

Wilderness House Literary Review 20/4

Colby Mackenzie
A Good Lay

"I want to have sex with your husband."

It was Memorial Day weekend, the one they always spent together. Not that they were any sort of great friends; it was a matter of convenience more than anything. A holiday where anyone is a friend and old friends are best friends even if they were never really friends to begin with. It is a nostalgic holiday and so the man she went to high school with was closer than ever for just this weekend.

But she thought of him now. She thought of him, looking as he stood on the stern of the boat with her husband. They were drinking Coors light and talking about whatever it is men bond over easily, the same way women who must be close for only a few days defer to the default topics - children, husbands, work, jewelry. But Darcy and Chris were easy and real, and it was too easy to lose any sense of propriety.

Chris was as gorgeous as he'd been in high school. The short dark hair curled on his lean chest and his blue eyes shone behind his RayBans though she could not see them. He had a silly laugh and a voice he put on for jokes. He was a good father, that she knew. And she'd been seeing him in her dreams, his tan body on top of hers with his white ass between her legs and she knew she wanted him, for no other reason than to have a warm body on hers that was different and know that she would never fall in love.

Darcy stared at her. Her sunglasses hid her eyes, but she knew they were wide open in that shocked way. Her eyebrows raised above the dark brown and gold frames. She expected anger, fury. Darcy turned her head to look at her husband and their golden-haired child whose head he was rubbing absently with one hand in conversation, the child looking down at the inflatable arm rings she was to blow up on her own if she could.

Bev waited calmly. This was not a friendship that would end over such a thing as they were not great friends to begin with. But they were friends for this weekend and that was important. Darcy was intelligent and funny and had an air of authority about her always, easily hidden behind blonde hair and an easy smile.

Bev only had to wait a few seconds. Darcy threw back her head with a chortle, and then looked at her incredulously.

"What?"

"He doesn't know about this. My husband does and he's not happy but there it is. I don't love Chris and I won't, but I want him now so I thought I'd ask. It's your decision. I can go either way."

Her tone was neutral, flat. She had sunk to the stone place in her middle, the one that unwavered and that said what it wanted and had no fear, none at all. No fear of female hysteria or awkward silences or consequences.

Darcy laughed again.

Wilderness House Literary Review 20/4

"You're fucking crazy!"

"Think about it. Chris doesn't know and won't know unless your answer is yes."

"He doesn't know about this? I know you two fucked in high school."

"Yes, we did. It was a brilliant summer. I don't ask this of just anyone."

Darcy hesitated, thought it over, needed more information.

Bev continued.

"We both know he's gorgeous, he's a good father. I'm attracted to him still for obvious reasons, for the same ones you are."

"Yes he is, he is those things," Darcy said.

Bev continued her pitch as if she didn't particularly care for it.

"Frankly, he's a good lay. So is my husband by the way - the best sex I've ever had. Because I'm in love with him. And that's the best sex there is. Chris is a good lay out the gate, which is impressive and I've never forgotten it. He's gorgeous now and so am I and we're young and I'm just in a fuck it kind of mood. You can tell me to fuck off now if you want. You can watch if you want or join - you're gorgeous too. We can see if my husband's interested if you want. Whatever. If this is crossing a line that we can't come back from, then let's not do it. It's not worth it. We can pretend this conversation never happened, and I'm sorry if I'm upsetting you."

Bev shrugged to put a point on that last sentence. She was, to her surprise, not really at all sorry.

Darcy did not answer. She was looking at their little girl. She had the blonde hair of youth alone, freckles dusted across her nose and cheeks from the New England summer sun. She had a polka dot bathing suit on and her chubby thighs touched together the way grown women dread and she was still immersed in the problem of the deflated swimmers. One of the clear plastic stoppers was giving her a hard time and would not come out so she could blow in it. She furrowed her eyebrows and looked up at Chris.

"Daddy?"

Chris let out a laugh at something Bev's husband said and looked down at the little girl, his hand still on her head as if steadying her always.

"Yes, sweetheart?"

"Daddy, it won't come out!" She stomped her little feet with the pink polish on the tiny toenails.

"It won't come out?" He asked her, gently mocking. He looked over at Bev's husband. "Hold this a sec?" He handed him his beer and squatted low to the deck of the boat to be level with the girl.

"Here, let's see what we can do." He wedged his fingernails around the circle of plastic that was pushed into the floaty. It took him a minute, and the girl stood against his shoulder watching.

"See Daddy? It's hard!"

Wilderness House Literary Review 20/4

"Yes, you're right sweetheart! It's hard for Daddy, too. Maybe we need Mommy's nails." He looked to the bow of the boat at Darcy where the two women were seated and grinned at her.

Darcy held out her hand with a tight smile. "Come here love, give it to me."

The little girl ran towards them, past the center console and ignoring the ropes and sandals and beer cans strewn about the floor.

Both parents hollered in unison.

"Careful!"

"No running!" The little girl heard them, but she was already at her mother, standing between her legs as Darcy swung them round to face the child, dangling her legs over the bow seat where she'd been cross-legged and facing Bev. The little girl handed the single arm floaty to her. Darcy dug her nails around the fine edge and freed the plastic stopper, the air point of entry and exit. She handed it back to the little girl.

"Here you go love."

"Thanks Mommy," the girl said, not looking at her, looking at the floaty and then running back towards her father who had reclaimed his beer. She sat on the deck on top of his feet and started blowing, the concentration furrowing her faint golden eyebrows. Her cheeks puffed out in globes as she blew into the floaty and she kept her mouth on it so the air would not come back out.

"She's so beautiful," Bev said.

"Yes, she is."

"You have such a beautiful family."

"Yes, I know."

Darcy swung her legs back to cross-legged so she could face Bev. They both took a long sip of their beers, tall and still cold tucked in their koozies.

"I lost it though."

"Lost what?" Bev asked. She did not have children.

"I don't know. Me. Myself. The edge. The freedom." She looked down into her drink and then back towards the stern of the boat at her husband and their beautiful little girl.

"Mhmm." Bev murmured in acknowledgement. She said nothing else. She'd already said plenty.

"It's the best thing and the worst thing. I don't know how to explain it. You only know if you have children. You two don't have any right?"

"Nope." Bev laughed. "We decided to be selfish instead."

Darcy turned her head to look at the sea. "Yea,"

"I read something once. An article collecting comments from writers about children and regret. The conclusion was that there is always some

Wilderness House Literary Review 20/4

thread of regret no matter the decision - people with children regret it on some level and people without children regret it just the same. There is no right answer, it's only what we can live with. I feel lucky to have had the choice, though I think that makes it harder." Bev was pulpitting now. She stopped and took a drink.

"I wouldn't trade it for anything," Darcy affirmed. "But this shit about fucking my husband - it's not just my husband you know. My little girl. Not fucking her obviously," Darcy said with a snort, "but it's my family."

"I can understand that. Forget I said anything. Forget I said anything at all. Take it as a compliment, which it is, and let's leave it at that. I like you and I'd rather be friends." Bev raised her beer to cheers Darcy.

"To hot husbands and friendship." Darcy said as she clinked her beer bottle top against Bev's and the women drank.

"Another?" Bev asked.

"Please," said Darcy.

"Let's go see what they're gabbing about," said Bev as she got up.

"Right behind you," Darcy said, and she remained sitting. "I want to put some more sunscreen on."

Bev rode the waves rocking the boat as she side-stepped the ropes, picking them up as she went along the length of the boat and looping them into circles. She approached the men and the little girl, joining her on the floor.

"How's it going?" Bev asked the child.

The child lifted her mouth, red in the face from the blowing, and said to her while catching her breath, "It's going but it's hard! It's taking me a long time."

Bev put the child's thumb over the top of the plastic opening. "Here," she said, "if you lift your mouth away, put your thumb over top so none of the air gets out." The thumb was no bigger than a small carrot, the fingernail the size of a pea or an Advil, thin and clean.

"Sometimes the best things take a long time," Bev said, smiling at the child. The child smiled back but her eyes said she was not convinced. Bev's smile turned tight - she'd been wise again - and stood up to face the men.

"Hi babe," her husband put his arm around her shoulders. It was warm from the sun and from the place where her head fit into his neck, she could smell the scent from his raised armpit and the sweat that had stained the shirt and it was her favorite smell. She closed her eyes and inhaled.

"Hi." She looked up at him lovingly and then at Chris, who stood too casually now as if he'd heard them.

She moved towards the big Yeti behind him. "I come for reinforcements."

They carried on as she opened the lid and bent in, moving aside the

Wilderness House Literary Review 20/4

Bud Lights to find the pricier bottles. She did not want to talk to them, so she knelt with her back towards them and looked busy. The cooler was at the left corner of the stern and as she rummaged absently, Bev looked up at the cool blue water. The waves were small and rolling, gently rocking the boat as they glided underneath the hull. The water towards the horizon was a true blue, a bright dark blue, a cobalt undulating beneath a clear sky. She looked down into the water right over the boat edge and saw the sun streaking into it and how the blues became greens and then blue again and then a deep blue-green. It was her favorite color, this peacock sapphire color, this dark turquoise found only here and in the gem.

She looked over her shoulder back towards the bow at Darcy. The sunscreen bottle sat next to her, unopened. Darcy's back was towards them all and she was leaning back on her straight arms, her legs out in front of her and crossed at the ankle. Her black bathing suit had a scoop back and there was the faint white line of a bikini across her tanning back. Her face was tilted up towards the sun.

Bev smiled. The beers can wait. She had that glorious first buzz that didn't take much now and she stood suddenly before she lost her nerve, whipped off her linen button down, stepped up to the boat edge and dove in ungracefully. As soon as she was submerged she felt the feeling she craved always, the feeling of weightlessness and freedom and being cool and protected and safe. She was always safe when all of her was underwater - it was the treading of the legs and the mysterious unknown beneath her that she could not stand. She blew air out of her nose with her arms out straight, hands together and pointed, and glided down and away as far as her breath would take her, opening her eyes midway and feeling the sting of the salt and seeing nothing.

The buoyancy of her body and changing lung pressure raised her to the surface. She bobbed there facing the horizon, facing the clean unchanging line that was only a mirage, an illusion, and then kicked her legs up to float on her back with her face to the high noon sun. She thought back at her conversation with Darcy but only to be proud and astonished at herself, to have looked at the precipice and jumped off, regardless of whether or not it was destructive. Maybe it was destructive. Why had she done it? She didn't know anymore. She hoped nothing would change. Then her mind darted to the sharks perhaps swimming beneath, swimming aimlessly and then catching a glimpse of Bev's juicy body and thrashing their tails towards her, and turned abruptly towards the boat.

"How is it?" Chris called.

"Glorious," she said while swimming towards them.

Chris put down his beer and took off his sunglasses, putting them in the center console and taking a last look at the child.

"I'm coming," he said and dove in.

She was already on her way out and she got to the edge of the boat and looked up smiling at her husband. She debated hauling herself out at the side but then remembered the small stairs at the stern that hung into the water.

Wilderness House Literary Review 20/4

"Babe, would you mind lowering those stairs for me please?" she asked.

"Yea, let's do it that way," he said laughing, knowing, and walked over with his beer still in his hand and picked up the metal stairs, flipping them over the backside of the boat so the last step hung into the water. She hated doing it this way because she was by the motor and always envisioned one of the propeller blades going haywire and chopping her foot off. She scurried up the ladder fast as she could and thumped back into the boat.

"Going in?" she said to her husband, picking up a yellow and white striped towel.

"Not yet," he said. He was looking at Chris's lean tan body in the waves and she knew he wouldn't.

"Your nose is getting red. I'll get you some more sunscreen," she said. She opened the cooler to grab one of the good beers and walked carefully up to Darcy, setting it beside her opened.

"Mind if I borrow the sunscreen?" Bev asked to the side of her face still tilted up towards the sun.

"Not at all." Darcy smiled and took the fresh beer, removing the old one from the koozie. Bev took the empty bottle and the sunscreen back to the stern where her husband stood looking out at the blue ocean and put her arm around his waist.

She handed him the sunscreen. "Here."

The child was now onto the second floaty, the full one stopped up and tucked carefully between her crossed legs. Chris had swum up to the bow and was talking to Darcy.

Her husband took it with his free hand but made no other movements. "Thanks babe."

They faced the open sea, clinked the tops of their beers together, and each took a long drink.