

## Conscience

by Sho Botham

Hunched over, struggling with the weight of his burden, he thought to himself, 'only two more streets to go'.

Her elegant, cream patent leather high heels dressed her feet and ankles in the way that only expensive shoes can. The simple but clearly couture, cream linen, sleeveless dress hung effortlessly from her slim, tanned shoulders.

Nearly there, he thought wearily, nearly there.

With a last look in the long mirror in the corner of the expansive hallway, Meredith picked up her cream leather shoulder bag from the dresser as she headed towards the front door.

He was dragging a large grubby bag up one step at a time towards her. She could see he was tall despite being bent over. His face not visible due to uncut hair falling over his hollow eyes and cheeks.

"Yes," she said in a clipped voice.

"Mum, it's me," he said and collapsed onto one of the stone steps leading up to the entrance of the sizable Victorian house.

His voice stopped Meredith immediately. She listened but no further words were spoken. She looked trying to see evidence that the old looking young man was in fact her son, Luke. She had sent him on a gap year to Asia and was not expecting him back for at least two months.

The young man spoke again. "Mum it's me, I had to come home."  
Meredith looked at her son and couldn't quite believe her eyes or ears. He'd left all those months ago her tall, fit strapping, well-dressed young man. She wanted him to grow up and become independent before going to university.

She wanted him to become confident and worldly wise before immersing himself in the world of business that the rest of his life would revolve around. She'd sent him off with a list of business contacts who'd all promised to introduce her son into the business world of Asia.

For the past ten months, Meredith had regularly told her society friends about her son's gap year travels. According to her, Luke had been eager to venture out into the world and her stories were all about how well he was doing and how his confidence was growing daily from meeting the business people on his mother's trusty list. But reality was very different. The Luke that Meredith told her friends about over canapes and drinks was nothing like the real Luke - her tall timid son who loved nature, helping those less fortunate than himself and living a quiet existence. This Luke didn't want to spend years at Business School learning to be a Suit. Luke wanted to study something to do with nature. He wanted to be outdoors and not stuck in an office.

Meredith's face came back to the present and looked at her son sitting uncomfortably on the steps of his family home.

"What on earth is the matter with you?" she asked him? His face looked up at his mother's and saw the disappointment in her eyes.

"I haven't heard from you in months and now look at the state of you."

She began to say that he would be fine once he'd had a shower and was dressed in clean clothes. As usual, she didn't think to ask Luke what his needs were.

He'd recovered his breath from the long walk after what had seemed like an incredibly long bus journey and began to straighten up to his full height. He looked older than his twenty-two years but his eyes were filled with wisdom. They had seen pain. He'd given away his money to those in need. He'd worked in places where they could not afford to pay him. He'd bought hand-made items that he carried home in his bag. He didn't need them but knew he was helping individuals struggling to keep a foothold in life.

Meredith began to chatter about her society life continuing to talk about her make-believe world outside of reality. Luke stared at her realising she believes the fantasy tales she tells others. He thought inwardly, a conscience is that still small voice that people won't listen to. There was no point in telling his mother about what he had seen and endured on his travels. She wouldn't understand why he wanted to throw away the big brash life of a Suit in favour of a small and difficult life following his conscience.