

# Eat Your Heart Out

Katie Boland



# Swelter

My friend Colin died the summer we all turned seventeen.

It happened on a Tuesday. A Tuesday of all days. What ever happens on a Tuesday? What ever happens on any day? When I heard, I was helping my kid sister, Sarah, fix her bike. She was eleven. I was the last to know.

I'm Louise. I hate that name, but it's not like I picked it. My other option is Sugar Tits, so said Colin. I chose Louise.

I'm blond and grossly skinny, way too skinny. Not even in a model way. Sometimes I'm not bad. Whenever things are going well, I start to feel vain. Then something like this happens and I'm ugly all over again.

There were four of us until Colin died. We made a funny-looking crew. Hedge, short for Tom, is fat and short. You know me. Then there's Seb. He's stupid good-looking, but I'm the only one who thinks so. And Colin, normal height and skinny like me with grey eyes and a new hair colour every three weeks. We called ourselves T.L.C., The Legend Crew. Don't ask me why, it's not like any of us ever did anything legendary.

People always ask why I only hang out with guys. I don't have a reason. The truth is that it's funny who you feel the most like yourself around.

When I heard, it was one of those days in late August when heat radiates off the pavement and you can see it, before your eyes, like

little waves of air, I remember them clear as a bell the day I heard, feeling the gravity bend before my eyes.

My sister started crying hysterically. Colin was always her favourite. He was really quiet, but he was cool with little kids. “Kids don’t really need to talk,” he said once. “Adults pollute everything with talking.”

You want to know the first thing I thought? Shit, he made it to everybody’s birthday party but mine. That’s a selfish thing to think, isn’t it?, but that’s the first thing I thought. Sometimes I can’t even believe myself. Jesus.

He died in the most badass and tragic way. He did a lot of graffiti, huge, crazy, angry murals all over the place. Normally he’d do them really late at night and he’d come wake you up at six in the morning and you’d have to bike over to wherever he’d worked the whole night before. It was really annoying, but you’d forgive him because he’d have this Jack Nicholson smile on his face. And the murals were truly gangster.

Beautiful colours, weird shapes, funny words all sewn together on some wall in the middle of town. It would really piss old people off when they’d see it, but we were the only ones who knew the culprit, so, natch, he never got caught.

Anyway, in the middle of summer, he’d taken to working all night on boxcars at the train tracks. It was dawn when it happened. It was his own stupid fault. He had his earphones in. Fucking idiot. A train came at dawn, and he never even heard it. If he didn’t have his ears in, he would have moved. Instead, it was done, just like that.

I feel split up. Half of me thinks if he had to go, at least he went doing what he loved best. But then one morning in the middle of

work after I'd been up all night thinking, I thought about how much it would have hurt to go like that. Sure, it was short, but it must have really hurt. After I realized that, I lost it, snot everywhere, and my boss at the deli counter let me leave early even though I never told him what happened.

Maybe he knew. It's funny how word spreads when a kid dies.

I couldn't bring myself to go see the mural. The boys did. When I asked him how it looked, they said, "Cool," and that's all. So I figured I'd leave it at that.

Like I said, it's fucked up when a kid dies.

The funeral was held at some church in the middle of town. Colin would have hated it. It was filled with people he didn't even know, and even if he had known them, he still would have fucking hated it.

We, the only people he did know and usually didn't hate, weren't involved at all. Seb and Hedge asked his parents if they could be pallbearers, because my dad told them that'd be the thing to do, but they couldn't get a straight answer. A little later, I asked if I could read a poem I'd written about something cheesy, like summer turning to winter, and all they said was, "Thanks for the sentiment."

I can't blame them, though. Just imagine how you'd be if your kid died. I'm surprised they didn't come into the church with guns and shoot everybody just to make some sense out of the fucked-up fact that we'd all lived, for no reason, when their kid had died. That would be true vigilante justice and I don't even think they'd deserve jail for it.

The funeral felt really long, like it stretched out for hours, days, weeks, months, years, like it covered miles, countries, continents, oceans, and equators. The heaviness that sits on a bunch of people

who are mourning the death of a young person weighs trillions of pounds and crushes your bones. I just got tattooed on my ankle and it says, *Inside each man there is a poet who died young*. Colin died when he was still the poet, but after he died, that poet died in me, that poet died in us all. We felt the poems dying that day. Growing up is realizing that everything about life is unfair, and the most unfair part is that it ends. Life kicked the childhood out of me that day. Once you're gone, you really can't go back.

The reverend talked some shit about the loons on the lake at his cottage, about Jesus, about how Colin loved boating and how the peace he found on the water would be the same peace he found in the Hereafter. That was so ridiculous I laughed out loud until my mom slapped me to shut up. His dad owned a boat that he used to invite girls from our high school onto when he was drunk at Colin's birthday parties. The last time Colin had been on the boat he puked all over me because he'd pounded a bottle of peach schnapps twenty minutes earlier. He hated that fucking boat. But no one remembers the truth when you're dead.

I couldn't get out of the church fast enough.

"Colin's got the right idea," Hedge whispered to me when we were walking out, like kids following leaders, in the funeral procession.

"What?" I whispered as quietly as I could, like if anyone heard me speak they would think I was so disrespectful that they'd kick me out of town forever and I'd have to live in a cardboard box on the desolate border between here and the next Bumfuck, Nowhere, town.

"The only way to stay immortal is to die young," he said, way too loud. "That way, people remember you for what you could have been, not for what you ended up as. I want to be forever young too."

What is there to say to somebody when he believes something as crazy as that?

I found Seb. My first thoughts upon seeing him were, yet again, selfish. Fuck, he looked good in a suit.

“Do you feel different?” Seb asked me. His eyes looked so damn blue right then.

I shrugged. What a ridiculous question. *Of course I felt different.* Then I motioned for the boys to meet me in the parking lot. Sitting on some random car, I took a dime out of my purse and rolled us a fat joint.

We knew we were smoking to Colin, but who was ready to say it?

The weed wasn't very good.

A few minutes later, Hedge had to leave because his mom found us smoking the joint and screamed at him, “This is a time for families!”

So then it was just Seb and me.

“Want to come to my place?” he asked.

We ended up in his bedroom. He pushed me up against his wall and he kissed me. He'd kissed me before, always at parties when he was drunk or high, but this time, it felt different. He meant it this time. He tasted like those white tic tacs, kind of vanilla and kind of mint. Pure delicious. I knew then he'd planned it.

“Let me move in you,” he whispered in my ear.

And before I knew it we were having sex, real sex, for my first time ever.

When he finished, I'll be honest, not that long after we started, he kissed me, really tender, like boys always kiss girls in movies and rarely in real life.

“I love you, Louise,” he said before we had to put our clothes on because his parents got home. I felt so pretty when he said that. I started crying and then I couldn't stop.

Seb let me sit on the handlebars of his bike and drove me home the long way. It would have been awkward sticking around his house with his parents home. I could hear his mom crying too when we snuck out the back window. So instead, we drove through town dressed all in black, like morbid Amish people during a parade. All I needed was a bonnet.

Later that night, I wondered if he made love to me because he wanted to feel closer to Colin. Then I thought, maybe we'll get married because we have this in common. No one else is going to know Colin, not how we did, and by pledging ourselves to each other for eternity, we would, in some ways, be staying close to Colin forever.

Funny how history works.

Four days later it was my birthday party. I didn't feel like a big celebration, but the boys told me I was being weak if I didn't do something. I knew the score; they just wanted to get shitfaced for a reason. What kind of a friend would I be if I denied them an opportunity to get drunk? Reasons were usually so few and far between.

We sat on the rocks near the water where we would always meet every Saturday night for the remainder of our adolescent lives. Hedge smoked me on a joint, and Seb told me that he got me something but he'd forgotten it at home.

"Tell me now."

"No, shut up."

"Tell me now or I'll leave and never come back." God, I can be a real selfish bitch sometimes.

And then when Hedge wasn't looking he whispered, "It's romantic, okay?"

As Bob Dylan once said, we started out on burgundy then soon hit the harder stuff. I shouldn't have let them do that because sometime around midnight Hedge threw a small rock at Seb. It was totally out of nowhere, like when George Bush just plum didn't help the black people in New Orleans.

"What the fuck?" Seb screamed, throwing another bigger rock.

"Stop, you guys!" I yelled.

Then before I knew it, they were punching each other, so hard. I'd seen them play-fight before, but this time they were truly going at each other, vicious. I started crying because I felt so helpless. God, being a girl is helpless sometimes and it really pisses me off. I kept screaming at them but they didn't even look at me. Then Seb's nose started bleeding and Hedge fell to the ground like he couldn't breathe. I had never felt so panicked in my whole life.

Then do you know what those assholes did? They started laughing! Laughing like maniacs. Then they picked up sand and rocks and driftwood and threw it around, yelling like lunatics released from the asylum.

"FUCK THIS!"

"FUCK YES!"

"THE LEGEND CREW!"

Then Hedge started crying, really hard, and I'd never seen him cry before. Seb walked up to him and they hugged each other. A few seconds later, they started wrecking shit again. It was like a scene out of that terrible book everybody has to read in Grade 10, *Lord of the Flies*. I was just waiting for one of them to eat the other.

I left five minutes later and they didn't even see me go.

It really is true that men deal with things totally differently than women.

Seb came and found me the next morning.

“Sorry,” he said from my doorstep.

“You look like shit.”

“Can I come in?”

I moved aside. Now that he'd been inside me, I acted totally different around him. It is a universal girl law that you can never act normal when you want to. I felt like my mouth was chicken-wired shut. There were about eighty-five things I wanted to say to him, but they were lazy fucks and just refused to slide from my brain to my lips.

“So . . . I brought you your birthday gift.”

It was a mix CD.

“Should I listen to it now?”

“Yeah, if you want.”

I put it on, and we sat on my couch. The house felt cold, like fall decided to just show up that day, like when your aunt from out of town comes by for no reason and then you later realize it's because she's getting divorced. But with Seb next to me, I began to feel warmer. I had goosebumps, but I was sure I was also sweating.

“Why are all the songs in French?”

“Because I'm moving there.”

“What?”

“In six months, I'm moving to Paris.”

“You are?”

“Come with me.”

I started laughing, like I knew he was kidding.

“I hate it here. You do too.”

“You're serious?”

“Yes. Colin hated it here and he never got to leave. Remember how he'd talk about getting a passport and taking off to Europe

and he'd have that obscenely hopeful look on his face?"

I did remember.

"Well, we get to leave. There's nothing keeping us here. I want to go and I want you to come with me."

"But we don't speak French."

"I think everyone speaks English there anyway."

He kissed me, and once I started kissing him back I couldn't stop. We spent the rest of the day kissing and then talking about French things like cheese and wine and the Eiffel Tower and Ernest Hemingway in the 1920s.

He ran his hands through my hair, and I fell asleep on his chest, listening to his heartbeat, dreaming about France and Europe and London and Big Ben, places I thought I'd never see.

I lay out in my backyard the next morning. I was alone. My parents had gone to work. The sun felt nice on my skin, but I was still cold and I couldn't shake it.

I had my headphones on. I listened to the CD *Francais*, as I had taken to calling it. The music pushed the leaves from the trees, the clouds from the sky, the blue from heaven, and I could see all the planets. I could see silvery Pluto, beautiful red Jupiter, and then yellow Venus. I could see the infinite blackness and all the beautiful orbs of colours that populated it. I reached out and touched Neptune. It felt like cold water.

I think I even saw Colin waving at me.

"This town is so severe and silent. I wonder if a person can die from it, choking to death on things they always wanted to but were never able to say." Colin told me that the week before he died. We'd just gone out for breakfast, the two of us, because everyone else had slept through their alarms.

It was a pretty insignificant thing, coming from him. He always said shit about life and death, waxed poetic about unanswerable bullshit. The boys called him Socracock.

It's only because he's gone that all those trivial things from the past echo on and on and on, but I wonder if maybe it was the silence that killed him. Maybe he had died, choking on the silence, seconds before the train hit him. So on his death certificate it should have said that the cause was "peace and quiet," not railroad misadventure.

When I went inside, still shivering, I put the kettle on.

The water boiled while the day was on fire, and I watched it, patiently waiting like a bird on a wire.



KATIE BOLAND is an actress and writer who divides her time between Los Angeles and Toronto. She was chosen as one of the Toronto International Film Festival's "Rising Stars" and as one of three Canadians to watch by *Elle Canada*. She has appeared in more than forty films and her writing has appeared in *The Toronto Star* and *TChad Quarterly*. *Eat Your Heart Out* is her first published work. Please visit Katie online at [katieboland.com](http://katieboland.com), [@katieboland](https://www.instagram.com/katieboland), or on her blog, [comedy-and-drama.blogspot.com](http://comedy-and-drama.blogspot.com).