

Prologue

Her vision blurred red.

He hit her again.

She tried to breathe and it sounded like a baby's rattle filled with syrup as blood gurgled deep inside her lungs. She coughed a fine red mist into the air.

The crunch again of metal on bone.

Something in her broke and she began the long, slow fall into the void. As she fell, an image stirred in her shattered mind and she saw the face of a man, a boy really, no more than twenty years old.

A dream, she thought. A beautiful dream.

No, not a dream, a memory.

What a thing to remember at the end of it all. Why did it have to be this? She wanted something warm to grab on to

GJ Moffat

and hold tight as she fell into the cold embrace of her death. But death is not a friend to warmth and she died drowning in the memory of her own tears.

They sat at the end of the bed with the red cotton throw wrapped tightly around them, making silent bets on the threads of rainwater racing down the window. Two of the threads merged as one, becoming greater together.

She started at a loud crack from the logs burning in the open fireplace. A single glowing ember was spat out on to the old floorboards, scorching the wood black.

Tell him.

She rested her head on his shoulder, her breath a warm caress on his damp skin and his sweat like seawater on her lips. Her heat penetrated deep inside him, settling down in the marrow of his bones. She slipped her hand into his and squeezed hard as the branches of the oak tree raked against the outside wall of the flat.

Tell him.

He turned to her and saw something fleeting in her eyes, something that aged her for a brief instant well beyond her years.

'What?' he asked.

'Nothing,' she said. 'It's nothing.'

As if repeating it would make it true. He sensed that it was not true, but his fear stopped him from asking the questions that he should have asked. He shifted his doubts to the same place he kept his feelings about the growing distance between them in the last month. If he didn't think or talk about it, how could it be real?

How different would things have turned out if he had forced her to open up? She wanted him to do it. To push her down on

Daisychain

to the bed and shout at her to let it out, to tell him what it was that was forcing them apart. But he never did.

They could hear the growing din of rush-hour traffic outside on Byres Road and lay back on the bed. The cotton throw fell away leaving them both naked. He turned on his side and traced his fingers over her shoulders and then down over her breasts and on to her stomach. She put her hand on top of his and pressed it hard into the flesh of her belly. She wanted to push his hand down through the layers of skin and fat and muscle until he was inside her womb and could feel the pulse of new life growing there.

Tell him.

He sensed her muscles straining and mistook it for desire. He leaned over and opened his mouth on hers, his tongue sliding over her lips and entering the warmth of her mouth.

Tell him and it will be all right, she thought. Then she almost laughed at the naïveté of the thought. They had both just graduated from Strathclyde University, confident about the future in their chosen careers of law and architecture. And it was a career she wanted, not a husband and a child – she knew that it was selfish but she still found herself pushing him away. How would they bring up a child?

And now, as the distance between them continued to grow, she convinced herself that she was not even sure that he was the one she wanted to make a life with. She knew in her heart that it was the fear and uncertainty driving them apart and not just the natural atrophy that a dying love endures before the end. But she willed herself to ignore that, to make bearable the decision to leave him and end the pregnancy.

Tell him.

GJ Moffat

Instead, she guided his hand down between her legs, pushed up to meet him and lost herself to him.

Make it good, she told herself. Make it the best and he'll hold it dear, like a photograph that fades with time but never disappears.

It was.

Later, he stood in the door to the street with his hands in the pockets of his jeans and watched her run through the rain to the underground station, water kicking up off her heels. The street lights buzzed to life along the road and glowed dirty yellow in the late afternoon gloom of a Glasgow winter.

He raised a hand to wave as she stopped at the station entrance, lifting the wet hair up out of her face and smiling. He was too far away to see that the smile never touched her eyes, too far to distinguish the tears from the rain.

Was it good enough, she wondered? Then he stepped out into the street, his bare feet splashing in the puddle outside the door. The rain quickly soaked his shirt, moulding it to the contours of his body so that he appeared naked to her. He cupped his hands to his mouth and shouted.

'I love you, Penny.'

Tell him.

Tell him.

Tell him.

Her insides twisted and screamed and she took an unsteady step back towards him, towards life and away from the ugly death waiting for her down the years. But he did what he always did and stepped back inside and out of sight.

'I never want to see you go,' he told her once when she asked why he did that. 'No long goodbyes.'

Daisychain

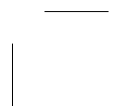
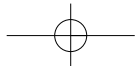
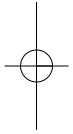
The moment was lost for ever, her tears coursing away with the water in the gutter and falling into the sewer drain beneath the street. She stood alone in the rain.

'Till a' the seas gang dry,' she whispered to the space where he had been.

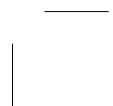
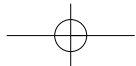
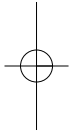
It was how she always responded when he told her that he loved her – a poet's way of telling him it would be for ever.

She paid for a single at the ticket booth and waited on the narrow central platform for the distinctive orange train. She stepped on and the doors hissed shut behind her. The train rattled and lurched forward, taking her into the black of the tunnel.

And she was gone.



Day One



1

Monday, 5.00 a.m.

As an associate lawyer in one of Scotland's biggest firms, Kennedy Boyd, Logan Finch didn't get nervous about the big deals any more. But confidence had come slowly and he still remembered the days when he would have to bolt to the bathroom in the early hours of a crucial day to deposit the dinner of the previous night.

He looked at things now from a business perspective; the long nights he endured as a sort of down payment on his future as a corporate lawyer. And now, not far off his thirty-fourth birthday with the biggest deal of his career looming, he felt in control. It had been a price worth paying.

Things change.

He opened his eyes in the dark of his flat, still half asleep and caught in a dream. As the mental residue slowly bled

GJ Moffat

away and reality seeped back in, he was surprised at how real the dream had seemed, at the raw emotions it touched off deep in his chest. He put a hand to his breastbone and felt his heart thudding quick and hard.

Penny.

He hadn't thought of her in a while, and now this dream of their last time together in his old flat. He wondered where she was in the world today. Hong Kong was the last he'd heard from Bob Crawford, but that was probably more than a year ago now.

'Jesus, Logan,' he said aloud. 'Get over yourself.'

His voice sounded too loud in the quiet of the room. He swivelled his feet out on to the wooden floor and lifted a complicated-looking remote control panel from his bedside table. He touched the screen and it glowed a soft blue. Still rubbing sleep out of his eyes, he fiddled with the remote for a bit, said fuck a few times and then found what he was looking for. There was a low-level electric hum and the curtains started to slide back from the floor to ceiling glass panels that made up the exterior walls on two sides of the flat.

He padded barefoot to his wardrobe and pulled on a skanky old sweatshirt, jeans and a woollen beanie hat. Then he walked to one of the windows and pulled the door back, still amazed at how light such a big piece of glass and steel felt on the slick runners. He stepped on to the wooden decked balcony sixteen floors up and looked out to the south side of Glasgow from his place in the Pinnacle building at the end of Bothwell Street.

He loved this flat, even though the mortgage was crippling

Daisychain

him and he'd had to sell his beloved old Merc to finance the deposit. Driving a five-year-old Ford Focus wasn't quite his thing. But you had to make sacrifices in life.

'I hope you're not putting yourself on Queer Street with this mortgage,' his mum had said.

Logan wasn't quite sure where Queer Street was, geographically speaking, but it had certainly felt as if he was on it each time he'd checked his bank statements since he moved in six months ago.

He leaned on the steel railing and blew a long, white breath out into the frigid February air. He was glad for the hat but his toes tingled as the frost on the deck melted under his feet.

The old feelings stirred by the dream bubbled just beneath the surface and Logan drew in a sharp lungful of the cold air to clear his head. He pulled the hat off and ran a hand over his close-cropped hair, turning when he heard the cat's claws clicking on the deck. The old girl jumped on to one of the wooden patio chairs and curled into a ball.

'Coffee, Stella?' he asked.

The cat eyed him contemptuously, purred heavily and then went to sleep.

'Suit yourself.'

He smiled at the memory of the day the cat had wandered into his old garden flat through the open back door while the boys were round for the football. After a six-pack of Stella Artois each, she had her name.

Logan walked to the open-plan kitchen area and turned the coffee machine on, then picked up his acoustic guitar and went through to the living area to wait for the coffee. He'd

GJ Moffat

wanted to learn how to play when he was a teenager but never had the patience back then. He'd started taking regular weekly lessons about a year ago and could now at least play a tune and even throw in a bit of a solo. Sitting on the couch, he strummed through a few bars of a Kings of Leon song and then got up to have his coffee.

He filled a big mug with coffee and milk and went back out to the deck. His attention was drawn to the Kingston Bridge on his right where two marked police cars were whipping over the River Clyde below with their blue lights strobing out into the dark of the morning. It was eerie watching them without the accompanying sirens and he guessed they didn't need them when there was no traffic around. He followed the blue pulse of their progress south and sat on the chair next to Stella. The cat half growled, half purred (grurred?) when he stroked her head.

'Looks like somebody's in trouble,' he said to the disinterested cat.