

Forever a virgin

'These bloody dopey sods I've been messed up with!' Tessa said aloud to the thick hawthorn hedge and crushed her cigarette into the ground. The hedge with off-white overblown flowers blocked her sight to the left, wet tarmac shone on her right. It was drizzling since a few minutes.

Not one car passed in the last half hour. Yes, in the opposite direction, some went back to York, but nobody seemed to go up north, to Edinburgh.

Why did Carol start on that bottle of gin? It was only three in the afternoon? And Nick, Carol's brother, he opened one beer bottle after the other with the guys in the band. They had arrived early, apparently just to get fuddled.

Nick and Carol were twins born on the 21st of June, nineteen years ago. Each year they celebrated their birthday in the weekend nearest the longest day. It had been such fun every year. One didn't want to miss out on their parties. But this year something had gone wrong, Carol as well as Nick were not themselves, something had happened. Something terrible, they didn't want to share with Tessa. That's why they both started to drink and were sloshed before the guests had even arrived.

A car passed, 'shit, dammit, stupid cow,' Tessa, so deep in thoughts, forgot to raise her thumb. The rain intensified and she decided to wait under the protection of a lonely tree along the quiet country road. A hole in the hedge displayed the barren Yorkshire fields to her. In the distance she discerned the vague contours of a barn. Fortunately, it wasn't cold, but she got damn wet. She still wore last night's clothes, a teeny weeny miniskirt and a navel jumper. Two hours earlier, she'd woken up from the filthy mattress, dragged into a corner under a window. When she'd opened her eyes, her head ached and her mouth felt dry. Outside the sky was stacked with grey clouds and she'd pinched Nick's jean jacket, she was grateful for that now. 'Lousy party, even the weather was lousy this year,' she muttered.

Nick, Carol and Tessa had been pals since they were small kids. They'd been neighbours in Edinburgh and had always played together. Until three years ago, when their parents had moved outside York, to some remote village. She'd visited them twice before in their new home and in between she'd endlessly emailed and chatted with Carol and of course with Nick. Dear Nick, he was her boyfriend and she had promised him her virginity. 'But not before I'm eighteen,' she'd always said, 'on your birthday we'll do it,' She knew she was old-fashioned, all her girlfriends had been doing IT for years. But mum had drummed it in, 'darling, sex is not the same as eating an ice cream, you only do it with the one and only.' She hoped Nick would be her 'one and only', her friend, her lover and her brother, but after last night she wasn't so sure of him anymore.

He was so changed, when they met yesterday. She hardly recognised him and he had frightened her with his Mohican haircut in green, red and blue, he had piercings everywhere in his ears, his eyebrows, his lips and even in his tongue. She was appalled when he gave her a French kiss and felt the iron ring stroking her tongue.

She'd turned eighteen a few weeks ago and she'd prepared herself seriously for the divine moment. She'd bought a sexy black lace slip and bra and asked for the pill from her doctor. She endlessly fantasised how his fingers would touch her there, first shy and unexperienced. Then, passionate and eager, ripping the lace to bits while she still struggled with the zipper of his jeans.

A car passed. Tessa lifted her thumb, a girl younger than herself sits rigidly behind the wheel, looking straight ahead. The boy next to her must be her boyfriend teaching her to drive, according to the howling engine. An antique Morris Minor, with an elderly couple just visible behind the windscreen, tailbacks the former car. A 4x4 jeep speeds up, ready to pass the first two, Tessa ducks away in Nick's jumbo jacket. She must look funny, with the miniskirt's hem covered by the Wrangler jacket and her long bare legs sprawling under it. 'Bloody locals,' she shouted after them while kicking a stone on the tarmac with her bare big toe peeping out of the sandal. 'Ai.' A glance on her watch showed her it was a quarter past four. Would she ever reach Edinburgh today? She should have taken the train. Nick, soft and very sensitive, was always overruled by his bossy sister Carol. He

wanted to show he was someone too, that he was not a sissy. He had hardly talked to Tessa, too busy banging the drums, drinking beer and smoking dope in his punk outfit with chains rattling when he moved. He even made fun of her, half to her half to the guys he had said, 'Hey, Tess, still a virgin, huh? You see it in their eyes, you know.' They had all laughed. She had showed them her back and had bitten her lip. How could he be so rude? It was their secret, he'd wanted it just as much as she did, he'd said it in his E-mail last Friday.

With Carol it hadn't been much different. She'd been drinking hard liquor all afternoon and never spoke to Tessa, instead she got an empty gaze. Later, Tessa was shocked to find her in the basement room bonking some guy.

With the hosts switched off, Tessa began to feel responsible for the success of the party. She started to fill up bowls with chips, cleaned vomit, collected glasses and listened to some boring 'Yorkshire puddings'. In the end she'd even smoked some dope to drag her through the night. That's why she felt so drowsy.

Another car approached and she jumped onto the street making herself very visible.

The next moment she found herself staring at the long and dark blue bonnet of a jaguar. Her finger followed, only for a second, the back of the jumping silver animal at the front.

'Am I glad I didn't drive fast.' A slender elegant guy got out and laughed at her. 'What's the matter, are you hurt? You need help?'

'No, no I'm fine, only hitch-hiking, I need to be in Edinburgh tonight, but good luck left me.'

'Well, it found you again, I happen to be on my way there.'

'You do? You're going all the way up north?'

'Yep, jump in,' he opened the door on the passengers side. Tessa slid into the car and ensconced herself in the cream coloured leather. She shook her head like a wet dog, as he settled behind the wheel raindrops landed everywhere, on the walnut dashboard, his flanel trousers and bottlegreen polo, even on his face. 'Oh, sorry,' she said, slapping her hand in front of her mouth. He answered her clumsiness with a long and sympathetic smile.

She pushed the glittering auburn hair out of her face and went on, 'I'm so glad you've stopped, it's the worst place to hitch. A farmer dropped me, I walked a few miles then it started to rain and no cars were passing.'

'Well, I passed.'

'Thank God for that and you're going to Edinburgh, I can't believe I'm so lucky and in such a smashing car no less.'

'What brought you to this remote country road outside York?'

'Midsummer night's party with some friends, but it was horrible.'

'I'm so sorry, what happened?'

'Ooh, nothing, just a lot of booze and dope, I suppose,' she laughed and glanced at his profile. Neatly shaved, suntanned too. He looked resolute and trustworthy, how would you call that, aristocratic? And his hands, so delicate. Rings? No wedding ring, only a signet ring on his left hand.

'Did something awkward happen?'

'No, nothing happened. What I actually wanted to happen never happened.' Gosh, I can't tell him that, the guy is at least 30 years older than me and I don't even know him.

'How annoying,' he smiled and looked down at her bare knee. Tessa rattled on, 'Nick became a straight punk and Carol ignored me completely, I saw her doing it with some guy, can you believe it?' Suddenly embarrassed she stopped in the middle of a sentence. 'Sorry, must be mad to bore you with my chit-chat,' and she kept quiet for a while. Wondering if it was polite to ask him something, then she snoozed off a little, suddenly so tired from last night's lack of sleep.

~

He peeked at her, what a peach, he thought, admiring her rosy cheeks with the shadow of long dark eyelashes. Against the light of the lowering sun, peeping through the heavy clouds, he perceived blonde down on her upper lip. Her auburn hair is muddled, like long hair of young girls often is. It probably hadn't seen a comb the last twenty four hours. A hardly perceptible draft in the car made it flutter lightly, which he found extremely attractive.

With another glance, his looks were captured by her bare belly, the big denim jacket hung loosely around her shoulders, her short jumper gave him full view on the prettiest navel and suntanned skin around it. But he must tore himself away once more, as the turnoff to the motorway is nearby and he had to speed up.

His aged mother lived in York and he visited her dutiful every Sunday afternoon.

Today, however she wasn't feeling well, so he left early. Despite the weather, he took the country road and couldn't believe his eyes when the girl jumped in front of his car.

He felt confused, because of his obsession, as big as former South Africa. He was born there 46 years ago on a huge ranch in the outback, far away from civilization. As an only child he was brought up by a pair of incredibly cerebral and cold parents. He never played with children of his age and was never near girls. Sometimes he talked to the native black girl who worked in the kitchen. One time his father caught them talking, he had become mad with rage. A few days later dad had died of a stroke. He left behind with extreme guilt feelings and had never been able to approach women in a healthy way, since. Women, especially young girls, became his obsession. He desperately wanted to make love to them but never dared to. With this vulnerable and callow beauty sitting next to him he felt she would be the one, the first one he would ever possess.

Though, he had to be careful, he had not been near any adolescent girl since his collision with the police last year. He had behaved himself, although it had been hard. He had to force himself to turn his eyes away when he passed a teenaged girl in the street.

However, in the silent darkness of his apartment behind his computer he played with them. He stroke their bare backs, combed their long blonde, brown or black hair, he rubbed their caper big or pinhead small nipples until they were as hard as green peas. He loved his lissome lovers with their spring meadow smells, their skins soft as the bark of a silver birch and their eyes shining and bright, not from fear but because they yearned after him just as much as he desired them.

He never put out one perverted hand to them, though he did use them. He painted them and took photo's, which he put online. He ran several porn-sites and earned a lot of money with that. But he never slept with one of them. He never dared to, still so afraid for his father's wrath. He had only watched them, sniffed their perfumes and dreamt behind his computer screen.

On the motorway the traffic thickened, people were heading home after their Sunday afternoon visits. The girl next to him was breathing heavily and seemingly fast asleep. Her head fell over and rolled on and off the headrest. With his left arm he picked up a pillow from the back seat and pushed it beside her falling head. Around him red braking lights pricked through the grey curtain of a cloudburst. He had to pay attention now and suspend the long looks on the forbidden fruit next to him.

~

After a while she opened her eyes, and stared at the man next to her. He smiled and said, without taking his eyes of the road, 'I wanted to comfort your rolling head a bit.'

'Thanks, I dreamt, I wasn't out for more than a few minutes, was I?'

'What did you dream of?'

She blushed and quickly said, 'my dog. It's a Jack Russel, he caught a rabbit twice as big as himself,' Geez, she thought, I can't tell him that I woke up in his bed between silk sheets.

That he entered the room with a bottle of champagne and slipped next to me, stark naked.

He opened the bottle, produced two glasses from under the sheets and poured out the golden liquid. Some was spilled on his breast. I licked the moist from between his bushy blonde hair on his suntanned chest. Then he kissed me with his mouth full of champagne and I swallowed his gulp.

'What's his name?'

'Huh, whose?'

'Your dog?'

'Ah, very original, Jack.'

'What's yours by the way?'

'Tessa.'

'So pleased to meet you, I'm Howard,' he held out his hand and she put hers in it. He closed his fingers around hers, slightly longer than necessary.

Tessa, beautiful name, it suits you. Do you live in Edinburgh?'

'Yes, with my parents, till after the summer. Then I go to Oxford to study history of art.'

'You like art?'

'Yes, I work in a gallery at the moment.'

'In Edinburgh?'

'Yes it's owned by Barbara McFarrath.'

'I know her, you like her?'

'To be honest, no.'

'Me neither.' He laughed heartily when Tessa pulled a face and flapped her arm as if she wore a lot of bracelets, like Barbara did.

'How d'you know her?' she asked.

'I'm a collector of art.'

'Wow, what genre do you collect.'

'Everything, but mainly women, nudes to be precise.'

'Impressive, I would love to see them, one day.'

'You're welcome, any day. Have you ever been a model?'

'Nude? No,' she said.

'I paint too, and take photo's, would you like to be my model?' Howard asked.

'Oh yeah, I would love to, great, when will that be?' she cried out.

He smiled once more at her and said, 'I think you're a natural, next week?'

Tessa stared out of the window. Wow, a model? Sitting for this guy? He seemed so nice and was so handsome. That dream she just had, wasn't that great. Tremendous. How would it be to sleep with an older guy, more experienced. Wasn't it a much better idea to ask him to take her virginity, but could she trust him? She saw herself sitting in a velvet bordeaux coloured robe. Part of her breasts and shoulders were bare, her legs slightly apart. And then, he came to her, slowly, his eyes locked into hers. With the back of his paintbrush he pushed aside the dress until a tuft of pubic hair was visible. He took her hand and kissed her fingers one by one. A warm wave hit her heart and tickled her abdomen, a feeling Tessa didn't recognise. She blinked away her fantasy and looked out of the window, rather confused.

~

After a while he asked, 'Tessa, aren't you hungry? May I invite you for dinner? We're near Dunbar where I know a good restaurant.' He wanted to look at her, sit opposite her, see her eyes, her teeth behind her smile, perhaps he even dared to touch her once more, if only her hair.

'Yes, something to eat will be great. The last thing I had between my teeth was a stale bun, hours ago.' Her sunny smile touched him deeply. Definitely, she will be the one, she wanted him too, he just sensed that.

~

It was still half an hour or more to Dunbar. The countryside was passing fast now. She looked down in the valley, along a steep slope next to the road, there were crowns of trees below and she saw a silver line of a brook shimmering. It was beautiful here, the sort of dreamy landscape fairytales have. The sun sank behind the hills in the distance. Sunrays of red and golden yellow light shone through the clotted creamy clouds. It was as if God sat on them, directing the light with his wand. 'Isn't it an impressive sunset?' she said to Howard. 'It is, isn't it?' he looked up briefly, hardly interested.

~

He was more occupied with her bare legs. His eyes went up and down like a flasher. Her skirt crept up to the level of her lace slip and what he saw was at least confrontational. Tessa noticed his embarrassment and tried to manage herself in a more decent position, but it was too late. Howard looked down at her crotch once more, completely forgetting he was driving. The jaguar made an awkward move to the right, just missed the car he was passing and banged on to the safety-fence several times. He lost control over his heavy car. Tessa

screamed. The jaguar moved back to the left side of the road, beat against the opposite guardrail and overturned. Slowly, but steady, it slid on its rooftop into the soft grass verge. For a moment it was still, no sound of scraping iron on tarmac or braking cars anymore. Their bodies hang motionless in the safety belts. However, the car never stopped moving and reached the top of the slope beside the road. It toppled over like a canoe in a waterfall and skidded down, slowly at first, but constantly and finally really fast. Two huge alder trees on the bank of the brooklet broke its slide. They collapsed by the weight of the car, which hit their trunks. Like breached matches they draped their branches over the car, heavy with leaves.

Minutes later, or hours, he had no clue, Howard started to think again. Where was he? What happened? The girl, what happened to the girl? With his eyes closed he realised he hung upside down in his belt, the wheel pushed in his stomach, his head touched the roof. His whole body ached. The sound of water, or was it petrol? babbled underneath the car. He opened one eye, it was dark. Something tickled his face, he tried to loosen his left hand, aaargh, that hurt. He groped around him and felt the soft body of Tessa. Her hair was everywhere, he pushed it aside and touched her face next to his, it was so close. He couldn't see her but moved his head to her, his lips brushed over her cheek. For a moment, triumph filled him, when he dared to kiss her. She didn't move. Was she alive? He stroke her almost bare body with his free hand. He stirred the lace slip, he'd done it so many times before, but never in reality. The nipples on her breast were tangible under the material of her tight jumper. He stroked them. Then, he touched her face, her eyes were closed, her nose, her soft lips with the blonde hairs around them, he felt them with his fingertips like a very soft fur coat. They were wet, from what? saliva? No it was thicker, blood? He tried to open his other eye to discern her face in the darkness. God, was it dark, was it already night? A moonless night? He kissed her again. Licked the blood from her face. Tried to hold her, but stuck he couldn't move any further. Was it her heartbeat he felt? Or his own. Over and over again, he kissed her. He never kissed his own mother, he realised, not even on the cheek. But Tessa he could touch where he wanted and as long as he wanted. A faint wisp of her body odour entered his nostrils, sweet but also sharp and bitter like cold sweat. Would help come? Rather not, he was happy, she's near. He finally found himself a woman, she would be his first. Was she dead? Was he dying?

He dozed away, woke up again and heard sounds in the distance. Men were shouting.

'There is the car, we found it.' Sirens, a chainsaw, pulls on his door, 'I see two people, a man and a girl, carefull, they are extremely injured.'

'Are they alive?'

'Don't know.'

'Look at that girl, they probably had a sexual intercourse while driving 100 mph.'

'Don't talk, get them out.'

'The bastard, such a beautiful, young girl.' Howard heard them but was too weak to speak up.

He slowly transcended his body, left his car behind under the crashed alders above the brook. Tessa had already gone. He met her a bit further where she sat on a trunk, like a transparent elf, staring into the dreamy landscape. He wondered what her thoughts were and took her hand.

Once more she gave him one of her dazzling smiles. He was sure now, he would possess her soon, he would lose his virginity, they both would, in a few minutes.

They moved away from the noise of chainsaws and the shouting men. He held her, looked into her eyes, brushed her lips with his and was so happy.