

## Looking for the Heart of Saturday Night

by Francesca Ryan

“Mummy!

“MUMMAAY!!” the voice wailed from the toilet. “It’s poking out, Mummy!”

Barbara looked over at her husband. He was engrossed in his game; headphones on, eyes on the war scene in front of him. It was generally understood that on weekends, Paul would spend time with four-year-old Jakey. This included the shittier bits of parenting. She let him play on undisturbed, though. She was in an unexpectedly good mood after the phone call. It had been a long week for both of them. He looked tired. These last two weeks, Paul had had to leave home very early, and return home late. He’d flop beside her in front of the TV. Supper was whatever she had come up with as a meal solution; recently that was often Marks and Spencer’s. She’d also been working hard. Her workplace was the computer in the spare room. Working from home wasn’t easy. There was Jake to get up, breakfasted and dressed. She’d take him to nursery, do some shopping, pick up Paul’s prescription, come back to put a wash on, do housework. She wanted to go back to bed again with a tea, radio on, maybe have a little doze. But the first several zoom meetings yesterday had started at ten. Face and hair needed attention. Something presentable and cleanish to wear above waist level, from the overflowing heap on the bedroom chair. Thank God it was the weekend.

“MUMAAAAY! IT HURTS!”

She went through to Jakey and knelt beside him.

“Mr Hankey is stuck Mummy.” His little face was screwed up with the effort to get Mr Hankey out. Paul’s mother disapproved of using euphemisms, so at her house, Jakey had to use the preferred terms. No ‘Mr Hankey’ for Mrs Hartley. In Cora’s house, the Hoover was a ‘vacuum cleaner.’ Sellotape was ‘sticky tape.’ Jakey had startled his babysitter into giggles once, when he’d announced he needed to do some faeces.

“That’s why we need to drink lots of water, little man. So our poo doesn’t hurt.”

“I don’t like water.” Finally, with a satisfying splash Mr Hankey was released and on his way.

“I can wipe my own bottom mummy, it wasn’t a poo-ey one.”

“OK, but you don’t need as much toilet paper as that.” Too late. It spooled out several feet.

After Jakey was bathed, in bed with dinosaurs and the promise of a story from Amina, Barbara went into the kitchen and poured herself a large gin. Paul took off his headphones and looked at her.

“Oh, so I’m driving, am I? I’d have done Jakey if you’d said.”

“Why should I always have to say?” She stuck her tongue out at him at him to show she wasn’t bickering. Not really. It was Saturday night, and her drink was hitting the spot.

“Anyway, looks like we’ve got a free pass my sweet. Eddie called, it’s off. Nuala’s got covid, poor thing.”

She was grinning. Not because she wished Nuala ill, but because she was enjoying the delicious sensation of Jomo. Jomo was a feeling of Joy At Missing Out; the opposite of Fomo, fear of the same. At the Coopers, you certainly got fantastic food, but the anxiety Nuala went through to impress was palpable. Not relaxing for her guests, some of whom Barbara found a bit of an effort; last time the conversation had taken a lurch into Brexit territory. And then there was the burden of reciprocity, the return invitation. It made her heart sink. Her idea of entertaining was stone-fired Pizzas bought in from Alberto’s, a big bowl of sharply dressed salad, plenty of wine. Haagen Daas chocolate caramel to finish off. She was no Nigella, but good friends enjoyed themselves, talked up a storm and laughed all evening.

“Should we put Amina off? We won’t need her now,” said Paul. Amina was Jakey’s babysitter; he was besotted by her. Putting him to bed had been an easy transaction tonight, with the promise of her company. He would stare entranced into Amina’s large brown eyes as she read to him in her faintly sing-song voice.

“We’ll still have to pay her of course” replied Barbara. “Why don’t we go out anyway? Not in the car.”

“Sausage and mash down the Engineers?”

“£17 is a lot for a bloody pub sausage, Paul”.

“Best sausage and mash ever, though. Must be all the organic bollocks. Thought you loved that stuff?” he turned up the Tom Waits a little.

*You got paid on Friday  
And your pockets are jinglin and you see the lights  
You get all tinglin' 'cause you're cruisin' with a six  
You're lookin' for the heart of Saturday night...*

“All right, but you’re paying. We can watch ‘Britain’s Got Talent’ when we get back.”

“Whatever my lady commands.” He slipped an arm round her waist and swooped her across the kitchen.

“Mind my bloody gin. That’s Amina now, have you got the cash?” She shrieked as he smacked her bottom. “I wish you wouldn’t bloody do that.”

Saturday night as an adult, so this is it, she thought. This is it and I like it.

*Is it the barmaid that's smilin', from the corner of her eye?  
Magic of the melancholy tear in your eye...*