

## IN THE BLOOD – by James Brown

He was proud that I stayed.

I could never be far from him of course, but as I grew older myself, I realised it was as much the infinite, Anglian skies that pulled me back when my wanderlust itched like the yellow *Pyracantha* we once threw down each other's school jumpers.

For weeks grandad had been living in the sitting room of their long, pink cottage that had been their home forever. The carer had lit the fire. It was warm and welcoming on that fading, autumn evening. I went to the chair that was now always by his bedside and sat. Grandad opened his eyes and smiled.

'Whatcha little'un.'

It came as more breath than words, but his eyes sparkled, just a little. I laughed and it was genuine and surprising. I had not expected to laugh that day.

His hand floated from the bed, and I took it in mine. That delicate hand, wrapped in silk, that once felt like steel and guided me safely through Bury St Edmunds Market, while I said hello to the chickens and rabbits. That guiding arm around my shoulder, shielding me from the old men in long coats that stared beady eyed at the auctioneer, making miniscule gestures. Grandad whispered,

'Stand still or you'll buy us a horse.'

They took me to Great Yarmouth, and that time I held Nanna's hand. Walking at the fore, Grandad opined how one did not need to go abroad to have a holiday.

'Why would I want to be anywhere else?'

How whimsical it was. He held his melting ice-cream, shirt sleeves tightly rolled, craning his head to catch the drops, lest they fell on the mother-of-pearl buttons of his maroon, paisley waistcoat. The Pleasure Beach with all its screams and laughs was behind him, and at that moment I longed to be there. But as I sat by his bed, that fading, autumn evening, I would have given anything to be back, walking on Yarmouth seafront with Nanna and Grandad, while he told me that he didn't want to be anywhere else.

Then I remember the cine camera nights. Flickering ghosts boating on the Broads transitioned to that everlasting couple sat proudly on the front pew of Haughley Church. She hid a crumpled tissue in her palm. The camera panned to me, standing nervously with my hands behind my back, eyes pleading to him for reassurance. The day went without a hitch. The film scratched, pitted, and finally wrapped itself around its spool. That meant it was their bedtime.

His eyes were heavy now, and as if he had been reading my thoughts, he whispered,

'Thas in the blood.'

Then he closed his eyes and slept.

That's in the blood. Those words are my legacy, and I carry them in me. So, wherever I am, my Granddad's guiding arm is around my shoulder still, helping me to not buy a horse.