

The Mall

By J. Cole

"Now don't go doing too much just because it's your birthday. I'm not at all sure you should be going out by yourself in this cold weather, Dad. You're not as steady on your feet as you used to be. Eighty-six is not a good age to go wandering off somewhere by yourself." Beryl wrapped the bright green scarf snugly around his neck and tucked the ends inside his thick dark grey overcoat, then stood back to have a good look at her father.

George squinted his eyes at Beryl and frowned in annoyance.

"Don't fuss woman." He said impatiently, wanting to be off and away from the constant irritating attentions of his daughter. He hated being treated like an idiot. He wanted to go and sit on his favourite seat in the Sun where he could sit and watch the world go by, screened from the chilly winds by the bushes and the brick wall. People knew he'd be there and they would give a cheery *'Hello George'* to him as they passed

He continued. "I've been around long enough to know my limitations. I'm still far from being senile." He paused with a stony look at Beryl. "I'm not one of those decrepit old geezers who've lost their marbles." He retorted forcefully.

"All right Dad. Be sure you're back for lunch, or I'll come have to come and fetch you again."

She gave him a peck on his cheek as he turned and left the warm house.

Turning left, he walked slowly down the street to the corner, then turned into the small shopping Mall. Then he stopped. Someone was in HIS seat. A couple of small children and a woman sat surrounded by shopping bags sat enjoying the early spring sun from the protection of the bushes.

He cursed under his breath. Of all the seats to sit in, they had to choose HIS. Still there was just enough room for him to squeeze in. After all it was HIS seat. Everybody knew that. He'd been using for long enough, Hadn't he?

"Hello George." The woman greeted with a big smile. "I thought you might be here soon." Her friendly eyes gazed into George's. "I was only saying to my husband the other night how you always seem to be here. What's the matter at home then? Don't they like you hanging around the house during the day? It's rather cold for you to be out George. You should be inside where it's warm."

George considered getting up and going for walk just to get rid of incessant nattering. "*She's worse than Beryl.*" He thought to himself.

Boy oh boy! She was so annoying. He began to feel his blood pressure rising and a flush came to his face. "*Just take your children and go home woman.*" He whispered crossly to himself.

He lowered his head to his chest and closed his eyes. "*Maybe if I sat quietly for a few moments, I might feel a bit calmer.*" It was strange how warm it was now that he'd sat down in the sun and how tired it made him feel. "*If this woman stopped chattering, I might be able to get a little nap before lunch time.*"

As he drifted off to sleep, he could no longer hear the woman chatting although there was some music coming from somewhere. "*Oh yes of course. That'll be the music shop a bit further down. A bit better sort of music today..*" he thought. "*Better than their usual crap.*" he thought.

He had beautiful dreams. All the memories of long ago came to him as he dreamed. It seemed as if it were only yesterday. His heart was pounding with the thrill of all those wonderful memories. He felt full of life as if he were still a young man. Then he shut out the sounds of the mall to leave only the music. "*I've always liked that music.*" He said to himself. "*Sounds a bit above the level they usually play in the music shop.*"

Slowly it too, died away to silence and George awoke suddenly. The mall was silent. The people made no sound as they walked past. Turning to the woman by his side, he could see her lips moving but no sound came out.

"Good God!" he thought. "I've gone deaf." He gazed around him in bewilderment. Then he saw coming towards him was a Familiar figure. He knew the man was Familiar, but couldn't quite place him.

The man came and stood right in front of George.

“Hello George.” He said pleasantly. “I’ve come to take you home. They’re all waiting for you.” And offered George his hand.

George stood up, still bewildered but said nothing.

As the man took his hand and helped him to his feet George felt a burst of new life as he did so. He looked down at the man’s warm hand then turned to say ‘goodbye’ to the woman.

She was still sat there talking to the old man on the seat next to her. The old man’s head was still on his chest and the thick bright green woolen scarf was still wrapped round his neck.

George smiled. Then he understood everything.

George accompanied by the Familiar man, walked down the mall for the last time.