

Bad Luck - Eva, Year 9, QLD

‘How would you describe your life?’

I’d say I have a *balanced* life.

Literally. When something good happens to me one day, something bad happens the next. For example, if I step on dog crap on the way to work, I might get a small bonus the following day.

It’s an equal scale: each unlucky event is as bad as the lucky event good. Ultimately this makes my life *dreadfully* predictable.

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\$5,000,000

I tremble in panic and confusion as my fingernails dig into the lottery ticket. My organs wriggle inside me and nudge each other anxiously. Blood abandons my head, leaving me dizzy. I lunge towards the cashier whose noticeably fake-tanned face is wrinkled with a fake, jealousy-stained smile.

“Can’t you check again?”

“I’ve checked five times,” she sighs, losing the smile with a look that says, *‘If this ungrateful jerk doesn’t want the money, I’ll have it so I can quit this awful job.’* She’s probably beginning to dream of a vacation, curled back in the sun in a floral bikini – actually tanning – and sipping a chilled margarita.

“Then get your manager!” I’m almost frothing at the mouth like a desperate beast. Salty-sweet blood leaks from my gnawed inner cheek.

The cashier bites her pink lip, dramatically swishing her hips as she turns away. Some customers watch me with bulging, dumbfounded eyes. Others squint in scrutinization. A middle-aged man returns with the glaring young blonde. I’m drawn by the oddly satisfying way he rolls his r’s:

“Sir’, ther’e is nothing we can do other’ than give back the ticket. You’ll have to inquir’e mor’e with the website on the b...”

I’m barely listening, tapping my finger impatiently.

“What if I don’t want it?”

The manager's eyebrows ruffle in bafflement and he stutters. "Uh, call the website sir'."

He slides the ticket back. I take it hesitantly and leave the gas station. My neck is bent down as my pupils fix on the many zeros. I don't realise I've bumped into a vain teenage girl and her loyal pack of hyenas sneer as I pass. My sweaty palm scrunches the paper as I continue mindlessly navigating to my apartment.

When I'm back, I dial the one phone number my shaky fingers know. A familiar voice – slurred, lengthy, and playful – interrupts the ring.

"Hey dude, whatd'ya need? Want your DVDs back already? Aw man, I've only gotten through Kill Bill. Give me another few days."

A genuine smile forms on my lips. Mike always eases me with his light-heartedness. He's the only person I talk to about my issues with luck.

"Not that. Could you come over? It's, uh, important."

"No worries! I'll be there in ten." I can practically hear his humorous wink through the phone.

After the beep I stare up at the popcorn ceiling, observing the little bumps as if they are paths that might lead my eyes to a better destination, but they simply circle back. A creak at the door interrupts my daydreaming.

Mike drops onto the couch beside me without a greeting as if it's his place.

"So, what's up?" He leans back, arms sprawled behind his head, before his features sharpen. "Something's wrong, ain't it?" He can read right through me as though each crease on my face speaks for my paralysed tongue.

I dig out the crumpled ticket. His honey-brown eyes glide side to side, each time squinting more with concern.

"Holy— five million dollars!" His eyebrows furrow: the idea of what this means pains him more than me. "I don't want anything to happen to you."

I can hear his tongue tremble through his teeth. It's when I'm awkwardly squeezed between his arms, I realise I'm not as ready to face tragedy as I thought. I notice the wetness trickling down Mike's cheeks like the morning dew burdening a leaf.

"Alright, we'll take it easy. I'll stay with you," he murmurs. Because anymore and we might tangle, his broad shoulders pull away.

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Most of us know Einstein's famous theory of time relativity. Considering that, this moment has passed, and tomorrow is already happening.

But there's no point wasting this last moment of mine, even if it's already gone.

"Let's go out."

Mike's irises have been dazedly locked on me, but the depth returns to them at my words.

"Where?"

"Anywhere." I'm already up, too impatient to decompose in this dump any longer. Mike jumps to open the door with such swiftness it shakes the floor. I lock my grave behind me.

On the street, the nighttime city's ether strikes a dreamy and almost erotic longing for life. People pass by full of youthful ecstasy. I snatch Mike's hand and allow the moment to steal us into another realm. A realm where we can forget everything until nothing exists but us. Until I'm ready for my life to crumble apart.

"Let's go there!"

Mike's finger, like a bow, aims an arrow to the bright, fluorescent target: 'The Laneway'. Within a second we're seated at the bar ordering whiskey. My brain is slurred before my tongue has been saturated. The bartender hands us glasses of the golden drinks topped with buoyant ice. Mike and I sip the pleasingly throat-burning drinks without a word; the comfort between us fills the conversation – along with the drowning noise as people all around let loose (or drench their worries in drinks like us).

Mike's cheeks are soon rosy. Indecipherable whispers ooze from the tip of his tongue, and his face morphs, seemingly preparing to say something tense but failing in the process.

"I... I luh...."

"God, Mike, how much have you drunk already?"

His eyelids droop with tipsiness and his teeth squeeze his bottom lip sheepishly. My gaze trails to the empty glasses in front of him, but my thoughts are cluttered, and they distort into many. I don't know how much I've had either. I could've sworn we came through the doors a minute ago. I cuss Einstein under my breath.

Mike tugs my sleeve. "I feel sick."

I frown. We search for the bathroom sign, stumbling between bunched bodies. I think my legs are twisting beneath me. I'm going to fall. But we somehow find our way. The bathroom's white walls reflect a dull, cool light like in a hospital. I bring Mike into a stall that's crampingly putrid. I run my palm along his back as he leans over the toilet, spilling puke from his mouth. He moans in discomfort, turning to look up at me. His sickly pale skin sags along his skull, moist with perspiration.

"I need some air."

"Yeah, it's too muggy in here." I haul him up and hold him close. We stagger around a pool table where a group is cheering, waving their cues in celebration like warriors triumphing in battle with swords held high. Their cheers are the real swords though, piercing my ears and inflicting a wince.

My stomach prods: I must be intoxicated too. Am I going the right way? I keep circling between people, between tables, between more people, between pool tables, between sheep. I reach out to one grazing wool-tufted creature and ask where the exit is. It bleats and waves its hoof indecipherably.

My calves strain. We haven't gotten anywhere. "How high is this staircase?"

Mike gives a puzzled 'baa' and looks down at his feet. I look down too. He's right: the ground is swirling. We must be walking on water, not stairs. It makes me realise the dryness in my mouth and teases me with thirst.

After three days, fresh air finally greets us. Mike and I abandon the aquarium of sheep, whiskey, and puke.

"You good? You've been out of it for the past five minutes," Mike's voice is as breezy and gentle as the night's breath.

"I'm fine – I should be asking that. Feeling any better now?"

Mike hums an 'mhm' in response. The midnight moon lingers above, caressing the dark city with its diamond gloom. Cars blink their white eyes as they soar past along the black serpent that slithers between the urban scape. My hand scrambles through the fabric of my pocket for the recognisable texture of my cigarette pack.

Suddenly, my fingers crush something. My heart stops, and the crinkle makes me nauseous.

It's as if I knew what was next.

I don't remember the moment I freed the ticket from my pocket. I don't remember the moment the wind's exhale caught my fingertips off guard. I don't remember the moment it glided onto that black strip of hell.

But I remember the last time I heard Mike: *'I'll get it!'*

Then came the screeching tyres. The flashing lights, blaring sirens, and bleating sheep herded to be an audience to my cruel fate: it all lingers to this day. I can't escape even as I cradle myself under the hospital sheets. It's like I'm still watching the limp body of the one I love as pools of scarlet leak from him like a popped pimple.