

DRIVING

SHORT SHORT STORY NO.26

Two boys, Conor and Stuart, are driving to Roscommon for the weekend. They've been a couple for three months but this is the first time they've taken a trip together. They're on their way to visit a third boy, who is also called Stuart, who used to go out with Stuart. Privately, Conor refers to his Stuart as Good-Stuart and to Stuart's Stuart as Bad-Stuart because he is doing everything in his power to break this new relationship up. Given the choice, Conor would never have to see Bad-Stuart again but he is not given this choice.

Good-Stuart ended his relationship with Bad-Stuart more than two years before but he keeps him on a string for one simple reason: Bad-Stuart buys him things. Anything he asks for. And he asks for a lot.

Conor, seated in the passenger seat, is slowly drowning. He arrived at Good-Stuart's flat early that morning and wasn't buzzed in. Instead, Good-Stuart told him to sit in the car and he'd be out shortly, although it took him another forty minutes to appear. From where the car was parked Conor couldn't see the front door but he knows that his boyfriend cheated on him the night before and had to smuggle the guy out so he wouldn't be seen. He also knows that he can't say anything about this or, rather than feeling guilty and remorseful, Good-Stuart will simply end the relationship and he'll be alone again.

'What time can we leave at on Sunday?' Conor asks, aware that he hasn't spoken in almost fifteen minutes and desperate for the reassurance of inane chatter.

'About three o'clock,' replies Good-Stuart, glowing with the sparkle of the recently laid. 'After lunch.'

'We could leave before lunch if you want,' suggests Conor. 'And find a nice place to eat on the way home?'

'We'll leave around three,' says Good-Stuart. 'After lunch.'

Conor nods and looks out the window. He hopes they will slow down so they don't arrive at Bad-Stuart's house too quickly. He knows what it will be like there. Suffocating. Bad-Stuart lives alone with a house full of Star Trek DVDs. Every season, every episode. The last time they met he'd got a Westlife haircut, even though he's old enough to be their father, and looked ridiculous. Good-Stuart is the only spark of light in his otherwise miserable existence. He is happy to give him money. He is happy to have him visit with a new boyfriend every time. Anything, as long as he visits.

'We should stop off and buy some wine,' says Conor a little later. 'It's rude to show up empty-handed.'

'If you want to buy some, that's fine,' says Good-Stuart, offering his permission.

Conor sighs to himself. In his mind, he decides to change their names to Bad-Stuart and Worse-Stuart. It makes more sense.