

SHEILA HETI / The Girl Who Planted Flowers

When she woke in the morning there beside her was the boy she had dismissed the night before as far too ugly and ingratiating, and on the other side, even more of a surprise, the boy she had dismissed as far too pompously intellectual. And there she was in the middle, and she thought she was in the house where she had partied the night before, but she wasn't sure, she just wasn't sure.

She climbed gingerly over the one and went to the window and looked out into the backyard where she saw huge piles of sand, little mountains with peaks. And as she had no idea why or where they had come from, she quickly decided, "I must have blacked out." Then she went to the bathroom and returned as the two boys were rising.

"Hello boys," she said lazily, without surprise or enthusiasm. And the boys, first one, then the other, said hello and looked at each other, but as they did not smile or seem to commiserate, the girl took her seat at the foot of the bed.

"I'm hungry," she said. "Are you two hungry?"

One boy nodded while clearing the sleep out of his eyes, and the other boy looked around trying to figure out where he was.

"Well then, let's go," she said. And since they were all in their clothes there was nothing to do but leave.

One boy was taller, and the three moved slowly down the road. It was cold. It was already November and should have been colder, but still, it was cold, and the girl thought nothing. When the sidewalk narrowed the intellectual hung back, and the ugly boy and the girl walked ahead.

After five minutes they reached a good place to eat. It had eggs, it seemed, and bacon and potatoes and unlimited coffee and no sign that forbade smoking, so they took a booth at the back, and the booth was brown, and the lighting was dim, and the sun wasn't shining, and they were all wretched and existing in various degrees of humility and banality.

They all ordered the same thing, except for the ugly boy who was a vegan, and he ordered nothing but black coffee and orange juice, and the girl thought drearily in her head, "Oh God, I slept with a vegan." And the tall intelligent boy kept his

eyes on the table and said nothing, and none of them said anything except the girl, who made comments like, “Are you sure you don’t know what happened last night?” and “Your name is Martin, I think I remember.”

Eventually she grew irritated with their silent and purposeful ignorance, their childish posturing, and she thought that since they weren’t fessing up to anything, probably something like this had never happened to them before, but the thought was so terrible she pushed it from her mind.

“Well,” she said when the food arrived, and inwardly cursed these humourless boys, and their dark woods succeeded in pulling her down with them, and she knew, even then, that it would be much better if they were cocky and glowing and gay.

They ate their food in silence, and the intellectual, she could tell, wanted terribly to go. Before he was finished he asked for the bill, and the young waiter brought it and left, and the intellectual left while she was still eating. Then the ugly boy gulped down the rest of his juice and paid and left, and neither said more than “okay” or “good-bye.”

She was alone. She put down her money and realized for the second time that she was out of cigarettes, and felt horrible and hung over and nothing like a slut.

The girl walked through the city that day, and it was cold and dark, and the sky was uglier than it had ever been, but not as ugly as the boy she had slept with, and she realized that she was twenty-one, and she thought of her life, “What a waste.” And nothing convinced her otherwise.

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