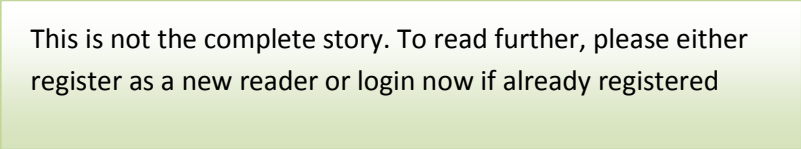


## EXPOSED

The ledge was unprotected and shrouded with coarse bracken which rustled in the sharp breeze shaving up the cliff face. The plains below looked dwarfed but impressive, stretching as far as the naked eye could see, empty of life, but full of nature in a dusty, scuttling kind of way.

The man crouched on the ledge, watching the open desert with glazed eyes. The wind pulled and whipped his hair across a wide face, as sharply chiselled as the granite against his back. One hand dangled forgotten across his knee, the other pressed the dead rock in a steady stance.

He had been crouched in the same position for hours, thinking and deliberating, invisible to any soul casually glancing at the rock face, had there been anyone to look. What little possessions he had were carefully folded beneath a hysterically swaying bush, held down against the piercing wind by a sharp piece of stone.

He had no food,  ttering manically like pieces of jet buried in the sand. He'd lost count of the days that had passed since he'd pulled himself on to the ledge, confident, arrogant and smug. But as first the hours, then the days passed his confidence had faltered, arrogance evaporated and a hungry calmness had invaded his body. Now he was finding that reality and dreams were blurring together like paint on a canvas so that it was more and more difficult to distinguish where one colour finished and another started. The memories that had led to the desolate precipice took on a solid reality, overwriting the stinging wind and his empty stomach.

His name was O'Donnell and he was a Theology Professor with more than a smattering of rich Irish blood running through his veins and a hot temper that was the result of a lethal dose of Italian ancestry. What had been planned as a touring holiday of Jordan soon turned into a challenging wager when he got heavily involved in a debate with one of his students, a pock-marked gangly youth with bad teeth, who had goaded him into losing his Italian Irish temper and agreeing to the challenge with the entire class as witness.