

Wrecked

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I spy her at Mortuary Station at a party the air metallic with powder and pills and people touching each other in corners. Intermittent lights make faces blue and green and shiny. Ghosts weave in and around us unseen, adding to the density of the atmosphere like striations of gas. Imprinting themselves. Making everything complicated.

She's incandescent in front of me. She looks at me and I have a halo of gold she can see me. We have things in common. Her brother, my sister. Loss, dissolution. She takes me to her house and washes me tenderly in the shower before we fuck. I am compliant I am a lamb. While we sleep she wraps herself around me. It makes me feel like I matter.

We talk, so easy. She stays with me and I have found the one. She moves in with one pair of boots, a motorcycle, a dog. We are rapturous, we are pirates together and I feel lucky. She gives me a nickname she calls me her little L. We are happy. In the evenings we pull out the bottle and sometimes the needle, our dear friends always faithful. My other friends become scarce and I am somnambulant, cocooned in my dream world.

Until it cracks. It takes me a while to notice that we have stopped looking at each other. That she has stopped being kind.

I am uneasy.

I see things more clearly now, the fault lines. She goes creeping around the holiday house next door and steals their furniture and wine. She takes the dog to the RSPCA while I sob and beg her not to. She sleeps with her back to me. Her love becomes laced with surveillance. Sometimes she doesn't come home but she rings to make sure I'm there.

Some part of me withers, unseen and undernourished.

This time she's examining the drawing. I'm reckless, I didn't credit her with understanding the picture. Her fury is white hot.

'Oops,' she says. She's menacing as she pushes me up against the wall, forcing air out from my lungs. It's not like those other times. Those other times there was a playfulness around her mouth, her lips open, smirking, the tip of her tongue poking out. Those times she leaned carefully against me, her forearm braced across my rib bones, and used her other hand to unbuckle me. Those times I was hot for it.

Something fractures in me. This is what it's like to be afraid, this is what fear feels like rioting through my body. I freeze. Her hands around my neck. Spit on my face. The furies riding her. No smirking now. Her eyes are wild, flashing. This is the part where I hover above us. This is the part where I watch. I'm speechless.

It's not been my story before. For the first time I have a bruise above my eye and a handprint on my arm. Is it broken? Is this who I am now? She takes me to Emergency.

It is her story and here she is doing it again. Brutalised by her parents and then by her partners, love and violence entwined as intimately as a wedding vow. Slapped, punched, passed around for sex. Debased. This is what I've inherited. She's angry and I pay for it.

'It's different,' I tell my old friend, when she calls saying she hasn't seen me. 'We're both women.' I want her to tell me to leave, to give me permission, to make me, but she doesn't. I know it's not different, I'm just ashamed, desperate for it not to be like this.

I draw everything in symbols. My loneliness, my yearning and desire. My disappointment. My love, my hate. This is what my lover sees. 'Nobody else will want you,' she says. 'Not when they find out what you're really like,' and I believe her. On those nights she curls around me saying 'sorry, sorry, sorry,' and being more tender than she's ever been.

'Forgive me,' she asks, so close I can see the lashes curved on her cheek, and I lie and say 'Okay' but the next day I make the phone call.

My mother and my remaining sister come, like trumpeting angels.

'Go and get your things. Get in the car.'

And so I do. A sleepwalker. Wrecked.

'I never thought you'd betray me,' she says, her last words to me, and I can see she doesn't understand.

I don't see her again.