected and decide to leave it at that.

1.00pm Arriving at the nursery, all the children are playing outside. Liam sees us straightaway and runs up to Kim. Tempest takes a little longer. Kim and a nursery worker exchange a few words about the heat and protecting Tempest's pale skin. The nursery worker refers to Tempest as 'a handful'. On the route home the children do that ball-of-wool style walking, weaving around us at different speeds, running ahead then retreating again. Kim says, Shall we go to the shop on the way back and buy you two a drink? We stop at Tesco. The shop is quite full. The children run up and down along the aisles, taking things off the shelves and then taking the shelves off the brackets. Kim tells Tempest to stop being a vandal, 'I'll kick your bum if you don't stop that now'. The children choose a drink and we wait in the queue. A man comes up to Kim and they exchange a few words. Their shoulders move closer together as they talk. He asks her to get a couple of things for him, passing her the items and the money. She tells me later that he is Lee, she went out with him for a

while when Tempest was one and they are still good friends. He has two 'really nice' children already with a previous partner and another one on the way with a new partner. Tempest points at me and says, 'Not coming'. Kim says, Sometimes you just say whatever you think don't you? We pass the playground on the way home and Kim is relieved that Tempest passes it without wanting to go there. A ten minute walk can turn into 45 minutes if Tempest decides she wants to play. Kim tells Tempest to stop as she reaches the road. Tempest glances back at her and carries on walking. Kim says, right you're going to your room when we get home.

Once home Liam settles down to watch cartoons and Tempest moves between the house and the garden. Dave and Gillian are still in the garden. The beds are planted up and look lovely. Dave is getting ready to mow the lawn. Gillian closes the back door so that the noise doesn't disturb Brian sleeping upstairs. Gillian asks Kim to get Liam a drink and bring the washing in. Well, she doesn't ask, she tells her without saying please or thank you. Kim comes back with the washing. It's now about 2.00pm and I'm overcome with tiredness. Kim is talking to me some more but I'm not quite there. I drink a big glass of water and try to liven up. Tempest is wandering about with a dummy

in her mouth. She points to me as she goes by. Kim says, Have they put sun tan cream on you today, smelling Tempest's arm to check. After mowing the lawn Dave leaves and Brian gets up 15 minutes later. I see him in the living room mirror coming downstairs in his dressing gown. He potters about the kitchen and the living room, doing some ironing and getting his things ready for work. He says hello but I can't quite see him as he moves about. Gillian is banging about in the kitchen. I hear raised voices. Gillian is saying, how come whenever I'm getting ready for work, you're getting ready for work, there's always ... I don't catch all of it but she's shouting at Brian. He makes a couple of phone calls. He can't find his passport and needs the number to renew his security pass at work. Gillian huffs and puffs around the house. If he kept his passport with all the other passports there wouldn't be this problem but no he won't do that will he, he insists on carrying it around with him and now he's in this mess. Typical male. Gillian goes on the computer to look at the passport site.

Noise levels in the house have increased dramatically. The television has been on all day and is now emitting the familiar onomatopoeic sounds of animated cartoon strips, there are two fans whirring in the living room, the computer bleeping, Gillian commenting upon and creating a commotion, Brian on the phone and the washing machine on a spin cycle. No danger of falling asleep now. Completely lose sight of Tempest now who has taken herself to bed. She does that when she's tired Kim says. Sophie comes home as the turmoil rumbles on, petering out rather than coming to any resolution. She wheels her bike through the house into the garden. Gillian says there are some sandwiches in the kitchen for her. Turning to Brian she says, Are you having chips at work tonight or do you need something here? It's Friday you usually have chips at work. If it's different I need to know. She tells Kim to get ready for work.

There's a knock on the door and Brody arrives with girlfriend Kate. Entering the living room Kate announces that she doesn't smell of garlic today as she hasn't been to the restaurant yet. Brody gets into a conversation with Gillian about finances. He has brought some bank statements for Gillian and she asks him for money to pay off his debts. Kate sits down next to me and talks about her job. Addressing Kim mainly, Katee is making cocktails tonight as one of the bar staff is off. Tomorrow she has to

get in early to sort out stock. She's had the internal phone in the restaurant taken out because she doesn't want other staff talking directly to the kitchen staff – she wants to take charge of this line of communication herself. The kitchen staff have to take it from her, everyone has to do what she says because she's always right. She doesn't like taking orders from anyone including head office. Other restaurant workers call her the Duchess. The kitchen is upstairs so there's a lot of running up and down to do.

If there are any problems she knows the security guard at the Slug and Lettuce. Brody says the Slug and Lettuce should be called the Slag and Lettuce. Katee takes exception, she used to work there so what is he saying? He tells a story about a man who is banned from the city centre repeatedly trying to get into the clubs and being thrown out again. They leave after a brief whirlwind visit and Kim and Gillian get ready to do their rounds on the estate. I take this as a cue to go too and leave the house at the same time as them, 4.30pm. On the way out they comment on me having a boring day as they live in a madhouse. I thank them, say it's been an interesting day, not boring at all and a nice change for me as I'm normally in an office.

Final thought: why am I always engulfed by a wave of tiredness every time I go there? It's a strong physical reaction that sweeps through the whole of my body. I don't normally feel tired in that way and certainly not during the course of a regular working day. The first time it happened I didn't know what it was. Now I'm alert to it but still can't prevent it. In the past it's usually set in after an hour or so. This time it came after about four hours so perhaps I'm building up a tolerance. I did spend approx 7 hours on the same settee.