

Candie Sanderson

I Like Your New Girlfriend

I find her very pretty. I met her last week at our common friend's bachelorette party. It is funny, we both think we sort of look alike. She has good style. We have similar clothes. We purchased the same bra, in different sizes. Her breasts are bigger than mine. Of course she doesn't have my natural European class, but she looks good, in a tackier, American kind of way.

I think she suits you better. She is kinder, quieter, nerdier, less ambitious and more understanding. A nice girl really. Like you, she works with mentally troubled children. That is where you met her. You used to take shifts together. I remember back then when you were playing scrabble online with her on your iPhone. I knew something was up. But you told me she was too big. Then she lost thirty pounds. We stopped sleeping together.

Your new girlfriend and I talked about that lying on the hotel bed after the bachelorette party. About how we loved you and cherished you and only wanted the best for you. You know me, I played it cool. We were both drunk from vodka cranberry cocktails. She was walking around naked. She took a picture of us. We looked like sisters. She sent it to you.

You left her alone at the bar after our friend's wedding. You were grumpy the way you are when others celebrate. I bought her a drink. I have been her before. I knew what she needed. I said, "Let's get out of here," the way men who are not like you do. On the parking lot I grabbed her waist. She didn't struggle. After we kissed she offered a threesome. I said I wasn't interested in you anymore.

Chick Flick

I have known Lisa since fifth grade, so when she sits down on my couch and tells me she is battling depression, I pour myself a drink. Even her semester in Denmark with all the happy blonde people didn't change anything. She did the same there as here: she stayed home in front of her computer screen.

I tell Lisa she must be watching a lot of streaming. She says she has low speed internet: it takes about half an hour to load a four-minute video. I ask what she does in the meantime. She doesn't rent DVDs. She doesn't read. She tried *50 Shades* but couldn't finish. She says now that I ask she can't figure out where the hours go. She says maybe she spends her days waiting for the videos to load.

She asks about my job. I tell her I just broke up with Tony. She says all her friends have boyfriends who live out of town and every weekend the friends go visit them. There's nobody left to go out with. I pour myself another glass. Cheers! Coupled friends are stupid. I wonder that Lisa doesn't drink.

I say, forget her other friends. She can hang out with me. I will take her to parties. It'll be just like high school, only better because now we're both pretty. I will introduce her to poets and painters, we will wear high heels in the snow, smoke cigarettes and drink whiskey. She says my life sounds like a movie.

When I open another bottle she says she has to leave. I offer to walk her home. She declines: it's only a few blocks, I should stay in.

After she's gone I return to my computer. It's almost the credits, but the movie is still loading.

The Act

When I was a kid I would lay on the floor, on the living room carpet, close my eyes and hold my breath. I was trying to stop my heartbeat, my chest from rising, my eyelids from twitching. I soon noticed your eyes still move even when you close them. So I closed them harder, trying to shut off every flicker of light, every hint of a movement, until all I saw were blurred patches of reds, purples and greens, soon breaking down into specks, mere pigments of color. I would take a deep breath and hold it in, mentally closing my nostrils and my throat, willing my body into momentary death. I wanted to see what my parents would do if they found me dead.

I never managed to make them quite believe it. My mom or my dad would come into the living room and ask, fists on their waists, looking puzzled or crossed « What are you doing on the carpet? Come on, get up, don't lie there, it's dirty! What is wrong with you? » I would never answer right away but wait at least thirty seconds, often more, thinking that if I didn't say anything and lay perfectly still, my parents would start to worry, throw themselves at me and to the floor, shake me like in too many American movies I had seen, frantically calling my name and begging me to come back to life. But after a few minutes of nothing but annoyed silence or repeated angry remarks on their part, I would get up and sigh, retreating to my room to reflect upon my failure and plan how I could, the next time, improve my your child-is-dead act.

I have found a way. I have perfected the act. I only need one witness. I hold my breath with you. I do not close my eyes. I want to see how long it will take for me to die. I clasp your hands against my neck, pushing them into the windpipe. I try to hold one more moment still, ten seconds more, thirty. I hold until my face turns red then pale, the blood rushing to my head as you thrust your hips into my thighs. I see you through blurred patches of light. You hold yourself so high, so straight, towering over me, your back lengthened, your ribs tight. Your extended arms yet so slender bridge the space between you and me. I will let your sinewy strength crush me.

But soon you loosen your clasp as you breathe into my neck. You do not throw yourself at me, you do not call my name, you do not ask me to come back. I have failed to die once again.

Starburst

I gave your coat to the homeless. It never kept me warm but it had big pockets where I would hide your letters and my hands. I took it across the sea. I told myself you were wrapped around me.

When I moved I didn't want your coat between my new boyfriend and me. There are so many bums in Berkeley you said, there are so many bums and when I met you you were one of them. Just a flower and a case, playing guitar for money.

So I gave your coat to a homeless man. I turned and walked away, headed for another plane. I heard him shout, wait. There was a key to a room up on a hill and plastic stars in the pockets. We bought them at the toy store, I climbed on your shoulders as we jumped on the mattress to stick them to the ceiling. We watched them glow because we had no real sky of our own. Or you did, I just didn't know.

I looked at the stars, they wouldn't stick. I looked at the key, why did you never pick it up, allowing me to walk in and out of your life, on the side of the road, that night. There was an accident. Red lights, a clump of cars, a truck on its side, broken glass, and we drove right by. I heard sirens. You sang Johnny Cash. Driving to the drive-in, popping Starburst. Fruit, fruit, fruit, chemical fruit covering my palate – added sugar, an over-powering sweetness. And then your tongue. And then nothing. You pulled your fist out of my chest.

I gave your coat to the homeless. He kept the stars, I kept the key. I was never one to break safes. Never know when I will need to walk in and out of your life again.