

Neill Gun competition

The ocean breeze hit my face, it made my face tingle but I was used to it. I watched over the cliffside, water hitting off submerged rocks. Waves as wild as a lion fighting another. It felt good to be out ever since my son left, I thought to myself. It's not good to hate your own child, but I had a fair point. A very fair one. I saw the local fishermen throwing the crab cages into the water, I'm surprised it didn't fly back at them. The wind was overpowering up north.

I sat at the table, looking out the web covered window. I wrapped my hands around my rustic coffee cup. I had no heating, there's no electricians out here to do it for me, so I just make use of what I have. On the other hand, I am a *hermit*, nothing is really around me. People, shops, live events and most of all, electricians and plumbers. I do it all myself. All the years I've lived here I've learnt to be independent. I pushed my chair back and got up, pouring the coffee grounds down the sink and filling the cup with water. I waddled over to the door, a letter?

To Mr. Millard MacDonald

It was a plain white envelope. The stamp was a pink 6D with a photo of Queen Elizabeth. I shook my head in confusion, throwing the letter in my messenger bag, throwing it over my shoulder and putting my wellies on. I walked over to the cliffside and sat on the bench. This was my free space, I felt safe here. Fishermen doing their jobs on boats and land, cars driving up the mountain. I don't need a car, I have my father's old bike. Plus it's better for the environment these days.

I sighed.

It's getting boring living on top of an isolated cliff, nobody around, rustic house and a forest behind me. But I don't think I want to move any time soon. I picked at my nails. I kind of just sat on this bench that gave me life for a few minutes before I put my hands in my pockets and walked to the forest behind my cottage. The flowers looked depressed due to the cold up here. I walked down the muddy path. There was something a little off with the mud, there were teeny-tiny footprints embedded into it.

I watched as butterflies tickled the tops of flowers, their wings glancing off each other like distant hugs. The flowers moved under their dainty weight, slightly stooping to hold them up. Their brightly coloured wings soon disappeared into the camouflage of the petals. Taking my time, I patted myself down in an attempt to motivate this old body into movement. The draw of the letter calling me back into my hut. I know who it would be from. My son. He's always asking me to return to the city. He knows it's a foolish endeavour coming to visit me. He knows the journey back feels twice as long when it's unaccompanied.

I sat down under a tree watching the clouds skim across the sky, I got my binoculars and watched the hills in the distance, a doe and fawn next to a bramble bush. I did not want to read this letter. I knew it was from my son. The fawn and doe reminded me of my wife and son when we were all younger, I brushed my hands off my trousers and got up. I was so furious for some reason I can't describe. I opened my front door and took my wellies off. I sat down at the table and looked out the window. My eyes widened when I saw the fawn struggling to walk, mother behind supporting it through its childhood. Trying to teach the wee thing to walk.

I just want to go back in time, where everything was better and everyone was less problematic. I didn't choose to live in a world with rapidly growing stresses and pressures. I didn't ask for a life of pay grades, deadlines, financial burdens and family responsibilities. The world around me created those. So I did what most people think of doing, but dare not. I exiled myself and found a bothy in the hills. There I would live my life according to my own standards, my own limits and most importantly free. Freedom comes at a cost. She said she couldn't support me in this. 'Where would we live? How would we raise a child?' Then he came along and those questions became a reality.

I sat with the letter in my hand. 20 years of solitude and he expects me to go back. I'll admit I did consider opening it. And I did. The letter was from my son talking about how he's sorry for what he's done and he was asking to move back in with me. I slammed my hands on the table and pushed my seat back, I ripped the letter up and threw it into the fireplace in the wood room, I stared at the orange fire getting bigger as the paper burned.

The ashes of the paper were fluttering about, like the butterflies in the forest. I blinked and went back to the front room, put my wellies on and sat on the bench.

It was very quiet, with a quietness that was tall and far, delicate as a leaf, and soft-footed as the grass

I felt free.

I felt alone.