

Hurunui Writers' Group

# October November Challenge

Writing From a Picture Prompt



Write 1000-3000 word story based on the image.

# The Black Run

Leonie watched the backs of her friends drifting away into the amber-lit mistiness of Oxford Street, oblivious to her standing on the curb. The river of cars separating them was just a blur of light.

"Nige! Bernard! Wait!" her despairing shout was swallowed by the traffics' rough chorus. Bernard partially turned his head. Had he heard her? She held her breath. He blew on his hands, put them in his pockets, and continued on, talking to Chantel, sharing a joke. Leonie stamped her foot and howled in frustration. She could no more shout after them as run after them through the non-stop tide of traffic. Like all the others she had encountered this evening, the pedestrian crossing button did not respond to her repeated hammering.

She had tried calling her friends on the phone, but, for whatever reason her phone was not connecting. It had been a long walk from her apartment in Belsize Lane to where she knew her friends were likely to be hanging out on a Friday night. It seemed as if every crossing in the the city was against her. Every time she tried to use one it seemed to not recognise she was there and she'd had to wait for a gap in the traffic. It was so frustrating. She thrust her hands into her great-coat's deep pockets, seeking the reassurance of warmth as a ward against the chill creeping ever closer to her heart. Even her pockets and fur-lined hood were not enough to push back the cold. A vision of tumbling ice and snow. It was gone as soon as it had arrived.

When she looked up again, there were no signs of her friends. At this time of night they would probably be heading for Tokyo Joe's. She checked herself; jeggings, her favourite chunky boots, and somewhere under her great-coat, a tee-shirt. There was no way she was going to get past the bouncer dressed like this. But what choice did she have? Drifting aimless and alone she spiraled through the busy hub of Soho, gradually pulled by the gravity of her old haunts. Her weary feet lead her to the neon glow of Tokyo Joe's as surely as a squid is attracted to the lights of a fishing boat. She told herself she'd feel re-energised once she got in there on the dance floor. A good driving beat had always kept her going to dawn. Maybe this would shake the weight of darkness that was pressing down on her, if she could get past the doorman. *If* she could get past the door man. If she was in luck it would be Dmitri. Huge Dmitri. Dmitri would let her in even if she was dressing down a bit right? He was cool. He knew her.

There was a new guy on. Leonie didn't recognise him. He was average height and despite the cut of the suit she could tell he was all muscle. A natural fighter and probably as mean as a ferret. Nevertheless, she squared her shoulders and pulled herself to her full height. At four foot ten, that wasn't saying much.

"Hi." she said with a cherry little wave from the depths of her coat.

The door man ignored her, and continued glaring at the prospective patrons, daring them to approach.

"Hi." said Leonie a bit louder. "I think my friends are in there already. Did a group of four come in, in the last twenty minutes? We're regulars so you may have seen us before."

No answer.

"There's two blokes, a blonde guy with a sort of goatee, a stocky guy, looks a bit rough around the edges, a sleek chick with a black bob with purple fringe, and a tall girl with long ginger hair, looks a bit like Drew Barrymore in Charlies Angels."

The guy didn't respond in any way.

"Can I just take a peek and see if they're there?" the doorman continued to glare at the stream of people passing by. "No?"

A taxi pulled up issued forth a couple of thirty somethings, dressed as if they'd just featured in a James Bond movie. The doorman smiled and nodded, allowing the couple through. A burst of warmth and pounding beat swirling past them as the inner door opened.

"Say. Is Dmitri around?" Leonie asked brightly. It was like talking to a lamp-post. Leonie's shoulders sagged and her brightness faded. Slowly she backed down the steps, slumped against the wall, and hid her face deep in her hood, lost in an endless labyrinth of misery and foreboding.

How long she had been sunk in her pall of despair, before she was pulled out of it by some intangible change? The inner door opened and a young woman with black sharply bobbed hair and a slash of purple, pushed through followed by an athletic, angular featured man. The woman stopped on the steps and fished through her bag, producing a packet of cigarettes and a lighter. She offered a cigarette to the man.

"Hannah!" Leonie scurried across to the woman. "I'm so glad to see you guys." She hesitated. Who was the bloke? She had never seen him before. "Hi Hannah."

Hannah leaned in and lit her cigarette.

"Who's the cute bloke? Are you going to introduce me?"

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"Thanks." the bloke accepted a light from Hannah. "Not a bad place. The DJ has quite a good line up of eighties and nineties classics."

Hannah ignored Leonie. "It's okay." She blew out a long stream of smoke.

"We can go somewhere else if you like."

"Thanks Josh. Maybe. Nigel, Bernard, and Chantel, are still in there. I dunno. It's been over a year since we were last here. Maybe I'm just not in the mood tonight. It's just not the same."

"Things change." said Josh nodding.

Leonie was puzzled. It wasn't that long ago they were last here.

"Yeah. I guess." Hannah closed her eyes.

"How can you not be in the mood? This place rocks!" Leonie folded her arms and gave Hannah a severe look. "You love this place."

"It just reminds me ...." Hannah looked up at Josh. "It was her favourite place"

"Dangermouse?" Josh took Hannah's hand. She hung her head, her hair covering her face, a small nod.

Leonie staggered as if struck.

"She was the energiser bunny. So much energy packed into such a tiny person. Her mischievous grin and infectious sense of humour always made us feel good to be with her. She kept us all going to the wee hours. She was high octane and never stopped."

"I wish I'd known her." said Josh.

"I'm right here." shouted Leonie.

"If that had happened, I wouldn't have stood a chance." said Hannah, a slight smile appeared.

"What's going on?" shouted Leonie.

The world shifted. A steep chute of ice and snow surrounded by rocks black and jagged dropped away below Leonie's ski tips. Fear clutched her chest. There was a growing dread with a red hot core of impending calamity. Her mind shrieked "No Stop!" but she heard herself yell with excitement as she pushed off, carving a smooth curve towards the chute, clouds of deep powder rolling in her wake. She cheered in animal delight as her skis scudded over the spring snow, and crackled across patches of ice. A gust coming down the chute her pushed her faster, carrying with it a light cloud of snow flakes. Suddenly it was gone and once again she was standing in London's neon lit streets.

Hannah laid her head on Josh's shoulder.

"Leonie was fearless." said Hannah. "There was nothing she wouldn't try."

"An adrenaline junky." Josh nodded. "I admire them too, but would never have the guts do what they do."

"You know." said Hannah. "I'm glad to hear you say that."

"Come on, lets go somewhere quiet where we can talk." said Josh.

Hannah nodded, and pulled out her phone. "I'll let the others know we're off. Oh! I've a message here from Chantel saying they left quarter of an hour ago."

"Did she say where they'd gone?"

"Umm. The Library?"

"That's that cocktail bar a couple of blocks over. It's booths are surrounded in bookshelves, full of old books. It's a cool place."

Leonie's mind was reeling. What had happened? As she stared into the space formerly occupied by her friend, a breeze touched her face, a chill wind like a knife carrying the steel smell of blood and ice. Edge, lift, edge, she sliced down the chute, the rocks on either side a blur. A gust coming down the chute after her pushed her faster, carrying with it a light cloud of snow flakes. The wind in her ears roared, a deep throated rumble almost below hearing but able to be felt deep in her chest. In her body. It was the purr of a giant cat toying with her and carried the inescapable promise of death. Suddenly it wasn't fun any more. A prickling fear seized her, and she glanced back into the roiling, tumbling, maw of the avalanche.

The flickering neon darkness enfolded her. She staggered and collapsed to her knees. Was she dead? Was that why no one could see her. She opened her eyes and found that she was once again in the streets of London's Soho district. Maybe not. Being just another face in Soho was as good as being invisible. She had to let her friends know she was still here. Resolve driving her feet, she chased after Hannah and Josh.

Through a gap in a bookshelf, Leonie spied Chantel lounging in one of the deep leather sofas.

"Chantel!"

Chantel made no sign of having heard or seen Leonie.

"Yeah it was as if we didn't have a pass to be there." Chantel laughed. "We couldn't stay."

"Sorry I missed your message." Hannah said, accepting her cocktail from the waiter. "I would have come with you. I found it hard being there too."

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“With Dangermouse, it felt like we belonged there.” Chantel put her hands behind her head and gazed at the ceiling and at nothing.

Leonie perched on the end of the sofa, the leather unyielding beneath her.

“Sorry for suggesting we go there.” said Nigel, sipping his cocktail. “I didn’t realise you’d feel that way.”

“Neither did I.” said Hannah.

“We’re like planets who’ve lost their sun.” whispered Chantel closing her eyes.

“How long have I been gone?” Leonie breathed.

She was startled when Chantel answered, “It’s been almost a year since she died.”

Leonie was rigid hardly able to breath. “Died?”

“Why is it hitting us so hard now?” Hannah wondered.

“I don’t know.” Chantel settled into her jacket, a chill wind carrying a hint of snow swirled between them.

“Maybe the cold and gloom of winter is reminding us of that trip.”

“More vitamin D?” suggested Josh.

Hannah gave him a frown.

“Sorry.” he whispered.

“I wish we’d tried harder to talk her out of her plan to ski those black runs.” said Hannah.

“I think we would have had to tie her down, and put her skis through a mulcher for that to work.” said Bernard.

“I can hear her saying it - ‘Death happens to other people.’” said Hannah.

Immediately they were enveloped in settling clouds of snow, unveiling a chaotic jumble of ice and snow rubble. Hannah looked in alarm at Chantel. Fear in their eyes, and desperation driving their feet and hands, Bernard, Chantel, Nigel, and Hannah scrambled into the debris calling Leonie’s name. Leonie stood where the avalanche washed against the tamed ski slope, watching her friends as they threw themselves at the snow and ice, ripping into it with hands and fingers. Others joined them in their frantic search. Eventually they uncovered her face. Hannah turned away, sobbing, Chantel knelt by her friend, feeling for signs of life, and gently cleared snow from her face. Nigel and Bernard, carefully dug around her, releasing her from the avalanches icy grip.

“What was that?” Bernard jerked back in his seat, released from the vision.

“You saw it too?” Hannah was aghast.

“Me too.” Chantel was sitting bolt upright, eyes wide.

“What. What happened?” said Josh. “I saw you all go rigid, and your eyes go wide.”

“That was too real.” muttered Nigel.

Leonie was silent, shocked. “It’s me.”

“This is too weird.” whispered Chantel. “I’ve got to go.”

“It’s me.” said Leonie looking up at Chantel as she stood, and gathered her bag. “I’m causing this. I’m so sorry.”

“Are you okay?” Josh reached for Hannah’s hand. “What happened?”

“Some sort of shared vision of the accident. We should go too.” said Hannah. “I’m freaking.”

“I understand now.” said Leonie sadly. “Goodbye my friends. Live well.” She slipped off her seat and hood covering her face walked out into the streaming night.



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