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## What we learn from those who have lived before us

by Victoria Cooper

He stood up in the auditorium and slowly turned towards the waiting audience. Squinting through the haze of dust particles dancing in the fluorescence he stared out at the faces before him and wondered over their presence. Those grey scholars were so welded to their seat, flint yet unknapped from stone. Embedded establishment, impenetrable and unforgiving.

Someone coughed and he felt a wave of impatience hit him and combine with the wall of breath-stealing heat. He carefully wiped his brow and as he did an unfamiliar pain spread across his chest.

Another cough, loud and impertinent this time; waiting. He pushed back his spectacles, looked down at the words pirouetting across the page and with blood drumming in his ears he began,

“My advice to all young writers is quite simple ....”

In that instant of inbreath, no breath came. Instead a sea of faces swam towards him, knocking him off the podium and sending him crashing to the floor. Dead as his final full stop.

Days after the well-attended funeral that was silhouetted by the publishing world, his daughter found the lines that followed.

“I would caution them never to evade a new experience. I would urge them to live life in the raw, to grapple with it bravely, to attack it with naked fists.”

She smiled. Then mused over new age nuance her father had no knowledge of. Mindful millennial adrenaline-fuelled junkies looking for the hit of experience. Filling each moment like the young ones before them, but not for a drag of a forbidden cigarette or from the rush of a speeding car. These FOMO newbies hanging from a precipice by their fingertips because they can, then problem-solving in an Escape Room because they can't. Was that the experience he eluded?

He, like the grey flat faces that swam towards him on the podium or circled him at his funeral could never comprehend a lifetime so desperate to engage with life they simply let it pass them by. Their greedy arms flung out to grab all they could get, was it with courage? Was it with attack?

He would have slowly shook his head with incredulity at a tourist standing on Eagle Point of the Grand Canyon, fall to their death while taking a selfie. Grappling only with their final full stop.