

I Got A Plan

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Mama let it all out during the drive to the airport. They had to go through Mt Eden and it gave Mama heaps of ammo. She'd been waiting all week; when the traffic froze, the momentum jolted the words out of her mouth. The first disappointment was the beard her son had grown because Adz was trying to save money on razor blades. He would get in serious shit if he had to appear in court again for boosting blades again, but he couldn't explain that bit. Really, the beard made Adz not-a-criminal, like, it indicated he was refusing to steal to shave, and Mama should have appreciated that, but she was ragging and you can't deal with women when they're ragging. The gardens of Mt Eden made her bitch about plants. Every plant she talked up, she was really saying 'You're useless at growing anything.'

He hated driving her to the airport (who was gonna pay for the gas?) but at least it got rid of her quicker, and at least she'd given him all them fuel discount vouchers. And the boxes of aspirin, and filled their freezer, and washed the curtains. Mama was disappointed with the warning sticker on the nasty rap CD Adz had left on the dashboard, and she couldn't snooze with that orange Empty light on. She was clutching a bottle of fabric softener against the big pillowy rolls of her belly. The strap bisected her belly like a hamburger. She was so huggable, but he was holding out on the hugs, after that shit she'd done to him behind his back, well, in front of him, giving those things to Ev.

Adz hadn't used the fabric softener, so she was taking it back home. He wanted to keep it, it was worth like eleven bucks, but he didn't say anything.

They were boxed in by vans and people-movers, and it looked like a fire engine was trying to squeeze into the traffic further ahead. A mortgage broker grinned at them from a billboard. His teeth were irritatingly white, basically pointing out how brown Adz's teeth had gotten, and the tarseal was too black and the datura trumpets were too purple. Everything was bugging him.

'Why you car smell smoke?'

'Ev musta been smoking in here. Hey, FYI, when I make my first five figures I'm gonna buy a billboard that says, Mama's the Bomb. That's a guarantee.'

'But this you need diploma degree, Adam.' She was still rockin' that Third World accent. Cringe. He didn't say nothing back. She inched through the radio stations, pressing her finger like a hundred times instead holding the Scan button down, found one with an American guy going on about the Book of Genesis and the naked lovebirds fucking up Paradise after a week. When the story ended, and mankind was promoted or condemned or

whatever the fuck, she put in her CD with the ukuleles, and it made the traffic budge forward a bit, somehow. The Empty light glowed more strongly and Mama fished out her credit card and stroked the bumpy plastic numbers. She'd paid for the vehicle two years ago. Adz supposed it was her vehicle, if you thought about it.

He didn't have any coins for the airport parking machine, sorry Mama—well, he did, but he was saving them up for a pack of tailies — so he couldn't pay for the parking while she boarded the plane. My bad. When he hugged her across the seat, straining against his seatbelt, not undoing it, hibiscus petals from behind Mama's ear were knocked onto the gear stick. She'd taken the flower from one of his neighbours, the only other Islanders in the block of flats. He didn't speak the lingo any more. That's what he told people.

Adz didn't have a job to rush back to, but he was in a hurry to get somewhere, he had this, like, theory he needed to test, and he just didn't have time to stick around to watch her plane gap it. He'd had a dream that if you punched the right combination of buttons on the telephone, then hung up, then dialled some more, secret phone lines would open up to you, and you could talk to any president or IMF honcho or Illuminati you wanted. As they kissed cheeks and brows, pollen irritated his nostrils. The stench of those hibiscuses reminded him how the islands stank like soil and warm rotten mushy leaves and the roads were all bumpy and covered in clay and dust.

'Not many people actually wear those,' he said, pointing to Mama's flower as she heaved her suitcase out of the car, 'It's more, like, for dressing up.'

'At home we do this,' she said, and slammed the door.

The driveway was where all the stormwater in the hood seemed to collect, making the tarseal lift off and float like black icebergs of tar and gravel. Their place was right under a pylon which hummed loudly if you stopped doing the dishes and paused to listen. Sometimes when it hailed, blue sparks climbed through the air. That shit was pretty dope to watch when you were blazed. He'd come up with a plan to filch the copper lining from the hot water cylinder, trim it with scissors so thinly that he could have a wire twenty metres long, and lasso the power lines to get free energy.

He parked facing uphill so the Empty light wouldn't come on again. Ev would need to take the car to the university later on and it would seem like her fault for not topping the tank up. He had to get back to his base on the couch and unpause PrimoPoker.net, but he knew Ev was gonna have a mental at him about Mama if he saw Ev inside. Mama'd given Ev some money and done a few other things to fully piss him right off, underhanded shit, paying for their groceries and sending the car all the way from the islands and buying Ev and him those crop plants she'd rooted in the patch

of dirt at the base of the pine tree.

Pigeons were waddling over the muddy patch where all the weird ethnics in his block grew vegies. Adz wanted the roots of Mama's plants to rot away, then he'd test his can which sprayed flesh eating virus on odour-causing bacteria, after he'd developed it, that was, after he'd got it through the patent office, after he'd finished his poker tournament. His invention would make poor countries smell better, like Mama's island. It would make this block of flats smell better. All these people ever did was hang washing out of their windows, big billowing patterned garments glinting with gold that they cloaked their heads in and hid their knees behind.

Checking the mail was a good way to delay going inside. He trudged up the steps, jandals slapping. There were fresh flyers and catalogues in the mail box: awesome. Mama would fly over them any moment, now. He saw the underbellies of so many planes every day. Were they escaping or being sucked back?

'Leave it. This is junk.' The mailbox was at the top of the mossy stairs; Ev was standing at the bottom, calling him back. 'Put these advert in ze neighbour's box.'

'But there's good vouchers in here. Here's one for Thai, we haven't had that in ages.'

'Can't afford, ja. Just leave.' He trudged back down and followed Ev into their depression. It was hard to see the couch under Adz's scattered dissertation pages, books and computer parts. He had a chess game going on this miniature laptop with half the keys missing. He opened the fridge but it only had nail polish in it.

'What they are serving on the flight?'

'How ze hell should zis dom doos know?'

'Do not mock me or it shall be der last time. What shall we hef for tea, I'm dyyyyyying for ribs.'

'Have mine.' He lifted up his shirt and showed her the stripes on the sides of his stomach, which she pinched and frowned at.

'You don't eat enough.'

'I don't need to,' he said, squirming away. 'I'm not hungry for food.'

'So you going to get these veges growing, hey?' She tossed him the latest packets of seeds Mama had given her.

'I choose not to for reasons of conscience.'

'Liar, liar. You are no greenthumb.' She went back to her laptop and the keys made that nibbling noise. The hot tap was running in the bathroom and fingers of steam were reaching out of the hallway. Maybe the condoms he'd flushed would push water back up the toilet; maybe plumbers shouldn't be expensive in the first place. Adz couldn't wait to find out. If he could flush all household waste, it would save them four bucks a week on council rubbish stickers and bags, and maybe Ev would finally admit he was a genius.

'I could if I wanted,' Adz said, standing in the clear spot in the centre of the lounge. 'They made us grow all kinds of roots and yams and shit in the islands... Tapioca, you ever heard of it?'

'And, what, zey teach horticulture on Dr Phil? The six hours a day watching TV, this is you learning, hey?'

He tried to stare her down, but she wasn't looking up. 'I already told you, the uni lost my paperwork. Stupid idiots.'

'You're right. It is the fault of someone else you have no purpose.'

When the rapture came, Adz would be spared for his moral, objective mind. They alien overlords would reward him with a Play5tation, fifth generation, plucked from the future.

Ev closed her laptop and pulled her top off. He licked his lips as she stripped, her flesh jiggling like jelly. She pulled a box of nougat out of the hot water cupboard and said, 'I'm taking a boarh.'

'How'd you hide that in there? Where was that?'

'Want some?' she said, ripping the box open and stuffing white hunks into her thick lips. 'I have concluded that we need to move. You have to get zis place cleaned up, to get our bond back.'

'Stupidity is the desire to conclude.' That's what Flaubert concluded.'

'You all day learning this instead of apply for jop?'

'The flat's impossible to clean. It's a write-off. I could sell the car?'

'Neffe sell this car. How are we supposed to get away from all this?' she said, unwrapping the cellophane from a tray of chocolates and popping two quickly into her mouth.

'I thought you liked Mt Eden?'

'I like you, despite you are wildebeest. I want to live where you are. Just so long as it has a bath tub, ja.'

She stepped out of her knickers and flung them down the short hallway into the laundry basket. He didn't like the red pimples at the bottom of her belly that said her razor was too blunt, and the ragged black regrowth where her thighs met, but he watched her wide, white, wobbling butt leave him and as she plopped into the sloshing water and the tap stopped and everything was silent and steamy, she said, 'Ahhhh,' and his mind smiled.

When he'd lost a nice, even \$88.88 on the poker, he followed her into the bathroom for sex on a mildewy towel which twisted as they fucked, devouring each other's mouths to muffle the sound of their stomachs yawning. Ev shuddered and Adz's eyes rolled back in his head as he poured seed into her, picturing his big score.

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That infomercial for the juicer meant it was midday. He must have slept for only seven hours, since five, sitting upright on the couch, blanketed in manuscripts, a glowing laptop screen for warmth. He'd stayed up watching ab creasers and treadmills, scribbling blueprints for his next invention. The longer he stayed awake each night, the more cigarettes he could have in his

life. Ev had fallen asleep eating popcorn in bed, transcribing some interview with some nerd. She worked too hard on her uni stuff. She took life too seriously.

He'd left the front door open and the motorway was pumping rubbery smog and noise inside, but it felt good to know he could just thumb a ride and cruise out of Ev's life at any time, let her get on with her future where everything was planned.

He picked the sand out of his eyes, fell forwards and did a few push-ups on the thin carpet. His body felt disgusting with sleepiness, soggy, useless. The windows were dappled with condensation – Ev must have closed the door as she left for university. Ev got an office, Ev got office hours, and Adz got suspended. How fair was that shit?

He opened the hot water cupboard and stroked the barrel of warm metal before he'd even gone for a piss. There was space behind it, a black cavern pointing towards one of the neighbours, it was hard to tell which one. He dipped his shoulder inside, groped around, touched something cold and wiry and stole his hand back and slammed the cupboard shut went walking.

You could smoke as much as you wanted when you were out walking. The stink didn't cling to you that much, so you only had to shower twice a week. A flock of boys were on a bench outside the dairy, thumping each other's shoulders. One of them was trying to chuck a knotted pair of shoes over the power lines. Adz pretended to put something into the post box so he could avoid the evil atmosphere around them like a gas cloud. Their school jackets were tied around their heads, and their shoelaces were wrapped around their calves. These boys had never put hos before bros like he had, and it made him sad trying to recall the last time he'd played Soggy Biscuit or punched a guy in the arm or arm-wrestled or rated girls out of ten. Some of his old homies were overseas now, playing for development squads. Some of them had started their own t-shirt companies and lived in websites. Some of them had been called out on Facebook for getting two girls pregnant and hung themselves in abandoned houses.

Adz bought a fresh pouch of tobacco and had it open before he'd even left the dairy. He stood there sucking on a smoking filter, keeping his hunger pushed-down, and read adverts for Western Union, phone cards to ring home to Pakistan, Bollywood movies, fireworks. The shop windows contained roasted ducks hanging by their feet, fried chicken, dried octopus coconut cream. His tobacco had a tropical beach on it that looked nothing like the Docks at the south end of the road. Real beaches have pylons running through the water, and signs warning you not to gather the shellfish.

Ten minutes down the dead end street was the scrap metal yard and he ambled that way, hoping the gangstas wouldn't make eye contact with him. He had nice long arms and a bumpy stomach but he was too skinny to smash anyone anymore. Ev had more strength in her than he did.

A train stopped him from crossing the road for a few minutes and he stared at its blue and orange carriages until a plan came to him, and he pulled the schemebook from his pocket and scribbled an idea in there. Then he trudged down to the scrapyard, arcing round the frothing rottweiler and over the difficult, dusty stones. They gave him a quote about how much copper was worth. They said the cheapest way was to take out a power pole with your car, then when the linesmen had shut the power supply off, you came back at night with some bolt cutters and a screwdriver and trimmed the sweet sheets of copper off.

You got some copper you're not tellin me about, I can tell.

His stomach chewed on itself.

I'll send the boys round to collect.

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Afternoons were the worst. Even if he napped, the clock didn't move much. He was alright at defrosting blocks of tofu, or maybe lasagna toppers, if there was anything to defrost, but he left the cooking up to Ev, mostly. Quorn was hard to cook; lentils took too long. The longer she kept him waiting for her to get home, the more right it gave him to read her journal.

In the centre of the journal, hundred dollar notes were wedged, a couple dozen of them. How long had she been keeping this? He wrote on the notepad in his brain: Check journal more. He shuffled the notes. He was a Vegas card dealer – well, he could be, if he wanted. There was enough there to cover the bond on a new place, although there was still that late rent to make up before they left here. She didn't know he'd missed a few payments; smokes had been getting expensive, and you had to wager real money on that god damn poker tournament, none of it was his fault. He moved Ev's cash to the hot water cupboard. It was a giant sloshy womb and there was his baby inside it. He wrapped his fingers around the copper pipe and thought his big score. He was gonna grow his own business from nothing, franchise it to other hoods. The scrap metal guy'd said he'd pay him mad stacks if he brought him what he needed. Not copper, the other thing, you dumb cunt. Get outta here, course he wouldn't put anything on paper. Paper was evidence. If Adz was a fuckin' nark, he'd feed Adz to his fuckin rottie, got it?

Ev burst in the door and kissed his cheeks and he got a fright, cramming her journal under his arse, pretending he was putting his dissertation in order. She went straight to the stovetop, put a wok on it, switched it on, opened the fridge-freezer and nibbled a stick of biltong while she searched the kitchen for food. Most of the cupboards only had sticky paint brushes in them, or DVD vouchers.

'You didn't go shopping today?'

'Nah, too busy.'

'Busy sanding? Painting? Scrubbing the bath tub? Busy getting our bond

back?’

‘Got us a big score all planned.’

‘Excellent, then I shall cancel the student allowance and buy 100 pairs of shoes.’

‘Nah, I’m serious, babe... Oi, help me - I’m stuck.’ His fingers were bonded together with superglue from Ev’s old art supplies.

She shook her head like a war had broken out overseas that she could do nothing about, and dug inside her pocket. ‘Don’t worry, I’ll ring your ma, she will help us.’

‘DON’T YOU EVEN THINK ABOUT IT, EVELYN.’ He stood up and his laptop fell onto the carpet and the screen cracked and filled with rainbow oil. ‘I can pay for that,’ he said after a long time, ‘Don’t forget I got a plan.’

He helped her find coins under the passenger seat of the car (thanks for bein clumsy, Mama) and she went across the road and bought two scoops of deep fried chips and a loaf of bread. He watched her waddle back and forth and saw her screech at the gangstas who were trying to get at third pair of school shoes up on the power lines. They spat when she was far enough away that she couldn’t hear them, then biffed their little twisty white smokable thing into the spit and got up and sauntered home. Coulda been a roach they discarded, maybe. Coulda had a little unused weed in it. Worth following up on, Adz thought.

After they’d eaten and he’d licked the salt from the newspaper, she cut his fingers apart with scissors and used methylated spirits to dissolve the glue, but Adz still felt stuck.

‘What were you gluing?’

‘Just something.’

‘Why you have 24 new lightbulbs and no groceries?’

‘They’re cheaper if you buy bulk.’

‘Tell me, domkopf.’

‘It’s my project. It’s a secret.’

‘This house is too small for you to hide things from me.’

‘What, like your journal?’

It was like she’d tossed a bucket of boiling water into his face, all he heard was the whipping sound and then his cheek felt like it was bleeding.

She had a bath and then went to bed. No sex for you, Adam. Adz didn’t join her. She was lucky she had a warm bath. She was lucky the copper was still in that cupboard – for now. What was the point of sitting atop a gold mine and not spending it?

He packed his pockets and backpack full of sawdust and bent nails and went walking to the mosque and the dump and the rusty basketball hoop and he dumped the wooden scraps and bent nails in the bush. He had Ev’s journal with him. Sometimes he took the new flat money out and

groped it, sometimes he tried to crush it. It was like she had planted a tracking device on the money. He wondered if she were seeing some rich guy right now, riding him, and the thought didn't upset him. She deserved that sort of thing, he was useless at it. He was useless at everything, he supposed, really.

APARTMNT 8th FLOOR. NO PETS; 20 MINS FRM BOTAN GARDNZ 095560126, the latest entry in her journal had read. She was obsessed with finding a new place for them to suffer. A river carved through a concrete stormwater runnel. The mosque, the temple, the Orthodox thing, the Assembly of God hall and the Korean Presbyterian church all had old people carrying things in and out, ironing boards, trays of lamingtons, fans. Those people were staying put. Those people weren't being ripping their roots outta Eden. He searched a clothing bin with a sign written in scribble, which almost bit off his arm. He picked cigarette packets up and checked them. Sometimes his feet stuck on chewing gum. Sometimes he found a ciggy butt not properly smoked.

Behind a group of tiled retirement villas, he stumbled down a muddy incline to where the grey water ran through the depression. This was the lowest part of the city, and weird mudskippers and crabs lived in holes in the clay banks. The grass ended and it was like Adz was seeing the thighs of the earth, all exposed. The bamboo became dense, and no one could find him down here. He hopped over the river and came up towards some shops, rumbling his fingers along fences. He took a book of DVD coupons leaking from a mailbox, cha-ching. His legs walked while his eyes read.

There was a section of Ev's journal where Ev had stashed letters from Mama. They both had pretty shit English, but it was obvious she'd said Adam was a good-for-nothing who couldn't even get a sickness benefit gig. They were both worried about him. Worried? Against, more like. He slapped the journal against his leg, hard, and some bits of paper flapped out and skittered along the ground behind him. Ev wouldn't miss a bookmark or two.

He realised he was standing in the middle of a pedestrian crossing, clutching a nailgun in a box with a receipt stapled to it. He barely remembered buying it. Some snob with a couple of children in little blue school blazers was tapping on his steering wheel and looking at him like he was from outta space. Adz's throat burned and his guts boiled up and he rolled a furious, twisted cigarette and broke into a scurry towards home, smoking and sprinting, kicking the front door open and hauling the heating cupboard open. He set to work with a wrench and pliers and had the copper lining out of the cylinder in a couple of hours of sweaty, cramped grasping and straining and stretching. The boards had to go, too. When he had thirty bucks worth of copper, he fished inside his pocket for the wad of money from Ev's journal, but his pocket was empty.

He kicked the nailgun into the cupboard and cursed the drill and

extension cord. He desperately needed a cigarette. His pouch was empty. He headed across the road for the dairy. He saw a discarded roach under the picnic table. The hoodrats were gone. He picked up the roach and ripped it open, checking for seeds.

She was suddenly home and tugging the long yellow-and-black electrical cord which ran from the kitchen out the window and into the wash house they had to share with all the Indians and Russians.

He snapped out of his trance and tried to put the jigsaw of his life back together in a hurry.

‘What do you need this for?’

‘I promise I didn’t,’ he squawked, getting up and putting a pot of water on the stove. ‘Hey, hon. Got any smokes?’

‘You have one parking ticket. For staying too much time in your place. I found you hid it.’

Adz cringed and turned away slightly, prepared for a beating, ravelling the extension cord around his wrist and putting it in a cupboard.

‘I found us a flat. We’re out of here.’ She pinched his ear and jingled the car keys.

‘You got us a new place without consulting me?’

‘You are saying you won’t help the move?’ She never broke eye contact as she reached inside a cardboard box in her handbag and pulled out a samosa and bit it open.

Adz studied the parking ticket like he’d never seen it before, reading the terms and conditions. ‘I don’t remember this...’

‘HEY! ADAM! Are you refusing me? About the flat?’

‘No?’

‘Good.’ She patted his head. ‘We can’t stay here forever. You need to inform neighbours.’ Ev carefully pulled her clothes off, went into the bathroom and ran a tap, then put some fruit in the bowl, chewing her samosa. He was pleased she hadn’t read his mind for once – she would have found out that he’d sold the hot water system. They would be bathing in cold water from now on; it wasn’t that big a deal, he hated washing anyway. She put her clothes in the laundry basket and carefully arranged pieces of samosa on a plate and put it on the floor at Adz’s feet.

He watched her trot down the hallway, say ‘Ahh,’ then get into the bathtub and scream.

She ran out of the tub naked, blackening the carpet with drips, and phoned their landlord. She told him they were getting out of there. He had to give them their bond back. What damage to the heating? Which neighbours? Name them! No, it couldn’t have been Adam’s fault, how could he even suggest such a thing?

Ev scrawled **!!!BOND PARTY!!!** on the wall with lipstick. Her new dress

had petal-patterns. Adz yelled across the room that they would find their bond disappeared if Ev wrecked the place, but a spirit was bursting out of her that wanted to shiver all its security away and be insane and unaccountable. Guests entered through random doors and windows, interrupting him with hugs and cheek-pecks and fist-bumps and shoulder barges.

She screamed, 'Kiss MY wreck!' tipping seven dollar wine on the carpet, 'We are MOOOO-FING!'

The friends showed up in pairs and triplets, clutching two bottles each, one for her, one for them. Ev told the story over and over again, buzzing, about the thousand bucks she'd saved with her student allowance, hidden in the house where no one could find it, and her scholarship and something else which Adz couldn't make out. How they just had to sort the bond and she'd slip into this great apartment and We're saying GAAN KAK to the landlord WOOOO!!! 'cause the landlord was a jerk for saying it was their fault their hot water got cut off and he wouldn't even send a plumber round and there was some lock inside the hot water cupboard she'd never noticed and she didn't have the key and OMIGAWD THIS POESY PLACE IS HISTORY, MON. There was something about an insane power bill they'd had yesterday, too, she told people, what you'd spend on about a hundred light bulbs.

It made Adz uneasy how many mates she had, how they all knew his name, as if she'd been telling people about him. He didn't have anyone to tell about her. It seemed weird to him that she had fans because she did baking and visited them when they had plaster casts on their arms, instead of people judging her on her looks or brains. They gifted her edible body paint, candy knickers, bonsai trees, a new kettle. Their relationship was getting overcrowded so he went outside and watched a long gangsta hovering around the public letterbox, kicking the tarmac. He almost called out and invited the kid over but he noticed some of the neighbours' heads sticking out of their windows and thought he would offend their blue, tusked gods if he reached out to a lonely gangsta.

One of Ev's mates, strong-jawed with a tight t-shirt, slipped them a tab of acid each. Another South African, perhaps Ev's idea man. Why bother competing? 'Congrets on ye new place,' the dude said with a wink, 'And get your fill of Ev, mon. She's worth her weight in gold.'

'That a fat joke?'

'Dunno yet. What you gonna do about it?'

Adz looked for his woman, but she was showing a friend the curtains in the bedroom, something about the curtains. He was stuck half-inside the bathroom.

'Nothin, that's what I thought. You're nothing, varknaaier. Don't kid yourself, bra.'

Adz squeezed past the guy and got pecked by his obnoxious cap and

quietly asked Ev where she'd got the money for her lovely dress. 'I've been SAVING!' she snapped.

'Didja keep the receipt? Ev? You might wanna return... never mind.'

He locked himself in the bathroom and slipped a tiny tab of cardboard under his tongue, pausing for a second to think about the half-picture of an apple on it. Ev had the other half.

The acid did nothing until the lino came alive and marched endlessly without going anywhere, and the room tipped upside down and the air became spicy, and before he could steer the vessel in the right direction, he was outside on wet knees, sniffing the seedling stalks. The motorway was painted with whitecaps, and the catseye reflectors looked like jagged rocks. He clutched the letterbox so he wasn't swept away. His Mama was at the party, why hadn't he hugged her? He shouted at her that she didn't take enough risks, she was too successful, she didn't live at the splintered present-end of history where no one knew what was going to happen to his generation. Boiling hot tequila geysered up his throat and he was hiccupping. He had the toilet seat around his neck. The tapwater was jelly. Ev used the hem of her new dress to wipe the vomit from Adz's lips and cradled his head until the birds woke up.

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Pots were clattering. He heard something shatter. Then she was standing on his shoulders, shaking him. 'We've been robbed we've been robbed we've been robbed. I'm calling the police. Where is it? What happened to our rent?'

Ev wore a duvet, Adz wore a towel.

'We can still get our bon...' Adz looked at curls of wallpaper and chips of plaster. 'You want me to cook, uh, breakfast or somethin?'

'What is there to eat, bliksem? Anyway, I'm sick again.'

'Again?'

'I'm sick all the time and I'm sick of you.'

He ate candy knickers for breakfast, sucked body paint from his fingertips. Pigeons squabbled outside the door.

'Start from the beginning.'

'From the beginning of time? Well, um, God made man, he had a paradise, then he made a chick from the dude's ribs and she screwed everything up.... You're not laughing.'

'Just tell me, and then we're done. Seriously. Kaput.' She began scrubbing BOND PARTY!!! from the wall with a foamy mop. 'Hurry your arse. I'm listening.'

'As soon as I tell you, you're gone?'

'That is what I said.'

'Then I'm not sayin shit. I'm in the lab for the rest of the day. Don't nag me.'

Adz went and hung out on the top of the stairs and checked the neighbours' boxes for catalogues. He popped down every now and again to drink out of the garden tap. The front door was locked. He checked the vegetable beds. The pumpkins and carrots had rooted and risen. The proteas and hibiscus were happy. Then Adz drove to the car yard and handed over the keys and papers. He told them to go ahead and tear out the immobiliser. As he walked to his home, he hummed an old island rhyme and clattered a stick along a fence, feeling washed. He kept one hand in his pocket, clutching the money. He felt like digging out his old school graph paper and charting how high he'd bounced back. He used to be good at accounting, that's right. Wasn't there supposed to be, like, heaps of money in accounting?

They packed bowls and spoons from a banana box. Adz discovered the offer of place for him to sit his Ph.D. at the university, and he screwed it up before Ev noticed, then unscrewed it, flattened it and pushed it into his pocket. Dinner was microwaved carrots and pumpkin soup, baby food samples Adz had sent away for which had just arrived. Ev rummaged up a jar of jam for dessert, and then that was all of their food gone. They would have to wait for the front garden to grow.

'Can you open this?' she said, wincing and handing him the jar, 'You're strong.'

'There's this story in my culture,' he lied to her, 'People tell the story all the time in my village. I don't care if you're mean to me, I'm gonna tell it anyway.'

'Everything you heff done to destroy this family, and you think I'm mean to you? CEASE SMILING LIKE THAT! CEASE IT AT ONCE!'

'You said we're a family...'

She rolled her eyes and pulled the five hundred bucks out of his hand. 'Tell the freaking story, then I'm going.'

'Are you comfortable? Cool, 'kay, alright, here goes: the mightiest hero in our village, like, he waited patiently by this, um, woman's side and even though he made all the mistakes in the world, like he killed a thing with a fin and he thought he'd slayed a mighty shark but it was just a dolphin, right, like, and, but he was the hero in the end, because his clumsiness made them all crack up, and without him, they would be just a bunch of smart people stuck on an island. They needed him around to forget how miserable their lives actually were.'

'You really think I'm miserable?' Her eyes had been stabbed with glass shards. They were expired eyes, used, done with, broken, gone.

'Um... no?'

'I HEFF to finish. You have to understand that... I HEFF to finish my studies. Stay with me while I finish if you can. Otherwise, no hard feelings, Adz, but seriously: fock off and ruin your own loif.'

'I have to finish what I'm doing, too.'

‘And this is?!’

Adz looked down and around and away from her face. ‘I’ll show you when it’s done.’

Ev ran the shower, and screamed and sobbed when she got in, but then she got used to it and started singing songs with funny Afrikaans words which used letters he’d never thought of. He went and meddled in the hot water cupboard, put the new double-wrapped copper cylinder in place, turned the connection back on and then the warmth came through.

When she was had stopped crying and dried herself, he forced her to wear one of his giant hoodies and he took her inside the hot water cupboard. As long as he stayed as skinny as possible, he explained, he could squeeze into the back. He took her into the darkness, hushing her to shut the door behind her.

Everything went orange. The bulbs were hot and stank of sawdust and melted plastic. ‘I had to get cash, see, to buy the copper back... There’s about a hundred bonds growing here.’

At the back of the cupboard, he prodded a square of insulation paper with his finger and a wall fell away. A new room was stuffed with bulbs glowing so hot they were white, and bushels and bushels and bushels of green buds, spiky, luscious, growing strongly, cramped, condensed, hidden, steaming under the lamps and sprinklers.

‘Secret garden, babe.’

‘This is the stupidest thing you heff done yet,’ she laughed. ‘You’d better get focking rich. I’m focking pregnant.’