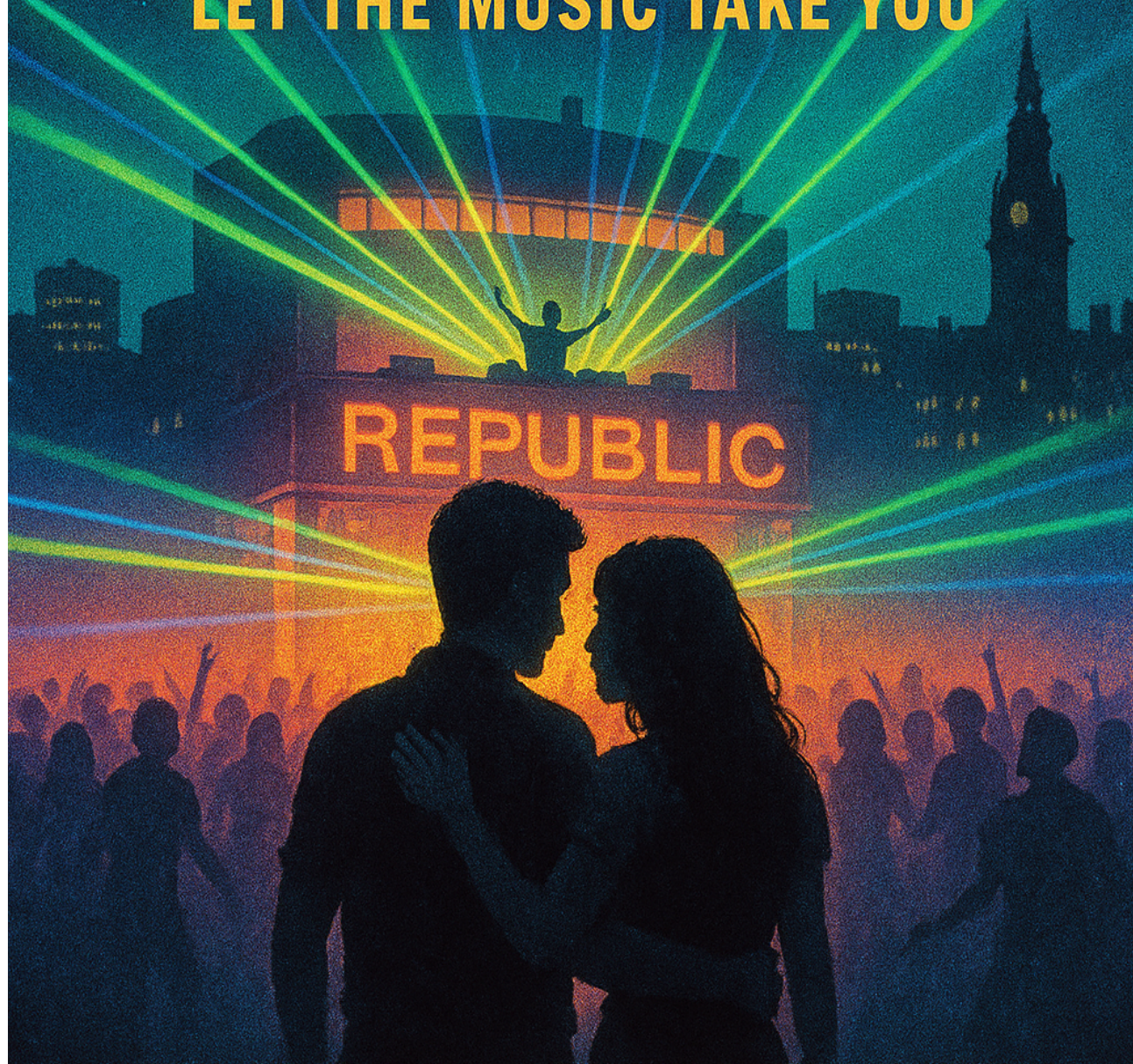


BASSLINE ROMANCE

LET THE MUSIC TAKE YOU



DAVE PAYNE

Chapter One: The Night They Met

A cold wind curled down West Street, rattling kebab wrappers. Stuart was heading towards Matilda Street where Gatecrasher had moved from the Aldelphi, you could hear the distant thump of bass. Somewhere beneath it all under the grey sky, past the pub queues and underdressed students stood Republic nightclub, an old warehouse that started life as the Roper and Wreaks works. From outside, it looked like a car park with ideas above its station. Inside, it was a portal to another world.

This was Gatecrasher. Home to booming basslines, laser lights, and a generation high on euphoria, hope, and Mitsubishis strong enough to make you believe your hands were made of clouds. Word was the pink doves were smooth and dreamy, the speckled dolphins were pure fire, and the blue punishers were to be taken only if you had someone to hold onto.

Stuart, 24, was new to all this. Well, not new, but still learning. He'd borrowed a pinstripe shirt from Gav and sprayed on enough Lynx Africa to confuse a sniffer dog. By day, he was a part-time assistant at Curry's and a full-time disappointment to his mum. But by night, he was chasing something bigger—some feeling, some rhythm, something more than his clapped-out Vauxhall Nova and reduced Safeway sandwiches.

His flat was a bedsit above a defunct hair salon, with one radiator that only worked in July and a gas hob with ideas of self-harm. He'd grown up in Stocksbridge, in a house where the walls were covered in faded wallpaper and the soundtrack was Radio Sheffield and arguments about heating bills. His dad had long gone off to Spain with a younger woman and a failed dream of running a tapas bar. His mum still called every Sunday and asked why he wasn't on *that Changing Rooms* show since he liked speakers so much.

He was leaning against a sticky pillar near the toilets, nervously checking his watch. Daz was late. Typical.

"Waiting for Daz?"

The voice came from a girl with spiky red hair, a silver bomber jacket covered in sewn-on patches—smiley faces, yin-yangs, and a faded one that said "*No sleep 'til Don Valley*." She had cheekbones sharp enough to slice a lemon and a grin that said she'd been here before—and probably once danced on that speaker stack over there.

"Yeah," Stuart replied. "He said he had some, uh... 'vitamin supplements'."

"You mean Mitsubishis?"

"Yeah. With the stamp."

"I'm Sarah."

"Stuart."

"You look like you need looking after, Stuart."

"Do I?"

"You've been checking your watch every thirty seconds. That's a rookie move. You'll get clocked by security and pulled."

He looked sheepish.

"I'm just nervous."

"Don't be. Daz'll show. Probably been sidetracked chatting breeze about how he once DJed after Judge Jules. Total bollocks. Like that time he claimed Sasha handed him a bottle of water after his warm-up set at the Hacienda. Never happened."

Sarah, 23, was no stranger to chaos. She worked at a tiny record shop on Division Street called *Rhythms*, where she spent most of her time reorganising vinyl, fending off crusty lads who thought they knew more about ambient trance than her, and giving unsolicited life advice to students.

Her flatmate Jules was an art school dropout who believed eyebrows were optional and had once exhibited a sculpture made entirely out of lighters and old condoms. Sarah's family had long since stopped asking when she'd "settle down."

She was a regular on the Sheffield scene—The Arches, The Limit, even dodgy warehouse parties in Neepsend. She'd once DJed a squat rave in a derelict school near Manor Top with nothing but a generator, a pile of TDK tapes, and a lightbulb swinging from the ceiling. Her sets sometimes ended up on Pitch FM, the pirate radio station based somewhere in Burngreave—or so the rumour went.

She still talked about the night she saw Sasha play an early warm-up set in a sticky basement on the outskirts of Leeds. No one knew who he was back then, but his transitions were flawless—mixing Orbital into Jam & Spoon like it was alchemy. Sarah said that was the night she decided to learn how to mix properly, not just fade in and out.

Stuart relaxed slightly. Sarah had that kind of presence—electric, calm, and crackling all at once.

Then the beat dropped.

It was *Grace – Not Over Yet*. The synths soared like angels on uppers. Sarah's eyes lit up.

"I love this tune!"

She grabbed his hand without warning and dragged him onto the dancefloor.

Gatecrasher's main room exploded around them. Lasers sliced the smoke. The bass hit like a defibrillator. Paul Oakenfold's mix was in full swing—layering, teasing, building toward a drop so massive it might take half the ceiling with it.

Stuart danced like a man politely trying to escape a wasp. Sarah, on the other hand, danced. Arms in the air, body liquid, hair flying. She didn't care what she looked like. That was freedom. That was power.

Around them were all the tribes of the Sheffield rave: lads in Reebok Classics and Adidas poppers; girls in cyber-goth trousers, UV-painted faces, and faux-fur bras. Glowsticks twirled. Someone was rubbing Vicks under their nose while another bloke in a surgical mask shouted, "*Oi, smell that—it's minty madness!*"

They moved together, bumping shoulders and grinning. At one point Stuart shouted something about Gav being stuck in the queue with Big Dave, but Sarah just pointed at the DJ booth. Scott Bond had taken over, arms aloft, mixing *Red Sun's This Love* into the set. The crowd howled.

It was magic.

They danced for what felt like hours. At one point, Sarah handed Stuart a bottle of water and kissed him on the cheek. He couldn't stop grinning.

Was this what it was always like? This scene? This mad, euphoric bliss?

Just past 3AM, the lights dimmed, and a familiar staccato beat began—*Born Slippy* by Underworld. The entire club reacted like someone had won the FA Cup.

Everyone. Went. Off.

Sweat. Smoke. Tears. Arms. Love.

Sarah leaned in close. Her lips brushed his ear.

"You're alright, you know."

"You too."

Then they kissed. Properly. Surrounded by strangers, soaked in sweat and strobe lights. Right there, on the sticky dancefloor of Gatecrasher.

It wasn't elegant, but it was real.

By the time they staggered outside, Gav had somehow acquired a traffic cone and Big Dave was trying to convince a taxi driver to accept half a Twix as payment.

"What happened to you?" Gav asked, looking at Stuart's ruffled hair and dazed grin.

"I met someone," Stuart said.

Sarah winked. "We shared a bottle of water. That's serious."

Big Dave climbed into the back of the cab, cuddling the traffic cone. "I think I'm in love too."

They ended up back at Sarah and Jules's flat near Ecclesall Road. A packet of Monster Munch was split between five ravers (Wasn't the packets bigger then). Someone put *Smokebelch II* on the stereo, and everyone lay on the carpet in silence, letting the melody wash over them.

Flyers littered the floor: illegal warehouse raves near Darnall, SubMerge midweekers, and an old flyer for "The Bounce" at an abandoned foundry near Kelham Island. Jules had taped over *Top of the Pops* with a Dreamscape '93 tape pack. The smell of incense mixed with stale Rizla and lemon squash.

That was how Sunday mornings were meant to be.

That was the start of everything.

Chapter Two: The Morning After

The morning light dribbled weakly through the mismatched curtains of Sarah's flat, filtering through cigarette smoke and particles of rave dust. Somewhere in the kitchen, a kettle clicked to life. Jules groaned on the sofa like a pensioner mid-wrestling match.

Stuart opened one eye, regretting the decision instantly. He was lying next to Big Dave, who was spooning a traffic cone with all the affection of a man in a long-term relationship.

Sarah was curled up in a blanket in the armchair, sipping tea from a mug that said "*Don't Talk To Me Before 1997.*"

"You alive?" she asked.

"Not legally."

"Your jaw was going like a sewing machine in Crasher. I thought you were going to bite through your tongue."

He sat up slowly.

"What happened after we got back?"

"You fell asleep during *Dream Universe* woke up demanding beans on toast, then passed out again on Gav's coat."

"Sounds about right."

Jules shuffled into the room with sunglasses on, holding a kettle in one hand and a half-eaten biscuit in the other.

"Pitch FM's on," she announced, nodding toward the battered stereo.

They all listened for a moment. It was the unmistakable sound of underground trance—gritty, beautiful, full of heart. The illegal radio station had been broadcasting from some dodgy attic in Burngreave for months. It was their soundtrack. Their heartbeat.

"Who's that mixing?" Stuart asked.

"DJ Axis. Lives near Hillsborough. Rumour is he once got electrocuted mid-set and finished the mix anyway."

"Legend."

They listened in silence for a bit. Sarah eventually stood and stretched.

"I need air. Anyone fancy a walk?"

They ended up at Endcliffe Park. The sky was bleak. A dog chased a pigeon. Gav tagged along halfway there with a Mars bar and no socks. It was peaceful in a weird way. The rave had faded from their muscles, but the memory still pulsed in the background.

"You always go that hard?" Stuart asked.

Sarah laughed. "Sometimes harder. Depends on the track and the company."

"And last night?"

"You did alright. Bit like Bambi on Es, but charming."

He grinned, then paused.

"I don't know why, but this feels like more than just another come-down."

"Maybe it is."

They talked about everything and nothing—school, bad jobs, worse dates, music they loved. Sarah confessed she'd once tried to be a music journalist but had only ever written one gig review and accidentally slagged off a band she fancied. Stuart admitted he'd once DJ'd his cousin's wedding and mixed Scooter into Simply Red by accident.

Later that evening, back at Stuart's bedsit, they sat listening to Pitch FM again, sharing a Pot Noodle and dreaming aloud.

"We should do our own night," Sarah said suddenly.

"You mean like... run a club?"

"Or something. Something that's ours. No gatekeepers. Just music. Vibes. The right people."

"Alright then. Let's make it happen."

Outside, the city began to light up again.

And in a tiny, smoke-stained flat, two ravers plotted something big.

Chapter Three: The Raid

Gatecrasher was at full tilt, a heaving, writhing organism of sweat and sound inside the Republic nightclub. You could taste the bass before you heard it—like electricity laced with citrus.

Sarah had wrangled a spot near the front for Scott Bond's late-night set, dragging Stuart and the gang—Gav, Jules, and Big Dave—through a crowd of glowstick wavers and shirtless nutters. Everyone was buzzing. Gav had consumed what he thought was a strawberry Calippo but turned out to be a frozen shot of vodka. Jules had glitter on her face that wasn't hers. Big Dave was pacing like a nightclub security guard who had lost his radio.

Scott Bond dropped Floor Essence, and the crowd howled. Stuart's brain was vibrating in perfect sync with the strobes. Sarah danced with her eyes closed, mouthing lyrics to songs with no words.

Then the lights changed.

Not the nice ones. Not lasers.

Fluorescent. Steady. Unforgiving.

"EVERYONE STAY WHERE YOU ARE!"

The music cut like a guillotine.

The vibe imploded.

Red-and-blue lights spun in the rafters. It was a raid.

Police swarmed through the crowd. Some ravers tried to look sober. Others tried to look invisible. Gav attempted both and walked into a bin. Jules hissed, “*Look casual!*” and pretended to be tying her shoe—only she wasn’t wearing any. Big Dave offered an officer a Werther’s Original.

“We’re just here for the music, pal.”

Sarah grabbed Stuart’s arm.

“Fire exit. Left of the bar.”

They bolted.

The cold night hit them like a slap. Rain lashed down as they ran into an alley, slipping behind a skip.

“Bloody hell,” Stuart panted. “That escalated.”

“First time you’ve been chased out of a club by the cops?”

“Definitely the first time with a traffic cone under my arm,” he said, realising he’d nicked Big Dave’s mascot.

They caught a cab to a house party in Walkley, where a guy named Muzzy was DJing in a kitchen lit entirely by lava lamps. The walls pulsed. Someone was juggling satsumas. *Pitch FM* crackled from a battered boombox in the corner.

Sarah and Stuart crashed on a pile of coats, still buzzing, still high on adrenaline and each other.

“You alright?” she asked.

“I just nearly died of heart failure in a toilet stampede,” he said. “And weirdly, I’ve never felt more alive.”

“Welcome to the scene.”

They danced again before the night was out.

Just the two of them.

No lasers. No strobes. No pyros. Just *Pitch FM* and a song they didn’t know the name of—but swore they’d never forget.

Chapter Four: Midweek Blues and Euro Fever

Sheffield was starting to hum in a different way. The city had become one of the host locations for the European Football Championship—EURO ’96—and there were Union Jacks and England shirts everywhere. They clashed beautifully with bucket hats and neon rave flyers still clinging to lampposts, relics of another kind of loyalty.

The group had just come off a solid weekend—three clubs in two nights and a *Pitch FM*-hosted afterparty that ended with Gav attempting to grill sausages over a tea light.

But now it was Tuesday, and reality was knocking.

Stuart sat at his kitchen table, chewing a pen lid, staring at a copy of the *Sheffield Star* open to the job section.

“Six positions for telesales,” he muttered. “One for warehouse packing. And a bloke offering to pay someone to dress up as a gnome and deliver birthday cards.”

He circled it.

Sarah was doing slightly better. *SubMerge*, the gritty club near Devonshire Green, had finally given her a midweek residency—Tuesdays from 9 p.m. till close. Not exactly peak time, but it was hers. She even got a bit of pay and free drinks.

Last week, a punter had come up and told her she dropped the best version of *Not Over Yet* he’d ever heard. She nearly cried.

They met for chips outside the Peace Gardens, watching the fountains stutter as a school trip passed through in a blur of flapping cagoules.

“You ever feel like we’re just spinning plates?” Stuart asked.

Sarah shrugged. “That’s life, isn’t it? Spin the plates, drop a few, glue ’em back, do it again.”

The real kicker came when Stuart’s mum rang.

“You watching the football?” she asked.

“Er, yeah, course.”

“I saw Hillsborough’s got a few games. We should get tickets. Family outing.”

“I’m not taking Nana to see Italy vs Czech Republic, Mum.”

Later that week, they all watched England vs. Switzerland at The Howard. The pub was electric. Gav wore a St. George’s flag as a cape. Big Dave painted his face. Sarah made bets on who’d cry during the national anthem.

(Answer: *Big Dave*.)

Pitch FM ran a cheeky football special in the build-up, mixing in an acid remix of *Three Lions* with snippets of Gazza interviews. It was chaotic and brilliant.

After the game, slightly tipsy and riding the patriotic high, Sarah took Stuart by the hand.

“We’re doing it, aren’t we?”

“Doing what?”

“This. Living. Dancing. Surviving. Planning. All of it.”

“Yeah,” he said, looking at her against the backdrop of a chanting city. “We’re not over yet.”

Chapter Five: Field of Dreams

By the end of June ’96, the city was still buzzing from football fever, but Sarah had her eyes on something even bigger—something she and Stuart could build themselves. Not just another club night. A rave. Their own. Out in the open.

“Trust me,” she said one Sunday, pouring hot water into a mug of instant coffee.
“Gatecrasher’s mint, but it’s not ours. We need something we don’t have to sneak out of during a raid.”

They roped in the usual suspects.

Jules volunteered to handle décor and visuals. Gav somehow acquired a secondhand fog machine and a bag of questionable fireworks. Big Dave promised to organise the generator, saying he knew a bloke from Dinnington who owed him a favour after a “bouncy castle incident.”

After two weeks of wandering the outskirts of Sheffield in Big Dave’s Micra, they found it: a half-abandoned field near Dore, framed by trees, mostly hidden from view, and best of all—dry enough not to sink the decks.

They called it **Illuminate**.

Sarah made a flyer in black and white—photocopied at the uni library using Jules’ student login. A dolphin leapt over a soundwave. There were smiley faces. No address, just a phone number and the words:

“Pitch in. Show up. Illuminate.”

Word spread. People started ringing the hotline. *Pitch FM* mentioned it during a Thursday night set. A rumour spread that Paul Oakenfold might turn up.

He didn’t. But the buzz was real.

On the night, cars trickled in from as far as Huddersfield and Derby. Jules strung fairy lights across trees. Gav set up a tea tent (which turned out to be just a flask and a bag of Jelly Babies). Sarah took her place behind the decks.

She had planned a set that builds into the night starting with tracks such as: *Are you out there*, *Calling Your Name*, *Not Over Yet*, *Children*; Before to tracks such as: *For an Angel*, *Floor Essence*, *Dreams* and finishing with a remix of *Born Slippy*.

It was everything they wanted.

No bouncers.

No curfews.

Just the moon, the music, and the smell of wet grass and energy drinks.

They danced until their knees gave out. Someone brought sparklers. Someone else brought a projector and beamed visuals onto an old bedsheet. Stuart stood watching it all, the sound vibrating through his chest.

He turned to see Sarah silhouetted in the glow of lasers and moonlight, completely at ease. She saw him watching and smiled.

He stepped forward and kissed her.
Not just a 'we're mashed and it's 4 a.m.' kiss.
A real one.

"Look what we did," she said.
"And no one's legged it from the police yet."
"Well, the night is young."

They held each other as *Born Slippy* played through the dawn.

Mist rose around the field.
People swayed in hoodies and foil blankets.
Stuart whispered:

"This... this is it, isn't it?"

Sarah didn't answer. She just rested her head on his chest.

Somewhere in the distance, *Pitch FM* was still broadcasting.

Chapter Six: Trouble and Tenderness

Autumn 1996 brought with it a slow change. The leaves fell early that year, blanketing the city in a crisp, golden hush. But for Sarah and Stuart, things weren't as peaceful as they seemed.

Sarah's Tuesday night residency at *SubMerge* had blown up. Word had spread, and her sets were being mentioned on *Pitch FM*'s shoutouts. She was even asked to do a guest set at *Club Zero*—a glossy new venue with high ceilings and no soul.

For Stuart, things weren't rising the same way.

He'd picked up a job doing speaker repairs at a second-hand shop off London Road, but the hours were patchy and the pay was pitiful. Most days, he sat in the cold back room re-soldering cables and listening to tapes through half-working Walkmans.

The distance between them crept in slowly, like smoke under a door.

They were still together—still hugging in bed, still sharing late-night chips—but the spark was flickering.

One Friday night, Sarah was booked at *Club Zero*. Stuart was meant to come, but work ran late, and he'd missed her set. He arrived just in time to see some bloke in a silk shirt trying to talk her into an afterparty.

The fight that followed spilled into the smoking area.

"I'm trying here!" Stuart snapped.
"You think I'm not?" Sarah shot back. "I'm doing everything I can to get out of rinse-and-repeat DJ gigs and warm-up slots, Stu."

"I'm proud of you. But I feel like I'm holding your coat while you race ahead."
"That's not fair."

Neither of them spoke for a moment. Around them, the muffled thump of trance inside the club carried on like nothing was broken.

They didn't split up.
Not that night.
But things felt... brittle.

Two weeks passed, and they barely saw each other.

Gav got involved, insisting the group all meet for a "friendship repair sesh," which turned out to be a movie night featuring *Trainspotting*, a four-pack of cider, and half a bag of Monster Munch. It helped. A little.

Later that week, Stuart turned up at Sarah's flat unannounced. He was carrying a box of cassette tapes and a tiny speaker system he'd wired himself.

"I made you something," he said, setting the speaker down and pressing play.

The hiss of tape. Then music.

Track One: Not Over Yet.

She sat on the sofa, eyes brimming. He sat beside her.

"I don't want to be behind you," he said. "I want to be with you."
"You are."

She leaned her head against him. The city faded beyond the window. Just the sound of tape hiss and slow, steady breath.

Outside, the rain tapped gently on the glass.
Inside, their world steadied.

Chapter Seven: Bassline Ever After

By the end of the decade, Sheffield's skyline had started to change. The industrial grime was giving way to bars with faux-Scandinavian furniture and tapas menus. Republic had become Gatecrasher One. Superclubs were on the rise—but so were noise complaints. The scene was shifting.

Sarah and Stuart had shifted too.

SpinCycle opened on Abbeydale Road in the summer of 1998. A tiny corner shop with battered speakers in the windows and hand-drawn posters for *Listening Sundays*. They sold vinyl, refurbished old decks, hosted acoustic gigs in the back, and always had a pot of mint tea on the go.

Jules painted a mural on the roller shutters—an exploding speaker blooming into a galaxy of stars. Gav occasionally manned the till, wearing mismatched socks and spinning conspiracy theories about Ibiza being a government distraction. Big Dave moved to Whitby and started a “fish and rave” weekendender called *Soleful Beats*.

Sarah’s name started appearing on flyers for bigger gigs—warm-up for Sister Bliss, a guest slot at Creamfields, even a remix played on Radio 1.

But she always came home.
Always came back to *SpinCycle*.

Stuart fixed things. Amps, speakers, Walkmans, hearts.
He never became famous, but he built something solid—something real.

Together, they hosted a monthly night called **Low Frequency Love**, mixing ambient trance with storytelling, tea, and fairy lights. It was weird. It was wonderful.

One Saturday in early 2000, they threw a reunion party at an old warehouse near Kelham Island. *Pitch FM*, now long defunct, was honoured with a mural and a surprise set from one of its original pirate DJs.

Gav wore a suit.
Jules arrived with a goat.
No one asked.

As the clock struck 2 a.m., Sarah dropped *Born Slippy*
Stuart found her behind the decks, grinning.

“Still got it,” she said.
“You never lost it.”

They danced like they were 23 again. No timelines. No mortgages. Just movement. Memory. Music.

Afterwards, back in the shop, they curled up in sleeping bags between shelves of vinyl.
Sarah rested her head on Stuart’s chest.

“We were right, weren’t we?” she said softly.
“About what?”
“About chasing it. The nights. The madness. The dream.”
“We didn’t just chase it,” he said. “We caught it. Then we pressed it onto wax.”

She smiled.

Outside, the city buzzed faintly—new and old at once.
Inside, the music played low.

And somewhere in the hum of the night, a ghost signal flickered...
Like *Pitch FM* never truly left.

Not over yet.

THE END