

His coat felt heavy with rain, his cagoule that would have been more practical in the wet conditions but it would have been disrespectful to wear a brightly coloured outdoor coat to a funeral. He hung it up in the warm hall, watching the steam gently dispensing the aroma of wet dog throughout his flat. How ironic, he didn't have a dog. James badly needed a drink.

His mind was blank, he suddenly realised he had been standing holding his penis for what seemed like forever, he shook it dry and flushed the toilet. He reached for the soap and covered his hands in suds, scrubbing between his fingers and under his nails.

As he rinsed his hands and looked up at the grey face staring back from the mirror. James Stewart, he wanted to smile at the irony of his name but he couldn't encourage his face to react. It didn't seem ironic now just heart-breaking. Everyone had called him Jamie; at least they had when he was a young student teacher. He remembered those exciting years with his future open in front of him. Jamie always had a plan, he would get experience in an inner city school, then travel and see the world. The taps on his sink needed a good scrub, they were black at the base and he desperately needed whisky.

James opened the fridge and pulled out the remains of last night's lasagne. It was the simple things; when he lived with Katy he had always been excited about opening the fridge. She had loved to shop and as he pulled open the door he wondered what she had bought, sometimes it would be full of fresh vegetables, exotic fruits, delicious quiche and a range of nutritious salads. He licked his lips and stared at the slightly discoloured leftovers. He knew it would taste great but it looked so unappealing. He stared at the space in the door where the chilled chardonnay used to nestle next to the freshly squeezed juice; it now held the plastic container of milk.

He missed Katy; he missed everything they had together, the companionship, the camaraderie, the future. James stared at his meal spitting in the microwave. He watched the seconds of his life count down. It was the funeral; he opened the cupboard and stretched high, his fingers reaching to find the miniature bottle of whisky he kept for emergencies. He sat at the table and looked intently at the bottle in his hand. The microwave pinged and he remained seated. The bloody funeral.

It had affected all the teachers, Miss Jenkins back only a week from maternity leave was a sobbing wreck and she hadn't even taught her. He yanked at the metal lid holding in the whisky, the cap sliced into his thumb and pain shivered through him.

"Fucking stupid fucking thing!" he yelled.

Anger surged through his body, he slammed down the bottle and pulled at the kitchen drawer, it opened smoothly refusing to stop and dropped suddenly slamming hard into his leg, he yelled and released the handle, it dropped the last few inches onto his foot. He was aware of pain in his hand, his shin and his foot and he felt so angry. Then he stopped bewildered, they had found her in the park, curled like a foetus. He moved slowly towards the taps, washing away the blood that was sliding down his hand, he pressed the wound and watched his blood dilute and spread across the sink, it was an insignificant cut and the amount of blood loss was minor. He shook his head; his thoughts daring to ask the unthinkable questions. He knelt on the floor and pulled out a plaster from the drawer, he tightly bound it around his thumb, he knew it was too tight he could feel his thumb throb. He lifted the drawer and pushed it back into the space where it belonged.

Where did he belong? He had wanted to travel, they had discussed so many travel plans and the years moved on and she had wanted a family and he had still wanted to travel. He stared at the

whisky bottle. He remembered the night they discussed their future, so calm, so mature. He hadn't wanted to settle down, he had been adamant he would travel if not that year then the next, when he had got the deputy headship he deserved. Katy had left the next day. She had been right, he hadn't travelled, he was still here waiting.

That wretched funeral. He hardly knew her; he'd given her detention for chatting, for disrupting the learning experience. He felt the emotion build. Who cared about Henry VIII, what did it matter? She had spent the day before her death in lessons and then in detention, he heard the sob escape, what had he done? He didn't remember her; he hadn't known he had even taught her until the counsellors had asked to see him. In the early days he had known every one of them, he had taken an interest and dare he say it now, he had loved some of them. Now, now he couldn't remember their faces.

The microwave flashed back at him. 11:27. Why was he so hungry? He ate lunch at 1pm, exactly 1pm every day. He stared at the clock as it blinked at him. He was hungry; watching the church full of young children had made him hungry for life, for his life. He wanted to eat at irregular times, watch the sunrise and each fresh fish in a shack on the beach. He peered into the microwave, his reflection stared back. There were tears on his cheeks, he was sad about Elsa, sad about her loss of life, about the wasted potential. He swallowed down his hatred. Would she have been any different? Would she have lived a full life or would she have been just like him wasteful. He acknowledged his resolution with a short sharp nod.

He opened the microwave and ate his lasagne with relish; he scraped his plate and smiled as he threw the miniature bottle still full of whisky into the bin. He had an obligation, he knew that now, he had an obligation to Katy, to Elsa and to himself to start his dream. He booted up his laptop and boiled the kettle as he jotted down a list of his dream destinations. Then he keyed in 'Petra' and watched the data download.