

A Long Weekend

"I'll drive, it's my turn," a smiling Emily was jangling a bunch of keys provocatively in the face of a rather sullen-looking young woman.

The dour face looked up, "Are you sure? I mean you've only just passed your test and it's a long way, on motorways and stuff." An unsmiling Katie fixed a grim expression at Emily, simultaneously failing in a half-hearted attempt to snatch the keys from a nimble-fingered Emily.

"I'll be fine, Katie, don't worry and lighten up, we're going to the seaside," answered Emily cheerily, adding, "Anyway, I drove right through London last week." Katie's face remained unmoved, she glanced at her fingertips, saying quietly, "Yes and you terrified everyone in the car."

Emily's eyes rolled upwards, ignoring her friend, she opened the driver's door. Katie sat next to her on the passenger seat and straightened her skirt. Emily sighed as she watched her companion yank on her seat belt. Satisfied that it was in full working order, Katie clicked it into place and leaned forward tapping the car's media button with her index finger. The melodic tune of Ariana Grande singing 'God is a Woman' filled the car. "Come on let's go get Maisie, she'll be wondering where we are." Emily was shouting above the music. Katie remained unmoved.

"Hi yer, Maisie Jeeps what have you got there? We're only going for a long weekend, not a bloody fortnight." Emily was helping a grinning Maisie to bundle her tightly packed blue holdall into the boot. With it stored safely, Maisie slammed the lid shut and leapt onto the rear seat, "You know me, girls, I always come prepared and what's up with you Katie? Your face is a picture and not a very pleasant one," Maisie was leaning forward in between the two front seats, shuffling her bottom excitedly. Emily looked at Maisie through the rear-view mirror, "She's sulking, Maisie, she doesn't want me to drive."

Maisie sat back, her face beaming. "Get over it Katie, we're gonna have some fun this weekend, the weather forecast is brill, go on have a swig on this." Maisie produced a bottle of rosé wine from her paisley-patterned shoulder bag and thrust it in front of Katie.

Taking the bottle from her friend, Katie pouted as she carefully unscrewed the top and took a small sip, followed immediately by a large gulp. Turning and frowning at Maisie, Katie pointed accusingly at Emily saying, "Don't give HER any, not whilst she's driving, she a bloody liability at the best of times."

"Chill!" shouted Maisie and Emily in unison. Maisie ruffled Katie's blonde hair. All three burst out laughing and sang together (slightly out of tune).

'You'll believe God is a woman

And I, I feel it after midnight

A feeling that you can't fight

My one, it lingers when we're done

You'll believe God is a woman'

The Sat Nav screen displayed, 'Southend on Sea - 66 miles – turn left in half a mile.'

"Cripes that looks like a bad one," Maisie was staring out of the rear windscreen. Two cars were lying on their sides; a lorry was buried into the central barrier, bright yellow-attired uniformed people running across to the cars. Flashing lights filled the road. The carriageway was strewn with debris.

"Don't you look, Emily, just keep on driving, I hate rubbernecks," Maisie turned back into her seat and fell silent.

As she glanced at Maisie in the mirror, a sudden wave of fatigue hit Emily. Tightly gripping the steering wheel with her left hand, she frantically rubbed her eyes with her right. Suddenly a layby appeared on the left-hand side of the road. Emily quickly steered the car into it. "Sorry girls, I've got to pull over, I can't keep my eyes open."

She didn't hear a response from her two friends.

The Face hovering above her looked familiar but in her confused state, Emily couldn't recall whom it belonged to. It was a man's face, with mild blue eyes and long untidy blonde hair. She tried to move, but her arms failed to respond. The Face smiled at her. A soft voice breathed from its' pale pink lips, "Don't worry, Emily, you'll soon learn to move around, it takes time." Emily attempted a reply, but no words came out. "Oh, yes, you'll have to learn to communicate again, but it'll happen very soon, be patient," the Face was now positively twinkling.

Emily could hear music playing faintly from somewhere beneath her. The solemn tones of 'Morning Has Broken' lifted into her ears, it was her favourite hymn. The Face looked gravely down at her. "Hmm, yes, umm that, umm sometimes happens, it's a bit disconcerting, you know, hearing your own funeral. I'm sorry, but if it's any consolation, they are saying some nice things about you." The Face fixed a painful smile. Emily looked back at the Face, her mouth drooping, her eyes filled with horror. Simultaneously she felt a burning sensation fire through her body. Seeing Emily shiver, the Face winced slightly, he knew that her funeral had ended.

Her voice returned. She heard herself saying, "My funeral? So, I'm dead?"

The Face looked down, frowning, "Err Emily, up here we don't use the D word, it's regarded as a bit of an expletive. But if you want me to be blunt, then the answer is....." The Face hesitated, "Yes, I suppose you are. But on the upside, once you are up and about, you're going to meet some familiar people."

Emily felt curiously comfortable.

Emily looked at the Face, "Maisie and Katie, they were in the car with me, the last thing we saw was that terrible accident....." Her voice tailed away. The Face had fastened a knowing smile. "That was us wasn't it?" The Face raised his two blonde eyebrows in agreement. "Are they, you know, with us

here?” With a swirl of mist, the Face produced a thin pale hand and drew out what, remarkably looked like to Emily, was an iPad. It was her turn to raise her eyebrows. Long thin fingers tapped the screen. The Face looked up from the iPad and looked thoughtfully down at Emily. With a slight shake of his head, the Face mouthed, “Sorry no, according to the tablet, Maisie isn’t due here for many years and” The Face let out a long whispery whistle, “Katie is going to get a card from the King.”

Emily felt her body tingle; she looked down at her figure. She saw that she was clad in a white gown, she couldn’t determine the type of cloth, it felt soft, but unlike anything, she had sensed before. Thinking hard, Emily raised her head and stared directly at the Face, “I know you, don’t I?” The Face looked back at her, Emily thought that his expression was slightly patronising. “You’re the bloke that pulled me out of that pool in Majorca when I was a little kid. I thought I was going to drown. You saved me.” The Face nodded silently. “So, who the flip are you?” Emily’s voice was slightly shrilled.

“I’m your guardian angel, your time wasn’t up then, but sorry to say it is now, I can’t fight fate,” the Face displayed a tinge of disappointment. Emily felt strangely touched by the Face’s sincerity.

Suddenly and with a slight whooshing noise the Face rose up; Emily saw that he was also clad in the same white material. He spoke in a cheerful tone. “It looks like you’re ready to move. Come on Emily grab my hand. I’ll give you a guided tour. You’ll love this place, it’s fun!”

Emily reached out and slipped her hand into the Face’s proffered palm.

It felt surprisingly warm.

The end