

She is just an ordinary girl, just starting out, yet she dreams sometimes of a man with a knife in the dark house. You lie in your bed, which ought to feel safe – it is warm, comfortable – but sometimes the dreams come walking in and you can't understand where they come from.

The house creaks in the night, its wooden boards shrinking with the colder temperature of night, the house creaks and groans. A sound just like a stranger walking through the dark house. This house which sits in the shadow of the quarried volcano, the big King. Most of it's park – people letting their dogs run all over the place, joggers and walkers – but on the other side, across the field (that strangely flat place), is the quarry. They're not supposed to work at night, because of the people living all around, but sometimes she hears the movement of heavy machinery.

Sometimes a deep rumble in the night, which she knows – in her mind, at least – is the sound of explosives going off. And when she walks that way, home from school over the mountain, there is the deep reddish-brown valley gouged out of the land, which makes her remember when she was younger and everything else - adults, buildings - looked so big, that feeling of being like an insect (a tadpole, swimming round in a bowl).

Their street winds a short way up against the side of big King. They have some view - from the corner of the front room you can look out to the western part of the city, the lights sparkly pretty at night - even though it's a state house. They've always lived here. Her Mum has got a patch for vegetables out the back, egg plant, tomatoes, some taro. Over the back fence is the flat field, which must've once been quarried, to make it so flat. Sometimes boys kick a ball up around there. At other

times it is eerily empty. She likes that word *eerie* and uses it in English essays. One time, a man jumped their back fence – saw it from her bedroom window – and crashed his way through her Mum's tomato plants, heavy booted he was yet loose in his body, like a hiphop guy, baggy pants and singlet with a swipe of red dirt across his chest, like he'd come from the quarry. He loped across the lawn and disappeared round the side of the house. Later that day, police came knocking around the street. The girl was used to seeing police come knocking, a police car parked outside somebody's house. Wanting to know if they'd seen a man running – he was escaping the scene of a crime, they were told. Which was kind of thrilling: the scene of a crime. Her Mum, who was home from work then and trying to cook tea, shook her head, and the girl, standing behind her, said nothing, just looked. Let somebody else tell. Then the policeman left and she turned back to her room.

Doing homework, music playing softly. Sounds of her Mum in the kitchen. Sounds of the TV going and her brothers in there, not doing homework like they should, saying they don't have any. She'll do some homework, music playing, then call one of her friends. Call her boyfriend. Sweet JayCee, not at school any more, but left to work on cars in a garage. The shop, he calls it, the workshop, proud of his first job and the girl proud for him too. There he is, earning money and roving the night streets in his gun metal car, music beating out quietly, JayCee a quiet boy, not trying to be like the hiphop heroes, just being himself, and often she'd be with him, sitting in the front seat, feeling the music reach up through her legs (the knees that look too lumpy thick, the hair that won't lie down flat, though JayCee doesn't notice these faults in her) and the music reaches through her whole body so she feels happy and free, JayCee driving with one hand on the steering wheel, proud of his first car and the girl proud for him too. They are like travellers going through the dark night, travelling in a foreign land, roving the wide city streets. And sometimes they might stop at McDonald's and get a burger, some soft drink, because that's what you do.

They are not the only ones moving around the city at night. Sometimes they might meet up with some kids from school, or new friends of JayCee's from the shop, the shop floor, the workshop. These guys are older and look harder around the eyes, and the girl is a bit shy in front of them.

One time, all their cars outside McDonald's, Slug was drinking from a can of beer and parading in front of some girls from her school, popular girls with straight blonde hair that they would make even straighter with heated tongs, the piercings in their belly buttons glinting in the lights. Slug shouting out: 'Hey girls, wanna come back to my place and see me *wank*?!' The jangly girls laughing hard and turning away. But when he'd sauntered back to JayCee's car, the girl, hot in the face, had tugged at his sleeve. 'Slug, you shouldn't talk like that in front of girls.' Meaning maybe herself. Slug had laughed it off and lit a smoke, but then he'd darted a sideways look at JayCee. JayCee younger than them, but respected because he's good with cars.

Then it's just her and JayCee again cruising the quiet night streets.

Sometimes things happen in the night. One time, coming across a cordoned-off street. There'd been an accident and the whole street was closed off, police cars flashing red and white in the dark, sound of a distant siren coming towards them, ambulance maybe, a car lying dark and leaking on its side, the sound of somebody crying. JayCee had turned the wheel, real smooth, and they'd gone back the way they'd come. Like travellers gliding through the night, nothing touching them, always moving, nothing else matters all that much, like what to do in the future, where they are going, cause they are in their own world, inside the car that is JayCee's pride and joy, and the girl proud for him too, sometimes talking quietly, sometimes not, his hand on her knee, together they are a couple, driving the city streets, inviolate. Another word she likes to use in the essays, has only just learned it: *inviolate*. It is a good thing, to be moving through the night. The rest of her life so fixed tin the

present, but in the car it feels different, it makes her feel strong, like she has stepped outside of her ordinary life and has become something more. At night, it is like they own the city – it is theirs, they make the city theirs, it is a thing they have made.

Back home she mostly keeps to herself. She is separate from the others these days - her rowdy brothers, jostling and bumping into the girl in the mornings, their energy barely contained by the narrow hallway, between kitchen and bathroom and bedroom, the girl always wanting to get up early so she'll have the bathroom to herself before her brothers and their towels and splashed water, but sometimes she'll be too tired from the night before and will sleep through the alarm. Then her Mum will call loudly, *Get up now, time for school, hurry up*. Her Mum busy trying to get ready for work and getting the boys' lunches ready and doing the breakfast dishes. All the while the girl moving as if still dreaming, still in the night world with JayCee, so she is like a traveller surprised by the morning. Almost as if the morning rush and bustle aren't the girl's real life at all, but something she has to tolerate, just like you tolerate school and homework and sitting in class. She'd leave school too, only she wants a proper job, not working behind a counter in a shop like her Mum and earning not very much money every week so it's hard sometimes to pay the bills. Already the girl has her own job, on the weekends, working behind a counter in a shop, but knowing all the time how she wants something more for her life.

Walking back from school past the fenced quarry and its sound of machinery, and going over the mountain, she walks from one world to another. In a dream, she climbs the stile next to their back fence, coming down the side of the house and letting herself into the house, the boys already back, hearing them even from outside, the noisy row of them in the kitchen, slamming around with peanut butter and white bread and glasses of milk. *Hey*, they call out when they see her. But she doesn't really hear them. Her pack beeps and it's a text from JayCee. Standing there in her room that looks out the back to the vegetable patch and then the flat field

and above everything the rising top of the mountain, sound of the quarry machinery going in the distance. JayCee wanting to go out again tonight. Yes she'd like to do that, but instead she texts back saying she's got homework to do. That's okay, he says. He'll call her later, when he gets back from work. They are a couple (inviolable) and they talk every day: every day he calls her or she calls him. She puts her books on her small desk in the corner under the window, feeling dreamy and loose. She will do homework all evening, until maybe nine, when she'll watch some TV then go to bed.

She dreams of a man with a knife in the dark house. The house creaking and groaning in the dark night, a wind tossing around outside. She wakes, afraid, listening intently to the sounds of the house, the creaking as if somebody is walking around inside. Her clock says two a.m. Something has woken the girl, she doesn't know what, maybe it is just the scary dream waking her, or maybe the wind, the sound of it creaking round the roof and shaking the loose bit of guttering over the girl's bedroom. They are normal sounds, yet she is afraid. She lies in her warm bed, eyes wide open and listening to every sound.

Then she hears it, maybe not the sound that has woken her but a sound that is different inside this house, it is a stealthy footstep outside her room. Her door that is always left open at night for the air and outside the door the dark shape of a man looming suddenly. He is like in her dream only bigger and things happen faster than in her dream, where she wakes and everything is normal, but this is no dream and things happen faster than she can take in, fast so she doesn't understand properly what is happening until it is too late, the big hand pressing down on her mouth, and she is no longer a girl, thinking and talking, but is turned into an animal struggling caught in a trap, filled with the smell and fluorescent tones of her own fear, and the shadow looms above her darker than night, blocking out the night itself. There are

flashes of pain that make the girl's eyes roll up into her head, into another kind of darkness again and it is all happening too fast to take in or properly understand and if only JayCee was here but he is not, only this hard black shadow hanging over her like a devil or a bad man from an R18 movie. She can feel her life slipping away, everything she knows about herself, her life standing still, nothing else exists in this moment, as if her life and everything in it has been cancelled out. She is only a girl, she wants to shout this out but cannot, *I am just a girl!*

There are strange sounds, sounds she doesn't know, and she opens her eyes to everything white. Blinking, the girl thinks she is in a place called Heaven, for it is so white, or maybe she has been blinded, she'd always thought blindness would be night dark, but maybe not so, maybe it is a blazing white.

'You are awake,' says a voice, and it is her Mum, sitting in a chair by the girl's bed.

'Where am I?' Her own voice she doesn't recognise.

Her Mum's lips moving without sound, like praying. Then: 'You are in the hospital,' says her Mum, looking sad, the light of very early morning on her face, showing all the lines that the make-up normally covers. 'How are you feeling?'

The girl thinks about this, tries to feel her body, but it is like her head has been separated from her body, and there is no feeling at all, only the memory of pain and the growing awareness that pain will flood in later, maybe with the brightening day. Tears start in her eyes. Her Mum, too, with tears in her eyes, and her skin grey in the rosy pale light of dawn.

'Found you over the fence,' says her Mum, barely talking. She wipes her eyes. 'On the other side of the fence.' Her Mum barely able to talk.

And the girl turns her face to the too-bright window where the sun is coming up and she can hear the early morning street sounds, to show that the day is just

waking up, just beginning, and another day is starting all over again like normal, except nothing will be normal again for the girl.

She and JayCee, they still travel through the night. Everything is different, though strangely also the same. They drive through the city streets, stopping at red lights, cruising past late-night takeaway bars and shop windows bright with light, everything exposed, while the streets run darkly off from the main road like arteries, slicing across the city suburbs and running out to the west where at night you can see the valleys of pretty lights. They drive along the waterfront, the water glistening with orange lights. They don't stop at McDonald's any more, but keep to themselves. She and JayCee sliding along these city streets, shops and sleeping houses flicking past, dark parks and bus shelters and other cars coming towards them with lights beaming out along the orangey-black asphalt, then driving into the street where her family live now, in a smaller house rented from a relative. It is a shady street, with many feathery trees which the girl likes. The street where they used to live, beside the mountain with its quarry and heavy machinery sometimes working in the night, that street didn't have any trees. Here, in the new street, there are nice houses where some of the mums don't go to work but stay at home looking after their kids and weeding their flower gardens. Her Mum has already planted some tomatoes out the back. There is a tiny garden, before the next house starts, just room for vegetables and maybe later some flowers too. Sometimes when the girl looks out the back door, she thinks about the guy who jumped the fence at their old place, that guy running away from the crime scene, and running through the backs of houses, trampling over other people's gardens, people he didn't know and who didn't know him.

He couldn't do that here, the wooden fence is too high.

Standing at the back door, the girl lights a cigarette. Sometimes she smokes now, for the calm feeling it brings. She is listening for the sound of JayCee's car that

will soon turn into the street, pulling up at the front of their new house, waiting for the sound of his car door opening and shutting. She will slip into the passenger seat, her hands held in her lap, ready to be driven out into the city night. She still likes driving though the night, only now the scenery looks different. Before, she mostly saw the pretty lights and the unfolding asphalt lit up by the car's headlights and the shiny cat's eyes winking back. Now she also sees the dark corners and the shadow-black people. She thinks she might be looking for something, searching for a shadow person, maybe, in the dark pavement shapes, as JayCee drives. What would she do if she found that shadow person? Maybe tug his sleeve and tell him something (*I was just a girl*). Maybe she would scream at him. Or, maybe, she might just point him out to JayCee – *That is the one, Are you sure? Yes* – and then, while JayCee slid his car soundless as a shark towards the pavement, she would shut her eyes tight and just keep moving.



