

I LIKED HER

Alan Beard

Annie I called her, her name's Joyce. Skin like a coconut. Met her down there in the wee shopping centre. I'm not Scottish. A blown-down bike outside Tesco Express brought us together. She grabbed me as I passed. Spray of wet from the spinning wheel came with her touch.

She used to come round and I didn't mind that. She called twice. Shared cups of tea before the business. She shaved her cunt but not her legs. In mid-fuck once I asked her to marry me. I'd forgotten what you're supposed to say. She said she was already, her thighs shaking, her ringless hands behind her head. She listened to me talk after, flicking ash into the sink she leant against, leaning this way and that to give me views of her tits.

Used to see them, he carried a motorbike helmet but I never saw the bike, and flames were tattooed along the fingers that grasped her arm. From my flat, in the gap beyond the ashy roof of the social club, they'd pass by. Behind her tits she was flat and hard as the tower block she came from. The next but one to mine. I liked her.

OUR FATHER WAS FAMOUS FOR KEEPING THE HOUSE COLD

Luke Whisnant

so the day he left my mother he gave her an electric blanket. ‘Her name is Kate,’ he told her; he’d gotten Kate’s phone number by rear-ending her in the In-N-Out Store parking lot. Mom slapped him, then helped him make up their erstwhile bed with clean sheets and the new red blanket, the wires of which he’d snaked between mattress and box-spring while she was slamming doors downstairs. They switched it on and lay down together to test it out. After, they spooned in the cold bedroom, listening to the blanket click on and off and on again, and then Dad got up and dressed and started packing his black suitcase with old underwear and socks. Nine months later my sister was born, feet-first; I followed four minutes after, and when we were ten our mother choked down a handful of blue pills, turned on her side, and pulled the unplugged electric blanket over her face. We moved in with Dad, and Kate drove us to school in the mornings and later sang drunkenly at my sister’s teenage wedding and after nineteen years left our father and went back to her first husband, a retired airport security guard. My sister wrote erotic poems that she read me over the phone and plays that were never performed, and I hitchhiked across the country twice, sleeping outside in every kind of weather. When my father calls me now from assisted living, he says his room is too cold. He says it’s some kind of experiment, they’re trying to freeze his internal organs, they’re trying to kill him. He says he can’t remember anything anymore, his brain is frostbitten. He wants me to tell him – as if I would know – what happened to that electric blanket.