



Source: Reuters, 'No end to mistakes', *Sydney Morning Herald online*, 14/10/07.

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She spat on her pals with no warning. The thing about it was the gin. The gin made her do it she told herself. Nothing else was off-limits like the gin. Behind the bed was where it was stashed—under the cases of glass animal figurines. Her mother's gin though. Not hers, though the friends shrugged whenever she said that. She was indifferent to their accusations since it was precisely the fact that it was her mother's gin that cancelled out the infraction in her mind. Suppose it came crashing down on their heads; a montage of violent scenes of glass shards and yellowy, muddy liquid clicked quickly in front of her eyes but when they stopped abruptly and she regained focus, she could see there were no consequences to her thoughts.

Looking around her, the bedroom was filled with photo albums and metal chairs, corrugated boxes and unfinished clothes, all the things her mother worked on, important portions of her life sitting awfully and delicately alone. But with her friends at such close quarters, packed like in a cage, there was little option but to speak in the forceful tones of a leader and bark like a dog that fun-time was over and that the boy who dropped the H bomb in school, the ignorant asshole who bee-lined right up to her face after class, was due. And she would settle the score even if it meant escalation. That was after all, the key to survival. Without daring to take it one step past expectations, she knew life was like crawling around on the ground like a little toy.

After they all got rusty on gin, their makeup looked like someone had taken a swab of rubbing alcohol to their faces. Pissed that the bottle was bone dry but giddy like opening night stage actors, they lifted up their shirts to reveal their torsos as hard as a backbone. They slapped each other twice across the stomach so it stung like a bonfire as was custom. From the first, she knew the kid, the newbie, was going to do it. She could tell there wouldn't be much need for coaching. What do you do with a natural? You put them in their element and let them go to work she thought. The girl was always talking about how her dad this and her dad that in the way you throttle a motorcycle, like she was fucking putting a phone to her ear on both sides of her face until her nails dug as deep as possible into her palms.

A little shake of the hips, one group bellow and they were streaming down the stairwell together. Always together until the moment of confrontation and then it was a chaotic dervish-like scene of wailing arms and legs

pogoing out and back, never aware of whether they hit their mark or whether they hit a friendly. There was no code except to keep on spraying the limbs, to keep on avoiding the blows, causing harm, making a racket until your enemy is terrorized enough to flee. Either that or the look out warning gives just enough time to ratchet everything down a million notches so that the adrenalin stops flowing on command in the same way a Buddhist monk can stop his breathing and when the security turns the corner there's nothing for them to see but a bunch of smiling, sweating kids saying in unison, 'Nothing going on today officer.'

The digestion always took a pounding, the breathing deepened, but when all was said and done it was good for the system. Like a restorative tonic that reset the body's default modes and washed out the wasteful uncertainty. At least she told herself that but this time there was more advanced stress since there were rumblings of guilt from deep, memories that were primordial and ancient to her of her own first time. Noteworthy because they involved the self-knowledge that it was all strung together like a fishing line and that she didn't recognize herself in those few moments of reverie. The kindergarten-self was how she referred to the time before her cherry was popped, before she knew a razor blade settled matters and there was no more need for further proceedings. Fuck the procedures she thought.

The boy was where he promised, inhabiting the centre of a small circle made by his friends. Conceptually, she knew that the boy was already dead. Empirically she knew that A, B and C had to happen first for this to be true. She claimed a prophet's facility to see into the future. A little-publicized ability that deep down she knew was the only thing she didn't inherit from her mother. She clung to this, aware of the irony, like a birthright, like her only achievement, and it was this that gave her power. Her gestures were expansive and easy, pursing her lips, smacking her hips, flagging her arm up and down with the finger pointed directly in the eye of the boy still wearing the same shit-eating grin as earlier in the day. What's his name spoke up finally. No longer able to counter her controlled hysteria with a nonchalance so extreme that it must harbour wellsprings of violence, he took one last finger in the face before the initial touch of his blade to her stomach revealed that the future she saw was a lie.

*Adapted for performance by Barbara Campbell from a story by Michael Grosberg.*