





the strong

in heart

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We think by feeling. What is there to know?  
I hear my being dance from ear to ear.  
I wake to sleep and take my waking slow.

This shaking keeps me steady. I should know.  
What falls away is always. And is near.  
I wake to sleep, and take my waking slow.  
I learn by going where I have to go.

—Wallace Stevens



# the strong in heart

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## Foreword

TEN YEARS OF WRITER'S CRAFT, ABOUT THREE HUNDRED STUDENTS, and so well over three hundred stories, and as many plays and non-fictions, close to a thousand poems, and several thousands of book club journals and close reading exercises. Bales of paper, ponds of ink.

*The Strong in Heart* is only the second anthology of AHS Writer's Craft work that I've published. Had 'instant print' been possible ten years ago, I could look forward, like Chaucer's Clerk, to having "at his beddes heed / Twenty bookes, clad in blak or reed" when I retire. This regret doesn't diminish in the least the satisfaction I feel in sending this anthology on its way. There are readers eagerly awaiting it, and even though I've read every piece many times, I too want a book I can hold between my hands, not just an image on a computer screen. Garrison Keillor wrote the following in praise of the book:

Slow to hatch, as durable as a turtle, light and shapely as befits a descendant of the tree. Closed, the *objet d'book* resembles a board. Open, its pale wings brush the fingertips, the spore of fresh ink and pulp excites the nose, the spine lies easily in the hand. A handsome useful object begotten by the passion for truth.

The students whose work is collected here have learned the craft by doing and making, not by formula or precept. They have submitted to the discipline of the emerging form, accepting that many revisions and many re-conceptions are needed before the story or the poem becomes what it wants to be. Through much practice, they have also begun to read texts as practitioners of the art. They will learn by going where they have to go.

People who know me know that I have a lot to say about the teaching of writing in the schools, both creative writing and academic writing. In plain words, from what I've seen, our students are ill-served. I originally intended to use this foreword to air these opinions, and to remind my readers of the findings of fifty years of research into writing pedagogy, findings which—so far as I can observe—are largely ignored. My drafts ran over-long, however, and then I reflected that the authors represented in this anthology already knew much of what I thought, either

because I told them, or because they had experienced first-hand a different pedagogy. In any case, they are almost all attending university now, and can observe for themselves that quick-and-easy formulaic writing is not what is expected of them. Consequently, I have cut a disputation of many pages down to these few sentences. If anyone else, on the other hand, wants my thoughts about writing in the schools, all you have to do is ask.

My gratitude to *all* the writers of Writer's Craft 2010 for their persistence, and for sharing their creative processes with me. I'll keep fond memories of their good humour and their groans, their kidding and teasing each other, their tolerance for my dreadful jokes and my fussing over details, their resilience, their honesty, their supporting each other, their desire. I hope they all stay in touch: I want to hear from them. My thanks to everyone who cares about writing, and refuses to reduce the teaching of writing to barren formulae. As before, thanks to good friends Ginette Dénomme, Deb Paterson, Craig Millage, Doug Heaman and many others for their support. Thanks to old friends Bill Laurin and Glenn Davis for professional advice. A hearty welcome to Maria Maiato and Jim Orfanikos, for their enthusiastic interest in this annual project.

IRL

October, 2010

Toronto

Days after I composed the foreword to this volume, I was injured in a traffic accident. I was very concerned, and I know the Administration was also concerned, whether a replacement teacher could be found who could continue to teach Writer's Craft in the same spirit as it had begun. We were very lucky that Ms. Alison Short arrived, fresh from her sojourn in Europe, full of confidence, practiced in the art of the playwright, ready to take creative risks, ready to engage. I am sure that the class of 2011 will join me in wishing her great success in a career so auspiciously begun.

I also need to thank all those colleagues, friends and family who rallied around when I was recuperating, above all my sister, Joanne Lindsay, on whom I could always rely.

IRL

December, 2010

Toronto





Non-Fiction



Morgan Joudrey

## Bags of Ketamine, Shots of Whiskey

IT'S A DAUNTING THING, BEING ON YOUR OWN. BEING FORCED into the world, neither hand held by the hand of another. No strings holding you at a tentative distance, no glaze covering you, numbing the intensity of the air. It's daunting, but it's beautiful.

I still remember the day in the doctor's office, reluctantly sitting, jittering, waiting to finally agree to hire my own personal bodyguards. Hired to smother any mistakes imbedded in my DNA. I've never seen the good in allowing a transparent plastic cylinder carry your ammunition, allowing you to build a wall between you and reality. Month after month, refill after refill, the wall gets thicker. Until you can't even hear a peep from the other side.

With time passing and being blinded more by each minute, I somehow managed to come across a way out. A momentary lapse in my bodyguards' incredible hold. I found a method to scare them

away. I found myself in a vicious storm of the many kinds of drugs and alcohol available. With each herb I smoked, each tab I dropped, each swig I took from the cold bottle, I found myself in a passionate riot. I was able to break down the wall for a few hours to witness the trees again, to feel each molecule of the world press upon my skin. And as my bodyguards returned and began to feverishly re-build the walls, I could laugh. I could be soaked in ineffable joy. But as always, it would soon be over, trees hidden, light dimmed, protected again.

Depression is a funny thing. The signs and symptoms you routinely hear seem to be experienced by everyone, just heightened in some. I have been told before that I happen to be one of the lucky ones, with each sign and symptom enlarged so greatly that I could be a walking information pamphlet on the disorder. I was easy to spot. It's a funny thing because I happen to not believe in it.

Over time those magical escapes became the focus of my attention. Pushing aside my deep resentment towards my company, I allowed each fix to fill my mind completely, since other thoughts couldn't inflate to the extent of drugs. At least then my mind felt full. Foggy, but full. Time brought me to that point due to my tendency to think hard about the pharmaceutical chemicals casually floating through my veins. To think about the protective forces constantly standing guard around me. It made it harder, seeing

what they were hiding. Seeing them struggle to constantly cripple a part of me, to constantly keep my eyes from reality.

It's rare to hear folks speak of the downside to medications. Most believe they do wonders, save lives even. You hear horror stories turned miracles. Patients bless scientists, the doctors and the psychiatrists for their achievements. Some believe they owe an everything, life itself, to that first introduction to the transparent bottle filled with god-knows what. But most people don't know that you don't need to have the full list of symptoms to be given a bottle. Have two or three? Yes—have a bottle. Psychiatrists can write you off on their pads so fast that by the next day your encounter could easily be forgotten. Prescribing medication is so commonplace that they could write the drug and the dosage just from hearing you say your birth date. Most of these people believe that life is easier with help, with mistakes suffocated. The case with myself is different.

It got harder and harder, each time I destroyed the wall. Each time broken, it was built back even faster. With each rebuilding, I was found more frustrated. And thus, my maelstrom shifted and my riot now fixated on myself. It became a race to achieve what I wanted while out-running all that protected me. My escapes became more frequent, more frenzied. Such disorientation ensued that my body guards were found cradling bags of Ketamine and shots of whiskey. I found myself holding bricks, dead debris

everywhere, fallen on the ground, everyone and everything from the storm fallen on the ground.

It was two weeks after I stopped taking the medication that I was aware of the spacious air around me. I could hear the soothing, empty hum of silence. I could feel the warmth of the missing piece that had been snatched from my side. I felt the true loneliness of being on my own. There were no walls to strain myself breaking, only myself to strain myself fixing, with only the help of reality's mystic aids.

What those people who looked briefly at my symptoms didn't care to know was that I never wanted my own body guards. I didn't need protection. I didn't believe in protection. I can handle being alone.

Justine Jennings

## Behind the Dancer's Mask

IT'S EASY TO IGNORE THE RAIN WHEN WEARING A RAIN COAT.

It's easy to ignore emotions when wearing a mask.

The dancer's face is a mask. Her eyes are hazel, thickly made up with gold, brown, green, shimmering white diamonds. Her cat eyes drawn out with eyeliner. Her cheeks, her brow painted with cover-up. Lashes thick with jet-black mascara, lips glossy red. Behind her mask, what is she thinking? What feelings simmer inside? We do not know. We only see the mask, the solemn dancer's face, her thin arms rigid by her side. Her eyes fixed on the middle-distance, some place above our heads. The dancer is nine. This child is me.

I am eight. On television, dancers are beautiful elegant creatures, light-footed, hardly bound to earth. In the stage light, they gleam. These children in the studio though, they are too real.

The boy sweats. The girl is sniffing. The teacher points out faults. At eight, this was not my understanding of beauty.

Still, these sights did not deter me. Unsure of myself, I joined Irish Dance class; in my sloppy penmanship I signed below the promises I made. *“I promise to show up to class and put forth a consistent effort. I promise to listen to my instructors and perform to the best of my ability. I promise to satisfy my team members, as well as myself. I promise to have fun!”* At eight, this was not my understanding of fun. My parents though were supportive, enthusiastic about the opportunity that awaited me. Adding a little culture to my life made my grandparents happy too, and that’s all that mattered at that point in time. My dad’s side of the family had been born in the beautiful green land with rolling hills and leprechauns running about—a land I had never seen.

The dancer glides across the vast moonlit open stage, her mask beautiful, but her true emotions hidden.

Like most first trials—things do not go well. When stretching I sit alone. I do not know anyone. The other dancers finish their stretching routines and line up in formation, waiting for further instructions. One by one, they dance their pieces. I sit and watch, biting my nails. My eyes alert and fixed upon the talent that lies before me. Dancers of different ages, heights, body types; eight girls and me and one lonely boy. But not one of them has done anything well.

“Point your toes. Tuck your feet. Arms at your side. Head up. Knees together. Lift your legs. Kick your butt. Extend! Focus! Extend—extend, Justine!”

I am nine. And this becomes routine. Not once do the fiery-haired sisters who run the studio say, “Nice smile.” Yet every dancer in the mirror-paneled room remains positive, always smiling, always giving it everything we have, while our self-esteem suffers. Dance class ends at the same time as usual. I change at the same pace as usual, my parents standing in the same place, wearing the same encouraging smile as usual. Sometimes I think they are happier for me, than I am for myself. In fact, I *know* they are.

Today, we hurry to the scuffed dance floor and sit down. We stretch at our own pace, and are then asked to attempt the splits. Now, flexibility does not come over night. Seven girls and the only boy immediately fall to their knees and maintain position for perfect splits. I am nowhere close. I try harder, I push myself, but I am at least a foot off the ground. My dance teacher stands behind me, she begins pushing at my shoulders, she straightens my back, lifts my chin, and pushes again- lightly then harder and harder. Not to the point where she intends to hurt me but she does. “How will you ever get good if you don’t practice? You’ll never get your jumps and lifts if you haven’t got the flexibility.” She pulls out a ruler and measures the height I am from the floor. She takes notes, and comes back to me the following week. I have improved—I am lower to the ground, but not yet there. I am ten,

and I am beginning to learn that all the dancers I have ever met have put themselves exactly where they are today. If they don't physically want it—they aren't going to get it.

I have to work harder.

My dad uses his carpentry skills to cut me a piece of wood that I can practice on at home. He gets me a mirror, he paints the top with four-leaf clovers for good luck, and a smiley face for encouragement. “*Treble 1, treble 2, treble 3, treble 4, treble hop back, and slide, toe heel roll, treble 1, treble 2, jump 2, 3...*”

Knowing the drive to the dance studio was only ten minutes, I asked my dad if we could leave at 5 PM rather than 5:15. I get to class earlier, I stretch, warm-up and practice my dance. It's just me and my mirrored reflection. My dad sits on the bench, reading the newspaper, peeking over the edge of the paper.

“Your jumps look better,” remarks my dance teacher. I know I don't make enough noise when trebling, I don't extend my knees enough when sliding, and I don't move far enough across the floor when doing toe heel rolls... but my jumps look *better*. I'll take it one step at a time.

I am eleven and I am strongly encouraged to sign up for the Etobicoke *feis*—the Irish dancing competition.

“I think you're ready to perform. It would be nice to have you represent us,” my dance teacher says. I am thrilled.

I am to perform my first soft shoe dances—the reel and the jig. I enter the arena, focusing on the thousands of people:

dancers, parents, siblings, teachers, judges, musicians. And then I see wooden stages all around. An awful racket of accordions can be heard while the musicians warm-up. Vendors set up, selling hair bands, wigs, shoes, socks for those dancers that were too rushed this morning to put all their equipment in their dance bag. A little, elderly lady is propped up against her booth, where she is selling clothing and jewelry. My dad purchases a t-shirt: *Feis Dad*.

We look for people we know, we are lost, this experience is new. But we soon find a place that we can call home base for the day.

I pull my white socks up, just short of my knee. We dancers glue them to our calves using sock glue. If our socks slip, the judges deduct marks. I pull my hair back into a neat, sleek ponytail, so tight it feels like my skull will split but still I add gel—just to secure the pain. I open a pink wig box: Dad and I drove all the way to Niagara Falls for the perfect wig, the perfect curls, the perfect shade to match my long fine hair. I don't need a wig, I have plenty of hair, but it is tradition. With the wig on, my head feels unbearably heavy. I thickly make up my hazel eyes with gold, brown, green. They shimmer like white diamonds. My cat eyes are drawn out with eyeliner. My cheeks, my brow painted with cover-up. Lashes thick with jet-black mascara, lips glossy red.

What am I thinking? I am eleven. I am too young to cover my child face with all this make-up. I'm scared—I have never done

this before, and I'm anxious. But I've worked hard and I deserve to be here.

I put on my leather shoes, three sizes too small, believing the lady at the Irish Dance Shoppe who had told me they would stretch. (She was a fairy-like woman, elderly. Of course, I presumed she knew what she was talking about.) I tie up my laces, criss-cross them around my ankle, and criss-cross them on my leg, confirmed with a double knot. I feel like I have lost circulation.

Next, I step into my dress. Two thousand five hundred dollars for this dress. Not that the price tag matters—but it's a solo dress, a dress no one else would ever have. You only get these dresses when your dance teacher gives you permission—when you are deemed *'good enough.'* Handcrafted, felted, jeweled extremely artistic and beautiful, a hard cardboard piece fixed in the waist of the dress to maintain posture and position. The colours match my eyes. Deep green like the colour of evergreens. Orange, red and yellow, like fire blazing on a cool winter's night. A clean, crisp white, like the bed sheets that my mother washes so often. The silk green lining on the inside of my dress matches my bloomers. In competition, we kick and jump so high we need bloomers for modesty.

Minutes before my performance I pin my number on the front of my dress. I am not Justine, I am number 332.

A dozen girls or so, novice competitors in my category, sit in the chairs at the side of the stage. We are eleven, twelve,

thirteen....Counting on my fingers, I recited my dance steps on my lap. “*Step hop back, step tuck, step tuck and jump 2 3, and slide, Charleston forward and back.*” My hands stumble over one another. I fear my legs will do the same when it comes my turn.

We walk onto the stage, remembering first impressions last the longest. I step forward, alongside my partner in competition. I look at the judges, making their last minute notes, the musician tapping his foot to the tempo and beat he would play at. I glance above their heads, into the distance, there is my dad smiling. The music begins on count 5, I point my toe forward, pushing extra hard to make the curve in my foot better than the girl beside me. I am twelve, and I *want* this.

All those elements that contribute to my dancer image—the shoes, the leotard outlining every curve in my body, the glamour behind the dress. The beauty of the mask that hides every dancer inner self, her individuality—this is what made me a dancer today.

But my parents’ smiles also made me who I am today. Their smiles that encouraged me to get up and try again, to ask for help, to practice and practice until my legs felt like they had been crushed. Their ability to help me—take me to class, build me my own dance studio. Their reassurance, commitment, and parenting have made me confident. Above all, their smiles led me to win gold that day. Their smiles made me who I am.

I am eighteen.

Lindsay Allison

## Caught Up in That Moment

I STEP OFF THE BIG YELLOW SCHOOL BUS, IMMEDIATELY bombarded with cheers, hugs, and extraordinary laughter. A curly-haired blonde girl puts a plastic orange lei around my neck. “Welcome to ESCAPE!” she cries. She looks almost too happy. And she isn’t the only one. Thirty-five teenagers with the same blissful expression surround me. I look behind me. Groups of people stepping off the same bus I did, and the others parked around us appear to be sharing my exact feelings. Stepping off this bus is stepping into an energy that could blow the biggest fuse. Confusion. Apprehension. Intimidation. Awkwardness. Fear. Curiosity. To my left, Marty is looking awkward. Kyle has told us next to nothing about this weekend, except that it is sure to be one of the best of our lives! At this point, none of us know what to expect.

Every spring, the York Region President's Council holds a leadership conference for over 200 high school students in the York Region District School Board. Four days when judgments are left at the door. Four days where age doesn't matter. Where every single person is inspired and encouraged to reach their full potential. From the delegates to the security to the skill builders to the executive council. We all feel it. Even the teacher chaperones. The first conference I ever attended was ESCAPE '08—Empowering Students' Creativity and Positive Energy. It was just that. I felt the power run through me. I was a part of the magic. I was energized.

*"If you get down on me, I'll get down on you."* Upbeat. Crowded. Hot. Loud. Alive. The popular B-44 song blasts through the old wooden dining hall, bouncing off the mass of teenagers squished together at the front, all dancing around like a mosh pit at a rock concert. Ryan Kowarsky's manufactured pop voice can barely be heard over the sound of those singing along at the top of their lungs. The heat is almost unbearable—most of us in tank tops or t-shirts, no regard for the three feet of snow still outside. Orillia can do that to you. Snow in April, I mean. Arms reach high towards the ceiling, feet pound on the floor, the building shakes. I'm not thinking about anything except where I am at this exact moment. No worries about tomorrow, no regrets from yesterday. My mind is on the present, soaking up every moment granted to me on this precious dance floor. This is not the first time we have done this;

we dance after every meal. Dancing on the floor. Dancing on the tables. Dancing on the benches, and the boxy makeshift stage. Astounding.

The skillbuilders—those crazy ones who overwhelmed us the first day—take delegates through ten sessions during these four days. Exploring and learning about topics like Communication, Trust & Risk, Conflict Resolution, Teamwork, and Self Awareness. We are strangers. Every member of each group hails from a different school. Nobody knows another in the group. But by the last morning, we know each other better than we could ever have imagined in such a short time.

A wooden playground set. Well worn from the hundreds of kids who invade this place every summer. One platform, six feet to the ground. I stand on it. On the edge. The other nine members of my session stand beneath me, waiting with outstretched arms. I am supposed to fall. Backwards. Close my eyes. Cross my arms. And fall. No big deal, right? *Wrong*. I am terrified. My stomach feels like it is about to burst out of my mouth. I am going to be sick.

“Come on, Lindsay. You can do it.”

“We’re right here. We’ll catch you.”

Jake, one of my skill builders counts down. *Three*...I cross my arms over my chest. *Two*...Close my eyes. *One*...Breeeeeeeeaathe.

Fall.

Catch.

High fives, hugs, pats on the back. A huge grin appears on my face, of its own accord.

“I’m so proud of you Lindsay. You did good.”

Thanks, Jake.

*Carpe diem.* The Latin phrase means ‘seize the day’. This is the main thing I have taken away from the two conferences I have attended, ESCAPE 08 and SHINE 09—Students Helping Individuals with Necessary Empowerment. Live like there is no tomorrow. I have made friendships I never hope to lose: Urvashi, Alex, Mike. They have defined Conference for me and made me who I am. I ran for student council twice—once after ESCAPE, and once after SHINE, getting elected Vice-President for my grade 12 year. I was on the Executive Council for YRPC in 2008-2009. I helped to organize a World Vision fundraiser at my school. I have tried to make the most of everything I can, and there is not a day that goes by where I do not have contact with somebody from YRPC.

This spring will be my third and final conference. I am applying for the position of skill builder, allowing me to do for another group of delegates what Jake and Alyssa did for me and the rest of The Mile High Club. This year, I am not afraid. I will seize the day.

As the big yellow school bus pulls into the gravelly, twisting driveway, we are immediately bombarded by teenagers

banging on the windows, cheering and laughing. The bus pulls to a stop, doors open and the noise becomes even greater. But this is not an every kind of noise. This is not the hustle bustle of a city or the sound of a club on a Saturday night. Not the sounds of gossiping teenagers at the mall on a Wednesday. This is the sound of happiness. This is the sound of kids stripping off the paint they hide behind in everyday life. This is the sound of *home*.

Colleen Alkalay-Houlihan

## Change Islands

THE *CAPTAIN EARL W. WINDSOR* TAKES US FROM FAREWELL TO Change Islands. The road, newly paved, stretches before us, twelve kilometres into town. The island at first appears unremarkable, unimpressive. Juniper and black spruce cover rocky hills, and pitcher plants dot great stretches of bog. The landscape looks like Northern Ontario. Then, around a bend in the road, Red Rock Cove appears. Rusty rocks glow red and grey stones shine in the afternoon sunlight, wetted by shallow brackish pools. I breathe in, amazed, and wish once again that I could paint this wonder.

The “Hardy Taylor house” at first disappointed me. My parents had told me, “Oh it’s wonderful, just beautiful.” But it was simple, plain, and just like any other saltbox house. I did not understand—what was different about this all-white house with tiny windows? The house’s eyes were too small. “This house is

amazing?” I wondered. Why did we buy it? I knew the story—my parents spent a week looking, with no luck. The only houses for sale were new, with vinyl siding, or ‘denovated’, or not really for sale. There always seemed to be a brother or cousin or grandchild in Alberta or Ontario who just might want the house. But then my parents saw the ad, *House for Sale, Change Islands*. The next day they took the ferry from Fogo Island to Change Islands. It was the first sunny day of their trip, and as my mother reached down to pick a four-leaf clover, she knew—“This is our lucky day.”

In the town of Change Islands, my parents saw the FOR SALE sign. The house had a stage and three stores right on the tickle, a narrow strait of water. It was an old house, with traditional clapboard siding. The white paint was peeling, and the deck rotting. Although the dim bulbs illuminated little at ten-thirty that night, they could see that this was the house. The one they’d been looking for. *This* was their lucky find. They fell in love and—best of all—it was truly for sale. They shook on it that night.

The house is musty; it has been unlived in for twelve years. Twelve years of Newfoundland humidity and salty spray. During storms, when the water on the tickle churns and licks at the dock, rain beats upon the house in tiny droplets—icy cold and painful. Drafts blow through the walls, and water droplets enter through gaps in hand-made windows. We begin to revive the house. The poison of black mould scoured, electricity flowing, the house wakes

up. The little glass eyes of our hundred-year-old saltbox light up with life.

Jenny and her mom, Gail, are the first to come. They bring green kiwi Jello and whipped cream pudding. “We heard you bought the Hardy Taylor house.” News travels on an island of two hundred eighty. Jenny offers to show me around; she invites me to the Youth Centre, where I meet Melissa, Jeremy, Justine, Kerri-Lynn, Ellen. They are welcoming people, friendly but shy. They offer to hang out, then silently examine me, at a loss for words.

Winston Bown’s grandfather established the Andrew Bown General Store at the turn of the twentieth century. There is still no computer or cash register—Winston, 65, and his wife Netta write out receipts by hand. They store accounts in ledgers, one per customer. I go in to buy canned peas, and Netta asks me, “Will you be paying for that?” I laugh, surprised, but the Bown Store offers credit to anyone. Write Winston a cheque and he gives you cash, right away. The general store is the bank on Change Islands. Rumour has it that Winston will even advance money for a ticket to Alberta. Residents pay him back when they have earned enough money. But Winston would never mention this to anyone.

The Andrew Bown Store is old-style, yet up-to-date; it has everything imaginable. What they don’t have, they can order for you. Netta LeDrew, the other Netta on the island, tells me, “In our house, we say, ‘If the Bown Store doesn’t have it, you don’t need it.’”

Invariably, we discover we are missing something halfway through every project. We end up at the Bown Store a lot. At least several times a week. At nine o'clock one night, changing a light fixture, we discover that we need screws. We get to Bown's at 9:20, and just as we arrive Winston is walking out of the store. It's closed. I open my door to the blowing winter wind and my mum calls out, "Are we too late?" "No, my dear, I'll open up the store again for you. Don't worry about it." Winston was heading up to watch the hockey game, but he cheerfully helps us find the screws. Our total? Twenty cents.

Conrad and Chad built "the camp", a cabin on Crown land, when they were in high school. They host a New Year's party there every year. Adults drink Lamb's rum at the Fisherman's Lodge while Roy, the principal of the local school, deejays. Anyone from thirteen to thirty goes to the camp, a wooden two-storey building on the bog.

My parents are typical nervous foreigners. They make us walk into the camp with other people. They are at first reassured, until they find out that the guys are from Fogo Island; they've never been to the camp either. Through thigh-high snowdrifts, we wade past the church. The path curves—left, right, left again. Stunted tamaracks line the path, their knobbly trunks twisted by the ever-blowing winds. The snow drifts and the bottles clink as we walk. We turn once more, and through the junipers appears a yellow light. Pulsing music shakes the night, and can be heard

across the bog. The swirling wind and swooshing snow cannot cover the sound of laughter, laughter heard across a frozen bog. I shiver, nervous and excited.

Masked mummers come to visit come during the twelve days of Christmas, dressed in over-sized boots and long johns. They pound on the door and holler out, “Any mummers ’lowed in?” Then, in a whirl of fishing coats yellowed and ripped and blue overalls, the mummers enter. The kitchen is suddenly crowded. I find myself lost in another time. I see the shabby mummers’ clothing of a fishing village; an outpost comes together in disguise. The islanders celebrate the damp cold, the long hours at sea and in the fishing stage, the biting wind and deadly waves. Hardships are not forgotten, but rather embraced. Newfoundlanders rejoice. The children get a shot of strawberry Purity syrup, red and sweet, the adults a glass of ’shine or rum. Molasses cookies are passed around, and a fishing yarn is shared. But then the mummers, our mummers, break into song, and I am jolted back to the crowded kitchen filled with laughter. As I hand out the drinks, I see a mummer’s painted fingernails—that must be Gail.

At last it is summer on Change Islands, and icebergs surround the north end. They tower above rocky islands like skyscrapers of the sea. I step out onto our wharf and a boat goes by; Owen waves. My mother calls out to me, my answer mingling with the sound of fishermen at work across the tickle. The fish plant is still alive—for now. I reluctantly leave my bench on the

wharf to go get lobster. Careful to avoid the stinging nettles, I pick my way through the gate and around the fence.

The lobster seller is off the island for the day. “But don’t worry, me love, I’ll just leave the lobster tied up down under the wharf.” I feel odd going on to someone else’s wharf, a little like a trespasser. I reach down into frigid waters and pick up the full bag of lobsters left for us, still active, still alive.

At the car, my mum turns to me guiltily. “I forgot a bucket to put the lobsters in.” I hold the bag of squirming lobsters out the window the long kilometre home. I see teens swimming by the Burgundy Squid Café and turn pink with embarrassment. They wave as we pass by.

Every morning, every day of the year, Netta LeDrew wakes up at six to care for the Newfoundland ponies, her loves. She spends hours feeding, mucking out, grooming, playing with the ponies and cleaning up. Her unparalleled commitment is rewarded by their deep affection and pony love. Netta and I, wearing rubber boots and old clothing, set out for the barn at noon. Charm calls out a greeting, and others join in to welcome us—and their afternoon meal. Schooner, my favourite foal, peeks his starred black muzzle out from between the fence and nickers with pleasure.

After an hour of hard work I am sweaty but content. The smell of horses is on my skin, dust covers me. Being outside has made me hungry. We fry up cod for a snack; it is delicious with the

lemons brought from off the island. The house smells of fish and I worry what people will say. My mother tells me, “They won’t even notice the smell.”

Neighbours bring us Newfoundland foods before we leave. We get a whole salt fish, cut in two, from Ivan. It is huge—almost three feet of cod—and it barely fits in the suitcase. Then Donna shows up. “Brought you some bottled seal. And Owen got a caribou out in the Northern Peninsula, here are some steaks.” Sadie brings over damson jelly, a little gift for Christmastime. Our suitcases are full, and we are thankful. A community welcomed us, a community where neighbours help out and care. We are fortunate to be a part of Change Islands.

Life on Change Islands contains many wonders. Icebergs reach high into the fresh sea air, blue and salty. There is a postcard view out my bedroom window; I look out and see our old-fashioned picket fence and the red ochre buildings perched by the seashore. On sunny days I can see the red coast of Fogo. Brimstone Head looms in the distance. Every time I leave, the passion for life and the hardships of Change Islands draw me back. On the ferry, a neighbour embraces me—“Welcome home.”

Rachel Bloom

## Delicatessen

MY NOSTRILS STING WITH THE PUNGENT SMELL OF MEAT. LONG after my shift at the Foodland deli, the stink of pastrami will cling to my clothes. The deli is cramped and fluorescent lights hang overhead – the spotlights of my first job. I slice, package, weigh and price meat for nagging soccer moms, clueless old men who never know what to order, athletic teenage boys, and check-out employees who buy food during their half hour breaks. The soccer moms always come in looking fit, like they’ve come from Pilates sessions, yet not a hair is out of place, and they carry designer bags haughtily on their shoulders. These particular customers aren’t so bad, though they are always in a rush and get frustrated with me when I work slowly.

“Excuse me, young man. Can you slice my meat instead of the new girl? I’m kind of in a rush!” The impatient woman smirks

victoriously as my co-worker takes her order. It's only my first week and I'm not as skilled at handling the slicer. She is not the only customer to lack patience with my learning process. Later I irritate one man because he asks if he can reach into the oven to get a chicken. Yes, I reply, because it is a self-serve oven. Despite the "Warning! Hot" sign, he reaches in carelessly and "burns" himself. He makes it clear that his injuries are my fault and he shoots me some unpleasant looks before stalking off, just another customer with complaints.

The grocery store is also near the campus of an all-boys boarding school whose students walk over after their soccer practices for food or to stock up on snacks for the week. They never know what weight they want, and always end up leaving with large amounts of oven roasted turkey. It's the cheapest. A teenage boy in a St. Andrews College soccer uniform walks over to the counter and asks me, "Can I get a medium container of coleslaw?" He laughs as I grimace while I scoop the unnatural green salad into a plastic container. "Been working here too long, eh?" he remarks. Yes, one week is long enough to know that "salad" was scooped out of a giant Tupperware bucket in the cooler, marked "Coleslaw Salad Product".

All through my first week most customers have demanded that I re-weigh, re-package and re-price the deli meats to make sure that I've not tried to short change them. A lot of customers are looking to save every dollar.

“Five dollars! Well, are you sure? Do you mind double-checking?”

I don’t mind, but I’m sure the five people in line behind you do mind. I glance back to the line that stretches out to the bakery before forcing a smile and a nod. Usually the price ends up being the same. The meat is priced by a machine, after all. The customer has wasted his time and my time, and has annoyed everyone in the queue. And each of them, when it comes their turn, is unpleasant with me.

Every day we have new specials: turkey, chicken, ham, bologna, salami and sausages in several variations. Spiced, seasoned, oven-roasted, smoked, brand name, no name, hot, medium, buffalo style, sliced thick, sliced thin, shaved, paper on, paper off and rounded to the gram precisely. The salad bar is stacked with more of that stinking sea-green coleslaw, potato salads, egg salads, bean salads, broccoli salads. My least favourite to dish up is the ‘Hawaiian special’. This ‘salad’ teases my gag reflex. “Don’t blame us,” the Hawaiians protest, “we never concocted such a thing!” Marshmallows and artificial pineapple chunks scooped out of a bin. No palm trees or beaches here.

“I’d like a large container of the Hawaiian special!” demands one customer. I wish that along with our latex gloves, baseball hats and hairnets, we wore nose plugs.

Nose plugs would also be useful when it is time to clean the oven. “It’s time to clean the oven,” announces Julie, my boss.

My palms start to sweat when I think about that combination of pink gooey soap and chicken grease. Explosions of queasiness blast inside of me whenever I look at that chemistry experiment gone wrong.

The inside of the oven is coated with the remains of roasted chicken and chemically sweet smelling soap. As I empty the chicken grease holder, some of it spills on my black work shoes. Great, that will never come out! After the final rinse, the oven is clean and I'm free to go back to slicing.

The central responsibility of my job is to carve meat using the slicer. The slicer is flat metal traced with the clammy scent of thawing pre-cooked meat. The top branch is where I place the meat, after lifting it from the chilled cooler display and carrying it over to the slicer. I bring the handle over to clench the summit of the lump of flesh selected by the customer, with the handle's spikes piercing it in place. The handle is then used to shove meat into a rotating sharp cutting edge, which processes the slice out onto a piece of wax paper. Customers order by the slice or the gram, and are picky. "I asked for 250 grams, not 260 grams."

Whenever I use the slicer, with the special shabby yellow slicer glove, I hear my mother's voice in my head saying, "You better come back from work with all your fingers." Yes mother, I always think as I hop out of her car in my uniform. Her words remain with me throughout my shift and I handle the fierce slicers gingerly. Slicing is tedium, but they don't call it work for nothing.

An employee once told me job is an acronym standing for Just Over Broke.

As I carry the meat I recognize that these are the animals that graze on the farms I drive past. The Buffalo-style chicken, smelling like spices and speckled with dots of red, brings this realization to mind. This is a creature that at one time lived and breathed, had a family just like me. I have disassociated myself for too long from what I am holding. I didn't want to believe what I knew was true. I am handling dead animals all day. I dismantle them further for people's eating pleasure.

It doesn't feel right, so right then I decide to stop eating meat. "Montreal smoked meat?" That's not beef, that's cow. Call it smoked cow and the line up would drift away. Spicy this, spicy that? It's spiced because it's tasteless—this is industrial meat, raised in barns, raised in feed lots. This is the cattle that waded through manure. The animals that once had a heart beat, just like me, are taken because we crave protein. The slaughter of these animals seems suddenly immoral.

My work at the deli leads to two firm decisions. First, I will never eat one of those salads, especially the Hawaiian special. Second, meat is not for me.

Mark LaRiviere

## Edgifest

THE QUEUE STRETCHES FOR HALF A KILOMETER. MORE FANS join the line-up near 11 AM. AJ and I have been here for three hours already, which is totally worth it. We stand a mere fifteen feet from the gate, fifteen feet from the first Edgifest concert in a decade. Sam Roberts, USS, the Stone Temple Pilots, and Linkin Park. Easily the best birthday present ever.

It's July 12<sup>th</sup>, it's hot, humid, and there are storm clouds over head. A bald guy in front of us looks like the kind of guy who takes off his shirt in the middle of the show.

“Yo, dude, I think those two girls are checking us out.”

Typical AJ, concentrating on girls instead of the more important matters at hand, and there are more important matters at hand. I'm in line to see three of my five favourite bands.

“Yeah, they're definitely checking us out.”

The gates open and people are being let in. Security guards frisk everyone as they file in. A pile of confiscated drugs and bottles on the security table. Gross. Two more steps inside and now a full view of Downsview Park. Small kiosks and stores under tents line the perimeter of the field. The main stage stands, massive, at the back of the park.

“AJ! AJ! Check it out!”

“No way. No way!”

The Batmobile is being rolled out, not 30 feet in front of us. The same Batmobile that was used in *Batman Begins*.

We three-sixty around the Batmobile, paying special attention to where the rockets were shot from and singing “Na-na-nana, Na-na-nana, Na-na-nana, Na-na-nana, Bat-Man!”

I want to be right up against the stage, so we head over and lean against the front rail. Third ones there. Sweet.

“So, who’s first to play?”

“A local band from Hamilton, The Arkells. I think this is their big break, they have a pretty popular single out right now called ‘Oh, the Boss is Coming’.”

A mere twenty minutes pass and the crowd is already pushing us right against the railing. The Arkells come out and make their introduction. They’re nervous, this is their shot, and no wonder. Look at who they’re expected to open for.

I like these guys. They’re sort of a mix of indie-rock and classic-rock. I can tell some of the crowd doesn’t share my

appreciation, but the Arkells' perseverance through the ten or so people booing them is admirable.

*Oh, the boss is coming, better look busy,  
Because your ass is on the line.*

Most people are getting into it now. It's a pretty good song.

The Arkells' set ends and I'm confident that they will do fairly well for themselves. Some people drift off to see the Sony stand or the Batmobile. We stay where we are. I listen to almost every band headlining, and I need to see it all. We only have to wait about fifteen minutes for the next band, so AJ heads off to grab some food. By the time he's back with the pizza and hotdogs USS is almost done setting up.

"Who are these guys?"

"USS, Ubiquitous Synergy Seeker."

"Wow, what a name, eh?"

"Yeah, they have really weird, entertaining music too."

It's true. USS has the most bizarre, yet enticing song titles. No normal person names a song 'Hollow Point Sniper Hyperbole' or 'Porno Star Trek'.

They take the stage, and all hell breaks loose. Before I know it, I'm almost falling over the railing, laughing. AJ is tearing up, everyone is laughing. Ashley Boo-Schultz is up on the Human Kebab's shoulders playing guitar and singing while his feet are used to scratch the turn tables. The next song comes on and the Human Kebab's doing back flips on and off the stage and running

on top of people's heads. During 'Porno Star-Trek' he raises a cardboard cut-out of Einstein and makes it look like the old physicist is scratching and rocking out. By the end of their set my stomach is sore and I need the banister to keep myself up.

"Yeah. Yo, those girls are checking us out again. Go over and introduce us."

I always get stuck as AJ's wingman. We introduce ourselves to the two girls and the girl with blue eyes, as if by some wacked form of concert slut magic, instantly clings to AJ. I chat with her friend about the music and bands playing. She has brown eyes. We'll never remember their names, so we just stick to calling them Brown and Blue. Still, Brown is pretty cool and it's funny because she and her friend are like AJ and me. Brown and I are here for the music whereas AJ and Blue are here as tagalongs, just looking for a hook-up.

"Sam Roberts is up next."

"I really, like, loved *Love at the End of the World*."

"It was a good album, but I think I like *Chemical City* better."

As Brown and I talked I could hear AJ throwing painfully clichéd lines at Blue. "Your eyes remind me of the stars." Jesus. Shut up.

The Sam Roberts band comes on stage, opening with the 'Bootleg Saint'. A good opening song. AJ and Blue run off.

“Brother Down” starts and I feel a wet, clammy body ram into my back. My belly squishes against the railing, and my stomach fights to keep control of the pizza I just ate. Behind me the bald guy from the line has his shirt off, trying to mosh to the music. You don’t mosh to Sam Roberts.

People are getting pissed off, but this asshole is still trying to continue his one man pit. Some guy in his early 20s beside me is getting irritated. I get pushed into the rail again and I instinctively throw my elbow back. I hear the thwack as solid contact is made with the bald dude’s nose.

“Shit!”

The guy holds his nose, blood flowing down from his hand to his forearm, dripping off his elbow.

“Holy crap, sor-“

“Hey, get this guy over to the medical tent.”

A security guard hops over the rail and grabs the lone mosher and leads him out of the crowd. I feel pretty awful about hurting the guy.

“Hey, good job, man. He deserved it. You don’t mosh to Sammy.” A guy in his early twenties pats my shoulder.

“That was awesome.”

I still feel bad, but the praise feels good nonetheless. As Sam’s set comes to an end I feel the cool prickles of light rain on my arms and neck. Sam’s guitar solo, which has been carrying on for a little too long now, wails in the background as it rains harder.

His set ends and the audience cheers for its favourite iconic Montrealer.

The Bravery, some band from New York, starts to set up. I really don't care much for them so I look around for AJ. On my third scan of the field I see him and Blue heading towards me. I raise my arm up so that he spots me.

By now the rain is starting to come down hard. I run towards AJ, Brown tailing behind me, and signal to find cover from the rain. Most of the crowd is doing the same.

I catch up to AJ and Blue and keep moving past them towards shelter.

“Where are we going?”

“To the Batmobile!”

Damn. That sounded cool. The Batmobile is under the closest tent, so we hurry over, soaked, hair matted, and clothes sticking to our skins.

The Bravery carry on through the pouring rain. The girls are rambling about the designs on the shirts being sold. AJ and I aren't really listening.

“Yo, Mark?”

“Yeah?”

“I just got hired.”

“What?”

“Ten minutes ago,” AJ winks, “I got hired.”

I realize what he's saying and I'm not impressed. I don't care what kind of job he got so I'm not going to bother asking. AJ is the reason that girls think guys are pigs.

“Cool.”

After half an hour the rain finally stops. Twenty minutes later The Bravery are done and we try and get as close to the stage as possible. We stand about thirty-five feet from the stage awaiting the arrival of the Stone Temple Pilots. We might not be against the rail, but we are still in great shape to see the show, considering there are about 10,000 people here. The STP are a great band, and the most of the middle-aged adults are here for them exclusively.

“And who are the STP?”

Jesus. AJ knows nothing.

“The Stone Temple Pilots....” His face still remains blank and questioning. “...’Trippin’ on a Hole in a Paper Heart’.”

“Oh! I love that song!”

The only reason AJ knew that song is because of Guitar Hero 2, but at least he wasn't going into this band with blind expectations.

After the third song, Buddy, the lead vocalist, starts taking off his shirt and throwing it into the crowd. All the forty-year-old moms go wild. The beginning of “Vaseline” starts and Buddy tries to yell a piece of prophetic wisdom to the crowd.

“Let the waves of our music wash like everlasting love.”

Is that what he said? I couldn't understand him. The audiences' reaction is the same everywhere. *What?*

The Stone Temple Pilots end their set with the "Interstate Love Song" and inform us of the delay of the main event. Linkin Park is going to be delayed for forty-five minutes.

Son of a bitch.

All of the older people who came to see STP start to file out. All of us younger folk take the opportunity to get in as close as possible to the stage. It's really too bad that their forty year old ears can't handle the beautiful yelling that Chester Bennington is so good at. We end up about ten feet from center stage, packed tight, but close to the music.

After what feels like hours, Chester and Mike walk out on center stage. It's ten-thirty, so it's completely dark outside. The only light is purplish and focused on the two vocalists. Chester starts singing a soft version of "Breaking the Habit," only vocals and piano. They follow it up with another soft version of "Pushing Me Away," all the while Mike is backing up with vocals and keys. Once Chester is finished Mike starts an *a cappella* version of "Hands Held High," but after the first verse he starts a slow build up, a crescendo of the keys, holding the last note so long that the crowd shifts uncomfortably, pining for something to happen, the tension building. The stage light blare as the entire band appears out of nowhere, powering into "What I've Done".

"Mark, are you crying?"

“Shut up!”

This is unbelievable, so well done, and so...perfect. It sounds at least three times better than on album. Almost everyone in the crowd is singing along. Chester throws his half empty Gatorade bottle in the air and I feel small sprinkles of the cool beverage prickling my arms. I'm in heaven.

They play old songs, new songs. Mike raps a mash-up of “Petrified” from his side project, Fort Minor, with “Points of Authority”.

The show ends, but the crowd wants more. Cries for an encore fill the park. “We want more! We want more! We want more! We want more!”

The band comes back on stage and dives into playing “A Place For My Head,” my favourite song.

“Dude, are you crying again?”

“It's my favourite song, all right?”

The song ends. The show is over. I grab my fifty dollars and book my way through the crowd to get my sweatshirt before anyone else.

Victoria Blakeman

## Equestrian Park

SUNDAY MORNING, I WAKE UP IN THE DARK, FOUR thirty; I am not tired, just anxious. Today is the last horse show this season, I anticipate the worst. I leave my house at five. I wonder what my neighbours think. Am I going to work? Did something happen? Am I up to no good? But then they are probably still asleep.

I wake up when that woman turns on the lights. My favourite time of day—fresh water, hay and breakfast grain. Beet pulp and pellets, the perfect combination. I pin my ears back and kick at the other horses when I get my grain. Bad experiences with other horses taking my food I guess. When we finish our grain, turnout starts. Today I stay inside. I am confused, everyone else got to go. I get nervous, I start running around my stall, calling for my friends.

I enjoy driving this early. The chill in the air, the mist on the farmers' fields. Hill 'n' Dale farm, Millar Farm, Vivian Hall. Foodland, Real Canadian Superstore. Road kill.

When I arrive the lights are on: the day has begun. The horses are fed and turned out, except of course the show horses. LB, my bay thoroughbred mare, is pacing around her stall, an anxious habit from her racing days. She knows something is different. I start packing the trailer with everyone's tack: saddles, bridles, martingales, girths, saddle pads, half pads all get packed. The smell of linseed soap is still fresh and shining stirrups catch the morning sunlight.

That girl walks in soon after I woke up. She doesn't come up every day, but I recognize her. She's nervous about something. She finally comes to say "Hello" and begins putting on my Boogaloo shipping boots and Baker sheet.... Apparently I'm going somewhere.

When the trailer is packed we load the horses. LB is being stubborn, backing off the ramp, rearing up and kicking out, a practiced routine now. With carrots, hay and grain, we bribe her on. We take the leather lead shank off her nose and attach the cross ties to her halter. The journey begins.

That girl leads me outside to the big, grey box that I hate. She tries to take me up the ramp. I back off, I'm scared. I fuss, hoping I'll scare her so I don't have to get on. I sense her

frustration and nerves. She uses food to lure me on. I can't resist, but I resent.

It's a long ride to the show. I doze off, but with the horses moving around the trailer, it's too bumpy to actually sleep. As we pull up I see dozens of trailers already there and people warming up their horses. We unpack the trailer and take the horses off. LB gets off running and nickering. I shouldn't be wearing my Birkenstocks, she'll probably step on my toes. I put on her tack: boots, saddle pad, half pad, saddle, running martingale, and bridle. I put on my breeches, show shirt, field boots and show jacket. When we're both ready, I get on and walk to the Grand Prix ring.

It was a long, bumpy ride in that box I loathe, that stupid grey gelding beside me. I see a lot of horses I've never seen before. I'm nervous getting out of the box. I've never seen this place. New horses, smells and flies...I hope they don't leave me here. That girl is still nervous, I still don't understand why. I run around her, she knows I'm nervous too. She gets on me and we walk around this strange place.

The Grand Prix always intimidates me. Olympians ride here for God's sake! Former Olympic gold medalist Jim Elder is here coaching his three grandsons. LB is still prancing around. I begin preparing for ultimate humiliation. My coach Nancy warms me up. The jumps start at two feet and go up; two foot six, two foot nine, three feet, three foot six.... They announce our names. "Four away, Victoria Blakeman and Life's Blessing." I learn my

course. Singes, oxers, liverpools, combinations. I hope I don't forget it, I have a couple times before. They announce our names three more times; three away, two away, on deck. I enter that big ring, I'm alone.

I see a horse I know: Alf. He notices me too; he's my best friend, my companion. Now I don't feel as alone, not as nervous. That girl is more nervous than before. She starts making me jump over those poles. They get bigger and bigger, I don't have a problem with them. She takes me to that huge ring with more jumps. I go in and I feel alone.

We go towards the first jump and almost at once we feel like a team. The feeling is surreal, as if we share a brain, as if we are the same, it cannot be explained, only experienced. We soar over jump one, it's sponsored by John Deer. We gallop to the next jump and come to a dead stop. I'm frustrated; I feel my face turn beet red. I just didn't want to jump it. We circle and try to regain our unity. We clear the second jump, it's regained. We feel the mud splash us as LB gallops along, the rain on our faces, and yes, the clichéd wind in our hair. We clear the next twelve jumps.

I can't help but feel disappointed when I get home. Our last show did not go as planned. It's only one thirty. I go back to bed. I wake up that evening; it feels like a different day.

I can't help but feel relieved when I get home. I'm in my clean stall with fresh water, hay and bran mash.

Rachel Mester

## I Want To Be Amazed

SITTING IN CALCULUS CLASS, DOING HOMEWORK FOR A different course, working patiently and instinctively on the things that need to get done. A paper drops in front of me, and I look at it. It's my test, and I got a 95%. There's no way that this is real. Could I have done *that* well?

I breeze through school, fly through all the boring bits of class, and find myself at home, holding my test, and a comic smile plastered on my face. *95%, man, that's so damn good. I can't even believe it.* I had aced that test, rocked its world. Now all I need is for my parents to see it. I won't even argue if they dig out some tape and stick it to the fridge.

I run into the family room, kicking my shoes off in my excitement, dropping my bag in the middle of the floor, and standing in the middle of the space, holding my paper up. *Look at*

*me, not at your computers.* I think, trying to project my thoughts into my parents' heads.

When my dad notices me, it's because I have sat down on his hassock. Bouncing his legs so that he cannot ignore me. He gives me one of those *I'm working* looks. I don't care. I kind of shove my test into his hands. Then I wait. Patient. Actually, I bounce around on the couch waiting for him. *Acknowledge my success!* He flips through the paper, agonizingly slowly, and I find my nerves hauling my stomach into my throat. He looks at me, words forming in his mind, and I realize too late that maybe I don't want to hear them.

"What happened to the other five percent?"

Oh man. Are you for real? I do that well and that's the response I get?

This is where I disagree with my father. It's not about how many questions you miss, it's about how many you get right. Instead of counting the failures, count the successes. It's not about being perfect, it never is. Trying to be perfect is a burden that sucks all the life out of accomplishment. We are imperfect creatures trying to create a perfect world, and therein lies our problem. We can be amazing. We can be spectacular. We can be awe-inspiring individuals that alter the events of the entire world itself for now and for all of time. But we *cannot* be perfect.

There is a joy in doing things. Elation, when we find something we truly love. In that, there is happiness.

Take the mathies, the mathematicians who dedicate their lives to playing with numbers and making them do cool things. Who twist what is logical so far, and in such convolutions that it becomes logical again. They. Love. Numbers. Purely and honestly, it is that simple. They love working with values and symbols until the sun goes down, and then comes up again. There is no way in any universe that they would be caught doing math all the time, unless they loved it. Unless numbers, logic, and definitive rights and wrongs made them inexplicably happy.

The joy in the doing is the only motivation for the effort it requires.

I play soccer, a lot. I run fast, pass faster, and kick hard. I dive for the ball without fear of consequence or outcome. I leave the field muddy, exhausted and satisfied. I find that when I run, the soccer ball in front of me, the opposing players running desperately behind me, I find my joy. The beautiful crunch of cleats in dry dirt, ripping the turf as I cut so fast across the ground that clumps of grass tear out at the roots. The push and pull of muscles stretching, the pounding of blood in my temples. The exertion in my legs and the feeling of my lungs closing because they just can't work that fast. Nothing compares to knowing that I have done my best, and the end result is in my favour. The contentment in knowing that my best is enough.

We were put on this earth to try. Anything above and beyond our best, or even expecting such a level of performance

drains the joy and happiness out of an act. It loses colour and brilliance, fading to a dull monotony of frustration.

When my father asks me where that other five percent went, I only shake my head, and I smile. Because we make mistakes. We make mistakes and learn to fix them. It's how we grow, how we learn.

Contentment in life can only be attained through satisfaction in what I can do. Not what anyone else can do. I aim not for perfection, but to better myself. The golden, pure feeling of pride that swells deep inside my heart when I know that I have done all that I can.

When I dance, when my feet hit the stage and my stomach leaps into my throat, I am happy. But I am not satisfied. No. I push myself so that I leave the stage gasping, I throw myself into the movements knowing that if I don't, I won't be content. My arms are soft, but powerful, and my legs carry my weight; moving, turning, jumping, sliding, with such certainty that can only come from hours of rehearsal. I leave the stage, and I am satisfied. I have done my best. It's not perfect. Dancing can always be improved upon. But in that moment on stage, there is nothing more I could have done. And that is a small perfection.

So the five percent that I didn't get on that test, that were lost by stupid mistakes or miscalculations, they are imperfections. Wrong, incorrect. I know that. But I find that it doesn't matter. I did my best. So my best isn't perfect, and I am okay with that.

Maybe the next test, I will have improved, and be ready to tackle the daunting task of getting nothing wrong.

Maybe.

Or maybe not.

I find my joy. I seek it every day in doing the things I love to the best of my abilities.

I don't bother myself with perfect, because if I find it I don't want to be relieved, I want to be overwhelmed. In that one instant, I want to be amazed.

Shuai Yuan

## Knocking on Fate

WHEN SUMMER ENDED FOR JONNY, HE DIDN'T GO BACK TO HIS house in Vancouver. He traveled from his home in BC to his home away from home in Ontario, my home. Every summer of the five past years, Jonny has lived with a host family, working twelve hours days selling textbooks and encyclopaedias to stay-at-home parents across Ontario.

Jonny, 25, grew up in the south side of Vancouver. A gifted student in high school, he had the privilege of going down south for his post-secondary education, attending the University of Washington. But by the end of his sophomore year, he ran out of funds and had to come back to Canada. Unfortunately for him, his university credits did not transfer and he was back to square one. He had to start out as a freshman again.

“It was tough for me to accept. It was like I had just wasted two years of my life. I was half way there, but now I had to start all over again. I knew about it at the middle of my sophomore year and I tried to get more money from banks, from friends.... In the end, it wasn’t enough.”

Determined to finish university this time, Jonny now goes door-to-door everyday from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. His base salary is minimum wage, and barely covers his cost of living. To make money, he has to sell books, lots of them. At 6:30 am on a beautiful day in June, most university kids are still in bed, making up for their sleep-deprived semesters. But Jonny and two of his colleagues are already up getting ready for a new day. By 8:00 am, Jonny has made his way from Aurora to Barrie, his designated area. By 8:01 am, he knocks on the first door of the day. “Hi, my name is Jonny. I was just talking with the Johnsons up the street....” The routine has been perfected through hundreds of repetitions. Ring the doorbell, take three steps back and wait with the body pointed to the side to give the impression that he’s only going to be there for a minute.

Make no mistake, it is not easy. The long hours alone make the job demanding, physically and mentally. He leaves the house at seven in the morning and comes back at ten at night, Monday through Saturday, for three months. His lunches consist mainly of peanut butter and jam sandwiches. He easily walks about ten kilometres a day, under the blazing summer sun. Even though

there is no work on Sunday, he still has to shop for groceries, wash the laundry and fill out reports. This is not really a job, but a boot camp. Now a team leader, Jonny has obviously earned his stripes, has been through the pain and sorrow. This summer, he started out with a team of ten people. By the end of the first week, three had quit. Yet, Jonny carries on.

“With this job, I can usually make about four thousand a month. This job also makes me realize how expensive living by myself is. Rent and money for food add up quickly. I need around eleven grand for school, so I’m trying to save as much as possible.”

Starting out it was difficult. That was partly why he first took this summer job. The pain of being forced to leave University of Washington was overwhelming. “That was definitely the low point of my life. It wasn’t just about switching a school. It was about giving up my dream of working on Wall Street. The prestige and the networking opportunities offered by my new school aren’t anywhere close to those offered by the University of Washington.” He needed something to distract himself. The thing about this job was that he did not have any time to collect his thoughts, to reflect on his life. It was literally eat, work, and sleep. He wasn’t sure if he liked it or not, but he did enjoy the feeling of being physically tired and mentally dazed. That summer, he was going through the routines like a robot. “I went into a mini-emotional withdrawal.” It helped his performance though. Being a door-to-door salesman requires thick skin. The toughest part for a rookie salesman is

handling rejection. That wasn't the case for Jonny. He just didn't give a damn about rejections. The man was a sales-machine. Not surprisingly, his attitude translated into lots of sales.

He overcame his emotional numbness when he phoned home one day. His dad informed him that his mom had just successfully undergone a hip replacement surgery. After his call ended, Jonny was stunned and ashamed. He was not aware that his mom had a bad hip. This incident made him how much he missed home and how little time he had spent with his parents. The last time he had celebrated Christmas with his loving parents was when he was still in high school. He missed them. This also opened his eyes and his mind as he contemplated what else had he been missing in life. Then it hit him. Every day, he walked into the lives of dozens of families. Behind every door, there was an interesting story waiting to be discovered. The stay-at-home parent is as willing as anyone to tell those stories. From that day forward, Jonny had another objective besides selling books. When he was speaking with his clients, he wanted to listen to their stories and ask their advice. The amazing thing was that while Jonny knocked on fewer doors, his sales actually increased.

“One time, I talked to a mom who worked as a pilot. She invited me in as soon as she found out I was selling books. Her family loved books and actually owned a mini-library, which might explain why two of her kids were both going to Amherst College in

the States. She made me realize that I had to go the extra mile to get ahead in life.”

Fast-forward to four years later. Jonny is now a charismatic and well-spoken team leader. His job is similar to that of a college don, helping the freshmen to cope with the rigors of their new lives while focusing on his work at the same time. He is very upbeat about life. Whereas his colleagues complain about the high temperature, Jonny embraces the sunny days, or at least that’s what his attitude suggests. During his stay here, never once has he made a negative remark.

Jonny has this amazing ability to build instant rapport with people. His facial features are very gentle. Every morning, he shaves and gels up his short brown hair up. He normally wears a white collared t-shirt and a nice pair of jeans. Well-dressed and well-mannered, Jonny’s demeanour just gives off that trustworthy vibe that put people at ease. You can’t teach this ability to build instant comfort in a classroom. Through all these years of knocking on doors, Jonny has become attuned to the subtleties of human interaction. On the day he moved into my house, he somehow learned that I am an avid basketball fan. When I woke up next morning, he was gone, but there was a brand new Adidas headband and a handwritten thank-you note on the dinner table. This small gesture instantly won me over.

Now Jonny is a master salesman, and he’s far from the typical pushy lying salesman you’d see on TV. Not only can he

convince people to give him their time and their money for his books, on certain occasions he scores some of their dinner. It is quite a sight to see him come back with a big smile on his face, a check in one hand, and a bag of BBQ chicken wings in the other. His clients are probably won over by his gregariousness. Everywhere he goes, he's always very optimistic and considerate of other people.

“I transferred to a school that is cheaper, closer to home, and offers just as good an education. By turning that chapter of my life, I got in touch with a side of me that I wasn't aware of before. I have also come to master the practical side of my business education. I love this job and I love my life.”

Rachel Mester

## The Left Aerial

I WALKED INTO A COLD, EMPTY ROOM. THE MIRRORS ON the wall surrounded me with my own frightened face. Horizontal bars hung suspended on the walls, whispering secrets about hours of effort and sweat. A few other girls tip-toed into the room, silent in an attempt to preserve the stillness. At least I wasn't alone.

At seven years of age, I am the quintessential tomboy. I wear my brother's old hand-me-downs. I play football during recess. I won't wear skirts. I stop wearing dresses because dresses mean I can't wear my snow pants. As a result of my karate classes, I often misjudge my own strength. My father tells me, "A girl must be able to defend herself." Pink? Forget it. Purple? Forget it.

I have just finished a soccer game, trudging victoriously back to my mother's gold minivan. She sighs loudly—I must be

trudging boyishly. She rolls her eyes... here we go. She's about to start on my posture. Again.

“Rachel. Stop walking like a boy. You're going to be a young lady soon.”

I scoff at that. I don't want to be a lady.

I want to be strong, powerful, respected. None of those ideals line up with my image of ladies. Dainty, soft, quiet little things. Everything I don't want to be. I can't, *couldn't* see myself fitting into any likeness of that image. I don't want to.

“I signed you up for ballet classes.”

Wait! What? What did she say? I could swear she said she put me in ballet. Isn't ballet that lame thing with tights and painful shoes? Sparkly costumes? Makeup? No. My mom would never do that. She knows me too well.

“It starts next Monday.”

Oh. Damn.

Yelling, crying, hiding in my room—I tried them all, yet my mother forced my seven year old self, kicking and screaming, into a small, rundown hall that I suspected a class could barely fit in, let alone dance in. I was wearing a bodysuit and tights, things I despised. I wanted nothing more than to be at home, as far away from turnout and pointed toes as I could get. When I first started taking ballet classes, I hated it.

We had started a new routine. Every Monday. I would come home from school. Every Monday, I would eat my snacks

and do my homework. Every Monday, my mother would somehow get me changed, into the car, and standing sulkily in the corner of Victoria Hall. Every Monday, I would sit through hell.

Or so it seemed.

Ballet class was always painful—still is sometimes. My teachers constantly encourage us to jump higher, spin faster, smile prettier. And don't forget turnout. The rotation of the legs starting at the hips, that way if I put my heels together, my feet make a neat little V. Every movement must be turned out. Every kick, and every jump. Even standing still, my feet have to be placed in one of five predefined positions. For me, it's like running an obstacle course, and just after I cross the finish line, exhausted, some crazy person runs up to me saying:

“Now do it again, balancing a book on your head.”

And that's what it's like in class. I do the dance; I smile for my pretend audience. I grit my teeth and try to fix all the mistakes that the teachers are yelling at me. My calves burn, my arms are like lead, I can *feel* my own pulse. But I keep smiling, because as my teachers always say,

“You love this. This is easy. Effortless.”

Picture day was always a hassle. Posing for pictures that my mother proudly displayed on the mantle. Like I wanted anyone to know that I wore skirts. Somehow, against all odds, I was waiting patiently in line, with my tutu and—much to my mother's

dismay—my lipstick smudged. I was admiring all the sample photos when I saw her.

In the picture was a girl, seventeen at the least. Her head thrown back, spine arched, toes just barely grazing the back of her head. In the photograph she hung in the air, suspended forever.

“Mom!” I called, beckoning until she joined me by the picture. I pointed at the girl, smiling at my mother with my most persuasive eyes.

“I want to do that.”

And just like that, I was signed up for acrobatics, a blend of gymnastics and dance. I had finally found my place. Acro was a safe haven after the terror that was ballet class. In acro, you’re not judged by the precision of your pirouettes or the delicate movements of your arms. Instead, you are admired for your strength and daring, respected for your willingness to trust yourself to do things you only ever imagined.

Mondays became a treat. What would I learn today? Would I get to practice my headstands or learn my front-overs? Acro was so different from ballet. Every day was an adventure. Every class I would learn something new, something my body yearned for me to do, but my mind would scream at me to stop. *Don't go upside down. Don't put all your weight on your head. Don't trust the other girl not to drop you. Don't touch your toes to your head, it will permanently contort your spine.* But I never listened. The adventurer in me was never satisfied with average. Apathetic in ballet, but striving

to be the best in acro, I worked until my arms ached and my back complained so loudly I couldn't hear anything over the pounding of my own heartbeat.

And every so often I would slip and fall on my butt. But that was all part of the trade.

Looking back, I realize I am able to fondly recall my memories of my early dance years. I am proud of my younger self for not compromising who I was. I know now my mother had only the best intentions when she signed me up for that once-a-week class. Intentions I now appreciate.

Now when I dance, it's magical. I step on to the stage and I become a better version of myself. A smile lights up my face (whether it's supposed to be there or not). Confidence floods through my veins, filling me up so completely that everything else becomes irrelevant. The music starts and I feel it everywhere. In the floor, vibrating into my toes. In my very core, the bass pounding so loudly it echoes in my whole being. In my movement, I am the music and I must follow it till the end. And in my heart. I feel the music in my heart. An indescribable, all-consuming joy that overrides my fear, my anxiety, my self-consciousness. A joy that stays with me until the last core-shaking beat of the music. A joy that I don't think I could've found anywhere else but on a stage, dancing my heart out.

I find it difficult to describe how I feel when I'm dancing. Every move I make is based on *my* strength, *my* power. I am not

respected for my fearsome slap shot or incredible line-backer skills. I am respected for my courage and trust, in both others and myself. My ability to push myself until I can't breathe, and then push harder. Of course, I didn't believe that myself until I got my left aerial.

Picture a cartwheel. Now picture a cartwheel with no hands. That is an aerial. Many acro dancers will settle for achieving that aerial on one side. In my case, my strongest side was my right, and that was the side I got my aerial on. My teacher often encouraged me to work on my left aerial, to improve myself. Instead, I focused on perfecting my right, doing it two, three times in a row. Doing it from standstill. Then, one day, my teacher showed up with a bag of king-sized chocolate bars. I was ogling them before I even found out what kind they were. Then she told us what they were for. Incentive.

"These are for the people who got their aerials, and haven't gotten a chocolate bar for it yet." I sighed, I got my Aero bar for my right aerial months ago. But then, I had an idea.

"If I get my left aerial, can I have a chocolate bar?"

And so, for about forty-five minutes, I overcame the awkwardness of approaching my aerial from the opposite side. I concentrated on pushing higher into the air, bringing my legs around faster. Class was thirty seconds from ending. But I was going to do it. I was going to. *I had to*. It wasn't just about the chocolate anymore. I ran into my attempt. I put my hand down. I

tried again. Two hands this time. Kids from the next class were filtering in. I had only a few more tries before my teacher kicked me out for the next class to start. It was now or never.

I leaped into the air, kicking my legs high, and fast. Watched the ground as I flew over it. I landed. No hands. My heels crashed mercilessly into the floor. Not a perfect aerial. But an aerial none-the-less. Of course I got my chocolate bar, but that wasn't the point. It was never the point.

I learned then that my limitations in dance are only those that I place on myself. I had never pushed myself for that aerial. But then I achieved it in less than an hour. I learned that by trusting myself, my capabilities are boundless. By believing in my own strength, the strength that came from being that tomboy, from refusing to like ballet, I did what I never thought I could.

It was my biggest fear as a child that dance would take away who I was. I never wanted to wear the makeup or the dresses. I never wanted to learn how to point my toes or do a proper plié. I never wanted to be a lady. I was scared of being weak. I didn't want to be quiet or delicate. I was terrified that by putting on the tutu, I would stop being who I was and become who my parents wanted me to be. That was not a sacrifice I was willing to make. Not even close.

It took me a few years to realize it was a sacrifice I did not have to make. Nobody wanted me to give up my strength, nobody needed me to wear lipstick and like it. I had been wrong about

dance, just as I had been wrong about so many things when I was young. The people on the television weren't real, just like dance wasn't just for girly girls. It was all about strength, power and determination, and the ability to control your own.

Maybe I didn't have to be a lady, but as my mom tells me now, "At least you started walking like a girl."

Shuai Yuan

## A Love and Hate Affair

MY PIANO TEACHER, MR. WANG, WAS EXPENSIVE, ONE OF THE best in ShengZhen. His students were famous for their technique. In front of the piano in his bedroom, he barked orders at me. “Make the notes crisper. The sounds are too sloppy.” At the age of nine, I passively accepted his ways of teaching. To develop what he called “the perfect form”, I even rested an egg under my palm. Most of the practices were finger drills and scale exercises. But though I was developing faster and faster fingers, I never understood music. Worse, I never loved it, and I dreaded my weekly lesson. Nevertheless, I improved very quickly. My desire was to complete Level 10 as fast as I could. After just three years of taking classes, I was about to do my Level 5 exam. I had to play Bach’s *Prelude and Fugue*. It was a short piece. Short, but fast. Short,

but extremely complex. I dedicated hours practicing it, memorizing the notes.

On the day of the examination, I walked through a big concrete building to a plain room. The walls bare, the floor covered with plain beige tiles. The room was empty save for a piano, a long desk, and three chairs. In each chair sat an adjudicator. I walked towards the piano timidly. It was an old one. I could see the fingernail scratches on the fallboard. Time had yellowed the white keys. I murmured my name and the name of the piece. The judges acknowledged me with silent nods. After shifting uncomfortably on the worn-out bench, I began. Each note followed one another, mechanically. I didn't care if I wasn't one with the music. I just wanted to finish the piece without any slips. Then, a slip. What had happened? My heart began racing. Under my freshly-ironed shirt, my skin prickled. What was the next note? I tried to pick up somewhere...anywhere. But I couldn't. My mind went blank. I couldn't remember the rest of the music.

I went on like this. My stomach twisted with fear. The judges just sat there, silently, watching me intently. If silence had ever been audible, it certainly was then. The whole room was screaming with silence. I poked at a few notes, hoping that random note-playing would eventually lead me to a familiar section in the piece. Each wrong note rang with piercing dissonance. I was badly frightened. I gave up. I ran away.

Needless to say, I failed the test. My future performance suffered. Whenever I performed, that sense of defeat tugged at my heart. No matter how much I practiced the fingering, I kept messing up. With my progress hitting a plateau, I decided to go to a new teacher, Mrs. Fu. To this day, I still remembered her appearance. She had a shaven head and yet she wore fashionable dresses. “Can you play that more beautifully? You have to enjoy it.” My new teacher’s approach to music was initially bizarre and difficult to understand. I was not sure how I’d make a piece beautiful. All I knew was precision—striking the right key at the right time.

For our first lesson, she allowed me to practice on her Steinway grand piano, a great honour. I was awed by its beauty. The light gleamed off the veneered black lid. The spruce keys soothed my shaky fingers. The sheer mass of the piano made me feel strong. It took a while for the music to sink in my stiff body and scarred mind. Gradually, I found myself swaying to the music, relaxing.

Over the span of two years, I improved dramatically. With all these months of piano training that emphasized musicality, I learned to become one with the music. The harmonies carried my thoughts away. Beethoven sang from the finely-tuned soundboard. My favourite piece was Beethoven’s Symphony No. 3, the *Eroica*. This piece was originally dedicated to Napoleon Bonaparte and embodied the ideals of the French Revolution—liberty, equality

and fraternity. Two years earlier, I had only focused on a piece's technical challenges. Two years later, I felt the liberation that the light rhythms conveyed. At a recital, instead of timidly approaching a stage, I would walk confidently to the bench. Instead of smiling awkwardly to acknowledge the audience, I would live the moment. Instead of rushing through the *Eroica*, I'd sit back and attend to all its details.

I began to play for me. I had forgone the idea of seeking approval from strangers as an end. I chose not to become a puppet of nameless adjudicators. These days, everything I do is for me. My pursuits, whether piano, clarinet or basketball, have become ends in themselves. If I focus too much on the result, I might miss the joys of the journey. I should live in the moment. As the ancient Chinese saying goes, "Yesterday is history; tomorrow is a mystery; today is a gift, that's why it's called the present."

Emily Mitchell

## Marmalade

I HAVE A BEST FRIEND NAMED MARMALADE. AN UNORTHODOX friendship. It's very one sided—not in my favour. Maybe it's because we're so alike that it's hard for us to get along. My best friend is a horse. I am unconditionally bound to twelve hundred pounds of horse muscle and bone. Twelve hundred pounds I trust. Twelve hundred pounds I love.

Marmalade is a complicated girl. Moody, unpredictable, sometimes just plain mean. What woman isn't? Oh there are kinder, gentler, more loving horses in this world. But they aren't Marmalade. They aren't my best friend. Ours is an honest friendship, the most honest that I have. No lies, no secrets. A laugh and a smile will fool most people but that means nothing to a horse. They see past any guard you try and put up. They feel every emotion you try to suppress. As in any friendship, there are the

highs and the plummeting lows, sometimes so low I end up on the ground.

Her chestnut coat with tiny flecks of white hair within it, her three white socks that always get dirty, her muzzle: the softest things I've ever felt. I know all her lumps and bumps from previous injuries, I know where she likes to be scratched and where she's sensitive. I know she hates her girth being tightened and when I pick out her back hooves, I have to wait a moment for her to lower her leg down into a comfortable position. I know that when she threatens to bite me, she doesn't want to hurt me. And when she successfully grabs my skin, she immediately lets go and retreats to the back of her stall. Maybe in shame, maybe in fear of my reaction. Her tiny forelock, her overly long back, her toed out hind legs. I even love these faults. I know her better than I know myself. And most of what I do know about myself, she has shown me. She's taught me to be patient, she's taught me to get up and wipe off the dirt after I fall. She's taught me that failing is never an option and you have to persevere to succeed. I now know what it's like to love with every particle of myself.

Almost every day, Marmalade hurts herself. One sunny afternoon in late June I went to the barn. It was filled with little girls chatting, laughing, grooming their ponies. Over me hung a grey cloud as I prepared to attempt first aid to the agitated Marmalade. "Don't stand directly behind a horse." This golden rule

normally applies but if you respectfully announce your presence where a horse's eyes can't see, you're supposed to be safe.

Marmalade knew I was there, so I should've been safe.

I dipped a wad of cotton into a bucket of watered down iodine and carefully tried to clean a cut on the outside of her right hind cannon. Marmalade then proceeded to thrust her hoof straight into my leg.

The little girls' laughter was soon replaced by the violent words surging from my mouth at lightning speed. "You bitch! Damn it! Ow! You stupid little shit!" My hand came down hard on her hindquarters. Marmalade's face looked back at me, alarmed, and my fit quickly ended. Her big round eyes were wide with guilt though they didn't show much understanding. I couldn't be angry with her. She had only expressed her pain and discomfort, I happened to be within firing range. It wasn't malicious, it was honest. So the blue and purple bruise, the exact shape of Marmalade's hoof on my right thigh, meant nothing. I forgave my horse because that's what friends do. We love unconditionally.

Only the little girls' ears were left scarred.

Everyone has days that test us. Bad karma days. My only remedy for such a day is a ride on Marmalade. A soft breeze coming over the gently sloping hills, horses playing in the fields, the sweet smell of hay, pine shavings and manure, it all welcomes me. I walk out to her paddock and call out her name. Her head shoots up, ears pricked in my direction. She contemplates leaving her food

and eventually decides to make her way over to me. She swats away flies with her tail, her chestnut coat glistening in the sun. I smile and greet her. “Hey, pretty girl.” She stands there patiently waiting to be led inside the barn to be tacked up. I stand there a moment. I stand there with the cool breeze, the sweet smells and Marmalade.

We ride outside. We make our way through the woods, her ears following the sounds of birds, and twigs snapping. We pick up a trot and emerge into a field. A field so vast, I can’t yet see the end of it. The long green grass sways gently in the wind. Her muscles tense as her excitement rises. She knows this field. We race through the grass, hooves pounding, kicking up dirt. The wind forces tears from my eyes as the adrenaline flows steadily through my veins. I imagine this is the closest I’ll ever be to flying. After much effort, she slows. She walks on, agitated. After all, this horse was born to run. I feel nothing. A wave of calm sweeps across my body. I no longer recall why it was one of those bad days. Any problem I had, the wind picked up, and carried away to some far off place. As we walk back to the barn I remember why I ride. Why this animal means everything to me. She is home.

I care about this horse more than I’ve ever cared about anything. Periodically over the last four years there have been times where I must go to daily to the barn to treat her injuries. She’s had treatments from an equine masseuse and chiropractor—luxuries I can’t afford for myself. I put her before everything and everyone. Recently, the vet diagnosed another injury. She’s torn the

suspensory ligament from the sesamoid bone in her right leg. So now she may never be the competition horse I thought she would be. She was bought to fulfill a duty she may no longer be able to carry out. I don't care. She was meant to be the horse to win me ribbons. For a while, she did. But she became so much more than that. She became family.

No matter how frustrated or defeated she can make me feel, it eventually dissipates. This horse would jump over the stars if I asked it of her. I love her for that. I may never fully understand our relationship. Words may never explain it. But I know it's her shoulder I cry on, it's her heart that's bigger than any person's. I wince when she can't put weight on a leg, I cringe when she throws her head up protesting the pain. And I pity anyone who never gets a best friend like mine. I pity anyone who thinks I'm irrational or deranged for loving an animal to the extent that I do. This beautiful, violent, stubborn horse, she's the sweetest friend I'll ever know.

Justine Jennings

## Mother's Day Special

SURROUNDED BY HUNDREDS OF PEOPLE EACH DAY, SURROUNDED by unfamiliar faces, we judge by appearance. We don't sit and say, "She looks kind," or "He looks like a sweetheart." No, we don't.

Instead, we judge, critique and envy:

"What is he wearing?"

"What that on his head?"

"What's with her hair?"

"Her outfit is adorable."

He stands about five foot seven, brown hair matted to his head. I watch him, but I don't approach him. I am hesitant. He wanders around aimlessly, wearing a puzzled, confused face. He is not alert.

I stand at the front of the store. My hands are behind my back as I weave in and out of the clothing racks. I ask people if they need assistance, how they are doing, but I am wary of this one man.

I greet people, help people, offer advice and I watch. I watch each person, some are independent, some are lost and some needed pointing in the right direction.

My feet ache from wearing these four-inch heels but still I stand here.

I look across the store at this man. We have made eye contact. He smiles at me. I smile back, but I am quick to break the connection and look down at my aching feet.

I clutch the silver watch that embraces my wrist and look at the time. It is approaching noon, and many people begin to filter into the store to buy last minute Mother's Day gifts.

This man, his clothes are tattered, he arrived over fifteen minutes ago and has made several laps around the store.

I finally wander over to the man, who greets me with yet another large smile and glistening eyes.

“Hi.”

“Is there anything I can help you with?”

This man, in his early twenties, begins to tell me a story. He explains that he lives with his aunt and that he is looking for a Mother's Day gift for her.

“Are you looking for more casual or more dressy?”

He stands in his track pants and tight red shirt and looks at me.

“She looks good in anything. Yeah, everything looks good on her.”

I smile. “Why don’t I show you a few different things and we’ll go from there.”

“That’d be great,” he says following me around the store.

We walk together. I point out some choices.

“That’s not really her, I don’t think. No, that’s not her.”

He is quick to refuse the dressier pieces. I soon learn that his aunt is a more casual person.

“You know, Dianne, that’s my aunt, she asked for a sports car. But I told her she’d have to wait a long time cause sports cars are a lot of money.” He giggles.

I find myself laughing alongside him.

“That’s funny! Wouldn’t everyone love a sports car?!”

“Yeah, she wanted a yellow one, cause that’s her favourite colour.”

“Mine too!” I try to spark conversation with this man.

It’s evident. He’s mentally challenged. Suffering from some mental disability. Not quite right, as some would say. But who decides what the norm is and what is *different*? Right from wrong?

After learning that his aunt's favourite colour is yellow, I show him some yellow tops. I also grab some black pants neatly folded on a shelf. He really likes these black Capri pants.

"Black is good because it is a standard piece that can be worn with anything," I explain, but he doesn't look as though he is processing this.

"Yeah, I like the black ones."

The way he presents himself, I guess he doesn't have that much money. I try to make his dollar stretch, value for his money.

"What about a t-shirt or a cardigan?" I suggest.

But he walks over to the short-sleeved cotton hoodies.

"This is really nice." He picks up the turquoise sweater and holds it out to me. "Yeah, I like this one a lot, and so will she."

"Great! This is an awesome piece and really quite popular." It also happens to be this week's special, on sale—'*The Cool Cardi.*'

"What size are you looking for?"

He stares at me, puzzled. He brings his hand up and takes off his hat.

"I'm not sure."

"Is she smaller, bigger?"

He isn't understanding what I'm asking. He isn't sure.

"Is there someone in the store that looks about her size? See if there is, and point her out to me."

He looks around, there's a bit of a crowd. "That lady, the one wearing that nice brown coat."

I'm guessing his aunt wears a medium top and about a size 7-9 pant. We now have six possible items. I lay them across the desk, so we can evaluate them all at once.

The man follows a few steps behind.

"Which one do you like?" he asks.

I point to the casual 'boyfriend' shirt, a looser dress shirt, a casual look. "But at the same time, you know your aunt better than I do!" I assure him.

He ponders. He looks from side to side at the tops we've selected together.

"I like them all. I'm going to get them all. That's okay, right?" he laughs. "She's going to love them."

Now I'm puzzled. He wants to buy two plain t-shirts, yellow and purple; a turquoise hoodie; a boyfriend dress shirt, a cross-over blue knit sweater and the black Capri pants.

His transaction totals \$194.53 for the six pieces.

He thanks me for all the help and gives me the most generous smile.

"Thank you so much."

I truly know he means it.

My manager says "Good work!" It's good work because of the sale I rung up. Not "Good work!" because I was patient, or helpful, or because I earned this young man's smile. Just the sale.

Colleen Alkalay-Houlihan

## Prickly Pears

PRICKLY PEARS, CHERISHED FROM MEXICO TO SICILY, FROM Greece to Egypt to Malta. I am fond of this fruit, which thrives in bitter landscapes. A lush sweetness in the desert.

Prickly pears or Indian figs or tunas or cactus figs. Odd names, deceiving. A strange image forms, a curved fruit with spines. “Indian figs,” *fichi d’India*—but why? They’re Mexican, and not pears or figs at all. Fist-sized wonders, cylindrical, with many spini on either end, protected by dragon leather and daggers. The armoured hide deceives: for those who defeat the thick skin, withstand the prickings, there awaits an exquisite sweetness.

Biting into a prickly pear is biting into a Mediterranean dream. Sweet and juicy, with vibrant sunset colours—purple, yellow, pink, green—every bite is refreshing. A single taste will suffice—you are in Sicily. Your spirits raised, you roll the little

black seeds on your tongue. You hear Vespas puttering, and the distant shout of a *frutti vendolo*. The sweet, juicy flesh blends; you are filled with the taste of laughter and family. *Fichi d'India* contain a desert magic.

When I am eating the best food with people I like, I am happy. A little grandma hides within me; she is guiding and wise. I feel her now. Her wrinkly face nods approval as I feed my friends. She shakes her head, disappointed, when they can eat no more. “Eat,” she insists. My friends hear this too. “Mom,” they call me sometimes. “Mom,” they ask me, “make me some cookies.” Food is a great way to find friends.

I know food. Food is a tradition in my family, and *fichi d'India* are just one example. We eat fresh foods, use their Italian names, and eat a lot. I once went for a job interview at Longo's, an Italian grocery store. “Why do you want to work at Longo's?” And I told her, “My family goes to Longo's every week. It's a tradition.” I wanted to work somewhere with an aisle full of just pasta, a store filled with the scent of dark coffee and fresh bread. I was attracted to the round purple eggplants, the *finocchio*, the dark green basil right next to the pale grey artichokes, the lemons spilling over into the blood oranges. The interviewer smiled for the first and only time. But she did not know the whole story.

Food is such a part of my family that everyone is shocked when they see our fridge. It overflows with *parmigiano reggiano*, prosciutto, chestnuts, salami, grapes, olives of every variety, capers.

We don't waste; we eat a ton. Oregano, thyme, rosemary, bay leaves, *pepperoncini* in the cupboards—and bags of almonds, pistachios, pine nuts, chickpea flour, and semolina too. When friends come over, they catch our enthusiasm and eat like we do. For my seventeenth birthday party I had four girls over for supper. We ate a loaf of bruschetta, a bowl of hummus, a veggie tray, a fruit tray, a whole pan of Swedish meatballs, baked brie with fruit, and quesadillas. Yes, teenaged boys eat like this, but so do girls.

LAST SUMMER. I BACKPACKED IN PERU FOR A MONTH. I SPENT A week in Tamboya, a village of five hundred souls in the “eyebrow” of the jungle.

Awakened by the roosters, I see the early morning. Fog surrounds the cement houses, the adobe church, and the three schools. By eight the fog lifts, revealing the crown of mountains, green with corn, bamboo, orange trees, grass, and coffee plants. Those breathings in the fog materialize—donkeys and mules, sweet with grassy breath. The residents are already in their *chakeras*, ready to start the day's work. Cows are milked; squabbling chickens and pigs quiet once they have eaten.

Even getting to northern Peru is an adventure. Our brave little Toyota, one of only three cars in Tamboya, travels four hours of washed-out mountain path, fords several small rivers, and negotiates narrow wooden bridges. Foreigners don't come to Tamboya. Ashley was the first, as a Peace Corps volunteer in 2004.

She has returned with a group of twelve high school students and two instructors. We, too, fall in love. This tropical mountain village is different. The people are generous, accepting, loving. Our group experiences culture, language (a Portuguese-accented Spanish), and food. An abundance of food. Many families are almost subsistence farmers. The men sell any surplus in Morropon for cash. Between two and four in the morning they crowd into the three vehicles and leave for market.

My *abuelita*, my little grandmother, and my mother, Theresa, rise at five to cook breakfast. With sun-darkened fingers they place tortillas, made from Tamboyan corn, on a cast-iron griddle in the centre of the wood oven. Orange surrounds black; the pale corn browns. Theresa deftly flips the bubbling patties. *Abuelita* removes the steaming, slightly browned tortillas from the hungry fire. “Do you want help?” I ask. She laughs, knowing I cannot help, and hands me a still-steaming tortilla. It is thick and delicious.

As a guest in Tamboya, I am treated with a courtesy and kindness beyond anything North American. Food is not always plentiful. But what there is—fresh fruit, tamales, rice, beans, eggs, and always coffee—is eaten in joyful abundance. More important than money is community. Food is enjoyed, meals respected, community important, and the land close by. For now, Tamboyans are free. There are no *Star* magazines, no American Eagle Outfitters; they enjoy life’s gifts all the more for what they lack.

This is why I eat. I eat for family meals and fresh food. I eat to enjoy; I eat to live. Biting into the pure sweetness of a prickly pear, I taste Sicily, community, tradition. I taste the jungles of Tamboya, and remember my *abuelita* laughing.

Emily Mitchell

## Riding with Ashley

THE IRRITATING BLARE OF THE ALARM BLASTS ME. I reach over to my bedside table and slam my hand around until the noise stops. I don't want to get up. It's seven o'clock in the morning. The sun's starting to filter thorough my window straight into my eyes. I pull the covers over my head and try to block out the light. I do not want to get up. My dad thinks it will be funny to let my dog jump on my bed and lick my face. It's not. And I still don't want to get up. But I do. Then I see I only have half an hour to get ready and I leap out of bed. Throw on an ugly old t-shirt and my breeches. Pull my hair back into some form of a pony tail. As I leave my room I happen to glance upon my reflection in the mirror. Not my most attractive look. Oh well, who cares? I quickly eat some cereal and then run around trying to find everything I'll need for the day. Water—a lot of water, lunch, sunscreen, baseball hat, running

shoes and paddock boots, bug spray and sunglasses. All of it gets thrown into an old back pack and I get into the car. My dad is driving.

We pull up to the barn. I get out and he drives away. Everything's still quiet. It's only 8:00 am. One of my friends has already started feeding the horses. I put my stuff in my locker and help with feed. We give them hay, grain and water. We bring horses in and we turn horses out. We chat as we do so, our actions synchronized. We do this together often. Troughs are filled and then we start mucking stalls. Fifteen between the two of us. That's usually two trips per stall to the manure pile with the wheel barrow. It gets tiring. Finally we're finished by nine. A break is in order. Too bad, the kids are arriving.

Little girls stream into the barn. Happy, chatty, exuberant little girls. They can barely contain their excitement. Riding camp! "Who am I riding?" "Can we go visit the ponies in the field?" "What craft are we doing today?" "Can we go on a hack?" "Can I ride Prince?" "No, I want to ride Prince!" "Not fair, you rode Prince last week!" "I have to pee."

It's incredible how much noise such small children can produce. It's also irritating. But, with a big smile and an over the top happy voice I reply to their questions. "Okay, girls, settle down. No one's to go into any of the paddocks unless one of the counsellors is with you. Your horses will be assigned when Lauryn gets here. Everyone will have their turn on Prince at some point

this week. We're going to make picture frames for the craft. You'll have to wait until the end of the week to go on a hack and the port-a-potty is over there." My friend and I share a knowing look. It's going to be a long day.

There's real time and then there's Lauryn time. Lauryn time is twenty minutes after whenever she said she'd be there. She's my coach and the barn owner. She's also a good friend. And, for a few weeks in the summer —my boss. My friend and I have been entertaining the campers with funny stories of runaway ponies and falls into ponds. At least we find them funny. It's possible that we're just scaring them. A little fear is always healthy around horses. Lauryn divides the girls into three groups based on their riding experience. I get the novice group—perfect. I take my five girls into the tack room. I learn their names. I will then forget their names periodically over the next few hours. "Okay, girls, sit down on the chairs. All right, we're going to start the day with a little horsemanship."

My novice group groans in unison. "Why do we have to do horsemanship?" "Yeah, it's no fun." "Yeah, can't we go on a hack?"

Inhale, exhale, count to ten. "It's *not* fun, or it isn't *any* fun. Horsemanship is an important part of becoming a good rider. In order to ride horses, we have to know how to take care of them. Don't you girls want to know how to be good riders and take care of your ponies?" They nod reluctantly.

“Okay, we’re going to go over the rules of good feeding first. Can any of you think of anything that would be important to think about when feeding your pony?” The little girls look at each other with blank faces. Then, one little face lights up. “Give him carrots!” They all nod their approval, as do I. “That’s a good one, Marina. One of the rules of good feeding is ‘Feed something succulent every day.’ Good thinking.” “What’s succulent mean?” “It means juicy, something with water in it. Both carrots and apples are succulents. It’s nice to give your pony something other than their regular old hay and grass.” “Is a cucumber a succulent? Because they’re very watery!” “Yeah, what about watermelon? Can we give our ponies watermelon?” Giggles erupt from all five of them. “Those are succulents yes, but we don’t give them to the horses, okay girls?” They manage to nod between their fits of laughter. The next half an hour continues on just as painfully. We manage to establish four of the rules of good feeding. We also establish that the nails that go into the horses’ shoes aren’t the same as those you use in wood and that unicorns aren’t horses’ ancient ancestors.

It’s time for my group’s riding lesson. I’m supposed to help them tack up their horses, giving pointers and teaching them about horses in general. Instead, I tack up their horses while frantically pulling them out of harm’s way. “Girls, you have to wear your helmets when you’re in the stall with your pony...No! Marina you can’t leave the stall door open! Sarah, please do not stand

behind the horse. Remember they can kick you...Why is Prince's halter around his neck? Marina, close your stall door!"

Eventually, I get them all outside and on their ponies. I take them down to the sand ring. Lauryn will teach their lesson—meaning I get a break. I sit under the blazing hot sun. I re-apply sunscreen, how is it possible to burn so easily? The flies buzz around. I try to swat them away but finally give up and let them crawl all over my arms and legs. I hear a loud thump. I look up towards a cloud of dust. The thump is followed by the sound of a little girl wailing in agony. Lauryn runs over to Ashley who's fallen off the favoured Prince. I jump up and grab him before he runs back to the barn. I lead him over to Ashley. She sits on the ground, covered in dirt and tears. No blood, thank God. Lauryn is trying to quiet her down. "Are you hurt Ashley?" She shakes her head. Lauryn turns to me. "Can you help her, please?" She then resumes the lesson. When I mentioned Lauryn was a friend, I didn't mean all the time. Just perfect, I have to deal with the hysterical lump of dirty child on the ground.

"Okay, Ashley, time to get up, there's no use sitting on the ground." She pulls herself up reluctantly, still sobbing. "Okay, are you hurt anywhere? Move your arms and your neck in circles." She does this but for whatever reason, the crying doesn't stop. It's emotional agony. "Okay, Ashley, you need to calm down. Take a deep breath. All right, deep breath in...and let it out. Do it again." I take deep breaths with her and the crying turns into sniffing then

silence. She won't look at me. "Do you want to get back on now?" She shakes her head rapidly. "Why don't you want to get back on?" She shrugs. "Did you actually hurt something?" She shakes her head no. "Are you scared?" She shrugs. "Are you embarrassed?" She shrugs. A little more information would be helpful. "You know Ashley, everyone falls off sometimes. I've fallen off more times than I can count on both my hands and both my feet."

She looks up at me, eyes wide. "But why do you keep riding if you fall off? What if I fall off again? What if I get hurt? How come none of them fell off? What if Prince doesn't like me and doesn't want me to ride him?"

Any anger I had with her quickly dissipates. She's just scared. I've been scared; I know how it feels to fly through the air and land on the hard ground, watching hooves crash around you. "You know, Ashley, it's okay to be scared. But what you have to do is prove to yourself that you can get over being scared. You could go back to the barn, un-tack Prince and wait for the rest of the girls to finish their lesson. Or, you could be brave and get back on and feel proud of yourself. Not everyone can get back on. Do you think you can get back on?" She doesn't know what to do. She wants to say yes, that she can get back on but it's terrifying. "I can walk around with you if you'd like. I'll hold Prince's reins and only let go when you feel comfortable." She ponders this. "Okay, I'll get back on." I give her a leg up and walk Prince around. After a few

minutes she's smiling and laughing again. She joins the rest of her lesson.

We all go back up to the barn to put the horses away. Someone asks Ashley how her lesson was. She beams up at them. "It was great. I got Prince to go over the trotting poles!" She pats Prince and gives him a carrot. She was made of tougher stuff than I had previously assumed.

I get through the rest of the day without too much more anguish. The girls groom their ponies then have lunch and spend the rest of the day doing their craft. The only other incident is Sarah vanishing for a short while. I find her in a tree. Why she climbed up a tree is beyond me. At 5:00 pm cars pull up to collect the kids. They all wave goodbye and give me hugs. I can't help but like them, though I'll never admit it out loud. Time to feed again. My friend and I bring horses in and turn them out. We give them hay, grain and water.

I lock up the barn and wait for my dad to come pick me up. I'm the only one left there. I sit in the long grass. The sun's not hot anymore; a cool breeze is blowing through the trees. I look around me. The horses are happily grazing in the field. Birds fly in and out of the branches of the tall maple trees. It has been a long day. I'm tired, entirely covered in dirt, sunscreen and sweat. One day down, only thirteen more to go.

Matthew Samuelson

## Routine

“HELLO, MATT.”

“Hello, Stephanie. How are you?”

“Good and you?”

“Good.”

“Hey, Matt.”

“Hey, George”

It’s odd calling Mr. Lawrence “George”, but he insists upon it. The hot smell of cheap burnt coffee fills the common area. We fill our cups, exchange chitchat, waking from our home lives into our working lives. It’s still strange wearing dress shoes, dress pants, and a crisp ironed shirt everyday, but it’s my summer job, so I do.

“Good Morning, Matt”

The obligations of civility, meaningless salutations.

Here I am, in my office. I had imagined an office as a special place, where I could magically mature, where my neat production would have tangible results, a place where I would be contributing to the creation of wealth. The office is fifteen feet wide, twelve feet deep, walls painted gray, a bank of lateral filing cabinets, Kelly's desk and computer, my little table and my laptop. This is where I enter data.

I hear the groan of my swivel chair falling into place on its spine as I sit down in front of my table. I open the booklet which has been sitting on my table overnight, just as I left it. I turn to the page which has been bookmarked by a sticky note. The information is organized by tables, seemingly endless rows and columns of employee information—names, birth dates, social insurance numbers, addresses, hours and wages. The first name is Gary Nixon. Born on March 12, 1976, social insurance number 483 076 965, living on Bloor Street, building 132, apartment 7, making 982 dollars every two weeks. Surely, Gary means more than these numbers to someone, but not to me. I move on to the next name, slowly making my way through the information, the numbers, and the lines of the tiny boxes which hold them, lines of lumbers eventually blurring under my gaze, blending into grey

The sole sound in the office is that of typing. Kelly sits at her desk, straight across the room from me, quietly, doing the same type of work as me. She continues to type, steadily working on, never faltering, entering piece of information after piece of

information. The dynamic hammering of her fingers onto a single key punctuates every second, a constant reminder that she refuses to be overwhelmed by the daily routine of the workplace, the option of improving her situation non-existent. She works not for herself, but for her children, her family.

I am sitting down in front of my little table in the corner of the room. Here's a laptop, the booklets of information which I must type into the database, the pad of sticky notes I use to keep my place. Not much, leaving most of the table bare. An empty landscape. Directly opposite is Kelly's desk, bigger than mine, filling out the space near the far wall. It is cluttered, almost overflowing. Her computer and her paperwork, of course. But also pictures of her children, two boys, hair parted with a mother's care, one missing a tooth. A small radio, which softly plays music throughout the day to relieve the tedium. She is permanent. I am temporary.

“Hey, Matt.”

“Hi, Kelly.”

“How was your lunch?”

“Good, yours?”

“Good.”

She has just gotten back from her lunch. Once a week she and the other women of the office will go out for lunch at the deli across the street. It's something to look forward to, a break in the routine, something different.

Theodore Roethke writes in his poem “Dolor”, “I have known the inexorable sadness of pencils, Neat in their boxes, the dolour of pad and pen”. This past summer, I worked at an adult’s job. From nine to five, I lived an adult’s life. I worked with people who had no choice, and were forced to push forward in a dead end situation in order to make a living. I too witness the dolor of the workplace, dolor not physical pain, but mental pain, following the same routine day after day. I can not help but admire Kelly, and the other women whom I worked with, if only for their resilient nature, working hard, fighting through the dolor of the workplace, not for themselves, but for others, sacrificing themselves. I have come away from such an experience with new motivation, realizing that I would like to obtain the luxury of choice in my adult life. I must work hard in the present, to provide myself with opportunities in the future.

Ryan Bagshaw

## The Smell of the Grass

BEFORE THE SUNRISE, BATHURST STREET IS JUST AN IDEA THAT my headlights make real. The dream animals appear out of nowhere—racoons, squirrels, coyotes—and disappear. The night closes behind me. I begin my work before the dawn. The grass is heavy with dew; the night crawlers are relaxed, fat and glossy; fog fills the hollows of the course. The air is chilled, a crisp fall day, capsulated into a summer's morning. The fairway machine headlights in the distance rise and fall: fireflies in the fog.

In the deep grey of false dawn I pitch the cart down the path past the second hole, a long par five, past the eighth, a sharp dogleg left, outlined in dense spruce forest. I pull over. I'm now at my destination, hole number seven. Along the right side of the

fairway is a large deep pond, sliced full of golf balls. Here the fairway is always wet and dense, and the turf is pocked with divots like road rash. I picture the duffers, chopping down into the lush green turf, spatters of mud as scalps of Bermuda grass fly high and flop. I can hear my boss Dave now.

“Jeez. look at that hacker! Looks like he’s digging a cat’s grave out there!”

It’s truly a crime against nature, the way some of these men play. Even though St. Andrew’s is known as a difficult course, it always seems to attract some of the GTA’s worst golfers. We never spare them.

“Look at that dunce, three shots deep and he’s not even past the ladies’ tee. You know the rule about that, right, Jordan?”

“Yes sir! That clown’s gonna have to play that next hole with his pants down.”

The course wakes up as the sun rises. The dream animals retreat into the shadows of the forest, and the birds, warmed by the sun, sing their songs. While filling the divots that pock the fairway, I slip into a zoned out stupor. A dream like trance thought comes over me, thinking of golf, work, and what I’ll do when I’m out of this grass prison. I can’t get one thing out of my mind. Why I have to do such a boring job?

*That bastard, always giving me the worst jobs, why me? Seriously, why me? I’ve been working here longer than all those dweebs combined. Oh*

*well, I'll work my ass off today and get a better job tomorrow. At least I better or I swear to God I'm quitting.*

The sun is halfway to its peak. It warms the course, evaporating the dew up into the clouds. My office, hole seven, is covered in half shadow and half sun, blocked off by a massive hill dividing it from the eighth hole. I fill the divots slowly, packing them with a soil and seed combination that's heaped in the back of my cart. With my shovel, I scoop, dump, stomp. Scoop, dump, stomp. Actions wired into my muscle memory, so practiced I do not think, so practiced I do not feel the time.

The sun reaches its highest point in the sky. The sound of summer peaks, the heat bugs screeching, about to burst in the immense heat. The sun scorches the back of my neck, painting it a light pink. My eyes, squinting, unable to look anywhere but down, no refuge from the sun. Sun, cicadas, heat—must be lunch time. The green pickup truck cart has never moved so slowly. I drive through the tree lined holes, the hazard-filled fairways and fescue-filled rough. I step on the gas pedal. The cart pulls through the short cut, a gravel path behind the driving range, and past the tenth, a dog leg par five, with a big oak tree on the right.

I arrive at the clubhouse, a large building, light blue colour, with a small outside patio, recently carpeted in the same drab colour. A pink and blue interlocking stone is the base for the four patio sets. The clubhouse is relaxed and homey like a cottage, landscaped with ferns, flowers and decorative boulders at the main

entrance. It's surrounded by a practice area, thousands of square feet—putting greens, chipping greens, and a driving range—help for the sub-par golfer. My stomach's shrinking, making such loud noises I have trouble thinking over it.

*Jesus Christ, if I don't eat anything soon my stomach's going to implode. Actually I hope that happens, maybe I'll get to go home early.*

I move inside. I look around, a small kitchen and dining area, mostly formed of rustic stained wood, the walls covered in antique golf memorabilia. A comfortable atmosphere for the old, rich golfers that play here. I turn to see who's working the kitchen. The floor shakes.

*Oh great, Heather.*

“Hey there!”

“Oh, staff, eh? You guys shouldn't be allowed up here you know. I've got work to do and I'm all backed up with your orders.”

I look around, not a soul in here. What a whining bitch she is. So lazy while we're out there working our asses off in the hot sun.

“Sorry, Heather, forgot my lunch. I'll try not to come up here so often”

“Yeah, you better not, or I'll be having a chat with Dave. So what do you want kid?”

“I'll have a cheese burger please, with lettuce, onions, hot peppers, pickles, ketchup, BBQ sauce and pepper.”

“Hmm, well that's a lot. It will be a while, sit down kid”

She better not spit in it. And if she calls me kid one more time I'm going to snap.

Twenty minutes pass.

“Here's your food, kid,”

I grind my teeth.

“Thanks, Heather. Have a nice day”

I place my lunch in the glove box and continue up to the shop, down hole one, a short hole, divided by a golf ball-hungry creek. I pass this, the green and drove up the driveway to our shop.

There it is, the shop, a large aluminum building, our lunchroom, supply shed, garage, and home. I take a large whiff of the air. A smell of decaying grass and pond water fills my nostrils. There's the source, the area outside the shop, a drain we wash the disgusting grass and muck into, affectionately named the `honey pit`. The shop is surrounded by a fifteen-foot hedge, a fence secluding our turf staff behaviour from the high class golfers on the other side.

I walk inside the shop and glance around. Thousands of dollars worth of equipment hanging on the walls, weed whackers, leaf blowers and chainsaws, all things I wouldn't be using today. I walk through the cavern-like warehouse and into the shop hallway. I walk past the disgusting washroom, encrusted with mildew and dirt, past the lockers, over the muddy carpet, past the dingy unused shower in the corner.

Finally I move inside the lunchroom, join the staff of twelve at the large lunch table. We all enjoy our lunches, whether bought or brought, and talk about the stories of the day. We mock the hilariously bad golfers, their equipment, skill and dress.

Jordan, a particularly rowdy character, pipes up.

“Hey, boys! Did you see Mr. Whitfield’s pants today? Should have been at the circus, not the golf course. And what about Mr. Lawrence’s swing? Looks like a gorilla trying to smash that ball. It’s all in the hips, buddy! Betcha I could play better than that goof—blindfolded, with one arm!”

All the boys laugh. Stories of past nights with women and exaggerated golf scores are exchanged. Drawings of the male anatomy were put on the bulletin board mocking fellow co-workers. It’s all in good fun.

“Hey, Jord, look what I drew: you and Heather doing the dirty up at the clubhouse”

“Aw, Bob, man, that’s nasty, anyone but Heather, that whale. Gross”

We all laugh.

It’s then that something clicks in my mind. It doesn’t matter the job I was assigned at the beginning of the day or the experience I had, we all meet as one. The joking, laughing, and reminiscing unites the staff. The brotherhood of the course meeting on common ground, the lunchroom. For the two months of summer we are family, we care for each other, look out for each

other, and help each other. We all experience the same things—the mocking jokes, the early mornings, the dizzying noons. Freedom. The brotherhood of St Andrew's Valley united at 5:00 AM, all for the smell of the grass.

Cameo Allan

## Strong in Heart

THE CALEDON HILLS RING THE HORIZON, FRESH POWDER snow, trees dripping icicles, the sun bright. I've already thrown on an oversized red work uniform jacket and my helmet. Where's my group, the "Pink Princesses"? I've stocked up with peanut-free gummy bears and sheets of Disney stickers, and I'm stoked with my own bubbling energy and excitement. In one hand I hold my class card and a blunt pencil, the other pushes my half-frozen hair back into my helmet. Another winter of endless encouragement, concerned parents, and wailing youngsters. I can't wait. Weekend after weekend I spend trying to motivate and entertain young children. My goal now is to instill a love of skiing and confidence into all my students, no matter how goofy or silly I may look.

But once upon a time on these very same hills, I faced dread, weekend after weekend. I suppose I could have been the champion racer, eager and fearless, strong in heart, courageous on snow. Instead I raced without passion or drive, simply there in body. My legs would collapse at the smallest sign of struggle and I would tumble in the snow.

Standing at the top of the race course a girl, five foot nothing, leans down on her poles. She feels awkward, ungainly. She bites her lower lip, her shoulders hunch. She will not look towards her teammates. Her toes are almost completely numb, the burning pain is setting in. She wiggles her skis, hears the crunching of the snow. Under a thick overcast sky, wind whips over the crests of the hills, tormenting tree limbs, tossing them back and forth. Her teammates laugh, they brag about their new Rossignol World Cup RX race skis. She has Rossignols too, but they are second-hand, recreational style, and officially two inches too short.

The coach points at her and says, “So are you going to run the course or what?”

“Fine,” she says, “but no matter what wise piece of knowledge or helpful tip you give me, I suck no matter what!” Earlier in the training session, she had simply averted her eyes, and had been ignored. Now her isolation called attention to herself.

“Pardon, what did you say?” Justin asks, eyes squinted. Yet already, the giggling teens around him have distracted him.

“Nothing at all,” she says, too quiet for Justin to have heard. She poles herself to the starting gate. That famous Caledon man-made corduroy snow squeaks at her. She hates the cold, the squeaking snow, the endless encouragement from people who aren’t her friends. She hates the competition, but every Saturday and Sunday of every winter she finds herself at the ski club, decked out in a skin-tight blue-flame spandex downhill suit, a pair of useless silver shin guards, and a pout intimidating enough to repel most of her teammates.. If she must endure a winter of listening to her fellow teammates ramble then she’s going to sit miserably and sulk.

It’s racing time, the long anticipated race day. She stretches and prepares to ski, ski faster than ever before. She wants her edges to dig hard into the ice, to hear nothing but the wind zipping past her helmet. She’s going to keep a high line, be aggressive, and keep forward. She’s going to yell when she bursts out of the starting gate and scare the opposing team. She’s going to be fearless.

But then she goes to the locker room to dress. The downhill race suit hugs her angularities. She begins to grind her teeth, clench her fists and bite her lower lip. She feels her feeble ankles break when she stuffs her feet into the ski boots. In the warm up exercises, she is to bend her knees while keeping her arms straight, rotating her ankles while looking down the hill. She abandons her exercises early. She wants to get to the bottom of the

hill before frostbite nips her cheeks. She is an ice monster—angry, cold, and alone.

Real racers had the strength to harness the speed. Real racers wanted the wind to numb their cheeks, to lose all feeling in their fingers and toes, to feel the burn when they entered the hot chalet. Real racers craved race day, thighs burning, skis chattering and slipping out from beneath them on the sharp turns. So I wasn't a real racer. I felt humiliated.

Today, the Pink Princesses arrive for lessons in their snowsuits, top heavy under the bobbling helmets, swaddled in layered pink and purple fleece sweaters, flapping oversized mittens. The clan has gathered together, bearing broad smiles and the news of the past week at school. They are eager to leave their parents behind. They stomp their boots like pachyderms, their coats crinkle in the cold. The girls' long unmanaged hair sticks out in every direction, in their mouths, down their jackets and in their goggles. Their balaclavas are frozen with spit, their lips covered in balm, their eyes bright with excitement.

I learned what it takes to have a sense of individualism, a painful life experience. I have begun to focusing on my strengths, an experience of great personal growth. The most important life lesson that racing could have taught me was best expressed by Eleanor Roosevelt when she said, "Nobody can make you feel inferior without your permission."

Nicole Doucette

## Timeless

WHAT IS TIME? IT IS NOT TANGIBLE, BUT STILL CAN BE FELT IN the wear of old bones and the stiffness of our joints. Seen in the creased faces of our grandmothers and fathers, and shown by the rough stubble on a young man's face. But time does not make us age; it is time that measures aging. So time is a measurement. Age itself is a form of measurement. But what about dates? They are not measurements. They are simply snapshots in time, a death or birth, a dentist's appointment or a best-before date. And if dates are not measurements, then where does that leave us? Time is a concept which we have created, but cannot understand ourselves. In our fear we have put limits on a limitless universe, we change and shape and mould what we cannot understand into something we can. Or at least something we can try to understand.

When I was very young, I used to sing. I strove to be flawless, to be perfect in pitch, harmony and presentation, a daunting task for a child. And so, every single day, I spent sixty minutes practicing. An hour of time I could never get back. I remember when I auditioned for my school musical, and after I was done, the director was crying. I was proud of this, that I could make people smile, or even cry. This is why I did it, not for myself, but for everyone else. I did it for the control I had over people's emotions, I did it because I could change and captivate them, just with my voice.

Control is something we always fight for. Control of our lives, of other lives, of cities, even whole countries. We walk against the current of time instead of embracing it, and we know which one is easier to do.

We used to watch *Grey's Anatomy* every Thursday night. We would sit on my musty leather couch in the basement, him on the right, me on the left, our sock-clad feet propped up on the coffee table, shoulders pressed together. The feeling of the warmth of his body against mine and the roughness of his hands. I remember small details, me sneaking looks at him, watching how the flickering light of the television caressed his face with a soft white glow, how lucky I felt. I loved it. It wasn't the show, it was the time. An hour of time I got to spend with him, all alone, all to myself. Rarely can I recall what happened in the show. I treasure these moments because I know no one sticks around forever.

I remember when I was asked to sing the national anthem at a business awards ceremony at the Toronto Metro Convention Centre. I always had mind-numbing stage fright, and while I was terrified at the prospect of performing in front of hundreds of important adults, I said yes. I remember the racing of my heart and the twisting of my stomach as I walked onto the stage, my heart pumping with adrenaline, filling me up, speeding me up. The relief that flooded me as I walked off. I was told I sang well, but all I remember from that night is how my heart was hammering like a bass drum, resounding and filling my head. It went by in a multicoloured blur of nameless faces and pounding bright lights, sweat and nerves. An unforgettable experience. *Unforgettable.*

Unforgettable. We use this word loosely, but we must remember, that as long as time moves, something is changing. Our minds cannot withstand the erosion of time, age erasing memories like dust blown off a counter. In this fragile life, if we do not have control and we do not have our memories, what do we have? What we have is our choices. We can control what decisions we make in our lives, whether we want to brush our teeth in the morning, what we want to eat for dinner, who we will spend our lives with. However insignificant, every choice we make is a moment in time that we can never get back. Tread carefully, because we rarely get a chance to re-do our decisions.

It was just over a year ago when he joined the Army. He said he won't leave me, but he made the choice. He chose to go

where I cannot follow. He is changing, his long hair buzzed to a military cut, a few more scars than he started with. Drinking more heavily, trying to forget what he has already learnt and later will see, more unsure in the slippery footings of right and wrong. The Army is changing him, and I resent it for that.

Change is inevitable, and yet we all try to stop it in its tracks. But such is the nature of life, no matter how hard you try, it keeps on moving forwards. Time is relentless. And if you stay there, that is when you get left behind.

I want to grab him by the shoulders and shake him hard. Tell him that he will not come back the same person who left, that what he's training to do is monstrous, that it is catastrophic, that it will change everything. Training to murder and massacre, training to play God standing amidst the destruction of mankind, the rag-doll dead children and their mothers, the chaos which he has helped create. That he may join the masses, the nameless dead, and leave me here, alone. But his life is not mine, and the words stick in my throat. It is his choice, and not mine. What he has decided is final, and it carries away time, a fall wind bearing away the whispers of dead leaves. How can I belong to someone who does not belong to himself?

I don't sing anymore. A few years ago, I quit. I haven't sung since. I don't remember that day, just the lift of some crushing weight off my chest and the disappointment of my decision. I don't know why I did it, the terrible stage fright, the

constant pressure to be flawless in voice and performance? That's what I told my younger self, but now I know better. I was afraid to lose what I had, I was scared that because I was so good, there was nowhere to go but down. Like an hourglass with hissing sand, and the harder we grasp a handful of sand, the faster it slips through our fingers.

But the world is huge, and our choices are infinite. We can't always go back, but we can always go forwards. Try to fix those we've wronged, try not to think too much and ruin what we have. Time sits in the palm of our hands, and it is up to us what we decide to do with it. And though we may become caught up in this vast swirling of time, we can set down our feet, and say *no*. Time has nothing on us.

Mark LaRiviere

## Walking the Death March

THE PORTAGE BETWEEN DIAMOND LAKE AND WILLOW ISLAND Lake is five clicks of mud, slippery hills, mosquitoes, and deer flies, deer flies big enough to punch. After four days of bug-bites, we're red and swollen all over, under the dirt. It is warm, making it bad mosquito weather—good for them, bad for us. Five clicks of bites, five clicks of hell. We call this the Death March.

We pole our way through the swamp, using all of our strength to pull our way through the reeds and yank our paddles out of the mud, rupturing pockets of undisturbed methane gas, releasing them in our faces. We can't step into the water: too many leeches. Ryan had his foot in for a few seconds and he ended up having to rip four of the buggers off. We learn from one another's mistakes. No one is going in the swamp.

I think back to when I told my mom about the trip. When she was nineteen, her older brother, Mark, died of hypothermia in a canoe incident with the St. John's School of Ontario. I'm his namesake. This trip is only an hour's drive beyond Timiskaming where the accident happened. My mother was frightened.

"Mom, I swear, it will be fine. We will have prepared for a month. The counsellor has a ton of experience. No mom, please don't cry. You aren't going to lose me too, I promise."

Unlike my uncle's trip, we were ready, experienced, rested, but there was still some doubt in me. If my Grandmother ever knew I went on this trip I probably wouldn't get those Edward VII coronation plates in my inheritance. I've lived through dozens of her rants about those plates.

"You little devil. Keep that up and you won't be getting those plates."

Those bloody plates! I don't give a damn. I'll sell them on eBay.

We reach the start of the portage. Quinnie is in the bow and he's the first out. He hops out of the canoe, and sinks knee deep in mud.

"What the--"

He tries to move forward but his legs end up sinking a little bit more.

"Quinn! Don't move!"

"Guys, I can't get out."

He's up to his chest in mud. We set canoes on either side of him and stand in them so we don't sink too. It takes six of us to pull him out, grabbing his arms and under his shoulders.

“Okay, one...two...three...!!!”

Out pops Quinnie, the creature from the black lagoon with a not-so-pretty mug, minus a hiking boot.

We start to load up. Marshmallow packs and food barrels for the little guys, Grumman for the bigger fellas.

“Jer, Marc, grab the broken Grumman.”

They call me Jerry—two guys named Mark and Marc make things awfully confusing. Apparently I look like a Jerry. I don't see it. The other Marc stands six-four and weighs in at two sixty; no one should be that big at fifteen. I stand in his shadow—and we are supposed to tandem this busted Grumman. The centre thwart, the yoke, is broken.

Marshmallow packs are easy, full food barrels can be a challenge, and portaging a canoe alone is pretty difficult. I would rather do any of those for twice the distance than tandem a Grumman. They're built so the yoke is the centre of gravity, and to tandem it from the stern thwart and bow is incredibly painful.

“Front or back?”

“Back.”

“Wear your lifejacket upside down.”

“Why?”

“Just do it Marc, you'll thank me later.”

This was a nifty trick I picked up on day two on a short portage when the tandem wasn't bad. This one's a bitch. He will thank me later.

The first kilometre of the portage is mud, uphill then downhill. The stink carries. Slippery going up, slippery coming back down, and patches of sucking mud on the flats. A single, foot-wide log lies across the sticky mud. I'd hate to slip off. I'd hate to see this place after a rainy day.

"You good, Marc?"

"Can we switch? I think my shoulders are bleeding."

"Yeah."

Sure enough, the thwart cut poor Marc right down the middle of both shoulders.

"Should've flipped the lifejacket."

"Heh. At least they look badass."

I bruise faster than a peach, so I flip my lifejacket upside down, protecting my shoulders. Already I can feel the thwart digging through.

The second kilometer is dry, but there are ponds on either side of the narrow path. Legions of mosquitoes breed here. I hate those nippy mothers.

"Christ, Marc, my legs are getting destroyed."

"Lucky you. If your head was above the canoe you'd get your face bitten off like me."

Apparently I'm not getting the worst. Because I'm in the back my face is covered by the canoe. Marc on the other hand is attacked by an armada of the tiny bloodsuckers. We later count, between us, over one hundred and forty bites from the two hour portage.

The third and fourth kilometers are a nice change in scenery. Spruce are spread far enough that we aren't getting poked by outstretched needles, but the path has turned to algae-speckled rock. We have traded off bugs for difficult terrain and a better chance of a sprained ankle or broken leg. A single log stretches over a rivulet. It's the only way over.

"Careful."

"You don't need to tell me."

"I do. I am *not* falling. If I do, you're coming with me."

The log bends under the weight of us and the canoe. It creaks, it groans, it strains to hold us as we cross. The cabin idiot, Brent, is at the end waiting for us with his marshmallow pack, smiling, not even breaking a sweat. I could kill him.

"Last k. guys! It looks pretty clear!"

"Shut it, Ass-Monkey, we're dying over here."

"Settle, Jer, we're almost done."

Marc and I switch places again, and this time he is sure to flip his lifejacket. The final klick is all uphill. It's a straight path, trees snuggled together so tight it's a wonder the roots have room to spread. No light can seep through the branches above us, but in

the distance we see the light reflecting off the cool water of Willow Island Lake.

“Want to run it, Marc?”

“Let’s do it.”

We barrel past Brent and run towards the end as fast as the Grumman permits us. The last fifty meters are a blur. The rest of the guys cheer as our pace quickens, roaring their pride as we approach the end.

With a heave, Marc and I toss the Grumman aside, not needing to worry about damaging the canoe, it crashes as loud as thunder. Nothing to hold us back, we sprint into the lake. Cold, cold, cold. Cold relief on itches and scratches, cold water on a hot day.

We emerge from the water still bloodied and bitten, but the death march is over. We have conquered Death.





# Fiction



Melissa Bromley

## Boyfriends

FOR ONCE THE PARTY ISN'T OUT OF CONTROL. UNDER FIFTEEN people – just like mom said. Nothing's broken, and no one's sick. Yet. I still can't believe my mom is letting me have this party after the 'party gone wrong' a few weekends ago. It was an absolute disaster, but I still somehow managed to clean everything up, get the alcohol out of the house, and move all the furniture back to normal before she got home. Tonight's not going to be crazy though. Other than Ty's friends, Nicole and Hilary, there aren't any random people coming and I know everyone from school.

“Shit, Nicole would be drunk after two shots... Great!”

“Is this Tyler actually not being a sly guy? Motto for tonight: ‘Let's not take advantage of the drunken girl,’ OK, Ty?” I can't help laughing a bit.

“You’re just hilarious, Cass!” He rolls his eyes but he is so holding back a smile. “I think Hilary will be spending most of the night with her though, not me”

“Well, I’ll go get some food, maybe you can try and sober her up a bit so you don’t have to let Hilary babysit her the whole time.”

“Yeah, thanks, Cassy-love, you’re a doll,” calling me just one of many nicknames he’s made up through the years—only Ty.

I knew buying those frozen pizzas a few days ago that they would be put to good use. I’ve learned by having a few parties that extra food is always important. I slide the pizzas into the oven. Hilary is trying to control the drunken twirling ballerina that Nicole has now transformed into. I definitely know how Hilary feels though. Drunken friends are no fun when they don’t know what’s going on. Hilary’s much prettier than her Facebook pictures at least. Tyler gave me a heads up on who the girls were, so obviously I did the usual thing and creped some pictures on Facebook. Perfectly normal. Hilary has long wavy blonde hair, and tonight two braids pull back her bangs and they are pinned together at the back. She walks into the kitchen slowly, looking tired.

“I’m sorry she’s already like this. I’m Hilary by the way, thanks for having me. Well, us.”

“No problem. I put some pizzas in the oven and they should be done soon! Maybe Nicole can have some of that and sober up a bit!”

“That would be great, thank you so much!”

“Anytime! So you go to Bell Senior High, right? Tyler’s given me some details.”

“Yeah, I do. Tyler seems like a really nice guy. Maybe if Nicole sobered up she would notice that!” Hilary laughs. “I’m not drinking tonight though, so she’ll love these stories tomorrow because I’ll remember it all!”

“Oh, did you drive here?”

“Yeah, my parents actually gave me the car. My dad goes away a lot on the weekends for business so I usually get to take his car at one point.” She starts fiddling with her keys. “Sometimes it’s a pain though. People think I can drive every night while they get drunk out of their minds. But I don’t usually mind.”

“I know what you mean; my mom goes away a lot lately with her new boyfriend on the weekends.”

“Oh, are your parents separated?”

“Yeah, they actually divorced when I was eleven.” Not exactly an upbeat conversation for a party.

“I’m sorry, that’s really too bad.” It looked as though she felt kind of guilty for even asking, but who am I to say.

“It’s okay. It seems like it’s been tough for my mom though, she’s never really been able to stick with one guy for a while since the divorce.”

“I can totally understand how that would be tough for her.”

“Yeah, but anyways, since I usually have the house to myself on the weekends, everybody wants me to have parties. So welcome!” Laughing, I go to the oven to get the pizzas.

HEARING A KNOCK ON THE DOOR, I KNOW WHO IT IS. I OPEN the door to see Hilary standing there smiling with plastic bowls piled high in her hands, and dangling from her arms grocery bags filled with pancake mixes and utensils and her bag with swimming stuff. Ever since that party I had a few months ago when Hilary came with Nicole—who ended up sick in the bathroom for the rest of the night basically—we’ve become really good friends. Our friendship is fun and easy, and we talk about anything. Every Saturday when neither of us are busy, Hilary comes over after she drops her dad off at the airport and then we spend the day doing whatever we feel like.

“Sorry I’m a little late, the airport was pretty busy. I am so hungry though, we *need* to make breakfast”

“No problem. Yeah, let me help you with that, and then let’s get cooking!” I grab some of the bags and bring them into the kitchen. I don’t know how Hilary has been holding all of that, it’s taking up half of the kitchen counter, but I grab the bowls, pour some of the pancake mix and then add the water.

“I can’t wait to eat these.” Hilary puts the pan on the stove and turns the element on.

“Same here! They look pretty good right now.”

By the time we eat all the pancakes, I don't know about Hilary, but I can barely move. I'm so full. I think we made around twenty-five pancakes, and we probably ate almost ten each.

"So should we just save the rest for my mom then?" I struggle, laughing.

"Yeah I think that would work. I know I definitely can't eat anymore. I'm so full." Hilary grabs her stomach then slumps over in her chair. I agree and bring the plate with the extra pancakes over to the counter. We start cleaning up the rest of the mess we've made.

"So speaking of your mom, am I *ever* going to meet her boyfriend? You said you finally think he's a decent guy—sweet, nice, and she seems so bubbly and happy lately!"

"He's actually coming over today."

"Really?"

"Yeah, around two, I think. My mom didn't see him last weekend so I think she said he was coming over today."

"Finally! I've wanted to meet him for so long now"

"I want to meet your dad now too, though!"

"He was actually home last weekend;. He didn't have to go to Atlanta. Next time he doesn't go, we'll go to my house and make pancakes so you can meet him!"

"Okay, awesome! So why does your dad go to Atlanta all the time anyways?" I'm pretty sure it's because of business, but I'm not entirely sure.

“Because it’s his job. His new job with Google needs him in Atlanta fairly regularly on the weekends.”

“Well, that kind of sucks a bit, but at least he’s home sometimes.”

“Yeah, during the week, so after school he’s home.”

“True, so it’s not like he’s never home.”

“Exactly.”

We clean up all the dishes.

“Time to tan?”

“Yes, please!” Hilary already has her bag of clothes and is headed up to my room.

“I really need to get rid of these tan lines – I don’t want bad ones for prom!”

“Wear that cute strapless—”

“Got it!”

“Yeah, that one. Hey, which prom dress did you end up choosing?”

“Oh, god. We had a little scene—okay, maybe not a scene, but my mom got pretty upset at one point.” I look across my room and see Hilary changing, and I turn to face away.

“What! What happened?”

“Do you remember that strapless, long white dress from BCBG that has the diamond detailing on the top?”

“Yeah, that was gorgeous!”

“Well, apparently it looked a lot like my mom’s wedding dress.”

“Actually?”

“Just the whole strapless idea, diamond detailing, and then long and white. So she didn’t make it a huge deal or anything, but I can just tell when she’s going to get upset, and that was *so* one of those moments!”

“No way! That sucks. Your mom always gets kind of upset over marriage situations, right?”

“Basically. So I felt kind of bad, I couldn’t do that to my mom.”

“Right, that makes sense. It’s funny though. My parents are just about to celebrate their twenty-fifth wedding anniversary, so my mom actually had her wedding dress out the other day! I couldn’t believe it!”

“That’s adorable!”

“Yeah, pretty cute, eh?”

“Definitely. So yeah, I ended up choosing the faded pink dress, and I love it!”

“Really? The long pink one with the one strap that has flowers? I *love* that one!”

“Same! So now I just have to get rid of my tan lines before prom!”

“Well, at least you have a ridiculously nice day out to start.”

“I like your thinking, Hil!” As I open the back doors, it feels like a huge wave of heat just hit me. It is so hot out!

“Thank god you have a pool, Cass. I’ll be in there in probably, oh, five minutes.”

“I don’t blame you; I’ll probably be right behind.”

“So....” Hilary is hesitating. Not good. I just have this feeling she is going to bring up something embarrassing. “How’s this prom date looking? Cutie or what?”

“Hil, you know I’m going with Ty. Just as friends.”

“I know I know! It’s just fun giving you a hard time. But in all honesty, do you ever think that maybe you and Ty could be more than just friends?” She doesn’t look me in the eye when she’s saying this.

“I seriously don’t know. We get along so well together, but that’s only because we’ve been friends for so long and we don’t have to worry about impressing each other.”

“That’s true. It would be nice if it were easy though, you know.”

But it might be a bit awkward.” I start to rub on some tanning lotion. “Like I love Ty, but I love him like a brother, so I’ll always love him.”

“And you wouldn’t want that to ever change, right?”

“That and I just wouldn’t want to ever lose him. Like what if we eventually did become more than just friends, but then

something happened and we didn't talk again. I wouldn't want to lose our friendship, or him."

"But if you think about it, you'll never really know if you don't try. And who knows, maybe it will work out."

"I totally get that, but I don't exactly want to get serious with him right now. We're best friends so I don't really want to start something now, it's too early."

"They do say you always end up with your best friend!"

This is so not fair, she's bombarding me! It's just Ty, we're best friends. Oh my god, she's making me think about it more now. "Okay, enough out of you! I'm not talking to you about this anymore—you're making me think about it too much! We're friends. And I'm just going to go sit in the pool on my own now to get away from you!"

"Already time for a dip, eh? Good job at avoiding the conversation."

"I seriously don't remember the last time it was this hot!"

"Haaaa! Okay, but yeah, it is a little over the top. This tan better be worth it!"

"Oh, it should be!"

"So, I was just wondering..."

"Again?"

"No this is actually serious, I swear!"

"Fine... what?"

"What ever happened to your dad?"

“My dad. Troy. Well just before I was ten, he and my mom started to have a lot of problems. I never really got told about the real issue, I just heard the yelling.”

“Holy crap.”

“Yeah. I don’t know, so I guess the problems started, and then a few years later it was really bad, and one day he just left. Barely said goodbye to us, just left.”

“That’s awful, I’m so sorry, Cass.”

“Oh really, it’s okay. There was enough time for me to love the man, and then hate him once he left.”

“Wow.”

“It wasn’t even me so much though, but my mom. Once they got the divorce, my mom and I moved. She kept calling it a ‘new start’, but it still seemed a little tough on her.”

“Worth a try though.”

“Yeah, but it meant little boyfriends here and there—nothing that would last.”

“But now there’s Jack? That’s good at least!”

“Yeah, exactly! He seems great, and they’re really happy. I’ve only met him a handful of times, but he seems good for her.”

“I can’t wait to meet him!”

“Can’t wait to meet who?” my mom asks, stepping outside.

“Your new *boyfriend!* How are you, Brandy?” Hilary is so overdramatic with the “boyfriend” that it’s kind of funny.

“I’m just great, Hil!” She laughs and checks her watch. “Jack should actually be over in a while. We were thinking of staying in for lunch, then maybe going out tonight!”

“Great! I’m so excited; I want to meet this man!”

“You will soon, don’t worry! Is there any chance you girls could take the dog for a walk in about twenty?”

“Really, mom? It’s just getting nice out, I do need a tan!”

“Yes really, please. Coco hasn’t been out much yet today.”

“Anything for you, Brandy!” Hilary definitely deserves a little stare for that one.

“Thanks a lot, Hil.”

“You can walk Coco, come back, talk to Jack, and then come back out to tan. It works just fine.” Of course my mom would come up with a plan for this.

“Yeah, fine, we’ll do it. Just definitely give us twenty minutes!”

“No problem! I’ll yell at you guys when you should take Coco out!”

“Sounds good, mom.” When my mom is inside, I turn to Hilary who is really enjoying the sun in the pool. “I so don’t want to get out of the pool.”

“I agree, but whatever, it won’t be for too long!”

Floating around in the pool we relax for the next twenty minutes, thankfully avoiding all conversations about Tyler and any future we might have. Instead I’m able to turn the conversation

over to Hilary's boys. She couldn't resist explaining her whole situation and explaining who she was going to prom with. "So, even though you're going to prom with Craig, you're still interested in Luke, who likes Claire, but wants to go to prom with you?"

"Pretty much." Of course it's simple to her...

"That's fairly confusing."

"Not really. Well I guess the fact that Craig likes me and doesn't really know about Luke makes it a bit more confusing, but it's really quite simple."

"Two boys, one Hilary... how tragic." God, I'm funny.

"So not that! I'm just going to prom with Craig, and hanging out more now with Luke."

"Oh right, I'm glad that just cleared everything up!" I'm never going to be able to understand what she is going on about. Way too many love triangles going on.

"You're such a bitch." Hilary laughs and shakes her head at me.

"I know!"

Laughing we walk inside and upstairs to my room. "Mom we're just going to go put some dresses on then go walk Coco."

"Yeah, that's great girls."

When we came back downstairs, my cute little Coco with her Coach collar and bright pink leash is waiting for us at the front door.

“Aw, that’s the cutest thing ever! Go get your camera, Cass!”

I run to my room, get my camera, and come back down without Coco moving one bit... well except her tail moving side to side in pure happiness. “I’ve actually never seen her do this, this is pretty funny!”

“I guess that might be a hint to take her out, eh girls?”

“Yeah,” we say together.

Just as we are putting on our shoes and getting ready to go, the doorbell rings.

“Jack?” Hilary sounds so excited.

“I think so!” Now my mom’s excited too.

“I’ll get it,” Hil said making her way to the door.

After that, the weirdest thing happens. Something I don’t know how to explain, or why I even have to experience it in the first place. The tall, tanned, familiar brown-eyed man is standing in the doorway with a bouquet of flowers in his arms. It’s Hilary though—I have never seen her so stiff and confused. The only word she can say is the word that brought everything crashing down.

“Dad!”

Rachel Mester

## Coffee for Two

LILY WAS JUST SETTLED IN WHEN HE PUSHED OPEN THE DOOR and walked in, stood right in front of the barista station, and scanned the room.

She had her favourite spot, by a bright window framing a coffee table, and two comfortable chairs. The chairs faced a little couch, creating a small island. Looking across the couch she had a view of everyone, coming and going, clacking on their laptops, leaning over small tables to exchange confidences. Lily looked over to the bar, the steam hissing, the complex little dances of the baristas, and suddenly there he was. Solid, square-shouldered, grinning. *Hello, handsome.*

He scanned the room, his eyes catching her gaze. She felt the sudden link, the crossing of eye-beams. That grin.

And now he was walking across the shop on a heading right to her little island. His green eyes never swayed from Lily's own greys, though his shaggy brown hair kept falling in his face. Flannel shirt and ripped jeans flecked with all different colours of paint. Lily's scrutiny rose back up to that tanned face, her breath catching on that damned grin. She could feel the blush rising, and she bit her lip, letting her gaze fall from that smiling face to the cushions on the couch. *That fabric*, Lily thought, *is probably chintz*.

"Hey."

He swung himself down on the chintz couch, leaned forward, and winked.

"Hey yourself."

Lily began to lean forward unwittingly, letting herself get drawn closer and closer to those captivating green eyes.

"Tall black coffee for... Lily?"

Lily tore her gaze from those eyes and that lazy smile to glance up at the barista standing above her, holding a tray with several steaming mugs of coffee, and receipts in the other hand.

"That's me."

"Here's your coffee." The barista set it down on the table with a soft clink, and turned to eye Lily's companion appreciatively, doing the same once-over Lily had done only minutes ago. She looked at him with a come-hither smile.

"Can I get you anything, sweetie?"

He smiled charmingly. "A double double, please."

“Kay.” The barista took a second to internalize the information. “I need a name,” she blushed, “for the order I mean.”

He laughed. “Adam.”

“Hmm, Adam,” said the barista, rolling the name around on her tongue, testing it out. “Your coffee will be ready in a few.” With that, the barista ceased her scrutiny of Adam and left, leaving them with only Lily’s steaming mug and a faint smell of cinnamon. Lily watched the girl carefully, blushing when a thought rose unbidden to the forefront of her mind.

*Hub. Competition.*

For a moment, Lily avoided looking at Adam, because she knew if she caught a glimpse of that half-smile, she would blush even more. And that would just be embarrassing.

“Hey, Lil?”

“Oh, hey.” Lily greeted Adam as if she had forgotten he was there.

“Black coffee? Really?” Adam eyed the dark liquid sceptically.

“Yes. Really.” Lily confirmed that by lifting her mug and taking a long, appreciative draught.

“It’s already black, hun, you really need to chug the stuff?”

Lily’s face must’ve have been beet red with all the blushing she’d been doing around this guy. *Just my luck to be freakishly pale with a penchant for being embarrassed.*

“Shut up. I’m tired.”

Adam laughed loudly, leaning back into the cushy chintz chair. Swinging his arm around the back of the chair, he appeared—to Lily—to be the very image of ease.

“Coffee dependent before you even graduate from university? I’m shocked and dismayed.” Adam’s feigned shock earned a chuckle from Lily.

“Not dependant...well acquainted,” Lily corrected.

“All right, that’s fair.” He conceded the point with good grace.

“Adam?”

Lily and Adam both looked up to see the barista from before, holding a tray supporting only one mug of coffee.

“Yes?”

“Here’s your double double. I made it myself.”

“Oh, uh, thanks.”

“Just call me if you need anything....”

Lily tuned out the annoyingly flirtatious barista, and took that brief moment of respite to take a short sip from her still steaming mug. She closed her eyes and let the warm, strong flavour envelop her senses for a short moment.

With her eyes closed, Lily let her other senses take over. The sharp click clack of typing, the low hush of relaxed conversation. The concentrated whirl of coffee machines at work. Lily inhaled deeply, surrounding herself with the smells of the small shop. Mostly coffee, but underneath, a strong current of chocolate

and cinnamon. She filled her lungs with hot, midday air, revelling in the feeling of her chest overflowing with oxygen.

Lily was so lost in her senses that she almost didn't notice when Adam started to talk again.

"So, what exactly do you do?" he asked, leaning forward over the small table separating them.

"Huh?" Lily blinked a few times. She took a quick gulp of her coffee to jolt herself out of the scent-induced stupor.

"Work," Adam clarified, chuckling. "What do you do at work?"

"Oh!" *What DO I do at work? Think...* "Customer relations." *Teller at a bank.* "I help people get valuable resources." *I cash birthday cheques for snot-nosed twelve year olds.* "My company is all about customer service, so I work with lots of people every day." *Some jerk broke the ATM last week, now all transactions go through me.*

"Sounds pretty interesting."

Lily just nodded, sipping at her coffee. She set her mug down with a muted clink, resting her elbows on her knees.

"What about you?"

Adam just gestured to his paint-covered clothes.

"I work for a contractor right now, just to pay my way through school."

"Oh? What are you studying?"

"Teaching."

“Wow, you must have the patience of a saint!” *Or at least more than I do.*

“Or I’m just a glutton for punishment.”

“Touché,” Lily conceded, and smiled. Adam grinned back, sipping at his coffee leisurely. “But enough about work. Let’s talk about something else.”

“Like what? What do you want to talk about?”

Lily paused. She felt her coffee cooling as she contemplated. Then, an idea.

“What’s your favourite colour?”

“Easy,” Adam retorted. “Green.”

“The colour of your eyes? Really?” Lily laughed at him. Adam flicked his hair out of his eyes, and peered at her intently.

“You’ve been looking at my eyes?” he asked her curiously.

Lily froze. *Ab! Caught!* She looked at Adam, then down at her coffee, then back at Adam again, searching frantically for a non-creepy way to explain why she had been staring at his eyes. He was still looking at her through the fringe of his dark hair, eyebrows raised curiously.

He cracked a wide grin, chuckling.

“It’s okay. Everyone does.”

“Yeah, yeah,” Lily said as a reflex. She needed to change the subject. “Favourite food?”

“Kraft Dinner with ketchup.” Lily did a double take. Adam held up his hands in mock surrender, before explaining: “I

know, I know, ketchup is blasphemy and what not.” Now it was Adam’s turn to look embarrassed, because Lily was having trouble controlling her laughter. “Hey, what about you? Colour? Food?”

“Red, and mint chocolate chip ice cream.”

“Movie?”

“*The Notebook*. You?”

“*Anchorman*. Book series?”

Up until now, Lily had failed to notice how close they were, sitting at the edge of their seats, leaning over their table. This close, Adam’s eyes were blue-green, in contrast to the warm orange decor of the coffee shop. She cleared her throat and looked away. Adam watched her expectantly. Lily raised an eyebrow.

“Oh, you actually expect me to choose?”

“Of course!”

“But there are millions of good books out there!” Lily threw her hands up in exasperation.

“Choose one!”

“I *can’t!*” Lily leaned away.

“Choose!” Adam leaned closer, a smile in his eyes. Lily shook her head insistently and zipped her lips, throwing away the key. Adam rolled his eyes, flashing her that crooked grin of his. He leaned even closer to Lily, raised an eyebrow, daring her.

“Choose,” he asked quietly.

*Well fine, if we’re playing like that.*

“*Twilight*.” Lily answered with a smirk, laughing internally when Adam sat back in his chair. It was so difficult to keep a straight face when he sighed heavily, his breath ruffling untidy bangs. Lily waited as he sat there, contemplating for a few moments. He swung himself forward, one hand mussing the hair on the back of his head, the other reaching needily for his coffee. Lily giggled—*since when do I giggle?*—when he rubbed his eyes as if he were exhausted. He eyed Lily seriously.

“I’m afraid, that unless you are joking, we can’t be friends anymore.”

Lily smiled widely. “Then we’re okay, because I’ve settled on *Hitchhiker’s Guide*.”

Adam sighed in monumental relief. “I’m a Tolkien man myself. T.V. show?”

Lily began to lose herself amid all the questions being thrown back and forth. She hadn’t had to think this fast since those one minute math quizzes back in grade school.

“If you were a Pokémon...”

“Best sport and why. Go!”

“Most embarrassing moment?”

She was so caught up in her discussion that Lily failed to notice the sun settling from a powerful mid-afternoon blaze to a quiet, late afternoon glow. The sounds of typing and discussions had ceased, and traffic blared outside the shop with the noise of people heading home to their families. *Or their televisions*. Lily was

about to ask Adam about his position on favourite pets when the young barista from earlier approached their table.

“Hey, um. We’re closing soon. Like fifteen minutes. So, yeah.” She walked away awkwardly, leaving Lily and Adam in an awkward silence. Lily checked her phone—dead.

“What time is it?” She asked.

“Oh, um, about five,” Adam answered, flipping out a dark blue cell phone.

“Have we really been talking for two hours?” Lily spared a glance at the clock over the cashier’s counter—yes, they had.

“I guess so. I hope you didn’t have anything important to do today,” Adam added as an afterthought. He took a swig of his coffee, grimacing as it hit his taste buds. “Blech, cold.” With a shake of his head, Adam downed the rest of the cold drink.

Lily glanced at him as he flicked his hair out of his eyes. As reluctant as she was to leave, they probably both had places to be.

“Maybe we should go pay?” she suggested, gesturing at their empty mugs.

“Will they make us wash dishes if we don’t?” Lily thought she was immune to that crooked smile, but apparently not. Her heart thumped loudly—obnoxiously—in her chest; even worse when those green eyes caught the light of the sunset, turning hazel.

*Silly girl.* Lily shook her head to clear her thoughts.

“Probably. Let’s go.”

Lily stood, walking with Adam to the cashier. She tried not to smile too noticeably when their hands brushed on the way, delighting in the butterflies currently having a wild dance party in her stomach. She was aware of the barista eyeing them carefully while she rang Adam up.

As the barista handed Adam his change, Lily was sad to see their day end. Had she really spent that long in a coffee shop, just talking? *I haven't done anything like this since high school.* Hadn't had the time. Hadn't had the patience. Lily jumped slightly when Adam tapped her on the shoulder.

“So, you come here often?”

“Every once in a while.”

Adam smiled genuinely. No flirting grin or charming smirk. A real genuine, showing-teeth smile.

“Guess I'll see you around, Lil,” he said in goodbye, giving her shoulder a friendly squeeze. Much to Lily's regret, Adam turned to leave, heading out the double doors and out into the real world.

Lily smiled to herself, looking down at the counter. She rubbed her shoulder happily while handing the waitress a five dollar bill.

“So? Dish!”

Lily glanced up in confusion. “Excuse me?”

The young barista had suddenly become animated, looking Lily directly in the eye. “Well, who is he? Your friend?”

Booooyfriend? Who?” She cooed, sounding every inch the high school girl she most likely was.

“Oh.” *In my dreams.* Lily blushed again, glad that the light of the sunset invading the store made everything red, and not just her flushed face. She turned to watch Adam in the parking lot as he approached a pick-up truck, hopped in, and drove away. Lily grinned at the waitress, a poor imitation of Adam’s half-smile.

“I have no idea.”

Shuai Yuen

## The Contours of the Landscape

IT WAS SATURDAY, ABOUT ELEVEN IN THE MORNING, QUIET, sunlight drifting down through the old maple in the yard. I'd been drafting a proposal for Lebovich, a development plan for some farmland they'd bought some years back, north and east of the city. I pictured old man Lebovich sitting there, poker-faced, a big cigar in his hand, not taking a note—just waiting to skewer me if I made a misstep. Business was a little slow—we wanted the Lebovich business.

So I'm running through the PowerPoint slides in my home office, and hearing myself working through the pitch in my head—run the slides again and again until I like the pitch, then I write it down to rehearse. I never use a script on the day, I just run with it, so it sounds fresh but polished, like I know what I'm talking about.

The doorbell chimes. It's quiet enough. I hear it, but I'm running the slideshow. It's not for Catherine—she's out shopping for tomorrow's dinner party with Jack and Sheila and Bert and Gisele. It must be for one of the kids—though I thought Will was at his friend's house and Marie at the barn. So I pay it no mind until the door chimes again. I freeze the slide show, walk out of the office across the great room, down the hall to the front door. It's no one I recognize.

I open the door, and there's this boy. Just from the way he stands there, stiff and awkward, just from his clothes, too new, too shiny, too stiff, he's not from around here.

“Hey there. Can I help you?”

“Hey, Mr. Brown.”

I don't recognize him from anywhere. How does he know my name? He's awkward, standing there, and it's as if he's too small for his clothes, the Yankee hat too big for his head, his brown jeans so store-bought new. He's not from around here. Will's friends tend to slouch around with their hair flopped down over their eyes, wearing a lot of black clothes—obscure band t-shirts, skinny jeans, old-school Converse sneakers. They're all “emos”, says Marie. They never say a word to me or Catherine. Just drift under the doorsill like dust and settle in the dark basement. And all Marie's friends are girls from the stable, and maybe some of the dancers she used to go to studio with. But this little guy? He knows I don't know him.

“Hey, Mr. Brown. It’s Jason. You know, from the rec center.”

That suddenly jolts my memory. Every Thursday, I volunteer at the recreation center. Jason is one of the gym rats there. He looks so different without his gym clothes that I didn’t recognize him. Dark clothes give him a lighter skin tone. I could have sworn that he looked bigger and more muscular on the basketball court.

“Hi, Jason. How are you?”

“I’m fine.”

The boy is awkward. His stiff arms rigid by his side, as if he does not know what to do with them. He keeps cracking his knuckles and shifting his weight from side to side. His eyes trained on the floor. This kid must be really nervous.

Unconsciously, I fold my arms across my chest and ask, “How come I didn’t see you at the center last Thursday?”

This is an innocent question, intended to get the boy to relax. The boy bites on his lower lip and begins to draw imaginary lines on my Italian tiles with his right foot. He is taking long deep breath.

“... Mr. Brown. I’m in trouble and I need your help.”

As he speaks in his raspy voice, the boy suddenly looks at me straight in the eye. Behind his big brown eyes, I can see tears forming. His eyes are very red. He must have cried for a long time. This is the first time I have the opportunity to examine his face

closely. He looks much older than his age. The scruffy sideburns on his cheeks indicate that he has not thought much about his physical appearance. The boy is a train wreck.

“Why don’t you come on in and we’ll discuss about your problem in the living room.”

I let the boy into the house. After he bends down to take off his shoes, there’s a strong odour. I shoot a quick glance to the boy’s socks. They used to be white, but now they look grey. I lead Jason to the sofa. The boy sits on the edge of the couch, fidgeting with his hands. His eyes trained on a prized porcelain lamp on the dark mahogany coffee table.

“So Jason, what’s wrong?”

“I did a dumb thing. One of my friends’ brothers paid me \$20 to take a bag to this address. When I dropped off the package, these two cops came out of nowhere and put me under arrest. I only found out afterwards that there was weed in the package.”

I can tell that this boy is not in the drug business. His voice too soft, body too small, body language too insecure. He must have been hanging around the wrong people. I want to learn as much information as possible from him so I sit there silently, listening. The boy continues about how a legal aid lawyer arranged bail and a future court hearing for him. While Jason is speaking, I can’t help but pick up the soft ticks of the clock. Every tick represents a second wasted not working on the Lebovich deal. At the end of his tale, it is obvious that the boy is extremely anxious.

His face is red. Tears are running down his cheeks. His hunched shoulders do not straighten. I hand him a box of Kleenex.

“So exactly what do you want from me?”

“Aren’t you a lawyer? Can’t you help me?”

I scan the earnest face before me to see the red-shot eyes. The boy has that dumb innocence to him. “Jason, do you know the difference between a criminal lawyer and a real-estate lawyer?”

“I don’t care what type of lawyer you are. I trust you. Please help me.”

My natural instinct is to say no. The kid already has a legal aid representative, what does he need me for? Besides, I am really busy. But something stops me. “Jason, I want to think about it. Leave your number and I’ll get back to you.”

After I walk Jason to the door, I slump back onto the couch. I lay back my head and close my eyes. I begin to rub my temples with my index fingers. What do I do with this kid? My mind drifts to an earlier time. It was 1985. On a bleak snowy day, David Fletcher came knocking on my door.

IT’S 10 P.M. ON A SUNDAY NIGHT AND THE PLEASANT SMELL OF steak lingers in the house. Catherine is lying on the couch watching television. I am eager to join her. There is a great game on tonight between the Leafs and the Canadiens. After I load the last dish into the dishwasher, I walk across the living room to the couch. Cathrine is lying down, eyes half-closed. She looks great tonight. I

bend down to plant a kiss on her forehead as I sit down beside her and wrestle the remote from her hand.

“Honey, I was talking with Gisele earlier today and she mentioned that a strange boy came to our house yesterday.”

“Funny you ask. I was just about to talk to you about him.” Knowing Catherine, I have to be very delicate with this situation because she is not a big fan of drugs. I should probably gloss over Jason’s trouble. “The kid’s name is Jason Stackhouse. I know him from the rec center. He’s in trouble because he was tricked into doing something bad. He’s a good kid and I want to help him.”

“What kind of trouble?”

“He got busted for carrying a bag of weed for one of his friends.”

“Ha, ha, good one. No, seriously though....”

I look at her with a faint smile on my face, not saying a word. Mary suddenly sits up with a shocked look on her face. Formerly tired eyes are now focused. They are staring hard at me. “James, Are you out of your mind! Why would you bring him to our house!” Mary takes the remote from my hand and turns off the television.

“He didn’t know about the weed. One of his friends just told him to carry the bag to a house off Yonge.”

“And you believe him! How are you even going to help him? You’re not a criminal lawyer.”

Looking at Catherine straight in the eyes, I said, “I think I can help to change the boy’s life by introducing him to the right people.”

A look of incomprehension appears on Catherine’s face. “Why are you bothering with this kid?”

“Do you remember David Fletcher? He was at our wedding.”

“Not really. What does he do?”

I lean back, spread out my arms, cross my legs. I reminisce about my college days as I stroke Catherine’s hair gently. “I was a struggling Commerce student at Queen’s. I felt lost—there was no direction in my life. Commerce was not for me. Then one day, David, the don of my dorm, suggested maybe changing to Honour Economics to take advantage of my strong business background and taking a minor in Political Science, which he thought was a good fit for me.”

“I don’t see the connection.” She pushes my hand away.

“At first, I was scared to make such a drastic change. In the following weeks, Dave arranged many opportunities, coffee breaks, dinners, for me to speak with various professors and students from the Arts Faculty. In the end, I made the decision to switch faculties and the rest was history. David Fletcher changed my life....”

“And you think you can do the same with this boy.” She is getting impatient, the way she scratches her forehead with the

pinkie of her right hand. “James, listen. Number one, you’ve got to land the Lebovich deal, so you don’t have time for distractions. Two, I’m not going to let a drug dealer come into our house and hang around my kids.”

I shift my body towards her and point my index finger at a family portrait behind us. “Do you think our kids live a good life?”

She turns to look at the family portrait. It brings a smile to her face. “Look how harmonious we are, dear. As to your question, yes. Will and Marie enjoy great lives, thanks to you.”

“But it’s not all good. Look at Will. What has he done all day other than listening to screaming rubbish from his Ipod? Our kids are wasting their lives away. Music and horses should be hobbies, not the main focuses of their lives.” I get up to walk to the bar and pour myself a glass of scotch. The thought of Will sitting in front his computer, with the blinds drawn, is disrupting. On a beautiful day like today, he was withering away in his jail cell.

“Honey, you remember what it was like being a teenager.” She signals me to get another glass for her. I walk back to the couch with a glass in each hand.

Once I sit back down again, I take a big sip and knit my eyebrows as I swallow. “I do remember what it was like being a teenager. I remember working hard in school so I could go to college. I remember working hard in my father’s store so I could afford college. Nowadays, everything is handed to our kids on a silver platter. They don’t even have to try hard in school now that

post-secondary education is deemed almost like a right, not a privilege.” Catherine looks at me speechless, unsure how to respond. So I continue, “Admit it, our kids are seriously lacking the in the life-experience department.”

“So you want to introduce them to a drug dealer,” Catherine bursts out. She follows that with a big sip of scotch.

“Jason is not a drug dealer. He is just a victim of his circumstances. I think it’ll be actually good for Will and Marie to meet people like Jason. This will probably increase their awareness about our society and see that there’s more to life than horses and music.”

Catherine sits back and crosses her arms. “How about the Lebovich deal?”

“We’re talking about human beings here. Besides, the Lebovich deal won’t be an issue, Catherine.” I hold out my hands, palms facing up.

“All right, if you really get involved with this boy, I can’t stop you. But Jason is not to be in the same room with Marie at any time.” I am hoping that she would reach out and grab my hands. But she just gets up and leaves for our bedroom. I get up to follow her with my drink in hand. When I reach the stairs, I retrace my steps to the bar. With a bottle in one hand and the glass in another, I head for my office.

Amalee Lavigne

## Darla

THE WOMAN STEERED HER CART DOWN THE CANNED FOOD aisle, grabbing nothing, staring at her empty cart. Tousled black curls rested on her shoulders. Sweat pants and a rumpled t-shirt hung limply off her small frame. There was a blank look in her eyes, her face expressionless. She stopped in front of the shelves of pasta, stooped down and picked up a package of spaghetti. The woman stood there, flipping it over and over in her hands, as if thinking about the purchase. Then her eyes fixed on the little square reporting the nutrition information of the pasta. Her head dropped, black hair spilling over her face. A small noise escaped her mouth, breaking the thick silence in the grocery store.

The woman extended her arm forward to place the package back, moving painfully slow, as if the pasta had an immense weight. Her hand jarred loose another package of the

pasta. The stacked packages cascaded downwards, spilling spaghetti all over the floor. She reached forwards, attempting to stop the cascade of packages, but to no avail. The woman dropped to her knees, letting her purse slide off her shoulders, its contents scattering out all around her. She leaned back on her heels and shook her head, her curls bouncing with every shake.

“No,” she breathed, a woman on her knees, surrounded by packages of spaghetti. “Stop it. Just stop it, please,” she whimpered.

“Oh dear!!” cried a shrill, far-off voice. The woman tilted her head up slightly, to see a petite blonde in a tight mini-dress, thrust up by a flashy pair of pink stiletto heels. She was hurrying down the aisle, shuffling her feet and holding out her arms so to not lose her precarious balance.

“What happened over here? Are you all right, darling?” Her voice carried a hint of a British accent, and was thick with concern.

She attempted to pick up the fallen packages, but struggled to bend over due to the height of her heels and her impossibly tight dress.

“I don’t think I can reach them darling. It’s these heels, they are beautiful but completely impractical, don’t you think?” She looked down, speaking to a bent head of black curls. “Oh, where are my manners? I’m Darla. Darla Richardson.” There was no response from below. “I’m sorry darling. I didn’t quite catch your

name.” Darla reached down to touch the woman’s shoulder. “Is everything okay, darling?”

The woman glared up into Darla’s face, taking in the vibrant red lipstick and fake eyelashes. “Rebecca,” she whispered.

Darla smiled. “Very nice to meet you, Rebecca.”

Darla leaned back against the shelf and slid down to the floor. She strained forwards and popped off her ridiculously high shoes. “Ah. This will make the clean-up a little easier.” She chuckled to herself and shook her head. “I don’t know what I was thinking, wearing this outfit. I think I was trying to reconnect with my younger self. Ridiculous, I know.”

Rebecca took a deep breath and moved onto her knees, beginning to place everything back in her tattered leather purse. Darla moved quickly, piling almost all the packages in her arms and shoving them back on the shelf. “So how did you manage to make this big of a mess? Darling, you almost took down the whole shelf!” Darla looked at Rebecca with a grin, her eyes sparkling with amusement. Rebecca fell back against a shelf, her eyes brimming with tears. “Oh honey. What is it? I don’t think the store will be angry about the mess. We cleaned it all up! You can’t even tell!” Darla crouched down by Rebecca’s feet and placed a hand on her leg. Rebecca jerked her head up and stared at Darla’s hand. A sob erupted from her throat. She abruptly covered her mouth with her hand, muffling the sound.

“This isn’t about the pasta, is it, darling?” Darla slid over to sit beside Rebecca, leaning her head on her shoulder. “Do you want to tell me about it?” Tears were streaming down Rebecca’s face and her shoulders shook. She remained silent. Darla put her hand over Rebecca’s, and laced her fingers with hers. “We all have bad days, darling. We must roll with the punches, you know? I woke up this morning and didn’t want to get out of bed. I wanted to stay there and wallow in self pity. But you know what I did? I got up, put on this sexy dress and these absurd shoes and walked out my front door. The looks people gave me really raised my spirits.”

Rebecca gave Darla a cautious glance. “I hate being alone,” she mumbled, another tear streaming down her face.

Darla gave her hand a squeeze. “Don’t we all? How about we be alone together then? What do you think? I could really use some coffee right now. Join me?” Darla glanced expectantly at Rebecca, slowly rising off the floor. Rebecca stared at Darla, an incredulous look on her face. “Don’t look at me like that! Coffee always tastes better over good conversation.” Rebecca hesitated, and then slowly nodded her head.

“I’ll meet you at the front of the store?” she asked, her voice a little louder. “Great! See you in a few!” Darla grabbed her shoes and walked down the aisle.

Rebecca rummaged around in her purse, pulling out a small plastic bottle. She paused for a moment, her eyes fixed on the bottle of pills in her hand. Rebecca sighed and placed the bottle back in her purse. She would leave them there for another day. Right now, Darla was waiting for her.

Rebecca Black

## I Don't Need Help, This Is My Help

MARGARET BAKER DRINKS A LOT. TWENTY YEARS FROM NOW her liver will turn to a stone, her husband will take off, her daughter will despise her very existence. Then, her picture will be stapled to a wooden cross by the side of a lonely road somewhere with a bouquet of plastic flowers. They will say, "We could have helped." Margaret Baker drinks a lot.

Laura Marks does everything else. Injects, smokes, sniffs, ingests, she does it. Twenty years from now she will be the size of a toothpick. With bones protruding from her thin fragile frame, she will be alone and broke. She will tell herself, "I could get help." Laura Marks does everything else.

I do something too, I don't drink or inject. I don't smoke, sniff, or ingest. I don't do it for attention. I don't do it for a high, I do it for the pain. Controlled pain. I deliver the pain and can decide

when it starts and stops. The physical that numbs the mental. The mind goes blank, this is my drug. And that's why it's sometimes satisfying to cut yourself, and see that blood so red it buzzes, this vibrant blood of yours. It glows even in the darkest of times. And I don't need help, this is my help.

Dark brown locks of hair fall around my face. Mascara bleeding from worn eyes that stare out to nothing as I lean over my bathroom sink. The harsh lavender smell, the bubblegum pink walls, the matching floral border. This bathroom makes me sick. This house makes me sick. This place makes me sick. The only reason I come in here is to bathe, and brush my teeth, the normal washroom routine. Except for that one thing that the average person doesn't include in their washroom routine. The sink is filled to the top with hot water. Steam slowly fills the room. I inhale deep, the dense air fills my lungs. Beside me lies a razor. It's an easy task to do, disassemble a razor. The simple disposable ones that you can buy at the drug store or the ones you find around your house, they are the easiest. The cheap plastic encases three, sometimes four blades—sharp, delicate, thin blades, tiny artists tracing on my skin. Sharp little thorns, delicate roses.

I plunge my hand deep into the hot water and let it burn my skin. It feels like a million tiny bugs devouring the surface of my hand and wrist revealing raw, red, stiff skin. Underneath a thin layer of translucent skin my veins pulse with desire and rise up to meet this man-made thorn. I place the blade sharply down and

push in as I ascend from my wrist to the crook above my elbow; this is what I've been waiting for. My skin splits easily, it's as soft as butter and the cut is clean. The initial pain is a numb sting, my whole hand is dead and all I can feel is the addictive tingle where the razor has ever so delicately sliced my skin. Slowly the feeling creeps back up into my frozen limb and I can feel the blood pouring out of the fresh wound. First a single droplet of blood lands into the crystal clear water, then another, and another. Soon these thick clouds of deep red stain the basin below me, and I watch, fascinated as they spread throughout it. Like little veins the blood weaves around invisible obstacles and then dissolves into nothing, because I am nothing, and my blood means nothing.

A low engine rumbles outside my window as a car races past my house. The world around me continues to move, turn, grow. The world inside, my world, it freezes. I hang on every moment, milk the pulse. One dose of pure adrenalin is shot through my veins at the first sight of blood. I read somewhere that the sight of your own blood releases endorphins into your system. Similar to the way that alcohol or chocolate does. To see your own blood, whether you are the cause of it or not, you can get a high off of it. Alcoholics, chocoholics all addicted. So does that make me a "cutoholic"?

When it started, I was ashamed. Three, four years ago was the first time. It started off as a one time thing; I didn't know it would feel like this. I didn't know why I did it, curiosity I guess. All

I knew was that I did and I felt better, not amazing but better than I felt, anything was better than that. I felt low, and that's the only way to describe it, low. Now, it's not any different. My friends aren't friends; they lie, cheat and steal. My parents are pretending to be parents, asking questions with their eyebrows forced into a concerned line, eyebrows that make a shield blinding them from the obvious truth. They want to care but can't.

The front door of my house swings open and I scramble to throw the stained towels in the drawer and the bloody blades into the sink. My mother yells from the bottom of the stairs. I'm light headed with sudden movement. Blood, walls, floor. I sit on the floor as my head spins. I love it, my own little theme park. In the distance I can hear my mother's shrill voice as she calls me to come down stairs. I muster up the strength and open the door to the bathroom. New fresh air rushes in and pushes out the stale steam, taking its place. I run the water, cold, and clean the sink. My cuts are washed and I throw a long-sleeved sweater on as I lug my heavy body down the stairs.

*Took you long enough*, she says to me. I flash a weak smile through dry pale lips. I can feel her judging eyes pierce my flesh. Waiting, they fall around my face, my body, my wrists, my ankles, heavy stares prodding every part of me. I'm standing open and vulnerable. I feel as if I'm being torn, torn apart from the inside. She's digging, intruding, prying in on my insecurities. The things I say are coded into her brain and used against me, weapons against

me in this war. She hates me for it; they all do. I follow her eyes as they trace my body and land on my wrist, deep red blood seeps through my speckled gray sweater. In a second, she is at my side tugging at my sweater. I thrust my hands further into my pockets and try to retreat back up stairs. Practically glowing with anger she pulls my arm out of my sleeve to reveal the open flesh, starting again to leak with blood. *What is this? You are disgusting!* She gasps. A moment's pause is all it takes and I'm dashing up the stairs two at a time. I run for the washroom and she's right behind me. She shoves her hand between me and the closing door, forcing it open. A high strung shriek escapes her lips as she spots the mark on the carpet. *What is that on my rug?* Below my feet there are three perfectly arranged spots of blood. Two eyes and a mouth, a smiley face. In response I smile back. *You are sick. This is not funny!* Still a little tipsy from the cut, I just lean on the sink. *You need help.* With tears of rage in her eyes she says *Do you have any idea what kind of effect this is having on me!* Silence. Behind her the house creaks softly and I listen to this, not the melodramatic nonsense pouring out of my mother's mouth. Noticing that my eyes have glazed over she stops talking and leaves the room in a fit, slamming the door behind her. Never asking why, just telling me that I was going to get "help."

The thing is, this was my help, it helped me get through the day, it helped me put up with them—my parents, my friends, and it reminded me that I was still alive. I cut myself so I could feel something that wasn't a lie. If I didn't cut, I would have no release,

no way to decipher reality from fiction. I would be a faceless pawn in play, no emotion. I would be dead. I would be commanded to do what they tell me to; my parents, my friends. I guess that's why they wanted to get me "help."

I don't like that I do it, I just do. I can't stop. Sometimes, I surround myself with people I hate, the people I despise because they are happy. When surrounded by these people, I become them. I'm forced to smile so they don't ask questions, I hope that if I'm around them long enough then soon my body will evolve into what I long to be. A body with the outside emotions blocked and no one truly knows me, so I can live my life on the inside with my true self on the inside. I can't accept that it's just something I do; I don't want to accept it, but I love it.

AS I GOT OLDER IT GOT EASIER, EASIER TO BE AROUND MY parents, easier to be around my friends, and easier to keep it hidden. They thought the "help" helped, and I let them, I still do.

Time passes and my open visible wounds heal to scabs, deep slashes fade to embarrassed remains. The scars that I face daily "build" me up and make me strong. I'm a smart young woman. I see my mum and dad every Sunday afternoon for tea, and we chat, catch up on the *overwhelming* events of the past week. Every time before I leave she kisses me on the cheek and with a hug she holds my wrist and says *I'm glad you learned*. I smile back with a toothy grin and hug dad on my way to the door. In five safe

strides I'm sitting in my car. So, I have learned. I've learned to smile convincingly and I've learned how to cut the right way.

I did stop for a little, but it's an addiction. If I took Margaret Baker and sent her off to live in a bar would she stop drinking? No. If I sent Laura Marks to a rave would she stay sober? No. You can't remove my scars, they are always there and they make me crave it. You are what you surround your self with. So the scars open and burn from the inside until they flow with hot blood again. Blinded by pain and pleasure, numbed by the satisfaction, this is what keeps me here.

I'm older but still pained. The kind of pain that makes you want to rip out your own hair, the pain that blinds you with the light blur of acid tears. When people lie to you, when you lie to yourself, when there's no difference from morning and night, when it all feels the same. And that's why it's sometimes satisfying to cut your self, on days like these when your blood is so red it buzzes, this vibrant blood of yours. It glows even in the darkest of times. And I don't need help, this is my help.

Alex Crowther

## The Rain Came Down in Torrents

THE RAIN CAME DOWN IN TORRENTS. INCESSANT AND unrelenting. More water came down than I'd ever seen before in my life. I remember looking out my window thinking it could not have come at a more perfect time, but then I always thought rain was a gift.

It was the summer when it all fell apart. I was living in Toronto around Flemington Park with my mother, my sister and my little brother. Our dad had just been sent to jail for tax evasion or something to do with the government. I remember watching the police come into our house and handcuff him. He looked so sad, I was too afraid to say goodbye. Mom couldn't even look at him. Poor mom; there was a woman whose pride was the very foundation of her existence. Dad lost more than just money in her eyes; he lost the respect of our family. She was always a bit rough

though, never hugged any of us or said kind words, but she took care of us better than anyone ever could. We were always fed and clothed and warm. We had what we needed to survive and that was good enough.

She filed the papers for the divorce and sent them to my father in the mail. That same summer she decided to move us all up north to Thunder Bay. She said it was a good place to start again. A new beginning she called it. That always stuck in my mind. A new beginning, somewhere where the past can't harm us. I wanted so badly to leave, to change.

My mother owned a ten-year-old Toyota Corolla. It was white with the beginnings of rust on the lower body to complement the black trim. It sat five exactly and we were four exactly. Davey, my brother, had to sit in the back because he was too small to ride with a passenger airbag. Lisa and I always used to get into fights about who got to ride in the front.

“Lisa, you're not allowed there, you got the front last time. Mom! That's not fair, tell Lisa to get out of the front seat!”

Mom would just say, “Stop your whining, she got there first, and it makes no difference anyway, you'll both get to ride in front eventually.”

Then she would stare at me till I gave in and surrendered to ride in the back. The trunk of the car was jammed with all our clothes and the car had sunk a good inch toward the ground because of the weight. Mom had paid a moving van two days

before to carry all our furniture and it was going to meet us at our new house. We didn't have that much money but the moving van was a luxury that Mom could not deny.

“I will not waste my time going back and forth carrying all that stuff like a panhandler. This family has enough dignity to support itself.”

I didn't really understand what she meant by this but I agreed with it anyway because I knew in my heart she was right.

It had just started to rain when we pulled out of the driveway and were on our way. I waved goodbye to the house that I would never see again. I was sad to see it go but I knew it was better this way. It was time we found something new and forgot about the past.

The rain was coming down like waterfalls by the time we got on the highway. There was hardly any visibility and the roads were beginning to flood. All the cars were at a walking pace except for the occasional one, which would zoom pass. My mother always hated the fast drivers.

“They have no business being so reckless. I don't mind them killing themselves, it's the decent people they kill I worry about.”

She was always very critical of things she didn't understand or maybe the things that scared her. I suppose she just wanted us to be safe.

We hadn't gotten far when she decided it was too dangerous to keep driving. We pulled over to a rest stop. I think it might have been a Wendy's. Trucks were packed into the parking lot like sleeping dragons, waiting to be awoken.

Mom tried to park as close to the doors as she could but we ended up getting soaked anyway as we ran in. It was impossible not to get wet. I took two steps and was drenched to the bone. Mom took Davey to the family washroom. Lisa and I sat down at a table. I was still upset with her for taking the front seat when it obviously wasn't her turn. I crossed my arms and looked away, trying to make sure she knew I was angry and had the right to be angry with her. She just ignored me, which made me all the more angry. I got up and decided to explore, soon realizing the rest stop was basically a fast-food restaurant with one large dining room, which I was currently in. I went and sat at another table by my self-sulking. A very large man came and sat at the table across from mine. He started eating a very large meal, which he refused to chew. He saw me staring at him and took off his hat and said.

“Aren't you a little young to be sitting by yourself?”

“I am 11 years old and I am not by myself, I am waiting for my mother.”

He grunted and went back to inhaling his cheeseburger. A little unsettled I decided to go back to my sister. My anger could wait till I felt more protected. I sat back down with her just as Mom and Davey came out.

“The rain’s letting up” Mom said. “We should get back on the road”

We ran back to the car. I sat in the front. The rain was still intense but the visibility had improved and it was safe enough, or so my mom thought, to drive.

We got back on the highway and continued on our journey. The roads were clearer. I watched the land float by. Time passed and the highway started to get more crowded. Mom had filled the car with Mad-lips and car games so we wouldn’t distract her or so she said anyway. I didn’t like word games very much. My favourite toy was the Etch-a-sketch, it was this contraption you could draw on using these two toggles. One toggle would draw a black line horizontally on the screen while the other toggle would draw a vertical line and if you spun both toggles at once you could make diagonal lines. I would spend hours playing with it, layering line over line until the entire screen turned black.

I was engrossed in my Etch-a-sketch when I felt mom slow the car down. I immediately looked up too see a truck with a hitched RV veering left. The RV’s compartment pulled out and got caught by the wind. The truck span out of control and careened onto the shoulder of the road. My mother pulled over the car immediately and rushed out to see if the driver was all right. None of us said a word. We were all looking out the side windows trying to see Mom through the rain. We starred for about fifteen minutes, Lisa started getting impatient. Finally Mom came back and said that

everything was fine, that the owner had just forgotten to lock something down and that no one had been hurt. The people with the RV pulled out and waved at us.

Mom got back into the car and turned the key. Nothing happened. She tried again still nothing. She said something silently under her breath, put on her hazards, and got out of the car. I looked out the window to see cars zipping by while my mother tried to wave them down, but no one wanted to pull over. Eventually Mom came back and sat in the car. It was a long half hour and the rain had started picking up again. We all sat in silence I could tell Mom was upset and in a mood. We all sat in silence and listened to the rain come down on the roof of the car.

It was about one o'clock in the afternoon when a big eighteen wheeler pulled over and offered us some help. The driver was gruff and bearded, but obviously was kind enough to give us a hand. He said he had just delivered a shipment and he was driving the truck back to the depot. He offered to take us as far as the next town so we could find a car garage and get the car towed. Mom looked concerned but seeing no other alternative agreed. She made us leave most of our stuff in the car and all four of us piled into the front seat of this eighteen-wheeler. The trucker told us his name was Bill. He was apparently having trouble with his wife. He lived in Peterborough with her but thought she was too needy and he wanted someone who understood his needs better.

He dropped us off at a car garage and Mom called a tow truck. Later, the repairman said that she had blown a belt in her transmission and that it would take two days to fix. She had a long discussion with him while we stood outside under the protection of the overhang. She came out flustered and said we were going to have to find some place to stay. We ended up in a Motel 6. It smelled like cigarettes and wet carpet. The walls were an electric yellow with stains on the carpet and in the bathtub. We were all pretty tired and fell asleep quickly.

I woke up to see the sun come up. It was the first time I'd seen the sun in days. I sat up in my bed with the faint smell of mildew in my nose. The sun came in our room reflecting off a glass by the window making prisms on the floor. I slipped my naked feet on the ground and treaded softly to the window. Looking out I felt lighter already. I was stuck in a dirty cheap hotel but I was invisible here, I was free. No one knew who I was or where I'd been. This was what I was looking for, a new beginning. I went back to bed and shut my eyes and waited for Mom to wake up.

Matt Samuelson

## Reunited

“SO... MAYBE WE COULD MEET FOR LUNCH SOME TIME.” HE CAN see in her face that this is unlikely. “Or I’ll give you my phone number.” Still no answer. “I’d like it if you called me sometime.” He takes out a small piece of paper, and dashes down the number.

NOISES FROM THE KITCHEN SPREAD THROUGH THE HALLWAYS of the small house, making their way into her room. Alice wakes. She lazily swings her legs off of the bed, letting them dangle inches above the floor before making the small jump down. It is late, the red sticks of her digital clock searing through the darkness of the night. She gropes in the dark with her feet, searching for her slippers, clutching onto them with her toes, pulling them towards herself, slipping them on, warm, pink, and fuzzy. She glides through the hallway, her slippers gracefully sliding across the

hardwood floor, making no noise. She arrives at the entranceway of the kitchen, peering in, silent. Her father stands in the center of the room, hunched over a black bag, packing things. Yellow light falls through the window, cascading onto his back, moving steadily from his left shoulder to his right as the headlights of cars pass by on the street. He zips up the bag, carefully placing it over his shoulder, and moves quietly toward the front door, trying not to wake anyone. He is making his way out of the kitchen when he sees her, standing in the doorway, hair tangled in knots, her arms hanging loosely by her side, confusion on her face. Kneeling down, embracing her, he says, "Sorry, honey, but Daddy has to go away for a little while. I love you, now go back to sleep". Tears form in the corners of his sharp blue eyes, his young handsome face staring directly into hers, and he kisses her with his thin red lips. He turns away, making his way to the front door, exiting the house, softly shutting the door behind him. She makes her way to the window, watching as he drives away, the red glow of his taillights fading into nothingness, engulfed by the darkness.

CLOUDS HANG IN THE SKY, BLOCKING OUT THE SUN, CASTING grey over the small city. Her car moves through the streets, weaving in and out of traffic, eventually pulling up at the curb, colourful storefronts facing the street. Alice gets out of her car, stepping onto the sidewalk. She is wearing all black. Black high heels, black dress pants, and a black blouse, both fitted perfectly.

Her blonde hair is pulled back, tightly pinned to the back of her head in a bun, not one loose hair. Around her neck hangs an expensive necklace, and wrapped around her wrist is a gold watch. She is wearing make up, but not too much, her sharp blue eyes showing through. The bell of the store door rings as she enters the local market.

She is shopping for oranges when it happens. Trying to decide which to buy, holding them, smelling them, testing their firmness, and she sees him out of her corner of her eye. They are separated by three aisles, but her body has seized, unresponsive. His eyes have faded—they are still the same sharp, piercing blue that they had always been, but they have lost something. Wrinkles stem from his eyes, carved into his face. His hair has turned white, he is balding. His lips are still red, still thin, but they have begun to crack open, his mouth also surrounded by wrinkles. A wrinkle for every year. He is wearing a plain white t-shirt, clinging loosely to his upper body, worn out jeans, and running shoes. Glancing up, he sees her. A faint smile begins to form in the corner of his mouth, and he begins to make his way over to her.

Alice walks out of the store, stunned. It is raining hard. Part of her wants to run back to him, part of her wants to run as far away as she can. Cars whip by her on the road, driving through puddles and splashing the sidewalk with spray.. Still in a daze, she begins to walk quickly towards her car. Her hair has now fallen free from the

tightly pinned bun, loose strands hanging in front of her face. Her slacks are wet and dirty, splashed by the passing cars. She is walking as if in a thick haze, lost for a moment. She comes to a garbage bin, pauses, and then hesitantly lets the small piece of paper fall into the bin.

Kate Markle

## Summer

OWEN STUMBLED THROUGH THE CROWDED ROOM, TRYING TO locate some sort of alcohol He swore there'd been a keg on the pool table earlier. Looking around, he bumped into a group of drunken girls who fell over squealing. God. He just needed to find some more booze. It was a fun party, but the drunker some of these girls got, the stupider they became. He didn't have the patience tonight.

“Hey! Owe!”

Pete was standing across the room where the keg was standing on an overturned pot. Finally.

Owen pushed his way through some girl and guy flirting. They nauseated him. Nodding to Pete, he poured another cup. He turned to Pete and noticed a blond standing beside him, her

straightened hair sticking sweatily to her face. Her tight blue dress captured what was underneath perfectly, but he noticed he was staring and turned to Pete instead.

“Great party, dude.”

“Thanks, man. Saw you were stumbling around over there, guessed what you were looking for was this,” pointing at the keg.

Pete’s goofy grin was emphasized by his red face. His blond hair sticking straight up made Owen want to laugh. Pete’s eyes widened, “Oh. Owe, this is Cassie,” gesturing to the girl.

Cassie smiled, her red lips opening to perfectly white teeth. Why did Pete get all the luck? Cassie leaned over and whispered something to Pete before disappearing into the crowd of drunken teenagers behind him. Pete leaned against the wall, and looked at Owen with the same goofy smile.

“What do you think of her, man?” Pete asked, cupping an imaginary chest.

“Go for it.”

“All right. Thanks, man. Listen; there are tons of hot chicks here. You need to have a good time.” Pete’s face went serious for a moment before patting Owen on the shoulder and disappearing into the crowd, in the direction that Cassie had gone.

Owen filled up his cup again before pushing himself through another group and squishing onto a couch beside two other guys. Mikey and Craig were completely immersed in checking out the girls around the room. Owen tuned them out. Taking a

gulp of beer, he supposed Pete was right, but he couldn't get into the "party" feel that he was used to.

"Is there any space for me here?"

Owen looked up to a black smiley face t-shirt covering two large breasts. Realizing he was staring again, he continued his gaze upwards to a pale face surrounded by messy black hair. She was smiling.

"Is there any room for me to sit beside you?" she repeated.

"Uh...yeah." Owen shoved closer to Mikey and Craig, who were now staring at two girls dancing together.

"Thanks." She sat down, collapsing into the cushions. "Nice party, isn't it?" she asked, turning her body towards him. She seemed out of place in this crowd, her ripped jeans, boots and loose t-shirt. He nodded.

"I'm Summer." She smiled, pale lips opening to reveal even white teeth.

"Owen" he said, trying to think around his dizziness. "I haven't seen you around. Are you new or something?"

"Nope. I live just around the corner. Go to Westview High. How about you?"

"Really? I go there too. Haven't seen you before." He was sure he would have noticed, especially since no senior girl at the school dressed so casually.

Her face grew serious for a moment, as if she were thinking what to say next. She looked around the room. Guys and

girls were dancing and drinking. It seemed the later the night, the more they drank, the more they danced, the more the clothes were thrown off.

“Why aren’t you dancing with everyone?” she asked suddenly.

“Dunno, I guess I’m just tired.”

“Hmm...” was all she said. They sat in silence.

Her face was pale; her eyes dark as if she hadn’t slept in a while, but a lopsided smile was on her lips. She sat Indian style on the couch faced towards him, head tilted. Her hand was playing with a necklace around her neck. Her eyes wandered around the room contently. All of a sudden, her smile disappeared and her eyes darted back and forth, stopping on Owen.

“Wanna get out of here?” she asked.

Owen had already become drowsy, but she pulled him off the couch before he had time to respond. Her hands seemed cold despite the warm basement.

“Come on.” She pulled him up and out of the basement door. They stumbled up the stairs, laughing as their feet slipped and the floor swerved. Reaching the doorway, the heat of the summer air came through the open door. The air was muggy and hot, but the stars lit up the dark street.

He wondered if they’d be walking to her house. Down the driveway she looked towards the house where the bass of the music could be heard. Turning back himself, he hadn’t noticed how

loud the music was until they had left. Actually, he hadn't really noticed it at all.

"I have an idea. Hold this," she said, handing him a cold bottle of white wine, beaded with condensation. Where had this come from? She hadn't had it when they left the party.

"Let's climb up to the roof." And she began hitting the support beams of the porch to see if they were sturdy.

"Are you sure this is a good idea? I mean, we're both sorta drunk and..."

"Of course it's fine. I do this all the time!" She was standing on the porch railing already. "Come on!" she called as she pushed her way onto the roof. She disappeared for a moment, but soon popped her head over the edge and held out her hand for the bottle.

Couching on the railing, Owen slowly pushed himself to the standing position, steadying himself by grabbing on to the eaves. Handing the bottle to Summer, he managed to pull his torso up onto the ledge, despite his fatigue. As he dragged his body, something snagged.

"Shit!"

"What is it?" she asked, poking her head closer to him.

"I'm stuck." Looking down, he saw that one of the buttons of his sweater had been snagged on a piece of broken plastic on the eave.

Summer handed Owen the bottle, and while he held himself up with one hand, she got down on her stomach and scooted towards the ledge.

“Be careful!”

“Stop worrying!” Her hands moved quickly to move the twisted piece of cotton around the plastic.

“There!” she said, laughing.

He pulled the rest of himself up, swinging his feet around, almost hitting her in the head.

The two of them sat on the shingles, Owen catching his breath from the sudden flow of adrenaline running through his veins. Although the alcohol had made him sleepy, he was re-energized by the climb, blood tingling in his veins.

The sky was clear and the air was still. Summer was all around them in the silence. The shingles were still warm from the day and felt good against his skin. Owen pulled out a pack of cigarettes and a lighter from his pocket and offered one to Summer. They smoked and drank from the bottle in the silence on the rooftop, watching the clouds puff from their mouths. When had he last done this? Owen wondered. Usually he'd have stayed inside, the beat in his head surrounded by loud girls and loud music. He'd never just sat with someone. He looked over at Summer.

“So, do you climb roofs for fun?”

“Naw,” she said, “It’s just a place I like to come to be quiet.”

“Oh...so, what do you do when you get up here usually? Do you often take guys up on strangers’ roofs?”

She laughed and took another swig of wine. Did she? Suddenly, he was curious, but she said no more, just looked upwards, hair brushing away from her face and tickling his arm. They sat in silence, listening to the bass and the evening, his breathing curiously loud compared to the silence from her.

Lying down on top of the roof, he let out a sigh. He felt on top of the world, lying next to a beautiful girl on an August night. Summer smiled down at him, though her eyes showed something else.

He sat up.

“What’s wrong?”

Her face flickered for a moment, her expression changing again to that funny lopsided grin, but her eyes were distant, as if she wasn’t looking at him anymore. It was strange.

“I have an idea,” she whispered.

Owen leaned in, hoping she meant what he thought she meant, but instead, she stood up without a sound and walked to the edge.

Owen’s mind was still fuzzy from the evening and the alcohol, and it took him a moment to realize what was going on.

“No!”

He leapt to his feet, but before he had a chance to steady himself she had disappeared from the place between the roof and the sky. Not wanting to fall himself, he carefully shuffled his way over to the ledge and peered over, expecting to find a body sprawled on the ground. But there was nothing. Not even any mark of where she had landed. He looked up and around, wondering if she was hiding as a joke.

“Summer?” he called, but all he could hear was the music, which someone had turned up. He sat back down on the ledge. What the hell had just happened? He turned his head and saw the bottle propped up against a peeling shingle. He picked it up and took a swig. The wine was tepid as it slid down his throat.

So, where had she gone? He sat, waiting for something. Anything. Sitting in the silence, he drank up the rest of the wine. Maybe she’d return. Maybe he was just waiting to wake up.

He heard the door open from below. Voices emerged, but he couldn’t make out what they were saying. Maybe they’d found the body somewhere else. Maybe it was Summer laughing as he sat there, gullible as hell. He heard Pete yelling.

“Owen? Owen! What the fuck are you doin’ on my roof?”

Owen wanted to shout something back, but he felt too tired and sick.

“Owen! Get down from there you stupid fuck! You’re going to fall!”

Pete continued to shout drunken profanities at him until he pulled his energy and his stomach together and stood up.

He wondered what would happen if he jumped himself, but decided not to and slid his way over the eave, onto the railing, and hopped down to the front porch.

“Owen,” Pete spoke in a normal tone finally, but out of breath. “I’ve been looking for you for hours. Found a girl who’s pretty into you. Thought you might hit it off, you know? Never expected to find you on the roof.”

“I wasn’t alone,” Owen responded defensively, though his stomach was still queasy and all he wanted to do was lie down.

“Doesn’t look like there’s anyone up there to me.” Pete raised his head and then turned to Owen, one eyebrow raised.

“Her name was Summer. A girl at your party. Had dark hair, pale? Uh... kinda looked out of it a bit. Baggy jeans, big boots, big boobs...”

Pete laughed. “What have you been smoking?”

“What?”

“Man, I’m pretty sure if there had been a girl like that at my party I would have noticed. But, if there was, where is she now?”

“She jumped off your roof.” Owen felt like he was going to puke. Pete’s face went pale and his eyes open wide.

“What? Where? Is she okay? Where’s the body?”

“There was none.” At this point Owen didn’t care anymore. He was so tired. But he pointed to where Pete’s mom’s rose bushes were still upright and blooming. No sign of a body. Even so, Pete ran up to the scene with Owen following slowly behind. They looked around but there wasn’t a trace. Pete turned to Owen.

“Man, you’re sick. You had me going there. But seriously. Not funny, dude.”

“It’s not a joke! I’m telling you, she was there. Her name was Summer and she was all grunge or something.”

Pete put his hands on both of Owen’s shoulders. “Dude, you’re drunk. Are you sure you didn’t smoke anything tonight? ‘Cause you’re tripping balls!”

Owen was so tired he thought he was about to collapse. He had no energy left for arguing. He was dizzy and just wanted to be let back in and sleep. Owen followed Pete back in.

“You need another drink?”

“Naw, I think I’m good. Actually, would it be okay if I crashed on your couch?” They were at the stairway now, and Owen had no desire to return back down to the party. From what he could hear, someone must have brought energy drinks. Owen stumbled over the couch. He could barely stand and was surprisingly chilly. He fell into the cushions.

So who was she? Where did she go? His mind tried to keep focused but things were getting foggy. How did she do that?

The window burst open with a gust of frigid air. Owen bolted upright, suddenly very aware yet his head was spinning. What the hell was that? He got up and fell towards the window. Peering outside, the air was still and warm. No sign of a storm. Just the hot, humid night. Closing it quickly, Owen shivered again. He slowly turned around, scanning the room. Just Pete's parent's living room. The brown couch with messy cushions, the matching chairs, the glass coffee table with a flower pot in the center. Nothing different. Nothing special. The loud thumping from downstairs re-entered Owen's head. Taking one last look around the room, he went downstairs.



Verse



Alex Keerma

## I Do Not Want To Be Alone

The sand had spoken through its dance,  
A howling, whirling force.  
Hunted by the stinging wind,  
He wandered a distant course.

He blindly trudged the sea of dust,  
The stars obscured by sand,  
He sought the road that led to town,  
And his lover's waiting hand.

Long days, long nights had passed away,  
She'd fret beside her door,  
There was no news of his return,  
Yet he'd come home, he'd sworn.

The storm raged on for hours more,  
Time dragged, then slipped away,  
He fell upon his knees that night,  
And screamed into the fray:

“I do not want to be alone,  
I do not want to cry.  
These sands may take my life away,  
But I will never truly die.

“For death may come and grip me,  
But I am not afraid,  
My heart was given long ago,  
My love will never fade.”

The sand had spoken through its dance,  
A breeze had rushed the town.  
Still by the door, she stood alone.  
The storm had torn him down.

She shut her eyes, a moment more,  
And faced a spray of dust.  
The skies were clear, no signs of life.  
He'd come to her. He must.

Rachel Mester

## The Invitation

A quiet night, a lonely night,  
And never a breeze would sway.  
The pearly moon lit up the road,  
And the inn where I would stay.

I walked alone, my bag in hand,  
And cursed the heavy load.  
When through the night I heard the sound  
Of travellers on the road.

The driver reined, the carriage stopped,  
A white hand ope'd the door.  
I saw a fine lady and her knight,  
“O pity, please, the poor!

“I have no home, my lady fine,  
Nor a bed to rest my head.”  
The lady looked at me and smiled,  
“Stay with us instead.”

I flourished my hat, I tipped it to her,  
“Why, thank you, my lady dear.  
There are creatures out this blackest night,  
Whose deeds we all must fear.”

The lady laughed, her head tilt back,  
The gentleman hid a grin.  
“O silly man, there’s naught to fear,  
Unless you let them in.”

The whip it cracked, the coach sped on,  
Dust flung by heavy hooves.  
The night was clear, the stars shone bright—  
Yet the darkness seemed to move.

The coach it pulled to a hasty stop,  
The ending of our quest.  
The couple crossed to the dim-lit inn  
To take their well-earned rest.

I followed the path of this trusting pair,  
Bending my ear to hear  
My lady calling from the inn,  
“Come in, come in, my dear!”

I stepped inside, in great relief  
My crooked hat I righted;  
I knew no thing could harm me here,  
Unless it was invited.

We spoke until the lady sighed,  
She could no longer wake;  
She took her knight and begged my leave,  
But I had thirst to slake.

And in the darkness while they slept.  
A creature crept inside,  
It smelled her blood, delicious blood,  
Teeth glinting in the night.

Not till noon the knight arose,  
Under mid-day’s burning sky.  
He turned and reached for his sleeping wife,  
And cried a dreadful cry.

His wife, his love, his lady fair,  
Dead and cold by morn!  
Yet 'twas she took that creature in,  
Though they had been forewarned.

It was a quiet night, a lonely night,  
Where never a breeze would sway.  
The bloody moon lit up the road,  
And the inn where I would stay.

Colleen Alkalay-Houlihan

## One Winter Night in Newfoundland

Oh come all you fellows and listen to me,  
A terrible story I'll tell,  
The mummers they came on a dark winter night,  
Those mummers they came straight from Hell,  
From Hell,  
Those mummers they came straight from Hell.

In ragged old clothing they hid underneath,  
Our neighbours we thought that they were,  
As soon as they entered the terrors began,  
If only that we had been sure,  
Been sure,  
If only that we had been sure.

Their tattered old Stanfields covered the stench,  
Of dying and rotting and more.  
They sang a fair song and played on the spoons,  
Until they were in through my door,  
My door,  
Until they were in through my door.

“Any mummers ’lowed in,” they cried with a roar,  
I wish I had not been a host.  
For if I’d never let ’em into me house,  
I ne’er would have met any ghosts,  
Any ghosts,  
I ne’er would have met any ghosts.

They stomped right on in, not pausing a beat,  
And when I looked up at their eyes,  
My heart stopped its beating, I gasped and I groaned—  
I understood why they disguised,  
Disguised,  
I understood why they disguised.

Under the pillowcase over their heads,  
A terrible presence did hide,  
The spirits of men long gone from our isle,

The spirits of men who had died,  
Had died,  
The spirits of men who had died.

I had the dark feeling they wanted me soul,  
Or those of me child and me wife.  
My knees shook with terror, they circled around,  
I prayed; yes I feared for me life,  
Me life,  
I prayed; yes I feared for me life.

“I’ll give mummings Christmas cake, syrups and rum,  
I’ll do a good neighbour a turn,  
I’ll lend you me punt with me nets fer a day,  
But I won’t give me soul in hell to burn.  
To burn  
I won’t give me soul in hell to burn.”

They bowed then and let me live, thanks to me nerve;  
They turned ’round and marched out me door.  
The man who was leaving, his pillowcase up,  
Was Johnny who’d washed up ashore,  
Ashore,  
Was Johnny who’d washed up ashore.

See that's why no mummers 'lowed in any more,  
No mummers 'lowed in from the cold.  
The last fellers here I let in me door,  
Were ghosts come to steal me young soul,  
Young soul,  
Yes the last fellers here I let in me door,  
Were ghosts come to steal me young soul.

Rebecca Black

## Someone, No One, Nowhere, Someplace

One still strange night in someplace—  
Somewhere no one really knows—  
For who would want to live there,  
Now that no one comes or goes?

The road still passes by the door,  
And the house looks just the same,  
Yet something happened in this house,  
When someone homeward came.

A strange still night in someplace  
A moon gleams in the sky,  
And lights the path below it  
Whereon three children lie.

The children lie upon the path,  
With hair in tangled knots,  
Their gaping throats—fresh bloody wounds,  
The children someone lost.

Someone stands there, blade in hand,  
He gloats, he stares, he raves,  
His evil eyes caressing them,  
The children no one saved.

His shoes and shirt all drenched in blood  
He walks the ill-lit path,  
Three no ones lie sprawled on the ground,  
Three victims of his wrath.

He takes the children by the hand,  
He drags them up the stairs,  
And through the door, along the hall,  
No worries and no cares.

Inside he looks across the room,  
His eyes as dark as coal,  
A gruesome smile on his lips,  
Four bodies but one soul.

He dumps the bodies on the floor  
And pours himself a gin.  
He heads back up the stairs to bed  
And smiles and tucks them in.

Now in their gory bloody beds,  
Three children now can rest  
And father whispers in their ears  
“This is for the best.”

One still strange night in someplace,  
Somewhere no one comes or goes,  
Three children sleep the deepest sleep,  
And only father knows.

Keira Thomson

## The Something

That night he lay asleep in bed,  
He only heard his breath.  
Not even the sound of a creak in the floor,  
He slept as deep as death.

The clock struck two and as he woke,  
He felt a sudden rush.  
There was something breathing over him,  
He knew that he must hush.

He felt cool air upon his back,  
He knew he wasn't alone.  
But when he turned to look behind,  
That something did not show.

The boy sat up and looked about,  
But nothing was in sight,  
Until he looked beneath his bed—  
He had a raging fright!

Its yellow eyes looked up at him,  
The drool ran down its chops.  
Through sharp brown teeth it hissed the boy,  
And into his bed it hopped.

The boy bounced up and leapt away,  
But he was much too late.  
That something gripped and grabbed the boy—  
Oh, that death would be his fate!

The boy held on to all he could,  
His bed, his bear, the sheets,  
But that something kept a hold of him,  
And death was coming fleet.

That famished something gaped at him  
As if to take a bite,  
But there was one thing that something missed—  
That weapon to his right.

The boy looked up and smirked at it,  
Whatever it might be,  
And swung the sword he'd hidden there,  
Where something couldn't see.

He slashed and bashed with all his might,  
Until its eyes were shut.  
The something that the boy once feared,  
Was just a pile of guts.

The boy cleaned up the mess he'd made,  
And hopped back in his bed.  
There wasn't gonna be a something  
Messing with his head.

He lay awake in silence,  
He only heard his breath.  
For something wasn't drooling,  
And frightening him to death.

Rachel Bloom

## Tale of a Graveyard Night

A graveyard is an odd, odd place,  
And odder still at night.  
And sometimes tales of graveyards come  
That give a child a fright.

The sexton walks about the yard,  
With a flashlight and a cane,  
He guards against the pranks of boys,  
He walks the graveyard lanes.

Six feet deep the coffins lie  
Under mounds of grass.  
Six feet deep the bodies sleep  
Of all the dearly passed.

Wreaths of flowers lean against  
The headstones here and there.  
Carefully placed upon the earth,  
To show true love and care.

Grieving lovers will prop a wreath  
Against a marble stone.  
Grieving lovers will leave a rose  
Where their true loves sleep alone.

And once upon a cold, cold night  
A mad lover went too far.  
He brought a pick and shovel  
Into the old graveyard.

Quiet, he snuck around the guard,  
Quiet, he crept to the tomb.  
Little did the mad lover know  
That he crept into his doom.

At once a hand from underground  
Gripped the lover's cuff  
The hand pulled down the lover,  
One sharp tug enough.

Down he fell into the grave,  
And tumbled to his death.  
A skeleton hand reached over his lips,  
As he took his final breath.

So now they rest side by side,  
Together they lie still.  
The corpses of a man and wife—  
There's nothing left to kill.



# Plays



Shuai Yuan

## Change of Heart

SETTING: *On Wellington Street West.*

BRYANT: *A recent university grad who is really great with women.  
Works in marketing.*

JOHN: *A recent university grad. An engineer.*

NOTE: *The characters sing and adapt lyrics from the song “Same Girl,” by R. Kelly, featuring Usher. (“Same Girl” written by J. Jackson, J. Smith and R. Kelly; Record Label: Jive; Copyright: 2007 Zomba Recording, LLC.)*

JOHN: Yo, Bryant.

BRYANT: Hi. What have you been up to?

JOHN: Nothing much.

BRYANT: [*Sings*] *Same shit, different day, just riding through the city  
looking pretty as the usual.*

JOHN: That's what's up. [*Sings*] *The same old thing, have my name on my chain so they know who's who.*

BRYANT: *I'm over here so they can come find me right after they lose you.*

JOHN: Man, that's not even the right words.

BRYANT: Whatever man, you are just mad cuz *I'm over here so the girls come find me right after they lose you.*

JOHN: Don't flatter yourself.

BRYANT: Ha, ha, ha. But for real, I have a nice story to tell you.

JOHN: Go for it.

BRYANT: Let me introduce you to my new girl.

JOHN: What she like?

BRYANT: [*Sings*] *Man she so fine.*

JOHN: [*Sings*] *Straight up, dang?*

BRYANT: *She stands about 5'4, coca cola red bone.*

JOHN: *Damn.*

BRYANT: *She drives a black Durango license plate say "Angel". Tattoo on her ankle. Plus she's making pay so she got a crib on Yonge Street, right on 17<sup>th</sup> street.*

JOHN: Easy R. Kelly. Is she actually real?

BRYANT: Funny guy.

JOHN: Who is she?

BRYANT: Guess. One hint, I call her KT.

JOHN: *Does she have car?*

BRYANT: *Yep.*

JOHN: *Always come over to your house?*

BRYANT: *Yep.*

JOHN: *Does she have a beauty mark at the right side of her mouth?*

BRYANT: I'm not talking about the music video girl, John. You know her too.

JOHN: *Went to U of T?*

BRYANT: *Yep*

JOHN: *Work for CBS?*

BRYANT: No.

JOHN: Oh, I know who you are talking about.

BRYANT: That's not the best part. Right after I asked Katie out, I got a million girls angry at me.

JOHN: Why, cuz she's too good for you? Yeah I know. I would be mad too if I were her friend.

BRYANT: Imagine. No man, they are mad because they want to be with me.

JOHN: Good one.

BRYANT: No I'm serious. Read this text. I said some stuff, and she's like 'I've been waiting for two years to you to ask me out'.

JOHN: Noooooooo. Okay, let's take this back to the beginning.

BRYANT: Never mind, I'm just joking. Next subject. [*sarcastically*]

JOHN: No, you're going to tell me the whole story from the beginning.

BRYANT: Just read the texts. They're pretty self-explanatory.

[*Handing over the cell phone.*]

JOHN: Wow, what the f! You just got a new text from my Miley.

BRYANT: What did she say?

JOHN: [*Tossing the phone back.*] I don't even want to look at it anymore.

BRYANT: [*Reading it.*] Man don't worry, I promise I won't make a move on her.

JOHN: Yeah, just like you didn't make a move on Pete's girl last year.

BRYANT: That was because Pete pissed me off.

JOHN: What did I ever do to you!

BRYANT: I didn't do anything! I don't know why she's suddenly telling me that she wants to bond with me on the NYC trip.

JOHN: Let me get this right. I invite you to go with me to the greatest city in the world for free. And this is how you repay me!

BRYANT: Man, here. Pretend that you're me and text her back. I'm sure that she's just joking like the rest of the girls.

JOHN: Pass me the damn phone. [*John reads what he texts on the phone out loud.*] "Miley, what do you mean?" I swear, I'll be so mad at you if you are fooling around with my girl.

BRYANT: Let's just see what she says. If you like her so much, why don't you ask her out already?

JOHN: I'm waiting for the right moment.

BRYANT: Man, don't be a wimp. You've been eyeing her for three months now.

JOHN: Well, I was planning on telling her during the New York trip.

BRYANT: All right man, I promise that I will be out of the way.

*Phone rings.*

BRYANT: What did she say?

JOHN: Wait, this is my text, not yours. [*Reading the text.*] I hate your guts. She wants to room with you and wants me in a room with her friend Jen.

BRYANT: Well, this is awkward.

JOHN: Don't you understand, I love Miley.

*BRYANT'S phone rings.*

BRYANT: Well, judging from her text to me, it obvious that she doesn't share your feelings.

JOHN: What did she say?

Bryant: She wants to get to know the mini-me.

JOHN: I'm kicking you off the trip.

BRYANT: Don't be like that.

JOHN: You have just crossed the line buddy. Enough's enough.

BRYANT: If you do, then you'll be going to the Big Apple alone because Miley will stay with me here.

JOHN: You son of a bitch.

BRYANT: [*Sigh.*] Since you are my friend, I'll help you get her back. Besides, I don't even want her, I have Katie.

JOHN: Good, that's what friends do.

BRYANT: Man, she's not even anywhere close what you imagine her to be.

JOHN: Now you are just trying to convince me to leave her so you can have her. I can't believe you. Yo, I'm not going to your place anymore. Peace.

BRYANT: Don't be like that.

JOHN: Peace, I'm out of here.

*JOHN starts to walk away.*

BRYANT: Wait, I said I'd help you win her back.

*JOHN stops and turns around.*

JOHN: Ok, what's your plan, Mr. Hitch?

BRYANT: First of all, you're too nice. Nice is boring. Just pretend that I'm her. Make fun of me.

JOHN: Should we try it out?

BRYANT: Let's do this. [*In a girlish voice.*] Hi *John*, I don't think I have feelings for you.

JOHN: Girl, you don't come, I ain't gonna die. But you've never seen a man so fly.

BRYANT: Great, mmm, but try to be yourself instead of using other people's lyrics.

[*Beat. JOHN does not know what to say.*]

BRYANT: Ok, to make things easier for you, just say anything.

JOHN: Ok, mmm, hi.

BRYANT: *Hi, John.*

JOHN: What's up?

BRYANT: *I'm just waiting for someone to sweep me off my feet. Oh Bryant, hold me tight.*

[BRYANT *bugs himself*. JOHN *punches him in the shoulder*.]

JOHN: Come on, be serious. The trip is only three days away.

BRYANT: Ok. *Nothing much, just doing my hair. What have you been up to?*

JOHN: Nothing much. Want to go for coffee later?

BRYANT: *That's boring. No thanks.*

JOHN: What do you mean?

BRYANT: I'm sorry but it sounds boring.

JOHN: That's not what she would have said!

BRYANT: Are you sure?

JOHN: Positive.

BRYANT: When's the last time you two went out for coffee?

JOHN: [*Quietly*.] I can't remember.

BRYANT: When's the last time you asked her to go for coffee?

JOHN: A couple days ago

BRYANT: See what I mean.

JOHN *sits down and covers his face with his hands*.

JOHN: You're right. I am boring. That's not good...

BRYANT: ...at all.

John: You have to help me.

BRYANT: Don't be needy.

JOHN: Man, I really need your help.

BRYANT: Did I not just say don't be needy?

JOHN *gives a frustrated growl and stands back up*.

JOHN: Screw you. I am going to make her fall in love with me by myself. I don't need your help. I got the charm and the look. [*Point his finger at BRYANT'S face.*] If you stand in my way, may God have mercy on your soul.

[*BRYANT'S face breaks into a big grin.*]

BRYANT: That's my boy. There's the confidence I've been looking for.

JOHN: Watch, I'm going to call her right now and we are going to hang out together.

BRYANT: I'm watching.

[*JOHN picks up his cell and calls.*]

JOHN: Hey, Miley... What's up... You wanna... Oh, no problem... Some other time then... Bye...

BRYANT: I'm gonna go out on a limb here and guess that she said no.

JOHN: That's not even the worst part.

BRYANT: Oh boy.

JOHN: She gave me the lamest excuse. She has to help out in her parents' store today.

BRYANT: Well, maybe she does have to work for her parents today.

JOHN: Her parents don't own a store!

BRYANT: Ouch! You have to admit it. That's pretty funny. By the way, why do you like this chick so much?

JOHN: We have so much in common. I remember a few months ago when me, her, and Jen would chill all day. Fun times.

BRYANT: Then what happened?

JOHN: Then I made out with her at a party and her demeanour changed.

BRYANT: To what?

JOHN: Let's just say that if I ever need some ice, I can just chip some off her heart.

BRYANT: Damn, that's cold.

JOHN: It's like thirty-degrees below plus the wind chill.

BRYANT: [*Sings.*] *Ain't I packing chrome, ain't I blowing strong. Ain't I ain't I ain't I ain't I got it going on.*

JOHN: Everything is a joke to you, isn't it.

BRYANT: Is Jen hot?

JOHN: What?

BRYANT: Is Jen sexy?

JOHN: Pretty hot. What does that have anything to do with my situation at hand?

BRYANT: Describe her to me.

JOHN: She stands about 5'11. Brunette hair and green eyes. Does track so her body is smoking.

BRYANT: Ewww, I hate those skinny cross-country runners.

JOHN: Naw, she has the curvy sprinter-type body.

BRYANT: That's what I'm talking about. Come here.

[*BRYANT smacks JOHN on the head.*]

JOHN: Oww! What's that for?

BRYANT: For being an idiot.

JOHN: How am I an idiot? You are the one with the ADHD, switching topics all over the place.

BRYANT: Why are you wasting your time with Miley when Jen clearly likes you?

JOHN: I don't know where you get the 'wasting' part or the 'likes' part from.

BRYANT: Dude think about it. I think the only reason Miley started talking to you is because Jen got jealous. And of course Jen wants to room with you on the NYC trip.

JOHN: Oh my god, I think I'm in love.

[*BRYANT shows a small smirk on his face.*]

BRYANT: What about the "Miley is my soul mate" b.s.?

JOHN: Love works in mysterious way.

BRYANT: It sure does.

JOHN: Wait, I don't believe it. One second, I am obsessed with Miley. Now all of a sudden, I kind of like her roommate.

BRYANT: I think I'm a little caught up in her spell too.

JOHN: No, don't tell me you like Jen now too.

BRYANT: I'm talking about Miley.

JOHN: What about Katie?

BRYANT: Well you know...

[*They look at each other with mischievous smiles on their faces.*]

BRYANT and JOHN: [Sing.] *I know I'm with her, at the start, but let me tell you something, I had a change of heart.*

*Curtain.*

Mark LaRiviere

## Cosmic Ninjas

SETTING: *Outside the dojo. Three boys enter the stage dressed in their karate outfits. They have just finished a class and are practicing their moves.*

NATHAN takes it very seriously and puts all of his focus into his practice.

LUKE has fun while practicing.

JAKE goes crazy pretending to do energy blasts.

LUKE: [*Throws a front kick.*] Hi-Yah!

NATE: [*Puts up a block.*] Kyah! [*Throws a punch.*] Hi-yah!

JAKE: [*Puts his wrists together with his hands spread apart.*]

HODUKEN!

NATE: What's a *boduken*?

JAKE: It's an energy blast of absolute awesomeness!

LUKE: Sweet.

NATE: That's ridiculous. Honestly, you should take martial arts more seriously. It could save your life one day.

JAKE: *KAAAA MAY HAAAA MAY HAAAAAAAAAAAA!* Nah, this is way more fun. Sometimes I like to pretend I'm a super-crazy-awesome Cosmic Ninja, and when I'm a ninja, I can do energy blasts from my hands.

LUKE: That's pretty cool. I bet you're, like, the last of your kind too.

JAKE: Hells yes. I also have to defend the honour of my fallen family from the evil... er, Nate-bot. That kind of stuff. You know?

NATE: You know what I know? That's the stupidest thing I've ever heard.

JAKE: What are you talking about?

NATE: Martial arts are about self-defence. You're making the sport unrealistic.

JAKE: It's totally self-defence and realistic if I have to protect my family from an evil Nate-boot.

NATE: And the energy blasts?

JAKE: Those are just super-badass.

LUKE: They *are* super badass.

*NATE starts to get agitated*

NATE: It's not real though! Can't you see how obviously stupid this is.

LUKE and JAKE run around pretending to do crazy movie-like martial arts.

JAKE: [*Pretends to rapid throw shortens.*] Ft-ft-ft! Ninja stars!

LUKE: [*Jumps and strikes a ridiculous pose.*] Dodged!

NATE: Stop!

LUKE and JAKE: KAAAAAAAAAAAH...

NATE: [*Starting to get angry.*] Don't!

LUKE and JAKE: MAAAAAAAAAY...

NATE: [*Anger is building*] Guys, this is really embarrassing!

LUKE and JAKE: HAAAAAAAAA...

NATE: [*Almost furious.*] People are looking at us weird!

LUKE and JAKE: MAAAAAAAAAAAAAY...

NATE: [*Snaps from anger.*] STOP IT!

JAKE: Whoa!, settle down there, *mom*.

LUKE: God dude, why does this piss you off so much. Just relax a bit.

NATE: It's not fair. It's not fair.

LUKE: What's not fair?

NATE: I get in trouble for acting silly.

JAKE: That...sucks!

LUKE: Yeah, it totally does.

JAKE: How do you get in trouble?

NATE: You remember that time last year when we were playing "Cowboys and Indians"?

LUKE: Yeah, I lassoed Jake and tied him to that tree in your backyard.

NATE: So Jake here is covering me while I shoot my way out of the fort because we were low on supplies.

JAKE: I was hungry for some Oreos.

NATE: Right, well anyways my mom comes out, takes me aside, and gives me a lecture about racism.

JAKE: Racism?

NATE: Yeah. Racism

LUKE: What's racism?

NATE: It's like, if I didn't like Jeff because he's Chinese.

LUKE: I thought you didn't like Jeff because he's a jerk.

NATE: Yeah, but that's okay. If I didn't like him because of where he's from it would be racist...I think, I don't really get it.

JAKE: Do people actually do that? Not like someone because of where they come from?

NATE: Apparently. But my mom lectured me about how the game is inappropriate and I ended up being grounded.

JAKE: "Cowboys and Indians" isn't racist.

NATE: According to my mom it is. You guys know what it's being around my mom.

JAKE: [*Very politely*] Yes, of course, Mrs. Peterson.

LUKE: [*Very politely*] Very well, thank you. And yourself, Mrs. Peterson?

JAKE: [*Very politely*] You are absolutely right, ma'am.

NATE: Man, I really don't want to go home. After lessons I have to do an hour of homework.

JAKE: What? An hour? I don't do that much homework in a week!

LUKE: Well we aren't going to be picked up for a little while.

JAKE: You could play with us for a bit!

NATE: How long do you think we have?

LUKE: At least ten minutes, maybe fifteen.

NATE: What can we do in that amount of time?

JAKE: You want to know what we can do. This!

*JAKE runs to the garbage can and climbs on top. He jumps off doing a flying side-kick in the air. He lands and throws a three punch combination.*

LUKE: That's nothing, check this out.

*LUKE climbs the garbage can does a flying side-kick off, rolls his landing, stands and does a back-kick.*

LUKE: Kyah!

NATE: Psht, that's it?

*NATE climbs the garbage can and does a spinning kick off, landing perfectly.*

LUKE: Whoa, dude! Can you show us how to do that?

JAKE: Teach us, Master Sensei.

NATE: Ha, cut it out.

LUKE: Seriously, man. You have so much confidence in your moves.

NATE: Really?

LUKE: Yeah! If you had that confidence all the time I bet you could stand up to your mom.

NATE: I don't know.

JAKE: I do!

*JAKE climbs into the garbage bin. Lights flash and weird transitional anime music plays. JAKE emerges with tinfoil wrapped around his arms, a dented spaghetti strainer on his head and underneath, a woman's wig. Metal is sticking off various places.*

JAKE: RAAAAH!!!! MOM-BOT TRANSFORM!  
Naaaaaaathhaaaaaaaan! Come insiiiiide and doooo your  
hoooomewooooork!!!

LUKE: What are you going to do. Nate?

NATE: Kyah! I don't have any homework!

*JAKE, as Mom-bot, and NATE start battling, doing eccentric fighting moves and flailing.*

JAKE: Then you can cooome and stuuuuudy for an hooour  
instead! P-yoo! P-yoo [*Pretends to shoot laser beams from his eyes.*]

NATE: Why? I don't have to study for anything! Ft-ft-ft! [*Pretends to throw Ninja Stars.*]

JAKE: Because I SAID SOOOO! [*Pretends to do an energy blast with one hand.*] BECAUSE—I—AM—YOUR—MOTHERRRR!  
[*Pretends to do an energy blast with the other.*]

*NATE falls dramatically from the "blasts". JAKE stands over NATE so that he can't get up. LUKE comes and leans down to talk to NATE. JAKE raises both hands high in the air, charging for a powerful energy blast.*

LUKE: What are you going to do, Nate? What are you going to say?

NATE: I don't know! I have to listen to my mom.

LUKE: C'mon! You have to hurry before her Energy Bomb is complete!

JAKE: Come inside and stop being such a child!

NATE: I AM A CHILD!

*NATE rolls and gets back up.*

NATE: HODUKEN! [*He puts wrists together.*]

*JAKE falls dramatically.*

JAKE: B-but I'm your mother! I know what's best for you!

NATE: I think I need to learn for myself what's best for me!

*Jake gets up and the lights go back to normal. He takes off his spaghetti strainer.*

LUKE: That. Was. Awesome.

NATE: Yeah?

LUKE: Yeah! You totally showed your Mom-bot up. Now you just need to be able to do that at home!

JAKE: You *can* do it! I was scared there for a second.

NATE: Thanks, guys. I'll try and do that more at home.

*A door offstage slams shut.*

LUKE: Aw, I bet that's one of our moms.

*LUKE peeks offstage and returns to centre*

LUKE: Nate, your mom is here.

NATE: Aw man. I don't want to leave.

LUKE: Don't worry man, you can come over this weekend.

NATE: Yeah?

LUKE: Yeah. We can get in a nice game of Cowboys and Indians in at my house.

JAKE: I call dibs on being a Cowboy!

NATE: Yeah, if my mom lets me.

LUKE: You can always say you're coming over to do a project.

NATE: Hey, yeah! All right. I'll see you guys in school tomorrow!

*NATE leaves.*

LUKE: Man, I love playing "Cowboys and Indians".

JAKE: Yeah, but I think I like "Cosmic Ninjas" better.

*There is a pause as LUKE and JAKE look at each other. They start flailing around with their "ninja moves" and spar each other.*

*Curtain*

Megan Fisher

## Lasagna

*SETTING: Living room/ dining area of a modest one-bedroom apartment. A couch, lamps, coffee table.*

*JENN: mid twenties, living with Matt*

*MATT: mid-twenties.*

*Jenn enters, Matt is sitting on couch reading the newspaper.*

MATT: So what do you want to do for dinner tonight?

JENN: Thai food?

MATT: Not tonight.

JENN: We could go to Giovanni's?

MATT: Too expensive.

JENN: Too expensive?

MATT: Yeah. Too expensive. I mean, we can hardly afford the

hydro bill this month, let alone afford to be eating out every weekend.

JENN: You're right, you're right. Well, what do you want to do then?

MATT: I don't know. There's some leftover lasagna in the freezer, we could heat that up.

JENN: All right, I'll go throw it in the oven.

*Jenn exits room, and returns some moments later*

JENN: Do you love me, Matt?

MATT: Of course, Jenn. Hey, guess what news I have about my brother, Ryan.

JENN: And you would stand by me through anything.

MATT: Of course, Jenn, through anything. Through anything, hon, OK? So anyway, Ryan and Kate, you're never going to believe this, are getting married.

JENN: Wow!

MATT: Married! Can you believe it?

JENN: Well, yeah. I mean, it's a little soon I guess, but they're so crazy in love with each other. So, yeah, I can believe it.

MATT: But they're so young!

JENN: Matt, they're 23. That's hardly too young to be getting married.

MATT: I'm just saying. You and I are going on 26, and we haven't felt the need to get married yet. What's the big rush anyway?

JENN: Well I'm happy for them. And I think they'll be happy

together.

MATT: You think so?

JENN: I really do, Matt. When two people love each other, they'll be happy together. It doesn't matter whether or not they're married. They'll be happy.

MATT: [*Laughing.*] You can be so naive, Jenn. Of course it matters the circumstances. One change in the relationship, and WHAM!

JENN: Wham what?

MATT: The whole thing falls to pieces.

JENN: You don't really think that, do you?

MATT: Of course I do.

JENN: But... but what about us?

MATT: What about us?

JENN: You don't think we could survive a... [*Snapping her fingers*]... a change in the [*using air quotation marks.*] "balance of our relationship"?

MATT: Well, it really depends on what this change would be.

JENN: I see.

MATT: Like, getting married for instance. Sure, we could do the whole marriage thing, be a [*Using air quotation marks.*] "happily married couple". But why rush into all of that right now? It's a big commitment, not to mention a lot of money for a wedding.

JENN: Money, money, money. That's all you ever talk about Matt.

MATT: That is not true... well maybe it is. But that's just because it seems so scarce right now.

JENN: And a big commitment? Why is marrying me such a big commitment? We've lived together for a year for Christ's sake.

MATT: I know. It's just that, I want to be with you because I *want* to be with you, not because a marriage certificate requires me too; not because I *have* to.

*Silence*

JENN: I know, I know. Listen, I'm sorry. I know you love me, and I know you want to be with me. This really isn't about marriage at all anyway.

MATT: It's not?

JENN: No, it's about us being able to survive whatever is thrown at us.

MATT: [*Laughing.*] Jesus. Why are you being so melodramatic?

JENN: I'm not!

MATT: Yeah, you are. Is something bothering you?

JENN: No, no, not at all.

MATT: Well, good. Anyway, I think I'll talk to my brother tomorrow. Let him know what I think about the whole marriage thing.

JENN: Come on, Matt. Just let the guy do what he wants.

MATT: Yeah, sure. He can do whatever he wants, but not before I let him know what I think.

JENN: And what exactly are you going to say? [*A deeper voice, imitating Matt's.*] Marriage is stupid? Don't do it? [*Normal voice.*] Very convincing, Matt.

MATT: No, no. I'll just tell him, very frankly, that he's too young to be getting married.

JENN: I fail to see exactly how they are too young.

MATT: For one, they have no money.

JENN: Neither do we.

MATT: They don't own a home.

JENN: Well, we don't have one of those either.

MATT: Yeah, but that's a moot point. We're not getting married, are we? Also, Ryan's in danger of being laid off.

JENN: Any one of us could get laid off, but go on.

MATT: Well, what if they got pregnant?

JENN: So what if they got pregnant?

MATT: Well, they're getting married, it'll probably happen soon enough.

JENN: What would be so bad about that?

MATT: Jenn, were you not listening to a goddamn thing I just said? No money. No house. No job. It's just not the right time for them to be getting married. Or to have a baby.

JENN: But—

MATT: Having a baby is exactly the kind of change of balance that I was talking about.

JENN: So when is the right time for Kate to have a baby? When she's forty?

MATT: No, of course not. That's not what I'm saying. All I'm saying is that it's just plain irresponsible to have a child when you

don't have the means to support a family. That's why you and I are smart to be putting all this marriage and baby stuff on hold until we're ready.

JENN: I'm pregnant.

MATT: I'm sorry?

JENN: [*Smiling.*] I'm pregnant.

MATT: Really? You're sure?

JENN: Can you believe it? I mean, despite everything you've been saying, it's exciting, right? It's exciting!

MATT: Jenn, you can't be serious.

JENN: Of course I'm serious. I know you don't think we're ready—you've made that clear— but when are you ever really ready, you know? We'll love this baby no matter what.

MATT: You're keeping it?

JENN: *We're* keeping it, yes.

MATT: No, you're not.

JENN: Yes, we are.

MATT: We can't afford a baby. We can't even afford the fucking rent.

JENN: But Matt, I love you. And you love me. And we'll love this baby. And everything will be good.

MATT: No, it won't. It won't

JENN: But you said, Matt, you said you'd stand by me through anything.

MATT: Well, not this I won't.

JENN: But you said—

MATT: Listen, Jenn, I say a lot of shit to keep you happy. You really think I mean all of it?

JENN: Well, yeah. I did.

MATT: You are not keeping this baby, Jenn. And that's final.

JENN: You really can't make that decision for me.

MATT: Looks like I just did.

JENN: Matt, why are you being so closed minded about this?

MATT: All right, Jenn. Yeah, we're in our mid twenties. Yeah, we're old enough to start having children. But that doesn't mean we're ready. We don't have the money, or the space, to raise a child.

JENN: I know, I know, but—

MATT: How will you be able to take time off work to look after the baby?

JENN: I'll—

MATT: And what are we going to feed it?

JENN: We'll—

MATT: And how will we afford to clothe it?

JENN: We can—

MATT: And where will it sleep, huh? We don't have room for it.

JENN: We'll—

MATT: Listen, Jenn. We are not having this baby.

*Silence*

JENN: We're not?

MATT: No. The baby goes. Or I go. Take your pick.

JENN: You can't just go. You'll have child support to pay.

MATT: Oh, I know. And I'll adhere to that. But that will be the most you ever hear from me.

JENN: But Matt—

MATT: I'm serious. You'll get a cheque from me every month. But I swear to God, Jenn, you will never see my face again if you have that baby.

JENN: Really?

MATT: Do you love me?

JENN: Of course.

MATT: And would you do anything for me?

JENN: Of course.

MATT: Then don't have this baby.

JENN: Okay.

MATT: Good. [*Beat.*]. Now, I'm hungry.

JENN: I'll go check on the lasagna.

*Jenn exits. Matt picks up the newspaper.*

*Curtain*

Matt Samuelson

## Pauper's Grave

SETTING: *Graveyard. Heaps of earth. A pile of bones,*

JACOB: *A gravedigger, suitably attired.*

DAVID: *Another gravedigger.*

JACOB: C'mon, dig.

DAVID *grunts.*

DAVID: Hey, I think I've found something. [*Reaches down to pick up a bone.*] Could this be anything?

JACOB: No, no. She can't have three femurs.

DAVID *bends down once again.*

DAVID: Well, how about this?

JACOB: Yeah, maybe. Put it in the pile.

*DAVID throws the bone into a pile of already excavated bones to his left. There is more grunting between the two as they continue to dig. JACOB lifts up his head.*

JACOB: Man, four years of our lives at university so that we could do *this*.

DAVID: Don't think of it like that.

JACOB: Oh, no? How should I think of it?

DAVID: Think of it as a stepping stone.

JACOB: A stepping stone?

DAVID: Yeah. This job may not be the best—

JACOB:—Yeah?—

DAVID: —it might be pretty miserable—

JACOB: —Yeah?—

DAVID: —pretty morbid—

JACOB: —Yeah?—

DAVID: —but it's just a stepping stone to something greater. Just you wait, soon we'll move on. We'll be able to find better jobs.

JACOB: Oh yeah? There were no jobs for us when we finished university, but I'm *sure* that all the

major corporations will just be jumping out of their seats once they realize that we have grave-digging experience under our belts now.

DAVID: Hey now, keep looking, and we'll eventually be able to find better jobs.

JACOB: It's a complete dead end, bonehead. We're not going anywhere for a very long time.

*DAVID stops digging to look at JACOB. JACOB soon does the same.*

DAVID: So, you just think that were going to be working here forever.

JACOB: Yep, there's no escape.

DAVID: Well then, you'd better get used to it.

JACOB: I have. I've completely accepted that these hands will be searching through dirt and bones for the rest of my life. It's you that can't accept your own fate.

DAVID: Well, I don't see how that's at all true.

JACOB: You're under the illusion that you might go somewhere, make something of yourself. You've actually managed to fool yourself into believing that there's an ounce of hope in your life.

DAVID: So what, you want me to just accept that my life is over, and do nothing about it, give up?

JACOB: Exactly.

DAVID: We're both twenty-two!

JACOB: Precisely, our lives have just begun, yet, they're already over.

DAVID: Why do you have to think like that, man?

JACOB: Like what?

DAVID: You know what.

JACOB: Realistically?

DAVID: No, so cynically, so negatively.

JACOB: Is there a difference? I mean, we got top grade educations to become grave diggers, our reality is quite disheartening.

DAVID: Well, it depends on how you look at it.

JACOB: No it doesn't. Everyday I come to a cemetery and unearth what is left of men—

DAVID: Well,...

JACOB: Hell, no one even cares about these people any more, however magnificent they may have been in life, they've been left to rot in the ground now, haven't they. Gets you thinking about life, doesn't it.

DAVID: I don't like where you're going with this.

JACOB: All of these people, no matter who they were, what they were like, who they knew, how much they were cared for by others, they all ended up in the ground.

DAVID: So?

JACOB: These people could be us.

DAVID: What do you mean?

JACOB: All of these people, they lived as we do, and they died as we will. They were forgotten, and left to lie alone.

DAVID: Why are we even talking about this.

JACOB: A tragedy for no one to see. They don't matter anymore.

DAVID: Don't say that-

JACOB: They're completely meaningless. Just like us, completely meaningless.

DAVID: You can't think that way. You can't always focus on the negatives if you ever want to lead a blissful life.

*They both pause for a moment.*

DAVID: Can we just get back to digging?

JACOB: All right.

*Both men resume digging.*

DAVID: Jackpot! Here we go.

*DAVID bends over and picks up a pile of bones.*

JACOB: Wow, looks like they could be hers.

DAVID: Yeah. What's "her" name anyway.

*JACOB pulls out a piece of paper.*

JACOB: Her name was...*[Looks at the piece of paper.]*... Lucy Owens.

Lucy Owens, "I knew her

well, a woman of most excellent fancy."

*Both chuckle.*

JACOB: You see anything else over there?

DAVID: No.

JACOB: Let's try over here then. "Now pile your dust upon the quick and dead, Till of this flat a mountain you have made".

DAVID: All right, all right.

*Both fill in the hole which they have just dug, and then move to the right, and continue with their digging.*

DAVID: What about that girl that you've been seeing lately.

JACOB: Jenny?

DAVID: Yeah, Jenny. How've things been going with her?

JACOB: Well, I took her home to meet the parents yesterday.

DAVID: Oh, and what happened?

JACOB: Just a usual night.

DAVID: What did you do?

JACOB: You know, I introduced her to my parents, we had dinner, some nice conversation, and then I took her home.

DAVID: Well, that sounds good.

JACOB: Yeah, it was good.

DAVID: There you go, that's something positive in your life. That has to mean something, try to focus on that.

JACOB: Yeah, I guesses I could focus on that...*(keeps digging in silence for a moment)*.... She has nice bones.

DAVID: *What?*

JACOB: My mother said that she had nice bones.

DAVID: Your mother said *that?*

JACOB: Yeah, my mother commented on Jenny's nice bones.

DAVID: Your mother *actually* told you that Jenny had nice bones?

JACOB: Well, she said that she had pretty cheek bones, but everyone knows that that means she has a pretty facial structure, or, bones. Really, my mother was just saying that Jenny had nice bones.

DAVID: This is what I'm talking about. You're obsessed with bones, and death.

JACOB: Hard not to be, my life is full of them.

DAVID: Come on, you've gotta try to focus on the positive in your life.

JACOB: Well, how am I supposed to focus on the positive in my life when all that we do with our days is dig through the graves of the diseased? Collecting and disturbing the bones of the dead. All that I see is dirt and bones. My whole life is dirt, bones, and death, and every person that we disinter from their graves means absolutely nothing, so how exactly am I supposed to look at life any differently, when I'm forced to look at life as the meaningless mess that it is, the individual's life, *our* lives meaning absolutely nothing, how exactly am I supposed to look at life any differently? And you know what the worst part is?

DAVID: What?

JACOB: This job has stripped me of my humanity.

DAVID: Oh yeah?

JACOB: Yeah.

DAVID: How so?

JACOB: I used to feel remorse. When I was sifting through the resting places of the dead, disturbing what was meant to be holy, even eternal, I used to, I don't know, feel as if I was doing some wrong. Now, I don't know....

DAVID: - "Custom hath made it in him a property of easiness."

JACOB: Yeah, something like that.

*They continue digging in silence for a moment.*

JACOB: You found anything else yet.

DAVID: No.

JACOB: Let's take a break then.

DAVID: Yeah, all right.

*They sit on opposite sides of the hole. They are silent for a moment. DAVID then sees something out of the corner of his eye.*

DAVID: Hey! Look at this.

*Davis reaches down into the hole, and struggles to pull a skull out of the ground.*

DAVID: We must have missed it before, you think it's hers?

*He gestures towards the pile of bones which have already been found. DAVID passes the skull over the hole to JACOB. JACOB stares intently at the skull, then, holding it up, he turns it towards DAVID.*

JACOB: "Life is nothing much to lose."

DAVID: C'mon now-

JACOB: "They give birth astride of a grave, the light gleams an instant, then it's night once more. From birth, through youth, to overturning the bones of others, to the overturning of our bones by men such as ourselves. Life is nothing much to lose".

*Curtain*

Jessica Heppler

## Turbulence

SETTING: *an airplane*

JONATHAN: *the ex-husband*

LISA: *the ex-wife*

FLIGHT ATTENDANT

*Jonathan is sitting in his seat, waiting for the plane to take-off.*

LISA: *(walking down the aisle)* Excuse me. Pardon me.

FLIGHT ATTENDANT: Can I help you find your seat?

LISA: Yes please, I'm looking for seat B3.

FLIGHT ATTENDANT: Right this way, ma'am.

LISA *follows* FLIGHT ATTENDANT *to seat B3.*

LISA: Thank you very much.

FLIGHT ATTENDANT *walks away*

LISA: Excuse me sir, my seat is beside you.

JONATHAN: Oh, sorry. [*Looks up at LISA.*] Oh, great.

LISA: Nice to see you too, Jonathan.

JONATHAN: [*Mutters.*] Could my day get any worse.

LISA: Well, that's unfortunate because for the next three hours you're stuck beside me.

JONATHAN: I hope you're in the mood for a very quiet plane ride.

LISA: Anything is better than talking to you.

JONATHAN: Good.

LISA: Great.

JONATHAN: Perfect.

LISA: You really haven't grown up in the last year have you, Jonathan?

JONATHAN: You don't have a clue what I have been doing in the last year.

LISA: So typical of you.

JONATHAN: You haven't changed either! I've been here with you for five minutes and you're already driving me crazy!

LISA: Jonathan, you *are* crazy, I certainly do not have to drive you there. [*Mutters.*] I'm in need of some hard liquor.

JONATHAN: What'd you say?

LISA: Nothing that concerns you.

JONATHAN: Good.

LISA: Great.

JONATHAN: Perfect.

LISA: What are the chances of this? Why are you flying to BC anyway?

JONATHAN: For business. You going to visit your parents?

LISA: Yeah, you know I go home every Christmas.

JONATHAN: Usually, you go home next week for two weeks around Christmas and New Year's. Not this early.

LISA: Well, I'm taking three weeks' vacation this year, if that's okay with you?

JONATHAN: Not really, cause now I'm stuck with you on this damn airplane.

LISA: Don't kid yourself, if you think I'm enjoying any of this.

*Beat*

LISA: [*Knocks Jonathan's arm.*] Would you keep your arm on your own arm rest?

JONATHAN: I will put my arm wherever the heck I chose.

LISA: Not on my arm rest you won't.

JONATHAN: I don't know how I put up with your nagging for two years.

LISA: I only had to nag, because you were so lazy. I did everything!

JONATHAN: I did my part.

LISA: Oh yeah? What, sitting on the couch? I worked full time, I cooked, I cleaned, and I looked after you, which was like babysitting a five year old.

JONATHAN: I cooked and cleaned!

LISA: The only time you raised a finger was if I was out of town on a business trip.

JONATHAN: Therefore I still cooked and cleaned.

LISA: You're unbelievable!

*Enter FLIGHT ATTENDANT, pushing a drinks trolley.*

FLIGHT ATTENDANT: [Excuse me, sir, would you or your wife like—

JONATHAN: [*In unison with LISA.*] She is not my wife.

LISA: [*In unison with JONATHAN.*] I am not his wife.

FLIGHT ATTENDANT: Oh, my apologies. Would either of you like something to drink?

LISA: Vodka, please, on the rocks.

JONATHAN: I'll take a beer please.

FLIGHT ATTENDANT *hands LISA and JONATHAN their drinks and keeps moving along*

LISA: [*Sips her drink.*] Still drinking beer, huh?

JONATHAN: Will you put a sock in it please. I'm over nineteen; I can drink whatever I want to.

LISA: I'm simply making an observation that you still drink beer. I mean your look has changed but your personality has not budged at all. You're still the same arrogant selfish man that I made the mistake of marrying three years ago.

JONATHAN: Mistake? You think marrying me was a mistake? You should try living with you!

LISA: I live with myself everyday.

JONATHAN: You know what I mean. You nagged, you yelled, and absolutely nothing I did was good enough for you. I tried to please you but nothing could and quite frankly, Lisa, nothing ever will.

LISA: I have been quite pleased with my life this past year. It's not only been stress free, it's been Jonathan free as well.

JONATHAN: You loved having me in your life.

LISA: For like the first year.

JONATHAN: Still loved sharing your life with me.

LISA: I did not.

JONATHAN: You really think after living with you for two years, I can't tell when you're lying.

LISA: I'm not lying.

JONATHAN: Your voice still goes high pitched when you're lying.

LISA: Shit, I hate that you know me so well.

JONATHAN: Yes, yes I do.

LISA: Don't be so humble.

JONATHAN: I'm not being humble; I should know my wife like the back of my hand

LISA: Ex! Ex-wife!

JONATHAN: Why do you always have to announce that?

LISA: Because...

JONATHAN: Because why?

LISA: Were not married anymore, that's why.

JONATHAN: Okay, but you make it out like our entire marriage was just horrible.

LISA: All the good memories seem to have become repressed.

JONATHAN: Lisa, c'mon, we had some good times.

LISA: Before all the anger and hurt!

JONATHAN: Doesn't mean the good moments weren't there.

LISA: Do you know how much you put me through?

JONATHAN: I know, a lot, but we were married for two years, you know I'm not all bad.

LISA: I know that you aren't all bad, but...

JONATHAN: But..

LISA: I don't even think you realize why our marriage fell apart?

JONATHAN: Yes, I do!

LISA: Why, Jonathan?

JONATHAN: Our marriage fell apart, because I couldn't handle you anymore. You nagged a lot, and towards the end I could barely breathe.

LISA: That's not true.

JONATHAN: Okay, than why did our marriage fall apart?

LISA: Our entire relationship was you being in control, and me having to put up with all your controlling behaviour. As soon as I stopped, our marriage fell apart.

*Beat.*

LISA: Nothing to say? Typical.

JONATHAN: No, I just can't make you understand.

LISA: Understand what?

JONATHAN: That I know we were both in the wrong. Yeah, our marriage took a turn for the worse, but not everything was bad. Think about how much fun we used to have. Our expectations of each other just ended up falling short.

LISA: I don't get it.

JONATHAN: I'm saying we should just move forward.

LISA: Like put everything behind us, and be friends?

JONATHAN: Yes, friends could be the perfect alternative for us!

*Beat.*

LISA: I think that's the most intelligent thing you've said in a long time.

JONATHAN: I'm going to take that as a compliment, so thank you!

LISA: You're quite welcome, Jonathan.

*Beat.*

JONATHAN: So...

LISA: So. How've you been the past year?

JONATHAN: Good, and yourself?

LISA: I've been good, working a lot.

JONATHAN: Like usual.

LISA: What does that mean?

JONATHAN: Nothing!

LISA: You said it with tone.

JONATHAN: I swear, I didn't.

LISA: Yes, you did, I know when you're speaking with tone, we were married.

JONATHAN: Lisa!

LISA: What?

JONATHAN: When we are trying to be friends, you don't just go and make comments about being married previously.

LISA: But we were married.

JONATHAN: You don't get it.

LISA: Jonathan, honestly, I don't think being friends is going to work.

JONATHAN: Don't give up!

LISA: If we're all friendly, something bad could happen.

JONATHAN: Nothing bad will happen from being friends, Lisa.

LISA: It's just a rule, you can't be friends with your ex.

JONATHAN: Well, that's a stupid rule. Why?

LISA: It's too hard to be friends, and share stories, without bringing up something that reminds us of old times we shared.

JONATHAN: I guess that is true.

LISA: Yeah, and if we start talking a lot.

JONATHAN: What if we start talking a lot?

LISA: We could end up liking each other again.

JONATHAN: Oh, Never thought about it like that.

LISA: So, I just don't see "friends" working.

JONATHAN: Okay, well, I really don't want to go back to this whole arguing thing.

LISA: Me neither.

JONATHAN: Well, then what do you suggest?

LISA: I think we'd work best as complete strangers to each other.

JONATHAN: Strangers?

LISA: Yeah, you know, like strangers who become acquaintances?

JONATHAN: I don't know, Lisa.

LISA: Look at this way, we don't know each other, we can't tell stories and be reminded of each other, and we can just move on without all the bitterness.

JONATHAN: Strangers....[*Beat.*]

JONATHAN: I think I like it.

LISA: Thanks, Jonathan.

JONATHAN: I'm sorry, do I know you?

LISA: Oh no, sorry, I'm Lisa.

JONATHAN: Nice to meet you, Lisa, I'm Jonathan.

LISA: So why are you heading out to BC?

JONATHAN: Business trip, what about yourself?

LISA: Just visiting family for the holiday.

JONATHAN: Alone?

LISA: Yeah, recently divorced.

JONATHAN: That's funny, so am I.

FLIGHT ATTENDANT [*Voice over.*]: Welcome to Air Canada flight 115 Toronto Vancouver direct....

*Curtain.*





