

THE PHOTOGRAPH IN THE WALL

SAM

There stood a wall, unremarkable, dull, and damp and dilapidated from both age and the cold drizzling days of London weather, which would often beat its ruthless fists upon it. The earthy stench of mildew sifted through the air as passersby took short moments to recollect themselves against this shabby, old thing, taking away pieces of its crumbling structure with the soles of their trainers. Its face was freckled with nooks and crevices and the occasional gathering of emerald moss.

It was unremarkable in almost every way.

There was, however, a rather unsightly gash upon its bottom left side, and this was what Joseph loved so dearly about this wall.

On the rainiest of days, he would hide a small photograph inside this ragged cleft. Wrinkled and yellowed, he'd hastily covered it in thin plastic film, but the edges had given away to the relentless beatings that it had taken over the years. When days would turn into melancholic evenings and the cacophony of restless cars blurred into the surroundings, he would rest his weary back upon this wall and stretch his blistered legs onto the pavements. Most days would not fare well for Joseph, in a city anaesthetized to the grieving of the downtrodden and lonely.

Sliding a calloused finger along the plastic, his eyes would soften as they followed the delicate chin of the woman in the photograph, tracing her high forehead down to the slender tip of her nose.

He never wondered if his own mother shared her porcelain skin, nor if his father wore the same pride she did in her olive eyes. As far as he was concerned, the warm, inviting embrace of her smile brushed away any need for such contemplations.

He didn't know her name, nor could he ask, but he knew that he could find comfort in her coquetry. He had grown attached to this photograph, this dingy thing he'd found in the same crevice which housed it still.

His home was with her when nights grew barren of commuters and rowdy tourists. He dreamed of the day the girl in the photograph would come by and say hello in a strike of divine intervention. Or perhaps he'd find her for himself one day, when he had a few extra pounds and enough bread tucked away in his rucksack. The sun dipped into a palette of blues, lilacs, and pinks, and his thoughts drifted to their *reunion*. He knew he wouldn't have to say a thing when it happened. She'd just *know*.

Overcast days lingered on, and his tin cup remained still low on coins. His stomach would rumble uncomfortably, but he was always quick to rush towards the crumpled photograph. Taking it out as cautiously as he could, he'd roll down the plastic and perhaps if he was lucky, he'd share with her a sip of some beverage he'd found earlier through the day. Together, they'd melt into a peaceful slumber.

He delighted himself with such thoughts.

He'd wait with her as the sun raised its head high, welcoming dawn and its amber rays. Eyelids fluttering awake, he'd

tuck her back into the plastic, and carefully push her back towards the crevice.

Some days were not so kind.

Drip. Drip. Drip.

His hands would tremble on rainy days as he'd wiped any remaining precipitation off the ledge.

Drip. Drip. Drip.

Off he was to shake a cup full of coins at the muddied shoes of passersby.

Tragedy awaited Joseph one night.

Determined to return to *her*, his feet plodded firmly through the streets. He marched right through the many puddles that littered the road, even as the aching in his heels begged him to slow. A wiser man would have chosen to lay rest upon any of the old, stone walls there, but he had his own wall to think of. Sleep could wait.

It was unfortunate that he hadn't taken notice of the loud whirs and the determined crashing of metal against stone right then. The clattering of London at sunset rendered everything to his ears white noise, so imagine his surprise when he saw the fat, yellow crane parked across his beloved wall!

He heard peals of laughter from brawny builders, each oblivious to the horror that had seized his face. Surrounding pavements lay coated in fine grey powder that once held together the foundations of *his* wall. A bulldozer sat haughtily by the side, lazing after a hard day's work.

Imagine his anger.

Hot coils of rage built inside his chest. He prepared to lunge forward and tear

apart these terrible men. For what good, it did not matter, and he could only take so much more injustice and apathy from this world.

He charged.

Furious exercise did not suit his skinny legs however, and they gave away as his thin body heaved.

Defeated.

He screamed silent screams. He thrashed. He flailed his feeble arms in frenzied desperation. His head throbbed violently as he lashed his arms towards them, but to no avail. They restrained him easily and threw him against the pavement. His body lay broken and bruised.

He only watched from then on. Dirt and skeleton dust from his beloved wall clouded the surroundings, and he sat listlessly and without protest.

His eyes didn't catch, or perhaps wilfully ignored, the young child that spat onto his back, or the old, greying wanderer who took off with his rucksack upon his own shoulders.

The clouds hung above him once more and thunder roared as if maddened with grief. The deafening bellows reverberated against his eardrums, and each flash of lightning offered little opportunity to happen upon the photo a last time.

She was gone, vaporizing with the rains into the sky.

The April storms, the wretched builders, the impertinent passersby. They all took her from him.

He only ever wished to know her name.

The storm raged on relentlessly that night, blanketing away any signs of dawn.