

# December 1999

by Kathryn Kulpa

You're driving to the lawyer's office to file your bankruptcy papers and a cheesy 1970s song by Paul McCartney comes on the radio and that makes you sad because your childhood decade is now a retro fashion layout in teenybopper magazines and a prime time revisionist nostalgia sitcom instead of a private joke between you and your best friend, the way it was when you were still the youngest generation, a generation nobody had Xed yet, and now your banana seats and Pop Rocks are some other twelve-year-old's happy days, and that makes you sad, but what really makes you sad is Paul McCartney, left alone in his old age, marooned like your grandfather who'd sleepwalk at night, knocking on your bedroom door or your parents' bedroom door, calling your grandmother's name. You picture Paul McCartney sitting in some dark pub with his kids, drinking a Guinness, all of them singing some song his mother would know, Paul is singing too, but tears are running down his face. And then you realise you're seeing a scene from *Educating Rita* and why Paul McCartney in a working-class pub with his millions and anyway he's not that old, not sixty-four, or maybe he is, or maybe fifty-four, and you are thirty-four or some unimaginable age and yet your brain is still a spider web catching the trivial gnats of pop culture, and you can't balance your checkbook or divide a three-way bill in a restaurant but you can still recite all the sixteen ways of SHAUN CASSIDY TELLS: 16 WAYS TO TURN ME ON! Still you don't know where Shaun is now, and that's good; you don't know if he's grown up and married or if he overdosed or was arrested for prostitution like all the other ex-child stars. Age does not become them. *Todos somos viejos y yo también*. Everybody's getting older and you are too: six years of Spanish and translating Borges for your graduate school exam and now all you do with it is order premium tequilas in ersatz Tex-Mex chain restaurants. You can't afford them but you order them just the same because when you can't afford anything at all the difference between four dollars and five, or five

and six, begins to seem absurd. At some point, you think, it will just not matter. You're waiting for that point to come but it seems you haven't reached it yet, even though the other day someone who used to be your friend accused you of being at the bottom. You're at the bottom and you won't climb back up, she said, but this isn't the bottom. If it were the bottom you wouldn't cry when you cross bridges because suspension makes you sad; you wouldn't cry because the woman sitting across from you in the temp agency wears green plastic clogs, the ugliest clogs you've ever seen, and ugly shoes make you sad; you wouldn't cry over poor widowed Paul McCartney or the fate of washed-up child stars or airplane crashes or your cat's ear infection or the bored, underpaid teenage girl putting sugar in your coffee at the drive-through when you asked for no sugar. There's a point at which people don't cry anymore. You wish you would hurry up and get there soon. Everything makes you sad these days.

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