

## My Friend Jane

It was the first day of grade three, which was also the first day I met my friend Jane. She had just moved onto the farm next to ours with her mother, bringing their cows and home wrecking, or so I overheard my mother say. I stood, two feet planted on the dirt road waiting at the bus stop. Which was coincidentally placed between our properties. That's when she came running atop the wooden fence of long logs held by rusted wires towards me. Her curly mess of bleached blonde hair was knotted on top of her head, and her clothing, was obviously not picked out by her mother. She jumped down off the fence next to me, creating a cloud of dust at her feet.

"Hi there, I'm Jane," she said throwing her arms around me. Not knowing how to react, I just stood there keeping my gaze towards the bus, slowly making it's way.

"Tom," I blurted out, when she finally loosened me from her arms.

"What's your favourite food? Favourite animal? Tell me a secret?" She demanded, stepping in front of me to block the view of the bus.

"Uh,"

"We're friends now Tom! And friends tell each other everything!" There it was. Friends.

"Mothers pot roast with a tall glass of two percent milk, my old dog Sadie, and I don't have a secret..." I told her. The bus pulled up and she smiled her toothy smile as we both boarded.

For the next four years of elementary school I would talk with my friend Jane every morning at the bus stop. She had fit in at school like a glove, making more and more friends, as I read more and more books. Each morning before the bus came to take her away from me, we'd

share our secrets, like the time her mother had yelled at her for sleeping with the horses. So, that night she snuck out of the house, to sleep with the horses again.

The summer of 2002 came and went. But something must've happened during the summer, for when we met up at the bus stop the first day of grade seven, it wasn't my friend Jane. This Jane wore a mini skirt and makeup covering the true beauty of her face. She no longer ran the length of the fence, instead she blew massive bubbles of Hubba Bubba.

"Morning stranger," I laughed as I tried to catch her eyes.

She looked at me, smiled a fake smile, then leaned against the wooden fence.

"How was your summer," I tried.

"Well Tom," she breathed, "I swam at the beach, went to Toronto with my mom and landed myself a high schooler,"

A rush of blood left my face.

"Is he nice?"

"The nicest! You'd love him," she smiled at her feet, "He can drive, and when he kisses me..."

"Kisses you?"

"It's just a kiss Tom."

"Do you love him?"

"You're not my father, Tom," she shot me a look, then slowly glanced towards the oncoming bus.

"No. I'm not. I'm your friend,"

"Then act like one."

That was the last time, for a very long time, that I talked to my friend Jane. From that day on, the only things I heard from her, was through the grapevine of middle school gossip. Every morning it seemed that her mini skirt got shorter, her make up got heavier and her ability to ignore me, grew stronger. I found out the high schooler she was dating, Ryan Manson, was in the eleventh grade and a total “ladies man”. What would an eleventh grader want with a seventh grader? “*Nothing good*”, is what my mother said. Throughout the two years of middle school I had learned through passed notes, and the message vandals left on desks, that he had cheated on her, that she had smoked a cigarette and that she was no longer a virgin. But worst of all, she was hopelessly in love with him. I didn’t understand how someone so perfect, so sincere, could be so in love with someone who was the opposite of her. She walked down the hall passing me, leaving me to wonder, ‘Where was my friend Jane?’

It was finally the first day of high school. I spent the summer milking cows, mowing lawns and looking out my window watching Ryan Manson, pick my friend Jane up in his beat-up truck. That morning at the bus stop, she slowly and sheepishly made her way towards me. I watched her until she stumbled over herself and fell face first into dirt and gravel.

“Shit!” she said as she tried to get up.

I ran towards her, gripping each of her arms to put her on her feet. The last time I felt the warmth of her skin was grade six. She reeked of alcohol and cigarettes.

“Are you okay?” I asked her, still holding on to her, in fear she may collapse again.

She laughed and rolled her head around to look me in the eyes.

“Are, are... You... Okay?” she said maintaining eye contact.

“Maybe I should take you home,”

“No!” she said pushing my hands aside, and turning around to point a finger to my face,  
“I’m okay... okay?”

“Okay.” I assured her. She stood there, knees shaking, “Would you like to sit down?”

She laughed, “If you insist,”

We both sat down on the wild grass at the side of the road, and leaned our backs against the fence that wobbled with age.

“I’ve done a bad thing Tom,” she said dropping her head towards me.

I grabbed her hand, and interlocked our fingers.

“You’re not a bad person,”

“Oh, but I... I am,” tears concealed her eyes. She glanced up at me, “I killed it,”

My eyes continued to fall down to her weak fragile body, covered in her own tears. All I could do in that moment, was hold my friend Jane.

I graduated four years later, with my books, and no friends. I will never forget that feeling when I walked across that stage, to the satisfied clapping and Jane’s face looking up at me smiling. I went on to study literature in Toronto, and the only remembrance from home, were the phone calls once a week from my parents. They updated me on their health and the cows. But not one word of Jane. As much as I tried to forget her, it was very hard. Every time I saw a head of bleach blonde hair on the subway, my spirits raised in hopes of it being her. I met other girls, but none ever compared to my friend Jane.

“Who is the lucky girl at home?” my roommate asked me one day.

“Pardon?”

“C’mon, man. You’re the only male on campus not chasing skirts,”

I laughed.

“You’re either gay, or she was a doozy,”

I wanted to know where she ended up. Was she married? Did she still live next door? Was she thinking about me?

It was a warm spring day when I stepped off the GO train from Toronto to Roseneath. The warmth of country hit my skin, the smell of sweet corn filled my nose and the only thing filling my mind was my friend Jane. My mother and father’s hugs surrounded me with comfort, as they assured me a pot roast dinner was waiting for me at home. The car rolled past her house, and I stuck my head out of the window. ‘Jane? Where are you?’. After my stomach was filled, and my parent’s were satisfied with the number of stories I had told them, I returned to my room. While slowly filling my empty drawers with my clothes, I saw her, dancing a top the wooden fence held by rusted wires. I stopped, and ran as fast as I could. Step over step, I was now, standing in front of my friend Jane. She jumped down off the fence, creating a cloud of dust at her feet. A tangled mess of bleach blonde hair on top of her head, and clothes that I was now sure were not picked out by her mother.

“Tom,” her voice filled my body.

“Jane,” I smiled.

We walked closer and closer together, until our arms were wrapped around each other.

“Hi,” she giggled. She no longer smelt of cigarettes, or beer and the makeup no longer caked her face. She looked more beautiful than the day I first met her.

“Hello.”

I lowered a piece of paper and looked out into a crowd of one hundred and fifty, of our closest friends and family, looking up at me. I slowly began to turn my head to face my beautiful bride.

“Now, I bet all of you are wondering, what happened next?” I bellowed out, looking straight at her. The audience roared into laughter, “Long story short,” I smiled, “I fell in love with my friend Jane.”

Word Count : 1496