



LIFE AS SEEN IN THE COFFEE SHOP

He's aged. The last time I saw him, he was young, tall, confident, knowing that the world would obey his every command, because he had been brought up to believe that it was his for the taking, and he would, oh, how he would.

I look at him without appearing to do so, half-hiding behind the counter, placing the stacked cups strategically between us so I have time to study him. His hair is beginning to show smatterings of grey and his face is lined. I remember him when he was young, his eyes bright and shining with a fervently passionate fever. Now, he is walking with a limp. Perhaps he tripped over and fell down the stairs and broke his ankle or something similarly inane, but I think it is more likely a piece of shrapnel got him.

It's his turn in the grand scheme of things, and he places his order.

"Double espresso please," he says. I remember his voice, deep like a gravel pit, although now he speaks English. He does not look at me, and if he did, I doubt he'd remember. I have changed from the person I was back then. I am no longer young and beautiful, and life has carved large chunks out of me like the butcher it is.

I always dreamed of the moment I would meet him again, what I would say, what I would do.

"That'll be £2.20. Please take a seat. I will bring your order to you." I try hard to hide my accent.

He pays, and moves to a seat by the window where the sun catches his face. I start making his coffee. I listen to the gurgle of the machine, like a lung that's gasping for air after it's been torn apart by a bullet, and look at his face, to see if I can catch any guilt on it, any regret, but I doubt I'd recognise it after all this time.

He made the first cut, fate's first incision into my life. The sun was shining back then, as well, incongruous and misleading, when he and twenty other men drove into our village with their guns, their eyes bright fever spots in their faces as they opened fire.

The sun carried on shining after they left. I remember how the blood glowed like an ageing burgundy as it gushed from my husband, my child, my mother.

The coffee's ready. I spit in it surreptitiously before I place it on a tray to take to him. I wish I had poison, but life is different now, here in this safe, bland café, and this safe, bland country I made my new home.

"Enjoy your coffee, Sir," I say. My spit will have to do, the sticky distillation of me that is all hatred.