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Missed Opportunity

by Stuart Carruthers

The conversation was slow at first, often pocketed by periods of silence.

Pete fidgeted with the laces on his trainers. Up ahead his best friend emerged from behind the bus shelter. Suddenly he could feel his heart beat faster.

Ashling noticed his was blushing. Glancing over her shoulder she spotted the boy on the bike.

“See you later.”

“Ok.”

A few weeks later as the evening horizontal rain engulfed the deserted high street, a lone dark figure, walked briskly towards the station. The bus had standing room only.

In the kitchen next to the fridge, Ashling carefully removed a large brown paper bag. She was home alone. She knew her brother would go mad, but she wanted to impress. She didn't waste much time in deciding what to wear. Placing the door key under the plant pot, she slammed the front door and headed out, but not to meet her friends.

Across town things weren't going well at the Coconut Club. Water poured in from the roof and while Dee Dee and Maria frantically moved their equipment from the stage, Lenny the caretaker swore loudly as he struggled to close the sky lights.

“He's so dammed nice and he's so awful. He's my sort of thing.”

The girls roared with laughter as the cheap wine released their inner emotions. Kelly Short didn't have any real friends, she used people to her own advantage. Ashling didn't like her. By the time she reached the doors of the club she could feel that the atmosphere was different.

"Why won't they open the doors?"

"Frannie Jones just said the place is flooded."

"Have ya any drink left?"

"I'm not standing outside here all night in the rain, shall we head back to town?"

A scuffle broke out between the boys from the High Rose estate and a group of lads from town. The sound of bone on flesh brought loud cries from some of the girls. It didn't take long to turn ugly. Ashling leaned back against the wall. It was hard to tell who started it. Faces covered in blood. Clothes ripped. The rain was now relentless.

Inside the hall Lenny went about his business. Mopping up the last puddle of water from the dance floor he could just about hear the faint noise of someone banging on the door.

Dee Dee wasn't impressed. Maria sat on the corner of the stage sipping their last can of cider.

"Any chance you could open the bloody doors Lennie? it will be bedtime soon."

"I better turn the heating on to dry the place out, don't want the kids slipping on the floor."

Maria shook her head from side to side.

"Get the lights will ya, we're running an hour late, them lot will be too drunk to dance by the time they get in."

It didn't take long for the hall to fill up. A sea of running mascara and blood stained white t-shirts went berserk to the defending music.

Peering in through the toilet window, Pete waited for someone he knew. He was precariously balanced on wet beer crates. Ashling walked in. She paid no attention to the sudden crashing noise outside.

"Can you tell Dee Dee I need to see him."

"He's busy."

"Obviously."

“Pay your money and you can talk to him all night.”

“I’m skint.”

“Tough...next.”

It was a long walk home.

Ashling leaned against the exit door. Maria played her records. The floor emptied. She smiled.

If only Pete was here.