

BLOOD DRAGONS

ROSEMARY A JOHNS

Ruby and I swaggered through the shadowed streets, towards the promenade and Palace Pier - her in crimson silk, me in military Great Coat - two creatures from another world and time, unnoticed by these petty First Lifers because we weren't painted in the colours of their tribe. We twirled each other round, dancing in the carnage and the flames.



FANTASY REBEL

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For A.

'There's nothing but snowflake patterns.'

King James Bible – Leviticus 17:14

‘For it is the life of all flesh; the blood of it is for the life thereof; therefore I said unto the children of Israel, Ye shall eat the blood of no manner of flesh; for the life of all flesh is the blood thereof; whosoever eateth it shall be cutoff.’

1

You know those vampire myths? Holy water, entry by invitation only and sodding crucifixes?

Bollocks to them.

Because you know what? There are no monsters and no immortals. There's just us: the Lost.

Somewhere deep inside, you know it's true.

I can see a glimmer Kathy - give me something - the slightest flicker in those glazed blue peepers.

You remember me today, don't you, love? At least you *used* to and wouldn't need me raking it up. If I can just get this down, or if you can just remember, I won't lose my last thread of humanity. Sanity. Otherwise there's no one with the pretty pictures in their mind but me. Of what I've seen. Or what I've done.

Do you even remember my name? *Your Light*?

You laughed when we first met and said my parents must be *right hippies*. You were direct like that: I loved it. But I couldn't explain. Not then.

How many months since you've looked at me
and said my name? Looked at me and known me?

After all these decades, you're lost. And I'm
alone.

Ilkley Moor's bleak when you look out at it under
the crisp snow of winter; sod it, it's bleak when the
sun beats down in the broiling heat of summer too.

Not that I've seen more than photos of the
daytime. I don't fancy bubbling to a stinking pool.

Yet now, when I can't even see the heather, just
rolling mounds of snow, which cast blue shadows
and make burial mounds of the hills (the boulders
the gravestones), it's bloody bleak. So the tourists,
dog walkers, day-trippers and climbers, don't come
out here in the freeze of the dead months.

Except we're here because I wanted to bring
you somewhere familiar, which you'd recognize: for
the end. For *your* end.

The docs say – oh, you know, so much
bollocks. They're wankers, the quackmongering lot
of them.

This last decade, as you've slipped, and I've had
to watch, useless as a...

Dementia they call it. They always have a
pretty label, don't they?

Dementia.

Box it in. Mask the nasties with their lists and
tick boxes. I reckon the physicians of this age figure
themselves dead brainy fellows.

So I brought you back here to Ilkley Moor, in
the howling wind roar of December, because I
wanted you to feel at home. I hoped you'd
remember one last time.

Only now I realise all it's done is haunt. And we've a hell of a lot of ghosts clamouring on our backs.

I've a Soul to haunt, the same as you. Of course I died (hollering, I don't mind admitting). Yet when I was reborn into my second life, my Soul was stuck to me. They're fat, mewling consciences, until we choose to carve them away, slice by crimson slice, with every First Lifer we slaughter. But others? We tend to our Souls' shreds, chaining the pulsing migraine hunger.

We're individuals, get what I'm fixing at? More so, because after election, every emotion is amplified: the good, along with the bad.

It's not as if freewill is your headline act alone. We Blood Lifers decide the body count, how fast the tune plays and how deep the darkness bites. Because little by little – year by year – it consumes us all eventually.

It was you who taught me that.

I stand most nights in the damp of our whitewashed stone farmhouse, where everything has been changed from when it was first our home. The shell, however, remains. No one can gut the core of a house. Its beams. Walls.

Soul.

I can taste our life still throbbing warm.

I stare out at the rugged wilderness, which is shrouded in the haze of mists that threaten to swallow us, because I don't have the balls to turn and watch you.

To see you rock backwards and forwards in the crumpled mess of our bed, wringing your hands until the nails rip the skin, like there's something dirty you can't clean off.

That should be me, love. It's all on my hands.
Not yours.

On those nights, I know you're lost in the past - not with me - when you say one word, like a bloody mantra: 'Advance, Advance, Advance...'

Why can't I wash it clean for you? And I'm too much of a coward to turn round.

So this - here - is me turning round. This. Here. Now.

I can't change the past. I never thought much about it before. I never had to. I was always the one, who lived in each fleeting second, high on its intoxicating splendour.

You never got that. Not like Ruby.

Sorry, that's a jinx just there. The blood talking. Calling to me. But now I see the tracks left behind are more than the picture perfect moments in my brain; not clinically still, but blurred bloody lines.

I want to share them with you. Fully, unabridged and unedited. All the nasties and wankery. The truth (as far as that exists), before you no longer understand me. I'm writing it down because then I can cut it straight. How I want you to hear it.

If these are the last words I ever say to you, then I need them to be right, so let me get it in at the start: I love you.

From the moment I saw you...no scratch that...from the moment I *heard* you, I loved you.

All right, there was awhile I reckoned I hated you, and *you* thought I was a pillock and a bad boy Rocker too, let's not leave that out. Have you forgotten what a hard time you gave me? But these last five decades..? Although of course to you our love was forever. Yet to me? It flamed brighter than

the bloody sun, but it's not forever because that's so much longer than you'll ever know.

Your First Lifer world doesn't get that theirs is only the starter, not the main. None of us know what's for dessert. I fear I haven't been a good enough boy for that and I wager I'm most like to be sent to bed without any.

We tell ourselves lies, however, to maintain the pretence of safety, as if the folks in our civilized country wouldn't burn the world around their ears if they missed just three square meals.

So you see, if anyone but you reads this book, then that instinct for self-deceiving self-preservation (along with every other fib in the web of status quo that bind First Lifers), will kick in.

Still reckon they'll believe? Think this more than fiction?

You lived it. Breathed it. Bled it. I want this to bite to your Soul. But to them?

It'll appear merely ink stains on a page. Not the howling of a vast new world opening up in the shadows.

2

Rough leather motorcycle jacket, studded and faded, decorated with a worn gold *Ace of Spades*, collar firmly turned up, over a black t-shirt, jeans and tall motorcycle boots, topped by a light brown pompadour, tamed with Brylcreem.

‘That’s what you kids are wearing now, is it?’ Your new carer for Wednesdays was studying me, like she’d just revealed a manky specimen in your bedpan. ‘Latest fashion?’ Her gaze curdled; you could tell it would’ve done, even when she was half a lifetime younger and not dried up with defeated dreams.

Karen the little thingy on her blue overall read. But after years of an endless parade of day to night handovers, these birds blurred into a day of the week, rather than a name.

I grinned, as I slouched against the wall. ‘No, luv, these’ve been around awhile.’

Wednesday flinched at the *luv*. Babes to this world, you First Lifers bristle at words, which are deemed outdated, as if they had more power than

echoes. I'm too old, however, to change more than I already have (and that's more than most).

How about a bit of bloody appreciation?

Wednesday was shuffling around your bed, as if checking for hospital corners. Now I knew she was pissed because no carer ever does that. They stick to checking your pills, pressure sores and signing timesheets, before dashing out of the piss stink of this room as fast as they can.

I try to cover the old woman smell with your Chanel No. 5. You'd have bit my bloody head off for spraying that around mist-like, back when you could speak. But the sweet scent of you darling, it's faded, as if you're withering. I can't even smell the blood in your veins. It's like you're being fossilised inside out, every day one drop less.

Are you still inside there?

As I watched Wednesday's disapproving rearrangement of the sheets, I dragged out my pack of ciggies, clenching a fag between my teeth. Then I rummaged in my jean's pocket, pulling out my gold lighter. I snapped open the smooth lid, flicking on the heady orange surge of flame: I've got to get my kicks somewhere and there's nothing like looking into the fire.

When I lit the fag, Wednesday emitted a squeal, as if I'd sacrificed her newborn to a Druid god (and yeah, I've seen that done a few times, although it's not my cup of tea).

I raised my eyebrow. 'Sorry,' I proffered the lit fag to Wednesday, 'want one?' She drew back, her lips pursed. Wednesday's peepers were puffy with exhaustion; little burst blood vessels threaded her cheeks. You looked dead small in the middle of that big, white bed without me. I wanted to climb in with you and hold you against the emptiness of that white but I didn't reckon Wednesday would've got

it. 'Suit yourself,' I withdrew the ciggie, rubbing the tumbling ash between my fingers and thumb, as I took a deep drag. Wednesday looked significantly down at you. 'Oh right,' I wedged the fag between my lips, shrugging. 'Pretty sure she's not gonna want a puff.'

'Second-hand smoke,' Wednesday hissed.

'Christ, reckon she could die from..? Wait, she's already snuffing it. And I can honestly say - hand on heart - smoking's not gonna kill me.' When Wednesday swung her bag onto her shoulder, slamming towards the door, I sighed. Then I flicked the stub to the wooden floorboards, before stamping it out. 'The world's now safe one more night.'

That's the thing about you First Lifers: you're burnt up so fast, like fire consumes oxygen, that every second's precious. Yet your bodies with their fragile cells are open to attack by mutation. Bacteria. Decay.

The worst of it, is that you understand enough of the threat to fight your own desires, impulses and urges. The joys of life, see what I'm fixing at? Smoking. Drinking. Sex...

Life is fear.

Just the act of living for the whole bloody lot of you. And yeah, you're right to fear.

Us Blood Lifers? We died already. We evolved past all that.

At least, that's what we've conned ourselves.

The butcher's delivery service had left the box in the cold of the stone porch, as per monthly instructions. They're good like that - dead efficient.

As always, I'd waited until I'd heard the roar of their van struggling away down the snowy track,

skidding on sheets of black ice, which were treacherous underneath. One year, when the winter bites too deep, maybe they'll not be able to make it with their bloody titbits. Then we'll see how well I've chained the hunger: or whether I'm the one in chains. Either way, Wednesday would be top of my nosh list.

Oh yeah, there's a list.

As soon as Wednesday had stomped down the stairs, huddling like a malting owl in her coat, and then out into the smudge of shadows, I snatched up the box.

Bugger me it felt blinding: warm in the cold, beating and pulsing. Alive even in its death. I slammed the door shut against the frost of the night air. You were asleep up in the bedroom, shrivelled in that vast white bed, and I held red life in my hands.

I panted, wiping my knuckles across my lips. I hugged the box to my chest, as I darted across the hallway towards the dark of the connected garage. Your light-proofing's still holding up for the glass panels above the shelves.

I clicked on the over-head. It was fetid; mould seeped across the far wall in black blossoms behind the empty jam jars, which you were going to use six summers ago before...

So many sodding *befores*. Like before this thing got its teeth in you, munching through your mind, piece by bleeding piece. Before it took you away from me. Before it took you away from yourself.

I dived further into the garage, dropping the box, so I could start dinner preparations.

It'd been a long wait; the hunger had become a part of me. This isn't sodding milk we're talking about. It can't be left in the fridge for later: this is

kill or be killed. Basic predator 101. You hunt and then you feast. Want to recreate that artificially?

Eat fresh.

I pressed by my Triton motorbike - a slash of crimson in the drear. She was nudging me to take her out. She hates the winter slumber as much as I do. It makes her restless trapped inside.

I selected a latex glove, stretching it out – it'd do.

The blood from the butchers was thick, fresh pigs' blood. I must be their most regular customer: I'm one for *black pudding* me. It was your idea to drop that in, when we set up the order. You still knew what was what back then, at least for some of the time. You always got how to cover, well, you know, *what I am*. You First Lifers act like blood drinking's manky but you still nosh it with your fry ups, don't you..?

I heated the blood in the microwave, which was stowed behind the broken plant pots, waiting for the *ping*. When I poured it into the glove, it bulged out each finger: a fat blood hand waving. Then I tied up the top tight.

Here comes the best bit, when I hold back, anticipating and letting the thirst build: that blinding, intoxicating thrill. How could a First Lifer understand the rush?

You never got it - how all life is laid bare in a moment - no matter how many times I tried to explain. Even though I'd see this look, as if you were laying yourself open, exposed to anything I gave you. Yet it didn't matter: you weren't one of the Lost. You'd never tasted the gush of blood. Words are simply the shadow. The memory of our real lives. But what else do we have?

So right, the glove? It's the closest thing I've found to human skin. Then I can mimic the

glorious sensation of violation, when the fangs sink in deep. It's about more than the blood, you see.

Slowly, I extended my fangs: two thin canine needle points. As I closed my peepers, I imagined...

Said I'd tell you all the *nasties and wankery*, didn't I? Flay myself bloody?

I imagined it was *your* neck, as my mouth closed on that glove. I always have done. I imagine, as my teeth pierce the latex in dual sharp points, it's your skin I'm breaking. Your blood I'm sucking. Faster and faster. Harder and harder. That the warm coating the back of my throat is your life drawn into mine.

There's a dizzying buzz, like the world's exploded into multi-coloured connectedness, after a month of monotone loneliness. Then the glove's empty, and you're in me - all in me - completely. Then I climax.

It was over. My fangs retracted, as my peepers snapped open. I dropped the sucked dry glove into the bin, wiping the blood away with the back of my hand.

Now, don't get narked. You're to blame (or to be thanked, I don't know bleeding which), that I have to drink this animal piss to start with.

For my abstinence.

It was an ultimatum - yeah, *yours*. Give up First Lifer blood or lose you. I reckoned you were barmy.

Not bloody likely, I said.

Then we rowed. I swore. Bargained. Begged...

Of course you didn't get it (you never did), what First Lifer blood truly is to us Blood Lifers: it's our very breath. No drug blows your mind to such a high. And the dead sweet part? There's no down.

When it hits, you actually feel each chamber of your heart pumping, as every cell, nerve and

synapse sparks. The atoms of the world unite in flowing motion, as if you're part of something infinitely bigger than you or the world. You could touch the face of sodding...god, nature, the universe because you're truly alive. In that moment more than when you slithered from your mama's bloody womb.

But here's the thing - animal blood? Not the same bleeding deal. It's like pretending sugar free can give you the same rush as the sugar laden, delicious original. The spark and life is only just there. It sings but it doesn't burn.

And I hunger for the burn.

Look, a pig's not exactly as high up on the evolutionary chain. It doesn't have the same DNA to ignite the match.

But you'll survive, you'd insisted, you'll live.

Yeah, a half-life. A shadow.

Still I'd done it for you: a half-life with you was better than a full one alone.

There was no choice between loving you, or loving the blood, after what we went through to be together. After the corpses we left behind.

Real hearts and cupid me, aren't I?

Still, I deserved the ultimatum. Don't think I'm wriggling out of the blame. After all, you found me with that skanky donor.

You must've followed me, when I was too drunk on the call of the blood to smell you.

This punk rocker had invited me up. She had piercings in her mush, lower down too, but I didn't have a shufti because with that much metal, she'd have stuck holes in me if I'd got too intimate. She must've dressed for the occasion: pink tutu and

combat boots, with eyeliner drawn on like battle paint.

The punk kept stroking the *Ace of Spades* motif on my jacket, like it was a religious symbol she'd sworn to memorise; it made me wonder if she was writing a text for a band of deluded Blood Life worshippers. But the smell, Christ in heaven, the *smell*. Pot wafted in mushroom clouds, choking me, as I swaggered after her inside. My peepers watered.

The bint had already drained her blood into a chipped *I Love My Mum* mug. It balanced on a dressing table that overflowed with spiked bracelets, ripped fishnet stockings, razorblades and a bowler hat, which jauntily hung off one edge, as if it'd dropped out of the pages of *A Clockwork Orange*.

The bird smiled when she passed me the mug, just a hesitant twitch of her mouth's acned corners. Her fingers drifted over mine. I'd already offered cash, but she'd refused. I'd suddenly realised I wasn't bloody well offering what this bird - in her crush daydreams or death wish fantasies - reckoned either.

The blood was warm, swimming; I watched it dancing round and round in beautiful circles, singing to me to *drink*...

Then came hammering on the door downstairs and your voice, hollering loud enough to wake the dead, 'Get out here Light right quick, before I come up and belt you one.'

I never did get that last drink.

I was pacing around the garage, my shoulders hunched, clenching my fists up, as if for a barney or a bonk, with the blood bobbing through me, when I noticed the board over the window was rotted.

It was flaking snowy splinters in dust showers. The rusted nail was bent out of shape, like a deformed spine. As I tested the board with my thumb, the wood suddenly crashed from the glass panel in a decaying mist, flooding the garage with the orange glare of the dying sun.

‘Buggering hell.’

I leapt backwards, as my cheek smouldered like the tip of a ciggie, my eyeballs melting ice-cream at the bleeding beach. I hissed with the agony of it, the nitwit braindeadery of it, the indignity of the one sodding vampire myth that holds true – night walking.

A sharp shaft of sun burnt across the garage, over the Triton and between me and the door out to the hallway.

I was trapped.

What if you needed me?

I strained to listen. But the house was silent. You were either sleeping or were...

Bloody morbid I was nowadays - death catches you like that. I’d forgotten. Not because Blood Lifers are immortal, in fact we simply decay more slowly because the blood replenishes us. We still have a shelf life: this whole planet does. I’ve never seen one of us much older than half a Millennium.

I leant against the damp wall, exploring my tender mug. I couldn’t make out anything but dim shapes in the garage with my burnt peepers, except that blinding spear of light. The blood would fix that, give it time. It heals, restores and resurrects, even pigs’ piss poor substitute for the good stuff. The new skin cells were already tight where they were knitting themselves into place, grafting my mush back to its never changing contours.

That bursting into fire in the cruel light of day?

See here's the thing, it's more like wax reacting to a flame. Us Blood Lifers are candles: we burn bright.

But there's always a cost.

If you want the science and not the poetry (you used to say that, and I'd nark you by merely grinning), it's to do with how our cells synthesise the blood to repair themselves.

What gives life, takes it away. The world's big on irony. Or would be if it cared enough. And it doesn't.

Our clever thinkers know the formulas.

Me? It's enough to know the sun and me don't mix. But I walked in the day once and now I have the night: 50:50 seems a fair split.

I tried to edge around the strip of light, but the sun was still too high. My boot protected my foot for the second test, but by the intense heat in my toes, wouldn't for long. I didn't want to have to get out the stink of skin fused to leather because that's nasty. And not something you ever forget.

I slunk to the trapdoor in the far corner, swinging it open, before I slid down into the belly of the basement. The basement is a tiny cave-like room, with nothing in it but a truckle bed, wireless music system and my tatty editions of Mojo.

I sprawled on the blankets, letting the door slam shut and entomb me in a familiar blackness, as I waited for my eyesight to return and my cheek to mend.

I slipped in headphones, moving by touch alone in my private refuge. I hoped the haunting melancholy of The Stones' "Ruby Tuesday" would sear the pain away; the driving piano, plucked bass and recorder were part of the permanent soundtrack of my life. Memories of my own Author

- lost to me - were brought to life in the black. My own Ruby.

This is where I retreat - my underground hole - when the daytime carers come.

In the early hours, when the sun's still pausing for breath over the hills, I hand over your breakfast (toast and honey), your wash things and make-up because you deserve to look...yourself and your mountains of multi-coloured pills, to the whichever day of the week it is carer.

Then I pretend to head for work through the garage. I don't know what the carers reckon I do, or how I get there, but they don't bother to ask, and I don't bother to tell. It's a game we play. We all do that. Not that I *can* work, not even cash in hand, no questions asked stuff, with you to look after. Other avenues aren't much better. Not since you knocked the nicking stuff on the head.

When I was first elected into Blood Life, there was nothing I couldn't take, if I fancied. Now I have to budget your pension between the two of us.

Talk about being bloody defanged.

At least pensions are one less thing *I'll* have to plan for: silver linings in the dark, right?

But when you... When I'm left behind, there'll be no more pension or house. No more you.

What shred of the First Life, which we've built for nearly fifty years, will I have to hold onto then?

What part of it's been *real*?

The terror rises - sticks in my throat, darling - chokes me...when I think that.

The past, it's like this series of photos. But the future's just this expanse of black. What if I slip back into those shadows with nothing to hold onto? But I don't want to because I've already seen what's in them.

I know what's waiting for me.

I always lock the garage, once I've left for my pretend work because I see those women's looks, suspicion like spiders in their peepers. Big bloody double padlock on the basement once inside. I'd dug this hidey-hole the first year we came back here. *Overkill*, you'd called it. *Security*, I'd said.

Because they know: the carers, delivery boys and all the other gormless First Lifers, who stumble across us. Not *what* exactly but they still pick up the prickling sense that something's dodgy. *Different*. But do they say anything? Of course not. That'd be too simple and straightforward. The truth without artifice.

No, I get the *smile* instead. You know the one. We get any more repressed in this great country of ours, we'll implode with all the crap we're *not* saying.

It's always been a problem. First I was your husband. Then toy boy, son, grandson...to strangers. To you I've simply been *your Light*. But we've had to keep moving, Christ, so many places, because of those labels. Also because of *me*, in the bible of you.

'Why won't you register with the Blood Life Council? Things could've changed? They'd sort it.'

Sort it? Those nasty bastards? The Blood Lifers, who give other Blood Lifers the willies?

We'd have got sod all from them. Apart from maybe done in.

At least, they'd have given it their best shot.

Let's say they were reasonable for once. Reckon I want my balls crushed in the sweaty hands of Westminster? Just another dog to be leashed and tagged? Those wankering bureaucrats are no more than petty shadows of the First Lifer Parliament. And you know what I think of *them*.

Except we don't even have the vote. There's no democracy in our world, only a bunch of brats no more than decades old, wielding their power like their dicks, in the way only blokes can, who are excited to discover how to use them: by buggering the rest of us.

'Stop playing the rebel,' you'd said.

Know what? I'm not playing, love. I tried conforming once, didn't fit.

I won't be what the First or Blood Lifers want. But I've tried - for you. My blindside. My wonderful weakness, for whom my blood hums.

The sun had finally bled behind the moors. My new skin was tight and pale. I could see as sharp as a night owl again.

I switched off The Stones, swinging out of the trapdoor into the shadowy garage.

When the rotten board crumbled in my hand, as I tested it, I ached for you; I'm a creature of the night, but you were the creature of the toolbox. I ripped what was left of the wood from the nails, hurling it against the far wall, where it shattered with a satisfying *bang*. When I heard you startle awake, I instantly regretted it.

You were crying. A low animal wail.

I legged it into the hallway and then up the stairs into our room. You were thrashing side to side in the bed, agitated. Your gaze wandered to me in confusion, as I dived towards you. But there was no recognition. Only fear.

'Just me, luv.'

'No, no, no...' Your fingernails were scrabbling at me, as I soothed, scratching deep gouges.

‘All right,’ I backed away, the blood trickling down the backs of my hands, ‘you’re safe. It’s night. Sleep time, yeah?’

You quietened. For a moment. These bursts of violence burn you out. And scar me.

I tried to smile. ‘Kathy...’

A low moan. Your mouth hung open and then twisted into a snarl. You clawed at the covers, raking them up and down, as if you were trying to escape.

It was your white wisps of hair - more fragile than even the bones in your thinning body - which got to me. Sometimes it’s the little things, which you could never guess at, rather than the big stress or drama, which boots you in the gut. It made me march to the door, without looking round again, as I mumbled, ‘I’ll make us a cuppa.’

Only once I’d clicked on the kettle in the dark of the kitchen, resting my forehead against the exposed stone of the open hearth, did I realise we were out of mugs. That cheeky bitch Wednesday had slurped tea into her mush all day, without sodding well cleaning up after herself. Instead, she’d stacked the slimed mugs, with grainy rims, in haphazard piles in the Belfast sink. Sighing, I threw off my jacket, ran the water and started bloody rinsing.

The image of your white hair on that white pillow, forced itself on me: no escape this time. Look, I’ve seen enough corpses in white coffins. Morbid, right?

I concentrated on drying your special Union Jack mug: the one I’d filched from “I was Lord Kitchener’s Valet” on Carnaby Street in the 1960s.

We’re both still here.

The mug's colours were faded and there was a hairline crack under the handle. Me? I'm smart as ever - not that I ever *was* smart.

I dropped the teabag in but as I turned for the kettle, I heard your shriek, 'Advance...'

I swung round, catching your mug tottering off the edge. I saw the danger but bugger me if I could do anything to stop it. Not this time.

Everything was in slow motion: the Union Jack mug tumbling arse over elbow to the flagged floor, red and blue smashing in a spectacular *bang* Mr Firework. Great Britain shattering. Yet all I could do was watch.

I stared down at the now still pieces. Your mug. Broken.

Then I was bawling out my nancy little heart, balled up under the oak table, because it was like the world was falling and I'd better find somewhere to hide. Except I'd forgotten how to feel like that because Blood Lifers'll tell you that we don't fear. Yet we do, when we're motivated. And love's the greatest motivator of all.

So I kept on bawling, until it felt like there was nothing of me left - I'd salted it out in tears. Then I cleared away that old broken mug, before brewing you a new cuppa.

You studied me dead close as you supped your tea.

I experienced one of those moments, when I reckon you know me - not for long - just for a second or two.

I snuggled down next to you, massaging your palm, in the way you always like: round and round, anti-clockwise. You smiled.

'We'd lie like this out on the moors, remember Kathy? That first night we did it, on the hilltop by the Twelve Apostles? Bugged your dress with

stains, but you'd stripped me down to the skin, so *my* clothes were all right.'

Was that another smile? Your blue peepers were wide.

'Your hair was...' How could I go on, when I could see the dandelion fluff puffed over the pillow beside me? '...bloody gorgeous. Just growing long again. It'd tickle me when you did that thing you liked to...' It didn't feel right going into details. Not if you weren't with me. Not truly with me. Christ I ached for you. 'Well, yeah, that thing you love. Of course there was the danger and the thrill. You told me I was a junkie for it. You were right. There's nothing like the hunt. Also nothing like being the prey. I grew out of it. Or maybe I did.' I looked down.

You were whining again. Your gaze was unsteady.

'But it was a rush. What they'd do if they ever... It heightened those moonlit shags. Ranks them in our top ever and we're, well, thoroughbreds, at least in that department. But you know what I never told you? It was the moments after, when we were starkers, yet in no hurry to dress, when I'd share the night and the beauty of the stars with you, whilst you'd share the day and the sun with me, all those details of your life that I couldn't live with you, which I loved the most. Did you ever get how sodding jealous I was of every daylight hour? You'd say how tasty the blackberries were, or how yellow the spikes of the Bog Asphodel. Or you'd tell me about the flutter of the Green Harstreak butterflies, the loud bark of frogs, or whirr of Red Grouse over the low heather. You brought a world to life that I'd died to. Day and night united, darlin', that's us.'

I grinned, but you snatched your hand away from me with a deep growl.

You were lost in the darkness again, and I was lost to you.

You didn't know who I was; I frightened you, some kid in a studded leather jacket yakking about day and night.

Just leave out the poetry? Well, all right then.

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