

## MOOR BABY by Des Dillon

Ivry Friday ma Carline drove down tae Err tae see her new boyfriend, Bobby.

Hings were gonnae be diffrint when he hid a job in Glasga bit for now they were stuck wi her drivin down therr ivry week in this oul Mini she got fir wallies. Tae git therr she drove down tae Bothwell an over the bridge up tae East Kilbride. Then she hid tae go through Eaglesham an across the Fennick Moor. That wis a right dreich place at the best ae times. High winswept moor land. Full ae grouse an pheasants an telly masts. Nut a tree fir ten mile. Nut a house or a farm. On a grey day this place wis as close tae nuhin as ye'd iver git this side ae purgatory. Carline nivir noticed it much because she wis cocooned in her car wi the radio on. Ronnie Laine's 'How Come' wis playin. If she'd thought about the wurds she wid huv laughed – they were aw about witchcraft. Bit she nivir thought ae they hings at that age. She wis young an she wis in love. Therr wis only her an the dark glass an the lights ae the odd passin car. The pleasure ae the radio nursin her aw the way tae her lover in the south. Beside the sea. Wherr his faimlie used tae fish tae they took it aw away.

Wan night in late October Carline wis drivin the oul Mini over the Fennick Moor. The rain wis skelpin down lik broken steel rods. The rods splinterin as their ends touched the tarmac. The cats-eyes were peerin through the bars lik prisoners on a conveyor belt tryin tae escape; bit therr's always more bars. The rain wis relentless. Bit therr wis a waarm glow in Carline because in the backseat wis a box. An in the box wis a pair o size 9 black patent leather shoes she'd bought for Bobby. It wisnae his birthday or nuhin bit because she wis workin an he wisnae she bought him sumhin now an then tae cheer him up.

She'd been on the Moor five minutes. Up an up the windin road she went. It could be anywherr when ye luckt at it. The Hielands. South America even. Ten minutes an she hadnae seen another car. None behind her an none passin fae up ahead. The

weather wis that bad people hid decidit tae stey in. Watch the telly. Bit Carline wis in love. A wee spit ae rain wisnae gonnae stop her.

Visibility drapped tae she could see jist twinty feet ahead. She pressed her face close tae the winscreen. Drove on. An on. She slowed down tae thurty mile an hour. The rain wis lik bullets on the roof now. She drove slower an slower. Then, up ahead, she saw sumhin on the road. She strained tae see whit it wis. The wipers were furiously skitin fae side tae side an she could see the hing for half a secont then it wis gone intae the waash ae the watter on the winscreen. Slow, slow, slow. She got ten feet away fae it when she realised whit it wis.

It wis a wean. A wee wean lyin in the middle ae the road. In the middle ae the night. In the middle ae the worst rainstorm fir years. In the middle ae the Moor. She skiddit tae a stop. When she git out the car, it wis lik a scene fae a film. The car wis stannin aw squinty on the road wi the door flung open an movin back an furrin the win. Threatenin tae bang an then swing open again. Carline paused atween the car an the wean. She wis half drawn tae the safety ae the car; half pulled tae the rescue ae the wean. She bent furrin an pushed through the gale that wis howlin aw about her. The rain wis bitin intae her eyes. Bit she hid tae git tae the wean. She hid tae git tae the wean.

Bit it wisnae a wean. When she got therr. It wis a doll done up tae luck lik a wean. Nut lik a wee lassie dis a doll up – bit lik an adult wid dae a doll up. Lik an adult wid dae a doll up tae luck jist lik a wean. Sactly lik a wean.

Carline grabbed it bi the plastic leg an took it back tae the car. She nivir knew why she did that. It wis only a daud ae plastic an she could hae left it therr or flung it in the ditch at the side. Bit it wis the shape that persuadit her. Got intae her subconscious. Some ae her waantit tae spin it intae the trees bit her female instincts hid been tricked an were still recoverin so she took it intae the car.

The watter wis runnin aff both ae them. She flung the doll on the flair at the passenger side as her bahookie hut the seat, slammed the door an drove aff. She wis bealin awright, cursin whitivir eejit hid done such a stupit hing. On a night lik this an aw. Bit her anger soon subsidit. She'd done a guid turn really. It might huv caused a crash. Two or three cars close thegither. Front wan clocks the wean. Slams on the brakes. A car's hurlin the other way. Bang. Could've been a right mess so it could've. Aye, she might hae avertit an accident right enough. So she wis feelin awright. The rain hid died or at least it wisnae horizontal any mair because she wis on the brae down comin aff the Moor.

That wis when thae headlights startit flashin in her side an rear view mirrors. She turnt the rear view mirror away bit the lights behind were joined bi the orange click ae hazards. She wound her windae down an pullt the wing mirror back so the blindin wid stop. Then the car behind's horn startit goin beep, beep, beep. Carline pit her fit on the accelerator. She git faster. The other car git faster. Therr wis nut another car on the road. Next hing the car tried tae overtake her. They were both goin lik the hammers ae hell.

Carline instinctively pullt out an bumped the other motor so it wis forced tae

pull

back.

Then, Carline seen salvation.

Up ahead were the lights an lines ae cats-eyes that marked the A77. She acceleratit mair. Birlid ontae the dual cairriageway an pit the accelerator tae the flair. She'd been in fourth gear aw the time. She made some distance atween her an the chasin car. Bit the other car must've been mair powerful. It wis gainin on her. Catchin up. Therr wis no way she wis gonnae risk stoppin an tryin tae flag down another driver. Nut on these roads. Nut in this weather. Nut in this darkness.

The car caught up an they were side bi side tearin down the A77. The car wis tryin tae push her intae the side ae the road. Nut bi duntin her bit bi gettin its bunnit in front an swervin inwards so that she wis forced closer tae the kerb. Carline braked hard. So did the car. She git a guid luck at the driver. He lucked lik he wis no right in the head. He wis screamin an pointin fir her tae git on the verge. He hid his windae rollt down an his herr wis wet wi the storm, aw stuck tae his cheeks an forehead. His eyes were bulgin lik they were tryin tae talk.

The road suddenly narraad tae wan lane an he hid tae pull in behind her. That gave Carline the chance tae git away some distance. She slammed the brakes on so that the guy hud tae slam on his. He duntit her a bit then braked, pullin back. As he moved up again she repeatit the move. This time he braked afore he shuntit her. She's no daft, ma Carline. She done the same hing another three times. Then she slowed down tae forty. He slowed down. She pressed the accelerator right tae the flair bit at the same time tapped the brake pedal so that the lights came on. As he braked, her car wis speedin away. She pit at least five hunner yards atween them. An she wis jist sighin some relief when therr he wis, right up behind her again. Carline startit tae brek intae tears.

“Help me, help me!”

She wis shoutin an screamin tae the other caurs, zoomin past in the opposite direction lik wee bubbles ae hope floatin up fae a deep dark burn. Wan man, she minds, wis chantin a song as his car whizzed past. Nae way wis she gonnae let this maniac git a haud ae her. Nae way wis she lettin him grind her down. She took the white line in the middle ae the road an made sure he couldnae pass. He jouked this way; she jouked that. He jinked this road; she jinked the ither.

Aw the way the chase rummled on. Right tae the Prestwick roundabout. Carline bumped the edge ae the roundabout as she screeched roun the curve an on tae the Err stretch o the A77. Cause she wis full ae fear she hid the accelerator tae the flair

an got guid traction goin roun the bend. Her pursuer didnae. He went straight intae the roundabout an out the other side, spinnin on the road an endin up facin the wrong way. Carline laughed a lang shriek. An out intae the night she went. Jist in case she turnt her lights aff an flicked the full beam on so that she could see wherr she wis goin bit anybody comin up behind widnae see her. She clocked the sign – Err, five mile – an felt better.

Bang!

Therr wis a dunt. A jolt. He wis still therr. Right behind her. The shuntin made the doll roll about the passenger flair, its eyes glintin an its face grinnin as the sodium lights slid their ghostly yella over its face. It luckt lik it wis laughin. It sounded lik it wis laughin. The streetlights passed above lik seconts on a terrible clock measurin out the last ae Carline’s life.

She strained intae the curve ae the Err roundabout. She screamed the engine down intae the town. She crashed right over the roundabout an intae the polis station waw. She git out the car scrammlin on her hands an feet afore straightenin up an runnin as fast as she could. The chasin car came tae a stop on the roundabout an the guy git out an chased her. She ran an he wis right behind her. She wis nearly at the front door ae the station when he grabbed her bi both airms.

“Leave me alone, leave me alone!” she screamed.

He twistit her roun an his eyes glowered right intae hers.

“Don’t kill me, mister,” she wis shoutin. “Don’t kill me.”

Bit he pit his fingir on his lips an shooshed her tae she wis quiet an only her hard breathin could be heard. Pressin intae her shooders, he pinned her back tae the waw.

“I’m nut gonnae kill ye. I’m nut gonnae hurt ye.” He spoke clear an slow. “I’m nut gonnae harm ye in any way. In fact, I’m tryin tae help ye, hen.”

“H...help?”

“Aye, help.”

“How?”

“I wis only tryin tae tell ye that whin ye stopped tae pick up that doll way back therr on the Moor, a man git in the back seat ae yir car.”

“Whit?”

“Whin ye stopped tae pick up the wee doll, a man git in the back seat ae yir car.”

Carline screamed an screamed. The polis eventually git up an came tae see why therr wis a car smashed agin their waw; a secont yin squinty on the roundabout haudin up traffic an a greetin lassie crumpled beside a man. Wance they arrestit as many folk as they could, the story startit tae unfankle. When they searched Carline’s car there wis no doll. Bit the back seats hid been slashed an slashed tae they were jist red leather ribbons wi the stuffin puffin out. They said a knife similar tae the wans used in slaughterhooses fir guttin pigs wis used. The black patent leather shoes Carline hid bought fir Bobby were gone an aw.

Carline got an awfie fright. She takes the train now tae see Bobby in Err an when he gits his job up near Glasga she’ll no need tae go down that way again. Oh an by the way, in case ye were wunnerin, they caught him. The man that hid been cooried down in Carline’s back seat aw the lang car chase down fae the Moor. They caught him three month later. Up at Fennick Moor. Stannin on the tap ae a car wi a wummin’s head in wan han an the wee doll in the other. He wis howlin at the moon an the blood wis drippin ontae his nice size 9 patent leather shoes.

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