

## The new NatWest Relationship Manager

looks familiar, although the trappings of an ageing  
18-30 holiday rep are wrongfooting me. Everything  
about her is loud – bling earrings, diamanté watch,  
godawful white stilettos, Cuprinol tan, ratty extensions  
grinning from the blond castaway tangling down  
her regulation banking jacket. And that voice!  
Colleagues three offices away are closing their doors  
and I feel their eyeballs rolling. She's getting stuck  
into the numbers, pushing credit terms we don't need,  
loans to build a fountain in reception, get bigger, faster  
cars, more staff, more everything. I can't see her  
eyes through the clarts of mascara on fat feather  
dusters jittering her cheeks. Who the hell is she?  
The hyphenated name is clanging bells – nobody  
likes a plain Smith anymore. When she finally shuts  
up, looks up, I see sharp blue eyes sizing me across  
the maths class, unexpected competition from the wordy  
kid who can also do equations. I see her following me  
after school, tugging at my top, threatening to thump  
me, knock a tooth out, break my beaky nose, smash  
my know-all mouth. My rapid acceleration up the hill,  
just out of reach of her fat grab, her voice still sounding  
off, hounding me home. And now she sees me too. It's so  
gratifyingly awkward. I ask her to run through the numbers  
again, justify the interest, how her terms compare to Barclays.  
The wordy part of me notes with wry amusement her surname  
at school rhymed with *flounder*. I suddenly stand, jar the table  
a little, rattle her coffee cup. It's been *so* lovely to see her again,  
my assistant will let her out, get back to her in an unspecified while  
about the figures. I leave without looking back, keep out of reach.