

Apodyopsis

Siofra,

It was hard to put all this in writing, but I have a lot of ideas I want to share with you and see if you can help make sense of them. You said you are busy, but if you have the time—and haven't seen it yet—the movie 'Three Days of the Condor' with Faye Dunaway and Robert Redford might be something we could consider as a precursor to a more contemporary context. Again, tough to explain in this letter, but I wanted to get you all this research as soon as possible. The last few pages are a short story—something I tried to write over a year ago. Then we met and I was able to finish it. Maybe not for the manuscript, but just something I've wanted to share with you since we last saw each other.

1

They approached from opposite ends of the street. Though the relationship was still new, Shannon and Thom affectionately wrapped their arms around one another. Despite the harsh rain earlier in the day, the London evening was now mild.

“You’re just wearing a jumper,” Shannon said as she released Thom from her arms.

Thom stopped in his tracks, “You were expecting a tuxedo? Is there a long red satin evening gown under that scruffy coat?” He winked and chuckled at her.

“Oh shite, no!” Shannon laughed as she took off her rugged military-style coat, revealing a crisp grey striped oxford shirt and black jeans underneath. Jet-black hair tied up in a tight bun just as it was every time he’d seen her before.

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Thom mentally noted, again, her clothing. She dressed modern and casually, as always. Accessorized, but not overdone. Jewelry and makeup, but not too feminine. It was part of her appeal, he thought. “I should have dressed nicely for you.”

Giving each other a polite peck on both cheeks, “Oh no, you look grand, Thom. I was afraid you’d be looking dapper, and I just showed up in my work clothes.” Thom loved the lilt in her Irish accent. *I could listen to her talk all night.* Her voice, along with her comfort with sarcasm and wit, is what first attracted him to Shannon. At the same time, Shannon was admiring Thom’s rugged square jaw and the way he stood tall, almost like he was at attention.

This was their second time together. The third if they counted when they first met at the lecture on *Modern Architectural Design Influences in Western Europe* just over a week earlier at King’s College. Arriving a few moments late, and at the same time, they introduced themselves to each other, sitting in the back of the academic lecture hall. Then as the lecture became less interesting, they started making jokes about the lecturer’s accent. Then they made fun of his shoes. An hour later they realized they were making more stupid jokes to one another than they were paying attention to the lecture. They snuck out the back door to drink some tea at the kiosk across the hallway.

Originally, Shannon was drawn to Thom’s wit. As she spent more time with him, her thoughts became more physical. He kept his hair long, like she’d expect from an American academic, not one from the UK. He was a bit taller than her, and his body was framed by broad shoulders and hips, giving him a more outsized presence than his easygoing demeanor would suggest.

“You look fine,” he said, following her into the pub. “Your jacket looks like it came from a rummage sale, though. There’s no sense in trying to impress each other at this point, right?”

“Don’t be a smartass,” Shannon laughed as she asked as she snaked through a mob of afterhours businessmen trying to impress each other. She looked back over her shoulder to make sure she hadn’t lost him in the crowd.

Thom was on sabbatical from University of Massachusetts working on a book about contemporary European civil engineering. Shannon worked at a corporate design firm in London. Though originally from Wickford, she moved to London about three years ago and was enjoying her professional successes. Hitting it off immediately, they met for a weekday lunch a few days later at St. James Park and laughed at tourists who tried to buy tickets to a Richmond football match hoping to see Ted Lasso in person.

Maybe because they both worked in related fields, Thom kept the conversations about their shared

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professional interests. Despite that, Shannon asked him to meet her for dinner. She hoped tonight he would show an interest in *her* this time, but she wasn't sure he would.

As soon as they sat, from behind the bar a voice called over to their table over the din of the crowd, "What can I pour for you two?"

Stabbing two fingers in the air, Shannon called back, "Whiskeys. On the rocks." It wasn't her type of drink but knew from previous conversations Thom would want one and she just wanted the first round to come quickly. As with the previous time they met, most of their initial conversation was about developing their own careers and interests in architecture.

Thom noticed the bartender, a woman who looked to be in her early thirties and slightly younger than the two of them, lingered at Shannon for a moment. Then the bartender's eyes turned to Thom and her face had a hint of embarrassment before turning to grab a bottle off the shelf. He looked at Shannon who didn't notice this small exchange that only lasted a fleeting moment. He smirked unconsciously.

"What's that look on your face," Shannon turned a side at Thom.

He waited to make sure the bartender's attention was still occupied, "You caught her attention." He nudged his chin the woman's direction. Shannon looked back at him curiously for a second then realized what he was saying. She looked over at the bartender, now pouring their drinks. "She's not my type," Shannon quipped while allowing her own gaze to linger. "But she is the type I usually attract." Shannon was neither joking nor being dismissive.

"Bartenders?"

"No, women too young to know I'm not that into women."

Matching Shannon's frankness, "Not *that* into women?" Thom was not flippant of the idea Shannon might have been interested in women. He laid his hand over hers. His first attempt at flirting.

Shannon smiled back at him and playfully pivoted to leave him curious. "Tell me about yourself, Thom. What are doing at this pub holding my hand? If you're looking for a job, this isn't a suitable way to do it." Again, Shannon's accent was delightful and made her playful sarcasm even more attractive.

"I told you before; I came here to study and write, but...I'm falling in love with everyone I meet." Shannon rolled her eyes, but Thom was unfazed, "Seriously, everyone I meet. I'm not kidding."

The bartender plopped two glasses in front of them, but Thom and Shannon's attention remain locked on each other as he continued, "Last week I was wandering around Manchester. I'd gone to look at the cathedral...I can't remember what it was called, but *the* cathedral.

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“It’s called the Manchester Fucking Cathedral.” Shannon shook her head in mock disgust.

“Yeah, that’s the one. So anyway.” He smiled, “I was trying to find where I parked my rental car. I had a map in my hand, looking terribly hopelessly lost. I asked this woman for help. What luck; she knew where the Manchester Fucking Cathedral was. Told her I was parked near this pub - I forget that name too – and so, she shows me on the map. Then she offers to walk me to my car.” Thom mimicked her in a falsetto voice, “‘Aye Luv, I’m walkin’ near there anyway. Not a bother.’”

“Oh, she did? Shannon teased. “An old nun, was she? Or was she possibly a lass looking to follow a handsome man to his car?”

“Oh well, now that you mention it, she was very lovely,” Thom added as he picked up their two glasses and handed one to Shannon.

“That was the last you saw of her or did you two get on? What were *her* intentions, do you think?”

“She’s still in the trunk of the rental if you want to ask her.”

She liked the feel of his hand over hers and it felt like his interest in her was growing. “I’ll be honest, Thom. I wasn’t sure what *your* intentions were. The first time we met at St. James? It seemed like you were in a job interview or something. You were so *professional*. I thought you weren’t interested in me.”

“Really? What were you hoping I’d do; say something playfully sexist?” Thom offered with a smirk. Shannon was enjoying Thom’s banter.

She waved her hands in exaggerated frustration, “I wanted to see if you’d take me out.”

“What, like on a date or by a sniper?”

“Well shit, now I’m not sure.”

They both burst into laughter, Shannon nearly spitting out her drink which made Thom laugh even harder.

“Well, if you want, we can sit here and flirt with each other all night. That would be less lethal, I suppose.” Thom took his hand off Shannon’s and placed his arm around her. Shannon smiled at Thom. He leaned in and kissed her slowly on the lips.

She sat back and stared into his eyes, she cooed, “Mmm, that’s more like it.”

They spend the next half hour asking each other questions about themselves; their likes, dislikes, what made them happy, what caused them stress.

When they finished ordering food and another round, Thom shifted in his seat. “Look I don’t mean to pry, but the other day when we had lunch you were saying that sometimes you feel self-conscious around the office. What did you mean about that? It seems like you’re successful and are working in a field that you know a lot

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about.”

“Oh, it’s not that. I know what I’m doing for sure.” Shannon took a sip thinking about how to say what she was thinking. “I work with a *few* lovely people. It’s just sometimes...”

Thom waited for her to finish her thought, but she seemed to be hesitant. “What? You can tell me. It’s not like my opinion should be that important to you; you’ve only known me a few days.”

“Sometimes I think the help I’m getting from coworkers is...subpar. Does that sound petty? Sometimes I’m a bit spiteful.” Shannon was suddenly aware she’d turn the conversation back to a career mentoring session. For him or her, she couldn’t tell.

Thom sensed the conversation was going in the wrong direction as well. “Sam Kean said that we should never underestimate spite as a motivator for genius.”

“Who in the name of Sam Kean is Sam Kean?” Shannon barked before taking a sip from her glass.

“I don’t know but he had some spite in him.”

“What the fuck good is that to me then?” Shannon let out a loud cackle before she could cover her mouth.

“It’s no good for you, but that laugh was outrageous and now I’m just in this for myself,” Thom and Shannon exchanged a long glance. “You’re definitely not the office trollop like...what did you say her name was the other day?”

“Oh, yes. Sasha. She’s always dressed like a *doxie*, but her sales numbers are through the roof.” Shannon felt catty but was impressed that Thom remembered a miniscule detail from a conversation days earlier. “She definitely dresses to impress.”

“Can I get her number? I want to ask her to walk me to my car tonight.”

Shannon gave Thom a playful kick under the table. Then she finished off her drink just as two more appeared in front of them. Thom wanted to take a risk with Shannon. He took his fresh glass and, with a cautious tone offered, “We, I mean men, just...for office work anyway...are expected to wear suits or shirts and ties. There’s not really much room for personal style there. But woman can dress any fashionable or personal way. You have more choices. Men kind of... wear...uniforms?”

“If I worked around men in uniform all day, I would be sent to human resources *all* the time. Apparently, it’s unprofessional to get *handsy*,” she joked. “But yes, that is a *thing*. Women like men in uniforms. It might be a stereotype or a cliché or whatever, but when women get around men in uniform...” she fanned herself comedically, “the look of stability and confidence... it is sexy.”

Thom looked at her with doubt.

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“Scientific fact!” Shannon was blustering now just for the show of it. “This is black and white. Do not question the science.”

Thom shook his head, contemplating. “I’ve never felt the world is just as simple as black-or-white. It’s more like... horny Irishwoman or blood covered knife.”

“Is this how you flirt with everyone or are you just a psycho?”

“Either way you’ll know by the morning.” He replied slowly while reaching for a knife off one of the unused table settings. Shannon mirrored him but raised an eyebrow as she grabbed a spoon instead, just to be funny.

“Do you think only women feel that way? That stability and confidence is only sexy in men? Or that woman don’t look sexy in business clothes?” Thom was edging towards something he wanted to tell Shannon, but only if the lead-in was set with the right tone.

Shannon fidgeted with a napkin, damp from condensation coming off the iced glass. “Yes, yes, yes, men want women to be lovely and frail and fragile and all that bullocks.” She chuckled at her silly outrage.

“I hate to say this, but you are wrong.”

“It doesn’t sound like you hate to say that at all,” She gave him a quirky side-eye.

Shannon looked at him inquisitively. *What is his point?* He was smirking at her, but she couldn’t decode it. “What have you to say there, Thom?” She flicked her chin towards him, “Come on; out with it.”

Thom took a healthy sip of his drink then leaned in close to Shannon’s face. Quietly he whispered in her ear, “I thought you looked sexy at the lecture. I thought you looked sexy at lunch the other day dressed in your lady business suit. I think you look sexy in what you’re wearing right now.” Thom said with conviction. His finger reached just inside the collar of her shirt. “It’s like...the same...a woman version of a uniform I guess?” He was glancing at her shoulder, just inside her shirt as his finger slid along the edge of the fabric. “Confident and smart...yes.”

Shannon turned and gave him a kiss. “That was sweet, Thom,” she paused. “*And* playfully sexist...as promised. Fair play.”

“Oh, don’t let it go to your head; the bartender’s outfit is sexy,” he said pointing back to the woman that was eyeing Shannon earlier. “The throwback hip hugger jeans from the nineties. Now that I think of it, she looks like a girl I made out with in high school.”

They continued like that throughout their dinners. Their flirting got more raunchy, almost as if they were seeing how far they could go with each other. Neither flinched. Each took turns being more explicit.

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“I shared, now you share. What turns you on Shannon? Gimme the answer to the test; how do I get your eyes to roll in the back of your head with desire?”

Shannon cackled, holding her hand in the air in defiance. Before she could speak, Thom leaned in and kissed her. He leaned back but Shannon pulled him back to her and gently bit his lower lip. Thom was turned on by the slight control she took in that second.

She released his lip from the gentle grip of her teeth. He felt an electric vibration of anticipation in his chest. His head felt light, almost dizzy with arousal. He let the feeling fill him and wanted more. Their eyes still locked he said matter-of-factly, “What’s wrong with getting what you want. Be selfish.”

Shannon felt an erotic rush too. He was daring her to take what she wanted from him. And she wanted to take from him. “Thom, it’s even louder in here now. All the kids are getting rowdy now that football is on. The brawls should start in about an hour. Let’s go to my place and do something else.”

Thom grinned, “You have something nefarious in mind?”

Shannon motioned for him to get up so they could leave. “Absolutely. We’ll just make sure we both have a good time and that we’re ok with everything. We just won’t be well-mannered about it.”

2

Inside her flat, Thom immediately noticed that she was neat and organized. Her living room was immaculate, but still looked cozy and welcoming. She hung their coats on a rack by the door and told Thom “Make yourself a drink over there,” motioning to a side table with glasses and bottles.

“Should I make you one too?”

Again, motioning with her hands to give him directions of where everything could be found, “There’s an open bottle of white wine in the fridge. To be honest, I only had the whiskey to impress you.”

“Fair. I only drank tea to impress you.” He poured himself a glass, “Can I get some ice for this?”

Shannon reached into the fridge and grabbed some ice and slowly dropped it in his glass, then plopped some into her wine. As she did, Thom’s gaze traveled up and down Shannon’s figure. She watched him look her over. It wasn’t the drinks, but Shannon that made him weak.

Thom walked up behind her and slowly kissed her on the neck. She squirmed a bit at first, wanting to turn around and face him, but when she felt his tongue gently brush her skin below the lobe of her ear, she lightly

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gasped. She put down her glass and placed her hands firmly on the kitchen counter in front of her. She felt his hand gently move the collar of her shirt and his lips trail down the side of her neck towards her shoulder mixing a few nibbles between kisses as he got more aroused. Shannon arched her back and leaned her head to the side, inviting him to continue.

He felt himself get carried away and stopped kissing her. “I wasn’t kidding earlier.” His breath was warm on her skin as he whispered. “When we met for lunch the other day...” Thom paused again and kissed her neck. “When you dress like that...even a tie...I imagine how long it would take to undress you. Nudity is ok, I guess. But it’s more of a turn on...” She turned and faced him as he continued, clearly quoting something (she didn’t care what). “*‘The wrappings are only partially removed from the curves and softness of skin. When you undress, you are opening the drapes.’* Let’s not be in a hurry. When we were having dinner, I fantasized about undressing you tonight.”

“Oh my. Did you now?”

“There’s a term for that. Apodyopsis.”

Raising a seductive eyebrow, Shannon said, “I don’t fucking care,” flatly.

Thom firmly wrapped his hand around the back of Shannon’s neck. Even he was stunned by his sexual desire for her. Shannon’s chest rose with excitement. Wanting to draw the night out as long as she could, she pushed him back. Pressed him firmly away but gripped his shoulder as she did, just let him know she was not done with him. Again, waving her hands to provide general direction, “Over there. Put some music on. I’m going to light some candles. You’ve earned it I suppose,” she joked.

As Diana Krall’s voice serenaded them, they settled onto the couch with their drinks. Sitting closely with her legs around him, they talked a about gender roles and relationships then suddenly they found themselves sitting in silence.

Thom broke the silence before it became too awkward. “Androgyny is sort of sexy. For women,” almost in a mumble.

Shannon looked at him, chuckling. “What did you just say? Androgyny?”

“Don’t judge me.” Thom said sarcastically, “I know my truth.”

Shannon sat up on the couch, facing Thom, “Seriously, what does that even mean?” continuing to laugh though not really expecting an answer. She leaned in and kissed him again. This time he felt one of her hands run up his thigh. “That was nice of you at the pub. When I was prattling on about my coworkers. Dunno why I said all that back there but, yeah, it was nice of you to say those things.”

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“Oh, you thought I was being *nice* to you?” Thom asked, “No I wasn’t being nice, I was hitting on you.”

“Were you? A bit outta practice.”

“That wasn’t intended to make me feel good about myself, was it?” Thom said dryly.

“Poor dear,” Shannon condescendingly added while she sipped her wine then proceeded to rip her hair out of the tight bun. Pulling at her hair tie, she fought to undue it. Thom watched her struggle as one hand tugged the elastics out and unravel her hair in frustration.

“That always looks so sexy in the movies, but...you just sort of go at it like an otter working and oyster don’t ya.”

Raking her fingers through her now unbound hair with one hand while still sipping wine with the other, “Maybe you don’t share all of your inner dialogue, huh? Y’feckin’ *bearrthachán*.”

Once she stopped, Thom ran his fingers under her locks and onto the side of her neck, slowly caressing her. His hand gently progressed under her shirt collar onto her shoulder. He followed his hand with his eyes. She realized the candles provided Thom enough light to enjoy the sight of her. And she liked that he enjoyed just looking at her.

Thom’s fingers reached her bra strap under her shirt before it couldn’t go further. He quietly said, “There was something written down, I don’t remember where.” *’The shape of the cavity between a woman’s collarbone and the top of her shoulder is beautiful. The way the collarbone’s curves contrast with the line of a strap of her bra is so divine it makes me flush with desire.’* That was from a book, I think.”

Shannon felt one of his fingers slide under her bra strap as he was speaking about it. By the time he finished, she began to unbutton the next button on her shirt and seductively move it aside with the tip of a finger, allowing his hand to caress her shoulder and inside the front of her shirt. She sat and watched him as he continued reciting something (She did not know what).

“I want to touch the parts of you that have been just beyond my gaze all night. And if there is a place you’d like me to start, or someplace you’d like me to touch next, pull back your clothes and lead me there.”

She leaned into his face. “You relax by readin’ erotica, do ya? Who are you plagiarizing?” She teased with a smile pressed against Thom’s lips.

“Maybe I wrote that.” Thom gently bit her before continuing, *“We write down made-up stories to tell the truths we wish we could say out loud.”* Someone else wrote that.”

With wanting in her voice, “I don’t fucking care.” Shannon pulled Thom closer, and he began to kiss her shoulder. Then sinking down to trace her collarbone with his lips and tongue. Taking him for his words, *pull*

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back your clothes and lead me there, she opened her shirt more. Now guiding him to places she wanted him to touch her with his hand and kiss him. She leaned her head back, enjoying the feeling of Thom reaching into her shirt and running his hand over the smooth satin bra covering her breast. “Thom, I think I like foreplay more than I like sex.” She said looking down at him enjoying the shape of her. Thom just wanted to slowly enjoy her body and she now decided where.

“Let’s not be in any hurry to get undressed.” Thom whispered.

“Mmm. Let’s just make it all about *me*.”

Shannon giggled with joy as she leaned back on the couch and pulled him on top of her as Thom began to kiss Shannon on her mouth, sliding his tongue across her lips. He gently nibbled her lower lip. “I might accidentally bite you too hard. I’ll apologize later.” he said playfully.

Shannon looked up at him hovering above her, gripped his long hair in her hand. She looked into his eyes with what could only be described as carnal determination, “I’m *going* to bite you, it *will* hurt and I’m *not* going to apologize” and she bit him on his lip a bit harder than his gentle nibble. Thom moaned in surprise.

They propped themselves up so they could slip their shoes and pants off as they continued to kiss. Shannon sat Thom upright on the couch and crawled on top of his lap. She moved slowly, wanting him to watch as she seductively straddled him. Her shirt was half open and her sleeves were rolled up.

She pulled his top over his head, leaving him in nothing but his underwear. She pulled her shirt open on one side and firmly put her hand on the back of Thom’s head as he had done to her earlier. She pulled one of the cups of her bra under her breast and guided Thom to her nipple. She moaned as he put it in his mouth. She leaned back and just enjoyed him. Then she looked down at Thom, playing with her nipple in his lips. Quietly, she said. “Bite it.” He did, gently. She let out a joyful “Aaahh,” watching him the whole time. “C’mon, just a little harder.” Shannon let out a little squeal of happiness when he did. Thom leaned back on the couch with a big smile as Shannon hovered him and gently at first, then forcefully, kissed him gripping his head in both of her hands.

They continued to play and tease this way as long as they could. Soft music playing in the background. The candles remained dim. The room felt warmer than before. Shannon leaned over to the table on the side of the couch and handed Thom his drink, then grabbed her wine. The ice was melted in her wine, but his whiskey still had a few pieces floating in it. They sat like that sipping their drinks and enjoying the moment.

She put her wine glass down and grabbed a piece of ice from his drink and put it in his mouth. She took his glass from him and put it on the table. Her shirt collar laid open, she gradually slid her bra straps over her

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shoulders, first one, then the other, revealing both of her breasts. She pulled him back to her chest, forcefully. She gasped with pleasure as his cold mouth wrapped around one nipple and his fingers gently tugged on the other.

Shannon got up from Thom's lap and stood in front of him as he sat on the couch. She pulled her panties off. Then she paused a moment enjoying the sight of Thom's arousal and anticipation.

Instead of covering his body with hers as she thought he'd expect her to do, she sat on the far end of the couch instead. She leaned back seductively on the arm of the couch with pillows adding comfort to her pose. With a smile on her face, she opened her shirt and let it hang off her shoulders. She ran her fingers in through her hair and relaxed back with her legs wide open. She removed her clothes to their minimum. The margins of her anatomy, as it were, laid open for Thom.