

ZOE HARRINGTON

Depono

I tried walking in the evenings to relieve my anxiety and depression, a combination that made me feel like a fire stoked from both sides. I had forgotten I was afraid of dogs and I laughed when one launched at me, barking from behind a joke of a wooden fence which was as sparse as the dog's gums. I laughed because one day the pathetic creature would try to rip a bone from its sheath – probably mine – but would just end up with less teeth. My new "courage" was due to my relationship with James who I had walked with in the evenings up until recently, and who was not afraid of dogs; he was not afraid of anything. He was big and stoic, so tall that dogs, people, anxieties were all dwarfed by him. He imparted some of that strength to me when I was with him. There was something about knowing that he was with me that made me feel so safe. When he left me, I could feel the strength being replaced by indifference, a poor substitute. I'm ashamed to admit to being so dependent on another person, a man, but it is the truth. I was alone, I hated being alone.

After two weeks, I couldn't stand his absence which seemed to fill every room and I rigged up an apparatus to simulate the feeling of someone holding you while you sleep. It was very elaborate in its specifications but very crudely made. It consisted of a large rubber blow up doll filled with a jelly substance that when heated to body temperature felt like an actual warm body. It was quite easy. Because it was so large and heavy I had to heat it in a warm bath; and keeping it in a warm bed allowed the jelly to retain the heat for hours. I woke up the first few nights thinking that there was a stranger in my bed.

I loved my job as a GP and the knowledge that I could help people, make them better. It gave me a wonderful confidence, maybe too much, as I felt that I could face anything with my knowledge of the human body – that it was all just chemicals, muscles, tissue and bone; it seemed all so simple. After James left, I began to feel like a fraud because I could not fix myself and get on with my life. I had treated people with depression before and was so certain that my methods would help them and if they didn't then I would refer them to a specialist. I was not following my own advice because I did not want to see a specialist. I wanted to be able to fix the problem myself. I quit my job.

Two weeks ago I felt like we were more in love than we had ever been before. We just couldn't stop saying it. He was talking about marriage and although I wasn't quite there yet, I didn't tell him that – so that couldn't have been the reason that he had suddenly left. I must have done something terrible because he wouldn't even return my calls; I no longer meant anything to him at all. I felt like I had been living in a state of delusion, that our love was a figment of my imagination. Being separated from him just made the longing for him worse. Suddenly I realised how much I wanted to get married, have babies and live happily ever after. I had suddenly lost the only thing important in my life while before, when I had him, I was in love but I was so unsure.

I talked to the doll incessantly like it was James who was never a big talker anyway but he would at least give me some kind of acknowledgment to indicate that he had understood what I had said. The silence was annoying and at times I would glare angrily over at the doll, forgetting that it was a doll, and occasionally give it the silent treatment. I was very lonely and very pathetic but it suited me for a short time. I told the dummy all the things that I wish that I had said to James, mostly emotional appeals.

Even with the dummy, I still couldn't sleep because the memories of the two of us in our bed pursued me, haunted me. Like ghosts they never slept so neither did I. The last time we were together plagued me as I remembered how he reached out across the bed and pulled me to him. He seemed to be worried that I

might disappear, or maybe he just liked the feeling of my naked body against his; we both hated pajamas which in retrospect was one of his better qualities. I must fall asleep sometimes because I see him in the house, but when I go to talk to him, to hold him, I wake up with my head against the wall; and then I cry. It was worse at night, I don't know why.

There were times during the night when my disbelief was momentarily suspended, when my mind was between waking and dreaming. During these times when I was delirious from sleep deprivation, I was convinced he was right there next to me; and then other times I'd turn to kiss him and be rudely awakened by my own pathetic reality. You would be surprised how much latex feels like skin.

After a while James Junior started to smell a bit like rotten egg gas. I thought that it must have been the gel crystals; or it could have been the cologne which I had been applying to its skin. After a while the stench became really obnoxious and he had to go. A part of me was sad but at the same time, I knew it wasn't real. I didn't know how I wanted to get rid of the dummy, but I couldn't just throw him away. It just didn't feel right. I wanted to give him a proper funeral so I waited till it was dark and I dug him a hole in the backyard, buried him, held a service with candles and flowers and that was it. And from that event, I really felt like it was my relationship with James that was being given a funeral which gave me a tremendous sense of peace.

The next day, the police came to my yard. Apparently the neighbours had been complaining about a smell coming from the house and one of them saw me bury a body in the backyard. I explained as sanely as I possibly could about how I had broken up with my boyfriend and because I was lonely I had made this doll to help me adjust to sleeping on my own. The policemen were slightly disturbed by my pathetic story and looked like they weren't sure whether to laugh or to lock me up in a loony bin. I didn't blame them, I was quite ashamed of myself. But they still wanted to check the backyard.

So I lead them to the dummy grave and let them dig him up while I went to

the kitchen to make tea. There was a kind of weird scream that males do: kind of husky and high pitched. "James! Are you alright?" I was so startled by my response, I dropped the cups which shattered, sending shards of pottery across the floor which cut my feet – the tiles becoming awash with blood and bone white china. Suddenly I was in the back of a police car and wearing handcuffs.

They showed me pictures of the "deceased" at the station but all I saw was the dummy. The policeman told me that James had fallen off the roof while painting the house; our first house together. I told them that they were wrong and to call his mobile, but they wouldn't. My head ached and I couldn't hear anymore. I don't know why I didn't call an ambulance – I don't remember him falling. As a doctor, I knew I would have done everything that I could to try to resuscitate him – if he had fallen. I looked again at the images but again all I could see was that stupid doll. As they described James' death to me over and over again, trying to make me understand, the lights in the small room began to burn my eyes and I felt something cool and hard hit me on my side. I closed my eyes and waited for James to come in and tell me, like he used to, that everything would be alright.