

Frank

Extract from a story by Lily Greenall

Frank entered the ferry lounge and sank into one of the high backed seats. He yawned widely and looked around the cabin. The deck was almost empty; just an elderly man at a nearby table, eyes on a newspaper, and a group of young men in sports jackets hovering near the door. They stood with their hands in their pockets, rocking back and forth as they spoke. Frank recognised two of them from the village. Big Tam, married to the woman from the post office, and Donny who drove the west side bus.

A young couple banged through the doors at the front of the lounge. Frank had seen them coming up the gangplank. The girl was walking in front, the boy trailing behind dragging a suitcase. The girl was wearing a silver scarf and her dark hair was tangled from the wind. Frank yawned again and sank a little lower in his chair. His eyes were still gritty with sleep and his throat was raw from the pints he'd had the night before. He cleared his throat and watched the girl stride towards him between the rows of seats. She held her chin up as she walked and her boots clacked on the floor. The way she moved caused a ripple in the sleepy, morning air. Frank turned his head, watching as she stopped at the opposite booth and sat down. The boy shuffled down the aisle after her. He was tall with a long, pale face, with thinker's eyes that were always swivelling about, taking everything in. Frank could tell by looking at him that he'd never done a day's work in his life. Needed a haircut too. Frank looked at the girl. He couldn't see what a girl like that saw in the boy. Once the boy reached the booth he stopped and looked down questioningly at the girl. She beamed and patted the seat beside her. The boy flopped into it and the girl began to unwind her scarf then set it neatly on the seat beside her. Using one hand she opened the flap of her coat, popping all the buttons at once, and wriggled free like a fish darting through a net. She folded this too and laid it beside the scarf. She moved back in her seat and put her face close to the boy's.

Frank could hear them murmuring to each other, the girl's face just visible behind a curtain of hair. The boy nuzzled into her, hunching over to sleep, and the girl wound an arm about his shoulders and gave a squeeze. Frank stared at her face as she leaned back. Her eyes were glazed and her expression was serene. Frank suddenly wanted to press his thumb into the hollow between her nose and lip. The boy had thin arms. Now that he'd taken off his jacket Frank could see that his jersey swamped him. Frank's own arms were sturdy. Though he was nearly fifty there was still muscle packed tight across his chest. He imagined the girl's little hands pressing against his torso, fingers kneading the cloth of his shirt. He rolled his head against the seat cushion and turned to stare out through the brine splashed window.

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