

Charlie Smalley

Memories of a child minder

I remember how we met. I was nervous, suspicious.

I don't want her, I want mummy to stay at home.

I crouched under the table, traced circles on my knees, the floor, and glared at the staircase. I could hear talking upstairs, grown-up talking; handshakes and "how are you"s and the like. I waited, hardly breathing. Footsteps on the stairs and my eyes were squeezed shut, sharp fingernails digging into my tiny palms. Then a voice was saying my name, a smiling voice. A long, long quiet and the clock was ticking so loudly. Then a sound echoing round the kitchen: a soft sound, a twinkly sound. I peeked out from under my eyelashes. She was laughing.

I sat up and frowned as I surveyed her. Shiny black leather boots on the second step, dark denim jeans tucked into them and a fleecy orange jacket. I looked up further still, and tipped my head to the side as I decided on her face. Rosy, pretty, friendly. And then I was laughing too. A high-pitched giggle, mingling and mixing with her laugh to create a happy, tinkling harmony. From there onwards, we were as one.

She was there everyday.

The clicking sound of the heating coming on and water running downstairs rouses me gently from sleep. The crinkled edge of the navy curtain does not keep all of the light out, and sun seeps gently through the gaps and falls onto my face. Murmuring softly, I turn over pulling the duvet across my cheek to keep out the day. I drift sweetly in and out of consciousness for what feels like hours, until people are climbing the stairs, figures moving, just visible through the slatted wooden banisters and the sleep in my eyes. Mummy is kissing my forehead and telling me to have a good day, the subtlest hint of her perfume lingering long after the door clunks behind her. And then Sharon is there, brushing my hair back from my face and gently rubbing my eyes. I blink twice, and then open them. She is leaning over my bed to open the blind, wrapping the white cord in a figure of eight to secure it. I cringe back against the harsh sunlight flinging my arms up to cover my face. She laughs, my favourite laugh, and hauls me out of bed to the window. I press my nose against the cool pane and breath out, enjoying the way the glass mists over. We look down out at the morning. The sky is duck-egg, and the light falls through the trees creating a chiaroscuro effect on the grass. The birds are spiralling overhead and we're high up, near their chattering and swooping and the pale, fluffy clouds.

I run my clumsy fingers through her auburn hair. So many colours; red and gold and brown and even a tiny hint of green. She laughs again when I say this, and says she will have to sue her hairdresser if I'm right. I tell her my hair is boring; cup-of-tea coloured, short. She shakes her head and pulls my hair into bunches, fixing them with tiny pink bobbles. I run my fingers across her cheeks, I want to know every part of her face because she is mine. I stroke the orange fleecy jacket, feeling the loose tassles. And the rest of the day is ours, and the week, and the month and the year. She is my Sharon.