

Hair of the dog

Odds on favourite. It didn't take Seanieboy long to die. Not after the bus crunched his skull leaving little more than a dark brown stain climbing up the side of a rubbish bin. He'd been drinking of course. But so had his father, which was possibly why his reactions were blurred and he failed to grab Seanieboy back up to the kerb.

"You know your problem".

Seanieboy listened. He pulled his pint closer. Then took a deep swagger. He held the glass close to his lips, a defense against a direct attack. There were times when he could hit his old man.

"You never listen to me".

His father was right. But there wasn't much to listen to.

"You didn't have to win you know".

"It's football dad".

"I know it is son but you don't always have to win. You can make money either way." His father paused, panted a little: he always seemed to struggle for words. Intimate conversations were always a bit too much. Buffonery with the boys was more his line. "Just look at those dogs down there. Money in them if you know what you're doing."

Through the clatter of the crowd, the rancid smell of humid bodies on a dark winter's eve, Seanieboy followed the shadows as they hearded the greyhounds into their boxes. The doors snapped open. They were off.

"You could have been off side. There was no need for that last goal".

His son fiddled his drink. He'd thought about it at the time.

"I had 100 euros on that other team you know".

"Why not bet on mine".

"Cause yer shite".

They sighed.

"Come on. My round". His father rose, casting a giant shadow over the table, a red speckled face looming honestly behind that that quirky smile which engaged friends wherever he went. Another winner. He nodded and laughed as the dog passed the post. For some reason Seanieboy felt guilty.

It was dark, the street light had blown, the wind whistling in from the north, icing its way up their trouserlegs, winkling down their back and freezing their emotions beneath the alcohol fumes. One of them was telling a joke. They laughed loud, wiping their noses free of ice, the smell of drivel steaming up from the canal; for a moment they washed aside their inherent inabilities to converse. His father clapped Seanieboy on the shoulder. Maybe too hard. They slurred, missed a step. Neither heard the bus take the corner, roll over into their path.

When he was small Seanieboy would climb up on his knees and yap like a dog.

When he was a bit older he once picked his mother up and put her on his fathers knee. They had a quick kiss, a good laugh, hand up a skirt and Seanieboy got all embarassed.

Shuddering in the back of a police car, Seanieboy wouldn't go away. How was he going to tell her? Seanieboy's mother would kill him.

"What number sir?"

"What?" Seanieboy's father echoed an emptiness that lacked meaning, a void that failed to even fall into confusion. What the fuck was the man talking about?

"What number?" The Police driver was trained to be calm. He knew how to keep his voice just even enough to extract teeth, the truth behind a scowl, a red face bursting to overflow.

"Your house number" the policeman repeated gently, breath frosting the window despite the air conditioning humming above the police channel.

Seanieboy's father couldn't remember. Not even the colour of their front door. Seanieboy wouldn't be coming home and his father didn't want to.

Police travel in pairs for a reason: his partner recognised the house. "It's that one." She pointed to the lounging red-bricked semi detached blending into the bend of the road up ahead.

"I tried you know," Seanieboy said.

Their voices were beginning to slur. The last greyhound hit the track.

"Just that the ref didn't spot it."

"Well there you go. Odds on favourite and the ref fucked up."

The last race spun out.

"Gone to the dogs. But not a bad night." His father pocked his winnings. They fumbled for coats and braced themselves for the wind that lay in prey outside the emptying bar.

"Come on. Time to go home".

Seanieboy's mother opened the door.

"Again?" she whispered. The policeman nodded silently.

"You take care now," the policeman proffered, hoping to get back into the patrol car quickly, out of the biting wind and the lengthening stare of that woman's face, the pools her eyes had been before they dried up and were sucked back into the harrowing shield that posed as a face.

She grabbed the old man's arm and led him over the doorstep. He stumbled slightly. Her husband muttered about Seanieboy. But that was a long time ago. He needed to get over it. She had. She nearly missed the step as she led him into the kitchen.

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