

Dancing the Shadowline

Most people know they've stepped over. It's the moment when the glass shatters, the lights come up, the stage is suddenly swept bare of the special effects which blurred the line. And in that moment – *that moment* – when realisation fires into the brain, when imagination calls forth the permutations of agony to be suffered, that's when they know they've crossed from one state of life into another.

Most people. But, waking up to the normal sunlight blearily dispersed through the bedroom curtains, all I could think was; "It's Saturday."

Beside me, Michael stirred, the duveted Quasimodo form hunching and extending as though the chrysalis was about to burst to reveal something wonderful and rare; gusts of sleep-warmed air smelling of pyjama-sweat and tired hair puffing into my face. All that was visible of my husband was a dark quiff, straining to reach the pillow and a pair of skeletal feet protruding from beneath the floral cover like death under a tablecloth.

We always lay in on a Saturday. Too much work during the week, too much separation and distinct identity, Saturday was our day of merging back into the couple we'd once been, and although Michael now chose to do that by playing football and going to the Lion with the team afterwards, it had been a nice idea. We did so much separately now.

I ran my mind over last night as I ran my tongue over my teeth, feeling the snaggy velvet of too many drinks and the dull pull of memory tugging me backwards into that dark bar; where Manda had bought that last, disastrous round...

Then back. Further. Into the mist of obscurity invoked by that unwise final cocktail, the blue randomness of events hit me in the hindbrain like a bag of sick, bursting to scatter acid remembrances across the carpet of banality. I felt my skin heat to sweat as the memories piled in, eager now the door was open – the smoke-stained pulse of the music filling my ears, my head, my body; the swaying hypnosis of the beat, the press of the bodies growing closer as the music slowed, the hand on my shoulder, my neck, my thigh...

An involuntary flex of my fingers brought the duvet up to cover me, and Michael shifted in his sleep to follow the warmth. I moved to the edge of the bed before his arm could brush against me, as though the thoughts of last night could spread to him through contact, invade his dreams with images of the taste of unfamiliar beer in the mouth of a stranger, the press of an unfamiliar tongue. Snatches of image, as though I'd danced in freeze-frame, moved like an animation to the back of the room, the quiet alley. SNAP – the open-mouthed stares of Manda and the others as I'd juttied my body against him to the music. SNAP – dark hair falling around my hot face, caught by the warm air which followed us outside. SNAP – an eager mouth, eager fingers, his, mine, a tangle of bodies freed from restriction. SNAP – that final, keen push which took me over the line.

He'd had a good body, all straight lines, shadowing of bone and muscle against a sleek frame. Different. The angles had felt strange after the fleshy corners of

Michael, the cool slender fingers of lust compared to the hot pudgy digits of habit. All strange, all alien, still a man but without the rounded pillowing of familiarity.

We'd hung together, clung together in the shadowy corridor between the Chemist and the bar; the moss-grained walls grazing the backs of my legs and the detritus of a thousand similar such encounters blowing around our feet. He must have had a name too, but we never got to that, never reached the stage of boring one another with the randomness of our lives, the minutiae. What we had in common was less important in the dark than our differences.

I lay, my body blushing beside my husband. I'd been hungry for the encounter, parched of passion for so long that I could build this brief scramble of nameless intercourse into an instant of significance. A man, who hadn't cared had become more important in those few moments than Michael's ten years of increasing indifference. For one, gasping second, to that one man, I had been special. When he had dropped his face against my hair and groaned, I had *existed*. But now, here I lay, back in my bed in my invisible obscurity, with Michael's squashy eyelids raising to not-see me, his fumbling hand brushing my hip hopefully. This was Saturday morning. This is what we did.

And afterwards my body lay, while he pulled and mauled the newspaper and made comments I couldn't hear because the deep part of me was still back in the bar moving in time against another man. And when the phone rang, I wasn't sure which part of me went to answer it.