



JENKINS

Alan McCormick

Jenkins fucked me on a beach at Dungeness and my knees carried the indents of pebbles for days after.

I'd seen him the night before in a drag pub in Brighton, talking with some men at the bar. In a tight fitting blue T-shirt and jean jacket he was just my type.

I was eighteen, studying art at the Poly, and already drunk from a show when I arrived alone at The Mermaid that night. Jenkins told me later that he hadn't seen me come in, though I couldn't keep my eyes off him from the moment I got there. Watching him talking and smiling, inhaling on his cigarette, everything in my mind racing, telescoping towards him; but that may have been down to the tab I'd just dropped. He was so at home with his casual, sly mannerisms, the hand on the shoulder of the man next to him, the gentle leaning forward to whisper something in his ear.

Jenkins said he only noticed me when I got up to do my Karaoke Nothing Compares 2 U, my party piece, but the Sinéad O'Connor

version, not the Prince one. He said I was like a siren, but he could hardly fail to have noticed me, I was singing it six feet from his body, all the time staring straight into his eyes.

We got talking and within five minutes his hand was on my knee, his fingers travelling slowly up my thigh. I asked him about the blue anchor tattoo that lay on the soft crescent of flesh between his thumb and finger. He said he'd got it done in Amsterdam when he'd lived there in the seventies; but then he also said he was thirty-seven.

I talked so much, maybe it was the drugs or drink, but I just couldn't stop. I told him about my real dad, a painter, who disappeared in the sea off Greece, and about my stepfather who liked to chase me round our kitchen. My mum would stand there, staring blankly as if she was watching television. I described the day when she did nothing to stop him, and how I left the house the following morning, never to return. Jenkins said nothing, but his eyes took everything in. They sparkled, a crystal blue, like the sun raining on the Aegean Sea. We shared a cigarette, and kissed.

I talked about my tattoo, a heart floating in a pool of sea, a pearl in the milk of its own shell, and how it lay secreted from view. I whispered that, if he was good, he might get to see it one day. He pushed his hands up between my legs and whispered that he had a thing for the gamine. 'What?' I thought. He said I reminded him of Jean Seberg. 'Who?' I said. That he loved my ash blonde wig and was turned on by the tiny rabbit hairs above my top lip. He said he could just imagine them when I got to sucking him off, and how talking about it now made him as hard as stone. All this should have jarred many things inside me, set off all kinds of alarm bells, but the truth is it didn't, it turned me on.

After the pub we went to a club by the seafront, but the queue was too long to get in. The acid I'd taken earlier was beginning to wear off and I felt tired. The bright lights of the pier all of a sudden went grey and dim. All I wanted was to do was to lie next to him, to feel the warmth of his body, to feel his skin on mine. I was shaking and could barely walk, but he steadied me along, his arms around me all the time.

I'm not sure how it was decided but I ended up on the back of his motorbike. He had a spare helmet, ready I guess for just such an occasion. I bet there had been many others. I liked that idea; it made me feel safe, even when he drove like a demon.

I could barely make anything out as we clambered the night up into the Downs, somewhere between sky and sea. Every so often, the forced revving of an engine groaned from behind climbing a hill, attempting to catch up, but no car ever passed us. They screamed by in the opposite direction though, their lights dazzling. I don't know how he could keep control, let alone see the road. Brighton had long disappeared from view, its ragbag of urban lights and fumbled memories blown from my brain.

Then nothing, but the numbing sound of the motorcycle engine, my helmet compressing against my head. As we drove on there were fewer cars on the road, and those that were signalled themselves with soft splayed out torches of light from high and afar, winding in and out of view along the hillside bends until they suddenly appeared in front of us, eyes of light beaming, then casting out shadows on the road, blackness enveloping us once more.

We drove for ages and I began to feel cold. I pulled my body closer to his, wrapped my arms tight around his stomach, my hands

slipping into his jeans. I slid them down further and felt. He let me but showed no reaction in his body, no shudder, no little look round, just the occasional and sudden twitch of his cock. Each time it moved it made me laugh.

There were times that I thought I might fall asleep, and others when I felt like jumping off as fissions of electricity surged through me. A bolt of energy climbed through my body, the chill of night and ice on my nipples so exhilarating I thought I might never feel this good again; I just wanted us to stop and fuck.

At Dungeness, I got my wish. Nothing was said. We just went at it, roughly at first, then more gently, and I didn't suck him off once. We lay up close, he inside me, and moved slowly as the waves lapped and dragged themselves up and down the pebbles, then back into the black of the sea.

As dawn arrived, in its thin grey light, we could make out the faint yellow beams of fishing boats on the horizon. As we craned our heads we could see a small blue boat chugging out from the beach. One of the fishermen saw us. He told his mates and they waved and whistled. We were naked, entwined. I got up and stood on a rock and waved back. Jenkins seemed not to care; he handed me a drag of his cigarette and looked away.

We got dressed and walked along the beach, skipping stones, and picking up driftwood. A man came near with a dog. Jenkins spoke to him. I petted the dog, the smell of seaweed on his fur reminding me of my dog, Charlie, that I'd had when I was a child before Dad ran away. I felt sad. Jenkins noticed, and when the man left, he pulled me close to him and kissed the back of my neck.

We came across Derek Jarman's wooden beach house with its

strange natural, sculpture garden. Jenkins said he'd met him once, that he'd been something of a local character. I was eleven when he died, and I remember his film, *Blue*, being shown on television: a beautiful blank Klein-blue screen with only his commentary for explanation. My mum had turned it off saying it was 'filth', my stepfather adding that it was 'a waste of a fucking licence fee' – his words. 'It's channel fucking four, actually' – my words as I climbed the stairs to my bedroom, leaving them to their whisky and shouting. I lay on my bed, sinking my head back into the pillows to drown them out, and looked up at my poster of the southern oceans, and dreamt of swimming, swimming way out to sea.

We drank tea in a cafe in the nearby fishing village of Winchelsea. Jenkins said he'd never seen anyone put so much sugar in their tea before. 'Eight's my record,' I said. 'Six is being boring.' He smiled and gently pushed something across the table towards me. It was a stone from the beach. He must have found it when I wasn't looking. It was ivory smooth, long and beautiful. 'Does it make a noise when it goes off?' I said, picking it up. He didn't laugh, just wrapped his hands around mine, and the stone I held, and squeezed lightly. This was my moment, and though I knew he meant it more as an ironic, erotic keepsake to remind me of him, I just didn't care, I'd never felt so wanted.

We got back to Brighton later that afternoon. Jenkins said he had to work. He didn't tell me where. We kissed and when he left, he didn't look back.

Every Thursday after then, I went to The Mermaid in the hope of seeing him. I asked the men at the bar if they'd seen him. I described

him – the motorbike, the small tattoo on his right hand, his pale blue eyes. ‘But what’s his name?’ they’d say. I shrugged my shoulders; Jenkins was just a name I made up for him. Jenkins was originally the name of an art teacher who touched me at school. He got sacked, and looked a bit like my seaside lover, that’s all.

A few weeks later, I went back to the Winchelsea cafe, and walked along the beach to a spot where a blue fishing boat had recently sunk. There was a circle of marker buoys, and in the distance was Dungeness with its ugly concrete power station, shadowy against the sky. I stared at the waves and imagined Jenkins below, his slim body resting at the bottom, the small anchor on his hand settling slowly in the sand. I fantasised for a second of diving in and swimming down to join him, then thought about the sex we’d had on the beach. I felt inside my pocket for the stone he’d given me. I squeezed it hard; then threw it as far as I could out into the sea.

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