

CLAY

by

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INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY

EUGENE (33) stands near the front door looking frustrated. He runs his hand through what's left of his short brown hair. Light streams in, illuminating a cheap plastic cat tunnel bent on a tattered Persian rug: a pink snake intruding on the shabby yet immaculate space. As he reaches down, someone knocks on the door.

EUGENE

Oh hi, you found it OK?

MOTORCYCLE HELMET (25) strides in. He is tall and imposing in his motorcycle gear and helmet, and his eyes ask silent questions below the raised visor. He fiddles with the helmet strap under his chin then drops his hand; the helmet remains on.

HELMET

Eugene?

EUGENE

Yes, come in I'll—

Helmet walks up the stairs near the front door.

HELMET

The room is up here?

Eugene, confused, follows.

EUGENE

—show you around?

INT. SPARE ROOM - DAY

Helmet stands in the centre of the empty room, looking around. Eugene waits in the doorway. Helmet notices Eugene staring and fiddles with the strap.

HELMET

How much is the bond?

EUGENE

4 weeks rent, so 880. Through the NSW bond board. Just to protect us both. Because it's a private lease.

HELMET

Are you the owner?

EUGENE

... Yeah.

INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY

Eugene reaches the bottom of the stairs as Helmet leaves through the front door. Helmet fiddles with the strap as he turns back to face Eugene.

HELMET

When can I move in?

EUGENE

Do you like cats?

Awkward pause.

HELMET

Mmm, I used to have one. I really like this place,
and you're a good guy.

EUGENE

Yeah, great, I'll ... be in touch when I've
decided. I have lots of inspections. Lots of
interest.

Eugene closes the front door. LUNA (3), a black
and white cat, emerges from under the couch.

EUGENE

Well Luna, what do you think?

Luna meows.

EUGENE

Right? Who doesn't take off their helmet?

Luna yowls.

EUGENE

Yeah, I miss her too. Are you hungry?

INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY (FLASHBACK)

Taped-up moving boxes clutter the space. Eugene
slouches on the sheet-covered couch, playing with

a lump of clay. He hears a car park outside and jumps up, sliding boxes towards the door. Sharp heels click on the pavement outside, then IMOGEN (25, business clothes) steps in.

EUGENE

What do you want to move next?

IMOGEN

I ... I thought you were going out?

EUGENE

Dave cancelled. C'mon, let's just get this done.

IMOGEN

But ... You don't have to help. Are you sure you're—

EUGENE

I'm fine, Imogen. What do you want to move next?

INT. LIVING ROOM - LATER (FLASHBACK)

The room is empty of boxes, but far from tidy. Eugene sits on the couch, dull eyes gazing through the closed door. Luna sits at her food bowl across the room and yowls at Eugene.

EUGENE

(baby/pet voice)

Hang on Lunatic, I'm just ...

Luna approaches Eugene, pauses, then yowls louder.

EUGENE

(normal voice)

I said wait, you shit!

Luna meows. Eugene drags his gaze away from the door and watches as Luna drops her head, meowing one last time, barely audible. Eugene meows back.

EUGENE

(pet voice)

Luna ... Poor little grumpus. You want some num-nums? Evil little ting, c'mon.

Eugene plods to the fridge in the adjoining kitchen. Luna follows, tail waving like a flag in a light breeze. Eugene opens the fridge - it contains a squeeze bottle of tomato sauce and a questionable takeaway container.

EUGENE

I thought there was an open...

Eugene closes the fridge and grabs a tin of cat food. He neatly portions the firm puree into the waiting bowl. Eugene's stomach grumbles loudly, drowning out the sound of Luna's fervent lapping. He scoops a half-teaspoon and brings it to his open mouth. Without tasting it, he slams the teaspoon back in the tin.

EUGENE

(shouts)

Fuck!

Luna startles and runs back under the couch.

EUGENE

Ah fuck, I'm sorry sweetie.

Eugene puts the tin to the side, then drops to his hands and knees, peering under the couch.

EUGENE

(pet voice)

Looney Lunatic... I sorry, please come eat your—

Eugene melts onto the floor, face-down.

EUGENE

(cont. normal voice)

What am I going to do ...

INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY (PRESENT)

Cat hair mingles with dust on the rug. A haystack of cardboard crowds a scratching pad. Eugene and JULIA (60, knitted jumper) sit at either end of the couch. A coffee table sits before them hosting two tea-filled mugs. Steam rises.

EUGENE

So, Julia, tell me a bit about yourself.

JULIA

I don't actually need somewhere to live. I'm here for my friend. He's living in the caravan park, but he can't afford to stay there. He's 55, tidy, quiet. Keeps to himself mostly.

Julia picks up her tea and blows on it. Eugene smiles, but he isn't happy. Julia fetches a packet of Werther's Originals out of her purse and offers one to Eugene, who waves a hand in dismissal.

EUGENE

He— I ... Okay, when can he come inspect?

JULIA

I'm inspecting on his behalf. He would like it here, I think you'd get along.

EUGENE

I'm really sorry, but I can't give someone the room without meeting them...

JULIA

That's silly, I vouch for him.
Eugene fidgets with the handle of his mug.

EUGENE

It's not that ... I ... I just don't know if he'll be a good fit.

Julia puts her mug down with a thunk and marches towards the door.

JULIA

Well that's stupid. You sound like a fucking idiot. And for your information, George loves cats.

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

Eugene sits at the dining table, which is covered in a clay-stained sheet, resembling a colourful

Rorschach inkblot. He is fiddling with a clay figurine that could be mistaken for Helmet.

EUGENE

(mocking)

You're a really good guy.

He picks up another figurine - Julia.

EUGENE

(mocking - falsetto)

You're a fucking idiot.

JEN (28, summer dress) pads down the stairs with an empty moving box in one hand. Her long hair is gathered in a loose bun, escaped strands dancing as she moves.

JEN

What'cha doin', roomie?

Eugene startles and drops the figurines on the table, flipping the edge of the sheet over them.

EUGENE

Nothin'. Working on my project.

JEN

Did you make one of me too?

EUGENE

Don't know what you're talking about.

JEN

I'm sure.

Eugene squishes spare clay into a small cube.

JEN

I found this ... massager ... in my room, does it belong to you?

Jen waves a light-blue egg-shaped vibrator.

EUGENE

That's ... that must've ... I'll ... Give it here.

Jen comes down the stairs and plops it on the table with a smirk.

JEN

I'm going to get another round of boxes from my sister's. See you soon.

Jen leaves. Eugene unflips the sheet, revealing multiple figurines. He picks up one that looks like Jen in one hand and the vibrator in the other. He stares at them. And stares at them. After an almost uncomfortable length of time, Luna peeks her head out from under the couch and meows.

EUGENE

Oh you're right. I still haven't asked—

Luna, now standing by the chair, meows louder.

EUGENE

(pet voice)

Of course she's gonna like you. Who wouldn't?

INT. KITCHEN - EVENING

Eugene's head rests on the dining table. He's snoring. A light from outside illuminates moving boxes, which hold the front door open. Jen drags a disassembled bed frame inside.

JEN

Eugene? Eugene!

Eugene snorts awake and his head springs up. Clay sticks to his face.

JEN

Can you give me a hand?

Eugene's head swivels. His eyes take in the scene, processing.

EUGENE

Hey! Close the door!

JEN

What?
EUGENE
Luna!

JEN
Who?

Eugene rushes past Jen to the open door and she drops the timber, which clatters on the tiles.

EUGENE
Luna?! Luna!

JEN
Who the fuck is Luna?

EUGENE
My cat, obviously. Do you even like cats?

JEN
You have a cat?

EUGENE
Did you read the ad?

JEN
I guess I missed that part. I'm more of a dog person.

EXT. EUGENE'S TOWNHOUSE - NIGHT

Eugene and Jen are outside the 1960s-era brick building, comprised of six townhouses. A train rushes past unseen somewhere beyond the Colorbond fence and its horn bellows into the night air. Jen stands against the fence, outlined by the floodlight perched on the end of the building. She shivers and rubs her arms in a self-hug, while Eugene searches in the shadows of the bushes nearby: a fugitive figure hiding from the spotlight.

EUGENE
Luna!

JEN
I don't think she's in there.

EUGENE
Rattle the treats louder.

JEN
I'm rattling!

Pause.

EUGENE
Am I a bad cat-dad?

JEN
... Did you say "cat-dad"?

Pause.

EUGENE
Why did you let her out?

Jen huffs, angry.

JEN
I didn't even know—

EUGENE
She's all I have left of ...

JEN
(sarcastic)
And a vibrator.

EUGENE
And a vibrator ... I'm sorry for yelling at you.

JEN
You don't sound sorry.

EUGENE
Thanks for helping ...

Another train rattles past, slower this time,
longer - a coal train. Its horn cries out,
wounded.

EUGENE
(half-hearted)

Luna?

Eugene emerges from the bushes into the harsh light. Jen sidles up to him, their shoulders touching.

EUGENE

Every time I see her, I think of ...

JEN

It's okay to move on.

EUGENE

I don't know how.

Jen wraps her arm around Eugene's. She pulls him towards her, and plants a soft kiss on his mouth.

JEN

How about now?

EUGENE

Uhh ... Maybe.

She kisses him again. Insistent.

EUGENE

Hang on, I—

JEN

Just to help you forget her, yeah? Doesn't have to mean anything.

Jen's free hand twists and she crosses her fingers.

JEN

(cont.)

You're cute when you blush.

(mocking)

You fucking idiot.

EUGENE

You weren't meant to hear that.

INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Eugene slouches inside holding the bag of cat treats. Jen waits on the couch.

JEN
Well?

EUGENE
Well, I guess that's it. Maybe she'll come back.

JEN
Who?

EUGENE
Luna. Definitely Luna.

JEN
You really are an asshole, aren't you?

Eugene sighs and plonks onto the couch next to Jen.

EUGENE
Yeah, maybe I am. Why are you still here?

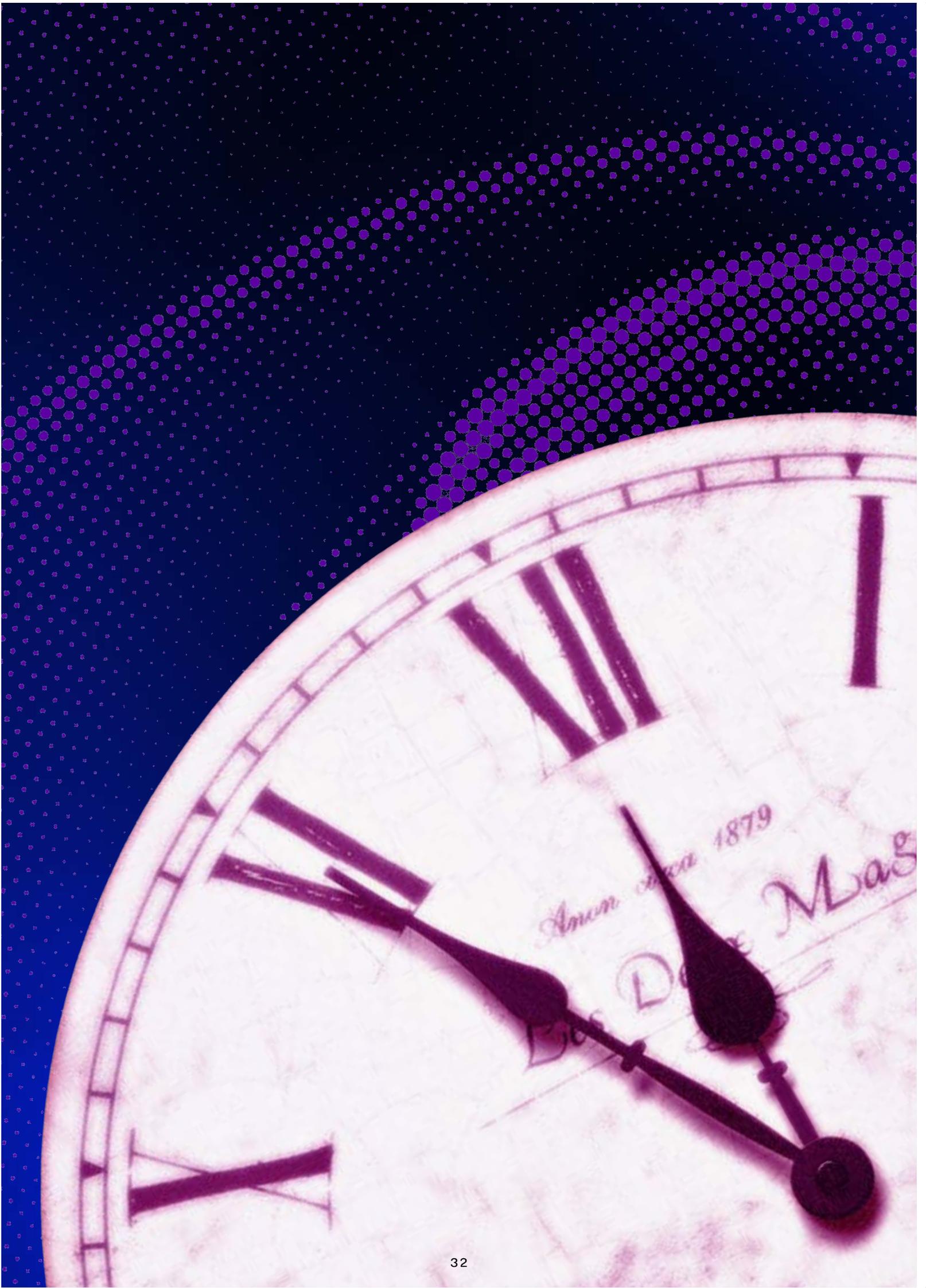
JEN
Because I ... isn't it obvious?

Jen cuddles up to Eugene, capturing his arm again.

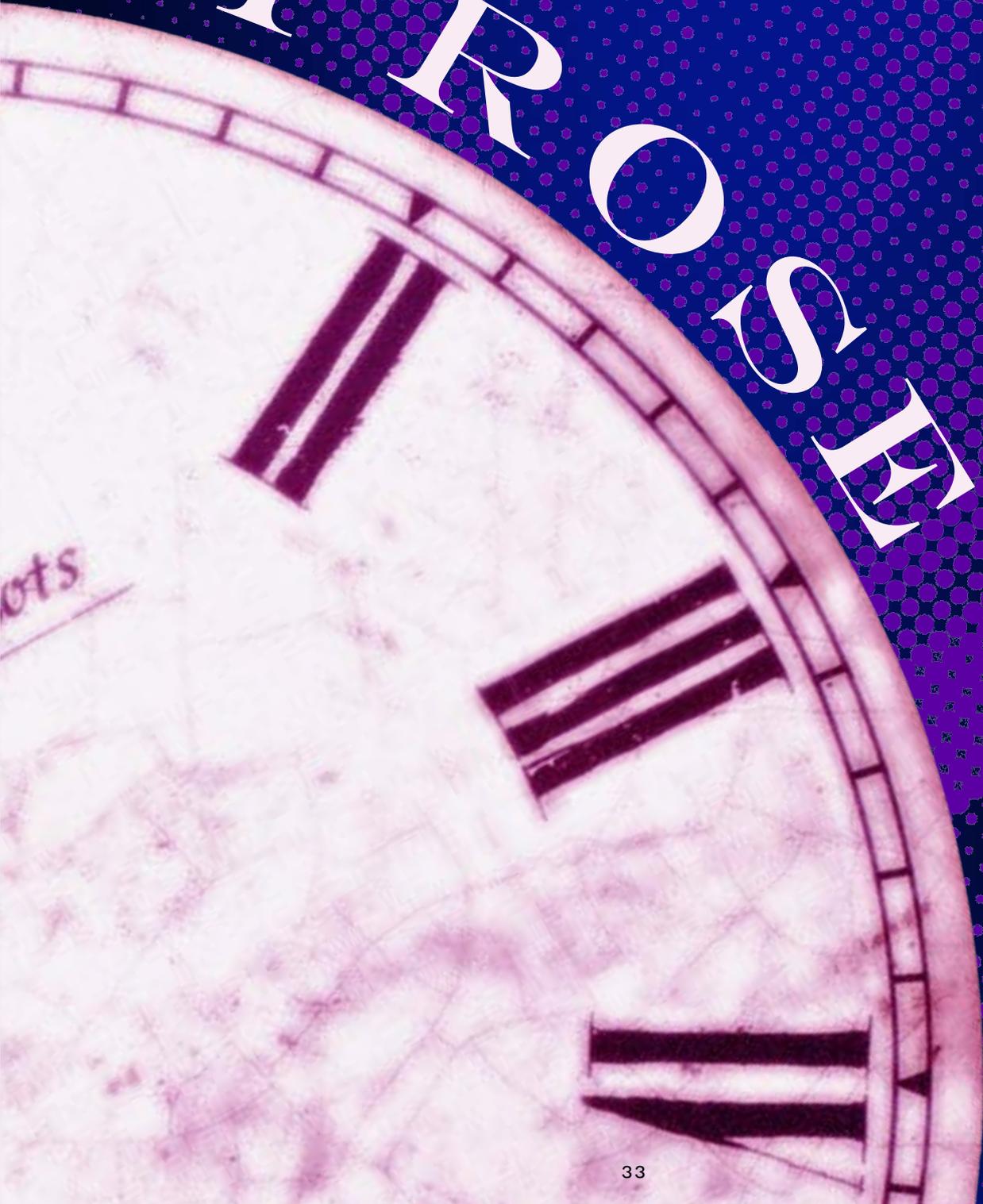
They sit in silence, her head resting on his shoulder.

From under the couch comes a meow.

FIN.



PROSJE



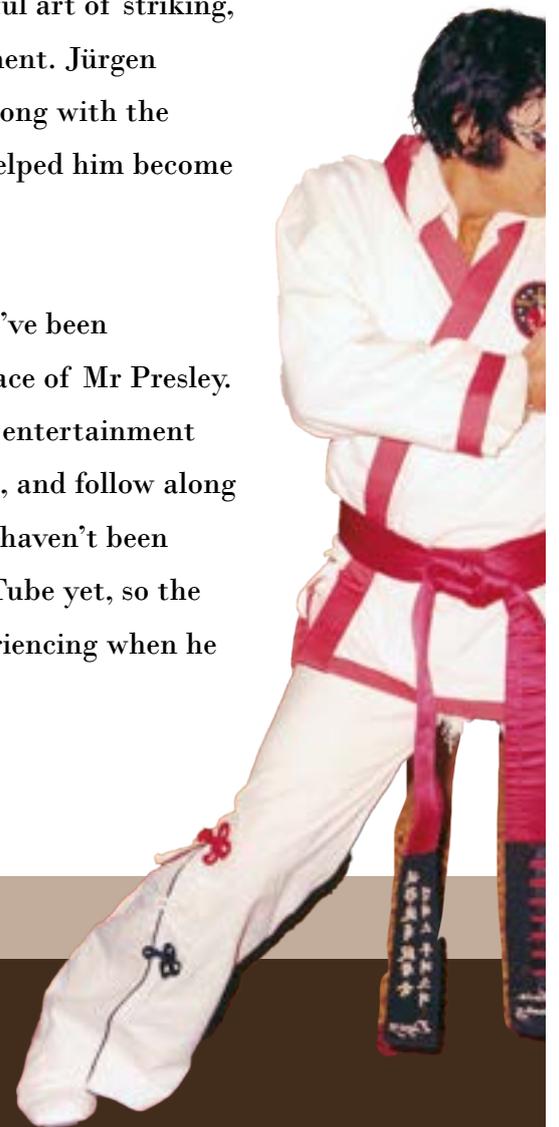
Elvis Did Karate - Clare O'Toole

A lot of people think it doesn't take much to be Elvis. How hard could it be? Grow out your sideburns, a bit of gel in your hair, and some hip mobility. Depending on how much you like sit-ups, you're early career or his Vegas decline. That's how you end up with so many hacks in this business.

I think people should take a bit more pride in their work. Sure, anyone can mumble out "Thank you very much" in a white jumpsuit, but almost no one is willing to spend the hours in the dojo necessary to match the King of Rock and Roll's love of Karate.

Say what you want about Germans during World War II, but after that they introduced our boy to the beautiful art of striking, sweeping, and kicking the hell out of your opponent. Jürgen Seydel's introduction of Karate to Mr Presley, along with the U.S.A.'s balanced provision of amphetamines, helped him become the man we all know and love.

Without having my own German Karate tutor, I've been simulating the experience to get into the headspace of Mr Presley. I'll load up Apocalypse Now (1979) on my home entertainment system, have my phone belt out some Beethoven, and follow along with a YouTube Intermediate Karate tutorial. I haven't been able to find a German Karate instructor on YouTube yet, so the Beethoven helps round out what Elvis was experiencing when he was working towards his black belt.



Learning Karate develops a discipline that most Elvis impersonators are missing. Elvis spent hours each day for nine straight days studying Karate in private lessons during his vacation to Paris. Can you imagine on your vacation FROM WAR dedicating yourself to the development of a shuto (knife hand) or empi-uchi (elbow strike) which would be completely useless in the event of military combat on account of guns and Agent Orange? Elvis can.

Which is why those fucking hacks at the convention couldn't handle my routine. While the rest of the contestants were busy playing the surface-level of Mr Presley's caricature, I presented a deeply embodied Karate routine reflecting the discipline and depth of Mr Presley's time in the United States Army. As I assumed these were connoisseurs of Elvis Presley depictions, I thought that the level of commitment I devoted to go beyond your typical white jumpsuit and hip-thrust routine would be appreciated. So naïve. Instead, some kid with the right lips and a robotic replication of his Jailhouse Rock (1957) routine took the prize. Of course in retrospect, I understand my decision to challenge him to Karate combat may have been influenced by my faithful ingestion of amphetamines. Being ejected from the convention then and in perpetuity is regretful, but I will never apologise for my dedication to The King.



FALL

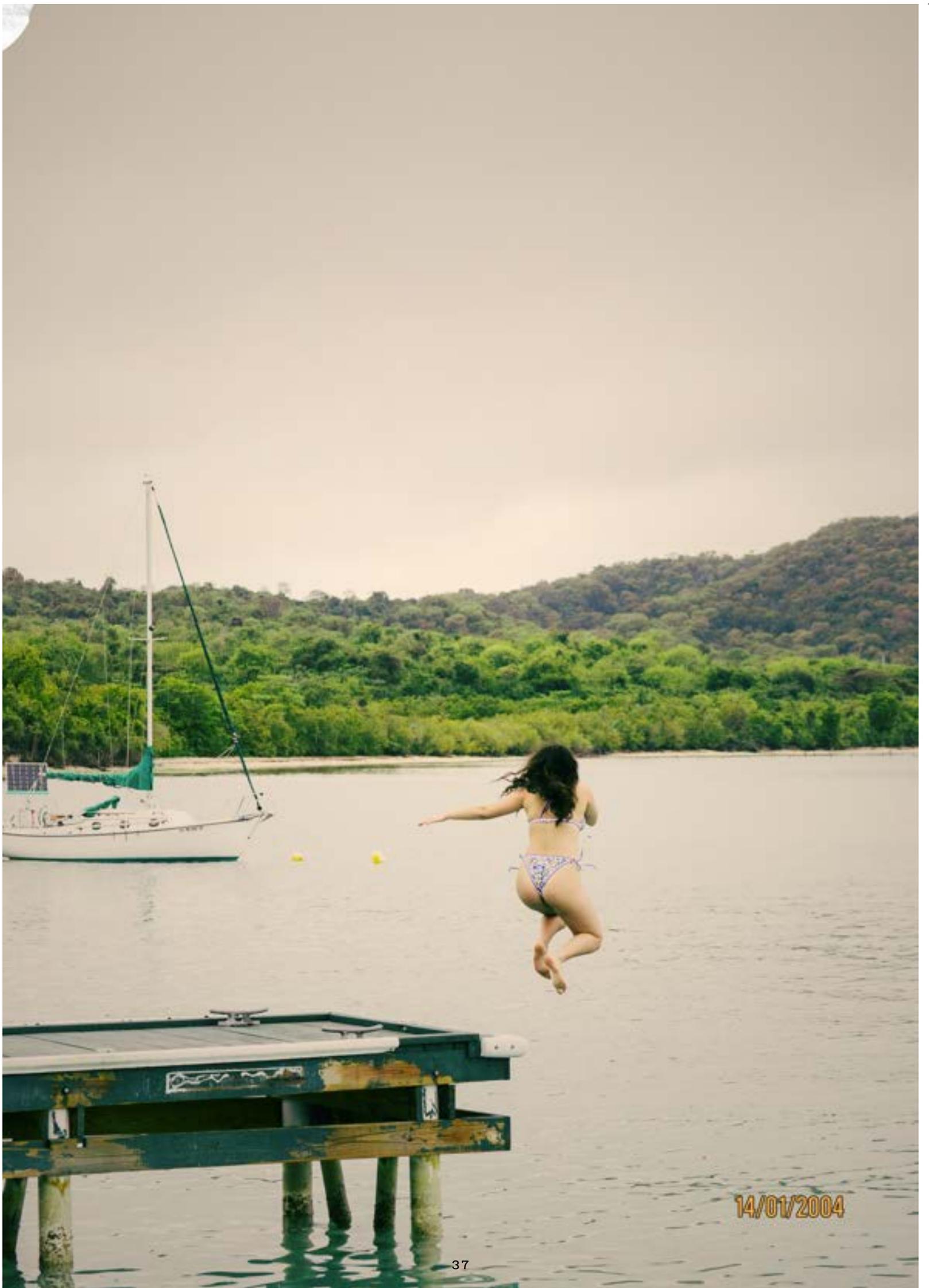
By Asher Wood

I never jumped off jetties as a kid.

Never leapt from the swing, or did flips on the trampoline, or tried wheelies on my bike. Didn't even climb up the outside of the playground. I didn't talk to strangers and I stayed out of trouble at school. Last year my own mother laughed at me for living my whole life without licking a nine-volt battery.

It's not like I didn't want to. There's this itch, at the highest point, to just let go. To feel the weightless rush of flying through the air and the shock of the ground catching up to you. To do something dangerous and exciting and forbidden. I craved that feeling. It's just that something stopped me, every time. My mind would invent lists of everything that could go wrong: playing me a highlight reel of broken limbs or smashed-in skulls or embarrassing myself in front of all my friends. It was unavoidable. Inescapable. It still is: something in my head seems to get a kick out of watching myself be hit by a car every time I step out before the light turns green.





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But I wanted to. You can't even say I didn't try. I would ride fast, swing high, run up to the water's edge, prepare myself for what came next, and it just... wouldn't happen. My body wouldn't move an inch. Stuck. Frozen. Rooted to the spot.

I'm not sure when I stopped trying. How old I was before I decided the thrill simply wasn't for me. It was just easier to sit on the sidelines than to feel the shame of turning back and walking past the other kids stuck behind me as I tried to make myself move. I hadn't stopped wanting it, but I had learned my lesson. I let my family go out without me. I waited at the crossing light while my friends left me in their dust. I sat inside and read while my cousins showed off their latest tricks.

Anyway, I went swimming the other day, and something called me to the edge of the viewing platform. I'm not sure what it was. If I had something to prove the teenage boys throwing themselves into the ocean as easily as taking a step, or if it was just the same urge I'd spent years pushing down and ignoring.

From the water, it didn't even look that high. Maybe twice my height, if that. A split second between jumping off and breaking the water. Easy.

But what if I froze up again? Showing all those boys that I was a coward. A scared little girl in a twenty-something body. What would they say? Would they laugh out loud, or wait until I walked away before they started to whisper? And how would I react? I've never been able to just brush things off like that. Does it make me Part Of The Problem if I show them that I care what they think?

Not worth it. I swam another lap. Did a somersault underwater where gravity couldn't stop me. Kept my legs tucked up close to my body, in case the seagrass contained some kind of creature just waiting to bite my toes off and/or kill me with its venom.

That didn't stop me from wanting it.

Maybe if I just went and had a look. Was I seriously about to let some high school kids stop me from doing what I want? Embarrassment isn't even real, they only have power if I give it to them, et cetera. What's the worst that could happen?

So I found myself on the sandstone wall, staring into the murky blue waves. It looked a lot higher from above. I couldn't tell the depth, or if there were rocks waiting below to smash my bones to dust and tear my flesh to shreds. I pictured myself getting stuck, adding another to the long list of times my body had betrayed me. I was so sure it would.

I'm not sure how I made it happen. I leapt into the air and my body came with me. No arguments. No hesitation. Just a split second of freefall and the thrill of finally doing something I wanted.

I hit the water and everything slowed down.

I could feel every bubble as it rushed past my skin. Every tiny movement of the water as it scrambled to fill the gap above my body. The murkiness cleared, and I saw everything. Swarms of tiny fish, not scattering or darting away, but staring back at me as I watched refracted light glint off their scales. The sway of the seaweed in the waves like grass in the wind. A diving bird slashing through the surface one millimetre at a time.

The biggest fish I'd ever seen slipped past. "I forgive you," it said, and was gone before I could ask why.

I wondered, if I could wriggle through the gaps in the shark net, or climb over it like the backyard fence I never vaulted as a kid, what would I see? Whether I discovered the lost city or whether I was torn to pieces by a ferry propeller, at least I'd die having found out.

My fingers reached out, trying to pull it closer, and the world sped back up. Water urged me back to the surface, gasping when my head broke through. Just like that, it was over. Everything looked the same - the long hours I'd spent underwater just watching the world pass, all condensed into a couple of seconds.

When you get to the end of a rollercoaster, the first thing your brain wants is to do it again. Hooked on the adrenaline of not dying, I hauled myself up the stairs, ran to the edge, and jumped, without a moment's hesitation. I wanted to go back. To visit that magical underwater world again, seeing my city from below, watching seals come and go like commuters at some kind of subnautical train station. This time, I'd make it to the open water. I'd swim as far as I could. Leave my life behind and become someone new. Someone who didn't hesitate to chase what they wanted, who wouldn't be paralysed with fear at the first hint of danger.



I hit the water, and... nothing.

No slow motion. No magic. Just the weight of the ocean as it covered me up and released me again. That was it. The world I'd glimpsed had been a one-time offer, and it was over. I'd never get the chance to shed my skin, never be anyone except the same old self I'd always been.

Still, when I returned the next day, I didn't even think before I dived in

