

**9****Sid**

The boy was called Sid. He smelled of cigarettes and anger, but even if it had not been for that, it was as if something seeped out of him that screamed, *'I'm different to you'*. But Suzy liked him. She was posh, and popular. She smelled of Hubba Bubba and Jean Paul Gaultier. Her friends were baffled by the friendship and somehow that saved Sid just a little from the taunts because just as words were about to leap out towards him, they would get stuck in the back of throats because, well, if you took the piss out of Sid then you'd be taking it out of Suzy, too.

Sid's Mum had died of a drugs overdose and his Dad was as good as dead. Just about everything in his life was as good as dead, until he met Suzy. They would walk to the bus stop together after school and talk about art and music and teachers that just didn't get it. Once, at Suzy's house, they spent a whole day listening to Pink Floyd on her white roller tape deck, drawing on her bedroom walls.

Everything they did together was cool.

She didn't feel sorry for Sid, and that's why he liked her. Sid didn't give a shit about where Suzy came from, and that's why she liked him. They would spend endless hours sitting on walls kicking their heels, talking about escaping. In the summer they lazed on the grass; Suzy blowing bubbles with her gum, Sid blowing smoke rings. Summers, winters... life ticked by with Sid and Suzy in their own little tribe.

Before their school days finished Suzy dyed Sid's hair peroxide blonde and cut it into a mohawk. They vowed to stay true to themselves. When they did escape into the big wide world, Sid went one way, Suzy the other, but letters flowed: from apartment to council flat, far-flung

places to inner-city spaces, penthouse to jailhouse. But then came real boyfriends, grown up ones with fancy cars and friends in all the right places and suddenly the letters had to stop.

*“I don’t want you writing to another man”*, the boyfriend said. Perhaps Suzy was in love with Sid, you see. *“Women and men can’t be friends”*, he snapped. And Suzy was a grown-up now, she thought. She had to do the right thing, and so she moved on from Sid and stored his memory somewhere on a dusty shelf at the back of her mind.

When she became a *real* grown-up she trailed leads to find him, but it turns out she was just a little too late. The day the phone-call came Suzy replaced the receiver softly, gently curled up on the kitchen floor, and cried until day turned to night and the air ran cold. She cried for herself, she cried for him, and she cried because they would never get to sit together on a wall and just be kids again.

I saw Suzy the other day, walking down the old haunts showing her young daughter the places of her past. *“There used to be a photobooth there you know, Sid and me had our picture taken in it once”*, she was saying to the girl.

“But where’s Sid now Mummy?” the girl asked. “Sid died sweetie,” Suzy replied blankly. “How Mummy?”

Suzy paused for a long moment, “well, I guess you could say he died of sadness.”

But that night Suzy forgot about the sadness, instead she took herself back to the scents of tobacco and bubblegum, listened to the laughter as they walked with arms linked on summer evenings, saw the light reflecting on Sid’s face as they drew on her bedroom walls and shared their dreams, and she felt sure that he was still here, looking down, willing her to think only of *the times they had* and letting her know that it had been enough.