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FLYING STRAIGHT TO HEAVEN.

Hi Sharon,

This is Alex. It's so good to make contact with you. They tell me that it's really difficult for people like us to find one another, even in the modern world. Other people get in the way. Even yesterday, I was overhearing a water-cooler conversation where a stupid middle-aged man was 'mansplaining' to this young woman about how she ought to be wary of making contacts online. 'You don't know who's out there,' he said, as if she hadn't thought about that herself.

Your profile looks really interesting. I love the fact you are a 'twitcher' just like me. Have you seen any rare species recently? I was in the local woods the other day, when I spotted a hawfinch. Have you ever seen one? I was so pleased I laughed out loud, 'Haw! Haw!' (Just one of my 'birdy' jokes – you'll have to get used to them, I'm afraid).

I know life has been tough for you, in terms of relationships. It's the same for me, if I'm honest. I've had some therapy. She told me not to blame myself. She also talked about my other big issue, but now is not the right time to speak about that. Maybe we can chat about it when we meet up. We are going to meet up, aren't we?

I like the fact that we're only a thirty-minute train journey apart. You know, I love train journeys. You can just relax, read a book and think your own thoughts. We're saving our planet as well, not polluting the atmosphere like all those stupid car drivers, mainly men, of course.

Let me tell you about myself. You'll know a lot of stuff anyway, through my profile. One thing I didn't write is that I'm a metal detectorist. Stupid people think that's something to do with being a detective, but you'll understand that it's about finding stuff like old coins and jewellery. Some people like doing it on the beach, but I prefer going into the woods, so I can combine it with my bird-watching. It means I can kill two birds with one stone. (There goes my sense of humour again - another 'birdy' joke!)

I'm well-known for my jokes amongst my friends, not that I have lots of friends. My policy is that if you haven't made me laugh once in our first two meetings, then you're not really worth calling a friend. Life's too short to waste time with idiots, isn't it? Don't you agree?

My last question: do you enjoy going on holiday? If things work out, and we get to know each other better, we could go on a rambling break together. I've been on a few in the past, but, to be honest, I prefer to organise my own. You can spend your time with the people you like, instead of listening to endless stories about how successful people have been in their careers, or how much they love their children. The question I want to ask them is this, 'If you love your children so much, how come you've got so much time to go rambling?' It's usually men, leaving all the child-minding duties to their partner, of course. You can say I'm wrong, but that's the beauty of same-sex relationships – there is absolute equality, and I mean real equality, not just lip-service (And I'm not going to make a joke here!).

Enough of my views. I think you're getting to know me already, and we haven't even met in person yet. I'm really looking forward to hearing back from you. Don't forget, let's 'hatch' a plan (another 'birdy' joke) to meet up before the weather gets any worse.

Your new best friend, I hope,

Alex.

Dear Diary,

What can I say? I got a letter from Sharon today. That woman has given me wings! I just feel so happy. She definitely connected with all the stuff I wrote about birds, and she's keen to meet up and do some metal detecting. The world couldn't be any better. Has she made me laugh already? Too right, she has. Now we've got to fix a time when we can get together. As is my way, I want the time to be precise, on the hour or the half hour, and nothing else. I love the fact that everything in my life is so neat and tidy.

There's just a couple of problems. The first is that she's been out of work for a while. In her letter she told me that she hasn't got much money, so it's difficult for her to get away from home. Of course, my first thought was, 'Could this be a scam?' But then I thought 'I'll decide when we meet up.' Let's hope she's happy with that.

The next thing is the issue that I didn't speak to her about in my letter. I don't even want to write about it now. It's just so difficult to talk about. I know it shouldn't be, but it is, and that's a fact. It's not my fault, I know. The therapist told me that. It's society; people are just too judgemental. Sometimes I feel it's like living in times long ago, when witches were executed. They were women, of course, which begs the question why I've chosen to go on the journey I have. I just can't write about it now. Do you understand that, Dear Diary? It's not the right time. Like my therapist says, when you write something down, it's like a message for posterity, and I don't know whether posterity's ready to hear this yet.

Another strange thing happened last week. I was talking to people at work, and we were discussing our favourite TV characters, when we were kids. I told everyone mine was Sweep, when all my mates loved Sooty. I knew Sweep couldn't speak properly, but I just loved his name. Sooty reminded me that things can be messy, but Sweep was the best name for making sure that everything was neat and tidy. That was really important to me then, and it still is. I'm not ashamed of that. Why should I be?

That's the reason I don't like the way people use the word 'straight' now. I'm straight. You know what I mean, don't you, Dear Diary? I mean, I just love everything to be neat and tidy. But those idiots insist on saying that it's all about whether you like people of the opposite sex or not. Don't they understand that there are people who like people from the same sex, who also like everything to be 'straight', neat and tidy, as they must be? I know, because I'm one of those.

I really like the idea that Sharon and I are going to meet in person. I'm sure we'll get along so well. 'Birds of a feather', that's us. She has even agreed that we should send each other

letters through the post, the good old-fashioned way, but not by 'carrier pigeon', which would suit me, of course! Sharon, you're the best. I just can't wait to meet you 'in the flesh'.

Anyway, time to get on with the story I'm writing. Maybe I'll get it published one day.

'Values'. My story.

It was early Neolithic times. Bear stood in a cave, which was dark and wet. Beside him was his partner, Matty, who was cuddling their young child, Lydi. The only sound from within was the sound of the water, as it leaked through the cracks in the rocks. But the slow 'Drip! Drip!' that descended could not match the tears that flowed from Matty's eyes. Lydi had been wounded by Konst, the leader of a neighbouring family. As she sat, Matty prayed to the God, Animus.

Konst had insisted that he had not deliberately wounded Lydi. It had been an accident. He had been distracted by another animal, as he was aiming to spear a rabbit, causing him not to throw the spear straight.

'I do not know whether he told me the truth or not,' said Matty.

'That man has been envious of me for an age,' replied Bear. 'He deserves to die. I know he has lied. There can only be one top man, and our great God, Animus, has approached me in the night, and told me I am The Chosen One.'

'Then you must follow the command of Animus. It is your duty. To disobey him is to show disrespect.'

That night, Bear took up his spear, kissing Matty before he left the confines of the cave to wander across the barren wasteland, hidden by the shelter of the night, to find Konst. The temperature was warm, as Animus blew out his cheeks from on high, signalled by the wind, to guide Bear to his destination.

Approaching Konst's camp, Bear saw that all the guards were asleep. Spear in hand, he crept towards Konst's slumbering body. Taking one last look at his bitter rival, Bear plunged his spear through Konst's chest. As a warrior, Bear made sure that the spear was completely upright, and not leaning to the side. This is what Animus wanted.

'Welcome to justice,' he said, as he witnessed the horror on Konst's face. His screams would alert those in the after-life, that he was about to join them. They drowned the words of Bear.

'I am doing my duty, as bid by Animus.'

Bear ran, before Konst's family, now woken by the screams, focussed, their eyes, which were wrapped in the blindfold of the night, on his fleeing figure. As he sprinted home, Bear reflected that, by entering Animus' eternal kingdom with such a cry, Konst had announced himself as the person that he really was, a fierce man, but one lacking the control needed to be a truly successful as a hunter. Animus desired everything to be neat and tidy, and everyone to controlled and deliberate. This was the way the world had to be for a true hunter in the After Life.

‘The deed is done,’ announced Bear upon his return. ‘Only one person, Konst, saw that it was me, and he is now gone, yelling his arrival to those in the After Life. We are safe from his family. They will not know who perpetrated the deed. I left the spear in Konst’s chest, not pointing in any direction, but upwards towards the After Life, where Animus will decide Konst’s fate.’

Matty kissed Bear, as Lydi awoke, with a startled cry.

‘You see, she is alive and awake, my beloved child,’ said Bear. ‘Her cries echo those of Konst, but she will not join him until Animus wills it, and he is not yet ready.’

‘You are right, my love. With you in this world, there is justice.’

Dear Diary,

I am here to say sorry, because I shall have to destroy you, and I know that you do not deserve it. You have been my friend and companion throughout my life, but I must kill you to save myself. You shall be burnt. Before I do this, I shall tell you the truth, because you are the only one who deserves to hear it. I am writing to you to tell you exactly what happened, but I am writing it as a story, because this is my passion. Please understand that I am honouring you with the truth, just as you have honoured me by listening.

My story:

Alex and Sharon meet in a pub.

‘Hi Sharon. I’m so pleased to meet you at last. What are we going to call ourselves? Birds of a feather?’

‘Absolutely! It’s great to hear your sense of humour in person now, not just seeing it in writing. Hey, why don’t we start with a drink. I’ll have a white wine spritzer, if you’re buying.’

‘No problem. Mine’ll be a pint of bitter. Can’t change the habit of a lifetime, can I?’

Alex went to the bar, before returning with the drinks. As their eyes met, they both smiled. They truly wanted this to work. Alex was being her usual, kind self.

‘Go on, then. Tell me all about yourself, Sharon.’

‘Where do I begin? I used to be in a long-term relationship, to a man called Simon. I was happy at first. Simon was great around the house and very good with my parents, which can’t be said for my previous boyfriends.’

‘And then?’

‘It was all so sudden, really. It came as a bit of a shock, even to me. You see, I’d been having these feelings, but I didn’t think anything of it. You know, I thought it was just a passing phase, except that it wasn’t, of course.’

‘Go on.’

'It all happened at work. There was this new girl. Well, I shouldn't call her a girl. She was a young woman. She was so attractive; you know the stereotype, with long blonde hair and big blue eyes. A figure to die for.'

'Let me guess... er... You couldn't help yourself, and fell head-over-heels in love with her.'

'That's exactly how it happened. '

'And this young woman, did she...?'

'Well, we became really good friends. We just got on so well. Then one Friday night, when we were both out at an after-work drinking session, everyone had gone home and... oh my God, I must have been so drunk... I made a pass at her. She didn't stop me. It was the best kiss I've ever had.'

'So, she was up for it too?'

'Well, so it seemed. We didn't go home together, of course, not with Simon waiting for me. But the whole weekend, I just couldn't stop thinking about her.'

'So what happened on Monday morning, when you were back at work?'

'That's just it. Long story short... she asked me to meet up after work. I had my hopes really high, but what she said was devastating. She didn't know what had got into her on Friday night. She said she must have been so drunk. She apologised for leading me astray.'

'I'm so sorry to hear that.'

'Oh, don't worry. I'm over it now. But the whole thing made me realise who I am.'

'And that's why we're meeting today.'

Alex and Sharon's glasses met together in celebration and, Alex believed, in confirmation.

Then it was Alex's turn to tell Sharon her story.

As she listened Sharon gradually became colder in her response.

'So that's why your voice is deeper. You are trans... You were born a man, but now...'

'I am still truly a woman. I think you must know this.'

Then Alex and Sharon finished their drinks and went into the woods, to do some detecting, just as they had agreed. As they went in search of metal, Sharon listened to Alex's full story.

'I am sorry, I really am, but I cannot continue with this,' was Sharon's response. 'I do not want to offend you, but there can be no 'relationship'. I really am truly sorry.'

It was clear to Alex that there was no going back. She had to do what was right. Sharon was no better than the rest. Her world conformed to that old stereotype, where 'straight' did not have its true meaning of orderly, neat and tidy. Like Bear, Alex knew that 'Revenge is Justice'.

Sharon and Alex had been so happy when they had exchanged messages, and Sharon had wanted to meet. But now that Alex had told her truth about her journey from manhood to womanhood, Sharon had rejected her. Had she not understood how difficult Alex's journey had been, so difficult that she had not even told her tale to Dear Diary? But Alex had been inspired by her own tale of Animus and Bear. This had guided her.

Alex had learnt much from her therapist, but it was not until her own words, spewed out in her story, that Alex had understood that this therapist, or 'the-rapist' as she now called her, was no better than the rest. She was a liar, too.

'Why are you holding the metal detector like that?!' Sharon shouted, her eyes wide and staring as the implement threw a shadow across her face.

'Because now is the time to break with tradition. Today it is going to be the final utterance of just one bird, not two, dispatched by one stone.'

This was Alex's pronouncement, and her action confirmed this truth.

The weapon came down, sending Sharon to a better place. The deed was complete, so Alex gave Sharon a blessing.

'I hope your journey will be a smooth one. It is not your fault that you do not understand the true meaning of 'straight'. I shall make sure that you depart as you should. In doing this I show my care and kindness.'

Alex made sure that Sharon's arms and legs were straight by her side, but removed the detector, following her pledge to allow Sharon to travel onwards, unencumbered by clutter.

Then she wrote her final message, before incineration:

Dear Diary,

'Here is the whole truth. I know Sharon was falling in love with me. But she rejected me because of those lies that surround us all in this world. I was born a man, but now I am a woman. Sharon refused to accept this truth. But, Dear Diary, I shall remain the person that I am, for now and evermore.'

Now you know my truth, I shall have to burn you. But have no fear. You shall not be alone, because we shall burn together. We shall travel to the next land, the land ruled by Animus.

As the bird song sings its final refrain, we shall be doused in petrol, to fly together to Heaven, you and I, Dear Diary. If Sharon is good and true, she will meet us there. If not, she does not deserve to be anointed by Our God, Animus.

Goodbye for now.