

# A Lack of Colour

By : EwanMac

Sometimes love is easy. Sometimes its the hardest thing anyone can go through. Meet Ollie and Kate, Kate is a newly wed starting to doubt whether her husband is the man she wants to be with for the rest of her life. Ollie has just escaped from a harsh relationship and struggles to keep his head above the water when it comes to Ex-Girlfriend Joanne. Will the pair find the love they want?



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## A Lack of Colour : Chapter 1

Kate smiled to herself as she opened the oven and gazed in at the two heating pies in the oven, in the mood of romance she pushed them closer feeling they would be ready quicker if they were together. She closed the door again and checked the clock behind her, "Four more minutes" she told herself. She removed her red and white striped apron and threw it aside and pulled out the bobble in her hair, allowing her long blond hair to cascade freely down her back. She gave it a shake and returned to her apron. Carefully, she picked it up and folded it and placed it back in to the drawer it came out of. She opened up the kitchen window and reached into her jeans pocket, pulling out a slender packet of Marlboro reds. Removing a single cigarette and placing it so gently between one's lips was rarely done with more grace than how Kate did so. Lighting up and taking the first, fresh draw she sighed and sat on the metal stool that she kept in the kitchen for such exercise. The room quickly became filled with dancing blue smoke despite the good ventilation in the room and Kate became lost in thought as the poetic poison filled her lungs. There was a ringing from a distant egg timer and Kate was tossed back into reality, she opened the oven and removed both macaroni pies from the over, prodded the delicious center of each with an expert's finger and placed the two on separate plates. She boiled some water and prepared two cups of tea. She placed the mugs and the plates on a tray and hoisted it up, slowly pushing the door open with her rear and walking through the living room, she spied a stray piece of dirt on the ground and promised it she would be back, from the small living room she made her way into the narrow hall and ascended the stairs. A grey and white cat darted down the stairs to the open door that supplied a route out of the house and made Kate stagger, spilling not a drop she continued on her journey. She reached her destination, placed the tray in one hand and opened the door. And there sat on the bed was her husband reading a book, gazing up from it he smiled with care at her efforts and set his book aside. Happily she strode towards him bare footed and lay the offering of food on his lap, she lay beside him and selected a plate. "Good morning," she said facing him

"Good morning to you too," he faced her "And what may I ask is this for?"

"I'm not sure Mr. Handsome, perhaps I love you?" she said with a mock shrug and a girlish smile

"And what do I do if I love you too?" he said with a charming raise of his brows

"Well, you'd eat it"\*\*\*\*\* "Yeah.... Yeah... Sorry what was that?"

"See this is the problem Ollie!"

"What? That you speak too quickly?"

"So I speak quickly now?"

"Oh, you would turn that into an insult!"

"What's that meant to mean!"

"You're always on the defensive Jo! You always think everything is an attack let it go!" She left... She turned around her hazel coloured hair following her in a Hollywood fashion and left his apartment. They had fought before on their randomly occurring exchanging of familiar gifts that were once ornaments of love and affection. Now they served a different function, now they only caused arguments and strife. Funny thing was, Ollie craved these moments. They were all he had left of a powerful bond the two shared. Well the powerful bond he had for her. Joanne had something in her when she was angry or upset, her beautiful brown eyes would water giving them a liquid texture. A thousand artist could very well try and mix the colours that stirred Ollie's heart so much, but none would succeed. He pulled out the small rectangular packet and unfolded it taking his credit card out of his wallet he began brushing the white powder onto a DVD box and started grooming it into a neat line, he removed a premade paper straw and put it to his left nostril and inhaled deeply. The ketamine vanished and he knew this incident would too with the moving shades on the wall. He smiled a dopey smile and inhaled again and again to force whatever was remaining clutched to his nose out of hiding. The taste came and he sipped some water. He relaxed back on his sofa and let the world unfold.

## Chapter 2

He woke up a little dizzy still, the drugs had yet to fade. He staggered half naked over week old newspapers and piles of dirty somethings to get to the fridge. Ollie pulled out a bottle of still water and drank like a thirsty horse, gulp after gulp. He wasn't as used to the substance as he poised himself to be, and these effects sometimes took long times to wear off, but they did and often in a heart beat. He looked outside his window and saw that the Edinburgh sky was still and the morning sun was only just creeping over the horizon, like a child playing hide and seek trying to determine whether it was safe to expose themselves or not. Ollie took a box of Kellogs cornflakes from the cupboard below the cooker and a bottle of milk lingering close to the end of it's days from where he left it the night before, which happened to be a little too close to the radiator. Yet the breakfast served its course and Ollie was soon picking up his faded black skinnys and reclaiming whatever loose change had found a comfortable place to spend the night. Beneath three Guardians a Metro and an Evening news he found his black Nokia which displayed a photo of more pleasant times cut in half with the banner "4 New Messages!" proudly demanding attention. He pressed the button to open it and sighed at the first two, uninteresting messages from his Network telling him how he could get more from their service. He deleted them both. The next two proved more interesting: Hey boy! big night out 2nite, me u nd stevo? Get pished, u can forget bout wats her name!

Mike Ollie smiled, Mike was his best friend and knew a lot about how to deal with him in situations where he may feel a little rough, however forgetting about "whats her name" was not a high priority of his and so any night spent with that purpose would only fail. The second proved far more shocking: Ollie, sorry for being such a twod last night, me u Amber, Jane and what his name maybe for tonite? Nothing big

Jo x He was dreaming. Or maybe the Ket had not run it's course, he rubbed his eyes and read again, and again and the message would not change. A night in with Jo, with the other two. They wouldn't come, not if he played his cards right when he replied. Mike wouldn't understand, but screw him. He'd be getting, well screwed actually. \*\*\*\*Joanne grinned maliciously at the reply to her seemingly innocent message, so Oliver dearest wanted to throw around insults like that? Well Joanne Anna Grey knew how to play nasty, and she would to get back at people she disliked. What a shame that happened to be Ollie. \*\*\*\*Kate twirled her hair and crossed her eyes and pulled funny faces to pass the time. The Hubby was at work, and would be there late... Again. She spent a lot of time by herself, just doing what a modern housewife does, hovers one room and refuses to do the others, cleans the dishes and ponders over the happenings of Hollyoaks. When that failed her good friend Glens and Coke would soothe her pangs. James worked most days, Saturdays and Sundays tended to be days off but were often used to catch up on missed deadlines, and the jobless Kate had nothing to do but sit. On occasion she would go out or a walk in the town, Princess Street gardens in the winter was always a sight she loved, with the German market and ice rink being her favorites. The botanics provided an excellent retreat but then, these were day time pursuits. It was the evenings Kate found hard to pass. She had aquired a passion for knitting, and with Christmas coming up soon she had also hammered it into her head that a home made sweater with matching hat and gloves would make the perfect gift for several family members. Yet, she remained, most days, bored stiff.

As she sat finishing her last Holiday Hat there came a low buzzing from her hand bag, the buzzing built and built and became her favorite christmas song. She plucked out her phone and read the message she had recieved: Hey Kate, just thought I'd see how you are with James all good? Plans for tonight? Text me x This had been sent by a friend she had met only a few years ago, yet the two clicked instantly. Claire was pretty much everything Kate was not, but then opposites do attract. She answered with a smile and went into her bedroom, slid open the wardrobe and eyed up potential evening wear.

## Chapter 3

They sat together on his double bed, alone together like they used to be. She sat there filling her room with the scent that followed her everywhere, it was not a perfume or a bodily smell, but it was so distinguishable as hers as much a part of her as her big brown eyes, her soft chestnut hair and that delicate figure. She wore a black dress and red high heels that matched her elasticated belt and hand bag. He wore a shaggy beige t-shirt he had worn to bed the night before and a pair of three quarter lengthed green shorts. Ollie was unshaven for a few days and black stubble was starting to make him look like something from Planet of the Apes. She reached up and caressed his cheek, smiling at him. He looked into her eyes, his green orbs meeting her almond shaped pools of liquid brown, they darted away from his and so did the hand, and it was clenched into its partner and stayed on her lap.

"I'm sorry about that, Ollie"

"Oh, it's okay" he said a little disheartened.

"No it is not, I shouldn't be using you like this" tears began to form in her eyes, tears as fabricated as the rest of her charade, but to this Ollie remained oblivious. She moved her head closer to his, and touched the side of his face with her moist, red lips and kissed him gently, and retreated a few inches awaiting a response. The thoughts played in his head, why would she do that? What should he do now? what if-

He was cut short of thinking as the next move had been decided for him, she grabbed his arms lightly and kissed him on the lips, pulled away, and entered again. The pair kissed for a moment, entwining their tongues as they relived their better days.

Ollie was taken back to their first Christmas Eve together, dark streets and light snow. Kissing on the street corner as they reluctantly parted their ways. Better times, when Ollie had her heart and his head. Now both were trivial items.

She was removed to a time of her own, the rank taste of cigarettes. The stale taste of beer mixed with cheap cider and the nights together that were forced on her when he chose to go to her house drunk. They detached from each other, and stared into one another's eyes, She stood up gathered her things and kissed him on the cheek again,

"I'm so sorry for this Ollie"

And she left in the same way she did the night before, leaving only the homely smell of love and a lingering taste of minute old chewing gum. Ollie, startled and disappointed on one hand and some what pleased on the other. He found his rectangular packet, and followed the same steps he did last night. He inhaled the white powder and lay back.

"One, two, three..."

He liked doing this before getting his high, he breathed in deeply and stared at one spot on the wall. As he inhaled the shadow of the television moved too, and kept on moving, dancing to his breath. It sped along the wall and became, it became a fish. The karp in a Japanese painting he had seen in his youth. It was peace incarnated. Swimming freely without care. What did it have to care about?

The karp vanished, and in its place came the shadow of a rabbit, hopping along the white wall. He was a happy bunny, jump, jump, jump. He stopped. But why? Then Ollie saw them too.

The hawks were coming, but the Bunny didn't move.

"Run away" Ollie whispered in his mind

Bunny remained and the birds drew in

"Run away"

And then Bunny vanished too.

## Chapter 4

Kate sat alone at the bar as the neon lights and loud music fused together forming a wild atmosphere. She spun herself on the rotating seat and awaited the barman's arrival. She smiled at her friends on the dance floor who were already a little flustered from the vodka shots and stranger-bought drinks. Kate accepted no drink from any of the young men that asked, James would not like it. She lived to please him.

"What you having?" called the barman over the loud beat of the music

"A... A coke please?" the man turned over a glass and shot the non-alcoholic beverage into it, placing it on the counter with anything but grace, "Pound, fifty" he called back.

She placed the coins on the counter and drank as the man walked to the till and continued his work. What was James doing right now. She kept thinking to herself all the better things she could be doing. The night was over and Kate called down a taxi, shepherding Claire and Natasha into it first she sat down in between them and gave the driver their addresses. Claire refused to be silent

"You... You're way not the same as me... K-Kate..." she hiccuped "See, you're wanting all this, candles and Barry White playing and all that shite kind of girls..."

Kate nodded, she did like Barry White

"I'm not, I just like a good shag and.... and... lying on the bed smoking a cigarette and talking dirty after it"

Kate nodded again "Yes, Claire... We know" Natasha laughed at this.

"Yeah...", Natasha was the extreme opposite of Claire, where the latter excelled the former dared not try, and vice versa, She then returned to staring out the window.

They quietened down as Kate's companions grew tired. Kate however was still wide awake, would James be home yet? She looked at her golden wedding ring and turned it on her finger, smiling a little to herself. She sat alone in the taxi once her friends departed and pulled up outside her house some forty minutes keeping awkward conversation with the driver, politics, football and weather was the routine conversation, one always led to the other. She paid the driver and vacated the vehicle, she walked to her door and opened it. James' shoes were not in the cupboard in the hall. She kicked off her heels and trodded into the kitchen, pulled out two slices of white bread and put them in the toaster. She waded back and forward as she waited for the heating to click on. On her seventh lap of the room she spotted a letter. She looked at it and read:

Katey, your weren't in so I went back to work, if I'm not back when you get this sorry!

Why did he do things like this? Kate understood her husband's need to work, but she felt there was more love between him and the office than he cared for her.

Though she hated thinking like this, she found it hard not to. She gave up all her ambitions when she married him. She was going to move to London and start a business, and be successful... and probably fail. James provided money, and love and that's all she needed in her life. Unable to sleep she turned on the television and watch half an hour of drivel before heading to her bed, only to struggle to keep her eyes closed. She kept the blinds up and stared out the window, counting the people that passed by became an enthralling sport.

"One... Two... Three" a yawn...

"... Four... Five... Six..." and then she slept.

## Chapter 5

Ollie awoke in a cold sweat clawing at dream visions and gasping for air. The dream had been wild, but he was used to them now. He waded into his now clean hall way, avoiding the cardboard boxes containing miscellaneous bits-and-bobs for the charity shops, and entered his kitchen. Taking two paracetamols from their plastic cases and putting them in his mouth, the dusty taste making his taste buds writhe. He then filled a dirty glass from the tap and swallowed them reaping the benefits of the cold water instantly, the pharmaceuticals would take their time.

It was a Sunday morning, and his routine for this day followed the same as every other, wake up, shower, bum around and then sleep. On the off chance he may buy a paper, but his ventures into the outside world were few and unpleasurable, everything was to him these days. Though he did try to persist. After a few hours of watching the day time TV, Ollie decided to get washed and ready for the next day of doing nothing. He turned the wheel of his shower activating the device, cold water rained from the head and cracked on the plastic floor beneath, Ollie waited for a few minutes sitting on the toilet seat until the water warmed, he slid off his clothes and stood in, closing the frosted screen.

It was when he stood, naked cleansed in water with such small boundaries that Ollie felt the most comfortable. If he found peace anywhere off drugs it was in this narrow, cramped chamber that he called his own. His long dark hair, soaked, grabbed his face as the warm water dripped off each individual strand. He plucked the Lynx shower gel from its stand and applied, the cleansing process continued. He ran his sudsy fingers through his hair and the loud thud of liquid soap falling from six feet echoed through the small box, the crashing of the water continued

Then stopped. He stepped out, wrapped a towel around his lower half and, almost like a King would as he stepped toward the balcony to greet his people, made his way over to the sink. Clutching either side of the grey plastic basin he stared into the mirror above. Staring at himself intently he noticed a slight change in his face, early mornings and late nights had formed dark bags under his eyes, a lack of shaving had caused some wild stubble and generally he appeared a little rough. Through bloodshot eyes he scouted for a razor, and found one in the usual place. He then located the shaving cream and applied it generously over his face, he carried out the process with delicate precision. He found it strange how such a small daily act could prove fatal, or at least very painful. Once shaved he got dressed, first unwinding the towel and once again standing unadorned in any garment. He stretched and went into his first drawer and pulled out a pair of white Calvin Kleins and pulled them on, adjusting himself with care and then found a pair of socks. He pulled on a pair of almost unworn jeans and a tee-shirt he liked. He rolled on some Lynx and exited his apartment for his newspaper\*\*\*\* Kate awoke to find James lying beside her, still asleep. She got out of bed and checked herself in the full body lengthed mirror. Night old make up cracked on her face and what was, the night before, a particularly note worthy hair style was now a bush of blonde hair standing at awkward angles. Wearing only one of James's old shirts and her underwear, she was not the glamorous housewife she signed up to be. She washed, leaving the shower power on low as not to wake her Husband, and got dressed ashamed to be nude in front of her lover. She pulled on a pair of denims and a patterned T-shirt and went down stairs to prepare breakfast. Eggs, toast and, hey why not, some freshly squeezed OJ sided with a fruit salad an almond croissant. She was quick about this practice, but not hasty. She placed the various plates and cups onto a tray and carried it upstairs, slowly up the stairs she went never dropping a bead of juice.

She placed the tray on her bedside desk when she entered her room and gave James a light shake, he awoke and smiled at his wife, she kissed him on the cheek, "Breakfast, James."

"Hmm? What time is it?" he said pulling himself to a sitting position.

"Ten, Half ten maybe?" Kate said taking a sip of fresh orange.

"Oh, I've only been in bed seven hours..." James rubbed his sleepy eyes and smiled as he picked up a croissant and began to eat "Sorry about last night, the office was horrible."

Kate only smiled again and shook her head "No, its okay... I went out, with the girls."

"Oh... Thats cool..." James said slowly drifting back asleep,

"Well, I'll leave your breakfast here and you can get some more sleep" she rubbed his hair and gave him a



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friendly peck on the cheek again. She went down stairs again, tossed on her jacket and a pair of shoes and walked off to the shops.\*\*\*\*Ollie walked around the supermarket grabbing what he thought he needed at random, onions, carrots, newspapers. That was the thing that annoyed Ollie about food shopping, you go in for one thing and end up buying an entire farm's produce, but he enjoyed it once he had got into the rhythm. He carried his basket to the till and waited in line.\*\*\*\*Kate wheeled her cart around the supermarket picking up everything she had written down on her list, she loved zooming around the aisles browsing all the food and snatching all the best bargains. Personally she always went for quality over cost but sometimes, when feeling daring, she would pick something a little less expensive. She picked up a bag of potatoes, and tossed it in. She rolled her cart up to the queue and waited. The man in front of her turned around, and gave her a friendly smile, she smiled back and gave an awkward "Morning."

The man was fairly handsome, dark haired with olive skin. He looked a little sickly but who didn't during the winter months? He moved up in the queue and started placing his items on the conveyer belt. He paid for his products and turned again, smiling.\*\*\*\* Ollie carried his bags away from the till and smiled at the blonde haired woman again, she seemed nice. Probably a young mother, she had that kind of smile. He was kicking himself for being so rude, he should of returned the greeting.

Her blonde hair, pale skin and rosy cheeks stayed with him for a bit, and then he compared her to Joanne, and left the Supermarket.

## Chapter 6

Kate drove home, watching the lightly packed road carefully for ice. She did not live far from the supermarket and often felt guilty about driving there and back, hearing so much about carbon emissions and global warming. She was a soft hearted one and hated to think she was causing damage to anyone or anything. Today wasn't one of those days, seven heavy plastic bags would not carry themselves down the road and she was not prepared to do it either. She pulled into her drive way and opened the boot, she pulled out two of the lighter bags and took them inside, putting them in the kitchen. "James," she called out "Would you mind getting the other bags out?"

There was a thudding on the stairs and James arrived fully dressed in casual weekened clothes, "Sure thing," he left the house and came back in with an other four bags and left and came back again with the remainder. They unpacked together placing everything Kate had bought in its right place. Once the packing was finished the pair sat down on the couch, Kate with her legs over her husband's lap and her head resting on the arm of the chair. They turned on the TV and watched the Sunday afternoon films that were shown around this time. Kate shifted her position and turned to a sitting position, she pulled out her cigarettes and selected one of the few she had left, James watched her do so. "I wish you'd stop," he said sounding concerned.

"Hmm, Maybe next year, I mean I don't really smoke that much." Kate said lighting her cigarette and pulling an ash tray closer to her.

"I know but it's so bad for you,"

Kate only nodded and continued to inhale and exhale the nicotine.\*\*\*\*Ollie trudged home on foot with his four light and evenly packed bags, he did not have enough money for a bus, despite the long journey from the shop to his home. When he eventually arrived at his flat, he unlocked the heavy front door and walked up the stone steps to get to his front door. He opened it and dropped his bags at the door way, bent down and picked up his mail and rested the letters on one of the charity shop boxes. He carried the bags into his kitchen and randomly unpacked the various jars, boxes and packets into the drawers and cupboards. Once unpacked he set into his living room and picked up all the mess he had still lying on the floor, binning some and storing others. Once he had finished this he sat on his old chair and watched some TV, there was little on his limited channels. He waited until eventually a familiar buzzing came from the table sat next to him, he picked up his phone and checked the text message. Ol, Thanks for blowing us off last night, how was it with the witch? Anyway, me, you pub tonight! I'll be up at six! Mike... There were times in Ollie's life when he felt his friends had too much control over him, and he liked it. Mike especially was an artist when it came to cheering Ollie up, pub humor and all his various quirks made him a great friend to have. Ollie reached over onto the table beside him and grabbed a cigarette, lighting it.\*\*\*\*James sat scowling a little to himself in spite of his wife's habit. As she stubbed out her cigarette he turned and showed his general dislike of the addiction she claimed she did not have. He smiled and held her hand, "Chris called while you were out,"

"Oh how lovely! How is he?" Kate asked kindly, it was through Chris that the pair had met.

"He's fine, well just over the cold actually. He was wondering if we wanted to go out tonight?"

"Oh James, I have yoga... Hmm, doesn't matter I'm sure I can miss one lesson..."

James squeezed his wife's hand and smiled

"He'll be happy to see you."

## Chapter 7

Kate sat, relaxing her head on a closed fist at the small booth in the pub, Chris and James were slowly drinking their beers and she, the sole female at the table, was already on her third gin and tonic. She nodded at the conversation her husband was having with their companion.

Chris went to James' university and had dated one of Kate's friends at a party one evening he had introduced the two and they had clicked ever since. Chris was at least a year older than James but appeared many more years his senior, for a start James had thick yet well tamed brown hair where as what was left of Chris' was thin and greying. Kate was steadily working her way through her fourth drink when she shot up at the loud bang of the pub door being opened with too much force, she glared at the new arrivals. Three young men, around her own age. One was clearly far more drunk than the others, a sandy blonde haired man with a goatee styled beard, the other two were less drunk. The most sober of the three was a dark haired man she felt she recognised, it began to claw at her, where had she met him before? Ollie sighed as Mike pushed the door open with a little too much pressure than was required, because of him they were forced to leave the bar they were in previously, as it was still early they decided they may as well attempt a pub-hop. They sat down at the bar and ordered their beers, Stevo payed. Believing himself to be somewhat above the other two financially he often obliged himself in paying for most of the drinks. Ollie never refused, debts built up for him very easily. University tuition fees, a habit of twenty cigarettes a day and of course his Ket addiction meant that when he was hard for money he was very rarely able to pay up quickly enough to escape more debt.

Ollie began sipping his drink and gazed around at all the new faces in the lounge, as his eyes passed a blonde woman in, what would be a rough guess, her late twenties he felt a spark of familiarity. But who was she? After many more beers Ollie found himself in a heavy position, weighed down by alcohol he turned his head to his two worse off companions and smiled. "Oi-Oliver..." Stevo said with one hand in his pocket reaching for something "Y-You are a very good... Friend of mine... So I want you... To have this" He pulled out a twenty pound note and shoved it in Ollie's direction.

"Steve, don't" Ollie said shaking his head.

"Naw, naw. You need it..." He forced Ollie's hand and pushed it in, unwillingly he accepted and finished his beer. He then jumped off his bar stool and walked outside to enjoy a cigarette. Kate was growing tired of giving her opinions on child obesity in the UK, she had learned enough studying psychology to know that when in her position it was healthier just to ignore the problem. "What I am saying James is that although the statistics suggest an increase by 2012 I can honestly say, and I should know in my line of work, that it just doesn't seem likely"

"I understand but you have to admit that the statistics also said that there would be a short de-"

"I'm going out for a cigarette" Kate said interrupting, James shook his head disapprovingly. She gave him a light peck on the cheek "I promise to try and stop tomorrow, dear."

She sauntered out of the pub and into the cold. When there she saw the, handsome, dark haired man she felt she knew already half way through a cigarette of his own. "Sorry, do you have a lighter?" Kate asked holding her unlit cigarette in between her two fingers.

"Oh, yeah, sure..." Ollie said reaching into his coat pocket, Kate lit hers and returned the lighter.

"Cold tonight isn't it" he said rubbing his arms.

"Yeah... Chilly. Hey, I know this will sound a bit strange but do I know you?" Kate risked the question.

"Yeah, well you look familiar." The man squinted his eyes "Were you not in the shops this afternoon?" The woman clicked her fingers, "That's it." she said smiling, "Well nice to see you again, small world"

Ollie didn't quite want to point out that, as she used both the supermarket only ten minutes away and this particular bar, she likely only lived half an hour away from his flat "Yeah, tell me about it! Oliver Aitken" he said extending a hand.

"Katherine, Katherine Hower" she took his hand and shook it "but please, call me Kate"

Ollie smiled awkwardly "I prefer Ollie."

## Chapter 8

Ollie finished gift wrapping the customer's purchase and smiled a plastic smile, "Four pounds, fifty please. Do you have a club card?" he hated his job... The customer replied in the negative and paid for the goods and left. Closing into Christmas work was always busy, and by the end of the day his cheekbones were searing with agony, he did not mind smiling his teeth were, in his own opinion, his most attractive asset. It was the false smiles that he hated, smiling for the sake of smiling just seemed so pointless. He took a coffee break. In the Staff Room he prepared his drink and sat in one of the comfy chairs that the managers blessed their drones with. Mike waltzed in beaming, more false smiles. "Feeling okay today Ollie man?" he asked pressing down on his shoulders from behind and taking a seat next to him.

"I'm fine, I was hardly drunk... How 'bout you?" he sipped his coffee.

"Fresh as a daisy, say who was Blondie last night? Don't tell me you're over Joanne already, what's it been? Four months?" Ollie furrowed his brows.

"Her name's Kate, and she's married..."

"Hard luck, mate..."

"I barely know her, for a start." Ollie said beginning to get agitated, he could see how this debate would go.

"So? You think I know half the people I sleep with?"

"You're an ass hole Mike..." Mike feigned to be offended and picked up an apple and began to eat loudly.

"Look you got her number didn't you?" Ollie nodded, "Well, then she obviously wants to see you again, give her a text ask to see her after work."

"I'm not so sure..." Ollie said pulling out his phone, Mike grabbed it.\*\*\*\*Kate had only just finished dusting all the nooks and crannies and had sat down to a glass of mulled wine. Sipping it she began to muse over where to clean next, and perhaps her need of a hobby. She went up to her bedroom and began folding clothes and placing them their drawers. She placed various items of laundry into a pile for washing. She picked up a pair of her jeans and took out the contents, her phone included. She slid it open and was greeted with "1 new Message" and "2 missed calls" both were from the man she had met last night, she redialed the number and put the receiver to her ear. It rang for a while and then he picked up, "Hey," he said cheerfully.

"Hello, You called?" she asked continuing her folding and piling.

"Yeah, sorry, well I was wondering if maybe your not busy we could meet up for coffee? Well after work or what ever... Or maybe not?"

Kate finished folding one of James' shirts and swapped the phone in her hand, "Oh, well, sure why not? I have housework to finish up so maybe around four or five?"

"Sounds great, do you know the Cafe Nero on Rose Street?" he asked.

"I'm sure I could find it..."

They exchanged their farewells and Kate hung up. She smiled a little to herself, it would be nice to get out of the house.\*\*\*\*It was ten past five and Ollie was sitting arms folded with a large hot chocolate in front of him, dressed with whipped cream and marshmallows. He sipped it, and waited for Kate to arrive. Even if she did not he would be pleased. He liked it here, in this cafe, with this particular drink in front of him. The door jingled open and brought a chill with the new customer. Ollie turned in his seat and smiled at the wool covered woman smiling back at him, these were in Ollie's mind two honest smiles. Kate placed her hand bag on the table next to his hot Chocolate. Removed her bobble hat, scarf and gloves and began to unbutton her jacket. "That looks yummy," she said indicating to the drink "Now that I'm here I know, I've been here before." She surveyed the room she was now in and smiled "I'll be back in a flash, just going to get a cup of tea, and a cake. Want anything?" Ollie kindly declined and returned to her drink.

She came back and sat down with her tea in one hand and a particularly generous slice of chocolate cake in the other. "I love cake," she admitted "So, how are you?"

They traded pleasantries and anecdotes and the minutes turned to half hours quickly. "So, Ollie." Kate said before sipping her third cup of Earl Grey "Do you have girlfriend?" Kate asked with all politeness.

Ollie's face turned from cheerful to brooding in moments "Well, not anymore..." he confessed

"Oh, I'm sorry to hear that." Ollie reassured her that she had not offended.

## A Lack of Colour

"And anyway I think we are on the mend anyway," he grinned and brushed aside his side parted black hair  
"How long have you been married then?" Kate finished her drink and shook herself into answering mode with a scratch of the head "Three years, its flown by." she said with a far off smile. Closing time came for the cafe and all customers left, including Kate and Ollie. They walked together to the nearest bus stop, and waited together. It was an empty street excluding them. Kate sat, legs folded, on the provided bench smiling to herself. Ollie stood outside with one hand in his pocket and the other holding a cigarette. "I've had fun, Ollie." Kate said facing him.  
"Yeah, me too." Their eyes met and the pair exchanged a smile again. The bus rolled up and the pair stepped on.

## Chapter 9

Kate smiled at Ollie as she exited the bus, stepping off into the cold weather she pulled her scarf around her. It was not a long walk from the bus stop to her home, she walked and unlocked the door. Or at least attempted to unlock the door, as it was already open. She walked in to see James already home, still in work clothes, boiling some water in a pot and looking at pasta recipes.

"Oh! You're home. I'm just in, starving. Been out?" James said smiling with a wooden spoon in one hand, he walked over and kissed her on the cheek "God you're cold."

Kate laughed, "Yeah, was out with a friend, nice to see you home at a normal time!"

The couple talked as Kate took over from the cooking and prepared quite a delicious meal, lucky she had bought those olives on impulse yesterday. The pair sat at the table sharing a bottle of wine as they ate, James smiled over at his wife and continued to eat.

"Something wrong, James?" Kate asked holding a loaded fork to one side.

"Well... Kind of, I have some bad news. You'll hate it but I need to say right off that I am getting a pay rise and a promotion out of it!" his tone was rushed and apathetic. Kate raised her brows and smiled, "Go on," she said, and ate the contents of her fork.

"Well, as you know I have been really busy at work and, Head Office want me to do a presentation at a conference... In Berlin..." He gave an apologetic smile, Kate only smiled back at her spouse.

"Why would that disappoint me? I mean if its good for you, then its good for me isn't it?" She smiled again and sipped her wine.

"I'm so glad you think so!" James beamed, reached over the table and gave Kate a loving kiss on her cheek.

Kate smiled, and smiled... It helped fight back the lonely tears. \*\*\*\*When the bus pulled up at the stop closest to Ollie's house, which was still a fair distance away, it had started to rain. He pulled up his hood and trudged through the forming puddles. He unlocked the front door and made the ascension to his apartment. He walked in and looked around, I should probably do something about these boxes, he thought to himself. He caught a glimpse of a red light on his house phone and looked over and noticed it was shining next to the "New message" sign or rather "N'w M'ssag" sign, long conversations bored Ollie and so one Ket enhanced conversation had led him to scratch off all the Es.

He pressed the button to hear the low buzzing that came before the message. It beeped and then came a familiar voice, "Hey, Ollie. Stopped by guess you must have been out? Anyway I'm stopping by again tomorrow okay?" Joanne was a demanding presence when she cared to be. He sat on his sofa and dug out his Ket-pouch. He scratched the white powder off again. He sniffed it up and lay back. He thought about Joanne, her long brown hair, perfect figure... And she appeared in front of him, her sunny looking face. Bright brown eyes screwed in laughter her cherry red lips forming the most beautiful smile one could ever hope to achieve. Then it changed, her eyes opened and her brown eyes were replaced with soft light blue ones. Her straight brown hair lightened and curled, even the lips paled into a sweeter shade of pink and the face staring back at him was that of his earlier companion. Kate smiled the same smile she had when she walked into the cafe earlier that day. Ollie grasped the arm of the chair and squeezed his eyelids together so hard it hurt, when he opened them he was lying on the couch some hours later. He rolled off the couch, still terrified by the vision or dream or what ever had just happened, and made his way to the kitchen. He poured a glass of water and sat on one of the rarely used seats in the kitchen. He struggled to pull out a cigarette, he struggled further to light it. When he did, he took each draw with a rugged breath. His chest hurt, he should not be smoking but he continued despite the pain.

## Chapter 10

As promised, Jo arrived on Ollie's doorstep at Six thirty. He paused before opening, was a hopeless devotion to a woman that caused him so much pain a healthy decision for him to make? No, it was not yet his feet moved by some force far beyond the power of his mortal mind and he opened the door.

She stood with folded arms looking to the right, at first, avoiding eye contact and then looked up and smiled "Hey, Ollie." she said and pushed past him into the house. There was something odd about her this evening, her make up was faded and smeared and her eye liner had begun to run a little, then it hit him. She was drunk. "Hey, umm can I get you a glass of water?" he asked as kindly as he could, his voice cracked a little.

She turned and shot him a look laced with dark intent and smiled "No. Come on," she said slurring her words a little her usually sophisticated tone of voice quaking "I want to talk to you." she said pointing as if the indication was needed. They sat, close together almost holding each other. Not looking in the eyes, no for that would require some level of emotion which Joanne just did not have. "Now, Ollie." She began addressing the conversation as a formal, yet friendly, matter of importance. "I know there are some, lingering feelings towards me," she touched his knee and began moving her hand upwards "but, I have to be honest, they just aren't returned" she faced him, red lips parted, Ollie was beyond listening to the words she was speaking a well timed trip to bathroom meant there was enough ketamine in him to give the appearance of him being focused, but his mind was a blank canvas. Joanne kissed him on the lips, her hand finding hold on his abdomen. Regaining a semi-clear head he pushed her off "No, I don't really want to do this..." but he did. She kissed him again, regardless of his words. And he submitted, his drug induced mind could only resolve that this is what he wanted. Joanne moved her hands under his t-shirt, her cold hands against his warm skin her mouth and his still linked. She moved her head down to his neck and began kissing there, softly. It tickled a little but it only added to the pleasure.

There was a break from the kissing for a brief moment as she took off his shirt and then it continued, she ran her frozen fingers down his arms and back up again. The exposure to the cold air around him made Ollie shiver. He shook his head and pulled away. "Joanne, go home." he said firmly, frowning. She left, and Ollie remained half dressed on his couch. Fooled and ashamed, why had he told her to go? \*\*\*\*Kate's day was slightly more action packed than the previous three years' worth of days, though the reason for this was a little heartbreaking. She placed James' clothes into the suitcase folded and overlapping, it was winter so she was sure to pack enough warm clothes and double the amount of socks she would usually put in, she knew her husband well enough that when he was cold he would always put on an extra pair.

She pushed the suitcase down and zipped it up, she stood back and smiled at her work. She went downstairs and fed the cat, and sat on the large brown chair in her living room. She began to nod off and slept. When she awoke it was night and again, James was not home. She was hungry and so prepared a small meal for herself she ate it in darkness not seeing the point in turning on the lights. She finished her meal, let the cat out, undressed and went to bed, to sleep again.

## Chapter 11

Snow fell on the city early in the morning as Ollie was getting ready for work. He pulled on a pair of black trousers, a black shirt and tie and a pair of polished black shoes. He sprayed on some deodorant and grabbed his wallet before stepping into the white sheet. He walked his way to the closest bus stop and waited, lighting up a cigarette and smoking it to pass the time. One turned to three quite quickly as he awaited the bus to arrive. He stepped on it when it eventually came, but by this time his jacket was soaked and his hair was drenched and slime laden due to the damp hair gel. He sat on one of the maroon seats downstairs and watched as the snow fell outside. His stop came quickly and he got off, crossing the busy road and stepping into the old building that was his place of work, he strolled through the perfume department of the large shopping mall and made his way to the staff room. He threw off his jacket and organized himself, the manager appeared wielding a clipboard. He eyed Ollie up staring him down, Ollie hated to be stared at. "Hmm, Aitken isn't it?" the short bald man asked

"Yes," Ollie said, tired as he was he still managed to force a pleasant sounding tone of voice.

"Hmm, You're in the toy department today... Wear this." he pulled out a badge with the store name on it, Ollie accepted and pinned it on his shirt. The short man and Ollie stood silent for a moment, awkwardly staring at one another, each unwilling to break the meeting. "I think I'll get some coffee" Ollie said tearing himself away from the manager and walking over to the kettle. Once he had finished he made his way to the basement floor where the toy department was, he went in behind the main desk and waited for the store to open for the customers. The toy department this close to Christmas was usually bedlam. He heard footsteps, a fellow employee must have been drafted in to the terror shift. He smiled.

Hannah was a close figure to Ollie. She acted like the older sister he would of preferred. She too smiled at Ollie as she came down the stairs.

"Good Morning, boy," she said holding a mug of warm fruit juice in her hand "Been here long?"

"Nah, baldy just sentenced me here about ten minutes ago... Christ I hate working down here"

"Still better working with Barbies that don't talk..." she said referring to the women that worked on the various perfume counters upstairs, they had a fairly fake way about them. If Hannah was anything, feminine it was not. She still had a lady like air around her, it was her lack of girlish manners that attracted Ollie to her. He valued her companionship. The crowds poured in by the masses and Ollie and Hannah were flooded with questions on what present to buy. The horde refused to thin out over time and Hannah was forced to call in reinforcements. Management, however, was slow to send them in but Mike and an other unnamed coworker came marching just in time to meet the next wave of afternoon shoppers.

A lunch break became valid and Ollie and Hannah retreated to the staff room. Ollie filled her in on his encounters with Joanne over a cup of tea. "Oh, god. Ollie how can you let her walk over you like that?"

Hannah asked with a tone of clear sympathy. "Look, I know you love her and everything but, frankly, she's evil. If you really want to try and get back together with her just, be careful okay?"

She understood him, Mike tended to be a little dismissive of the idea of love. Hannah on the other time knew to include such a detail into her reassurances.\*\*\*Kate watched the snow from her bedroom window as it drifted downwards in a pale sheet of wonder. Each flake landing gently on her garden plants forming white shells over them. James was gone already and she lay, a little lonely, in her bed wishing for the day to pass. Her mobile lay beside her in James' place but it did not provide suitable company.

She thought about Ollie, and wondered what he would be doing. She lifted her phone to text him and risk a meeting, but decided against it.

She got up and prepared a breakfast for one, corn flakes. She flicked on the TV and watched the morning television. Eventually the tension of isolation caved in on her and she phoned her new found male companion. Ollie, Kate here. Care to meet same place? She edited it a thousand times and sent it on, hoping for a cure to her boredom.



## Chapter 12

Ollie's phone went off just as soon as he stepped out of the building. It was from Kate, he replied saying that he would love to go out with her. He spent the minutes between him finishing work and his meeting with Kate walking through the damp, iced streets. The snowing had ceased and all that remained was a slushy mess. He walked through the narrow street to where the cafe was and entered.

He ordered his usual, a tall hot chocolate with marshmallows, and opted for a slice of cake with pecans on it. He began sipping his drink and eating his cake when the jingle of the door opening welcomed his companion. Kate wore the same jacket she was wearing on their first cafe meeting, she took it off and lay it on a chair next to her. "Hey, sorry for being so sudden, I was bored out of it" she smiled and eyed up Ollie's cake "That looks great! I might get a slice myself."

"Oh, help yourself to it." Ollie said smiling and handing her a small plastic fork. She accepted it and began to eat, her blue eyes widened with enjoyment as if the small piece of cake was exactly everything she had ever wanted in life. She swallowed. "Wow, mind if I have more?"

"Sure, finish it if you like" Ollie said pushing the plate towards her. The pair ate and drank together and they talked of interesting subjects. They had been at the same nursery, but one year apart Ollie was slightly older than Kate was. They had both taken exchange trips to France in high school, Kate had been to Paris where Ollie had stayed in Normandy. They had an eerie amount in common, that likely half the population of the world could relate to.

"Hmm, probably going to close soon." Kate said with a sigh.

"Yeah, why don't we just go for a drink?" Ollie suggested, feeling reluctant to find any curious messages on his answering machine.

"Sure, wanna just go now then?"

"Of course." They entered the steamy pub, the subtle smell of beer filling their nostrils as they found a seat. They ordered their drinks and Ollie paid. A beer for him and a red wine for her, the drinks would become stronger as the night went on.

"So how are things with you and... Joanne wasn't it?" Kate asked after a third glass of the crimson liquid.

"Not sure. I think I love her, but part of me just doesn't want to do anything about it... You know?"

Kate nodded to herself "Yeah, I know what you mean."

"How about you? James still hard at work?" Ollie asked trying to return the question.

"Yes and no, He'll be flying to Berlin now. He's away with work"

Ollie, too, nodded along to this "Well, that's nice isn't it?" he said smiling.

"Yeah, it is..." she lied.

## Chapter 13

It was late now, far beyond the realms of mortal timing and Ollie and Kate walked along the dark, sodden streets each on their own trek home. Ollie, with burning in his chest for a helpful line of his favorite substance, trudged on with Kate hung, drunk, upon one of his shoulders.

"I... Think the last one did it" she slurred, Ollie laughed.

"Not the six before that then?" The neared Ollie's apartment and he stared at his two priorities, Kate could not make it home in the condition she was in and he was pretty desperate for those drugs. "Okay, Kate. I'm gonna go upstairs and call you a taxi okay?" Kate only nodded vigorously. They entered his house together and he sat her on one of the couches in the living room.

He battled with himself for a moment which to do first, call the taxi or feed his addiction. He opted to do his part for his friend, the last thing he needed was a sour trip half way through a phone conversation. He dialed up, gave his address and Kate's name and hung up. He went into the kitchen, got Kate a glass of water and snorted some Ket. They sat together on the couch, the taxi was now closing in on a half hour late. Kate, half asleep on Ollie had suggested she would just stay where she was for the night. Ollie did not exactly agree, the shadows on the walls were dancing in such a peculiar way that he only smiled and gave an inaudible noise as an answer. Kate was now sobering up, and still had no intention of leaving.

They put on an old DVD, something Ollie was unsure as to how it made its way into his collection, but something enjoyable. Halfway through the film Kate yawned, and in a small broken voice said "Ollie?" in return her host gave a friendly "Hmm?" in return.

"Ollie, do you- well are you afraid, of being alone?" The question struck, Ollie hard. However before he even answered she spoke again "I am... I mean, sometimes I just stop and try and think what's going on. I'm happy with James but the more I think about how little I even see him these days-"

Ollie touched her arm with affection and smiled "Yeah. I know what you mean."

The pair gazed into each others eyes. Kate moved her head closer to Ollie's, but in shock he drew back.

"My god!" she said quickly "I-I have no idea what came over me, I'm so-" he cut her short again this time by kissing her gently on the lips. The excitement hit both of them at the same time. For Ollie, this was him and Joanne together again. Like the way they were in the earlier days.

For Kate this was James before work had higher standing over his wife. There was passion in this kiss. And then, almost at the same time, both sets of lips pulled apart in terror. Kate only sat there, blue eyes wide with shock. Ollie's jaw hung open a little, flabbergasted at what had just transpired. Kate pulled her things together, "I think I will leave now, Ollie. I'll phone you soon okay?"

"Yeah, of course!" the pair spoke in rushed manners, she wanted to be out the door as soon as possible and he wanted her out.\*\*\*Kate, shook with excitement and shame as soon as she hit the safe haven of her own bed. She closed her eyes tightly. The journey home was a mystery, all she knew was that she and Ollie had kissed, and she was not at all concerned about James. At the same time she screamed to herself. How could she let it happen? How could she do that to James? Why, why why?!

She sighed and relaxed, and hoped morning would bring answers.\*\*\* Ollie was pacing in his kitchen, why did he do that? Was he an idiot? He enjoyed the kiss but she was married! He took an other line to clear his head, but the thoughts only grew and grew inside him.

"She's married and you kissed her!" he scolded himself

"But she tried it first!" He answered

"So what, we are children now? Is that how adults deal with things?"

"Shut up! You don't even know me-"

He cut himself short, aware just how crazy the drugs had made him sound. He went to his bedroom and lay down. Tonight, there would be no nightmares.

## Chapter 14

Kate made her bed in the usual pristine way eliminating any crease or unwanted fold. She looked at the half empty bed, and how cold one side must be without its occupant. She sighed a sigh of shame and longing. Shame for more than one reason, all things involving the black haired, green eyed man she could not get out of her head and longing for the person she was closest to feeling true love for. She found herself in a conflict of interest, James was her husband, her lover, her friend they had stories that would make a soapy romance movie come to life... And Ollie was just a mysterious stranger that she knew nothing about. She could feel it in her, a strange bubbling feeling that may well develop something more terrible. Would she tell James? Or keep it a secret. In all the years of their relations, Kate had never kept anything from him, would something like this even mar her union? She reached under her bed and pulled out a small tin, in it held everything she had deemed important enough to keep forever. In it was a series of dated photos, her and James on their first date, James in a pair of swimming shorts on their first holiday together and their wedding photo. She looked at herself, she was slimmer in this photo. Memories of intense dieting preluding to her wedding came back to her, she chuckled. Under the photos was a note from James, one of many that were either lost or misplaced over the years. It was dated, like most things James signed, a week before his proposal. She read it aloud: Katherine, We have been together a very long time now, and I hope you know I still love you as much as I did when we first met. I want you to know that I can't write down exactly how I feel, because then they would just be words on a page.

I have never met anyone quite like you. You laugh off anything that causes you harm and giggle through things that make you happy (which is great because you have the most beautiful laugh). I can't see myself eating any other person's cooking, you know I'm too lazy to make my own too!

I love you Kate, and always will,

James...xShe read it again and again. At last she packed the photos and the note away and secreted it under her bed again. She went down stairs and was comforted by her furry companion. Her gray and white cat, Mipsy. It was unusual for her to show affection, but in situations like this she was always there by Kate's side. When she was younger Kate had an imaginary friend, she told her everything. However age and rational thinking came over her, but the need for a figure that Kate knew for certain would never judge her on her wrong doings remained and the Cats took their place. She began caressing the soft, short fur and felt the vibrations of the cat's purr. She filled Mipsy in on the night before, every detail, trying to exclude any bias she may have. The cat did not respond but continued to purr. "I love James, and I know he loves me too. But, I'm getting feeling for Ollie and I don't want that! I can't, I won't!"

The purring continued.

"I'm afraid, I don't want to hurt either of them. James will be heart broken if he knew I loved an other and I can't be around Ollie without getting these feelings"

No response.

"Maybe its just a fling, yeah I'll get over it... Or why not I arrange a double date? Me and James, Ollie and his Girlfriend... God I didn't even think about her..."

Mipsy rolled on her belly and stood up, walking off to find a quieter place to sleep.

## Chapter 15

The town was busy now, with Christmas exactly seven days away people were swarming like locust grabbing what they could and taking it to their destinations. Children and their parents were queued up for miles waiting for their turn on one of the gigantic fairground machines, and the prospect of rain was weighing down on anyone older than seven. Joanne marched through the streets as if it were rightfully hers, two of her friends followed.

"Will you two hurry up? The shops will be closing in less than an hour and I still have to get a new pair of shoes." She said scowling at her companions, or cronies depending on how well one knew the trio. Laura, who was perhaps a little more brawny than most females winding their way through the city center, only scowled back "Yeah, and when are we going to where we want?" she tossed back some of her peroxide blonde hair, improving her vision.

"Well, we hardly have time for you. Sorry, come back up tomorrow." Joanne was a persistent one when it came to anything taking shoe form. After buying the delightful pair of reduced priced heels, Joanne was thirsty. She marched herself, and her friends to the nearest cafe and as a treat, bought the first round of coffees. "Well we got there just in time didn't we?" she said beaming.

"Yeah," Laura said sipping her drink and twirling the spoon provided in her other hand. Laura was shockingly not what she appeared, at first glance one may take her as an unintelligent woman with a mean streak, however she was of course very clever with a mean streak and even her oldest friends forgot this at times.

"Good you got something too," she said smiling at the third, Hannah.

Hannah was Ollie's original intended, through various twists, turns and lies from a very close friend she decided against him. She was one of those, empty shell people. Those that lack enough personality or originality to make their own minds up on matters, to many she was good old reliable Hannah. She smiled and lifted up a plastic carrier bag and removed the shoe box and looked in, a pair of black night shoes sat snug in a beg of thin paper.

"I still don't know why you got them Hannah," Jo snidely stated, taking an alarmingly large gulp from her mug.

"Well, I liked them... And I'm going out with work tomorrow, so..." she smiled, an empty smile and put the box away, perhaps personality was not what Hannah lacked it was very possible it was simply enough confidence to argue against tyrant people like Joanne. The entrance bells chimed and Joanne turned around out of curiosity to see who had entered. Just a woman. Joanne followed her with her eyes to one of the provided couches, she watched as she removed her hat and jacket and scowled "Why do people grow their hair to such awful lengths?" she eyed up the woman as she bought a hot chocolate and walked back to the couch where she left her belongings. Minutes passed, and Joanne had long forgotten the blonde woman that had entered previously, when the bells chimed again. This time Joanne's mouth curled up forming a smile at the new arrival to the cafe.

## Chapter 16

Ollie opened his eyes from a more pleasant dream than he was used to these days. He forgot the details, but the warm feeling in his chest told him it was a good one. He followed his usual routine; he poured some milk over a fresh bowl of corn flakes and ate them; He showered, taking his time the way he enjoyed it; and got dressed ready for the day ahead.

He was not working and had no other plans, he would need to make a few phone calls to a collection of unsavory characters, such was the drug addicts life, to purchase the goods he would not be writing on his shopping list. He walked to the supermarket and picked up all the items he needed, recalling that only a few weeks ago he had met Kate right by that cash point. He payed for his products and took them home, packing them away on the shelves and in the cupboards.

He then picked up his mobile and searched a single letter on his phonebook tool, and the name he was looking for popped up straight away. Dialing the number and waiting for the phone to ring out once. It did and he tried again, this was the Drug Dealer's way of avoiding confrontation. He picked up this time. "Ollie?" Came the dopey think scottish accent from the other side of the receiver

"Yeah, man, its me... Just wondering if-" "Oh yeah... Well... Might do," He replied,

"I haven't asked you what I want yet MJ." Ollie said laughing a little.

"Sorry... Man... Sorry... God, can't hear shit... What you lookin' for mate?"

"Ket?"

"Gone, man."

"E's?"

"See what I can get man..."

"Well what can you get for sure? No mushies either, that last batch was crap"

"Yeah sorry... Well I got some weed, and more Acid than I can sell..."

"Right, say a Q and two, sheets of Acid?" Ollie asked, preparing for MJ's weakness...

"No man, no way... Three sheets of Acid, I'll throw in the third man..."

bingo...Ollie knocked, three times, on the old green door. The paint was flaking off and the hinges were almost completely rusted off the grass on the front lawn was almost as high as the small, broke, pink bicycle. Ollie was never sure who owned the bike, MJ had no children or any family as far as Ollie knew. He was one of those people, dedicated to drugs. Lost in the vortex Ollie hid in to escape his problems, he always wondered what life in the vortex would be like... It stared him in the face when he opened the door.

MJ was a shaggy man, ginger beard reaching the middle of his chest "Ollie man?" he asked keeping the door ajar.

"Yeah man it's me."

"Prove it!" the man snapped.

"Your middle name is Ivan, after your uncle..."

"Christ is it?"

"No man, you told me that was the pass this week."

"Sorry man, here come in... Were you followed?" He opened the door and allowed Ollie to enter.

The interior of the house was a stark contrast to the outside, Dali and Picasso hung from the walls one or two Monet's joined them. Lush wooden furniture and a plastic wrapped leather suite added to the effect of wealthy working class. MJ pulled out the drugs and placed them on the table, "Fifty Euros, man" his face was serious. When he looked serious MJ's eyebrows stretched his forehead down, revealing a red scar. Ollie had never asked how he had obtained it, he doubted he ever would.

Ollie payed up. MJ refused to have any dealings with the Royal Family, something about giving them free money, and apparently they had asked him to carry out the murder of a wealthy business man... Oh to live in his mind, this stretched as far as insisting on Euros, not Pounds.

Ollie didn't mind, his dealer seemed to forget about exchange rates, MJ was the cheapest Drug Dealer in miles. He went home and smoked a joint, feeling the smoke around him like a kitten stroking his face with soft, toxic fur. His phone vibrated. He looked at the screen, Kate, he looked at the text, Inviting him out for

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coffee. He pulled on his converse and got the bus. He pulled up at St Andrew's square, walked to George Street, pushed open the door. He smiled at Kate, and to his right he heard, in a poisoned voice, laden with false sweetness he heard someone call his name. "Shit" he said to himself.

## Chapter 17

Ollie found himself unsure how to compose himself in this situation. Kate and he had pulled up chairs to sit beside the trio of women. Kate and Jo appeared to get on quite well, much to Ollie's surprise. Two women less alike would be hard to come by. They laughed together about recent events on the celebrity scene. Hannah and Laura spoke to one another, and Ollie found himself staring into his coffee. "... Ollie I'm talking to you." Joanne prompted him out of his daydream, with a stern tone.

"Hmm, sorry what did you say?" he looked up from his drink to face the four females staring at him.

"Deaf as a board in his moods," Jo half mocked directing the statement to Kate "I was telling Kathy about that sweet valentines day last year. Tell her what you got me again."

Ollie rolled his eyes "Socks..."

Jo laughed a little "He's so adorable." She smiled, sending a shiver up Ollie's spine. Kate was sure this was another Joanne to the one Ollie was in a relationship with. For a start this woman seemed unable to spell Ollie's full name let alone be able to form a serious relationship with anything more complex than herself. Secondly she seemed more fascinated with herself than anything else, and from what she had gathered from some of Ollie's previous statements, he hated people like that.

Still first impressions were often wrong for Kate. Her two friends seemed a bit quiet, probably just the same as her. Kate shut down half way through the conversation, nodding when Jo nodded, laughing when she laughed. Kate hoped to herself her acting was not as bad as the conversation she was being forced to endure.

"Socks..." came Ollie's voice, pulling her from her trance.

Jo said something, too quickly for Kate to grasp it. Did she just say adorable?

"Oh yeah, what were they like?" She asked feigning some form of interest. Ollie blushed.

"Blue weren't they, Ollie?"

"Yes... I think so." Conversation dragged on carrying no more essence than a deflated balloon. "And so, your married?" came a soft, high toned, voice. Noticing it came to the one introduced as Hanna, Kate smiled, "Yes, three years now." she said smiling and turning her ring.

"That's sweet, where is your husband now then?" Hanna questioned.

"Oh well, he's working in Germany at the moment. He'll be back for Christmas" Kate smiled again, feeling her cheeks hurt.

"And while he's gone you've adopted little Ollie?" Came Joanne's drone.

"Excuse me?" Kate asked, almost a little annoyed.

"Oh I'm kidding, I know you wouldn't try anything with my Ollie."

Ollie looked at Jo "Aren't we separated just now?"

"No, silly. I thought we made that clear the other night."

"Oh..." Ollie smiled, a little pleased he had it confirmed he and Jo were a couple again.

"I was thinking that, Myself and James, Ollie and Yourself should have dinner one night?" Kate risked.

"I'm not too sure-" Ollie started.

"That would be lovely," Jo finished. Jo and her followers left before Kate and Ollie, leaving the pair with a particularly messy table.

"Double date eh?" Ollie said casting a clearly agitated smile.

"Come on it will be fun, you and James would get along just fine."

Ollie nodded "Yeah I guess so, You and Jo got on."

"Yeah, she's... Lovely" Kate lied.

"For now..."

## Chapter 18

Kate got home and sighed with mild relief that things were not too awkward with Ollie, it had been difficult to discuss things with him, what with that pretentious woman Joanne there. She put her out of her mind and Ollie with her, she had called Claire earlier and invited her around for dinner and she knew Tasha would come with her. She set about preparing a simple meal, a pasta dish she could make blind folded. She boiled some water, put the dry shells in and stirred occasionally. While that was happening she chopped some chicken, fried it quickly with some onions and bacon, she put a pizza in the oven for good measure and simply waited it out. She just pulled the pizza out when the door knocked.

It was Tasha, unaccompanied. This was not unusual, the pair usually arrived in this order. Luckily Kate prepared soup, to tide them over until Claire's delayed appearance. Tasha was in a long standing relationship with a man Kate had only met once or twice. She rarely talked about him in social conversation, only mentioning him when asked about him. She was a quiet sort of person, loud enough to form decent conversation but still, quiet. "So, when does James come back?" Tasha asked placing her empty bowl to one side,

"Next week I think, if he doesn't get delayed."

"Yeah, does it bother you? How he's always working?" Tasha hazarded.

Kate paused and replied "Not at all, he has to work. I mean, he needs to support us both."

"Yeah, I suppose." Tasha smiled and picked up her bowl and took them both into the kitchen, Kate followed. Claire arrived in time for the main course, while it was still warm enough to eat. She was dressed up, perhaps a little too flashy for a night in. A bright coloured t-shirt, a short skirt and high boots, hardly winter wear but if a cold was the price of looking good Claire would risk that.

Claire had a few 'boyfriends', or at least had a few male friends who occupied a lot of her calendar space. Her wish to commit was equal to her wish to dress practically. Her last boyfriend was a waste of time, he was not like Claire in the least. Kate never liked him at all, it took a while for Claire to recover from their rather dramatic break up but she did, eventually. Though perhaps not the way Kate would have, pouring a large glass cheap beer over him and his latest target was probably the closest thing Claire had got to a mush break up. "Wow, this is great." Claire said between forkfuls of pasta.

"Thank you, I got the recipe off Moira," Tasha and Claire exchanged grim glances.

"She is my mother in law..." Kate reminded them scornfully.

"Did she have rat poison in the original?" Claire asked.

"Yeah, Kathy... She doesn't like you much does she?" Tasha, was the only person that Kate allowed to call her 'Kathy' and she was right, James' mother didn't really like her but Kate often chose to ignore that.

"She does a bit though" Kate said smiling,

"No chance..." Claire said, The three and Moira had met at the wedding after a rather rude remark on the choice of colours for the bride's maids dresses Claire practically had to be held back, seeing as she was wearing the insulted garments. "Anyway, she is coming over here for Christmas this year, so be nice to her." Kate said pointing her fork. When the two other women left the house, after two bottles of wine, Kate set about clearing up the kitchen. Placing each plate in the dish washer as carefully as she could. She picked up the bottle of wine they had been drinking from most recently and opened the back door to place it in the recycling bucket. At that moment three things happened that lead to Kate's injury; Mipsy bolted in tail flourished resulting from a fight causing her to stagger; her phone vibrated in her pocket, scaring her a little and finally her shoeless foot caught some ice, sending her falling.

She was okay, a little dazed from the fall. She felt a warm tingle on her hand, and gasped at what she saw. The bottle she was holding had shattered, the main bulk of the bottle was scattered in her radius where as some smaller fragments were embedded in her hand making a large slash glisten a slight green.

She remained calm, if a little ill as she bandaged up her hand. She picked up the remaining shards and placed them in the bin, scolded her cat and checked her phone to see who had cost her some blood.

She smiled, perhaps it had been worth the injury after all. She closed the the message and smiled. James always had that effect on her.



## Chapter 19

Ollie made it home just before half ten, he bought some rizlas at the shop on his way. He went into the kitchen and considered making some dinner, and opted against it for now taking a long drink of water instead. He headed back for his living room and sat in the chair he was most fond of. He relaxed every muscle. His brain ached from the meeting with Joanne. Life never was simple was it? Ollie depended on his friends, essentially that's all he had. He had alienated his family long ago, the decision was drugs or them and at the time it seemed like the better option. He would always get a Christmas card from his Mother and Sisters, his father never signed his name, for whatever reason. Ollie liked to imagine he was dead, but he doubted it. The eldest of the sisters, Jenna, visited him quite often. But over the years these visits became less and less frequent. In his mind Ollie envisioned himself as a seven year old boy again. Jenna would be three, walking around in the manner babies do, using very sudden and random words "Mum! Daddy! Owivur" as she called him then. His youngest sister, Erin, would only be one. Sitting in her high chair with the constant look of shock on her chubby face. Ollie himself would be in the garden, burying his toys or whatever reason he did that for. His mother, a red haired woman with a freckled round face, a bit like a pancake, would call him in and wash his face smiling at him.

She would give him some toast and sit him on the wooden chair in the kitchen next to his sister and he would make her laugh as their mother prepared her mushy baby meal. Then, later on, his father would come in and pick him up and give him a new toy before getting him ready to bed. How easy it was to be happy back then, romance was a television subject and love branched no further than the family and the only drugs one could get their fingers on were those your parents gave you when you were ill. Ollie missed those days. He missed a lot of happy moments in his life, Joanne included.

There was an emptiness about him these days, a void that was unable to be filled in a healthy manner. Kate helped, he knew she was unhappy. He could see through her well established cellophane shield. She was as, if not more, empty inside than he was. And he had made it his private mission to help anyway he could. He picked up the skins and placed his marijuana in, rolling himself a thick joint. He ignited it and breathed in the first breath of grassy smoke. His depressive state of mind was replaced with total relaxation, the void inside him contacted and relaxed like a third pupil in his soul responding to some unseen light. Very steadily the prospect for some dinner became more and more attractive. He went into the kitchen and struggled to find anything particularly nice to eat. Recalling his vision he took two slices of bread and placed them in his toaster. He ate an apple in the three minute countdown to the sudden jump of the nicely toasted bread. He scrapped some butter across the toast and put them on a plate, he took them back into the living room, still drawing at his joint.

He finished his meal and drifted away again, into a state of relaxation he had never felt without use of one intoxicant or the other. He steadied himself long enough to turn on the television, he switched over onto one of the shopping channels and laughed hysterically at things that would otherwise be too boring to stand most other moments. At least, he thought, he was genuinely happy.

## Chapter 20

The calendar on her wall told Kate that it was the twenty third of December, James would be home tomorrow. He phoned her to confirm he would be back, at around seven in the evening. For now though she would battle her way through her drudgery, today she and Ollie had arranged a drink in their usual cafe. Joanne may be there, nothing was certain with her. Although she had now met her on occasion something still bugged Kate about her. Oh she was pleasant enough, filled with compliments. But something lurked in her, deep down inside, that was venomous and malicious. Or perhaps Kate was simply envious of her, envious that she held the heart of the most tender and warm person she had met since her own husband.

Kate peeked under her bandaged up hand and winced at the dark gash on her hand. She visited the Doctor, who praised her on her quick reactions in cleaning the wound, he supplied her with some antibiotics in the instance that the wound became infected. So far it hadn't. She applied her lip stick and picked up her hand bag and walked out the door. She got in her car and turned on the radio, a slow romantic like song played straight away. She sighed and reversed, keeping the song playing. She drummed on the steering wheel, not to any particular beat, but more her own. The pressure on her injured hand sent sharp strikes of pain up her arm. She probably should of walked, but she just didn't have the energy for it. Eventually she arrived at the part of town she had intended to park, she dropped her coins into the parking meter and walked the extra ten seconds to the entrance to the cafe, she peered around and saw Ollie, sitting alone, waving at her.

"Sorry I'm late, I decided to drive." she apologised.

"Oh thats fine, didn't realise" he laughed.

"So, where's Jo today then?" she faked interest.

"Oh she's off with her friends again, not sure what they're up to though." The pair changed the subject mutually with no lingering awkwardness, Ollie peered down looking at Kate's bandaged hand.

"So did you go to get that checked?"

"Yeah the Doctor told me I'd be fine... No losing limbs for me" she laughed the same almost strained laugh Ollie witnessed most of the time, and as usual he could only smile back. There was a fragility to Kate that Ollie noticed a lot, he wondered if she noticed his and doubted it. "Anything planned after this then?" Ollie asked smiling,

"Gosh, I need to clean the house, James is home tomorrow and the place is a tip..."

"Oh is he? Great."

"I'd love for you two to meet up, after christmas obviously." Kate smiled again.

"That would be cool, love to meet the guy." The pair finished their coffees and departed from one another, Ollie returned to work and Kate to her home.

## Chapter 21

Kate sat at the cafe in the Airport sipping what was left at the bottom of her third coffee of the day. It was six thirteen according to the digital clock provided with the plane time tables, James would be arriving in twenty minutes.

She closed her eyes and imagined the possible scene, he'd come out rolling his suitcase behind him then she'd run up to him and wrap her arm around him, kissing him. And then the end credits would roll along to some song in which the words "Love" and "Happy" were repeated. In all honesty, Kate would never indulge in such a public display of affection and neither would James. It was just one of their unspoken agreements. At home anything goes, in public there are limits. It didn't mean they were any less in love, did it? As Kate smiled as the people that weren't her husband made their way into the main terminal she grew more and more anxious to see James. Eventually he appeared, scruffy brown hair, red hooded top and blue jeans, trudging his green plastic case as though it weighed five tons. He noticed her and grinned she returned the gesture.

"Morning Handsome" Kate said giving her husband a friendly cuddle as he came close.

"Yeah," he yawned "Morning." He continued to look around almost totally oblivious to the woman standing before him.

He grinned as a red haired woman came, walking elegantly into the terminal with a fabric suitcase rolling along with her in one hand and a black handbag in the other, she was dressed in a black suit jacket and a white shirt with an almost navy blue skirt to match.

"Kate you've met Eva right?" James asked as the woman parked herself beside the pair.

"No I don't believe I have," she returned extending a hand to the woman.

"Such a shame, James just hasn't shut up about you love." said the woman with a twinge of English in her accent. Kate adopted the term Scottish off Ollie, a term he used to describe either Scottish people with slightly English accents or Scottish people with what he deemed English mannerisms. This woman was certainly Scottish on both accounts. Eva was James' business 'partner' for this journey. As the trio sat in the airport cafe they retold their encounters with the German Businessmen and women and all the various wild stunts they got up to while overseas, which in Kate's honest opinion was not at all crazy.

"So Kate, what line of work are you in?" Eva asked putting emphasis on the 'you'.

"Actually I'm unemployed," Kate responded

"Hmm, why's that? More jobs than people if you have the know how and where, love." The red haired woman told her seriously.

"Actually, I prefer staying at home..." And that was the end of the conversation. The drive home was one with out Eva, or much conversation. James snored lightly to himself in the passenger seat as Kate drove home. "So, your mum phoned... Said she's coming for Christmas again this year." Kate said to the half asleep Husband.

"Hmm..."

"She reminded me 'Not tae overcook tha' terky'" Kate copied Moira's accent as best she could.

James stifled a laugh. Hours later, once James was cleaned and dinner was ready the pair sat facing each other over the table. "Kate..." James' said in a tone Kate was only too used to,

"Yes?" She responded already aware of what was about to be said.

"Eva and I have been invited to a conference in London in January..."

"That sounds exciting, you haven't been to London have you?" Kate tried to act nonchalant,

"No... So is that okay?"

"Of course James' I'm not your babysitter" Kate smiled warmly "I know you have to work and I'll just hang out with Claire and Tash."

"Yeah That's great."

There was a silence, "You know I miss not having you around James" Kate sniffed back a few dry tears.

"Yeah... I don't have to worry about you... Do I Kate?"

"Only if you want to..."

## Chapter 22

Ollie's eyelids flickered open in the dim morning light of his bedroom. He rolled over onto his back and exhaled deeply, it was Christmas wasn't it? He stepped out of bed with a reluctant twist and waded over the various items of clothing littering the floor and made his way to the kitchen. He poured himself a glass of water and drank slowly. Plans had been made for today, Jenna and Erin were coming up in the afternoon and Joanne was coming later on. Turkey dinner, cranberry sauce and boughs of Holly would not be seen in the kitchen. Erin would probably bring something, a cake perhaps. She had dreams of becoming a chef, and it seemed likely. Ollie considered ordering in a Pizza.

He then made his way into the living room and examined his bitter excuse for a christmas tree. Actually it was quite nice, a plastic imitation tree with tinsel and baubles tossed over it at odd areas almost covering its four foot mass. It just had a melancholy about it, like a school without children. Ollie ran his fingers through his dark hair and stared out of the window onto the road below, the usually busy street was almost entirely deserted save a few robins daring to venture out. He pulled on a red t-shirt and a black shirt over it. He gelled his hair in it's usual way and brushed his teeth. He went over the the two christmas presents under the small tree, one from Mike and Stevo and the other from Hannah. He unwrapped Mike and Stevo's first knowing it would likely just be some small joke gift. He was right, a "Grow your own wife" kit. Ollie gave a stifled laugh and put it aside, Hannah's gift would likely be more thought provoking. Correct again, a manga art book. He vaguely recalled telling her he liked the cartoon style. He flicked through the pages for a while and attempted to water his new spouse, and the doorbell went. He got up and rubbed off some of the dust that had gathered on his lap while he was sitting down. He answered the door, and as he assumed two grinning brow haired girls stood there with presents piled high. \*\*\*\*Kate opened her eyes, James had shaken her out of her sleep and he now loomed over her, smiling with a tray of pancakes and chocolates. "Merry Christmas, love." he kissed her on the lips and rolled back over onto his side of the bed.

He hadn't yet changed into his lounging clothes, all he wore was his penguin printed boxer shorts that Kate had bought him the previous year. Kate smiled and ate her breakfast, "What time where you up?" she asked.

"Six? maybe Half past." He replied, Kate checked the clock beside her. It was eight. After breakfast they made their way to the Living room, a large tree stood in the corner well decorated. Kate and James had done it up together prior to his leaving for Germany and beneath it sat a number of presents for each of them.

The sieved their way through the presents, nothing of real interest. A few dresses for Kate and Socks for James. Kate began to busy herself in the kitchen, glazing the turkey and so on. She was used to doing meals like this. Moira was a hard woman to please, even harder still considering she detested Kate for being the unambitious trollop that stole her son for any real success. She had never said this but it was always implied. The phone rang in the living room as James sat watching Scourged in his new pyjamas Kate had bought him. He answered and muffled words indicated that Moira was lost, again but would try to be on time. Several minutes later, the door went and Kate answered, having completed the most of her tasks so far. And surely enough she was there, empty handed.

## Chapter 23

Ollie helped his sisters with their burdens and sat them down in the living room, their grins never left their faces. They began bombarding him with questions, how was your day, how have you been, have you spoken to mum lately? These were the questions they asked every time they met. It must be hard for them, essentially being in the middle of the conflict between their father and their brother. Actually it was safe to assume Erin had no idea, the fall out happened before she could really understand what was going on. All she knew is that Ollie and their father never talked, and that to mention either in the other's presence would bring on the darkest and most sinister of silences. Jenna pushed three large wrapped boxes his way and Ollie opened them with care, a Blender, a toaster and a novelty alarm clock all from his Aunt Ella. Erin handed him a small, thin, rectangular present wrapped up and a larger box shaped one. The smaller one was a framed picture of a young boy on an ancient three wheeled bike, some time in the past ages with a pair of legs (presumably his father's) in the background. The boy had long floppy black hair and huge green eyes almost resembling an owl's it took no time for Ollie to remember the exact moment the picture was taken. Written in red pen at the left hand corner was "To the Best Boy," it was his mother's handwriting.

The slightly larger box was filled with small styrofoam chunks and nestled amidst them was a small clay figurine of a dinosaur emerging from it's egg. A stray tear dropped off Ollie's chin, neither of his sisters had noticed. This small figurine of a dinosaur emerging from it's egg was a gift from his father a very long time ago. Olivia Aitken, the mother of Oliver, Jennifer and Erin Aitken, had been the worst effected by the war between the two males that meant the most to her. Her son, Ollie, had committed no horrendous crime but an ill act against her husband at the age of fifteen. Her husband, had packed her son's bags before she could even beg him to stop. She crawled within herself and spent most of her days looking at photographs of earlier days, the ones that meant a lot to her she would send to her son. She never visited him, she never spoke to him... And she could not for the length of herself think why. Oblivious to his sadness Erin grinned and lifted an other gift "This one's from me" she beamed holding it out to him, he unwrapped it and smiled, an other shirt to add to his little collection. Jenna too handed him a gift, a medium sized bottle of after shave. These were routine gifts, where would one be without after shave and shirts? Luckily for Ollie, Erin had anticipated his lack of effort to buy food and had prepared a very basic christmas dinner and had brought it in small plastic containers. They ate, and once they had finished his two sisters left with a kiss on the cheek and a merry christmas. Erin grinned, and threw in "And if I don't see you, Happy New Year" and waved as she walked off. After half an hour of playing around with his new toys, making various messy drinks with the blender, the door bell sounded. As he opened the door he expected to see Joanne, but standing, soaked, at the doorway, was Kate.

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