

Roland Laverette

Roland stood with his walking stick in the garden and threw a warm mince pie onto the ground. He watched as his two favourite crows came down from a tree and walked over to the food. He smiled as they eyed it suspiciously and after a few mock pecks at the crust they tucked in and soon opened up the contents onto the grass. They were joined by robins and blackbirds who darted in and out with mince morsels in their beaks; much to the annoyance of the crows who were attempting to cover the pie with their wide spread wings. Roland opened up his small bag and threw cut bread and peanuts onto the ground and soon the jackdaws and small finches joined the feast. He derived great enjoyment from the interaction and as he left for the house, he saw the squirrels arrive for their share.

I have witnessed many a lonely old man, living out the last years of his life in a house; sitting quietly in a chair embracing his memories and holding back tears. Aye and on the table sits a bottle of whisky, half empty and a glass in his hand. Nobody visits, nobody cares and the world moves on; he is no longer a player and players only love you, when you are playing. The old man's generation have all passed away and now as he nears death, the younger generations are too busy to care. To all intents and purposes, he has become an inconvenient responsibility.

This was not the case for Roland Laverette; he had embraced life and in old age, he continued to do so. It was a beautiful day and a lunch at the 'Old Tavern' was calling him. He went to his extensive wardrobe and put on summer clothes, all made of Egyptian cotton; light blue trousers, a yellow open necked shirt, a bright red cotton blazer with gold buttons, a white scarf and a light blue vintage beret cap for his head. He finished with slipping on a pair of Michael Kors black moccasins. To the neighbours he cut a dash despite being 88 years of age but he looked much younger, and with his sun beaten face, he exuded class and breeding. Hair still clung to his head and curled up around the edges of his cap. He stopped in the driveway of his small steading and as he casually put on his favourite orange tinted Ray-Ban sunglasses, he slid into the driving seat of a 'classic' 1989 Porsche 944-S2 white sports car. He started the 3 litre, 4 cylinder boxer engine to a mighty roar, opened up the sun roof and as the car glided through the steading's large electric gates, he waved to his neighbours on the street outside. There was those who admired his tenacity and those who scowled for no other reason.

The Porsche roared along the country roads from Edinburgh to Hawick in the Borders Country between Scotland and England. The journey would normally take about 2 hours but over the years, Roland had managed to shave off around 20 minutes. It was a nice Sunday morning in a hot summer and the roads were devoid of vehicles; Roland made good time. As the trees raced by, his mind drifted in and out of those faces that he knew so well; men and women now departed, and in that moment, he was struck by melancholy. Bitter sweet memories flooded his thoughts and a tear ran down his face. He put his foot to the pedal and as the Porsche picked up speed his mind changed to the thought of lunch and Caroline waiting for him at his journeys end. She was a beauty and always welcomed him with a smile.

Roland switched on the CD player and listened to his favourite track, 'Nothing's Gonna Stop Us Now' by Starship, a pop group that had existed in the 1980s. It reminded him of his first love, his first wife and the words brought back all those glorious moments when they first met and made love. He thought they would stand together but sadly those moments faded and love was lost. She married again and went to live in London with a banker, which suited her financially, although he eventually became bankrupt. Roland laughed out loud at his fortunate escape but she still held a place in his heart. Throughout his life, he had made decisions that most men would have found too painful to undertake. His first love was unconditional but not his second. Roland's new wife enjoyed a lack of hygiene and did not take pride in her appearance. He could live with the debt and deceit of his first wife but obesity, rotten teeth accompanied with all the foul smells that they bring, he would not tolerate; his attentions would wander and mistresses would occupy his bed and accompany him on his business and social events. Hence it brought an end to an otherwise happy second marriage. Now, he had been divorced for over thirty-three years and had never regretted it. Roland still held feelings for his second wife but he knew that he could never be happy living with her, so their relationship ended. In reflection, he was saddened that his marriages did not work out.

For a man who practised meditation, it was relatively easy for Roland to wash out his mind. He sat back in the driving seat and his soul released a flood of tranquillity that acted as a catalyst; he felt a lightness touch him, a feeling of release, a sudden contentment and he was refreshed. His mind cleared and his senses heightened; he smelled the air of the countryside, he was in harmony with the sway of the trees, heard the creatures as they foraged and played; he felt as one with nature and the world. This was the secret of life, the ability to transcend. In his sixties he had taken up the teachings of yoga asana, which originated in Vedas, the oldest religious texts of the Hindus and ever since, had continued to practise it. To the passing viewer, Roland appeared to be in a trance as he drove down the country roads. His face displayed a calm smile, his eyes stared straight ahead, but he was as one with the car and everything around him. A pheasant ran out from the right onto the roadway in front of him and Roland, without pausing, swerved the Porsche towards the running bird, carefully brushing its tail feathers and continued on his way, leaving the pheasant unharmed.

The Porsche finally reached its destination and its tyres crunched the gravel track of the 'Old Tavern' as Roland steered it to a halt in the car park. In human form, I was waiting for his arrival and I greeted him with a wave as he alighted from his car. Smiling, he waved back and crossed the car park to join me at the front door. He exclaimed in a loud voice, *"I am glad to see you, old friend, I have missed our conversations"* and I nodded in agreement as we shook hands and entered through the hallway. Caroline was waiting at the reception desk and raised her head to welcome him. Roland leaned over the counter and stroking her ear, he nuzzled her face with his cheek and gave her a cuddle. I smiled, *"you spoil that cat and she always seems to recognise you."* As we entered the restaurant seating area, he replied, *"I have always managed to get on with females, even the feline kind."* I chortled at his analysis of his magnetism for behind us Caroline was playing up to yet another guest.

The restaurant was quiet with very few patrons and we sat down at one of the many empty tables to inspect the menu. We placed our order with the waiter and after our drinks arrived, we sat back to enjoy our first sips. I opened, *"how are you these days, are you still finding enjoyment in old age"* and his reply came as no surprise, for I already knew the answer. Roland smiled and remarked, *"I love life, I love living it and I love to see all those young people who are just starting out and have so much to look forward to. I am not bitter that youth has passed me by, for upon hearing their laughter in crowded bars and restaurants, I am uplifted by the visibility of their innocence. We all live in a wonderful world and although it has taken me some time, I now realise just how wonderful it is. I have finally learned to preserve my morality, vocation, humility and integrity which brings me immense contentment. I am not afraid of old age, I have never been afraid of dying and even if I was to become infirm, I would still find something to hold my attention."* He went on, *"to be able to create, even the likes of a model aeroplane, boat or perhaps a model train layout, would suffice to bring me contentment. I have always been into photography, so to just sit back in a wheelchair and snap images of wildlife in my garden would provide me with enough diversion."*

Before I could counter, he waved his hand and continued, *"I have never told you about this, but there was a period, in 2017, shortly after my old mother passed away in her nineties, that I became very bitter and railed against, what I considered a dystopian world. She had often remarked that she could not understand what life had been about because it seemed to hold no purpose, then I remembered your advice; to select a task, a project that I might enjoy and stick to it but not to confuse loneliness with the loss of purpose and compound it with philosophy."* He laughed out loud and squeezing my hand, he chortled, *"it was good advice and I also took up your advice on yoga asana, I even purchased a powerful motorcycle, sat my test and embraced danger and fear as I rode it down the country roads. The exhilaration you get, heightens your senses and brings with it an awareness that you are more alive. I have several bikes now and I still take them out for country road blasts."*

I smiled at the innocence in his persona and I was sure the death of his mother had finally brought it back to the surface. Gone were many of the barriers he had created in his lifetime and along with them were the aggressiveness that had built up, due to many years of interaction with his fellow man. He interrupted my thoughts and went on, *"I often visit the Zoological Gardens in Edinburgh and enjoy a lunch there in the company of the other members. My camera is always with me and after lunch, I capture images of the animals as I walk around the grounds. It is a great place for photography and my camera is sometimes pointed in the direction of the other animals, the ones who visit. Street photography is my niche subject and I enjoy nothing better than a walk in the city and a pub lunch."* I interjected, *"I am glad that old age has not held you back."* Roland smiled and nodded his head.

He appeared contrite and lowered his face to the table before looking up at me and asked a question, *"do you believe in life after death"* but before I could reply, he went on, *"after the death of my mother in December 2016, I experienced about 6 months of dreams; they were pleasant interactions with her, as if she was alive,*

and yet I knew she was dead. In the early dreams, I would exclaim to her that she was dead and immediately I would be drawn backwards in massive acceleration and she would fade from my eyes in the darkness; I would suddenly wake up, very despondent. In later dreams, I did not declare that she was dead and we would spend time in lengthy conversation as if she was in the house and I would wake up in the morning feeling very happy. Sadly, the dreams stopped and I have never dreamt of her since. Have you ever experienced such an interaction with a person who has passed?" I sat back and sipped my wine from its glass, before replying, *"The loss of a mother is a profound moment in a man's life, the bond in life is strong, even although there may have been some discontent. Perhaps your mother held on to that bond and finally after 6 months, felt she could leave you. Perhaps the spirit of your mother crossed dimensions to comfort you in your dreams?"* Smiling, he said, *"I like your explanation, it is a nice way to consider life after death."*

We continued our lunch and Roland consumed a hearty meal. He was an old man and yet his outlook on life made him appear younger than his years. We toasted each other's health; we enjoyed each other's company and we filled the restaurant with our laughter. For those chosen moments, Roland was a young man again as he breathed the 'hot breath of youth'. He regaled me with the many escapades in his life regarding lost generations of family and friends; his dogs, all border collies, who had characters of their own, and of course his loves. There were no tears other than the tears of laughter.

I watched as he drove off in his Porsche. I admired Roland, for in the midst of a chaotic world where good manners, breeding and integrity were sadly lacking, he had found a way of living with old age which gave him peace and contentment.

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Adapted from [The Dragon Project](#)

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