

Fork in the Road

by Y York

©2004

Commissioned as part of "10 By 10"

Contact: Dramatic Publishing

inspired by the ninth commandment, "thou shalt not bear false witness," which is often misunderstood to be "thou shalt not lie."

Characters: DESIE, 17, dressed for school; IAN HASKEL, 17, dressed in grease-covered overalls. Although similar in intelligence, they cope with the pain of reality differently.

Time and Place: The present. Early morning along a moderately traveled road in a moderately sized town.

(Early morning along the road. DESIE watches cars drive by, waves. Unseen by her, IAN HASKEL stops to watch. She lets a few cars pass, then she waves again.)

IAN HASKEL: I don't get it.

DESIE: (Jumps in surprise) Ah!

IAN HASKEL: What are you doing?

DESIE: ...Nothing.

IAN HASKEL: Yeah you are— you're waving at cars. I saw you...Do you even know those people?

DESIE: Yeah.

IAN HASKEL: Who are they?

DESIE: ...They're the people who live across the street.

IAN HASKEL: Across what street?

DESIE: Across the street.

IAN HASKEL: Across the street from you?

DESIE: Yeah.

IAN HASKEL: ...The blue car or the white car?

DESIE: What?

IAN HASKEL: (Slowly) Do the people in the blue car or do the people in the white car live across the street from you?

DESIE: ...Both.

IAN HASKEL: (Laughs) So what's their name?

DESIE: Jones.

IAN HASKEL: Jones is your name, Desie. ...You crack me up.

DESIE: I didn't mean to.

IAN HASKEL: So how come you're waving? How come you wave when two cars pass and not when one car passes? (Silence) Come on, spill. (Silence) Hey, I don't care. I'm not going to "turn you in to the authorities."

DESIE: Were you in jail, Ian Haskel?

IAN HASKEL: Jeez, who said that?

DESIE: Nobody. I saw the police car. Then you weren't there any more.

IAN HASKEL: Don't believe everything you hear.

DESIE: I didn't hear it, I thought it.

IAN HASKEL: Then don't believe everything you think.

DESIE: I don't know how to do that—

IAN HASKEL: Bunch of guys stand up and point their finger, doesn't mean it's true. I was no "danger," no danger to anybody. I punched the wall. That's all who I punched, the wall.

DESIE: ...The hole between the boys' room and the girls' room?

IAN HASKEL: (Checks his fist) Hurt like crazy. But I didn't punch a guy. None of them were ever in any danger, and they knew it—

DESIE: It was a plaster wall. Very thick.

IAN HASKEL: I wouldn't ever hurt a person, I wouldn't. Mike McKeon wasn't even there. The other guys just told him about it, and he's the one everybody believed...I almost believed him myself, he told such a good story. What are you supposed to do when somebody tells a good story like that on you? Under oath!

DESIE: Mike McKeon is a very good speaker.

IAN HASKEL: See. You believe him, and you didn't even hear what he said.

DESIE: They fixed the hole.

IAN HASKEL: I don't care— I'm not going back. I'm in the real world now. I fix engines. I punch a clock. (He makes a fist and jabs the air.) I'm there on time because they pay me to be there on time, which is a better reason to be on time than school reasons, which I never even knew what they were. (He jabs the air.)

(For the first time, Desie is a little scared.)

DESIE: What time is it?

IAN HASKEL: I don't know. It's early yet.

DESIE: I should go to school.

IAN HASKEL: Don't be scared—I told you I didn't punch anybody—

DESIE: No, I just have to get there before the bell.

IAN HASKEL: Yeah? You going to meet somebody? Somebody going to share their morning muffin with you?

DESIE: No muffin.

IAN HASKEL: You going to let somebody copy your homework? Some friend?

DESIE: They look at you if you get there after the bell.

IAN HASKEL: You're not going to miss the bell.

DESIE: What time does your work start?

IAN HASKEL: I just got off. Ian Haskel works while the rest of the world sleeps. Does that make you feel safer? To know that Ian Haskel works while you sleep?

DESIE: I wasn't feeling unsafe—I told you—I don't want to be late for school is all I'm feeling.

IAN HASKEL: (to himself, sad.) "Don't be late. Don't be early. Don't talk in class. Don't talk in the hall. Be yourself. Fit in with others. Don't pick your nose. Don't pick your friend's nose." All their rules and regulations and stupids. How is a person supposed to cope with all their rules?

(His sadness eases her fear. She tries to cheer him up.)

DESIE: The rules are good.

IAN HASKEL: Jeez. Which ones?

DESIE: The rules can help you cope. All the lists of rules. They can keep you from making a mistake.

IAN HASKEL: They keep you down, is what they keep you.

DESIE: No, before you do something or say something, let the rules flash, like a blast, in your brain. And then you know what to do, because of the rules.

IAN HASKEL: Not in the real world. The rules don't help in the real world. You want to learn how to deal the real world, get a job, that's where you learn.

DESIE: All I want to learn is physics; a job won't teach me physics.

IAN HASKEL: Sure it will. (He pulls money out of his wallet.) The physics of where this comes from. How to get a lot more of this.

DESIE: That's economics. Economics, like physics, is phantom science, depending on belief to exist.

IAN HASKEL: How do you figure that?

DESIE: A dollar is worthless until you believe in its value. You can't see an atom, but you believe it's there.

IAN HASKEL: ...Economics, okay, maybe, but physics is solid, not phantom. "An object in motion tends to remain in motion." whether you believe it or not.

DESIE: Not that kind of physics. The molecular kind. You have to believe that all of the molecules that make up your dollar bills are going remain in place relative to one another. If the molecules disperse, your wallet could be empty when you look in there.

IAN HASKEL: (Amused) It's a good thing you're studying physics, Desie. Your theories need a lot of work.

(She turns away from his rebuke, and waves as cars pass.)

IAN HASKEL (continued) They live across the street, too? Come on, tell me what you're doing. (Brief pause) Do you want me to stay and talk to you or not?

DESIE: I can't decide.

IAN HASKEL: Oh, yeah. Because you got so many people that talk to you, that are nice to you, that are dying to hear your theories on physics, that you can just toss one of them away. Right?

DESIE: ...No.

IAN HASKEL: Yeah, no. So if you want me to stick around and talk to you...be nice to you...be friends with you...you have to tell me about the waving.

DESIE: (Amazed) You're going to be friends with me?

IAN HASKEL: If you tell me about the waving, I am. Otherwise I'll go away, and you can be all by yourself again.

DESIE: Okay, okay. Shhh. (Whispers) My arm needs to wave. When I'm near the road, it takes all my willpower to keep my arm from waving. But it upsets them when you wave at them— the people in the cars. They turn around and drive up to you and say "why are you waving?" So I do this: I wait until there are two cars close together. Then I let my arm wave and I put my glance between the two cars, that way the people in each car think I'm waving at the other car...Also before I wave again, I make sure all the cars-that-might-have-seen-me-wave-already have driven by. (Brief pause) I used to squeeze my toes together. My toes needed to squeeze, and I could squeeze them any time any place— nobody would know— somebody could be standing right next to me. But then my feet got cramps. That's when I started to wave. Waving cured my squeezing.

(Silence, as he contemplates her. Then, a confession.)

IAN HASKEL: I need to squeeze, too. My hand into a fist. It's a big need.

DESIE: (She small waves at him, then.) Now? Do you need to squeeze now?

IAN HASKEL: ...No. (Slightly surprised) I don't seem to need it now.

DESIE: I need to wave all the time.

IAN HASKEL: No, not all the time. Just when it starts to...when I start to...

DESIE: Unravel?

IAN HASKEL: Yeah.

DESIE: Disperse?

IAN HASKEL: Yeah!

DESIE: All your molecules start to escape?

IAN HASKEL (Nodding)
And I need to rein them back, so I squeeze. Hold everything in.

DESIE: So it can't escape.

IAN HASKEL: Yeah. ...You get it.

DESIE: Well, yeah. It's physics.

IAN HASKEL: You really get it.

(A silent moment of connection. She is happy throughout the following exchange.)

IAN HASKEL: You're like some kind of antidote to my squeezing.

DESIE: I'm an antidote?

IAN HASKEL: Yeah, a looseness. And not only that, you glow. There's this light around you, a halo.

DESIE: Aura. Made from escaping molecules.

IAN HASKEL: Yeah. Do I have one?

DESIE: (Looks to see) No. Squeezing is working. No molecules escaping.

IAN HASKEL: I'm not squeezing now. I should have an aura, too.

DESIE: Maybe you're doing a mental squeezing. Keeping all the molecules in place with your belief.

IAN HASKEL: I'm not doing that. I should have one.

DESIE: Nothing there.

IAN HASKEL: Look harder. (Brief pause) You don't see one? An aura around my head?

DESIE: No. Just a head.

IAN HASKEL: Are you sure?

DESIE: I'm sure.

IAN HASKEL: ...You could have said you saw one. You could have said one was there.

(Her happiness is punctured by his disappointment.)

DESIE: How could I have said that?

IAN HASKEL: You just could have. You could have said, “yes I see it. It’s very little but it’s definitely there.”

DESIE: But it wouldn’t have been true.

IAN HASKEL: But it would have been nice!

DESIE: (really asking) Is that allowed?

IAN HASKEL: Is what allowed?

DESIE: Can it be not true if it’s nice?

IAN HASKEL: It’s allowed. What? You got some list of rules bursting in your brain telling you not to be nice?

DESIE: I might have misunderstood. The rule.(Pause) Is it too late? Too late to see your aura?

IAN HASKEL: Yeah. It’s too late.

(He starts to leave. She gasps at him and points at his head.)

IAN HASKEL: What? What’s wrong?

DESIE: Little lights. Little colored lights. Escaping.

IAN HASKEL: ...Yeah?

DESIE: Thousands— millions.

IAN HASKEL: That many, huh?

DESIE: And dancing— a dancing glowing.

IAN HASKEL: ...You don’t have to overdo it.

DESIE: No! Really! Really! Little lights.

(The happy end.)