



CRAIG SILVEY 2023 AWARD

FOR YOUNG WRITERS



LET YOUR
IMAGINATION TAKE
YOU SOMEWHERE
UNEXPECTED



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LOWER
PRIMARY



Hi my name is Fred, This is my friend Tintin he lives in space with Me, Eating Potatos and tomatos. We are best friends ha! No one can live better than us! Oh yea, I am seven and tintin is 4 years old. I am very smart and cool! Tintin's not smart and not cool (only cute).

Have you wonderd why we can run and jump in the space? Well, the technology has developed from 2023 to 3023!!! We can go to space whenever we want. Do you see the solar system in the background? Well, they are my friends.

One morning, we woke up, and we were hungry. So I said "Lets go to mercury!" Tintin was shocked "Why?" asked Tintin, "Because Mercury is hot and hotpots are hot too" "Imagine having hoptpot for breakfast!" "okay" said Tintin and we went to Mercury.

We drove off in the minirocket, and we went to mecury, we went to hot pot city and ordered 1 hotpot (as you might expect), and Tintin also said: "too hot!!" and I said: "Calm down baby?? But that didn't work at all, So he drank water instead.

After we finished our breakfast (which tintin is still mad about) I said "lets keep exploring!" which Tintin said "yes" But we felt a pulling feeling. "Do you hear that sound?" says Tintin. "I think we are being dragged by a blackhole" "run!" I say.

But we cannot run. The black hole is toooo strong! I want to Pull Tintin back, but it's impossible. Tintin got sucked in the blackhole. "No!" I said going with him "We are Dead!" We shouted sacredly "argh!"

But we were not dead. We were in a black tunnel Dragged along with snails, sand, and Two-in-one-men, Two-in-one-eye-Two-in-one-men. They didn't hurt us AT ALL. Instead, they smiled at us. Which we want to smile back. We were dragged to the end of the tunnel.

Suddently, We landed on a strange planet, We looked around, And found its' blue and green. "It looks like Earth" I Say "No, it's kepler-452d" said Tintin Angryley. We looked at this planet, it was beautiful! "I like it" I said patting on Tintin's back. he thought for a while and said to me: "I like it too!"

We wonderd for a bit, and dicided to go into kepler-452b. It was amazing! We were reeeeeeeeeeally fast, though it was pretty scarey AND Fun! I love it, love it sooooooo much we went to the big country and BOOM! It was amazing!

After we arrived on the Kepler-452b, we saw lots of Junkfood men. There was pizza men, hamburger men, hotdog men, fries and coke men, they were adorable and sneaky! They were playing what they were playing. And didn't notice Tintin and me, Fred. We were surprised that didn't hurt us.

We looked around and, we were afraid that they will hurt us, so we jumped in the drain. I got in first and then Tintin came last closing the lid. It was soooooo dark in here that I can't barley see. It was actually fun.

We saw a broccoli standing there and she said "help the veggies please" Tintin said "Who are you?" "I'm a broccoli from Mars, But they don't like me so they put me in here." "So, how can we help you?" I said. "You have to go to Mars and call them to come here so this land is healthy." Said Broccoli. "Ok" we said and drove off.

We went in our minirocket, without being pulled by the blackhole to Mars. Mars was unusual because it was green. We thought it was green because of the light from the other planets. When we were approached it, we found out why it is green: the green juicy vegetables and fruits.

They went to Mars and vegetables and fruits. Tintin asked peapod a thing. "Who are you?" "I'm peapod you can call us veg, but not to green apple men ok?" said peapod. "Ok" I said and Tintin said "Broccoli's stuck on Kepler-452b can you help us?" "Of course!" said peapod and they went in there big-veggie-tesla-plane. It was enormous or gigantic. It was white with two light eyes pop from the lights. The Tesla's two wheels seemed pretty mysterious. I was in the front controlling the steering wheel – while Tintin sits next to me seeing space. It has two wings as well, TWO BIG WINGS. Everyone except Tintin and Fred was calling "Faster!"

As soon as we arrived at Kepler-452b, tons of Junkfood were standing there. "Let's have a fight!" shouted Tintin "who ever wins gets a key and broccoli too!" cried Tintin and they had a fight. Peapod shot peas and hamburger dodged it. French Fries shot fries at pepper and he dodged it too! It was SUPER cool!!!

And they won it. They won it! They got broccoli's baby! It's FANTASTIC Today! We were celebrating. "Yay!" shouted Tintin. "You rescued me!!!" cried broccoli's baby. "Now what do we do?" I ask "Let's go back to Earth!" Said Tintin. "but before we go, I like to say a BIG hooray!" I said we said "HORRAY!!!" we shouted.

Two hours later, we left Kepler-452b, we went to the MiniRocket and we went in to the Solar-system and Found..... EARTH!!!! I was looking at it and my head looked soooooooooooooo Bigggggg! It was super cool!

After we arrived at Earth, I said: "MOVIE!" "Um.... – yes!" said Tintin "But I want rest first." "Ok." I say and we rested for about 400,000,000,000,000,000,000,000,000,000,000,000 hours until..... MOVIE TIME!

The movie was about a friend called Fred and Tintin going to space and exploring vegetables and fruits and..... Junk food???!!!

- THE END -



Crash! A boy named Gabriel woke to the sound of rippling waves lapping against the shore. He looked out his window and saw vines crawling up the walls, seagulls squawking over his tin roof, (the house was shadowed by a weeping willow tree) and then his two small frangipani trees. Just then, he caught a glimpse of the magical endless path of silvery blueness. He had always loved the beautiful beach. When he went to the beach he always felt like another heart was entering his body.

Two weeks earlier, precisely four KM from the beach Gabriel usually visited, something Astronomically Amazing was happening! Floating on the ocean floor, a shell was being hit by a magical meteorite with dust that brings things to life! The magical dust looked like the pale, rocky moon surface. Just then, the meteorite went boom! Like a tsunami pelting down on the roofs of a million houses.

Pop! went the shell as two beady blue eyes appeared followed by two uncurling bright wings. Then came two short legs and two small arms. The magical metamorphosis was complete!

Gabriel walked confidently across the sunlit beach collecting lots of beautiful shells.

Suddenly, he came across a quiet rock-pool hidden by shrubs on the sand dunes. He started to dig into the golden sand. A shell flew out of the hole, startling the boy. He immediately snapped his neck towards the flying seashell. He held his hand out in astonishment and the shell fluttered into his palm. "You'll be safe with me," whispered Gabriel. He grabbed a chunk of clumpy seaweed, put it in his bucket, and lowered the shell gently on top.

The boy hurried across the rocky footpath and into his plant invaded backyard. He saw his dad in the kitchen making sushi for the boy's lunch. "Hey Dad!" "come over here!" he yelled. His dad came out and looked into the bucket. "You'll never in googolplex years guess what I found Dad"!

"It's a real life living shell"!!!!!!!

"Nice imagination Bub"! said the dad as he patted Gabriel's shoulder.

Gabriel raced up to his room to get changed and make a mini home for his shell. When Gabriel sat down on his bed, he noticed the shell examining his bedroom wall. The shell peeped over the edge of the bucket staring thoughtfully at his

underwater magazine posters. A jar of special violet coral sat next to a hard cover book – International Facts about the Sea.

“Wow” said the shell amazed by his surrounding. Gabriel lept up in surprise with his hands shaking knees buckling and eyes popping.

“Can you understand me?! Gabriel asked, astonished and overjoyed at the same time.

“Well yes”, said the shell “but only because you are one who loves and wants to protect the sea and all sea creatures”

During the week, Gabriel brought the shell to school with him for company. Whenever Gabriel was laughing with the shell, he felt like nothing bad had ever happened to him before. That afternoon Gabriel and the shell went up to Gabriel’s room. “Where did you come from?” asked Gabriel curiously. “I... um...came from the legendary edge of the world.” replied the shell.

“Really!?” replied Gabriel, excitement rising in his voice. Gabriel really wanted to go this amazing place but had second thoughts. He was worried about getting in trouble and more.

He tiptoed out of the house with teeth chattering, legs wobbling and thoughts bursting inside of him. He grabbed his dad’s jetski and hauled it onto the shore.

As Gabriel was roaring across the sea, he noticed rolling grey clouds calling in a raging storm. Now that Gabriel knew there was a storm, he actually felt the jet ski bouncing up and down. He then heard a clap of distant thunder followed by the earsplitting sound of a bolt of luminescent buzzing electricity. The shell clung to Gabriel’s pocket, his mouth wide and eyes staring at the extremely choppy waves.

A huge gust of wind suddenly blew Gabriel, with the shell in his quaking hand, into the merky dark depths of the sea. The icy cold waters, streaking in marvellous patterns around him, were becoming slower as Gabriel plunged towards the seabed.

Boom! Gabriel hit the seabed and felt mushy seaweed brush against his face. He could see nothing but a glowing thing. He picked it up. It was the shell! Relief flowed through Gabriel’s body. He had forgotten all about his little friend! “You can breath under here!” “Try doing it yourself”! said the shell. To Gabriel’s amazement, when he took a breath, the water formed a bubble around Gabriel so he could breath!

He reluctantly swam to the nearest shore with the shell clutched firmly in his quivering hand. As Gabriel looked up, he noticed Dad standing with arms folded and a sour expression.

“What were you thinking?!” dad said, “It’s not like you to do such a treacherous thing!”

“Well... um... I was just looking for the edge of the world”, Gabriel explained.

“I love you Bub, but why did you have to take and loose my perfectly good jetski?”

Gabriel felt coldness sweeping into his heart, while teardrops splashed onto the seawater like soft rain.

That night, Gabriel was sobbing in bed and holding his special friend, the Shell. A warm glow started to help him overcome his emotions, and he began to drift off to sleep. That morning, his dad wispered in Gabriel’s ear, “come on!” “I’ve got a surprise for you”. Gabriel opened his eyes and saw his dad standing with a small smile. A neon-red glow filled his window as the sun rose higher and higher.

When Gabriel reached the beach with his dad, he could smell pure saltwater and hear waves crashing down on the gleaming sand. They put down their towels and lay down next to eachother. “I forgive you. I've bought you a snorkle and mask so we can explore the sea together,” said dad. Gabriel rejoiced and felt his emotional bucket filling with love and kindness.

Gabriel whispered to his shell. “I don’t really need the snorkle part.”

“Correct, but let us keep it our little secret”, the shell replied. Gabriel and his dad waded together into the biting waters.

When Gabriel’s dad tucked him into bed that night, he wispered, “I believe you about your shell even if I can’t see it” .

– THE END –

WADE SEQUEIRA

The Best Sandwich Ever



In a town far away, there lived a boy named Jack. He lived with his parents. Jack was a 10-year-old boy, and he was quite an adventurous child. He had black hair, brown eyes, and pink, rosy cheeks. Jack and his family did not have a lot of money. They had a small home but not a lot of food in their house. Jack's dad was a coin collector and did not make lots of money, and because their town was so small, he could not find another job. His mum on the other hand was a pie seller who worked with Jack in a crooked stall, all worn out. Every day, Jack and his mum sold their pies, but not many people bought their pies because a few blocks away, there was another pie maker who made the best pies anyone had ever tasted.

A few days later, when Jack was eating his breakfast, the doorbell rang. "I wonder who it is?" He opened the door and outside there was a parcel and newspaper tied together. Jack took the newspaper and shouted, "Mum, there is a parcel for you!" Jack's mum took the parcel and headed out with it because it had a new sign with her business name on it and some new screws to fix the sign to the stall as all the old screws were rusted. Jack was a little bit bored, so he started to read the newspaper. Inside the newspaper it read "Welcoming everyone to compete in a challenge where you can collect ingredients to make the best sandwich ever. Jack was so excited and did not finish reading the newspaper which would lead him into trouble. Before gathering his things, he quickly read a sentence at the bottom saying **Warning! could be dangerous. Could take a long time.** But Jack did not understand what it meant.

Jack decided to be prepared as he was heading out, so he went to his piggy bank and took out a few dollars that he had found on the ground the previous day. Jack then went to the shops nearby, so he could buy a few things. Once Jack got there, he took a big water bottle, and a pocketknife just in case he needed it. Then Jack went to the counter, so he could pay. Jack then went back home so he could check if he needed anything else. Jack looked inside the newspaper again and when he opened it, there was a map! Jack took the map with him in case he needed it on his journey. Then Jack set off. Unfortunately, Jack did not read the newspaper properly. On the second page of the newspaper, it read: **if anyone eats the sandwich, they will get trapped a huge monster!**

Once Jack got outside, he started to follow the map. The map led into a huge forest. While Jack walked into the forest, all the leaves fell to the hot, rough ground. There were crickets chirping and each time Jack took a step, it got

darker. Jack started to get scared. After Jack walked through the forest, he came upon a big strong storm! Jack could not see where he was going because it was so foggy. Suddenly, Jack tripped and fainted! Twenty-five minutes later, Jack woke up and saw that he was in a forest that was like a leafy kingdom. "Wow, this place is amazing! I love it," he said. Then Jack looked at the map and it said to go underground. At first Jack did not understand but then he decided to dig a hole to fit him underground. Jack did not have a shovel but luckily, he found one hiding behind a big tree. He took the shovel and started to dig. After digging for a while, Jack missed his step and fell into the hole! When Jack reached the end of the hole, he came to an underground maze that had many different pathways! Jack decided to double check the map just in case he missed something, but unfortunately it did not say anything. "How is this a map if it doesn't show the path to get the ingredients properly?" Then he realised that nobody had gone to make this sandwich before.

Now, Jack still had to go to the other side of the maze. All the walls were made of stone, but they were not that high. Then Jack had an idea. Because the walls were so low, he could climb up them. Once Jack got up, the walls were a bit uneven, but he still managed. When Jack stood up, he could see the whole entire maze. Jack then started to walk on the walls. At first it was quite hard, but then he got the hang of it. When Jack almost got to the middle of the maze, there was a glowing light. Jack was determined to find out what it was. Once Jack reached the middle, he jumped down and came closer to the mysterious, glowing ball. Once Jack was as close as possible, he grabbed the glowing light. Suddenly the light went away, and the glowing ball turned into a piece of bread. The bread was smooth, and it was so sparkly. After Jack had a good look at the piece of bread, he put it in his backpack that he brought along and then he continued his journey.

Jack then climbed back up the wall and started to walk to the end of the humongous maze. Once Jack got to the end of the maze, he jumped down and started to walk deeper and deeper into the ground. It started to get darker and unfortunately Jack did not bring his torch. After some time of walking Jack tripped and fell. When Jack came to the end, there was some light coming from somewhere. When Jack came closer, he noticed that he was in front of a huge mountain. Because the light was so bright Jack could see that there was a door on the front of the mountain. Jack decided to explore what was inside. When Jack came inside, he saw an old man sitting in front of a huge fire. Then

the man spoke to Jack. He said, "Welcome to my home, I'm Neville." "Hi, my name is Jack, nice to meet you." Then Neville said, "I am a wizard." "Why have you come here?" Jack said, "I have come here because I want to make the best sandwich ever." Neville said, "Are you sure you want to make the sandwich?" Jack said yes. Okay said Neville, but I am warning you that something bad is going to happen. Before Jack left, he gave Jack a magic wand he said, "If you need any help just say expinio purfectium."

After Neville told Jack everything he needed to know, he was very happy. "Thank you so much," Jack replied. Then he continued his journey. He walked out the door with his brand-new wand, but after walking for a while, Jack fell into a trap! When Jack stood up, he noticed that he had fallen into a pit of snakes but luckily, they were all asleep. Jack then took out his wand and said "expinio purfectium. After, Jack saw that all the snakes disappeared. Underneath the floor was a passage. Jack jumped into the passage and started to walk. There were so many different lanes to take. Just then, Jack saw a glowing light again. Jack grabbed the light and held it tightly in his hands. Jack got two ingredients. The first ingredient was a tomato and the second one was a big, clean lettuce. This felt like a game! In front of Jack were huge blocks. Suddenly he turned into a video game character. Jack thought it was beautiful but then a huge gorilla came in front of him. Then he remembered his wand and hit the gorilla, and it went away! Then a tiger came upon Jack, so he did the same thing he did to it. After, Jack got hot, so he poured water on him, and everything went back to normal. Jack was now in a big passage, which had floating blocks everywhere. At first it looked easy but then the blocks started to fall. Jack decided to go underneath the big blocks so he would not get smashed. After running around for a while, the blocks started to disappear. So, he continued to follow the map.

Just then, Jack saw another light. He had got two other ingredients! The ingredients were a mayonnaise and a tomato sauce bottle. By now Jack was extremely hungry so he took out his big bottle that still had about one gallon of water and started to drink it. Jack thought he had finished making his sandwich but unfortunately, he had not. Then he came upon another mysterious light, which was a big, shiny kingdom. The kingdom was shaped like a sandwich. Jack started to walk up to the towering palace. When Jack got there, it looked like no one was guarding the palace, so he walked in. When Jack got inside it looked bigger than the outside. After a few more steps millions of guards surrounded Jack. Jack knew he was in danger so; he quickly took out his pocketknife and took a piece of wood that was next to him. Then he quickly carved out a sword

from the wood. As soon as Jack finished carving out the wood, all the guards started to shoot different types of things you would put in a sandwich. After the guns ran out of food, all the guards fell and acted like they had fainted.

Jack started to walk forward. He noticed that he was walking on a bright red carpet. When the carpet ended, more guards came but they did not hurt Jack and instead they shouted, "sliced tomatoes, perfect bread, kneel to our master Big Mac Ted!" Suddenly the place started rumbling and Jack felt scared. After all the rumbling stopped, a huge sandwich came from out of the ground! It started to throw fruit and vegetables from his own sandwich. Because Jack was so hungry, he ate all the food that the giant threw at him. Once the sandwich ran out of food he disappeared and so did Jack and the castle. When Jack reappeared, he was in his favourite place with the sandwich that he had made. Jack then started to eat the sandwich. When Jack ate one bite he fell in a huge monster's stomach! It started to destroy everything! Inside the monster was lots of sandwiches that Jack had to fight. Just then Jack had an idea. He started to pour water on all the sandwiches, and they magically disappeared. When Jack defeated all the sandwich's, everything went back to normal. He went home to his mum and dad, and they told Jack that they now have lots of money! Jack still had his wand so if they needed any money, they just had to say expinio purfectum. They then lived happily ever after.

– THE END –



MIDDLE PRIMARY

MY SUSPICIOUS NEIGHBOUR



ANYA ARYAPUTRI-EDI

My neighbourhood had a cat lady who only moved in a few months ago. Her name was Miss Jenny.

Miss Jenny was old with pale, wrinkly skin and grey hair. Her clothes were simply black like her cat, Obsidian, which made her look like a witch minus the hat. She smelled musky like a tropical rainforest after a thunderstorm. She also had small wrinkly eyes, and her tiny mouth formed a tight line. Her nose looked like a tomato because Miss Jenny was allergic to cats, but she still kept one.

My mum always told me that if I didn't draw eyebrows on my character drawings, they were basically Voldemort. Miss Jenny too had no eyebrows, so I totally freaked out! Miss Jenny was meek like a turtle in its shell and rarely went out in the public unless she was grocery-shopping or going to the doctors.

She shyly thanked everyone for welcoming her into Lotus Drive on the day she moved here on April the 13th, a gloomy Friday. Lotus Drive was tucked in a peaceful neighbourhood where everyone knew each other. Our street had 10 houses and a cul-de-sac. My family were the Robinsons. We lived at the cul-de-sac number 7, opposite from Miss Jenny's number 4.

My parents had a soft spot for Miss Jenny because they assumed that she was a very lonely person, living only with Obsidian. I wondered what Miss Jenny mostly does in her house.

Over time, Miss Jenny seemed as lovely as a lamington. She helped us with our plants when we were away on holidays. When it was raining, she helped us push our wheelie bins in. Sometimes, my family would send her food in thanks for her kindness.

At times, I felt odd about her. She never really invited us to her house, and it seemed that she always shut the door almost instantly, as if trying to hide something. Her cat, Obsidian seemed mysterious and always glancing at us with her large green eyes. I found Obsidian as creepy as a goblin shark. I found Obsidian suspicious. I've been watching her ever since she'd stepped into Lotus Drive with Miss Jenny. Our peaceful neighbourhood had some strange happenings since then.

On one Saturday, I was riding my bike across the gravelly path, waving to neighbours who were gardening and enjoying the sweet, spring sun. I came across the Holly's front yard and saw Obsidian underneath their Toyota. I

thought this was normal, for cats have a knack of walking around and poking their stiff tails everywhere. I went past their house and continued, catching the lovely breeze.

The next day, I was cycling again when I turned to my street, and saw some neighbours gathering there, gaping. The Holly's car had smashed into their own house. They were unhurt but shaken. Their Toyota was beyond repair and a tow-truck came and took their car away. Obsidian was watching, too. I heard Mr Holly groan, "I don't have a car insurance!"

A few days later, another incident happened on our street.

I came back from school riding on my bicycle. I saw Hua, one of the Lin's children teasing Obsidian with her chiko roll. Hua baited Obsidian with her chiko roll and when she got close enough, she kicked her away! I told Hua off for doing animal cruelty, but she just shrugged and walked away. Obsidian was visibly upset, meowing sadly. For once, I felt sorry for Obsidian.

The next day, I woke up to ambulance wails sounding like an upset toddler coming from the Lin's house. I jolted out of bed and looked out of the kitchen window. An ambulance was parked outside the Lin's. Hua had choked on her chiko roll breakfast and nearly died. On the Lin's lawn, I saw Obsidian sunbathing and watching the commotion as if it was a movie.

My mouth went dry. Although Hua was not too friendly around me, I still felt bad for her. I pondered if black cats do bring bad luck.

Ever since then, I sometimes heard my parents talk about a few incidents that had happened over time. Lawnmower out of control... Thick branches falling into roof... Someone almost got hit by a postie... When I was at school, I wondered what was going on in Lotus Drive.

Another month had passed. It was also the start of my school holidays, so I thankfully had more time to monitor Obsidian. The Coopers love doing barbecues on Sundays. It was lunchtime, and I smelled the aroma of grilled lamb, steak, corn, and onions. My mouth was watering! A few minutes later, the lovely aroma had become a strong bushfire scent and it made my eyes water. I ran to my parents, who were downstairs in the kitchen and told them about the smoky air.

We ran to the Cooper's and saw their barbecue on fire! The whole time we helped the Coopers extinguished it, Obsidian watched leisurely on the fence!

The next day, I was so terrified of Obsidian that I didn't want to leave home. I wish that I wasn't neighbours with Miss Jenny and her creepy cat.

"Lily dear, breakfast is ready!" exclaimed my mother from the kitchen. I stayed in my bedroom and gazed out of the window. The sun was lovely, dew sparkled on the grass, and I nearly felt peaceful. Obsidian was the only thing that made me unsettled. I went down for breakfast. My mind was spiralling on the accidents that had happened so far.

I sat down and started guzzling my french toast with bacon and maple syrup. I chugged down my milk, and my mum bustled in the kitchen, baking warm apple pie.

"Lily dear, go to Miss Jenny's house and share this apple with her," ordered my mum.

"Mummy, I don't want to go to her house! I-I'm scared of her cat!" I wailed, and turned my back on my mum, about to go to my bedroom. My mother glared daggers at me before turning as red as a London double-decker bus. She yelled at me for being silly and I knew that I had no other choice.

A few minutes later, I got out of my house and dragged my feet to Miss Jenny's house number 4 opposite mine. The tray in my hands felt warm and smelled sweet, but my hands cold from my anxiousness. The door was ajar. I stepped in. The air smelled as fishy as Obsidian. I studied the room. Then I spotted Obsidian, her green eyes glowing like a lantern.

I jumped and realised that it was just a calendar on the wall, printed with a close-up photo of Obsidian. I let out a sigh of relief.

I was in a cosy room with a fireplace and red-velvet armchairs. There were several fraying rugs on the creaking wooden floorboards. I set down the apple pie on a mahogany table. It was covered with letters and a laptop lay open. The laptop was showing a lottery site and I could tell that Miss Jenny liked gambling. However, the calendar piqued my interest more.

I walked up to the calendar. I first noticed a star dotted on yesterday's date, Sunday the 4th of October. The name *Cooper* was scribbled beneath it. The Coopers? Was it their birthday?! I flipped to August. I saw a star on a Saturday with the word *Hua* scribbled below. I could never forget that day when Hua nearly died from her chiko roll! Then it struck me. These starred dates were days of calamities!

My heart dropped to my stomach. I frantically searched the previous months, each day of a catastrophe marked with a star. I flipped to November and there it was, my family's name with a star. I collapsed onto a chair near the mahogany table. My mind was spiralling and when I came back to my senses, I couldn't help but read the letters on the table. The letters congratulated Miss Jenny for winning many various lotteries and online competitions. Each of them was delivered on a day when a neighbour stroked bad luck.

I heard a creak.

I glanced at the door and saw Miss Jenny shuffling in, carrying her groceries, Obsidian at her heels. She stopped in her tracks when she saw me. "He-Hello, I'm here to...erm, drop off apple pie. I didn't know where to put it," I stammered. She smiled and thanked me.

I scuttled out of the house. "Goodbye, Miss Jenny!" I sang almost too cheerfully to hide my fear. I was sure I knocked over one of Miss Jenny's favourite pots, as I heard it crash on the ground. However, I didn't want to look back. I stared at my house, looking so distant although it was only 10 meters away and ran with heavy legs. I wanted to get back to the haven of my house as quick as possible.

I counted the days until it was my family's turn to get Miss Jenny and Obsidian's curse. I wondered what will happen. I had nightmares of it. *Roofs caving in. Losing my mint bicycle. Oven exploding. Swooped by magpies. So. Many. Possibilities.* ...and all underneath Obsidian's watchful eyes.

Days passed as fast as turning pages of a book and soon the day came. I woke up from a nightmare, cold sweat on my neck. I walked downstairs like a blob. I was staring at the floor so much that I walked into a wall. Mum made my favourite breakfast. Cheesy sausage, avocado toast and milk. Oh, the day would've been perfect without my suspicious neighbours in my mind!

I was drinking my milk when Obsidian and Miss Jenny entered the room. I nearly choked and couldn't stop myself from blurting out, **"WHAT ARE YOU GOING TO DO TO US?!"**

My mum gawked at me. "Lily, manners! Why are you acting weird?" asked my mum.

Everything that I bottled up started pouring out, "I saw your calendar! You planned all these incidents! I saw your source of luck, giving the neighbours bad luck!" My mum turned pale. "Lily, what are you talking about?" she asked.

Miss Jenny laughed. "Did you see my calendar? Ah, yes. I was just here to talk to your mum about a baking competition we want to enter together," she explained.

Miss Jenny turned to my mum and asked her if she could have a quick chat with me. She led me to my patio, and I questioned, "Why did you put a star on the day the Hollies got a car crash?"

Miss Jenny smiled and said, "Ah... That incident reminded me to renew my car insurance, and the Cooper's fire reminded me to give them a new barbecue if I win one on an online competition". Miss Jenny explained that she loved staying home and enter online competitions and lotteries to kill time. I tried to process all this new information.

I suddenly got a flashback of knocking over Miss Jenny's pot. I apologised to her for that and for accusing her wrongly. She accepted my apology kindly.

I waved goodbye to her as she continued chatting with my mum. When she left, my mum nudged me, "You really tend to overthink, don't you?" and I couldn't help but smile. I guess I did overthink about Miss Jenny and Obsidian. After all, nobody could live a life without a few incidents, could they?

The day passed peacefully and that night I went to bed happy and calm.

I woke up early in the morning and heard a knock on the door. I walked downstairs and saw a new postie holding out a lumpy package. "For Miss Lily Robinson?" he said. I nodded quickly and asked him what happened to our old postie, George. I felt a strain to his voice and instantly knew that he must be hiding something.

He was so suspicious!

- THE END -

TWO TERRIBLE TEENAGERS

ROBBIE GLIDDON



Jack and Harry didn't believe in chores. This meant they had no pocket money. However, Jack really wanted an iPad and Harry was desperate for an Xbox. So, the boys started to brainstorm... "I know" said Jack gleefully "Let's rob a bank!"

A few days later the boys arrived at the local bank. "What now?" said Harry nervously. "I have a plan," said Jack. "We will cut the power off so no one will see us."

So, they did what they had planned. BUT the only problem was... they could not see anything inside the dark bank! People were confused, shouting, and bumping into each other, so they ran out of the bank and around the block. Eventually, when they stopped, they were gasping and out of breath.

"That didn't work very well" said Harry "but I've got another idea. Let's rob a house!" "But which house?" said Jack. "That one..." said Harry, pointing across the road.

So, they went across to the house and they peered in the window. There was no movement inside, so they went through an open side window.

As they looked around, they realised it was SO messy! "I can't see the floor!" said Jack. "We'll have to clean it up to find any money," said Harry.

Moodily, resentfully, the boys got to work. Although they cleaned and cleaned, no money was to be found anywhere.

Suddenly they heard a key turning in the lock! Disaster! They are home!

Until they heard... "Oh my goodness, the house looks great!"

It was the owner of the house, Mrs Messi, who gave the boys 200 dollars for cleaning up her house. The boys were in shock!

Crime doesn't pay, but cleaning certainly does!

– THE END –

IT'S OKAY TO MAKE MISTAKES

SESANDI THEBUWANA



The sun shone brightly into Williams clear glass window, peeking out from the horizon as he yawned drowsily and walked down the narrow stairs. Boiling a pot of tea, he spread a layer of butter on a piece of toast and wolfed it down. He walked into the music room and sat down on the soft black stool in front of the highly polished piano. It was quiet and the small room was spotless with not a speck of dust anywhere. William arranged his sheet music on the stand and stretched his hands. Resting his spindly, elegant hands on the smooth white piano, William began playing. His hands danced around on the piano, caressing the many black and white keys and hitting all the notes with grace. After all, piano was his life.

William booted up his computer and began composing a new score. He aligned notes and entered melodies carefully. Suddenly, the doorbell rang loudly. When William opened the door, there was a little letter lying on the brown rough mat in front of the door. Running in with haste, William ripped open the letter greedily and read the letter. As his eyes moved down the lines, his smile grew wider. It said that he had been invited to play piano at the Parliament House. Excited at this new opportunity, William began thinking of what he was going to play. After all, this was the top of the game: he had to play for the leader of the state!

The next week William dressed up in his best clothes and drove to the Parliament House. Trees whipped by as his stomach grew steadily and steadily jumpier. Finally, they arrived. He stepped out from his car and marvelled at the splendour of Parliament House. He entered the building excited, worried and nervous. These feelings jumbled around in his body as he walked through the massive hallway. There were shining chandeliers hanging from the ceilings and the walls were painted a shade of shimmering white. A man dressed in a black uniform standing at the door of the Premiers office greeted him and opened the doors for him. William stepped inside and saw the premier sitting at a polished brown desk with a pen in his hand. William sat down on the velvet seat and started playing. He launched confidently into the beginning, accenting his notes perfectly. When he came to the chorus he froze, he had forgotten the notes. The two men sat there in icy silence and William shuffled uncomfortably in his suddenly uncomfortable seat.

William turned around and saw the premier smiling and encouraging him to play on. He felt his confidence coming back and William improvised a nice tune that fit the song he felt his happiness coming back as he steadily continued.

When he had finished the premier clapped loudly and handed him a certificate. "You earned this". He whispered into Williams's ear softly as they were taking photos. As William left the building, he realised that it is okay to make mistakes. When he arrived home William stuck the precious certificate on his wall and stared at it. He smiled proudly and sat down on the comfy stool in front of his piano, ready for another day's play.

– THE END –

UPPER PRIMARY



THE LOVED ONE



BUDDY BOVELL

As the sun started to poke its head above the horizon he sleepily opened his eyes and stretched as far as his legs and arms could possibly reach. Waking up is his favourite thing. He loves to cuddle the person he's lying next to as he starts to wake from his deep sleep. Then comes food, followed by the good stuff that he likes to keep a secret. After he's finished with his food he tries to find a comfortable spot because he doesn't know how long he's going to be there for. Ideally a spot in the sun. "If I wait really patiently, I might get to go outside", he thinks to himself. Eventually, someone nearly always does approach him to see if he wants to go outside and of course he does, although when he is outside he sometimes wonders why he likes it so much. Everyone is so much bigger than him. Although there is affection to be found, there is also a lot of running and hiding required and sometimes he finds himself wanting to go home.

He loves being at home, but he hates being alone. Often he cries just at the thought of being alone. He also loves to be at the beach. He could happily spend hours watching the little flies pop out of the sand as the waves retreat and chase them. People would sometimes point at him and laugh and say, "Look at him, he's crazy!", but he wouldn't care. He couldn't stop himself, it was just so much fun. He loved to run.

And he loved people. He considered all of the people in his neighbourhood to be his friends and loved to show and receive affection.

His garden was also a place he loved. He'd sit on his coach looking out at it. He liked to explore the garden and all of the different plants in it, and there was a fish pond too, although the park was probably his ultimate place to spend his time, especially when his friends were there. He was quite athletic and his friends were too. Deep down he felt he was the fastest, especially for his size.

He often felt quite protective and possessive of his house, he wasn't sure why. It would make him angry when other people came close to it. But if he didn't get to leave his house he would also get really bored. In fact, sometimes it would make him behave in ways he wasn't proud of. He might break or even destroy things. If he was honest with himself, he knew that he was just desperate for attention.

Sometimes, he got to go to new homes! None were ever as good as his home, but he was happy to accept them as a new home if that's where his people were.

Bunbury, Margaret River, Esperance...he'd been to lots of places all around the state. He didn't particularly like being in the car, but if he was with his friends then he was happy to go wherever they wanted to go!

At home, he was still enjoying exploring the unexplored. Today, he was having fun seeking out new sights and smells, but suddenly something felt off. It was too quiet. He began searching for others. Searching desperately for company. But no, his worst fears had been realised. He was home alone! He freaked out and worried. "Where did everyone go? Did they leave me?" he thought to himself. He went inside and peered out of the windows overlooking the street. He felt close to tears. He waited. He breathed. He looked. He searched. Eventually, he even slept. But always, when he woke, he felt fear at being alone. He didn't want to be alone. He had to do something so that he wasn't alone.

He spent a good deal of time thinking about how to find company again and, after a while, his plans began to crystalise in his head. First he would go around the side of the house. There was a gate there and under that gate there were some bricks. To the right of the bricks there was some dirt and he could see potential in being able to dig his way out in the dirt. So, he gave it a go and, to his astonishment, it worked! He was beyond the gate. He was dirty and tired and a little bit scared and sore from the squeeze, but he was finally free to find his people! That was all he wanted in the world. He wandered across to the park opposite his house. He had an amazing time there, truly free for the first time in his life. There were no time constraints and no one telling him to come or to do this or do that, he could just do what he wanted for a change. There he had the greatest time, running around and living a life, his best life.

Eventually, he got tired though. Every so often people he knew would wonder past him and make comments on his behaviour or appearance. He started to feel uncomfortable and out of place. After what felt like hours some neighbours invited him back to their place. There they cleaned and fed him. They could tell that something wasn't quite right. They contacted his family and looked after him until someone close to him could come and collect him. They were worried for him and he was too.

He had no idea just how worried his family were though. They were so relieved to know he was safe. They were so excited to see him again and so was he, he couldn't stop moving and wriggling and crying and showing them affection. Sometimes it was almost too much affection! He just had so much love to

give. His family couldn't stop telling him what a good boy he was, it made him so happy. When they eventually said to him, "Do you want to go home?" he answered loudly with a resounding "Woof!".

– THE END –



Artwork: La Grande Jatte - by Georges Seurat

EAVESDROPPING

by
Lizetienne
Burke-Hardy

// "What do you think he'll call this one then?" the man asked his wife, indicating the area around them.

"Well, he's very literal," she commented. "It's Sunday afternoon, and we're on the island of La Grande Jatte. He'll probably just call it that." They looked on in silence until she pondered aloud, "Why do you think we're made of dots?"

"Because that is Seurat's preferred method," the man replied. "He thinks that dots provide more depth than just standard brushstrokes, especially from far away. Although that doesn't stop me from disliking it," he added. "Every time he adds them to my coat, it tickles."

"And look," his wife added, pointing to a nearby person. "We can see through each other."

Her husband stood, silently smoking his cigar before he gestured towards the footpath with a quizzical look. Huge, fluffy white dandelions meandered past the duo.

"Oh, Degas' ballerinas," she said. Most of the dancers were hurrying out of view, probably on their way to the theatre. "I don't understand why he had to make them look like that," she continued. "Our dots may look strange close up but they make us look good from far away. The strokes may make them feel whole, but it makes them very smeary people."

"Indeed." The man took a quick glance around him to check that nobody was eavesdropping and whispered, "I heard a rumour that Edgar Degas, even after painting that, wants to be called a realist."

"No!" the woman gasped, her eyes widening. "Is that true?" Her husband nodded sagely.

As the woman became distracted by the conversation, she didn't notice that her pet monkey was pulling on its leash. She looked down. "Claude!" she scolded. "Behave yourself!" Suddenly, a small dog appeared and scampered quickly across the grass, rolled over onto its back and wriggled. Its collar wasn't attached to a lead and its owner was nowhere in sight, so there was nothing anyone could do but watch helplessly as the puppy smeared the picture. People cried out, then covered when they spotted the giant paintbrush looming down to retouch the grass. They flinched and braced themselves, ready to be remedied. The brush dabbed over and over again until it finally disappeared.

Everyone sighed thankfully when it was over. But suddenly, the woman heard the unmistakable voice of the little girl in white ask:

“Mummy? Why is the spot pink?”

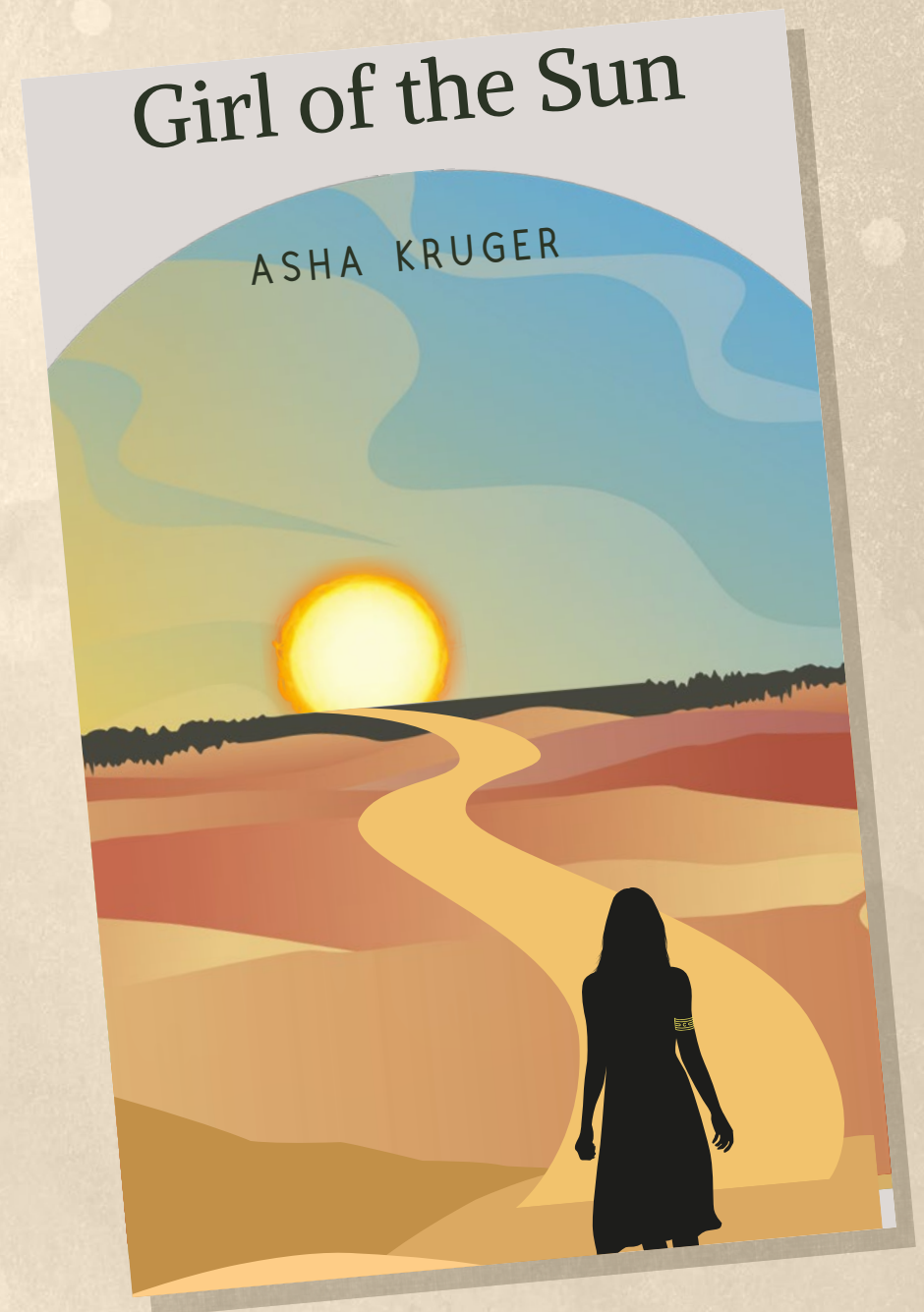
The woman lowered her gaze until she saw it. A random blotch of pinky beige in a sea of green, that the little girl was staring at sadly. Why had the painter chosen the colour so randomly? She nudged her husband and nodded towards it.

“Why didn’t he use dark green? Has he run out of green paint?” the man asked, contemptuous of the artist’s choice. “And come to think of it, the shadows over there don’t seem to follow the laws of physics. Look where the sun is, where the trees are and where the shadows should fall. Is this man an amateur?”

“Maybe it doesn’t matter,” the woman suggested. She contemplated the patch. “I think because the grass is now that colour, it’s a talking point. Who knows? The painting might even become more popular, and people might be more likely to discuss it. And then, maybe Seurat will be able to sell it. Not that he struggles like so many artists seem to.” She paused a moment before continuing. “And I think that what matters more than everything looking as if it’s in the right place is if a piece of art makes you feel something. It may not be everybody’s cup of tea, but hopefully this painting will make some people feel happy or peaceful when it’s finished.”

They stood in silence for a few minutes whilst the gentleman was clearly considering what she had said. The breeze blew gently as the woman in front of them lowered her fishing rod into the water once again.

– THE END –



Prologue

People say that the desert is a dry and barren place. They say that it is constantly smothered in scorching, smoldering, horrible heat. They say that there is no life in such a terrible place. What they say is untrue. The desert is a seething sea of life. If you look properly, you will see things that most people don't. It's not about having good eyes. It's about how much you care about the desert. You will see the tracks that snakes have left when they slither through the pale sand. You will see lizards soaking up the sun on rocks and boulders. You will see one pair of human footprints. Just one, because even in this desert of life and biodiversity, there lives only one human. One isolated, solitary human. And that's me. My name is Ivy, but I call myself The Girl of the Sun. I've always wanted to share my story, but there were parts of my life that even I didn't understand. But now I understand. Now I understand it all. So here it is. I am the girl who lives alone in the desert. I am the girl who hasn't heard another human voice for years and years and years. I am The Girl of the Sun, and I'm telling you my story.

Chapter One

Fans of sunlight break the darkness of the early morning. Rosy streaks appear in the sky as the sun rises, bathing the pale, rolling dunes in a soft light. The sand ripples and shifts, then slowly comes alive with subtle movements. I see that the tracks from the previous day have disappeared, but new ones have been imprinted in the sand in their place. The sky is now a pale orange, tinged with a hint of yellow that is so pale, it's almost white. I watch the transformation of colours in the sky until it's just an endless sea of blue, then stand up. The soft sand flows this way and that under my bare feet, carried by the subtle air currents. I walk along the ground, the waves of sand trickling over my feet. The sun beats down relentlessly, its rays spreading far across the floor of the desert. I take shelter in the shadow of a large dune and pull out some food from my sack of supplies to make a meal. A few wild plums found from some trees around here, as well as a small handful of nuts. I prepare the food on a flat rock, then start to eat. The nuts crunch beneath my teeth and the plums have a sweet, tart taste. When I have finished my lunch, I set off to gather some more food.

The sky is an inky shade of deep purple as I make my way back to my camp. It's still warm but the air has cooled down a lot compared to this morning.

When I'm back at camp, I slump down on the sand, tasting the sandy air on my tongue. The stars are shining brightly above me, and I feel a sense of calm that I only ever feel in thy desert. Of course, there are lots of things that I only feel here. A sense of home. I only ever had that feeling before when I was a bright, happy twelve year old who lived in a small town that is a three day walk from where I live now. And now, with that sense of home, I fall asleep under the star-strewn sky.

In my dream I am twelve years old again. I sit on the dusty floor outside of the small village house that I once shared with my parents, throwing seeds and grain at the flock of birds that has gathered around me, laughing as they squabble for the largest bits of food. I feel a powerful emotion of relaxed happiness, as I sit in my village. And then suddenly, our safe sanctuary explodes into chaos. Masked figures appear, and jets of fire scorch the ground. I'm on my feet now, running through the jostling crowd of people trying to escape, searching for my parents. People press in around me, surrounding me. And then everyone is gone and I'm running and running for my life, into the desert. Flames surround me and then I fall into darkness.

Chapter Two

I am still in my dream, although I feel awake. I am floating in darkness. I feel as though I am alone until a disembodied voice rings softly through the nothingness. "What you just saw was what caused you to abandon your life and flee to the desert", it says. "You chose to live your life in the wilderness rather than return to your home, although I see that you also consider the desert as home. But the people at your real home need you. They are now ruled by those who attacked you, and only a handful of people are brave enough to fight back. Let me show you The Order of the Flame."

I am lifted from the darkness into my old village, although it is very different. No-one is outside except for three people, a girl about fifteen years old with coffee coloured skin, blue eyes and ebony hair, another girl of the same age with olive skin, grey eyes and brown hair, and an older man with copper coloured hair, green eyes, and pale skin. They talk in hushed whispers, and a can just make out the low, quiet of the man growl "Basement. Midnight. Fifteen others. Bring information." Then the three of them disappear into three different houses. Suddenly, the landscape seems to ripple. Everything freezes except for the weird, rippling, warping sensation. And then I am standing in a dark basement,

cobwebs clinging to the roof and walls like silvery, gossamer streams of feathery silk. A lantern sits on a table, casting a pale, flickering glow. Human shadows are gathered around the table. All of them are looking at a girl at the end of the table. She is only very young, perhaps ten years old, with dark hair, dark eyes, and satiny, olive skin. She is speaking to everybody there. I can hear what she is saying. "What I have deciphered from the assignment is that the enemy is growing stronger", she says. "We are strong too, if we work together. All of us here are brave individuals, but our own personal strength is stronger combined with others. It does not matter what we can do as individuals, but what we can do as a world, a country, a community. We are all stronger with our hands united. Thank you." A quiet applause echoes around the dim room. I briefly wonder why the girl is so young, but again I am falling into darkness. I can now feel the desert around me again. I smell the sand around me, feel the soft heat on my skin, though still my eyes refuse to open. It's weird, like being stuck in limbo between asleep and awake. Suddenly, the voice is in my ears. I can't refuse it because it isn't a real thing, just something ringing in my head, passing through my life and then leaving. "That is the Order of the Flame, the small resistance that fights back. They are not strong enough though. They are like beads without string. They are not united, for each has his or her own personal goals. That's why they need you. You will be their string, Ivy. I have supplied you with what you need. It is time to return to your home."

Chapter Three

I am truly awake. The disembodied, eerie voice in my head has not lied. A large chestnut horse is tethered to a stake driven into the ground, and a burlap sack sits beside me, full of whatever I will need. I sort through the sack. The bag contains one small coil of wire, an ink pot, quill and parchment and a golden armband with a flame design carved into it. I grab my net bag and fill it with all my food and water. Then I walk towards the horse. It lowers its head and I cautiously climb on. Around its neck there is a rope with gold letters hanging from it, spelling out the words of the horse's name: Hazel. "Hello Hazel", I say quietly as I gently squeeze my legs around her middle. Believe it or not, I have had a lot of practice riding horses. When I was living in my old village, I would ride the family's horse, Blaze, to the small lake that is an hour's ride from my village. There was a small hut there that always smelled like smoky pine needles, even though the fire there had long since died away. I would play there

all day, foraging for nuts and edible roots. Then I would start a smoky fire and go to a wild blackberry bush and strip it clean of its juicy berries. The nuts and roots would be cooked by then, and I would enjoy a meal of nature's food. I loved the feeling of the delicate skin of the berries breaking under my teeth, the crunch of the sharp-tasting nuts and roots. These memories are what give me my knowledge of edible plants in the desert, as well as my knowledge of horse riding. These memories flood into my brain as Hazel gallops towards the setting sun. These shreds of forgotten memories are treasure to me. I hold onto them as I become closer and closer to the place that I have missed for years. I never returned there because I never knew if it was safe. And now I know that is not safe, and that is why I'm going there. Because I need to save my people. I am The Girl of the Sun and that is a bit of my story. I am The Girl of the Sun, and I am finally heading home.

– THE END OF BOOK ONE –

LOWER SECONDARY



The long day had driven the colour out of his cheeks, tiredness making itself known in the bloodshot lines marking his eyes. His hands made their way to the handle of the coffee mug. The brown liquid was his usual late-night saviour. He worked your average 9-5 and it was apparent in the way he set up his desk. The papers crowded the used-to-be white desk, huddled between ink stains and the scent of hard work.

The warm puddle of liquid energy touched the sides of his throat as he attempted to retain as much of his consciousness as humanly possible. His eyes travelled downwards, tracing the untied laces of his shoes. Thoughts of home and youth cascaded into his mind; almost as warm as the coffee singeing his fingertips. He bent down to tie the laces. Bunny hole, around the tree, over the mountain. Something like that.

Droplets of rogue coffee stained the white tips of his shoes like rain on a highway. He clutched his mother's sturdy hand. He was always told to do this, no point in risking a traffic accident. The rain fell hard, mixing with the mud crowding his shoes. The holes where his toes poked through were fraying at the edges, a sign of the adventures he had endured during the short period of the shoes' late life.

The loud purr of steam erupting from the back of the bus was evident as soon as it backed its way into the parking spot. The boy held his only 50 cents from inside his jacket pocket, to lose it would be a shame. Pushed forward by his mother's hand, he took a step onto the bus's tattered rug. The driver nodded briskly as he showed him the old silver coin. The boy nodded back; a silent acknowledgement between the two.

He traced the droplets of water flying down his window before they slid beneath his view. They made trails of thin rivers across the pane of glass. They blurred his vision of the outside world. A barrier between himself and the slick roads to his sides.

The bus skidded ever-so slightly as the breaks were hit and the doors slung open. His mother's hand found its way back into the grip of his own. The wind running amok before them as they watched a man run after his hat. Leaves stuck in the air like stars hung high on a night sky.

His feet left dents in the moist soil as the two made their way from the bus stop. The large sign posted high above the dull building was making its way through

the clouds. The air smelt of memories soon to be created and the beach on a summer day. His eyes found their way to the glass double doors. A smile etched to his features. They opened as he neared, some sort of technological magic.

Rows and rows of shelves lined the shop like flowers in a garden. Boxes swam through the ocean of employees and red-coloured shirts. He knew at an instant that this section of the shop with all its abundance of riches and unclaimed gilts was not what they were looking for. No, there were too many adults and too many signs. There were too many smiles plastered to the children's faces.

He took a step forwards, looking for anyone like him. He found his lead and took chase. The shelves lining the walls shrunk in size as he passed. The red-coloured shirts and boxes galore dissipated the deeper he ventured. The few boxes that remained were missing their lids and the usual new shoe smell. These boxes were without a shelf or a price tag. Money was not being thrown at them. Parents were not fighting over who's child got to take home the contents of the box. Yet the usual sight of no-one in particular brought warmth to his thoughts. The sight of discarded boxes and discounted shoes was no longer what he saw. His eyes widened as he scanned the boxes full of different lessons, different memories, and different opportunities. He stared at the boxes full of tipped over dreams and unseen sights. These boxes that, to one, might mark the border between the overpriced shoes and the discounted ones. To someone like him, they marked the border between planned travels and discounted adventures that had you wishing for more.

His hands gravitated to the lace-up shoes without an accompanied box or price. The white soles and high-rise fabrics caught his eye. His first pair of lace-up shoes. A milestone in a child's mind. They were creased and bent, and he didn't know how to tie them yet.

He tried them on, checked for sizing. His mother bent down; hands working diligently to tie the two black laces into something resembling a bow. Bunny hole, around the tree, over the mountain. Something like that.

His knees buckled as he stood back up, age getting the better of him. The cloth in his hand drained the coffee drops before they could stain the white tips of his shoes. He would love to go back to a time like that. A time where he found enjoyment in these little moments. A time when the tipped over boxes and discounted objects didn't bother him. A simpler time.

What he would give to go back to buying his first ever pair of lace-ups. Impossible. The shop was long gone, in a city that he no longer remembered. This was now a time he only said hello to on his most tiring days and longest nights. For now, the coffee will have to do.

– THE END –



Our Housekeeper

Emily Natalina Rafala

C RASH! I heard the glass shatter in the kitchen. It happened again! Meredith was always dropping things and we've had so many broken items in our house lately.

I loved Meredith. But she was getting too old for her job.

I remember when I was a little girl, and how Meredith was always there for me. She took to me school. Made my school lunches. Made dinner for us all when my parents came home from work.

She helped raise me. She has always been a part of my life.

Meredith was our housekeeper. After I grew up and got married, I asked Meredith to come work for me.

My parents retired and wanted to travel.

After working over 40 years for my parents, it was time for her to come help with my own family.

She was there when Adam was born. She was there when Lily was born. Meredith helped raise them while Jonathan and I were at work.

"Kathleen!" Meredith screeched to me.

I ran into the kitchen and saw three of my plates and two glasses broken and shattered on the floor.

"I'm so, so sorry Kathleen. I don't know what's wrong with me anymore," Meredith whimpered.

"It's okay, Meredith. We'll get this cleaned up."

She got the broom out of the hallway closet, and I grabbed the bin. We worked together to clean up the mess.

Looking at her, I noticed her short grey hair was really messy. She forgot to brush her hair again. She was getting really forgetful in her old age.

It was strange how her hair colour changed from when I was a little girl. I remember it being a light brown. I didn't know her hair could change colours like that.

She was wearing her light blue work dress and white apron.

She looked so exhausted.

"Meredith, how about you take a break this evening? Since I'm off work this week, I'll make dinner for all of us. The kids will be home from school soon," I said to her.

"I'm supposed to do the cooking, it's my job. I may be getting old, but I promise I won't break anything else," Meredith replied.

"It's fine Meredith. Have a seat on the couch and take a break," I insisted to her.

SLAM! went the loud sound of the front door closing. Adam and Lily were home.

"Meredith! Look what I drew for you in school," Lily said while running over to her.

My 11-year-old Lily, had become quite the expert in drawing. She handed Meredith a piece of paper.

As I watched from the kitchen, Meredith looked at it and for a brief moment, I thought she was about to cry. Then a smile, and I do mean the biggest smile came across her face.

"Lily, you drew a picture of me. This is the most breathtaking artwork I have ever seen," Meredith told her.

"Thank you Meredith. I wanted you to have something to remember me by," Lily told her.

"To remember me by? What are you talking about?" Meredith asked her.

I walked into the living room and sat down next to Meredith.

"Meredith, I think it's about time you retire. I can tell you're getting weaker and tired. It's hard for you to get all your work done," I said to her.

"I know I'm getting old Kathleen. I know I forget things and break things. But I love all of you. I don't want to leave my job," Meredith said with concern.

"I think you need to rest. It's just time for you to retire. I think it's best that we get a new housekeeper. To be honest with you, I've already called the company and informed them that we need a new housekeeper," I said.

There was silence from her. I don't know if she was sad or angry with me.

"It's okay Meredith. We'll always love you. You've always been there for us," Adam said to her.

My 13-year-old son, trying to make her see how much we care about her.

Adam hugged Meredith and Lily wrapped her arms around her as well. They gave her kisses on her cheeks and whispered private secrets in her ears. Meredith let out a small giggle.

Then Meredith spoke, "When do I have to retire?"

"Well, the agency is sending a replacement over tomorrow. I'd like you to stay and help train her. So, you'll still be with us for a few more weeks," I explained to her.

"Very well, if that is what you insist on," Meredith said in an irritable manner.

She got up and walked towards her bedroom. She shut the door behind her. We never saw her for the rest of the night.

Our entire evening was quiet. Jon, Adam, Lily, and I ate dinner, but without Meredith.

~~~~~

The next morning, Meredith was up before me. I found her in the kitchen cooking scrambled eggs and toast for the kids.

It was Friday. Adam and Lily's last day of school for the term, then it was the 2-week school break.

They ran up to Meredith, hugged and kissed her bye.

They gave me a hug and kiss as well.

Then Jonathan kissed me and mentioned he'd be home early to meet the new housekeeper.

I heard the car leave.

I walked over to Meredith. "Good morning Meredith," I said to her.

"Good morning Kathleen. I've made no mistakes; I've been good today. Nothing is broken either. I'll finish in here and then I'll start the laundry," Meredith said.

"That's fine. Thank you, Meredith."

~~~~~

The morning passed by quickly. So did the afternoon.

Jonathan and the kids were home.

DING-DONG! DING-DONG! The doorbell was ringing. It was 3:30pm, right on time.

Lily ran to the front door and opened it.

"Ahh-key is here Mum!" she was saying as I walked up to the door.

"Hello Miss Kathleen, I'm Bill, from the AHKI agency. I've brought along your new housekeeper and would like to introduce her to your family."

I looked and saw no one else around.

Lily ran out the front door and around the corner of the house.

I heard Lily yell, "Look Mum, she's over here."

Lily came around the corner and was walking with a very young housekeeper. She looked like she might be around 20 years old. Tall, thin, with long and wavy auburn coloured hair. She was wearing a very tight, knee-length red dress.

"My name is Lily," my daughter said to her, as they walked closer down the pathway towards the front door.

Bill saw me staring at the new housekeeper and observed the shocked look on my face.

"I know she's young, but she's new to the housekeeping agency."

"Does she have any experience at all?" I asked him in a worried tone.

"Well, unfortunately she doesn't. At the moment, Emma is the only housekeeper available. We have a shortage of housekeepers. People are so busy with fast paced lives, so everyone is hiring a housekeeper. Our manager thought that once Meredith trained her, you might be pleased with her. And if you're not happy, you can always give us a call and we'll put you on a wait list when another housekeeper becomes available," he explained.

I was unsure. I mean, she was so young. No experience.

"Look, lilies, just like your name," Emma said, pointing to the flowers along the pathway as she looked at Lily.

Lily smiled, grabbed her hand, and said, "My grandparents always grew lilies in their yard. That's why my Mum and Dad named me Lily."

It touched my heart that Emma connected with our daughter.

“Please come in,” I gestured to Bill.

CRASH! Another accident! Jon and Adam went swiftly into the kitchen to help Meredith. After the small clean up, they walked out.

Bill looked straight at Meredith and smiled.

“Hello, Meredith. It is truly an honour to meet one of our original housekeepers from the agency. There is no housekeeper left like you.”

Bill then introduced Emma to all of us and explained to Meredith how she needed to train Emma.

“I know you’re tired Meredith but it’s time that you retire,” Bill told her.

“I don’t want to retire. I want to keep working and take care of the family,” she ranted at him.

“Meredith, when everyone gets older, they retire and no longer work. It’s part of life. We all get weak, tired, forgetful and we can’t do our job properly. I’m 66 years old and I’m retiring next year. They consider me obsolete at the agency because of my age. And Meredith, you’re older than me. It’s about time that you retire,” Bill explained.

Meredith looked sad, but appeared to nod slightly at Bill in acknowledgement.

“Now, I hope you will give Emma a chance. Explain her duties and share your knowledge with her,” Bill said.

“If I must,” Meredith replied with a sullen look on her face.

“Thank you, Meredith. You’ve earned the admiration of everyone at work. You’ve done an amazing job for the agency. You don’t need to worry about working anymore,” Bill said to her.

Meredith turned and stared at Emma with total contempt.

Bill said his goodbyes and left Emma in our hands.

~~~~~

The first day with Emma was quite an eventful day.

Meredith was distressed and felt useless watching Emma figure out some of her duties.

She asked Meredith for help with certain jobs, like cooking meals and where to find things.

Meredith refused to help Emma with anything.

She was adamant about how she felt about Emma.

Then, that evening, Emma had burnt dinner. Meredith knew that she should have taught her how to cook.

After seeing we had no proper dinner, Meredith felt guilty and gave in. She taught Emma how to make a proper dinner.

~~~~~

Many days went by, and Emma was doing quite well with adjusting as our new housekeeper.

After 2 weeks, Emma knew everything required for her job.

Meredith, however, was simply exhausted. She realised that teaching Emma was stressful and required more energy to keep up with her.

She went and sat down on the couch. Jon, Adam, Lily, and I walked over to her.

“I’m sorry Kathleen. I look a mess, and I forgot to brush my hair again,” Meredith said.

“It’s alright,” I said to her.

She stared at me, then said, “I’m really tired. I think it’s time for me to go now. I’m ready to retire.”

I nodded at her with a sad smile. A tear started running down my face. We all started to shed a tear, knowing that it was time for Meredith to retire.

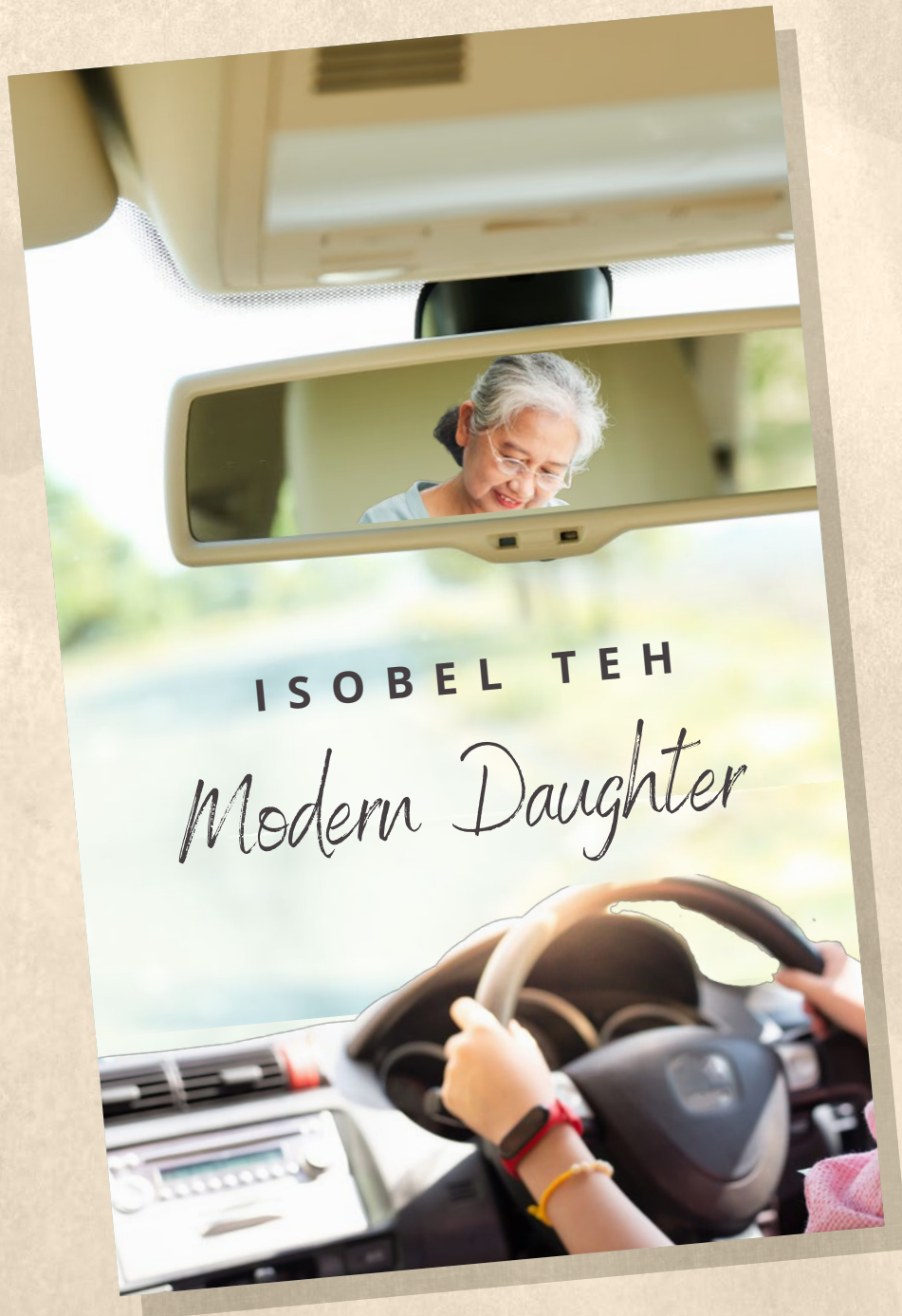
Since her hair was messy, I brushed it to make it look nice.

I looked at her and said, “You will always be a part of our family and we will always love you Meredith.”

Then I lifted the back of her hair. In tiny writing on the back of her neck, words were seen which read: Property of AHKI (Android HouseKeepers, Inc.)

I took my fingers and pressed inwards at the back of her neck for 2 seconds. She powered down.

The ‘Meredith Model’ was now obsolete.



The old woman sat in the backseat of the magenta convertible as it careened down the highway, clutching tightly to the plastic bag on her lap, afraid it may be kidnapped by the wind. She was not used to such speed, with trembling hands she pulled the seatbelt tighter but was careful not to touch the patent leather seats with her callused fingers, her daughter had warned her not to dirty it, "Fingerprints show very clearly on white, Ma."

Her daughter, Mei Choo, was driving and talking on her sleek silver mobile phone using big words the old woman could barely understand. "Finance... Liquidation... Assets... Investments". Her voice was crisp and important and had an unfamiliar lilt to it. Her Mei Choo sounded like one of those foreigners on television. She was speaking in an American accent. The old lady clucked her tongue in disapproval.

"I absolutely cannot have this. We must sell!" Her daughter exclaimed agitatedly as she stepped on the accelerator; her perfectly manicured fingernails gripping onto the steering wheel in irritation.

"I can't DEAL with this anymore!" she yelled as she clicked the phone shut and hurled it angrily toward the backseat. The mobile phone hit the old woman on the forehead and nestled soundlessly into her lap. She calmly picked it up and handed it to her daughter.

"Sorry, Ma," she said, losing the American pretence and switching to Mandarin. "I have a big client in America. There have been a lot of problems." The old lady nodded knowingly. Her daughter was big and important. Mei Choo stared at her mother from the rear-view window wondering what she was thinking. Her mother's wrinkled countenance always carried the same cryptic look. The phone began to ring again, an artificially cheerful digital tune, which broke the awkward silence.

"Hello, Beatrice! Yes, this is Jennifer." Jennifer! The old woman cringed. I didn't name her Jennifer. She remembered her daughter telling her, how an English name was very important for 'networking', Chinese names being easily forgotten. "Oh no, I can't meet you for lunch today. I have to take the ancient relic to the temple for her weird daily prayer ritual."

Ancient Relic. The old woman understood perfectly it was referring to her. Her daughter always assumed that her mother's silence meant she did not comprehend. "Yes, I know! My car seats will be reeking of joss sticks!" The old woman pursed her lips tightly, her hands gripping her plastic bag in defence.

The car curved smoothly into the temple courtyard. It looked almost garish next to the dull sheen of the ageing temple's roof. The old woman got out of the backseat and made her unhurried way to the main hall.

Her daughter stepped out of the car in her business suit and stilettos and reapplied her lipstick as she made her brisk way to her mother's side. "Ma, I'll wait outside. I have an important phone call to make," she said, not bothering to hide her disgust at the pungent fumes of incense. The old lady hobbled into the temple hall and lit a joss stick, she knelt solemnly and whispered her now familiar daily prayer to the Gods.

Thank you, God of the Sky, you have given my daughter luck all these years. Everything I prayed for; you have given her. She has everything a young woman in this world could possibly want. She has a big house with a swimming pool, a housekeeper to help her, as she is too clumsy to sew or cook.

Her love life has been blessed; she is engaged to a rich and handsome man. Her company is now the top financial firm and even men listen to what she says. She lives the perfect life. You have given her everything except happiness. I ask that the gods be merciful to her even if she has lost her roots while reaping the harvest of success.

What you see is not true - she is a filial daughter to me. She gives me a room in her big house and provides well for me. She is rude to me only because I affect her happiness. A young woman does not want to be hindered by her old mother. It is my fault. The old lady prayed so hard that tears welled up in her eyes. Finally, with her head bowed in reverence she planted the half-burnt joss stick into an urn of smouldering ashes. She bowed once more.

The old woman had been praying for her daughter for thirty-two years. When her stomach was round like a melon, she came to the temple and prayed that it was a son. Then the time was ripe and the baby slipped out of her womb, bawling and adorable with fat thighs and pink cheeks, but unmistakably, a girl. Her husband had kicked and punched her for producing a worthless baby, who could not work or carry the family name.

Still, the woman returned to the temple with her new-born girl tied to her waist in a sarong and prayed that her daughter would grow up and have everything she ever wanted. Her husband left her and she prayed that her daughter would never have to depend on a man.

She prayed every day that her daughter would be a great woman, the woman that she, meek and uneducated, could never become. A woman with the ability to do anything she set her mind to. A woman who commanded respect in the hearts of men. When she opened her mouth to speak, precious pearls would fall out and men would listen.

She will not be like me, the woman prayed as she watched her daughter grow up and drift away from her, speaking a language she scarcely understood. She watched her daughter transform

from a quiet girl, to one who openly defied her, calling her old-fashioned. She wanted her mother to be 'modern', a word so new there was no Chinese word for it.

Now her daughter was too clever for her and the old woman wondered why she had prayed like that. The gods had been faithful to her persistent prayer, but the wealth and success that poured forth so richly had buried the girl's roots and now she stood, faceless, with no identity, bound to the soil of her ancestors by only a string of origami banknotes.

Her daughter had forgotten her mother's values. Her wants were so ephemeral; that of a modern woman. Power, Wealth, access to the best fashion boutiques, and yet her daughter had not found true happiness.

The old woman knew that you could find happiness with much less. When her daughter left the earth everything she had would count for nothing. People would look to her legacy and say that she was a great woman, but she would be forgotten once the wind blows over, like the ashes of burnt paper convertibles and mansions. The old woman wished she could go back and erase all her big hopes and prayers for her daughter; now she had only one want: That her daughter be happy.

She looked out of the temple gate. She saw her daughter speaking on the phone, her brow furrowed with anger and worry. Being at the top is not good, the woman thought, there is only one way to go from there - down.

The old woman carefully unfolded the plastic bag and spread out a packet of noodle in front of the altar. Her daughter often mocked her for worshipping porcelain Gods. How could she pray to them so faithfully and expect pieces of ceramic to fly to her aid? But her daughter had her own gods too, idols of wealth, success and power that she was enslaved to and worshipped every day of her life.

Every day was a quest for the idols, and the idols she worshipped counted for nothing in eternity.

All the wants her daughter had would slowly suck the life out of her and leave her, an empty soulless shell at the altar.

The old lady watched her joss tick. The dull heat had left a teetering grey stem that was on the danger of collapsing. Modern woman nowadays, the old lady sighed in resignation, as she bowed to the east one final time to end her ritual. Modern woman nowadays want so much that they lose their souls and wonder why they cannot find it.

Her joss stick disintegrated into a soft grey powder. She met her daughter outside the temple, the same look of worry and frustration was etched on her daughter's face. An empty expression, as if she was ploughing through the soil of her wants looking for the one thing that would sow the seeds of happiness. They climbed into the convertible in silence and her daughter drove along the highway, this time not as fast as she had done before.

"Ma," Mei Choo finally said. 'I don't know how to put this. Peter and I have been talking about it and we plan to move out of the big house. The property market is good now, and we managed to get a buyer willing to pay seven million for it! We decided we'd prefer a cosier penthouse apartment instead. We found a perfect one by the coast.

Once we move into our apartment, we plan to get rid of the housekeeper, so we can have more space to ourselves..." The old woman nodded knowingly.

Mei Choo swallowed hard. "We'd get someone to come in to do the housework and we can eat out-but once the housekeeper is gone, there won't be anyone to look after you. You will be awfully lonely at home and, besides that, the apartment is rather small. There won't be space. We thought about it for a long time, and we decided the best thing for you is if you moved to a Home. There's a very nice one just down the road."

The old woman did not raise an eyebrow. "I've been there the matron is willing to take you in. It's beautiful with gardens and lots of old people to keep you company! I hardly have time for you, you'd be happier there."

"You'd be happier there, really." Her daughter repeated as if to affirm herself. This time the old woman had no plastic bag of food offerings to cling tightly to; she bit her lip and fastened her seat belt, as if it would protect her from

a daughter who did not want her anymore. She sunk deep into the leather seat, letting her shoulders sag, and her fingers trace the white seat. "Ma?" her daughter asked, searching the rear-view window for her mother. "Is everything okay? What had to be done, had to be done." she said firmly, louder than she intended, "if it will make you happy," she added more quietly.

"It's for you, Ma! You'll be happier there. You can move there tomorrow; I already got the housekeeper to pack your things." Jennifer said triumphantly, mentally ticking yet another item off her agenda.

"I knew everything would be fine." Jennifer smiled widely she felt liberated. Perhaps getting rid of her mother would make her happier. She had thought about it. It seemed the only hindrance in her pursuit of happiness. She was happy now. She had everything a modern woman ever wanted; Money, Status, Career, Love, Power and now, Freedom, without her mother and her old-fashioned ways to weigh her down...

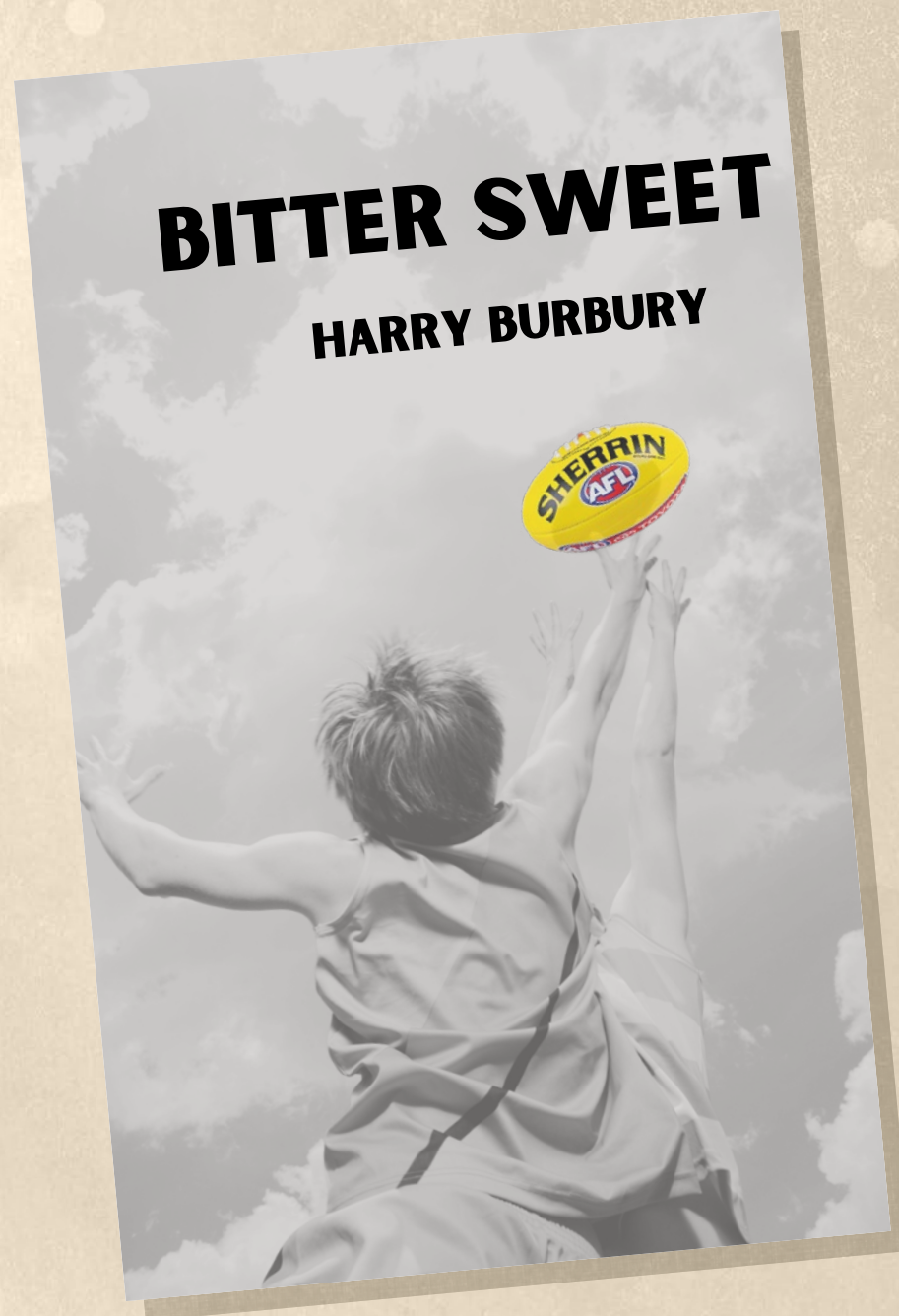
Yes, she was free. Her phone buzzed urgently, she picked it up and read the message, still beaming from ear to ear. "Stocks 10% increase!"

Yes, things were definitely beginning to look up for her...

And while searching for the meaning of life in the luminance of her mobile screen, the old woman in the backseat became invisible, and she did not see the tears.

- THE END -

**UPPER
SECONDARY**



Run! Run! Get there! He feels his lungs hurt as he gasps for air. It's hot, dry, dusty. He sprints, willing himself on. Tired legs scream. He ignores them. Must keep going. His hand touches leather. Not even a hand, a finger. Then he slams into something solid, unmoving. He's knocked to the ground, hard. He tries to breathe but the shallow, short breaths give him no respite. He groans and rolls over, looking up at the bright blue sky. It's an endless blue dome, unbroken by clouds. The scorching sun's rays burn down on him. He closes his eyes, takes stock of his injuries. Nothing that can't be pushed down, saved for later when he has time to recover. He hears the loud screech of rainbow lorikeets, squabbling over nectar in the bottlebrush nearby. The deafening drone of cicadas calling for a mate. He feels a hand on his shoulder. Someone pulls him to his feet. He wipes the dirt from his eyes. Spits out the grit. Takes another breath. Gathers himself and pushes on.

He loves this game. Loves the thrill of the chase, the contest for the ball. Arms pumping and legs flying behind him as he races across the paddock, the kind of freedom you only feel in dreams. His father played this game. Taught him how to handball. Showed him how to take an overhead mark and kick a torpie. Taught him what it meant to be in a team. To be part of something bigger than yourself. Playing a role and working towards a common objective.

It's a physical game, full of hip and shoulders, pushes in the back. There are elbows crushing ribs and bone-jarring tackles. He endures all this, welcomes it almost. It's part of the game.

He squints in the midday sun and sees the yellow ball soaring in the blue sky. He watches it float over his head. He turns and chases it. It was just him and the ball. Until it wasn't. He feels a presence. A dark shadow advancing. He tries to avoid the inevitable collision. Too late. Crunch. He feels the baked earth beneath him. Not much grass really. He's dazed and he shakes his head to clear his vision, still lying flat on his back and clutching his ribs. Everywhere aches. He tries to move, but can't. The umpire's shrill whistle cuts through the ringing in his ear like a squawking canary, awarding him a free kick. He climbs to his knees, deprived of oxygen. Finally, up to his feet. He takes the ball and walks back off his mark. Turns around. The siren sounds. Silence. His heartbeat echoes in his ears. The ball beneath his fingers. He looks toward the goals. Then he hears it.

Those words. Those same familiar words that have haunted him throughout his life. You never get used to them. Like gut punches each one. Never build up a tolerance. Only words, people say.

Names can never hurt you. And yet, what is this feeling if not pain? This feeling that you are somehow less of a person. Inadequate. Part of a team but never fully accepted. Words that are thrown about carelessly, thoughtlessly. Said without considering the hurt caused. Or then again, perhaps that was their intention all along. He takes three deep, shaky breaths, trying to push these words out of his focus. He walks, then jogs and drops the ball on his left boot towards the four tall sticks. His kick is off, across the face. He drops his head. Smirks are seen and jeers are heard, humiliation felt deeply burning in the pit of his stomach. Failure.

Three quarter time. In the huddle. He watches the coach's mouth move as he delivers his speech. Sees his eyes blaze and his spit flying. Barking orders and offering encouragement. He hears none of it. Shame eats away at him. Why is he even here? He feels unworthy. His head is full of doubt.

When will he be seen as an equal? When will he be seen for who he is? He feels his passion for the game diminishing. He hears his voice in the smattering of people along the boundary, he locks eyes with his father. Was there a small nod? Deep eyes, old beyond his years. A look passes between. An

unspoken understanding. Old as time. A shared pain. A connection. A belonging. An understanding. Family. A swell of emotion like a tsunami hits. It's almost physical.

The game continues, final quarter. He feels his heart quicken as the whistle blows. He loves this game, the great outdoors, the bright blue ceiling. The red dirt in his boots. The deep ache of his muscles as he pushes his body to the edge. The exhaustion and exhilaration in equal measures. He breathes in deeply, tasting the heat. Feeling the dampness of his jumper sticking to his back. The umpire bounces the canary yellow ball in the centre... He is ready.

– THE END –



// Learn from me ... how dangerous is the acquirement of knowledge, and how happier the man is who believes his native town to be the world"
-Mary Shelly, *Frankenstein*

Log 4/10/1987

Birds heard multiple times. Weather cloudy.

Log 6/10/1987

Minor oil spill on timestamp 5:45:36. Oil spill caused by accidental infraction by Employee #14. 16 (all employees) went past camera. Weather rainy.

Log 7/10/1987

Employee #4 and #8 engaged in a verbal confrontation on timestamp 10:08:42. Argument about whether conditions on the rig were safe enough to continue. Employee #4 argued it wasn't, citing the mold (first mentioned on Log 15/9/1987) and weather as evidence. Employee #8 dismissed that as "groundless worrying for a Weak-Willed disgusting man". The argument increased in intensity until all employees were called for lunch at timestamp 10:35:28. Weather rainy.

Log 10/10/1987

Mold has seemed to have reached hallway by now. Weather rainy.

Log 11/10/1987

All employees try to destroy mold via a mix of baking soda, distilled white vinegar and water. Employee #2 and #11 cleaned the hallway from timestamp 3:10:45 to 4:55:12. Due to the cleaning, the normal duties are missed. This was noted and the infraction was filed. All of the employees spend from 00:05:35 to 11:13:31 cleaning the entire ship from the mold. Weather rainy.

Log 12/10/1987

The mold is back. Weather rainy.

Log 13/10/1987

Employee #13, the rig's resident biologist, attempts to find the type and taxonomy of the mold so the group can better destroy it.

He presents his findings to the group at timestamp 13:24:59. I have transcribed this here:

<<START OF TRANSCRIPT>>

Employee #13: Um... my findings are as follows. Mold #17, which is the placeholder I have decided to assign to it, is unidentifiable. I will...

All other employees shout over each other loudly.

Employee #2: You're a dumbass "biologist"!

Employee #15: What crackhouse did you get your degree from? Employee #7: You are full of shit!

Employee #13: Please listen to me!

All other employees begin to quiet down.

Employee #13: Listen to my reasoning... please.

The rest of the employees finish quieting down

Employee #13: Mold #17 began spreading on roughly the 14th of September from the boiler room. Um... in the month since, it has spread around to almost all of the rooms on this rig. It has eaten away at the food at storage units #3 and #4, rendering them inedible. It has also drastically decreased the air quality in various rooms, like Bedroom #5.

Pause

Employee #13: Mold #17 has a black or dark grey appearance. It is somewhat fuzzy and it started off as white spots. This seems easy to identify, right? It's a simple case of black mold, a genus called stachybotrys, which grows commonly in damp spaces. And this rig is certainly damp from all the rain and ocean currents. Case closed?

Problem solved? Right?

Vague muttering from the rest of the employees

Employee #13: Well, it's not. The best way to identify mold is to look at its growth structure and cells under a microscope. This process is morphology. That's where the problem is.

Employee #13 sighs

Employee #13: Mold #17, despite having all appearances and processes of mold, in a breach in all that is known to science, does **not have cells**.

Nervous noises from the rest of the employees

Employee #15: *hesitantly* Are you ... sure you haven't made a mistake?

Employee #13: Yes! I have spent days in my room, looking through all my books and all my knowledge I have learnt in my all-to-long decades on this planet in some vain attempt to understand this goddamn mold! But nothing... nothing I do makes any sort of sense. It violates all known laws of the natural world.

Pause & sigh from Employee #13

Employee #13: I simply don't know what to do.

<<END OF TRANSCRIPT>>

Birds heard. Weather windy.

Log 15/10/1987

On timestamp 04:08:43, in Bedroom #4, Employee #4 did not wake up at the assigned time. They did not respond to the other employee's shouts and pokes. It was at this point the employees realized she was unconscious, likely due to the mold. She was promptly moved out of Bedroom #4 into the hallway. Employee #2, who was trained in first aid, analyzed the situation and gave CPR that continued for 12 seconds until Employee #4 regained consciousness at timestamp 04:09:59.

All 16 employees later unanimously decided to all sleep together in Bedrooms #1 & #2, as these were the only rooms not affected by the mold and to call mainland for advice.

Birds heard and passed in a left to right direction. Weather rainy.

Log 16/10/1987

Employee #4 was indisposed for the workday, due to headaches, extreme fatigue and vomiting. Employee #13 attempted to relieve Employee #4 of their sickness.

Employee #3 & #5 attempted 15 times through out the day to communicate to the mainland via radio. This was not possible due to the rainy weather and some malfunctioning equipment from both parties.

Weather rainy.

Log 17/10/1987

Employee #4 was announced to be dead on timestamp 01:04:03. Employee #13 attempted and failed to find the specific cause of death, and ended up attributing it to "this eldritch fucking mold [sic]".

Employee #4 was wrapped in cloth and was given a burial at sea. Employee #7, who was close to Employee #4, had this to say:

<<START OF TRANSCRIPT>>

Employee #7: Um... I've never had to give one of these, but I'll guess I try. The person we are remembering today is ██████████ ██████████. She was a wonderful woman, partner and friend. She treated everyone with kindness where ever she went. When I had came where to this rig, nearly bankrupt and at my last resort, she gave me the support I needed. She helped me realize so much more about myself, and my relationships and my emotions and my...

Employee #7 quietly sobs

Employee #7: Um... so, yeah... that's all I have to say. Let's just get this over with.

Employee #4 is dropped into the ocean

<<END OF TRANSCRIPT>>

The group tries to contact mainland 35 times. All were unsuccessful. The mold has almost taken some entire rooms.

Weather rainy.

Log 25/10/1987

Employee #2, #7 and #15 have all died of similar ailments to Employee #4. The mold has taken over the majority of the rig, with the exception of the roof. It is because of that fact that the rest of the employees are now staying there. Over the last week, they have attempted and failed to call mainland 516 times.

Most of them want to give up. Birds were heard. Weather rainy. Log 27/10/1987

Employee #11, #12 & #16 quickly patch together a makeshift raft from various tables and chair from Bedroom #2. Despite the pleas from Employee #13 and #15 that the rainy weather will make it dangerous, the group argues that it is "their only hope to survive".

The group sets off to the mainland at timestamp 10:16:43 and they shortly disappear into the horizon.

At timestamp 11:55:12, the raft floats back to the rig without the group on it.

As of now, the whereabouts and states of Employees #11, #12 & #16 are unknown.

Log 29/10/1987

On timestamp 2:12:55, Employee #14 & #15 fall off the roof, landing on the stairs on Support #2. This kills them instantly. It is unknown whether this was an accident or a suicide. Their situation suggests the latter. Employee #13 is now the only person on the rig.

Log 31/10/1987

On timestamp 00:45:09, Employee #13 calmly walks down onto the ground floor, which by now is extremely affected by the mold, and lays down. His last words are transcribed here:

<<START OF TRANSCRIPT>>

Employee #13: This mold is beautiful, you know. It seems simple but it is infinitesimally complex. For example, it appears black at first but it is really all colors even some outside human perception. Right now, it is a blue that is blacker than black.

Pause

Employee #13: God... it's beautiful. It shows you things too. In the past few days living with this godlike... thing, I've experienced all possible existences. A peasant chinese girl in the 16th century, a tech billionaire in the 2000s, a supposed french prophet in far future. All of that in the past couple days. All of it... just all of it.

Laughter

Employee #13: The mold told me to come down here... yeah. It whispered to me in the most beautiful, ethereal voice. "Give yourself to me". It beckoned me with an outstretched hand. It felt nice walking down here. The mold telling me sweet nothings in hushed tones. It felt like that this... this is what I was put here on Earth to do. Like this was my purpose.

Pause

Employee #13: It felt fucking amazing! To be a part in this higher being's plan. Gosh, I was so vain before, trying to explain this god with science. "Black mold, stachybotrys" I declared. It was all bullshit. All I know that it's beautiful... it's beautiful... it's beautiful...

<<END OF TRANSCRIPT>>

Oh my god...

I see it now. He's right. I can feel the power of the mold, my master, through this screen. This feels right. This feels like my purpose also.

The mold is beautiful. It's beautiful.

It's beautiful.

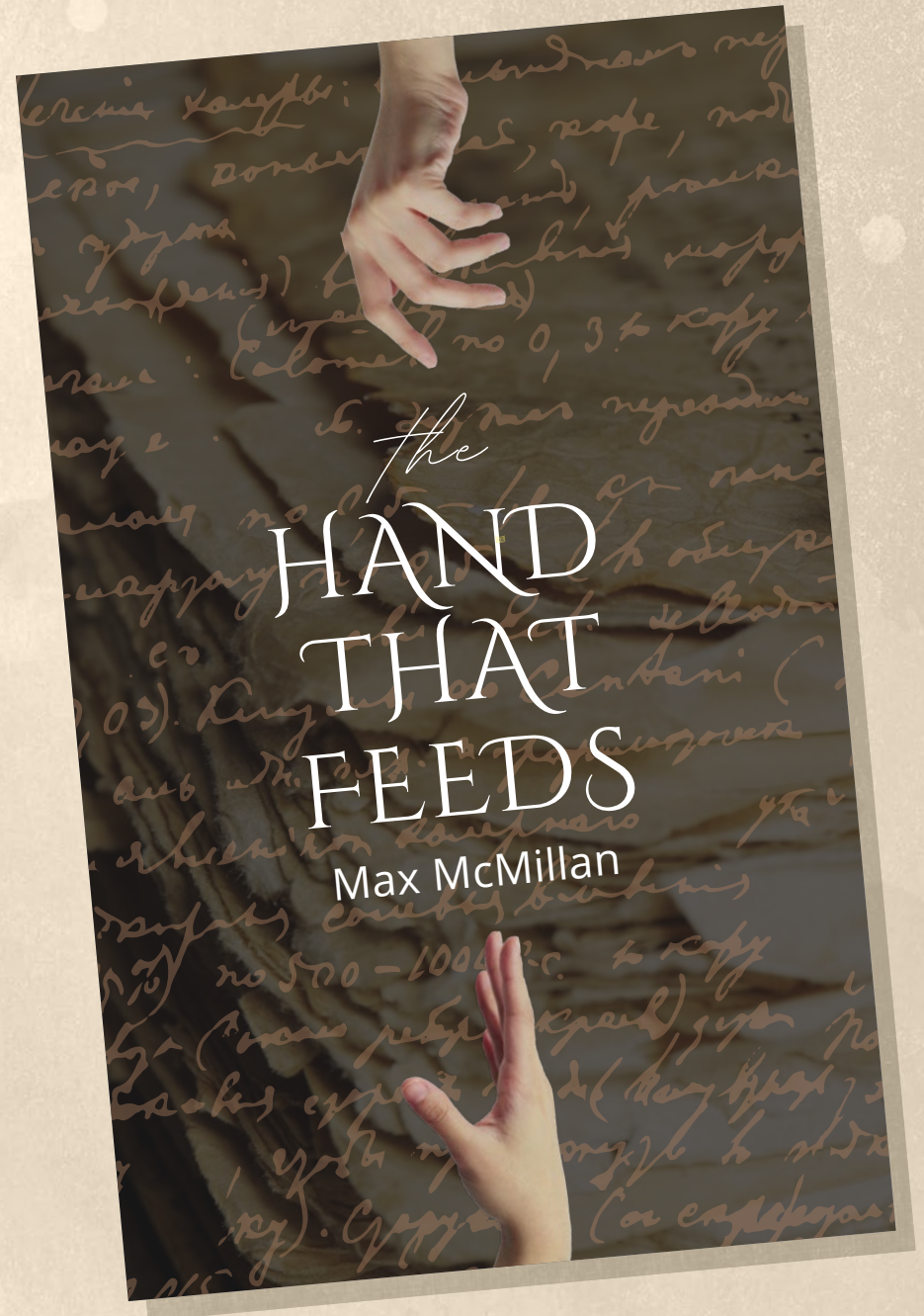
It's beautiful.

It's beautiful.

It's beautiful.

It's beautiful

– THE END –



I was waiting and while I was waiting I ran my finger along the edge of my thumb-nail and while I was doing that I was wondering what would happen if I ran it over the edge a million times. Would the repetition wear down the jagged, bitten edges and actually smooth the nail out like those bits of matte glass you find on the beach? Perhaps that would take so many reps that it would just be easier waiting for the nail to grow back smooth and rounded and shiny and perfect and new and ready to be bitten because that's what a nail's job is at the end of the day. You can go out and buy a stress ball if you like but God gave you five nails on each hand (and ten more if you're flexible and adventurous) for a reason. You bite it and it grows back because it knows you need something to bite and it doesn't try to argue with you because it's growing out of your finger and it wouldn't want to argue with the hand that feeds because what can you do with no food? You have no energy and you shrivel up and die and your body breaks down and your skin goes pallid and your cheeks sink in and your nails certainly don't grow back even though that's their job and if you managed to chew them down to painful rosy nubs even though you're too malnourished to run your jaw like a locomotive choo-choo-choo up and down and up and down and chomp-chomp-chomp—

"Jesus Christ, Beth."

"What?"

"This is gibberish."

"Well I know. He was always a bit avant garde, you know that. But that was Dad and everybody loved him and—"

"No, Beth, you aren't hearing me. This is nonsense. It isn't potential. It isn't a dark, deep exploration of the human condition. It's a nothing burger. The mad ramblings of a schizo's last brain cells."

"Josh, please. Just think it over. Please. It isn't superhero schlock or whatever Michael Bay's taking credit for nowadays. But it's raw and it's real and there's a market for this kind of thing. Anderson might want this; Eggers, Kaufman, Del Toro even—"

"Beth, come on. Our last film cost three-hundred bucks and we filmed most of it in a Red Dot. I don't think Wes Anderson would call us if we had the Magna-bloody-Cartman."

"Carta."

"Carta. Whatever... Point is: I know you miss him. I miss him too. You think I like having a matching tattoo that matches with a dead guy? But he's gone. And I think you're trying a bit too hard to bring him back, Beth."

"Maybe you're right—"

"I am right."

"You *might* be right. It's just hard to have nothing, you know? Mum got the ashes, Uncle Larry got his car. Hell, at least you've got the tattoo! I don't even look like him, for Christ's sake, and I was the only one who stayed with him through thick and thin."

"You can't seriously be going there, Beth, right?"

"Am I wrong?"

"I'm on the other side of the country trying to make a name for myself. You know what kind of damage even a month off work is gonna do me? Even a day? What if Anderson did call and I was in Perth feeding dear old Dad pea soup and listening to him ramble about sea glass and locomotives *choo-choo-choo!*?"

"And you think abandoning him's gonna be so much of a better look, do you? Abandoning all of us? What do I mean 'us'? Me. Just me. Coming home from twelve hours of stacking shelves to bathe him and wipe the pea soup from his mouth and lock up the cabinets he'd gotten into. It was hell, Josh. Actual hell. And now I can't even be glad that hell is gone because its departing gift was a dead dad and a stack of useless papers my brother barely even skims, sitting in his faux-leather nepotism throne, with his suit jacket two sizes too big, peaking at the secretary's cleavage and arranging business meetings at Dome where all he does is order a six dollar coffee and get disappointed when the server doesn't show as much cleavage as the secretary does and—"

"Beth—"

"What?"

"Here you are saying you've got nothing to remember him by. You talk exactly like the crazy bastard!"

"Yeah. I guess I do. I shouldn't blow up like that."

"That's just what we do, I'm afraid."

"Sorry about what I said."

"I'm sorry that most of it was true."

"It's late. I'm tired. I have so much less to do now, but it feels like so much more. It's hot all the time. I don't remember the last time I woke up without a headache. And at the risk of sounding like a teenager, I am so *goddamn lonely*. All day. I'd rather hear about locomotives choo-choo-choo than just be left here. Alone. Trying to make sense of nonsense. Of nothing burgers. Y'know, the best part of my day yesterday was hearing someone cry in the next flat over. Just knowing I hadn't drained this post-code's tear reserve single-handedly. Isn't that depressing? More than one depressing. That's like depressing squared."

"Jesus Christ, Beth, you didn't tell me all that! Look. I'll reschedule my flight. I can be there by Monday. Then I'm all yours until the funeral and maybe a week or two after that. Anderson can leave a voicemail—"

"No, Josh, I'm not trying to guilt you."

"It wouldn't work if you were. I'm in your head, Beth, *mi casa es su casa*."

"Thank you, Josh. For reading it."

"I love you Josh, I think you mean."

"I love you Josh,"

"And I love you too—more, in fact."

"I'm going to sleep now. It's past midnight and—Jesus, Josh it's like four o' clock in the morning over there! Go to bed!"

"Yes, mother."

"... Do you really think it's nothing?"

"I think it's something to you—to us. And I think that's enough."

So What?

There was another piece of paper in that house. A piece of folded up white that wasn't found for six years, after Beth got her degree and moved out of that inferno, and it wasn't unfolded for another two. By the time it came apart, a statue of Ron Blaten was erected in his home suburb in front of a library where

a picture of him had hung since his first novel's publication. Years passed; both his twin children, whose birth had emblazoned the West Australian thirty years prior, got married (not to each other, obviously); like a locomotive choo-choo-choo, life moved on.

Beth Blaten met a woman named Shell; they sip wine out of mugs after the kids are asleep and watch movies in their big Cottesloe abode. She doesn't know what makes her chuckle more, "Cottesloe abode" barely rhyming, or that her wife's name is shell and she lives near the sea. It's a blissfully boring chuckle either way. One Beth can't get enough of.

Josh's hypothesis was correct. The month away from Melbourne did indeed do damage, and it did indeed become more than just a month. In his absence, some unsavoury rumours that everyone knew were true came to the public's attention. Josh was forced to disband Blatantly Blaten after only seven months of operation. Operation on Daddy's dollar; "a schizo's last handful of change", he might say. Anderson never called. Nor did Del Toro or anyone else. His wife has a face he thinks is mediocre and an average sized bust. His home is too loud and hardly a home at all.

Ron Blaten's name lost its novelty after a while and became just another that the kids in year ten came to shudder at, knowing they'd have to dissect themes that to Ron were just facts. Facts of life that he squeezed and moulded until they meant something and sounded pretty. They were never meant to sound pretty to a fifteen-year-old's ears. Few things do.

When the piece of paper came undone, Beth read the first line and felt herself swallow a bullet of guilt. She drove to her brother's house and they read it together.

Babies.

There was a colour a moment ago. It was just there, and then it wasn't, but I saw it long enough to register it. It was pink, but only barely. That glorious dollop of pulsing vernal pink. I knew it immediately. It looked just like your little hands. I must've told you this factoid but in case I haven't I'll reiterate: you two were born holding each other's hands. And you were holding them together so tightly and so sweetly that the doctors were worried for a second that you were conjoined or siamese or whatever the correct term is. And maybe you medically aren't. You can walk and talk and think separately. But I think conjoined is the perfect word.

The scariest part was that I did register that colour, and I registered that it was the first thing I had fully registered in a while. I take that back. The scariest part has been superseded. Now I don't even know if that part about the hand holding is true.

I feel like God knew that this parasite would be the way I went out. I know that's why he made me a writer. He took pity on me and my children; at the end of my line in his grand plan, he knew I'd struggle for sentences, so he decided to foreshadow that with my life's work, making sure I got as many of them out as possible while I could.

I know one day that my name will mean nothing. I will look like Ron, smell like Ron, have the same DNA as Ron's kids and carry around a piece of plastic with Ron's date of birth on it and his money in it. But that person will not be me, will not be Ron, will not be your father. I'm slipping, babies. Slipping out of this skin. It's someone else's turn in this outfit. Ron is being pushed out. I hope this new person loves you and makes your life easier than I can. I hope he can still write and cry when he sees a picture of his mother even if he has no idea who she is. I hope he remembers your birthday long after he can't count how many of mine he's missed. And I hope you can tolerate him long enough for me to find my way to the gates and ask Him myself why our lives had to turn out this way. I think God will like me, though. He and I have a similar sense of humour.

I hope I don't have to see you again. No father who is really a father does. But if that time comes, we'll gather somewhere ethereal and eat egg sandwiches on a blanket that looks like a big tea-towel and I'll nod while you catch me up on what I'm going to miss.

My guilt is as boundless as my love for you.

Forever and always,

Dad.

Postscript

"You remember that fight we had?"

"I'm sure Anderson does."

"Oh shut up."

"What's that park called? With the bridge to the swamp; the mandarin trees?"

"Pioneer Park?"

"That's the one."

"What about it?"

"I need a walk. This gut I've accumulated would probably agree."

"... I think he was wrong."

"That isn't a very bold statement. Wrong about what, exactly?"

"About slipping; falling out of his skin. As far as I'm concerned, he was Dad up until the very end. Still is, if you ask me." She was silent for a moment.

"The hand fed us well."

– THE END –



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