

*We're Just Friends*

For Neen Bean

*This isn't right!* Robert couldn't shake the thought. Uncomfortable feelings ran through his body burning up inside. The stucco paint job over his dorm room wall dug tiny spikes up his bare legs and back. The question of whether two people could sleep in his single bed *was* only now being answered by his own racing mind. *If only sleeping here with Rosie Miller didn't feel the way it feels!* And what was she doing there next him after she rejected him?

Her brown skin pressed against his. Rosie's warm back breathed against his pasty white chest only sending the mercury inside him past boiling point. This evening her red silk underwear and his white cotton boxers were the only barriers between their two bodies. About an hour ago he had peeked while she changed on the edge of his bed. Come to think of it, it felt like she knew he was looking. Now she had his arms around her just above her breasts. Her palms were wrapped around his wrists like soft clamps.

He was stuck there between the wall and Rosie.

*Rosie, oh Rosie?* It was love at first sight for him when he saw her across a lecture theatre in one of his classes. Back before Easter, he made a promise to himself. Or was it his own body and self making that promise to Robert? If he couldn't be with Rosie then he wanted to be on his own.

*Maybe I'd rather stay being just another virgin in this college a while longer.*

He was there to write, and writing well was what he was there to learn. That meant applying his ass to the seat and keep on keeping on. But it was only ever a crush, he'd had them before and this one was over.

*This is so not right. It-it's not funny:*

So many thoughts swirled in Robert's aching head. *I-I've got to kick her out.*

Then a little voice of reason inside of him spoke up.

"That's the spirit Buddy, ditch the bitch and make the switch!"

Well, he couldn't disagree with that. Then in his mind's eye, he saw him: A tiny man dressed all in black and hidden under a balaclava. Robert knew who this balaclava man was: *Shame and Anger*. Shame and anger were, as far as he was concerned solid energies. Like the energy he needed to tell Rosie to get out of his bed for instance.

"Yessiree!" Shame called up from his churning stomach. "She's rubbing your face in it, bud!" She *was* teasing him.

Actually, this chick was the definition of a tease.

He was fuming, but he couldn't realistically kick Rosie out and into the dead of night. Mr. Shame n'Anger on the other hand knew what really lived in Robert's heart. Even if Robert couldn't quite admit it to himself, Shame knew.:

He *hated* her.



“We’re just friends, Bobbie.” Rosie stared out over the bay as she told him this.

It was exactly the same situation as her 19th birthday. They were alone together at her dad’s place. Nineteen red roses, a birthday present from him to her lay by Rosie on the wooden balcony railing. What she said, and the way she said it, all felt like a slap in the face to him. A slap Robert had been stewing on for the last five weeks. Water on the little beach below them lapped under the balcony. Her body seemed to burst out of her pink t-shirt and powder blue, elastic shorts. He hadn’t seen anything like these before and they stretched around her hips like a skin tight bathing suit.

Her voice, over their study sessions together had become like honey to him. They rewarded each other’s right answer to upcoming tests with a spoonful of hokey pokey ice cream. But from Rosie’s birthday onward everything about her was poisonous hokey pokey. He should have known better than that to let her stay in his dorm tonight.

“She never mentioned those flowers again.” Robert knew better than to talk to Shame, but what else could he do? “She probably threw them out.”

“Probably.” Shame added. “You know, screaming feels good.”

He didn’t want to listen to this.

Robert hadn’t forgotten that Rosie was already 19 years old. He was going to be 18 for another 6 months. That age difference probably made all the difference. He wanted her, hated her and now because of Shame n’ Anger he wanted to scream.

Shame, on the other hand had his shoes off, relaxing in a banana chair, front-row to the growing bonfire inside his Freshman host's body. Robert wasn't sure if he knew what love was, but he did know he had pull himself together, move on and forget about her. It'd take time.

Maybe a week or two.

He had things to do and people to see: People that weren't Rosie, right?

That's when he'd collect up every feeling that he felt for her, wrap it all up, and pack all that tape inside of a golf ball. Then he'd smash that garbage into the blaze Shame was warming his wriggling toes up against.

*There's gotta be something wrong with me.*

"She probably already knows that." Shame had set up a little barbecue behind him, with snacks smouldering on it as he watched Robert fry. The more Robert struggled with that tiny terrorist, the worse he felt. He wondered if he really was unlovable.

And he hated how much he loved the way Rosie smelled like potpourri. In a university of plain looking girls she was a shining star to him. The upset he felt from what started as a bonfire had risen into an all-consuming volcano.

*If she won't play then she should pay!* "She needs to pay with interest, buddy." Shame said this as he sipped on a cocktail with a little umbrella.

Robert couldn't help but agree with that one either. *It's because she's nineteen. Girl years are like dog years aren't they?* Shame nodded. *I need to find another 18-year old who won't tease me like this.*

That's what he needed to do.

One thing he knew for sure (or on second thought two): He had to stop feeling sorry for himself. That, and this was the last time he'd let Rosie stay over in his bed. "*Bob-bieeh?*" She whispered to him from the other side of the bed.

"Huh?" He wasn't sure if he was dreaming it.

"Bobbie," her body tensed. "What's happening with us, Bobbie?"





“Well,” there was so much Robert wanted to say. The volcano inside of himself was about to explode; Shame n’Anger stocked it with every thought and dream Robert had ever had. Now it was burning with molten lava pouring off a top-heavy towering inferno. Out of this monster came the answer Robert needed. This was going to be delicious and he could finally be alone again. Shame rubbed his palms together in anticipation of Robert’s attack.

“We,” Robert began. “We’re just friends, Rosie.”

Down past his spleen, Shame ripped off his balaclava and waved it around with a demented joy. Back in the bed, Robert gasped when he saw the little man’s face.

*What a good-looking bloke*, he thought. Actually, this Shame n’Anger character was a miniature version of himself. And the likeness was uncanny, right down to the mole on his left cheek. “We’re long lost twins, Buddy,” Shame shouted. “Separated at birth!”

What a boon? It was a reunion of brothers united to take on all the girls everywhere that wanted to hurt poor lonesome Robert. Then the mattress shifted as she sat up. Then the wall behind him released like Velcro over his legs and back with a cool air. She was hunched over on the edge of the bed with her back to him. “Y-you’re the one who said we were just friends,” he said.

But something wasn’t right. “Go on,” Shame yelled. “Tell her again!”

“Rosie, what’s wrong? Come back to bed!”

“No, no, no,” Shame yelled. “Don’t ask her back. We don’t want her!”

*Please be quiet, mate!* He reached over and put his arm around her waist.

Nothing. “Rosie?” He sat up next to her. Her skirt was back on and she was getting dressed. “Rosie, don’t go.”

Shame’s head was in his hands tangling up Robert’s throat. “It’s Mr. N’anger to you now, boy!”

“Why?” Rosie cut the word short like she regretted ever asking it.

“Because,” he breathed in, “I - I love you.”

*Why in hell did I just say that?* The thought echoed over the smouldering bonfire. One upside was clear, Shame was knocked out cold as soon as he told Rosie how he really felt about her. But her face was still turned away. Now he was getting scared that this was going to be like every other one of his other failed attempts. It wasn’t that he’d just be alone again, and that’d be that, but she’d still be able to hold what she said against him, tell all her friends about it, and keep talking about it for the rest of his life. He’d given up his secret letting her know his real feelings. It was something he instantly regretted doing. And with that feeling of falling Shame returned from dead on the floor, and batted his eyes as he came to.

*No one else was ever going to know about this.* Robert swore. No-one ever.

Shame to know: He’d put on acting casual and deny everything to everyone if needed be. She was looking up at the moon casting blue light on her face through the window. He made a silent vow to deny any and all of this to anyone who asked. As far as any of his friends were concerned, she was never there.

She was nothing.

Yet the part of him that didn't want anything to do with silent vows was gently turning her face towards his own. He brushed her wet cheeks as he sat up.

"Where were you going to go?"

"Back to my - my room," she spluttered. Rosie's dorm was a twenty-minute march away on the other end of campus. She was choking up, like she couldn't finish what she started. "To cry me to sleep, like a piece of dirt."



“Just hold me, Bobbie.”

She resisted his first attempt at a kiss. Now somehow, he felt her leaning on his shoulder and something inside of him started to cool down, like air conditioning slowly being dialled up to full blast. The relief. He couldn't hold his laughter in.

“I already told you I liked you at your birthday!” Then, like a brass key sliding into an old lock and turning for the first time, their first kiss began as lips searched for lips in the dark. Her lips, when she found his hungrily accepted. Now she was kissing him. She tasted like perfume as she lapped at him in the darkness. Her breasts heaved against his chest. He felt like he waited his entire life for this, and didn't know if he was doing much of it properly.

*How on earth could she know what an 18-year drought felt like?* Sure, he thought it, but then he also knew the sentiment was really from his old buddy: Mr. Shame n' Anger.

He wanted to forget all that Shame stuff. And a newly resuscitated Shame collapsed in his belly again. If only it was as easy as wanting it? Her little hands pressed against his chest, squeezing him against the wall, and the prickly paint felt good on his back with her kissing and licking to level up all the scratches. It sort of reminded him of a fight one night in one of the bars in town. Everyone got locked inside the saloon on the second floor and the fight kept going until the police came.

So you were stuck in it whether you liked it or not. She was kissing him, biting his lips, and telling him what to do. With each soft wet kiss from Rosie, he imagined himself escaping that bar like jumping out of the burning building. Feeling like falling out of the building and onto a massive airbag with her blue eyes painted twenty feet wide across the top. Standing by to catch him on the street below.



The reclining seats on the overnight train ride home gave Robert the opportunity to sleep. He squinted with the sunlight streaming in as the breakfast trolley wheeled through with the smell of fresh coffee.

It was pushing 7 o'clock but to sleep was so good. Especially with a picture of her inside. He had a permanent grin on his face.

Work that needed doing stared at him from a folder in the back of the seat before him. He fished out the radio play pages he needed to complete that weekend. Something fell out of the carbon papers and onto the rattling carriage floor. A black square of cardboard card folded in half like a greeting card.

When he opened it, silver glitter fell out over his pants and the carpet. It was a love note Rosie sneaked in there for him. The attendant serving coffee looked back at the spill, and paused with a cold look at him. For a moment Robert froze hunched over like he was busted. Then a wave came over him. *What a good looking bloke!* The name tag pinned on this attendant's shirt read "NANGER."

*Shame's probably always there and it's always my choice not to take it. Everything was going to work out just fine. 'To my Beautiful Boy' - She wrote this note with a silver pen. All he cared about was what they had together and their 'feelings'. He traced this word with the tip of his glittered finger.*

*I wanted her, then I hated her, now I love her and she loves me.*

All these feelings were so new. *How did she do this to me?* He wondered how it all happened like a riddle. It was like she was a witch that cast a spell on him and transformed him into another creature. The wound-up golf ball in his heart that he'd been stuffing up with all his most personal feelings on tape, and whacking with a driving iron was actually a bright red glazed cherry.

It sat on top of the towering volcano in his gut that was really six throbbing scoops of strawberry and vanilla ice cream with a honey chocolate heart. A perfect dessert for two lovers to share. And all of it held together in a frosty glass, with a spoon.

