

**One Night**  
**By Gabriel Bergmoser**

Apparently in some exotic parts of the world, Saturday nights are considered fun. In my sad little corner of existence, however, that was never the case.

I sat alone in my tiny room in my tiny shared apartment, staring at the computer screen and trying to think of a porn site I hadn't visited in a while, or maybe, just maybe, a new one altogether. I was tired of the same old shit and ready for something new and exciting. Maybe some vigorous sex shot from an angle I hadn't seen before. It was a world of possibilities. I scrolled through my mental list of warped, twisted and possibly illegal acts, searching for the right one to suit my mood. There was a delicate art to choosing porn, and in this one practice, I was a perfectionist.

And then, breaking me out of my holy reverie, I heard the door slam and the sound of loud obnoxious whistling. Ed was home, and he was drunk. I closed my eyes and leant back in my chair. Well, that was the end of that. Any semblance of intimacy was shattered whenever he rocked up. I could already hear the sound of a beer bottle being popped open and him fumbling through the cupboard looking for his beloved bong.

Having said a wistful goodbye to the prospect of porn, I opened Facebook and was immediately hit by the very last thing I wanted to see. A beautiful, grinning face with wide brown eyes that seemed to be looking directly at me, with the offending caption beneath it; *Jennifer Matheson is in a relationship.*

I felt like someone had kicked me very hard in the shin and before I even had a chance to shut myself up a very loud 'fuck' had escaped my mouth. Sure enough, within seconds the door to my room had slid open and Ed, tangled black hair bouncing everywhere, had made his appearance.

'You okay?' he asked, not even trying to sound concerned.

'Fine,' I said.

'You just yelled fuck pretty loudly.'

'Did I?'

He took a swig of beer. My beer, I noticed. 'You sounded upset.' His eyes moved to the computer screen and before I had a chance to minimise the page he had seen the offending image. 'Ah,' he nodded. 'Right.'

'What's that supposed to mean?' I snapped.

'Well that's your ex, isn't it?' he asked.

'No, it's her doppelganger that happens to have exactly the same name.'

'Course it is,' he said. 'How long ago was it you guys dated?'

'A year,' I said. 'You were at school with us, remember?'

'Well yeah, but I never took notice of people who bored me.'

'You just move in with them?'

'Something like that,' he lit a cigarette and took a long drag, still staring at the computer screen. 'You you still into her, then?'

'Is it that obvious?' I grunted.

'It would explain why you never stop moping.'

'I resent that.'

'Sure you do. Still, it's a bitch that you're not over her. Can't imagine that would be easy.'

'What would you know?' I said. 'You've never had a meaningful relationship in your life.'

He laughed. 'Because a three month high school relationship is just *so* meaningful, right?'

I looked away. 'I wouldn't expect you to understand.'

'Hey, just because I think its stupid doesn't mean I don't get it.' He walked into my room and sat on the bed. 'I mean, my best friend at school seemed to think his relationship meant something. Til he went and monumentously fucked it up. Sound familiar?'

I wasn't sure whether or not to be offended. 'I never fucked it up.'

‘Oh, okay,’ Ed grinned. ‘So it must have been a different Rob Ryan who got punched out by his girlfriend’s ex for being a condescending dick and then implying that they were still fucking. Total relationship master class there, by the way.’

‘Fuck you.’

‘You wish,’ he crossed his legs and pointed the smoke at me. ‘I’ll tell you one thing. You need to get out of this place. Even just for a night.’

‘Why should I?’

‘Because your room smells like dead things and it’s starting to stink up the whole place,’ he said. ‘Plus, what’s the worst that could happen?’

‘Well-‘

‘You might enjoy yourself,’ he said.

‘Doubt it.’

‘You might get laid.’

‘That’s likely.’

‘You might go to jail.’

‘And that’s appealing *how*?’

‘You would have been somewhere other than this room,’ he smirked.

‘I..’ I shook my head. ‘Fair point.’

‘Well, in that case we’d better get going,’ Ed ground out his cigarette into my wall and slid off the bed. ‘That booze isn’t gonna drink itself.’

‘Right,’ I followed him into the living room. He was fumbling through our fridge, and finally withdrew a bottle of white wine.

‘Perfect,’ he said. ‘Two dollar cleanskin. This’ll get us well and truly started.’ He opened it, took a swig, and passed me the bottle.

‘Really?’ I raised an eyebrow.

‘Really,’ he said. ‘Remember where we live, Robert. This city is overpriced at the best of times. We need to be drunk on arrival.’

‘Doesn’t that get you kicked out?’ I took the bottle from him.

‘Worst case scenario,’ he replied. ‘Just keep a straight face until you’re actually in the building. From there on, it’s all fair game.’

‘Whatever you say.’ Holding my nose, I sculled some of the sour booze.

‘More than that,’ Ed said.

With an internal groan, I obliged. After several painful seconds, Ed snatched the bottle back.

‘Equality, man,’ he said. ‘Don’t drink it all.’

With ease, he finished it off, then flashed me a yellow-toothed grin. ‘Alright. Shall we?’

‘I guess,’ I said, waiting for the wine to hit me. Ed had opened the door and together we walked down to the elevator. ‘So where are we going?’ I asked.

‘Out,’ he said.

‘Yeah, I got that. Out where?’

‘Anywhere that serves beer.’

‘Right. That narrows it down.’

Ed lit another smoke.

‘Dude!’ I hissed.

‘What?’ he said, bemused.

‘The neighbours could rock up at any second! Put that thing out!’

‘So what if they do?’

‘We’ll get kicked out.’

‘I’ll get kicked out,’ he said. ‘Just say you were a pussy about it and tried to curb my delinquent ways. It’s more or less true. Want a drag?’

‘No!’ I said, starting to feel a little pissed off.

‘Man the fuck up,’ he replied.

‘I don’t smoke!’

‘You do now.’

‘That is a terrible argument.’

He shrugged. ‘Not an argument, man. Fact. You’re coming out with me, you will enjoy a cigarette.’

The elevator arrived and we stepped inside. ‘Even if through some impossible circumstances I end up smoking, I’m not gonna enjoy it,’ I said.

‘And just like that, I’ve won.’ He grabbed my hand and put the cigarette in it. I stared at it, unsure of what to do as Ed continued. ‘Man, your resistance lasted all of what, two seconds?’

‘I’m still resisting,’ I said.

‘Complaining about how you won’t enjoy a cigarette is a big step forward from insisting you won’t have one,’ Ed said. ‘In order to not enjoy it you have to first smoke it. Which you’re going to do now.’

I glanced at Ed, then down at the burning, stinking tube in my hand. Finally, with a resigned sigh, I put it between my lips and inhaled. Almost instantly I started coughing; I felt like my lungs had been filled with cement.

‘How the fuck is anyone meant to enjoy that?’ I gasped.

‘It’s an acquired taste.’

‘Why would anyone *want* to acquire it?’

‘You tell me. Try again.’

For reasons I could not quite place, I took another drag, just as, with a ringing sound, the elevator hit the bottom floor, the doors slid open and I found myself face to face with our paunchy, droopy eyed real estate agent.

‘Hello Neil!’ Ed said.

He stared at me; specifically at the cigarette in my hand. ‘What are you doing?’ he exclaimed. ‘You can’t smoke in here!’

‘It was...’ I looked to Ed, but he had already launched into his excuse.

‘Jesus... I’m sorry Neil, I tried to stop him, but Rob *never* listens to me about these things. I don’t know what has gotten into him lately, but I keep telling him that this devil-may-care attitude is juvenile and will get him killed if he doesn’t stop. Please don’t kick us out.’

Neil seemed to have no idea what to say.

‘Why are you here, anyway?’ Ed asked.

‘I’m showing an apartment,’ he said.

‘This late?’

‘Yes.’ His voice was terse and he was still watching me. I was still holding the cigarette.

‘Expecting many people?’ Ed asked.

‘Well, you never know...’

‘So, no.’ Ed grinned and took the cigarette from me. ‘Well how about this; let us buy you a drink, or rather, let Rob buy you a drink, you tell your boss that no-one turned up, and everyone is much happier.’ He took a long drag, narrowed eyes fixed on Neil, who seemed completely bemused.

‘Look, uh, as much as I appreciate the offer-’

‘Oh come on,’ Ed said. ‘It’s a Saturday night. Who works on a Saturday night? Aren’t most real estate agents tucked away in their coffins at this time? Come on; let a couple of handsome young bucks make your night better. What do you say?’

Neil was so thrown he did not seem capable of refusing. With an easy smile, Ed ground out the smoke on the ground of the elevator, took Neil by the shoulder, turned him around

and walked him out the front door, beckoning me to follow. Together we stepped out into the cool night air, the busy streets alive with the sounds of beeping cars, trundling trams, distant music and everywhere the excited chatter of people. I took a deep breath, trying to rid myself of the foul taste of that cigarette. It had done nothing except make me feel slightly ill. Meanwhile, Ed was guiding Neil in the direction of the bar down the road, talking over the agent's protests as he did.

'I'm telling you Neil, it's all about hitting up those uni bars and pretending you're a student to get the discounts. You could pass for one of those directionless dudes in their mid-sixties who decide to do an arts degree because they believe that the great Australian novel is a thing and their boring life is exactly what people need to read about. Anyway, tonight Rob is buying the drinks so we don't need to worry, but for future reference, eh?'

'I'm not buying the drinks,' I called out.

'Robert Ryan, when will you ever learn?' Ed said without looking at me. 'There are consequences to your actions; in this case, your flagrant lack of consideration for the poor other occupants of our building who now have to deal with the stench of your cigarettes, just because you couldn't wait until we reached the street. Again Neil, I can't apologise enough for his behaviour.'

I was almost ready to just turn back now. We had been out of the house only minutes and already I was regretting letting Ed talk me into this. Seeing as we were probably going to get evicted now, I made a mental note to start looking for a new place to live, and soon. Already my worst opinions about Ed were being reinforced. So far, all he had managed to do was get me in trouble and then cover it up by bribing the real estate agent with alcohol that he would make me pay for. I tried to remind myself again why I was here.

Before I could come up with a truly compelling reason to leave, however, we had reached the dingy corner pub and I had followed the others inside. The whole place smelt like stale beer and urine, but Ed, of course, was right in his element as he guided Neil into the corner, then grabbed me and dragged me to the sticky bar.

'What the hell are you doing?' I hissed.

'Trust me,' Ed said. 'Get one jug of beer and three tequila shots.'

'Jesus, Ed, I can't afford-'

'I promise you, you can.' He grabbed me by the shoulders and looked me in the eye. 'Everything is under control.'

'By which you mean you're gonna use my money to get our real estate agent drunk to make up for you being a fuckwit?'

'No,' Ed said. 'I mean everything is seriously under control. I guarantee you are not going to be a cent poorer.'

'Except for the fact that I will be.'

'Rob, you have to trust me,' he said. 'Get the drinks.'

Maybe it was something in his voice, maybe it was the fact that I was slowly realising how much the prospect of going home was depressing me, but finally, I walked over to the bar and did as he said. Wincing at the price, I carried the drinks over to our table. Neil looked deeply uncomfortable as Ed distributed the shots.

'Now,' he said, 'isn't this better than showing irresponsible students shitty apartments?'

'Look, boys, I-'

'Neil,' Ed said, lifting his shot. 'Drink the fucking booze.'

Neil drank the fucking booze, wincing and spluttering as he did. We both followed suit; the moment we were done, Ed swiftly filled three glasses and we started on the beer. The entire jug was consumed in silence; Neil still seemed far from comfortable, but he was drinking.

‘More shots!’ Ed announced, grabbing me by the wrist and pulling me up, collecting the empty shot glasses as he did. ‘Vodka this time!’

‘Ed,’ I growled as he dragged me to the bar. ‘How many rounds am I gonna have to get?’

‘Buy one vodka shot,’ he said, giving me one of the shot glasses. ‘I’ll be back.’ He disappeared in the direction of the bathroom. I lined up and waited, occasionally glancing back at our flustered looking real estate agent. *What the hell is going on?* It was a testament to how much I needed distraction that I was willing to just let this night play out, whatever the consequences.

Ed re-joined me at the bar just as I had bought the single shot. He was still holding the two glasses, only now they were filled with clear liquid. ‘What the-‘

‘We’ll be drinking something a bit different to him.’ Ed winked at me and nodded to the table. With no idea of what the hell was happening, I once again followed him. Keeping a close eye on which shot went where, Ed passed them around and we drank. Immediately I understood; *Ed and I had water*. Following his lead, I grimaced as if I had just drunk something burning and unpleasant.

‘How’s that Neil?’ Ed asked.

‘It’s, uh, well I haven’t had straight spirits in a while...’

‘Which is why you’re here,’ Ed said. ‘Now come on; this is better than the alternative, isn’t it? Another round. This one’s on me.’

Ed scurried off to the bar, leaving me alone with Neil. I smiled weakly at him. He nodded. He looked unwell.

‘I should get to that showing,’ he muttered. ‘They’ll fire me if I don’t turn up. People might be waiting. I’ll-‘

‘Are you talking nonsense Neil?’ Ed asked, returning with another jug of beer and three more shots. ‘You’re staying right here. The night is young and there is booze to be consumed. Get drinking.’

The beer was real; our shots weren’t and this was how the evening progressed. While Ed and I got pleasantly tipsy, Neil began to look messier. His tie was loosened and his saggy cheeks had reddened.

‘I jus...’ he waved his empty glass around as he searched for the words. ‘Jus’ isn’t fair. Issnot. I loved them kids. All m’ heart. An’ she kicked me out.’

‘And how did that make you feel, Neil?’ Ed asked, barely containing his laughter.

‘Like shit.’ He slammed down the glass. ‘Bitch.’

‘Let’s drink to horrible women, shall we?’ Ed said. ‘More shots.’ He nodded to me. Knowing the drill by now, I scooped up two empty glasses for our water and headed for the bar. Despite everything, I was actually enjoying this. While I was worried for my bank account, it was almost worth it to see how effectively Ed had turned the tables on our real estate agent. By the time I got back, he had only become more embarrassingly honest.

‘I’m... I’m only gonna tell you ‘cos I trust you. But there was no showing. I’m...’ He leant in close to Ed, beckoning us in. ‘I’m sleeping in t’apartment.’

‘Ah, I thought so,’ Ed said. ‘You have to admit Neil, saying you had a showing on a Saturday was weird. You’ll need better excuses than that to fool us, eh?’

‘Y’smart ones,’ Neil slurred, eyelids drooping.

‘Might be time to get you home,’ Ed said. ‘Rob, help me out here.’

We took an arm each and together hefted Neil out of his seat. With a nod to the frowning barman, Ed led the way to the door, staggering under the weight of the barely conscious middle aged man. We shuffled out on to the street, where it was colder than before. But rather than immediately head back up to the apartment building, Ed turned us down the road, in completely the wrong direction.

‘Ed, what are you-‘

‘Shh,’ he said. ‘It’s a shortcut.’

‘It’s nowhere near home.’

‘We’re not going home.’

‘Then where-‘

‘Just trust me.’

So, inclined to do anything but, I helped Ed carry Neil down the road. I was about to ask how far we had to go, when Ed came to a halt, only a hundred metres from the pub. We were standing in front of a crimson painted building with a sign surrounded by red lights. In curly font, the sign said ‘Parisian Nights.’

‘Ed,’ I said, concerned realisation dawning. ‘This is-‘

‘Home!’ Ed said loudly, shaking the dead weight that was Neil. ‘We’re here Neil. Rob, hold him up for a second.’ Ed stepped out from under his arm, leaving me to strain to support the bulk as Ed reached into Neil’s pocket and withdrew his wallet.

‘Ed!’ I hissed, mortified. In reply, Ed put a finger to his lips. Neil seemed to have no clue what was happening as Ed removed three fifty dollar notes and replaced the wallet, grinning. ‘Alright Neil,’ he said. ‘Can you walk buddy?’

‘Yeah...’ Neil managed.

‘Just up those stairs and through that door,’ Ed said kindly, guiding Neil toward the stairs. ‘There you go. Have a nice rest buddy.’

‘You... good man, Ed. Good mate.’ With one attempt at a wave, Neil made his wildly veering way toward the door. Ed turned to me, beaming. ‘Shall we?’ he said.

‘You realise that’s a brothel?’ I said as Neil collapsed forward on the front steps and continued at a crawl.

‘Obviously.’ Ed handed me a fifty dollar note. ‘There you go. Payback. The rest will cover our night. Now, come on. We’ve wasted enough time already. Oh, one last thing.’ He took his phone from his pocket, turned on his heel and snapped a couple of photos of Neil struggling toward the door of the brothel. Then, with a satisfied expression, he gestured up the street and we began walking.

‘We are so evicted,’ I said, shaking my head.

‘Well then he is so fired,’ Ed said. ‘Considering we have photos of him trying to access a brothel and a recording of him admitting he’s sleeping in the apartment.’ He shot me a sideways smirk. ‘Don’t worry. I keep on top of things.’

‘I’m not sure I’m comfortable with this,’ I said.

‘Look at it this way,’ Ed said. ‘First he’s a real estate agent, so he’s already a soulless monster. And secondly, he makes more money in a day than we do in a week. He’ll barely miss this. Plus, it’s not like he has to worry about rent at the moment.’

Ed had a fair point. Or at least, it was close enough to one to push away my guilt and allow me to feel just a little bit excited about what Ed had in mind next. So I followed as together we strode up to the main part of the city, through the Saturday night crowds, past the gorgeous girls in their short skirts and their barely stable high heels, past the loud guys with the pink shirts and the immaculate hair, brandishing their muscles and abusing anybody who so much as looked at them. I followed in Ed’s wake; he did not seem to notice or care about any of this. Hands in the pockets of his leather jacket, collar turned up against the weather and cigarette dangling from his lips; he cut a striking figure. Something about him made people move out of his way as he walked. I felt like I was hurrying to keep up with him, even though we were walking the same pace. By contrast, I felt small and insignificant. I was scared of all these people, but I didn’t want to go home. Home was a depressed wank and dreams about Jen. This at least was something unpredictable. Tonight would be something to think about other than the usual sad rubbish. That, to me, was worth whatever came next.

Whatever came next turned out to be the last place I expected Ed to veer toward; a loud, pulsating club full of the same almost identical folks who filled the streets. Inside was like an asylum for shit people; crammed together with terrible, shrieking techno music vibrating the walls and the floors. Girls jerked around self-consciously in what I assume was meant to be a dance while guys just stood, arms and legs apart, head bobbing as they stared at the tightly clad bodies of all the women here. The bar in the centre of the space was a circular, neon thing, behind which bartenders with obvious hatred for everyone here continued to serve, forcing smiles at all the yelling fuckwits demanding more booze.

‘Ed!’ I called over the ‘music’. ‘What the fuck are we doing here?’

‘Follow my lead,’ he called back, and we made for the bar.

I noticed Ed’s attention on a bulky, singlet wearing guy, chatting up the girl next to him as the bartender prepared his drink beside him. Ed raised a hand, calling me to a halt as the guy got his drink, nodded to the girl, and made his way in our direction.

‘Hey mate,’ Ed caught his arm before he could pass us, ‘sorry, but I think that dude next to you just put something in your drink.’

The guy’s eyes went wide; he shoved his beer into Ed’s hands and turned, heading straight for the oblivious young man at the bar. Ed grabbed me by the elbow and steered me away before we could see what happened, pulling us deeper into the crowd.

‘Here.’ He handed me the beer. ‘Hang tight; I’m getting another one.’

I stood there, feeling totally out of place for a few minutes until Ed returned, looking thrilled, with a second beer. ‘I should have said,’ he yelled, ‘we’re here for the free drinks!’

I couldn’t argue with that. So we drank the beers and when they were done I waited while Ed repeated the process. After a while I realised that I was quite happily drunk and soon I forgot all my previous awkwardness as Ed shoved me into the crowd, toward a girl dancing by herself. She caught me, laughed, I met her eyes (god she was pretty) and, with an apologetic grin, I kissed her. She seemed to have no problem with that and suddenly I was having a better time than I had done in months. My fears and concerns seemed to disappear into the arresting music and the arms and lips of this girl. I had expected aggression but her kiss was gentle and a little uncertain. I think mine would have been the same. I started to wonder if maybe Ed had been right, maybe I *would* get laid tonight. *God that would be nice.* It had been so damn long. And to break the dry spell with a girl like this... yes, I decided in that instant. Yes, I would make this work. Tonight would be the end of all this self-pity and misery. Tonight would-

‘Right, gotta go!’ Ed yelled in my ear and before I had time to process his reappearance he had grabbed me, pulled me off the stunned looking girl and shoved me toward the exit.

‘Wait!’ I tried to protest but Ed was having none of it. I thought I could hear furious yells from behind us but Ed’s repeated calls for me to hurry were drowning them out and the music didn’t help and next thing we were out on the street again.

‘Come on!’ Ed said pulling me away from the club.

‘Stop!’ I yanked myself out of his grip. ‘What the fuck was that? I was doing well!’

‘Yep, great, good for you,’ Ed said, eyes darting between me and the club door. ‘Sadly circumstances got in the way of that so now we should really, definitely run, okay?’

‘What circumstances?’ I demanded. ‘Fucking hell Ed, it’s been ages...’

‘Okay, you know my handy way of getting us drinks?’ Ed spoke fast. ‘Well turns out one of the guys I accused of spiking was the guy with the drink’s brother, and that brother was someone I had caught before with the same trick. Also they were both really fucking big and way musclier than us and had a bunch of friends and HOLY FUCKING SHIT THAT’S THEM, RUN, FUCKING RUN YOU FUCKING IDIOT!’

I ran. Ed ran. Heart racing, lungs burning, muscles screaming we tore down the street, weaving around yelling people and others who just frowned as we passed. We ran, turning



down a side street and ducking into a tiny, narrow, slimy and smelling alley. Ed stopped, I did the same and together we spent the next couple of minutes desperately trying to catch our breath.

‘That,’ I said finally, ‘had nothing to do with me.’

‘Leave no man behind,’ Ed said, leaning against the wall, still breathing heavily.

‘You could have left me behind,’ I said. ‘I would have forgiven you.’

‘But would I have forgiven myself? Never. Okay, where next?’

‘Where next?’ I said. ‘*Next* should have been that girl’s house! That was my *next*, Ed!’

‘Yeah, you have to learn to adapt to changed circumstances,’ Ed said.

I was about to tell him exactly what I thought of his changed circumstances when I felt my phone vibrating in my pocket. I removed it out, saw the name and closed my eyes with a deep sigh. ‘Oh no,’ I muttered. ‘Not now.’ I went to reject the call but before I got the chance Ed snatched the phone from my hand, looked at the caller, grinned and answered.

‘Evelyn my dear sweet girl!’ he said loudly. ‘No, this isn’t dick face. Unless that’s what people call me now... no, not to my knowledge... okay, come on, guess. I’m not Rob, so who am I? Nope, I didn’t rape and murder Rob. Who would want to?’

There was silence for a moment as Ed, smiling, listened to the voice on the other end. ‘Yes!’ he said, gleeful. ‘It *is* Ed! The one and only... I’m hanging out with Rob to make his life better... well why are you not here if that’s your job? Oh, you are? Brilliant, see you in five minutes!’ He hung up and handed me my phone back.

‘What the fuck have you done?’ I stared at him in disbelief.

‘Which one’s Evelyn?’ he said. ‘The cute one who knows all the drug dealers?’

‘No,’ I said through gritted teeth. ‘No. She is literally the last person I want to see right now.’

Ed’s face fell. ‘So she doesn’t know any drug dealers?’

‘I don’t know if she knows any drug dealers, Ed!’ I snapped. ‘All I know is, if I hang out with Evelyn all she’s going to do is spend the night belittling me and making my life even *more* miserable, which I really do not need right now!’

Ed’s brow furrowed as he tried to think. ‘Hang on. Isn’t she your best friend?’

I rolled my eyes. ‘Yeah, but-’

‘The more the merrier,’ he said, turning on his heel and beginning to walk. ‘She’s the next corner down; apparently she got kicked out of a bar and now she needs company.’

‘Does she need *our* company?’ I asked, hurrying after him.

‘We’re fun, remember?’ Ed said.

‘Yeah, but she’s not.’

‘Even better; we’ll balance each other out. Can’t be getting too irresponsible, can we?’

We reached the main street again, and after Ed quickly scanned to make sure there were no signs of our previous pursuers, we headed town toward the green and white colours of the corner convenience store at the end of the block.

Standing out the front of the store, dressed in black jeans and a jacket done up against the cold, was Evelyn. She was about a head shorter than me with spiky, coloured hair, eyes heavy with eyeliner and a bored expression.

‘Since when do you two hang out?’ she asked by way of greeting.

‘Since tonight,’ Ed said. ‘Rob needed to get out of the house and, being the charitable sort, I decided to help him out.’

‘And how many laws have you broken in the last couple of hours?’ she asked.

Ed counted on his fingers. ‘I’m pretty sure it’s only theft,’ he said. ‘In a couple of instances.’

Evelyn snorted. 'Pathetic. Alright pussys; booze is too expensive in this festering haemorrhoid of a city and I'm as broke as an African child on payday, so I'm suggesting we hit up the bottle-o, get a couple of goon sacks and get to a house party I know of.'

'Actually, I could do with that,' Ed said. 'Save this hundred for a later date. Rob, thoughts?'

I shrugged. 'Does my opinion count for anything?'

'Bad mistake Edward,' Evelyn said. 'You're letting him question. Alright, let's get this stuff and get moving.'

There was a bottle shop across the road, so I followed the others, now feeling very sorry for myself. I thought again about the pretty girl back in the club. She had probably gone off with someone else now. That thought stung more than it really should have, which I guess just went to show how long it had been since I had been laid, or even kissed a girl. *Almost a year*. Almost a year since Jen, and I still felt like this. That was shit no matter which way you looked at it. As Ed and Evelyn bickered over which goon was better, I hung back and let the excitement I had felt before slip away. This night had taken a turn for the worse; what had happened in the club never happened to me, and it especially wouldn't now that Evelyn had been added to the mix. Once again, I imagined my dingy room and wished I was back there. Let Ed and Evelyn have whatever their fucked up version of 'fun' amounted to. I'd go back to mine.

'Rob.' Evelyn slapped me lightly across the face. 'Get your shit together. We've got places to be and people to bang.'

'Lose weight first,' Ed said to her, heading for the door of the bottle shop.

'It's easier to lose weight than grow a dick,' Evelyn replied. 'Which is what you'd have to do.'

Ed somehow managed to flag a taxi fairly quickly; Evelyn ushered me into it before I had a chance to tell her I was leaving. Ed slipped in beside me while Evelyn took the front seat to direct the driver. I looked out the window and watched as we slowly escaped the overflowing streets of the city, out to where Saturday night was a quieter, calmer place.

'Hey,' Ed said from beside me. 'You alright man?'

I glanced over at him. I wasn't sure if that was genuine concern or if he was just making conversation.

I nodded. 'Fine man.'

'If you faggots are gonna start making out, I need fair warning,' Evelyn called back to us. 'I have to aim my vomit out the window.'

'Aim it on yourself; you might smell better,' Ed replied.

It did not take long to reach the quiet suburb with the one loud house at the end of the street. In contrast to the neat lawns of the other houses, the overgrown grass, angled mailbox and abundance of cigarette butts marked this out as a student abode. Ed paid the driver with some of Neil's money and we stepped out on to the curb.

'Who do you actually know here?' I asked Evelyn.

She shrugged. 'Some dude.'

'Is it cool for us to be here?' I asked.

'We'll make it cool,' Ed said. 'Let's do this thing.'

Wanting to do anything but, I walked after them to the front door. Without bothering to knock, Evelyn opened it and together we entered the battered house. The smell of smoke, booze and vomit filled the air, along with music that was only slightly better than the club. We moved straight for the kitchen, in which a few couples were making out, stopping only to swig from the bottles they clasped. Ed went straight for the kitchen bench, clearing some space in the clutter of bottles and plastic cups for the casks. He poured us all a glass and handed them around. I glanced at the occupied couples; we had not been noticed.

‘Alright,’ Ed said, eyes alight as he raised his glass. ‘Let’s get this night happening.’

But, as we drank, I knew that this night had happened for me already and I wasn’t sure how much more happening I really wanted. Still, I accepted the second and third glass of goon, and kept accepting until my buzz had returned and my vision began to blur.

‘Alright,’ Ed said, ‘we’re ready. Backyard.’ With Ed in the lead, we stumbled out from the kitchen, down a hall and through a door to the back porch of the house. There were more people here, clumped off into small groups, chatting about various things, drinks in hand. Nobody seemed to notice or care that total strangers had turned up. Immediately, Ed made a beeline for a group of especially drunk looking girls. Evelyn raised an eyebrow as we surveyed the scene together.

‘Alright,’ she said. ‘I hate this place.’

‘What did you expect?’ I asked.

‘Not a teenage make out party,’ she said. ‘This is practically fucking domestic. Whose idea was this?’

I rolled my eyes and drank more. After a few moments some nervous looking guy with glasses approached Evelyn, a feeble grin on his pimply face. He stuttered a hello and she proceeded to make him leave with a combination of words that I was pretty sure could get you imprisoned in some countries.

‘Is it any wonder you’re still single?’ I asked.

‘Says you,’ she replied.

I couldn’t argue with that, so we drank more. Ed, meanwhile, seemed to have tired of his first group of people and moved to a second, who seemed not especially entertained by his unique charms. Not that it bothered him. Evelyn and I watched in bored silence until a frowning older guy with a crew-cut approached Ed, pulled him from his conversation, and proceeded to ask him some heated looking questions. I could not hear what they were saying but my heart sank when he pointed at us. *Oh come on. Not now.* Scowling, the guy approached.

‘Right,’ he said gruffly. ‘Who’s behind crashing my party? I don’t know any of you people.’

‘Him,’ Evelyn said, sounding bored as she drank. ‘Blame Rob.’

‘So sorry man,’ Ed piped up from behind the guy. ‘He said he knew you and it was all cool. We were just tagging along.’

‘I...’ I looked from Ed to Evelyn to the angry looking owner of the house.

‘Alright you little prick,’ he growled, approaching me.

But as he got closer and Ed and Evelyn did nothing I felt a strange anger take me over. What was it he planned to do, exactly? Beat me up for following my friends? Tonight I had been chased, almost evicted, committed theft and now was going to be punched all because of Ed. And all I had wanted was to sit in my room, jerk off and go to sleep. So despite the fact that he was much bigger than me and could crush me in a heartbeat, I waited until he was close then, with more force than I thought I had in me, I kicked him hard in the nuts. The guy cried out as he went down but I shoved him before he hit the ground and he went sprawling back. Ed jumped out of the way as he hit the ground, wincing as I stood over him.

‘Back the fuck off,’ I spat. ‘I didn’t want to come to your stupid fucking party anyway.’ I turned to Evelyn. ‘Fuck you.’ I didn’t even look at Ed as, trembling with anger, I left. I hurried back through the house and out on to the front lawn, fumbling with my phone as I did. I wondered how long a cab would take to rock up. Much longer than it would take for that guy to recover, follow me out here and beat the shit out of me. Still, even that would be better than another second spent in Ed’s company. I dialled the number and waited.

‘Hey.’

I didn’t turn.

‘Rob.’

‘Please leave,’ I told him.

‘No.’ he came up beside me, lighting a cigarette as he did. ‘Evelyn’s trying to calm that dude down. She said you have severe brain damage.’

‘I don’t care what she said.’ The phone was still ringing.

‘I thought that was fucking awesome,’ he admitted. ‘That’s the most life I’ve seen in you for months.’

‘Yeah, well, thank yourself for that.’ They weren’t picking up. I hung up the phone and turned to Ed. ‘What the fuck, man? Why would you blame me for this?’

‘Technically it was Evelyn.’

‘The question’s open to both of you,’ I said.

Ed took a long drag before replying. ‘Sorry,’ he said. ‘Just an impulse, I guess.’

‘Is it possible for you to do anything that *isn’t* based on an impulse?’

He smirked. ‘Maybe not. But tonight wasn’t a bad impulse.’

‘To you.’

‘Oh come on,’ he said. ‘You had fun. And I’m glad you did.’

‘Fun,’ I muttered. ‘Sure.’

There was silence for a moment.

‘Look,’ Ed said finally. ‘Sorry for being a dick. I just wanted someone to hang out with. Have a bit of fun with, y’know?’

‘What about all your other fun friends?’

‘Don’t have any,’ he said without a hint of shame.

‘Yes you do.’

‘I think I’d know,’ he said. ‘Rob, I really don’t hang out with anyone. Which is fine, seeing as I hate everyone. But tonight was a nice change. And I reckon it might have been for you too.’

‘For a bit, sure,’ I said.

‘Still could be,’ he said. ‘You reckon that girl in the club is the only girl you could score? Come on, once Evelyn has calmed that guy down I bet we can have a rocking night here.’

‘We have exactly five minutes to get off the property!’ Evelyn’s voice called from behind us. ‘Or they’re calling the cops.’

‘Well it is a free ride home...’ Ed said.

‘No,’ I said. ‘I’m not getting arrested. No fucking way.’

‘Then we’d better start walking,’ Evelyn said, coming up beside us. ‘Did I interrupt you two molesting each other? If so thank fuck. That’s not something I ever want to see.’

‘We were having a moment, Evelyn,’ Ed said.

‘No we weren’t,’ I said. ‘I’m going home.’

‘You live with me,’ Ed pointed out.

‘Well we still have these.’ Evelyn lifted the two goon boxes. ‘Which I chipped in for, so I’m coming with you.’

‘Alright,’ Ed said. ‘We go back to ours and we get wrecked. Listen to some music, play some games, draw dicks on the first person to pass out. What do you reckon?’

‘Better than jail,’ Evelyn said.

I closed my eyes and took a deep breath. I was about to tell them I just wanted to go to bed. The whole night was playing out in my head. It had been a shambolic wreck and...

...and I was still in one piece. Pleasantly drunk, alive with a lot of booze and two people who were possibly the worst interpretation of the word ‘friends’ I had ever heard, but for tonight they would do. What was the worst that could happen? Actually, I didn’t want an answer to that question. Either way, for now at least, maybe I could just stop thinking.

‘Fuck it,’ I said. ‘Let’s do that.’

'Cab?' Evelyn asked.

'They're not answering the phone,' I said. 'And we should probably get moving.'

'Well then,' Ed ground out his cigarette with a grin. 'Let's go. It's a long walk home.'

**THE END**