

## The Past is a Foreign Country

It's good to be back thought Sally. It had been a few years. Not possible with small kids, then Covid, then the divorce, but at last, here she was at her first festival in ages. The kids were with her ex, and her best friends Anna and Claire had similarly escaped domestication. She and Claire were in the campervan, and Anna was next to them in a small tent. They were there for the music (of course!) but mostly they loved the chance to dress up and get a bit drunk.

The Friday night line-up wasn't really to their taste - techno, loud, repetitive and flickering strobe lighting, so they sat in camp chairs next to the tent and drank too much wine. Anna tearfully revealed that she and Duncan were splitting up. He was too mean with money, they weren't having sex, and he wouldn't let her have a puppy. Sally and Claire, consolingly, said they'd never liked him anyway and he'd once made a pass at Claire at a party. Anna made a snide remark about Sally's ex and a barbed comment about Claire's 'boring' partner Tom. A slew of 'how-dare-yous' and 'what-the-hells' followed, and Anna stormed off and fell over a guy rope. The row ended in a sobbing group hug, a vow of allegiance to each other and death to the bastards that are all men.

Next morning the sunshine seared through their hangovers, but wet wipes, a mug of tea and a bacon sandwich restored them. The line-up that afternoon was seventies and eighties rock royalty. Sally and Claire had followed the theme. Sally was channelling Cyndi Lauper in a dayglo leotard, leggings and rara skirt. Clare had opted for bell bottoms, a floor sweeping Afghan coat and feathers in her hair. Anna was inexplicably dressed as a mermaid.

They joined the heaving mass at the main stage. The sun and the music beat down, they danced, they drank, they queued for the toilets, they did it all again and again. Suddenly Claire slumped to the floor like a crumpled wigwam. "Heat stroke and dehydration", said the St. John's Ambulance man, "We'll put her on a drip, come back in an hour." Needing to sober up, Sally and Anna followed the smell of frying fat to find some food.

Toiling back to the campervan to put Claire to bed, they encountered a group of young women on their way to the evening set (nineties and noughties pop divas and indie boy bands). Fresh, white broderie anglaise, eye lash extensions and trout pouts gazed on the three friends, much like gazelles might look on a distant pack of hunt-weary hyenas.

Claire safely asleep in the campervan, Sally and Anna slumped in the camp chairs. "I knew I shouldn't have had that pulled pork!" Anna groaned as she heaved into a Waitrose carrier bag. Sighing, Sally opened a bottle of warm white wine. Next year Glyndebourne and a decent hotel perhaps?