

Short Story

Blind

by

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Nick had been eagerly anticipating the weekend away on the Gold Coast for months. It had been a stressful year, and a boy's trip was exactly what he needed. He finished up on the worksite early on Friday afternoon, and he and his best friend Jack left Brisbane and made the hour-long drive south to Surfers Paradise. There they met up with the rest of the group at their hotel, loading up on pre-drinks before heading out to the nightclubs on Orchid Avenue.

Staggering into the street, Nick hung off the equally unsteady Jack for balance. His vision was blurred. He tripped, awkwardly steadying himself before taking a seat on the curb. Unable to hold himself upright, he leaned over and dropped his head between his knees, vomiting into the gutter.

"Stand up, Nick!" Jack slurred. "Don't pike out now, get up!"

In the early hours Nick came to rest in an alleyway behind Orchid Avenue. He knew that he had become separated from his friends, but in his drunken stupor he didn't care. He had no energy to move, and didn't even flinch as headlights illuminated the alleyway. Two dark figures approached, and still he did not open his eyes. He groaned as he was made to sit upright, his arms and legs wrangled as he was lifted from the gutter.

Nick stirred awake, peeling open his eyes. He rubbed his face; his cheeks were numb. The content of his stomach was teetering at the bottom of his throat, dangerously close to projection. He tried to roll over, his shoulder banging against a hard surface. He returned to his position on his back, his head spinning, his vision blurry. He reached his hand above his face, out to his sides, and found splintery walls.

"Jack?" He banged his fists on the coarse surface above his face. "Tim?"

He heard nothing. His heart pounded in his chest, and he began to shout, hitting and kicking at his surroundings.

“Hey! *Hey!*” Nick shuffled as close as he could to the edge of the wooden box.

“Help, please!”

He rolled onto his back again and pushed against the wood above him. He rested, panting, then pushed again, coughing on the dusty air.

“Okay, okay, okay,” he breathed.

He pushed once more, using his knees for added pressure, letting out a long, painful groan.

“What the hell is this?” he wailed, his panic escalating. “Jack! Can you hear me? Please, somebody help me!”

The space was closing in around him. He imagined the surroundings of his cramped underground dwelling. The sense of hopelessness sank hard and fast inside him, then escalated into loud whimpering and desperately pleading as he attempted to claw his way through the wood above him, splinters piercing the tips of his fingers.

“Please, help me!” he helplessly howled.

He kicked and punched some more, but he knew that he could make as much noise as he liked, and it would make no difference. No-one would hear him.

After a few minutes Nick’s cries trailed off. Exhausted, he laid still again, salty sweat dripping from his forehead onto his lips.

He closed his eyes, resigning to his fate. His cheeks were clammy, wet and muddied from his tears. He focused on breathing, feeling his chest tightening as the air thinned in his confines.

In a quiet moment, he thought of Jessica. He wept aloud; he couldn’t bear to think that it would end like this. Would she ever even know what had happened to him? Or would he just disappear, never to be heard of again, left to rot deep in the ground?

Beneath him he felt a subtle vibration, and he snapped out of his state of defeat. He reached around into his pocket, and was dumbfounded to discover his mobile phone. The number was blocked.

“Hello?” he cried. “Help me, please!”

Nick heard a scratching sound on the other end of the line.

“Nick? Are you there?”

“Yes, I’m here!”

“It’s Jack.”

The tremor of Jack’s voice was unnerving.

“What’s going on, Jack? Where are you?”

“I dunno, I dunno where I am. It’s dark, Nick. It’s really hot, I can’t breathe...”

“Jack, what happened? Out on the strip, what happened?”

“Some of the boys went to drop these girls they met back at their hotel,” Jack whimpered.

“They said they were coming back. You wandered off into a backstreet and passed out.”

Nick could hear uproarious laughter on the other end of the line. It sounded familiarly close.

“What the hell is going on, Jack?”

The lid opened, and Jack and the rest of the group stood over Nick, looking down at him and laughing uncontrollably.

“Happy bucks night, Nick!”

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