

“Forget-me-not”

Iridescent droplets rained down from the sky, drawing white tracks through the dirt on the old man's face, creating rivers in the deep crevices of his wrinkles, wetting his ragged hair and soaking his filthy tuxedo. Shivers ran down his spine. But still, he forced himself to look up and face the world that had betrayed him.

Water misted his eyes and flashes of memory raced through his mind of a life once lived. Long gone now but as deeply written into him as the wrinkles on his brow, he felt tiny hands gripping his own, blissful waves as school shoes clapped down the driveway and the chime of glasses as the sun set sitting next to a woman with bright blue eyes. Yes, he had lived.

Light streaked through the sky. Rain turned to hail shooting down on him like bullets reminding him of the night he lost it all. He had strutted out of the house like he had already won. He could recall draining pints of amber liquid, filling his table with empty glasses one by one. The roll of the dice; then deep dread as he handed over every penny to his name.

He could barely remember the walk home, but it took no effort to recall the dread, regret and shame he had felt, fearing the disappointment in those bright blue eyes. That's when he smelt the smoke. He still saw the orange tongues of fire ripping through his house, the screams of his children rang in his ears and still lived in his nightmares. He'd frozen. Fire licking his ankles and rain dripping off his fingertips, he had watched as his life fell at his feet and turned to ash before his eyes. He could still feel the pain. He trailed his fingers along his scars, shuddering as he placed a hand on his heart. He felt it thump rapidly under his palm and wished the jagged blades of his feelings away. They gripped him in his sleep, waking him in fits of sweaty delirium, bringing him pain so unimaginable that sometimes he couldn't move. But he asked himself, was it better to have loved and lost or never to have loved at all.

He shook his head, clearing his mind and bringing him back to the present. He was slumped on a park bench, looking over a simple rain-soaked park. He brought his hand to his face, wiping away the dirt, rain and tears.

He raised his eyes hearing the squealing delight of a child, being pushed on the swing by a woman with angry burns crawling up her arm and a smile in her eyes. “Grandpa,” the child called. He smiled as he stood, feeling his old bones creak under him. He dragged himself from the shadows and into a future as bright as the golden spill of morning after a life spent in the dark. It started with this child. A child who held a forget-me-not, as blue as her eyes.