

COPING

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We all stood around the courtyard leaning on various objects. It was a cold night and under the orange streetlamp the only way you could tell if the white clouds leaving people’s mouths were from vapes or dragon breathe was the smell. Does second-hand smoke apply to vapes too? I thought to myself, wondering if in thirty years I’d regret coming to these things even if I wasn’t addicted like they were. But I know that I am fooling myself, my cold fingers felt frozen into place around the beer I am holding. I watched as grabbing hands reached out for the substances, I listened to the sound of something vaping through their t-shirt, I heard her suck in as the coils heated up. When she breathed out I could smell the burnt juice. It filled my nose and I felt my eyes water.

“What nic is this?” she asked.

“Forty nic, my dad got it for me, it’s a bit harsh.” He replied, a sense of pride in his voice. He might have even been trying to puff his chest out but he looked so malnourished it was hard to tell.

“Oi mate, can I have a hoon?” Asks Sam, no one likes Sam, he was born in Seatoun but talks like he’s from the Hutt cause he thinks it’s cool. It actually just makes everyone uncomfortable. But he gets given hits, like the other nicotine addicted seagulls who crowd around whoever has a vape squawking until they get a hit of their own liquid gold.

“Who wants to go back in?” Someone asks. I follow them, I didn’t spend ten dollars to stand outside and watch other people vape. I can do that for free at interval. As I walk up the stairs and in the door I am hit by a combination of sound and sweat. I hang in the back with the rest of the people too scared to go into the mosh pit, we stand together in wiggly lines holding cans and cups slightly in awe of the people in front of us smashing together. As I watched them all bang and crash into each other I was reminded of the humour theory coined by Herbert Spencer, the basic idea being that humour is a way for us to overcome our social inhibitions. I realized that was the point of the mosh pit, of this display, it allowed them to let go. They all kept falling, tripping each other up like dominoes but they fell as if they wanted to, the animalistic side of the ritual bringing out a physical numbness.

I watch one of the human dominoes fall then get back up and I realize that I recognize him. He was Jamie when I knew him, but I’ve heard his name has changed again, he was always a coward. But I knew him as Jamie, he was Jamie when I met him, lying about my age to get into a gig, he was Jamie when we stayed up at night talking, he was Jamie when he slipped

his tongue into my mouth and he was Jamie when I tried to convince my friends that he was a good person. I watch him from a distance, watch as the chains attached to his body move but his hair stands stiff. I watch as he crashes into someone and helps them up, she looks young, her face clings to remnants of baby fat. I watch as she blushes shyly at his touch, I know how she feels. I know how she will hurt.

“I need to go to the bathroom.”

After throwing up I catch a glimpse of my face in the bathroom mirror. My face looks hollow and my under eyes sag. They sag even more today because of the messy black eyeshadow I put under them, I’m tricking people to think I got less sleep than I actually did. Altogether it gives me the appearance of an anorexic raccoon. I wear every piece of jewellery I own, which sags my neck down, almost forcing me to look at the ground, I don’t mind. I can still hear the music screaming, I sit against the door as if that will block the sound out. I want to check the bus timetables but my phone is dead. So instead I have to wait it out. I imagine the bacteria from the bathroom floor climbing up my leg, I hope it makes me sick and I have to stay inside even longer. I shiver and feel tears drip down my throat, falling onto the dirty ground.

This is how I cope.