

Story for performance #707
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Bad timing it was. When we first met, drunk and falling. That didn't seem good. You looked at me glassy-eyed but I saw hope in that reflection and you know something, I needed it.

'Shag me', you said.

That wasn't going to happen. Every pint had a chaser and I was just keeping guard. I had a safe house and you could stay there. I wouldn't have to set the alarm or bolt the front door. Just close the curtains. And the next day I would have something to tell Miranda when she asks, 'Well, any news?'

But there was a fork in your brow and an air of devilment weaving its way round your flailing arms and neck as you spun rings around Frank, the barman.

'You've had enough lad. Better take the lady home.'

I wanted to set Frank straight. You see, we hadn't had that conversation, probably never would. I didn't even know your name. I wouldn't have believed you, even if you told me.

He was actually a decent skin, Frank, but you had to go and coax it out of him by spitting in his face.

'You're a wild buck, that's well oiled', said Frank. He wasn't happy and had your card marked.

But you persisted, 'Hit me, hit me, HIT ME...' So he did. And at that moment all your pain went away as your head flipped back and two large drops of deep, red blood landed on the slate floor. It was almost a religious experience to watch you, your coat and your bones, all falling. I remember your smile. I'm going to take you with me, I thought.

We walked down Dublin Street. You screamed profanities at my hometown to draw blinds and damp streetlights. But I listened to your howls that swelled as we reached the top of Pound Hill. You danced with holey soles in the middle of the road, bloody-lipped, telling me how they turned the other cheek and you leathered them and I wanted to believe every word.

From the gutter your voice poured down the street like torrential rain. Why are we here?, I asked myself. Why am I here with you just after closing time? The rest of them had moved onwards in disgust, maybe some were afraid, the odd pasty face looked back but with no intention of waiting.

You had no idea where you were heading. But I knew you weren't lost and it was that which stuck me to you. That and the fact you kept pushing me away.

We staggered along curbs, brushed past wing mirrors, lay on bonnets, swung gates before diving on top of hedges.

'Perfectly formed tits', you said.

You were just skin and bone. I clutched your sleeve and it was when our backs were arched over tightly packed leaves and branches that we could see the stars.

'I could marry you, but I won't. You're too fuckin' good for me. That's not what's gonna happen', you said.

'That's why I'm with you', I replied.

We sat arm in arm, backs against a pensioner's garden wall smoking cigarettes. Neither of us felt the cold.

'Have you ever listened to a dawn chorus?', I asked. 'I mean really listened. Those sounds can open and close gaps. Hunger sounds beautiful.'

'I wrote the music', you replied. I could believe it, you had that look about you. 'I can start it too if you like?' And with that you picked up concrete squirrel, which sat beside toad in a row of garden ornaments and fucked it through the windscreen of a red Fiesta. 'What are you waiting for?', you roared.

I picked up concrete rabbit. It hit the passenger window of a Toyota and so the chirps began.

There was no doubt we were bad for each other but in some ways that cancelled it out. So all that was left was laughter. I hadn't laughed like that for a long time. You made me forget that I had been made redundant, that my father had Alzheimer's, about the chaos next door. You had started closing the gap and that was making me remember.

I was four years old and we went to collect my Gran from the airport. It was 5am and in the car on the way home she told me to try and stay awake. If I did I would get to see daybreak.

Needless to say, I fell asleep and when I woke up daylight flooded the car as we breezed down the M1. 'You missed it', she said. I'd missed it and as I lay down again I imagined what I had missed and yes she was right, it was spectacular. A huge golden crack in the dark sky that gradually pulled apart as the birds sang and the day burst through filling everything you could see.

'You bring out the best in me', I said. 'I hope I'm still like this in front of others'.

But you had already given up conversation for the night. We had reached my house. I gave you a blanket. You slept on the sofa and the gap closed. It was 5.35am and I could hear a blackbird.

Adapted for performance by Barbara Campbell from a story by Derville Quigley.