



This is not a Letter but my Arms about you for a Brief Moment

by Victoria Cooper

She was seen and yet not seen as she walked home from school, past the gap-toothed fence that ran along the alley. The fading sunlight made her blink as it flickered between the posts. Overzealous town planners had designed these areas, hoping to become recreational places where communities gathered, but like everywhere else in this forgotten town, the grass had grown up between the broken paving slabs and left nothing but a litany of broken promises and recycling banks.

The sound of her footsteps echoed, ricocheting, just like his drumming heels, as he sat on the wall, waiting for her. She could not see him but she knew he was there. Waiting to pounce. The rhythm of his swinging feet steady and fast, but not as fast as her beating heart.

She didn't need to go this way home, she could have gone through town, past the parade of closing down shops and hairdressers, but she could not risk seeing "poor Mr Dorit" again. Once before he had watched her walking towards him; waved as the rain started, beckoning her in from the leaking guttering. She didn't want to appear rude to "poor Mr Dorit"; her mother had told her not to stare at people like him. So, she stood in his carpet shop full of polyester and plastic, and avoided looking at his pinned-up suit sleeve.

He asked the usual questions about school, smiling and joking about the teachers, then he offered her a Quality Street, and could he put his hand up her skirt. She misunderstood at first, had not seen the good hand tremble.

She reached into the box, and he let out a tiny sigh, she felt his breath on her face and she wrenched herself backwards, out onto the shiny wet pavements, rain stinging her eyes as she pelted home, clutching a toffee penny.

So she took the back way home now, even though she knew it came with a price. He was always there.

Her parents would argue, while they peeled potatoes together. Her mother chopping with violent force as her father scrubbed beneath the surface, muddy brown water droplets collecting on the hairs of his arms. They fought over why their “bright girl” told them regularly she hated school. Her mother insisting it was boys and laziness; her father silent, but slowly shaking his head wondering where his little girl had gone. As the mountain of potatoes scaled, her mother grew more exasperated at why her daughter loathed the very place she longed to be. Finally, she threw the salt in and slammed the lid with a clang; the matter dropped.

Jess drew nearer, knowing the final bend of the path would reveal him. The twilight time between school and tea could find him cruel and restless, depending how long she made him wait, or how little he had left in his pocket, but most times for no reason at all. She knew with a sinking heart it was too late to turn back, too late to risk town. She turned the corner.

“Hello sis,” he snarled.