

Your Girl Friday

Alice Foo

You made sure your compliments were esoteric and they always smelt of peppermint. You resolved to crack me like a puzzle, taught me useful words like *hagiography*. You thought intimacy ‘morbid’, disliked ‘fetishised emotion’, didn’t own a television. You said, ‘Osculation is the act of kissing’, but

that’s less than half the story, just a graze, a sideswipe; you forgot to mention all the swilling, chewing over, spitting out. Everyone you ever introduced me to was unambiguously awful. You were often bored: once, at a voguish private view, you drained a glass of warm Champagne and, sweeping back my hair,

discreetly snapped my necklace with your little finger. Then, as fat faux pearls met polished floor in mortifying slo-mo, you – again discreetly – exited and climbed into a cab, alone. I retrieved your hat and jacket from the cloakroom and returned them to you early the next morning. You once spent a whole weekend

in my bed, fast asleep and fully dressed (except for unhitched braces), your arms crossed above your head as if I’d tied you up. You were jet lagged or reacting badly to some borrowed medication. As you slept I took your photograph – the only one of you I kept. When your sister had her baby

you declined to visit her in hospital, citing a phobia of nurses. ‘It’s the way they glide around without their feet touching the floor,’ you said. ‘I’m pretty sure that’s nuns,’ I said, but you just shuddered and went back to reading *The Spectator*. Why did I keep finding sand in all your trouser pockets, when we never once

held hands beside the ocean? To be absolutely clear, it was not my life’s ambition to be your amanuensis. For a start, I couldn’t write your thoughts down fast enough; furthermore, I’d no desire to see your inner workings. As they say, once you’ve been shown around backstage, it’s so much harder to enjoy the show.