

# An Anarchist and a Mother

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My mother used to say that all people were created equal and those who thought otherwise only made distinctions because they felt insecure. This is how she would comfort me when I was picked on at school. I would come home crying because the girls in class had laughed at my name and she would explain that deep down girls like that had low self-esteem.

‘I called you Myfanwy because you would stand out. Your name is special, not boring and generic,’ my mother would say as she sat cross-legged on our lounge room floor painting posters that screamed ‘No Blood for Oil!’ and ‘Ariel Sharon is a War criminal!’ She told me Myfanwy was a Welsh name and that the Welsh language was beautiful and resilient despite British attempts to wipe it out. When she painted posters, my mother wore her oldest jeans. She would tie a bandana around her long dark hair. Through her t-shirt I could see her heavy low-slung breasts and her large brown nipples. The other mothers at school didn’t seem to have breasts, just sharp pointy things held up with underwire and yellowing lace. The only time my mother wore a bra was when she went for one of her walks.

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When I was young we moved around a lot. Every so often Mother would get the urge for what she called some fresh air. At each new school I would sit alone at lunchtime eating a falafel roll and I would recite the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights under my breath. ‘All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood.’ Mother always told me to say ‘sisterhood’ but I didn’t like breaking rules.

When she was nineteen my mother changed her name to Sky. Before that people called her Christina. For a long time Mother tried to get me to call her Sky but I stubbornly refused. The only concession I made was not to label her anything maudlin like Mum or Mummy.

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Once in year four I asked my mother who my father was. We were in the kitchen shelling peas. I liked slitting open the pods with my fingernail and removing each pea one by one. When I asked about my father, Mother stopped what she was doing and looked at me.

‘You don’t have a father. Well, of course, biologically you do. No doubt, Myfanwy, you understand that you come from a man’s sperm and my egg ...’

The pod in my hand began to look like the picture of the female reproductive system I had seen in Mother’s medical dictionary. I felt sick.

‘However, as far as who raised you, who loves you and who cares for you, it’s just me I’m afraid,’ she said, and smiled her occasional smile.

‘But I’m only really half of you,’ I said. ‘I’m half someone else, right?’

‘No,’ she said vaguely, and looked off into the middle distance. ‘You’re all me.’

I thought I had made her angry.

‘No, I’m just having a grey day,’ she said and went back to shelling peas.

When Mother had one of her grey days she would sometimes sit down on the floor of the shower and let the water run over her. She would sit there for hours till all the hot water had run out and then come out shivering and swearing. On these days we would have tuna sandwiches for dinner.

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When we moved to a new place Mother would immediately join the local peace group and other political organisations. She would take me along to meetings in the evening and I would help photocopy flyers and lick envelopes. For a while Mother was involved in something called the Feminist Underground Guerrilla Group. One night Mother and I drove around in an old brown Holden with a bunch of university students. They stopped the car when they saw sexist advertising, jumped out and spray-painted witty subversive slogans over the offending material. Mother had already explained to me prior to the outing that while such activity was vandalism and technically illegal, in some instances it was necessary to defy authority. It was thrilling driving around at night-time with these beautiful angry women. Mother rolled down the window and let the wind kick her hair across my face so I could smell its earthy, inimitable smell. I grinned at her and she squeezed my hand, but at nine thirty she asked the girls to drop us off as it was time for me to go to bed.

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But soon enough Mother would feel the itch again and we would pack up and move on. It was like this till I started high school. Mother declared I needed stability in order to focus on my studies. So we settled down.

For good.

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On Thursday nights Mother and I would go grocery shopping. Extended trading hours saw us roaming the empty aisles at Coles. Mother would put on a lenient face and let me buy food she would never normally allow; stuff like processed cheese and soft drinks. The rest of the week Mother would surreptitiously throw-out all the junk food we had bought on Thursday night: empty the Nesquik tin and refill it with organic cocoa and remove one Kraft cheese slice at a time and put it in the bin. By sixteen I'd stopped really minding Mother's covert missions to get rid of the consumer products. Thursday nights weren't about the purchases – they were a routine and comforting distraction. Mother called our outings 'a way to ward off the loneliness'. It was supposed to be a joke but on Thursday nights Mother seemed somehow more vulnerable. She lost her everyday bravado – her indomitable will to do humanity good and became lonesome and solitary. On these nights Mother pushed the shopping trolley slowly, distractedly, and refused me nothing.

Before my mother finally acquiesced and bought a car, we would carry our shopping home in the dark. Sometimes people would forget to draw their blinds and from the dark street their houses looked carved open like jack-o-lanterns with miniature families eating dinner, fighting and laughing inside. I would stop and stare, drawn like a moth to the honey glow of what seemed like normal family life. I ached to belong. Mother would eventually push me from behind and say, 'Come on, Myfanwy, remember Ovid – *tempus edax rerum*. Time is the devourer of everything,' and stride off into the dark evening.

Mother never seemed to mind our position on the fringes of normal society. In fact, it pleased her. To her, our isolation set us apart and made us free-thinkers. Up until high school we moved around too much for either of us to make any close friends. Even afterwards it was still really just the two of us. We never had family friends round for

dinner. There were no loud-mouthed cousins to play with in the summer. No Daddy's clients to be wined and dined.

It was always just Mother and I sitting on the couch in the evenings eating yoghurt and watching the BBC version of *Martin Chuzzlewit* while Mother printed out leaflets on nuclear disarmament to letterbox the next day.

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In year ten I got a job. I worked at an ice-creamery in the shopping complex up the road. I spent all day scooping raspberry swirl and butterscotch crunch and would come home with my arms aching and my skin smelling of sugar. I had to wear a powder pink shirt and skirt that rode high on my legs. I looked like a piece of fairy floss and Mother declared my uniform was a lawsuit waiting to happen, but I didn't care.

Unlike the girls at school who regarded me with taciturn indifference, the girls I worked with thought I was a novelty and included me in their feminine schemes. They asked me to impersonate customers and help them with their English assignments. I complied with the bouncy good nature of a pet rabbit. I started spending my pay-cheque on the same clothes and makeup they wore.

At first Mother seemed pleased about my part-time job.

'It will give you empathy for the worker and a healthy sense of responsibility.'

But when she saw the clothes I was buying she became concerned. She would stand in the doorway of my bedroom in her navy blue dressing gown with her unshaven legs poking out the bottom and say, 'Oh, Myfanwy, you don't need this stuff to be beautiful. You are beautiful! Besides, if you always work Thursday nights we can't go to Coles together.'

'We'll go another time, Mother.'

'But this stuff you're buying is produced by misogynists who want women to be uncomfortable and unhappy. You don't want to be a consumer sheep do you, Myfanwy?'

'No, Mother,' I would say and go off to work.

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A boy who worked at Howard's Storage World started buying ice-cream every Thursday night.

‘He likes you,’ one of the girls said. ‘One time you were on your break and he asked where you were. You should jump him. He’s hot.’

The boy would watch with a steady gaze as I dug out ice-cream from the barrel. I was conscious of the way my shirt gaped open like a cavern when I leant over.

‘So, Myfanwy, where does your name come from?’ He said, reading my name tag.

‘It’s Welsh... You know like Dylan Thomas’s *Under Milk Wood*?’

‘Never heard of the guy. I’m Morgan,’ he said pointing at his name badge. ‘You must really like ice-cream working here and all.’ I couldn’t tell if he was making fun of me or not.

‘Actually, I hate the stuff,’ I said.

‘Yeah, same here ... It’s too cold.’ He smirked at me and walked off.

When I got home that night I lay down on my bed and thought about Morgan’s brown knowing eyes. I pictured the silver ball in his chin and the black discs in his earlobes.

My mother knocked on the door.

‘Myfanwy, do you want to watch *Four Corners* with me? It’s on the West Bank settlements.’

‘No, Mother,’ I called and rolled over onto my stomach.

Next week Morgan ordered more ice-cream.

‘I DJ at Laundry on Friday nights. You should come. Wait, you’re still at high school, right?’

‘Yeah.’

‘Eh, Laundry is narko when it comes to under ages. I’m meeting people at the pub after work wanna come?’ Before I could answer he said, ‘meet me outside Woolies after your shift. I’ll drive around and pick you up.’ He walked off.

‘You have to go,’ one of the girls said.

‘Yeah, but my mother expects me home at ten. Besides, she won’t be happy about me going out with some random guy. She finds men in general pretty redundant,’ I said.

‘Look just say you’re going to the movies with us girls. She can’t have a problem with that.’

So I called Mother.

‘I don’t know, Myfanwy. It’s a school night. I know that phrase is a horrible Americanism, but in this instance it applies.’

‘Mother, please ...’ I begged.

‘Alright, I guess so...but try not to watch any movies by Jerry Bruckheimer. That man is deplorable.’

Elated, I hung up the phone.

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As we approached the pub I started to get nervous.

‘Um Morgan, I don’t have ID.’

He laughed and patted me on the head.

‘Don’t worry, Myf, they always let pretty little girls in.’

My face burned.

Morgan led me over to a table where a guy and a girl sat. The guy was sleepy-eyed sullen. The girl was dressed in black with hostile chic and a bull-ring piercing through her nose.

‘This is Dave and Bella...umm this is Myfanwy.’

I felt uncomfortable in my powder pink ice-cream uniform.

‘Sorry, what’s your name?’ The Pierced Girl asked me with vaguely mocking eyes.

‘Myfanwy,’ I said and tried to smile.

She nodded and then turned back to Dave and Morgan. I sat down. Morgan poured a glass of beer from the jug on the table and shoved it towards me. I took a sip and silently gagged.

‘Anyway, fucking Nick man, I was supposed to be on the door for TwoUp. He said he’d put my name down but when I got there ... nothing. I had to pay a twenty dollar cover charge for a band I didn’t even want to see.’

‘Yeah, I know it was a wasted evening. I would have just preferred to see 206 Collab by themselves.’

I sipped on my beer and feigned interest. Suddenly Pierced Girl turned to me and said,

‘What music do you like, Myfanwy?’

‘Umm, folk I guess. Bob Dylan, Joan Baez ...’ I looked at Morgan for approval.

‘Retro,’ Pierced Girl said and laughed. ‘That’s cute. How old are you?’

‘Sixteen,’ I said.

‘Oh my God, Morgan you cradle snatcher! You always get them young so they don’t know what a loser you are!’ Pierced Girl put her hand on Morgan’s leg and smirked.

‘I don’t know what you’re talking about, Belle,’ Morgan said. He didn’t remove her hand from his leg.

After that no one included me in the conversation.

And so I drank. After an hour or so I decided I liked the taste of beer. I felt I was drinking the nectar of adulthood. I slouched in my chair and listened to, without actually following, their conversation. I let Morgan and the Pierced Girl’s witty jousting sessions wash over me. I effaced myself behind my beer glass and the amber turned my whole world warm. I laughed at their jokes without quite understanding them even when Pierced Girl threw me brief disparaging glances. I drained my glass and sucked at my lips.

‘Mind getting us another one, Myf?’ Morgan said patting my knee.

‘Yeah, sure.’ I got to my feet carefully and brought them back another jug.

‘Thanks babe,’ Morgan said.

I repeated the exercise three times. Morgan never offered any money. I imagined this was a thoughtful gesture – he was demonstrating that I was an independent women and he was not a chauvinist. Mother would be pleased, I thought, as I bought them all a fourth round.

I began to feel sleepy – a contented sleepiness that made me smile for no reason. I couldn’t be drunk, I thought. From my experience people who were drunk were noisy, talked loudly and tripped over. If anything I had become more silent and careful. I only noticed a slight heaviness in my fingertips and a red flushed heat that rose from my chest to my cheeks.

‘You’re such a wanker, Morgan,’ Pierced Girl was saying. Instead of looking affronted, Morgan smiled and leaned in.

‘Explain to me Belle, how I’m a wanker?’

‘I have to pee!’ I said.

Morgan looked at me and shrugged. I walked with a careful conscious air to the toilets and pushed open the doors.

A little hard, perhaps.

I banged the toilet stall open and sat down heavily, forgetting Mother’s hallowed rule to always place toilet paper on the seat before using a public toilet. A trickle ... and then a stream. I looked up at the ceiling and sighed. I leant my head against the wall for a few minutes, rolled wads of toilet paper round my hand and wondered why no one had ever mentioned what a joy it was to pee. I smiled at myself in the bathroom mirror before going back outside.

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They didn’t acknowledge my return. And so I drank some more. Peed some more. Pierced Girl touched Morgan’s arms and legs some more.

And then suddenly it seemed the pub was on an angle. I grasped the underside of the table trying to not fall off my seat. No one else seemed to have noticed this unexpected incline. They continued talking. I felt sweat break out on the edges of my hairline. The delightful heaviness in my fingertips turned into clammy palms. I took deep breaths and waited for the room to right itself.

‘Are you okay?’ The Dave guy was looking at me with curiosity. I nodded unwilling to open my mouth. ‘You’ve gone all white.’

‘Morgan,’ I whispered sideways, ‘I’m going to be sick.’ I got up quickly and tottered to the ladies’, pushed the door open and threw up all over the floor. I dragged myself into a cubicle, lay down next to the toilet bowl and opened my mouth. It had been a long time since I had vomited and I had forgotten the force with which your body pushes the acidic warmth up your throat as you gag and gasp for air. In the intervals between vomiting sessions I lay down on the cool white tiles in sticky relief, glad Morgan couldn’t see me like this but also wondering why he hadn’t come to see if I was all right.

After an hour he did come.

‘Myf?’

I got up and opened the toilet stall door. He looked nervous to be in the ladies’ toilets.

‘Hey.’

‘Hey, did you spew?’

‘Umm, yeah.’

‘Come on,’ he said as he put an arm under me and helped me out.

Dave and the Pierced Girl looked up as we made our way back to the table.

‘I better take this one home,’ Morgan said nodding towards me with a benign paternal smile. Pierced Girl rolled her eyes. Morgan steered me out of the pub with one hand resting on my butt. Even in my queasiness I felt a sense of triumph.

‘Haven’t you been drinking?’ I asked halfheartedly as we got into his car.

‘Nah, I’m a good driver even when I’m drunk,’ he said as he leant over and buckled me up responsibly. His hand lingered on my skirt. With one quick movement he dug down between my legs and squeezed my crotch.

Hard.

He smirked at me and turned on the ignition.

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When we got back to back to Morgan’s place I asked for a glass of water.

‘Yeah, sure help yourself. The kitchen’s down the hall,’ he said. While I was standing at the kitchen sink one of Morgan’s flat mates came in. He looked me up and down.

‘I’m with Morgan,’ I said.

‘Sure you are.’ The guy grinned and walked out.

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Morgan’s room was at the front of the terrace. It was dark with a musty overripe smell. Towers of CDs and vinyl added to the dank claustrophobia. When I got back to his room Morgan was playing records. He stood behind one of his turntables wearing oversized headphones stroking a record with his index finger, a look of intense concentration on his face. When he saw me he took off the headphones and walked towards me.

‘Lift up your arms.’

I did what he asked. With one movement he pulled my top off over my head.

‘Take off your skirt.’

I wriggled my skirt down over my hips and stood in my underwear facing him.

‘Take off your bra.’ He sat down on the bed and watched as I unhooked the back and shook it off, letting it fall at his feet like an offering at a shrine. He looked at me with glassy eyes.

‘Lie down.’

I walked around to the other side of the bed. Conscious of my exposed pink nipples, I lay down on my stomach and turned my face away from him. He moved close to me.

‘Still feel sick?’

‘Uh uh.’ I shook my head.

‘Good.’ He pushed himself up on to my back. I heard him unzip his jeans and yank them down. He never asked if it was my first time and I didn’t offer the information.

‘You’re cute,’ he said and pushed my underwear to the side.

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When it was over he turned away from me and lay on his side. Morgan had little brown moles and blobs of white scar tissue all over the wide expanse of his back. I traced the pattern of these markings with my finger and kissed his back.

He moved away.

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My bag began ringing.

‘What the fuck is that?’ Morgan said.

‘Oh shit,’ I said scrounging for my phone amongst the things in my bag. ‘Hello?’

‘Myfanwy?’ My mother’s voice sounded frightened. ‘Where are you? It’s one o’clock in the morning.’

‘I’m still out with people from work, Mother. We went to the movies like I said. We just stopped on the way home for coffee. I’ll be home soon.’

‘Coffee’s terrible for your digestion, Myfanwy. It kills off the nutrients in food. Where are you? I’ll come and pick you up.’

‘No, no,’ I said, conscious Morgan could hear everything. ‘Umm, a girl from work is driving me home. We’re on the way now.’

‘Well, I hope she’s a good driver. Besides Myfanwy, you have an early start tomorrow. We’re picketing outside the U.S. Consulate before school.’

‘I’ll be home soon, I promise,’ I said and hung up.

Morgan was leaning on his elbow smirking at me.

‘Your mum?’

‘I have to go now.’

‘I’ll give you a lift.’

‘No, it’s fine. I’ll walk.’

He laughed.

‘Drunk little girls shouldn’t be roaming the streets at night by themselves.’ He got up and pulled on his jeans. I dressed hurriedly, conscious of his watchful gaze. We didn’t talk much in the car. I was deciding whether or not I was now Morgan’s girlfriend. The idea made me happy.

When we were outside my house he asked what my mother did.

‘She’s a nurse,’ I said, ‘but she also volunteers with a lot of political and social justice organisations.’

‘Does she work during the day?’

‘Yes,’ I said, thinking it was a strange question.

‘Cool. I’ll see you later then,’ he said.

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I got out of the car and went inside the house.

‘Myfanwy,’ my mother called from her bedroom. ‘Did you have a good time?’

‘Yes, Mother,’ I said.

She stood in the doorway of her bedroom in her nightgown. She stared at me for a long time without saying anything.

‘Well, as long as you had a good time,’ she said and went back to bed.

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Before I went to bed I looked at myself naked in the mirror. I smiled at the bruises on the back of my thighs and between my legs.

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Morgan came to my house every Monday. He would wait in his car till he saw my mother leave for work at eight. I would get dressed in my school uniform, say goodbye to my mother and then meet him at the door. No one at school seemed to notice my absence, but then, they had never really noticed my presence.

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We had sex on my single bed with a picture of Gandhi looking at us from the wall. Morgan had sex like it was a necessary chore. He had the habit of pushing my face into the pillow and fucking me from behind. In this position I could not see his face. I felt this avoidance was an expression of his tortured poet's soul. He said he liked my arse.

One time, though, I turned to the side and looked up, catching him off guard. The look on his face was the same one he had when he played records - an intense angry concentration.

Afterwards he looked at me like I had said something in poor taste and then he went off for a shower.

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The girls at work asked how my boyfriend was.

'Great,' I said and meant it.

It never occurred to me that perhaps boyfriends and girlfriends saw each other more than once a week.

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I made excuses not to go to anti-war protests with my mother.

'You've been distant lately, Myfanwy.'

'Just tired,' I said and closed my bedroom door.

•

I began to smell of sex—under my fingernails and in my crotch. It was the same musty, overripe smell as Morgan's bedroom.

I stopped reading Tolstoy and started learning band names. I pushed out the black doubts that entered my head – how Morgan never invited me over to his place or took me to the movies.

In the liquid silences after sex I thought, *this is it. I have a boyfriend.*

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Morgan's worn grey jocks were endearing.

His silence was intellectual brooding.

'You know, you've got the same existential angst as Holden Caulfield,' I said.

'That's nice,' Morgan said. 'Can you get me a drink?'

•

Morgan said I needed to be educated on music. One morning we postponed fucking so Morgan could teach me. He played music and rocked back and forth in a trance-like state while I tried not to smile.

'Well?' He said when the music stopped.

'Yeah, good,' I said and kissed him.

'Fuck off, Myfanwy,' he said and put another CD on.

Finally I heard something I recognised

'This is amazing,' I said.

'Yeah, I know.'

'Edgar Allen Poe was a genius The Raven is one of my favourite poems.'

'What are you talking about? This is MC Lars.'

'Yeah, but the lyrics are taken from "The Raven" by Edgar Allen Poe.'

'Nah, Myf, trust me. This would be MC Lars's own material.'

I laughed.

'Morgan, it was written in the nineteenth century. I know.'

'Fucking hell, Myfanwy, what do you know about hip-hop?'

'It's not hip-hop. It's a poem ... a famous one.'

Morgan thought about it for a second then glared at me.

Silence.

Bile lapped up in my stomach.

'Don't get angry, Morgan.' I put my arms around his neck.

'I'm not angry but I think I probably should leave, now.' He pushed my arms off him.

'No, Morgan. I'm sorry. Please ... don't leave.'

'Nah, I should. I've got a lot of shit to do today.'

‘No, Morgan, honestly, I think I made a mistake. I was thinking of another poem.’

‘Yeah, it’s fine, but I should probably go. He got up and walked to the door of my bedroom.’

‘Please,’ I stood in front of him, blocking his way. ‘Please ...’

He looked at me.

‘Fine then.’

He spun me round and shoved me down on the bed. He pulled at my clothes till I was naked.

‘You want it?’ He asked.

‘Yes.’

‘Say please.’

‘Please.’

•

A while later I felt Morgan pause. A sound behind me made me look up. My mother stood in the doorway in her nurse’s uniform.

‘Jesus!’ Morgan said scrambling off me and grabbing for his pants.

My mother looked from me to Morgan then back at me. For once in her life she seemed lost for words. But her silence did not last long.

‘How dare you! How dare you! What the hell do you think you’re doing?’

Mother hadn’t even looked this angry when the U.S Army used daisy cutter bombs in Afghanistan.

‘What the hell do you think you’re doing? How old are you? Do you know how old she is? She’s sixteen for Christ’s sake!’ Mother turned to me with white eyes. ‘Myfanwy put on your clothes.’

‘Mother, please,’ I begged pulling on my school skirt.

Morgan looked like he was going to wet himself.

I got up from the bed and walked towards my mother.

‘Mother, please. He’s my boyfriend.’

She slapped me in the face. Hard. Angry red spots had appeared in her own cheeks.

‘Your boyfriend? Your boyfriend? I’ve never met him. Has he ever been round for dinner? Have you been to his place for dinner? This boy comes round to the house when I’m not at home. When you’re supposed to be at school. Have some self-respect. Are you going to let him do whatever the hell he wants with you? Have I taught you nothing, Myfanwy?’ She stared at me.

I prayed to a God I didn’t believe in.

Morgan took the opportunity to sidle past with his shoes and socks in his hand. Mother didn’t seem to notice him.

‘You know, I was young once too,’ she said. ‘I let a boy walk all over me and do you know where it got me? Pregnant,’ she spat.

I heard the front door close.

‘I hate you,’ I said.

‘Fine,’ she said and turned away.

I slammed my bedroom door and sat down on my bed.

The combined smells of Morgan and my mother made me sick.

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Morgan didn’t call.

I called his mobile and no one answered. I called his home phone and his flat mates said he was out.

I didn’t speak to my mother.

Every day I went to school. Every night I sat in my room and thought about Morgan’s index fingers on my body and him whispering, ‘You’re cute.’ Every night my mother knocked on my door.

‘Myfanwy? I’m writing a letter to the newspaper about the apartheid wall. Do you want to help me phrase it?’

She left a tray of food outside my bedroom.

•

On Thursday night I went to work. I watched the entrance to Howard’s Storage World waiting for Morgan to come over and buy ice-cream from me. I tripped over cartons and gave people the wrong change.

‘Sorry,’ I mumbled as I handed someone a waffle cone instead of a cup.

At eight thirty I saw Morgan walk out.

‘Cover for me a second,’ I said to one of the girls.

I walked towards him. Morgan was looking in the opposite direction. He waved at someone. I watched as he put his arms around the Pierced Girl and kissed her.

‘Morgan,’ I said.

He turned around.

‘Oh ... hey, Myfanwy.’

‘I called you,’ I said.

‘Yeah, I know. Look ...’ He took me by the arm and led me a few steps away.

Pierced Girl sighed.

‘Umm it was fun and everything, Myf, but I should have said ... I think we should leave it at that. Besides, it’s not like we were a couple or anything.’

Silence.

‘Anyway, I’ve got to go,’ he said. ‘I’m going to Bella’s parents place for dinner,’ and he walked off.

•

‘Men are bastards!’ the girls at work declared. ‘Don’t let him get to you. Besides, Myfanwy, plenty more fish in the sea.’

‘Yeah, I guess,’ I said and went home.

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My mother held me as I cried.

‘This is all your fault,’ I said.

‘I know,’ she said and hugged me some more.

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Next Thursday I didn’t watch the Howard’s Storage World entrance. I looked at the ice-cream instead. I counted the flavours. I divided the milk-based by the sorbets. I was moving on to toppings when I bumped elbows with the new guy who was scooping out cookies n’ cream.

‘Sorry,’ he said and smiled.

‘How’s your first day?’ I asked.

‘Good,’ he said. ‘But this shirt makes me look like one hell of a dandy. I may as well stick a flower in my buttonhole and call myself Oscar Wilde’

I smiled cautiously.

‘You like Oscar Wilde?’

‘Yeah, sure. Witty guy.’

‘I love Oscar Wilde!’ I burred. ‘Such a genius of social insight...one of a kind...a true savant...Hey, you wouldn’t happen to be interested in billposting anti-war material for the greens sometime?’

‘Sure, anytime. I personally think Kerry Nettle is the hottest woman in parliament. Although I can’t help you Thursday nights. My mum makes me go to cello practice.’ I smiled.

He moved on to the next tub of ice-cream.

‘Hey, do you mind doing me a favour?’ I asked. ‘Can you cover my shift tonight?’

•

I called my mother.

‘Meet me outside Coles in fifteen minutes.’

•

We walked up and down the aisles not talking for a long time. Finally Mother spoke.

‘You know, Myfanwy. I wouldn’t want you to think men are scum. All people are good people. Some are just ... weak.’

She looked at me.

‘There are thousands of wonderful men in the world. Noam Chomsky, Edward Said, Michael Palin ...’

I laughed.

‘Kofi Annan, John Pilger, Jamie Oliver...’ She turned back to the food on the shelves and sighed. ‘I wish something would go wrong with all these horrible little barcodes and then the capitalist world would turn into glorious anarchy!’ Mother’s arguments were always enthusiastic if a little nonsensical.

‘If you were really an anarchist,’ I said, ‘you’d let me stay out all night and eat whatever I want.’

She smiled at me - her wry occasional smile with its pinprick of self-awareness.

‘You can be an anarchist *and* a concerned mother.’

•

She pushed the shopping trolley forward.

‘Come on droopy drawers,’ she said. ‘I’ll buy you that processed cheese you like. The type that comes from cows that have probably been pumped full of hormones and God knows what else!’

She pushed harder and then, like an eight-year-old child, she jumped up and clamped her feet onto the sides of the trolley.

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I watched as my mother bright-eyed and wild-haired coasted down the aisle.

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