

MIKEY CUDDIHY

FLASH 500

FRAGILE GIRL

Fragile girl drew a line in green on a piece of white paper, and ran upstairs, tearful.

Earlier, fragile girl: pale, blond, pretty, thin and small, with a strong black flick of eyeliner on her eyelids, opened her pink mouth and started to sing. She has a raspy, Billie Holiday voice, not what you'd expect at all. She opens her mouth quite wide to sing, like a baby bird – the inside all pink and fleshy, and her white, white teeth.

She is Scandinavian, and should have been tall (to my reckoning), but she used to be anorexic and it stopped her growing. It's late morning, after a late night with her father and his musician friends, playing guitars. The men have all gone out, and fragile girl is putting eyeliner on her stepmother's eyelids, and then on the eyelids of the ex-vicar's wife (now a folk singer, living on a houseboat on dry land). Fragile girl talks randomly, with no seeming thread or structure. 'I can't use Tampax', she says... 'I think I left my purse at Donna's house'... She talks only about herself, and we advise her. She could break at any moment. Sitting outside a pub in the sunshine, I put my jacket over her shivering shoulders.

The night before she served the tapas she'd been hired to make, to a country audience attending a Spanish guitar concert. She had bought the ingredients at Lidl: jars of green olives with pimento; some Spanish chorizo, some real Manchego cheese, stacked onto toothpicks, and olive paste on toasted Kingsmill (brown and white), cut into tiny squares. She stuffed the miniature peppers (from a jar), all by herself, with cream cheese. Everything is arranged on silver-coloured platters. She wore a tight red dress and had her hair up in a French roll. Donna served at the bar, wearing a black sleeveless dress nipped in at the middle, with a wide belt, like a large parcel. Fake tan, flicky eye make-up too.

Fragile girl likes to draw sylph-like women, but best of all she likes to draw eyes and eyebrows. 'I have really good eyebrows', she says. And she has; they are pale brown, shapely. She runs upstairs to get her sketchbook. 'Look, I drew this house in Denmark.' It's in pencil; there is lots of detail: a complicated and decorative structure, with several windows.

Fragile girl has no structure to her. It's as if she could dissolve into her surroundings at any minute. Her room is like a shipwreck, with her bed a messy white raft amongst the clutter. Cigarette stubs are the only things contained, in a homemade clay receptacle by the bed.

Fragile girl is moving north to Hull with her boyfriend, to a large student house with eight other people; she's not exactly sure where it is. We look on a map. It's in the North East, twenty-five miles inland, on an estuary: a short line on the map from the coast. I hope she'll be okay.