

Fiancée

by Ann Bogle

The willing suspension of disbelief, a parakeet.

You cook then leave dishes for the reader.

I prevent having dishes to wash by not cooking.

I eat nuts and cheese and berries, but what if I did not eat?

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A while ago, my boyfriend left me. Bella says it's sexy that I go around my small circle in town saying, "He broke up with me. He left me. He quit." Sexy, but I don't know how not to: he didn't leave, and he wasn't my boyfriend. He was my fiancé. He stays in, deep in, a granite fissure in Manhattan. I stay in Minnesota and go out. I go out to meet the girls—old girls, new. We go on, trifling with language that's in use for us. Hot, cool, loving women with not cool, loving husbands or with hot, cool, loving boyfriends or with no husband or boyfriend: *duende* for a season or a reason for a while.

"You don't like the word 'cunt,'" my fiancé said judiciously. "I like it but not as a first name," I said.

Bella shows me a heavy, beaded necklace that matches my boots—beige-tipped and turquoise-shafted, the turquoise color not visible under jeans. I bought the jeans already tattered so I wouldn't have to wait for them, but they are all cotton without added stretch, so I wait anyway, stand around cased in them, dropping pounds walking and talking ceaselessly in them, talking and walking, while the air in the rooms turns pale red. He'd spy me dancing to paragraphs, gorging on beer then pizza yet growing loose and looser in the limbs until I feel like a girl again, a go-girl on a budget, a Gidget, a gadget. Yes, I say to Bella: I'll take the beads and black wool wrap with alpaca feathers and peacock brooch starred with crystals. I wind the stole around my jeans and pin the peacock at my hip. The wrap swings like a thick skirt over the jeans and beige boots. The peacock sparkles. They say and it is: subject for a runway.

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Bella tells a story about a woman, an acquaintance, who came into the boutique with her boyfriend, the woman smelling of an STD. We perk up, listen. What STD? The smelly one, Bella says. The one with impossible syllables no one has heard of. The men of the north reject condoms and motorcycle helmets. The law permits you to break your head.

We walk to the Narrows from the boutique, fortified by talk of men and fashion. The Narrows is a blues bar known for outbreaks of small violence. I am wearing the winter white swing coat I bought for the wedding and the gold and turquoise beads.

A crowd parts to assess us. We take our seats at the corner of the bar. At the boutique we drank vodka. If I want to kill myself, but I don't, not here, not now, I'll order red wine. I ask for a Stella. A handsome man is already sitting next to me. I eye him as I shimmy in. He has beady green eyes. We go straight to politics. He is a Republican who lives on the Lake and commutes to Wall Street. Here, I am not surrounded by liberals on a sofa. Liberals are irresponsible dreamers who know nothing about finance, he says. I am not a liberal I tell him, but a leftist, a *feministe*. I hate abortion—keep it legal, I say. I am wearing the sapphire ring. I have no friends and no enemies. My fiancé left me, I say.

An hour of this, a radio hour of talk-fucking, his green eyes boring into me, he leaves, and I turn, isolated. "He's married!" I say to Jen. "After I invested an hour in it." Jen laughs and repeats to Bella what I say. Bella has to leave. It's ten. I move to her seat and into the brown eyes of a bald man shorter than I, a Libertarian distributor of faux tin ceiling panels. He sails in summer, ice boats in winter. I am a leftist and a *feministe*, I tell him. My fiancé left me. When we get up to dance, I feel drunk, but he holds me at the waist, and my legs kick out freely on the tiles.

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If I get caught drinking and driving, I'll go to jail for a year. I tell the man with the brown eyes to drive us. Where are we going? To his house, he tells me. His friend, also named Tom, gets in the backseat. That Tom wears tiny spectacles, and I think that I have

gotten it backward and that the glasses-Tom is the intellectual, but what if none of us is? I put on the seatbelt.

At Tom's the other Tom says good night in the driveway, and we go upstairs to where a clean white dog with beige spots and beautiful brown eyes is watching us. Tom leads me to a black leather couch in one of the living rooms. He strips me: boots, jeans, swing coat, beads. In moments, he's in me. He's not large, not small, slick. This—that—entry—is *raison d'être*. "Clean as a whistle," I say to the air, meaning no organisms, the organisms you can feel on contact. "Tight," he says.

My fiancé said, "It was like having sex with the Holland Tunnel to be fucking Diana. My wife that was sex in a monkey patch. But sex with you is the sweetest, snuggest space."

I'm glad Tom rolls me over and buffs me again. I call out in the dark that I'm a Jamaican. Another man comes near the room and stands in the door. He says something, but I miss it. I don't know who the other man is, but I see his shadow watching us. I wish the second man would come in, but there is only thought across the distance. Later Tom tells me it's his foster son. Tom is 61.

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I wake in the bed looking out at a giant golden maple, not knowing what town we are in. "What town is this?" I ask Tom, and he tells me but I forget. He answers my next thought, "I can't get you pregnant." Then he says he is going to make mass. It is Sunday morning.

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At breakfast, Kevin, who is 23, tall, dark, and impressive, sees me in the light. "I thought you were African when I heard you," he says. "British and Swedish," I tell him. "I might be Arab," he says.

I listen again to Tom's speech. He didn't say "mass." He said "mast." He is going to make a mast.

