Remember Me

Sarah Diamond



25th July

Don't know where to start, or what to say. Don't even know why it matters. I'll have to tear it up as soon as I've finished. Can't have them finding it.

But I had to write it down. Otherwise, it's going to drive me mad. I just found out she's going away for two weeks, next Wednesday. Leaving me with Him.

It's funny, really. Started off today in such a good mood, because nothing had happened yesterday or the day before, or even the day before that, and I thought I'd found a way to hide from him. Lately, I've been sticking to her like a limpet, and even though I don't like her as much as I did, it feels sort of like having a bodyguard. As long as she's there, I'm safe – he won't do anything in front of her.

And then this afternoon, she says she's going away for two weeks.

She sounded so happy, like a little kid. I never knew you could say something that almost gives someone else a heart attack and not have the least idea. Guess what, she said, we're going to – and I just froze up and stared at her. Don't worry, she smiled, I'll send you a postcard, and I swear to God I just wanted to kill her. Because she doesn't understand, and there's no way I can tell her that she was smiling about something that's going to keep me awake every night till they leave.

I know it's not her fault. But that doesn't seem to matter. Before this all started, I thought someone had to

do something bad to upset you, but they don't. It's enough for them just to be there, happy when you're terrified, not even seeing you're terrified, not knowing there's any reason to be. Like living in a nightmare with someone who's living in a dream. Lately, when I see her smile, I wish she was dead.

Of course, I don't mean that. I can't. Before all this, we were best friends.

Whatever he did to me last week, it's going to be ten times worse when she's gone. I know that much for a fact. While she's off having a lovely time.

But I don't hate her. Really.

I don't hate her—

1

She woke up abruptly. For a second or two, though she couldn't remember the dream she'd just had, it was still oddly strong in her mind – a taste she couldn't put any immediate name to, an echo that could have been caused by anything at all.

She reached out to touch the sleeping man beside her – turned, rested her chin on one hand as she looked down at him. Saw a roundish, blunt-featured face peaceful in sleep, tousled sandy-blond hair against the pillow. She felt a sudden, intense rise of tenderness, and shook him gently, with a half-recognised urge to banish the misty remnants of the dream.

'Andrew. *Andrew.*'

She watched him slowly surface from sleep, eyes opening – grey-blue eyes, weary, humorous, slightly naive. 'What's the matter?'

'Nothing.' She felt embarrassed at having woken him, even as part of her was reassured. 'I'll have to get up in a minute.'

'Half six already?' He reached out for her, drew her into a sleepy and asexual cuddle which she melted into gratefully. 'How come you always manage to wake up before the alarm?'

'Just a natural talent, I guess.' They lay together in peaceful half-lit silence for long minutes before she spoke again. 'Better start getting ready. I'll be late for work.'

'Surely they'd let you get away with that today? The

star of the Fanta pitch?' She laughed. He pulled her closer to him. 'Come on, sweetheart, stay in here a bit longer. No rush.'

'You know I want to. I just can't.' She disengaged her flesh from his with genuine regret. 'I've got that lunch with the boss later, and for all I know, she's going to keep me for *hours* – I'll have to get a lot of work out of the way this morning.'

'You're too responsible for your own good sometimes,' Andrew grinned. 'Puts me to shame.' And she smiled too, getting out of bed, barefooting her way across the stripped-pinewood floor, heading into the bathroom, where she washed and brushed herself ready to face the day. A bright May morning showed through the half-open blinds, and the light was dazzling.

Back in the bedroom, Andrew was still in bed. Rachel went over to the wardrobe to get dressed and dropped the towel she'd wrapped round herself, prompting a slow, appreciative wolf-whistle from behind her. She laughed, turned. 'Hadn't you better get a move on?' she asked, buttoning up her blouse. 'You'll be late for work yourself, one of these days.'

'Never happens. You must know that by now.'

He spoke airily – it was true, she knew, he never seemed to go out of his way to get things done, but it all fell into place for him just the same. She often had a sense that she was older than him, even though she was nearly two years his junior. 'Just born lucky,' she retorted, pulling the curtains wide open to let the sun in.

She was putting on her make-up at the dressing table when she heard him padding into the bathroom, showering, starting to sing. An involuntary smile touched the edges of her lips. 'Do you do encores?' she called, but

couldn't tell whether he'd heard her over the running water. She applied a second coat of mascara, and made the bed with a chambermaid's precision.

In the kitchen, she poured herself black coffee, which was all the breakfast she ever had, and noticed the open jar of Nutella on the side, the telltale crumbs that told her Andrew had succumbed to an attack of the munchies while she was asleep. A familiar blend of exasperation and deep affection took hold of her as she screwed the lid back on the jar and replaced it in the cupboard, cleaned the crumbs off carefully, wiped down the marble so it gleamed. 'Andrew,' she called, with half-genuine, half-joking irritation. 'Will you *ever* learn?'

He appeared in the door dressing-gowned, vigorously towelling his shower-damp hair. 'Will *you* ever learn to relax?' he complained, taking the cloth from her hand. 'They're *crumbs*. They don't *bite*.'

She couldn't help laughing – he had that effect on her, made her take things less seriously. 'I suppose they *might* run wild, if you let them get out of control,' he continued gravely. 'We'd come back one night to find them rampaging through the flat.'

'I know, I know. It's just a shame to make a mess. It's such a beautiful flat.' Her gaze swept the kitchen with a pleasure that was more than houseproud, before she felt his mocking eyes on her and grinned. 'Anyway, duty calls. I'd better make tracks.'

'See you later,' he said, and pulled her in for a kiss on her way out of the kitchen. She returned it for long seconds, enjoying the Badedas-and-toothpaste taste of him before the ticking clock in her head became impossible to ignore. 'Have a nice day,' she said at last, pulling away.

'You too, sweetheart. And enjoy your lunch with the boss.'

The apartment block they lived in was a private development, and the neat curves of her year-old black MG gleamed in the crowded forecourt. She got in, started the engine and set off.

Her prowess behind the wheel tended to reflect her mood: under stress, she was probably the nerviest and most erratic driver in the capital; this morning, almost as laid-back as Andrew himself. She was cruising out of Camden and humming along to chart music on the radio when the double-decker bus pulled out in front of her without warning, and she'd squealed to a hair's-breadth halt before she was a hundred per cent certain she wasn't dead.

2

Sophie was sitting towards the back of the bottom deck and looking out of the window when the bus came to a bone-jolting stop. Horns blared furiously, and she craned to see what they'd almost smashed into. She had a moment's glimpse of something shiny and sporty and black driving away, before the bus set off again, the moment over.

Suddenly, she was on edge. She took a long, deep breath, trying to distract herself from subtle fears. The window showed a clean, crisp spring morning, tree-lined streets, empty parks – people waiting at bus stops, hurrying into tube stations, beginning the day. *I'm one of them now*, she thought. *I live here now.*

It surprised her to realise it was true; she'd only been in

the capital for two days. She'd been shown round the shared house yesterday afternoon, would move in properly within the next hour. The single suitcase she'd brought with her was the only one in the luggage rack by the bus doors. She kept forgetting about it, then remembering sharply, her eyes darting over to it with a small-town girl's paranoia as she remembered there were thieves in London.

But those moments of panic weren't just about the suitcase. They expressed something far bigger, that she'd never really known before; half exhilarating, half terrifying, a sense of her life as something portable.

Think of the good things, she told herself: *freedom, opportunity.* Around her, she saw life on a different scale from the town she'd grown up in: taller buildings, wider streets and an atmosphere that was hard to put a name to. It was in the eyes and faces and movement of the people she observed – the harassed-looking young man in the baggy suit, the grey-haired woman trailing an ebullient mongrel – an urban look, anonymous. The streets in Underlyme had felt like an extension of home; those around her belonged to nobody.

There's a future here, she told herself, *you can feel alive again*; but deep inside, she was aware that she was keeping her thoughts away from the For Sale sign in front of the house on Acacia Avenue, the memories of twenty-five years rinsed out as carelessly as coffee dregs.

Then the bus was pulling up outside Camden station and she was getting her suitcase, heading out into the morning.