



GOOD VIBRATIONS Paul Cuddihy

Mitigating circumstances. That's what they'd say. Poor little deaf kid, they'd think, with expressions of pity and patronising words no-one believed he'd understand, but he did.

It made him smile, when he thought about it. So predictable what the reaction would be. He could already picture it, where everyone would be placed in the room, in orbit around his own body, sitting centre stage, head bowed, full of remorse but secretly laughing at the whole situation. Sorry? Not a chance.

He had planned this operation meticulously, thinking of nothing else for weeks but the details of the task ahead. Truth be told, however, it wasn't an intricate plan. Simple in its execution, with little chance of detection or error. The repercussions he already knew, or at least hoped, would be minimal. Anyway, it would be a price worth paying.

He glanced at his watch. Only fifteen more minutes before he needed to set out. A sudden knot twisted sharply in his stomach but it was strangely comforting. Nerves would keep him focused and on edge.

‘What are you doing today?’ his mum asked, signing the words with her hands to accompany her voice, though he could more or less deduce, from the movement of her lipstick-coated lips, what she was saying. A useful skill, it enabled him to eavesdrop when people presumed he was out of the loop.

‘I’m going into town,’ he signed to her.

‘Who with?’

‘Myself.’

‘Do you want any company? I’m not doing anything.’

‘No, it’s fine. I’ll not be in for long.’

‘What are you going into town for?’

He hesitated before replying, his hands poised, ready to communicate whatever white lie he opted to tell his mum. He wondered what she’d say if he just suddenly blurted it out now. Probably think he was joking. He smiled.

‘What’s so funny?’ she asked.

‘Nothing,’ he signed, shaking his head to wipe the grin from his face. ‘I’m just going window shopping,’ he explained, smiling again at his own, unintentional joke.

‘What is so funny, Liam?’ his mum asked, her face displaying a mixture of puzzlement and irritation that transmitted itself to her hands, which signed with an increased degree of frustration. She shook her head when he remained silent over the cause of his sudden joviality.

‘Teenagers,’ she said, not bothering to gesture with her hands this time. He shrugged his shoulders as she shook her head again and walked out of the room. He checked his watch again. Time to go.

It was just as well he’d checked when the bus would arrive. It was a horrible day. Rain was falling with a heavy monotony and the wind battered and buffeted it in every direction, mainly, or so it seemed to Liam, right into his chilled face. He pulled his woolly hat further down over his ears as he stepped onto the bus.

The driver stared at him impatiently as he held out the palm of his hand to display the one pound coin and tiny silver five pence for his fare. He put the money into the machine and gestured ‘ONE’ with his index finger. The driver looked puzzled so Liam did it again, pointing to the money in the machine as well. Suddenly the driver’s face changed, as if a light had just been turned on inside his brain.

‘You - want - a - ticket - into - town,’ he said with exaggerated slowness.

‘I’m not a fuckin’ moron, you fuckin’ arsehole,’ Liam signed, while smiling at the same time.

The driver smiled and nodded, pointing at the machine where Liam’s ticket had appeared. He gave Liam the thumbs up sign as he grabbed the ticket without further reply, waiting until Liam sat down before moving off from the bus stop.

Liam was glad to take the weight off his feet and, more importantly, the rucksack off his shoulders. He could feel the pain stretching across the top of his back as he manoeuvred it onto the floor at his feet. It was heavy, very heavy. He wondered if his dad would notice the missing boulder from the small rockery in the back garden that was his pride and joy. He’d know soon enough who the

culprit was and for what purpose it had been used.

The rain still fell with the same relentless rhythm when he arrived in the city centre. Glasgow's streets were coated with a shiny black veneer while the sky was a monotonous grey as far as the eye could see.

The bus stop was just round the corner from the music shop and Liam, almost trailing the rucksack along the floor, got off the bus without glancing at the driver. He heaved the bag onto his shoulders again and began walking purposefully towards the shop, his stomach once again jangling with nerves. It was nearly time and he was anxious to begin.

He stopped in front of the shop window, removed the rucksack again, placing it on the wet pavement, and stared through the glass. Taking centre stage in its full glory and splendour was the object of his affection and the reason for his mission. The drum kit seemed to beckon him, calling out through the plate glass barrier that separated them. He glanced up and down the street. It was almost deserted save for a few hardy souls who'd sacrificed their Sunday afternoon to battle the elements. Perfect.

He had always loved drums; for as long as he could remember they held a particular fascination, though it was difficult for him to explain and impossible for others to understand. When he was barely two years old, he'd toddled into the kitchen behind his mum, and while she busied herself at the sink he had opened one of the cupboards and proceeded to empty its contents on to the cold, tiled floor.

It was the stainless steel pots which aroused his curiosity; they became helmets which covered his hair and slipped down over the top

of his eyes, leaving him in temporary darkness. That game quickly lost its appeal and the helmets became drums. Turned upside down he used his fingers to hit the bottom of the pots before he discovered a potato peeler previously discarded on the floor and began using that to bang the pots. Almost immediately, the peeler was snatched out of his hand and he found himself lifted off the floor and spirited back into the living room to be given his toy train as amusement, but in those few seconds he had felt something as he banged the pots, a vibration up his arm that was both thrilling and unsettling, a feeling that never ceased to excite him even as he got older and pots and cardboard boxes were thrashed with vigorous intensity.

He had always craved his own kit, had coveted one after seeing a picture in his mum's catalogue but Santa remained deaf to his pleas.

It was love at first sight when he saw the spotlit kit in the window of the Helter Skelter Music Store. He had stopped abruptly and ventured right up to the window, pressing his face against the glass like a hungry man outside a restaurant. This was what he wanted, had always wanted but knew was a hopeless dream. His parents couldn't grasp his need and he couldn't articulate it. The music store, he knew, would be no better and he'd probably be laughed out of the shop. A deaf boy wanting to try out a £1500 drum kit. Not a chance.

So as far as Liam was concerned, he had no other choice. He could wait several years before he'd saved up enough money to buy the kit but he'd never be able to wait that long. He had to play these drums ... now.

He crouched down and unzipped the rucksack, first slipping on his mum's gardening gloves. Next he removed the sticks he'd bought at Helter Skelter just last week, slipping them into the inside pocket of

his jacket. Then he gripped the large, dirt-covered boulder and stood, adjusting it in his hands to make sure he'd get an accurate and powerful throw. Taking one last look around, he stepped back to the edge of the pavement, took a deep breath and sprang forward, launching the boulder at the glass when he was just a few feet from it.

The boulder burst through the glass, leaving a gaping hole but, more importantly, shattering a large portion of the window. Liam didn't stop to admire his handiwork but immediately stepped forward and aimed a powerful kick at the weakened window, sending more of its small particles into the shop display and out on to the pavement. Another couple of well-placed kicks and there was a big enough gap for him to squeeze inside.

Liam quickly sat down behind the drum kit, removing the gloves, stuffing them into his jacket pockets, then bringing out the drumsticks. He could feel his face breaking out into a wide grin as he fingered the sticks, letting them roll back and forth in the sweaty palm of his hand.

He hit one of the golden symbols gently, watching it vibrate for a few moments. He nodded approvingly and brought the sticks crashing down, closing his eyes and instinctively finding each drum, feeling the vibrations shimmer up his arms.

Opening his eyes, still grinning, Liam was aware he was now playing in front of an audience. A young couple, the girl with her arm linked into her boyfriend's, standing amidst the fragments of glass strewn across the pavement, watching his musical exertions with amusement. Behind them, a car had stopped in the middle of the road, its occupants staring at Liam like they were at a safari park studying one of the animals from the safety of their vehicle; the two

little girls in the back were pointing urgently towards the broken window and the man sitting playing the drums, their mouths moving silently behind their own glass barrier.

The perplexed, almost awe-struck gazes that never left him only forced Liam to play with even greater energy and urgency. He closed his eyes again, savouring each and every moment of his very own golden silence.

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