

## Feathers

Lorraine Mariner

With the woman from your office that you left her for away at a weekend conference, you found yourself at a party staring at your ex-girlfriend and her new boyfriend, and deciding that the new boyfriend's jumper was the kind favoured by train spotters or watchers of birds (the sort that fly without any help from you) repaired to the bedroom set aside for coats, got as close as you could to the dressing-table mirror, and practised saying *For old times' sake* with your eyes.

But you didn't know that on the evenings you were working late, she had put off going home to an empty flat by browsing in a bookshop near the station, and read in the poetry section that hope is the thing with feathers and in the natural world section that ninety per cent of bird species are monogamous compared with three per cent of mammals, and bought herself a pocket guide by Bill Oddie and binoculars one lunchtime from a sports shop, and waited for the day when you would leave.

So when you approached her at the buffet table your 'come to bed' look didn't register and you found yourself demanding *who's the fucking jumper?*

Refilling their glasses in the kitchen her new boyfriend picked up that stunned silence in which he could have told you about the day on Hackney Marsh when from his hide he saw her walking towards him, a new variety he couldn't name, who wanted to learn everything he could teach her and had him describe swans mating for life again and again and again, and how much she loves his jumpers, particularly this one, bought by her and worn by him to repel birds of prey.

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