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The Writing is on the Wall

by Stuart Carruthers

Pete watched intently as a tear shaped piece of condensation ran down the inside of his bedroom window.

He was bored.

The box room was the coldest room in the house. He covered the mould patches on the woodchip paper with posters Maria gave him when he did odd jobs at her record shop.

Downstairs all hell was breaking loose.

His older brother, father and John from next door were arguing over the recent damage to the cars in the street. The trouble with living in a single-skin brick Victorian house is raised voices travel uninterrupted between the dwellings, especially when people are arguing.

They didn't notice Pete as he emerged from behind the curtain at the bottom of the stairs. He sensed it was about to turn nasty, so he made for the back door and the loneliness of walking the empty dark streets.

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Across town Sharon and Jes did what they had to do. It was easy money. Giggling out loud as they walked arm in arm, they didn't notice Aisling emerge from the dark shop doorway. Taken by surprise Jes dropped the money on the wet pavement.

"What did he say?"

"Why won't you meet him?"

"Did he pay this time?"

"Look Aisling it's your brother who's behind this, apparently he's out next month."

Aisling cut Jes a sharp look before turning to walk in the direction of the bus stop.

"Wait Aisling...we need to sort this out."

Stepping onto the bus she knew she never wanted to go back.

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With a gentle nudge of his shoulder the door sprung open.

Maria quickly glanced over to see who it was before returning to checking the latest box of old vinyl that landed on her door that morning.

"You can help me after you've made me a cup of tea."

Pete swore under his breath as he scrambled over the mountain of boxes in the back room. The shop was his sanctuary.

He would spend hours carefully reading the sleeve notes and dreaming of better days far away from this sad old town

After the incident on the Hill Top estate and with life at home slowly deteriorating, he was seriously considering running away.

They worked in silence.

Maria would serve the odd customer who wandered in, Pete tended to stay in the back room. She could sense he wasn't happy. When it came time to close the shop, Maria knew something was troubling him.

Unaware to Pete she had earlier slipped a brown envelope inside his jacket. He would be very grateful later on

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Wednesday morning.

The harsh northerly wind easily cut through their thin overcoats. Pete stamped his feet and buried his hands deep into his pockets in a vain attempt to stop his frail body freezing. His pale skin matched that of his girlfriend.

Two brown cotton bags were all they had.

They recognised a few of the sorry souls standing in line for Kavanagh's bus. All heading to the big city.

As they slumped into the rear window seat, they huddled together to try and generate some much needed body heat.

Wiping her bone-like fingers over the condensation covered window as the bus passed across the city, Aisling turned her back to the window.

"I like a view but I like to sit with my back turned to it."

Pete Smiled and held her hand tightly.

"We will be ok, wont we?"