

Wilderness House Literary Review 10/1

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THE GIRL WITH NO NAME

"Relationship is one of the most powerful tools for growth. If we look honestly at our relationships, we can see so much about how we have created them."

~ Shakti Gawain

1: The Girl With No Name

SHE WOKE, TURNED HER HEAD AND LOOKED at her boyfriend. He was asleep – mouth open, stubble pooling blue across his skull. She looked at the grey light spreading down the bare wall and sighed as the familiar tension took hold. Rolling over she reached down and grasped the bottle. With a soft grunt she tipped it up the right way, removed its metal cap and drank deeply. Heat rasped her throat and spread through her gut, muscles relaxing. She swirled the last of the liquid and shrugged before finishing it – letting the bottle and cap fall to the floor. She dropped back on her crumpled pillow. Her boyfriend stirred and placed a warm hand on her shoulder. Skin prickling at his touch she sighed again. Without a word he rolled on top of her, erection growing against her thigh as he pushed her legs open, mouth seeking a nipple.

When he was done she got up, cleaned herself in the bathroom and pulled on jeans and T-shirt. In the kitchen she made instant coffee, grabbed her smokes and headed out the back, hidden from the street. The rough coolness of concrete pressed through jeans. She blew a stream of smoke into the air and wondered what they'd do today.

Water gurgled down the drain interrupting her thoughts. She sniffed and finished the cigarette. Stubbing it out on the side of the steps she added it to the pile on the ground and headed back inside. Her boyfriend was in the kitchen, frying pan, eggs, butter and bread out on the bench. She stood in the open door and watched his back, movements well practiced. He placed the pan on the element, its bottom hissing as he threw in a lump of butter.

"You want eggs?"

She pulled out a peeling chrome chair and sat, fiddling with flyers strewn across formica.

"Yeah, thanks."

The smell of burnt crumbs and frying eggs filled the air.

After breakfast she cleared the table and started cleaning. She was good at cleaning. A bit of detergent and some time brought order to a room, made it right. In the bedroom she straightened the bed, fluffed the pillows like Mum, and picked up junk off the floor.

Her boyfriend slouched on the couch, texting.

"Who's that?"

"Mongo."

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She frowned, unease creeping up her arms. Her boyfriend flipped his phone shut, stuffed it in his pocket and reached over to grab a pile of DVDs,

“Don’t worry, he’s bringing the drinks.”

She did worry. Mongo was unpredictable.

By the time she had the laundry out and was in the kitchen with her second coffee Mongo arrived. The illusion of routine destroyed she leapt up and started rinsing her cup, her back toward him as he came in. Her hand still on the tap she felt his crotch press into her, his hot breath in her ear.

“Play your cards right and you might get lucky, remind you what you been missing.”

He slammed a slab of drinks on the bench, eventually following her boyfriend into the lounge.

Mongo and her boyfriend spent the afternoon gaming. She sat alone, the arms of the old chair wrapped protectively around her as she sipped her drink and watched. When they stopped to change DVDs Mongo looked up, held her eye, gave her a wink and passed a joint. She hesitated, saw her boyfriend’s puzzled look, thought *a couple of tokes wouldn’t hurt*.

She finished her can and got up to put on the stereo – Marley [redemption songs]. Her body relaxed. She hummed as she drifted into the kitchen to grab the spare drinks along with some crisps, thinking *“life isn’t too bad, when it’s like this”*. She almost managed to forget Mongo.

But, there he was, slumped on the couch next to her boyfriend, eyes half closed, silly grin. The room felt small. Pressure built in her bladder. She dropped the drinks and crisps inside the door and turned down the hall.

Pressure gave way and relief flooded her body as she let her bladder go. She dropped her head back and groaned. Mongo’s voice broke through.

“That’s nothing compared to what you’re gonna feel.”

Before she could focus her feet were gripped and she was jerked to the floor. Her head hit the seat hard. She was forced face down over the bowl. She tried to push him away but his violent thrusts butted her head against the seat. She braced her arms, smelt her own piss. Her brain reeled. When he withdrew she caught her breath, raw pain echoing in her throat as she vomited. She felt his mouth near her ear.

“I won’t be so gentle next time.”

She heard him leave, but kept her eyes closed – afraid if she opened them it would be real.

His filth grew cool and sticky as it slid down the back of her legs. She still couldn’t move. When she heard the footstep she whimpered, eyes screwing even tighter shut. Stillness filled the small room. She forced herself to turn her head and look. Her boyfriend was standing in the open door, his expression unreadable. She began to cry.

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He wouldn't meet her eye. He turned and left, softly closing the front door behind him.

2: Not A Real Brother

Today I taught Snot Nose a lesson. I told him that if he did what he was told and didn't tell Mum he could join me and my friends. He looked so happy, his snotty little face splitting into a smile. If I didn't hate him so much I would have felt bad. But it's all his fault anyway.

If Mum hadn't been so gross and got pregnant to that loser, Dad would have come back, I know it. Now I'm embarrassed to bring my friends back with Snot Nose following me everywhere I go and his dad always sitting on the couch. Mum said Dad's moved on with his life and so had she – whatever that means – and that I needed to accept my little brother and her new partner. I'll never accept them. Never.

Her new partner's a loser. That's what I call him – Loser. I can't even stand being in the same house as him. When he looks at me it's like I'm invisible. He only ever has time for Snot Nose. Sometimes at night when I'm in bed he stands in the doorway. I pretend to sleep and he eventually leaves, but I hate it and wish he'd go away forever.

Anyway, back to Snot Nose. Mum said I should call him by his real name, but who calls a kid Mongo? I can't see how what I call him is any worse. I mean like Mongo the Drongo, how bad is that? I just wish he'd disappear, and then Mum and Dad could get back together and I could have a real brother instead.

So this is what me and my two best friends Charmaine and Britney came up with – well actually, Charmaine is my best friend, but Britney's dad is rich and they live in a nice house with a swimming pool. Charmaine says she's not so bad, and besides she has lots of cool stuff.

Anyway, me, Charmaine and Britney came up with this really cool plan on how to teach Snot Nose a lesson so that he'd stop bothering us. What we did was we told him to go get his favourite teddy and meet us around the back of the garage. He couldn't run fast enough on his stupid little fat legs.

When he came back all smiles clutching his teddy bear we had everything all set up. We had dug a hole and lined it with stones just like I used to do with Dad when we would go camping and build a fire. Then we made him put his Teddy down in it telling him it was like a bed. When he did this we then told him he had to poo on it. He started to cry. I told him that if he didn't do what I said he couldn't play with us ever. We then got the lighter I stole from Loser and set it on fire. Snot Nose started to scream and Britney started to look uncomfortable – her hands covering her face. But, Charmaine told her to grow up. We then told him to go hide in his room and we'd come looking for him later, and that if he told anyone what happened we'd do the same to him.

All snotty-faced he finally shut up and went back to his bedroom. We covered the melted mess with the dirt from the hole and went to the park

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to play. Britney said she thought we were mean. I told her she didn't understand living in her perfect house with her perfect family and that he'd asked for it. She went home after that. Charmaine told me to not worry, that we didn't need the snooty cow.

After I came home Mum stopped me in the hall and asked me if I knew what had happened to my brother. She said she had found him in his bedroom crying and he wouldn't say why. I dropped my head to hide my smile and shrugged, saying how would I know what goes on in his dumb little head. She gave me a hard look, but left it at that, not that I would have admitted anything anyway.

For tea tonight we had fish and chips and when I took the last chip from Snot Nose's plate he just looked away, his bottom lip wobbling like a fat worm. I almost gave it back, but then changed my mind and stuffed it in my mouth – he didn't need it anyway. I so wish I could live at Charmaine's, or anywhere else but here. Snot Nose is even worse when he's all quiet. I hope he snaps out of it soon. He's going to be a real pain. I was just trying to teach him a lesson, that's all.

3: Best Mates Forever

Mongo was sitting in the dark when the knock came. He had been waiting, remembering the day that they met, all those years ago. At first he hadn't trusted the new kid with his sandy hair and tentative smile, but their mutual interest in Mortal Kombat soon brought them together.

It was when they were sitting in front of the TV plugging the box in to play, that their friendship was sealed. His sister and her friend Charmaine came along. He did his best to ignore their whispering in the doorway, but every part of his body grew tense at the sight of them. Fuck them. Even thinking about it now made him tense up.

The game was just getting going, cables trailing, when his sister and her friend made their move. They walked straight through the cords ripping them out, and in smart-arse voices said:

"Did anyone see the monkeys on the couch?"

"No. Did you?"

"No. Want to watch TV?"

his sister with her back to him, her voice so fucking pleased-with-itself high.

Mongo watched his mate quietly stand, walk over to the smart bitch until his face was in hers, and calmly say,

"Do that again and I'll have you, no matter how long it takes."

His sister stepped back – her friend standing there stupid mouth open – and sneered

"And what are you going to do, little boy?"

But he noticed how she was no longer smiling – her sideways glance to

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her friend. She turned away saying, "We don't need to hang around these losers anyway. Come on Charmaine". And they left. He remembered looking at his mate and the way he just plugged everything back in and sat down. He hadn't had a best mate before – not anyone. So, when his new friend spat on his palm and solemnly held it out saying "Best mates forever, no matter what," he did the same and grasped the offer of friendship agreeing "Best mates forever, no matter what."

Now Mongo got up slowly, guided by street light, and opened the kitchen door. The face that pressed close to his wore no expression at all – not friendship, not hate. Nothing. The sandy hair long gone. The boy let go of the door and wordlessly made his way to the lounge, not bothering to put on a light. He waited for his mate to join him, lighting a cigarette and taking a deep drag. His mate sat next to him and after a long while he quietly asked,

"Why did you do it, Mongo? I thought we were best mates."

Mongo exhaled, blowing smoke through nostrils, and said,

"Forget her. She's nothing but a whore. You know she screwed around."

His mate leant forward, elbows resting on knees,

"She was good to have around."

Mongo lit another cigarette and handed it over,

"Thought I was doing you a favour. Teach the whore a lesson."

The once-sandy-haired boy didn't respond. Time passed. Mongo lit another cigarette and added, "it's just like what you did for me when you taught that bitch sister of mine." He drew the smoke into the bottom of his lungs, held and slowly released as the memory of that day came back.

They were in high school, it had been just another afternoon as they sat in their usual spot on the couch, DVDs lined up on the coffee table and drinks in hand – Mongo had found his father's stash – when she came in making some smart remark about them being homos. A short while later, large box in hand, she came back into the room, saying,

"I'm out of here, Losers, and I won't be back."

She was going flatting with that Charmaine. When she left his mate had made some excuse about having to go home, and quietly slipped out the door after her. Curious, Mongo followed. He watched from the kitchen window as his mate grabbed his sister by the hair, pulled her away from the boot of the car and out-of-sight. When his mate had been gone maybe a couple of minutes she finally came out and looked over to the house, catching him watching. Their eyes locked. He felt nothing. It was about time someone taught her a lesson.

Nobody ever spoke about what happened afterwards – not his sister, his mate, or him. He never saw her again.

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4: Coming Of Age

The girl and her friend were draped over a park bench mimicking their teacher at nanny school – the lectures on young ladies who smoked – laughing hysterically as they blew plumes of smoke into the air when she noticed two guys horsing around.

She nudged her friend in the ribs.

“Sharon, check those two out. I bags the guy with the sandy hair.”

Sharon blew out another stream of smoke, and squinting through the haze said, “That’s alright. I’ll have the other – he’s well built”. She re-crossed legs to show more thigh. The girl looked down at her own baggy jeans, wished she could be more like her friend. With a slight shrug she sighed, took a swig from the bottle and handed it back to Sharon, not taking her eyes from the sandy-haired figure. When he looked up and caught her stare she held his eye, taking an exaggerated drag on her cigarette, allowing the smoke to escape in a slow stream from parted lips. He squawked as his mate cuffed him around the head, got to his feet and came over.

The girl and the sandy-haired boy saw each other every day after that. Her friend Sharon went out a couple of times with his mate, Mongo, but said he was a loser and a weirdo and so broke it off. School became irrelevant. When the girl’s aunt started asking awkward questions about where she was going and how school was, the sandy-haired boy told her she should quit school, get a job and move in with him – which she did. Her aunt didn’t seem too bothered and she was sure the Old Bag from nanny school would have smiled if she hadn’t forgotten how. Sharon said she was jealous and wished she could do the same, but her Olds would kill her.

When she phoned home to break the news there was a long pause before her mum said, “Well, it’s your life, and it’s up to you what you do with it,” and hung up. The girl felt cold and empty inside, as if she had been slapped in the face, but she supposed her mum was right in a way: it was her own life and it was her choice.

Life soon found its new rhythm. She got a job cleaning at the local Montessori, and Sharon would come around on a Friday night and they’d have drinks and gossip about what was going on at the school. The only problem was her boyfriend’s mate, Mongo, who would always be there, alternately hassling Sharon for a shag and accusing her of being a whore. Sharon eventually stopped coming round., But Mongo was there more and more, especially when her boyfriend started his night-shift. *Keeping an eye on her*, is what he said. She could handle it though – until one night she and her boyfriend had a fight. She couldn’t even remember what the fight was about. All she could remember is that it was late and they had been drinking. Mongo listened to her. She wasn’t attracted to him. It just happened. She didn’t even enjoy it. She didn’t want to be alone, that was all.

But the real problems started when she tried to end things. She refused him. He threatened to tell her boyfriend, saying their friendship was stronger than any relationship with a whore. She believed him. He said

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if she wouldn't 'give it up' then he'd just take it. She didn't fight, but she didn't cooperate either. Mongo left. She straightened her clothes and lit a joint. Her boyfriend came home. He opened the door and turned on the light. When he saw her on the couch he asked,

"What's wrong? Why's the light off?"

She took another drag, her hand shaking.

"Nothing."

He dropped his keys on the coffee table and sat next to her. He looked into her face. "Tell me."

She started to cry, afraid of losing him. What would she do? Where would she live? She sniffed – his concern far worse than any anger. Eyes closed, she said, "It's Mongo. I was drunk. I didn't mean to. He made me."

Her voice trailed off and she braced for the blow. She deserved it.

He sat unmoving. She couldn't even hear him breathe. Afraid to look she kept her eyes closed and waited. Nothing happened. She opened her eyes. He sat bent forward, elbows on knees, fingers laced through sandy-cropped hair – she resisted the urge to stroke it.

He said, "I've got to go."

He collected his keys and left.

5: Never A Boy

Slowly, very slowly, the sandy-haired boy pulled into the curb, turned out the lights, switched the engine off. The street was still, the occasional sound of a car in the distance, a dog's intermittent bark, nothing. He sat motionless. Eventually, the ticking of metal as the engine cooled broke through. He reached forward, turned the radio on. Another murder, victim knew his assailant. He turned it off. His hand hovered over the dial, reached up to tilt the rear-view mirror. Cool street-light pooled through the windscreen illuminating the man who blankly stared back. Muscles flexed, fingers released to explore stubble spreading across his scalp, then drop to tap on his thigh. He looked away from the mute image out the side window then down at the twitching fingers. With a slight shrug the once-sandy-haired boy refocused on the glove compartment, opened its door and rolled a joint. Cracking the window he lit up, drew in deeply. He remembered his mother, a woman who could be in the same room but a million miles away. His father in contrast was always there – in the room, your head, despite the fact he spent more time at the pub than at home. He remembered that day he came into the kitchen and saw his mother's swollen face, his father's angry one – he had been about five. He remembered trying to leave and his father stopping him. "Women and children. They need boundaries. That's what makes them feel safe." Father's words still hanging in the air. He remembered his mother's eyes looking down – always looking down – and how that made him angry. He never understood.

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He tapped ash on the window and took another drag. His friendship with Mongo had given him a way out, a small escape. Video games at Mongos became regular afternoon activity. When he wasn't there he would sit in the park waiting, putting off going home until it was too cold, too dark to stay out.

It had given him a sense of purpose acting as the awkward kid's minder – making sure others at school left him alone. Shielding him from that bitch sister.

He remembered her calling them homos as she left the house for the last time – he had been about 15. Rage came as a surprise. His father's words filling his head: boundaries, women and children need their boundaries. Rage led him out the door.

He would have a word, slap her around a little, teach her she couldn't treat them like that. But her fear was unanticipated, exciting. He grabbed her by the hair and dragged her into the back of the garage.

Now, after all he and Mongo had been through – days of Mortal Kombat and that one explosive moment with Mongo's sister in the garage – Mongo had taken their trust and smashed it. Mongo shouldn't have done that. He shouldn't have taken her, the one person who gave his life meaning.

They'd met in the park, her eye holding his – unafraid. It was as if she had been made for him. The girl had simply appeared in his life and stayed as naturally as breathing. And so her betrayal, unexpected, hit hard. It was then that he shaved off the hair – he knew she loved it. He remembered how, in the beginning, she used to say he was her very own sandy-haired boy while she stroked his head. He remembered that night, sitting next to her on the couch, the space between them. He remembered how he felt the illusion of happiness slipping away. She had cried, begged, promised. He had wanted to believe her.

More ash dropped down to rest on the car's framework. His mate – his best mate from when they were kids – had just told him he didn't realise she meant so much to him. How could he think that? He'd said he'd back off, no worries. He'd said no whore would get in the way of their friendship. But something had shifted. Mongo had not let up, and look where they were. He had looked the other way a few times, but now this? There was no turning back. Mongo had fucked up. And now Mongo – his best mate – was forcing him to choose. How do you choose between your mate and the girl whose quiet presence you need? He cursed and threw the butt out. It was time.

Slowly, very slowly, he wound up the window, reached forward and turned the key. He re-adjusted the mirror reflecting the empty street and pulled away from the curb.

6: Mothers And Daughters

Sharon was in her bedroom sexting a guy she had met at the pub when the message came through. It was her friend from Nanny School, the one who had dropped out to live with her boyfriend. She felt bad; it had been ages since they had seen each other. It was the boyfriend's mate that was the problem – Mongo the Drop-Kick. He really gave her the creeps. Sure, she had gone out with him a couple of times, and even thought he was quite good looking in a muscley way. But there was something seriously wrong with him and she'd soon called it off. And he was always at her friend's, hassling, so she stopped going round altogether.

She read the message. Pleasure vanished as ice prickled limbs. She struggled to take in the words. Her hand shook as she stroked long hair, the down beneath cool with sweat. Sharon was way out of her comfort zone, way out of her anything zone, and didn't know what to do. She needed help: her mum's help.

She reached for her handbag and clawed through the junk. She found the small glass bottle, removed the metal cap and took a gulp before making her way to her parents' room.

Their door was ajar. Light from the hall angled in, the sound of her father's irregular snore wafted, reassuring. With a deep breath she pushed the door open further and tip-toed around to her mother's side of the bed. Her mum was on her side, an arm flung over her dad's back, breath expelling in gentle puffs. Sharon lightly touched her shoulder.

Her mum woke instantly, half rolled toward her, eyes open, alert.

"What's wrong? What's the matter?"

Sharon pulled at her mother's forearm.

"Please come, its real bad. I don't know what to do."

Her mum frowned.

"Have you been drinking?"

"Mum please – come on – there isn't time. Hurry." She started to shake – the alcohol wasn't working. Her mum got up, put on her dressing gown and led her daughter into the kitchen.

Sharon watched her mother's back as she put on the jug, placed two mugs on the bench and methodically lined up milk, sugar, teabags – nobody messed with routine, not even Dad. Tea made, they sat at the table and sipped the steaming liquid. Finally, her mum said, "Well, isn't that better? Now, you had better tell me what all the fuss is about."

Sharon gulped a mouth full of scalding tea. She didn't know where to begin. Her hands still shook. She took a deep breath: this was no time to lose it. *The phone, hand Mum the phone, and she can read the message.* Where did she leave the phone? She looked down, it was still in her hand. She handed it over.

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Her mum paused as she read the screen. Then she looked up at her daughter. "Filth, pure filth. He's going to do what to you? Who's been sending you these?"

Sharon was confused then, heart plummeting. Flushed with embarrassment she snatched the phone back.

"No, no. No, no. Sorry." She felt like throwing up. This was too much. Fingers fumbled as she found the right message, all thoughts of self vanishing.

"This one." She handed the phone back. She kept her eyes fixed on her Mum's face – the frown deepened, mug suspended – Sharon could feel the panic rise. Her mum looked up and held her eye for a long moment, but she couldn't read the expression.

Finally her mother spoke.

"And what about the girl's mother?"

Sharon exhaled, relief flooding her body. Mum was going to help.

"Her mum doesn't live here. I don't think they're close." She looked down at her mug of tea, then back to her mum's face and waited.

"Go get the car out, while I get dressed and tell your father. Text her we're coming."

*

They found the girl in the bathroom – front door unlocked, bathroom door locked, no lights on. It took Sharon ages to convince her they were alone, that she had come with her mum and that no one else was there. Her mum spoke, "Dear, it's Sharon's mum, do you remember me? You came around for dinner a couple of times."

There was no answer.

"Well, dear, we can only help if you unlock the door... that's a good girl... unlock the door and we'll take care of you."

They heard shuffling then the lock release. Sharon looked at her mum who nodded. She gently pushed open the door and switched on the light. The girl held up an arm to shield her eyes. Sharon drew in a sharp breath. Her friend said, "It's not what it looks like."

Sharon took a step toward her, unsure what to do, but wanting to comfort. She looked back to her mum. Her mum stepped forward, gently lowered the girl's arm and stroked her face where the large bruise pooled down her cheek.

"Come with us, dear, and you can tell us all about it on the way to the station."

The girl jerked back.

"It's not his fault. He didn't do it."

"Yes, I know, dear. You can explain it all to the police when we get there."

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The girl grasped her arm, "But you don't understand. We argued because he was going to do something really dumb. I got in the way and he pushed me. It was my fault. He never hit me, never. It's because of Mongo."

Sharon struggled to take it all in, hopelessness washing over her. The girl's face streamed with tears and snot. She had never seen her friend cry before.

Her mum stroked the girl's face. "Maybe we can stop him in time, if we go now."

The girl concentrated on her hands.

"OK."

Together mother and daughter led the girl to the car and helped her into the back seat. Sharon drove, nerves jangling. Her mum's reassuring touch occasionally brushed her shoulder as she quietly talked to the girl.

At the station her mum insisted they had a female cop. The girl sat between them, the policewoman opposite. Sharon took in a deep breath and squeezed the girl's hand as the woman cop shuffled papers, cleared her throat, and looking directly at the girl, asked,

"Name?"