

ONE

On the Street Where You Live

I live where you live.

There are pretty tree-lined streets. The asphalt is even and unpockmarked, unlike my adolescent skin which is currently sprouting a massive zit, not to mention my other scars...the ones you can't see. The ones that come of living the cliché of a tortured adolescence.

A little river, a brook really, bisects the town-cum-city. The houses are ordered into architecturally-controlled districts. Some have only cedar-shingled roofs. Some are gated communities. None of the colours is offensive to the eye or brighter than beige.

Every house has a fence.

The streets are named, not numbered, which makes it difficult to get around this pretty, pretty place.

We live in the bird section. Birdwood. I'd like to say we live on Cuckoo Street, but that would be lying. There's no such street. We reside at 22 Oriole Crescent. In a modest house, unlike our neighbours to the north and east. Who live in wannabe mansions. A zillion windows. Interior designer furniture. Two furnaces each to heat their humungous homes. And of course, their three-car garages.

Not that I'm jealous or anything.

I go to one of three high schools in this boring borough. W. E. Whitleigh. Named after a dead white guy.

Chance to Dance for You

Oh, I should mention that our affluent suburb is mostly made up of white people. Despite the Métis who first settled here. After the Cree, of course, who first lived near the little river in our valley for who knows how many hundreds of years. But no one cares about that now. This community has been nicely sanitized of all that messiness. Well, almost. And most of its colour.

And in the little town-city that wishes it were a big city are all the shops and restaurants you'd find anywhere else in North America. A tidy strip runs straight through Turid Park, dividing it east and west. And on the tidy strip is the Canadian Tire, the A&W, the mighty golden arches, the Mr. Lube, the Shell and Esso and Petrocan, all vying for your dollar to fill up any one of your two cars and one SUV so we can all go merrily along raising the global temperature.

I'm in the environmental/human rights club at school. It's about the only thing I do at school. Besides dance, that is.

Despite its glossy surface, there's a dark underside to this small-town city, as if you didn't already know that. A shadow cast by the nice white folks who live here. This place, like yours, has lots of secrets.

For instance, Mrs. Theodore, my Spanish teacher, is married to a nice man who sells cars for a living. He owns the dealership. I like Spanish. But not the way she teaches it. Her nice husband is having quite an affair with one of his much younger employees. We all know her. She graduated from Whitleigh three summers ago. Mrs. Theodore holds up her head and goes on conjugating irregular verbs. I guess that's the sacrifice you make for the three-car garage, the nice neighbourhood and every kitchen appliance you could ever wish for.

My drama teacher, and I do like her, is also having an affair. With a brown man. I think Mrs. Theodore caught them coming

out of the darkened drama room one night after school. Nowadays Ms. Sbuda doesn't look very happy. When she smiles her eyes don't get involved. She's still a very good teacher—I love drama—but she's somewhere else. Guess that's what happens when you're up to shenanigans with a brown man in a white school after hours.

I have it on good authority that the handsome music teacher, Mr. Ritz, was in rehab over the summer. Good thing, too. I ran into him after dance rehearsal last spring reeking of weed. Him not me. Then rumours were flying that he had a cold. One of those that never end. The kind where you're always sniffing. Then he was missing a lot of school. And then one day he was just gone. The final band concert was cancelled. But he's back now. I guess over the summer he also found his lord and saviour. He runs the Christian reading club. I hear that before every band concert there's a group prayer. Good thing there are no Muslims or Jews or Buddhists in the band, or in our school for that matter.

And I guess that over the summer Miss Dayton lost her baby. Poor thing. Apparently, she'll be rejoining us in term two. Until then she's on stress leave. I guess she has until January 7th to patch her life back together. Good to know that she found out about Paxil.

I also know for a fact, and so do you if you read the papers, that Mrs. Wilson's husband embezzled money from the securities company he works for. Used to work for. I rode my bike past their beautiful house, now empty and for sale. She's living with her sister, these days. He's gone to jail. Saw the news photo of him in a prison-issue jumpsuit. Sadly though, orange was never his colour. Mrs. Wilson teaches physics. Not my favourite class, though I'm good at physics, and it's the one I share with Jess Campeau.

Jess Campeau, the most gorgeous and popular guy in the school. On the football team. The town hockey star.

Chance to Dance for You

Jess Campeau, the pig. Who smears me and my friends—especially my best friend, Tilly—with his filthy mouth every chance he gets.

Jess Campeau.

But I digress.

Did I mention that my principal, okay, ex-principal, the ineffectual and almost invisible Mr. Dibson, is gay? He left principalship for real estate and fell madly in love with a fellow broker. Then he left his wife. And kids. And heterosexuality far behind. Somebody spray-painted *Mr. Dibson is a fudge-packer* all over the back bricks of the school. I have a strong hunch who did it. Now we have a new principal, Mr. Kato, who drags his fat ass around the hallways picking out his favourites and picking on the misfits. Guess which category I fall into? I miss Mr. Dibson.

Which brings me to my point. In a nice white suburb, in a nice white neighbourhood, in a nice white school, I just don't fit. I am incongruent. I guess such places are good for guys who are hockey players (not mentioning any names) or girls like Tilly who love soccer. But where does a kid like me fit in?

Kids like me are prey. Especially for kids like Jess Campeau. For example.

I was in the gym locker room. Changing. Did I mention that I loathe and detest the gym change room? It's been the site of much derision and humiliation. So I loitered in the can, waiting until everyone else had changed and left the room. Then I went to my locker and was fiddling nervously with the lock. Guess who sneaked up behind me? He should have been long gone to his next class by then. He was definitely violating my boundaries. Not that he cared or even knew about those.

Jess Campeau spun me around. Pressed me into the lockers with his ripped torso. I could hardly breathe. And then he kissed

Gail Sidonie Sobat

me on the mouth. I mean really kissed me. Deeply. And I confess that I melted and kissed him back. Then he hissed in my ear.

“If you tell anyone, ANYONE, I will rip off your balls and stuff them in your mouth!”

How romantic.

Then I watched as the love and the enemy of my life straightened up and strutted out of the guys’ change room.