

Not finding you

by Saskia van der Linden

Had this been a film, I'd have seen you at once. *Extreme close-up:* my finger on the green button that opens the door to the park. *Long shot:* my leaving my bike at the entrance. *Slow shot:* my walking down the narrow stone path.

Depending on the kind of film, the camera'd now zoom in on my skirt and boots, on the rose in my hand or on the look on my face.

I don't find you there. This is not a film. This is the lowest kind of reality, in which I have to knock on a wooden door to speak to the porter. In his small office he looks you up in the database. He gets me a number that he writes down on a yellow post-it note: 11691.

I walk back, I walk on, I walk backwards and forwards, but I can't trace the number back to you.

Once I think I spot you in an especially festive corner, full of colourful decorations. That would have been your kind of place. But it's full of children instead.

Again I knock on the wooden door. The porter, annoyed now, takes big steps to show me the way. I can hardly keep up on these heels.

11800 is the lowest number he can find. He's no longer annoyed with me, he now mutters, 'I'm so sorry...'

I'd read about other people who didn't make it in time to see another person alive. But I was never prepared to be too late for a grave visit.

With those big steps of his he's worked out where your stone used to be. 'The bones are still down there, but the stones have been removed and destroyed ages ago.'

It's not for you but for these words that tears start streaming down

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my face. Ten years at the most, and then they dig you up to make place for others; but maybe if I mark this piece of soil with my rose, they'll leave you alone just a little bit longer.

