

Jackson Stewart was not impressed. He had been promised a brilliant night and it was turning out to be one of the worst yet. It was one of those horrible nights that combined heavy, low fog with so much rain it looked like the ark was about to float along down the road behind him and so cloudy that the moon was almost invisible, not offering any light to break up the darkness. And it was cold, so bloody cold.

And here he was stupidly attempting to light his cigarette -damned smoking ban- in the pouring rain and biting cold, waiting for friends that were already over an hour late at a place he didn't even want to be at. He wasn't a dancy person, he didn't like this kind of music and he certainly didn't like that fact that he suspected this was his friends attempt to get him out and meeting women again. They just didn't get that he wasn't interested, not yet, not at all really. His ex wife was now happily shackled up with an investment banker from Leeds, it hadn't taken her long to move on, in fact, she hadn't even bothered to tell him that it was over before she'd found his replacement.

He shook his head and inhaled sharply again, blowing out a steady plume of the noxious smoke into the air, watching it mingle and dance with the smoggy atmosphere that was already making his foul mood ever worse. He took one last drag and threw his cigarette butt onto the ground, grinding it out forcefully under his heel. He shivered and pulled up the collar of his jacket a little more, the warmth and light of the dance hall called to him seductively, but he ignored it, mostly out of principal as his eyes scanned the murky darkness for his friends car.

Bending down he picked up his pint glass of coke, being a driver was a pain in the arse for sure, and took a sip of the tepid, flat drink. Nice, just perfect he thought sarcastically.

The wind picked up suddenly in a vicious gust, whipping cruelly at the exposed skin of his face, forcing him to retreat back further into the doorway of the church hall. He glanced around, noticing the posters promising him that God and Jesus loved him. He couldn't help but snort, it didn't feel like anyone loved him right now. Even his friends seemed to have forgotten about him. He glanced at his watch, almost swearing out loud when he saw how long it was since he had arrived, remembering just in time where he was, he curbed his tongue. He might not be religious but he'd been brought up to be respectful of others and churches were one of those places you didn't misbehave in, though he was sure the monthly dance had probably shown the hall its fair share of swearing and bad behaviour.

He sighed, the place itself was rather plain, but the church next door to which it belonged, was a different story, it looked like it had stepped right out of a gothic horror novel, all looming dark stone work, towering steeples and gargoyles glaring down at him, sitting in judgment of his sins. He laughed bitterly, his sins, he was practically a boy scout compared to some, but even he cracked sometimes and now was one of them. His friends had left him here long enough and he was sick of it.

Marching back inside to return his glass, Jackson ducked and weaved his way between the writhing bodies of the couples on the dance floor, raising an eyebrow at some of their moves, sure that they were more likely to go to hell than he was. He deposited his glass on the makeshift bar, trying not to look at all the happy people. He shouldn't have been there alone, he should have been having fun with his friends, he'd kill Jesse for not turning up.

He decided that trying to make his way back through the dancing throng was not his idea of fun and skirted round the edge of the dance hall, breathing a sigh of relief that was quickly whipped away by the howling wind. He pulled his jacket closer around him and ducked his head against the rain as he

rushed towards his car, his keys already in his hand, he didn't want to spend another second out in this monsoon if he could help it.

He didn't see her immediately, she was tucked in the doorway of the church next door, and if he hadn't happened to glance that way as he slid his key in the lock of his car door, he might have missed her completely. She was so small, dressed in a white shift dress that clung to her body where she was soaked to the skin, her long, dark hair plastered around her pale face. She looked ethereal, almost angelic huddled against the old wood and dark stone, her arms wrapped around her body for warmth. Without stopping to think Jackson rushed over to her.

"What are you doing, You should be indoors, it's horrible out here. Is everything OK, do you need some help?"

As if coming out of a dream she turned and smiled at him, such a sweet smile that it lit up her whole face, making her go from pretty, to down right gorgeous.

"I'm alright," she answered him. "I'm just waiting for my friends, they were supposed to come tonight and then give me a lift home, they seem to be late." She shivered again, her arms covered in goose bumps, the sight affecting him so much that, before he knew what he was doing, Jackson had shrugged off his jacket, placed it around her small shoulders and started steering her towards his car.

"I'll give you a lift home, I'm not leaving with you standing out here on your own, I'd never forgive myself." There was something about her that made him want to beat his chest in a very he-man kind of way and do whatever he could to protect her. Sure someone else should be doing it but as he was the only one here, the job fell to him. Ignoring her quiet protests about it being out of his way, he bundled her into his car, shut the door and sprinted round to his own side, practically diving into the drivers seat.

Shaking the water out of his eyes, he pushed his soaking hair back from his face and jammed the keys into the ignition, starting the car and cranking the heater onto full the second the car fired into life, he tried not to shiver in the chill air. "Oh, you're cold, here, your jacket..." the girl tried to twist round in the seat and remove his jacket from around her shoulders but he stopped her. "No, no, you keep it on for a bit, warm up." Jackson tucked the soft leather back around her. "It's OK I don't really feel the cold," she argued back, but still Jackson insisted she kept it on. Once the heat started circulating in the car and the windows had lost some of their foggy sheen, Jackson turned to the girl. "So what's your name and where do you live, sweetheart?"

He pressed a button on his satnav to turn it on and wrote in the address Grace gave him, she was right, it was quite out of his way, but somehow he didn't mind that fact, there was something very calming about her, and for the first time in so long he couldn't remember, he felt a bit of the pressure in his chest ease, like he could breathe a little freer as he swung out of the car park and onto the dark country road.

Jackson checked the little screen of and saw that they still had quite a bit of travel time until he could drop her off, and they had spent the whole drive in silence. Never really having been one for conversation but feeling he should make the effort, he turned to Grace, and attempted to be polite.

"So, do you go to that dance often?" and he immediately wanted to bang his head on the steering wheel, what a stupid question was that?

But Grace just smiled that sweet smile "I come every month, there isn't really much else to do around here. My parents are rather old fashioned and they think I need a husband and are convinced that this is the place to find one. You see, they met here at this very dance, it's kind of a village tradition now. I pretend that I'm not really into it, but honestly , I quite enjoy it, it's nice to come out with my friends." She looked at him. "But I haven't seen you here before, no offence but this is kind of a small village so we don't get many people just passing through, and I'm sure I would have remembered you."

Jackson grimaced, keeping his eyes on the road ahead, mostly because the fog had grown thicker in the last half hour since he had left the dance hall and was now managing to obscure almost all the markings of the road, anything that might have been distinguishable was now lost. He was just glad that he had his trusty satnav to warn him of up coming turns and bends in the road or they could have had a nasty accident. He was very glad that he had insisted he give Grace a lift home, he couldn't bear the thought of her trying to make her own way home. The wind had picked up and was battering at the sides of his car, making it rock slightly from side to side, forcing him to drive slower than he would have liked. It seemed they had nothing but time.

'I'm just visiting...' he started, never really being comfortable talking about personal problems, yet with her it all just seemed to pour out, "my best friend from school moved here a few years ago and I came to see him. He and his wife and friends were supposed to meet me at the dance tonight, but they never showed up. I only just got into town today." His hands gripped the steering wheel tighter, mostly as he navigated a particularly nasty bend in the road, but also in an unconscious effort to anchor himself to the here and now, clearing his throat he continued. " I just got divorced. My wife - well my ex wife- we married almost straight out of college, and I guess we just grew apart." He heard the standard lines tripping off his tongue, the ones he told everyone who asked about it and he suddenly realised that he didn't want to be like that anymore, he didn't want to keep making excuses and covering for her, she had been in the wrong, not him. "Well, my ex grew apart and then grew close to someone else, I just wish she had told me before she moved out. I came home from work to an empty flat, not even a note."

He turned to look at Grace, expecting to see the usual pity or the knowing look of 'well you must have done something wrong' that was usually on peoples faces when he told his pathetic story, which was one of the reasons he hardly ever did. Yet Grace again surprised him. She looked angry and offended on his behalf. "What a cow," she exploded. "Well I think you're well shot of her. You need someone nice, someone that doesn't just care about herself. My best friend just broke up with her boyfriend, and I told her the same, find someone that's nice and not a self centered idiot."

Jackson couldn't help but smile to himself as he leaned forward in his seat, peering through the little arcs in the rain the cars windscreen wipers, he liked the fact that she seemed determined to think the best of him even though she didn't know him. They sat in comfortable silence as he drove, with only the little voice of the satnav issuing directions ever now and then. He didn't really know what else to say and thankfully, Grace seemed content to stare out of the window, almost as if she knew that his brain was working overtime, rolling through the thoughts in his head. And Jackson had a lot of them.

For the first time since his wife had left him he actually felt like he was a decent human being again. Just the small fact that a stranger had in her own way stood up for him, meant the world. Of course his friends and family had, but they had to, it was kind of in the job description, but not Grace. Maybe he wasn't the pathetic loser that Beth had said he was as she signed the divorce papers with an air of relief, like she was glad it was over and she could move on to the next poor sap stupid

enough to marry her. He wasn't the bad guy, all he'd done was work to keep her in the life that she had made herself accustomed to, never saying a word when she blew through his bonuses without him seeing a penny, or refused to get a job herself, stating that she was too busy, yet never seeming to do anything but shop and lunch with her friends, friends who all seemed to dislike him.

Now, sitting in this car on a darkened road, he realised that he deserved happiness as much as the next person did, he did deserve to move on and meet someone new, someone who deserved him in return. He began to smile to himself as even though he couldn't see more than a foot in front of the nose of his car in reality, in his head he began to see clearly for the first time in months. He opened his mouth to speak but Grace beat him to it.

"I've never liked nights like this," she sounded mournful, almost sad as she stared out of the window at the rain rolling in little rivers down the glass. "I don't really feel the cold anymore but they aren't nice all the same. I hate the noise of the wind." Grace turned away from the window to look at Jackson, seeming to see him again for the first time. "Thank you for bringing me home." He was just about to answer when the cultured voice of the satnav advised him to turn left, then an almost immediate right and that then they had reached their destination.

Grace gave him another dazzling smile and flung open the door, darting out into the rain, slamming the door behind her, she vanished almost instantly into the fog.

Feeling slightly dazed at her abrupt exit, Jackson turned back to the satnav and called up the details of the guest house he was staying in, swung his car around as quickly as he dared and headed back to the road and hopefully a good nights sleep.

Jackson awoke the next morning feeling like he'd finally had a full night of sleep and was actually well rested, something he hadn't enjoyed in a long time. He pondered for a moment just what had changed and recalled his epiphany the night before. He smiled to himself, Grace had been a sweet girl. He was almost glad that his friends had stood him up, he was tempted to leave and start repairing the tattered remains of his life back in London, but he guessed he should check on them just the same, he wasn't a complete asshole. He looked around for his phone which he usually took from his jacket pocket every night and put on his bedside table... His jacket, where the hell was his jacket? . Then it came back to him with perfect clarity, he hadn't taken it back from Grace.

Cursing lightly to himself at his own stupidity, he knew he'd have to go and fetch it back, his whole life was in that jacket, wallet, phone, house keys, everything. Though in truth, he would be lying if he said the thought of seeing her again and having an excuse to call at her house, wasn't such a bad one. He quickly got dressed and rushed through his breakfast that the guest house provided, though he hardly tasted a thing, he was feeling rather excited at the thought of seeing her again. Hopefully he would still have her address.

Outside the day was bright and new, no sign of the horrible rain and wind of the night before. It was like the rain had washed everything clean, leaving the air smelling fresh and crisp, but it was still cold and he mourned the loss of his jacket once again as he started his car and flicked back through his satnav for her address, sighing in relief when he found it.

The twisting country roads were much easier to navigate in the daylight and he made quick progress, pulling up outside a neat looking semi detached that was surrounded either side with its almost identical looking brothers. He strolled up the small path, fixing a pleasant smile on his face as he knocked.

The door opened but he was greeted not by a small, delicate, dark haired woman as he had expected, but by an older one. Maybe she still lives with her parents, he thought as he fought to keep his smile in place.

"Hi there, sorry to bother you, but is Grace home? I gave her a lift from the village last night and lent her my jacket. I hate to be a pain but my wallet and phone are in it and I need it back."

The lady listened, hearing him out, a look of dawning resignation on her face, before she answered.

"I'm sorry, Grace and her family no longer live here."

Jackson frowned in confusion. "They don't? Well I definitely dropped her off here last night. Do you have an address for her now then? I really do need to get my stuff back."

The woman nodded and picked up a pad from her little hall table and scribbled an address on it.

"You'll find her here."

Jackson thanked her and returned to his car, entered the information he'd been given into the little device and followed his satnav as it called out directions to the new address.

"You have reached your destination" The voice chimed out, over and over. Ignoring it as he cruised up and down the street, Jackson couldn't help but begin to worry. There didn't seem to be any houses or anywhere that she could be staying, just a long, high brick wall that seemed to stretch the length of one side of the street. He was about to give up when he spotted a blond haired woman walking down the street beside him, carrying a small bunch of flowers.

Pulling his car over he cruised slowly next to her, wound down his window and called out. " Hello, sorry to trouble you, I'm looking for a young woman named Grace Jones, I was given this address and as you can see, there's no houses her. "

The girl paused and turned to look at him and he was pleasantly surprised to see she had rather a lovely face. She wasn't strikingly gorgeous like Grace, but she had an almost classic beauty that shone out even though she wore no makeup that he could see, leaving her fresh faced. She seemed not to know what to do at first, her head tipped to one side, her little nose wrinkling as she appeared to assess him and his question. Finally, seemingly satisfied that he wasn't some weirdo stalking a girl he'd just met, she nodded, visibly relaxing.

"I know Grace, she's my best friend. Come with me, I'll take you to her. I hope you don't mind, but I've just got to drop these off first. " She nodded at the flowers in her arms. Jackson debated for a second, not really wanting to get side tracked, but as this girl seemed like his best bet, he nodded and jumped out of his car, locking it behind him and fell into step beside her.

"I'm Leila, " the girl offered as they walked.

"Jackson" he replied back with a small smile in response to her own.

Following her down the road a little way, he noticed a set of gates up ahead, breaking up the seemingly endless stretch of bricks that made up the wall they were walking besides.

Leila turned in to the gates and went through, entering the quiet cemetery. She quickly made her way down a path with the familiarity of someone who visited often. She stopped in front of a headstone that bore the names Alfred and Jane. "My Grandparents," she told him in answer to his silent question. "It's my nans birthday today." She bent and placed the flowers in front of the stone, arranging them to her satisfaction, she straightened.

"Come with me."

He followed again as she took a smaller pathway that branched off from the main one. She stopped and pointed. Jackson followed her finger and ahead of him he spotted another headstone, one that had something familiar looking draped over it. He rushed over, picking up his jacket, his fingers delving into the pockets, finding his phone and wallet exactly where he had left them. Once assured that his possessions were intact he glanced at the stone, and immediately felt his blood freeze in his veins. The words on it were simple 'Grace Jones, beloved daughter and treasured friend' .

Leila had come up behind him, putting a comforting hand on his shoulder. "When did she pass? he finally managed to force out.

" Two years ago," Leila replied.

"Do you mind me asking how?"

Leila sighed. "We all used to go to the church dance, every month without fail, it wasn't a special thing, a bit lame really, but it was all we had, so we made the best of it. Anyway, it was a really wet night, a storm had been brewing all day, you could feel it in the air. We would all usually meet up at the dance and then after, Grace and I would walk home, but I had a bad cold that week and stayed indoors. Our friend Jeremy had promised to pick Grace up and drive her home, but his car got a flat and he never made it. We think that she grew tired of waiting in the rain and decided to walk home on her own. It was foggy, and cold, and the roads round here are hard to drive at the best of times. The driver didn't see her and knocked her down as she crossed the road. She died almost instantly."

Jackson shook his head in disbelief, "She can't have, I gave her a ride borne last night. It must be someone else. " Leila pulled out her mobile phone and flicked through the screen for a second before turning it to face him. There was a small picture of Leila and the girl he had driven home the night before. Her hair was dry and curly, her clothes neat and makeup perfect, nothing like the bedraggled mess she'd been the night before and he almost didn't recognise her, but her dazzling smile at the camera was exactly the same. Jackson felt like he'd been hit in the gut with a sledge hammer, all the breath knocked out of him. His brain whirled as he struggled to gather his thoughts. He'd only known her briefly for an hour at the most, but he felt like she had given him so much, she had made him see clearly, think logically for the first time since he found out about his wife's betrayal. And now she was gone, he didn't know what to do. But never being one to just give up. He took a deep breath, mentally and physically pulling himself together. She might be gone, but the things she made him realize were not. He had to get on with his life.

'Are you OK?' Leila asked. Jackson nodded slowly, finally pulling on his jacket. As he slipped his arm into the sleeve, he glanced at Leila, she really was quite lovely, not in the delicate way that Grace had been, more petite and curvy, but still captivating. Something nudged his shoulder, a light brush that in normal circumstances he would have ignored, but not this time. This time, he listened.

"Yeah, I'm alright, just cold. Hey, I don't suppose you'd care to join me for a coffee to warm us up?" His heart skipped a little beat in his chest when she smiled wide, a smile that lit up her entire face.

'I'd like that."

And as she slipped her arm through his Jackson though that maybe Grace had given him back something other than his jacket.