

Kyoko YOSHIDA

Two stories

Borrowing Books

One night Kenneth visited his love Barbara and showed her a novel he had borrowed from Jenny, then jealous Barbara said to him that Kenneth was lucky to have so many female friends; she didn't have any male friends to borrow a book from. Kenneth pointed at himself and said that how about himself; he was a good friend of hers, but she replied that "good friends" don't *fuck*, which remark made Kenneth truly sad because he had believed Barbara was his best friend and he himself had always tried to be her best one. This incident disappointed Kenneth greatly.

Next morning, when he woke up in Barbara's bed, a wonderful idea cracked up in his mind: he should sleep equally with every female friend of his to prove "good friends" *do* fuck. He was convinced that Barbara would then realize she was the very best one among his female friends if Kenneth made relationships with all of his female friends.

Kenneth started to work on his idea. First, he had to make a list of women to do. Ninety-eight names lined up on his list. They were all his good friends. He imagined the sight of ninety-eight women standing in a row in front of his bedroom door. He was almost giving up this dreary project, when he compromised by picking those who had lent him books. This new rationale trimmed the number from ninety-eight to ten, yet Kenneth was not satisfied, for some women excluded from the list were apparently closer friends than the ten book-lenders. So Kenneth made another list of women who made better friends than the ten women whom he borrowed books from. The total number of his female friends on the two lists turned out to be twenty-three, which seemed to be a reasonable number to execute his plan.

Soon Kenneth found out how easy it was to undress his good female friends. None of them had said no so far. Many of them undressed themselves voluntarily as if they had been waiting for this moment. A couple of women became upset after the thing was over, but as far as they had willingly done it, Kenneth did not care. He assumed it would not take long before he crossed off all the names on his list.

To finish off his plan quickly, Kenneth could have done two or three women at

once, but he never did it because what he was working on was not promiscuity but a highly solemn project.

Of those who had not lent him a book, Kenneth would ask, "May I borrow your book?" Every one replied happily, "Sure! Which book?" Kenneth bonked them instead of answering that question.

By the time he copulated with thirteen women out of twenty-three, an odd thing began to happen: they wouldn't lend him a book any more. They would buy Zippo lighters for him instead of lending books to him. They threatened his peace with vacuum cleaners and bags of groceries. They demanded that he take them to the movies, to the beach at sunset, to French restaurants, anywhere they had never been with Kenneth. They disputed when they coincided in his room. A few women began to use the word *commitment*, which baffled Kenneth. Many of them requested him to squeeze their breasts and to flip their skirts again.

He said that he had no time for that.

Then they would complain, saying, "Don't you love me any more? What was that last Tuesday night when you made love to me so passionately?"

He would say, "No! I didn't make love to you! I just wanted make sure I could borrow a book from you," and go away.

Kenneth was getting exhausted. He badly needed to see Barbara, whom he had not met for more than a month. He wanted to touch her velvety belly and to read together on her water-blue sofa, but he had to finish up with his "good female friends" first to prove his thesis. Kenneth was not a vigorous man. Too much bottom exercise was emaciating him. When he finally fulfilled his mission, Kenneth was just skin and bone. He tottered to Barbara's apartment. She wasn't home. Falling on his buttocks from extreme distress, he waited for her in front of the door like an old dog. The passers-by cast suspicious glances at this man trembling in the dewy night, squatting on the ground.

At last Barbara came home, holding a couple of books under her arm and a grocery bag in her hand. The books had classification labels on their spines. She must have stopped by the public library on her way home from work.

"What are you doing here?" Barbara asked, looking down at him while groping for the key in her coat pocket.

"May I borrow your book?" Kenneth said, still crouching.

"Sure! Which book?" she said, nonchalantly.

"*The Astronomic Almanac*," said Kenneth, failing to raise himself. Barbara jerked him up with her empty hand. She let him in, and right after she handed him *The Astronomic Almanac*, her fist knocked him down on the kitchen floor. She had known what he had been doing, of course.

Kenneth lost all his "good female friends" but succeeded in demonstrating that Barbara was his love and best friend: she loved him and lent him a book, too. Although she would not let him touch her for the following six months, they lived happily ever after.

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Marsupial, the Lowly Mammal

Juliet ditched me. When I woke up, she was gone. No message, no good-bye. She took our TV, our answering machine, our rice-cooker, our bike, my alarm-clock, my sunglasses. And she left her dumb cat. She must've planned it for a while.

I know why she left. I've been unemployed for two months. I hadn't made any effort to find a job, but I was about to.

I stay in bed for three days and three nights, hoping Juliet would return. I've made her favorite tomato sandwich to keep in the fridge so that she can come home and eat any time. Every evening, I get out of the bed to change the soggy bread to fresh one. Juliet detests soggy bread. I give it to her stupid cat.

On the fourth day, I crawl out of bed and gobble down Juliet's sandwich. The tomato tastes bitter. I take bus 30 and tell the driver I've left my wallet in my office. She kicks me out. I walk to the job placement center, downtown.

They give me a sales job. I team up with Terry, an expert traveling saleskangaroo from Darwin.

We travel from door to door selling notions. Terry talks to find out what ladies want, and I dig it out of his pouch. And ladies just love those average plastic combs and mediocre synthetic leather gloves coming out of Terry's lukewarm fuzzy pouch. Terry trains me and I help him with my able hands. We've become buddies. I tell him about Juliet one night at my place.

"I should've known she'd leave me. She'd always beat me up whenever I do anything wrong. This time she didn't. She'd been nice for two months. She even smiled at me."

Then I tell Terry how smart, nimble, diligent and sometimes sweet Juliet was.

"She was too good for me."

"She'll be back." Terry taps on my back. Suddenly I feel terribly lonely. I look at Terry, who grins and slaps his belly.

"Come!"

I pillow my head on his belly. It is warm and soft, and smells of sunny grass. It reminds me of a huge bunny my mom made me out of worn-out blanket. That one smelt like fresh piss steaming in the summer grass. This makes me weep for a second. I sniff into his pouch. Juliet's shitty cat is napping inside. I squeeze it out before I screw my legs

into his tummy. I put my arms around his neck and am about to doze off when the door bangs open and Juliet is standing there staring at us, my bottom sucked in Terry's pouch.

"What are you doing?" She barks.

I creep out of his pouch in silence. I introduce my job partner to her, hoping Terry's kangarooness doesn't affect her judgment.

"Male marsupials don't have pouch, you know," Juliet says. "I just wanted to see how you are doing. You've got such a capable partner. Nice. Good-bye." And before I say anything, she slams the door, which smashes my toe.

Terry's huddled up in the corner, scratching the edges of the half-stripped wallpaper. The cat peed on the carpet.

"So you're a girl."

"I'm sorry. Thought you knew it." And she hops off the door.

I cannot stop her.

So I lose my job, again.

I loaf in bed for three days and three nights, hoping Juliet or Terry would come back. They don't. I am lonely. So must be Juliet. And Terry.

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