

Luke

CINNAMON RAIN

My Favorite Place



A cave on Pebble Beach,
a bike ride from home,
where the sting of salt air
tears away the built-up wondering
of what to do —
on the last day of holidays,
about Casey,
with my life.
Tomorrow,
school will throw a cover
over the last six weeks
and pack it away.
I don't mind.
One more year
and I will be closer
to wherever I'm going.
And

I'll see Casey again.
When I say it like that, it sounds
like it's meant to be special,
and it will be,
except first day back,
by roll call,
I know it'll be like
we never had a holiday,
and I still won't know what's wrong.
And when the day is over,
she'll say, "See you tomorrow, Luke."
It's like nothing will ever change.

A Change

.....

Day two.

Science lesson one.

Mr. Chalmers — the new guy.

We line up at the door

like ducks ready to cross the road.

Fig Murphy stops swearing

when he notices the teacher.

“Right, you people.

I want you in alphabetical order,

and when you come into the room,

I will point out your seat.”

So we sit

in our allocated spots,

where we will stay

“for the remainder of the year,

unless I tell you otherwise.

Is that understood?”

“Yes, sir.”

(But not really.)

I sit between Imran and Jemma
at the back because
we look like we
can be trusted.

Bongo is in front of me —
third row back —
how long will that last?
Casey is at the front,
next to Fig Murphy.

“Perhaps, Mr. Murphy,
you might catch
some of her manners.”

From here

I can’t even catch her eye.

The Lesson



From the front of the lab,
Mr. C. drones on
about the study of fossils.
Bongo is making a peashooter.
He pulls the ink tube
from his pen,
tears scraps of paper
from his workbook,
chews them like gum,
and lines them up
under his pencil case.
Mr. C. writes on the board.
We copy into our books —
except Bongo.
He loads his peashooter,
takes aim,
and hits Casey in the head.

Again.
And again.
But she doesn't feel it
because her hair is so lush.
When the bell rings,
Casey's long black curls
are decorated
like a Christmas tree,
Bongo's page is empty,
and I know all
about paleontology
and peashooting.

Casey



Eight years I've known Casey.

It started with a grin
that reached across the room
the day she joined our class.

I remember

her pencil case clutched in her lap,
fingernails disappearing into red vinyl.

Her oh-so-new black shoes,
feet pigeon-toed under the desk.

And peeking out
from her jacket's bulging pocket,
an orange, fat and round.

"She's new," said Mrs. Edmunds.

"Please look after her."

And I have.

As much as I can.

As much as she lets me.

Some days she laughs and jokes
like one of us,
but other times
she's as close as Mars.
She's often late for school,
and I lend her my workbooks
to help her catch up.
She forgets to bring lunch
at least once a week,
so I offer her mine.
After school and on weekends,
she's "too busy" to hang.
Mostly, I can get her to smile.
But some days
I just can't win.

Nicknames



“Lead the class in, Mother Duck,”

says Mr. C. to Seb.

Murmurs and smirks:

“Mother Duck.”

“Ha-ha-ha.”

And Seb turns pink.

“An experiment—” says Mr. C.

“Yes!” says the class.

“—In observation,” says Mr. C.

We examine fossils and

are told to write down

our observations

so we can classify

each species.

“Continue to observe,”

says Mr. C.,

and he leaves the room.

I observe
an unclassified species:
Bongo.
Using his compass,
he bores a hole
in the side of the cap
of his pen.
He pulls out the ink tube,
chews a three-centimeter piece
off the end,
then jams that
into the hole.
He hooks up his weapon
to the tap at his workbench
and fires away —
an arc of water
streaming
from one side of the room
to the other.
I yell, “Duck!” and
Seb stands,
placing himself

in the line of fire.

He's answered to it.

That's settled:

it must

be his name.

Great Luck

.....

Duck,
under Bongo's bombardment,
flees to Mr. C.'s bench,
rips a paper towel
from the dispenser,
shoves it under the tap,
and flings
the wad
at Bongo:
direct hit to the chest.
Bongo stops spraying.
Everyone peers
from their hiding spots
behind benches and stools
as he peels
the glob
from his shirt

and pelts it at Duck,
who
again
doesn't.
It splatters
across his scalp
like duck poo.
The door flies open.
Mr. C. strides in,
points at Bongo, and says,
“You’re to sit
where I can always see you.
Swap seats with Casey.”

Winning



Jemma, Duck, and Bongo
cheer from the sidelines.
I've scored a six
against Mersey High,
the private college of cricket elites
who kick our butts
every season.
I scan the boundary
of Kendall Oval.
Casey sits at the north end,
reading.
When Mersey takes up bat,
I bowl like a demon,
take three wickets in all.
Each time
I look north
and see Casey

still reading.
We lose,
as usual,
and pack up.
“Good game.”
“Well done.”
Pats on the back,
handshakes all round.
Seared by the sun,
we walk back to school,
line up for the bus home.
Casey, who walks,
smiles on her way past
and says,
“Great bowling, Luke.”

Great Bowling

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February heat—
the worst kind—
slides sweat down our bodies,
and we bake like chickens
under the E Block stairs,
where Year Ten hangs.
Duck slurps from the bubbler.
Bongo creeps up behind,
jams his finger over the spout,
sprays Duck up the nose.
Duck shoots back,
and Bongo retreats.
Soon, they both man a bubbler,
spray each other until soaked,
then open fire
on the rest of us.
We scatter,

take up positions behind the seats,
and defend ourselves,
drink bottles squirting
until they run dry.
Time for the big guns:
grenades appear from schoolbags.
We hurl them across the quad
in a constant splatter
of apples,
tangerines,
and oranges
that rarely find their target.
I polish an apple
(on my crotch),
and Casey cracks up.
Then I bowl a flipper
that ricochets off a bubbler,
spins over the railing,
and lands on the top stair
at the foot
of our principal.

Our Principal

.....

Mr. Tink,

aka Stink,

says we

“can not be trusted . . .

are all equally to blame . . .

need to learn about consequences.”

So he cancels our first field trip.

We protest:

send him a letter,

put a petition together,

demand he reconsider,

and get no response.

Bongo buttonholes him

in the car park,

only to be told,

“The matter is closed.”

Bongo begs,

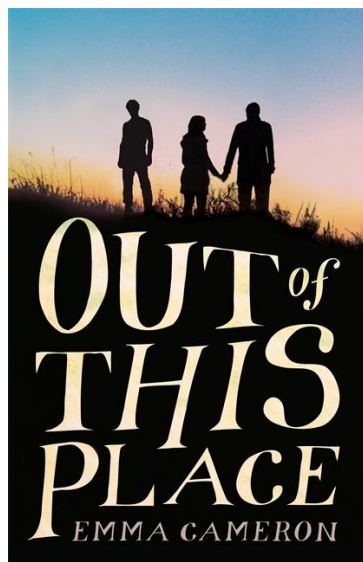
pleads,
and whines,
then launches into a tirade
of abuse.

Like that's gonna do it.

Stink stalks off
and leaves Bongo
staring at the ground
in the car park.

Out of this Place

Emma Cameron



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