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Tags: [intimacy](#), [celebrations](#), [workplace](#)

Writer/s: Tessa Wallace

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"Dad's gone into hospital. I don't know how long I'll be gone." Alistair had said.

Rebecca hugged him close for a long time when he broke the news.

"Are you going to be okay here alone?" Alistair asked, stroking her hair.

Rebecca nodded, but later she was fighting back tears as he headed off to thumb a lift into Nice. They had barely spent a night apart since falling into bed together, almost two years ago, when they met during Freshers' Week. Rebecca watched her boyfriend get into a dusty blue VW, then walked back slowly across the campground. Nicholas, a fellow camper and worker at Bar Biarritz, touched her arm and smiled kindly on her return. "Ça va, Rebecca?" he asked. "Oui," she sighed, surprising herself by blushing at the gesture.

Rebecca headed back to her tent and sat alone, taking in all the space created by Alistair's sudden departure. She lay down with her eyes open to think. She swatted at a mosquito that had sneaked through the netting, then stretched out her limbs like a starfish. She felt slightly guilty for enjoying the extra room as she drifted off into a long late afternoon siesta.

At first, Rebecca felt as if being without Alistair was like trying to function blindfolded with one arm tied behind her back. She was so used to him being there, laughing at her stories about the clientele's drunken antics, as he rubbed her aching feet after a ten-hour shift. From the moment she started work until the time she sat counting her tips, Bar Biarritz was abuzz with chatter, laughter, loud music, the clinking of glasses. She could never get to sleep until a good few hours after her shift. Instead, she'd do shots with the bar staff to chase the adrenaline still coursing through her veins.

For the first week after Alistair left, however, she'd slip off at the end of shifts to the Internet café. Alistair had been e-mailing daily since he left. His Dad was doing better; he was grateful to have his children nearby. Alistair's sister, Rhona, had cut short her summer trip around Italy to join them back home. She and Alistair hadn't spent any time together for months, so he reported to Rebecca that they were enjoying catching up.

Rebecca had responded to the first few e-mails, sharing tidbits about the bar and reassuring her boyfriend she still missed him. But for the last few days, she had opened, read, and then deleted his messages. She couldn't fully figure out why, and felt bad for behaving this way when he needed support. She realized she felt pangs of jealousy when Alistair spoke about the good times with his sister, yet she had always liked Rhona, so this confused her. Rebecca had started flirting with Nicholas around the time she stopped responding to Alistair. Everyone at the bar flirted—some did more than that—and they all had people back home. Rebecca decided it was harmless fun. One night, after the others had drifted home, she sat with him on the beach, and they held hands as they talked.

Her boyfriend was a good person, Rebecca told herself, as she shut down the computer in the Internet café—once

again without giving sign of life. He was close to his family; all her friends loved him, and he had always looked after her—right from day one. She wished she was loving him right then as much as everyone else seemed to.

On the third Saturday after Alistair's departure, and after four rounds of shots, Rebecca raised her glass after work and made a toast:

'To me! To nineteen years of me!'

'Quoi?' said Nicholas.

She turned and grinned at him woozily.

'It's my birthday...mon anniversaire.'

Her workmates protested loudly that she should have mentioned it earlier so they could celebrate properly. Rebecca shrugged. She was already overwhelmed at how good life felt—living by the sea, working crazy hours and meeting people unlike anyone she had known before; people from countries she had only seen on the map, telling their stories—telling you everything, because after a day or two, they would be gone, and new punters would take their place at the bar. Rebecca reckoned life didn't get better than this. She hadn't mentioned her birthday in advance, because she wasn't wanting for anything more special than what they already had day in day out.

So the birthday celebrations ended up being impromptu. Nicholas grabbed a case of beer and led the way to the beach. They lit a fire in the dunes; there was singing, dancing, then moonlit lunacy in honor of Rebecca's nineteenth birthday. A few hours after they got there, when the last of the tourists had returned to their hotels, the whole crowd stripped down to various states of undress and charged into the sea. Rebecca shrieked, 'You're all crazy,' so they came back and dragged her fully clothed into the waves.

Nicholas gave Rebecca a piggy-back home in her dripping jeans and tee-shirt. Then she giggled nervously as he helped peel everything off. Immediately after they had had sex, however, she rolled over and wished he were gone.

Soon, the tourists were wearing sweaters on account of the chilly night air. There were quiet spells when Rebecca and her workmates would keep looking at their watch hands, willing them to move. High season was coming to a close.

'Write to me, Rebecca,' Nicholas said, before leaving for his next job in an Alpine ski resort. Rebecca left his address on the Eurostar train. At Victoria Station, she turned her head a little when Alistair went to kiss her, and he missed her lips. Later in a greasy spoon, she explained she no longer felt the same. As she watched him walk away afterwards, she felt very sad. She realized then she had envied Rhona, because she would always have Alistair. Rebecca wanted to grow old with him, but not quite yet.

*Adapted for performance by Barbara Campbell from a story by Tessa Wallace.*