



LOVELY MISFORTUNE

RACHEL
FOSTER



LOVELY MISFØR SENØT

BY
RACHEL FOSTER



Peaches in April

Summers, for me, were always simple. Even when I became a teenager it was all easy. When all the other kids were out smoking, drinking, rebelling, I stayed in. The trouble wasn't worth it to me. It never appealed to me to be rebellious. I guess you could say that it just wasn't my style. Summers to me were about one thing, the peaches.

When I was a child my best friend, Lily, and I would climb the peach trees behind my house and suckle in their sweet fruit day after day. We would sit there without words. I guess that was just the type of friends that we were.

I had known Lily since the second grade. It was then that I moved to New London Connecticut. I had felt so alone, without a single friend. My mom had suggested I introduce myself to someone. So, on the first day of class I walked up to Lily, stuck out my hand, (as I had seen my father do so many times) and said, "Hello, I'm Taylor."

She just stood there, half smiling, half stunned and then said, sheepishly, "Lily." I guess after that we were friends. Lily came over on weekends, and walked home with me from school. She called me often and then, when summer came she sat with me in the peach trees, chatting, and thinking, and eating.

When we started to grow up, hitting our middle school and high school years, we weren't always as close as we had been throughout childhood. I mean, we faded. I got a boyfriend, or she made a new friend. Actually it was probably the other way around. You see Lily was always the pretty one, tall, thin, big boobs, dark hair and mysterious eyes. I was always the likeable one, the "best friend." A little bit pudgy around the edges, soft spoken, and once you got to know me, a great listener.

When Lily hit fifteen she began to experiment with boys and drugs. I made new friends. But I never invited them up to my tree, for some reason the crop was never as good during the summers that Lily and I weren't friends. The peaches were always mealy and bruised. The summer before we went into high school we didn't exchange a word. The crop, that same year, had been devoured by bugs.

The thing was, though, that we always fell back to one another. When something happened, or we failed a test, or whatever we would find each other, climb our tree and sit there. Sometimes, even if it weren't yet season, some peaches would bloom, as if they had known Lily and I were coming.

In the eyes of the life around us we had nothing in common, but we both knew differently. We had just clicked so many years ago, that our friendship was old, comfortable, the most comfortable, and therefore we

always had something to say when the other needed a talk in the tree. She would tell me about her different adventures, the boys that had hurt her, how the cops had almost arrested her the night before, and I'd listen. I would tell her on the adventures I'd imagined, and she would always encourage me to try them out.

I never did.

So, it was during our junior year of high school, the year had been a long one, SAT's, term papers, and college preparation, that Lily and I had fallen apart yet again. Not in a bad way, just in the way that we always had, when one day she walked up to me, I remember in well. It was the dead of winter, and flakes of white littered the ground. It covered New London with a beautiful essence, but the air was unforgiving. It cut through your bones, frightening people away from the beautiful flakes. I stood by my locker gazing through the frost-covered window to my right.

Lily walked up to me, breaking my gaze, and said, "Want to hang out in the trees?"

I stared at her blankly for a second, and then, still a little thrown off I replied, "Lil, it's a tad bit cold, and there's no fruit." I smiled softly at her, catching my composure.

"I know that it's the wrong season, but I kind of need to be there right now."

"Another breakup?" I asked, quietly though, because I was pretty sure that wasn't it.

"A need for a friend... I'll meet you here after school." She tossed her hair, as she turned from me in perfect timing with the bell. I saw her "crowd" rush up to her, almost admitting her, and I smiled to myself. They all wanted to be like Lily.

I went through that day as normal, ate lunch, and went to my classes, forgetting almost entirely that I was supposed to meet Lily. But after school, as I stood by my locker Lily appeared as promised.

"You look kind of tan for this time of year Lil," I joked, she always went to the tanning salons. She surveyed her hands closely for a minute before nodding in agreement, and then turned to lead the way out the door. I knocked my locker closed with one finger, half running to keep up with Lily.

"Fuck, is it cold," I whined as we pushed through the double doors.

"Yeah," Lily agreed in a wistful sort of way.

It wasn't long though before we could see my house, an old Victorian that used to be white but now looked grayish from the years of weathering and dirt. Walking through the front door, I picked up the note from my mom telling me she was running errands.

"Lily, it's so cold, want to just sit around in my room?" I asked hopefully, although I could tell from her face that the cold was not going to beat her out today.



"Nah, I'd rather go and sit in the trees."

I nodded at her solemnly, and began to pull some mittens and scarf out of the closet to my left. I handed Lily a scarf and a blanket. Her hands, dressed in her black leather gloves reached out for the vibrant red blanket. Her nose crinkled a little, and I raised a brow, "Want to freeze?" I asked her, she shook her head no, while gathering up all the ends of the blanket. I then pushed my way out the back door. I trudged past the garden, which was a deep white now from the snow. Lily followed closely behind. We walked past the apple trees, and I looked ahead towards the peach ones. Three trees all lined up in a perfect ninety-degree triangle. I looked at the snow covering them and cringed at the cold as I wrapped my hand around the trunk of one and pulled myself up.

I could feel Lily's warm breath behind me, hoisting herself as well into the tree. Then, we sat there, her in thought, and me shivering but knowing that I wasn't going to leave.

I have no idea how much time passed, but at the time I don't even remember being cold anymore. I just lay, nestled into the bare tree. The snow melted under me from the heat of my body, soaking through my pants. They had just started to dry when Lily turned to me and softly said, "Okay, I'm ready to go."

I turned to her and shrugged my sign of agreement. I began to lower myself to the ground, and then, she said it, "I'm going to die you know." I stopped in my path, swiveling my body around.

"I'm sorry, Lil, what?"

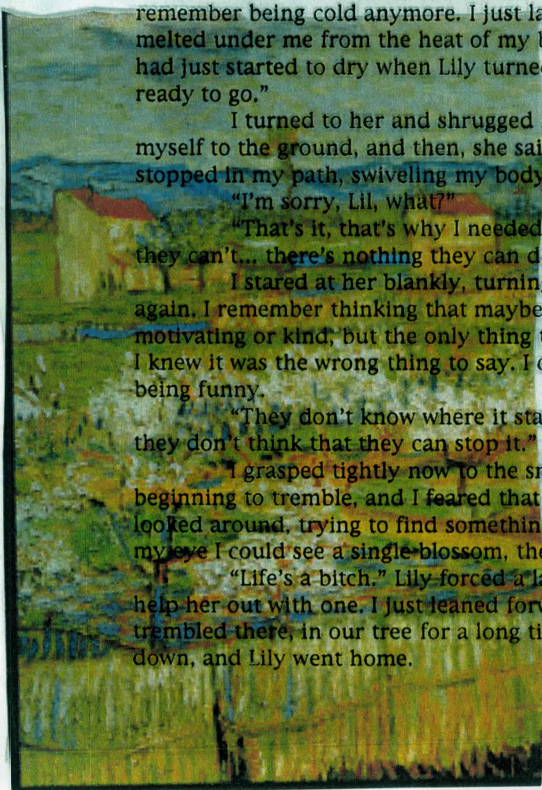
"That's it, that's why I needed the tree, because I have cancer, and they can't... there's nothing they can do."

I stared at her blankly, turning the words over in my head again and again. I remember thinking that maybe I should say something, something motivating or kind, but the only thing that came out was, "You aren't funny." I knew it was the wrong thing to say. I could tell from her face that she wasn't being funny.

"They don't know where it started," was her only response, "and they don't think that they can stop it."

I grasped tightly now to the snow filled branches. I could feel myself beginning to tremble, and I feared that I might fall straight out of the tree. I looked around, trying to find something new to focus on. Out of the corner of my eye I could see a single blossom, the beginning of a peach.

"Life's a bitch." Lily forced a laugh out of herself, but I couldn't even help her out with one. I just leaned forward and took her into my arms. We trembled there, in our tree for a long time. Then without words we climbed down, and Lily went home.



would say, "Just wait until tomorrow, tomorrow will be a better day. Until then, just smile." Maybe she was right; maybe all I need to do is smile. Maybe then this will all go away.

My mother died twenty years ago. Breast cancer took her life. It's kind of funny, you know, because I never thought that that would happen to me. My mother smoked and I don't, she ate junk and I don't. I exercise, get plenty of sleep, work forty hours a week, have a husband, two children, and then, I have cancer. It began in my breast, the same way as hers, and then it ate away at the rest of me.

My mother was my hero; she could do anything. She didn't take care of her body a day in her life, and yet, she was so strong. I really always thought she would make it. When I was little she would sit on the porch and smoke, watching me on the swings. I remember her eyes, they always stung through my body, they never left me. My mother was brilliant, she taught zoology at Connecticut College, she was one of the first women to ever enter Yale as a graduate student, and she was beautiful. Her blonde hair, the same color as mine would mat to her neck when she watched me swing. She always smiled.

When I was thirteen my mother got cancer. She fought it for six years; she had been given six months. When a day was hard she would always find something that would make her smile. Her policy was at least one minute a day; she always thought that somehow her smiles would make it all go away.

I've never felt that strong. People always say it's just one more thing to add to my busy day, one more thing to fight, one more thing to do, one more moment to be tough. This is how I see it;



It's the last thing I'll ever have to live through. Everyone always tells me, "You li, you are so strong." It's like a joke with no punch line, you know the kind, where the person gets you all psyched up, tells this long story, and then goes, "Shit, I forgot how it ends." That's what my fighting and strength and whatever other bullshit the world thinks I have is like. They've given me my time, nine months to live. Why fight? Why be strong... I don't feel strong.

My children are six and three. I am thirty-nine, and I'm going to die. *Smile*, isn't that what my mother used to say? I try.

But my heart quakes in my chest every time that I do. I'm lying to myself, I don't feel like smiling. I'm thirty-nine, just wait until tomorrow? Who knows if one will be there, how can I smile?

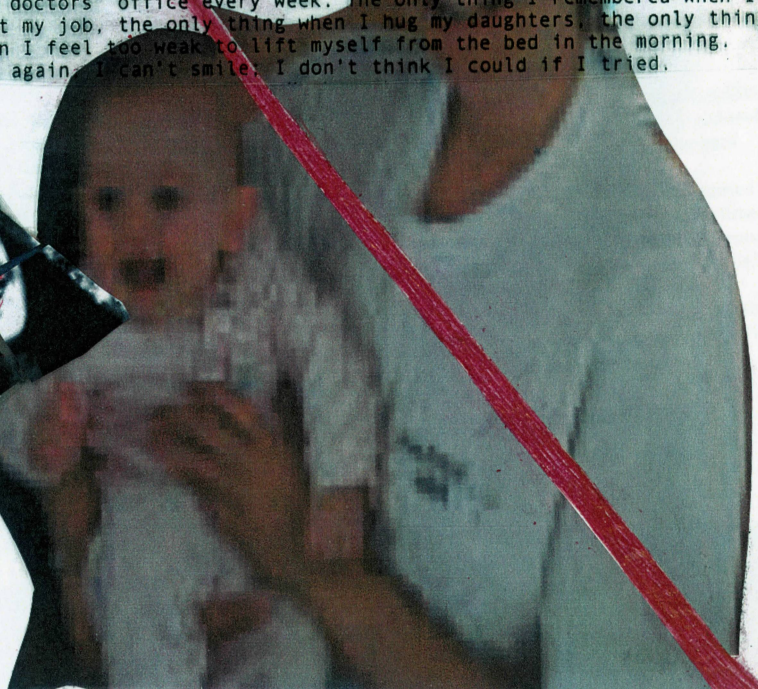
I have no hair. I weigh almost nothing. I can barely hold my three year old daughter, Julia. I'm going to die. Sometimes I look to Julia to support me. Sometimes, she makes me smile. Then I always think, *how is this happening to me?*

...on my shoulders, just like my mom's. It accented my blue eyes and my defined cheekbones. I stood five foot six, and I had breasts. Now my breasts have been removed, and I've begun to shrink. My eyes look tired, and my hair is falling out, that is except for a few wisps. Really, they are more like feathers.

I throw up for hours, radiation burning away my strength. Sometimes I can't walk. On the days that I can carry a basket of laundry I feel strong. I feel worth something. I feel like I used to. Those are the days that I wonder if I will survive, if I can win the fight. And then, I always seem to fall, sometimes down the stairs, other times I am just standing up, and then, I am not. My knees grow weak and I have no strength I have lost, and losers have no reason to smile.

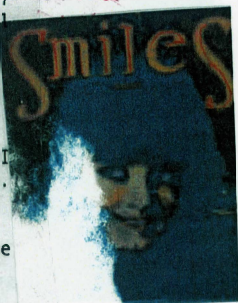
My husband used to run his fingers through my hair. He still does it sometimes without thinking, and chunks of it will lie, resting menacingly between each of his fingers. And I don't even try to smile.

I feel as if I am two years old. The difference being that I can understand all of the big words that the doctors use. And though I get what they are saying I will never understand why this is happening to me. I am thirty-nine years old, and I'm going to die. That is the only thing that rings through my head when I leave the doctors' office every week. The only thing I remembered when I quit my job, the only thing when I hug my daughters, the only thing when I feel too weak to lift myself from the bed in the morning. And again, I can't smile. I don't think I could if I tried.



On her deathbed my Mother changed her mind. Her whispers of a better tomorrow turned to, "Live life for today, never wait until tomorrow, because you never know if there is going to be one." I know though that there probably will not be one. My heart throbs aching against my chest when I think this and I gasp for breaths of air. I wish only to be okay, to have a reason to smile. The truth is my muscles hurt to bad too turn my cheekbones in the correct upward movement it would take for me to be happy. Instead I cry, I don't know why, for some reason a frown is easier on my jaw.

I am thirty-nine; I have two beautiful daughters and one wonderful husband. I will miss my daughter's senior prom; I will never see them get married. I am going to let some other woman move into my husband's life, and I will wither from all of their minds. I can feel myself gasp when I think this, and so I remember my mother and I try, I really do, to smile.





Runaway Trains

When my dad died it was something that nobody ever expected. He was one of those people that were supposed to make it, no matter what. Four times he was pronounced in remission, the last time, he it was pronounced that the cancer had spread to his brain. I remember running with him when he told me; we had always run together. For years he had trained me to run cross-country like a champ. My being a good runner was more important than my health, then my body.

My dad had been a great cross-country runner, world class. He was even favored one year to win state, but out of no where this guy, Rick Burgess appeared, he stole the title right out from under my father. Rick Burgess went on to win the silver in the Olympic two-mile, but that was never a good enough explanation for my dad. See, my Dad had tried to keep up with Rick, and for about the first two miles of the race he did. But cross-country races are three miles, and so, it wasn't long before my dad couldn't keep up. The problem was that he had burnt himself out so much that he started to get passed. One by one the other runners flew by him, my dad finished the race fourteenth. You need to be in the top twelve to be all state.

So my dad trained me for his dream, and every day we ran. I was never fast enough, never good enough, never strong enough. But I swear, I tried. And in sort of a sick twisted way his dream became mine, and running became our way to bond.

That's why it wasn't weird for me that he had chosen our run to tell me about his illness. He just looked at me and said, "Marissa, I have cancer, and this time, they don't think they can fix it. I'm going to try to fight, but it's all over my body, and the truth is that it might be too late; you see, the cancer has reached my brain."

I nodded at him, fighting back tears. In that distance I heard the whistle of the train and I began to run faster, we always used to race the train together.

I remember the first time that my dad had cancer, I was eleven. It was thyroid cancer, a very "curable" kind. I remember him telling me so clearly, like it was last week. We were all sitting around the diner table, my mom, my little sister, and me. My mom and him looked at my sister, Allie, and I so carefully and breathed out words that I could not believe. It was my mother who began, looking us all in the eye and saying, "Marissa and Allie, there is something that we have to tell you..." she broke off with a gasp for air. It was as if her throat had just cut off, and her eyes began to water.

I started to speak, asking my mom what the matter was, but she didn't respond, she just looked at my dad, whispering, "Daddy," my father's name, over and over and over again.

My sister too young to know any better, exclaimed in mere shock, "Daddy, you are crying." At her young age, just barely seven, she had never seen my father cry. He just wasn't the crying type, somewhere inside he cared, but it was rare that he ever showed it. I sat there in silence, stunned from the events that proceeded before my eyes.

It was my Dad that spoke next, "Girls," my father looked solidly at my sister, and me but his arm reached out and tenderly began to stroke my mom's arm. "I have Cancer," he continued, "Do you know what that is?"

I stared at his perfect hands. The only callus on them was at the tip of his index finger, from where it had played against a computer keyboard for days at end.

"Cancer," I heard myself repeat, "Cancer," the word rolled easily off my tongue. I said it one more time before letting the silence of the room return. My parents proceeded to eat their dinners, and my dad's hand suddenly lifted from my mother's arm. He dug his fork into a piece of his salmon, lifted it to his mouth and then repeated the process yet again, this time lifting a green bean. A tiny bit of steam dropped into his food as the rest of the green collided with his tongue.

I began to mock him, mimicking his solemn facial expressions, and eating patterns, except shortly after I realized that I wasn't hungry. So I let my hand guide the fork around my plate, carefully rearranging. I put my fish where my beans had been, my beans where my rice had lay. I dared to steal a glance at my sister who was doing nothing at all. She just sat, looking perplexed. She looked around the table over and over again, watching the three of us; I turned towards my dad, who now seemed to be mimicking me, slowly rearranging his food.

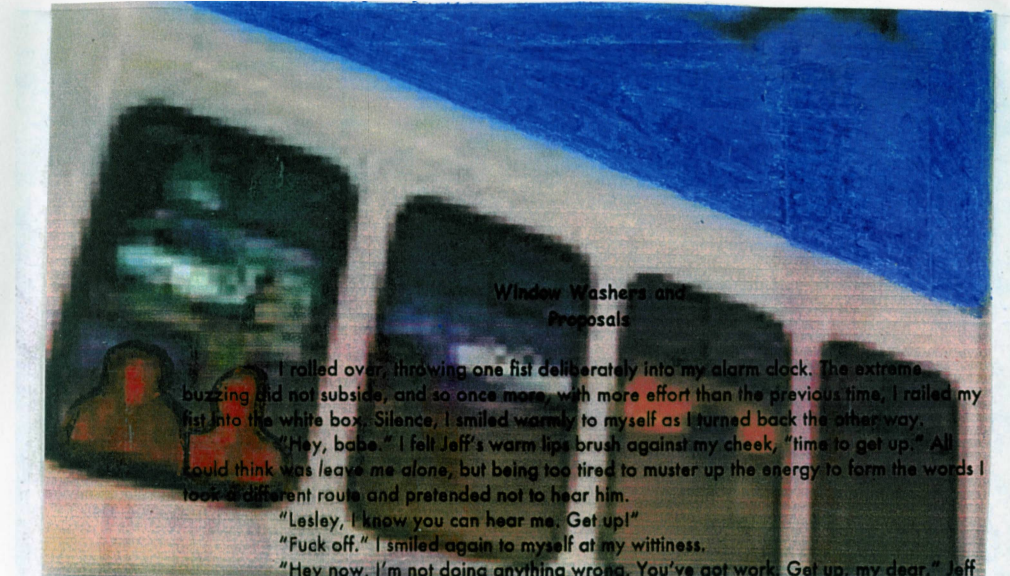
"Excuse me," Allie loudly announced, "I do not know what cancer is." Her face looked content with her proclamation. She stared, wide eyed at my father waiting patiently for a response. Nobody supplied her with one, and a few minutes later she stood from the table in a huff and marched up the stairway, taking care to stomp every individual stair on her way up. None of us began to eat again until we heard the slam of her door as she entered her room for the remainder of the evening. Two bites later my mother raised herself from her chair and went after her. I heard Allie's door creek open, and my mom's soothing voice explaining slowly what cancer meant.

Shortly after I heard the passionate wails of my little sister. I was pretty sure that she still didn't understand what was going on, but knew that she was supposed to cry. I pictured my mom holding her, and I was tempted to get up and join them. But I sat, glued to the hard mahogany chair.

One the other hand knew exactly what cancer was, I had read about it, learned about it. Hell, I lived on the north shore in Chicago and had. I had heard one to many times in my science classes what cancer was. I only had one question about it and it pounded through my head so loudly that I thought I would burst, and so I just asked him, "Are you going to die?" I held my eyes level with his, forcing him to remember me, remember what I had asked.

Finally he answered, "Not if I can help it." And of course, he could, and so it was on the eleventh of February, the day before my fourteenth birthday my dad was pronounced in remission, and my life proceeded as it had always been without a second thought to the problem.





Window Washers and Proposals

I rolled over, throwing one fist deliberately into my alarm clock. The extreme buzzing did not subside, and so once more, with more effort than the previous time, I railed my fist into the white box. Silence. I smiled warmly to myself as I turned back the other way.

"Hey, babe." I felt Jeff's warm lips brush against my cheek, "time to get up." All I could think was leave me alone, but being too tired to muster up the energy to form the words I took a different route and pretended not to hear him.

"Lesley, I know you can hear me. Get up!"

"Fuck off." I smiled again to myself at my wittiness.

"Hey now, I'm not doing anything wrong. You've got work. Get up, my dear." Jeff began to kiss me again, this time over and over. I felt his lips brush my neck and I began to giggle.

"Okay, okay, I'm up... you happy?" I smiled at him and kissed him back, rolled over and swung my feet out of bed. I glided them cleanly into my slippers to avoid the cool floor of morning. I walked towards the window and felt the chilled glass, my morning tradition of inaccurately deciding the weather.

"Sixty-five and partly cloudy." I heard Jeff yell from the kitchen.

"Thank you, honey." I made my way into the bathroom wondering to myself what I would do without him. We had been dating for a little over two years now, and had just recently moved in with each other, one of the greatest decisions that I had ever made.

I stripped out of my nightshirt and flicked on the shower. I deliberately turned the dial to the exact temperature of water and waited a moment before climbing in. I let the water run over me slowly, beating against my body before I began to wash myself.

Climbing out, I shivered at the cool morning ran through me yet again. I wrapped my towel around me and moved back into the bedroom. I opened my closet and stared for a moment. My head turned towards the outfit in front that I had laid out the evening before. I pulled the blue skirt and matching blouse off of the hanger and stepped into it. I moved back into the bathroom, dried my hair and brushed some makeup onto my face.

Dissatisfied, I stared into the mirror before making my way out into the kitchen. On the way I grabbed my suit jacket.

I took two bowls out of the cupboard and began to pour Jeff and myself bowls of cereal. I heard him open the refrigerator behind me. "Grab the orange juice honey," I yelled before picking up the two bowls and taking them into the dining room. "And the milk."

"Have I told you lately that I love you," Jeff began to sing as he walked into the room.

"Yeah, you have, but it's always nice to hear it again." I smiled at him warmly, watching him maneuver his way towards the table. I sat with one leg crossed neatly over the other; Jeff came to sit with me. He held the paper in front of his face, but through it I could see his warm eyes and grin. Boy, did I love him.

"Eat up, it's your big day," Jeff lowered the paper to let his eyes meet mine. "Are you nervous?"

"Yeah, I mean, we have McDonalds coming into the office today to see if they want to sign. I'm going to throw up!" I pushed my bowl of cereal away from me before continuing. This time talking more to myself than Jeff. "They've been looking around heavily, and even

though word on the street is that they're favoring AAI, well, me, to write the commercial, we have our work cut out. But damn, if I land this deal I'll definitely be promoted, and that would be..."

"Unbelievable," he cut off my mumbling and laughed.

"Yeah, that would be unbelievable," I responded in a dreamy tone, thinking to myself how badly I wanted this, now nothing had ever weighed so heavily on the outcome of my career. Being the head of the McDonalds corporate account was every advertiser's dream, and I had a shot.

Jeff's eyes barley blinked, he almost looked nervous. I had never seen him have a look like that and wondered where it had come from.

"Hey, Miss corporate account manager, you're gonna be late," Jeff smiled as if it were a joke. I felt my stomach drop.

I glanced at my wrist, "Shit, I love you." I leaned over and kissed him while grabbing my briefcase in the same sweep. "Bye..." my voice trailed off as I made a run for the door.

"Good luck," I heard Jeff's voice call after me as I let the door swing closed behind me.

I ran swiftly down the stairs headed for the parking garage. I paused for a second to remember where I had parked before jumping quickly into my Lexus; it had just been washed and gave me a good feeling for the day.

My foot lay flat against the accelerator; my nickname being Lead Foot Lesley, this was not an uncommon position for me to be driving in. Cruising smoothly onto the highway and pulling off two exits later, I took a couple of right turns and maneuvered my car smoothly into the parking lot. I swung my car around into spot 19 and climbed out.

For a moment I sprinted towards the building, but quickly remembered my composure as I slowed to sashay. I hit the button to the elevator, and deciding it may never come I turned towards the stairs and began my ascent towards the ninth floor.

Tired and out of breath, I walked into the room where several of my colleagues already sat. "Hello, everybody, sorry I'm a little late." The people in the room nodded towards me as I took my seat at the head of the table. "Is everything in place and ready to go?" I peered around me at the various instruments; drawing boards, layouts, overhead and computers littered the area. Everyone nodded towards me, and I took a breath before letting my eyes wander nervously towards the window.

"We're going to nail this thing people," I said with such a great amount of enthusiasm. Then I whispered it again, as if to reassure myself, "We are going to nail this."

"Yeah, we are," my best friend and colleague, Jenny, said as she swung open the door. She took her seat next to me and leaning in she murmured, "Les, you've got this one, don't worry."

Then they entered, McDonalds' board of representatives. Seven people dressed mostly in black. Some of the most terrifying executives I have ever seen, running one of the largest and most profitable organizations in the world. They walked as if they had rehearsed it towards separate chairs. None of them ran over another, none had to adjust their steps. Single file they took their seats across the table from me. All except the one directly across from me sat filled. Then the eighth executive walked in. "Sorry I'm late," the head of McDonald's advertising, Jim Franklin, said as if he had watched and was now mocking my earlier entrance. We all

stood. "How are you all?" Jim asked, then, before waiting for an answer, he said, "Shall we get started?" His eyebrows rose slightly as he took a seat at the foot of the table facing me.

"Um, yes," I blurted out while scrambling to my feet. I found myself thinking of how smooth they all had been, and felt my feet almost topple from under me. I shut my eyes for a second, and then remembered they were all watching, thinking, maybe I'll just throw up now, I felt Jenny squeeze my hand, and I took a breath and started again.

"We, my colleagues and I, have spent several weeks and hours trying to compose a way to best fit, or represent the essence of the McDonalds corporation." I paused for a moment to let my fingers flip on the overhead, which displayed the boxes that laid out our commercial. I peered to the layout boards that rested against the wall next to them conveying the same images. I've got this. And I felt words begin to flow, effortlessly, as I had practiced them before.

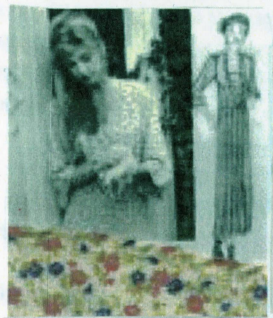
I began, "Here is what we have been thinking. McDonalds is fast, easy and geared a lot towards the idea of a quick meal. So we thought," I let my finger point to my head, accentuating the idea that we had thought about this for some time, "How do we take this appeal and incorporate it into the working classes everyday life. How do we turn the idea of McDonalds into a meal that a person can eat every day, perhaps on, a lunch break?"

Picture this," I picked up a pointer and pushed it towards the first box of the drawing, "There are a bunch of people, all sitting in an important business meeting, much like the one that we are in now. They all are looking groggy and bored, and you hear one mumble under their breath" I could feel my pointer moving now, but I couldn't feel my hand holding it, " 'Lunch.' They all nod at each other and one asks what they think they should do. Then, as if a light bulb appears they all look out the window at the bantering window washers..." Everyone waited for me, but I just stood there. My head deliberately turning towards the window, so that all the eyes in the room followed suit. I felt my stomach drop as I saw nothing.

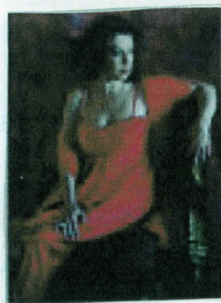
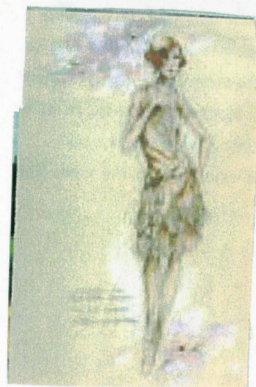
After what seemed like an eternity I saw our final trick. The window washers heaved themselves up the side of the rope displaying a sign that read, "Have you had your break today?"

I turned to look at the board's faces, which for a moment looked confused, and then, realizing what was happening their faces broke into smiles, and then even a couple small chuckles of laughter. The window washers held up the sign for another minute before pulling out the finale, each held up a McDonald's Big Mac and bit into them, all grinning with enthusiasm, as they began to banter and tell jokes.

I turned from the window, but the others did not follow. I opened my mouth as if to speak, but stopped myself and turned back to see what everyone was staring at. I heard Jenny gasp as my eyes fell onto Jeff. All the window washers ducked down, and Jeff stood there for a moment, not doing anything except causing my heart stop in my chest. Then he pulled out a sign from behind his back, he smoothly lifted it high over his head. I stared at it for a moment in disbelief, and then read it out loud, "Will you marry me?" I whispered to myself. I felt tears well up in my eyes, and I turned back to McDonalds board. They all smiled and nodded, and I felt my head begin to do the same. "Yes," I mouthed to Jeff, and I let tears of happiness run slowly down my cheeks. I saw him smile back.



Presentable



Presentable

When I was growing up I used to look around and pretend that I wasn't there. I'd try to picture what everything would be like. Wondering, would the whole world be different, or would not a single person notice? It was always a weird thought, but I could never seem to shake it.

It's sort of a funny thought; I grew up in the most perfect life.

I grew up outside New York, in this beautiful house, with these beautiful parents. My house was a large Victorian, old, but remodeled. It was set up on a hill so that when you looked out, you could see the town near us, all the lights and the people shone through when you looked out the windows. I had everything, every little thing that my heart could have ever desired. And the things my heart didn't desire, I had those too.

My father was a lawyer, but the majority of his fortune came from old money. My mother didn't have as much money, but she sure like to act as if she did. The one thing my mother was never short of was a performance.

Nobody would have ever expected me to think so weirdly, not me, not little Ashley. Then the shit would start to roll on in, and I was never sure how it would pass. Sometimes I didn't think it would, and so I would go to my mirror and let the images fade away. My mom always said with a big smile and a good outfit you can appear to be happy even if you weren't. My mom was never happy. But, she always looked it. I don't think anyone, not even my father, had tried to crack through her shell. Nobody had the energy to fight her desperate image of perfection. Why bother, she puts it all on so people will believe her. Still, I wonder, maybe she wanted to be cracked?

My mother was one of those people who wake up at five in the morning. She put on makeup and does her hair in a tousled way. She wraps one of her silk robes around her so that when she steps outside at six in the morning to get the paper it looks as if she has just gotten up in the most beautiful looking manner.

She threw parties, grand parties, *Great Gatsby* like parties. When people drove up the long winding hills to get to our house, they could see the lights and in their heads glasses were already chinking. Everybody stayed till late, drinking and laughing.

When I was a child I would watch from the stairs. I remember one night my mother had her hair done up in these perfect golden tendrils. Each pinned tightly to her head, but despite it a couple had fallen out around her face. Her cheeks were red from the champagne, the rim of her crystal glass stained a deep red from her lips but her lips somehow still burned red as well. What I remember the most is her dress. It was almost golden, and hugged her thin frame and curves tightly. The dress was decorated perfectly with beads and shone as she walked across the room. She was a spectacle; everyone said so.

All I could hear that night was, "Oh Meredith, you look like an angel." My mother was like an angel, and she knew it. But she would just smile, telling them that she didn't believe a word they said.

Men would always talk to my mother. In addition to talking they would touch her and flirt with her. I could see my father watching from across the room. He wore his tux and looked so stiff. He was thin and tall, brown hair and blue eyes. He and my mother looked perfect together. They always took picture, just so they could stand side by side. Then, though, they would each wander in there own direction. My father would stare at my mother for hours and hours, hidden against the wall, as men approached and re-approached her. He never did anything to stop it. He would just watch my mother as her white teeth shone through her smile, listening to her echoing giggles. She lit up the parties. And when the parties were over and the guest were gone, the maids were cleaning up, and I was told to go to sleep, my father would slide his hands gently around my mothers waist. He would whisper into her ear and she would laugh the same way she had with all the other men, allowing my father to lead her up the stairs.

When I was a child, I never heard a sound from their room. I wonder now that I am older if the whole thing was just a show. I mean, I don't think I'll ever truly believe that every night my father could have wanted to make love to a women who flirted in front of his face. And my Mother was far to proper to give her body, so often; to a man she so obviously hurt time and time again. He wasn't the type to want to be with a man that she had married, and then ignored so often for so many years. She just liked to walk those stairs with him, and feel, presentable.

Oddly, I always assumed that deep inside of them somewhere my parents loved each other, just a little bit, every once in a while. I think my father thought that he loved my mom. He loved the way that people looked at her and knew that no matter what, when the night was done, she was his. My mother was one of those women who needed an arm to link. Someone who needed to be walked through crowds with a man. Protected from the world by a man. Told that everything would always be all right, by a man. Not only that, but by a presentable, rich and handsome man. In short my father.

Growing up, and still a little now, I looked like my mother. When I was a child I used to wonder if I was actually my father's daughter, but I now know I am. I have his ears, ears that are oddly always said to be perfect. I just always thought that it was weird to call ears perfect, but still people look at them and almost coo at how great they are.

Then they always told me how lucky I am. My life is fixed with everything I wanted. My peers hated it. They whispered behind my back that I am the type of person who you always want to "get it" in life but knew that I never would.



I'm not mean, and its not that everyone hated me. I may act bratty at moments but I am far from entitled. It's just that nothing is perfect, and from the outside everything in my life looks perfect.

Maybe that is how I tuned out the way that I am; under the perception that I had to be perfect to match my life. My life up on that hill. Maybe I did it to prove that I was better then my mom, that I could handle it. I couldn't.

My mom worked out about seven thousand times a day, okay, maybe four. She was beautiful. Skinny. Perfect, always, always perfect. Since I was about six my mom would look at me and whisper, "Ashley, you have to work out. You have to be active you are gaining weight. You have to be presentable." Presentable was my mother's favorite word. I used to swear she lived her life by that word, revolving her world around it, our lives around it.

We kept so many maids. My mother kept so many closets. She gave me so many closets. My father had about thirty different designer suits, all picked out by my presentable mother, who sent them to the dry cleaners, even if they weren't dirty and had just been "sitting too long."

When I turned eight I had a personal trainer, Silvio. A Romanian man whose motto was the notorious, "No pain no gain." We would run, lift weights, and play basketball and swim. He came every day to "train" me to look presentable. I didn't really mind; it was all I ever knew. I even think that for a point it could have been considered healthy; a lot of kids don't get enough exercise.

My mother had a trainer at the time, too, Eric. A champion runner who had become injured before he could make it big, but still had a few good tips. Sometimes my mother and I would work out together. It was during these workouts that I felt her love me, accept me. She would push me and congratulate me on a good job. It was different from the way she would hug and talk about me at parties to impress her friends. Always cooing about what a good child I was. It was real, and I loved it.

It was time away from the nanny, Mary, who had raised me; it was time with my mother. I ran harder, played harder, lifted heavier, jumped higher, and did all that I could to earn her approval.

My mother threw many more parties in her life besides the one that I was just talking about, but none stand out as greatly. I don't even remember what the party was for. Probably nothing. I just remember her, her image her body. It's frozen in my head, I watched her all night, and although I can see her I can't even picture her moving. At that party she looked so beautiful and so skinny. I just remember thinking, god, I wish that were me. Perfect, beautiful.

My doctor says that at the age of seven I was already heading down the wrong road. That the fact that I remember my mother as skinny and associate that with beautiful is where the



basis of my problem lies. The fact that I can't even remember anything but my mother and the way she looked at the party is said to be, "The root of my unhealthy obsession."

My mother eventually fired Eric because he said he wouldn't train her unless she started to maintain a healthy diet. That seemed fair enough to me, considering by the time I was twelve my mother's frame was withering away. But it didn't seem to slow her down ever. She still threw her parties, men still flirted with her, and her life remained presentable.

It was at about the age of twelve that I started being able to attend my mother's parties. This was another time when my mother truly loved me, I believe. The whispers of, "Oh, what an angel." And, "Your daughter is just so magnificent, she looks just like you," would boom through my ears, and I would watch my mother beam and I would beam as well. Proud to be a part of it all, proud to be presentable.

My mother, though, continued to wither. My father would just stand by and watch; he never said anything. He almost seemed afraid to. It was never his responsibility to care about my mother, only to stand by her when she needed a partner.

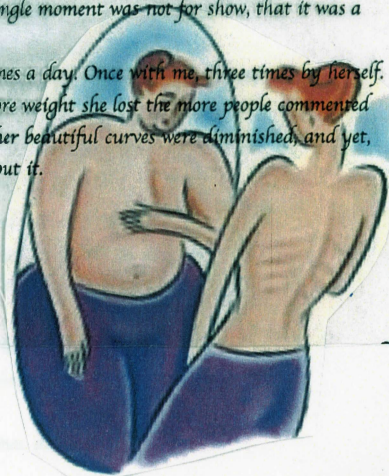
One night at another party, I spent the night watching my father. This is another image that stands out in my head. I must have been thirteen at the time, but because I was sick I had been told to stay in bed. Of course I resumed my childhood space on the stairwell and watched the party until the late hours of the night. My father stood that night watching my mother. Her dressed glowed a deep red, and her hair again was pinned tightly to her head. You could have seen through her she was so skinny.

That night was the first night my father ever gave me any indication he cared in a loving way towards my mother. I saw him cry. Well, tear. His eyes welled up, until a small pool tipped. At the same time I looked my mother did, and suddenly she left whatever man she was flirting with and sashayed her way over to my father.

I could see her lips move, promising that she was fine, that he needn't worry. She kissed him softly then, in front of every one. I heard my parents make love for the first time that night. A strange and foreign sound, for both them and me. Still, it was somehow reassuring.

That was the evening I decided I was not the child of an affair. That I was the child of spontaneous love, love that was so rare with these two people that I was almost lucky to have been a part of it. I was proof that their marriage for one single moment was not for show, that it was a private thing held dear by two people.

My mother started working out four times a day. Once with me, three times by herself. I always thought that it was so strange, how the more weight she lost the more people commented on how great she was looking. Her face was hollow, her beautiful curves were diminished, and yet, she was thin and the whole world seemed to rave about it.



Later that year, right after I had turned fourteen, my mother's heart stopped. Just like that. No warning, no signs, her heart just called it quits. The doctors diagnosed her cause of death as extreme anorexia nervosa.

My father told me that she just got tired. She was always doing too much. Too much champagne, too many parties, too much running.

I wanted to scream, "And too little food."

I can't even remember if I cried. I remember for a moment hating my father because he did nothing to help her, but then I knew he was not there to crack her open, to fix her problems. He had never been; he was there to look nice next to her.

One night I even screamed at him, "Didn't you care. Didn't you love her? I will never have a mother again because you did nothing. Because you let her throw her parties and have her stupid trainer and not eat. Only drink champagne and run and run and run. And wear dresses that were sizes too small." At this point, with all my fourteen years behind me, I threw myself on the floor, kicking and screaming and pounding as if I were four years old all over again.

My father just watched me, his eyes filled with sadness and hurt, whispering, "Ashley, I am sorry. There was nothing I could do."

I knew then, and I know now, that he meant it. I mean, of course, technically, there was something that he could do, but not him, not my father. He was always too busy looking presentable for my mother, helping her plan her evenings, too statue-like with her to actually become involved in her life. And even if he had tried, she would have never let him help. My mother was not the kind of person who needed help.

For a few more years, I was fine. Mary continued to act as my caregiver, I continued to see my trainer, and oddly enough, my father continued to throw grand parties. Our house was never dark; it was never gloomy. Even on the day of the funeral, everything seemed as it had always been. Flowers lined the room as well as the casket, hiding it from the dreariness that lay within it.

The casket was opened, and my mother, as she always had, looked perfectly presentable. She lit up the room, as she always had with her perfectly done makeup. The lighting made her look almost as if she had more life than she had possessed when she was actually alive.

And everyone told me I would grow up to look like her.

They dabbed their eyes with the corner of their dry cleaned kerchiefs, perfectly embroidered with initials and flowers; they hugged me lightly so their dresses wouldn't wrinkle, and they all told me how sorry they were. What a loss it was. And how, one day, I would be her. I would look like her; they could already see it.

My body, according to the doctors, by the time of the funeral had just begun to "internally" wither.

And so she did nothing. She watched the girl she had tucked in every night for sixteen years whither away, because I wanted to be my mother, and not her. She took away my mother's image, and I was fighting to preserve it.

Then one day, as I had moved forward into my grape phase, I felt as if I was going to curl up and die from the pains in my stomach. I fell in agony to the floor, hunched over in a ball. My five foot four frame looked tiny as I cried and cried. My blonde hair, like my mother's tendrils, had begun to fall out, and locks of it lay wet against the floor. I couldn't breathe.

All I could think was *this is how she did it; this is how my mother died. This is how she left me. This is why I am lying here.* Mary ran in, screaming, "Are you trying to be her? How could you do this? I told you, I told you. Do you want to die like your mother did?"

And I softly whispered, "Yes, I want to be her." That's all I remember from that day.

I don't remember hearing the sirens, or Mary screaming at my father to do something. I heard the story for years to come, but I never saw the stretcher. Never felt the scale under my feet read seventy-five pounds. I never saw a doctor, or felt my back against the board they carried me in on, but they all told me again and again, in their fake voices, dabbing their eyes with the same kerchiefs used at my mother's funeral, that it was so, so scary. Again they cried, all of them. My aunts and uncles whom I did not know flew into town, and for the first time for as long as anyone could remember, the house remained dark through the night.

The clinking turned to an awkward silence and the laughter came to a halt. My world watched on as everyone began to wonder just how far someone could take the word presentable. And they whispered, as I had desperately wanted to hear for so long, "She's just like her mother.

This brought me no joy, and oddly the same, no pain. It just taught me how truly unpresentable my mother must have been to torture herself.

When I woke up, I was shocked to see not Mary but my father sitting next to my bed. His hand placed lightly against my arm, his beautiful brown eyes burning into me, pleading with me.

I lay my hand just then against his. I looked up, knowing that my brown eyes that had once looked like his had turned hollow. That they had ascended deep into the crevices of my forehead, now surrounded by dark black circles that hid their beauty, and caused them to grow hazy instead of their past glow.

I slid my empty hand over my stomach, and my father did the same, as if he was touching me for the first time in his entire life. "It dips in," I heard him whisper to no one. Then, he counted the fingers on each of my hands and, looking satisfied that there were still ten, he drew up the bed sheets, causing them to wrinkle, and he began to count my toes. He let his pointed finger touch each one as he mouthed the number. He touched them gently as if afraid he would break them off. Then, my dad smiled at me, whispering, "You'll get better, you will."

As his voice trailed off, I felt a reassurance. Mary awoke from her chair across the room, and watched on with a smile.

Later that day I peered into a mirror, thinking how so many times before I had wished myself to simply disappear. I would hide from myself, from the rest of the world. Not admitting to pain, not admitting to imperfections.

My doctors say, "Anorexia Nervosa is a very complicated disease of the mind, in which a person destroys their body," and so on and so forth. I think it's simple, I just Didn't eat. I strove to be somebody who wasn't real to begin with. According to my therapist, "This problem is rooted at the relationship you had with your mother." When she says this to me I laugh. No shit, it was. I wanted to be my mother, my problem wasn't rooted there, it was the problem at large.

My mother defined the word presentable. She always did with her big parties and beautiful gowns, with her perfect husband, and wonderful house. And with her daughter who aspired to win her affection. Though she will never be here to say it, I'm pretty sure there is a point in my life when my mother could have been my best friend.

My father is now; I've given him permission to crack me, I'm no longer living life for the show.

No one knows for sure what causes anorexia nerv experts agree that there is not one single cause, b the society we live in, the family we come from, ar

For instance, the images we see in magazines, or if the only way to be beautiful and happy is to be t think (incorrectly, of course) that losing weight will

Anorexia can also be related to family problems. (other family members who have unrealistically hig about their body, or who may even have their own feel that starving themselves is the best way to re members. They may feel that their family controls Girls with anorexia often feel misunderstood by th

Some people are born with personalities that mak instance, girls with anorexia tend to be high achiev grades and are popular. On the outside, it may loo from feeling bad about themselves. They may als

Certain life experiences can also lead to anorexia think that they are fat and begin to diet excessivel when they were very young and use their weight ; over their lives. Girls who participate in gymnastic and shape may also develop anorexia.

Recently, scientists have been learning about how the reason for why some girls develop anorexia

A Fine Time To Dine With Dr. Theodore Geisel

Kick back and relax, and please read away, as I tell you of one very glorious day. The month was December of seventy- nine. At home with my wife, I said, "Audrey, let's dine." When asked if we should eat at home or eat out, I sensed that her cooking might fill me with doubt. For tonight, if she'd cook, it'd be bean sprouts and trout, so I said, "Let's go out, Audrey, please, lets go out!"

But Audrey said, " Where should we dine this fine night?" I said, "Any place that might meet my appetite." She gave me some highly persuasive reasons to drive to the restaurant called the four seasons. We departed to enjoy this lovely affair, as Audrey and I hoped into my Corvair. As she drove, I complained that I wanted a dish of some chicken or lobster or simply some fish, because I was engaged in a state of famish.

When we finally got to the restaurant at eight, I was unable to await my first plate. So I picked up the bowl of butter and bread, while beautiful thoughts of steak filled my head. As I chewed my food I watched others dine, making small talk, and drinking glasses of wine. In a restaurant with quite an old fashioned design, the lights were dim, how they ever did shine! (As did my wife Audrey, for she was all mine!) And my life with my wife was wonderful and fine.

As I delighted in this lovely venue, I took a look at my enormous menu. Dozens of choices of pasta were listed. Many an option of seafood existed. Cowboy steaks and Thai stir- fry, and gourmet pie all pleased my eye. But my wife said, "No, no if you get that you'll die. Your cholesterol level will raise to the sky!" So much to my absolute utter dismay, Audrey ordered me vegetarian that day.

"No, no, no!" I yelled. "I can't! I just can't! What good can I find in a plate of eggplant?" But Audrey insisted on making the cook fix me what in my mind was gobety- gook. So I returned to eating the bread in the bowl. It upset me that this was how I must become full. She angered me, she was not very nice. I'd much rather be eating some chicken fried rice.





But just as I sat there awaiting my crap, there quickly arose a horrid mishap. Form across the room, I heard a mighty yell. And this yell was not a good thing, I could tell, I could tell. It seemed that a woman's dear husband was choking, and incomprehensible words he was croaking. She was crying while he was flailing about, for anyone to come help this poor man out. She cried, "Someone please save my dying spouse! Is there perhaps a doctor in the house?"

I looked all around, but not one hand was raised, and the lady was becoming quickly more crazed. There was nothing to do, it was looking severe. Four Seasons became a hostile atmosphere. But then it became remarkable clear

that I, a doctor, should now volunteer. I raised my hand way, way up in the air. "I'm a doctor," I said, "Here to cure your nightmare."

"And what kind of doctor are you?" screamed the wife.

"Don't ask questions," I said, "Let me just save his life."

Time was running out fast, so I ran to the man. And unfortunately I was without a plan. But I had to do something. All eyes were on me. To these people, I was their worthy trustee. But what could I do? Was I just a fool who never showed up at medical school?

At first I thought I should invoke a taste of my wit- I'd tell him a joke. "Say, what could be lodged up your diaphragm, could it possibly be some green eggs and ham?" I looked around the room, and it was silent, so I tried another silly comment. "What is it sir that you started to eat? Did you possibly see it on Mulberry Street?" Again- silence, this plan did not work. By offering help, I was merely a jerk. He moved through the room, and continued to cough. My theory was that I was simple off.

"The Heimlich maneuver!" I heard someone yell.

"Very well," I said, "Very, very well."

But I did not know the Heimlich maneuver, so instead I performed the Dibblety- Doover. I then placed my hands around the mans knees, and I squeezed and I squeezed, and I squeezed and I squeezed. I kept on squeezing. I just could not stop. And then I heard a terrible, "Pop!" This poor mans condition was just getting worse, so his wife looked at me and she started to curse. The Dibblety- Doover did not help at all. I looked at this man, and he began to fall.

He was on the ground. He fell to the floor. So his wife started kicking and punching me more. But in the midst of this uncalled- for attack, this lovely man's wife slipped and fell on his back. When she hit his back, the food fell out, and the man was no longer flailing about. His wife grabbed and hugged me, and kept thanking me, "I know I owe you a big apology."

"Don't be sorry," I said. "I know how you feel. It would be fine if you hand over his meal."

The Chicken Marsala that night was supreme, and so was desert- cheesecake with whipped cream. And luckily this did not bother my wife. For she knew that I had just helped save a life. As we drove home, I was feeling grand. In some sort of way, I had lent him a hand. I was happy that night, for I was put to use. I saved someone. Yes, me, Dr. Seuss

Four Great Minds

When I was six years old I went on my first African Safari. My father took me, he felt bad because he was always gone and we hardly knew each other. It never really bothered me, but at any rate, on my sixteenth birthday there he was, standing outside my door and ready to go.

"Son," I remember him saying, it's time we got to know each other." We left a week later to Africa, at the time I don't even think I knew **Where Africa was, but I'd soon find out.**

After the longest flight of my life we landed at a dusty airport in the middle of "god knows where." That's right next to "East Jablb," and right down the street from "where god lost his sandals!" Anyway, my father, looking rather proud of himself Ran off to pick up the luggage and use some of those self taught luggage skills that he got from those teaching cassettes he brought with him. I walked to a little pathetic stand of brochures and pamphlets set up by a window.

I wondered out loud, "Why did we come here? My voice sounded like I was six years old and about to throw a tantrum, and maybe I was, I wanted to go to Hawaii!

My mother sighed, just as she had in the earlier flight. We were in some unknown country with a totally different language.

This time I sighed. Maybe this interesting destination isn't so bad at all. New Place, new language, new guy maybe?

I went snooping around for some hot international guys. I would hide behind bushes and then jump out at the boys I thought were cute. To my dismay, though, once I got up close they all turned out to be gross. The, I saw him. His nametag read, "Brache." For a moment I wasn't sure if what I was seeing was real, but there he was. Brache. So I jumped fiercely from the bushes, tackling him to the ground. The two of us looked at each other, **and looked and looked, for what seemed like an eternity.**

Finally one of us got the guts to speak up, "Oh Brache, what are you doing here?"

"What am I doing here? You jumped on me!" Damn, I was hoping he wouldn't notice.

Meanwhile, I'm still pinning him to the ground enjoying my moment of bliss.

"Are you done yet?" Brache asked sarcastically.

"Okay, okay," and I forced myself off of the god I like to call Brache.

'Look, is there something you want to talk about now? We can't keep meeting like this. I looked away, staring off into the sun. "Would you like to go on a date with me?" I wistfully asked him.

"No," he sarcastically said, "Your too weird." His response was so sudden, calm, rehearsed. A tear came to my eye, maybe from the sun. I had been staring at it for a long time. Ad so, I got up, and I moved into the shade.



