

Survivor

“Right girl, you’ve got this”, Jodie muttered to herself as she looped the guitar strap over the head. She stared at herself in the mirror trying not to feel self-conscious. “It’s like riding a bike...”

“Ready?” Mark asked poking his head around the door, “Five minutes to go and I can see the old gang in the front row already.”

She smiled at his familiar face, his long hair falling into his eyes in the same way it did nearly 30 years ago. His bright blue eyes were now lined but still twinkled mischievously.

“You look great babe,” he winked at her; “like no time has passed.”

She smiled at her husband gratefully, knowing the truth of how different she looked. When she had seen her old friends earlier, they had tried unsuccessfully to hide their looks of shock at her altered appearance.

She adjusted the strap again, feeling more confident as the weight of the instrument rested against her chest.

As she heard the long-forgotten sounds of musicians warming up, the backstage bustle of familiar vocal exercises and colourful language, she could hardly believe she was here. She hadn’t dared to believe the nurses who had held her hands and her head as nausea from the chemotherapy racked her body. They had told her to keep hold of her of her dreams of singing again.

Earlier that afternoon she had walked with Mark along the Pier to quell her nerves. The smell of fish and chips took her back to their early dating days when he would meet her before starting his night shift as a junior doctor at Brighton Hospital. Jodie was temping in an advertising agency and moonlighting in the Seafront Café at night and although many years had passed the smell always took her back to her leather-wearing rock chick days.

Mark had made her laugh by referring to himself as a “middle aged groupie”, putting his fingers up in a jokey “Rockstar” pose. His easy laugh belying the many days and sleepless nights he’d spent on hospital chairs watching her anxiously. Their two daughters were farmed out to friends and neighbours who then dropped off food and ironed their school uniforms.

Mark had given her the classic Stratocaster during her final round of chemotherapy saying that he wanted to see her headlining at the old café.

“I’m so proud of you babe”, he said now as the chatter from the audience intensified. Jodie could picture her friends and family in the front row: her friends rapidly getting stuck into their glasses of Prosecco and G&Ts and her girls giddy at the thought of Mum being on stage.

She rubbed her hands over her newly shorn hair, which was dyed bright pink. It was disconcerting at first, but now she was glad of the change signifying a fresh start.

She nodded at Mark, smiling broadly. “Yep, this old girl is ready to rock!”

488 words

Based on the book title “Brighton Rock” by Graham Greene.