

Sarah

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Have you heard that men and women can't be friends ? Thats not true, they can be, as long as each knows what they want, and its not each other. That's how it was with Sarah and I.

I'd been sexualising my friendships with chicks for years, pulling the same inappropriate moves and living the bloke cliché. Fucking up every female friendship in a tangled mess of pizza boxes and horn rimmed glasses. With Sarah it was different, that was never a problem.

We met in Brown Thomas, I encamped on the TV couch, dissing the wretched animated video for headlong, she sawing through the isles, gnawing at a presumptuous friends wedding list. So fazed she tripped and fell beside me, a tongue tied cotton knot of girl. Hair a bush curled tangle, face crooked and embarrassed. Neither of us spoke at first, but we watched the free TV for a while, occasionally prodding each other for comfort on the tight leather couch, and eventually a conversation emerged.

It was weird but understandable, I think now, that us two nymphomaniacs could be so able to restrain ourselves around each other. We found some common ground, some empathy in our shared fear of intimacy, our mutual defences. We found more in each other than unthreatening disposable bodies.

Two weeks before Christmas, wrapped in a worn technicolor dream poncho, hatless, flatless, but happy, she turned up on my doorstep and moved in.

Through that spring a string of broken suitors and quick fooled intimacies shared our breakfast and slipped out embarrassed. To leave us giggling fraternally and fighting with flour over the names of new born pancakes. Weekaday evenings we'd shuffle under an old duvet with a bottle of Tesco wine and bounce a ragged tennis ball off the black and white TV, enraged at the banality of Will and Grace, passing out to crawl groggily from sweaty sleepy goodness to shine our teeth and brush our shoes and run for daily things.

Come June I decided time had come to fly down to Cork and finish what I'd started years ago, reconstructing the itchy flaking ruins of uncle Peters towering pile. Sarah insisted she come, but I was loath to pay her fare, already having accepted her rent free company. Simon, a friend from work, cloyingly generous and eager to please, agreed to take her on. He was driving to Limerick for an exercise in self promotion and was only too happy to go the extra mile.

On the banks of the chocolate river Lee, bleeding in the rusty dusk, the house awaited me.

I laboured all day at peeling back the cavernous living rooms wallpaper, sweating away the dirt of a year in the city. I worked bare-chested in the oak reflected heat of the day, swigging one handed from a bottle of cheap Rose wine and laughing like a fool.

The crust of generations clung to those walls, years of layers of patterns one atop another. Nursery fairytales, cigar stained lilies, painfully aesthete modernist parallel lines, it all peeled off alike. Shavings of stories building up under my twisting feet, curled memories stuck together like fever dreams.

By late afternoon I had collapsed drunk as the lord of this very fine manor, to admire the wood revealed. Acres of panelling, much of it engraved, lent the room the impression of a temple, its humice layers of torn paper, scattered by the natives to soak up the blood of a coming sacrifice.

Some disaster, natural or man-made, had ripped a hole through the roof, an attic, two upper floors and the ceiling to give me a view almost to the sky. The tear in the roof had been mended, but experience told me the cold would get through none the less. We'd have to sleep in a tent tonight, foetal in the womb of the wooden living room.

Simon woke me with the moronic bellow of his laugh, a defiant clamour against his dullness.

"Jesus Christ T", his eyes were wild. "You're really letting yourself go, ha ha ha."

To my waking eyes the windowless room was black but for a pool of auburn sunset, pouring though from the floor above to wash my rocking chair and gloriously bacchanalian form. I must have looked like a Celtic king, celebrating an uncouth victory.

"Si", I grunted.

"Drunk as well T ? You lucky fuck." He handled the bottle like a broken fag and took a mincing swiglet.

"Had the most fucked up trip actually", he continued, crouching at my feet like an acolyte.

"Your Sarah...", he lowered his voice to a leering hiss, "is a sexy little bitch."

"Shut up Simon." I struggled to spit out through a woolly mouth and throbbing head.

He ignored me, settling down amidst the papers, suddenly growing sullen.

"Thing is, I've never been too good with the ladies, you know ? Ha ha". I bit my tongue, which seemed to be filling my head, a foul slug like parasite.

"..she looked so fucking fit, you know ? Had two gear sticks the whole way down", something seemed to be crushing him, his joviality sounded more forced than I'd ever heard it.

"Simon what is it ? Where's Sarah anyway ?"

"That's the thing mate..She just looked so fucking good all the way down. Like an angel or something. I don't know..All the queer poetic shit.."

Everything disappeared but Simons face, orange in the evening, and the floating dust motes between us. In a second I saw it all. Simon, loud and stupid as a horse, balls like potatoes, probably seeing something beautiful for the first time, and reaching out to take it, to break it.

"Simon, what did you do ?" ..I tensed, struggling with my desire to seize him, choke him, bash his head in.

Simon stood up and turned away, wringing his hands and staring at the floor like an errant child.

"Do ?", he echoed.

Sarabs face hovered before me, frozen mid laugh. Tongue teasing from behind a wicked grin, gypsy hazel eyes deliciously hidden by a veil of curls.

"Do ?", again stupidly, her face receding into his heaving back.

"What did I do ? I bloody killed her T."

A liquid second, a frozen moment, then her laugh like a hallucination at the door.

"Gotya", she yelled, and vanished.

Simon roared, half bull, half simian, and leaned against the wall in paroxysms of idiocy.

Something broke inside me, a damn I hadn't realised was there collapsed and I flowed out rich and thick. Sarah, Sarah, dear God, dear Jesus Christ, my love. I bolted for the door.

Everything time lapsed to stuttering flashes. Sarah's face manic and mocking at the top of the curling lobby stairs, me up the steps three at a time, her perfume like the fear of a hunted animal, hot and bitter in my mouth. Climbing and tossing myself through the half black wrecked corridors, tearing my hands on the wood splinter edges of doorways. Six feet under the attic, Sarah yelling and laughing overhead, pulling the ladder up into darkness. Diving and clutching, leaning feet against the wall and thrusting through the hole to crouch cat like on a beam before her. Reach, no I don't want to remember, no, no please...Reaching, and rising and about to speak. And she backs away, and I come forward, to catch her, to hold her.. But she's moving again, moving too fast, twisting in the air, face a blur under her streaking curls, she's falling. Too late I'm at the edge, hanging one handed, too quick to miss her hit the ground. A splash of varicoloured paper, flaming in the failing light, and she' s still. Twisted like a broken doll, and quiet.