

Come Home

Please come home. I won't be angry.

I'm standing here holding a photo of you, the one from the prom. You're in your long pink dress, hair up in curls, shape shifting from a child into an adult. I want to take you in my arms and hug you. To feel your fragile bones beneath the slippery dress. Your fine hair tickling my nose, smelling of strawberries. My fingers catching on the jaggy thistle backs of your earrings. Earrings! How we argued about those. Too young to have your ears pierced. Wait till you get to high school.

Just come back home and I would let you puncture your skin in any way you wanted. Multiple rings and chains in your ears; a nose ring; ridges of studs; tattoos of eagles.

I've walked down that street so often I recognise the bumps in the pavement, like the face of an old friend. I can avoid the potholes without looking. That's where you disappeared. Last seen near the Fire Station. The blood red engines watching over the street – weren't they meant to protect you? Come home.

That night I ran up and down shouting for you. I didn't feel the rain creeping down my neck, because of the colder fear prickling my chest. I didn't feel the water crashing like waves over my legs as vans and lorries hit puddles in the road. When the Firemen made me come inside, I felt a burning pain in my fingers as they warmed up. In my gut was the same burning pain, which had nothing to do with the bitter coffee they gave me.

I still walk the hard ridges of that street every anniversary of your disappearance, handing out this photo to passers-by, in the hope someone will remember you. Attaching this letter to the lamp-posts, in the hope you'll read it.

I need to believe you've run away, that you'll come home someday. Just let me know you're ok. Don't worry, I won't be angry.

Rhona McAdam