

"Reap What They Sow"

A Novel excerpt

by

Chase March

© 2008 Chase March. All Rights Reserved.

Prologue

FIRST YEAR OF UNIVERSITY

Michael was lying down on the couch. The football game was on but he wasn't really watching it. He was somewhere else.

"Yo! That was crazy man!" said Bryan.

Michael snapped back to the room. He noticed the game was still on. The replay flashed up on the screen. His roommate was looking over at him, expecting a reply.

"Yeah, he's on fire today."

"You watching the same game as me, bro?" said Bryan.

"Sorry, man. I wasn't really focused on it there."

"I can tell. JC Holmes hasn't done much all game."

"Oh."

"Oh," said Bryan. "Is that all you have to say? I mean, like, where do you go when you zone out like that?"

The phone rang. The name and number of the caller flashed up on the television screen. This was the best feature to have when you share a place with someone. The television basically announces to both of you, who needs to get up. The screen read - C. Taylor (905) 555-1423.

Michael relaxed. Saved by the bell. Bryan got up and answered it.

"Hi mom," said Bryan as he took the cordless phone to his bedroom. "Just watching football." He closed the door behind him.

Michael decided to get up as well. He could use a snack. He headed to the fridge to see what was in there. On the trip to the kitchen he heard Bryan's words echoing in his head. "Where do you go when you zone out like that?" Hell if I know, he thought. It was an interesting question. We tend to relate thoughts to metaphors of travelling. There are thousands of examples in the English language. We can lose our train of thought. We can get lost in our thoughts. We can run through ideas. But do we ever go anywhere?

He left these thoughts in the back of his mind, just like he left the contents of the fridge in back of the fridge. There wasn't anything worth eating in there. He wasn't even hungry. He was just bored. Another boring Sunday in what was shaping up to be a boring life.

He flipped around the television. His roommate wasn't a fan of music videos, so every chance that he got, he channel surfed over to Much Music. They were playing a classic video by 2Pac. He immediately felt energized as he

recited the lyrics by heart and copied the actions of the rapper on the video.

Bryan came out of his room and hung up the phone on the charger. "So Dad is at it again."

"Oh yeah," said Michael.

"Yeah, he's helping to rebuild the gazebo in the park, and then he's going on a bicycle hike with the Kingsmen."

"Good he's got all the energy. I know I don't have much today," said Michael, once again firmly planted on the couch.

"Who's winning?"

"I'll flip it back." Michael picked up the remote off of the coffee table and paused. "Ya know, if I was 2pac, I'd be dead now." He flipped back to the game.

"Woah! See that play. Holmes is on fire."

"About time," said Michael, fully aware of the irony. He watched the replay and got back into the game.

FOUR YEARS LATER

"Four years. I can't believe it's been four years since that conversation." He had said it out loud. There was no reason to, other than just to get some comfort from the sound of his own voice. Nobody was anywhere around him. He looked ahead. The road stretched on for miles. He looked back and was amazed at the symmetry. The road stretched on for miles. If I spin around and around and around, enough that I disorient myself, I wouldn't know which way to keep walking. It's beautiful.

He didn't follow up on his thought. He kept walking in the same direction. He walked for a few minutes until he heard a vehicle approaching from behind him. He moved to the side of the road and stuck out his thumb.

He was wearing blue jeans, a plain red t-shirt, and a blue spring jacket. He sported a McMaster University baseball cap on his head, and a grey backpack slung over one of his shoulders. To the approaching truck driver, he looked like a student.

The truck slowed and pulled off to the side of the road just ahead of him. He opened the passenger door.

The driver said, "Where ya headin'?"

"Kingston."

"Well, I can get ya a little closer. I ain't goin' there but hop in if ya want."

"Thanks." He jumped up, put his backpack down on the floor in front of him and buckled up. "The name's Micheal." He held out his hand.

"Barry," he took it and shook it firmly, placed his hands back on the wheel and started the eighteen-wheeler in motion once again. "So what takes you to Kingston?"

"I don't know," Michael shrugged his shoulders. "Never been there before."

"That's as good a reason as any. One of the reasons I like driving a truck. This job takes me all over the place."

"That's cool."

"Yeah, too many people get stuck where they are, ya know? They live their entire lives in the same city. They may get away for vacations but they never really truly explore anything else. I think it's sad."

"Why's that?"

"Cause the world's so big. We have a beautiful little corner of it over here. But who wants to stay stuck in the corner all the time."

Barry turned up the radio. "You like this station."

Michael nodded. It didn't really matter what they listened to. He appreciated the ride. He'd been walking for quite some time. Not too many people seem to pick up hitchhikers anymore. He leaned back on his seat, totally content.

"Michael!"

Barry didn't get any response. He looked over at his passenger and called out his name again, "Michael!"

Michael looked like he was awake. His eyes were open. He appeared to be staring out at the road before him. But he didn't respond to his name, twice. Finally Barry tapped him on the shoulder, "You alright man?"

Michael seemed disoriented only for a second. "Yeah, ... Barry ... I'm ... fine. What's up?"

"You tired or something?"

"Nah, I was just thinking."

"What about?"

"Nothing special."

"Well whatever it was, you were sure into it."

"Yeah that happens sometimes."

"It's a good thing you aren't doing the driving."

"I'd just as soon leave that to you too."

Chapter 1

Starting Point

SECOND YEAR OF UNIVERSITY

"Anything on television tonight?"

Michael had to ask. Bryan was the type of person who set timers on the cable box for everything. He liked to be in control of the television. It didn't bother Michael much. For the most part, they had the same taste in shows.

They had met in their freshman year at McMaster University. They stayed in the dorm that year. It was like a right of passage or something to do so. Of course, not much studying gets done in a place like that. There isn't much privacy or control there either. But the two hit it off well and decided to share a place off-campus the following year. That's about the whole story so far.

Bryan didn't seem to hear him so he repeated the question, "Anything on TV tonight?"

"Mostly reruns. It's that time of the year."

"I should probably be studying anyway." Michael tried to roll off the couch but flopped back down. "Or maybe not."

"I hear ya, it's been a long week, eh?"

"Yup, sure has."

The television changed channels. Bryan affirmed what he already knew. "Yup, rerun."

"Huh, I don't think I've seen this one." Michael yawned and settled into a comfy position on the couch. This was the only way to watch TV.

"This bites. I think I'm gonna go out for a bit," announced Bryan. "You want anything?"

"No thanks."

And that was it. Michael now had full control of the television. He could flip over to Much Music on every commercial if he chose to, and of course he would.

He had no energy tonight for some reason. Of course, it didn't help that he went to school full-time and held down two part-time jobs. Fortunately, he had the night off and was determined to use it as a recharge night. Sometimes a body just needed to plug into a couch, watch TV, drink pop, eat chips, and do nothing. Tonight was just such a night.

He flipped around channels all night long, watching music videos, and various other shows. It felt good to do nothing.

"Hey honey, I'm home!" joked Bryan as he came in and could hear the TV still going on in the background. He walked through the kitchen towards the living room. "Man, your up late. How come?" He didn't get an answer. He figured that his roommate had fallen asleep in front of the television. It was late and he was tired so he decided to turn off the TV and call it a night himself.

He glanced over at Michael as he turned off the TV. His eyes were open, staring blankly right at him. His eyes looked glazed over, almost grey. It was freaky. Bryan didn't know what to do. He yelled, "Yo!" instinctively, and then added, "Come on man, stop playing."

Michael's eyes slowly regained their colour. "Bryan ... hey ..." He yawned. "What time is it?"

"Seriously. That's it. You scared the crap out of me dog."

"I must've fallen asleep."

"No man, your eyes were open. It was freaky."

"It was a freaky dream too," said Michael. "I was watching television and not really focusing on it, ya know."

"Sounds like you."

"Yeah, but I was thinking about stuff. I was thinking that I wished there was an easier way to write my essay. It's due next week and I should've been working on it tonight. I felt lazy. I felt like I needed to escape and go somewhere."

"Yeah," said Bryan.

"Yeah, and I did. It was a strange experience. It didn't really feel like a dream. I was walking along a highway. It stretched on for miles in front of me and behind me. It was like I was lost out in the country somewhere. Yet, I didn't feel lost. I felt like I belonged there and I needed to explore it more."

"Weird dream man!"

"It didn't look like a typical road. It was like energy or something. It was a blue-yellow kind of vibe. Man, maybe I'm just tired."

"Maybe. I know I am." He yawned. "I'mma hit the sack now."

"Alright, catch ya tomorrow."

"Just no more sleeping with your eyes open alright, that was seriously creepy!"

Bryan then went to his room and closed the door and Michael was left with his thoughts. There was something about that dream that just lingered. Something about it that he knew he would revisit someday.

Michael thought about it a lot that year but never experienced anything like it again. He got back to his schoolwork and his two jobs like usual. He had hoped that his life was going somewhere and that he could find where he belonged in the world. That was what university was supposed to be about, right? Yet he didn't feel like he belonged anywhere as much as he did on that blue-yellow road.

THIRD YEAR OF UNIVERSITY

Michael was in the library working on a computer. He had a pile of papers beside him on top of a file folder. He looked at the papers, typed in a name on the search bar, and waited for the results. "One more down," he thought as he wrote down all the pertinent information beside the name on the list.

There were lots of articles on the list for him to find, but the task was quite easy. If he couldn't find what he needed at this library, he could go up the mountain and search the college library. He could even search online journals and articles.

He rubbed his eyes, ran his hands through his hair, and leaned back on the chair.

"Tired?"

The voice surprised him. He didn't normally run into people he knew while he worked here. He turned around and noticed Holly. Ah yes, Holly. She was in one of his English classes, and pretty unmissable. She was one of the tallest girls he had ever met. She seemed to be just a bit taller than him, but he wasn't sure if that was because of her shoes or her hair. She wore glasses that most people couldn't pull off. They were a throwback to the sixties, but somehow she made them work. She made everything she wore work.

"Hey Holly, ya a bit. Been here like four hours, I think." He yawned.

"Working hard, eh?"

"If you could call this work. It seems like I don't even really do anything."

"Yeah, but you get paid to do it, I wish I had a job like that."

"Believe me, it's not all it's cracked up to be."

"It's better than flipping burgers," said Holly

"Yeah, our pizza dough on my other job, I guess," said Michael with a shrug.

"What are you researching now anyway?"

"Something about the role of nature and religion in early romantic poetry. I don't get this stuff much. I'm looking up articles, photocopying stuff. Ya know, whatever the prof needs for the new book. And it's a lot." He started to clean up all the papers. "Say, I think I'm done for the night. Ya wanna go get a drink or something?"

"I wish I could," said Holly, "but I gotta do some work. I just got here."

"The library closes in an hour."

"Yeah I know," said Holly.

"Maybe I could stick around. I still got more work I could do."

"That's sweet but Steve is going to pick me up after and we were--"

"That's alright, I'm kinda tired," said Michael. "Say hi for me."

"Will do. See ya in class tomorrow."

"See ya."

ONE YEAR LATER

He was suddenly aware that he was looking out the window and on his way to Kingston. He'd been thinking about Holly a lot lately. He made a mental note to email her next time he could get online. He was determined to stay in touch with her, as well as Bryan, and his old friend Tom, no matter what happened. He straightened up and looked out at the road ahead of them.

"So is there a girl in Kingston?" Barry didn't insist that his guest keep talking the entire time. Michael was glad of that. Sometimes hitching a ride was like torture. You had to constantly invent things to talk about. If there was dead air, it never lasted long. It had been about twenty minutes since they last spoke, much longer than other lonely drivers would be able to handle. Michael was quite enjoying the ride, so he answered the question the best way he could.

"No, she's back there."

"Ohhh!" Barry dragged it out. "I know that feeling."

"Do you?" asked Michael, not meaning to interrogate.

"Oh yeah, everyone has a girl," he pointed with his thumb to the back of the truck, "back there somewhere. Feels like you need some space, right? Just to figure out who you are."

Who is this guy? Michael thought but answered, "Her name is Holly. She is everything I could ever want in a girl."

"But?" asked Barry.

"But she's spoken for. She's engaged to this guy, who's like the hardest guy to hate. She goes on and on about how in love they are. They seem perfect together."

"Hmmm," laughed Barry.

"What?" asked Michael, feeling a little putout at this response after he had opened himself up so much.

"Nah, it just reminds me of *my* Holly."

Michael looked over at him in all earnestness.

"Course, that wasn't her name," he continued. He talked for a while and everything he said reminded Michael of Holly. His story seemed to be a complete parallel to this Holly situation. It was refreshing to hear that someone felt the same way.

Michael sometimes thought that he was the biggest fool in the whole world. He was friends with Holly. They had a class together and always talked to each other before and after. He would often walk her to her next class. They even went out a few times; never on a date, always with a group. You know how it is.

They became good friends and even though she spoke about Steve a lot, he couldn't help but fall in love with her. She was just so amazing. It almost hurt to just be friends with her.

Barry was just finishing up his little story, "Of course, they say that there is that one person out there. That special person for everyone."

"So did you find that person?" asked Michael.

Barry answered quickly, "Yes I did!" He smiled, tightened his hands on the wheel, and turned his attention back to the road. There was something about his answer that told Michael he shouldn't inquire any further. They fell back into silence, just watching the road and listening to the radio.

THIRD YEAR OF UNIVERSITY

Bryan and Michael shared a place again for what was to be the third and final year of university. The end was in sight. An education in hand meant that life could start. Or so Michael thought. It seemed like he was working way too hard, and when it was over, he could kick back and enjoy the fruits of his labour. It would be time to harvest who he really was, to prove to the world that he could get a good job, buy a place and a nice car. Then, and only then, he would know that he had made it.

Struggling to get through university was tough. His family hadn't been able to support him much financially. He worked two jobs out of necessity and busted himself like crazy over the summer months just to make ends meet. That was what made Bryan's announcement feel like a bombshell had dropped.

"That's great," Michael lied when he first got the news.

"Yeah, it is!" sang Bryan as he bounced around the apartment. "An opportunity like this doesn't come around every day."

"Nope, no it doesn't," said Michael, trying to be supportive of his friend.

"So, sorry man but you will have to get through the rest of final year without me."

"I guess I will. But don't worry about that man. You gotta get your stuff together. I can't believe that you're actually going."

"I know, isn't it wild?"

It was wild. Bryan had been chosen out of thousands of students to go on the expedition. The best thing about it all was that it counted towards his degree. It would look amazing on his resume and would probably get him a great job right out of school. It was a great opportunity and he had to take it.

Michael worried about finding a new roommate. He didn't want a new roommate. Bryan and him were best friends. They clicked so well together that the last two and a half years had been quite bearable despite all the hard work.

Plus, it was now November. Pretty much every student would already have their living situation all sorted out. It might be tough to find someone to come in and split the bills. Michael put out an ad in the paper and put notices up around campus. But he didn't get any response. He saw Bryan off a few weeks later but his room remained vacant.

Michael would have moved into a single bedroom place but he had a lease. He wouldn't be able to squeeze out of it easily. So he did what he had to do. He scraped by the best he could.

ONE YEAR LATER

"Thanks Barry!" said Michael as he stepped down from the rig.

"No problem. I just hope you find what you are looking for here. Good luck," and with that he drove off.

Michael was grateful for the ride. He didn't think that he would get into town so early. This was good. Beautiful too. The sun was just starting to set and the sky was a welcoming orange hue. Michael had always liked orange. It was his favourite colour.

He wasn't sure that this weird experiment of his was going to work. But things had worked out well so far. He had gotten all the way into town in only one day. He had a great trip with no setbacks whatsoever. He couldn't have asked for anything more. Although soon he would need a roof over his head for the night. He looked at his watch and frowned. He wouldn't have time to walk if he wanted to make it in time.

Up ahead, he noticed a bus shelter by the side of the road. He picked up his pace and walked quickly over to it. He scanned the map and traced a route with his finger. He jingled his pockets and smiled.

Two buses and one hour later, he was outside of Queens University. He quickly found the residential services office and went in. A colourful poster on the wall advertised their summer accommodations. It was a sweet deal. The university dorms sat unoccupied in the summer months until someone came up with this idea. It was a great idea; he wished he'd thought of it. Whoever came up with it was probably sitting pretty right now.

"Hello," said the student behind the desk.

"Hi," said Michael. "I'm hoping that I could rent a room."

"Sure, no problem. What are you looking for?"

"Ah, just a dorm room, I think."

"Okay, because we have apartment units as well."

"Oh yeah?"

"Yeah, they have full kitchens, and are Internet ready."

"Hmm. sounds like that's what I want."

"Okay, how long are you planning on staying?"

"About a month."

"Great we have a monthly rate."

And just like that, Michael was set up in his own one bedroom apartment off-campus. It was much cheaper to get a room off-campus but it was actually only a few blocks away. It was close enough to walk most places. Perfect for his needs.

When he first opened the door to his new place, he could tell right away that it was a student house. The floors were hard wood, the type of wood that you could smell. It was an old wood and not beautifully furnished.

It had obviously seen its fair share of shoes, boots, and such. The bedroom had three beds in it, a bunk bed and a single bed. It had two desks squeezed into that small room and a third desk sat in the hallway. The kitchen was modest too, but it would do. There was a small dining room with a table that sat four. The living room had a couch, a chair, a coffee table and two end tables. That was it.

It would have been a busy place during the school year, hopping with life. Three roommates squished in like clothes into a coin operated washing machine, which they had downstairs by the way. Everywhere Michael looked, he could see the life that had only recently abandoned this place. Abandoned was the operative word too. The place felt empty and sterile now.

But he was tired from his day of travelling. A quick trip to the store and he would call it a night. That was the plan anyway.

He locked his near empty apartment and went for a short walk. A green sign called him to the 24-hour grocery store. Normal grocery stores would still be open but it was college town and convenience was king. He got the essentials to break in his new home; chips, milk, cereal, plastic dinnerware, cookies, soup, pasta noodles, sauce, bread, margarine, peanut butter, and cheesies.

Back at the apartment, he quickly put the food items into the cupboards or fridge. He then went to unpack his backpack. He took out all his clothes and put them carefully into the dresser. The ablutions kit went straight to the bathroom and all of the items in it were evenly distributed into the medicine cabinet. He put a hand towel on the rail in the bathroom and a larger bath towel on the hook behind the door.

Next up was the home office. He carefully unpacked the laptop computer and set it up on a desk in the bedroom. He uncoiled a blue DSL cable, an optical mouse, and plugged them both in. And presto, he was now off and running, once again plugged into the modern, wired world. He couldn't wait to catch up on his blog reading and send an email. He opened up his cakewalk account and started typing an email.