

Body Without a Head

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They leave pets buried in backyards in lots of cities and they're not allowed to put decorations on the walls because Mummy and Daddy will be in trouble with the landlord. Daddy makes films everywhere and Mummy stars in films everywhere and there are always parties. She finds his videos of Saturday Night Fever and 54 and his stacks of dance music tapes, but there's no clubbing for her, so Jezz sets up her own club. There is a huge box that the refrigerator came in and they're allowed to paint it and turn it into a club and it doesn't matter so much each time they move, as long as the box comes. Jezz and Clyde don't need to be watched when they're in the box.

Clyde brings home some skirts, each with a different girl's name written on the tag and Daddy says grown-up words to him and Jezz thinks it's a weird thing to do to someone, to tell them hurty words with letters made of beestings, and Clyde never tries to give things to Mummy and Daddy again, although he supplies everything to the kids at whatever school they're at. Usually it's erasers and boxes of juice. From her corner, hidden under the tablecloth, Jezz sees the big girls at Mummy and Daddy's parties swishing their drink in these really skinny glasses, like the tiny vases at restaurants that you put a single rose in, so Clyde borrows a whole box of the tiny vase-glasses and they're all Jezz will drink out of. Sometimes they have to go to restaurants that are only open when the sun goes down, and there's only food and fizzy drink to play with, and their stomachs get sore and it doesn't even taste exciting after you have three of them, and the lights are too

flashy and sharp. Clyde has to read Jezz the cocktail menu because her eyes don't work properly because Mummy's glasses don't work on her.

Clyde makes friends everywhere because people are scared of him. He never gets in trouble 'cause no one ever watches him. Him and his friends work out which houses read their catalogues and newspapers the most quickly, and they deliver to just those houses, and dump the rest of the circulars in recycled clothing bins. Clyde borrows Mummy's treasure for her; tampons, earrings, picture frames, rings. He tells her he doesn't want any money. He just wants Mummy. He shows her real interesting notes and coins with pictures that she would've never thought of.

Last in the family is Jezz. She falls in love with all the boys in all of Clyde's gangs. She loves how their skin colour and hair changes in the different cities across the continents, and she writes them songs. Every song is about love; love which can make the tropical summers cool and love that can make the northern snows cosy. All of Gloria Estefan's songs are about love, Madonna's and Roxette's, the timeless ones that make her feel like she doesn't have to obey gravity.

The Cardboard Club is beside a barbecue in a backyard, then it's in the storage room of an apartment building, then it's in a carpark. It goes wherever Daddy is making movies. It has a door where you have to show Clyde your ID and he puts a sticker on your hand. You put on a hula hoop as you go in. Jezz glues glitter on her face and performs her songs inside with a real-life microphone. She's taped backing music off Hitz FM. Jezz has six tapes of songs. Clyde sticks his fingers down his throat and pretends he's puking, but no other boys are allowed to do that or Clyde will hit them. When she's played both sides of her tape, Jezz kisses all the boys on the cheek, the sons of waiters

and second unit directors and actors, and Clyde isn't sure if he should beat the boys up or not. There will always be boys around. He can't hurt them all no matter how hard he tries.

Clyde borrows her packets of CDs and tapes for her birthday, and sometimes on ordinary days, too. She writes her name painstakingly on the stickers, with entire rainbows of felt pen ink. She has to carefully time her songs so they fit perfectly on the tapes. Mummy dies without a warning and they burn her into fairy dust and Jez has a hard time putting together a perfect tape, they make them too short, the tapes are supposed to last an hour but she can't even fit the whole 100 minutes on them, and there's a new mum with smaller shoes.

It only takes Jez a couple of years to watch all the movies in the whole world and sometimes she pauses them so that J-Law will linger longer on screen. She rewinds and rewinds and says the actors' lines perfectly. She's afraid to do better acting than Elizabeth. She does exactly the same acting as Anne. Some of the teachers cuddle her and cuddle her and Clyde kicks and slams doors. Most times they begin a new school, no one has even heard of Clyde, so he has to let them know who he is.

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Her brother's friends can't stop giggling as they touch the twins. This huge, jutting spear sticks out of their pants and they laugh and battle them and when they pee, it goes on the ceiling. The boys are still giggling as they hand their money over to Clyde. He gets mad with how cramped the Cardboard Club is, tells Jez he's taking it down. Jez pulls down her t-shirt and stares at Clyde. He grabs his friends roughly and pulls them into the den to play GTA Vice City. Jez doesn't know what to do so she makes some powdered juice and shakes it up. She has to drag a chair

into the kitchen and stand on it to reach the good cocktail glasses. The new mum has far more cocktail glasses than regular glasses. Daddy throws out Mummy's stuff all the time and Jezz has to save whatever she can from cats and crows and garbagemen. One of the rose-glasses drops and when it shatters, the broken pieces are bigger than the whole glass was. It's hard for Jezz to figure out how these sharp, differently-shaped pieces could go together. She stares at the fragments for a bit with her mouth open, then she turns back and takes down the other glasses real careful. Some of them've been used on set by famous boys. She pours the juice just right and puts them on the tray and carries them through into the dark den with the glowing TV in the corner. The PS4 is telling them what to do.

'Here's your martinis, gentlemen.' She places the glasses beside the boys. She knows they're used to drinking out of plastic. They don't look at her. They're quietly folding their spears away. Clyde can't sit down, he's telling everyone which buttons on the controllers to push and how hard to push them. Jezz crouches behind the couch, peeping over their shoulders to see the cool game they're playing. They elbow each other in the guts and, snickering, one of them writes on a bit of paper torn from the TV Guide and gives it to Jezz.

'It's a cheque,' he says. 'It's legit.'

It's the bit of the TV Guide cover with the barcode and price, \$2.95. She stands up and lifts her shirt over her head, so she can't see anything. 'Don't you wanna see me again?' she says, muffled. The boys are snickering too hard so she goes away into the kitchen. Clyde has left the room and is already cleaning up the mess, pouring the dustpan into the rubbish bin. His bare foot is stamping the linoleum with buttons of blood.

'Get lost,' he says, 'You don't have shoes on. You'll

cutcha self.'

Jezz tosses her yellow hair behind her head and says, 'Frankly my dear, I don't give a damn,' and shivers her eyelids like butterfly wings.

'A boy says that.'

'You had me at Hello.'

'QUIT SAYIN THAT MOVIE CRAP.'

'Come up and see me sometime.'

'You so owe me,' her brother sighs, 'I got better stuff to do.' He doesn't need a chair to pull the paper towels down from the high cupboard. His arms are powerful. He puts the whole roll of paper towels in her hands as he barges past her, not looking at her on purpose. Jezz takes the cardboard tube from the centre of the paper towels and follows Clyde back into the den. 'Do one more show for the boys,' he tells her, and she hears him tell them he'll punch their heads into their bodies like a turtle if they try and go home for dinner. He's moving town soon, so their brothers won't do anything.

'Where's your dad?' one of the boys goes. Another boy starts crying.

She asks him, 'Wasn't my music good?'

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The piercer tells her to hold her singlet up. Jezz winces and tries to hold her phone above her eyes, texting. The pillow under her head absorbs two neat, hot tears and her friends, sitting on vinyl chairs, swinging their legs, giggle and gasp and show each other how to roll cigarettes.

'I know your bro,' the piercer whispers, 'The nigger's solid. Tell him I said Wassup.'

'What does 'solid' mean?'

'He got patched, didn't he?'

'I'm Jezz by the way. I'm a singer. What's your name?'

'Yeah I already read ya tat,' he says, pointing to Jezz's

name sashaying across the bottom of her back. 'Who done that for ya?'

'Clyde. He's got his own gun.'

'Tat gun?'

'Yeah he's got a tat gun, too.'

'I've got some work for him, if he's available. Give him my card.' He reaches down her shirt and puts his business card between her nipple and the cotton singlet. Then the piercer squeezes a clamp and a barbell slides through the pinch of skin below her belly button, and he screws the butterfly onto the ring and adjusts it. He tells her to pull down her pants and he wipes her with a damp cloth, and she writhes and tries to hold her legs together and to finish her text.

'Got some scar tissue here,' he says.

'They cut us apart,' Jezze says, 'We're twins.' She blinks so that her eyes will sop up her tears. 'Okay if I keep rubbing? You girls get out. Scat. Go to school or something.' The other girls somehow make it down the stairs even though they're not looking where they're going, and Jezze tries to sit up, not sure if her friends or Someone Important needs her more. The important piercer tattoo man shoves her down and his hand is so heavy and she can't quite finish the smiley face she's punching into her phone.

'STOP. Quit it for a sec?'

'This better be good...'

She makes him promise he'll do another tattoo on her, another name, on the front of her hard, flat belly, opposite to where she got Jezze inscribed. It stings, the time Jezze spends lying on her back while he jabs and scrapes and pierces her, but Clyde will be totally stoked.

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Jezze gets sent out of class for cutting the bottom

inches off her school shirt and making everyone ask about her tattoos. While they type up the form that removes her from school, she sits in reception picking dried gunk from her belly button. When the piercer came all over her guts, the piercing got infected, and she thinks it sort of warped her tattoo.

She has more friends outside of school than inside, anyway, and she brings them home, hoping to catch Clyde in between burglaries. The house is theirs, with Daddy selling marketing rights to kings with black curly hair, and Clyde is filling all the unused rooms and the three car garage with PS3s and laptops and exercycles and toasters and cell phones still in their boxes. They have cartons and cartons of Singstar and Guitar Hero but he never plays them with Jezz, he just likes to take them and keep them. He likes packaging, loves boxes, but they get stacked on the Cardboard Club and it gets all flat and useless and crumbly. She spots him every few nights and each time he's wider, heavier. His arms are the same thickness as his legs now and his fingers are like steel rebars and he is shaving his skull with Daddy's razors and trying to grow his chin hairs long. He can command any vehicle - it used to be BMXs - now he looks natural in BMWs and squeezing motorcycles between his thick thighs. He wears singlets and shorts all the time but does all his weights at home and he's slowly getting prison stripes tattooed from his shoulders down to his ankles, and there's a ball and chain inked onto his foot. Every weekend he gets another stripe, from this guy that actually toured with this band that opened for the Stones. When she tries to introduce girls to him, he waves them towards his friends. She calls him a cocktease and he leaves the room.

Clyde won't say where he got it from, and no one knows how to set it up, but he's got an amp and turntables

and twenty boxes of cocktail glasses. Vanloads keep coming and coming, and his friends get older and older, some of them even have grey hair and long things on their chins, and they're hanging out with *him?! Clyde* gets something printed on him you can't get at any tattooist: cracks in his forehead and at the corners of his eyes. He's only an hour ahead of her in age- what could have happened to him in an hour?

She's moved into Mummy's old bedroom now and the wallpaper is completely covered up with posters, and the windows are pasted with pages ripped out of Cosmo. The sunlight makes the teeth of the idols glow. Clyde squints when he absolutely has to go in, always looking at some project at the front of his mind. He walks like he's got a nail in his shoe, always showing his teeth and frowning and hobbling slowly. He carries so much weight on his body. He puts his beer mugs down with precision. He biffs each beer mug out after using it just once. There's always another hundred of the things.

A rainy day is as close as they're going to get to night time, so they pull all the curtains shut and only use the light of their cell phones and they party, just six girls and four men with hair sticky with gel, and Jezz riding the notes between her legs and thrusting with the beat on a little stage made from a washing basket tipped upside down, and Clyde, like a chopping board, standing in the hallway with his arms folded, thick neck, square jaw, short arms. She stamps his anvil hand, whispers into his ear that it's free to get in before 11 tonight, but she licks his ear without meaning to and he head-butts her and the next thing Jezz knows, her friends are pulling her up and pouring cold Coke onto her lips and she wants to cry but crying is for songs, not for real life.

She's wondering if there will ever be a graceful way to

leave the bathroom when Clyde kicks the door in and tells everyone he'll burn their houses down if they don't vanish off right now and he drags Jezzy by one arm into her bedroom and flops her on her back. A leathery man hovers around the door and Clyde presses his chin against his and Mr Leather goes back to the club and Clyde kicks the door closed. She lets Clyde spread her with his hand, like smoothing a sheet. Her legs open and her toes point inward, towards her core. He says, 'Hold up a sec,' and goes away and comes back with a needle and a handkerchief and a lighter and sunglasses. Her arms are riveted to the mattress. He slides on the shades, lights a cigarette and presses the needle against the hot glowing smoke.

'Where'd you get that?'

'Mum's sewing stuff.'

Clyde takes off his singlet and she can see the word 'PROSPECT' and a number curving across the top of his chest and she's excited and wants to show him her tattoo so they can be tattoo twins but he keeps flattening her and sticks the orange needle into the lump around her piercing, and Jezzy's rigid stomach tenses and she says, 'God, Jesus, God,' but her eyes are dry and Clyde isn't making any sound at all. She makes a mental note to always wear sunglasses at all times, forever and ever. There are 60,000 party napkins in packets of 100 in stacked boxes in the corner, and he punches a hole in a box, rips a napkin from its packet and gently dabs pus with red swirls in it from Jezzy's belly. Then he unscrews the butterfly jewel on her ring, holds it up to the light, squints at it, and says, 'You shoulda checked with me first.'

Clyde reaches for his singlet but Jezzy picks it up with her big toe and bends her foot behind her head.

'Gimme that.'

'Gimme something for singing tonight.'

She wraps her pine-coloured legs around him and he squirms, twisting like there's a net on him, but the thick, black denim and the buttons where his stomach funnels into his pants are pointing straight at her, a big bulging arrow, and when she unbuckles his belt and tugs his jeans down, he doesn't waddle away pulling them up, he merges with her and, gritting his teeth, punishes her for irritating him. There's the *WOOLP* of a police siren and Clyde peels a curtain away from the window and jumps away like the curtain's electrified. His back's against the cupboard and he grabs Jezz's ankle and goes, 'Find out what one called the cops. Promise me.'

'Anything.'

'You can't have none of this junk,' he says, sweeping his arm over boxes of Heineken underneath a pallet of blow dryers, 'It's not even mine. Some boys might be 'round to pick up the bikes. Don't touch nothin'.' He finally hauls his undies and jeans up and pulls Jezz's shirt down and smoothes it over her belly button. A patch of darkness blooms just above the hem, she's still leaking bloody pus and her butt is sticking to the bare mattress they made love on. Her legs try to pin him like forceps but he sweeps them off.

'Sing-Sing Time,' he says, trying to make his belt buckle connect, 'Year or two, I'd say. Don't let any of these dickheads fuck ya.' He leaves Jezz on her back, and pulls some keys from his pockets. Do they belong to a jet ski, or a helicopter, or a snowmobile? She can't hear what happens because the floor and walls are rattling and it sounds like someone is banging on the wall over and over, and an engine revs, but behind her eyes she can see him getting tackled and his arms pinned behind his back, and she thinks Sad Smiley Face.

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Two Korean guys are both trying to have her. She tries to sing over the stripped-down music but it's impossible, so she sings under it. She tells the two guys to kiss each other, but they start fighting and one of them gets shoved into the road by a bouncer. In the handicapped toilets, Jezz's knees get soaked black. This karaoke bar has no food menu, so she has to suck a whole cocktail shaker to get the taste of the man out of her mouth. She's allowed to drink all the alcohol she wants from the bar, but she doesn't like drinking that much, to be honest, it makes it hard to remember her song lyrics. Jezz's favourite thing in the whole, wide world is watching people's feet tapping to the rhythm of gigantic speakers while she sings. Harmonising with the speakers can make the pool tables disappear and make her feel like she actually weighs something and she won't float off into the sky soon. She does a lot of private parties, and this show at the strip-club where she has to open her mouth as wide as it can go, but she writes on LinkedIn and Facebook and Twitter that her heart belongs to Sing-Sing, and she is the house singer here and here only. The walls aren't cardboard and she lost all her pin-ups, but this is a comfortable place before she explodes and becomes a spray of stars in the sky. Whole gangs of Koreans adore her, but they keep trying to buy her, and they keep asking who her manager is; the manager written on the business cards she printed on her HP Deskjet - who is Mr Sing-Sing? How can we sit down with him? What is his price?

She's brought Facebook friends but they disappear from the door and Jezz rushes after them. She's not even sure they realise that she is a 110% professional singer (two nights a week, at least), or that she can get the high score on every edition of Sing Star, and that her voice is so, like, omigawd you can't even tell if you're hearing karaoke or

not. 'The wind is vicious and they all get goose bumps. Jazz only befriended these girls because they get paid by the karaoke bar managers to bring customers in but they've turned out to be pretty average. One girl has black skin and red hair. She stops a taxi and bangs on the bonnet, then as she walks away laughing, her heel snaps and she lands with her feet pointed in different directions, one ankle twisted, and she laughs instead of screaming and it scares Jazz. Jazz can't go into the next club without her friends, really, what if they stop coming to her gigs and don't download her EP? A bouncer tries to shove her deep inside a club that's all green but they aren't going to ID her, so she pulls her ID out anyway because it's nice to be reminded how young she is. He speaks firmly and clearly over the bass. He has a nose as square as a box of matches and his ears are like knobs on a bedside drawer. 'You're the one that sings hard-out. From the karaoke place.'

'It's Jazz. Most people forget.' She takes his hand and kisses it.

'Go and say What Up to the DJ. Tell him Vincent says 38. Hear me? 38. He'll give you the mic, let you do vocals.'

'Why 38?'

He picks her up, carries her a few metres and dumps her between two gay guys and she pretends not to panic, just sticks her arms up and cuts through the black t-shirts and sparkling jeans and dropped ice cubes and white cigarettes and climbs a twist of stairs into the DJ booth and says '38' and the DJ taps his headphones and shrugs and hands her his iPad, and she types it in, and he nods and within two minutes, her song comes through the blackness. From her handbag, she pulls an orange Fire Warden vest that was out in the back of the club in a little cupboard just for her. Now it's impossible not to notice her. She leaks the first notes into the mic, and it accepts her voice. It's a horse

which hasn't thrown her. She gets inside the song, sings it from the inside out because she loves it more than the original singer. If you neglect something, if you don't love it enough and leave it behind, someone else will love it. She doesn't even know where she gets the courage from, there used to be her old life but now she is standing over two billion moshing, steaming people, pointing her fingernails at them, and she's absolutely sure she sees Clyde's face and shoulders here and there and over there, and she tries not to move ahead of the beat although everything in her wants to race through time and finish the night and pull out her iPhone and update her status and create the Jezz Fan Group and tell her 2,000 friends to Like, Like, Like.

She's - she's still singing! She hasn't ruined it! The DJ is looking down at his laptop and scheduling songs and he's turned the backing vocals down and it's just her lungs and tonsils and tongue out in space, putting colour in the earth, making long hair mosh and whip, making people pash. Time moves as the song moves. The crowd is a churning, black ocean lapping at the legs of the oil-rig she's on, and all she can see of them is their white teeth and sloshing earrings and sparkling hand-bands. To them, in the bright vest overpowering everything above her neck, Jezz is a body without a head.

She sits on ProTools for entire seasons made only of night, tinkering, making mistakes, getting pissed off, going out clubbing at the deep end of the night, forgetting everything except the chests in front of her. Finally her wake-up coincides with a sunrise. She rolls on her back. Her eardrums are still shuddering. Her toes are twitchy. She delays showering as long as she can. She loves having sticky Red Bull on her throat, loves finding lemon seeds and straws in her pockets and losing credit cards and finding all

the cigarettes in her handbag crushed and wondering where all her Durex went. Sunday afternoons, she takes the pillows off her bed and drags them into the lounge and cuddles up with them and watches shows about smart women with thick hair who always win at the end. She hydrates with isotonic, vitamin-enhanced water, from the local café. The convenience store is cheaper, and a lot more convenient, but she likes being seen in the café. You're supposed to be in cafes all the time. There was this show on TV where all these friends never made their own coffee, they lived in a cafe.

Sometimes she thinks she sees herself in the celebrity pages and gives a little shriek. If her stomach flattens out again and her nipples stop being big round brown coasters, she'll get in there and won't have to squint at the paper and pretend. Her timing is... she checks her watch and frowns. She pays for her water and drives her Rav-4 the quarter mile back around the corner and returns to the lounge floor, her cushions and blankets. She sings along with the theme songs of her shows and draws smiley faces with lipstick on paper. Clyde's friends have these two basement apartments. They've smashed the dividing wall so it's one big joined apartment and it's full of glass display cabinets with weird weapons like you see on movies, like samurai swords and Bowen Arrows. They don't trust using the landline, and they use code words that keep changing and Jezz can't keep up, or says the code word wrong and gets growled at. They come around in their Humvees and search the house for Clyde, and Jezz squeezes her legs shut and vows not to get pregnant again.

This lawyer gets Jezz to come into his office and write her real name on some forms that mean all of Daddy's stuff now belongs to her. If something happens to Jezz, the stuff will go on to her baby daughter.

'Can you find out where she's living?' Jezz begs him, 'If she's safe? What name did they give her?' She opens the 'net on her phone. 'What's her handle on Twitter?'

Jezz gets a cute IT boy to come over to her house and show her how to build her own website. She is giddy after making the booking, and rubs browning lotion into her legs and arms and cheeks, and has enough energy for an entire spring clean – under the overturned photos of Daddy, behind the boxes of loot that men are really interested in, between the crates full of her EPs, everywhere. The mirrors, especially. She turns up the stereo and murmurs lyrics as she polishes things from countries on the travel channel. She polishes the wing mirrors of three motorcycles. She hoses the dune buggy that she's never used, and the scuba gear and skis. She wishes she lived by the coast, the global beach that edges all the lands on earth. The beach cleanses everything with its refreshing, salty air.

The IT boy arrives on a bicycle. She is wearing her bikini and has a towel around her shoulders. She's flushed her hair in the shower so that it looks like she has just come out of the pool. She can tell he's gawping at the boxes of Hennessy and the CDs and petrol vouchers stacked everywhere. He is shaking so much that he gets his satchel stuck on a parking meter which is slumped against the breakfast bar, all bent, its bottom shiny from where Clyde hack-sawed it (Clyde got a whole year's worth of parking change from it.) She realises he's staring at her platinum hair. It's so bright that you can see it in the dark, so people stop thinking she's just a body without a head. He probably recognises her from her YouTube channel, or from MTV Clubz, or because he's been to Cl@ssy and seen her singing, or Fatale or Luna or one of the other joints. The boy installs Flash animations which make her name sparkle

and shimmer on the page. She asks him to spell everything in American. He gives her a programme called Dreamweaver. Sounds like it'll make her dreams come true.

They stand by the road having a cigarette before he drives away.

'You'll have to add me.'

'Ah... who are you, exactly?' he asks.

'You're funny.' She brushes his arm. 'I'm a singer.'

'Nah, but, like, for a job?'

After the IT boy has left, she emails everyone about her website. People write some hurtful things on her Facebook, they seem to think she's just singing along to Boney M's songs, and Whitney's songs, and that's just a big dumb lie; if the music comes out of Jezze's mouth, then it is original, because she is the one in the world most passionate about it. She believes in the words more than Floyd or Fleetwood, so why shouldn't the songs belong to her? It's not fair that someone got to those feelings before she did. She would've settled on those words sooner or later. She phones up the IT guy and asks him if there is some way to check where people are viewing her page from.

'It's so cool you saw my page! I fully stalked you! I can't believe you work here! What one's your girlfriend?! I fully have to meet her.'

'Be profesh,' Clyde growls, sliding the ashtray off the tabletop and not looking as it shatters. Benji Fraulich, king of Berlin beats, plops into the booth with his producer Sambo from LA. Clyde isn't as thick and large as he used to be, but his face has stopped smiling completely, it's a smashed watch that will never work again, and that is scarier and sadder than any muscle or wide back or steel boots or blade, or black belt or Baretta. His skin is full of holes and dents, like the floorboards of a church hall, and

those blue bars creep up his neck, and his lips are white and his hair is slicked back with shiny gel and he wears tight, black jeans and a long-armed, black cotton shirt with flames going up both arms. It says the name of his gang across his chest and on his back. She thinks his eyes have been replaced with glass that doesn't reflect.

'She's mine, she's all good, she's reliable,' Clyde tells the cool people in a voice you can hear through the music, 'I supply only reliable people. I've known her forever. You know who I am. What I am.' Sambo nods. Benji clicks his fingers and grins. 'I'll give you the vocals for all them samples you're wanting, but she's not got the rep yet for a tour.'

Benji Fraülich reaches across the table and takes Jezz's floppy hand and says, 'Tell me in your ownership words, Jezz, what you are do for life. For make life, career.'

Jezz looks at Clyde for the answer. Clyde wraps his fingers around Benji's thumb and peels his grip off Jezz. 'No touchin the girls.'

She starts to pull her sparkly bra up. 'I've been singing, like, since the day I was born,' she explains.

Sambo opens his suit jacket and takes out some forms and flattens them and Clyde takes one look at them and nods. 'Now you can touch her.'

'Jezz,' Benji drools, twisting on his chair so that Clyde isn't in his way any more, 'He say you are best singer in this city, this you feel?'

'That is soooo Clyde! He's silly. Yes, I fully do!'

'Modelling?' Sambo from LA suggests, 'Go or no?'

'I'll be a model, sure! Cly, is that cool?'

'You'll do what I tell ya. She'll do what I tell her.'

'Omigawd, is this really happening?' Jezz's eyes drop as she sends a tweet to the world. Clyde is twisting her wrist. 'Youch, let go!'

Clyde pushes Jezz's head down until she's forced to read a clause in the Benji contract about not getting pregnant on tour. '*Don't fuck it up again*,' Clyde growls.

'Thank you all,' Benji Fraulich says, getting up from the table, his legs stiff in their black leather, 'I haff other commitment.'

Clyde shoves a pen into Jezz's fist and she signs the contracts and when Clyde's expected to initial everything he says 'I ain't putting shit on paper' and slides the papers off the table and the world's top dance music promoters have to scramble in a puddle of beer to rescue the documents and they all shake hands and when she realises they're all leaving her, Jezz blurts out, 'BUT I HAVEN'T SONG, you you you wanted me for, to—' and Clyde's eyes turn to slits and he says, 'You're their problem now.'

'But I wanted you to see me -'

'Didn't I get your fuckin' foot in the fuckin' door?'

'No it isn't,' Jezz pleads, looking at her foot.'

'I ALREADY SEEN EVERY SONG YOU'VE EVER DONE. Don't make me tell you again.' Then he punches a bouncer in the arm and they do a special handshake from chest to chest and punch each other in the back and chest and neck and suck each other into the crowd. She could pull her shirt and skirt and panties off and turn herself inside out and they still wouldn't notice her.

She wakes up to a vibration under her hip, wonders why she can't stretch her legs, why the air tastes so stale. Outside are lights and grey concrete, as if she is in...

It's her phone. It's throbbing like a racing heart. Nikki is calling – as in Minaj. Whose car is this? What country is this? It's so spacious inside, the interior is perfect, not a blemish or scratch, the leather is tight and glowing, and it

that steering wheel velvet? 'Omigawsh.'

She answers her phone.

'I twisted his arm,' Clyde says. 'Benji'll take you on tour with him. One year at a time. Ibiza and Macau, mostly. Be at the airport at ten with your shit, you're flyin out.'

She gets a huge fright and her blood tries to burst out of her: there is a man snoring in the driver's seat. He has grey and black hair in his ears. His tie is riding his chest. She whispers as lowly as she can, 'TEN?! Ten? AM or PM?'

'First stop's London. Instore promos. Mostly giving away free mp3s on memory sticks and that, photos and shit, giving posters to kiddies. Mess it up, you mess with me. Crystal clear? Solid.'

Jezz tries to escape before she can answer, but her body is trapped – her feet just kick against the door of the car, and it's perfect, too good for her, grey leather interior with wood-marble panels. There's a bottle of champagne sticking out of a drinks cooler full of cold water. She looks out the window. Gosh the sky's grey, she's parked on the motorway or –

No, she's in an underground parking building. This is not her car. Looking around, she sees those flags that she knows from the backs of Minis, the flag from James Bond's parachute. London? It has to be. She has never felt more moved to be in London and she knows that this is when you must write down what you are feeling. There is an app on her phone that lets her compose poetry that is the most intensely passionate, emotional that could ever have existed, more moving than anything written during any war. There is a selection of fifty word-tiles on the screen and she gets to choose which ones to use.

She's hunched in the Lamborghini but her mind is within the music video, she can hear the snare drum and horns and breaks and beats. She can hear girls and boys

chanting *Most Wanted*.

You're the most wanted one
In love with your gun / you're on the run
Can't we live as one / under the sun
My hands in the air / but I just don't care
Are we better off apart? / you're breaking my heart
Nothing is fair / when you're not there
But I still care / but you're not there / but I still
care

And you're my number one / most wanted one
She leaves a CD on the chest of the man and eases
out of his car and clacks in her heels across the
underground car park, looking for an elevator.

Benji's name stays on the posters and tickets and websites but he has an apprentice do the actual DJing – his arm is in a sling and he's always afraid Jezz's manager will show up. From beaches to university orientations to political fundraisers, Jezz sings until her lungs are charred, and Sambo keeps selling Jezz's original vocal track with Benji's beat to DJs in weaker countries who keep mixing it up. Sometimes she's in Moscow and he's in Helsinki, sometimes he's in Reykjavik and she's in the airport Hilton. Always, she has a box of memory sticks or CDs to sell, and always men buy them off her in one single go and pay her a really precise, exact amount of euros with lots of zeroes. She is allowed to share her recordings on her fan sites. She can't get over the difference between each fan-made remix, such range of expression from something as simple as lifting the underscore or tweaking the reverb, or slowing the BPM so it feels like when you've been sitting down for ages and you stand up too fast and your head gets full of fizzy drink. There's *Most Wanted (Club Mix)*, *Most Wanted (Fever Mix)*, then there are the *Disco Mix*, *Txt Mix*, *Reinvented*

Mix, Libra Mix, DJ ZØne Mix.

In a city full of Japanese faces, the dance-floor is a volcanic pit full of cyclists in fluorescent orange and green lycra, and she's at the bottom on a glowing circle, using her music to plea for release. Then she wakes up, and everyone's speaking Italian.

The lawyer gets in touch to say that he's packing up the house and selling everything and he asks for her bank account number and she asks him to describe the house because she can't remember what it looks like.

Most Wanted is what they call a seven o'clocker, Benji tells her over the Sargasso Sea, it's a song to put people in a serene mood as they are leaving the club and going home to shower and crawl into bed with their lover.

'Gosh... that's good, right?'

'Jezz, how I say in English... This song, it is the last thing people hear in the head, you understand this?' Benji taps his skull. 'Everyone haff most wanted, haff love they lost. You haff lost love, I have lost love, Sambo has lost love.'

'What about Clyde?'

'I don't know this man's head,' he says, shaking. 'This song will Number One, Number One, Number One. You get this?'

Jezz shakes her head. 'No, I don't get him.'

The begging in Jezz's voice makes her song an essential in every club from west to east. Jezz's name goes on the posters and websites and tickets and even if she's not singing, she's on stage or coming out of fifty speakers harmonising in an invisible bubble that bobs over everyone like a beach-ball. Her icon is the golden butterfly in her belly button - a five inch wide designer piercing. It appears on posters above the stencilled image of her panties and the tops of the C-L-Y-D-E letters she had tattooed back in

the blurry years. One night she can't find any of the new Benji Fraulich tracks in iTunes, the next, Benji Fraulich feat. Jezz is in the top five Heatseekers. She begins to orbit the Earth and barely touches down.

Did you know that lots of the Chinese people in Taiwan speak English? Have you ever flown over Sydney at midnight in full daylight? Do you know the difference between Singapore Airlines and Malaysian Airlines? Did you know that everyone in show business has a manager who's only a phone call away except her?

Sambo takes some of Jezz's phone calls because Benji is just too busy. Yes, he says, Yes I will pass these words onto Benji, he says, Yes thank you for sending through the vocal cut for *Your Own Way*.

Jezz sings it for him, over the phone. because he has to hear it from her.

Loving you
Isn't the right thing to do
How can I
Ever change things that I feel?
If I could
Maybe I'd give you my world
How can I
When you won't take it from me?

Sambo reminds her that her contract expires on February 6 and says then she'll be free.

The Indian Ocean puts a finger up her nose. It smells like yachts and warm sand. She left the ranch-slider open and now she's being caressed awake by a sea-breeze. Convinced that she's dreaming, she murmurs the words to her single, then sings at full volume, lying on her back, her throat fattened with that wind the lifts seagulls, her diaphragm free.

She's not sure which ocean it is. The one by the beach.

She rolls across the bed and grabs her iPad. Facebook says she has 11, 208 fans. That is a dream come true. The KFC commercial was the smartest thing she has ever done. Benji is going to get sick and tired of @nya any time now. He only told Jezz to go away because technically her contract had expired and he felt sorry for @nya or something. Benji had said it once herself, she is the Queen of the Clubs. 'She is Queen of ze Clubs, she must come out of zis toilet, ja?'

The year passed on planes and in black rooms full of ice buckets and glass tabletops and bikinis.

While filling the hand basin, it occurs to her that the belly button piercing is Benji's way of plugging her up. She slides it out and plays with the hole it has left in her, and realises the fistula looks like a purple notch across her stomach. She has to slide the piercing back in and carry on. She thinks of her Caesarian scar further below.

She gets a fright when the housekeeping woman talks to her in American. She's not in the Seychelles, she's in Malibu. She asks the cleaner to come back later and open the lyrics written in the notepad on her phone. The song has been lurking inside her lungs and her fingers and her brain for years, and now she's finally ready, it's the new one, it's the next step. The lyrics are the most incredible yet, and so natural – it's like she's had them inside her for years. It's like somebody else wrote them and then died and she was reincarnated as that person.

When he hears *Your Own Way*, he'll beg her to put her vocals against some studio beats and return to him in Paris or Manchester. She flicks the TV on and it takes ages to find the channel with dance music, and the rhythm in this Lady Gaga tune helps her finish her song. She pulls out her iPad. She has got to, absolutely GOT TO tell Clyde about

this. She wishes Clyde used email. He's so vanilla sometimes.

Benji Fraulich feat. @nya comes on, and @nya's voice slices through everything. If you listen to doves / to a voice from above, @nya sings over some footage of two glaciers morphing into mouths and kissing,

You'll be one / you'll be one /
with the gun / that you love /
that you love / number one
/ you'll be one / and your gun / you'll be one...

It's her song. It's HER song. HER words, HER song.

Her brain goes mouldy and later, Jezz can't tell the paramedics just what she swallowed or what she washed it down with because basically it was everything, even the Listerine, even fungus ointment, Jezz put everything inside herself and imploded – after she set up the RIP page on Facebook.

Nation's Most Wanted producers make her sign this form. By signing, she's agreeing that they are not discriminating against her because she limps because she had hip surgery. They are not allowed to do that. A man wearing a tie shouts at her until she goes quiet. They're even angrier at her than when they banged the gong and shouted at her to stop singing, for God's sake, woman, how old do you think you are? She needs to go number one real bad so she shuffles out of the lights, behind the curtains and the panel of judges buzz the next contestant on. She can hear it's a stand-up comedian - nothing like her. He can't even sing, lol!

If she can get a babysitter, she sings in the Santa Parade, or at shows for veterans, or at launches for parks maintained by the city council, or at the beach. They use her voice on the radio for adverts for leathery new cars

with tyres so black they shine. You can hear Jezz on that advert for nappies. You know her voice from that jingle telling you what to do when there's a fire in your kitchen.

Her babies asks her why she reads the newspaper at the table. She tells them she's getting better at everything. Really, she's looking for her name, but it's not there. She has faded from Google and those stats showing how many people are looking at her YouTube vids make her want to crawl into a cardboard box and fold the flaps down over her. They use one of her songs at the gym when pregnant women are rolling on Swiss balls and she complains at the desk that she didn't say they could use her song, and it takes a month, then there's a meeting with the gym manager and his lawyer who get to the bottom of this: Benji Fräulich owns Most Wanted, and Your Own Way, and Hearts Apart, and all the rest. Not Jezz.

'Gotta add though, if he didn't pay you for the use of your voice, we definitely need to talk,' the lawyer tells her, tapping his business card on the table. 'I could rectify things.'

The gym manager yawns and stands up. 'So'd the guy rip you off or not?'

Jezz shakes her head. She doesn't want to say.

'You need to talk to your manager. Who's your manager?'

She's watching her Likes inch towards 4000 when a chat box boops open. Clyde, the name says. No last name.

U wil never guess where I am

He's in Pelican Bay. She says that sounds sunny. He says she has to bail him, he's gonna get done in here. He'll get done in the laundry and they'll pour bleach on the fingerprints.

What u mean dun
No more Uncle Clyde
U r not Uncle Clyde n e way
Pls Jezz pls pls pls u hav 2 u r lucky i get interpol
convention they hav 2 let u access computer 4 a loyer
*loyer
Y didnt u jus ring me or right
Hw am I suposed 2 know were u live
I live in our place I bort it
Y
Thatz not ur home lufthansa iznt my home dis iz my
home

DONT U UNDASTAN I NEED U FUKN POST
BOND 4 ME

She closes the chat bubble and uses this real nifty thing called Metacrawler to find those old interviews with her and photos of her at the launch of that new country beside Russia with all the balloons and flags. She goes and picks the kids up from school in the convertible. She notices how scratched the Benji Beatz CD is. She thinks about Benji feat. Jezz, and B. Fräulich + @nya, and Benji/Brunhilda, and Benji Bros. and all the other “partners” Benji has. They’re so talented, she wishes them sunshine and a fortune. Benji’s a wanted man. He’s been on top for so long, maybe there is no down for him. He’s probably really happy.

Claudette won’t sleep, she keeps wanting hugs, and Jezz gives up and lugs her through into the lounge. Jezz never plays her songs on her phone anymore, she puts on the TV and has to keep flipping through the channels. There’s something on Deutsche Welle about international gang boys, some DJ has been shot in a club in Berlin and there was a riot and Interpol are all sticking their noses into CDs with ecstasy soaked into the cardboard of the booklets

and girls being used as drug mules. What's a mule again? Jezz thinks of the Golden Books she used to borrow from other kids. They had old-fashioned animals – mules, donkeys, oxen. A mule's like a boy pony, right? Finally something calms Claudette down, a nature documentary about pink flamingoes and those big white birds with pelican beaks. Claudette doesn't blink for long, stretched minutes at a time, then before Jezz knows it, Claudette is a snoring bundle of rags in her arms and Jezz molds her into the soft mattress in her cot and coaxes the door closed. On the computer in the den, she Googles Pelican Bay, thinking she might take Claudette there to see her daddy.

