

The American Woman

Drew wiped the counter.

He wiped the counter as he had wiped it many times that day, and as he would many times more; meditatively - the constant back and forth of the grimy cloth over the even grimmer surface lulling the seconds and minutes into an easy passage, and persuading the lone, cheap iris of the security camera that cleaning was progressing without actually having to clean any of the actual... *shelves*. Those demons of dust and debris, spilling over with tins of peaches and spam, a freezer stuffed with bags of oven chips - and something was definitely *growing* in there. The ceiling - barely taller than him - dipped and sagged in the places where old leaks had steadily rotted the cheap plywood. The once-red floor now oozed brown oil, and stunk of old cooking fat.

The shop belonged to his Great Aunt Lynda, who he also lived with in the monstrous house next door. She believed that a day not working was a day wasted — Which he found ironic considering she had no visible job, just owned the shop which the four other residents of what-they-called-a-Village named G'oleach. Besides Aunt Lynda's house, there was Mr Jessop's, Mr and Mrs Cameron's place, and Ms Watson's - who liked to remind Drew that she was a 'Ms' and tried to persuade him to call her "Catherine" - all lined up cosily next to each other as though once there had been four more houses opposite, and they all were part of a busy street in a big city, and not placed randomly in the middle of nowhere; and even more out of place was the shop tacked on like a lean-to shed with a sign. Each of the neighbours had their little spending rituals - a 'Sun' newspaper for Mr Jessop, four bottles of cheap wine for Mr and Mrs Davie, and various odd bits and bobs for Ms Watson - once a fortnight she would buy a tub of vaseline, which Drew tried not to think about.

But today everyone had been in relatively early, so after eating the Kit-Kat that Ms Watson had bought for him - "Thank you *Catherine* loon, there's nae need tae be so *formal*" - he was wiping only until he heard the door of Aunt Lynda's house slam, and footsteps wander down in the direction of Ms Watson's. After a moment or two he relaxed, slouched over and into his little wooden chair in the corner, and brought out his phone. A few minutes later however, he heard a distant rumble.

The thundering sound grew in volume and teeth-juddering bass. He went to the door and watched through a gap between the posters covering the window as a huge motorbike rumbled to a halt just outside the shop, a rider kicked down the stand, and sliding easily off, headed towards him.

He rushed back to the counter, wondering where this rider had come from. The door burst inwards, hinges complaining, and two boots stumped in. The woman, clad in thick green-hued riding gear removed her helmet, and then untied the bandana holding up her deep red hair. She wandered along the aisle facing away from Drew, heading for the crusty coffee machine. After a few moments there came a groaning, spitting sound as coffee was squeezed through the various tubes into a little cup, and she wandered down to the counter.

As their eyes met he was struck by her gorgeousness, possessing the kind of beauty that comes from strength and confidence - she intimidated him. The muscles on her arms and legs were visible even through her leathers. She smiled, and something about her whole look screamed 'sex' at him.

"Hi. One coffee."

Her American accent washed over him, sounding so *clean*. his own voice felt... slow in response.

"£2.10 - please"

"Aye - sure"

She brought a small brown leather purse from a pocket, and poured some coins into her palm, she began counting, but seemed to struggle.

“Can you help me? I don’t get your coins”

“Uh.. sure, you just need tae get the hang of it.”

Her hand stretched out towards Drew. He pointed out some coins.

“There’s a pound, some 50 pence’s, and a 20p, I’ll gie you ten change.”

He picked out the money, and as he lightly touched her hand, an electric current seemed to pass through the tip of his finger and into his body, he looked up, met her eyes, and a voice appeared in his head, saying *‘I felt that too!’* but she simply waited with her hand outstretched, any communication unacknowledged. He opened the till. Once he gave her the money she turned and walked back to her coffee, and he found himself internally begging her to never leave, to turn again, walk to him, and hold him forever. She picked up the scalding hot coffee and took a long sip before he could warn her, but she barely noticed the heat. she looked at him, licking a stray drop from her lips. A long moment passed.

“Anything to do around here”

‘Me’ sprang unbidden to his mind, but he quashed that thought down, and stammered out:

“Uh, Th-There’s not much, but I guess it depends fit you like doing.”

“I like a lot of things” she grinned “but I’m thinking about somewhere I can relax for a couple of hours. I’m waiting to meet a friend.”

“Well, there’s like a nice viewpoint not far away.”

“Do you know where?”

“Uh, well, not on a map, but... I wouldnae ken how to direct you to be honest.”

She looked at him for a few seconds, he met her eyes, and she smiled. His body suffused with warmth, like sitting in front of a warm fire after being out in the rain.

“Come with me, I have a spare helmet.”

“Uh, I dunno...”

Her eyes flashed dark, and for a split second the warmth disappeared, leaving an emptiness, and a darkness, but before he even understood the feeling, it was gone, leaving only a fear of it ever happening again. “I’m due to start closing in half an hour, I guess I could finish early.”

Her smile widened.

“Great.”

As she watched, finished her coffee, and then donned her bandana and helmet, he counted out the money from the till, put it in the money box, turned off the lights and then stepped out with her to lock the door. She led the way to her bike. It was big, sleek, green, and had ‘ninja’ written on the side. There ended his knowledge of bikes. Strapped to the rear was another helmet, similar to her own. “You’ll have to do without leathers” she said, opening the seat to get at the strap. “But you’ll be safe with me.” With that, she pushed the helmet over his head. He had a feeling of suffocation, but then he was looking into her eyes once more, through the plastic helmet cover.

‘Trust me.’

Nervously, he climbed on to the bike behind her. “You’ll need to hold my waist” she said gently. He slowly placed his hands on her sides. “Tightly.” She warned, and pressed the starter, sending a rush of vibration through his legs. Her foot kicked the bike into gear and she revved into motion.

Very soon he had to hug her tighter, wrapping his arms around her waist and pressing his body into hers as they picked up speed, the bike pulsing beneath them, and the wind snagging his thin jumper, and suddenly he felt *cold*. He realised she hadn't asked him once where to go - and now she couldn't, with the noise of the machine she drove and the helmets they wore. Yet she seemed to know where he wanted to go, so he didn't worry; letting her warmth infuse and soothe him.

It was only a few miles: a little lay-by, on a B-road, shaded by the thick trees overhead, with a view looking over the hills lining the long valley in which the village sat. He clambered ungainly off the bike and stumbled a few paces, letting blood flow back into his legs while he took off his helmet. Turning round, he found her leaning against the bike, helmet on the seat, looking out, the wind brushed the hair from her face, and her eyes twisted into him.

'Come here.'

And his feet walked forwards. He swelled with the same warmth as before, but a little voice at the back of his head pulled back, saying *'Wait, no, this is strange.'* but the same soothing voice came back, hushing him *'shhh, it's alright. It's alright. Close your eyes. Kiss me. Kiss me.'*

And his eyelids slipped shut, and he leant forwards, letting her lips close onto his.

And it was *amazing, blissful*, how could he Ever Stop this Kiss? How could he abandon the softness of those lips? How could anyone? He stood there, and let her hands grip his sides, holding him up, holding him in place. He didn't need to worry about anything anymore. He didn't need to worry about *breathing!*

Then that voice at the back of his head screamed: *'YOU NEED TO BREATHE!'* and suddenly the spell was broken.

His chest heaved with sudden fear, he pulled back, but she held him tighter, his lungs constricted.

Opening his eyes, he saw hers turn inky black, saw the depth, the terrifying *hunger*. They narrowed, and he felt the same emptiness he had earlier - a hundred times over.

'Mine.'

He pushed back, and away from her, his body came free, but he couldn't detach his face, his eyes looked down towards their lips and found nothing but smooth skin, stretching from her cheeks to his. She had attached herself on to him, and now was pulling, sucking him in closer.

Desperately, he jerked back, but her hands gripped him again, pulled him against her and stopped him from moving even an inch; he felt a tongue - long, leathery and coarse, with a thin tip - slip between his teeth and with inhuman strength wrench his jaw apart, then it *tasted* him, his tongue, his gums, the back of his throat, he gagged powerlessly, trying to breathe, and the skin *peeled* upwards and around his head, pulling his face into a tunnel of skin that now ran between their heads. He closed his eyes, but felt her tongue slide up, then fork into two, each part stretching his eyes open, forcing him to see the horrifying sight:

A little human skull - like a baby's, stared at him from within the dark fleshy prison; its eyes a deep dully glowing red, skin drawn and thin like old parchment, and mouth gaping, dripping with phlegm, which coated the walls and the tongue which explored his face - suddenly it slashed at his cheek, drawing blood. The thing shrieked with freakish pleasure, sucking him closer to it. He tried to struggle but still he could feel his body failing to beat the creatures vicious grip, and as he did, black spots appeared in his vision and he felt faint, weak. Suddenly he sagged, and the only reason he stayed up was the monsters foul grip.

He felt the life being sucked out of him as it fed, and the horrific thought dimly struck his brain: *'This thing is going to eat me!'*

His skin burned and the vessels in his eyes began to burst, blood mixing with the tears streaming down his face, all of it being drawn away.

But suddenly the creature *jerked*, and it stopped sucking him further in. The dull eyes widened slightly; its grip relaxed and his body sagged, with his head still trapped inside. A rough hand grabbed his shoulder and pulled him back with tremendous force, he heard a *squelching* noise as - in a single movement, the things massive, slimy, gaping mouth detached and slid back over his head and he was released into the dazzling light. He fell back onto the ground, hitting his head on the tarmac, and lay there, dazed. A shadow fell over him.

He breathed desperately, forcing air back into his chest, and as his vision cleared he saw - to his astonishment - Ms Watson, standing over him, holding a double-barrelled shotgun. She smirked.

Another familiar voice shouted "Kat!"

She looked down at his feet and sauntered out of his field of view. A second later, a gunshot boomed out, ringing in his ears, and he felt a slight tremor in the ground as the shockwave went through him.

Steadily, he sat up, looking where the thing that was the American woman lay. And there he saw his Aunt Lynda, and Ms Watson, standing over the headless corpse of the monster. Aunt Lynda was covered in blood, and the gun in Ms Watson's hand was still smoking.

"Weell," Ms Watson said, "You'll have tae tell him now"

With that, he vomited down his front, and then fainted.