

The Dead I Have Left Behind

By Andrew Lee-Hart

There was a gorilla in her bed. Thick black hair, and heavy limbs. He was at rest now, snoring slightly after his exertions of earlier. She had always liked him in his apelike sort of way; hirsute he had a confident masculinity that Rebecca found attractive but did not entirely trust. He swaggered as he pushed trollies about the supermarket where they both worked, and when he had taken her in his arms in the pub garden last night; it was as if he were asking for a kiss but knew all along that it would be granted.

He was a gentile of course, and although he was not the first goy she had taken to her bed, she always had a feeling of consorting with aliens whenever she did so. With their uncircumcised penises these young men looked rather childish and silly. But it was not just that; they were just different did not have the same background, the same understanding. She suspected that Gary would just smash through any problems and misunderstandings with his heavy paws, not even aware that they were there.

He had been a good lover, she supposed, but rather too good, as if he had it all down pat. And there had been an unmistakable look of triumph as she shuddered and gave a slight scream in ecstasy, which was all that she was going to give him. But it had been a while and she had missed the intimacy, and the passion. And afterwards as she helped him reach his climax she felt more tenderly towards him, and had kissed him passionately and looked at him almost with love as he swiftly fell asleep.

He smelt of a rather pleasant aftershave, designed to disguise his animal odours she supposed. A few of them had agreed to go to the pub after their evening shift, and Gary had shifted her into a corner; caged her with no possibility of escape. It was a warm July evening and they were outside. The pub was close to Leicester Cathedral, from which sounds of singing escaped. After a rather intense conversation with Gary she had looked up and realised that the others had gone and then he was kissing her; his thick tongue investigating every part of her

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mouth, dominating it and overriding her feeble defences.

But now at three in the morning she wondered how long he would stay. It was Saturday now and she was off work, and had things to do. She did not mind a slow breakfast, feeding him bananas, and possibly another grapple on the bed as a way of saying goodbye, but after that she wanted him to go so she could get on with her chores, and hopefully do some of her art.

“When she said/ “Don’t waste your words, they’re just lies”/ I cried she was deaf”

She stood in her studio painting, whilst Bob Dylan’s album *Blonde on Blonde* played quietly in the background. It was a Thursday morning and she had two days off from the supermarket. The studio was one she shared with a couple of friends she had met when studying art. It was not far from Leicester city centre and about half an hour’s walk from her flat. It was light, and warm from the offices that surrounded it.

Walking through Leicester on the way to the studio, Rebecca often felt inspired; the bright colours worn by many of the inhabitants, the big sweets like play-doh on glass shelves and the smell of the various spices from the numerous Indian restaurants. She could not imagine that her art would thrive in any other place, certainly not in England. She loved Leicester and never wanted to leave.

Her latest picture was a market scene; rather abstract, with swirls of yellows and greens and even some silver and gold. She knew the basic idea of how it would look but always allowed for inspiration as she painted. She could hear the noise of the people buying things; bargaining, sharing a joke. And there were the smells of food and humanity. For a few moment as it was if she were inside her picture; immersed in the sounds, intense odours and movement.

She had a break and thought of Gary whilst drinking some Earl Grey. As she had hoped he had left reasonably quickly that Saturday morning after devouring some toast. Fortunately she did not have much food in or she suspected that he would have stayed longer. That had taken place almost three weeks ago, they had met at the supermarket since, and had been

friendly and affectionate with each other, without either of them hinting that they should meet up again; and that was how it should be she supposed, and how she wanted it.

She flicked some aqua marine paint at the painting and watched it drip slightly, and then rubbed it. She had often overdone her paintings in the past, and had learnt to leave well alone. She realised that she had come to this stage. She would look at it properly later, but for the time being, she put it in her corner of the gallery with the rest of her canvases, facing the wall. Her friends Jenny and Angela both enjoyed discussing their ongoing work, but Rebecca was much more reticent, even when the picture was finished and on a wall. She lay on the floor and listened to Dylan singing about that sad eyed lady with her Arabian drum, before gathering her stuff together and leaving the studio, forgetting to lock the door behind her as usual.

“I like to see it lap the miles/ And lick the valleys up,” the Emily Dickinson lines came unbidden into her head.

“He devours me”, she thought. “He eats me alive, so that not even my bones are spared.” His head between her legs, she could feel his tongue inside her, taking her very essence away from her. Was there nothing of her that was not secret from him? She gripped his thick hair tightly, not caring if it hurt him. And eventually she gave herself up to him, and shuddered and screamed not caring who heard, or what they thought.

Lying intertwined she wondered whose legs were whose. Was that circumcised penis that lay between them his or hers? She stroked his chest, the hairs so thick and coarse.

“Thank you” he murmured. “Bet you didn’t think that would happen again”.

“Oh, I thought it might” she admitted. “I knew you weren’t just inviting me to the pub for a drink.”

He laughed and disjoined himself from her and made his way to the toilet. She could hear him piss vigorously and unashamedly. He really was a gorilla she thought. There were hairs

on the light blue sheets; dark and curly, and so many of them.

He walked back into the bedroom with nothing on; his hair this way and that on his body.

“Would you like me to make you some lunch?” he offered. I could make us some bacon sandwiches.

“Not in my house”. She said tiredly, she did not follow the dietary laws strictly, especially when she was out, but she never cooked anything that was not kosher. She swung herself out of bed, and walked over to him; he was slightly shorter than her, but then she was reasonably tall. She kissed him on the mouth, and then slapped him hard on the right buttock.

“I am going to have a shower, there are some rolls and cheese, do with that what you will.” He wandered into the kitchen still naked and did her bidding.

Dylan’s World Gone Wrong album filled the studio; one of her favourite records. She was painting a portrait. The usual arrangement; a friend of a friend’s father whose seventieth birthday was coming up. She had been round to his house a few days ago, taking photographs of the subject with her camera. He had insisted that he be portrayed in front of his bookcase and sat at a desk, she wondered if he had ever actually read any of these rather dirty tomes; they smelt and looked unused. She wanted him in front of a plain background, looking straight at the viewer, looking vulnerable and infinitely sad, but it was a commission so all she could do was suggest things.

Rebecca realised that if she was to make a living as an artist then she would not always be able to paint what she wanted to but rather create things that would sell or were commissions, and get her a reputation, especially to start with. But at least it would be more interesting than working on a till which is what she had been doing yesterday. She wondered if she could give up the supermarket job; she was earning more and more money through her art; even some of her more abstract paintings had been sold. The market painting had gone to a

Turkish café in the town centre, where she often drank coffee and ate cake. But she enjoyed the banter in the supermarket and talking to the customers. And then there was Gary; the feeling that something more might happen with him. The suspense. The wanting.

She turned up Dylan as she worked at the portrait. The books were still there as her patron wanted, but the look was not intellectual but haunted; someone facing their death as it came into view round the bend, slowly but surely.

She realised that she hated him. Astride him, looking at his stupid hairy red face contorting itself. He had come round, slightly drunk. She hadn't invited him. And she had been upset, thinking about her brother and his illness, and she could have done with someone to hold her hand, and just hug her. But he just wanted sex. Could he not see that she was sad; was he that desperate? This instinct to mate that overrides all decency and kindness....and love.

"I don't want to do this with you anymore" she told him, as he lay there, slowing his breathing down, "It is over with." It still felt as if he were inside her, but it was fading, and she was glad.

"Okay" he muttered, seeming rather embarrassed.

"Yes I think you should go. I will see you at work. But don't come to my flat again, I won't let you in."

He wondered how somebody he had been so intimate with could become so cold. He put on his grey trousers and black mohair jumper hurriedly, feeling like somebody from a sitcom. He stumbled out and down the road. He tried to whistle, but could not think of anything appropriate. His thoughts turned to other things as he walked back to his enclosure.

Although she had no photographs she had been able to clearly picture Gary, as she painted him. She emphasised the hair and the simian looking jaw. He was pictured naked, and

cold. She wanted to show a vulnerability that he probably did not understand but also his ignorance and lustfulness. She called it “sad ape” and made it the centre of her exhibition in the small Leicester gallery, which she held six months after going fulltime as an artist.

After the first day of the exhibition about a third of the paintings had been sold, including “Sad Ape”. She stood in the gallery looking at it; the owner of the gallery was about somewhere in the back, but otherwise it was empty. Dressed in blue, she was sipping a glass of wine, she had stuck to apple juice before, not wishing to make a fool of herself by getting drunk, but now she could allow herself something stronger.

She had not invited Gary to the exhibition or told him that she had painted him. She had sent a flyer to the supermarket where she used to work, but so far nobody from there had visited, she wondered what they would say when they saw the portrait of Gary, or even if any of them would bother to come. She had lost touch with her colleagues sooner than she had expected to. She had always thought she was popular and respected, but perhaps not, or perhaps they had moved on and assumed that she had done the same.

“Sad ape” was not a typical painting for her; it had almost a surreal quality about it she had never attempted before. She realised that she was very pleased with, probably the best thing she had ever completed. She had captured Gary in all his animal ways; his very essence on canvas. She stared at those rather sad but aggressive eyes which looked directly back at her. She held his gaze for a few minutes, and for a moment thought that he was trying to escape from the picture, to crawl out and tear her apart, but the feeling faded and he seemed to give up the attempt. She laughed in derision and left him to it. Turning the light off as she left.

Later, from the empty gallery, there came the sound of tapping, and ripping, and then a loud crash. Padded footsteps echoed through the building, getting faster and faster.

The End

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Andrew Lee-Hart bio: I was born in Yorkshire many years ago but now live near Liverpool where I write stories and earn money supporting people with learning difficulties.