

Thorny Rose

Rose is swept away by the soaring notes of the trebles, captivated by the music's beauty. It had been Michael's favourite part of worship too. Tears smart her eyes, blurring the bright colours of the Minster's East Window.

Choral practice finishes with a flourish and she stands up quickly, swaying slightly. Perhaps it was a mistake to say her farewells to the Minster, but it had been so much part of their lives. She peers at her watch: not long now. She should hurry.

Striding out, past the vestry again, Rose nods greetings at familiar faces but doesn't stop to chat. She recognises one of Daphne's floral arrangements: their's is one of several relationships she'll miss.

At the Chapter House, Rose grimaces and growls at the gargoyles, as she and her husband had done together in their early days here, uncaring of tourists' astonished expressions. Her heart aches as she recalls the joy of last Christmas's concert. He'd held her hand the whole time, even though forty years married. She wipes away her tears surreptitiously with her sleeve and suppresses a laugh at the irony of her lack of hankie... at what is to come.

Down into the crypt, she walks beside the time line showing the Minster's rich history. Michael had been proud of this heritage, and of his faithful service here... until recently.

She doesn't attempt the Tower steps. It had been many years since they'd climbed them. But she spares a moment for the Rose Window. 'Second on my list of favourite roses,' Michael used to say with a smile. She feels another, harsher pang at his loss.

Joining the queue for Evensong, Rose files through to the Quire and kneels in her usual place. 'God bless Michael,' she whispers her prayer. 'May his soul rest in peace.' Surely God would forgive him for taking his own life... would understand his frail mental state was caused by *That Bully*. She can't bring herself to mention his name, but knows he is officiating tonight. She'd come to know him well, every medical complaint he griped about over those long months of persecution, until he'd orchestrated Michael's dismissal with his reputation-poisoning lies.

Enough! Rose sits back to admire her own arrangement of blooms at the lectern's base, and hears *him* approach, sneezing as he brushes against the flowers. He blows his nose, before a look of consternation crosses his face. Wheezing, he pats his pockets vigorously, clutches his throat with one hand, chest with the other, and crumples to the floor. Startled members of the congregation run to his aid, call out for a doctor, one woman punching numbers into her mobile.

Rose knows it's to no avail. He isn't just reacting to the lily pollen she'd shaken over her floral display, but also to those grains she'd applied to his handkerchief. Add to that the asthma inhaler she'd removed from his cassock pocket... and his weak heart...

Unnoticed, she walks away. Unrepentant. Revenge is sweet.