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After the Party

by Candida Lloyd

“You two sit there and I’ll sit here.” The girls plug themselves into their phones and block out the noise of the crowded carriage. I clutch the bar mitzvah gift – musn’t leave it on the train. I check my beach waves with my free hand; perhaps they’re too young for me?

My youngest sits opposite in her bright red, body-con dress, selected after hours searching on the internet. On top she wears an oversized black, furry jacket which is covered in bits of grass.

Her older sister’s make-up is immaculate, if a little heavy - must push for that dermatology appointment. With her long blonde hair, she is oblivious to eyes of the men who look. They’re too old for her.

We walk the busy London streets. “Can we please not be the first to arrive mum?” Passing homeless people we find a café to kill time. Around us there are silent people on their screens. I thought cafes were for chatting?

The girls say: “but we won’t know anyone!”, “Will there be vegan food?”, “Shall I use the loo here or wait until we get there?”, “Can we not stay for too long?”

A security guard greets us at the wine bar which is filled with shiny surfaces. There are men in party shirts, women wearing lipstick and heels, and teenagers dressed up like miniature adults. “Hallo!”, “You look wonderful!”, “So grown up!” - we are greeted by our hosts. A hipster waiter offers up a tray of cocktails. “Well, alright then!”

Later there is music and dancing in a circle. I hold hands with adults I have never met before. Isn’t he a politician? We surround the bar mitzvah boy who is raised up on a

chair, people smiling and clapping all around. His sister tugs at her skirt when it's her turn.

At the bar I chat to a woman half hearing what she says over the music. Her son is joining the armed forces. He's been lost for a couple of years and now he's SO HAPPY. She tries to convince herself.

Turn the music down it's time for the speeches! The boys' teary parents declare what a wonderful person he is. He is! His friends compete to be his oldest and best – "Well, I have known him since nursery!" I see my daughters smiling and cringing.

But we must catch the train! Goodbye everyone. Thank you. It's been lovely!

The late train is filled with the smell of take away food. The girls are animated and sharing pictures from the photobooth. "Did you know Louise is gay now?", "Delilah's boyfriend was really nice - he's 24!", "Did you get one of those mini jackfruit burgers?", "The magician put my mobile into a balloon!", "Did he actually?"

Now my youngest daughter's phone runs out. Her furry hoody feels soft as she leans her head on my shoulder. "I wish we could have stayed longer," she says. But I wonder. What's better. The party or after the party?