

Sarah Sorensen

Snow Blind

I remember the bruises on Sheila's thigh as being kind of pretty. They looked like violet clouds with little red points. I felt guilty for staring, for liking them a bit. I knew how she got them, and it should have made me sad. But, when I looked at her all I felt was gratitude. Back then, I couldn't really see her as miserable or violated. To me, she was everything. A perfect blond with perfect pointed teeth that could sink into my shoulder and make me feel a little pain. Perfect teeth that could make me feel. I thought maybe she liked pain a little too, so maybe she let Mitchell leave a few marks. I didn't want to know that the real reason that she didn't leave him was she because she was just a sad fuck. It is impossible to see that when you idolize someone.

I would come over late at night when Mitchell was out boning some other girl and I'd creep in through Sheila's kitchen door and sit at the table, listening to her take a long shower. The first few times that I came over, I took it upon myself to look through the drawers and cabinets. I saw that all of her dishes and cups were plastic. One drawer was just miscellaneous junk: rubber bands, expired hamburger joint coupons, an old nail file, and a Texas postcard from the only out of state vacation she'd ever been on. I'd sat looking at the armadillo on the card, wondering why she'd driven to Texas with that asshole instead of me. Sometimes she'd take so long that I'd even do her dishes. They were always caked with shit and smelled like eight days of trash.

The time that I remember best was that March when the big snow storms came and shut us in for a whole day. Mitch called from the Super 8, telling Sheila that he was staying there for the night because his buddies had “felt like it.” Sheila told me that I could stay over. The next day, the snow had sealed us in so tight that Mitch couldn’t get in and I couldn’t get out. I stayed from 2am Wednesday until 7:30 that night. It was the most time that we’d ever spent together. And it was the last time that I’d see her.

It had started out like any other night. She came lazing into the kitchen after her shower, and we just sat at the table for awhile, drinking her old coffee. It tasted terrible and I could tell that she wasn’t paying much attention to me when I talked. I tried to tell her things about my job, about my family, and the stuff that I was dreaming about for the future. I don’t think she really wanted to know me, least that was the impression that I got watching her fiddle with her mug, dance her fingers around on the table, and all of the rest of the things she did to fill her mind while I tried to say something about what it was like to be me. After a few tries, I gave up and just listened.

“He knows about you, you know, but he don’t leave me. It hurts him so bad; he’s just gotta let it out somehow. And really, he never does it where people can tell. He doesn’t want to shame me that way. Some men like to let you go around looking all jacked up and kept, but he don’t never touch my face. It’s his way of being considerate.”

Sheila looked so sincere when she was talking. I wondered if she ever thought anything really bad about Mitch. I wondered if she ever thought that she could do better.

“So are you saying he loves you so much that he’s the victim?” I asked.

“Sure. Men like Mitchell can’t look weak. They can’t cry about their shitty girlfriend who fucks her girlfriend. If I wasn’t shit, I’d probably never get knocked around. I don’t know. I’m just not very monogamous, I guess. Like, I think to myself: ‘this is the day. I will stop effing around on him, bake a cake or some shit like that,

and be all dressed up when he comes home.’ Then, I get to feeling so lonely. He don’t get here ‘til whenever. I get more lonely. I start thinking about getting off. I start thinking about you.”

I could feel my face going red. I could feel my palms and armpits sweat. I looked down at her mug that said “Don’t Stress Me Out!!!” and featured a frazzled looking cartoon cat. The copyright date was 1989.

“So what do you think,” she asked. “Ready to fuck?”

I grabbed her long blond hair and pulled, tilting her head back. I kissed her neck.

“Let’s go to bed,” I whispered.

She got up and dropped her rat-eaten bathrobe, leading me into the bedroom. I watched the dry tips of her wet hair curling across her lower back. I liked the four dimples on her right ass cheek, and the tattooed on garter on her left thigh. She glanced back at me over her shoulder and smiled, eyes a little dead.

The bedroom was always a big mess. Her clothes were everywhere and there were cheap fashion magazines spread open all over the bed. She’d circled posh looking necklaces and blazers, things I could never picture her wearing. Sheila pushed them to one side, laid down and spread for me. Then she shut her eyes and scratched her right breast.

“Go on, honey. I’m ready.”

I tried to kiss her, but she just smiled that same smile.

“C’mon. Don’t make me beg for it,” she sighed.

I stopped trying to kiss her, to touch her breasts or brush my fingers along all of her peach perfect skin. I just fucked her, like she wanted. When she came, she bit my shoulder until I bled. Then she collapsed and turned away from me. She turned on the TV to *The Golden Girls*, set the timer, and pulled up the covers. I could barely get out of her way fast enough.

“My favorite is Blanche,” Sheila said. “She’s a lot like me.”

“Maybe,” I said.

“Since Mitchy’s not coming home tonight and you’re staying just make sure you don’t move much. I sleep light and I can’t get lines under my eyes or I won’t never get a job.”

“What kind of job do you want?”

Sheila had been working a single night a week at the pizza place downtown while her friend was on maternity leave. Other than that, she did nothing all day.

“I want something of my own that I know how to do. I hear the titty bar is looking for girls. I like to dance. It’d be money. Mitch’d get off my back about what I spend. Things would start to be real ok for us.”

“You have beautiful tits,” I said. But when I reached around her from the other side of the bed, she just slapped my hand away.

“It’s still a new piercing,” she said. “And I’m too tired for more tonight anyway. Now shush because I can’t hear my show.”

I laid in silence, trying not to touch myself until she was asleep. Then, I tried to touch myself without moving much or making any noise. The result was pretty lackluster. So I just laid there, in the Mitch scented side of the bed. I ran my hand over my short pixie hair and then traced over my bicep the tattoo that I’d promised myself next paycheck. It was going to be a mermaid girl with wild swirls of red hair, strategically twisting over her breasts. The guy at the shop said he could do it in about an hour and a half, one hundred and eighty-five bucks. Probably give him an even two hundred. Good to tip those guys well. They are serious business and you can’t look cheap to them or they’ll fuck you up on the next tat.

Sheila was so deeply asleep that I could see the drool glistening at the corner of her mouth when I leaned over her. I wished that I could run my finger over those dagger teeth. I wished that I could tell her to leave Mitchell, to wash out these sheets and ditch him so that I never had to smell his cigarette and stale cologne stink again. Eventually, I fell asleep.

When I woke up, Sheila was standing over me asking for pancakes. I got up and made them. I piled them on a plate and we took turns peeling them off the top, eating them with our hands and no syrup. We looked out the window above the sink and ate in silence.

Later, when we sat half-heartedly playing a hand of Old Maid with half the deck missing, she surprised me.

“You should fuck Morgan,” she said.

Morgan was her cousin. We had gone to school together. She was the reason that I had met Sheila in the first place.

“I don’t really like Morgan like that. And besides, Morgan *has* a girlfriend already. Take your turn and stop saying things like that,” I said.

“Honey, you got to know this won’t ever be much.”

She dropped her eyes down to her cards, and frowned. I could see the tiny specks of not quite washed-off mascara still clinging to the corner of her left eye. Her thigh bounced impatiently under the table.

“Yeah.”

“Well, can’t say I never warned you,” she said.

Then she won the game.

When Mitch called to say that he was coming home soon, I picked up my wallet and my tube of Pink Crush Valentine lipstick and got ready to go. Sheila stood out in the snow with me, pants-less. She was buried up to her thighs and wearing nothing but a nightshirt.

“You’ll fuckin’ freeze,” I said. “Why don’t you just go in?”

Her legs were a sort of periwinkle just above the snow crust, the same color as the sky.

“I just wanna say goodbye,” she said.

“There’ll be other times, Sheila. Go in before you get frostbite.”

“No,” she said. “There won’t.”

As I tried to protest, she turned and left. The snow and ice caked to her thighs dropped off in clumps and drips as she stood inside the screen door shivering. Sheila glanced over her shoulder for a second, then closed the door. My fingers instinctively touched the tender spot where her teeth had been, a new scar already forming there.

It made the cover of the paper the next morning, a huge article about her bereaved family and the grieving boyfriend. Mitch talked his talk to the reporters, using phrases like, “what a waste” and “too young.” Sheila was gone long before he’d ever gotten home that night. She must have done it pretty much the minute I got half way down the road. Funny how people always say that if only they had known, maybe they could have saved the person. If I had stayed behind, she probably would have just shot me too. She never did like to do anything alone. And I was never more to her than a useful thing.