

real people talked to each other like this. Maybe we really were in *Hollyoaks*. I should have been written out a long time ago and now the oversight has been corrected.

"Because you never tell me anything, you never tell anyone anything. You say you're upset or anxious about mystery thing X or mystery thing Y but you just won't say what and it is so frustrating..."

"Oh, boo hoo! Sorry you're frustrated, I'm the one that's got all this shit to contend with."

"I'm sorry about everything, but I'm not going to be a rock for you to crawl under" (I told you she liked clichés) "You need to face up to stuff or you'll never sort yourself out, you're never going to feel better just by crawling into my bed whenever you feel down."

"I feel fine. I can't help it if I suffer from anxiety and depression."

"Natalie was not afraid of clichés. She said she left me because I was an ostrich. She repeated the word 'ostrich' several times just so it would sink in. It was weird."

"You hate yourself. You walk into a room like a drooping flower. Your posture is..."

"Okay, I get it."

But she hadn't finished, "And you hate everyone else too. Why are you so judgemental?"

Judgemental? She can talk. Her and her Headingley-based, style-bar frequenting, heteronormative, posse. I bet she never even saw a queer before me. I opened my mouth to say this before realising it would neatly prove her point and then burst into tears. We hugged with some actual intent, like the way we hadn't hugged for the last six months. She let go after a few seconds, I held on as long as I could and then I asked her, "Fuck, Natalie, what am I gonna do without you?" The question was not rhetorical.

Natalie looked me right in the eye, touched my face and said, slowly but firmly, "Find yourself." We both burst into hysterics. That was taking it too far even for her. I wondered if the whole break-up thing was a joke too, then she withdrew her hand from my face. Not a joke then.

The night Natalie broke up with me I had a dream I was floating in space. I was in a space suit and I had somehow become detached from my spacecraft. I was drifting away and there was nothing anyone could do to save me. I just had to wait until the air ran out. One armed scissor, that's the code. They've never had to use it yet, it's never happened. I would be an historic moment, hopelessly floating away.

A couple of weeks after we split up, we

fucked again. It was great! Like forbidden things are wont to be. Sporadically, we had sex for the next four months. We went out and did things together and they were fun and romantic, exactly what the last embers of our relationship had not been. We took eight bottles of Babycham up to Heptonstall where Sylvia Plath is buried and leant against her grave downing the bottles and kissing. After five bottles we were struck with a profound realisation: the picture would only be complete if we started singing early Manic Street Preachers songs which we did so with gusto. I was about to put on your eyeliner when we were approached by two middle aged dykes and their dog. The three of them barked at us for being disrespectful. We slunk off and then burst out laughing whilst they were still in earshot. "Fucking lezzzbians," I slurred, "They're only saying we're being

disrespectful cos we're not there with a chisel chipping off the Hughes bit!"

"Shut up!" Natalie snapped. She didn't want to consort with a homophobe, not even a gay one. "Are you drunk? On Babycham?"

"No but the taste of alcohol is in my mouth, I feel it gives me an excuse to act like this."

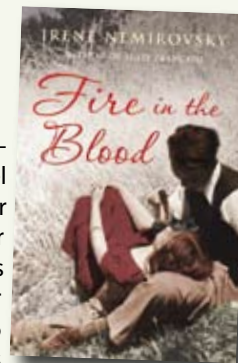
Our honeymoon-limbo period ended a few months after the break-up. Natalie and I had sex less and less frequently and then stopped altogether. I still wanted to but Natalie made it quite clear that that part of us was over. I found it hard, but not as hard as I'd have found it if we'd stopped when we'd broken up. A slow weaning off of intimacy. But still when we slept in the same bed, we'd wrap our bodies around each other, or when we lay on the sofa watching a film, we'd merge into one lump of girl. Then Natalie got herself a new girlfriend and the new girlfriend believes in monogamy. I guess Natalie thinks it's inappropriate for us to curl up together now. Rationally, I understand, I really do. But this isn't about sex. I don't care about that anymore. That's just something to do. I just want to curl up with someone who doesn't want anything from me for once. It feels like everyone else I go to bed with or even hug is self-serving. Natalie's not like that.

A couple of weeks ago I went and stayed with a friend in Todmorden. I needed to get out of Leeds. I climbed a mountain and sat there till way after dark. I looked across the valleys feeling moved by the size of everything, remembering the time I'd gone up there with Natalie and we'd taken magic

New Releases

Fire in the Blood

Irène Némirovsky
Chatto & Windus



This newly discovered novel by the author of the bestseller *Suite Française* is published now for the first time, 66 years after it was written. Hidden in separate archive files, the pages are finally reunited to form a captivating tale of rural France, of lives interwoven, the passion of youth and the regret of old age.

Sylvestre is an ageing man who has left his travelling, womanising days behind him in search of a quieter life back home. The locals live on their own land and there is little trust between them. Written in a quietly beautiful style, the book takes on a more sinister tone as narrative twists culminate in the drowning of a young man in a mill-stream.

Fire in the blood is an excellent depiction of its title — an account of the purity of youthful abandon seen through the eyes of a man who has almost forgotten how it feels to burn.

Alexis Somerville

Diary of a Bad Year

J.M. Coetzee
Harville Secker



Diary of a Bad Year is one of the most compelling novels of 2007. The novel takes an unusual format with essays that provide a social commentary on democracies and the way that we interact with them. The main character is a famous 72-year-old Australian writer that has been invited to contribute to a book entitled "Strange Opinions". It is an opportunity for the author to air some of his social concerns, and mostly he writes short essays on the origins of the state, Machiavelli, anarchism, al Qaeda, intelligent design, language, music, and so on.

Meanwhile the main character meets a beautiful young woman, Anya. He finds out that she is "between jobs" and hires her to type her manuscript, but her boyfriend, an investment consultant has other plans.

This novel is provides an intimate view into Coetzee's deepest ideas, thoughts and opinions. The essays offer deep insight into some of the world's most serious issues, while at the same time the novel almost unfolds as a love story. Shirley Stevenson