

BAD GIRLS

ADRIANNE

At thirteen we had been lovers, Adrienne and I. Two children who had always fought like cat and dog briefly in harmony for six pubescent months. And now, almost thirty years later, nothing seemed to have changed. I did not want her but she was my cousin, my blood, and she clung to me. While she was alive.

I had not seen her for well over twenty years. She having married some local accountant-cum-broker in our hometown while I had fled south to the anonymity of London. Or so I thought. Then, a matter of days before my forty-third birthday, a letter had clung gastropod-like to my mat and there was something familiar, sticky-sweet and nauseating, about the fawning tilt of the handwriting. Violet ink on faintly scented lilac paper.

It had to be her. And it was.

It seemed that fate was against me. She was in London. Resident. Streets away. Kevin, the husband, had inveigled his fat, slippery arse into some wonderful yuppie job and they had arrived. Sickeningly close to me. Like a bad penny or a portrait in the attic, hanging onto a familial thread that did not exist, suffocating me already with invitations to a dinner party that never happened.

Because Kevin got himself killed.

So, instead of meeting over candles and some newly-purchased Heal's dining set, our reunion took place in the sombre maroon and grey outer offices of the local undertaker's shop. A banal joining of two lost souls under the ministrations of one Frazer Salter: a large effusive man who looked as if he should have been a sales rep for

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Callard & Bowser, and who flipped the plastic pages in his vision-book of coffins with all the solemnity of a man showing the latest catalogue of toffee tins.

And, just as when we were children, Adrienne went to pieces and left all the arrangements in my capable hands. Looking at her, a small quivering heap of blonde hair and tears, she didn't seem to have changed at all. Her hair was being dyed now, of course, to cover the first strands of grey, and there were bigger bags under her eyes than I remembered. Also a trace of crows' feet here and there, and her old haunted look had become more pronounced. But that was it. She was essentially the same old Adrienne. Adrienne the cry baby. Adrienne the motherless waif. Adrienne who had delighted in standing up in the bath and peeing in a golden arc. Adrienne who used to cry if I didn't let her choose every game we were to play. Adrienne who coveted my first dark strands of pubic hair while she thrust her own smooth crotch into my face.

Smothering me.

I honestly didn't know if I loved her or hated her and she was dead before I had the chance to find out. But she was the same old Adrienne to the last. Adrienne my golden-haired darling who left me tangled in a web of blood as her extra special parting gift.

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