

IF I COULD SEE ME NOW

Helen Lederer

Comedian, writer and actress, 65



◀ Helen Lederer today, right; as a teenager, left; with Sooty and Sweep in 2000, below, and performing stand-up in 1989

What would your younger self make of your life today?

I was a very annoying child. I went to Blackheath High School in London, which had very strict teachers who weren't used to children who were jolly and would come up with ideas to introduce a bit of fun. That's the kind of child I was – making up rude games and getting into trouble by mistake. It must have been very irritating for those teachers, but the truth is that we're all annoying, even though we don't mean to be. My older sister used to hum, and I remember flying at her, desperate for her to stop. I now realise she did it naturally, but it used to annoy me so much. So my worry is that I can annoy people even now, but I think my younger self would have complete sympathy with me. Wanting to have a laugh, and finding a connection

with people through finding life hysterical, that's what makes me who I am now, just as it was then. I attract people like me and I still get into trouble, but something in me means I always just about survive.

My need to write and perform is something that my younger self would understand, too. At home I was always role-playing with my sister and another pair of sisters who would come over. My sister would engineer it so that, in whatever game we were playing, she didn't have to do anything – just something like reading a comic or being served drinks.

When we did a play, our poor parents had to sit there being the audience and looking pleased.

My father, Peter (born Klaus), was Czechoslovakian, and came to this country when he was about nine. My mother, Jeanne, similarly exotically, was from the Isle of Wight. Dad had left Czechoslovakia because of the war and all that hoo-hah, but he did really well here and I suppose that's



partly what drives me. They were both funny people, but I think they were always faintly concerned about what I was going to do next. My younger self would still see parts of them in me: my father always enjoyed spotting something amusing about people, and my mother always liked to spin out a story.

One of the earliest bits of TV I did was a sketch show called *Naked Video* in the mid-1980s, around the time that women were doing a bit more writing and performing. I'd been doing stand-up, and I played a Sloane girl mouthing off at the bar. My childhood self, who did sketches of her own and was like David Frost, but a fat female child version, would have really rallied to the idea of being able to write her

MARRIAGE DIARIES

'I'm dreading my husband returning to work, and the woman who was his lover'

The worst moment of my life was when my husband of 12 years confessed to an affair. I hadn't suspected a thing – he was always out at events for work, and I was used to him attending conferences and coming home late after client dinners. He'd always phone or text me, and our relationship didn't change at all during his fling – though looking back, perhaps he was a bit more distant. I probably put it down to work stress.

But 18 months ago, we were in bed, reading, when he said "there's something I need to tell you."

It still didn't occur to me – my initial, shocked thought was that he'd lost his job. So when he said, "I've been seeing someone else", I felt as though I'd been slapped.

Over hours of me sobbing and him apologising, it emerged that he'd met a woman at a conference – what a cliché – there had been "a spark", and they'd started texting each other. She was younger, "very ambitious", and he'd been flattered.

Aside from the betrayal itself, I was furious that he'd been so pathetic, such a typical middle-aged man. There was nothing wrong with our marriage, he told me, he was just "feeling old" and vulnerable to a bit of excitement and attention.

He'd met her in a hotel a couple of times, and been to hers once, he confessed, but the guilt was too much and he ended it. I believed him – he was genuinely wretched. I was glad he'd come clean, but devastated that he'd

been unfaithful. I struggled to forgive him, and lost all desire for him.

Previously, we had a good sex life, but now all I could think about was his betrayal.

After a few months, we went for counselling, which helped a lot, and things gradually got back on track, though any small uncertainty would plunge me back into doubt, despite his promises.

The lockdown has been a huge relief,

because he's been working from home. I hadn't realised how tense I was feeling about his work events and conferences until they all stopped, and it was as though a weight of worry had been lifted from my shoulders.

For the past four months, I've known where he is every day (the spare room, making Zoom calls), and our evenings have been spent together watching old movies and cooking dinner. It's been like a second honeymoon, we've reconnected and really enjoyed each other's company again. Soon, though, my hus-

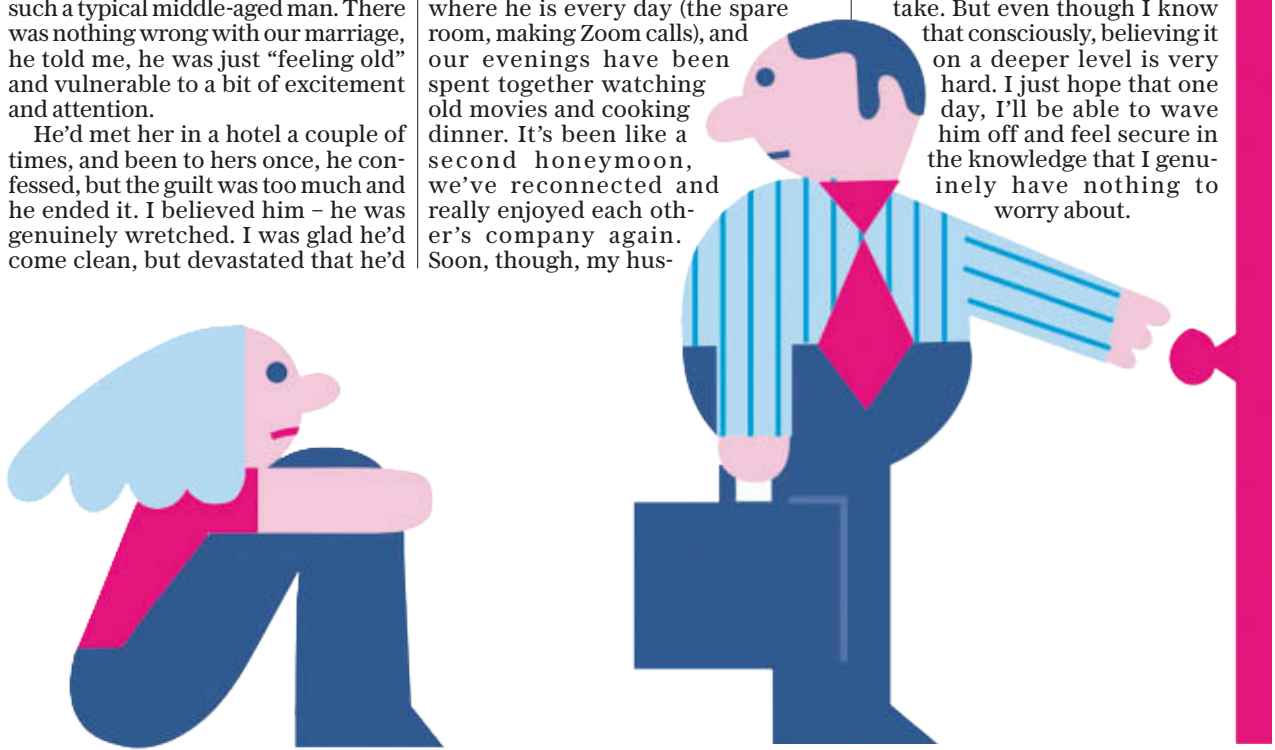
band's firm is reopening, and I'm dreading the return to normal.

The nature of his job is social, and there's no way they'll let him carry on working from home. He's genuinely looking forward to meeting clients again and, at some point, the conferences and away-days will resume and I'll have to get used to it.

Yet despite his reassurances, I feel sick with nerves. I want to trust him, but there's a part of me that just can't. I imagine him meeting some glamorous woman and getting drunk, heading back to her hotel room, and it's eating away at me.

I don't want to be controlling, I want to feel that I can relax, but I'm already lying awake until 2am, fretting. I know there's no point asking him for constant reassurance, as our counsellor pointed out – he can't promise more than he already has. He's ashamed and doesn't like discussing it, either, so bringing it up is stressful for both of us.

I know there's no choice but to try to live with the situation, reminding myself that he's committed to our marriage, and it was a stupid mistake. But even though I know that consciously, believing it on a deeper level is very hard. I just hope that one day, I'll be able to wave him off and feel secure in the knowledge that I genuinely have nothing to worry about.



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Our friendly team also remain available 7 days a week to answer calls and emails.

ES 9BA	£550	L21 BEE	£550	NI 518	£550	6689 RK	£600
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R121 ABE	£550	P23 BET	£550	M23 NNY	£550	N21 ROB	£500
M16 ACC	£550	R25 BET	£550	M23 NOR	£550	L23 ROB	£500
CB AC	£550	S16 BEV	£550	L21 NOX	£550	ROD 5Y	£2400
M24 ACE	£550	600 BJ	£300	L23 NOX	£550	ROD IR	£600
L25 ACK	£550	884 BUF	£550	L24 OAK	£550	N20 ROD	£750
R25 ACK	£550	BL 632	£4500	M21 OAK	£550	N22 ROD	£500
N21 ACS	£550	R29 BLU	£550	AS 0AT	£550	GG RON	£700
M24 ACT	£550	M7 BMH	£550	T2 0CT	£550	W4 RON	£300
M27 ACT	£550	F9 BMW	£550	M21 OBY	£550	R21 RON	£500
T53 ACY	£550	J600 BMW	£750	07 0PM	£750	S34 RON	£100
4180 AD	£1700	43 BO	£3800	08 081	£950	RON 47A	£2300
R27 ADD	£550	S555 BO	£2300	09 0LY	£400	ROB RON	£400
N29 ADD	£550	N21 BOB	£500	L28 MCM	£550	ROD RLY	£750
L40 ADD	£550	W5 CSR	£550	L28 MCR	£550	L21 ORD	£550
AD 0EY	£3400	T55 BOB	£1400	L24 MCR	£550	M21 ORE	£550
L21 ADY	£550	C4 BOD	£800	085 JAG	£550	RO5 RA	£1900
L23 AUM	£550	R25 BOD	£550	L23 JAG	£550	L21 ROD	£750
K888 AJH	£550	P21 BOY	£550	L28 JAG	£550	RO5 ROS	£650
M23 AIL	£550	850 BP	£3500	L21 GAR	£550	S30 KAR	£550
P21 AIL	£550	C4 BUR	£550	L27 JAH	£550	N24 LER	£550
APF 206	£950	N21 BON	£550	L28 JAK	£550	H10 MEE	£550
M25 AGS	£550	P321 BOO	£550	L21 GAR	£550	P5 LES	£400
R27 ADD	£550	R28 BOW	£550	L21 GAR	£550	L24 LER	£550
V10 AID	£550	C4 BUB	£550	L21 GAR	£550	N21 MER	£550
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