

*Always follow your heart. Or bury it at Wounded Knee.*

My dad liked to trot that one out whenever I asked him what I should do. An old Native American proverb, I guess. Those boys had a snappy one-liner for every situation.

My heart says: Sit down and hold his hand. He doesn't look as though he's got anyone else to do it. I can recognise a lonely face from ten miles off.

The hand is warm and dry, and surprisingly soft for its size – it's a proper paw. I try to put both my hands round it. Ridiculous.

He was brought to the ward in the early morning, just after four. There are multiple fractures to his arms, legs and ribs; his right clavicle is smashed. There's a thick bandage round his right hand. The nurse says he's lost his index finger, but you can't just lose an index finger. He has no head injuries and his lungs aren't damaged. His kidneys are swollen but basically working. There's a single main doorway in his neck. That's where the drugs go in – the glittering disco stuff from the bags hanging on the drip stands. He's getting something to make him sleep and presumably all kinds of stuff for all kinds of pain. It's clearly working 'cos he looks strangely peaceful, and his face is unscathed, apart from a few scratches from the asphalt.

Forensics took his clothes; he had no papers on him.

He's really tall: with all the splints on his arms and legs he hardly fits the hospital bed. His hair shines silver-grey and it's close-cropped at the sides, a bit longer on top. His face is one of those angular

models that men only grow into at a certain age. I'd put him at early-to-mid fifties. A man in his prime, if he weren't so broken.

Yeah, if he weren't so broken, he'd look a bit like a tall George Clooney.

The machines on the wall behind his bed start beeping. The nurse comes in and presses a few buttons. She smiles sympathetically around the room, as if I were a relative, even though she knows I'm not.

That keeps happening to me.

I don't always react to it very well.

'What was he wearing?' I ask her. 'Before the gown, I mean?'

She switches off her smile, question marks blinking dully in her eyes.

OK. Sorry.

'Where was he found?'

'I don't know exactly,' she says. 'Somewhere near here.'

Her stare is getting harder.

She seems to resent me: even if I'm not a relative, I could at least act like one.

She idly moves a few things from one side of the bed to the other, then hastily leaves the room before I can ask any more impudent questions.

I stay beside the tall, sleeping man and look at him.

I stay by him until the clouds finally seize power in the sky and it grows gradually dark; then I head home.

As I get out of the taxi in my road, cold rain falls on my head.

Yellow light rolls from Klatsche's window.