

NIGHT OWLS

By

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INT. KITCHEN - EVENING

KENT, 35, stands at the sink cleaning dishes. His faded clothes age him ten years.

Rubber gloves on, he scrubs one plate. Puts it on the draining rack. Scrubs one knife. Scrubs one fork. Both placed to dry.

The washing up done he peels the gloves off. Tips the water from the washbowl down the sink.

Outside the window, at the edge of a line of trees in the distance, something catches Kent's attention. He stares hard then shrugs it off - he's imagining things.

Night draws in. Rain falls.

INT. LIVING ROOM - LATER

Kent sits on the sofa in a large, old-fashioned living room. He reads a book.

A clock ticks monotonously in a corner.

Dotted around the fireplace are photographs of Kent and a RED-HAIRED WOMAN. He is younger in the photographs. These snapshots capture him during a happier time, a time long gone.

A sudden clash of THUNDER interrupts the silent room. Kent looks up from his book momentarily before returning to the engrossing story. He is safe in his surroundings.

An OUT OF PLACE NOISE grabs his attention. He strains and listens to an odd SCRATCHING sound. It's not loud but it's not supposed to be there. He lays down his book, rises from the sofa to investigate.

INT. HALLWAY

Kent ventures into the Hallway. Beyond the frosted glass of the front door is movement, the source of the SCRATCHING.

Kent's hand reaches for the door knob. Before he touches it the door opens tentatively. A teenage girl, bent over to the level of the door knob peeks her head around the door. Straightened hair grips in her hand, her lock picking tool. She meets Kent's middle, stops, looks up and smiles at him, innocent.

TEENAGE GIRL

Hi!

KENT

Um....

She straightens up. She is MARI, 15. Her hair is dreadlocked, a small key lodged in there somewhere. A bike chain on her skirt. She is soaked to the skin, not dressed appropriately for the bad weather. On her upper lip is a fresh cut. A bruise escapes beneath her hairline.

MARI

These old locks are very easy to pick. You should upgrade. Get something more secure. An alarm too. You never know who is outside wanting in.

KENT

You don't say.

Kent looks Mari from head to toe. He notices she is missing a shoe.

AWKWARD SILENCE

Mari wraps her arms around her wet body, rubbing her arms.

The cold night getting to her.

MARI

Not meaning to be funny but I'm freezing my tits off. Can I come in?

KENT

You were trying to break in. Why should I do you a favor?

MARI

You wouldn't send a kid like me out on a night like this would you?

He is cold as a statue. Uncomfortable in her presence.

Mari smiles at him, gazing into his eyes. Hoping for a sign, any sign, that his ice will melt.

MARI (CONT'D)

Please?

(exaggerating a shiver)

I'm freezing.

A flash of sympathy on Kent's face for a just a moment is enough for Mari to leap forward and throw her arms around him. Her skinny limbs lock around his back, holding him tighter than he has been held for years.

Kent, his arms out by his side, tries not to touch Mari, the alien creature who has invaded his home.

INT. LIVING ROOM

Mari sits on the floor in front of Kent's fire. A blanket wrapped around her while she towel dries her hair.

Kent enters. He hands her a cup of tea. He takes a seat nearby.

MARI

Thank you. God will let you into Heaven for this.

She wraps her hands around the cup to warm her fingers.

KENT

You're the Preachers daughter! I knew I recognized you.

(beat)

Though you look different.

MARI

Yes. Neither mother, the congregation nor God want me to dress this way.

KENT

I like your mother. She gives an interesting sermon.

MARI

Interesting? Really? You should live with the Jesus freak! Listen to her interesting sermons 24/7.

Mari laughs. Kent does not see what's so funny. The smile slowly dies from her face.

Over the top of her cup she looks at him. She SLURPS her hot tea.

The metal in Mari's hair glistens in the firelight - Kent's attention is drawn to it.

KENT

You have something stuck in your hair.

MARI

Hmmmm?

(realising)

Oh, that. It's a key. I put it in there for safe keeping.

KENT

What does it open?

MARI
Dunno - I forgot. It couldn't have
been that important.

Kent doesn't know how to respond.

The silence is stagnant again, until Mari breaks it:

MARI (CONT'D)
Where's your cat?

KENT
Cat?

MARI
You look like the kind of guy who
owns a cat.

KENT
I don't.

MARI
Says more than you know.

KENT
You look like the kind of girl who
has two shoes.

MARI
(mock Kent)
I don't.

KENT
(mock Mari)
Says more than you know.

He smirks at her. One up in their little game.

KENT (CONT'D)
Get warm, get dry, finish your tea.
Afterward you can leave.

MARI
Can't I stay? At least until the
rain stops?

KENT
They say it's going to rain all
night.

MARI
If that's how long it takes--

KENT
No, absolutely not!

MARI

(sighs)

You invite me in. You let me get warm and dry and now... are you really going to put me out in the rain?

Mari gives him her biggest, pity me, doe-eyed look.

KENT

Technically, I did not invite you in.

MARI

You didn't not invite me in either.

(beat)

Please. You're supposed to be a Christian.

Kent looks away, shame-faced. Mari smiles a BIG smile.

When he looks back he is stern. Mari quickly hides her smile.

KENT

Until the rain stops. After that---

MARI

Okay, okay, I'm gone like I was never here.

Mari takes a hit on her warm tea. She smirks once again.

MARI (CONT'D)

If you want me out of here fast you can give me a ride home. I'm sure you have a fancy car tucked away in a garage somewhere.

KENT

I don't drive.

MARI

At all? Ever?

KENT

Never.

MARI

But you're like... old!

KENT

Thanks!

MARI

Why don't you drive? All old people drive.

KENT
I can drive. I just... don't.

MARI
How do you get around?

KENT
Walk. Trains.
(Beat)
I like trains.

MARI
You like trains? Like, you really
really like trains?

KENT
Well, yeah.

MARI
(smiles)
Adorable.

Kent appears a little embarrassed at how geeky he is and feels around her.

Mari rises. She is warmer. She takes to strolling around the room. Looking around his home.

His attention turns to her one shoe resting by the fire.

KENT
What happened to you tonight? Shoes
normally come in pairs.

Mari puts her tea down on the table.

MARI
Do you remember when you were a
teenager?

KENT
Just. After all, I am old!

MARI
You remember how some people just
didn't fit in?

KENT
Uh huh.

MARI
Well....

Mari gives Kent a half-hearted little tap dance shuffle, and finishes with:

MARI (CONT'D)

(sarcastic)

Ta-da!

(beat)

Here she is; the person who just doesn't fit in. The punishment for the crime of being me is my bag of clothes stolen, my shoe up a tree, and my head introduced to the ground.

KENT

Kids are only mean because they fear you. They fear and push away what's different.

MARI

Yeah - they are really afraid of me when they keep kicking the shit out of me. Adults say some dumb shit!

KENT

(his head bitten off)

I'm sorry.

MARI

Forget it. It's not you I'm mad at. Or them.

A moment of silence. Mari sucks in her emotions before she sits on the table with her tea.

Their knees are close to touching. He is uncomfortable with her being so close but stands his ground.

KENT

Parents?

MARI

They're dicks.

There's a chink in Mari's armour. Her hand shakes.

MARI (CONT'D)

I don't want to talk about them.

She shakes her head until the clouds clear from her brain.

Mari is back.

MARI (CONT'D)

What's your name fella?

KENT

David. But everyone calls me Kent.

MARI

Kent?

KENT

My full name was David Kenton Jnr.
Everyone called my father David.
Kent stuck with me, not Junior.
Thankfully.

MARI

Was Junior?

KENT

Mm-hmm. There is no Senior now, so
no more Junior.

Kent dwells for a moment on his last comment then quickly
breaks the atmosphere.

KENT (CONT'D)

What's your name?

MARI

Everyone calls me Mari.

KENT

Go on then, what's it short for?

She is taken aback.

MARI

No one's ever asked me that!

KENT

Well I figured it would be a Marie-
something. You look like a Mary-
Beth or--

MARI

A Marilyn. It's short for Marilyn.
My Mum's a fan of this dumb blond
who couldn't keep her skirt down.

KENT

(laughs)

I think I've heard of her.

Kent's laugh warms Mari. She notes his enriched mood.

MARI

You're alright Kent you know that?

INT. LIVING ROOM - LATER

Mari's tea cup is empty on the table. She idly thumbs through
Kent's record collection. She has already placed one on the
turntable. The room is filled with operatic notes.

Kent sits as though a guest in his own home.

KENT
Do you like this kind of music?

MARI
Sure. I put it on didn't I?

She looks back at him.

MARI (CONT'D)
Did you assume I wouldn't like it?
(tapping her head)
Different, remember?

Her hips start to sway as she hums along to the music. She continues to flick through the records.

Kent is hypnotized by her.

Mari rises as she explores the room again. She eyes the framed papers on the wall.

MARI (CONT'D)
Diploma?

KENT
(dismissive)
Just college.

MARI
Did you go to uni?

KENT
For a while.

MARI
What happened?

KENT
Life.

Mari hasn't turned her attention to the photographs of Kent and the Red-Head. In one of the pictures she has her hands rested on her stomach.

Mari turns back to Kent.

MARI
Since you were a student I think we might have a friend in common.

Kent looks puzzled. Mari reaches into her bra, retrieving a bag of marijuana.

Kent is a little embarrassed to have seen her do that.

MARI (CONT'D)
They can take my shoe but they will never take my stash!

KENT

We probably shouldn't.

Kent still looks unsure. Mari puts the bag up to her mouth and talks through it in a silly voice:

MARI

Come on David - be my fwiend!

INT. LIVING ROOM - LATER

The fire burns low as Mari and Kent lie on the warm carpet. They 'top & tail' each other. Both with lit joints. Both a little high with slowed speech.

MARI

David - sorry, Kent - do you know something?

KENT

I know a lot of things.

MARI

This house. It's gigantic, humongous, massive, enormous, gargantuan, huge.

KENT

(smiles)

That is something I do know.

MARI

Do you ever get lost?

KENT

No, I grew up here. My parents left it to me after they... you know.

MARI

So you're like, rich?

KENT

No, not rich. I can barely keep up with the cost of keeping this place in shape. I was left property, not money. That was all gone.

MARI

Ever considered moving?

Kent shrugs before taking a long, thoughtful drag on his spliff.

Mari opens her mouth to speak. Then closes it again. Kent notices the movement.

KENT

What?

He exhales.

MARI

How long ago did you stop being a Junior?

KENT

Four months, to the day in fact. Heart failure. He lived a rich mans life. Excess in everything. Hence the lack of money, just a crumbling house.

MARI

Aren't you sad?

KENT

Do I not seem sad?

MARI

Not like sad as in 'new' sad. You just seem 'life' sad. Like you've been sad for a long time.

(beat)

The kind of sadness that learns to live with itself.

KENT

Where is that from?

MARI

I don't know. I think I read it somewhere. I don't know what it means.

(Beat)

I think I make this shit up as I go along.

She looks him in the eyes. For a moment he gets lost in her. And her in him.

MARI (CONT'D)

But it seems to suit you... sadness.

Kent looks away. Their bond broken.

MARI (CONT'D)

Have I upset you?

KENT

No, no you haven't.

(beat)

(MORE)

KENT (CONT'D)

Either I'm stoned or you're speaking more clearly to me than anyone has for years.

They take drags on their spliffs.

MARI

I don't have a Dad either. Well, I do, sort of. We've just never met... scandal, non?

KENT

Non.

MARI

He lives abroad. Travels a lot. He sends me crap on my birthday, not sure why he bothers. Perhaps he feels it's his duty. His letters are brief. So are mine. We're strangers.

KENT

Me and my Dad didn't speak. We did not mix well. Oil and water. Vinegar and custard. I take after my mother.

MARI

Your mother and father mixed right?

KENT

They were married but I am not sure why. He was a taker, a bully. He ground people down until they became what he wanted them to be. He never could accept that I wasn't the same as him.

(beat)

I had to get a job as an accountant for him to say he was 'proud of me'.

(beat)

I fucking hate my job.

MARI

Do you regret it?

KENT

Trying to please him? Yes.

MARI

That you weren't close I mean? I tried to be close to my mother but can't. The woman's a lost cause.

KENT

If I said I regret not trying to
make amends with my father before
he died would it inspire you go
home and sort things out with your
mother?

Mari takes a ponderous drag on her joint. The question
inhaled and exhaled with the smoke.

MARI

Everyone hates me.

KENT

I don't.

MARI

You're part of the 'everyone'.
(alternative line)
You're part of 'everyone' aren't
you?

KENT

I like you.

MARI

I'll make you hate me. It's my
thing.

KENT

So change it. Let people in.

MARI

You live here all alone. You don't
let people in.

KENT

I let you in.

MARI

I broke in. You had no choice.
You're hiding in here.
(beat)
You're incomplete.
(beat)
You're catless.

KENT

I can buy a cat. I can buy a cat
tomorrow.

MARI

What will you call him?

KENT

Archibald.

A smile grows into a grin then a laugh that erupts from Mari. Kent catches the laugh.

The laughter subsides.

KENT (CONT'D)
Are you cold? I'm cold.

He reaches for a rug. Pulls it over them both. He positions himself next to her as he does.

KENT (CONT'D)
Can I come in?

Mari laughs.

MARI
Strange boy.

He settles down under the rug. They are eye-to-eye. Kent is focused on her innocent eyes that peek out from behind dread'd locks of hair.

The gaze lasts too long for it be comfortable. Mari takes charge.

MARI (CONT'D)
Did you know that if you cry too much it can make you ill?

KENT
Yes. I have been there myself.

MARI
But it feels so easy sometimes.
Like the body

MARI (CONT'D)
naturally wants to be sad. Being ill feels like an escape from the sadness. Being happy takes more effort.

She smokes her joint down to her finger tips then stubs it out.

MARI (CONT'D)
Enough smoking. It's making me mopey and sad.

KENT
No, you're making sense. I'm the one under a rug.

She looks into Kent's child-like eyes. Gently she takes his face in her hands, and kisses him.

She moves away. Kent is flabbergasted.

He tries to compute what happened. He can't. He searches for words for a moment before he finds them.

KENT (CONT'D)
Why did you do that?

MARI
Because you needed it. So did I.

They are quiet for a moment. Their eyes are heavy.

The clock ticking becomes apparent again. Sunlight fights its way through the curtains. A beam of light lands on Mari's face.

KENT
Can you imagine how much trouble
I'd get into if I--

MARI
(cutting him off)
The rain's stopped.

KENT
Does that mean you're leaving?

Mari slow blinks. A smile on her face. They look deep into each others eyes.

INT. HALLWAY - EARLY MORNING

Mari has her one shoe in her hand. On her feet are sparkly ruby red shoes. They don't match the rest of her outfit but this is not unusual for Mari.

MARI
Are they from your private clothing
stash?

KENT
No! They belong to... it doesn't
matter.
(beat)
They look good on you.

Mari clicks her heels 3 times.

KENT (CONT'D)
Are you going home?

Mari shrugs.

MARI
I guess. I think I've tortured
mother enough for one day.

She opens the door and steps onto the porch.

On the outside Mari holds the door knob.

On the inside Kent holds the door knob.

Neither of them quite know what to do. Not wanting to go, not knowing how to stay.

MARI (CONT'D)
(calling through)
Take care David. Good luck getting
a cat.

She releases the handle.

KENT
(his words lost in the
door)
Not everyone hates you Mari.

Mari smiles to herself, almost as though she heard the encouraging words.