

Rodney & Chelsea

by Kathy Fish

Tangerines

Rodney and Chelsea have decided this is the day. They are sixteen years old and they are in love. Neither of them has ever done it, though Rodney has come close, with a girl he worked with at Dairy Queen who smelled like French fries and who had perfect, melon-sized breasts. Chelsea's breasts are more the size of tangerines, but he likes them. He likes that she smells like Fruit Loops and that her front teeth overlap slightly. Her mouth is glossed. He slips his tongue inside.

Bear Spirit

"Rodney's an old man's name," Chelsea's mom says and calls him Rascal instead. It makes Rodney feel like a Labrador.

Chelsea's mom believes that life is a celebration and that people should live in the Now. Chelsea has an older brother named Royal. Nobody knows where the hell he is. He ran away from the halfway house downtown, the place Chelsea's mom said was his best chance and hope. He has a behavior disorder which involves beating people up. He doesn't know his own strength is what Chelsea's mom says. He has a bear spirit. He is unruinable.

The last guy he beat up now walks with a cane.

The Bunnies

Chelsea's father left when Royal was ten and Chelsea was a newborn. Every Easter, he sends Chelsea a six foot Easter bunny and now she has sixteen huge Easter bunnies and there are no more places to sit in Chelsea's house. Sometimes people sit on the

bunnies' laps or sometimes they just stand, looking around or sometimes they sit on the floor.

A Small Complication

Their first date, Rodney plucked a daffodil from Chelsea's garden and presented it to her at the door. And Chelsea's mom gave them Boone's Farm, mixed with a splash of 7 Up. All three of them got a little drunk, sitting on the porch watching the sun go down and a full moon rise. Chelsea's mom insisted on driving Rodney home. Before he got out of the car, she pulled his face to hers and kissed him, hard.

About Rodney's Parents...

Rodney doesn't have any siblings. He feels lucky, given the circumstances. His mother died of cancer when he was five. He remembers standing on tip-toe to reach a cookie off a plate on the counter and her hand slapping it away. He tries to really see that hand, to see something about it that is especially hers, but it always ends up being just a hand.

Rodney's father is a podiatrist who is working on his overall fitness. Every day at dawn, he walks the perimeter of the cul-de-sac, gripping fifty pound dumbbells in each hand. In warm weather he goes without a shirt, his burgeoning muscles gleaming. He makes three trips around, bobs his chin to Chelsea's mom who watches from her kitchen window, and lays the dumbbells on the porch in the special box. He consumes nothing but protein: lamb chops, sausages, steaks as thick as two hands clamped together. He will never love another woman, he promises Rodney, who really doesn't care if he does or not. Rodney only wants his father to be happy,

which his father assures him he is.

Clinical

Two bunnies sit in opposite corners of Chelsea's bedroom. One is missing an eye and one's polka-dotted ear is nearly torn off. Rodney and Chelsea undress in a clinical manner, and fold their clothes, as if they have decided to join the Army together. Rodney has seen parts of Chelsea but never the whole and now he stands before her and reaches out to touch one tangerine breast. Unsure of what to do with her own hands, Chelsea simply places them on Rodney's shoulders.

She's afraid to get closer because his thing is standing up. She digs her toes into the pink shag rug and closes her eyes. The breeze through the window is making the shutters flap against the window frame and Rodney's breath smells like oatmeal and grape jelly.

The Now

At this moment Chelsea's dad is getting fired from his job selling tires in Terre Haute and her mom is hunched over a patient, scraping plaque in an office downtown, thinking of that kiss and Royal's getting the shit kicked out of him in a bar in Tucson. At this moment, Rodney's dad's outside on the curb, sweating, coughing, turning blue, as Rodney kisses Chelsea. Like howling into her mouth.

