



Love and Other Landings

Stories by the Morrin Centre Community

STORYTELLING, WRITING & SHARING

Stories of Our Community



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Histoires par la communauté du Morrin Centre



Quebec City
2025

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Stories of Our Community

Introduction

By Louisa Blair

In the late 1990s, all that was left of the Literary and Historical Society was its English-language library, almost unchanged since the mid-1800s and a well-kept secret from most residents of the city. Back then I interviewed a number of elderly members and staff about their memories of the place.

There was librarian Silma Landrier, tall and willowy, who sat at a table laden with royalty magazines and chain smoked as she told her story. There was Irene Calfat, who had read every book in the place and was paid \$5 an hour to keep the old card catalogue in order. “I’m opposed to anything electronic,” she said. The sum total of technology at the Library in those days was a rotary telephone and a typewriter.

There was Mary McGreevy, who’d been going to the library since 1931, and by four in the afternoon had pressed three gin and tonics on me before she agreed to give me her story. “Oh the Society was such an Old Boys’ Club,” she said gaily. And there was Posey (Rosemary) Cannon, the first woman president in the history of the Society, who remembered another board member locking her in a prison cell downstairs for a laugh.

All these marvelous characters are now dead. But there’s now a new cast of characters, with new stories to tell.

Since I did those interviews in 1999, the Lit and Hist, as we called it, has grown into an English-language cultural centre, the Morrin Centre. It’s now for everyone, men, women, young, old, English-speaking, French-speaking, or anything-else-speaking. People for whom English is their first (Canadian official) language are only 2.5% of this city’s population, but we have our own place to go that is overflowing with history and culture.

The authors who responded to the Morrin Centre's call for stories are from all over the world, but many came to Quebec for the same reason: Love.

Love is a great generator of stories—just ask any couple, how did you meet? And a well-crafted story, cherished and retold over and over, will tumble out.

Love has no formula. Only a story can really capture the unique nature of each relationship. In these stories, love narrowly survives a mistaken identity, love is found through a deleted Facebook post, love makes more than one author jump on a plane on a whim. Love pushes us to leave the places we know and where we feel safe. And like anything worthwhile, love is dangerous, it can end badly, it can hurt.

Most of these authors also belong to more than one place—another story generator. When we move, we see things afresh, we take nothing for granted, and we have the distance needed to write about it.

But like love, moving home is also dangerous—a boat sinks, the waiting family begins their mourning ceremony.

However, the dual-belonging in these stories can also be transformative. One author travels in search of a less ordinary life, only to find true adventure in the last place she expected it. For another author, a tiny detail, an overheard word spoken in a language of her childhood, changes a bad day to a good one.

The Morrin Centre and its parent, the Literary and Historical Society of Quebec, have been making stories for 200 years. Enjoy a few of the latest.

Paryetta came!

By Amirhossein Bahramnejad

It was around this time last year when I suddenly decided to go see her. No plans, no second thoughts—just like the day I fell in love with her. At two in the afternoon, I bought my ticket, and by five, I was on my way to the airport. I stayed awake for the entire journey. Sleep wouldn't come, and the unease kept tightening around my chest. The whole night, I pictured the streets we had walked together, the cafés where our laughter must still be lingering, and the moment I would see her again, after all these years.

At seven in the morning, I arrived in London. My first call: "Paryetta, I'm here." Her voice was still drowsy—or maybe just indifferent. She paused, exhaled softly, and said, "Okay."

It was my first time on the London Underground. I had always loved first experiences, taking risks and facing new adventures, but this one had a strange taste. The train was packed with people, none of whom were her. None of them had her voice, her scent. I blindly followed the crowd. The lines, the stations, boarding, getting off... but none of it mattered as much as seeing her.

We had arranged to meet near tower bridge. With a suitcase as heavy as the weight of all my memories, I passed the stations from King's Cross St. Pancras to Aldgate. I left my luggage in a storage room and retraced my steps. Station by station, until Tower Bridge. My heart—this unfaithful companion who had tried to ignore me several times, was pounding so hard it felt as though it would burst out of my chest.

And then, Paryetta came.

The same eyes, the same smile—but something was missing. Maybe the magic I once saw in her had faded. Maybe it was time that had come between us, waiting for one of us to admit that things weren't

the same. Still, I couldn't take my eyes off her. I watched her breathe, the way she moved her hands, the strands of her hair floating in the breeze. Every little detail that I had recreated in words was now right in front of me again.

We talked. We spoke of life, of how we were doing. We laughed. But the laughs tasted old, as if they no longer belonged to us. As if nothing was the same anymore.

Then, silence.

I reached into my bag and handed her the book—the one I had written about her. Every page carried a piece of my soul, every word held memories of our love, of my longing, of the emptiness she had left behind. I had spent months writing it, pouring everything I had ever felt into those pages. And now, it was hers.

She took it with a soft smile, flipping through a few pages before closing it gently. "Thank you," she said. Just two words. Nothing more. I wanted her to say she remembered. I wanted her to tell me that my words meant something, that I had meant something. But instead, she just placed it in her bag, as if it were nothing more than a worthless object.

That night, I checked my phone. I wanted to know what she thought of it, if she had read even a single page. But I never got the chance to ask. She had blocked me. No calls, no messages. Just silence.

Since then, I have had no news from her. I don't know if she ever read the book, if she ever thought of me after that day. She disappeared like a dream—one so sweet that, for a moment, you believe it's real. But then morning comes, and it's gone. And no matter how hard you try to hold on to it, you can never return to it again.

Paryetta had come. But I was no longer the man who had stayed awake all night just to drown in her presence, her beauty and her scent. I had already died—long ago—in her heart.

The Kiss

By C.E. Battle

My heart raced as the wheels brushed the tarmac. The brakes engaged. The pressure from the seatbelt on my gut contrasted with my heart's attempts to escape from my chest. Fear of crashing wasn't the reason. This trip to Québec had been a long time coming.

That reminds me; I should back up. A year and a half before that 727 touched down, I went on another adventure on a different plane; that one to Warsaw, Poland, to volunteer at a children's camp. I was younger, larger, and more audacious. That year Warsaw was sauna-esque. A few days into the trip, I was working outside. I was a moist mess, gloved up, and covered in bits of underbrush. I smelled glorious. Then, a car carrying destiny pulled up the driveway. Out she stepped.

"She" was Sara. *Is* Sara. Beautiful. Graceful. Québécoiseful. She had it all. Smitten was I. Within moments I had masterminded the opportunity to have my arm around her in the group photo. It felt just right. We worked side by side for the rest of the summer. The grueling challenges revealed her utter brilliance in everything, and I learned everything I needed.

Wait, did I say that I was from BC? It's important to know because after the summer in Poland, we returned to our respective homes 4774 kms apart (not as the crow flies, but as the car drives).

Yikes.

Thus came the dark days. She went her way. I went mine, though not by *my* choice, if you catch my drift. I declared her decision a misstep, a wrong ending, but I pity anyone obstructing a Québécoise's resolve. Hence, the schism.

But one fateful day six-ish months later, I received an email notification from Facebook that someone had commented on a photo of mine. I opened up the picture, but there was no comment. Just a closeup of Sara's glowing face taken by me. We had been in a van, heading back to camp after a long service day. Her wild appearance had prompted me to take a photograph. Her face said, "what are you doing...don't take my picture...I actually like it you like the way I look right now...oh okay, take my picture." The picture was lovely. I revisited the email comment. It read "Sunburn!!" and Sara had written it. But she had deleted it on Facebook.

So, I did what anyone in my situation would have done: I teased her about it. I wrote her a direct message and revealed that her deletion was in vain; that I was aware of her comment and was now responding, anyway. This resulted in a daily private message conversation that equalled hundreds of pages (I saved them) and spanned many months, her coming to visit me in BC that summer, and dating long distance. Finally, I planned to visit her in Québec on December 27 to ask for her hand.

Thank you, Facebook email notifications.

Having caught you up, let's return to my flight to Québec. Seated next to me on the Toronto to Québec City leg was a delightful couple who hung on my every word as I regaled them with the tale of our budding romance (they got the extended version). The cherry on top? We'd never kissed. Hence me anxiously awaiting touchdown.

Perhaps you've been to the Jean Lesage International Airport in Québec City. If you haven't, it's a great little airport. One of its quirks is this glass door on a sensor that opens when you are leaving the baggage claim area to enter the public space. In theory, it's exit only. When I arrived in the baggage claim area after deplaning, I could see Sara behind the glass.

She looked amazing. Actually, amazing doesn't cut it. Imagine a sunset reflecting off a glacier that is in the foreground of majestic mountains with a perfect smattering of trees, plants, and animals.

Repulsive compared to her.

But she might as well have been on the far side of Highway 40 on a Saturday afternoon. Untraversable. Unreachable. She was behind the glass. Conspicuous signs commanded rule compliance. So, I complied. I had broken enough rules in my life by then, and didn't know how strict Québec is with its rules (I still don't know, to be honest). But my Sara—did I mention she's a fiery redhead?—snuck like a cat through that glass door when it opened. Before I knew it, she was in my arms.

Hallelujah.

The moment stretched and vanished. Sheer bliss—and yes, with that cherry on top. I broke the eyes closed rule and snuck a look over to baggage claim: my friends from the flight clapped and cheered us on. We were engaged a little over 24 hours later, and the rest, as they say, is history.

Just a Good Day

By Sarah Blair

Clara did not consider herself very interesting. Her family's value currency revolved around lucky stories and she spent her childhood trying to collect memorable milestones to assure her own space in the family archives. She endeavoured to live as many adventures as possible whilst depending on her parents to provide everything from rubber boots to bicycles.

This was an era when parents didn't really pay much attention to what their children were up to so long as they were out of the house. One day, playing Cowboys and Indians in the rural English woods (the kids with ponies were the cowboys and the kids without were, of course, the Indians), she came across a riderless pony, reins flapping and saddle invitingly empty. She knew this pony and suddenly felt like she'd come up in the world. Taking possession of the pony meant she had reached the level of cowboys and had possibly won the game. She did not actually know the rules of the game but she thought it involved somehow becoming part of the lucky gang. She mounted the small rotund pony and had an exciting time cantering through the forest, arrogantly ignoring any Indians now that she considered herself one of the winning race, until she came upon the real cowboys. They were furious with her for having stolen a pony and the adventure did not turn out as well as she'd hoped. Lucky stories did not involve shame.

It helped when at the age of nine she acquired a great little pony of her own who enlarged her world significantly and gave her the real status of a Cowboy. Unfortunately, those games had finished by this time, the older kids' interests having moved on to young men. Cowboys had also gone out of style by then and been replaced by astronauts. But Clara was not discouraged; together with her sister and her sister's unstoppable wild pony, they embarked on great adventures. They regularly lost themselves in the forests, eventually

returning home muddy, cold, wet and bruised. At the end of a day the mud, bruises and filthy clothes added up to a passable adventure and her sister would creatively relate the lucky stories. Sometimes they even rode along the old Mediaeval Pilgrim's Way towards Canterbury and discussed Chaucer and his companions and their outrageous adventures. This added a definite spice to their bruises and cold chapped hands.

Some stories she couldn't share, like the silent fear at leaving friends' houses on her own and riding home in the gathering dark through familiar woods that nevertheless terrified her with monstrous scary shapes formed by shadows and the stumps of trees, and the crying of the wind and the owls' warnings of impending death. These were the types of adventure she only appreciated in hindsight. Lucky stories did not involve fear.

When Clara grew up and had a family of her own she decided that her children should also have the opportunity for adventures, especially since they lived in a nice little friendly suburb of Montreal where adventures were hard to come by. One day her daughter ran away from home with her scooter, her favourite stuffed animal, a jacket, a book and some change. The scooter was heavily laden and unfortunately for her, she didn't reach the edge of the village before her best friend came running over to Clara's house to tell her the news. Clara was very impressed at such an adventurous whim and tried not to hide her delight when she found her daughter a few blocks away, still furious about some terrible event that had caused her to leave her family. It reminded Clara of the time when she had run away from home too at the age of five, but not only did she not have a scooter, she'd been wearing her slippers. She managed to make it to the next village but then her best friend's mum found her walking purposefully along the road as she was driving her children to school. She drove her home to a desperately worried mother and Clara had felt deflated and a failure. Her hands were bloody from the cold and after all her efforts she didn't even get a day off school.

Her own daughter had obviously thought things out more clearly and she praised her for her preparedness and tried to persuade her to come home. Which she did a while later, on her own. Clara decided that her daughter's scooter adventure was just the right level of excitement.

So it happened that when the children were a little older Clara set off with her little family gang to Europe for a slightly more daring adventure. They walked long distances over hills and streams and mountains, through forests and over plains, in sunshine and rain and sometimes frost. They took a couple of donkeys with them for companionship and to share the luggage. They also packed their fiddles to entertain themselves and anyone else who might like to listen to them along the way. It was a good life and it seemed at the time as natural and as normal as any other life. They didn't need to share any lucky stories since they lived them together and their life was one big endless lucky story, or so they felt.

Clara looked back on all the other adventures she'd experienced through her life and looked at the big walk and thought, this is just a good life, this is not really an adventure, no more so than wading down the stream in her rubber boots when she was five. She concluded that life could simply be a perennial adventure and every day, however normal in appearance, could add up to something really spectacular. It certainly did not feel normal when some gypsies tried to steal the donkeys one night in Spain. That was way too exciting and her ten-year-old son played a star role in warding off the evil perpetrators and wrote a memorable story about it afterwards. He'd forgotten the whole episode after a couple of days, but not Clara. She would wake up every night after that and listen out for the comforting midnight bray and the soft breathing of the donkeys outside the tent. She didn't want any more lucky stories.

On their return she definitely considered their big walk with awe and it continually astonished her that they had achieved such a thing all together as a family. But it was the sense of continuation afterwards that made her realize adventures don't actually end but keep going throughout our lives like an ungroomed trail. When she wrote about them they came alive for her and stayed with her like old companions.

She still loved reading children's adventures in her 60s and she did not mind that they were totally improbable, she believed in them anyway. She appreciated her own quieter lifestyle whilst vicariously enjoying swashbuckling Pippy Longstocking type fantasies.

When her children were grown-up and busy creating their own particular life journeys, Clara went off by herself for another big walk. She just wanted to go for a nice long stroll and that is what she did. She explored ancient Britain this time. Sometimes she would consider that it was an adventure but mostly she basked in the day by day ordinariness of it all, and the things she remembered best afterwards, the things which brought her most joy, were waking up in her tent to the dawn chorus every morning and stopping for tea and scones in the middle of beautiful nowhere, somewhere overlooking the sea around mid-morning. And taking the time to love it all. She wondered if the memories would be more vibrant if she wrote about them and decided that that would be another adventure in itself but not a lucky story, more a treasure to be shared later on down the road with family and friends.

Clara had discovered that having yearned for so long to be interesting and have exciting stories to tell people in order to be accepted and loved, she'd actually forgotten all about it and had simply enjoyed the slow snail-like motions of following through with her simple dreams.

Remade in Quebec

By Saxon Davies

I stare out of the window as the plane takes me away. Despite my efforts, I am unable to comprehend how monumental this change in my life is and so I give up trying. My emotions have tugged at my thoughts to the point that I no longer know if I am excited, nervous, regretful, or outright exhausted. Everything has happened so fast that I wonder if I would have made the same decision if I had had more time. I'm thinking too much, so I rest my head and close my eyes, praying that I will lose myself in the world of sleep.

#

I thanked the driver and got out of the taxi to see my house looking exactly the same as the last time I'd seen it at the beginning of summer. This took me by surprise as I was certain I'd come back to see a drastic difference in the brickwork, or perhaps the garden would be flourishing with pink roses and lavender, the door painted a different colour. Alas, the bricks were the same, there were no flowers and the door was still mint green, a colour I didn't care for. I had changed and I expected the world to follow suit, which I know now was a very narcissistic thought process.

I had just returned from a backpacking trip through Europe. In the beginning, it was intended as a solo trip without a planned route, although this didn't last long as I met someone in the first month of my travels, a Canadian who had also just started a three month backpacking trip. On the first night we met, we talked about where we wanted to go, made fun of each other's accents, and displayed vulnerability which was uncharacteristic for me at the time. Since that first night we were never apart. We traveled together for nearly three months through countries most people don't know exist, or at least couldn't place on a map. We became accustomed to each other and soon enough, we confessed our love for each other. As our trip

progressed we realized that eventually we would be forced to split and go back to our own countries, which was unimaginable to both of us. To stop this from happening, I presented the plan of moving to Canada to be with her. It was absurd at the start, however during the summer the plan would become more serious. I started doing research, began working on visa applications and creating lists of things to pack. It was decided that I should end my trip and return to England sooner than planned to ensure that everything was in place for the move to go smoothly, and so that I had enough time to say goodbye to the people and places I loved.

I entered my house as silently as I could so as to not wake my mother, who was sleeping upstairs. She thought I wasn't due to return for another two weeks and I was to surprise her with my return. I crept upstairs and spotted my sister through the crack of her open bedroom door. Deep blue light from her LEDs leaked through into the hallway like floodwater. She was awake, sitting on her bed waiting for me, and we exchanged a silent wave. She was the first of my family I had seen since I left. I turned to my mother's bedroom and carefully opened the door. It was nearly pitch black, the only source of light coming from the ocean in my sister's room, though it was enough to see my way to where my mother was sleeping. I softly rested my hand on her shoulder to bring her to consciousness.

"Hello," I said.

My mother awoke with a start and instantly recognized my voice. She tried to form a coherent sentence but only managed some half-words of astonishment. My sister and step-father, who also knew of my return beforehand, were laughing at my mother's face of pure bewilderment. She looked at me as if I was an apparition. The son had come home!

My mother finally managed to come out with her first comprehensible sentence.

“Well, where is she?” she asked.

“Still in Prague,” I replied.

With that, my mother’s sentences became unintelligible again.

#

Sleep doesn’t come and I have now reached a point when my fatigue affects how I perceive time. The minutes and hours stop abruptly and then jerk forward again like a stalling car. The flight map shows that we are approaching the ocean, so I decide to look out and take in my country this one last time. Seeing England from above is an enchanting sight. The history shows in the landscape. There are small civilizations dotted around, buildings spread out like an urban splatter. I notice faint outlines of Celtic hillforts surrounded by irregular farmland. It’s as if everything is stitched together like a blanket made of deep and golden green-coloured patches. The kind a cartoon bear would carry around, or wear as a tatty pair of shorts. I see ant-sized people in ant-sized cars drive past rolling hills. They look like blood flowing through the landscape, a constant stream of life to England’s many organs. I too was one of those blood cells, although I hadn’t realized it. I had tunnel vision, too focused on myself to take in what I was actually giving life to. Those rolling hills had been just empty space between towns and cities to me, considered only as the number of minutes it took to travel through them. I was oblivious to the fact that through the window was more than just a mere painting of a green and blue blur. Being in the sky, it’s easier to see that neighbourhoods and cities are only different shades of patches in the English blanket. I had a groundling mentality and I am infuriated that I’m realising this upon my departure. I’ll remember this revelation for when I return, one day.

#

It had been a long time since I'd woken up in my own room. It was a strange feeling to have privacy after sleeping in the same room as strangers for three months. I'd gotten so used to locking my bag and keeping my phone under my pillow that my heart skipped a beat upon seeing my open bag on my bedroom floor, contents exposed and vulnerable to theft. I got up and relished the familiarity of my surroundings. I looked at my shelves of organized Batman figurines and Lego figures. I went through my wardrobe and my drawers. It was as though I was in a museum. There were relics and artifacts, new and old, but all from a previous life. I'd outgrown my room in such a short time. I had gotten so used to my surroundings that I didn't notice I was hindering my ambitions by staying there. A great realization washed over me, nearly drowned me, that my somewhat ludicrous plan of moving to Canada wasn't ludicrous at all, but necessary.

#

We have crossed the ocean and the long rectangles of New France's seigneurial system of land division come into view. Canada is flatter than I imagined. I was expecting craggy mountains topped with snow and large lakes that stretch like oceans, eventually spilling off the Earth in monumental waterfalls. Luscious, thick forests with bears and moose. That famed Canadian wilderness must be further north, I think. Or maybe I fell for the stereotypes.

I see my first Canadian civilization. Houses cling along both sides of a fairly straight river that splits the earth in two. There is no outward expansion, no splatter, every house has access to the water. It's evidently a town built to be fair to everyone. There was a blueprint from the beginning. I've never seen anything like it. I wonder if Quebec City is the same. We have an apartment waiting for us, although I have yet to see the interior. I have been refused access to photos despite my constant demands. It's a surprise I'm told.

#

Two weeks was both too much time, and not enough time at all. I felt like shoving my few significant possessions in a bag, taking the bus to London, and boarding the next available plane, all without telling anyone, just to get it over and done with and save the inevitably tragic goodbyes. Yet I had so many places I wanted to revisit one last time. I had people to see whom I couldn't simply abandon without a proper farewell, so I decided to tolerate the distress with stoicism and wait it out. Knowing that every sleep brought me one day closer to leaving was a daunting realization. The excruciating part was not knowing when I would feel this familiarity again. The sense of feeling at home. I wondered if my new country would feel like home or some sort of temporary accommodation. Home is where you make it, and home is with Her. This is how I reassured myself.

I had to leave most of my belongings in England. Everything I was to take with me had to fit in two large backpacks. I started with the clothes. As I rigorously sorted through my wardrobe, I discovered I wouldn't have worn most of what I owned anymore, so making choices was fairly easy. I didn't need to bring any household necessities such as pans and linens, although I did opt to bring a light brown plate I'd used since I was a child. It was the only plate like it that my family owned and as I felt entitled as a child, I refused to let anyone else use it. I was the special one that deserved the special plate. As I got older, this entitlement vanished but I was still the only one to use the plate out of tradition. Of course, I would bring my childhood bear. He was an adventurous one, having gone with me on my backpacking trip. He'd been to more places and done more than most other bears and I couldn't starve him of his desire to explore the world. The rest would stay in England on display, untouched until the sorrow of my departure dissipated. When this happened, my possessions would be boxed up and stored away until I came back to collect them.

#

We are approaching the runway and I am exhausted. I have not slept properly in over 24 hours, only hovered between slumber and consciousness. My recollection of the last few days is already choppy. I remember hugging my Grandma, my sisters, and my mother, all glassy-eyed and proud, though when and in which order is impossible to say.

The plane touches the ground. I close my eyes as the impact jerks my body. I allow my head to be thrown side to side like a ragdoll as the mechanical wind of the engine acts as a white noise that permits my mind to drift. We slow down to a stop but I keep my eyes closed. Time has paused again. I sense a shift that marks the beginning of something new, as if I've shed my old skin. My plan of moving to Canada is realized. It's no longer just an idea, a name, a flag. It's actuality. I feel rejuvenated.

The bell dings and we are permitted to unbelt ourselves. I finally open my eyes. The light rushes into my retinas and a pure whiteness covers everywhere I look, then dissolves leaving the world made anew.

Toi

By Anaïs Laflamme

J'ai tout perdu, peut-être. Non, je le sais que j'ai tout perdu. Mais je te haïssais tellement. Je préférais partir, quitter cette ville mauvaise aux allures désuètes plutôt que de revoir encore un seul centimètre carré de ton visage fier. Je trouverais mieux. J'ai quitté la ville pour découvrir un nouveau décor, similaire à celui que je m'imaginais quand je te racontais mes rêves. J'ai rencontré cinquante personnes, de tous les âges, capables de me faire rire, mais un peu moins qu'aux instants lors desquels tu me regardais et dissimulais ton malaise avec un sourire. Oui, parce que nous avions les mêmes visions du malaise qui, aussitôt qu'il se manifestait, nous incitait à nous regarder, à nous retenir de rire, à s'en pincer le ventre et à se mordre l'intérieur des joues. Et alors nous étions contents d'avoir vécu un malaise. Moi, j'étais contente d'être heureuse.

Je ne sais pas ce qu'ils nous font. Je n'ai personne à accuser. La technologie, peut-être, mais ce serait exagéré, puisqu'il ne m'a fallu qu'une seconde pour tourner mon regard ailleurs qu'à l'endroit où se trouvait ton visage. Je m'ennuyais. Oh, mais non. C'est la faute de mille divertissements virtuels qui me font croire que tout vaut mieux la peine d'être vécu que le moment présent.

Mais tu ne m'écrivais plus! J'allais quoi, t'attendre? J'aurais dû t'écrire. Je ne l'ai pas fait. J'avais la tête pleine. Dans ma tête passaient des images de débats philosophiques médiatisés, de dessins numériques, de séries populaires, de suggestions YouTube et de publicités de chaussures. Je pensais aussi au visage de celle que tu suivais sur les réseaux sociaux. Comment pouvais-je t'écrire, quand l'univers esthétique d'Internet avait complètement affaibli ma capacité à penser par le langage? Mais j'aurais dû t'écrire : « Salut! Je constate que tu es silencieux depuis un moment! Est-ce que tu vas bien? » Ça aurait été tellement simple.

Quand tu as cessé de m'écrire, mille images de fuites et de réussites m'ont donné l'impression de m'élever lentement vers le ciel. Je me vengerais de ton silence. Je te quitterais. Un an plus tard, ce ne serait pas assez. Je changerais de ville. Je déménagerais.

C'était beau, dans la nouvelle ville, d'écouter une bonne pièce de théâtre, d'écrire ma vie dans mon studio, de couper tout contact avec mes amis d'adolescence, de danser, seule, sur des chansons rythmées, puis de me gaver de littérature classique. J'ai voyagé et étudié, quoi. Je t'avais quitté sans m'intéresser à la raison de ton silence. Tu ne t'intéressais pas à moi, il était là, le problème.

Je pensais parfois à ton texto, après que je t'aie dit que je voulais que l'on se sépare. « Ça va? », m'avais-tu écrit. Je marchais entre les gratte-ciels de la nouvelle ville, à la recherche, sans le savoir, de quelqu'un plus communicatif que toi. Et pourtant, ne posant pas plus de questions aux autres que je ne t'en avais posées, personne n'était pour moi un sujet d'intérêt.

Il aurait fallu que je revienne te voir et que je prenne de tes nouvelles. J'aurais dû t'écrire. J'aurais tellement dû t'écrire.

Tu m'as apporté beaucoup de bonheur durant de nombreuses années, je te le jure. Le fait d'avoir choisi de rompre, après ton silence par texto, me fait penser à l'acte de couper une racine.

Quand j'ai cessé de m'intéresser aux attractions de l'autre ville, je ne pensais plus à devenir entrepreneure ou romancière. Je suis retournée vivre chez mes parents. Les images de moi plus jeune balayaient les espaces de leur maison. Je pensais à toi qui venais. Je me suis souvenue d'un passage littéraire que j'avais lu dans l'autre ville. La littérature vue en classe devenait un apprentissage réel.

« Nous aurions pu être heureux ensemble pour toujours! »

Je regardais mon ancienne chambre maintenant vide. Je t'avais quitté! Pourquoi avais-je fait cela? J'étais en colère. J'imaginai

ton indifférence. Je te trouvais impertinent de t'isoler pour lire. Et maintenant que je l'avais fait, toute la littérature du monde me faisait aujourd'hui penser qu'il fallait que je t'écrive, parce qu'avec assez de connaissances pour ne plus m'ennuyer : « Nous aurions pu être heureux ensemble pour toujours! ».

Je t'ai envoyé un message texto. Même après mes années de voyage, je savais que tu me répondrais. Tu as accepté de me répondre et j'ai pu lire un « Ça va? » de ta part. Je devenais folle de savoir à quelle carrière tu te consacrais et quelles informations tu détenais.

Tu as accepté de m'appeler. J'ai su où tu vivais et dans quel domaine tu exerçais.

Et je m'imaginais tellement que tu pardonnerais ma rupture et que tu me proposerais de venir te voir.

Et par appel vidéo, tu m'as dit : « J'habite dans un appartement, avec ma copine ».

How I Met My Sally

A tribute to friendship, love, and *When Harry Met Sally*

By Christian Shriqui

Doing laps in the pool trying to focus on my semi-coordinated movements. My thoughts keep drifting towards the past, present and future: my Sally, my BLC (Best Leftover Chef—a title won during her undergrad years at Oberlin), my BFF.

Blame it on the Hall family who founded a tiny business called Hallmark. Valentine's Day is tomorrow. I have loved this celebration since third grade; especially when I exchanged Valentine cards with my teacher, Miss Zelda, who captivated me with her warm smile, beauty, positive energy, Twiggy outfits, zany hairstyle and make-up. As I churn through my lane, the Valentine menu takes form: sushi and Veuve Clicquot Rosé followed by handmade chocolates accompanied with a bouquet of multi coloured gerberas. Tucked away in my closet lies a neon orange sweater in a ruby red box next to the card which depicts the Japanese countryside reminiscent of a past trip to Kyoto.

As I pondered ideas for haikus, my mind wandered back to Montreal forty-one years ago, to a blind date and a scrap of paper on a messy desk. Tilda's face resurfaced. This visiting relative from New Zealand had tried to play matchmaker. After raving about her cousin, she scribbled a number that she plopped into my hand and declared: "She's expecting your call." Several months later, as I waded through piles of papers on my desk, I noticed the scrunched-up handwritten phone number. At first, I almost chucked it. Minutes passed, and I found myself dialing. Was I curious? Was I bored? We talked for over an hour during our first phone call. Over several weeks, we did not meet in person, although only minutes away from each other by car. At the time, I was preparing for my bar exams while she struggled attending classes at McGill with a broken ankle. We spoke every evening on the phone (the internet, cellphones, and FaceTime

awaited their inventors) and chatted away on a smorgasbord of topics: musical, cinematic and literary tastes, global politics, favorite artists, cities and museums, Julia Child and The Galloping Gourmet, future travel destinations, life goals and ambitions.

Simultaneously, we decided: it's time we meet. Finally, a Friday date night was planned: a movie and drinks downtown. Before hanging up she blurted: "Wait! I'll tell you what I look like. I have wavy blonde hair, blue green eyes, am of average height and I'll wear a long black coat. What about you?" I replied: "I'll be wearing a sheepskin coat" and hung up. Did I want to keep an aura of mystery?

She was standing at the corner of De Maisonneuve and McGill College when a tall, tanned, and handsome guy in a sheepskin coat made eye contact and smiled. She reciprocated and he moved towards her. "Harry?" she asked. "No, I'm Rohan! Is this a blind date? If he doesn't show, meet me at the *Foufounes Électriques*!"

Just in time, my taxi screeches to the curb. I dash out into the cold, clad in a sheepskin coat. Some ten feet away I see a young woman who fits Sally's description, looking miserable. She is guarded when I say: "Sally?" To my relief she replies: "Harry!" We pause and look into each other's eyes and hurry off to catch the most forgettable Richard Gere movie. We stroll to a hip bistro called *Café La Brise* and order a bottle of Pinot noir.

My reverie is interrupted when I collide with another swimmer. Jolted, I look up at the clock, notice the time, then zip out of the pool to change and scurry off into the snow-filled streets of Quebec City. There is still plenty to do before tomorrow. I head to the photo lab to pick up a sealed box with framed copies of a recent photograph of us and our daughter proudly holding her degree. I do not open it till much later, when I discover that the photographs are not ours, but a stock image of a schoolgirl wearing pink heart-shaped glasses holding an adorable white puppy. My plan to add this framed family photo to the Valentine's gifts goes awry. I feel more pressure to

write the haikus, as they are meant to be the crown jewels of this Valentine's Day.

I light a fire in the living room and curl up in my favourite chair and blanket. With my iPad firmly propped on my legs, I embark on a haiku marathon. To my great relief, I'm inspired.

Haikus for Sally, Written February 13, 2025

[Setting: By the fireplace, a winter storm is raging]

Metallic hearth
Warms this long winter
My heart at peace

[Setting: Staring, bedazzled by the fierce blowing snow]

Snow, heavy whiteness
Winds swirl with mighty force
Overwhelming beauty

[Setting: Reflecting on our Bichon who passed away]

Playful and lively
Comforting presence
Our beloved friend

[Setting: None needed]

My life is transformed
Heart shining, dazzled with love
Your endless gaze

Valentine's Day is finally here. We are eating Uni—the sea urchin's version of ovaries or testicles. I stretch my hand out and invite my BLC to dance to alt-J's entrancing *Taro*.

Decades have passed, and we are now in our retirement years. I feel a profound sense of gratitude and joy to share my life with Sally.

A smile grows inside me. "All good" as our daughter likes to say. Our journey continues.

December 23

By Smym

Need a crane to haul me out of the bed. Peeking outside through the curtains: weather in accordance with my mood. Finally drag myself to the bathroom. Who is this sad, tired, grey woman staring at me through the mirror?

That's it! Something needs to be done.

December 23: little chance of getting an appointment for today. Still, I'm trying.

Good! They had a cancellation; there is a slot available just for me. Time to hurry, it takes longer to get ready with the winter gear to put on.

Cold. Grey sky, sun hiding behind a heavy curtain of clouds.

Trying not to skid on the sidewalk, taking the small streets to avoid being slushed by passing cars.

Not looking forward to the usual questions that are to come, the hands all over my head, and the Muzak-like conversation.

Arrived! No going back now.

Going through the double doors. I know the routine. I sit on the bench, I take off my boots, I slip my feet in the slippers I brought, I hang my coat on the coat rack, I take a seat, and I wait for my turn.

The chair is comfortable, guarded by a big planter of succulents. There is another chair and a low table on which rests a small wooden structure with coloured beads. I brought a book with me, but it seems that I won't need it. There is much to observe and to listen to.

The manager's voice resonates, bringing into the room the warmth of Southern France, the sound of cicadas, and accents of lavender and thyme.

A couple, slightly older than me, arrived a few minutes earlier. The silver-haired man sat down on the chair next to me and is quietly checking his phone while the sweet petite lady is already being gently taken care of.

A few steps away in the room, a young couple stands holding a toddler in their arms. What's going on? The man is tall, with big muscles and tattoos, but seems quite moved. "See, I didn't shed a tear," says the young woman. What happened? Was the child hurt? But the little boy doesn't cry, and he looks oblivious to all the fussing around him. He seems much more interested in the wooden toy he spotted earlier in the waiting area. The young family moves back towards the exit, passing near us, and then the mother proudly tells us, "It was his first haircut!"

My first name is called in a friendly tone using the polite French "you" to keep a respectful distance. I like that.

The protective coat with its rubber collar is handed to me and I'm invited to sit down in front of a mirror.

"It drives me crazy" I say. "Every day is a bad hair day. I can't stand it anymore. Shave it all!" The hairdresser looks somewhat startled by my outburst; she starts checking her phone.

Oh dear, I think, I lost her!

But after a short while, she shows me her phone screen which displays several models wearing short haircuts (not shaved ones). Oh, I like that, I will look classy like Princess Di or sporty like Jamie Lee Curtis. I already feel better, lighter.

The sweet petite lady is now at the front desk, paying for the service and chatting with an amiable employee. Suddenly, I'm taken years back. I just heard the silver-haired man ask, "Alles goed?" That's exactly the way my father used to gently tell us, in Dutch, to speed up goodbyes at the end of a visit.

I'm heading home. The sky has cleared up now, the air is crisp, and the sun is shining.

La vie est belle!

Our Story

By Ricky Zurif

My grandparents Chaya and Abraham Zurif immigrated to Canada from a region that was at different times Ukraine, Russia or Poland, depending on whose army had most recently taken over.

It didn't really matter to them. Whatever the regime, it was not a good place to be for a poor struggling Jewish family, so they decided to leave. Ah, everybody thinks, the Holocaust. No, no, way before then—1902. It was not the Holocaust, but nor was it a Jewish paradise. They simply couldn't earn a living in the place where they lived. My grandparents wanted a better life for their six kids, so they organized their journey the way many families did in those days. My grandfather and his sons (Bill, Barnett, and Asher) left first in 1902, while his wife stayed behind with their daughters (Annie, Ethel, and Peppy). There were no phones in those days, no internet, no texting, no sending photos of the children, no contact at all. Perhaps a letter on a crowded boat made its way across the ocean every few months. And what did the letter say? "We are well. It is cold here. Soon you will come." But really, who knows? Who can even imagine the loneliness, the isolation, the terrors of the frozen new world for a family split in two by an ocean and poverty and silence.

My grandfather sold furs in Quebec City. Not elegant coats, probably just pelts. Meanwhile his sons interpreted for their father, as the fur dealers spoke French and English and my grandfather didn't speak either. It was not a rags to riches story, not even close. The father and sons were crowded together in tiny rooms with no charm, no comforts, and no women. I visited the Quebec City neighborhood of Saint-Roch some 80 years later. It had not been gentrified.

Meanwhile, my grandmother stayed in what we assume was then the Ukraine, or whose army had recently taken over the region, supporting her girls (how she did so is a mystery) and waiting for

the letters from her husband. Those years were marked by working, hoping, and probably worrying.

Eventually, three years passed and my grandfather sent for them. Again, a note made a painfully slow voyage across the ocean: "Come. Tell me your ship and the date." I have no documents to verify if this is what the note said. But she sent the ship's name and the date of her arrival. I have a photo of the women just before they left. The three girls look to be in their early teens. Chaya looks determined. No one is smiling.

When the day, the joyous day, arrived, the men and boys (my family was one of many) went to the docks to greet the long awaited, much missed and longed for women and girls. They waited, hearts bursting. And they waited, and waited, but no boat arrived. There was an announcement. The boat was not coming. It had sunk. No survivors.

I was not there, my cousin Ada who told me this story was not there. None of us had been born yet and so none of us heard the sobbing, the wails, the heartbreaking cries of my grandfather and his sons as they went home to prepare for the mourning ritual called "sitting shiva." Jews in mourning sit on low chairs, in black, torn clothes. The front door is left unlocked so that friends and neighbours can drop by with food and kind words. When the week is up, the family walks around the village (nowadays just around the block) to signify that they are ready to resume their lives. Prayers are said for the dead, then and for years after. It is a ritual which has psychological value. The bereaved are not alone, they are cared for, they are comforted. It helps. Here, the pain was too great to allow comfort a seat at the table.

I looked up the names of ships sailing that year, ships that had sunk, but there were so many ships that did not make it, it was a futile task. Up until then, I had no idea that the journey was so hazardous.

No one knows what pain those sinking ships caused, no one in the family even talked about it. I only heard about it from my cousin Ada many years later when everyone in the story was long dead.

I was not there. The man and three teenagers sat on their low chairs, devastated, crushed, bewildered, hollow. I was not there. I can only imagine. Three days passed. Maybe four. I was not there.

This is all a second- or third-hand account, but this is how it happened. On one of those shiva days, a day of sobbing and praying, all heartfelt, all futile, a neighbour burst into the house, out of breath, his face red with running, and gasped,

“They are here! They are here! They are on their way!”

A shocked silence flattened the little dark room. Nothing, nothing, nothing, and then in walked Chaya and her girls. A vision? A miracle? The little room turned from the bleakest despair to wild joy and tears.

Less than a year later, my uncle Meyer was born. A Canadian citizen (our family's first), and a year after that Nathan—Nat, the baby, the last child—was born. He is my father. All of the eight children married and had children who, in turn, had children, and we are all (just for the record) historical Anglos of Quebec.

What happened to Chaya and the girls was this. They arrived in Liverpool, England to catch the boat for Quebec and her trunk was not there. It contained everything the family owned. Nothing was objectively valuable, no silver candlesticks, no brocade gowns or antique gold jewellery, maybe some old baby clothes for the babies she hoped to have in Canada. Of course, these were all the more valuable because they had so little. She was assured the trunk would follow in a later boat, but she would not be swayed to leave without it. And since she spoke only Yiddish, a language spoken mainly by eastern European Jews and certainly not what you'd call popular in

Liverpool, how did she convey her wishes? But she did. She probably asked some people on the boat to explain to her family that she would arrive a few days later, but since the boat sank, no one lived to relay her message.

I love this story—my father got to be born after all. However, the happy ending of this story did not guarantee joy, because the family went on to have further sorrows. In 1918, Chaya and Abraham died of the Spanish Flu, leaving all eight children orphans. Most of the children were already independent at the time, but the two youngest, Meyer and Nat, were still living at home. Meyer was taken in by a Jewish family in Montreal and he later married their daughter. Nat was taken in by his sister Peppy, a saint, a mensch, and the poorest of the sisters. He shared a single bed with his baby cousin, Sonny, for seven years until he was old enough to go to Regina to live with his eldest brother Asher, twenty years older than him, who put him through university. It was there that my father met my mother, and she came with him to live in Montreal where he could be near his best friend and brother, Meyer.

Everyone did well in Canada; all received a good education and half of them stayed in the province, moving to Montreal. There is a plaque in the Quebec Jewish Cemetery, a National Heritage site, which has a list of the Synagogue board members who took on the responsibility of the cemetery. Chaya Zurif, mother of eight, is one of them.

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