

## Deadline: *The Girl at the Door*

499 words

“I think you must be very brave” my brother said, over a crackly line. “You haven’t even spoken to this ‘Ellie’ and she’s coming round to your flat, how did that happen?”

It happened because Ellie is a friend of Phil. Well, not actually his friend, but Phil has this cousin who now lives in Australia and knows this girl in Manchester...

“It’s a long story - sorry, I have to go, she’s due here in thirty minutes”.

I start to wash the dishes but there’s so much to do and so little time, so I put most of them, unwashed, on top of the kitchen units.

I’m proud of those kitchen units, genuine MFI, rescued from a skip and lovingly re-assembled by me. MFI doesn’t *re-assemble* very well, I had to improvise. They’re fine providing you don’t put anything heavy in them. I admire my handiwork. I look at my watch. Twenty five minutes remaining.

The bedroom is problematic. Too much ‘stuff’. I put it (all of it) on the bed, carefully arranging the duvet over the top. It looks as if there’s a large man underneath. And he’s vibrating slightly. Should I dive under there and find out *what* is vibrating? No. No time.

I check the sticker on the wardrobe, lovingly written by my last girlfriend: *grey and beige, brown and black, green and red*, colours I shouldn’t put together because, apparently, they clash. I don’t understand colours, I choose a grey shirt and grey trousers, hoping that they are not really dark green and dark red.

Fifteen minutes to go.

I need to tidy the living room. Its dominating feature, my pride and joy, is a giant head-and-shoulders model of the monster *Predator*. A bit scary, perhaps, but there really isn’t anywhere else to put it in such a small flat.

Ten minutes left.

Oh dear, the loo. I should have cleaned it months ago. Maybe she won’t need it. Should I tell her it’s out of order?

What else? I *must* have forgotten *something*. Music!

What have we got? My standard selection: Black Sabbath with Mozart, Simon and Garfunkel, Elvis Presley, and Duke Ellington. And the Sex Pistols. And Stockhausen. They're all famous so I'm sure she'll like them.

OK, a quick check in every room. I mustn't leave anything embarrassing lying around...like last time.

Only five minutes now, I think I'm done, I need a drink.

Drinks! The fridge. A bottle of ketchup and a somewhat soggy cucumber (I must get round to doing some shopping). And half a bottle of wine. Supposing she wants whisky...or vodka? I have lemon and barley, will that do?

Jus as I am pondering this, DRRRRING!!

I rush into the hall, stop (be calm...be calm). I take a deep breath. I open the door.

"Ellie?" I say (just in case it *isn't* Ellie).

"Yes." A pause. "You are, err... you're not at all as I had imagined."

"You're not at all as I had imagined! Come in."