



Source: 'US forces find 19 tonnes of explosives', *The Australian online*, 21/10/07.

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"Carol has added you as a friend on Facebook'. You can imagine Gina's shock: they hadn't spoken in years. Not that it was the first time; she kept getting emails from relative strangers asking for her virtual hand in friendship. Gina joined the website wondering how she'd ever get time to work it out—it was hard enough finding time to water the garden on those days she was allowed. Browsing through Carol's list of friends, she saw the past reduced to thumbnails arranged on the screen like a vertical row of inert dominos.

During high school Carol was her best friend and band-mate, but she hadn't seen her in at least ten years. Gina was sick of always being backup singer in a relationship defined by petty jealousies, mostly over bass guitarists. A string of failed band restructures and an almost-maybe record deal was how Gina summarised her shared history with Carol. As much as Gina thought herself the better singer, Carol always stole the spotlight. When Carol recorded a solo album behind her back in '86, Gina split from the whole scene by joining other rock and roll footnotes in retail afterlife.

She scrolled down the list of Carol's 382 friends and came to Tammy, a mutual classmate of theirs from high school. Tammy's main claim to fame in high school was having really great teased rock and roll hair. Carol envied it like nothing else. Tammy had posted an event on Facebook—a 25 year high school reunion to be held at a Leagues Club on the North Shore. 'It'll be really huge!' proclaimed the blurb, '25 years have passed since high school!!' Adorned with champagne cork clip art and an abundance of exclamation marks, Tammy's event induced in Gina a strange cocktail of nausea and curiosity. Why North Sydney was anyone's guess, they went to school in the western suburbs.

Tammy's web photos looked like she lived in an ice-cream commercial—the kind where women fellate chocolate covered vanilla. Tammy's profile said she was married to a forensic lawyer named Tom and had four beautiful boys named, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. Her favourite film was *Four Weddings and a Funeral*; her favourite band was Coldplay and her favourite quote was, 'If you have built castles in the air, your work need not be lost; that is where they should be. Now put foundations under them'—Henry David Thoreau.

This Facebook thing could become addictive, thought Gina as she browsed other profiles, 'adding' a stockpile of people she knew from somewhere or other. Gina liked the feeling of detached superiority she got by looking at the online profiles of women who went to her high school and who appeared to be struggling with a) obesity, b) alcoholism or c) Christianity. She even stumbled onto a profile for her first crush, Craig Harris, and judging by his photo, he looked more beautiful than ever. Gina was

about to send him a message, her pheromones stirred by the hope that he might be single and still an avid e. e. cummings fan. Then she saw that his profile listed 'gay activism' as one of his interests. Gina added a fourth category to her analysis: d) homosexual. Thinking about it now, she surmised that the high school Craig was a bookish new wave version of what the kids these days call 'Emo' but what she suspected was a euphemism for 'Homo'.

Hours had passed and Gina was still browsing friends of friends of friends' profiles. Eventually she found herself where she had started, reading the minutiae of Carol's profile. A bit bored now the thrill of stalking had waned, Gina was about to shut the computer down when she saw that Tammy had posted a comment, begging Carol to sing at the reunion. Gina clicked back onto Tammy's page to see if there had been a response, but couldn't find one. She'd never know if Carol was going to perform unless she turned up and saw it for herself.

As if you'd sing at a school reunion anyway? Back in the day we'd have been horrified at the thought; now it seemed, at least for Tammy, the ultimate badge of honour.

As Gina tried to sleep that night, she was haunted by Tammy's voice: 'It's really huge...It's really huge...It's really huge'. She dreamt that she had spent weeks preparing for the Silver 25th Anniversary reunion; she even had a facelift to bookmark the occasion. En-route to the reunion in a stretch limousine, Gina's BlackBerry signalled, 'New Message'. The blinking black gadget beckoned her to visit YouTube, where a better view of the reunion could be witnessed. Typing the convoluted URL into a web browser, Gina downloaded the reunion onto the windscreen of the limousine in perfect 16:9 aspect ratio.

Carol was performing the only song Gina had ever written—a ballad called, 'Time Will Never Tell'. Tammy was a backup singer and Craig was on bass guitar. The audience appeared lulled into the kind of arm-waving formation dancing you'd see at trendy arena-seating churches where concrete takes precedence over stained glass. A red progress bar at the bottom of the screen showed how much of the reunion was left to download; a mere minute and twenty seconds. Panicking that she wasn't going to make it to the reunion in time, Gina pressed pause at YouTube and logged into Facebook to delete her account. As she did, text scrolled across the windscreen notifying her that the SMS line had opened—it was time to vote for your 'favourite friend'. Even though she'd hate herself forever, she voted for Carol, and strangely enough, felt an inner calm she hadn't experienced in years.

*Adapted for performance by Barbara Campbell from a story by Daniel Mudie Cunningham.*