

## *Prologue*

*It's the silence that's disturbing. Silence that has spanned the last few days. Long silence, accompanied by moody staring out of the window or into the distance. Silence that allows nothing to be said, and nothing to be heard. Silence that speaks volumes.*

*Something is up. I know this, but nothing I say elicits a response. No amount of specific questions, or even diversionary questions, break through the impenetrable wall of silence. She won't speak to me. And I can't read her face, impassive; her body language, protective; her silence, deafening.*

*It is killing me.*

*It's been over half an hour since we got home. She said nothing on the journey. Even before it, when I insisted she stay at school until the end of the day, she*

*met me with silence. She switched her phone off. What could I do, but pick her up early for the second day in a row and hope she would speak.*

*But she was silent. And now she still is.*

*Forty minutes.*

*That's enough. I get out of my floral armchair, place my cup on the table and walk upstairs. I bang on her bathroom door.*

*Nothing.*

*Silence.*

*'Annie,' I call out loudly, trying to harness my rising hysteria. 'Open the door. I want to talk.'*

*Nothing.*

*I grab the brass handle. I turn it. The door silently refuses me entry.*

*'Annie, open this door.'*

*I want to scream. Bang the door down because the silence is crashing down on top of me. 'Annie,' I shout again and rattle the handle furiously.*

*Silence.*

*I pull the drawers from the antique hall stand. One cracks as it hits the floor, spewing contents out. I rummage through them. A hairpin. I stick it in the door's release mechanism. I rattle the handle furiously*

*again, loudly, because what other option is there?*

*The handle gives and the door pushes open so hard I hear the wall chip behind it. 'Annie,' I scream as the word freezes on my lips. 'Annie,' I try to say again, running to my child, my beautiful daughter, Annie of acting classes and impersonations, Annie who wanted to be a unicorn as a five-year-old and travel the world as a fifteen-year-old, but there are no words. The silence has infected me.*

*I run to the bathtub. Her hair swirls across the water like an oil spill. I plunge my arms through the water, grabbing at her shoulders. She slips through my fingers. Water sloshes over my feet. I clutch at her shoulders again. I try not to look at her face. A bluish hue. Her eyes are shut. In my head I'm saying 'Annie, Annie' as she falls onto me, so wet, so heavy. I wrestle with her lifeless body on the floor and I'm still speaking to her. I begin CPR. I can't remember how many breaths to how many pumps. I just keep doing it and pull my mobile out of my pocket.*

*I hear someone's voice in the silence. 'I need an ambulance,' it says clearly and calmly. I breathe – three inhaled, fifteen pumps.*

*'My daughter's not breathing,' the voice continues.*

*'Yes, I'm administering CPR.' The voice gives the address of my house. I continue breathing for her, beating her heart. I can't stop. I hear the sirens. Footsteps and voices break the silence. Hands gently remove me and they are there making her breathe, making her heart beat.*

*'Are you the one who called triple-0?' one of the paramedics asks me.*

*I can't take my eyes off my daughter. 'Yes,' I say, in that same calm and clear voice that broke the silence.*

## *WHAT IT'S LIKE TO BE A GIRL*

Welcome to my blog. This is a blog of confessions about Greenheadgate and the reality of what it's actually, really, truly like to be a girl ...

*DISCLAIMER: To protect the privacy of others, names have been changed and characters combined. While I have attempted to be as honest and truthful as I can, these are my memories; I am the teller of my own story.*

---

*'It is far harder to kill a phantom than a reality.'*

*Virginia Woolf*

*The Death of the Moth and Other Essays*

## *Post 1: In the beginning*

My name is Jasmine Lovely, Jazz usually (unless I'm in trouble), and I'm a rapist. In fact, I'm guilty of more than just rape but, as my lawyer says, in the interests of judicial fairness, we can't be prejudicial. It's hard enough to admit to rape. As a girl, it's exceptionally hard. People look at you blankly. Not that it's something I admit to often, like I just did to you. I don't normally preface my introductions with that abrupt statement, and I'm not part of a self-help group, where you hold your hand up, state your name, then your addiction, affliction, crime. But this is the truth. I'm sixteen now, but twelve months ago that is what I did, I raped a girl. Her name was Annie Townshend. I could sound all David Copperfield and say, 'To begin my life with the beginning of my life, I

record that I was born (as I have been informed and believe) on a Friday,' but I'm not recording this for posterity. In fact, I'm really just creating this blog to address everything, to set the record straight.

For those of you choosing to follow my blog (and, I might add, you probably need to get a life if the ramblings of a sixteen-year-old constitute your week's entertainment), I should go back further, before the night that changed everything. As the power of the internet allows anyone around the globe to have access to this site I guess I need (as Miss Peters, my Lit teacher, says) to give you some context.

I lived in a small town called Greenhead about a hundred kilometres out of Perth. It's a pretty quiet place, mostly small farm holdings, big houses and the local primary school. It's a place where wildflowers grow in abundance and one of the big trades is exporting them to the rest of the world. If you've ever had a delivery of Geraldton wax or kangaroo paws, they probably came from Greenhead. The other big trade is wine. Over the last twenty years plenty of boutique wineries have popped up. It's

made the landscape more attractive – big stone tasting cellars and an influx of tourists – which makes the place more vibrant, particularly in the summer. The knock-on effect was the creation of a town centre, a bakery, cafe, newsagent and convenience store. It sounds smaller than it is – I feel like I’m giving the wrong impression. It’s not *that* country, by country standards. The people who live there are mostly well heeled. Enough disposable income to take yearly holidays, drive nice cars, have quad bikes. Most of the kids yearn for the day they can leave – get closer to the action, or at least closer to a train station, which is about an hour away. So I guess the geography made us kind of insular – we had to find stuff to do within walking distance, because until we got our own cars, we were pretty well stuck. There were about thirty of us who travelled each day, by bus, to Namba High, the closest high school, nearly forty minutes away. It’s not large, by city standards – maybe four hundred from Year 7 to Year 12 – so everyone knows everyone, although the degrees of friendship vary. To the rest of the school we were the Greenhead kids. Sometimes I think they viewed us as a bit country,

and now I wonder if that attitude is what fuelled us to party harder than them.

We had a reputation for big nights at friends’ places when their parents were out of town. That was the upside to the isolation: if your parents had to go to Perth, they normally stayed the night, and we seized every opportunity to capitalise on their absence. We had gatherings about once a month. The gatherings were always the same – steal booze from your parents and take it to the party. The one goal was to get as trashed as possible, as early as possible. When Scottie McGough discovered jagerbombs, things got even messier. Wasted by nine, passed out wherever you fell, hung-over for a couple of days. It was just what we did. But again, I feel like I’m jumping ahead too fast and maybe giving you the wrong impression. Aside from the parties, the only other big thing we had was school. So we would travel as a group, see each other in classes and travel home. Most of us worked for our parents in some capacity and did schoolwork. It was a pretty sedate life – until a gathering was scheduled and then there was something to really look forward to. But I guess it’s school that tipped the balance we

Greenheads had. School and the internet – Facebook in particular, but also Snapchat and Instagram. I think without those things that connected us to the Namba kids, and to the rest of the world, everything might not have got so bad.

I guess you want to know who the main players were. Me, of course, Jazz Lovely. What can I tell you about myself? You should know me, before you judge me. I think this is one of my main reasons for exposing everything about the night we call Greenheadgate. I'm being judged based on my actions of one night. It's like everything I did before that evening has ceased to exist and the sum total of who I am is encapsulated in the word 'rapist'. I admit it's true – and while I may not have stated this earlier, I am deeply and profoundly ashamed of my actions. The worst thing about regret is that there is no way to undo it. No way to go back in time and make better choices. No way to prevent the here and now. Please don't think I want you to feel sympathetic – what I did was terrible, a crime, something I can't change despite all the wishing and regret in the world. I wish it didn't have to define

me, I struggle daily to live with my actions. But live with them I must – because there is no other option. Annie Townshend thought there was and I understand why. Both she and I made terrible mistakes that night. The difference is I'm prepared to live with mine.

So, about me: I'm 172 centimetres, 58 kilos and I have a really pretty face. I imagine you just rolled your eyes in disgust – totally up myself – but there is no point in lying on this blog. No point in false modesty – that was a big contributing factor to the events, along with jealousy and self-esteem issues. I know I'm pretty, I've always been noticed by boys, even some men. I have a classical face and huge blue eyes. My eyelashes drive my girlfriends mad, they are so long and fake looking, but they're real. I've even been approached in the city by strangers asking if I'd like to be a model – and that is what I thought I'd do, up until the night of Greenheadgate. But now I want to finish school, I want a degree. Who knows now if that is possible? But anyway, here is the thing about being pretty. You don't have to try very hard. You get offered opportunities, people want to get

to know you. So, what I'm about to say contradicts this (please don't think me a liar — I'm not. I'd just like to make that clear, throughout all of this I never told one lie): because you don't have to work hard to attract people and opportunities, you have to work harder than most to keep them. On one level people are drawn to beautiful faces and at the same time they hate them.

I have to be smart at school, because if I'm not, there is always someone there ready to claim, 'She might be pretty, but she's as thick as pig shit.' I have to work hard to be fit or it's, 'She might have a beautiful face but it's a shame about her body.' And more than anything I have to have a nice, friendly personality or it's, 'Yeah, she's lovely in name and lovely to look at but what a fucking bitch.' I worked hard, I tried really hard — and I hope this doesn't sound like I'm a phony, but that is genuinely who I am. Was. I tried not to have faults, because, as Jack once told me, this world is a bitch and people even bitchier. But of course all the trying in the world can't make you perfect. What is perfection? I had the same doubts and fears as my friends, the same appearance issues if there was a pimple lurking, the

same body issues — because despite my seeming perfection I am flat chested. Boobs not even big enough to fill a B cup.

That might seem like the most meaningless thing you've ever heard, but there it is, my Achilles heel. Mark White in my year had bigger tits than me. Make no mistake, he was punished mercilessly for that crime against humanity. But that was my focus — the size of my boobs — and for a long time I really thought that if they were bigger (I certainly wouldn't have ruled out plastic surgery) then I could cope with anything. Before you think it, let me say it: how fucking shallow was that? But we were shallow, all of us, fixating on minor flaws and using them to make ourselves miserable, or using them as a weapon against someone else.

But body issues aside, before the night of Greenheadgate I was a mostly happy and content person. I had friends, I was popular and I was doing well at school. I had no real dramas in my life. And even my mum and dad, who worked together in our boutique winery, were proud of me, in their aloof kind of way. It kills me now, to know how much that has changed.

## *Post 2: Best friends for life*

I guess you want to know about my friends. Let me take you further back in time to when I was six. It was time to live the dream: after arriving from South Africa as a newlywed couple, my parents' idea was always to make money, then leave the city and buy a small landholding where they could grow things and live in a safe community. My dad retired from his lucrative dental practice and bought fifty acres in Greenhead to set up a winery. My mum, who was a bank manager, had been studying viticulture. I was starting Grade 1 and it was the biggest upheaval of my life. As we stood in front of the school in Greenhead I was terrified of being left alone, but along came this six-year-old boy, Jack West, and his mum, Maria.

'Hey,' Jack said, scrunching up his eyes, as he still does today when he smiles, 'what grade are you in?'

'One,' I said, looking at his tousled red hair and freckly face.

'Me too. I'm Jack.' He waved to his mum. 'See ya. Come on,' he grabbed my hand, 'let's make sure we get to sit together.'

Jack always took me by the hand, from that day on. He was my best friend in the whole world. I trusted him with everything. One day I was at his house while my mum was at the hairdresser. After exhausting all of the Disney DVDs, Jack had an idea — he would be my hairdresser. I sat patiently on the blue plastic stool as Jack tied a towel around my neck and arranged his tools.

'Right,' he said, 'and how would you like your hair today?'

I waved him on. 'However,' I said. My hair was shoulder-length ringlets — my mother's pride and joy — held aloft, either side of my face, in two bunches.

'Something fashionable,' Jack said in his best imitation of a hairdresser.

It was Maria's scream, when she entered the

playroom carrying two glasses of Milo and a plate of biscuits (that Milo stain never left the cream carpet), that alerted me to the fact that Jack's cut was definitely *not* fashionable.

'Good lord, what have you done?' Maria shrieked, collecting my perfect bunch, still in its elastic band, off the floor. Jack had severed it from my head, just above my ear.

When my mother arrived, her newly coiffured hair unable to even bob under its helmet of hairspray, her look of disappointment (one she perfected later, during the time of Greenheadgate) confirmed she agreed with Maria.

She stared grimly through the windscreen as she drove me to the local salon. My mum always worried about what the neighbours would think. She couldn't see anything funny in this.

'Cut it above her ear,' she ordered the startled hairdresser, holding my remaining bunch out as an offering.

'Such beautiful ringlets,' the girl murmured. 'Why?'

'Here's why,' Mum said, turning my head so the girl could see my asymmetrical cut. 'Even it up.'

When the girl offered my mother the lopped-off bunch as a keepsake, my mother, no fan of sentimentality, dismissed it with a wave of her hand. 'Bin it,' she said. I know that even today, Maria still has the other one in a box of Jack's childhood memories.

So from the age of six I sported a very chic bob, which I actually loved. However, after my twelfth birthday, my dad (back in the days when he actually looked me in the eye) commented scathingly, 'What do you think you are? Parisian? For crying out loud, Jasmine, grow it — no girl needs to look like a boy, or French for that matter.' From then on, I let my hair grow out.

As for me and Jack, we didn't care, it was just hair. We were six. We were best friends for life.

### *Post 3: He's just a boy*

All through primary school it was Jack and me.

One hot summer day, when we were about ten, Jack and I were mucking around with a pot of bubble liquid and a bubble blower. You know those plastic rings on a stick that you dip into the detergent and blow through? We had been to Scottie's party and got them in a lolly bag. We were seeing who could blow the biggest one – Jack was dragging his plastic ring through the air, creating a distorted and bulging bubble that reflected streaks of blue and pink in the sunlight. Suddenly the bubble broke free from its plastic confines and wobbled through the air, over the hedge that separated Jack's place from the Maitlands'.

We pushed through the hedge and watched

the bubble shiver through the air and slowly settle on the surface of the Maitlands' pond. Despite the trickling water from the ornamental stone fish's mouth, which rippled the water, the bubble sat firmly on top of the pond. It was indestructible. That was until a large pair of lips, belonging to one of Mr Maitland's gigantic koi, puckered up and kissed its side. The bubble popped. The expression on the koi's face was one of sheer shock (I think startled looks are the default position in these creatures anyway), but no matter, it had us in fits of laughter. And then a thought bubble popped right over the top of Jack's head.

'I've got a great idea,' he said.

We gathered up detergent from both our houses and squirted it – all of it – into the stone fish's mouth where it spewed water into the pond. It was immediate. The pond started foaming violently and then it went out of control. Our laughter stopped abruptly as a tsunami of foam cascaded over the confines of the pond and erupted down Greenhead's main road.

'The fish,' Jack shouted as we watched one helpless victim caught up in the deluge skitter down

the street. I ran to my house to grab a bucket and something to scoop. In the time it took me to find a ladle – the one with the holes in it – and return to Jack, it was too late.

‘Geez, Jazz,’ Jack said, really ashamed and miserable. ‘I didn’t think that through. I think I killed all the fish.’

We hadn’t. There was one left, who we rescued from the dishwater and popped in the bucket with clean water. Jack was so brave marching into Mr Maitland’s bakery and confessing to the crime, while I stood behind him holding the bucket with the sole survivor. I’ll never forget Mr Maitland’s face – the dark beetroot colour it went, the spittle flying from his lips as he berated Jack and labelled him (for life) the town troublemaker.

Others in the town found it funny – not the death of the fish, which Jack solemnly promised to replace – they just knew Jack was trying to have a laugh and was not intentionally malicious. ‘He’s just a boy,’ was the usual response.

## *Post 4: Here’s Tommy*

Tommy Robinson arrived at Namba High at the start of Year 8. He was totally hot – all the girls had instant crushes on him. A perfect face, with perfect teeth. I wasn’t alone in fantasising that one day Tommy would be my boyfriend. The guys liked him too. He was athletic – into footy, so a welcome addition to the local team. Tommy slid easily into the Namba community.

But I guess I had doubts about him pretty early on. He’d watch me and Jack together and make comments.

‘What’s up between you two?’ Tommy asked once as we were all sitting around at school.

‘Nothing,’ Jack said dismissively.

‘You fancy her.’ It was a statement, not a question.

I turned on him, ready to set him straight as to how Jack was my best friend and that was it. But Jack replied first.

‘Aww, gross,’ he said, screwing up his face. ‘As if I fancy her. That’s Jazz.’

I was humiliated and hurt. I got up and walked off. I didn’t speak to Jack for the rest of the day. How dare he say that, like that? How dare he?

The next morning I was still studiously avoiding him. He found me outside Food Tech.

‘Hey,’ he said, like nothing had happened, ‘when King tells us to get the ingredients, you get extra chocolate – I think the muffins will need more than the one piece they’ll let us have.’ He screwed his eyes up, laughing, but stopped when he saw I wasn’t joining in. ‘What’s up?’

‘Nothing,’ I said, turning away. I didn’t want to talk to him, I didn’t want to be around him and I certainly didn’t want to be doing his dirty work.

‘Sure,’ he said frowning.

‘I’m not your little bitch,’ I snapped.

‘Hey, steady, what’s your problem?’ Jack said.

‘Get stuffed, Jack.’ I really wanted to tell him to *fuck off*, but then, when I was thirteen, I think it

was like the worst thing I could think of saying. To actually say it to Jack, my Jack, was impossible.

‘Hey,’ he grabbed my arm, ‘what?’

‘How can you touch me,’ I shook him off, ‘when I’m so gross?’ And I couldn’t help the tears, so I ran to the toilets.

Jack pushed open the door to the girls’ toilets and saw me sobbing over the sink. ‘You’ll be in serious trouble if Mr Man finds you in here,’ I snivelled at him through the mirror. Mr Man was the actual name of our deputy, a man mountain whose appearance belied his generally soft interior. Still, he wasn’t one who would take lightly a boy breaching the sanctity of the girls’ toilets. I could already hear him: ‘Show respect – they are young women, who are entitled to privacy.’

‘I don’t care,’ Jack said, venturing forwards. ‘Jazzy, I’d cut my tongue from my head if I thought I’d offended you.’

‘Well, I wish I had a knife,’ I said, glaring at him angrily, ‘because you have.’

‘I didn’t mean it like that,’ Jack said. ‘I didn’t mean *you* were gross. I meant what he was

suggesting was gross. You're my best friend. You're like my sister. You're more than that, you're my everything in the whole world. The idea that it's something else is gross. Guys like Tommy don't understand.'

As usual, Jack had pulled the anger from me. Of course he hadn't meant it like that. Of course he was repulsed that someone would think he had an ulterior motive towards me. Jack loved me. Best friends for life.

'But no matter what, I'm sorry, Jazzy.' And he put his arms around me and hugged me tightly.

Later that week, I got my first period. I sat on my bed sobbing, because — well, I didn't know why, but I just felt so sad and confused. And Jack sat with me. He held my hand. He went to the shop and bought me two different types of pads, because he wasn't sure if wings were good or not. He never blamed my changing body and my hormones for making me so prickly. He never treated me like I was a mere female who couldn't control her emotions. He just held my hand.

And as for Tommy, well, from that day I never

trusted him. I guess I always felt like he was looking for something nasty in everything that was innocent.

Of course I also had girlfriends, picked up over the years at Greenhead. Simone, Sim we called her, whose dad was a cop — so you can bet there were never any gatherings at her place — and also Lily, whose parents had a huge wildflower business. We were all the same age so it made sense that we would hang together. And, in the middle of Year 9, along came Annie (you'll get to know her later).

So that's the backdrop against which this tragic tale is set — a small community, and the fact that bad decisions can have life-changing effects.