

Kay

Lorraine, Amber and I are looking out the tinted windows at everyone outside the church. They've been catching up with old friends, while waiting for the coffin to arrive and saying how terrible it is they only see each other at funerals. The car is cold from the air conditioning even though it's warm and sunny outside. Lorraine looks at me as if to say: '*Are ye right?*' and I say: 'In a second, chicken.'

Amber looks fed up. She's a pain in her arse with the whole day already. Know how she feels. There's something on her mind, I know by her.

'Are you alright, love?'

She kind of shrugs her shoulders a bit, 'Can I ask you something, Nanny?'

Brace myself for what's coming cos you never know with this one.

'Do you think he was just holding on until I had Jaime?'

Never let myself think about these things. Suppose I always hoped he was holding on for me.

'Maybe, Amber. I don't know. I do know he was delighted he got to meet him and when you called him James, well, he was chuffed with himself.'

'He wasn't disappointed in me, then?'

'Don't be so stupid, you could never do wrong in his eyes, you know that.'

Pull her over for a hug. Whatever I've said seems to work because her face isn't as cloudy-looking as it was.

Gem's brothers and their sons slide the coffin out of the hearse and lift it onto their shoulders. We follow them through the guard of honour. All the kids from six to sixteen are dressed in

their stripey blue-and-white kit. Their white shorts are sparkling. Gem has finally gotten someone's mother to wash the bloody things. 'How-wa-ye, Kay,' some of the kids say as I pass, some are too upset to look at me. Jo is waiting at the church door with Jaime all snuggled up in his buggy. She gets a bit embarrassed because she doesn't know what to say. I don't know what to say either so I just say, 'How-wa-ye, luv,' and move on. They place the coffin on front of the altar and we all sit down. Feel like I'm at me own funeral. My family is here. Gem's is here. Fellas from his job, various committees, even parents whose kids were in school with Lorraine. Bet he's looking down; pissed off he's not able to go to the hotel for a few pints after. Niall sits down behind us and touches Lorraine's shoulder. It's nice to see her finally having a bit of happiness. The good ones are hard to come by. Remember my own mother saying to me: 'Gem by name, Gem by nature.' It reminded me to hold onto him tight. The service is nice. The priest goes on a bit but he's getting paid a few bob, it's the least he can do. Know I should be upset but I'm too nosy looking around to see who's here. The church is packed. Wonder if Gem can see all the people who want to say goodbye to him. At the cemetery the priest says a few more prayers but he makes it quick; it's coming up to two and people are getting hungry, myself included. When they lower his coffin into the ground I realise for the first time that's my Gem they're putting in there. All day I've been taking mental notes like I'm going to see him later. I'm not ready for him to go. I want him back, even the banjaxed version will do.

'What, Ma?' Lorraine whispers to me.

'I don't want to be without him. I say out loud.'

'I know, Ma, I know.'

But she doesn't know, she doesn't know. I've been Mrs James Neville twice as long as I was ever Kay Kelly. He hadn't even retired, for fuck's sake. What am I supposed to do? Sit around and wait twenty years until I eventually die and join him?

Lorraine is pulling me away from the grave but I don't want to leave him. I am making a scene, I know. Can hear people talking and getting upset, others are just walking away.

Couldn't give a shite. I'm staying where I am. Amber comes over and hoists me up under the arm, the same way I did when she was small.

'You're not making a thick out yourself,' she says, dragging me towards the car.

Hold my ground. Lorraine's trying to break the two of us apart, hissing at Amber to stop. She eventually lets go and runs off towards Jo. Lorraine gently steadies me on my feet and kisses me on the cheek.

'We'll give you a minute, Ma,' she says.

Open my hand and stare at the soil. After a few minutes I slowly pour it into Gem's grave. Can't say goodbye to him, not yet. Turn around and follow them back to the car.

SIX

Amber

Jo, me and Jaime get a lift back to The New Hotel with Uncle Tony. Even though it's not the 'new' hotel any more, it's opened about three years. Head straight for the bar. Had to stop breastfeeding. It was turning me stomach. And I've had more than enough of being teetotal. Nine months of it I had, well seven... six and a half, really. My ma's going mad, said the baby needs it for his immune system. Me bollix, six weeks was loads. We're the only ones in the bar, except for a couple near the window. They're looking at me like they know me. Think they're friends of me ma's. Smile at them and they smile back.

'Amber?'

'Can we have a word with ye, love?'

Get Jo to follow me over with Jaime.

'We're Paul's parents,' yer woman says.

Jo is pushing the buggy behind me, hears the tailend of the sentence and spins it back around. Can't believe she's legging it, leaving me on me tober with these two.

'Maybe this wasn't such a good idea, the day that's in it an' all. I'm sorry love.' The oulfella says, getting up to go.

I'd heard Paul's ma and da wanted to see Jaime. I was getting around to it, but I had no idea how mental everything would be. A five-minute stroll to the shop now takes hours of packing before you even walk out the bleedin' door.

'You're grand, sit down.'

Don't know where this calmness is coming from, feel real mature or something.

Knew your granda from years ago. Would you believe I played on the under-sixteens' for him?

He takes out an old photo from the inside of his jacket and hands it to me. It's the 1974 football team. All the lads are wearing the blue-and-white kit, except all their hair is real long. My granda's wearing flares and has a beard. I've never seen him with a beard before. It's mad. Know this sounds stupid, but I've never thought of him as anything other than my granda. The oulfella says to hang onto it; he fished it out especially for me today.

'We saw the photos you sent Paul on e-mail, he's gorgeous, it's like looking at Paul all over again...' The ma says.

He'd rang a good few times all apologies, but I was having none of it. If he meant it, he'd be ringing from Dublin not Australia.

'Do you want to see the real thing?'

The oulwan is shaking a bit and the oulfella holds her hand. Shout for Jo to bring over the buggy and take Jaime out and pass him to his grandparents. He goes and gaas like never before and his eyes are wide-open staring the two of them out of it. His timing is perfect.

'We'll head off in a few minutes, love,' the oulfella says.