

Lethargy

by Alison Wells

'I'm bored of my despair,' said Sandra
'I'm afraid of getting fat,' said Karen, licking the cream, watching the coffee swirl in the mug, holding the steam under her nose to help with the blackheads.
'Shopping?' said Sandra
'Bopping?' said Karen.
It wasn't even raining.
'Didn't she die?' said Sandra, looking at the actress on the screen. It was a film from the eighties. All wheel spin and big sunglasses.
'Or get divorced?' said Karen.
Karen picked the fluff off the sofa, then off her skirt, she ran her hand down the side of the sofa cushion. It was gritty there.
It wasn't even winter.
Karen sighed. She almost looked out of the window but the woman on the telly was wearing those power shoulder thingys...
'Shoulder pads,' said Sandra.
Sandra almost drummed her fingers but she bit her fingernails instead.
'One night stand....' said Karen, checking for cellulite.
'Night stand,' said Sandra.
'Furnitureland has a sale on,' said Karen.
'50% off,' said Sandra
'I'll get my coat,' said Karen point and clicking the remote.
'There's a match on,' said the salesman, gesturing around the empty salesroom. He had a skinny tie — a tie that wasn't meant to be skinny but had been washed too hot. He had spots.
'Steaming,' said Karen
'You should come for coffee,' said Sandra.
'What?' said the salesman. 'What? Now?' he said.
He could wink with one eye. Karen had seen him do it, not to her. She was in one day with her mother buying a pull out bed. She

couldn't wink properly. No matter how she tried, both of her eyes closed. He could also raise one of his eyebrows.

He was raising one of his eyebrows.

'Now,' said Karen.

'Now,' said Sandra.

He sat in the back seat, like their child. Karen wondered if he could also roll his tongue.

The man who handed them their coffee was glum. 'There's a match on.' He said looking round at the empty tables, pine with check tablecloths. He'd got a good deal from Furnitureland. On each table someone had placed single rosebuds, pink, in plastic vases.

'Anything else?' he said, with the wiping down cloth in his hand.

'Yea...' said Karen, looking at the slices of sponge leaning behind the glass display, the cream turning yellow.

'No,' said Sandra 'Nothing at all.'

'Your hands are very clean,' she said to the furniture salesman. His name was Morrison. After Jim he said. Morrison Pentworthy. His father specialized in Doors.

'He's into Doors and you went into Furniture,' said Karen, adjusting her underwear under the table.

Sandra's held her hand aloft, fingers parted, as if she was holding a cigarette, which she would have been if they'd been allowed. Karen would have liked to smoke to loose weight but her lungs couldn't take it. She'd also come to realise that people weren't as sympathetic to whales having asthma attacks than those in danger of choking on oil slicks.

'I didn't go into furniture,' said Morrison, 'I found myself there.'

It was the most interesting thing he'd said so far.

But that was only the beginning. They'd thought they were hi-jacking *him*. He brought them to a place that still sold vinyl, a place so dark that the owner gave them torches to read the labels. He brought them to a book shop with a winding staircase and soup that looked like it came out of the river but tasted fabulous. He took them to a spot on the cliff walk where they could watch the sun dunk into the green tea sea like a Marietta biscuit. Everywhere was quiet,

untouched. Even the dust was hanging out. There was a match on.

After dark he took them for some fish and chips. The outsides were sharp and hot, the insides were fluffy and giving.

They went into a pub. Sandra said she was buying.

There were two men leaning against the bar.

'One night stand?' said Sandra.

'Hat stand,' said Karen, pointing.

It was an old fashioned pub. The match wasn't on. They sat in the snug. The snug had a door. 'My Dad fitted that door' said Morrison. It wasn't the most interesting thing he had said.

But then he told them he wrote poetry.

'What would you write about me?' asked Sandra, smoking. The owner was an anarchist.

Morrison took her other hand. He had a five o' clock shadow and his eyes were iroko.

'I would have to think very deeply about that,' he said in a radio voice.

Then he laughed and gave Karen a squeeze. 'Peanuts?' he said, getting up.

It was so quiet they heard the turf fall in the fire.

Morrison took them to his place.

'One night stand,' said Karen, tipsy.

'Last stand,' said Sandra, swaying against her.

'Nice door,' they commented as he turned the key.

Morrison lived with his Mum and Dad. His Dad was affable. His Mum had a fireside smile. 'Are you sisters?' she asked.

'Sort of,' said Sandra.

Morrison's Dad coughed. He offered up the comfy armchair. But the three of them sat side by side on the sofa. Morrison's Mum came back out of the kitchen smiling as if she had a secret. She had cake on a plate. She went back in for the tea. 'A bit late for coffee isn't it?' she said conversationally as she sat back down.

It was eighties on the telly again. Moustaches. White suits.

Karen licked cream from the sponge from her fingers. The tea was swirling quickly.

Sandra was optimistic for laughter later. Maybe even Scrabble.

