

MISS

written by

Ferdia MacAonghusa

INT. GROTTY HOUSE SHARE. BATHROOM - NIGHT

SAM - 30s, in a wheelchair, drunk - looks at herself in the mirror. She steadies herself, meets herself in the eye. She's got 'don't fuck with me' eyes.

She awkwardly wheels out of the bathroom into the bedroom.

INT. GROTTY HOUSE SHARE. BEDROOM - NIGHT

Where DARRAGH, late 20s, is passed out on the bed. He was halfway through taking off his clothes.

SAM

You okay?

She wheels over to him.

SAM (CONT'D)

Man, are you okay?

She sees that he's out cold.

She transfers herself onto the bed and moves him into recovery position. (Not easy when you're paralyzed.)

She checks his pulse and she clears his airway.

She lightly slaps his face. Nothing.

There's an open bag of coke, spread out beside a ring of keys, on his bedside table.

She slaps his face harder.

SAM (CONT'D)

Fuck, fuck, fuck, fuck-

She opens his phone with his face ID and opens the contacts.

She looks back down at the passed out man. And the coke.

SAM (CONT'D)

Fuck you, fuck you.

DARRAGH

(opening his eyes just barely)

'mawake.

Sam lets out a long sigh.

SAM

Fuck you, man. Jesus.

She pushes him out of recovery position and rearranges her legs by hand.

DARRAGH

What?

He comes to, a little bit more. He sits up and tries to decide whether to dress himself or to continue undressing.

DARRAGH (CONT'D)

Why are you in my house?

Sam looks at him, a little disgusted and a little embarrassed.

SAM

You invited me.

He still looks confused.

SAM (CONT'D)

To have sex with you.

Still confused.

SAM (CONT'D)

In your house. And then you blacked out.

This seems to satisfy him. He looks a little confused about the wheelchair though.

SAM (CONT'D)

Do you have cigarettes?

He finds her a (worryingly sticky) vape among his boyish detritus. She reluctantly takes a drag.

SAM (CONT'D)

(points to herself)

Sam.

DARRAGH

I remembered.

SAM

Sure.

DARRAGH

Do you want to have sex?

SAM

No, I-

She transfers herself back onto her wheelchair.

SAM (CONT'D)

I should go, I've got class in a couple of hours.

She picks up the bag of coke and asks permission with a gesture.

DARRAGH

Wait are you a - you look too old
to be a student.

Sam looks at him, eye brow raised.

SAM

I'm a teacher.

She takes the key-bump.

CUT TO:

TITLE: MISS

INT. SCHOOL HALLWAY - MORNING

AOIFE UÍ CHONCHUBHUIR - mid 50s, tense and resentful for forty years - offers Sam - dressed like someone's idea of a teacher - a handshake.

AOIFE

Bean Uí Chonchubhuir.

SAM

Um - Sam.

Aoife gives her a look.

SAM (CONT'D)

Miss O'Connell.

Aoife smiles approvingly.

AOIFE

Do you need me to push you
anywhere?

SAM

That's fine.

Aoife starts walking and Sam follows her.

We see a little bit of the school.

Everything looks a little bit terrible. Even the doors to all of the classroom seem flimsy.

AOIFE

And you went to school here?

SAM

Yeah, before the last amalgamation.

AOIFE
It must feel like yesterday.

SAM
The paint's the same.

Aoife gestures to one of the doors.

AOIFE
Staffroom there. Or - I'm sure you remember.

She sees TWO STUDENTS at their lockers.

AOIFE (CONT'D)
Morning prayers!

The two students scuttle off.

SAM
Still prayers?

AOIFE
Of course! I start all my classes with another prayer, you should think about it, love.

SAM
Um...

AOIFE
There are some good kids here, but...

They step into:

INT. SCHOOL ELEVATOR - MORNING

The elevator takes longer to start moving than you'd like.

AOIFE
Students need structure. There are studies and everything else to- they need structure.

They leave the elevator.

INT. SCHOOL HALLWAY 2 - MORNING

Aoife comes to a stop in front of a classroom door.

AOIFE
Do you want me to go in with you? Settle them down a little?

SAM
 (a little too fast)
 No.

Sam tries to cover it with a smile.

SAM (CONT'D)
 No, I think I'll be fine.

INT. CLASSROOM 1 - MORNING

THE KIDS (second years) are completely raucous.

SAM
 Good morning everyone, please sit
 down.

A few kids, including PRINCE (a quiet boy with watchful eyes), look up. But most continue on as if Sam doesn't exist.

SAM (CONT'D)
 I'm Miss O'Connell and I'll be -

PRINCE
 Are you the new trainee?

Sam nods.

She takes out a poetry text book.

SAM
 I'll be with you guys for two
 classes a week and we'll be working
 through...

She nervously flicks through the textbook.

ERICA
 Miss, you're older than the last
 trainee!

This earns a few giggles.

SAM
 (under her breath)
 Very observant.

Sam squeezes her wheels a little bit.

SAM (CONT'D)
 We'll be working through the Yeats
 stuff that Bean Uí Chonchubhuir
 started you on so can you - can you
 tell me which - which poem you left
 off-

Most of the kids have made their ways to their seats, half heartedly taking out their class materials.

But there's a small scrum of conspiracy near the window.

SAM (CONT'D)
Hey, seriously. Sit down, class has started.

Everyone looks over at the

One of the boys, DANIEL, looks back at her with a glint in his eye.

He starts to climb up to the window, surrounded by cheers from his friends (mostly boys).

SAM (CONT'D)
What the-

She swallows the swear.

SAM (CONT'D)
What are you doing? Get back to your seat.

Daniel looks back. Challenge accepted.

He opens the window and it's suddenly clear that we're two stories up.

Sam tries to go for calm and authoritative and not "OH GOD OH GOD, I'M GONNA KILL A KID ON MY FIRST DAY AS A TEACHER".

SAM (CONT'D)
Come on, sit down now. Class has started.

But he has his audience now. Most of the class starts to cheer him on.

And just as he makes his first step out of the window:

SOFIA
Daniel, sit back down.

SOFIA - mid fifties, with the exact air of calm and authority that Sam was trying to fake - has stepped into the room.

And like magic, Daniel sits down.

Then the whole class is sitting down, their guilty faces all presented to Sofia.

Sofia looks at Sam. With pity, but with a certain degree of reproach bleeding through.

Sam struggles to meet her eyes.

INT. STAFF ROOM - LATER

TEACHERS, including Aoife, surround Sam with sympathy.

AOIFE

Animals.

The teachers agree as Sam grimaces through her staff room coffee.

SAM

I mean, I'm not sure if-

AOIFE

And they took advantage of you, they assumed they could do whatever they wanted when they saw a young woman in a wheelchair.

SAM

They made it pretty clear that I'm not young.

AOIFE

I have that class again tomorrow, I swear I'll make them regret it.

SAM

That's okay, it's my fault as much as-

AOIFE

Do you need me to bring you anywhere? It helps if you're waiting for them, love. Look in their eyes as they come in.

Sam shakes her head.

SAM

I don't have anything this class.

AOIFE

Okay, love.

Aoife gives Sam's arm a squeeze.

Aoife leaves and the crowd of teachers disperse.

Sofia quietly sits beside Sam.

She sips from a tea that looks incongruously fancy in the surroundings.

SOFIA

I know who you are.

Sam readjusts herself on her chair. She finishes the dregs of her awful coffee.

SAM
Okay. I mean - okay.

SOFIA
I didn't expect someone like you to be walked all over twice in a row.

Sam snaps around to Sofia.

SAM
Listen, I'm not gonna let you fucking speak to-

SOFIA
There it is.

SAM
What?

SOFIA
More of this, and a lot less of whatever this morning was.

Sofia leaves Sam to stew with her empty cup.

INT. BAR - EVENING

Sam sits opposite MAEVE - early 30s, pulled together - with a table full of empty glasses.

MAEVE
The window?

SAM
Stop fucking laughing!

MAEVE
I'm not!

And she's at least trying not to.

MAEVE (CONT'D)
Why did he climb out of a window?

SAM
He was taken by the devil, fuck you Maeve, I don't know why kids do things!

A BARTENDER comes over with two shots and two glasses of wine.

Sam slams her shot back. Her shoulders get a little release when the alcohol hits the back of her throat.

Maeve eyes her friend, reluctantly following suit.

MAEVE

And you didn't say anything when Mrs. Bitch called the students animals?

SAM

Bean Uí Bitch, she's the Irish teacher as well. But no.

MAEVE

I just remember you skinning people alive in college for less.

Sam shrugs.

MAEVE (CONT'D)

Like, where was the speech about fascist dehumanisation tactics and the bourgeois fear of the horde?

Sam sighs and half drains her wine.

SAM

Fuck it I don't know. She makes you feel thirteen again, I guess.

MAEVE

And how do the actual thirteen year olds feel?

Sam shrugs.

Maeve sits back, mulling something.

MAEVE (CONT'D)

You know my undergrads can't read?

SAM

(dismissive)
What?

MAEVE

I mean, they can obviously - like they can read, but I can't assign them more than ten pages.

SAM

Come on. I'm sure our lecturers said the same about us - you sound like a-

MAEVE

No, this isn't a Kids These Days thing, the literacy standard is genuinely down. I spend half my time going over basic reading comp.

Sam is finished her drink and is eyeing Maeve's mostly full glass.

SAM

Why?

MAEVE

Phones, Covid, teaching to tests? I dunno. But probably phones - I mean, I can't read for more than fifteen minutes without giving up and scrolling.

SAM

So what do I have to do?

MAEVE

Make sure that they can read. When you stop fucking them out windows.

Sam guffaws.

SAM

Here, I'm gonna get us more shots.

Maeve reaches out.

MAEVE

Sam, the guys and I've discussed this. Why are you even - you know after you came home you could have done anything?

Sam's body language locks down, she refuses Maeve's touch.

MAEVE (CONT'D)

Like, let's be real - with what happened and with the media coverage and - you could have better than my job on the first day in any universtiy.

SAM

I'm gonna get us more shots.

MAEVE

I'll come help-

SAM

Nah, I'll get the guy to bring them again.

Sam turns around and heads to the bar.

INT. JOHN'S HOUSE - NIGHT

The door flies open and Sam, drowning drunk, pulls herself over the slightly raised doorway, into the old-Dublin terrace house.

She gets the door closed and wheels herself towards the Belfast sink.

She casually vomits over the porcelain and then fills herself a glass of water.

She tucks the glass between her legs and turns, but she misjudges the distance. One of her wheels bangs into a cupboard and the glass slips on to the ground and breaks.

She leans on her knees, dazed. She stares down at the shards.

As if they were tea-leaves - the secret to her future.

JOHN

If you move back a little I can clear that up.

JOHN's early 60s, with an R.E.M. t-shirt and the same don't-fuck-with-me eyes as Sam.

SAM

Have a drink with me, Dad.

JOHN

Careful of the tyres.

She moves back and John sweeps up the glass.

She looks up, trying to stop her head from spinning, while John empties the dustpan into the bin.

SAM

Have a drink with me?

John looks at her.

He pours two whiskeys, considers the bottle, then brings it and the glasses over to the coffee table.

He passes her her drink.

JOHN

Who'd you meet?

Sam shrugs and downs her glass.

JOHN (CONT'D)

(faux-casual)

First day in school?

Sam, with shaky hands, refills her glass.

SAM
Grand, yeah, grand.

JOHN
They like poetry?

SAM
It's fucking poetry, I dunno.

JOHN
You love poetry.

Sam smiles a little.

SAM
Yeah, but that's a secret.

John takes a small sip of his whiskey.

He chews it. Or an excuse to grind his teeth.

JOHN
Listen, it's not... we don't
usually- we don't usually talk talk
but,

Sam pretends to check her phone.

SAM
I've got classes in a - a couple of
hours.

John pauses. Then he just nods.

She moves to the stairlift.

She starts to transfer over to it, but a sudden rush of
dizziness causes her to lose her grip.

Her wheelchair flies back and she's suddenly half on the
floor, half holding on to the stairlift.

John's already beside her, holding her while she catches her
breath.

SAM (CONT'D)
Dad stop, I-

John tries to help her up.

SAM (CONT'D)
No, we-

John steps back. Sam's arms, impressively, lift the lifeless
bottom half of her body back up on to the stairlift.

SAM (CONT'D)
We talked about it.

JOHN
I'm sorry-

SAM
It's fine, it's just-

JOHN
No, I should have-

SAM
If I need your help, I'll ask for
it.

John steps back. We can see he doesn't believe her, but he doesn't say anything.

The stairlift brings her up and she doesn't look back.

John puts on a kettle and cleans out the sink.

He looks at the ceiling, hoping his eyes dry a little.

He hears a sickening THUMP from upstairs. He winces, like it's physical pain.

He looks up the stairs and squeezes his knuckles white.

For a long moment, he forces himself to stay where he is, just staring up.

CUT TO:

INT. SAM'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Sam's on the floor, her shirt half off, and her upstairs wheelchair's knocked back.

She tries again to reach her chair. She's dazed and sore.

Finally, regretfully:

SAM
Dad?

And John's there.

JOHN
Love, do you need-

SAM
It's fine, I just need-

She cuts herself off.

She looks up at her Dad.

She gestures to the bed.

John puts his arms around her neck and her legs.

He lifts her up. Not a small strain for a man in his sixties.
But he won't show it.

Sam screws her eyes shut. She's willing herself to feel like
she's somewhere else.

He places her down on the bed.

JOHN

Please, Sam. It's us, you can tell
me what you're-

SAM

Why do you think you get to know
what's inside my head?

JOHN

Love, I-

SAM

It's private. It's private and I'm
managing it and it's fine and it's
fucking private.

JOHN

I know what it must be like, I-

SAM

Dad, I love you but if you finish
that sentence you'll break
something in this relationship
forever.

John opens his mouth to speak. But then he closes it.

He shuffles out, looking two feet shorter.

Sam let's out a single vinegar sob and then forces herself
back to silence.

INT. SCHOOL HALLWAY - EARLY MORNING

The sun isn't quite up. Sam wheels through the school on her
own.

The school feels strange this empty.

INT. STAFF ROOM - MORNING

Sam stares at a boiling kettle, in the staff room alone.

SOFIA comes in. She watches Sam for a moment.

SOFIA
Morning.

Sam jumps and turns around.

The kettle boils.

Sofia sets up beside her, taking out her own tea bags as Sam makes herself instant coffee.

SAM
How bad do I look?

SOFIA
You're fine. Colm came in one day with glitter and... something else on his shirt. He just turned it inside out and taught his maths class.

SAM
(smiling)
I gotta go out with Colm some night.

SOFIA
He'll like you. A lot.

Sam smiles. Her shoulders loosen a little.

SAM
Why are you in so early?

SOFIA
I say good morning to the kids when they come in.

SAM
Just to-

SOFIA
Some of them haven't had anyone say good morning to them yet.

Sam wheels her coffee to the table.

Sofia takes packets of pens and new copy books out of her handbag. She puts these beside Sam.

Sam looks at them, confused.

SOFIA (CONT'D)
They sometimes don't have pens or copies. You can shout at them about it, humiliate them.
(MORE)

SOFIA (CONT'D)
But you can also just give them
pens and copies.

SAM
Won't that train them not to
bother?

Sofia shrugs.

SOFIA
My way, they learn how to write.

Sam takes the copies and pens.

SAM
Anything else, sensei?

She produces a box of cereal bars.

SAM (CONT'D)
Really?

SOFIA
It's hard to focus if you haven't
eaten.

Sam takes the box.

SOFIA (CONT'D)
Can I say one more thing?

Sam nods.

SOFIA (CONT'D)
You can't lie in this job. Kids can
smell dishonesty so you're gonna
have to allow yourself to be seen.

Sam pulls back in her chair.

SAM
That seems- I'm sorry but that
seems kind of woo woo, to me. Come
on, how can they smell dishonesty?

SOFIA
Everyone can.

Sofia looks straight at Sam. Sam can't quite meet her eyes.

CUT TO:

INT. CLASSROOM 2 - MORNING

Sam has a sentence written on the board, labelling each
linguistic function.

SAM

The dependent clause, guys?

No one answers her, but they're at least (mostly) paying attention.

CUT TO:

INT. CLASSROOM 1 - NOON

Sam has Yeats' *Aedh Wishes for the Cloths of Heaven* on the board.

SAM

Come on, a feeling, what does "tread softly" make you feel?

ERICA

Sad?

SAM

Okay cool, what kind of sad, give me more?

CUT TO:

INT. SCHOOL HALLWAY - AFTERNOON

Sam struggles with an open step lift. The direction buttons are flashing, and nothing is moving.

AOIFE

Can I help you there, Miss O'Connell?

Sam closes her eyes in frustration. But there are students nearby.

SAM

(as chirpy as she can get)
Yes please, Bean Uí Chonchubhair.

Aoife slowly examines the step lift.

AOIFE

I'm not a hundred percent up on all of these new gadgets, now Miss O'Connell.

SAM

Could you just, I've seen these before, if you just pull out the red stop-

Aoife pushes it in.

SAM (CONT'D)

No, you have to pull it-

She pulls it out and the direction buttons stop flashing.

Sam holds down the up button and slowly rises up a floor.

Aoife stands there, awkwardly waiting for her.

Sam comes out and pushes past the older woman, just as she's pulling together something demeaning to say.

INT. CLASSROOM 3 - DAY

SAM pushes through the door of the class.

None of the kids (fifth years) are at their desks and something is playing on the overhead projector.

Sam turns to see the video:

Sam dressed in combats with "PRESS" and her blood type on a bullet proof vest. She's running and trying to address the camera over shooting. A bullet hits Sam's back. And she starts to go down, then the video pauses.

DAVID, 16 and awkwardly tall, is at the class computer and he's just paused the video.

Shamed and silent faces wait a long moment for Sam's reaction.

They watch her looking at the still frame of herself, blurred and mid-fall. The kids can't read her expression and neither can we.

She makes a quick gesture with her head towards their seats.

They all scuttle back as Sam uses the remote to turn off the projector.

Sam waits for them to be seated.

SAM

Congratulations, you can Google. If you can figure out copy and paste, your homework's sorted for the rest of the year.

She puts her bag on the desk and pulls out a fifth year poetry textbook.

She wheels back around to them and waves the poetry book at them expectantly.

They all pull their copies out.

SAM (CONT'D)
So onto Plath, like we said?

A groan ripples through the class.

SAM (CONT'D)
What?

None of the kids respond.

SAM (CONT'D)
Tell me, come on?

Nothing again.

SAM (CONT'D)
Screw you guys, I love Plath.

The class warms up a tiny bit.

SAM (CONT'D)
(shrugging)
Em, so Morning Song, uh -
Love set you going like a fat gold
watch.
The midwife slapped your footsoles,
and your bald cry
Took its place among the elements.

Our voices echo, magnifying your...
arrival...

She looks up. Sam's a professional speaker, so her reading's fine, but she's not a Manic Pixie Poetry Teacher. She's getting very little.

SAM (CONT'D)
Okay come on, what the fuuu-eck...

She smiles at them, caught. She rolls her eyes and shrugs. Some of them smile back.

SAM (CONT'D)
is going on here, someone has to
tell me.

She looks over at Daniel.

He awkwardly hides behind his hands.

SAM (CONT'D)
Yeah man, I can't see you at all
when you do that.

There are a few stray giggles.

SAM (CONT'D)
 (gesturing with the book)
 Does anyone understand this? The
 baby poem?

A few quiet shaking heads.

SAM (CONT'D)
 Come on, reply when I ask you
 something, this is exhausting. Does
 anyone understand the poem?

She gets a few verbal "no"s.

SAM (CONT'D)
 Good. Good, that's the point. Some
 things are hard to understand. A
 text from a girl you like is hard
 to understand. The news, or a
 college application, or why you're
 Mam is talking like this tonight...
 some things are hard to understand.
 But you need to understand them if
 you're gonna be alive.
 And poetry's hard to understand. So
 we're gonna use it to practice. Cos
 practicing something makes you
 better at it.

She looks around the class. It's not like they're all
 convinced, but some of them are paying just a little bit more
 attention.

SAM (CONT'D)
 Okay?

She gets a few stray nods.

SAM (CONT'D)
 Okay. Then let's get to work.

INT. STAFF ROOM - EVENING

Sam sits on her own. She's watching the footage from the
 overhead projector on her phone.

Sofia comes in, clearing her throat.

Sam turns off the video and snaps around.

SOFIA
 How did it go?

SAM
 They like it when I pretend to
 swear by accident.

Sofia stays back, watchful.

SOFIA
Are you gonna keep doing it?

SAM
Might get diminishing returns.

Sofia says nothing.

SAM (CONT'D)
You meant teaching?

Sofia nods.

SAM (CONT'D)
I mean, my first two days and one kid crawled out the window and another...

Her hand half twitches to her phone.

SAM (CONT'D)
I'm still here. What's the worst thing that could happen now?

SOFIA
They could die.

Sam's silenced.

SOFIA (CONT'D)
The worst thing that can happen is that you make a real connection with one, you care for them. You don't tell anyone but you think you love them. You start to feel like they're going to be okay and then they die.

SAM
Does that - did that -

SOFIA
These are vulnerable kids, Sam. I didn't think I'd have to tell you about the tragedies that can happen to a person in the world.

She sits down.

They hold the silence for a time.

SOFIA (CONT'D)
I have to ask. You could have done anything else after you got hurt.
(MORE)

SOFIA (CONT'D)
You could have worked in a
university or got a column or a...
a home improvement show.

Sam gives a half laughs to that.

SAM
That might have been fun.

SOFIA
So?

Sam breathes in.

SAM
I - journalism was everything. It
took everything I could give. And
then a little bit more. I'd get
fucked up and I'd live in my nerves
and it was for something. I saw the
bullshit, obviously, but - but
there was real work there too. I
could show something or lead to an
understanding or maybe maybe maybe
change something.

She grips her wheels.

SAM (CONT'D)
And then when I- I - in the
hospital. The real part got smaller
and further away. And the more that
people called me a hero, the more I
thought about the work I was proud
of - I'd follow up on a story I did
years ago and I... And I found it
harder and harder to think of my
work, my life as *useful*.

She looks Sofia in the eye.

SAM (CONT'D)
I just want to feel useful again.

Sofia smiles.

SOFIA
Well then I'll see you tomorrow.

CUT TO CREDITS.