

The light. The light was like forty thousand flash bulbs. No. The light was like suddenly opening the fridge door in the darkness of a two a.m. kitchen. No, no. The light was like.. the light was like... The light was like nothing Ben had ever seen. It felt like it would burn through his head and out the other side. He fished about hurriedly in his bag looking for the antique sunglasses thrown in at the last minute.

He should have put things in more carefully. He should have paid attention. He should never have been in such a hurry to leave.

Finally, his hands came up against something unfamiliar and plastic.

He pulled the glasses from the bag and stuck them on his face without bothering to clean them up at all first. He was desperate to get some relief from this unholy glare. Once able to see more clearly, he glanced around at the others standing and waiting. Why were they standing? Crouched over in that ridiculous position, neck bent at forty-five degrees. No matter how many times he went on a plane, this phenomenon of human nature would always baffle him. Did these people really think that their standing would hurry up proceedings? He turned his attention to the workers on the ground. Their clearly unhurried pace seemed to suggest that these impatient passengers might be starting their holidays, or their 'onward journeys' as the airlines like to put it, with a severe crick in the neck.

No sooner had this thought occurred to him than he remembered that ginger headed boy at school. Jeavons, that was him. Boy had a crick in his neck for all of four days. Never walked with his head up straight again. Not for the remaining three years of school at least. The teasing was merciless. Poor devil.

Strange how these thoughts just came out of nowhere. Lately, Ben had noticed more and more how many things triggered long-buried memories.

He looked back at the still acute and obtuse passengers. There they all were. The usual suspects, more or less. The middle-aged couple who look like they last had a proper

conversation about thirty-five years ago and whose communication now seemed to consist of malevolent, blame-apportioning stares. The young family with four children; mother with hair pulled back so tightly that she could barely close her eyes and the glimmer of a delicately placed tattoo peeping out from beneath her vest top. The juvenile Italians with mobile phones already active and cigarettes at the ready. The suave unplaceable European businessman, or crime lord, with his immaculate suit and perfectly coordinated silk tie.

And then there was Ben. Where would he fit into all this? For him not a holiday. Not a business trip. Not coming home. Not visiting relatives.

Not easily classified, that was him. Always had been, he supposed. Once again his mind started to drift back. This time to a dingy, cramped, under-used spare bedroom.