

Gym Floor

by Rachel Alexander

I look up and watch the sweat roll along my arm and land in a perfect plop on the floor. Veins protruding. Pulsing. Shooting blood around my body. Keeping me alive. I am alive.

To my left, a young man. A gifted GAA player. A happy go lucky go suck my dick kind of guy. He doesn't have the decency to look me in the eye or say my name or acknowledge that brief moment of teenage history that sits between us, on this gym floor.

The music throbs in my ears and I'm back in the club and I'm feeling bad because I've already said no a few times. But you were persistent, so I said okay. You didn't take my hand as I followed behind you, five and a half pints of cider swirling inside my empty stomach. You didn't take my hand as you led me through the streets of a town that I call home and I was seventeen and that was a time when the only thought that crossed my mind when a man looked me up and down and licked his lips like he could eat me up and spit me out was wow. This is my power. We went to the playground and you didn't have the decency to sit on the swings and make small talk. Instead, you headed straight under the monkey bars and whispered into my ear. There were no sweet nothings and the hairs prickled on my neck as you said it: will you give me head? Now, I've been asked this before and when I said no I was told that I was different to the other girls in this town. When I said no, I was told that I was different to the other girls in this town. And again, I said no. But you were persistent, so I said okay. So I said you can't tell anyone. You licked your lips and said it will be our secret.

My knees crunched down on gravelly ground and I did the deed. The promise agreed. And all the while I thought of the countless times my knees have touched this ground. But never like this. Not quite like this. And all the while I felt the ghost of me watching from the swings. Questions burning in her dark eyes. What are you doing? Why are you doing that? Does it feel nice?

To my right, another young man. A quiet guy, a rather shy guy. The boy I married when I was four years old and we held hands every day and raced through that very playground. What is she doing? Does that feel nice? He has the decency to look at me but his eyes flicker away and I think it's the guilt that sits between us. Or maybe the shame.

Because I was back from the playground and I was back in the club and he left me on the dancefloor with a smile on his face that made me think that this is a secret that will be told. No promise agreed. And then I bumped into him, my childhood lover, my little companion and we laughed and joked about being in love. Or our idea of love.

When I got home I tucked the duvet to my chin and pushed the visions of the playground to the back of my brain. In the dark, I scrolled through the glow of my phone until a notification appeared. A Snapchat video from my little ex husband. A Snapchat video of his dick in his hand and he was yanking and wanking over my name.

And I was alone in the dark, lying with this rising feeling that couldn't be stilled. Is this my power? Does this feel nice?

I look up. My sweat still resting on this gym floor. To my left and to my right, two great young men. Two promising young men. Two young men joking and laughing on this gym floor while I hang my head back down and stare at my gathering sweat. Protruding. Pulsing. Shooting something around my body. Keeping me alive. I am alive. Does this feel nice?