

Bucket List

Lou frowned as she wrestled her wheelie-case between the tables. 'You mean,' she said, 'you haven't booked him on *anything*?'

Katie shook her head. 'He wouldn't let me. Wait here,' she added. 'I'll get them.'

The coffee-shop was packed, and the rattle and the steam were the last things Lou needed after an eight-hour flight. She blew out her cheeks and slumped onto the faux-leather seat. Bloody Katie, she thought. If there's any organising to be done, it's always got to be me. Never Katie. I even had to book a hairdresser for her wedding, because she'd forgotten. And now this...

After what seemed like twenty minutes, Katie had queued, paid and waited, and was now returning with two lattes. 'Andy says he'll be another half-hour,' she said. 'No rush.'

'So,' said Lou, stirring her coffee, 'he wouldn't let you?'

'No,' said Katie, 'he said—'

'I thought we agreed?' said Lou. 'When he got his diagnosis? Whatever he wanted, we said. Wherever he wanted to go. No expense spared, we said. Make his last year a happy one.' She set her teeth. Of course, it'd be her own expense, wouldn't it, with Katie only working part-time and that loser Andy being a mere junior partner. Lou's money, and Katie's time – that had been the deal. Because Katie was the one who lived in the UK, and Katie was the one who could get time off work. So she, Lou, would be paying for everything while Katie got to spend those last precious holidays with Dad.

Out loud she said, 'What about Florence? He's always wanted to go to Florence. Said it was top of his bucket list.'

Katie put her cup down. She waited while a fat man squeezed his way past them, then said: 'You think I haven't tried?'

'No, dear, I'm sure you have. In your own way.'

'He's dying, Lou. I'm not going to start pushing him around, making him do things he doesn't want to.'

Lou tutted. 'He does, though. He's always wanted to see the Northern Lights, he's always wanted to see Venice, he—'

'He says he's happy just to see out his last year at home.'

'Just book it. Don't give him any choice. You know he's only saying no because he "doesn't want to be any trouble". He thinks we can't afford it.'

'He's not stupid, you know,' snapped Katie. Then she sighed. 'Look,' she went on, 'you've just got off the plane. Let's not argue.'

Lou shook her head.

'But Dad,' said Lou, 'don't you like it?'

Danny, pale and grey, looked up from his recliner-chair. 'Of course, love,' he said, holding the picture up to the light. 'It's very nice.'

Lou swallowed. She'd looked long and hard through the old holiday snaps that she'd got Katie to send over, and this one – Mum and Dad, Lou and Katie, taken the year they went to Barcelona – had caught them when they were all smiling, all relaxed, all happy. She'd put it in a lovely frame, so he could have it by his bed, and all he could say was, "it's very nice".

Never mind, she told herself, he's ill. Got to make allowances. She took a breath. 'Katie says she's mentioned about going to Florence,' she said, glancing at her sister, who sat opposite, studying the carpet.

'Oh, aye,' said Danny. 'She hasn't stopped goin' on about it.'

Katie was still looking away.

'Very nice of you both,' her dad was saying. 'But I'm all right where I am, thanks.'

'But Dad!' said Lou, trying to suppress the quiver in her voice. 'You haven't got long. Don't you want to – I mean, you know, live life to the full? Be happy, Dad. Please, I want you—'

She broke off and fumbled in her bag for a tissue. When she looked up, Katie was holding out a box of Kleenex. She took one and blew noisily.

Danny pressed his controller and the chair tilted him upwards. Then he eased himself up and held out his arms. 'Here,' he said. 'You too, Katie.'

'Listen,' he went on as he hugged them both. 'Happiness? It's over-rated. Me, I'm contented. I'm okay. I've had a pretty good life,' he added, nodding. 'Sometimes happy, sometimes sad. It's nice to go places, sure. But – like, I've realised, I don't need anything more.'

'Now,' he went on, gently wiping Lou's tears, 'how about a nice cup of tea?'