

# FRISBEE GIRL

James Douglas

In between concrete slabs stacked on top of each other two people stand in the stairwell of an above ground parking lot. The boy and girl are friends. Close but only recently so. She's smoking a cigarette while he watches. He quit during the winter when he came down with a sinus infection. Above them the sound of a bird trapped inside the structure flaps its wings against a glass window. It's summertime and the girl is wearing a tank top with a tote bag around her neck. Inside is a mason jar with a glass pipe, weed, and a dark pink bandana to keep it from breaking. Wedged next to it is a plastic frisbee. The guy is wearing a classic white shirt and blue jeans.

"I need to get out of here." The girl says.

"Where will you go?"

"Canada."

"Really?"

"Yeah, why not."

"Where will you stay?"

"I'll find a cheap place to rent."

"Really?"

"Yeah, and until then I'll couch surf."

“Come on that doesn’t really work.”

“Sure it does. I have a friend that did it last summer. I sorta did it for a week or two. If you meet the right people and find the right vibes it’s actually really cool. You end up going to a lot of interesting places.”

He stopped to listen for a moment. Then said, “Oh that’s cool, I guess.”

“It is,” she said.

Above them the bird smacks as it bounces off a plexiglass window trying to get out.

It catches the girl’s attention.

She looks up.

“What’s wrong with the bird?” she asks.

“Not sure, seems confused.”

“Maybe we can help it,” she said.

“Yeah maybe.”

“Here, it needs to get out through the doorway.”

She walked over to the exit door and opened it allowing a swoosh of warm air to wash in off the parking lot roof. The bird paid no mind. It seemed determined where it was at the other end of the stairwell trying to fly south towards the sun and water through an opening that wasn’t there.

The guy looked at the bird and then to his friend standing in the doorway. This wasn’t going to work.

“I think it needs to be encouraged,” he said.

They were sitting in the bathroom.

She had the toilet seat down and was sitting on top of it.

He was leaning on the edge of the bath tub.

She looked him in the eyes and they made contact for a brief moment before she broke away and said, "When I'm nice to you, it makes me feel uncomfortable, and then I need to create space for myself by being mean."

She made contact again for a brief moment, his eyes were piercing, and she broke away.

She couldn’t quite speak to him, so much as she could pull the pin on a grenade, turn to him, throw it, and then shield herself from the blast by turning away before it exploded.

It was a hot summer day and he had found himself a refuge of air conditioning and a moment of free time, so he sat down and began writing in his journal:

*“Frisbee Girl texted me from Paris, multiple times. The first time it was about the non-gender specific cat she thinks I should adopt. The second time it was her calling me a cute nickname and hoping I was well. I thought of responding immediately, but chose to play it cool, maybe make her sweat. The irony is that I don't want to do that. I want to tell her how I feel, honestly and immediately. But my experience with her has lead me to believe that she pursues that which retreats from her. That she feels the need to convince those who don't desire her, to change her mind. As fucked up as this next part sounds, I think it has to do with the relationship she has with her Russell Crowe-lookalike father. She brings him up so many times while talking to me about associatively relative topics that the conclusion is clear. To think otherwise would be foolish... So here I sit. Distracted by her texts. Thinking of a cute, fun, non-committal, brief message to respond with. Something that says, 'I like you.' Without saying, 'I need you.' Or worse, 'I'm desperate for your validation.' It was somewhere around the point when I thought to use a cute nickname that mirrored hers (dogs and cats) in a cute way; when I remembered that she was texting me internationally and there was a good chance my new cellphone bill didn't have International texting. This communication could possibly be quite expensive. Was it worth it? I wasn't sure.”*

She was drinking a triple shot cold brew coffee.

He reached for it.

She pulled away.

“You want some? Then you gotta walk.”

He frowned. It had been his idea to buy it in the first place. Both of them had needed a little pick me up with all the pot they had been smoking together.

“Alright. I could walk,” he said. “I could use a walk.”

“Yeah ok, but you know we're walking to Park Slope right?”

“How far is that?”

“Across Gowanus, and then—“

“And then?”

“Yeah.”

“There’s an and then?”

“Yeah, and then we walk across the park to get to my place.”

“Why?”

“So I can borrow a suitcase from my dad to pack.”

They entered the park from the Grand Army Plaza archway. It was a little out of their way but they had taken a detour around a corner to smoke something several blocks back.

“You know, I have this other friend.”

He turned to her unsure what she meant.

“We go on walks all the time.”

He winced.

“He’s really smart. We talk about everything.”

“Yeah?” he said with a wave of insecurity.

“Yeah. He’s always telling me the difficult things I don’t want to hear. The stuff I need to hear. Y’know?”

“Yeah...” he said.

She walked in, past a confused and tense-looking elderly man wearing a white button down shirt; it was tucked in. His hair was gray and most of what should have been on top was no longer there. He didn't wear glasses though he looked like he ought to. She paid him no attention, walking directly past, not inches from him. Then turned around and said, "Oh, there you are."

The elderly man looked at her friend.

Then her.

Then her looking at him.

He glanced at him, then looked at her.

She reacted and spoke to him first. "This is my father Bernard," she said. "And this is James."

He extended his hand and introduced himself:

"Hello, I'm James."

The elderly man tilted his eye to the side and winced in a bemused manner, "Johnny, did you say?"

“James,” he said. Looking him straight in the eyes.

The man then turned his gaze towards his daughter as he shook her friend’s hand.

He turned around and stepped away towards the turnstiles. Giving them privacy seemed like the thing to do. He even averted his eyes for good measure. He still wonders what they talked about.

Later on their way through the turnstiles James turned his head to look back for her father. He wanted to wave goodbye. Give a slight nod. A recognition of respect. But the man had already left, back out into the rain.

Later that day he got a phone call.

On the screen the caller ID read: ‘Frisbee Girl’.

He must have changed it in the last few weeks.

“What’s up?” he asked.

She wanted to hang out. But she didn't want to leave the house.

"Too hot out," she said. "Call me later, once the sun goes down."

Much later that night, he got another phone call from Frisbee Girl. She wanted to smoke pot and go see a movie. Then she said nevermind because she was broke. He told her about possibly being caught up in a terrorist plot (under the guise of shooting a music video) and she told him about the articles she was reading in bed that referred to the success story of a retarded model. She didn't seem pleased. She seemed pissed.

Way later that night he got a text message from her. She was waiting for the train and frustrated about how long it was going to take her to get home. She didn't tell him she was drunk.

A little bit after that, they were sitting awkwardly on a fancy couch that no one could ever possibly sit comfortably on. She pulled out her phone and started scrolling through her Instagram feed. He sighed. Took his phone out, and began responding to emails.

She stretched her arms out to yawn, and accidentally elbowed him in the face.

"Ow!" he yelled.

He caught the wrist and moved her arm to wrap around her waist. She slid down. The back of her head rested on his chest and for a few moments they sat together in peaceful tranquility. Then she turned her head to the side. She was breathing against his skin: heavy, hard and wet. Like a dog.

"You ok?"

"It's mostly boogers and stomach acid."

"What?" He said confused by the sound of the air conditioner.

"I'm fine," she said.

"Huh? I can't hear you."

"Nothing."

"No. Really, I can't hear you, you're looking the other direction and the fan is on."

"Oh, it just that—"

Just then he got a phone call. It was Madison. His dead brother's ex-girlfriend. He hadn't heard from her in years, not counting their last annual meet up on the 4th of July a few weeks ago. They had a tendency to avoid one another while gravitating around the anniversary of his death. This was an odd time of night to be calling, but something made him want to, so he answered the phone and walked out of the room.

"Hello?"

"Hi."

"What's up? It's late."

"I'm sitting on my fire escape smoking cigarettes and drinking mimosas. What are you doing?"

"I'm making stoner quesadillas with shredded cheese and Sriracha."

"I hate you," she said in a half-joking tone.

He laughed.

Though what he said had been a lie, it did give him the idea that he could get stoned right now if he wanted to. He had a bunch of leftover roaches in a film canister sitting in his drawer. He could get stoned. Maybe sleep. And then not have any left over for later in the day when he needed to get work done. Justification city? He didn't think so. He thought it was the perfect plan. Totally logical.

"So why are you calling?" He inquired with a smirk. Somewhere in all of this he had decided not to take this too seriously and as a result was having a bit of fun with it.

“We do this every week. We argue. We make up. It seems fine. We drink. We eat dinner. We argue. It happens all over again.”

She continued to complain about the weekly cycle of arguments and apologies.

“Maybe it’s the drinking,” he said.

“What?”

“I don’t know,” he said.

“Nevermind.”

She hung up the phone.

Click.

He took the phone off his ear and looked at it, confirming she had hung up on him. Then went to his text messages and thought about it for a second.

He looked back down the hallway where Frisbee Girl was lying on his couch. She was still awake but had just yawned and turned over, pulling her feet up into her chest.

He looked back to his phone.

The last message between the two of them displayed. It was from over six months earlier, the last time they had attempted to meet up. He had been the last one to message saying: “definitely” in response to her “let’s meet up soon”.

He looked at the time stamps.

He sighed.

Then he messaged her: “?”

A few moments passed with no response so he went to the bathroom before getting in bed and turning off the light.

In the dark he checked the phone one more time, the blue light burning his eyeballs.

Nothing.

He shrugged it off and turned over in the other direction.

A few moments later he heard a beep.

He didn’t want to look at it, but he also did, so he turned over, unlocked his phone and saw her text message which read: “Can we talk?”

“Of course we can,” he responded.

A few seconds later a ring tone went blasting into his ears.

He picked up.

She took a deep breath and then exhaled into the phone: "He gets drunk every day, every day, I just can't do this anymore and I'm not sure what to do about it."

"Sounds awful."

"It is."

He hung up the phone. She hadn't asked about him.

"What's that?" the girl on the couch asked.

It seems his taking the phone call had accidentally woken her.

"Nothing. Go back to sleep," he said.

The next morning when she left she kissed him on the cheek and forehead. "Sleep well," she said. He opened his eyes and said, "I hope you have a good day," before passing out for another two hours. He had work to do later. Always more work to do.

The other day he found himself asking friends and family the following question: "Is the 30th a good day for you to attend the memorial?" He tendency was to be far to accommodating for his own good. Who cares for him?

She didn't want to bring her bike inside. She parked her bike on top of my garden. When he asked her not to she said, "They're dead John. Give up, they're dead!"

He said they weren't. She insisted it was too late.

Later that night, when it began raining, she brought her bike into the hallway. He asked her why she chose to kill his plants while they smoked a cigarette on the front stoop. She apologized. He walked her home.

She wanted to smoke a joint. He said yes. After all, when a beautiful woman says she wants to do something cool and dangerous, the guy says yes. There is no other response. They started walking. Later on, a cop car rolled by with the windows up. They were safe. A few blocks later he wondered when he was going to turn back. He hadn't planned to walk her the whole way home, and she knew that. It was a long walk. In fact, walking part of the way was her idea. But he's a gentleman, and he had a crush on her, so they kept walking. She began trying to ride her bike with both legs on one side, like a proper English woman riding a horse sidesaddle. He inhaled.

"It's all tobacco at the end," she said.



"Uh-huh," he replied while exhaling.

He passed her the joint and then she tried to get him to ride with her by sitting in the basket hanging off the front handlebars, while she pedaled. He began to giggle as he tried to fit, but was too heavy and his weight began to bend the frame.

"This isn't working," he said.

"Do you think you could push the bike for a bit while I walk?" She asked.

"Fine. I guess."

"What?"

"Nothing."

He took the bike from her and began leading it by the handlebars. She concentrated on smoking and began moving with pep in her step.

"I'm really good at walking. I can walk on lots of little stones and step well."

Then she tripped over broken concrete. He laughed. She turned to me and smiled.

"Yeah. Well. When I'm focused."

"Lemme see that," he said motioning to the joint. She took a hit and passed it.

Suddenly--out of nowhere, he heard a voice: "Excuse me sir, what are you smoking?" Whether he threw the joint on the ground before or after the officer spoke, he didn't know. Maybe it was the way he held it, the way he tossed it. Or maybe it was the smell. She did say it was all tobacco at the end. He turned his head; it was a cop, two in fact.

"A cigarette," he said.

"A cigarette, really?" The officer wasn't buying it.

"Yes."

"Just a cigarette?"

He knew where this was going.

"Where is it?" The cop sternly inquired.

Without thinking twice he stuck his finger out and pointed directly to where the roach lay.

"There." He said.

The officer clicked on a bright white LED flashlight and aimed it at the ground. "This?"

"Yes."

He pulled out a rubber glove, and without putting it on his hand, used it to pick up the roach.

"This is just a cigarette?"

"It was tobacco at the end," he said with the honesty of a seasoned lawyer.

By this point the policeman's partner was asking him his own questions and he felt the pressure increase as they ganged up on him.

"Please have a seat over here sir," said the officer's partner.

He said nothing. He sat.

The two uniformed men were towering over him when the first gave the roach a good sniff and said, "You sure this is just tobacco? We can find out. We have a kit in the car. We can test it."

"It was a spliff," he confessed.

"Oh, so you were smoking something else?"

"Yes, it was a mixture of pot and tobacco, with only tobacco at the end," he said with determination not to tell a lie. He hadn't so far. Sort of.

"What are you two doing?" The first officer inquired, turning to the girl. "Just walking down the street, smoking a joint?"

"I wasn't smoking anything," the girl quickly replied with a sense of fear in her voice.

"I just saw him smoking it," the policeman said to his partner.

"That's not mine," she said as she looked back over her bicycle.

"It's mine. It was just me." He spoke in a strong and resonant tone.

The cop proceeded to separate the two and had the young man sit down on a stone stoop and asked him for ID while shining a bright flashlight in his face. Frisbee Girl looked back over the bicycle from up the street with a pained expression on her face. She seemed worried. John just sat there accepting what had happened as if it had already occurred.

She threw him under the bus, he thought. The shit hit the fan, and she threw him under the bus.

Afterwards he walked her the rest of the way home. They had an extended hug, and he took the train home at 1:30am.

It was one in the morning and they found themselves sitting in a vinyl booth at an all night diner by the F train.

"Damn, that's a good milkshake."

She leaned back. Smiled. Then leaned forward to take another sip, this time lifting the glass off the table as she did it. Then she finished by placing it almost in front of him.

She leaned back and smiled before turning her attention to the TV screen behind his head: on it is a televised game of Texas hold 'em.

He looked at her, then the glass, and said, "Can I have some?"

"Of course."

He leaned forward. Drew the straw to his lips. And took a sip.

"Yeah, that is good."

She giggled. "Right? It's like pure ice cream. So good."

She pulled the glass with both hands and slid it back across the table, taking another sip.

"Jack, what would you say if I told you I was getting married?"

His face grimaced, and he glanced back at the TV to hide it, then looked back to her.

"I dunno. Sounds like some stupid shit you'd do."

She laughed.

"Yeah. That's true," she smiled, ". . . Dead On."

"Are you serious?" He asked.

"Of course I am," she said, "Why wouldn't I be?"

"Who are you going to marry?"

"Sam."

He said nothing.

"I told you about him."

He glanced at the waiter over her shoulder for a moment and then resumed eye contact.

He had not expected this.

She texted. She wanted to know what he was up to tonight. He responded in motion. He was getting out of the shower on his way to a friend's party. He told her as much, included the address, and continued preparing to leave.

Suddenly, a phone call. He picked up. It was her. She wanted him to wait for her, she wanted to come. She wanted him to meet her on the subway platform. "Frontish of the train," she said.

"Sounds good," he said.

"Are you leaving now?"

"Yeah."

"Cool. I'm pulling my pants up. Should be at the train in fifteen minutes."

"Sounds good."

"Ok great. This is great," she said with excitement building in her voice.

He noticed this. It made him smile.

"See you soon."

Once he got to the train station it occurred to him that something didn't add up. First he went to the wrong platform. Realized he didn't have a swipe left. Bought a new Metrocard. Then checked the map. Her stop was in the opposite direction of the party. He'd have to go backwards before they could go forwards. He wasn't quite sure what to do next. He was already underground, and likely so was she. No signal. No way to call. She'd be expecting him so he didn't have much of a choice. Just then, his phone began to ring. Somehow her signal had made it through the concrete. He picked up.

"Hey."

"Hey."

"Yeah I just realized I should be riding the train towards you actually."

"Yeah I know."

"Are you already riding towards me?"

"At the station."

"Cool. Meet at your stop?"

"Yeah. Are you going to be at the front or the back?"

"Middle. Towards the back."

"Ok . . . How will I—"

"Look for me. If you see me get on. If I don't see you I'll get off."

"Ok."

He was inspired by her decisive tone. He decided he was going to make his move tonight. He wasn't going to tell her how he felt. He was going to kiss her.

Then he realized he was on the wrong side of the tracks. He paused. Contemplated how unimportant money was in the grand scheme of things, remembered how she had sounded on the phone, exited through the turnstile, ran up the stairs above ground, across the street, and back down the other side where he bought another Metrocard before swiping his way back in to wait.

He waited. It was hot in the subway. When she arrived she was wearing denim booty shorts and a tight yellow shiny t-shirt that could be argued as see through.

"I cut my finger," she said, "see, look." Then she held up her hand so he could see it.

"I don't see anything," he said. "How did it happen?"

"A can opener."

"Ouch."

"Yeah, my can opener is old so it doesn't always work properly and I got cut by the jagged metal lid."

They had arrived at the party when suddenly, a cute black haired girl wearing a denim dress appeared out of nowhere, her name was Sophia. She was making an entrance at the front door with several bottles of booze and a man named Vincent in tow.

"Roof?" he said to Frisbee Girl.

Sophia landed a bottle of Prosecco on the kitchen counter and began unscrewing the foil.

"Roof?"

"What's this about a roof?" Vincent inquired.

"We're on a mission." John said.

"Oh yeah?"

"Yeah. I hear there's a roof." John looked to FB and smiled. She seemed nervous. "Come on, the roof!" he shouted as he began moving forward, leading the charge.

By this point Vincent was preoccupied talking to Sophia over an unopened bottle of cheap whiskey while she continued unscrewing champagne foil—just then, there was a loud pop! and Sophia smiled, while the crowd hooted and hollered.

"Woo!" yelled John.

"Yeah!" shouted Vincent.

"That was scary," said FB. "Someone could have lost an eye."

"Aw, come on," John said. "It's exciting."

"Wanna go smoke a cigarette?" she asked.

"Roof?"

"Yeah."

She walked to the front door and he followed. As they went through the door, John half peaked

backward over his shoulder towards the people he was leaving behind, but he didn't look. He stuck his arm out, palm open, to catch the door as it closed. He did. But it didn't make much of a difference. The door slammed loudly all the same.

The young couple of kids began climbing the stairs. Somehow, even though she left the apartment first, he was the one leading their way up the stairs. Several floors later, one of them decided to say something:

"God, this is sooooo long. How many more floors are there?"

"We're almost there," he said.

"How much further?"

"I don't know."

"Let's just go downstairs."

"To the first floor?" he asked.

"Yeah. Come on."

John stuck his head out into the opening in the middle of the stairwell and looked down to the black and white tiled ground level, then upward, all the while counting floors.

"But we're halfway there," he said.

"That doesn't even make sense," she replied already walking downward.

"What? Come on."

He stood there for a moment and watched her walk away. Then he followed.

They reached the ground floor and went back out the double set of locked glass doors. They would have to ring the bell and face a security camera to get back in.

"I just realized I left my cat locked in my bedroom back home," she said. "I'll have to go back home and let her out."

"Oh," he said. "Well can we smoke that cigarette first?"

"Yeah, of course."

They walked to the curb and then stepped back towards the building, finding refuge by a brick column. FB looked up. "Gotta be careful," she said. "People throwing cigarette butts."

"Yeah that's true."

He removed a pack of Camel Turkish Gold cigarettes from the left pocket of his blue jeans.

She handed her lighter to him then removed a pouch of red American Spirit tobacco from the shaman medicine coin-purse around her neck and offered to roll him one. He waved her off and

lit his cigarette with her lighter, taking a drag.

"What was her name?" she asked.

"Who?"

"The girl inside."

"Which one?"

"Your friend. The one that you said 'hello' to."

"Oh, her . . . Sophia."

"Sooo . . . Fiii . . . Uhhh . . . So-fi-ah — that's a nice sounding name." She crossed her arms and leaned back against the brick wall, "Three syllables. So, fi, uh."

He looked her in the eyes. "Oh, I guess."

"I cut my finger, see—" She shoved her finger in his face, showing it to him. "I gotta go."

"What?"

She started walking away.

He stood there for a moment, watching it happen.

"Wait a minute," he said.

He panicked. He couldn't shout his feelings to her. That went against the whole plan. It was at this moment he remembered he had her lighter: he was holding it in his hand.

"You forgot . . ." he was begging her to turn around, lifting his hands up to his face, pleading with what was between them, ". . . your lighter."

She stopped.

"Oh," she said. Slowly walking back in his direction.

He did the same.

They met in the middle.

"Thank you," she said. Accepting the lighter from him.

"Of course."

He smiled.

So did she.

He leaned in and placed his hands around her forearms.

She paused.

"No. No I can't," she said. Pulling away.

He lifted his hands in the air and stepped back, turning his body to the side, away from her.

There was a sad and pensive look in her eyes.

She uncrossed her arms.

He stood there, doing nothing. She took a half step back and looked down toward the pavement. He looked directly at her then he purposefully looked away. Then they both just sort of stood there for a moment, waiting?

"Ok," he said. "Can I get a hug?"

"Yeah."

He stepped forward and embraced her. She tried to give him her usual limply clutching hug but this time he grabbed tight and squeezed.