

Island Eyes,

Island Skies

Island Eyes, Island Skies

Richard Levine

**FEATHERED TALE
PUBLISHERS**

Copyright © 2010 Richard Levine
All rights reserved.

Except as permitted under the U.S. Copyright Act of 1976, no part of this publication may be reproduced, distributed, or transmitted in any form or by any means, or stored in a database or retrieval system, without prior written permission of the author.

Feathered Tale Publishers
Second Edition: October 2011
First Edition: November 2010
Printed in the United States of America

Cover design by Susan Lasker
Book Design by Five Rainbows Services (FiveRainbows.com)

The characters and events in this book are fictitious. Any similarity to real persons, living or dead, is coincidental and not intended by the author.

Publisher's Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Levine, Richard.

Island eyes, island skies / Richard Levine.

p. cm.

ISBN: 978-0-9829269-0-1

1. Friendship—Fiction. 2. Loss (Psychology)—Fiction.
3. Young adult fiction. I. Title.

PZ7.L5786 Is 2010

[Fic]—dc22

2010913108

*To my daughters, Julie and Dani,
and my wife, Sue*

PROLOGUE

D.C.

My parents tell the story like this: I was three years old, it was my first time on a plane, and I walked down the aisle in my cute little pixie haircut and blue jumper, announcing, “This plane is gonna *cwash*” (BTW, that’s the way *they* tell it, the way *they* say I said crash; things that are so false—I never ever talked like that, not even when I was three). Anyway, about the plane—my parents say no one on board was amused.

Rob

Never been on a plane. I like to look up at them though—the big, sleek, silver ones way up high, winging their way to faraway places, the little ones too, the two-and four-seaters just out for a spin.

**THE FIRST PART:
A GIRL STUMBLES
INTO A PARTY**

THE KISSIN' COUSIN

D.C. Blau

Oops! I tumble over the front doorstep into the arms of Aunt Kay who catches me. Darn these long legs of mine that have grown six inches of pure gangly over the past six months.

“Whoa, D.C.,” Aunt Kay says, “easy, big girl! Becky and her friends are all downstairs in the basement. You think you can make it down there without stumbling and cracking your head open. I’d hate to have to call an ambulance tonight, what with the party going on and all. I mean any other night...”

I interrupt her. “Aunt Kay, I think I can manage,” I say, but what I’m thinking is, *you’re a regular laugh riot, Aunt Kay*. She’s my dad’s sister, and my dad says of the two of them, *we’re like two peas in a pod, your Aunt Kay and me*. But if you ask me, the female of this pair of peas is definitely different, a little smooshed up on top

where it's mean, green and ugly. And to be honest, I've just about had my fill of pea humor and of giving peas a chance.

It's the first night of the summer after school's out, and as the too-tall, out-of-town girl, I walk uneasily down to my cousin Becky's birthday party. And now I'm made all the more uneasy as Aunt Kay yells after me in a voice so swollen with sarcasm it's practically bursting, "*Nice shirt, D.C.!*" I don't give her the satisfaction of seeing me turn around, but she probably catches the momentary hitch in my step. Gee thanks, Aunt Kay; thanks for reminding me of the crazy loud shirt I'm wearing—just before I walk into a room full of kids I don't know.

The shirt's bright banana yellow, and on the front, there's a picture of a giant rainbow-swirl lollipop sticking out of a bucket of much smaller, different colored lollies. Above the picture, the shirt reads **Have A Biggie**, and below it, **At Big Lolly's**. Now that I'm in the room, I already feel like a giant mutant monster 'cause I'm so much taller than all the other eleven- and twelve-year-old-girls here, but to top it off, I'm wearing this ridiculous, sun-bright T-shirt. It makes me stand out that much more—like the giant lollipop that's pictured on it—both of us swimming in a sea of smaller, normal-sized lollies. I couldn't hide in this room if I tried.

Across the room are the boys, a group of goofy-looking dwarfs, acting all loony and stupid. Talk about a sea of small lollies! Becky's got more dwarf friends than Snow White, not a one of them even half as tall as Preppie. By my count, there's an even dozen dwarfs, and from the looks of them, it's definitely a doozy dozen. From across the room, I'm picking out and naming the dwarfs; I find a Happy, a Sleepy, a Sneezzy and a definite Dopey. And then there's Creepy, the eighth dwarf, the one Snow must've hidden out back while they made the movie. Unfortunately, he's here tonight, following me around, looking me over from head to toe, smiling and leering at me from the room's every corner.

Creepy comes up to me and asks, "Hey, sweetheart, Goliath babe, you wanna dance?"

I turn down his offer politely, but I mean: *Really, Creepy! Calling me sweetheart. Not!* And did Creepy really think I would like being leered at and called Goliath babe? Not only a creeper, the boy must be a real blockhead too. It turns out I'm darn near on target 'cause now I hear some other dwarfs yell out to him, "Hey, Rockhead." Not blockhead but almost. Ooh, I'm good! Although he's definitely more of a Creepy, it's not hard to imagine how this blockhead creeper came to be nicknamed Rockhead.

There's another boy dwarf though who, although no taller than the other little squirts, catches my eye 'cause he seems quieter than the rest, a definite Bashful. I also think he's cute and foolishly mention this to my cousin who immediately spills the beans to the whole world, dwarfs included. Who knew Becky was such a gossip girl blabbermouth? Anyhow, that's how Bashful comes to learn *faster than a speeding bullet* that the tall out-of-town girl "likes" him. Well, I'm already feeling self-conscious because of the brighter-than-neon shirt I'm wearing and because I'm obviously a freak, my head all by its lonesome up here in the stratosphere—and also because with every move I make, I seem gawky, my muscles out of sync with the command center in my brain. On top of all that, I'm also embarrassed that he "knows," and so when Becky takes my hand and literally drags me across the room to introduce me, I'm just about ready to die. His real name is Rob, and he does seem a genuine Bashful.

Rob Cameron

Jennie Matlock, who I've known since the second grade, walks across the room, takes my arm, pulls me away from the other boys and whispers to me that the tall girl likes me. When I look up and across the room, I wonder how it is I didn't notice her before 'cause the only girl I don't recognize is tall, pretty, and wearing a T-shirt that's so bright that if you look at it for more than a few seconds, it'll burn your eyeballs out. She turns away from me, and I see on the back of the shirt, a large circle with a slash in its center through the

words, *little lollies*, meaning, I guess, no little lollies. Strange. Well, the *girl's* certainly no *little* lolly; in fact, she's so tall, and in that T-shirt, so colorful, she's like a rainbow lolly on an extra long stick.

Unfortunately, when Jennie pulls me away, she doesn't notice Adam Rocker, accompanied by his usual cloud of body spray, quietly sneak up behind us to listen in on her whispered secret message. Although known as Rockhead 'cause of what's generally thought to be between his ears, I know he's not really stupid. However, he *is* the most annoying kid, and although he fancies himself a big shot with the girls, that's one thing he's definitely not. There isn't a single girl here or anywhere else who even wants to be in the same room with him, never mind actually dance or do anything with him.

Rockhead follows my gaze across the room to the tall girl and then whispers to me, "Well, beam me up high, Scotty! Talk about having your head in the clouds; that girl's probably got a whole weather system up where *her* head is. She's definitely got some curves on her though, doesn't she?" Now he makes an hourglass-type outline of a girl's body with his hands. "And get a load of those legs of hers that stretch from here to there. That enough girl for you, Cambo?" he adds.

I try to ignore him, but I'm finding it hard not to gag from the local air pollution problem he's causing; it's a wonder Rockhead hasn't OD'ed any number of times just from breathing in all that body spray stuff he douses himself with. Geez; what the heck does he do anyhow—rip off the spray nozzle and *pour* the stuff over himself? I'm thinking maybe we ought to rename him Reekhead. Anyhow, as reeking Rockhead slips away toward the refreshment table surrounded by an almost visible cloud of body spray, he looks back at me with a sick grin on his face that creeps me out totally.

A little later, Becky, whose birthday party it is, walks the tall girl across the room and introduces us. The tall girl's name is or rather her initials are D.C., and she's Becky's cousin.

"Interesting T-shirt," I say.

"Thanks," she says. "It's the official T of my mom's candy store. Well, actually it was my grandpa's store; he founded it way back

when—probably when people rode around in horse-drawn buggies. My grandpa’s Big Lolly.” She points out the name on the shirt.

“That his real name?” I ask.

“Nah. It’s Solly, short for Solomon, but Lolly sounded better, you know, short for lollipop, so he took on the name and called his store, Big Lolly’s Candy Cove And Emporium.”

“And the specialty of the house is the giant swirly-colored lollipop?” I ask.

“Actually, anything big and made of candy,” she says. “We sell all sorts of cool stuff besides huge lollipops—Halloween witches made out of a jillion candy corns, life-sized chocolate animals, candy superheroes...”

“Candy superheroes?”

“Yeah, they’re awesome. There’s a salt water taffy Elastowoman, and we’ve got chocolate and caramel caped crusaders.”

“Like Superman and Spiderman?”

“Yep.”

“That *is* awesome!”

“When I was little, I would run around in the store like a chicken without a head...”

“A chocolate chicken?” I interrupt.

“Ha. Actually, come to think of it, we do have chickens, but they’re made of Chiclets.”

“You’re kidding now, right?”

“No, really,” she says. “We *do* have Chiclet chickens. Anyhow, with Grandpa chasing after me, I’d run around the store, gawking at the big pink bubble gum pigs and the giant white and dark chocolate panda bears. My eyes would be popping out of my head, and Grandpa would laugh and say, ‘D.C., don’t you know that at Big Lolly’s, we don’t do small’—which, by the way, is the store’s slogan.” She turns around now so I can see the **WE DON’T DO SMALL** in big print under the slashed circle on the back of her T. “See?” she asks.

“It’s hard to miss,” I say. Then I add with a smile, “So it must be cool to have a candy store in the family, especially a *sweet* one like that.”

“Sweet, huh?” she laughs. “Good one. Anyhow, Grandpa’s gotten too old to run the store, so now my mom and my uncle do. My dad designed the shirt though; he’s really into cool T-shirts and must have about fifty himself.”

“Like the one you’re wearing?”

“No. They’re all different, but they all have some random funny writing. My dad’s strange.” Looking down at her own shirt, she adds, “This one’s a little *too* bright though, huh?”

“Well, it *is* colorful,” I say. “I like it though. It’s, um, festive,” I add. “I mean it *is* a birthday party, after all.”

“*You’re* sweet—not to make fun of it,” she says.

A song is just starting up, and I surprise myself by asking, “Wanna dance?”

“Sure,” she says, and I put my arm around her gingerly, like even though she’s bigger than me, I have to be real careful not to break her. I haven’t danced with girls a lot, and I don’t know just how close I’m supposed to get, so I keep at least half a foot between us. When the dance is over, I’m glad she doesn’t go back over to the girls’ side of the room.

“So, Rob,” she says, “you live here in Westwood?”

“Yeah, just around the block from here,” I say.

“We live in New Wellington but are moving to Westwood, actually Old Westwood, this summer.”

Now a fast song starts up, and D.C. starts to move to it. Gyrating her arms and legs like a crazy person, she reminds me of the internet guy who videos himself in front of all these famous far away places, only she’s a lot prettier. I’m dancing too but not so, um, enthusiastically; really, I’m mostly just watching her. I don’t think she notices though ‘cause she’s in this trance-like state, her head up in the air looking out at the tops of the room’s four walls. The other thing I’m doing is trying real hard not to laugh.

Becky’s mom, who’s come downstairs carrying a birthday cake, wanders over to us and whispers a little too loudly to me, “Let’s hope she doesn’t fall down and crack her skull open; I told her no

ambulances tonight,” before slipping away and laying the birthday cake on the refreshment table.

D.C. looks angry, shaking her head.

“Ambulances?” I ask.

She says, “Things that are old and not funny. Pay no attention to my aunt; actually, she’s more spider than aunt. She thinks she’s so funny she should be on TV, but she’s got a twisted sense of humor—like my Dad’s, only hers has a streak of mean and nasty.”

I don’t get the aunt-spider thing, and as I don’t think I want to go there anyhow, I ask, “Your dad’s got a weird sense of humor too?”

“Twisted like a telephone cord—you remember those, right?”

“Not really,” I say.

“Well, anyhow, never mind that. The two of them, my dad and my Aunt Kay, when it comes to what they think’s funny, they’re like two peas in a pod, only one of the peas is nasty, the other just weird. And sometimes, they make me so mad I want to make pea soup.”

“Huh,” is all I say now, fearing we’re treading into dangerous territory.

When another slow song starts to play, I hold out my arms in an offer to dance again, and like before, she accepts. As if there was no conversation in-between, I continue the one we were having before the fast song came on.

“That’s good,” I say.

“What?”

“Oh, that you’re moving to Old Westwood. It’s nice there.”

We maintain the six inches between us, and as my eyes are at about her chin level, I make sure my gaze is tilted slightly upwards so as not to let it fall where it shouldn’t be falling. I don’t usually have an easy time talking to pretty girls, but she’s just gawky enough that I feel comfortable around her. With her long, dark, slightly wavy hair, a longish, slightly upturned nose, and green eyes, she reminds me of Disney’s gypsy princess, Esmeralda.

Finally, it comes to me out of nowhere, “Oh, I get it,” I say. “You meant ant, not aunt, you know, with the spider thing.”

D.C. looks at me now like maybe I'm missing a few critical books from the top of my bookshelf.

But I'm not *completely* clueless—so as not to let her think too much about those missing books, I quickly change the subject. “So, D.C., do you play basketball?” I ask.

“What. 'Cause I'm tall?” she asks, sounding a bit accusing.

“Uh, no,” I lie. “I was just wondering—'cause maybe you'd like to get together and play sometime.”

“No, no basketball,” she says. “Softball and tennis. You?”

“Uh, yeah, I do play basketball, but it's not my best sport. I'm better at baseball, and I run a lot—you know, cross country, track.”

“How 'bout tennis?”

“Well, a little, but I'm not exactly another Roger Federer.”

“But you're a runner boy.”

“I guess,” I say, not knowing exactly what she means.

When D.C. goes to the bathroom, it gives Becky the opportunity to sneak up alongside me and whisper in singsong in my ear, “Robbie's got a girl friend.”

Then Rockhead, who's been spying and listening in again, says to me, “Cambo, when your *girl friend* comes back, let's see you stand up on your tippy-toes and give that delicious-looking Amazonian lollipop babe a big smooch. I don't know how you did it, but you managed to catch the eye of that super-sized Big Gulp of a girl, you dog, and if I were you, Cambo, I'd get up high on my toes and lap up a nice long drink.” He sticks out his tongue now, curls its tip, and makes like a thirsty dog lapping water from a bowl.

“You're a sicko, Rockhead,” I say.

“Yeah, shut-up, Rockhead. You're disgusting,” Becky adds.

The sicko smiles, and then slipping away from us, walking backwards, he puckers up and throws us a kiss.

When the evening's over, before heading towards the front door, D.C. kisses me on the cheek. I'd never been kissed by a girl before, and it feels like just about the sweetest thing ever, sweeter even

than a giant Chiclet chicken. For a minute, the kiss freezes me in the middle of the room—but when I see her still standing with the bottleneck of kids saying their good-byes and waiting to get through the front door, I run up to her.

“D.C.,” I say. And when she turns towards me, I kiss *her* on the cheek. It’s the second time tonight I’m surprised by my own boldness. She smiles at me and says something about getting together over the summer. I nod my head in agreement, but I don’t really hear much of what she’s saying. It’s noisy at the door, and I’m too busy thinking about just how much I already like Becky’s tall kissin’ cousin.

On the way home, I think hard and come up with a headline for tomorrow’s *Kiss ’N Tell Gazette*: **Party Over, Cheek Kisses Exchanged.**