

Tender

What I know now is this: you have a lime-green, SMEG refrigerator, immaculate inside and empty of everything but a box of lagers, a yellowing pack of Morrison's own-brand butter and a bottle of sweet chilli sauce, lid long lost. It's an appliance at odds with the rest of your flat-pack kitchen, which is laid out along one windowless, magnolia wall in your room, tucked under the eaves.

'When did they stop being bedsits,' I muse, sometime later, contemplating the drizzle through your single skylight, 'and become studio apartments?' My back is pressed against the side of your rumpled bed; the charcoal, nylon carpet scratches my naked bum as I drink beer from a can, taken from your pristine, fruit-coloured fridge.

Wrapping myself in your beach towel, its vibrancy long-faded, you pull on your discarded underwear and sweatshirt. It's our attempt at modesty before opening the door to the puffing pizza-delivery man, dripping helmet and soggy boxes in hand. We both ordered vegetarian; you give me your olives.

I believe your name is Chris. You believe mine is Alex. At least 50% of us are being misled.

I lick a gob of garlic butter from your chin. You push aside the pizza box and me to the floor, letting the towel drop open, protecting my back from the roughness.

What I don't know is your Mother's name, or whether spiders frighten you or who your favourite teacher was at school. You'd never guess at my fleeting marriage at twenty-two or losing a child at fifteen or what I do for a living.

All I need to know now, is this: there is a spot beneath your earlobes, above where your neck curves to your shoulders that, when kissed, induces your breath to deepen, your eyes to soften and a small sigh to slip between your lips.