The Script Sucks But the Special Effects Are Killer

by R. Daniel Lester

Victor didn't want to be alone, so he phoned Sophie.

They talked.

They caught up.

He told her he hadn't written the perfect radio-friendly-but-with-indie-rock-cred song yet.

She told him she spent the whole day on set, so she was tired and cranky and hungry, but not necessarily in that order.

They decided to meet for dinner.

After dinner, a finely crafted bit of architecturally avant-garde fusion, they walked the five blocks from the restaurant to the Yaletown apartment they used to share, but that actually belonged to Sophie (Victor got the fern, the espresso machine, the orange felt garage sale chair).

As they went, they passed by a microbrewery, a dog spa, two bars with trendy mono-syllabic names, an organic trifecta (grocery store, coffee shop, clothing boutique), a MINI dealership, two excavation pits soon to be condos and a movie shoot on lunch break at 10 p.m. Sophie knew the director, so they chatted briefly on the New York, or maybe London street, and that was the thing with a young city still discovering itself: it can be dressed up to look like anything.

Inside the door, Victor kissed Sophie, partly out of a sense of

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routine, but mostly because he really needed to disappear into someone, something.

Sophie kissed him back, but then pulled away, her eyes asking the question they both knew should be asked.

Victor's answer was to pick her up and walk to the bedroom, like he'd done so many times before, where things progressed, as they were apt to do. But since the break-up, the allocation of goods, the move-out, they always stayed above the covers. It was an unspoken agreement between them that blankets and the space underneath them was strictly the territory of the lovers they used to be: those lazy creatures of a Sunday afternoon, when scattered around them like blast debris were the inherent coffee mugs, muffin crumbs, magazines, books, half-completed crossword puzzles.

Truth be told, they'd probably stayed together about as long as an actor and a musician could in the concrete forest called Vancouver. Sophie was making a good living with small but important roles in locally-shot Hollywood productions, and Victor was lead singer/songwriter in a local band that was only two years old but had already survived one overdose and two near-miss big label signings. Between auditions, gigs, acting workshops, managers, agents, cross-Canada van tours, busy shooting schedules, trips to L.A. for pilot week, midnight recording sessions, growing bank accounts (hers), disappearing bank accounts (his) they tried to live a life together. But while it lasted it had definitely been hip/witty and pretty/confusing, and filled with a lot of late nights/early mornings with a lot of equally hip/witty and pretty/confusing denizens of the city of glass.

After circumstances in the bedroom played themselves out accordingly, satisfyingly, Sophie held up a left index finger wrapped in a band-aid.

I cut myself a few days ago on a rock, she said. I was running from the aliens.

Good aliens or bad aliens? Victor asked.

Bad aliens. They use human skulls as percussion instruments and make acoustic guitars out of tendons and femur bones.

Oh, I see, said Victor, not seeing it at all.

Yeah, the script sucks, said Sophie, but the special effects are killer.

And let me guess: the soundtrack is going to rock.

Oh, totally. Nickelback's in the studio as we speak. In the video it's gonna be like a battle of the human vs. alien bands and Chad's mic stand morphs into a ray gun.

Sounds...I don't know how it sounds.

And I'm pretty sure there's already a licensing deal.

Score me a keychain?

Done.

Sweet.

Victor?

Yeah?

I'm scared to take the band-aid off because it might hurt.

It probably will, said Victor. Pain seems unavoidable.

Sophie sat up, resolute, shivering even though it was summertime. She said, Speaking of unavoidable, maybe we should stop doing this. We're not even together anymore.

Okay, he said.

And we probably shouldn't see each other so often. We need to have time to meet other people.

I'm sure you're right.

Sophie got up and went to the bathroom.

Victor watched her walk naked across the room, knowing it was the last time he would do so. Then he gazed around the bedroom also knowing it was the last time. As he did, a lyric fragment popped into his head.

script sucks
special effects are killer
tell me life is more than what it appears to be
packing peanut filler

What? Sophie asked from behind the closed door.

Nothing, said Victor.

Oh. I thought I heard you singing.

I was.

A new song?

Maybe.

Vic?

Soph?

It didn't hurt as much as I thought.

That's good, Victor said, not sure if she meant their second break-up, or finally removing the band-aid. Probably both. ❄ ❄ ❄ Victor walked from Yaletown. It was 2 a.m.

The streets were alive with people, chatter, the bass thumps from passing low-rider cars. But he didn't want noise. He wanted stillness. So he traveled side streets back to Gastown, and when he reached Water Street, turned left towards Coal Harbour instead of right towards his place.

Thirty minutes later, without planning the destination, he entered the dark womb of Stanley Park, looking back upon the glitter of the downtown core. He sat down on a bench.

On the next bench over, two street kids were sleeping, wrapped around each other for warmth/comfort. Victor briefly stared at them, but then switched his attention to the city reflecting on the sheer glass surface of the water, as if it was an idealized version of what Vancouver could become if it worked a little harder.

After a few minutes sitting there, considering nothing, considering everything, Victor walked home.