

## Silk Gloves

The heavenly flakes of snow that fall from their kingdom of ice remind me of the day I met you. Floating down to land on a hill of grass, melting on impact to never quite settle because, as I imagine you'd say, the conditions aren't right. They're never quite right here, apart from the day we met. On that day the ground lay frozen underfoot, stems of grass frozen into fragility that quickly welcomed the flakes of snow. On and on they fell, a velvety blanket soon wrapping the landscape in its comforting grip. Our worlds fell silent. I like to think Earth was holding its breath, waiting in suspense for the moment we'd meet. And later that day as I saw you in the café alone, the winds raged against the windows as the Earth blew its sigh of relief.

I had no intention of finding you there. I didn't want to meet anyone that day; work was tiresome and the short walk home had me soaked to the bone with melting flakes of snow. My hair was a mess, boots sodden and cheeks a harsh blazing red. Yet I know their crimson tone grew deeper still when the café took me into its hold, my boots crying a puddle of melted snow and you struck into my vision like a comet flung from orbit. The best I could do was make my order and settle down across the room, purposefully in your line of view.

Watching you from across the room was like studying a painting, your tilted head frozen in time as you dove deeper into your book. With every second my intrigue for you grew - I felt there was so much more to you than just a girl reading. You seemed so at peace with your hair falling thickly down your back, slipping every now and then in front of your eyes - but I don't think you noticed. The movement you made each time to push it away was rhythmic and quick, a showcase of a practiced art. Bringing the coffee to your lips was another clockwork procedure, your eyes dancing away from the page fast enough not to break the melody of the words. How I wish I could read that tune. I never asked the title of the

book, I never had the chance. But I don't think there'll ever be a book that captivates me as much as you.

Approaching you in the café was not something I could bring myself to do - ripping you from the enchantment of the book would have been cruel, so I waited. I ordered another coffee, the black liquid swimming through my body and making my nerves grow deeper. I watched as the snow fell hard outside, silently hoping it would never stop and we'd be stuck here, frozen in this perfect moment. But life is no cliché and miracles don't happen, so my stomach twisted at the thought of you leaving me here alone. Twisting and turning. Churning and knotting. Sickness rising, sweat forming.

I twisted the metal band that lay burning into the finger on my left hand.

I twisted and turned until eventually it slipped off.

Into my pocket - out of sight.

Wife out of mind.

It was as though you were waiting for that very moment, the moment where I let everything go. The details of my life ceased to exist and I became a free man ready to accept you. Your eyes tore away from the book. Head tilted back up, gazing around wide eyed at your surroundings as though you'd forgotten where you were. An animal out of hibernation. Life quickly flooded back to your face and softened your features, deep hazel eyes now blinking softly, sweeping round the café and relaxing at the familiarity.

And then they locked with my stare.

I could tell by the sudden freeze in your movement and subtle frown you were taken aback at first, but I quickly melted into a smile and you returned it. You looked away whilst I carried on watching. Was I racing through your mind? Did that smile burn you up inside as

much as it did to me? Maybe it did, maybe we shared that scorching flame because you looked back. Packing your bag and sparing me subtle and quick glances – I couldn't help but smile at you. You stuffed the last of your belongings away, pulled on your coat with a brilliant swiftness and headed for the door. One last look at me over your shoulder. A beckoning to follow? I wasn't certain, so I let you disappear out into the frenzied white world whilst I waited lonely, eyeing up the seat you were sat in moments ago.

That's when I noticed it. My golden ticket.

A pair of gloves left abandoned in your haste. I scurried over, scooping them up and turning them over in my hands, taking in the gently woven fabric that once encased your own. A good pair, soft silk with flowers gently woven into an intricate pattern that made my eyes go dizzy. Soft and thick. Warm. I couldn't let you walk out in the snow without them – no good man would allow that. So I headed to the door, leaving the warmth of the café and throwing myself out into the snowy abyss. The sheer white consumed me, sky and ground merging into one hypnotic stretch of nothing. Even the houses threatened to disappear, their roofs piled with mountains of snow, masking their tiling that would make them known. The flurries of snow that danced through the air blurred away the brickwork. It was the only soft light glowing from the windows that confirmed their existence. Families huddled inside, laughing beside a fireplace whilst swimming in their love for each other.

My own family, half a mile down the street. Were they thinking of me in this moment? Pleading for my return? I doubted it. Yet the guilt that came with these thoughts were racing through me, eating me up like a poison. I told myself they were false, injected into me by someone telling me how I should feel, mapping out a fictional guide for morality.

I needed them out my mind – finding you was my priority.

Time passed, darkness grew.

I want you to know I searched until my hands turned blue.

My feet turned to ice, body shivering violently against the raging snow. It never stopped, a snowfall to last eternity, practically mocking me as it grew heavier and deeper and my hopes were buried amongst it along with any trace of you. Forever lost, forever taken away by the blizzards of snow.

You left me alone to become simply a lost girl, somebody searched for by a sad man. Is that all you want to be? You could have been more. I could have made you more.

As I walked on home the gloves hung sadly from my numb hands, crying out for their rightful owner. My feet were buried deep but my dignity lay buried deeper.

I slipped my wedding ring back into its place. Greeted my wife with a kiss at the door.

I told her the gloves were a gift, something I found down at the market. She loved them more than anything and admired me more than ever.

It was just a pair of gloves. I never understood her love for them.

She wears them whenever the temperature drops below ten. Even to this day, two years on, where the snow still falls but never quite settles, where every time my wife grips my hand in those floral embroidered gloves I can't help but think of you.