

Bourne
toWrite...
creative writing
workshops

KIR

by Victoria Watson

She has a tattoo on her left forearm. They are the words her father would say to her when they said goodbye. The last time he said it by phone. Those words travelled over land and sea, flew between the stars to drop down, down before the moon and finally rest peacefully within the bloodstream of her grief-ridden body.

Today as she unpacks the bag her wide infectious grin betrays her sad eyes and you want to hug her but are afraid her teeth might bite into your sinew and bone. She so desperately wants life.

She tells you how much she misses your brother, her father and you tell her in the beginning you moved through the days like a severed head that finishes a sentence.

They eat vegan cupcakes and as you pass around your Tupperware picnic boxes you wonder how come you were so stupid at the same age. They hike and they climb. They view and they listen. They take nothing for granted. But not you. You were the great grandfathers of the first-time buyers and all you ever wanted was more.

Her clean skin sparkles against the white cliffs and you look up considering the fall. Did you come here before when you had no job and yet was old enough to know you needed one? Did you bother? Did you see it? Did you watch the spiralling seabirds dance with one another on the warm breezes offshore?

She picks up a flat stone and turns it carefully over in her worn-down palm. When you reach the point of no return or when your parents die do you just stop being a klutz or do you simply stumble on groping in the darkness? Her boyfriend has serious glasses that do not hide the serious gaze behind them.

He smiles and makes jokes, but in a kind, considered way; a way that shows he drinks oat milk and supports Amnesty International more than a monthly payment. Someone related to you demands ice cream and you turn away your face burning with shame.

A picnic on the beach too early for wasps too late for the haar. You sit in your sea fret and realise you are middle aged.

“He’s only doing Business Studies so he can party,” she laughs. You remember her brother; he looks like your own brother but without the cancer. He blinks from the photos like a fledgling and you see your own offspring as the sparrow hawk echoes overhead.

She smiles with a mouth that hides a collection of ancient stones. She is so old and so tired you know she just wants to lie down and sleep but you tell her it’s not her time.

“We can only die in the future, I thought; right now we are always alive.” She says this with a heavy sigh and the many bracelets on her wrist jangle.

You nod pathetically, admitting to yourself she got the joke before you did.

You say your goodbyes and when you hug her you want her to leave an imprint on you and to leave some indelible mark on her but she won’t let you. She turns and her pink mermaid hair flows behind her in curls. Both mythical and magical, like the selkies she swims away from you, less than half your age, full of grief and still older than time.