

Jack Kane

Billy Downes stares into a mirror: receding hairline, creased suit and slacked tie. He checks his jacket pocket for his pills, sniffs the lemon-scented smell of piss in the air and flings his tie into a urinal on his way out of the public toilet.

All the people are still there, gathered around his wife in the casket. The only ones deserving of attending are his Godmother and Aunt, the rest are just cashing in on as much social relevance as they can in the usual mantra: 'Sorry, for your loss', 'It must be so difficult', 'She was such a kind soul'. Why should they care? Billy promptly plops himself on a near barstool.

'Whiskey. Straight.'

'Of course, would you like ice with that?' Billy looks at the barmaid just long enough to make her uncomfortable, then:

'No. No ice.' He looks back at the hyenas and their corpse. His Godmother is crying now, Billy seems to remember something about her husband dying earlier on in the year though can't for the life of him confirm that fact. 'Tough break.'

Billy's whiskey arrives and the barmaid points to his jacket's handkerchief as it folds slightly: a piece of cardboard cut into shape. He takes the cardboard into his hand and unfolds it revealing scrambled writing on its back.

'Is that your speech?' asks the Barmaid. It was not. Billy sips his whiskey and begins to read the lyrics written down on the folded cardboard, signed by a 'Jack Kane.' A gust rushes through Billy, bringing with it all the splendour and adoration of the past and for a moment he feels bereaved and choked up, though that could just be the whiskey.

Billy walks towards the casket, vagabonds parting to let him past, and rests his drink on the woven wood. He looks down at his wife, gaunt face layered in makeup, and remembers the drug-fuelled concert he and his wife met at. He was the performer and she was the roadie who had snuck into his private dressing room at the age of eighteen. Looking now at his roadie's dead face all he can think is how good her cheekbones look. And just as his Wife's mother attempts to approach him, Billy spouts 'She was such a kind soul' and returns to his barstool.

On cue, as if sensing Billy's sorrow, a few of the unrecognisable tumbleweeds that had been caught by the casket blow towards the bar. They start the usual way: 'Such a shame', 'She was taken too early' but their attention turns from Billy Downes to Jack Kane; 'Can you sign something for me Mr Kane?', 'Excuse me Mr Downes are you really Jack Kane?' Billy's Aunt and Godmother look scornfully at the small group gathering around Billy. Billy himself buys a round of drinks: so much for sorrow.

Signing receipts, explaining songs, reminiscing about certain gigs, Billy tastes the life he loves and now spies the hyenas of the room with new eyes; now they whimper and pace too nervous to approach Jack Kane for a conversation and too star-struck to do anything about it. A lady asks Billy about his next album release, to which he simply states 'It'll rock your socks off' and finishes his whiskey, he wasn't going to let them know it released a month ago with below-average reviews. After all, who believed that Jack Kane's latest deserved a two out of five?

Crowd growing, the casket is left alone except for Billy's Auntie and Godmother. Jack Kane's fan meet-up, on the other hand, is larger by the second. Billy feels a sick perversion of his wife's funeral; enjoying every second of limelight and retreats to the toilet once more.

Billy locks a stall and sits down on the seat. His world spins as reaches into his jacket pocket. Popping two pills, he calms now only hearing the beating of his heart in his eardrums and the roar of a crowd long forgotten. The bathroom light hums and grows brighter as Jack Kane leaves the stall to take a long and hard look in the mirror's reflection. He sees a gun-toting, raven-haired man looking back with wings spread wide.

Jack glides out of the toilet and enters Billy's Wife's funeral reception, a spotlight now shining down upon his adoring fans waiting around his barstool, holding the casket and Godmother in darkness. He floats towards the girl who asked for an autograph singing one of his most famous

tunes and orders another whiskey. The crowd erupts; their idol is resurrected, and Billy's Godmother and Auntie leave the funeral reception.

Spinning tales from tours; the pimple popping teenage daydreams, the guy who passed out in the front row, the backstage girls, the free drugs and the adoring fans, Jack spills out of Billy's cracks like water drawn from a tapped tree. Jack stands at the centre of his own storm, the wind picking up the sweat from his brow and the dust particles of dead skin and propelling them away with ego.

A glimmer catches Jack's eye. His cantering slows as a second spotlight flickers off and on above Billy's dead wife's casket, humming. Jack pulls away buying his acolytes another drink - on the house of course.

The more they drink the younger the group get. Jack stands around as the groupies and love-drunk teenagers slowly morph into view and his storm grows as limbs fling out searching for their willing victims. The concoction of booze, pills and ego reach their peak and the second spotlight hums into action blaring a white light upon the casket, while Jack's spotlight dimmers.

The man with a gun in his jacket pocket, finds his body edging towards the spotlight like a moth to a fire. He finds his eyes tearing up and his knees clamping, but he reaches the casket all the same. Behind him, the acolytes chant his name but the confidence this usually inspires is void, now more akin to the chanting of craven madmen before the sacrificial lamb is led to slaughter, and Jack Kane peers down at the casket. His angel wings are gone, his raven hair grey and skin gaunt and rotting: it is not Billie's Wife in the casket but Jack Kane himself, having died with the pained expression of a scream on his face.

Spotlights flickering the bright stage lights silhouetting Jack Kane fade and the room darkens. Jack Kane falls to his knees scrunching his eyes unable to remove his own dead face from the backs of his eyelids. When he opens his eyes, the room has returned to how it had been: normal and dull. Billy sees that his large group of Jack Kane fans were actually just two or three stragglers at the bar and watches as they start to leave having had their shopping receipts signed by a has-been at his wife's funeral. He checks his pockets and heads to the exit.

Billy Downes walks off to some two-bit club with a half-used pack of Viagra in his pocket and an unpaid tab behind him: 'I never did like that barmaid.'