

A Story With No Title Whatever - August C. Bourré, 2002

Jared sat at a table near a window on the South side of the university's library. No one was nearby. He drummed on his notebook with his yellow No. 2 pencil, using the eraser end, which would not damage the paper. There was nothing written in the notebook. He stopped drumming and looked out the window. Outside he could see several students crossing the quadrangle. Two students were leaving the Modern Languages building and walking in the direction of the Engineering department. One student had just stepped out of the library and was rounding the Southwest corner of the building. Jared looked down at the blank page of the notebook on the table in front of him¹.

¹ Sun's warm today. Smiling down, down, down, lots of little specks of dust dancing in the light. Privacy. Alone. Empty white rooms. One bed with a bare bulb and nobody around for miles. Last Valentine's Day, Sarah gone and just static on TV. Spoke volumes with just a dial tone. Beep, beep, beep, beep. "I don't love you anymore." Beep, beep, beep, beep. The sound of love hanging up on you. Tappety tappety tappety tap tap. Bum de bum bum bumpedy bum bum ba dada dum de dump badadadadee da dump bump dadadadeedum. Lines deep grey reflecting the light with varying density. Fibres soaked in graphite like houses in paint but not yet because there's nothing to say. Nothing to write. Maybe a pen next time. Ink might make me, what did Woolf say, "incandescent". Damaged pages not for me. Tried it once. Took an old notebook out once and it was used and wrinkled and damaged like nobody's business. Wrote five lines of blank verse; put it down, put it away, almost burned it for shame. Ruined pages make ruined words make ruined thoughts make ruined writer. Think harder. Think think think

This, he wrote, *is a story about nothing*. He stared at the page. He erased the sentence, and wrote in its place, *This story is about nothing*. Ten minutes passed, during which Jared looked out the window twice, brushed eraser shavings from the notebook to the floor, and adjusted his position on the wooden chair².

think think think think. Should be out there. Pretty girls on the sidewalk with Porcellino. Pretty girls on the grass. Walking across with Sarah, touching the pig's nose and rubbing for mid-term luck. Should be with warm sun on my back and sweat running down from sport or sex. Out there. Flagstones under thin soles and feet sore but not sore, walking with pretty girls not giving me the time of day. Mom wanted a girl, Dad wanted an Engineer, both disappointed. Artist, writer, publisher, editor, boy, stooge. Jackass, some days. Sarah joked once, "The only thing your parents think you're good at is fucking up." Funny. Fun. Ha ha. Laughed for ages with a glass of merlot in each hand. Made love on the sofa spilling over onto hardwood floors, hum of the computers in the background. Home office, living together six months by then. Have to write something. "Death of the author" my ass. "Texts are products of the sociolect" my ass. Sociolect should come down here and write this story for me. Give me pointers. Let the sociolect lose sleep when there's a deadline. Hand sociolect this pencil and say, "Here, take this, it's sharpened for you and everything." Stand back, watch sociolect work. Win Journey Prize. Bet the sociolect wouldn't sue for prize money. Is there prize money? Not sure.

² Sounds profound; isn't really. Sell it to *Malahat*, or maybe *McSweeney's*. False profundity in vogue right now. Ok, maybe not. Better wording. Screw with syntax. Pretend I'm experimental, cutting edge. Exploring my gendered political perspective. Or something. Comfort is everything. Left buttock going numb. Sarah used to tell me to

A girl with dark hair walked by. She wore a red dress with a black design down the left side, a black tank top. She wore no jewelry except a blue plastic bracelet³.

Jared erased the words from his notebook. He brushed the eraser shavings on to the floor, and smoothed the page with his hand. He stood up and walked up and down the hall more than ten times. He stretched his back. He cracked his knuckles. He sat back down and looked at the blank page. There were faint grey lines where he had written on the page⁴.

switch my wallet to the other pocket. Knock my hips off balance. Walk funny in later life. Walk funny now. Bounce, drag one foot a little. Sarah bang on. Sarah was always bang on. Probably still is. Just not with me. Frustration; ready to break pencils and tear books. Look over my shoulder for sociolect. Still a no show. Guess this one is up to the author.

³ Sarah. Not Sarah. Spirit and image. Wrote a poem once, girl dressed in red skirt with black pattern, black top. Called it "Red Skirt" or something. Good poem. Better woman. Good woman. Like this woman. Girl. Woman. Don't know what to say anymore. Nice skirt.

⁴ This is no good either. Start again. Rewrite. Rephrase. Change. Do-over. Never right. Never never never. Had a professor once, taught Creative Writing. Said no matter what, the first draft is always terrible. Change it no matter what. Drastically. Always. Every time. Ghosts of dead words. Shadows of my thoughts. I wonder if Joyce ever had this problem. Looked at the words and erased them, and saw their ghosts, worried if what he was doing was right. Did a major essay on Joyce. Was Bloom an androgynous figure, or a fetishist? Liked looking at silk and crinoline and girls with their skirts up. Probably

Jared wrote: *This story is the most profound work of art you will ever encounter. It is a test, perhaps the hardest test you will ever take. If you do not work hard, if you do not give it all you have, then friend, you will fail.* He looked down at the words on the page. He turned the pencil around so that the eraser was suspended over the words. He held it there for ten seconds. Then for ten more seconds. And then for twenty seconds. He put the pencil down. Some of his hair fell in front of his eyes, and he blew it at it. He picked up the notebook and held it out in front of him⁵.

Gary walked past. His khaki pants were wrinkled. His white shirt was not. He said: Hello, Jared⁶.

would have liked magazines about white cotton panties and garters. Maybe modern Bloom would surf the web. Suicide Girls.

⁵ This story is not a story this story, this story, this story is bollocks. Excuse, this story, an excuse, to be profound—not to be, but give the look. Hide it well. Eraser a death-knell. Guillotine for prose. Hover. a hover { text-decoration: none; font-weight: normal; color: black; }... No. Pencils down, test is over. Pass/Fail—couldn't tell you, can't tell you. Must wait for report, editor. *Malahat, McSwy's*. "We are pleased to inform you..." "Unfortunately we cannot at this time..." Can't check the mail for days. Cut like Brad Pitt, not my fucking khakis. Doesn't fall in his eyes, Aniston brushes, anyway, for him. Out of them. Blow, winds, blow. Kerouac wind. Soundslike: new model SUV. Distance for clarity, clarity for dissonance, dissonance for quality.

⁶ Gary, khakis (is his khakis, HornBoy brand, whatever), no talking. Don't notice, no talking. Talking. Noticing. Smile hello, say hello, hello, hello. Helloing.

Hello: said Jared. He looked from his notebook to Gary. Gary smiled and walked to the end of the hall. He turned the corner, and Jared could no longer see him. Jared looked out the window. There was no one in the quadrangle. He put the notebook down, and stood up. He turned around completely, and sat back down. He tore the page from the notebook and crumpled it in his hand. He put it down on the table and picked up the pencil. The lead was dull⁷.

He wrote: *This is not a story about change. This is not a story about great social upheaval. This is a story about*⁸

⁷ Return volley: hello. No looking. Does he notice? Feels, on his back, eyes. Awkwarding walk. Walking awkward. Feels it. Knows, conscious of self and selfishness of gaze. Possession through sight, power through sight. Feel the same way. Always back of crowds, especially women. Stride can make or break a man. They giggle, if you know they're watching. Emasculate. Circumcise from behind your back. Empty. Dust devils and amusement parks and post-industrial decay. Lonely Porcellino. Lonely Sarah-less apartment. White walls, impression where bed was; compressed carpet, no pictures. Let blood into my legs. Tingling rush traveling up and down, can stand, can sit, can walk, can run, can breed, all with enough blood. Bad page, bent corners, ruined. Anyway, it was bad prose. The look and the feel, but not the substance. Looks like a duck, walks like a duck, must be a raccoon. Dull pencil means dull stories means dull storyteller means no royalty cheque means no lovingly rendered biography ten years after death. Immortality lies in this pencil. Potential.

⁸ This story is an episode of *Seinfeld*.

He stopped writing. He held the pencil just above the page. Ten seconds passed. Twenty seconds passed. He put the pencil down. He snorted quietly. He checked his watch, which read forty-five minutes past two. He closed the notebook and put it in the bag at his feet. He put the pencil in the bag, and closed the snaps. He slung the bag over his left shoulder, and left the library⁹.

⁹ Stab at thee again, page, with this my leaden dagger? Graphite hummingbird; fluttering but not landing, cool, crisp black lines (not any longer crisp, not any longer a Sarah at home to read them—not any longer legs to breath or shoes to pick up from in front of the door) now fuzzy. No critic at home. Drawing her own map in Victoria. Leaving Waterloo off. Fine, then. Writing my own story, then. Leave Victoria off. Leave Sarah off. Leave off. Come to a full and complete stop.