

The Lies, Deceptions and Falsehoods of Grief

by Victoria Watson

Nothing travels faster than the speed of light with the possible exception of bad news, which obeys its own special laws. It was a line she thought often when waking; it reminded her of the phone call telling her that her father was dead. The light cast diagonal daggers across the room and she knew she should feel gratitude for the warmth of the sun, the new day, all the possibility but she just waited for the phone to ring; the bad news.

The waiting was broken with banging on the door, aggressive and incessant. Grabbing at clothes she hurled herself downstairs, the banging shaking every timber of the house.

As the door opened, she was immediately flung back by the force of policemen in bulletproof vests, clutching rifles. They barged into the hallway and forced her to the floor. She could hear heavy boots all around her, slamming doors, shouting and more banging. The air fizzed and she tried to speak.

His dry lips pushed down on hers and she voluntarily opened her mouth so he could explore deeper; he licked her top lip greedily. She was back safe in her bed, with him; there were no policemen. He shifted himself on top of her but at the same time pulled back and stared down, smiling. She was incapable of words and he smiled and then got out of bed.

Downstairs despite the radio, commuter traffic created the music to the morning. Noise suddenly seemed so painful to her, even his toast popping, or the kettle clicking she wanted to cover her ears. She knew she had to keep moving through the sticky toffee of the morning and act normal. She knew she had to sit down, pour coffee, spread toast. She had to do these things so he would not know what was happening to her, she had to protect him.

He whistled and the shrill sound struck her ears like a wasp inside her head. She focussed on stirring the coffee and not striking the side of the cup.

When she looked up, he had gone, she did not remember saying goodbye. The radio at last silent. She lowered her head on her arms like a child in class, and shut her eyes comforted.

“Mummy, mummy, mummy”, small hands clasped around her arms and legs, yanking at her hair, tugging at her. She pushed them away, sat back in her seat, but small hands kept coming. One covered her mouth and it smelt of marmite and wax crayons. She screamed and it rose deep within her like a dragon’s roar, but fat stubby fingers pushed it down, silencing her while pulling and tugging. They grabbed her clothes and wiped snot on her jumper. One jumped on her back and whispered in her ear “piggy back, piggy back, piggy back.” Small hands undid her shoelaces and pulled her earrings. She stood up shaking off the Lilliput creatures with her arms raised high above her head and opened her mouth to the sky.

“Squally showers and a high of 15 degrees in the capital today,” said the radio, looking down she was still sat at the table and her coffee was cold.

She walked to the tube station and her phone began to ring, “Hey, just checking you’re ok, have you got to work yet?”

His upbeat tone failed to hide his concern. She knew he was worried. She knew from the carefully placed words, the slow smiles and unblinking stares that he thought she was losing it. She was not the sort to make others worry; she was the one who called, always reliable. Grief had done this, and now she was unpredictable and could no longer be trusted, not even to herself.

She tried to put her phone away, head bowed and fingers fighting with the zip. A man with a bomber jacket and a shiny forehead pushed his face into hers and yelled at her. She cringed. Another. A woman this time, leaned in and screamed in her ear. Then another, a boy with a fluff of a moustache, mouth open, eyelids pinned back, shouting, shouting, shouting. Her fingers could not get the zip to move; the voices and faces kept coming. A woman with an umbrella, poking at her, prodding at her, people stamping on her feet. She covered her face with her arms, willing it, waiting for it, longing for it to stop. She knew what it was this time. She knew it would pass. Her heart racing, and without looking, she broke free and pushed past the bomber jacket, the umbrella and the moustache and just ran.

“The next station will be Bakerloo, Bakerloo, please change for the Northern line at Bakerloo.”