

The History Channel

by  
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CHARACTER NAME	BRIEF DESCRIPTION	AGE	GENDER
Madeleine	Well turned out, confident, alcoholic.	29	Female
Michelangelo	The cantankerous ghost of the Renaissance artist	c.550	Male

## SCENE ONE

AT RISE:

MADELEINE sits on the settee in her lounge. There is a coffee table by the settee and a TV in front of her. On the coffee table is an envelope, a full bottle of red wine, a half full bottle of wine and a half full glass. A corkscrew with the cork still in it is on the table. She drinks wine throughout, but never appears drunk. There are empty bottles scattered around the room, otherwise it is tidy. The rest of the room is filled with bookcases, full of history books. Where there is space, there are pictures of famous historical characters.

MADELEINE

I used to find it frustrating talking to stupid people. These days, I just find it frustrating talking to people. So, you'll understand, my job in a call centre tests me to the very limit. Still, every cloud has a silver lining. One grey, November morning, as I sat waiting for my next call, thumbing through the pictures section of *Edward I: a Great and Terrible King*, a Mr T T Rafferty came through on my line. I ran through the security questions with him - date of birth and address. Then I asked a few extra questions of my own.

You see, a certain Thomas T Rafferty was the star of a number of 1980s disaster films my best friends and I loved in our teens. Classics of their genre: leaning more towards stunt than plot and always with a pleasingly high body count. I freely admit I still carried a torch for Thomas T Rafferty. I had to find out if I really were talking to the man himself:

“Mr Rafferty” I said “are you Mr Thomas T Rafferty, star of *The Tenement Terror* and *The Iceberg Incident*?”

He chortled - I've never heard anyone actually chortle before - and admitted he was. I say “admitted” I got the impression he was truly proud of these shining examples of 1980s cack. But who am I to criticise? I particularly enjoy the part in *The Iceberg Incident* where the penguins go mad.

“Are the penguins wild?” the love-interest asks.

“Wild, my dear?” Thomas replies. “Why they're absolutely livid.” High wit.

We indulged in a brief reminiscence of the explosive climax to *The Tenement Terror* and he reminded me of its sequel, *The High-Rise Horror*, not one of my favourites. Then I asked him what he was doing now.

“Pantomime,” he told me.

“Ah, they never offered you Bond, then?”

“Never even got an audition, he frankly confessed. “They already had that English bloke lined up for it when it could have been my turn.”

Oh yes. And I don’t think for a minute “that English bloke” will be strutting the stage dressed as Widow Turnkey this Christmas. “Never mind,” I consoled him. “Bond’s over-rated.” He liked that and after a bit more chortling was ready to end the call. Just before hanging up he asked me what my name was.

“Madeleine,” I told him. I spoke the truth.

“That’s a very pretty name.”

“I’m a very pretty girl.” Opinion is divided on that, but I’m always very well turned out.

Thomas chortled again, said it had been a pleasure speaking to me and hung up, without actually saying why he’d phoned in the first place. I bid him goodbye, but I knew this would be the last he heard of me. Pantomime dame or not, a hero is a hero. And a hero is exactly what I’ve been holding out for all these years. I wrote down his address and contact details.

Well, I waited until I had a bit of free time and I went over there. I dressed casual, but feminine, for my first encounter with Thomas T Rafferty: long suede skirt from River Island, t-shirt from Oasis, with a wrap-around cardigan from Bennetton and my long, black coat - my prize possession - from Jaeger. Long boots, as always, from Ravel and I took my Gucci handbag. Make-up was subtle: foundation and a natural look in eyeshadow and lipstick. This was meant to be a casual encounter; I didn’t want to look overdone. Accordingly, I went easy with the perfume that day - just a hint of Obsession by Calvin Klein. It is the only perfume I wear and I always wear it.

To entertain me during my vigil I had OMD, The Style Council, The Human League and Ultravox. I rarely listen to anything post-1989.

I found the house easily enough, but it looked a bit run-down. In truth, it looked like council. I don't know if his money is secretly stashed offshore, or if panto just doesn't pay very well. All seasonal work, I suppose.

I found out he lives with a chubby blond bloke; it took me a long time to find out he is Thomas's son. I worried for a while it might be his boyfriend, that would have been a tricky obstacle for a girl to surmount. There was no sign of a wife.

The first encounter didn't go quite as planned. In fact, I bottled out of encountering him at all. In the end I spent a couple of weeks just driving out there and waiting: watching the house until I'd concocted my plan.

Eventually, plan concocted, I phoned him up. I told him I worked for a local charity and wanted to set up a youth drama group, in his home town of Brecon. Something to give the kids there a focus, a challenge, direction and hope. And so on. Who knows, maybe we'd find the next Richard Burton. If not, I declared, we'd at least give the kids their self-respect.

In truth, I'm a vehement opponent of amateur dramatics. I think theatre - and the arts in general - should be left strictly to the professionals. Thomas T Rafferty, however, does *not* think art should be left to the artists. He agreed to meet me in his local pub the following Tuesday.

And I met him. I was slightly late, due partly to the grumblings of Michelangelo delaying my departure from the house. Partly because it took me some time to find the pub and then because, once found, it took me some time to find somewhere to park. I can't just roll into a car park and leave the car in any available slot. Oh no, my car has a faulty handbrake, so I have to find somewhere completely flat.

The pub was called the Seven Ages of Man, but it should have been the Seven Shades of Shit: not a night went by that a vicious fight didn't break out in the back bar. I gave Tom - he told me to call him Tom - some vague, rambling rubbish about my vision for a drama group; I really should have given it more thought beforehand. I drank too much and had to make a hasty exit before he noticed. I don't know how much Tom Rafferty thinks a young lady should be drinking, but it's probably not two bottles of red and half a litre of vodka a night.

I was lucky to make it home without tipping the car down the embankment...

MICHELANGELO

What are you doing, Maddalena? If I've told you once, I've told you a thousand times, this is no way for a lady to behave!

MADELEINE

Oh, you're awake, are you?

MICHELANGELO

Very much awake and don't you turn me to the wall!

MADELEINE

I'm not going to turn you to the wall.

As I was saying, I was lucky to make it back without tipping the car down the embankment and when I did get home, this is what I came home to; a lecture from the conscience in the picture frame, Michelangelo.

Yes, Michelangelo, from the Sistine Chapel and all that. He lives here. Not as he was, that would be impossible, but his ghost. It's maybe not quite accurate to say he lives here. He dwells here maybe, or haunts would be more precise. In an irritating, rather than a scary way.

He haunts that picture of himself on top of my bookcase. In his lifetime Michelangelo thought the picture captured his soul and when he died it turned out, it really had captured his soul. He found himself living on inside the portrait.

In the vaults of the museum where it was kept, the problem went unnoticed until a couple of years ago, there was a minor fire and the portrait was one of the casualties. The soul of Michelangelo needed somewhere else to go and it went to a print of the portrait, in a gift shop in Florence, just minutes before I bought it and brought it back here.

He didn't speak a word of English when he arrived, I didn't even know who he was for months. But when I realised the picture was speaking and speaking a foreign language, I started leaving the TV on while I was out. Then, when I came home in the evenings, I'd speak to him, really slowly. It wasn't all that long before he started speaking back to me; really slowly. Soon after that there was no shutting him up. I could lay the picture down to muffle him, but I couldn't actually shut him up.

I brought him up to date with the goings on in Italy: Garibaldi and the Unification;

Mussolini, the mafia, Pavorotti, Berlusconi and all that. Then I brought him up to date with my own comings and goings and he was not keen on this business with Tom Rafferty.

MICHELANGELO

How can I keep silent when I know you go to lurk like some criminal outside an innocent man's house?

MADELEINE

We've moved on from those days, I'm meeting him for a drink. Anyway, what do you mean "lurk like some criminal"?

MICHELANGELO

I think it is a crime to go following people around. To stand outside their houses for no good purposes and watch. To break into the house and rifle through their belongings. It is a crime, isn't it?

MADELEINE

Well, you make it sound like one. But I was outside the house for a very good purpose and I don't need to follow him anymore, I'm meeting him. I know where he's going to be. And I don't break into their house, I have a key.

MICHELANGELO

You know very well what I mean. And how do you have a key? I'm sure this man never gave you a key. How did you get your hands on them?

MADELEINE

Michelangelo, you think you want to know how I came to have a key, but you don't really. You'd be upset if you knew how I came to have a key. Or angry.

MICHELANGELO

You should be out meeting friends, watching a play, or a cinema play. You should meet a nice young man, one your age and get married. Have some children and forget this madness.

MADELEINE

We usually bicker for a while after I've been out on my exploits and then we watch TV. He was a bit uptight when he first arrived, he'd only watch the arts programmes and BBC2 for months. Gradually he relaxed and expanded his viewing repertoire and now, with nothing to do but wait for Judgement Day, he'll sit here and watch whatever's on.

He likes a murder mystery - once he realised the victims weren't really murdered and we both like *Ice Road Truckers* and *Coronation Street*. Speaking of which, Michelangelo, *Midsomer Murders* is on in a minute, do you want to watch it?

MICHELANGELO

Si, on the coffee table, please.

Madeleine gets up, moves the picture onto the coffee table and switches the TV on.

MICHELANGELO

Can you move me a little closer, please?

MADELEINE

Of course.

Madeleine moves the picture closer to the TV and pours herself a glass of wine.

MICHELANGELO

It's starting... Can you turn me a bit? The light's glaring on the screen.

Madeleine turns the picture.

MADELEINE

OK?

MICHELANGELO

Back the other way a bit.

She turns it again.

MICHELANGELO

Move me forward. No, actually back. Can you draw the curtains? That will do.

MADELEINE

If he doesn't feel he's made enough of a nuisance of himself on any given day, he'll have me spend the first five of ten minutes of a programme maneuvering him into the perfect viewing position. I don't get much peace from him, especially any peace to read.

She picks up a heavy book from the coffee table.



## MADELEINE

I don't read much apart from historical biographies, but these I read a lot of. There's not much I don't know about the English monarchy. Or the Italian High Renaissance. Or Michelangelo. He doesn't like it when I read about him. He was the driving force behind my art history degree. He was my dissertation. I got a first. My dissertation tutor said he had never had a student who dived so fully into her subject. No-one who lived and breathed it the way I did.

## MICHELANGELO

On my god! He's stabbed him with a pitchfork!

Madeleine glances at the TV.

## MADELEINE

Oh my god! So he has!

She turns away from the TV.

## MADELEINE

After university I came back to Cardiff and met Rhys.

Rhys was the love of my life. I wanted him to be what Joe is to my oldest friend, Hannah; what the horrible Geraint is to my auxiliary friend, Nina and most of all, what Matthew is to my little sister, Meredith. Matthew is Meredith's *husband*.

I was out Hannah and Nina, renewing old acquaintances when I met him. In the absence of having made alternative best friend arrangements, Hannah and Nina are still my best friends, but truly, in hindsight, I was already finding they were slipping away from me.

Once I'd met Rhys it didn't matter so much about Hannah and Nina. I did a bit of temping and eventually ended up with this job in the call centre. It didn't matter that the job was naff, I was only really bothered about Rhys and eventually I was going to leave anyway and do a PhD in history. Then I would become a history professor. Working in a big, old university and living in a big, old house. With Rhys.

Problems were the money and the course, of course. There was nothing to suit in Cardiff and I didn't want to leave again so soon. So I carried on with the job. It wasn't so bad while I had Rhys, nights out, biographies and TV. And on it goes... We bought the house and stopped going out so much.

Michelangelo and the Renaissance gradually slipped from my mind. I was into the Plantagenets next. In King John's day they thought that madness was contagious.

Rhys played rugby on a Saturday. When we first got together he started going straight home after rugby to tidy up and go out with me. When we bought the house and moved in together he started staying out for a few pints, then coming home. We'd stay in then, to save money.

I always pictured both of us when I thought of my future. I imagined cultural holidays, weekend shopping and home improvements. Reluctantly, I imagined, as the years went by, a few grey hairs and kids.

We were together for six years. He made me happy, he made me whole, he gave me a reason for living in reality. He made me laugh and eventually, he made me cry.

He left me for The Lovely Abigail.

She drinks some wine while she thinks.

#### MADELEINE

Yet life goes on and my meetings with Tom became a regular thing, once I initially hooked him with the drama group. He sometimes brought George along. George was Tom's son. George, like me, was of the view that art is for the artists. He's a mechanic by day and a DIY enthusiast by night. I'm not convinced DIY is an area for amateurs either, but he offered to help with the props.

You may wonder, I certainly did, what Tom T Rafferty looks like twenty years after he hung up his action hero hat. He looks very well. Not for him the middle-aged paunch and comb-over. His hair is full, if graying and he's kept himself in very good shape. Quite the opposite of George. At thirty-three George already shows a fair amount of scalp and sags around the top of his jeans. I have wondered if there was a mix-up at the hospital when he was born. You hear of these things.

Anyway, Tom is as fine as ever he was. You'd never guess he's in his fifties. I like an older man.

Well, I have done since I met him.

After the pantomime season finished, the Tuesday drinks became Friday drinks.

I tended to start before they arrived and the Friday drinks became Friday benders. For me at least.

I had to stay over on their settee. I found a spare set of keys down the back of it, so I took the one for the back door. That's how I came to have a key. So I started letting myself in when they were out, sorting through his laundry and his wardrobes, doing his ironing, or the washing up and so on.

I thought all that would make him happy and kindly disposed towards me. Even if he didn't know it was me. I thought such a benevolent presence in his life would make him more open to other presences, but instead he became a bit distant.

Michelangelo reckoned that Tom must have had his doubts about me, but Michelangelo reckoned a lot of things. He didn't really know about life these days, he just thought he did because he watched *This Morning* five days a week.

I told myself I was imagining it at first. The trouble with Tom. I've flown off the handle many times before, only to find I was imagining it. But now and then you find you're not imagining it.

This time I waited a while and I wasn't imagining it. He used to invite me to sleep on their settee if I'd had too much to drink. Which was always. Latterly he just advised me to leave earlier, or get a taxi. He never wanted to chat. He asked me about the drama group, of which there was nothing to tell. Then he'd say he'd better get going. And went. Maybe I should actually have done something about the drama group. Maybe not.

I hated to be pushed aside.

When Rhys left me, I stayed in on my own - most of the time - for months. I listened to *I Am A Rock* by Simon and Garfunkel. I listened to *The Winner Takes It All* by Abba. I listened to *Everybody Hurts* by REM and *Sad Songs Say So Much* by Mr Elton John. They did say so much.

I phoned in sick for work. I ate Snickers bars and sat in the house playing Patience for a week. I developed mild repetitive strain injury in my wrist.

We went out for a drink, the day he told me. I think he wanted to be in a public place.

I'd known things weren't perfect. I knew he didn't pay much attention to me; I even felt sometimes that he didn't want me around. But I thought that was normal.

When you'd been together years that was just how it was.

I never thought, however, that there was a Lovely Abigail waiting in the wings. He went straight to her flat from there, after offering to find me a taxi. I declined and walked the seven miles home. It's not that far when you've got plenty to think about.

I was back into the Renaissance at the time. I was halfway through *The Collected Letters of Michelangelo. Volume Two* and when I got back to the house I went to it and started reading. I didn't stop until I came to the end. Then I revisited *Michelangelo: Biography of a Genius*; *Michelangelo and the Pope's Ceiling* and *The Agony and the Ecstasy*. I knew the stories well and I knew all the characters. It was the only company I wanted. Other than Rhys.

I tried not to think about the situation I was in. One thought led to another and I'd swing between torturing myself with thoughts of him and her, to musing over the pointlessness of what was left. With Rhys around I could blot out the fact I was going nowhere. At least I was going nowhere with him. At least I was going nowhere with him.

But once he was gone, the rug across that gaping chasm was removed. I had always told myself that however I'd been failing, things would end up alright. But now I knew better and there was no point telling myself things wouldn't get any worse, because things can always get worse. This was the reality, now that there was only me in the house. Well, me and Michelangelo.

And the feeling returned every time I re-entered the house - arriving home from work, coming in after lager and sympathy with Hannah and Nina. I thought that it would never go away; not while Rhys was with The Lovely Abigail. And I stopped going out so that I wouldn't have to come back in. I stayed that way for months.

Yet these feelings all have their shelf life. I couldn't stay in the house forever. Eventually you have to do something.

Eventually I went back out.

MICHELANGELO

Have you guessed who's done it yet? I think I have it.

MADELEINE

How would I have guessed who's done it? I haven't been watching it, have I?

MICHELANGELO

I don't know. You haven't been turning many pages of your book. You've just been muttering.

MADELEINE

Just because I'm not turning pages, doesn't mean I'm watching your stupid programme.

MICHELANGELO

I thought you liked this programme.

MADELEINE

Not really, no. It's too far-fetched. It's ridiculous.

MICHELANGELO

I don't think it would be so interesting if it wasn't far-fetched.

MADELEINE

I don't think it's interesting. Shut up and watch it if you're watching it. Otherwise I'll turn it off.

Michelangelo "humphs".

MICHELANGELO

Sorry.

Madeleine picks up the remote control and flicks through other channels.

MICHELANGELO

Hey!

MADELEINE

It's only the adverts! You're not missing anything.

MICHELANGELO

It's on again any second!

MADELEINE

Oh, here you are then. Have it.

She slams the remote down in front of him and goes to fetch another bottle of wine. Michelangelo speaks while she is out of the room.

#### MICHELANGELO

What did I say? What did I do? Sometimes she has these moods. I don't know why, but I always say sorry, although I don't know what I've done. Sometimes she leaves me stuck here all night with the TV on and it is not a good place to be for a long time. My eyes ache by midnight and I can't do anything except look at the TV.

Madeleine returns, opening a bottle of wine.

#### MADELEINE

I know I'm not perfect. I can be a bit stropky and I'm not always proud of myself where Michelangelo's concerned. He might have been a towering genius and formidable temper in his lifetime, but here he is just a soul trapped in a picture. Dependant for me on sound, vision and company.

I treat him badly sometimes. I leave him too close to the TV; I turn him to the wall, so he can't even see out of the window. I left the radio on a rock station once, even though I know he can only stomach easy listening. All on purpose, just out of anger. Or spite.

One morning I came downstairs with a storming hangover. Well, that wasn't just one morning. But on this particular morning, when he could see I wasn't going to bite his head off, he asked me what my plans were for the day. I told him I was finishing a biography of Lord Nelson.

"Is your head hurting?" he asked me.

"Not too badly," I replied.

"Is your heart hurting?" I told him he sounded like a bad ballad.

"Well," he said "you were in a very bad mood last night." He said I'd drunk nearly two bottles of wine and when he spoke up, apparently, I'd told him I was going to put him in the loft. He said he was locked in the vaults of the museum for years "I don't want to be locked away again."

I said I was sorry and I was. I shouldn't have been saying things like that to him, although I knew I often said them. I wouldn't really put him in the loft. I said. He said he's been scared to speak for the rest of the night. I didn't blame him.

He said I was a tragedy, so I explained that a tragedy is where someone gets a reprieve moments after they're executed or something. I could understand if I was an annoyance, but I'm not a tragedy.

He saw an advert once for internet dating. He was very keen for me to give it a try: it seemed both safe and clean to him. I thought he should have a go. I can see how his profile picture might have put a few people off, but I could do the typing for him, or we could maybe have invested in some kind of voice recognition thing. It would have been perfect for him.

I didn't want a go myself. I was seeking one particular man and with that end in mind, I wrote a poem. A poem for Tom.

She reaches for a small box which rattles with the small  
pieces it contains when she shakes it.

#### MADELEINE

I wrote it from this fridge poetry set and it was pretty good considering it's the first poem I'd written since school.

Fridge poetry was one of many unwanted Christmas gifts from Meredith. She has never given me a single gift I have wanted at the time of giving, but if I leave them lying around long enough, they tend to come into their own. I think this came the year I gave her a Carravaggio print, which went straight into her loft. A very bloody expensive print that I had to order from America.

The fridge poetry ultimately found a use as this romantic gift-slash-gesture for Tom Rafferty. It gets quite addictive, mind. Now and then I while away an hour or two with it, just for fun.

What it is, is a little box, full of little pieces which have words or some individual letters on one side and are magnetic on the other - designed for sticking to fridges. You're supposed to make sentences and poems from them. It's both frustrating and compelling, there are thousands of pieces, but not too many individual letters and very few of the words I actually need. Sometimes the words just tumble out like magic, all in a poetic order; sometimes it takes me hours to get the first line. It would be quicker to sit down and write my own from scratch, to be honest, but then they wouldn't be magnetic.

This particular set is the Shakespearean set, but I don't think you could make an actual play of it.

I wrote most of it in the spare room, I couldn't do it down here because Michelangelo wouldn't stop asking me to read a bit to him. I don't think he was expecting it to be Shakespeare, although one way or another, that's exactly what it was going to be. They were all Shakespeare's words, I suppose the knack is in how you line them up.

Eventually, though, lined up they were. And tis is what it said:

You are the light of my life and  
 The only one I want to be with  
 I love you far above the sun and stars  
 Our IOOOs - an I, three Os and an S, thousands - of happy memories are what  
 Heaven is all about  
 I will always love my heartspun hero  
 I am your Madeleine.

I read it out to Michelangelo. He commented on the fact it didn't sound entirely as if it were about me and Tom and asked me what heartspun meant. I think I made the word up. I stuck "heart" and "spun" together. I liked the sound of it, though. And the poem did sound like Tom and I; we'd had loads of happy drinks together.

Anyway, I took it round to the house. I put the words in my pocket and off I went. I had my fingers crossed they'd both be out and indeed they were. Other than that, it did not go as well as I had hoped...

I went in through the back door, but in the dark I tripped over a pair of boots just inside the door. I went flying and when I stood up, I found a lot of the words and letters had fallen out of my pocket. I couldn't find them again. I put the kitchen light on and I found a torch to look under the furniture with, but loads of it had vanished. So I had to do it with what was left. It was rather abbreviated. It said:

U R - just the letters U and R -  
 U R the light of my life  
 The one that I want  
 I love the sun and stars  
 Our IO happy memories are  
 All about my heartspun hero

The individual letters suffered particularly heavy casualties and so, I couldn't write "I am your Madeleine," all I could manage was "I am Mad". I was going to go back and change that, but when I drove past again there was a light on upstairs, so I jus carried on.



I was pleased with “The one that I want” line though. Who would have thought you could find John Travolta and Olivia Newton John in a box of Shakespearean quotations?

MICHELANGELO

Who?

MADELEINE

Who indeed.

MICHELANGELO

No, who are John Travolta and Olivia Newton John?

MADELEINE

You haven't seen *Grease* yet? We'll have to watch that. You'll love it.

Tom didn't contact me the night I left the poem. In the end I went to bed and tried not to think about it. Otherwise I was just going to be watching my phone. I made a point of leaving downstairs. Michelangelo said he'd shout if it rang, or beeped for a text.

Madeleine pours a glass of wine, picks up a remote control and starts flicking through the channels with it.

MADELEINE

Look at this, there's a programme on later about the sun and the end of the world.

Michelangelo thinks that when the world ends, the Kingdom of Heaven will still go on. I think it's weird he's still so pious when he's spending eternity in a picture frame. He thinks that proves God's existence.

MICHELANGELO

Si. If God can put me in a picture frame, he can release me from it too. He won't forget me on Judgement Day.

MADELEINE

No, but I'm sure he'll wish he had.

I got really angry with him one day. Hanging there are smug and sanctimonious, so sure he was right. He said he pitied me, I think that was the torch to the flame. I shouted at him. I screamed.

“No!” I said. “I pity you! Stuck there in that bloody picture for ever and ever. Long after my bones are dust you’ll be there in that picture or some other picture, haranguing some other poor soul! Taking out your frustrations on whoever is here. On and on you go and on and on you will go.”

And on and on I went about it. And then I turned the picture so all he could see was the wall and the flickering of the TV in his peripheral vision. And no-one knows as well as I do the range of his peripheral vision; I spent enough time turning him so he could see exactly what he wanted to see. And exactly what he wanted to see was all he did see, I often thought. I left him there all night.

The next morning, when I turned him back round, I was ashamed of myself.

I carried on, though, bullying Michelangelo. But sometimes I was kind. I used to perform acts of mercy to improve his quality of life. Quality of afterlife. I took him for a drive in the car sometimes, I drove too fast to impress him and we nearly went down the embankment doing ninety. One time he asked me to bring back some chewing gum for him. He couldn’t taste it himself, but he was fascinated by the idea of a sweet that is never swallowed. He wanted to see me chew for an evening and I did it of course. I also brought him Coca Cola because he wanted to see a drink that sparkled. And exploding candy. That was a messy one.

Eventually I crashed the car. It happened in Brecon. I was there, minding my own business - and Tom’s house - wearing a very casual ‘70s style track suit - now binned - and listening to the Pet Shop Boys. Suddenly, as the final bars of *It’s a Sin* faded away, there was a tap on my window and my mother was standing outside.

Well, I wound the window down and asked her what she was doing here and she asked me the same thing. I’d forgotten she visits some people here who used to live next door to her. I said I’d be returning home soon and she could carry on her way, she needn’t have stopped. She said she knew I was up to no good. She didn’t know how, it was just her instinct. After nearly thirty years of me, she knew the sight of me parked in a residential street in Brecon was a scene that wouldn’t end well.

She said she wanted a word with me anyway and I was to follow her home. To her home, that is. She went back to her car and set off. I followed her. Then, as we came to the edge of Brecon, I pulled out and flew past her.

I don’t really know what possessed me because I was only planning to come back here and that wouldn’t be difficult for her to find.

Anyway, there is a very tricky corner only a few miles out of Brecon. Well, tricky at the speeds I go. I lost my grip on the steering wheel and went down the embankment at about one hundred miles an hour. It was quite cool in its way, I had Opus on the stereo and you could still hear *Live Is Life* blasting out as I was walking back up the slope. High-energy '80s Euro-pop, how did it ever die?

I had to stay in hospital overnight. Then they made me stay another night at my parents' house. It was lucky I was wearing my seat belt, I was hardly hurt at all, to be honest. My wrist was badly sprained, but I didn't really need the sling I wore for a couple of days. It was getting me sympathy at first, but once that dried up I jettisoned it.

I also had a few bruises which I stopped showing for the same reasons. I only had to stay overnight in hospital because that's how long it took for me to finish nagging me. She let me go in the morning. With the air of someone releasing a rabid dog into the wild: it's not very community spirited, but you don't want it in your own house.

It was a good job Michelangelo didn't need feeding, he did have forty-eight hours of Channel 5, though. I'd left the TV on.

The car's OK as well. It was only at the garage for three days. I thought about asking them to fix the handbrake as well, but that would have meant admitting I've been driving around knowing that it's faulty. So I didn't. I'd managed several years with it like that, I thought I could manage several more.

I did ask them to take the nodding dog off the back shelf, though, Meredith glued it there as a surprise gift last summer and I hadn't been able to get it off. It was a mere memory when the car came back.

She switches the TV on, sits down and opens a chocolate bar. After a moment she turns the TV down and pours wine.

#### MADELEINE

One of the main things I remember about the months after Rhys had gone was the rate at which I started shovelling Snickers bars down my neck. I would take a batch - I reckon to have four or five in a batch - and sit across the road from their house. When they moved to the house they gave me the address. They had to because we still had the mortgage to sort out. I disguised myself and watched for days.

I learnt when they were in and when they were out, when one was in and when one was out. I waited until they were both out and crept in through an open window.

I became a regular visitor. I went through their things. I tried on her make-up. I wore it like she did and I tried on her clothes: her skirts and her blouses. Her jewellery. Her pure angora sweater, kept apart from the rest in its cellophane wrapper. I tried it on and it stretched across the chest. I practiced walking like her.

I bought the same cosmetics and clothes she wore. I had my hair coloured and cut like her. I moved like her.

I went to the house looking like her.

I climbed in through the kitchen window and straightened my clothes and hair in the mirror in the hall. I wandered into the lounge and looked through her glossy magazines. *Cosmopolitan*, *Marie Claire*, *Vogue* and so on. I read an article about a woman who spent fifty grand on surgery to make her look like Cher. She didn't look like Cher.

I opened a Snickers bar and went into the hall. They must have been expecting company, the whole place was thoroughly dusted and polished; the scent of Pledge was still in the air and there were flowers on the occasional table. I went upstairs.

I looked at the photos on the shelf in their bedroom. I'd never looked at them properly before; too busy looking in the make up bag and mirror. There were Rhys' parents, his sister and the family dog (deceased). The others I assumed were The Lovely Abigail's family. A sister, much like her, a mother, a father, a cat with glowing red eyes. A couple of the pair of them.

I went down to the kitchen and watched a pair of magpies chasing each other around the garden. Two for joy. I wondered what The Lovely Abigail would do now. If she were at home for the day without a care in the world. Would she watch TV? Read the magazines? Whatever it was, I was going to do it. I took the last bite of Snickers, flipped the bin lid and dropped the wrapper in.

Still chewing, at the kitchen door, I heard a key turn in the front door, though no-one was due home until at least half past five. There was little point in running, you could see into the kitchen front door, so I stayed where I was. The very image of The Lovely Abigail. Rhys entered the house.

He looked surprised, then his expression became harder to name. It wasn't pleased.

"Hi," I said.

"Madeleine?" he said. "Madeleine, what the hell are you doing here?"

"I came to visit. I.. Um... missed you and I wanted to visit. I wanted to show you what I look like now. I've changed my hair. I do my make-up differently. Isn't this the way you like it?"

He said it wasn't the hair or the make-up. It was me. It was her. He said it wasn't an equation. It didn't work like that. He said he wasn't getting into it.

"Yeah," I said, "but..."

He said it wasn't up for discussion. He said I was in his home, uninvited and unwelcome. He said if I left straight away he'd say no more about it. But if I didn't, he would call the police.

I asked him to listen, but he said "Not listening!"

So I lunged. Arms open, at the speed of light. I kissed him full on the lips. I even got a bit of tongue in before he got away from me. He gripped my wrists and held them tight. But at arms' length. He began to shout. But only for a few seconds.

After that he began to gasp for breath. He made a choking sound and tried to say something. Probably "help". He let go of me and dropped to the floor. He started to turn blue.

Rhys was allergic to nuts.

I phoned an ambulance. "I think he's touched a nut" was the most coherent thing I managed to say. I didn't mean me.

The ambulance arrived anyway and they asked me who I was. I said I was The Lovely Abigail. They asked me if I'd been drinking. I said no, for once and followed them to hospital in the car.

I could give them some help with next of kin because I knew where his parents lived, of course, but I couldn't remember their phone number.

I hung around waiting for news and luckily was hidden when the real Abigail arrived. I heard her telling a nurse who she was and the nurse replying in a puzzled voice that The Lovely Abigail was already here. Perhaps she'd better speak to her. It was time to go.

He didn't die; he lies in a vegetative state in the Heath Hospital. They should probably turn off the life support, but I can understand of those kind of decisions are hard to make.

They had to notify me because I was still the beneficiary on the critical illness policy we had for the house. It was one of the things we hadn't got round to changing. That's why I own this house with no mortgage, despite my pittance of a salary.

No-one ever made the connection between me and Rhys' collapse. I don't know if there was some discussion around the phantom that was The Lovely Abigail, but if so, nothing ever came of it. I assume the Snickers wrapper was never noticed.

Or maybe Abigail liked the odd Snickers herself. Maybe she thought it was her fault. I'll never know. The chapter is closed on me, Rhys and The Lovely Abigail.

Madeleine opens another chocolate bar.

MADELEINE

I had noticed that a week had gone by since I left the poem on Tom's fridge and I still hadn't heard from him.

MICHELANGELO

When that happens, I think you need to assume a man doesn't want to be involved with you and forget about him

MADELEINE

Are you mad? It means you need to raise your game.

He didn't know what the phrase "raise your game" meant. He did by the time I'd finished.

MADELEINE

What's the way to a man's heart?

MICHELANGELO

I'm not sure. I forget these things. There is a very thick artery running from...

MADELEINE

It's a saying. It's not an anatomical answer. The way to a man's heart is through his stomach.

MICHELANGELO

That's a strange saying.

MADELEINE

With that in mind I bought a chicken and some vegetables to roast around it and I was going out here again that night.

I didn't want to tell him how it had gone when I got back. It had not gone well, I was embarrassed. He pointed out that if I told him, he wasn't going to tell anyone else and he couldn't think any worse of me than he already did. He had seen me passed out drunk on the settee with my legs in the air and my head under the coffee table and he had heard me snoring where I fell on the stairs. "What could be worse?" he wondered.

Loads of things. I suppose he rated things a bit differently to me, I didn't find those things particularly embarrassing. Still, sometimes it hurts to get things off your chest, so I told him.

I went up there with the chicken. I put it in a roasting tin and I chopped up the vegetables. I put it in the oven and left it cooking. Then I came back to Cardiff. It was still rush hour when I got back.

If I hadn't had so much time sitting in a traffic jam I might not have thought of turning round again, but I had this idea that I would go back and just have a peep through the window to see if they were enjoying it. My cooking can be a bit hit and miss, to be honest and I wanted to see how it had come out as much as anything. If it looked nice, I thought I might even knock on the door and see if they'd invite me in.

So, back I went, but the sight that greeted me was not domestic bliss. It was the sight of two fire engines, a clutch of concerned neighbours and black smoke billowing out of Tom's back door.

Michelangelo wanted to know if I was in trouble and if they were angry with me. I said they didn't know I was the culprit. He said that one way or another, they probably did.

Fair point. I wondered this time if they might phone the police. Michelangelo thought I was loopy if I thought they wouldn't.

## SCENE TWO

From the kitchen comes the sound of empty bottles clinking together. A glass is smashed. Madeleine enters carrying a bottle of wine and a full glass.

MADELEINE

After I'd set fire to Tom's house he told me not to contact him again. I drank for weeks.

MICHELANGELO

And that was no good. When these things happen you have to put those wine bottles away and wash yourself and get on with your life.

MADELEINE

But I told you what happened!

MICHELANGELO

Yes and the only strange thing is that it didn't happen before.

MADELEINE

I'd known Michelangelo wouldn't understand. Tom had told me to leave him alone! To never contact him again! He hadn't even told me himself. He went to Surrey and left George to tell me.

Michelangelo said that he thought I should be grateful. He thought Tom had treated me very kindly. From what he'd seen, people get into a lot of trouble for doing a lot less. Which I suppose was true. Although others have gotten away with much worse.

He said that we all have setbacks. We have to put them behind us and move on.

But what was I moving on to? Another year in a call centre? Another year watching Meredith's life getting better and better? Being forgotten by the world? Then coming back here every night and listening to him telling me what's wrong with my life? I started to get angry. I stood up, slightly unsteadily and walked towards him.

"I don't know why I tolerate you," I said. "I don't need you here just to have sound, I'd be better off without you, you know. You should be left in the loft."



You're always telling me what's wrong, you never mention what's right. It's probably your fault I'm like this, I never felt so bad so often before you came! It's because I'm always hearing the worst about myself from you. And by now, you've almost got me believing it! Getting rid of you is probably the first step I should take towards getting Tom back!"

He asked me not to put him in the loft. I said I wasn't putting him in the loft, just out of the room and I picked him up, opened the lounge door and threw him as hard as I could down the hall. I heard the glass break as it bounced off the far door frame and onto the floor.

I was sorry straight away. I went running down there and brought him back. I told him I was sorry. I cleared all the broken glass from his face. I told him I'd buy him a new frame; he could choose it himself on the internet. He just wanted to be left alone.

Well, I knew how that felt.

Madeleine leaves the room.

MICHELANGELO

Maddalena - Madeleine she calls herself - moped and cried and drank and stayed in her pyjamas for some time after the roast chicken incident. Eventually she went back to work, but in the evenings and at weekends she just came back to the house, drank wine and watched the History Channel, or read her biographies.

We have been through several Roman Emperors as the summer has changed to autumn. Then, one afternoon, she came home happy. I didn't know what had happened, she didn't tell me. I thought she might have met a boy; girls can be coy about these things. She drank five cans of lager per night for three nights. For Maddalena that is hardly drinking at all.

Then, on the sixth evening, she went out. In a dark green top, dark blue jeans, six inch high boots and a smart black jacket. She was wearing some make-up, but not too much. That is why I thought she may be meeting a boy.

But when she got back to the house later that night she was not all bashful and in love.

I heard the front door shutting and footsteps on the stairs, then the sound of something being dropped upstairs, I hoped it was not burglars.

Then the footsteps came back down the stairs, the lounge door opened. Maddalena crept in and ran to the settee in a crouch. The only light was the lamp she had left on for me, but she crept to the window, pulled the curtain closed and went back to the settee.

Madeleine returns to the lounge with a new bottle of wine.

#### MADELEINE

I went back to work in a daze. I answered calls, but I didn't know what I was saying. I drove home, but I didn't know where I was driving. I read my biographies and I couldn't remember which year I was living in.

The something shifted. It always will in the end. Tom Rafferty returned to the South Wales area. I saw him down Queen Street one Tuesday lunchtime. I think he'd been drinking; his face was a colour Dorothy Perkins were calling plum last season and he smiled and waved when he saw me. So I took my cue.

I stopped drinking - almost - then, I headed out for Brecon.

I drove past their house at about half past eight and since it was Friday, I wasn't surprised to find there was no-one in.

I parked my car in a nearby street, it took a few minutes to get it stopped properly; I had to leave the wheels at an angle to stop it rolling. I waited there for a while: the sun was setting and it was starting to get chilly. Eventually, with time marching on, I got out of the car and went to wait amongst the shrubbery across the road from their house.

And I was only just in time. No sooner was I hidden than they appeared at the end of the road. Yes, *they*. Not Tom and George, but Tom and *some woman*. I had a good look at her as they cuddled beneath the light of a street lamp. Middle aged, bottle blond, rather cheap. Laughing like donkeys, the pair of them.

Their voices carried across the night air. They were talking about a film they'd been to see; he invited her in for coffee, wine or schnapps. *Schnapps!* He never offered me schnapps. He never took me to see a film. He never walked with his arm around me. I didn't know he new what schnapps was. "Have you got any tea?" The ungrateful cow replied.

She was fifty-odd. She was short and stocky. She had a laugh like a drain clearing.

Jealousy raged, I admit it. I looked for a rock and decided that while Tom was unlocking the door, I would run up behind and cave in her skull.

Then I thought that I probably wouldn't. There were no rocks anyway. Just gravel.

They went indoors, but I couldn't just leave it and go home. Not knowing what was going on in there, imagining and playing it out in my head all night, all the next day, all the next week.

I ran across the road and rang the doorbell.

As so often happens with those whom I love most, he didn't look pleased to see me. I told him I was just in the area. I saw disbelief on his face. I told him my car had broken down a couple of streets away and I wondered if George could come and have a look at it. George wasn't in. Could Tom come and have a look? Tom wasn't a mechanic. No, but he was a bloke and blokes just know about cars, don't they?

I don't know if he did know about cars. Or if he subscribed to the notion that blokes just know about cars. Or if he felt he had to seize this opportunity to send me on my way, but he agreed to come and have a look at it.

We lifted the bonnet and I gave him a torch to shine onto it. He pushed and tugged at a few parts. He asked me to turn the engine on. I turned the engine on and returned to his side to see what he was doing.

Before I got there, the car rolled forward. It knocked him down and rolled over him. It stopped in the wall at the end of the road. Tom lay where it left him, his skull horribly distorted.

The car had a faulty handbrake, didn't it?

The car still worked so I ran away, but I only ran as far as my house. I knew the police would catch up with me soon enough. The woman was screaming at the end of the street and a couple of neighbours had already come out of their houses. I saw one of them noting down my number plate as I fled the scene.

I told Michelangelo what had happened.

"Oh Maddalena," he said. "You have killed a man." Another man.

I told him we'd let the courts be the judge of that. In the meantime I asked him if he would

like to hear a short essay on the life of Fyodor Dostoevsky?

“Is that relevant?” he asked.

No. Would he prefer me to do something relevant? Should I update Wikipedia?

He said “No. Tell me of Dosto - whatever it was. Who was he?”

“He wrote *Crime and Punishment*” I said. I went to the bookshelf and took down the book. I sat down by the lamp and began to read:

“Fyodor Dostoevsky was born on 3rd October 1821 and for fifty-six miserable years poverty, disease and starvation were his travelling companions.”

“It doesn’t say that!” Michelangelo blurted out. He would always ruin a good story, but it did say that. I took the book over and started showing him the words, although I’m not sure if he could read English and it was a bit dark to see properly even if he could. Then the doorbell rang. It was the police. They let me back in to get my coat. I put the TV on for Michelangelo.

I left it on Alibi and told him I may be some time.

They let me out on bail. It was good to get home. Michelangelo reacted as if I were the prodigal son. He was probably just pleased because he wanted the TV turning back on: Meredith has been in to get a change of clothes for me and had turned the lights and the TV off. But he did a good job of pretending to be pleased to see me. The actual ME, not merely the Guardian of the Remote Control.

Over the next few days we discussed the trial. It was to be held in November, a few days after my thirtieth birthday. We agreed it would be best if I didn’t jump bail and stayed to face the music instead. After all, Michelangelo pointed out, at least I knew they weren’t going to hang me.

He asked me if I was sorry. Sorry that Tom died, that is, not only sorry that I’m in trouble. Of course I was sorry! What kind of person would I be if I wasn’t sorry?

#### MICHELANGELO

Probably the kind of person who hangs around strangers’ houses, pesters them until they let her in, turns to a rage when they don’t do as she wishes. The kind of person who speaks badly of her friends and her family, is suspicious of the motives of others...

MADELEINE

I don't think this is the time to be lecturing me on how I am. There's been more than enough of that already, for all the good it's done.

He said that he hoped I would learn something from this even if I were going to learn the very hard way. I thought that if I hadn't learnt by now, I was probably never going to. Anyway, I wasn't even sure what he expected me to learn from this. Thou shalt not kill?

Michelangelo said I had many things to learn and if I made the effort I could learn them. But I have to try. I have to learn to be pleasant to people and that I cannot control them. I should take my head out of the books and learn to live in the world I really live in. If I were to be a hermit it would not matter that my mind was always somewhere else, but since I make forays into the real world, I have to learn to deal with it and make myself reasonable to other people... and on it goes.

It was easy for him to say all this - sat in here all day with psychology lite on TV all day. But how would he know what I have heard in times and places he hadn't been? And how dare he criticise? He often took offence where no offence was intended. If anyone paid him a compliment, he looked for the insult hidden behind it. I was starting to get annoyed with him, I could feel my fingers itching to throw him at something.

MICHELANGELO

Do they feed you in goal?

MADELEINE

Of course they feed you. How would anyone serve a life sentence if they weren't being fed? No-one dies of starvation in prison. No-one who's not on hunger strike, that is. They die of murder or natural causes.

MICHELANGELO

You could be murdered?

MADELEINE

Possibly. If I was sharing a cell with a Tom T Rafferty fan who found out what I was in for. It would be unlucky though. I think it's child killers and paedophiles who are most often murdered.

MICHELANGELO

If you were murdered, if I were able, I would make you a statue for your tomb. Free of charge. Whatever you liked.

MADELEINE

Could I have a medium size statue of me, please, but flattering? With narrower hips and thicker lips.

MICHELANGELO

That would be no problem. I would make you beautiful in your idea of beautiful, not in mine.

MADELEINE

I said thank you and asked if we could talk about something else now, but he wanted to know where he would be kept if I went away. I thought I might be able to take him with me. After all, they have TV in prison, so it would probably be for the best.

It wouldn't be so bad if I could take him with me. I wouldn't be able to talk to him much, but at least he'd be there to see the same things as me.

Michelangelo thought it would be better for him as well. We agreed I'd take him with me. I'm not sure what he'd make of the other inmates, but we didn't have to keep in touch.

Then we watched TV.

### SCENE THREE

Madeleine enters, sober, wearing a suit, drops her handbag on a chair and sits down. There is no wine in the room.

MADELEINE

Luckily for me, this government is soft on crime, soft on the causes of crime. I got a two year suspended sentence and an eighteen month driving ban. My solicitor argued a very good case for me having had no idea the handbrake was faulty. So good, in fact, for a while I thought Peugeot were going to end of up in the dock.

Maybe this will be how I'm remembered. Some historian will cite me from court reports:

“Life was cheap in the twenty-first century,” it will say. “Thirty year old Madeleine Hughes killed a man, left another in a vegetative state and walked away with a slap on the wrist. Did she go on to kill again? Let's take her as a case study...”

I had to make some changes though, this couldn't go on. Who would be next? Well, I think we know who would be next.

Madeleine takes the picture of Michelangelo down from the shelf and takes the picture out of its frame.

MICHELANGELO

Maddalena... Madeleine? What are you doing?

MADELEINE

I'm sending you to live with my sister. I don't think it's good for you to live with me.

MICHELANGELO

But I don't want to live with your sister. She will not be good for me. I've heard what you say about her. She won't talk to me or listen to me. She won't leave the TV on for me when she is out. She won't watch *Ice Road Truckers* or *The X-Factor* with me.

MADELEINE

She watches *Coronation Street*, though, you'll still have that.

MICHELANGELO

She'll probably throw me in the bin. I'm sure I won't survive long in her house. She has no interest in art. She won't love me. She hid away the Carravaggio picture you gave her. You told me that before.

MADELEINE

I know, but this will be different. I'll tell her that she must keep you on display.

MICHELANGELO

Will you tell her why? Will you tell her this is me?

MADELEINE

Well, I can't say exactly why, can I? She thinks I'm loopy enough as it is. I'll explain this picture means a lot to me and she must keep it on display. I'll suggest, subtly, that she talks to you sometimes. It'll be better for you at Meredith's.

Calm sensible conversations with Matthew. Sophisticated evenings watching rhinos humping on National Geographic. That's the thing, it will be much calmer at Meredith's. They don't shout and scream at each other. They don't get wound up about trifles and throw things around. I don't think they do.

I'm far too destructive and you might think I'm getting away with it because the courts went easy, but I'm not getting away with it because the courts went easy, but I'm not

getting away with it at all. Every time I seem to have got away with it, I feel a little worse and so I get a little worse. So I have to send you to Meredith because it could be you I damage next. And you never blame or take revenge on me or fail to forgive me.

MICHELANGELO

I'll be meaner. I'll stand up to you. I've got quite a bad temper myself, you know I have.

MADELEINE

Your temper's burnt out. You've lived your life and you've succeeded. You don't match me, these days, rage for rage. You are no longer the terriblia who thundered through Rome and Florence and fought with popes. You have no need to be. You fought, you won. But I am losing. I'm a temper without a talent; without a purpose. It's only a few weeks ago I shattered your glass.

MICHELANGELO

But you won't damage me. I am already damaged beyond anything you can do. What if you burn me? I'll reappear as Shakespeare or Guy Fawkes over there! That's what happened before. I'm until Judgement Day, this is my purgatory. Please don't send me away. This is how you will destroy me.

MADELEINE

Well, if it's purgatory, you're not meant to enjoy it. You'll probably have it over with sooner at Meredith's. I've made my decision. I'm sorry. This is not a discussion, this is what will happen.

MICHELANGELO

But Madeleine, have you really thought it through? You never mentioned it before! It's not a good decision, you'll wish you hadn't. *Please* Madeleine, please?

Madeleine takes an envelope from a drawer and puts the picture of Michelangelo in it.

MICHELANGELO

It's dark in here!

Madeleine looks at the envelope and wavers for a moment.

MADELEINE

Stop "please"ing.



She starts to write the address on the envelope. There is a muffled squeal.

MICHELANGELO

Maddalena... what's that? Stop! Don't! Stop! That tickles! Don't!

MADELEINE

You can feel things, can you? You never said.

She finishes writing, seals the envelope and sticks on a stamp. Michelangelo continues to protest, but his voice becomes fainter and more muffled, ending in a muffled scream. Madeleine wipes a tear from her eye.

She puts the envelope on the coffee table and gets her coat. She is speaking to herself now.

MADELEINE

I'll be going near the post box, I'll drop it in now... Or maybe in the morning. It's a bit out of my way. Yeah, in the morning. No, actually, now. I might change my mind if I leave it 'til tomorrow. Or forget. He'll still be lying there in six months, under a pile of magazines.

It'll be collected at eight in the morning if I do it tonight. But he'll be there on his own in the dark all night. And it's November. I wonder if he feels the cold. I'll do it in the morning.

She turns off the light and leaves.

*The End*