

# BLUE GOLD

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**NORTH AMERICA**

**BY THE TIME** people finished texting the address of Jeff’s party around to everybody they knew, eighty kids had shown up. The front door was wide open when Fiona and Ryan got there. Girls and guys were hanging out on the front porch, soaking up the late-evening sunshine. It was an older crowd, some from different schools. Fiona didn’t know a lot of them, so she was doubly nervous about how she would fit in.

Inside, bodies crammed the living room. Fiona and Ryan wove their way through the crowd looking for Jeff, whose parents were away for the weekend. It was so loud that everybody had to shout, which just made it louder. In the kitchen, Fiona was relieved to find her friend, Rick Yee, chugging a beer while a bunch of other guys chanted, “Do it, do it, do it!”

Rick finished and wiped his mouth. “Fee!” he yelled when he saw her, slobbering a bit as he lifted the empty bottle in victory. “Pokémon!”

Fiona had known Rick since grade one, when Pokémon was their shared obsession.

“Pokémon!” she yelled back.

“You gotta catch up,” Rick told her, wiggling the bottle in her direction.

But he was wrong. Fiona was already more buzzed than she wanted to be. Before the party, she and Ryan had stopped at the park to chug down half a water bottle of vodka Ryan had pinched from home. He said it would help her relax. Fiona wasn't into drinking, and the vodka was making her feel woozy and out of control—the opposite of relaxed—but she didn't want Ryan to know that.

Fiona had been dating Ryan for five weeks, since the beginning of May. Practically married, according to some people. But Fiona was still getting used to the idea of having a boyfriend. She liked Ryan—she just wasn't sure if she *liked him* liked him. He was pretty average looking, but then so was Fiona, with mouse-brown hair that was too bushy and a face that, in her opinion, was too broad and too freckled. Ryan was tall and ridiculously skinny. They were both B-list popular. Well, Fiona thought she might be more like B+.

Ryan found a couple of rum coolers in Jeff's fridge and handed her one. “You'll like it. It tastes like lemonade,” he told her. He was right—in a few sips, half of it was gone. “C'mon,” he said into her ear. “Let's check out downstairs.”

He took her hand and led her toward the basement. *How are you supposed to know what you feel?* she wondered as he pulled her through the crowd of kids jamming the stairway, down to the family room, where the lights were low and the music throbbing. People were slow dancing, even though the music was fast. She could see couples

kissing while they danced, and some were full-out groping. *What exactly is Ryan expecting from me?* Fiona's stomach fluttered in sudden panic. She could taste the rum cooler in her mouth, and the vodka behind it.

She spotted her friend Lacey along the wall, in the middle of a group of girls with their heads bent over their phones. Fiona leaned close and told her, "I don't feel so good."

Ryan threw her a questioning look, but with the music so loud, he couldn't hear what she was saying.

"Tell Ryan you want to leave," Lacey advised. She was sipping a beer, buzzed but not drunk. Trust Lacey—tall, model-thin, and confident—to look like she belonged here. "Do what feels right," she said.

But Fiona didn't want Ryan to think she was being a drama queen, so she let him lead her to a leather sectional in the corner, full of kids making out. He found a spot for them and pulled her down so that she was sitting on his lap. Then, without warning, he pushed his tongue into her mouth. His kiss was hard and wet. She tried to respond, but she felt like she couldn't breathe, and the music was giving her a headache.

Ryan broke off the kiss and whispered in her ear, "The bathroom's free."

At first Fiona wasn't sure what he meant. Then she glanced over and saw Jeff and his girlfriend emerging from a bathroom. Ryan and Jeff were a year older than Fiona and her friends, who were still in grade nine. Maybe grade tens were more into sex than her crowd was, but as far as Fiona knew, none of her friends had done the deed. Girls

were expected to put out in other ways, though—blow jobs, hand jobs—neither of which she had ever done. She felt panic rising again, which made the nausea worse.

“I think I’m going to be sick,” she said, and staggered for the staircase, her head spinning.

“Fee?” said Lacey as she passed her. But Fiona kept moving, craving fresh air.

Somehow she got outside. On her knees on the front walk, she gave in to her retching stomach and threw up under a bush. When she leaned back briefly, Lacey was by her side.

“Get it out,” she told Fiona, holding her hair back. “All out.”

Fiona puked again, and, when she was done, felt a bit better. When she sat up, she saw Ryan beside Lacey, watching her with concern.

“You okay?” he asked.

“Yeah. Sorry,” Fiona told him, feeling gross and like an idiot. A gross idiot.

“Don’t worry about it,” Ryan replied.

“Want me to take her home?” Lacey asked Ryan.

“Nah, I’m good,” he said. He put his arm around Fiona and helped her up. “Can you walk?”

“Yeah. Sorry,” she apologized again.

“Happens to everybody,” he said, but he seemed disappointed.

**JEFF’S HOUSE** was in the posh Point Grey neighborhood of Vancouver. Fiona lived with her mom further east, in Kitsilano. By the time they reached her place, she was a

little less woozy. She glanced up to the fourth floor of the low-rise building and saw that the lights were on in their apartment. Her mom was probably waiting up for her.

“Can you smell it on my breath?” she asked Ryan, pausing at the security gate.

“The puke or the booze?”

He seemed a little disgusted, and he wouldn't look her in the eye. Fiona felt guilty for making him leave the party. She hoped he wasn't going to break up with her over this.

“I'm really sorry, Ryan.”

“Hey, it happens.”

“My mom is going to freak if she finds out,” she said.

“Just go right to your room. Don't let her get a whiff.”

“Is that experience talking?” she asked, trying to joke with him.

“Whatever,” he shrugged. It seemed like he was in a hurry to get away from her.

“You should go back to the party,” she told him, although she didn't want him to, not with all those other girls there. Maybe this was how you knew you were with the right guy—when the thought of him being with somebody else made you jealous.

“Maybe I will,” he said, and started off down the sidewalk without even kissing her goodnight. Fiona supposed she could hardly blame him, considering she hadn't had a chance to rinse her mouth out. He tossed back, “I'll call you later,” so casually that Fiona wondered if he would. Ever.

She took Ryan's advice when she went inside and kept the conversation with her mother, who was reading in the living room, to a minimum. *Yes, I had fun. No, I'm not hungry.*

She was pulling on pajamas in her bedroom when her cell phone pinged with a text. It was from Ryan.

“ok wth mom?” he asked.

“ok,” she texted back. “sry about 2night”

“ddnt go xactly how i xpctd”

“wat did u xpct?”

“dunno. u r so sexy”

*He thinks I'm sexy!* So he wasn't mad at her after all.

“wat r u doing?” he asked.

“gting rdy 4 bed”

“wat r u wearing?”

The truth was she was wearing flannel pajamas with little skating penguins all over them. But in the safety of her bedroom, she *felt* sexy.

“nthing,” she texted back.

“lets c”

Fiona hesitated. Really? Would she dare? Another text arrived.

“pls? u r so prty”

*He thinks I'm pretty!* Fiona felt warm all over. *This is what it means to have a boyfriend*, she realized. Sharing secrets—feeling hot for each other. Another text arrived.

“sho me u lke me”

*I do like you!* she thought. Maybe she even loved him. Before she could talk herself out of it, Fiona held her cell phone at arm's length, puckered her lips in a vampy kiss, yanked up her pajama top, and clicked a selfie. With another click, she sent the photo to Ryan.

“sb,” he wrote. *Smiling back.*

Fiona smiled, too. It was only later, when she was lying in bed, her head spinning from the booze, that she started to worry about whether she'd turned herself into a sexting cliché, sending a shot of her bare boobs out into the cyberverser for anyone to see. Friends. Teachers. Her parents! *Get a grip*, she told herself. Ryan was her boyfriend. She trusted him not to send it to anybody else. Besides, it was just a joke. What harm could come from that?

**SUNDAY MORNING**, Fiona's alarm went off at eight. Her head was pounding and her mouth tasted like it was stuffed with compost. But there was no time to feel sorry for herself. Her dad was picking her up in half an hour for a softball game—he was the coach, she was the pitcher. She threw off her blanket and got to her feet, feeling the floor rock beneath her and her stomach rise. More than anything, she wanted to lie down again, but she knew her father was already on the bridge, driving over from West Vancouver. She couldn't let him down.

Fiona faked her way through the game, counting herself lucky to stay standing. In the end, she gave it up ten to three—not so bad, she figured, given that her brain was working at half speed.

“What happened out there?” her dad asked as they headed across the grass toward his car.

“I think I may have the flu,” Fiona told him.

He put his hand to her forehead and then pulled her into a hug. “Poor pumpkin,” he said. “Home to bed for you.” Sometimes her dad was way too easy.

Inside the car, Fiona rummaged in her bag for her cell phone to see if Ryan had texted, but she couldn't find it. She was foggy about a lot of things that morning, but she was certain she'd put the phone in the bag. Had it fallen out, or had somebody taken it? There had been tons of people in the park, and the bag had been lying in the grass, where anybody could have gotten at it. Suddenly, Fiona really did feel feverish—with anxiety. Losing her phone was bad enough, but she was mostly freaking out about what was on it. What if somebody found the boob shot?

*Wait*, she told herself, *I erased it*. At least, she remembered *thinking* she should erase it. But had she? Yes, she was certain of it.

Fiona glanced over at her dad as he drove, so cheerful and clueless in his tidy white team shirt, tucked in, and wire-rimmed glasses. He'd flip if he found out Fiona had lost the phone—he was big on being responsible—but if he found out she'd sexted Ryan? He'd bust a vein.

When they pulled up in front of Fiona's mom's place, her dad gave her a funny look and asked, "Everything okay? I mean, apart from the flu?"

"Fine," she said.

It was only half a lie. Everything would be fine—if she got the phone back. As she watched her dad drive away, Fiona's head was suddenly crystal clear. She had to find that phone, before anybody else found it.

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