

Hear the faint tinkle of the bell downstairs. Put me alien willy away, promising myself I'll try again some other time. Thump down the stairs, the same way Lorraine thumped up them when she was a teenager. Open the living-room door and see Gem out of his chair, slumped face down beside the coffee table. Drag all thirteen stone of him to sit up. He's gasping for air and even though his body isn't moving, his eyes are darting all around the room.

'Hold on, love, I'll ring the ambulance.'

I know if I let go of him he'll fall face-first back onto the floor. I'm trying to hold him up, pulling him toward the settee to lean up against it. He's looking at me, trying to say something. I can't make it out. Those brown eyes are turning black.

'I yuv ye.'

'What love? I don't understand.'

'I yuv ye.'

'"I love ye", is that what you're trying to say, Gem?'

The head slightly nods and the eyes slip closed.

'No, Gem.'

I'm shaking him.

'Not yet, I'm not ready, Gem!'

He never listened to me once in forty-two years of marriage and he sure as hell isn't going to start now.

'Wait until I get the ambulance.'

But he doesn't. He lets one final breath and goes limp. Want to knock the shite out of him. He never gave up so easy before. I'm not sure what to do; so I sit there with him in my arms. It sort of feels like the old days, we'd settle down after he came in from football or whatever meeting was on that night. We'd always have a cuddle while we watched some shite on telly. Wonder what I'll do, now that I'm not his wife. It's all I've ever been or wanted to be. I should really ring Lorraine.

FIVE Amber

Just got him down for his nap... Ah... he's fabulous, even if he does have my granda's nose. Freaky thing is though he's the absolute spit of Paul. Jo said most bastards are the image of their das, it's God's way of making sure they can't deny them. Asked her to be godmother, don't know why – if I died the last person I'd want Jaime living with is her. Wonder if 'down there' ever gets back to normal, or if I'll ever feel like a human again instead of a cow? Can't wait for him to get a bit older and buzz off him a bit, he doesn't really do much at the moment. Sleeps, eats, shits, cries, cries. I'm still wrecked, though, me ma's only gone since this morning and the house is in a heap already – but I won't be cleaning a thing until Sunday evening. Ah... she's been great but I needed a break from her as well. There was a reason I used to go out so much. Niall wanted to bring her away for her birthday but there was no way she'd go while I was still pregnant. So the other week I started dropping him hints. Fair play to him, he had it booked and paid for so she couldn't say no. He's nice, kind of quiet – real hairy. Had his kid up here last week, now he's a nuijob. Screams his head off at the slightest thing, wants bleedin' everything. Couldn't wait to see the back of him. Me ma's trying to be real patient but any day now she's going to let a roar at him. Having said that, she's in great form lately, haven't seen her so happy in years. It was mad seeing them off. Think the last time she was on holidays was when Nanny and Granda brought the two of us to the Canaries when I was about three. Niall called for her about half six this morning. Me and Jaime were up anyway so waved them off from the porch. She went to get in the car about three times but kept running back to remind me about something else. She finally gets in and is putting her seatbelt on when I get this awful pain right in the pit of my stomach. Not sharp or anything, like a dull ache, and I have this horrible feeling I should be stopping her getting on the plane. It must have been panic. Probably thought I wouldn't be able to manage on my own. We've been grand though; I've enjoyed having him all to myself.