

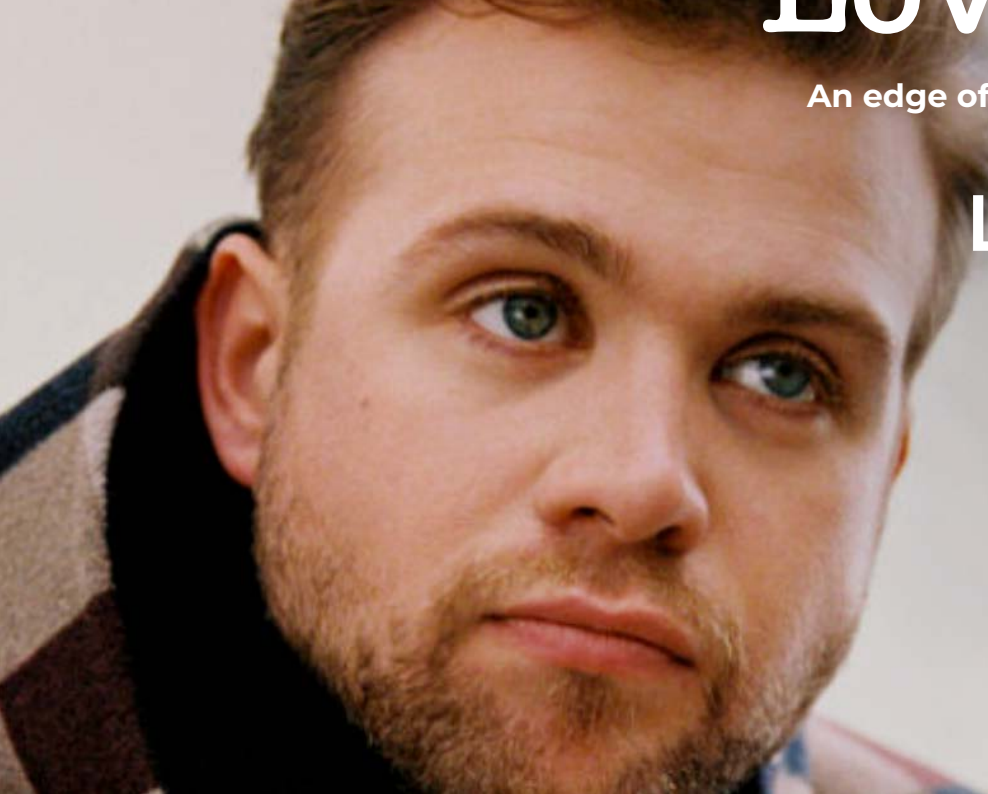


“Love Spies”

An edge of the seat romantic comedy

By Iain Weatherby

LUCIAN



Episode One:

'Step 13'

London, a church hall, fold out chairs in a circle. We're in a Twelve Step group. STEPHEN (50s) is invited to 'share'. He's never done this before, so the group moderator DOMINIC says, why don't you just start at the beginning...

Stephen does and it quickly becomes clear that this is an 'intimacy disorder' or 'commitment phobia' group (thankfully nobody says 'sex addiction' anymore).

But Stephen is a brilliant natural raconteur (he's a successful restaurateur, beautifully tailored, an East End boy who moved from working in kitchens, to building a restaurant empire and selling it – then watching it implode under private equity. Keith McNally meets Anthony Bourdain).

As Stephen tells his story, the circle leans in...



And one young man, THEO (early 30s, straight up gorgeous) seems especially enthralled by Stephen's tale. But just as Stephen's story is getting really juicy, Dominic chimes in with 'thank you, that's one minute.' Stephen stops dead: what? Dom says that's the deal here – three minutes each. He's on the watch.

Stephen is not used to being interrupted and he's a little put out: it took a lot for him to be here, to open up with strangers, plus he just got going. He is pissed off: he wraps up fairly abruptly.

The next guy, obviously a regular, tells the same story every week. This week he does it to music, cueing it on his phone... On Stephen: this is bullshit. He excuses himself, says he has to go to the bathroom.

Theo watches him go, then follows him out...



In the street, Theo finds Stephen trying to hail a cab: his phone is dead, there are no black cabs. Theo asks does he really want to be leaving now? Stephen says he should never have come. It's not him. He asks can he give Theo cash (being 'a kid' he probably doesn't know what cash is...) to book him an Uber.

But Theo's only got a brick phone. That's for his own good, his own form of 'self binding' — to keep him off the the apps... the smartphone is his gateway to hell. He is very charming, witty. He's an actor, which basically means he's a tutor. Stephen likes him immediately.

Look says Theo, something clearly brought you here, something you need, why not at least come back in and hear my story... I mean, I listened to yours. And back in the room it is Theo's turn to share. He is frank, honest about the mess he has made of his life.

Stephen is impressed with the young man – wishes he had that much self-knowledge or bravery at his age, at any age...





Afterwards, they run to a local pub for a pint. And they get into it. Theo asks about Stephen's motivation for being there: the older man says he wants to get back with his wife HANNAH ('not number 2 or 3 but number 1'), his first and forever love (as he realises now, far too late) – the mother of his daughter IMO who is 14 and his son SAM who is 17.

Trouble is, it's not a second chance that Stephen is looking for, it's like a ninety-ninth chance – it's a long shot at this point.

And Theo? He wants to make things OK with his long-term partner GABI who ditched him the week before their wedding, when she discovered quite how lost in the apps he was. Getting back together is probably too much to hope for: but he would like to say sorry properly and make it all right.

But his bridges are not just burned, they are dynamited, they are pulverised... and that is on him, all of it. Theo says he needs more than twelve steps to get another chance with Gabi, he needs like twenty thousand steps...

So even though there's maybe 20 years between these two guys, they have exactly the same problem...



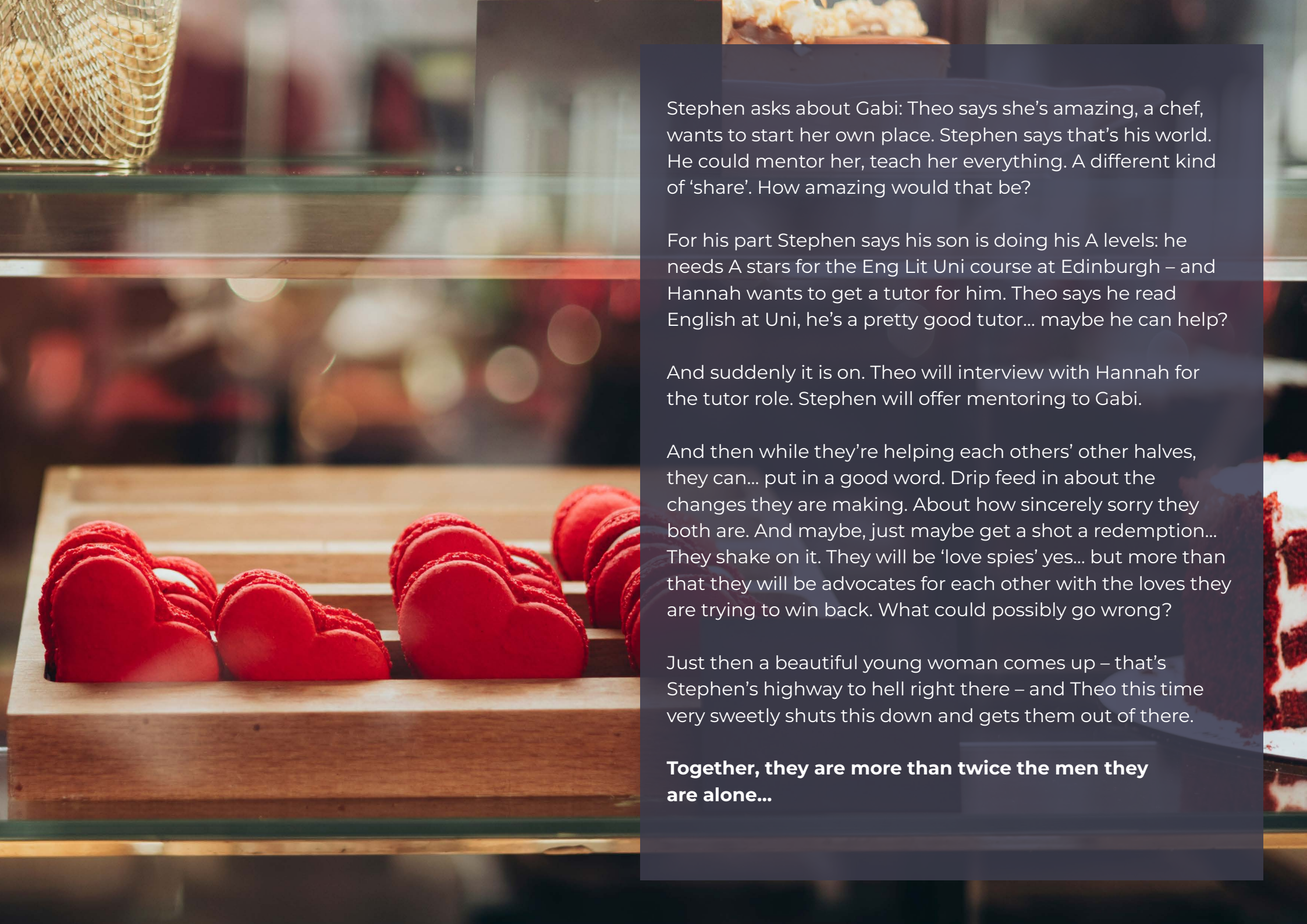
They are interrupted by the proprietor of the pub, who has one of Stephen's cookbooks and wants a selfie with him. Stephen is closing this down when Theo steps in, says, better than a selfie – such a bad angle – why don't I take the shot for you, landscape is better isn't it? And Stephen, charmed by Theo, goes along with it.

The guy is super grateful and says that's funny because he had heard that Stephen was a dick but it turns out, not at all... and in this moment Stephen begins to perceive that Theo could be good for him – could be his wingman and conscience, the consiglieri he needs right now...

Then Theo muses: what if Hannah and your kids could see what you did for that guy? They'd know that you were serious about changing. And Stephen says what if Gabi could see what you did for me outside that group, stepping out there, taking a risk, bringing me back in... she would see what she has lost, wouldn't she?

What if there was... something else we could do for each other to help get our lives – and our loves – back? Call it “Step 13”.





Stephen asks about Gabi: Theo says she's amazing, a chef, wants to start her own place. Stephen says that's his world. He could mentor her, teach her everything. A different kind of 'share'. How amazing would that be?

For his part Stephen says his son is doing his A levels: he needs A stars for the Eng Lit Uni course at Edinburgh – and Hannah wants to get a tutor for him. Theo says he read English at Uni, he's a pretty good tutor... maybe he can help?

And suddenly it is on. Theo will interview with Hannah for the tutor role. Stephen will offer mentoring to Gabi.

And then while they're helping each others' other halves, they can... put in a good word. Drip feed in about the changes they are making. About how sincerely sorry they both are. And maybe, just maybe get a shot a redemption... They shake on it. They will be 'love spies' yes... but more than that they will be advocates for each other with the loves they are trying to win back. What could possibly go wrong?

Just then a beautiful young woman comes up – that's Stephen's highway to hell right there – and Theo this time very sweetly shuts this down and gets them out of there.

Together, they are more than twice the men they are alone...

So, a couple of days later, Theo meets Hannah and Sam in their house, Stephen's old family home. Hannah is amazed by how quick his application came through – she only just put the ad up and he responded. He seems perfect. Theo bonds immediately with Sam in their trial run lesson – why would she look any further? (Overlook that he's also kind of gorgeous). Assuming his references check out, the job is his.

Meanwhile Stephen eats at Gabi's pop up and they meet after for his review. She's clearly brilliant but he has notes for her – mainly how can this tiny space ever make any money? He could find her investment but she'd have to sharpen the concept and make it scalable... he can help with that.

Gabi is thrilled: Stephen's part angel investor, part fairy Godfather but when he, super casually mentions Theo, Gabi turns on a dime – she is instantly hostile and defensive. Stephen tries to put in a mildly good word for Theo (he set up this meeting didn't he?) but Gabi doesn't want to know. So Stephen sees for the first time how tough this will be... they agree to meet for another mentoring session.

Likewise, tentatively, after a lesson, Theo carefully asks about Sam's Dad – and both Sam and Hannah all but spit on the ground. That name is not to be mentioned in this house... wow, this is going to be tough. Hannah, suspicious, wants to know how Theo knows Stephen? Theo covers: through padel... or is it bookclub?

It's going to be a hell of a long way back for them both...





Stephen and Theo report back on their progress. Theo first tries to sugar coat it but Stephen wants it straight: they need to be up front with each other, so they have a baseline – so they know the size of the task here. They each fess up to the depth of antipathy that they are going to have to overcome here.

They each recount precisely what their exes have said about them: word for word. It's brutal but necessary (It's also very funny in the moment).

But there's another even bigger problem. Both Hannah and Gabi are now dating – (And we'll see these scenes as Stephen and Theo each relate what they have learned from their romantic detective work).

Gabi seems to have an on / off arrangement with BENICIO – a hunky inked Spanish fellow chef... 'your basic dreamboat, muscles, good to his mother, knows his way around a squid'. On Theo: shit.

While Hannah has connected with mild-mannered divorced lawyer SHAUN on the apps. He's not much to look at but, Theo has done the research, he's loaded. Hannah and Shaun are courting in an old school way. They went to the ballet this week (Stephen knows Hannah hates ballet so she must be serious about this guy) but they haven't yet got together, which Sam confirmed: Shaun has not yet 'stayed the night'.

Fuck fuck fuck...

If their exes have both got new partners, then what chance has their project – what chance has “Step 13” got?

They might even need... Step 14...

Theo says it first – ‘we need to close these fuckers down’.

They are going to need to go hostile, negative and try to terminate – with extreme prejudice – these tender budding relationships... if they are to ever have a chance with their exes...

And, as things begin to escalate seriously and our two commit to go all in – that’s the end of our pilot.





Across Season One – and Beyond

So we are off to the races with a unique emotional quest that that will get very complicated, very quickly.

Stephen and Theo must work undercover to sabotage Gabi and Hannah's current love interests. Theo begins by making Shaun look dumb at a pub quiz. Meanwhile Stephen bribes an environmental health inspector to rate Benicio's kitchen as unfit... with 'signs of rodent activity' – when in fact he is the rat.

But then Hannah, late one night after another chaste date with Shaun, makes a clumsy pass at Theo. Theo – being completely above board, relates this to Stephen who seizes on it –

But that's it – that's how we'll break them up...

We both put the moves on each other's exes, causing them to break up with their current boyfriends... then break up with them... allowing us back in to pick up the pieces and get back with our true loves....

'It's genius.... isn't it?'

Except how did this all start – and where did they meet? And even if started from a good place they are deep, deep into subterfuge now... and which one of them has put the fox in the henhouse?

Finally, Theo and Stephen will be pitted against each other, as their scheme wildly unravels and Theo's darker long game is revealed.

In Season Two, roles are reversed as Gabi and Stephen must work together to break Theo and Hannah up...





Our world and tone

Love Spies is by turns exquisite romantic comedy and a suspense about love, intimacy issues, the internet and masculinity now.

We collide one of the great set-ups, the central pact of *Strangers on a Train* (I'll solve your problem if you solve mine) with the miscommunications and undercover romantic scheming of a *Cyrano de Bergerac*. Like the great rom coms, we'll desperately want our couples to be together, even as the obstacles to this get ever larger. The result is a story that aims to be as ingenious, witty and and heartfelt as *The Apartment*.

Our story is set in London now and straddles two huge chasms – of the generations and the wealth gap. The younger pair of Theo and Gabi are struggling to get their Gen Z feet on the ladder, while the Stephen and Hannah are dealing with their post divorce mid life challenges. *Love Spies* is a delicious intergenerational romantic comedy – with a totally unique twist.

Iain Weatherby co-created and wrote BAFTA-nominated *Truelove* (Channel 4). He has written episodes for *The Gentlemen* (Netflix) and *Joan* (ITV). *The Trap*, a rural thriller, has been commissioned by Channel Five. Iain wrote on *Humans* (AMC / Channel 4) and on the thriller *Safe Harbor* for Mark Williams (*Ozark*). He has been in writers' rooms for *Temple* (Sky) and *Kaos* (Netflix). *Hollywood Berlin* is Iain's neo noir feature about German emigrés in LA in 1941. In the real world Iain has worked in finance and advertising and serves on the board of the Charlie Waller Trust. He lives in rural Dorset.

Lucy Barzun Donnelly is an Emmy and Golden Globe-winning producer (*Grey Gardens*) with 25+ years as a founder, CEO, and creative producer running development, financing and production across the US and UK. Lucy began her career in New York at Miramax, building Oscar campaigns for *Shakespeare in Love* and *Life is Beautiful* before serving as EVP at Kalkaska Productions (*Pieces of April*, *Austin Powers in Goldmember*). She then raised and deployed an independent film fund (*Bag of Hammers*, *That's What She Said*). Other credits include *Maggie's Plan* and *Friends With Kids*. With Lucian, Lucy is building a slate of dramas and comedy dramas which lean into classic storytelling to deliver human engagement, not merely body count. Lucy recently moved with her family to London from LA.

