

The Bigshot

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Booyah! I slap the chunky magazine onto the Bigshot's lap and he stops what he's saying about the renaissance Scottish literature mid-sentence.

'Want me to find the page for you? With my story on it?'

He chews some air and adjusts the blanket on his knees. The record player scrapes and mumbles. The leather couch cushions creak as I take a seat beside him. It's a bit faggy, sitting up all close, but the other chairs suck. 'You're now published,' he goes. He still hasn't actually opened the country's finest literary journal. 'Did you thank any, how shall I say, influential writers?' he goes, 'In your blurb?'

'Yeah, nah... It's kinda implied without saying it.'

'There's a story about a young man.' His words dart out into traffic. His eyelids always close when he busts out important shit likes this. 'In this collection you're working on. Correct? A young man based on yourself who rapes somebody in did-he, didn't-he circumstances. Perhaps it's 2am at a boozy high school party. Yes? Thought so. And the protagonist can't handle the concept of being potentially guilty, although his memories of the offence have been artificially put inside him by accusers? Correct?' The Bigshot opens his eyes and rips a walnut open with these long creamy old man thumbnails. 'It's an internal philosophical conflict. Ego versus id.'

'Far out. You psychic?'

'And I'll warrant you've drafted a story about a loner in a tight-knit sports team—the first eleven footballers,

perhaps—who's inclined to destroy the team somehow? Sabotage, is it? Or suicide? Perhaps a Salingeresque refusal to perform?

'Kind of. Except it's not sports, it's the Teen Greens. They chain themselves to steamrollers and shit, but he's a Young Nat and... Did you actually read that other one I left you or...?'

'Did I need to? Toss the manuscript. Begin afresh. Ask yourself what Hemingway would do. You're likely to write ONE worthy story for every hundred drafts, if you're serious about this. I exaggerate not.'

I find something to do with my fingers. Rolling a ciggie, why not. All great writers smoke. The Bigshot's house stinks like Savemart clothes. Smoke smells better.

He pulls the thick chunks of glass down from his eyes. His eyes are like, real confrontational and cold and sore-looking. The skin's black around them. 'You're not listening. See this?' He flaps his speckled hand at this pale section of his book shelves, two rows of yellowy pages and spines behind me. 'Not less than four hundred stories. I exaggerate not.'

I'm squished into this tight corner of the couch. I wanna get up and move. He closes his eyes, slumps his heavy old head on my shoulder and says into my ear, in a voice soundin like that Leonard Cohen fool, 'Try harder, my friend.' When he doesn't say any more ancient Obi-Wan stuff, I realise he's asleep. That's a new record, he musta hollered at me for, like, only five mins. 'Try harder, *friend*? Pretty heavy shit being a FRIEND with the Bigshot. He's, like, got his own entry in the 1988 encyclopedia of lit that my mum got given at English Language Partners back in the day. And he's my FRIEND. How buzzy's that shit?

I ease out my phone real slow and take a few pxts of him— his hand squeezing my wrist, his lips drooling on my

shoulder, his body pushing me into the corner of the couch, his hand flopping over my thigh. His snoring sounds like somebody tearing sheets of paper into shreds real slow. His arm flumps off his belly and lands between my legs. It could only be The Bigshot's hand because it's still clutching the story he was goin on about earlier, written in that cursive handwriting that no one can read. Up close, you can see how pitted and pocked and red his skin is. It's, like, been sandpapered or something. In some bits it's the colour of those saveloy sausages white people eat. I take a pxt of his hand near my junk, then I take a story and a sonnet off the book shelf.

I sit there smoking and thinking about my acceptance speech, for when I get the Premier Award, the Laureate, the Palm Door. I'll thank the Bigshot, for sure. I'll tell people he's my bro.

I wonder if he's dreaming about me. I wonder if he's jealous, now that I got some shit published.

There's just the record player for, like, ages. Mostly silence otherwise. I can hear his missus snapping twigs and singing Sanmin Zhuyi.

When the record player starts hiccupping, his mouth wakes, although his eyes don't open. He lifts his head off my shoulder. 'You don't want me to predict what the rest of your stories are about. I suspect such a thing would break you.'

'What's, like, how do ya, how can you come up with fresh material?'

'Don't be me. There's already one of those.' His lips squirm up into his cheeks. He pulls his hand out of my dickal region.

I get up, ease his head down onto a cushion and lift his feet up onto the couch. His missus Sarah always reminds me that he needs naps every three hours; I push the Bigshot too

far every time I see him, always sucking his expertise out. I take his slippers off. I take, like, three of those four hundred short stories as I tiptoe my way out. He won't even notice. It's, like, one percent I've taken. And you're allowed to copy 3% of works, they told us on my writing course.

Sarah is snapping kindling over a sawhorse by the birdbath on the grass. The Bigshot never wanted to get married, it's just that white chicks stopped finding him attractive so he had to marry something. Dunno how he scored Sarah, she's kind of a MILF, but he's got no idea what social class she's from. There are piles of leaves behind her. Probably her home in Guizhou's made out of leaves, feel me?

I rev my scooter and ask her if she wants to come with.

She doesn't get it. Where am I offering to take her?
Aren't my visits solely to learn from the Bigshot?

'I have to burn the leaves,' she says, in English. Her back is the only part of her that'll look at me. Her eyes are on the lawn. She thinks everyone's judging her, 'cause the Bigshot's always trippin on her all the time. She wears no makeup. Her hair is tied harshly back like it's in trouble. She's a xingbalao anyway, that means Reservoir Trash in our language. I shouldn'ta bothered even trying. Later.

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I am a rocket ship taking off, leaving earth behind.

I am a tsunami of talent, come to change the literary landscape. That's what the reviews reckon, anyway.

My publisher gets me an interview on StudTV, that's the student TV station. StudTV's pretty chill and I can talk about Hennessey or Gears of War and I can smoke while they interview me and stuff like that.

The current affairs show's called TellTales and it's pretty influential, like the big papers will have an editorial in response to it sometimes, and even the president's been interviewed on it once, or prime minister or whatever, and surprise surprise, Fiona's become like a regular interviewer. First she forms a Yellow Pride feminist splinter group called China Grrlz, then she founds her own zine just for womyn, then doesn't message me back, then she puts me on that setting so I can't post on her Facebook, now this, her getting to interrogate me. Fine. Whatever. I'm still selling books. First Chinese male under 25 to make the top ten bestsellers, byatch. What's she sold? Zines?! Pfft.

I don't know why I'm biting my fingernails. One of them's bleeding, and I can't leave the, what do you call it, the cubicle alone. I get stuck on words sometimes. Where's the Bigshot when you need his help?

Some of the writers and producers, like Erica, are from Yellow Pride circles. I know the gaffer and the second unit director. I sit on my bleeding finger so they can't see it. It's real sore, eh.

The interview chair, well, throne, it's on a stage in a studio that used to be a classroom—you can tell by the whiteboards fixed to each end of the room, and by the heinous sunflower-colour paint on the walls that StudTV's tried to cover up with black bedsheets. Fiona's 149 centimetres away, I've counted every centimetre 'cause my OCD's flaring up. She's editing her interview questions on her iPad, treating me with respect, acting like I'm just another random famous person. The first seven minutes are a report on CABAL, that's the Critics And Booksellers Alliance. CABAL'S been kind of a resistance against market forces, like they question my publisher all the time, and I think Fiona's agenda is to support, like, established authors against up-and-coming youngsters like me that actually get

makeup artists backstage asking me to sign books for them. Fiona's such a cock-tease, all immaculate goddess, all help-the-aged and shit. Fiona's gonna make it into parliament before she's 30, everyone reckons. Tryhard. Xinku much?

I'll bet you right now she's remembering how we put together the bio for the Bigshot on the national lit directory website, sipping green tea on my bed and eating yam lollies. It was like 4am when we got it sewn up. I'll bet you she's forgotten how she wanted me to sign a pledge sayin I would honour her as a lady if we got it on, like this actual contract written on paper stopping me from tappin and gappin.

She looks like no one's ever been inside her. Those glasses with the thick black frames are a barrier, a shield. No pussy for you, her face is sayin.

We kick off. She reads to the camera the names of critics who put me in their Top Ten list at the end of last year. She names, like, six people, as if the whole world doesn't think I'm spesh, just half a dozen people do. She says the story that won me THE short story comp, won me the tenGs, is derivative of the Bigshot. 'Derivative *in flagrante delicto*,' she goes.

The studio is silent. I'm the guy who's moved 20,000 units and all they've gotta say to me is *silence*?

Maybe I should show the world a pxt of her in the Hwa Hsia Society in her cheongsam, show everyone she ain't a banana and she ain't a boiled egg: bitch is just white all the way through.

'What are you doing?'

'Sorry? Wha? I wasn't listening.'

'You *are* planning to attempt further writing success with Macintosh to, how shall I say, help you find your words?'

There are students in the studio audience, and they're chuckling, and glugging from drink bottles, and posting

Tweets, I can hear the clicks. Fuck they chucklin about? It's the rumours, bet you a million bucks. I saw this blog—

‘With this book, I’m gonna donate 30% of the proceeds from all sales to World Vision so they can get my brothers and sisters out of slavery. You know, get them out of sweatshops and brothels. In Macau and shit.’

‘So you say, but what are you going to do *next*?’

‘I don’t get you?’

She asks me about the writing residency, about the speech I did at Boy’s High, about the spoken word samples I gave MC Jin. She asks if I’m still dedicated to Yellow Pride. She’s trying to out-Asian me. Stick to my published books, let’s talk about them. She asks me about *The Binding of Isaac*. She says it’s nothing like anything else in the collection.

‘Who wrote it?’

‘Says right there on the cover.’

‘I don’t want you to feel like you’re being attacked...’

‘What do you mean, “who wrote it”?’

‘So you’ll go on record claiming you yourself wrote *The Binding of Isaac*?’

‘I thought you were on my side...’

‘It’s just such a distinctive story,’ she goes. ‘Abraham is a man powerful enough to engage in conversations with Jehovah, with God himself, but to Isaac, his father Abraham is simply an old man who likes the sound of his own voice and who is cruel to Sarah, the mother-figure.’

‘Totes. That was me. I wrote that one.’

‘I don’t doubt for a second that you typed the words.’

‘You’re makin us uncomfortable.’

‘All I’m asking is if you could explain the Macintoshian flourishes.’

My teeth are too blunt to pull out the damn bit of skin tucked away between my nail and my flesh. ‘Can we take five, Yi-Ling?’

‘Fiona.’

‘Can I get another chair?’

‘Sorry to keep hectoring you, but can you just clear this up for me—you *did* write that story, or you didn’t?’

There are rows and columns of heads hidden in the black benches in the studio. One of the heads goes, ‘Third degree *burn*.’

It was always summer, back then. My lawn was better than hers.

Finally I go, ‘Least I didn’t suck his dick to get ahead.’

‘OOO!’ these dudes go, in the black audience.

Fiona gives me this look like I’ve just said there’s a 27th letter in the English alphabet she never noticed.

‘If that’s what this is really about,’ I go, ‘in the handicapped toilets, right? At the Governor-General’s pad, at that trippy soiree they had? Wro—’

‘Can you be adult about this?’

‘—Wrong? Either you sucked his dick or he ate you out. 2012; when he did the launch for *Countess of the Kerb*. You and him in the toilets. Together. Sorry if it hurts or anything...’

She flops her head around like a wobbly newborn baby. She won’t look at me anymore. ‘ERICA!’

‘He was a paedo, Fiona. Macintosh fondled me like a, you know, like a priest. Don’t, don’t go on his side... don’t.’

Folks are hard out crackin up. Now I’ve got their attention.

‘STOP THIS NOW. I MEAN IT.’

I hold up my phone and waggle it and this gaffer comes over and there’s this slot the camera boys can plug a USB into. You ever tried to check out how scary a hydroslide is and before you know it you’re sliding down? I plug in my phone and the producer’s up for it, like fully on live TV and shit, and I show, like, the whole country the pxt of the Bigshot’s hand between my thighs. Student TV, bro—they

need the ratings. It's hard to see, so the second unit camera man gets a longer USB and they plug me into the relay. A 72-inch screen shows us what the country's seeing. Told you I was a big deal, bro.

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I go round to give flowers to Sarah. Sure Bigshot was mean to her, but she'd be havin a sad right now, you'd think. They're in my backpack, the flowers, plus this bottle of sake I want to get her wasted on. There are men putting new tiles on the Bigshot's roof, and some scruffy dudes putting up new wallpaper, and a real estate douchebag with a tablet in one of those protective black folders showing this family around the place and the kids are screeching, buy it, Daddy, it's got goldfish, Daddy.

I can't find Sarah anywhere. I hope she didn't get deported. Do they deport you when your husband dies? That'd be fucked up. I sort of had, like, a plan for her.

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I am the youngest writer ever to have had the honour of writing a front-page obituary in *the* paper, y'know, The Paper Of Record, they call it. It's got a circulation of 420,000 and a readership three times that. The blurb they writ about me in the italic letters above the obit says how long my short story collection's stayed on the top ten. My big-ups take up a third of the word count of the obituary that's supposed to be all about the Bigshot.

I coulda used a fuckin hand to write the fuckin thing but... yeah. As for my dead dawg, he drops off the bestseller list. Weird, it feels easy to stay on, far as I'm concerned. The biggest impact, though, is the Homes For Books project. See,

Bigshot used to get funded to put classic literature into low-income households. The government hasn't renewed the charity's funding. I write 500 words about it for the Weekly Weaklings column in *TIME* magazine. The editors are in Sydney and they pay a buck a word.

I get the Glaxo Fellowship. Glaxo's either a drug or a drug company, I forget which, but they send you to this gangsta bach on the coast which is all rustic on the outside but it's got brand new marble benches on the inside, taps with stainless steel handles, and three sinks, each with an InSinkErator, plus real heavy deck furniture and you can't even see any nails or screws in the wood. Wish they'd've left a Welcome Basket in the bach filled with pharmaceuticals.

I'm meant to do some writing while I'm usin their bach. What if it sucks, though? What if I hurt my reputation by writing a flop? I can't get advice from my fuckin idol anymore, can I.

I get this sweet late model sedan to use and I keep getting speeding tickets driving into town to do interviews on RadioNation and MoreTalk. I pass this billboard with an ad for my book and a giant photo of me slam-dunking a pencil through a hoop-shaped piece of paper. Sometimes I go to a cocktail lounge with the radio host after the show. They don't have Cody's so I gotta get them to mix actual bourbon with Coke that comes out of a little glass bottle. The hosts are always about a foot taller than me. I have to translate heaps of my normal talk for them. They ask how I talk like I do but write such good English. I give the bitches on the bar signed copies of my book.

Glaxo gives me a pretty sweet laptop. It's one of those Apple Macintosh, I mean Macbooks. Wait, did Apple do a computer called Macintosh? Sometimes it's hard to remember who comes up with ideas first.

I tinker with the manuscript for, like, four hours a day. Everyone's gonna say my writing style's changed back so I have to get this right. A lot of my time I'm just Facebooking. I never send messages to any of my boys. This is not *Entourage*. I don't want them to think I'm the same old banana they grew up with. I don't wanna seem approachable, you know, ordinary, average, xingbalao. I'm elite now. Sorry, boys.

I take a hit off my pipe and walk along the beach, pulling apart fish skeletons bone by bone, building forts out of driftwood. Weed's the only thing that understands me. I walk with my shirt off and my \$200 Ray-Bans on. I saw Sonny Bill wearing them on a magazine. I've been doing reps. I don't wanna look like a writer, I wanna have muscles. The fellowship has blitzkrieged my student loan, it's buzzy, nyerrrrrrrn, boom, gone, and mum's credit cards are almost paid off (although I've gained like ten credit cards myself.) Now I can pick and choose what media I do. No more StudTV. I got me two agents and I can dispatch one to handle academic appearances, and one to do pop culture—like, they have a page on me in *Crush* magazine and I'm all Photoshopped and wearing a white long-sleeved shirt which only has the top button done up so my abs are showing. I get all these friend requests from bitches you can tell are still in college, and even dudes, that's probably the choicest part. When I was at school I used to send fan letters to bigshot writers I really liked. Now, principals want me to speak at their schools, like in assembly. I literally wish the Bigshot was still here. He'd be proud of me if he knew all the bitches who wanted my dick. Were still here? Was. Were? It's the little things like that I need help with. Where's the Bigshot when you need him?

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I do a music video. I do a spoken-word bit on that Lorde EP. I buy Mum plane tickets to Fujian with one week's royalty payments. She starts crying when I say I'm not coming with her. Mosquitoes, fog, corruption, no Google? Hellllllll no. The casinos woulda been sweet, though.

A chick in long pants and hoodie comes trotting into the bach. The sun's not cutting through the grey roof of the sky; I've only just got to sleep. The bach is full of salty fog. My skin's tingly. The ranch slider was open all night. The coffee table is piled with so many Woodstock cans that some have rolled off onto the carpet.

It's Fiona. She's dyed her hair red and it's in those plaits like Pippi Longstocking. She's some kind of dyke now.

She pulls plastic and cardboard out of the rubbish bin and puts it in a box she finds somewhere. She does the dishes real noisy. I can't pretend I'm asleep anymore so I sit up in my boxers, topless, blanket over my lap, touching my face. There's still league on the TV. You get it 24/7 on Sky. I like leaving Sky going, just to waste money. I put the *bling* in xingbalao, byatch.

I've been thinking about your story, she goes. Isaac was a speck, Isaac was nothing. But the father? Abraham was an elder when he took his son to the hill and offered him. It was Abraham testing God, not the other way round. If God wanted him to kill a child, Abraham would've found another God. He was in control, that's why, and nobody feels sorry for the boy. No one's even heard of Isaac.

'Want coffee?' I go.

'God no,' she goes, crossing her arms. She strokes the breakfast bar. She won't sit down. 'I've got work.'

Those stories, she begins. You never hung in Browntown. How could you know what it feels like to get divorced? You didn't play hopscotch. You didn't eat noodles

out of a paper cup. You didn't work in a boiler room. You didn't drink whiskey at breakfast-time. Did he give you the stories or did you take them?

'Quit raggin, honestly. Siddown and chill. I'll order a pizza. Do they do breakfast pizzas? Bet they do. It takes, like, half an hour to get here. Did you want coffee? Can't remember if I asked. You can get a pizza with gaaaangsta cheese on it from Gourmet By The Bay. I'm puttin the bling in xing—'

She takes my book out of her bag and hands me a pen and opens the first page. The paper is loose. I don't recognise it. The writing's small and unfamiliar. It's probably a new edition. She wants me not to recognise the words I, myself, carefully chose and wrote into cement. I'm still groggy. My tongue is coated in scum. I don't have the...thing... to come up with immortal words, 'specially not for Fiona, so I just scribble my signature. She removes the loose leaf of paper and gets up to go.

'That was an affidavit you just signed, you illiterate arsehole,' she goes. 'Say hi to your mum from me. Bet she's real proud.'

She pauses on the doorstep. She scopes the broad bay fringed with foam, the greenstone waves clattering as they smash onto the beach. She admires everything she sees except me.

The Bigshot never said what he thought of my stories, that's the annoying part. He kept falling asleep, so I stashed them in his bookshelf, what's the big deal? I thought it'd make him respect my stories more, if they were part of his library, just for a week or two, even if he didn't know. My stories could, like, absorb his greatness. He didn't read 'em, I grabbed 'em back, sent 'em to a publisher, got published, won some comps, fair's fair. Least, I meant to grab the right ones.

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When we were kids, if Fiona got a prickle in her foot, I'd gently lay her on her back on the lawn and suck it out, even though the prickle wasn't my fault.