

## **Disco Heaven.**

**©Mark Binmore 2020.**

The boy had black hair, as black as a raven's wing. His eyes were glass grey and rimmed with tear-stained mascara. He was sixteen this summer, and he looked like a sooty angel in his black leather and lace. He stared vacantly at his own reflection in the mirror above one of the wash-room sinks. His cigarette slowly burnt out. The ash grew into a long cylindrical droop and fell away. The hot ember met the flesh of his fingertips, and he dropped it with a gasp. He studied the stub as it burned a hole into the edge of a stray paper towel, and then he stamped it out with one quick gesture, as one might kill a spider or a beetle.

Outside, the thunder of 'Disco Heaven' pounded into the nightclub walls. He fumbled in his pocket for his box of matches, and shook one out. The match had a blue head, very neat. He ran the match along the sandpaper strip a couple of times, and on the third strike, it snapped. He dropped the broken match. His hands were shaking. Then he tried again. This time the match flared. He held it upright and watched the flame slowly eat at the wood. The flame flickered and spat. When it came close to his fingernails, he shook it out. Then he closed his eyes and breathed in the thick, sharp scent of sulphate. After a moment, he took out a third match and lit another cigarette.

'You know you can't have him,' he said to his reflection, blowing smoke. 'He doesn't even know you exist.' His reflection stared back at him with nothing but contempt. The boy wondered why he felt such a perverse delight in torturing himself.

He studied his slender body in the mirror. His hair was long, tangled and dull. He tried to use his fingers to comb it, but they snagged halfway down. He decided that he did not like his hair, and inspected his roots, which were light brown and looked grey against the rest of his head. He separated out a few strands from his hairline at the front, and lit them with the end of the cigarette. He was startled by how fast they burned, like little tapers, and panicked, trying to jump away from them. They did not stop until they were almost level with his eyes. He brushed away the ash and it floated wildly.

The air stank of burnt feathers. He laughed at himself softly and leaned back against the sink unit. He wondered if he had a boyfriend. The magazines never said. If he did, then he did not want to know. He wanted him to be single, and hate everyone in the world but him. He rubbed his brow. He explored the idea slowly, turning over the possibilities in his mind. He

could be single. He could be. He looked single. He shook the thought from his head. The boy boosted himself up onto a space on the unit between two of the sinks. He got up close to the mirror and inspected his eyes. They were a little red, but not too noticeable. His nails were painted with black varnish. It was cheap stuff, and badly applied. The polish was chipped, and overlapped onto his skin. He picked at the varnish on his skin, because it felt horrible and sharp on his fingers.

Then he remembered why he was there, and he started to cry softly. He felt lonely.

Searching out some tissue paper from one of the toilets, he wiped his tears again. The mascara was a dark smudge beneath his eyes, and made him look tired. Well, that did not matter. It just seemed to add to the effect. He picked up his cigarette from where he had balanced it on the edge of the sink, and took another drag. He coughed and blew his nose, almost setting the tissue on fire in the muddle. He stared at the cigarette pensively. Then he turned it upside down and angled it for the flesh of his forearm. He closed the distance. He could feel the heat of the ember above his skin.

The hair of his arm began to curl and turn black. The skin began to turn red and singe. Then he jabbed the cigarette down in a sharp movement and yelped in pain, jerking his hand back. The cigarette flew across the room and landed in a puddle of water at the far end of the toilets, where it died a smoky death. He put his arm under the cold tap. He was not drunk enough for it to be numb. He whined miserably to himself, and thumped his leg, which did not help. He put his lips over the burn and sucked it better, leaving a black lipstick kiss on his arm. He looked at the mess and laughed again unhappily. He suppressed some more tears. Music blared and lights exploded, as the wash-room door was shoved open: some clone with big hair and tight black jeans. The man walked past the boy to the urinals. The boy stared dully into the mirror until the man finished and left with another blare of music and a slam as the door snapped back on its hinges.

The noise had woken the boy from his trance. He pulled himself together and looked around, but no one was there. There was no point missing the show. He searched his back pocket for his elusive stick of lipstick, and reapplied it to his lips. He thought about writing on the mirror. He thought about writing 'Fuck You,' but that just seemed childish, so he wrote 'Disco Rules' instead. He loved the way the lipstick slid so easily over the glass. He looked around for something else to write on. Then he had an idea. He searched for a piece of paper in his pockets, but there was not any. He thought of tissue, but that was too fragile.

Then he saw the paper towel holder. It was empty, but there were a few green papers lying around on the urine soaked tiles. He picked up a reasonably dry one. Then he wrote 'I Love You Queen B' on the paper in block capitals, as big as possible. He folded it neatly in half and made up a paper aeroplane from it. He smiled. He thought about putting something smart and knowing, like, put me in your coffin, but that sounded stupid, so he did not.

Then he went out of the toilets and into the roar of the crowd, pushing his way anxiously to the front, shielding his aeroplane close to his chest. He caught a glimpse of the boy with his glitter wig as he skipped across the stage with his high heels and kimono, and his heart nearly stopped. He threw the paper object. It looped up into the air in a U shape, arched down and, amazingly, caught in the boys glitter curls. The boy's throat tightened up with excitement. In that moment, he imagined the impossible. That he might read it; look at him. Blow him a kiss. Invite him backstage. Take him to his hotel room. A surge of passion tingled through the boy's belly. The green thing caught up in his glitter wig annoyed the performer. His legs were already soaked from where some queen had thrown a plastic cup full of cider onto the stage. He shook the green thing free, and when it fell to the ground, he stomped on it and mashed it into the sticky puddle at his feet. He shot a glance out into the audience, and then juggled his bass line with a jump in the air as the chorus began.

The boy was crushed. Around him, the crowd surged forward and they screamed along to the chorus. The boy slipped out of the crowd and found a speaker stack to sit on near the back, where he could watch him. 'I love you Queen B,' he mouthed miserably. He felt empty. His nose began to run, and he felt in his pocket for a tissue. He lit another cigarette and watched dejectedly as the crowd raised their hands to the electro beat of the remix.