

Brown and Blue

by Alison Wells

She was in love with a boy whose eyes were so brown that she sat stopped in the restaurant at the anniversary dinner with the spoon in her slow chocolate fondant. Out of the corner of her eye, around the back of her head, under the table knees knocking, crawling as a child under the tablecloth at parties, everyone was him.

She had known him since they ate mud together age three, their mothers in swooning frocks, chatting above their heads, their voices like clippers in the foliage.

My boy. She patted his hand. Their faces were so close, Eskimo nose kisses. Under the tablecloth at parties, blue eyes facing brown.

The same people come round and round in lives, like on the Circle line or long races in athletics.

She was in love with a boy whose eyes were so brown that she collected chestnuts in the woods and piled them on a dish on the table and she put apples beside, red apples on the brink of rotting and leaves, gold and auburn and turning. Then she took out her brushes and painted a still life.

She saw on the television a story about a family in Kansas who survived as the tornado raged round them because they were in the eye of the storm. All around them was torn up, trees uprooted, houses awash in silt.

She was in love with a boy whose eyes were so brown that she envied the crows their pillage of newly ploughed fields.

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The sky reminded him of something. Something long ago, under a tablecloth.

Where he lived the wind was always howling. It was never still. Walking on the seafront where last they'd seen each other, it pushed him along, away, away from here.

He saw on the television how blue the Earth was from afar.

Sometimes after that he went for a ride on his motorbike, for no particular reason, going nowhere in particular.

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"Sometimes," said Sandra, "you hear stories about people who meet again after fifty years, get married and live happily ever after."

"Hmmm?" said Karen. She was painting her nails and adding stick-on stars.

"On the radio."

"They met on the radio?" Karen blew on a nail and examined it.

"No, well, yes, that happens too...It says here," Sandra continued, "that they were childhood sweethearts. Then they ended up parted for their whole lives."

"What parted them?"

Sandra peered at the newspaper. "Circumstance."

"Did he marry someone else?"

"Of course he did. But accidentally."

"Then what?"

"Then one day she's walking down the street in her old town and literally bumps into him."

"Literally?"

"Yes, literally."

"Must have been painful..."

"They got over it." Sandra looked at Karen's unruly brown hair. "Do you think you'll ever meet the man of your dreams, Karen?"

Karen looked up from her nail painting, holding the brush with its thick dollop of blue nail polish. Her lips had bright peach lip gloss which glinted. "I doubt it", she said, and she smiled.

"Me neither," said Sandra, smiling back. *Chocolate fondant.*

"What about Morrison?" remarked Karen, thinking of the man they'd met in FurnitureLand.

"Morrison," said Sandra and they both laughed.

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Working in FurnitureLand, Morrison was a fan of brown. What people didn't realise was that there were many hues ranging from almost black to verging on yellow.

And another thing. Why did it always happen that when you saw someone once you kept seeing them again and again. Like that

woman with the weird blue eyes and her two blue-eyed daughters with dresses like candyfloss. *Emily*. He'd seen her in FurnitureLand then later at the bus stop, where she looked distracted and soggy. She was near that odd guy, the guy who wasn't all there who always shouted Yarr! randomly. Morrison could see that he was making her, *Emily*, feel uneasy. He thought he might go and stand near for solidarity but he was afraid of being close to her and not knowing what to say.

Then there was that other guy, the guy who didn't have a clue when he came into the shop looking for furniture for his new flat. Morrison had managed to sell him a bedroom package and a couple of kitchen chairs. Later he saw him driving off on his motorbike, a proper one. Morrison drove a moped, very slowly.

He'd seen that guy again also, at a newsagent on the way to the bus stop. Sometimes his customers became so familiar, he thought he really knew them, that he had a wide circle of friends.

On the bus Morrison took out his notebook. He was a poet or trying to be. He found himself scribbling '*Sightings of Emily*' at the top of the page. He quickly crossed it out because God knows if the police ever read his poetry notebook he might be up for something.

He wished he'd been in love, did Morrison, or perhaps he was, perhaps everything he felt was love and he didn't know how to differentiate. Every time he wrote a poem it was because he loved something about life, or something about someone, even people he didn't really know, or know yet. His last poem was about Autumn and chestnuts, that solid round brown warmth, the shine, the smooth outside, the gritty, sweet taste of them straight from the oven. Next he might write about sky, the strange, inconstant blue of it.

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Sandra bought a two pack of chocolate fondant mini desserts in Groceryland. On the way home on the bus she thought of how she and Karen would sit together on the sofa later, dipping their spoons into the luscious chocolate. Then her bus and another edged past each other on the main street, and coincidentally she thought she

saw Morrison, sitting behind a woman and her two daughters,
staring at the woman's hair. Funny how things kept coming around.

