



ENGLISH-SPEAKING UNION

Queensland Branch

PROMOTING INTERNATIONAL UNDERSTANDING & HUMAN ACHIEVEMENT THROUGH ENGLISH

THE ESU ROLY SUSSEX SHORT STORY COMPETITION

2023

Highly Commended in the Secondary Schools Division

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The Tangible World

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Every night I talk to him. The screen's fluorescence adheres to my face, and nothing can separate me from the screen and the one I hold so dear. The screen acts as a gateway to a world where distance and time lose their significance, where the boundaries of reality blur and two souls can intertwine effortlessly. I have all his pictures. He sent them to me. Falling effortlessly, his long blond hair cascades down his shoulders, his dreamy blue eyes pull me out from the shore into mysterious depths, and his body carved like a white marble statue leaves me breathless with his perfection. As I sit in the dimly lit room, my face is illuminated by the nostalgic image of the Windows XP hills, as I await him to come online. Studying him is all I do. I manage to watch his moves, ensuring he will never leave me. The screen becomes our meeting ground, a space where our souls merge and dance in harmony, transcending the constraints of the tangible world. He comes online; I eagerly await.

As the alert fills my screen, the familiar MSN messenger logo flashes, accompanied by his profile picture – a playful rubber duck that has become my favourite image. Months have passed since we first initiated a conversation, delving into each other's lives, dreams and deepest thoughts. Our bond grows stronger with each passing day, growing like a cosmic constellation. His tender gestures and caring words make me feel cherished, loved and beautiful. He isn't like other men that I've met, he's different. He's perfect, he's mine.

Yet, amid this joy and comfort we find in our online interactions, a secret weighs heavily on my conscience. It's time. Time for me to meet him in person. Time for us to bridge the gap between our digital personas and the real world. Time for him to see who I truly am and stop being an imitation. But there's one thing he doesn't know. I'm not who I've claimed to be all along. Behind the carefully crafted words and the meticulously constructed identity, I have concealed my true self; though, he's the first I'm ready to be truthful to, the only one who's seen me for who I am and not who I was. He knows me as Sara: Age 22, Interests – sports, video games and hanging with friends. My profile picture: a snake. I guess I like snakes. Their scales and length. The way they can betray

one another. The way they watch their prey, then sporadically attack, devouring their victim whole.

MSN Chat Log [27/04/2010 – 10:32 am]

James: I can't believe it's already been a month since we started talking. It feels like I've known you my whole life.

Sara: I know, right?

James: But seriously, I'm so grateful we found each other. Speaking of which, Sara, I think it's time you flew to Melbourne to meet me. It's about time we turn this virtual love story into a reality.

An invitation to see him. Intriguing, indeed. Although he doesn't possess the knowledge of my true identity, it's a peculiar paradox that I often find myself grappling with. There are days when even I struggle to define my essence, lost amid the intricate labyrinth of my thoughts and emotions. And yet, it is precisely this enigmatic nature of our connection that intensifies my longing for him. However, I don't know if it's because of the look on his face, or the unspeakable longing for the taste of it.

I find myself in a frenzy, desperately scrolling through the myriad of flight options that illuminate my screen. The list seems endless, displaying a cascade of one-way tickets. My eyes dart back and forth, analysing each option in hopes of finding the perfect connection to be by his side. The destinations blur together as I focus solely on the airlines, departure times, and fares. Every detail matters, as I tirelessly compare and contrast the options. Time slips away, but I persist, determined to secure a ticket that will bring me closer to him. Jetstar. \$131 one way. This afternoon ... Perfect. I rush to send him my response that I've bought the ticket and that I'm coming to see him.

James: I can't believe you're flying from Sydney to here this afternoon! I've thought about our future, you and I, what we will be when you get here.

The room brims with anticipation, as I carefully choose garments that will accompany me on this journey. Each piece of clothing is meticulously folded and finds

its place in the suitcase, creating a tapestry of colours and textures for this city of four seasons. From the cosy warmth of sweaters that whisper promises of chilly evenings to the light and breezy jumpsuit, I select an array of outfits tailored to every possible occasion. In a corner of the room, a vibrant array of presents beckons to be wrapped. His presents. From me. With a sense of urgency, I dart into the bathroom, my hands reaching out to gather all the essentials. I snatch my trusted toothbrush, its bristles poised to bring a sparkling freshness to my smile, the familiar bottles of shampoo and conditioner ready to cleanse and nourish my hair. My gaze lands on the razor, waiting to rid my face of any hint of stubble. Its sharp blade promises a clean and smooth finish. As I grasp the bottle of beard oil, its earthy scent wafts through the air. I have everything. I'm ready to leave.

In the dimly lit confines of the Uber, I find myself surrendering to the mesmerising dance of shadows playing on the windows. The soft hum of the engine creates a hypnotic backdrop, amplifying the surrealism of my emotions. It's as if I'm traversing the threshold between reality and a dream, teetering on the edge of a precipice where desires and fears blend into an enigmatic tapestry. My heart flutters like a delicate butterfly trapped in a gilded cage, yearning for freedom, yet fearing the consequences of unshackling my desires. The boy of my dreams, his image etched in my mind like a masterpiece, possesses a magnetic allure that draws me irresistibly closer. But lurking within the depths of my soul, a dark, voracious creature seeks to feed on vulnerability, threatening to devour my innocence and dreams. In my surreal journey, the cityscape outside transforms into a wonderland. Neon lights cast prismatic hues on the urban landscape, and the buildings appear like towering sentinels, silently witnessing the battle between my aspirations and apprehensions. The sensation of displacement makes me feel like an otherworldly voyager navigating through a cosmic labyrinth. As the driver continues his amiable chatter, I immerse myself in his innocent words, seeking refuge from the tempest raging within. The veil of paranoia remains relentless, distorting every spoken sentence into a cryptic riddle, concealing hidden meanings that may not even exist. My heart races, each beat echoing like a haunting melody that demands attention, as I desperately try to decipher the enigma of my emotions. Fingers tapping gently on the window, I trace patterns that mirror the chaotic dance of thoughts inside my mind.

The city outside is both inviting and forbidding. The sights blur as my mind races, entangling itself in a web of possibilities, uncertainties and whimsical notions. In the midst of this emotional maelstrom, I catch fleeting glimpses of the driver's reflection in the rear-view mirror. His serene countenance offers a sharp contrast to the turmoil enveloping my soul. I wonder if he perceives the labyrinthine turmoil lurking beneath

the facade of my smile. Perhaps, like the city lights, my true self remains veiled and distant, elusive to the outside world. Amid this struggle, a silent plea emerges from the depths of my consciousness. A desperate desire to embrace vulnerability, to surrender to the vulnerability of connection and love, hoping that it will be a guiding light in the pervasive darkness. The boy of my dreams embodies the promise of a love so profound that it could heal the scars of past doubts and traumas, transcending the sinister pull of my inner turmoil. As the Uber approaches the airport, my heart tightens like a knot, realising that this symbolic journey is just beginning. I clasp my hands tighter, clinging to the reality slipping through my fingers. A part of me yearns for this surreal odyssey to continue, a chance to unravel the complexities of my emotions in the safety of this confined space. The Uber comes to a stop, and the driver bids me farewell with a warm smile, completely unaware of the silent battle that unfolded during this fleeting encounter. With a deep breath, I step out of the car, my feet grounding me in this concrete reality once again.

The airport buzzes with activity, a symphony of bustling travellers and echoing announcements; yet, in my head, a silent focus takes hold. The multitude of distractions fades into the background as my attention narrows to a single task at hand. The rhythmic beeping of the metal detector, and the diligent scrutiny of the security personnel, all contribute to the intensity of the moment. A surge of relief washes over me as I successfully pass through the checkpoint, knowing that each step brings me closer to my destination. The boarding announcement reverberates through the terminal, and I join the queue, feeling the rush of adrenaline coursing through my veins. The plane awaits, a vessel of possibilities, ready to carry me towards my rendezvous with destiny. As I step onto the plane, my heart quickens its pace, mirroring the anticipation that thrums within me. I find my seat, settle in and fasten my seatbelt, my palms are slightly sweaty, a sign of the excitement that swirls around me. The plane taxis along the runway, gaining speed, and then lifts off, defying gravity. The rush of adrenaline, the anticipation of what lies ahead makes me enthusiastic for more. In the heat of the moment, my body submits to the fatigue, and I find myself drifting into a deep sleep. A buzz hits my pocket.

James: I'll be free tonight! Meet me at my place, 46 William St, Mount Waverley. I'll see you soon.

As the plane smoothly touches down, I feel a sense of satisfaction knowing that the journey has been completed without a hitch. I gather my belongings and step off the aircraft, my anticipation reaching new heights with each passing moment. The thrill of being reunited with him fills my heart, creating an eager impatience to reach Mount Waverley and feel his warm embrace. Outside the airport, I hail a taxi with a smile, sharing my destination with the driver, "I'm off to Mount Waverley, please." The cityscape whizzes past the window as we embark on the journey towards our reunion. As the cityscape gradually transforms, skyscrapers give way to greenery and the urban cacophony softens into a gentle buzz. The scenery outside becomes a metaphor for my internal journey – the transition from the known to the unknown. I can feel the tug of excitement and trepidation as I move closer to the place that beckons me, a place where new beginnings await.

Venturing through a labyrinth of streets, all seeming indistinguishably alike, I reach his elusive address. Guided by ethereal beams of light, my trepidation grows. Doubts tug at my conscience, fearing a repetition of past mistakes. I can't do this again, especially not to him. Hesitant, I approach his door, my heart pounding with anticipation. Ringing the doorbell resonates through the stillness. Finally, the door creaks open, revealing a dimly lit figure. Uncertainty engulfs me as the question echoes, "Who are you?" In that instant, I know this encounter is more than a task, it is going to be a challenge. A challenge to not be a snake, to not devour my victim whole, to not let me do it again.