

She has been wired up, filled up and drained out. Ultimately, she has been saved. Last week's scan results have given her the all-clear. Everyone is glad, relieved, grateful. With sympathetic eyes they tell her life will now begin to get back to normal.

Cassy will not look at me. A pregnant silence circles us both. I wonder if she is struggling to be seen in her altered state, mortified by the evidence of her suffering. Eventually, searching for connection I say brightly 'You've had your scan results.' In a single motion Cassy's back straightens, her head turns and she looks straight at me. That's when I realise she is feeling neither mortified nor grateful. Her look is white hot and merciless. It seems to say, 'If you so much as think of telling me my life will now get back to normal, I will take you apart.'

All at once I find myself in the presence of something unknown and very powerful. The hairs on the back of my neck stand up. Deep in the pit of my stomach something stirs. Low and prolonged, it's the kind of sub-audible sound a cat makes when it senses danger. Cassy's presence feels both intimate and profoundly 'other'. The pitiless horror of what she has been through since we last met has burned away her compliance. The notion of anything being normal again registers as an affront. Layers of cultural conditioning have been torched. The good wife, the loyal mother, the conscientious client, have all gone. What remains is a force of nature.

Cassy is ablaze.

In this heightened moment it is tempting to disarm the force of the encounter with interpretation, to rescue us both from the unspoken and the unspeakable by filling the space with words. Instead I hold her gaze. Scorched by the heat of her, I am in the presence of something entirely unforeseen. Separate and self-willed. Wild. I don't know what I am looking at. More accurately, I no longer know *who is looking at me*.

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