



# Stay



KATHERINE LAWRENCE

COTEAU BOOKS

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*for Anna and Rachel*

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## Halo Hello

i.

My twin is buried in a wooden box  
lined with white silk  
soft as dandelion fluff, the stuff I blow  
to the wind, to you,

Billy

it's me, Millie, your weather girl reporting graveside  
about the latest family squall.  
Did you hear the storm last night?

Yells of thunder from Dad, lightning in Mum's voice,  
flash of tempers followed by silence—  
sudden crack that jolted me upright: Mum wants  
a divorce.

Tears like rain – his, hers, mine. I listened for Tara  
but our big sister is deaf to everything but her  
own playlist.

Billy, some nights I hide under blankets,  
wish we were twinned in one bunk, tucked away  
far away, riding that wild wave,  
a roller coaster heave-ho that swooshed me  
nine minutes head first *toodle-oo adios au revoir*  
your fist the knuckles at the back of my knee,  
the two of us a tangled knot of legs hands toes—

I held my breath as the doctor slapped my back,  
cried for you, little brother,  
but you didn't open your mouth,  
didn't fill your lungs  
with air.

Billy, you are the sun,  
no ordinary star.

Hey, perk up. There's chocolate cake in our future.  
We're eleven going on twelve next month.  
My legs longer than my jeans,  
feet fast as jackrabbits.

ii.

And you, Billy? Have you wings?

Can you text me from heaven?

Halo, hello.

C'mon, let's ride 'em bronco, hop on my bike.

I'll stuff the soccer ball in my basket

race down Webster's Hill

over the foot bridge near the cemetery.

Do you feel the wild grasses tickle my bare ankles?

Hear crickets hum the air? Look

I can see your headstone from the bridge

if I balance both my feet on the seat like a trick rider  
rodeo queen (wearing a stoopid helmet).

Question: Do you get goose bumps when I trace  
your stone letters?

WILLIAM 'BILLY' PATTERSON.

Me too.

Guess what? Nobody knows how often

we practice my kick—

knock knock soccer ball bounce—your headstone  
a goalie from the other side.



## Fines Accumulating Daily

Our house is a library, books  
spilling off shelves, leaning

towers of fact and fiction  
encyclopedia sneezing dust—*Ahchoo!*

Dad reads science with a pipe full of tobacco,  
Mum drags history to bed.

Tara's addicted to vampires, blood  
dripping soft-cover horrors.

I prefer to read family mysteries,  
mother's text messages, sent

and received, her cell  
a table of contents.

Snooping? Spying?  
Try and stop me.

How else can I figure out  
why Dad moved to the basement.

His bed the scratchy green couch  
beside a furnace that snores.

## Sent

*Darling,*

*I'm running out of patience.*

*Michael refuses to move out of the basement.*

*How much longer can I keep you a secret?*

*xox*

## In

*Sweetheart,*

*He's putting in time until he can find an apartment.*

*I went through the same thing, remember?*

*Stay beautiful, beautiful.*

*Love you.*

*x*

## Punctuation

I've got  
the longest  
ponytail  
in class,  
a blond  
question  
mark  
curling  
my  
spine.

If my hair  
could ask,  
would Mum  
brush  
and comb  
the answer?

Sweep my suspicions  
into an updo?

Or braid  
and tie  
another lie?

## Stop Asking Me Questions (1)

Billy, you're in my head and you're making it hurt.

*Would a kiss help?*

Go. To. Sleep.

*Why don't Mum and Dad kiss goodnight anymore?*

Who cares.

*You?*

If I kiss the air will you go to sleep?

*Ok*

(kiss kiss)

*You still awake?*

I think Mum kisses somebody new.

*Let's tell Dad.*

Billy!

*I'm asleep.*

## Jane

Jane runs up the steps to my front door  
every morning knock knock ding-dong.

We walk to school together, arms  
a chain fence linked at the elbow.

She's the desk I sit behind,  
long black hair I pencil curl,  
the raspberry popsicle we lickety split  
on the walk back home to my house,  
genius Jane conjuring up a costume  
for Halloween: witch, beatnik, Cruella DeVille?

Last year she was pig-tailed Dorothy,  
Toto's leash in hand, a collar around my neck.  
How do we top Oz?

We need brain food, says Jane.

To a blender add:  
2 scoops double chocolate ice cream  
2 cups milk  
1 cup raspberry yogurt  
1 banana  
1 teaspoon vanilla extract  
Whir on high.  
Pour and serve.  
Slurp, burp,  
wipe your mouth on your sleeve.

Cross-legged in my bedroom closet,  
flashlight, pillows.

Jane's spoon dangles spit-stuck  
from her tongue,

I tie our shoelaces together,  
pretend twins, tangled feet.

*Whohabeahahun*, says Jane.

*Huh?*

She unglues her tongue:

*Two heads are better than one.*

We kick off our runners  
work like Cinderella's mice,  
brushing, combing back-to-back  
our heads fused at the crown,