

The Good Boy

by Jay Faulkner

"Don't ... don't worry, kid," the man with the blood on his hands stammered, his face whiter than his teeth. "Everything will be okay."

The faces cluttered around me, above me, leaning over and pressing in. They looked like the balloons my dad had got me for my last birthday; eleven balloons, one for each year, he had said. The faces were just like that — floating, though I couldn't see the string.

Car engines roared, just as they had when I started crossing the road, but I couldn't see them. I could smell them, though; their fumes tickled my nose and made me want to cough. The cough wouldn't come; my chest hurt. Horns blared, again, but the screeching sound I remembered hearing was gone, now. What had that been? I couldn't remember.

"Jesus." The man's voice shook. "Has someone called an ambulance?"

I giggled a little when he said the bad word. Dad would have told him off for using that one. It wasn't just a bad word, it made fun of God too, and Dad didn't like that. He didn't like that at all. Every Sunday we dressed up in our best clothes; him in his blues and me in my blazer; shirts finely pressed. I used to love watching the steam from the iron, blowing into shapes that only I could see. Dad said he could, too, but I don't think he could.

"Hold on, son, you just hold on!"

I blinked the darkness out of my eyes and saw the man again; I could smell his breath. Just like dad's. I must have fallen asleep. My eyes felt so heavy. I was cold. Why was I cold?

Dad used to kiss me with his stubble tickling my face; his breath having that funny smell of coffee and fags. I used to like watching him flick the ashes of his cigarettes into the air. The wind took them, sometimes, and made them dance in the breeze; they made shapes like the steam did too, sometimes. I remember asking him, a long time ago, if I could have a cigarette so that I could have yellow teeth like him. He told me off. He said no. I was allowed to get stubble, though, sometime. He smiled when he said that and everything was all right again. He smiled a lot, my dad did, even on the day he got on his big boat. It wasn't a Sunday but he was dressed in his blues anyway. He held me tight, kissing me with his stubbly lips and making me giggle.

"I'll be back soon, son," he said with a smile, his teeth yellow.
"You be a good boy, you hear?"

He always held my hand when we crossed the street; told me to look both ways. I think that he would have told me off this time. I forgot to look; I wasn't a good boy.

"C'mon son, hold on!" The yellow teeth smiled through the darkness; I smiled back. I wasn't cold; not anymore. I was floating warm and safe. And tired. So tired.

"Yes, dad."

