

RACHEL

by
Rick Allden

Typical casting: *Woman (20s – 40s)*
Word count: *1124*
Approx. run time: *10 minutes*

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RACHEL Sometimes it's hard to notice the start of something without knowing where the end is. But that's now. It's here. It's here banging at the door. Rachel, he shouts. Rachel! He'll get in, I know he'll get in. I know he'll get in and that will be that. Just touching the blade makes the blood bulb on my thumb.

It was that perfume, I think, the start. We'd been out, into town, shopping. Our first Christmas together. We had just bought this place, fresh ideas still billowing over the rooms. Said I could have anything I want. Within reason. Within reason? Well, I suppose we could do with a new – but he interrupted me. Not a “could do with”, he said. Doesn't want to buy me something practical, something that doesn't show how he feels. Not something I would think of nothing to popping down to Argos to buy for myself. Told me stop making us like that. So he suggested perfume, I said OK perfume and went to tell him what I liked, but he said he knew which one.

I'd never worn that perfume before in my life. It smelt acidic; like red wine or balsamic vinegar. Dark. Not me. But why not, I suppose. Beginnings are the times for change. Rachel, he shouts at the door again. It won't hold for much longer. It'll strain and strain and strain before splintering to shards.

Funny. Relationships can start off in a way that it feels that there is nothing else that will ever be as important as him in the rest of your life. Not work. Not other men. Not children, even. Everything, everything is in relation to him. You have your hair the way he likes it. You wear the clothes that he likes to see you in. Then, gradually, things fall away. Erode. Rough edges sharpen to points. You realise that it's easier

to love an idea than a person and you're angry, but you're not angry with him, why doesn't he understand that, you're angry at the fact that you're back where you were and everything's the same. Everything except you. You're bitter now, older, shaped around him, and you try to ignore that knowledge shrieking for your attention. Back to everything being still out of reach. There is no magical solution and you can't escape yourself. You can't. It hasn't been as gradual with Tom. It's like he knew all this, knew the process from the start.

One night I'd said I wanted to go out, he said we couldn't, we didn't need to, that's fine I said, I will. And he said No. Just that, just those two letters. No. One no and we both then knew. It was frustration, I think, that made him grab my wrist.

He couldn't tell me, but he realised; realised at least that I went to bed early that night to think things through. I didn't move out, but he knew that something had changed in me. I didn't want to give up, but that was for the time I had put in; nothing to do with him. I wanted two wages coming in. I wanted help around the house. I just wanted it as easy as could be because it was too late now; he could have been anyone. I came home later and later from work, finding things to do that I hadn't noticed before. I started staying on the sofa when he went to bed. If he argued with me, or shouted, or screamed then I would follow him upstairs. Duty, nothing more. Eventually he saw.

One night he cooked. He made the effort, ironed a shirt, chopped some vegetables himself. I left him to it, went upstairs. Thought I'd clean a bit while he was occupied, scrub away some of our dirt. I wasn't snooping, he must've just been

careless. Perhaps he thought I was past caring. Perhaps I did. It was a bank statement. An account I didn't know he had. He's been sending some of his wages to her. They were together for eight years. I'd expected baggage; all the complications that go with the ending of a long relationship. Rather than putting money towards us though, towards our future, towards our house, rather than any of that, it's going back to her. He's never cooked for me like this. He's never bought me presents like this. He hasn't talked about it, if he does know, but that's a part of him. Talking about something solidifies it; the words add bulk to the memory. Ballast. If things are left unsaid they're harder to articulate in the future. It's how he manages.

I go back downstairs to the kitchen but he tells me we're making an effort and I should put on the dress he's bought for me. For the occasion. Asks me, tells me to wear my hair up.

Can't remember the last time I was in his bedroom. Our bedroom. Not all the money goes to her, he's buying more things for me all the time. Faded pink lipstick. An eyelash curler. I don't know how to use an eyelash curler. Rachel! He shouts again at the door. Once I found the statement I wanted to find other things. I found this box. He'd moved it recently as it wasn't there when I had last slept in the room. The box he had kept of his time with her. Photographs, stuffed toys. Darker things. Letters from her to him. Letters rejecting his threats; to her, to himself. Letters begging that he contact her, letters demanding to know what he had done to himself, letters screaming, letters pleading. Rachel! Rachel! He cries. I looked at the photographs. I had never met her and now I stared into her face. A face I would

once have scratched from the paper. A face of pain. Of fear. Of expectation. I stared and stared and stared until I saw it. Until I saw what it was. Saw what I was. The clothes, the hair. I looked at the picture and could smell the perfume.

I put my hair like her as he wanted. I walked down the stairs and told him I was leaving. I felt hot water strip skin from my leg as he threw the pan of water at me as I ran up here to the bathroom. The room with a lock. It doesn't matter though. Nothing does. Because this is the end. I look at the pictures of her and it's as though she's in the room. Rachel, he shouts again. He's been calling for so long. I can hear the violence scratching through his voice. Rachel's not even my name. It was hers.

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