



SPORTS AND PASTIMES

JEAN-PHILIPPE BARRIL GUÉRARD

TRANSLATED BY  
AIMEE WALL

A NOVEL

# Sports and Pastimes

Jean-Philippe Baril Guérard

translated by Aimee Wall

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## SWIMMING

Estelle Lavery made me break my promise. Nine hours ago, I was vomiting on Highway 15, and now I'm already on my third pint.

Dirty slut. Me, not her.

Estelle still has to work as a bartender to survive, like a lot of actors. I pity her, but an acquaintance who works in a bar means free shots, and free shots are a fast track to happiness, so I can't say it doesn't suit me.

In my defence, I came for drinks out of compassion. Estelle had texted me that it was a dead Sunday at the bar where she works and that she needed company. I thought she mustn't be feeling that great and needed to talk. Then I realized she'd put out a call on Facebook to say the bar was empty and she was bored. I felt a little less special. Estelle has a pretty serious problem with solitude. She's a slut, ready to tolerate the presence of just about anyone. As long as the person keeping her company talks very little and listens a lot, she's satisfied.

Estelle is crazy and a little empty inside. I really like her. She's one of the rare girls I can tolerate in my entourage, because she's considerably less neurotic than most actresses, who are, by definition, hysterics.

I'm thinking of going home to bed when a crowd of bearded guys comes into the bar. I recognize most of the faces from a photo or a video somewhere. Musicians, but I couldn't specify beyond that. More indie than pop, but everyone is indie now anyway. So musicians, period, then. Two or three faces I've seen at parties. At least one of them has slept with someone I know, it seems, but I couldn't say who. Estelle, definitely. Estelle sleeps with everyone.

The Félix awards were tonight. It seems early to me to be crashing a bar at the end of the party. I gather from their yelling that the after-party sucked and they ended up here.

I lose Estelle. Now that she's busy, she doesn't really need me as much. She's teasing the musicians, the slut. She does take the time to pour me a fourth pint. The dirty slut.

One of the musicians is holding a Félix award in his hand. He keeps setting it down everywhere. On the bar. On a table. Lifting it into the air. He sets it down everywhere but always keeps it well in view. The slut. Announcing that he won a Félix. Even the least discerning already got that twenty minutes ago. I'd like to shove it up his ass. Not in a sexual way. In a brutal way. In a way that would mean he wouldn't be able to even think about shitting without wanting to cry for the rest of his life. It relaxes me, just thinking about it. I drink my pint in big gulps. I get ready to leave.

He comes and sits down next to me, says:

“Want to make out with my Félix?”

“I want to shove your Félix up your ass,” I say with a cordial smile.

“Interesting.”

This ability that some idiots possess to perceive sexual innuendo in just about everything.

“I don’t think you’d be into it,” I say.

“Oh, I’m pretty open. You’d be surprised.”

I grab his Félix and inspect it disdainfully.

“I’d shove it up there all at once,” I say. “Without warning.”

“Is there a way to negotiate a slightly more gentle treatment?”

He takes back his Félix.

“I was just leaving,” I say.

“A shot first, maybe.”

This guy is not hot and I find him bland. But I never say no to a shot. The girl reflex. An unfounded reflex at that. If someone has to pay for a round, it should be me. I must make four times what he does. I haven’t read his tax returns, but I’m pretty good at these estimations generally.

Bottoms up. He says:

“You’re an actress, right?”

“Yes.”

“Shit, man, that’s what I thought, I’ve seen you on TV.”

“Yes.”

“You were in... *Triplet*, right?”

“Not just that.”

“But you were in *Triplet*, right?”

“Yes.”

*Triplet*, a kids’ show that went off the air four years ago,

followed the crazy adventures of three teenagers studying at a music school. These teenagers were played by me, Félix-Antoine, and David. We were cast because we each played an instrument a little: me, the clarinet; Félix-Antoine, the trombone; and David, the piano. A low-end production with scripts sanitized by educational consultants and social workers that charmed a whole generation of kids lacking taste or the capacity for critical thought.

He continues:

“I didn’t really watch it...but I caught a little bit of it here and there.”

Lies, you probably followed the show with a religious fervour but you’d never admit it because it’d be incredibly uncool to admit that when you’re trying to pick up a girl.

I get shots bought for me pretty often because of that show, which I find kind of incredible since I didn’t suspect at the time I was shooting it that something as trite as *Triplet* could have the power to mark my generation in such a lasting way. It’s even more incredible that people only remember that, when I’ve never really stopped working and I’ve been in projects that were clearly more relevant and successful. At the same time, someone who recognizes me because of a shitty TV show definitely doesn’t go to the theatre very often, and probably goes to film festivals even less often.

Sunday nights are treacherous nights because there’s little warning given before you’re thrown right into them and taken from behind.

A friend of the idiot with the Félix comes over to say hello. Kisses the corners of my mouth. Looks me in the eyes too long. He seems to recognize me from somewhere. I can’t place him. I can never place anyone.

“Hey you.”

“Hey,” I say.

“Having a good night?”

“Okay.”

His name, if I ever knew it, is not coming back to me. Don't feel like I can ask him. I wish someone could yell out to him, to help me out.

The party is losing momentum. The bar isn't enough for the musicians anymore. They want something better. I hear them enumerating their options. It's Sunday. The options are limited. A few minutes later, I grab my bag and jump in a taxi without saying goodbye to Estelle. I don't know where we're going. I'm sitting between Musician With Félix and Musician With Forgotten Name. Musician With Félix takes out a baggie of coke and dips a key into it. He hands the bag to Musician With Forgotten Name, who helps himself too. He strokes my nose with the key. The Pakistani driver throws us a slightly panicked look, muttering:

“You know, I don't really like for you to be doing that in my car...”

Musician With Forgotten Name catches his eye in the rear-view mirror:

“We can get out and take another taxi if you prefer.”

The driver sinks down into his seat, silent. I giggle like a schoolgirl. Like a real fucking idiot. Pressure on my knees coming from the left and from the right. It's a really big seat. There's no need for pressure. A human sandwich.

Downtown. Entrance to a building of condos. Pretty nice. Not made of cardboard, swankier than your basic model. Intercom. It's unlocked right away. Elevator.



Twenty floors. Musician With Félix hits the twentieth. Penthouse? Interesting. Musician With Forgotten Name's cellphone rings, he answers, snaps:

"I'm coming, calm down."

He hangs up. No chance for his interlocutor to respond. I look at my phone. David never responded to my text. He must be in one of his feral phases. A little bump before the doors open again.

It's not bad. Big view of the city. We know so few people who live downtown, a view like this is almost exotic. The place is huge. It's terribly furnished, super tacky. Bad taste is endemic with these people.

There are a lot of people. A few TV people. A lot of musicians. Faces I often see at parties but couldn't name. It always ends up being the same crowd. Little smiles, little nods of the head, so as to not look snobby, so as to not ignore anyone, in case it turns out to be someone you don't want to get on the wrong side of—and who would you want to get on the wrong side of, in this small town of a city where everyone's worked with everyone and slept with all their sisters?

Musician With Forgotten Name's girlfriend is here. Frantic. She complains about how long it took. Jams her tongue in his mouth. Ostensibly, that is. To clearly establish their relationship to anyone who might be watching. In this case, me.

She's a cultural commentator, I think. She interviewed me once. Not super smart but nice. I find her considerably less nice now having seen her babbling with her boyfriend and almost pissing on him to mark her territory in front of me. It's crazy girls like this who make guys afraid to get involved. At the same time, it's because of guys

who are afraid to get involved that girls go crazy. The chicken or the egg.

There are people in swimsuits.

I really don't get it about swimsuits. The way that people wear swimsuits without any consciousness of the fact that they're incredibly ugly. I also really don't get how people become ugly so quickly. How people get ugly so young. Having a huge ass at twenty-five is unacceptable. I understand we drink a lot of alcohol. It's normal. That's why we have to find a balance somewhere. Eat less. Move more. Do coke. I'm not a shining example of the lifestyle practices recommended by Health Canada and so far my ass still fits in a bikini without detaching anyone's retinas. A little discipline, really.

And even if I had a king-sized ass (which will never happen in my lifetime), I'd have the goodness of heart to hide it. It's the bare minimum of decency and etiquette.

There are girls better suited to bikinis than me, I admit. But enough girls less suited that I don't look like a vile babushka should I decide to go swimming.

Texts from Estelle Lavery.

**Where are you???**

**I don't know**

**You don't know what?**

**I'm at some kind of party at  
someone's place**

**Okay**

**You want to come?**

**No, I still haven't closed up**

**Shitty**

When I look up again, the party has dispersed. Musician With Forgotten Name, whom I've now identified as Seb, thanks to his girlfriend meowing his name non-stop, begging him for kisses, is standing in front of me, in his shorts, without his bitch at his side.

"Pool?" he asks.

"I don't have a suit," I say.

"Me neither."

"Cool."

I follow him to the pool. An enormous glass room. An indoor pool on the roof of the building. I wonder how much it costs, a penthouse like that with an indoor pool.

The pool appears to be collectively owned but nobody seems to care right now. I wouldn't want to have the owner of the place as my neighbour. The party has definitely transferred here. There are at least fifty people in the pool.

The music is on full blast but the people it could disturb are probably too cool to be spending their Sunday evening relaxing at home. They're probably either in the pool with us, or like relaxing in their chalet in the Townships.

Seb wants to do a line before jumping in the pool. He does up four, offers me two. Even with my back to her, bent over to do the line, I feel his girlfriend's eyes on me. Bitch.

Seb decides he doesn't want to get his underwear wet. He does a cannonball into the pool, completely naked. I do the same, because it seems like a great idea: getting naked confirms that I've got a practically flawless body, which is not the case for any of the idiots present here.

I don't know what's gotten into everyone, but the party

suddenly gets really filthy. Seb has a forty of Jack Daniel's but refuses to give me a sip unless I kiss his girlfriend.

If that's all it takes. His girlfriend plays along. She even seems pretty happy about it, the bitch.

Everyone around us is making out. A girl starts sucking off the Musician With Félix, who's sitting on the edge of the pool. He's even less beautiful naked. A long, not-so-toned body. Lanky, with flabby skin and a little beer gut. Soft muscles. I'd have him working out a little. It'd do him good. Another girl comes over and pushes the first girl out of the way to have a turn herself. It seems pretty urgent, this fellatio.

Seb decides he wants to make out with me. I am, let's say, lukewarm about it, but his girlfriend seems to think it's a good idea. She watches us, touching herself.

Well then. I keep going, what're you gonna do. It's not so bad in the end. Not bad-looking, Seb. A girl passes us and stops to kiss Seb too. I make out with her too, why not.

Seb seems very pleased with my behaviour because he compensates me with a lot of Jack Daniel's.

Musician With Félix is no longer Musician With Félix but Musician Period. He's put down his Félix. The situation must be serious or require particular attention.

He's on his knees on the edge of the pool, a girl in the water in front of him. He's cheerfully jerking off. About a dozen people stand in a circle around him. They encourage him. He growls like a little dog. Like a little pug. His soft skin ripples to the rhythm of his masturbation. His face contorts in an expression of extreme pain. He could be shitting, or dying. It's not pretty, ugly people coming.

When he finally spurts all over the face and breasts of

the girl beneath him, the circle around him applauds. That girl is beautiful, I think to myself, she deserves better sperm. I lift the bottle of Jack into the air, as if to congratulate Musician Period. I pour Seb a shot. It splashes all over his face.

The pool filter had better be in good shape because it's really got its fucking work cut out for it.

Seb drags me out of the pool and lays me out on a lounge chair. I hear his girlfriend protesting, in the background, behind us. Seb ignores her and starts feeling me up. When I have a moment of lucidity, I look up just in time to see his little bitch finish dressing and leaving the party in tears. We get back to it, with more enthusiasm. Seb's phone, on the ground in his half-soaked jeans, doesn't stop ringing. I get goosebumps. I shiver. The chlorine burns my nostrils. Behind us, laughter and shrieks and sighs of pleasure.

He stops, not to answer his phone but to cut us some lines. He brings me back to the apartment to get us some drinks. He spits a mouthful of gin down my throat. The party's slowly dying. We decide to leave as a couple takes over the sumptuous Italian-wool sectional couch to do it doggy style.

A few minutes later, we're in a taxi with a bottle of gin that I made sure to steal on our way out. Seb keeps kissing me, wanting to make out, but his penis remains incurably flaccid. Too much coke. His phone keeps ringing, non-stop. I finally force him to answer it by accepting the call and putting the phone up to his ear.

It's his bitch. She's crying. He sighs.

"Listen, baby, stop, calm down, what you're saying is not true, you're freaking out because you're drunk. No.

No, it was on vibrate and there was music. No. Listen. Calm down. Calm down. Stop crying. I'm coming back. Soon. I'm at the party, okay. No. No, we're still together, baby, don't say that. Listen. I'll call you back. We'll talk tomorrow, okay?"

Then he kisses me again. Kneading my thighs and breasts like fresh dough. The taxi is stopped in front of my place, has been for the last five minutes at least, and the meter is still going. This is going to be an expensive make-out. I get out. He follows me. I say:

"Seb. It'd be better if you went home."

"No, come on..."

"Really."

"My girlfriend won't know," he mutters slackly.

"Your girlfriend has a pretty good idea what's going on."

"Yeah, but..."

Your girlfriend has a pretty good idea what's going on, and you're never going to get a hard-on with all the coke you've snorted, so I'm not going to be wasting my time with you. That's what I might have said, but I've learned that you cannot, must not, talk about erectile problems with guys, even the ballsiest twenty-year-olds. They'll get obsessed and their cocks will stay soft forever. Premature erectile dysfunction is the great evil of our time, and I'm trying to remedy that as best I can. We've already got Gabriel likely tormented since our night together last night. I'll try to save them, the poor little boys.

Seb finally listens to me when I lose my patience and talk to him like he's an idiot. He gets back in the taxi, whining like a preteen refused a kiss. You can't say that I don't have at least a little regard for female solidarity.

Heading up to my place I realize how much alcohol I've ingested since the beginning of the night. Good thing I didn't eat much, it'd be a fucking ton of calories. If I'd brought home a guy who could get it up, I'd at least have been able to exert myself a little. I should have taken advantage of the pool and done a few laps.