



Campbell King
Never Lay Your

Head Down

Montez Press

Writers Residency

The darkness at 4pm floors me every time
It's happened twenty-seven times now
and it's deeper and starker each time
That's the thing about darkness
It becomes more distant the longer we live in the light
I'm learning I'm not special
and this feeling ain't new
and it's risky
but just let it break you
and I know that
joy is borrowed
nothing's mine
I know that the truth changes over time
It's true that I do love you
and it's true that something's missing
It's true that the truth changes
over time
It's true that I was yours and
you were mine
and it's true I hardly know you now
It's true we tried
Is it worthless if it hurts us?
And our purpose never surfaced
I am nervous, heaven ends

Truth can change

I cycled to South London in rush hour last night
Just to see the lights on Tower Bridge
Just to see how people live
I got to the roundabout in Elephant and Castle
You know the massive one with a building in the middle
Chaos
It makes you feel little

And I thought
if i started screaming
no one would know
If i disappeared the traffic wouldn't slow

Thank god
I'm irrelevant
If I'm nothing
It takes the pressure off of everything

I remember being outside your flat
proper dodgy estate
playing out On the grass
'ach it's safe enough' you'd say
front door wide open
You, asleep on the couch
in the middle of the day
You probably worked all night
probably in pain but just tell the kids it's all ok
and some guy just walked in
and robbed your tele
right under your nose
You've got to laugh really
at the audacity
I remember laughing when you were asking me
'Why didn't you stop them?'
Like there was anything I could do
That's a metaphor really
because nothing could have stopped us from losing you
The last thing u ever asked me to do
was learn how to play that old song Shipbuilding
You'd play the drums and I'd sing it
You thought my voice was just like his in it
The lyrics are mad sad
It's about a guy so desperate to buy his kid a bike on his
birthday
and how he'd work building ships that would take his kids
life away
Is it worth it?

Diving for dear life
I'm diving for pearls
I'm thriving despite all the will in the world
The world ain't fair when you're poor
The world ain't fair when you're queer
It's funny how much we have in common
It's funny how a force can disappear
I don't need a psych assessment to tell me that I'm grieving
I've been angry for years
you never told me you were leaving
and now you don't know me
You broke my heart so incredibly slowly

I went to a funeral the other day
My dad's best mate big Len
U know Len from the pub?
Len who wears a Fall T shirt
Len with the kind eyes
Len with no phone
Len who you can only find if you go to the pub and ask around
'He's normally in around now'

The guys in the pub thought he was clever because he did
the crossword every day
I thought he was clever because he showed me The Last
Waltz by Martin Scorsese
and it opened up my world
Lifted the lid on limits I didn't know were there
Made me want to chase the dreams I didn't know I had yet

He taught me how big the world is
Even though he'd be the first to admit that his was small
A bar stool he hardly left
The same half mile of town he walked

He taught me about looking out for your own
and looking out for people who aren't your own too

Everyone said he kept himself to himself
because he never married or had kids
because he lived in the same bedsit on the Lincoln council estate
his whole life

He got the flat when he was 18
Both his parents died and he had a kid brother Rod who was 14
He didn't want the social to take Rod so he kept it all hush hush
Moved Rod into the bedsit and brought him up
Immaculately
Rod had every chance Len never got
Rod did the speech at the funeral
and said he owes his life to Len and owes his life to love

Rod got happy
Got paid
A miracle
And Len stayed
and stayed
Worked packing boxes, told stories
in pubs, did the crossword and prayed

The eulogy said Len was a content man
Never wanted for anything
and someone could have called it sacrifice
if they looked at it wrong
but Len didn't see it like that
He gave everything he had away
never wanted any of it anyway
So no, i don't think he did keep himself to himself
He just gave himself away

Around the time his kidneys started to fail
he came over to my Dad's
and we watched YouTube videos of Neil Young all night
and drank

whisky on ice
I was a teenager
and I remember offering him one of my kidneys
He said 'over my dead body'
And I said 'well it will be'
And we laughed
and I was right
He said the way I drink whisky I better hold on to both my
kidneys
Just in case
He was right too
I don't drink whisky anymore
I've found new ways to pray
Stillness
Choosing to stay

I still lay down in the light though
And think of Len
And living the right way

The funeral song was *never lay your head down*, his favourite
He could have written it
The song says
Love is a lesson to learn in our time
please won't you, please won't you bear it in mind, just for me

and that's it
That's exactly it
because every single person felt that Len had love just for them
Never shared or spread
No compromise

Not a single dry eye
and the song says
May you never lay your head down without a hand to hold
and that's it too
He held a hundred hands at once
Steadied us all
To never walk alone
The song says
May you never make your bed out in the cold
And I know that if we needed him to
he'd have filled that bedsit with us all
raised us as his own

What a relief
To have known
The kind of gentle love he showed
Len is where my heart goes
when I think about Home