

## **There Are Six Cubicles**

*by Alex Aldred*

The man in the first cubicle works in real estate. He wears an off-the-rack suit, tailored perfectly to his off-the-rack life. He is travelling south to inspect a property he has never seen before, so that half an hour later he can convince a pair of newlyweds that it is the house of their dreams. Currently, he is pissing. Mostly on the floor.

The man in the second cubicle has a decision to make. Behind the cistern is too well-hidden; just scribbling it on the wall feels excessively obvious, almost gaudy. Frustrated, he pivots on his heel. Ah. There will do. He reaches up and sharpie-scrawks his number onto the inside of the door, just underneath the nub of snapped plastic where the coat hook used to be.

The man in the third cubicle is not alone. He is accompanied by his six-year-old son, whose name is Jeremy, and who is presently making an awful lot of noise and mess. Once Jeremy has concluded his business, the man in the third cubicle will pick him up and carry him to the sinks. Then he and Jeremy will return to the family hatchback, where the man's wife sits fidgeting, and Jeremy will be buckled into his booster seat amongst the dense scrum of holiday luggage – like their car is a barrow, packed full of offerings to the gods of sun cream and hat-bags.

The man in the fourth cubicle is dead. He will be discovered by the cleaner in just over an hour, although the card insert on the far wall proclaims “these facilities are inspected EVERY TWENTY MINUTES by a member of staff!”

The man in the fifth cubicle is finishing up. As he buttons his jeans, he notices he has spattered the rim of the bowl with yellow flecks of urine, and reaches for the tissue dispenser so that he can wipe it clean. His hand brushes against nothing but damp cardboard. The dispenser is out. The man checks the top of the dispenser on the off-chance, but there is no spare roll perched there. He grapples, briefly, with this minor dilemma. Then he reaches a decision, and puts the toilet seat down to hide what he has left there.

The sixth cubicle is empty.