

Puppet

My hand briefly hovered over the brass knocker as I hesitated before announcing my presence. The door opened more quickly than I had expected it to, startled me slightly and caused me to inhale sharply. Though I had rehearsed exactly how I wanted this moment to go, I could exhale only a single syllable, “Hi”.

“Hey” he said, revealing a few thousand dollars worth of orthodontic work as he smiled. “Come on in, you can have a seat anywhere.”

I had known Matt only briefly in high school, and so much had happened since then that I really couldn’t remember why I had been so drawn to him. He looked about the same as he had five years earlier—like a boy, only taller. Now, he seemed to tower over me even in my 3 inch heels. His light brown hair was cut in a way that mothers find respectable because it mimics the haircuts of husbands everywhere. On his face, his eyes were the most notable. They were the shade of blue that only comes from a contact company. While vanity is hardly ever attractive in guys, the contacts certainly did something for him.

Thinking back to the Matt I knew in high school, what I remembered most vividly was my impression of what he might want in a girlfriend. Then, I was silly and flighty, and he was responsible and reserved. As we were hopelessly incompatible, the friendship didn’t last long. Now that we had met up again, I wanted him to see that I had matured. The hypothetically perfect girl for him would be smart, sweet, honest, ethical, uncomplicated, and fairly passive. Though it was clearly a charade, as I walked into his dorm room in my white sweater and jeans that seemed a little curvier than the last time we’d met, I thought that maybe I could be her.

His room was neat, except maybe around the desk. A mountain of used books spilled out of his backpack on the floor beneath the desk. As an English major, I was always interested in what people were reading. The titles caught my eye, *Bridges, Not Walls: A Book About Interpersonal Communication*, *Microbiology*, and a Bible-sized anthology, presumably for a literature course.

Blue post-its dappled the wall to the right of the chair, as if they represented a collection of brilliant ideas that had trickled out of his ear. I tried not to read the notes. I didn’t want to appear to be prying into his life, and find out that they were something other than brilliant ideas, like girls’ phone numbers.

Along one wall was a country blue sofa, inherited from mom and dad when they redid the family room. At one end of the sofa, in the corner of the room, a guitar rested against a large potted plant. This discovery was so significant to me that it almost seemed like the rest of the room was a frame to border this single item.

“Is the guitar yours or your roommates?” I asked, almost sheepishly.

“It’s mine” he replied, “I haven’t had it very long, so it’s still pretty rough on my fingers. I’m only just starting to get calluses,” he said, extending his left hand. I only nodded, almost scared, as I lightly touched the tips of his fingers.

Soon after, we left for the Harrison Roadhouse, a local pub with the best crab cake sandwich found in a non-coastal region. Though it was my favorite, I didn’t order the crab cake because I didn’t want remoulade to drip on the white sweater I had purchased solely for this evening.

As the night wore on, I realized something. Matt was a nice guy and I think I liked the nice girl I pretended to be when I was around him. But it wasn’t real. I spent the entire night trying to keep my sarcasm in check, my opinions at bay and my sweater clean. Instead of speaking up, instead of laughing freely, instead of offering ideas, instead of eating the damn crab cake sandwich, I spent four hours as an empty puppet animated only by the qualities I wanted him to see.