

Lisa E. Balvanz

Deleted Scenes

In the darkness of the living room the light of the television glows softly on Isabella's round face. This is Isabella's favorite scene out of every one of her father's movies. She watches as the gentleman, Alexander, her father, welcomes the lady, Harriet. Harriet collapses into the open door frame, upset because the man she thought she loved has once again disappointed her. Alexander had his own agenda, was planning on telling Harriet how much he loved her, but instead he takes her by the arm, serves her tea and listens to her troubles. Isabella likes it because she knows the gentleman cares about Harriet very deeply. She likes how he puts aside his own feelings for Harriet. And she likes to see the look of compassion on her father's face, his eyes kind and sad. She likes to see him wrap his long arms around Harriet's small, shaking body. She imagines it is her that he is holding.

Isabella knows that everything will turn out all right. She knows that eventually, the gentlemen will be able to tell Harriet that he loves her and she will love him back. It is the thirty-sixth time that Isabella has seen this movie, and the eighty-ninth time she has watched this scene.

When it is over, she pulls the DVD out of the player, flips the television off, and tiptoes back down the hallway to her room, careful not to wake her aunt or uncle, aware of every creak the old floor makes. She stashes the movie in a shoebox with the others and shoves it, once again, under her bed, before crawling on top and sliding under the covers.



It is summer, and Isabella sleeps late into the morning. Her aunt and uncle don't mind. They say they remember hot summer days and don't bother her.

When she does get up, Isabella finds her aunt in the kitchen, cracking eggs over the frying pan. Isabella squints her eyes at the

sun coming through the sliding glass doors. Outside the little house, the rest of the city has been up for hours. Their neighbor, Mr. McKenzie, is mowing his yard. He looks up and waves at her. She waves back.

“There’s a package for you,” her aunt says, nodding toward a box sitting on their well worn table.

Isabella rushes to it. Of course, it is from Phil Beverly, an actor and old friend of her father’s. He always remembers her birthday. She slices through the tape and pulls out a card. Phil’s forward slanting handwriting is scrawled on the inside:

Happy Birthday, Iz. This isn't much of a present, but I thought you might like it. I found it when I was cleaning out the garage. Your father forgot it when he came to visit once, and I never got it back to him. I hope you're still doing well. Let me know if you need anything.

Isabella reaches down into the box and feels cool leather. It is a large black jacket—not designer, without embellishments, nothing special—but Isabella shivers with excitement. She does not own anything that her father has worn. She slips her arms through the large sleeves, where his arms once were, and zips up the front. The jacket hangs down almost to her knees.

“That’s your present from Phil?” her aunt asks, turning from the stove. “It looks ridiculous. Why did he get such a big size?”

“It was Dad’s,” Isabella tells her, looking back at the card.

Her aunt raises an eyebrow. “Well, what will you do with it?”

Isabella swings the sleeves hanging low beneath her hands. “Wear it. I think it’s wonderful.” She closes her eyes and imagines her father standing beside her, in the cold now, with no coat, because his daughter needed it. She breathes in deep the smell of leather, burnt hickory, and sweat. “Do you think Dad liked sitting by the fire?” she asks her aunt. “Do you think he liked roasting marshmallows?”

“I don’t know,” her aunt says. “Your mother always liked to. During the summer, when we were girls, Maria and I made s’mores every night.”

“I bet Dad liked marshmallows in his hot chocolate better than in s’mores,” Isabella says, sitting down on a rickety wooden chair. “I bet he liked to sit with his arm around Mom and stare at the flames.” Isabella remembers nothing about her father.

“What kind of cake would you like today?” her aunt asks.

“Chocolate peanut butter swirl,” Isabella says eagerly, “and can I put the decorations on?”

“Sure,” her aunt says.

Her cousins are in the living room watching cartoons. Isabella joins them, and they say “hi” and “happy birthday” when she walks in the room, but they don’t ask about the coat; they are busy watching *Spongebob*.



It is as though Isabella’s mother was a real person. There are pictures of her all around the house: on the walls in the hallways, in the dusty photo albums, on top of the TV shelf. In some she is only a child. Others have her grown up, standing next to her sister and brother-in-law. There is one where she holds Isabella in her arms. It is just after she was born, and her mother’s brunette curls are droopy and frizzed with sweat. Isabella has her shiny, baby eyelids shut. Her mother smiles.

The only real picture Isabella has of her father she keeps on her dresser. It is from his wedding day. He stands with her mother, and in this picture, her mother’s curls are up on her head, bouncing down in near perfect ringlets. Her father’s smile is larger than in any of his publicity pictures. Isabella knows that he was really happy when they took this picture. His hair is not perfect, and while her mother is dressed for a wedding, her father is wearing only jeans and a brown polo shirt.

Isabella has asked her aunt and uncle why this is, but they say they were not there. She knows Phil was, but she has not asked him. On her bookshelf, Isabella has another picture from the wedding. This one is of Phil and her mother, and in this one, Phil is dressed up. Isabella thinks that her mother was going to marry Phil, but while they were standing at the alter, the pastor giving his sermon and the crowd trying not to fall asleep, her father stood up and ran to the front of the church.

In a shoebox under her bed, to the left of the one with the movies, Isabella keeps more pictures of her father, but in these pictures, he could be any guy in the movies. In this one, he is in a tuxedo on the red carpet and his hair is short. In this other, he is in a tuxedo on the red carpet and his hair is a bit longer. In all of them, he smiles, but it is not like he does in the wedding picture. She looks at

these pictures when she wants to see him just a little bit differently than in the wedding picture, when she wants to remember that he was a star and everybody knew him and thought of him.



After dinner, Isabella's aunt brings out the cake that Isabella spent the afternoon decorating. The frosting is a magnificent green background piled high with lop-sided flowers in pink and blue. In the middle, Isabella has drawn herself, complete with leather jacket, though she could not get the color right, so instead of black, it is a brownish gray. Her aunt has placed candles framing the picture, and her uncle pulls out the matches to light them.

When they are all lit, Isabella looks into the glowing of the candle flames, closes her eyes, and makes a wish. She wishes that she would wake up tomorrow and find herself two years old again, her father would pick her up from her bed and kiss her good morning, then, with her mother, drive safely to the funeral that is someone else's.

When Isabella opens her eyes, the candles are smoking.

"What did you wish for?" her youngest cousin, Mark, asks.

"She can't tell you or it won't come true," her cousin, Jane, says.

Isabella knows her wish will not come true anyway. But already she is distracted as her uncle cuts the cake and sets a piece, almost more frosting than cake, buried in flowers, in front of her place. Then after cake there are presents—three shiny silver boxes with bubble blowing toys, a 500-piece puzzle, and a copy of *The Lion, The Witch, and The Wardrobe*. Isabella decides to use the bubbles first. Mark and Jane help her, and they watch the sun set on the little floating orbs.



Tonight, Isabella does not risk getting up to watch a movie. Instead she huddles under her covers with a CD player, headphones over her ears, listening to the reading of *David Copperfield* that her father made. His voice is deep, but with an airiness about it, seeming to ever so gently sweep the words along. She does not know what the story is about. She never listens to that—only to his voice.

In her hands she holds a flashlight and the picture of her father and mother on their wedding day. When she looks at her father's

face she can almost see his mouth move.

“What do you think of that for a kite?” he asks, and she looks out from under the covers so she can see it standing in the corner of the room, a huge purple diamond with a long, blue tail.

“It looks very pretty, daddy,” she says.

“I made it,” he says. “We’ll go and fly it, you and I.”

“Can we fly it tomorrow, in the park?” she asks. “Can we make it fly high above the clouds?”

“There’s plenty of string,” he says.

“Will it fly so high that I can write a message and send it up to God?” she asks.

“When it flies high, it takes the facts a long way,” he tells her. “That’s my manner of diffusing ‘em. I don’t know where they may come down. It’s according to circumstances, and the wind, and so forth; but I take my chance of that.”

“Well, I’m sure God will find them,” Isabella says. “He’s everywhere, you know. My message will fall off the kite, and he’ll snatch it out of the sky, the way he does with baby birds and spreads their wings out so they can fly.”

“Well, child,” her father says, and she knows it is time for bed. Then she shuts off the light, closes her eyes, and lies back on her pillow, and he is in the other room, talking to her mother about this day, the latest movie shoot, the new script he’s reading, whether he should take the role, how he might have to be away for awhile—to Africa, or Europe, or Asia—but just for awhile. His voice carries down the hallway to her bedroom, lulling her to sleep.



“Do you think I could watch a movie today?” Isabella asks as she eats her breakfast.

“Sure,” her aunt says. “What movie?” She is making bread, kneading the dough on the counter beneath the little window.

“Maybe *Fireworks*?” Isabella asks.

“You’ve seen that one a lot already. Why do you want to see it again?”

“My dad’s in it,” Isabella says.

“Why not something new?” her aunt says. “Jane just got a bunch from the library. Why not see one of those?”

“Could I call Phil?” Isabella asks. “I want to hear what he

remembers about dad.”

“I don’t think so, honey,” her aunt answers. “It’s long distance. Why don’t you just send him an e-mail?”

“I want to hear him,” Isabella says. “And besides, he says he gets too many e-mails from people he doesn’t know.”

“He’ll probably call you soon anyway, won’t he? That way he can pay the bill. Lord knows he’s got plenty of money lying around.”

“I could use my money,” Isabella says, “from my parents.”

Her aunt shakes her head. “I told you already, Isabella, you have to save that money for college or you won’t be able to go.” She looks at her niece as she reaches for a bread pan from the cupboard. “You don’t need to be so glum,” she says.

“This is the day my parents died,” Isabella says.

“Why don’t you go outside? It’s a nice day out. Do something fun. Don’t think about it for awhile.”

Isabella sighs, pushes her chair back and gets up from the table, her head low.

“There are popsicles in the freezer if you want one,” her aunt says.



Isabella sits on the steps to her house, watching Mark play in the flying water of the sprinkler. Above him, there is a large oak tree. The sunlight is splotchy through its leaves. The temperature is in the 80s this afternoon, but she is wearing the jacket, her skin moist underneath it. In her right hand, she holds a grape popsicle, and she keeps it far from the jacket, so the sticky sugar does not get on it. With her free hand, she bunches the sleeves up once again, before leaning back in for another lick.

Jane comes from the house, holding her own popsicle, strawberry, and sits down on the step—a bit too close for comfort, considering her possession. Isabella scoots to the side a few inches.

“Are you going to go in?” Jane asks, nodding towards the sprinkler.

“Nah,” Isabella says. “I don’t want to get my jacket wet.”

Jane turns her head to look at her cousin, tucking some of her disheveled brown hair behind her ear. Popsicle juice from her fingers wets the hair and flattens it against her head. “Oh.” She looks away, licks her popsicle. “Why don’t you just take it off?”

Isabella rolls her eyes. “It’s from Phil. It was my dad’s.” Isabella stands up straight when she says it, turning around for Jane to see.

“Your dad wore leather?” Jane asks her. “He must have been cool.”

“He was,” Isabella says. “He was an actor, you know. He did all sorts of cool things. He wore leather, played basketball, got in fistfights, and even rode a Harley.”

“You don’t know that,” Jane says. “You weren’t even there.”

“Sure, I know it,” Isabella says, scrunching her nose. “He’s my dad. You know your dad, don’t you?”

“My dad’s not dead,” Jane says.



Isabella walks next door to find Mr. McKenzie. She wants to show him her father’s jacket. Since his wife died, Mr. McKenzie has been Isabella’s friend, inviting her in for chocolate or letting her help him in his garden. Today, Isabella rings the doorbell and breathes in deeply as she waits.

“Hello, Isabella,” Mr. McKenzie says when he opens the door. “Is that a new jacket?”

Isabella nods, smiling. “Guess where it came from.”

Mr. McKenzie scratches the bald spot amidst his gray hair. “I don’t rightly know. It seems a bit too big to be yours.”

“Phil sent it to me,” Isabella blurts out. “It was dad’s.”

“Well, I’m sure I can’t top a gift like that,” Mr. McKenzie says, “but I do have some Snickers bars if you’d like. Come on in.”

Mr. McKenzie’s house is small and filled with plants. Every flat surface in the house seems to have a fern or flowers growing in a pot on it. The kitchen counters have herbs and tomato plants. Even the TV has its adorning coeus.

But, by far, Isabella’s favorite part of visiting Mr. McKenzie’s house is looking at the movies. On the shelves surrounding the living room, often hidden behind the plants, are rows and rows of movies. Isabella waits in the living room looking at the movies as Mr. McKenzie gets the candy from the kitchen. She is fairly certain that he has all of her father’s movies, but they do not sit together on the shelves, and he often rearranges things, so she makes it a game to try and find them when she visits. Today, she only finds three before Mr. McKenzie comes in with the candy, and they sit down

on the couch to talk while they eat.

“You know,” Mr. McKenzie says, “I think I remember seeing your father in that jacket. Maybe just in a tabloid.” Mr. McKenzie’s brother was a camera man, though he is retired now. Because of his brother, Mr. McKenzie often got to meet actors, but he had never met Isabella’s father. “No, no,” Mr. McKenzie continues, “I think it was in a magazine. I might have it somewhere.”

“Could we find it?” Isabella asks. “I’d like to see it.”

“If we can find it, you can have it,” Mr. McKenzie tells her.

When they finish their candy, they go upstairs to Mr. McKenzie’s office. It is full of plants and magazines, boxes and shelves dusty from not being used. They find the issues of magazines from the years her father was famous and glance through them.

Isabella finds the picture first. It is at the bottom of a very large box and the edges of the magazine are torn, the cover ripped. There is her father in his jacket, right on page seven. He is on a motorcycle, riding next to Phil, with a blond lady behind him. Isabella does not recognize the lady, but she thinks maybe it is Phil’s sister, for she knows he has one, and that would explain it. The article is about Phil, and it says the name of her father only once. Never the lady.

Carefully, Isabella rips the page from the magazine, folds it up, and puts it in her jacket pocket—the same pocket that exists in the picture. She does not want her cousins or aunt and uncle to see, so she waits until she is in her room alone to take it out again, and after staring for awhile at her father’s smiling face, his hair brushed back by the breeze, she tucks it into the box with his movies.



It is July twenty-first. One day after Isabella’s birthday, and the day her father and mother died. On this night, Isabella watches *Cold Money*, and her father dies again. She is very careful, on this night particularly, that she does not wake her aunt and uncle. Still in her room, jacket on, she waits a bit longer than usual, then slips out and pulls the movie from under the bed.

Only on July twenty-first will she watch this movie. She has only seen it four times since she managed to bring it home from the store without her aunt and uncle noticing. But she can remember it vividly.

This time she takes off her father's jacket and lays it on top of her crossed legs as she sits on the couch in the darkness. This time she can smell him, she can feel the warmth of his jacket, and it is as if he is right there beside her.

It is an action-packed adventure, a thief trying to rob a bank with some of his friends. They plan meticulously. He dates a bank teller to get the inside scoop. She falls in love with him. But during the robbery, things don't go well. They turn against each other; they want his share of the money. Soon, the police are on their way, and their leader, Big Rob, heads out, throwing some explosives behind him before shutting the door. Isabella's father ducks behind the counter and avoids the blast. Things look good for a minute, but the building is on fire around him, and now a big, wooden post is laying over the lower half of his body.

Isabella pulls the jacket close around her body. This is the part that she hates. She can do nothing. He looks at the teller who loves him. He takes off his mask so she can see who he is.

"You have to help me!" her father yells.

"I can't," she whispers, Isabella whispers.

"Yes, you can," he says. "Don't be afraid."

"I'm too weak." She shakes her head. "I can't lift it."

"Be strong."

"I'm not afraid. I want to save you."

Isabella does not remember how she could not help then. She was too small and scared, and when she saw her father lying there, she cried and did not know he needed saving.

Lisa E. Balvanz, though originally from Iowa, currently lives in Fairbanks, Alaska. She spends the dark winter nights writing and learning to play the ukulele. Her work recently appeared in *Sixfold*.