

Standing in the Rain

The volume was loud. It was dark. A spinning mirror ball scattered rays of coloured light. Sporadic white strobe cutting up the nicotine haze. The stench of spilt beer, and cheap aftershave. A small dance floor packed with perspiring bodies. Girls in brightly coloured miniskirts and hot pants danced around handbags. A few brave males tried to look cool. Danny and his mates propped up the bar.

'This is hopeless!' he shouted.

'What?'

'All the birds are dancing, you can't chat any of them up.'

'Maybe we should take dancing lessons.'

'Might as well go home.'

'Let's have another pint, it is Christmas!' Danny offered.

Finally at about one thirty, they decided enough was enough.

'Let's go get a taxi, there's bound to be a long queue.'

Outside, Christmas Eve was cold and wet; reflections of street lights and decorations glistened along the Headrow. They joined the taxi queue behind a group of giggling girls, sheltering under their small umbrellas. The lads only had their jackets on. Danny stood next to the girl in a low cut yellow dress with matching yellow stilettos.

'Let's share your umbrella love, I'll be soaked by the time I get a taxi.'

'Get lost creep.'

'Where do you live love?'

'I said get lost!'

'I only asked where you lived.'

'Nowhere near you. So you can't share a cab, there won't be room!'

'Ooh, Miss Mardy Knickers.'

The girl turned her back in disgust.

'You wouldn't want to share a taxi with those slags, mate,' said Stuart.

Danny's flares hung limply onto his platform shoes as the rain poured down. His long blond hair was curling up as the rain trickled down the side of his face.

The taxi queue shortened, he sensed that the girl in the yellow dress was now eyeing him up.

'So where do you live then, pet?' she asked.

'Cross Gates love, why?'

'Just wondered.'

'So I'm not a creep now, am I?'

'And we're not slags, OK?'

'I didn't say you was!'

'But your mate did.'

'Don't take any notice of him, he's pissed.'

'And you're not?'

'Do you fancy meeting up after Christmas?' Danny spurted out bravely.

'Why?'

'We could have a drink.'

'Maybe.'

'Is that a yes?'

'Go on then, you look harmless enough. Give me your number and I'll give you a ring after Christmas.'

'I'm Danny by the way.'

'That's a nice name, I'm Sandra.'

He dug into his wet suit pockets, but he didn't have any paper, or a pen!

'Hold my umbrella, I'll have a look in my handbag.'

Thursday night was Bingo night for Danny's Mum; his Dad had escaped to the pub so he was home alone when the phone rang.

'Hello, is that Danny? It's Sandra, do you remember me? Miss Mardy Knickers!'

'Oh hello, yes I'm Danny. That's right; I remember, you had that nice yellow dress on.'

'And you got soaked.'

'That's right, I didn't think you'd ring me.'

'Why? I said I would, didn't I?'

'I know ... I don't know.'

'Make your mind up! Do you still want to go for a drink?' Sandra asked.

'Sure; when would be good for you?'

'Well my Gran is coming to stay with us tomorrow until Sunday, would Monday be any good?'

'Yeah I suppose ... isn't that New Year's Eve?' queried Danny.

'Err, I think so ... well it would be a good way to start the New Year, wouldn't it?'

'OK, I've not got anything planned either, where shall we meet?'

'How about outside the Queen's Hotel; near the station? My bus stops near there.'

'OK, what time?'

'Eight o'clock would be good.'

Danny put the phone down and had to ring Stuart immediately. His mates wouldn't believe he'd finally pulled!

His suit had dried out by Monday and he got his Dad to drop him off at the station. It was raining again, but at least there was a canopy to stand under at the front of the hotel. He was there at ten to eight, he daren't be late. The Queen's Hotel was busy with well-dressed partygoers arriving. His memory of Sandra's appearance was confused; did she have blonde hair or was it brown? She was about the same height as him, late teens or early twenties and looked pretty, or was that the number of pints he'd drunk that night. He looked at his watch ... five past eight, she was late. The rain came down heavier as he shuffled under the canopy trying to avoid the incoming guests. She wouldn't stand him up, not on New Year's Eve, she sounded keen on the phone. Quarter past eight; Danny felt conspicuous loitering in the hotel doorway.

'I thought you were meeting that bird,' shouted Mick as he struggled through the revellers in the pub.

'She didn't turn up!'

'What! That bitch needs teaching a lesson,' Stuart insisted.

'I know, but how?' Danny asked.

'You should fix up another date with her and stand her up, see how she likes it standing in the rain getting soaked!'

'But I haven't got her phone number.'

'You're hopeless mate!'

'In that case it's your round, Danny!'

Their collective brain power aided by several pints of Tetley's deliberated over the problem for the next few hours.

The following evening Danny was at home recovering from his hangover and feeling sorry for himself, when the phone rang.

'It's for you, Daniel,' his Mother shouted. 'A young lady,' she whispered handing him the phone.

'Hello.'

'Hello Danny, it's Sandra. I'm sorry about last night, I'd forgotten my friend Tracey had invited me to a party at her house.'

'You could have rung me.'

'I'm sorry, I meant to, but ... my Gran stayed an extra night and ... I forgot.'

'I got soaked, again.'

'Sorry ... I don't suppose we could try to meet up again?'

'Why?'

'I thought you wanted to.'

'I did, I do ... I don't like getting stood up, especially on New Year's Eve.'

'I've said I'm sorry.'

Danny couldn't believe his luck; he phoned Stuart.

'I can't believe it ... she's just rung me up to apologise and I'm meeting her tomorrow night'

"Nice one mate, did you arrange to meet outside the Merrion Centre?'

'Yeah" just like you said.'

'Great stuff; we can all sit in the Bay Horse across the road and watch her getting stood up!

That'll teach her a lesson, Danny'

'Thanks Stuart, it's a brilliant plan.'

The lads agreed to meet at seven thirty so they could get an early pint in and ensure a window seat for the main event across the road.

'We'll show her not to mess with you,' Stuart greeted Danny as they arrived simultaneously at the pub.

'Yeah, it's going to be great,' Danny replied.

Mick and Steve arrived a few minutes later as Stuart arranged the chairs for a ringside view of the Merrion Centre across the road. Stuart got the first round in.

'Here's to a good night, cheers Danny.'

'Thanks, Stuart. It's a shame it's not raining, it would be good seeing her getting drowned.'

They sat waiting expectantly, watching the traffic go by outside.

At quarter to eight, Danny got up and peered out of the window. No one was stood across the road, it was a quiet night in the city centre.

'Where is she?'

'Plenty of time yet, Danny.'

'I know, I can't wait.'

At ten to eight the sight of an attractive girl loitering outside the shopping centre quickly focussed their attention.

'Is that her in the red dress?' said Stuart; 'She looks like a bit of alright!'

'No, I don't think so. Can't really remember what she looks like, it was raining too much. I know she had a yellow dress on.'

'Well she's not likely to be wearing it again tonight, is she, Casanova?'

'We just need to see her standing across the road waiting, then we'll know it's her,'

'But it might be someone else.'

After standing for a few moments looking up and down the street she walked round the corner, looking in shop windows.

'It can't be her, must have been another bird,' said Danny.

The lads were onto their second pint of Tetley's when the girl in the red dress returned just before eight o'clock. She stood outside the shopping centre entrance, looking about anxiously. The old railway clock above the bar chimed eight o'clock.

'That's definitely her, it has to be,' declared Stuart.

'If she had the yellow dress on, I'd be sure.'

'Not many birds would be standing outside of t'Merrion Centre on a Wednesday night, would they?'

Well, it's t'right time and she's standing in t'right place, it has to be her!'

'Nice one Danny,' we knew you could do it mate.'

Their second pint was downed quickly in celebration.

'Your round Danny!' ordered Stuart.

Danny leapt to his feet and made his way to the bar with a warm glow of self-satisfaction. The girl checked her watch at regular intervals, continually looking up and down the street, now with increasing desperation etched on her face. The mood in the Bay Horse was jubilant, the party was in full swing.

'That's taught the bitch a lesson, now she knows what it's like to get stood up.'

She was still there at quarter past eight, looking distressed. Danny checked out of the window again, as a tall man in a jacket and jeans walked up to the girl.

'Aye up, what's happening now?' said Stuart.

The man seemed to be asking her a question. She shook her head. They engaged in a short conversation. Several cars, a lorry and a couple of double decker buses went past, temporarily blocking their view.

'What's happening?'

Danny jumped up out of his chair to get a better view.

'They're holding hands now!

'I thought she was waiting for you.'

'He's giving her a kiss.'

'What!'

'I'm glad she's not my bird.'

'I don't believe it, she's going off with him! It can't be Sandra after all.'

'You mean she's stood you up again, mate!'

'What a loser!'

'You owe us all another pint.'