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The street was empty, dark. Moisture hanging in the air and settling on Lucy's skin as she stood on the corner, watching them.

Katrina was fumbling in her bag for the keys. Steve leaning casually on the wall in front of the garden. The jangle of metal broke the silence, the heavy clank of the door echoing back and forth between the tenements. Then the light flicked on.

In the doorway the light shone through Katrina's hair. She was wearing a long coat, fitted around the waist and hips, and her face was white against the dim hallway beyond. Lucy stared at her. Her head was spinning. She saw Steve get up from the wall and go to stand next to Katrina, his arms slipping easily around her waist.

"You coming, Luce?" Katrina called out and smiled.

Lucy followed them up the stairs to the flat, the fluorescent light high up on the wall flickering. A piece of white paper was sellotaped over the brass nameplate on the door. It was starting to look dirty and peeling up at the edges. Lucy stared at it as she walked in, swaying and leaning momentarily against the wall. Katrina's name was hand-written in black letters and, beneath it, was her own.

Steve and Katrina went through to the kitchen, turning on lights and standing close together as Katrina reached for the bottle opener. Lucy watched them from the hall, the way they kept touching for no reason, hands, arms. Katrina's arms were bare. Her sleeveless top a deep blue with straps that crossed over her back and Steve kept touching her arm just below the shoulder. Lucy turned away and went to her bedroom. She drank some of the stale water in the pint glass on her bedside table, put on her pyjamas and sat on her bed. Listening. She heard them walking down the hall, heard Katrina's bedroom door opening and closing. The sound of their muffled voices next door, Katrina, Steve, saying words she couldn't quite make out. She got up and walked over to the wall.

Lucy's CDs were stacked up in ordered piles, alphabetised, all around the edges of her bedroom. She pushed them out of the way, clearing enough room to sit sideways, her left ear pressing against the wall. She shivered and hugged her knees into her chest.

Steve was laughing. There was something malicious in it, Lucy thought. He was laughing at her, he was gloating. What had Katrina said to pull that laugh out of him? She

spoke quietly, Katrina. Forcefully but quietly. Her voice wouldn't transmit, not unless she wanted it to.

It was dark in Lucy's room, the only lights coming from the face of the alarm clock and the streetlights outside, and the ceiling was high, the lack of furniture dictating that all Lucy's possessions be arrayed on the floor. She looked up, trying to think clearly, to focus on the vast unavailable space that composed the top half of her bedroom. There was a spider's web in the corner. It was old and dusty, black looking instead of white or transparent, and had spread all around the cornice work. Beautiful twirls and fine details of plaster filled in with blackened silky webs, matted now, half eaten and torn.

She heard a crash in the room beyond the wall. She strained to hear. It sounded like a glass had smashed and there was Steve's voice, muttering an apology made clumsy and insincere by alcohol. "Kat," he said. Why was he calling her Kat? Her name was Katrina. Lucy called her Katrina. But maybe she liked Kat better?

Lucy raised herself onto her knees and reached towards the bed. Almost falling, she grabbed a corner, pulled roughly and dragged her duvet to the wall. She sat on it, the feel of it soft and padded after the worn, sparse carpet, and she pulled it around her shoulders, wrapping herself up.

And after all, it was probably nothing. Katrina didn't even like him anymore. She'd said so herself. She was always making fun of him, talking behind his back. It was their joke. Hers and Katrina's. They'd laughed about him. They'd laughed about his stupid baggy trousers and the way they fell down all the time so you could see the top of his boxers, his boasting and his arrogance, they'd laughed about him. Katrina must be wanting her to hear. It was going to be their joke. Tomorrow morning it would be their little joke.

Something banged, hard, against the wall. Lucy jumped. Waited.

Katrina's bed was by the wall. Katrina had put it there, dragging it from under the window on that first day she'd moved in. Lucy pictured Katrina on the bed, sitting up, leaning over him, her dark hair falling around his face, her skin pale and bare and she wanted to touch her on the shoulder. To make her look around and see.

There were noises now and voices, whispered urgently. She couldn't hear the words, but she could hear the tone of them. Then something that sounded like a table being dragged around, or was it the bed? She could almost feel it in her stomach, vibrating along

the floorboards. There were footsteps and then his laugh again, but less laugh-like now, it sounded unsure, scared almost, and Katrina wasn't laughing back, she was sure of it. He spoke. He said "Kat?" It was a question, loud and urgent and he was saying other things too, his voice deep, hushed, like the bass line from a CD being played one flat above you with the rest of the notes obscured and just the lowest vibrations transmitted through plaster and wood and brick. He spoke. He said "Kat." It was not a question.

Lucy wanted Katrina to speak. Wanted to hear her words, to get inside her head, to know what she said to other people when she thought Lucy wasn't listening. She wished Katrina would speak but she didn't. He spoke again. It wasn't a word, it was a note, another bass note, like a cello bowed carelessly with too much pressure, the string creaking under the weight of it. Then Katrina spoke, a singing teasing no and Lucy loved it. But Steve was getting louder and insistent, his groans deep and boastful, like his laugh, and Lucy could hear him so clearly and he said "Kat," and there was begging in his voice and Lucy hated it. And still Katrina was silent.

Then Lucy had the terrible thought that perhaps Katrina wasn't silent. Perhaps she was saying things, making noises, but they were for him only and she wasn't sharing, she was whispering in his ear and Lucy would never know what Katrina said. She pulled her legs in closer, hugging them to her chest, rocking, trying to think of Katrina but now she was thinking of him, of them, together.

And then Katrina laughed. It was slow; an intimate laugh. But joyful too. Lucy hadn't heard her laugh like that before.

Lucy put her hand against the wall. Her palm flat, open. Just one more sound. She stroked the wall. One more sound, just for me this time. Laugh again, because *I* want you to. Lucy held her breath. Silence.

She would wait.