

**Sunday Times** bestselling author of **Yes Man**

**DANNY WALLACE**



**and how  
to do it**

'Very funny, very clever,  
very charming' **Jonathan Ross**

**More Awkward  
Situations for Men**



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Danny would like to thank...

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# About the Book

**No one said it was easy being a man.**

And Danny Wallace is finding it harder than ever. A husband and now a new father, he struggles to understand the unspoken rules of society...

For example, when do you hug? And when do you NOT hug?

How do you react when you realise that yesterday's underpants might still be in your trousers?

And what happens when you think you may have accidentally ordered your wife a prostitute for her birthday?

As Danny ponders these questions, he discovers that finding his way through everyday life without inadvertently causing offence, embarrassment, or general confusion is much more difficult than it looks ...

# About the Author

Danny's first solo book, *Join Me*, was described as a 'word-of-mouth phenomenon' by *The Bookseller* and 'one of the funniest stories you will ever read' by the *Daily Mail*. His second book, *Yes Man* - in which he decided to say 'Yes' to everything - was described as 'hilarious' by several national newspapers. The Warner Bros. film adaptation of Wallace's book *Yes Man*, starring Jim Carrey in the lead role, was released in December 2008 and grossed \$230,000,000 worldwide. Danny's third book *Friends Like These*, described by *The Bookseller* as 'another comedy masterpiece' is currently in development as a major project by Miramax. In 2011, Danny Wallace was named PPA's Columnist of the Year for his weekly column in *ShortList Magazine*, 'Danny Wallace is a Man', which formed the starting point for his book *Awkward Situations for Men*.

Danny lives in North London with his wife and baby. Find out more about Danny at [www.dannywallace.com](http://www.dannywallace.com).

**what  
not  
to do**

**and how  
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**More Awkward Situations  
For Men**

**DANNY  
WALLACE**



**EBURY  
PRESS**

*For Tiffany Daniel*

Is there anything in this world cuter than burping a  
baby?

Yes.

Burping a kitten.

But oh no, 'society' frowns on that.

***Gorbachev***

# Introduction

HELLO THERE.

This is *What Not to Do... and How to Do It*, and my name's Danny Wallace.

You might remember me from that time on that train when I was daydreaming but it looked like I was just staring straight at your chest or phone or small child and you wondered whether you might need to alert the authorities.

Anyway, I welcome you to this book – a book packed with stories from my life at a time when everything had changed. When life was no longer just about me, or my wife, or my friends...but about a brand-new little man too, and all that that entails.

I think many of the events in this book – the awkward situations, the well-meaning faux pas, the inadvertent insults or slights which are given or received – apply to lots of us, whether male or female. The universal rules of polite society seem never to have been written down properly, and perhaps this is an attempt to remedy that just a little.

This is not a book you should feel you should have to read in one sitting, by the way. Please don't feel pressured. In fact, it's probably best if you read it in short bursts. If you identify with a particular story or event, maybe put the book down for a little while, so you can think long and hard about what that means and why you insist on living your life this way.

My thanks must go to the people of *ShortList* magazine – in particular Phil Hilton and Terri White – for allowing me

to collect many of the pieces I've written for them and include them in this book.

I have done my best to tell these stories in the way I would tell them were we sitting down in a pub together, and I hope you like them.

Your round, by the way.

*Danny Wallace*  
*London, 2011*

First of all...

# First Things First

'WELL,' I SAY, trying to make it sound like an important word, an *historic* word. But I don't quite nail the gravitas I was after, so I try it again three times. 'Well well well.'

We are standing by the ducks in a local park, and it is the day before my wife is due to give birth.

'Well well well well *well*.'

'Well well what?' she says, staring out over the pond, half-smiling.

'Well...this is probably the last time we'll ever do this. Just you and me. Walking through the park. A couple.'

My wife considers it, and doubles her half smile to a full one.

'I s'pose it is.'

And we walk home, holding hands.

That night, we're sitting in a darkened Turkish restaurant on the high street as a slanting rain batters the window. I've just ordered some small sausages and a beer.

'Well,' I say. 'Well well.'

'Well what?' she says.

'I'm just thinking. This is probably the last time you and I will do this. Just the two of us. The two of us - a couple - sitting down and having a romantic meal together.'

My beer and small sausages arrive.

'It's not *that* romantic,' says my wife, looking at them.

'No, it's not *that* romantic, no,' I say, picking up a tiny sausage, and pointing it at her, so she can see I'm serious. 'But this is probably the last time we're going to enjoy a

not-*that*-romantic meal together. Because, as you know, we're going to have a baby, you see.'

'Yeah. I think *I* told *you* that.'

'I'm just saying. This is it. The end of an era. The end of coupledness. The beginning of...well...what would you call it?'

'Parenthood,' says my wife. 'You'd call it parenthood.'

'Exactly!' I say. 'That's *exactly* the phrase!'

And I eat my sausages and we walk home, holding hands.

Later, as I climb into bed, I hand my wife her healthy peppermint tea and I clamber over her bump.

'Just think,' I say, picking up my book. 'When we turn off the light in a minute or two, that'll be the last time we'll ever turn off the light as a couple, and then go to sleep as one, because tomorrow, everything changes. Everything. So we should just enjoy this moment, just as we enjoyed that last meal, and that last walk, and that last trip away, and that last drive-through McDonald's, and that last peppermint tea in your hand.'

My wife looks at me. And then she leans over and she gives me a hug.

'You shouldn't be scared,' she says, gently. 'It's going to be good. It's going to be *great*.'

I nod and turn the light off.

It's dark.

But the light comes sooner than expected.

By six in the morning, we're at the hospital.

And by 6.09 in the evening...we have a child.

And as I stand there, and as I pick him up, and as I hold him for the first time, and I look into his eyes for the first time, and I hold his hand and I kiss him for the first time, I realise that this is a *day* of firsts, and not a day of lasts, because out of nowhere I now know that life - the very *best* of life - is all about the firsts. Because it's the firsts that matter. The firsts are worth looking forward to; the firsts are worth looking back on.

That night, my wife sleeps quietly as our baby dozes on my chest, the streetlights blushing orange through the hospital window.

I place my hand on his back, and smile.

Then, a couple of days later, when the time is right and proper, my wife and I, we step out of our car - a little, fragile family - and we carry our son through the front door.

For the very first time.

And so we begin

# The Lift

THE LIFT IS taking a while to arrive, but I am confident it will get here eventually.

I have taken all the necessary steps: I pressed the button; the little red light came on. Now my main function is to wait.

The display over the doors tells me that the lift is still on the sixth floor of this department store. It's been there a while. I give the button another little press for luck and step back and stare out across the shop.

Seconds later, a small harassed woman has arrived and stands next to me, tutting and looking at her watch. She tuts some more and it becomes clear she wants to involve me in her tutting, but I have no time to encourage other people's tutting today. She seems determined, though, and tuts and sighs and says, 'Oh, why is this taking *forever*?'

I smile and look at her but she quickly looks away, as if she has thought about it and actually she's too busy and too late to involve me in her tutting after all.

The lift's on the fifth floor now, but seems to have stopped again. Maybe it needs a little rest. I start to consider the stairs, but then - for the briefest flicker of a moment - the small, harassed woman *almost* steps forward. It was just a flinch, just a tiny movement, virtually imperceptible...but I'm onto her.

'I know what she's doing,' I think to myself, inwardly frowning, taking it in. 'She wants to press the button!'

She sighs again, and I can sense her rolling the thought around in her head some more.

*'Just press it,'* she's thinking. *'Only you can press it properly...'*

'She doesn't have the nerve,' I think to myself. 'She knows I have already pressed the button. The little red light is on. I've got this. Pressing the button *herself* would be a bold statement. She would be saying, "I do not trust this man to have pressed a button correctly. He must have pressed it wrong, even though there is only that button to press and all you can do with a button is press it. But I can press buttons *correctly*. If I press the button, I will do it slightly differently, and the lift will magically get here quicker than it will under *this* idiot's rule.'"'

I smile to myself at the thought, about how ludicrous I'm being, and as I do that her little fingers jab forwards and she presses the button again.

'No!' I think. 'You lunatic! I'd already pressed it twice!'

I steal a sideways glance at my new nemesis, this woman who thinks so little of me that she has to push my buttons for me, this woman and her curious and direct challenge on my abilities as a human male.

'Chimps can press buttons!' I fume to myself. 'They can teach squirrels and pigeons to do it! But oh no, this lady assumes I've made it through thirty-four years of life without ever happening to come across a button before. She probably thinks I've been here all morning, staring blank-eyed at the display, my tongue out, wondering when the magic metal box will arrive to change my surroundings!'

'Please,' I start to think. 'Please don't let the lift arrive now by chance. If it does, she will have won, and worse, I may very well have to deal with the fact that I can't press buttons properly.'

But no. The lift makes no such appearance. The display tells us it's now on the third floor, and I'm filled with warmth and love for it.

'Rest, sweet lift,' I think. 'Take your time.'

The woman has started tutting again, but I am serene and calm. I would happily wait here all day, because *she* has pressed the button now. She was the doubter who wanted to take charge, and I have been proven right. Nothing would make me happier than to wait here for nine, ten hours, because it's not my responsibility any more. *She* is now to blame for the lift's non-arrival.

Maybe I should tut *her*.

And then a man arrives. He's busy and important and talks loudly on his phone. He jabs the button. Seconds later the lift door opens. He looks at us, as if to say, 'Why didn't you just press the *button*, you bloody simpletons?'

'What floor?' says the man, as we traipse inside, belittled.

'Six please,' I say.

'Two,' says the woman.

We know this is no longer our dominion.

So we ignore each other, and let him press the buttons.

# The Doll

ON A COLD and frosty Tuesday morning, when our baby was still a couple of weeks away, we received an email from an eccentric aunt.

'I had the best idea,' it said, 'to help you with parenthood! I've just ordered it on-line! It'll be with you in the next few days!'

This was exciting. Exciting and mysterious. What could it be, this magical idea to prepare us for parenthood?

'Maybe she's got us a nanny,' my wife had said, puzzled. 'Or a baby.'

We thought about it for a moment, and then got on with other things.

Three days later, a package had arrived.

'A package has arrived!' I shouted upstairs, because packages deserve to be shouted about. 'It's for us!'

'Is that why it arrived here, at our house?' replied my wife, but I ignored this, because I was already ripping it open.

'Oh,' I said, finally. 'Hmm.'

'What is it?' said my wife, walking down the stairs.

'It's...a life-size rubber toddler,' I said, staring at it.

The doll stared back. But there was something else about this doll, and I was not sure whether I should point it out.

'So...I wonder why she chose a *black* toddler,' I finally say, and then I went all quiet, because I wasn't sure if what I just said was racist. 'I mean, I *welcome* this black toddler. Let it not be said that I don't welcome this black toddler. It just seems...unusual in its specificity.'

‘Yes,’ said my wife, slowly, also unsure of where the lines are when discussing the racial background of a small rubber doll. ‘But we must embrace him into our family. We will call him...Didier.’

We sat Didier on the sofa, and within hours, it was like he’d been there all our lives. He fast became a useful tool. He reminded us constantly that soon, there would be a new, small person in this house. One we must *prepare* for.

Soon, though, we got a little too comfortable with Didier. My friend Wag came round, and we sit on the sofa drinking wine, and it wasn’t long before Didier had a glass too, and my wife took a photo.

‘Oh, that’s a *great* shot of Didier,’ she said. ‘We’ll have to use that for something.’

I struggled to see what we could possibly use it for, but I nodded along happily, because I didn’t want to insult little Didier.

A week or so later, there was a knock at the door. I knew exactly who it was. It was the man I’d found on the internet who’d agreed to fix our computer.

‘Come in!’ I said.

The man was tall and black with elegant gloves and I asked him to sit down while I popped the kettle on.

‘So,’ I said, wandering into the living room. ‘It’s a Mac.’

‘What operating system?’ he replied.

‘I’d have to check,’ I said, handing him his coffee and sitting down opposite. And then I noticed something. Something *appalling*.

The man was sitting next to Didier.

‘And what’s the trouble?’ he said.

My mind went blank. I had no idea. Because all I knew was, I had to get this man off this sofa. But maybe he hadn’t noticed! Maybe he hadn’t noticed he’s sitting next to a small rubber black boy!

‘Let’sgoupstairsandI’llshowyou,’ I garbled.

My mind was racing as we traipsed upstairs. God, how did this make me look? I looked like Madonna, but on a budget. I was a Lidl Madonna!

'This is the computer,' I said, pointing at the computer, which seemed unnecessary, given this computer expert had probably seen a computer before.

He sat down and began tapping away. I was flushed with embarrassment and felt weirdly guilty.

'I could explain,' I thought. 'That way he wouldn't think it was weird. He doesn't know I'm married. Maybe he thinks I'm a single man who lives with small dolls.'

Instead, I spotted a copy of a PS3 game still in its cellophane wrapper, and then inexplicably said: 'Do you have a PS3? Would you like this game?'

'So we could set up a network here,' he said, after refusing. 'Have you got a laptop?'

This was my chance!

'My *wife* has!' I said. See? Not weird!

I bounded off to fetch it as proof.

'You'll be able to file share,' he said, turning it on. 'Plus share your music, your photos...'

'That'd be *great*,' I replied, and we both stared at the screen as it came to life.

And we *kept* staring.

Because as it turned out, my wife *did* use that photo of Didier. As her desktop picture.

I cleared my throat as we took in the image. Me, enjoying a glass of wine, with a small rubber black boy.

'So, do you have an Xbox?' I said.

# The Visitor

IT IS A breathtakingly peaceful Sunday and I am sitting in the kitchen reading the papers and drinking some tea when the doorbell rings.

I look at my wife. She looks at me. There is a silence.

I check my watch. It's two o'clock. Two o'clock on a Sunday.

The bell rings again.

I put down my paper and shrug at my wife, who looks terrified. Who could this be?

It can't be the baby – he's upstairs, asleep.

So who could this be, on a Sunday at two o'clock?

It is our friend Anna.

'I'm so sorry I'm late,' she says at the door, hugging me. I am confused. My wife must have invited her without telling me. I pretend I know all about it.

'No worries!' I say, grinning broadly. 'Come in!'

We walk into the kitchen.

'Anna's here!' I say.

'Hello!' says Anna, scanning the kitchen and seeing we've not really cleaned up or washed the dishes. And then she looks at me. I'm wearing pyjama bottoms and a *Ghostbusters* T-shirt.

'Let's go through to the lounge!' I say, confidently, as if I *always* dress this way to welcome guests into our home.

Moments later, I'm back in the kitchen.

'You didn't tell me Anna was coming,' I say.

'You didn't tell *me* Anna was coming!' she says.

'I didn't know Anna was coming!' I say.

'I didn't know Anna was coming!' she says.

'What are we going to do?' I say, desperately, and then a look of abject terror flashes across her face.

'New Year's drinks!' she says. 'She thinks she's here for New Year's drinks! Remember we floated the idea?'

I think back. Yes. Yes, we had. *Ages* ago. We'd even suggested the first Sunday of the year. But no one had mentioned it again. No one had *confirmed*.

'You know what she's like! She's going to expect champagne!' I say. 'We're going to have to find champagne!'

'There's a bottle in the fridge. That posh one your dad didn't want.'

I am thrilled. We can do this. We can pull this off. My wife leaps upstairs to put some proper clothes on, while I grab the bottle of quality champagne and some glasses and take it to the lounge.

'Happy New Year!' I say, showing off the label like we'd bought it specially, and then popping it. Anna looks delighted. Anna is someone who drinks a *lot* of champagne.

'So, am I actually *early*?' she says, pointing at my pyjama bottoms.

'No! You're bang on time. This is the time we agreed, isn't it? For the - you know - for the New Year's drinks we'd planned and are now doing?'

'Yes,' she says. 'So who else is coming?'

'Um...' - oh, God - '...I think it's just you.'

She looks a little uncomfortable.

'And Colin,' I say, quickly. 'My friend Colin.'

She relaxes a little. I excuse myself and immediately phone Colin, who is hungover and grumpy but agrees to come round. My wife bounds into the living room looking great and I leave to change out of my T-shirt and pyjamas.

When I get downstairs again, they are laughing and Anna has made good headway on the champagne. We are getting away with this. She is convinced we have arranged a

wonderful event in her honour, complete with plenty of vintage fizz.

The doorbell rings. It's a dishevelled Colin.

'All right?' he says. 'What've you got to drink?'

'Champagne!' I say. 'The finest vintage champagne!'

He comes in and we pour a glass each and everyone is having a lovely time. And then I see the bottle is empty. I pick it up and ask my wife to join me in the kitchen.

'I think I can knock up some canapés,' she whispers. 'We've got some Philadelphia and that carrot.'

'We've run out of champagne!' I say. 'We've only got this stuff left!'

I hold up a bottle of supermarket own-brand sparkling white wine.

'I can't bring this out!' I say. 'She's going to think we're downgrading her!'

We both look at the empty bottle of proper champagne. And then I do something unforgivable. I pop the bottle of own-brand wine open and, while I hear a delighted whoop from Anna in the other room at her favourite sound, I take this cheap stuff and, with impressive skill, manage to pour it into the posh bottle.

'She won't know,' I say. 'It's all the same!'

I am brilliant.

I stride proudly into the living room with the now-full bottle.

'*Another* one?' says Anna, mock-shocked. 'You're *really* spoiling me!'

I make a humble face and then, the perfect host, begin to pour.

There is an awkward silence.

Anna stares at the glass.

'Why's that champagne bright orange?' says Colin.

'Happy New Year!' I shout, far too loudly.

# The Bench

ON MY WALK home from the station, I decide to stop off at the park for a few minutes to eat my sandwich. I choose a bench - one with armrests - and I sit in some unexpected end-of-winter sunshine, the only person on any of these benches, in this sweet North London park.

It's peaceful here, and I ponder quietly to myself as I notice an older man shuffling past the other benches, a newspaper under his arm and a blue plastic bag in his hand. I instantly like him, for no other reason than he is here, in this park, with me. We are two men of different generations but the same mindset, brought together by nature and chance. I imagine when he passes, we will raise our eyebrows at one another, as if to say, 'Peace, stranger. Fare thee well. Fate that our paths should cross this day,' and then something like, 'Live long and prosper,' but not that.

How nice it is, I think, that two complete strangers can be bonded by just a moment. That we will share something, for no more than a second in time, and how good it is that as humans we—

OhGodhe'ssittingdownnexttome.

I stare straight ahead. This is not the done thing. I subtly look around. There are *loads* of benches in this park. Some *terrific* ones. And yet this man's chosen to sit down on this one. Next to me.

I've not been munching my sandwich for a bit from the shock of it so quietly begin to eat again.

'He wants to chat,' I think, shaking my head imperceptibly. 'That's the only explanation. He sat down next to me in search of a *chat!*'

There should be no reason why him sitting next to me should be in any way uncomfortable. The bench is big enough for two. I am not averse to talking to strangers and indeed consider it something we should all do. It's just that when it's made so abundantly clear that a stranger wants to talk, the pressure that brings with it is huge. The more desperate they seem, the less inclined I am to want to join in.

The problem is, you can't just get up and leave. That's hugely insulting, and it makes you look as if you're the type of person who doesn't want strangers sitting next to them on benches, which we all definitely are, but which we all definitely feel is very important no one ever knows about us.

I realise I am trapped for a minimum of five to ten minutes.

'He'll probably just get his newspaper out in a second,' I think. 'I just have to play the waiting game.'

I close my eyes and pretend I am thoughtful and sunbathing. But it's like there's a ticking clock. We both know he has to make his move soon.

And then he coughs.

'This is it,' I think. 'This is how it begins. A noise to break the silence. A cough he can now excuse himself for or remark on or that will act as a lead in to something I won't know how to respond to, like, "Well, I wasn't expecting to see the *sun* today!"'

But no. There is no follow-up. He must have lost his nerve. But why? He was doing so well! He had the guts to sit down next to a stranger, he held off on opening the newspaper, *and* he coughed! This is sad.

It must be me, I think. I have been too closed off to his advances. Sitting here, staring straight ahead, or