



WINNING STORY

You

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Waking takes a little longer this morning. Your eyes open slowly to the ribbon of light sneaking into your bed through that gap in the curtains. It's early, but you smile.

You roll around for a moment in the warmth of the bed. They're beside you, breathing heavily. You think of last night and the day before. Then you think of the night before that and the years of companionship and love which brought you to this place. The moments of anguish and anger are quickly forgotten. You want to wake them, but you don't.

The chill only teases you for a minute before you step into the warm shower. The heat sails around you in the steam and you can only just see the bottle of bubble bath and moisturiser on the shelf when you decide to open your eyes. When you close them, there's nothing but that familiar smell of yourself, the toasty caress of water that's just a little too hot and the promise of a new day.

In the kitchen you fry eggs for the boys and mix fruit salad for your fussy little angel. The yolks harden slightly as the whites turn opaque and butter spits and sends up that delicious scent. You decide to add a little passionfruit pulp to the salad. Why not? A few kisses and you're walking to the bus stop.

The journey is long, but you don't mind. You check your emails. You listen to a little music. You text a friend and you find twelve minutes to read some of that book you never get enough time for. Soon you're at work.

The restaurant is already busy and you know it'll be full at lunch. You take orders and smile. It's not a fake smile, it's real. You love the social side of the job. You love being paid to chat to that woman who always wants to talk about her son, even though the child is only one and hasn't really done anything worth talking about yet. You love watching the toddlers drool as their

fathers walk them past the cake cabinet. You love life and the warm sun reminds you of that fact every day. It never rains for long.

Soon people rush in and start relaxing. They order shiraz from the east, chardonnay from the west and sauvignon blanc from our friends in New Zealand. A thin man in a vest and pin striped trousers sips whisky as he scoops up little mouthfuls of risotto. He chats to a younger woman who slowly picks at a pavlova. She takes tiny little bites and enjoys the texture of it over her tongue with the taste of sweetened whipped cream. They laugh in harmony as they share their lives around this perfect meal.

A large group of men and women sit at one long table and tell jokes. As they yell back and forth, the strangers around them eaves drop and giggle at the silliness of it all.

“What are the three major Australian political parties?”

“What?”

“Liberal, labour and cocktail!”

A roar of mirth rises from the large table and sweeps the room, infecting everyone. You can smell lamb and that miraculous aroma of rosemary. Pepper. You can hear the bacon crackling on the grill.

Soon it's your break and you order the fish. It's breaded and fried in a shallow pan. You want to know what it's seasoned with but the chef is too busy to talk. You squeeze a thick chunk of lemon over the meal and the drops sink into the soft coating like tears of pleasure into a tissue. It flakes away in little diamonds on your fork and it's so supple in your mouth you don't even have to chew. You chomp down on thin fries and think of the beach. The way you love to eat fish with

your fingers from those huge sheets of butcher's paper. You only put vinegar on your chips at the beach. You remember watching sea gulls argue. You're finished and you tie up your apron once more to get back on the floor.

You carry on and clean for a few more hours. Then you're done.

You wait for the bus. You check your emails again. You ride the bus. You open your front door and hear your loved ones. It's so strange the way they always sound the same in that first moment, no matter what they're talking about. As if your home somehow remembered what you wanted to hear and played it back for you. As if your whole life was spent just returning to this place. Everything good that makes you smile out there is just passing time until you can get back to everything good here.

A few kisses and that special someone smiles a long deep grin to see you. A grin so full it changes the entire shape of their face and makes you feel like every moment before has only been to practice gratitude.

You hold hands like simple lovers, you walk side by side like comfortable friends and you chat. Their eyes follow your movements and you watch them as they watch you. You do nothing out of the ordinary, but everything you do together is exceptional. This place is so peaceful. So perfect. This place is home.

Before long you're wearing your favourite comfy clothes and sitting in your favourite chair. It's dark outside and the kids are quiet, but not asleep yet. The TV is on. You don't really like soccer but apparently the world cup is a big deal. In February you watched the Winter Olympics in Sochi. You enjoyed it. It made you proud, even though you didn't quite understand why. Perhaps you were just proud to be human.

You think about that. Being human. You think about everything we've accomplished together.

You think about how we rely on each other and how we're lucky to do so.

Soon you'll go to bed, but not yet.