

# Why Rosie Left

Matthew Turner

He came in from the street with the snow all over him, his head and his shoulders, and he looked silly and just delicious and I knew right then. I was waiting for Andrew but this was Adam here to tell me that my brother couldn't make it. A rush design job and an unexpected late shift. If I didn't mind he would take me to the exhibition instead. Of course I didn't mind.

The snow clinging to the strands of his hair like little winter branches. The way he'd simply let it fall on him. And all I could see were his chilled red cheeks and warm wide smile. The quiet calm. I didn't know then but a year later he'd have the white hair for real. I was looking at an image of his future self.

Don't take that the wrong way. You shouldn't think I minded that his appearance changed so soon after we got together. It didn't bother me one bit. The grey hair made him look like there were stories he knew which he chose to keep to himself. His tactfully hidden wisdom.

Adam provided the commentary as we moved among the sculptures. I remember the urge to touch and stroke the exhibits, to feel the curve of the cold smooth stone, and not knowing whether this would be classed as unacceptable behaviour. They cried out to be touched, I thought, the artists designed them to appeal to us this way. I looked to Adam for silent approval, to become a guilty partner, but I couldn't read his expression either way.

The monologue was more or less unbroken and slowly I realised: he was nervous for me to like him. The happy shock of it. He could say whatever he wanted

and I would hear just that intention, his eager heart. I rationed out a smile every now and then to keep him going.

The Saturday after the exhibition we met again. Neither of us had said it was a date but we were going for an Italian meal, which is the sort of thing you do on a date. We had a candle on the table that made us forget how cold it was outside, real scarf-and-gloves weather.

We talked about people we had in common, old days in Little Port. My brother's friend, I'd known of Adam since I was small without knowing anything about him. We talked about the schools we both went to, me two years younger, and in every connection we found the tiny thrill that we might be doing something forbidden.

When the waiter came to clear the first course away Adam rose from his chair, smiled sheepishly and nodded towards the toilets. Before leaving he seemed to consider something, then lurched forward to kiss me right above the bridge of my nose. It was sudden and discreet, and he didn't hang around to discuss what he'd just done. I didn't want him to.

A dozy night indoors, we watched a tacky documentary about a serial rapist in France and the manhunt that caught him. The show was low on facts and heavy on the mood, all around Marseille I think, the attacks in one holiday season at different resorts down the coast. I remember they thought he only liked to attack local women. If you couldn't speak French he'd let you off.

They fleshed out the programme with reconstructions, each time playing the same moves and lingering on the detail. The quickening steps, the heavy breathing, the gloved hand across the mouth – all long shadows and psycho-music. They wanted to tease you and hurt you, cheap TV pressing all the right buttons.

‘Why are you watching this if it makes you sad?’ Adam said.

‘You’re watching it too.’

‘Not so much,’ he shrugged. As if the choice was never his to make.

We watched another ten minutes. Another woman got jumped by the docks. The director thought it necessary to show the man tugging at the belt of her stonewashed jeans.

I felt Adam staring at me. He wasn’t going to say anything.

‘Adam, I *want* to watch it.’ I knew it was junk and so what, just because I’m crying – I can choose to suffer, can’t I? You can’t protect me from all the evils of the world just by switching the channel. I shouldn’t have to explain.

He sulked a little and we watched the show through to its credits. And I was meant to take from his silence that he was only trying to help and maybe next time he wouldn’t bother.

In the morning it was forgotten, the placid little smile returned. Adam never stayed angry for long, though how I sometimes wished he would. He took passivity for a virtue and always looked to move on, to put his own feelings aside. If something was forgotten it couldn’t cause any more pain. And always he’d step aside as if for *my* sake, but did I ever ask him to do that?

The smile became more distant over time as he lost his old friends. Marriage and work accounted for most of them, and with each one I gave a silent guilty cheer. I

felt that I was getting Adam back to myself in small stages, like a kidnap victim, one piece at a time. He gave his loyalty to these fools but I would outlast them all and he would understand. What they had to offer wasn't worth his heart.