

‘Hidden’

and

‘Looking in a Broken Mirror:

Reflections on the Split Writer and the

Visual Artist Character’

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Abstract

'Hidden' is a novel exploring ideas of secrecy, self-presentation and what it means to be an artist. The two main characters are Jemima, an art student at university, and Clement. They meet at a party when Clement walks in on Jemima cutting herself. Something about Jemima reminds Clement of his sister, Hannah, who died as a result of her anorexia. Jemima is intrigued by Clement's reaction to her cutting and finds herself drawn to the only person who knows her secret. While she finds comfort in the fact he knows something she keeps hidden, and the space of intimacy this creates, she refuses to participate actively in that intimacy, keeping him, emotionally, at an arm's length.

Clement and Jemima travel separately to Barcelona. Clement visits before the start of the novel and returns early when Hannah is readmitted to hospital. Clement remembers Barcelona in a twist of pleasure and pain. It is where he found his artistic voice and where he felt free as an artist for the first time. At the same time, however, he feels that he deserted Hannah for art, represented by Barcelona. Since his sister's death, Clement has become 'anorexic' about art. In an attempt to control something in this uncontrollable world, he avoids seeing or creating art.

Jemima, perplexed by Clement's feelings about Barcelona and knowing nothing of Hannah, thinks that by going there she'll be able to connect with him, without the risk of real intimacy. At the same time, travelling alone to Barcelona appeals to Jemima as a way to escape their burgeoning relationship. In Barcelona she discovers that she will always be herself no matter where she goes. She also

finds her own way of thinking about art and what it means to be an artist – very different from Clement's.

'Looking in a Broken Mirror: Reflections on the Split Writer and the Visual Artist Character' is the exegesis for 'Hidden'. The exegesis explores the idea of split or doubled artists, looking specifically at the relationship between writer-artist and fictional character-artist. It is argued that writing about a fictional artist can be a way of exploring the creative process and the relationship between artist (writer) and artwork (novel). Margaret Atwood's novel *Cat's Eye* is discussed as exploring a possible relationship between the artist, her life and her art. Other novels about visual artists are also discussed in relation to 'Hidden'. The creative process and the experience of research for this project are examined, specifically in relation to the split or doubled relationship between life and art and the split between rational and creative thinking. Gaudí's architecture, in the city of Barcelona, is considered in these contexts as a significant influence in the development of the novel.

Declaration

This work contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma 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.

I give consent to this copy of my thesis, when deposited in the University Library, being made available in all forms of media, now and hereafter known.

Katherine Doube

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Om Shanti Shanti Shanti



I have used the original spelling and grammar in quotations even when it is not consistent with my own spelling and grammar.

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Part One

one

Clement feels like he has been trapped by the image in front of him. He can hear the party happening through the wall behind him but he stands in the corridor staring at this art work, unable to break his trance. It is a Picasso print; *Guernica*. He saw the real painting in Madrid when he visited from Barcelona. That feels like a long time ago now but through this shrunken copy he can still feel the force of the painting. The pain and suffering of war. An expression of the ineffable. What holds his eye is the woman screaming over the flopping corpse of her baby in her arms. Her pain is riveting, he feels it pulse through his blood with the beating of his own heart. He stares but he doesn't want this empathy, he doesn't want to look at it. He doesn't want to notice the skill in the balance of the epic scene. He doesn't want to remember back to that other time, when he spent hours standing, transfixed, in front of the canvas.

Someone stumbles past him, yelling into a mobile phone. Clement shakes his head, trying to rid himself of the taste of art, and ploughs up the corridor into a room full of people. He was dragged to the party by his housemate Ansell, who

disappeared as soon as they arrived. Now, he looks around for Ansell's blonde spiky head.

Already the party atmosphere is getting too heavy for him. He used to be able to do this. He used to be in the thick of it, bottle in hand, smoke billowing around his head. Ever since he stopped smoking dope he's found parties difficult. It's not that he feels out of place without an altered mind space, it's the opposite; how easily his mind slips. How hard it has become to grasp the thickness of the air, the shape of conversation. He goes through to the kitchen which is even more crowded than the rest of the house, out to the small backyard, and, seeing no one, turns to retrace his steps.

"Clement," he hears, and turns to see Anne, the newest of his housemates, squashed between the kitchen sink and the back of a man dressed in black. He walks over and she squeezes herself out to talk to him. "Ansell's here too," she tells him.

"I know. I came with him."

Anne bops her head to the music and looks around the room.

"Dodger's not here is he?" she asks suddenly.

Clement shakes his head. "He was still working when we left."

Anne lifts her drink in a wave to someone on the other side of the room.

"I'll be right back, alright?" she says, and weaves her way out of sight.

He knows she is not coming back and so pushes through the gelatinous air, breathing becoming more difficult the more he smells burning mull. Panic starts

to claw at his throat and he searches for an escape. Bursting through the nearest doorway, he breathes the smoke from his throat. It takes a moment to shake off the chaos of the party, to loosen himself from its shackles, but once its hold has released him he finds himself in a bathroom, in front of a tableau. He knows it is not a painting but wants to believe it is. A woman sits on the edge of a bathtub, her long reddish brown hair falling over her shoulder, like one of Degas' women bathing in the tub, but she is fully dressed. One foot gently rests against the tub and she is looking up, frozen in her action. Her skirt lifted, hitched up over her knees and in one hand, she holds a razor blade poised just above her thigh. He can see the small beads of blood beginning to ooze through the skin.

What an odd scene, he thinks, confused, and then the woman moves.

A sudden flick of her hands sends her skirt fluttering down over her knees and to her ankles, the blade hidden like a magician's trick in the palm of her hand, and although there is no doubt that he saw it, her purposeful raising of blood, a veil of secrecy falls from the ceiling and gathers like her skirt around their ankles.

Suddenly all he can feel is his bladder pressing against his skin.

"Don't mind me." He hears the words leave his mouth as he walks over to the toilet and lifts the lid. She slides along the bath ridge away from him and the toilet as his shoulders relax and his bladder empties.

She sits there, watching him, her brown eyes wide open. The porcelain bath tub cold in her grip. She feels as though time has stopped. The blood is fast in her veins. Her secret unburied, dirt and mud brushed away. He doesn't seem to care. She's always imagined reactions of shock or horror. She's wondered how

she would change in her friend's eyes – if rumours would spread, if they'd try to heal her, cloying, or run from her like some run from illness, from things that disturb the smooth surface of deathless life. She did not expect this: acceptance.

When he has finished, he lowers the lid and goes to the sink, conscious of her eyes on him. As he washes his hands, he glances up at the mirror. He can see her reflection as she slides back to her original position by the toilet and presses her hand onto her skirt where the material would be absorbing the beads of blood.

His eyes wander over the mirror and catch themselves, looking bloodshot and irritated by the smoke. His dark shoulder length hair falls greasily forward. He looks back at the smooth skin of the girl, at her soft face and reddened cheeks as she watches his back, assessing his height, his soft round shoulders, his stoop, his lack of hard strength.

He turns to face her. "I'm Clement," he says and waits.

"Hi. I'm Jemima." She can still feel her breath caught in her throat. The secret thrill of being discovered. Is it really possible that he is not disgusted by her?

He is surprised by the smile which seems real and warm. The air weighs heavily in the pause. Dust particles slow in its density.

"How do you know Tom?" With her words the air thins and breathing, again, becomes easier.

"Tom?" Oh, the house owner, the party thrower. "He's a friend of my housemates." Another pause, not as heavy as the last. "Ansell?" he asks, though he's not sure if he expects her to know him.

“Ansell...” she says, as though through tasting the name she’ll remember the person. “I think I’ve met him. Friend of Steve’s?”

“Yeah.”

“Yeah. I remember him. Tall. And thin.”

“That’s him.”

The noise of the party presses against the door but Clement feels safe, barricaded despite the fact there is no lock on the door. She still sits on the edge of the bath but she has straightened her legs and her hands are resting either side of her bottom.

“So you’re studying?” He leans back against the sink.

“Yeah. Art.” She looks down at her feet and straightens her elbows.

“Doing it or examining it?”

She laughs lightly. “Doing it.”

“What’s your major?”

She looks up at him suddenly, her soft hair flops against her cheeks. “Not sure yet,” she says and nods. “You?” she asks, too quickly, too nervously. “Are you an artist?”

His stomach twists and he quickly says, “No.” His voice sounds too hard. “No,” he says again, softer. “But I live with a couple.”

“Oh? How did that come about?”

“I’m friends with them. We’ve been friends for years.” Clement leans back against the sink. “It’s a nice enough place. What about you? Where do you live?”

“I still live with my folks.” She pulls a face and then changes her mind. “No, it’s not too bad. We get along fine.”

There is a bang at the door and they both jump. It opens and a girl in a short dress walks in.

“Oh, sorry,” she says.

Jemima stands. “No, it’s fine.” She pauses. “There’s no lock.

“Well,” she says, and he realises he is between her and the door. He stands and gestures for her to go first. “Oh.” She steps out in front of him. “Thanks.”

The other girl is impatient and closes the door behind her.

The party seems muted as they leave the bathroom, the colours less garish, the sounds muffled, people slowed to a frame a minute. He watches out for raised eyebrows and nudges, whispers of “What were they doing in there?” But nobody notices and he loses Jemima in the crowd. He feels disappointed, as though something that was meant to be exchanged wasn’t and he has missed his chance.

He does another round of the party, looking for Ansell or Jemima or Anne or anyone else he could talk to. The people he knows all seem too intoxicated or absorbed to interrupt and he finds himself spat out onto the pavement. The quiet is sharp after the muffled party noises. The night is still warm and the smell of roses

permeates the air. It was time for him to leave anyway. He didn't really want to stay any longer.

He decides to walk home. It'll take a while but he's not ready to sleep and he can't afford a taxi. Clement thrusts his hands deep into his pockets, despite the heat, and starts to stroll in the general direction of the house. Unsure of exactly where he is, he knows he'll get to a main street eventually and from there he can just follow the grid home.

The girl reminds him of his sister. Something in the wounded look in her eyes, both accusing and pleading, invaded and relieved. By the end it was like Hannah's eyes were the only part of her body that was still her, and now it is always her eyes that he thinks of first. In all his memories, not just the ones where her skin shrinks like cling wrap over her bones.

He feels nauseous as the image of Jemima's blood and the blade in her hand rises suddenly in his mind. He pushes his hands deeper into his pockets and picks up the pace, concentrating on the rough concrete rolling beneath him with each step. The jagged cracks that run higgledy from the edges, the grass that creeps and pushes between. The straight lines, pressed while the concrete was still wet, pass with the rhythm of his steps, the even light and shade from the street lights. He reaches a main street, which he recognises instantly. It's not as far as he thought.

As he walks towards the share house, he can see Dodger standing outside the front door.

Dodger nods to him and blows a thin stream of smoke from his nose. “It’s killing me, man,” he says when Clement is close enough to see his features in the dim light from the street.

“Huh?”

He holds his cigarette up in the air, the glowing tip making light trails behind it. “It’s killing me,” he repeats, a strange almost triumphant look on his face.

“That’s what cigarettes do,” Clement replies as he makes his quick escape inside. The lights are off but a glow tumbles down the stairs from the studio.

Lying awake in bed – a mattress on the floor – a short time later, Clement hears Dodger’s hacking cough accompany his footsteps stomping up to the studio. He stares up his ceiling: the underside of the stairs, stepping away from him as in an Escher print.

Jemima dreams there is a storm. The wind blows sheets of hard icy water and she pushes through the air, feeling the water lash against her skin like a cat o’ nine tails. It is night and the rain distorts the street’s lights, sharp daggers of light slicing through the empty street. The rain is so thick that she feels like she will drown when suddenly, there is a hand around her wrist and she is pulled, hard, through a doorway.

The room she is in is dark and empty of furniture and water runs down the walls. The air is dusty and, although she can't see them, she knows the corners are filled with spiders and their webs. Water runs down her face and her skin chills. Clement pulls her up the stairs which creak and threaten to crumble beneath her feet. Upstairs, it seems, they are closer to the storm than downstairs. The wind wrestles with the roof, the windows blow open and closed with loud banging. She pulls at her wrist, still in his hand, and yells to go back downstairs.

“It’s safer up here,” he says and, as though he controls it, the storm is quiet for those four words.

She sits on the edge of a simple wooden chair, her feet in water that rises to her ankles as the storm rages around her. A window breaks free and the storm enters the room like a snake, swirling around, lifting clothes, papers, even another chair from the floor. She tenses, about to run back downstairs but, from where he is calmly folding something on the opposite side of the room, Clement pins her with his eyes, and so she sits there, water creeping up her leg, chair flying about her head.

She wakes in her dark room, suddenly but calmly. She thinks she invented Clement, that he is a creation of her imagination. It is only when she feels the ache in her wrist where he pulled her from the street that she realises that he is real, and remembers meeting him in the bathroom at Tom’s party. Staring at the ceiling, she turns her wrist in the air above her and rubs the skin where it feels bruised. She is comforted by her certainty she will see him again, although she doesn’t know how or when.

She thinks about his reaction to the cuts on her thigh, the blade in her hand. It was almost as if he thought it wasn't an aberration, as though it was common place. Maybe he didn't see. It made her feel like a child, wondering how far she would have to go to shock him. How hard to hit the other kid in the sandpit to get a reaction from child or teacher, what rude words to say and how loudly before the adult lays down the boundary. Perhaps she is disappointed he wasn't shocked.

She expected him at least to try and stop her, ask why she does it, tell her to go and get some help. No one would understand. Maybe he hurts himself too. Maybe he knows that it can be harmless, despite the shocking colour of blood. Maybe he approves. Maybe he knows she deserves it.

Who is he? She pictures him as he was, leaning against the sink. Big and soft. Not exactly fat but not thin either. Not bulky but gelatinously rounded, jowly, filled with excess water. And tall. His shoulders rounding forward in a stoop. His hair unwashed, unbrushed, lank, falling forward over his face, and so close to black it would be camouflage at night. He moved softly, gently, as though unsure what his fists could do. As though he could cradle her, become a cave to hide in.

Jemima stretches under her sheet and closes her eyes. Her mind fills with possible futures with Clement. Public humiliation as he reveals her secret. A relationship turned bad: him relishing her pain, or hitting her himself. She delights in these images of her punishment. Falls asleep thinking of her pain.

two

Clement pulls on some trackies and blinks away the thoughts he woke up to: the girl, Jemima, her eyes, her hair. His head feels heavy despite not drinking last night. He can hear Ansell and Steve in the living room but as he opens the door he sees Steve at the front door on his way out.

“Bye,” Steve calls, blowing a kiss to both of them and closing the door behind him.

Ansell glares at Clement. “I know,” he says. “He’s bad for me. I’m an addict.” His voice has both pride and sarcasm in it.

Clement shrugs. “It’s none of my business.” Clement grabs some bread from the fridge and puts it in the toaster.

“I know but you give me these looks. So full of concern.” His voice is suddenly punctuated with vulnerability. “But I love him.”

Clement can’t help his concern showing now. “I know you do but he’s treated you so badly in the past.” Clement shrugs again.

“I’ve got it under control.”

Clement raises his eyebrows as he peers in the fridge.

“Anyway,” Ansell grabs the magazine sitting on the bench and walks towards his room. “I might like the pain.”

Clement sighs. Things get so complicated. The drama of on again off again relationships. Steve is one of those charismatic people and Clement can see why Ansell is in so deep. Clement himself met Steve the week Dodger told him they had a spare room. He was desperate to move out of home after getting back from Barcelona. His mum’s worry settling like dust on everything. His father acting like all he felt was the need to support his wife, like his daughter’s illness didn’t affect him at all.

Dodger, who he’d known from uni days, had called and asked him over to look at the room and meet the other housemates, Steve and the girl who had just moved to Melbourne. Steve offered him tea and straight away started telling him all about his new muse, about how much energy he now had for his and Dodger’s new project. He brought light into the house and during the conversation Clement almost forgot about Hannah. A few weeks later that muse had been forgotten and there was a new young thing fawning over Steve. It always seemed that way. He had a way of making you feel like you were the centre of his world. But you never were, and the pilot light of hope kept Ansell hooked.

Clement takes his toast up to the studio. It is covered in a fine white dust. Dodger has been sanding plaster again. He grabs the broom from behind the door. He knows he can be a doormat; he has looked in the mirror and seen footprints on

his face, but it is easier to sweep the floor than to talk to Dodger and hear about the next fantastic project he's working on, to hear why his art is so much more important than cleaning up after himself.

Once he has cleared a space for himself to work in, Clement sits with Van Gogh's sunflowers in front of him and, picking up a black texta, starts to divide it into colour segments. He didn't look for this work. When he could no longer create himself but his only skills were visual, he was told they wanted someone for a new paint-by-numbers series. He does it by hand and then scans it into the computer. He turns shading into solid blocks, reduces two colours to one, dulls the works. Azure and Kingfisher become B1. Carnelian and Crimson are R2. He can change his palette. So, for the *Sunflowers*, he'll have seven yellows and so long as he keeps under ten colours, he doesn't have to represent them all. He reduces genius to the mundane.

He likes this part of his job. The fact that thousands of these are produced. People all over paint simple but recognisable masterpieces. It proves they are worthless. They are nice, pretty, echoes of something else. The something else's meaning is spread so thin all over the world in reproductions it has no connection to itself any more. The reproductions are just copies of each other, clones in a world where the original has been lost among them. Not only can you buy this thing that was once special, but you can create it yourself; anyone can create it themselves. He likes that he is deleting meaning.

It is like his mother's tapestry of Monet's *Waterlilies*. His mother's face, sagging with the weight of life, comes to his mind. He wonders if his parents knew all the secrets he and Hannah tried to hide as teenagers, or if they didn't

know any, not even the things they didn't try to hide. He expects most of Hannah's secrets came out during the sessions, which he was forbidden from entering. Partly to his relief, but mainly he felt excluded and unloved. It was unjust. He was the only one she would talk to so why exclude him? Some of her secrets were intertwined with his but, not being present, he doesn't know what his parents know about him and what they don't.

In front of him the dull yellows of the sunflowers interrupt his thoughts. He draws a black line around a petal, marking it Y4 for yellow ochre and wonders whether he'd still think the painting ironic if he didn't know of Van Gogh's madness.

He finds that girl, Jemima, intriguing. He shudders every time he thinks of that blade, that blood. It comes to him as an image, the red blood against white skin, the blue skirt fluttering down to her ankles. He wonders why she did it, if it was a once off. He doesn't understand how she could do it. How she could ignore or bypass the pain response, the physical warning the body sends when something is wrong. How did her hand make that move, how could one part of her override the rest and make the cut?

He wants to go and look at some photos of Hannah, remind himself of her life. Almost like he is looking for clues about what went wrong. He wants to know Jemima, look for clues in her life too. The image of blood on her thigh surprises him when he remembers it; his brain has a way of slipping over it, showing him her soft smile in its place. He's been riding on a high but his certainty that they will meet again is already fading. Doubts are starting to creep into his mind like unblotted ink.

He taps his pen against his nose. He is not sure why this makes him nervous.

Jemima wakes and looks up at the ceiling. She can hear her dad mowing the lawn outside. The light is bright despite her drawn curtains and she rolls over to look at her bedside clock: 11.56. The day stretches out in front of her, hours waiting to be filled. Hours where the house is full and her parents can watch and disapprove of her laziness, her lack of social life. She rolls out of bed and pulls on some clothes.

In the kitchen she looks in the fridge and then the pantry and then stands over the sink looking into the back yard at her father. His shorts have a hole in the back and his socks are covered with cut grass. On his head he wears a floppy hat to protect his bald patch.

She fills a glass with water and sips it. Again she opens the fridge and bends over to peer in. It is full but she still finds nothing. Again she leans against the sink, watching the day outside.

She hears the front door open and soon after, her mother walks into the kitchen.

“Morning, dear.” She kisses Jemima on the cheek and puts a shopping bag full of clothes down on the floor. “Did you have fun last night?”

“Mmm-uh.” Jemima thinks about the party and moves so her mum can get to the sink to fill the kettle. The same as every other party. A night of feeling out

of place. Except for Clement, with whom she found a moment of real interaction.
Pity he's not good looking, she thinks and takes another sip of water.

“It’s hot out there.” Her mum pushes the button on the kettle.

“Yeah. Looks it.”

“We’re going out for dinner tonight. You’ll have to fix your own.”

“Okay.”

“There are a couple of those frozen curries in the freezer.”

Jemima wanders back to the fridge and opens the door.

“Oh,” her mother says, annoyed, looking out the window at her husband.

“I’ve already thrown those shorts out once.”

“Mmm.” Jemima closes the freezer and looks at the clock as her mother goes out the back door. Twelve thirty. She wanders back to her room and falls onto her bed. She should do some uni work. The visual diary. The reviews. Rolling over, she sighs and closes her eyes.

She continues to lie there, every moment telling herself to get up, minutes ticking away. The longer she lies there the less time she’ll have to do her assignments, her washing, her chores. She listens to her parents come in and out of the house. The ceiling is blank white, the globe decorated by an old light shade she got for Christmas once. Pink, frilly, girly. She doesn’t even like it anymore. Shadows move.

Her bladder starts to press. She gets up and goes to the loo. On the way back she picks up her uni art folder and plonks herself back on her bed and flicks through the sketches and assignments. Crap. Crap. Ultra crap.

The sketches are mainly from her life drawing class last week. It looks like the woman, but there's no feeling in it – it's just a drawing. She remembers peering at the easels around her. In Ben's sketch the woman reclined languidly, her body warm and comfortable. Tamsin had shaded hers with cross hatching, giving it a tense uncomfortable feel. Isabelle, with her long smooth legs and blonde hair, only used the bottom left corner of her page as if she was scared of taking up too much space, and had drawn a neat precise picture of the woman. Tamsin had winked at her when Bek, their tutor, had complimented Jemima's work. Like she needs the sympathy.

Jemima sighs and kicks the folder and sketches off the bed. Thinking of Clement, she lies back and stares again at the ceiling. *Worthless*, she thinks. *As if he'd be interested in me.*

three

Clement walks to his parents' house from the train stop. It's hot but there is a heaviness in the air, a dampness that weighs the sky down. He opens the side gate and walks down the concrete path. Perro hears him and comes barrelling around the corner, tail in a frenzy of movement and barks held in, escaping in excited whimpers.

“Hello boy.” Clement squats and scratches the big soft golden head. Perro jumps up onto Clement's knees and pushes him over backwards, trying to lick his face. They both know this behaviour is not allowed and they both know Clement won't tell him off.

Pushing Perro away with one hand and standing, Clement continues down the path alongside the house.

“Come on Perro, let's go say *G'day* to Mum.” He walks around onto the patio, ducking under the wisteria, and waves to his mum who is standing at the sink inside. She smiles and waves a sudsy hand in the air.

“Hello love.” She hugs him as he kisses her on the cheek.

“Hi Mum.”

“You’ll stay for dinner?”

“Yeah, thanks.”

“Your father’s in the lounge, you should go and say hello.”

Clement sits down at the dinner table.

“How are you going?” he asks.

“Oh, fine. Your father’s on call this week.”

He feels his shoulders pull forward. “I wanted to look at some of Hannah’s photos.” The air stiffens with the mention of her name.

His mum’s voice sounds controlled when she speaks. “Her album’s in her room, on the book shelf.” She dries her hands as though she’s planning to go and get it for him but Clement stops her.

“No, no. I’ll get it, but do you mind if I take it?”

“No. Of course not.” There’s a pause. “What do you want it for?”

“I just want to have a look.”

“Are you working on something?” Her voice lifts in hope.

“No.” Never.

She sighs. “You should, you know. You’ve got such talent,” she says with a mother’s confidence. “You could go back and finish your course.”

“Mum,” he says.

“I know, ‘stop nagging’. It’s just such a shame you quit.”

She thinks he just gave up but he can't explain to her why he can no longer paint. He hardly even knows himself. All he knows is that whenever he thinks about it his stomach twists and his hands start to sweat.

He stands to go to Hannah's room. "Thanks Mum," he says, squeezing her shoulder as he walks past.

He steps into Hannah's room and, still, it is like nothing has changed. Swimming medals lined up on the shelf, Nine Inch Nails poster on the wall. The shelves aren't even dusty and he imagines his mum coming into this room every week, vacuuming the floor, smoothing the unused bed clothes. His stomach twists and he grabs the album, closing the door quietly behind him.

"Clement?" his dad calls as he's walking back down the corridor.

Clement groans inwardly and goes into the lounge room.

"Hi Dad." He stands in the doorway.

"What's that?" His dad asks after a moment.

"Hannah's photo album."

His father looks back at the article he was reading. "There's still a teacher shortage."

Clement waits.

"You can't just bum around with your art your whole life."

"I'm not –" Clement stops.

"No, you quit." His father shakes his head. "You have to do something."

His eyes drift to the album Clement still holds in his hands.

“Dinner,” Clement’s mum calls from the kitchen and Clement breathes with relief.

When he gets home, he sits on the floor in the middle of his bedroom and looks through the photo album. It’s like peering on her life, sneaking glimpses through bushes and windows – from the cold dark night into the warm lit space of her world on the other side of the photo.

He flicks through pages of photos. Her best friend Eliza with chips stuck up her nose, them both kissing the cheeks of a laughing boy, at a party, at Eliza’s house, at the beach. Year eleven formal.

He stops abruptly at a photo of himself smiling next to a waterfall. Clement remembers that day. Bored, they drove out to Waterfall Gully, just the two of them, and scrambled off the path, following the water hole around and up to the bottom of the waterfall.

They sat on the rocks – the sun warm on their skin, sprayed with the fine mist of water – and shared a joint.

“Fuck it.” She had broken their contemplative mood. He had started laughing at the abruptness of the words clanging against the rocks, and never found out what *it* was.

Another photo, this one of her and Paddy. Clement had been stoked when his best friend and little sister had finally hooked up, they had been flirting for years. One of those perfect teenage couples, when everyone still believed love could last forever. He wishes it didn’t have to disintegrate, that they hadn’t broken each other’s hearts. In the end Hannah’s eating stuff was too much for Paddy.

While they were together it had turned from something that was unknown and hidden to something that couldn't be denied. And Paddy had been taking more and more drugs, becoming changeable and paranoid.

When Paddy had complained about how manipulative Hannah was being, it was easier for Clement, despite knowing it was true, to blame Paddy's erratic behaviour than to admit how strong a grip food had on his sister. He was angry and protective of her, looking for people to blame.

Clement remembers talking to Hannah later, after Paddy had given up drugs and moved to an Ashram in Melbourne. They had been having lunch and he'd watched as she scooped the cream off the top of her soup, putting it on the plate the bowl sat on. The napkin between the plate and bowl turning soggy, traces of orange pumpkin streaking the white. He kept thinking she must have been finished but she kept scooping, the puddle getting more and more orange.

She was still in love with Paddy, even though it was months since they'd broken up. When Clement had pointed out they could visit she had said that Paddy never wanted to see her again.

"He hates me."

"He hates your anorexia."

She had looked at him, eyes wide and wet. "I just can't do it, Clement," she had said in despair. "I don't want this anymore."

"Don't then."

She had looked away from him and he remembers feeling like he had somehow betrayed her. He knew it wasn't that simple but couldn't understand why not. It should have been that simple.

“You know Mum and Dad want me to go to this clinic,” she had said, not looking at him. He had nodded, desperately, believing it would solve it, heal her, take it all away. And it had, for a while. She was released from the clinic and was eating when he left for Barcelona.

He shakes his head and continues turning the pages of the album. The photos peter out, just the occasional one at events. Year twelve graduation. Paddy with his red hair fizzing wildly. Hannah and Paddy at the beach. Photos of her friends, Hannah absent, at parties. And one last photo placed loose like an after thought, not in a pocket even though the album is far from full. Hannah in hospital, drip in arm, black hollows under her eyes. She looks away from the camera, as though in a daze, as though not even aware of the camera and the person behind it.

This photo confuses Clement. Who took it? How did it get into her album? It is the last hospital, the one she never left. The olive green paint behind her reveals that secret. Who would take such a photo? He pulls it out from between the pages and slides it into the negatives pocket at the back of the album, where it can't be seen.

Bored, at home, research for an assignment on Pablo Picasso's blue period scattered over her room, Jemima idly wanders the internet. Maybe she should move to a different city as he did as a student, escape herself and her life. She wonders if Clement from the party has ever done anything as glamorous as study in Paris. She imagines him as her muse, supporting her artistic genius in Paris. Like she'll ever be any good. She's barely knows him and so can create him anyway she likes. Her stomach sinks. This means he could create her as something she could never live up to.

What do people think about self harm? She searches the net and finds a pro self harm website, sits back to read the conversations posted on the message board. These people are so much worse than her. She opens the topic "Who knows?" thinking again of Clement, the only person who knows about her.

– I think my mum knows. Says dyinginside. She asked about some blood she saw on my bath towel. I lied and said I have my period. I think she bought it but I'm not sure.

–My brother knows but he thinks I've stopped. You have to be super careful once someone knows. You always feel they are on the look out for marks on your skin. blackheart laments.

Jemima has always known other people cut themselves, burnt themselves, hurt themselves but these people are real. Specific individuals. A mixture of relief and identification runs through her veins. She also worries about people's eyes on her skin.

– My boyfriend wants me to stop but he just doesn't understand.

– *No one knows about me. I'm really careful. I don't do arms.*

Jemima flicks over to another topic.

blackheart, boasting, says, *I cut myself so deep last week I had to go to the hospital. 6 stiches.*

She feels a burst of competitiveness, a tinge of jealousy. She is not in the same league as blackheart. She's not sure if she feels better or worse about this. She feels both.

– *Where's your favourite place to cut?* Asks toomuchpain.

Arms is the overwhelming response.

– *Even though it is more risky,* says Dizzy.

– *I cut my breasts,* says dyinginside. *Maybe there's some symbolism there?*

– *You always wanted to be a boy?* jokes runningblood04

– *Maybe it's because of the abuse,* blackheart suggests, on a more serious note and Jemima wonders how much of each other's lives, back stories, worlds they know. She logs off quickly, chased by the feeling they can see out through the screen to the pathetic scratches on her legs and the 'well adjusted' upbringing of her middle class life. That they can see her and accuse her of being an impostor. *If I were somewhere else,* she thinks. *I could construct myself like a work of art. If I were somewhere else I could be a blank canvas.* The idea of being free of herself is like an unreachable goal.

She draws a Stanley blade across her upper thigh, waiting as the blood slowly seeps. *I'm not even worthy to do this*, she thinks.

four

Jemima's parents have already gone out. She is used to being home alone, having been allowed to stay home as soon as she was old enough to look after herself. She would watch late night movies that were too old for her and crawl into bed when her eyes drooped too much. It was better than falling asleep at one of her parents' friends' houses. She has always liked being alone.

Tonight, however, she is going to a party and smears foundation over her skin. She always finds it hard to get the right consistency so that it covers up but isn't thick like an extra skin. She thinks that's what foundation's supposed to be like but she finds it hard to keep abreast of what everything is supposed to be. Especially as often in the magazines the die-by rules are contradictory. Anne's housewarming tonight should be fun, she tells herself, not believing. There should be lots of people she knows there, as Anne and she are friends from high school and are doing the same course. She squeezes her eyes tightly, trying to contain the tears. They are her friends and she is shocked at her betrayal of them. She is supposed to trust them not to hate her. *How could they not hate her?* she thinks, knowing the question is irrational, but feeling that it's true.

She outlines her eyes with black, can't help an unevenness. Finally mascara and a light, almost not there lipstick. Looking back at herself in the mirror she breathes out, and out, and smiles. Bares her teeth. The blue of the shower curtain behind her makes her hair look darker, her eyes bluer, her cheeks redder. Colours side by side, each changing the other.

You can do this, she thinks, and ties the smile tighter to her lips.

Steve leans forward and rests a hand on Clement's forearm, whispering conspiratorially, "I bet Dodger's holed up in the studio, pretending he's so inspired he can't come down." He laughs meanly. "Like he's got talent or something."

Clement squirms uncomfortably, he doesn't like bitching about Dodger.

"You should talk to him," he tells Steve, as he does every time Dodger comes up.

"Not a chance." Steve pauses and watches a young surfer type weave his way through the crowd. "Who's that?" he asks.

"A friend of Anne's," says Clement, recognising him as one of her classmates.

"Do you think I can convert him?" He laughs and slaps Clement's arm. His eyes scan the crowd and pause.

Clement follows to see who he's looking at and Ansell waves, weaving through the crowd to come and talk to them.

"Excuse me, love." Steve stands and, holding a cigarette by way of an excuse, makes a quick escape out to the front yard, after the surfer.

Ansell arrives next to Clement and looks after Steve who is screeching out a laugh and closing the door behind him. "What were you two talking about?" he demands.

"Dodger."

"Dodger," he says dismissively, looking around the rest of the party before turning back suddenly, eyes wide. "Do you think there really is something between them?"

Clement laughs. "Come on, Ansell. You know Dodger's straight. Work-wise, however, they're meant for each other."

Ansell looks away again. "Even that's too much." He still surveys the room, looking crestfallen. "Why doesn't Steve want me? What's wrong with me?"

"Oh, Ansell." Clement rests a hand on Ansell's arm.

"You've got my dope?" he reminds Clement. "It's in my pencil case."

"Yeah, hang on, I'll go and get it." As he stands, Clement finds he has drunk more than he realised and the ground shifts beneath him. He borrowed Ansell's pens to fill in some dole forms and the pencil case is still in his room. Stumbling to his room, he opens the door and enters. It is quiet and he is surprised

at the contrast to the party. How loud it is out there. He stands still in the centre of his room, breathing space into his lungs, trying to remember what he came in there for. He suddenly feels removed from everything, as though there is mucous creating a barrier between him and the world. Like he is suddenly different from the person who was just out amongst people, friends, laughing and talking.

He hears the door open behind him and turns to see Jemima enter. He didn't even know she was at the party. She looks up as she closes the door and as their eyes meet they both start laughing at the mirrored situation. Clement feels it rising up inside him and bursting out of him like water from a broken pipe. He feels like he's a child again playing some hysterical game of nonsense with Hannah. He's gasping and the air is full of the waves of their laughter.

Jemima feels her bladder pressing against her pelvic floor, the laughter shaking her insides. "I thought this was the bathroom," she says.

"No, my room."

"You live here too?"

"Yes."

"Anne and I went to school together. She's looking forward to living here."

"Small world." Clement smiles, it means they will see more of each other.

God, I'm so boring! groans Jemima inwardly. "I am busting though. Where's the loo?"

"I'll show you."

Clement leads Jemima back out into the flow of the party and to the toilet, and she smiles at him, closing the door behind her. She sits on the loo, reading the poster ‘how to be an artist’ that is pinned on the back of the door, taking each reason as proof she is a sham. She sighs heavily – she’ll never be a proper artist.

Despite herself, she is relieved to see Clement is waiting for her when she opens the toilet door.

“The sink’s in there,” he switches on the light and leans against the doorway as she washes her hands. She can feel him watching her in the mirror and glances up, catching his reflected eyes. Something makes her think of Pierre Bonnard’s self portraits in the bathroom mirror. The way they seem so honest, yet they are still constructed. Clement looks so real, almost vulnerable in the way his eyes reach for hers. But he could be like her: the gulf between self and presented self as wide as the ocean. She turns off the tap and looks around for something to dry her hands on, resorting finally to her skirt.

“Do you have a drink?” Clement asks and she shakes her head, following him out into the open space of kitchen and living area.

“Beer?” he asks and when she nods grabs a couple from the fridge. It’s crowded and loud and a dance floor has opened out between the kitchen bench and the back of the couch. Jemima leans awkwardly against the sink, watching Anne wiggling her hips at Ben from life drawing class. Clement leans next to her, also watching the dance floor. If only Jemima could dance, then she could enchant Clement. If she were beautiful she wouldn’t mind people watching her as she hypnotised them from the dance floor. She smiles awkwardly at Clement.

He leans towards her ear and she feels the heat of his breath as he asks,
“Do you want to go outside?”

The cool night air is a relief and it is relatively quiet.

“Hey.” She sees the glowing end of a cigarette and a guy leaning against
the side of the house.

“Hey,” Clement nods at him. “Do you guys know each other? This is
Jemima. This is Dodger.”

“Hi,” Jemima stumbles. “Nice to meet you.” *So uncool.*

Dodger regards her from the safety of the dark. She almost squirms under
his gaze, so different to Clement’s eyes in the mirror.

“You a friend of Anne’s?” he asks.

“We went to high school together.” The words just hang in the air. Jemima
feels compelled to add more. “Doing the same course now.”

“Art school,” Dodger scoffs. “The Man trying to make us all the same.”

Jemima almost laughs but it occurs to her he might be serious so remains
silent. The bass from inside shakes the air around them.

“Are you an artist then?”

“I sculpt,” he says as if he owns the activity. I sculpt therefore I am. I am
therefore I sculpt. I sculpt therefore no one else sculpts.

“Did you see the clay piece by the door? That’s Dodger’s.”

A slim faceless figure reaching towards the empty air above it. She had noticed it the moment she arrived. The sad ambition as if it was only reaching through habit, as though there was nothing there to grasp or no chance of reaching it. Reaching out for the stars.

“That’s just a model,” says Dodger. “I want to make them slightly bigger, so the hand’s at the level of our mouths. About ten of them. Have people walking around and between them.”

The work shifts instantly in Jemima’s mind. A crowd of them. Their grasping not as sad, suddenly the possibility they might reach it. It becomes somehow accusing, no longer the single plaintive figure, but a menacing mob.

It’s probably not what he’s going for at all and she doesn’t want to sound stupid so asks instead, “Have you got a place to show it?”

Dodger glares at her and she realises what a stupid question it was. He stubs out his cigarette in the ashtray sitting on the window ledge.

“I’ll find somewhere,” he says, defensive. “I don’t think they’re ready for it yet.”

Jemima’s amazed at his certainty. It’s like he doesn’t doubt his worth, his work’s worth, his place in the world.

“I’m going to do some work,” Dodger says. “If I can concentrate with this noise.”

“See you,” says Jemima.

“Later.” Clement grips his shoulder as he passes.

They are washed briefly with noise and light as Dodger goes through the front door. Clement sits on the low brick wall and Jemima suddenly remembers the drink in her hand. She takes a sip and looks up at the stars. The sky is small behind the tree overhanging the garden.

“What subjects are you doing this semester?” Clement asks.

“Life drawing, theory and ceramics.” She sits next to him on the wall.

“Ceramics?” Clement almost says that he never did ceramics, but bites his tongue. “Do you like it?”

She shrugs. “I think I’m more into portraits and figures. Last year in pottery we made some human figures, I preferred that to this year. Making pots and cups and stuff. I mean, it’s not really art, is it?” Immediately she regrets saying that. She doesn’t even believe it, she had just heard Isabelle say it at the start of the term and she’d sounded so certain and sure of herself.

“Oh, I don’t know,” Clement counters, and Jemima feels even more miserable. “I think it’s art. Beautiful hand crafted objects. You can do heaps of different stuff in ceramics.”

She doesn’t know what to say. She’ll look even stupider if she turns around and agrees with him now.

“I mean, what is art anyway?” Clement kicks at rock near his foot.

Jemima hears a tinge of hate in his voice and cringes, feeling smaller and smaller.

“Oh, that old argument,” she laughs, wanting to change subjects. “I believe Duchamp, and I also believe in the naive stuff – Idols and American quilts or whatever.” She pauses. “I’m very gullible.” She laughs again, even though she feels like she is drowning.

“You know they’ve taken the word gullible out of the dictionary?”

She laughs and slaps his arm. “Now that *is* an old one.”

He shrugs, laughing. “Some people still believe it.”

She can smell the stale cigarette smoke in the cool air and takes another sip of her beer. His eyes are on her but she doesn’t look at him, resisting the moment of intimacy, fear rising in her chest.

His eyes pressing into her cheeks.

In a moment of panic, she stands. “Have you heard of Bas Jan Alder? He sent his friends a postcard with a photo of him crying on it and wrote on the back “I’m too sad to tell you.” Do you think that’s art? It’s so cruel to his friends. And what part of it is art? The postcards themselves? The act of sending it? The act of receiving and reading them?” She can still feel his eyes on her, and she steps on the gumnuts scattered over the ground, crushing them one by one under her big toe. “Is it art if only the artist and his friends know it exists? Or if no one ever sees it?”

Clement stands up and takes a step towards her, looking into her eyes. The stale smoke in her nostrils.

He is going to kiss me, she realises with surprise. And he does.

The stars shine through the city lights. Gumnuts crunch underfoot.

After a moment she becomes aware of her skin and starts to worry about her skill as a kisser and she is somehow both relieved and disappointed when it is over.

When they look into each other's eyes she feels a well of panic rising in her. Everything she ever does is wrong. How is she going to fuck up now? She glances away, catching sight of the ashtray.

"Stinks of smoke," she says, and they both laugh. His hand still rests on her hip and she feels herself relax.

She can't remember what they were talking about.

Noise spills out and they find themselves in a shaft of light as the front door opens.

"There you are." It's Ansell. "I've been looking for you. My dope?"

"Oh," says Clement. "I forgot. Sorry."

"This time I'll come with you."

Clement gestures for Jemima to go in first, his hand resting on the small of her back.

"Sorry to interrupt," Ansell's voice is teasing.

Anne appears as they walk into the living area. "I've been looking for you everywhere!" she says. "I pushed Ben!" Her voice an exaggerated whisper.

Jemima almost laughs. “But you like him, don’t you?” Clement has disappeared. The spreading warmth of his hand still on her back.

“Yeah, but...” Anne trails off, looking across the room. “Do you think I should sleep with him?” She laughs. “There he is!”

Anne nudges Jemima as Ben walks towards them.

“Hello ladies,” he says, and Jemima watches as Anne is melted by the warmth of his eyes.

Clement dreams of a tangling jungle. It’s impenetrable like the jungle in a Henri Rousseau painting. There are things going on that he can’t see, can only hear. He knows they are just animal noises, grunts, mating calls, fights over food, but he understands them for what they are: celebrations, party poppers, laughter, drunken slurs. Things are getting out of control. He knows everything is about to topple into chaos but he can’t see through the vines, he can’t prevent anything. The green is too thick, the darkness too dense between the trees. He can’t decipher the space between the leaves, the movement of the air. How can he make things safe again if he can’t see these building elements, if he can’t predict when it will implode.

Clement wakes with a throbbing head. This is why he doesn’t drink, he remembers. This and the blur of forgetfulness that smudges his night. He does remember last night, it’s just that the colours are too garish, or muted, and the sounds are loud and undistinguishable. Like the dream, like looking at the night

through a jungle. Jemima was there, this he feels under the surface of his skin. The lightness of her touch, the smell of her hair, this he remembers.

He rolls onto his back and stretches out, touching the wall with his fingertips and the stairs that climb up his ceiling with his toes. Laying his palms flat on the wall and pushing away. The house is quiet. No one is up yet. He rolls again and looks at the alarm clock on the other side of the room. Quarter to two. That means everyone is tired and hung over and the house is still a mess. It is like he can still see Jemima in front of him. Her smooth skin, the shadows on her cheeks.

He reaches out and opens a drawer in his desk, pulling out an old sketchbook from the very bottom. He is not ready to face the mess of last night's party – the empty bottles, the cigarette butts, the discovery of broken things. *How wild did it get? he wonders. Did people throw up, pass out, go home?* He opens the book. All the drawings have been torn out and he stares at the blank page in front of him. The textured white, waiting, suspended.

He turns the pages, white after white, until he hears the scraping of glass and someone swear in the living room on the other side of his door. He stops and listens.

“Who put all these fucking bottles outside my door?” He hears Anne's voice and the mumble of someone else, someone male.

He smiles. Good for her, he thinks, and flicks back through the blank pages, as if expecting them to have changed. He closes the book and puts it back in the drawer he got it from, under everything else.

five

“Hi Mum,” Clement kisses his mum as he comes in the back door. Perro leans against his legs and looks up with adoring eyes as Clement bends over to pat him.

“Where’s Dad?”

“In the lounge.”

“Clement?”

Clement hears his father’s voice call him.

“Hi Dad.”

“Go on,” his mum gives him a nudge. “Go in and speak to him.”

Clement rolls his shoulders forward comically, dragging his feet as he walks towards the lounge. His mum smiles and Perro flops down on the floor, his pats over.

“Hi,” Clement says again as he walks into the dimly lit lounge.

“Hi Clement.” Clement’s dad folds up his *Financial Review* as Clement enters, putting it on the coffee table in front of him and leaning back in his armchair. “How are things?”

“Good.” Clement sits down on the couch, twisting his arms in front of him. “Fine.”

“Just been reading the stock pages. Salamanca is up.” Clement can tell from his father’s expression that he owns some of these stock and he’s proud that they are doing well, that he’s making money. He feels like it is his doing. He must know Clement is not interested in these things, that he can’t absorb that sort of information. Clement is not like Hannah who brought home ribbons and medals, her swimming awards still gathering dust in her yet to be disassembled room. He wasn’t bright enough to even consider following in his father’s footsteps and studying medicine. His only skill was drawing, that useless hobby, a way to spend leisure hours, like his mother’s tapestries or bike riding.

“Good.” Clement nods, unsure of what else to say.

“Did you read that article I sent you?”

Clement remembers sighing as he saw his father’s handwriting, opening the envelope and leaving the article on the kitchen bench, unread, and soon to disappear. He did notice, however, that it was on the company he himself has shares in. His father bought them for him, trying to ignite some interest. It didn’t work.

“The one about Millitude?” he asks his dad.

“Yes. The effects of the second float on the existing shares.”

Clement nods in response, the non-committal way to stay in the conversation. His father returns his look sceptically, not believing but hoping he did read it.

“Dinner.” They hear his mum call from the kitchen, and Clement stands quickly, relieved. They walk silently into the kitchen and Clement pats Perro quickly before washing his hands at the kitchen sink and taking a seat.

“Smells great, Mum. Thanks.”

“It’s good to have you here, Love.” Clement’s mum squeezes his hand and they all pick up their forks and knives.

Jemima sits with her sketchbook on her bed, looking through photos to try and find one to use for this portrait assignment. She wants to draw her mum but can’t bring herself to ask her to sit for her. She could do a self portrait but she wants her art to be beautiful.

Again she wonders if she dreamt Clement. How could they not see each other for the rest of the party? He must have been avoiding her. The party wasn’t that big. The stupid annoying girl who cuts herself, who wouldn’t avoid that? He couldn’t have been a dream. His hand on the small of her back, guiding her to the bathroom, that was real. She can still feel its press on her skin.

Flicking through the photos, she sees herself smiling, beaming with friends. It all seems so false. She thinks of herself chatting and laughing with her

friends at the party. As always, she had listened to the sound as she laughed, careful not to snort. Scanned her sentences for incorrect sentiments, out of place words. Things that could be scorned, held against her. Anything that would show her up as the fake she is. There were times where she relaxed and was more natural. With Anne, when they were smoking out the front. With Clement, laughing. Was she more natural, or was she just good at fooling herself? That laughing fit, it was real, wasn't it? She wasn't pretending? It was really her? But she doesn't remember the feeling anymore. She is empty and doesn't know how the kiss could have happened.

Now she is starting to worry. What stupid crap did she say? And laughing in his bedroom, she must have made a fool of herself, losing control like that. What did Clement think of her now?

She draws her mind back to the portrait. It's broad – they can use any medium but Jemima knows she'll have to use a soft medium, pastels or watercolour. She's not very adventurous and hasn't had much experience with printing or oils – there's a whole world of media she's never had a chance to try. Art school is a kind of apprenticeship, she thinks, where they are given the opportunity to try things out, sample what they can until they find what works for them. The thought that she might not find anything is like lead in her stomach. She's probably just wasting everyone's time; she'll never be a good artist. After wasting these three years she'll just have to go and do some practical degree. She sighs. She'll never amount to anything.

She wanders into her parents' room to look at her favourite photo of her mum. It is from when her mother was about twenty. The colours of the photo have

dimmed over time giving it a sepia look, browned like faded linoleum. She is standing at the sink at Jemima's grandmother's place, her hands still in suds, looking up at the camera. She is not smiling but she looks happy, peaceful.

In the photo her skin looks impossibly soft like she was sculpted from talc and one breath will blow her away into the air, spread over distance and time. She has a red flower behind her ear, Jemima can't tell what type, and behind her glass doored cupboards are filled with neatly stacked mugs, bowls and plates.

About Jemima's age and full of promise. What dreams did she have then? Is she disappointed with how her life has turned out: a career interrupted by a dud of a daughter?

Who is this woman? Has she ever felt like Jemima does? What secrets are kept hidden in those smiling eyes?

Clement feels like his hands are sewn on to the wrong place. After dinner with his dad he always feels dislocated, like his body has morphed and doesn't quite fit anymore. So he walks. It is dark and he walks between the spaces of lights, the fuzzy circles on street corners, shadows still and undefined. He walks through the suburbs, avoiding main streets where the light is more consistent and passing cars more common.

He remembers one time Hannah came into his room and spat venomously, "I'm never going to be like Mum."

He had been surprised. “What’s wrong with Mum?”

“She’s so... pathetic. She’s got no life of her own, she doesn’t even want to *do* anything. She lets herself be controlled by Dad.”

“Well, I’m never going to be like him.”

“You’re nothing like Dad.” She had been dismissive, like she was the only one at risk of becoming their parents.

Clement will never be able to fill the shoes of the golden daughter.

He keeps walking past houses, dark and lit, hidden and exposed, under trees with rustling leaves, the pavement hard beneath his feet. He can feel the sticks and stones he steps on through the soles of his shoes. They are worn out, too thin, and his big toe breathes through a hole. They are not water proof but it is dry, summer, and he avoids the sprinklers on their after eight jaunts.

The air is still and he can feel eyes watching him. He looks around him and sees a cat sitting on a porch step at the end of a path leading to a front door. It is watching him as he passes, surveying, noticing. Still. Contained. Clement stops, returns the stare. The cat twitches its tail. Its eyes are green and still. It stares and stares. Clement feels like it is scrutinising him. He remembers a time Hannah had been studying for exams and he had sketched her, idly, as she leaned over her books. She had looked up suddenly, suspicious and demanded to know what he was doing. She had been furious when she saw the drawing, lunged for him, and ripped the page in half. Clement had jumped away, ran from the room, his sketch book crinkled by the force of her grab. He can still picture, clearly, the torn page left in his book; a bony shoulder in front of a plant, its leaves round and full.

The cat is so still Clement starts to wonder if it is a statue, or if time has stopped. He moves, to see if the world has changed its fabric, he starts to walk again to prove time still passes.

SIX

Clement dreams that he is wandering amongst thick columns, footsteps bouncing back at him from a white tiled ceiling. It is dim and he hears someone crying quietly. He is panicked. He knows it is coming from above and races up the stairs, ducking under the brightly coloured gargoyles, blinking as he comes out into the bright light.

He looks out over Barcelona, the mosaic bench snaking away from him, the cross standing high off one of the gatehouses sparkling in the sun. Park Güell isn't crowded; Clement has never seen it so empty. The jewellery sellers aren't even here, the flat sandy ground stretches across to the bench which curves all the way around to the other side. The sky is a dramatic blue.

He sees her sitting deep in one of the curves. Her red coat contrasting with the blue of the sky. Behind her he can see the *Temple Expiatori de la Sagrada Familia*, the cathedral in perpetual construction.

She is crying and he is paralysed. Here she is in the open, under the sun, the wind blowing tears from her face. It is Hannah, Jemima, no, it can't be. He

doesn't know who it is. She is familiar and a stranger at the same time. Aren't you supposed to keep your tears for the dark hidden spaces? Aren't you meant to secret them away into small boxes and hide them beneath your bed? You are not meant to use them to tile benches, you are not meant to display them, shining, against the sky.

Clement blinks the dream away. He knows it is day, he can hear housemates in the kitchen. Since living in this windowless room, he has developed ways other than light to distinguish day from night. Noises: from traffic outside to laughing in the kitchen and water running through the pipes. Smells: burnt toast or coffee. Body clock, which is about as reliable as a quantum atom, sometimes there, sometimes not. Still, there is some light, a sliver that creeps under the door reluctantly on dull days, with more confidence on bright days like today.

He pulls on a t-shirt and track pants and blinks as he opens the door into the living room. This space is the opposite to his small dark square room. He feels tucked away, placed neatly and efficiently under the stairs. The living room and kitchen are in a big open space. Big windows at the front of the house catch the bright sunshine outside and skylights throw the light – smack – onto the hard dusty concrete floor. The ceiling is high and the bench marks the line where the kitchen begins.

“Morning Clement,” croons Ansell, in a class room sing song voice.

“Hi,” says Anne.

“Morning,” smiles Clement.

“Sleep well?” Ansell asks. He and Anne are sitting on the swivel stools by the island bench in the kitchen. Clement yawns in response.

The bench was there when Clement arrived but he has heard the story about how Dodger and Steve found it outside a laboratory on hard rubbish day. The surface has acid burns and scrubbed out graffiti, some from its laboratory life and some from its house life. The legs are metal and have feet that screw in to adjust the height or correct a wobbling leg. Now, instead of test tubes and Bunsen burners, it’s scattered with dirty plates and mugs, envelopes of opened letters, junk mail, and a fruit bowl with two soggy apples and a lemon in it.

Clement fills the kettle with water from the tap and, after putting it on to boil, comes around to sit on the third stool, next to Anne.

Again Clement’s mind is filled with Jemima. He wants to ask Anne about her, how he can see her, what she does in her spare time. Instead he asks, “What are you guys up to today?”

“I’m going to that new exhibition this afternoon with a friend from uni,” Anne says and Clement knows the friend is Jemima.

“The still life one?” Ansell asks and Anne nods.

The kettle clicks and Clement stands.

“Why are you going to that?” Ansell asks. “Still life is so boring!”

Clement shakes the instant coffee jar towards them and they both nod.

“It’s not that bad.”

“It’s for old ladies.”

Anne laughs and Clement smiles, rinsing three mugs he has found by the sink. He's glad he doesn't have to go to wanky pointless exhibitions anymore.

“Actually they're making us go. Our tutor wants to talk about it but I think it's only because the exhibition is organised by one of her friends.”

Clement stirs the coffee into the water, watching the clear liquid discolour.

Ansell groans as he takes the mug Clement passes him. “Thanks.”

He passes Anne the skim milk from the fridge and peers onto the shelves, pulling out some pasta left over from last night.

“It's the only way they can get people there – nobody's into still life,” Ansell says.

“Everybody is,” corrects Clement. “Think of how much everyone loves all those Dutch masters.” Ansell shrugs. Clement can't believe he still remembers all this crap. He thinks of the still lives he saw in the National Museum of Catalanian Art in Barcelona. The rich sensuous colours. The Spanish take on still lives was no different. The fruit glistening ripely. The dark backgrounds pushing the food out towards the viewer. The minute detail of imperfection. It's all the same. Pointless pictures of opulent food. But why can he picture them so clearly? The dead fish, shining, flopping, slipping. The pheasants hanging loosely from their feet, lifeless despite the living glory of their feathers. The bread, dusty with flour. The silverware and the bending reflections. The ceramics, the tablecloths. The changes in texture, light. The intense study of surfaces. Why does he remember it all?

Later, in the studio, he pulls out his workbook and sees a piece of driftwood he found on the beach last year hidden away in one of his boxes of old stuff. He pulls it out of the box and turns it in his hands. The wood is lined with cracks and the bark has fallen off, or been washed off. It is smooth and light, bleached by sun and water so it almost looks black and white. Perfect for charcoal. He sees it in black and white, stark in its lack of life. It is only because of the talk of still lives this morning, that he can see it so clearly, and he tosses it in to the bin and thrusts the box further back onto the shelf. He hears footsteps coming up the stairs and although they don't sound like Dodger's he holds his breath, hoping he's right.

Anne appears at the door and he smiles. "Hi."

"You were scared I was Dodger, weren't you?" She smiles, having caught him out.

"A little," he admits. His reason is different to Anne's, who just doesn't like Dodger. He finds it hard to work when Dodger's also in the studio, the intensity of Dodger's ambition rasping against Clement's disdain for art. "Am I in your way?"

"No," Anne comes into the room and picks up an art folder from where it was leaning against the wall. "I'm fine here." She starts to look through the papers and Clement suddenly realises how quiet it is. Each paper shifting – each one of Anne's meticulous drawings – sounds loud and when he takes his work to the desk he can hear his pen smooth against the paper. He tries not to listen to the noises in the room, tries to concentrate on the paper in front of him. His stomach

rumbles. He looks over his shoulder to see if Anne noticed but she is intent sorting through her pictures.

“I’m having a picnic tomorrow,” Anne says, making him jump. She pins a piece of paper with a half drawn woman on it to his old easel. “Do you want to come?”

Jemima might be there, he thinks, and although he probably would have said yes anyway there is no chance he’d say no now.

“Yeah, that sounds nice. Where are you going?”

“The park down the road.”

“Cool.”

“We’re all going to dress up,” Anne continues. “Like pioneer days.” She laughs.

“Heidelberg School?”

“Exactly. On the train out of the city to the outback of a suburban park. We’ll be part of a famous movement yet,” laughs Anne.

Not me, thinks Clement. “The one that starts in the famous city of Adelaide.”

“That’s it. Equal to Paris and New York.” Anne continues sorting her pictures. “You don’t draw much anymore, do you?” she asks, suddenly.

“Never,” answers Clement. “Never did, really,” he lies.

“Oh.” Anne seems vaguely surprised. “I thought you did, before I moved in. I’ve seen some of your stuff.” She sounds confused. “It was really good.”

“Don’t reckon,” he says. “I just colour in other people’s drawings for them,” he laughs, “when they can’t make computers do it.”

Jemima knocks on the door and waits for Anne to answer it, wondering if Clement will be around. She doesn’t know why she gets nervous before seeing her friends but as she stands there and listens for noises coming from inside the house, she wipes her sweating palms on her jeans. As she starts to wonder if she knocked loudly enough, if she should knock again, Anne opens the door.

“Hi,” she smiles and moves aside to let Jemima in. “Come in, I’ll just grab my stuff and we can go.”

Jemima follows Anne into the large living area and there he is, sitting at the kitchen bench, his back facing her. She knows it is him because of the curve of his shoulders, the hang of his hair. Her breath catches in her throat.

“This is Clement, one of my housemates,” Anne says as Clement swivels on his seat and sees her. “This is Jemima, from uni.” Anne pauses.

Clement’s eyes are still and blue-grey and lock with Jemima’s.

“Oh, you’ve met before?”

Jemima feels like she has been loosened from the world and nods as Clement says, “Yes.”

They break their gaze and both turn to look at Anne in affirmation.

“Good,” she says, and then, “I’ll just grab my stuff, I’ll be two seconds.”

She follows the splashed red paint and footprints into her room and they are quiet for a few moments. Jemima can feel her heart beating and her palms are still sweaty. She leans on the bench and Clement smiles, placing his palms on top of the bench in front of him, thumbs underneath like clamps. They hear Anne say, “Where the fuck is it?” in her room. They both smile.

She wonders if this is the moment of truth: random pash or something different. She’s not sure if she cares either way.

“I looked for you,” he says, and relief washes through her. “You disappeared.”

She shrugs, smiling. “I don’t know where to.”

He reaches out and touches her arm, as though wondering if she is real. He just wanted to feel the warmth of her flesh.

“Are you going to Anne’s picnic?” Clement asks and Jemima nods. He can feel the warmth spread from her arm to his fingers. “Great.” He smiles. “I’ll see you there.”

“Okay,” she says.

Anne comes back into the room. “Oh, there it is!” She grabs her bag from the kitchen bench and rolls her eyes. “Let’s go?”

Jemima sees that Anne doesn’t notice the touch. “Yep.” Jemima smiles at Clement. “See you.” *Clement*, she thinks.

“Bye, Jemima,” he says and she feels how he says her name.

“See ya Clem,” Anne says and he waves with one hand as they walk out the door.

“He’s the nicest guy,” says Anne once they are outside.

“Mmm?” Jemima doesn’t want to seem too eager for information.

“The type of guy you can tell anything to. You know? Like he’ll really support you if you need it. I almost wish I had a crush on him,” Anne says as they climb into the car, “but I’m not attracted to him.” They are quiet as Jemima starts the car. “He’s just so *nice*.” Anne laughs. “How do you know him?”

“We’ve only met a couple of times. We met at Tom’s party.” She should probably tell Anne she and Clement kissed.

“Oh yeah.” Anne groans. “That was a bad night.”

Jemima is blank for a moment and then remembers that was the night Anne first saw her ex with his new girlfriend. Guilty that she had to sift her memory for something that’s so big in her friend’s mind.

“Yeah.”

“I can’t believe the bastard came to my housewarming too!”

He knows, Jemima remembers. *Clement knows*. She is surprised that it wasn’t all she could think about during their conversation.

“Oh, did I tell you?”

“Mmm?” She didn’t exactly not think about it, either.

“I slept with Ben the night of the housewarming. Ben from life drawing?”

“No!” Jemima smiles, pretending shock. “Oh my God! What happened?”

The fact Clement knows is woven into the fabric of their interactions, a different level of detail.

Anne squirms happily.

“Have you seen him since?” She feels flat after the conversation with Clement. They had nothing to say to each other.

“Not yet, but I spoke to him. It was cool.” Anne looks across at her. “Shit, I hope it won’t be awkward.”

“It won’t be,” Jemima reassures her. “Not if you’re not.” Outside of the strange altered world of spaces inside parties Jemima becomes ordinary again, herself, nothing to say, nothing to offer, nothing to keep someone interested.

“You’re right. I’ll just be normal around him.” Anne laughs. “I hope.”

seven

Jemima wakes early. She can hear her parents in the house but it sounds like they are on their way out. Short showers, quick breakfasts, without the usual lazy Sunday feel. Lying in bed, she waits until she hears the door close and the car drive away before sneaking out into the kitchen, breathing a sigh of relief that they are both gone. There is no reason to avoid them, she just doesn't feel like seeing them. She said she would bake something for Anne's picnic and now she is nervous, as she doesn't bake often and worries about it not turning out. She groans as she sees a note on the kitchen bench.

*Hi Love. Gone to the food and wine festival. No time for dishes, can you?
We'll be back late, sort your own dinner. Love, Mum.*

Jemima sighs. She'll do them after she's baked something. She pulls a recipe book from the shelf and starts to flick through. She is excited about today but she doesn't really know why. It is like the air is slightly charged and the excitement is not actually inside her, just buzzing on the surface of her skin.

She finds the lemon cake recipe and puts the recipe book down on the bench, going outside to pick some lemons. It is cool but it will be one of those days where it is warm in the sun even if the air is cold. She doesn't think it will rain and is glad for Anne.

Anne will never be impressed with this simple lemon cake, with all the fancy things she bakes herself, but it is all Jemima can make. She remembers Anne's family home. The noise, the busyness, the smells, the crowdedness. Anne's mother's kitchen was never quiet, Anne's two younger brothers, the twins, drawing with crayons at the big wooden kitchen table, her older sister grabbing an apple on the way though to netball practice, her grandma drying dishes by the sink. Things Jemima had never heard of filled bowls for snacking on, herbs she had never tasted hung from the ceiling.

The kitchen at Jemima's house is all clean surfaces and pristine sink, disinfectant and space.

Jemima remembers making cookies on the big wooden bench at Anne's, her mother's gentle instructions. Rolling dough, using cookie cutters, squeezing icing. She felt ashamed that she didn't know what it meant to cream the butter, something, it seemed, Anne had known since time began. The smell of baking cookies filling the warm kitchen, the sunlight landing on the floor.

Anne had been stirring and slicing, mixing and baking her whole life. It was a kitchen, a home Jemima delighted in, and felt intimidated by. These things of common knowledge – rocket, basting, saffron, simmer – were unknown to her. She was obviously lacking. She didn't know a colander from a zester and watched

in helpless awe as the whirlwind of Anne's family blew around her. It was fun and exciting and made her own empty house seem cold and dark.

Even though she always tried to extend her visits, even though she loved to be embraced by Anne's soft mother, she was always pleased to get home, pull the doona up to her chin, listen to the emptiness of the house. And even while she was there, amongst the boiling tomatoes, rising bread and baking chickens, she knew that she wasn't quite right, that she'd never be truly included. She'd never be one of them.

She sighs as she walks down to the lemon tree and reaches up to pick one. As she closes her hand around a lemon she feels the sting of a thorn prick, pulls back suddenly and stares at her thumb. She's always surprised how much lemon tree pricks ache. It is as though they are dipped in poison. The next lemon holds firm to the tree and she pulls harder; suddenly it gives and her arm scrapes against the branches. She looks at her arm and is disappointed that there is no blood, only raised red lines. Next time she will try to override that preservation instinct. She reaches out for the next lemon. It comes off easily and so she doesn't scratch herself again. Gathering the lemons from the grass, she heads inside, feeling the pain along her arm, concentrating on the sting in her thumb.

Clement and Ansell walk along the pavement towards the park. Anne left earlier with blankets and a picnic basket full of food, instructing them to bring along a couple of casks of wine and a box full of plastic glasses and plates.

Ansell chatting cheerfully. "It was like I was the only person in the whole world." The ongoing saga of Steve's waxing and waning affections.

The day has the feeling of a big event, even though it is just a picnic in a park. Clement feels a bit light headed and trips on a stick, nearly dropping the box he has wedged under his arm. He's nervous and excited about seeing Jemima.

"Right, love?" asks Ansell, as though he doesn't really care, and then continues with his story. "It was just him and me at his place. You've been there?" Clement nods, even though he is hardly concentrating, and shifts the cask to the hand holding the box. "We were watching *Dancing with the Stars* on telly, and he kind of snuggled up to me."

Clement tries to calm himself down. Great things never happen on days that tremble with anticipation.

"Then, later, he was resting his head in my lap, I think he wants to be a real couple!"

Through his tenuous connection with the conversation Clement feels his unease grow. He knows that neither Ansell nor Steve will change and doesn't want Ansell to get hurt again.

"Steve is like your addiction," he says, as they turn the corner and find themselves next to the park gate.

Ansell takes offence but Clement can't concentrate because the light has become pinpricks on his retina. He feels trapped in a pointillist painting. There is a girl with a parasol standing with her back to them, talking to Anne, who is setting up the picnic blanket next to the empty water channel that runs through the

park. It is like Georges Seurat's *A Sunday on La Grande Jatte*, and his skin prickles with the paint dots. The light is patchy through the poplars and eucalypts and he has to reach out and hold the gate post to steady himself. Ansell has gone off ahead and Clement has to concentrate on breathing. He grips the gate post and watches Ansell talking to Anne and the girl with the parasol and, as if in slow motion, they all turn to look at him. The girl is Jemima, and this seems somehow predictable. She smiles at him, her hair catching red in the sunlight, glowing, framed by the white of the parasol.

Sometimes memories are sudden and visceral, lodging themselves like rocks in clay in the centre of the body, heating his insides with their intensity.

Clement was in the stomach of La Sagrada when his whole body shuddered and he knew he had to go home. It wasn't just the food poisoning that made him sweat and shake in that forest of scaffolding. It wasn't just the way the building stretched away from him like some grotesque fleshy mouth that made him crave somewhere warm and simple. It was the bodily knowledge about Hannah. He knew in his centre, in the same place that his body was fighting the bad paella he had eaten. He knew her fight with food was coming to an end.

It was like pushing his way out of a maze, bumping against columns and bursting out into the bright sunshine, finding a phone and using the last of his Euros to call home, to find out cerebrally what his body already knew. The words on the other end of the line were blurred with exhaustion and worry. The money ran out and the line cut dead before the complete explanation.

He carried the answer with him, unable to think until he found a toilet and could let the shit burst from him. Relieved that it wasn't a death that sped over the

world and hit him in the stomach, just a collapse, a *turn for the worse*. She had been admitted into the hospital down the road, again. As the short conversation came back to him, clearer in his mind, his surroundings crystallised around him. The graffiti on the walls, the soggy toilet paper on the floor, the smell of his own shit mingling with other equally bad smells. His mother's gushed apologies for not letting him know: they'd only just got back from the hospital, they didn't have a number for him, they didn't want him to find out from an email, sitting alone in an internet café. Liquid shit splattered against the dirty porcelain and splashed in the water. He winced. It was not relief he felt, it was a strange mixed feeling where he had feared it was worse but it was still horrible, and he wished there was nothing there instead. He leant forward on the toilet, responding to a twist in his abdomen and trying to get away from the dirty walls. If only his body had not known, somehow she could have still been alright.

And now, again, his body is trying to tell him something. His stomach twists as he looks at Jemima dressed in white, parasol a glowing halo in the sun. He watches her like his sight is the chain to an anchor, link by link securing him to earth. He is starting to feel a bit better. The points are spreading and connecting, the world is smoothing out.

“What were you doing?” asks Anne as Clement walks towards them.

“Oh, you know Clement,” Ansell is obviously still annoyed. “Sometimes he thinks he's not one of us.”

Anne glares at Ansell and Clement glances at Jemima to see her reaction.

“I just worry about you, Ansell.” He says, avoiding the question. “I lived with Steve, I know what he’s like. There always used to be hundreds of boys hanging around. Steve has too many of Cupid’s arrows to shoot.”

“You don’t know what it’s like,” snaps Ansell. “This is different.” He turns on his heel and storms out of the park.

“Sorry, Anne.” Clement feels responsible for ruining the mood of Anne’s picnic before it has even started.

She shakes her head and explains to Jemima, “Clement reckons Steve is a bit of a player and Ansell refuses to believe it.”

“He’s a sucker for the pain?” Jemima asks, half joking.

Clement shrugs and Anne looks at her watch.

“They’re all late,” she says and screws up her nose. “I hope they are coming.”

A gentle breeze pulls at Jemima’s parasol as she sits on the edge of the picnic blanket. Clement was sent to get ice and Anne is busy helping someone with their foldout chair. Even though they are just metres away and she can hear every word they say Jemima feels very alone watching them laugh as they battle the chair. She is uncomfortable in her long white dress. It looked okay in the op shop and Anne raved about it, but sitting with her legs folded to her side, all she can think about is sitting in something or spilling something on it. She smiles and waves to

Tamsin who has just come through the gate pulling a granny cart behind her. Today, her spiky hair is pink and she wears a velvet green dress, obviously from another time. You can almost see it shedding dust in the bright clean air.

“Ciao, Bella,” she greets Jemima and kisses the air beside her cheek theatrically.

“Hi Tam,” Jemima responds and kneels up to help her unpack her trolley.

“I love your dress, Jem.”

“Oh,” Jemima looks down at it. “Thanks, it’s from the op shop in that little alley.”

“Oh, yeah. They have some cool stuff.”

Jemima glances up as Ben arrives with Isabelle, the beautiful, blonde, private school girl from their life drawing class. She had wondered why Anne had been so keen to throw a picnic. She had been pretending not to like Ben since their one night stand at the housewarming but staunchly hating Isabelle for no reason.

“Have you been to the one down at Glenelg?” Tamsin asks. “They’ve got some great stuff but it’s not at all organised so it takes a whole day to find anything.”

“No.” Jemima reaches out to take the plate of food Tamsin is passing her and sees on her forearm the scratches from the lemon tree. There was blood, after all, not much but enough to leave marks. She wonders if Tamsin sees them and if it would occur to her that she might have cut herself on purpose. If Clement were

to see them he would think she had. She wants him to know that these aren't intentional. But even if there was a way to tell him, he maybe wouldn't believe her. Next time she reaches for the plate with the other arm.

Ben and Isabelle come over and Ben lies back on the grass staring up at the sky through the gum leaves.

Isabelle sits primly on the edge of the blanket and Jemima watches her face as she watches Ben. For no reason Jemima feels annoyed with boys like Ben. Girls just like them, they don't have to put any effort in, things just happen for them. He stretches out, his foot nearly in a plate of food, as though he doesn't have to negotiate his surroundings, as though he belongs. Jemima shrinks into herself; in her mind she checks her body, making sure there are no errant body parts that could offend.

"Have a good weekend?" asks Tamsin.

"I'm buggered today," says Ben, eyes closed. "Big night last night and went for a surf this morning."

"Nice day for it," says Tamsin, only a smidgen of boredom in her voice.

"It was so nice down there," pipes up Isabelle, marking her territory.

"Chips for breakfast!" She laughs loudly at her risky behaviour.

Jemima sees in her mind's eye Isabelle sitting, bored, waiting on the bonnet of Ben's mate's panel van as they all surf. She imagines her, slightly icked by the damp sandy seats, the old saucy pie bags scattered on the floor. Forcing herself to eat hot fatty chips for breakfast because she wants to achieve that role of *girlfriend*. She feels sorry for Isabelle, being that good looking, that *perfect*, and

still trying so hard to please. She knows she does the same thing, tries too hard not to step on toes, but her desire is directionless, rudderless. She glances up and her heart jumps as she sees Clement, ice over shoulder, holding the gate open for Ansell.

“You came back!” Anne’s delighted voice floats over and Jemima watches her give Ansell a hug. The others all turn to look, even Ben who leans up on his elbow before lying back down with a grunt.

Jemima finds herself aware of Clement’s presence as he walks behind her, a kind of heat in her peripheral field. As she listens to Anne and Tamsin chatter she knows he is pouring the ice into the esky, spreading it with his hand, shaking his hand dry. He smiles at her and sits nearby, on the picnic blanket, picking up a dead brown leaf and twirling it in his long fingers.

The conversation continues around them and she rakes her mind for something to say, annoyed at herself for not finding conversation easy like everyone else.

Clement is only half paying attention to Anne talking about childhood images in art. Most of his mind is on Jemima, the air between them, her hands breaking pieces of muffin and lifting them to her mouth. Her lips, her tongue, eating.

“Because my childhood was normal, I can’t use it as inspiration,” Anne complains.

“But Miró’s childhood was normal for him,” Jemima says. “Growing up on a farm, what could be more normal than that?”

Everyone pauses to listen to what she says and Clement notices that she reddens slightly. He wonders what her normal is, and sees a picture of a little girl in a white dress, with a white parasol, a shrunken version of the girl next to him, as though she's been eating the elixir of youth. It is so sudden and clear it feels like it has come from somewhere else, like it's something he has seen somewhere.

She looks relieved when Ben says, "And even if you had an unusual childhood like growing up in a lighthouse or something, it doesn't mean you'd have all this inspiration. You might still just draw shells and glue sand to bits of paper."

"What about you?" Clement asks Jemima quietly. "Do you have any dominating symbols from childhood?"

"Don't they only become symbols when someone else decides they are? Like *The Farm*. Miró painted half of that in Spain and half in Paris, so for him it could have just been about reminding himself of home. But to everyone else each detail becomes a symbol of Spain, of Miró's childhood."

He is aware of her mouth as she is talking. She still picks at the muffin, and he has to stop himself from looking at her too closely. She laughs lightly, as though dismissing what she says. He wants to give her something to make her believe in what she says, something to buoy her up.

"What about you? I know you don't draw but if you did, any dominating symbols?"

He likes the sound of that. *I don't draw*. He pauses to think of his own childhood: the house where his parents still live, playing with toy cars and trucks under the bushes to the side, flying kites with Hannah, pulling arms off her dolls.

“We lived halfway up a hill,” he tells her, “and I loved things with wheels. My neighbour had a go kart.”

The day they borrowed it from him it was hot and dry and the road was covered with dry eucalypt leaves and little fallen gumnuts. The front wheels had a wooden plank for an axle and the rope to steer with was tied through little holes drilled next to each wheel. They were young, maybe twelve and ten, and Hannah was only just getting brave enough for speed. She watched him whoosh past twice before demanding her turn but was too scared to do it alone. He sat her between his legs and she gripped onto his knees as they rocked over the slow curve at the top of the hill. Her hair flapped in his eyes and she called, “Faster, faster!” as their house passed by them. There was only the one speed anyway, but with the weight of the two of them they were going faster than he had been before and when he pulled on the rope to turn the corner it snapped and they hit the curb. They were both off and on the cement, twin bloody knees.

“I came off on the first day I used it,” he tells Jemima.

Hannah was crying as she leant on him and they limped back up the hill, leaving the go kart in a pile against the curb, and he waited patiently for his turn while their mum patched her up and kissed her better.

When he went back to the curb later the same afternoon, he found one of the wheels had broken off and had got itself stuck in the drain, wedged by its

velocity. If it had been going any slower it would have toppled and fallen. He could see where the rope had been fraying and thought he should have checked before they used it, should have made sure it was safe.

The next summer, when their scars had healed, they went on a road trip and they squashed their scars to look like mouths and had conversations, pretended to feed their knees with pieces of paper. Twin scars.

He pulls up his shorts. "I've still got the scar," he says to Jemima.

"Oh, yeah," she leans over his knee. "I can just see it."

And it is only then that he realises how much the scar has faded. He pushes his shorts down again, in his mind it is still smooth and white, marked different from surrounding skin.

"But I don't think a go kart is a dominating symbol," Clement continues. "What would it mean? Speed. Only travelling down hill?"

Jemima laughs. "They'd come up with something it could represent. It has to be abstract, like love or fear. Go karts represent sadness, for sure."

Clement laughs. "Sadness." He picks up his cup of wine and stretches out his legs.

Plates and bottles empty and slowly people start to leave. Clouds have come over and wind rustles the leaves of the poplars, still reminding Clement of the Impressionists – twists of light on the leaves, the movement of colour over the canvases of Monet's poplars. He consciously shifts his attention to Jemima as she calls goodbye to Tamsin who's just walking through the gate.

Anne sighs. “So, everyone’s gone,” she says. “Will you guys help me pack up.”

“Nope, no chance,” jokes Jemima, pretending to walk away.

Ansell is still sitting on the blanket with half a cup of wine in his hand. Anne kneels down and starts putting empty containers into her basket. Jemima starts gathering empty cups and Clement folds up one of the blankets. The breeze picks up and a paper plate blows up and flattens itself against Ansell’s leg. He grabs it and passes it to Anne.

“Thanks for your help,” she says, and he raises his glass to her.

“You’re very welcome.” He smiles.

A flock of leaves accosts them and Clement looks up at the sky. “It’s going to rain,” he says and starts moving quicker. He pulls at the corner of the blanket Ansell is lying on and Ansell groans and stands up.

Jemima grabs the other side of the blanket and they fold it together, their fingers brushing lightly as they pass corners. Jemima feels hyper aware of this simple accidental moment and wonders if he even notices. They pick everything up, laden with blankets and baskets and bags of rubbish, and walk down the road towards the house.

The rain starts to fall and they all make the last dash up the driveway, picnic baskets clanking, blankets trailing. The drops are heavy but spacious and the sudden burst of running, the feeling of being caught out in the wet, gives rise

to giggles and laughter. Jemima can feel the heat in her cheeks and knows her laughter is slightly tipsy. Clement's hand rests on her upper arm and guides her forward into the lounge.

"I'm sopping!" screeches Ansell, brushing his damp jumper and shaking his head like a duck resurfacing from under water.

"Ha!" Anne laughs a single sound and everyone collapses into laughter. They all dump their loads on the floor of the lounge.

Jemima walks to the window where Anne's cat Billy is looking out at the rain. "It's really coming down out there," she comments and Clement, arriving next to her, leans on the window sill and peers into the dim light.

"I'm getting out of these clothes," says Ansell and disappears into his room.

Anne follows the red footprints into her room and calls out to Jemima "Do you want to borrow a jumper?"

Despite the rain Jemima doesn't feel cold and the droplets on her skin feel fresh. "No, it's cool," she calls back.

The space between her and Clement shrinks as they look out into the rain steaming up from the footpath, cooling the surface of the world. Their arms brush, so lightly that it could just be the hairs that make contact. Blue electricity, static hair. And then eye contact.

His eyes are so blue.

Something passes between them but she doesn't know what it means. They hear Anne come back out of her room and turn away from each other, back to the window. The rain has stopped and the air is moist with steam, the sunlight sharp and narrow.

"I got you one anyway," says Anne, handing Jemima a black cardigan.

The rain on her skin is less precise now and under each hair is a bump: goose pimples. She pulls the cardi on over her dress and runs a hand through her hair, getting tangled between the wet and the dry. Panic edges her heart. She is scared of any closeness those blue eyes might bring.

As Anne hangs the damp blankets over the stools Jemima turns to help her unpack the things from the picnic. She puts a half full goon bag on the bench and pulls out her cake from the basket.

"Thanks for your help, Ansell," Anne calls out sarcastically. They hear a muffled response from his room but he doesn't come out to help pack up.

"You can have my lemon cake, Anne," Jemima says, moving the last two slices from her plate to one of theirs. "I won't eat it." She needs to escape.

"Yum! Are you sure?"

Jemima nods, passing the plate to Anne. She feels as though she has been stripped of understanding. Signals are flying through the air between her and Clement: meaning in glances and gestures, significance in breath.

"Thanks!" Anne covers it with gladwrap and puts it in the fridge, singing, "Lemon cake for us! Lemon cake for us!" and poking Clement in the ribs.

He laughs and pushes her away, turning back to the sink where he is washing the cups he got from one of the baskets.

“Well, I should go,” says Jemima, realising she can run. She can escape this feeling of confusion. She can just leave.

“Oh, alright,” says Anne, sounding surprised. “Thanks for your help.”

“No problem,” she says, giving Anne a hug goodbye.

Clement has turned away from the sink towards her, hands still holding soapy mugs. “See you, Jemima,” he says and smiles. Jemima wants more from that look; she wants to understand.

“Bye, Clement.” She wonders if she should stay but can’t go back on herself now. She shouldn’t be running but the decision has been made and she is already on her way. She walks outside into the sunshine which seems all the brighter because it reflects off the wet ground sharply. If she had stayed she might have understood the look.

When she gets home, Jemima unpeels herself from her white dress and climbs into trackies and a jumper. She is not cold but feels like being covered, snug. Her heart beats too fast and when she thinks about the picnic, about Clement, about this afternoon, there is a crunching ache in her stomach.

Her parents are still out and there is too much time between now and when she will go to sleep, too many hours and no way to fill them. She turns on the telly and falls back onto the couch. Golf, cricket, fishing, and the end of some American kids’ movie. She chooses the movie and lies back, looking up at the ceiling, running through the day in her mind. She scratches her leg and then pulls

up her trackies to look at the cuts on her thigh. They are a few days old now and she lies back, idly running her fingernail down the scratches.

She smiles as she thinks of Clement. She had fun today. She thinks about their conversation. It was not so difficult. She should have stayed. She is stupid, taking the easy option, avoiding life because of fear.

She scratches harder, pulling the scabs off in flakes. They have healed enough, and were never really deep enough for real blood and now as she peers at her leg, she sees there are only little white lines left on her skin. There won't be scars. In years time there'll be no evidence.

Her stomach shifts as she thinks about the moment. His eyes holding hers, a message transmitted but not received. It is uncomfortable to think about.

She must have misread it. Of course there was no moment. Why would he have a moment with her? Just because he pashed her once when he was drunk? It was just her being stupid. She is too ordinary to be of interest to him. Their first meeting flashes into her mind. *He knows*. Maybe she is not so ordinary. But, of course he doesn't care. She is ordinary and boring and there is no way he would ever care or even think twice about her. She digs her nails into her skin; little half moons of hate.

She jolts as the television starts yelling at her to save money on things she doesn't want or need. Rolling over she watches the flashing screen displaying bargain basement prices. She winces as the ad reaches its painful crescendo and then turns the tv off with the remote, tossing it away from her onto the coffee table.

Her Picasso project looms in her mind and she rolls off the couch onto her hands and knees, groaning as she crawls, for the sake of melodrama, to her room. She climbs up onto her bed and stares at the pile of books on her desk, chin on bedspread, like a dog. She groans again, and wonders what Anne and Clement are doing now. If they are still drinking and laughing or if they too have separated and are now alone. She closes her eyes.

Later, she hears the front door open and her parents arriving home. It is dark now, outside. She shuffles under her covers. It must be late for her parents to be home.

She hears her door open.

“Honey?” her mother whispers and Jemima mumbles a response, turning over as she does, pretending to be more asleep than she is. As her mother opens the door and comes in a slab of light from the hallway falls across the carpet and her shadow moves, large and ill-defined, across the room.

She brushes Jemima’s hair from her forehead and kisses her. “Night,” she says, and as she leaves Jemima watches the square edges of light creep closer and closer, dissolving into darkness as her mother closes the door so softly it is like she’s scared of disturbing the dust.

“Mum,” Jemima says, but it is too late, she’s gone, and in the dark room a heaviness settles onto her bed. Her eyes well up.

The weight of this love is not something she can live up to. She wants desperately to be someone else, to be able to kiss her mum back. She wants desperately to be held, tightly in the heart of her mother’s chest. She wants to be a

child again, when the world was safe and there were no expectations of her, when she didn't have to live up to their idea of who she is. She wants to dissolve into nothingness. She wants to escape this world and herself.

She has no excuse to be this miserable. She reaches over to her bedside cabinet and pulls out her razor. She'll give herself an excuse.

She thinks of the people on the message board on that website. They weren't just being self indulgent when they did this. She pulls the blades lightly across her thigh, a line parallel to the scratch. They had real problems to deal with. One of them talked about being abused as a child but no one has ever touched Jemima inappropriately.

She remembers her first boyfriend, Joshua. She had been fifteen. They didn't go all the way, she saved that special occasion for a one night stand she never saw again, but he was always kissing harder than she liked, sloppily, and putting his hands on her body. It was supposed to be what she wanted.

Her best friend at the time, Melissa, thought he was *so hot* and told her too many details of her own exploits with Joshua's best friend. Jemima liked Joshua. He had big strong hands and messy dirty black hair. He made her laugh in maths class and smoked dope at lunchtime. He was *cool*.

She remembers sitting with them all at lunchtimes while the pipe was being passed around the circle, and making excuses or pretending to suck the smoke into her lungs. She would cross her arms and wrap her fingers around her triceps, squeeze until she could feel little fingerprint bruises colour her skin. It

made her feel stronger, the pain in her arms. She had at least some control over the situation. This was before she discovered the power of blood.

Jemima could smell sex on the horizon. Hands were wandering further and more insistently. She knew it was supposed to be what she wanted. Despite Melissa's objections and even though she liked him, she broke up with Joshua before sex became a real possibility. She knew that if he asked, she couldn't say no; those were just the rules.

He quickly hooked up with the captain of the netball team. Melissa was furious that she had to hang out with the bitch, but soon decided it was Jemima who was the bitch and the netballer gathered the reputation of being a slut. Jemima always felt sorry for her after that, though she was not quite sure why. Damned if you have sex and damned if you don't. Cold whispers of *frigid* or vicious snarls of *slut*. If Jemima had taken the fall for her it wouldn't have made any difference. There would have been two sluts. If she had said "no" he would have broken up with her and moved onto the netballer anyway. There would have been a prick tease and a slut. As it was Jemima only managed to save herself. Maybe that was why she felt guilty, because her reputation had slipped past unscathed and it was only because of fear. That was when she and Anne became friends. It was as if Anne rescued Jemima from an adolescence of isolation, like Jemima owes Anne something unknown for letting Jemima join her group.

She smears the blood on her leg across her skin and cuts again, lightly. Maybe she should have slept with him. It's not like that guy from the club was all that special. The heavy hands, the smell of beer, the underwear on the floor. In a way she didn't have a choice then either. She was drunk and did as she was told.

A good girl. It was she who had left, once it was over. He hadn't asked her to go. She had lain awake, suddenly aware enough to notice the cracks on the ceiling, and waited as he fell asleep, arm heavy on her chest. She had slipped out from under him and gathered her things, double checking to make sure she hadn't left anything behind, pulling strands of her hair from the pillow and carrying them with her, outside, letting them blow away in the breeze.

And then last year there had been Eric. Again, somehow, it wasn't something she chose. It was something that happened to her, like tripping over a stick or getting hit by a car. Being fumbled over for a month before she realised she didn't even remember what he was studying. That was how little she cared.

The blood is bright and glistens in beads on the surface of the cuts. She should have cared. She must be an unfeeling nasty bitch. Not that he cared. She licks her finger and cleans where she has smeared the blood, gets a tissue and absorbs what is still wet. None of those guys saw anything worthy in her, why would Clement? She shouldn't be so stupid as to believe there was a moment.

eight

Jemima walks to uni from the bus stop, passing a man wearing a highlighter yellow vest selling the *Big Issue*. Although she would usually stop today she keeps walking. *Stupid horrible evil bitch*, she thinks as she passes. *It's not like you can't afford that four dollars*. But she keeps walking, shoulder bag held close to her thigh. She hears someone call her name and turns to see Isabelle hurrying to catch up. Her step is light and her blonde hair looks golden in the sun. Jemima wonders why Isabelle is talking to her.

“Did you bring your assignment? Let's see.”

Jemima swings her book open to show Isabelle the pastel portrait of her mum. Isabelle stops walking. Jemima's mother floats on the page – Jemima left the sink and cupboard background out of the picture. The red flower behind her ear is faded but the eyes are bright and inaccessible.

“Wow,” Isabelle says. “That's so beautiful. I can't show you mine now,” she laughs. “Who is it? It looks kind of like you.”

Jemima feels like she's been winded. "It's my mum." It wasn't meant to be like her.

"Let's see yours."

She looks at Isabelle's watercolour of a young girl.

"My sister," she says. "Do you like it?"

"It's lovely." She smiles, even though the picture looks like a high school cliché.

"Do you believe what Bek said about seeing the soul of the artist in a good work?" asks Isabelle, looking at her painting.

Jemima shrugs. The idea scares her. The possibility of being like her mum, of being as spectacular as her. "I guess there is that extra indefinable quality to a good work, but is it the artist's soul? Is it just something that reaches you, that you identify with?" She shrugs again.

"My sister and I are twin souls," Isabelle says. "Is it her or me on this page?" Isabelle shrugs and puts her painting back into her folder. "Come on, we'll be late."

As they walk into the studio, Jemima waves to Anne who is already sitting at an easel on the other side of the room.

"What did she want?" Anne asks under her voice as Jemima sits down.

"Isabelle? Oh, nothing."

Anne almost snarls. Jemima is sick of being obliged to hate people and so she remains silent, relieved when Bek their tutor enters with a fluster of instructions.

After class they sit in the sun in the courtyard waiting for the lecture in the afternoon.

“Do I look okay?” Anne asks, skimming her hair behind her shoulder.

Jemima looks. “Yep, you look great.” She shakes her head, dismissing the question and remembers back to this morning, staring at her own eyes in the mirror, still swollen from crying herself to sleep. They had felt puffy and heavy, but they looked passable.

“Do you think they’re sleeping together?” Anne nods across the courtyard to where Isabelle laughs while watching Ben act out what looks like the world’s biggest seagull’s attempt to steal chips. Jemima watches them. Tries to read their interactions.

“No,” she decides. “I don’t think so. Do you?”

“I dunno,” says Anne. “She’s definitely trying to get her claws in, don’t you think?”

An image of Isabelle the eagle with talons firmly sunk into Ben’s flesh comes to her mind.

“Yes. She wants to.” She watches Ben flirting with Isabelle and avoids adding, “And so does he.”

She finds it hard to agree with Anne about her mistreatment. Surely she knew those were the rules. A drunken night at a party, a one night stand. Surely she knew when she chose to sleep with him that that was all it'd be. Like she herself had known Clement would not want to kiss her again.

“But he was so nice in the morning,” Anne had whined the week after the party.

He's a nice guy, Jemima had thought. She wouldn't expect him to be nasty to her.

She can see Anne's anger and jealousy rippling on her surface. When Ben and Isabelle come over and join them in the sun Ben is nonchalant as though he is not even aware of these two women circling each other, green eyed. As though it has never occurred to him that he might have hurt or wronged Anne.

They talk about their weekends and about their assignments and then head back inside as their lecture starts.

“I don't know what he sees in her.” Anne whispers. “She's such an airhead.” She giggles fakely and tosses her hair.

Jemima remains silent, wanting to stand up for Isabelle.

“Come back to mine after?” Anne whispers again after the lecture has started, and Jemima's heart skips. She nods, pointing to the lecturer with the end of her pencil. Anne rolls her eyes and opens her note book.

Clement walks up the path towards the house after posting the latest paint-by-numbers. He can hear laughter inside. Anne's home, with someone. His heart quickens as he realises it might be Jemima. He opens the front door and sees them both sitting on the couch bent over in hysterics.

"That's so mean," laughs Jemima as he watches her.

How can this be the same girl who sat in that bathroom, her eyes filled with pain? This sunny, laughing, joking girl, who seems so happy as she and Anne giggle. How is it possible that on her thighs are scars, scratches, lines in red and white, pain of her own making?

She glances up. When he sees her smile all thoughts of what she did disappear and he is drawn into the room towards the couch. Anne turns to see who Jemima is looking at.

"Clement," she smiles too.

"What are you guys laughing about?"

"Nothing really," says Jemima, making them giggle again.

"Oh, there's another exhibition." Anne says suddenly. "Do you guys want to go? It's some multi media thing, like, combining video and sculpture or something. I don't remember."

The idea of going to an exhibition twists his stomach. All those new ideas, those new things to look at, think about. He waits as Jemima agrees and then finds himself agreeing too, despite the pain in his belly.

"Tomorrow?" asks Anne.

Jemima nods. Tomorrow. He'll have to brace himself.

After Jemima leaves, Clement heads upstairs to the studio. Dodger is working furiously and hardly looks up as Clement enters. Clement remembers this excitement of being in the midst of creation, when ideas are flowing thick and strong and fingers work quickly and deftly, the body only a conduit. The nervousness about whether it will actually work out, whether the paint dripped into the yellow will turn it too brown or the perfect shade of yellow. He refuses to miss those feelings.

He can't bear being in the same room as someone who's so lost in their creativity and, without even grabbing his work, he stumbles out of the room.

"Clement." Anne looks up from the kitchen as he comes down the stairs. "I completely forgot I've got a doctor's appointment tomorrow. You guys should go without me. I'll text Jemima to let her know."

His breath catches in his throat. He and Jemima will be going alone.

Jemima lies in bed and stares up at the ceiling. She doesn't want to get up. Her parents have already left for work and the house is quiet. It is dim in her room, the curtains are drawn. As long as she stays only half present she doesn't have to deal with her existence. As long as she is safe in bed she doesn't have to fail at her life. She tries to look at things practically. She has almost finished her Picasso project, but it is crap beyond repair. She doesn't have uni today, so she doesn't have to see all those people to be reminded of how much they don't like her. She only has to

go to that exhibition with Anne and Clement where she won't be able to say anything intelligent about the pieces and will be a general burden to their afternoon. She groans.

She rolls over and watches the clock tick. Tick. Tick. Tick. She counts as it takes 29 seconds to tick down to six and 31 seconds to tick back up to twelve. This is something she knows well about her clock. She wishes she was someone else. If she went away she wouldn't have to be her. If she was in a whole other country she wouldn't have to be around herself. Her phone beeps and vibrates. She reaches out to the floor and drags her bag towards her. It's a message from Anne.

4got dr appoint. duh! no exhib 4 me. u & clem still go tho. hes still keen.

xox

Clement. Alone. With no buffer. He'll see her as the fake pathetic bitch, the boring worthless person that she is. How is she supposed to be interesting enough to talk to someone alone, without other people to take up the slack?

She cringes. There's no way to get out of it. They've already organised it. And she does want to see Clement.

Lying back again, she stares at the ceiling. She has to get up otherwise she'll be late. Instead, she pulls the sheets up to her chin and resists closing her eyes. She knows she has to get up. The clock ticks. Eating up her getting ready time, second by second.

She is used to this misalignment between the world and what she expects of herself. She is not a perfectionist because that would imply that things were

close to perfect or that she would work on them until they were. But she doesn't. She is just always aware of how far below par she is. They weigh on her. All her imperfections. They press her further into the black hole of self hate. *I'm not the way a person is supposed to be*, she thinks, *I am hardly even human*.

But no one notices. She is so good at keeping the right face on, at doing the right thing, at being cheerful. It is a calculated risk. She goes out and talks to friends because it is what's expected of her. She weighs up the risk of fucking up, of knocking the mask askew, against the declaration that she can't cope with social interactions, being seen as a hermit. If she stayed home her parents, her friends, would know something was wrong. She is proficient at living a false life. She is skilled at *being happy*. She has forgotten how to be real, how to be herself. She doesn't even know who *she* is.

She'll go to this exhibition because that's what's expected of her, and despite the fact he knows she will create a fiction so thick he'll forget what he saw, or think it a once off. And she will do everything that's expected of her. She will be normal. She'll find out what normal is by watching others, by following his lead. Her blood chills. Behind the private doors of a relationship there is no knowing what is usual or normal. Inside a relationship there is no knowing how it should operate. Will she be able to fool him once the shadows of other people are gone? How quickly can she escape this emerging relationship unscathed but without tipping anyone off?

It hasn't even begun and she's already looking for an escape, she realises with a sigh. She'll travel: New Zealand or Thailand. Go somewhere else where

she doesn't have to live up to any expectations. Her eyes widen. It's the perfect escape route. The perfectly peaceful pacifist exit point.

She replies to Anne's sms, brightly, happily. It's so easy to hide in the texted word. She climbs out of bed with a sigh. She does want to see him again, but she doesn't want to ruin it.

Clement feels as if he can almost do this, look at all this pointless art, so long as Jemima is next to him. He stands in front of a painting and is aware of the space between him and Jemima, almost as if each particle of dust has synapses of electricity communicating from her skin to his. The painting in front of him has very clean and sharp lines, done with an airbrush so the surface is smooth and hard with little shading between the colours as though inspired by Jeffrey Smart. He shifts his weight on his feet and finds himself slightly closer to Jemima. There is something familiar about the painting but only in a strange way. There is something out of place or altered as though he has seen the exact same form as a sculpture or on the side of a passing bus as an advertisement. He stares at it for a long time before he realises, "Barcelona!"

"Barcelona?"

In contrast to the painting, Jemima's skin is soft and there is redness under her cheeks.

"Only it looks nothing like it. Barcelona is more porous than that." He knows that doesn't describe it properly. "It's not clinical and sharply lined." He

cocks his head. “It looks so wrong!” He notices that she is wearing a lace skirt over leggings, and a bright top, as if she embodies the contrasts of Barcelona, like it is her who is gothic and modern, old and new.

“Mmm.” Jemima cocks her head too. “Do you think he did it on purpose?” she asks. “Or that’s actually how he sees it.”

“It’d have to be on purpose.” Clement says feeling like he’s looking at a dreamscape. “Surely.” He stares at the painting. “Wouldn’t it? It’s like drawing Sydney as though it was an organic form. Warping the context. The shapes just don’t make sense...”

“I’m going to Barcelona.”

“Really?” Clement is instantly excited for her but, at the same time there is a sudden heaviness in his gut. “When?”

“Uni holidays.”

“You’ll love it. What’ll you do there? Will you go to Casa Batlló?”

He can see the shadows of her eyelashes and she reddens slightly.

“What’s that?” she asks.

“A house Gaudí designed.” Clement’s fingertips tingle. “You should see his architecture. It’s amazing.” He remembers taking his sketch book to Casa Batlló and a drawing and drawing. He did the first painting he liked there. He had taken his watercolours, not his preferred medium but the most portable, and drawn a section of the house. What he liked about it was that even though it was actually a realistic drawing, it looked abstract. It was only days before Hannah relapsed.

“Do you like it?” she asks, breaking the silence and nodding to the painting.

Clement considers the painting. “It’s like looking at a distortion mirror or through a kaleidoscope. It’s not what I loved about Barcelona but the twisting of the world was so common there, so it’s almost like it’s got the essence of the city without the representation. It’s a novelty but I don’t think I like it. It’s unlike Barcelona in every way – texture, light, but structurally it is Barcelona. It tips me on my head and, although I like that, I’m not sure if I like the actual painting.” He feels like he’s on the edge of a slippery slope. He doesn’t want to be thinking this way again. He doesn’t want to be dragged back into the world of art.

Jemima nods as she listens to him and looks at the painting.

“You?” He asks.

“Well, I’ve never been, so it’s not twisting my perspective like it is yours. It’s new to me as a painting and as a place. But I wouldn’t have picked it to be in Spain, it’s not how I imagine it at all. It’s okay. I wouldn’t put it on my wall.”

Clement laughs. “No. Not mine either.”

After they have wandered around the exhibition, they head toward a coffee shop just a little way down the road. The cars pass too loudly and too close, each one shooting a wind tail behind it, coating their legs in dust, heat and exhaust. It feels like the heat is coming between Jemima and her body, like lemon juice curdling milk, separating the curds from the whey. In the hard sun she feels the weight of

the silence, her throat is tight with the lack of things to say and the heat is lifting her brain. Old glue letting laminex rise, corners dislodged and curling.

She doesn't know why she said she was going to Spain. She knows nothing about Barcelona, just that Clement gets that odd look, like a sheet of wax paper has come between him and the world. Like he's transported back there just by the thought of the place. It's so impractical going so far for such a short time but it just came out of her mouth without consulting her first. It was something to do with the look Clement got when he realised the painting was Barcelona. Like he was suddenly, briefly, somewhere else, in a world where something – or nothing – mattered.

Clement's hand surprises her on the small of her back, guiding her away from the road and passing cars, reminding her of her skin.

She shifts and is glad of his hand.

They walk into the small deli and her skin prickles with the air conditioned air which hits her face as they enter. She sinks into the plastic chair and hopes Clement doesn't think her pathetic with weakness from the heat.

“Coffee?” he asks and she nods, still waiting for herself to arrive. Her shirt is damp and she suddenly thinks with embarrassment that Clement might have felt it, her sweat through her top. Then she realises that she should have paid for the coffee but it is too late and Clement returns to the table and sinks into the chair opposite.

Clement leans back. “It's so hot out there,” he says squinting out the window.

She follows his gaze. “Ridiculous for the start of Autumn,” she agrees.

She feels awkward. Unsure where to tread on the line between flirting and not, unsure even of her flirting skills. Her skin is cooling but she still feels sticky and adjusts her legs where they catch on the plastic chair. She fidgets with a sugar packet as she thinks about touching him. Her back still holds memories of his hand and she wants, again, to feel his warmth on her skin.

The waitress, a round woman in her fifties, places the coffees in front of them, and walks back to the counter with the slowness of someone whose feet hurt from being stood on for so many years.

“Thanks,” Jemima murmurs, still lost somewhere between the heat and glare of outside and the cool inside.

“Climate change,” Clement says. “It used to be El Niño but these days it’s climate change.”

“Mmm.” She has to concentrate to listen to what he is saying.

“It means ‘the boy’,” he continues. “El Niño. I think there’s a La Niña too but it’s something a little different.”

“What language?”

“Spanish.”

She nods, her mind moving slowly. “How long did you spend there?”

“About six months,” he says and there is silence wrapped in the words.

“Why?”

“To study.” He nods out the window. “Exchange. I was going to do my degree there.”

“Good school?”

“I did a subject on Catalan art and one on Gaudí.” He stirs his coffee even though he didn’t add sugar. “Or started it.”

“You didn’t finish?”

“Not the Gaudí one.”

She’s about to ask why when he continues. “They love him over there. He’s a real hero. I think he was mad. I mean some of the stuff he built!”

She feels her lack of knowledge like a weight in her stomach.

“It looks so crazy but he could be a genius. It’s like he’s made these essentially inorganic things – buildings which are usually square boxes or something – organic. He based a lot of his designs on nature. Like he’s making the place give a false impression, like it’s pretending to be something it’s not.”

Jemima nods. She understands about pretending to be something she’s not. Yesterday on the phone Anne told her how balanced she was. “You’re so grounded,” she had said. “You always give such good advice.” She had been complaining, again, about Ben and Isabelle.

“Casa Batlló,” Clement continues, “is like a water house. Everything looks like it’s something from under the sea. The curvy glass, the blue tiles, the swirling ceiling, the scale print walls. A liquid building! And down the centre of the

building, these columns of light. Like courtyards but not. Where from the outside, you'd think there's nothing but building. It's so counter intuitive."

They don't notice as it grows dark outside and finally the waitress tells them she has to close up and they step out onto the street.

It's still warm, the heat held tightly by the pavement, but Jemima's skin prickles with cold. "I should have brought a jumper," she says.

"Maybe we should go back to mine," suggests Clement. "I don't know what we could do, but at least it's warmer."

When they arrive home, he makes them some instant coffee.

"I'll lend you a jumper," he says and Jemima follows him into his bedroom, looking at the blank walls and messy desk. She sits on the edge of his bed, legs crossed on the floor and flicks through a book lying next to the bedside lamp.

Clement looks through his drawers to find a clean jumper.

"Here you go," he says.

She pulls it over her head and he sits next to her, hands wrapped around the hot mug.

Jemima shuffles back on the bed to lean back against the wall and blows on her coffee. They are quiet, but companionably so.

"What's this from?" she asks, touching the back of his hand where a white scar sits raised against white skin.

“That?” Clement surveys the scar, testing his memory. “I don’t remember. This one, though,” he puts his mug down on the floor next to the mattress and shows her a neat white line at the top of his palm. She runs her finger along the slight ridge. “I fell on some glass in a playground. My mum was so angry. I remember thinking she was angry with me but, of course, it was with whoever had been drinking there, who ever had left the broken bottle. My first stitches. Only two stitches but I was pretty little.”

“Ouch,” Jemima sympathises.

Hannah was about four when it happened and had cried just as loudly as Clement, distressed by the blood and anger and pain and worry. They both got a lollypop from the doctor.

“You?” Clement asks without thinking. “Any impressive scars?”

She puts her mug down next to Clement’s. “Only this one.” She lifts her leg to show him one on her ankle. “A hockey stick,” she explains.

“Ooo. Nasty.” Clement runs his finger over the old scar. Their faces are close and Clement kisses her, his hand palm down, over her ankle scar. Her smell surrounds him. Clement likes this girl. He really really likes her.

A short time later, Jemima lying in the crook of his arm, they are quiet and still.

“And this one.” Jemima says and lifts the sleeve of the jumper, pointing to a mark on the back of her wrist. “Fell off my bike.”

“It’s a good one.” Clement rubs her wrist with his thumb and looks at the scar. It just doesn’t sit that this girl can hurt herself like that.

After Jemima leaves, Clement lies back on his bed and gazes at the underside of the stairs. He can still feel her skin on his fingertips, smell her in the air around him. His mind is pleasantly empty. Vague non-thoughts of Jemima, shadows. He hears someone climb the stairs above him and his soul wants to climb those stairs too. His fingers itch. He wants to paint. He wants to draw. For the first time since he was in Spain he wants to pick up the brush, pencil, pastels. He wants to create, express, form. This feeling has become so unfamiliar it almost feels new.

He can see the drawing in his mind. Done in pastels. Soft colours, browns and earth reds. On brown paper the colour of soil. Wide enough to fit Jemima’s stretched out arm, with her head resting on it, as though on a pillow. The length of the arm almost excessive, extended. Her hair sweeping over and down, across her face, framing her eyes, her nose. Hiding her mouth and chin. Her brown eyes soft, gentle, almost closing into sleep. The centre of the drawing.

It is a physical sensation; his hands want. They could almost propel his whole body out the door, up the stairs to his old pastels. His hands twitch but he controls them, doesn’t allow them to rise and create. There would be no point.

He is angry with his hands. Their excitement is betraying him. He puts them under his bottom, lies on them. Why bother with that drawing? It would serve no purpose. It would not stop Jemima from cutting herself. It would not make her realise her beauty. It would not make her feel better. It would not change anything in this world. It would not contribute or help.

It would just be another way to waste resources, another piece of paper ruined. He stares up at the stairs, direct and forceful, their white lines moving away from him. His anger wells and grows and increases on itself. He is angry with himself for being angry.

He remembers this passion with hate and derision. It was the thing he lived for, existed for. His life was constructed by and for art, his own and other people's. It was his essence, his breath, and still it didn't change anything in this harsh and indifferent world. He poured his heart and soul, all the energies of his entire being, into it and his sister still died. It had taken him away, overseas and to a different life, away from her pain, away from any possibility of helping her. It took him away and he had drenched himself in it and she had died.

Art could never have saved her; he never thought it could. But he used to think it was important.

As Jemima arrives home and opens the front door, she calls down the empty corridor, checking if her parents are home.

"Hi Darling," two voices call back, her mother's from their bedroom and her father's from where he has just walked into the corridor.

He pauses, waiting for her to reach him, and kisses her on the forehead before going into the kitchen. Jemima goes into her parents' bedroom where her mum is putting on jewellery.

“Hi Mum,” she says and gives her a hug. “Are you going out tonight?”

She lies back on her parents’ bed, sinking into the soft doona, remembering watching her mum get ready as a kid. Pink fluffiness of the powder puff, amber jewellery glowing.

“Dinner with the Roberts.”

She used to help her mum choose her necklaces from her jewellery box, running her fingers lightly over the chains, watching the light shine off the gold, polishing her greasy finger prints off smooth surfaces.

“Mmm. Where are you going?”

Her mum leans towards the mirror and blinks on her mascara. “Lemon and Lime.” She picks up her lip liner.

“Mmm.”

“It’s nice there. A bit loud though. Have you ever been there?” She asks, twisting her lips for lipstick.

“We went there for my eighteenth, remember?”

“Oh, that’s right. Anne came too.” She presses her lips together. “Right,” she says, putting her lipstick down so it clacks on the dresser. “Done.” She stands and runs her hands down the fronts of her hips, smoothing her top as she does, checking herself in the mirror.

“Ready, Elisabeth?” Her dad appears at the door.

“Coming, coming.” Picking up her bag, she leans over to kiss Jemima. “Night dear,” she says as they walk out the door and down the hall. “Don’t wait up,” she jokes and the door closes behind them.

The house is quiet and Jemima listens to the car pull out of the driveway and drive off down the street. She rolls off the bed and goes and sits in her mother’s chair. It is still warm and Jemima stares at herself in the mirror, red lips printed on her forehead. She sits with her hands folded in her lap and stares at her mother’s daughter. People have told her that she looks like her mum. She can’t see it. Her mother is glamorous, beautiful, nothing like her at all. She looks at the photo she used for the portrait. She has looked at it often, trying to find herself in the face. The photo was taken by her mum’s first boyfriend. Unlike Jemima, her mother had the misfortune of too many men falling in love with her. She used to laugh lightly at references to her old boyfriends, her husband’s quiet pride that he had won.

Isabelle could see Jemima in the portrait. Jemima is not like her mum, though, and suddenly the thought of someone taking such a picture of her terrifies her. The stillness, the wholeness of her mother in the picture, the closeness of the camera’s operator, his insight into the woman by the sink. The thought of Clement’s mouth on hers, of his hand feeling the extra fat on her hip, panics her. She could not live up to anything he might expect. What *does* he expect of her? She should have kept it simple, kept that distance between her and the world but now someone has seen inside her, someone has seen her wounds, and the door between them can never be shut again. Now he is going to expect to *get to know her*. He has already seen her cuts, interpreted them in his mind. Her meaning is set. She already has things to live up to.

She looks at the face in the mirror and scowls. She sees her mother's nail scissors lying next to her makeup case and watches them glint in the light from the lamp. She picks them up and tests their sharpness with her finger tip. She places them back down on the bench, carefully, not letting them make a sound. She can't do it here with her mother's clothes and her father's books staring back at her in the mirror.

She goes to the bathroom and locks the door even though no one else is home. She finds her razor and pulls off her leggings. She presses the skin around the cuts, blood beads. Her lace skirt falls over her thighs and colours – red seeping into white.

She smiles, easily satisfied, relishing the light pain, and gets ready for bed.

Later, she wakes quietly as her mum kisses her on the forehead and tiptoes across the carpet to the door.

"Mum," she says, still caught in drowsiness, and her mum turns around, coming back to the bed.

"Sorry, I didn't mean to wake you."

"That's okay. Was it fun?"

"Oh yes," she sounds unconvinced. "It was a nice evening but your uncle was in one of his moods."

"Oh, I didn't know Uncle Geoff was going."

"Yes, those two and the Roberts. Do you know the Roberts?"

Jemima shakes her head. It's hard to keep up with her parents' friends. Not that there's a high turnover, there are just so many of them, and often new ones. Now that she's older and might have a better chance of telling them all apart she hardly ever meets any of them. Not that she met them all that often as a kid, just on the occasional 'kids welcome' event or a night they couldn't get babysitting. She used to sit quietly on a corner of a table or, if there was room, she used to love climbing underneath the table and sitting amidst the sharp heels and polished shoes, reading a book, falling asleep. Hiding among the stockinged knees and sharply ironed trouser creases, listening to the undecipherable babble up above; it was always a safe place.

"Did you have a good day?" her mum asks.

Jemima nods. "I went to an exhibition."

"Oh, lovely. With Anne?"

"With Anne's housemate, Clement?" Jemima feels her voice tense slightly, not wanting her mum to make a big deal of it. Anne tells her mother everything. Jemima doesn't know why she avoids telling her mum things.

"How nice," she says and Jemima finds herself unexpectedly disappointed that her mum can't tell or doesn't care that Clement is *someone*. "Well, goodnight." Her mum stands and kisses her again on the forehead. As she leaves she pauses, looking at the open sketchbook on Jemima's desk.

"Did you do these?" she asks.

"Yeah. Sketches for my visual diary."

“Wow, Jemima.”

She winces at the note of pride in her mum’s voice. It makes her feel reduced. She knows the sketch is nothing, no good.

“We’re proud of you, Love,” her mum says. “You’re becoming quite the artist.”

She stands for another moment at the door, hand resting on the knob.

“Night then,” she says again.

“Night Mum,” Jemima says as her mum gently closes the door behind her, returning Jemima to darkness. Only a mother could think those sketches were good. She’ll never live up to their opinions of her. She’ll never deserve their pride.

She stares up at the ceiling thinking that she’ll never be competent at social engagements like her parents are.

She remembers the sound of their chatter through a layer of wood and tablecloth, under the clatter of glasses and cutlery. She should have learnt how to make her voice smooth and round like her mother’s *out* voice, how to laugh quickly and easily, realistically, despite being a pitch higher than usual. She should have picked up, through watching and listening, the proper way to socialise; a smarter more savvy child would have. Instead, all she knows is that it is different to how you are at home. That you are meant to present a shinier and more polished self, that you are meant to sparkle. Especially as a woman. But Jemima knows that no matter how much you polish and shine wool it’s never going to sparkle. She is not like her mother.

She wonders about Clement, if he is like his father, or indeed his mother. What they are proud of about him.

He thinks she's an artist. Unlike her parents' pride, his easy belief in her as an artist makes her feel like it could be possible. But isn't an artist meant to be tortured and pained? With her simple middle class life there's no twisted inspiration, no abuse, no madness, no passion. If her cutting wasn't so false and needless it could prove her damaged, worthy.

She heard Isabelle introduce herself as an artist the other day and nearly choked on her beer. *Artist in training*, she could almost own at a stretch but *artist*? Surely there is something extra that pushes you across the line. Van Gogh's madness, Frida Kahlo's physical pain, Andy Warhol's peculiarity, Claude Monet's... vision of light? She scratches at the cut on her thigh. She nurses her pain, wishes it were enough.

She'll never be good enough to be an artist. Good enough at art, at ideas, at innovation, at life. The only art she does is for assignments; she's not inspired. Clement is more of an artist than her. There must be some sort of darkness hidden away, secreted amongst his memories of Barcelona. She knows she is being overly romantic. Just like her, Clement is probably an ordinary person.

Her leg is moist where she is scratching. She will bruise but it is not enough. She reaches into her bedside drawer and pulls out her blade again. She is stupid and ridiculous to think this will give her validity. Genius and pain don't walk hand in hand. And this pain, her pain, is just self indulgent.

nine

“I can’t believe you didn’t tell me!” Anne whispers to her, arriving late to their life drawing class.

Jemima feels herself pinken slightly. She didn’t know if Anne knew and didn’t know how to tell her. It’s not really a big deal, it shouldn’t feel like a confession. There’s a difference between things that come up in conversation and things that are told. But every time it could come up in conversation, Jemima felt herself edging around it, stepping delicately over it. She is not sure if Clement would warrant approval from Anne, or indeed if she would be considered good enough for Clement. And it would require too much explanation. She wants to avoid defining it, the laying of words onto action, the setting of meaning.

“So, have you pashed yet?” Anne pulls a piece of charcoal out of a box and Jemima turns a little redder but is glad Anne knows.

“Change,” calls the tutor and the model readjusts her pose. There is a rustle as all the students lift another piece of butcher’s paper into place.

“Good for you!” Anne slaps her lightly on the upper arm. “He’s the nicest guy, Jem.”

Jemima nods. “Yeah, he’s nice.” She doesn’t look at Anne, focusing instead on the shape of the model whose arm is flung upwards, hand dropping from the top like a dead fish, and drawing quickly, trying to capture as much as she can in their speed drawing exercise.

“Change.”

“So, what’s the deal?” Anne asks, covering one piece of paper with another. “Are you together, or... what?” She peers past her easel at the model.

“I dunno,” Jemima says, evasively. With quick lines she draws the model’s bending body. “It’s too early to tell I guess.” She sees Anne nod out of the corner of her eye.

“He’s nothing like that Eric guy you went out with last year, don’t worry.”

“Change.”

“You guys are perfect for each other,” continues Anne, dropping a piece of charcoal as she gets a new piece of paper.

Jemima cringes. They’re still practically strangers – how could they be perfect for each other? She draws quick lines of the round arse and long legs in front of her. The hair twisting down the back.

“Change,”

Jemima lifts another piece of paper over yet another incomplete sketch.

The quick sketches continue until the class is released into the day outside.

“Did you hear the goss?” Anne asks as she watches Isabelle make a quick exit after class. “Isabelle is such a slut.”

Jemima winces inside, knowing that she’ll be expected to laugh meanly at someone she quite likes.

“I heard she rocked up to Ben’s on the weekend. All dolled up in her slut-a-rama outfit. Can you believe it?” Anne scoffs. “This was after they had the ‘friends’ talk on Thursday.”

“Oh, I didn’t know they broke up.”

Anne glares at her. “They were never together,” she corrects. “They were just sleeping together.”

Jemima shrinks inside to think what misunderstandings are floating between her and Clement.

“So she rocks up Saturday, pretending she also wanted the ‘friends with benefits’ thing and they were having a party – she didn’t even know,” she rolls her eyes as though this proves how stupid Isabelle is. “And he’s already pashing some girl in the pool! She ran out crying in her slutty dress.”

“Poor girl,” says Jemima, hating Ben in a type of sisterhood.

“Ha,” says Anne. “Serves her right.”

For thinking he liked her? For taking his affection to mean that he cared? Jemima wants to ask, incredulous at Anne’s bitchiness. She knows that Anne still

likes Ben. That all this is a performance of how much she doesn't care about her own similar treatment.

"Poor girl," Jemima says again, aware that Anne's pretending her amusement, that her gladness that Isabelle's out of the picture is embittered by this other girl, that she is refusing to know that her dislike of Isabelle is more to do with Ben than Isabelle herself.

"She deserved it," Anne says.

They are both aware of the prickles between them and Jemima tries to think of a way to smooth them down. They sit down on a wall in the courtyard.

"Did you see his new tattoo?" Anne asks, nodding across at Ben who is laughing on the other side of the courtyard with some friends. "It's here," she points to her tricep, "on the inner arm. It's so sexy." She catches herself. "I mean, it's a good spot to get one, for a guy. It'd look sexy on anyone. He doesn't really have the arms for it anyway."

Jemima laughs and slaps Anne lightly. "What are you talking about? He's got great arms. Surfer's arms."

Anne laughs. "Yeah, you're right." They both look across at Ben who's telling some story with large expansive movements.

"I'm thinking of getting one," Anne says.

"Really?" Jemima's surprised. "Why?"

Anne shrugs as though a reason isn't needed. "I like them."

Jemima screws up her face, "But they cane, don't they?"

“I’ve heard it’s not too bad.” Anne shrugs again. “I think if you get it where there’s fat it doesn’t hurt as much. I might get it here.” She puts her hand on the inner side of her hip bone. “Besides, the pain’s worth it. Want to come with me?”

“When are you going?”

“No, I mean, get one too. Do it together?”

“No way!”

“Why not?”

“I’m not going to get a tattoo!” The thought of ink injected into skin cells turns Jemima’s stomach.

“You scared of the pain?” teases Anne.

“What would I get?” asks Jemima as an argument against it.

“Oh, come on. We could think of something really cool.”

“I don’t even want one.”

“Oh, fine,” says Anne. “I didn’t think you would anyway.”

They continue to watch the antics of the boys in front of them.

“So,” says Anne in a teasing tone. “Clement?”

Jemima smiles, embarrassed.

“I’m really happy for you.” Anne squeezes Jemima’s arm.

“It’s not that big a deal,” says Jemima, meaning it’s only early days, don’t jinx it, there is no forgone conclusion. “We don’t even know where it’s going.” She tries to explain.

“Don’t worry,” Anne says, misunderstanding Jemima’s hesitation. “He likes you.”

But I’m not sure how much I like him, she thinks nervously. What if I don’t like him enough, or too much? What if I’m just playing with him? What if I’m not who he thinks I am? She’s jumping ahead like she objected to Anne doing.

“We’ll see,” she says. “It’s not like we’re going to tattoo each other’s names across our hearts,” she jokes and Anne laughs.

After uni, walking to the bus stop, Jemima passes a travel agent. She stops three steps past and stands for a moment. Taking a deep breath, she turns and walks in. The girl behind the computer is friendly, her eyes bright and voice bubbling, she knows exactly where she belongs. She seems confident and acts as though travel is normal but still exciting. When Jemima tells her she’s never been overseas before she leans forward and squeezes Jemima’s arm, motherly even though they are close to the same age, “You’ll love it,” she says, rolling the *l* of *love*. “It’ll be the best thing you’ve ever done,” she says with certainty. “You’ll be hooked.” Jemima books a ticket to Barcelona for the uni holidays and leaves with her stomach kicking against her ankles. She doesn’t have to pay a deposit for a while and can’t tell if she is doing the right thing.

Clement sits at his parents' dinner table pushing his food around his plate. He has been avoiding the studio for days now. His paint-by-numbers work lies undone on the desk. The proximity to charcoal, paint, pastels, ink, too much to bear. He can't even bring himself to climb the stairs and retrieve the working prints from amidst the easels, paintbrushes, water colour paper. He's thinking of quitting. It's no different really from working at a café or in a supermarket. It's just the part time and own hours thing he liked. Maybe he should get the type of job his father wants him to get: a banker, a business man, anything that requires a suit. He shudders at the idea but doesn't dismiss the thought.

He remembers one time when they went to Melbourne, just the three of them, Hannah, him and their mum. The first time they went their dad was going to come, but work came up at the last minute. Clement, in his eight year old way, was glad. If their dad had come their mum would have been different. She would have been distracted by him and the whole trip would have been more sober, less fun. The second time their dad wasn't even invited.

That time the parent-teenager barrier dissolved and they were all easy and communicative together. All their teenage angst and anger forgotten. Hannah told them about the boy she liked and their mum told them about her first boyfriend.

Hannah had laughed when she found out their mum's first boyfriend was a hippy. "I can't imagine it!" They were eating ice cream on a park bench. "Were you a hippy? Imagine how different we would have been!"

"We wouldn't exist," pointed out Clement.

“It’s better this way,” their mum had said and Clement doesn’t know if it was with sadness or if the sadness is the memory’s addition. “This way I have you.” She drew them both in for a hug. And for the first time since turning thirteen Clement hadn’t squirmed away.

When they were released, Hannah loaded some gelato into her spoon.

“Should I make her regret us?” she had asked Clement, pulling the spoon back, catapult-like.

“You wouldn’t dare!” Their mum was uncertain, not sure if her authority was strong enough to prevent cold splatter.

Suddenly ice cream was in the air and landing on their mum’s shoulder. Half a moment’s pause to see the reaction, and then there was lemon, vanilla, chocolate in the air and they were laughing until there was none left and they were all multicoloured and sticky.

“I didn’t mean to flick it,” confessed Hannah, laughing. “It just slipped.”

“Well, it saved me eating it. I certainly didn’t need it.” Their mum stood, patting her hips. “Come on, let’s get back and get cleaned up.”

On the tram looks, glances and wide berths from fellow passengers dissolved them into laughter again and again.

When they got home and their father saw their mum’s shirt being used as a polishing rag he asked what had happened to it.

“Oh,” their mum sounded nonchalant. “I spilt some ice cream on it.”

The kids both had burst with laughter and hurried away before questions could be pressed, memories tainted, secrets shared.

Clement smiles at the memory. He hardly ever heard his mum laugh like that. Things were different after that trip. Hannah and Clement had returned as friends. From then on they shared their lives.

In front of him is a meal, prepared by his mother with all the love and care, habit and duty as usual. His parents are eating, talking, and he stares at the plate in front of him. He remembers when meal times first started getting tense. It was sometime after Hannah stopped eating, once they all knew and food acquired a sheen of meaning, a lacquer of awareness, when suddenly every mouthful was watched hopefully, every lowered forkful glanced at, when remaining portions of food were noted and nudged. He eats a mouthful of mashed potato. It feels like ash in his mouth. It is difficult to swallow.

Clement knew before his parents did. Not because Hannah told him, but just because he knew. He felt it in his heart and in his stomach. He started eating too much when he first worked it out, as though he could feed her through his own stomach. He was constantly over full, and he never left anything on his plate, trying to lead by example. He put weight on then. Changed from a tall, skinny, gangly adolescent, to a soft, heavy giant. It only got really bad when she was in year twelve but he could feel it coming for about a year before that. People didn't realise he was eating for two. He got pudgy on her secret.

He hadn't known what to do. Should he have said something to someone? Betrayed their bond as soon as he felt the hunger? Confronted her, raised her wrath and anger? Because she was moody then, doors slammed, fists pummelled.

That was alright, he had his protective layer of fat. Was he scared of being told it was true, that the meals missed weren't just because of exhaustion and drama practice, that the weight lost wasn't just from over training at swimming? He knew her veganism, copied from Paddy, was an excuse to reduce food intake rather than the intensely held belief she pretended.

So he ate. He started to eat when he first began to suspect, and kept eating through the discovery of Hannah's disorder by their parents, the therapy, the hospitals. In Barcelona when he had to cook for himself he had started to lose the weight again. And then when she died he no longer had to eat for her too.

Now, sitting here in front of this love in the guise of food, he finds he can't eat a thing. He can't bring himself to put the fork in his mouth. He knows the full plate will raise memories. The food tipped into the compost bin will scrape at his mother's heart but he can't put that stuff into his body.

On the train on the way home his stomach rumbles. He can feel people glancing at him and shifts uncomfortably in his seat.

As soon as he gets home he opens the cupboard door and looks for food. He finds some cereal and eats it dry, out of the packet, sweet, crunchy. He shoves the pieces into his mouth handfuls at a time.

How did she do it? He misses one meal and he is starving. In Barcelona he hardly ate, but that was different. Then he was full up. He was absorbed by his art. What discipline did she have not to eat, to disobey her body's demands. But she always was the disciplined one. The one who studied and trained and followed the rules. The good child. The better human.

He wants to know what it feels like to be so empty you start to consume yourself. He wants to know how she felt.

Jemima is welling up. She is too full of, she doesn't know what, but it suffocates her, making it hard to move, making her limbs larger than they should be, her head take up too much room.

Some of it, what is welling up inside her, is good: this warm heavy feeling for Clement, the memory of his touch, his lips on hers. But most of it is bad. This knowledge that she has let someone in and at any moment he will realise he can't stand her. The fact that she is not worth his time. The sense of dread and apprehension waiting for the penny of hate to drop in his mind, waiting for the disillusionment to clear. Her excessive self absorption. The fear of what he expects from her. The fear she won't behave correctly next time they see each other, won't act with the correct amount of affection, so as not to push him away nor draw him too close. The pressure to remain someone he could possibly like. The pressure not to be fake. The memory of his warm touch now seems too close, suffocating. His lips over hers: what did she taste like, was her skin too rough, what if she was a bad kisser? The fact that despite it all, despite her appearance, her personality, her mind, her soul, his knowledge of her self harm, despite all that, he still seems to like her. This is the scariest thing of all. It is like a lump in her throat, rising, pressing, pushing. It is making her ill and she knows it should be making her happy.

ten

“Now,” says Clement, placing a plate of strangely coloured noodles in front of Jemima. “You don’t have to eat it. We can order pizza if you want.”

“No, this’ll be fine,” smiles Jemima, adventure in her voice. “I made you make it, I’ll eat it.”

Clement brings over his own plate.

“Cheers,” they lift their wine glasses and each take a sip.

He watches Jemima pick up her fork and prod the melting cheese covering what is on her plate.

“This is the only thing you can cook?” She lifts up the cheese and looks at the two minute noodles, tomato, tuna, pea mix underneath.

“I’m better now, but I used to live off this.” He watches her gather some onto her fork. “It’s not that bad. This is the gourmet version.”

She lifts a well loaded fork into the air and grimaces. “Here goes.” She takes a bite and chews thoughtfully.

Clement takes a bite himself and remembers standing at the window of the tiny flat he shared in El Ravel, Barcelona, watching people passing by underneath. He spent his money quickly and badly in Barcelona. He spent more than he could afford on art supplies, preferring then to draw rather than eat. Sketchpads and pencils, paints and charcoal. And entry fees for museums, Gaudí buildings. He visited too many too often. It was like an addiction. He was driven to see the new exhibition, to check whether the doves flew into or out of the nativity façade of La Sagrada, whether the iron jaws of La Pedrera’s balcony kept you in or out.

He’d stand in the art supply shop, fingers caressing the perfect shade of blue, running across the surface of the rough water colour paper. His stomach would rumble in protest but that afternoon the sky on paper would be exact and he would go to bed hungry.

“Do you like it?” he asks.

“It’s...” Jemima takes another bite. “Interesting. I don’t know about the tuna.”

“I was trying to be healthy. Cover all food groups,” laughs Clement. “This is extravagance – it uses two cans!”

Occasionally he would get together with other students or his housemates and they would eat out, another way to leave himself hungry for the rest of the week. But at the time he thought it was worth it. They would have grand conversations about art and artists, eat tapas at cheap places off the tourist route. Drink bottles of red wine. Come home inspired and wanting, even more, to work.

Sometimes in weeks where he left himself destitute after buying a new sketching pad or large meal long since digested, he would buy one of the one euro tourist fruit salads from the market, Mercat de la Boqueria, and that would be the only thing he ate all day. At the time he didn't mind that he was hungry because he had the colours to paint the hands that constructed the mountains of fruit. The cold slick ice cooling the shining fish, the shell fish he'd never seen before. The legs of jamón hanging from their hooks. The cheeses in their wax. The purchase allowed a quick study of faces, perhaps even a sketch.

Hannah didn't eat. He had never thought of himself as 'not eating'. He had always thought of it as 'choosing art' but now he suddenly connects this with his own rumbling stomach in Barcelona.

Was this it? Was it the loss of his digestive support that made her weight drop even lower? Was it his ever increasing piles of sketches and watercolours that leached the last nutrition from her body? Money wasted on paintbrushes instead of bread. On the other side of the world.

He feels ill. Not only did he desert her physically by leaving for Barcelona but he deserted her mind and soul. He deserted her bodily with his lack of support. He should have kept up their net calories, surely that could have made a difference. He should have kept her in his mind all the time. He let art absorb him. In all the ways he should have been with her. Physically, bodily, mind and soul. He chose art when he should have chosen her.

He can't eat this plate full of soggy noodles. The meal he ate most often in this time of betrayal. He can't eat this.

“It’s not too bad,” concedes Jemima. “I didn’t believe you but…”

“It’s awful,” he says. His desire for art ate up her body bit by bit. Leaving it empty, nothing but skin shrunk onto bones. He reaches across and picks up Jemima’s plate. “Let’s get pizza?”

When he first got back they had gone straight to the hospital. He noticed the angle of her cheek shaped by the angle of her jaw bone. He saw her in blue pastels. He saw her sunken eyes in grey watercolour.

“It’s not that bad,” Jemima laughs at this sudden urgency as Clement jumps up and orders pizza.

Even then he was choosing art. Even then with this shadow of life beside him, her hand brittle in his, his mind was twisted with art.

As they eat the pizza all Clement can see is the image of his sister’s eyes, her thin hair, her too-large joints. He feels the warm grease on his fingers and he shovels pizza into his mouth as if he could make up for his desertion.

He remembers his last night in Barcelona. He had had one favourite painting of his own, the red jacketed girl at Park Güell which was by then lining the nests of pigeons, rotting at the bottom of ponds. He had sorted through his other pictures, turned over piles, flicked through sketchbooks, pulled paper off the walls. There were too many to fit in his small pack and under the 20 kilogram weight restriction. Each picture he selected he had imagined showing Hannah, sharing with her this bright world where rows of bikes sit below ancient crumbling walls and phallic towers sparkle above the city’s skyline.

The night he had arrived home from Barcelona, after seeing Hannah in hospital, he sat alone in his dusty room in their quiet house. This side of the world was long since asleep, the air still and stale, undisturbed for months, and he had pulled, page by page, his pictures from his rucksack. Here were his housemates in the kitchen in smudged pastels. Renaltas the Lithuanian, his written English scattered with words Clement had to look up in a dictionary. Antonio, the Catalanian, also an art student. And Rebecca the interior design student from England. Laughing, drinking, talking in a room that could barely fit them all. He screwed up the piece of paper. Here in thick acrylic was the tiled dragon's back of Casa Batlló against the bluest of blue skies. He tore through the thick paper. The helmeted sentries that were the chimneys of La Pedrera. The smiling greengrocer at the market. The swimming pigeons in the courtyard of Frederic Mares' gallery. The grasshopper gargoyle protecting the gothic cathedral. A door imposing with its wooden strength. Frank Gehry's fish arching towards the sea.

Thick artist's paper. Thin leaflets, receipts, napkins. Pages ripped from sketch pads with broken holes still attached. Water colour, pencil, charcoal, ink.

He tore up and screwed up, ripped and crumbled each piece of paper, one by one. He climbed out his window and on the patch of concrete between the house and the garden, where he had smoked cones almost every teenage night, where he and Hannah had laughed uncontrollably, had smothered themselves to keep their parents unaware, here he lit and burnt each piece of paper. Watching them blacken and curl, the images turn to ash, the flames consume them.

He bites and swallows without chewing, trying to fill himself up, trying to quench his hunger. He reaches forward again but the last piece of pizza is gone

and he looks up. They glance at each other. This girl of flesh and blood. Her round smooth face, her auburn hair shiny and thick, her arms muscular, her breasts full. The blood on the surface of her skin, the knife in her hand. He looks into her eyes.

Jemima smiles at Clement, uncertain. They hold each other's gaze. Jemima wants to look away, but controls herself. This time she won't let herself run away. She knows what you're meant to do. She's done this before but part of her feels like an understudy, like she isn't really present, like she's standing in the wings watching the star, the better actor, the proper person, play out the lines. It's like she has no control over her body. It knows this play and it will perform it to the end. It's lucky, in a way. If she had control her nervousness and fear would mean she'd look away, would mean she'd sabotage any advancement in this emerging relationship, avoid connection, slip away from intimacy.

The actor in Jemima's body dutifully kisses him back. Maybe he does want her. Maybe, like her, he is just following the script. They are both taking part in a fiction, pretending attraction. Is she just pretending to like him? What is she supposed to be feeling?

His hands are warm on her body. It feels nice, his fingertips on her skin. She listens to the sound of their breath, waits to see what he will do next. She is curious to see if they will sleep together today. If not today then she assumes some time soon. Sometimes the easiest path is the one of action not inaction. It's not that she doesn't want to, if she had a choice she would probably choose to, but she doesn't feel like she has a choice. She wasn't part of the writing of this script.

There is no reason to stop seeing him – she enjoys his company, they have fun, they like each other – and there are only the two options. Sleep together or break up. She doesn't mind either option. She just hopes he doesn't want the lights on. Of course he might dump her before it gets to that, but today she will just see where the play goes.

Clement draws away. "We should stop," he says and Jemima can't tell how much it is a question and how much a statement. If it is a statement he must not like her because all boys want sex, don't they? It's what males want?

Their faces are still close, his hand still under her top, on her stomach. She pulls in her stomach. Their lips reach for each other. There is a sudden thump upstairs and they both jump, brought back to the wider room. They are not just bodies, they are bodies on a couch, in a room, in front of a playing dvd, where housemates might arrive home or come downstairs.

"Do you want to...?" Clement stands and Jemima follows him to the bedroom. She is amazed at how seamless the transition in. The awkwardness of awareness is minimal. The movement from couch to bed seems almost too natural. These are good script writers indeed.

Because they are actors it doesn't matter that her thighs are fat and hairy, that her stomach is soft and white. These things can be airbrushed out afterwards. They are participating in a fiction.

His mouth on her skin, her hands on his. They are all surface, all nerves.

Afterwards, as they lie in each other's arms, whole length of skin against whole length of skin, Jemima feels herself return to herself. She was here all along, wasn't she?

She almost feels that he finds her attractive. She almost believes it. She wonders when he'll come to his senses.

Clement runs his hand lightly over Jemima's stomach. He is starting to feel ill. The pizza resting heavily in his own stomach. He should feel sleepy, satisfied, but all he feels is angry and ashamed. When he kissed her he had tasted the pizza on her lips, felt the flesh on her hips, wanted the press of her body against his. He had been able to just want. He shouldn't have slept with her, not yet, when all he wanted was some comfort. When he only wanted to forget about Hannah, about Barcelona, about food, about art. He almost feels like he used her. It did not happen like he wanted it to. It should have been about her. About how beautiful she is. About how amazing her laugh is. How fascinating he finds every little thing she says. It should have been about how wonderful she is. Especially for this girl who is so special and so particularly special to him but instead it was about him. He wanted only ever to make her feel good but instead he tainted their first time.

He had known – he had said – that they shouldn't, he shouldn't. He had known that it wasn't going to be for them, but he wanted to feel warmth against his skin. He wanted to be full up again. He wanted softness around him. He wanted to drown in something other than the past. What if he has ruined it all? She is too precious to be overtaken like that, looked past, to be only comfort.

He strokes her hip, her side, pulls her into a hug.

Clement feels his breath deepen and holds Jemima in his arms. He doesn't realise he is asleep until she moves and wakes him.

“What are you doing?” he asks, voice muffled by sleep.

“I've got to go home,” she says, climbing over him.

He follows her out to her car and watches as she turns the corner. The night is cold and the stars are sharp in the darkness above him. The concrete is damp under his bare feet but Clement stands looking up at the quiet sky. Regret settles like silt in his belly. He should have done it differently. There are gunnuts digging into the soles of his feet. He turns and goes back inside where he falls onto his bed, just to smell her on his sheets again. He sleeps wrapped in her scent, a fallen hair tickling his chin. He hopes he hasn't ruined it all. He hopes he did not break this thing between them.

eleven

When Clement wakes he can hear noises in the living room. He lies on his back and watches each step as someone – Dodger, he can tell – walks up the stairs. His heart quickens as he thinks of Jemima. It could be her, that laughter in the kitchen. But as the thought arrives he recognises the only female laugh as Anne's and the other voice as Ansell's, which means he read the footsteps correctly, Dodger is upstairs. He smiles to himself as he hears further confirmation in the form of a few enthusiastic thumps through the ceiling. Sometimes he wonders what it would be like always to be inspired like that. To feel like the world is there to assist your genius.

He climbs out of bed, pulls some track pants on and stumbles out of his bedroom door greeting his housemates.

Opening the fridge door he peers inside. Milk for cereal, bread for toast, an open can of fruit. His stomach tells him he wants to eat but he closes the door and picks up the half full plunger, gesturing to Anne. She nods and he pours himself a cup.

“I’m going back to bed,” says Ansell, and trudges back to his bedroom.

“Night,” says Clement, going around the bench to sit next to Anne.

“He’s still coming down,” explains Anne as she lifts another spoon of cereal to her mouth.

“And on a school night!” Clement is mock-shocked. In front of him the fruit bowl is empty aside from a sagging lemon that has grown a soft blue fuzz around its edges.

“Not eating?” asks Anne, chewing on her cereal.

“Later,” Clement says and blows on the surface of his coffee before taking a sip, the liquid hot and rough in his throat.

Later, Clement steels himself to go upstairs. Dodger has gone but Anne is there and he opens the door to see her leaning over a lump of clay. The light from the skylight shines smooth and hard on her shoulder blades. He is glad she is there. He is less likely to be distracted by thoughts of his own art, his body is less likely to betray him with its desire to create.

“What are you up to?” he asks as he pulls some work down from a shelf. It is the second last from the Van Gogh series and he has decided not to do any more after finishing this series. He’ll get an ordinary job. He doesn’t know what. Whatever it is, he’s not going to do this. It’s too dangerous. This use of pen, this reminder of colour.

“For uni,” Anne says. “Still on The Human Form. Do we ever get off The Human Form?”

“Ha,” Clement laughs. “Not if you’re taking portraits.”

“But this one’s for ceramics.”

“Sculpture in ceramics?”

“The assignment’s *limbs*.”

Clement tries to stop the jumble of images that jump into his head.

“What about tree limbs?”

“I didn’t think of that. Too late, though, I’ve already started.”

With his thin black pen, Clement continues to divide colour from colour, stop shading with a clear black line.

“Do you want to come out tonight?” asks Anne, smoothing the clay with a touch of water. “With Jemima and maybe some people from uni?”

“Sure, sounds fun.” With one line Clement reduces a spectrum of five shades to one. The reason computers can’t do this is that they are too precise. They let things get too complicated.

This one’s a self portrait. The blue background is easy enough, just mark it off as one colour. The yellows in the blue jacket a little harder to translate. The greens in his cornfield hair. Clement wonders why Van Gogh did so many self portraits. Did he feel himself to be fluid and want to pin something down, a way to say, *here, this is me*? This isn’t one of the ones where he has a bandaged ear but it was done soon after and Clement imagines the ear missing on the other side of his head, wonders what is in its place. The idea of the artist born under Saturn

bothers Clement. It seems to discount so much good art. And become an excuse for bad behaviour.

Van Gogh, the pin up for mad artists, stares at him with those green-blue eyes. Is this what he saw where he looked in the mirror? Is this what he wanted others to see? His paintbrush and pallet hover expectantly in the corner. Are they authenticating objects – *see I really do paint what I see* – or symbolic, a claim to an identity?

Clement shakes his head, annoyed with himself. He really has to get a different job, something far away from the smell of turps.

On the bus home from uni, Jemima listens to the two boys sitting behind her. They are still in their school uniforms, rolling cigarettes and exclaiming how much they need to get off this bus and have a smoke. Their need is intense and urgent, as it is all of ten minutes ago that they stomped out their cigarettes and climbed onto the bus, breathing that last lungful of smoke into the windowless cabin.

She has to go out tonight when all she feels like doing is curling into a ball and going to sleep. She told Anne she would. She knows Clement is coming too and feels strange about that. Shouldn't they have decided together or something? Will she be there as Anne's friend or as Clement's new love interest? She doesn't think she can be both.

“Did you see her wrists, man?” one of the boys behind her asks the other.

“Fuck man, what a loser.”

“I know. Like it makes her so cool. She didn’t even do it properly.”

“Ha, I know. Everyone knows that you have to go along the arm.”

Jemima shudders. She isn’t sure what they deem less *cool* about this girl, the fact she slit her wrists or the fact she failed at dying, in a culture where failure is cool, where angst in the right person is desirable. She feels, as she does with all criticism, that it is her at the end of their judgement. She’s the loser, she’s the one who can’t do anything properly. She’s the one who was never cool enough, but she was also never threatening enough to be noticed.

She wants to turn around and ask them, *How do you know she was trying to die? Maybe she was just trying to make it all stop, make you two disappear.*

Jemima herself doesn’t want to die. She knows this. She values life, recognises its hardships. But sometimes she dreams of more blood, of her life pouring from her veins, thick and red on the bathroom tiles. Sometimes when she’s driving home in her parents’ car she thinks about how easy it would be to press hard on the accelerator and jerk the steering wheel suddenly to one side or the other. And sometimes, when standing on the platform at the train station, she thinks about how easy it would be to take a well timed step off the edge, she’d never even have to land. And sometimes, when she has a headache or period pain, she wonders how many aspirin she would have to take for it to be effective. She wouldn’t want to end up like Sylvia Plath, under the floorboards alive in her own vomit.

She dreams about blackness, blankness, eternal emptiness, nothing.

But she's not suicidal. She would never kill herself. She wants to live. The blade on her skin gives her that brief moment of blankness. *Her little death*, she thinks poetically. Like a sneeze, it means you are all body, or no body, for just a millisecond. A moment to escape. A moment of nothing.

She wonders if this girl wanted to die.

"She said it was barbed wire when I asked," one of the boys scoffs. "Like anyone believes that."

Jemima wants to yell at them, throw things. Why did you ask when you knew the answer? Did you want her to say *I did it myself, I tried to die*? Did you want her to break through the skin of high school life and touch the heart of reality? If she had would you be scoffing now that she *admitted it*?

At the same time she is relieved that she was never subjected to such blatant queries, such relentless cruelty. Relieved that no one pushed at her thickly masked pain. Relieved that she always passed.

The first time she cut herself it was spur of the moment. She was in the bathroom, staring at her horrid reflection. She was angry. So so angry. With herself. She doesn't remember what she was angry about. She doesn't even remember how old she was – fifteen, sixteen? It's been part of her life for so long. She was, is, so often angry with herself. Her stupid annoying idiot self.

She had hit the wall with the heel of her hand, felt bones stop suddenly, brutally. The pain obliterated everything else. She felt real. She saw her shaving razor on the sill of the bathtub. Thought of blood, of accidental cuts in the shower

and wondered how hard it would be to do it, to give herself pain intentionally.

Wet blood. More or less spectacular.

Now she is used to it. She likes the drama of it. It is comforting to her, to know she will always have that. Like a place to return to.

The poor girl, for everyone to know, and for no one to be able to talk about it. The elephant in the school. In each interaction, in each glance, the extra presence of knowledge. The silence laid like a quilt over her screaming body.

Jemima is glad that there is only one person to misunderstand her and her actions. Still, it is one person too many.

That night, as she arrives at the pub, Jemima scans the tables outside looking for familiar faces. She spots Anne and Clement at a table with a group from uni and sits between them, smiling greetings around the table. Quickly she is wrapped in a conversation with Anne, telling her about the lecture she missed earlier in the day. She glances nervously at Clement. She's not sure how to act towards him, what his expectations of her are. There's been nothing to indicate that he thinks of her as more than a one night stand. She's more at ease playing the role of Anne's friend than of Clement's something or other. She'll be cool and collected and friendly and here to hang out with Anne and their uni friends. She's always been the social coward.

She buys a beer and returns to the table, nervous when she sees that both Anne and Clement are in conversation, framing her seat with turned backs, isolated. She sits and takes a sip of her drink, trying to work out ways to include herself.

Anne turns back to her, "I'm going to borrow Jemima's notes. You probably could too?" It is a question, but one to which there is just one answer.

"Of course," Jemima nods at Ben who also missed the lecture this morning. "Why weren't you there?" She asks.

"I couldn't resist the swell, man," Ben laughs, Anne laughs. Jemima laughs, annoyed.

The wind is cold on her legs and she pulls her coat tighter around her, leaning forward to listen to Ben and Anne's conversation. She laughs in the right places and adds the occasional word. She is doing okay tonight, none of them can tell she is a fake. She thinks she can feel Clement watching her, and leans back in her chair to try and see without looking at him. He seems to be talking to Tamsin, who is sitting across the table, her short hair unusually flat and a strange blackish green colour. As she breathes out a lung full of smoke, it hangs for a moment above her head, before being whisked away by the cold wind. Jemima imagines curlicues of smoke spiralling from her lungs, a decorative drawing, maybe in silhouette.

She turns back to Anne and Ben's conversation, but still feels like Clement's attention is resting on her. Maybe he knows that she is a fake. Maybe he can tell. It makes her uncomfortable, this feeling that he is watching her, and everything she does she does with more awareness than usual. She scans herself twice to check for misplaced behaviour. She wears a skin of performance and doesn't like it.

She is certain now that he is watching her and wants him to stop. She feels judgement, accusation, disapproval in his look. She wonders why he stares. She had thought he liked her. Perhaps he is accusing her of being Anne's friend over his. Perhaps she insulted him when she arrived by hugging Anne first. Maybe he feels slighted that she didn't reaffirm a bond that she feels is tenuous. Now she feels guilty, and talking to Tamsin, smiles at him, trying to be reassuring, immediately feeling like an idiot. He probably wants nothing to do with her, he's probably trying to work out why on earth he slept with her.

Clement finds himself watching Jemima out of the corner of his eye as he talks to Tamsin. The red plaid of her jacket pulled close around her shoulder. Her hair frizzing at the edges. She laughs and chats to Anne and Ben, to Tamsin, with the whole group. She lifts her beer and sips it, lips pale pink and shining. She hooks stray hair behind her ear and leans across the table to hear Tamsin better. When she glances at him and smiles, his face breaks into a wide smile in response, he can't help it. He wants to reach across and place a hand on her knee, to squeeze her arm, touch her back, but something about the way she is so neatly contained on her chair prevents him. It is like she knows where every cell of her body is, and they are held tight, away from any possible contact with another person, with anything but surrounding inanimate objects. It is like there is an invisible cage around her. He is not sure if it's stopping her getting out or others getting in.

His stomach is lined with guilt when he thinks about the night they slept together but as he watches her something tugs at his heart and his guilt melts away.

Her hands are elegant and when she talks her voice is lilting with humour, her hands run through the air, giving her quiet words volume and space. He hardly hears what words she says in listening to her voice, watching her eyes dart between the people who speak. More often, she is listening, not talking, nodding, keeping eye contact, attentive. Part of him wants that attention on himself, but he also likes observing her like this. He is just enjoying being near her.

Jemima stares at the shadow of the window on her ceiling. Even though she thinks she passed at the pub this evening, she feels isolated and confused. She can see herself smiling, laughing, talking, surrounded by ‘friends’ at the pub, but it was only her skin, it was empty of blood, bones, heart, guts; it was filled with air, inflated with nothing. She is nothing. She is not *part* of anything.

She feels like one of the people in Magritte’s *The Kiss*, attempting a moment of intimacy with their heads covered in linen. She never quite connects.

Clement’s stare was not just empty staring. She is a fool for thinking there might be something tender or caring in that look, even though she knows that underestimates him as much as it holds the cold satisfaction of self hate. She can still feel his stare penetrating her skin, seeing her emptiness, the push of indifference behind it. Tonight it seemed like Clement wanted nothing to do with her. It’s not like she wants people to pay attention to her all the time but surely if you like someone, if you’ve slept with them, if they mean more than dust, they warrant a smile, a question, something to indicate a connection, past if not future.

Not just a vicious stare. Maybe all she is good for is a fuck and he actually wants nothing more to do with her.

She angrily recreates the evening, exaggerating slights, brushing over moments of connection. She is willing to believe that he ignored her because there was something else going on. But even then, she feels like she should be an ear or a shoulder, that he should care enough to talk to her. Maybe she's expecting too much too soon. It's not as if they didn't swap a word all night, they took part in the same conversations, they spoke a little just between themselves. What does she expect? Declarations of intent? Him to lay his innermost feelings across the tiled table for her to examine? She knows she has double values. She dreads having to share with him, dreads any questions, any steps towards intimacies. She knows this is part of her isolation. Even though she wants to ask him questions about –what? Desires, hopes and dreams, fears, insecurities and scars. She has carefully steered conversations around these things, for fear of having to voice them herself. And now she is home, alone, feeling all her insecurities to be pathetic, despite the acute tension in her chest.

She is certain he doesn't like her. Maybe he does. How could he? Why would he? She is worthless. No good as a friend, not wanted as a lover. Boring, self obsessed, oversensitive. She should just lighten up. Get over herself.

But the hole inside her chest is sucking everything into its darkness and she is surrounded by this heavy black hate and pain. She rolls to her side and hugs her knees to her chest, sobbing. Her eyes screwed up tight, she buries her face into her knees, trying to disappear, to find a place where the darkness doesn't press. She uncurls herself, reaches for her razor and cuts and cuts and cuts.

The darkness turns grey, and again she hugs her knees to her chest, feeling stickiness between her thighs and stomach. Now it is quiet. Now her face is smooth.

twelve

It is raining and Jemima shuts her eyes, trying to stop herself from waking properly, managing to waste half the day in a grey semi-conscious dream. Saturday stretches out in front of her like a desert. She looks forward to weekends but once they arrive, she finds that she has hours on end to spend with herself. Hours on end where everyone else is with friends having fun and she is alone in a quiet house. She could call Anne and see if she wants to hang out but she doesn't want to impose herself on others, she is nervous of rejection, and it is exhausting trying to be liked.

Eventually, she is woken by her phone beeping. A message from Clement, suggesting a movie tonight.

She is used to ignoring the previous night's certainties, to jumping over negative thoughts and feelings to get on with life in the day time hours, recreating version over version of events. She knows how to convince herself she is hated, she knows what evidence to gather but she also knows how to dull this fact in order to make social interaction possible.

She has a shower before responding, the water hot on her skin, the sting on her thigh. She remembers Clement's hand on the skin of her stomach, the closeness, the potential of love, the potential of *something* between them. She decides what she will do today. She will pay for her flight. The rules are different for something with no future. You don't have to be yourself. You can be yourself because the end is approaching anyway. There is freedom where there is no future.

She composes the message carefully to seem friendly, happy and keen, but not too keen.

It is a different girl at the travel agent's this time, and she seems surprised that Jemima hasn't paid a deposit. "Cutting it fine," she says, and Jemima feels small in her disapproval.

Jemima keeps thinking about the night she and Clement slept together. The air in the travel agent's is muggy, the air conditioner confused by the humidity, and Jemima wants to breathe the freshly washed air outside. She pays in full and again surprises the travel agent.

There is a spring in her step as she goes back into the cold bright day. Outside, the light is bright after the fresh rain. If he does want any more to do with her they can break up when she leaves. It can't last more than a month. How close can you get in a month?

When Clement sees Jemima hurrying up to him outside the cinema, he is happy, simply, to see her. The ground is wet from the rain and the light reflecting on the black asphalt makes it look darker, contrasting with the inside of the cinema, shining with lights of entertainment. Her cheeks are flushed against the cold night. She is about to spurt apologies and can feel her nervousness searching for something to say when he wraps her in a warm hug. She settles instantly, surprising herself, finding comfort when she didn't know she needed it.

They go in, a rush of wind pushing against the glass of the cinema door, and buy tickets, tempted by the warm salty smell of popcorn.

He waits for her as she goes to the bathroom. It is dark, as if they've forgotten to turn on the lights, but Jemima knows it is always like this, the vintage movie posters on the wall hiding in the dark, retired from their advertising jobs.

She looks at herself in the mirror, cheeks still pink from running late. She almost feels like she is normal, like this is a normal date, like she could be any one of these people seeing a movie on a Saturday evening. Almost like she fits into this world. This thing with Clement, she feels, is a good thing. It seems he does like her. Might like her. In these moments, looking at her unpleasantly familiar face in the mirror, she is not scared.

Clement stands at the bottom of the stairs, one foot on the first one, examining a poster. She smiles at his curving shoulders.

"Hey," she says, and as he turns he touches her shoulder briefly. They walk up the stairs, the carpet worn in the centre.

They walk down the aisle, and both pause at the same time.

“Here?” he asks, and she nods, allowing herself to be guided into the row by the hand he places on her lower back. They settle into their chairs, leaning back, looking up at the screen, but Jemima can hardly concentrate on the movie. Clement’s arm rests on the arm rest between them. Jemima’s hands are small and contained in her lap and she is aware of the space between her and Clement. His fingers hang over the end of the armrest like mistletoe, centimetres from her knee. His leg splays out towards hers, almost touching it. She could move, naturally, incidentally, and their knees could touch, could rest against each other. She could adjust her position so her shoulder came closer to his seat, her upper arm could touch his elbow but she stays still.

The space between their skin. She is all skin and all space. She feels her body only in relation to his. She feels crowded against the edge of herself that is closer to him. The movie drags in this heavy knowledge of her body and she is glad when it is over. Her muscles relax as she stands, she didn’t realise how stiffly she was holding her body.

She watches their conversation. It seems easy, as they drive to the share house for a drink. Even in the car, she is aware of his knee as she reaches for the gear stick, of his hands playing with the stub of the movie ticket. She knows she should be better, and worries about the quiet patches in their conversation, but he doesn’t seem to mind. She is able to read his behaviour positively. Against all odds, against her whole world view, he actually does seem to like her and he laughs at her jokes as they pull up outside the house and go in.

“Dodger’s home,” Clement says as he opens the door and sees the light shining down from the studio.

“What’s the story with him and Ansell?” asks Jemima, sitting on the couch and nodding as Clement offers her a glass of wine.

“Oh, I don’t know. Have you met Steve?” Clement passes her a glass and sits next to her. “Dodger and Steve used to work together.”

“Work?”

“Paint. They used to do these amazing huge canvases. The detail and the big picture in one. They had a falling out just before their first big show together. I’ve never really known what about. But, boy, can they both hold a grudge! That was soon after I moved in. That paint,” Clement nods towards the splash of red paint and the footprints leading to Anne’s bedroom door. “Steve threw the whole can at Dodger.” They both laugh. “You know, temperamental artist types.”

“And Ansell?”

“I guess he’s jealous of their old relationship, or angry with Dodger so that he’s supporting Steve. I don’t know. Dodger’s not the easiest person to live with. He’s been doing sculpture instead of painting since the Steve stuff and, well, he’s a better painter than sculptor. He’s moody, he thinks his art comes before everything. Cleaning, other people’s stuff...”

“Anne’s always complaining that he moves her stuff around.”

Clement shrugs. “He’s okay. You just have to give him space.” He smiles and places his hand on her knee.

Jemima leans back on the couch, a tingle of electricity runs over her skin.

Jemima knows that night is a place where things are hidden. She lies awake next to Clement in his dark room. He is asleep, his breathing even and deep. She is used to the shine of the street light in her room but here there is only the glow of the clock radio on the blank walls. The stairs on the ceiling climb eerily green, their shadows too vague to have form. She feels like she is underground.

After sex and climbing towards sleep the distance between their bodies grows until, in the last step from consciousness, Clement turns away from her, his body curled into his dreams.

The house is quiet. Darkness like a smothering blanket lies across the city, land, hemisphere.

She lies still, scared any movement might disturb and wake him. She cannot relax. She is not used to sleeping next to someone. Sleep, too, is a place where things hide.

She is starting to feel claustrophobic; on one side of her is a plaster wall, on the other, this body, like a cliff in a canyon, blocking her in.

She thinks of blood. Her fingers itch. This sleeping body next to hers traps her. She feels the press of her bladder, not because it is full, but because she can't escape.

Her parents don't know where she is. They don't mind what she does, so long as they know where she is. She seizes onto this. They are the perfect excuse.

She composes herself, rolls over.

“Clement,” she whispers, lips close to his skin. “Clement.” He rolls, grunts, waking. “I have to go.”

He mumbles a response, questioning, disappointed. He pulls her towards him, hugging, stroking her back.

“Okay,” she thinks she hears, not giving permission but resigned to it.

She likes his smell and the warmth at the centre of his chest. Almost regretting her decision to leave, she climbs over his body, gathering her clothes towards her, knees drawn up, hiding her body from possibly open eyes.

“Mmm.” He sits up, looking around blindly, groping the air for his clothes.

“Stay,” she says, pulling her jumper on.

“No, I’ll walk you out.” His voice caught in sleep.

She turns to him, places her hands on his shoulders. “It’s okay,” she says, pressing him back down. “Stay in bed.”

He closes his eyes. “What time is it?”

“Two thirty,” she says, but doesn’t think he hears.

The living area is quiet and greyed by the night’s light. She heads to the bathroom without turning on the lights and sits in the darkness on the toilet, listening to the quiet of an unfamiliar house. She thinks of the way he kissed her shoulder as he fell asleep and her throat constricts. She wants him, wants to know him, love him, wants to be known and loved. She doesn’t want this distance between her and the world. But this flutter of panic is rising in her chest and her throat is so tight she can barely breathe.

In the bathroom the fluorescent light flickers on and she blinks at herself in the mirror, cheeks red in the cold air. It seems louder in the light and Jemima is glad to hide once again in the darkness as she makes her way to the front door.

She glances back and is startled by some bright eyes watching her. Billy the cat stares at her from where he lies snugly along the back of the couch. Her breath catches and he continues to eye her.

“I’m sorry,” she says in her head, not wanting to break the soft silence and unsure what she’s apologising for.

As Jemima drives home through the empty streets she feels guilty. Clement’s warm open hug, his disappointed grunt, the cat’s accusing stare. Billy hates her. She knows she is ridiculous but thinks the cat is going to rat her out to Clement. *She didn’t leave because of her parents, she left because she is a coward, because she’s not sure how much she is willing to like you, because she doesn’t want to be twisted into intimacy, because she’s scared of the morning, because she couldn’t breath in your room, because she is wrong, broken somewhere that really matters.*

She shrugs, mocking herself, she’s allowed to be the mad one of the relationship: she’s the artist.

thirteen

“Were you at our place last night?” Anne demands as they leave their life drawing class. “I saw your car when I got home.”

Jemima smiles coyly.

“No wonder he was cheerful!” Anne slaps Jemima lightly on her arm.

“Where were you this morning?”

“I had to go home,” explains Jemima. “My folks would have worried.”

Anne flicks her hand away, a gesture half way between understanding and *stuff ‘em*.

“So?” she asks, linking her arm with Jemima’s. “What happened? Tell me everything.”

Jemima laughs, unsure what to say. She is used to Anne’s details and analysis but isn’t used to voicing her own. “We went to a movie,” she says, knowing it’s not enough.

“Mmm?” Anne prods for more.

“It was nice. It was fun.”

Anne grins at her. “You guys are perfect for each other.”

Jemima wants to disagree with her hyperbole without invalidating their relationship altogether.

“We’ll see,” she says, aware she sounds like a prim librarian. “Ooo,” she says, letting the excitement into her voice. “I’ve paid for my ticket. I leave in a month.”

“Oh my God!” Anne stops walking, dropping her arm. “A month!” She sounds almost disappointed. “How long will you be gone for?”

“The whole break.”

“What am I supposed to do for the holidays?” Anne jokes. “I’ll be all alone.”

Jemima laughs and they start walking again.

“Wow, cool.” Anne nods. “I’ll miss you.”

The thought surprises Jemima. She’s always thought herself to be on the periphery of other people’s lives. She didn’t realise she made an impact on this world, never really thought of herself as important enough. She always thought of herself as an imposition, thought of other peoples’ kindness as charity. Now she realises she was selling Anne short. She had just never considered that other people might like her and want her around.

“It’s only three weeks,” she says, awkwardly laying a hand on Anne’s shoulder. “But I’ll miss you too.” She realises that she will too. She had been

thinking of escaping, trying to be someone else somewhere else, she hadn't thought of being away from Anne, away from her parents.

"No you won't," laughs Anne. "You'll be having too much fun. I'll be stuck here. Boring!"

Jemima laughs. "I can't wait," she says, pushing her nervousness deeper inside her.

"Your parents will miss you," says Anne. "I'll have to pop over and be a surrogate daughter occasionally."

"They'll probably be glad to see the back of me," laughs Jemima. "Have an empty nest."

"I love your mum," says Anne. "She's so cool."

Jemima feels her chest constrict. "Mmm." She knows her mum is considered the cool one, lenient, understanding. Anne often stayed at her house when they were younger to avoid telling her own mum about parentless parties, over-age concerts.

"Remember that time in year eleven when we got smashed with her in the kitchen?"

Jemima remembers trying to sneak into her bedroom unnoticed, after arriving home late after a party. Anne saw the light was still on in the kitchen and insisted on saying *hello*. Jemima had shared most of a bottle of vodka with Anne and was uncomfortable with her drunkenness around her parents.

“Girls!” Her mum had poured them each a glass of wine and they had leant on the empty kitchen bench. While Jemima watched their reflections in the shining kettle they had laughed loudly as Anne told stories about the party, their mouths grotesque in the metal curve. Her own glass sat untouched.

Later, lying in bed, she listened to Anne’s voice drift up from the mattress on the floor. “You’re mum is so cool, Jemima. I wish my mum was like yours.” She lay still, not responding, not pretending to be asleep, thinking about Anne’s chaotic warm lived-in house.

The next day her mum giggled to herself while packing the breakfast dishes into the dishwasher. “Funny girl,” she had said, “your friend Anne.”

After that Jemima had started to ask Anne around less often and found excuses for why they had to stay at Anne’s or someone else’s. She pretended her parents had suddenly become strict and she and Anne needed to wrap themselves in layers of complicated lies to live the teenage life, like everyone else. She didn’t want her parents to know any part of her life, any part of her. She became mean in her secrecy.

Now, Jemima laughs lightly. “Yeah,” she says. “That was fun.”

The train’s thumping rhythm carries Clement towards his parents’ house. He watches the dry eucalypts rushing past. It’s easy to forget it’s winter, it looks so dry. When he got home from Barcelona he couldn’t bear to stay in that house. The rooms that were once filled with his and Hannah’s laughter, with Perro’s excited

barks, with the noise of a living family, were then filled with a thick silence. Even offers of tea were whispered as though something would break from the sound waves. Even Perro's wags seemed quiet. Tentative and sad. Clement couldn't stand the heaviness of his childhood home.

Clement had wanted to be loud. He wanted to fill the hours with noise. He didn't want to feel like he was waiting. He wanted to shake Hannah, to break whatever it was inside her that kept her from eating.

He had moved out quickly to Dodger's place. People he knew. He didn't even have to look. He had liked that Dodger was always in a frenzy. It had made him feel calm.

He failed to re-enrol for his last semester. His days were empty and he had to learn how to fill them up. Most days he'd catch the train up to the hospital, walk from the train station under creaking eucalypts, crunching fallen bark underfoot and spend time with Hannah. He'd peer through the door and if his mother was there he'd fade back down the corridor and walk around the nearby golf course. His mother's false cheer augmenting her nagging was too much for him and his father never came during the day. This was when Hannah was going to get better. She was going to get better until she died.

Sometimes they sat in silence or wandered around the grounds, holes in their conversations like the holes in the backs of the gowns of the other patients. There were different rules for everyone. Some weren't even allowed to leave the ward. The rules for Hannah changed over time. Sometimes she was ward bound, sometimes not, depending on her behaviour and health. At the end she couldn't even get out of bed, her body was just too weak. Sometimes he tried to think of

stories about Barcelona. Sometimes he'd try and revive that spirit he saw in her before he left. The girl who rolled her hair into dreads and read about feminism, inspired by her new university life. He had thought she was better when she started to claim her professors were *full of it*. She seemed happy, enjoying the release from high school, the change in her life. He never did find out what happened, if anything *happened*. If there was a reason for stopping eating again.

Most of the time he just tried to make her laugh because her laugh, her real laugh, was the only part of her that hadn't changed. Because when she laughed it was almost like she hadn't given up.

He would waste the rest of his time. Watch old school friends smoke dope. It was like watching people living under water. He no longer understood their symbols; the patterns of their minds were empty for him.

He tried to fill his time with the computer games he used to play stoned as a teenager but, like the friends he played them with, they no longer made sense. He went to the beach and resisted collecting sponge, driftwood, things weathered and twisted, perfect for drawing. Still, pieces found their way home with him on the bus, unwelcome visitors in his room until he stashed them away in the studio. Their presence taunted him, hardened his resolve, his anger towards art.

They weren't pleasant pursuits, always the worry about Hannah shading in the hours. He did things to try not to notice he wasn't at uni, to try not to notice he wasn't drawing. He got used to moving slowly. After a while an afternoon didn't need to be filled, it just passed.

But now hours are lengthening, stretching. Now the paintbrushes are calling, he needs to find a way to use up his time.

Dusk is settling by the time he gets off the train and walks to his parents' in the dark, scuffing his feet on the asphalt, pulling his arms around him against the cold. Seeing Perro always cheers him and he rough and tumbles the wagging bundle of golden fur in greeting.

"Hi Mum," he says as he comes in the back door.

"Hi Love." She kisses him, stretching upwards to reach his cheek.

Clement always wants to be smaller than his mother in these moments. He doesn't want her to have to stretch, he wants her to bend down over him.

"Your father's in the lounge," she says as Clement pulls a stool out from under the bench and sits on it.

"Is he?"

"He is." His mum looks at him, half smiling, half stern.

"What are you making?" Clement picks up an apple peeler that is sitting on the bench. He knows she is disappointed about his relationship with his father.

"Spag bog," she says. "It's almost ready."

"Yum." Clement turns the apple peeler in his hand.

"Will you set the table?"

Clement pulls placemats from the drawer and, as always, is aware of the missing space at the table.

“And tell your dad.”

Clement is about to yell loudly like Hannah used to do from where he is standing laying out the forks and knives, but he doesn't. Instead he walks to the door of the lounge and leans on the doorframe.

“Hi Dad,” he says quietly. “Dinner's ready.”

His dad looks up, takes off his glasses and lifts himself stiffly from the chair.

They sit around the table, steaming bowls in front of them.

“Thanks Mum,” Clement smiles at her. “Smells great.”

“Looks good, Maureen,” his father agrees.

Clement lifts a forkful to his mouth. Perro snores from his bed by the back door and the tumbling noise blends with the sound of cutlery against bowl, glass against table.

“What did you do today, Clement?” his father asks.

“I worked on one of the paint-by-numbers canvases. I'm not going to take another contract after I've finished this one.”

“Oh?” his mum asks.

“I'm sick of it.” Clement shakes his head, unwilling to explain how selecting colours, outlining shapes, has become too dangerous. That he might unravel if he is near the paintings.

“Sick of it. Bored with it.” His dad takes a mouthful of wine. “That’s your problem Clement. No sticking power. You have to put effort into things. You have to stick with them. Quitting your course for no reason. What is there in your life?”

“You never wanted me to do that course anyway,” Clement retorts, sidestepping his own awareness of the emptiness of his life. “You said it was a waste of time.”

“I knew you’d never finish it.”

The patterns are old and the tracks well worn. They hardly even put any energy into their arguments anymore. Clement is silent.

“You never try at anything, Clement.” His father sounds exasperated, but he is just following the path. “You need to find an occupation.” He chews his spaghetti. “There’s a job at the bank.” He is always suggesting jobs. He hardly pays attention to their appropriateness anymore.

Clement is quiet and then asks, “What kind of job?” He veers off the track. Both his parents look up at him, surprised.

“A teller.”

“Do you need experience?”

His father is taken aback. “They know me there. They’d give you an interview.”

Clement tries to picture himself as a bank teller. There has been nothing in his world that allows him to think it is possible.

“Okay,” he says. “I’ll send in my CV tomorrow.”

After dinner he helps his mum clear the table and stacks the dishwasher while she makes a cup of tea.

“A bank teller, Clement?” she asks. “What about your art?”

“I’m not doing that anymore, Mum,” he says. “I told you. Dad’s right. It’s a waste of time. It’s not worth anything.”

“And balancing people’s accounts is?”

He drops the spoons into the cutlery basket. Inserts the plates one by one.

“I’m seeing a girl,” he says.

“Really?” His mum lights up. He chose the right topic to divert her with, she won’t return to bank tellers. “How did you meet her?”

“She’s a friend of Anne’s. My housemate.”

“Oh yes. Anne’s a lovely girl.”

“They went to school together. She’s doing art at uni too.”

“Oh, Clement, that’s fantastic,” she says, but looks sad as she pours boiled water into the mugs. “So, when do we get to meet her?”

“Mum.” Clement can hear the edge of a teenage whine in his voice.

“We’ve only just got together. You can’t meet her yet.” As he says it he realises that he sees this thing between them extending out into the future, many more *yets* to come.

His mum laughs but Clement can't help feeling that everything he does is a reminder to his mum of things that Hannah won't do. Jemima is the equivalent of a boyfriend Hannah won't have, the life she won't lead.

When he gets home he falls onto his bed. He should have said something when he first knew Hannah wasn't eating. But that certainty, was it really there? Or is he only certain in retrospect. He could have prevented it. Healed her. Even as he thinks this he knows its falsity but still he believes. He wants it to be different. He wants to have saved her.

As he listens to Dodger stomping around upstairs, his body shakes. He feels broken, helpless and hopeless. He wants to have done something to make it all better.

His mother's face as he left. The face of a damaged woman. That look every time he leaves. He will always be the one left. The one who has to live, has to love, has to be loved, for both of them. Hannah didn't have to die.

There was something in that look. It is not blame. It is not the idea that the wrong child died. It is the inescapable awareness that now there is only one. As though his mother can't look at him without seeing her dead daughter. As though each month he ages is deeper evidence of a month Hannah has missed. Each word that leaves his mouth a reminder that there will be no life agonies for her daughter. That what it was is over. It will never be again.

He is not crying. He will not cry. Not for his mother, nor for himself.

He has been altered. Things that he couldn't control happened and the world shifted. Now he is different from before.

He wants the ability to stop things. He squeezes his fists tightly. He will never paint again. That, at least, he can control even though he cannot bring back Hannah. He cannot save Jemima.

fourteen

“I’m nervous,” Anne whispers to Jemima as they sit on the wheeled stools in the back room of the tattoo parlour. Jemima is nervous too, even though it is not her getting the tattoo.

Dave, the artist, is calm and gentle, his facial hair the same length as his shaved head. He talks quietly to Anne, confirming what she had asked for and marking it on her skin. He sets up the things he needs on the dentist’s bench in front of him – black ink in a little plastic pot, needles attached to mechanical contraptions, absorbent paper, Vaseline, latex gloves pulled with a snap over his hands. Jemima watches as he spreads Vaseline over the back of Anne’s hip and leans forward, his vibrating needle making the first mark on her skin.

“Ow!” Anne yells, and Dave stops, leaning back in his chair, quiet, waiting. “Keep going,” Anne says loudly, voice tight.

Dave leans forward again and starts his needle whirring. Anne breathes purposefully through her lips and tightens her grip on Jemima’s hand.

As Jemima watches the needle on Anne's skin, Dave wiping with absorbent paper, smearing ink, she remembers the self injury forum where blackheart said that when someone at her school got hurt she would always lean forward, hoping to catch a glimpse of the blood. That blood, even other people's, gave her a rush. She saw beauty in the shine of the red. But Jemima doesn't like seeing the reddening of Anne's skin under and around the ink. She can see the skin's pain, its irritation. She doesn't like seeing Anne in pain. She doesn't mind, however, Anne squeezing her hand, her ring pressing against her other fingers. The crush of bones and flesh.

She looks at the murals painted on two of the walls. A cosmos swirling away from her, a woman with a gun like a phallus. The press of her hand makes her feel real and she smiles at Anne, comforting.

A couple of girls, giggling, come out the back with the younger man from the front and they settle themselves onto chairs.

"Stop!" Anne calls and Dave stops.

"Want a drink?" he asks her and she nods.

"Tom," he lifts his head to the young man. "Can you get a glass of water?"

Jemima watches Tom get a plastic throw away cup from the sink, where it was sitting on top of some soap, and wonders how many other people have used it. The chemical smell is starting to scratch at her throat.

"Okay," says Anne, voice still strained.

"Sure?" asks Dave.

Anne nods, eyes closed.

Behind them one of the girls screams. Jemima jumps and looks over her shoulder. The girl is looking, horrified, at her belly where Tom is inserting a stud.

The other girl leans forward, looking at the redness, the little bit of blood.

“Fuck, Man,” she says. “That’s so cool.”

The pierced girl smiles, despite the whiteness of her face, and then says, matter of fact, “I think I’m going to throw up.”

Jemima quickly turns back to Anne, watches the needle drilling ants onto her skin.

Anne unlocks the door and Jemima follows her inside. She is disappointed to see the living room empty, she was looking forward to seeing Clement and doesn’t know how to tread the ground around dating her best friend’s housemate. Is she allowed to just go into his room? Is she allowed to hang out with the one who didn’t invite her? When does it become imposing? When does it become neglectful?

Anne tosses her bag into her bedroom and knocks on Ansell’s door.

“Hey Ansell,” she calls, knocking on Clement’s too. “Clem? Come and look at my tat!”

There is a loud thump upstairs and Anne lifts her middle finger up forcefully at the ceiling as Clement comes out of his room.

“I can yell all I want,” she says, quieter. “It’s my house too.”

“Hi,” Clement lays an arm over Jemima’s shoulder and pulls her into a half hug. “Let’s see it then.”

Anne pulls down the back of her jeans, and pulls off the bandage, revealing the small trail of ants.

“Did it hurt?”

“Oh, it wasn’t too bad,” says Anne, walking over to the fridge.

“You were screaming like a banshee!” says Jemima. ““Make them stop!””
Jemima holds her hands up in front of her as though to ward off attackers.

Anne laughs. “I wasn’t that bad.”

Jemima looks at her.

“Okay, it caned. I’m never going to give birth naturally.”

“Okay, let’s see it.” Ansell strides into the kitchen from the bathroom and peers at Anne’s tattoo. “Very cute,” he says as though approving fruit for sale, and then slaps her on the bum. “Where are you going to get your next one?” He asks, joking.

“On my ankle,” Anne says decisively.

They all look at her, surprised.

“A dragon, I think, wrapping up my calf and chasing a maiden up my arse crack.”

They all laugh and she passes them each a bottle of beer from the fridge.

“No, I’ll wait for a while,” Anne laughs.

Jemima can’t tell how serious she is, if she really has already started thinking about her next tattoo.

After Anne has washed the tattoo they all sit on the couches and listen to Ansell entertaining them with stories about Steve. They are all laughing when Jemima looks up and sees Dodger coming down the stairs. For a second she doesn’t recognise him, he looks almost meek, but as the others see him and stop laughing he expands, filling his usual space in the room. He grabs a beer from the fridge.

“Hey Dodge,” Clement says in greeting and Dodger nods back. He walks back towards the stairs.

“Do you want to see my tat?” Anne asks, tentatively.

Dodger comes over to the couch and peers over the back of the couch as Anne leans forward, pulling the back of her jeans down.

He grunts. “Cute,” he says, the word sounding strange in his rough voice. He lifts his beer bottle to them all and climbs back up the stairs.

Jemima feels a strange fondness for that man she hardly knows and returns her attention to the group as Ansell starts to question her closely on her travel plans.

They laugh as she admits to having very few and Jemima realises with surprise that she isn't uncomfortable. Having these people's attention focused on her doesn't make her want to run and hide under the stairs. Being honest about her lack of plans and nervousness doesn't change their view of her, doesn't make them see how broken she is. She is being herself and the sky is not falling.

After everyone else has gone to bed, Jemima and Clement go into his room and lie together on their backs on his bed, enjoying the closeness of their bodies. She smiles to herself and breathes in the smell of his room. She had fun tonight.

Clement rolls over, arm wrapping her in warmth. "Do you have to go home tonight?" he asks, voice ready for disappointment.

She looks at him, his blue eyes gentle. "No," she says, taking a leap. "I can stay if you want."

At this moment it is so nice. Warm, companionable, loving.

"Good." He smiles. "I'm glad." He squeezes her, nuzzles closer.

Later, as Clement falls asleep next to her, she looks at the stairs climbing up the ceiling, glad that things are okay today. She still can't tell what Clement thinks about her cutting.

It started with the purposeful deadening of the preservation instinct. Rather than stopping herself from falling, the quick withdrawal from heat, the shying of a slipping knife away from flesh, she started to let herself fall, slow down the withdrawal, watch as knife entered flesh. And then scratching, with sticks bored at lunch time, with fingernails on bug bites. She discovered you could draw blood

from scratching. In the shower while shaving her legs, an accident. She watched the blood, watery, diluted, wash off her skin. And then for the first time she did it on purpose, rather than just not preventing it from happening. She had started to experiment, trying different pressures, angles, movements. It was surprisingly difficult to draw blood. The angle particular, the preservation instinct strong. She had thought of her Stanley blade, she was doing silk printing in art class. The first time she drew that blade across her leg she almost didn't want to. But afterwards she'd felt a release, she had felt like she was in control.

In the morning, Jemima dresses fully before she heads to the shower. She does not want the other housemates to see her in the t-shirt she slept in. As the hot water runs over her body she worries that perhaps she was too much herself last night, that there will be repercussions. She is quick and is careful to be fully dressed when she leaves the bathroom.

"Morning Jemima." Ansell does a little knowing bow as she leaves the bathroom.

"Oh, sorry," she says, stumbling a little over her words. "I didn't realise you were waiting."

"Only just got here, Puddle Girl." He closes the door behind him.

He is grumpy, she thinks. She knows it is more likely that he is just not a morning person, or not yet awake, but she feels small, like he is grumpy with her. She is aware that these people have not chosen to have her in their house, to spend this time with her. Clement chose her last night but everything can change through sleep and darkness. Even he might not want her here now.

Anne is eating breakfast as Jemima walks back through to Clement's bedroom.

"Morning," they both say.

Jemima has spent hundreds of mornings with Anne. Hung over after parties, bored after video nights, surrounded by Anne's family or quiet at Jemima's house. Jemima doesn't know why now, all of a sudden, she feels awkward about this morning.

"You going to the tute?" asks Anne, and Jemima nods. "Me too. Can you help me take my pots?"

"Sure," Jemima nods as she reaches Clement's door. He is still in bed and reaches out to her. As she sits on the side of the mattress they kiss and he pulls her back on top of him.

"I have to go to uni," she laughs, untangling herself.

He grumbles in good humour and gets up himself, pulling on a pair of trackies. In the kitchen Jemima is acutely aware of Clement's dishevelment. She is embarrassed. This morning seems like a public admittance of their relationship, like the fact they had sex last night is blatantly written across Clement's tangled hair, her presence in their house.

She wants to ask Anne if she can borrow a top so she doesn't have to wear the same clothes to uni two days in a row, but feels like that would be another admission, another exposure of her and Clement.

“Morning,” Clement greets Anne, who looks up and nods. She is reading a magazine absent mindedly, flicking the pages between lifting her spoon to her mouth.

They eat breakfast quietly and Jemima wishes she was more entertaining. Anne looks up at the purple alarm clock sitting on top of the fridge.

“Oh,” she says. “We should go.”

Jemima takes their plates to the sink, unsure of what to do next and is relieved when Anne says, “We just need to grab my pots,” and heads up the stairs.

“Jeez, Dodger,” Anne grumbles, annoyed, as they enter the studio and see boxes and bags full of bottle lids, shoes laces, and small bits and pieces piled up in front of the shelves in the corner of the studio. “He leaves it here,” she bitches, shoving it out of the way, “and then gets angry when someone moves it.”

Jemima helps as Anne reaches into the bottom shelf and pulls out a box.

“That’s not it,” Anne mumbles to herself.

Jemima looks down at the picture on top. It’s a laughing girl in brown and white charcoal on cream paper. The girl’s hair falls forward over one eye and she lifts her chin, laughing with the world.

She reaches down and picks it up, enchanted.

“That’s Clement’s,” says Anne and Jemima’s stomach drops. Clement did this? He can draw? Not only draw but create something as beautiful as this?

Jemima doesn’t pay any attention to Anne as she reaches back onto the shelf.

“Oh, where is it?”

She is absorbed by the drawing in her hands. Clement. Clement did this. It's beautiful. The girl's eyes are bright and reach out of the paper to hold Jemima's gaze.

“Someone's moved them,” Anne looks around the studio.

Jemima doesn't understand. He said he wasn't an artist, that he couldn't draw or paint or anything.

“There they are.” Anne spots her pots on the other side of the room and sighs.

She holds her hand out for Clement's drawing so she can put the box away again. Jemima doesn't want to give it up. She doesn't want to stop looking at it.

Reluctantly she puts it back on top of the box and Anne returns it to the shelf, shoving it right to the back. Jemima watches the picture disappear.

“He's good, isn't he?” says Anne, replacing the shoelaces. “I don't know why he doesn't do it anymore.”

Anne knew. How did she – his girlfriend – not know he can draw such amazing things?

Anne stands and walks over to her pots.

Jemima watches her and notices some canvases slid between the shelves and a cupboard. Red and grey in glimpses.

“He did those too?” Jemima’s voice sounds hollow to her. Does she know him at all?

“No, that’s some of Dodger’s old stuff,” Anne says dismissively, handing Jemima a small box of pots.

“I thought he was into more sculpture-ish stuff?”

Anne shrugs. “I think he used to paint with Steve. I’m not really sure.” She lifts the other box up onto her hip. “Let’s go?”

“Let’s go,” agrees Jemima, still thinking about Clement’s drawing. He’s so much better than she’ll ever be.

fifteen

“What do you want to do?” Clement asks.

“There’s an exhibition I really want to see,” Jemima says. “It’s a young guy, Wayne Arthur, have you heard of him?”

As soon as she says the words Clement’s insides clam up, a thickness in his throat. Clement shakes his head, searching for excuses not to go, ways to distract them both.

“He uses light,” Jemima continues. She thinks again about the picture of the girl she saw in the studio the other day. It feels like clandestine knowledge. She wants to tease him out about it, ask who it is, why he stopped if he can produce something so beautiful. But it is something that belongs to him and to admit knowing before he tells her would be like thievery. A stolen image. The picture has lodged itself between her eyes and her tongue, now when she looks at him he looks different. “Prisms to refract light, shadows, filters. He’s made rooms or something where the viewer becomes part of the work. You know, because the light shines on our bodies and our shadows are cast. It sounds quite cool.”

“Oh, yeah.” He knows he sounds uninterested.

“I mean, we don’t have to go,” she says, regretting suggesting it. “I can go another time.”

He doesn’t want to create that nervousness in her but doesn’t think he’s got the strength to withstand the ideas and creativity of an exhibition. He has started to dream about paint. Like a teenage boy with uncontrollable wet dreams.

“It’s just such a beautiful day,” he says, reaching. “We could have a picnic?”

Jemima smiles and nods. “That sounds like fun.” She wants to go to the exhibition, but isn’t willing to pit her own desires against his. She doesn’t believe in herself enough to be sure of her desires, she is scared he would choose his wants over her.

After going to the shops to buy bread and dips, they settle themselves on a broad grassy hill in the botanic gardens. It is a crisp day, the contrast between the sharpness of sun and the deep cold in the dark shade drives them onto the damp grass.

Clement lies back and looks up at the expansive blue sky. Hearing familiar voices, he props himself up on his elbows to see some old school friends of his crossing the bridge next to some bamboo. He lifts his hand to wave, indifferent, but they come over to talk to him.

“Hey man,” they all smile at him.

“Hey.” Hands make contact with hands. Smiles are shared. “This is my girlfriend, Jemima.”

Jemima’s heart skips. *Girlfriend.*

“Heard from Paddy?”

Clement nods. “Still in Melbourne. Been meaning to go over and visit, actually.”

“Zen master Paddy.”

Clement watches them all laugh. Unlike them, he understands why Paddy sought sanctuary in the Ashram, sought a way to calm his drug scattered brain. Paddy was scared by how irrational he became. He scared Clement and Hannah too.

“Old friends?” Jemima asks, breaking off some bread as they wander away.

“Used to be really close.”

“Not any more?”

“When I stopped smoking dope,” he says. “I dunno, I guess we drifted.”

“Why did you stop?”

“I dunno.” He remembers the deal he made with Hannah; he would stop smoking if Hannah went to uni. Both things they didn’t want to do, but knew they should. She had said, *Art is your breath. Marijuana is a pillow.*

“I didn’t like it anymore I guess,” he says.

Maybe he should start smoking again. But he remembers that deadened feeling. It used to be the one he wanted. Flattened. A cushion between him and the world.

Because of what it's done to Paddy. Hannah's other argument. *You can still escape unscathed.* He doesn't feel as if he escaped unscathed. His mind works five beats too slow. His thoughts don't quite reach to where they used to. It is the way he has come to be.

"My friend Paddy," he tells Jemima, "smoked too much. Got pretty paranoid. It scared me I guess. Did you smoke?" he asks.

Jemima nods. "Grew out of it I guess." She shrugs.

Jemima lies in bed and thinks about Clement and his friend Paddy. She feels like she's seen a different side of Clement. A darker side. He's an artist. He too has felt things, been through things. Had pain, been scarred. She has never had to *go through* anything. Aside from the false scars she gives herself, her life is smooth and sunlit. She will never have an *artist's life*. There are no ears chopped off, love scorned, sanity questioned.

Bored, she gets up and turns on her computer. Logging onto the self injury website makes her feel less alone, knowing there are other people out there like her, people who would potentially understand her. She reads page after page of other people's posts, getting lost in their stories, noting the points at which she differs from them, the points at which her heart leaps with identification.

Should I cut deeper? she wonders idly, reading about people having to get stitches, and learning first aid to keep their cutting safe. *No, it's enough*, she knows. The sharp edge of pain, the blood beading on her skin. That is deep enough.

What if he only likes me because I am damaged? She types and then deletes.

Sometimes I want to stop, she types, and then deletes.

She never presses *post*. She is scared to open up even to these strangers who will never know her, scared to release her secrets into the wide world of the net, scared that she is too much of an outsider, even amongst these outsiders. Scared someone will recognise her, scared someone won't.

She passes. In everyday life no one can tell. Anne, her parents, Tamsin, Ansell, none of them have any idea. Clement is the only one who knows and they are bound together by the denial of this secret.

She returns to the same question again and again. *How could he possibly like me?* And the same answer. *It is not possible. He must think I am someone I am not.*

sixteen

Clement hugs Jemima closer, enjoying just lying together.

“Did you have a favourite game as a child?” she asks, out of the blue.

Drawing, always drawing. Him and Hannah lying on the kitchen floor. Butcher’s paper. Crayons, pencils, paint. The time they made masks of each other’s faces. Plaster white, rivulets of water running down their necks. Of course Hannah’s had been pretty, a mermaid, scales on her cheek, seaweed for hair. His own a monster, scales on his cheek, seaweed for hair.

“My...” *sister* he is going to say but the word won’t form on his tongue. It is like a block that won’t move from inside his mouth. “...mother,” he swerves, “bought some plaster once and we made masks. I loved that.”

He knows he should tell her. He feels this secret between them like a thick blanket, separating skin from skin.

“You?”

“I used to make up worlds,” she says. “You know what it’s like, being an only child.” He doesn’t correct her. “I had to entertain myself.”

It is wedged between his heart and his lungs, dark, sticky and deep. It would be difficult to extricate, even if he wanted to, even if he felt able. He doesn’t know why he cannot talk about Hannah. He used to; maybe Jemima is the only one who doesn’t know.

“They were always based on fairytales, though. You know, I was a princess being rescued or whatever.”

He assumes he is the only one who knows her secret. Maybe it is something to do with balance. The tree house with Hannah. A strange blend of pirates at a tea party. Although more often they were his stories they played out, him being bigger and older and wiser and cleverer.

“It’s strange how we’re sad for childhood,” says Jemima. “Even though I was bored most of the time it has attained a golden sheen, as though that is the only time someone can be purely happy. As a child. With no worries. Without a sense of the world as a real place.”

It hurts. This thing inside him. For him the ache for childhood is also the ache for Hannah. Neither will ever return. He turns into Jemima, smelling the skin of her neck, running his lips over her shoulder. He wants to give her his pain. He wants to take hers from her. There is no capacity for either.

He wants to climb inside her, hide in her warmth. As he kisses her with more urgency, he feels the ache of desire spread through his skin, but it is more

than just this he wants, more than the brush of skin on skin, more than the taste of her flesh.

Afterwards, Jemima lies in Clement's arms and feels his relaxed body curl against her. She can feel him falling asleep, little muscles in his body conversing with twitches. Her open eyes fill with liquid and she stares at the flat blank wall not far from her face. She is crying. The pillow is getting wet. Their bodies are close and it should be safe and comfortable but she is crying.

She feels so false. If you care about someone you should be true. Relationships are about opening hearts. She feels used. Like she's just a hole into which to shove things. This is not fair to him, and she hates herself twice over for feeling this way; she could have said something. *No, not now, later.* But forever the path of least resistance.

He stirs behind her, ambling between sleep and wakefulness. She cannot let him see that she is crying. She wouldn't know how to explain and couldn't bear trying and it would just hurt him. He would be wounded by her wound and she would never be able to heal them.

She knows he must never know but at the same time she wants him to discover it, to touch her face and feel the wetness of the tears. To hold her to his chest. To make everything alright.

Jemima is slowly feeling more comfortable at breakfast time in the share house. She still feels like an intruder, as though she needs Anne or Clement as her licence to be there, but Clement laughed at her last time, when he got back from the shower to find her holed away in his bedroom, as though waiting for permission to leave. Wanting permission to exist. So today she sits on the couch flicking through an aviation magazine, still not brave enough to make some toast and quiet her hungry stomach.

She hears movement behind her and turns to see Dodger putting his Italian espresso maker on the stove.

“Morning,” she says.

He nods to her and comes over, leaving his coffee on the stove and sitting on the arm of the armchair, looking at nothing in particular.

“The Aviat Husky,” she says, showing him a picture of a small yellow plane landing on snow.

“The best one,” he says, holding his hand out for the magazine, “Is this one.” He flicks through until he finds the page he’s after and passes the magazine back.

It’s an old fashioned plane and looks like a kombi with wings, floating next to a pier.

“Cool,” she agrees. “It looks heavy, doesn’t it?”

Anne, humming, bursts out of her room and stops abruptly, mid note. She looks at them both. “Morning,” she says, reanimated.

The coffee starts to burble on the stove and Dodger stands to attend to it.

“Morning,” Jemima smiles at Anne who gives her a sympathetic look and rolls her eyes as if Dodger is someone to put up with.

Jemima turns on the couch, sitting sideways so she can see the kitchen. Dodger pours his coffee while Anne reaches for the plunger, opening the cupboard doors violently and shaking the cutlery in the drawers. She goes to the fridge and pointedly gets out a different jar of coffee despite Dodger’s jar sitting next to the kettle. Dodger puts his coffee maker on the sink and Anne glares at it as he leaves.

“Dickhead,” she murmurs when he reaches the top of the stairs, loud enough for Jemima to hear. Jemima sees the falter in his step.

“He yelled at me last week for using his coffee. It wasn’t even me! The rest of us are happy to share coffee. And he won’t let us use his precious espresso thing, even though it’s so much nicer than plunger coffee.” She puts both Dodger’s and the other coffee into the fridge. “It’s not like he’ll want to use it again in the next ten minutes.”

Jemima shrugs.

“And he leaves his crap everywhere.” Anne tosses a teaspoon into the sink where it lands with a loud clang. “Dickhead.”

“You’re in a bad mood,” says Jemima.

Anne looks at her.

“I know!” Anne laughs at herself as she pours boiled water into the plunger. “It’s alright for you,” she says. “You’re so balanced. Nothing upsets you. You’ve got everything sorted.”

Jemima thinks of the uncontrolled tears last night. Crying for no reason. Crying next to the other half of a *blossoming relationship*. Crying in secret.

“I get upset,” she says, as though trying to prove she’s human. She will not use last night as proof. It shows her as unhinged.

“But not like me,” Anne counters. “I’m a fucking mess.” She laughs. “I can’t even talk to Ben anymore. Every time I see him I feel like crying.”

Jemima walks over to the kitchen and leans against the bench as Anne gets out mugs.

“You’re just so,” Anne pauses, “calm.” She offers Jemima a mug. “You can cope with anything.”

Jemima laughs. How can her best friend’s gaze glance so surely off her surface? Is she completely hidden by her reflection?

Clement comes through from the bathroom, landing a wet kiss on her cheek as he goes into his bedroom.

“Him too,” says Anne. “Solid as a rock. You guys are perfect for each other.”

Clement, Jemima thinks, *solid as a rock*. Maybe she doesn’t want to live a drama-less life. She has to talk to him soon, break up before she goes. *He won’t mind. I’ll be doing him a favour.*

That night, she lies in Clement's arms, and reminds herself not to start a conversation because he probably wants to go to sleep. His fingers circle her shoulder.

"Why do you do it?" His voice is hesitant, wary.

"Mmm?" she asks, not sure what he's talking about.

"Cut yourself. Why?"

Her insides freeze. She wonders if she could pretend to be asleep. His fingers stop, hovering, waiting. Her mind runs through possible answers. Truth and lies in layers, fading into one another. *Because it means I don't have to cry. It's not a big deal. Sometimes it's all too much. It removes the numbness. I don't, anymore. I don't know. I'm sorry, but I don't want to talk about it. I like blood. Because there's no other way. It helps me cope. I deserve it. It reminds me I'm alive. Because I'm not perfect. It's nothing.*

There are so many true answers and so many possible lies and not a single way to answer that question.

The silence has been long.

"I'm sorry," he says. "I don't mean to pry." He pauses. "I just... I wish you wouldn't do it."

She remains silent. Shut down.

"Are you okay?" he asks, now concerned at the damage he might have caused.

There's a dark stretch of water inside her that he cannot, will not, must not see. It is something that not even she wades into because she knows that even at the edges the mud is dark and sticky and sucks you in. The person you are with is meant to see this water, but hers is too stinky messy revolting to go near. And it's an illusion, this water. Really there is nothing there. She is empty. She is full. She is in pain. She is being self indulgent.

She props herself up onto her elbows and looks into his worried blue eyes. Leaning forward she kisses him on the mouth. It is the first time that she has done the kissing. Ever. With anyone. She pulls away and again looks into his eyes.

Unable to explain away his look of confusion, not even sure herself what she was trying to say with that kiss, she rolls away and pulls him behind her, their bodies echoing each other's like quotation marks, and closes her eyes.

It is something that is fundamentally wrong with her – something unreachable and unknowable. She is broken.

seventeen

On the way home from uni Jemima stops by the share house. She plonks herself down next to Clement on his bed and laughs at his silly jokes. She can feel her heart growing as they flirt but at the same time she is careful of where her boundaries are; she cannot be completely real, she must be careful.

Clement leans forward and kisses her. She smiles and kisses him back. They grin at each other and Clement runs a hand up her thigh, lifting her skirt as he does so.

There they are: three old scratches. Red brown scabs on white skin.

Jemima quickly pushes down her skirt and, wrapping a hand around his neck, tries to draw him back into the kiss, tries to make him ignore it. He kisses her back but now his body is turned away. His heart does not face her. She must find a more hidden spot, somewhere he won't ever see.

He hates me. She knows this finality. He finds me disgusting.

“Jemima.” His voice sounds tight, like he's making an effort to control it.

She waits. She dreads.

“Did you know,” she says, suddenly realising the tactics of warfare. Evasion is just as valid as combat and less likely to incur collateral damage. “They say avocado is an aphrodisiac.”

“Avocado?”

“I read it. That doesn’t mean it’s true but...”

He stands up.

“Can’t you,” he stops, as though wondering how to finish the sentence. “Can’t you just stop?”

Jemima sits quietly for a moment and then shuffles forward to the edge of the bed. She feels betrayed. She had thought he understood in some way. She had thought... something.

She consciously sets her face, aware of his eyes on her. She stands and grabs her bag.

“Jemima.” He sounds apologetic and she pauses. The air is empty. She can hear Ansell whistling on the other side of the door and opens it.

“I’ll see you later,” she says to Clement.

“You had better see me later, Jemima Puddle Girl,” Ansell says, hearing her.

She smiles at him, completely composed.

“Or you’ll never see me again,” she completes Ansell’s threat, and he laughs, blowing kisses behind him as he climbs the stairs to the studio.

At the front door Clement comes up behind her and grabs her arm. She can feel his fingers in her muscles.

“Jemima,” he says again.

She beams at him, her smile bright and strong. “See you, Clem,” she says, using Anne’s nickname for him, and pulls her arm from his grip, closing the door firmly between them.

Clement is uncomfortable in his father’s suit and sits, waiting for his interview at the bank, fingering his paltry résumé. He simmers as he thinks about Jemima this morning, the gluggy air in the bank heavy on his shoulders. When he saw the cuts he had felt like they were his own wounds, like she had been cutting him. He hasn’t been angry like this for years, not since Paddy broke up with Hannah.

Clement had gone to see him after spending all night awake listening to Hannah cry in the next room.

“I just can’t do it anymore,” Paddy had said. “Sometimes I find her disgusting.”

Clement had punched him for admitting what he refused to admit himself, for highlighting those too thin arms and heightened cheekbones. He had punched

him for being as useless as him, for not being able to change anything. He had punched Paddy and Paddy had done nothing.

“Clement?” A man calls his name and indicates the open door to his office. “I’m Charles.”

“Charles,” Clement repeats, offering his hand. He looks at the smile on this man’s face, the wrinkles around his eyes, the stains on his teeth. *Pastel*, he thinks. *Or oils for the texture*, and bile rises in his throat.

“I’m sorry,” he mumbles and flees the bank, running past the credit card pamphlets, through the automatic doors, into the car park where he dry retches next to a dark blue car. Trying to breathe.

It’s her fault. She killed herself. She could have just eaten something. She could have just eaten. It’s not his fault for not saving her, not Paddy’s for dumping her, not their parents’ and their expectations. It’s her fault. She died and left him all alone. She is the one who deserted him.

He retches again, bile mixing with tears, his hand on the hot metal of the car. The heat on his fingertips brings him back and he wipes his mouth with his father’s handkerchief.

Back home he falls into bed, his father’s suit scratching his neck, his knees pulled up to his chest and sobs. It’s Jemima’s responsibility. Her cutting. There’s nothing he can do.

When he wakes up he calls her and apologises, tries to explain himself to her, but she interrupts with a shockingly cheerful voice.

“No worries,” she says as though he’s apologising for being late, and changes the subject to a movie she wants to see. She will not talk about it. She slips from it. The like pole of a magnet.

Jemima hangs up the phone, annoyed that he now knows she can be blatantly cheerful when in fact she is angry, upset, something else. She doesn’t think it is worth it. All this for such a short relationship. It’s not worth the risk of him knowing her just for a few weeks of hanging out. She also knows that she will continue to take the path of least resistance. If he wants nothing more to do with her then she will fade from his life. If he still wants her, and it seems like he does, then fine. She is not one to rock the boat.

She stuffs her essay on Picasso into her desk drawer. Bek must feel sorry for her, she gave her a distinction even though it’s so obviously crap. It’ll be good to go to the Picasso Museum in Barcelona, especially now she knows a bit more about him. A thrill of nervous excitement runs through her. She’ll be able to be anyone she wants. She could be glamorous or mousy, an actor or an accountant. Like Clement, she could renounce her art, claim she is nothing more than a checkout chick. It still bothers her that he doesn’t admit to the fact he is an artist. She could tell by the charcoal face and his approach to the world, the things he says, his being makes him an artist. Unlike her. It is like seeing his talent, shunned or ignored, has illegitimised her. She’s no artist. In a year or two she’ll just be someone who used to draw, and not very well at that. The major assignment next semester is a self portrait. Like Clement she could construct herself anyway she likes. It is like he expects her to reveal herself, but won’t even admit he used to paint.

She logs onto a self injury forum. Here too she could create herself anew. She could say anything she liked and they wouldn't know. She could even tell the truth.

My best friend saw the scars the other day, she reads. Sometimes I wish she knew so I wouldn't have to lie.

I know what you mean, says crimsonpain. But they'd all think I was a freak. In art class the other day we got out the razors and they were all joking about it. One dickhead said, you know emos, always wanting attention. They have no idea. I'd hate it if anyone knew.

They are all creating fictions of who they are. Like her, like Clement, they are living a lie. Is there ever any truth in the way we represent ourselves? Even the words on the screen have been chosen, like they are a written self portrait. Can we be honest about how we see ourselves? She wonders. Are we deluded, our self image clouded by our desires and our fears, like an anorexic girl looking in the mirror? Can we ever be honest about who we think we are?

How can she hand in a self portrait that combines both how others see her and how she sees herself? How can others recognise their version of her in hers?

Does her new knowledge of Clement change who he is? Has the truth of him really been hidden from her view? And what does it matter? What is so wrong with fiction? If it's okay for Clement to pretend to be someone he's not, then she's allowed to pretend too. If there is no real difference between truth and fiction then she can live a lie.

eighteen

“I leave soon,” she says.

“Yeah. A week,” he says.

She is sad that it is over. She likes this boy. Enjoys being with him. “A month’s a long time.”

“Not so long.”

“But we’ve only just got together. Who knows if we’ll still feel the same in a month.”

“I’m not going to hook up with anyone.”

“No,” she agrees. He isn’t the type for fast flung romances.

“A month really isn’t long.”

“Can’t we just see how we feel when I get back?” she asks, meaning no *guarantees*, meaning *break up until then*.

“Yes,” he says. “See how we feel when you get back.”

She knows he means, *wait for each other. Resume, even if in a different place.*

She feels hemmed in. How will she escape when she gets back? How will she prevent this invasion of mind, body, emotion, this invasion that is called human relationships? What happened to happily living a lie?

He leans forward to kiss her and she lets him. She lets him undress her, she lets him enter her body. It is just her body after all. Her body which is separate from herself, her body which needs pain to remind it it's alive.

They lie together. Clement thinks there is a sadness between them. In his arms, Jemima is small and warm. His heart is surging.

A month feels too long. It feels impossible.

He knows he should tell her but they have come too far for him to suddenly say, *By the way, I have a dead sister.* He isn't sure why she doesn't know, how he could have avoided mentioning Hannah all this time, and he feels the weight of the fact of her ignorance pressing him into a diamond. It wasn't a choice but there have been no doors in the corridor. The tunnel of a secret has lead him to a place he doesn't want to be.

He wants it to be simple and clear between them. He cannot break into her castle, would rather be invited, and has found himself, inexplicably, with a moat all the way around him. He is the castle. Even during sex he cannot reach her.

The preciousness of this being in his arms. The overwhelming uniqueness of her existence. The depth unseen. The inaccessibility. He only knows one solvent: love.

Three nights before she leaves they both know this will be their last night together. She likes this time, the post sex closeness. It is her favourite time. His hands on her body, like she is almost herself. Her head on his chest, listening to the beat of his heart.

They are both a little drunk and this makes it easier. It is easier to sit in her skin when she is drunk, her mind forgets to examine. She knows, however, that in the morning the cringes are larger, the humiliation deeper.

Should she roll away, give him space, or will that make him think she doesn't like him? Is she allowed to talk or does he want to sleep?

He runs his hand lightly over her skin. "I wish you weren't going," he says and she feels guilty but pleased.

"I mean, I'm glad you are," he continues. "You'll love it, but I'll miss you."

"Mmm," she says in agreement, unable to utter actual words. He is kind and loving and can stand her company. It is safe next to him.

As she rolls over, he responds, spooning her, holding her in his arms. She's relaxed and he kisses her neck as she closes her eyes.

"I think I love you," he whispers into her ear. Her eyes spring open, her body tenses. This is not what she expected.

She fights against her body's flight response, forces herself not to move.

He kisses her shoulder.

She is in a well of panic. She doesn't know what to say. She wants to throw up. She has to respond. She can't just not respond.

"You'll only be gone a month," he says, as though consoling himself.

She rolls back into him and kisses him on the mouth.

"Not long at all," she agrees.

"Is that okay?" he asks and she kisses him again, for thinking time. She knows he is referring to the love comment and inside she is running away. She has never liked confrontation and this is even worse. She feels like the cruellest sort of confidence trickster. She searches her heart for some truth but under the panic and under the fear she is empty. There is just nothing there.

She sleeps with her back to him, unable to open her self in his arms. Throughout the night she feels herself edging away and wakes pressed hard against the cold wall.

At breakfast she smiles at him and they laugh as they eat. No one else is home and she is a pillar of positivity.

When they kiss goodbye he holds her for extra long. "I'll miss you," he says and she curses herself. She had meant to say it first, without prompting, because it's something she can offer with truth.

"Me too," she says. "But it's only a month."

She gets in the car and drives away. When she looks in the rear vision mirror there is no one there.

The house is empty when she gets home and she falls onto her bed and bursts into tears. *He loves me*, she thinks. *I am a betrayer, a harlot, a player with hearts. I'm insensitive and rude. How could I do this to someone I care so much for? I am not worth it.*

She reaches for the razor blade in her bedside drawer.

Jemima is perched on the edge of her bed. Her rucksack, packed and almost bursting, leans on the wall next to the door. She is going. She can't believe she is actually going.

Last night, at the restaurant, her dad actually got a bit teary. "Our little girl," he had said, blinking at the beautiful but bored waitress.

"Dad," she had wined. "I'll only be gone a month," as though she herself didn't care. As if a month, four weeks, thirty days away from them was a blink. As if countries, oceans, continents, cultures, languages between her and her home were mere dust on a bookshelf. As though she wasn't nervous, as though she didn't feel like she was doing something big.

Anne, too, earlier in the day, cried when they said goodbye. Wet eyes and laughter.

She can see on the bottom shelf of her bookcase a row of soft toys that she hasn't glanced at for years. She gets down on her knees and picks up each one, readjusting arms and legs, kissing worn furless spots. She replaces each gently

back on the wooden shelf. This room. A whole childhood. This life. This self. She can say goodbye to it all. She will be different when she returns. It is almost a vow.

There's a knock at the door.

"Hon?" It is her mum. "We'd better go."

Outside the day is only just beginning to think of dawn.

Her mum comes in and stands next to her, hand resting on Jemima's head, smoothing her hair. "You'll have a blast," she says. "I could never have done something like this at your age. You're a brave girl."

I'm not brave! She wants to scream. *I'm terrified. It's all false.* But she places the last teddy back on the self and stands.

"Wouldn't want to miss the plane." She smiles.

She knows her mother watches her as she hoiks her rucksack onto her back, as she walks down the corridor and to the car.

Part Two

She is so aware that she is not at home. She can feel it on her skin every second of the day. The world smells different. Her eyes are not open enough. They will never be open enough. She will never be able to see all, hear all, be all, experience all that she wants to. There will inevitably be details that pass her by. She feels like she is floating through moments, feelings. Everything hits hard with its intensity, threaded together with meaninglessness. The world is brighter, smells stronger, tastes more intense, feels softer, harsher, colder, warmer on her skin, but all those sensations are floating in a soup of disconnection. She is skitting along the surface of the city like a skipping stone.

She follows Clement's ghost around the city. Out walking the morning after she arrives, she turns a corner and walks – slap – onto a street she has already seen. It is a moment that hovers above the rest; a single moment of meaning. It is like she is creating the city as she discovers it. But it is already his. Everywhere she goes he has been before.

Manzana, in Spanish, means apple. It also means block. She likes the feeling of this different language sitting oddly against her skin.

She stands near the metro exit and stares along the *Manzana de la Discordia*. Two Modernista, Barcelona's homebuilt home-loved Art Nouveau, buildings stand side by side. Gaudí's Casa Batlló grows up, organic, the balconies and doorframes curving like coral, the brightly tiled façade shining in the sun. A dragon's back curves over the roof: the dragon St George, Barcelona's patron saint, has slain. Next door, Casa Amatller is squarer, symmetrical, as though she doesn't want to break any rules. Her skin patterned neatly, ordered, like brocade. The effect is indeed discordant.

Jemima feels, herself, discordant. Her arms don't belong with her torso. Her heart has left her completely. Her right big toe once belonged to the dragon on the roof. It hardly fits in her shoe. She is not sure what she is doing here. Clement had called Casa Batlló a liquid building, but here in front of her it is more solid than she is. Poor Casa Amatller has to stand next to her prettier more eye-catching more famous cousin Casa Batlló for eternity. She edges herself into photos hoping that one day she'll be noticed. Jemima is in the wrong place. She doesn't fit here. She doesn't fit anywhere. At least Casa Amatller tries with her pretty patterns. People are surprised and pleased to see her, something they didn't expect. She is not such a disappointment.

Down the road at the Antoni Tàpies gallery Jemima stares at the abstract canvases. She has studied this type of art before. Abstract impressionism. She's studied minimalism, conceptual art, fauvism but somehow she has never really believed in them. She has never paid them much attention.

She stands in front of the canvases in the huge open room on the dirty concrete floor. Lumps of papier-mâché give the canvas texture. Thick strokes of paint, scribbles, scrapings. She stands in front of the canvases and feels.

She leaves the gallery tired but with electricity in her veins.

Talking to her mum on the phone it is hard to convey her sense of the city, of all the amazing people she's meeting. She can't name a thing she's learnt or a way she has changed but feels like she has. She feels different and the same. Sometimes it's good and sometimes it's bad but most of the time she feels caught in the middle of a river, everything washing past her, new people, new words, new foods, new places.

It is the best thing she has ever done.

How can she express her experience? Her memories are light, visual, not witty and substantial anecdotes.

She receives an email from Clement. He says that there's not much to say. Anne's working on some costume design thing. His own life is passing without incident. He doesn't sign off. No *love*, no *xx*, no *cheers*, no *be safe*, not even his name at the end of the page. This means something, she is sure.

When she was home all she wanted was to be away; it was an escape. If it wasn't her with Clement, if it was someone else pretending to be something else, then she couldn't fuck it up. If she left they wouldn't get any closer. If they broke

up, he'd never have to know her. But they didn't break up, and waiting for her at home is the danger of someone knowing her. And now, she is floating in this strange limbo, not knowing where she stands with him, where he stands with her.

The balconies are soft iron twisting into black mouths. Jemima stands below Gaudí's La Pedrera and hinges her neck back, looking at it curving against the sky. She climbs to the roof and stands amongst the sentries of chimneys. Cameras snap; she is being caught in this moment. She leaves her camera in her bag. She will not take a photo. She is being captured, trapped. There will be proof that this moment existed, even if it passes unnoticed by people flipping through albums. Even if her presence on this rooftop matters to no one but herself. The sun shines like a friend but the air is empty, there is nothing of substance to weigh her down, to keep her on the earth.

It is hard to imagine home at this moment. What is the weather? What is the time? At this moment, what is Clement doing? Anne? Her parents? Is this very moment as empty for them as it is for her? Can such a moment break through the soil?

Not happy, not sad, not lonely. Just. Just. Life has been stripped back. Despite being on the other side of the world, despite standing on the roof of one of Gaudí's buildings, life is empty of meaning.

Jemima and Sam, a girl from Tassie who is staying at the hostel, catch the train to Montserrat, the monastery on a hill about an hour from Barcelona. They catch the

funicular up to the top and walk the long dry path around the mountain back to the monastery. They swap lives, laughter, hopes, promises. Jemima can see Dali's *Metamorphosis of Narcissus* in the limb-like rocks that dwarf the huge buildings of the monastery. On the train on the way home they meet a Catalonian couple who make the pilgrimage from Barcelona every year. Spanish is their second language, but Sam manages to communicate with them, her own Spanish slowly improving. Jemima feels like she and Sam will be friends forever.

Sam suggests salsa dancing and, even though she's never been before, Jemima follows Sam down into Barceloneta and they find a club. They are too early. They come back four hours later, with extra hostel friends in tow, and she laughs as she is thrown around the room randomly by an Aussie who also has never salsa-ed before. And then she concentrates as she is taught the steps – back tap together, back tap together – by a serious Englishman who has taken three lessons.

She is thinking about Clement. Even though she pretends she doesn't like him *that much* and that she doesn't miss him.

The Australian who works at the Hostel is hot. He wears pointy shoes and speaks Spanish and when he first spoke to her she didn't recognise his accent. Now she knows he is from Shepparton. He is nice and friendly but every time she speaks to him she feels her insides shrivel. He is too cool for her. She wishes he would flirt with her but knows she is so far below him in the ladder of who matters it is not

funny. She feels like she is back in high school. Every time he is nice, charging her less for breakfast, telling her the easiest way to get to Park Güell, she is surprised that she is worth the breath.

She can understand why someone like Clement might be nice to her, but not this guy: this guy's hot, and cool, and not nice by nature. It unsettles her. When he's nice to her it makes her feel like he's playing a joke on her.

The guilt of an English speaker weighs on her. Expecting people to understand her language when she is in their country. She skips meals and remains silent out of embarrassment and shame.

But Barcelona is beautiful. It is amazing. She wanders down the alley between the cathedral and a museum, looks up at a unicorn gargoyle. Drops coins into the busker's guitar case, sits for a song and a half to listen. Steps aside quickly when she hears a bicycle bell ring behind her. She feels like laughing, raising her arms to the sky. She wishes she could capture this place, this life, this feeling.

On the balcony outside the dorm room she can hear Robert in conversation with Someone From Home. He is trying to convey the meaning of what he has been doing. On the other end of the phone someone is trying to understand. But here the sun is shining. There the moon is out. They can only see the reflection of his words in the sky. "I love you too," he says, and from the tone of voice she thinks it is a girlfriend. Why should she know he has a girlfriend? She has never

mentioned Clement. He comes back in and lies on his bed, staring up at the springs and mattress above. She understands that feeling. He is raking himself off the sky, drawing himself back over oceans and lands, remembering that he is in Barcelona.

In the middle of the auditorium in the Museum of Catalan Art, Jemima stares up at the immense ceiling, turns in a circle to see the seats high up and all around. *What do they use it for?* She feels dwarfed, like under the Australian night sky on an empty beach, stars for eternity. She is the only person in here, the shining floor stretching away from her to the gift shop, the café, the door to the gallery proper at the edges. She walks across the smooth floor, her shuffling footsteps quietly audible, and goes into the toilet. It glows peach and smells of cleaning products. She sits on the toilet, wondering what to do next, having walked through each room of the museum, exhausting herself with art. She flushes, looks at the sparkling white porcelain. She pulls her black felt tip pen from her bag and writes, in neat capital letters, R. MUTT 1917. She stands back, surveys the otherwise pristine toilet and smiles. *They know Duchamp, they're an art gallery*, she thinks. *They'll get it.* But as she walks out of the gallery and down the steps she just feels guilty. She doesn't know why she did it.

From Montjuïc, Jemima looks down on the city of Barcelona. The fountain lined boulevard reaches Plaça d'Espanya, and beyond that stretch buildings, streets, people, lives. She takes a photo, zooming in on the rooftops. When she gets home she will flip it. Back to front, upside down. She will play

with the colours, removing and adding, making it monochrome. Play with the image, see what can be created.

She wanders down La Rambla, dodging flower stalls and peering at mice, turtles, budgies in cages. There is a man dressed in armour standing as still as a real statue. Further on a robot-man in silver and alfoil. A little further, a man painted all green climbs slowly up a leaning tree, posing for photos with tourists, hissing for coins thrown into his hat.

They probably think they are artists, Jemima thinks, but still pauses to watch the lizard man. His movements are careful and studied. His tongue darts out of his mouth. His costume – what isn't body paint – is detailed with scales, a tail flicking behind him. She can't tell where his tail ends and he begins. She watches as a small girl approaches with trepidation and with her, forgets for a moment that he is a man. She tosses some coins as she walks away. Maybe that is art – making people believe. Maybe he is an artist.

Tearless, in the cold fluorescence of the bathroom light, Jemima locks herself in the cubicle and draws her blade across her thigh. She watches as blood rises and glistens. Beads expand. She leans back against the cistern and looks up at the ceiling on the other side of the door. It is the middle of the night and the hostel has that muffled everyone asleep sound. She looks passively at her leg and pulls off a single sheet of toilet paper, blotting and wiping. She is ready for bed. She doesn't want to get blood on someone else's sheets.

She aches for word from home but when she reads Clement's emails they seem empty, she can't find the warmth in the words. She replies cheerfully and feels like every word is a lie.

She catches the train to Figueres to go to the Dali Museum. A girl in the Hostel raved about it. Called him a genius. He seems to have done well at being famous. She waits in line for an hour. Inside there are so many people she can hardly look at the paintings. It feels like she is in a theme park. She waits in another line that snakes around the edges of the Mae West room to catch a glimpse of a couch turned into lips, paintings into eyes, and wonders if there is something wrong with her because she can't see the genius and doesn't actually like the place that much.

She finds that she is staying in Barcelona longer than most people in the hostel. They flow in and out of her dorm room like the ebb of the ocean.

Tonight she is the only person in this room who speaks English. She is not sure how it happened. A French girl speaks to her briefly, but their words are lost in the space of misunderstanding, and raking though the memories of her year six French class affords nothing but 'je suis' and they have already swapped names. In English. She floats.

The French girl looks at her, but then shakes her head, smiling and saying something in French. "Adios," she says as she leaves the room. Jemima was mistaken. She is stuck with her existence.

In the sun outside the Museum of Contemporary Art, she sits and watches the skaters as they ollie and grind and dodge tourists. She bites into the *bocadillo* she bought from the little bakery she passed on her way here. *Jamón*, a bit like prosciutto, bread and the strange thing they do with the tomato, rub it into the bread or something. It's awesome. She will definitely make this at home, she thinks to herself.

Sometimes she feels like her camera is translating for her. She takes photos with awareness of framing, focus and balance. She likes to feel that she is not just taking holiday snaps. She tries to think of things she might be able to do with the digital photos that are amassing on CDs in the bottom of her bag. She has a mind to art.

Watching the Magic Fountain of Montjuïc, lit up and dancing to corny music, and drinking cheap Spanish wine, Jemima realises she's drunk. And flirting with Bob from Texas. And she doesn't care. She laughs loudly, safe amongst these other drunk laughing stranger friends. She is leading him on, which is one of the biggest sins, both to this boy and to Clement, but she's having fun, and likes to think it would be possible. This boy – who is hot – and her.

She loves the bright colours and abstract forms in the Miró gallery. Her favourite piece is a huge tapestry woven out of primary colours and taking up a whole wall. At first she likes just the shapes, the different texture in the weaving, the colours contained by their black borders. She steps back, and back again, and sees that it is a dog under a moon and star. She smiles. She likes the sense of surprise, the echo from his other works.

Sometimes, when she thinks of Clement, she aches and she doesn't know why.

Mark works in a mine in WA. He says the trucks are so big that they can only just fit on the road up to the surface. There are little hidey holes every now and then that normal cars can back into to let the trucks pass.

Abigail's girlfriend is going on tour in Germany. She's going to join her and sell CDs and t-shirts to the punters. She's been away from home for 5 months and hasn't seen her girlfriend since she left.

Hannes is studying accounting back home in Munich. He wants to improve his job prospects and so is learning Spanish.

Colin is on exchange from California. Rooms are like hens' teeth. He cannot find a place to live and is chewing through his money too quickly staying at the hostel. And he keeps sleeping through his lectures. "If you ever need to cheer up," he says, "put on a brand new pair of socks. It works." His face full of boyish wonder.

Toby is serious and worried because he's lost his iPod charger.

Joy seems sweet and innocent but she's the one who stays out the longest and flirts the most with all the Spanish boys.

There are so many people and they are all amazing and fun and nice and interesting and different.

Of course.

But there is still her. Ideas of escapist fictions fall by the wayside because, no matter who she pretends to be, she finds herself bound. Tied tightly to herself.

A girl from one of the other rooms in the hostel, Sal, is so typically troubled. Slightly overweight with baggy black heavy metal band t-shirts, an eyebrow ring and long straggly hair. Her status as an outsider brazenly declared, loudly, angrily, with her clothes and her faux-aggressive shoulder to the world. But she is really very sweet. And fun. And even though, as travellers, they are an eclectic mix, even though none of them fit in, she fits in the least. Even less than the blond lesbian couple, sharing cigarettes, sharing clothes, sharing shampoo. Even less than the heart-on-his-sleeve Australian who, although he is doing it, doesn't quite like or understand this travelling business. He just wants to have a beer with his mates at his local. Less than the New Zealander who is not going to shave until he gets home. Even less than Jemima, who is well dressed in the skin of normality.

When Jemima sees the star carved into the back of Sal's hand she is not surprised. It all seems so typical. And so sad. Her heart aches for this girl's pain. Sal quickly pulls her long sleeve back over the scratches, hiding the scars safely under black, and laughs, *Salud!*, with her beer raised.

Jemima wants to comfort. To take away the pain. To make this girl feel less alone but she cannot share. *Oh look*, lifting her sleeves to show white lines on white. *Me too?*

Aside from that, she wants this girl to know she is beautiful. It is not a *Breakfast Club* moment: "If you just plucked your eyebrows and wore makeup." It begins and ends with, "You are pretty." But it would not be believed. It is

assuming too much. It is assuming low self esteem and even if that is clear to Jemima it is not something that can be voiced aloud. There are boundaries, and Jemima is not willing to cross them.

She sits at the computer at the hostel and reads an email from Clement.

Nothing much going on here. You know, the usual. Although Billy the cat did go missing for a couple of days. He's returned now and Ansell is certain he's had himself a couple of days of lovin'.

She is happy but she is crying. She had forgotten she missed them.

Jemima knows that the bravery of Sal, the girl with the star cut into her hand, is wrapped in her fear, they are twisted together to make a single rope. Sal asserts her difference, sticks to her clothes, her chosen appearance, announces her tastes loudly in the world. Comforts herself with what is familiar. Hides in her identity. Yet she travels. Takes herself out of the world where she is like everyone else, because that world does exist with the local heavy metal bands and shops that sell black t-shirts and studded wristbands, and places herself elsewhere, away from family's judgements, in a world where you could meet any and all. Expose yourself to unrelenting judgement, assumption, disapproval.

Jemima herself is too scared to look different, to ripple the surface of normality. Her fear and her cowardice are her rope. She will never be honest with her skin.

Staring up at the Passion Façade on the front of the *Temple Expiatori de la Sagrada Família*, Jemima tries to see something of the genius everyone claims Gaudí to be. She listens to her audio guide and discovers that these sculptures of Christ's last days, the soldiers drawing lots for the goods of the condemned men, the dog by the table at the last supper, the cock crowing for the third and last time, these sculptures weren't even designed by Gaudí. She feels cheated. She walks past the brass doors and into the cathedral.

There are rumours about Gaudí. Some say he was killed by a tram, some say a car. She's heard that he was hit when stepping off the footpath, walking backwards across the road trying to find the best place to admire La Sagrada from. So wrapped in the beauty of his own building he wasn't paying attention. Or maybe he was noticing all the things wrong with it. The American in her dorm said he was dressed like a 'hobo' and could have been saved if they bothered to treat him once he got to hospital. No one cared about a homeless person so they just didn't bother. Some people say he never drew the design for his final Masterpiece, La Sagrada, and what has been built since his death has been guesswork. Some say the designs were all burnt in a fire.

He is a man of myth.

She pauses and looks through the scaffolding, through the barriers to keep the public away from the workmen, at the stained glass window. She isn't sure if this was designed by him or someone else.

Almost all agree, whether they like his architecture or not, that he was a genius. It seems to be an accepted fact.

Jemima thinks that one day she will read a biography. Sift through words for the truth. But for a moment, standing in front of the stained glass window in the artery of La Sagrada, her skin lit blue green red, for a moment, she feels this is all the truth she needs. Colour and light.

I'm looking forward to seeing Paddy, she reads in an email from Clement. I told you about him, didn't I? My best friend from school. We used to get stoned before school. He was one of those people who couldn't cope with their intelligence. It's a pity we smoked so much. Even now I feel altered. I can't change it but I wish I knew then that it would change me. He's been living in an Ashram in Melbourne for ages now. I miss him sometimes. I'm going to go a day early to hang out.

Adelaide and Clement feel so far away. There are whole sections of his life that she knows nothing about. Whole parts of Clement remain invisible to her.

It had seemed like a good idea when he suggested it: meeting him in Melbourne and driving back together. Tacking a romantic holiday onto the end of her trip. Now, reading his email, his words don't make any sense.

She is so tired. Tired of meeting new people, seeing new places, battling with a language she doesn't understand. She doesn't think she can face the bustling street below, making decisions about what to do, where to go. She knows she can't stay

here in her bunk bed forever, that she can't just roll over and cease to exist. She knows it is not that simple.

The sun is shining and from where she lies she can see out the window to the blue sky. She is the only one in the ten bed room. The others are all out. Laughing having fun, travelling. She stares up at the underside of the bunk. "I love you" is written in black texta just above the pillow. Is it a silent plea or confession to the sleeper above, or a shared secret between lovers in a public space?

She returns to La Sagrada and stares at the towers, asparagus spears growing from the ground. What had Clement said? Making the inorganic organic. It is true, this solid building seems to be slipping away from her. This hard rock seems to be soft, melting and at the same time growing, spearing the sky. An image of blood on her skin flashes across her mind. She imagines blood flowing down her arms, dripping off the fingers, landing heavily on the ground.

At the hostel she laughs loudly with Michelle. They have bought tetra cartons of sangria and are going out later. They are joined, Bob from Texas, Jeremy from Mt Isa, Liz from Sheffield, and they all head out to a bar. They choose tapas, pointing at what they want, and order beer in bad accents. *Un caña cerveza por favor*. It is the one sentence they all know how to say. Jemima feels like she is Gaudí, pulling on someone else's clothes and wandering the paved streets. She too is pretending to be someone she's not. She never pretends to be herself, and pretend is the only thing she can do.

La Sagrada Familia doesn't look like a cathedral. Gaudí designed it to celebrate the Holy Family but huge rock snails slime their way up the outside, the front arches look like jaws ready to gobble people up as they walk in. But it is not pretending. Perhaps there is a way to be herself without pretending. Perhaps they are faithful snails.

Jemima stands in front of Picasso's *Guernica* at the Renia Sofia in Madrid. While walking through other rooms, around the courtyard, she had been hearing people talking. "Where is it?" "Gallery 6c," those who had come in, paid their six Euro, just to see The Piece. Like the *Mona Lisa*. She could feel anticipation building as she circled closer to the gallery, as she saw, past other Picassos, past the photographic record of its process, the crowd first, then the painting.

She stands and stares. It screams at her silently. The voices have been choked by bombs, shrapnel, hard sharp pieces of metal. We are all drowning in our own sadness and the pointlessness of it all. There is no one to rescue us. Our children are dead and dying. What is there left? We have all been silenced. Our voices stolen from us by death. We have been emptied by grief.

She doesn't notice the shifting crowds. She doesn't notice the change of security guards. She only moves when her view is blocked and to look more closely at other parts of the painting. She cries, tears rolling down her cheeks. She is barely aware of their cold path, of the hole they fill in her heart.

When Jemima gets off the train in Barcelona, she feels like she has returned home. She loves this city, and loves the fact she can walk through its streets without a map. The hot boy with the pointy shoes at the hostel greets her like she's an old friend, even though he didn't know she was coming back, doesn't even know she's been to Madrid.

I cried at Guernica, Jemima writes in an email to Clement, paying herself out, brushing it off. What she doesn't tell him is how she felt it was her own soul painted on the canvas. She knows it is bigger, wider than her. That it protests against the Spanish Civil War, that it's about everyone's suffering, the whole world's pain. She doesn't tell him that for her the immense canvas was reduced to her own little self. That she screams silently at night like the horse, that she can't find the flower of hope in her own *Guernica*.

Before she leaves, Jemima wants to wander through the familiar streets one last time. She wants to gaze again at the dragon on the corner of the building on La Rambla. She wants to have one last *bocadillo*. She wants to relive her Barcelona, moment by moment. She wants to sit on the steps of the cathedral, watching the pigeons beg for food, she wants to wander through the stalls at the *Mercat de la Boqueria*. She wants to say goodbye to Barcelona, her favourite city in the world. But she only has one afternoon so she climbs the hill to Gaudí's Park Güell.

She sits on the bench looking out across the city of Barcelona. The mosaic tiles are hard against her skin and she leans back to admire the wave-like curves of the bench. She thinks about the abstract canvases of Antoni Tàpies, the architecture of La Sagrada, the surrealism of Miró, the buskers on La Rambla.

Maybe she doesn't have to paint representational art. Maybe she doesn't have to use clay. Maybe she can throw her camera away. Maybe she can do something they would never teach her at university. She feels the possibilities beating through the blood in her veins.

She is going home tomorrow and she still doesn't know who she wants to be.

Part Three

nineteen

Clement sits on the floor of the ashram his knees crossed high with stiffness. Paddy faces him, back straight and comfortable on the floor. Paddy's shaved head and calm eyes are aware of the things they share, as though their past, his present, their for-all-time-connection is written on the surface of his skin.

“Sorry, Man, we don't have any chairs.”

Clement shakes his head. It is always strange to see Paddy again. This same-different friend forever. Hannah is not always an absence between them; sometimes it is just the two of them. Tonight all three are here.

Every time Clement has seen Paddy since he moved to Melbourne there has been a disconnect between the Paddy in front of him and the Paddy he knows. At the funeral Paddy had cried and Clement remembers thinking that was proof he wasn't enlightened, as though that was a black mark against him, as though *enlightened* was a dirty word, as though there had been a betrayal. But afterwards they had talked and each seemed to settle back into their bodies, and Clement knew that despite their differences, they were friends and he didn't need to hate

Paddy. He needed a different scapegoat. Blame spread evenly over his parents, her friends, himself, Paddy. Lifted off people one by one, the weight on his own shoulders getting heavier and heavier.

Now, as he watches Paddy in front of him shimmering like a mirage between known and unknown, he thinks maybe all his meditation has provided Paddy with an answer.

“Do you think that if you hadn’t started to get paranoid you would have stayed together?” He’s grasping for ways to change the past, ways to keep her alive.

Paddy shakes his head. “It was too much,” he says. “I couldn’t watch her lose any more weight. I could hardly touch her and she knew I found her disgusting. All that bone. It made her righteous. Gave her satisfaction. It made her feel justified in hating me, hating herself, hating everything. The fact that I couldn’t touch her emaciated body.”

Knowledge of her existence sits between them and Clement realises that this fact is usually hidden within his life. It is covered with a shroud and no one is allowed to lift it, no one can peek under it.

“Jemima?” asks Paddy. “You’re picking her up tomorrow?”

Clement nods, brought back.

“I’d like to meet her.”

Clement nods again, somehow unable to process this request, to understand its meaning. “We’re going to spend a night in Lorne.” It is a fact but it sounds like a refusal.

“Maybe next time.”

Clement smiles. He feels like he is floating just to the left of his body. As though nothing is quite real.

Jemima feels like she is about to meet a stranger. She is going to have to spend whole days with this stranger. Worse than a stranger, a stranger she can cope with, she can pretend to be anyone. Clement is someone to whom she has unknown ties, someone who has expectations of her, ones she doesn’t know and is likely unable to meet.

She is tired, after the long flight and transit in Singapore and lags behind the other passengers, her day pack heavy with things to entertain her during the flight. There is no time and light and dark are arbitrary. Dinner at nine pm, whose time? Breakfast at five am. It is light now. She had watched the spread of light over the horizon, the wide slow stretch of the waking sun. She hasn’t breathed real air for how long? Trapped in planes and airports, isolated from sun and wind, rain and breezes on her skin. She doesn’t remember what to expect from the weather. She will have to be awake all day to combat jetlag.

She stands in line at immigration waiting for her homecoming stamp. She wants the bored man with the stamp to say *g’day* but he smiles blandly and nods.

The carousel is turning luggage waiting to be claimed in a cycle. She watches other people's bags. A life in each one, scratches, ribbons, cling wrap twisted around and around and around. She steps forward as her bag advances, pulls it off the conveyor belt and lifts it – too heavy – onto her back.

Customs. She has nothing to declare but feels like she will get in trouble. She doesn't hurry. She doesn't know if Clement will be waiting or not. She doesn't even know the time.

Her palms sweat. The doors open in front of her. People look, disappointed she is not their own, and turn back to themselves, chatting. Some people lift signs, bored, only half hoping she will claim the name on the sign and they can leave, swap one boredom for another.

And there is Clement, hands in pockets, walking towards her. He grins at her and wraps her in a hug, her day pack a barrier between their bodies, her rucksack expanding her space. She thinks they didn't even touch, it was a communication between her bags and him.

"I'll take that," he offers, indicating her rucksack, and she lets him, despite having carried it through airports and train stations, through streets and buses. She unpeels herself from its skin, her day pack light in its place.

"How was your flight?" he asks as they step out of the airport, cold air hitting her face. She knows this is a question used to let people return. To fill in time while they settle back on land, while their soul searches for body.

"Fine," she says, automatically. "Thanks."

Her lungs are in her throat, her whole body tense with the fear of reconnection. What if she doesn't remember how to fit into the space she left behind?

"Your drive?"

"Fine."

As they navigate through a maze of cars she feels herself dependant on him to get out. She wants to ask for her bag back. She wants to find her own way home.

"I caught up with my friend Paddy last night. Haven't seen him for ages."

"Oh, nice," she says. "Fun times?" She can hear other people's voices in her words. Patricia the Brit, Colin the American.

He unlocks the boot and closes it on her bags.

In the passenger seat she tries to be as small and inconspicuous as possible. She wants to be silent. She wants to disappear.

Clement can hardly keep his happiness in, it is so good to be beside her again. She is quiet next to him but he is content to drive silently, glad to have her breathing by his side, her smell filling the car, to feel himself plunging back into his own skin, feel his flesh made real by the touch of her hand.

They drive out over long freeways, the winter sun heating the car, the black road arching like a serpent in pain. He wants to hear about her adventures, wants her to make Barcelona real for him again.

“Did you take many photos?” he asks. He remembers what it is like to arrive home, that feeling of dislocation, the clash between home remembered and what is solid in front of you. It is like when he visits Paddy, the familiar made strange. It takes a while to settle back on earth.

“So many,” she says but keeps watching the road coming towards them as though she is driving. “I’ll probably never even look at them all.”

He laughs. “You can show me.”

“Not all of them.” She glances across at him. “Even I’d get bored.”

They pass billboards, a mass of railway tracks, big industrial buildings.

“Did you go to Casa Batlló?”

“Yeah, how cool!”

“Did you go inside?”

“Yeah. The floor with the laundry on it was beautiful.”

“And the vent system, so well designed!”

Jemima pictures the fleshy stone façade of La Pedrera. “You know those solid looking rock faces of La Pedrera? They aren’t actually part of the building’s foundations? The real support structures are hidden, that curving stone is just the skin.” Like her own body – skin hiding what is real underneath.

As they turn onto narrower more windy roads, they settle back into silence, Jemima watching the sea out the window.

They walk down to the beach from the cabin in which they are going to spend the night. Jemima is disgusted with herself, how easily she jokes with Clement as they walk along the beach, as they let their toes freeze on the wet sand, the sharp rocks. How light she keeps their interaction while inside darkness is lurking. Every word she utters is composed. She is acting the person she should be. And he likes her false self, her façade of stone, not her. It is impossible that he could like her.

Clement tries to skim a rock, watching as it sinks with first touch.

“You’re more throwing than skimming,” Jemima teases. Why was it that when she was away she could feel like she was the person she was pretending to be. Carefree, having fun, full of laughter. Why is it that here, with this person around which her emotions twist, here where theoretically she should be able to be herself as Clement wouldn’t judge her, why is it she feels false while being herself? Who is she, anyway? Who is to say what is her and what is not?

Maybe it is the expectation that this is her. As though things are being set in stone. As though every display of attitude and personality is a bar in a jail around who she is allowed to be.

That night when he cleans his teeth and goes to bed she finds excuses to stay up, unable to say *no* if he was to intimate sex. Unable to say, *not tonight* or, *can we wait?* The risk of his hands on her skin is too great, so she feigns interest in the late night movie, and, in the morning, doziness.

Still, she wonders why his hands don't wander to her side of the bed. She assumes he does not find her attractive. She knows this is unfair. Does she want him to be animalistic? To make advances despite her trying-not-to-be-too-obvious disinterest? To rape her?

After breakfast, Jemima piles her half packed rucksack back into the car and they head out along the road that curls around the coast. They listen to music. They are silent. They point out birds or funny signs or amazing trees, beautiful views. They turn out onto a freeway and drive straight and fast for kilometre after kilometre. Through towns and arbitrary borders. Empty farmland rushing past them. Crops straining against the dry soil for life. Sheep in jackets to save them from frost.

Jemima watches the clouds in the sky, the horizon flat and long around them. A dark cloud races along the horizon beside them like steam from an old train. It is a mirage, this blackness keeping pace with their race across the countryside.

They swap drivers and Clement slowly falls asleep next to her. From the corner of her eye she can see his head droop and droop until he gives up and grabs a pillow from the back seat, pressing his shoulder into the door, the pillow hugged like a childhood toy in his arms.

Adelaide looms hours away. For the most part, she's looking forward to getting home. Seeing her parents, friends. Sleeping in her own bed. Having food in the fridge and not having to buy something every time she's hungry. Playing around with her photos. Drawing, experimenting with the ideas she got while she was away. Even going back to uni next week. She is nervous, though. What if all

her cogs slip like they are slipping with Clement? What if she doesn't fit anymore? What if nobody likes her?

On the side of the road, on a bend, she sees, propped on a bloody couch, two slaughtered pigs. The shock of it. Blood and skin and flesh. Like a threat. The glistening scarlet of the blood. The violence of it. The vision is whipped away too fast, not fast enough. Mallee scrub rushing past. Squealing, gunshots, wrenching limbs, balancing, tying. It makes no sense. Did she really see it? She thinks about waking Clement, telling him, turning the car around to reduce the shock by examination. Remove the surprise, make the face the violence.

Was it a joke? Was it premeditated? Who put them there? And for whom? Is it a message? Were they wild boars terrorising the farms? Were they a farmer's pigs killed as a threat? A crude and violent practical joke? Was it a work of art? What does it mean?

When Jemima does start to slow, coming into a town, and Clement stirs, she does not tell him. This is a violence she will not share. She will hold it inside. She will keep its unexpected horrors to herself, not dilute its power with words.

He stretches his legs, bumping his feet into the end of the foot space, even to Jemima it feels like an unsatisfying stretch.

“Do you want me to stop?” she asks.

He yawns, bleary eyed. “We used to stop here as kids.”

The plural confuses Jemima.

“I think there’s a playground next to the bakery. Let’s get something to eat.” He watches out the window as they pass houses, a school. “I used to push Hannah on the swing.”

“Who’s Hannah?”

There is a pause before he answers. “My sister.”

Her stomach drops. *Sister?*

“She died last year.” His voice is quiet.

How did she not know? Is she so self centred? She pulls up at the bakery, an emptiness at the back of her throat.

He has a sister. Had a sister.

She doesn’t know how to respond. The image of the slaughtered pigs sticks in her mind and she feels dizzy. She thought she was the one with secrets.

Is she supposed to say *I’m so sorry for your loss. My deepest sympathy. My commiserations?* Is she allowed to ask for details?

She doesn’t understand how she didn’t know. He is a complete stranger. Why hadn’t he told her? Their whole relationship is false. She is the one who keeps herself hidden from the world. He is hidden from her.

He said he might be falling in love with her.

There is something between these reactions that she cannot reach. Some mode of behaviour that evades her, the right way to feel.

Clement climbs out of the car, stretches his arms towards the sky. His secret is out. Hannah is dead. Blinking in the glaring light he imagines he sees her, small and sad, leaning against the swings. His travel tired mind grasps at the image, trying to make it real. He can't see Hannah's expression and takes a step forward.

“I'm sorry,” says Jemima, and, distracted, he turns to her. When he looks back his mirage is gone.

He kicks a pebble, disappointed, and walks into the bakery ahead of Jemima.

Jemima almost feels like she should knock instead of digging in her bag for her key and swinging open the door.

“Hello?” she calls down the hallway.

She hears noises in the study.

“I'm home!”

Her mum rushes out of the study, followed by her father.

“Jemima, darling.” Her mum hugs her hard.

“Welcome home, love.” Her dad hugs her too.

They look up at Clement who is hovering just inside the door, Jemima's rucksack on his shoulders.

“Mum, Dad, this is Clement.”

Her mum rushes forward and hugs Clement. “It’s lovely to meet you at last,” she gushes. “Oh,” turning back to Jemima, and squeezing her arm, “I’m quite overwhelmed.”

Her dad shakes Clement’s hand.

“Your father put some champagne in the fridge this morning,” her mum tells Jemima, ushering them down the passage. “Put that away,” she instructs Clement, nodding to Jemima’s bag, “and come and have a drink.”

Jemima opens her bedroom door and steps in. It shouldn’t be a surprise that it’s exactly the same, that the clothes she jettisoned while trying to shut her pack lie in a pile on the floor, that one of her sketchbooks sits on the unmade bed. She doesn’t want to *have a drink*. She wants to be alone, to be rid of this questionable entity who has followed her into her room.

Her shoulders tense at the thought of him seeing her childhood room. She sees her own body, slaughtered and propped up on a chair like the pigs. Her stomach slashed to reveal guts made from loved childhood toys, organs of drawings put on the fridge. Objects from her life spilling out, guts and blood and bile. A stomach full of invented games. Intestines full of imaginary friends and siblings. She had thought they shared at least this: an only child’s childhood.

Clement lowers her rucksack onto the floor, leaning it against the bed.

“Nice room,” he smiles and starts to look around.

Is he in any way the person she thought he was? Looking at her favourite books from childhood on her shelf, the little ornaments she’s been given as gifts. Examining her life. How dare he?

“We’d better get that drink,” Jemima says and steers him from the room.

In the lounge they all sit and toast Jemima’s arriving home. She gives her parents their gifts and lets her champagne go flat in front of her. They ask her about her trip but she doesn’t know how to tell them about it, the holes are too large, the gaps too big to fill. She wants to curl up on her bed and close her eyes. She wants everything to ebb away into darkness.

It is not often the house is empty and as Clement walks into the quiet living area he feels lost, as though without someone to greet him he’s still floating around somewhere else, waiting to land. He puts his bag into his dark bedroom and stands in the kitchen, listening to the quiet humming of the fridge, the lifeless creaking of the settling house. Even Billy is absent, off hunting, grooming, snoozing, refusing dependence in a way only cats can. He has nothing to do. No way to occupy the hours stretching away from him through dusk, evening, night. At one stage of his life he would have relished those uninterrupted hours, drawing, sketching, working on new ideas, finishing old projects.

Instead, he catches the train home, up to his parents’ house, and walks, crunching fallen bark underfoot, the early dusk crowding around him, ushering him into the warmth of the house.

Perro looks up, surprised but sleepy, as Clement opens the front door. Letting out an excited whimper but not bothering to get up from his cushion, he squirms in happiness to see Clement.

“G’day boy,” Clement says and pats him vigorously, thinking, *There’s a better homecoming*. “Mum in?” he asks the dog and looks around the room. A half finished tapestry lies on the couch and he hears the toilet flush.

His mum returns.

“Clement,” she says happily and he stands for a hug. “I thought you were in Melbourne.”

“Got back today.”

“Ah. You’ll stay for tea?”

Clement nods.

“I haven’t thought about tea yet. I was doing some…” she looks towards the tapestry.

“No hurry,” says Clement. “You can keep doing that.”

“No, no.” She wanders into the kitchen. “It’s time I got started anyway.”

Clement sits on a stool and Perro stands to come near enough for the patting to continue.

“How was it?” his mum asks. “How’s Paddy?”

“Good. He’s still at the ashram.”

They chat about Paddy and the drive back. Jemima knows about Hannah and nothing is different. What did he expect to change anyway?

“Mum?” Clement can hear hesitant warning in his voice. “Do you and Dad talk about Hannah?”

His mum's knife pauses for half a second mid chop before resuming.

"Sometimes," she says, scooping veges into a bowl. "We don't avoid talking about her."

Clement continues to rub Perro's ears, listen to the sound of his mother preparing the food.

"We like it when you come to dinner, Clement." She looks up at him, brown eyes echoing Hannah's. "It's nice for the house to feel less empty."

Perro lifts his head as they hear a car drive into the driveway.

"Your dad's home." Clement's mum turns on the stove.

Clement feels too large for this kitchen, the air is too warm and crowds him, like there is something too close to his face, invading his personal space. He listens as his father enters the house and Perro stands and stretches, wandering to the kitchen door to welcome the arrival.

"Clement." There is surprise in his Dad's voice.

"Hi Dad."

"Welcome back." He kisses his wife on the cheek. "Hello dear. What's for tea?"

When dinner's ready they sit down, the meal steaming hot in front of them.

"There's a job at the local library, Clement," his dad tells him.

"I wasn't qualified for the last one you suggested, Dad."

“They may have hired you if you hadn’t run out of the interview. This is a trainee position. I think you should go for it.”

His mum looks at her husband, exasperated.

Clement feels the weight of a bowling ball in his stomach. “Okay,” he says.

His mum looks back at Clement. “But Clement,” she says. “You don’t want a job like that.”

“Don’t I, Mum?” he asks, thinking, *why not?*

“Don’t tell the boy what he wants, Maureen.” His dad shoves a forkful of steak into his mouth. “You could always go back to uni. Do some sort of vocational training.”

Clement nods, shifting the peas on his plate. “I’ll apply for the job,” he says.

“Oh Clement,” his mother says sadly, not an objection, not a plea.

Clement is not inspired. He wants to live a simple ordinary life. He can’t bum around like he’s been doing for the last year or so. He wonders how you go about getting qualified to be a banker or bus driver, a businessman or mechanic.

His mother’s reproach is quiet, like she’s disappointed in him and for him. He’ll get a job. He’ll never be spectacular but he won’t be different either. He’ll pass. He’ll remain the disappointing son in his dad’s stories at golf. The one not nearly as successful as every one else’s son, as Hannah might have been.

It is heavy in his bowels, this need to be enough for both of them. To fill enough space in this house to make Hannah's hole not so large. To live when she does not. His stomach twists. He cannot eat.

"Excuse me," he says, and stands mid meal, walks to the bathroom.

He doesn't go to the closest toilet, he goes to the one at the end of the corridor, the one he and Hannah used to share. He sits and stares at the half of his face that is reflected in the mirror. He bends forward in pain. He cannot go. He is all blocked up inside.

Jemima stands alone in her bedroom. Her own space. No one else in the room. She opens her rucksack and starts to unpack. She should probably try to sleep, try to normalise sleeping patterns. She slept badly last night, in the same bed as Clement, the awareness of his presence keeping her from relaxing enough to drift into sleep.

He's got a dead sister. She's not sure how to fit this piece of information into her life and has been waiting to be alone ever since it came into her possession. Like when she found out that he was an artist. She feels like a dog who has dug up a rotting bone and takes it away from the pack to contemplate it in peace. Pulling on rotting flesh, unable to work out the size and shape of this dirty treasure in front of her. Is it a secret? Is it something shared? Does anyone else know? Is it something stolen from the space between sleep and wakefulness?

Why did he tell her and then ignore her when she tried to talk to him? What does it say about their relationship that he has kept it from her?

She abandons the unpacking and picks up the sketch book she had left on the bed. Flicking through it, all the old drawings look so lifeless, so bland. She grabs a pencil and starts sketching her own body, propped on a couch, flopping, lifeless. Her own body in place of the pigs'.

Clement closes his eyes on the train home. Think think think.

He dreams again of the girl in the red jacket. It is Hannah, it is Jemima, it is a stranger, it is him. Park Güell, this time, is packed. There are people everywhere. Cameras flash, teeth smile grotesquely, everyone ignores her red swollen eyes and wet cheeks. Her sad face the background of a thousand photos. Her sobbing ignored like the sound of the gravel crunching underfoot. But they all know she is crying. They see her, exchange glances, but they leave her, let her weep and wail alone. They all know that crying is meant to be hidden behind closed doors. They all know she is being indecent. What does Clement do? What does Clement know?

When he wakes, he has gone one stop too far. He gets off the train, bleary eyed, and walks home through the dark and quiet streets. Everyone is inside in front of television sets. The asphalt glistens wet from the afternoon's rain.

His stomach is angry with him for not eating his dinner but when he gets home he falls straight into bed, unable to face the thought of food. The idea of

chewing, of crunching things between his teeth, of saliva making mash, colours mixing. Squeezing it down his throat, acid in his stomach. It is too physical. Too much of the body.

twenty

Jemima reasons with herself. She is allowed to go to the share house without letting Clement know, giving him warning, asking permission, because she is visiting Anne. She knocks on the door and Anne appears within seconds.

“Jem!” she cries and their hug is warm and long. “So good to see you! Come in!”

As they walk towards the kitchen, questions tumble from Anne’s mouth.

“How was it? Tell me everything. Do you want some tea? Any hot boys? (Aside from Clem.) Tell me. What’s Barcelona like?”

She puts on the kettle as Jemima nods to Anne’s question.

“Jeez, Anne,” Jemima laughs. “Give me a chance.” She can’t help herself looking around, trying to discern whether Clement’s home, trying to garner clues from his closed door and anything that’s lying around the kitchen or living room.

They settle down on the couch with their tea and a cake that Anne has just baked.

“Procrastination,” Anne explains, sending Jemima into a spin of panic.

“Do we have an assignment due?”

“No,” laughs Anne. “It’s this thing Izzy and I have been doing over the holidays.”

Izzy? thinks Jemima.

“It’s been so much fun. Bek asked Izzy when you couldn’t do it. Didn’t I tell you?”

Isabelle. The pretty blonde from uni, Anne’s competition with Ben.

“It’s been a heap of work but we’ve had lots of fun.”

Anne is friends with Isabelle? Jemima feels the world spin around her. She feels like she is back in high school, being nudged out of her friendship with Melissa like a non-cuckoo egg. For a few weeks she would try to find hidden away places to eat lunch, places where no one would notice that she was alone. She remembers sitting next to Anne in maths class, her quietly opening a space for Jemima in her own group of friends. Laughing with surprise at Anne’s half jokingly vicious bitching about the captain of the netball team, boyfriend and best friend stealer extraordinaire. She had never had a friend like that before.

“I’ve decided to do the costume design course, instead of that photography one we were going to do? Izzy’s going to do it too. I hope you don’t mind. I’ve had such a good time helping out with this design thing.”

“Of course,” Jemima smiles. “It’s so cool you like it.”

She had thought that when she went away she might find a place to belong, she didn't realise that she would sever the strings that tie her to the earth, that she would be left floating, unable to fit anywhere. This is a different world to the one she left behind. Clement has a sister. Anne is best friends with her sworn enemy. She laughs at the story Anne is telling her. Tells her own stories about the buskers on La Rambla, about drinking sangria from tetra cartons. And when Anne asks her about her trip back from Melbourne with Clement, she says, "Good," and changes the subject.

Clement wakes late, Jemima's voice twisting in his dreams, confused and bleary. He struggles to wake and as he climbs out of bed, he can hear Anne saying goodbye to someone. His body refuses to hurry and when he goes out to the kitchen Anne is by the sink washing up.

"Oh, you've just missed Jemima," she says, looking over her shoulder as he greets her.

"Bugger." So she was here, not just a voice from his dream.

"Long sleep in," she says. "You're usually up before now."

"I haven't been sleeping well," he says, thinking about the night before, lying in the cold bed next to Jemima, the sheet like a glacier between them, her body turned away from his, her desire not to be touched written in flashing neon. But then in daylight hours, her smiling cheerful face, like nothing was wrong, like he imagined the glacier. Maybe he did. Maybe she just needs time.

He opens the fridge and his throat constricts at the idea of toast.

“I baked a cake,” Anne nods to half a cake sitting on a plate on the bench.
“Help yourself.”

Deep red plums shine on top of the cake, staining the yellow crumbs,
fading blood to pus.

“Looks good,” he says, “Maybe later,” and goes into the bathroom.

He sits on the toilet and reads, for the thousandth time, some of the 101 ways to be an artist. *Dance like no one’s watching. Follow the bees. Live in beautiful spaces. Smile at strangers.* Dodger has written at the bottom, “Don’t pay attention to poxy posters TM about how to be a faux artist.” In another pen someone else has scribbled, “Be Nike. Just do it,” with a little Nike symbol next to it. And in yet another pen, “Buy! Consume! Buy!” At the top of the poster someone, Anne he presumes, has quite recently started to illustrate some of the advice. Next to “Love Animals,” is a cute little dog. Next to “Rustle the autumn leaves,” is a maple leaf. He sees a pen on the floor next to the open packet of toilet paper on top of a pile of magazines and picks it up. He imagines a little umbrella, complete with falling rain, next to “Walk in the rain,” but drops the pen back onto the floor.

Washing his hands in the bathroom next door, he looks at himself in the mirror. His eyes are bloodshot, tired. Now he is empty. His stomach reminds him that he hasn’t eaten breakfast. He nods at his reflection, leans on the bench. Turns and leaves the bathroom, now he is empty.

twenty-one

Jemima looks around her photography class. She doesn't know anyone except Tamsin who is sitting on the other side of the room, her hair suddenly long even though it's only been a month since Jemima saw her. She wants to go and talk to her after class but when the time comes she finds herself too shy and leaves the room quietly, her folder tucked under her arm.

"Jemima," she hears as she walks down the stairs.

"Hey." She turns to see Tamsin hurrying to catch up to her and suddenly feels incredibly rude for leaving without saying hello. "Good break?"

"Great. I went over to Yorke's," Tamsin says. "It was awesome. I actually did heaps of drawing. I didn't mean to," she laughs, "but there wasn't that much to do. Too cold to swim and everything. You?"

"I went to Spain."

"What?" Tamsin pauses briefly. "I didn't know you were going overseas! How was it?"

“It was great,” Jemima says. “I loved it.”

They are quiet for a few moments as they enter the quad.

“It’s hard getting back, though,” Jemima finds herself saying.

“Yeah?”

“It’s like everything’s different but the same. Even me.” She can feel tears pressing against her eyes and wills them away, yelling at herself inwardly for being so pathetic.

“I know what you mean,” Tamsin says. “I was like that when I got back from Canada at the beginning of the year.”

“Oh?”

“I was away for a year.”

Jemima feels guilty that she didn’t know this.

“It takes a bit but you’ll settle back in.” Tamsin smiles. “Already planning the next trip?” she asks.

“Paris,” says Jemima. “The Louvre, Musée d’Orsay…” Jemima looks around the quad. “Or maybe New York…”

Tamsin laughs. “Awesome.”

Clement goes upstairs to finish the last of the Van Gogh series. He's decided to apply for that job in the library, and if not that then work in a servo, in the Menz factory, or deliver the mail. Whatever he does, he's not going to do this. It's too dangerous. This use of pen, this reminder of colour. He opens the door to see Anne throw open a sheet of pink satin. The light from the skylight ripples over the material as she looks up and smiles at him.

“What are you up to?” he asks as he pulls some work down from a shelf.

“The last thing for my placement,” Anne says. “Fairy tales. It's a bit obvious.”

“Pink and frilly?”

“Yeah, but it's fairy tales. It has to be a stereotypical princess. That's what they want.”

“Mmm. Perfect.”

“Exactly.”

With his thin black pen, Clement continues to divide colour from colour, delineate shading with a clear black line.

“We should have a house dinner,” says Anne, the sound of her scissors slicing sharply. “Invite Jemima, Ben, Isabelle, Steve if Ansell wants to.” She tears the material, a sudden ripping sound filling the studio. “It'll be fun. We can play board games or something afterwards.”

“Mmm.” Clement leans over the field of swaying wheat.

“You in?”

“Sure.”

Clement realises that he'll be expected to eat. There will be food in front of him, waiting for consumption. He frowns. Hannah would have thought like this all the time. Sorting through social engagements to find ones where you wouldn't be obvious. Always aware of your secret, trying to find ways to avoid what you fear.

How, Clement wonders, do you not eat in front of people, at meal time, with food in front of you? He remembers Hannah, shifting the food on her plate. *I ate a huge lunch. I ate when I got home. I'm just not hungry.* But more often it was avoidance. Rehearsals at dinner time, going straight to bed when she got home, being in the *study-zone*, saying she'll eat later, not wanting to eat before swimming. Things that seemed plausible. Things that were believed until the thinness became a worry, until they noticed day to busy day, an excuse everyday for weeks.

“This'll be fun.” Anne pins pink to pink. “I'll cook my vege pasta. Have you tried it?”

“Yeah, it was awesome.”

Is this what it's like for Jemima? A secret lodged in the back of her throat.

“Yep,” smiles Anne. “This'll be fun.”

Jemima sits at the computer, reading through the posts left by people on a self injury website. It is not right between her and Clement. She wonders if it is just her, or if he can feel it too. It is too early in their relationship to enter into deep conversations. And besides, she's not sure it is worth the pain and effort. She is not sure how much she is willing to invest in this relationship.

I told you how much my mum freaked out when she saw the blood, she reads. Like it's such a fucking big deal.

People react to blood, she thinks, feeling again the shock of the pigs on the roadside. If they had been cleaned up so they weren't bloodied and dirty, would they have stuck with her in the same way? A body drained of life but clean, is that as shocking as blood escaping from a live one?

She sees her own naked body, tinged blue, lifeless, propped on a chair. Clean, empty, smooth white surfaces. She sees her body alive but bleeding. Cuts on her arms, legs, wounds on her torso, blood dripping to the floor, the chair becoming slippery under her skin. What would her eyes be doing? In the first, lifeless but open. Unseeing and dead. In the second, watching the viewer passively? Watching her own blood leave her body? What would the eyes be doing?

She continues reading the website.

Thanks for your support guys. I've always lied before, you know, said the blood on the towels was from my period or whatever, but then she saw those cuts, the time I had to get stitches, I wasn't quick enough. So I did end up talking to my mum. Now she's making me go to a f#@#ing therapist. Have any of you guys*

*'seen a professional' before? I dunno. I don't want to stop but now she's being super over bearing and watching me all the time. She even raided my bedroom for sharp things, like I'm a prisoner or something, can you believe that! But at least she cares, you know. I didn't think she did. It was kind of bonding or something I guess, but I still wish she didn't know. Any tips for being *super* discreet? My advice: don't let your parents find out in the first place. D'oh.*

Jemima changes threads, reading down the page.

I'm going to fail, I know it. Just because I couldn't get off my f#@#ing arse and study. And now my arm hurts.*

Don't worry, babe. You'll go ok. Sorry about your arm.

My boyf has gone away for the weekend. I'm so alone without him.

Hugs.

Jemima has never believed in that adage that a burden shared is a burden halved but she did feel better after talking to Tamsin today. To know she's not alone in feeling off kilter on return from a trip. She opened up and the world didn't cave in under her feet. Of course it didn't. Why does she always feel that disaster is always just one false move away in social situations? A vowel said wrong, a butterfly wing flapped in the wrong direction. She knows telling someone how she feels doesn't lead to exile. But what would she say to Clement anyway? *I'm freaking out about your dead sister? I don't know what anything means?* What could she possibly say that would make things better? Her chest is trapped in a Chinese finger trap. She is pulling and pulling, the grass mesh getting tighter and tighter. She thought that because he knew she cut she'd be able to be

herself but the more she likes him, the more time she spends with him, the more she wants to be real with him, the tighter the finger trap binding her to herself.

She turns off her computer. She's had enough of peering in at other people's lives.

In this new age world she knows the only way to make and have friends is to be yourself. She watched the daggy videos in Health in year eight. But that only works for everyone else. For the people who aren't wrong at their very core. Who aren't objectionable pieces of shit whose very existence in the social world depends on the artifice of them not showing who they really are.

She doesn't even know who she really is. She pulls the blade from her drawer and draws it across the scratched skin of her thigh, opening yesterday's scabs with the movement, waiting moments for the line to turn red, the blood to bead.

She jumps as her phone rings. Clement's name glows on the caller ID screen, and her blood goes cold with dread.

She doesn't feel like she has a choice not to answer. She would have to explain why later, make excuses. "Hello?"

"Hey. It's me."

"Oh. Hi." She puts a smile in her voice. "How are you?"

She presses a tissue against her skin, absorbing the blood.

"I missed you yesterday. I was still in bed." He laughs. "The drive really took it out of me."

“Yeah, all the sleeping you did.”

“I know. It’s tough sitting on your arse for five hours.”

She laughs. This is easier than she thought.

“Back at uni today?” he asks.

“Yeah. The first photography class.”

“You think it’ll be good?”

“Hard to tell. Hopefully.” She blots at her leg with a tissue. Her blood is flowing more easily. She is surprised at the lightness of feeling and when they hang up she finds herself excited about seeing him tomorrow. Annoyed at herself for being so up and down. As she tosses the bloody tissue onto her bedside table she thinks of Tracey Emin’s *My Bed*. The artist’s own bed displayed as art – the detritus of her life for all the world to see.

Clement tosses his phone up onto his desk. He had called her, as he lay in bed, to put off being surrounded only by his thoughts. He sighs when they hang up, disappointed the conversation has ended.

The bed feels large and empty and he doesn’t move, listening to the television in the living room. Listening to Dodger in the loft above him. All he can think about is food. He wraps his hand around his forearm and squeezes. His stomach feels so empty. He suddenly remembers Hannah telling him one night, before they knew she was sick, when they were sharing a cone outside his bedroom window, how much she liked that feeling of emptiness. She had put her hand on her stomach and pressed. *It feels flat*, she said. *Like I could fit in more*

places than usual. He doesn't remember exactly when they had the conversation and is shocked that he is only remembering it now. It feels like he has come across the key, if only he had remembered it when she was sick he might have understood. If only he had known what was to come, he might have had the chance to stop it.

Sometimes food just weighs you down, she had said. And he imagined sky diving with shopping bags, and they laughed at the image of trying to pull the chute open with hands full of shopping. They laughed until they forgot what they were laughing at.

He doesn't like feeling empty. It is like there is a hole in his centre. He feels consumed, not by his hunger but by this new obsession. He can't sleep for thinking about food.

twenty-two

Jemima pops into the share house after uni and thinks that maybe today she is allowed to believe he likes her. When he opens the door her smile is open. Boy of warmth, comfort and safety. Is she moody? Can he tell her moods? Her ups and downs of liking him, herself, trusting their interactions?

As they drink tea and laugh in the living room, she imagines his hand running up her leg. She thinks about Hannah, trying to formulate questions she could ask, wanting to squeeze his knee. Wanting his lips hard against hers. She cannot say the words. It is his grief, his story, his choice to share. When he does kiss her, softly, gently, she wants to run fingers over skin. Little chance of rejection. All the more painful if it happens.

When his body makes motions towards the bedroom she complies in a way that confuses who made the first intimation. She knows they both want this. The closeness is not unbearable. She feels she could be in love.

She wants to have sex because when their bodies aren't touching, when they are clothed on opposite sides of the world, city, car, she can't believe in their

connection. The touch of his lips on her skin removes the need to think, to analyse. She doesn't understand why it all felt so different yesterday. They giggle at themselves, at the awkwardness of sex, and today her laugh is not derisive; there is no scratch of hate under the surface. Her heart is open. The sex settles her and lying in his arms afterwards she can believe. It is not so hard.

They are back on course.

When she gets home, Jemima looks back through her photos from Barcelona. Already they hardly seem real, as though they are paintings of some imaginary land. But, to her, some paintings have always seemed more real than photos, more truthful. She remembers a painting she saw in the Picasso Museum. A self portrait he had done when he was quite young, before he left art school thinking there was nothing they could teach him. The feeling of raw self on the canvas. As though he had nothing to hide. It was rough with power. She remembers wondering, when she saw his later more abstract work, if his portraits were somehow more complete, if with both sides of their face showing he managed to capture the person in a more honest absolute way.

It seemed cathartic, the self portrait, the truthful showing of a person. As though the letting out of all secrets means you are free. With nothing to hide you are free to just live. She could never do that though; she is too much a coward to put all of herself on the canvas. Do you have to scrape back the skin for a true self portrait? Surely selective presentation is part of a self portrait: how do you want to be seen? She is too controlling to put herself up for others' interpretation, doesn't want them to see anything she hasn't chosen to show.

Clement leads Jemima straight into his bedroom when she arrives at the share house the next day. He presses his lips against hers and she laughs, responding to his touch. He pulls her down onto the bed and starts to undress her. Suddenly he sees fresh cuts on her thigh, the skin around it angry and red. His blood stops.

If he didn't know how she got those cuts, he probably wouldn't have even noticed them, caught in the passion of the moment, but, knowing, he can't go on. He is her boyfriend, how is it possible that this pain in her is not somehow his fault?

She kisses him. His stomach rumbles and she giggles, as if trying to cover his change of mood with another change of mood. A hole in his centre.

"Hungry?" she asks and runs her finger down his soft stomach.

The pain in her that makes her do this, the deep dissatisfaction Hannah had with her self, her body, his aching heart at the loss of his sister, it is all too much. He wants her. He wants to fill his emptiness with her. He wants oblivion.

He kisses her again, fingers pressed into her soft flesh. Her blood spilt. Hannah's blood stilled. His blood hot and cold. Their bodies in perversity, working against the natural order. It's painfully physical. He feels each of Jemima's skin cells hard against his, the pain in his stomach twisting against the pleasure of sex. All the blood, pus, mucous, bile of the world pumping through them, making skeletons flesh, making veins swell. All the hurt in the world pushed away from these hot breathing bodies. There is nothing that is not physical.

He needs oblivion. He wants to be okay in her flesh. He is scratching against the emptiness.

She feels like he is consuming her, like he is gobbling up her curves, her breasts, her stomach, feels his fingers grab at her flesh, push it into him.

She is being reduced, absorbed, eaten into him. Not just her body but all of her, soon there will be nothing left. She watches his face; it is dark, eyes unseeing.

Afterwards, as Clement falls asleep next to her, Jemima finds it hard to breathe. His arm presses her body to the mattress, his eyes dream-closed. She is going to disappear. There is glee in this thought.

“You need to stop.” His body jolts as if suddenly waking. She thought he was fast asleep.

“Hmmm?” she says into his chest, their bodies pressed against each other.

“Cutting.” His voice is firm, as though he is a teacher who has made a decision and will stick to it. “You need to stop.”

“Fuck off,” she scoffs, surprising herself, her anger usually turned inward, swallowed. “You can’t tell me what to do.” Their bodies untwine. She has never felt this anger rise in her chest before. “Like you own me. You have no right over me. This is me, my body, I can do what I want with it.” She reaches around on the floor, feeling for shed clothes.

“But you have to stop.” He props himself up on his elbow.

“I can’t believe this.” She grabs her clothes to her, her naked back exposed to him, and covers her skin as quickly as possible.

“But why do you do it? Shouldn’t it be better?”

She knows she can’t argue this, that not even a toe is dipped in rationality. How can she explain that it makes her feel better? She clutches onto her anger, allowing it to drown any other emotion.

“I can’t believe you’re trying to tell me what to do with my body.”

“Don’t go, Jemima,” he says, his hand on her back, almost pressing her away. “Don’t be angry with me.”

“It’s like telling me to lose weight.” How, she is not sure, and he looks at her in confusion. “You knew when we started this,” an accusation of betrayal, like he wants to change the contract, to go back on his word.

“So?” he asks. “It’s a horrible thing to do to yourself. I thought you’d get better.” He is pulling on clothes too, watching her as she gathers her things from around the room.

“So?” she retorts. “You don’t own me. Why do you even care? It’s not like it affects you.”

“I love you.” His voice is quiet, as though this is meant to silence the argument.

She can’t breathe, the weight of this impossibility pressing her lungs. “Well, you don’t, because this is part of me.” She opens his bedroom door and he follows her as she walks to the front door.

“Please, Jem,” he says. “I’m sorry. Can’t we talk about it?”

“No.” She turns to face him, hand on door. “We can never talk about this.”

She watches his eyes as they assess her face, consider the offered terms of agreement.

“Okay.” He reaches out to her hip. “But, stay, will you? Have a cup of tea?”

Her hand drops from the door handle and she is silent for a moment.

“Okay,” she says. “But can I have coffee?” She laughs and despite the layer of tension between them all evening, she is glad she stayed, glad she is now safe in silence.

twenty-three

Shielding her precious homemade cake from the wind with her body, Jemima runs from the car to the front door of the share house. After their fight and their tense “made up” evening, she is worried about seeing Clement again. She’s annoyed at herself for this nervousness, aware that her worry and analysis always make things harder than they should be.

She takes a deep breath and knocks on the door.

“Hi,” she greets Clement as he leans forwards over the cake and kisses her. She is relieved by the kiss, feeling lines drawn around her, like directions in a script. Her nerves settling.

“Hi,” he smiles back.

The wind kisses her legs and, as she steps out of the darkness, damp leaves push their way into the light like sprites of the night. Clement closes the door against the wind and Billy the cat surveys Jemima critically from his seat on the back of the lounge.

“It’s so cold out there!” she says and waits to follow Clement even though she can see Anne in the kitchen from the door.

“Hey Jem,” Anne greets her as they walk across the open floor.

“Hi. I brought cake.” Jemima lifts the cake up into the air. She knows her cake will not be anything compared to what Anne could make but felt the need to contribute. To buy her friendships, she often thinks, remembering what they were told in primary school. You don’t need to buy your friendships with gifts, be yourself, people will only like you if you are yourself. These half true rules, meaningless.

“Fantastic. Just pop it there.” Anne, who’s peeling roast capsicums, nods to the bench which is unusually free of scraps of paper and unopened letters.

Jemima puts her bag on the floor against the bench. “Do you need a hand?”

“I still need to make the salad,” Anne says.

“I’ll help too,” Clement offers, and gets some salad ingredients from the fridge.

“I put the bowl up there.” Anne points with her elbow to a clean bowl next to a row of bowls on the bench. “I was going to put pine nuts in it. They’re in the cupboard.”

Clement gets the pine nuts out of the cupboard Anne indicated.

Anne seems teetering on the edge of chaos. The kitchen is full, every surface occupied. There are bowls of olives and plates of fruit and small goods,

platters of crackers, boards of cheese. There are pots boiling on the stove, something in the oven, and Anne, surrounded by chopping boards and dirty bowls. But Jemima knows that Anne is in control. Jemima has always been amazed at Anne and her ability to cook. She is like a puppet master, every finger busy, everything on the stage firmly controlled.

It reminds Jemima of the awkward comfort of love and food in Anne's mother's kitchen. One equalling the other, herself never quite measuring up to either. Her wrong words and actions, her mistakes and confusion creating pauses and being skipped over. Not even managing syncopation in the music of their family life, just the loud clangs of burnt toast or off beats of spring onions in place of basil.

Slicing, however, can't be stuffed up and so she takes the knife that Clement offers her and starts to slice the cucumber, thin wet rounds. He stands next to her slicing cherry tomatoes in half. She's aware of the space between them, like a sentence without a full stop. Her skin reaches towards his, a magnet held back.

There is too much going on for Clement. Jemima, next to him, her skin, her laugh, her hair shining in the light. His stomach absorbing his attention. Anne's nervousness about hosting, her self esteem on a thin edge, balancing on Ben's flippant and changeable behaviour, on her friend-rival, Isabelle's forthcoming presence. Ansell on the swing, pushed by Steve, between devastation and everlasting adoration. Dodger, upstairs, feeling interrupted by social obligations. The world is pushing at his edges. He tries to concentrate on what is here and now

in the present. He concentrates on slicing the cherry tomatoes. Pick up from the punnet, slice in half, toss onto the rocket in the bowl. Pick up, slice, toss.

“What’s for tea, Anne?” Jemima asks.

“Roast veggie pasta,” Anne says.

“Yum,” says Jemima.

“It’s really good.” Clement tries to ground himself with involvement. Pick up, slice, toss.

Clement feels light on his feet like he is slowly evaporating. It’s because he hasn’t eaten. He knows this and feels slightly nauseous. He concentrates on the weight of the knife in his hand, the puncture of the tomato skin, the sharp slide against the chopping board. He is still unsure how he is going to negotiate not eating tonight.

There is a knock at the door.

“I’ll get it,” Anne says, too quickly, and after washing her hands, turns to Jemima. “Do I look okay?” she asks, smoothing her skirt.

Jemima smiles and nods, “You look great.”

Clement watches Jemima watch Anne as she walks towards the door. He needs to sit down. He steadies himself on the bench as he walks around to the other side and lifts himself up onto a stool.

“Okay?” Jemima’s voice is coated in concern, her knife paused in action.

He grins at her, lying to the world. “Fine.” The world is not in its right place. Behind him he can hear Ben already expounding on the surf of that morning.

They are standing around the kitchen, wine glasses in hand, watching Anne administer the final flourishes and eating bits and pieces from her antipasto plates. Clement still sits on the stool. Jemima is not sure what is wrong, but can tell he’s not feeling well. Ansell and Steve emerged from Ansell’s bedroom soon after Ben and Isabelle arrived, pouring over-large wine glasses full of red and pressing them into people’s hands. Ben and Isabelle stand on opposite sides of the kitchen, Jemima can see that whatever was between them has simmered down into friendship while she’s been away. From Ben’s point of view it was probably never anything else.

“It’s ready,” Anne declares and looks at Clement. “Can you go and get Dodger?”

“I’ll go,” offers Jemima quickly. Clement still looks unstable.

She climbs the stairs up to the studio and knocks timidly on the door before pushing it open.

“Dodger?”

He is already looking at her, stirred by her knock.

“Dinner’s ready.”

“Jemima.” He almost smiles at her. “Welcome back. Come and look at this.” He beckons her over to his sketchbook.

She looks at his drawings, sketches for what look like an epic painting.

“It’s going to be huge,” he says, excitement in his voice. “Seven by three metres or so. There’ll be something wrong with every figure. See this one,” he flips the page to a sketched detail. “A hoof for a foot. This one, no mouth.”

“Our faults made physical,” she muses.

“I guess,” he says and leans back over his sketches.

“We’d better go down to tea,” she says and Dodger nods. She envies his commitment, his ability to make his art real.

“You’re right,” he says and, as he follows her down the stairs, he looks longingly back at the studio.

Everyone is sitting along the row of card tables and desk that has been constructed for this dinner party and Anne is passing around big steaming bowls. Jemima sits in the empty seat next to Clement, Dodger next to her.

Clement found he could get through the antipasto without a problem, passing plates to people, exclaiming over things he hasn’t tasted. It is only now that he has his own plate of food in front of him that he discovers he’s got a problem.

“You shouldn’t have fed us so much before, Anne,” he laughs, joining with the others praising of her food. “I’m stuffed from all that good food you’ve already given us.”

Jemima looks at him and says, “It looks delicious!”

Clement stares at the pasta in front of him. People around him are laughing and talking and his world has shrunk to the pasta, his stomach and his mouth. The red sauce steaming and flecked with green herbs, orange of the pumpkin, the dark green of roasted zucchini, perfect obelisks of pine nuts scattered over irregular lumps of soft white cheese. Hannah. With his fork he prods the pasta, turning forkfuls over like he’s tilling earth. He feels his hunger in his throat as he lifts some pasta to his mouth. He hears laughter around him and the smell, warm and rich, reaches him first. A lump forms in his throat. His eyes water like he is allergic.

There is food in people’s mouths everywhere around him. The world speeds up. It is an eating frenzy. Anne chewing pasta and veggies, blending and mixing in her mouth. A piece of capsicum stuck on her lip as she laughs at something the surfer boy says. Ansell sipping sipping sipping red wine, shoving forkfuls into his mouth. He keeps lifting the fork, eating, swallowing, eyes flitting over faces. Jemima picks at the bowl in front of her, selecting her mouthful, licking her fork with her tongue. Everywhere they are chewing, swallowing, digesting. He cannot join them. The distance from hand to mouth cannot be breached and he prods the pasta with his fork.

He walks into the kitchen and fills a glass by the tap, watching bubbles settle in clear liquid, watching the tap drip its last drop into his glass. Clear on clear.

Jemima shrinks down into her chair as Dodger and Steve start to argue. Clement seems oblivious to the rising voices. Everyone falls silent as they both stand and stare at each other across the table. She looks at Clement, wanting and expecting him to do something, to step in and stop the fight, but he is standing by the sink, he is not doing anything. He's not paying attention.

“You should never have painted Hannah's portrait,” spits Steve.

Jemima draws breath. The answer to a question she should know. It is only looking around at Anne and Ansell's faces, at their hesitant looks towards Clement that she remembers how she knows the name Hannah. Clement's sister. The gap widens.

“She'd only just died and you go and use her starved body as an example of scrawniness. Art!” Steve scoffs. “Like you've got anything to say anyway. It was so fucking insensitive.”

She didn't even know Hannah was anorexic. She is the one who knows him least. She is the girlfriend who is kept an arm's length away. She is the lover without the history.

Dodger looks towards Clement as though judging his reaction. “You don't understand. I threw red paint on it, Steve.” He speaks quietly but his voice is angry. Dodger nods towards the paint puddle near Anne's door. “Just like you. If you'd bothered to go to the exhibition you would have seen that. No one saw it except for you and me. No one even knew about it.”

Jemima remembers she's seen that canvas. In the studio, looking for something with Anne. Taller than it is wide, a thick splash of red paint running

down the surface, hiding whatever is grey and dark underneath. The feeling that there is something underneath, something that is being kept secret.

“You shouldn’t have painted it. You’d sacrifice your own mother if her blood was the right colour.” Steve, suddenly the one who’s let the secret out and is holding the wrong grudge, scrambles around for other things to throw. “It hurt. Even me and I hardly knew her.” Months of anger baseless. “And you still exhibited it. It was meant to be our exhibition. We were meant to do it together.”

Ben and Isabelle look shifty eyed and uncomfortable. It’s like watching a friend’s parents argue, something private you should not see, things exposed that you don’t want to know in contexts you don’t understand. Anne looks close to panic, devastated her dinner party has become such a disaster.

“So that’s what you’re angry about? That I didn’t fall apart without you?” Dodger’s voice is full of venom. “I had to use works that weren’t even ready yet. I could have damaged my reputation. You could have ruined me by pulling out.” Again Dodger nods towards the red paint.

“That’s a lie,” Ansell blurts out suddenly. Clement always says that Ansell wants to be love, muse, amanuensis, breath, light and world to Steve.

Steve glares at Ansell as if he’s said something more insulting than anything Dodger said. Jemima understands the indignity of having someone with a bias fight for you. His words more meaningless than a loving mother’s about a picture held to the fridge with a magnet.

Absurdly, Jemima almost feels like laughing. How seriously they take themselves! How important they are to themselves! She lifts her legs and presses

her thighs to the underside of the table, feels the scars sting. How seriously she takes herself! How important she thinks her pain!

“What would you know?” Dodger’s wrath turns. “You don’t even have an eye. You’ve got no talent.”

Ansell’s face falls and he looks at Steve.

“Fuck you,” says Steve, but it is obvious this is not on Ansell’s behalf. Jemima can almost see Ansell’s heart and ego breaking. He knows he is not good enough and he’s always known Steve doesn’t love him. She watches as these truths are ground into his heart by Steve, ignoring Dodger’s slight.

“I’ve always been better than you.” Steve pushes his chair back violently and starts to walk from the room. “Fuck you,” he says again.

“I’ve still got the canvases,” yells Dodger as Steve storms from the house, sounding angrier than such an admission should.

Ansell glares at Dodger, channelling the pain from wounds inflicted by his lover to another source, and follows Steve from the house. Dodger in turn glares around the table at the rest of them, and then storms out the back, slamming the door loudly, disappearing into the cold night.

The quiet is surprising, the stillness a shock.

Clement grips the glass of water in his hand and leans heavily against the sink. He knows that there is something going on in the room around him, he can hear the

raised voices, see the bodies moving but he cannot concentrate, cannot take his attention from his churning stomach and the memories that clasp him sharply.

In Barcelona it was paella that made him sick. He thinks it was the rice. People always think it is seafood, but more often it is the rice. In his tiny room he'd curled up on the little foldout camping bed, the blanket twisted around his body so that when he had to get up, in a rush for the toilet, he tripped and banged his head on the wall. Now as he leans against the sink he lifts his hand to feel where the lump was.

He was bed-bound, for two days, and felt like he was floating on the surface of time, which skitted underneath him, forgetting to sweep him down, under, into it. But then when it did it sucked him under with a rude shock and when he woke he realised he'd finally been sleeping. The light shone too brightly through the window. He still felt seedy when he crawled out to the shower and went to book a ticket home. That delay cost him more time, the next possible flight in three days, and time now tugged at him, constantly reminding him of its slow slow flow. All the while he was uncertain about how fast life dripped from body on the other side of the world.

He had felt empty then, too. His stomach still tender from fighting its battle, his throat scratchy from throwing up. And he was hesitant about food. First a little bread, and then a little more. Things that were heavy and soaked up any leftover bacteria.

He called Hannah then, time eating up his Euros as he listened to the nurses at the reception try and find her, talk rooms and meetings and doctor's visits. Her voice was quiet on the phone, reduced. It was a strange empty

conversation, like talking to a ghost. The silences were long and they didn't know what to say. He couldn't talk about Barcelona, the gap between how real it was for him, and how unreal for her was too big. She had no picture, no way to anchor herself to what he was saying. And it seemed trivial, to talk about Barceloneta or the Miró museum, the light open space was too removed from her life. And her life was too close for her to talk about, he had no way to anchor himself in her experience. His stomach was still testing the bread, still deciding whether to accept it or reject it. He remembers pressing his favourite drawings and sketchbooks into his suitcase, deciding what to leave behind.

Clement looks at the glass of water in his hand, the clean clarity of transparency.

"I don't want you to come back, Clement," she had said, finally, after too much silence. "I'm fine. I'll be fine. I don't want to ruin your trip."

It was an arrow but he didn't know where it hurt. And later, when he had put in his very last Euro, when the voice told them, in Spanish, they only had one minute left, "I want it to be over, Clement. I want to feel different." And that had been all. He had listened to the beep for moments, asking it to explain her to him, asking it to tell her that she could, that it's simple, if she wanted it.

Clement concentrates on breathing. On breath entering and leaving his lungs, his throat, his nostrils. He gulps his glass of water.

After he had hung up from Hannah, he'd gone back home and looked at his favourite of all his paintings, the one of the crying girl at Park Güell, the one he had known from the moment he saw it completed that he would frame it and

give it to Hannah. A token for her of his time in Barcelona. He had pulled the painting down, blue tack pulling slivers of paint with it, caught the metro to Vallcarca, climbed the steep hill, run up the outdoor escalators to Park Güell, through the winding paths to the front entrance, to where he'd seen the red jacketed girl, where he'd done sketch after sketch of people, tiles, the city, the gate houses. He had stood there, looking out over the city of Barcelona, La Sagrada surrounded by scaffolding like a grandma with her zimmerframe, the Agbar Tower rising, phallic, from the earth, the twin skyscrapers at Port Olympic tall by the ocean. He had torn the painting in his hands into little squares and dropped them, like confetti, little red white blue squares of paper falling amongst the pigeons, catching the light of the setting sun, like fire, dancing on the air, settling, scattered, stuck between tiles, spreading out over Barcelona, tangled in the hair of people down below.

Jemima turns to the kitchen to see Clement still standing there as though he's floating above the surface of the evening. Isabelle giggles and Ben pushes his chair back loudly.

“Well,” he says, “that’s what I call mid meal entertainment.”

Isabelle giggles again and Anne glares at him, close to tears.

“I don’t get it,” says Isabelle. “What were they fighting about?”

Anne stands and starts picking up almost full plates from the table.

“Anne,” Jemima says, not knowing what to say next, and Anne looks at her, brown eyes brimming. Her eyes flick between Ben, Isabelle and the table.

Isabelle stands and taps Ben on the shoulder. “Maybe we should go?” It sounds like a question but it is an instruction. “The food was delicious Anne.”

Anne nods. “Thanks for coming,” she says, without grace.

Jemima moves forward with them, finding coats and bags. “Sorry, guys,” she says unsure what she’s apologising for – the fight or the banishment, or something else entirely. “Thanks for coming.”

She closes the door behind them. Anne sits down again, the plates returned to the table loudly. Jemima waits a moment for Clement to move but he remains still in the kitchen. This all seems an over-reaction, making the others leave, the tears, like the fight was between them all, not just Dodger and Steve.

“It’s all my fault,” says Anne. “I can’t believe I was so stupid as to invite them both.” She looks with sorrowful eyes to Clement. “I’m sorry Clem.”

Jemima also looks towards him, trying to sort it out in her own head and placing a hand on Anne’s shoulder.

“I’m going to bed,” he says. It hurts that she is not included in this option; she is nothing more than furniture. She can understand if he is hurt that Dodger used his sister as a model for fleshlessness, but why the silence? Why does it seem like she doesn’t even exist? She strokes Anne’s shoulder as she watches Clement close his bedroom door.

“The food was amazing,” she says.

Anne looks at her and laughs. “It was good, wasn’t it?” She laughs again. “Even if I do say so myself.”

Anne and Jemima tidy up, leaving a pile of dirty dishes by the sink. Once they have finished Jemima stands quietly outside Clement's door, listening for any noises inside, any signs of what she should do. It is silent and she decides to go home, unable to invade his inner spaces.

Clement can't sleep. The noises of Anne and Jemima cleaning up stopped hours ago and he's given up waiting for the door to open and for Jemima to join him in bed, her warm soft skin a comfort against his. It is dark, the only light is from his clock radio, but it is enough to shadow his upside down steps, enough to add texture to his open eyed night. There is still anger in the air, as if the night has been shattered and no one has bothered to piece it back together, to bind it with a soft bandage. His stomach aches. It feels like Hannah has been made actual in the emptiness of the shattered night. Like someone has spoken her name and now she haunts the darkness, pushed aside by a hint of light.

He imagines Jemima's lips, her taste.

His stomach flutters with hunger.

He feels like he's lost the ability to live his own life. There are no more decisions, just things that happen. He cannot control anything anymore. He wonders if he ever could.

He grabs a pen and notebook from the floor next to his bed and finds himself scrunched up against the dim light emanating from his clock radio, sketching a girl on the lined page in front of him. She looks over her shoulder out

of the page. He throws the pen and paper away from him, the book sliding across the floor to the other side of the room, and stares at the ceiling. His stomach rumbles.

The cement floor is cold on his feet when he stands up and he bumps into a stool on his way to the kitchen. Anne is sleeping behind her closed door. He doesn't think anyone else is home. The air is hushed.

He opens the fridge door. He is only wearing white boxers and the dim light shines on his white skin. Chasing Hannah into corners. A blue tinge. He is a body in the kitchen.

He peers into the fridge. It is a mess of half used packets of things jumbled haphazardly on top of each other but in the middle shelf sits Jemima's cake, a ring of space around it like a halo. The only thing rescued from the remnants of the meal, like a full stop never used, a destination unreachd. Cling wrap stretches over it, squashing the icing, giving it smooth round edges. He reaches out and runs a finger down the cling wrap, over the soft cold icing and down the smooth empty surface, feeling the tension. When he removes his finger he has left a little dent in the plastic. He has ruined it. The night's last chance to be something different.

Taking the plate from the fridge, he tries to reform the tension of the plastic, but he has stretched it and he gets icing on his fingers and smears it accidentally, leaving fingerprints. He licks his finger without thinking. The icing is good. Sweet. Like concentrated sugar with a sharp lemon taste. With his finger, he wipes the cling wrap, trying to clean it, transferring the smudged icing from cling wrap to finger to mouth. It is impossible to neaten. The cake feels heavy

when he picks up a slice. His teeth move easily through its bulk. Sweetness spreads over his tongue, the bite of lemon crowds the edges of his mouth. It tastes like Jemima. He chews the soft crumbs, feels them disintegrate between his teeth, swallows cake like a lump down his throat.

His mouth is full of smooth sweetness and he keeps biting, swallowing, biting, swallowing as though he is practising circular breathing. He breaks lumps of cake from the circle and pushes them into his mouth, piece after piece, his mouth full, chewing and swallowing at the same time. The cold from the fridge bathes him as he squashes together the crumbs left on the plate and lifts them to his mouth, wipes the last skerrick from the cling wrap, licks his fingers. He runs his tongue around the edge of his mouth. It is all gone.

He throws the glad wrap in the bin and, despite the pile of dirty dishes by the sink, washes the plate in hot water, dries it with a tea towel and puts it in the cupboard, at the bottom of a pile of odd plates.

His feet are cold, no longer just his toes and the soles of his feet. His cheeks feel cold as he closes the fridge door and plunges himself back into darkness.

He wanders to the bathroom. The light flicks, fluorescent, brighter than the fridge. He looks in the mirror and sees that his face is wet. He has been crying. His cheeks shine with tears like light after rain. He reaches up and touches his face. It is warm and soft and he feels the wetness on his fingertips. When he tastes the tears, they are salty. Something has broken in him and he doesn't know if that is good or bad.

Jemima isn't sure she did the right thing. Was it heartless or respectful of her not to go in and see how Clement was doing after the party? Was she giving him space or neglecting him in a time of need?

She thinks about the fight tonight. Poor Clement. It must hurt to know his friend had painted Hannah like that. And to find out in that way.

She doesn't know what Steve and Dodger were like when they were working together but she gathers it was fairly volatile and that it worked, the heat between them creating inspiration. Their ideas and talents bouncing off each other, twisting around each other, creating things they could not have done alone. They both seemed so hurt tonight, so wounded and vulnerable. Their anger a thin mask, what else?

Her chest feels tight and dark. She can feel the pain and confusion of them all. It all crowds around her head. She cannot believe in light and happiness, that life can be anything other than a dark twisted struggle. She cannot believe in love. There is no place in this world for happiness. There is some sort of deep satisfaction in this thought, as though it's proof she is unlovable, as she draws the razor blade across her skin and waits for the blood to run.

twenty-four

Clement wakes slowly, groggily, his mind stuck in the quicksand of his dreams. The first things he is aware of are his hunger and his thirst. His mouth tastes metallic and the idea of water pouring over his tongue and cooling his throat is enough to untangle his legs from the sheets. His face feels swollen as he blinks in the dark room. It is early, the house is quiet.

Clement's legs walk him up the stairs to the studio. He finds himself kneeling in front of the shelves and reaching in to pull out his old boxes. They are full of materials: a box full of charcoal, stubs and pencils, soft and hard; paints, the lids sealed by dry paint, the tubes squeezed, the pots spotted with the wrong colours; things he liked for still life: driftwood, shells; a tiny artist's mannequin that he found at a garage sale, one arm missing; canvas boards he got at a sale; a pad of water colour paper with some pages torn out, some left in and used, some blank, pristine and white. On top is the picture he did of a model for one of his major assessments. Under that is half a picture, Hannah. Only half of it, the other half long since screwed up and thrown out, or what ever she did with it when she ripped it from him in the anger of being drawn. His breath catches in his throat as

he sees it, he can almost feel it being pulled from his hands, the paper scrunched where his grip tightened. At one time he was that protective of his art. Now, in boxes further back, his old drawings and paintings from his years at high school and uni gather dust, create homes for silverfish, stick together with decay. He wishes he kept the stuff he did in Barcelona. He wishes he hadn't burnt it all, that he could turn page after page of painted and sketched scenes, wade through the memories.

He pulls out a sketchbook, only the front few pages used, and grabs his pencil case and charcoal. He sets up a scene: the driftwood, a pot from Anne's ceramics class, a paint splashed jar with brushes sticking out of it. At first his line is unconvincing, hesitant on the page, but his fingers warm up, his eyes remember how to see. He uses pencil and the charcoal, turning the pages as he completes a sketch, or gives up on one. He changes the arrangement, adding a paint tube, removing the brushes, taking off his shoe and placing it amongst the other objects. He gets out his pastels and uses colour, practising, his hands, eyes, brain remembering how to work. The hours don't pass, he just puts this shadow here, adjusts this shape, turns another page, until he has used the last page of his sketch book and he notices his hand is aching, returning to himself. He smiles, excited, exhausted.

It feels so natural. It feels real and pure. The ecstasy of creation. He knows what he is going to do. But first: breakfast.

Anne glances up at him as he comes down the stairs.

“Afternoon,” she says, unsmilingly. She is standing by the toaster and the dim winter light is soft on her skin, contrasting with the hard crockery, benches, metal sink, walls around her.

“Afternoon.” He can’t help smiling.

“I don’t think they’re home yet,” she says. “Are you okay?”

“Hmmm?” He’s not sure what she’s talking about and opens the fridge, bending to peer in, an empty space conspicuous on the centre shelf.

“Can you grab the marg?” Anne asks. “Are you going to talk to Dodger?”

Clement shrugs, passing her the margarine. He knows he should ask about the fight last night but it feels like it doesn’t matter, like today is a new beginning. Billy rubs himself against Anne’s legs, his fur shining and smooth next to the texture of Anne’s pants.

“I shouldn’t have invited him,” she says

“Steve?” Clement skulls a glass of tap water, noticing the way a droplet runs down the outside of the glass.

“Dodger.”

“You had to. He lives here.” Clement gets a plate from the cupboard, Jemima’s plate is still at the bottom of the pile. “It’s time they got over whatever they’re fighting about.”

Anne glances up at him. “After last night? It just made it worse.”

“They used to fight all the time.”

Anne looks sceptical, taking her toast over to the bench and sitting on a stool.

“It’s better than them not talking.” Clement pops his own toast, butters it and spreads it with a thin layer of vegemite, dark silt on a dry riverbed.

He takes his plate over and sits next to Anne.

“You’re cheerful,” she says, as if she only just noticed and it is an offence.

He smiles at her, saying nothing, looking at the toast in front of him.

She laughs. “Maybe you’re right.” She chews the last bite of her toast.

“Maybe it is better.”

He lifts the toast to his mouth. As he chews and swallows, as the toast on his plate is reduced to one piece, half a piece, he feels himself settle, as though the food in his stomach is bringing him down to the ground, anchoring him like a weight on a helium balloon. The saltiness of the vegemite, the heaviness of the bread, the texture in his mouth, is more pleasant than he remembers.

Anne puts her plate by the sink and puts the margarine back in the fridge.

“Hey,” she says in surprise. “Who ate Jemima’s cake?”

Clement looks guiltily away from her. “I did,” he admits. “Last night.”

“The whole thing!” Her voice mixes shock, amusement and disappointment.

He shrugs. “Sorry.”

“Piggy wiggy.” Anne laughs and pokes his stomach around the bench.

He laughs and slaps away her hands. “I know,” he says. “I couldn’t stop.”

After breakfast Clement heads back upstairs.

He tidies up his stuff and pushes his boxes of old drawings back onto the shelf. He flicks through that morning’s work. The practice of drawing. Lines on a page. They are not good, but they improve as he turns the pages. As he surveys his work, he notices the canvases that were next to the shelves have been moved. Looking around, he notices for the first time the five canvases that lean against the studio walls. They are Steve and Dodger’s old ones. He laughs at himself. He’s spent all morning studying the shade, colour, texture of his tiny collection of objects so closely that he failed to notice them. Dodger must have pulled them out from behind the shelves and placed them around the room. They are all black, grey, brown and white, except for one tall narrow canvas, which has red paint dripping down its centre, covering most of what is underneath. Despite the fact that he can see they are incomplete, he finds them arresting. He can see the different angle each artist brings to it. Some parts seem entirely Steve: the delicate feather work on the dove, the reflective scales of the fish in the bird cage; other parts entirely Dodger: the brutal movement of the fish, the thick violence in the face of the child with the burst balloon. But some places he can’t tell – their ideas so perfectly blended that they lift from the canvas, a third purer expression. The sad crumple of the empty balloon, the bland inertia of the glass of water.

He hasn’t seen any of them before. They must have been doing them when he was spending most of his time visiting Hannah, but seeing them confirms what he has always known. Together, their work is something special.

As he slides the last of his things onto the shelf, Dodger appears at the door. He hovers there for a second, as though contrite, and then rushes over to Clement.

“I’m sorry man,” he says and nods to the tall canvas with red paint dripping down the centre.

Clement looks at him in confusion.

“My painting of Hannah? I did it the day after she died. You were at your folks’ place and all I could think about was you and them and her. It was so sad.” He looks at the paint spattered ground. “I should never have painted it. It was meant to be a tribute. It was meant to – I don’t know.”

Clement had wondered what was under that red paint. He is surprised by his lack of emotion. He knows that if he had found this out yesterday he would have felt angry, betrayed, part of his life stolen. Furious that other people had found inspiration in his sister where his art had died. Today he just wonders what she looks like under that paint, if she is flesh or bone.

He is even touched by Dodger’s gesture and rests his hand on Dodger’s arm. “It’s okay,” he says. “Thank you.”

He goes down the stairs and into the kitchen. There is no one else about, he doesn’t know where they are. He eats some left overs straight from the fridge and gets into bed, exhausted and satisfied. He falls asleep quickly, sleeping deep and peacefully, without weight.

twenty-five

After Dodger's confession, Clement feels responsible for Steve and Dodger's falling out. He calls Steve to ask him to come over. Ansell is certain that he won't come but Clement knows it will be easy to convince him, that the fight shifted something, lifted the lid.

Once Steve arrives Clement makes coffee and they chat as if there isn't an ulterior motive.

They all laugh as Ansell squawks out a joke. Dodger comes out of his room, hearing Steve's voice or his laugh and silence falls over them. Clement watches. Ansell is the only one who becomes tense.

"They're still up there," Dodger says quietly, regarding Steve from where he stands on the other side of the room. "I got them out after the party."

Steve watches him, turning his mug in a circle.

"The canvases we were working on." Dodger doesn't move.

"All of them?" Steve glances at Clement and Dodger nods.

“They look good,” Clement says. “I saw them last night.”

“They’re still up there?” Steve asks after a pause.

Dodger nods again.

Fire flashes between their eyes.

“The wire and dove?” Steve asks. Dodger nods his head almost imperceptibly. “I worked out how to fix it.”

Interest and a question in Dodger’s face.

“We use real wire. Barbed wire. Simplify the paint and use real wire.”

Dodger nods. “Obvious,” he says, although it’s evident he has never thought of it. He nods again, this time a question, and Steve stands. They walk up the stairs to the studio.

“I can’t work out how to attach it though.” Their voices fade as they disappear, Ansell watching them, pained.

He turns to Clement and sighs.

“I know,” he says and Clement looks at him. “This was going to happen all along.”

Clement shrugs. There was no way of knowing what would happen.

“There’s no place for me with Steve. I’ve always known that.”

“They’re not lovers,” Clement points out. “You know Dodger’s straight.”

Ansell snorts. “Dodger could *never* be Steve’s lover.” He rolls his eyes. “He’s not pretty enough,” he says *pretty* as though it was something to be both scorned and revered.

Clement laughs. “Not like you?”

“Not like me.” Ansell mimes flicking long hair over his shoulders. Even though he is joking, there is sadness in his movements. “Well,” he says, pouring the rest of his coffee down the sink. “If I can’t have all of him, I don’t want any of him.” He looks tired. “Not anymore. I’m done.” He dusts off his hands as if Steve is a dead and dirty pot plant he’s just put out with the rubbish.

Clement squeezes Ansell’s shoulder as he passes.

“See you, Clem. I’m going to work.” He sniffs but remains composed.

“See you Ansell.” Clement smiles at him. “You’ll be okay.”

Clement finishes his coffee and calls Jemima asking her to come over when she can.

Jemima is nervous, again, about seeing Clement. She’s never sure he is going to like her. She fears some sort of nice-guy obligation, some inability to hurt. Surely, by now, she should believe he likes her. She finds herself so frustrating, why can’t she just trust his feelings for her? Because things change and sometimes there is no warning.

“Hello?” she calls as she opens the front door and walks into the share house.

“Hi.” Clement walks over from the bench where he was sitting and kisses her. Today he likes her. She is reassured.

“How’d you pull up?” she asks. “After the party? It was pretty intense.”

He looks at her in question, as though the party was so long ago everything has moved on.

“Fine,” he says, dismissively. He places his hands on her upper arms, holding her, facing her to him, and says, “I want to draw you.”

“Oh.” She didn’t expect to hear that. She didn’t think he wanted to draw anymore. “I didn’t know you were drawing again.”

Saying *no* is not an option. She can tell he hasn’t even thought about whether she would want to do it. She is there and she will be drawn. Because this is the first thing she knows, she doesn’t ask herself if she wants to do this, she doesn’t ask herself how she feels.

He is waiting for her to say *okay*, so she says, “Okay.”

“Great.” He is all action and grabs his sketchbook and pencil from where he was sitting. “Steve and Dodger are in the studio—”

“Together?”

He nods impatiently at her. “Yeah, they made up. So, we’ll have to do it down here. I’ll do clothes on first and later, would you mind? I’ll do some nudes.” The question is cursory. The business of drawing.

She sighs and knows she will just roll with it. She'll do what she's told. She wants to please people. She wants to be liked.

"How do you want me?" she asks.

"Take your jacket off. Look out the window."

She does as he asks, and continues to do so as the afternoon progresses.

She wonders if she should be flattered that he wants to draw her. She wants to ask him, *So, why are you drawing again? What happened? Is it something to do with Dodger and Steve? With your sister? Why the sudden inspiration, the sudden change of heart?* She wants to tell him about her own new idea of layering and building a picture with parts that are hidden, parts that are always kept secret. She wants to blow up her photos from Barcelona and draw sections, add them in, make slight changes, have parts of the photo in fine pencil drawings.

Still, she doesn't say anything. She stands still and adjusts her body when he tells her to. She stands still and doesn't say a word.

After sketching Jemima all afternoon, Clement can feel something forming in his head. The figure is taking shape, placing herself in space, on the canvas. He hadn't realised how much he missed drawing. It feels like he's returning to his body. And hanging out with Jemima all afternoon was nice even though he was distracted by the new energy in his fingers. It's like there is a sense of urgency in his life.

After she leaves, he catches the train to his parents' place. His dad is out for the evening, working late, at a conference, something, Clement doesn't enquire about the details.

His mum makes tea and they sit at the kitchen table to eat it, Perro sprawled metres away.

"I didn't get that job at the library," he says. "Dad'll be annoyed."

"Don't listen to your father," his mum says, surprising him. "You've got some misguided feeling that Hannah was his favourite and you have to somehow fill her shoes. Her not being here is all the more reason to live your life true to yourself, Clement. Your father just wants what's best for you."

Clement looks at his mum with new eyes. He can see her strength in a way he never has before. He has always thought of her as submissive, living and loving for her husband and children but she has a deep solid foundation holding her to the ground, making sure she stands up. For the first time he sees her as a person independent from him, his sister, his father, their lives.

"Why haven't you said that to me before?" he asks.

"I have." She smiles at him and pats his hand. "You just haven't listened."

"I've started drawing again, Mum."

She looks at him in surprise. "Oh, Clement!" There are tears in her eyes. "Oh." Her hands shuffle nothing, moving her fork, knife, her napkin. "Come here." She pulls him to her, hugging him tightly. "I'm so..." she trails off, her tears wetting his cheek. "I'm so relieved."

Clement laughs as she releases him. He didn't realise it would mean so much to her. "Me too, Mum. Me too."

twenty-six

Jemima follows Clement into the bathroom. The light is better than in his room. The studio, again, is being used, and Clement is sensitive enough to know that Jemima wants the privacy.

“I put a heater on before, it shouldn’t be too cold,” he says as he closes the door and starts fussing around with his sketch pad and seat.

She’s hesitant about taking off her clothes. He’s seen her naked before but in the dim light of night, and with the blurry eyes of passion. He has not examined her body in the cold fluorescence of the bathroom, a mirror reflecting her hideousness.

“The light’s terrible,” he says, and she nods not really paying attention. “Maybe we’ll be able to use the studio later.”

She wonders if she should step into the bath, behind the shower curtain, to get undressed, to have some sort of privacy if only in the transition from clothed to naked.

But Clement is not looking at her, he is moving his chair back into the corner by the door, looking for a place to put his charcoal.

She pulls off her jumper, folds it slowly, places it on the edge of the bath. Removes her top and folds it. She is aware of the fresh scars and the old scars, on her thigh under her jeans, waiting to be revealed. She takes a deep breath and pulls off her jeans, her bra, her undies, and sits next to them on the edge of the bath, arms folded in front of her breasts, waiting for instruction.

“Ready?” Clement asks and smiles at her as if he doesn’t register her nakedness.

She nods. “How do you want me?” she asks, and stands.

“Your arm like this.” He shows her and she copies. “A bit more this way.” His hands on her flesh, like it is bread dough, moving her, adjusting her. She sees that he notices the scars but he doesn’t say anything as he places her. She doesn’t know if his lack of reaction is because he knows she doesn’t want to talk about it or because she is already just something to draw and he is too distracted and bound up in his work.

“Like this?” she asks. She knows what it is like. She has drawn live models before. She has seen the human body as form, as lines and contours, spaces of light and shade, as a shape to be translated onto the page.

“Perfect.” He steps back and returns to his sketchpad, faces her and gazes at her for a few minutes.

She can feel herself being turned into an object. Not objectified, there is nothing sexual about Clement’s gaze, but her arse is no different from the curve of

the sink, the scars along her thigh of the same value as the grout between the tiles. She is being turned into a toothbrush, an orange, a dead pheasant. She is cold. Her body is not flesh and blood. There is no proof. She will need proof later in the form of blood and pain.

She wonders what happened to the pig carcasses, if they were removed and buried or if they were left there to rot. Flies breeding in their flesh, muscle dissolving, skin dripping away, bones drying and disappearing into the springs and foam of the decaying couch. Their pig-ness disappearing like the stench of their rotting selves. No longer two pigs. No longer pigs at all.

Despite the heater it is cold, the tiles freezing her feet. She stands, and breathes, and gets colder. She tries not to think.

After a long time standing still, after shifting into new positions, different angles, eventually, Clement says, "I think I've got enough for the moment." He looks up at her, her eyes and face, not her body. "How are you going? Are you cold?" Does he think she is returning to being a real person? Does he think her feet will thaw?

"Sorry," he looks at the heater. "I should have looked for a better one."

She pulls on her underwear and jeans as Clement packs his stuff.

"Tea?" he asks. "I'll leave you to..." He slips out the door as she puts on the rest of her clothes. She goes to the toilet and when she returns to wash her hands, she looks at herself in the mirror. She looks waxy, her flesh unreal like moulded clay. She touches her fingers to her face, ice like, they make her flinch.

She goes out and joins Clement in the kitchen.

“Here,” he passes her a mug of tea. “Thanks, Jemima. For doing this. I really appreciate it.” He smiles at her and she smiles back. His hand squeezes her arm.

“Do you want to stay for tea? Maybe a DVD?”

“Sure,” she says, and smiles again. For him there seems to be no transition from in there to out here. “A DVD would be nice.”

Later, in bed, Jemima assumes Clement has fallen asleep so when he props himself up on his elbow and looks at her in the dim green glow of his clock radio she is surprised. He runs his fingers down the side of her body, down the curve of her waist, up the rollercoaster of her hip, down her thigh. His fingers stop abruptly. They have reached her scratches and start moving again, slowly feeling along the lines of broken skin.

It’s as if she is a different body to the one he drew, as though the idea of drawing blinded him. Is she more real now or when he was drawing her? She waits for a reaction.

The bumps of scabs under his fingers. He feels the intensity of wanting things to be different but also her need for him to let her be. He resists words. Leans forward and kisses her.

“Jemima.”

She slides her hand around his neck and pulls him to her, kissing him back. They lie, bodies snuggled together, and Jemima waits for sleep. When Clement gets up and pulls on some clothes, she doesn’t react, assuming he’s going to the toilet. She hears footsteps climbing up the stairs over the bed, but still, she

waits for him to come back. The darkness thickens around her. Time passes and he doesn't come back.

She knew the moment he asked her to pose for him that things would be different. Maybe he's going to dump her. This thought doesn't make her particularly sad. She can't believe that having known from the very beginning that she cut, after making her pose for him for days, after staying with her while she was away, he is going to dump her. It feels like he is reneging on their unspoken agreement. It was the cutting that first intrigued him; it couldn't have been anything else. She was meant to be the artist.

She feels like everything is falling from her grasp. Cutting is the only way she knows how to cope, so she leans off the mattress and scrambles in her bag for something sharp. Her trusty nail scissors. They hover above her thigh as she watches the door. She doesn't cut there, that is where he'd look. She imagines a daily check, like he's an overbearing nurse, and punishment if there is something wrong with her body. She displays her arm to herself, the white smooth inner arm. Three short straight lines. Blood wet and revealing. She glances again at the door and quickly puts the scissors back in her bag. Grabbing a tissue, she presses it onto the cuts. She lifts it away, pulls at the skin, encouraging more blood. Bright red on the white tissue.

The house is quiet. Everyone is asleep. It is dark outside, no light shines through the skylight. Clement is now ready to paint, suddenly and surprisingly. Something

in that ache he felt as his fingers ran over her scars makes him want to paint this picture. Something to do with the extent to which he just doesn't understand how or why she could do that to herself. Her cutting just doesn't make sense. It almost makes sense for some emo kid, or a Goth, someone who's into the macabre, into performance of pain, someone he doesn't know.

He moves things off his easel, remembering when his mum and Hannah gave it to him as a *congratulations* present for getting into his course. His low grades meant he had to rely on the strength of his portfolio, so it was a surprise to get the envelope and they had all laughed hysterically in the kitchen. He's excited to be standing in front of it again.

The canvas has already been primed. It's a cheap one, the paints old, his technique near forgotten. It is just a small painting to remind himself how to do it. He'll attempt Dodger-like lofty career starting canvases later, he jokes to himself.

He sketches lightly on the canvas, thinking about the torn and scattered page he was going to give to Hannah. That one was the practice, the sketch. He lays down a blue, works on the detail of the broken tiles. This feeling for Jemima reminds him of how he felt about Hannah. Someone he loves is in pain and he doesn't understand why or know how he can help.

He paints the figure nude first, her scars lit by the sunshine. The angle is difficult and he refers again and again to the different sketches of Jemima. He looks at the figure he's drawn. Her scars visible, the softness of her flesh, her gentle skin. He finds himself painting over her skin, dressing her in a red coat. Hiding what is not his to share.

As slim light starts to edge through the skylight, he finishes the painting.

The girl faces out of the painting, eyes wide, mouth soft. She holds her hands palms up in front of her like an offering. In the foreground is a tiled bench and a view of a city spreads out beyond that, reaching out to the sea and up to the sky. Clement knows that someone who hasn't been there won't know that it is specifically Park Güell, Barcelona, but that doesn't matter. It is a woman in a city caught between her present and past, between the viewer and her own thoughts, between possession and independence. Maybe she is breaking free. In her eyes is the honesty he covered with the coat. In her eyes is a pain and a tenderness and an ability to heal.

He is relieved. It is good. The technique, perhaps, could be improved, but it is emotive. To him, at least, it means something. He thinks about Hannah, the emptiness he's felt since her death. He thinks about Jemima and her self harm as he stares at the painting. He wishes she'd talk to him about it. He thinks of his not painting, not eating. How his empty sickness made him feel better, self satisfied. Jemima not knowing about Hannah had somehow meant her death didn't seem so real, as though silence was denial.

Of course he wants her to stop but now, as he stares at his painting, he feels willing to try to understand. He doesn't want to fix her, heal her, bend her to what he thinks is normal, he just wants to understand.

He climbs down the stairs slowly, goes to his room, sits on the edge of his bed where Jemima sleeps, curled like a foetus. He watches her peaceful face. Quietly, quietly, he climbs into the bed beside her, this girl he loves, this girl he wants to help break free, this second chance. He feels tender after painting all

night, exhausted, on the edge of reality. Bruised, as though he left his soul on the canvas. He sleeps lightly, dreaming of paint.

Jemima wakes to see Clement beside her and wonders where they stand. What did it mean, last night, the way he stroked her scars? A cold fist of fear closes around her heart.

“Where did you go last night?” she asks and he leans his body towards her, lining them side by side.

“I painted.” Clement yawns. “All night.”

“Oh good.” She looks across at him. Could she lie? Tell him she won’t cut anymore? “Did you get much done?” She likes his arm over her, safe and warm.

“I finished it.”

“Well done!” She leans back into him. “Can I see it?”

“Of course.” He starts to get up. She didn’t mean now but follows him as he climbs from the bed and pulls on some clothes.

They walk up the studio steps. The house is quiet, everyone else still asleep. As she steps into the studio and sees the painting on the easel, she stops in her tracks. It is like her soul has been cracked open and spread violently across the canvas, the thick paint her blood, her fears, her vulnerabilities. He has wrenched out her insides and exposed them for all the world to see. He has come too close, taken too many liberties. He expects her not to mind this betrayal of privacy.

She looks at herself in the painting. She has been trapped there, she didn't have a choice. Held in her palms is an escape from the self hate, the feeling that somehow she is wrong at her very core. It is her choice – she can keep it all, close her fists and stuff them deep into her pockets or she can let go – open her palms and loosen her grip on herself. See what would happen if she didn't clutch with such tightness the comfort of hate.

She could receive in her open palms what is being offered. A chance to accept herself, a chance to believe what he thinks of her, a chance to face herself and her fears, a chance to know how empty her self hate is. A chance to be merciful.

She knows that the Jemima of the painting has not yet made up her mind which to choose: fear, vulnerability and love, or safety, isolation and habit. She wonders if Clement even knows what he is offering.

She looks at him and sees that he is watching her carefully, willing to be vulnerable in his desire for her reaction.

“It's good,” she says. “Really, really good.” She tries to imagine herself not cutting, tries to imagine skin smooth and clear.

He smiles at her, relieved, like he thinks she'll choose him.

“I need a bath,” he says.

Jemima runs a bath for him and watches him as he pulls off his top, his hairless chest white in the fluorescent light. He pulls down his pants, soft flesh hanging from him, his penis quiet, his arms hanging deadweight by his sides.

Jemima runs her hand through the water, testing the temperature and Clement steps in. Jemima, fully clothed, sitting on the edge of the bath, rubs soap into the sponge and submerges it in the water. She gently lifts it, moving the hot water over his shoulders, bathing him, sponging his body, little rivulets of water running down his back, along the bones of his spine. Her sleeves are pulled down over her fresh cuts, her cuffs getting soggy. She knows this will be the last time she will see him naked. Somehow they have reached their end.

Clement feels the water run over his body and as Jemima gently sponges his skin, he thinks about the email she sent him from Madrid.

“You cried when you saw *Guernica*?” he asks and she pauses in her movement.

“Yes,” she says and he waits. “It was so intense,” she continues. “All those people twisted and tortured.”

He can feel her heart aching. He can feel the effect this work of art had on her. He believes, again, in art.

Jemima watches Clement eat breakfast. After he had climbed out of the bath and dried himself, she had made him leave before having a shower herself, both laughing at her, only one of them critically.

Maybe I should start an argument, she thinks, maybe I should tell him I can't feel that exposed.

Anne comes down the studio stairs carrying the princess gown stuffed into a plastic bag.

“Is that yours, Clem?” she asks. “The painting? I’ve never seen a painting of yours before, only drawings.”

Clement looks surprised, but Jemima’s not sure whether he’s surprised that she has seen drawings or that she hasn’t seen paintings.

Jemima waits for Anne to turn to her, to say she’s seen into her soul and made her judgement.

“The girl,” Anne says. “Where is she?”

“Barcelona.”

Anne nods and then looks surprised as a thought occurs to her. “Like you, Jem?”

Jemima nods, confused that Anne didn’t see it was her straight away.

“But it’s not you.” Anne laughs. “That girl’s too troubled or something. I mean, she seems happy there, but as though it’s a sudden passing thing, as though she knows it’s temporary.” Anne shrugs, and laughs again, dismissing her opinion. “Well, I’d better go.” She lifts the bag in the air, pink tulle almost bursting the seams.

After breakfast, Jemima follows Clement back into his bedroom. He falls back on his bed and yawns, looking up at her sleepily. He pats the bed next to him but she sits on top of the dirty clothes piled onto his chair.

“You know I can’t change for you,” she says and Clement looks confused for a second. “I am who I am.”

“I’m not asking you to change.”

“Yes, you are.”

“No.” He sits up. “I just want you to tell me about it.”

For a moment she imagines what it would be like: to have her palms open – ready to give and to receive. But her throat tightens and she lets anger rise in her chest.

He doesn’t understand her at all. How could he paint her so accurately in that painting yet not know how hard it is for her to talk about these things? How can he expect her to show her vulnerabilities? To tell him all the things wrong with her, all the reasons she deserves punishment, all the ways she hates herself. He expects her to tell him and for it not to turn him against her. For him, the girl in the painting has already made her choice. She has chosen what Jemima is too scared to choose. She has chosen to be real, to risk the true and final desertion.

“Could you just *try* talking to me?” He sounds annoyed. “I just want to understand.”

“It’s not going to work,” she says, holding tightly to her sense of righteousness, her sense of wanting to do what she likes with her body, her feeling of being unnecessarily invaded. “You’ll never accept it.”

“I don’t think I should. Can’t you see that it’s bad for you? You *cut* yourself, for God’s sake.”

She is hurt by his disgust. She didn't know she revolted him so much.

"Can't you see that it's harmless? It's just a coping mechanism." She knows herself that this is a string of truth and falsity twined.

"I'm sorry Jemima," he says. He seems to be making an effort to control his voice. "How does it help you cope?"

She feels tricked. She can't believe he is making her talk about this. She can't believe she's said what she's said. She won't tell him anything more.

She thinks of how she felt when he was drawing her, like an object for his use. She thinks of his sister and how little she knows about him.

"We're done, Clement," she says, voice calm.

"Fine," he says. "But won't you try talking? If not to me then to someone else?"

"I mean us. You and me."

"Jemima." His tone is that of a patience stretched parent telling a child it's their last chance to behave.

She shrugs. "It'll always be this thing between us." She knows this is not the real reason.

"No," he says, "it's because I love you that I want you to stop."

She almost laughs. *Loves me, how could anyone love me?*

"I just want to understand."

She is resolute and shakes her head. “No, you don’t. You’d always hate it and so hate me.”

“No. I’d always want you to stop because I love you.”

She shakes her head. “Exactly. You’d always want me to be different.”

“Please Jemima, we can work this out.”

She shakes her head again and stands. He stands too, grabbing her wrist gently.

“But I love you.”

“Well, I don’t love you.” As she says it, she pulls her wrist free. She says it more as a way to break free, not knowing how true it is.

He looks shocked and his arm falls to his side.

“I’m sorry Clement.”

As she drives away she starts to cry, sobbing as she drives along the backstreets all the way home.

She feels bruised. She has been exposed. She has let herself do something amazingly stupid. She is free. She’ll no longer be expected to be herself, to share, to be vulnerable, to be intimate. No one will want to know her now, no one will want to see deep inside her soul, no one will want her so much they want the barrier between them to disappear. Her stomach is hollow and she sobs and sobs, sitting in the car outside her house.

Clement stares out his open door where Jemima left. He thought things were okay. He didn't expect her to dump him, for things to be over. His eyes are heavy, he's been spending more time painting than sleeping and it feels like the ground is shifting under his feet. He's angry with her, with himself. He doesn't understand. He thought she loved him. Stunned, he walks out to the kitchen, not really aware, and sits on one of the stools, picking up a pear and turning it in his hands.

It is a forelle pear, dusted red on the smooth round cheek of flesh. Spotted lightly, small, fitting neatly into his hand.

"You've started painting again."

He looks up to see Dodger standing in front of him.

"It's good." His voice is void of emotion.

In anyone else the lack of enthusiasm would indicate a lack of interest in the piece, but Clement knows that is not the case with Dodger.

"It looks like Jemima."

"She posed for me."

"It's Hannah?"

Clement shrugs. He doesn't know. He doesn't care. The pear's skin is cool and firm.

"I think it is," Dodger says. "She's saying she's still here."

It feels like Dodger is watching him carefully.

“Not like ghosts or whatever, but in your thoughts, your memories. It’s like the girl is saying, *Even if it’s nothing to do with me, I’ll always be here.* Something to do with the viewer and how once you’ve seen something you will always have seen it. It becomes yours. Part of you and yours.” Dodger nods. “It’s good.”

Clement glances up at him, away from the pear. “Thanks,” he says.

“You okay?”

Clement shrugs. “I’m tired.” He’s not willing to admit their break up yet. He goes back into his bedroom and falls on the bed, sleeping before he even looks at the stairs of his ceiling.

Later, Clement wakes groggily. He should know not to sleep during the day. His limbs are heavy but he drags himself from bed and climbs the studio steps. He grabs the canvas, wraps it in newspaper, and walks to the train station.

The train takes him through the suburbs, up the hill. It is dark out the window but he’s caught this train so many times he knows what he’s passing. He goes past the stop he used to get off at to visit Hannah in the clinic, to his parents’ stop, and walks through the dark streets to their house. The air is missing that harsh chill of winter, the smell of spring is in the air.

Walking though the back door, he rubs the squirming Perro and kisses his mum *hello*.

“Here, Mum. This is for you,” he says, passing her the canvas.

“Oh, thank you.” She takes it from him and unwraps it, leaning it up on the bench. “Clement,” she says. “It’s beautiful.”

His dad walks in. “Hi Clement.”

“Hey Dad.”

“Did you do that?”

Clement nods and his father regards it.

“It’s amazing, isn’t it?” His mum presses his dad.

“Is it Hannah?”

“If you want it to be,” Clement says.

“Yes,” says his mum. “Of course it’s Hannah.”

His father nods and lets out a small sigh.

Clement shakes his head. *Why can't he just let me be?*

“I also brought back her album,” says Clement and, as he passes it to his mum, the photo of Hannah in hospital falls to the floor. His mum gasps. The metal pole holding the drip as thin as her arm, the needle pressed violently into her pale skin.

“I put that in there,” she says, tears in her eyes as Clement bends to pick up the photo and slide it back into the album. “I wanted her to see it when she got better, to see how far she’d come.” Tears roll down her cheeks.

“Come here.” Clement’s father pulls her into a hug and they stand together, the quiet made denser by her occasional sobs and sniffs. A partnership. Clement looks down at Perro and strokes his head.

“Right,” says his mum suddenly, sniffing decisively, pulling herself out of the hug. “Dinner?”

Clement and his dad both nod, and Clement’s mum holds out her hands to him. She pulls him close and kisses him on the forehead.

“I’ll put this away,” Clement says, picking up the album from the bench, and his mum nods.

Clement walks down the corridor and into Hannah’s room. He still has to resist the urge to knock. But it is different now, he notices with surprise. The room has been tidied. Hannah’s things are now arranged in a packed up way, rather than a lived in way: in boxes, placed on shelves, shifted into a corner, taking up less room. In the extra space is the sewing machine, moved from the living room where his mum always thought it was in the way, and his mum’s shelves full of thread and tapestry looms.

He kneels down next to the book shelf that seems to hold all of Hannah’s things and looks for a place to put the photo album. He slides the album onto the shelf next to a box of swimming trophies. As Dodger says, Hannah will always, somehow, be there with them.

twenty-seven

Clement stands in the centre of the square of light from the skylight in the studio. Dodger and Steve are behind him, working on another canvas, sometimes loudly discussing their ideas and plans, sometimes working in silence. Clement does not listen to them. He is drawing. He is working from one of the sketches he did of Jemima. He is doing it larger, finer, in more detail, in charcoal. Jemima's face framed by her long hair. Her eyes with a glint of happiness, her face soft and peaceful. Jemima as he knows her. A beautiful girl he'll never understand. He can at least give her this, even if he can give her nothing else, he can show her how he sees her.

Anne has come to Jemima's place and Jemima realises that it's the first time for years that Anne has visited. Jemima has always gone to the share house, and before that, she more often went over to Anne's place.

“What happened?” Anne asks, voice ready with sympathy.

“Oh, I don’t know,” Jemima shrugs. “It just wasn’t right, you know? It didn’t feel right.”

“But I thought you guys were perfect for each other!”

Jemima shrugs again.

Anne puts her hand on Jemima’s arm. Jemima knows that she is a disappointment to Anne, who wants desperately to comfort, hear stories, compare hurts. But Jemima cannot cry in front of Anne. She cannot perform the emotions that are required of her. It is too close, too real. Instead, she smiles at Anne and changes the subject as she makes some tea.

They sit outside, enjoying the sun’s warmth when it shows.

“It’s a pity your mum’s not here,” says Anne. “I haven’t seen her for ages!”

Jemima closes her eyes. “Mmm.” She is glad her mum is not here, glad she’s not there to laugh loudly at Anne’s jokes and tell Jemima what a nice girl Anne is. Glad Anne isn’t having a cup of tea with her mum and forgetting about her. She feels small inside, ungenerous, immature.

When Anne leaves, Jemima goes into her room and pulls out a canvas and paints. She carries them out into the back yard and sets up to paint a self portrait. She will be her own model.

She paints straight onto the canvas, a background: the imagined city of Barcelona. A square from the gothic area, old stone walls, paved streets, balconies hung with washing. But she adds a dragon backed roof, Modernisme tiling on the

walls, as though the buildings are caught between realities, a hitch in space and time.

She rifles through her wardrobe for her old lace skirt, the one she was wearing when she and Clement first kissed, and tears it up, layering it over the city, browned blood stains over gargoyles, torn holes over mosaic. She presses it into the paint, makes sure it sticks.

On a sheet of clear plastic she paints her own face. See through, frank, scraped back. Not smiling or laughing but looking straight back at her, eyes clear and honest. She suspends this over the city, over the lace. She stands back, surveys her work. She'll get a good mark, she can see that, but she is not satisfied. This is not a self portrait. The blood on the lace bothers her, the see through face. It is like she is trying to make claims, rather than just be. It'll do to hand in.

She goes inside and stares in the bathroom mirror. She remembers the first time she and Clement made love, the feeling of his fingertips on her skin. She thinks of her time in Barcelona, chasing his ghost around corners. She remembers what it felt like to pose for him: to be the created rather than the creator.

Jemima undresses quickly, stripping off her clothes, shaking her hair free. She places butcher's paper onto the ground and takes her biggest paint brush, smearing red paint over her naked body. She lies down and rolls over once, twice, pressing her skin into the paper, especially where she can feel old cuts. She stands and takes her blade, cutting the paper lightly on the print of the thigh. If she lifts the paper the cuts separate and she can see the tiles on the other side.

She knows she is not doing anything new. She knows she is quoting Yves Klein, but this is her own body, her own art. She knows this is small and pathetic – hiding and confessing her secret at once, like with the lace. But this is not for anyone else.

In the shower afterwards, she washes the red off her skin, watching it stain the water and drain away. She runs her hands over her muscles, feeling their solidity in her palms, moulding her body. She cups her buttocks, circles her fingers around her thighs, presses her breasts into her chest. She feels the shape of her face and watches as the water finally runs clear.