

She was a redhead, all right

A Short Story
by Toby Scales

She was a redhead, all right, a real redheaded sorrowful little slut and God wouldn't I love to show her how to hold it in her hand and watch it grow.

But she was my friend's sister—a good friend too, even if he is an alcoholic—and she would join us at the bar some nights, especially when she knew I was there, because she was getting off work and hated her husband. I never met him, but I know he hardly ever slept with her. She told me as much.

She'd limp down the smoke-stained stairs of that old basement bar, red hair rain-wet and tucked into the corners of her mouth, white skin glistening like music, her face pinched and glum like she needed someone to wake her from a disturbing dream. Some kind of foot problem at a young age gave her just the tiniest limp, not hardly noticeable but sad anyway, sad the way she looked when she talked about her husband or her life or when she finished laughing at something I said and didn't know what else to do but look away.

Above her ankles she was proof of God's erection, a put-together ice queen that wore makeup like a whore and short skirts right through Christmas. She had a kind of nervous daring to her sexuality, and a smile that melted so overtly you figured she would do you right there if you asked her right. Every time she joined us in the basement she would seduce my eyeballs, slipping off a coat or adjusting a stocking and glancing over at me with that red-waxed smile turning up at the corners of her fuck-me-here mouth.

The bar was dark and wooden in those days, and at five o'clock deserted save for us.

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I like sex. I like it a lot, and I like it the way my friend likes booze. Some folks, they only like good sex but I like all kinds of sex. In fact sometimes I prefer the bad sex, sex so sloppy and painful I can't get off. I'll just keep grinding and grinding, trying to climb through that translucent waterfall to find the source of those colors shimmering away off in the distance, beyond death, beyond the bed sheets knotted up and leaking sweat, beyond the poor gal I'm grinding into over and over again, the one looking up at me and wondering when I'm going to be finished.

Some of them look up at you and they're girls, others look up at you and they're women.

The thing about sex with women is, it's spooky. Dark and sweaty and spooky—like hiding in a closet under the stairs and hearing your own breath for the first time. There's a wetspot smell to sex with women, a real earthy smell that is so goddamned authentic it's downright scary, like staring into the vibrating eyes of your drunk mother. A woman doesn't have a pussy, she has a cunt and it's like those things in car washes, huge long hairs hanging down in your face and it smells a little old and rank in there, too.

Sex with girls, on the other hand, has a clean kind of Pine-Sol smell, the smell of white-washed skin and cheeks and skinny little arms and legs akimbo. It's scary like a tickle-fight, or stealing a dirty magazine, or wrestling with a boy. A girl is clean as can be, but the problem is the way they look up at you. When you're going again and again and can't get off, they look up angry and disappointed in themselves, like they've let you down—and it's a goddamn awful thing to learn you can't be everything to everyone all the time.

Women, they look at you through the centuries. They let you go, and go, and go another hundred, and they take in all that disappointment, letting it burn inside them slowly, heating from the inside like a microwave until one day you want it back. Then they turn and smile and shake their little ringlets at you, and you know it's gone for good.

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This game-legged little redhead would have been one of those. A woman. Fingering my cigarette, I watch her freshly-painted lips part, her eyes flick over my hands. I know she wants one but she doesn't smoke—at least she doesn't so far as her husband knows, but I know she's thinking of it now so I tap the extra ash off, let it sit for a while and run my eyes up and down her neck, exploring the rim of her blouse, imagining the breasts below.

My drunk friend is yammering something, I don't know what, going on about a goddamn book he read or something and he has no idea I'm molesting his sister sitting right beside him, running my hands over every crevice of her shimmering glistening body and she's loving every minute, she's breathing deep so I can watch her tits fall and she's sliding her hand along her beer glass begging me to stop, please stop, no don't, don't stop, no—

She reaches for the cigarette, but I put it out before she can get to it.

“Did you want one?”

“No, thanks.”

We make our way back up the smoke-stained stairs and our breath starts showing before we even get outside. I watch her navigate the ice carefully with her crooked foot while I stamp my feet on the ground as if to keep warm, but really it's to raise the souls below.