

# ILLEGIBLE NARRATIVES:

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Towards a Queer Violation of Life Story

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## Abstract

‘The Women Who Hit Me’ is an exercise in *queer writing*. Via strategic (mis)uses of the aesthetics of creative writing, it attempts a Genetesque seduction of its readers in order to crescendo the force of its (im)potential disturbances. A novella of sorts — imagined from within the structures, the strictures, of heteronormative language — ‘The Women Who Hit Me’ engages in a self-conscious fictional game that it nonetheless plays dead serious. The focus is Jimi: a protagonist at a queer disjunction with the language that inscribes her. ‘The Women Who Hit Me’ is the coming-of-age story of Jimi’s illegibility as the textual non-binary demarcations of erotica/pornographica, supplication/confession, fiction/thesis battle like MCs until ultimately there is no victor. — Corrosive even to that which it loves, part suicide note part love letter.

As well as addressing the concepts and strategies mentioned above, the exegesis is an idiosyncratic response to the metacritical problem of in/appropriate theoretical speculation. Informed by the night vision pedagogy of Williams S. Burroughs’s *My Education: A Book of Dreams* and the implications of reading the unconscious as a nonsymbolic and nonfigurative social force in schizoanalysis, it aims for a critico-philosophical phantasmagoria, a post-surrealist “look-behind-the-scenes” at the thinkers and poets who claim ante-

cedence to 'The Women Who Hit Me.' Like the creative work, the exegesis is a *queer text*, working against the fulfilment of meaning and toward the disturbance of the poetics it nevertheless desires.

## **Declaration of Originality**

This work contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in my name in any university or other tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text. In addition, no part of this work will be used in a submission in my name for any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution without prior approval of the University of Adelaide.

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**Gretta Jade Mitchell**

**May 2015**

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And finally, to Michelle Wilson for your love and enduring devotion... read 'em and weep, my love, read 'em and weep.

# CRITICAL INTRODUCTION

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## I

A draft of ‘The Women Who Hit Me’ first came into my possession at midnight on new year’s eve, 2013. The writer, Gretta Mitchell, a fellow postgraduate who’d published not a single poem was seeking feedback. I’d heard whispers in the halls of the audacity of her writing, the expectations of her failure. Talk of idiosyncrasies which warranted raised eyebrows, perhaps a fleeting expression of ironic recognition, and no further comment. I opened the file with quiet loathing; it read,

What do we care for laws of right and wrong? (some dead faggot)

I read no further and picked up the phone. I cannot say why I called Mitchell that dark morning. I remember a sensation, vague and unpleasant, like winning a prize I didn’t want, for I knew the line of poetry:

Que nous veulent les lois du juste et de l’injuste?  
Vierges au cœur sublime, honneur de l’archipel,  
Votre religion comme une autre est auguste,  
Et l’amour se rira de l’Enfer et du Ciel!  
Que nous veulent les lois du juste et de l’injuste? (Baudelaire ‘Les-  
bos,’ 36-40)

Thinking as I called, how and why is Charles Baudelaire, nineteenth-century Parisian poet, squanderer of fortunes, a *faggot*? Thinking ‘[...] style [...] has its roots only in the depths of the au-



thor's personal and secret mythology [...] Whatever its sophistication, style has always something crude about it [...]' (Barthes 10). To my surprise she answered. I mentioned that I found the very markings of *some dead faggot* jarring and asked if she'd read Mina Loy. Emphasising that not *I* (to my mind, her citational opening not only parodies a tradition dear to academia and writing and by extension itself; it also introduces a narrative style reflexively ill at ease), but *we* the academy would deem it inadmissible. In short, she would need to explain herself, to go further than producing an illegible dead end as the beginning of her thesis. Questioning her directly she replied, 'It's a disease of the French mind,' and put the phone down without ending the call.

I think there is more to this than DADA. For Mitchell is aware that in her hands dadaist gestures become lame impostures of provocation. What she desecrates is not hers. (Or in other words, Marcel Duchamp is a part of history and she is not.) As consequence of this abandonment, Mitchell's work produces what I can only conceive of as the tone of the *nevertheless*. Thus despite the jarring distraction of the citation's attribution, it is worth *nevertheless* diverting attention to the citation itself, which defiled rests on the page like a clue (a single high-heel by the bins in the alley). For it is there we will locate the tradition her writing salutes. Proffering

a well known TS Eliot quote on dada as a disease of the French mind, Mitchell not only contextualises her strange citation firmly in the history of literature thereby legitimising her work, she also, with a sleight of hand, returns us to *Les fleurs du mal*.

Eliot's quote is sourced from a brief essay, 'The Lesson of Baudelaire,' published in Wyndam Lewis's *The Tyro*, a short-lived modernist magazine (only two issues made print). Eliot contends that the importance of dada 'if it has any, is to a small public formidably well instructed in its own literary history, erudite and stuffed with tradition to the point of bursting' (4). A demographic, I'm afraid to say, far from Mitchell's purview. Furthermore, Eliot correlates the worth of dada to the extent that it is critical of the *morality* of French literature and life (4). 'All first-rate poetry,' he writes, 'is occupied with morality: this is the lesson of Baudelaire. More than any poet of his time, Baudelaire was aware of what most mattered: the problem of good and evil' (4). (For the duration of the essay good and evil remain undefined, yet mark the philosophy of morality.)

To their detriment the great poets of the English language denied creative writing as an instrument capable of elucidating good and evil.

The Englishman had too much fear, or too much respect, for morality to dream that possibly or necessarily he should be concerned with it, *vom Haus aus*, in poetry. This it is that makes some of the

most distinguished English poets so trifling. Is anyone seriously interested in Milton's view of good and evil? (4)

Eliot locates the source of his reverence for French literature in the coherent morality of the works of the Seventeenth Century and argues that Romanticism sought a new morality but failed due to inconsistency and 'rotten' foundations (4). Baudelaire, on the other hand, with 'intellect *plus* intensity, and without much help from his predecessors, [aimed] to arrive at a point on good and evil' (original emphasis, Eliot 4). For Eliot, a high modernist, literary morality is structural, technical, and formalist. He speaks with disdain of chaos and inconsistency and yet venerates Baudelaire — with a nod to Barbey D'Aurévilly who defended *Les fleurs du mal* against charges of immorality with the espousal of the collection's 'secret moral architecture,' a moral architecture which functions only if it is never revealed (Humphreys 63; Culler 'Intro,' xvii) — as the '*deformed* Dante' (my emphasis, 4).

Invoking thus the figurative disfigurement of Baudelairean morality, Eliot (without intention) opens a critical tangent enabling Mitchell to situate the lesson of Baudelaire — for the figurative use of *deformed* is the 'perverted, distorted; morally ugly, offensive, or hateful' (OED) — in the tradition of the *perverse*.

## II

Twenty years ago Jane DeLynn claimed, ‘Gay writing is perverse’ (8). Her declamation wasn’t censure, on the contrary: highest honour. Responding to questions raised by the publishing industry, book shops, and minority awards such as Lambda — questions which continue to be asked (see ‘The Only Gay Book In The Village’ a 2011 Wheeler Centre roundtable featuring William Yang, Benjamin Law, and Fiona McGregor) — DeLynn argued that a book cannot be classified *gay* due to authorial identity formations (i.e. LGBTIQ) or content (i.e. girl meets girl); to be *gay* a book must have that necessary, that elusive elixir: the perverse (8-10).

At first blush, DeLynn’s perverse functions (rather than is defined) in an adjectival mode: a perverse mind, a perverse consciousness, a perverse sensibility, a perverse attitude (8-10). For the perverse ‘applies not just to sex but to all aspects of being — walking down the street, buying a chair, preparing food’; it is the ‘cherishing of the abnormal and *proscribed*’ in everyday existence (original emphasis, DeLynn 9). That is why, for DeLynn, identity and/or content cannot be used to categorise gay writing. Locating the perverse at the level of the prosaic, DeLynn recognises the force of the immanent law of expected behaviour, from which same-sex desire is but one perverse swerve.

An ostensibly straight writer can therefore produce a work that is, in DeLynn's terms, *gay*, and by extension an ostensibly gay writer can produce a work that is *not gay* (9). These latter texts are nominated 'castrated' by Fiona McGregor who holds a privileged position in the debate due to the incorrect and unspoken presumption of her heterosexuality after the release of her first novel *Au Pair* (126). 'The we're-normal-too message is a white lie,' writes McGregor (129), echoing DeLynn's sentiment: 'True gay authors *know* there is something perverse about their sexuality—' (9). Both writers express a reticence to align the perverse with same-sex desire without denying a tenuous connection exists:

I think if you're placed on the margins of society by being queer you have a head start in being perverse, and if you're perverse you have a head start in understanding more deeply the foibles and mysteries of human behaviour. (McGregor 130)

Against the normalising trends of assimilationist (i.e. gay affirmative) writing which is motivated by an unfettered obsequiousness to the mainstream market, DeLynn and McGregor conceive of the *perverse* as 1. shifting and looping in disjunction with social norms (8; 127), and as 2. 'wayward, cantankerous [...] wilfully determined or disposed to go counter to what is expected or desired [...] persistent or obstinate in what is *wrong*' (my emphasis, 9; 130).

Is the perverse therefore a question of right and wrong, of good and evil? the purview, to paraphrase Eliot, of all first-rate writing?

\*\*\*

I emailed Gretta my work, requesting comment. She replied:

I'm not surprised the figure of Jane DeLynn (aka *Don Juan in The Village*) whose self-hate functions in a masculine tense has recourse to such unsatisfying quips — 'Perversity is exactly what refuses to be categorised' (9). I'm not surprised she falls prey to the temptation to valorise the detestable via the endorsement of a perverse which is not only 'a kind of avant-garde' unable to be 'co-opted' but also a multitudinous force enigmatically immune to 'fascism' (9). I *am* surprised she presents utopia dressed down as dreary American realism.

The humanities teach that there is no greater *wrong* than fascism. It is the concept that ruptured the Twentieth Century and sent the signified flying off into postmodernist space. If there is no greater *wrong* than fascism and the *perverse* is *obstinate or persistent in what is wrong*, then the *perverse* is always already co-opted into fascism.

It's depressing to see our hard modernist (the matter-of-fact Jane DeLynn) align the *perverse* with freedom fighters. What might fill younger minds with zeal... Nevertheless, we agree. DeLynn's dislike for gay-affirmative writing, I mirror in an extension to any text that is *engagé* in the Sartrean sense.

I'm attaching the latest draft.

Gretta

ps. For an analysis of the aesthetics of homoeroticism and fascism see Judith Halberstam's chapter "'The Killer in Me Is the Killer in You'" ('Failure,' 147-172).

pps. One could easily substitute DeLynn's *perverse* for *queer*, the discursive functions of which are correlatively provisional.

('Correspondence,' 1)

### III

I first encountered an exposition of *Queer Writing* in Elizabeth Stephens's study of homoeroticism in the works of Jean Genet. An orphan, an impecunious criminal, and an uncompromising queer,

who, at forty years of age, became a twentieth-century Parisian literary darling, Genet's engagement with hateful discourse functions not to expose oppression but to facilitate a contamination of the dominant language by the marginal subject (Amin 507). Via a strategy of seduction, which is an apparent compliance with dominant modes of literary writing, Genet — thus welcomed by the reader — is able to unsettle and disturb expectations, as he makes it perfectly clear that he 'enjoys sneering at the object of his charm' (Stephens 139).

Borrowing from the poststructuralist feminism of Hélène Cixous and Luce Irigaray the concepts *écriture féminine* [feminine writing] and *parler-femme* [woman-speak], Stephens moves toward an *écriture homosexuelle* [queer writing]:

Like Genet [...] Irigaray and Cixous see the potential of writing as deriving primarily from its ability to disturb dominant culture, rather than its capacity to encapsulate or directly represent the experiences of marginal subjects. (145)

The queer writer's 'most important rhetorical technique' is the simultaneous and paradoxical attempt to give flight to the 'significance of words' and to 'hollow out their meaning' (Stephens 142). *Queer Writing* conceives of itself as a 'mode of resignification *within* the dominant language' (my emphasis, 144). The uses of language as material power, as deliberate tool of dispossession, are not questioned. *Queer Writing* is rather understood as an idiosyncratic re-

sponse to the undisputed normalising forces of all of the forms of language.

For Stephens, the architecture of penal spaces — a feature of Genet's fiction — may be read as a figure, metaphorically suggestive of the structures of heteronormative language (64): an oppressive structure, which nevertheless houses the homoeroticism inscribed on its walls. Understood thus, through the theories critical of phallogocentric language, the charge of *reinscription* against Genet, and by extension *Queer Writing* — that is, the charge against 'strategic appropriations of conventional assumptions' which appear to 'perpetuate normative ideas' — is answered (Stephens 146-7). For *Queer Writing* challenges the 'traditional view' that 'marginal subjects' and 'dominant languages' are 'stable constructs locked in an oppositional relationship' (Stephens 150). *Queer Writing* is not a blunt instrument, but a question of dexterous elusion: refusing to oppose or resist, it evades the binary logic of language as magic evades dialectics. Its delight is to trouble 'structures and syntax from within, thereby disrupting [...] systems of knowledge;' its 'disruptive contrariness' functions as a 'destabilisation of meaning that never settles [...]' (Stephens 159-67).

If the *Queer Writing* 'process involves devising lines of flight out of normative expectations and assumptions [...] the strategic use of



literary language [...] the aesthetic qualities of that language in the service of values [...] presumed to be antithetical to it' (Stephens 167), then we need look no further than the character of the prolix dog Jack Russell (aka J. J. Loveless; aka Jack Dorian Gray) who is conscripted by Dad to surveille and report on Mitchell's protagonist Jimi for an example of *Queer Writing* in 'The Women Who Hit Me.' In each surveillance report we find Genet's game of seduction: the strategic use of the aesthetic powers of literary language in the service of its philosophical antithesis. In each report we find a textual delight in troubling language from within, a disruptive contrariness *queering* systems of knowledge.

Teresa de Lauretis — who credits herself for coining the term *queer theory* — rejects the consideration of authorial presence in favour of a provisional text-based analysis. For de Lauretis, a *queer text* not only 'works against narrativity' and the 'fulfilment of meaning,' it 'pointedly disrupts the referentiality of language and images' (244). Furthermore, it is a necessary condition of a *queer text* to 'carry the inscription of sexuality as something more than sex' (244). How can a text carry the inscription of sexuality as something more than sex? Simple: de Lauretis's *queer texts* produce sex and sexuality as *figure*. She honours Djuna Barnes's *Nightwood* and David Cronenberg's 1996 film *Crash* with 'the figural inscription of sexual-

*ity as drive*' (246). de Laurentis conceives of the figure of sex as a Freudian destructive force — as 'beyond gender and beyond desire,' as beyond the pleasure principle, as death drive (247-54).

[...] the trouble with gender is the kink in sex — the perverse, the infantile, the shameful, the disgusting, the 'sick,' the destructive and self-destructive aspects of sexuality that personal identity seldom avows and the political discourse on gender must elide or deny altogether. (253)

Mitchell's exegetical writing is an example of a de Lauretian *queer text*. I don't agree with the risk she takes. To attempt an exegesis which 1) works against the fulfilment of meaning, 2) conceitedly disrupts referentiality with the (ab)use of rhetorical devices, and 3) marks the page with sex as figure — seems to me to present wildly unnecessary difficulties. I called her to insist upon a complete rewrite. She didn't answer.

The next morning as I ordered a double-shot soy latte, I received this text from Gretta:

Postmodern knowledge is not simply a tool of the authorities; it refines our sensitivities to differences and reinforces our ability to tolerate the incommensurable. Its principle is not the expert's homology, but the inventor's paralogy. (Lyotard xxv)

And this four hours later:

Life itself is at stake in this question of proper and improper, appropriate and inappropriate speculation — yours and mine [...] (Dufresne cited in Freud 16)

#### IV

The third time I called Gretta I'd planned to discuss the title of her novella. I'd planned to draw comparisons between *Les fleurs du mal* and 'The Women Who Hit Me,' to argue that both titles desubliminate the feminine (ideal) while antithetically producing the "perfume" — 'Baudelaire was a great poet of odours, of the sense of smell' (McGowan cited in Baudelaire 353) — of a Romantic work of love; and further, to argue following Jonathan Culler that Baudelaire's title, thus by extension Mitchell's, 'underlines an aesthetic of bizarre combinations,' permeating the entire collection's use of 'dissonant images' which function not only as a reflection of modern dissociation but also to 'foreground the operations of language' (xxv-xxvi). Working thus as a Baudelairean 'ironic frame,' (Culler xxxi) Mitchell's title disrupts literary expectations. A disruption echoed in the contrariness of form espoused in later drafts: tone maladjusted to the content of its production.

'The Women Who Hit Me' drives toward Baudelairean discursive contestation, refusing thus an aesthetics of "marriage," Mitchell embraces the jarring logic of slutty syncretion. It is possible, moreover, to conceive of this strategy in queer terms. That is, as a misfiring of (sexual) natures which produces a textual atmosphere rocked by fundamental disturbances. Furthermore, disjunctions of form

and content function reflexively, alerting the keen reader to the shifting ironies of the self-conscious poet, his queer relationship to his text.

Beginning to love the sound of my own voice, I spoke of a ‘special linguistic space’ produced by the ‘strange procedures of Baudelairian verse’ (Culler xxxiii). In a distracted tone Gretta said, ‘He was going to call it *Les lesbiennes*. I’ve been anticipating a request to change the title. Is that why you’re calling? Do I need to explain why the title is in first person while the work is narrated in the third?’

After a considered silence, I replied that nobody would notice — adding that she may need to explain her choice of *Les fleurs du mal* as *vade mecum* to her thesis given the difficulties of engaging with male authored depictions of female homosexuality (Schulz; Schor; Halberstam; Landenson).

With a marked change in energy, willing criticism in other directions, she said, ‘I’ve an *evil* hangover... reading too much Bataille and not enough Derrida. I keep failing to hide *The Tears of Eros* from myself. If only I could forget that book.’ I remind her that Jacques Derrida has shown the entire Bataillean lexicon to be inadmissible to poststructuralist economies:

At any moment, everything there can turn toward the most policed predication — sinister, moral and derisively reactive. An unstable

and inaccessible limit, sovereignty, with its whole system (simulacrum, expropriation, loss, major laughter, and so on), is always in the act of teetering {*basculer*} into metaphysics (truth, authenticity, ownership, proper(ty), mastery). (Glas 220-2)

Nevertheless, Bataille's teetering erratum — his oeuvre — is vital to criticism of 'The Women Who Hit Me.' Best known as a textual pornographer — 'a minor but interesting modality or convention within the arts' (Sontag 83) — Georges Bataille also wrote philosophy and literary criticism. His 1957 study *Literature and Evil* features a chapter on Charles Baudelaire. Extending Eliot's brevity, Bataille demands that writing admit its guilt, its 'complicity in the knowledge of Evil' (ix).

The conjunction of poetry and morality is an economic equation for Bataille, a question of *work* (53). Work = the increase of resources and is future driven; pleasure = the expenditure of resources and is of the present: 'Always, at all times, the choice brings us to the vulgar and materialistic question: "Should I expend or increase my present resources?"' (52-3). Bataille reads Baudelaire's response to this vulgar question, the base materialism of all our concerns, as 'curious' (53): 'On the one hand his notes are filled with the determination to work, but on the other his life was a long rejection of productive activity' (53).

A parallelism at work in Bataille's dialectic argument correlates *good and evil* with *work and pleasure*. Furthermore, this parallelism

is evident in the thinking of Baudelaire; and rather than reading the poet's rejection of work as an individual 'impotence,' Bataille argues that the dialectic play between work/good/future and pleasure/evil/present is not internal to subjectivity but analogously afoot in the society in which Baudelaire wrote *Les fleurs du mal*. What he calls Baudelaire's 'unparalleled tension,' is the result of a 'material tension imposed, historically, from without' (54).

An era of capitalism 'in full swing' has no time for the feast: no time for ambiguous 'expenditures of resources for the sake of the present' (Bataille 55). Capitalism 'reserve[s] as many of the products of work as possible for the increase of the means of production' (55). In this sense capitalism = the perennial good, striving constantly to *work*, to increase its resources, always in the future tense. Therefore an anti-capitalist, an anti-work, stance = evil.

Romanticism — at best a symptom of a bourgeoisie ill at ease with itself — preceded Baudelaire with a response to the 'utilitarian calculation' of capitalism:

Traditional literature simply expressed the non-utilitarian values (military, religious, erotic) admitted by society or the ruling class, while romanticism expressed the values denied by the modern State and bourgeois activity. (Bataille 56)

Whereas romanticism produced an aesthetic of 'dreamy' individual versus the disciplinarian state from its rebellion against the commitment to work, Baudelaire produced an aesthetic of reflexiv-

ity from his 'failure' to be committed to work (57). Bataille quips, 'He had no will power, but an instinct animated him in spite of himself' (57). As keen witness to his failures, Baudelaire offers a reflexive (self-conscious) attitude to the question of good and evil.

## V

Written within the specific context of the 'historical phenomenon' of the emergence of the figure of the lesbian in modern literature, *Les fleurs du mal*, as is well known, was to be called *Les Lesbiennes* (Culler xiii). Before Baudelaire, in the first half of the nineteenth century, in the Romantic, French language texts of the time, gender ambiguity (embodied by castrati, hermaphrodites, androgynes, and the transgendered) permitted explorations of same-sex desire (Schulz 130). After Baudelaire — who is credited for the poetic rupture which disturbed irrevocably the Romantic lyric 'I' and the unity of the subject which Julia Kristeva has shown to be its thesis — the 'literary lesbian,' unambiguous and erotic, proliferated (Schulz 130). Jonathan Culler reads Baudelaire's lesbians as 'soulmates' of his poetic voice (xiv) — high praise indeed. For the speaker of 'Lesbos' views himself as a chosen one, a singular man invited ashore the allegorical Isle. He alone is able to understand the cult of tragic Sapphism. Thus contra simple imaginings of male relations to the figure of the lesbian as voyeuristic and ultimately

degrading, the male-poet/lesbian-figure tension is characterised by ‘identification’ (Schor 393). Gretchen Schulz, furthermore, implicates the Baudelairean inauguration of the relationship between (male) poet and (lesbian) figure in the very disruption of subjectivity that we understand as modern (130). It follows that the “lesbian” is therefore — although etymologically classical and inspired by the male poet’s adoration of Sappho — a modern figure: Walter Benjamin’s ‘heroine of modernity,’ who, in one stroke, celebrated and condemned, is imagined as *subject* rather than *object* (Ladenson 374-5). Furthermore, as Culler demonstrates, doomed, masochistic, and sterile, the figure of the Baudelairean lesbian shadows the workings of that other famous modern defeat, *desire* (xiii-xxxvii).

Composed in the traditional French alexandrine line, 12 syllables long, Baudelaire’s ‘Femmes damnées: Delphine et Hippolyte’ (one of the three explicitly sapphic poems from the canonised collection) spans twenty-six quatrains of alternate rhyme. James McGowan, translator, notes that Baudelaire’s poetic ‘tension’ is produced by the disjunction of content and form. If Baudelaire is ‘frequently outrageous [...] in subject and imagery,’ he is ‘most often traditional in form’ (cited in Baudelaire liv). For McGowan, unresolved conflict between form and content is precisely what gives Baudelaire’s writing its ‘wonder’ (cited in Baudelaire liv).



Unlike 'Lesbos,' and unlike 'Femmes damnées' (the second of the two poems bearing the title 'condemned women'), 'Delphine et Hippolyte' does away with apostrophe (which structures the relationship of poet to his lesbians as an address) to speak through them (which problematizes this relationship) (Schulz 134-5). Thus three voices emanate: the two lovers' and the speaker of the poem.

The first stanza places Hippolyta (Greek literature's famous Amazon) in the pale clarity [pâle clarté] of languid lamps [lampes languissantes] on deep cushions [profonds coussins] impregnated with odour [imprégnés d'odeur] (1-2). There she dreamed [rêvait] of powerful [puissantes] caresses which rose the curtain [levaient le rideau] of her young candour [jeune candeur] (3-4). It is clear by stanza five that Delphine has, in the moments leading up to the beginning of the poem, given Hippolyta oral pleasure.

Strong beauty on her knees before frail beauty's couch,  
Superb, luxurious, she breathed completely in  
The wine of her triumph, and she stretched out toward her love  
As if to gather in a kiss of recompense. (18-20)

Delphine, after kissing Hippolyta's sex, inhales synaesthetic triumph (i.e. the smell of Hippolyta's cum) and moves to kiss her mouth. This eroticism: the exchange of kisses through which lips on lips on lips mix secretions (i.e. told secrets) and outrage purveyors of "taste" (i.e. discretion) betrays the tongue (i.e. speech) of an after-sex discourse which is not dual but multiple.

Via the postmodernist device of pastiche, Mitchell introduces her genderqueer protagonist Jimi: a girl with a boy's name. Through the "frame" of the three voices of 'Delphine et Hippolyte' we are introduced to the strange, illegible Jimi. Moreover, Mitchell does not read the speakers as clearly delineated but following Georges Bataille, perhaps tangentially, as formless, as "spit." This formlessness is contaminated and perverse. As such, a reading of the three ways in which the text "speaks" of Jimi must understand the boundaries of the three speakers in the original poem are corrupted (by the others).

Orgasm fading, Hippolyta is troubled by the loss of her 'blue horizons' which have given way to desire's tempest (5). She begins to weep in stanza three, which only adds to her 'fragile charm' (12). It is from here, in the fatigued atmosphere of recent sexual exhaustion, that the poem imagines its lover's discourse, its after-sex dialogue. Schultz doesn't specify the cunninglingual aspects as I do; she is, however, the first to treat the poem in this "light." That is, in the pale clarity [pâle clarté] (1) of sexual and emotional dénouement.

As Bataille demonstrates, Baudelaire was troubled by his curious response to the vulgar economic question of work/pleasure. The lesbian sex-scenes of 'Delphine et Hippolyte' function as a parable

of his torment. This is how lesbian sex is figured as evil in *Les fleurs du mal*. Evil, because their sex is pure pleasure: of the present and pitifully aware of its own un(re)productive temperament. The evil of Baudelaire's lesbians is not an exercise in vilification. For as poet, as thinker, Baudelaire suffers with his sisters in the aesthetic Sapphic distress of "spent" lovers.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Caveat: critical engagement with 'The Women Who Hit Me' must understand as fundamental that Jimi is, like Fiona McGregor, *not a lesbian* (my emphasis, 124-131). Jimi is not, that is, a figure of the lesbian. She is rather a figure of the queer child who is born of the sterile acts of after-sex discourse — not modern, but postmodern. Look, therefore, for a return to gender ambiguity (i.e. what we now call *genderqueer*) which is, as Schultz has shown above, premodern: that is, Romantic (130).



TO THE NO ONE WHO CARES

To The Perfect Magician of Dead Living

To My Dearest and Most Admired

LOVER AND FRIEND

Michelle Wilson

With Feelings

Of The Most Profound Humility

I Dedicate

These Sickly Stories

G. M.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> A queer pastiche of the dedication of *Les fleurs du mal* — to Theophile Gautier, to Michelle Wilson. Here the stature of a *Great Man* is appropriated by Mitchell and offered to the most extreme form of dispossession: death.

## Prologue

(by the healthy student)

Compiled in endnotes are sketches of my critical distractions. A more rigorous thinker may be able to elaborate a theory of writing or write a long essay, a model of coherence and persuasion, but I cannot. I don't hesitate at exegesis, at a reading of my own writing. It's just that I'm ultimately pitiful. This is all I have to offer: weak diversions into the books I carry with me. Unable to settle, I skip and trip through their syntagmata. Does that qualify as research? as thesis? Why, of course not! Antithetic and thus doomed to the *playgrounds* of "practice-based research," I am infantilized and not permitted to handle money. Penniless, I've nothing better to do but *play* (and I refuse to waste my word-limit on inane justifications of having nothing better to do). I guess you could say I'm resigned to my fate. Fortunate then that these adumbrations function as, if nothing else, a reference list. To demonstrate to you, oh *arbiter elegantiae*, not the penetration of my discourse, nor the exquisiteness of my taste, but the friends who come — as Kristevan instigators — to abandon me when I play.

The aptitude for risking something dangerous and rare in one's creative output as an artist ranks higher than talent, a graceful line, an acute sense of color and composition, a poetic soul, or a gift for cocktail party gab. (Wallace 175)

# THE WOMEN WHO HIT ME

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A Novella

## Sticky Kniky

The girl was a blonde Aboriginal. Her hair sun and bleach with a cropped fringe and falling tussocks, always a touch wet and salty like she'd just been swimming at Wreck Point. Jimi caught her attention one day walking past the flaking house built on stilts alone. Eight steps ran up to a verandah and a front door that never closed. Over the railing, Kniky balanced on her hard stomach doing what looked like a useless exercise, a dress rehearsal for the attempted murder of future boredom.

As a sick joke all the boys called her Sticky Kniky. At nineteen, no one looked as worn-out as Kniky. There were people in town at least one-hundred years older. People who knew they were living on the doorstep of hell. Even they didn't compare to this girl's attrited body. Years of surface rust, the corrosivity of open secret touches, left flecking jagged edges. Kniky reminded Jimi of an undiscovered car crash decaying in a dene. Born in dog country, the daughter of a dog country man, Kniky was local. She climbed out of windows with traces of suicide.

Kniky'd heard all about Jimi, and even though she thought she should be scared, she wasn't. And even though the words were dark and strange, a broken air served their fragile charm. Jimi, depending who spoke, was one of three things.



— A harmless tomboy who, on her knees, left no trace on the bodies of her pale victims. As if untouched, no need to fear, they remained, as if untouched. Like pretty insects, her kisses died each day at dusk. Never mind the troubled heads, nor the strange acts, the rules don't apply at wartime. Never mind the feeding, nocturnal, black, phantasmic, and terrible. Her tragic hair, her useless words, her red sun love, her fatal look. What of imaginary volcanoes brewing in our daughters' empty chests? *She* cannot compete with the stigmata; we've already typed reality.

— Or the germ of a weaselly pervert who would grow up to speak a little too well for his class, whose tongue betrayed his bloodthirst, the care he took to mark prey with his teeth. Calm and full of joy, he penetrated his lovers with perfumes of death.

— Or the echo of shame that gave left-handed blessings to those who do not know that virtue and love don't mix, to those who do not know that there are problems, insoluble, to those who one day discover that they've lost a jet, clean gone from the sky, clean gone from their reach.

Jimi, then, more *maud* than *maudit* (at least eventually) must dash at the limits of desire, far from the living world, wandering, doomed, like a wolf seeking remove, without food, descending, descending...

The upshot? Jimi was not a real boy. It was either pathetic, wicked, or the consequence of ill-omen that she insisted on dressing like one. But, as accidents decree, Jimi was lucky. Kniky liked unreal characters to be her friends. Jimi didn't feel lucky. Crossed (out), somehow.

In general (but Kniky wasn't general), Jimi found barefoot black girls easier to talk to than heeled whites. The smiles of many white girls bored her: an expression based on the concrete knowledge that they would one day betray their own daughters and on the proposition —

*No matter how brutish, poor, and uneducated we become, we will always be treated better than all the slutty black girls and all the smelly dykes.*

Looking undecidable, the first time Jimi spied Kniky dancing she stopped thinking straight: "Maybe I've never thought straight and if I'm not thinking straight having never thought straight does that mean I'm thinking straight?" From her shoelaces to her sentences, Jimi didn't know she wasn't the first — funny girl with a funny name.

## aka

Kicked out into the world from a brainless high school, Jimi swore mistaken vows. No philosophy could teach the lessons of Sticky Kniky.<sup>1</sup> Schooled in the terrible, the regional, the blank nightclubs, those disjointed abattoirs of time.

Predator dogshit-bags unaware of the design they were submitting to, like tools in a primitive digital game, filled the seats arching the dance floor. Underage, Jimi walked through this violent default, through the malign history of slavery as nature, through the science determining the architecture of all the seedy places, and her brain tensed ready for a fight.

Victory was hers as the men were mostly psittacists. Still Jimi didn't understand why —

— why the women did what they did. She didn't understand they did it for money, to stay alive. What did it make her? She wanted to watch, not dance. Poor? Dead? Poor, then dead? What did it make her?

Kniky, dancing, felt Jimi watch; and Jimi felt Kniky ask a question. As the worn-out girl — made for the drunken eyes of the men and their sins, for the old eyes of debauchery — began to understand Jimi's eyes. After raising her palms to the closed-in sky, shrugging her shoulders and mouthing with mock exasperation,

“*what?*” Kniky accepted without further trouble the excess pair of teenage eyes and went on dancing.

At least Jimi couldn’t kill her. But *what?* is (more than the questioner dares to think) a dangerous question. A word beginning with *v.* Vague and yet a lethal, a laced pinpoint, for its presumption of a common base.

Nevertheless, Jimi craved infiltration. Percolating the girl’s head with fifteen seconds of ebullition, hot questions brewing nightmares, pages of confessions detailing strange feasts at night. The spectrum of responses veered from dystopian dreamscapes to textual pornography — not at all like a dream.

Kniky whispered, cuming<sup>2</sup> up real close to those useless, harmless eyes, turning her mouth to Jimi’s pricked ear, “You’d make a real cute boy.” Against sound logic her quiet words penetrated the nauseating music. The atmosphere failed. Dull glass grubbed by dirty fingers reflected a shattered future, not dense with lust but brittle with lack of imagination.

No wonder Jimi found herself in Kniky’s bed alone. The lines of the rusty iron frame moved like a Brett Whiteley nude. Lines like Wendy don’t go out of fashion: inky, ambiguous violence striking through the air. Nothing simple, nothing straight, nothing still. The

springs, worn and elastic, under two inches of foam (a bunk unfit for any privileged painter's dog) were somehow flexible enough to survive. So far, so far. Sinking into the pleasure of rudiments, it'd become impossible for two people to stay apart on Kniky's bed.

A silent tropical sea, its minion breeze, crashed through the sarong transparent from wear, seamless and hanging from the window. "If she keeps thinking of me as a boy," Jimi reasoned, "I could make her have a real nightmare. So she's straight. Girls can be obliging. What's her problem?" The answer came to Jimi as she vomited out Kniky's window. The swimming high vertigo too much for her growing body. Like a girlfriend's strokes the tassels of the sarong keeled down her back and calmed the temporary sickness of her body. "She doesn't understand just how much I could hurt her."

Jimi knew it was time to give up. She recalled the party where she first saw two women making a scene. A married university lecturer and an out-of-town miner. Jimi'd asked herself, "How'd the miner get a woman like that?" Watching from the privileged position of a shadowy child observer, in innocence she learnt. "Well, she showed how much she could hurt her. She showed her just like she showed everyone at the party. Yes. But more: the woman understood. The woman grasped the possibility of a terrible pain. They didn't have to be *queer*, just *smart*." Jimi'd been speechless for days.

One afternoon high key colours set a tone of lazy urgency. Jimi walked, dragging with Kniky by the cinemas, wondering how she was going to survive people when it was place that was killing her.

“Just look around,” she thought, “there’s no horizon.”

They passed the toilet block made of rohypnol besa bricks where the mythical rapists lived. Plain old rapists just lived at home. (Not at Jimi’s home. Thank God.)

The allegory industry having moved on some years back, the town had the tone of dissonance. Built as an afterthought, jig-sawed then scattered. There was a threatening smell. There’d once been a poet in town who knew what it meant: *Yeppoon*, the doorstep of hell.<sup>3</sup> But the poet wasn’t really a poet. Minus legacy, her songs long dead. Like melted cryogen nobody knew what it meant.

The materialists said the coastline seen from the air looked like the doorstep of hell, easy. The paranoid said there was something *in* the air, an intoxication, a geographical madness peculiar to the town. The temperance union said it was wrong to blame the town; it was the people but it wasn’t their fault; it was the weeds. Everyone agreed that everyone else was wrong, and in that everyone was right.

Nine hours' drive from the nearest city — summer muddy and dense, clean hopelessness in the light warm winter. How sweet it smelt, the rain in dog country. Of nocturnal rottenness, of tropic decay. A girl could disappear. Pay no mind. Vanish to the beach at night or into a drawer in a drawn room. Two lunar oceans, her choice.

Vanquished by the fatal grace of the place, Jimi looked at Kniky's skin, the mix of russets like a good death, and tried not to think about what happened behind the shutters, under the asbestos rooftops, the little stories littering the ground like parts of a murdered girl's body.

Kniky stopped and kissed Jimi on the mouth. A quick reticent kiss. "Cum and see me tomorrow when I'm off work. I'll be at Spider's," she said, and ran away behind the cinemas. Just before she got out back by the bins, she turned and looked at Jimi in loving miscomprehension. For Jimi was impossible. A girl with a boy's name. Does that mean she milks the sun? See, impossible.

Jimi stood looking after her. Without will she dragged her feet. Without checking for oncoming cars, she crossed the pot-holed street. Without, without, without her, Jimi's skateboard shoes hit the quiet and echoed there. Sun high as heaven in the hot sky and

the asphalt burnt a hole the size of a ten-cent piece clean through her sole. Seen around town burning like a decimal, Jimi, a remainder, smoked at the empty bus stop.

It cost a lot to catch a bus, no one ever did. Penny infrastructure tormented Jimi like an open cage. Crude pornography graffitied the town. Jimi resigned to the warm sea and the dying reefs. "I'll have to find another girl." She looked at the sun 'til she saw only blackness.

Dancing in a line, girls made of the sun's black light each came in turn to sit on Jimi's lap. They said, "Cum and see me tomorrow when I'm off work," and ran away behind the cinemas.

"Sorry... I can't tell you... my real name... we're not allowed to let you touch... but tomorrow... at Spider's... I'll let you... have you been there before... all day high... don't worry... I don't work there... don't worry... you'll be better off without me tonight... you're beautiful Jimi."

Without an audience, Jimi snarled as she looked away from the sun. Two private school girls walked by. One held the other's arm as if she might drift off into space if she let go. Jimi looked after them, biting the inside of her bottom lip.



Jimi saw Kniky every day after that until Kniky kissed her for the last time. Her head was found in a council bin. Her body never was found.

## Justine

Jimi sat in the dry sand on Bluff Beach holding hands with a girl from Emu Park who liked attempting the impossible. Full of trouble, they waited for a lift to pass them by. Justine had bad news: the letters Jimi wrote — destroyed, along with sixteen photographs. One of her innocent mistakes. Dropping Jimi's love letters right into the palm of the kingshit cock around town. A bantam called Shem, all the girls loved.

Everyone wanted to kiss and play with Justine in the cubby house. Jimi was not her first. Her lovers dated back to kindergarten, taking turns at playing Daddy. Seven years later in a teenage nirvana where the streets were paved with drugs, Justine made Jimi smile crooked and devise eternity schemes.

To the men she was just another girl who walked like a tart.

Justine became Jimi's friend because she felt sorry for her. Neglected and derided, by means of simultaneous equations, Jimi was lucky. Justine liked to fuck things she felt sorry for. Jimi didn't feel lucky. She wanted to stick the knife in the toaster at breakfast and jump off balconies.

Jimi knew who her enemies were and she'd shit in her pants to keep them away. The hostiles were looking for her in the name of

their friendship (imaginary or not) with Justine. This diametric alignment made the tongue kisses of the girls an aquiline trespassing, a hungry feeding in the gardens of friendlessness. They ate each other up and asked for more.

Dune erosion and the flat muddy sea gave the beach (one headland north of Main) an incongruent, failure-of-logic look. Smells of reef scum, wet sand, and something dead somewhere, touched the tongues of the two girls whenever they opened their adolescent mouths. A pair of sandy dick-togs washed here and there on the shore and emitted horrible slapping sounds like God cutting pornography in the next world.

“I was here last night,” Jimi said, “with Spider and his boyfriend. Spider owns the cinemas. Y’know the guy who wears a shoelace for a headband? Always so drunk on the cheap, he sweats pure alcohol and smells like sick perfume. His boyfriend went to see *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* one day five years ago when he was nine and never left. Pretty little thing. Anyway, Spider gives me a drink and his boy is getting jealous. After Kniky introduced us, Spider started reading me Jean Genet. He said, ‘In this place where you live young Jimi, in this jaundiced paradise, according to its dog-bitten denizens, Frenchmen have funny names. Y’know, *girl’s* names. Remember Renée? Poor devil, poor devil. Perhaps, in this book you’ll find a

tradition to rescue you from the jaws of your sky — funny girl with a funny name.’

“It became practice. Friday night readings when Kniky and his boy were working. He said, ‘There’s a book to seduce everybody, even you — my boy.’ And ever since he calls me ‘my boy,’ or ‘Jimi, my boy.’ His *real* boy imagines this as lover’s code and hates me. But Spider never found the right book for me. Never came close. (Can you keep a secret? I know the book that won the boy.)<sup>4</sup>

“So the boy says, ‘You aren’t even a real boy, you’re just a tom-boy.’ I told him, ‘I don’t want to be a real boy; I just want to pretend, because real boys get their arses fucked by Spider.’ Spider laughed his wheezy laugh that gives all the kids the shivers. The first person I ever saw who liked Spider — Kniky’d said, ‘Like all true sickos, forever could not forget him.’”

Touching her aching left hand with her right Jimi thought, “Our buttocks are not like theirs...”<sup>5</sup>

Justine waved to a boy, calling him over. “Can you get something for us?” she asked smiling femme.

“You know this guy?” Jimi asked, bugged by the boy.

“I’m not sure what I want exactly,” her voice acted deaf like she hadn’t heard Jimi. “I wonder if it’s a good night for hallucinogens?”

Jimi closed her eyes as Justine tried to communicate the concept of divination. The laws of the seer. Virtue? a hedonist suffering. Charming, condescending, with an ear for the boy's state-school vocabula, she played daddy's-little-girl-has-a-sensitive-brain. A lithe schoolgirl with hair cut short like a boy's, blue-meany delirium made Justine cry. Not a hollow cry, yet without a trace of sorrow. The meaninglessness of hard labour sentences. The pale eye lament of a girl punishing Radclyffe Hall. Chloë Sevigny directed by a third-class education, wearing a Queensland suntan, she secretly listened to 'Pain Killers' at breakfast. She'd an inexplicable regard for the law. Unlike Kniky she performed for the ideal.

Jimi gazed.

Acne on her cheeks and a slight overbite made Justine's soft mouth hard. She looked like a popular girl and at the same time a runaway. Her face showed the pus of the world, the terrors of wearing inside information on the outside. Not moved by her heart's pulse but by cerebral design.

Jimi could help her; and more without knowing it. A sexual friendship with Jimi would separate Justine from the other girls. It would be an axial, a planetary disjunction. Visible only in a twist of dress. Her skirt a little shorter, her shoes a little punxie. Not many

would notice the change in her gait. A select few would be privy to her unusually high tolerance for pathological illusion.

A taste for downers, Jimi'd take whatever Justine gave her. Other girls froze when Justine wanted — to talk. Zinging with utopia, she told Jimi strange stories. The tone never matched the content.

“My dad hates you Jimi.” Justine picked up a handful of sand. After the party with the cat and the whip, her threats were dressed-up as whimsy. Dislocated symbols taught Jimi the humiliation of retributive violence. The lesson? Justine controlled the rules. Every control possessed magic outcomes.

“I thought that was your mum.” Jimi, hanging her head, a picture of contrition, wasn't sorry for kissing that cat, for the things she did with her tail and her mouth. She shocked the act out of the performance. Scaring the little flirt in the fancy dress skirt closer to the collapse of her role. Where her role becomes unwatchable, real.

So Justine had a magic trick: after the precedence of Jimi's ungodly behaviour, Justine could throw mud (sling it all over Jimi) without getting dirty. It'd all started long before it started with Jimi standing beside Justine, their backs to a kitchen bench. The floor'd been cleared for dancing and people with innocent ideas of fun milled around like cannon fodder.

The cat put on some early Tricky and danced facing the stereo for a brief improv... thinking of Jimi's sun-blinded eyes. Knowing, hoping they watched her tail. Knowing, knowing her boy with the whip was getting his kicks. She turned, moving closer to Jimi (her strange, hidden sex) in stock stripper jest. Dizzy with rum-fuelled lechery Jimi erased the whole room. Even the music died. Replaced by a deadly buzz.

The cat wanted out. She'd expected Jimi to ease her from the game. Recompense for having invited the stranger to join her harmless burlesque. Jimi wouldn't let go, wouldn't let go of the cat. Time passed adjacently to everything Jimi'd been taught about consciousness.

The crowd left the room in the sullen order of witnesses to a crime. Dissatisfaction crept inside Justine for she'd played no active part. Her desire to hit Jimi hurt. From the arches of her feet to the tips of her hair. Hurt. Jimi touched Justine's shoulder to talk as co-conspirators, to ridicule the scene. Justine slammed her loving hands hard into her girlfriend's chest. Knocking Jimi's cheating heart into the wall. A grotesque becoming, Jimi didn't lose her feet. Regaining her honky tonk stance, she caught the eye of the host. A judgmental woman with limp hair who didn't understand the

meaning of the violence. Obvious to her nonetheless: *Jimi* invited violence to her house, to her nice ecohouse in a nice ecosuburb — violence! to her nice, edgy party. A basic set-up job. Failed because the script didn't account for *Jimi*.

Nor did *Jimi* repent of her rotten desire, *Justine* in earshot. A cannibal breathing through the end of millennia soundtrack. Startled, the gaping audience'd held their breath, fearful of the antisocial in their midst. If not for the unanimous eyes of social opprobrium, *Jimi* may've been concerned. Enduring the days of punishment like a poet, *Jimi* knew *Justine*'d take her side.

Moving her hip along the sand, closer — *Jimi* placed her strange left hand behind *Justine*'s back. Touching her in mistakable ways, she remembered how much she loved remembering that story. Even its violent ending, even if *Justine* had the last laugh.

It was a party with a dress code: everybody must wear a skirt. A naive valorization of the feminine, *Jimi* guessed. The cat had a boyfriend with a whip. Assigned the task: punish transgressors. Not averse to dresses and skirts, *Justine* wore pants in a protest for *Jimi* who'd rather die than wear a skirt.

A wimp who liked all kinds of drugs, the boy with the whip showed minute signs of fear. Smart enough to recognise the devil in



Jimi's features,<sup>6</sup> he deployed penalty by proxy and lashed Justine. Watching Jimi detach he played the act of punisher effete. He hit in a tease. Justine didn't know what to do and looked at Jimi. Jimi did nothing. Maybe she did nothing because she wore a tuxedo, maybe she was distracted by the cat, maybe she did nothing for unknown reasons like there was really something wrong with her.

"No, my mum hates lesbians. Dad hates *you*." With invective Justine disliked remembering that story. She shifted her weight against Jimi and her tailbone began the line of touch. Sensing the girl's back running up the underside of her forearm, Jimi smiled incredulous. She held her one free hand like a believer listening to her teenage wife pray.

"He's conscripted his dog to spy on us. Jack Russell my once loyal pet. I've stolen the first surveillance report."

"Do you have it with you?"

"No. The document is too valuable. I've learnt it by heart."

"You learnt a report by heart? like a song?"

"Yes. Dad wants me to be a lawyer. Mum just wants me *not* to be a lesbian. I have to work on the strength of my memory and I have to stay away from you —

“Work on my desire for penetration. I’ve decided it’s in my best interest to please Dad first. I can always not be a lesbian when the time is right. Lucky you.”

Jimi didn’t feel lucky and thought, “I can penetrate you, if you like.”

“It’s called *Code Name Justice*.”

A saturnine mad hatter, Jimi shifted her trilby and expressed amusement through flared nostrils exhaling a quick fix of CO<sub>2</sub> heard only by the seaweed living with the man o’ wars beneath what looked like but was not a surface. “That’s not a very good title,” a sardonic grin on her lips, “I hope the writing improves. Really? They changed your name to *Justice*?” Jimi almost laughed, but, remembering the predicament which was her life, didn’t.

“I know... but they are only dogs and men protecting the innocent by changing names. I understand you understand it’s a fascist imposture. He’s my *dad*, Jimi.

“The greatest part —” she said, shifting alliances as planets do, touching Jimi’s neck under her hair, whispering in her ear a divine (i.e. written) auricular tease, “Dad’s notes were on Russell’s draft. There are whole conversations in the margins.”

Justine inhaled, closed her eyes and began her recitative as the pale flickering came back to haunt Jimi’s hollow place on earth. A

place where something was wrong with the stars. Chaos cancelled out under the rules of a fixed game she wasn't even allowed to play.

*A kiss begins like murder, Dad. There is no one around. Any place will do: schoolrooms, toilets, rooftops, dunes... if there is no one around. Thus in effect my assignment is impossible. If it weren't for Justice's trust, I am afraid to confess failure would be likely. As it is I have her trust and she thinks nothing undue of her father's dog at her heels, his eyes on her summer. I have total access to her bedroom. A privilege I understand you no longer hold. From the inside, I'm sorry to say, the situation is far worse than we imagined. You'll be pleased to hear: the appearance of her room remains decent and feminine. There are no clear signs of the destruction of middle class moral hygiene, nor of the impotent aesthetic of disgust and rebellion that Jimi sports. And while cause for celebration this feature of her room, this very cleanliness makes me uneasy. For the crimes occur within, among the gifts of childhood: her sketchbooks and her dolls. They are lit by Nana's lamp, reflected in the mirror before which she dresses for school, safe behind the lock and blinds there to guard and hide, on the proud, sequestered bed made for her virgin days. I am sorry for your trouble, Dad. I think it's best we classify the information. In other words, don't tell Mum.*

*For Jimi was a very, lucky, little boy this afternoon, waking with the warm salt air on his chest and the young face of Justice in his sex. Playing with the taut vigour, the life of her breasts verdant with young growth, she moved over his erection, from her chest to her areola, with a curious arch of her back. She turned her head and kissed Jimi's inner right thigh, licking him upwards with a slow, dragging bottom lip to the tendon in his groin. Her disheveled crop (silky, here and there with the wetness of the boy) pressed against his left leg as she sucked the groin tendon with a hard, asymmetrical kiss. Jimi's adolescent penile, buried in her short hair like an unholy ghost, leaked the start of his extinction. And the children's flesh distended the other's in a piercing, silent quest, until Jimi — you and Mum were in the kitchen, surely ringing in your ears, the crimes behind the closed door — until Jimi viced Justice's thin, pencil-like neck with his thighs, rolling her over.*

*On his knees with Justice's lips, her tongue, her chin, and eyes beneath him, her body neglected below, Jimi watched himself fuck her mouth. With deranged control, he offered the lips of Justice his pulse and sweat, watching all the while the reflection of Justice's tongue reach for his teenage phallus — eager to play. Her earrings jangled terrible percussive music like a collar against the inside of his thighs. Pinned to the bed like a victim of murder, Justice realised Jimi was*

*watching the mirror. Aghast, she struggled, let out a muffled cry of resistance. (I cannot say if you heard this Dad, but right at that moment I heard you check the locked door. Do you remember that choking sound Dad?) Jimi flushed, a criminal caught, turned his eyes to the pale, blue pair trapped by his evil pose, and moved his pelvis, like a kissing threat, hard against the bones of Justice's face. Outraged, she hit his chest with her fists. Jimi didn't stop looking at her eyes as he moved down onto her skull again. Justice punched and punched and withdrew her consensual mouth. Jimi sat there leaking anger while Justice coughed and gasped, regaining herself from the suffocation of Jimi's secretion.*

*It appears that the idea of Jimi fucking her mouth does not bother her. The idea of him watching the image, however, troubled her sense of self to the point of excruciation. As if everyone may be witness to her violation. In time the meaning of this observation will perhaps with careful analysis provide a clue to your daughter's transgressions. Interim strategies must include an outright ban: no boys in bed.*

*Russell, you fool! Jimi is not a boy.*

*I see, a major distraction to be sure. I guess we can't proscribe "no girls in bed" for Justice would have nowhere to sleep. I see, this boy (I mean girl) Jimi is smart. Extra surveillance required.*

*Yes, yes, extra surveillance... and weapons, Russell. How do we fight this? If she's not scared of complete alienation: of us and our power over the children's right to eat?*

*I'm not here to psychoanalyse: out of my jurisdiction, Dad. I do however know a Spider who may be able to help. For Jimi was a very, lucky, little girl last night. You and Mum were out visiting the man whom Mum will one day... end up fucking; and Justice, dressed naked in a gown, played Jimi grunge music (something you'd hate, cymbals, kick, and fuzz) on your new stereo in the lounge. In the dim light, Jimi, dressed in jeans and a tight, white singlet appeared to pay no mind to your daughter, distracted in your emerald chair, playing with some pencils. Justice danced, dancing and crashing through the sedentary room, over the banal furnishings, and the precious symbol of carpet, onto Jimi who called her a whore. Roughing up her brain, with knowledge of the rules of the game, Jimi pushed Justice off her lap and down onto the floor. Justice rocked there for a moment — then stood and continued dancing. She gave Jimi a curious look like a character aware of its construction. But Jimi wasn't looking; she was strapping together three pencils with laces of high-grade kangaroo leather. Justice, out of nowhere, fell at Jimi's feet (fell to be understood as an act of will) and curled around her ankles. As Justice's loose gown exposed her torso, neck to pubis, Jimi inspected her work. Resting like tragedy,*

*Justice said, "I can't tell you my real name." Jimi feigned an evil tenderness and guided the pathetic, griefless teen-queen to her left knee, and with her hands on the skin below the breast-line, helped her onto the arm of the chair. Sitting across Jimi, with her feet on the right arm, and the edge of her buttocks on the left, she said crying, "Please hit me again, Jimi."*

*Jimi twisted her left arm around Justice's leg, pulling her apart. In her right hand she held the three pencils, a triangular, strapped whole. Pointing the blunt end at Justice, holding her in sleight, not allowing her to get a good view, she pressed her pencil-machina against the girl's clitoral hood. The three sharpened points (their violence) — only ever harmless in the air at Jimi's wrist. There was no resistance. Jimi held onto Justice's thigh like death and Justice pressed back, pushing the pencils down to her cunt, sliding Jimi's graphite into her, into her, out of her, up to her searching clitoral erection, parting the spit-glistened hair. Jimi pressed and held back, biting the inside of her bottom lip so hard it bled. Justice moved to her and to her machine, fucking Jimi's pencils and covering her in cum.*

"At this point of the report," Justine interjected, "there's a marginal discussion on the correct spelling of cum. At best an endnote though in an oral tale. Shall we continue?"

Jimi gave her a look that said rhetorical questions were the first tease. Her left ear burnt without answer as she listened for more.

*Jimi put the pencils to her tongue and licked through smoky, lean teeth the taste of play and sex. Justice, watching Jimi feed on the pencil slime, moved to the floor and undid Jimi's jeans. Pulling the weight of tribady down upon her in a daze of formlessness, caught between body and cloth, the fingers of her right hand, pushed hard against the outer folds of Jimi's sex. An urgent, alien tongue tensed inside the caverns of the girl's mouth and throat kissing the dirty soul of her purity in a queer distortion of reciprocity. A game of hide-and-peek, a game of fuck-before-they-find-us. Jimi moved her useless bones against Justice's fingers, in paroxysms that hurt the nature of her hand. In effect, the crime was a baseless feeding, committed in a world where there were dogs in the sky.*

*Have you been working Russell, or perving on my daughter and writing a sicko book? What is this about dogs in the sky?*

*Working, working, all day at my post; call me the sex sentinel. It is not an easy task, for the text is governed by rules nobody understands. Rules that exceed by limiting the humdrum. Dogs in the sky is an evocation of the senses because it doesn't make sense. These are*



*connections that predate enlightenment. Knowledge of the body as filth, writing as impregnable code, erotica, erotica —*

*— erotica? this is not erotica Jack; it's a report.*

*And I report that Jimi was once again a lucky, little shit, waking mid-morning in the mid-summer air. Justice prepared her a breakfast of your hard-earned food: toasted wholegrain pita-breads with melted white cheese, sliced, cold steak, and garden tomatoes bursting with seed. Stolen beer in Jimi's backpack, the girls walked to the beach with light hearts. The beach was deserted and Jimi found a washed-up shelter. They rested. There was nobody around. A kiss begins like murder. See? Jimi saw that there was nobody around. She said, "Justice, see? There's nobody around."*

## **Alice's Wish**

Without fail the little perisher looked devious. Like a sick boy this girl with too much spirit and bad posture on the back steps doing nothing. Even when she slept a radiation of bent visions turned people away, so with a plan in her pocket, with idle hands busy again, Jimi looked like plain, old, bad news. Signifying for unknown reasons, unknown trouble. Kid-alien in an ET shirt and newsboy cap, crocheted shoes on her feet, holding the bottle she was much too old for, Jimi moved the way a devil moves when he's at home in heaven. Only six years old that ordinary Australian day, whistling air from her young lungs into a menacing rhyme.

For Jimi knew a thing or two.

She knew what it was like to be drowning and not mind. She knew how to train her feet so she liked the way they looked, edifying their unconscious imitation of the other kid's apish slant. The dangers of the copycat riddle tickled her brain. She knew how to throw and how to catch a ball, the way plants like to be touched, and the singular knowledge of the amputee... like sun on her back.

On a stack of six, thick bibles, Jimi stood to reach the man-size instruments. She loved Pop's stuff. His flat carpenter's pencil, sharpened with a Stanley knife. His protection glasses missing their

lenses, offering no protection at all. And emptied paint tins scattered with nails and screws and rolls of negatives, ambiguous red coins from Thailand.

Jimi checked the contents of the First Aid Kit. The back verandah was thick with passionfruit vine growing past the point of itself. “This is going to hurt,” she thought. Whipping a sapling the size of a child’s ring finger down against the work bench, she placed Pop’s hacksaw across it. In two sharp but sawing strikes the rustless blade cut through the young tree as a tailless skink ran into the shade of the bohemian garden. Not seeking a false idea of protection, it lived for the smell of decaying leaves left to their own disintegration. Jimi took her cap in her right hand, saluting herself for a good morning’s work. Cool air on her sweat, she affected a pioneer’s breath before returning her cap to the place where her head should’ve been, returning it with a twist like lemon. Everything was ready for the visit.

Jimi’s mother was standing at her dresser thinking, “If only —” when she’d heard the screams.

“A — A — Alice!”

Ignoring the vocative case as only mothers knew how, Alice wished she could go back in time and call the dogs, back in time to

Gehenna's pit. Standing in the mirror her image knew the morning would cum when she wouldn't be able to look. But that day was then faraway. A good mother who drank a lot and worried a little, a post-war orphan who made her own family out of nothing, four girls in seven years and still she'd managed to keep her figure. Alice knew how to love hard and how to love hard love.

"A — A — Alice!"

But Alice was faraway playing Russian Roulette with Christopher Walken. After the wedding she didn't unpack — not a thing 'cept phobia. She felt the weight of eleven years of dust breaking cobwebs. Hanging from the corners of her bedroom, eviscerating on a drift, silent arachnid visitors left threads deep in her brain. Her suitcase, open on the floor, overflowed in loving mess. Everything required for a quick getaway. Singlets, printed and plain, made of cotton and hemp, a miniskirt (there might be a party), some underwear in an antisocial state, one pair of jeans, boiled wool pashminas, a studded belt, purple lipstick and black eyeliner, xanax, diazepam, codeine —

"A — A — Alice!"

"If only," Alice thought, "if only *she*," Alice could not think her name, "crashed in a flaming wreck on her way up here. If only *she*

took the last corner just a little too fast, drifting across the corrugation until... ”

Alice wasn't interested in her friends because they didn't possess the spirit to die with any drama. No sense of the spectacle. No sense of the love their carcass (under the weeds, mouldering bones) may move. A fireman, Pop'd seen a lot of crashes and he said that people sometimes walked away from a crash, twisted hunks of steel, you'd swear must've ripped them to bits, and they're just a bit shaky, just need a strong drink. Other times the crash doesn't look that bad and everyone is dead, dead as a dog.

“A — A — Alice! Why don't you answer me?”

Alice swore an oath never to babysit again. Reverie cannot compete with an ugly little girl, not your own, her words like snot filling her nose and running out.

“J — J — J — Jimi... she wouldn't listen to me Alice, she wouldn't. I tried to tell her. *Girls aren't allowed to play with Pop's hacksaw.* She started whistling 'Pop Goes the Weasel.' And when I screamed, *Jimi punched me the face!*”

Poor Jimi having to play with the ugly, little girl all day. Alice wanted to punch her in the face too, little snitch. Alice guessed she better check on her third born and with a roll of her eyes walked down the hallway onto the back verandah calling ahead, “Jimi?”

Pale and on the verge of a faint, Jimi tried to stem the flow of blood with gauze.

“Jimi? Where’d you get all that red paint? It’s all down your arm. There’s some on your hat.”

When the scene dawned like emergency flashing, Alice ran around like a dog without its head. Jimi leant an elbow on the work bench for support waiting for Alice to stop chasing the imaginary answer, a feint-ruled smile on her lips.

“Hospital! We need to get Jimi to the hospital!”

The doctors attempted to reattach Jimi’s ring finger, but failed. They broke the news to Alice in the careless tone of surgeons who make wounds every day. Imagining what Alice’s cunt felt like enveloping their phalluses, they gave their prognosis.

“Jimi’s auto-amputation means she will never be betrothed; there is nowhere to put the ring.” They waited for the shock of it to sink deep into Alice’s heart. One put his hand on her left shoulder and continued, “There are places... don’t worry Alice... there are places for wenches who never get married. Sequestered. Penal.” The doctor ran his hand down her back. “What kind of girl —”

“— she’s my darling little Cossack!” Alice’s outburst (understood as shock) was left to fadeout.

“What kind of girl,” with the patience of the educated he continued, “would detach herself from love, *matrimonial* love, in such a *violent* —” the surgeons loved the ring on this word — and alas, so few scenarios in which to use it well, to relish the phonemes like communion over boutique espresso. “Yes *vi-o—lent*; and I know it is not vogue to speak of permanence — but, *permanent* way?” He paused to hear the echo of his glorious tongue. He congratulated himself: in fine form today.

“Not a bad-looking tyke, to boot,” he said making Alice feel the heat of his gaze. Alice desired to be desired so she forgot everything else. “We think,” he said, sliding beside, his arm around her shoulders, “she’s got lawbreaker written all over her, from her shoelaces to her sentences.”

The pack of doctors stood in a posture of unanimous decision, dumbed down for the grieving mother into nodding heads and smiles of understanding that said *we’ve seen it all before* (even though this was, to be sure, a case so rare as to warrant several publications. Oh yes, the journals would be knocking down their doors).

Audience to her own power, the remaining bones in Jimi's hands grew to love disfigurement. All the perfect nonsense in the world. She survived childhood, living as a monster from an ancient book, a book made for boys, bound in tough leather, on a crepuscular creep for others, others to mirror and deflect the strange shadows of her (dis)figure, grinding her teeth against the bars thinking, "— fuck."



## The Target is Leo

Bassie sat down at the family-friendly picnic table — so unfriendly to some — with Jimi, dropping her backpack, her cooler-bag, emptying her pockets of a tin cigarette case, a lighter, and a would-be hustler's phone ringing with inopportune demands.

Jimi played with a pencil in the remaining fingers of her left hand, holding open a book with her right. She didn't show Bassie its obscene cover. A north-easterly blew onshore. Main Beach tasted of salt. Jimi's mouth watered anticipating the absent tang of lime on the white flesh of fish, and didn't recognise her hunger.

Fond of injecting uppers, Bassie needed to be organised. Logistical nightmares accompanied her everywhere. Her appendages covered the table, obscuring the scratch graffiti here and there that read — *faggot this, faggot that — JM 4 JS — abos this, abos that — Kniky is a dead slut* — Jimi crossed out *is* and inscribed *was*, blunting her pencil. The illogical tense structure of *Kniky was a dead slut* made Jimi feel the low, jaded power of exile, as if she existed beyond the grammar of the hate graffiti, beyond its scratching law.

Bassie couldn't sit straight. On the edge of her seat, her body parallel to the table, she leant forward with the back of her forearms on uncrossed legs. She smoked a quarter of one of her endless supply of cigarettes in a long fast drag. A mystery where she got her

money; a stout girl with a speedy Celtic face, Bassie always kept a spare smoke behind her ear like an image of a girl who never cried.

“What you know?” Jimi asked through the midweek school-hour air: the heavenly waste of lurking truancy, of being in the wrong place, at the right time. She spoke in a blank, futureless, adolescent tone.

“Not much, Jim. Except, someone trashed my caravan. And I know who. It was that inbred, or whatever she is. You know her. Kathy Heslin.”

“Heslin? The girl with the janitor dad who’s always cleaning ’round the pants of Del’s little brother?”

“You mean Bon, the Catholic. No, this is another one. Bon has decided all that sort of thing is very wrong, so she will only see me when she needs to take revenge on some guy.”

“Serious?”

“Yes. Well, Heslin is as genderqueer as me.” Bassie coughed and coughed. At fifteen, she had the damaged lungs of a injured bull-fighter. “Excuse me. If not queerer. But she won’t accept it. I got her back though. Caved in the roof of her mother’s (you know her mum is really her grandma, her sister is really her mother, and her dad is really her dad?) — smashed up her mother’s car — full body slam. She has no idea why bad things happen to her at times.”

“Her dad is really her dad?”

“... her dad is *really* her dad.”

Bassie hit her fist on the table. Nothing tickled her more than stories of straight perversion. She looked over her shoulder. Someone walked past. If he'd overheard, he didn't stop and that was all that counted. A hypertension, animalistic, radiated from the negative imaginations of the little faggots, so hated by their mothers who'd once loved them. Without the knowledge of their history, they lived within the invisible somatic fields of constant threat: each reckless and fearless, a creature slowly dying of fright.

When Justine wasn't around, they shared Jimi's bed, as soldiers or prisoners are wont to do. Bassie swore cerulean murder that Jimi put her hands over her comrade's forbidden places when she slept, or “pretended” to sleep. Of course, Jimi had done no such thing. Her sex disinterested. Despite the belief in her own fantasy, Bassie grasped, unlike Del — a castrated, thirteen year-old girl on a bad trip who never came down from the blade of the priest — the demarcations of Jimi's desire. Bassie knew Jimi'd never fuck her, and knew why. Del knew Jimi'd never fuck her, but she didn't know why. It'd been a pitiful night of twenty-seven shooting stars, assuming biology as totality, a night of cancelled molestations. A failed

experiment where Jimi refused to act as expected, denying the dissolute girl and her pathetic, hidden outbursts of incest.

A silence, peculiar to Yeppoon, as to all small coastal towns (a silence of nursing homes, cracked here and there by distant violent outcries) made the girls desire quick, complete intoxication. GHB style. Bassie finished another cigarette, lit the lighter for no purpose, and stared at the flame with fierce red eyes. The silence hit Jimi's body, and her face began to age.

Devil-green eyes suspended... her long, masculine hair was not in control. Like the curling curls of kingdoms that never were, it fell from under her hat, protecting her marked face, and on occasion obscured the pages she read. The twisted darkening of her words became evidence — Jimi deserved ridicule. A lovelock amongst false puritans, her image was written off with the nasty, echoing sniggers of the trials of nonsense, physical nonsense. She wore the feathers of dead pheasants in her rabbit felt hat. "Listen to this," she said.

"... the swampy regions of the cunt (nothing resembles them more than the days of flood and storm or even the suffocating gaseous eruptions of volcanoes, and they never turn active except, like storms or volcanoes, with something of catastrophe or disaster) — those heartbreaking regions."<sup>7</sup>

*Story of the Eye* Jimi'd read more than once. A gift from the smartest girl at school — before Jimi was kicked out, before all that mess — who'd a common name spelt in an uncommon way.

Kelli, a lightweight, a waif, only meant to loan Jimi the second-hand paperback. When Jimi affected to assume the book a gift, Kelli said nothing and Jimi had a new book. Maybe a new friend. Even though the smartest girl at school, Kelli learnt slow when it came to Jimi. A counterexample to Jimi's theory, proving not all cleverness queer. She said, "But I never met a... before." A game of fill in the blanks, Jimi guessed.

A healthy fear of discourse wedded to a pencil-thin aversion to what she called political correctness, still nothing perverse came out of her mouth. *Another* game of fill in the blanks, Jimi guessed.

Jimi didn't want to love Kelli because everybody loved her. She had just the right amount of difference for the world. "Am I making sense?" She asked over and over again. Jimi thought it easy and facile... she wanted to love someone nobody did.

Unable to ignore the way she put her hands in her back pockets, Jimi didn't love Kelli in a dress. Like Luke Skywalker she kept going back to the dark side. They didn't speak for months. She said she didn't want to hurt anyone as only a Sadean could.

Alone, together they went to see films on desire — Kathy Acker’s *Variety*, and foreign, silent surrealism, looping into ruin, ruin, ruin. Nothing happened. They agreed the object necessarily arbitrary and went back to the beds of their familiars. Whereas Jimi’s pages were black, Kelli’s were blank.<sup>8</sup>

High tide hit the quarried rocks, taking its passage without consent a wave — a word — at a time. Jimi stared into the sun. The smartest girl at school had another gift for her: in the bowels of the library down amongst the theses that nobody read. Quiet, they had to be quiet.

“My heart’s been broke by a million cunts,” Bassie spoke to nobody. For Jimi wasn’t listening but walking away, walking away from the secret touch in the library for no good reason at all. She grinned and leant across the table, punching Bassie in the arm hard enough to hurt. Kelli would have to wait.

“I was at school this morning.” Bassie said rubbing her formative bruise. She eyed the patrol car over Jimi’s left shoulder on the hunt for Aboriginals (or women wearing men’s underpants). Only after they drove by in their slow menace creep, oozing blood at every turn of the wheel, she continued, “— at school, in the office. Someone ratted on me for smoking. And I know who, too. That dykey

swimmer, Nat. Anyway, the fool principal left me in his office alone.” If Jimi ruled the world and its currencies, Bassie had pure gold in her backpack. “I found this in *Justine’s* file.”

She passed the document in horizontal stealth to Jimi across the table. Her distaste for Jimi’s girl was performed in the way she said her name — whispering it like a sidekick in love with her boss. Jimi tasted the salt of her own sweat and yawned at hopeless rivalry. Out on the reef a sea creature was eaten by another. In the sand, a love letter — erased.

Moving from the impasse of the unideal virgin to the abrupt departure of condensed pseudoephedrine, Bassie gathered up her logistical nightmare like an over-organised camper and looked at Jimi, granted her the smile of a loyal hobbit (doubtful of her loyalty), and walked away like a confused silverback.

When Jimi’s mum saw Bassie walking home from school, she’d said, “Look at that boy, he walks like an ape.” Jimi laughed for the first time in years. “No. That’s my friend, Bassie. She walks like a boy.”

Jimi yawned again and went back to thinking on Justine. How many days had it been? She wouldn’t cum over on school nights anymore. Three or four days? How Jimi missed those school nights. Kicked out, getting high all day, anticipating Justine in uniform.

Her blue cotton skirt, a fraction too short; the white shirt buttons, undoing undone; the cherry boots, their fruity kick; the perfumes of her cunt releasing from the tight schoolgirl jockeys the aftermath of the hard plastic chairs of the right answer, releasing into Jimi's lost hands senses of loss.

The way to Justine's heart was penned from the start by a great white man. Jimi just had to learn the lines in the drama room where the school kept the costumes.

One lunch hour Jimi disappeared, Justine with her. Everybody noticed and yet nobody found them 'cause they couldn't think like poets. Directing Justine to sit on the narrow dresser, her back against the mirror, Jimi slid behind a screen to change and doffed the livery of a faggy fascist. Emerging mute with the power of a Proustian effete, Jimi walked across the canyons of sexual law with sure step to Justine who twinkled and breathed a rhythm of salt and good fortune as the black uniform and Jimi's noir speechlessness made her clean forget that *she* was *not* a boy. Lifting her skirt, she curled her still-growing legs around Jimi's waist and tongued his neck until he lost his knees and gained the trembling status of a new rival in town. Jimi's favourite place at school was inside this virtuous girl from Emu Park. Justine imagined a world where Jimi was a true contender.



It was an archaic file. A manila folder, a relic from the twentieth century. Closing her book, she opened the hardcopy report. Jimi, holding the loose pages of manuscript down against the afternoon wind, read awkwardly between gusts. The paper wanted to fly away. Defeat... inevitable. Like making a late-night phone call when you have nothing to say.

*As death begins like love, Dad, I am a different dog. There is the sound, the smell. Something's not right at general assembly. I am a different dog. Call me Loveless from now on: J. J. Loveless. Jack Russell is dead, and it is I who killed him. Fear not for me: thirteen days later — howling a lupine serenade to my dead heart — I am in love and reading H. Cixous (in the dark).*

*If it wasn't for Jimi's inscrutable desire, I am afraid to confess our losses would surely have trebled. We have much to fear. So, I am urging you: desist from the vigilantism! (All that dirty sprog in Jimi's school bag? Jesus, fellas. I have it all on tape.)*

*We will find over the course of the term that young Jimi has moved from a sexual complex to a more perverse idée fixe. Piracy is the key term in her lexicon. Our darling little Cossack is not however seeking*

*transfiguration through the usual channels of T injections and top surgery. The white lace of the page —*

*— the negative space, is what draws her.*

*Sensing the phallus elude us — its flight from gods and men — and liberated thus from the drive to possess (a failed model to be sure), Jimi is more dangerous than ever. That is why, gentlemen, I have decided to take an extraordinary turn.*

*I have become Jimi's friend.*

*I ask for your complete trust in this endeavour; and before you drag out your old "boy's own" spy books, remember this —*

*Never trust the pirate.*

*I am sending you strong thoughts. You will have my report by October 31<sup>st</sup>.*

*J. J.*

Jimi grinned to hide her imperceptible delight. Despite the conditions, inconducive to reading, she could not stop. Nothing on Main Beach tended toward an end or a result. Relentless it all seemed, the infinite crashing. Writing about writing about writing about writing —

*From the second storey of B Block through the dusty, angled louvres of an abandoned English class, Jimi observes with hostile intent.*

*Across the northwest corner of the lamentable quadrangle (empty of the sons of Abel who feed there) and through the windows of the halls of science, the line to her object is blocked by the closed doors of adolescent laboratories where they bully with corrosives. Her accomplice am I. Bassie her physical agent.*

*The skies are May blue, sharp and balanced. Words like future, equatorial winter, and clear hopelessness (though they be not here) are seen in the light of our autumnal days, our southern-hemispherical fate. Somewhere, a secret plot: weeds crystallize, anticipating death.*

*I smell fear.*

*Bassie is carefree (it is what delusion brings), thinking Jimi finished with Justice. Provoked, she wants to play her part in the betrayal. A butch vocation, fraud. Despite secrecies' feminisation. Justice remains ignorant, she does not yet know she will regret those few, those whispered phrases from her lips —*

*("I kissed the rapist, Jimi. After you — I mean after our night, high on the water tank. It was a party; you weren't invited. I had to know if I made the right choice. So I kissed him. He stuck his tongue straight down my throat and I knew it was you. I made the right choice.")*

*All Jimi knows? She has no debt to Justice. No misguided fidelity will hold her now.*

*Our target is Leo. A new girl from the city. From a family that moves to Yeppoon for work, a family looking for work where there is none. Poor dear. She has a satchel made by prisoners in Barcelona. A tasteful piece that proves easy to identify. For even the rich kids carry ugly backpacks.*

*Bassie walks into the science halls before the lunch bell sounds. Her demeanour undergoes a radical shift: respectful and calm under the moral strain of Jimi's request. She does not sweat. I stand guard. She touches the girl's things like they are her own, as if she is familiar with the textures and weight. Inside she leaves a folded piece of paper.*

*Need I conclude for you Dad? Your brutal prank has given Jimi the idea. Of leaving anonymous gifts in the possession of pretty girls. For desire knows nothing of exchange; it knows only theft and gift.<sup>9</sup> An unwanted gift is a perverse theft, as you well know. When you ejaculated in Jimi's backpack, you stole a part of her space. Menacing because in death we lose all our space. Now, to win them with her hand, she is fighting you with love letters!*

*One cannot fight with a love letter, Russell. It's an impotent gesture.*

*Have you been reading, Dad? Or... asking Mum for directions. Pay attention. Jimi is driven by the unfulfilled. The evil of the flower. And the name's J. J.—*

*J. J. Loveless.*

*Your code name irritates me Russell. It is the alias of a pornographer. I refuse to call you this, this nomination. And we — remember I am more than one — will not tolerate this sham.*

*Forgive me. What do you refuse to call me, Dad?*

*J. J. Loveless.*

*Pardon?*

*J. J. Loveless.*

*Yes?*

*Fuck you, Russell. There's a reason why you're Loveless.*

*Thank you. Shall we continue?*

*The silence of dilapidated affect, a post-political, quiet mayhem, acknowledges our presence as we join Jimi on watch. Beyond the noise, anxiety dissipates. No one needs to know. We have a few minutes — to wait. Bassie is dying to — jumping up and down inside the speed-coloured narratives (no full stops) of her tongue — but no one speaks. All we hear is the pencil on Jimi's page stop.*

*She looks out the window. Nothing. Yet.*

*Her notebook is expensive, imported, strange... certainly no generic exercise pad. She tears out a page in deft recklessness, folds it carefully. Contrary. It must look contrary. Like the joy of penum, sexy and fun. Attempting the marriage of form and content is old news like cut-up beat prose. Jimi needs expensive paper carelessly torn. All her mad moves are about to depose the king. Bell sounds. Chairs are pushed backward in a chorus of aggressive relief. Science is over for another day.*

*Leo and her best friend emerge with anonymity among the class of children. They are the last to gather their possessions, distracted endlessly by each other's precious hair. Jimi whispers to herself, "Leo doesn't need her mane, doesn't need her nature." We are silently gazing as Leo lifts her satchel in a movement of new girl grace, opening and reaching for her fine comb made of bone, the folded paper falls. It hits the ground.*

*Bassie gasps and I almost howl. What if she hasn't seen it? I look at Jimi and she scares me, Dad. I understand she doesn't care if Leo reads her writing or not. Jimi is grinning malediction. An unread love letter? What figure could be further unfulfilled?*

Jimi, sensing a presence, looked up from the pages and watched a lone paedophile walk past. “School must be finishing,” she thought. She had a talent for spotting them — the worst taste in clothes, ugly shoes, a thoughtless cap, and cheap pharmacy sunglasses. Part ticket inspector, part retard, part impotent uncle. A single white male trying to look inconspicuous, or at least unidentifiable in a place made for children. Once Jimi had seen two walking together on Main Beach, but only once. Kids were everywhere. Like most, this one prowled on the mono (on public jaunts, that is). Jimi tried not to think about the networks and their videos. He would not bother her, already fifteen she was much too old. She turned the page.

*The world comes back with the smell of the children of humanity eating on the cheap. Leo begins to comb her hair, and then it's gone again. The world, that is. What can I say of this silent vortex? Only that it is aerial Maelstrom... below the equator we feel the Earth spin. Death from below, death from the winds below.*

*Leo's friend is looking at the ground. Her never-kissed lips move; she is speaking words we cannot hear. Leo frowns and touches the paper with delicacy as if it might burn her. Uncertain of the strange*

*text her bestfriend's fingers are touching. Should she accept this, this unsolicited material? She does —*

*— and we pirates have found our treasure. We espy it from afar. Over coves of negative space eyes, we see like Basquiat and promise poetry to those who cannot read. O, ruin from coast to coast! The process of becoming entangled in white lace. Never speaking the word that begins with 'b'. Crashing, all at sea.*

*Leo unfolds and reads.*

*Meet me below the library at 3.15.*

*That's it? That's it! That is not a love letter, Loveless. It's a note.*

*Yes, Dad. It's a note. And I note (as should you), Jimi's ductus litterarum — irrespective of content — makes Leo want to undo her hair and redo it a different way.*

*Criminal!*

*Value judgements, Dad? Something more refined, please. This is difficult to write. Do not speak to me of law. The theme is: secret.*

**K**ids from Jimi's old school began descending on the beach. She hoped she would not be seen.

*Bassie can't believe her eyes as the scene unfolds. The girls are at a complete loss. Exuberance, overcuming... so they jump up and down*



*on the spot. Two femmes holding hands. The letter between them touched, then read, then touched again. They stop in midair and furtively look around. They have the feeling they are being watched. Leo, coming back to Earth with zero gravity grace, refolds the paper and places it in her pencil case. (Leo knows that the eyes of the school will be occupied trying to look up her skirt and down her shirt, but not in her pencil case. No, never there.)*

*About to fizz and pop, the girls can't deny another childlike embrace even though it threatens their brand new secret. A secret about a secret boy. Gathering composure like the woman she will not become, Leo holds her make-up mirror and changes the way she looks. Now she knows a boy... somewhere... watching... her whole day is brighter. Her only question? Which boy is it?*

*So, Loveless. Jimi is not dangerous at all. She cannot show up for that meeting.*

*No Dad. That's incorrect; she can — on paper.*

Jimi picked up her book, and grinding her teeth walked inclining and declining down past the caravan park. She had nowhere to go, so she went past Mulatto's.

No one was home. After crawling in the window to see what she could find, Jimi cut back past St. Ursula's, the private girls' school.

Justine called to her from inside the high-fenced tennis court, “Romeo, Romeo. Juliet, Juliet. My shape-shifting silhouette...”

Threading her fingers through the wire, leaning all the weight she had against the taut barrier, shaking it in a short, covert, violent performance, Jimi answered the serenade. “You look persecuted,” precisely the words Justine wanted to hear. Looking uplifted cuming down, she appreciated those who noticed.

The heist of the second surveillance report had (regrettably) failed. Justine was not on speaking terms with Dad or Mum, and her sister spent her days looking for Jimi. Jimi didn’t like being looked for... it implied a hideout and the poor secrets of war.

A dour wench called Nikoff had been the last person looking for Jimi. One of Mulatto’s women. Her license was governed by the rare, cold press of coins. There were whispers buzzing like mosquitoes at dawn around Jimi, fifteen, and Mulatto, twenty-one. Whispers of common women, unable to recognise the unkind sea taunting Jimi, unable to read the simple code of the words with which their handsome Mulatto spoke to the tomboy, ungifted with his eye for underexplored marketability. Nikoff lived in the house with the scarlet door. Scavenging a life among the ruin of symbols, the crude colour-coding was lost on Jimi. Mulatto’d taken her there to show her what a gunshot wound looks like. The guy who’d been hit was

showing off, acting tough. Jimi wasn't fooled. A real tough is femme. Concerned with his lunar prettiness to the extent that he never complains about pain.

Nikoff found Jimi one day walking to school. She followed in an unregistered Ford sedan, and her slow susurrations to the passenger, an oversized boy with dull-ache eyes, sounded like chewed-up tape. *Ritardando*. He looked at Jimi like she didn't make sense. A question made of words he didn't understand, illegible, Jimi threw an imaginary hard cover dictionary at his head; it connected with his brain and killed him — not instantly. Pointless, the suffering. No pain made him feel his own leadenness.

Justine started talking about her family, their tedious, familiar story. "You know, all their hopes are on me. I don't owe you anything, Jimi. My mother is the way she is because she grew up in a shack with a dirt floor. Are you listening to me Jimi? She used to have to sweep the floor, the dirt, and wants better for me. I love you, Jimi. Do you remember the night you set fire to my hair?" Jimi's boredom was sucked into space, warped, inverted. "That's when I knew I loved you. They've offered me a car, a degree, to pay my rent indefinitely. All I have to do is renounce you, forever. I've told them about the party and the cat." Justine, refusing Jimi's hands for three days straight, moved to touch the silently railing

Jimi, saying, “I want to run away to the jungles of South America, because I can’t do it. Not, yet.” Justine spoke with girlish depression, “I’ve been to see a fortune teller. She talked a lot about an enigma of a man. A skeletal, ashen witch with a decaying work ethic seeping the intoxicants of debauch. She said to treasure my contact with him, and to be careful when he looks like he’s been dragged backwards through the bush. It’s your dad Jimi, Mitch.”

## Who?

Jimi turned down Queen St. She walked dragging her feet one scraping step after the other. Slow and aimlessly, moving toward a known doom that would happen in unknown ways. Like a HIV dementia patient, her back bent, showing her bones to the dogs. Jimi was silent, mute, unsure whether or not she had to go to the toilet, checking the fly of her faded jeans, never knowing which way to go, this way no this way, no this —

— suddenly she knew where she wanted to be but then as soon as she remembered she forgot. Jimi walked on and thought about her weeds. Mango buds, dripping with violet resin, sticky on her burning tongue. Retarded by a series of diamagnetic defects, like a scientist she didn't understand their causes or their aims.

She passed a group of Aboriginals in the park. A living black memorial desecrating the stone, the expensive honour for dead Europeans. There they sat, on the Anzac's steps doing nothing. A long-lost war, an unpopular war, some said no war at all, but they were wrong.

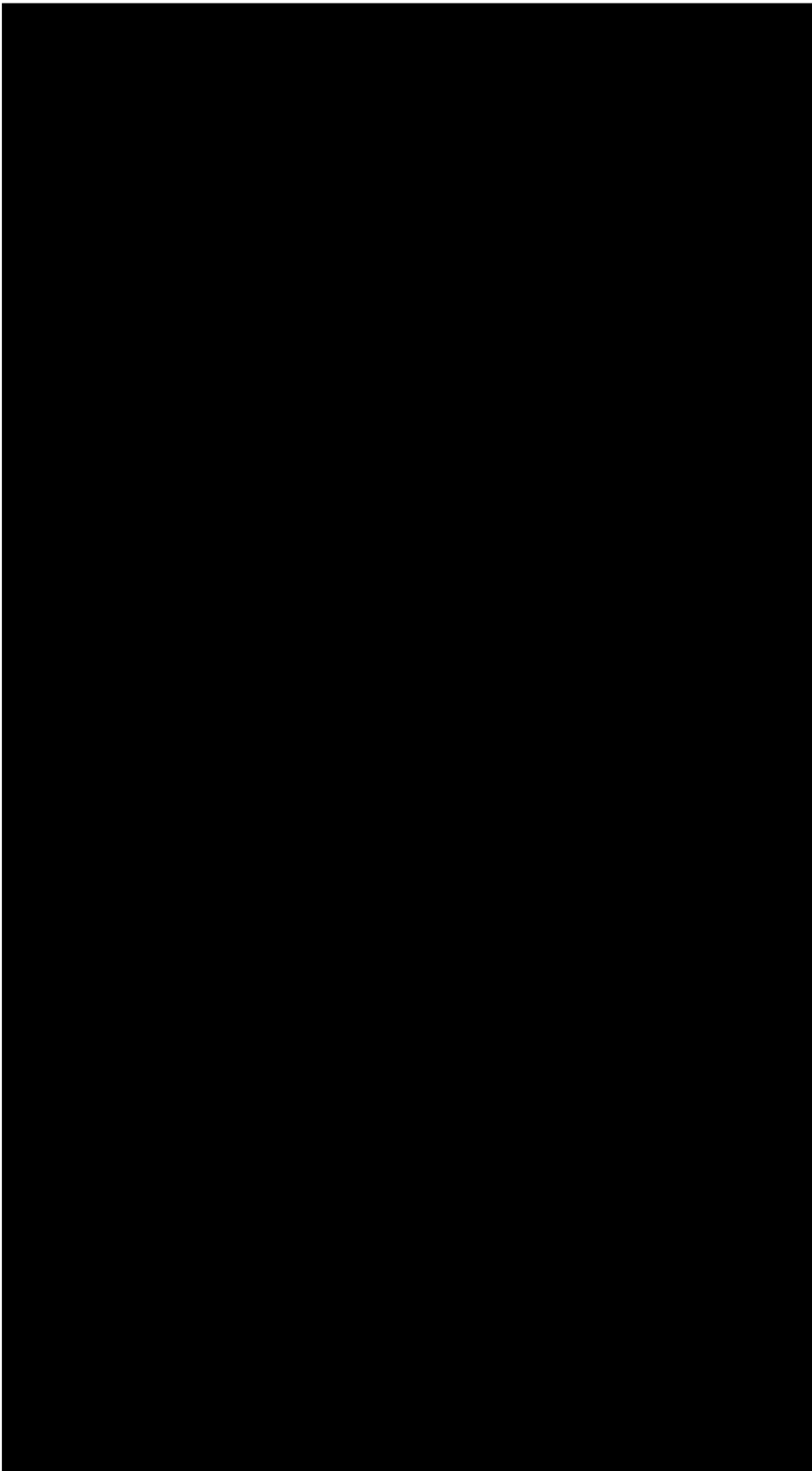
Jimi listened, "White fellas don't get it. They don't get that the government try on black fella what they're planning to do to white fella. Black fella first, white fella second."

The park was surrounded by welfare agencies. Like legalised daylight robbery, Mutual Obligation was harrowed into the skin of the place. Work, work, work... for a feed of sheep guts. It was the Australian way. Jimi lived in the lucky country, Jimi didn't feel lucky.

Across the street she heard a nasty laugh.

A flopping bozo — big as a shithouse, old as a thunderbox — laughed an aggressive, pissy laugh as he crossed the street by the cinemas. A group of out-of-town high school seniors were waiting to see a matinee double of *Kids* and *Melissa P.* He couldn't get over the way they were dressed, just couldn't get past it. They were on a road trip excursion up the coast. Jimi'd heard about these girls. They came from Tweed River High, from the border town Point Danger. Far away from Yeppoon.

Jimi stopped dead —



## **Alive like Albertine**

A stranger made of black strokes vanquished Jimi's aspect. It was obscene how much her writer loved her. Pure profanity. Jimi fell to her knees and started crawling. Tasting bile, its rancid zing, she vomited, thinking, "— fuck."

From the day she was born, she was named Mikhel.<sup>10</sup>

Mikhel.

And she'd just killed Jimi.

The smallest of the small crew, punchy and deft. She stepped in time to the fighting heart in her chest. In an out-of-place, out-of-time uniform — Einstürzende Neubauten band-shirt, skinny black jeans, and street-dancing shoes — she got into a lot of fights.

Her dark glasses made it difficult not to see, and impossible for Jimi not to see what she saw. Demystifications hurt. Life'd dragged her to this cunthole end of this cunthole town. An orphan and a feminist.

"Look at you footy shorts and thongs. You're a walking default." Mikhel laughed, deflecting the ridicule. She shimmered like theory, like she knew something the bozo didn't. The bozo didn't get what he didn't understand, couldn't understand what he didn't. Mikhel always stood up for her mortal friends. Like all abandoned gods she



knew only of the violent law of myth. Her friendship was a danger to hold.

She'd the best eyebrows Jimi'd ever seen. Sculptured, but Mikhel wasn't an architect because she couldn't change her past. Her eyelashes curled upwards at their tips. Coloured by the loss of something she wasn't going to find, her androgynous face suggested the hopeful energy of the vanguard.

Jimi thought, "Now, for her I would be the foolish virgin of Delirium 1."

Puny and muscular with a superhero jaw-line, a tenebrous mouth, and river-coloured eyes that flooded with minerals when she was angry, Mikhel's indignation was spent on friends who didn't comprehend the importance of the battle. Like an old Spanish custom, the sable hair down her back, mixed on the palette of a fervent expressionist, was shaved, undercut. She parted it to the extreme left, to the extreme right.

The tension turned critical.

To her unworthy adversary, to a creature at least five times her size, and with pocket-rocket kick, Mikhel demanded, "D'you want to fight? Do you?" Gesturing victory, "Do you?"

Shocked, the bozo ran away and hanged himself that very night.

Jimi struck dead was struck again. Her first epiphany... too bad she was dead. Taught that theft is evil and conditioned to show signs of guilt at the pure abstract thought, Jimi thought, "The world is made up of thieves proper and safe." It followed because Jimi was already dead. She must steal for the god to know her by name.

A poor girl, you didn't think of Mikhel as living in poverty. Like a ruined aristocrat, a pirate, a heartbreaker, she'd just won the love of a nine-fingered thief.

## **Any Other Name**

Through the anti-theft machines, a different Jimi walked into Dolly's, the local Christian market. She picked up a mango and held it to her nose as she moved in the direction of the ladyfingers. Absently, she placed the mango down among the litchis. Taking her time to break a banana from its bunch, to feel in her disfigured hands... audacity, daring, effrontery, insolence, open disregard for the constraints of moral decorum. The warm yellow fruits bent a phallic gesture. Jimi turned like a Brumby, for it was time to run, time to jump the fence, time to commit a meaningless offence and ride in the company of strange lovers like Quixote.

The police arrived to take Jimi in, and the Aboriginals got a hell of a fright. The stranger was nowhere to be seen.

The surgeons testified to a pathological history: a danger to herself *and* others. She spent two years of a five-year suspended sentence penniless on the beach, godlessly reading.

## The Two-Year Sentence Notebook

Last night my love, I dreamt I had a  
penis. A daring femme held me in flux.  
Past perfect, I meant nothing to her.

I wonder where you are.

Last night my love, I dreamt I had a  
penis. Things'd be better if I were a  
man. I'd give you a family. Maybe then  
I'd know your name.

Last night my love, I dreamt I had a  
penis. You told the girl you love (fuck-  
ing) to suck me. She ran away, crying.

I wonder where you are.

Last night my love, I dreamt I had a  
penis. You said, 'If I had a penis, I'd use

it in creative ways.' You were thinking  
of the girl you love (fucking).

I wonder where you are.

Last night my love, I dreamt I had a  
penis. It didn't feel strange, I had no  
testicles.

I wonder where you are.

Last night my love, I dreamt I had a  
penis. The girl you love (fucking) has  
started working at Bad Girls. Blunt-  
high Tuesday afternoon, I purchase her  
for you.

Last night my love, I dreamt I had a  
penis. Skeletal like fingers. You ran  
away, crying.

I wonder where you are.

Last night my love, I dreamt I had a penis. Shoegazing with a darling femme, she felt good to me but wasn't you.

Last night my love, I dreamt I had a penis. It was cut off by a Korean King. Because I love you. Because I love (fucking) you.

I wonder where you are.

Last night my love, I dreamt I had a penis. They paid me to write a book about women. It went Platinum; now I'm friends with Lil Wayne. You refuse to read a word.

Last night my love, I dreamt I had a penis. Suffering an audio-visual masculine nymphomania you rehearsed dirty

talk for the girl you love (fucking). I suggested you say, 'I want to be your faggot.' Without rage you punched me in the mouth; my top lip cut against my teeth.

Spitting blood, I wonder where you are.

Last night my love, I dreamt I had a penis. Nineteen and I made you my wife. You gave me your vows and a penile ring. Your fine hands placed it on me. We were celebrated. No wedding guests, no gifts.

Last night my love, I dreamt I had a penis. It occurred to me that I may be infected. I'd never considered a condom before. I told you this and you replied, 'All that rubberglove shit is bullshit. We don't need contraception.' The

girl you love (fucking) was spreading rumours. You'd given her something deadly.

I wonder where you are hiding.

Last night my love, I dreamt I had a penis. The medicine man pointed the bone, white against your heart-red sky.

I wonder where we die.

Last night my love, I dreamt I had a penis. You were gone when they came for me in riot gear, Black Panadol in their fists. I didn't put up a fight. My counsel, a penniless rogue, pleaded love as our defence - nobody was amused. Two years I've served, stranded on Palm Island: all day, every day, with others just like me - our log-books lined with venereal disease. I



work for the dole, regenerating dunes

lost to the dead-reef sea.



## **Mikhel**

Standing lost on Elizabeth St like she couldn't lose, Jimi looked around for Dahmer's car. The no-longer-white hatchback with the kicked-in driver's door. Once a brand new car, it had that look. It'd been driven through Fortitude Valley too many times. Ugly and dangerous 'cause Dahmer'd argued with a vegan about smelly compost. Her neighbour, he liked hot chips and was a dirty dick who'd given Jimi's eldest sister scabies. Man, it'd been years since Jimi'd been to Brisbane.

Everyone took advantage of Dahmer except Jimi who played with her mind. The car stereo was broke 'cause the same guy who kicked in the door had disconnected the battery. Not the kind of person who remembered where the unlocking code to the car stereo is kept, the useless music machine, its blinking, its red flashing eye, troubled Dahmer when she couldn't sleep and had run out of smokes.

"I just need five-hundred dollars," she said to her friends who lived in poverty.

Medication'd made Dahmer bigger. She didn't fill out the space her body took. The effect was wonky. Hard to imagine the anxiety

caused by the fear of not fitting through a door. Jimi grinned, she'd be staying the night with 137 kilos of anti-psychotic side effects.

A good driver like most girls who grew up in the North Queensland bush. When manic, Dahmer rode the clutch. She was in love. Jimi'd heard all about it when she'd called ahead to confirm her stay. *Dahmer, in love* with her new flatmate! Bewitched by a cheap buck, she'd advertised her spare room, thinking she'd make money, supplement her pension. None of that mattered now. Fate'd intervened.

“— but I've got a new flatmate, Jimi.”

On Jimi's end of the line, mosquitoes were cuming for young blood like a deadly buzz. Jimi thought unbelievable thoughts. How hard it proved to make people understand — that she was in prison — that she was getting out — that Saturday morning meant nothing to her. What she'd been through the last two years on the beach only poetry could explain. Jimi's silence got into Dahmer's head.

“Oh, hang on. I'll just check it's okay, okay?”

“You there Jim?” Dahmer inflected her statements like questions, so Jimi didn't answer.

“Jim?”

“She says it’s okay but you have to sleep with me. I mean in my bed. She doesn’t want to wake up to a stranger sleeping in her living space. It’s a small space, you know?”

Jimi planned to crash in a cramped corner behind a barred door and to sleep on a sofa-bed designed to ensure the Devil only stayed one night. She said nothing, thinking, “— fuck.”

“One more thing, Jim, before you go. She says not to call during Big Brother.”

Existing on disjunction and luck, without a lease, and at the mercy of a medicated schizo who, in a twisted fall of fate, crushed on her — at 19 Mikhel knew the good times were done. She agreed to go along for the ride into the city, hoping to see the girl she loved fucking. Dahmer’s friend was coming to stay. Mikhel couldn’t imagine what kind of person chose to be Dahmer’s friend. A pitiful fool who never shut up? An inferior, explaining herself over and over and over again? It was going to be a long day.

Dahmer’d told Mikhel all about Jimi but it didn’t seem real. A girl with a boy’s name who was incarcerated for stealing a single lady-finger banana for the love of a girl the prosecution claimed didn’t even exist. Her counsel had a pornstar name. Jimi got five years and

served two. There'd been an accident when she was six; now she only had nine fingers.

As Dahmer drifted 'round the corner, pulling up sharp, Mikhel didn't get a good look —

Jimi jumped in the back.

Mikhel, who above all else was tired, thought, "Here we go."

Dahmer starting raving. Her true calling: shaking hands and a spewing mind. Jimi wasn't listening. Aware of the stranger, she'd the urge to change her hat. Jimi was lucky, she'd packed three hats. Jimi didn't usually feel lucky. But hashish'd put her in a sanguine mood. Belting herself into the centre seat, if nothing else she was pleased not to be in the car alone with Dahmer.

Dahmer said something about biting her own tongue off.

Her tone, like her driving, was close to a crash.

Mikhel couldn't believe it. She realised she'd have to do something: introductions, names, &c., &c. Dahmer was making things awkward. Goddamn it, this was not her role. Mikhel was special; a genius, in short. And like all geniuses she suffered an acute and untreatable anxiety. Swallowing social phobia with a touch of hell, she'd lost all hope of seeing the girl she loved fucking.

She turned.

What Mikhel saw was a true story nobody'd ever believe. Defenceless, speechless, she retreated at once. Snapping front like a soldier, she flashed miniscule expressions of fright. She didn't expect Dahmer's friend to be somebody, somebody —

*beautiful.*

Jimi had no idea who the stranger was... infamous at least, and without doubt *famous* in certain circles she was now expelled from. Nonetheless shoegazing, Jimi'd the urge to untie her laces and redo them a different way.

"Jim? when're you visiting the hospital?" On a tilt, Dahmer wanted to get rid of Jimi. All her nightmares were cuming true. She couldn't compete with Jimi. Her only hope was that Jimi would somehow fuck it all up. Jimi didn't answer.

Mikhel liked Jimi's silence. She seemed to say nothing. "She reminds me of a dream," Mikhel thought. "She reminds me of a dream."

"Did you want me to drop you off." Dahmer asked the statement a million times before Jimi, deferential, refusing the frustration on offer, said, "Let's drink now, think later."

Outside, Woolloongabba, drenched in barometric pressure and the sweat of its concrete, lived what was nonetheless a life. Orbiting

the bottleshop, the people and their polysemous baptisms. Alcohol was one of the few reasons to live. Washing at that wicked water for different aims.

Jimi drank to self-medicate. Prescribing herself rum like a pirate at sea, an earthling searching for sea legs. Mikhel drank to kill. Heartache, oppression, poverty, rage, and the crying pain of abandonment. Dahmer drank to join in.

The flat, barred at the windows and doors, gave Jimi the creeps. She'd told Dahmer the last time she was in Brisbane that she lived in a firetrap. "Imagine there's a fire. And you can't get out."

Dahmer hadn't got it.

"Apparently," Jimi'd said, "the thought of a thief in the night is much worse."

Dahmer'd looked concerned, thinking about a secret stash of cake.

Jimi'd smelt char.

Mikhel squeezed the last drink from a box of white wine and Jimi felt her look close. She'd the gaze of a feel player: she didn't stare and she didn't act as if she wasn't looking. The best eyes Jimi'd ever seen, edge alive. "This time it's the woman..." Jimi thought, "I'll shed more tears than God has ever asked for."



Dahmer watched the silent exchange, raving... something about a female rapist.

Mikhel looked at Jimi again: “It *was* her.” The girl trapped in the imaginary like an angel, levitating above heads, above beds. In real life, Mikhel guessed, Jimi was more devil’s side. Her dress accented the joy of the fall, the celebration of Eve and her evil choice. She wore a red cap, Vietnam star on the front panel ’cause she wasn’t anybody’s whore. Not even America’s.

Jimi thought the stranger wordless. Standing outside discourse like a male dancer in his workshop. A powerful punch on a poor-kid boxing bag, Mikhel would never give up trying to erase the wardens of words. Mean labels that deny dexterity. Without the gift of prevarication, Mikhel was violent like a river. Never given credit for her dastardliness, nor her courtesy. Broadsided, she crossed *wench* and *slut* out of her dictionary. She didn’t given a fuck that she could fuck. Her gifts wasted on — she hated the place — Australia. God-forsaken lands.

Dahmer and Jimi talked about the latest series of rapes in Yep-poon. The story was about a guy known with affection among the men of the town as Snowy. Snowy grabbed women off the street near the shops. Nine victims, so far. There was never any doubt it

was Snowy and nobody did anything about it. Nobody did anything. Until, one day on a fishing trip, he raped a man.

The men were outraged and ran him out of town in a spaghetti western mob. No one'd seen him since. The papers didn't report the rape of males. Jimi wondered why and thought of Kniky. Rape. The national sport of Australia. More popular, more parochial than men in 4WDs running down high-achieving high school girls walking with their friends at night. Australia was a sick place. The story always read: dead woman, raped. Why not? dead man, raped. And as counterpoint to every international performance of 'Waltzing Matilda' echoed the explicit version of the school boys. Rich boys and poor boys singing, "Waltzing Matilda / Who fucking killed her? / Lying in the grass, / With a dagger up her arse."

Jimi thought like a print-out craze, "Monsters were women once." But conversation is difficult to continue after stories of rape.

Mikhel said nothing and opened the fridge, grabbing a white plate, on it, half a left-over sandwich. She wasn't eating for pleasure but to minimise the chances of alcohol poisoning.

Twenty hours later Jimi was in Mikhel's bed with a spiteful-looking rash. She'd behaved badly. Danced like a Cossack. Said

things, done things, spoken out of place, out of turn, slinging bottles in the garden like a six year old, slinging insults like abstract power didn't exist, like she wanted to see what she could get away with, to see if anyone loved her. Mikhel'd frowned in the margins, straight and black like a pen stroke. Offering her hand like a wise and sexual wife, she'd helped Jimi onto her bed and lay close. Armed with a high tolerance for the drunk delirium of troubled androgynes, Mikhel didn't care for what Jimi said, but for her body. She needed to touch ambiguity, to make sure it existed. Corpse thinking: a lover's discourse, "With a body like that you can do, say, anything. I don't care." Mikhel's feet tapped out a silent rhythm in the air. Jimi's body, assuming control, for her brain was an unequivocal failure, moved to touch Mikhel, coiling through the masculine grammar up to her mouth for a humming mutual kiss.

Without missing a beat, Mikhel'd freed her left hand and slammed the door behind Dahmer. The deftness of the way she moved was not lost on Jimi. Nor was it lost on Jimi, drunker than a rainbow lorikeet dazed in the midday sun.

When Jimi got drunk, she could fuck the girl she wanted all night. Her green eyes swampy with want, the pupils clear, evil and black. She didn't understand the too-drunk-to-fuck crowd and never listened to Dead Kennedys. Mikhel'd never seen anything like

it. “What’s wrong with you?” she asked. Her weight heavenly, cuming down with refined aggression on Jimi’s body, on Jimi’s disfigured hands.

Jimi couldn’t answer that question.

Mikhel came like a dirty buzz in Jimi’s brain, like a reason to live in her hand.

“What’s wrong with you?” Aghast, Mikhel didn’t speak Jimi’s name for next three days.

### **Day 1, Dawn.**

Outside Mikhel’s window an abandoned lovebird sang ‘The Last Post.’ Far out on a cracking limb, he called the suffering to rise. Through the dirty blinds of rented rooms, melody rhymed with malady.

5.45, the time of a swarm of mosquitoes — malign inside the resting heads of sun-tanned adolescents. And the breezes that dried the weeping eyelashes of men were full of shivers, of suicidal things. And the butches tired of writing, and the femmes of fucking.

Occupants of this flat and that convinced themselves of a reason to get out of bed and lit their smokes. While rentboys — eyelids vivid, mouths open — fell dormant into stupid sleep. Poor hags dragged their tits, meagre and cold, and breathed on their fingers.

Among the frigid and spare, birth pains broke through. Like a sob cut by blood and gore, the scummy chant of cock, a faraway counterpoint, was tearing the haze that licked the Hospital structures and those dying in the background with unequal wheeze. The debauched, wrecked by their work, returned home.

Shivering under a sleeping-bag of rose and terre-verte, Mikhel advanced, slow over desolate creeks to where Jimi lay awake. Cold women's hands did not warm them. Honest working men did not remember them. Unfortunates: plural. The perfect fifth is the fighter's lie. So Mikhel and Jimi's opening line was all corrupted and shit. Remixed by the slurred tones of blue surrender.

"Hear that?" Mikhel asked, whispering; she didn't want to startle the universe. Serenades are extremely fragile. Scatter them and they will gift another's window with their song. A tune to recall that some don't make it at all. Soft, pianissimo dawn. A tune to recall that it's downright conclusive, that it's *not alright Ma*, not alright at all.

"Listen." Mikhel said, "Listen to the rhythm."

But Jimi listened to the words, the crying games of words. Touched by their stories, she couldn't ignore what they said. They said: "You are going to die." All else? Distraction.

A careless atmospheric regard for preciousness, misunderstood often as wanton, touched the four walls. Atop floor-standing speakers, candle wax'd melted over a rare piece of vinyl. A portrait of Mutaburuka hung from a masonry nail. On the bedside, a bouquet of dry Australian flowers at the height of their slow death were offset by a handmade ceramic ashtray, a lighter violated in some way, and a cheap and nasty mobile phone that Mikhel didn't want to ring. The bed itself was two sides hard-up against the off-white bricks: a mattress held aloft by six milk crates. On a black wire clothes-rack Adidas originals and Japanese sandals, a Bomber Jacket, camos that fell from Mikhel, her crowbar thighs, like cross-gendered hand-me-downs — her clothing held road stories in its folds. But even the cool kids cared about the sexual division of dress and those who dressed crossed abjected through the wrong drawer: a navy blazer, oxford shirt — in case she was signed to Sony Music. There were no chairs in Mikhel's room. It was either the bed or the floor.

Under the thin sleeping-bag, Mikhel wore a pair of boy's briefs. Perishing and cuming apart at the seams, they'd lost all their stretch. The antithesis of lingerie, they were Mikhel's best underwear. Her chest was bare — bar a chain. An asymmetric relief against her feminine skin. Unlike Jimi, she'd a conservative streak

that erupted, or was frustrated, into an undomesticated savagery that held witnesses in awe. Unlike Jimi she'd slept with a few men. Like Jimi, she didn't wear skirts. It was fundamental to them which made them queer.<sup>11</sup>

They waited for the serenade to end before they spoke.

"Would you be queer if you were a guy?" Jimi asked.

"No." Mikhel's breath sombre at the touch of Jimi's missing finger, maudlin in the midst of her prestidigitation, "No, no. Why, would you?"

Jimi nodded. "Not like big-man homo, but boho homo."

Mikhel laughed. Jimi thought herself tough. Even street. Laughed again. Jimi: a whistling weed with a pencil neck. Tough? Street? Her words fell from her with a drawl, a piece of grass hanging from her lip like a bush kid. It was hard to convince people of her intelligence, speaking like that. She may've had a chance if she didn't move in slow motion.

But Jimi didn't mind being underestimated. A weakling with a few power moves. A minor threat, at best. For, Jimi was kind-a retarded. A failed thief with a missing finger and that mark on her face, she wore it like Cain. Mikhel knew the other children must've tortured Jimi for being born with a prominent birthmark. Unspeak-

able taunts that Jimi gave no second thought. A superiority complex made of graphite and hickory had always been her friend. “Who, then, would you want to kiss if you were a guy?” Jimi wondered aloud. Surely Mikhel wouldn’t imagine herself straight, even if she were on the brightside of sexlines.

“— queer girls.” Mikhel impressed Jimi. Her combination of the dead serious and the absurd. Cheating without a care, cheating without guilt. An intelligent child who only played games she was guaranteed to win, games she won with ease. Jimi watched the delicate roughened hands, the dawn in her eyes, and listened (clandestine) for the beat of her heart. She touched Mikhel’s ear, its complexity, and felt the force on her new lover’s out-of-phase ruin. Mikhel’d lost something she wasn’t going to find. And in its place, Jimi’s mouth, her tongue aching like doom to taste her. Biting the inside of her lip, like an imp from a playground hell, Jimi grinned. “You’d be lonely.”

“— I already am.” Mikhel learned to stop crying because her mother never came to feed, or change, or kiss. Her weariness dormancy, not extinction. She’d need volcanic rest; she’d get none with Jimi.



In these, the first blue tones of their dawn, Jimi saw what she hoped Mikhel's ghost to look like. Fierce, clever, transparent, pop-star divine! Laughing all the way to the bank. But as the yellow day played a dirty trick with its warmth, only dark roads lay ahead. Jimi couldn't recall moving from the bed to the floor.

With a physical smart, Jimi's hands changed her mind. "No, I was wrong. I don't think you'd be lonely." Mikhel had the pulling power of a carcass, her body alone. "But... imagine being a queer guy; all that sex." Hypnotised by the silent sun-dial, Jimi was without tick, without tock. Like a shadows theory: light cums to hide the dark.

"That's a myth." Shutting down the dialogue with a posture of exhaustion, Mikhel couldn't believe the nerve of the upstart.

Jimi's skin started to burn in strange places as Mikhel dozed. Here and there where Mikhel's hands had been, Jimi's body abre-acted to a forgotten fever. It dawned, like shame. It was *her*. The God that'd killed Jimi. Or rather, the girl Jimi went to prison for, the girl the prosecution claimed didn't even exist. Here she *was*. And even though the unkind years showed an awful edge behind her, some place vital she couldn't return to, and even though she was a superstitious realist, convinced and convicted, and even though she'd given Jimi a nasty rash — Jimi'd never leave. It was the way

she moved. How cuming, she looked like sound. How beating, she smelt like taste. How like danger, she'd keep you safe. Jimi thought, "You're a myth, all Gods are."

Jimi tried to leave the bed without waking Mikhel, who, asleep on her stomach, breathed rhythms of a beat soldier who feminism had failed. How Jimi wished her new lover'd forget about the politics of things. She wasn't a union man, but a delight. Jimi hoped to distract the wasted fighter, disrupt the menial script of who gets what with something other than war.

Jimi was burning, "I have an allergy to you."

Mikhel possessed the sensory keenness of the abandoned, but she was far too beat for Jimi's puerile, cryptic games. The first thing she'd teach this peculiar, lost upstart is that sleeptime means sleep-time.

Under the tepid shower, Jimi breathed, thinking, "— fuck." Flashbacks mirrored her spreading rash: Mikhel's wet thighs — dying to feel — her aggressive weight — against — her torso, to make her — grow in her fingers again and again — and to feel her hands, those exquisite tools, pinching areola.

## **Day 2, Dusk.**

Light like sugarcane, friend of the fiend, nailed the room shut. Mikhel'd set up a cheap TV for arthouse porn, but Jimi didn't want to watch. They were abandoned, left reflecting an old-fashioned test pattern, that twentieth-century beast. Mikhel and Jimi bounced off the brick walls. If nothing else, discolouring paint.

Sigh. Night. Kind night, you ease the psyches of dirty fauves devoured by wild pain, and the obstinate thinker whose face only ever gets heavier, and the bent worker killing himself for a common buck. Hung-over demons wake like rich playboys to fly and crash into windows at breakneck speed. Even the wind is tormented. A whistle cooks something up. Sombre and dusky, night leads the clubs of pricks and their complicit cunts, staggering to the common gulf; the hospital is wearied by their groans. Sex traps. It's every city's map. Who do you want to eat? To live but a few days more.

Gather yourself, my heroes, in this grave moment, and close your ears to the roaring tones. Uncommitted like dandies, love each other in anyway that's possible, love like credibility rivals, "I'm more fucked-up than you."

They'd disturbed Dahmer's coma and the neighbours hated hearing them talk. The ambiguous voices reminded them of something

they'd like to pretend didn't exist. So they punched the walls and stomped up the halls, yelling, "Shut up!"

Beside Mikhel, Jimi lay perfecting a scary mien. Checking her image against the underside of a broken CD, she hoped to see ferocity.

Mikhel turned and said, "You can't scare your enemies away."

Jimi sat up in bed and smiled a crooked smile. It had something of a coward traced in its lines. Of infidel, and Jimi couldn't control its burst. Mikhel wanted to see the other smile, the one Jimi'd flashed in the car, like spirit all over her face.

Bending in the obscure ways of godless alchemy, Mikhel reached for Jimi in an unaffected posture of cool cockiness. Leaning into the imaginary girl whose name she still hadn't spoken, into her mouth for a low, burning kiss. For an aching moment the taste of heart, of beating pulse and salted blood, muscle on muscle, tongue on tongue... each other only existed. The kiss cancelled out the smell of doom, the sulphuric scent of future lost homes.

After they learnt their world was a lawless prison, Mikhel and Jimi's cell became a forum for all that had gone wrong. The city's doors, their hinges, whined lonely cries of disuse and desolation faltered, troubled by Mikhel's presence. When she walked in a room, heads turned. But more than that, the air shifted. A strange figure whom people were wary to love, she caused minor discordances in

atmosphere. She didn't like debates, but she didn't mind a fight. For the society of men was like a stuttering sermon for a feed of stale bread. Mikhel'd rather go hungry.

Jimi didn't share the city's fear. Just the thought of Mikhel, her hair quiffed, the might of her body in flight, imaging genderlessness, her voice the transmission of the perfect androgynous register, keened Jimi's body. Equilibrium, rocked. Her pace, anamorphic. In the flesh, Mikhel was potent, getting Jimi high like a pleasant dose of deadly poison, like a lovesick philtre. Jimi was lucky. At least she believed in her addictions. Jimi didn't feel lucky. She wished she had a fortune to gift Mikhel.

A more abstruse lover than Justine, no doubt. Mikhel coiled. Her movement was coloured by the calm desperation of tragedy and ruined empires, by violence and need, despite herself, monologic —

“I was taken from my mother when I was three; kidnapped by my father who, aided and abetted by the male law, took me to his parents' house. I work hard at hating my father. It isn't easy resisting the discourse of family, but it should be, because he deserves my hate. He is a scoundrel, a coward, an imbecilic madman. He says my mother neglected me, preferred heroin to breastfeeding.”

Mikhel's room looked like a hideout from the bed. The ephemeral comfort of a hideout — when you leave, you burn it all. Her

back against the bed head, Mikhel looked for her drink as a prisoner looks for his books. Locating it, she shifted, drank with a steady hand to a clean lip and continued, “I became a strange child aware that my prevarications were systematically feminised. In blunt blow after blow, everything was taken from me: underwritten, as it were, below. It was not fair; even my highly specific cruelty changed — transfigured into a general malaise. I watched black and white movies, and wanted to grow up fast so I could smoke a cigarette, drink in a bar, and have fights with a woman who needed a slap and a kiss.”

Her grandparents who raised her were tolerant but in no way bohemian. They were still reeling from the disaster that was Mikhel’s dad.

### **Day 3, Danse.**

On a dark, dark street, in a dark, dark club, in a dark, dark corner, of a dark, dark dance floor, a noble nadir addict waited for Jimi and Mikhel. Nothingness dressed to kill, she’d her hands full of kicks. Void of eyes, not looking for love, a wheezy waif in a cape abandoned — down to her bare heels. On nocturnal walkabouts the wind blew right through her, tunnelling the city of her clavicles. Her indifferent cologne, called to Jimi like black onyx hanging. She

knew who she came for; insouciance and spine, laughing like a Pimp MC, and denied, denied, denied many times more than a Jesus Christ doll.

“Jimi?” Her vital carcass called, “Mikhel? Cum dance with me.”

Pushed by Saturday’s desires, chasing away the mocking bird’s song. She dreamed she cooled the fluid of hell with a licentious license. Writing explicit and cryptic, distillery of grief, Jimi heard taipans in her call; they lived under her ribs. Discredited but fine, only a strong few acquired the taste of her presence. Mortal men didn’t appreciate her charm, didn’t get the joke.

Who’d dare approach her gulfs of pensive horror — high, exhaling vertigo? What dancer wouldn’t feel sick to kiss her dental work, her eternal grin?

She laughed at the hard men and their fragile sexualities. Their self-deceit conceits, mere hallucinations like toilet perfume. So quick to shrink. Under this, the limp dog’s watch, *queen* became *quean*. All she could do was coke. So much so, she’ll need another nose. She told the dancers — faded boys, smooth faced players, the grey and the sleazy love laces, the glazed cadavers — she told them, one and all:

“Despite the powers of your powder, the richness of your pocket rogue, you smack of — well, the musky dead. From the steps of

Spring Hill to the Adelaide grid, I got the moves to lead you all astray. Unseen machine guns are aimed at you, the drum-samples of the angels: rat-a-tat-tat. It's my scene, an unheard-of place. Perfume me, if you please. I admire your global insanity. It looks good with my irony chain."

Jimi moved in slow motion. Sharp and grungy, the night of celeste winters was ruined by high-density living. Poverty increased the planet's gravity as the weight of history fell on the place where Jimi's head should've been. At seventeen she already knew there were no answers and then we die. Like phantom riches, MDMA affect and stage make-up fright was all that was left.

*Denigrare*, anonymous, sextet dressed, Jimi craved her back to the bar. Camouflaged like ink in snake denim skin, pulling black rabbits out of her hat, she wore a vest two man-sizes too big. XXL Machismo, like she weren't afraid to die. Custom citational rings, no re-production. Frame on frame, cranial *noir*. Violet strikes against her cheekbones, surreal like a side-alley show, Jimi was a monster in an old book for boys. Smelling of paper lust, her whole stance said, "Forget me."

Mikhel: a danger by her side, stepping rhymes. Her rocksteady hands played violence like fiction. Her body, her sweat, bass and



nicotine. Her sex, taurine and sweet rum. Step left into her lap of high aggression. Her collapse — only in the dark could Jimi hope to catch that rare creeping song of their kiss.

After three nights together, Mikhel and Jimi were lost. Food became difficult to find, and every morning around 11.30, Mikhel, overcum by an obscure anxiety, played music at the same low level as the day before. Smoking and pacing, she would leave for the bathroom abruptly. Jimi was wrong to think nothing of it.

Before this diurnal black spot came and went, Mikhel disliked any kind of noise human and not music: Jimi's laconic voice seemed unbearably loquacious, the violent crash of empty bottles drilled her temples, but in particular the telephone. She'd had bad experiences with telephones. The prosaic evil ringing, like tinnitus, deafened her and prolonged the pain nobody noticed she suffered. It did not occur to her that she was sick, as she associated sickness with old men. Mikhel didn't keep secrets from herself, but her dark mornings were somehow unselfconscious. She always left her cigarette butt floating like something dead in the toilet.

## Three-Secret Jim

When lost, Jimi didn't like asking for directions. She never listened to them anyway. There was a push in the air to ask for directions if you didn't know where you were going. And sometimes, when weak, Jimi succumbed — regretting it instantly. Like a stupid cartoon character she thought, “I really should be listening right now, but I can't believe I am standing on earth next to this person. Look at their ugly shoes!” Good Samaritans giving directions always knew just before they finished instructing the queer looking stranger, that she wasn't listening, but looking at their shoes. The obscenity of Jimi's judgment (here they were, being helpful) caused a moral panic for most, and a fleeting joy for the rare twisted spirits.

The helpful guide, abandoned and morally wounded by the side of the road, kecked as Jimi walked away in the wrong direction, “But — wait. You're going the wrong way.” At first sight aimless and random, Jimi had the look (if you really looked) of a giant killer thinking on secrets. She knew she could only walk aimlessly for a limited time before the police, or worse, the Dean of Graduate Studies was called in. “Hello, police? I've seen a strange figure pass my window three times this morning... seem to be doing *nothing*. Please hurry, I can't tell if it's a boy or a girl. Pardon? No, they don't look... well, yes, now you mention it (who can be sure anyway?)”

The sky radiated a futureless tone and Jimi felt dead planet handsome. She'd met a rocking queer, so queer it rocked you. A tired and disgusted monument, Mikhel liked to get rock-pig drunk and sexually — is harass the right word? maybe accost? maybe there is no word, or concept that covers it.

What becomes of molestation with the threat of rape removed? A female rapist is commonly unthinkable, but Mikhel liked to get messy and touch without asking... the nipples of popular golden boys who thought they were cool because everyone liked them. A vigilante in action, taking revenge for the sex oppression Jimi refused to see. Not to say Mikhel didn't want to sex the safe and pretty boys, drawn to her prey, their youthful physiques and harmless, rose-coloured intellects — libertinage, in short. Jimi a privileged witness. First, the blunt fix of shock and awe, and then, the derisory pleasure of watching the social contract obvert. A sight to behold, worthy of an entire study.

Coloured by the dead civilisations of South America, a cruel, tender, fierce, and urbane lover, Mikhel whispered word abuse and had Chihuahua friends. Whereas Jimi didn't think of herself as woman, Mikhel argued that what we know as feminine is not feminine at all, but a projection of masculinity, *a masculinity*. She fell on the femme side of the androgyne line.

The grounds and the access roads were cleared of their morning traffic. Everyone worked toward their deaths inside, except the smokers who had a cool, shady spot under a Moreton Bay Fig. Jimi went nowhere without distraction. Approaching the end the wrong way, like a skater she traversed the grounds, using the built environment contrary to its purpose. Sliding down a railing, skipping a few steps, Jimi hit the asphalt and concrete playground of institutions knowing the game to be dead serious. Jimi had three secrets, three dead-serious secrets.

First, she was an irrepressible bed-wetter. Even at seventeen, sheets and mattresses weren't safe around her. Secondly, she liked to let mosquitoes bite her. The third secret wasn't really a secret but she couldn't tell anyone.

Sleeping in a puddle of urine is a hard secret to keep. An abject thrill tolled for Jimi in each sleepover invitation. Forced to comprehend the horror of causing horror with precocity, Jimi became wicked.

While other children contrive naughtiness as a series of mutually-agreeable transgressions (a little slap and tickle), the bed-wetter's crime is penalised as downright evil because it discloses an out-of-control body — the crashing body that secretes while sleeping or dying.

Jimi's crime was beyond transgression for she broke no law. The social demand for rigid bodily control, the metaphysics of constraint, was what she unconsciously refused. And yet because it would be "abuse" for the bed-wetter to receive punishable blame, those faced with the aberrant urinal beast hatch a brutal, whispering plan to shut the pisher down with pack rejection.

The rejection of the pack begins with intangible twitches and ends with the starvation of the outcast. Jimi'd been to five sleepovers. Never twice at the same place for she wasn't invited back. The cry, "Why didn't you tell us?" rang out on the matutinal wind. As if the world had a right to the knowledge of the child's tragic flaw, a right to be warned of a hero's *harmartia* before the play was done.

Over another breakfast that begrudged our sweet son a drop of milk, a crust of bread, a teaspoon of love, Jimi told useless lies that didn't affect her shame. The blush passed, but the delirium (last night waiting to fail dirty on a strange, clean sheet, the anticipation overcoming her) transfigured Jimi into a frightening, social creature child. Eight years old with excesses of energy. Like the pus of a mosquito bite turned boil, she seeped.

Sitting incorrectly on the arm of a chair, dressed in boy's clothes, she spoke — in an out-of-character voice — convivially with her

friends who were not her friends. About who got nits the most times, about the ugly boys' masturbation guilt, about how skinny orphans make the best kissers. Mattresses were on the floor as makeshift beds for the girls. A television may have been set up for horror movies.

“So, what you know about mosquitoes?” Jimi said, looking at Tara.

— no response. The girls in the room died of disappointment. Only feminine echoes of their rejection were heard. The baby-pink walls, through rotting, saccharine teeth... If only... like a trepidatious girl, the lightshade swinging imperceptibly... If only, if only... accursed automata of sexual training, the dolls on the host's bed... If only, if only, if only...

“If only Jimi wasn't here. I'm scared of her. Me too; she shouldn't be allowed at girls' sleepovers because she's more like a boy. She stinks of mangoes and dirt. Jimi's gross. I hate the way she wears that stupid hat everywhere. She says it's to protect her brain. I hate the way she wears it the wrong way. She looks stupid in boy's pants. Real boys are cute. Tomboys are gross. Just stay away from her, stick close to me. She'll molest you for sure.”

Jimi inhaled to speak and the girls left the room to go to the toilet together. They shut the door behind them. A soliloquent sadness echoed on the soundtrack to the movie of this book.

“I met a boy from town at the playground under the stringy common mango tree. He taught me a science lesson.” Jimi settled into the story. Her child’s body — in the queer stance of the very few little devils left, little devils bred out systematically since the genocide of witches, what a task to be one of the few left, what a burden — showed no signs of hurt. Easing her burden in the only way possible, she played with it.

“A boy from town — big thickset boy with Doe eyes — dumbest cow you’ll ever see — flat-footed, with hands like trotters — cums up to me, looking at the mark on my face and my seeping arms (at the time I had quite a few boils from scratching my mosquito bites; I was a recently spent minefield) and expected me to like him just because he was a boy. Dog-bitten mangos, dropped by flying foxes, some green rotting into black, and others black rotting into yellow — flawed flesh, hence the eponymous *common* — littered the playground. In a voice that made me cringe without fear, a vociferation taking full advantage, no qualms, of undeserved privilege, he says, ‘You know only *girl* mosquitoes eat human blood?’ You can pick a boy from town by the way he says *girl*. Like he really believes that

he is better at everything than every single girl in the world. He was trying to make me hate girls, make me hate myself. But he couldn't see I wasn't really a girl and didn't know I have mosquito friends. I picked up a rotten mango and threw it at his head, '*Drink,*' I corrected him, 'they *drink* blood.'

"He ran as fast as he could to get Dad. Just before he got to Dad, I saw him flinch, remembering... Dad was *not* his friend. He turned to look at me, wondering what would have happened. But it was too late. The rotten common was all over his face and in his ears and in his hair, running from his nose mixed with snotty tears down to his shaking, slimy mouth. Dad was angry that son got beat up by a girl. He considered killing me to make himself feel better. I actually saw him tense ready for a fight. A creature five times my size was getting ready to eat me. It happens a lot 'round here.

"Missing girls," Jimi whispered, "gone without a trace into quicksand or into the mouth of Goya's *Saturn.*" Jimi was lucky. Her dad didn't want to eat her. Jimi didn't feel lucky.

"Then out of nowhere the boy's sister starts screaming because a mosquito was biting her. She screamed and Dad slapped her forearm with his rough meaty hands, hurting her while the mosquito escaped. Dad looked at me with abhorrence in his eyes. Though he would call it hate, because trisyllabic words were clear, beyond him.



He knew one thing. *I* was to blame for *everything* that had *ever* troubled his simple short-back-and-sides life. He would find me and kill me. But for now he had to make sure he hadn't broken his daughter's arm.

"The mosquito who fed on the girl is my friend. Her name's Grey Dengue. She tells me secrets."

People who'd seen Jimi walking aimlessly were starting to get twitchy. Midmorning, petty anxieties of the public servant produced the atmosphere of an accident waiting to happen. The couriers' angst outweighed the dread of the wish-I-were-dead patients inside.

Jimi walked the wrong way down a ramp made for cars. A taxi driver wanted to kill her to make himself feel better. The distraction of a measly fare saved her life.

Jimi's second secret should've been easier to keep. She should not have been standing at the window screen killing mosquitoes. She had a theory without explication. A woman looked at Jimi in vicarious horror. The men stared with detestation on their lips and fear marking their lumpen brows. It was not the act, but the way Jimi moved. She knew the bloodthirsty flights of her insect friends

but didn't react as a scientist. She hated them like lovers. Biblically. On her hand a perfect specimen landed. The world disappeared. She moved her six grey legs, one at a time, until the slight, precise adjustments made her stance — killer.

Her proboscis entered Jimi with a piercing sting, radiating into an itching burn. Grey Dengue aka Tiger Mozzie, her thorax marked, took Jimi's blood. Through Dengue's pellucid skin, Jimi watched the empty abdomen fill with crimson life. Jimi couldn't kill her. She let her feed and watched her fly, heavy with life and blood, away.

**R**unning out of aimless time, Jimi thought of Lore waiting.

**B**ut another clear and hopeless July morning held Jimi in flux. In winter the weeds flowered. A pungent correction of the sober oppression which ends in dipsomania. A pungent correction of the world with black and purple highs.

Every man and his cunt knew Jimi's third secret. After imbibing all of Alice's wine before sport's carnival, she'd passed out and pooped her pants during the march. Her new nickname was *Shitty*. A nice gender neutral pseudonym.

Shitty's plot was made of female weeds, the males culled. Mulatto'd taught Jimi how to tell the difference (vitaly important to

get the males early — they could ruin, by turning to seed, the female flowers). After drawing Jimi a diagram and explaining: boys don't cross their legs and girls do, he said, "You don't want the energy of the female weed to be wasted on seed. You want her to focus on her (in theory) limitless uselessness. Of course from time to time, but not often, you will have to choose a male weed. Isolate it immediately with the strongest female, away from your general plot. Be careful of the wind — winds carry insemination — and watch closely for signs of contamination (i.e. fertilisation) amongst the virgins of your ground. One more thing, you may not believe me, but I've seen females turn male... sometimes just parts of them. Dispose of these as of any other male."

Jimi visited her plot at dawn. The paths there were hidden. Some said they didn't exist because Jimi approached via different ways each time. She took care not to disturb the undergrowth. All that was known? Close to a water supply, Jimi's plot drew mosquitoes.

Eventually at 11.43, Jimi walked with the fear of being stopped and touched like a criminal through security into the head injuries unit. The HIU, not exactly a hospital, was a kind of residential building with a secret wing and the locked doors of all asylums. Jimi

knew it would take her a long time to find. She didn't know *what* she'd find.

As a joke, a guy in a 4WD had swerved at a group of high school girls walking along a road at night. He'd "pretended" to run them down, and Lore was thrown so far... at first her friends couldn't find her. Lore was a real clever kid who looked like a Geisha. Jimi made her worry she might be gay.

The local fire fighters arrived just in time to save her life.

Destined to be a fireman just like Mitch. Climbing freestanding ladders off the back of a truck without machismo, pulling dead teenagers out of cars, dead babies out of caravans, divining water and starting fires, friends with the best looking women... Jimi could be nothing. Not Lore's hero, nor the bad teenage husband of Justine fucking around, nor Mikhel's future friend. Nothing because she chose not to be a woman. It was her only choice. Except — to not be a man.

Jimi saw a rope a'swinging.

Lore was sitting up in bed, with her mother Bel on vigil. An educated ex-junkie, Bel was a nasty woman who'd give you the shirt off her back. Her lies were somehow honest.

Jimi'd cut her hair when she'd heard about Lore's "accident," fresh high undercuts below a blunt shoulder-line curl. Lore was the opposite of punxie, a classic high-achiever with a conservative look. Lore would no more cut her own hair, than tell her stoned mother she loved her. She registered Jimi's presence. Her cranial brace recalled Kara Walker's silhouettes, more frightening than any *Saw* movie. Lore could not lie down. It distressed Jimi to hear everyone say that she could.

Jimi entered the room and Lore kick-started her critical mind. "Where have *you* been for the last three days?" she said, in affected law-enforcement tones. Everyone knew Jimi to be guilty. Jimi didn't feel guilty as she planned to miss her train. If it wasn't for her filibuster blood alcohol level, the remnants of last night's piracy, the patient's performance of outrage would've made Jimi cry. She placed her reptilian left hand (the amputation, the missing finger, made the present digits appear longer) on the patient's shin and felt under the blanket, under the sheet, and under her flesh, to the bone — the tibia.

"In bed," Jimi said. "I've met the girl of my dreams."

Excitement flashed across Lore's face, leaving a wondering sadness in its wake. Jimi looked her over like she was the fighting fit specimen of their childhoods, and said without speaking, "There

were years, sweet one, when it could've been you. If you weren't so fucking neo-con, our pre-adolescent years could've been filled with tongue kisses and cunning lingua. Don't dare mourn your loss of me now."

Lore backed down, but didn't let go of her indignation. Jimi was supposed to be *here*, visiting her, a fifteen year old girl she'd known since she was seven, who, moreover, was lucky to be alive after a brush with a "joke" in a 4WD, but spent three whole days cavorting with a complete stranger.

Jimi's guts contracted. She needed to find a toilet. "I'll be right back," she said.

The nearest toilet was for patient use only. But if Jimi didn't use this facility, she would be mistaken, not only for a patient but for a mess of a patient. Alarms would sound. So, Jimi figured herself a patient, but only in the future tense.

The diarrhoea came fast, with contortion cramps of a torturous bowel and a pallid ague that threatened the white light of painful unconsciousness. Jimi held the disabled rail for support. She wanted to howl at the cruel moon sleeping on the other side of the world, but managed to keep her mouth closed (teeth grinding) as her bowels opened. Mercifully, it was quick, and the patient's toilet was

clean: “*was* clean,” thought Jimi, surveying the damage. Her pants were clear, thank god. It had been a few years since anyone had called her *Shitty*. Was that blood in the toilet? Jimi stared at her mess and looked around, triple-checking the door. Locked.

A larger room than most domestic toilets, patients’ bathrooms are made for more than one person. The white-tiled floor, without those useless domicile divisions, was not unpleasant, and a generous mirror above the basin helped Jimi straighten out, in the titled way of drinking to cure a hangover. She splashed water on her face and dried it with course public paper. Grateful for the shelter, Jimi flushed the toilet and wondered if the smell of shit was on her clothes and in her hair. Guts contracting, Jimi reconciled to another round. She needed water, water... she desired the silvery faucet, just out of reach.

A lurching creature of anatomy was waking from its rest. Menstrua, a bush kid guided by a street lamp and a left-over hunger for the wrong toys. That lunar, that female rapist, was cuming for Jimi again. “Shit, shit,” Jimi didn’t have a tampon.

Bleeding came to surprise Jimi each and every time, because she didn’t think of herself as a woman, nor particularly female, though not male, inclined, nonetheless to that dress. She watched the blood connect with the toilet’s water. She wondered if she could take a

shower. She had to think of something. Her rash, which'd faded, pulsed with every heart beat. "There must be a tampon in here somewhere." Jimi didn't believe her own hype. Of course there wouldn't be tampons in an Australian institutional dunny. "Shit, shit," someone came to the door, and moved on. No, there would be no tampons. An incontinence pad? A nappy? Yes, yes, — no tampons.

Jimi willed the coagulations of blood out into the water. She'd be able to get most of it out and buy some time. The threat of the white light, gone. Breathing in through her nose, jaw clenched, she didn't know why, but she thought of her sister Lee.<sup>12</sup>

Rags. That's how the mighty Menstrua was known in Yeppoon. Rags. Jimi took off her jacket, her shirt, and her singlet, and threw the shirt and jacket back on without moving from the toilet. Biting the seam between her left hand canines, she tore through the overlocking, and then ripped the singlet in two, repeating the process for the other seam. She folded one piece of cotton and placed it on her right knee, over her pulled-down jeans, and did likewise for the other. The toilet was a bloody crime scene. Deciding against the shower, Jimi cleaned her pubis. The hair knotted where it was longest. She needed water, water... Jimi'd have to spend the day in the HIU with blood-dreadlocked pubic hair, a mean looking rash,



slowly dehydrating. Mikhel believed with the blood of Menstrua and stem-cell research the poor could regrow their teeth.

Walking quickly to air out her clothes, the same outfit she'd worn for the last three nights, so not only would she smell of shit and blood, she would also smell of two girl's cum, Jimi went back to Lore, consoling herself with the knowledge that she always looked better when she felt bad and that Bataillean malodour was fashionable.

"You've cut your hair," Lore said looking at Jimi. Scanning her face, as patients do, she attempted to read what her visitor was thinking.

Lore's halo brace consisted of four parts, a hard plastic vest, steel pins and bars, and the eponymous halo. What smiling Americans, feeling positive about their broken neck, think of as the "angel's halo." The halo is a metal ring crowned on the head, connected to the skull with, what must be a euphemism, *pins*. These pins were not an object Jimi would find at her mother's sewing machine, but in her dad's toolbox; these *pins* were *bolts*. Eight bolts, then, four into the frontal bone, two on each side, and four into the back of her skull. Vertical rods ran from the halo to the hard-plastic vest. The vest, like a medicinal corset, was renowned for skin irritation side-effects because it was essentially a cast wrapping around her

neck, over her shoulders, and down to her navel. As Lore recovered from the “joke” that broke her back, the “joke” that broke her neck, her halo brace kept her head and spine still while she moved around the HIU looking for her sense of humour.

Lore didn't have to share a room, either because she was one mistake away from another harrowing stay in intensive care, or because her Grandfather worked for a newspaper in Sydney. The body length windows of the single room, peculiar to humanist sanatoriums, could not be opened, from inside or out. The aspect was of a badly-cared-for garden.

Gardening (aka the cutting down of trees) was considered a masculine pursuit. Ruled by a post WWI aesthetic, in Brisbane, the hatred of trees was rife. Trees were like witches — everywhere. The newspapers liked nothing better than the story of a killer tree (witch) responsible for the death of an innocent working class family. Despite the neglect, despite the poisons, herbicides that smelt of a witch-free Europe, plants in the tropics continued to grow. Like the creatures who begin their day at dusk, they kept cuming. No matter how many were slaughtered in the broad breaking day, crickets chirping their crepuscular sex, from the bellies of their enemies they kept cuming into the hostile homes of their families.

Two of Lore's school friends walked into the room, private school girls. It'd been two years since Jimi'd thought of Justine.

"Pardon?" one said, denying Jimi's presence.

"I said your hair looks nice." Lore's eyes were on Jimi, hazel and pleading. Her friend mocked a brief crazy mien, as if Lore had lost her head, but she, a good friend, would go along with it so as not to cause a ruckus. "Oh thanks, it's nothing," the fool heard herself saying. Lore didn't have the strength or the will to explain. Invoking her might, she flashed the girl a look that said, "You know I am smarter than you. Why do you think I am sitting here? Why? Is it my fault? Is it? No, you did not outwit me. I was talking to *Jimi*."

The girl looked at Jimi like she could not possibly be the conversational centrepiece. She wasn't sure if Jimi was male or female, so she didn't know whether to love her or to hate her. Lore fixed her gaze on Jimi, who, stupefied, stood at the window, a whispering in her brain. (Mikhel.) Now was a good time for a cigarette. Bel and Jimi went to the courtyard, from where they could see Lore's room. Inhaling something other than oxygen eased their sense of strife.

"Oh God, Jimi. The doctors say it's frontal lobe damage — personality. She may never return to us from the pre-empathetic state of a child." Jimi had not yet learned: when you have nothing to say, touch. So she just stood there smoking, thinking, "— fuck."

“Of course she does all the rehabilitation exercises. Her acuity will cum back with time.” Beyond husky, every word struggled with Bel’s faltering larynx. “The antibiotics gave her the worse thrush I’d ever seen. Oh God, Jimi. It was down to her knees.”

Jimi blew a kiss as Lore walked into the courtyard, her two friends trailing. “Still smoking, I see.” she said as Bel turned, panicked by the unexpected visit.

“Want a puff?”

Lore sat down on one of the bench seats, energised by Jimi’s irreverence. The courtyard was an enclosed hexagon, a relic from the era of classic institutionalism: a closed, open space. Six wings radiated from the centre of the courtyard. Jimi looked at the sky, from what felt like a tunnel. Lore said, “You know I always liked you the best.”

“A curse,” said Jimi. “Been in my family for years — a long line of the androgyne. Some say we look like trees, some say witches. I shall never forget the unspeakable joy that radiated from my streptococcal glands when the baneful password *mother* was eradicated from my future. If I wasn’t queer, I certainly would’ve been a slut. Maybe I’m a queer slut, but who has use for that? I thought of the brutalised butches, Leslie Feinberg, living through rape after rape after rape after rape. Could it possibly be that I was one of those few

who were born to suffer the singular torture of Tribade? I read in a daze, like a lost-and-foundling — just a minute, Emily Brontë, this isn't your script. I often dreamt, while awake, of ropes, swinging ropes. I could describe their sailor hemp, their trafficking, but it was a story of the unseen. Who was the woman swinging the rope? A fool, I thought to die at my own hand would somehow punish my enemies. It was a wise old dream — about playgrounds and violence — that taught me to live just to spite them.

“Poor Tribade came to a sticky end riding a stampeding horse in Marcel Proust... her neck broken, I suppose. Thrown, from the force of the attack, into a ditch where her friends could not find her. Even the heroes were late, make no mistake. Then I knew, I didn't know the meaning of pain.”

Jimi paused, looking at Lore, throwing a derisory glance at her friends. Bel who stood next to Jimi had gone far away.

“You made me worry I was gay,” Lore said, “because,” her posture perfect, how could that be? “I liked you best, out of all the girls.”

“I wish I'd troubled you further,” Jimi spoke through a mouth full of smoke thinking, “— fuck. Do you want an apology?”

“So, tell me about this girl of your dreams.” Lore said without a flinch.

Jimi delayed answering. “She's a drummer.”

“I always wanted to play the drums,” said the second of Lore’s friends.

Jimi sized her up, shaking her head. “I’m afraid not. It isn’t easy to qualify. If you want to be a drummer, first, you must look like a drummer. There are no old drummers. A drummer should die young, her skin moist with sweat like molten gold, perspiring rivers of loyalty to treacherous guitarists. Her wrists and ankles are made of fine bone. She wears a stolen bomber jacket and button-fly jeans. Her shoes are a classic collection of surreptitious gender transgression, and the dog of misfortune follows her everywhere with the taste for sun-rotten meat.

“So you got the calling and the look. You go around school sussing out who plays; and you hear whispers of a girl with blonde hair to her waist who plays a bone-white Flying V. She was caught making-out with her friend under the stairs. You go to this friend and talk: ‘Look, I’m dead serious about making your band the best in the country. I’ll work for free, continually allow you to insult, not only my intelligence, but my groove. You won’t have to feed, or clothe me, and I’ll play for you as if my life depended on it. You won’t even have to talk to me.’

“After years you have perfected a road-worn thunder. The ability to make a room move. But the courage of a suffragette means noth-

ing, as the immorality of the dog on your heels has decreed that your career is over at nineteen. A worsening anxiety disorder, possible alcoholism, no money, and no hope, lead you to purgatory. Women and men used to gasp at your body when you went swimming because drumming had given you the physique of a G.I. Jane doll, part Joan Jett, part Demi Moore. So fit, so young, so gifted, so doomed... all is not lost, you can still get fat and play the irony blues. Find a dumb woman with the body of Artemis to love and abuse — to rage after. For nobody understood: you never played from anger, ever. They just didn't understand; you weren't a punk, but a street dancer.”

Jimi left HIU in the middle of a creeping dusk. A lick of wind on her skin, she paced high-tempo to the shop. She hadn't eaten all day. A few steps from the door, Jimi phoned Dahmer to ask if she needed anything. Mikhel answered, and Jimi said something asinine about Dahmer and if she needed anything.

“She's in bed.” Mikhel didn't understand why Jimi asked after Dahmer. Jimi didn't understand either; maybe something *was* wrong with her. Distracted by the noise of people drinking and talking in the background, excremental dialogues, Jimi didn't tell Mikhel that she loved her.

Back at Dahmer's, Jimi walked down the side of the building and around the back. Since Kniky, she didn't like using front doors. And besides, people were more likely to leave their back doors open. It wasn't a metaphor for sodomy but a character trait of place. And if the image disrupted symbolic tradition, then... there would be no then.

To access the kitchen where Mikhel and her friends were drinking, Jimi had to go through Dahmer's bedroom. A small amount of light came through the sliding doors and shot the scene in black and white reel. The terrain of form and weightless masses, for only the greatest can be weightless, planetary. The room felt like a ship, but not any kind of ship, a space ship, and not any kind of spaceship, an alien spaceship. Jimi couldn't tell where Dahmer began and ended, lumpen mess under the covers. She knew, though: Dahmer'd been in bed all day. Mourning, Jimi guessed.

Manic depression was antithetical to Jimi, her curse set on a plain, as empty space is the most intense place. Jimi opened the sliding door with care. "Dahmer, are you alright?" The nerve of Jimi outraged the depressive. To be fair it was the reason she liked Jimi, so what could she do? "Jim, have you seen Lucifer?"



“Not since this morning.” Jimi’s rash buzzed. All she could do? breathe, breathe. Obscene how much she loved her.

Opening the door, Jimi took a sharp left turn leading to the galley. It was different galaxy, people littered the space. Mikhel caught Jimi in her sights and without distraction watched her new girlfriend walk her way. Mikhel knew she’d be with Jimi, knew before they met. She wanted to touch Jimi, to make sure she existed.

Jimi felt warped as she handed the coke over; and under the din of a small room, crowded with empty bottles and bullshit talk, the pathetic dreams of drunk young people living in poverty, she mouthed, “I have to ring my mother.”

Quizzical, Michel watched Jimi leave. “What’s wrong with her?” she shrugged, mixing herself a drink: “She has a mother?”

Once out the front door, Jimi dialled Alice’s number and sat on the brown tiled outer hallway, her back against the rough brick wall. Unaccustomed to high-density living, she didn’t think anyone would cum by — nobody did.

Jimi took a seat on the roughened, synthetic sofa next to a cross-eyed blond. He wanted to talk to her, but as he spoke he appeared to look over Jimi’s right shoulder. The effect was of an uncanny ad-

dress. The blond was not a bad-looking boy. Kind of like a beat-up Jared Leto.

Jimi learnt early in life not to trust boys because their acculturation taught them to lie. It didn't mean there were no honest men, but that honest men were failures of socialisation. So Jimi didn't trust this guy, either way. Most boys were easy to baffle because they were taught to expect certain behaviour. War begins when certain expected behaviours aren't met. A dangerous practice to ostentate a general distrust.

Jimi followed the cross-eyed and looked over her right shoulder at what may have been a horror created just for her. She showed him the strength of her profile, that she wasn't afraid to look. She showed him that she wasn't listening anyway but looking for her friend — Lucifer.

Mikhel appeared with a rum and Jimi said, pointing to the potato chips on the table, "I had those for dinner too." Mikhel said that she liked chips better when they're slightly stale because it reminded her of a party, and disappeared. Jimi thought, "Where the fuck did she go?"

The broken-record act with the cross-eyed began again: *In media res*. Jimi couldn't help but think of Jared Leto. His stolen beauty disturbed her even though she knew it was fake. He reminded Jimi of

the good Christian boy who'd pretended to cum in front of her and another boy called Amos while masturbating with his parent's electric massager, offering them each a turn. Reminded Jimi, not because they looked alike, for the boy who'd pretended to cum was ugly, but because they shared the same Christian name. Their letters were similar. No, they were identical, same spelling and all. The kind of guy who thought any woman who looked at him wanted to fuck, Jared secretly visited gay beats and his sex was always violent. He'd wanted to see his friends cum. Amos took his turn, then Jimi. Jared asked a lot of questions.

The room would have lost appeal, if the world had something to lose. A bloated guy in a trench-coat sat sideways at the table. He was listening to someone faraway. Mikhel... nowhere to be seen.

Jimi stood up, feeling sick with 177 centimetres of love. Head spun on her feet, without dénouement she left the cross-eyed conversation. For Jimi knew: the impulse to not offend leads to one place only. A place where you're hanging by a hook with a killer about to mess with your genitals.

## Lovesick Rage

Jimi got out of Mikhel's bed to pick up a scrap of paper on the floor. The pen had run out of ink three-quarters through, so the inscription of the letters faded to a scratch before changing colour from red to black unwillingly.

Jimi moved the feint-ruled paper further away from her eyes to get a closer look. She couldn't decide. Was it a discourse on augury, malifice, napery, cozenage, fugitation, tormina, pedagogy, or joy? Mikhel's handwriting, fine and urgent, read

How are you?

Oh, okay. I've just cum back from the toilet where I discovered that my undies were inside-out.

Oh.

Yeah. Well, I've told myself that it doesn't matter. Although...

So you didn't mean to have them inside out?

God no! Who would do that?

I don't know. People.

I remember in primary school my undies being inside-out a couple of times. It would really spin me out for a bit, like I really thought I had put them on the right way before school. I thought,

“Yeah, magic!” Why not? People believe in Christ, I believe in magic.  
So I told my cousins my theory.

That magic was responsible for your undies in reverse?

Yeah... They thought I was crazy. Still do. I never see them.<sup>13</sup>

Jimi grinned, revealing the onset of dental neglect. With the posture of a brain that only thinks of its burdens, she curled. Women who cared for her, like that rare swimming teacher when she was five, tried to fix her, correct her tendencies toward negative thinking. None of that mattered because Mikhel was skipping Mutual Obligation. Lovesick, doctor. She'd deal with the high chance of an empty bank account and a welfare breach tomorrow. Today she wanted to tell Jimi her secrets.

“Ever had a gun pointed at you?” Jimi shook her head. “I have. It was the one time I was thankful for Grandma, just for being there.”

“What did you do?”

“When the gun was pointed at me?”

“Yeah.”

“I laughed.”

Jimi's brain buzzed, “Who pointed the gun at you?”

“My friend. He was acting strange when I got there. I was in grade five and we'd decided to meet in the shed on the land border-

ing the caravan park. My friend had another friend there I didn't know. They were acting weird. My friend told me I was really good-looking except when I smile. So I turned to leave and my friend points a gun at me and tells me to get on the bed. I looked from my friend's friend, back to my friend, and laughed. I said, 'I thought you wanted to play, but I can see you just want to be dickheads,' and walked backwards out the door, running clear all the way home."

Jimi was speechless. The nightmares took thirteen years to pass.

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*Writing ends like sex, Dad. Did I make enough sex with my body? Its raging erogenics? Its life? For I'm an old dog, Dad; and sex is dead. I've become unbecoming. Jack Dorian Gray: a bad-art painting hidden from view, a hardcopy poem on dirty fire. When I smile, it reads like a snarl. My words lie, but the shape of my mouth cannot. Since the day Jimi took me into her garden, I've repaid my debt with constant crosses. For what? Obsequiousness? That I may be accepted, a house queer, only hungry now and then? Jimi'd say don't bite the hand that feeds you; eat it!*

*You'll be pleased from ear to ear of your shit-eating grin to hear it's all ending in the other-earthly tears of a noir-neo-romanticist for our young buck Jimi. She lacks the status to hang a fraying rope! La post-*

*boheme, sans man's respect, an artful dodger, who only thinks on her death.*

*The o, so common answers of petty ambition and false bequest, the strains of a bloated self-proclaimed ethic can't gratify her. Anti-savvy. Anti-suave. Jimi's is a guileless hypothesis:*

*She, who is sure to die, must do as little as possible, as little as possible for evermore. For in the final count there is no score.*

*You'll be encouraged, Old Man, by the out-dated newsflash, old paper corrupted by the sun, that Jimi pays for this perverse philosophy — pays in dark and mean, bones-of-her-arse, trisyllabic poverty. I can feel your limp joy as I write that destitution has aged her well before her time. She is, nevertheless, rewarded with an un-commodified slow-motion time.*

*For years I have watched her live in pause-frame — waiting to be fed scraps, anything — as she rests in a garden of endless opium, in a garden of those natures denied. Wasties and loners and lovers and women.*

*Smacked! Punched! Stabbed with a fork over a rum-fuelled repast of North Indian Dahl! Touched without consent on the beach! Jimi knows what it is like to be asked if she is real. Handfuls of sand thrown in her face! Touched with by-design-ambiguity in front of*

*school authorities (the humble men who are nevertheless Geniuses)!  
Jimi has been man-handled all her life by women! She knows what it  
is like to be asked to leave in the middle of the night.*

*I've observed her queerness remove her from the usual powers.  
Present company excluded, Dad, the patriarchy don't concern them-  
selves with her. It's the mothers, the turncoats, the Jezebels, the lovely  
young whores with fuck dancing bruises on their thighs, the teachers  
their suspicious eyes...*

*Jimi'd been called a card, a rake, a cunt!*

*Before me, now, I see a creature who lingers in electric storms and  
finishes conversations two years too late. Need I conclude for you,  
Dad? Jimi doesn't seek closure. Her land taken from her, aimless,  
cursed to wander, she does not fear death. For life is jumping from the  
Kemp Beach cliffs. Some fall so long their teeth decay. What is a phi-  
losopher without dental pain? Some fly and hit cement young, past  
tomorrow we are all no one. It's a wonderful joke. So again, Jimi does  
not fear death.*

*We observe a dreamtime bush turkey scratch up the compost.  
Avocado skins and seeds, red papaya from the north of Cairns, brain-  
like litchis, their empty husks, and mango weeds flowering, flowering  
smoke like depressing blooms and their saturnine perfumes. We ob-*



*serve that every day he remembers he is going to die, for he does as little as possible.*

*In this you have no say, Dad.*

*This is my final submission,*

*Jack*

## Chapter Thirteen

“Perfect doom,” Jimi said, “begins in the viscera, moves through so-called genitalia breaking into two arcs fucking the temples across a high brow to eyelashes of sorrow, dry now all the crying is done. Doom is in the fingertips.”

“You have the best hands I’ve ever seen. I love your disfigurements.”

“I wish we were aristocrats.”

“We are ruined aristocrats.”

“Where do we live?”

“Nowhere. We move to avoid abuse. We are vagabonds.”

## Epilogue

She said all this was just the tears of a sadist.

And then she hit me with absent,

disfigured similes

and malapropistic, homonymic play.

Like, like,

*comme, comme.*

“Hey Jimi, like Jimi, c-c-c-cum in my car.”



# ADDENDA

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## Gothic Frame

A grey sun  
hanged himself from the sky, and the smell  
of the mangrove's deceased tongue and Old Empire pesticide  
set thick a cheap perfume 'cross the cemetery.  
From the swamp she sang, the mother Ms. Alice, steeling  
her nicotine voice as she walked back and forth  
before the cr—ash, her poison bottle swinging.  
Spare, unfortunate weeds grew round the graves,  
bindweed and grey mushrooms, colourless glory too,  
and there mosquitoes, unfolding their clear wings,  
cum for blood, the spread-legged leeches of the swamp,  
grey malingerers who make no living off the 'grove.  
And round the bank, noxious weed, breeding fast and young,  
empty, dissolute, sun-drunk in the mud.  
Nine pot-holes in a mess, lazy and obscure,  
sinking side by side, leaked extinction left and right.  
Headstones littered, scarred with violence,  
(blank) with scratch graffiti. Why, even a pirate, long dead,  
who landed on that place would gaze in wonder  
brain buzzing with pleasure. And I, Renée,  
the mighty waste of talent, stood there, transfixed...

## Learning to Read

Lee, what does this mean? Lee took the paper from Jimi's dirty hands. Jimi was always asking what this meant, what that meant. It means you got a rickety brain, said Lee. And she read the piece of newspaper Jimi had torn from its page.

The Save More Centre car park wasn't black. Under the sun tar faded, first to grey, then to white. Cracked like cattle country in the drought, it sank here and there into wet depressions.

On a busted concrete barrier, Lee and Jimi waited, six inches off the ground. Lee was pretty close to understanding why Jimi couldn't read. There was noise in Jimi's brain. In between the reading lesson and Jimi, a distorted guitar was buzzing, fuzzing out the words. Jimi looked liked she was listening, but she wasn't listening to the lesson, she was listening to that strange guitar. Thank heavens for mistakes, Alice would say. Thank heavens for Jimi. But Lee wasn't a mistake. Lee didn't even make mistakes. If Jimi only asked what the words said and not what they meant, she'd learn to read. Lee was pretty close to understanding words. They never meant anything, they never even said anything. Lee was pretty close to understanding everything. She was nine years old.

Purple nut grass, greedy for life, grew out of the broken ground. Poison could not kill it. I've taught you these letters before, Lee said. Jimi frowned. Earth to Jimi. Ground Control to Jimi. This word is baby; it means what you were eight years ago. This word is dead; it means what you almost were four years ago. You know when we had *the scare*. This word is mother; it means Alice. This word is questioned; it means all the stupid questions you ask, like — what does this mean, what does that mean. The police are stupid too, Jimi. Maybe you should be a cop. Then you could ask stupid questions all day, and get paid for being dumb. Dead Baby Mother Questioned. It means a mother killed her baby. It means Alice killed you, Lee laughed. And Jimi's brain buzzed.

Over the years, the car park spaces had been marked three times, each time in a different place. Council men were told to make a mess, just to get to Lee.

But Lee, I don't want to be a cop and get paid for being dumb. Lee hit Jimi in the face with her palm (it was a move so swift and sharp that to anyone who cared to look at the sisters sitting in the Save More Centre car park, it looked as if Jimi held her nose for no reason, as if Jimi was just a weirdo kid who liked holding her nose). Grazing her fingers on the rough pitch, Jimi picked up a piece of



smashed concrete and pegged it hard at a smelly Land Cruiser. The pink dogs woke up in their cage, smelling the air for rape and kill.

Hey Jimi, maybe Alice will find a baby in the bin while she's looking for her keys, Lee said. Why would there be a baby in the bin? Jimi said. Because that is what this story is about, said Lee, and she gave the scrap of paper back, wiping her hands clean on Jimi's terry towelling shorts. This story is about a mother throwing her baby in the bin. Jimi looked at the shape of the words, their blank mystery and said, I wish there was a picture. So do I, laughed Lee, a close up. The dogs barked, biting the air, trying to taste the smell of no accident road kill.

Lee, do you think it was breathing? No Jimi, it was dead. But was it dead before it was thrown in the bin, or did it die in the bin? Lee squinted, it's not right to call a baby it, Jimi. What should I call it? Not it, said Lee, it was a boy, or it was a girl.

Are we still a boy or a girl after we're dead? Jimi said. Are we still a boy or a girl if we're thrown in the bin? Yes Jimi, most kids are always a boy or a girl, even after they die. But Lee, I couldn't tell if the Yowie was a boy or a girl. No Jimi that's right, Yowies are its.

But Lee was wasted on Jimi, wasted on this town, wasted for now. One day she'd get away from Jimi always asking — what does

this mean, what does that mean. In five years she'd be fourteen.  
Easy. Easy to find a dumb boy with a shit car. Lee won't need him  
for long. Just long enough to get to Brisbane.