

Emily Perry - Boys on films

Ckristo

I don't know what to do. I went into my tea with a spoon from the drying board to remove the teabag but realized I'd already done it. I wonder what would happen if we were all conscious of all we did. I register the tight nagging knots in my upper back and adopt the downward facing dog pose in my kitchen. I forgot to breath then realised I wasn't breathing and stood up breathing, disappointed that I wasn't aware of my breathing.

She's living away from her boyfriend at the moment, just for a few months while she's working away. She's noticed he's more laddy without her; he watches more football coz she won't watch it with him, he is angrier after work because he now only works with men so communication in meetings is an exhausting competition full of egos, and he's got into a new gym routine which is male too. She notices the influence they have on each other. They were shooting some hoops on the campus basketball court and she fell in love with him all over again when he was so bad at it. Men are so much better with women

around. She said some people think sexuality is a choice but she thinks if that were the case we'd see so many more lesbians walking around.

On the train I plan what to talk about and imagine I might look better than the image I see in the mirror once I smile. My stomach and lower chest feel like one wobbly, weighty, yet tense bag. I think of myself as a bag of flour or sand like I used to make on my sculpture degree course when trying desperately to understand how women deal with their bodies. My heart beats weirdly. I imagine the tense feeling as clumps of damp flour amongst the loose, soft, dry flour. I imagine the feeling when my saliva takes on a thick claggy texture but I can't remember what causes this feeling, is it just when I'm ill?

Or when I eat certain things? I get an image of my childhood friend at primary school eating yoghurt all wrong. The image associated with my claggy lumpy tense sensation is a warmly lit close up of wet dough residue sticking to the bowl and the wooden spoon when making scones.

We ask so much of food. We want it to love us, to nurture us, to make us feel happy. But it's also a weapon to use against ourselves. Or sometimes it's the crime which later justifies the punishment. My female friend forgets to eat, I think she forgets to care for herself. Another won't throw any food away, eating even moldy food, presenting it as if blind to its decay just like Mrs Havisham. She savors the occasion until it lingers, the expansion only highlights the lack. Another friend just fucking loves food! But she does lose followers every time she posts photos of her full up body.

I complimented the artist's exhibition and he kissed me on the cheek, and then the other cheek. He said he didn't believe me because he doesn't believe what people tell him at his openings. I think this was performative self-awareness, the most self-depreciation he could muster, as I think he did believe that I enjoyed his work. I think he was trying to seem more human and humble. I agreed that he shouldn't believe people because we wouldn't tell him it was bad

but assured him nonetheless that I was being honest with my feedback. Later at the bar he kissed me again and told me he was a bit jealous that I'd got representation straight after graduating. I made self-depreciating excuses like «oh it's coz I'm a woman and do performance, they like that at the moment». This seemed to visibly comfort him, and he said something in agreement like “yeah”.

I said the word power referring to how I had more power than a guy on a date. He said the word back to me. I said it again to show I was committed to the word. I told him «you're a man, you don't have to think about power». He didn't say anything. When exploring my multiple personalities, I asked him why he hates feminist Emily. He tried to call her bitch Emily one time. I'll defend her.

Dylan

I thought about emotional labour and wondered who was considering the other more. I went home exhausted after a night of holding my tummy

in, not turning my head in profile to anyone I liked, and constantly performing like a comedian, pre-empting every comment, planning every response, being funny and self-deprecating as much as possible, trying to appear like I don't take myself seriously, while trying to communicate clearly and straight forwardly when asked about art. I often find people like me performing; they feel better about themselves in my company. They feel relaxed and at ease, trusting I'll remain in control. Sometimes I'm rude to new men and shut them down or openly pick up on their subtle male behaviours. They feel nervous around me and I like the power. It is like a respect test. Though I don't respect myself on the way home, feeling like a ridiculous entertainer, unsure why I chose such an exposing career.

I see moods in myself that feel like my mums. I am so disappointed by these moments, both because I don't want to not like the feelings that remind me of my mum and I don't want to act in a way that others can dread.

When talking about our mum's like we often do, we decided that as a mum you're damned if you do and damned if you don't. I thought about the impossible task of motherhood. We can't be good at it. It's never enough. You also can't be good at being a woman. I told her on the phone that I am so in love with my mum right now and she was really pleased to hear that. We work so hard at our mums; try so hard to understand them. We are so attune to their pain; we feel it with them. My brothers don't get it. I am more bruised by it yet understand her rage like inherited trauma. My brother said maybe it is easier to forgive someone who hurt you than to forgive someone who hurt someone you love.

He slapped me in the face during sex on the second date. I jumped and looked at him, to my surprise he did it again. Our conversation on feminism in the pub was foreplay, talking about female empowerment and then slapping her is all part of the kink. While on the phone to mum crying to her about my oldest friend upsetting me and being late for a work meeting, I added to the

stream of stressful consciousness that some guy slapped me last night during sex.

What would happen if we screamed until patriarchy ended? I am authored by society; my subconscious is authentic of society. My authentic is leaking out, excreting all the bits I don't recognise to pull up and examine. A very female scream.

It's really hard. I want to talk to him and connect with him but I can't. I can't communicate properly. I'm stuck. I'm stressed about my relationship and my family and my work and my friendships and what I do with my time and what I eat and how I sleep. I'm very unsettled. I have so many things I'm angry about. It's repressed. How does it hurt me to repress my feelings? My body tells me: my eyes glaze over, fix into a gormless stare but I'm still listening, still absorbing. I discover I'm frowning, I'm not breathing, I'm holding back words. I can't get comfortable even in pajamas without a bra drinking gin at home. I'm so much better at dealing with it all but so much

more aware of all I'm dealing with. I worry how stress will kill me. I can't be with my love and I'm not okay with that but can't find a solution to the problem. Continue hating it until I don't anymore feels a little lame. I'll never really know how he feels, or anyone. Words are awful. I'll use my intuition. Working with kids who had a different language I learnt to feel situations and got to understand them through facial expressions and gestures. We became friends through baking cakes, making cardboard toys and food shopping together. I am sad for my mum and sad for me. I should tell mum about the content of my exhibition beforehand. I'm frowning again. Boring tedious sadness. Hamied would say I'm brushing feelings away. I need to shout or run but really I mean I need to talk for a long time until they have heard me. The people I want to hear me might never and I bet I won't notice those listening.

Etienne

My dating app asked me what I'm looking for and I wrote "an interesting feminist". I receive 5 unsolicited comments, ranging from the archaic

“the best thing women can do for themselves and society is raise children”, to the tedious “fuck feminism”, “yawn”. I screenshot the comments and post them to my Instagram story, later this emboldened, reactive energy will be replaced with a tired air of malaise. I am also sent one ambiguous emoji but I consider its decoding unpaid labour and so turn my phone on its belly and decide not to date at all.

Echo could only reflect Narcissus’s love for himself. The session was about exploring myself, communicating with him in a way I could feel rather than understand. He was being very complimentary and I felt in control. I enjoyed his gaze. I didn’t care about his appearance but only about the dynamic. I was turning myself on. Using him to love myself. It felt very private, not anything to do with him. Of course I was simultaneously performing for him, reading the room, knowing my audience, pleasing the crowd. And feeling guilty for every part I play.

I said while crying, sobbing: She put her butter

and roast potatoes on his plate. Automatically. I find it so gross. It's like women feeding men, denying themselves. He feeds off her share. Her eating habits are a part of their relationship, a charming part of their dynamic, an example of their closeness. I saw myself in her and I hated it. I hated him for being fine and letting her give him her food. I hated me for hating her. It's disappointingly easier to hate her than him, coz she's me and I want him. My authentic layers of internalised sexism.

He told me his ex-girlfriend was a phycho. I told him he sounded like a dickhead and every man's ex is a phycho for leaving them, right? I'm being a bitch. I'm being uptight. I'm overreacting. I need to calm down.

It makes us run through sparkly-floored, thick-aired shops full of symmetrical faces, plastered on bodies and on flat surfaces. I'm seeing it all quickly, it's a blue, white, artificial future and smells like the Oscars. The air is oppressive and desperate. Unsolicited competition seeps into us.

We all look ridiculous. Brutal, stressed and unpleasant, I think of all the people who have already withdrawn, refused to participate in this mess and I envy them. Individuals hide behind uniform, they are instant, obvious, flat, branded, corrupted, smiling, loyal soldiers. Sylvia Plath saw gulls; white caps, one just the same as the other, coming and going without any trouble, doing things with their hands. He bought me tulips in Amsterdam. Pink tax, purple tax. Van Gogh would have hated airports. He said cities don't let us think. He and Hockney are all about looking, committed to really seeing. My boyfriend spends time looking at me. He sees me when I'm sleeping. I am impressed with how thoroughly he looks; he studies me with an artist's attention. I am uncovered, not fully cooked but not comfortable enough to be raw.

I want someone to want to marry me but I don't want to get married.

Robert

I'm naked and partially dry after my shower and

lying on a towel on a blanket on my duvet on my bed. There's loads of crap on my bed, dozens of notes and scraps of paper waiting to become notes, envelopes, some clothes and card ready to make Christmas cards 'coz I'm a good girl. I'm laying here in the wrong bit of the bed, horizontally across it, pillows to my left and all the crap snuggled up to my right. I'm looking at my ceiling watching the dramatic shadows create many versions of white, the work of my bedside lamp. There's a tiny thread hanging from the ceiling, perhaps part of an old spider's web or just a long string of dust dancing. I often watch it, it's always dancing even when the air feels still and warm. It seems to be moving as if I'm blowing it. As I say some things out loud - I occasionally use the voice recognition software to make notes on my phone but it often makes me feel more stressed as I feel a time pressure and become more aware of articulating myself - I imagine my room as full and thick, tracking my breath, picturing it move the air around me like my words are a finger dipping in a bath of still water. Sometimes I can't tell which is the

string and which is the shadow.

Mum, Dad, Mic and Sue were surprised that Mum's story of gendered harassment still happens to Ellie and I (the representatives of our generation in the room at the time). I couldn't tell if this was genuine surprise at the fact that these assaults still happen or if it was a performative expression demonstrating how non-sexist they are. I know how group dynamic sometimes goes; sometimes we perform shock or forget the real focus. And it's tough, when we want to demonstrate our sensitivity to a subject, to respond appropriately. It's also hard to comment on these brutal topics straight away, but there is often a pressure to have the appropriate response ready to be articulated immediately. Social situations are difficult. We're all playing games. I like to play the put-myself-down game, which I think I do in attempt to expose humanity and connect with people by breaking social etiquette laws. It is my job to break the tension. I worry that my self-deprecating humour harms other women.

I fantasize about knowing everything about

Hamied. I wonder if I would still be attracted to him if I knew everything about him. I wonder how old he is. Does he have a wife? I know he's not gay. I want that calm energy. He doesn't forget to set the recorder now. I used to like it when he forgot to press record. It made me feel a bit powerful when I remembered and he didn't as if I'd taken all of his attention and distracted him. I like the idea of him thinking about me and like it when he says he can talk more, or show more of himself with me, than with other clients. It makes me feel special. Like I'm making better progress. Now we're in a fight. I decide he is a narcissist. He is knocked off his pedestal, no longer Hamied, but a flat, male therapist. I still want him to love me. He suggested he loved all his clients and I wanted to hurt him.

Victor

I hate being watched. It feels violent. Seeing something I am not. Taking something I can't control. It affects me, what you think of my appearance. It doesn't stay just with you. I've been squashed. I've flattened and fattened myself.

Always in excess. Always too much and never enough.

Self care makes me want to hurt myself. I pick at my thumbnail until it bleeds and throbs. It's not working unless it's painful. I want to be sick and cry. I need to wee to the point of discomfort.

I understand why everyone distracts themselves with marriages and jobs and kids and cats. It is hard being busy and hard being bored. I really want a kid recently, I play out conversations with my imagined child on my way to work, but I remember the very distinct sensation of simultaneous stress and boredom I felt when looking after kids: a kind of terrifying mundanity. This week Dr Seuss gave me some wise, comforting words about life being a great balancing act, so did Peep Show when the guy says "nothing you want will ever happen" and that Radiographer who did my ultrasound when she said "life is awful" in a sympathetic way.

A naked, clammy, cliché, genuine "I'm falling in

love with you”. Involuntary noises that I think came from my heart. Hidden smile in the darkness but he feels it through the back of me. Thick silence full of thoughts and feelings. He sees my shield perforated with unknowingly exposed flesh handles. I type “self-loathing heterosexuals” into the search bar. Sex eyes noticed through a Gorilla Glue haze. A homeless person walks past in the rain eating crisps. He’s annoyed that I’m now disgusted at us and talks about guilt and working hard for money. I roll my eyes and feel far away from him. Brutal honesty disappoints and inspires the ridiculous, desperate creation of Loke.

I dreamt there was a tiny dead baby between my legs hanging on by an umbilical cord.

I’m scared my therapist will leave me. These cramps are so bad this month. I haven’t had them like this since I was a teenager. I’m aware of my frowning, and my inevitable death, and raise my eyebrows in an attempt to counter the developing frown wrinkles. I am the only one now.

Seventeen
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