

teased us about our reversed roles. On a trip to Yorkshire, our friend Jon exclaimed, 'I want Chris' job - having your girlfriend do all the work!'

I found it funny then. Chris still made money as a freelance puzzle editor so I knew he wasn't sponging off me. Yet not long after, we decided to buy a flat together. I went to the mortgage lender to find out what we could borrow. A man in a suit looked over my finances and whistled. 'So,' he said. 'You make £50,000 a year and your boyfriend brings in a lot less.' 'Yes,' I replied. 'What do you suggest?' He shrugged, looking at my file. 'I think you should leave him.'

It didn't stop me from buying a flat in London with Chris, and I kept hauling myself off to work, while he kept tapping away at his keyboard. Then, in 2006, when I was 34, I was offered the chance to work at a magazine in New York and Chris agreed that we should move. Most of our London friends were having children by then and our usual whirl of pubs and parties was slowing down. We wanted a new adventure.

At the same time, though, Chris lost an important work contract. Suddenly, he was without paid work, living in a strange city without any close friends, while I worked even longer, tougher hours. Once I asked him if he'd consider finding work in a bar, but he said in a hurt voice, 'I'm a law graduate, I can't take work in a bar.' And I was okay with that. I didn't want anything to distract him from his dream and fill him with self-doubt or sadness.

One year passed, then two. Chris wrote another book, aborted it, then started another. His latest book, he told me, would definitely get published. In the meantime, he and I would go to parties, where people asked what he did. Neither of us knew how to answer. He was no longer a puzzle editor, but he wasn't a writer yet either. Who was he?

While I worked like crazy, Chris tinkered at his computer, cooked and looked after the house. Sometimes, he'd go to the pool hall in the middle of the day. I started to resent his free time and bohemian tendencies.

Still, Chris knew how to surprise me. One Saturday morning, he woke me up and told me we were getting on a train. We arrived at a place called Bear Mountain, about an hour out of New York City. We hiked to the top and, as we sat down, Chris pulled two glasses and a bottle of champagne from his rucksack. He handed me an envelope. Inside was a card with the words, 'For Margi because, without you, nothing.'

'It's the dedication for my book,' Chris explained. 'I wanted to propose when I got published, but it didn't happen in time. So here it is now... Will you marry me?'

We married soon after and, two years later, Chris finished his book, *Black Chalk*. To my pride and amazement, an agent signed him within a week. Chris immediately started fantasising about book deals and writing tours. Yet he still needed to find a publisher to start making money. I'd supported him for so many years, how much longer could this go on?

I worried what my parents thought. I knew they loved Chris, but were they secretly disappointed in me? They probably wished we'd just have children, instead of chasing after vapours.

Chris' book went out to publishers, and 20 rejections came back. Two years passed and Chris became more and more depressed. Between 2010 and 2012, the crisis reached its peak.

On a holiday in Mexico, Chris strode up and down the beach staring off into the horizon for hours. Over dinner, we were talking about a writer who'd recently killed himself and he said,



Chris, dog Mabel and Margi, and, below, Chris' novel, *Black Chalk*



'I WASN'T JUST SUPPORTING MY HUSBAND; I WAS SUPPORTING AN ARTIST. AND SUCCESS AS AN ARTIST IS OUT OF YOUR CONTROL'

'Suicide is a logical choice. If you're unhappy, if you can't do what you want to in life, why wouldn't you kill yourself?'

Back home, I started watching him closely, counting the beer bottles in the recycling bin. As the months wore on, he seemed to be drinking more. One night we had a huge row. Chris had drunk even more than usual, and was in a terrible mood, making what I perceived to be vicious, ungrateful

comments. I went to bed but he followed me, holding a large glass of whisky and spouting angry thoughts. Finally, he snapped and hurled his glass at the bedroom door. It was the most violent thing I'd ever seen him do. I buried myself under the covers and curled into a ball until daybreak. He muttered for a bit, then - realising I wasn't going to engage - passed out.

The next day, Chris was mortified. He agreed to see a therapist - something I was already doing to help work out my issues of resentment and worries over our future. Talking to strangers helped us both. It enabled me to re-evaluate the choices I had made and realise I wasn't just supporting my husband; I was supporting an artist. And finding success as an artist is maddeningly out of your control. It's like trying to conceive when you're infertile. There might be a miracle IVF treatment around the corner, but it's just as likely you'll never hold that baby in your arms. Still, couples who can't conceive can adopt. But what do couples do who are desperately trying for a book?

Eventually, I realised it didn't matter what anyone else thought. I had a happy marriage. And then, in spring 2012, Chris got the call that would change his life. He would be published in the UK and US, as well as Russia, Taiwan and beyond. After almost 11 years, he finally had a contract, an offer. More importantly, he had an identity.

Chris will keep writing more books and I hope we have a life full of them. Unfortunately, even published writers don't make a lot of money, so I can't put my feet up just yet. Still, I'm currently the managing editor of features at the *New York Post*, so we're doing okay financially. I'm now 41 and feel we've been through so much that we can probably weather the worst life has to throw at us.

As always, Chris shows me his gratitude as often as possible. He comes up with the most wonderful ideas for my birthday and Christmas, and writes a personalised note on every gift that is so beautiful and touching. He even bought me a Cartier watch for my birthday last year, with the money from his first advance. But it was the words engraved inside that I treasured most: 'Because without you, nothing'.

*Black Chalk* by Christopher J Yates (Harvill Secker, £14.99) is out on September 19th. Read our review and Margi's blog at [Redonline.co.uk](http://Redonline.co.uk)

STYLING: KATIE BURNETT; HAIR AND MAKEUP: LAUREN WHITWORTH; MARGI WEARS: THIS PAGE: CARBONIA; LAUREN BAGLORE: TOP AND TROUSERS; J CREW SHOES; MARGI'S OWN; PREVIOUS PAGE: COAT, TOP AND TROUSERS; J CREW; SHOES; CORSO COMO; CHRIS WEARS: THIS PAGE: SHIRT AND TIE, J CREW; JACKET, JEANS AND SHOES; CHRIS' OWN; PREVIOUS PAGE: JUMPER AND SHIRT; J CREW; JACKET, JEANS AND SHOES; CHRIS' OWN