

'Early Promise'
Ian Seed

After my divorce and losing my job, I was reduced to wandering the streets and dossing in doorways. One day a man threw me some coins. I recognised him as a friend from my youth. Over the next few weeks, he put me up in his luxury apartment. He seemed to take pleasure in my dependence upon him, for in our younger days I had been the one with the brilliant future. Now he wanted me to keep him amused. He would take me to parties, dressing me up in one of his discarded suits, which was much too loose on my scrawny body. One night he came across an old lover, and abandoned me to make my own way back to his apartment through the dark streets of the city. Taking a path through a park, I got lost and decided to kip down on a bench.

When dawn came, I could see a small building that I recognised as the Italian café I frequented in my youth. Giovanni and Rosa had always been kind to me, treating me like the son they yearned for. It was in vain that I had tried to hide my crush on Rosa, for I couldn't help blushing whenever she spoke to me. I think Giovanni knew about this but was generous-hearted enough not to mind. He would always offer me an extra coffee on the house. It made his wife happy, he said, just to watch me stare dreamily into space or become lost in a book. It was the kind of thing they never had time for in their own lives. I wondered now if they were still alive, if they might still be there, and what they would say if I knocked on their door.