

## Not About Love

*Amelia Walker*

*Est-il possible d'éprouver une attirance purement physique pour l'esprit d'une personne? Le sexe peut-il être totalement dénué d'amour? Qu'est-ce que l'amour, de toute façon? Peu importe. Ce n'est pas une histoire d'amour. Vraiment pas.*

"Another drink?" asks Sal.

We're sitting in the Jade Monkey, drinking cheap wine and listening to noise. The place reminds me of a David Lynch film... or a film by students copying his style. It's simultaneously pretentious and kitsch, but at least we're not likely to see anyone we know.

"Yes thanks."

Sal heads off. I feel people staring at me. They've been doing it all night, so blatant I can hear them thinking.

*Twenty? Twenty-five? She can't be older than that. But look at him! He's got to be forty. At least. And he's short. And fat. Father figure complex? Smack, maybe?*

I have to admit, Sal's everything my type isn't. I wonder what these people would say if they realized he's also married, and with a six year old daughter.

Even I feel a little shocked, when it's worded that way. But like all situations, ours is different. If Sal had never cheated on his wife before, I'd feel bad about it. But I know he has, many times. Even his wife had an affair with him, when he was with his first wife. Personally, I think she's an idiot. I'd never fall *in love* with a man like Sal.

Past that initial reaction, Sal being married is one of the best aspects of this... thing (I hesitate to say relationship). Almost as good as his vasectomy. I know he'd never leave his wife, although the two of them long ago stopped even kissing. Leaving her would mean leaving the only woman he's ever truly loved. His daughter. For me, this is convenience. It means there's no chance of what we have ever turning into anything more than what it is — pure, bottom row of Maslow's hierarchy, flesh greedy fucking. It's something Sal and I both need. He doesn't get it from his wife. I don't want it from a steady relationship. Neither of us can be bothered with the hassles of one-nighters.

"Which one are you looking at?"

I hadn't noticed Sal return, nor realized I was staring straight at a group of girls. Now he mentions it, I notice they are all attractive.

“The one on the left, with the short hair.”

Sal nods.

“We’ve got the same taste.”

I sip my wine and study Sal. He has pale green eyes. I’ve never seen anybody else with eyes quite that shade. But beyond that, I really don’t get it. For a purely physical relationship, I might have picked somebody a little more... well... physical.

*But he’s a good writer.* A voice reminds me.

Sal is an amazing writer. I’ve known him for two years, through spoken word pub gigs. The first poem I ever saw him read was about his father’s death. I wanted to cry. Most of his other poems are about drinking and sex, but not in a tacky or crowd pleasing way. He simply tells the truth, presents living as it is, desire as it is, pain as it is. He’s not scared to laugh at himself, either, to admit he’s utterly pathetic. I respect that.

“Do you think it’s possible to have a purely physical attraction to somebody’s mind?” I ask him.

“I wouldn’t want to be with you if you weren’t intelligent”, he replies.

“Intelligent?” This surprises me a little.

“There are plenty of cute girls around, but they’re boring.”

We sit in silence for a while, watching the plastic plants in the corner flash different colours as the light dances over them.

“This is dangerous”, I tell Sal.

“What?”

“This... out, together, talking.”

“And fucking isn’t?”

“One of her friends could see us.”

“Danielle?” The name makes me cringe a little. I never use it. When she has a name, she becomes real. “Her friends would never come to a place like this. And besides, she knows, I’m sure.”

“Has she said?”

“No. But she must.”

“It’s still dangerous.”

Silence again. I don’t want to look at Sal, so I don’t know whether he’s looking at me.

“Hey, there’s Pete.” Sal’s spied an old friend and is off in a flash. I sit alone, thinking how you can’t go anywhere without running into somebody, when through the entrance comes Jordan. He spots me, and before I have a moment to think, he’s here.

“Penny. How are you?”

He has an accent. I’ve never been able to work out what it is, but like his long hair and dark eyes, it sings of far away flavours, exotic mysteries.

“Me? Good... good... and you?”

“Quite good. I’m out alone tonight, but hoping to have fun anyway...”

He smiles at me, so blatantly seductive I have to fight hard against the urge to giggle. If ever I wanted to sample a tall dark lover, my chance is now. The thing is, I don’t think I do. This man is in front of me, screaming sexy, but I realize I don’t want him.

“Let’s go.” It’s Sal, back in a flash. His stare is hard, the reflection from one-way glass.

“Nice talking to you.” I wave goodbye to a somewhat surprised Jordan.

Outside the air is cold. Sal walks quickly, saying nothing. I laugh and tease him.

“That’s one way to get your attention.”

He stops, then laughs dryly.

“You little bitch! You did that just to control me?”

It’s not fully true, but I nod, happy to claim any form of power. Sal’s pretending to see the funny side now, but beneath that I can see some of his anger is real. I can’t tell, though, whether it’s directed at me or himself or both of us. It frightens me a little. After all, why should he care? We’ve always agreed there’s no commitment (that ugly c word). He’s married, for crying out loud. And it’s fine for the two of us to look at other girls together — but the second I talk to another man...

I keep laughing. It makes things easier.

“You’re so easy”, I tease poor Sal.

“Easy?” He grabs me by both wrists and presses me against the wall. “You’re a mean bitch”, he growls.

“And you love it.”

“I do.”

Silence. His eyes are wide, unblinking.

“No you don’t”, I whisper, suddenly terrified.

Silence again. He lets go of my wrists and then laughs.

“You’re right. I don’t.”