

# Spence

**Richard Hill**

18-year-old Spence has a fleece hoodie on today, just washed by his girlfriend, Ann. It smells calm and cloudy, fresh out of the tumble drier. He gets down on his knees to play with Poppy, his ten-year-old Jack Russell Terrier. Poppy's blind and finds her master by his body odour but is a little confused as he's wearing body deodorant and dressed in that overpowering hoodie. But she finds him and submissively rolls on her back for a "tummy tickle". Spence obliges, and she reacts with a passive whine of pleasure.

'Are you going to pick up your prescription?' asks Ann. Spence nods and speaks to his dog in a silly childish voice. 'Is that nice, Poppydog?' If she were a cat, she would be purring but just looks up with sightless eyes. 'Is Poppydog going to be a good girl for daddy till he gets home?' asks Spence in that baby-talk tone. He stands and turns to speak to Ann. 'Right. I'm off now, love. Kiss me.' Ann kisses him. 'I hope you make more than yesterday. And don't forget to pick up your script.', she reminds him. Spence opens the front door and leaves.

He hates taking the lift, but following a football injury a few years earlier, he can't cope with the stairs, not even going down. He presses the "down" button and waits. 'C'mon, c'mon' he impatiently mumbles. He hears the clatter of the lift approaching. It comes to a standstill and the door scrapes open. It smells of stale piss. It descends. It's not a very nice day to be begging on the street. It's that kind of misty drizzle that gets under your collar.

Fifteen minutes later, he's arrived at a parade of shops, one of which he'll soon be begging outside. But first, he's going to the chemist where he'll collect his methadone. For the past few weeks, it has been dispensed by a nurse at the health centre. But now, he is coming off heroin, to which he's been addicted for a few years.

His "weaning off" heroin is being strictly supervised by his doctor. But now Spence is considered stable and responsible enough to self-medicate at home. Yesterday's dose, the last to be administered by the nurse, is wearing off and his body aches for more, and soon, after he visits the chemists nearby, he'll be 'topped up'.

-OPENING ENDS-

