

Sky-Bound Misfit

By Jane Powell

Excerpt #1

Later that day, I sat just below the tracks on the ledge that was moulded into the top of one of the enormous concrete posts that held the train bridge up. The bridge had three huge iron arches that stretched above it from one end to the other. Iron beams crisscrossed from the tops of the arches down to the mainframe, linking the magnificent structure together. From a distance, at dusk, the train bridge looked like a fantastic beast, like a dragon bounding over the river with its back and tail arching in waves of playful excitement. It reminded me of Falkor, the white luck dragon. I sat on the ledge with my headphones on, listening to music with my back against an iron beam. The river rushed under the bridge, far beneath me. Earlier in the summer, Eva and I had picked this to be our regular meeting spot. It was our secret place, our “club house,” where we could be alone, uninterrupted.

Eva lived in Roxboro, the next train stop over toward Montreal. The train bridge was about a half-hour walk from her house. She'd only taken the train a handful of times though, as her mum didn't trust any vehicle she wasn't driving herself. Eva and I had planned to meet at two o'clock. I checked my watch. She was a few minutes late, which was typical of Eva. If I was a five-minute early bird, she was a 10-minute late-bird.

I ejected the U2 tape from my Walkman, popped in Pat Benatar, and pressed play. As I was fiddling with my Walkman, Pinky crawled out of my bag, up the front of my T-shirt, sniffed the air, and then made herself comfortable on my shoulder under my hair. I wasn't worried about her disappearing on me. She regularly followed me around the island. She knew her way home. I found a marker in my bag and began to doodle.

A few minutes later, I put down my marker and studied the drawing I'd just completed on my arm. I had transformed my butterfly tattoo into a magical flying luck dragon. I smiled, satisfied with my work. Much better. The dragon was the one from the dream I'd had in the music room, just before I'd fallen madly in love with Gil. Thinking of this luck dragon made me feel happy and safe, and a little sad too. If only my luck hadn't been so delicate, so volatile. If only. I put my leather armband back on, over my luck dragon doodle. It was still technically that damn butterfly tattoo. I preferred it stayed hidden. It wasn't a topic I wanted to discuss with anyone.

Eva showed up a few minutes later. She jumped down from the tracks onto the ledge, surprising me out of my musical daydream. She was dressed in jean shorts and a baggy Metallica T-shirt.

Eva plopped herself down beside me and reached out to Pinky, tickling her under the chin. She looked at me and smiled mischievously. "I got it."

I returned her sly smile, "Guess we're partying tonight."

Excerpt #2

I found Eva lying on the grass under a Russian olive tree on McGill's campus at lunchtime. Her head was resting on her bag and she was staring up into the tree's twisted canopy. It was one of our favourite lunch spots. We liked it because of the evolving enchanted shadows the tree cast throughout the day. Eva had walked right out of the gymnasium before class started and I hadn't seen her since, until now. She hadn't noticed me approach, and I paused for a moment before revealing my presence. So many thoughts and emotions stirred in my mind. I had crushed Eva. I had exposed her secret. And I might as well have yelled it out over the school intercom because the Terrible Twos would surely spread the word faster than a broken dam floods a landscape. What would I say? How would I fix this? I couldn't fix this.

I walked over to where she lay and sat down silently beside her. Iron Maiden's "The Loneliness of the Long Distance Runner" pulsed from Eva's earphones. Eva noticed me and closed her eyes. There were no words to express how sorry I was. I stayed silent and waited for her to speak. After a few minutes, she opened her eyes and looked at me. I could tell she had been crying earlier. Her eyes were still pink and puffy. Then she averted her eyes from mine, stood up, threw her backpack over her shoulder, and walked away.