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Close to Home

Dissertation submitted as per course requirements of the UCT Creative Writing Master's course.

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Abstract

Located in the college novel tradition, *Close to Home* explores a number of the themes common to the sub-genre, specifically the ennui of university students from a wealthy background. The story's characters have an excess of money, privilege and leisure time, which leads to boredom and ultimate tragedy. The protagonist, Faye, epitomises the stereotype of a spoiled Cape Town girl – a personality that turns out to have a lot in common with the magnetic but ultimately dangerous characters of some of the best-known college novels.

Two of the main influences on this project are Donna Tartt's *The Secret History* and Bret Easton Ellis's earlier work, particularly *The Rules of Attraction*. Both novels were the subjects of scrutiny in my honours thesis, and this close analysis allowed me to gain an understanding of the gender issues at play in the college novel at large, the unique attributes of college novels written in the last thirty years, and how these issues can be explored – or obfuscated – with great effect.

A tradition that extends from the work of F Scott Fitzgerald (or, by some definitions, earlier writers) to the work of novelists such as Tom Wolfe, Jay McInerney and Philip Roth, the college novel sub-genre deals with universal issues but tends to place them in a distinctly American context. One of the ways in which *Close to Home* contributes to this body of work is by placing a college novel narrative in a current South African setting and exploring, specifically, the youth culture of wealthy Capetonians.

I didn't mind that they called it suicide, because she was a nice girl.

He, on the other hand, was not a nice boy, and when I realised that I'd have to be the one to find him. I didn't have much trouble taking hold of the clammy wrist to check his pulse, and then calling the police. His face looked much the same dead as alive.

I also didn't mind that they called it suicide because I understood her, or at least identified with her. Both of us were out of place around Clarence's family, but more to the point, she's as practical as I am, and she would have gone about the killing in as systematic and calm a way as I did the cleaning. I like to think that she would have helped with the cleaning, too, if she hadn't been keeping out of the way directly after the murder, but I suppose I might be giving her too much credit.

The day he died was a strange, dark day, with an air of finality about it. It's easy to say afterwards that you knew something was going to happen, that you predicted it and in this way had some special power over it, but when I looked out that afternoon at Clarence and his brother drinking whisky in the rain by the swimming pool that no-one ever used, I had a distinct feeling that something would be different by that evening. In the urgency of cleaning up after the police had left and before Clarence's poor mother returned, and arranging things for her, I neglected to clear away those glasses until a day or two later. When I took them inside to wash one was empty, the other half full.

The fact that he was dead meant that his mother and father would never have to find out a lot of things that they need not know, and that's another why I feel that there's no injustice in having it said that he killed himself. If she and I don't say otherwise, his mother and father will never have to know those things about Clarence.

I don't know why she didn't forge a note if he had killed himself, there'd have been a rambling, self-indulgent note -- but if I was to guess I'd say that it was because there would have been dishonesty in that. This was not dishonest, this was ambiguous. People believed what they'd like to believe and everyone wanted to believe that there was no motive, because everyone liked Clarence.

It was my job to not be noticed, and unnoticed I went, agreeing only that this was a bad thing. I never lurked in doorways or behind thin walls to listen to conversations, but conversations were simply carried on in front of me with no concern about whether I heard or not.

I knew what was happening. It's better for everyone that it was called a suicide.

Jaime

On the day that we graduate it's hot and dark, and the clouds are rolling overhead without bothering to stop to scatter rain. The six of us all studied the same thing, and so we all graduate on the same day, in the same ceremony, and so we all wear dresses to match the same blue sashes on our gowns because it seems like a fun idea. We've been the same since before any of us can remember, so being the same comes naturally now.

Before, it also came easily to throw around phrases like, "I'd die for you." A lot of people thought that that was odd, but that was how we were. They didn't understand dressing alike either.

Things have changed. Everyone read that note, with that very phrase within it, and no-one's forgetting in a hurry. Everyone's more cautious now, and we look at each other a little differently since we heard the news. We're thinking about that note. We don't know what to do, or if we should do anything at all. We don't know what it is that we're hoping for, and this dark weather is not helping to clear things up.

Death is still in the air today, and that's what we'll remember before we recall the view of the suburbs and forests from these stone steps, or the speeches that made us laugh and cry guardedly, or the hair blowing in our eyes, or what everyone else's dresses looked like on that typically unpredictable Cape Town summer day. We'll forget one of our names misspelt on the programme, and red wine spilt on a suit dark enough to hide it anyway. We might remember that we were sweating, but cold in the wind. Today is a relief – we have something to discuss other than what's happened. After weeks filled with averted eyes, people can stare at one another openly, with the pretence of taking pictures and feeling pride. We're wearing heels on campus for the first time, and perhaps the last, at least until we have sons or daughters who graduate from this place. They get stuck in the cracks between bricks and paving stones as we move around to take pictures (on the grass, in front of the hall, in front of the view, on the stairs) and we are reminded that we don't want to leave. Our hair shines, and our nails are manicured, although Nancy has already bitten down hers, and Brigitte looks thin.

Corinne is angry but it's nothing new. Today, she is embarrassed by her mother, who is the one taking all of the pictures. The rest of our parents also took a few pictures, but they've long since admitted defeat: Mrs Carson is better at this, too. Faye is here. She is not one of the six of us, but Corinne's older sister. She drinks water, and it feels like the end of something, and she's wearing big dark glasses.

"There's a glare."

She looks exhausted. She's not, she's just numb. Next to her stands Sarah, her best friend, Jane's older sister. Next to Sarah is Craig, one of the brothers between Faye and Corinne. Craig didn't remove his sunglasses during the ceremony; we all waited, without consciously thinking about it, for Mrs Carson to make him take them off, but that moment didn't come. While we pose for pictures (smiling, pouting, then serious) Sarah turns to Faye and says,

"The last day that the weather was like this was when—"

But as she breaks off, hesitates, Faye smiles and turns away. We all used to wish that Faye was our sister, except perhaps for Jane, who had Sarah, but now there's sympathy mixed with our admiration, and little desire to have Faye and Faye's problems closer to us than is necessary. She looked anxious from where I was sitting during the ceremony, but she's moving more slowly now. Then again, maybe I imagined the nervousness in the first place, or the heat and emotion of the day causes everything to seem to be slowed down.

The last time that the weather was like this was the day that we found out that Clarence was dead, and we think back to it without meaning to.

Corinne Carson

Clarence is stabbed and found dead on his front steps – I am the one who sees him first – and of course it would be strange to conduct a murder in a place perfectly visible from the road. It's

a quiet road of big pastel houses and big black cars where I seldom go except when I'm trying very hard to enjoy a pointless jog, and there's no-one to be seen between the time that office jobs begin and the time that school lets out, but of course there'd still be a risk involved in lacerating a man's forearm in broad daylight and leaving him to bleed.

"Impulsive," is a word used by a coroner to describe the killing, once it's been decided that the body is lying where it died, that it was not moved there after it breathed its last breath. Had the killer wanted passersby to be able to see Clarence splayed at a strange angle over the front steps, displayed so that all of him was in full view, his body offered up for inspection? It's possible, but it seems more likely that the location is incidental; the endpoint of a struggle. But there is no sign of struggle: Clarence's only injury beside the split-open wrists from which he bled to death is the damage to the back of his head where he fell. None of us will ever see that, but it's what comes to me most often when I think of the murder – the back of his head crushed inward, the spongy pink insides of it compressed and misplaced beyond repair even as his perfect features remain intact. Once or twice I have nightmares about picking up peaches and finding maggots writhing inside them.

He's not undignified, even upside down as he is, feet on the veranda and head on the lawn, body on the five steps between. Because it's a perfectly sunny day and I'm not expecting anything to go wrong, and because his body looks uncomfortable rather than disfigured, it takes me a few moments to recognise what I'm seeing. In the end the most unsettling part of it all is the time I spent looking straight at exposed flesh and tendons and dislocated bones before the reality of the image registered.

When I recognise that what I'm seeing is a body I imagine a horrible accident, but that doesn't explain why I run away, and don't go for help. When I see him lying there with waxy skin and an arm bloodied from fingertips to shoulder, I think of suicide before murder, but I decide to leave someone else to find the body. There's a big black bird near to him on the veranda and maybe it's because it stares me down that I run off, or maybe rather than simply being unnerved by a bird, I don't want to wait around to see what it might do to an arm that already looks like strips of meat.

His eyes are open but he still looks peaceful somehow. He can't still be bleeding, but one slow-moving stream of blood that's darker than I thought it would be continues to make its way down the step on which his hand is resting.

When I get back to the house I'm sweating, but that doesn't seem strange because I'm dressed in clothes that suggest exercise anyway, and so Brigitte tells me to take a shower and drink some wine with her while she cooks, and it doesn't feel like the time to talk about a dead body. Jane shows me a new vintage sweater that she bought in town today, and I think to myself that she looks like she's on drugs, but she and her sister always look that way. She looks gaunt under the thin long-sleeved T-shirt she's wearing and gets bored of exclaiming over the new sweater and starts to smoke a cigarette, then leads me back into the kitchen to sit around while Brigitte makes a shredded duck and cherry pie and moves her feet through the ballet positions that she used to practice. We don't remind her that she still does it and I don't tell them I feel shocked or ill, because none of it's taken away my appetite, then I eat hungrily and the time never really comes up to tell them what I've seen.

"You look pale," Jane says, inhaling a cigarette, pushing some pie around on her plate because she doesn't like to eat while she's smoking. I shake my head, and Brigitte says,

"*She* looks pale? Look at the two of us." and it's true that both of them have milky white skin, but they always do and it makes them look artistic, but then the time for telling them has passed.

Brigitte doesn't touch the pie, even though it's delicious.

"Clarence is dead."

My sister Faye is saying this to Jane's sister Sarah a day later.

Sarah has never met a Clarence. She's sorry that he's met his end, but it's a silly name that he had. She's holding pills in her hand and wonders how many of them she'd have to take to send herself to sleep. She wonders how many she'd need for a long, deep sleep. She wonders if they could be

dangerous if taken in large quantities, but then wonders why Faye is sitting on the couch with her face in her hands. She remembers that Clarence is dead, and wonders again who he was. University has become one long hallucinogenic experience for Sarah, although before today she could have been described as mostly drug-free. Her constant dull confusion results from a lack of sleep, a strange and meagre diet, too much to drink, the always-shifting Cape Town weather, and being constantly lost in university buildings designed in ways that become curiouser and curiouser as a day wears on.

"I'm calling my mom," Faye says.

It's because of her pride in her drug-free status – not a Just-Say-No pride, but the sly I-know-something-you-don't-know feeling of having others think that you look like the kind of girl who conceals pills in her underwear or has cocaine residue on her medical aid card when in fact you aren't – that Sarah is having trouble taking the pills that sit in front of her.

They're tranquilisers. They're meant to help her sleep, so that she can alleviate at least one of her symptoms, and hope that a cause or two will be removed in turn. They're yellow, and no-one calls them tranquilisers, they're anti-anxiants now, but this is no comfort. Sarah knows that once she swallows them, she'll be like Faye's mother, and her own mother, and most of the other moms we know. The justification that she allows all of them is that they have children to deal with.

She picks up the pills in fingers that have always been slender, but are heading over to the wrong side of skeletal. She looks at them, and resolves to put them into her mouth.

The phone rings – a landline, like no-one has anymore. It's her mother.

"Hello Mom," she says, trying to sound calm; wondering why she isn't.

"How are you, Se?" Her mother asks.

"Very well," she replies, too vehemently and too loudly, her bony body squirming in the big chair next to the obsolete telephone.

"So you haven't heard?" her mother asks. "About Clarence?"

"Clarence?"

Her mother is sorry to be the one to tell her, but Clarence has passed away.

"Passed away?"

"Yes." There's a tense pause. "No, you might as well know, you'll find out anyway. It was a suicide. It's so difficult when it happens like that. I know we all think that there was something we could have done, but the truth is that we can never know what's going on in another person's life, or in their head for that matter."

"No."

"You can't feel much like talking now. Please, be strong for the girls. I'll call you later."

"Thanks, Mom."

She ends the call and puts the phone down stiffly. Her heart is beating too fast, as it has been for the past nine days or more; she doesn't know why. Sarah has never met a Clarence. She's terribly sorry that he has met his end, but it's a name ridiculous enough to be remembered, and she doesn't remember it at all.

Craig Carson

On the day that I find out that Clarence is dead, I walk down a corridor of Faye's building with my earphones in. I'm listening to The Beach Boys, I think, but I could be wrong because I don't remember. The passage is stark for such an expensive block. There's lots of exposed cement, and it's in sharp contrast to the lavish pool area, and to the interior of Faye's apartment, which is well-furnished whether or not she keeps it clean. I let myself in with the key that's meant to be Ross's but that Faye hasn't noticed that I now possess. The scene inside is unsettling when you see it with what in my memory is muted volume, but what at the time was probably sixties pop, maybe The Beatles.

Sarah sits at the dining-room table (mahogany, large enough to seat twelve, too big for the flat, too small for Faye's dinners). Faye sits on the couch (white, stained with an impracticality that

our mother warned against and Faye couldn't resist). Both of them are facing me, but neither seems to notice that the other one is in the room. Faye still hasn't had her mirror hung up, and I think for a moment that I might try to do it myself.

Faye is absorbed in her tears; not violent ones, but the kind that can persist for hours. Sarah is fixated on something between her fingertips, which are looking frighteningly bony lately. The sun's setting, and it's easy to say this in retrospect, but I felt then that although something bad had happened, something far, far more awful was still coming. It's Faye who looks at me first, and speaks, and I take out my earphones. The music must be loud, because I can still hear it from waist-level.

"Clarence is dead," she says, perhaps repeating herself or perhaps expanding on what she'd just told me.

I look at Sarah to see what the appropriate reaction to the news is. She looks back now, but shrugs, eyes detachedly wide. Faye stands up and comes over to me, and stretches up to put her arms around my shoulders.

"I'm so sorry. I know that you boys were friends with him."

Clarence was a friend of Grant's. For Faye's sake I say,

"It'll be okay," although I realise as I say it that it's not okay for Clarence, and I'm wondering if Grant will be okay when he hears, if he doesn't know yet, and then I ask, "How did it happen?"

"He killed himself," she says. The tears are gone from her voice. In its place are interest, confusion, and perhaps incredulity.

Whatever it was that had been in Sarah's hand, she swallows them.

Ross

We drive to the Waterfront to search for something for Laura to wear to the funeral. My place in the driver's seat makes me feel a little superior to her, despite the fact that she is about to spend the equivalent of my monthly salary on a pair of ill-fitting pants. It's warm in the car, and I wish that we - that's Craig and me - were going somewhere with a fireplace. They're doing their utmost to convince me that my company is as valuable to the excursion as my driving is. Craig is being implausibly acquiescent. Laura lifts her efforts to be nice beyond her usual uninterested politeness to a level that's almost enthusiasm. Craig has almost managed to convince me that he and I had planned to take this trip anyway, and that Laura is just tagging along. I'm not sure what it was that the two of us had planned to do at the mall, but perhaps we should be grateful to Laura for giving our day purpose. We go to get sushi after Laura finds a dark dress. Laura and Craig are combining two of their favourite topics in a conversation: themselves, and moneyed personalities. Craig poses the question,

"If you could have anyone design the costumes for your play, who would it be?"

Laura answers with no hesitation,

"Vivienne Westwood."

They haven't written plays. They're not going to write plays.

"Vivienne Westwood?" Craig asks. He is gently incredulous; there are consequences to hurting Laura's feelings.

"Yes." She replies.

"But I feel like she's all wrong for your genre."

He expands on the theory, then ends with the damning words,

"Anyway, she designed the costumes for Tank Girl."

"I hate Tank Girl."

"I've never seen it."

"Neither have I."

"Prada could work for a period piece. So could Chanel."

"What if they collaborated?"

My mind wanders off somewhere, and when it returns,

"It's never really too early," Craig says.

Laura affirms,

"Except if you're talking about white wine. Then it's always too early."

Cocktails arrive on our table. There's one for me too, despite the fact that I almost always prefer beer.

"But isn't that just always the case with them?"

"It always is. I can't understand why."

I could just say "no" next time Craig asks me to come along on an outing like this, but I know that I won't. There's really no use setting limits, for the simple reason that I am expendable. There have been others before me, and there will be plenty of others to follow. I look at these people – Craig and Laura today, Faye or Sarah or Corinne or Morgan on any other day – and I realise that nothing can go wrong in their lives. In their company I have developed a certainty that there is nothing in this world that premium vodka and a fillet steak with a blue cheese and mushroom ragout won't solve. I'm certain that despite what literature will tell you, no real tragedy befalls the young and beautiful.

"I heard that he didn't die from the bleeding," Laura says. "I heard that it was when he fell – he smashed the back of his skull open and that was why he died."

"He wouldn't have fallen if he hadn't had his wrist sliced open. He must have been dizzy from all of the bleeding."

"You're so right."

Sarah Richards

I've heard sad people speak about the relief that comes with having some minor tragedy befall them; something about which, for a time, they can feel the justifiable, healthy sadness that must surely come with such an event. The lingering emotions of distress and misery can be expressed as a reaction to the tragedy – perhaps hyperbolic, but justifiable – then, following the grieving process, the bereaved can experience a state of happiness greater than whatever he or she felt previously, as waves of emotion wash away whatever sticky dregs of negativity had clung. This wouldn't, of course, be likely in the case of some truly horrible, close-to-home event, but could very possibly happen in a situation such as the one in which we now found ourselves. A distant acquaintance had died. For some of us, a person who we knew of but did not know had died, and so the outpouring of emotion that should have followed Clarence's death should have been just the cathartic release I'd heard discussed. We should have felt the kind of sadness that resulted not from the decline in our own quality of life by Clarence's recent absence, but because of the loss of youth, and its personification. We should have been reflecting on the demise of a strong and well-loved boy, in the prime of his life. It should have been the kind of event that caused us to appreciate those still with us, and to better understand the value of life, once we had finished wiping our eyes at the big funeral with lots of family and boys in private school uniforms who had known him about as well as we had.

But Clarence's death was not like that.

Craig Carson

The time of day makes me feel uneasy. In Durban it would be getting dark in an hour or two; maybe some internal clock of mine is set, still, to East Coast time. All of the old boys from Clarence's school, distinguished by their saved school ties worn now with their grown-up suits, look more at ease, and I put this down to the fact that this is their city, they're used to it. It's dark here anyway, although the sun won't set for a long time, because of black, swirling clouds above us. It's not going to rain. Still, the weather will do for a funeral. It's grey and unpleasant enough to reflect the mood, and the sun does not smile a disrespectful face on the mourning. It would be better

if it rained, because funerals are meant to be all tears and black umbrellas and misery, but this will do.

"Can I wear these inside?" Faye asks me, with a vague gesture to her face.

"The sunglasses?" She pauses, possibly wondering what else I could mean, then replies,

"Yes."

"Sure. If you're crying."

"If I wear them, no-one will know."

"True."

My sister is at her best at times of misery; good with sad people and skilled at casting aside her own middle-class turmoil to deal with the tragedy at hand. She frustrates Sarah often by cancelling their plans with the words, 'I can't make it today. He's having *drama*,' in reference to some friend of theirs. With the amount of drama that Faye herself has generated and weathered, she is the expert on the topic, and always the one to turn to.

Beneath the big black Prada glasses she's got a healthy glow to her cheeks today, and causes a number of the schoolboys to forget the grimness of the occasion as she walks past, even though she's gone to great pains to look demure. One of them glares at me for being the one walking into the church with her but he's beautiful so I smile back at him and he looks away.

Corinne Carson

It's not going to rain. Everyone has their umbrellas at the ready, but that means nothing. They have handkerchiefs and tissues ready, too, but that doesn't mean they plan to cry.

Clarence's funeral is the most beautiful I've ever seen, but I'm no judge – it's fair to say that I've encountered far less death than my fair share, even for my relatively short life so far. The lilies that decorate the church are a pure, deep white (white can be deep) and the church is cold and timeless as a good church should be. The pictures chosen of Clarence were taken at an age when he had already become beautiful in the way that we knew him, but still had an innocence that I, for one, never got to see in the living version of the unflinching figure who now surrounds us like the the church is meant to remind the mourners that God does.

"Why would you kill yourself on a front porch?" Jane asks beside me, her obsession budding.

"Making a statement," Brigitte says, leaning in from my other side, "like that boy who hung himself with his school tie."

"Maybe he'd changed his mind," Morgan whispers, "Maybe he was going for help."

"The maid was there. He could have asked her for help."

"He could have phoned."

My attempts to silence them fail, but when we're told to pray they keep quiet.

Everyone who attends wears black, in every texture imaginable, and a limited range of tasteful styles. Jewellery is limited to diamonds and pearls. I feel for what may be the first time in my life that I've got the dress code right, in a black cashmere cardigan over a satin dress that isn't mine. The fact that everyone is dressed in black comforts me; the fact that people are willing to mourn Clarence outwardly demonstrates to my mind that they are mourning him inwardly, and the fact that they mourn him makes his death hurt my delicate emotions far less.

It's when I wonder to myself whether God would like what we're wearing to the funeral that I start to question our collective thought process. I wonder if it matters what we're wearing in church. It might matter less, because we should be concerned with bigger things, or higher thoughts, but there's the problem of it possibly mattering more because we should be showing our respect here. I wonder if God cares what we choose to wear to church, then I wonder if it's very sanctimonious to consider this question at all, then I wonder if thinking about dresses in church is very frivolous.

My sister is wearing a black Gucci dress, and in spite of myself I want to look like her.

"Is there no alcohol here?" Faye asks me after the service is finished, and I find it odd that

she structures her sentence like that.

Sarah Richards

I truly didn't know Clarence, but for the sake of everyone here I pretend that I did. I'm almost certain that I had never even met Clarence, but some of the people here are friends, more of them acquaintances, and all infinitely watchable. All eyes are on Clarence's twin brother. Does he still count as a twin? He's in a waistcoat, and a slightly gingery girl who must be his girlfriend does not leave his side. I dislike her immediately. Also in the family row is someone who no-one knows. She is strawberry blonde and pretty and about the age of the deceased, and is wearing a black Chanel dress and a lot of dark, respectful make-up. I don't mind her. Jane taps me on the shoulder. She asks in a whisper,

"Who was Clarence?"

I shrug in response in the darkness, eyes wide.

Laura is looking weepy although she has no greater knowledge of the deceased than all of the rest of us do, and she's clinging to Craig's arm while looking pretty wearing a dress that he chose for her at her request. She's exhausting but he's learned Faye's need to pay penance for all the turmoil that they've created by being endlessly patient with other exhausting people.

Jane Richards

After Clarence dies, Brigitte develops the habit of calling her younger sisters morning and night. She's felt guilty since we arrived in Cape Town about leaving them alone with their parents – perpetually on the brink of divorce – but more than guilt motivates her now. Standing next to me with her copper hair pulled into a low ponytail and a thin black cardigan covering her balletic shoulders, she feels cold as she has the same thought that we're all having: it could have been someone we cared about. We're all treating this as an act of God, of course. We're ignoring the fact that Clarence made his choice and ended his own life, spilling a lot of his own blood, we're told. We choose to act and think as if Clarence was killed by a bolt of lightning, an unexpectedly strong current, or an aeroplane plummeting without warning or explanation from the heavens.

"It can happen to anyone," we say, shaking our heads, and we sound just like our mothers.

In the months that follow Clarence's funeral, Nancy starts to cry in the restaurants and coffee shops in which she used to eat so ravenously, and where she now picks at her food, although she never fails to finish what's on her plate – our meals just take longer. Today, though, she does not shed a tear, and so in the months to follow we all wonder if it's Clarence she's crying about.

"Would you like some?" Faye asks me in the church hall, and offers me a glass of orange juice that she's probably spiked with something because it doesn't smell quite as I'd expect, and because Laura's orange juice is a different colour to hers.

"I'm alright," I say, because I want to look like her but maybe not be like her, and I'm feeling extremely edgy and think that I'd be worried that some mourner or other would find me out sooner or later.

"I'll have some," Sarah says, "It'll take the edge off," because she's tense too, and no-one ever finds her out. They switch their glasses quickly and smoothly.

"One of us should have married him while we had the chance." Jaime says, and Sarah drinks deeply from her glass of orange juice.

"For the money or to save him from his murderer?" Morgan asks.

"Either."

"I'd have made such a good wife."

"You're not dead, he is. You'll still make a good wife."

"Do you really think so?"

"I think he would have needed more than a wife to save him."

"From himself or from his murderer?"

"Aren't we going with the suicide theory here?"

And of course, we are, here, but we're still saying "died", not "killed himself".

To understand all of this, we have to go back to the beginning, and it all begins with Faye.

Corinne Carson

It all begins with my sister because it's Faye who welcomes us here after the holiday that followed the end of high school, when we moved to Cape Town for university. My mother has told her to take care of the six of us when we get here and in her own way, Faye does that: she makes sure that we're drunk before noon every day from the time we arrive until we escape to live in res two weeks later.

Faye lives with Sarah and their best friend Ross in an apartment that's opulent but just big enough for three, but despite space constraints she has all of us there every day, and Craig and Grant when they have the time, all draped over chairs or lounging on the floor, and we spill out into the block's courtyard and pool area to drink rosé out of plastic cups and make a noise that the neighbours forgive. She introduces us to all of her friends who come to visit, but I don't remember them until much later, or anything from that week other than the taste of flat sparkling wine and that I repeatedly called it champagne and was corrected, and an argument that ensued about new money.

My first night in Cape Town is what I can remember. I fly to the city the day before my friends do, and I go out to dinner with Faye and my brothers and Faye's friends. Looking back, I think I understand it all, but on that night the significance of most of it is lost on me.

On that night, Faye's numb, and unlikely to be able to eat much at all, but I don't know this about my sister. I don't know, either, that my brother Craig has my sister's best friend Ross's hand between his legs. Craig, with his lovely, expensive clothes and cheekbones, sits next to Laura, who does know. Craig calls her his best friend, because she's too pink-lipped and radiant for "fag hag". Laura is oblivious to the fact that Sarah, sitting next to her, thinks that Laura is insane, but it's becoming apparent to everyone else. Later, Sarah will hate herself for hating Laura, and have to try her best to avoid throwing up her food.

Grant is my other brother, between me and Craig in age, and between me and Sarah at the table. When he was in high school, Grant was called normal rather than termed a jock, but everyone around him's become strangely cultured in a way that wearing a nice brand of golf shirt doesn't cover. What's going on between Ross and Craig hasn't escaped Grant, who isn't stupid despite what stereotypes will tell you. His first clue was that Craig was on top of Ross when Grant walked into Craig's room a few days ago, and a lot more things have seemed to make sense to him since then.

"What are you going to be studying?" Laura asks me. She's meeting me for the first time, she's doesn't know that I'm happiest when I'm left alone.

"Probably a BA, I think." is my reply. "I think- it'll be a BA."

Her friendliness is incurable. "A BA in what, do you think? English, like us?"

Sarah rolls her eyes behind her menu, with reference to Laura's unshakeable habit of speaking about Craig and herself as if the two of them are a unit. A lot of listeners think when she does this that she's talking as if they're a couple, but they're wrong: if you listen closely enough you'll realise that she's talking about them as if the two are one entity. Craig has never corrected her, and he never will.

Sarah will order the cubed pork belly or the beef carpaccio.

The room feels too warm, and Grant undoes the top button of his shirt, but as he does so the waiter catches his eye and raises what seems to be an appreciative eyebrow over too-stylish black-rimmed glasses. He is wearing the tightest jeans Grant has seen, also in black, and none of the rest of us notice. Grant looks down at his menu.

"So did you read the book that they assigned?" Laura pursues on an exhausted topic.

In the background plays music that lacks lyrics or much in the way of volume, but makes up for it with quantities of pretentiousness and chiming sounds.

"What's everyone having?" Craig asks. It's his desperate attempt to change the subject, for

my sake, and Ross supports the effort. They are new enough to their relationship to believe that this means that they understand each other perfectly.

"Shall we get some more bread for the table?" Asks Ross, and I wonder if he knows that he's drawing attention to the fact that he's just finished the previous basket entirely on his own. Craig or Sarah will pay his bill for him, and he knows that we all know this.

"I think I'll have the beetroot thing," says Faye, and Sarah nods. Sarah wants to ask Faye to share the beetroot option with her, even though she knows that most people would consider the portion to be barely enough for one, because the carpaccio is starting to sound altogether too bloody, but she doesn't ask.

"Do you want to share that with me?" Laura asks Faye.

"Cool." Faye replies, and Laura turns back to me and asks,

"Did you like the story, though?" and informs the table in general and me in particular that, "I really didn't. I mean, I get that it's... a comment... on the country's... situation. But I just didn't enjoy it."

"It was depressing, I think. Especially the part with the dogs."

Grant is not only the sole straight male at the table; he is also the only non-BA student. He has nothing to say.

"Do you want to share the pork belly?" Ross asks, leaning over to Sarah.

"Okay, cool." Sarah feels that there's some insult in Ross's presumption that she'd want this, and knows she should be annoyed by the fact that she has in all likelihood just collected at least this part of Ross's bill, but she doesn't mind for a minute.

I probably start to play with my fringe, as is my nervous custom. Like Faye's, my hair doesn't get greasy. She's drinking champagne and a toast to my future here. She and Craig touch glasses, looking entitled, and acting entitled, and generally being the most entitled pair you will ever meet. One is more detached than the other. Craig feels like he's drowning in wine. People are looking at him, asking him what he thinks about things.

I'm the one he identifies with, but I won't see this for a long time, and I won't know for even longer. Our brother and sister are loud, overachievers, boringly beautiful. He sees me lost in my own world, and overestimates me, imagining that I have all of their secrets already figured out. He removes Ross's hand from his leg.

"How is Durban, anyway?" he asks me, as the one who's arrived from there most recently.

"Oh, pretty much the same as usual, I think."

"Still leading an exhausting life next to the pool?" asks Ross, drunk on someone else's wine, and well aware of it.

"Still jealous?" Faye asks him, not bothering with a sideways glance.

"Still superior?"

They might be fighting, or they might just be engaged in some sort of playful verbal sparring. No-one can be sure, least of all me, only feeling vaguely that I may have started this.

"Still inferior?" Craig contributes.

"You're all still childish," Grant laughs, looking into his plate with none of Faye's detachment, bracing himself, almost hoping that everyone will turn on him, before things get nasty and inevitable. But this is not to be.

"Stay out of this," Craig says, and Grant is surprised that it's this that hurts him, largely because of how gently it's said.

"Still controlling?" asks Sarah. She's not sure whose side she's on. She should defend Faye, as Faye would defend her, but she'd rather be on Ross's side tonight. She's not sure whose side Craig is on, so he seems to be a safe bet as an opponent.

"Still a bitch?" asks Ross.

"Still taking our money?" Craig asks.

It's not called for; no-one will dispute that. Everyone expects Ross to be taken aback, but he doesn't flinch.

"Still in denial?" he asks, loudly and clearly.

There is a clear division between those who know what he means and those who don't, but discomposure unites them. Thankfully, Grant realises, no-one crosses the divide.

"Shut up, Ross, you're just being difficult," commands Laura crisply, pushing her plate away. "Now Corinne, I want to hear all about your school."

I tell her, expansively and eagerly, and no-one wants dessert.

I don't know if any of this is significant, but it's what I have to offer when we try to piece together the story of what happened. We've begun to dwell on this task, but nothing seems to matter more than discovering if we could have seen what was on its way.

Jaime

Faye has blonde hair that would look trashy on anyone but her – it's almost white in the sun, and there's lots of it – and dark blue eyes that seem fascinated by you. She must be clever, but she shows no evidence of intelligence in everyday life, and I think that we love her for this. She has a beauty queen's smile, and nothing bad ever happens to her.

Fourteen of us grew up on our street at home, eleven of us girls. Faye and Sarah were the oldest, then came Craig two years later, and Faye's other brother Grant a year after that. Morgan's older sister Lindsay is the same age as Grant. Corinne is the youngest Carson, five years younger than Faye and the same age as the rest of us – Jane, Nancy, Brigitte, Morgan and me. Brigitte Laridon has two younger sisters who she raised, and I have a younger brother who I hardly know. It might seem unlikely that the six of us would all happen to be the same age, in the same grade, on the same street, but it's not the unlikeliest thing that's ever happened in our lives. It's not the unlikeliest thing that will happen in this story, by a long way.

Disregard a few of these people, as I have. Many of them ceased to be important a long time ago, and you'll see, like I did, which ones need to be remembered.

Perhaps even before that happened, I ceased to be important to them. Faye, however, can't lose her significance because I can't help feeling that in a lot of ways she made me, or maybe all of us. I am nothing like her, and yet everything I do is an echo of something she did before.

Grant Carson

Before the girls arrive here, Faye and I are lying next to the pool. It's been a long summer, and we both have very dark tans. Faye is drinking margaritas the colour of her hair and wearing the same beige bikini that she's been wearing for at least two weeks, even though she has a selection of others in varied colours and patterns somewhere in her room. It's been a long summer for us. We're all bored of each other's company; even I am, and I don't live here.

The summer might have been too long, but the fact that it's ending makes me edgy, and I feel anxious about the fact that my sister and her five friends will be here in a few days.

"Where are they going to stay?" I ask Faye. She takes a moment to reply and I think that maybe she's gone to sleep behind her sunglasses, but soon enough she says,

"In res. Mom organised it." It's been hot all day, but it's clouded over now. It might rain for the first time in days.

"When res opens they'll do that. But it can't be open yet?"

"Mom organised it."

And that's how my mother is, and that's how a lot of conversations end. Faye chooses to continue this one.

"They can stay here for a bit, if they want to. It'll be fun. We can take them out with us. All of us together again. It'll be nice."

I don't know who she means by 'us'.

It might rain, and I'd be relieved if it did, but we stay outside because the cool air is soothing and the atmosphere inside is stale in every sense.

"Craig too?" I ask.

"I don't know. I hope so," she says. She's giving nothing away.

Craig is inside the flat with Sarah. Sarah is more tired of everyone else's company than anyone else is, but she's trying to hide it. Craig has been around a lot, more to see Ross than to see Faye, but Sarah doesn't mind him. He's as angry as she is.

"Does Corinne know that you do drugs?"

I have Faye's attention, and she rolls onto her stomach and takes off her sunglasses to tell me, "I don't think so. No." She frowns, then rubs the lines that the frown might have caused on her forehead.

"I won't tell her."

Faye shakes her head in agreement – no, we won't tell Corinne.

"Does she know about Craig?"

Faye frowns again, confused, then squints at me. "What about Craig?" It occurs to me then that Faye doesn't know about Craig either; about Craig and Ross, and this unsettles me for two reasons.

"That Craig does drugs too," I lie, badly, while there's still time.

The first reason is that this is Faye, and Faye is meant to know everything, but she **doesn't**, and she's meant to be able to solve everything and save us from anything, but maybe she **can't**. She's going to be embarrassed by this whole situation, by being the last to know, and there's nothing that I can see that I can do about it.

"No. Why would she know about him and not about me?"

"I don't know."

She stands up, and gathers some foreign men's magazine of Craig's that she's got wet, and her towel and her sunglasses, and she looks much taller than she really is.

"Anyway, don't keep saying that we 'do drugs'. You make it sound like a habit, and you sound old. Just because you won't touch them it doesn't mean that the rest of us are addicts."

She walks away, wading through heavy air.

The second reason that I'm unsettled is that if there are things that Faye doesn't know, it follows that there must be things I don't know. If Faye doesn't know everything about us, then no-one does. I lie outside until it's nearly dark, and it gets dark so late here now, and I feel nervous.

Craig Carson

We're looking older now, Faye and me, but she's still somehow in charge of all of us, more through our own fault than hers. When she storms away from somewhere, you can't help but feel sorry for whoever she's left behind, and you can't help imagining the things she's just said to them. It's dark when she comes in from lying next to the pool with my brother, and I wonder if the two of them have fought. She stumps into the room as effectively as someone who's barefoot and in a swimming costume can, and they must have, whether my brother is aware of it or not. She snaps her sunglasses shut with one hand in the swift, tense motion that she's inherited with these tense moods from our mother, and releases her grip on her towel and my *Details* somewhere around the couch. She's never had to pick up her own things, and she's learnt that if you leave something undone for long enough, someone will eventually do it for you. She walks over to the fridge and opens the door, and when its light floods a good portion of the open-plan room I realise that it's got dark in here, and that Sarah and I haven't bothered to turn on the lights.

I notice, too, that the two of us have stopped speaking.

Faye takes out an almost-empty jug and pours herself another of the mojitos that she's been drinking all afternoon. She smiles dazzlingly at the two of us, in the way that makes everyone love her, and says,

"It's a nice night to go out."

Then she walks to the door to Ross's bedroom, stepping over my magazine. My sister is the girl who never trips or falls apart.

Sarah raises her eyebrow at me, and I raise mine in return. I lean back in my armchair and

look out of the sliding glass door at my brother. He lay outside in the sun, and is lying there in the dark, and will lie there long after the swimming pool's floodlights come on. For now, he's lit only by the lights in the swimming pool itself, and the overmuscled arm that's allowed to trail in the water looks waxy and stiff. His eyes are open, stare straight ahead, and look glassy. Looking back at him, I wonder if my brother is the one who could see what was in store for us in the future.

Grant Carson

My brother is the only one who could have said what was going to happen, but he doesn't tell us anything. We don't like to admit that anyone could have done anything, but maybe Craig could have.

I remember everything, but none of it adds up.

When I look back at varsity, I remember driving fast all the time and meeting new people on every day that I was there, and pastel golf shirts in summer, and black coats in winter, with grey v-neck jerseys over the shirts or under the coats in between. I was tired all the time, and I realised that everyone loved indie music, no matter how not-indie they were. I gained weight but it was muscle and a girl I knew said that it suited me. I felt richer than I had in high school, where everyone was rich, and I loved staying in res here more than anyone else did. I liked it better on this side of the mountain and tried to stay here when I could but Faye would win in the end and I would end up here, next to the pool, near to the sea, dreaming dreams like this one.

I dream about the time I crash the car on a bridge with Faye in the front seat, not screaming. The focus of my dream is not the car crash but the moment when, in the hospital afterwards, unharmed after all, I see myself naked in a full-length mirror for the first time in months. It's deep in the Cape Town winter then, and I look waxy, and I am pale and inhuman.

When I wake up next to the pool, I'm surprised to find that I'm still there. It's dark. Everyone is gone, I'm not sure where, and then Laura is there. It must be past midnight, but she's dressed in blue linen dress that makes me think of picnics, and I think she might have been wearing pearl earrings, and this is how I'll always remember her.

"There's been an accident," she says.

Craig Carson

When I get slightly hysterical phone calls from Faye, I always presume the same thing, but I'm always wrong, because it's always just a matter of her wanting me to join her party, because she just wants everyone to be together. It's past three, and I know that the club will be closing in less than an hour by the time I get there. I weigh up my options, but my options here aren't great either. She doesn't notice that I can hardly hear her over the music in the background, or maybe she thinks it's her background and not mine.

I go to where she is to find her.

Ross

When Faye says that we should go out, that's what we do, but Craig is different from the rest of us and says,

"Not tonight. I've already made plans, sorry."

The familiarity of this enrages Faye and the two of them fight about why Craig never parties with us, and where it is that he's going, and why he can't be more interesting. He's the one who wants to end the argument, and follows her around the apartment trying to do so, until she finally comes to a stop in front of a huge mirror that we've never got around to hanging up. We never will.

"You could just make a plan to come out once, you know?" she shouts at his reflection. He looks as if he's about to smile, but just says to her,

"I know. I will. But not tonight."

Faye shakes her head and glares at her tilted, made-up self.

"I hate this thing," she says. "It would look lovely at Versailles or something, but why we need it in Seapoint I can't understand. And I can't understand why hanging out with these people is so important. Who are they, anyway?"

"Friends, Faye. Marc and Chris. I've talked about them before. And you live in Camps Bay."

"Then just have some champagne with us." He shakes his head and walks out.

"I'll go talk to him." I say, and follow him out the door. He'll tell me nothing, then I'll make his excuses for him.

"Thanks Ross." She says, and starts on a second coat of mascara, or lipgloss.

When we're out, people keep buying Faye drinks, and guys try to buy Sarah drinks but she ignores them. Girls hit on me, and I let them. Who are Marc and Chris? Faye and Sarah go to the bathroom, while I stand outside and talk to some guy called Clarence who I think is a friend of Grant's. Where is Grant? Clarence, who was alive at this point, buys me a drink, then I realise that I need to find Faye and Sarah again because they can't possibly still be in the bathroom.

When Craig arrives he smells of alcohol and cigarettes, although he doesn't seem in the mood to party. As I see him at that moment, I hate him. I sit at the bar, uninterested, and think about how I'd never be able to describe this scene if I was asked to do so. Happy nights out are all the same, bad ones are all awful in their own, special ways. I look to my left and I see Faye and Craig. A guy walks past them and bumps into Faye and says something, and Faye grabs his arm. At first I think that it's her way of greeting him, being her usual inclusive self, but then, before any of the rest of us know what's happening, Faye pulls her arm back and swings and punches him, and he's staggering a little and his nose is bleeding. It's then that I notice properly that Grant is missing, but it turns out later that he's okay.

Corinne Carson

Don't think that because you find us here in a state of languid disarray that there wasn't a time before this when we were easily the happiest girls and boys you could hope to meet; don't think, because you find us cynical now, that we weren't once filled with all the youthful optimism that any person could wish for, under blue skies and in soft new clothes. Before the novelties wear off, before the complications arise, before the drugs don't work, before things take a decided turn for the worst, we are unflaggingly appreciative of all of this. We like the beach and the sun, and we like the beautiful people. We like glossy magazines and new haircuts, and we like our collars neatly folded.

Before we arrive, it's Sarah and Faye, and then they find Ross (where do they find Ross?) and then Craig arrives, and Ross and Craig find each other. Laura arrives the following year; Craig finds Laura, or Laura finds Craig, depending on how you look at it, and Grant arrives the following year. I have my opinion about what point it is in that sequence at which things begin to fall apart, but so does everyone else.

By the time we arrive, the process has begun. By the time Clarence dies, months later, it's well underway.

Sarah Richards

When I remember it all, it seems like one long hallucinogenic experience, and I wasn't on drugs. Maybe it was too little sleep or too much alcohol, or the fact that I never ate, or just the buildings on campus that I got lost in and that made you feel like you had fallen down a rabbit hole, but nothing seemed real. I remember sitting on stone steps outside and waiting for Faye, and waiting, and waiting, and I remember skipping most of my lectures and then going to lectures later and being so fascinated and so confused that I wished I'd gone to every one.

I remember little else about the days.

When I see my sister Jane, and Corinne – and the other girls too but my and Faye's sisters in

particular – I want to send them straight home. I've long ago accepted that Faye will always be the fun older sister and that I am her more boring version to Jane, so I lose nothing by being protective, but there's no effectiveness in any of it either.

I remember more about the nights, although these memories don't make sense. I remember bouncers who knew Faye and endless boys who knew Craig but didn't talk to him much, and Grant driving too fast. I don't know if everyone remembers university this way, but Faye says that we're not like everyone.

Faye was drinking cocktails that were always too sweet, and there were a lot of big black cars. There's a penthouse with luggage on the floor – but I don't know whose – and a view of the sea in the dark and a kitchen with dark marble countertops and dance music that repeats, and repeats, and repeats. There are palm trees and bars and stamps on my arms, looking like bruises. I want to send Jane home, but I realise that Faye and I would have been like this anywhere. I remember waking up surprised to be here, or that I was still there, as if I'd expected that Cape Town was all a dream.

Brigitte

Where Durban has drama, Cape Town has glamour. On Cape Town streets we wear long coats and learn to sweep in and out of restaurants in the rain without getting water on our hair or our dresses. We don't know that we're doing it until we go home or the middle of summer arrives to remind us that we're not in a movie from the Fifties; not a Hitchcock film or even a musical. We're wearing boots for the first time in our lives. We're learning to layer. Everyone and everything here is beautiful and it makes you feel dizzy, and Faye's flat is so high up that when you look at the bright blue sea in front of you, you feel that you might tilt forwards and fall over, into the ocean or off of the edge of the world.

Correctly or incorrectly, we presume the worst parts of our lives to be over. We like the feeling of being sunburnt, and we like how people look at the six of us, like they always have, and we're so proud of the way that they look at Grant and Craig and Faye and Ross and Sarah. We're where no-one knows us and the feeling won't last because we can't help making friends, but for now we feel like we've dropped out of the rat race, or out of some other clichéd term, or out of all of the clichés if we're lucky, and are enjoying a pleasant retirement somewhere far, far away. Faye shatters our illusion repeatedly by telling us how young we are, and how strong, and how we need to stop wasting time and have more fun. Ross tells us how we're practically famous here, but we don't want to hear it, so we turn back to our copies of *Vice* and *Vanity Fair* and pour more drinks. We find that here we can have sundowners while actually looking at the sea, and that is the advantage of the West Coast.

We're preppy here. We wear golf shirts and v-neck sweaters, and, it should be said, we don't look a bit out of place. Preppy gets appropriated and turns into indie, and the indie kids become hipsters, and then maybe we're that too sometimes. In winter we discover that it can get cold enough to warrant the wearing of scarves for warmth as well as aesthetics, but we really do love cable knit on each other. In second year we'll find a band that sings about sweaters and linen and Oxford and we'll love them because they'll have defined us, even though they're an indie band. We wear big sunglasses, and from the right angles, we look famous.

On one of the days I remember, someone is singing the beginning of "I wish they all could be California Girls", but I don't know the song until years later. Craig rolls his eyes, but I don't notice. We listen to hip hop and Vampire Weekend and then MGMT and Phoenix and then a lot of indie folk, but we don't notice that any of it sounds sad.

On campus in first year we listen to the Shins, who sound right with all of those trees, stone walkways, echoing footsteps when it's late. We have our ipods in, we're drinking mocha coffee from cardboard cups, or Evian from sport bottles with red caps because Perrier water is difficult to carry around, and we never have anything ready on time. We sit on benches or at outdoor picnic tables or on the grass sometimes, and talk about how busy we are. We're making plans about moving into a

house that has six bedrooms and we're looking forward to living in Newlands, which is green and looks to us like it'll be the setting for all of the good things that are going to happen to us very soon, and the backdrop to a lot of pictures we'll take.

Our courses are hard but we're good at them, and dedicated in a way that sees us stopping to write ideas for essays or projects into notebooks when moments before we were in a hurry to get somewhere. The music that we like sounds emotional in just the way we feel – that it's emotional about nothing in particular, but that the person singing is very moved by very small things at unexpected and inconvenient times.

We feel like we've been through the worst stuff we'll have to go through because high school nearly killed us; death by overachievement. We feel like we deserve a break and so we take it. We spend a lot of time sitting in the sun on lawns outside university buildings or on uncomfortable chairs and benches in the main street of Cape Town's city centre, in the company of pretty hippies and beautiful architect types in both locations, and lawyers and architects and artists and bloggers and writers, too.

Some of us take up smoking, without taking it seriously. Yes, some of us get addicted. I like the way the smoke looks curling off above our heads, sneaking off unnoticed. I like the smell of my hair when I wash the smoke out of it. I like going out for breakfast and eating a lot, slowly, while sun comes through windows of the kinds of restaurants that are meant to be quaint in the extreme, but are too spacious and glossy for that. Everyone else is hungover, and I never am, so I pretend that I need to move more slowly, too. We're always together, people say, but we don't care.

Corinne

At the beginning of the year at night we go to the same places that everyone at varsity goes to, but then everyone separates. The places to which we used to go remain, loyal if slightly dirty and waiting for us if we choose to need them again. Later, we have new places to wear high heels and show off how sleek and polished we are. I like how we are now. The abandonment had to happen. Brigitte needs new music and Morgan needs new people and there seems to be some kind of lingering fear that I might echo some incident involving Faye and her rage that happened earlier in the year. Nothing happens in first year.

Until Clarence dies, nothing happens this year because we're too busy being happy, or too happy being busy. We dance in places that are too small to be called clubs and too artfully furnished to really be called bars, so they're lounges. The patrons are not cold in the way that glamorous people are meant to be: they greet us, they dance stupidly, they sing along, but they are still undeniably beautiful. The places we dance seem to be high above everything. I like our high heels, the silk dresses, and the way Brigitte does her make-up.

Always in the centre of the room is Faye. In wood-panelled rooms filled with people she is there, drinking whisky on the rocks and having boys and men ask her out to eat dinner, and spinning, or maybe we're the ones spinning, and her blonde hair is white in the dimly lit atmosphere that makes everything seem high-contrast.

Brigitte

Always in the corner of our vision is Faye. You could call her gorgeous if it wasn't a term too hackneyed for a girl who's so often been called original. You could try to ignore her if you wanted to but it would be futile because Faye has made a vocation out of getting noticed and won't make exceptions for anyone, however insignificant. She is drinking strawberry martinis and wearing too many bracelets. I notice at first that I don't have to look after anybody anymore now that I'm here, but soon I become used to being one of the little girls, not the oldest sister in the house and not the middle child of the street. You notice at first here that you're paying a lot more for drinks than you would have at home and that there are entry fees where you wouldn't have expected them. The places are nicer, the music better, and the patrons prettier, but after a while we get used to

it and don't notice the improvement or the cost. That's how it is with everything, maybe.

Soon we'll be friends with the bartenders, we'll be on guestlist.

In Cape Town you don't have to be enthusiastic about anything, and it's immensely freeing. Even if you feel ecstatic, sometimes you want to keep it to yourself. That's my experience. I'm not certain why we're here, but I like it that we are.

Nancy

We stay over at Faye's, cared for, to be driven home in the morning, and we go to bed early, before three. Faye is still out. Ross has brought us home, Sarah has stayed wherever we were to look after Faye, because this is the order of things. Where is Craig? Craig is disordered, or at least disorderly.

I go straight to bed, Faye's bed. Jane will share with Sarah, two of us will sleep on the couch, two more of us will share Faye's bed, and if Faye sleeps she'll share with Jane and Sarah, or Ross. I think that Morgan and Jaime are in the bed with me, and they go to sleep right away, but Faye has trouble sleeping with the lights off and so she's had a nightlight of sorts installed, and I don't know how to switch it off, and I have trouble sleeping with the lights on, so I'm awake to hear Sarah and Faye arrive home. There's nothing comforting about the light. It makes things murky rather than cosy. Faye's room is messy and even though the mess is pretty by virtue of the prettiness of everything that Faye owns, it's difficult not to imagine what might lurk deeper than the layer that meets the eye. I have the impression of being adrift on a white feather raft in a sea of silk nightgowns, single stilettos, perfume bottles, and dusty pink fifty rand notes, in the ocean in a part of the world where the light is unnatural because the sun never quite sets.

Morgan and Jaime go straight to sleep when we get home, but I lie awake between them. My eyes are closed but I think that the room is spinning. It occurs to me that if I'm not mistaken, we now know something that Faye doesn't. It occurs to me that Craig is not at home, but that I don't remember leaving him behind. I realise that I remember everything, although I keep trying not to.

Craig Carson

I'm not a scene kid, because I can't pick a scene to be a part of and stick to it, but I know the kids in the scenes and I write about them. Just like at school, I'm good at fitting in to groups that I'm not a part of, but never good at being a part of anything. I like the indie kids, in their skinny, skinny jeans, but everyone likes the indie kids now before they become real hipsters. We go to some place that backpackers and exchange students love and I'm bored of waiting for everyone to become tired, but I can't feel any real impatience for people who are having such genuine and guiltless fun. Faye would say that I'm a part of this – a part of us, or them – or if Faye didn't say it then Ross or someone else would. I don't feel that I'm a part of it at all. I look across at her as we're dancing and wonder if she minds that I'll be transcribing this all at some later stage, one day when I'm writing the novel that gives away all our secrets, if we had any to begin with.

It'll be okay; people like me and they like her.

On a balcony high above everything (or maybe, looking back, only some things) I feel that I'm happy, and I realise that this is when I miss having someone or other to love, standing beside me. Misery is something to be fought and endured alone, and it gives me a grim sense of purpose to trudge through whatever personal winter I find myself in. But there is nothing to do when you are faced with summer and happiness, except to stand still and let it do what it will with you, and that's what makes me wish that I had someone beside me to hold my hand. It's a sentiment that makes me feel terribly original, even as I know that someone else must have felt it before me.

We go to a bar, near the beach, which reminds me of Paris and I feel terribly jaded. Faye knows the owner and I like his jeans but he's always been suspicious of me. Sarah sits on the couch next to me and stretches out long bony legs in front of her, and holds a burning cigarette, which she really doesn't know how to smoke. My younger sister and her friends, who are too young to be

here, talk next to me.

"Nothing ever happens here." Corinne says, in Faye's voice.

"Everything's happened already." Jane says, and at this point I lose track of who's speaking.

"At least it's pretty." Instead of really listening to what they're saying, I look at the six of them, who are no more beautiful than Faye and Sarah are, but are far more impressive for their strength in numbers.

"It's cold."

"It's summer."

"No. I mean the way it's decorated."

"You're right. We should go back to where we were."

"We can't. It's too late now."

"It's just cold, I don't hate it."

The attractiveness of these girls isn't lost on me, despite my preferences. They're youthful and vital and strong, even if they are frighteningly thin from the wrong angles. They might look fragile from a distance, but up close you can see the flicker of muscles in Jane's arm as she lifts a gin and tonic, and the glossiness of all of their hair, and the straightness of Nancy's back, and the brightness of all of their eyes.

"I wouldn't want one anyway."

"I couldn't live without one."

"You live without one now."

"We live in res."

"So? You clean up after yourself now, you'll be able to do it later."

"And the kitchen?"

"Why wouldn't you want someone else cleaning your house?"

"Wait until you have your favourite shirt ruined."

I'm not sure that I'm really listening. I'm getting what I think are jealous looks from all of the other men in the bar, but I don't particularly want to believe that men so old would be interested in girls so young.

Eighties hits are playing. They don't fit with the white and antique décor. They don't fit with girls born as the Eighties ended.

"It's not that expensive."

"It's like the cost of a new pair of shoes every month."

"Depends where you're getting them."

"I just want where I live to be mine."

Faye does not look as strong. She's still glossy, it's true, in a way that make-up can't fake, but she droops in a tired and top-heavy way when she thinks no-one is looking. I'm looking. Sarah looks stronger now. I wonder if she's eating. She doesn't look like she's fading. She manages to smile now and then, which is unlike Sarah, who hates partying. Where is Laura?

"It's just easier."

"Yeah, but they've got stuff to deal with too."

"Less stuff than girls do."

"What do you mean, 'less stuff', anyway?"

"Issues. Boys don't hate themselves like girls do."

I feel very cold and I'm not sure whether I should keep drinking or make Ross drive me home with whoever else wants to come along. And where is Ross? The question is irrelevant by the time he appears, and says that he's driving home. I refuse the offer, and he rolls his eyes at me, then he is gone.

Ross

Eventually, we have to begin to go out again, because we can't stay away forever after the death. We go to a party that I think starts early, because it's still sunny and because it seems to lead

on naturally from lunch. What I don't consider is that it's always light here in summer, and that we always eat lunch very late. We're drunk on a roof together, and the beautiful people are nearby and I'm grateful for that but I'm focused on you because what you're saying really is interesting. I feel like I'm in a Bret Easton Ellis novel, and everything looks like it's been photographed, or photocopied, and I tell you so, and I don't think you're listening because you ask me to repeat myself, but you say,

"Where's that from? Who did you quote?" and when I tell you I was just talking you tell me to write it down, because you like it, so I do, but don't think that you'd have said that if you were sober. I love it here and I think you're wonderful - you always were.

"I'm going to go and get you another drink," you say, and walk carefully down the wooden stairs that lead to the bar.

Someone died just the other day, I realise.

Laura

Deaths, in my experience, happen right in the middle of busy periods, so that everyone can say to each other,

"Life goes on. He wouldn't have wanted us to stop living for him," and continue with the things that must get done. Clarence, instead, died very near to the beginning of holidays, presumably to save us all from grief while studying for exams. People say he was very considerate.

We find ourselves with a very long stretch of time in which there is little to do but think about the fact that we should all be mourning but find it hard to keep that up with clear skies.

It's hot; we are wasting summer, but we want to cry too. We're confused, so we compromise and please no-one by lying constantly in the sun but staying very quiet.

We drink a lot, but our hearts aren't in it.

If anyone should paint an idealised picture of these people, it should be me. I am amazed by them, who are beautiful, and kind to me, and very clever and funny, and who seem to glow with a strength and health which others are simply without. Their capacity for the consumption of alcohol is limitless, and their emotions are displayed only behind closed doors. They are the bravest people I know, and they can make anything happen. I feel certain that they won't grow old.

My optimism about them colours my feeling about the world at large, and soon I'm convinced that things are going well for us; and that new starts are there for anyone who chooses to take one.

Life moves fast now. It gets strange, or my idea of normality shifts. On a weekday afternoon I get a lift into the car with Faye, who's taking me into town and who's got to see her therapist at five o'clock. When we get into the car it's four minutes to five.

"Oh, we're late," I say, obviousness epitomised. She shrugs, noncommittal, and chooses from her iPod playlists a selection called 'Driving 7'.

"I'm always late for him," she says a few minutes later when we're driving through traffic on the main road she shouldn't have taken. She's smoking and she's not opening the windows, I'm not certain why. On either side of us appear coffee shops and dry cleaning stores and bistros and Chinese restaurants and Jewish delis (and Jewish everything) but the sound of the hip hop playing from Faye's speakers fills the car and drowns out everything outside, or gives it a soundtrack. People move faster, look stronger.

"Does he mind?"

She smiles again, and replies slowly but assuredly,

"He's my therapist. I pay him to like me." She puts on Gucci sunglasses and stares straight ahead, and drags from her cigarette again. "I pay him to not mind."

"Why do you see him, anyway?" I ask.

She indicates and replies evenly, "Because I'm angry. We're trying to work out if I'm angry because I'm really sad, or if I'm just angry. Then either way I have to stop being angry." We turn onto a wider road with less traffic and she puts her foot down on the accelerator. "I think we're really making progress." She says.

Grant Carson

I'm driving a black BMW that's a bit gay but that I really like anyway, and that Laura likes a lot. Before things go wrong, I take her out to lunch. We go to a seafood restaurant in Camps Bay and I don't remember what I order - a big slab of something, or calamari - but I tell her what kind of sushi she'd like: she's got the idea that she likes sushi, but she hasn't had enough of it to know what she likes. I think to myself that she has a lot to learn about pretending to have opinions, that my sister - Corinne, not even Faye - walks into restaurants whose menus she's unsure about, or hasn't seen, looks vaguely over her options, then points to something she sees and declares it to be her favourite. She hasn't been caught out yet. I think to myself that Laura has a lot to learn about pretensions but then I think that maybe she's comfortable enough around me to be herself.

I like taking Laura out to eat because I like seeing her thinking that it's a big deal to be ordering sushi, like she thinks it's something exotic, or maybe just that sushi at this price is something special. I am not jaded enough to repeat to her what my sisters always say - that there's no need to pay the full price for sushi in Cape Town when it's one special all the time. When I order a beer, she orders a double vodka on the rocks, which is my brother's drink. She is not entirely innocent, and she is not entirely at ease. I like taking Laura out to lunch, but coming up with endless excuses for why I'm paying for her food becomes tedious.

Craig Carson

"We're celebrating," I tell Laura. "My first chapter's done."

"How is it?" she asks.

"It's okay," I say. "I'll let you read it soon." But I don't think I plan to.

"This place is expensive," she says, looking at the menu. It's not that expensive, and I should tell her so to save her from future embarrassment, but I'm the only person who she ever tells when she thinks that, so I don't need to bother.

"How's Ross?" She asks, genuinely interested.

"He's boring." I say, and immediately feel guilty and disloyal, so I want to change the subject by asking her about someone, but there's no-one to ask her about so I ask, "How are you?"

"I'm fine." She says, pleasantly, and smiles at me.

Days later, Faye is telling me a story about Laura, and I start listening at the part where she says, "When I came out of my appointment, there she still was." She's getting something from the fridge, and I can't be sure if it's annoyance or just some strain of amazement that's in her voice. Faye is often angry, but hardly ever amazed. She switches a glass from one hand to the other and sits down opposite me. "I don't know if she'd waited there for me the whole time, or if she'd left and then come back, but she was there outside, and she just said, 'Why are you angry?'"

"What did you say to her?" I ask. Faye laughs.

"You didn't just hear anything I said. She was just there, hanging out outside my therapist's office."

"He's my therapist too."

"You're really missing the point. Can I pour you a drink?"

As she does, she smiles. She likes Laura now. Laura has shown herself to be enamoured with Faye, or substantially eccentric, or better, both, and Faye is returning the affection. Her cheeks are pink and her arms are tanned and I dread the exhaustion that lies ahead of poor, pallid Laura.

Sarah Richards

It's good that Laura is always helpful, and it's very good that she always has something intelligent to say, but neither of these things make her any more appealing to me.

In the case of Faye, the opposite is true. I can't outline why she's my favourite person, but

she is. There are those who hate Faye, too, but they probably aren't able to explain themselves any better than I can. You can hate Faye as much as you like, but you'll still want to do just what she suggests. No-one will ever make you feel so appreciated as Faye can. She is across the table from me right now, appreciating someone who was once a mutual friend of ours, and is now very much Faye's friend. She looks bored as he talks, and I see him growing more and more desperate for her blonde-haired, blue-eyed approval. He tells one story after another, and she's pleasant and lights a cigarette. Smoking's one thing she picked up from me, but it suits my burnt out looks and demeanour better than it ever will her pretty, well-planned face with the pink-red lips and white, white teeth. Somehow I know that no amount of nicotine will colour them, so perhaps it's her habit to keep after all.

TV On The Radio's playing in the background because we're obsessed with them then and I'm just beginning to get drunk. Just when this boy, man, looks as if he's giving up hope of getting Faye's attention, he says something that makes her smile, slowly, then turn her face to him and laugh. He looks as if he's just felt summer's first rays of sunshine, and smiles shyly and radiantly back at her.

Her great gift is in making it seem as if whatever you're doing is really not that bad. If we were skipping a class she would remind us that there were people who had skipped the class week after week, while we diligently attended; and if we spent six hundred rand on dinner she'd remind us that her mother – and we all liked her mother, despite ourselves – regularly spent twice that. If we smoked weed she'd say, "It's hardly coke, Sarah" and as the guilt set in after my first line of cocaine, she reminded me that "For crying out loud, it's hardly heroin." It was all true, of course – there were always people doing worse things than we were. If we were feeling bad, it wasn't our fault, and if we were ruining someone's life, well, no person can truly ruin another person's life unless that person lets them. Whatever she got you into, Faye could get you out of with her steady smile, and then she was your saviour - then you were lost.

After I've finished watching this conversation, Faye will suggest something fun and spontaneous for us all to do, and I will have nothing to say but "Yes", or better still "Why not?" because we both know that I have nothing I'd rather do. The fact of the matter – and it's a fact so clear that Faye would never have to articulate it – it that if you refuse to go along with her plans, it's always your loss. When I tell other people about her, I realise that I make her sound awful sometimes, but why gush over her when everyone who gets to know Faye and I well enough will eventually realise not only that they adore her, but that I do too? I started out as her best friend, and today I hate her, but tomorrow that all will change again. The thing that stays the same is that if she asks anything of me, I know what I'll say.

This is what Ross and Laura have in common: they would both die for Craig, and they are both without the money by which they find themselves surrounded. The money that we have can't be hidden, and I say this for two reasons – to explain why there's no use trying to hide it, and to begin to explain the way it might feel to be in the constant company of a Carson. Each of our families is moneyed, affluent, or wealthy in its own way, but a better word for the Carsons' financial situation is "rolling in it". When it comes to the company of Carsons, there's no-one who knows the story better than I do.

Laura remembers everything. She knows our birthdays, which is nice, and our mothers' birthdays, which is strange, and remembers when we're writing tests, and that can be helpful. What troubles us the most is the way that she remembers every conversation we have with her or in her presence, and her ability to quote our words back to us.

"Does she have friends?" Ross asks, in a tone that's meant to indicate that she doesn't, but the fact is,

"It wouldn't be so annoying if she didn't, but she does. Lots of them, from school or her classes. She talks to them on campus and makes you stop for hours at the movies or the beach to talk to them, but she doesn't want to hang out with them if Craig's available."

"Or if he isn't." Ross agrees.

"Or if he isn't."

"What can we do about it?"

"What can we do? Nothing. We can't kill her. We just deal with it."

He laughs. "Kill her? Probably not. None of us knows how to keep a secret."

Ross

On campus everyday I see the six of them, Faye's sister and Sarah's sister and their friends, sometimes late but always there. They're all dressed in long shirts, skinny jeans or tailored shorts, mannish blazers or cropped leather jackets or summer dresses depending on the season, sometimes the two worn together, and of course for Corinne standing out with her weird love of salvaged oversized jerseys from other people's wardrobes. Sometimes, the jerseys are mine, but they look better on her anyway so I don't question how they found their way to her.

They stick together in a way that's intimidating, and I think often that it must be impossible for boys or men to talk to them in this constant atmosphere of audience. I'm never really aware of any of them dating, but every now and then one of them will be crying and the others will say,

"I could kill him," referring to the recent ex who's hurt their friend – and where there are exes they were once boyfriends, and where there are boyfriends there were once boys brave enough to talk to a group of girls – so I'm proved wrong.

Laura

I go to Craig's lectures because he's a year ahead of me so I feel like I'm getting a head start. I love the shadow of his late afternoon sessions, with small groups not by the standards of his small course, but small enough to have allowed me to construct stories about the lives of each of his classmates during the sections of the lecture that don't interest me. During the parts that do interest me, I pass him notes written in a pink pen, which is his only concession to campness, fabulousness, that so many people expect his sexuality to entail. It's the one way in which his difference is magnified, but in this class (one boy wears green skinny jeans and shares his love of Madonna, another flicks blond hair constantly above a striped waistcoat) he is not different or stereotypical enough to be noticed.

The lecturer doesn't mind our note-passing, or that I'm drawing big purple pictures, or Craig sending text messages now and then: I'm quiet, and Craig's marks are those of the kind of student that lecturers dream of. My lecturers might mind if they knew how Craig helps me with my homework, but somehow it doesn't feel like it could be cheating when we felt like the same person.

Craig Carson

Laura and I get along because when we're sitting in a lecture and I whisper to her that "I'm so sick of Ross," she writes in the margin of her notes,

"Let's Kill Him." and raises her eyebrows and smiles.

Corinne Carson

"I know that this is the story I'm going to finish," Craig says to Laura, who is lying beside the swimming pool while he sits and reads. He began the conversation by poking a toe against her side and saying,

"You look dead," to which she replied,

"I don't feel dead." But now he's talking about more serious things. She opens her eyes now, and smiles with all the enthusiasm that a "that's nice" would entail, but says instead,

"Why?"

"Why?" he repeats. Seldom caught off-guard, he suddenly considers responding honestly: "Because there are people I want to immortalise, and time is running out."

"I'm bored," is his reply, and we won't see emotion from him for a long time; but he concedes, "I feel like I should."

"I think you should, too," she affirms, and there it is. The plan is set in stone. He lies down on the concrete next to her and they are silent, and she wonders if she'll be in what he writes, and he just wonders if people will think he's arrogant if he calls what he's working on "a book".

It's midday on Tuesday and they can hear traffic noises and what might be the sea in the distance, or might just be more traffic. Maybe half an hour passes – it might be less, but time goes slowly when the sun is beating down so hard and you know you should move but don't want to – and then Laura asks,

"What's it about?"

"People. People who are like us, I suppose. Not much."

"Won't that be depressing?" she asks, and he doesn't know what to say. After a while, she says, "You know, you make me whole," and when he doesn't reply again, she thinks that he must have fallen asleep because she can't see his eyes behind his sunglasses.

Not very far away, Jane and I are sharing a packet of Liquorice Allsorts; she gets the liquorice domes covered in sprinkles and I get the ones that look like painkillers. We split the sweets that look like sandwiches according to colour – Jane finds orange repulsive.

We're doing tutorials, short questions, and I've skipped over the first one and moved to the second when Jane asks, "Do you see what Grant sees in Laura?"

"I think so. She's very, you know, wifely. You know?"

"And 'wifely' is what he wants?"

Jane pulls the fleshy pink part of her Allsort wheel away from the liquorice cog shape that forms its centre.

"I guess. What I don't see is what Craig is doing with her."

"Every gay man needs a girl to be fabulous with, right?"

"And every group needs an outsider."

I give up on sucking the capsule in my mouth, and chew it up.

"But he has, I mean, Faye and Sarah."

"And we have Ross."

"To be fabulous for, or as our outsider?"

"As our outsider."

She hands me an orange sweet that she has accidentally been allocated.

"And you think that that's all they're doing?" she asks. "Being fabulous?"

Brigitte

Between classes, Corinne and Jane and I have four hours free on every day of the week except Friday. We are dedicated enough to be one of the forty in a class of two hundred who come back after the break, but not dedicated enough to pass the time with studying, so we find other things to do.

We go to the university's swimming pool to lie in the sun, or picnic in a field nearby. We sit on the steps with the others in their shorter breaks between classes and Corinne drinks chocolate milk or eats chinese food while Nancy chews gum and I take pieces from her pack or smoke cigarettes at some points. We visit the library to look at magazines from 1920 in the basement and Corinne tells us what Faye's told us about where people she knows have had sex between the shelves, and Nancy rolls her eyes. We take the shuttle into town to look at vintage stores, or take the same blue shuttle busses following a different route to go to the nearest shopping centre and eat hamburgers and shop for underwear or things for the house or new books that we may or may not read, or magazines.

It's in the library one day that Jane asks,

"Imagine if it was one of us?" and I ask,

"One of us what?" and so she says,

"One of us who killed Clarence."

Corinne looks up from her book on Victorian socio-economics and smiles a smile so small that it shows that Jane's comment does not merit even the effort of an eye-roll. We're propped up in the narrowest of the spaces between shelves, after we went to lunch, got too drunk, and accidentally came back too early, with another hour to pass. Jane and I sit with backs to one shelf, with Corinne's feet between us as she leans on the shelf opposite. No-one minds that we're here because few people use this section and we're quiet and at this time of the year it's too far from exams for anyone to be tense enough to be riled by the sound of distant, hidden voices. Corinne speaks next:

"Since none of us even knew him, that seems unlikely."

"What, you'd only kill your friends?" Jane asks.

"I'd only kill someone who gave me a motive. How would he give me a motive if we'd never spoken?"

"Some of us knew him. Morgan kissed him, you know. And maybe more. And then Grant was good friends with him."

"So Carsons only kill their friends?" I suggest.

Corinne laughs and says, "Rad. My family of killers."

"And if Morgan killed everyone she kissed, there'd be no men left alive in this place." She may be referring to the university or to the library, or to Cape Town, and she wouldn't be exaggerating too much in any case. Two of Morgan's past hook-ups are just metres above us, and I only saw about eight people in total when we walked in.

"Maybe he just kissed really badly."

"Maybe."

Laura

Since Clarence has died, and since we seem to have decided that his death was not at his own hands, I've made a habit of considering what I'd do if it was one of my friends who'd killed him. Craig sleeps next to me on his bed and I think about what I'd do if it turned out that he was a murderer. He sleeps deeply and resolutely, never moving, usually on his back, and I have no fear that he'll wake up to see me looking at him with my evaluating eye. Perhaps if he did see me, he'd think my stare was the product of the same adoration that causes me to follow him around and agree with everything he says, but he'd be only half right. Although I conclude that I love him enough to stand by him no matter what he does, the fact remains that I find the idea of Craig as a killer plausible enough to have allowed myself almost half an hour to contemplate it. I've finished the reading long ago, and I have nowhere that I need to be, so I put down the papers and lie down on Craig's chest and pull a blanket over us, hoping that he'd forgive me for thinking these things about him.

I spend the time I have free between my classes and Craig's in the food court with him or in a special section of the library with people I don't know. Here the rare books, heavy wood desks and polished antique fittings could have been placed particularly to show me that I should be grateful for my surroundings and my current lot in life, but I feel jealousy instead.

I look around at what everyone else has: only seven other girls out of twenty-three have MacBooks, so I do well there, although one of those is a MacBook Air so I'm clearly not doing that well. Soon there will be iPads. I am the only one with an Evian bottle, but I do like the glass Woolworths water bottles that three girls have, and only nine people have their water bottles on their desks anyway.

I begin to calculate the hours that I'm spending alone.

Corinne Carson

One Thursday Brigitte can't spend the four hours with us because she's hanging out with

someone else or has something else to do, and I don't know the details but Jane seems angry because although she hasn't said anything about it she's slung her messenger bag over her shoulder and wants to go.

We get onto a shuttle to wherever we'll decide later to go to. Once, we were on one of these busses and there was a rush for the last seat, and some guy approached it from the front of the bus and took it just as I was about to sit down. I made some sarcastic "chivalry is dead" remark to Morgan or whichever of us had been standing next to me, and then a neatly dressed little boy who couldn't have been older than six – I don't know why he was there among us, if he was there with one of his parents, or if he could possibly have known what I meant or just saw that I was upset to have missed out on the place – stood up to let me sit down. I'd felt guilty for my cynicism of a few moments earlier, and although my first reaction had been to let him go back to sitting and Jane had nudged me to take the seat so that I didn't hurt his feelings.

Today is not like that day – today there are plenty of seats for everyone who wants them. On the bus it's just me and Jane at the back, a boy who looks too young for the heavy book he's reading sitting near the front, and a group of jock-type guys taking up a few seats in the middle. Jane is smiling at them, and I realise that they're all exactly Nancy's type: all the same. I wonder aloud how she tells the guys she likes apart from one another, but Jane just laughs at me and says that all the hipster boys we go for look the same, too. I imagine all of Nancy's ex-boyfriends buying the same clothes from the same stores, waiting behind each other in line to pay for their new v-neck sweaters, or two of them reaching for the last blue polo shirt, and never knowing how much they all have in common. We got on at the first stop on campus and they clamber off at the last one still on university property, so we begin the looped route off campus in near-silence. We're isolated by windows closed against the cold from traffic noises, shouts on Main Road, and the wind, hearing only the comforting mechanical hum of our own vehicle as it slows down or speeds up. Although we have all the space we need, Nancy's huddled in a corner. I take up the rest of the back seat by putting legs up on it, seated sideways.

We don't know where we're planning to go so before we come to another stop or are lulled into a long sleep on this narcotic vessel I shout across to Jane, too loudly, "What do you want to do?" She looks at me with wide eyes but doesn't answer, because when I shouted the boy at the front of the bus turned around and although I didn't notice because I wasn't facing forwards, always-pale-anyway Jane could be described as appearing to have seen a ghost. She waits until he's settled back to his book, possibly disorientated with his earphones in, and then she whispers to me,

"He looks just like..." And she trails off, but I know immediately who she means.

We set out like this on most days, with four hours to kill, both knowing that if we find anything worth staying away for we won't be back for a while longer. Until today, we'd always come back on time.

When we spring up and start to disembark at our stop, we realise that the object of our attention is not doing the same. It's easy enough to fake a phone call that has supposedly summoned us back to campus ("Oh no – we'll have to go back.") but more tricky to stay on board when he doesn't get off there, either ("This is getting ridiculous – we've got to start planning better."). When we arrive at our destination for the second time, we're relieved to find that he's finished his chapter or his thoughts, and we make a concerted effort to leap enthusiastically from our seats ("Finally. Now where are we meeting her?") when it's clear that he's getting up. There's only one way from the bus stop to anywhere that you'd want to go – the Main Road, the new apartment blocks, the older houses, a shopping centre – and so we move along that road and trust that the boy who looks like Clarence will follow.

As Jane scowls and strides and I trot along beside her, I realise that it's a colder day than I'd prepared for. Jane's wearing slouchy boyfriend jeans, and I'm jealous that her legs are covered even though she's wearing only a cream vest while I have a scarf and grandpa-style argyle cardigan over my t-shirt. I think to myself that although we don't put as much effort into what we wear as our friends do, we get our clothes from the same places, and then that although we're the sloppier dressers of the group, our looks are quite different.

We walk right up to the road and the light's red which is a good thing because it gives us time to stand still, but it means that the boy who looks like Clarence steps in front of us, eager to cross the road, and we get to see him better, and try not to stare.

He walks along a road where there's construction happening and we get whistled at but he doesn't seem to notice anything that's going on around him, and we follow his lead and walk on, past a restaurant that's almost empty at this time of day, and a short queue at MacDonal'd's, and into the shopping centre and down an escalator. The white light in here seems cosy after the near-stormy weather outside, and the people doing their shopping are like us: wealthy, well-fed, and with plenty of time on their hands.

We walk past a homeware store, an antique store, a nail and beauty salon, another restaurant, then into Woolworths, and things get tricky again as we try to appear busy finding items that take us on a very different route to his, but that cause us to pass him now and not let him out of our sight. We buy a bar of chocolate, a bag of coffee, and a block of parmesan cheese. He chooses french bread, a bottle of cheap red wine, a can of tomatoes, and some fabric softener. At one point we reach for the same pack of mince. Jane turns to him and says, "Sorry," over all the meat, and smiles sweetly in a way that she wouldn't if this was an everyday situation, and I think that she's very brave for being able to, because my heart's beating very fast.

By the time we get to the counter, Jane looks invigorated but overexcited, as if she might be about to pass out, so I hold the groceries, and the mince is starting to feel quite damp against my vest, and he is two places in front of us in the check-out line and pays and leaves, and our timing's just off, so even though we hurry up the in-store escalator and past the sale section, we don't catch up with him in time to see where he's going.

When we get to the house that night, Brigitte is in the kitchen with her hands and arms and some of her white t-shirt covered in what turns out to be beetroot juice.

"Guess what we found?" I asks, and so Brigitte asks,

"What did you find?" so I say,

"A guy who looks just like Clarence."

"Oh." Brigitte replies. "His twin?"

"He really did look enough like him to be his twin. I mean, so similar – if I didn't know better I'd have said it could be."

"Well it probably was his twin then," Brigitte says with a shrug and a wipe of her hand on a dishcloth that was white moments ago, "I mean, he still lives around here."

We all frown at each other for a moment and then I ask,

"Clarence has a twin?"

"Yes. Had a twin. Well, yes, maybe 'has', because the twin's still alive? Anyway, yes, there were two of them, and now there's just the one, and that's Clarence's twin."

"How did we not know this?"

Brigitte shrugs. "Living under a rock? I don't know. He's not that interesting so don't worry about it, you didn't miss out on much. Where did you see him?"

We tell her about our day but our accounts are different because Jane downplays our excitement at spotting him, while I tell it with plenty of detail and the phrase, "I'm so disappointed, now" between any others.

"Do you think it needs more crème fraiche?" Brigitte asks us all as she tastes the risotto that she's served us. She'll always ask, but will never take our opinion seriously.

"Mm, no, it's perfect."

"Perfect."

"Delicious." There's lots of nodding from the five of us.

"Just very red," I add, but she take a second helping.

Nancy looks distraught and is picking at her food with a fork that's part of a set that Mrs Carson bought for all of us, but I realise that the risotto isn't the problem.

"It all just seems a bit ridiculous, doesn't it? That this perfect guy gets murdered in some big house and no-one knows how, and then it turns out that he has a secret twin too."

"He's not really a secret," says Morgan. "I knew him. Know him. I can show you his profile on Facebook."

"And it wasn't necessarily a murder," Jane says, quite quietly and with little apparent expectation that she'll be heard.

"So basically, a guy killed himself, and his twin, being his twin, was too miserable to go to the funeral, so he didn't. Sad, but pretty believable."

"I heard they had to keep him drugged for eight days. He wanted to kill himself too, or he was crying a lot too, or something."

"I know it's lame that you wasted your afternoon because of this, but the lecture wasn't that good anyway. And I took notes," says Morgan.

"It wasn't a waste." Jane says, and smiles, showing slightly pink teeth. "It was fun."

Sarah

It's hot today, and I almost immediately regret that we requested a table outside, and that we got it, too. We're shaded from the sun, but our feet are in the sand, and this adds to our warmth with its sun-baked quality. The restaurant is set on a little private beach and if we look away from our own table we can see the heat rising off of the ground.

"You'd think that at a place with a guest list that you have to fake a British accent and a media email address for, they could give you glasses made of glass," Jane says.

"Well if they fall over, these won't break. It gets windy here."

"This is Cape Town, it's windy everywhere."

Jane looks out to sea, and it occurs to me that my little sister has grown jaded very quickly, but that she seems to have taken to jadedness better than we did; she seems happy. The water looks like it's struggling under the weight of the heavy air and makes little more than ripples, rather than waves.

"But this is the only place where you won't end up with broken glass on the table when the wind blows," I say, triumphant, then roll my eyes and say, "And that's why there's the ridiculous guest list and why everything costs at least a third more than it does anywhere else."

We can't complain with any real bitterness because we didn't have to wait or even lie to skip the queue - we just got Faye to call and to mention her mom or dad, and three hours later, here we are. Jane's friends all know that they can eat here without too much trouble, but would rather spend their money on cheap vodka and taxi fare, and have supposedly heard all kinds of rumours about people being excluded from this place for one reason or another: having torn jeans, having cheap jeans, wearing shorts, wearing pants that looked too formal for the beach setting, being black, not being tanned, looking poor, looking arrogant - "So how did that guy get to be here?" Jane asks. She indicates where I should be looking with the use of one of her eyebrows, which I've learned to read skilfully. I look over my shoulder and see a guy with dirty-looking hair and the beginning of a moustache, skinny green pants, a t-shirt that's printed and might be grubby or might be vintage, and a pair of sunglasses that are like Wayfarers but are significantly shinier.

"Oh come on, he's a total hipster." I argue for him. "He's probably on every guest list in town. They probably asked him to eat lunch here."

"Hipsters don't have guest lists."

"Of course they do. They have members-only bars."

"No they don't. Hipster kids don't keep you out when you're not like them, they just make sure that you don't have fun once you're there."

I look at my little sister and feel grateful that she's exchanged her clear-lens frames for dark sunglasses for lunch today. As if she's heard what I'm thinking, she tells me that,

"We're not real hipsters, you know, me or my friends. We just have the skinny jeans and vintage jackets, we're like moderate hipsters. The real ones have backpacks, and skateboards, you know, or they look like they're Amish with lots of facial hair and like, hats..."

I shudder a little and try to change the subject by saying,

"We should order. Do you want to get one of those really big pizzas to share?"

But Jane goes one better and says, "I thought I saw Clarence the other day."

The mood changes.

"Jane, he's dead." I sound tense.

"Yes, I know that. It wasn't him. It was his twin."

"Oh, okay."

"And apparently I was the only one who didn't know that this twin existed, but anyway, we followed him—"

"You followed him?"

"We followed him. It was me and Corinne, oh, and I suppose I wasn't the *only* one who didn't know that he had a twin because she didn't know either, so we followed him into Woolworths—"

"You don't think that maybe you're obsessing?"

Death and hipsters are all around me. I don't want to start a fight. I want to be interrupted by a well-intentioned waitress, maybe to fight over whether we're having wine or cocktails or just vodka and lime, just not over this, but the girl assigned to serving us is angled just so that I can't catch her eye and if I wave, Jane will say frustratedly that I never listen to anything that she says, and that I never have.

"No, I don't. We had four hours between lectures, this was how we spent them."

"You followed him for four hours?"

She rolls her eyes.

"I'm just saying," I continue. "that you talk about this dead guy quite a lot, and it's getting a bit weird."

I suppose I'd been expecting her to get angry at this remark, to shout her protests at me and allow the few diners sitting around us to hear, but she doesn't. She just shrugs and says,

"You talk about Ross a lot. That's weird too, but so what, right?"

"He's — alive?" I reply, struggling to see the parallel. "And we're friends."

"Okay." She says. "You just talk about him, you know, a lot."

The fact that I don't want to talk about Ross means that I don't press her about her obsession, which means that she can't talk anymore about what I didn't want to hear in the first place: that she's moved into a mode of operation enjoyed by stalkers the world over.

My girl detective sister confines her surveillance operations to sitting in coffee shops in the shopping centre where Clarence was last sighted and hoping for him to appear again. She's enlisted Corinne's help, and to a lesser extent Nancy's, so they now have a way to occupy themselves for the hours between their classes, and plenty to tell anyone who'll listen.

"He's not the one who killed Clarence," Jane says, "But he knows who did."

"He's engaged," adds Nancy. "To a girl who we've had classes with. She's pretty."

"She has a rad ring."

Corinne says that, "She knows too. She knows everything about what happened."

It must have occurred to me at this point that my sister and Faye's sister and Nancy could not have known all of this purely from watching and waiting, but I either choose to ignore this or to focus on Faye herself, who is performing amateur investigations of her own.

"It's like he's not telling me something," she says, as the two of us and Ross sit on the veranda of a hotel overlooking the ocean. "I tell him that he should find someone, or at least hook up more often, and he just looks at me with this weird knowing expression. He's so frustrating." She's talking about Craig, whose lack of a girlfriend seems to trouble her at points throughout the day, allowing her to propose a new solution at each of these moments.

"So I went through his BlackBerry," she begins, and is interrupted by Ross spilling some tea onto his knee, maybe out of clumsiness or the fact that Faye has him styled into a scene in which he plays the stereotypical gay best friend that he isn't, or maybe out of theatrical shock or terror, and she pauses her story abruptly to revisit a memory of Ross dropping a bottle of Patron at someone's

birthday party during someone else's speech, but I say,

"What did you find on Craig's phone?" And she says,

"Oh, nothing. That's what's weird. All his messages were deleted. Only the most mundane emails. He can't be that boring, can he?"

"Of course not. He's *your* brother." I hope I don't sound bitter.

"Where did he leave his phone lying around like that?" Ross asks.

"Oh you know, in his bag. If he's deleted everything, I think he's hiding something."

"Nothing at all though?" I quiz to sound as if I feel confusion rather than relief. "Not even messages from Laura?"

"Now Laura – that's someone who needs someone," says Ross, who thinks that everyone needs someone, anyone, and he does not know at all what he has set into motion between mouthfuls of tiny salmon sandwich.

Grant Carson

Now, increasingly, I seem to be dating Laura. It's not awkward anymore when I pay for her food, and we go to more and more places alone, and then one night in a corridor at a house party she has me pushed up against a wall and is kissing me. We don't have sex that night but a week later I take her to movies and the one we want to see only starts two hours after we arrive to book our tickets, so we drink wine in a restaurant in the shopping centre until it starts. In the dark and almost-empty theatre Laura pushes her fingers in between mine and kisses me again, and the movie's short so when it ends we're both still drunk and we end up in bed at my digs. I'm happy that she's good at all of this but mainly I'm just happy, and when I feel stupid and naïve for feeling that way I look over at her and she looks happy too, and it's a relief, and I know that we won't talk much about this. Somewhere before, between, and after these events, Laura had started doing my laundry, I had started cooking for her, and she had been offering me pieces of life advice that I hadn't asked for. We spent a lot of nights on her couch watching DVDs, and we have similar tastes in music, which makes things easier, and everyone's really pleased that things have worked out this way.

Ross

"Do you *have* to invite her tonight?" is a question that Sarah's long had a habit of asking Craig about Laura. Sometimes he answers 'yes', and sometimes he just walks out and abandons his plans with Faye and her friends and ends up seeing a movie with Laura alone instead, but increasingly the answer is 'no', because Laura's seeming to become oddly self-sufficient. For one reason or another, she finds out nothing about Corinne and her friends' quest to find Clarence, and they know little about how much she's starting to find out. When I see her trying to get closer to Craig, I feel sorry for her for a bit because he's a million miles away from all of us.

To Laura's credit – and because this is to Laura's credit, Sarah will never admit it and neither will I – she does have a few friends who she spends time with. More impressive is that she sometimes enjoys her time with these people, and she makes new friends and keeps trying to find someone whose company distracts her from Craig for more than a few moments. So that she doesn't simply find a substitute for his company, she finds people who are his opposite in a number of ways – they're female, straight, aren't writers, and don't order wine with breakfast – and in other ways are a lot like him – they're wealthy, cynical, and good-looking.

None of them ever has cash, so they pay with their cards and tell Laura that she can pay them back next time. She's pleased that they keep to this – that they want to see her again and don't have the Carson compulsion to pay for everything of hers – and she impresses and unnerves them with her memory for exactly how much she owes them for coffee, croissants, red velvet cupcakes, or artisanal cheese.

Craig Carson

"Why do you want to be a writer?" you ask me.

"Book launches," I reply.

"Really, though," you say.

"I guess I'm just angry," I reply.

"It's a nice night," you say to me, and talking about the weather is what I've reduced you to. I look at you over the little table that sits between us, holding our almost-drained wine glasses, and see that I've argued with you, undermined you, or laughed at you about what you've had to say on every conceivable topic, and now you've run out of options. I don't think that you used to drink wine when we started seeing each other, and you're smoking now, so that you can follow me outside.

Little more than a year ago, you pushed me into a room at some penthouse where we were drunk with Faye and Sarah and some more of your friends. You locked the door and I sat down on the bed and then you were next to me, kissing me and sliding a hand into my jeans clumsily but insistently (you weren't so much more experienced at this than I was) and I thought you were brave, because I didn't know how clear I'd made it that I'd wanted this too. When we came out of the room Faye thought you'd just been giving me drugs. We hardly knew each other so you didn't know what to say to me then but we were kept busy acting natural, and the two of us had everything left to talk about. Best of all, we had a secret, so nothing that anyone else said could be as important as the things that you said to me or that I said to you.

Now, I just say, "The weather's beautiful." and I still want to be close to you, but the conversation has dried up.

"I'm sick of this," you say, a few mornings later when the two of us are having breakfast at a little restaurant in a row of restaurants and coffee shops on a hill in town. I look up from my french toast, crispy bacon, and honey, and ask patiently,

"What are you sick of, Ross?" and you reply,

"This. All the lying to everyone." And I didn't think that that was the problem so I ask about other things that I don't really believe to be the matters at hand,

"So that's the problem? You're not sick of me paying for your meals and your drinks, or of being with me in nice places, or of my friends, or of being a martyr about everything that you have to do for me? It's the lying to *everyone* that's getting to you?"

You frown at me and look momentarily distracted by your wild mushroom omelette, but you say, "Don't bring that into it. I want to tell people about us."

"You just told most of the restaurant. You tell quite a few people. Who in particular would you like to tell?" I'm using what Corinne calls my passive aggressive tone, and this is what keeps it from sounding to everyone seated around us that I'm attacking Ross.

"Well, Faye, and-"

"If this is about my sister, like everything is, and about possibly offending her, then I can't help you. I'm not enough for you in some way, and I've done what I can to fix that, but if being a public couple is what you want, not being with me, then I'm not your solution."

I get up at this point and get my coat and start taking my cigarettes out of the pocket as I head for the steps down from the veranda to the street, but I can't quite leave you there with the bill, which I don't think that you can pay. I turn back, pay, wait for my card to be approved, then I leave again, all without making eye contact with you.

You don't come up to me, and it takes all of my willpower not to turn around to find out if you're still eating your breakfast, and maybe mine too.

Laura

When Craig breaks up with Ross he arrives at my door, not suffering from any apparent trauma, but with a very visible intention of staying for a while. He carries a bag far larger than the

one he usually carries when he's spending nights at my flat or Faye's. Unrelated to this is the fact that he's soaking wet from a storm that's broken out unexpectedly as he was coming over.

He smokes cigarettes and we watch old movies, then we order pizza with a thin crust and he asks,

"If you could only eat one food for the rest of your life, what would it be?"

"Sandwiches. What would you eat?"

"Pizza."

"That's cheating. You can put anything on a pizza and it's a completely different food."

He frowns at me. "And sandwiches are all the same?" he asks, and I shrug.

He teaches me to play a card game that I'll forget and his heart's not in it. He wants cheap wine, but not to leave the house. He doesn't want any drugs that might cheer him up, just sleeping pills, and neither of us know where to get those without talking to Faye. He sleeps all day, and goes back to the novel at night, but I don't think he writes much, because we end up watching *Gossip Girl*. I fall asleep next to him, unhelpful. I make him breakfast, and coffee, but he doesn't eat much, and goes back to bed, then I lie next to him and read until he wakes up and needs his book back, and then I go back to sleep. He asks where Grant is and I tell him that Grant's busy, but I've got a few messages from him on my BlackBerry asking where I am. I tell him eventually that I'm busy with Craig, and that Craig's just broken up with Ross, and he doesn't ask anything further. Craig opens a bottle of vodka that he's bought (he has left the house for the first time in days while I was sleeping) and asks me,

"What's the most drunk you've ever been?"

"After my matric dance."

"You're a cliché." He smiles.

"What about you?"

"There was this time in St Francis..." He begins, and I get comfortable, because his and Faye's stories about St Francis Bay can stretch out for what seems longer than their weeks away there, but I hang onto every word of them. This story ends with a wrecked boat and Craig not being allowed out on New Year's Eve, then Faye sneaking him out of a window.

"You're a cliché," I say to him when he finishes the story.

Craig takes a bath and when he's done he looks like he's been crying, so I put my arms around his waist and he puts his arms around my shoulders and for a moment he gives in, then he says,

"Hey, can you make spaghetti for dinner?" and I do.

Times moves quickly, food runs out, and neither of us have been going to classes, then one day when I am half asleep and don't expect this at all, Craig says, "I'm gonna go now." His bag is already half-packed so I know that any protests would be useless, but I ask him why he's going and he says, "I can't stay forever."

Grant Carson

After about six days, Laura comes back. I'd got used to her presence already, so these days have passed strangely, with me always looking over my shoulder for someone who turned out not to be there, and I feel a kind of relief at having her back where I can see her – but I don't tell her this.

It's not raining anymore, but it's still cold and dark, and she's not saying much. She smells like she's just showered but she looks exhausted, and when I sit down on the couch in the lounge she sits next to me but also lies on me, with her head on my shoulder, and she just lets me talk until I ask her if she wants to go to bed now, even though it would still be light outside if it wasn't for all of the clouds. She lies down properly on my lap, with her her face looking away, then rolling onto her back and stares up at me.

"I've missed you," she says, and then, "Okay, let's go to bed."

When we're there with the lights off she kisses me, then puts a cold hand under my shirt and lets me undress her, and when we're lying still together later it feels as if all of our fitful movements were in aid of arranging our limbs just as they are now, fit perfectly together, and I feel that

everything's as it should be.

I dream about nothing much at all but movement in a murky blackness; it's not an unpleasant dream, but it's soaked through with the feeling of having just woken up and not knowing what's just happened, or where and when you are. I think that it goes on for a long time but Laura sleeps deeply beside me and when I wake up it's early and dark but everything's suddenly very clear. I squeeze Laura's shoulder so that she scrunches up her eyelids, then opens them.

"There was no note," I tell her. "There would have been a note."

Craig Carson

"What you need to do is stop thinking for a few days," Faye says, and so I do. It's cold and so I put on a pea coat over my skinny jeans, T-shirt and cardigan, drink a glass of brandy that someone else has left on the countertop and find a few notes on the floor to last me until I get to an ATM.

I take some friends and acquaintances up on their offers to party together and go to a club that only exists on Fridays, then to another one that you can only go to if you're there with a girl, and I am, so it's okay. There are guys with long hair, girls with short hair, everyone dancing and shaking their hair, wooden floors and carpeted walls, music with lots of drums and cymbals, then The Cure, Black Label everywhere, and a girl drumming glossy black fingernails on a scuffed leather bag. Ross never stopped telling that I was good-looking, or trying to prove it by going down on me often, but tonight's the first time in a long time that I believe it, and it's because of the way that everyone looks at me while they're pretending they aren't. I get it wrong by asking to buy coke at a place where everyone just does pills, and then wanting to dance at a place where all the girls are playing fozzeball and the guys are talking about playing pool and remixing hip hop, then a photographer in a cap who doesn't look like a hipster at all takes my picture and while I'm looking into the lens I wonder how it is that anyone manages to hook up here. I express this thought to the girl standing next to me and she thinks that it's as sweet and idiosyncratic of me to say this as it was to try to buy coke here, and she says, "Let's go.", so she and I and two of her friends - they look a lot like me - leave together, but we all get separated. I think that we all got into a taxi together but I end up in a club on the other side of town that I've been to a lot of times and where everyone is so beautifully groomed that I don't think that the artfully dishevelled hipster kids could have planned to end up here. Weirdly, no-one I know is here and so I talk to the barman. He pulls me into the bathroom and I take out some of the pills I bought and offer him one but he just laughs, shakes his head, and cuts me a line.

He leaves me on a couch talking to a boy who looks a lot like Baptiste Giabiconi - olive skin, high cheekbones - but has longer hair, and a girlfriend. I dance with a girl to a Shwayze song and then I decide that I have to leave, and the barman's finishing work so he takes me to a party at the house of some guy he knows at a penthouse in Clifton. There are glass windows that look out over the sea and in the dark it looks as if we're in the middle of the ocean, and I feel like I've been here before. No-one ever tells me who it is that owns the place, but there's a much older guy who says things that I think he couldn't say if he wasn't the host, but I stick to not thinking too much and find a little bar fridge filled with Moët. The barman opens a bottle for me like it's just a habit for him, and I tell him that Moët's for new money, because that's a habit of mine. He's gone for a while and I look around and see that most of the guests at this party are boys younger than I am, all thin, a lot of them an old man's idea of good-looking, and I feel like I'm just beginning to grasp what's going on when the barman puts an arm around my shoulders and starts kissing me. I'm really surprised because I thought he was straight, but he's not, and when he sees the old man watching us making out he wants to take me back to his flat, but I want to go somewhere that I can sleep because I'm exhausted. I take him to a hotel, and after we check in we go up onto the roof and swim in their pool and look at the lights of the city as we do.

We're getting sober now and know that we won't do anything if we don't do it soon, so we go downstairs to our room and leave the curtains open so that we can still see the lights, and take our

clothes off. He removes his T-shirt and my shirt and pants casually, like we're sharing a locker room, though he allows me to drag his jeans off. He acts like he's more drunk than he really is so that he can pretend to forget all of this if he needs to, but he kisses me in a way that suggests he wants to impress me, and it works, then he stops moving and lies very still as I touch my lips to his collar bone and his chest and a jutting hipbone.

"I'm basically straight," he tells me the morning after, but then says that after the things he'd done before I got to the party, he needed to be with someone who was nice to him. It sounds to me like something a drunk person would say, but I'm pleased that someone could think I'm nice. I realise I have to leave before he does so I wait until he goes back to sleep under heavy, soft grey sheets in the hotel room and write my number on his hand so that he doesn't feel abandoned.

I decide to walk home although I know it's a longer way than any distance I've ever walked, and in the rainy bewildering midmorning I walk through streets with tall buildings and the wind to get there. When I get home it feels as if the sun's just rising, even though it's nearly midday.

Sarah Richards

After Craig and Ross break up, Ross lies around reading a lot of Frank O'Hara and crying. I wonder if he understands the poetry or if he's just reading it because Craig said that he liked it, but it suits him in a way that the crying does not.

"I don't know what's wrong with you," Faye says, "But I'll try to help you feel better if you'll let me."

She's drinking glüwein from a thick glass because she's making a point about how cold it is, and she switches it from one hand to another because it's becoming far too warm in her palm as she scrutinises Ross. He opens his big, brown, tragic eyes and says,

"Nothing can help. I'm just sad."

And then closes them again and curls up tighter on our couch. Faye abandons the talking cure then, and resorts to just ruffling his hair. It'll be a long time before I understand the lengths to which she is going to console him.

"You don't have to tell her anything that you don't want to," I tell him very quietly and entirely altruistically when she's gone to her room to nap until it gets dark, and he nods, and I put my arms around him and say, "We'll talk about it all soon, okay?" And I think that he nods.

The first time I realise that Faye is not the only one of us being kept in the dark about some things is on an early evening when I turn on the lights in our apartment and find two sleeping bodies: Faye, in a thin expensive t-shirt and lace underwear, wrapped around Ross and his Jockey shorts on the couch in the lounge. My shock could not have been stronger or drained the colour from my face faster if I'd found them in pools of their own blood.

There's no actual evidence that anything's happened, and I've slept in Ross's arms often enough to know that this on its own is not unusual, but there are two empty bottles of wine on the coffee table next to them, and I know very well what both of them are like when drunk – restless and petulant until they find someone to hook up with, or at the very least rub up against – and I have no doubt in my mind that Faye and Ross now know each other more intimately than I will ever know either of them.

They don't wake up when I walk past them into my room, slam my things down, move into the kitchen, and break a glass while trying to pour myself some water, so I don't bother to wait around and see whether they're finally roused by the sound of my violent closing of the glass sliding door when I leave. Instead, I notice an icy-looking sky and the fact that in the image I can't get out of my head, Faye is biting Ross's neck, and I know that he enjoys this because he's told me so.

I drive off in search of a place that will remind me of neither of them.

I fantasise about never seeing her again, as I do at times like these. Being friends with Faye is exhausting, but it's the fatigue I feel at the thought of removing her from my life that stops me from making the severance.

"I'll get this drink, right, because you got the cab?" she'll ask, and I'll reply, "Okay, but I paid for that because you paid for lunch, right? But lunch cost more than the taxi did, so I still owe you."

"Cool," she'll say. "You can pay entry wherever we go after here."

And so we owe each other perpetually, but I realise that I could write off debts petty or substantial in my seething anger, but that other problems are present. If I had walked away from her here with the intention of never speaking to her again, I'd quickly find that I'd have to see her again because of the fact that we live together. If we didn't live together, our lives are and always have been mixed together thanks to things – t-shirts, hairdryers, iPods, tubes of make-up, all keeping us together thanks to the fact that they're left intentionally or accidentally in each other's bedrooms. Then Mrs Carson calls me her "favourite child", a joke because she has so many of her own to choose from; my mother pretends not to be fond of Faye but is really just jealous on my behalf, and would be confused if not upset with her gone.

How would we explain each other's absence?

Our mutual friends would be stunned, and we'd have to divide them up between us. The joint investment that we've made in all of them is something that neither of us would be willing to lose the rewards of, and we would not have the courage to make them choose between us.

We'd have to divide up the places we like, or learn to act very mature when seeing each other at these venues, or one of us could move to another city.

Faye could be deleted on Facebook, but she'd keep popping up in the party pictures of others, having a fabulous time without me. Then all of the good photos of me have Faye in them too, and if I could no longer display these, I'd essentially have to start all over. Pictures from our childhood would be lopsided.

Then there are our sisters, Corinne and Jane, with none of our issues, who could never be parted or made to take opposing sides, who have other friendships far too close to allow any of us to conceive of them dividing those up into Team Sarah and Team Faye.

We are largely stuck – and anyway, in her good moments Faye is wonderful.

Craig Carson

Getting away is what we're doing now. Faye is hidden in a hotel room somewhere, I don't know why, Sarah is taking all the pills she can lay her shaky hands on, Ross is keeping out of everyone's way if he possibly can, and I am going home. At the airport I try to write but go outside often to smoke cigarettes, then call Laura to tell her where I am. She sounds frantic, then resigned. The plane taking off makes this all seem too final, and underlines the ending of a strange time that I don't quite want to be over. I fall asleep with a pill Sarah's given me and soon I'm in Durban and the next few days pass slowly, dully, and peacefully, with me sitting by the pool and staring at the view a lot and my mother coming out between consultations with clients to smoke or ask me if I want anything to eat, or to bring me a drink. There are few phone calls from Cape Town, except from Laura. Whether I'm in Durban or Cape Town she calls late at night to ask things like,

"What's the best way to cook chicken?",

"If you could bring one person back to life, who would it be?",

"If you could decide how you were going to die, what way would you choose?",

"How old would I seem if you met me?",

"Who's the happiest person you know?", but other days she'll ask something a lot more difficult, like,

"What is it that Faye does all day?" And then I'll have no answer for her at all. It seems that she mainly just wants to talk, and I don't mind, except when she continues to talk long after I've made it clear that I'm busy with Ross, or at dinner, or perhaps in a movie, but in Durban I have nothing better to do than entertain her thoughts and answer her questions.

"What does Faye, you know, do?" she asks, and I reply,

"You tell me, you're in the same city as she is. What have you been doing with yourself?"

"I've been writing," she says. "But I don't like it. Have you?"

"No, not really. Just drinking. That's Durban."

"That's you."

"That's true. But there's something strange here, right now."

"Strange?"

"Eerie? That's the wrong word. Creepy? I don't know the word for it."

"Then tell me about it."

I pull my coat around me and switch the phone to the other hand and say, "The wind's blowing. You can see a lot of palm trees from our house, and they're all blowing in the wind and they look thin and... hungry. It's getting dark-"

"So early?"

"From like, four thirty," I say, and I'm as bewildered as she sounds. "You can see the casino from our house, so not many of the ordinary yellow lights from the city have come on yet, but you can see the neon ones from the casino, pink and blue, but mainly pink. I think that that's what's making me nervous."

"Unnerving?"

"Nervous."

"But maybe 'unnerving' is the word you were looking for?"

"No. It's beautiful though. It's a little bit cold, and there are those pink lights, and the palm trees, and just the sound of cars far away. I feel like something must be just about to happen." I think she knows what I mean, not because I've explained it well, but because I'm feeling this and so she can too.

"Chilling," she says. "Because you're scared, but also, you know, excitable, and cold too. I think that that would be the best word."

"Hey," I say. "You're right." I wait a while and imagine her looking as tired and as far from excitable as I feel. "I really miss you." I say, and I do.

Craig Carson

Shortly after I get back to Cape Town, Laura is in Durban with Grant. There, I'm told, my mother loves her, and no-one finds it odd that she talks about me constantly.

"You know," She says one night when she calls me. "It's really weird, the whole thing with money. I know your family have money, and it's nice that they're happy to spend it on me, but I hate taking it. I mean, I still feel weird about letting you pay for stuff for me. Let alone them, you know?"

"Why?"

"I don't know. I guess I feel like I owe all of you something."

"Well then, I mean, that's your problem. Just don't worry about it so much, if we didn't want to spend money on you we wouldn't. And that's true with everyone, you know."

I'm not sure that she's convinced, but I never am with Laura.

Corinne Carson

We're sitting outside drinking smoothies at the shopping centre where the twin was last seen, and Morgan has taken the lid off of her blue takeaway cup and is holding the straw so that drips of pomegranate smoothie fall back onto and into the rest of the liquid.

"We're going to need to go to the house," Jane says, and I know instantly which house she means, and I get the same tired, sinking feeling that I experience when my sister begins a sentence with the words, "There's this new bar I think we'll like".

"What for?" asks Nancy, but Morgan says at the same time,

"Okay, I know where it is."

From here, it's only a matter of when we will go to the house (now), how we will get there (we'll

walk), and what it is that we'll pretend to be doing if someone asks us why we're there (going for a walk).

It's a longer walk than we'd imagined – we cross Main Road, pass a lot of private school playing fields, and generally move quite swiftly from busy traffic to suburban streets that feel abandoned in a well-tended sort of way. When we arrive at our destination, it turns out to be a curving street of big houses set far back from the road with big grass verges outside that allow the properties to be elevated a little from the pavement. While we're walking, Morgan is talking about the end of summer and how beautiful it is, but how sad, and I have no desire to think about either of these emotional responses to the greenery around me, and then we are at the house.

The six of us stand in front of the gate, underwhelmed, and stare at the house for a little too long. I'm about to say something or start to tap my foot when Jane says,

"It's creepy." When in fact its only creepiness lies in the fact that it's a nice old house in which nothing bad seems to have happened, and that this difference between its appearance and its actual history cause it to seem deceptive.

"That was his room." Morgan says. "The one on the corner."

"Where does the twin stay?" Jaime asks.

"In the one next door. It faces in the other direction, though, so we can't see it from here."

"Well," says Jane. "We should go in."

"What?" I begin, but Morgan supplies the information that,

"No-one will be there. Just the maid. So it's perfect."

"How do you know all of this?" I ask.

"Oh, I came to a party here once," she says, and she steps forwards towards the gate but Brigitte grabs hold of her arm and says,

"Wait." But she's not about to be the voice of sanity. Instead, she says, "We're going to need a good story about why we're there if we're hoping to be let in and not just climb over the gate or whatever."

"We're not climbing over the gate," I emphasise.

"We're not," Brigitte agrees. "Listen, can we walk while we have this conversation, we're attracting attention to ourselves."

It occurs to me that circling the neighbourhood, in fact circling the playing fields of a school, and then ending up back where we started might draw some attention to us too, but I don't even bother to point this out. We discuss various reasons why we might need to enter the property, but it's decided that simpler is better: we'll just say that we're there to see the twin.

"Does one of us at least know what his name is?"

"Morgan knows the whole floor plan of his house, right Morgs, so you must know?" As it happens she doesn't, but,

"I know," says Brigitte. "His name's Mark."

For this reason it's Brigitte that rings the doorbell, because Brigitte is also the one who knows that at this time of day he has a class that he never skips, so we will ask to be let in to wait for him, take a quick look around, then explain that he's taking too long and that we have to leave. As planned, the cleaning lady answers our ring at the doorbell and lets us in, though we are ushered into the lounge and she glares at us until we all sit down, disallowing any exploring.

"What do we do now?" Jaime whispers.

"We wait." says Jane.

"For what?" I ask, and as if in answer, the doorbell rings again.

The cleaner shuffles over to the door, answers its little intercom, and says, "He's here."

"What? Who?" I ask, and I must sound as panicked as I feel because Brigitte nudges me as we're told, "Mark is here.", and as he comes into the house. We can see the front door from where we're sitting so even before he can finish says,

"Thanks Edwina," He sees us and says, "Oh."

We stare at him in shock for a moment or two, but then Morgan takes over.

"Hi," she says.

"Oh, hi," he says. "What's up?"

"Oh, cool. Um, we came to return your flash drive," she says.

"What?"

"Your flash drive. You left in the lecture theatre after English and I thought I should bring it back in case you have, you know, projects on it that need printing soon, or whatever."

He smiles gratefully at her and does not seem to notice that this is not someone with whom he has an English class and says, "Thanks," but then as she rifles through her bag for a flash drive that I can only assume will be hers, he looks nervously over at all of us and says,

"Hi, guys." Then, "How did you know to find me here?"

"We asked around," she says, because she knows that the simplest lies are the most effective.

"Oh," he says. "Well, lucky guess. I don't actually live here anymore. I just had a class cancelled today and so I thought I'd come by and get a tennis racquet I left behind when I moved out."

She pulls the flash drive from her bag. There's a collective holding of breath: she has one of the generic flash drives that everyone on campus has and that he could easily mistake for one of his own, lost or present in a bag or pocket of his elsewhere, forcing her to hand it over and leave him with whatever proof lay thereon that it was really hers.

"Oh," he begins again. "It's not mine. Did all of you guys have to wait long?"

"No, not at all. Just got here," Brigitte says.

"Oh, good." There's an awkward silence here, and then Morgan chooses to fill it by saying,

"We're having a party next Saturday. You should come."

I think about this, wondering if something's slipped my mind, but conclude that we are definitely not having a party next Saturday, and that Morgan is making this up, and I try not to look worried as I will him to say he can't be there.

"Sounds awesome," he says, with a kind of desperate excitement that I find frightening. "I'll be there."

"Cool," says Morgan, looking a little desperate herself. "It's at like, seven. Eightish.

Whatever. There's no Facebook event, but I think it's gonna be big anyway, so you know, bring your friends, or whoever."

"Okay, I will. I'll see you guys there."

He smiles at us as he waves us out in a way that seems unnervingly alive. When we saw him previously, he was moving slowly and alone in a way that seemed to suit the brother of someone dead, or, as I've come to think of him, the image of a murder victim. I wave back in a way that I hope is both calm and enthusiastic, and wait until we're around a corner to say to Morgan,

"You know that there is no party, right?"

"I know," she says, cheery. "I can't believe I said that – but it's okay, we'll just have to have one, I mean, there's space at the house."

"Did you have to mention that it was 'going to be big'?" Jane asks. "That's going to make things quite a bit more difficult for us."

The task we've set ourselves is an intimidating one, but my friends turn out to be equal to it. We have to stage an event that's big, and fun, but that also seems to have been planned weeks ago. It's not as simple as telling everyone that we just hadn't told them until now, because we don't want to alienate everyone we know by making them feel like they're the last to know.

"I mean, it's all got a bit out of hand," I find myself lying. "We were just going to have a few people over, from class, to get to know them better, but we've got the whole garden so now it's going to be a few hundred of us. So you're so welcome to come too."

The lies multiply and I ask, "You didn't get the text? I sent it weeks ago." And no-one wants to believe that they weren't invited or that I forgot them anyway, so they make things easier by saying,

"My BlackBerry's so bad with SMSs sometimes, sorry. Add me on BBM," or "Oh, I think maybe I did. Sorry. But now you've reminded me, so I'll be there."

In the end, it comes down to creating a Facebook event that specifies that we really did try to organise and event without social media's help, that we've been doing so for months now, but that it proved too much for our logistical skills, and so anyone who somehow hasn't heard about the party shouldn't be offended, they should just be there. Everyone seems to be okay with this explanation.

Jane Richards

Faye, inexplicably, has decided to write each of our guests' names on the plastic cups that she's bought for the occasion, but she's facing some difficulties. The first – and this is bringing home to all of us the scale of the event that we have on our hands – is that three hundred people have said on Facebook that they're coming, but that we don't know how many of them will really be there, and how many of them will bring friends, and what those friends will be named.

The next problem is that she's trying to do it while drinking champagne from the bottle and smoking a cigarette, and keeping her already-sprayed hair in place.

"Should you put a shirt on?" Corinne asks, and it's a casual suggestion, to which Faye replies, also casually, that,

"I'm tanning this way. So, I mean, no," and it's true that sitting there in there in her white cotton bra and her denim shorts she has turned a shade or two darker. She puts another cup down on her left with the others that have been written on and says, "Eight."

"You've done more than eight." Nancy says, squinting at them, holding up a hand against the sun.

"Eight people named Mark." Faye counters. "That's eight Marks coming to the party."

"If four hundred people arrive," Sarah says, her voice tinged almost imperceptibly with sarcasm, "that'll be two per cent of the guests. Two per cent of our four hundred guests will have the same name and that, in its small way, will add to the chaos."

"Stop panicking," I say.

"Exactly," says Faye. "We've been to more than a few parties like this, or bigger than this."

"Of course," Sarah is smoking a cigarette and tasting her first attempt at punch while she paces around the trestle table. "but it's always us going to them, not having them. We're the ones breaking lampshades and throwing up in other people's bathrooms and doing lines off of other people's smooth surfaces."

"Breaking lampshades?" Corinne asks, fascinated.

"There was one time when we were in grade eleven and Sarah was doing a handstand on a couch, or trying to, and—" Faye begins, but Sarah is saying,

"Or having sex in their beds, or eating the food in their freezer—"

"There's no food in our freezer, or fridge, or anywhere."

"Or taking showers in their bathrooms, or spilling wine on their carpets, but *now they're here.*"

"It's about time then." Faye is draining the last of the champagne. "Payback. We can afford it. Hide the stuff you're worried about."

"We're not worried," Corinne says.

"I'm not worried either," Sarah says, sitting down to light her next cigarette. "I'm just saying."

"I know," Faye says, and takes a cigarette out of Sarah's box and lights it and continues,

"Remember how much fun it was? The night we broke that lampshade."

"We didn't break it. I broke it and you took half the blame."

Faye shrugs. "I was doing handstands too. Am I getting burnt?"

Corinne Carson

People start to arrive at the party early, people who Jane knows and who have decided not to pre-drink but to come straight to our house instead to have shots in the garden from the bottle of

vodka that they've brought along. Next they'll start on the punch, which Sarah has perfected, except that it needs more ice.

Slowly, more people fill the garden, and although we haven't given the party a theme, there seems to be a consensus that at a party in this neighbourhood, some unspecified fancy dress is required, and so there's a lot of neon face paint.

It's occurred to us, of course, that he might not come to the party at all. He might have been trying to be nice, or trying to get us to leave his house as soon as possible, and all of our efforts may have been in vain. He has our address, and we have his number so we could have called to follow up with him, but as Brigitte put it,

"This is Cape Town. Just because he tells us nineteen times that he'll be there, it doesn't mean that he'll really arrive."

Jane Richards

Halfway through the party we give up hope that Mark The Twin is going to show up, and I feel heartbroken that we have wasted all this effort, but Morgan says infuriating things like,

"At least we're having fun," and worries about trivialities like whether the punch is too warm.

"It's definitely too warm," says Sarah, who has been in a bad mood for the last few days, we don't know why, and then she announces that she's going to walk to the petrol station just down the road to get some, and stalks off. While our neighbourhood is safe during the day, its narrow roads and tall trees make us all nervous at night, and Morgan asks, as Sarah disappears from sight,

"Should we worry about her?"

"It's Sarah," replies Corinne. "If anyone tried to attack her she'd take out their jugular vein her teeth."

I'm surprised by the violence of the statement, but I know that it's a compliment because if it was anything else she wouldn't say it in front of me or Faye, and I agree to the point that the image appears in my head quite realistically.

Sarah Richards

I try to forget Faye's selfishness, and the image of her and Ross on the couch, and we have not discussed the incident at all, but none of my seething anger will go away, so I don't go near either of them when I have to appear pleasant, and find other things to keep me occupied. Tonight, I find other people to talk to at the party, then walk to the shop to buy ice, then feel like I can't bear to go back inside and stand on the road at the end of the girls' house's driveway to smoke a cigarette while I get my strength up and the ice melts.

I wonder why it is that they decided to have this party at such short notice, and think about how dark their road gets at night despite a few streetlights, and realise only when he speaks to me that I feel safe in the decidedly creepy setting because of a boy standing a few metres away, also smoking a cigarette.

"Do you know them?" he asks.

"Sorry?" I reply. I heard him, but need time to come out of my trancelike state of fury/

"Do you know the girls having the party?" he asks.

"Yes, I do," I say. "Do you?"

"Kind of. I mean, they invited me, but under pretty weird circumstances. Anyway, I guess I'll go in. Have you been in?"

"I have. It's pretty fun, you should go in. I thought you were probably just standing out here waiting for drugs or something." He laughs a bit at this. "Why wouldn't you, though?"

"Wait for drugs?"

"Go in."

"Oh, I don't know. I don't really know them. I don't know if they really want me here."

"I'm sure they do. They were really excited about this whole thing." I almost start telling him about how the whole event's been thrown together so fast, about how no-one seems to have got more than a strange and informal invitation, but I suddenly think of how cruel and merciless my sister and her friends can be to people who they don't want around. I feel now that it's my duty to save this quiet boy from them, or at least to give him the option of escape. "But you know," I say, "If you're not keen, you don't have to make yourself go in. I mean, whatever, right? It's just a party." I smile at him, encouragingly I hope, as I drop my cigarette and stamp on it. "Anyway, I better go back. Maybe I'll see you inside. What's your name?"

"Mark," he says, and this time I laugh, remembering the conversation we had earlier.

"We get a lot of those around here," I say. "I'm Sarah."

Jane Richards

"Best hook-up song ever," says Morgan, about something that's playing as the party's ending, the punch finished and the guests trickling out.

"No," says Brigitte, shaking her head gravely.

"What?" Morgan's confused as to what's wrong with it.

"It has the words 'flay you alive' in it?" I suggest.

"Oh, no, I meant that it's from *Twilight*," Brigitte says.

"It's a dubstep remix, so I guess that's different?"

"All good reasons why it shouldn't be playing," I agree. "Who made this playlist?" I walk off through the dark to change it, and I notice that summer's ending, and if you're not careful you can forget that there'll be another one.

After the party, I dream that I've died. I don't feature in the dream, but my friends are there one by one. I see Brigitte in the kitchen with her sisters, patient and very thin, putting one of them down to search for her phone, to pick it up to take the call that tells her that I am gone, then hanging up and sitting down very quietly and ignoring Grace and Audrey for a moment or two before pulling one of them onto her lap. They are eight and seven, and I never could tell them apart. In the dream I can see all of them. Jaime has to leave the library to take the call – she ignores the number she doesn't know, but on the fifth ring call she finds it odd that whoever's calling hasn't left a message, and she goes outside and picks up the phone, then starts to cry in the area between the library doors and the coffee shop where we used to buy hot chocolate in winter. There's no sound in the dream. I wonder who's calling them – is it the same person, or does one of them hear and pass the message on? Morgan's asleep although it's the middle of the day, and doesn't seem to understand what she hears, blinking with sleepy eyes. Nancy looks better than I'd ever seen her, and is holding six shopping bags, but she never misses a call, and asks whoever's on the other end of the line to repeat what she thinks she heard. Corinne's by the pool, and at first I think that it's Faye who I'm seeing, but then I realise that it's Corinne with her hair looking lighter in the sun.

I feel nothing while I am dreaming and when I wake up I think hard about it, and what worries me is that none of them are together in the dream. If this was a glimpse of the future then I want to know why they are apart more than I want to know why I am dead, but I'm not going to get to know the answer to either of those questions.

Craig Carson

Laura calls me from Durban, where she's at a party and says,

"It's so strange here. I'm staring into the pool... And nothing really makes sense, you know?" I have a clear picture of her in my head, staring into water that's lit from beneath, with bare feet and her hair blowing in the wind, but her clothes still neat. In the picture in my head she's next to a pool at a house where I once went to a party years ago, and it's big and looks faux-tuscan with a lot of brick, but then I remember that at that party there was no water in the swimming pool because they'd been having it painted black. I want to talk to her, but I'm being shuffled towards a taxi, so I

say,

"Listen, I'm on my way to a party. So I'll call you tomorrow, okay?" There's a long silence before she replies,

"Okay." Impassive, without intonation, perhaps with her feet kicking around a bit in the cold water.

"Bye Laura."

"Love you."

"Have fun." And I end the call and put the phone into the pocket of my jeans.

Later that night, when I least expect it – and I'm not sure there was any point at which I did expect it at all – the straight boy uses the number that I left behind with him and gets in touch. I tell him to come to the party and he fits right in here, knows some of the guys there, and seems as concerned as everyone else does that my brother is not there, though I'm sure he's never met him. His name is Tyler, and he dresses like a catalogue hipster in brogues and a band t-shirt with some little vest, waist-coat worn over it, but this doesn't fit well with the way he was when I met him – dressed all in black, very neatly, being very polite to patrons who wanted Patron palomas or Jaegermeister shots chased with four different kinds of chasers.

"I'm a model," he shouts to me over the music playing in Corinne's garden. "So I just bartend to, you know, pay for everything while I build my portfolio," and suddenly it all makes sense, and I get the chilling sensation that he probably has a blog, too.

He's not drinking much but by some force of habit he's pouring drinks for me and my friends, and it seems silly that we're still here so I suggest that we leave, and he suggests that we go for a drink somewhere else, and he knows a place, so we leave and end up in a bar and restaurant that seems to house a grown-up version of the Claremont crowd, all hell-bent on having their allocation of fun for the weekend now that they can't party on Monday, Tuesday and Thursday, too.

Tyler and I get drinks (he's having a beer, I do too) in the corner of the bar, and he says, "I like your friends. They're really fun. Your sister's cool too."

"Which one?" I ask.

"Corinne?" he says. "I just met the one, do you have more?"

I smile at him and it seems charming and sweet that he hasn't noticed Faye, that he managed not to see that she and a guy from my politics class pulled the trampoline to the edge of the pool and jumped in while he, absent-mindedly, was holding a bottle of champagne, starting a trend, perhaps causing some guests to get hypothermia. It seems sweet that he managed to avoid having someone lean over to him and say, "That's Faye Carson," or that if he did he managed to avoid connecting my surname and hers, and I say nothing. It all seems charming until I realise, later, that I don't impress him either, and that mentioning Faye's name might not have been the worst idea in the world after all.

"Hey, when we met," I begin, as if this thought has just occurred to me, "who was that guy I met? The one whose penthouse we visited."

"Well, it's not actually a penthouse. It's just two flats joined together-"

"Oh, I remember now. He tried to tell me it was three but-"

"Oh, he does that to everyone. He should really take that *House and Garden* story off of the wall if he wants to get that past anyone."

"I think it was *House and Leisure*."

"Ah. What's the difference?"

"One's Condé Nast. The other one's- something else." How did I become complicit in his attempt to change the subject? I stay silent for a few moments so that he eventually has to say,

"He's a guy, who... Used to come to the bar a lot. He knows a lot of my friends, and the guys I work with." I still don't say anything. "So now I... Know him too. He's really weird. He just gives us champagne and money and whatever, drugs for whoever wants but I don't do that, I mean, not there, I don't want to owe him anything."

"So, does he want anything from you? I mean, in return?"

"Oh, yeah. But I mean, I don't have to do anything..." He's probably going to say "Anything

I don't want to" but maybe he realises what a cliché this sounds like and instead he chooses to suddenly hear the song they're playing and he leans his head a little to the side for some kind of emphasis and says, "I love The Strokes," and of course he does, and I order another whisky, and focus on how good-looking he is.

Craig Carson

After the party I wake up hungry and hungover, at the girls' house. I don't know why I decided to stay over, but I can't have been too drunk the night before because I remember at least that it felt like a good idea to stay. I love in the fridge but there is nothing there, or in the freezer, or in the cupboards. I knock on Corinne's door and hope that she doesn't have a napover in there, but she calls out that I can come in, though she doesn't acknowledge my presence my emerging from underneath the blankets, where she seems to be curled tightly.

"Want to get some food?" I ask the lump of Egyptian cotton duvet. "You don't have any."

"Cool," she says, getting up, finding a hoodie on the floor. "Let's go."

My car isn't there so Corinne drives us, taking corners sharply and driving fast and looking unnervingly calm as she comes very close to pedestrians. She is single-mindedly hungry, I realise.

"Did you have a good night?" she asks as she stares into a laminated menu once we're seated at a pub where her friends allow her to drink but not to eat, but where I am held against my will now because she drove us here and because I have a feeling of general guilt that I'd like to appease.

"It was good." I say. "I got pretty drunk."

"Do you think I can have nachos for breakfast? I did too. I kissed a guy who knows you - Mark?"

"Mark... Michaels? Woods?"

"Sturgess."

"Oh, nice guy."

"What about you?" she asks, looking up, keeping a finger on the words 'Bacon Burger' so that she doesn't lose her place.

"I... didn't... see Mark?" I say.

"No, I mean, you left with that nice guy who I always see in the food court and stuff, did you guys hook up?"

I check the time on my BlackBerry, too tired to roll up my sleeve to look at my watch, and see that it's before ten - still too early to order a drink. "I did." I say.

"He's hot," she says, and just like that I've come out to one of my sisters, but she keeps talking. "Good rebound material. An improvement on Ross."

I hesitate then say, "He is. But it's all kind of a weird situation. I mean, with him. He has these friends, who hang out in Camps Bay. And they all know this old guy, in Camps Bay. And they hang out there a lot."

"Two flats converted into one? Little fridge for the champagne? Lot of vitamins?"

"Um. Yes. Have you been there?"

"No, just heard about it."

"From who?"

"Gay friends. Oh, and Faye."

"Oh." There's a silence that I find uncomfortable but then I have to ask, "So, what happens there?"

"I don't know. I gather that he pays them? For... Whatever. But I've never found out. Which I think is better." She looks around for a waitress, then says urgently, "Not that you couldn't tell me if anything like that happened to you."

I smile at her, and think about how the two of us are just alike, in the same way that Faye and Grant are alike and entirely unlike Corinne and me.

"Thanks, baby sister." I flip over the menu to search for the drinks section. "You'll be the first to know if I let an old man pay me for sex."

"You can't sleep with him." Corinne says, frowning.

"Why not?" I ask, genuinely interested to hear this.

"Because you don't need the money. The fact that the Volvo's petrol is getting expensive and you'd like to get a second Tag does not justify doing that."

There are so many problems with her reasoning that I don't know where to begin.

"I don't drive a Volvo," I say.

"The last guy who slept with him did," she replies, so I ask,

"How do you know that?"

"Somebody told me."

"Okay. Why do you think I'd be sleeping with him for money?"

"Because he's offered you money to sleep with him."

"I wouldn't have to take it."

"You wouldn't do it for fun." We both know that, because he's ugly. "You're trying to make me argue with you."

"You're good at it. How poor would I have to be to make it okay?"

"I don't know. In trouble. Ross."

"Ross needs money?"

"Of course he needs money."

"Why hasn't he asked me?"

"Well if you haven't offered by now I guess he thinks that you're not going to be helping him out."

And it's true, but there's also the problem of the fact that if I gave Ross money – gave it to him, in a wad of cash, rather than just paying for his food and generally supporting him – it would feel like I was paying him for what he used to do with me, if only because he deserves it.

"I'm not turning him into a male prostitute," I say.

"You're just looking at it the wrong way," Corinne tells me.

By the time a waitress comes to our table it's late enough to order a vodka and orange juice, so I do, and eggs, and Corinne decides against the nachos and just has a beef burger, and the enthusiasm with which she devours it makes me feel very lethargic.

Morgan

When I saw Mark the Twin last, I realise, I gave the impression that I'm in his English class, and I realise further that he might find it odd if he doesn't see me there again, so I decide to start going to it. Problems with this idea include the fact that he's a year older than we are and as I have taken no English at all, let alone the four first- and second-year classes that would have provided me with the credits to register for this one.

"Don't register?" suggests Jane, so I don't, I just go.

The best part of this idea is that the class is large enough to allow me to blend in with the other kids who are taking it. Because I've never taken any English courses I don't run any risk of meeting a professor who would enquire as to why I was in the wrong class for my age, but then I suspect that professors don't notice these things, and wouldn't be too troubled by them anyway. Another useful point is that the course is on Modernism, so I'm not the only one who hasn't read the set texts.

"Were you here yesterday?" I ask the guy sitting next to me. He seems to be wearing eyeliner, and I like him immediately when he gives me an insightful summary of the previous day's lecture, adding in opinions that I'm willing to bet are his own.

Mark is seated a little in front of me and to my right. He sits alone, asks no questions, and shows that he's paying attention by staring very intensely at the lecturer rather than by taking notes. There is no sign of the fiancé that we've heard that he has, and I am desperate to see her.

Jane Richards

"We should have just climbed over the fence," Morgan says cheerfully as we walk through piles of leaves that have appeared from nowhere – not from the trees, which are still so full of crispy brown foliage that they can't possibly have accommodated any of the leaves we scrunch underfoot between what sits comfortably on the branches.

"Maybe," I say, and smile at her, and choose not to take too seriously the look of steely resolve that she has in her eyes. The wind, which could be called a breeze if you were the understating type, is starting up at what I think is the wrong time of year.

Winter is beginning, and Faye is in a warm suite in a hotel where we will never find her. She eats miniature chips from the minibar and drinks from the assorted miniatures of alcohol in there, even though she knows she'll be drinking a lot and should just open one of the full-size bottles.

She lies in a hotel room that's all white – except for the carpets, which are beige, and some mahogany furniture – and that looks very much like an expensive hotel room should, with a view over the choppy winter sea framed by almost-white curtains. She sleeps uneasily, though, and when she dreams it's a different place she imagines.

This hotel, the unreal one that she conjures, is lavishly furnished too, but in a more modern style and there is no sea view and little light, because of the lush Amazonian vegetation that crowds its reception area and lounge. It's cool, and everything seems to be glossy in greens and reds, and the place really could be anywhere: it could be underground, except for the fact that when you put your head back and look up, you can see the sky, white and complete with tumbling dark clouds. The hotel could be anywhere, but it turns out, when you get into the big black airport transfer car to leave, that you're in the middle of the desert. Leaving the lobby, you see that you were mostly glassed in, and note idly that the structure's elevators are on its outside, presumably allowing a view of the desert without and the forest within. Now that you're in the car, you don't know where you're going, just that there's lots of desert ahead to travel through.

Faye wakes up uneasy, but not anxious. She switches on the TV, and drifts back to sleep.

Sarah Richards

Faye's phone stays turned off and I remain worried.

I visit my sister but I'm anxious and distracted and she's busy watching *Jawbreaker* with Brigitte and Corinne.

"I've missed this movie," she says to the two of them, and one of them says,

"I miss the nineties," then the other replies,

"It would be cooler if we actually had jawbreakers."

"I've got liquorice?" one of them offers.

Faye may be in trouble, she may be angry at me: either way, it's a problem. Every time my phone makes a sound I'm sure that it might be her, with good news or bad, but then finally it is: she sends me a message that says, "I'm okay, in a hotel nearby. Don't worry X". When I try to call her, the phone is off again, and I feel like the message is her telling me to follow her, so I do, but this is all making me nervous so I can't go alone.

Laura

Although his break-up with Ross seems to have caused him little actual pain or sadness, Craig tells me that, "My misery has really helped my writing."

None of this misery shows up in the writing, but he's producing volumes of text, and he lets me read it; sends it to me so that I can print it out and lie on the grass and look through it all, squinting as sun reflects into my eyes off of pieces of paper that are too new and white. It's good, I think, and I smile when I read conversations that I recognise, and that he seems to have copied down word for word from exchanges that've happened between people we know.

Later, I realise that I may not have understood what's happening here: I read a line in his

story and then hear him saying it later, to Faye, and what's most unnerving is that her response is just what's predicted in the story. I wonder briefly whether he's seeing the future, then I wonder even more briefly whether he's writing it into being, like some movie I saw in high school. I come to the conclusion that he's just trying out his words on paper before he utters them, or screening them to a test audience while deciding when to keep them.

When he is gone I miss him, but I try to keep my longing in check. One day without him, I tell myself, is nothing, two days are fine, three days not really so bad – and I seldom have to set my mind to longer periods than that, because we have classes together and so he has to be around me, like it or not, if he hopes to pass the course.

While I'd rather have him with me than not by any means possible, the issue of our daily lectures together begins to become a problem for me as I wonder whether, if he was not forced to, he would still want to see me. Would he make plans to see me outside of campus, because at the moment he does not do that and tends to spend weekends away from me. He might miss me and want to see me after a few days of my absence, I think, but then there's also the chance that he wouldn't miss me at all, to the point of not noticing my absence in the seat next to him, and it's this problem that haunts me. I tell myself that he doesn't want to see me later because we're already studying together, and that that's a lot of time spent together already, and that everyone needs space, but I'm not convinced. This is when I begin to count.

I'm compiling a mix CD for him and downloading the music I know he likes is painstaking because you can't get them on any mainstream download site but have to use one that sends you to endless blogs where individual songs are available for free. I go through each of them and I'm doing well but when I get stuck on the fourth to last song on my list and when I click onto a blog that purportedly has the track but displays the message, "I'm sorry, but you're looking for something that isn't there", it seems very meaningful.

Craig Carson

Tyler tells me that he's in some sort of trouble with the guy from Clifton and with his boss and he throws in words like "scared" and "hit men", all with a sort of fake flippancy, and although I know that his boss is harmless I know nothing about the guy from Clifton, and I realise that it would be awkward if he did end up getting killed or something with me partially responsible, so I tell him he can stay at my place for a while.

My brother and Laura are still in Durban. My mother keeps pointing out that they should remain there a while longer, and why, and Laura has become complicit in the reasoning and the promotion of guilt that Grant is no good at arguing against.

Laura calls me early in the morning and seems to want to talk about nothing which is okay because Tyler isn't awake yet and I've been passing the time mainly by pacing but then she asks,

"If you could get rid of one of my friends, who would it be?"

"What?" I ask.

"Which one of my friends would you get rid of if you could choose one of them?" My silence must still sound confused because she goes on explaining: "I mean, I guess what I'm asking is which of my friends you like least."

"Get rid of how?"

"Oh, I don't know. I just mean – who would your life be better without?"

"Well, none of them I guess. Because they're *your* friends, so they don't affect my life that much, you know."

"Oh, okay."

It seems that I've given her the wrong answer. "Why?" I ask. "Who of my friends would you get rid of if you could... get rid of... one of them?"

"Oh, I don't know." She sounds to me like she's shrugging. "None of them, I guess. Ross maybe? But it was a stupid question, you're right. You can't just make people go away."

Something about what we've just said must trouble her, because she soon ends the

conversation, without saying much more. With the call over, I take in my surroundings for the first time since the phone woke me.

I'm at Faye's, having slept on the couch. Visiting is awkward with Ross here, but since Faye's been missing I've been around here even more than when she was present, I don't know why. Now, everyone else is somewhere other than this, doing various things that had to be done, but Sarah's here with me. It's nine in the morning and she takes a bottle of wine out of the fridge and hands it to me to open but before I can open it she asks, "What do you want to do today?"

"Um," I reply. "I hadn't thought about it. Do you want to go for a drive?"

"Okay," she says.

In the parking garage, she seems oddly purposeful for someone who's just acquiescing to my suggestion, on the road, driving, even more so.

"Where are we going?" I ask.

"I don't know. Where do you think we should go?"

"Well, we're on Main Road now, headed towards Camps Bay, so I suppose we should go to Camps Bay?"

"Yes, we could do that." She says, in a voice that would need a smiley face to express its pleasantly but unenthusiastically assenting tone if it was typed rather than spoken.

"Or... We could keep driving?"

"You're right. It's such a nice day and we said we wanted a drive."

She puts on her sunglasses and then lights a cigarette as we drive along the road that's beginning to wind now, and it's around about the time that we first see the view of the sea that I begin to fear for my life, but both of her hands are back on the wheel before we hit the part of the road that takes us alongside the beach.

When I realise what's happening, I almost tell her that I know that we're going to be looking for Faye and that that's okay with me as long as we do get to eat something at some point, but since she must be doing things in this way for a reason I say,

"While we're here-"

"What?"

"She said she was in a hotel nearby, didn't she? While we're here - I mean, she likes these hotels - should we, you know, check if she's around?"

"Well, we need to find Faye," says Sarah, summarising, and I'm about to tell her that she hasn't known Faye as long as I have, and doesn't understand that she does this kind of thing, but then I realise that she has, and that she probably knows Faye better than I do. It's safe to say, then, that if Sarah chooses to ignore the evidence that this is just another of Faye's episodes, that I'm not going to change her mind with simple, powerless facts. "But how would we do that?"

"I don't know," I reply, very genuinely this time. "What do you think?" She frowns deeply.

"I don't know either." I realise with some sadness that she's being honest too now. "The thing is, I mean, her two favourite hotels are nearby, so..."

"Yeah. But we can't wait to see if she goes in and out of the entrance, because that's the whole appeal of these places for her - that she can order everything in. And we can't just go up to reception and ask if she's checked in."

"Can't we?"

"No. They wouldn't tell us."

She pulls to the side of the road, perhaps so that she can think more clearly, transferring the tiny part of her mind that's been focused on driving to the task of deciding how best we can apprehend Faye.

The hotels I like are in the city centre. I prefer dark furnishing, dim lighting, and as impersonal a feel as possible, because if I wanted warmth and intimacy I'd be setting up a home, not leaving mine for a hotel. My sister likes the kinds of hotels that like white and beige, the kind that serve high tea, very specifically the kind that have sea views. This is how we've ended up in Camps Bay near to the kind of bars that house second-rate celebrities in summer and disappointed tourists in winter, parked near to the grass and palm trees that separate the road from the sea, hesitating

before we pass the first of Faye's regular residences on the way to the second.

"Maybe what we need is lunch," Sarah says, but I've had an idea that's made me forget the prawn cocktail that I'd been worrying was too ironically retro to find in an area that takes itself as seriously as this one does.

"I've had an idea," I say. "Let's just try it out here and then if that doesn't work out so well for us, we'll have lunch before thinking up a better plan."

"Okay." She replies.

"I'm looking for my sister," I tell the hotel's receptionist. "We're going for lunch and I've forgotten whether we're meeting up here or at the restaurant, and now her BlackBerry's died." I pepper my story with facts, not too many, and roll my eyes for authenticity. "Has a blonde girl who kind of looks like me just left?"

"Um. No, sorry. I've been on duty since ten, and no-one, you know, young, has come out here. I can give her a message if she comes past?" The way that this suggests that this woman has in fact encountered the 'her' to which she refers troubles me momentarily, but I just say, "That would be lovely. Just tell her that Craig came looking for her and that she needs to charge her phone."

"I shouldn't tell her where to meet you?"

"No, it's okay. Just that she really needs to turn her phone on. Thanks again." I smile at her, and Sarah and I turn to leave.

"Sir," the receptionist calls after us when we're about to walk out. "I might be confused, but I think your sister checked out yesterday."

"Oh," I say, not knowing how to ask her to elaborate without breaking the illusion that this is all a very casual interaction. "Well, I could be the one who's getting this wrong. It's the eighth though, right?"

"It's the ninth," the receptionist replies, smiling for the first time.

"Well here I am thinking that my sister's an hour late and I'm about-" I check my watch for effect - "Twenty three hours and fifteen minutes behind schedule. Well, I better go and find her and act very sorry."

"You're sure it was his sister?" Sarah asks, a little too intensely.

"Almost. Not as tall, long blonde hair - a girl - but the same face? Same watch?"

"That's our Faye," I say.

"Annabelle."

"What?"

"I might have the wrong person, because this girl was named Annabelle. Is that not your sister's name?"

Sarah jumps in here. "Well that's her second name. She just hates 'Faye'. It's not even on her ID book." She rolls her eyes, shakes her head once, just as she does at Faye's real quirks, then we really do leave.

"Wouldn't she have had to have shown them some kind of proof of who she was? I mean, for her credit card?" Sarah asks when we're alone over lunch.

"Not if she paid with cash," I reply. My sister always carries notes in her wallet, or a coat pocket, or a hidden part of her handbag, and will say from time to time in a voice laden with meaning, "There are some things you can't pay for with a credit card."

"Four days of hotel bills, upfront, in cash?"

"It's possible. If she'd planned ahead."

"Faye, planning ahead?"

"Okay, it seems unlikely. But she obviously charmed them into it somehow. I mean, we had the same watch, right?"

"Right," she says.

There's no prawn cocktail here, so I order a seafood pizza which as it turns out may have been meant for two, and Sarah orders tagliatelle which she twirls around and around her fork, but doesn't eat much of it.

"She's just... Exhausting, isn't she?"

"She's so exhausting," I say, and Sarah looks relieved when I do.

"I guess we'd all be bored without exhausting people," she adds, as if she's worried that Faye is sitting listening at a table nearby and that she'll take this the wrong way.

"I suppose so," I agree, thinking of Tyler. "We keep them alive, they give us something to live for." She likes this, and smiles at me.

"It all just feels sinister. Right?"

"Right. Like we're going to find out something terrible, that'll make our skins crawl."

"But there isn't much left to shock us, is there? I mean, sex, drugs, rent boys. We've kind of done it all."

"Rent boys?" I ask.

"Oh, I called the other day when you were in the shower, so that guy living in your flat picked up your BlackBerry."

"How long did you talk for that you discussed his profession? And he's a model, so I don't know why he went and said that."

"Well, he started telling me about his blog, so I read some of it, and that was just the impression I got. I just feel like we've seen everything, you know," she says, and she shrugs really sadly, and I want to tell her to turn around and look at the sunset behind her because it's breathtaking and might make her feel better, but I just say,

"Maybe that's what Corinne and all of them are looking for with this Clarence thing. They're pretty jaded themselves, for girls in their first year out of high school."

"Corinne and them? Oh no, this is because of Jane. She's the problem here."

"Well, maybe the whole obsession will blow over soon," I say, pouring the last of the wine out of the bottle, remaining neutral.

"It is an obsession though, isn't it?"

"Oh I don't know," I reply. "I don't think they're obsessed, just bored. They need boyfriends or something."

"You sound just like your sister," Sarah says, and rolls her eyes.

"Faye?"

"She thinks everyone needs a boyfriend, and then they'll be happy."

"Not me." I smile at her here, but realise that I don't want to talk about it so I continue, saying that, "You guys don't have boyfriends." Sarah shrugs, looks away.

"She does the long-distance thing so that she never has to spend too much time with any one guy, and I just- I don't know. Guys don't like me. Or don't think I'm hot, so, that's how it is." I don't think that she means this to sound self-pitying, so I reply,

"I'm sure you can't say that no-one thinks you're hot."

"I don't mean no-one. I'm just a specific type, I think. Some guys like me: married men, lecturers, tutors. Unavailable men. So I don't feel completely ugly, and I mean, I like unavailable men so it would all work really well if they weren't - you know, unavailable." I nod.

Sarah Richards

"Okay," you say, and you carry on drinking your wine but nod in a way that shows that you know what I mean.

You're really very beautiful, and I look at you and wonder if you know, then you look at me, and I know that you do. You always lean forward with elbows on the table when I talk and I suspect that it's something you learned to do long ago to give people the impression that you're enthralled by what they're saying, but one of your legs is stretched out to the side, as if you're trying to trips passersby, to get as much late summer sun as you can.

I look at my own glass, in my own thin hand, and it's dripped condensation in the unexpected heat but the wine's not warm yet thanks to the fact that you put ice cubes into it when you poured it out of the bottle for us, just like your sister does.

"Anything but chardonnay," you said, shrugging, when we ordered the wine, sunglasses on

inside. You heard the phrase from some arrogant boy on campus who heard it from his mother and you liked it: the first letters of the words spell 'ABC'. We sat inside to begin with, but then moved outside, each with a glass in one hand, you with the other hand on the bottle tucked under your arm.

"Craig." I say, and you answer,

"Yes?" and I forget entirely what I was going to say.

When it starts to seem that it's getting darker – and it's getting dark earlier and earlier these days – we realise we'll need to go home soon, although neither of our phones have rung; no-one is looking for us.

"I can't drive," you say to me, meaning that you're too drunk to do so. "I don't think you can, either."

"Probably not." I reply.

"Well, we're going to have to stay here. Luckily, we know a good hotel in the area."

Morgan

Taking one course with Mark seemed frivolous, taking two feels like a plan. He's enrolled in an etymology class that I heard someone say is basically for anyone who can't pass other BA courses, so I'm surprised to find everyone producing quite lengthy homework assignments on my first day there. I'm more surprised still to hear that we are going to discuss these answers – every single one of them – right now, and I'm taking out a notepad and preparing to lean over and tell someone that I've left my workbook at home when someone sits down beside me and says,

"Hi," and I turn to see Mark sitting beside me.

"Hi," I say. "You take this class?"

"Yeah," He says, smiling, and takes out his book and assignment, and I decide to be at least partially honest before something awful happens, so I say,

"I haven't done this. Can I read from your answer sheet?"

The class starts and I find that it's interesting – it's essentially about etymology, a word I did not know the meaning of but do now, and we discuss the meaning of the word 'necromancy', finding that it means more than just 'talking to dead people'. The lecture venue is one I haven't seen before and it's furnished like most of the other older rooms – steps of a blocked desk-and-chair structure, walls painted in colours that are drab but that fulfil our fantasies of an academic environment, linoleum floors added later than the other furnishings, white board added even later – but this room is unique in that it's in the centre of the building, so it's surrounded by other classrooms on all sides, and positioned between two levels. I feel claustrophobic in here, then very safe, many degrees of separation from the world outside and the persistent winter rain.

"Our next word is 'ameliorate'," begins the lecturer, who has so much energy that she almost ruins my sensation of being ensconced in a cozy separate world in which time slows down. "How about... You, with the stripes, what did you answer here?"

I find that she's pointing at me so I glance down to check if it would really be possible for a normal human being to see the fine stripes on the t-shirt that you can only see a tiny triangle of under my cardigan and blazer, and although I conclude that it would not, I realise that that is what's happened. Mark's paper is positioned between us so that if he looks down at it it looks as if he's put his homework at his right, and if I look down at it it's on my left, not that far off, and with my heart beating because I feel that I may have been caught, I say,

"To make better?"

"To make better," she answers, in agreement I think, and then goes on to elaborate with facts that I won't remember because the rush of relief I feel at the fact that she didn't point out to the entire room that I'm an intruder here is overwhelming. The class passes quickly after this, except when the world slows down a little as I watch Mark deliver his answer, and as he's getting up to leave he says,

"So, I'll see you for the test tomorrow?" and this is not something that I've anticipated at all.

dangerous if taken in large quantities, but then wonders why Faye is sitting on the couch with her face in her hands. She remembers that Clarence is dead, and wonders again who he was.

University has become one long hallucinogenic experience for Sarah, although before today she could have been described as mostly drug-free. Her constant dull confusion results from a lack of sleep, a strange and meagre diet, too much to drink, the always-shifting Cape Town weather, and being constantly lost in university buildings designed in ways that become curiouser and curiouser as a day wears on.

"I'm calling my mom," Faye says.

It's because of her pride in her drug-free status – not a Just-Say-No pride, but the sly I-know-something-you-don't-know feeling of having others think that you look like the kind of girl who conceals pills in her underwear or has cocaine residue on her medical aid card when in fact you aren't – that Sarah is having trouble taking the pills that sit in front of her.

They're tranquilisers. They're meant to help her sleep, so that she can alleviate at least one of her symptoms, and hope that a cause or two will be removed in turn. They're yellow, and no-one calls them tranquilisers, they're anti-anxiants now, but this is no comfort. Sarah knows that once she swallows them, she'll be like Faye's mother, and her own mother, and most of the other moms we know. The justification that she allows all of them is that they have children to deal with.

She picks up the pills in fingers that have always been slender, but are heading over to the wrong side of skeletal. She looks at them, and resolves to put them into her mouth.

The phone rings – a landline, like no-one has anymore. It's her mother.

"Hello Mom," she says, trying to sound calm; wondering why she isn't.

"How are you, Se?" Her mother asks.

"Very well," she replies, too vehemently and too loudly, her bony body squirming in the big chair next to the obsolete telephone.

"So you haven't heard?" her mother asks. "About Clarence?"

"Clarence?"

Her mother is sorry to be the one to tell her, but Clarence has passed away.

"Passed away?"

"Yes." There's a tense pause. "No, you might as well know, you'll find out anyway. It was a suicide. It's so difficult when it happens like that. I know we all think that there was something we could have done, but the truth is that we can never know what's going on in another person's life, or in their head for that matter."

"No."

"You can't feel much like talking now. Please, be strong for the girls. I'll call you later."

"Thanks, Mom."

She ends the call and puts the phone down stiffly. Her heart is beating too fast, as it has been for the past nine days or more; she doesn't know why. Sarah has never met a Clarence. She's terribly sorry that he has met his end, but it's a name ridiculous enough to be remembered, and she doesn't remember it at all.

Craig Carson

On the day that I find out that Clarence is dead, I walk down a corridor of Faye's building with my earphones in. I'm listening to The Beach Boys, I think, but I could be wrong because I don't remember. The passage is stark for such an expensive block. There's lots of exposed cement, and it's in sharp contrast to the lavish pool area, and to the interior of Faye's apartment, which is well-furnished whether or not she keeps it clean. I let myself in with the key that's meant to be Ross's but that Faye hasn't noticed that I now possess. The scene inside is unsettling when you see it with what in my memory is muted volume, but what at the time was probably sixties pop, maybe The Beatles.

Sarah sits at the dining-room table (mahogany, large enough to seat twelve, too big for the flat, too small for Faye's dinners). Faye sits on the couch (white, stained with an impracticality that

our mother warned against and Faye couldn't resist). Both of them are facing me, but neither seems to notice that the other one is in the room. Faye still hasn't had her mirror hung up, and I think for a moment that I might try to do it myself.

Faye is absorbed in her tears; not violent ones, but the kind that can persist for hours. Sarah is fixated on something between her fingertips, which are looking frighteningly bony lately. The sun's setting, and it's easy to say this in retrospect, but I felt then that although something bad had happened, something far, far more awful was still coming. It's Faye who looks at me first, and speaks, and I take out my earphones. The music must be loud, because I can still hear it from waist-level.

"Clarence is dead," she says, perhaps repeating herself or perhaps expanding on what she'd just told me.

I look at Sarah to see what the appropriate reaction to the news is. She looks back now, but shrugs, eyes detachedly wide. Faye stands up and comes over to me, and stretches up to put her arms around my shoulders.

"I'm so sorry. I know that you boys were friends with him."

Clarence was a friend of Grant's. For Faye's sake I say,

"It'll be okay," although I realise as I say it that it's not okay for Clarence, and I'm wondering if Grant will be okay when he hears, if he doesn't know yet, and then I ask, "How did it happen?"

"He killed himself," she says. The tears are gone from her voice. In its place are interest, confusion, and perhaps incredulity.

Whatever it was that had been in Sarah's hand, she swallows them.

Ross

We drive to the Waterfront to search for something for Laura to wear to the funeral. My place in the driver's seat makes me feel a little superior to her, despite the fact that she is about to spend the equivalent of my monthly salary on a pair of ill-fitting pants. It's warm in the car, and I wish that we - that's Craig and me - were going somewhere with a fireplace. They're doing their utmost to convince me that my company is as valuable to the excursion as my driving is. Craig is being implausibly acquiescent. Laura lifts her efforts to be nice beyond her usual uninterested politeness to a level that's almost enthusiasm. Craig has almost managed to convince me that he and I had planned to take this trip anyway, and that Laura is just tagging along. I'm not sure what it was that the two of us had planned to do at the mall, but perhaps we should be grateful to Laura for giving our day purpose. We go to get sushi after Laura finds a dark dress. Laura and Craig are combining two of their favourite topics in a conversation: themselves, and moneyed personalities. Craig poses the question,

"If you could have anyone design the costumes for your play, who would it be?"

Laura answers with no hesitation,

"Vivienne Westwood."

They haven't written plays. They're not going to write plays.

"Vivienne Westwood?" Craig asks. He is gently incredulous; there are consequences to hurting Laura's feelings.

"Yes." She replies.

"But I feel like she's all wrong for your genre."

He expands on the theory, then ends with the damning words,

"Anyway, she designed the costumes for Tank Girl."

"I hate Tank Girl."

"I've never seen it."

"Neither have I."

"Prada could work for a period piece. So could Chanel."

"What if they collaborated?"

My mind wanders off somewhere, and when it returns,

"It's never really too early," Craig says.

Laura affirms,

"Except if you're talking about white wine. Then it's always too early."

Cocktails arrive on our table. There's one for me too, despite the fact that I almost always prefer beer.

"But isn't that just always the case with them?"

"It always is. I can't understand why."

I could just say "no" next time Craig asks me to come along on an outing like this, but I know that I won't. There's really no use setting limits, for the simple reason that I am expendable. There have been others before me, and there will be plenty of others to follow. I look at these people – Craig and Laura today, Faye or Sarah or Corinne or Morgan on any other day – and I realise that nothing can go wrong in their lives. In their company I have developed a certainty that there is nothing in this world that premium vodka and a fillet steak with a blue cheese and mushroom ragout won't solve. I'm certain that despite what literature will tell you, no real tragedy befalls the young and beautiful.

"I heard that he didn't die from the bleeding," Laura says. "I heard that it was when he fell – he smashed the back of his skull open and that was why he died."

"He wouldn't have fallen if he hadn't had his wrist sliced open. He must have been dizzy from all of the bleeding."

"You're so right."

Sarah Richards

I've heard sad people speak about the relief that comes with having some minor tragedy befall them; something about which, for a time, they can feel the justifiable, healthy sadness that must surely come with such an event. The lingering emotions of distress and misery can be expressed as a reaction to the tragedy – perhaps hyperbolic, but justifiable – then, following the grieving process, the bereaved can experience a state of happiness greater than whatever he or she felt previously, as waves of emotion wash away whatever sticky dregs of negativity had clung. This wouldn't, of course, be likely in the case of some truly horrible, close-to-home event, but could very possibly happen in a situation such as the one in which we now found ourselves. A distant acquaintance had died. For some of us, a person who we knew of but did not know had died, and so the outpouring of emotion that should have followed Clarence's death should have been just the cathartic release I'd heard discussed. We should have felt the kind of sadness that resulted not from the decline in our own quality of life by Clarence's recent absence, but because of the loss of youth, and its personification. We should have been reflecting on the demise of a strong and well-loved boy, in the prime of his life. It should have been the kind of event that caused us to appreciate those still with us, and to better understand the value of life, once we had finished wiping our eyes at the big funeral with lots of family and boys in private school uniforms who had known him about as well as we had.

But Clarence's death was not like that.

Craig Carson

The time of day makes me feel uneasy. In Durban it would be getting dark in an hour or two; maybe some internal clock of mine is set, still, to East Coast time. All of the old boys from Clarence's school, distinguished by their saved school ties worn now with their grown-up suits, look more at ease, and I put this down to the fact that this is their city, they're used to it. It's dark here anyway, although the sun won't set for a long time, because of black, swirling clouds above us. It's not going to rain. Still, the weather will do for a funeral. It's grey and unpleasant enough to reflect the mood, and the sun does not smile a disrespectful face on the mourning. It would be better

if it rained, because funerals are meant to be all tears and black umbrellas and misery, but this will do.

"Can I wear these inside?" Faye asks me, with a vague gesture to her face.

"The sunglasses?" She pauses, possibly wondering what else I could mean, then replies,

"Yes."

"Sure. If you're crying."

"If I wear them, no-one will know."

"True."

My sister is at her best at times of misery; good with sad people and skilled at casting aside her own middle-class turmoil to deal with the tragedy at hand. She frustrates Sarah often by cancelling their plans with the words, 'I can't make it today. He's having *drama*,' in reference to some friend of theirs. With the amount of drama that Faye herself has generated and weathered, she is the expert on the topic, and always the one to turn to.

Beneath the big black Prada glasses she's got a healthy glow to her cheeks today, and causes a number of the schoolboys to forget the grimness of the occasion as she walks past, even though she's gone to great pains to look demure. One of them glares at me for being the one walking into the church with her but he's beautiful so I smile back at him and he looks away.

Corinne Carson

It's not going to rain. Everyone has their umbrellas at the ready, but that means nothing. They have handkerchiefs and tissues ready, too, but that doesn't mean they plan to cry.

Clarence's funeral is the most beautiful I've ever seen, but I'm no judge – it's fair to say that I've encountered far less death than my fair share, even for my relatively short life so far. The lilies that decorate the church are a pure, deep white (white can be deep) and the church is cold and timeless as a good church should be. The pictures chosen of Clarence were taken at an age when he had already become beautiful in the way that we knew him, but still had an innocence that I, for one, never got to see in the living version of the unflinching figure who now surrounds us like the the church is meant to remind the mourners that God does.

"Why would you kill yourself on a front porch?" Jane asks beside me, her obsession budding.

"Making a statement," Brigitte says, leaning in from my other side, "like that boy who hung himself with his school tie."

"Maybe he'd changed his mind," Morgan whispers, "Maybe he was going for help."

"The maid was there. He could have asked her for help."

"He could have phoned."

My attempts to silence them fail, but when we're told to pray they keep quiet.

Everyone who attends wears black, in every texture imaginable, and a limited range of tasteful styles. Jewellery is limited to diamonds and pearls. I feel for what may be the first time in my life that I've got the dress code right, in a black cashmere cardigan over a satin dress that isn't mine. The fact that everyone is dressed in black comforts me; the fact that people are willing to mourn Clarence outwardly demonstrates to my mind that they are mourning him inwardly, and the fact that they mourn him makes his death hurt my delicate emotions far less.

It's when I wonder to myself whether God would like what we're wearing to the funeral that I start to question our collective thought process. I wonder if it matters what we're wearing in church. It might matter less, because we should be concerned with bigger things, or higher thoughts, but there's the problem of it possibly mattering more because we should be showing our respect here. I wonder if God cares what we choose to wear to church, then I wonder if it's very sanctimonious to consider this question at all, then I wonder if thinking about dresses in church is very frivolous.

My sister is wearing a black Gucci dress, and in spite of myself I want to look like her.

"Is there no alcohol here?" Faye asks me after the service is finished, and I find it odd that

she structures her sentence like that.

Sarah Richards

I truly didn't know Clarence, but for the sake of everyone here I pretend that I did. I'm almost certain that I had never even met Clarence, but some of the people here are friends, more of them acquaintances, and all infinitely watchable. All eyes are on Clarence's twin brother. Does he still count as a twin? He's in a waistcoat, and a slightly gingery girl who must be his girlfriend does not leave his side. I dislike her immediately. Also in the family row is someone who no-one knows. She is strawberry blonde and pretty and about the age of the deceased, and is wearing a black Chanel dress and a lot of dark, respectful make-up. I don't mind her. Jane taps me on the shoulder. She asks in a whisper,

"Who was Clarence?"

I shrug in response in the darkness, eyes wide.

Laura is looking weepy although she has no greater knowledge of the deceased than all of the rest of us do, and she's clinging to Craig's arm while looking pretty wearing a dress that he chose for her at her request. She's exhausting but he's learned Faye's need to pay penance for all the turmoil that they've created by being endlessly patient with other exhausting people.

Jane Richards

After Clarence dies, Brigitte develops the habit of calling her younger sisters morning and night. She's felt guilty since we arrived in Cape Town about leaving them alone with their parents – perpetually on the brink of divorce – but more than guilt motivates her now. Standing next to me with her copper hair pulled into a low ponytail and a thin black cardigan covering her balletic shoulders, she feels cold as she has the same thought that we're all having: it could have been someone we cared about. We're all treating this as an act of God, of course. We're ignoring the fact that Clarence made his choice and ended his own life, spilling a lot of his own blood, we're told. We choose to act and think as if Clarence was killed by a bolt of lightning, an unexpectedly strong current, or an aeroplane plummeting without warning or explanation from the heavens.

"It can happen to anyone," we say, shaking our heads, and we sound just like our mothers.

In the months that follow Clarence's funeral, Nancy starts to cry in the restaurants and coffee shops in which she used to eat so ravenously, and where she now picks at her food, although she never fails to finish what's on her plate – our meals just take longer. Today, though, she does not shed a tear, and so in the months to follow we all wonder if it's Clarence she's crying about.

"Would you like some?" Faye asks me in the church hall, and offers me a glass of orange juice that she's probably spiked with something because it doesn't smell quite as I'd expect, and because Laura's orange juice is a different colour to hers.

"I'm alright," I say, because I want to look like her but maybe not be like her, and I'm feeling extremely edgy and think that I'd be worried that some mourner or other would find me out sooner or later.

"I'll have some," Sarah says, "It'll take the edge off," because she's tense too, and no-one ever finds her out. They switch their glasses quickly and smoothly.

"One of us should have married him while we had the chance." Jaime says, and Sarah drinks deeply from her glass of orange juice.

"For the money or to save him from his murderer?" Morgan asks.

"Either."

"I'd have made such a good wife."

"You're not dead, he is. You'll still make a good wife."

"Do you really think so?"

"I think he would have needed more than a wife to save him."

"From himself or from his murderer?"

"Aren't we going with the suicide theory here?"

And of course, we are, here, but we're still saying "died", not "killed himself".

To understand all of this, we have to go back to the beginning, and it all begins with Faye.

Corinne Carson

It all begins with my sister because it's Faye who welcomes us here after the holiday that followed the end of high school, when we moved to Cape Town for university. My mother has told her to take care of the six of us when we get here and in her own way, Faye does that: she makes sure that we're drunk before noon every day from the time we arrive until we escape to live in res two weeks later.

Faye lives with Sarah and their best friend Ross in an apartment that's opulent but just big enough for three, but despite space constraints she has all of us there every day, and Craig and Grant when they have the time, all draped over chairs or lounging on the floor, and we spill out into the block's courtyard and pool area to drink rosé out of plastic cups and make a noise that the neighbours forgive. She introduces us to all of her friends who come to visit, but I don't remember them until much later, or anything from that week other than the taste of flat sparkling wine and that I repeatedly called it champagne and was corrected, and an argument that ensued about new money.

My first night in Cape Town is what I can remember. I fly to the city the day before my friends do, and I go out to dinner with Faye and my brothers and Faye's friends. Looking back, I think I understand it all, but on that night the significance of most of it is lost on me.

On that night, Faye's numb, and unlikely to be able to eat much at all, but I don't know this about my sister. I don't know, either, that my brother Craig has my sister's best friend Ross's hand between his legs. Craig, with his lovely, expensive clothes and cheekbones, sits next to Laura, who does know. Craig calls her his best friend, because she's too pink-lipped and radiant for "fag hag". Laura is oblivious to the fact that Sarah, sitting next to her, thinks that Laura is insane, but it's becoming apparent to everyone else. Later, Sarah will hate herself for hating Laura, and have to try her best to avoid throwing up her food.

Grant is my other brother, between me and Craig in age, and between me and Sarah at the table. When he was in high school, Grant was called normal rather than termed a jock, but everyone around him's become strangely cultured in a way that wearing a nice brand of golf shirt doesn't cover. What's going on between Ross and Craig hasn't escaped Grant, who isn't stupid despite what stereotypes will tell you. His first clue was that Craig was on top of Ross when Grant walked into Craig's room a few days ago, and a lot more things have seemed to make sense to him since then.

"What are you going to be studying?" Laura asks me. She's meeting me for the first time, she's doesn't know that I'm happiest when I'm left alone.

"Probably a BA, I think." is my reply. "I think- it'll be a BA."

Her friendliness is incurable. "A BA in what, do you think? English, like us?"

Sarah rolls her eyes behind her menu, with reference to Laura's unshakeable habit of speaking about Craig and herself as if the two of them are a unit. A lot of listeners think when she does this that she's talking as if they're a couple, but they're wrong: if you listen closely enough you'll realise that she's talking about them as if the two are one entity. Craig has never corrected her, and he never will.

Sarah will order the cubed pork belly or the beef carpaccio.

The room feels too warm, and Grant undoes the top button of his shirt, but as he does so the waiter catches his eye and raises what seems to be an appreciative eyebrow over too-stylish black-rimmed glasses. He is wearing the tightest jeans Grant has seen, also in black, and none of the rest of us notice. Grant looks down at his menu.

"So did you read the book that they assigned?" Laura pursues on an exhausted topic.

In the background plays music that lacks lyrics or much in the way of volume, but makes up for it with quantities of pretentiousness and chiming sounds.

"What's everyone having?" Craig asks. It's his desperate attempt to change the subject, for

my sake, and Ross supports the effort. They are new enough to their relationship to believe that this means that they understand each other perfectly.

"Shall we get some more bread for the table?" Asks Ross, and I wonder if he knows that he's drawing attention to the fact that he's just finished the previous basket entirely on his own. Craig or Sarah will pay his bill for him, and he knows that we all know this.

"I think I'll have the beetroot thing," says Faye, and Sarah nods. Sarah wants to ask Faye to share the beetroot option with her, even though she knows that most people would consider the portion to be barely enough for one, because the carpaccio is starting to sound altogether too bloody, but she doesn't ask.

"Do you want to share that with me?" Laura asks Faye.

"Cool." Faye replies, and Laura turns back to me and asks,

"Did you like the story, though?" and informs the table in general and me in particular that, "I really didn't. I mean, I get that it's... a comment... on the country's... situation. But I just didn't enjoy it."

"It was depressing, I think. Especially the part with the dogs."

Grant is not only the sole straight male at the table; he is also the only non-BA student. He has nothing to say.

"Do you want to share the pork belly?" Ross asks, leaning over to Sarah.

"Okay, cool." Sarah feels that there's some insult in Ross's presumption that she'd want this, and knows she should be annoyed by the fact that she has in all likelihood just collected at least this part of Ross's bill, but she doesn't mind for a minute.

I probably start to play with my fringe, as is my nervous custom. Like Faye's, my hair doesn't get greasy. She's drinking champagne and a toast to my future here. She and Craig touch glasses, looking entitled, and acting entitled, and generally being the most entitled pair you will ever meet. One is more detached than the other. Craig feels like he's drowning in wine. People are looking at him, asking him what he thinks about things.

I'm the one he identifies with, but I won't see this for a long time, and I won't know for even longer. Our brother and sister are loud, overachievers, boringly beautiful. He sees me lost in my own world, and overestimates me, imagining that I have all of their secrets already figured out. He removes Ross's hand from his leg.

"How is Durban, anyway?" he asks me, as the one who's arrived from there most recently.

"Oh, pretty much the same as usual, I think."

"Still leading an exhausting life next to the pool?" asks Ross, drunk on someone else's wine, and well aware of it.

"Still jealous?" Faye asks him, not bothering with a sideways glance.

"Still superior?"

They might be fighting, or they might just be engaged in some sort of playful verbal sparring. No-one can be sure, least of all me, only feeling vaguely that I may have started this.

"Still inferior?" Craig contributes.

"You're all still childish," Grant laughs, looking into his plate with none of Faye's detachment, bracing himself, almost hoping that everyone will turn on him, before things get nasty and inevitable. But this is not to be.

"Stay out of this," Craig says, and Grant is surprised that it's this that hurts him, largely because of how gently it's said.

"Still controlling?" asks Sarah. She's not sure whose side she's on. She should defend Faye, as Faye would defend her, but she'd rather be on Ross's side tonight. She's not sure whose side Craig is on, so he seems to be a safe bet as an opponent.

"Still a bitch?" asks Ross.

"Still taking our money?" Craig asks.

It's not called for; no-one will dispute that. Everyone expects Ross to be taken aback, but he doesn't flinch.

"Still in denial?" he asks, loudly and clearly.

There is a clear division between those who know what he means and those who don't, but discomposure unites them. Thankfully, Grant realises, no-one crosses the divide.

"Shut up, Ross, you're just being difficult," commands Laura crisply, pushing her plate away. "Now Corinne, I want to hear all about your school."

I tell her, expansively and eagerly, and no-one wants dessert.

I don't know if any of this is significant, but it's what I have to offer when we try to piece together the story of what happened. We've begun to dwell on this task, but nothing seems to matter more than discovering if we could have seen what was on its way.

Jaime

Faye has blonde hair that would look trashy on anyone but her – it's almost white in the sun, and there's lots of it – and dark blue eyes that seem fascinated by you. She must be clever, but she shows no evidence of intelligence in everyday life, and I think that we love her for this. She has a beauty queen's smile, and nothing bad ever happens to her.

Fourteen of us grew up on our street at home, eleven of us girls. Faye and Sarah were the oldest, then came Craig two years later, and Faye's other brother Grant a year after that. Morgan's older sister Lindsay is the same age as Grant. Corinne is the youngest Carson, five years younger than Faye and the same age as the rest of us – Jane, Nancy, Brigitte, Morgan and me. Brigitte Laridon has two younger sisters who she raised, and I have a younger brother who I hardly know. It might seem unlikely that the six of us would all happen to be the same age, in the same grade, on the same street, but it's not the unlikeliest thing that's ever happened in our lives. It's not the unlikeliest thing that will happen in this story, by a long way.

Disregard a few of these people, as I have. Many of them ceased to be important a long time ago, and you'll see, like I did, which ones need to be remembered.

Perhaps even before that happened, I ceased to be important to them. Faye, however, can't lose her significance because I can't help feeling that in a lot of ways she made me, or maybe all of us. I am nothing like her, and yet everything I do is an echo of something she did before.

Grant Carson

Before the girls arrive here, Faye and I are lying next to the pool. It's been a long summer, and we both have very dark tans. Faye is drinking margaritas the colour of her hair and wearing the same beige bikini that she's been wearing for at least two weeks, even though she has a selection of others in varied colours and patterns somewhere in her room. It's been a long summer for us. We're all bored of each other's company; even I am, and I don't live here.

The summer might have been too long, but the fact that it's ending makes me edgy, and I feel anxious about the fact that my sister and her five friends will be here in a few days.

"Where are they going to stay?" I ask Faye. She takes a moment to reply and I think that maybe she's gone to sleep behind her sunglasses, but soon enough she says,

"In res. Mom organised it." It's been hot all day, but it's clouded over now. It might rain for the first time in days.

"When res opens they'll do that. But it can't be open yet?"

"Mom organised it."

And that's how my mother is, and that's how a lot of conversations end. Faye chooses to continue this one.

"They can stay here for a bit, if they want to. It'll be fun. We can take them out with us. All of us together again. It'll be nice."

I don't know who she means by 'us'.

It might rain, and I'd be relieved if it did, but we stay outside because the cool air is soothing and the atmosphere inside is stale in every sense.

"Craig too?" I ask.

"I don't know. I hope so," she says. She's giving nothing away.

Craig is inside the flat with Sarah. Sarah is more tired of everyone else's company than anyone else is, but she's trying to hide it. Craig has been around a lot, more to see Ross than to see Faye, but Sarah doesn't mind him. He's as angry as she is.

"Does Corinne know that you do drugs?"

I have Faye's attention, and she rolls onto her stomach and takes off her sunglasses to tell me, "I don't think so. No." She frowns, then rubs the lines that the frown might have caused on her forehead.

"I won't tell her."

Faye shakes her head in agreement – no, we won't tell Corinne.

"Does she know about Craig?"

Faye frowns again, confused, then squints at me. "What about Craig?" It occurs to me then that Faye doesn't know about Craig either; about Craig and Ross, and this unsettles me for two reasons.

"That Craig does drugs too," I lie, badly, while there's still time.

The first reason is that this is Faye, and Faye is meant to know everything, but she *doesn't*, and she's meant to be able to solve everything and save us from anything, but maybe she *can't*. She's going to be embarrassed by this whole situation, by being the last to know, and there's nothing that I can see that I can do about it.

"No. Why would she know about him and not about me?"

"I don't know."

She stands up, and gathers some foreign men's magazine of Craig's that she's got wet, and her towel and her sunglasses, and she looks much taller than she really is.

"Anyway, don't keep saying that we 'do drugs'. You make it sound like a habit, and you sound old. Just because you won't touch them it doesn't mean that the rest of us are addicts."

She walks away, wading through heavy air.

The second reason that I'm unsettled is that if there are things that Faye doesn't know, it follows that there must be things I don't know. If Faye doesn't know everything about us, then no-one does. I lie outside until it's nearly dark, and it gets dark so late here now, and I feel nervous.

Craig Carson

We're looking older now, Faye and me, but she's still somehow in charge of all of us, more through our own fault than hers. When she storms away from somewhere, you can't help but feel sorry for whoever she's left behind, and you can't help imagining the things she's just said to them. It's dark when she comes in from lying next to the pool with my brother, and I wonder if the two of them have fought. She stamps into the room as effectively as someone who's barefoot and in a swimming costume can, and they must have, whether my brother is aware of it or not. She snaps her sunglasses shut with one hand in the swift, tense motion that she's inherited with these tense moods from our mother, and releases her grip on her towel and my *Details* somewhere around the couch. She's never had to pick up her own things, and she's learnt that if you leave something undone for long enough, someone will eventually do it for you. She walks over to the fridge and opens the door, and when its light floods a good portion of the open-plan room I realise that it's got dark in here, and that Sarah and I haven't bothered to turn on the lights.

I notice, too, that the two of us have stopped speaking.

Faye takes out an almost-empty jug and pours herself another of the mojitos that she's been drinking all afternoon. She smiles dazzlingly at the two of us, in the way that makes everyone love her, and says,

"It's a nice night to go out."

Then she walks to the door to Ross's bedroom, stepping over my magazine. My sister is the girl who never trips or falls apart.

Sarah raises her eyebrow at me, and I raise mine in return. I lean back in my armchair and

look out of the sliding glass door at my brother. He lay outside in the sun, and is lying there in the dark, and will lie there long after the swimming pool's floodlights come on. For now, he's lit only by the lights in the swimming pool itself, and the overmuscled arm that's allowed to trail in the water looks waxy and stiff. His eyes are open, stare straight ahead, and look glassy. Looking back at him, I wonder if my brother is the one who could see what was in store for us in the future.

Grant Carson

My brother is the only one who could have said what was going to happen, but he doesn't tell us anything. We don't like to admit that anyone could have done anything, but maybe Craig could have.

I remember everything, but none of it adds up.

When I look back at varsity, I remember driving fast all the time and meeting new people on every day that I was there, and pastel golf shirts in summer, and black coats in winter, with grey v-neck jerseys over the shirts or under the coats in between. I was tired all the time, and I realised that everyone loved indie music, no matter how not-indie they were. I gained weight but it was muscle and a girl I knew said that it suited me. I felt richer than I had in high school, where everyone was rich, and I loved staying in res here more than anyone else did. I liked it better on this side of the mountain and tried to stay here when I could but Faye would win in the end and I would end up here, next to the pool, near to the sea, dreaming dreams like this one.

I dream about the time I crash the car on a bridge with Faye in the front seat, not screaming. The focus of my dream is not the car crash but the moment when, in the hospital afterwards, unharmed after all, I see myself naked in a full-length mirror for the first time in months. It's deep in the Cape Town winter then, and I look waxy, and I am pale and inhuman.

When I wake up next to the pool, I'm surprised to find that I'm still there. It's dark. Everyone is gone, I'm not sure where, and then Laura is there. It must be past midnight, but she's dressed in blue linen dress that makes me think of picnics, and I think she might have been wearing pearl earrings, and this is how I'll always remember her.

"There's been an accident," she says.

Craig Carson

When I get slightly hysterical phone calls from Faye, I always presume the same thing, but I'm always wrong, because it's always just a matter of her wanting me to join her party, because she just wants everyone to be together. It's past three, and I know that the club will be closing in less than an hour by the time I get there. I weigh up my options, but my options here aren't great either. She doesn't notice that I can hardly hear her over the music in the background, or maybe she thinks it's her background and not mine.

I go to where she is to find her.

Ross

When Faye says that we should go out, that's what we do, but Craig is different from the rest of us and says,

"Not tonight. I've already made plans, sorry."

The familiarity of this enrages Faye and the two of them fight about why Craig never parties with us, and where it is that he's going, and why he can't be more interesting. He's the one who wants to end the argument, and follows her around the apartment trying to do so, until she finally comes to a stop in front of a huge mirror that we've never got around to hanging up. We never will.

"You could just make a plan to come out once, you know?" she shouts at his reflection. He looks as if he's about to smile, but just says to her,

"I know. I will. But not tonight."

Faye shakes her head and glares at her tilted, made-up self.

"I hate this thing," she says. "It would look lovely at Versailles or something, but why we need it in Seapoint I can't understand. And I can't understand why hanging out with these people is so important. Who are they, anyway?"

"Friends, Faye. Marc and Chris. I've talked about them before. And you live in Camps Bay."

"Then just have some champagne with us." He shakes his head and walks out.

"I'll go talk to him." I say, and follow him out the door. He'll tell me nothing, then I'll make his excuses for him.

"Thanks Ross." She says, and starts on a second coat of mascara, or lipgloss.

When we're out, people keep buying Faye drinks, and guys try to buy Sarah drinks but she ignores them. Girls hit on me, and I let them. Who are Marc and Chris? Faye and Sarah go to the bathroom, while I stand outside and talk to some guy called Clarence who I think is a friend of Grant's. Where is Grant? Clarence, who was alive at this point, buys me a drink, then I realise that I need to find Faye and Sarah again because they can't possibly still be in the bathroom.

When Craig arrives he smells of alcohol and cigarettes, although he doesn't seem in the mood to party. As I see him at that moment, I hate him. I sit at the bar, uninterested, and think about how I'd never be able to describe this scene if I was asked to do so. Happy nights out are all the same, bad ones are all awful in their own, special ways. I look to my left and I see Faye and Craig. A guy walks past them and bumps into Faye and says something, and Faye grabs his arm. At first I think that it's her way of greeting him, being her usual inclusive self, but then, before any of the rest of us know what's happening, Faye pulls her arm back and swings and punches him, and he's staggering a little and his nose is bleeding. It's then that I notice properly that Grant is missing, but it turns out later that he's okay.

Corinne Carson

Don't think that because you find us here in a state of languid disarray that there wasn't a time before this when we were easily the happiest girls and boys you could hope to meet; don't think, because you find us cynical now, that we weren't once filled with all the youthful optimism that any person could wish for, under blue skies and in soft new clothes. Before the novelties wear off, before the complications arise, before the drugs don't work, before things take a decided turn for the worst, we are unflaggingly appreciative of all of this. We like the beach and the sun, and we like the beautiful people. We like glossy magazines and new haircuts, and we like our collars neatly folded.

Before we arrive, it's Sarah and Faye, and then they find Ross (where do they find Ross?) and then Craig arrives, and Ross and Craig find each other. Laura arrives the following year; Craig finds Laura, or Laura finds Craig, depending on how you look at it, and Grant arrives the following year. I have my opinion about what point it is in that sequence at which things begin to fall apart, but so does everyone else.

By the time we arrive, the process has begun. By the time Clarence dies, months later, it's well underway.

Sarah Richards

When I remember it all, it seems like one long hallucinogenic experience, and I wasn't on drugs. Maybe it was too little sleep or too much alcohol, or the fact that I never ate, or just the buildings on campus that I got lost in and that made you feel like you had fallen down a rabbit hole, but nothing seemed real. I remember sitting on stone steps outside and waiting for Faye, and waiting, and waiting, and I remember skipping most of my lectures and then going to lectures later and being so fascinated and so confused that I wished I'd gone to every one.

I remember little else about the days.

When I see my sister Jane, and Corinne – and the other girls too but my and Faye's sisters in

particular – I want to send them straight home. I've long ago accepted that Faye will always be the fun older sister and that I am her more boring version to Jane, so I lose nothing by being protective, but there's no effectiveness in any of it either.

I remember more about the nights, although these memories don't make sense. I remember bouncers who knew Faye and endless boys who knew Craig but didn't talk to him much, and Grant driving too fast. I don't know if everyone remembers university this way, but Faye says that we're not like everyone.

Faye was drinking cocktails that were always too sweet, and there were a lot of big black cars. There's a penthouse with luggage on the floor – but I don't know whose – and a view of the sea in the dark and a kitchen with dark marble countertops and dance music that repeats, and repeats, and repeats. There are palm trees and bars and stamps on my arms, looking like bruises. I want to send Jane home, but I realise that Faye and I would have been like this anywhere. I remember waking up surprised to be here, or that I was still there, as if I'd expected that Cape Town was all a dream.

Brigitte

Where Durban has drama, Cape Town has glamour. On Cape Town streets we wear long coats and learn to sweep in and out of restaurants in the rain without getting water on our hair or our dresses. We don't know that we're doing it until we go home or the middle of summer arrives to remind us that we're not in a movie from the Fifties; not a Hitchcock film or even a musical. We're wearing boots for the first time in our lives. We're learning to layer. Everyone and everything here is beautiful and it makes you feel dizzy, and Faye's flat is so high up that when you look at the bright blue sea in front of you, you feel that you might tilt forwards and fall over, into the ocean or off of the edge of the world.

Correctly or incorrectly, we presume the worst parts of our lives to be over. We like the feeling of being sunburnt, and we like how people look at the six of us, like they always have, and we're so proud of the way that they look at Grant and Craig and Faye and Ross and Sarah. We're where no-one knows us and the feeling won't last because we can't help making friends, but for now we feel like we've dropped out of the rat race, or out of some other clichéd term, or out of all of the clichés if we're lucky, and are enjoying a pleasant retirement somewhere far, far away. Faye shatters our illusion repeatedly by telling us how young we are, and how strong, and how we need to stop wasting time and have more fun. Ross tells us how we're practically famous here, but we don't want to hear it, so we turn back to our copies of *Vice* and *Vanity Fair* and pour more drinks. We find that here we can have sundowners while actually looking at the sea, and that is the advantage of the West Coast.

We're preppy here. We wear golf shirts and v-neck sweaters, and, it should be said, we don't look a bit out of place. Preppy gets appropriated and turns into indie, and the indie kids become hipsters, and then maybe we're that too sometimes. In winter we discover that it can get cold enough to warrant the wearing of scarves for warmth as well as aesthetics, but we really do love cable knit on each other. In second year we'll find a band that sings about sweaters and linen and Oxford and we'll love them because they'll have defined us, even though they're an indie band. We wear big sunglasses, and from the right angles, we look famous.

On one of the days I remember, someone is singing the beginning of "I wish they all could be California Girls", but I don't know the song until years later. Craig rolls his eyes, but I don't notice. We listen to hip hop and Vampire Weekend and then MGMT and Phoenix and then a lot of indie folk, but we don't notice that any of it sounds sad.

On campus in first year we listen to the Shins, who sound right with all of those trees, stone walkways, echoing footsteps when it's late. We have our ipods in, we're drinking mocha coffee from cardboard cups, or Evian from sport bottles with red caps because Perrier water is difficult to carry around, and we never have anything ready on time. We sit on benches or at outdoor picnic tables or on the grass sometimes, and talk about how busy we are. We're making plans about moving into a

house that has six bedrooms and we're looking forward to living in Newlands, which is green and looks to us like it'll be the setting for all of the good things that are going to happen to us very soon, and the backdrop to a lot of pictures we'll take.

Our courses are hard but we're good at them, and dedicated in a way that sees us stopping to write ideas for essays or projects into notebooks when moments before we were in a hurry to get somewhere. The music that we like sounds emotional in just the way we feel – that it's emotional about nothing in particular, but that the person singing is very moved by very small things at unexpected and inconvenient times.

We feel like we've been through the worst stuff we'll have to go through because high school nearly killed us; death by overachievement. We feel like we deserve a break and so we take it. We spend a lot of time sitting in the sun on lawns outside university buildings or on uncomfortable chairs and benches in the main street of Cape Town's city centre, in the company of pretty hippies and beautiful architect types in both locations, and lawyers and architects and artists and bloggers and writers, too.

Some of us take up smoking, without taking it seriously. Yes, some of us get addicted. I like the way the smoke looks curling off above our heads, sneaking off unnoticed. I like the smell of my hair when I wash the smoke out of it. I like going out for breakfast and eating a lot, slowly, while sun comes through windows of the kinds of restaurants that are meant to be quaint in the extreme, but are too spacious and glossy for that. Everyone else is hungover, and I never am, so I pretend that I need to move more slowly, too. We're always together, people say, but we don't care.

Corinne

At the beginning of the year at night we go to the same places that everyone at varsity goes to, but then everyone separates. The places to which we used to go remain, loyal if slightly dirty and waiting for us if we choose to need them again. Later, we have new places to wear high heels and show off how sleek and polished we are. I like how we are now. The abandonment had to happen. Brigitte needs new music and Morgan needs new people and there seems to be some kind of lingering fear that I might echo some incident involving Faye and her rage that happened earlier in the year. Nothing happens in first year.

Until Clarence dies, nothing happens this year because we're too busy being happy, or too happy being busy. We dance in places that are too small to be called clubs and too artfully furnished to really be called bars, so they're lounges. The patrons are not cold in the way that glamorous people are meant to be: they greet us, they dance stupidly, they sing along, but they are still undeniably beautiful. The places we dance seem to be high above everything. I like our high heels, the silk dresses, and the way Brigitte does her make-up.

Always in the centre of the room is Faye. In wood-panelled rooms filled with people she is there, drinking whisky on the rocks and having boys and men ask her out to eat dinner, and spinning, or maybe we're the ones spinning, and her blonde hair is white in the dimly lit atmosphere that makes everything seem high-contrast.

Brigitte

Always in the corner of our vision is Faye. You could call her gorgeous if it wasn't a term too hackneyed for a girl who's so often been called original. You could try to ignore her if you wanted to but it would be futile because Faye has made a vocation out of getting noticed and won't make exceptions for anyone, however insignificant. She is drinking strawberry martinis and wearing too many bracelets. I notice at first that I don't have to look after anybody anymore now that I'm here, but soon I become used to being one of the little girls, not the oldest sister in the house and not the middle child of the street. You notice at first here that you're paying a lot more for drinks than you would have at home and that there are entry fees where you wouldn't have expected them. The places are nicer, the music better, and the patrons prettier, but after a while we get used to

it and don't notice the improvement or the cost. That's how it is with everything, maybe.

Soon we'll be friends with the bartenders, we'll be on guestlist.

In Cape Town you don't have to be enthusiastic about anything, and it's immensely freeing. Even if you feel ecstatic, sometimes you want to keep it to yourself. That's my experience. I'm not certain why we're here, but I like it that we are.

Nancy

We stay over at Faye's, cared for, to be driven home in the morning, and we go to bed early, before three. Faye is still out. Ross has brought us home, Sarah has stayed wherever we were to look after Faye, because this is the order of things. Where is Craig? Craig is disordered, or at least disorderly.

I go straight to bed, Faye's bed. Jane will share with Sarah, two of us will sleep on the couch, two more of us will share Faye's bed, and if Faye sleeps she'll share with Jane and Sarah, or Ross. I think that Morgan and Jaime are in the bed with me, and they go to sleep right away, but Faye has trouble sleeping with the lights off and so she's had a nightlight of sorts installed, and I don't know how to switch it off, and I have trouble sleeping with the lights on, so I'm awake to hear Sarah and Faye arrive home. There's nothing comforting about the light. It makes things murky rather than cosy. Faye's room is messy and even though the mess is pretty by virtue of the prettiness of everything that Faye owns, it's difficult not to imagine what might lurk deeper than the layer that meets the eye. I have the impression of being adrift on a white feather raft in a sea of silk nightgowns, single stilettos, perfume bottles, and dusty pink fifty rand notes, in the ocean in a part of the world where the light is unnatural because the sun never quite sets.

Morgan and Jaime go straight to sleep when we get home, but I lie awake between them. My eyes are closed but I think that the room is spinning. It occurs to me that if I'm not mistaken, we now know something that Faye doesn't. It occurs to me that Craig is not at home, but that I don't remember leaving him behind. I realise that I remember everything, although I keep trying not to.

Craig Carson

I'm not a scene kid, because I can't pick a scene to be a part of and stick to it, but I know the kids in the scenes and I write about them. Just like at school, I'm good at fitting in to groups that I'm not a part of, but never good at being a part of anything. I like the indie kids, in their skinny, skinny jeans, but everyone likes the indie kids now before they become real hipsters. We go to some place that backpackers and exchange students love and I'm bored of waiting for everyone to become tired, but I can't feel any real impatience for people who are having such genuine and guiltless fun. Faye would say that I'm a part of this – a part of us, or them – or if Faye didn't say it then Ross or someone else would. I don't feel that I'm a part of it at all. I look across at her as we're dancing and wonder if she minds that I'll be transcribing this all at some later stage, one day when I'm writing the novel that gives away all our secrets, if we had any to begin with.

It'll be okay; people like me and they like her.

On a balcony high above everything (or maybe, looking back, only some things) I feel that I'm happy, and I realise that this is when I miss having someone or other to love, standing beside me. Misery is something to be fought and endured alone, and it gives me a grim sense of purpose to trudge through whatever personal winter I find myself in. But there is nothing to do when you are faced with summer and happiness, except to stand still and let it do what it will with you, and that's what makes me wish that I had someone beside me to hold my hand. It's a sentiment that makes me feel terribly original, even as I know that someone else must have felt it before me.

We go to a bar, near the beach, which reminds me of Paris and I feel terribly jaded. Faye knows the owner and I like his jeans but he's always been suspicious of me. Sarah sits on the couch next to me and stretches out long bony legs in front of her, and holds a burning cigarette, which she really doesn't know how to smoke. My younger sister and her friends, who are too young to be

here, talk next to me.

"Nothing ever happens here." Corinne says, in Faye's voice.

"Everything's happened already." Jane says, and at this point I lose track of who's speaking.

"At least it's pretty." Instead of really listening to what they're saying, I look at the six of them, who are no more beautiful than Faye and Sarah are, but are far more impressive for their strength in numbers.

"It's cold."

"It's summer."

"No. I mean the way it's decorated."

"You're right. We should go back to where we were."

"We can't. It's too late now."

"It's just cold, I don't hate it."

The attractiveness of these girls isn't lost on me, despite my preferences. They're youthful and vital and strong, even if they are frighteningly thin from the wrong angles. They might look fragile from a distance, but up close you can see the flicker of muscles in Jane's arm as she lifts a gin and tonic, and the glossiness of all of their hair, and the straightness of Nancy's back, and the brightness of all of their eyes.

"I wouldn't want one anyway."

"I couldn't live without one."

"You live without one now."

"We live in res."

"So? You clean up after yourself now, you'll be able to do it later."

"And the kitchen?"

"Why wouldn't you want someone else cleaning your house?"

"Wait until you have your favourite shirt ruined."

I'm not sure that I'm really listening. I'm getting what I think are jealous looks from all of the other men in the bar, but I don't particularly want to believe that men so old would be interested in girls so young.

Eighties hits are playing. They don't fit with the white and antique décor. They don't fit with girls born as the Eighties ended.

"It's not that expensive."

"It's like the cost of a new pair of shoes every month."

"Depends where you're getting them."

"I just want where I live to be mine."

Faye does not look as strong. She's still glossy, it's true, in a way that make-up can't fake, but she droops in a tired and top-heavy way when she thinks no-one is looking. I'm looking. Sarah looks stronger now. I wonder if she's eating. She doesn't look like she's fading. She manages to smile now and then, which is unlike Sarah, who hates partying. Where is Laura?

"It's just easier."

"Yeah, but they've got stuff to deal with too."

"Less stuff than girls do."

"What do you mean, 'less stuff', anyway?"

"Issues. Boys don't hate themselves like girls do."

I feel very cold and I'm not sure whether I should keep drinking or make Ross drive me home with whoever else wants to come along. And where is Ross? The question is irrelevant by the time he appears, and says that he's driving home. I refuse the offer, and he rolls his eyes at me, then he is gone.

Ross

Eventually, we have to begin to go out again, because we can't stay away forever after the death. We go to a party that I think starts early, because it's still sunny and because it seems to lead

on naturally from lunch. What I don't consider is that it's always light here in summer, and that we always eat lunch very late. We're drunk on a roof together, and the beautiful people are nearby and I'm grateful for that but I'm focused on you because what you're saying really is interesting. I feel like I'm in a Bret Easton Ellis novel, and everything looks like it's been photographed, or photocopied, and I tell you so, and I don't think you're listening because you ask me to repeat myself, but you say,

"Where's that from? Who did you quote?" and when I tell you I was just talking you tell me to write it down, because you like it, so I do, but don't think that you'd have said that if you were sober. I love it here and I think you're wonderful - you always were.

"I'm going to go and get you another drink," you say, and walk carefully down the wooden stairs that lead to the bar.

Someone died just the other day, I realise.

Laura

Deaths, in my experience, happen right in the middle of busy periods, so that everyone can say to each other,

"Life goes on. He wouldn't have wanted us to stop living for him," and continue with the things that must get done. Clarence, instead, died very near to the beginning of holidays, presumably to save us all from grief while studying for exams. People say he was very considerate.

We find ourselves with a very long stretch of time in which there is little to do but think about the fact that we should all be mourning but find it hard to keep that up with clear skies.

It's hot; we are wasting summer, but we want to cry too. We're confused, so we compromise and please no-one by lying constantly in the sun but staying very quiet.

We drink a lot, but our hearts aren't in it.

If anyone should paint an idealised picture of these people, it should be me. I am amazed by them, who are beautiful, and kind to me, and very clever and funny, and who seem to glow with a strength and health which others are simply without. Their capacity for the consumption of alcohol is limitless, and their emotions are displayed only behind closed doors. They are the bravest people I know, and they can make anything happen. I feel certain that they won't grow old.

My optimism about them colours my feeling about the world at large, and soon I'm convinced that things are going well for us; and that new starts are there for anyone who chooses to take one.

Life moves fast now. It gets strange, or my idea of normality shifts. On a weekday afternoon I get a lift into the car with Faye, who's taking me into town and who's got to see her therapist at five o'clock. When we get into the car it's four minutes to five.

"Oh, we're late," I say, obviousness epitomised. She shrugs, noncommittal, and chooses from her iPod playlists a selection called 'Driving 7'.

"I'm always late for him," she says a few minutes later when we're driving through traffic on the main road she shouldn't have taken. She's smoking and she's not opening the windows, I'm not certain why. On either side of us appear coffee shops and dry cleaning stores and bistros and Chinese restaurants and Jewish delis (and Jewish everything) but the sound of the hip hop playing from Faye's speakers fills the car and drowns out everything outside, or gives it a soundtrack. People move faster, look stronger.

"Does he mind?"

She smiles again, and replies slowly but assuredly,

"He's my therapist. I pay him to like me." She puts on Gucci sunglasses and stares straight ahead, and drags from her cigarette again. "I pay him to not mind."

"Why do you see him, anyway?" I ask.

She indicates and replies evenly, "Because I'm angry. We're trying to work out if I'm angry because I'm really sad, or if I'm just angry. Then either way I have to stop being angry." We turn onto a wider road with less traffic and she puts her foot down on the accelerator. "I think we're really making progress." She says.

Grant Carson

I'm driving a black BMW that's a bit gay but that I really like anyway, and that Laura likes a lot. Before things go wrong, I take her out to lunch. We go to a seafood restaurant in Camps Bay and I don't remember what I order - a big slab of something, or calamari - but I tell her what kind of sushi she'd like: she's got the idea that she likes sushi, but she hasn't had enough of it to know what she likes. I think to myself that she has a lot to learn about pretending to have opinions, that my sister - Corinne, not even Faye - walks into restaurants whose menus she's unsure about, or hasn't seen, looks vaguely over her options, then points to something she sees and declares it to be her favourite. She hasn't been caught out yet. I think to myself that Laura has a lot to learn about pretensions but then I think that maybe she's comfortable enough around me to be herself.

I like taking Laura out to eat because I like seeing her thinking that it's a big deal to be ordering sushi, like she thinks it's something exotic, or maybe just that sushi at this price is something special. I am not jaded enough to repeat to her what my sisters always say - that there's no need to pay the full price for sushi in Cape Town when it's one special all the time. When I order a beer, she orders a double vodka on the rocks, which is my brother's drink. She is not entirely innocent, and she is not entirely at ease. I like taking Laura out to lunch, but coming up with endless excuses for why I'm paying for her food becomes tedious.

Craig Carson

"We're celebrating," I tell Laura. "My first chapter's done."

"How is it?" she asks.

"It's okay," I say. "I'll let you read it soon." But I don't think I plan to.

"This place is expensive," she says, looking at the menu. It's not that expensive, and I should tell her so to save her from future embarrassment, but I'm the only person who she ever tells when she thinks that, so I don't need to bother.

"How's Ross?" She asks, genuinely interested.

"He's boring." I say, and immediately feel guilty and disloyal, so I want to change the subject by asking her about someone, but there's no-one to ask her about so I ask, "How are you?"

"I'm fine." She says, pleasantly, and smiles at me.

Days later, Faye is telling me a story about Laura, and I start listening at the part where she says, "When I came out of my appointment, there she still was." She's getting something from the fridge, and I can't be sure if it's annoyance or just some strain of amazement that's in her voice. Faye is often angry, but hardly ever amazed. She switches a glass from one hand to the other and sits down opposite me. "I don't know if she'd waited there for me the whole time, or if she'd left and then come back, but she was there outside, and she just said, 'Why are you angry?'"

"What did you say to her?" I ask. Faye laughs.

"You didn't just hear anything I said. She was just there, hanging out outside my therapist's office."

"He's my therapist too."

"You're really missing the point. Can I pour you a drink?"

As she does, she smiles. She likes Laura now. Laura has shown herself to be enamoured with Faye, or substantially eccentric, or better, both, and Faye is returning the affection. Her cheeks are pink and her arms are tanned and I dread the exhaustion that lies ahead of poor, pallid Laura.

Sarah Richards

It's good that Laura is always helpful, and it's very good that she always has something intelligent to say, but neither of these things make her any more appealing to me.

In the case of Faye, the opposite is true. I can't outline why she's my favourite person, but

he is. There are those who hate Faye, too, but they probably aren't able to explain themselves any better than I can. You can hate Faye as much as you like, but you'll still want to do just what she suggests. No-one will ever make you feel so appreciated as Faye can. She is across the table from me right now, appreciating someone who was once a mutual friend of ours, and is now very much Faye's friend. She looks bored as he talks, and I see him growing more and more desperate for her blonde-haired, blue-eyed approval. He tells one story after another, and she's pleasant and lights a cigarette. Smoking's one thing she picked up from me, but it suits my burnt out looks and demeanour better than it ever will her pretty, well-planned face with the pink-red lips and white, white teeth. Somehow I know that no amount of nicotine will colour them, so perhaps it's her habit to keep after all.

TV On The Radio's playing in the background because we're obsessed with them then and now, and I'm just beginning to get drunk. Just when this boy, man, looks as if he's giving up hope of getting Faye's attention, he says something that makes her smile, slowly, then turn her face to him and laugh. He looks as if he's just felt summer's first rays of sunshine, and smiles shyly and radiantly back at her.

Her great gift is in making it seem as if whatever you're doing is really not that bad. If we were skipping a class she would remind us that there were people who had skipped the class week after week, while we diligently attended; and if we spent six hundred rand on dinner she'd remind us that her mother – and we all liked her mother, despite ourselves – regularly spent twice that. If we smoked weed she'd say, "It's hardly coke, Sarah" and as the guilt set in after my first line of cocaine, she reminded me that "For crying out loud, it's hardly heroin." It was all true, of course – there were always people doing worse things than we were. If we were feeling bad, it wasn't our fault, and if we were ruining someone's life, well, no person can truly ruin another person's life unless that person lets them. Whatever she got you into, Faye could get you out of with her steady mile, and then she was your saviour - then you were lost.

After I've finished watching this conversation, Faye will suggest something fun and spontaneous for us all to do, and I will have nothing to say but "Yes", or better still "Why not?" because we both know that I have nothing I'd rather do. The fact of the matter – and it's a fact so clear that Faye would never have to articulate it – is that if you refuse to go along with her plans, it's always your loss. When I tell other people about her, I realise that I make her sound awful sometimes, but why gush over her when everyone who gets to know Faye and I well enough will eventually realise not only that they adore her, but that I do too? I started out as her best friend, and today I hate her, but tomorrow that all will change again. The thing that stays the same is that if she asks anything of me, I know what I'll say.

This is what Ross and Laura have in common: they would both die for Craig, and they are both without the money by which they find themselves surrounded. The money that we have can't be hidden, and I say this for two reasons – to explain why there's no use trying to hide it, and to begin to explain the way it might feel to be in the constant company of a Carson. Each of our families is moneyed, affluent, or wealthy in its own way, but a better word for the Carsons' financial situation is "rolling in it". When it comes to the company of Carsons, there's no-one who knows the story better than I do.

Laura remembers everything. She knows our birthdays, which is nice, and our mothers' birthdays, which is strange, and remembers when we're writing tests, and that can be helpful. What troubles us the most is the way that she remembers every conversation we have with her or in her presence, and her ability to quote our words back to us.

"Does she have friends?" Ross asks, in a tone that's meant to indicate that she doesn't, but the fact is,

"It wouldn't be so annoying if she didn't, but she does. Lots of them, from school or her classes. She talks to them on campus and makes you stop for hours at the movies or the beach to talk to them, but she doesn't want to hang out with them if Craig's available."

"Or if he isn't." Ross agrees.

"Or if he isn't."

"What can we do about it?"

"What can we do? Nothing. We can't kill her. We just deal with it."

He laughs. "Kill her? Probably not. None of us knows how to keep a secret."

Ross

On campus everyday I see the six of them, Faye's sister and Sarah's sister and their friends, sometimes late but always there. They're all dressed in long shirts, skinny jeans or tailored shorts, mannish blazers or cropped leather jackets or summer dresses depending on the season, sometimes the two worn together, and of course for Corinne standing out with her weird love of salvaged oversized jerseys from other people's wardrobes. Sometimes, the jerseys are mine, but they look better on her anyway so I don't question how they found their way to her.

They stick together in a way that's intimidating, and I think often that it must be impossible for boys or men to talk to them in this constant atmosphere of audience. I'm never really aware of any of them dating, but every now and then one of them will be crying and the others will say,

"I could kill him," referring to the recent ex who's hurt their friend – and where there are exes they were once boyfriends, and where there are boyfriends there were once boys brave enough to talk to a group of girls – so I'm proved wrong.

Laura

I go to Craig's lectures because he's a year ahead of me so I feel like I'm getting a head start. I love the shadow of his late afternoon sessions, with small groups not by the standards of his small course, but small enough to have allowed me to construct stories about the lives of each of his classmates during the sections of the lecture that don't interest me. During the parts that do interest me, I pass him notes written in a pink pen, which is his only concession to campness, fabulousness, that so many people expect his sexuality to entail. It's the one way in which his difference is magnified, but in this class (one boy wears green skinny jeans and shares his love of Madonna, another flicks blond hair constantly above a striped waistcoat) he is not different or stereotypical enough to be noticed.

The lecturer doesn't mind our note-passing, or that I'm drawing big purple pictures, or Craig sending text messages now and then: I'm quiet, and Craig's marks are those of the kind of student that lecturers dream of. My lecturers might mind if they knew how Craig helps me with my homework, but somehow it doesn't feel like it could be cheating when we felt like the same person.

Craig Carson

Laura and I get along because when we're sitting in a lecture and I whisper to her that "I'm so sick of Ross," she writes in the margin of her notes,

"Let's Kill Him." and raises her eyebrows and smiles.

Corinne Carson

"I know that this is the story I'm going to finish," Craig says to Laura, who is lying beside the swimming pool while he sits and reads. He began the conversation by poking a toe against her side and saying,

"You look dead," to which she replied,

"I don't feel dead." But now he's talking about more serious things. She opens her eyes now, and smiles with all the enthusiasm that a "that's nice" would entail, but says instead,

"Why?"

"Why?" he repeats. Seldom caught off-guard, he suddenly considers responding honestly: "Because there are people I want to immortalise, and time is running out."

"I'm bored," is his reply, and we won't see emotion from him for a long time; but he concedes, "I feel like I should."

"I think you should, too," she affirms, and there it is. The plan is set in stone. He lies down on the concrete next to her and they are silent, and she wonders if she'll be in what he writes, and he just wonders if people will think he's arrogant if he calls what he's working on "a book".

It's midday on Tuesday and they can hear traffic noises and what might be the sea in the distance, or might just be more traffic. Maybe half an hour passes – it might be less, but time goes slowly when the sun is beating down so hard and you know you should move but don't want to – and then Laura asks,

"What's it about?"

"People. People who are like us, I suppose. Not much."

"Won't that be depressing?" she asks, and he doesn't know what to say. After a while, she says, "You know, you make me whole," and when he doesn't reply again, she thinks that he must have fallen asleep because she can't see his eyes behind his sunglasses.

Not very far away, Jane and I are sharing a packet of Liquorice Allsorts; she gets the liquorice domes covered in sprinkles and I get the ones that look like painkillers. We split the sweets that look like sandwiches according to colour – Jane finds orange repulsive.

We're doing tutorials, short questions, and I've skipped over the first one and moved to the second when Jane asks, "Do you see what Grant sees in Laura?"

"I think so. She's very, you know, wifely. You know?"

"And 'wifely' is what he wants?"

Jane pulls the fleshy pink part of her Allsort wheel away from the liquorice cog shape that forms its centre.

"I guess. What I don't see is what Craig is doing with her."

"Every gay man needs a girl to be fabulous with, right?"

"And every group needs an outsider."

I give up on sucking the capsule in my mouth, and chew it up.

"But he has, I mean, Faye and Sarah."

"And we have Ross."

"To be fabulous for, or as our outsider?"

"As our outsider."

She hands me an orange sweet that she has accidentally been allocated.

"And you think that that's all they're doing?" she asks. "Being fabulous?"

Brigitte

Between classes, Corinne and Jane and I have four hours free on every day of the week except Friday. We are dedicated enough to be one of the forty in a class of two hundred who come back after the break, but not dedicated enough to pass the time with studying, so we find other things to do.

We go to the university's swimming pool to lie in the sun, or picnic in a field nearby. We sit on the steps with the others in their shorter breaks between classes and Corinne drinks chocolate milk or eats chinese food while Nancy chews gum and I take pieces from her pack or smoke cigarettes at some points. We visit the library to look at magazines from 1920 in the basement and Corinne tells us what Faye's told us about where people she knows have had sex between the shelves, and Nancy rolls her eyes. We take the shuttle into town to look at vintage stores, or take the same blue shuttle busses following a different route to go to the nearest shopping centre and eat hamburgers and shop for underwear or things for the house or new books that we may or may not read, or magazines.

It's in the library one day that Jane asks,

"Imagine if it was one of us?" and I ask,

"One of us what?" and so she says,

"One of us who killed Clarence."

Corinne looks up from her book on Victorian socio-economics and smiles a smile so small that it shows that Jane's comment does not merit even the effort of an eye-roll. We're propped up in the narrowest of the spaces between shelves, after we went to lunch, got too drunk, and accidentally came back too early, with another hour to pass. Jane and I sit with backs to one shelf, with Corinne's feet between us as she leans on the shelf opposite. No-one minds that we're here because few people use this section and we're quiet and at this time of the year it's too far from exams for anyone to be tense enough to be riled by the sound of distant, hidden voices. Corinne speaks next:

"Since none of us even knew him, that seems unlikely."

"What, you'd only kill your friends?" Jane asks.

"I'd only kill someone who gave me a motive. How would he give me a motive if we'd never spoken?"

"Some of us knew him. Morgan kissed him, you know. And maybe more. And then Grant was good friends with him."

"So Carsons only kill their friends?" I suggest.

Corinne laughs and says, "Rad. My family of killers."

"And if Morgan killed everyone she kissed, there'd be no men left alive in this place." She may be referring to the university or to the library, or to Cape Town, and she wouldn't be exaggerating too much in any case. Two of Morgan's past hook-ups are just metres above us, and I only saw about eight people in total when we walked in.

"Maybe he just kissed really badly."

"Maybe."

Laura

Since Clarence has died, and since we seem to have decided that his death was not at his own hands, I've made a habit of considering what I'd do if it was one of my friends who'd killed him. Craig sleeps next to me on his bed and I think about what I'd do if it turned out that he was a murderer. He sleeps deeply and resolutely, never moving, usually on his back, and I have no fear that he'll wake up to see me looking at him with my evaluating eye. Perhaps if he did see me, he'd think my stare was the product of the same adoration that causes me to follow him around and agree with everything he says, but he'd be only half right. Although I conclude that I love him enough to stand by him no matter what he does, the fact remains that I find the idea of Craig as a killer plausible enough to have allowed myself almost half an hour to contemplate it. I've finished the reading long ago, and I have nowhere that I need to be, so I put down the papers and lie down on Craig's chest and pull a blanket over us, hoping that he'd forgive me for thinking these things about him.

I spend the time I have free between my classes and Craig's in the food court with him or in a special section of the library with people I don't know. Here the rare books, heavy wood desks and polished antique fittings could have been placed particularly to show me that I should be grateful for my surroundings and my current lot in life, but I feel jealousy instead.

I look around at what everyone else has: only seven other girls out of twenty-three have MacBooks, so I do well there, although one of those is a MacBook Air so I'm clearly not doing that well. Soon there will be iPads. I am the only one with an Evian bottle, but I do like the glass Woolworths water bottles that three girls have, and only nine people have their water bottles on their desks anyway.

I begin to calculate the hours that I'm spending alone.

Corinne Carson

One Thursday Brigitte can't spend the four hours with us because she's hanging out with

someone else or has something else to do, and I don't know the details but Jane seems angry because although she hasn't said anything about it she's slung her messenger bag over her shoulder and wants to go.

We get onto a shuttle to wherever we'll decide later to go to. Once, we were on one of these busses and there was a rush for the last seat, and some guy approached it from the front of the bus and took it just as I was about to sit down. I made some sarcastic "chivalry is dead" remark to Morgan or whichever of us had been standing next to me, and then a neatly dressed little boy who couldn't have been older than six – I don't know why he was there among us, if he was there with one of his parents, or if he could possibly have known what I meant or just saw that I was upset to have missed out on the place – stood up to let me sit down. I'd felt guilty for my cynicism of a few moments earlier, and although my first reaction had been to let him go back to sitting and Jane had nudged me to take the seat so that I didn't hurt his feelings.

Today is not like that day – today there are plenty of seats for everyone who wants them. On the bus it's just me and Jane at the back, a boy who looks too young for the heavy book he's reading sitting near the front, and a group of jock-type guys taking up a few seats in the middle. Jane is smiling at them, and I realise that they're all exactly Nancy's type: all the same. I wonder aloud how she tells the guys she likes apart from one another, but Jane just laughs at me and says that all the hipster boys we go for look the same, too. I imagine all of Nancy's ex-boyfriends buying the same clothes from the same stores, waiting behind each other in line to pay for their new v-neck sweaters, or two of them reaching for the last blue polo shirt, and never knowing how much they all have in common. We got on at the first stop on campus and they clamber off at the last one still on university property, so we begin the looped route off campus in near-silence. We're isolated by windows closed against the cold from traffic noises, shouts on Main Road, and the wind, hearing only the comforting mechanical hum of our own vehicle as it slows down or speeds up. Although we have all the space we need, Nancy's huddled in a corner. I take up the rest of the back seat by putting legs up on it, seated sideways.

We don't know where we're planning to go so before we come to another stop or are lulled into a long sleep on this narcotic vessel I shout across to Jane, too loudly, "What do you want to do?" She looks at me with wide eyes but doesn't answer, because when I shouted the boy at the front of the bus turned around and although I didn't notice because I wasn't facing forwards, always-pale-anyway Jane could be described as appearing to have seen a ghost. She waits until he's settled back to his book, possibly disorientated with his earphones in, and then she whispers to me,

"He looks just like..." And she trails off, but I know immediately who she means.

We set out like this on most days, with four hours to kill, both knowing that if we find anything worth staying away for we won't be back for a while longer. Until today, we'd always come back on time.

When we spring up and start to disembark at our stop, we realise that the object of our attention is not doing the same. It's easy enough to fake a phone call that has supposedly summoned us back to campus ("Oh no – we'll have to go back.") but more tricky to stay on board when he doesn't get off there, either ("This is getting ridiculous – we've got to start planning better."). When we arrive at our destination for the second time, we're relieved to find that he's finished his chapter or his thoughts, and we make a concerted effort to leap enthusiastically from our seats ("Finally. Now where are we meeting her?") when it's clear that he's getting up. There's only one way from the bus stop to anywhere that you'd want to go – the Main Road, the new apartment blocks, the older houses, a shopping centre – and so we move along that road and trust that the boy who looks like Clarence will follow.

As Jane scowls and strides and I trot along beside her, I realise that it's a colder day than I'd prepared for. Jane's wearing slouchy boyfriend jeans, and I'm jealous that her legs are covered even though she's wearing only a cream vest while I have a scarf and grandpa-style argyle cardigan over my t-shirt. I think to myself that although we don't put as much effort into what we wear as our friends do, we get our clothes from the same places, and then that although we're the sloppier dressers of the group, our looks are quite different.

We walk right up to the road and the light's red which is a good thing because it gives us time to stand still, but it means that the boy who looks like Clarence steps in front of us, eager to cross the road, and we get to see him better, and try not to stare.

He walks along a road where there's construction happening and we get whistled at but he doesn't seem to notice anything that's going on around him, and we follow his lead and walk on, past a restaurant that's almost empty at this time of day, and a short queue at MacDonal'd's, and into the shopping centre and down an escalator. The white light in here seems cosy after the near-stormy weather outside, and the people doing their shopping are like us: wealthy, well-fed, and with plenty of time on their hands.

We walk past a homeware store, an antique store, a nail and beauty salon, another restaurant, then into Woolworths, and things get tricky again as we try to appear busy finding items that take us on a very different route to his, but that cause us to pass him now and not let him out of our sight. We buy a bar of chocolate, a bag of coffee, and a block of parmesan cheese. He chooses french bread, a bottle of cheap red wine, a can of tomatoes, and some fabric softener. At one point we reach for the same pack of mince. Jane turns to him and says, "Sorry," over all the meat, and smiles sweetly in a way that she wouldn't if this was an everyday situation, and I think that she's very brave for being able to, because my heart's beating very fast.

By the time we get to the counter, Jane looks invigorated but overexcited, as if she might be about to pass out, so I hold the groceries, and the mince is starting to feel quite damp against my vest, and he is two places in front of us in the check-out line and pays and leaves, and our timing's just off, so even though we hurry up the in-store escalator and past the sale section, we don't catch up with him in time to see where he's going.

When we get to the house that night, Brigitte is in the kitchen with her hands and arms and some of her white t-shirt covered in what turns out to be beetroot juice.

"Guess what we found?" I asks, and so Brigitte asks,

"What did you find?" so I say,

"A guy who looks just like Clarence."

"Oh." Brigitte replies. "His twin?"

"He really did look enough like him to be his twin. I mean, so similar – if I didn't know better I'd have said it could be."

"Well it probably was his twin then," Brigitte says with a shrug and a wipe of her hand on a dishcloth that was white moments ago, "I mean, he still lives around here."

We all frown at each other for a moment and then I ask,

"Clarence has a twin?"

"Yes. Had a twin. Well, yes, maybe 'has', because the twin's still alive? Anyway, yes, there were two of them, and now there's just the one, and that's Clarence's twin."

"How did we not know this?"

Brigitte shrugs. "Living under a rock? I don't know. He's not that interesting so don't worry about it, you didn't miss out on much. Where did you see him?"

We tell her about our day but our accounts are different because Jane downplays our excitement at spotting him, while I tell it with plenty of detail and the phrase, "I'm so disappointed, now" between any others.

"Do you think it needs more crème fraiche?" Brigitte asks us all as she tastes the risotto that she's served us. She'll always ask, but will never take our opinion seriously.

"Mm, no, it's perfect."

"Perfect."

"Delicious." There's lots of nodding from the five of us.

"Just very red," I add, but she take a second helping.

Nancy looks distraught and is picking at her food with a fork that's part of a set that Mrs Carson bought for all of us, but I realise that the risotto isn't the problem.

"It all just seems a bit ridiculous, doesn't it? That this perfect guy gets murdered in some big house and no-one knows how, and then it turns out that he has a secret twin too."

"He's not really a secret," says Morgan. "I knew him. Know him. I can show you his profile on Facebook."

"And it wasn't necessarily a murder," Jane says, quite quietly and with little apparent expectation that she'll be heard.

"So basically, a guy killed himself, and his twin, being his twin, was too miserable to go to the funeral, so he didn't. Sad, but pretty believable."

"I heard they had to keep him drugged for eight days. He wanted to kill himself too, or he was crying a lot too, or something."

"I know it's lame that you wasted your afternoon because of this, but the lecture wasn't that good anyway. And I took notes." says Morgan.

"It wasn't a waste." Jane says, and smiles, showing slightly pink teeth. "It was fun."

Sarah

It's hot today, and I almost immediately regret that we requested a table outside, and that we got it, too. We're shaded from the sun, but our feet are in the sand, and this adds to our warmth with its sun-baked quality. The restaurant is set on a little private beach and if we look away from our own table we can see the heat rising off of the ground.

"You'd think that at a place with a guest list that you have to fake a British accent and a media email address for, they could give you glasses made of glass." Jane says.

"Well if they fall over, these won't break. It gets windy here."

"This is Cape Town, it's windy everywhere."

Jane looks out to sea, and it occurs to me that my little sister has grown jaded very quickly, but that she seems to have taken to jadedness better than we did; she seems happy. The water looks like it's struggling under the weight of the heavy air and makes little more than ripples, rather than waves.

"But this is the only place where you won't end up with broken glass on the table when the wind blows," I say, triumphant, then roll my eyes and say, "And that's why there's the ridiculous guest list and why everything costs at least a third more than it does anywhere else."

We can't complain with any real bitterness because we didn't have to wait or even lie to skip the queue - we just got Faye to call and to mention her mom or dad, and three hours later, here we are. Jane's friends all know that they can eat here without too much trouble, but would rather spend their money on cheap vodka and taxi fare, and have supposedly heard all kinds of rumours about people being excluded from this place for one reason or another: having torn jeans, having cheap jeans, wearing shorts, wearing pants that looked too formal for the beach setting, being black, not being tanned, looking poor, looking arrogant - "So how did that guy get to be here?" Jane asks. She indicates where I should be looking with the use of one of her eyebrows, which I've learned to read skilfully. I look over my shoulder and see a guy with dirty-looking hair and the beginning of a moustache, skinny green pants, a t-shirt that's printed and might be grubby or might be vintage, and a pair of sunglasses that are like Wayfarers but are significantly shinier.

"Oh come on, he's a total hipster." I argue for him. "He's probably on every guest list in town. They probably asked him to eat lunch here."

"Hipsters don't have guest lists."

"Of course they do. They have members-only bars."

"No they don't. Hipster kids don't keep you out when you're not like them, they just make sure that you don't have fun once you're there."

I look at my little sister and feel grateful that she's exchanged her clear-lens frames for dark sunglasses for lunch today. As if she's heard what I'm thinking, she tells me that,

"We're not real hipsters, you know, me or my friends. We just have the skinny jeans and vintage jackets, we're like moderate hipsters. The real ones have backpacks, and skateboards, you know, or they look like they're Amish with lots of facial hair and like, hats..."

I shudder a little and try to change the subject by saying,

"We should order. Do you want to get one of those really big pizzas to share?"

But Jane goes one better and says, "I thought I saw Clarence the other day."

The mood changes.

"Jane, he's dead." I sound tense.

"Yes, I know that. It wasn't him. It was his twin."

"Oh, okay."

"And apparently I was the only one who didn't know that this twin existed, but anyway, we followed him--"

"You followed him?"

"We followed him. It was me and Corinne, oh, and I suppose I wasn't the *only* one who didn't know that he had a twin because she didn't know either, so we followed him into Woolworths--"

"You don't think that maybe you're obsessing?"

Death and hipsters are all around me. I don't want to start a fight. I want to be interrupted by a well-intentioned waitress, maybe to fight over whether we're having wine or cocktails or just vodka and lime, just not over this, but the girl assigned to serving us is angled just so that I can't catch her eye and if I wave, Jane will say frustratedly that I never listen to anything that she says, and that I never have.

"No, I don't. We had four hours between lectures, this was how we spent them."

"You followed him for four hours?"

She rolls her eyes.

"I'm just saying," I continue. "that you talk about this dead guy quite a lot, and it's getting a bit weird."

I suppose I'd been expecting her to get angry at this remark, to shout her protests at me and allow the few diners sitting around us to hear, but she doesn't. She just shrugs and says,

"You talk about Ross a lot. That's weird too, but so what, right?"

"He's - alive?" I reply, struggling to see the parallel. "And we're friends."

"Okay." She says. "You just talk about him, you know, a lot."

The fact that I don't want to talk about Ross means that I don't press her about her obsession, which means that she can't talk anymore about what I didn't want to hear in the first place: that she's moved into a mode of operation enjoyed by stalkers the world over.

My girl detective sister confines her surveillance operations to sitting in coffee shops in the shopping centre where Clarence was last sighted and hoping for him to appear again. She's enlisted Corinne's help, and to a lesser extent Nancy's, so they now have a way to occupy themselves for the hours between their classes, and plenty to tell anyone who'll listen.

"He's not the one who killed Clarence," Jane says, "But he knows who did."

"He's engaged," adds Nancy. "To a girl who we've had classes with. She's pretty."

"She has a rad ring."

Corinne says that, "She knows too. She knows everything about what happened."

It must have occurred to me at this point that my sister and Faye's sister and Nancy could not have known all of this purely from watching and waiting, but I either choose to ignore this or to focus on Faye herself, who is performing amateur investigations of her own.

"It's like he's not telling me something," she says, as the two of us and Ross sit on the veranda of a hotel overlooking the ocean. "I tell him that he should find someone, or at least hook up more often, and he just looks at me with this weird knowing expression. He's so frustrating." She's talking about Craig, whose lack of a girlfriend seems to trouble her at points throughout the day, allowing her to propose a new solution at each of these moments.

"So I went through his BlackBerry," she begins, and is interrupted by Ross spilling some tea onto his knee, maybe out of clumsiness or the fact that Faye has him styled into a scene in which he plays the stereotypical gay best friend that he isn't, or maybe out of theatrical shock or terror, and she pauses her story abruptly to revisit a memory of Ross dropping a bottle of Patron at someone's

birthday party during someone else's speech, but I say,

"What did you find on Craig's phone?" And she says,

"Oh, nothing. That's what's weird. All his messages were deleted. Only the most mundane emails. He can't be that boring, can he?"

"Of course not. He's *your* brother." I hope I don't sound bitter.

"Where did he leave his phone lying around like that?" Ross asks.

"Oh you know, in his bag. If he's deleted everything, I think he's hiding something."

"Nothing at all though?" I quiz to sound as if I feel confusion rather than relief. "Not even messages from Laura?"

"Now Laura – that's someone who needs someone," says Ross, who thinks that everyone needs someone, anyone, and he does not know at all what he has set into motion between mouthfuls of tiny salmon sandwich.

Grant Carson

Now, increasingly, I seem to be dating Laura. It's not awkward anymore when I pay for her food, and we go to more and more places alone, and then one night in a corridor at a house party she has me pushed up against a wall and is kissing me. We don't have sex that night but a week later I take her to movies and the one we want to see only starts two hours after we arrive to book our tickets, so we drink wine in a restaurant in the shopping centre until it starts. In the dark and almost-empty theatre Laura pushes her fingers in between mine and kisses me again, and the movie's short so when it ends we're both still drunk and we end up in bed at my digs. I'm happy that she's good at all of this but mainly I'm just happy, and when I feel stupid and naïve for feeling that way I look over at her and she looks happy too, and it's a relief, and I know that we won't talk much about this. Somewhere before, between, and after these events, Laura had started doing my laundry, I had started cooking for her, and she had been offering me pieces of life advice that I hadn't asked for. We spent a lot of nights on her couch watching DVDs, and we have similar tastes in music, which makes things easier, and everyone's really pleased that things have worked out this way.

Ross

"Do you *have* to invite her tonight?" is a question that Sarah's long had a habit of asking Craig about Laura. Sometimes he answers 'yes', and sometimes he just walks out and abandons his plans with Faye and her friends and ends up seeing a movie with Laura alone instead, but increasingly the answer is 'no', because Laura's seeming to become oddly self-sufficient. For one reason or another, she finds out nothing about Corinne and her friends' quest to find Clarence, and they know little about how much she's starting to find out. When I see her trying to get closer to Craig, I feel sorry for her for a bit because he's a million miles away from all of us.

To Laura's credit – and because this is to Laura's credit, Sarah will never admit it and neither will I – she does have a few friends who she spends time with. More impressive is that she sometimes enjoys her time with these people, and she makes new friends and keeps trying to find someone whose company distracts her from Craig for more than a few moments. So that she doesn't simply find a substitute for his company, she finds people who are his opposite in a number of ways – they're female, straight, aren't writers, and don't order wine with breakfast – and in other ways are a lot like him – they're wealthy, cynical, and good-looking.

None of them ever has cash, so they pay with their cards and tell Laura that she can pay them back next time. She's pleased that they keep to this – that they want to see her again and don't have the Carson compulsion to pay for everything of hers – and she impresses and unnerves them with her memory for exactly how much she owes them for coffee, croissants, red velvet cupcakes, or artisanal cheese.

Craig Carson

"Why do you want to be a writer?" you ask me.

"Book launches," I reply.

"Really, though," you say.

"I guess I'm just angry," I reply.

"It's a nice night," you say to me, and talking about the weather is what I've reduced you to. I look at you over the little table that sits between us, holding our almost-drained wine glasses, and see that I've argued with you, undermined you, or laughed at you about what you've had to say on every conceivable topic, and now you've run out of options. I don't think that you used to drink wine when we started seeing each other, and you're smoking now, so that you can follow me outside.

Little more than a year ago, you pushed me into a room at some penthouse where we were drunk with Faye and Sarah and some more of your friends. You locked the door and I sat down on the bed and then you were next to me, kissing me and sliding a hand into my jeans clumsily but insistently (you weren't so much more experienced at this than I was) and I thought you were brave, because I didn't know how clear I'd made it that I'd wanted this too. When we came out of the room Faye thought you'd just been giving me drugs. We hardly knew each other so you didn't know what to say to me then but we were kept busy acting natural, and the two of us had everything left to talk about. Best of all, we had a secret, so nothing that anyone else said could be as important as the things that you said to me or that I said to you.

Now, I just say, "The weather's beautiful." and I still want to be close to you, but the conversation has dried up.

"I'm sick of this," you say, a few mornings later when the two of us are having breakfast at a little restaurant in a row of restaurants and coffee shops on a hill in town. I look up from my french toast, crispy bacon, and honey, and ask patiently,

"What are you sick of, Ross?" and you reply,

"This. All the lying to everyone." And I didn't think that that was the problem so I ask about other things that I don't really believe to be the matters at hand,

"So that's the problem? You're not sick of me paying for your meals and your drinks, or of being with me in nice places, or of my friends, or of being a martyr about everything that you have to do for me? It's the lying to *everyone* that's getting to you?"

You frown at me and look momentarily distracted by your wild mushroom omelette, but you say, "Don't bring that into it. I want to tell people about us."

"You just told most of the restaurant. You tell quite a few people. Who in particular would you like to tell?" I'm using what Corinne calls my passive aggressive tone, and this is what keeps it from sounding to everyone seated around us that I'm attacking Ross.

"Well, Faye, and-

"If this is about my sister, like everything is, and about possibly offending her, then I can't help you. I'm not enough for you in some way, and I've done what I can to fix that, but if being a public couple is what you want, not being with me, then I'm not your solution."

I get up at this point and get my coat and start taking my cigarettes out of the pocket as I head for the steps down from the veranda to the street, but I can't quite leave you there with the bill, which I don't think that you can pay. I turn back, pay, wait for my card to be approved, then I leave again, all without making eye contact with you.

You don't come up to me, and it takes all of my willpower not to turn around to find out if you're still eating your breakfast, and maybe mine too.

Laura

When Craig breaks up with Ross he arrives at my door, not suffering from any apparent trauma, but with a very visible intention of staying for a while. He carries a bag far larger than the

one he usually carries when he's spending nights at my flat or Faye's. Unrelated to this is the fact that he's soaking wet from a storm that's broken out unexpectedly as he was coming over.

He smokes cigarettes and we watch old movies, then we order pizza with a thin crust and he asks,

"If you could only eat one food for the rest of your life, what would it be?"

"Sandwiches. What would you eat?"

"Pizza."

"That's cheating. You can put anything on a pizza and it's a completely different food."

He frowns at me. "And sandwiches are all the same?" he asks, and I shrug.

He teaches me to play a card game that I'll forget and his heart's not in it. He wants cheap wine, but not to leave the house. He doesn't want any drugs that might cheer him up, just sleeping pills, and neither of us know where to get those without talking to Faye. He sleeps all day, and goes back to the novel at night, but I don't think he writes much, because we end up watching *Gossip Girl*. I fall asleep next to him, unhelpful. I make him breakfast, and coffee, but he doesn't eat much, and goes back to bed, then I lie next to him and read until he wakes up and needs his book back, and then I go back to sleep. He asks where Grant is and I tell him that Grant's busy, but I've got a few messages from him on my BlackBerry asking where I am. I tell him eventually that I'm busy with Craig, and that Craig's just broken up with Ross, and he doesn't ask anything further. Craig opens a bottle of vodka that he's bought (he has left the house for the first time in days while I was sleeping) and asks me,

"What's the most drunk you've ever been?"

"After my matric dance."

"You're a cliché." He smiles.

"What about you?"

"There was this time in St Francis..." He begins, and I get comfortable, because his and Faye's stories about St Francis Bay can stretch out for what seems longer than their weeks away there, but I hang onto every word of them. This story ends with a wrecked boat and Craig not being allowed out on New Year's Eve, then Faye sneaking him out of a window.

"You're a cliché," I say to him when he finishes the story.

Craig takes a bath and when he's done he looks like he's been crying, so I put my arms around his waist and he puts his arms around my shoulders and for a moment he gives in, then he says,

"Hey, can you make spaghetti for dinner?" and I do.

Times moves quickly, food runs out, and neither of us have been going to classes, then one day when I am half asleep and don't expect this at all, Craig says, "I'm gonna go now." His bag is already half-packed so I know that any protests would be useless, but I ask him why he's going and he says, "I can't stay forever."

Grant Carson

After about six days, Laura comes back. I'd got used to her presence already, so these days have passed strangely, with me always looking over my shoulder for someone who turned out not to be there, and I feel a kind of relief at having her back where I can see her – but I don't tell her this.

It's not raining anymore, but it's still cold and dark, and she's not saying much. She smells like she's just showered but she looks exhausted, and when I sit down on the couch in the lounge she sits next to me but also lies on me, with her head on my shoulder, and she just lets me talk until I ask her if she wants to go to bed now, even though it would still be light outside if it wasn't for all of the clouds. She lies down properly on my lap, with her her face looking away, then rolling onto her back and stares up at me.

"I've missed you," she says, and then, "Okay, let's go to bed."

When we're there with the lights off she kisses me, then puts a cold hand under my shirt and lets me undress her, and when we're lying still together later it feels as if all of our fitful movements were in aid of arranging our limbs just as they are now, fit perfectly together, and I feel that

inside. You heard the phrase from some arrogant boy on campus who heard it from his mother and you liked it: the first letters of the words spell 'ABC'. We sat inside to begin with, but then moved outside, each with a glass in one hand, you with the other hand on the bottle tucked under your arm.

"Craig." I say, and you answer,

"Yes?" and I forget entirely what I was going to say.

When it starts to seem that it's getting darker – and it's getting dark earlier and earlier these days – we realise we'll need to go home soon, although neither of our phones have rung; no-one is looking for us.

"I can't drive," you say to me, meaning that you're too drunk to do so. "I don't think you can, either."

"Probably not." I reply.

"Well, we're going to have to stay here. Luckily, we know a good hotel in the area."

Morgan

Taking one course with Mark seemed frivolous, taking two feels like a plan. He's enrolled in an etymology class that I heard someone say is basically for anyone who can't pass other BA courses, so I'm surprised to find everyone producing quite lengthy homework assignments on my first day there. I'm more surprised still to hear that we are going to discuss these answers – every single one of them – right now, and I'm taking out a notepad and preparing to lean over and tell someone that I've left my workbook at home when someone sits down beside me and says,

"Hi," and I turn to see Mark sitting beside me.

"Hi," I say. "You take this class?"

"Yeah," He says, smiling, and takes out his book and assignment, and I decide to be at least partially honest before something awful happens, so I say,

"I haven't done this. Can I read from your answer sheet?"

The class starts and I find that it's interesting – its essentially about etymology, a word I did not know the meaning of but do now, and we discuss the meaning of the word 'necromancy', finding that it means more than just 'talking to dead people'. The lecture venue is one I haven't seen before and it's furnished like most of the other older rooms – steps of a blocked desk-and-chair structure, walls painted in colours that are drab but that fulfil our fantasies of an academic environment, linoleum floors added later than the other furnishings, white board added even later – but this room is unique in that it's in the centre of the building, so it's surrounded by other classrooms on all sides, and positioned between two levels. I feel claustrophobic in here, then very safe, many degrees of separation from the world outside and the persistent winter rain.

"Our next word is 'ameliorate'," begins the lecturer, who has so much energy that she almost ruins my sensation of being ensconced in a cozy separate world in which time slows down. "How about... You, with the stripes, what did you answer here?"

I find that she's pointing at me so I glance down to check if it would really be possible for a normal human being to see the fine stripes on the t-shirt that you can only see a tiny triangle of under my cardigan and blazer, and although I conclude that it would not, I realise that that is what's happened. Mark's paper is positioned between us so that if he looks down at it it looks as if he's put his homework at his right, and if I look down at it it's on my left, not that far off, and with my heart beating because I feel that I may have been caught, I say,

"To make better?"

"To make better," she answers, in agreement I think, and then goes on to elaborate with facts that I won't remember because the rush of relief I feel at the fact that she didn't point out to the entire room that I'm an intruder here is overwhelming. The class passes quickly after this, except when the world slows down a little as I watch Mark deliver his answer, and as he's getting up to leave he says,

"So, I'll see you for the test tomorrow?" and this is not something that I've anticipated at all.

everything's as it should be.

I dream about nothing much at all but movement in a murky blackness; it's not an unpleasant dream, but it's soaked through with the feeling of having just woken up and not knowing what's just happened, or where and when you are. I think that it goes on for a long time but Laura sleeps deeply beside me and when I wake up it's early and dark but everything's suddenly very clear. I squeeze Laura's shoulder so that she scrunches up her eyelids, then opens them.

"There was no note," I tell her. "There would have been a note."

Craig Carson

"What you need to do is stop thinking for a few days," Faye says, and so I do. It's cold and so I put on a pea coat over my skinny jeans, T-shirt and cardigan, drink a glass of brandy that someone else has left on the countertop and find a few notes on the floor to last me until I get to an ATM.

I take some friends and acquaintances up on their offers to party together and go to a club that only exists on Fridays, then to another one that you can only go to if you're there with a girl, and I am, so it's okay. There are guys with long hair, girls with short hair, everyone dancing and shaking their hair, wooden floors and carpeted walls, music with lots of drums and cymbals, then The Cure, Black Label everywhere, and a girl drumming glossy black fingernails on a scuffed leather bag. Ross never stopped telling that I was good-looking, or trying to prove it by going down on me often, but tonight's the first time in a long time that I believe it, and it's because of the way that everyone looks at me while they're pretending they aren't. I get it wrong by asking to buy coke at a place where everyone just does pills, and then wanting to dance at a place where all the girls are playing foozeball and the guys are talking about playing pool and remixing hip hop, then a photographer in a cap who doesn't look like a hipster at all takes my picture and while I'm looking into the lens I wonder how it is that anyone manages to hook up here. I express this thought to the girl standing next to me and she thinks that it's as sweet and idiosyncratic of me to say this as it was to try to buy coke here, and she says, "Let's go.", so she and I and two of her friends - they look a lot like me - leave together, but we all get separated. I think that we all got into a taxi together but I end up in a club on the other side of town that I've been to a lot of times and where everyone is so beautifully groomed that I don't think that the artfully dishevelled hipster kids could have planned to end up here. Weirdly, no-one I know is here and so I talk to the barman. He pulls me into the bathroom and I take out some of the pills I bought and offer him one but he just laughs, shakes his head, and cuts me a line.

He leaves me on a couch talking to a boy who looks a lot like Baptiste Giabiconi - olive skin, high cheekbones - but has longer hair, and a girlfriend. I dance with a girl to a Shwayze song and then I decide that I have to leave, and the barman's finishing work so he takes me to a party at the house of some guy he knows at a penthouse in Clifton. There are glass windows that look out over the sea and in the dark it looks as if we're in the middle of the ocean, and I feel like I've been here before. No-one ever tells me who it is that owns the place, but there's a much older guy who says things that I think he couldn't say if he wasn't the host, but I stick to not thinking too much and find a little bar fridge filled with Moët. The barman opens a bottle for me like it's just a habit for him, and I tell him that Moët's for new money, because that's a habit of mine. He's gone for a while and I look around and see that most of the guests at this party are boys younger than I am, all thin, a lot of them an old man's idea of good-looking, and I feel like I'm just beginning to grasp what's going on when the barman puts an arm around my shoulders and starts kissing me. I'm really surprised because I thought he was straight, but he's not, and when he sees the old man watching us making out he wants to take me back to his flat, but I want to go somewhere that I can sleep because I'm exhausted. I take him to a hotel, and after we check in we go up onto the roof and swim in their pool and look at the lights of the city as we do.

We're getting sober now and know that we won't do anything if we don't do it soon, so we go downstairs to our room and leave the curtains open so that we can still see the lights, and take our

clothes off. He removes his T-shirt and my shirt and pants casually, like we're sharing a locker room, though he allows me to drag his jeans off. He acts like he's more drunk than he really is so that he can pretend to forget all of this if he needs to, but he kisses me in a way that suggests he wants to impress me, and it works, then he stops moving and lies very still as I touch my lips to his collar bone and his chest and a jutting hipbone.

"I'm basically straight," he tells me the morning after, but then says that after the things he'd done before I got to the party, he needed to be with someone who was nice to him. It sounds to me like something a drunk person would say, but I'm pleased that someone could think I'm nice. I realise I have to leave before he does so I wait until he goes back to sleep under heavy, soft grey sheets in the hotel room and write my number on his hand so that he doesn't feel abandoned.

I decide to walk home although I know it's a longer way than any distance I've ever walked, and in the rainy bewildering midmorning I walk through streets with tall buildings and the wind to get there. When I get home it feels as if the sun's just rising, even though it's nearly midday.

Sarah Richards

After Craig and Ross break up, Ross lies around reading a lot of Frank O'Hara and crying. I wonder if he understands the poetry or if he's just reading it because Craig said that he liked it, but it suits him in a way that the crying does not.

"I don't know what's wrong with you," Faye says, "But I'll try to help you feel better if you'll let me."

She's drinking gluwain from a thick glass because she's making a point about how cold it is, and she switches it from one hand to another because it's becoming far too warm in her palm as she scrutinises Ross. He opens his big, brown, tragic eyes and says,

"Nothing can help. I'm just sad."

And then closes them again and curls up tighter on our couch. Faye abandons the talking cure then, and resorts to just ruffling his hair. It'll be a long time before I understand the lengths to which she is going to console him.

"You don't have to tell her anything that you don't want to," I tell him very quietly and entirely altruistically when she's gone to her room to nap until it gets dark, and he nods, and I put my arms around him and say, "We'll talk about it all soon, okay?" And I think that he nods.

The first time I realise that Faye is not the only one of us being kept in the dark about some things is on an early evening when I turn on the lights in our apartment and find two sleeping bodies: Faye, in a thin expensive t-shirt and lace underwear, wrapped around Ross and his Jockey shorts on the couch in the lounge. My shock could not have been stronger or drained the colour from my face faster if I'd found them in pools of their own blood.

There's no actual evidence that anything's happened, and I've slept in Ross's arms often enough to know that this on its own is not unusual, but there are two empty bottles of wine on the coffee table next to them, and I know very well what both of them are like when drunk – restless and petulant until they find someone to hook up with, or at the very least rub up against – and I have no doubt in my mind that Faye and Ross now know each other more intimately than I will ever know either of them.

They don't wake up when I walk past them into my room, slam my things down, move into the kitchen, and break a glass while trying to pour myself some water, so I don't bother to wait around and see whether they're finally roused by the sound of my violent closing of the glass sliding door when I leave. Instead, I notice an icy-looking sky and the fact that in the image I can't get out of my head, Faye is biting Ross's neck, and I know that he enjoys this because he's told me so.

I drive off in search of a place that will remind me of neither of them.

I fantasise about never seeing her again, as I do at times like these. Being friends with Faye is exhausting, but it's the fatigue I feel at the thought of removing her from my life that stops me from making the severance.

"I'll get this drink, right, because you got the cab?" she'll ask, and I'll reply,

"Okay, but I paid for that because you paid for lunch, right? But lunch cost more than the taxi did, so I still owe you."

"Cool," she'll say. "You can pay entry wherever we go after here."

And so we owe each other perpetually, but I realise that I could write off debts petty or substantial in my seething anger, but that other problems are present. If I had walked away from her here with the intention of never speaking to her again, I'd quickly find that I'd have to see her again because of the fact that we live together. If we didn't live together, our lives are and always have been mixed together thanks to things – t-shirts, hairdryers, iPods, tubes of make-up, all keeping us together thanks to the fact that they're left intentionally or accidentally in each other's bedrooms. Then Mrs Carson calls me her "favourite child", a joke because she has so many of her own to choose from; my mother pretends not to be fond of Faye but is really just jealous on my behalf, and would be confused if not upset with her gone.

How would we explain each other's absence?

Our mutual friends would be stunned, and we'd have to divide them up between us. The joint investment that we've made in all of them is something that neither of us would be willing to lose the rewards of, and we would not have the courage to make them choose between us.

We'd have to divide up the places we like, or learn to act very mature when seeing each other at these venues, or one of us could move to another city.

Faye could be deleted on Facebook, but she'd keep popping up in the party pictures of others, having a fabulous time without me. Then all of the good photos of me have Faye in them too, and if I could no longer display these, I'd essentially have to start all over. Pictures from our childhood would be lopsided.

Then there are our sisters, Corinne and Jane, with none of our issues, who could never be parted or made to take opposing sides, who have other friendships far too close to allow any of us to conceive of them dividing those up into Team Sarah and Team Faye.

We are largely stuck – and anyway, in her good moments Faye is wonderful.

Craig Carson

Getting away is what we're doing now. Faye is hidden in a hotel room somewhere, I don't know why, Sarah is taking all the pills she can lay her shaky hands on, Ross is keeping out of everyone's way if he possibly can, and I am going home. At the airport I try to write but go outside often to smoke cigarettes, then call Laura to tell her where I am. She sounds frantic, then resigned. The plane taking off makes this all seem too final, and underlines the ending of a strange time that I don't quite want to be over. I fall asleep with a pill Sarah's given me and soon I'm in Durban and the next few days pass slowly, dully, and peacefully, with me sitting by the pool and staring at the view a lot and my mother coming out between consultations with clients to smoke or ask me if I want anything to eat, or to bring me a drink. There are few phone calls from Cape Town, except from Laura. Whether I'm in Durban or Cape Town she calls late at night to ask things like,

"What's the best way to cook chicken?",

"If you could bring one person back to life, who would it be?",

"If you could decide how you were going to die, what way would you choose?",

"How old would I seem if you met me?",

"Who's the happiest person you know?", but other days she'll ask something a lot more difficult, like,

"What is it that Faye does all day?" And then I'll have no answer for her at all. It seems that she mainly just wants to talk, and I don't mind, except when she continues to talk long after I've made it clear that I'm busy with Ross, or at dinner, or perhaps in a movie, but in Durban I have nothing better to do than entertain her thoughts and answer her questions.

"What does Faye, you know, do?" she asks, and I reply,

"You tell me, you're in the same city as she is. What have you been doing with yourself?"

"I've been writing," she says. "But I don't like it. Have you?"

"No, not really. Just drinking. That's Durban."

"That's you."

"That's true. But there's something strange here, right now."

"Strange?"

"Eerie? That's the wrong word. Creepy? I don't know the word for it."

"Then tell me about it."

I pull my coat around me and switch the phone to the other hand and say, "The wind's blowing. You can see a lot of palm trees from our house, and they're all blowing in the wind and they look thin and... hungry. It's getting dark-"

"So early?"

"From like, four thirty," I say, and I'm as bewildered as she sounds. "You can see the casino from our house, so not many of the ordinary yellow lights from the city have come on yet, but you can see the neon ones from the casino, pink and blue, but mainly pink. I think that that's what's making me nervous."

"Unnerving?"

"Nervous."

"But maybe 'unnerving' is the word you were looking for?"

"No. It's beautiful though. It's a little bit cold, and there are those pink lights, and the palm trees, and just the sound of cars far away. I feel like something must be just about to happen." I think she knows what I mean, not because I've explained it well, but because I'm feeling this and so she can too.

"Chilling," she says. "Because you're scared, but also, you know, excitable, and cold too. I think that that would be the best word."

"Hey," I say. "You're right." I wait a while and imagine her looking as tired and as far from excitable as I feel. "I really miss you." I say, and I do.

Craig Carson

Shortly after I get back to Cape Town, Laura is in Durban with Grant. There, I'm told, my mother loves her, and no-one finds it odd that she talks about me constantly.

"You know," She says one night when she calls me. "It's really weird, the whole thing with money. I know your family have money, and it's nice that they're happy to spend it on me, but I hate taking it. I mean, I still feel weird about letting you pay for stuff for me. Let alone them, you know?"

"Why?"

"I don't know. I guess I feel like I owe all of you something."

"Well then, I mean, that's your problem. Just don't worry about it so much, if we didn't want to spend money on you we wouldn't. And that's true with everyone, you know."

I'm not sure that she's convinced, but I never am with Laura.

Corinne Carson

We're sitting outside drinking smoothies at the shopping centre where the twin was last seen, and Morgan has taken the lid off of her blue takeaway cup and is holding the straw so that drips of pomegranate smoothie fall back onto and into the rest of the liquid.

"We're going to need to go to the house," Jane says, and I know instantly which house she means, and I get the same tired, sinking feeling that I experience when my sister begins a sentence with the words, "There's this new bar I think we'll like".

"What for?" asks Nancy, but Morgan says at the same time,

"Okay, I know where it is."

From here, it's only a matter of when we will go to the house (now), how we will get there (we'll

walk), and what it is that we'll pretend to be doing if someone asks us why we're there (going for a walk).

It's a longer walk than we'd imagined – we cross Main Road, pass a lot of private school playing fields, and generally move quite swiftly from busy traffic to suburban streets that feel abandoned in a well-tended sort of way. When we arrive at our destination, it turns out to be a curving street of big houses set far back from the road with big grass verges outside that allow the properties to be elevated a little from the pavement. While we're walking, Morgan is talking about the end of summer and how beautiful it is, but how sad, and I have no desire to think about either of these emotional responses to the greenery around me, and then we are at the house.

The six of us stand in front of the gate, underwhelmed, and stare at the house for a little too long. I'm about to say something or start to tap my foot when Jane says,

"It's creepy." When in fact its only creepiness lies in the fact that it's a nice old house in which nothing bad seems to have happened, and that this difference between its appearance and its actual history cause it to seem deceptive.

"That was his room." Morgan says. "The one on the corner."

"Where does the twin stay?" Jaime asks.

"In the one next door. It faces in the other direction, though, so we can't see it from here."

"Well," says Jane. "We should go in."

"What?" I begin, but Morgan supplies the information that,

"No-one will be there. Just the maid. So it's perfect."

"How do you know all of this?" I ask.

"Oh, I came to a party here once," she says, and she steps forwards towards the gate but Brigitte grabs hold of her arm and says,

"Wait." But she's not about to be the voice of sanity. Instead, she says, "We're going to need a good story about why we're there if we're hoping to be let in and not just climb over the gate or whatever."

"We're not climbing over the gate," I emphasise.

"We're not," Brigitte agrees. "Listen, can we walk while we have this conversation, we're attracting attention to ourselves."

It occurs to me that circling the neighbourhood, in fact circling the playing fields of a school, and then ending up back where we started might draw some attention to us too, but I don't even bother to point this out. We discuss various reasons why we might need to enter the property, but it's decided that simpler is better: we'll just say that we're there to see the twin.

"Does one of us at least know what his name is?"

"Morgan knows the whole floor plan of his house, right Morgs, so you must know?" As it happens she doesn't, but,

"I know," says Brigitte. "His name's Mark."

For this reason it's Brigitte that rings the doorbell, because Brigitte is also the one who knows that at this time of day he has a class that he never skips, so we will ask to be let in to wait for him, take a quick look around, then explain that he's taking too long and that we have to leave. As planned, the cleaning lady answers our ring at the doorbell and lets us in, though we are ushered into the lounge and she glares at us until we all sit down, disallowing any exploring.

"What do we do now?" Jaime whispers.

"We wait." says Jane.

"For what?" I ask, and as if in answer, the doorbell rings again.

The cleaner shuffles over to the door, answers its little intercom, and says, "He's here."

"What? Who?" I ask, and I must sound as panicked as I feel because Brigitte nudges me as we're told, "Mark is here.", and as he comes into the house. We can see the front door from where we're sitting so even before he can finish says,

"Thanks Edwina," He sees us and says, "Oh."

We stare at him in shock for a moment or two, but then Morgan takes over.

"Hi," she says.

"Oh, hi." he says. "What's up?"

"Oh, cool. Um, we came to return your flash drive," she says.

"What?"

"Your flash drive. You left in the lecture theatre after English and I thought I should bring it back in case you have, you know, projects on it that need printing soon, or whatever."

He smiles gratefully at her and does not seem to notice that this is not someone with whom he has an English class and says, "Thanks," but then as she rifles through her bag for a flash drive that I can only assume will be hers, he looks nervously over at all of us and says,

"Hi, guys." Then, "How did you know to find me here?"

"We asked around," she says, because she knows that the simplest lies are the most effective.

"Oh," he says. "Well, lucky guess. I don't actually live here anymore. I just had a class cancelled today and so I thought I'd come by and get a tennis racquet I left behind when I moved out."

She pulls the flash drive from her bag. There's a collective holding of breath: she has one of the generic flash drives that everyone on campus has and that he could easily mistake for one of his own, lost or present in a bag or pocket of his elsewhere, forcing her to hand it over and leave him with whatever proof lay thereon that it was really hers.

"Oh," he begins again. "It's not mine. Did all of you guys have to wait long?"

"No, not at all. Just got here," Brigitte says.

"Oh, good." There's an awkward silence here, and then Morgan chooses to fill it by saying,

"We're having a party next Saturday. You should come."

I think about this, wondering if something's slipped my mind, but conclude that we are definitely not having a party next Saturday, and that Morgan is making this up, and I try not to look worried as I will him to say he can't be there.

"Sounds awesome," he says, with a kind of desperate excitement that I find frightening. "I'll be there."

"Cool," says Morgan, looking a little desperate herself. "It's at like, seven. Eightish. Whatever. There's no Facebook event, but I think it's gonna be big anyway, so you know, bring your friends, or whoever."

"Okay, I will. I'll see you guys there."

He smiles at us as he waves us out in a way that seems unnervingly alive. When we saw him previously, he was moving slowly and alone in a way that seemed to suit the brother of someone dead, or, as I've come to think of him, the image of a murder victim. I wave back in a way that I hope is both calm and enthusiastic, and wait until we're around a corner to say to Morgan,

"You know that there is no party, right?"

"I know," she says, cheery. "I can't believe I said that – but it's okay, we'll just have to have one, I mean, there's space at the house."

"Did you have to mention that it was 'going to be big'?" Jane asks. "That's going to make things quite a bit more difficult for us."

The task we've set ourselves is an intimidating one, but my friends turn out to be equal to it. We have to stage an event that's big, and fun, but that also seems to have been planned weeks ago. It's not as simple as telling everyone that we just hadn't told them until now, because we don't want to alienate everyone we know by making them feel like they're the last to know.

"I mean, it's all got a bit out of hand," I find myself lying. "We were just going to have a few people over, from class, to get to know them better, but we've got the whole garden so now it's going to be a few hundred of us. So you're so welcome to come too."

The lies multiply and I ask, "You didn't get the text? I sent it weeks ago." And no-one wants to believe that they weren't invited or that I forgot them anyway, so they make things easier by saying,

"My BlackBerry's so bad with SMSs sometimes, sorry. Add me on BBM," or "Oh, I think maybe I did. Sorry. But now you've reminded me, so I'll be there."

In the end, it comes down to creating a Facebook event that specifies that we really did try to organise an event without social media's help, that we've been doing so for months now, but that it proved too much for our logistical skills, and so anyone who somehow hasn't heard about the party shouldn't be offended, they should just be there. Everyone seems to be okay with this explanation.

Jane Richards

Faye, inexplicably, has decided to write each of our guests' names on the plastic cups that she's bought for the occasion, but she's facing some difficulties. The first – and this is bringing home to all of us the scale of the event that we have on our hands – is that three hundred people have said on Facebook that they're coming, but that we don't know how many of them will really be there, and how many of them will bring friends, and what those friends will be named.

The next problem is that she's trying to do it while drinking champagne from the bottle and smoking a cigarette, and keeping her already-sprayed hair in place.

"Should you put a shirt on?" Corinne asks, and it's a casual suggestion, to which Faye replies, also casually, that,

"I'm tanning this way. So, I mean, no," and it's true that sitting there in there in her white cotton bra and her denim shorts she has turned a shade or two darker. She puts another cup down on her left with the others that have been written on and says, "Eight."

"You've done more than eight." Nancy says, squinting at them, holding up a hand against the sun.

"Eight people named Mark." Faye counters. "That's eight Marks coming to the party."

"If four hundred people arrive," Sarah says, her voice tinged almost imperceptibly with sarcasm, "that'll be two per cent of the guests. Two per cent of our four hundred guests will have the same name and that, in its small way, will add to the chaos."

"Stop panicking," I say.

"Exactly," says Faye. "We've been to more than a few parties like this, or bigger than this."

"Of course," Sarah is smoking a cigarette and tasting her first attempt at punch while she paces around the trestle table. "but it's always us going to them, not having them. We're the ones breaking lampshades and throwing up in other people's bathrooms and doing lines off of other people's smooth surfaces."

"Breaking lampshades?" Corinne asks, fascinated.

"There was one time when we were in grade eleven and Sarah was doing a handstand on a couch, or trying to, and—" Faye begins, but Sarah is saying,

"Or having sex in their beds, or eating the food in their freezer—"

"There's no food in our freezer, or fridge, or anywhere."

"Or taking showers in their bathrooms, or spilling wine on their carpets, but *now they're here.*"

"It's about time then." Faye is draining the last of the champagne. "Payback. We can afford it. Hide the stuff you're worried about."

"We're not worried," Corinne says.

"I'm not worried either," Sarah says, sitting down to light her next cigarette. "I'm just saying."

"I know," Faye says, and takes a cigarette out of Sarah's box and lights it and continues,

"Remember how much fun it was? The night we broke that lampshade."

"We didn't break it. I broke it and you took half the blame."

Faye shrugs. "I was doing handstands too. Am I getting burnt?"

Corinne Carson

People start to arrive at the party early, people who Jane knows and who have decided not to pre-drink but to come straight to our house instead to have shots in the garden from the bottle of

vodka that they've brought along. Next they'll start on the punch, which Sarah has perfected, except that it needs more ice.

Slowly, more people fill the garden, and although we haven't given the party a theme, there seems to be a consensus that at a party in this neighbourhood, some unspecified fancy dress is required, and so there's a lot of neon face paint.

It's occurred to us, of course, that he might not come to the party at all. He might have been trying to be nice, or trying to get us to leave his house as soon as possible, and all of our efforts may have been in vain. He has our address, and we have his number so we could have called to follow up with him, but as Brigitte put it,

"This is Cape Town. Just because he tells us nineteen times that he'll be there, it doesn't mean that he'll really arrive."

Jane Richards

Halfway through the party we give up hope that Mark The Twin is going to show up, and I feel heartbroken that we have wasted all this effort, but Morgan says infuriating things like,

"At least we're having fun," and worries about trivialities like whether the punch is too warm.

"It's definitely too warm," says Sarah, who has been in a bad mood for the last few days, we don't know why, and then she announces that she's going to walk to the petrol station just down the road to get some, and stalks off. While our neighbourhood is safe during the day, its narrow roads and tall trees make us all nervous at night, and Morgan asks, as Sarah disappears from sight,

"Should we worry about her?"

"It's Sarah," replies Corinne. "If anyone tried to attack her she'd take out their jugular vein her teeth."

I'm surprised by the violence of the statement, but I know that it's a compliment because if it was anything else she wouldn't say it in front of me or Faye, and I agree to the point that the image appears in my head quite realistically.

Sarah Richards

I try to forget Faye's selfishness, and the image of her and Ross on the couch, and we have not discussed the incident at all, but none of my seething anger will go away, so I don't go near either of them when I have to appear pleasant, and find other things to keep me occupied. Tonight, I find other people to talk to at the party, then walk to the shop to buy ice, then feel like I can't bear to go back inside and stand on the road at the end of the girls' house's driveway to smoke a cigarette while I get my strength up and the ice melts.

I wonder why it is that they decided to have this party at such short notice, and think about how dark their road gets at night despite a few streetlights, and realise only when he speaks to me that I feel safe in the decidedly creepy setting because of a boy standing a few metres away, also smoking a cigarette.

"Do you know them?" he asks.

"Sorry?" I reply. I heard him, but need time to come out of my trancelike state of fury/

"Do you know the girls having the party?" he asks.

"Yes, I do," I say. "Do you?"

"Kind of. I mean, they invited me, but under pretty weird circumstances. Anyway, I guess I'll go in. Have you been in?"

"I have. It's pretty fun, you should go in. I thought you were probably just standing out here waiting for drugs or something." He laughs a bit at this. "Why wouldn't you, though?"

"Wait for drugs?"

"Go in."

"Oh, I don't know. I don't really know them. I don't know if they really want me here."

"I'm sure they do. They were really excited about this whole thing." I almost start telling him about how the whole event's been thrown together so fast, about how no-one seems to have got more than a strange and informal invitation, but I suddenly think of how cruel and merciless my sister and her friends can be to people who they don't want around. I feel now that it's my duty to save this quiet boy from them, or at least to give him the option of escape. "But you know," I say, "If you're not keen, you don't have to make yourself go in. I mean, whatever, right? It's just a party." I smile at him, encouragingly I hope, as I drop my cigarette and stamp on it. "Anyway, I better go back. Maybe I'll see you inside. What's your name?"

"Mark," he says, and this time I laugh, remembering the conversation we had earlier.

"We get a lot of those around here," I say. "I'm Sarah."

Jane Richards

"Best hook-up song ever," says Morgan, about something that's playing as the party's ending, the punch finished and the guests trickling out.

"No," says Brigitte, shaking her head gravely.

"What?" Morgan's confused as to what's wrong with it.

"It has the words 'flay you alive' in it?" I suggest.

"Oh, no, I meant that it's from *Twilight*," Brigitte says.

"It's a dubstep remix, so I guess that's different?"

"All good reasons why it shouldn't be playing," I agree. "Who made this playlist?" I walk off through the dark to change it, and I notice that summer's ending, and if you're not careful you can forget that there'll be another one.

After the party, I dream that I've died. I don't feature in the dream, but my friends are there one by one. I see Brigitte in the kitchen with her sisters, patient and very thin, putting one of them down to search for her phone, to pick it up to take the call that tells her that I am gone, then hanging up and sitting down very quietly and ignoring Grace and Audrey for a moment or two before pulling one of them onto her lap. They are eight and seven, and I never could tell them apart. In the dream I can see all of them. Jaime has to leave the library to take the call – she ignores the number she doesn't know, but on the fifth ring call she finds it odd that whoever's calling hasn't left a message, and she goes outside and picks up the phone, then starts to cry in the area between the library doors and the coffee shop where we used to buy hot chocolate in winter. There's no sound in the dream. I wonder who's calling them – is it the same person, or does one of them hear and pass the message on? Morgan's asleep although it's the middle of the day, and doesn't seem to understand what she hears, blinking with sleepy eyes. Nancy looks better than I'd ever seen her, and is holding six shopping bags, but she never misses a call, and asks whoever's on the other end of the line to repeat what she thinks she heard. Corinne's by the pool, and at first I think that it's Faye who I'm seeing, but then I realise that it's Corinne with her hair looking lighter in the sun.

I feel nothing while I am dreaming and when I wake up I think hard about it, and what worries me is that none of them are together in the dream. If this was a glimpse of the future then I want to know why they are apart more than I want to know why I am dead, but I'm not going to get to know the answer to either of those questions.

Craig Carson

Laura calls me from Durban, where she's at a party and says,

"It's so strange here. I'm staring into the pool... And nothing really makes sense, you know?" I have a clear picture of her in my head, staring into water that's lit from beneath, with bare feet and her hair blowing in the wind, but her clothes still neat. In the picture in my head she's next to a pool at a house where I once went to a party years ago, and it's big and looks faux-tuscan with a lot of brick, but then I remember that at that party there was no water in the swimming pool because they'd been having it painted black. I want to talk to her, but I'm being shuffled towards a taxi, so I

say,

"Listen, I'm on my way to a party. So I'll call you tomorrow, okay?" There's a long silence before she replies,

"Okay." Impassive, without intonation, perhaps with her feet kicking around a bit in the cold water.

"Bye Laura."

"Love you."

"Have fun." And I end the call and put the phone into the pocket of my jeans.

Later that night, when I least expect it – and I'm not sure there was any point at which I did expect it at all – the straight boy uses the number that I left behind with him and gets in touch. I tell him to come to the party and he fits right in here, knows some of the guys there, and seems as concerned as everyone else does that my brother is not there, though I'm sure he's never met him. His name is Tyler, and he dresses like a catalogue hipster in brogues and a band t-shirt with some little vest, waist-coat worn over it, but this doesn't fit well with the way he was when I met him – dressed all in black, very neatly, being very polite to patrons who wanted Patron palomas or Jaegermeister shots chased with four different kinds of chasers.

"I'm a model," he shouts to me over the music playing in Corinne's garden. "So I just bartend to, you know, pay for everything while I build my portfolio," and suddenly it all makes sense, and I get the chilling sensation that he probably has a blog, too.

He's not drinking much but by some force of habit he's pouring drinks for me and my friends, and it seems silly that we're still here so I suggest that we leave, and he suggests that we go for a drink somewhere else, and he knows a place, so we leave and end up in a bar and restaurant that seems to house a grown-up version of the Claremont crowd, all hell-bent on having their allocation of fun for the weekend now that they can't party on Monday, Tuesday and Thursday, too.

Tyler and I get drinks (he's having a beer, I do too) in the corner of the bar, and he says, "I like your friends. They're really fun. Your sister's cool too."

"Which one?" I ask.

"Corinne?" he says. "I just met the one, do you have more?"

I smile at him and it seems charming and sweet that he hasn't noticed Faye, that he managed not to see that she and a guy from my politics class pulled the trampoline to the edge of the pool and jumped in while he, absent-mindedly, was holding a bottle of champagne, starting a trend, perhaps causing some guests to get hypothermia. It seems sweet that he managed to avoid having someone lean over to him and say, "That's Faye Carson," or that if he did he managed to avoid connecting my surname and hers, and I say nothing. It all seems charming until I realise, later, that I don't impress him either, and that mentioning Faye's name might not have been the worst idea in the world after all.

"Hey, when we met," I begin, as if this thought has just occurred to me, "who was that guy I met? The one whose penthouse we visited."

"Well, it's not actually a penthouse. It's just two flats joined together."

"Oh, I remember now. He tried to tell me it was three but--"

"Oh, he does that to everyone. He should really take that *House and Garden* story off of the wall if he wants to get that past anyone."

"I think it was *House and Leisure*."

"Ah. What's the difference?"

"One's Condé Nast. The other one's- something else." How did I become complicit in his attempt to change the subject? I stay silent for a few moments so that he eventually has to say,

"He's a guy, who... Used to come to the bar a lot. He knows a lot of my friends, and the guys I work with." I still don't say anything. "So now I... Know him too. He's really weird. He just gives us champagne and money and whatever, drugs for whoever wants but I don't do that, I mean, not there, I don't want to owe him anything."

"So, does he want anything from you? I mean, in return?"

"Oh, yeah. But I mean, I don't have to do anything..." He's probably going to say "Anything

I don't want to" but maybe he realises what a cliché this sounds like and instead he chooses to suddenly hear the song they're playing and he leans his head a little to the side for some kind of emphasis and says, "I love The Strokes," and of course he does, and I order another whisky, and focus on how good-looking he is.

Craig Carson

After the party I wake up hungry and hungover, at the girls' house. I don't know why I decided to stay over, but I can't have been too drunk the night before because I remember at least that it felt like a good idea to stay. I love in the fridge but there is nothing there, or in the freezer, or in the cupboards. I knock on Corinne's door and hope that she doesn't have a napover in there, but she calls out that I can come in, though she doesn't acknowledge my presence my emerging from underneath the blankets, where she seems to be curled tightly.

"Want to get some food?" I ask the lump of Egyptian cotton duvet. "You don't have any."

"Cool," she says, getting up, finding a hoodie on the floor. "Let's go."

My car isn't there so Corinne drives us, taking corners sharply and driving fast and looking unnervingly calm as she comes very close to pedestrians. She is single-mindedly hungry, I realise.

"Did you have a good night?" she asks as she stares into a laminated menu once we're seated at a pub where her friends allow her to drink but not to eat, but where I am held against my will now because she drove us here and because I have a feeling of general guilt that I'd like to appease.

"It was good." I say. "I got pretty drunk."

"Do you think I can have nachos for breakfast? I did too. I kissed a guy who knows you - Mark?"

"Mark... Michaels? Woods?"

"Sturgess."

"Oh, nice guy."

"What about you?" she asks, looking up, keeping a finger on the words 'Bacon Burger' so that she doesn't lose her place.

"I... didn't... see Mark?" I say.

"No, I mean, you left with that nice guy who I always see in the food court and stuff, did you guys hook up?"

I check the time on my BlackBerry, too tired to roll up my sleeve to look at my watch, and see that it's before ten - still too early to order a drink. "I did." I say.

"He's hot," she says, and just like that I've come out to one of my sisters, but she keeps talking. "Good rebound material. An improvement on Ross."

I hesitate then say, "He is. But it's all kind of a weird situation. I mean, with him. He has these friends, who hang out in Camps Bay. And they all know this old guy, in Camps Bay. And they hang out there a lot."

"Two flats converted into one? Little fridge for the champagne? Lot of vitamins?"

"Um. Yes. Have you been there?"

"No, just heard about it."

"From who?"

"Gay friends. Oh, and Faye."

"Oh." There's a silence that I find uncomfortable but then I have to ask, "So, what happens there?"

"I don't know. I gather that he pays them? For... Whatever. But I've never found out. Which I think is better." She looks around for a waitress, then says urgently, "Not that you couldn't tell me if anything like that happened to you."

I smile at her, and think about how the two of us are just alike, in the same way that Faye and Grant are alike and entirely unlike Corinne and me.

"Thanks, baby sister." I flip over the menu to search for the drinks section. "You'll be the first to know if I let an old man pay me for sex."

"You can't sleep with him." Corinne says, frowning.

"Why not?" I ask, genuinely interested to hear this.

"Because you don't need the money. The fact that the Volvo's petrol is getting expensive and you'd like to get a second Tag does not justify doing that."

There are so many problems with her reasoning that I don't know where to begin.

"I don't drive a Volvo," I say.

"The last guy who slept with him did," she replies, so I ask,

"How do you know that?"

"Somebody told me."

"Okay. Why do you think I'd be sleeping with him for money?"

"Because he's offered you money to sleep with him."

"I wouldn't have to take it."

"You wouldn't do it for fun." We both know that, because he's ugly. "You're trying to make me argue with you."

"You're good at it. How poor would I have to be to make it okay?"

"I don't know. In trouble. Ross."

"Ross needs money?"

"Of course he needs money."

"Why hasn't he asked me?"

"Well if you haven't offered by now I guess he thinks that you're not going to be helping him out."

And it's true, but there's also the problem of the fact that if I gave Ross money – gave it to him, in a wad of cash, rather than just paying for his food and generally supporting him – it would feel like I was paying him for what he used to do with me, if only because he deserves it.

"I'm not turning him into a male prostitute," I say.

"You're just looking at it the wrong way," Corinne tells me.

By the time a waitress comes to our table it's late enough to order a vodka and orange juice, so I do, and eggs, and Corinne decides against the nachos and just has a beef burger, and the enthusiasm with which she devours it makes me feel very lethargic.

Morgan

When I saw Mark the Twin last, I realise, I gave the impression that I'm in his English class, and I realise further that he might find it odd if he doesn't see me there again, so I decide to start going to it. Problems with this idea include the fact that he's a year older than we are and as I have taken no English at all, let alone the four first- and second-year classes that would have provided me with the credits to register for this one.

"Don't register?" suggests Jane, so I don't, I just go.

The best part of this idea is that the class is large enough to allow me to blend in with the other kids who are taking it. Because I've never taken any English courses I don't run any risk of meeting a professor who would enquire as to why I was in the wrong class for my age, but then I suspect that professors don't notice these things, and wouldn't be too troubled by them anyway. Another useful point is that the course is on Modernism, so I'm not the only one who hasn't read the set texts.

"Were you here yesterday?" I ask the guy sitting next to me. He seems to be wearing eyeliner, and I like him immediately when he gives me an insightful summary of the previous day's lecture, adding in opinions that I'm willing to bet are his own.

Mark is seated a little in front of me and to my right. He sits alone, asks no questions, and shows that he's paying attention by staring very intensely at the lecturer rather than by taking notes. There is no sign of the fiancé that we've heard that he has, and I am desperate to see her.

Jane Richards

"We should have just climbed over the fence," Morgan says cheerfully as we walk through piles of leaves that have appeared from nowhere – not from the trees, which are still so full of crispy brown foliage that they can't possibly have accommodated any of the leaves we scrunch underfoot between what sits comfortably on the branches.

"Maybe," I say, and smile at her, and choose not to take too seriously the look of steely resolve that she has in her eyes. The wind, which could be called a breeze if you were the understating type, is starting up at what I think is the wrong time of year.

Winter is beginning, and Faye is in a warm suite in a hotel where we will never find her. She eats miniature chips from the minibar and drinks from the assorted miniatures of alcohol in there, even though she knows she'll be drinking a lot and should just open one of the full-size bottles.

She lies in a hotel room that's all white – except for the carpets, which are beige, and some mahogany furniture – and that looks very much like an expensive hotel room should, with a view over the choppy winter sea framed by almost-white curtains. She sleeps uneasily, though, and when she dreams it's a different place she imagines.

This hotel, the unreal one that she conjures, is lavishly furnished too, but in a more modern style and there is no sea view and little light, because of the lush Amazonian vegetation that crowds its reception area and lounge. It's cool, and everything seems to be glossy in greens and reds, and the place really could be anywhere: it could be underground, except for the fact that when you put your head back and look up, you can see the sky, white and complete with tumbling dark clouds. The hotel could be anywhere, but it turns out, when you get into the big black airport transfer car to leave, that you're in the middle of the desert. Leaving the lobby, you see that you were mostly glassed in, and note idly that the structure's elevators are on its outside, presumably allowing a view of the desert without and the forest within. Now that you're in the car, you don't know where you're going, just that there's lots of desert ahead to travel through.

Faye wakes up uneasy, but not anxious. She switches on the TV, and drifts back to sleep.

Sarah Richards

Faye's phone stays turned off and I remain worried.

I visit my sister but I'm anxious and distracted and she's busy watching *Jawbreaker* with Brigitte and Corinne.

"I've missed this movie," she says to the two of them, and one of them says,

"I miss the nineties," then the other replies,

"It would be cooler if we actually had jawbreakers."

"I've got liquorice?" one of them offers.

Faye may be in trouble, she may be angry at me: either way, it's a problem. Every time my phone makes a sound I'm sure that it might be her, with good news or bad, but then finally it is: she sends me a message that says, "I'm okay, in a hotel nearby. Don't worry X". When I try to call her, the phone is off again, and I feel like the message is her telling me to follow her, so I do, but this is all making me nervous so I can't go alone.

Laura

Although his break-up with Ross seems to have caused him little actual pain or sadness, Craig tells me that, "My misery has really helped my writing."

None of this misery shows up in the writing, but he's producing volumes of text, and he lets me read it; sends it to me so that I can print it out and lie on the grass and look through it all, squinting as sun reflects into my eyes off of pieces of paper that are too new and white. It's good, I think, and I smile when I read conversations that I recognise, and that he seems to have copied down word for word from exchanges that've happened between people we know.

Later, I realise that I may not have understood what's happening here: I read a line in his

story and then hear him saying it later, to Faye, and what's most unnerving is that her response is just what's predicted in the story. I wonder briefly whether he's seeing the future, then I wonder even more briefly whether he's writing it into being, like some movie I saw in high school. I come to the conclusion that he's just trying out his words on paper before he utters them, or screening them to a test audience while deciding when to keep them.

When he is gone I miss him, but I try to keep my longing in check. One day without him, I tell myself, is nothing, two days are fine, three days not really so bad – and I seldom have to set my mind to longer periods than that, because we have classes together and so he has to be around me, like it or not, if he hopes to pass the course.

While I'd rather have him with me than not by any means possible, the issue of our daily lectures together begins to become a problem for me as I wonder whether, if he was not forced to, he would still want to see me. Would he make plans to see me outside of campus, because at the moment he does not do that and tends to spend weekends away from me. He might miss me and want to see me after a few days of my absence, I think, but then there's also the chance that he wouldn't miss me at all, to the point of not noticing my absence in the seat next to him, and it's this problem that haunts me. I tell myself that he doesn't want to see me later because we're already studying together, and that that's a lot of time spent together already, and that everyone needs space, but I'm not convinced. This is when I begin to count.

I'm compiling a mix CD for him and downloading the music I know he likes is painstaking because you can't get them on any mainstream download site but have to use one that sends you to endless blogs where individual songs are available for free. I go through each of them and I'm doing well but when I get stuck on the fourth to last song on my list and when I click onto a blog that purportedly has the track but displays the message, "I'm sorry, but you're looking for something that isn't there", it seems very meaningful.

Craig Carson

Tyler tells me that he's in some sort of trouble with the guy from Clifton and with his boss and he throws in words like "scared" and "hit men", all with a sort of fake flippancy, and although I know that his boss is harmless I know nothing about the guy from Clifton, and I realise that it would be awkward if he did end up getting killed or something with me partially responsible, so I tell him he can stay at my place for a while.

My brother and Laura are still in Durban. My mother keeps pointing out that they should remain there a while longer, and why, and Laura has become complicit in the reasoning and the promotion of guilt that Grant is no good at arguing against.

Laura calls me early in the morning and seems to want to talk about nothing which is okay because Tyler isn't awake yet and I've been passing the time mainly by pacing but then she asks,

"If you could get rid of one of my friends, who would it be?"

"What?" I ask.

"Which one of my friends would you get rid of if you could choose one of them?" My silence must still sound confused because she goes on explaining: "I mean, I guess what I'm asking is which of my friends you like least."

"Get rid of how?"

"Oh, I don't know. I just mean – who would your life be better without?"

"Well, none of them I guess. Because they're *your* friends, so they don't affect my life that much, you know."

"Oh, okay."

It seems that I've given her the wrong answer. "Why?" I ask. "Who of my friends would you get rid of if you could... get rid of... one of them?"

"Oh, I don't know." She sounds to me like she's shrugging. "None of them, I guess. Ross maybe? But it was a stupid question, you're right. You can't just make people go away."

Something about what we've just said must trouble her, because she soon ends the

conversation, without saying much more. With the call over, I take in my surroundings for the first time since the phone woke me.

I'm at Faye's, having slept on the couch. Visiting is awkward with Ross here, but since Faye's been missing I've been around here even more than when she was present, I don't know why. Now, everyone else is somewhere other than this, doing various things that had to be done, but Sarah's here with me. It's nine in the morning and she takes a bottle of wine out of the fridge and hands it to me to open but before I can open it she asks, "What do you want to do today?"

"Um," I reply. "I hadn't thought about it. Do you want to go for a drive?"

"Okay," she says.

In the parking garage, she seems oddly purposeful for someone who's just acquiescing to my suggestion, on the road, driving, even more so.

"Where are we going?" I ask.

"I don't know. Where do you think we should go?"

"Well, we're on Main Road now, headed towards Camps Bay, so I suppose we should go to Camps Bay?"

"Yes, we could do that." She says, in a voice that would need a smiley face to express its pleasantly but unenthusiastically assenting tone if it was typed rather than spoken.

"Or... We could keep driving?"

"You're right. It's such a nice day and we said we wanted a drive."

She puts on her sunglasses and then lights a cigarette as we drive along the road that's beginning to wind now, and it's around about the time that we first see the view of the sea that I begin to fear for my life, but both of her hands are back on the wheel before we hit the part of the road that takes us alongside the beach.

When I realise what's happening, I almost tell her that I know that we're going to be looking for Faye and that that's okay with me as long as we do get to eat something at some point, but since she must be doing things in this way for a reason I say,

"While we're here-"

"What?"

"She said she was in a hotel nearby, didn't she? While we're here - I mean, she likes these hotels - should we, you know, check if she's around?"

"Well, we need to find Faye," says Sarah, summarising, and I'm about to tell her that she hasn't known Faye as long as I have, and doesn't understand that she does this kind of thing, but then I realise that she has, and that she probably knows Faye better than I do. It's safe to say, then, that if Sarah chooses to ignore the evidence that this is just another of Faye's episodes, that I'm not going to change her mind with simple, powerless facts. "But how would we do that?"

"I don't know," I reply, very genuinely this time. "What do you think?" She frowns deeply.

"I don't know either." I realise with some sadness that she's being honest too now. "The thing is, I mean, her two favourite hotels are nearby, so..."

"Yeah. But we can't wait to see if she goes in and out of the entrance, because that's the whole appeal of these places for her - that she can order everything in. And we can't just go up to reception and ask if she's checked in."

"Can't we?"

"No. They wouldn't tell us."

She pulls to the side of the road, perhaps so that she can think more clearly, transferring the tiny part of her mind that's been focused on driving to the task of deciding how best we can apprehend Faye.

The hotels I like are in the city centre. I prefer dark furnishing, dim lighting, and as impersonal a feel as possible, because if I wanted warmth and intimacy I'd be setting up a home, not leaving mine for a hotel. My sister likes the kinds of hotels that like white and beige, the kind that serve high tea, very specifically the kind that have sea views. This is how we've ended up in Camps Bay near to the kind of bars that house second-rate celebrities in summer and disappointed tourists in winter, parked near to the grass and palm trees that separate the road from the sea, hesitating

before we pass the first of Faye's regular residences on the way to the second.

"Maybe what we need is lunch," Sarah says, but I've had an idea that's made me forget the prawn cocktail that I'd been worrying was too ironically retro to find in an area that takes itself as seriously as this one does.

"I've had an idea," I say. "Let's just try it out here and then if that doesn't work out so well for us, we'll have lunch before thinking up a better plan."

"Okay." She replies.

"I'm looking for my sister," I tell the hotel's receptionist. "We're going for lunch and I've forgotten whether we're meeting up here or at the restaurant, and now her BlackBerry's died." I pepper my story with facts, not too many, and roll my eyes for authenticity. "Has a blonde girl who kind of looks like me just left?"

"Um. No, sorry. I've been on duty since ten, and no-one, you know, young, has come out here. I can give her a message if she comes past?" The way that this suggests that this woman has in fact encountered the 'her' to which she refers troubles me momentarily, but I just say, "That would be lovely. Just tell her that Craig came looking for her and that she needs to charge her phone."

"I shouldn't tell her where to meet you?"

"No, it's okay. Just that she really needs to turn her phone on. Thanks again." I smile at her, and Sarah and I turn to leave.

"Sir," the receptionist calls after us when we're about to walk out. "I might be confused, but I think your sister checked out yesterday."

"Oh," I say, not knowing how to ask her to elaborate without breaking the illusion that this is all a very casual interaction. "Well, I could be the one who's getting this wrong. It's the eighth though, right?"

"It's the ninth," the receptionist replies, smiling for the first time.

"Well here I am thinking that my sister's an hour late and I'm about—" I check my watch for effect — "Twenty three hours and fifteen minutes behind schedule. Well, I better go and find her and act very sorry."

"You're sure it was his sister?" Sarah asks, a little too intensely.

"Almost. Not as tall, long blonde hair — a girl — but the same face? Same watch?"

"That's our Faye," I say.

"Annabelle."

"What?"

"I might have the wrong person, because this girl was named Annabelle. Is that not your sister's name?"

Sarah jumps in here. "Well that's her second name. She just hates 'Faye'. It's not even on her ID book." She rolls her eyes, shakes her head once, just as she does at Faye's real quirks, then we really do leave.

"Wouldn't she have had to have shown them some kind of proof of who she was? I mean, for her credit card?" Sarah asks when we're alone over lunch.

"Not if she paid with cash," I reply. My sister always carries notes in her wallet, or a coat pocket, or a hidden part of her handbag, and will say from time to time in a voice laden with meaning, "There are some things you can't pay for with a credit card."

"Four days of hotel bills, upfront, in cash?"

"It's possible. If she'd planned ahead."

"Faye, planning ahead?"

"Okay, it seems unlikely. But she obviously charmed them into it somehow. I mean, we had the same watch, right?"

"Right," she says.

There's no prawn cocktail here, so I order a seafood pizza which as it turns out may have been meant for two, and Sarah orders tagliatelle which she twirls around and around her fork, but doesn't eat much of it.

"She's just... Exhausting, isn't she?"

"She's so exhausting," I say, and Sarah looks relieved when I do.

"I guess we'd all be bored without exhausting people," she adds, as if she's worried that Faye is sitting listening at a table nearby and that she'll take this the wrong way.

"I suppose so," I agree, thinking of Tyler. "We keep them alive, they give us something to live for." She likes this, and smiles at me.

"It all just feels sinister. Right?"

"Right. Like we're going to find out something terrible, that'll make our skins crawl."

"But there isn't much left to shock us, is there? I mean, sex, drugs, rent boys. We've kind of done it all."

"Rent boys?" I ask.

"Oh, I called the other day when you were in the shower, so that guy living in your flat picked up your BlackBerry."

"How long did you talk for that you discussed his profession? And he's a model, so I don't know why he went and said that."

"Well, he started telling me about his blog, so I read some of it, and that was just the impression I got. I just feel like we've seen everything, you know," she says, and she shrugs really sadly, and I want to tell her to turn around and look at the sunset behind her because it's breathtaking and might make her feel better, but I just say,

"Maybe that's what Corinne and all of them are looking for with this Clarence thing. They're pretty jaded themselves, for girls in their first year out of high school."

"Corinne and them? Oh no, this is because of Jane. She's the problem here."

"Well, maybe the whole obsession will blow over soon," I say, pouring the last of the wine out of the bottle, remaining neutral.

"It is an obsession though, isn't it?"

"Oh I don't know," I reply. "I don't think they're obsessed, just bored. They need boyfriends or something."

"You sound just like your sister," Sarah says, and rolls her eyes.

"Faye?"

"She thinks everyone needs a boyfriend, and then they'll be happy."

"Not me." I smile at her here, but realise that I don't want to talk about it so I continue, saying that, "You guys don't have boyfriends." Sarah shrugs, looks away.

"She does the long-distance thing so that she never has to spend too much time with any one guy, and I just- I don't know. Guys don't like me. Or don't think I'm hot, so, that's how it is." I don't think that she means this to sound self-pitying, so I reply,

"I'm sure you can't say that no-one thinks you're hot."

"I don't mean no-one. I'm just a specific type, I think. Some guys like me: married men, lecturers, tutors. Unavailable men. So I don't feel completely ugly, and I mean, I like unavailable men so it would all work really well if they weren't - you know, unavailable." I nod.

Sarah Richards

"Okay," you say, and you carry on drinking your wine but nod in a way that shows that you know what I mean.

You're really very beautiful, and I look at you and wonder if you know, then you look at me, and I know that you do. You always lean forward with elbows on the table when I talk and I suspect that it's something you learned to do long ago to give people the impression that you're enthralled by what they're saying, but one of your legs is stretched out to the side, as if you're trying to trips passersby, to get as much late summer sun as you can.

I look at my own glass, in my own thin hand, and it's dripped condensation in the unexpected heat but the wine's not warm yet thanks to the fact that you put ice cubes into it when you poured it out of the bottle for us, just like your sister does.

"Anything but chardonnay," you said, shrugging, when we ordered the wine, sunglasses on

Grant Carson

There's a wide freeway into Durban that feels sinister to Laura because of the fact that it's been dug deep into the land long ago, with big concrete walls on either side. She can think of no reason why this would have been easier than building it on ground level with an elevated bridge above it, and when she looks at it she imagines it filling with a rush of water engulfing cars and the pedestrians that can't in reality walk there, or people tumbling off of its hard sides and into its squared-off depth. This is the first that a lot of people see of the city, if they arrive by road trip or a specific route from the airport, but she and I drove in along a road that allowed her to see the sea out of the window, just in case Durban sea looks any different from that in Cape Town.

"How is Faye?" my mother asks as Laura and I sit at the dinner table with her and my father. "She never has time to talk."

She rolls her eyes here, indulgent, as is her general attitude to Faye's busy social life. Her question seems to be directed at Laura, which is both a relief to me – I don't feel like lying tonight – and a worry – Laura can be painfully honest when I least expect it, and I think someone said the other day that Faye was missing.

"She's fine," says Laura, who's actually sitting in Faye's place just at this moment, to the opposite of my mother so that they can talk effectively, and is well lit by the gentle glow of the dining room's chandelier. "Of course, I hardly see her either. She really is just so *busy*."

My mother smiles, and slices another piece of fillet, and asks,

"And how is Craig?" which of course is another minefield altogether.

Sarah Richards

I can hear my cellphone somewhere in the bed and by the time I reach for it I suspect it's been ringing for a while so I answer it without checking who's calling.

"It's Laura," says Laura, as if she knew I had no idea who was on the line. "I hope I didn't wake you."

"No," I say, because I don't know what time it is and if I've overslept I'd like to create the impression that I have not. I turn on a light and pull Craig's wrist over to me to check the time on his watch. Quarter past four – in the morning, judging by the darkness through the open curtains. Of course she woke me.

"Well I just thought I better call to let you know that Faye's back." There's a long pause as I move through relief to a place of mingled anxiety and indignation.

"Why didn't she call me?" I ask, thinking that it sounds nicer than, "Why did she call you?"

"She did. She says you weren't answering."

"Well it's four in the morning. I'm asleep."

"She tried last night."

"Well why didn't she call Craig?"

"She did call Craig. He's not answering either." There's another of those pauses, then Laura asks, "Wait. How do you know she didn't call Craig? Are you with him? We're looking for him."

"No. If I see him I'll get him to call you," I say, guiltily tossing aside the wrist I'd grabbed.

"Thanks so much." As she says this she sounds more like the simpering Laura that I know so well, but then she adds in her new commanding tone, "Oh, and someone called Tyler is looking for Craig. But Tyler was at Craig's flat so presumably he'll know before any of us do where Craig is."

"Okay, sure," I say. "I'll let Craig know there's a Tyler looking for him."

"And I'll call Faye."

"Well, not right now," replies Laura. "She's sleeping."

"Okay. Not right now."

I know that I won't sleep until I speak to Faye, and I can see that Craig is too fast asleep to talk me through my panic, so I go into the bathroom and close the door and run water into the big,

white bathtub. The lights are off and the blinds are down and when the sun starts to come through them as I let more hot water into the bath for what might be the hundredth time, I think to myself that spending time dark bathrooms will now always remind me of the strange situation in which I find myself now, but then I realise that taking baths in the dark is probably not something I'll do often in my life, so I'm safe from this nostalgia.

When I get out of the bath I put on a nightgown and lie down on the bed and look at the morning sun on the sea outside of the window, and wonder why we found it necessary to pay for a sea-facing room if we just planned to sleep, and a mountain view would have been quite sufficient. Soon, my phone rings again, and it's my sister, I presume with more news of Faye.

"Did you tell the twin that he shouldn't come to our party?" she asks, sounding scandalised.

"No, Jane. I've never met the twin," I say, slipping into her strange vocabulary of obsession.

"Well Morgan just came out of a test and she sat next to him and he told her that he was going to come to our party but some girl *with ice* said that he shouldn't *bother* to go in."

I have so many questions. "Jane, how did they even discuss this while writing a test?"

"I don't know Sarah, but it wasn't you, right?"

"Well, I spoke to someone outside the party, and I told this guy that it was *up to him* whether he came inside, but I really think that I would have recognised the object of your obsession."

"How many girls with ice could there have been outside the party? And he said she was hot, too. It must have been you. I'm so mad."

"Fine, be mad at me. I mean, a lot of people brought their own drinks and I don't see why they shouldn't have had their own ice, too. But as far as I know everyone's mad at me, so go ahead and join in."

"Don't try and make me feel sorry for you or whatever. This is something you've done, and you need to take responsibility for it." She makes a sort of frustrated sighing sound, then ends the call. I roll over and close my eyes and this is the moment that Craig chooses, disconcertingly, to move closer to me cuddle up against my back.

Craig Carson

My sister calls before she should be awake, just before ten, before I wake up.

"I need to come and stay with you," she says.

"Um, sure." I say, and sound more willing than I would if I wasn't half-asleep while also being preoccupied with thinking about where I'm going to put Tyler, and so I don't ask, "Why?" but Faye says,

"I can't keep staying in hotels," and I'm not sure why she can't just go home but I want to stay out of whatever problems she's having with Sarah or Ross or both of them, so I say,

"That's fine. When do you want to come over?"

"Tonight?"

That afternoon, I move Tyler into the hotel that we stayed at the night we met.

"It's just for a while," I say, "While my sister stays," and he doesn't know Faye so he believes this completely.

"It's okay," he says. "It's really nice of you. Come and visit me, okay?" So I agree to this and drive off.

Corinne Carson

In town as winter gets close there's a time between day and night when it's dark and the shops have closed but the bars aren't filled yet, and the only sound is of cars rushing home, or wind or rain if it's a very cold night. There's another in-between time in the morning, but that has all of the promise of a new day to make it seem brighter, less sad and nostalgic. The sunlight reaches out at this time of day, over, between and among buildings, people, and the trees, and is slow to move on, quick to remind you that you can't hurry its progress.

Move up the hill and things are different – the sun lands on trees as well as stone buildings and the people sit outside in scarves and big coats, and have drinks after work and smile at the people that they've missed all day, but we won't know about all of this for a few years yet because town lies between Faye's seaside suburb and our own academic enclave. And how would any of the six of us know how to miss someone? We're all together all the time.

In the Southern Suburbs, we take long walks along long roads that wind around houses and little restaurants and big school playing fields. We point to the houses we like best and claim them for ourselves in future years, maybe specifying when we'll live there,

“When I have kids.”

“When I'm done living in Brussels.”

“When I need lots of space if my husband gets annoying.”

Whether it's serotonin or the outdoors or something else entirely, we're very happy on these walks, and because of the fact that we've got indie rock on our iPods, for the rest of our lives we'll be made nostalgic by tall trees and gentle, folksy, drum-and-tambourine-and-guitar music.

“Why do you think we feel so safe here?” I asked Morgan once, on a day when it was just the two of us walking.

“It's the old trees,” she replied, quicker than I'd expected when I still thought that this was an odd question that I'd been nursing. “And the mountain. Because, you know, they feel so old and unchanging that everything we do seems to matter a bit less. Like a church.” She shrugged here, because she knows that she makes people nervous when she says anything that borders on insightful.

We walk around here plenty of times in the course of getting from one store to another, renting DVDs, getting home from university or going to the bar where everyone from our classes goes for drinks in the afternoon, and on Saturdays to watch sport, but the walks for the sake of walking, in the late afternoon, are different. This is an intimate hour, because it can't be attributed to business or to the pleasures that weekends or later hours bring, so what you do with it says a lot about you.

Faye visits hotels often. She has favourites on room service menus, she can tell guests who are new to the hotel by their faint confusion in finding the swimming pool or breakfast room, she knows which beds are warmest in winter, and which hotels still keep Bibles by their bedsides. But Faye never becomes a regular at any one of them: she's not someone who the staff know by name, or even who is recognised, which seems odd when we think of her strikingly blonde hair and the way she spends money.

Maybe the hotels that Faye likes play host to a lot of blonde spenders, or maybe the only thing noticeable about her behaviour when she's here is how unobtrusive she makes herself, staying locked in her room and giving average-sized tips to whoever delivers her average-sized portions of room service. She leaves before the 'Do Not Disturb' sign hangs on her door for enough consecutive days to cause worry – this may be the only place where she's good at following rules.

It's never happened to her before, but this time when she goes missing she runs out of hotels that she likes for her short stays, and so she has to come back. She doesn't feel like trying out any new things this time around.

Craig Carson

“They've got pancakes,” says Tyler quite wistfully when I call him and ask how the hotel is. “I ordered them for breakfast, and they were so good that I ordered them again for lunch.”

“I suppose you haven't had dinner yet?” I ask, making a fatigued effort at a joke.

“Steak,” he replies, but then adds, worried, “Why? Did you want to meet up? I can eat again.”

“Oh, no, I can't tonight – just wanted to know what you were doing.”

I can't meet up because at this moment Faye is in my kitchen with a piece of fillet, liver pate,

some crepes, mushrooms, and two rolls of puff pastry, ostensibly in the process of creating a beef wellington. She needs a help with something, and will expect me to eat heartily in addition.

Tyler has taken my last utterance strangely, choosing to reply by saying,

"That's so sweet. I really miss you too."

"Well, I'll see you soon," I say, and say my goodbyes as a beeping begins on the line: someone else is trying to call me. I only know how to answer, not how to check who's calling without being reconnected with Tyler, so I end up talking to Ross.

"I miss you," he says. "What are you doing?"

"I've been meaning to call you," I say.

"Oh? Do you want to meet up?"

"Maybe not right now. Faye's here. I just have some questions. Hold on." I hold my hand over the phone as I look around the slightly open door to see if Faye's nearby, listening, but she's just peeling some crepes apart from some other crepes. "Why is she here?" I ask.

"What?"

"Why is Faye here?"

"For... Dinner?" Ross guesses. "Can I come over?"

"Ross, she's been here since yesterday, and wasn't at home before that either. You live with her – don't you notice these things?"

"Look, we can talk about all of this when I get there."

"There's no need for you to come o-"

"You said you wanted to talk to me. I found a poem-"

"I know I said that, but I wanted to talk to you about Faye, and we can't do that while she's serving us fillet."

"Oh, you're having steak?"

"It's beef wellington. Mushrooms. You'd hate it."

"Have you forgotten what we were like then, when we were still first rate-?" His voice takes on an oddly theatrical tone, so I have an idea of what's going on, but I ask,

"What?"

"It's the poem. Listen. 'And the day came fat with an apple in its mouth-'"

"Craig," Faye's knocking on the door and asks, "What are you doing in there?" I need help with the potatoes."

"I'm on the phone."

"I'm ready to start when you are."

"The whole pasture looked like our meal,"

"I'll be there in just a minute."

"didn't need speedometers!"

"Ross," I try, "Is that from the poem?", then, "Faye needs my help in the kitchen-"

"You have to hear this last part," He counters. "You'll love it, it's like a Taylor Swift lyric."

"Okay, let's hear it," I say. There have been no footsteps to suggest that Faye has moved away from the door.

"I wouldn't want to be faster or greener than now if you were with me. You were the best of all my days."

I sigh, confused on the most superficial level while also feeling moved. "That's beautiful, Ross. It doesn't sound like Taylor Swift, but that's a good thing, and it really is beautiful. I've got to go, Ross, But I really liked the poem."

When I step out of my room, Faye asks, "Did he want to talk about me?"

Morgan

My classes with Mark, the twin, take place at the beginning of the gap that used to exist between our lectures, so by the time we're done with them my friends are often off campus and out of reach and I have another two hours to get through until my afternoon classes. Mark has no-one to

spend the hours with either, so we get coffee and battle for a place at sticky picnic tables so that we can sit and do our homework or extra reading together.

"Mocha," he says to the petulant woman doing the pouring and selling, because the coffee is bad enough that it needs to be disguised under a few spoonfuls of chocolate powder, then I say,

"Let's go for a drink." I've been wanting to say it because the thought of another two hours spent passing dried-up yellow highlighters between the two of us depresses me and I'd rather really talk to him than snatch conversation between his readings. I've chosen the wrong moment to make the suggestion because he's trying to negotiate change, coffee and his books, and I can't help because I'm doing the same, but once we make it safely to the little station where we fetch sugar and stirrers and lids for our cups, he says,

"Okay, cool. Where?"

"Well, we've got these now, so we can't really go on a shuttle. We could just walk down to Main Road?"

"Sounds good," he says, and smiles. We walk through campus, down stone stairs, past the residence halls where he tells me he stayed (I'm impressed because you have to do well to get into this res, and confused because he lives in Cape Town anyway) and across the rugby fields. After this, we're confused.

"I've never really walked this way," he admits as we emerge from a tunnel graffitied with advertisements for societies, activities, and causes, and I reply,

"Neither have I. But I know that this is the Law Building. And if we keep walking downwards we have to hit Main Road, right?"

"Oh, right. I was meant to study law."

"Oh. Why didn't you?"

"Didn't want to. I really wanted to do English, Art and History, so I did. And that was the beginning of the drama with my parents. My fiancé was the second part."

"Where is she?" I ask, not wanting to hear about her or about drama, not wanting to make a joke about how it sounds as if 'drama' was another of the subjects he took. "I haven't seen her around."

"She's gone away for a while. Home. To hang out with her mom."

"What about classes?"

"She's stopped for a bit. She deregistered, actually."

"Oh. Got over it?" I ask, remaining flippant to give him a chance to do the same.

"No," he says, missing the opportunity entirely. "There were a lot of problems with my family last year, with me doing the degree, and being with her." There's a finality here, as if this explains everything, so I feel I have to ask,

"So she was really stressed out by it?"

"Oh, no," he replies, looking confused. "She did it for me."

"Oh."

"She decided to work while I study. I'm further along in my degree, so we decided she'd pay the bills while I finish, and then I'll work while she finishes."

"Pay the bills? So your parents don't?"

"Well that's the thing. They kind of do now. They're paying for me to study, because they're impressed that I carried on when they weren't paying, just not the other expenses. And it's good that they're paying, obviously, but it means added pressure from them. Because now I'm back to owing them something. And they still don't like her."

"Oh."

"It's the worst for her. Because she was working to support us, but then it started feeling much less important. I think that that's what she tried to say. Before, she felt like she was fighting for something, then she started feeling like she was the bad person."

I shift uneasily. It's a Friday at midday, and any moment now it'll become Friday afternoon. When it becomes Friday afternoon we'll have crossed over from class time into friend time, and this coupled with the intimacy of what he's telling me even before we sit down to the drink we're meant

to be having makes me feel a sense of panic.

He has soft brown hair that's shorter at the sides than on top, just slightly, and this and his height and jawline make me think of an Abercrombie & Fitch model like the ones in the ads I used to pin onto my mood board before I left home. His smile seems reluctant but it's also sweet and trusting and I want to warn him to be scared of me.

Grant Carson

On Saturday we're late to see a movie but Laura is determined that we should stop at Craig's to return a skirt that she has borrowed from Faye.

"Could we stop after?" I ask her.

"Faye'll be out." Laura says.

"But she doesn't even know that you borrowed the skirt. Why does she need to be there for you to give it back?"

"That's why I need to return it as soon as possible. I feel guilty."

The security guard waves at us into the building and we walk past his desk and up the stairs, then we knock and find that the door is unlocked so we walk in and find Craig and Ross doing what I can best describe as reconciling on the couch.

"Oh, hi." I say.

"Hi Craig, Hi Ross," Laura says with the friendly disapproval that she has learnt from the employees of various expensive clothing boutiques and bespoke health food delicatessans. "Is Faye here?"

"Hey. No, she went out."

"Oh, okay. Well I'm bringing this back." She holds up the skirt, neatly folded in a carrier bag, and then wanders off to put it in Faye's room. I am left alone with my brother and Ross.

"Doors," says Craig.

"We just never lock them." I agree.

"Guess that's what growing up in a safe neighbourhood will do to you."

"Middle class problems."

"What are you guys doing tonight?" Ross asks, his cheeks flushed and his hair tousled.

"Going to movies," I say. "You?" but this is the moment Laura chooses to stick her into the room and ask, "Craig, could you come in here for a minute?" meaning Faye's room, meaning that I am left alone with the man who I think is back to being my brother's boyfriend.

The conversation that follows between Ross and me is awkward, but what's more important is the conversation between Craig and Laura, which begins with her asking,

"Were you concerned that having a secret relationship with a rent boy named Tyler while having Faye living with you wasn't complicated enough? Did you think you needed to add a bit of drama to your life by sleeping with Ross again, too?"

"Tyler's not a *rent boy*. And I just kissed him."

"With your shirts off and his pants unbuttoned?"

"Listen, I'm not in a relationship with Tyler. We hooked up and then he needed a place to stay--"

"So you installed him in the third-most expensive hotel in Cape Town, indefinitely. I know. But what are you going to do now that you're back together with Ross?"

The conversation probably doesn't have any real resolution, because talking to Laura is even less likely to achieve anything than talking to Craig is, but I don't care how it ends and am just filled with relief that it's over when the two of them are back in the lounge and we can leave.

"What's he going to do?" I ask Laura, and she replies,

"I don't know," but she looks like she has a plan in mind.

Morgan

"Well let's go there then," says Corinne, but Jane replies,

"Okay, rad, but we've got to go somewhere else first."

"Why?" asks Brigitte.

"It's not open until late."

"What time does it open?"

"I don't know. After midnight. One? You know that. You've been there as often as I have."

"Well I don't remember what time we went."

"Ah, fair enough. So where should we go before that?"

"Um, The Kimberley?"

"That'll be over by ten."

They start to talk about going to another club but I'm not listening because I'm thinking about how I'm going to tell them that I won't be coming with them tonight, and I wish that I'd done it sooner or at least thought about it, because now I know it's going to be clumsy.

"I hate it there on a Friday. The last time I was there all these guys were talking about how tough matric was, and it made me feel old."

"I hate it on a Friday too but... It's Saturday?"

"Oh."

"Um, then how is Evol an option?"

"Oh. I guess it's not."

"What do you want to do, Morgan?" asks Brigitte, who usually wouldn't ask my opinion in this discussion because of the mainstream nature of the things I like, but I think she's noticed that I haven't contributed to the conversation yet.

"Well," I begin uncertainly, "I actually told Mark that I'd hang out with him tonight."

They exchange looks, and look at me, and then Brigitte asks,

"Mark... The twin?" which is a valid question because I've noticed that we know a lot of people named Mark and so I just reply,

"Yes."

"Morgan," Nancy says, "You're spending time alone with him on a Saturday night. That's a date. Should you be doing that when he has a fiancé?"

"We just friends."

"Morgan, it's you. You don't have guy friends. You have friends with benefits. Hook-ups. On-off relationships."

"Should we be worrying about that at all when he might kill her?" Jane contributes. "That feels more relevant."

"He won't kill me. And it's not a date, even if it is a Saturday night, because we're doing homework."

"English or that other thing?" Jane asks.

"English. Why?"

"Oh, just asking. Just hoping he won't find you out and kill you for lying to him."

"He won't," I say, not knowing any better than she does whether I mean that he won't find out or that he wouldn't choose to kill me if he did.

Corinne Carson

A rooftop in the city centre is where we end up, and there's a covered opening in the floor that's echoed by similar openings in the floors beneath it, so that there's a view all the way from the rooftop down to the wine cellar.

"That would make the raddest picture," Jane says, "If someone lay on that and you could see three storeys down in the background of the picture."

"It would be really effective," says Brigitte, then, an after-thought, "Except if it broke. And we fell through."

"Or if they threw us out," adds Jaime, smiling at the scene she's imagining, and we abandon

the idea.

We take our seats and I drink wine but the longer we sit here, the more vividly I see images of each of us falling through that square space, slow and level, never touching the sides and never hitting the ground.

Jane is talking to us about something she read, saying, "They never even flinch, you see. I don't know why. They don't have feelings or something. I don't know, it's more complicated than that obviously, but it's like a test to see if you're a psychopath."

"Where did you read this?"

"In the *GQ*. Or *Esquire*?"

"I think I saw this on the internet," Jaime's saying. "Is it the one where you answer twenty questions?"

"This is a real medical, psychiatric thing—"

"I know, I don't mean I found it on a random quiz site, I mean I saw an article about the psychological test."

"Oh, okay. Well I don't think that that was in the magazine. I just remember the part about the flinching."

"I wonder if Mark flinches?"

"Should we message Morgan and check if she's okay?"

"No, don't bother her on a date."

"It's not a date — he's engaged and they're doing homework."

"Of course, for the course she's not taking. No ulterior motives there. How's she planning to get away with it, anyway?"

"Well I don't know."

Morgan

"I don't feel like I can do this anymore," he says, yawning, rolling over a little to lie on his side. We've been highlighting key phrases in our notes, not talking, but he looks over at my open book every now and then to check that he's getting the same important points that I am.

"Me neither," I reply, then after a pause, closing a highlighter into the notes as a bookmark, "So, what do you want to do?"

"I don't know." We just look at each other for a while and as it's about to start getting awkward he asks, "Do you want to see something cool?" and I wonder if that question is awkward in itself, but I just say,

"Okay," and follow him as he gets up off of the bed and walks out the door, and along the darkened passage. He doesn't bother to turn the lights on when he says to me, "Wait here," and descends the staircase, leaving me at the top, but when he comes back up he flicks a switch that was next to me all along and holds up a little key with an air of pride, but before I can get the impression that this was what I'm being shown, he walks on past me.

I follow again and we pass three bedrooms and a bathroom, then he stops in front of an exceptionally narrow door that I presume to be a linen closet.

"Here we are," he says.

The key seems to be giving him some trouble, which gives me enough time to think over what it might be that he's keeping in here, and that I'm about to see. Later I'll realise that I should have been nervous that he was about to show me a gun, maybe the very same gun that killed Clarence, but instead I'm thinking about a scene from a movie where the boy shows a girl a plate and gets into trouble for it later, and how I'm feeling far too much as if I'm on film myself. The guns, it turns out later, are all stored downstairs in the liquor cabinet.

The door opens, and inside it is a ladder.

"It leads up to the attic," Mark the Twin says, and motions for me to climb up it.

"Oh," I say. Another thing that I'll realise later is that it would have seemed perfectly normal here for me to raise objections about claustrophobia, or a fear of heights, a bad childhood

experience with ladders, or even modesty – I'm wearing a skirt, and although it's paired with tights, he should climb up first for this reason alone. I think of three entirely different things as I climb to the attic: the first is that Mark is acting as if I should have known that this house has an attic but I'd had no idea, the second is that I was right about this having been a linen closet at some point, because I can see the deep grooves in the walls where thin shelves have been removed, and the third is that I must appear entirely trusting so that I don't embarrass either of us by letting on that my friends think that he might be a murderer.

He takes long enough to begin his own climb that I start to think that he might be planning to simply shut the door, lock it, and leave me in there, but slowly I hear the shuffling sounds of him joining me on the ladder, and he calls up,

"Just push when you get to the top, the trap door will open," and I do, and pull myself into a dark dusty space that must be the attic, then extend a hand back down to Mark, who doesn't need help, and who walks through the pitch black to a door, and opens it, and reveals a flat outdoor area with stars above it.

"This is the roof," he says, "and it's not so exciting after you've had a city view with lots of lights, or a sea view, but it's nice to look at the stars."

Now that he's mentioned them, we stand for a minute or two and look at them, before I say, "They're so beautiful. Hey, where do you live if you don't live here anymore."

"I just told you," he smiles. "In town."

"Oh." I smile back. "Right."

"Are you cold up here?" he asks, and I reply,

"No," so we sit down and he begins to talk.

Corinne Carson

One day, I will learn to really appreciate the six of us, and will look back on my five friends and our time together and all the things they did for me through my own brand of rose-tinted glasses, but tonight is not that night. I'll think of Morgan as the girl who could answer any sarcastic comment with a genuine pleasantry, who would walk down to the vending machine to buy me snacks when I was sick and we were in res, and who introduced and recommended me to most of my social circle, but tonight she is just the one who's abandoned the rest of us because something more interesting comes up.

We're all annoyed and we all drink a lot, but I have the deepest problem with rejection and I drink the most and end up very drunk.

After the bar we move on to a club and then end up at a backpackers that also has an open rooftop, coincidentally, and there's a party or really more the early stages of an orgy of Americans happening up here. The trick is to look at the view – steeples and high rise buildings on every side of us – rather than the people or the outdoors-in-Africa décor that's underlined by a very plastic astroturf. They're playing a remix of an Arcade Fire song and it's cool because they're not all mainstream yet, and so Jane comes over to me and says,

"This remix is rad."

"So rad."

"You know," she continues, "I was joking the other day about Faye killing Clarence, but the more I think about it, the more I think it might be true."

"Why?" I ask, drunk and not very coherent.

"Well, I found out that she was good friends with him. I think they might have been dating. And then they broke up, because of Grant I think." I wait for the rest of the story, but when it seems that that was its end I ask,

"But, people don't really kill each other over breakups, do they?"

"Well, Faye's always been moody-"

"Let's not do this now?" I try. "We can talk about this tomorrow, seriously."

"Okay."

We decide to dance instead of talking, in a space that opens up quite suddenly in the middle of the crowd, who've got prettier as the night's worn on and other, more glamorous places have closed.

It's around this time that Grant crashes another car. He and Laura are back from Durban and no-one can work out if they seem happy or just bored with each other, going for a lot of long walks and and picnics, smiling languidly, disinterestedly at the plans that the rest of us tell them about that involve going out after dark.

They find themselves united in the way that particularly insular couples are once they begin to become isolated, and "How's your writing coming?" begins their typical conversation, to which Laura replies,

"Really well. Craig says the last chapter's good," or "Not too bad, but sometimes I think I love my characters too much, do then I have to introduce new ones that I don't love as much every time I need someone to die or to do something bad," or something else that causes anyone who was listening to wander off.

The first time he crashed the car the car it was scary, but this time my mom can't help but find it a little bit funny that he's making a habit of it, and this particular car was well-insured anyway.

Laura

When Grant Carson heard about Clarence's death, he went for a drive in his big black car and didn't come back for eight hours. Later he'll tell me that he drove to the beach, and kept going past the restaurants and the tourists, the hotels, the big houses, the cliffs and open stretches, another hotel, then drove faster along the part where there's nothing to see but the ocean, and how high up you are. In the months that follow Clarence's death, Grant makes a habit of driving very fast as often as he can.

Jaime

In her time with Mark, Morgan finds respite from the time spent pursuing him relentlessly. Whatever motives he may harbour, he is at least very quiet about them, and she is complicit in nothing, spending most of their minutes in silence.

It's unsurprising to us that she's fallen for Mark the Twin, because she's shown herself to be prone to relationships of the unsuitable kind in the past. Kind, old-fashioned mothers would call Morgan 'fast', the ones jealous on behalf of their daughters of her brown-haired, girl scout good looks might call her 'slutty', but none could deny her general good nature and a personality that could generally be referred to as 'willing'.

It was her desire to make everyone around her feel comfortable that had us worried for Morgan, and convinced that she was going to get herself into trouble.

"We've all read *The Lovely Bones*," said Jane darkly, and it was true that all of us with the exception of Morgan herself had done so, "so we all know that it's always the nice girl who gets into trouble. The one who doesn't know how to say 'no'."

Despite this knowledge of ours, Jane went on to reiterate for us then what it was that niceness led to: many things, among them rape and murder in enclosed spaces.

"But what do we do?" Nancy asks, a response uncharacteristically proactive for a member of our group.

Craig Carson

"You could never make a movie about her, could you?" Grant's saying while we're having a drink at the pub on campus between lectures on Monday. "I mean, you'd keep thinking you'd got to

the plot climax or whatever and the movie was just going to end quietly, but then something else ridiculous would happen and someone else would fall over a balcony or another person would pass out at a casino or another girl *assault someone with a laptop*."

"Buildings falling down, The Pixies playing..." I say, helpful, almost drunk after just one whisky and Coke. He seems drunk now too, which must be where his next comment comes from.

"Hey, it's chilled that you're gay, you know." I'm not sure what to say, but he's carrying on. "I mean, obviously I don't really get it, but that's cool too. I mean, if you ever want to talk about it or anything I don't mind."

"You know me. You know I don't want to talk about anything," I tell him.

"Okay," he says, and smiles bravely, knowing that the worst of this conversation is over.

"More girls for me, right? No competition."

"Thanks," I tell him, and smile too, then finish my drink.

I'm left with an image of Faye and Ross standing in an empty room, very high up, Faye in a fur coat and explosions happening outside the window, and it's ridiculous so I know that it's not because of that thought that my heart's beating really fast.

Sarah Richards

"'Slutty' is relative," Faye says to me as we're walking across campus on a bright, cold Monday morning that's about to become afternoon. She sounds like my sister and her friends, newly versed in the respective tenets of feminism's many waves, but this is all about her. "I mean, people said that about me, but they didn't know what the, you know, 'quiet girls' were getting up to. And they didn't know how little I was getting up to, either, but that's a good thing I think."

There were people who called Faye slutty when we were in high school, basing their assumptions on the fact that she had blonde hair, blue eyes, and C-cup breasts at thirteen. The truth is, no-one knew all that much about what she did, or what I did for that matter, because we didn't party with all of the other girls, but with an older crowd who went to places where most of the girls in our grade couldn't get in. Some of them thought that we did this because we felt that we were too good for them and were consequently bitter, but most saw our social life for what it was: a matter of habit, and of continuing to hang out with the people we grew up with.

"I mean, I'm kind of asexual," Faye continues, struggling a little to light a cigarette while holding a coffee, and it's probably what they'd all have said if they'd known just how little like their assumptions Faye's private life was. To me, it's an exaggeration.

"That's not true. You like sex with certain people. Or when you're drunk."

"Yeah, with certain people. But then it's like, a love thing, you know?"

"Sex with love. You have some crazy ideas," I say to her, sarcastic because she hates to be called conservative but she really is.

"Maybe to you, with your intimacy issues," she replies, teasing because we've talked about this a thousand times, but I feel nervous that we're getting too close to her asking something which would lead me to have to lie about Craig and the surrounding hotel room situation on which I still don't quite have the facts.

I'm grateful, then, when we walk past a rubbish bin and she pauses for a moment to get a crumpled receipt and some change out of her pocket and throw it in.

"Did you just... Throw money away?" I ask her, and she replies,

"Well I can't use it or anything. It's too small."

I think that for about a second I contemplate explaining to her in a basic and quite patronising way about how small amounts of money do add up to larger amounts of money if you keep them around, but decide against it, and just say,

"Give it to me next time instead." She laughs pleasantly at this. A few steps later I shake my head and smile at her, and say,

"You have too much money for your own good."

"Oh no, you're wrong," she says. "I really love money." She gets very serious here, because

aside from loving it, and in her own special way, Faye takes money very seriously.

"Yes, you do," I say, and I'm still smiling, but she's thinking deeply and says,

"It's probably because I'm mostly asexual, you know."

"Why are we talking about this?" I ask, "Who called you slutty, anyway?"

Corinne Carson

Calling Morgan the slutty one in our group of friends would be accurate, but it would mean very little. The state in which Brigitte and Nancy exist is one of constant focus – Brigitte is dedicated to the dancing that gave her her figure, though she long ago lost hope of pursuing it far and has become something of a stage mom to her two younger sisters, while Nancy works at getting marks higher than she needs to for a BA degree. Jane is the kind of girl whose boredom is all-encompassing, who'll do what boys want but won't extend her efforts to enthusiasm, kissing with eyes open, while Jaime is purely and simply shy.

We have no doubt that Morgan will sleep with Mark, the twin, if she's not sleeping with him already, and we don't hold it against her: it's wrong, certainly, to sleep with a man who's engaged to someone else, but it's in Morgan's nature and she can't really help it. Her needs are so far removed from our own that we don't attempt to understand them.

"It's if she sleeps with him without telling us that, I'll be angry," says Jane, who is more tense than usual lately, but sums up what we're all thinking when she says this.

It's come to my attention that Jane thinks that Faye might be a murderer, specifically the killer of Clarence, but it's not something that I want to talk to her about because she gets defensive very easily on the topic. It occurs to me that I should be defensive on Faye's behalf, but I don't feel like fighting Jane on this at all.

"Jane thinks that Faye killed Clarence," I say to Brigitte, who's good at being unemotional, and true to form she shrugs and says,

"This week." As predicted, Jane seems to abandon her theory about Faye soon enough, or at least to put it aside in order to go back to dwelling on her more advanced trepidation about Mark.

"Maybe we should just go on another walk," she suggests to me in a hushed voice as we sit opposite each other at a study table in the library. "You know, to find out what it is that the two of them are doing."

"There are some problems with that plan," I whisper in reply, looking up from my Linguistics textbook.

"Like what?" she asks.

"Well, for a start, Morgan knows all of our... *methods*. She invented them. She'd know we were watching her. And unless the two of them are conducting their sinister activities in the front garden, a walk isn't going to help us very much."

Jane shrugs thoughtfully when I say this, and I think misguidedly to myself that she may actually be taking my points into consideration.

We'll find out later that for the moment, Morgan and Mark's activities are innocent: they spend a lot of time going for walks, doing their homework together, and running errands on campus, although they do it all with smitten looks on their faces.

"It's all very romantic, isn't it?" Jane asks Morgan, and it's a genuine question rather than a statement of supposition, so Morgan says,

"In some ways, I suppose. The roof – you can see the stars from it – and the big old house, and never really doing much but lying around together, you know?"

"Well I don't, really," Jane replies, ominous, "But I can imagine. And you still haven't done anything with him?"

"He's engaged, Jane."

"There have been men before him who that hasn't stopped."

"He hasn't even kissed me."

"Do you want to kiss him?" I ask her, drawn in.

"He really loves her, guys," she says, sounding tired, harried. She is out of our reach now, and there's nothing we can do to retrieve her old desire to tell us every mundane or sordid detail of her life as soon after the fact as possible.

What we'll find out later is that thoughts of Mark The Twin's fiancé occupy more of her thoughts than she'd choose to have us believe. When she lies awake next to him on the grass after he's fallen asleep, exhausted from the homework reading they've been doing together, she wonders if the fiancé will be taking over this position soon, and when she makes him another dinner of pasta with whatever other ingredient she can find, she wonders if her doing this would make the fiancé jealous. When she grabs his hand when she almost trips walking down his stairs, and when he puts a hand on her waist as he guides her out of someone's way in the entrance to the library, she looks around, imagining that she'll see the other girl looking upset, a thought problematic not only because the fiancé is assuredly not around, but also because Morgan doesn't really know what she looks like.

"Let's go for a run," Morgan says to him one Friday afternoon when they're sitting too close to each other on the couch watching VH1. He agrees, but suggests that they go in town, and that she stays at his flat there afterwards, and while it seems that his suggestion's had the opposite effect to the one she intended, she agrees with him. She's never seen his flat, and wants to, and doesn't know how to decline his offer without suggesting that he was suggesting something that he shouldn't.

When she comes into our house to pack an overnight bag while he waits in the car, she's relieved to find that none of us are home, because by this time she really feels like she's doing something wrong: she's never packed things to take with her to his place, because she's never intended to stay over. Falling asleep on his couch on a rainy night and coming home the next morning has seemed far more innocent than planning, in the mid-afternoon, to stay over, fully aware that she has no idea if he even has more than one bed at this flat.

The way Morgan tells it, when they arrive at the flat in town it's very much how she'd imagined it, except that there's a breathtaking view of the city that she hadn't anticipated, through a big window that needed cleaning. There was also only one bed, in fact only one very large room that was cleverly planned to feel like it was more than a bachelor, but Mark mentioned as casually as he could that he'd be sleeping on the couch and giving Morgan his bed.

They go for their run.

When they return, red-faced and exhilarated, Morgan is surprised to find a girl sitting on that very bed, paging through a glossy magazine. Mark seems even more surprised. It's when Mark runs over to the girl, and the girl stands up and throws her arms around him, ignoring how sweaty he is, that Morgan recognises her as Mark's fiancé.

Morgan has only seen one picture of the fiancé before: she has a closed profile on Facebook, with a profile picture that's the back of her head and the words, 'People are very strange these days' in a luminous yellow Brushscript kind of font as her cover photo. The picture Morgan's seen was above Mark's bed at his parents' house, but in that picture she's wearing a short wig (she is dressed as Uma Thurman in *Pulp Fiction*) and so it's a surprise to Morgan to discover that she has long red hair that suits her pale complexion and bony frame very well. After they've embraced and Mark's expressed what a surprise this is, the fiancé asks Mark,

"Who's this?" smiling at and gesturing to Morgan.

"This is Morgan," he says, too brightly. "She's my friend from varsity. And... jogging."

The fiancé laughs, pleasant, and glances down at the pink bag which is very clearly Morgan's, and which is now dwarfed on the floor by the fiancé's own bags. "I thought I'd been replaced," she says, and Morgan smiles back at her and thanks God that they walked in to find her there rather than the situation happening the other way around.

Craig Carson

"I need you," Tyler says to me over the phone, and those aren't words that I'm good at resisting, so I leave my sister while she's unconscious and can't say them too. When he speaks from

the hotel room his voice is always low, as if he's nervous that someone's listening to him or that it's taking up too much space in there, or maybe just as if the sound is distorted because his mouth is pressed too close to the receiver.

I leave Faye alone in my apartment, and being left alone turns out to be distinctly different to her from leaving in order to be alone.

What she needs, though we don't realise it then, is fun, and she doesn't realise it either. Faye needs the kind of fun that happens while seeing how long you can spin around in circles for, or swimming in the rain in the middle of a Durban summer, or spontaneously racing trolleys in the aisle of a huge, newly built and almost-empty supermarket.

In Tyler's hotel room, I feel claustrophobic. After giving him a perfunctory hug of intimate greeting, I walk over to the window and open it, taking a look at the city under a haze that could be heat or rain that's on its way, then sit down, then get up again to see if opening the door slightly creates a through breeze. It doesn't, and even though the passages are empty I can imagine that the opening means that anyone can hear us.

Tyler does need me, it has turned out, to feel happy, but tonight he doesn't seem needy: he sits cross-legged on the bed and tells me about the things that he's been watching on TV over the past few days and asks me polite questions about my own activities, before he grows tired of talking and I grow tired of my own restlessness, and we fall asleep beside each other on the big white bed.

It's sometime after we wake up at sunset that he says to me,

"This is the happiest I've ever been," so I don't reply, and because I'm not facing him I hope he thinks I'm still asleep.

Sarah Richards

Though I cannot ask him if we've slept together, Craig has found the courage to tell me all kinds of things about himself, and to share all manner of his problems with me now that he's at our flat all the time because Faye's at his.

"Tyler's discovered the hotel spa," he says, rubbing his brow in a way that looks too much like his sister, "and he's bored and lonely so I feel bad telling him to just not go there. But it's expensive, you know."

"Have you established if he's gay yet?" I ask, hoping that his answer will reveal something about his own indecision on this front, but he just says,

"He's so strange, Sarah. I'm worried about him. I'm worried about this man who he owes money to or something."

"What's the money for?" I ask. "Coke?"

"I don't think so. I get the feeling that it's something more mundane. Like, rent."

"It would be kind of embarrassing getting killed over rent money," I say, opting for the obvious because my joke that involves a pun on the term 'rent boy' seems insensitive.

"Mundane murder," he says. "Exactly. So I want to look after him, but this is all getting very expensive. There must be some other solution, right?"

Craig could explain to Tyler that he's back with Ross, if we're happy to use the word 'together' loosely, and see if this makes a difference to Tyler's ease in taking Craig's charity. He could explain that if he was paying for a hotel room for anyone he'd like it to be himself, and that he'd resorted to spending most of his time at the flat with me and Ross and our needs because even all of these presences are not as exhausting as Faye's in his own home. I know, though, that this is too simple and not what he has in mind.

"Right. I think. Well, maybe he just needs some other friends. Some friends who'll at least keep him out of the spa, and who he could maybe stay with."

"How am I going to find him more friends?"

"I don't know. Doesn't he know anyone else?"

"Maybe. I'll sort it out somehow."

Corinne Carson

When Craig arrives at our front gate without so much as a BBM to tell me that he'd be visiting, I recognise the guy with him as Tyler, from the party.

"This is Tyler," he says, and I reply,

"I know," making it awkward for Tyler, who I realise later must have no recollection of me. I make up for it by being more polite than I usually would.

"Come in, guys," I say. "Can I get you something to drink?"

"Cool. Some water?" replies Tyler, and Craig says,

"A screwdriver, thanks," and he looks so tired that I continue my politeness by simply going to the kitchen for orange juice and to Jane's bedroom for vodka and making it for him. I falter a little when he says,

"We were thinking that maybe Tyler could stay with you for a while."

I have some questions I'd like to ask him – who he refers to when he says 'we', whose idea this actually was, whether Tyler makes a habit of living with strangers, whether he expects me to think that this sounds like fun, but then he says, "The other idea we had, and this one might be a bit more logical, is that Faye could come and stay with you and then Tyler could move back with me. That could work too, but-

"I see no reason why Tyler shouldn't stay with us for a while," I say, imagining Faye sipping tequila from the bottle while Skyping with her on-off boyfriend, the one who's only available to talk between three and four in the morning because of his job and the time difference between Cape Town and Colorado. I don't know what habits Tyler harbours, but I choose to take my chances with them.

"He can take my bedroom. I'll share with Jane."

"Okay, sure," he says.

As I put fresh bedding onto my bed, which is now Tyler's bed, I mentally recap the situation: my sister has done something to make Sarah angry, so Craig's secret boyfriend is living with us because he can't live with Craig while Faye is staying there to give Sarah space, and he can't stay in a hotel because it was getting too expensive but he can't go home because he's being hidden from someone. I wonder if it's a sign that I've become too used to all of this when the thing I worry most about is that Sarah is probably really missing Faye. I'm putting the last of the new pillowcases onto its corresponding pillow when Craig shuffles in and says,

"Thank you so much for doing this."

"Oh. That's okay."

"No, really, thank you." He looks down at his feet. "I'm so worried about him."

"Why?"

"I don't think he's making it up, about someone trying to find him. It crossed my mind that he was, but I don't think so. I'm scared for him."

"Well, we'll soon find out. It's one thing to fake it for a four-star hotel room, but it's another to keep accepting charity when all it is is this room. It's kind of damp, you know." Even as I say it I realise that I should have got Jane to relocate to this bedroom – it's got an en-suite bathroom, while hers hasn't – but my reasoning still stands.

"I guess we'll see," he says, and wanders out.

It occurs to me then that I won't have to move into Jane's room anyway – I'll just move into Morgan's instead, because she's never there anymore anyway.

Instead, she is spending her time with Mark and his fiancé, who are turning out to be twice as much fun as Mark was on his own. Because Mark's flat is too small for the three of them, they spend most of their time at Mark's parents' house. His parents are still not back from their holiday, and his fiancé pretends not to be unnerved by living in the home of two people who dislike her quite strongly. Three lives, for now, are all about her: Mark is as devoted to her as he ever was, while Morgan still has her characteristic ability to put her heart and soul into the efforts of others. There's homework to be caught up with, a neglected Tumblr account to be revived, a long-planned clothing

line to be brought into being, and some kind of after-midnight event to be organised. Best of all for Morgan, there are spare rooms to be slept in so that she can stay over when they're all working late.

She chooses the smallest room, and as she's falling asleep she smiles thinking of how Sarah calls the six of us hipsters, because the word doesn't apply at all when we're compared to her two new friends, and she misses us then.

When Craig calls to check up on Tyler some days later I say, "He seems... happy."

I'm looking out of the kitchen window at Tyler, stretched out on our trampoline in his underwear, enjoying the winter sun. "He said earlier that he missed the pool, but I didn't know if he meant the one at your place or the one at the hotel, so..."

Craig makes a sighing sound on the other end of the line, and Tyler's stretching over the trampoline's springs to retrieve his drink from the safety of the flat surface on which it's been placed. When I found him in the same position yesterday, I asked him,

"How are you doing?" and he smiled a benevolent smile and said,

"I'm not good enough for Craig, you know," and I asked,

"What are you talking about?" to buy time. He responded,

"He's so beautiful."

"So are you," I say, but I'm still not comfortable with this adjective for boys.

"Not like he is." He looks at me again, still smiling kindly. "You can't know, because he's your brother. But he's special." I shake my head at him and smile too, and put an arm around his shoulders.

"Just because he's special it doesn't mean that you aren't," but I don't know if it works, because I'm unpractised at this kind of encouragement and emotion.

"Anyway," I carry on, when there's been a silence on the line to Craig for quite some time, "I'm sure he'll be fine without one."

"He better be," Craig cuts in then, menacing.

"Yes. That's true. Okay, well, if you ever want to see him, you know where to find him,"

We say goodbye then and that's when Jane seems to creep up behind me and ask,

"When did you get so passive aggressive?"

"I was very nice," I say, putting my phone into my pocket. "That was just Craig, asking how Tyler is. I didn't mean to sound passive-aggressive. Did I?"

"You did, and now you sound nervous. But I think you have a right to feel either of those things."

"Maybe." I shrug without commitment.

"Well, he's not really your responsibility. Your brother's just, you know, left you with him." I do start to feel nervous as she's saying this, because we can't see Tyler from where we're now sitting at the kitchen table, Jane with a glass of water and I with folded hands, and for all we know he could be very near to the kitchen door, able to hear what we're saying. I try to get up as casually as I can and look over the windowsill to find that he's even more sprawled than before, a limb stretching to each corner of the rectangular rubber surface, looking comfortably comatose.

"Well, he's not much trouble. And he won't be staying here for long, I'm sure."

"How sure are you?"

"Well, I don't know," I say, which means I'm not sure at all, and we both know it. "I mean, I know he seems to be getting pretty comfortable here, but I'm sure that Craig has some kind of longer-term plan in mind."

"Maybe," Jane replies. "But personally, I think that we're going to need to take an active role in resolving this whole situation, because he's becoming kind of a problem for your whole family."

Craig Carson

Faye's talking a lot, pacing a lot, cooking a lot, so if I want to get work done on my thesis or on the novel that I'm somehow expected to be writing I have to leave my flat often and for quite

sustained periods of time. Coffee shops work well, but I find that if I want to get any reading done, because I feel silly reading textbooks in a place where people come with such focused intent to enjoy themselves, I need a more isolated space, which is how I end up in the botanic gardens lying on the grass in the sun on a winter day. I lie on my back reading a novel, then on my stomach reading a novel, then on a stomach again to try to get some planning and writing done. After making a frustrated spider diagram for my thesis, I turn to a fresh page and write for what I'm calling My Novel now. After six pages, I lie my head down on the grass, telling myself that I'm only thinking about what will happen next in the story, then I close my eyes, and think instead about what it is that I'm going to do about Ross and Tyler, and whether I like either of them, or if their clinging tendencies have just made both of them very, very convenient. I think about Grant, and about how quiet he's been about whatever it is that's happening with Faye, and whether or not he knows something we don't. I consider blearily that I may be complicating Faye's situation to confuse my own part in it.

When I wake up, someone's turned my notepad onto a new page and written on it in flowing but quite childlike handwriting, "You're Beautiful but I'm Scared Of You"

I wonder how long they sat next to me, and how much they read.

Corinne Carson

"Apparently Tyler's hanging out with that twin now," I tell Grant when we're standing in the same queue for coffee on campus.

"Good," he replies, "Let someone else pay his hotel bills. Mom and dad are asking questions."

"But isn't it weird?" I press on, deciding that telling him that Tyler's living in my bedroom now might mean violating some secret of Craig's.

"Why?"

"Well, for one thing I don't get how they know each other. For another – Tyler's gay, right?"

"Gay guys can have straight friends. And like, they're boys from private schools, of course they know each other. One of their moms probably once knew the other one's aunt through a mutual friend who dated someone that one of their dads almost married."

"Hey," says Nancy, who's counting her change, "That happened to my cousin."

"Oh my," Morgan says to me, removing an earphone, "Did you know that there's a Metronomy song with your name in it? And as the title?"

"What? I don't know anyone with my name. That's crazy. I want to hear it." She thinks that I mean I want to hear it right now, at this moment, so she puts her earphones into my ears, and Grant gets to the front of the queue so our conversation is effectively over. Nancy's sighing because her change doesn't add up to enough for a latte and she'll have to break a hundred, and this is a great song, so I try not to think too much about all of this, but the diminishing of the degrees of separation between all of us makes me nervous.

Craig Carson

"He's dead," Grant says to me on the phone, and I ask,

"Tyler?" Because after being threatened by Tyler himself with Tyler's impending death for the past few weeks or months, I would be unlikely to apply those two words to anyone else.

"No," he says, "Tyler's fine. He told me about this. That creepy old man's dead. The one who was threatening to kill him because of the drug money or whatever."

"Oh," I say. "When were you speaking to Tyler?"

"At Mark's," he replies.

"Mark... the Twin?"

"Right. He was there and told me that he heard from someone he knows, a mutual friend, that this old dude's dead. So, your problems are over, I guess?"

"How so?" I ask, strangely inclined to answer a question with a question although I do follow his reasoning.

"Well, now you don't have to worry about hiding Tyler. He can move back to his flat, and I mean, if you need a break from Faye maybe you can go and live with him for a while. He is your boyfriend, and he does kind of owe you."

"What were you doing at Mark's?"

"Playing pool with him?" Grant replies, finding my question stupid. "Also, if you don't want to do that, maybe you could just go and stay with Corinne for a while, because it seems like Morgan's living with Mark, pretty much. Mark and the fiancé, in the spare room. Anyway, I better go. Just thought I'd give you the good news."

"Cool," I say. "Thanks. Hey, have a good night."

"Hey, thanks. You too."

I'm still hearing the words, 'Your problems are over', and thinking how idealistic they sound.

Corinne Carson

I get a text message from Morgan which is made up of just the two words, "He's dead!" and I think that she must mean Tyler, because when I last spoke to Craig he'd seemed worried that Tyler's life was in some kind of danger. I open and read the message when I'm just a few moments away from home and so I don't bother to text her back but instead ask Jane, who's sitting on a couch in the lounge with Nancy,

"Is Tyler dead?"

"Of course Tyler's not dead," Jane's saying to me. "He's upstairs. Why would he be dead?"

"The rent boy?" Nancy asks, more confused than I am, not seeming to know who Tyler is despite the fact that he's been living in our house for a few weeks now.

"He's a model," I say. "Not a rent boy. He'd be dead because... Well, because I think Morgan said he was dead."

"No I don't think she did."

"No, I think that's what she said."

"No, she definitely didn't," Jane replies, even though she hasn't seen the message.

"Okay. So everything's alright then?"

"Well, yes, except for the dead old man."

"Oh. What?" I'm now clear on the fact that someone is dead but confused because I don't know any old men, and Nancy's enthusiastic nodding isn't helping.

"The old man," Nancy explains, slowly and patiently, "has fallen off of a roof, and is dead. That means that the rent boy doesn't need to be nervous about getting killed anymore, or having anyone pressure him to sleep with them for money."

"So this old man was paying Tyler for sex? I ask.

"Trying to. I think. Craig thinks. Anyway, it's nothing to worry about now."

"No."

"There's nothing to worry about, really. He's dead."

"Yes, that's true," I concede. "This does solve a lot of problems."

"Someone should tell Tyler the good news," Jane says. "I'm pretty sure he doesn't know yet."

"Oh," I say. "Does anyone know where he is?"

Nancy shrugs, looks back down at the textbook in her lap, and I'm almost certain she still wouldn't recognise Tyler if he walked in now.

"I think he's upstairs. If he's not then he'll be on the trampoline or with Mark and Morgan or something," Jane says. "Call him and find out."

I don't especially like that this has become my responsibility, but I'm very aware that if I don't get in touch with Tyler, neither of them will. If he's with Morgan, though, I realise, he probably already knows. In case he doesn't, it's Morgan I call.

"Hey," she says, after answering the phone on one ring. "Did you get my message?"

"I did. I didn't know who you meant at first."

"I never know what to call him, you know? 'The man who seems to live in Clifton and may or may not be old, and is maybe a criminal, and maybe some kind of pervert-'"

"Past tense."

"Oh, right. Who seemed to live in Clifton, and may or may not have been old, and was maybe a criminal-"

"Exactly." I switch the phone to my other ear, and shut the door behind me because for some reason I don't want Jane and Nancy to hear what I'm saying. "Morgan, who did you hear about this from?"

"Oh, from Tyler and Mark."

"So Tyler knows?"

"Yes."

"And who did he find out about it from?"

"I don't know. Some mutual friend of theirs, I think. Anyway, he seems relieved. I mean, obviously he's not jumping for joy or anything because this is someone who he knew who's dead now, but I mean, it must be good to know that no-one's planning to kill you anymore."

"It must be, right?"

"Right. Well, I've got to go now," she says, and I wonder where she's got to go to, and also where she is now, but I don't ask about either of these things because I feel like I've used up my quota of questions for the day.

Craig Carson

Being Faye's brother and my mother's son means that I've sat through my fair share of awkward social occasions, but tonight I find myself at one that may beat all of them. I'm not sure if this dinner feels odd because we're celebrating someone's death while trying to pretend that we're not celebrating at all, or if it's odd because Mark and Morgan and Mark's fiancé are all here, and seem to be in some kind of polygamous family formation these days. It could also be awkward because Tyler is staring at me like he loves me when I'm worried that I might still love Ross, but the point is that I'd rather be somewhere else. I'd gone over to Mark's to see Tyler when I heard the news, and found the four of them in a contagious celebratory mood that I quickly caught. It was Mark's fiancé's idea that we all go out for chinese food, and a couple of hours later, while it's still light, we find ourselves in the kind of restaurant that serves any kind of cuisine that's conceptually asian.

When my phone rings and I see that it's Sarah calling I say,

"It's Sarah. I better answer, it might be urgent," and walk away from the table as fast as I can.

"Is it true that Tyler's *dead*?" Sarah asks me from the other end of the line.

"Of course Tyler's not dead," I say, glancing across the room just to make sure, and finding him very much alive and animated. He's on a second dish of a six-course set menu of chinese food that somehow involves sushi, and he's knocking back saki along with it.

"What?"

"People don't just get eliminated when they're getting expensive."

"Oh. Eliminated? I didn't mean- I heard that he fell off of a roof?"

"I heard that too," I say, lowering my voice now. "I guess I'm just not sure how easy it is to fall off of a roof without some kind of assistance. Jumping would make sense to me. But apparently that didn't happen. It wasn't a jump."

"But Craig, who fell – or jumped – off of a roof?"

"Oh. The guy who was paying Tyler."

"Oh." There's a long pause as she thinks this over. "So, he *fell*? He wasn't pushed?"

I have to laugh at her here.

"You sound just like your sister," I tell her.

"You suggested it," she replies, snappy, and it might be out of spite that she goes on to say, "I'm going to talk to Faye soon. I think that I need to tell her everything."

The pause is even longer now, but then I say to her,

"I know. You're right. Let's talk about it tomorrow, okay?"

When we're done talking I walk back over to the table to find Tyler eating the last of my California rolls, drenched in low-sodium soy sauce.

"You said they weren't chinese anyway, right?" he asks, suddenly concerned.

"You're right," I reply, "You can have them," although it seems a little late for permission. He always looks very happy when he's eating.

Sarah Richards

"I'm really worried about her," Craig says to me when I get him to answer his phone. He's been avoiding my calls since I suggested discussing telling Faye everything, and now he's said that I'm making things complicated, but at least he's talking. "I know she's always been moody. But she's kind of reclusive now, you know?"

"Not really," I say. "We haven't spoken."

"I know," he replies. "That's part of it. I mean, isn't that weird, that you two haven't spoken in so long?"

"Of course it is."

"Well, wouldn't she usually have broken down by now, and called you?"

"No. Never. I would have broken down and called her. And if I hadn't, this probably would have happened years ago."

"So if all of this is because you aren't calling her, can't you just... call her?"

"I don't think that all of this is because of me at all. I'm just saying that the fact that there's no functioning friendship between the two of us at the moment is because I haven't begged her for forgiveness or to love me or whatever it is that I'm meant to do. And it's come as a bit of a shock to me that she'd just leave it for this long." Despite all of the over-thinking I've done over the past few days, I haven't succeeded in describing the situation to myself as eloquently as I'm putting it Craig now. "And that she probably always would have left it, every time, but before I never wanted to know how long it would take, so I called."

"Does now have to be the time you choose to prove your point? Can't you just call here?"

"That's what I'm suggesting. That's why we're having this conversation – because I want to call her. And I don't want to lie to her anymore."

Corinne Carson

When Sarah finally works up the courage to talk to Faye about all of the things that everyone's been keeping from her, and when she's explained all of it in painstaking and painfully honest detail, Faye puts a hand to her temple in a motion that replicates our mother exactly and says,

"I'm finding this all very confusing and I'd like to go back a few steps."

"Okay," Sarah replies, shifting in her chair. She's chosen a colonial-style champagne bar that they both like as the location for their talk, knowing that it's always quiet during the day. What she hadn't considered was that the lack of patrons would just mean that the waiting staff would be particularly bored and find it especially easy to hear their conversation, and the feeling of being listened to is adding another layer to her unease.

"My brother's gay. Yes?" Faye asks.

"Yes. Craig's gay."

"So Craig is the gay brother. Which makes sense. But he's also the brother you slept with? You slept with my brother Craig?"

Sarah thinks that this is all going more slowly than she'd expected and that Faye might be

labouring this point particularly to trouble her, but she's in no position to show impatience. She's tops up their champagne flutes before they need it, holding the bottle with a still-steady hand.

"Yes," she says, "I think so. But it wasn't like that, if it did happen." Faye looks at her, not in a judgemental way, but in a way that shows her that she really should reconsider what she's just said.

"Okay," Sarah concedes to Faye's almost-frown, "obviously there are only so many ways it can be. But what it all comes down to is that your brother – Craig, the gay brother – was sleeping with Ross – our best friend – and we didn't tell you because Craig wasn't ready for you to know that he's gay. Then they broke up, and Craig was dating a guy named Tyler who we thought was a rent boy, but he still wasn't ready for you to know that he's gay, but now he's sort of back with Ross."

"And is he ready for me to know?" Faye asks, sitting back in her chair and folding her arms.

"No."

"Oh, okay. Well, that's awkward, about him getting them getting back together. I mean, with the thing with me and Ross. I'm sorry about that, by the way."

And there it is, when least expected: the closest thing to an apology that can ever be elicited from Faye. Sarah doesn't recognise it in this moment because in the very next moment Faye has a question that sidetracks her, but later on she'll come to treasure it as something very rare.

"But the first time you told me the story, someone died. Who was that?"

"Um, the guy we thought was paying Tyler for sex," Sarah says, never sure how to explain this person in ten words or less.

"So he wasn't paying Tyler for sex?"

"We still don't really know. But he's dead now, so we don't need to worry about it."

"So, is my brother paying Tyler to sleep with him?"

"No," Sarah says, though she hasn't given this much thought so now she says, "I mean, I really don't think so. And they're not sleeping together anymore, so..."

"But he was paying for Tyler's hotel bills? Even after they stopped sleeping together, he was paying?"

"Yes. I mean, as I understand it."

"He was paying Tyler to... Not sleep with him?"

"You could look at it like that. I guess he was being a good friend. Or ex-boyfriend. Whatever they were. But then it was getting expensive, so Tyler moved in with your sister."

"That's kind of weird, isn't it?"

"Yes, it was. So then he just moved in with that twin, because they're all friends with him now."

"Oh, that's good. The twin that they've all been stalking?"

"That's right."

"Okay. So is there a spare room at Corinne's now?"

"Well, no. Morgan still lives there."

"But you said she'd been staying with Mark. The twin. The one they'd been stalking."

"Oh. Well, yes, I think she is still staying there a lot."

"Okay. I think it would be a good idea if I went to stay with Corinne for a while."

All of this, according to Sarah, is how I end up with another houseguest, this time in the form of Faye. This, too, is how in a sudden and surprising twist I become the good sister (by comparison) as well as the sibling allied with Faye, for what seems like the first time in my life. At home one of the boys would always side with one of the girls, and I was mostly on Craig's side (when we were being contrary underachievers who hated popularity contests and all of the kinds of things that everyone else seemed to agree on) but also sometimes Grant's (when we were being particularly arrogant and tough and disdainful of anyone who spent time on their appearance).

Faye says nothing against our brothers when she moves in with me, in fact saying little at all, but she's smoking more than ever, a sure sign that she's keeping something in, expelling some little animosity through her breathed-out smoke. My guess is as good as anyone's as to what she's thinking, but when I think harder about it I realise that the heavy white towelling nightgown that she

wears for sustained periods after her sporadic, luxurious baths is taken from Craig. I think at first that this is some symbol of allegiance to Craig that makes sense to Faye, then I wonder if it isn't an act of petty revenge. I ask her which one of my assumptions is correct.

"It's just warm," she replies, ashing into one of our pub-stolen ashtrays and regarding it as if she misses the ones made of blown glass at her own flat, or jade at Craig's. "It was there."

"But why did you *take it*?" I ask.

"I like it," she replies. I nod, and I suppose that this wouldn't be an unusual thing for her to do, but I must look unconvinced because she says,

"You're getting weird, Corinne. All of you. I feel like you're doing, like, a tribute to The Famous Five."

"Well, that's what you raised me on," I say. She frowns at me and so I clarify, "You used to read me that stuff for hours."

"I can't believe you remember that."

"Well I was like, six. That's normal, right, to remember from that age?"

"No, you were way younger. If you were six I would have been eleven. I would have been bored by The Famous Five by then."

"You were bored," I say. "but you did it because you were nice to me. And I'd also remember if I'd been younger, anyway."

She still looks doubtful but I know it's true because I also remember her singing to me to make me go to sleep. I remember that 'Champagne Supernova' was the only song that would get me to close my eyes, and that Faye cut out the lyrics 'Where were you while we were getting high?' for my mother's ears, so that I was surprised when I heard the song in full a few years later. Maybe I liked it because it sounded like a nonsense rhyme, with or without those missing words.

"You were such a grown-up then," I say to Faye. She laughs at me and says,

"What happened, right?"

"You got a life."

"At twelve."

"Did you really start partying at twelve?"

"Thirteen I guess. I looked older."

The topic of Faye's social life is an exhausted one, so we go back to talking about my stalking.

"I know it all seems a bit crazy, but I'm sure Jane knows what she's doing, right? She's just worried about Morgan. And I mean, it's Jane, right?"

"What does that mean?"

"Jane's sensible." Faye shrugs when I say this and she replies,

"She's Sarah's sister," and I don't know what she means, either, but I think that she's disagreeing with me so I stop talking.

Sarah Richards

"How did it go?" my sister asks me when she finds me on campus the day after my talk with Faye. I realise that she must think that it went exceptionally badly if Faye is now living in her house, so I take the time to put down my textbook and smile at her and say,

"It was okay. I think it'll take her a while to process everything I told her, you know, but I think she took it well."

"That's good." She stays standing next to my reading table for a few moments, then pulls out a chair, sits on it, and leans conspiratorially close to me. "Does she seem *okay* to you?"

"She's been acting really weirdly," I venture.

"Weird how?" Jane asks, really far more interested in what I have to say than usual.

"Weird, like, evasive," I say.

"Maybe she's hiding something," Jane replies, nodding, and her eyes grow wider. I don't feel like telling her that Faye just doesn't want to talk about the fact that she slept with our gay best

friend, and because I slept with her gay brother, so I just frown.

"It might be something serious," Jane presses on.

"What, like that she killed someone?" I ask, joking here because I don't want to talk about the options that I'm really worried about: depression, suicidal thoughts, drug dependence stronger than I could understand with my limited experience.

My sister does not contradict me.

"Oh come on, Jane," I'm compelled to say eventually. "I meant that I think she's hiding how sad she feels."

"Okay, I know. But it's possible, right? Think about it. We know that she has a violent temper and acts very impulsively. And now, recently, we also know that she's been spending more and more time away from you, or on her own, doing who-knows-what. And she's hiding something."

"I think you're being a bit ridiculous," I say, but then Jane says,

"Think about it. You know that she wouldn't keep things from you and be so distant if she didn't have a good reason. You're her favourite person," and it's here, I think, that she plants a tiny seed of doubt, and that's why I say quite loudly to her,

"You're starting to sound crazy, Jane, you know that?"

She looks shocked, as do the few people sitting at the desks near to me, so I lower my voice to continue, "Anyway, you'll be able to keep an eye on her now. For both of us. I'm sure you'll see that she's fine."

When Craig finds me in a queue to buy printing credits on campus later that day he says, "I'm worried about Tyler."

"Oh?" I say, not in the mood to provide words of comfort but knowing that I must, and must choose them carefully, if I hope to avoid an exhausting situation.

"Yes. I mean, he seems to be spending a lot of time with that twin and his fiancé, and I just don't know what they're getting up to. I mean, I'm sure it's all pretty innocent, but, well, what if he's into drugs again? Or something?"

"What if he's 'into drugs again'? Craig, you're 'into drugs'. You sound like your brother. And are you really worried that your rent boy boyfriend is being corrupted by the boy and girl next door? I heard she wears paisley. I don't see that any harm coming of an association with them."

We shuffle forward a little as the queue moves along, then Craig says,

"What if he's upset about that guy from Camps Bay getting killed? I was just hoping you could check it out for me. You know, see what's going on?" I've failed in my attempts at avoidance.

"As in, wander over to their house and introduce myself?" I ask.

"Well I mean, you could make up an excuse for being there..."

"Why can't you go?"

"Well, it's weird because I'm gay. Weirder than if you go because I was with Tyler."

"Is it?"

Corinne Carson

When Jane tells me, "You have to go and see Tyler," I take a moment to catch up with where it is that Tyler is staying this week, then just hope that she's not planning to make me do anything especially illegal.

"Oh?" I say. "Why?"

"Well, Sarah's worried about him. At least, your brother's worried, but he can't go because he's gay and so he wanted her to go, but she can't go because she doesn't know him. So she asked me to go but I said I shouldn't in case Morgan's told Mark that I think he's a murderer. So I thought, Mark likes you, you should go."

"Mark likes me?"

"I think so?"

"No, I'm not sure he does."

"Oh, I think so." She's gentle but firm.

"Wait, why can't my brother go?"

"Because then Mark will think Craig wants to sleep with him."

"But he'll be going there to see his boyfriend?"

"I just think it's better if you go. That way we'll have a more direct report on what Morgan's doing there, too."

"But we wanted to spy on Morgan before, and we couldn't think of a good enough reason to go there. Do you suddenly have an excuse for me to use?"

"Well, this is different."

"How?" My voice is whiny.

"Because it was *Morgan*, so it was *awkward*." Her patience is wearing thin. "But this is Tyler, and like, he's *Tyler*, who's everyone's friend, so it's fine. And he didn't abandon us like she did. He had to go. So you're not going to look like this crazy lesbian cultist stalker or anything."

"Maybe you could come too? To see Tyler, not Mark?"

"You're not *listening*," she says, and so I simply agree to go.

The next day, after Jane has left for her anthropology lecture and while I'm still in bed, I get the idea that I'd prefer not to go alone, and get out of bed and pull on a t-shirt and jeans, then circle the house a few times to find Faye, and eventually find her at the kitchen table smoking a cigarette between bites of an over-buttered croissant. She's reading the horoscopes in a *Vogue* that's at least a year and a half old, so it feels superfluous when I ask her,

"What are you doing today, Faye?"

She looks confused, but not confused in an unconcerned way, but when I try to get her to come along she is firm in her resolve to stay at home today and tan in our garden.

It seems almost poetic and somehow poetic that I find Tyler, Mark, and his fiancé tanning in their own sprawling and now-overgrown garden. There's a breeze blowing as Mark and Tyler lie on the grass in their shorts staring defiantly at the sun with Mark's fiancé sitting between them focussing on a bright triangle of fabric that she's sewing with an impression of industrious rebellion. She looks up at me after a long moment and says, "Hello," and smiles, long lashes evident behind cat-eye sunglasses.

Back at our house, before Jane has a chance to interrogate me about the success of my mission, I come across Faye in the lounge and she asks me,

"How long did everyone know about Craig?" This is a habit that she's developed since Sarah's series of rapid-fire revelations: she stays mostly quiet, lulling those around her into a false sense of security, then, when you've spent a period of time in her company, she'll ask a question that almost certainly needs an answer okayed by Sarah herself.

"Um," I begin, "I wouldn't say that we knew exactly. Because we didn't talk to him about it. It just became more and more apparent to us that he was hooking up with guys. Then one day his boyfriend was moving in with us. It all happened quite fast."

She nods, staring ahead.

"If he'd killed Clarence, would you tell me?" I probably frown at her here for a moment, unsure what to say, but in the memory that I have of what I hope happened, I say,

"He didn't kill Clarence, you know that. He's too gentle."

"Of course. But if he had. If it was a big secret like that, would you tell me?"

"He'd tell you. If it was something that you needed to know, Craig would tell you. He just didn't tell you about this because he didn't think that you needed to know yet."

She nods, and frowns like I might have done, then asks,

"What if you did it?"

"What if I killed Clarence?"

"Yes."

"Would I tell you?"

"Yes, that's what I'm asking."

"Um, I don't know. I don't know if I'd tell anyone."

My answer doesn't please her, but she doesn't look very upset either, despite the fact that I know that it's not what I should have said. She stubs out the cigarette she's been smoking and pulls her jersey around her before she looks up at me and asks,

"What if I did it? What if I killed Clarence?"

"I don't know, Faye. What would you do if you killed Clarence?"

"I'd probably tell you. Could I tell you, even though you wouldn't tell me if you did it?"

"Of course you could tell me."

"What would you do?"

"I'd listen to what you had to say."

"And you'd believe me?"

"Of course I'd believe you. And I'd take your side."

"And you wouldn't tell anyone?"

"No."

"Okay," she says, with a cursory nod. "Well, good."

Craig

Laura says constantly that she misses me and I don't know what this means for my brother's relationship with her, but one day I miss her too and say,

"I miss you too."

"Then can I see you today?" she asks, seizing the opportunity.

"Let's go swimming," I propose, but she asks me if I've been outside yet, and I haven't, and when I lift up one of the blinds, the sky is grey.

"It's not actually raining," I say. "Let's go anyway," and so we end up at an almost-deserted pool area, the sun appearing as intermittent and hopeless rays behind dark clouds above us. It's hot despite being dark, and Laura says,

"We've never really swum here before," and I think she's just trying to fill the silence that she finds awkward while we pull our clothes off.

"We're always tanning," I say, and "Today's the day we swim."

It hurts to realise how much I've missed her, but that doesn't mean that I want to talk, so I dive deep under the water and she follows. She's pale and gangly under the water, with the strange sunlight through the blonde hair all around her face. I grab her around the waist and hold her for a few seconds at one point, but make sure that I let go before we have to surface.

Jaime

We get the feeling that Laura's past is not something that we want to dive into too deeply. She discusses her family seldom or never (have we ever heard her mention her parents?) but we aren't inclined to ask about them – her silence on the topic is not of the intriguingly mysterious kind. It's vaguely depressing, and we imagine linoleum and old bed linen in various degrees of vividness depending on how close to her world each imaginer has come in her own life.

Craig Carson

I get to see Tyler's flat, and it's largely how I would've expected. The furniture's old but I don't dislike any of it and so I imagine that Tyler's probably kept it out of choice rather than poverty, and that maybe he even chose it himself; bought it and moved it in. The walls are white, and look like they were only painted a long while ago, but one of them is covered with pictures, framed or cut out of magazines and all arranged in the style of a giant mood board, which makes me realise that I didn't really know that Tyler was creative – I know that he dresses well, and that he looks like he could be some kind of designer, but that we always talked about my writing and sometimes his modelling, but never about anything else that he might have going on. The pictures are largely of

the nineties: neon, Doc Martens, Leonardo DiCaprio, Larry Clark movies, a lot of blond people I don't recognise, Chlöe Sevigny, young Kate Moss, the word 'radical', rollerblades, yellow. There's also more recent stuff: River Viiperi, Johnny Depp (now, not then), Lana del Rey wearing florals.

We lie on his bed (striped sheets, probably not meant to be an optical illusion but they do weird things to my eyes anyway) and he flips through a copy of a book that he says he bought because I told him he should read it. I don't remember this conversation, but do my best to answer the questions he has about it.

I realise that one of my favourite things about Tyler is that he acts like some buddy of mine until he wants to have sex; chatty until he's suddenly clinging to me, sucking on parts of me and biting others, and making me happy to have him around. When he's got what he wants from the exchange, he'll lie next to me, no parts of us touching, and says,

"We should eat something," and I realise that I've achieved the straight fantasy of what being gay might be. I order a pizza and realise that I really do love him.

Corinne Carson

"This is ridiculous," Sarah says to Faye over the phone, by way of a greeting.

"What is?" Faye asks her, sounding bewildered because she's just woken up on our couch from an extended, prescription-enhanced nap.

"That you don't get to live in the flat. It's more your flat than it is mine, and if you can't bear to live in it with me then you should be the one who gets to stay here, and I should be the one to go."

"Don't go."

"You don't have to say that, Faye." There's a pause on the line, then Faye says,

"Okay," which is how Jane finds herself back at her home in Durban, on a sun lounger next to her sister.

Sarah Richards

"It's just better this way," I say to Jane, who's been protesting in a quiet, grumbling way about having to come home with me.

"Yes, it's much better that you deal with the situation passive-aggressively," she says, sarcasm dripping from her words as she turns the pages of a slightly damp magazine.

"I'm just giving her some space," I say, and Jane sighs at this, but says,

"I know."

"I always have a stomachache in Durban," I tell her, in a way to change the subject but also because my stomach really hurts, and she replies,

"It's the heat." She doesn't look up from the pages in front of her magazine.

"How does the heat cause a stomachache?"

"You know, dehydration and stuff. Drink more water," she says, trying to shrug her shoulders while wedged into the lounger, and I don't know if it makes sense, but I follow her advice and reach for the bottle that's next to me along with my glass.

Her blond hair's always at some point in the process of drying off from the pool or the shower, pushed back under a thin elastic headband. How can she remind me so much of Faye when she's so messy and so entirely without the need to impress? She lies around on my bed a lot and says, "How *Virgin Suicides* of me," in a way that suggest she enjoys the image, and sometimes falls asleep there, and one night after it gets dark she asks,

"Are you awake?"

"Could I possibly be asleep in this heat?" I reply.

"How did we ever sleep here?"

"Did we?"

"Maybe not. I think we half-slept. Too hot to sleep. Too hot to wake up properly."

“Mmmm.”

If you're from Durban you're skilled at leisure in a way that puts Capetonians to shame.

In the heat and my half-sleep I think of the boys that I've slept with, and the ones I loved, and the ones I'd wanted, and the ones I still yearn for. I stretch out my stiff legs as nostalgia almost kills me, but it's lust that I feel most strongly. It's not unpleasant, so I don't try to shake it off.

What brings me gasping to the surface of consciousness more often than I'd like are the thoughts that Jane has inspired in me. I haven't begun to believe her, but some of the images that feature in her ideas come to me unbidden: dead twin, trapped Morgan, girls in attics, basements and empty parks. In my discontent I start projects with the potential to change the world a little bit but that I won't finish when hard work calms me and reality hits and my real goals get in the way.

One night, Faye calls me, using our landline number which I thought she'd have lost long ago with one of her wayward BlackBerrys.

“What would you do if I killed Clarence?” she asks me without much preamble or much urgency.

“Why would you have killed Clarence?” I ask in return.

“It doesn't matter. What would you do if it was me who did it?”

“Well, I'd help you. I'd take your side, and defend you.”

“What if I asked you to keep it a secret that I'd done it?”

“It's not like I could help you to bury the body because you – or whoever else did it, you know – committed such a perfect crime that that's not necessary, but I'd do whatever it would take to keep you out of trouble. I'd say it wasn't you if I had to.” She pauses before she answers with her next question, maybe anticipating that I have something more to say.

“Really?” she asks.

“Really.”

“So you don't hate me?”

“I really don't.” I reply. I search for a way to make this point clearer. “I couldn't hate you, no matter what you do. I know that because I've tried. And I really can't.”

We can be in Durban because it's another varsity holiday. As is always the case at times like this, my sister and her friends miss each other extremely. One of them posts on another's Facebook wall, “You can plan a pretty picnic but you can't predict the weather” and it makes me nervous and I hope that it's just some kind of literary quote but I never bother to ask anyone or search for it.

We go out for dinner to a restaurant that we used to go to a lot with our parents (they're at dinner with their friends tonight) and Jane laughs at me for laughing at how low the prices are.

“I feel like we're missing out, being here,” Jane tells me.

“Missing out on what?” I reply. “No-one's in Cape Town. Everyone's away. They're all having wild orgies in Thailand or whatever.”

“I want a wild orgy in Thailand.”

“Me too. Or failing that, a trip up the North Coast.”

“Exactly.” She yawns.

“Do you remember being poor?” I ask Jane minutes or hours later.

“What?”

“Do you remember when we didn't have any money? Or were you too young?”

“No, I don't. I mean— What do you mean, 'didn't have *any* money?’”

“You know. Mom having to borrow money. Having to eat really weird dinners because we'd run out of proper food?”

“No. No, I don't remember that at all. When was this?”

“When you were young, I guess. I was young, so you must have been tiny. It was before we lived here.”

“Why doesn't anyone ever talk about it?”

“Well, I suppose because it's over now.” She frowns at this in a way that might be angry or

just troubled.

We're bored though I won't admit it, and we've lost touch with the city so we don't know where to go or what to do. We end up driving around looking for somewhere to eat lunch the next day and I put the radio on to find it still tuned to the local station, which today is playing a hopelessly repetitive song.

"I hate dubstep," Jane says and I reply,

"All hipsters hate dubstep," though she knows for a fact that I hate it too.

We drive under a vast blue sky dusted with a few grey clouds, past a sulky girl, a cityscape that looks like a wasteland except for the shining pinnacles in its centre, the stadium making the casino look small now, a Mercedes driving slowly on Musgrave Road, then countless more that we see on the Berea, red brick, pebbledash, and dark, dense green foliage. There's a bridge that a man who we all knew died on, and I drive across it fast and look quickly at the sea on the right, not bothering with the inland view of a river and hills and hotels on the left.

I can't blame her for not wanting to be here, and I run out of ways to blackmail her into staying. Besides this, there's some party happening in Cape Town soon that she won't be stopped from attending.

"It's at Mark's house. I know that I'm no more likely to find out who killed him at the place where it happens, but... I guess that is what I hope will happen, anyway."

"You're exhausting," I say to her one night. "Go listen to Foster The People or something," choosing a band that I know is already outdated so that it insults her slightly and also so that she can't accuse me of being in some way hip. It's because of this conversation, and many others, that Jane goes back to Cape Town and leaves me in the Durban summer on my own.

"How would I ever have survived here without you?" is the last thing she says to me before getting onto her flight.

One night I call Faye and ask, before she can start trying to discuss our issues,

"You'd tell me if you'd killed Clarence, right?" She laughs at my question, then replies,

"I tell you everything, Sarah," in a way that doesn't leave me feeling comforted.

Jane Richards

There must be a lot that I don't remember about when we were younger because now that Sarah's mentioned that we used to be poor I think of a time about a year ago when I was washing the dishes and ran out of Sunlight liquid and Corinne had said,

"Just use shampoo," so I did. Sarah had been sitting at the table reading a *Vogue* and she laughed when I started pouring the minty substance into the sink so I asked,

"What? Do you think it might be unhealthy?"

"Probably," she replied. "But that's not what I'm laughing at. It's just that mom used to wash our hair with dishwashing liquid when we couldn't afford shampoo, and now you're washing the dishes with R300 shampoo." I took this as a criticism and just shrugged my shoulders.

Morgan, Corinne tells me when I get back to Cape Town, has spent much of this week making bunting.

"What's bunting?" I ask her, and she says,

"You'll see," with a roll of her eyes, and that night I do get to see metres and metres of neatly stitched fabric triangles sewn together, intertwined with fairy lights and strung around the garden at Mark's. The lights cause the triangles to cast long, pointed shadows, and the effect is beautiful. They're playing trance, which I find confusing because I didn't know that it was cool anymore, and because at first, from a distance, the beat sounds like 'The Beautiful People' by Marilyn Manson.

Everyone is gorgeous, which I'd expected, but also very gentle and graceful, and they seem to move in slow motion. They smile widely at one another, rakishly or radiantly, and laugh with their heads slightly leant back, and hold their drinks between a thumb and one or two fingers, acting just as if they'd been at a garden tea or a dinner party, although they're wearing scuffed shoes and

blazers meant for genders other than their own.

Standing outside with her hair in a loose plait over a thin shoulder, Brigitte asks indulgently, "Is there anything worse than a hipster?" and Jane responds,

"A gay hipster," at which Tyler rolls his eyes.

"How do you tell which ones are gay?" Jane asks, and they both smile, but don't laugh.

"And when did they start liking Aleksander Skarsgard?"

"I love them," says Morgan, who'd been staring into the distance. "I want to take care of them, and buy them all the things they can't afford."

"They can't afford things because they've spent all their money on drugs and art supplies."

"I don't care. I love them. They're nice, and all... creative."

I'm talking to a guy I know through my brother, who's a black skateboarder, a combination that reminds me of Pharell though I know that that's not what he's going for, and he says,

"We're part of something. We're on the cusp of something," then he walks off and I'm left thinking that he's probably right. It's as if all of our sentiment and pure, naïve optimism has been distilled and released here, so that now it's poured over all of us and we're intoxicated in an overwhelmed, gasping way.

The house is very dark. I try a light switch in their candlelit bathroom and find that it doesn't work, and wonder if the bulb's blown, or if they're had a power failure, or if they've shut off their own power throughout the house to maintain the atmosphere. I ask myself where the music would come from if this was the case, but then forget about it.

Making Up For Teenage Crime is playing and Brigitte says,

"Sometimes I feel like I could have really liked trance parties if I hadn't hated the term 'stomping'."

She looks so sad that I think of just nodding in solidarity but I find that instead, I have to say,

"This isn't really a trance song," and then she sighs quite deeply and says,

"I know. But I could have really enjoyed, you know, the drive there," and this time I do nod and mean it.

Craig Carson

I'm about to walk over to my sister's friends but something stops me. Jane's lighting a cigarette and pushing a pile of her blonde hair away from the flame of her little silver Zippo as she does so. Brigitte leans in to light one too, and something about the intimacy of the scene and their posture makes me look away, put my head down as I walk toward them.

"Have you seen Tyler?" I ask, and they seem hesitant to answer but tell me in the end that he's inside, and when I find him he's talking to a girl who's pressed up against a wall beside the fridge. He doesn't see me, but she does, and looks frightened by the I'm looking at her, so she smiles nervously at me and motions to Tyler to turn around.

"Hey," he says, too brightly, and I introduce myself to the girl but she's still looking nervous and excuses herself and walks away.

"Tyler," I begin, using every bit of self-control I possess to avoid sounding confrontational, "Is being gay something that you only do... Professionally?"

"What?"

"Well, I mean, do you actually like men? I mean, sex with men?"

"I feel like you should know the answer to that," he says, embarrassed and angry.

"I know that you're good at it. But when I met you you told me that you were straight, and I've been wondering lately if it isn't money that changed your mind."

"What are you saying I am?"

"I don't know anything about you," I say. "Is your name even Tyler?"

"Of course."

"Really?"

"Really. What do you want me to say? Who do you think I am?"

"I think you're, you know, you, but I'm just wondering about the name... You're such a hipster, it seems too... Uncanny."

"What do you want me to say? 'You met me at a strange time in my life?'"

"Stop being so intertextual. I'm talking about Tyler like Odd Future."

"Okay. I'm a walking paradox. Are you happy?"

"Don't get so defensive, Tyler. I'm not accusing you of anything."

"Just of having a fake name."

"Not a fake name. A nickname. Like how we call Jane 'Baby'."

"I've never heard any of you calling her that."

"Well she hates it. But we like it, so sometimes we do it anyway." He rolls his eyes here, but seems to calm down a little, and says,

"I'm not Don Draper, okay? I am who I say I am. Nothing weird, nothing sinister."

Jane Richards

We're aware that there's some kind of discord between Craig and Laura, and of course we all know that Craig slept with my sister, but we can't be sure that the two situations are linked. I find out that there's trouble between Craig and Tyler too when I'm sitting on a couch at the party not even trying to hide the fact that I smoke anymore and Craig storms past me with Tyler trailing vaguely behind him.

I'm another cigarette down when Craig storms in the other direction, followed this time by my sister, and they don't reappear for a while.

I know how long they're gone because I'm sitting there the whole time, listening to someone that we don't know very well talking about why he'd surprisingly rather use poppers than do MDMA. At some point someone walks past and says to me,

"You look miserable," which I hate hearing, and I reply,

"I am having fun. It's just my face," and then scowl at him and show him what I really look like when I'm in a bad mood, then go back to smoking my cigarette.

When my sister walks past us again, she looks tired. I realise that this could mean that she's just been having sex with Craig, or it could mean that he's been telling people about what they did, or that she's not exhausted at all, but that this is just her face.

"Hey Sarah," I say, and I see that this is the first time she's noticing me there. She looks more guilty than concerned about the full ashtray and empty cigarette box next to me, so I ask,

"What have you been doing?"

"What do you mean?"

"Nothing. I just wondered where you and Craig were."

"Oh. Talking. He's having problems with Ross. I mean, Tyler."

"Either or," I say, shrugging, meaning, "You weren't talking, you just had sex with him," but she doesn't catch my accusatory tone and just says,

"I guess." She could mean anything, really.

We go out to a bar after the party and it's close to our house so we take the rest of the journey home on foot. We're walking down a road that even in the daytime seems long but at night has a certain romance added to its ardour, and years later I'll realise that we never felt so safe as we did on those Southern streets. We're all in heels except for Corinne, who's spinning in her little boots and also looks a little better in the moonlight, saying, "I don't want to sound clichéd but this might be the happiest we'll ever be."

"That's not a cliché, that's depressing," Brigitte tells her, laughing.

"I think it's from a Coke ad," I suggest.

"Well I think it's wonderful," I say, and I think that in truth they feel it all too.

Jane Richards

Since her fight with Faye, Sarah has developed a habit of driving in to town to take long walks. Long, pensive strolls in trench coats strike her as a very hipster-type activity, to be avoided, so she pulls on some shorts and calls it a run. On cold days, she really does run to keep warm because she's never been interested enough in exercise to buy long pants.

She starts in Company Gardens, where she dislikes being hit on by old men and approached by homeless people with various objectives. She does like the city lights through the trees at the bottom end of the central brick walkway, and she especially likes the feeling that she's got lost and ended up in some era past when she sees the domes and turrets of some of the buildings nearby.

She walks up past the Mount Nelson Hotel, up a road that's always empty, past tennis courts, the reservoir. The houses start to get more interesting. There are the Victorian houses, there's the architecture of the hundred years or so since, and then if she turns left there are stark, modern houses that look as if they might be in some way eco-friendly too. The further she goes, the more expensive-looking they get, and she walks a very long way.

If she follows the road's natural curve, she comes to the area of green space that she's unknowingly made into the goal of her uphill missions. If she realised how drawn she was to this place and its tall trees, she would probably not come back to it at all, and if she did she might just park her car next to it and save herself a lot of exertion. As things are, she believes that this just happens to be where she ends up around the time that she starts feeling tired. She thinks that she feels peaceful here, and perhaps dizzy too, but that's not unusual because she's always pushed herself too hard. She thinks that among the tall trees, in the middle of the suburban outskirts of the city, she doesn't feel anxious about the small things that usually trouble her. She certainly is focused, but is this feeling fear? When she tries to describe it later she'll realise that there was the feeling that something would approach you from a direction you wouldn't expect that it would be big and dark and lumbering yet fast-moving, and not quite tangible, but the feeling never quite became a fear for Sarah, who was more likely to find things fascinating or annoying than frightening.

We all feel that by a law of averages, the more we explore, the more likely we are to happen onto something unpleasant or gruesome. Brigitte gets her bag stolen once, Jane averts being robbed by screaming so loudly that her attackers are scared off; we're told repeatedly that we're very lucky, much worse things could have happened. Still, these are not the things that we're imagining.

Craig Carson

When Ross pulled me into that bedroom and made me realise that I was more obvious than I felt, it was my first year out of high school and the first time that a boy kissed me.

Not all that long afterwards, at a gay social gathering where I don't fit in, someone thinks that they're commiserating by saying to me that one of the most confusing things at first about being gay and open about it is that it's hard to tell who should make first moves when it comes to kissing, or sex, or dating. We're on our first glass of red wine, and even as a look at his heartbreakingly formal collared shirt and realised that we had nothing in common other than our sexuality, I wondered to myself if it wasn't too early in the conversation for this.

"We're so used to making the first move, hey," he says, and the past that I imagine for him flashes before my eyes. In it, he comes from a small town where his roles in high school plays and musicals make him something of a star, and he bores a lot of girls when he does make this first move of his, kissing them unimaginatively for long stretches of time.

His point is that now no-one knows whose job it is to take the initiative, and so no-one does, and I nod while disagreeing inside, and feeling a little sorry for him. Maybe I look lonely or just easy to take advantage of, but I've always had girls kissing me first, and now boys do the same.

Corinne Carson

Long after Craig gets a hard, jaded look as his default expression, Grant retains a long-eyelashed innocence that's interrupted only when something's been troubling him for a while, causing him to furrow his brows. Girls do anything to stop him from making that face, but I'm not sure that he ever realises how powerful it is, even when they're putting their arms around him and saying, "You look so *sad*, what can I *do*?"

Maybe he really was as innocent as they thought.

Craig Carson

The story I pieced together eventually from their separate accounts begins with Laura waiting up for Grant. He's gone out to watch a rugby match and go drinking afterwards but she, unable to bear the thought of spending the evening this way and wanting to give him some space, stays home to write and worry about whether her characters are like Marian Keyes'. She sends him a message to see when he'll be home, receives a reply saying he'll be home in ten minutes, sends him another message an hour later, and receives no reply. She gives up on hearing from him again that evening, and decides not to wait up for him. She does not worry about him like she worries about me, she says, which may be a declaration of affection, or an admonishment.

She probably goes to bed at about eleven thirty, and he probably gets home at about three, and crawls into bed beside her, and she moves closer to him and goes back to sleep with her arms around him in the dark.

When she wakes up again it still isn't light (it's winter, it gets light late), but she notices that something is strange and switches on a bedside lamp, and looks around the room and at Grant. The problem, it turns out, is closer to her than she'd imagined: there's blood on her pyjamas, from the collar of her white T-shirt and down past the hem of her shorts to her thin thighs. She pulls back the duvet and finds that Grant has only a small amount of blood on his T-shirt, so her first thought is that she's been hurt in some way and she pulls off her shirt and shorts but exposes only unharmed, lightly stained flesh. She gets up with no particular plan in mind, but catches sight of Grant's jeans on the carpet. They're in the same position in which they were presumably left the night before, having been pulled down and stepped out of and left there, with a thick jersey dropped beside them. Both are bloodstained.

She sits down next to Grant on the bed and shakes him gently and briskly awake and asks him,

"What happened?"

He stares up at her with the blankness that he retains for a few minutes after he first opens his eyes each morning, and then says,

"What?"

"Where did you go last night?"

"I don't... know?" This is not unusual; Grant is notorious for alcohol-induced memory loss and spends many mornings piecing together the night before.

"Did you know that your clothes are covered in blood?"

"What?"

She gestures to his T-shirt, and he frowns harder. "I don't know what happened," he says.

"Okay," she says. "Well, take that off."

He sits up and does so, and she takes it from him and gathers up his clothes and her pyjamas and walks out of the room. He follows leerily a few moments later, and finds her pouring bleach into his washing machine.

"Those are selvedge," my brother says, not really knowing what the word means but remembering it from when Faye presented the pants to him. "They're not meant to be washed, I don't think. Or, they're meant to be handwashed."

Laura gives him a steely look. "I have bad news for you," she says. "They're going to be machine-washed *and* hand-washed. And then, they're probably going to be thrown away. I'm getting

rid of these, but I'm not throwing out bloody clothes – it would look too suspicious.”

It crosses Grant's mind here, as it would mine, that she seems eerily experienced at this. Then again, she watches a lot of *Dexter*, and he just says, “Wouldn't it look suspicious throwing out R5 000 jeans, anyway?” He's just quoting a figure that he thinks he remembers.

“Maybe,” she says. “Let's check your wallet to see if we can find out where you went.”

There is nothing in his wallet. This, too, isn't unusual: he has no real reason to keep tillslips, so he just waits until his wallet is stuffed so full with little papers that it can no longer close, then extracts them all and throws them away all at once.

“What about your bank records?”

“Laura, what do you think happened?” he asks, rubbing an eye and his forehead.

“I have no idea,” she says. “But someone got hurt, and it doesn't seem to be you.” Standing there in his underwear, he is indeed undamaged. Neither of them are cold, because he's feeling nervous and she's flushed with the action of all of this, but she realises how silly they both look, intent and pale in white underwear, and walks over to the wardrobe to pull on a long jersey.

Corinne Carson

Laura and Grant's assumption that Grant may have killed someone turns out to be just what their relationship needs. Laura is nothing if not good in a crisis, and she is proving herself to be an excellent gangster-type girlfriend, the kind who might take 'ride or die' as her motto. The boredom is gone from their lives, because every time one of them runs out of things to talk about to the other, they return to the question of what might have happened that night, or the topic of how they'd do anything for each other.

What's nice for everyone around them is the fact that the conversation must by its nature be kept secret, so none of us is ever forced to listen to their declaration of loyalty: we just notice that they're bickering less.

Corinne Carson

“Do you miss him?” I ask Morgan, because since Mark's fiancé has got back she seems to have been seeing him less and less.

“No,” she says. “I mean, I still see him plenty at school.”

What I don't know yet is that Morgan has a set of keys to Mark's flat in town, and that she visits it when he's not there. Sometimes she's lost in nostalgia and sadness, but most of the time the place comforts her, between the view of the city and the smell of Mark's cigarette smoke.

“Anyway,” she says to me, “They seem pretty happy, right?”

Laura

For almost three years it's been my habit to tell Craig everything, and now I itch to tell him about what happened with Grant, about how sinister it all seems in light of the Clarence situation, and my resolution is to keep it all secret. When I'm not in his company it's easy – when I'm not in his company, I'm usually with Grant, and feel sealed into our world – but today I'm alone with him and as he sits on the floor waiting for me to make my bed so that we can go out for lunch, I gather the words to say what can't be said in the crowdedly popular restaurant where we're going.

I've puffed up the pillows and am shaking out the duvet when Craig asks me,

“Does he sleep on my side of the bed?”

“What?” I ask, interrupted.

“Does Grant sleep on my side of the bed, or do you sleep on my side, and he sleep on yours?”

I frown at him, and ask, “How can it be your side? You haven't stayed here for eight months. You said it was 'too weird,' whatever that meant.”

He just shrugs at this, and goes to sit in the lounge to wait for me. Although I ask him why he asked me that question, he won't respond, and tells me eventually that it was just a question, and to leave the topic alone.

Corinne Carson

For a while Faye and Grant drove the same model of car, which made them look more sinister than they needed to, rolling up in convoy. Jane said that they looked rappers. Morgan said that they looked like the Illuminati.

"The Illuminati... In Range Rovers?" Brigitte had asked.

It hadn't lasted. Grant crashed cars. After his third accident, in which the vehicle isn't written off but just badly damaged, I'm sitting with my brothers and Sarah on the stone steps in the centre of campus and Grant's telling us about how our parents are going to make him pay for our own repairs.

"They've never done this... Before? Have they?" I ask. My efforts to think of myself as the least spoilt sibling crumble as I imagine a trend by which my parents begin to make us all pay for all of our own expenses.

"Oh no," Craig says. "This is not entirely... Unprecedented. Remember when they made Faye pay half for the medical bills?"

"So I'm going to have to get a job," Grant says, reality sinking in.

"Or you could just do what Faye did," says Craig, and rolls his eyes, and then the rest of them look at me nervously while pretending not to.

"What did Faye do?" I ask, because I have to.

"She got her boyfriend to pay the bills for her," says Sarah, with the reassuring smile that she uses when she's lying.

"Really?" I ask Grant, who's not as skilled with untruths as she is, but he replies,

"I'm as lost as you are," and I believe him. He concludes, "And I don't have a rich girlfriend, so I think it's pizza delivery for me."

"You can't do *that*," says Sarah, so Grant stops talking about it before she gets upset.

Sarah Richards

I worry that Corinne will ask Faye about what we said on the steps, and of course she does.

"Sarah said something yesterday," she begins, while Faye smokes in a bathrobe.

"I'm sure she did," Faye replies, lying down on her bed and beginning to page through a magazine. When her comment causes Corinne to pause, Faye continues, "Well? What did she say?"

Still fearing – correctly – that Faye might be in a touchy mood, Corinne says,

"I don't remember exactly. Something about a boyfriend of yours? Who was really rich?"

"They usually are?"

"I don't usually meet them, do I?"

"They're never usually the type that you take home to meet your family," Faye says, making Corinne feel that they're approaching more closely the conversation that she really wants to have. She tries to smile encouragingly but this is tricky because her default expression is a scowl, and every time she exposes her teeth it makes everyone wary.

"No, you know that from the ones you have met," Faye's saying. "They're older. Serious. Wear a lot of black."

"A lot of suits."

"Yes. Suits in inappropriate settings. Or there are the other ones, who don't own suits. Just leather jackets. And they wear a lot of black too." This is not going where Corinne wants it to.

"How rich do you mean?" she asks.

"Um, I don't know. Rich. More money than us, I guess. Isn't that how everyone judges richness, on whether the other person has more money than they do?"

"Maybe."

"It's important. So don't forget that if you ever decide to start dating. When you've got money you have to find someone who has more money than you do, or you'll end up paying the bills."

Corinne is annoyed that all of this philosophising and life advice is getting in the way of her finding out whether Faye's ever let anyone pay her for sex, but just says,

"I don't think that I have the same... Options. The same options that you do, I mean."

"Lies," Faye says. "Put on some lipstick and girls' clothes and see what happens. We look exactly the same, you know."

It's true. No amount of her eating causes her to put on weight, and no covering of baggy vintage clothing can hide that Corinne has Carson curves. Her straight fringe gives her a harder appearance than she'd have with Faye's soft curls, but that would be easy to change, and Corinne could learn to pout.

"I think that's a terrible idea," Corinne says, and Faye just shrugs her shoulders to say,

"Have it your way."

Corinne Carson

For a while, Grant considers delivering pizzas for money, probably because the thought crosses his mind that he'd look handsome in the silly tuxedo uniform, but in the end it's housesitting that he chooses. There's a weekend stint here and there that involves pet-sitting too, but mostly it's show-houses on Sundays, outsourced to him by a busy estate agent with an auburn bob and a raging crush on Grant.

"You and middle-aged women," Craig says, shaking his head, but of course all women look at Grant with adoration in their eyes and show him largely unmerited favour. Sunday browsers who used to be reluctant to write down their numbers now share their contact details with a smile, no longer admitting that they're 'just browsing'. He's generally put in charge of watching one of the many flats that the agent has listed in a new, depressingly sprawling complex quite near to campus, and the fact that he's generally stationed in a brand-new apartment with no furniture means that there's something appealing blank about him – in blue jeans and a white shirt, in an empty room, he looks as if his life would be easy to slip into, or even that he could be added with minimal complication to your own world.

Laura goes along when he has a house to mind for the weekend, but she stays away from the show days.

"Why won't mom and dad just give him the money?" I ask Faye, who replies,

"Because of me maybe."

"What do you mean?"

"I don't know. I've always been stupid with money. Maybe we've all just genuinely got too expensive and pushed them over the edge, into being sensible."

"How much money do we have?" I ask, not sure how I expect her to answer – maybe with a net worth, as if I expect us to feature on Forbes' list. What she says instead is,

"More than Mark's family," which tells me nothing.

"How much is that?"

"They're rich, Corinne. We're rich. We're fine."

It does comfort me to hear this but I still feel confused so I ask her,

"Why do you compare us to them, specifically?"

She looks a little confused by the question, then says, "I don't know. First people I could think of who also have a lot of money and are also not letting their son have all of the money he wants, I guess," and she sounds like she's getting sick of me so I make up my mind to just be satisfied with this answer.

Jane Richards

For all of our care for Morgan and our vigilance over her activities, we still miss a few details that we would have found intriguing, and that possibly could have helped us to help her. We don't know, for instance, that she's sneaking off quite often to Mark's flat in the city. If we did know, we'd think that she was going there to see him, but we'd be even more surprised to find that she was going there to be all on her own, to look out at the view of the city while lying on a blanket on the wooden floor and listening to Mark's music and thinking of a lot of things that don't matter especially.

She leaves the house without saying where she's going and we've come to just presume that she's going to Mark's family's house, so we don't ask any questions. She leaves behind her Mini Cooper and takes the Jammie Shuttle because public transport relaxes her and because it takes longer, giving her more time to anticipate where she's going. The bus is warm and usually crowded with the art school kids on the way to classes at the art school campus, or on their way to their homes in town after their English electives on main campus. It gets off to a slow start as it winds its way out of campus and along the highway, but it's moving fast by the time the road narrows and it moves around the mountainside, with the view of the harbour and the city in front of it, and her heart jumps and she's exhilarated. It's during the walk from the shuttle stop to Mark's block that she feels guilty, and her actions strike her as dishonest if not yet odd. She does very little there, half out of a reverence for the place and half out of a fear of being found out, although Mark could come back at any moment, with anyone at all.

One morning she awakes with a start and doesn't know why. She gets up and knows that she won't be going back to sleep, and decides to go up to the roof to watch the sunrise through the large window that opens off of the top floor (and none of the other floors). Hoping to walk off what feels like a panic, she takes the stairs and then starts down the passage to the centre of the floor, and the window. The security cameras all over the block have always made her feel nervous, but now she hopes that at least one is watching her as she makes her way along the carpet. The music on her iPod is Odd Future ("who knows which one is Tyler and which one's Earl," Craig said earlier) and the beats and lyrics make her feel bolder but the sheer volume would prevent her from hearing someone approaching from behind, even at a run.

Why would some be coming up behind her, though?

Craig Carson

"The money's good," my brother tells me, with reference to his house-sitting job, and I must look skeptical because he says, "I mean, it would be nice to earn the money quicker... But this is fine."

"So you're going to carry on with it?" I ask, which seems like a stupid question as I say it because he's getting paid basically for nothing and I don't see why he should stop.

"Unless I find another way to earn the money quicker," he replies.

"Become a stripper," I say, joking, and immediately wish that my delivery had been less deadpan because he's looking at me like I've just made a very good suggestion and says,

"Like Tyler. But with women."

"Tyler's not a stripper."

"No. But he used to sleep with people for money, right?"

"It's quite a different thing-"

"I know. But he did, right?"

"From what I can tell," I reply, and when he takes his turn to look skeptical I say, "You know I don't really like talking."

"Oh, okay."

"No, I don't mean *this* talk. This is fine. I just don't like talking to Tyler about what he was doing before he knew me. I don't want to know – you know?"

"I guess." I think that this is the end of it but a few moments later he says,

"Aren't you *interested* though?"

"I am. But I'm also kind of scared of what I'd find out. I mean, someone's dead, right? I don't know what the story was there, and if it was as dramatic as the girls all act like it is – drug murder, or whatever – but surely in a situation like that it's always safest to know as little as possible?"

"Maybe. I'd want to know. I'd feel safer knowing."

"Do you think that you know everything about Laura?" I try to keep the incredulity out of my voice.

"No, of course not. But she's never hinted at some dark secret, so I don't think that there's too much to worry about."

"Okay. I mean, maybe."

"What, do you know something I don't?"

"No. I don't know much about Laura at all. And I'm her best friend. That's why I'm interested. Surely someone who says that little must have a lot hidden?"

We don't get to pursue this conversation because a woman with blonde and copper hair who's wearing a soft, expensive-looking outfit with a kind of equestrian feel about it has just arrived to view the house and Grant needs to dedicate all of his strength to get her to look at fittings and fixtures rather than the two of us.

Laura

"What's in that story?" Grant asks me as I'm sitting writing in a notebook, pressing on my knees with my feet on the couch.

"I've told you about it, mostly," I say absently, then turn away from the page to look at him and ask, "Why, are you worried I'm going to tell all of your secrets?"

He smiles at me. "I know that you wouldn't do that," he says. "But I want to know all of *your* secrets. Are those in there?"

"I don't have secrets," I say. "I'm an open book. So to speak. And you know me very well." It's true that I'm hiding nothing. If anyone looked hard enough, they'd be able to see the things about me that surprise them later.

Jane Richards

"Come for a run with me in town," Morgan suggests. "It'll be like when we used to walk all around home." 'Home' means the Southern suburbs and of course because we'll be in town and not there, and because it won't be all six of us, this walk will be nothing like those. I go anyway, because Morgan hasn't offered me any of her time in a long while, and we don't say much but I don't feel uncomfortable. We remark on things like old oak trees that are starting to displace the pavements, and houses that we like, and how once you get to the top of the hill you start seeing houses that are called things like 'Hilltop House'.

Once we're that high up, the mountain's starting to turn pink which means that the sun's about to set, and I ask Morgan,

"Is it safe up here?" although we're too far from my car for us to do anything about it if we aren't.

"Of course," Morgan says. "Your sister runs here all the time."

"Sarah's hardly the barometer for sensible," I reply.

"Shall we turn back?" she asks.

"Let's go up here. It'll take us round in a loop, right?"

"I think so. Let's try."

We walk along a road that winds upwards and to the left and I become out of breath so I don't say much, but think to myself that it's strange how quickly our route has gone from feeling like it's somewhere in the countryside in England to being a very clearly affluent Southern Hemisphere setting with houses spaced well apart and the mountain in the background of everything we see. Morgan's full of energy still and walks backwards some of the time so that she

can look at the view of the city that's otherwise behind us. The sun's at a place in the sky that makes all of the windows in town reflect the light and glint up at us, while every piece of rock in the landscape that I'm facing is turned pink.

"We're a long way up," she says. "I mean, that's the ABSA building, and we're parked near there. And it looks tiny."

"We're not really parked that near to the ABSA building. But I agree. We're a long way up."

"Do you think that you'll leave?" she asks, before I can pursue any suggestion of quickening our route back down, then adds, "We'll be done with varsity in less than a year."

"I know. I don't think I'll leave."

"I don't think that I'll leave unless I have to," she agrees.

"Why would you have to?" She frowns at my question, but answers pretty confidently,

"I don't want to sound like our parents, but we don't know what's happening with *politics* and everything. I mean, things could go really, really wrong, and we could end as another Zimbabwe." She sounds just like our parents, specifically her mother. "I mean, if the constitution gets changed... Anyway, that probably won't happen. I guess I just meant... You know, if I *had* to. Legally, or for whatever reason."

"I have no idea what you mean," I say. "But I think that we're agreeing. Anyway, it's getting dark. Shall we turn down here?"

"I don't know. I wouldn't want to walk past that open section of land near the dog park at this time of night. Let's keep going so that we can come down Kloof Street where it'll be busy."

"Okay, cool. You know, this really is beautiful. Does it seem strange to you that it looks like this everyday, even when we're not here to see it?"

"Yeah, it seems like a waste," Morgan says, "Unless someone else is making an effort to look at it daily."

"Of course they are. It's Cape Town. It's the most loved, watched, Instagrammed sunset in the world."

"That's true. That makes me feel better."

"We'll never leave. We just fit here. Here, these can be our houses." We stop to look at two very big properties set above the road, both cosily lit for the evening. "A modern one for me and an ancient one for you," I conclude.

"With Mark?" she asks sadly, and I just reply,

"You *do* miss him," and put my arm around her shoulder briefly and awkwardly, because we're both sweaty anyway.

"Is it true that Corinne found the body?" Morgan asks me.

"What?" I reply, then, "I'm pretty sure it's not."

We decide to run now, for fitness sake and safety's sake, and we startle a few people in the dark as our shoes hit pavements from well-maintained lawn, or crunch along expensive gravel. We stay out of the way of Jaguars and Audis and BMWs, and a few other urbane vehicles, and run around hairpin bends gathering momentum, just like the coins that used to roll around and around big plastic cones in shopping centres, landing eventually in a deep void set up for some charity. I'm starting to think that I'll need to walk for a little bit when we come to some open land and I see a rough-looking man sitting there, and although I'm aware of his presence from a long way away, I feel my heart beating much faster as he watches us pass him.

I'm quite dizzy with exhaustion by the time we hit Kloof Street, and the sight of a car placed for decorative purposes on the top of a restaurant confuses me, even though I've seen it a hundred times before.

Morgan

I'm woken from sleep by the sound of a key in a door and I wonder for a moment where I am, and it's when I realise that I'm on a blanket on the floor in Mark's flat that I panic for a moment. When I roll over and see him walking in, surprised to see me there, the panic is replaced quickly

with some embarrassment and more love than I had any idea that I had for him.

"Hey," he says, and puts down a satchel, and I say,

"Hey. I- Hey," but he knows that I'm slow to wake up, so he doesn't say anything for a while and comes to sit on the blanket beside me.

"What are you doing here?" he asks gently after a while, smiling at how ridiculous I must look.

"I didn't want to go home yet," I say, not explaining where it was that I didn't want to go home from, not telling him that I drove here very specifically from home. "I just lay down here and must've fallen asleep. Sorry."

"Don't be. I like having you here."

"Why are you here, though?"

"Didn't want to go home either."

He lies down next to me and holds my hand, then after a while changes his mind and stands up, pulling me with him. "You can't be comfortable there," he says, and "Come here," as he leads me to the bed, but he lies down chastely beside me, so he can't take all of the blame – it's me who kisses him first, and who lies on top of him and acts casual as we continue to kiss and I put a hand under his shirt.

He rolls onto me soon enough, clumsily, and then kisses me hard on the mouth for a long time, putting his hand up my dress, between my legs, inside me and hurting me, I think because he's just nervous. He isn't gentle and I end up bleeding slightly but it all happens fast because my head's spinning, though I am awake now, and whether all of this began with the kissing or the moving to the plain white sheets is up for debate – but what's for sure is that we now have a secret worth keeping, and it's the same secret that everyone has thought that we've had for ages.

Corinne Carson

It's Grant that Laura's still spending all of her time with, drawn closer to him and then bound there by their shared secret.

When they started dating they liked driving far out of town and going on adventures that involved rambling all over places that they hadn't visited before, a twee dream sequence of walks in the sun and lying on lawns; scenes that would make Zooey Deschanel blush with their sheer volume of full skirts, soft hair, plaid and The Smiths. Now Laura likes bracing walks arm in arm with him in the park in the middle of the city, amongst a hundred other Capetonians and tourists, looking just like ordinary people but knowing that they're different from all the others. They're not special because of what it is that Grant may have done – they feel decently guilty about that, troubled by it – but the loyalty that they're showing to each other makes them each feel like they're different from everyone around them in a way that makes them better.

She feels like she's playing dress-up; like he's a spy.

"No-one has to know," she tells him often, and sometimes the phrase brings to mind Craig and the way that she used to say similar things to him before his brother and sisters knew for sure that he was gay. She never broke her promise to him; evidence that she can keep Grant's secret as long as he needs her to, but she doesn't know that his mind is following hers until one day he says,

"Whatever's happening between you and Craig, it's okay. I don't mind."

"What?"

"What do you mean, 'What'?" They've stopped in the middle of the long central pathway now. They've passed picnicking couples and gambolling children, squirrels and their less charming rodent cousins, all under shady trees, but now they're in a largely open bricked area opposite a pond devoid of fish and a statue of a long-dead white war hero, and she's unlinked her arm from his and has one of her hands around the top of one of his arms as she holds him in place and looks into his face.

"I mean, what do you think is 'happening' between me and him?"

"You know," he says, tired. "Whatever fight it is that you're having. Whatever's wrong and

whatever started it. I don't want to get stuck in the middle of it."

She loosens her grip a little, and looks off in the direction of the mountain, which is gathering cloud. "Okay," she says. "As long as you don't believe the stuff that people try to say about us, like, doing stuff. Like, being together."

Grant gathers his strength and smiles at her. "He's gay, Laura. I know that."

"Yeah. But I mean, we get drunk and sleep in the same bed and stuff. And he's slept with girls before. It would be okay if you were worried."

"I'm not worried. I trust you, but further to that, we've always known he's gay. I mean, yes he's slept with girls, but it's been so clear that that's not where his interests lie."

"Who's the 'we' who had him all figured out?" Laura asks him.

"The guys in res. I mean, in boarding school they used to say it too. 'You're so gay' wasn't an unusual thing to say to someone. But once he was with Ross, everything just made so much sense."

"Well, you must have been a very perceptive bunch of kids."

"Maybe. Anyway, I hope you two can sort it out. I like it better when you're happy, and having sleepovers or whatever. I'm sure that whatever's going on is a gay-and-girl kind of thing that I wouldn't understand, but for what it's worth I'd like it to be over."

"Well then," says Laura. "I'll take that into consideration."

He thinks that he may have offended her in some way, but he can't think how, and so he puts it out of his mind and thinks instead about other things that he may or may not tell Laura when she's in a better mood.

Corinne Carson

"Hey," says Brigitte to me, "Do you think that your brother's making a lot of money from house-sitting?"

"No," I say. "Not a lot. But it's money for nothing, so I guess that's okay, right?"

"Right. But I mean, do you think maybe he's doing other stuff on the side?"

"Well no. I hadn't thought about it at all."

"Oh."

"But I guess he could be?"

"Yeah. I mean, he seems to have a lot of money right now."

"He's Grant. He always seems to have a lot of money. I mean, he usually does, but the fact that he complains continuously about not having enough means that I never know when to believe him."

"But he's not complaining lately."

"Isn't he?"

"No."

"Oh. Well I don't know. Maybe it's... Satisfaction at earning his own money?" We both smile at what I've said, which I didn't mean as a joke but seems like one now as we think of Grant. "What do you think he's doing though?"

"Oh, I don't know. But he's not telling you, so it's either illegal or embarrassing."

"I bet he's delivering pizzas," I say, and we giggle this time. "Either that or being a male stripper."

"But it can't be either of those things," says Brigitte, starting to sound like Jane with a murder mystery. "Because if it was stripping, one of your other brother's gay friends would know."

"Can men even be strippers?" I interrupt. "I mean, I know that they can, but do they?"

"Of course. And if it was pizzas, we'd know because someone would have seen him, or ordered a pizza from him, you know?"

Sarah Richards

My sister and some of her friends are at the flat to lie next to the pool and I'm inside trying

to watch series when I hear their voices raised and turn down the volume to hear if anything's happening that's serious. They're fighting, I realise, and Jane says to Morgan,

"You can't keep sleeping with people out of empathy." and it sounds like sensible advice to me, but I don't think about it very much because hearing them disagree is strange, and her tone is definitely too harsh to be just a friendly exchange of ideas.

"I'm so tired of your *hypocrisy*," says Morgan, and I lean back and look out of the glass sliding door in time to see her stand up, piling things on top of each other, sunglasses on sunscreen on towels on magazines. "You get to sleep with who you like but when I do it you give it some stupid name and make it into this *problem*."

Jane whispers something that's probably "Shut up so that my sister can't hear" because I suppose it's never occurred to me that she's had sex before even though she looks like an eighties rock groupie. Whatever it is that Jane said, it's just got Morgan going stronger. "It's the same with the murder stuff. You get to obsess over it, and then I make one suggestion and I'm the one—"

"One suggestion?" Jane sounds like she doesn't care anymore if anyone hears her. "I think it's more of a serious *accusation* than a suggestion."

"It's not an accusation if I'm telling it to you. If I was saying it to her it would be, but you know I won't do that."

"So you're so sure about it, but you're not planning to do anything about it?"

"Of course not."

"Then why do we have to talk about it, Morgan?"

"Because it's what happened."

Jane comes in, stamping her feet and shaking her head, and with her blonde hair she looks just like Faye. I pretend to have been involved in series all along but Jane must know that I was listening and suspect that I know more than I do because she says, "She's just crazy."

"You know, you look nothing like me," I tell her, and she looks at me like maybe I'm crazy too.

Nancy

If it happened at the time of year that I think it did, then the wind that was setting off car alarms and carrying leaves and plastic shopping bags past us was nothing unusual. The weather changes people (we're told), and in the city it's undeniable.

"There's more domestic abuse, more gang violence, all of it. It increases with the wind," Jane says to me, and I must look like I don't believe it, because she continues, with an authoritative look at Corinne too, "It's been proven."

It whips around us as we walk and we pull our coats closer, moving quickly through town to shop for the party later before the party shops close at twelve or one, while Morgan gets Mark's flat ready for the pre-drinks that we're all meant to be having there, and Jaime and Brigitte are at the bar, hanging bunting or fairy lights or in some other way annoying owners and staff. Foster The People seems to be playing everywhere, and we're sure that they're meant to sound very sinister and that everyone's missing the point.

Jane's in a good mood, excited for later, and she's showing it by talking in loud and exhilarated tones about death-related topics. She's been troubled by the dead animals for a while now: in the suburbs there are dead birds on the roads and pavements, and sometimes a squirrel that's frozen up completely. She looks up and away from them, but the image stays with her for the rest of the day.

"Worst hipster ever," Brigitte told her once, and when Jane asked,

"Why?" Brigitte said,

"You should be taking photos of them, not freaking out. Catching their beady little eyes on camera."

In the city there are pieces of clothing; less immediately disturbing. The odd shoes she sees lying on the pavement as we walk into the bottle store are what remind her of this extended subject.

In the shirts she sees signs of struggle, in the waistbands of abandoned pants she imagines suggestions of hasty escape.

"It's the underwear that makes my skin crawl," she tells me.

"Girls' underwear?" I ask.

"Why does it matter?"

"I don't know. It seems more... Violent that way."

"Boys can get raped too," she says, confirming that we were thinking the same sinister thoughts about the undergarments' sinister origins.

"I wonder if we need to get expensive vodka?" Corinne asks. "I mean, it's just us at predrinks. Will any of us mind?"

"Brigitte," Jane and I say together, and Corinne nods and puts down the faux-Russian bottle she'd been holding and picks up one Stoli Vanilla, then two, then three, instead.

Jaime

Dark clouds roll overhead and I think to myself that I don't remember the last time one of us had a birthday party that wasn't in a garden, near to a swimming pool. It probably occurs to the others too, because Corinne's saying at predrinks,

"Remember our sixteenths and our eighteenth, at home?"

"Of course," Jane says.

"Fairy lights twirled around palm trees,"

"Fairy lights over the swimming pool."

"Sparklers."

"Fruit punch."

"Trying to think of a new way to hang the fairy lights."

"Champagne in the bath."

"Fairy lights in the bathroom," I say, and Jane arches her eyebrows at me.

"You're making that one up," she accuses.

"I *think* it happened," I say.

"All of those gold helium balloons under the marquee."

"Grant swimming in his clothes."

"Faye swimming in her underwear."

"We used to be so classy," says Jane, frowning and smoking, and I'm not sure if she's being ironic.

At one of Faye's parties at the Carsons' house in Durban, glitter had fallen from the ceiling (at a specific point or just generally? We don't remember) and another time there'd been feathers. There'd been a bath full of bottles of sparkling wine when her parents were away for the weekend ("It's not *champagne*," she'd corrected someone, teasing them about their ignorance, because champagne would have been excessive) and there were lights on the palm trees and over the swimming pool. The music was poppy and flirty until Faye got drunk and lost all of her graciousness as a hostess, and played *The Violent Femmes*, which was what she wanted to listen to.

"Where were my parents?" Corinne asks.

Morgan shrugs at Corinne's question as she gets up to go to the bathroom, and the moment she's out of the room, Jane picks up Morgan's BlackBerry. I guess that she's just checking the time or using it to get a number that she doesn't have on her own phone, although she's smiling a lot for someone who's doing something that mundane. I don't think about it much as Morgan comes back in and sits down, then gets up to pour us drinks, suggests a drinking game, then decides against it.

"What time are we going?" Brigitte asks, and Corinne says, "Later, relax. We've got plenty of time," although Brigitte is draped over some cushion on the floor and if she relaxes any more she won't be coming out with us tonight at all.

Corinne's lack of urgency seems to make Jane panicky, because she says,

"Maybe we *should* think about going soon," although she hides the excitement in her voice

well. "Morgan, you come with. You *rejected* me today."

The fact that there are already six of us in our group of friends means that if we're partying with even a couple of other people, it's necessary to take two taxis. What Jane means is that she's chosen Morgan to come with her in the taxi that she takes, which she has decided will be departing as soon as possible, and the note of slurring threat in Jane's voice means that Morgan agrees easily, not wanting to fight.

After they've left, with Corinne and Nancy too, Brigitte says,

"Morgan." in a tone that suggests that Morgan's still in the room, and that she's being admonished.

"She's left already," I say.

"No," says Brigitte, "I know that, look at her BBM status," so I do and it just says, 'Mark' with a little pink heart after it. "I'm going to phone her and ask her what she thinks she's doing and tell her to change it," she's saying, but I'm already dialling and also saying, "She didn't set that herself. It was Jane. I saw her using Morgan's phone." The phone's just ringing.

"What's she thinking? Is this just Jane being funny, or is she mad at Morgan? Or does she think we're on *Gossip Girl*?"

"Maybe all three. She's definitely mad at Morgan."

"And she's so clever about it. To choose that, rather than something over-the-top--"

"A heart and the name of someone else's boyfriend is not over the top?"

"Well I mean, it's exactly what Morgan would post. It's not 'I'll love you forever, Mark', all in capital letters."

"You're right. Are none of them answering?" I've been trying Morgan but her phone just rings, so I try Corinne and Nancy but get engaged signals. I don't want to speak to Jane.

"Let's just go," Brigitte says, so we do.

Nancy

The night of the party is cool and clear and I suppose summer's coming soon because it gets dark later than we'd expected. It doesn't matter either way because the party's inside, on the second floor of what feels like a house but is in fact the oldest bar in Cape Town, apparently. Jane's yawning on a couch and looking in no way ready to party but Morgan's providing the energy and saying to Corinne,

"It's really ideal because obviously it'll only be the people we've invited, so it's not like it'll be a weird crowd.

"Well it'll still be a weird crowd," says Jane, stubbing out one cigarette in a tinny ashtray and lighting another, "But it *will* be the crowd we've invited."

"Oh no," Morgan says to us. "I've lost my phone."

"No you haven't," I tell her, "It's just in your bag somewhere. Come on, look again." She looks again, but she cannot find it, and so we all try calling it, and we still can't find it.

"Okay," says Morgan, "It's probably gone. So can one of you just BBM my number in case someone honest finds it and wants to return it?"

"Sure," Corinne says, not calling her naïve because this has actually happened to Morgan, twice, then she says, "Morgan!" and admonishes her for the status, which she's just seen and which it turns out that Morgan hasn't seen yet. Soon Morgan's panicking about not being able to change it while the phone's gone, since she's never needed to know her log-in details before and doesn't have them now, but what we realise is this: once status messages are posted, they're out there in everyone's news feeds, and deleting them doesn't help.

"So we just have to delete it from everyone's phones?"

"Not everyone," Morgan replies. "Just hers," but this is where we hear the first piece of good news for the evening: Mark's fiancé doesn't have a BlackBerry (too mainstream) and none of us can think of any reason why she should be talking to anyone on Morgan's contact list.

"She never talks to anyone but Mark anyway," Corinne says, then turns her attention to

confronting Jane about starting all the trouble.

"What do you mean it's *lost*? How did she lose it?"

"It's a bar, Jane. People lose cellphones in bars."

"I've lost cellphones in bars," she assents.

"Exactly."

Laura

For all of their differences, Craig and Grant make me fall in love with them in exactly the same way. They begin with easy, unrestrained love that they give naturally enough to suggest that this is just the way that they'll always be with you.

Once you adore them, and as quickly as if a switch has been flicked off, they're distracted and then gone.

I'll learn later that this is just how people are – the honeymoon phase is not a myth, no-one can stay enamoured with someone else forever, and no-one is at fault, but when Grant walks out the door it's stinging obvious that this is very much like what Craig did just months ago, right before Grant was there to comfort me.

Their roles have to be reversed, because there's no-one else for me to turn to, so I go to Jane's party with Craig.

Corinne Carson

"Do you think that Laura's insane?" Jane asked me a few weeks ago, and when I say,

"I think she's just unhappy," I expect Jane to state explicitly that she thinks that Laura killed Clarence, but instead she seems to see potential for future accusations. She says,

"I keep imagining her going on a killing spree to the tune of 'I Got You Babe'."

"That's so *American Psycho*," I reply.

"I'm thinking more *Ugly Betty*."

"Yeah. You know, something funny."

Laura's alone at the bar and looking nervous and as if she isn't finding anything funny at all.

Jane Richards

When Mark's fiancé walks in, the first person she sees is Sarah, who was on her way to the balcony to find Faye but stumbles into this meeting, instead, at the top of the stairs from the bar below. And so it's my sister, in the end, who when faced with Mark's fiancé and no-one else, and nothing to say to her, asks, what's up with Morgan's status, anyway?" Sarah has an iPhone because she's never been the chatty type anyway. She, like Mark's fiancé with her starter model phone that she insists is all she needs, should never have seen Mark's name and the little pink heart next to Morgan's own name in the status update section that we all used so seldom anyway, but Faye had taken it upon herself to lean over in their taxi and and say, "Hey, look," and show Sarah the update.

"What status?" asks the fiancé, and it's then that Sarah starts to feel the cold dread of having been the inadvertent bearer of bad news. She does what she genuinely thinks is a good idea, thought it'll look later like she was saving herself: she says, "Oh. I think that Jane told me something that wasn't true."

Corinne Carson

On the balcony, among people who neither of them know, Mark feels safe to say to Morgan,

"Why'd you do that?"

"What?"

"Set that status."

"I didn't. It was Jane. I don't know what her problem is. I guess she's just drunk – birthday excitement."

"It's okay if it was you."

"But it wasn't. If I fell in love with you, you'd be the first to know. I wouldn't share it with my contact list and forget to fill you in." He just says,

"You're beautiful you know," and she replies,

"What does that matter to you?" and he stares at her long and hard before he says,

"You know I love you, and that I want you."

She's caught off guard by this and is knocked back into her usual self.

"I didn't know that, actually," Morgan tells him, pushing her hair out of her eyes and behind her ears. "What do you want me to do about it? I mean, what do you plan to do about it?"

"Morgan. What can I do about it? I'm getting married."

She's numb enough to not feel this, so she just nods and says, "This would never have happened if I took Sarah's advice and got an iPhone," and she doesn't stand a chance of reasoning with him one way or another when she's having to shout louder than the bar's music and the voices of the people are around her, so she turns and walks away. She then does something that's exceptionally rare for Morgan: she decides to leave the party early.

She's sober enough to do a quick check to see that she has all of her things, phone of course excluded, then she pushes as gently as she can through the crowd that's downstairs (the bar's regular patrons; it's upstairs that's reserved for Jane), sends me a text as she's doing so, and has made it to the front door when she feels a hand on her shoulder and turns to see Mark's fiancé who says, "Are you going home? I'm exhausted, I'm going to come with you."

"Okay," says Morgan. "Let's find a taxi,"

"No, it's so close," says the fiancé, "Let's just walk," and Morgan is just drunk enough to agree.

When I get Morgan's message I decide not to tell Jane that she's gone home. Jane is drunk enough to not notice, and also drunk enough to make a scene if she does know that Morgan's left her party before it's even midnight. We're preoccupied anyway because while we're sitting on a couch during a song we don't like, Craig and Laura are having a fight within our hearing range.

"Why do you have to be so *exhausting*, Laura?" Craig is asking, his voice raised. She shouts something back at him that may be offensive or defensive, and he does his exasperated look (half-shrug, eyes half-rolled, shoulders tense) and walks towards the stairs, followed by her.

"That girl is crazy," says Jane.

"She's not crazy," Sarah replies. "It's him. He makes people look crazy."

"Of course this is the time that you choose to take her side all of a sudden..."

"No, not at all. It's not his fault. It just happens. I think that that's how he is."

"If you're talking about yourself, then, well, I guess we all look crazy sometimes," and Jane is talking about herself too.

I'm distracted from what they're saying by a man who's sitting on an arm of the already-crowded couch and is trying to elicit information from one or all of us.

"Where do I find, you know, the underground scene?" he asks.

"If it was underground, I wouldn't know how to find it," Brigitte says simply and with her primmest posture.

"This is so... It's like a tea party, you know," the man's continuing, and it occurs to me even before he adds that, "I'm from Scotland," that I think to myself that this is the kind of conversation that won't be worth telling anyone about because no-one will believe that it took place in all its mundanity. Jane rolls her eyes but Nancy just says, helpfully, "Oh, you want drugs?" and it turns out that he does in fact have his own drugs, but for some reason or another he leaves us alone after this.

Jane puts her arms around my neck later and says, "You're the best, Corinne. But you know that," and I don't agree at all but I'm not going to ruin the moment by asking her to back up her argument.

It's Faye who bumps into Laura as Laura is rushing out of the building, clearly immersed in tears but not frantic.

"It's your brother," Laura says, shaking her head as if to say that it is not Faye's brother at all, but actually meaning that there's nothing to be done. Most people would immediately have assumed that Laura was referring to her boyfriend, Grant, but Faye knows to first guess,

"Craig?" and Laura nods. "What's he done?" Faye continues, guiding Laura over to a seat which is rapidly cleared by someone intimidated by the combination of Laura's resolute weeping and Faye's steely, determined look.

"Nothing," Laura says eventually, once she's seated and has taken a few deep breaths. "It's me. I just feel so... Useless."

"Why do you keep doing this to yourself?"

"Because... I feel like... He needs me."

Faye looks long and hard at her.

"You're right," she says, sounding wise and intoxicated. "People like him need people like you. To stay alive. But what do you get out of it?"

"Who's 'people like him'?"

"I don't know. Difficult people? Creative people?"

Laura shrugs. "I guess people like him give people like me something to live for," she says, and this comforts Faye but not entirely.

Sarah Richards

I'm waiting in a line for the bathroom when Craig emerges from a cubicle where I think he's being doing lines alone. "Why am I surrounded by all of these crazy women?" he asks, saying the first unkind thing about Laura I've ever heard from him.

"Do you think that it's a coincidence?" I ask him.

"No. I must be too sympathetic or something," he replies, and the edge in his voice suggests that this point of contention may be directed at me.

"That's not really how I see it." I reply, and he asks,

"What do you mean?" but his tone's too aggressive and I feel too tired to fight.

"Nothing," I say, and he rolls his eyes and walks past me. I'm surprised to find that I'm too tired even to follow him, and I just keep waiting in the queue.

Morgan

The bar is near to a police station in an area that I suppose is industrial, and that has some new apartment buildings and another bar somewhere nearby. Mark's flat is across a park, and along too long roads: it is too far to walk at this time of night, in this kind of area.

Less than a block away from the police station is an area not covered by cameras. We don't think this about it – it's just another dangerous road where we wouldn't go in the dark, and perhaps not in the daylight either. We don't consider the fact that it's exceptional: this is not just a bad area, it's an area out of earshot of the other bad areas, too, with just a park on one side and an office block on the other, and no-one in either of these places. It's quite close to the bar, but sound doesn't travel around corners. It's less than a hundred metres from a church, and there's less distance still between here and the houses of parliament, but both of these buildings are empty tonight.

"Don't look so scared," she says as we're striding along, and she smiles at me, showing her white teeth. I think to myself that she's too brave for her own good, but it's only a few moments later when she stops quite casually and lays a hand on my wrist, as if she's just thought of something that might merit a mention, that I feel like something's wrong.

"You know," she begins, but I interrupt with,

"Should we not keep walking?"

She smiles and shakes her head once, dismissively, and continues speaking. "You know, you spend a lot of time with Mark."

"We have all the same classes."

"I know. Don't get defensive. It's not your fault. But you spend too much time together, definitely, and I don't *love* it. And I mean, I think you know what I do when I get jealous of someone taking up too much of Mark's time." I cast my mind back to various things that she might mean, because the obvious seems too unbelievable.

"I think we should keep walking. I don't like it here." I feel drunk and vulnerable and I don't know what it is that's going wrong but I know that I feel scared. I grab that hand that was holding my wrist and pull her along with me, hoping that she can't feel my fast pulse.

"Are you trying to hide something?" She's smiling at me now, possibly trying to get me to forget what she's just said and to confide in her on the basis that she won't judge me.

"No. I'm scared of getting robbed here. Or, you know, raped or murdered."

"Relax," she smiles again, and her manner is too much like that of an actress in a B-grade thriller to allow me to take the situation seriously. A flood of happy memories comes to me of sleepovers spent snug in sleeping bags, watching movies about girls killing each other on beaches, in jacuzzis, at proms.

"This is ridiculous, I say, with every bit of sobriety and bravado that I can summon, and I start to walk "If you want to talk about your feelings we can do that once we're safe at home."

"Listen to me, Morgan!" She's shouting, and I'm just walking faster. Her raised voice makes me feel safer: she's an angry girl having a tantrum, not the cool, calculating killer who orchestrated Clarence's death to look just like an accident. It's only when I hear her footsteps quickening to a run behind me that I realise that a death by any violent means in this part of town would not look unusual at all, or anything more than the unfortunate meeting of a high crime rate and a careless young female.

Nancy

Laura couldn't have known that she was choosing a bad night for the suicide.

In the past, she'd often delayed the act of killing herself so that she could avoid inconveniencing someone in some small way – it seemed wrong to do it on a birthday, for example, even a birthday of a quite-distant friend – or because she hadn't finished off one of the suicide notes that she was leaving to make sure that everyone had some closure.

It probably seemed, in fact, to be a good night to do it. Her affairs were very much in order, with her thesis recently submitted and an exemplary suicide note written on cream-coloured paper and placed in a cream-coloured envelope; no name on it to avoid individual blame. It is the night of Jane's party, perhaps, but it's far enough away from her actual birthday that Laura imagines that in time Jane will come to hardly associate the two events. It's a warm, pleasant night. Laura's sense of self-loathing is at a peak.

With all of this said – Laura hadn't planned to end her life on the night of the party. It's only after Craig has told her that she's exhausting, after she's found thi hurtful, after she's left the party and after she's been home about an hour that inspiration strikes. She's slightly drunk, emotionally so, and there's no such thing as a sobering thought when you've had what she's had.

She'd long planned to slit her wrists, but in the end she opted for pills, which she drank down all at once. They seem at first to have no effect at all, so she lies down.

How was she to know that this was the night on which Morgan would almost die, too?

Morgan

I wake up feeling cosy and drugged. The room is warm and it seems to be morning or late afternoon if the light's anything to go by.

Jane looks at me with love and relief in her eyes perhaps not because I am safe, but because

here in front of her in the form of my injury is the proof that she's been waiting for for so long. To put it in the most clichéd way possible, which is always what we understood best, I've given her the best birthday present she could have asked for.

Jane Richards

It's a man of about thirty in skinny jeans and a vintage T-shirt who brings Morgan back to the party. She's limp and he has to carry her, and it's brave of him to do it when it could very well have looked to us all as if he'd been the one to knock her out. We're grateful.

He hears her screams from around the corner (he must've been up at that end of the street buying drugs, though he won't admit to that, maybe because he's afraid of getting into trouble or maybe because he was buying the uncool kind). He hears screams like this in the city all the time but there's no-one else around on this occasion, so he realises that he might be the only one around to help, and when he runs to look around the corner he sees that there are just two skinny girls left behind; it's not a scene that it takes much courage to enter. They must have been attacked and left behind, robbed, he thinks, and feels a fleeting sense of relief that they're both still clothed, at least. Morgan, slumped on the ground, is very obviously injured, but it's only when he gets closer to the scene of the crime – he's walking fast now – that he sees that the girl still standing, who's facing him as she seems to kneel to help her friend, is injured gruesomely – she's been struck across the face and has a bleeding, diagonal wound from one eye down to the opposite cheek, by way of her nose.

"Hey," he's shouting. "Hey, are you okay?"

This is where things get strange. When she sees him, the girl with the cut face stands up and starts to run.

"Hey!" he shouts again, thinking that she's so traumatised that she's not thinking clearly. She quickly rounds a corner into what he knows is a thin alleyway that leads to Company Gardens. He knows that she isn't safe there, but he also knows, having just seen her speed, that she's in less danger alone than her prostrate friend would be.

He doesn't feel safe here (and wonders to himself what skinny girls were thinking, bringing themselves here) so he lifts up Morgan and begins the walk back to the party, which is the closest lit area for a long way around.

It would be difficult to explain to him that the girl in his arms had managed to cause the damage to her companion's face, and so we could never try. It would have been disturbing for him to hear that Morgan had learned to punch out of boredom, from Corinne, who had learned from Faye, who'd been taught by Grant and Craig for reasons of self-defence (the boys had learned at boarding school, from classmates with lives less charmed than their own. We spare him the confusion.

Whose injuries are worse? Morgan's, probably, because she's the one who ends up in the hospital as doctors look for a concussion. The fiancé stays out of everyone's way. We let her be: we cannot prove that she attacked Morgan, but her injuries will match Morgan's blood-stained, wolf-shaped rings exactly.

"They're so rad," Brigitte says, having removed them from Morgan's fingers to hide them before they become evidence, and I agree with her, so I say,

"Go and wash them," as much as to make sure that their gold colouring isn't corroded as to make sure that none of us end up in jail. We're frightened that someone will take Morgan away from us. She looks very small.

"But where *is* Mark's fiancé?" Nancy asks, and it's a good question but none of us have the answer. Mark's fiancé is probably wherever Mark is – he hasn't come to see Morgan, or called her, or texted her, so this too is anyone's guess.

Sarah Richards

When Faye and I hear that Laura has swallowed most of a bottle of sleeping pills – it's the

day after the party – the girls are busy attending to Morgan, and no-one can find Craig, whose phone is turned off. The girls pop in to see her, and pour genuine sympathy onto her sleeping figure, but it turns out to be me who sits in a chair near to the foot of her bed and waits for her to wake up.

Corinne Carson

“So now she's run away and we basically know that she was the murderer. I mean, she did it once and made it look like an accident with Clarence, then I bet she killed that old man and made it look like an accident with Tyler. I bet she did it that time to protect Tyler–”

“Where is Tyler?” I ask.

“I don't know. With Craig I guess. And I bet that she especially did this right where it would look like a robbery and–”

“It wasn't that what. She was angry, not planned–” says Morgan, who's still heavily tranquillised and not making much sense.

“Sweetie, calm down,” says Jane, who until a few days ago hated terms and endearments.

“We'll talk about this later, and you can tell us everything. Just get some sleep.”

“We're looking after you now, Morgan,” I add.

Jane Richards

It's as Faye's coming out of Corinne's hospital room that she almost runs into me and then takes a step back, looking at me, surprised.

“You look just like me, you know,” she says to me. “Everyone's always said so. But I see it now,” then she keeps walking, and I walk in and sit beside Morgan. She looks confused, but she's been like this for days and I'm too caught up in thinking about what Faye's said to give much it much consideration, so I'll only find out years later that a few minutes earlier, Faye had walked in to Morgan's room to see how she was doing, and found Morgan almost awake.

“I know you did it now,” Morgan had said to Faye, and Faye managed to avoid pausing for long before saying,

“You're all drugged up, Morgan. You're sedated. You don't know what you're saying.”

“You did it, Faye,” Morgan repeated, almost slurring. “I won't tell anyone that you did it.”

Faye took Morgan's hand here, tenderly, and squeezed. “No-one would believe you if you did,” she says.

In the few seconds between the time that Faye leaves room and the time at which I enter it, Morgan convinces herself that it didn't happen; that the medication is too strong and that she had a very vivid dream, so she doesn't mention it all to me for a good few years.

Corinne Carson

When Amy Winehouse died we hardly noticed, because Tyler had just died, too. We heard about her suicide on a Saturday night but it was on the Friday morning morning before that we heard about him, as we were walking up to a lecture and discussing the party.

“There's still dew on the grass, it's too early for us to be here,” Jane was saying as we got to the top of the stone stairs that led from the car park to the rugby fields, on the way to the Arts block.

“It was your idea to sign up for this tut,” I say to her, which is probably why she changes the subject by turning to Morgan and saying,

“I heard you kissed Mark,” and I turn quickly to her too, to gauge her reaction and to see whether it seems honest. But this is not the rumour I've heard: I was told that it was by brother who pulled Mark into a bedroom and kissed him hard for a few seconds before getting shy about the fact that they might get caught, and leaving again. True to this, or so I think, Morgan looks generally puzzled, and replies,

“No?” as I turn back to my own thoughts and to a view of the field rather than of poor

Morgan looking trapped and confused, hugging her books against her chest. Jane is right: there is still dew, or possibly ice, on the field around us, and it is barely light. The old stone buildings and the statue of Rhodes look beautiful in the morning light, but the Eighties-built Sports Centre is as ugly as ever and we are early for our class, and it troubles me that we'll have to sit around drinking tepid coffee for half an hour.

True to the adage about the things you worry about never happening, we never get to our three cups of coffee that morning because I get a BBM then from Faye that says,

"Tyler dead?!"

I think at first that she's hungover from a sleeping pill or up very late and still drunk, and still confused from the last scare with the old man from Clifton dying. Three messages later, though – and I have been frowning at my phone, surely, but the other two haven't noticed that anything's wrong – it becomes clear that she knows just who she's talking about. It's as we reach the big scare slab of stone that we often sit on on Fridays while we're trying to decide what to do with the rest of the weekend that I say, "Let's stop here a minute."

I think that they worry that I'm about to faint like Nancy sometimes does, because Morgan asks, "What's wrong?" and Jane does her concerned scowl, but I don't see or hear these things because I've stopped to read through the messages that Faye's sent. I determine that I know what she's saying, and that she seems lucid, and that the question mark in her first message was entirely unnecessary.

"Morgan," I say, because she likes Tyler more than the rest of us and would have been with him an hour ago, "Faye says that Tyler's dead."

"What?"

"She says that Craig called her to say that they found Tyler dead at Mark's house. Was he—" and I don't know how to put this delicately or to not sound accusing, "dead when you left?"

"I didn't know he was there when I left."

"He wasn't in his room?"

"Well, I wasn't in his room. I walked past it as I left, but the door was shut. I thought he was staying with Craig now that Faye was back at Sarah's."

"How is he dead?" Jane asks, "And like, how did he die?"

"Faye says he's just dead. Like, nothing looks wrong, but he's not breathing."

"And they've had someone- verify this?"

"The police are there now. So I'm guessing they have?"

"So he's dead."

Morgan starts crying now and I'm surprised to realise that although this feels in format like all of the other deaths that have happened around us lately, this is someone who we genuinely knew.

"This is so bleak," Jane says.

"I know. He was really nice," replies Nancy.

"And he looked like Baptiste," replies Morgan, repeating a fact often pointed out by Craig when Tyler was still living, breathing, and dating him.

"Who's Baptiste?" Nancy asks, and Brigitte says,

"Don't you ever read my Tumblr at all?" so I leave the room before this gets ugly. I go outside and sit on the trampoline and find myself crying, and wondering if I contributed to making Tyler sad, or if I could have done something to make him less sad. I've cultivated my belief in heaven over the past few months, perhaps as a coping mechanism, and I imagine that Tyler's must be a particularly nice hotel, and feel sure that it must have a wonderful pool area, and this just makes me cry even more.

Corinne Carson

We go down the coast to this house of my parents' where we haven't been for a while because we like having Christmas in Durban so that we can all be together and see our parents at

the same time.

The house is nicely furnished – a lot of cream, a lot of florals – except for the absence of curtains. Someone took them down years ago, planning to clean or replace them, but they never got round to it and now every room is bleached with light and you can't sleep past 5:30 in the morning in summer.

Craig's constant sad expression and his refusal to talk much gets annoying to us, but it's too soon to ask him to act or feel cheerful after a death and a disappearance of a boyfriend and a best friend.

Jane has surprisingly little to say. She may have exhausted her capacity for mystery, or she may be respecting Craig's feelings, but either way we hear little about her thoughts on what may have happened to Laura. "Do you think it's true that Faye dated Clarence?" Nancy asks us, but I shrug and Jane might be asleep.

We spend our days on the beach, subdued, walking into the waves or tracing hearts in the sand as we lie on our towels.

Nancy is the liveliest of all of us and one day I look up to see her running down the beach chasing Craig, and I feel happy to see them smiling and looking like they feel better, but I think to myself, "Not again, Craig."

Grant has become very quiet.

Sarah Richards

I'm lying on the beach between my sister and Faye and I say,

"I feel like something bad is about to happen," and Jane laughs and says,

"Come on, Sarah. After our year, could it really get worse?"

"Well, we're all still alive, aren't we?" I reply, meaning that yes, it could get a lot worse.

"It's okay," says Faye. "You're being silly. I'm right here."

Jane Richards

One night in the kitchen, Corinne is trying to help Faye to open a wine bottle. We'd broken the corkscrew that morning and someone remarked, "overuse." Corinne's holding the bottle firmly in place and trying to turn her face away from what could be a sharp, glassy accident while Faye uses a the handle of a butter knife to push the cork down into the wine.

"It won't taste great," she said to Corinne as a sort of disclaimer before they began, "but it wasn't all that good to begin with."

Maybe it's thoughts of what could happen to her face that cause Corinne to ask her sister,

"Why'd you punch the guy, though?", referring of course to the incident that happened before I got to Cape Town for the first time, in which Faye punched a man in the face in a club and demonstrated a physical strength that surprised everyone around her.

"Because of what he said to Craig."

"What did he say?"

"I don't want to repeat it. It makes me angry, still."

"But I mean, couldn't you just have told him that he was a dick?"

"It was loud in there."

Corinne nods, accepting what Faye's said, but then Faye finally pushes the cork from the neck of the bottle into the liquid with a small, well-contained splash and continues in one long breath, "You know, even if we'd been sitting at a dining table and I could have told him eloquently that he was either homophobic because he's hiding something or threatened by Craig because Craig is younger and stronger and richer and better-looking than he is, I still would have punched him. I could have told him about gender theory and about how his prejudices are outdated, but he wouldn't have understood any of it. He truly would have still thought that he's better than Craig, just because he has sex with girls and Craig doesn't. And Craig still gets more attention from girls than he does.

But it wouldn't matter. I guess sometimes you just have to talk to people in the way that they understand."

"Okay," says Corinne. They sit in silence for a while as Faye gets out a glass and pours some wine for herself (Corinne is nursing a vodka and something), and Corinne doesn't need any more convincing but before long Faye resumes her talking.

"I'd do it again," she says. "I'd cheerfully punch anyone who hurt any of you. You or Grant or Craig."

"Cheerfully, though?" asks Corinne, laughing, breaking the tense mood.

"Craig's still better-looking, even after our poor little victim's had his nose job." Faye's laughing too.

"Okay, not cheerfully."

"Angrily, maybe?"

"No— lividly." They both giggle — and that's the only word for the sound that they make — despite the heat.

Grant Carson

The girls, mostly Brigitte and Corinne, have prepared a pretty traditional roast lunch and we're all looking forward to it after basically just eating hot dogs or grapes or salmon and crackers for the last few days, and we all sit around the table and hold hands to say grace, which is something that Corinne likes to do lately. As she's telling Ross that he's going to be the one to do the thanking today, Faye says,

"There's something that I need to tell you all," and Sarah replies tensely or maybe just hungrily,

"Can it wait?"

"Not really."

"Not five minutes?" Sarah presses. Faye's been drinking screwdrivers since she woke up and then moved on to wine and her responses are delayed now. She doesn't reply and then Corinne says something that I don't entirely understand.

"You know it's nothing that we don't know already, Faye. We're not stupid, we know what's going on. And we've made our choice about what we're going to do, and this is what we're doing. Nothing."

"Okay," says Faye, looking a little pale, and then Corinne nods at Ross, which seems to be her signal that she wants him to get started.

"What about the old man, though?" Faye asks.

"What about him?" Craig asks.

"Oh no," breathes Morgan.

"We know," says Corinne.

"What about Tyler?" Craig asks.

"I did *not* kill Tyler," says Faye. "That was a tragedy. He shouldn't have died."

"Can we eat?" Corinne says, and smiles and still makes Ross say the grace, and he rambles on a little, so it's not surprising that I open my eyes to look around the table at everyone, but what I notice instead of them is the arc of flames that's spreading over Corinne's head, lighting up the pale floral curtains in a way that's beautiful, and above her bangs appears to be a particularly wide and brilliant halo, so I don't say anything at first, but when the width of the ceiling is alight I say, "Guys?" and it takes everyone a while to look up and no-one screams but they all look at least mildly panicked. They start to gather things cardigans, handbags, wallets, the roast duck on its serving platter and make their way outside, while someone authoritative is dialling an emergency number that was saved on a BlackBerry and someone else is throwing water from an old crystal jug at the flames, but having to aim it upwards.

I stay sitting, and I find that no-one hurries me along, but after a few seconds or minutes my brother turns to me and says, "I think this is it."

"What?" I ask.

"This is the dramatic ending to the story."

"You're right," I reply. "I think you're right. And we're not missing it."

"Come on," he says, "we better go," and we do.

Corinne Carson

The house burns to the ground, and we draw straws to see who has to call my parents to tell them, thinking they'll be livid. Sitting on the pavement of what's hardly more than a dirt track outside the house while we all eat bits of duck, Craig is surprised the find that my mom doesn't mind too much; the place was massively over-insured and they didn't like the house all that much, so everyone wins in the end.

"What did you mean inside?" Faye asks me when I'm standing alone, looking at the ashes and the bits of the house that have survived. I keep staring at it smouldering as I say to her,

"If you killed Clarence I don't want to hear it. If you have a confession to make, just don't. We've heard it before and we're turning blind eyes to it, but we don't need you to make it any more difficult for all of us by implicating us in it."

"But Corinne, I need to talk to someone about it."

"Faye," I say, and I turn to look at her and how dull she looks in the half-light, even in the big fur coat that she saved and has wrapped around her. "you need to pull yourself together. This isn't something that you get to talk about. Not to me, not to Sarah, not even to your therapist. This isn't something that gets you the spotlight. You need to keep quiet about this or you'll make us all criminals too."

"What do you know?"

"Faye, I'm on your side. We're all on your side. Isn't that enough?"

"I'm grateful," she says.

Sarah Richards

Drive from the South to the tip of the Cape and on both sides of the road, all the way, are memories of us. There's the house where Faye caused a scene at someone's braai, and the one where I went to a house party to which I wasn't invited, and the shops where we travelled to buy ribbon to tie up party favours for Corinne's twenty-first. There's the antique store where Dylan insisted on taking Laura to find furniture for her new flat, and the sun was setting that day by the time she finally decided on the heaviest bookcase there, on which Craig's novel would one day sit, she thought. There's the street corner where we sold charity magazines for varsity, once in first year and again after Jaime fell in love with the editor and signed up to be copy checker or something, and there's the pizza restaurant where Morgan made Jane go along on her dates when she knew that they were doomed from the start, and a cheaper pizza place where Grant and his friends went for all-you-can-eat Thursdays, and where Craig used to go too when he was still acting straight. There's the shopping centre where we whiled away hours in bookshops and clothing stores, and looking at Christmas decorations in Woolworths in October, going to movies drunk, or eating McDonalds for breakfast before going to classes. There's the big block of flats where Faye lived when they were first built, where if you lie by the pool at midday the traffic sounds, when you close your eyes, just like the sea, and where I was happy for the first time. Turn onto the next road and there's the boys' school where I had a tutoring job until I realised I had a crush on the sixteen-year-old boy I was teaching. There's the block of flats where I almost lived, and the park where Brigitte went to a picnic because it was for a friend's birthday, even though she was ill and had been throwing up for days, and there is the common where she would go running come rain or shine. Turn back onto Main Road and there's the yoghurt shop that we would walk to in first year, and the cheap DVD store where Laura would acquire the source of her wasted time when she was lonely, and the coffee shop where Corinne and Jane would sit for hours and talk and get high on sugar. In a few hundred

metres there's res, and you can see into the dining hall, where first years sit for hours despite hating the food, where I was once so nervous about meeting everyone, then Mowbray where we got lost looking for vintage jewellery and old books, and the fabric shops where we bought floral material that I don't think we ever used. Then there's town, and those indie kids, and those hip stores, and the bars that feel hidden and the big clubs, where we danced on the roof on Friday afternoons and in VIP sections on Friday nights and on speakers on Saturdays.

So this is memory lane, down which I might avoid travelling if I could. On this route, we're allowed to be nostalgic once in a while, and the fact that we've forgotten the bad memories must count for something, and today we drive on the same road, in the opposite direction, to the girls' graduation.

"So, you girls are finally getting out of here," Faye says to one or all of them.

"I don't want to leave," says Nancy, and Faye frowns for a moment like she's feeling a headache or a hangover coming on although she's not drinking at all now, then she says,

"Well, you don't *have* to. It's not like school where you keep moving up and then finish off and get shipped out. You can do postgrad, and then more postgrad, and then you can teach. Until you die." She yawns here, almost contentedly, and I know that this, broadly, is her own plan.

"I wonder where Laura is," I hear Jane say to Morgan as they look out in the direction of suburbs they've never visited.

"I don't know," replies Morgan.

"I mean, I wonder if she's even alive."

"I don't know," says Morgan, in a tone that sounds more disinterested than hopeful. "I heard that she writes plays now."