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## School Reunion

*December 3<sup>rd</sup> 2006*

Can it really be so long ago? Sometimes it felt like forever and other times like yesterday, they say your schooldays are the best of your life, well with a pinch of salt maybe they were. Katie re-read the e-mail,

*Dear friends*

*Cassius and myself are pleased to invite you to a reunion party at the Fox & Hounds, Bridge Street, Wellingboro' on December 31<sup>st</sup>, 2006. Price is £12 on the door or £10 in advance.*

*Lets make this New Year one to remember!*

*Best Wishes*

*Susan Brown*

This wasn't the first reunion of course, that was held in 2004, ten years after they had mostly all left school. Then there had been one last summer and again this last July – not that she'd gone to one yet. It's not that she hadn't *wanted* to go but there was always something getting in the way – living nearly two hundred miles away being the least of them. Lets see, 2004, yup she missed the email for some reason and only found out about it the day before. Then last year she'd wound up in hospital while her co-educatees partied and this year, well the choice of the reunion or a fortnight in the sun was a no brainer!

But this was different, a New Year party – there would be no excuses this time, she'd already agreed to stay at her parents for Christmas and New Year and they lived within walking distance of the Fox & Hounds. No this time Katie Tweed would go to the ball!

*Seven years earlier, December 1999*

"Katie, you can give me a hand this year." Sandra Tweed told her eldest offspring.

"Okay Mum."

It would certainly be different this year with Katie at home for the first time in five years; in fact this would be their first Christmas as a family since her eldest child left for University. It would be different to before, of course it will, the kids are both adult now for starters and of course Grandma Jenkins passed on two years ago. The kids really used to play her up but she loved it really.

Sandra fished some more damp clothing from the washer – *'the kids choice of underwear has changed too!'* She mused shaking out a pair of Katie's knickers. The plain cotton of their schooldays was certainly long gone, replaced by fine silk briefs and colourful boxers.

The noise of the kids around the house was a poignant reminder of the passing of the years.

"Muu-um! Tell him!"

*"Muu-um! Tell him!"* Pete mimicked.

Yup just like old times in more ways than one! Yet so different too.

"Give it back!" Katie demanded.

"Peter, give your sister her underwear back and Katie you stop taunting your brother." Sandra grinned to herself. Despite everything that had gone before the kids were actually pretty close in the usual sibling love hate way. Back when they were at school it had been the other way round, Pete always getting the short end of things.

*December 5<sup>th</sup> 2006*

The murders down in Suffolk were grabbing the headlines and column inches, two working girls murdered and dumped in ditches. Katie shuddered to remember how near she herself had got to joining that job scheme herself a few years ago. It could have been her they were talking about on the news, in the tabloids but for that chance meeting with Diane Thomas.

And it had been chance, Katie mused, seeing Diane in York that day....

*'It can't be, if its not it must be her double.'* She shuffled her grimy sleeping bag a bit so she could see the young woman walking up Coppergate a bit better. The young woman stopped and watched one of those annoying street mimes for a moment, that smile, it has to be her!

*It was so long since she'd seen anyone she knew she hadn't a clue what to do. She had been sleeping rough, begging on the streets of York for best part of six months and you could tell. The occasional night in a shelter was little more than relief from the stress of street life, the constant threat of violence, the daily abuse, the only income what you could pan handle from the tourists. Yes there was a way out, a quick and easy way out but so far she had resisted joining the working girls. But winter was moving in, the tatty sleeping bag needed to be supplemented with newspapers to get through the nights, not that she slept much, several of her 'street friends' had lost the few possessions they had by not being careful enough at night.*

*Something, embarrassment maybe made her pull the bedding up around her face, not that Diane was likely to recognise her. Where had she gone? She scanned the crowds in a strangely desperate hope of seeing her one time classmate.*

*"Here you go, get yourself something warm." The voice caught her completely unawares and she swung around to find the object of her attention offering a twenty-pound note to her. "Please, take it."*

*"Diane?" was all she could manage.*

*"How? Do I know you miss?"*

*"We were in the same class at school." Katie mumbled through chapped lips.*

*"Oh my god!" Diane exclaimed, "What happened?"*

Yep, mysterious ways indeed. Diane will probably go to the reunion so there will be someone I know there. Well I will sort of know most people I guess but I've not seen most of them in so long.

*December 8<sup>th</sup> 2006*

*"Okay Mum, I'll bring plenty...I know, I do live in Yorkshire you know, it does get cold up here!...I told you last week, the 23<sup>rd</sup> ...no the Saturday...half seven...I can get a taxi Mum...okay already! I'll ring when the train leaves Kett'ring...okay, love you too...byeee!"*

Mum's can be such worries.

*December 10<sup>th</sup> 2006*

'Best let Susan know I'm coming,' Katie chided herself spotting *that* email again. Those guys at *Friends Reunited* have a lot to answer for! It was her Mum who encouraged her to join the online service, but there were no regrets. Most of the class of '94 were listed on the site, when she first looked, those first few site visits were taken in trying to put faces to names, hardly anyone actually posted pictures!

It didn't seem right just mailing these people so she had kept a watching brief. There were some names she didn't recognise but I guess you don't really know everyone do you? There were doubtless people wondering who Katie Tweed was too, at least she had put up a picture though.

She quickly typed her reply and hit send, she was sort of committed now.

A reply came almost by return,

*Hi Katie*

*Glad you decided to come, Diane said you might. Looking forward to seeing you on the 31<sup>st</sup>.*

*Best Wishes*

*Susan Brown*

*July 15<sup>th</sup> 2005*

"You okay love?" Sandra stroked her daughter's head tenderly, there had been complications with the surgery and the doctors had kept Katie sedated for three days. But she was coming round now, that's all that mattered.

"Mum?"

"Shush love, I'm here."

"Is it gone?"

"Yes love." Sandra smiled for her daughters benefit, holding back her tears.

It really had been touch and go, it was major surgery after all. Katie had started to haemorrhage badly and she had to twice have her heart restarted. The fact she was smiling up at her Mum right now was no small miracle and testament to the surgeon's skills. Sandra couldn't contain herself any longer leaning down to hug her daughter and let a few tears flow.

*December 15<sup>th</sup> 2006*

Five bodies now and the Police are making connections to other deaths in the region too. Mum's been going mental, I've had her on the phone everyday, I nod and do the good daughter bit, I'd be more concerned if I lived closer than I do.

I found a nice top and skirt for the party today, not too flirty or anything but quite dressy nevertheless. I hope it doesn't turn out like the school disco's used to! It was always the same, the girls on the dance floor with the braver lads, the less adept keeping station around the edges watching, oh yes watching the elite up there. I was always a sitter, my dancing was crap, my gangly frame having little sense of either tune or co-ordination! Thunderbird Tweed they used to call me, it hurt but I could see their point.

*December 23<sup>rd</sup> 2006*

"Hi Dad."

"Hi love, let's have your bag." Marcus Tweed took Katie's bag from her hand and swung it into the boot.

"I could've got a taxi." The young woman stated.

"Humph!" the elder Tweed mentioned.

Katie climbed into her Dad's old Rover; thankful at least that it was warm inside. Maybe it was a mistake wearing the mini skirt, the train had been warm enough but even just walking across the station had sent goose bumps to places that didn't deserve to have them!

"How's Mum?"

"Same old." Marcus noted slipping the car into drive.

"Is Pete coming?"

"Said he'll try, they've had him working all the hours god sends lately."

She shivered briefly as the warmth started having an effect.

The drive to the Tweed family home only took five minutes or so and the senior female of the family was waiting at the door as they pulled up.

"God Kate, you'll freeze to death in that!"

"Hi Mum." She sighed, "Merry Christmas."

"Bring her bag in Marcus."

"Yes love." He agreed.

*December 31<sup>st</sup> 2006*

Christmas was unremarkable. That is to say it passed without major disaster, a big argument or major disaster! Despite my best attempts at weather manipulation it turned out to be just cold and intermittently wet on Christmas Day. Pete did make it, arriving late Christmas Eve although he did surprise everyone by bringing his new girlfriend along! Gemma seems pretty nice, maybe my brother is thinking of settling down.

The rest of the week has been a bit odd I suppose, I've not had this long a Christmas break since Uni really, well definitely not at home – I don't count that year I was in the hostel. I've been shopping with Mum; we had a full day in Milton Keynes! Mostly though its been pottering around the house, cooking and watching the box.

It's still a bit scary with the Suffolk Strangler possibly still at large but there haven't been any more bodies or missing girls so maybe that guy they arrested really is the one. Still, five deaths mean five families had a less than happy Christmas; on that score the Tweed household is at least fortunate. Must get ready if I'm gonna get to the party I guess.

"Who's that?" Ken Rainbow asked the little group of lads at the bar.

"Dunno, fancy your chances Ken?" David Paterson quipped.

"Well she looks okay." Ken admitted.

"She'll be with someone bet your bottom dollar." Mark Green noted.

"She looks sort of familiar." Dave added.

Their attention was diverted as a collection of spouses and girlfriends joined them.

'I'm sure they were looking and talking about me.' Katie wasn't quite sure how to react to that, had they recognised her? For her part she did recognise a lot of the faces in the room, its funny how you remember things like Mark Greens high forehead and Karen Jones hair flicking! 'Where is Diane? Is it warm in here?' the room started to swim a bit but before Katie could get up to get some air she blacked out.

"Katie?"

"Hungh?"

"Thank heavens, you had us worried for a minute there."

"Diane?"

I opened my eyes to see not just Diane but Susan and Ken stood over me.

"Sorry, I felt a bit faint. Um where are we?"

"We brought you upstairs." Ken offered by way of explanation.

"Um thanks." Katie started to blush somewhat.

"Well we'll go back down then eh Ken?" Susan stated.

"Oh right, yes, see you a bit later Katie."

"So what was that all about Kate?"

"About?"

"Dur!" Diane rolled her eyes.

"Well it was just seeing everyone again. It's been so long since I saw anyone other than you and so much has happened. I was sort of worried whether people would recognise me or not and what they'd think."

"You silly!" Diane hugged her friend. "I don't think most of them would care if they did know, they see what they want to and tonight that's a beautiful young woman."

"Thanks Di, I'm not sure whether I've said before but thanks for everything."

"Give over girl!" Diane started to blush. "Come on, let's go party – I'm sure Ken fancies his chances."

"In his dreams."

"Don't be like that Katie, I seem to recall he was a good kisser."

"Diane Thomas, you didn't?"

"Well I was young." She replied defensively as they headed back to the festivities.

Of course as you might expect at such a function there were faces you recognise and names you forget. It's amazing how the memory works sometimes, Katie didn't look much like the gawky sixteen year old who left Brickhill School twelve years ago but more than one ex-classmate claimed to recognise her face but forgot her name. Of course there was some catching up to do but the main purpose of tonight was to have a good time.

Singles were in the minority this night, out of a possible collection of just over one hundred, thirty five had decided to party together, twenty seven of whom if not married had a significant other. That of course threw the singles together somewhat

although there was a significant imbalance with five girls and three blokes.

"So what do you do up in the wild and woolly north Katie?" Ken asked.

"I um teach."

"Lots of screeching six year olds – I don't know how you put up with it."

"Well actually I lecture at the University, early music."

"Shit! Sorry I just assumed it was sprogs, now I come to think you were always carrying around some sort of instrument."

They shuffled around the dance floor in silence a bit more.

"So, how long are you in town?"

"Back home on Tuesday as soon as the trains are back on, I have marking to do."

You could see Ken deflate. How come he'd never noticed her at school all those years ago? It must've been the instruments and come to think of it, didn't she wear glasses back then?

"Pity, I was hoping to invite you to dinner."

"Hmm maybe I'll take a rain check on that." Katie suggested, having warmed somewhat to Ken's charms.

"Break it up you two," Susan interrupted, "it's nearly midnight."

The music was replaced by the radio broadcast from Trafalgar Square where the traditional countdown and party took place.

"THREE, TWO, ONE! HAPPY NEW YEAR!"

And so 2007 started with much clinking of glassware and exchange of kisses.

*January 1<sup>st</sup> 2007*

Did last night really happen? Katie lay staring at the ceiling, unable to return to sleep but not willing to show her face to the world. Diane was right, the reunion was fun, not least dancing with Ken – back at school she would never of even presumed to think about such a scenario. Now Ken was actually wanting to see her, it was good to see everyone else too, why had she thought it would be so bad?

*May 20<sup>th</sup> 1994*



"Okay you lot, pipe down!"

The classroom quieted before Mr Jefferson continued.

"I suppose this will be our last registration together, I'd just like to say I've actually enjoyed teaching you lot. I know some of you are moving on to college or have jobs lined up – good luck and those returning for the sixth form – well I guess we'll see you in September. Okay lets do this then, Susan Brown?"

"Here."

"Mark Green?"

"Yup."

.....

"David Patterson?"

"Yeah"

"Kenneth Rainbow?"

"Yes sir"

"Diane Thomas?"

"Here."

"Kevin Tweed?"

"Yes sir."

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