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Fall from Grace

by Victoria Cooper

I have this memory. I think I dream about it sometimes. I am standing on a beach of stones and I am looking out to sea. Grace is with me and is holding my hand. Grace is the daughter I always wanted. Grace is my great, great Grandmother. Grace was the fallen woman. Grace is dead.

We watch the fishing boats on the horizon and point out the ones that seem to buzz like bees in the distance. The sea is white tipped and foamy. Grace giggles when the foam reaches us and when we look down instead of seeing ten small pink toes, I just see sand. Grace has gone.

I long to feel her small hand in mine; the curve of her cheek laying pressed against my palm as she falls asleep next to me. The lightness of her limbs dancing on the sand, turning cartwheels with bare legs; tongue out and a wisp of hair tucked behind an ear. She moves away from me and although I call out her name, the spiralling cartwheels continue and I never catch up. She is too fast for me. She is too full of life.

I turn back to the sea. I am reassured by its familiar movement; the one continuum in this ever-changing memory. Grace the dancing girl has gone but this strong woman with neatly cut fingernails, broad smile and forehead is standing next to me. I cannot hear her voice but she tells me a million secrets that spread out before me like the starry sky. I only have to look up to know that they are there and she is sharing them with me. He made a fool of her and despite her pain she smiles at me.

Now her secrets can twinkle in the night sky she no longer feels her shame. She fell in love with this man who noticed her long auburn hair that stood out beside her five sisters of dark brown.

She believed the stories he told her, the life they would live together. He never told her about his wife. He never told her about the trunk; the bigamist trunk with the complicated metal lock and missing key.

Grace walks with me along the shoreline and I notice her lace up boots striding with determination; ahead of me now. She tells me of the big house with the walled garden and how her daughter loved to play and hide in rhododendrons. She describes her daughter, the one with the lie on the birth certificate, teasing a kitten with a dandelion clock. The girl is mischievous with the palest blue eyes of a china plate hanging on a wall in the hallway.

I am still staring at those boots. They crunch on the stones and I stop because I know I cannot follow them. She does not belong to me but to another time and whilst I can know her stories and feel how she was cheated. I am just stargazing. Just reaching out to touch the missing generations with my fingertips.