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The Pirate

by Victoria Cooper

It was the summer of 1979 that I fell out of a cherry tree and broke my front tooth. I had made a bit of a fuss and my parents were annoyed as it was ill timed. We were about to set off for a monthly classic car meeting and they had spent the morning polishing hubcaps and checking oil gauges. I hated these meetings but they happened so regularly I forgot to whine. They involved people in flat caps standing around smoking pipes and clutching tankards of bitter. Children were not welcome but my parents had no choice but to take me.

They owned a four and a half litre Bentley called Benjamin. Their divorce settlement was extensive over Benjamin and years later my therapist asked me how I felt about that. I liked its name.

It was stunning from sleek navy bodywork, stylish running boards to polished chrome headlights. This luxurious anachronism turned heads and made small children wave. I rarely saw this as I was underneath a black tonneau cover that protected the back seat. My parents felt it superfluous to remove this, so I was shoe-horned into the footwell until like a blinking mole, I was released upon arrival.

The black velvety darkness within was terrifying; with only engine sounds, the jolt of potholes and my parents' arguing to comfort me. I remember being once reprimanded as mother stopped to check the back axle only to discover the constant drone, she heard was me singing "Ten Green Bottles".

On arrival my parents joined the other enthusiasts while I was despatched to stay out of the way with a packet of crisps and a bottle of coke.

That was when I saw him.

He showed me his gold tooth and told me he was a pirate.