Confetti Letter

by Chris Cottom

It's thirty summers since I'd lie there, watching the sunshine dapple your tangle-hair while you slept. I'd pad downstairs, bring you jasmine tea, kiss you awake. We'd load doorstop toast with blackberry jam, plan a cycle ride to Rattlesden, or a walk round Nedging Tye.

Perhaps I knew it couldn't last, that Montana would call you home. Yet you put on a dress to meet my mum, suggested syringa for the back of the garden, agreed we'd get some honeysuckle to twist through the rose we'd plant in November. We never talked of visas.

You charmed the village, letting old Sam show you his Saddleback pigs, not mentioning being veggie since you'd turned twelve. You joined the curate's yoga class, ran children's games at the Funday, borrowed a guitar to sing cowboy songs at the Midsummer Feast.

As autumn crept in, you'd slip out to run along dew-laden lanes. One day, you said you'd met the postman, that he'd given you a letter, they wouldn't extend your visa. You told me you'd torn it confetti-tiny, trailed it across sodden fields, crying 'catch me if you can'.

We barely spoke as I drove you to Gatwick, knowing this was temporary, that you'd sort the paperwork, or I'd visit in the spring. You hugged me in the carpark, told me not to come further, hefted your backpack and walked away. When the doors slid aside, you turned and gave me a sad little finger-wave. Then you were gone.

The letter came the following week, allowing you to stay.

Half a life later, I imagine the rush of fast water, cabins we could have built together, freckled children we might have raised. I conjure bears who could have scared us, your hair golden in the Montana sun, and wonder why you lied.

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Author bio: Chris Cottom lives near Macclesfield. One of his stories was read to passengers on the Esk Valley Railway between Middlesborough and Whitby. Others have won competitions with Allingham Festival, Cranked Anvil, Free Flash Fiction, Hysteria, NFFD NZ, On The Premises, Retreat West, Shooter Flash, The Phare, WestWord, and elsewhere. He's packed Christmas hampers in a Harrods basement, sold airtime for Radio Luxembourg, and served a twelve-year stretch as an insurance copywriter. He liked the writing job best. (@chriscottom.bsky.social | chriscottom.wixsite.com/chriscottom)