

## FLAT FRINGE

Carrying the breakfast tray out of his Mother's bedroom, he could feel her eyes boring into the back of his head. Her white hair pulled tight into a bun, sharpening her contorted face. Contempt that had built up over at least 55 years, or even before he was born.

In the mornings before school she'd tut, "Oh Edward, why won't your fringe stay flat? It's just like your father's" she'd stick a wet flannel on his forehead, which would be removed as he left for school. He only vaguely remembered his father living with them. Edward shuddered at the memory of sitting on the stairs watching his father in the hallway and his mother snapping, "Walk out now Peter, and you'll never come back." Even at the age of five, Edward knew his father was very unhappy. Dad had wiped his eyes with a large white handkerchief, lifted the suitcase and gently closed the door behind him.

He thought a lot about his Dad. According to his mother, everything was his father's fault, and Edward had apparently inherited all his bad traits. When the school reports arrived, Mother would carefully read them, fold the papers and put them back in the envelope,

"What a shame you have your father's brains." She sighed.

Edward went to work at the tax office as soon as he left school. The careers adviser had lined him up for the interview, he'd had no say in it, but he didn't mind maths. His mother had nodded when he told her he'd got the job. "Oh well, I suppose it is a job Edward, but sadly not a career." As ever, unable to conceal the disappointment in her voice.

He dated Ruth at the office for a year and finally took her home to meet Mother,

"Of course Ruth," she falsely smiled "If you have any ambition in life, I wouldn't settle for the first man that comes along. That was the mistake I made and Edward is so like his father." She held up her teacup to Edward for a refill.

He never married, he never moved out, he'd worked at the tax office for 38 years. Glancing in the mirror by the front door, he noticed the thinning hair and the grey flecks.

"Edward, have you flattened your fringe before you go to work? Have you brushed the dandruff off your shoulders?" Mother's voice carried from the bedroom. He no longer even had a fringe...

The conversation with the financial adviser last month came back to him, he could start drawing his pension now, he'd been very astute with his wages and made some excellent investments, time to retire very comfortably. He was good at maths after all! Wiping his eyes with a crisp, white handkerchief, he gently closed the front door behind him and carried his suitcase to the waiting taxi. He cleared his throat,

"The airport please."

Ruth was waiting for him.

491 Words

Disappointment April 2021

