

I had to come away to forget. Or was it to remember? I wasn't sure, but somewhere there needed to be something new. If the pain of the past defines us, it can also consume us. Better maybe, then, to float away on a sea of calm nothingness, to a land where the scars of our soul can offend no-one, least of all ourselves.

I had arrived late in the afternoon and shielded myself from the horizontal rain by pulling up my collar and squinting. My umbrella had long since been blown inside out and back again and now hung limply from my wrist, like a listless grey bird, who having given up on the pain of its broken wings, was content now to simply swing back and forth on the burning noose of my wrist.

The bed and breakfast was on the edge of town, set off from a line of broken terrace houses, once painted in jaunty colours for seaside tourists, but now faded and peeling. Half of them seemed empty and a few had boarded up windows or to let signs outside. In contrast to this dismal showing, the '_____' seemed as though it had always been drab. Set diagonally against the seafront, it lurched over its foundations as if straining to jump into the ocean. A small line of pebble-dashing seemed all that kept it from hurling itself into the waves, which curled and washed against the sheer drop of the shore some two metres down.

I was asleep and dreaming again. But this time I saw the shadow of a man, standing by the window. Tall and broad-shouldered, I thought, and it flashed across me that he was young and good-looking, even though I couldn't see his face. Although he seemed strong, his body was stooped, not with physical pain, but the pain of some intense emotion, which had become embedded in his very stature.

And again I dreamed of the handsome sad man – for handsome I now knew he was. As I turned in my sleep there he was standing again by the window, his pained stature curved like the peak of a wave as it travelled across it's long ocean's journey – moving, but never changing. In my sleep I wanted to reach out for him, but I was unable to move, as if there was an intense fog between us, stalling all movement and vision. Longing to catch just a glimpse of his face, I willed him to turn and as if he could somehow, finally, perceive me, his right shoulder twisted slowly towards me. Thrillingly I clung to sleep, determined to see just once what his face looked like. As he turned the moonlight rippled across his brow, drawing the brown waves of his hair into a _____ over the proud straight slant of his nose. But his eyes!

I ran my finger along the keys and wondered how long it had been since I'd played? I remembered childhood lessons with Mademoiselle Yvonne, a friend of my father's, who had tried her best to instil musical scales inside me, something I had never learned to master, wishing instead I could have been born a natural musical genius and spared the tedium of hard work. The worn red leather of the

stool shone invitingly at me and looking around to check the old lady had not returned early, I eased myself onto the seat and spread my fingers across the keys.

Surely I would be able to remember chopsticks or even *'When the Saints go Marching'*? I frowned and concentrated. The early evening sun was dipping across the sea, spreading orange ripples over the casually bobbing gulls. Sunlight sparkled and glimmered through the dusty net curtains, bouncing off the drawing room mirror, bringing life and brightness to the usually dull and depressing room.

I pressed a key and the single note leapt into the room, crisp and clear, as if the piano had just been tuned that morning! But that was impossible! Startled, I dropped my hand and looked keenly around the room again, as if to check that no one else was there - no one who could have played or tuned the piano? But only drab furniture and dusty nets looked back. Curious, I tried another key – the same thing! Crisp and in key. I played another and another, drawn in by the strange purity of the sound. Unbidden a tune came to the back of my mind - I must have learnt it on one of those long, boring, after-school sessions with Mademoiselle Yvonne, although I couldn't remember ever having heard it before. The tune seemed to form itself through my fingers as I played and as the beautiful melody progressed, with each note the room seemed to glow warmer and brighter, as if awakening after a long and cold slumber. I found myself humming along, my body swaying gently to the rise and fall of the cadence...

Suddenly, the door burst open and the old woman clicked across the floor like an angry spider!

The unfairness, the injustice of it! This miserable old woman had taken it away from me! From nowhere I felt a sharp and violent rage enter my heart and pour itself through my veins. My hands leapt up, half clenched in fists, but finding an easier target on her throat, closed and squeezed. An unearthly shriek tore itself out of my throat and as the old lady pulled back, clawing desperately at my hands, we pitched and fell, rolling into the piano.

Just as quickly as it came the rage had gone, leaving me confused and bewildered. I looked down at the old lady, cowering before me, horrified at what I had done. My hands were still at her throat, and I whipped them away, seeing purple marks at the sides and base of her neck. I backed away, confused, muttering something, I don't know what. She stayed still, staring at me, not with fear, I realised, but a sickening kind of sadness. She lifted her hands to her throat and felt at the marks. Sighing, she dropped them again and uttered a single word – *'Josephine.'*