

## Whoever You Are, You're Not Juliet

What kind of lover turns up to a *Romeo & Juliet* style Leeds-Dover-Calais-Paris Ultimate Romantic Getaway with a *holdall*? You don't quite dare to ask your lover this. Instead, you grab the ugly grey lump from his shoulder and tell him he looks like some wannabe gangsta from, like, 1999.

The lover you've fantasised about running away with would've shrugged, winked, and said wha-d-ya mean, *wannabee*? In a seriously shitty New Yawwwk accent, before holding up his hands, saying, *Kaaay*, you got me, I'm a loser.

But the lover you're running away with isn't the one you fantasised about running away with.

The lover you're running away with yanks the holdall so hard, you smack down onto the tarmac. You 'ent smacked to the ground like that since you was a kid, and the ground is way further from your face than it was then, and you bite your lip to stop from crying because crying isn't the kind of thing to do on a *Romeo & Juliet* style Getaway.

"Sorry." He helps you up, but only after unlocking the door of the equally 1999-ish mashed-up car he's "borrowed," then shoving the holdall under the driver's seat. "Don't touch that thing, OK?"

"Why not?"

He does the paranoid looking over each shoulder thing: left, right, left, right. "Someone'll spy us if we don't get a move on."

"It even work?"

"Course it fucking works. You think I'm a mongee, or what? Now get the fuck in before someone sees us."

The car stinks of strangers.

One, two, three – "don't say nothing!" – four twists of the ignition and you're off. You don't watch the city in which you've built the life you're now running away from shrink and blur into the distance; you watch his profile – the jutting chin, the crooked nose, the eyes you can inexplicably see through – whilst reminding yourself this is what people mean when they say, "follow your heart."

"Fucking hell," are the first words Jay says as the traffic slows to a still outside Bradford.

You look for the button to buzz down the windows but this car is proper old school: you actually have to wind down the window with your hands. You stick out your head and see nothing but elbows and clouds of exhaust smoke.

"It's better up ahead," you say, even though this is the opposite of what you just saw.

He says nothing, so you say it again. He shakes his head and says, "Sorry, what did you say?"

You laugh. "Honestly. You're worse than my Dad."

"Thought you said your Dad was a psycho? You saying I'm a psycho? Is that what you're saying?"

"My Dad's not a ... Oh. It don't matter."

The distance between you and your old life is stretching, inch by inch, metre by metre, and then suddenly you're on the road, and the signs are all huge and white and say only THE SOUTH. And you see the holdall's grubby strap flapping out from under his seat,

and you wonder, maybe this is the strange new thing that is stiffening the air between you? Or maybe it's that your heart has no sense of direction at all.