

## S & M · *Jeffrey DeShell*

S—'S FEELINGS FOR SIN short for Synthia have changed she doesn't think she's in love anymore at the same time Sin's feelings for S— short for S— have also changed she's sure she's not in love anymore since their feelings for each other have changed they've both started being incredibly nice to each other neither wants to be the person that fucks everything up although both of them know that it's probably too late things have already gotten way passed the fucked stage and have moved into the really nice stage and everyone knows when you're in the really nice stage things have gotten way past the hope stage so both Sin and S— are just riding it out trying not to be the person who articulates what they both are thinking and feeling and by saying things are really fucked up aren't they moving them from a nice stage into an even more fucked stage.

The problem with this nice/fucked stage is that it really isn't that nice it's a transition between being involved with a person and not being involved with a person it's a stage where the plot's already resolved the game's already decided and all that's left is to go through the motions waiting for the thing to hurry up and end another problem with this nice stage is that it's similar to another nice stage the very nice stage which is the stage that comes at the beginning of a relationship the stage of transition between not being involved with someone and being involved with someone but in both stages the simple nice stage and the very nice stage there's this feeling of obsession in the very nice stage you want to be with around and inside this person all of the time in the simple nice stage you will do anything not to have to be in the same room as this person but when you are in the same room as this person you act extremely nice to them because even though this simple nice stage isn't all that nice it's better than getting into fights all the time because the fighting and hating stage takes even more energy than the simple nice stage and you don't like this person anyway so why put any more energy into them than you have to.

It's hard to tell when this simple nice stage started it's hard to tell exactly when things got so bad they both knew there was no hope and so subsequently started being really nice to each another S— thinks the simple nice stage started after this big fight they had because Sin wanted to go dancing and S— had to work on these photographs she was developing for

one of the magazines she does freelance for they had been planning to go dancing all week S— knew that but she did have to get these photos finished and they needed to be touched up a bit the light was too bright or something and so she had to work longer and harder than she expected and so there was really no time to go dancing which caused a big fight they yelled and screamed they called each other really horrible names like cunt and whore and Sin locked herself in the bathroom for awhile and S— sat around drinking a little white wine and then even though she felt pretty bad she did have to finish so she went back into the spare room she had fixed up as a studio and lab and put on her rubber gloves began to mix the chemicals and started working and when Sin came out of the bathroom S— could tell she was still really pissed off but Sin didn't say anything in fact she made some tea and brought S— a cup then she got dressed very quietly and left she didn't come home until seven o'clock the next night S— hadn't gotten home from a shoot yet but she had washed all the dishes and had fixed Sin a brunch before she left.

Since the tea and brunch incident they've both gone out of their way to do pleasant little things for each other like S— bringing home those flowers or Sin buying that expensive bottle of scotch the kind S— loves but rarely can afford while all the time the pressure's mounting along with the loathing and repulsion the more they loathe each other the nicer they are to each other it's not clear how long this will last or how it will end the way things are going the way the pressure's been mounting the way the world is today one wouldn't be at all surprised if it ended in an act of violence not murder necessarily but something out of the ordinary.

No violence this thing ended the same way most of these things end anticlimactically one day when S— came home from work Sin had taken all of her things and left no note no address no strings no more being nice S— breathed a huge sigh of relief and got very drunk on scotch that night and three days later the postcards started coming.

*Dear S—. We were both perfect beasts to each other, I guess we both deserved it. I need some time out of the city. I have a brother in Tucson, he lent me some money so I rented a car, a big blue Ford. Arizona here I come. Sort of a wild, depressed bull dyke On the Road. Something like that. Oh well. I'll send you some postcards, even if you don't want me to. Especially if you don't want me to. Postcards from hell. Sin.*

When S— woke up she felt the beginnings of a cold not quite the

beginnings of an actual cold more like the beginnings of the possibility of a cold in other words she didn't feel all that bad but she didn't feel quite right either she felt well enough to go to work in the morning and when she came home in the afternoon she still didn't feel quite right now only more so she didn't feel sick either she felt only the possibility of sickness she wished she would get sick at least then she'd know exactly what she was dealing with it is always much easier to deal with the thing itself than merely the possibility of that thing she came home from work still not feeling sick but not feeling quite right either not knowing whether she should behave as if she were in fact sick or ignore completely that feeling of not feeling quite right she didn't know how she should act she didn't know if she should act sick or if she should act well she thought that this feeling of not knowing how to act of not knowing whether she was sick or well was in fact a kind of sickness in itself or if not an actual sickness at least a symptom of an actual sickness she finally decided that yes she was in fact sick she took a hot bath read a little and went to bed early.

When she woke up the next morning she was very sick her chest and head were congested she had a temperature and her throat hurt she might have caught the flu that had been going around and on top of that during the night the electricity in her apartment had been shut off or something and her clocks were all a couple of hours behind so when she called her boss in the morning to tell him that she was sick and wouldn't be coming to work it was really later than she thought it was and her boss was angry with her for not calling and telling him earlier and she looked at her bedroom clock and it still read eight fifteen and she couldn't understand why he was so angry she was only fifteen minutes late but she was weak with fever and didn't have the strength to question or to argue so she just apologized and hung up she felt confused she fell asleep.

She didn't sleep very well her fever kept her in that state which is between consciousness and unconsciousness the sleep which is not quite sleep sometimes she would drift deeper into sleep and sometimes she would almost be awake she thought or dreamt of Sin and her smell of chrysanthemums and curry she liked those words even though they always reminded her of Sin she still really liked those words they still sounded exotic and strange she also dreamt or thought about her sickness she thought it odd that she only really became ill after she started behaving as if she were really ill maybe if she would have just ignored the not quite right

feeling it would have gone away and she wouldn't have gotten sick at all maybe she was too hasty in trying to force the issue maybe that was her trouble always wanting to know prematurely maybe she was too impatient maybe that was why Sin had left her she hadn't received the postcard yet so she didn't know where Sin was who she was with and what she was doing S— dreamt about her boss and why he had been such a prick to her that was how she dreamt of him as an enormous red prick even in her dream she realized this was a cliché but nevertheless she enjoyed the dream tremendously.

The phone woke her up it was her friend Simone from work she was downstairs thought she might be hungry so she had brought over some Chinese food and some magazines S— wasn't exactly in the mood for either Chinese food or Simone they both left her with this impatient unsatisfied feeling she chuckled at her joke her head felt thick and fuzzy with sleep and fever she felt slightly dizzy from getting up too quickly and her throat was parched and sore she was in that space where she really had very little to do with the external world she felt miserable she just wanted to go back to sleep she thought of her boss as a big red prick wondered with panic if he was downstairs with Simone no that was impossible buzzed her up and then slunk back in a chair she was really exhausted S— desperately wanted some orange juice but was too tired to get up and go to the refrigerator besides she didn't have any anyway Sin hated fruit juices S— didn't know why maybe Simone would run to the store and get her some why did she feel so fucking bad maybe she would feel better once she ate she could hear Simone walking up the stairs clack clack clack she suddenly was not at all in the mood for Simone and her high heels Simone and her Chinese food Simone and her gossip magazines Simone and her bladder infections Simone and her new boyfriend Simone and her fashion advice Simone and her drug adventures Simone and her motorcycle Simone and her latest fad fuck food or frolic suddenly S— missed Sin very much at least Sin knew when to shut up especially when one was sick she heard Simone knock on the door she struggled to get out of her chair then she opened the door and let her in.

Jesus you look terrible Yeah well I feel terrible come on in I brought you some Chinese food from Mah Wong's some really hot stuff to clear out your sinuses I like the Imperial Palace better but it was closed I also brought you some OJ you'd better sit down you look terrible Yes I know you said that already thanks a lot for the orange juice Do you want me to get you a

glass Yeah sure they're above the sink to your right no the next one right by the refrigerator there thanks Where are the plates In the cabinet next to the glasses you can just put the food in the fridge I'm not really hungry right now But I'm starving I'm on my lunch hour I'm sorry I have no idea what time it is I have a little fever I've got a quarter past one why does your clock say nine thirty I don't know is it still running Yes Well I don't know maybe the electricity went off last night or something I don't know I just don't know.

The orange juice made her throat feel a lot better but she still didn't feel like talking or listening to Simone Simone was one of those people the city was full of them who would never be able to comprehend the value of silence Simone believed that any pause no matter how small in any conversation no matter how trivial was the gravest social error imaginable and so she worked tirelessly heroically to fill the air with a constant stream of small monosyllabic words eating didn't slow her down drinking didn't slow her down lack of audience didn't slow her down S— thought she probably chatted while she fucked too but didn't know for sure S— sat across the table from Simone trying not to listen to her chatter trying not to get sick trying not to concentrate on the sight of her eating the Chinese food out of the bright white carton trying not to focus on the sight of her tiny pale hand poking the brown and white food between those very red lips trying not to tunnel her vision and concentration down to the sight of that small restless mouth constantly moving mutating masticating constantly seemingly randomly changing shape and line.

S— hurried to the bathroom and threw up a little mucous saliva and orange juice she stood motionless over the toilet bowl for a few seconds a line of spittle extending from her lip down into the water of the toilet while Simone on the other side of the bathroom door was asking S— if she was all right she was okay would be out in a few minutes I have to go baby are you sure you're all right Yes I'm sure I'll call you tonight Okay well I have to go now Thanks for the food and juice You're welcome I'm going to leave a note for Sin I need to borrow her red pumps Sin doesn't live here anymore she no we split up What Sin doesn't live here anymore it's all over Oh S— I'm so sorry why didn't you tell me open the door let me in No no I'm all right I just want to be by myself for awhile okay Are you sure you're all right open the door Yes I'm sure I'm all right You're not going to do anything stupid What I said you're not going to do anything stupid like kill

yourself or anything are you S— chuckled No no I'm not going to do anything more stupid than throw up You promise Simone god damn it I'm fine I promise I won't kill myself now leave me alone for awhile okay I'm sick I need some rest Okay okay do you have any red pumps I could borrow I just bought this new skirt No Simone I don't have any red pumps goodbye Okay I'll talk to you tonight I'll give your best to the kids at work Okay see you later lock the door when you leave I will goodbye.

S— stood above the toilet her forehead pressed against the cool tile she wanted to cry and throw up at the same time she didn't know why she did know why she missed Sin very much it would have been nice to have her around to take care of her now that she was sick especially since they were in the nice phase right up until she left when was that S— wasn't sure days weeks months years S— had no idea maybe it wasn't Sin specifically that she missed maybe it was the comforting feeling of having someone around someone to take care of you when you needed them that need was depressing S— suddenly felt oh so very alone and vulnerable so she cried for awhile then cleaned herself up swallowed a couple of cold pills with orange juice then went to bed and fell asleep.

When she woke up it was just beginning to get dark her fever had gone down a little and she felt hungry she looked at her bedroom clock it read five minutes past four she remembered that her clocks weren't right she didn't know where her watch was maybe Sin had taken it she thought no she wouldn't do that and she didn't feel like looking for it right now she decided that it didn't matter what time it was she didn't need to know it wasn't like she was going anyplace or anything she was sweating her pajamas and sheets were damp she was achy and tired she wished she could go back to sleep but she knew she had better eat something and besides she had to get out of bed to go to the bathroom to pee and while she was in the bathroom she heard the phone ring she didn't move to answer it that's what answering machines were for she half hoped it was Sin she listened at the bathroom door it was her good friend Sonia she was both disappointed and relieved at the moment she could deal with the thought of but not the voice of Sin.

She sat on the toilet after she had finished peeing and wondered about what she was feeling why she was feeling so alone and unloved although it had been nice when Sin was around it wasn't the kind of niceness you could count on or even enjoy it was never an absolute niceness never a niceness

just for its own sake it was always a niceness with a function always a niceness with strings attached always a niceness with an undercurrent of real bitterness and hate almost a violent niceness a niceness that could turn wounding brutal disfiguring any moment without warning S— didn't know why she missed that niceness so much why she craved that niceness that was not nice she wondered if she would ever feel a niceness any niceness again she thought she probably would but maybe not she didn't feel particularly attractive at the moment with her pajamas down around her ankles her head and chest all congested her mind in fever maybe she needed a change maybe she would move now that she was on her own she couldn't afford this place by herself maybe she could move in with Sonia or Cecilia no that wouldn't work maybe she would stay here and get a roommate she was attached to the apartment she had moved there almost four years ago a couple of years before she had even met Sin she could move her photo stuff out of the room she used for a studio and someone could fix it up as a bedroom that might work.

Maybe she could start sleeping with men again no that wouldn't be a good idea for one thing she really wasn't acquainted with all that many men not by choice so much it just happened that way and of the men she did know all almost without exception were either gay or incredibly unattractive and another thing this was the city and the last thing she wanted was AIDS no she could certainly do without penises for now she wasn't that desperate at least not yet.

She was feeling horny though maybe it was the fever she always felt really sexy when she had a fever she remembered the time she was laid up with a cold in Amsterdam and she and Sin decided to splurge on a nice hotel until she got better after two days she felt almost well yet she still had a slight fever and it was very cold so they stayed in bed for days bundled up making love over and over again not really over and over again more like constantly no real starting and stopping just perpetual kissing and hugging perpetually warm and wet almost like suspended animation not leaving the room for days not knowing or caring what time or even what day it was ordering room service eating strawberries off of each other's bellies until finally their bodies weak and drained they staggered out of the hotel to the train station in the early morning cold not daring to wash off their new skin made of dried saliva strawberry juice and other secret elixirs S— remembered how her stomach muscles ached from coming so much she heard a

toilet flush somewhere in the building opened her eyes she was sitting on the toilet seat her pajamas around her ankles her right hand buried between her legs she closed her eyes again and leaned back up against the toilet back extended her legs and shifted her weight so that her pelvis was thrust forward and exposed and she gripped the rim of the toilet seat with her left hand and with the middle finger of her right she began to probe and caress her labia and the soft place just to the side of the hood of her clitoris she rocked back and forth slightly on the toilet seat and as she masturbated she thought of Sin's belly hard nipples and the salty sour taste of her vagina she thought of the rough almost feline quality of Sin's tongue her long dangerous fingernails the silky hair of her armpits and the warm liquor and basil scent of her breath she thought of Sin's long unshaven legs her rough black coily pubic hair her stained old maid cotton panties her flannel nightshirt her thick muscular ass the mole on the inside of her right thigh way up almost where the thighs join she began to rub herself a bit more frantically now she thought of the small sounds Sin made the husky breathing the delirious movements of her legs and ass the strength of her embrace the sleepy stupid lascivious expression on her face she opened her eyes and she could almost see her orgasm floating up above her a discreet shadow suspended just beneath the whiteness of the bathroom ceiling a subtle darkened bluish vapor hovering above her head she closed her eyes again thought of the delicious sensation of Sin's rough tongue and full pouting lips between her legs imagined her hands gently stroking Sin's hair as that tongue explored her vagina and her lips caressed her clitoris she sped up her motions now as the tip of Sin's tongue found her clit and traced delicate slow circles around it S— opened her eyes and saw the shadow of her orgasm start to descend slowly slowly down down as the rhythm of Sin's tongue began to increase and the motion became slightly more rough and less controlled she kept her eyes opened and watched as the shadow slowly almost imperceptibly dropped down towards her until now it was only about a foot above her opened eyes and panting mouth she had a hard time thinking of Sin anymore she couldn't imagine the whole of Sin her imagination had contracted everything but the mouth tongue and lips the shadow floated about six inches above her forehead now with her left hand she opened up her pajama top and squeezed her right nipple between her fingers and thumb now even Sin's mouth was disappearing now it was only her tongue now it was no longer even her tongue it was just a tongue now

it was no longer even a tongue it was nothing a beautiful violent nothing between her legs the promise of a vacuum that threatened to suck her insides out the shadow was now at the tip of her forehead she heard a moan she closed her eyes tried to think of Sin but could not the shadow blocked out all thought it was over her mouth now it was suffocating her she didn't care the shadow was still slowly descending from her mouth down to her neck and then her breasts and belly it hesitated at her navel she raised her pelvis up to meet it but it stayed there hovering floating suspended a couple of inches above her vagina she sobbed still it wouldn't move it just stayed there she increased the rhythm of her hand rolled her nipple between her fingers harder harder until it hurt sobbed again then the shadow began to drop slowly slowly down over her hips slowly slowly down to the top of her vagina slowly slowly to her clitoris she closed her eyes her body began to twitch spasmodically she slowed down the rhythm of her hand she felt the shadow stop right at the lip of her vagina she felt it begin to probe and tickle her clit trying to open her up trying to empty her out she looked down a single tip of negative flame slowly caressing slowly coaxing her vagina to open and her insides to come rushing out a vacuum a void a nothingness caressing her luring enticing her trying to empty her out trying to gently pry open the gate between her legs slowly slowly her gate was very strong but the shadow was patient and very alluring there was no hurry slowly slowly slowly slowly she closed her eyes in expectation the image of Sin's face hair and body appeared to her suddenly the gate was open she was completely emptied out and she was nothing she was nothing for a long time waves and waves of nothing and nothingness for a long time she was nothing but the pleasure and nothing of the shadow between her legs coincided exactly with a palpitation and pain localized near her sternum so as her vagina violently contracted in bliss and ecstasy her heart just as furiously constricted in sorrow and grief and as the shadow began finally to leave falling down from her vagina dropping quickly to her knees her ankles her feet and finally disappearing through the floor she noticed an emptiness not between her legs but between her breasts a shadow not of joy but of despair it was as if the shade had emptied its scar not on her sex but on her heart.

She was exhausted and cold and she felt a little scared and she brought her right hand up to her nose and smelled her own scent on her fingertips the smell reassured her comforted her she would be okay maybe she got up

shakily flushed the toilet cleaned herself up warmed up the Chinese food ate it and drank some orange juice read the magazines Simone had brought over took a couple more cold pills and went to bed.