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## Live Laugh Love

by Ivor John

'Live laugh love', spelled out in silver script against a sky blue background. White clouds, archetypal fluffy white clouds, drifted above the script. He picked it up from the rack of A5 sized posters. Each framed in pine or pastel colours. It was factory sealed in cellophane. A sticker on the back, 'Paper Moon' £7.99. Previously he would have laughed at the idea of this mawkish sentimentality. The kitsch, so often seen in the homes of young couples with little children and young girls studio flats. Homes still filled with joy, company and optimism. Even if to him, this did seem misplaced. They sold the same posters in Ikea. He had seen them, along with the simple continental furniture and to table crockery in white or primary colours, convenient.

The shop smelled of scented candles and Nag Champa. He had previously, a while ago, been out with a girl who burnt it all the time in her bedsit. She had a resin statue of the Buddha, as she had insisted on saying and macrame holding cacti. He briefly enjoying the memory, he fumbled in his pocket, how took out a handful coins and took the poster to the till. 'Why' he thought are smells so evocative. The girl at the till, and attractive woman, perhaps in her early thirties, counted up the coins he had handed her, and handed him back a 20 pence piece. 'You gave me too much'. He gestured toward the Cat Protection league collection tin beside the till which she dropped the coin in to.

Taking the small framed print as he handed it to her, she carefully wrapped it in the white tissue paper which was spread across the counter. "I sell a lot of these, they are lovely aren't they. Is it a gift? Shall I take the label off for you before I wrap it." He mumbled, slightly embarrassed, that it was for himself.

She carefully pulled the tissue paper over the frame, somehow managing to fold the corners so that it held in place without using tape. She slipped it into a small paper bag, printed in a chintz pattern and handed it across the counter to him. 'Did you want a carrier, I'd have to charge you 25p' He declined, and left the shop with his impulsive purchase.

Looking at his watch, he had another twenty minutes until his meeting. Three PM, at the Blue Kettle. A small cafe that was just a few minutes walk. He looked at the rest of his change and wondered if he had enough for a pack of incense sticks. He had enjoyed how the smell inside the shop had reminded him of more cheerful times. He had £2.75 so maybe, but then he thought he didn't want to go back into the shop again.

He could see Julie was waiting outside the cafe. She always carried a small red corduroy case on a long strap over her shoulder, the sort you may use to carry a laptop computer. Wearing an orange lanyard with her NHS trust ID card, it was obvious to anyone who noticed them together, that she was there or some professional purpose. Nobody could think they were friends meeting for a coffee. Otherwise perhaps she could have been his younger sister or perhaps daughter.

He was pleased to see that a table in the corner was free. There they could speak quietly without being overheard. 'So Clive how has the last week been for you?' He started to explain what had happened since he last saw her. 'What have you bought?' She asked, noticing the floral gift bag. He told her about the poster he had bought and that he would put it in his bedroom. 'Oh that is lovely, and is that how you feel?' 'Not really very much', he said. 'I am living, I suppose I am, no love, recently anyway, and not so much laughter', he replied in a sardonic manner. 'I do try though Julie and these meetings do help. 'To be honest, I have already forgotten what happened and all that lies ahead, I live only for the moment, and at the moment I am still alive. For now anyway''