

Buzz

I wake up, on my back, on a blanket, sunhat over my face. I needed this escape. I've been working too hard. I can hear the soundcheck in progress: the arrhythmic thump of a drum; the almost-chord of a guitar strummed open-stringed. A monitor buzzes.

I pull the hat aside and wonder where the girls are. Half a bag of lunchtime red from the innards of a wine box discarded to enable efficient packing... A mid-afternoon nap was inevitable, a consequence of trying to relive my festival heyday. I'm not twenty-five anymore. A fly buzzes near my ear. I sleepily swat it away.

Behind me, the wheels of flight cases ker-chung-ker-chung-ker-chung over sections of interlocking metal carpet. I'm reminded of the spring when Jack learned to skateboard for endless hours along the paving outside, ker-chung-ker-chung-ker-chung-ing while I tried to write, staring at a blank screen, lost for words. That was the spring when nothing happened, the locked-down months when time lost its meaning and the outside world, and all the people living there, only existed behind a glass screen, with the background buzz of a poorly connected headset.

I sit up. People are gathering now. Some have their masks on already. We spent so long craving freedom, but we're still a bit scared of it. I wouldn't class this as a crowd yet, so I keep mine in my pocket. I lean to one side to see the stage properly, but there's still the same swarm of black-t-shirted roadies bent over instruments and electrics, twiddling, turning, tuning. My phone, in my pocket, buzzes, but it's a low battery, not Shell.

It's getting busy now. I'm starting to get mildly concerned - that my family are not going to be able to find me, undercut with a residual mistrust of mass gatherings. I put my mask on. They'll have a better chance of seeing me if I stand up. I untie the handbag from my ankle, gather up the blanket and get to my feet.

"I'll take that." Shell's voice is muffled by her mask. She slides next to me and reclaims her bag.

"Didn't think you'd find me."

"Spotted you a mile off, Bigfoot. Dani's down the front. She met someone from school at the bar. They seemed friendly."

She shrugged. We're still getting used to the fact that our kids can have lives that don't require our rubber-stamp.

The buzz, now, is the crowd. This is when they used to surge forward. They're excited, but we don't abandon caution like that anymore. The band appears. I crane

my neck; Shell is doing the same, but she's got little chance of seeing much if I can't. And then she squeals and holds her breath.

I see him. Jack strides confidently to the front of the stage, casually grabbing a pre-tuned guitar from a stand and slinging it over his shoulder. He steps up to the mic. I swell with pride. The drummer counts them in.

"This one's called Lockdown!" Jack yells.