

I'm a lover

The first time I saw her, she was rubbing wrinkles out of a sheet of paper she held in her hand. She was one of the dumb kids my mother tutored. She kept glancing at me as I opened the fridge and pulled out cold chicken.

"Guy. Upstairs." my mother said.

"Excuse me," I smiled at the girl. The girl looked away blushing. She was plain. In that way – and others; she was a girl – she was the opposite of me.

She started staying longer after her tutoring lessons, and my parents didn't mind. We sat in the backyard – it was spring – and talked. I dwelled on the details of her. A tiny braided bracelet. How delicate it looked wrapped around the protruding wrist bone. I wanted to take the bracelet in my mouth, taste the dirty threads that had accumulated her sweat.

Her knees. A dark spot from a scab that left a mark, like a kitten's paw. Also, the way her hair looked wet on a hot day when it got too greasy from being outside. Or how she scratched the side of her leg and then would sometimes clean the same nail with her bottom teeth, which was disgusting, but somehow wasn't.

She was a collection of images, impressions – artefacts that I'd bag up and file for later. All those images, parts of her brought out something in me – a need to be in contact with another human being. Not just any human being: her, specifically. It was sexual, but it was not exactly about sex. I couldn't tell what it was. It felt as if there were a short-circuit in my brain. It was very pleasant. Yet, I was troubled by this need; it was as if I absolutely had to be around her all the time. I hoped it would pass. I wasn't sure if this was okay, what I felt.

In retrospect, it was probably just puberty.

It happened on the weekend when my parents were away.

She undressed me like I was a child. She undressed herself.

We lay side by side on my parents' bed. We looked over each other's bodies.

We didn't talk.

I had already guessed the outlines of her breasts and predicted the flat stomach. But I was still shocked by her neat-but-bushy mound. It was the same mousy colour of hair as on her head. She looked nothing like the hairless women from the nudie magazines full of pneumatic lips and tits.

She pulled me on top of her and aimed my dick at her little vagina. She moved her hips. She was soft and wet and hot like

breath. Inside her, it felt eternally comforting. I fell into her softness.

I came.

She laughed with delight and then wrapped her arms around me, enveloping me; she was bigger than me. She breathed "I love you" into my neck. We fell apart; she threw her arm over my chest.

Immediately, I started to develop a headache. It was the sort of headache you get from running for too long. Her arm around me suddenly felt too heavy, as if it was her leg instead. There seemed to be no escape from it.

Still, her heat and smell made my own body respond with an intensity that terrified me. I was getting hard, again. I wondered if by sleeping with her I had unleashed something bad. Was I now capable of violence? Murder? I felt capable of it. I kept thinking of fucking: her, the women in nudie mags. My mother too, or someone who was like my mother. My homeroom teacher.

I didn't know what to do but to lie still until the feeling passed. I imagined that the arm pinning me down was capable of protecting me from whatever was happening inside me. I kept still. I waited.

Eventually, I fell asleep and dreamt of being covered in thick, dense blankets.

After that weekend, things were different between us. I developed other acquaintances in the neighbourhood, other boys. I spent my afternoons playing video games in their basements, or smoking in the garbage-infested park by the river that ran through town.

One evening, Caroline accosted me on my way home. The meadow near our house was loud with buzzing insects. She came out of the darkness and threw herself at me.

I did nothing. I let her hold me with my arms at my sides like a doll. I imagined myself to be a doll. Like a doll, I waited patiently for it to be over, to be put back in my box. Instead, Caroline tried to kiss me.

I moved my face away until she stopped trying to kiss me.

"Do you love me?" She squeaked like an ugly little animal getting stepped on.

"No. I don't think so," I said, truthfully.

"Wanker," she pushed me away. She lifted her hand as if to slap me. She stroked me instead. And then, for a brief moment, I felt what I had felt before, the longing.

"I'm sorry," I said.

"Piss off," she said, her voice not meaning it. She turned away, her shoulders spasming once with sobs.

She loved me! After all, I had done a good thing. I didn't love her but I gave her love. I changed her. I knew then I would do it again. I'd get better at it. I knew now I was capable of changing someone, someone plain and insignificant like her, of turning her into a person who could light up from inside. I wanted to make that magic again (and again!) because that was what I seemed to be good at.

I became instantly addicted to it. You cannot fight addiction. It installs itself in your head and doesn't leave. You can try to control it. But it's always there, a faint whisper somewhere behind you.

She ended up dating a senior from her high school. He didn't knock her up. She didn't drop out of school to do drugs. She didn't become obese. She finished school and went to college to become a nurse. She became a nurse.

Excerpted from Guy by Jowita Bydlowska, Wolsak and Wynn 2016, with permission of the author and publisher.