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Successful Failure

by Victoria Watson

You would think it's the big things in life that matter: your divorce or the job promotion that slipped you by and left you washed up by the photocopier machine. But it's not; they don't.

It's not the date you turned down because his aftershave made you wheeze, it's not the phone call you never returned or the letter that lay unanswered.

Maybe it was when he walked out of the hotel after you told him about his mother's dandruff. Or was it the scene you made when he made a Christmas Eve sandwich with the brie off the Christmas cheeseboard. Possibly it was the deadline you didn't meet, the night out you turned down because you were busy on the sofa cutting your split ends, watching *Blind Date*.

When you sit back in the therapy chair and your eyes run along the same book spines, your mantra of Du Maurier's *Rebecca*, Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment* and Jilly Cooper's *Riders*, you realise the answer lies at the end, just above your therapist's centre parting. *How to Fail*.

The walk home on glistening pavements reflects a different you with this knowledge; someone who believes in Roosevelt's *Man in the Arena* speech. All those failures are you.

It's your mumbled "I love you" as you drift off to sleep, only for you to be wide awake seconds later by the earth splitting lack of response vibrating from your lover's snores.

It's the best friend you dump on a Thursday lunchtime, leaving her confused by the school snack machine, eyes blinking at the unopened share bag of salt and vinegar crisps.

Her hot tears will prick her pink cheeks as you ignore her in the PE changing room, having a private joke with some other girl, while desperately trying to swallow the golf ball of guilt stuck in your throat.

It's the moment when your boss hands you an assignment that you lied on your cv you could do.

Its when you start a conversation on holiday with your GCSE French and you realise you cannot get past Bonjour and Ou est la boulangerie, s'il vous plait.

Its having a smear test the day the junior medics team will all be attending and you try desperately hard to stare at the ceiling tiles as three sweaty twenty year olds stare at your nether regions, clutching their clipboards to their chests.

It's inviting all your friends to a grown-up dinner party only to burn the rice, split the sauce and cry into your crème brulee. They will all expound your amazing culinary skills then sit down to your congealed hot mess. Your will hear your heart shatter into tiny pieces as food is politely scraped to the edge of plates.

It's the spider you rescue from your son's bath only to see him glaring indignantly as he catches you flush it down the toilet.

It's pushing your toddler goddaughter on the swing while imagining the warm fuzziness of motherhood, not noticing you have pushed her off the swing and not stopped it from hitting the back of her head, where the blood dripping off her long blonde pony tail will make you faint, and you will come to as her mother is shaking her head in astonishment that she only left her with you for ten minutes.

It's not having the assertiveness to go on a Self-Assertiveness course. It's pulling a sickie and then actually feeling unwell.

It's lecturing your child over a lost jumper/new pair of shoes/borrowed toy/birthday present only to find it later in your handbag.

Failure is merely the starting point; the beginning of the pain and shame yet to come. Its not the life coach speech about learning to fail better. Its sitting on the bathroom floor sobbing your life into a crusty bathmat not able to get up and pick up the laundry. You want the moment to teach you life lessons, pearls of wisdom to crawl out of the dusty recesses of your mind and with jazz hands give you a "ta dah". But the big reveal when you brush yourself off is only in the movies.

Reality serves it up as this, your arm is numb from lying under you on the floor, tears lay in a puddle by your ear; you know you are actually dead inside and your soulless corpse is utterly redundant. Then someone will knock on the door and a child/partner/work colleague/elderly family member will ask if you could hurry up as they need to use the toilet.

You will wipe mascara off your cheek, blow your nose, head downstairs and make a round of sandwiches/answer an email/clear the cat litter tray.

The moment of your failure will pass without thunderbolts of revelation; the hand of the clock will just move a little further round and you will just keep on going.