

LORRAINE'S



DIARY

SCOTT ZARCINAS

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Scott Zarcinas

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SCOTT ZARCINAS

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For Peter and Helen

*“Short stories are tiny windows into other worlds
and other minds and other dreams. They are
journeys you can make to the far side of the
universe and still be back in time for dinner.”*

— Neil Gaiman

FRIDAY, 13TH JUNE 2008

Dear Diary,

Is that how things start, “Dear Diary”? I don’t know. I’ve never done this before. I feel kind of silly, really, Bridget Jones kind of silly if you ask me. Writing was never my kind of thing, especially journals and notebooks and stuff like that. Always felt it was like talking to yourself. In a way, it is, isn’t it? And you know what they say about people who talk to themselves don’t you? I might be lots of other things, but I don’t think I’m mad. Not yet (ha ha!). Then again, Bridget Jones wasn’t mad was she? And if you think about it, things kind of worked out for her in the end, found her true love, her Prince Charming, and all that. So maybe this diary thing has something in it for me too. No harm in trying. That’s what dad always says, “No harm in trying. You’ve got to be in it to win it.” So here goes...

Geez, what’s wrong with me? I’ve been staring at these blank pages for over ten minutes thinking how to put into words what I want to say... and nothing! Absolutely nothing. I guess I’ve got what people in the writing world call “writer’s block.” Not a very nice feeling, I must say. You know you’ve got so much to tell and write about, but your hand stays frozen like a statue (oops, that’s probably what my old English teacher at Seaview High called a mixed metaphor!) and, well, the upshot is that I now know what the tin man in *The Wizard of Oz* felt like when

Dorothy stumbled upon him in Wonderland (or was that Alice, or have I gotten my stories completely mixed up again?). Anyway, not that I need a new heart in my empty chest (or maybe I do, because this one seems awfully heavy and fragile at the moment), only that when it comes to saying what I really want to say my body seems to be full of rust. I need some kind of oil—some kind of emotional lubrication, I guess—to free up all the stickiness in my mouth and hands and mind.

But it's not quite as bad as all that, thank goodness. My hand is trying its best. It's not its fault. Stickiness is probably not the right word. Tightness, maybe, and perhaps if I keep my hand moving the more chance that it'll give like a piece of old elastic in a hemline that's lost its stretch: just one more tug and then it'll give up the ghost (oops, there I go again with my mixed metaphors!). Seems all I have to do is tell my hand one more time what it's supposed to do—write—and all the stretch-resistance will disappear. Anyway, that's the plan, but it would be so much easier if some bright spark invented a machine that could make thoughts jump straight from your head onto the page, wouldn't it? Attach a few wires to your head and bob's your uncle, a whole page of instant thoughts. Then you wouldn't have to worry about writer's block and rusty wrists. Now there's an idea. Would also save a lot of time and make things a lot easier than having to write everything down and invariably get it all wrong. Especially for someone like me, you know, someone who failed year-10 Eng-

lish class, who's always getting tongue-tied and never seems able to find the right words to say at the best of times ("There you go, always putting your foot in your mouth," mum would have said!). But, after all that, here goes anyway, "Take 2."

So what was the real reason that brought me here to my desk and this little leather-bound book? Fear, I guess, if I'm going to be honest with myself (and that's what diaries are all about, aren't they, opening your heart and being honest?). Fear. Geez, I hate that word. "You have nothing to fear but fear itself." Who said that? I can't remember, but it doesn't make sense, does it? When you've got fear, it's usually for a good reason. Usually means somebody's going to do harm to you, or take something away from you that you need or love. Fear is a normal emotion, isn't it? A part of life. Only problem is, it makes your legs go to jelly. Not to mention your mind, whizzing around in panic like chickens with a fox loose in the coop. Fear makes you useless. Still, I always remember the quote from that lady who was deaf, dumb and blind. What was her name? Anne Frank. No, that was someone else. Helen Keller. That's her. She said, "Fear. The only way out is through."

That's why I knew last night while I was lying in bed, listening to dad in his bedroom racking his lungs with another one of those god-awful coughing fits, that if I didn't resolve this today I would never do it. I had to do something. I had to walk through my

fear, and if a deaf, dumb and blind woman could walk through her fears until she was old and grey, which must have been mountainous—can you actually imagine never seeing daylight, never hearing another voice, never singing at the top of your voice?—then surely I could walk through mine. But I also knew that if I didn't do it today—now—then nothing would ever change, and that scares me more than dad's coughing fits, so you kind of get the picture how bad it is.

In fact, I was awake till after two in the morning worrying about it. My mind was whirring faster than the needle on my Janome when I've got a client with a tight deadline to meet. I kept thinking about what mum used to say before... well, before you know what. "Find yourself a good man. Fall in love. Have kids. Money doesn't matter. It's what's in your heart that really makes you happy." And there I was, lying in bed with no man, no love, no kids, no money, and a heart that felt heavy and incomplete.

Am I unhappy? I guess I am, in a way. Though Georgina Twelftree would shake her head and tell me that with my legs I had no right to be sad, and anyway, I had no idea what being sad really was. She's always said blondes have more fun, ever since we used to sit under the old gum tree in the schoolyard and talk about boys and movie stars and bitch about other girls, all that kind of stuff teenagers get their panties in a twist about. I know she's always

envied my size-10 figure (“Olivia Newton John’s look-alike,” she always joked, “now piss off back to *Xanadu* on your roller-skates and leave me alone!”), and how Chris Jones, in that cocky, too-full-of-himself manner, used to stroll up to us while we were sitting under the gum tree and ask me out. Not that I ever said yes to him, to Georgie’s constant dismay (I always had a thing for the quieter boys, the ones that seemed to get things done while no-one else noticed, the ones that didn’t need to constantly blow their own trumpet and parade around the schoolyard as if they owned it). Yet in times like these I sometimes wonder how life’s path would’ve taken a different turn had I succumbed to the less-than-subtle advances of the captain of the football team and said yes.

But that was then, and this is now. No point getting stuck in the past and wondering what would’ve happened, the choices we made and didn’t make, the events we had no control over. What’s important is what’s happening right in this moment and making the best of what we have, isn’t that what the happiness gurus say? But all the wise sayings in the world don’t make you feel any better, do they? Sometimes your fantasies are the only escape you’ve got. Sometimes the only freedom you have is in the past.

So, it probably has to be asked, am I sad to be alive?

No, not really. I wouldn’t go so far as to say that. I wouldn’t say that I’m the opposite either, happy to

be alive, but more like the feeling that I'm kind of in between. What's the word I'm looking for? (Ah, why didn't I pay more attention in English class?) Nonchalant? Apathetic? Ambivalent? Anyway, you know what I mean. I'm not sad or happy, just in between, like the colour grey, between white and black, neither here nor there, not committed to any particular thing at all, in a way kind of incomplete. Tepid, if you like. Some days are better than others, but mostly they seem the same, just grey. Maybe that's why grey is so depressing. When you shine a light in the dark, you immediately see the light—it gives you hope—but when you shine a light in the greyness, it just gets absorbed into its miserable, tepid nothingness.

Here's a scary thought: can someone spend a whole lifetime missing the light? I find myself thinking a lot lately whether things will ever get better, thinking that I could spend the next fifty years sitting in this house doing the same thing day after day, just waiting for my turn at the good life, waiting for something that never happens or someone that never arrives. I often catch myself looking outside through the window while I'm sewing and wondering if the neighbours think the same thing. I certainly hope things change, and soon. I'm getting tired of waiting for things to get better, but I can't see how they will. Especially for dad.

The company has finally agreed to a compensation payout, but we haven't seen any of it yet, and

I doubt we ever will. They've got their lawyers tying the money up in the courts and offshore accounts in some remote island I've never even heard of, and now they're saying we won't see a cent for at least another five more years. It makes me sick. Do these people actually think about what they're doing to others? Do they realise how other people are dependent on what they do, how a few thousand dollars could make a huge difference to our lives? Do they actually care about people like me and dad? Anyway, from what I've heard the compensation is a pittance. Not that we've actually heard a real figure—we can only go on hearsay from the newspapers—but from what I can gather it will hardly cover the medical expenses. What dad really needs is a new set of lungs, not more drugs that can only delay the inevitable, and if he dies...

There, I guess I said it. Probably not the way I intended to say it, but there it is all the same. I don't want dad to die. Not like this. Not with so much pain, not with so much helplessness. This man-made disease is evil, pure and simple. He doesn't deserve to end his life this way. But...

But am I really being truthful here? Who am I really worried about? This is really about me, isn't it? Sure, I'm scared for dad. I'm scared for the day when the painkillers no longer work. I'm scared for the day when he turns to me and says he's giving up, that there's no point going on like this. I know he's going to heaven to be with mum when he finally passes

away, even if he doesn't believe in life after death himself. He's a good man with a good heart. He's always tried to care for me and mum as best he could, and I know God hasn't exactly blessed his life with riches and happiness but I know He would never refuse such a good man in his ultimate moment of need. But is that what I'm really worried about? Aren't I really just a selfish so-and-so who's more worried about being left alone to grow old and die, barren and skint, than she is about her poor father?

Maybe the word I've been looking for all along is guilt...

THURSDAY, 19TH JUNE 2008

Dear Diary,

Where has the time gone? It's been nearly a week since I started writing this diary and it seems like only yesterday since I put the pen down. Oh well, what can you do? I had good intentions of writing every day, but maybe that's a little bit unrealistic for me. I guess it has to become a habit, doesn't it? Like going to the gym, or going for a run, or eating healthy food. Or, I suppose, like crying in your bed.

Maybe for me I should just look at this as a 'part-time' diary? Nothing too serious. Just a part-time thing, like me and Geoff Redman used to be. Well, that's not quite true, is it? I was serious. Very serious. He wasn't. Maybe that's what scared him away. Maybe that's what scares most men away, seriousness—the threat of not being able to go out with their mates like they used to. Because that's what it comes down to with guys, doesn't it? The fear of losing their youth, losing their mateship, of growing up and taking responsibility. They fear change. Seriously.

Maybe that's what scares men away from me? They see someone who wants to lock them in the home and never let them out. Which is just ridiculous. I'd let them out once a year (ha ha! just jokes). But maybe that's it. Georgina says I've always been too

serious, ever since she's known me at high school at least. She also says I think too much, which always perplexes me, as if thinking too much is somehow bad. Anyway, perhaps thinking too much makes me too serious. Maybe I'm too serious too soon with men, which wouldn't have anything to do with my age would it? Tic-Toc the Menstrual Clock.

Perhaps I should try a different tact. Be less serious. Be less *needy*. Take Georgina's advice, just spread my legs and think less. Perhaps I should start to look at men like they look at women: just for sex. Then maybe I wouldn't fall too heavily for the next beau that knocks on my front door (when will that be, next century, ha ha?) and get all excited about wedding bells and babies in prams the minute he says hi. I'll just say, "Hey, let's not be too serious. Let's just have a part-time relationship. It'll be purely sexual, nothing else. We can (excuse my French) be fuck-buddies. How does that suit you?"

But is that what I really want? Just sex? (Well, a little bit wouldn't be so bad, actually. It's been so long I'm getting what Georgina would call, "Cobwebs down there!") I guess I want it all. A man. Sex. Children. Sex. A happy family. Sex. OMG I am getting desperate, aren't I? It's been so long I've forgotten what it's like.

All right, let's change the subject. Something a little less heated. I had a visit from my little black friend the other night. He's so cute. He's also rather large.

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