

We Wait for the Stars



BRIDGET HAMILTON

LITTLE TIGER

LONDON

I remember that night
so clearly,
like the pin-sharp focus
of a telescope.

It was the summer solstice.
We ran right down to the beach,
bathed in the orange and pink
of sunset.

School was nearly finished
and the holidays were drawing close –
possibility *fizzing*
on our tongues.

Our arms were full of blankets,
kindling, marshmallow packets
and one beer each
for Mum
and Dad.

I dug my tripod between the rocks
until it was steady,
pointing it at the ground
and not the sky
for the first time in months.
I adjusted the aperture,
set a ten-second timer
and ran –

the camera
capturing
our final
family photo
ever.

Then we skimmed flat stones,
ate molten s'mores
and laughed at each other's jokes;
Mum and Dad clinked their bottles,
linked their fingers,
stood up to speak to passing neighbours.

And when it came,
that height-of-the-summer moon,
it was as if it breathed fire;
glinting above the horizon,
all golds and purples.

By then, there was no one else around,
the dog walkers and day drinkers
all tucked up
in their beds,
and so we danced,
a mad family of five,
high on burnt sugar –

and when the moon had fully risen,
hot white,
bursting from the dark
we headed home,
staggering on sand and rock,
then up the steps
towards the road.

And Dad promised that one day
we'd shove potatoes
into the campfire's embers,
sleep right here on the beach,
and have them hot
and buttered
like toast
for breakfast.



Six Weeks Later

The church at the bottom of our road
was packed.

It was a sunny morning,
calm out to sea
with sailboats bobbing
in the harbour.

Dad didn't really believe in heaven,
but it pleased Grandma and Pops
to sing the hymns,
to believe their only child
was waiting for them
somewhere
up there.

And even though it felt weird
doing it without him,
we all went down
to the beach afterwards,
taking off our black shoes
and black socks
and pressing our toes
into the water.

That afternoon,
despite the stillness
of the waves
(not usually good
for finding treasure),
I came across a glass stopper,
milky white, frosted by all the crashing
and tumbling
of previous storms,
before calmly finding its way
into my palm.

Barely visible was the year 1891
embossed on its rim.

I took it home in my pocket,
imagining it would help
keep some of my feelings
out
and other ones
bottled in.



They Said Dad Was

An esteemed academic

A renowned philosopher

An avid stargazer

A devoted husband

A loving father

A supportive colleague

A pillar of the community

A friend to us all

A man who will be sorely missed

In the prime of his life

Taken too soon

Survived by his wife and three children

Gone, but not forgotten



The Truth Is, He Was

Quite annoying sometimes, actually
Not the kind of person you'd want
to sit next to at parties,
unless you enjoyed hearing new theories
about quantum physics

A bit of a nerd –
well, a *massive* nerd

Not good at small talk

A weirdo

The odd one out

Neurotic

Apathetic

Sometimes just pathetic

Absolutely not perfect

But also strangely perfect

And now, somehow, he's dead



It was Dad who came up with my name:
Celeste.

Apparently, it means
heavenly,
although I would struggle to find anything heavenly
about me.

I'm just a normal kid –
or, at least, I was
until recently.

Dad was a lecturer
who liked outer space and the beach.
He said that things looked the same up close
as they did far out,
repeating patterns
that built the world.

He explained
about the links
between the stars
and certain plants,
between the moon and the tides,

geometric equations
and broccoli.

Grains of sand
and stardust.

Unfurling leaves
and galaxies.

We were in awe of his brain, the one
that taught us to spell *Cassiopeia*
and how to spot *Pleiades*,
the Seven Sisters,
even though there were only
three of us siblings:
Me, the oldest,
Rae, who's fourteen,
and five-year-old Jess,
who we all call
Little Dipper.

We loved the way
Dad turned up to our school plays
in his solar system socks,
how he talked as intelligently
about Little Mix lyrics
as he did about metaphysics.

And if memories were things
you could keep on display,

like blue-green glass
or sea-tossed stones,

then our shelves

would be *breaking*

under the weight of them.

He wasn't sick,
and then
he was.

He was here,
and then
he wasn't.

Everybody said
it was a fluke,
a freak event
as rare as
seeing the solar eclipse
from your garden.

He was healthy,
they all said –
but these things
can happen
to anyone.

And this time,
it happened
to us.



The New School Year

arrives
on the back of the first autumn breeze.

The leaves are turning orange
on certain trees;
the reddest ones are falling,
getting crunched under my feet.

Every corridor
and scuff on the floor
is unchanged,
only now I'm in my first year
of college, and *already*
the work is piling up.

When I arrive in the canteen,
my best friends
Denisa and Abi are sitting
shoulder to shoulder
on the first table
from the right.
They're hunched over Abi's phone,
which is propped up
by a cup
of bubble tea.

When they look up and see me,
their faces drop.

Celeste! says Denisa
in the happiest voice she can manage,
but you can tell by Abi's expression
that I'm basically like
the Grim Reaper
arriving.

How have you been?
she asks.

Fine,
I say
and we carry on like this –
back
and *forth*
for ages –
saying words, but
communicating
nothing.

When the bell goes for class,
I'm kind of
relieved.

I pick up my camera bag,
bulky in my arms,
and I slip into the crowd
before either of them
can say goodbye.



Denisa

makes zines
and graphic novels
and turns heads in town
with her mass of curly hair
and nose ring.

Mum used to take me to art groups
at the community centre –
the ones with finger paints
and papier mâché –
and so did Denisa's,
and so while they talked
about balancing being an artist and a working mother

or something,

we would cover each other
in PVA glue
and we've been stuck together
ever since.



Abi

burst into our lives
in year five,
her muddy knees as dirty
as her tackles on the football pitch.

She moved up North from London
and still has the remnants
of Chelsea posters
stuck
to her bedroom walls.

Being friends with Abi
is like being friends with
a hyena with lion's claws;
she's got a wicked sense of humour,
but don't get on the wrong side of her –

trust me.



Conversation, Last Summer

If you take

geography

and I take

PE,

art is on Wednesdays

and English

is Fridays

Then the three of us

will get

at least

four lessons

and every lunchtime

together!

*And if your mum
signs the form*

*and you forge
my dad's signature
on mine,*

*then if we have frees
we can leave early,*

head

to Starbucks

and pretend to study

but actually

sample every

single type

of coffee –

What do you say?

Sounds perfect

to me...



I Thought That School Life

would start and end the same –
with my best friends
by my side,
as sure and as unaltered
as the torn-up nets
around the basketball hoops
and the chewing gum
squashed
under every desk.

We had planned
it all out;
not just our perfect
timetables, but our
weekend trips
and birthday parties,
who would learn to drive first
and where we would travel
during the holidays.

It felt like nothing
could be bigger
than our friendship,
so what could possibly
come along
and change it?

Then this summer
happened
and suddenly
I'm less and less certain
of the future we had imagined –
as if I'm looking up at a star,
not knowing
it has already
exploded.

And so I walk down the corridor
alone,
checking my timetable
as if I don't know my lessons
by heart,
and checking my phone
as if *anybody*
would ever text me
but them.