

## Made Up

Olivia perched on the edge of the bench, grateful to have found a seat that was relatively dry beneath one of the awnings of the pavilion. The pier itself was fairly deserted, which was no real surprise bearing in mind the awful weather which had blown in from the sea.

The rain had coated the wooden slats of the pier with a slick varnish, making them glisten in the fading light, and wind curled itself around the exposed wooden structures causing them to creak in protest. It had stopped raining for the time being, but a fine mist still clung to the air like a needy child.

Olivia pulled her coat around herself, coming to terms with the fact that the thin fabric didn't really hold her tall frame, despite what the sales girl had told her when she'd bought it. It didn't matter to Olivia as she'd wanted to leave the shop quickly before anyone looked at her suspiciously.

Now, far from home, she could relax a little more, safe in the knowledge that she wouldn't be recognised, although still afraid of lingering sidelong glances. It was why she felt more comfortable to come out on days like this. Other people rushed from place to place, conscious only of staying dry, without paying heed to anyone else. It meant that she could be outside without the ever present fear of being pointed out. She relished the cold air on her face, and the fact that her hands were kept warm by the newspaper package that sat on her lap.

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Carefully, Olivia unwrapped the edges of the paper and warm air rose up to steam her face. It carried with it the comforting scent of fish and chips, dressed cosily in batter, and sprinkled with salt and vinegar. Olivia's mouth tingled in anticipation, and using the tiny wooden fork she'd been handed in the shop she ate a small piece of cod, the greasy crunch of the batter sending her tastebuds on a journey of childhood summers spent by the coast.

That was the last time she could remember being truly happy. Running through dunes under pale blue skies, with toes sinking into sun warmed sand while her parents looked on lovingly. They would sit happily enough, eating cucumber sandwiches behind their windbreaker as their child built sandcastles at their feet. At the sound of the ice cream van, they would all race to be first in line for a cornet, her parents always running in slow motion, letting her win. She missed them. Longed to see them, but knew in her heart that it would never now happen. They'd never understand what she had done.

Even though no one else was around, Olivia could hear music being played through the speakers that lined the outside of the pavilion, and Ricky Valance's latest hit was replaced with 'Under the Boardwalk' by The Drifters. She could imagine that particular song was played a lot on the pier, and couldn't help but tap her toe against the wooden slats. Despite wearing tights, her toes had rubbed against the patent leather of her new shoes. They were too small really, but she'd loved their shine, and her inner magpie had handed over the money

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before it could be caged. It was a new pleasure to finally be able to buy things for herself, without being controlled by a man.

Olivia popped another chip into her mouth, the waxy taste of her lipstick mingling a little with the crispy potato. She'd probably put too much makeup on for a trip to the pier, but she didn't care. It was good to be able to look in the mirror and feel pretty, to be able to shed her dowdy appearance that'd been forced upon her for so many years. This was her time, and despite the sacrifices that she'd had to make to get here, she could finally start to live her life properly. Now that he was gone.

Finishing her meal, Olivia brushed the final crumbs to the floor for the gulls to enjoy and her eye was caught by a grainy image in the paper that had previously held her lunch. She knew that face so well. Almost as well as she knew her own. It was him. Ironically captured and confined forever within the pages of a newspaper. Imprisoned, just as she had been within the walls of her own home for so long.

Unable to live her life as she should, she'd had to put on an act for the neighbours, always unsure as to whether their polite enquiries would lead to well-meaning acts of friendship, or gossip fuelled ruination. As forward thinking as the sixties were becoming, to go against the man of the house would be the end of everything.

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But now he was gone, she read. The headlines shouting that he was missing, presumed dead. Sensationalism at its best. Olivia wished they new the truth. Wished that she could tell them the real story, of how that man had made her life a misery for so many years. More than she could care to remember.

She read the story slowly, taking in every detail of their suppositions. They'd made him out to be a hero, admired by colleagues and much loved by his family who grieved for him, begging for any information that the public could provide. Would they still think him a hero if they knew the truth about him, Olivia wondered.

The picture that the reporters had chosen showed him looking sad and exhausted, a man who should have been in his prime, downtrodden somewhat by life. Had he always looked like that? Had she done that to him? Olivia almost felt sorry for the poor deluded bastard, and a tear fell from her eye, splashing onto the paper to mingle with the grease left over from the food.

Taking a tissue from her pocket Olivia dabbed at her eyes. She mustn't feel sorry for him. He'd deserved what he'd got, to be left for dead. It's what it had come down to in the end after all. Only one of them could survive, and it'd had to be her. There'd been no choice.

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She lifted her face, letting the fine mist dust her skin like powder, and watched as two women blew along the pier towards her, heads bowed against the weather. Their arms were linked together, and as they passed one threw her head back and laughed, the sound snatched away quickly by the wind. The bright pop of colour from their raincoats made Olivia smile.

As all consuming as her guilt was, and always would be, she knew in her heart that she had done the right thing. That it was better for them all to think of Oliver as dead. They never would find the man that they were looking for, because he had never really existed in the first place. He was she, and she had so far to go with her new life, and so much to learn now that she was finally free of a lifetime of lies.

For the longest time the sky had been as grey as it would appear in a black and white movie, but finally a whisper of blue had appeared along the horizon, giving hope. Olivia took one last look at the image in the newspaper before screwing it up in her hands, and placing it in the bin, where it belonged. The story was already yesterday's news.