

Defining Moments

“Ladies and Gentlemen, Luc Varden!”

There is applause as Luc finds his seat.

Interviewer: “Hello, Luc it’s great to have you tonight, how are you?”

Luc: “Oh, I’m very well thank you. Yourself?”

Interviewer: “Me? Fantastic!”

The greeting is warm and Luc wears a genuine smile on his face.

Interviewer: “So, let’s get right to it shall we? Luc, tell me...”

Glasgow, 2009

It is the middle of the summer holidays and the days and weeks have melted into one another. Today is particularly hot and the ‘grey city’ has been transformed. There are blue skies above and happy people below. Fathers and sons parade the streets topless, the women are wearing sundresses and the distant sound of music seems to ring out in every corner of the city.

Luc sits by the window of flat 3b and watches as the children below ride laps around the block, occasionally there is a shout and someone is splashed by a water-balloon. Cars drive by and they too, are hit with water-balloons and the kids run off shrieking with laughter. Luc sits in the windowsill and watches. Many of the kids are of similar age and almost all of them familiar faces from around the street. He thinks briefly of joining them before dismissing the thought – his dad would be home soon anyway. His father had promised to take him to the park after work. It was now 16:00 and he was expected at any moment.

Luc perked up. After spending a full day bored and hot inside the flat, he was desperate to get outside. It wasn’t that he was particularly excited to spend the day with his father; he simply adored the park. The plains of grass, the dense trees and oh, the long winding river. On a summer’s day like today he knew the river would be low and he could cross it barefoot, feeling the breeze that drifted downstream as he did so.

In the park on the other side of the river, through a hedge and under a wire he knew he would find his favourite place. A wide open expanse of grass hidden on all sides by shrubbery and trees. The grass itself is unkempt and wild, growing up beyond his ankles and full of flowers and buds. In the northern end of the plain there is a large willow tree with a number of low strung branches. Luc liked to hoist himself up and climb as high as fear permitted him to, always pushing his boundary one step further, and one branch higher. Usually after a day of exploring and climbing Luc would return to his father where he slept by the river and the pair would make their way home in his van. These were pleasant days.

As Luc lost himself in a daydream of trees and sunshine the clock ticked forwards. By the time it was 16:30 Luc took notice of the time and the fact that his father was not yet home. He took out his drawing pad and pencils to busy himself.

By 17:05 there was still no sign of his father. Luc was beginning to grow anxious, he wanted to get out and breathe the fresh air. The laughter below had stopped and the kids outside had been called in for dinner.

At 17:40 Luc toyed with the idea of leaving for the park without his father. The sun would set in a few hours and the thought of letting another day go to waste was unbearable. He picked up the landline to ring his friend Mark from school, before placing it back down again – he remembered Mark's mum and dad had taken him on holiday to Spain. He then tried to call Nathan but only got as far as the 0141 and couldn't remember the remaining digits.

Feeling a little bit downhearted and suddenly very conscious of the distance between the park and where he lived, Luc sat by the windowsill again and decided to wait for the sight of his dad's white van.

At 18:00 he found himself pacing the length of the flat, his head boiling with both anger towards his father and the frustration of being cooped up inside all day. He wanted to leave. He wanted to prove to himself that he could. He just didn't know how the hell he would get there.

That's when Luc looked down and saw across the street; the collection of bicycles left littered outside the entrance to the close. Yes! There was his ticket! He could borrow one of the boy's bikes, cycle to the park in no time, climb his trees and lie in his grass and be back before the sun had even gone down! And if his dad gave him into trouble? He could worry about that later.

He tipped out his schoolbag and threw inside it a banana, a jumper, his Swiss Army Knife (just incase), a fairly flat football and a bottle of water. He then left the flat after leaving his father a little note that read; "Gone to the park". He ran down the stairs and out of the close and onto the street. Slowing his pace as he approached the bikes, he picked out the red one lying closest to him and in a fairly effortless move; stood it on its wheels, jumped on and rode away.

The bike was a far too big for him and he certainly lacked experience but he rode fast to the end of the street with adrenaline doing most of the work. At the end of the street, across the main road he caught sight of the path that led him to discrepancy and away from the scene of the crime. Here lay his boundary for solo exploration. Never before had he crossed this invisible line drawn up by his father and never before had he felt such exhilaration as he sailed across the street and out of sight of his home.

He came out of the path onto an unfamiliar street that sported semi-detached houses with gardens in the front and clean cars in the driveways. There was the smell of barbeques in the air and hot concrete baking in the soon. Here the roads were smooth and Luc flew along them.

He made a series of lefts and rights, trying to find his way to the main road that he knew would take him to the direction of the park. He cycled for about half an hour in this way, turning left here and straight ahead there following nothing but instinct and half guesses. He didn't care for a direct route as he was having so much fun riding about on the bike, standing up on the pedals and feeling the wind in his hair. Every now and then he would smile at the families or couples that he passed by.

Eventually, however, he did grow tired, and upon reaching a hill jumped off to push the bike. When he reached the summit (this was a particularly steep hill) he sat down on a wall and laid the bike on

the ground. For the first time, a sense of panic began to creep in. He admitted to himself that he had no idea where the park was, where he was, or how to get home. He began thinking of his dad and how furious he would be when he got home and didn't find Luc there.

These worries were overridden by anger and spite, however. This was not the first time his dad had broken a promise and it wasn't going to be the last. He may as well learn to make his own way around, he thought.

As he was sitting there on the wall, staring out at the cars passing by, he heard a voice;

"You alright son? Are you lost?" Said a man. Luc glanced up at him and recognised him as one of the many people he had waved at.

Luc took a second before he answered, he didn't want to admit that he was in fact lost and, what if he knew his dad? What if he knew the bike was stolen?

"Where's your parents lad? Do they know you're out here?" Said the man.

Luc grew anxious and stuttered, before an excellent idea popped into his head.

"Yeah my dad's at the park. I'm meant to meet him there, do you know where it is?" Said Luc.

"Which park, Pollok Park?" asked the man.

Luc nodded his head and the man broke out into a smile;

"Awk you're only five minutes away, cmon I'll take you there," he said.

So, Luc eagerly followed him to the park with a new enthusiasm. It was still bright and the sun seemed to show no signs of fading. When they arrived and passed through the huge gates that read 'Pollok Country Park' Luc quickly thanked the man and sped off before he had a chance to say goodbye. Luc raced down the path, past the resident highland cattle that seemed to glow in the sun, through a wooded trail over bumps and past dog walkers and eventually found himself at the river. He followed it for a couple more minutes and found a low crossing point where he ditched the bike and, taking off his shoes and hitching up his jeans, crossed the river. On the other side the ground was wilder and the trails less travelled. He walked for a few minutes, cursing as he stung himself on nettles, before he found his hedge. He threw his backpack over and climbed through – being careful to avoid the barbed wire.

Once through, Luc took the football out of his bag and kicked it high into the air, running after it with a smile on his face. The evening sun broke into the field unfiltered and golden as Luc ran around kicking his ball, sharpening odd different sticks and lying about in the grass. This was his own personal garden, a haven untouched by anyone else and he had got himself there all on his own. He didn't need his dad, or his friends or anyone. Suddenly he felt very old and mature. Luc had discovered his independence and was relishing every moment of it. He spoke aloud to himself, confident in the privacy of the garden. Taking on the role of commentator, TV presenter and famed celebrity.

"Luc Varden running through with the ball, he takes it by one, two and What A Goal!"

"Ladies and gentlemen, I introduce to you Luc Varden!"

"How does it feel to be the youngest person to invent a new sport?"

These were wild daydreams and Luc was the star of all them.

When he tired of this he took to the tree and hoisted himself up. He climbed several branches and eventually reached his previous maximum height, it was a comfortable spot with a wide branch good for sitting, and rather high from the ground. Above him, however, there was a branch that broke out past the leaves and split into a long Y-shape at the end. Luc thought that if he were to climb right out to the end he would have a view over the whole park. So, with confidence flying through his bones, this is what he did.

Reaching higher than he had before, stretching himself further than before, Luc pulled himself up to the desired branch and shuffled his way to the end. His hypothesis was right; he could see right over the whole park – and not just the park. Beyond the mass of green he could see the houses and the streets that led him here. To his left he could see the motorway with the endless stream of cars which he followed with his eyes right until the city centre in the distance. From up in his tree he could see the buildings that stretched into the sky and the city laid out before him. All of it drenched in a reddish hue as the sun set somewhere far away.

Once again he was conscious of that strange new feeling of liberation and pride. Goosebumps rose on his arm as the breeze waved over him. He took a deep breath, looked the scene over once more, and climbed his way down.

After collecting his things and crossing the river, Luc's warm peace of mind was suddenly replaced by the sensation of his stomach hitting the floor. The bike was gone. Shit – someone had stolen his stolen bike.

Who steals a bike? Who leaves a bike lying around in the first place? As he searched the surrounding area he remembered that no one had seen him take the bike in the first place. Or had they? He could possibly escape punishment, but how was he to get home? The image of the boy discovering the loss of his most likely prized possession brought a wave of shame and guilt and then fear. The boy was older, he would probably batter him. Then his dad would make him pay for it. Oh god what a terrible mistake, he thought. Was it worth it?

He debated this in his head whilst walking to the exit of the park, with the last of the remaining light fading. Ahead there was a glimmer in the dark; two policemen and their reflective vests. Then, his stomach dropped once more. There, standing with the policemen, in blue jeans, white t-shirt and a bottle of beer in hand; was his father.

"Where the *fuck* have you been?" his father shouted.

Interviewer: "So Luc, in your work, you often talk about 'shattering the dream'. What does this mean to you?"

Luc smiles.

Luc: "For me, to shatter the dream is to take your most sought after ambition or hope, pursue it, achieve it and then realise that perhaps it is not everything you ever wanted it to be."

Interviewer: "Can you give me an example?"

Luc thinks for a moment.

Luc: *“Well this I guess. I have spent a lot of time in low places, but I always had an unwavering assurance that at some point, I would achieve success. I would be invited to talk shows, and shown love and listened to. And that for me, was happiness. I thought that once I achieved that, all the other problems would go away. The reality is that they don’t.”*

Interviewer: *“So do you resent your success in a way?”*

Luc: *“Not at all no. For me it is essential to ‘shatter the dream’ because I have done and achieved so many things that I never would have. I think people are often scared to ‘shatter the dream’ not for fear of failing, but for fear that, like I said, it may not be the source of all happiness. For them it is easier to have their ‘dream’ whether it be; visiting Paris or writing a book, wrapped up in a nice ideal bubble far from their reach. They will invent excuses so as not to damage their dream, for if it lays untouched and unscathed then it remains perfect and – ideal.*

Interviewer: *“Ah, so you’re a realist then?”*

Luc: *“...well that’s the thing. I am an idealist in a way. You see, I spent so much time idealising the past that I began to live there, you know? I took fragmented memories of days gone by; of golden sunsets, leafy trees and childhood innocence, and stitched them together to create another unattainable dream. Which is nice, don’t get me wrong, but it became unhealthy. I stopped enjoying the present because I was so obsessed with this perfect memory that I had created. I convinced myself that my peak happiness was in the past, and of course, the more I aged, the further I slipped from it.”*

Interviewer: *“So you’re telling me your childhood wasn’t all rose tinted and merry?”*

Luc: *“Well it did have those moments yes, but like with everything, there were bad parts too.”*

Glasgow 2014 - Autumn

It was dark when Luc returned to the flat. All of the lights inside the house – except that which came from the noiseless television – were off. Luc found his father asleep in his armchair by the window. It was a sad scene. A lonely man alone in a lonely flat. Luc understood that now. His dad wasn’t a mean man, he was just lonely. From what Luc understood, his mother had left shortly after he was born - for reasons unknown. He had no recollection of her, there were no photos of her - Luc even toyed with the idea that she very well might be dead. What he did know, however, is that his dad; had stayed with him (perhaps reluctantly), refused to ever speak of his mother, and had an unalterable view that all French people were vile. Luc also understood that his mother may have been French.

People went to all sorts of lengths to assure him with their sympathy when he told them about his mother. But really, it didn’t bother him too much. He never knew her, therefore could not miss her. What would be worse, he thought, would be something like his friend Mark’s situation. His dad, whom he loved very much, had been diagnosed with lung cancer – and it didn’t look good. Mark would be saying goodbye to a man he knew and cared for all of his life, whereas Luc simply never said hello to his mother. Therefore, he didn’t feel worthy of the sympathy that came his way and any mention of her resulted in an awkward and uncomfortable attempt to change the conversation. So, like his father, Luc never spoke of his lost mother.

Luc had spent the day walking the streets in the city centre with his new (second-hand) camera. It was a dreadful day and there was not much to be seen but still Luc sat under shelter of trees and shop fronts snapping pictures of people that went by. He was a creative boy (now fifteen years old) and it seemed that every week he was picking up a new medium. He had found an old photography book when helping to clear out the neighbour's flat and became enthralled with the idea that someone could make a career out of taking photos. So, he had saved up for a few weeks and bought himself a fairly cheap digital camera. His photos weren't fantastic but he found it very peaceful to walk around snapping away. He liked to capture moments; a mother holding a child, two lovers walking hand in hand, or even a neighbour greeting another.

Some people found it strange though and he often received bewildered looks from passersby. His father, of course, was none too impressed – something which had become a recurring theme in their relationship. His dad insisted that Luc should be studying for exams instead of prancing about with cameras and sketchpads. It was not that his father discouraged art, he just didn't want his boy to be disappointed and – jobless. It was a natural worry from any parent but there was a fundamental lack of communication between the two – which of course led to mutual disagreement and unending strife.

Luc watched his father as he slept in his chair. The orange light from the window brought his face out of the dark and cast a shadow across the living room floor. Luc took a quick photo. The snap of the camera awoke his dad. He grumbled and shifted himself upright in his chair as Luc left the room.

"Luc you home?" said his dad.

"Aye" he called from the kitchen.

"Can you come here a minute, I want to talk to you about somethi.."

Luc cut him off. "Sorry dad I've got to run I'm meeting up with some pals."

"Right but when you're back we need to talk about your schoolwork alright?" He said, looking up at him from his chair.

"Aye. Okay cool, right see you later." Luc said, hurrying out the door leaving his dad alone in the darkness once again.

Luc stood on the other side of the door, wondering what to do now, almost ashamed of the lengths he would go to just to avoid a conversation with his father.

He pulled out his phone and called Mark, "alright mate what you up to?"

Luc went round to Mark's house and the two boys invited some more friends to join them. Included in the group were two girls; Alita and Grace, as well as their good friend Campbell. They had the house to themselves as Mark's mum was in the hospital for the night with her husband, this happened almost weekly at the moment. Luc admired the woman's love for Mark's dad. It was one that was bound beyond sickness, beyond hospital waiting times and stood the 18 years that they had been married. He often wondered what it would feel like to love someone like that, or to be loved in that way.

The small group of friends often met on odd nights like these. The pretence was that they wanted to keep Mark company – whereas Luc thought that everyone was in the need of company themselves. Like most friendships in the mid-teens this was one born through school. Luc and Mark had met Campbell on their first day of secondary school and immediately liked him. Alita had joined later and

effectively 'saved' Grace from a very judgmental group of girls. Over time and several glances in the corridor the trio of boys and duo of girls became aware of each other, and eventually friends. It was a funny mix in the sense that Grace was undeniably obsessed with Campbell, even though he was most definitely gay, and Luc and Mark both had fallen for Alita – of which she was aware of, there was no doubt.

Everything about Alita attracted Luc. She was the drummer in a punk band, she was brutally honest and she held a dear admiration for the simple things in life. On nights like these the group would meet up (Grace having acquired cans of cider from her big sister) and drink and listen to Mark's dad's records and smoke cigarettes out the back window.

Luc was very glad to have friends like these with open minds and honest personalities. Sometimes at the end of the night, half drunk, they would find themselves sitting in a circle having very serious discussions. Luc preferred to sit back and observe. He found it interesting to listen to everyone's point of view and, without judgement, connect the dots between their upbringing and their particular opinion. Almost always he could make the connection.

On this particular night Luc listened as the group talked about hopes and fears of the future. About their remaining school years and what might possibly happen afterwards. It seemed there was a split; as for Mark and Grace, they were terrified of the future and the unknown, whereas Alita and Campbell looked to the future with the positivity of one about to depart on an exciting adventure. Luc was making the connections between Mark's inherited sentimentality towards youth and Alita's dreams of independence when they asked him, what did he think of the future?

Now, Luc had an answer prepared. In fact, he had an answer prepared for almost all conversations that he deemed significant. On his long walks in the rain he would invent scenarios and situations and delve deep into daydreams of laborious dialogue. But what was his answer to such a broad question? Well, for this he would need several pages to transcribe his thoughts.

Luc didn't look to the future in detail for he found it terrifying. He tortured himself with the thought of time slugging forward and his present day falling into the hands of time. He hated the idea of his hair falling out and his back growing stiff, he hated the idea of lost ambitions and failed dreams. And he hated how the clear images in his head turned to ambiguous feelings of which he could only ever grasp a vague essence.

So, he didn't look to the future in detail, instead, he kept the future in a broad and obscure bubble that was to be meekly glanced at from time to time in casual optimism. Inside the bubble, this glass castle, were daydreams of artistic appreciation, musical success, intellectual recognition and a calm peace of mind. The bubble floated to the south of France and saw Luc reciting poetry to the sea, it drifted to a rooftop bar in Tokyo to find Luc playing piano for esteemed guests and then it meandered through windows and found its way to lengthy bookshelves where somewhere, in between the scholars and the authors, the fiction and the non fiction, was his name; Luc Varden, lying vertical on the blue cover of a book. In this bubble he was a pioneer, an intellectual revolutionary, a hero among men and one to inspire the generations. Someone to listen to.

Luc caught glimpses of these daydreams and was struck by a profound reassurance that somewhere in the future, despite his fears and grievances, his ideal life would ring true. So, it seemed that the ordinary fears of his friends; exam grades, and job applications were inconsequential, and he somehow sat above them in his 'profound' anxiety that he would be okay.

But how to explain this to four drunk friends who want a simple answer from the quiet one in the corner? How was he to tell them that he was both terrified and comforted by the uncertainty of the future?

“Fuck knows,” he said, “we’re here now though aren’t we?”

That seemed to satisfy them. But Luc glanced at Alita and briefly caught her eye before she turned her attention elsewhere. Unbeknownst to him, she had been watching Luc eagerly as he thought of his answer – hoping for a more detailed response than was given. She looked at Luc and wondered why her friend felt the need to hold back, what was he really thinking?

“Let’s take a photo!” exclaimed Grace. It seemed that all of the sentimental talk conjured up a mutual agreement to capture the moment. There were calls for Luc to set up his camera against the window sill as the young friends struck poses and brandished their cans. As Luc turned on his camera he was confronted by the very blue photograph of his dad, alone. He suddenly felt a wave of guilt for the man in the photo.

“Is that your dad?” asked Alita, leaning her head on his shoulder.

He told her yes.

“It’s a cool shot,” she told him, “very moody.”

The rest of the group shouted on him to hurry, and he turned to see them balancing atop one another. Luc feigned a smile, pressed the timer button, and stood with his friends.

While they waited for the flash, Luc stared into the black window where his reflection, taking on the appearance of his father, stared right back.

“Cheese!”

Alita squeezed his shoulder.

The camera flashed.

Interviewer: “Luc Varden! Thank you very much for joining us, I know how busy you have been lately.”

There are the typical greetings and initial small talk before the interview properly begins.

Luc has grown accustomed to the formalities of the interviews by now. His hair is thinner and he sits cross legged, with his hands poised on his knee. He is attentive and ready to answer the questions.

Interviewer: “You have spoken before about clichés and repetition. This isn’t something that worries your creative process, no?”

Luc: “No not at all. When I stopped worrying about being original, my work, as well as my mindset, changed for the better.”

Interviewer: “How so?”

Luc: *“Well, if you think about it. Currently there are near enough 8 Billion people alive. There are estimates that there has been 100 Billion ever to live. Some stories are bound to repeat themselves. And what’s the harm in that? Very often, there are reasons why something is popular. We’re all trying to grasp an understanding of life and so what if we use the same mediums to express that. We should focus on the point of view that is trying to come from it.”*

Interviewer: *“So you don’t care about being branded ‘unoriginal’?”*

Luc: *“I have long discarded the idea that I am anything but ordinary, as well as the notion that I will be the one to figure out the human purpose. But, I am part of the collective group that will discover it. And if I can contribute to that understanding, for this generation and the next - through my work – I am absolutely content with that.”*

There is applause.

Interviewer: *“Wise words Luc Varden, very wise. Now tell me, what inspired you to take up this career path?”*

He laughs.

Luc: *“Fear of the mundane, I think.”*

Somewhere in the Highlands, 2017

Scottish summers tend to lie in the more unpredictable region of meteorology. Sun is never guaranteed yet neither is the rain, one day can be beautiful whilst the next is miserable. It is a game of chance really, like the spin of a roulette wheel. It is well known, however, that when the sun does shine in Scotland, it is one of the most beautiful countries in the world, and as a result, there is nationwide celebration. Although, when the spirits are high, and they often are in the summer, not even the rain, wind or hail can dampen them.

Luc found himself at an arts festival in the north, near the highlands. The festival ground was situated in a valley with large roaming hills on three sides and a small blue loch at the other. The festival was a three day culmination of live music, spoken word poetry and theatre performances. There was food stalls, interactive arts and lots of people that looked like they would pay £5 for a latte. The crowd was definitely a lot posher and many of them older than those at the festivals he had been at near Strathallan or down in Leeds but he was a man of spontaneity and was happy to get a break from Glasgow, as well as his father.

He had acquired a free ticket for the night through Alita. She was playing the drums for an up-and-coming spoken word artist and had invited Luc along. Luc was a regular at most of her gigs (photographing and supporting) with the various bands she had been in and out of over the past few years. He had jumped at the mention of a free ticket at an expensive festival. He wasn’t particularly familiar with the jazz-folk scene, live poetry scene or any of the other ‘scenes’ going on at the festival but, as always, he was keen to explore. And, of course, he was thrilled by the idea of sharing a tent with Alita.

Luc had arrived early in the day with his small backpack. He met Alita and her friends who, by the looks of things hadn't yet slept. At 10am the sun was shining and the group decided to swim in the loch – a hangover cure. Luc wasn't hungover but he certainly felt cured by the water.

"Oh my god, it's fucking freezing." He called out laughing as the group stumbled over rocks towards the deep water.

They swam in the cold water for about half an hour. Throwing balls and ducking each other's heads. Alita swam close to Luc and they laughed and pushed each other around. Luc was very conscious of her body close to his, her wet brown hair as she flung it backwards and her wide smile that bore right into him. He enjoyed being with Alita, even if not in a romantic way. She was a comforting presence and every moment with her was refreshing. They exited the water and after drying themselves, threw some breakfast on their disposable barbecues.

While waiting for the food to cook Alita turned to Luc;

"How's your dad?"

"Ah you know... tired and angry about stuff." Replied Luc.

In the past year Luc's father, now a man of 56, decided that he had had enough as a tradesman and had taken up taxi-driving. Thirty five years of manual labour had begun to take its toll and he suffered from terrible back pains. The wage wasn't nearly as good but he was eager to make the transition.

"He seems to enjoy it," said Luc, "he gets to talk to new people every night."

Alita was a concerned soul, and knew that the only person in this man's life was his son. She was familiar with the statistics and she knew what could happen when a lonely old man has no one to talk to.

"Have you told him yet?" She asked.

Alita was referring to Luc's decision to move to France in the next year. He had received an offer for English courses from Aberdeen, Strathclyde and Glasgow University. News which seemed to bring a new lease of life to his dad. No longer would he have to worry about Luc's future. His son would have a university degree and although he would never admit it, he was proud of him. Luc had not yet had the heart to tell him that he would be declining the offers in search of a summer or two across France. The idea of studying English was one that did fascinate him but France was France with French girls and French food and French speaking people. He wanted to wake up every morning and swim in the sea as he had just done in that loch and speak a different language and feel the sun on his shoulders in the afternoon. His dad wouldn't understand and Luc avoided telling him for fear he would set off in another anxious state.

"No." Was the short answer.

Alita looked at him disapprovingly but left the matter there. It was a beautiful day and there was no need to spoil the present with worries of the future.

Throughout the day Luc was introduced to fascinating people and with his camera and "Press" lanyard that he had managed to acquire; he, Alita, and a few other of her friends did the rounds of the festival, watching an act here, wrangling a free drink there. It was a new experience for Luc and he loved every moment of it.

Late in the afternoon they were lying on the grass, half-drunk, watching a band perform to a small crowd. They had a few hours to kill before Alita and her friends were to perform. Luc lay with Alita's head next to his as he took quick photos of people walking by, people lying down and people performing. He was always fascinated by people and wanted to try capture the essence of the day. It was one of a carefree nature. By now the sun had receded behind a few clouds and there was a breeze that blew against the trees and open shirts. Luc pointed his camera at the sky and took photos of the clouds. A rain drop fell on his camera. He wiped it away. Then another. And another.

"Is it raining?" Someone asked.

As if answering to a call, there was a sudden downpour. The wind picked up and buckets came down. People jumped up from the ground and headed to the trees. Others stood under shelters of various stands. The bands, some of them, carried on performing.

Luc held his jacket above his head and Alita stood under it too. She was warm and he could smell her hair as she pressed in against him. They stood under the trees for about 20 minutes as people ran by; some screaming, most laughing, and many slipping in the mud. It was funny to watch the hysteria that the rain and wind could cause. It showed no signs of slackening and in the distance they could see tents in the campsite flying around in the wind and people trying desperately to keep them grounded. Which was all very funny until Alita and Luc realised, almost simultaneously, that they too were staying in a tent.

"Fuck! The tent!" They both yelled.

They ran hand in hand in the rain, both of them losing their footing as they ran up slopes and past people – laughing and shouting all the way. Despite the rain, people were still trying to enjoy themselves and most found the situation funny in its drama - even as their summer clothes were splattered with mud.

When Alita and Luc arrived at the campsite, the pair of them were already soaked through. They found their tent, and to great relief, discovered it to be very much intact. They climbed in and began removing their wet clothes. Alita didn't ask him to look away but he did so anyway.

On the bus to the festival he had thought about what he might say to Alita tonight. He had guiltily drawn up fantasies of 'forgetting' to bring his sleeping bag and having to share with her. He had slept with a few people before. Girls that he met at parties or on holiday but never had there been any connection that was anything more than physical. He was drawn to Alita in a very different way and as a result found himself dumbfounded on how to approach her.

There had been moments over the past few years that he had interpreted as romantic. A kiss on the cheek, a longing gaze or a squeeze on the shoulder. It seemed inevitable that they would end up together, but he often worried if he had waited too long to act? Had they surpassed the point of any romantic relationship and were now confined to one of only friendship. It was a friendship stronger than any he had had before and if he was truthful to himself he didn't know if a romantic relationship is what either of them wanted? Or needed?

He hadn't expected this moment to come so soon. In his head he had planned out the night of dancing and drinking, and eventually when they both returned to the tent at night, he would have enough drink in him to make a move. He was now very conscious of indecision. To act or not to act? To let the present continue or propel yourself into a different future? These moments are personified by the hand that lingers in the air, the greedy desire to stare into the eyes just a second

longer, the parting of the lips that ask the question. The momentary decision to act. It was both thrilling and terrifying.

They sat there in their underwear listening to the rain as it continued to pour down. Alita brought out her cheap bag of wine and lifting her blanket, beckoned Luc to join her. So much for the forgotten sleeping bag, he thought.

He climbed in beside her and lay with his hands by his side. Never before had he been so conscious of his hands but no matter where he put them, it seemed unnatural. He knew how the hand asks the question and what he had to do but how terrified he was! They lay there, centimeters apart, watching the rain as it poured hard against the tent. Luc was in distress and as the seconds passed the silence between them seemed to grow louder and the distance further. He debated furiously in his head; did he even want to have sex with her? It seemed strange and almost sinister to disrupt the boundary of friendship, but wasn't this how all the romantic stories started? Friends first lovers later? Well now was later and here they were, alone together, with only indecision separating them. Luc's mind flashed forward to the future – Alita and him, a married couple, reminiscing on their tender youth when the movement of a hand altered the course of their lives. That is all it takes, he thought. Is this how it starts?

But suddenly that seemed a terrible burden. Marriage, commitment? Fuck that I'm 18 years old, he thought. It seemed there was no way out. There was this beautiful woman lying next to him, skin and body and breath, yet he wanted to run out into the rain. What is wrong with me? He thought to himself.

He thought about what his future self would say, would he look back on this moment with regret of acting and ruining a friendship or not acting and risking losing something greater? What was worse?

If only she could make it clearer. Could she not initiate it and settle his mind for him? Instead she toyed with him – this was the bittersweet ambiguity of her very essence. Luc thought of the facts, she had invited him here – to share a tent, invited him beneath the blanket and into her warmth. But why didn't she make a move? Is this just what friends do?

Luc thought of his male friends and how they would tease him. Surely they never felt like this, did it come to them naturally? But then again, this wasn't a normal situation. He was aware of his beating heart and sweaty palms while she lay next to him so relaxed and calm, was she waiting for him to initiate? Yes. It must be. I am a man and she is a woman and this is what happens when a man and woman lie together. He had made his mind up. He was going to act.

But it was her that broke the silence.

"Are you okay?" she asked. "You seem tense." She said, sipping her wine.

He turned his head to face her.

"Alita, can I kiss you?"

She seemed surprised and then confused. Her eyes fell from his;

"Oh Luc, I'm sorry..."

"Yes or no." He said, interrupting her.

"No." She said.

Oh the relief! She had made his decision for him! The weight from his shoulders dropped and he stretched out, laughing. How easy was that! Why didn't it occur to him before? Just ask the question and all that worrying, all the beating about the bush is thrown away. Clear and simple, yes or no.

Now Alita looked even more confused. So he decided to explain.

He explained that while they had been lying there, he was tearing himself up with indecision. Trying to decipher clues when the obvious was staring him in the face. He apologised for making her feel uncomfortable and he explained that her friendship and support over the years was the dearest thing to him and that he was sorry that he had crossed that boundary and convinced himself of invisible expectations, simply because he was a man, and she a woman.

Alita understood wholly, accepted his apology and laughed at Luc working himself up in a state. Again, he apologised for "making things awkward" but she reassured him that that was far from the case. She appreciated his honesty and explained how she had lost a lot of good friends because they had tried to make a move on her and turn a friendship into something more. Some times she had pursued it but now she was certain that it was never a good idea. He was happy that she had said no, for that meant certainty, and they could resume as they were, Luc now with a clear head about where they stood with one another.

The rain thundered on. At about 18:30pm (just an hour before Alita was set to play) there was news that, due to the persistent weather, all outdoor performances were to be cancelled. Alita, her bandmates and the poet were all crushed. But they were young and full of life so instead of letting it ruin their night, they (Luc included) headed to the one remaining dance tent wrapped up in their cagoules and rain jackets. They drank and they danced all night. Outside, the continued to pour.

Every now and then Luc was overcome with a novel feeling of nostalgia as he danced. Here were hundreds of people, young and happy and moving, and it was truly a beautiful thing. He was happy to be part of it, this shared experience. He thought about how many people in the crowd he might encounter in the future. Perhaps they would share more experiences as time passed, and they too would pass by one another, unaware of their ties. He started to study the faces around him, perhaps they already knew one another? Perhaps they already had shared experience.

He moved his feet to the sound of the bass as he looked around at this crowd of not so strange-strangers and caught the eyes of Alita, studying him with mild wonder. What was that boy thinking about now? She thought to herself.

"What?" He asked, laughing.

She shook her head and smiled. "Nothing."

At the end of the night they crawled into their tent drunk and happy.

Luc lay on his back with her head next to his and said to himself;

"Aren't I lucky to be alive?"

Luc makes himself comfortable on the couch.

In this interview the live audience has been removed, as well as the cameras.

The interviewer draws out a notepad and reading glasses and studies his notes.

Interviewer: "It's good to see you again Luc, how are you today?"

Luc: "Very well thank you."

Interviewer: "Is there anything you would like to discuss?"

Luc: "I'm just happy to talk, fire away."

Interviewer: "Do you ever feel lonely Luc?"

Luc is taken aback, but with recovered grace, he responds.

Luc: "Oh personal! Okay well, yeah, of course I feel lonely."

The interviewer scribbles in his notes.

Luc: "It's natural isn't it? I do enjoy my own company, don't get me wrong. I do miss people from time to time. There are friends that you think would stick around forever but that's not always the case you know? So, sometimes you have to make do with your own thoughts and that's okay. I just wish I had the sense of mind to do this when I was younger."

Interviewer: "Do what Luc?"

Luc gestures around.

Luc: "Therapy."

Glasgow 2018

It was difficult to say goodbye to Alita.

They had seen each other only briefly over the 12 months since their night at the festival. Alita's band had been invited to support "Pletura" on tour for several months all over the UK. She would appear back in Glasgow briefly before she ran off again. Luc was proud of her, for making her way and doing what she wanted, but he would be lying if he said that he hadn't missed his friend.

Now, it was his turn to run off. He had a bus to London the following day which would take him to Dover, and then across the water and into France. There, he would make his way south with the money he had saved up for over two years now working in bars and restaurants. And once he was south? Who knows? He was aware that he could get a flight direct and save himself a lot of money and hassle, but as with everything, he wanted to take the scenic route.

He met with Alita in a posh coffee shop in the west end. She shared a whole barrage of fun stories from her tour, people she had met, situations she had found herself in etc. Upon asking what Luc and the rest of their friends had been up to, Luc confessed that he had fallen out of touch with most of them. Of course they rarely saw Mark after he had left for Aberdeen. Grace kicked about with her Uni crowd, and Campbell was working almost every day with his dad it seemed.

They then spoke of the many memories they had together. All of which seemed to belong to a distant timeline; one that is golden and fragile and only to be visited on special occasions. Luc was all too aware that careless recollection can lead to the spoiling of a memory.

They left the café and at the train station they hugged once more. Alita held him abreast and said;

“And Luc, when you find people out there don’t be afraid to open up to them.”

A lump emerged in his throat.

“Thank you Alita.” He said.

“You’re going to have the best time,” she said. “I’ll miss you.”

And with that she turned and walked away. Luc watched her for a moment. Her confident stride amidst the busy street, sun radiating off her as she went.

Luc took the subway to the city centre with Alita’s words ringing in his head. Yes it’s easy to say that. Open up to people. But how do you actually go about doing it? Luc’s mind was one of constant turmoil and doubt. Half the time he couldn’t explain to himself how he felt about something never mind real living people.

He arrived at Glasgow Central, taking his time to look around once more at the grand station. He observed the people that came through on this fine Saturday, there were families heading off to the shops, teenagers on their first trips into the city centre and men and women in suits looking very busy. In amongst the crowd of people he would occasionally spot a face that intrigued him, someone that he felt drawn to for whatever reason. Be it their hair, the way they sat or even a withdrawn gaze that signified that someone was lost deep in thought. He thought about the stories that each and every person in this train station had in their locker. The tales of adventure and loss and failures and successes. Everyone had their story and they all intertwined with one another. They intertwined with everyone else but him, Luc thought. Here there lay the potential in a few faces for friendship or romance or even conflict but it was not to be fulfilled because Luc was leaving tomorrow and none of these people would ever be aware of his existence or the lack thereof.

He sat by the window on his final train home and soaked in the sights of this familiar journey. How many times had he been on this train with friends on their way to a night out, or heading home from town with the hand of a girl in his? This train journey was littered with memories and each time he gazed out the window he saw a landmark that brought forth remembrance. He passed the station where he had been chased by bigger boys, others where he had been chased by police. He passed the station that took him to the park with its tall trees and green grass, others where his friends lived. He had travelled this track many a time before and although in it lay sentiment, he was dying to change course. Eventually he arrived at the stop that led him to his father.

How he was dreading this evening. His dad had lost in his fight to convince Luc to stay in Glasgow and now was even more distant than before. But who was he to decide Luc’s path? Why did he have to project his anxieties onto Luc? What happened to him that was so painful that he can’t bare the prospect of his son leading an independent life?

Luc returned to the flat. He had dinner with his father. Few words were spoken.

“What time is the bus?” his dad asked.

“06:00”

Throughout the meal Luc studied his father. He was his nightmare. A warning: if you don't succeed in making the right decisions, this is your life. His head stirred through feelings of guilt and shame, anger and frustration and finally sympathy. What was it like to live a life in regret? How did it feel to wake up in the morning, having to trudge through the mind's swamp of what could have been. To shower and be unable to wash off the inescapable smell of regret? Luc pitied this man. He pitied the loss he must have endured, the anxiety to which he regarded life, but not the loneliness he felt. It was his decision to cast aside his only son. His decision to keep his feelings locked away. His decision to deprive his boy of any indication that beneath this shell of a man there could be someone that he could connect to.

So, when Luc's father got up from the table and announced that he was going to the pub with little more than a goodbye, Luc stayed seated. When Luc's father put on his coat and his boots, Luc stayed where he was, facing the window. When Luc's father opened the door, and turned once more to look at the back of his son's head, Luc stayed where he was and thought that perhaps, some relationships, even those bound by blood, are just not meant to be. *C'est la vie.*

Luc: “For a large part of my life I did find it difficult to express how I felt. There are certain emotions or feelings that you just can't do justice with a couple of sentences.”

Interviewer checks their watch. They seem to be growing conscious of the time.

Luc: “Like do you know what I mean? Sometimes you need an entire novel, an album or a series of paintings just to scrape the essence of an idea. Essence. I like that word.

But what happens to a person when they don't have those means of expression? What happens to the ideas when they're not let out? Do they fester? Does hope turn to regret? Love to hate? Comfort to complacency?

Interviewer is shifting in their seat. There is something that they want to say.

Luc: “And then what if you go through all that trouble, just to be misunderstood. I think that would be the worst pain of all. Then whether you choose to express or not, those thoughts will still be trapped up inside your head. To be misunderstood is to be alone. What is loneliness but a lack of understanding, an inability to be understood? What if your attempts at love and protection go misunderstood, what if they're read as neglect and punishme-

The interviewer is showing clear signs of distress.

Interviewer: “Luc can you stop please. We know what you are doing. You know what you are doing.”

Luc notices the details of the room beginning to slip away, or is he just now noticing their absence?

Interviewer: *“There will be time for this in the future. But for now, please, live in the present. Don’t slip into this daydream again.*

Luc *portrays bewilderment. The interviewer speaks now, words pouring from the mouth that only ever listened.*

Interviewer: *“All too often you have chosen to avoid reality and fall into this bubble. I know it is comforting but there is a world out there with real people and real experiences. You have to pursue them first, you know that yourself. Then you can come here.”*

Slowly, the contents of the room come back into perspective. Except that there is no audience, no cameras, no plush sofas, and no complimentary drinks. There is however, a dining table, the remnants of a dinner and an old leather armchair by the window.

Luc *sighs and looks at the interviewer, pleading;*

Luc: *“I’m not mad am I?”*

Interviewer: *“No not at all. Where else are you to turn when there is no one to talk to, no one to applaud your words or listen to your monologues? But now, right now, there is a man. A lonely man in a lonely pub who needs someone to talk to just as much as you do. Go find him Luc. Talk to him.”*

Now the interview room has all but been replaced by the contents of the flat. There is no interviewer, there is no therapist, and there is interviewee. There is no athlete, nor director, no artist, writer, poet, musician, or anyone at all that would draw a crowd. There is, however, the pale reflection of a 19 year old boy with a camera, a notebook and an imagination that tends to get lost for hours.

We see the boy rise from the table, don his coat and boots, and after a brief glance in the mirror we see him leave the scene.

We then see him descend the stairs of the close and walk out onto the street with a confident stride.

We see him open the doors of a pub, walk up to the bar and seat himself beside a man drinking on his own.

We see a look of surprise in the man’s face and then a withdrawn smile.

We see the man that was always shut off confess to his son.

We see in the two men the years of lost communication, we see the yearning for connection that binds us all and we see how devastating indecision can be, as well as how simple it is to overcome.

Within the hand that lingers, the eyes that daren’t look away and the brief space in time when action becomes inaction we see the decisions that led to this moment, the experiences that call for growth and within them; the essence of what defines us.

