

L.A. Fields

Exit Signs

Part I: George

George takes off his sweaty McDonald's shirt and puts on an old T-shirt of his own. His mom needed the car tonight to take an old friend of hers some chicken soup, like it might help heal a bad case of TMB (Too Many Birthdays), and since he has to walk all the way home, George does not want to encourage the smell of fry grease to go deeper into his skin. He throws the shirt in a gym bag, though he most emphatically has never been to a gym, and he goes up front from the bathroom to say goodbye to Bruce.

Bruce should be the only person besides George left in the store. They officially closed ten minutes ago, and yet the same kid from earlier is sitting in one of the booths, just like he has been for over an hour, and does not look like his plans include leaving any time soon. George leans over the counter and whispers to Bruce, "You want me to stay and help you deal with this kid?"

Bruce shakes his head a little too fast, causing his extra chin to jiggle. "Naw, I know the guy, it's cool."

George hesitates a second. He is sure that a big boy like Bruce doesn't have many friends down at the high school, and this other kid, with the way he is loitering, does not look exactly friendly and George wonders what is really going on. Drugs? Gambling? Could the scrawny kid in the booth be here to kick Bruce's ass, slam his fingers in the drive through window, or what? George wants to stick around, and he decides he is going to, but secretly. Just in case it's nothing.

George makes a big show of leaving, lying like he has to get home quick to his mother, and once outside he crouches near the window, watching the action unfold.

At first it is easy to see everything. Bruce, behind the counter, is talking to the mysterious stranger. Both their faces are blank, bluffing. Then Bruce says something with a nod towards the door, and for a moment George believes the show is already over, and he is glad. He is starting to give himself the creeps, a pock-marked, overweight, middle-aged man crouching in the bushes outside a McDonald's; he does not want to be that man. But he is mistaken about the night being over. Mystery Kid gets up and heads to the door, but he does not leave. He only turns out the lights for the dining room of the restaurant, while Bruce turns out the lights for the kitchen, and George's eyes are just able to adjust in time to see Bruce jump over the counter (pretty spry for how big he is) and pull the other kid into a kiss.

And they are really kissing too. George cannot look away, though he finds it a little disgusting for several reasons. They got tongues and hands going on, and just

when it seems that they will be doing it on top of the nearest table they both stop, step away from each other, panting heavily, and walk outside.

George follows them with his eyes as long as he can, because he'd surely tip them off if he followed them with his big, lumbering body. But then they go around back, and George must creep up just to the corner of the building and peer around, where he is able to witness the tarp obscured fence around the back door and dumpsters clang shut. George does not even think about going home now, but slowly makes his way closer, looking for an advantageous hole in the tarp that also falls between a chink in the fence, a peephole that will allow him to see what they are doing. And boy, does he get an eyeful.

From his position outside this little enclosure, George is able to know that these boys aren't just experimenting, they aren't just naked and rubbing on each other, they are actually fucking, which makes George's stomach do a turn. Not only does he imagine the digestive discomfort of having something go in your ass instead of come out, he also gags a little at the sight of Bruce's body. Now George is no male model himself, but he is not so big that he won't hold other folks' weight against them, especially men. Women it's different, like they are allowed to have fat because what else are you supposed to make tits and hips out of, but guys shouldn't look like that, all stretch-marked and doughy. George imagines there is gravel getting pressed into the soft fat of Bruce's back as he lays on the ground like that, moaning quietly.

The fact that these two are fags is almost the least of George's concerns, though he is overwhelmingly thankful that today is Bruce's last day before he goes off to college. He would not have been able to look him in the eye or work with him another day after seeing this. He might have even snitched him out to management,

but as things stand now, George just heads home and leaves them humping. None of it is really his problem at all.

Part II: Bruce

“Aw, dude,” Bruce moans, trying to keep his voice down. He thinks that this is what being on drugs feels like; heart racing, eyes dilated, waves of hot and cold rolling through his body. It’s either like drugs or fever, malaria maybe, except this probably won’t kill him.

Wade doesn’t say anything back, frowning like he is concentrating, focused on making Bruce feel good. Bruce whimpers a little every time Wade thrusts. Wade hits this place that Bruce pictures is like a button that sends zaps of electricity through his body. Bruce never imagined anyone would want to do this to him. He thought that even if there was another queer in the entire state of North Carolina, that guy probably wouldn’t want anything to do with Bruce. But Wade was that way; everybody knew it and said so. It might have just been rumors, but Wade would often disappear, hitching out of town for a couple of days or weeks here and there, and people said he would blow guys for rides. Bruce wanted to believe it, and started watching Wade all the time, as if he might see it on him, the truth like a pink aura around his head. Eventually Wade noticed him staring and started hanging around the McDonald’s, and after a while he just came right out and asked Bruce if he wanted to have sex. The answer, obviously, was yes.

Bruce was afraid of security cameras inside the restaurant and so they always went outside to fuck, once on the roof when they had enough patience to get up there, sometimes in the woods behind the parking lot where they would usually get

too dirty, but most of the time they did it right here, under the green glow of an EXIT sign, just far enough away from the dumpsters so that it doesn't feel too trashy.

Wade strains to finish, bringing his ribs into full relief on his chest, and Bruce reaches out to touch them with his sausage-like fingers, wondering what it must feel like to be made so skinny, so small, so aware of the skeleton that keeps one standing upright. Wade takes the hand and presses it over his heart so that Bruce can feel its heavy beat working overtime for what is about to happen.

"Do you wanna come with me?" Wade asks, bringing Bruce's hand up and sucking two of his fingers. Bruce nods, and Wade lets his hand go so that he can bring himself off in time. Sometimes it's hard to reach around his own belly to jerk it, but Bruce makes the effort now, since there is a chance that this is their last time.

Like always, Wade is planning on leaving, on getting out of town, and like always he says he won't be coming back. Bruce doesn't believe him now more than he ever did, the only problem this time is that after Wade comes back, Bruce won't be in town anymore. He'll be in school in Raleigh, staying with his aunt, and Wade most likely won't go out of his way to come see him. And when he's not doing it with Wade anymore, Bruce does not lie to himself that he will be able to find someone else. The only other person who has ever liked him in spite of his weight was a substitute teacher who shut down a bully once making fun of Bruce, telling him to leave class and come back with either his mind open or his mouth shut. Even Bruce's parents can hardly stand to look at him. He is amazed to have had Wade at all, and is miserable at the idea of losing him.

They finish more or less together, Wade not bothering to pull out of him, and Bruce not minding at all. The chance of contracting a lifelong disease does not really worry Bruce. He cannot imagine it affecting his sexual future, since he doesn't believe he will have one after Wade, and if something he gets tonight kills him young, that is almost to be wished for. Bruce expects that otherwise his life will be just way too long and awful.

Wade falls limp on top of Bruce, laying across the raise of his stomach, sweaty and spent. Bruce pulls him further up on his body, wanting to kiss. It is allowed to happen, a wet lick experience that Bruce draws sustenance from: Wade's spit is like nectar, his tongue a delicacy too rich to be believed. Bruce wishes that he could stay here forever, never go to school in Raleigh, never hear that Wade has left town again by eavesdropping on other peoples' gossip, never have to get up from this very spot even though he is starting to get uncomfortable. But Wade rears back and sits down on his heels. He starts looking for his shirt, and it's over. Bruce rolls up and starts getting dressed too.

Part III: Wade

Wade watches Bruce struggle to put his pants back on, guessing that they are just a little too small to button gracefully. He puts a hand through his hair, hoping to tempt a breeze onto the sweat of his brow. But there is no breeze in a five mile radius, and even if there was, it would probably be hot with summer swelter and smell like the dumpsters, so perhaps it's better to not even hope.

Wade helps Bruce hold his pants closed so that he can zip and button the fly. He doesn't say anything about it because he knows Bruce is embarrassed, but

Wade really doesn't mind it so much. Yeah he's pretty big, but he's a nice guy, and every time he looks at Wade he has the light of worship in his eyes, which is just as powerful an aphrodisiac as toned muscles and such, at least for Wade.

They kiss a little bit before leaving the enclosure, and Wade waits around the restaurant, lounging on the front counter, while Bruce finishes cleaning up and locks the doors and turns in his shirts. Bruce is feeling vulnerable and Wade can tell because he's been like that himself before. The first guy he was with, when he was fourteen, left a mewling baby in his heart; this weak, helpless thing that wanted its daddy, wanted the one who made it to come back and give it love.

Wade doesn't really want to do that to Bruce, and wishes they could just keep on like they have been until Bruce gets sick of him, which Wade believes would happen eventually. He has his charm for only so long, and the more time people spend with Wade, the less they fall for it all. This knowledge has helped him get his hitchhiking down to a science. Wade knows just when to say 'here's good, thanks for the ride', or when to simply disappear at a rest stop. It's too bad that Bruce will be the one left hurting after tonight. Wade is used to the slings and arrows of love, having been around several blocks since he started stepping out nearly four years ago, but Bruce might never get over a broken heart. Some people don't.

They leave the McDonald's together, walking since neither one has a car, and in the darker parts between street lamps, Wade holds Bruce's hand, wanting him not to miss him when they split up at Main Street, but probably making it worse by being so kind.

“Well,” Bruce says as they reach their usual corner, the one where they say goodbye. He looks like he is going to cry, and Wade cannot abide it.

“Hold on,” he says, and drags Bruce by the hand to the narrow alley between the post office and the office supply store. He’s got an idea that could work out for them. He wants to see how Bruce hears it.

“Do you wanna come with me?” Wade asks for the second time that night, not that he notices the repetition.

“Huh?”

Wade grabs Bruce by his upper arms, squaring him for an explanation. Bruce’s skin is cold, at least relatively, and Wade has an idea that it has to do with how far his skin is from his heart and blood, like he’s so big that he must be cooler on the outer reaches of his body than he is in his core, just the laws of heat and energy in action.

“You could come with me when I hitch out of town. I’m thinking I’ll leave tomorrow early and try to find some long-ways commuter to get me started. I’ve got friends that should be showing up in Gatlinburg next week, I want to meet up with them. You could come too, if you want.”

Bruce frowns like he still doesn’t fully understand, but he heard Wade, and it’s just his way of thinking. This feels like it could be the perfect solution either way. If Bruce comes with him on the road, it might be harder to move around and get rides, but it’ll be nice to have some company until Bruce gets fed up with the transient’s

lifestyle, and then Wade can just bring him on home disappointed, but not heartbroken.

And, if Bruce doesn't want to come with him, then Wade would at least be absolved of guilt. What else could he offer Bruce but the kid's dream of running away, just the two of them together? If he turns it down, then that's his choice, and hopefully it'll sting less than it would having no choice at all.

Bruce is still quiet, still considering it. It's a big deal after all; it would mean putting off school, disappointing his whole family. Wade is used to all that, but Bruce might not like the ring of it. He decides to give him a deadline and turn him loose.

"Look, think about it tonight okay? And if you want to go, meet me here tomorrow at six a.m. I won't wait past six-thirty. And then if you don't come, then this is just it, and I'll see you whenever."

Bruce nods slowly. This is perfect. This may be goodbye but not really goodbye, because he's leaving Bruce with hope. Even if he doesn't come to meet Wade, and he probably won't because he's a creature of zero resistance, then at least Bruce can pretend he *could* come, and hold onto that all night.

They kiss a while before they split up, leaving just when it feels like either they must leave now or else find another place to take their clothes off. Wade turns around a few times and knows that Bruce is going to stand there and stare in his direction long after Wade is gone.

Author Bio

L.A. Fields is the author of *Maladaptation*, a novel published by Queer Mojo/Rebel Satori Press in 2009. Her work has been featured in *Wilde Stories 2009*, *Best Gay Romance 2010* and the Bram Stoker Award winning *Unspeakable Horror: From the Shadows of the Closet*. She has a BA in English Literature from the New College of Florida.

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