

5. The Street

The boy's hand, a little cold, fitted the man's as if destined to match. Their eyes locked briefly, and the man ruffled the boy's hair in the manner only a father could. Both had brown eyes, the boy though a little pallid, had slightly rosy cheeks. His nose was starting to show its adult shape and the direction the man's nose had taken so many years prior.

Both were standing on a cobbled pavement, a medium-sized wall covered in spreading ivy was behind them, the tarmac and traffic in front. He navigated them across both lanes of slowly moving vehicles, perhaps a little hesitancy in the boy, a reassuring squeeze from the man's hand. As they stepped up to the pavement on the opposite side, the man was already steering them to their right, slowly walking as a pair a further three-hundred metres. Their destination was a small cafe and ice cream parlour, a plastic clown with its wares on its board, various ice creams, drinks, and snacks.

Just before the cafe, a small collection of flowers and tributes furthest from the road on the pavement, mixed in with calls for a proper crossing, and more safety on the street. The man whispered, 'Those flowers need a refresh,' seemingly to no one in particular, but the boy's head momentarily nodded, emotionless eyes taking in the flowers, cards, and signs.

They sat down at a small, empty table, the boy sliding into a proffered chair, his feet elevated from the pavement. He avoided his crisp, well preserved uniform blazer touching the table as there were still ice cream blobs and bowls still on its surface. The man pointed to the menu, held in a display holder, with plenty of pictures, descriptions and prices adorning both faces. While the boy focused on which impending treat he wanted, the man attempted to gain one of the two waiter's attention. The waiter steadfastly refused to look in the pair's direction in that way waiters have to ignore clientele until they deemed themselves ready and interested to serve.

The man's back stiffened slightly, as a hint of frustration became evident. He looked back at the boy across the messy table, a smile on the left of his mouth, looking closer into his eyes. A wave of emotion, weak, and thinner than the breeze flowing down the street, passed from the man to the boy. The boy's fixed focus shifted and he looked back at the man, a tickle in his chest, as if to acknowledge the unseen connection. Tutting, the man looked at his watch, but it seemed to have stopped, the second hand stuck in its endeavour to smoothly sweep the dial. There was a roar and several cheers across the street, opposite the cafe, emanating from school children playing chaotic football.

The waiter passed, again not acknowledging them, only stopping to rub his upper arms, feeling a little cold in the fading sunlight. The man, indignant, indicated they would leave, reaching for the boy's hand again, as if expecting a classic reaction to a treat being withdrawn, but the boy just shrugged.

With a slightly higher impetus, the pair made their way across the street, man guiding boy back to their original position. Facing the wall, the boy looked up to the man, a slight, sad smile on his pallid face, as he seemed to grow vague against the backdrop. Fade. Fade. Gone. The man heard a rushing sound, like wind or a wave on the beach, as he too gradually faded, momentarily being visible near large and small tombstones in the cemetery behind the wall, a faraway, grieving expression. Perhaps tomorrow, some ice cream for the boy.

The breeze caught the dying flowers, and the signs of the pavement tribute, and the two photographs, fading slowly, of the two brown-eyed subjects, a man and boy. A card stapled to them with a handwritten note, *'the living live among the dead, the dead among the living, one day living and dead will be together. All my love x.'*