

## Camilla Pickard / MAN ON A RED SOFA

At the suggestion of a few students, Gabriel abandons the film workshop he's prepared. We've been talking about character, how to get inside someone else's skin. People ask for his advice. He'd like us to get what we want. He aims to please, he says.

So, in place of his scriptwriting exercises, we arrange private sessions with him on character development, voice.

Gabriel has what I want. He's slim, beautiful, talented, acclaimed. Witnessing his hands move articulate against the black walls behind him, the sound of his voice breaking lines of poetry like waves over the quiet room, I think I would like to swallow him up and keep him, inside my own body. I want to own the voices he owns, all the gestures, all the registers.

After he meets my eyes, I am afraid to arrange a meeting with him. But I do. Of course I do.

We are dismissed. Dillon offers me a lift home, and we go down a hallway striped with different fluorescents. We change colour subtly as we walk: greenish, murky orange, ghost blue.

Dillon says to me, "Gabriel is very pliable."

Is it an edge in his voice? His own desire, pressing up between the filaments of his words? The sentence begins to load and reload in my brain: Gabriel is pliable. He is very pliable. I say it to myself, in my head, in my sleep, repeatedly.

I ask Dillon, "Do you like pliable men?"

Dillon unlocks the car door for me and opens it, gentlemanly, smiling at his own chivalry. "Don't you?"

But I desire only myself. I masturbate and imagine Gabriel wanting me, how I'll ply him till he can't stop, to a pitch where he feels he can force, do as he pleases: his hand inside me, his whole hand.

I meet with Gabriel. It's in a coffee bar. Plaster of Paris gods watch us from the corners of the room.

He greets me fondly. Like an indulgent uncle he cups my elbow in his hand to guide me to the table. His demeanour is fragile, his face nearly ruined. I imagine, sanguinely, that I can see traces of suffering.

So do you want to show me something? he says.

I talk and he listens, appreciating everything: my gestures; my way of speaking; my silences; and his attentiveness is glorious, devotional. It's because he attends to me that I know I can seduce him. It happens almost without my help, now, looking at his eyes, I smile.

It's his own silent movie, a double reel. I am the screen upon which he casts the unsteady image of himself, seduced; and, at the same time, of himself, seducing, reducing me to tears, an agony of pleasure, to the only incontestable part of myself: the part that desires him, that desires pleasure, that can't disentangle its infatuation with itself from the knowledge that it is desired by him, from the thought of being seduced by him, fucked by him, repeatedly seduced and fucked.

This is the seduction I want, on a loop, a continuous streaming of that section of pleasure between unbearable yearning and the suffusion of orgasm. The suffocation of pleasure ebbing from us replaced again and again with desire.

But if we fucked it wouldn't be like this, Gabriel.

I meet with him. It's in a coffee bar.

Plaster of Paris gods watch us. He asks too-personal questions about my life and I answer them all, all of them, truthfully, as if he'd recognize my lies.

Where did you grow up?  
What's your family like?  
Do you have a brother?  
Your first boyfriend...?  
What kind of relationship do you have with your father?

So, you were — a good girl?

What has this got to do with film-making? Does it matter? I can't conceal anything, so he keeps asking. My opinions on sexuality, love, desire. Men I've enjoyed and disliked: their habits, affectations, their preferences. Like an embalmer, he removes everything from inside me, precise and tolerant: brain hooked out through the nose, viscera through the mouth. In two hours, he has possession of my secrets. He's made me his intimate friend.

So do you want to show me something? he says.

I say Yes. I want to show you something.

Once his door closes I can't speak. I show the rough cut.  
Huddled fingers like an anxious child: as if stillness could hold off  
his affection, or his displeasure. He watches without a glance at me.

His scalp shows through his hair. Odd mole on the front of his  
throat, a whisker in it.

In front of the camera I'm blissful, shot up with desire. A net of  
pixillated flesh. Digital gold icon. It's the image that seduces. Says  
what do you make of me? *Says Swallow* says what do you like *says*  
you like that? Give me your hand. Wrote a script for you *Says* I  
won't leave marks *says Swallow* me whole Fuck yeah swallow don't  
stop don't stop

Kaleidoscopic. My edges disintegrate and fall into place again. I'm  
made new.

He switches it off.

It's good, he says. I might have a few ideas for you. He puts out  
his cigarette. Touches me cautiously. The hip.

Let's see your script.

Telephone ringing unanswered. I pull away and he leans back  
in his chair, smiles.

His hand smooths his trouser leg.

What's heroin like?

*It's like this.*

I rub the spot of my desire till it wears right through.

