

The Only Constant is Change

by Victoria Cooper

Smash!

The glass bottle rammed into his face with such force he fell backwards and hit his head with an echoing thud on the pavement. The sticky redness splashed onto his collar and made him look like a clown, then it dripped down his tie. The hit of tobacco smoke stung throats as the chill night held the blue haze, both suspended in a wrestler's embrace.

YOU WERENT EVEN THERE

I was still holding my holdall as I watched the two men grapple with each other on the street opposite. Beery fumes slapped my face in the afterwork air, while red buses and black taxis charged past, and I thought of my father smiling as he handed me a glass. That was before, when he could still remember my name, or how to flip a bottle lid with his thumb in one easy action. Tapping the glasses together, pendulum like, he would give me a wink.

A boy with swagger and a phone stuck to his ear, tutted then shoved me as he marched past. Every parent's nightmare.

YOU FORGOT TO PICK ME UP.

I landed in London on a wintry autumn evening and still had so much of the country about me. My greenness shone like the Verdigris above my head and neon-lit words surrounded me with

I DON'T KNOW

The encircling onlookers widened their berth and someone handed the bloody man his laptop bag like a trophy. He hugged it to himself and staggering shook like a wet dog. The blood was still pouring from his head and he had a look of mild confusion as he dabbed at it with dirty fingers.

GET OUT OF THE WAY

The man still dazed, his open mouth closing and re-opening like a fish on the side of a boat. My father's boat, the one I used to row when we fished for silver darlings, near the Summer Isles, when I was in the spring of life.

Then it happened.

Suddenly

He was staring at me, across the busy evening traffic, across the lights and noise and exhaust fumes. His eyes locked onto mine and my brain tried to make sense of the confusion. How could it be?

He started to walk towards me with a zombie-like determination, somehow miraculously navigating three lanes of moving cars and a bicycle path to be stood right in front of me.

With blood spilling on his face, my hand instinctively rose to touch it; but it was his cologne that I felt first, as it made its way to first my thalamus and then sent messages to my hippocampus. I was on a swing in a late summer evening being pushed too high, no wait, I was running up a pebble beach as he stood laughing from the cold and rubbing himself with a towel. No, that was not it, I was sitting on his shoulders touching the gentle pink ears beneath his wet combed back hair.

Dad?

I THOUGHT YOU HAD FORGOTTEN ME