

# Paul and Marie in the Alps

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# 1

Paul and Marie come back from skiing, I had stayed behind. As she shook her hair loose from her hat, it was the first time I had noticed the light marks on her neck.

‘Did things go well on the slopes?’ I ask, casually.

‘Paul threatened to break my arm’ says Marie and she smiles and laughs and I’m trying not to reveal too much about what I know so I laugh lightly and look upwards and away and after a pause I say, ‘Have you heard the one about the...’ but Marie cuts me off with a sigh.

Paul has ordered a drink and is glaring at Marie. To lighten the mood I say, ‘Stop me if you’ve heard this one before...’ and I pause for effect and Paul sighs.

The sign opposite the hotel you’re staying in flashes ‘vacancy’ and for some reason it leaves you feeling uneasy. Paul tells you later, ‘I didn’t threaten to break her arm’. He looks straight at you, looks away. A further beat, for effect.

‘I told her I’d choke it out of her’.

## 2

We're driving in the Alps and Paul's got Marie on speakerphone though he hasn't mentioned it to Marie. She initially called to find out what he wanted for dinner but since the start of the call things had disintegrated. She says,

'Why don't you kill yourself?' and Paul looks angry and hisses,

'You've got no friends' un-selfconsciously and he looks straight ahead and he doesn't explain further. Marie says quietly,

'Spare me' and you imagine her rolling her eyeballs the way she does.

'One day I'm going to meet someone better than you' says Paul.

'Don't you think if you were going to meet someone better you would have already met them by now?' says Marie in a flat tone.

Paul ignores this, says, 'I had this dream...' and I can tell he's starting to get upset, his arm reaches out of the window for nothing. Marie says,

'I hate people who tell others their dreams' and Paul ignores it,

'...this dream and I'm walking through this *treacle* and then I look down and my ankle is caught in this metal trap and I bend down to try to free my ankle but only succeed in making the trap tighten and I keep trying and each time it gets worse until it's digging into my ankle and it's scraping the skin and there's blood appearing as it gnaws worse and worse through my sock and I keep trying to loosen it and I look down again and this time I can see the fucking *bone*'.

There's a pause, and Marie says lightly, childishly,  
'What do you think it means?' and hangs up.

*'Nobody was the same after that summer' read the line at the bottom of the poster at the cinema where we spent most Friday evenings during the winter. The last time I'd seen Marie she'd been crying although she said she hadn't been and I didn't ask for more information. The last time I'd seen Paul he told me he was the reason she was crying, that he'd got 'carried away' and she hadn't spoken to him since they left the hotel.*

*In the Alps, Marie had sat silently for hours, occasionally taking off her sunglasses and most of the time just staring aimlessly at something just beyond the horizon. In the end Paul confided in me 'She'll be fucking fine, she's just tired... wiped out' and he'd leaned over to touch her arm and she had pulled her arm away.*

### 3

In the Alps, the second time I see Paul and Marie. They wander in, holding hands and they don't notice me at first. When they ask where I've been, what I've been up to, I casually tell them I've been away for a while so as to avoid any awkward questions. Paul asks directly if this is the sort of thing I'd be more comfortable sharing with a court-appointed therapist and gives me a wolfish grin. Marie tilts her head. I smile so as to avoid any awkward questions. She asks about it anyway.

'I can't imagine you'd be very good at therapy. It involves telling the truth'. I glare at her and then break off into a comedy grin,

'Locked away for a crime he did not commit' I say loudly, annoyingly, to break the tension. She looks confused and tells me,

'It's ok, I'll just find out from Paul later'. Paul looks innocently at me, says,

'Honey...' to Marie. I refer to it as a traffic related incident. I play it right down as just part of a community outreach sort of program.

'The therapy was optional' I'm lying. Paul laughs and says,

'Of course it is. Most repeat offenders with a history of arson, theft, assault, substance abuse get given optional court appointed therapy' and he looks at the ground, looks back up at me.

'Tell me I'm making it up' he says, and I'm not smiling.

*Marie always had this way of looking right through me. I knew she couldn't, not really, and I suspect it was related to the fact she was so good looking. I mean maybe it just had some kind of strange effect on me. And she did seem to get it, sometimes. She was incredibly photogenic, a minor celebrity, she was briefly in a band that had a one-hit wonder and she'd turned that into a few magazine shoots.*

*She'd had some small contracts up until a few unpleasant situations, some of which involved Paul. Paul had this way of fucking things up for her, completely by accident. He'd just turn up and things would start to slide. I genuinely believed that. Recently some cool new band had covered the track for which she was sort of famous, so some of the media had been reminded of her and she wasn't in a great place, which I suppose was good news for the media.*

## 4

Paul tells you about this one girl, Debbie.

'Debbie...' he says and sadly shakes his head. He says, 'Debbie was a real sweetheart. She was really rich, I mean her family was really rich; they owned a couple of shopping centres and some houses. She said to me 'You know finally I know I love you because I don't want anything in return.' And something about that stuck with me and looking back what I did was exactly that - I gave her less than nothing in return' and he pauses. 'And you know what?' he says, looking askance at me, 'The funny thing is that finally I cheated on her and *she* found out and that was what killed it' and he raises his eyebrows comically in disbelief. I say nothing, shake my head a little in sort of agreement with him.

'She was tanned...', I'm rolling my eyes. 'Pert,' and I'm shaking my head.

Paul tells me later, 'If you like desperate women' and he pauses to add in a stage whisper 'like I do', he says, 'you should visit a stripclub during the day'. And I nod while lightly furrowing my brow without realising. He takes a gulp of whiskey, holds it in his mouth, swallows. 'If you want to see *depressing*, take a look at the guys there' and I'm looking out the window wishing I was somewhere else.

*'The mysteries of a relationship' was how Paul put it but it was clear that there was no real mystery. For a while, years ago, we'd lived in the same place, and he would disappear late at night not mentioning anything about where he was going.*

*Once or twice I saw him, visiting this younger girl he'd met that I guess he didn't want me, didn't want anyone to know about. She was sort of solid looking but she was young. I swear the second time I saw him he had seen me but he just ignored me and never mentioned it. Paul later told me that Marie was frigid, her sex drive was 'about zero'. I knew he was lying but I didn't say anything.*



## 5

The times when no one talks aren't any easier. My court-appointed therapist asks why and I shrug and say, 'They just aren't'.

I'm telling her a story about the days when I spent months in hotels on business. I'm telling her about a prostitute I'd connected with a long way out of town. This girl was sort of pretty and 'drug skinny' - that sort of gaunt look from substance abuse - and I tell my therapist it went well.

'Once I stopped crying uncontrollably,' and my therapist starts writing notes, 'I asked what her name was,' I say. She looks at me. 'Ok, I wasn't crying' I admit dumbly, shrug, 'just...' and I don't finish the sentence and she looks at me coolly, witheringly and says,

'You shouldn't say that sort of thing' and crosses out her notes, makes new ones.

I'm dying to tell her that I've been following her. It started by accident but it's sort of grown into something irresistible and I have a lot of time on my hands. I watch her from my car and although yes sometimes the thoughts are sexual, she's not very attractive at all and most of the time I'm uncertain of my motivation. Last week I watched her at yoga class without her knowing. She's not very good at yoga, she's the wrong sort of shape for it.

I continue my story. 'So... this girl asks me faux-shyly, fake-coyly, 'Do I look sexy in this?' and she'd giggled and I shrugged and said 'Not really' and the girl blanched a little and moved away from me'. My therapist shakes her head a little and makes a note.

Feeling pity for my court-appointed therapist I agree to write something down for her. I promise to tell the truth and wave at her to show her that my fingers aren't crossed. I write, *'One long summer my grandmother had taught me how to read tarot cards and she'd always maintained I had a sort of gift for reading the future. Sometimes, feeling depressed or bored, I would do my own readings and would scare myself by drawing the same cards in the same sequences each time. It was always bad news'*

The truth of it was that she didn't have all the facts, she didn't have all the available information.

# 6

I remember telling her again and again that it wasn't ever going to be the way she wanted it and she would look at me and tell me 'Everything's going to be alright, ok?'. She knew I hated that phrasing, adding 'ok' to the end of a statement like that, and she knew I hated it and that's why she said it.

She already told me she didn't want to see him and I lied and told her he wasn't going to be there. She was shocked when she saw him but some part of her thought it was the right thing to do. Later that night she got totally drunk and back at home, vomited. I crouched down beside her and I moved her hair out of her eyes gently and she remembered not to flinch.

Later, from her hospital bed, she's spending a lot of time just staring at nothing for hours. She asks me why I lied and asks me if I love her and I don't say anything. In a small voice she says, 'I didn't really want an abortion'. I don't say anything. 'It wasn't yours' she says and I know she just wants a reaction.

I hesitate, whisper slowly, 'Well.. yeah.. you can't get pregnant from sucking someone off' and no-one says anything. In a voice that sounds very girlish she says she hasn't self harmed for a while and neither of us says anything for a long time.

*A distant memory of her in tears, begging 'Hold me' and I'd had to stop myself from pantomime growling that yes I'd hold her: under water. I'd paused for effect, too long. 'Don't' she'd said, 'touch me'.*

*Before she ever met Paul, Marie had told me about a Christmas as a child. She'd been hoping for a blue check dress, and she couldn't sleep because her Dad had told her that she'd been a good girl and winked dramatically. The next day she'd woken up and amongst some other presents was the dress and putting it on she had been the most excited she'd ever been and she'd looked in the mirror and it just hadn't looked right at all and all she wanted to do was change everything.*

# 7

Paul tells me a story while we're waiting for Marie. Paul asks, did I ever meet Ricardo Casey? He used to be an adult film star.

Paul looks animated and says a friend of Marie's, Ben, had accused Ricardo Casey of spending an evening in a busy restaurant whispering lurid stories, desperate to tell him about what it was like to be in "pornography", these wild group scenes. Ben had complained to Marie and Marie had laughed and said, 'What did you expect?'

Then Paul tells me that *he'd* met Ricardo Casey and Ricardo tried to do the lurid story thing with him but Paul had threatened to break his fingers. Paul says Ricardo backed off pretty quickly, and then a week later Ricardo had been involved in a really bad car accident. They were filming a scene, just a regular scene with two guys and a girl in the back of a limo, travelling. Ricardo had been blindfolded as part of the set up. The girl had just taken off her top and was guiding blindfolded-Ricardo's hands and she was cooing a little and making obscene sort of faces for the camera and a concrete mixer which was travelling in front of them swerved to avoid a pot hole, wobbled and toppled and clipped a pedestrian bridge and the bridge had collapsed on top of the car, killing everyone except the sound guy. Paul laughs a lot as he finishes and says, 'That story cracks me up'.

*The bruises started to show immediately, much quicker than I thought they would. I told her she'd got what she deserved. I told her it was ok and she said 'I know it's ok' and she'd dug her nails into the back of my hand and I told her, 'Well, don't be a cunt about it' and she'd laughed. She told me she loved me and I shrugged. She asked 'Were you like this with Marie?' and I said 'Maybe'.*

*Several years ago, one summer, I'd gone to the trouble of making a voodoo doll of a girl I'd been seeing called Sally. She had broken up with me and I had punched a hole in the wall in the apartment I was staying in, though I didn't even really like her very much - I was more embarrassed about not ending it first.*

*The voodoo doll wasn't particularly realistic. After I made it I drove some nails into one of its legs and I found out through one of Sally's friends that Sally had broken her leg, she'd slipped on the wet stairs of her favourite restaurant.*

*I didn't like her friend much either, so I made a voodoo doll of her and poked a nail into its eye. Later in the week I saw in the local news this friend had been in an accident and was now half blind. It freaked me out and I didn't make any more voodoo dolls that summer.*

*Paul confides in me later, quietly, that he knew it was falling apart and that he did nothing to stop it from falling apart.*

## 8

My court-appointed therapist asks me how have I been. I say,

'It's easier if I just say things are fine' and I don't add anything further. It's quiet. She breaks the silence by coughing and says,

'You don't seem to grasp the...' and she tails off and I try to help finish the sentence for her.

'...seriousness?' I suggest.

She's talking to me and I'm finding it hard to concentrate. She's sat in front of a window, a blue sky, and in my peripheral vision I seem to occasionally make out black shapes moving quickly. I'm on the verge of asking her to stop talking so I can figure out if I'm imagining the shapes or if they're just regular black birds flying and swooping. I would like to know for sure.

She looks at me and I'm thinking of how she looked in the rain a few nights ago. I had followed her to her creative writing class. It had been raining heavily and she'd walked across town to the class, she'd taken a yellow umbrella. While she was in the class, this time I couldn't really see what she was up to. I hid her umbrella up some stairs. The way home, watching her from my car, she reminded me of what I think a half-drowned cat might look like, sad make-up streaking on her loose-fitting face. A sad wet shape moving awkwardly along the side of the road.

I wanted to read something of hers so I searched online and sure enough she had a site which was updated every so often. Mostly terrible short stories, some of them are just re-tellings, and they're packed full of childish impressions which I guess are supposed to be cute, she has this terrible habit of ending every short story with some dumb heavy-handed moral, to drive home the point of the story. Some have whimsical illustrations and it's all sort of pathetic, amateur.

There was one story based on 'The Wolf in Sheep's Clothing' and at the end she really hammed up the part where the farmer pulls the Wolf in Sheep's clothing out of the barn and turns him into mutton soup and I wasn't expecting it but it made me feel very nervous.



## 9

She says nothing for a while, staring blankly out of the coffee shop window. She says, 'My friend Lou came up with something, she said she'd figured it out'. This gets my attention. Lou's an idiot, pretty much.

'She said I'm not capable of letting anything or anyone love me back until I work this out'. And she pauses for effect. I go right ahead and ignore her and say nothing, look away.

*Marie and I only really spent a few weeks together and I guess she enjoyed it more than I did. There were good times but I didn't really feel anything, there was no real connection. I enjoyed the attention of someone who was so good looking. I enjoyed fucking her and I guess I could sense the looming presence of something cold approaching, some familiar horizon closing in, which I've never really minded.*

*Paul asked me, do you remember the time by the beach, in the cramped beach house. I stopped listening because all I can think about is fucking some girl I'd just met there, then later that week fucking some other girl who I'd also met there. While this second girl had been jacking me off I remember hearing Paul through the walls asking Marie, 'Can't you ever forgive me?'. And I remember really trying to focus on this girl because it sounded like someone was crying*

*and it had been impossible to tell who and after a while I'd heard Marie say 'I'm staying with you aren't I?' and then there was no crying for a moment and I quickly refocused before slipping the strap of this girls top down and she's*

## 10

My court-appointed therapist looks terrible today and I ask her if she's on her period and she looks up at me and doesn't smile. She tells me, 'A flying start today' and makes some notes on her pad.

I tell her, let's make this more interesting. She looks at me warily. I say, how about you let me read your notes for a change and she sort of laughs. She says actually she's been preparing a report and to give her a second. I swear I see six black ominous shapes race past her office window, one after another.

She pulls out a printed piece of paper from her desk draw, it's a draft she says. She pulls a black marker and proceeds to mark through the half page of written text with the black marker, redacting it. About a minute later she's finished and she hands it me and I read:

'Subject is \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ and is still not \_\_\_\_\_ to \_\_\_\_\_. Example. P was reminded of \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ and replied 'She could \_\_\_\_\_'. Constant cause for \_\_\_\_\_ see file \_\_\_\_\_ parts \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ from \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ for useful case study of \_\_\_\_\_ or \_\_\_\_\_. Example: \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, results to sexual deviance survey \_\_\_\_\_ showing a \_\_\_\_\_ worryingly high degree of \_\_\_\_\_ possible \_\_\_\_\_, otherwise typical arson-based \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ tendencies \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ to \_\_\_\_\_ when \_\_\_\_\_ frequently \_\_\_\_\_ also when \_\_\_\_\_ or \_\_\_\_\_ and shows pride, \_\_\_\_\_ addiction, other addictive traits \_\_\_\_\_ minor gambling \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ with \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ linked to \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_ vis low mood and \_\_\_\_\_, refusal to accept \_\_\_\_\_, lack of \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_, results to ethics survey are also a major cause for \_\_\_\_\_'.

I hand it back to her and say, 'So it's good news then?'

## 11

Paul tells me about when he was younger and he ended up cheating with 'this one chick' who started out as his best friend's girlfriend. She had helped get Paul a job at the restaurant she worked at. One time late at night she had crouched down to pick up an empty pack of cigarettes off the floor and in a low voice he'd said 'Spread your legs, so I can see up your skirt' and she had, so that he could see up her skirt. He says he felt guilty about it now, felt bad for his best friend, her boyfriend, but at the time that had seemed beside the point. It hadn't stopped there but overall things hadn't lasted very long.

Paul says 'the problem with Marie is' that 'she's really frigid' and 'wants everything on her own terms' and he sighs and tells you it's an 'ongoing issue'. I don't tell him it's just with him that she's like that.

Paul tells me the first time, he left her after a year as he said it was 'too depressing'. Later on when he's drunk he says sadly, out of nowhere,

'One day she just vanished'. I ask him, 'Marie?' and he says, 'No'.

Paul ignores this and carries on and says it's worrying sometimes speaking to people because this one girl, this one time, he'd told her all sorts of secrets and stories and she'd listened and smirked in all the wrong places and they had never mentioned it again and then

when he'd broken up with her she'd told the Police who reluctantly got involved and it was all a bit nervous and they'd taken some computer equipment of his for 'analysis' and even though he'd never heard from them again, he never got the courage up to ask for it back.

Paul says Marie's brother, Richard, has been 'making accusations'. Paul says Richard is 'siding with Marie'. Paul tells me how, in the city centre, Richard had come over, with his two young kids in tow, and had started making demands. Paul says it was funny, because Richard's wife had phoned him and he'd turned away to answer the call, the two children shyly holding onto his trouser legs. Richard finished the call, something about carrots and peppers and skinless chicken, and prepared to say something.

Paul told me he'd said to Richard, 'Let me stop you right there' and had shaken his head, and said firmly, 'Get lost' and looked at Richard and had gently touched Richard's forearm. The mood had shifted. Paul told me he'd grinned at the kids, raised his eyebrows, shrugged his shoulders. Paul told me he had waved him away and Richard, looking visibly shaken had walked off, his two kids asking him who the man was and if they could get an ice-cream.

## 12

Through the walls I hear a crash and the lines, 'No no no no!', 'Honey!', 'I didn't do anything I didn't do anything!'. A pause and a 'Honey please!'.

When I see Marie and Paul the next day they're holding hands and I don't even look up. They sit at the same table I'm at anyway and I'm saying, 'How's things?' and Marie goes to take off her sunglasses and before Marie can say anything Paul says quietly,

'Don't say anything' to Marie. 'You're not a great actress'. I'm making excuses so I can leave them as I'm not really in the mood and I try to catch the waiter's eye and that's when I hear Paul mutter something to Marie and I'm pretending not to listen and he ends, '..so don't worry' and Marie looks away and says firmly, 'I'm not worried'.

*A half memory of girl I once spent a few weeks with who pleaded with me, 'Beat me up while you fuck me' and I told Paul and he'd asked 'How did you beat her?'.*

*Staying at Marie's I'd been innocently rifling through her things and found a list, in a childish scrawl, 'Tissues, Apples, Cream Cheese, Find something/someone'*

# 13

'I'm not going to change my mind' I just about manage to mumble. Paul says, 'This isn't exactly something I want either'. Marie says, 'What the fuck is wrong with you two?' and giggles.

Paul says, 'He's...' and pauses and no one says anything for a long time. I sigh.

'If you'd told me this before, at least I could have had some time to process it', I whine.

Marie scowls. 'What difference would that make? I mean, *really*' and I have to be honest because all things considered it wouldn't exactly have made any difference.

'I...' I start and then don't finish. Paul pitches in to help.

'It doesn't have to be... terminal. You know you *could* see this as a fresh start'.

'I don't want a fresh start. I hate fresh starts' I'm saying.

Marie lights a cigarette, doesn't miss a beat,

'You hate everything'.



# 14

'What have you been doing?' she asks.

'I don't know', I manage to mumble. My court appointed therapist ignores me and launches brightly into a story. She says,

'This one client, we gave him the initial mental health check and he ticked 'does not apply' the whole way down the list, every question. But I'm so smart and I got right on it, I saw right through it'.

I pause. 'You are', I say, pausing again, 'very smart'.

It's warm in the office and she moves to take her light jacket off. As she does I can see a small forest of scars on her left wrist. She notices that I see this and moves to cover it with the sleeve of her sweater. As she does that, the other, right sleeve moves up and I see a small faded tattoo and I can make out the name 'Jack' in a sort of floral script and I'm wondering who Jack is, where he is now and I really want to ask her about him. I guess I just want to find out more about who she is. I say to my therapist,

'I want to fuck your brains out' and she flinches and says,

'This isn't progress'.

Feeling contempt for my court appointed therapist I agree to write something down for her. I write, '*I want to fuck your brains out*' and I pass it to her and she reads it grimly and rolls her eyes, screws up the

paper and throws it in the wastepaper basket and she just sits there and looks at me.

*She asks when did it start and I say I don't know. She asks has it been like this for a long time and I say I'm not sure. She asks how I feel and I tell her, tired. She says am I ok with this and I tell her it's been worse. She looks at me and says what is it you want to get out of the sessions and I say nothing, shrug and look away.*

I pick up the paper again and start writing. *'The first fire was an accident but I guess I should have seen it coming. The times I've walked out of jobs accused of stealing, and all the shoplifting charges: not guilty. I did prey on some pensioners but it wasn't entirely my fault. The sexual assault charges are largely accurate. I've served my time and everything is different now. Yes I've stolen cars and yes I've cheated people, but mostly without malice. And yes the time I spent as a part-time pimp, stripclub owner and pornographer doesn't exactly look good on paper, but it wasn't part of some big plan, just something I got caught up in at the time. And I cringe to even describe it as 'pimp' because at the time it wasn't like that, or didn't seem like that at all and we all made good money. Like the kidnapping - barely worth mentioning and it was only when her Dad found out that it all went south, the girl had been cool with it all.*

*The joyriding charge was fair, it wasn't the first car I'd stolen. The guy owed me money for some stolen goods he was meant to be selling to a contact. I mean again it sounds more serious than it was, it was just another set of events which didn't quite pan out as I'd expected. The way we got caught was we stole this guy's car, I smashed it into a tree in a park showing off to some teenagers.*

*So we got them to help us push it in the river and it was cool. The mistake was, this guy had a second car and we stole that too, except a) he filmed us taking it and b) it wasn't his car, it was his mum's. We trashed the car and set it alight and when it was burnt we pushed it off this cliff but the video evidence was enough.*

*My second major fire, I'd have to admit I was impressed by the sheer forces involved and it reminded me of the first fire which was pretty cool.*

*Drug dealing isn't really dealing when you're just hanging out with people and you happen to be better connected, I wasn't hanging around outside of bus stations or schools or anything. The time I ended up living in a car propped up on bricks outside my parent's place was pretty cool, I was gambling a lot and winning, hit a great streak, and then I got in pretty small but heavy debt with a few different people, and it was around that time all the selling stolen goods charges came from. So it wasn't exactly my fault either.*

*The third fire was also pretty cool but was over too quickly. Which is why I ended up with an unplanned blaze number four on the industrial estate next door, which was the one where they caught me alight, doused in primer. When I'd been nervously climbing on a bin, setting up, I hadn't realised I'd soaked my jeans in industrial primer. When they found me I was dancing around trying to shake off the flames. I have this dumb vision of me as Rumpelstiltskin trying to stamp his foot through the floor, shaking off the flames as first the fire engines then the police turned up.*

*They connected me to the other fires, I'd done the same set-up each time. All the fires were on light industrial estates, I'm not interested in torching civilians, plus, the chemical inferno sounded good, sort of impressive explosive sounds which I liked. I'm not planning on any more fires, it's pretty boring to me now.*

*It might seem like I've got some sort of bad luck but you have to remember there's a lot I haven't mentioned, there were a lot of pretty good times and I want to stress that. Only an idiot would believe any of the above. I want to fuck your brains out.'*

*I've been stalked my entire life by the thought that the worst is yet to come.*

# 15

Paul says, it's amusing to him no matter how badly he thought of some girl he'd still have to admit he wanted to fuck her. Paul once told me, he fucked her because she's the biggest girl he's ever going to have the chance to fuck, he'd said, who *wouldn't* do it, under those circumstances?

I'm looking out of the window of the car, watching my therapist moving behind her curtains and cooking something cheap, something awful.

I don't see the Policeman wander over until it's too late to do anything and he says 'Can I see your driving licence Sir?' and I wind down the window and I pull it out, hand it to him and he says, 'Paul Cooper?' to me and I'm saying,

'S-sure Officer, what is it?' and he says,

'You're parked in a No Waiting Zone' and points at this sign that he thinks I should recognise and I sigh and turn the key and I'm not hanging around.

As I pull away he waves me back, to hand me the driving licence which I'd forgotten and that's when my court-appointed therapist comes out of her front door with a black trash bag and she sees me

and scrunches up her face quizically and says,

'Paul?' and I'm still leaving so I just sort of frown and wave at her and drive away, and I'm rolling my eyes, and I'm checking the rear view mirror and I'm saying outloud to myself, '*Really? Was that all really fucking necessary?*' and I'm shaking my head.

# 16

I'm waiting at the airport and someone's left their copy of some tabloid magazine and it's folded open and I recognise the picture of Marie and she looks great, healthy and tan and from a distance I skim read that recently she had ended up in hospital after someone had punched her so hard in the face that her tooth had punctured her cheek.

There's no one else around and I sit down next to a cold pillar, subconsciously press against it. I'm waiting for someone, a special someone. My court appointed therapist finally arrives through one of the exits, as usual she doesn't know I'm here. I duck back and put my sunglasses on even though it's dark outside and I move to follow behind her. I make a mental note that I really should find out why she's always last off a plane whenever she visits her parents, because whenever I fly, it takes me much less time to disembark - I'm always one of the first out. I guess I just want to help.

Later that week, after I've ignored a few of his messages, Paul calls and asks how are things and what was the name again of the type of music I'd played in the car that one time. I tell him, 'I saw Marie' and he says nothing for a while then says,

'It's just not interesting to me' and hangs up.