

Excerpt from Skellig

I took my torch and shone it in. The outside doors to the back lane must have fallen off years ago and there were dozens of massive planks nailed across the entrance. The timbers holding the roof were rotten and the roof was sagging in. The bits of the floor you could see between the rubbish were full of cracks and holes. The people who took the rubbish out of the house were supposed to take it out of the garage as well, but they took one look at the place and said they wouldn't go in it even for danger money.

There were old chests of drawers and broken wash-basins and bags of cement, ancient doors leaning against the walls, deck chairs with the cloth seats rotted away. Great rolls of rope and cable hung from nails. Heaps of water pipes and great boxes of rusty nails were scattered on the floor. Everything was covered in dust and spiders' webs. There was a little window in one of the walls but it was filthy and there were rolls of cracked lino standing in front of it. The place stank of rot and dust. Even the bricks were crumbling like they couldn't bear the weight anymore. It was like the whole thing was sick of itself and would collapse in a heap and have to get bulldozed away.

Something little and black scuttled across the floor. The door creaked and cracked for a moment before it was still. Something scratched and scratched in a corner. I tiptoed further in and felt spider webs breaking on my brow. I opened a cupboard an inch, shone the torch in and saw a million woodlice scattering away. I moved so carefully. I was scared every moment the whole thing was going to collapse. There was dust clogging my throat and nose. I knew my dad would shortly be yelling me for my tea and I thought I'd better get out. I leaned across a heap of packing boxes and shone the torch into the space behind and that's when I saw him. I thought he was dead. He was sitting with his legs stretched out and his head tipped back against the wall. He was covered in dust and webs like everything else and his face was thin and pale. Dead bluebottles were scattered on his hair and shoulders. I shone the torch on his white face and his black suit.

"What do you want?" he asked. He opened his eyes and looked up at me. His voice squeaked as though he hadn't used it in years. "What do you want?" he asked again.