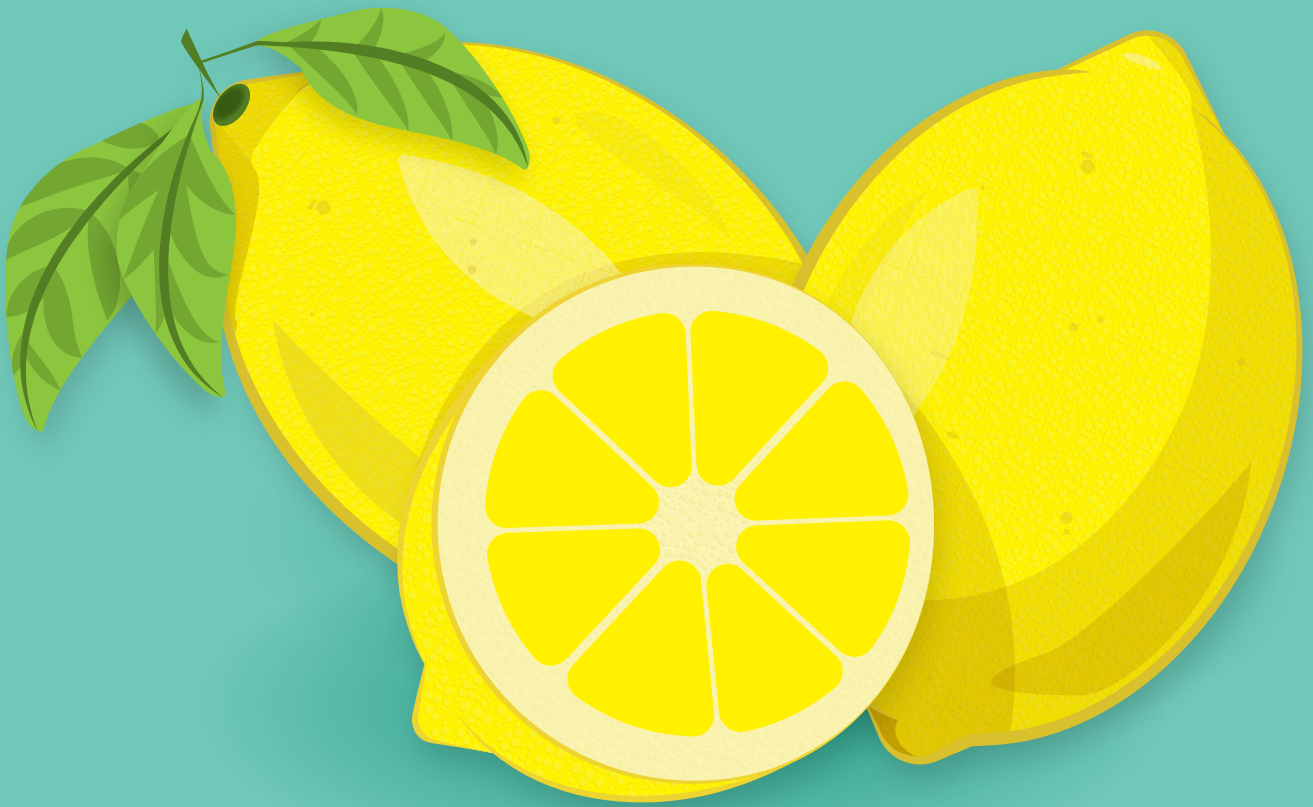


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THANK YOU

We would like to thank all contributors, editors, artists and readers because, without you, this issue would not be possible. A big thank you in particular to the new art team for taking on the role of creating this magazine. This issue is a testament to the hard work and dedication of many individuals and we hope you enjoy reading it.

Happy reading,
The FedPress team

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Just Say Yes

by Jasmyne Tzitziras

Click, clack, click, clack, over and over again I flicked the little box open and shut watching that slight glimmer of light shine through, only to lock it away again in its velvet case. I don't know how long I had been staring at it, only that this had been my routine for the past month.

Click, clack, click, clack, the only sound I'd been hearing lately every time Kiernan left the house I went through the same motions.

It's a vicious cycle of pulling the box out of its hiding place just to stare at it until Kiernan is about to get home and then I just put it back knowing nothing was going to change. I was a coward, far too scared of rejection, far too scared of living without him.

'Staring at it won't make anything happen!' My sister's voice was sharp and laced with irritation. I glanced from the box up at her.

She was sitting across from me at the kitchen counter holding up a little mirror as she coated her lips in gloss. Even though she was just coming to see me, Sophia looked like she was ready for the red carpet.

Even with her kid clinging to her legs with a snotty nose and fuzzy hair she still looked gorgeous.

The child was pulling on Sophia's pant leg whining as children do, my sister's son was about the same age as Kiernan's daughter, although I found him far more annoying than I ever did Josslyn.

Sophia let out a long sigh before glaring down at the child, making his whining stop as he looked down at his feet taking a step back.

'What? What do you want Martino? Go play and leave me alone!' She snapped. I thought Sophia was too harsh on the boy but honestly until she showed up fat and pregnant. I never thought she would ever have a kid.

Martino was quiet for a moment just looking down at his feet while Sophia stared harshly down at him.

'Juice?' He managed although his voice hardly came out in a whisper. I almost didn't hear him but apparently Sophia did, because her gaze moved to me.

'Well? Toni, get him some juice!' She ordered as though he were my child and not hers. I sighed shoving the box back into my coat pocket before heading to pour my nephew some juice. Martino watched me carefully as I got the plastic cup out. I wasn't sure if he trusted me or not, I knew he hadn't been around men much since being born. In fact, the only person he seemed to be around was my sister, and really she wasn't the best influence.

I knelt in front of him to hand him his juice offering the boy a smile. He stared at me for a moment before taking the cup in both hands whispering a soft 'thank you' before he wandered off into another area of the house. I stood back up and looked at Sophia who was back to fixing her makeup.

'You're too hard on him.'

Sophia scoffed. 'Don't go changing the subject, if I want parental advice from the man who freaked out over his boyfriend's kid I'll ask it!' Her words had me recoiling a little and slumping back down on my seat. She really had a way of bringing up things like this. Sophia only smirked at my reaction and went back to her makeup. 'Anyway there as I was saying, nothing is going to happen if you just stare at that ring all day Toni. I've known Kiernan my whole life and trust me when I say you need to make the first move.' I rolled my eyes and took the velvet box back out of my pocket. Staring at it for a moment before sighing and putting it back.

'What if we're not as serious as I thought? What if he says no? What if-' She cut me off.

'What if nothing! You two have been through more than anyone else I know and yet you still always find your way back to each other.' She stated glaring at me. 'If he doesn't want to marry you then he's an idiot.' She offered a small smile one I never really saw from her and I smiled back.

'You're sweet sometimes, you know that?' I mused.

Sophia scoffed. 'Don't go telling anyone, I won't have you ruining my reputation as a bad bitch.'

I chuckled only to frown again as I looked at the box. 'I don't know how well I'll cope if he says no Sophia.' She shrugged leaning on her elbow.

'Well, you can always come and stay with me if things go bad.'

Now it was my turn to scoff. 'I'd rather stay with Roman, at least he wouldn't make me take care of his kid.' Sophia winked getting up from her seat.

'At least I don't hate you.' She mused calling for Martino to come along. 'Ask him today, or you know I will.' She snapped picking her son up, the thought of Sophia asking Kiernan to marry me for me made me cringe and she laughed carrying Martino out the door. 'I'll see you later Toni.'

I sat at the bench a whole hour after she had left thinking about everything she said. She was right, if I didn't do it, it would never be done and I would forever be stuck in a situation where I didn't know how the next day would turn out.

I already had the ring, it was sitting perfectly in the little box laid out in front of me on the kitchen bench. I just needed the words, a place, a time!

'Toni? I'm home!' Kiernan called out as he stumped through the door, the bags he was carrying dropping around him as he struggled to pull his key out of the hole. Cursing under his breath. 'Do, *mother* you wanna *fuck* go out for dinner?' He asked.

I stared at him across the room my eyes probably bulging out of my head, here I was sitting with my little ring box in plain view! I cursed myself and grabbed up the box only to drop it on the floor as I struggled to get it back into my jacket pocket. 'Ah sounds good, I actually was thinking the same thing!' I stated my voice strained through stress.

I managed to shove the ring back into my pocket before Kiernan got his stuff together and wandered into the kitchen, he stared at me a moment while I was kneeling on the floor my hands deep in my pockets.

'Ah, so, you alright down there?' He asked a goofy grin which I loved on his face.

My cheeks flushed against my will and I looked away from him. 'Fine, I just tripped it all.' I muttered.

Kiernan chuckled and stooped down grabbing my wrist and yanking me off the ground into his arms.

He embraced me and planted a soft kiss on my lips, and I melted against him. Wrapping my own arms around his waist just to pull us a little closer.

Kiernan slipped his hands under my coat causing me to tense up against him, what if he felt the box? What if he laughed at it? I almost pulled away until his hands dipped down into the back of my pants forcing a gasp to escape past my lips.

His tongue slipped past my open lips tangling with my own, and I wanted this moment between us to last forever.

This moment of pure pleasure, pure happiness without any thought of rejection.

Sadly the moment ended and Kiernan pulled away holding me at arm's length his blue eyes staring into mine. 'We should figure out where we want to go for dinner.' He mused.

'Hmm?' I blinked a few times before I remembered I had agreed to go out. 'Oh! right.' I paused before pulling away from him, sinking my hand into my jacket pocket gripping the ring. 'Actually, do you think we can go for a walk down by the river before dinner? I want to work up an appetite.' I asked.

Kiernan chuckled before nodding. 'I guess, just let me change into something more casual.' He mused.

I nodded following his every step with my eyes. Kiernan was something else, lanky, pale with enough makeup to supply a whole store. He wore more chains than a prisoner, and you couldn't find a spot on his body that he didn't pierce or tattoo.

Looking at us you wouldn't think us a pair, I was his polar opposite. Blonde, toned with only one small tattoo and not a single hole in my body.

Yet I loved him, and from what I could tell he loved me. At least I really hope he did.

It wasn't long before the two of us were leaving the house. I locked the door behind us taking a hold of Kiernan's hand as we wandered off down the street. We took back alleys to avoid foot traffic because even though the sun was setting people were still out and about. Busy with their everyday lives.

I tried not to think about what I was planning on doing, just the thought was making me sweat. My hand clammy in his.

Kiernan didn't seem to notice my turmoil though as we walked past the houses and our neighbourhood and down a twisting path towards the creek.

I say creek but it wasn't like it was off in some remote area, the creek ran through our local park and often you could find couples around it or ducks in it. I preferred the ducks.

We stopped at a bench and both sat without another word simply enjoying the silence. I rubbed the velvet box between my fingers trying to work up the courage, everything was perfect. The sun was setting, we were alone and I couldn't think of a more perfect moment. But whenever I opened my mouth to let the words slip out they got caught in my throat and I had to shut it again.

The tension that was building inside my gut was driving me insane and I wanted to scream.

'Toni?' I glanced at Kiernan who was staring at me. 'Is everything alright? You seem jumpy.' He asked.

I forced a laugh. 'I'm fine! Really,' I stated looking down at my feet.

Kiernan sighed. 'No you're not, you're getting that way you do when you think I'm breaking up with you,' He muttered.

'No I'm not!' I stated.

Kiernan scoffed and stared me dead in the eyes. 'That's what you said last time you freaked out,'

'I'm not freaking out!' I snapped frowning as I looked away again.

This seemed to be going bad, I didn't want it to go bad. If only I wasn't so scared, if only I could just say it.

'Ah Kiernan,' I started but he put up a hand to stop me.

'Wait, I have something to say!' He stated.

I frowned but nodded.

He cleared his throat before producing a little velvet box from his pocket opening it with a glowing smile. 'Toni, will you marry me?'

I froze. 'What?'

He frowned. 'Will you marry me?'

He said it so casually, so easily. I couldn't understand how he did it. And I couldn't help but break out in hysterics. Making Kiernan pout.

'That's not the reaction I was hoping for,' He muttered.

I smiled at him wiping the tears from my eyes. 'It's not that,' I mused pulling my own little box out. 'I've been trying to do this for months!'

Now Kiernan laughed taking a hold of my shoulders and pulling me against him. 'You're adorable.'

I flushed looking away from him. 'So what now?' I asked.

Kiernan smiled kissing my cheeks. 'Just say yes.'



'The Adventures of Occasional Nate' By Kathryn Drum

ONCE UPON A MODERN TIME, THERE WAS A VERY LAZY MOTHER WHO HAD THREE SONS.

They lived in the same government housing flat she had acquired when she was 25. All four of them were out of work and struggled to put food on the table each day. Somehow the Very Lazy Mother always found money for bourbon and cigarettes, which confused The Three Sons. She never bothered to cook or clean for them and was always barking orders at them to do things for her.

One day the Very Lazy Mother told The Three Sons to get out and earn some cash, she was sick of them sponging off her. What she really wanted was for them to bring back money so she could get herself a new tattoo. The Three Sons packed up their things and set out into the world, not at all prepared for the experiences they would face.

The First Son went to a guy he knew from the pub and asked him for a loan. The Guy From the Pub smiled slyly and offered him a loan of \$5000. "That should be enough to get you set up. I won't charge you interest, but I've got some jobs for you to do until you pay me back. There's even a room upstairs you can crash in for a while."

He walked through the streets to find the address, the neighbourhood was rough and dark. There was a stench in the air that was so thick it clung to his nostrils. He soon reached the dimly lit alleyway. The door was locked, so he used the secret knock The Guy From the Pub had given him. Rap-rap-pity-rap-rap-pity. The door opened and a large, ominous looking guy stood staring at him.

"I, ahhh, I have the packages," The First Son stuttered. The large, ominous guy took the packages and handed him back another package wrapped in plastic. The money. He turned and headed back to the pub.

Meanwhile, The Second Son was feeling pretty happy with himself. He had enough money from Centrelink to pay for his hotel room, buy some nice clothes and eat well. My Very Lazy Mother never looked after me this well, he mused. He went to the café on the corner of his street and ordered coffee. He sat for hours, feeling content, and dreamed of all the things he would do with his life.

THE THREE BROTHERS

BY JODI FLOWER-RUSSELL

The Second Son went to Centrelink and after waiting for about three hours, asked them for a loan of \$2000. They agreed, and said they would deduct money from his fortnightly payments. He was feeling good, so he went to the nearest motel to find a room to stay in. The room was small and the bed smelled strongly of urine, but his creative spirit appreciated the minimalist atmosphere.

The Third Son knew he needed money fast and also a place to sleep. He headed to the local backpacker's hostel and told the manager of his position. The manager said he knew the man who owned the pizza shop next door was looking for workers, so The Third Son went to ask for a job.

Back at the pub, The First Son was setting out on his first job. The Guy From the Pub gave him some packages and an address, he was to deliver them and collect the money. Simple. Easy money. The First Son was happy with how things were working out.

The Third Son now had a job at the pizza shop, working six days a week. He was staying at the backpacker's hostel and had made friends with the other residents. The work was tiring, the heat from the pizza oven zapped his energy, but he was getting used to it. The job paid well, his savings account was beginning to look rather healthy; he would soon have enough money to rent a flat of his own.

After a month of running deliveries for The Guy From the Pub, The First Son had paid back only a small part of what he owed. He was surprised at how long it was taking to pay off his debt. He was getting frustrated and started complaining to some of the other blokes who hung out at the pub.

"How bloody long is it going to take? I thought I just had a few jobs to do and I'd be done. I want to get a flat of my own and get on with things." The other blokes exchanged glances and laughed. "No chance of that, mate. He owns you now. You'll never get that debt paid off."

Back at the café, The Second Son had become a regular. He spent his days chatting with the locals and telling them all about his plans to become an actor. He would star in Broadway shows and rub shoulders with the most famous of famous people. The locals loved him and would shout him lunch and coffee and listen to his stories.

His bank account, however, was dwindling. The hotel was costly and he wasn't getting as much from Centrelink because they were docking his payments to pay for the loan. He had a headshot taken and sent it out to all the agents and theatre groups he could think of. That should do it, he thought.

Another few months rolled past. The Third Son had moved out of the hostel and was renting a comfortable flat close to the pizza shop. He was such a hard worker that the pizza shop owner promoted him to manager. He was missing his brothers, but whenever he tried to contact them, they were always dismissive and uninterested in catching up.

Things were getting harder for The First Son, he was so busy running jobs for The Guy From The Pub that he didn't have time to look for a real job. He was drinking too much and hardly ate a decent meal. His tiny room above the pub was damp and grimy, with only a small window overlooking a brick wall. He often thought of his brothers but felt embarrassed about how things were turning out for him. He needed to escape, but The Guy From The Pub had a firm hold on him. He decided to go and visit The Second Son.



He arrived at the hotel where The Second Son had been staying. The girl at reception told him he had checked out three weeks ago. He went to the café where his brother liked to hang out, but he wasn't there. The café owner said he thought he'd heard he was staying with a friend a couple of streets over and gave him the address.

He found his brother curled up on the sofa at his friend's house. Deflated and grubby, The Second Son told him of how no-one was ringing with parts for him to play; his life was over. They talked for hours and realised how much they had missed spending time together. They wondered what their other brother was up to and despite feeling embarrassed about the way their lives were working out, decided that they would set out to find him.

The pizza shop was really busy that day, but the sight of his two brothers standing in his store made The Third Son smile; even though they were both a mess and badly needed showers. He gave them the key to his flat and told them to clean up. When he arrived home that night, they sat and talked for hours.

The Three Brothers ate a wholesome meal, drank a bottle of red wine and felt happy to be re-united.

The Third Son arranged for his brothers to take up jobs as delivery drivers for the pizza shop, starting immediately. There was room for all three of them in his flat, and he made sure they were well fed and comfortable. He paid off The First Son's debt to The Guy From The Pub, and told him The First Son wouldn't be returning to work for him. The Guy From The Pub was totally pissed off but without the debt owing, knew he no longer had a hold over The First Son.

The Three Brothers worked hard and saved their money. After five years they opened their own pizza restaurant and were very successful. Word spread of the brother's success; their pizzas were the best in town. Three Brothers Pizza Restaurant now have three venues across the city. One brother managing each of them.

Their Lazy Mother once tried to lay claim to their fortunes, but the brothers wouldn't hear of it and sent her away. The last they heard from her, she'd been locked up for stealing a case of bourbon from the local liquor shop. They didn't need her or her lazy ways anymore, they had discovered the secret to success was working hard and a positive attitude.





'Bobblehead' By Trent Bowes

The thin veil of fog never seemed to end, stretching forever before and behind me. I could just make out the figure ahead, becoming more and then less visible as they sped up, all while I tried to keep pace. I felt a force - a lure - pulling me towards them.

Why am I here?

The path was steep and quiet. With every step, loose stone and earth gave way, making my pursuit even more difficult. I couldn't see nor hear any animals, I only had the sounds of my own breath and steps to keep me company.

Why am I following them?

This irresistible lure pulled me - up and after the figure I had to go. As I moved I could see the figure again, just standing in the mist. I got close enough to make out a mass of brown upon them; A jacket I think. I must have made a noise, because they turned around and saw me. They took off into the mist again and I scrambled after them.

Why do I recognise the jacket?

I reached the point where the figure was standing, before I ran out of breath. I took in a deep breath and let it out, letting it re-join the mountains veil. A chill ran down my spine, a sensation telling me to look behind... There was someone following me.

The Lure

Why is someone following me?

I ran off into the mist before either of us could properly look at each other. That moment felt like déjà vu, but how could be? I've never been here before, so I must've been imagining it. I couldn't lose focus now. The lure was pulling me up again, and it was getting stronger. I'd nearly reached it.

Why does this feel familiar?

I started to hear something; A slow rumble, then a deep, crashing noise. Waves. The lure had brought me to the ocean and as the waves got louder, the mist was finally dispersing. I could see the figure once more, standing on the edge of a cliff, their back turned to me. I got another look at their jacket, it was identical to mine. As I looked closer, so were their pants and shoes identical to mine.

Why are they dressed like me?

The lure, the sensation that brought me here, had disappeared. The figure turned around and my breath escaped my lungs. It was me. I was standing at the cliff. I was wearing the same clothes. The me standing at the cliff began to speak, but their voice, my voice, was drowned out by the waves crashing below.

Why am I here, and how am I there?

Standing at the cliff, I had my arms out stretched. They were telling me to go back but I still couldn't hear them. I wanted to get closer, to hear them, to understand what's going on, but all of their body language said 'Run.' I took a chance, and slowly stepped towards them. I could almost hear them, hear me, the faint wisps of my voice overcoming the waves.



Why are they so afraid?

Their terror intensified, I could see they're screaming at me to stay away, but I could still only just hear them over the waves. Just one more step and I could hear them. I took a chance again. That was my mistake. The other me stepped back and disappeared over the cliff.

Why didn't I run?

My ears filled with white noise, my vision turned blurry, it felt like my head was going to implode. I must have blacked - out for a moment as I was now standing at the edge. I watched as the waves tossed, tumbled then swallowed the other me. I needed to get out of there. I turned and stopped dead in my tracks, as I saw myself coming out of the mist.

Why is this happening?

I furiously pointed and waved, I screamed at the top of my voice, I did everything I could to try and get the new me to leave and not look back. They instead walked towards me. Why were they walking towards me? When I did it, the other me fell.....No. I didn't want to fall too. I tried to yell louder, but I didn't respond. The waves.

Why?

They took another step forward, and by reaction, I stepped back. I didn't want to, but it was like I was pulled backwards. The cliff face seemed to rise as I fell. I tasted the sea salt on my lips. The wind roared around me like an angry monster. The last thing I saw was myself at the top of the cliff, watching. Darkness took me, as I too was swallowed by the sea, left without any answers.

The thin veil of fog never seemed to end, stretching forever before and behind me.

Will La Grue

Lemonade

**For three dollars
(two fifty on special)
you could buy a couple litres
of lemonade
a couple litres of a mass-produced,
sugar-filled, packed and stacked
funny-taste-in-your-mouth substance
that the label says is
lemonade.**

**Or
for the same price you could buy
a cup
from the children's stand on Chisholm Street.**

**A cup
of fizzy-sweet gold.**

Laura Benney



Two brothers walked down the street, towards their destination with a reckless abandon.

Caring not for what was or what had been, they simply swayed their arms with a joyful essence found most often in youth, and occasionally in the dangerous. And so too their arms swung with a tune familiar to many. An earworm was catching hold. It overcomes all. Even the strongest. It grew as recklessly as they strolled. Soon, the first boy could hold it in no longer, though no words echoed from his mouth. He sang in silence.

Where it began. They couldn't begin to know when. But then they knew it was growing strong.

The second grabbed onto the other, trying to restrain him. The other's eyes spoke louder than any words could. He was grabbing his shirt, begging him to make it all stop, but they were truly powerless to stop the worm.

The second boy tried to explain; he didn't know what was going on. He hardly seemed worried at all by what was happening, but his words fell apart as he felt the same swelling in his lungs.

And perhaps it was during the Spring. Then Spring became the Summer.

He belted this out with all the vigour his body could conjure, but not a single noise emerged. He heaved. His chest in pain. Like the hungover reflexes that follow heavy nights of drinking. He looked his brother in the eye and it, for a moment, felt like they were free. He knew. He understood

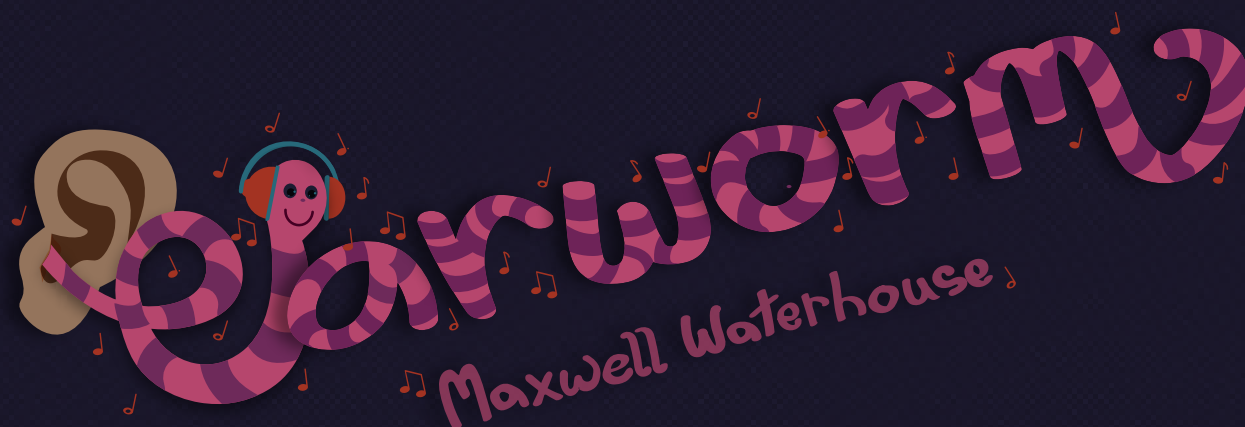
this horror. It stirred in them both. The sensation, in seconds, reached their throats. As they each came to a silent uproar, they saw a dear friend in the distance. She saw their distress, hurdling forward to reach them.

Who would have believed she'd come along? They couldn't keep their balance any longer. Nothing felt right anymore. Such a power had overcome them, and who could ever truly be prepared? On their knees they reached out for their friend. The boys held onto each other, she threw her hand out for them, as it welled up once more.

Hands were touching hands. Reaching out. Touching me, touching you.

Sweet Caroline.

"BUMP BUMP BUUUUM!" the boys finally erupted, roaring with every fibre of their beings. The ground itself was almost shaking beneath their feet.



fedpress

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fedpresseditor@gmail.com
before the submission deadline

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**When you notice a change,
no matter how small**

**Trust the Signs, Trust your Gut
& Ask R U OK?**

Learn the signs and how to ask at ruok.org.au

R U OK?TM
A conversation could change a life.

Cupid

By Dhogaluxmi Chemen



I choke back a scream, frustrated with the two humans I was assigned.

Before you become confused, no, I'm not a gang member out to commit murder. Nor am I a federal agent trying to rid the world of criminals. I do have a similarity with the FBI though; I make the world a better place. Not by eliminating criminals, but by spreading love.

Still not clear? To put it simply, I was Cupid's team member. After achieving high success in making people fall for each other, Cupid was promoted and could recruit agents to work for him; I was one of them.

Now before you get all excited and think that I have the best job on the planet, let me correct you. It's not very interesting to watch two people fumbling around each other and neither of them mustering enough courage to speak to the other. I mean, how hard can it be to just say hi?

I focus back on my humans, Jacob and Mark. Mark has been so obvious in his feelings and Jacob is so oblivious I could clobber him with my bow. My archery skills are adequate as it is, and Jacob has been so adamant in putting as much distance between them that I almost missed them.

Suddenly, Mark stops in the middle of the road. I come to a halt before I could collide with him, even though I am invisible to human eyes unless I choose to be seen.

Mark reaches for Jacob's hand, who pales but doesn't pull away.

I hold my breath as Mark confesses his feelings. Jacob blushes, and then smiles. Yes, this is it!

I watch grinning, as they walk away holding hands. Another assignment over!

I jump and spin around. Mid-spin, I stop as my eyes catch sight of someone.

My breath seems to be clogged in my chest. Was I having a heart attack? No, that couldn't be. Human ailments can't affect me. I knock my chest hard, and my breath wheezes through, but my heart still feels weird.

She is walking towards me, in a pale pink hoodie and grey jeans. Her oversized glasses cover her eyes and sunlight glints on them. She is hugging a huge book to her chest and tapping her fingers on it to the rhythm of the song playing through her earphones.

Her aura wafts towards me and I breathe deeply. The smell of old books, lavender and chocolate. Delicious.

Wait, what? I hate the smell of lavender. I shake my head, trying to get rid of these thoughts. But my eyes are still glued to the figure approaching me.

My heart skips a beat as her shoulder passes through mine. Abruptly, she falters and looks right at me. I hold my breath, worried that she has sensed me; but she shakes her head, probably dismissing her thoughts, and continues walking.

Out of their own accord, my feet move and I follow her.

I have the urge to know her name. A human's information is barred from me unless I am assigned to them. I want to know her name. I want to know what's her favourite colour. I want to know anything, and everything about her.

I go through another street, knowing that I will cross paths with her as she rounds the corner.

My heart pounds as I wait for her to appear. And she does. Her smell is more enticing than ever as I stand frozen on the pavement.

A strangled sound escapes my throat and she stops, looking at me inquisitively.

I stammer, 'Hi.' She smiles back, 'Hi.'

I exhale in relief. I wonder what fool thought it was easy to say hi.



Why it's

Important

to **ACCEPT**

People

on the **AUTISM**

spectrum

BY JARROD BOADLE

Autism spectrum disorder is being talked about more in our society due to the rising number of people who live with ASD. People with ASD struggle to learn when they're not in a supportive environment, and this affects their ability to achieve their full potential. Public understanding and acceptance will destigmatise the disorder and allow people with autism to achieve their goals. This is an issue close to my heart because I live with ASD, and I know how it affects me. ASD affects everybody differently because no two people are the same.

Autism spectrum disorder ranges from those who are low-functioning to those who are high-functioning. According to Autism Spectrum Australia, ASD is a lifelong neurodevelopmental disorder. People with ASD experience difficulties with social interaction, communication, restricted and repetitive interests and behaviours, and sensory sensitivities. These behaviours are displayed by having an intense and focused interest in a subject matter, stereotyped body movements like hand flapping and spinning, and an unusual and heightened sensitivity to everyday sounds or textures. They also experience difficulties with social interaction and unusual verbal and non-verbal communication. Autism Spectrum Australia estimates that 1 in 70 people are on the autism spectrum; that's about 230,000 Australians. It's four times more common in boys than girls.

Autism presents a lot differently in children because it can be displayed in many ways. Autism Spectrum Australia believes that the increase in diagnoses is due to increased awareness of the early signs of autism. The quality of life for many children and adults can be greatly improved by being diagnosed. I know from my experiences that my quality of life would have been affected significantly if I hadn't been diagnosed when I was three years old. I had the right support to get me started at primary school and beyond.

I knew early on about my quirky behaviour, and why I struggled to fit in at school due to my awkward social and communication skills. I struggle with tasks that involve using fine motor skills, such as using a screwdriver. Thinking logically can be an issue at times when doing day-to-day tasks because I start to panic due to overthinking a task, so learning new things can be a challenge. I'm also aware that other people with ASD will never have the skills required to live on their own, and how some will require constant care for life.

According to the American Psychiatric Association, 'autism is characterised and diagnosed by differences in two main areas: social communication and patterns of behaviour.' Those on the spectrum have a range of abilities and disabilities. The signs and symptoms of

ASD include making little or inconsistent eye contact, tending not to look at or listen to people, rarely sharing enjoyment of objects or activities by pointing or showing things to others, difficulties with the back and forth of conversation, having a lasting intense interest in certain topics, getting upset by slight changes in routine, and being more or less sensitive than other people to sensory input, such as light or noise. The mild form of autism includes people with abilities mixed with some difficulties, and the severe form focuses on the difficulties they face and how you can help those with it.

Early signs of autism include children displaying behaviour that is not normal for their age group. These can include having frequent tantrums, not being interested in activities, being fixated on a task, hand

flapping, lack of interest in other children, and repetitive speech. This will improve as children become older, but improvement may not come at all for those on the lower end of the spectrum. Low functioning people generally look and sound

very different from their typical peers. In other words, their disability is more obvious to the casual observer. High functioning people are more likely to appear typical, until some event or conversation makes their autism more obvious.

Autism is being talked about in today's pop-culture, which can be both a good thing and a bad thing. TV shows such as 'The Good Doctor', 'The Big Bang Theory' and 'Atypical' each have a person with autism as the main character. These shows do raise awareness about autism, but they can stereotype far too much, and therefore the characters displayed are not realistic. These shows characterise autism as people who are savants, but only 10% of people with autism have savant abilities. Stereotypes form in society when they see characters on TV displaying the same autistic traits, such as a brilliant memory and poor social skills. This can negatively impact those living with autism because it encourages others to label people as autistic when they see stereotypical behaviour.

It's important to remember that everyone on the autism spectrum has their own personality, and they all have their own strengths and weaknesses. I have my own unique quirks (that I display), and I want to be proud of my quirkiness. Everyone on the spectrum learns differently and they deserve the chance to gain the right employment and other opportunities. Autism is all about thinking differently, and public understanding goes a long way for people with autism to feel accepted in society. I hope to see continued progress being made to promote autism as a positive rather than a negative.

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THE ALL NIGHTER'S GUILT.

ALISHA HENDRICK

Tick tock, tick tock,
I hear the second hand of the clock,
As frustrating as writer's block.
I can't seem to write a word,
I gaze out the window, oh look a bird!

The deadline is near,
I fill with fear.
I have put this off for too long,
I do it every time, it's so wrong,
So much distraction,
I must take action.

I wish to rest my head,
But there is no time for bed,
I suddenly get an idea,
Do I still have enough time? Oh dear!

I quickly begin to type and scrawl,
Will I make it? I may bawl,
A bead of sweat drips down my face,
Against the clock, I race.

To my surprise,
The sun begins to rise,
It took all my might,
But I finished by morning light,
I submit and I sigh,
Another assessment goes by.
Left till the last day again,
Why must I put myself through this pain?

My stomach begins to churn.
I guess I'll never learn,
One is done, it's over it's through,
Now it is time for round two.





'Girl Interrupted' By Beck Small

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