

A Very Private Man.

'And finally, to my son, Harry, I leave...'

Harry craned his neck to see what his father had written – it didn't appear to be very much.

'...my hat.'

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'Just the hat, then?'

Harry sat glumly, turning the hat over and over in his hands.

'Look, you can have half my share – honestly, I'd love you to, and-'

'No, Beverly, this is just fine.' Harry managed a tired smile. 'I never knew him; not really. A bit of a disappointment – that's how he thought of me, I think. So, honestly, I didn't really expect much.'

'Nonsense, Harry. I'm sure he loved you dearly – just in his own way,' Beverly said, her voice dying to nothing.

Harry laughed and placed the hat between them on the sofa. 'You know, to be honest, I could never see the point of it really.'

'It?'

'Fishing, of course! The flaming be-all and end-all of Dad's existence!

Beverly refilled Harry's cup and laid a hand on his knee. 'None of us could, Hal, but fishing was just his...' she searched the walls for the right word, '*sanctuary*. His place of safety from work, from life, from all *this*,' she said, surveying the sitting room with its chintz curtains and its aging antimacassars. 'And from us too, the *family*! He was a very private man.' She stood up. 'Look, it's late. I'm sorry, but I've got to get going. Are you sure you're going to be okay?'

'I'm sure,' Harry replied and showed his sister to the door.

Returning to the sofa, he picked up the hat, held it on his palm, and spoke. 'I did try, you know, Dad. To be the son you wanted, but you never let me in. I loved you, and I think you loved me, but...' He replaced the hat, switched off the light, and went upstairs.

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Harry arrived at the riverbank – '*the best spot for trout in these parts*' – a hallowed place and one he had never been allowed to visit before. The beauty of the stretch flowed over him as he took in the sounds and the sights that his father would have appreciated many times over: the cool of the breeze whispering through the bullrushes; the trilling song of the Cetti's Warbler; the iridescent flash of a kingfisher caught in the corner of his eye. If only he could have shared this with his father. If only...

He sat near the edge, holding the hat in his lap and exploring the feel of the lures, still pinned to the rough fabric. Brightly coloured, and in a variety of shapes and sizes, their hidden codes were as meaningless to him as they would have been crystal clear to his father. Then he knelt, feeling the damp of the bank rising through his knees. Allowing the stream to trickle through his fingers he gently placed the hat, top down, on the water and let his father go.

In a minute he was gone.

Disappeared from view.

Forever.