

BRAILLE

by Erika Byrne-Ludwig

There was Mervin ... his eyesight was down to a quarter due to diabetes. When he looked at me, I could see small amber grains in his eyes. He would stare and frown until he'd caught me in his field of vision, then his face would light up and the frowns would smooth out into flat, crooked lines.

And there was I ... serving meals. A white apron. Lacy frill tied in a bow. *College for the Blind*, said the sign on the building's facade. Affected by poor vision or complete blindness, the students were studying braille. Scarred eyes, clouded eyes. Sensitive finger tips.

Mervin fell for me. A glance he gave me, and I immediately knew. A feather falls slowly from height. You can follow it with your eyes and wonder at its soft twirling. Mervin's fall was sudden, more like a stone. Looks and words quickly began mirroring his secretive thoughts.

In an atmosphere fizzing with gathered voices, clinking cutlery, amidst the smells of fries and hissing spluttering fried eggs, I moved from table to table, held up by Mervin's platitudes and followed by his constant gaze, his struggling eyes, trying to define my full image.

I thought of a cobweb's stringy strands, adhering to me with its invisible stickiness. Emotions are not eyes. They can be blinder than blindness itself.

Then his hand drew close to mine when I served him his meals. Like a lure, a bait, it lingered near. Its desire to touch was so strong, so real, I could feel life bursting in his fingers' puffiness.

Resenting the clinginess of the web, away from blind eyes, I ignited a match to light up a way out, struck a second one, a third, till I arrived at a lit path. It lay in front of me like a bright oblong eye, focusing on mine. In it I read a response. I untied my lacy bow.

The same evening, in a bold and resolute move, I opened my suitcase, calmly piled up my belongings, amused at my braille exercises ... I was trying to understand ... but my finger tips were too insensitive to the patterns of raised dots.

A shadow standing in the corner ... in one of his grainy eyes a
cloud shone when I said goodbye.

