

## The Most Beautiful

After a full day of sightseeing, we settle into the patio at St. James Gate, an Irish pub fairly close to campus. I'm drinking Manhattans, of course. 'I'm allowed. I'm a tourist.' Reid laughs and says that I'm ridiculous. I take another sip and shudder again. It's strange and special having a drink with my grownup son. He's not even legal age, but that didn't seem to be an issue for the waitress, and maybe that's why Reid suggested this place. There are so many things I want to say to him. Instead, I say, 'Second year will be half as hard as first year.'

'Most of first year I spent looking for a decent place to live.' Reid grins and takes a long draw on his Guinness. 'Remember that bathroom and Crazy Llewellyn?'

I laugh, although it had been a worry last year. Now there are bigger worries. We need to talk, but neither of us knows how to begin.

It isn't too long before a neat row of maraschino cherry stems lines my side of the table. The whiskey swirls my blood to the surface of my skin, and I can feel tingling in my cheeks. I pound my fist on the table as if to make a point, but Reid has left his seat, and I'm only trying to prove things to myself. I don't care if I have to support my filmmaker son the rest of his adult life; he makes beautiful films. He's a child of compassion and sensitivity – and we need people in this world devoted entirely to beauty. His animated short in eleventh grade brought me to hiccupping tears - and landed him a spot here at NYU Tisch School of the Arts.

Now Reid wants to take me to the MoMA. I just want to sit here with him, endlessly, in the cool shade of this St. James patio. I'm floating in a stream and I haven't

gone sad yet. The avenue swells with September sunlight, the shadows lengthen. Slow down, slow down. Lanky university kids stroll on by, some ride long boards and wear huge headphones, blocking out the world's noise.

There was a ballerina in Washington Square Park yesterday doing pliés beside a lamppost while her friend took photographs. What the lens must have seen: a tranquil pink leotard in frozen poise against a frenetic smear of background people. We are in such a hurry, running from here to there, busier by the minute. Until one day, you look up and you have one son instead of two.

It was a drunk driver that killed him. A drunk driver named Dan Mitko who had two young kids of his own. He crossed the centerline in a Chevy Yukon and hit my son's little Volkswagon head on. In a skidding, horror-filled few seconds, my eldest son was gone.

The next Manhattan is taller with a sugar rim and two cherries. There must have been a bartender shift-change. Have we been here that long?

I don't want to move. I want Reid to tell me about every single thing in his life. His voice is unique, timbered now that he's a man, but it had a lilting quality even when he was young, a particular way of raising his vowels: *selt* instead of salt, *wise* instead of was... Reid turned *maladies* into *melodies*. I want to curl up in that beautiful voice, the voice I've known through the most important part of my life, the mothering part, and float alongside him. I want Reid to tell me again about that girl in his Stop-Motion class. He mentioned her pretty name... Was it Hyacinth? I want him to tell me where he shops for groceries, to describe his film lectures. I want to listen to him explain a *bridging shot*, *deep focus*, *after-image*.

Reid stops talking, mid-sentence. He seems to know that the stream will not carry merrily on for much longer. He nudges me from my chair and at the first street corner, orders a pretzel with mustard. It smells heavenly, and through the checkered paper, it feels warm in my hands. Did he pay for all the drinks? Or did I give my credit card?

‘Let’s walk,’ Reid says, with a flip of his side-parted hair. He takes my arm, which almost brings me to sloppy tears. We crisscross streets for a long while until we pour out from the avenues into the vastness of Central Park.

After a bit of exploring, we find a bench near Strawberry Fields and sit shoulder to shoulder. Rising out of the grass like whalebacks are dark and glittering rock formations, half a billion years old. A dozen preschoolers grapple over the hump closest to us, squealing and hollering.

Come back to me, I think, but don’t say. Go out into the world, but come back. I squeeze Reid like he’s still a little boy – and he lets me. He’s so wise he may as well be one hundred years old, and yet he’s only twenty, here in New York City with the dazzling skyscrapers, the theatres, the art galleries. I look at him sideways and his clear eyes reflect the skyline, reflect the world back to me. In this faraway city, among all this beauty, he is the most beautiful.