

Bourne
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creative writing
workshops

Rose

by MaryPat Cambell

I knew he was a student because he always got off the bus at the same stop, near the Medical School. They all looked a bit worn out and crumpled in those days, as if they'd been sitting up all night chewing up their books and lecture notes along with the beans on toast and pints of beer.

His handsome, constantly weary expression and his brown leather briefcase made my heart flutter on the way to work each morning. We started to smile at each other, then he sat in the seat beside me one morning, and the rest is history. Three boys and a girl, a nice house in the suburbs, what I'd always wanted.

The last couple of years since his conviction have turned me inside out with shame and disbelief. A few weeks before he was arrested, after a few whiskeys one evening, he told me in a loud and slurred voice that *he'd stolen her heart away and put ice in its place*. I thought he was talking about his mother, who had never liked me, but lately I've been thinking that's what he's done to me. I keep that ice close to me in the hope that it will melt and drain away and leave me in peace one day as though I were an empty box with no troublesome things rattling around inside it.

I was born in the Spring with the lambs and the snowdrops, but my yellow hair called for an extra special name so my mother named me Primrose. He, on the other hand, called me Rose, for short.

I still visit him on Tuesdays at Wakefield. We meet in a big draughty room with a guard standing by the door. He doesn't speak to me much now although I try my best to humour him to show I don't believe what they say he's done. We never speak about it. I bring a few packets of his favourite biscuits, which they always search, along with newspapers and books to read. How could he be a devoted husband and a kindly if sometimes irascible father all these years, if he was doing what they say he did to those old women? I would have known, I'm sure of it.

There is one thing that haunts me though. I'm not old yet like they were, and if I was, would he have done the same thing to me? Was it just their money he was after? It's as if the ice in my heart protects me from something I dare not think about. I can't be curious about what's under the numbness I feel. This icy layer keeps me insulated against the news reports of the trial, the TV coverage, the neighbours gossiping. I have a new identity now. They arranged it all and moved me away to where I live now by myself near the seaside, I'm not supposed to say where.

I'm getting used to my new name which is half of my old name, and what used to be his name for me, Rose. When I hear someone call me Rose, it's as if my beloved Harold is still here with me, the two of us against the world.