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The Scab Never Properly Picked

by Juliet Robinson

You decorated with pictures of scientists, artists and writers. You told me this is to remind you that you are a fool. Later I realised how ridiculous that sounded, but it didn't seem so when you explained it to me as you showed me round your new flat. Because you have a way of talking that sweeps me along.

You're energetic, persuasive and a little intoxicating. You tell a story to get to the story but it never bothers your listeners, because you're hypnotic. There is something about you that draws people in. Some would call it charisma, but it's more than that.

Sometimes you treat your friends like shit, but they still number in the hundreds, because you know how to make people feel good about themselves. You're fun, you have a knack for turning the ordinary into an adventure.

You go through women like they have a sell-by date. You always need someone to want you. It took me a long time to see that their desire fills a void in you, leaving no room for your self-loathing. You hide that very well. A broken person seeking repair through others. I'm not judging, who doesn't hope another might fix them?

Throughout our friendship we have walked a very thin line. It's all there, the beautiful components for a toxic relationship, or fling. One that would spark and blaze leaving us both burnt. Sometimes we pick at that scab, normally when one of us is low, but we never cross the line.

Every so often you self-combust. You're like a gambler, desperate to unburden yourself of all their money. You hold all the cards, but then you throw the hand, shooting yourself in the foot. It's painful to watch.

You came round the other night, a bottle of wine in hand and I knew by the droop of your shoulders that you had screwed up again. You were half cut when you arrived. Drunkenness betrayed by the way you talk when you've had a few, over pronouncing your words, in attempt to prove sobriety. One bottle of wine turned into two, a given with you.

'You say you've always loved dogs. I don't know if I count but I might as well be one.'

You lean towards me as you say this and I fight the urge to roll my eyes. We're back here again, toying with the will we won't we part of our friendship. You want me to make you feel good about yourself.

You're handsome, you're funny, you're smart and nice, mostly. You aren't a dog, you just self-sabotage. Because deep down you don't believe you deserve to be happy. It's why you're so destructive.

We were floundering on the edges of adulthood when our friendship started. Back then I was more expert in sewing havoc. We were allied in the chaos we created for ourselves, it's where we forged our bond. And there was the not-so-secret attraction between us, it never went away. It's why we always end up here, we both like the way this thing, that will never be hurts. A comfortable and familiar pain.