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## Darkness is Cheap

by Ivor John

Clive put the receiver down slowly, the apprehension clear in the manner in which stood up from the tatty leather topped desk. Flipping open a packet of Benson and Hedges, he hastily lit a cigarette, his vape would not do. He grabbed at the half drunk Costa Latte in a tall takeaway cup, spilling its contents onto his desk diary. Hastily mopping up the spill with some other papers, which he deemed less essential than today's diary entry. His office was small and lit starkly by a strip light in the centre of the ceiling, stripping away any shadow or nuance, flickering periodically. Filing boxes, filled with investigation reports lined the MDF shelves behind the desk. He had a couple of stacking plastic chairs, so that he could interview clients who came to hire his services. It seemed so long ago, when at the end of last summer the client had sat there, and persuaded him to take the job. Entirely against his best judgement but he really felt that had no choice. Now the chickens had come home.

He had been planning to go the Fox that night, to meet up with his ex-colleagues, but not since that phone call. He had no choice now but to go and meet him. He would drive and park somewhere on the edge of the town, and then take a bus into the centre. He did not want there to be any possibility of him seeing his car.

He parked on the site of a small warehouse, which had been levelled and fenced off as a vast parking area. Posters threatening wheel clamping for those failing to pay the exorbitant charges stood out from the expanse of Heras fencing and yellow painted kerbs. The gates were locked at 10pm, there was a £50 charge for vehicles left parked overnight. He hoped he would be back in time.

His wait for the bus seemed to be endless, with every part of him wanting to abandon it, to go home. But he knew that he couldn't it would never be safe to go home again if he did.

It was early evening now, which in February meant darkness and drizzle. The long shadows cast by the high street lights played on his mind. Checking the time on his phone, he would be a few minutes late. Clive hoped he would be on his own, at least then he may have a chance.

There were people about, a couple walked ahead of him going in the same direction, but they turned off into a street of terraced houses before he reached East Street where he was to meet him.

Although only one block from the street where he had seen the couple, here it was deserted. and eerily quiet. East Street had been the site of the gasworks. Coal gas would have been stored in the two huge, pale blue gasometers. Though long since decommissioned, their rusting skeletons were still there, ominously reminding him of their useless obsolescence. The high red brick walls had largely collapsed now, evidenced by the debris of hardcore. The site was secured by a high steel fence. The top of which was folded at alternate angles in spikes. The gate, ominously, was open and Clive walked toward the only building on the site, a brick hut with a shutter door along one side. The streetlight did not permeate this far and the enormous silence was terrifying.

“Hi Clive, so you got here. I was about to give up on you. So have you brought it?”

His apparent friendliness was disconcerting.

Clive responded nervously, “where are you, I can’t see you. Are there any lights?”

“There are no lights Clive, darkness is cheap, as life is cheap. Have you brought what I asked for?”