

One Snip Short

Bradley Stoke



Karen paused outside the lavatories. To the left was the Gents, signified by a pin figure. To the right was the Ladies, where a similar pin figure wore the silhouette of a skirt. Well, it was obvious really. She was the one in the skirt, so she pushed the door open with a determined and resolute thrust.

After relieving herself, she busied herself with the real reason she'd scuttled off to the loo, and that was to adjust her hair, reassure herself about the make-up she'd thickly applied to her face, and to make sure the scarf hadn't slipped down too low. Yes, it was fine! She added an extra lustre to the deep red of her lipstick, revelling in her reflection in the mirror.

She was an attractive woman: that was for sure. Slim, curvy and, this she knew from the heads that turned appreciatively as she strode across the bar, very striking. Her hair fell over her face, almost obscuring her well-rouged cheeks. Had the hairdresser left her hair too long? Or could he have snipped a little more off? This was an extra anxiety she could have done well without.

She returned to the bar where Kenneth was waiting, sipping his glass of wine, the Guardian that had identified him when she arrived in the bar still in front of him.

Karen had been ever so nervous when she set off earlier that evening for the date she'd arranged through the dating agency. Was Kenneth really the slim, handsome, w/e graduate that had attracted her attention? Was he really sensitive with a Good Sense Of Humour? So far there was nothing about him that suggested otherwise.

But she was still nervous about her description of herself that must have taken his eye. Sure, she was slim, attractive, keen on the arts, enjoyed walks in the

countryside and liked a good time, but as she knew, and he still didn't, there was much more about her that she had deliberately omitted to mention. But would she ever do so? It was her intention to, but when would the time be right?

She sat down opposite him and sipped her glass of Chardonnay, and glanced around at the other couples who looked as sophisticated as she hoped Kenneth and she did in the slightly pretentious wine bar she'd arranged to meet him.

"You must excuse me," she said anxiously. "I'm very nervous. I've never done this before."

He looked at her through soft green eyes, with just the glint of contact lens, and smiled. The slight blueness of his cheeks swelled as his teeth shone in the candle-light of *Le Jeune Obscure*, as the wine-bar christened itself.

"My first time, too," he said softly. His voice was gentle and seductive, but she was astute enough to see a kind of restiveness, even awkwardness, about him. "I'd wondered what it would be like, you know, meeting someone like you when it's sort of arranged. A kind of confession of failure, I suppose."

"Failure?" wondered Karen, with a slight alarm. How could someone so handsome, but also so gentle and reserved, be anything less than a total success in the game of love? In fact, why had some fortunate woman not already clasped him to her bosom? Karen was sure that if she was lucky enough to take Kenneth in her grasp, nothing, but nothing, would ever take him away from her.

"I'm sorry," he said. "I didn't mean to say that *you* were a failure. I'm positive that someone as beautiful as you is nothing but a success when it comes to, you know, catching men's attention."

“It’s never as easy as that,” she said automatically, and hoped that he didn’t guess the deeper meanings of her words. “The right man has just never come along, I guess.”

“The same here,” he said. And then with a blush, he corrected himself. “The right woman, that is. I’ve never found the right woman.”

“That *is* so difficult to believe.”

“And me with you,” he agreed. “But the path to true love, as they say...”

She shook her head in agreement. “It’s not smooth. It’s not smooth at all.”

And, indeed, it never had been for Karen.

In a sense, she still thought of herself as a virgin. Perhaps not so in the literal sense, but in an emotional sense there was a truth about this she was too embarrassed to admit. True, she had experimented. There were the men who’d enjoyed her body when times were hard and the doctors’ bills most difficult to afford, but she knew for sure that she’d not really relished their affection as much as they apparently did. And, in any case, her scruples had never let her go beyond oral sex. She may have suffered financially as a result, but she had limits she’d set herself, however desperate she might have been.

When she was young and not so sure of herself she’d even had sex with women, but this was wholly unsatisfactory and more than anything reinforced in her mind just where her sexual preferences lay. It wasn’t just the humiliation of leaving her female lovers dissatisfied: there was also the deeper discovery that she would never be the sort of woman who could properly love another woman however much she enjoyed her company.

“Do you like this wine bar?” Kenneth asked, perhaps noticing Karen’s restlessness.

“It’s not the sort of place I’d normally go to,” she admitted.

“And what sort of place might that be?” he asked sympathetically.

Karen didn’t want to compromise herself too much by discussing the sort of slightly run-down pubs she’d more often go to where she felt more at ease. She glanced through the plate-glass windows of the wine bar at the darkening shadows of Kensington High Street.

“I like restaurants,” she said. “There are some very nice ones near here, I’m sure.”

“Do you like Italian?”

“Italian. Portuguese. Thai. Anything, really. Just somewhere friendly and,” she lowered her voice, “above all, intimate.”

“I don’t know this part of town so well, but I saw a nice small Italian on the way here.”

Karen nodded.

His smile broadened and for a moment Karen was speechless in the gleam of his penetrating green eyes and the seductive blueness of those cheeks which no razor could emasculate. Could men really be so luscious and yet she be so lucky to have such a man as a date? Even if he left her now, she would remain with memories of what might have been that would comfort her on many a lonely night at home. Oh please please let it work! Just this one time!

She nervously adjusted the scarf around her neck, stroked a stubbornly wilful

strand of hair into place and swiftly drank the last few dregs of her glass.

He stood up sharply. "Shall we go now?"

"The rest of your wine?" asked Karen, whose days of relatively poverty and the sacrifices she'd made prejudiced her against such waste.

"Don't worry about that. We can get another bottle in the *Fiorenze*."

As the two of them walked along the high street, Karen shyly slipped her arm into the crook of Kenneth's and was pleased that he didn't let it slide away. He seemed genuinely happy in her company and his lively conversation about the Italian meals he cooked at home distracted her mind from her anxieties. She just hoped his affection for her wouldn't lessen if ever he discovered more about her than she felt willing to disclose at the moment.

The *Fiorenze* was a very small restaurant with barely more than a half dozen tables, but it was pleasingly busy. The waiter showed the couple to a table for two where Karen was able to study Kenneth's face lit from below by a candle and hardly at all by the low lights of the restaurant. The candle's play on his cheeks and chiselled chin made him look, if anything, even more infeasibly handsome. She hoped the same subdued romantic flicker would enhance her own beauty. Or, at the very least, obscure any imperfections.

It was rare for Karen to enjoy a man's company and to talk so much. Normally, it was the man who'd do the talking and in the course reveal enough of his character for her to be able to dismiss him as a realistic proposition. But here, with Kenneth, it was she who was doing most of the talking, but not so frankly that her more intimate secrets were revealed. She discussed the books she'd read, the countries she'd visited

on holiday (despite them not being at all exotic), her executive job in the Home Office, the plans she had of re-decorating her flat, and her abiding, but still guilty, love of cheesy dance music.

Kenneth laughed sympathetically.

“You don’t have to apologise for liking mushy stuff like that!” he said. “I quite like house and garage and smooth jazz. Why! I’ve even got records by people like Macy Gray.”

“Do you go to night clubs?” she wondered, getting dangerously close to the limits of what she was willing to discuss. If she mentioned the places she’d be more likely to spend her nights, what would Kenneth think?

“Not often,” he admitted. “I’m a stay-at-home guy mostly, though I like a drink with my mates. Although...” and he paused, as if uncertain whether he should say anything, but he checked himself, “...I’ve sometimes been to some pretty banging night clubs. I quite like hard house, I think. You know, music by people like Tony de Vit...”

Karen frowned. “I’ve never heard of him. What kind of music does he play?”

It was Kenneth’s turn to look slightly uncomfortable. “Er... hard house. Anyway, it’s not what you’d call easy listening. Erm, do you like Jamie Cullum?”

She nodded, slightly aware that an awkward moment had been sidestepped.

Karen was secretly relieved, when the bill came, that Kenneth insisted on paying the whole tab. At a snip short of £70, it was a little too much for her to afford what with the ongoing debt on her medical bills. If only there was less distance between the two of them, she would have leant over and given him a kiss there and

then.

It was very dark when the two of them ventured out of the restaurant into a street slightly shining from a brief shower of rain. Taxis and buses cruised by, lighting up the moist black tarmac with their headlamps. The tube station was only a couple of hundred yards away. What should happen now?

Karen glanced at Kenneth who was almost exactly the same height as her, but would be slightly taller if she wasn't wearing such high heels. Perhaps her thoughts were written too clearly on her face because he bent his face towards her. This was an opportunity not to be missed! Her mouth eagerly opened and the two began kissing passionately under the streetlamp, pedestrians dodging past.

There was a great deal she could establish from the snog, even though she was far too much of a lady to confirm her suspicions by placing a hand on his crotch. When their lips parted and she could see the bright gleam in his eyes, the rim of green cornea overwhelmed by the black of his pupils, she knew that the evening wouldn't end with a fond farewell at Kensington High Street tube station.

"Erm..." she said in a voice husky with excitement. "My flat's not far from here..."

"Is that so?" he asked, his mouth again seeking out hers to resume the kiss they had enjoyed so much.

The couple made their way back to her small flat, on which the payments for the mortgage often caused her to despair and contemplate a return to her earlier more desperate ways of earning enough to meet her financial commitments. They made their way up the narrow stairway to the second floor, his arm so reassuring around her

waist and she still not sure whether this was all a dream that would soon come to an unhappy end.

There was no need for excuses. There was no pretence at preparing coffee, no giggling discussion on how comfortable the sofa was, and no apologies for missing the last train. They made their way directly to Karen's bedroom, threw themselves onto the mattress and resumed their passionate embraces.

However enjoyable kissing can be, and Karen was enjoying Kenneth's tongue inside her mouth more than she'd ever enjoyed physical intimacy with anyone before in her life, there comes a point where the tongues must part. In any case, the very blueness of his chin that attracted Karen so much when lit beneath by the restaurant candle was now grating painfully against her cheeks.

"What now?" he asked, as their mouths parted.

She smiled. She knew exactly what she wanted to do. And it was something she'd wanted to do ever since she saw Kenneth's details as supplied by the dating agency. She slid down onto her knees in front of him. She unzipped his flies. And with a gasp of delight she pulled loose his erect penis which had been pressing so hard against the crotch. She bent her head down and applied her tongue and mouth to the glorious proof of manliness that she'd unsheathed.

Her head bobbed up and down on his lap, his penis inside her mouth and pressed against the back of her throat. He certainly hadn't been lying in his ad. She'd never known a better endowed man than Kenneth.

When he ejaculated, as he did after just over ten minutes of her ministrations, she made sure that as much as possible spurt into her mouth, so that only the barest

dribble of semen trailed down her chin, which she greedily lapped up. She still wasn't sure whether she liked the taste of semen, but she was certain that with more practice she should soon appreciate it rather more, perhaps as one gradually came to appreciate blue cheese and good wine.

But would she have another opportunity with him?

Karen leaned back, her knees on the carpet and her skirt taut above her knees. She looked imploringly into Kenneth's eyes, so green and excited. She held tight onto his penis, which still had life in it despite its release, and smiled at him shyly.

"I wasn't being totally honest in my ad, you know," she said above the thunder of her heart.

He frowned. "Sorry?"

"I haven't been totally honest with you."

"But you're exactly as you said you were. I don't understand."

"It's not what I said," she replied. "It's what I didn't say."

"What you didn't say? Why? Are you a secret axe murderer? Do you vote Tory? What can it be?"

"I haven't always been a woman."

"Oh!"

"I'm mostly a woman now, but I haven't always been one."

Kenneth took a deep intake of breath. His face changed in a way Karen couldn't decipher. Was he shocked? Would he jump up in disgust and leave? But how long could she have kept up the pretence without her secret being discovered anyway?

"Post- or pre-op?" he asked at last.

“Pre-,” she said sadly. “I’ve had the hormone treatment. I’ve had surgery to my breasts, thighs and so on. I’m almost there.”

“You just haven’t had the snip?”

She shook her head. “I’m too frightened. It’s something I’ve always meant to do, but the idea still scares me. It’s so expensive anyway.”

“Just one snip short?” he asked in a voice she was sure was kind and sympathetic, rather than the disgust she’d feared. Significantly, he hadn’t shifted his body, letting her hand rest by his penis.

Karen nodded her head. She gazed imploringly into his eyes.

There was a pause while Kenneth returned her gaze with a complex expression that she hoped (hoped so much!) would not collapse into utter rejection. Perhaps they could just be friends. That would be better than nothing.

Kenneth coughed.

“You’re not the only one to be deceitful,” he said at last.

“I don’t understand.”

“I also omitted to mention certain truths.”

“You did?”

Kenneth sat up, his trousers and underpants still around his knees. Karen withdrew her hand and let it rest by her side.

“It wasn’t me who wrote the advert. It was my mates.”

”It was!” she said. At least they had accurately described the fact he was well-endowed. But then, she wondered, how did they know?

“My mates were worried about me. They’re good friends, but they’d been

worried that I didn't have a girlfriend. In fact, that I've never had a girlfriend."

"You haven't?" she asked in genuine surprise.

"I'm gay," said Kenneth. "Not bi. One hundred percent homosexual. I've just never been attracted to women. But my mates, most of whom I've known since school, they're all straight. So they assume I'm the same. And, of course, I've been too terrified, really, to let on what I'm really like."

"So they got in touch with the dating agency for you?"

"It wasn't behind my back," he said with a smile. "They're good mates, not wind-up merchants. They genuinely thought they were doing the best for me. But once everything was in motion, there was nothing I could do but go along with them."

Karen sighed.

"Does that mean that you don't, that you don't... fancy me?"

"That's the strange thing. I must have guessed somehow. It wasn't the scarf around your throat, though in retrospect that would be the most obvious sign. It's the little things. The thickness of your wrists, the shape of your jaw, the texture of your hair, the huskiness of your voice, the things you don't sort of immediately notice. But I guess it was those little things that made me think that perhaps there was something about women that's not so bad really."

"So, do you actually think I'm...?"

"Yes, I do find you attractive, Karen. And the fact you're also still something of a guy, well, I think I must have struck gold."

"Do you really mean that?" she asked breathlessly, a tear trickling from the corner of her eye and a stirring from inside her skirt that reciprocated Kenneth's own

openly displayed proof of manhood.

“You may be one snip short of a complete woman,” he said with a reassuring smile, “but you’re all the woman I’ll ever need.”