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| The Hidden Path Home  By  Andrew Milner |

**Chapter One**

Nothing else seemed to matter to him at that point. She was perfect in every way. Everything else just went out of the window. He sipped his hot chocolate looking at her over the top of the paper cup, sipping slowly which gave him more time to look at her. He watched as she glanced over to him, the corners of her mouth rising slightly. He wondered if she had smiled at him or if he just wanted it so much he had imagined it. He had had a stressful day but this was a perfect end to it. It was the final coffee break of the day and she was sitting directly in front of him. Crumbs on the table from the last piece of flapjack from the works canteen formed an arrow pointing towards her. He tried to decide if he would have noticed her without it and came to the conclusion that, as one of the most beautiful women he had ever seen, he surely would have noticed her.

He watched as she looked at the time on her mobile phone and then stood up. Her colleagues on the table behind her stood up as well, her break was over and their first eye to eye meeting had ended. He desperately wanted to say something to her but didn't know what.

"See you later," he mumbled.

"Bye," she replied. She had spoken to him. He felt on top of the world. He watched as she walked across the canteen to put her cup in the bin and then walked back past him towards the stairs, her long blonde hair shining in the lights. She quickly glanced back as she disappeared out of his sight. He knew instantly, he had met someone who would become very special to him. Just how special would be for the Gods to decide but that moment had made an impact on him that he would never, or could ever forget.

One hour to go and he knew that the paperwork could wait, he didn't want to think about anything else, certainly not today, his head had been turned completely and he wanted it to stay that way.

He wondered who she could be and where she worked as he hadn't seen her before. He would have remembered seeing her for sure so assumed she must be new. Had there been a new company that had moved into the new block of offices, it was his job to find out. He thought about how to introduce himself. It wouldn't seem strange that a manager from a neighbouring business would pop in to say, 'Hi'. He knew most of the managers and would see a lot of the other staff in the canteen, and although not swapping names they would exchange pleasantries. His office was swamped in the ticking of the old-design station clock on the far wall in front of him. He had seen it in a local store and liked it but not enough for his flat, however it fitted with his retro-style designed office. Lines of the colours of the rainbow going diagonally with black and white bold typeset saying the names of the colours adorned the wall. The clock, which sat in the centre of the wall ticked its way through every second of his working day.

The office block was purpose built to house local companies, with internal walls easy to move to increase or decrease the size of the offices so that before companies moved in, they could pick the size and design of their space. Most units were taken in the first few weeks of becoming available and, other than a few closing and others opening, there hadn't been many changes in the two years. It had opened with a great fanfare as a flagship in the design of office blocks and the people who worked there were still as impressed now as when they first started. Three floors with balconies overlooked a central floor space where a canteen was used by all of the staff of the various companies. Whilst eating it was guaranteed someone would be watching from one of the balconies. There were meeting rooms and training rooms which could be used by any company with prior booking, and the glass doors and outer walls gave much natural light.

Pete had worked for Shenton Removals for nearly a year and had started as a driver. He had been promoted after the previous manager was sacked after being found asleep in a lorry in a lay-by. He had been taking some boxes of fabrics to the docks in Hull to be put on a ferry for their journey to a Bruges based customer. He had pulled into a lay-by for a nap and three hours later the ferry was in the middle of the sea and the boxes were still in the lay-by. Pete had fallen into the job quite by accident after answering the phone one day and Mr Shenton had heard how he sorted out a problem for a customer to a high standard. Within days a brass plate was put on the light wooden door bearing the name **Peter Phillips** and proudly displayed underneath was the word **Manager**.

Pete missed a lot of things in his life and none more so than his mum. She had died in a nursing home when he was away and although he did pop and see her before she died her memory was fading, but he knew that she had seen him and he remembered her telling his ex-girlfriend about it when no one knew he was there.

Pete remained a private person, not really getting involved in the personal lives of others and he liked to keep his own personal business to himself. He had 'colleagues' at work whereas other people would call them work mates. He would quite happily join the lads on a Friday afternoon for a pint after work if it was quiet, but when the lads in the storage room carried on into town, Pete would go home to his lonely flat.

Usually the lads would take the piss when he said he was going home and shout 'lightweight' down the street after him but that was nothing new and he would get over it without a second thought.

Locking up that night, there was a different feel to the place, a positive air about the office. It wasn't just his office because Pete felt it down the stairs through to the storeroom and into the kitchen. He smiled as he locked the internal doors and set the alarm and closed the outer door behind him. The latch fell into place and Pete walked away from Shenton Removals wearing a smile that could cut through the darkest mood. The car park was emptying when he reached his car and, except for a few unfortunate staff working late, everyone else was leaving for the weekend. Pete sometimes would work Saturdays but it was up to him and based entirely on how much work he had to do. The forty minute drive home gave him time to think about work, think about the news that came from his car stereo on the hour and also time to think about that girl.

Arriving at his flat he realised that most of the journey was a blank and he couldn't remember driving through Beeton, a small village on his way home. He usually looked out for the speed camera van that positioned itself in the Police Vehicles Only parking bay, and if the driver got the camera van just in the right place, the street sign announcing your arrival in the village hid it just as you came from a 50mph stretch to a 30mph, therefore increasing the number of speeders. Pete, although wise to this tactic, could not remember in the slightest if the van was there on this day. He knew that he would find out, as a ticket would drop through his letterbox early next week. Speeding tickets were not an issue for him at this moment in time, the girl in the canteen at work blitzed everything. She had just dropped a bomb right in the middle of his life and it had been blown to smithereens.

Pete had had a lot to contend with this year, trying to get his life back on track after being away, and the fact that he had not really been able to contact people since his arrival back had only added to it. He missed some of his old friends but new ones would slowly replace them. He didn't want to rush and make new friends just for the sake of having some. Friends to Pete were important and people had to prove their worth before he would trust them. He couldn't contact his brother because he could not find the words to say to him. He loved him, they were brothers, far more important than friendship, but he had so many mixed emotions about Chris he wouldn't know where to start, suffice to say, had it not been for his own brother betraying him, he wouldn't have gone away in the first place. He remembered how he felt the night his ex-girlfriend told him she had slept with his own brother, the anger and the betrayal were still as raw as they had been, but he loved her. He expected more from Chris, the betrayal from a girlfriend is hard, but from your own flesh and blood it's unforgivable.

Would she work on a Saturday he wondered, he could always find things to do in the office and wondered if he should go in on the off chance. He assumed that she worked at the call centre; he would have to find out a bit more. He would ask Keith the commissionaire, he would know, and she was worth every bit of effort that he put into the investigation. Pete was convinced that every bloke and even every lesbian who worked in the offices would know her as she would turn heads everywhere. After making the decision to go to work in the morning he decided to have a shower and a few glasses of wine before going to bed. Both of these tasks took some time as his concentration span had somewhat shortened that day, but he finally arrived in bed clean and fresh and four glasses of wine full.

Listening to the cars coming and going from the block of flats where he lived kept him awake. Most would be taxis as a lot of young couples lived in the flats. He rented one from a bloke who advertised in the local paper when he came back, as he needed somewhere pretty quick and the guy was desperate to rent it as it had been empty for a year. Pete paid slightly less than what the man wanted but after meeting Pete he knew he would be a good tenant. Pete had made up a story that he had been in the army and had just come back from Helmand province in Afghanistan. He needed somewhere pretty quick as he hadn't expected to come out of the army for another year but got out early after a second spell there. It was all lies but quite feasible; his knowledge of the military life came from his dad who was in the forces all his life. Pete had lived all over the place during his childhood due to this, so to non-military people he could be very convincing.

He had lost count of the number of cars and taxis that came and went in the couple of hours that he lay awake and the number of times he had tried to guess the girl's name, before tiredness washed over him leaving him in a state of sleep that would only be interrupted by the alarm call from his phone. Turning over and pressing the sleep facility was the best part of Saturday morning. He couldn't do it through the week due to the more regulated routine of weekday work, but the traffic was also much kinder to him on a weekend. Another twenty minutes snooze being a real possibility on a weekend and as the only manager stupid enough to go in on a weekend he could please himself. The lads in the storage room had their own keys and it meant nothing if Pete didn't bother going in at all. Saturday mornings were used to tidy up and sort the jobs out for the following week. Vans and wagons would be fuelled up, cleaned inside and out and have their safety checks done. Pete would sort the paperwork or help with the vans. It was a much more laid back atmosphere and half an hour before the finishing time of twelve noon, everyone would sweep the floor of the storage room and go home. The weekend would then begin with the jobs that had to be done or a trip to watch football. Pete was lucky, as living in a flat meant he didn't have the grass to cut or the garden to weed, although he did miss sitting out in the garden with his ex-girlfriend. He occasionally met with the lads to watch football as one of the lads in the warehouse had a brother who played for Guiseley and they got into a routine of going to watch them. It was a good day out and not too far for them to travel to, and it was good support for a decent non-league side.

This day was a new start for Pete and for the first time since coming back he had found a new purpose to focus his life on.

**Chapter Two**

The normally heavy door opened as though a gust of wind had helped him push it open. The 1010 combination for the alarm was entered and the prolonged beep told him it was okay to enter without waking up the whole neighbourhood. On many previous occasions he had entered too quickly before the beep or entered the wrong combination, resulting in not only the Police being called but having to deal with the embarrassment of it in front of the lads working in storage which was far worse. The Police were usually quite understanding in most cases but the storage lads would keep taking the piss for weeks. The storage room was warm and the air had reached his office via the stairway. He threw his coat on the chair opposite his desk and sat down. His computer and kettle synchronised themselves perfectly so within ten minutes of going in to work, he was at the computer with a coffee in hand. He heard some noises so knew that the lads had come in, they would usually just get straight on with their jobs with minimal supervision so he wouldn't have to worry about them. Shenton's had taken over the unit, the area directly above which they used as the offices with the storage room now underneath.

He wanted to get his stuff done then he could try and catch Keith on his morning break and ask about the girl. As his mind had thought of her, it stayed thinking about her long after he had returned to his work. There was a lot of work on for the following week so Pete had to sort through the jobs, where they had to go, which drivers and crew would be needed and when. Sometimes they would have to meet items at the docks or the airport so would have to be there at a certain time. Even the smallest of details had to be thought of otherwise it could affect the service given. Pete had on many occasions worked long into the night sorting out security passes for the docks and airports.

Mickey popped his head around the door and Pete, being so engrossed in his work, jumped.

"Shit!"

"Sorry mate, just wondered if you wanted a butty."

"Nah, thanks Mickey, I'm gonna pop down myself in a minute, I need to see Keith about something."

"Okay, no worries mate."

He did want a butty, but wanted more the excuse to go down himself. The fact that Mickey had got hungry told Pete that morning break was here and most Saturday staff including Keith should be in the canteen right now. Pete, although dressed in the usual casual Saturday attire, made sure that his name badge was displayed before leaving the office. He left by the front reception door, which led out onto the first floor balcony and he tried without being obvious to look down to see who was in the canteen area. He could see a few people but neither Keith nor the girl were there. The smell of bacon had by this time filled the body of the building and Pete's mouth began to fill with water as his senses woke up and burst into life. He would forfeit breakfast for five minutes conversation with her but she was not there so the choice had been already made in his absence. He sat down at a table on his own and tried to ignore the comments from Mickey about him being too good to sit with the storage lads and how quickly people forget their roots. He knew that he would get stick for becoming management and he tried hard to maintain the links with the lads in the storage department but his white shirts were different to their overalls, there was no mistaking that. Pete held up his phone and mouthed that he was waiting for a call but Mickey, already bored by this conversation, had moved on to taking the piss out of someone else. His thoughts mingled with the conversations of the people talking over breakfast but not one of the words entered his head, instead bouncing off the barricade that his thoughts had created. His sausage and mushroom sandwich with brown sauce tasted good but his mind was elsewhere and the good taste stayed in his mouth instead of taking the journey to tell his brain just how good it was.

A bunch of keys dropped to the table and brought Pete back into the room. Lost in his mind was at that point better than being in a room without the girl.

"Alright Pete?" Pete looked up. The voice was a low throaty voice not dissimilar to Keith's. This however wasn't Keith although by the nature of the job it was close.

"Alright Kev?" Pete said. "Where's Keith today?"

"He's not well so I've had to cover. I'm supposed to be doing both blocks but I only get one wage so can only do one job." There was no mistaking the Leeds connection with Kev. His accent alone acted like a substitute for an 'I'm from Leeds' tattoo on his forehead.

"Absolutely. I hope it's nothing too serious." Pete tried to sound normal in his conversation but inside was gutted that Keith wasn't in.

"Nah think not. Probably his hip flaring up again. It 'ant been too good these last few shifts. The factories 'ant hardly had any cover this week 'cos I've been covering Keith. He can't walk far at minute."

"Oh well, pass on my best to him." Pete finished the last of his coffee and whilst patting Kev on the shoulder got up from his chair. As he walked towards the stairs, he threw the paper cup towards the bin in temper, which was the only opportunity he would get to let off steam. The cup bounced off the rim and onto the floor. He picked it up and slammed it in to make definitely sure for the second time that it went in. Walking back to the office, he was gutted. He had high hopes for this day and it had fallen at the first hurdle. He had seen her and lost her within two days. Monday seemed so far away and he could only hope that she would be there in the flesh herself on Monday morning. The pessimistic attitude was slowly pushed aside by a more positive one and Pete thought to himself that there were many more days to come. She must have only just started working there as he hadn't seen her before so it was more than likely he would see her soon.

That afternoon the invitation to attend the football match from the storage lads had been rejected for a more relaxed afternoon to be spent alone. Tracksuit bottoms and sleeveless t-shirt thrown on and the TV turned on, the hours slowly went by without much effort. The cheese and onion sandwich was washed down with a couple of cans, leaving only a few crumbs on the plate at his feet. He was chilled out completely and not remotely fretting about the girl. He was sick of calling her 'the girl' and wished he knew her name. He had guessed a few names that would suit her but none stood out. He imagined Jessica, but in his mind a Jessica would have dark hair. She didn't look like a Sarah or a Joanne, nor a Charlotte, Fiona or Lisa. No name jumped out at him but he knew when her name was revealed with a fanfare of trumpets in his head it would suit her and that name would be his future. His past was a bit messed up, but this girl was here to save him. He knew it had been a divine moment when he had seen her all those hours before in the canteen.

Saturday night television was not like it used to be. He smiled at the same time as the thought came into his head, thinking he sounded like his dad. His DVD collection was not many in number as he had only just started buying things again after being away for a while. It was taking him time to readjust to normal life again and catch up with recent films and music albums, but he was comfortable in his small flat and comfort meant contentment. It was only after the fifth attempt at finding something on television that he decided that a film would have to be found that he wanted to watch. He opted for *Goodbye Mr Chips*, a 1939 film that had been remade a couple of times since. It had been Pete's favourite film for many years and it brought back so many memories of his childhood in Fulneck and imagining that the boarding school in Fulneck was the school in the film. The time he had spent playing there with his friends and brother Chris as a child remained the happiest memories of all. The film also made him think of his mum as she loved living in Fulneck and opted to stay there instead of living in one of the family houses at RAF Catterick where Pete and Chris' dad Derrick was stationed.

Pete had gone away before she died and he missed her very much. He was devastated when he had gone to see her at the care home before she died. He knew that she had seen him but he had been unable to reach her, touch her or speak to her. She knew that he was there and that meant the world to him. He remembered how his mum had cried near the end of the film when the other teachers were stood over the dying Mr Chips in his bed and on hearing them talking he says, 'I thought I heard you say it was a pity, a pity I never had any children but you're wrong, I have. Thousands of them, thousands of them and all boys.' A tear came to Pete's eyes as he remembered his mum watching it when he was young, and then a second tear as he remembered the link to his youth. The tears joined together falling from his face at such a slow rate that they tickled his cheeks, before falling to an unknown destination beneath them. Plenty more tears followed and Pete, not one to cry, wiped his wet red eyes and masked the uncontrollable sobbing with his hands.

Thirty minutes after the film finished the silence rang in his ears and, still sat there, Pete found himself staring at the option on the menu displayed before him to watch the film again. He released the DVD from its tray and put it on the shelf at the side of the television. He had been completely unaware of time. Time intrigued Pete and the theory that the more aware of time you are the slower it goes. It wasn't actually possible for time to go slower or quicker as time always goes as time always does. Pete had many thoughts that he didn't want to make room for in his head and made every effort not to think of them. He liked to pretend that the thoughts were people that he had chosen not to speak to and once one of the banished thoughts came into his head he would turn his head and ignore it. It was the snobby nose in the air kind of move, but he found it worked for him. The thought, which now in his mind was a person, would then walk away thinking 'how rude'. The idea of being a rude person was much more appealing than living with unwanted thoughts.

As Pete headed to bed for an early night he tried to think of how to fill the next day. He hadn't thought of work so that was ruled out, as sometimes on a Saturday night he would realise there was some important task that he hadn't done and would decide to spend a few hours on a Sunday doing that so that on a Monday morning his desk was free of paperwork and his workload was ready for a new week. He hadn't thought about the girl either so whether or not he would see her Monday was not a thought he would spend time on. If he did then he did. If not then there was nothing he could do about it.

The day was bizarrely decided upon at the time he was thinking of what to do and it came in the form of a text from Barry Shenton, the Managing Director of Shenton Removals. The simple words which left no room for a reply simply said, 'Golf. 09:30 Middleton'.

**Chapter Three**

Watching a big black Mercedes-Benz pull into the car park signalled the arrival of Barry Shenton. The man oozed money at the first sight of him, but he was not materialistic, other than having a nice car and big house and fantastic holidays that others could only dream of, but he would think nothing of going to the pub with the lads on a Friday after work and eating a donner kebab before heading home. The staff liked him and respected him. He would roll his sleeves up and get stuck in alongside the storage lads if need be. He was one of the most down to earth men that Pete had met. If Pete needed anything he knew he only had to ask. The first time he drove Barry's Merc, he felt as though he glided through air, and it was a world away from his own Fiesta. Pete was standing with his clubs resting against the boot of the car as Barry pulled up alongside.

"Morning Peter. Nice weather for a thrashing I fear."

"Yeah, I'll go easy on you this time Barry," Pete joked. The last time the two had played a few weeks before they had played a pound a shot. Barry went round the course in a fantastic 74, which was six over par. By the end of the round, Pete had lost £20 for his 94, twenty shots above Barry. Pete was an average, fair weather player and would enjoy the idea of playing golf much more than the reality of actually playing, but he knew that was the way that things worked in the world of business and would go along with it.

The first shot off the first tee saw Pete in the rough, which made Barry's shot onto the green all the more spectacular. The grin on Barry's face said it all and the comments followed.

"You lost another ball I see?"

"The green is this way."

"I'll wait for you on the eighteenth."

Pete let all comments pass by without reaction, he had to concentrate if he wanted the contents of his wallet to stay in his wallet. Sliced shots and missed shots were mixed in with fantastic shots, but a crisp twenty pound note was passed to Barry at the bar of the club house, followed by two pound coins. The enjoyment of playing was the reason that they were there, and what Pete kept telling himself after yet another crushing defeat.

"Things okay Pete?" Barry asked him over a pint.

"Yeah, all is good."

"I'm going on holiday in a few days Pete. You okay to keep things running?"

"Yeah, no problem. You going anywhere nice?"

"Taking the missus to Barbados, we got a place there. I'll still be on the end of the phone Pete but I have no concerns about leaving you in charge."

"Cheers Barry. It means a lot." Pete was in charge every day but Barry was either in the next office or not that far away. This would feel like really being in charge Pete thought.

"Any problems that you can't deal with let me know, otherwise just make the decisions that need making." The two pint glasses came together with a ting sound and the word cheers going in both directions above it.

Once home Pete cleaned his clubs. He was looking forward to being the boss in complete charge. He knew Barry would be away for a couple of weeks at least so it would give him ample opportunity to check out his office. He knew he was more than capable of running things and the staff were hard working so there wouldn't be any major problems and he was happy to muck in if they got busy. It was going to be a good couple of weeks, he could feel it.

A quiet night in front of the television and a couple of cans of lager for company, and Pete was ready for the week ahead. It had been a long weekend and it seemed like days since he last thought of her but he knew there was a chance of seeing her again and, if he didn't, there were another four days after tomorrow before the next weekend. He was bound to see her before then surely.

His bedroom seemed cold as he got ready for bed. His shower had warmed him up but it had been an hour since then. He always slept in a pair of shorts no matter how cold he was and knew that he would soon warm up. The three pillows that he had were soft and his head made a valley in the bottom, they were comfy and recently changed so smelt nice. The quilt inside its white cover covered his body to the neck and he snuggled into himself. He waited to warm up but seemed to wait much longer than normal, however it wasn't long before he started to doze and then sleep encompassed his being.

He could see before him a long road winding its way up through the countryside. To either side were fields of many different colours. Most of the fields were square shaped with the odd one slightly more rectangular, but they all fitted together to join up on the horizon. The sun was hot and the sweat dripped from his forehead. He prayed for a gentle breeze to relieve the heat for just a second. His head felt like it was burning from the inside and his brain was melting, and he found it hard to think but knew that he had to get to where the road narrowed to a point. He could see this point in the distance and something kept pushing him against his body's wish to lie down and rest, but feeling compelled to carry on. He needed a drink and knew that one would be waiting for him if only he could get there.

Step by step the road behind disappeared, but for each step he took he could see a new bit of road ahead. It was like an impossible task. He felt a strength enter his body that came from elsewhere, he knew it wasn't his own because he had completely run out. The dry stone wall at either side of the road showed small messages, each written on a white sign cemented onto the wall at equal distances. He stopped to read one which said, '[Life may be not only meaningless but absurd](http://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/quotes/t/thomasnage202281.html)'. He stood trying to work out what it meant but noticed that he was stood further back than before. He had ground to make up and started to run. The heat had changed to a bitter cold and the snow blew in the strong wind right into his face. His run became a walk, which then became slower and his body was cold. He tried to rub his arms to warm up but he couldn't even feel them. Another sign appeared on his left and he tried to turn his head to see it but the snow blocked his view. It was coming down in blizzard proportions and he could barely see his nose before him. He was determined to read the sign believing it would hold some answers. He got close and wiped the snow from the sign with his finger, bent in frozen ice. 'There's nothing quite as wonderful as nothing.' He could not digest the information and became scared that he was going to freeze to death. He tried to force his hand to his face to wipe the snow away and as it connected he felt a rush of fresh air.

The leaves started to blow across his path. He looked up and the snow had gone. Piles of leaves were being blown around in the wind and although it was still cold it was a far cry from snow. He could not work out what was happening but knew that reading the signs was making him go further back. He regained his ability to think after the blizzards and decided that he would not read any more signs. They may possibly hold vital information as to where he was and what he had to do but he didn't understand them, so rather than wasting time looking and not being able to work them out, he would not give them any time. He passed more and more signs but didn't look at the words, and as he passed them he found himself walking faster.

The birds were now chirping and the trees in the fields were blossoming with leaves and flowers. The sun was shining although with a chill in the air, but the feeling was good. He was making good progress and the animals in the fields were all coming to see him. Horses and cows lifted their heads over the walls whilst still munching on the fresh green grass. The sheep baa'd to him as he walked by, passing one field after another. The end didn't seem so far away now and the messages on the walls had gone. He had a spring in his step and was enjoying the view. He could still see many fields in front but he instinctively knew that the end was close. The road changed from a road suitable for a car to a small narrow track suitable only for one person on foot. The tarmac was replaced by square stones. As a child he had always had a superstition that you could not walk on the cracks and he made sure that his foot was perfectly central before putting it down. Grass grew between the stones underfoot and the walls were close on either side.

They grew higher and higher a stone at a time until he had walked so far down the path that they were much taller than he was. They seemed to get closer and almost crowd him, making his movement become limited until he was forcing himself through a gap almost too narrow for him to get through. He tried to continue to force his way but the stones from the dry stone wall pushed into his back and stomach. He took off his coat and left it on the ground giving him enough clearance to go a few more steps. Again, the wall started to crush him. He took off his jumper and his t-shirt and then his shoes and socks and trousers and was left wearing only his boxer shorts. The wall still crushed him but he still felt compelled to continue. The stones became sharp and he could feel them slice into his flesh. He wanted to turn back but he couldn't, he had to continue. He watched as his clothes became so far away he could not reach them. He felt the pain from the lacerations and felt the grit from the stones enter his body at the very point of them. It became difficult to breathe and he could feel his ribs start to snap one by one. He shouted out in pain but didn't know who to. He secured his fingernails against a stone and pulled hard to try to move it but felt the nails leave his fingers. The pain was becoming unbearable and his eyes felt like they needed to pop to relieve the pain, but still the compulsion to continue was too great. The blood was gathering in puddles at his feet and he started to choke. His breath was hard to catch and he started to cough up vomit, which exploded from his mouth like a volcano erupting. A small strip of light became a focal point for him through a stone and he watched as it started to open up. He was oblivious to the pain and felt the light pull him towards it. Suddenly everything went white, but blank. He could see nothing other than white all around him. In the middle of what he thought was a huge white wall, were another two signs. His scrunched his eyes to read them but it was too light and it took a while to focus. 'Life without love is death.'

"What does it mean?" His voice echoed around him vibrating over and over again becoming deeper and more intense every time. Directly above it in perfect line the second one read, 'Obstacles divert from the real goal'. Two identical dark oak doors appeared with mist covering them. One to his left and one to his right. He watched the mist as it swirled in figures of eight. There was a mat on the floor in front of them, similar to the one he had at home that said 'Welcome' before you walked into his flat. Both mats displayed the words, 'Open me.'

"I don't understand!" Again and again his voice echoed around inside his head, spitting out into oblivion. He got caught up in the swirls of the mist and could feel himself going dizzy.

He gasped for breath, which made him sit up quickly and almost throw himself out of the side of the bed to breathe. He tried to fit as many breaths in as he could to make up for not being able to breathe.

The glass of water at the side of his bed was practically swallowed in one gulp. He ran his hand through his hair, which was as wet as though he had just got out of the shower; his pillows and quilt were also wet. The confusion was affecting his ability to put things into order. He knew that he had dreamt it but it didn't make any sense. He remembered every part of it and could still feel the pain as though the cuts to his body had left the dream with him. He looked at his watch displaying 06:30 and blinked when it aged one minute in front of him. He showered to try and wash the dream out of his system but over breakfast he thought about it: the walls closing in and the messages on the signs. He could not work it out, but as he left for work he decided that maybe he just wasn't meant to.