

Kinship

A timed exercise

by Stuart Large

There was something territorial, or tribe-like, about where Matthew had placed his BMX bike. The surprising thing was that he had trashed it so recklessly, because the truth was, he was mildly obsessive about taking care of it and would reluctantly let anyone sit on it, let alone ride it.

Yet here it was, slammed into the oak tree where the group would typically meet when they were off to a party, a gig, or some kind of event they were arguably too young to get into — or hadn't been invited to.

The latter would involve acquiring enough booze and timing their arrival at the party with precision. That would be just after the pubs had closed and the barrel had started to run dry, so a bunch of troubadours arriving on a wing and a prayer would see their chances of entry increase dramatically with a stack of cans and a couple of bottles of wine in hand.

Having spent five minutes observing the bike and the damage, it was curious that Steven took so long to register that Matthew may have been injured by the accident — or incident.

Trouble was, Steven had no bike with him, and it would take fifteen minutes to walk to Matthew's house, or a couple of minutes to reach the parade of shops where the phone box was. That made more sense to Steven: get to the payphone and call his house, but be hugely diplomatic, because Matthew's mother was highly sensitive to the welfare of her children, especially Matt.

He couldn't just blurt out, "Is Matt there? I'm worried because his bike has been left in Maynards Forest."

That would throw Mrs Levers into a tailspin. No, he would need to be chatty. She would like that. Then he would have to patiently wait for her to ask if he wanted to speak to Matt, or to say, “He’s actually not home, you know,” and wait for her to offer an explanation.

Steven headed to the parade, and what started as a normal walk became a fierce stride, which became a jog.

What was he thinking? Why hadn’t he been more alert to the situation? This was his best mate. Even if he had recently plucked Alice Roberts from his grasp.

Steven had been incensed, but for no more than twenty-four hours. He then realised she was going to be high-maintenance, and he was better off focusing on getting his artwork exhibited at the end-of-year festival. There were bound to be some of the A-level art students there. He’d already met a few of them — Hazel Walters, for instance.

She had this cool, boho way about her, and she had smiled at Steven on occasion. Steven always seemed to like punching above his weight, but hey, where was the harm in that when you were sixteen?