

White Street

by Juliet Robinson

'I know what I saw.'

Ellie is leaning against the kitchen counter, her cropped black hair is all angles, like her bony frame.

'Well, nobody was in.'

'Someone was, they were in your room.'

Despite my decision not to buy into whatever silly Ellie is catering I can't suppress the shiver that creeps up my spine. She lives in a flat down the street from mine, but I can see her lounge from my bedroom window, we wave at each other, and we joke about learning morse code to send messages back and forth.

'Just drop it.'

Ellie shrugs her shoulders, lights another cigarette, some other party attendees' bustle into the kitchen, the music's changed, and the subject is dropped.

A week later I am struggling down the street with my food shop, it's a horrible wet Glasgow day and I just want out of the rain. I press the button for pedestrian crossing, and as I wait for the green man I glance up at my building. Its early evening, no lights are on yet, so the windows are all shadowed, but in the centre of my bedroom window is a deeper shadow. Darker than the rest of the gloom, human shaped. A taxi races past its kerbside tires hitting a pothole splashing me with filthy water. When I look back at the window, the shadow is gone. A trick of the light?

Autumn, copper, red and golden leaves fill the gutters, I'm heading home from the library, my phone vibrates, and I read the message from my flatmate Susan.

Why have u chucked tampons and sanitary towels up and down the hall?

What r u talking about?

Just pick them up.

Christmas. I am at Jo's; she lives next-door to us, I forgot my keys she's taken me in until Susan gets home. We're drinking tea and watching Neighbours, my flat door slams and we hear muffled footsteps, Susan's home. I finish my tea and head back to my flat. There are two doors to our flat, a wooden door, that screens an inner one which is set with stained glass, when we're in we leave the outer set open, but right now its closed. The flat has one of those old fashion bell leavers which I pull to alert Susan to the fact I am still locked out, I can hear the chime of the bell, but she doesn't come to the door. I ring it again and this time it's answered by footsteps. I clearly hear the inner door rattle and then downstairs, the front door bangs and I hear Susan's voice, she's talking loudly on the phone.

If she's downstairs, who's in the flat?

She's surprised to see me in the hall and tells Jamie (her boyfriend) she'll call him back. I gesture for her to be quiet and point at the door, mouthing, 'Someone's in there!'

Susan pales, there have been a fair few break-ins round the area, the thieves targeting student accommodations. We message Jamie asking him to come round at once. When he arrives, we send him into the flat while we wait in the hall, he emerges minutes later clearly annoyed.

'The place is empty.'

Susan and I switch rooms, we work our rent out on a room size scale, the larger the room, the more rent you pay. I claim I need to cut back my work shifts to focus on coursework so I can't afford the larger room anymore. Truth is I just don't like the room. Not after Ellie's claims about seeing someone in there. Not after seeing the shadow. My sister spent the night and said she thought she felt someone sitting on the bed. The room is cold. The room feels sad – how can a room feel sad?

'Jamie don't! I don't want to try your bloody chilli!'

I pull my pillow over my head, Susan and Jamie are fighting in the kitchen. Eventually I drag my hungover arse through and politely ask them to shut the fuck up, before retreating to sleep again. Later when I've recovered enough to need food and tea I shuffle back to the kitchen. Jamie is standing in the window of Susan's room, his back to me as he looks out on the street.

'Sorry about earlier,' I say.

He shifts, a tilting of the head, but doesn't answer, which isn't unusual – he's mardy, and I did shout at him.

Susan's in the kitchen, 'Sorry about this morning, Jamie's a right bastard.'

'He's in your room. He'll hear you,' I whisper. I really can't be bothered with them yelling at each other again.

'He left hours ago.'

But then who did I speak to?

Easter break. Mr Creegan downstairs has his grandson Erik staying. Erik is incredibly good looking, so I make a point of saying hello to them in the stairs.

'Oh, you're in Trevor's old flat.'

Mr Creegan shushes Erik, but it's too late, there was something in Erik's tone that I can't let go.

'Trevor?'

'Yeah, it was so sad, he hung himself in the front window. Does anything odd ever happen in the flat?'

