

HOMEWRECKER

Gina de Vries

1. hook

She wanted to turn me against the rest of the world, that girl. It was me and her, radical revolutionary partners-in-crime fighting the fucked-up human race. We met at a radical queer youth conference in Washington, DC. I'd flown in from San Francisco with my straight ally hippie mom; she'd flown in from Atlanta with her LGBT youth group. We danced together in the hotel ballroom that'd been rented out for the conference dance, which was like every awkward high school dance ever, only gay. Then we curled up under the phone booths right next to the ballroom, stayed up all night flirting and telling each other stories.

She was a poor white Southern kid with a story not that far from my own—abusive dad, crazy mom, little sisters she raised because the actual

adults couldn't or wouldn't. She was stuck in that queer kid, poor kid, dysfunctional family, the-world-owes-me-because-I'm-a-victim frame of mind. The kind of girl who'd experienced enough drama for seven lifetimes, who was fifteen-going-on-fifty, and who didn't have a goddamn clue or reason to trust or love anyone, least of all herself. She made up for what she didn't know by being big and bitchy and loud, taking up as much space as possible. And always having the last word.

I was sixteen, and just as enraged and betrayed by the injustices of life. The problems of my world—my father's drinking, institutionalized racism, my best friend's depression, the boys at school who threatened to rape me—all felt insurmountable. But she made me feel stronger by proxy. Like maybe I could absorb some of her self-assurance, inherit her cocky attitude. I liked her strength, her confidence, her wicked sense of humor. I liked that she was trying to get her Southern accent back. She had short, spiky hair, a wiry, boyish body. She was pale and skinny, had almost no tits at all. She wore baggy jeans and tiny baby tees, one of those metal ball-chain necklaces, black Converse. The classic baby dyke, cute and vaguely punky, not even close to butch and aloof, my usual type. But her voice had that lingering hint of North Carolina drawl and she was hopping mad, and the anger and sass were enough to hook me.

We didn't even kiss, that first night. We held each other, sweetly, tentatively, while the tired and annoyed hotel night-shifters threw us shade for cuddling under the phone bank. But it turned into so much so fast, the way it does when you're sixteen and the smallest gestures take on the deepest meaning. The way it does when someone finally gets your rage and your politics. The way it does when you can will yourself in love with someone you barely know, because they like you, they really like you, a lot, and you're flattered, not used to that sort of attention.

Flirting under a hotel phone booth turned into being Instant Best Friends with big crushes; long-distance phone calls and 3:00 a.m. AOL IM conversations on my dad's ancient laptop. This turned into being long-distance girlfriends, and then came the fights. She was jealous of my exes; she was angry that I couldn't visit her because of money and distance and time; she was

enraged when I said that I wanted to cool off, just be friends again. Something felt wrong, too big, too possessive. But she liked me, and she was so smart, so funny. What was my problem? We were hyper-aware of every power dynamic in everything, be it ageism or classism, heterosexism or white supremacy. We were young, revolutionary, radical queers together. We had deep bonding conversations that involved the words *problematic* and *fucked up*. How could someone like her possibly be so controlling, especially from 3,000 miles away? Was I crazy?

And she became such a good friend after we broke up, after we'd taken some time apart. She'd changed and she'd worked on her boundaries and she was so kind and supportive, and, God, she listened. She was always there. Always there. Sending me smiley faces on the computer, leaving sweet, silly messages on the family answering machine. I'd get home from school and my dad would yell "The phone's for you!" and hand me the receiver with a knowing grin on his face. And then we were both applying to colleges and ended up deciding to go to the same school and we were such good friends, we had such history, we liked each other so much, why not try dating again? That old stuff, the stuff that had happened before, that'd changed, right? We were aware, we were watching. She was different.

When I met her, I could have been any scared sixteen-year-old girl, easily ensnared by someone tall and smart and manipulative. The criticisms and demands started small, but then they were all she ever offered me. All the ways I was failing her. All the ways she needed me desperately. Me and my girl against the terrible world. It worked until I became the enemy.

2. passing/desire

According to her, my offenses were as follows: I stopped wearing my wire-rims and started wearing cat's-eye glasses. I wore my hair in pigtails and put glitter on my eyelids at inappropriate times. I didn't want to own a car. My make-up was glittery. I didn't want to be monogamous. I was turning into a hipster. I didn't like sex enough. I didn't care about passing. I was friends with people she thought were famous. I didn't believe in marriage. I thought trans women were women.

I got scared when she threw her alarm clock at my head. I got scared when she threatened to jump out the window. I got scared when she hit herself and left bruises the size of grapefruits on her thighs. When she pushed her fingers inside me after I'd already said *No*, loudly, clearly, I told her to stop. I didn't want to bottom to her anymore, because the only times she wanted to top me were after she'd thrown something. When I was anorexic, it took the attention away from her. I dressed slutty and punk. I wasn't professional enough. No one would ever take me seriously. No one would ever understand me like she did. No one would ever love me as much. I wanted to pierce my lip. She told me I'd be more beautiful without a lip ring, so I didn't. I said *No*. I was a baby. Over-sensitive, over-dramatic, making a big deal out of nothing. This wasn't abuse, she wasn't hitting me, not exactly, she wasn't raping me, it'd only happened once and she'd stopped when I said *No* the second time. She wasn't cutting herself in front of me, just hitting herself, that was different. The absence of blood and razors made it ok.

Boys were the problem, she said. Masculinity was the problem, she implied, every time my eye wandered away from her jeans and fitted tees to women who wore their clothes very differently. I didn't love her enough. The kind of sex I wanted was too perverse, too queer. The women I wanted were too tough, the men I wanted wore more make-up than I did. I wasn't really queer because I was bisexual. I was too queer because I was bisexual. Why did I have to talk about it? A hot flush of my desire was enough to enrage her for days. I wanted to suck cock and I didn't care if it was flesh or silicone; I just wanted to be on my knees and have my mouth filled by someone who wanted it as much as I did. I wanted someone to hurt me because it made them wet, made them hard, made them shiver. Not because they were angry. I wanted dangerous things. I had sex with someone she'd told me I could have sex with. People wanted to fuck me and they didn't want to fuck her. I asked her to pick up the Mountain Dew cans she'd strewn around my bedroom. I didn't eat red meat. I don't think sex should be an obligation. I didn't believe in punishment. I didn't want to process all the time. I wanted one night a week to be alone. I wanted to sleep in my own bed. I missed my friends.

But these problems were our business, our life as a couple. Talking about it would be, as she put it, "breaking her confidentiality." In our world I tried to pass us off as healthy, happy, normal; meanwhile I barely passed at all. I wanted to be held, loved, cherished like I had been before; I wanted to do right by her, I truly did.

But no matter how hard I tried, everything I was, everything I wanted, was wrong wrong wrong wrong. We had to be middle class. Married. Respectable. Respectable lesbians were not bisexual leather dykes. They were not outspoken perverts and sluts and queers. Respectable lesbians did not dress like glam rock Italian-Catholic school girls, they did not wear short skirts and keep their hair long and still never, ever get mistaken for straight. They were not the trampy, brazen, not-gay-enough, too-queer failure of a lover that I was.

3. homewrecker

When I left her the last time, she screamed at me. A clear, loud, thick sound, ricocheting off the tiny walls of her messy bedroom. I could hear our housemates discussing us timidly in the living room. They were worried. *How Dare You* she shouted, as more objects from her floor whizzed by my face, a foot, six inches, three inches away from me. Her clock, as per usual; books; pillows and blankets, too. *You're going to FUCK him tonight, AREN'T you?* The boy she'd told me I could have sex with and then demanded I cut off after we made out against a brick wall. He was dangerous because he was a boy, but really what that meant was he was dangerous because he wasn't her. I said, weakly, *This isn't about him. I just can't do this anymore. I'm tired.* I murmured, *Please, stop.* I kept waiting for her to hit me. I almost wanted her to—it would have made it all real. It didn't occur to me to just leave the room. It took me three days to break up with her, because I'd start trying to leave and she'd try to convince me it would work, *slam*, another book hurled against the wall, we had a wonderful relationship, *smack*, the sound of her hand hitting herself. We were happy, weren't we?

She said I wrecked her home by leaving. She said I was erasing her family. I was her everything—*You're taking away my life*, she said to me, *Five years of*

my life, all this history with you, how can you do this? How Dare You. I don't know what made my words stick the third night. My Nana says that sometimes these things just happen in threes.

She clung to the story of how I ripped her safety out from under her, discarded the holy sanctity of our five-year lesbian partnership to fuck boys. The mantra she screamed at me as I cried and ducked and weaved and tried to walk out of her room unscathed, an entire gender shouldering the blame for my leaving. *You're leaving me to fuck boys.* The disgust in her voice was so thick. And I could feel it in the room, whizzing past my ears along with the clock and the books and the little stuffed cat she'd had since she was two. *No one will ever be this good to you, you stupid girl, and you're leaving me to fuck the enemy? You're wrecking our home for this?*

But how do you wreck a home that's already way past broken, the foundation rotten to its awful core? Even when my senses of safety and individuality had crumbled to dust I swept under the carpet, even when I'd convinced myself that everything she did was okay, that nothing was a problem, even when I lay awake at night having tense spinning conversations with myself, repeating over and over that if I just worked hard enough, if I was just good enough, she'd stop—I still had my desire. My desire was the one thing that never went away, and my desire is what finally rescued me. Fucking the enemy is what got me out of there. Yes, I wanted to suck dick, yes, I wanted to get beaten because I actually wanted it, not because it was how someone punished me for wanting freedom.

Being a homewrecker was my last and only survival strategy. Being a homewrecker was the only way I could get out. I left to make my home in myself, and that is something no one can ever take away from me.