

## Broken Vows, But Who Cares?

by Stuart Carruthers

Like a bull in a China shop with time running out, Niamh did what she had to do. Downstairs, her two children sat transfixed by the television. Outside in the darkened streets winter rain hammered on leaking crittle windows. The scent of burning food from the kitchen rose gently upstairs as the screams of a woman under pressure went un-noticed. The taxi was due in twenty minutes. Across town the aftermath of her actions lay in silence, in the darkness of the flat above Mr Vozza's fish shop. They were together in the end, but that wasn't his plan.

### *Seven Days Previously*

A week before her best friend's wedding, Grace took the long walk to her Niamh's house to confront her. But no one answered the door, so there was no point hanging around. Walking briskly down the high street ignoring the faces she recognised, her instinct was, this wasn't going to end well. As the rush hour traffic passed her by Michael shouted from across the other side of the street. He beckoned her into Joyce's café. It was empty. After a brief introduction they sat in the back corner. Inside his dark brown duffle coat pocket Michael's phone buzzed constantly. Grace was too occupied telling her story to notice.

A sinister smile lit up Michael's face as he observed his girlfriend crumble under the weight of the guilt she experienced at his every word. His lies were the truth in her mind. Like an artist finishing his masterpiece, months of preparation neared their end. The final piece of the jigsaw was now in place. His intentions for Niamh were different to Grace's. Before he could say another word, Grace headed for the door.

Niamh emerged from the hairdressers and casually walked down the high street. She was unaware of the young blonde woman following her. As she waited patiently at the pelican crossing she was suddenly aware that someone was behind her. When the green-man appeared she briskly walked across the road and down towards the bus station. Stepping into a shop doorway, she turned to see who was following her. Niamh smiled at the stupidity of her oldest friend. It was then she put her plan into action.

Back in the café Michael finally answered his phone. His caller wasn't happy. As he raised his voice in anger, his fist slammed into the hardened plastic table. The café owner raised her head from the Racing Post and made clear her displeasure with her facial expression. He assured the caller she was wrong and she needed to stick to the plan. His hands were shaking with fear.

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After years of neglect this was Niamh's only way out. She knew he didn't care. He was only after one thing. But what he didn't know was months earlier she'd moved the red velvet box from the place she'd told him about. Despite the wedding plans and the chance of being caught, they continued to meet in secret.

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Within the community plans were being made to celebrate the wedding of the year. His naivety had told him the contents of the velvet box were his. All he had to do was to follow her instructions. By this time next week, they would be free. Free to live their lives as they had discussed for years. As the days counted down, Michael had other ideas. Finally he'd got what he wanted. Niamh was the least of his problems. He still wasn't sure what he would say to Grace. What he did know was it wasn't going to end well.

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Grace stared passionately at the bottom of the bottle. Around her carnage ensued. Her best friend's wedding was out of control. Inside emotions pulled at her heart strings. On the dance floor family and friends screamed with excitement as the evening entertainment kicked off. Gripping the base of the bottle she raised it in triumph as a tear emerged with no reason to celebrate. Today wasn't the day to tell her friend what she had discovered the week before the most important day of her life.

It was too painful to watch them celebrate their big day.