

Carnivorous Souls

The day they met for the first time was unremarkable, as days go, except that G. and her girlfriend Dusty—a name that made G. cringe when she first heard it, but that which she grew to find endearing and totally appropriate for the horse-trainer she would come to spend four and half years of her life with—were hosting a potluck, and G. had promised to make enchiladas, both chicken and vegetarian because Dusty was a vegetarian, and needed to hit the Latin market before she left the conference early to go home and prep. The conference was one of those gimmicky things put on by the school district where G. was, at the ripe age of thirty-eight, a student teacher, and where she hoped to be hired. Which was why she was even attending a gimmicky conference on a Saturday of all days. In actuality, the real reason G. was attending the morning session of the conference was that it had been advertised that not one but two food trucks would be there at lunch time dishing out free food to conference goers. She had a minor obsession with food trucks and had determined that if she attended the conference until lunchtime, she would be assured of a meal that, undoubtedly, would qualify for something G.uy Fieri would showcase on Diners, Drive-ins, and Dives. She imagined it glistening in all its deep-fried, triple-decker glory and that fantasy was enough to get her up early on a Saturday.

The day dawned sunny and fresh in the way that makes you think it's summer and not early spring. And, so, G., optimistic about the weather, wore shorts and a plaid button up and spent most of the morning shivering through gimmicky sessions about gimmicky teaching techniques and people talking about themselves in un-self-conscious ways that made everyone around them squirm in discomfort. G. imagined that the lunch would be worth it and stuck it out, chatting with an acquaintance about the difficulties she was having figuring out how to end things with her grade 11 English class. Should she give a final essay? What if they weren't prepared? G. od knows she hadn't prepared them and neither had the slacker whose class she had taken over five weeks ago. The class had lost no time telling her how boring he was as soon as he left her alone with them and, although this made G. feel immensely satisfied that her burgeoning

teaching career would in no way resemble his, she was still not a confident teacher and feared she had screwed up with what she had instituted for their “final essay.”

“It’s not that I don’t want to give them an essay,” she said to her casual teaching acquaintance. “It’s more that I think I screwed up the whole thing and I am not sure how to fix it.”

The acquaintance, who’s name G. cannot remember for the life of her and who she would not know to see face to face to this day, seemed uninterested which wasn’t too surprising since she taught math or science or something that obviously made more “sense” than *Lord of the Flies*.

“I just don’t know…” G. trailed off as the session ended and lunch began. “But I am excited about those food trucks!”

Eagerly they walked downstairs to the main entranceway of the high school where the conference was being held. As they got to the bottom, the acquaintance turned to G., and, with an enthusiasm she hadn’t shown up to this point—G. just assumed she was hungry or tired or hungover—the acquaintance leaned in, pointed to a diminutive woman with excellent calves standing in the food truck line-up, and said, “That is who you want to talk to about the English essay thing. She can help you.” G. followed the line of her finger and abruptly thanked the acquaintance. She hurried over to get in line behind the woman so that she could casually strike up a conversation and, hopefully, get some help before she had to leave to buy tortillas. Tapping her lightly on the shoulder, G. stated as the woman turned around, “I was told I needed to meet you.”

It occurs to G. now, as she stands in her kitchen and fills the coffee pot with water to make precisely nine and a half cups—eight for Jane who drinks it whether it tastes like shit or not, and one and a half for her to be blended with grass-fed butter, MCT oil, and cream in the

Vitamix to make a frothy coffee dubbed “bulletproof” but which, in actuality, was about 500 calories worth of fat and possibly the most delicious way to dress up decaf G. had ever found—that Jane probably regarded her in that moment with not a little bit of antipathy since a) she hates to be touched, b) she is not fond of strangers, or even people, for that matter, and c) she was *hangry* (hungry coupled with the anger that inevitably accompanies hunger).

To her credit, however, Jane turned around, looked her up and down, and decided that today, despite her hunger and the tired face she got from being around people and the early allergies now attacking said face and eyes, she would grant this small, brown, tattooed, pierced, lesbian (obviously) the honor of chatting her up in line for, what turned out to be, the shittiest food truck food either of them had ever eaten. Except that neither of them cared, such is what happens when two carnivorous souls who had been searching a lifetime for one another meet finally in the line-up to a gluten-free, vegan food truck.

If anyone ever tells you that having an affair is exciting, immoral, or anything other than confusing, they are lying. For G. and Jane, it was a nonstarter: they weren’t having an affair—at least, they didn’t *think* they were. Sure, Jane was married with kids and G. and Dusty had been together going on four and a half years, but neither of them was even remotely interested in the other “in that way” at all. It was just a meeting of colleagues, of a mentor and a mentee, of friends, of *good* friends, of good friends who couldn’t seem to get enough of one another. That was actually the truth, the innocent way it all started. They just really wanted to be in each other’s company. Was that so wrong?

One day in the parking lot of the church adjacent to the school where Jane taught, the two of them sat in her SUV and went over G.’s resume and cover letter. The school district was hiring and G., as a part of her teacher education, was actually required to apply for a job. Jane had agreed to look over her resume and offer any pointers she felt might give G. an edge.

“So,” began G. matter-of-factly as she opened her computer, “I googled “soulmates”...” She glanced over at Jane to see what she thought of the declaration.

“Oh! And?” Jane asked with, what seemed like, genuine interest.

“And,” G. looked at her fully now, tearing her face away from her laptop as it tried in vain to poach wifi from the school even though they were parked too far away. “And...are we having an affair?”

Jane looked amused and not even the slightest bit worried when she said, absolutely honestly, “I don’t know.”

That neither of them had ever touched, made declarations of undying love and devotion, or had even lusted after the other—although G. had, for a moment *thought* about it but she was a lesbian and this was kind of hard-wired into her—seemed a moot point. For when G. had googled soulmates it was precisely that she had thought that maybe Jane was hers and wanted to clarify exactly what the implications were regarding this by surveying the online literature to form her expert opinion. She had concluded, by the end of her research, that Jane and she were, in fact, as close to soulmates as she had ever been and this, along with the fact that Jane was beginning to become attractive to her, was troubling.

A few weeks later the situation got worse—or better, depending on how you view it—when the two of them decided to play hookie from their respective commitments and drive out to a secluded beach near the airport and adjacent to a sewage treatment centre, and go for a walk before driving into town for a coffee and lunch. After all of this, as they drove home, they happened to drive right past Dusty who had been leaving her barn to head home to walk the dogs. Dusty had not noticed the SUV since she didn’t even know what kind of car Jane drove and had zero reason to be looking for it anyway, but G. had spotted her partner of almost four and half years and her heart started beating wildly. In an effort to calm G. down, Jane took her

hand as they sped along the road near her house. That was the first time they touched and the instant their skin pressed together, G. felt herself becoming calm in a way she had not thought possible.

Nine days later, Jane and G. would decide that they wanted to move though life together and G. met her kids to see “if it would work” with them. It did. That night, G. told Dusty that she wanted to break up. For her part, Dusty was not fazed at all which surprised G.. She asked Dusty about it who reluctantly admitted the she had been thinking of ending things for at least the past year. G. was floored but relieved. Eight days after that, Jane put a down payment on a townhouse exactly one kilometer away from her soon to be ex-husband and began to pack. And on July 17th, three months from that April day in the shitty food truck line up, Jane and G. moved in together. Their bed had not arrived but their new mattress had and they fell asleep that night holding hands.

In the intervening time, although things had definitely progressed from the hand holding stage, G. would hesitate to call their affair lustful. Passionate, yes. But this had never been about lust for either of them. Shutting the lid on the coffee pot and pushing it back in place—to be turned on the next morning, right after Jane came in from her run, but before she stepped in the shower—G. thought about what might have happened if things between them had been about lust. Surely, she thought to herself, they would have fizzled out by now. Many years ago a slightly insane friend of hers had advised her that chemistry between two people was an unreliable indicator of longevity. Which is not to say that Jane and she did not have chemistry. It was more that their chemistry catalyzed from their heads, as opposed to their pants.

It had now been over four years since they had moved in together and things had not always been smooth. The realities of sharing an existence with another human being were more often than not glossed over in the beginning by the blush of novelty. Made ever more difficult when said human beings were no longer carefree twentysomethings but, rather, careful thirty- and fortysomethings. While it was true that she and Jane still held hands while watching a show

on Netflix or as they fell asleep, more often than not, these days, G. slept in the basement bedroom after she woke up to go to the bathroom in the night.

Moving to turn off what seemed like every single light in the house, G. suddenly imagined this exact same scene twenty-five years from now. Would she still be the last one awake, turning off lights after getting nine and half cups of coffee ready for the morning? Where would the kids be? Would she and Jane still sleep apart but have twin beds in the same room like Ricky and Lucy? Would they have a different dog, she thought, as she looked down at their five year old chihuahua dachshund cross. She had heard of some small dogs living until their early twenties but she had never heard of one living to thirty. Sorry Vega, she thought, but you will be dead and we will get an Italian Greyhound and name it Hamlet. Or will we? G. would be...she quickly did the math in her head...sixty-eight years old! Her mom was older than that and still spry. Yes, she concluded, we would get an Italian greyhound. We...she thought suddenly. Would *we* even still be together?

In the past four years they had almost broken up a total of three times. G. knew that she was not easy to live with and her dissatisfaction with her teaching career had not helped the situation. But they had endured—even lived apart for nine months—and eventually they had found a rhythm. Now they were back under the same roof, G. was happily in grad school working toward a PhD, and Jane was doing what she loved: teaching English and being a mom. As far as relationships go, she thought, theirs was one of the better ones. No, maybe it did not look like what either of them had imagined when they were younger. But, then again, maybe it did. When G. recounts the way that Jane and she met, the people she tells are usually enchanted by the story. G. isn't sure if she is embellishing or if it is just an affect they put on for her benefit. True she has never used the phrase “an intertwining of lives and consciousnesses” to anyone but Jane but that's exactly what it has been. Slowly, as they have grown together, they have begun to finish each other's sentences or voice the other's thoughts. When this happens—and it happens more and more often these days—the two of them share a silent smile that seems an eternity

away from the tired face and allergies that greeted G. when she first tapped Jane on the shoulder and said, "I was told I needed to meet you."