

Wilderness House Literary Review 7/2

Jules Archer

A Finely Tuned Love Affair

I.

It's when Tommy shoves her face-first into the sandbox. That's when she knows she'll never be the good girl. She's got sand in her eyes.

II.

She thought she'd cry when broke up with her. Wrap her fingers around the phone, punch his digits. Screaming sweet nothings in his ear never sounded so good. She chickens out.

Instead, she drinks black coffee and smokes the weed her sister palmed her earlier that day.

She winds up thumbing through her brother's old Batman comics, contemplating burning the thin, colored paper pages and then finally laughing her ass off that her ex looks like Robin in drag.

III.

It's more sleazy-storybook than romantic comedy. She's the girl, way across town, who's so, so good to him. And it's perfect when she slips out, late at night, with only the street sweepers around, doing their business.

IV.

She tries hard to be good. Only dating those with real professions like engineers or architects or lawyers. But they're all boring and she sighs into her fist during dinners and parties and bedroom politics.

At night, when they're done, she twists beneath the white, tangled sheets, her hand finding what they couldn't.

V.

He drives a truck and has a black lab that answers to the name of Georgie.

They meet at the corner of Flower and Southern, each hunting down their own version of a drink. He wants JD, she scotch and soda. He asks for a pen and she hands him a tampon.

He still wants her number.

VI.

He must be a keeper, her mother muses.

When she visits his house, she whispers to Georgie to put in a good word for her. As an extra incentive to the lab, she brings MilkBone's over, crammed into her pockets like rubble.

VII.

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It's cheesy but she really wants to scream, Yes! A thousand times yes! when he slips that ring on her finger. She doesn't, instead laughing and kissing him hard, both their teeth knocking.

VIII.

He has the kind of hair babies always clutch in their fat little fists. Thick and brown, ready for action, like an 80's movie star. She loves him the instant she meets him.

If only he were hers.

IX.

She answers the phone, late at night, under the glow of the open refrigerator door, and immediately wishes she hadn't. The woman on the other line is sobbing, taking deep, sucking breaths.

She tells the crying woman, Your husband won't leave you for me. She's quiet then, hoping that takes the sting out of things. The woman cries some more.

She hangs up the phone, resting a hand on her round stomach.

X.

Sometimes when he holds their daughter she stands frozen, ready for him to see what she knows. But he never does. She twists the band on her left hand.

Lucky that way.