

## The Monastery

The boy found he was in the old ruins of the monastery. High above, the building's roof arched over him. It had caved in, probably hundreds of years ago, and now the remains curved against the sky, with the delicacy of a broken shell. The boy lay on the cobbles beneath it, his eyes transfixed on the patterns of its thin bricks, criss crossing this way and that, defying gravity.

An old goose, tethered by a rope some yards away from him, squawked in agitation. The boy turned his head, to look at it. He imagined how every day it would have been disturbed by visitors who wandered into the monastery. He felt sympathy for the goose, but as he looked into its eyes he noticed they were very small and sharp in the half light. The goose puffed its chest and began stalking up and down. The sound of its cries was magnified by the walls, which rose on all sides.

The boy realised he was trapped. The old guy would be outside – he may follow him in here.

As the boy came up the hill through the trees he'd heard the music – a folksy number that lifted his spirits. A white butterfly drifted from a branch in front of him and the sun seemed warm. But as he approached he realised the instrument was out of tune. The guitarist was up on a bank, looking down on him through heavy rimmed glasses. A mat, carefully scattered with coins, was right in the boy's path. He knew he was meant to throw in some money. The boy tried to concentrate on the sound of the woodpecker that rapped out reassuringly nearby. He kept his pace slow and continued past the mat, on up the hill. As he passed by, the man began shouting, shrieking and swearing, the words echoing in the trees.

'Mother fucker!'

The boy walked more quickly, trying not to run, keeping his hands in his pockets. He could hear the old guy scrambling down the earth bank. Stones bounced and fell with a crack on to the hard path behind him. Up ahead, he could see the entrance to a crumbling building. As he turned in, he saw signs of other people – neat rows of oranges on a table, ready for sale. He emerged from the dark passageway into a yard. Here there were chickens pecking the ground, but no one around. Limp washing hung from a line in a small enclosure. There was no sound apart from the scuffle of his own feet. He ran to the far side of the courtyard, through a doorway in an ancient wall, across the uneven, rocky floor. He tripped on a protruding cobble stone and fell headlong. The boy lay stunned for several minutes. Now, as he watched the goose, he saw the blood trickling from the side of his head.