

The Dating Season

The nuns had fucked her up badly. And all those charismatic priests. Touchy feely beneath gowns that poured out score. It became a habit.

That vacuum in the school lab. Her teacher had wanted to explain. Or so he said. She knew all about vacuums. Had been adopted. All kids like to think that they are adopted, that their parents are monsters out for their souls but she really was and deep down, she knew that the parents who had adopted her were the ones who were out to save her blood. But it didn't make the missing easy. The emptiness remained. Those lost years. Lost strokes.

Then she repeated the scenario. Another botched fuck up. He was cute but in those days protection was an old blue raincoat and once slipped over the shoulder you were bare naked to the world of masculinity and unwanted pregnancy. She'd actually enjoyed it at least. The quick fuck behind the garage. Not the afterbirth. Leonard Cohen would have understood. She had never gone completely clear.

A vacuum isn't science. Just emptiness. Hours wade into months as the tide sways into days and nights, full moons and empty beaches. He hugged her close.

Fathers were strange beasts. One minute shouting, another piggybacking. He'd never wanted her to be a nun. What father wants their daughter enclosed under somebody else's orders. He wouldn't really have fancied seeing her married off either. But in those days a whiff behind the bush, a thrust around the corner, an unwanted pregnancy only had one conclusion, the seclusion of remoteness, the pretence not the mistake, the consequences: you yourself never existed, you just picked up the pieces others threw at you. Her parents had been left no choice. Sad when families repeat the same old mistakes. But

that's what keeps you together. Dysfunctional is one word. Unlucky another. So many dumb ways to lie.

She still had that lock of hair. It was a daughter. She held her tight but she knew what would happen. They'd taken her baby. She wasn't allowed to be a mother. Too young. Not correct. Single. Unwed. And she had grasped that sweaty curl, fresh from calving, soaked in sweat and plasma. A souvenir of a lost soul, it remained preserved on the chain around her heart. She wondered if her own birth mother had done the same. Curious how families, real or imagined, reinvented or replicated themselves. She longed to lose her virginity just one more time.

The problem with men is that they don't understand that we too have our needs, almost religious desires. We all want to be priests and rule with a subtle thumb.

I'd spotted him ages before. I'd been watching him for days. Without his knowing of course. One must be careful. Coffee is a great disguise. Nobody every stares too much at somebody struggling with a large cardboard Starbucks takeaway in case it falls, splatters you, stains your clothes for life or threatens your face with plastic surgery. You are just one of the crowd and as you fumble, your eyes can spot and spy without fear of being caught, quizzed or understood while everyone focuses on your hands and how they tremble beneath the hot pot.

Age makes you quicker, more alert, less inhibited. There is no longer time to waste on futile scenarios which may never play out. Go for it. Tired of the groggy embarrassed hangovers of early morning alarms clocks, shadows struggling into stained trousers through the twilight of a looming dawn, disappearing down the stairs, flippant assurances jingling guilty as they run, like a pocket full of loose change in a slum, I Goggled him, Linked him in,

Facebooked him and found out pretty much all you need to know or would obtain over a long meal and several cocktails.

Louise led me to the sofa and plied me with coffee, a small brandy. A surrogate mother, her seductive smile hid boundless energy, the loving stroke of long fingers down my neck, the hint of luxury behind a cheap wine or a digestive biscuit. Adopted for a second time: how lucky can you be? Louise was the first to lift up the shell and check what was inside. I was pleasantly surprised.

"You take care," Louise whispered. "There are bars and bars. If you want quality go for wine: anybody can afford beer."

Her breath smelled of pine, or was that the bathroom cleaner. Funny how odours blend together to make a house, a person at home.

And as always Louise was right. I knew the minute I saw him. The suit was neatly tailored, breathing muscles and wallets as it strode neatly on his frame, chest breathing easily and far more expansive than the firmly packed stomach below. The right dimensions. Thighs strongly stroking as he propelled forward, eyes slightly slanting, concentrating on presumably his figures, or maybe just his figure. He'd been on holiday or a sun bed. I could imagine a seductive smile, lips rather thin, but neat beneath a sharply pointed nose that hinted at character and a sense of humour waiting for me to develop. My blood boiled, breath gasped, sucked in with my gin, ice-cube sliding down the glass to kiss my lips. Then, floating back down, a growing red stain spreading over it, melting into it's throbbing heart. He had no idea he would be hunted down like a rabbit ready to be skinned. He was in a right stew and didn't know it.

Within a couple of weeks I carefull brushed into him. A lie. A little slip up, enough to get noticed. Well just a trickle. Tricks of the game. Louise had

suggested spilling the coffee. He will have to stop and I can be so appealing, red hair flashing, teeth shining, breasts hugging, dangling over a skirt just slightly too tight without being indecently provocative. He couldn't do anything but stop short and inhale. I had that special perfume Louise had recommended. He took a deep breath. Let me get you something I said calmly as the coffee stain merged into his tie.

"I really am so sorry."

He nodded in agreement. He couldn't resist a smile: or maybe he couldn't resist mine. I let my eyes haunt his briefly. He was just as handsome close up. Smelt of fresh aftershave, an expensive wipe. Hair recently cut, just beginning to grey but generously wavy beneath the flick of his nervous hand.

"Don't worry."

Long fingers twisted the tie.

"I have another at the office."

I apologized again. He hesitated before walking off. Didn't look back which was correct. But I didn't leave him out of my gaze until he was well out of sight. A marked man.

I finished my drink. I left. I was in control, this was my game for once. So I waited. Followed him at a distance; caught the same metro; saw him to his door. No peck on the cheek, no reddening excuses. He didn't know. I saw everything. I was waiting next morning to guide him to work. Then I could relax: he'd be there all day. I went home and showered. Lay on the bed. Made coffee. Forced my eyes closed. Turned out the light. Could only think of him.

I felt love blossom in my heart, pound out its beat through my veins. I couldn't eat. Couldn't sleep. Couldn't get him out of my mind. Longed for him, felt it in my bones, deep down in my bowels.

Slipped him the number, I had it ready. He smiled and those longing lips hung above my bed all night, floating tantalizing as the moon slid behind the curtains and Peter Pan put out the light. I leaned forward, he pecked my cheek. I didn't wash later, but allowed the linger of his aftershave to stroke my skin, soaking up the feel of his lips, the slight puffy pressure, hint of firmness. Didn't even undress. Threw myself on the bed. Hugged myself. Warm all over, blood piping hot, eyes full: images of him naked in front of me here and now. Senses overloading dreaming up his smells, tastes, the most intimate of sensations, bourbon dipped in cheese snacks, the hush of curtains blinding out the light.

Rang Louise but was almost incoherent on the phone. She spent nearly all her time giggling. "You've got it honey, got it bad." Louise hung up. A little too quickly. But he was my prey now.

I lay back starry eyed like a fairy tale princess, baked in broil. Who said the world grows horrid with age, that there are no happy ever-afters and treasure troves of love. That lock of hair would never fade, never leave my conscience free to fuck at will.

It was the longest meal I have ever sat through. I'd set it up, backed him into inviting me over. His place. I should have suggested a drink: it would have been quicker.

"I'll cook."

"Fine, perfect."

It wasn't really my fault. Or his. I just couldn't wait. He had hardly even started when I arrived, still cutting, chopping. I thought of skipping the meal there and then, leaning over him to get a drink, bending close, letting my hair frisk his shoulder as his lips bit into the glass, an olive to his branch, a waist to his waistline, a teasing hand on his shoulder, massaging promise and rising hopes.

Veins boiling, throbbing. Would he just shut up and let me get on with it. I finally bit into the red steak, having sliced it firmly to my plate, firmly spewed on my fork. No pissing around the bush. Time to get down to the blood and the guts, veins throbbing, wet hair pulling loose at the roots, eyes blurring into the blood shot gaze of a spider's web.

It all worked as planned, as we knew it would, as it has for centuries: no point reinventing the wheel, only the uniforms change, like any war, back and forth, there is always an enemy they just keep changing colour, or proximity. I held my nerve, kept myself, my adrenaline, under control and we acted out the rituals perfectly. Good food, nonsensical chat, wine, brandy, cigarette. We drew closer, strap of dress slipping. His hands sneaking.

He lay exhausted, finally, curled up breathing softly under my arm. At last. I stood up in the pale blue light creeping in from the street, creaking across the floorboards, up over the bed in silent spiked rays. I slipped back the sheet and gazed along his body. He groaned, turned on his back. My eyes ate through him, greedily taking his flat stomach, hairy chest. The bed creaked. On the street sirens rose, faded, and circled again. Traffic stalled, hissed, fumed, and the lights changed and it began all over again, a reel of unending nighttime waiting to bleed into day, to be reborn and discover itself again twenty four hours later. Re-cycles were what you longed for as a child, Christmas, birthday, a bicycle all wrapped up was as good as it got at times, but cycles over time became feathers tying you down to the reality of a body you weren't even sure you wanted. Exhaust fumes smacked against the window, the crawl of a traffic

light drawling as it licked itself into shape, the whine of a drunk stumbling across on red. Maybe that was why the alarms were making the earth move.

I stood over him. The soggy bed fled. Body stretched taunt on black marble. Chest still heaving. Breeze blows, I feel in on my cheeks, gather my cloak tighter. Tingles through my skin as I raise my arms. The blade glints for a second in the moonlight just before it tears through his skin, ploughs down with a sucking sound, rasps roughly against crude bone then disappears in a mountain of piping blood, bright cardinal red bloating the night, shining through the paleness as the sun murders the moon; spurting forth in fountains of growth, destroys the cold night in its hot sticky clasp of powerful far. My hands reach through it down into the freshly heaving lungs. I lift them dripping, brought them to my lips. Body still twitching. Blood dribbles down my chin, rivers along my neck, tracing stains along my body. A hush descends.

Some see the world as a struggle between good and evil: what they believe and others don't. But not me: I can't see it as such, rather, as a progression. I feel cool. Happy. Fulfilled, utterly, like never before. Feel the breeze flow, mockingly over my skin. Almost dawn, can feel it clutching to the air. Goose pimples. Suddenly very warm, the sun approaches, stretches out a tentacle to touch my breast. Lips tear themselves apart, silent gasp, feel the icy hot tip on my skin. It glints, pierces, slides in deep. Stomach all hot now, bright shiny, slippery. Feel the pool flowing over my side. Sense myself shaking. The pain eases.

He is lying there, blood soaking the sheet, manhood fading, limply folding into the curve of a fetus. He'd last another hour or two. Not like hanging unfortunately when another quick fuck might be possible. His dick was well past it at this stage. I put on the coffee. It smells rank and bitter but it warms my insides. Another ceasefire falling into the fireplace. He groans slightly. I stroke up the news to full volume. Somebody is invading again, countries just won't grow up. Wish he would. Blood licks my lip.

I played with that lock of hair, spun it around and around into circles of deceit, unending romances, generations spinning forwards and backwards, wrapped into endless googles of desire and repetition. Past sacrifices don't mean you can't still surrender up the present. Louise understood, a fairy god mother a high priestess for the funeral of my desires. Distant fathers, absent mothers, adopted shadows that had managed to die away too quickly: Louise helped me put it all together. I had another sip of hot blood before beginning to tidy it all away.

Losing your parents is one thing. Being lost by them another. And I had done little but repeat the trick. Louise knew how to listen. That is what I paid her for. But it wasn't always enough. That lock of your hair hangs around my throat like a noose and I just pray that a blood sacrifice will break the circle.

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