

## More than Meets the Eye

Sarah wrestled her hands into prayer behind her back and panted as quietly as she could. She couldn't believe she was doing this again – yoga was for employed people with chickpea products in their fridges, not out of work writers living off the last of their father's' inheritances. Yet here she was, about to bend forward in this extraordinary position because of a man she fancied. She knew it wasn't original, but Sarah considered herself above doing such things in the hopes of attracting the attention of a stranger. Still, she had to admit to being human – people conducted all kinds of madness because of lust. Look at Theresa, two mats over, who'd gone skydiving with a Ghanaian paratrooper she liked. She got stuck in a tree and then he was gay – it was a terrible ordeal. Sarah hadn't been strict with her mirth and Theresa had been very offended.

She rolled up and grimaced. Luckily the pair of sculpted buttocks in front of her gave her the will to carry on. The shoulders below his perfect ears were wide and muscly, his neck straight and strong. He wasn't her usual type though: he wore a flaccid beanie, had a tat sleeve and a well-oiled beard. She imagined him liking smoothies and vintage shops; meeting his male friends for coffee. There's no doubt he'd be a sensitive lover and have no problem with women having pubic hair – as opposed to Sarah's usual type, beer and burger men – the kind that'd do her against a wall and forget to take her number. She put this down to her dysfunctional mother and absent father – most of Sarah's childhood was spent with aunts and cousins while her mother exercised obsessively and her father was at sea. She wasn't parented much and when she was, it was in snatches, always a little too late.

So having a crush on her first metrosexual was cause for alarm – she couldn't figure it out. What was there to gain from such folly? A life of cohabitation and adopted children? Sarah wanted a shotgun wedding and five exhausting children, a man who was possibly a fireman and wouldn't be caught dead in hemp clothing.

She pushed back into plank and admired the lean legs in front of her. Perhaps it was the exciting bulge in his not-too tight tracksuit pants (men in tights were a no-no for Sarah; there was simply *no need*) or something to do with the expensive shiny black German car she'd seen him getting out of in the carpark. But, she suspected, it was probably because of the ragged copy of *Kafka on The Shore* she'd seen peeking out the top of his well-used leather satchel the first time she noticed him. It seemed silly, liking someone because of Murakami, but really, at least it wasn't because of or Kerouac or Bukowski. For Sarah, Murakami was as close to God as there was and anyone who shared her adoration would have to be special.

“Oh you mean Daniel?” said Theresa, wriggling into a sweater covered in tiny Sanskrit symbols. Sarah had asked Theresa who he was after two months of carefully placing herself behind him in each Vinyasa class. “Yeah, he's cute. Plus his asana is so intense. It's like he really feels, ya know?”

Sarah didn't know – her own practise was motivated by a yoga body and not much else. Sure, she tried “letting go” during Savasana but she had distinct trouble with the chanting and couldn't help but feel foolish miming ancient tunes with a bunch of middle-class white people who'd paid handsomely for the privilege. Still, she reasoned, it might sink in subconsciously and she'd end up being peaceful and pleasant down the line.

“Yeah, that's what I like about him,” said Sarah, rolling up her mat. “It's like there's more than just meets the eye.”

Theresa smiled and adjusted her beads, taking care to ensure the red stringy bits were neatly pressed down. Theresa was a devout vegan and paid-up member of Save Our Seas and

every year she'd fly off to Japan to protest against the Taijai dolphin hunt. She cared tremendously about all kinds of causes – foxes, slum kids, water hyacinth invasions in Africa; but never dropped a penny for the homeless – not that that was particularly telling as most people find vagrants a bit of a chore. Intelligent water mammals are far easier to defend than toothless Lenny at the traffic lights, off his socks on cheap brandy, slurring stories of war.

“Fancy a cuppa?”

Sarah nodded. This was one of the reasons she maintained a relationship with Theresa. Being partially unemployed, save for the odd copywriting gig, Sarah tried to make or stay friends with people that did have jobs and wouldn't mind paying for cups of tea and the occasional month's rent. They chose a table near the window and ordered. Theresa waved her on when Sarah hinted at a slice of the carrot cake.

“I think you should ask him out,” said Theresa, digging around in her handbag. Sarah noticed it was leather and Theresa followed her gaze. “Gift from my parents,” she said.

“I've never asked anyone out before. I'd feel dead silly.”

“What've you got to lose? He can either say yes or no. You'll get over it.”

“You make it sound like he's already going to say no,” said Sarah piling a piece of the newly arrived cake into her mouth.

Theresa sipped her chai. “You know what I mean. We always fear the worst more than we expect the best.”

Just then, Daniel emerged from the yoga studio opposite, beanie on, satchel over his shoulder with its enticing contents within. He loped towards the coffee shop, hands in his track-suit pants with a hole at the knee, looking scruffy and chic. Only attractive people can pull off this style, thought Sarah – for instance if Theresa tried it she'd look like she'd just come off a night of meth.

He walked into the shop and took a table behind Theresa. *Is-he-behind-me*, she mouthed, gesturing wildly with her thumb. If he hadn't noticed the existence of the two women before, he certainly did now. He met Sarah's eye and smiled. Sarah, in turn, choked on a piece of carrot cake that'd gone down the wrong way.

What followed was like a slow-motion fight scene in the Matrix, except half as sexy and not nearly as coordinated. Springing to the rescue, Theresa knocked over her chai and Sarah, seeing the hot liquid headed towards her, leaned back to avoid it and overbalanced in her chair. She hit the ground with crack and lay there in a puddle of mushy carrot cake. Theresa and Daniel's face came into focus over her. Each gasped at the same time.

"Are you alright?" squeaked Theresa, her hand over her mouth.

Daniel frowned and did the same.

Why did they seem semi-disgusted? It was hardly a way to look at someone who had just fallen backwards off a chair and hurt themselves. Sarah sat up and rubbed the back of her head.

"I think I'm ok," she said and staggered up.

Theresa gestured to her nose and then to Sarah's. Sarah had no idea what she was on about and excused herself for the toilet.

A nasty fright met her in the mirror. The impact with the ground had dislodged an enormous ball of mucous from her left nostril. It was long and slug-like; it'd snaked its way down from her nose to the top of her upper lip and sat shimmering like a small Jabba the Hut. She stared at it, horrified at the sheer immensity of it. Had she just expelled the world's largest snotball? Sarah considered herself petit and contained – how could such a thing have the audacity to make itself inside her teeny nasal cavities?

She blew her nose and stood in the bathroom unsure of what to do. Of course she couldn't go back out into the café and naturally she would never go to yoga again. She peeped out into the shop and saw Theresa and Daniel chatting.

“Shit and piss and fart,” she said, scanning the bathroom for escape routes.

She pushed a dustbin under a window and climbed on. But it was all very well getting on the window sill but there wasn't any room to swing her legs over.

“What the hell are you doing?” said Theresa, suddenly at her feet.

“I'm escaping,” gasped Sarah.

“Get down before you hurt yourself. Honestly, could this get anymore insane?” Theresa helped her down. “How were you even...actually never mind,” she said, as if recalling the memory of her own recent arboreal suspension.

Sarah straightened her t-shirt and sniffed. “I can't ever see him again. The world's largest bogey on my face – it's more than I can bear.”

Theresa rolled her eyes. “Come on, don't be like that. It was only for the shortest amount of moments. He probably didn't even notice.”

“He had his hand over his mouth, Theresa, he was revolted.”

“Well ok, it was quite big, but that's all in the past now. He's invited us out. We're going to a thing with him.

“What thing? Theresa, I can't,” shrieked Sarah. “He thinks I'm a complete leotard!”

“Nonsense,” said Theresa steering her towards the door. “You're going to be fine. You just need to start from scratch.”

Out in the café, Theresa placed Sarah in front of Daniel. “Sarah, Daniel, Daniel, Sarah.”

Daniel put out his hand and grinned with the whitest teeth Sarah had ever seen –almost Hollywood unreal. But he had the brightest blue eyes, penetrating and cerebral – it was as if he

could see right through her to the other side. He was probably an English lecturer or a bookshop owner. He had a sure, learned air about him.

“Hi,” mumbled Sarah. “Sorry about the thing earlier and the other thing as well.”

“Don’t worry. It happens to all of us. Glad you ok.”

Do great big nose fruits sliding down one’s face really happen to all of us, thought Sarah? As he beamed his pearly whites at her, she doubted any such thing had ever happened to Daniel.

“Being inert on the ground was less than my finest moment,” Sarah blushed.

He laughed. “Nerd on the ground? That’s funny. ”

“No, inert,” said Sarah.

Daniel cocked his head.

"With a “t”. Inert, unmoving. You know, *still*.”

“Oh right,” said Daniel, with an odd giggle.

He got up and swung the beat-up satchel over his shoulder. The Murakami flashed for a tantalising second and was gone.

"Well, I'll see you ladies tomorrow. Around two?" He said this last to Theresa who nodded. And with a waft of something incensy, he was gone.

The next day, twenty minutes before the allotted time, Theresa picked Sarah up in her hybrid car. It smelt of fermented cabbage and had a dreamcatcher hanging from the rearview mirror. Sarah thought of her father when she saw dreamcatchers. Years ago, her younger sister, a some-time hippy and dabbler in the esoteric, gave him one for his birthday. Her father was a nonsense man having served in the merchant navy most of his adult life.

“What’s this?” he asked dangling it by one of its beaded ends.

“It’s a dreamcatcher, Dad. Good dreams pass through the webs down into the beads and bad dreams get caught in the net.”

Her father pursed his lips. “Does it get full?”

“Huh?” said her sister. “Whatcha’ mean ‘full’?”

“Is there a point at which it’s full up with dreams and has to be emptied?”

Her sister looked horrified. “No Dad, sometimes it needs cleansing but –”

“What, you mean like giving it a soak?”

“No!” she cried. “Sometimes you’d use sage, but I can do that for you.”

Sarah chuckled at the memory and Theresa glanced at her. “What?”

“Nothing – remembered something about my Dad. Where are we going anyway?”

Sarah had dressed carefully for the outing – she’d applied her makeup minimally but taken time on a striking smoky eye. She’d chosen her favourite lift-up jeans that hoicked her ass into a perfect perk and toiled with flat ballet pumps or something higher. Eventually, she’d opted for a sexy platform wedge that gave her height and made her calves look thin.

“We’re going to a carbon emissions protest,” said Theresa, same as if she’d said they were going to buy pies.

“We’re what? I thought we were doing something with Daniel,” spluttered Sarah looking down at her shoes. “I can’t protest. I don’t know the first thing about carbon!”

“Rubbish,” said Theresa breezily. “Everyone knows about our planet’s demise.”

Sarah pulled down the passenger mirror. “I’m overdressed! Look at my shoes. This is a disaster, I can’t go to a protest about air in these shoes!”

Theresa glanced at her feet and murmured, “Oh right.”

“Oh yes, oh right,” shrieked Sarah.

“Well,” said Theresa taking a breath. “You could borrow my Turkish slippers.”

“Your what?”

“My Turkish slippers. I got them from, guess where, Turkey. They’re in the back.”

Sarah twisted around and there on the backseat, where indeed a pair of Turkish slippers. In a vivid shade of purple, toe ends twirled into the curliest curls, they could not have mistaken for anything other than your run of the mill Aladdin footwear.

“You’ve got to be joking. I can’t wear those!”

“Suit yourself,” said Theresa, shrugging.

“Let’s go back to mine quick, I won’t be a minute.”

Theresa shook her head as she accelerated and slid onto the highway onramp. “Too late.”

Thirty minutes later they parked and Theresa jumped out the car in a tracksuit and sensible trainers. Sarah leaned over and got the Turkish slippers. Outside, she looked at her reflection in a shop window. In skin-tight jeans, a snug sequined t-shirt, large hooped earrings and a pair of bananas Turkish slippers, she looked someone who’d badly missed the brief.

Theresa giggled as she fetched her protest poster out the boot.

“I’m just going to sit in the car,” said Sarah and opened the door again.

“Don’t be silly. It’s a hundred degrees and anyway, you look cute. Kind of Turkish retro.”

In other circumstances, Sarah would’ve found a pub and waited for Theresa to finish her protest. But of course she didn’t have any money and when she weighed up sitting on her own with a glass of water, fending off glassy-eyed men versus attending a protest in Turkish slippers, the latter won out by a small margin.

Together they made their way up the road. Theresa loped along comfortably holding a *There Is No Planet B* sign and Sarah shuffled to keep up – the slippers were unyielding and didn’t allow for a heel-toe bend.



The protest was everything Sarah had expected. Frayed-looking hippies, gangly teenagers, stern students and the odd enthusiastic family unit. The throng milled about, some poking their signs at the sky, others chatting and hugging acquaintances.

“There you are,” said Daniel, stopping in front of Sarah and Theresa. He was wearing a tight, faded t-shirt and cargo pants. Sarah took in his taut abs pushing against the fabric of the shirt— without his beanie, he looked like some kind of modern-day Scandinavian god.

Daniel launched his sign into the air and joined in a mild protest going on behind him.

“Save our future, save our future,” they all sang together.

Sarah stared at Daniel’s sign. It said, *You cant ear money* and had pictures of dollar signs with red crosses through them.

“I think you’ve made a mistake on your poster,” Sarah called to Daniel.

Daniel squinted at it and walked over to Sarah. “Huh?”

“You’ve got ear instead of eat, and there should be an apostrophe in can’t.”

“Sarah’s a writer,” sighed Theresa. “She can’t help being a grammar Nazi.”

“I don’t think being able to spell eat is because I’m a writer, Theresa,” answered Sarah. She folded one foot behind her calf as if the sight of one Turkish slipper would be less offensive than two.

“Oh yeah,” said Daniel. “I hadn’t noticed that. Thanks.”

He dug around in his bag and handed Sarah the Murakami, a sheaf of papers and a chapstick. Sarah looked down at the shabby copy and wondered how many times he’d read it – she’d read her own copy many wonderful times.

“What did you think?” asked Sarah, holding her breath with anticipation. She hoped not something trite – simple was all that was needed. Genius or unparalleled, perhaps.

“Think of what?” he answered scratching in a side pocket.

Sarah held up the book and he looked at it as if she were holding up a pair of dirty underpants.

“Oh that. Dunno. It’s my flat mate’s. I used it to keep the door open once when I was bringing the shopping in from the car.”

He crossed out the “r” and replaced it with a “t”, the pen held in hand like a club. He put the poster between his knees and grabbed the book and papers from Sarah, stuffing them into his bag every which way. The book bent and Sarah heard one of the pages tear – the Murakamis she read always had very thin pages – it was another thing she loved about his books.

“Hey, those are quite weird shoes,” he said and together they look down at Sarah’s feet. The sun caught the sequins on the slippers casting mirror ball reflections on the bare skin of her ankles.

“Yes,” she said and handed him back his chapstick. “They’re from Turkey. You know, Turkey? With a “t”.”

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