

**From the story ‘Mistaken Identity’, which can be found in *Collections: One*.**

The last time I went to Glastonbury, I mistook a stranger for my sister.

We’d arranged to meet up at the back of the West Holts Stage, at the end of a set by a band that my sister wanted to see. The plan had seemed failsafe, but the area was a bottleneck: the crowd took a long time to file out, with more people arriving from other directions. To make matters worse, a light rain began to fall, prompting coats to be donned and hoods to go up. I spent so long scanning faces as they moved past, going from left to right, from left to right, from left to right, that when I looked away to give my eyes a rest, the trees appeared to sway from side to side.

When the area cleared, I saw her – the girl I presumed, without a moment’s doubt, to be my sister – standing beside a cluster of bins. She was scrolling on her phone. Her hair was flecked with rain.

She didn’t look up as I approached.

‘A brother,’ I said, touching her on the arm and gesturing above her head, ‘is as easily forgotten as an umbrella.’

She studied my eyes and face briefly, but she appeared to freeze, and said nothing.

I pulled my hand away and folded my arms. ‘Sorry. I thought ... Have you read *Umbrella?*’

My sister was in the second year of a literature degree, and I thought that she was a fan of Will Self.

She frowned. ‘Do I have a red umbrella?’

I laughed, although her response was both funny and sad. She must’ve thought

I was drunk.

‘No, the book,’ I said. ‘By Will Self?’

She looked at me blankly.

‘It’s a quote,’ I explained. ‘From Will Self. In fact, it’s not – it’s a quote from James Joyce.’ I’d performed countless routines in front of audiences up and down the country; I’d been the warm-up act in a TV studio with an audience of three hundred; I’d even done improvised comedy. But my voice wavered, and I could feel myself reddening. ‘It’s at the start of Will Self’s new book. I thought – never mind.’

‘I had no idea what you were talking about.’

‘Forget it,’ I said. ‘It was stupid.’

The last time I’d seen my actual sister was at a family christening more than four years earlier. She’d just turned fifteen – I’d missed her birthday – and I was twenty-two. All I could recall about that encounter was that her face had gained some definition in the time since I’d last seen her, and that an aunt had remarked on how much she was starting to resemble me.

I pushed my hood back and pointed towards the stage. ‘So what did you think?’

‘I’m sorry?’

‘The band.’

The shards of conversation as groups of people trudged by, and the munching of their wellies in the mud, and the swells of bass from different stages, were muted but refused to be silenced by the rain.

‘I didn’t see them,’ she said.

‘Oh,’ I said. ‘You didn’t, then, in the end.’

She gave me a look I couldn’t decipher – in part quizzical, but mostly ponderous. Then she checked her phone, before gazing past me, scanning the people

walking by as though she was still waiting for me to show up.

The sky was a throbbing grey. A soundcheck was taking place. The field had emptied but for a handful of hardcore fans of the next act, who were waiting up against the barrier in front of the stage.

I wiped raindrops from my fringe. 'What did you want to see next?'

I slid the mini programme out of its plastic cover and began to study it.

'I don't know,' she said. 'I'm actually trying to meet up with my friend.'

'Oh. OK. She's coming here?'

'He,' she said.

'My mistake.'

She sighed. 'I don't know what's happening. I'm waiting to hear from him.' She held up her phone. 'The signal's so poor.'

'I don't have that problem,' I said. 'But only because my battery's already dead. Yes, Glastonbury's bad for that.'

She shifted from one foot to the other, staring at her phone, and then gave me a sideways glance. 'You know what. Maybe you're right. Maybe it's better to go somewhere else. See if I can get a signal there.'

'I was thinking about the rain, as much as anything.'

She squinted at the sky, and grimaced. 'It's not getting any better, is it?'

I put my programme away. 'Let's start walking. Where's nearest?'