

ETC

DARRYL.

BY JACKIE ESS

LEBRON
P3-4

You live vicariously through celebrities, I live vicariously through the guys who fuck my wife. But sure, OK, I'm the weird one. Let me put it to you this way: Do you watch sports at all? I could ask, 'What's the point if you aren't the one playing?' It isn't exactly a fair question.

I think a lot about LeBron James. I'm picturing his NBA rings on the bed-side table, next to Mindy's wedding ring and these little antique porcelain ashtrays that Mindy's mom gave us for our wedding. I'll bet he's got a great grip, and big hands that move decisively. A touch with no tickle, no trepidation, no contingency plan, just going to exactly the right place and going straight there. That's basketball. I'm sure he's all-around athletic, but for some reason I specifically imagine his hands moving Mindy around. Six foot eight, God.

But look, I know as well as you do that that's just a fantasy. And even in fantasy I try to mostly keep this stuff confined to people confirmed to be in the lifestyle, which I'm pretty sure he isn't. Cause it's a little objectifying, you know? I try to do right by people. He's a professional athlete, he's focused on the game. Focused on, I don't know, his own family, probably. His own problems. Or maybe just his own fun. I'm just saying that he's got a life—that he isn't just there for me to look at. Just because a guy can fuck my wife doesn't mean he wants to. That was a hard lesson for me to learn, actually. But I'm glad I thought it through. Cause I really don't want to project too much on the guy. It's bad enough that everybody wants to compare him to Michael Jordan. By the way, I don't want to start an argument about this stuff, but I do think he's better, and you know what? Even if he isn't a better player, I like him better. Jordan always gave me the willies. All I'm saying is that I'd never write a letter begging LeBron to come meet us after a game, like:

*Dear LeBron,
I want to see your strong perfect hands gripping my wife,
palming practically her entire body.
[. . .]
I want her to have your baby.
Love,
Darryl*

I'd never write that. I'd write, 'Sincerely,'

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TABOR P5-6

Last Saturday I drove up to Portland with a plan to hike Mount Tabor, but I didn’t do it. It’s one of those things you always say you’re going to do, but in the moment you find you don’t really want to. It’s a tiny thing, barely deserves the name of a mountain and I like to climb it just for the joke of it, to imagine myself as a mountaineer—‘because it was there!’

As a kid I always went for the alpine adventures, not sure what that says about me. Maybe nothing at all. Just where my dreams take place. I had a cousin who belonged to the ocean in the same way. I saw the James Bond film Thunderball at his house at least twice and I’m sure he must have seen it a hundred times. The main thing was harpoon-fighting underwater. I never thought about the ocean. My dreams were all in the mountains, their peaks crowned with clouds.

There’s an episode of *Get Smart* where Maxwell identifies the Swiss villain by the habitual slalom of his walk. I pictured a place that was all vertical and you’ve got to move like a skier or a billy-goat. The real Switzerland is nothing like that. I once spent a summer there, in Lausanne, that’s why I know a little bit of French. Mostly I remember going out on Lake Léman with my weird cousin who was obsessed with James Bond and his dad who’d let us drink brandy, which I thought was crazy. I had to mix it with coke and they made fun of me for not wanting to take it straight. There were mountains nearby, but there are mountains here too. Europe is overrated. It’s like here, more of here but it’s more expensive. Everything in America is bigger anyway. I think I’d have to get a job if I lived there. I don’t see my inheritance as being enough to run with the Strasbourg set. I’d run out. Mainly I couldn’t take the house with me. But I wonder if it’s true that they’re more enlightened about cuckolding in France. People are always saying that and it makes sense. Just with how they are.

I didn’t end up hiking Tabor but I drove out there for a few minutes. Figured why not take in a little nature with my coffee. I’m not really a nature guy, which is a shame, living out here. Everybody else is, but I think maybe they don’t mean it, they’re doing it because they’re supposed to. One foot in front of the other until they’re at the top of the hill. Then what? Walk back down?

I saw a guy at the top. That felt good. It was enough for me that someone had climbed it, and that I got to see. I waved to him, just a little hiker’s salute, then wondered if he wouldn’t think that was weird. But I probably looked like an ant to

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him, it doesn’t matter. He probably wasn’t even looking this way. Tabor is actually even smaller than the hills around Eugene, it’s just funny to me that it’s right in a city like that. It’s the opposite of nature, and so weak. Apparently it used to be a volcano. Maybe he was going to throw himself in like that Greek guy, Empedocles? Don’t worry, it’s dormant.

GROSS P7-9

Something I was thinking about: If you’d never heard of sex it would sound pretty fucked up, right? You’d probably wonder if it was safe. Maybe you’d think it was gross. But somehow we mostly all come around. And we figure out how to do it, at least passably. Is that the species at work in us? It’s surprising that there isn’t more of a range of responses. Everybody wants to stick it in. Except me, I want to watch a guy stick it in. So here I am watching Bill fuck my wife. I can’t do it like Bill, not any more than I can play like LeBron, but I did what I could and it was alright for a while, before we really knew what was possible. That’s what’s different about me, maybe. I want to know.

In most ways, though, I follow the pack. I put a lot of stock in what’s ‘normal’ in my life. So it was easy to assume I was done growing up when I grew up. I can fuck (sort of), drink coffee (with milk), whisky (with soda), beer, grow a beard (well, that might be a stretch). I could join the army! It’s not like I did all that, but what I’m saying is, they’re all acquired tastes. Imagine saying to a kid, ‘Not only are you gonna like this, but your life, your whole world, is going to revolve around it. You’re going to take pride in taking it as bitter as you can.’ About coffee, war, fucking. It’s hard to believe. I would have pushed back. I think that must be why teenagers are the way they are. Though I guess not all of them. My son seems to love the way of the world. All that stuff I was afraid to get into, he couldn’t wait. He took to the taste.

I had to work through all of these aversions to everything bitter, gross, scary, and jealousy is kind of the same, it kind of belongs on that list. Maybe I’m the only one who finished growing up, but acquiring that taste too. Finding out about Mindy and Bill for the first time hurt intensely, even though deep down I knew; I’d been setting this up and wanting it to happen for months. We talked about it, and Mindy told me about the cuckolding lifestyle. Of course I already knew about it. But I hadn’t dared to bring it up. Now she was bringing it up. And I could ‘research’

it along the well-worn grooves of sites I’d typed the addresses of a hundred times before clearing my browser history. We’re starting to get the hang of it.

Sometimes I feel like my heart is a long hallway with every door locked. Locked by ‘gross,’ ‘humiliating,’ ‘unsafe,’ ‘bitter,’ ‘unreal,’ ‘painful,’ ‘it doesn’t feel like you think it does.’ Exploring this lifestyle feels like unlocking those doors one at a time, except I guess for the last one.


This must sound touchy-feely. It’s certainly not at all how I was raised to be. But isn’t that the problem? Everything they told me to be, I never could be. I never could be because I never was. Does that make sense? And even if you’re just like me, even if I try to show you, you won’t see me. Not for years. I feel like the Invisible Man. Actually I’ve never seen that movie or read the book (are they even related? I’m remembering someone taped up like a mummy, but I think the book was about a black guy?). I should see if it’s on Netflix and stop talking into the void. I need to think about it more when I’m sober. I can’t even relate to what I just wrote. Or maybe I’m just scared because I know what it means. Lonely road for us, ain’t it?

Maybe I should lay off the G. Mindy doesn’t like me taking it and I think she’s right, but I feel like I’ve been having these breakthroughs. I get very emotionally clear. I was never a drug guy but this stuff levels me out. I buy it direct from a chemist in Taiwan and take it solo. I think it might be helping me to lose weight, cause it’s got less calories than beer, but here’s the main thing: It isn’t bitter! Anyway, I’m safe with it: I always dye it the same color of blue, I never mix it with alcohol, I measure my dose with a syringe, and I keep it sealed to prevent evaporation. I’ve always been fastidious. The one thing I do that’s different I guess is to drop in a packet of NutraSweet. Mmm.

Sunday morning, Bill let me touch it. That was interesting. He asked if I wanted to and I didn’t know what to say. I’d never put my hands on another guy like that before. So that’s what a real man feels like. Different for sure. I guess until that moment I thought ‘hard’ was a metaphor. I thought it would be warmer, in a way. I wanted to maybe do something with it but I didn’t, I wasn’t sure how he’d react, so I just palmed it for a second and gave him a quick stroke. Actually, I didn’t know what to do, I just wanted something to happen, but nothing did. They just shooed me away as usual and I made the coffee.

Jackie Ess is the author of *Darryl*, the novel you are holding an excerpt of, and a number of short stories which can be found in places like the Chicago Review and The Recluse. One always hopes there will be more to say later.

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the dawn,
gether.

In Thrall


Jane DeLynn

A little sunburnt
by the glare of life.

With an introduction
by Colm Tóibín




JANE DELYNN
If you cannot love me as I am,
I will be lonely forever.



I took my lyr
Come my he

DOMINIQUE

The Case of an Adolescent




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