

'The Count' by Marcia Hutchinson

Chapter 1 - Madeleine moves house

The smell of hops and yeast pervaded the air. Depending on which way the wind was blowing and what was being made at the brewery, it could either be a mild nuisance or totally overpowering. Today it was overpowering. Underneath the beery smell Madeleine detected the familiar aroma of curried goat and patties wafting from the Golden Spoon Jamaican takeaway on the corner and beneath all that, was the faint but unmistakable tang of Moroccan Black.

Exhaling deeply she slid her key home into the lock. Madeleine had been here many times before, supervising the builders as they renovated, quietly but firmly pointing out where her instructions had not been followed. Each evening she had driven back to her old house in Leeds as she slowly emptied it of her possessions. Today she was moving in. Furniture pictures and memories from a now-dead marriage had to be rearranged. The Peace Lily she carried under her arm was battered from the car journey over the Pennines but it had survived. She turned sideways as she came in the door to save it from further damage. She was ready to start a new life in Manchester but what would it be?

The hallway was narrow and the lack of carpets made it echoey. It smelled of paint and varnish and newness. The floorboards had been polished back to a shiny old pine and she loved the little pits created by the nails which had been painstakingly punched back down to hold the boards to the joists, whilst avoiding the sanding machine. More than anything what she loved was the fact that this house was hers. No snoring Waste-man of a husband; no loud daughters messing up the place and 'borrowing' her favourite clothes. Just her. Well there

was also Naya, but that was different. The removal men had brought the big pieces of furniture and placed them roughly where she had indicated. On this, her last trip over the Moors she brought the last few delicate items, her heart included.