

Bradley + Molly 4 Ever (an excerpt) by Bridget Canning

Molly hated how everyone lumped her with Bradley. It's just geography and population, she wanted to say. Geography meaning Man's Harbour and population meaning seventy-seven. Bradley was the only person in Man's Harbour her own age, in her grade. That meant they took the bus to school together every day, they were in the same classes, and they attended the same Sunday mass. The school covered all the kids from all the surrounding communities, but in Man's Harbour, it was just her and Bradley.

Molly's house sat at the end of Man's Harbour Road and she should have been the first picked up on the school bus. But Bradley got on the bus first on its way to her, even though it would pass his house again on its return. Always the only one on the bus when Molly got on, sixth seat from the front with his slow-blinking eyes and hair parted scissor-sharp on the left, where his mother combed it. Bradley first thing with a question about math homework or their English assignment: Molly, you get page twenty-two done? And she wordlessly passed her notebook to him. But he'd have more questions anyway: how'd you get that answer? I didn't understand the ending to that story.

And if there was an event like a sock hop or a party, the phone rang and there was Bradley's hollow timbre: Molly, are you going? Can I get a ride, please? And her parents said absolutely, lots of room, this is what neighbours do and she wasn't allowed to say no. And Bradley's mother, so grateful. With Bradley's father always on the road, she said, it's such a blessing to have good neighbours. She sent Bradley over on the weekends with fresh eggs and homemade bread to thank them. Bradley, wandering into Molly's house, planting himself on the living room couch: Whatcha watching? And Molly wanting to leave the room and her parents saying, be polite to your guest now. Bradley in her house, Bradley on the bus, Bradley in every class, Bradley on the phone. She and Bradley, getting out of the truck together. Here they come, Bradley and Molly.

Then junior high and air cadets and baseball games and Bradley joining up too, needing to be picked up, needing a way home. And unlike school, where the teachers would give her sister or Bradley's sister homework to take home if they were sick, the coaches and cadet leaders would give her messages to pass on to Bradley, as if she was his keeper, as if telephones didn't exist.

Then senior high, and Molly overhearing some of the boys list off the single girls in school in a teasing way, provoking someone to ask out someone and the surprise in Jeremy Collier's voice: Molly's single? I thought she was with that Bradley dope.

And getting on the school bus and little Patsy Billings in grade five showing Molly her new binder with her list of senior high couples doodled on it: Tracey + Colin, TLA. Shelly n' Todd. Bradley + Molly 4ever!

Why'd you write that? Molly asked. We're not together. And Patsy's sad eyes: did you guys break up?

And Bradley, ever-present, insisting his part. The occasions when Molly's parents were out of town and she and her sister threw a party and Bradley always managing to find out about it on the day of, even though she did her best not to talk about it on the bus or in class. Right after supper, Bradley on the telephone: Molly, you having a party tonight? Can I come, please? And she'd sigh and say yes, come after ten o'clock, but sure enough, there he'd be, fumbling up the driveway at eight, the first person to arrive: I was bored so I thought I'd come down. Drinking his grape crush while she and her sister laid out ashtrays and put beer in the fridge, sitting up straight at the dining table so he's the first goddamn person anyone sees when then enter the house. I'm not going to drink 'til I'm legal, Bradley said over his pop. Goody for you, Bradley, Molly said. I bet that makes your mother very happy.

And Molly noticed how no one seemed to pick up on how Bradley was a bit of a creep. Sitting next to him in the cab of the truck, tolerating the quiver of his knees and elbows. Realizing he was staring at her and when she met his eyes, his gaze slithering down to the bulge in his gym pants. His little half smile. Catching him staring at her chest when she got on the bus. She stared ferociously, his innocent blink in reply and continuing to gaze at her tits until she sat down. The way he always managed to forget if she or her sister were in the bathroom at her house, the way he tried the door before knocking. Goosing her from behind in gym class and pretending it was an accident. I was just trying to get the basketball, he said and that smile again, but now directed at the other boys. And his shoulders jiggling with secret laughter, as if she was his due to time and proximity, as if he earned a right to do that to her.