

The Grey Garden

This right here, this is why I hate kids. The border closes tonight and we only have an hour to get to the airport or else we miss our flight. Now I'm running down the streets calling for someone who should be half my speed and getting weird looks from the Aldershot locals.

The bricks in the buildings I ran past looked like a blur, the wide open streets filled with people on foot and on bicycles were a cacophony of sounds from conversations on the state of the world, to a street band playing a slower tune than they usually do. The necklaces tucked into my shirt clanged together as I ran too, adding to the noise. Every TV in the restaurants I passed was on the same news channel as well, as if I needed any reminders how bad this year was looking to get. To think it was only March. I rounded a corner and caught a glimpse of a girl in a spruce blue dress running as fast as she could down the street.

“Bridget!” I called.

She ignored me, as I should have expected. I picked up speed and followed her along a black metal fence with large bushes obscuring whatever was on the other side. I was so close to catching up with her before my stomach cramped up. *Not now* I thought. I watched the girl turn left through an arch about a dozen yards away. I walked at a much slower pace to keep my cramp from acting more than it already was. I was this close to leaving her on her own by the time I reached the entrance and saw what those bushes were hiding. Fields of grey stones, markers of those we could never

forget, even if we wanted to. I hesitated for a moment. Then another. I don't know how long it took me to steel my nerves and walk under the black arch.

I made my way through the cemetery like my stomach was still acting up. I could see the girl I was after, but this wasn't the place for running. She was sitting on her knees between two gravestones with names even more familiar than those I was passing on my way to her.

Peter Dench, Michael Lowrey, Anne Clawtho. The list of friends I'd outlived never failing to grow, but at least I got to stop going down it when I got to her. I turned to the graves she was between for a quiet moment.

"So this is where they put him," I said. "Wish someone would have told me."

Bridget sniffled. "It's where they put mum. You were at her funeral."

Part of me wanted to call her a smartass, but she wasn't wrong. I sat myself down next to her, the grass pricking my hands on the way down.

"Not really something I like to think about, kid."

"Really? Wish I was that lucky," she said.

Yep, definitely Will's kid.

"If I leave now will I ever be able to see him again?" Bridget asked.

"I don't know Bridget. I never thought something like this could even happen these days. Everything going on right now is just— just so, so out of my control. A month ago everything was fine, but now it feels like the world is collapsing in on itself." I put my arms around Bridget, trying to hold her together. "I may not know how things got to this point, and I may not know if things will ever get better, but there was this saying your old man used to tell me in the east. Whenever things were at their worst and I

didn't see any way out, that man would turn to me, grab my shoulders, and say, "Wait for the sun Hughs. Believe the sun will rise and I promise you everything will look so much better than they do now. We just need to keep faith."

"Does it?" Bridget asked.

I kissed the side of her head through the gaussian blur that was my vision. "Every day."

She hugged me back, shoving her face into my jacket. I can't recall how long we sat there. Could have been a few minutes, could have been an hour. I wasn't in a hurry. Got stuck in the country for a while, stayed at a hotel for a couple nights until I was able to find a place to stay. Things got better. Wasn't too long before the border reopened and we moved west, back to the same job I had before. Bridget got through school, even when things got even rougher, and became someone I know they would have been proud of. Every year since then, we've gone back to Aldershot for a weekend, booking the same hotel room we got stuck in when the borders closed. Days begin with sunrise, then flowers, then friends, then her parents. All before the sunrises the next day, just as it always has and always will.