
24/02/2010

Wed, 24/02/2010 - 12:00

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Puppy love

There is a type of English woman - I won't call her a lady - which I meet every now and again, which propels me straight back to a period when I spent long stretches aboard my pony, shivering with cold and fear. She is loud and confident; often quite attractive but would consider make-up "silly," and laughs - which she does but rarely - like Basil Brush. I met one this morning - except now, she is not bossing me about the quality of my pony's plaits (I used rubber bands instead of needle and cotton) or the calibre of my steed's braking system (non-existent), but engaging me in idle chat about my dog. It is not my dog - it is my husband's, and goes largely ignored by me, apart from the odd pat. But, incredibly to me, these women talk about their dogs as if they are the latest Ferrari, or a newborn child. Which I suppose is the point. I am now of an age when the women I know that have children are becoming increasingly redundant. Their children no longer love them with the trusting abandon of their infancy, but they having become used to being useful, they fill the void with canines. Even formerly quite attractive women, who once wore skirts and heels seem to succumb to smelly jumpers and dog-haired armchairs by the time they hit fifty. And boy are they boring!

It is one thing sustaining a half hour conversation about the merits and demerits of flea collars versus powder, or lurchers versus labradoodles, but I draw a line at physical intimacy. As I was standing at the school gates in the rain this morning, my face lashed by what felt like fine needles, a woman pushed her dog's mouth straight onto mine. It has haunted me all morning, and like Lady Macbeth, I can't seem to get the taint of this hideous act out of my mind despite vigorous scrubbing.

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