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Fraud

by Mia Sundby

The facts, as far as they could be ascertained, were as follows. I was really quite tipsy by this point in the evening, we needed more batteries, and I wasn't in love with Vick.

The kitchen shifted around me as I swung my head and hips to the music blaring from the Sonos speakers. Across from me, Esther took a gulp from the tiny bottle of piss-water cider—which really tasted more like cheap beer—that she'd brought this evening. I smiled as I accepted the proffered bottle, taking a swig of the poor-tasting alcohol, wanting the buzz of intoxication to last a little longer.

The fifteen-or-so friends I'd invited over were lounging around, smiling and tipping back the declining number of half-full bottles. There was some sort of Wii game dance battle going on in the sitting room, which had caught the attention of most.

Anna, my younger sister, with whom I shared all my friends, was one of the three sober people at this gathering, and it was her who stood in the doorway of the kitchen.

“Claudia,” she screamed.

Brows raised, I turned to her, passing Esther the palm-sized green bottle. “Yeah?”

Anna's face was flushed from the heat of so many teenagers crammed into our house, but her white-blonde hair was fixed in a perfectly-styled pixie cut, her expression characteristically focused. “We're out of batteries for the Wii remotes.”

“D’you want some money?” I asked, accepting the bottle back from Esther. There was little more than an inch of liquid in it now, so the sip I took was a small one. “You can finish it,” I said, handing it back.

“Sure?” Esther asked, tipping it back as I nodded. Her newly-dyed pink hair caught in the lights of the kitchen, and I blinked my focus back to my sister.

Being unbalanced and easily disorientated even when sober, one drink was all it took to set my feet spinning, but it was only after several ciders and an embarrassing teenager drink that tasted like slushies that I was beginning to feel the alcohol in my head.

“Yeah, please.” Anna replied.

Waving my hand vaguely behind her, I prompted, “My purse is on the stairs.”

This was followed by me wading through the coat-swamped hallway after Anna, squeezing my arm through the banisters, like a low-budget contortionist, as I shouted out the request that someone go with her to the shop down the road to buy batteries.

As with the pizzas earlier, far more people than necessary decided to join the voyage through the drizzly, night-darkened streets and I didn’t bother to object.

Vick stood beside me in the hallway as at least six people filed out the front door.

She was smiling and it was like starlight in the low-lit hall. I smiled back, giggling, but I didn’t ache to reach out to her, didn’t strain to think of conversation, as I might’ve done several months ago, when her smile flickered in the light of cider bottles, or when her hand rested on my waist in the night.

I smiled and turned away, allowing myself to relax in the warmth of teenage revelry.