

But Jesus, he could sit and look at Patricia all day long.

He'd first seen her in the canteen of hospital where they both worked, the sun bathing her blonde hair, like a halo framing her exquisite face - red lips and white generous smile, the light blue sparkling eyes. *Ah, quit.*

So, he knew why he was there, but had a very uncomfortable feeling that he was way out of his depth. He had meant to meditate before he came, but that had proved... complicated. If he didn't have a hangover he was always leaving at the last minute for work. If he had one he was late. Anyway, when he did try, he got distracted immediately. Stopped, started again, went for a piss - *should have done that earlier.* Started again. Gave up. So instead he went on to Youtube and watched how to meditate. He only managed 20 minutes. Of that, he spent five making himself tea and toast, before deciding he would rather watch grass grow.

A quick read-up on Buddhism on Wikipedia revealed that you can drink and eat meat after all. The drinking was not recommended as it intoxicates the mind. *Well sure. Isn't that the point?* The meat bit was about animals. So, he'd been talking or in fairness listening a good deal and asking banal questions whilst expressing intent interest. She might as well have been reading the ingredients off the back of a crisp packet. All he could think was - *she is fucking gorgeous.*

Now you can get away with half an hour's conversation on anything. That being about the longest he had spent with her, maybe twice a week after he had sussed what days she worked at the Psychotherapy Department. She would always have a salad, Brendan the fry; double egg, sunny side up, one sausage, crispy bacon and brown sauce, thank you very much.

So, one day she's got this piece of string on her wrist. Purple with a knot in it. After months, finally, he had something to say to her when she was actually there. He had thought and indeed practiced talking to her many times in his head. Even then he squirmed at the cheesy lines he came up with. Turns out the string was a Buddhist thing. She had been in Hong Kong for something called an 'empowerment'. All sounded like a lot of bollocks to Brendan, when he actually listened, but to Patricia his face portrayed a practiced intensity.

The string just added to her mystery. He could barely understand a word she said, but loved how she said it. So, before he knew it, he was answering 'yes' when she asked if he meditated.

Six months later, she says she's going on a weekend retreat. Sounds fascinating, says he. Next thing, he's got the website details to take himself off and meditate. Meditate on Patricia, albeit.

The first evening he walked into the meditation room with her - and a great deal of trepidation. She strides straight to the front. *Why did they have to sit there cross-legged on cushions when there were perfectly good chairs around?* It was only then through his

peripheral vision that he noticed that people coming in behind him were sitting on the frigging chairs. *Bollocks!*

Patricia of course sat with a perfectly straight back. This, he couldn't help but notice, did wonders for her breasts. *Don't go there – last thing you need is a semi in a meditation room.* Hair tied in a coloured band. Hands lying effortlessly on her lap. Palms up, and, he swore to God, a sunbeam shining through the window haloing that blonde vision. *She must carry that beam around with her.*

By the end of the session he thought time had stood still. Not because he was in deep contemplative meditation – simply that he thought it would never fucking end.

He was sure he would need hip surgery on at least one side by the end of it. His nose now felt like a wee army of ants were having a dance on the now-escaped drip clinging to his seven-o- clock shadow. The session ended. *Saints be praised.* He had to admit he liked the tiny bells that signaled the end of meditation, and not just because he could get up and stretch his legs.

'Wasn't that wonderful?' Patricia beamed.

'Awesome,' says Brendan, clearly caught wiping his nose on the sleeve of his jumper. *Shite!*

He really wanted a drink.

Not only is there no bar but there's a ban on alcohol in the grounds - and these are big grounds. The nearest pub was three miles.

A very, very long weekend looked back over its shoulder at him.