

delicate minds

Hannah Whitehead

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first edition:december 2022

design by Tamsyn Williams

author's note

The origin of these short stories lay in the conversations I have with myself. I write to explore the many worlds I make up in my head that's separate from this one, yet equally linked. These pages have been materialising since I was little and include the works I feel are ready to share. This is the first of many worlds I hope to present as I fulfil my dream of being a writer.

H.W

Nameless

A TIME WILL come where you greet them.
A You will look into eyes the same shade as yours.

Their under eyes are tired, but vacant of the lines present
on your own features.

You are smiling at each other.

Elated.

To think you ignored them for another.

To know you saw their flesh as clay.

To invite unclean hands to tangle their bones into
uncomfortable shapes because others liked it.

You now meet them in your mirror.

At your doorstep.

You still see strange bumps in their shoulders and
stomach which are harder to mould back into place.

But you do not mind.

Because you know you are there to help them now.

You will take care of them as you see they are ill and
worn down.

You feast.

You drink.
You cry.
You laugh.
You are welcoming.
They are forgiving.
You whisper kind words.
You recite love poems.
You embrace this familiar stranger.
As you learn to love them again.

And you will.



Habromania

A form of delusional insanity in which the imaginings assume a cheerful or joyous character

LULLABIES CIRCLE Everleigh's mind. Words passed down from her mother's lips. Carefully crafted hoping to predispose Everleigh to a life paved with rose quarts and wealth. Planning to feed from her daughter's successes of promised golden auras, disguising her own failures, Everleigh sniggers at the image of her mother if she could see what was happening now. The cracked smile and curled lines around her eyes and forehead. Her eyes drained of apathy. Everleigh would have brought her a grandchild. A stolen baby, but a baby all the same.

Everleigh's honey-coloured curls stray from her scrunchie, they tickle her dry lips as the warm wind breaks on her face. Everleigh blinks slowly, analysing her complexion in the wing mirror of their valiant. Her warm skin tone appears to be glowing. A new mother's glow? Her Dixie sunglasses resting on the bridge of her nose. The shades of green in her eyes mixing in different patterns than before. *Wisdom?* The tire tracks create deep imprints in the loose sand, twirling in the air and trailing

behind the boot to be lost amongst more red sand. It drifts in from the open car windows and sticks to her exposed skin. Everleigh adjusts her yellow overshirt to fall further down her body, enjoying the sting. Clouds are speckled across the blue horizon, like tie dye on Everleigh's singlet top. She notices a large brown figure emerge in the background. Its shadow thins as the animal turns, illustrating a joey in its pouch. Her lips slightly lifting at the corners. Her shoulders twitch, itching to celebrate the first wild animal spotted on their trip. But Everleigh remains still.

She adjusts her husband's shirt which has been loosely wrapped around the infant's naked body. The lime green material muffles the baby's calm breaths. Upon finding this lost child Everleigh had purposefully tangled its fingers, left its head unsecure and kept the knot lose when swaddling the infant. Everleigh had sensed the potent gaze from her husband, analysing the hours of hidden practice she had spent when trying for their own child. Practice that's left unspoken, deciding they would ignore the nursery in mid renovation, and this new uncertainty in the wallows of their stomach when they gave up trying. Everleigh reaches into the cupholder, turning down the handheld radio. Elton John's Crocodile Rock seeming too light for their situation.

'What do you think her name is?' Everleigh traces the deeply sun kissed arm of the baby girl. Her skin clinging to bone, tiny bones. Everleigh lifts the infants head as she attempts to pour residual amounts of water onto her tongue. She remembers learning newborns are unable to have proper food, however they were unequipped to foster a forgotten child on their trip, so water is the only offering.

Christopher sighs, his lips clapping together. 'I don't know, Ev. It doesn't matter we aren't keeping it. Why you always got to ask these sorts of questions?' He keeps his eyes focused on the road, skin stretching across his knuckles. Christopher squeezes the gear stick. Everleigh watches her husband's demeanour continuously shift. Unsure if he is allowed to be vulnerable. Everleigh slightly knocks his elbow as she places the water bottle into the cup holder, urging Christopher for a response. His pupil moves slightly in her direction. She holds onto them for a sole moment, reading the shades of blue wrestling within them. Everleigh sees his wishes to have driven a few meters to the left instead. Stopping by a different bush. Any other bush. Prayers to travel back to their old selves which had yet to discover an abandoned infant in the landscapes of Coober Pedy. Christopher is screaming, begging for Everleigh to have waited till they had arrived at the next town before using the bathroom.

Everleigh ignores her partner's panic. Letting Christopher's gaze return to the road, she refuses to accept his unacceptance of this child.

'We found her, that's some sort of responsibility. There's no harm in naming her,' Everleigh presses conversation. Stroking the soft flesh of the child's cheeks, Everleigh mentally tries on her list of baby names to fit this girl.

Christopher swallows, 'whoever she lives with once we drop her off at the police station can name her'

'The police station! I thought we agreed on a hospital. They'll at least take proper care of her' Everleigh glares at her partner. Her stomach hurts to even admit to dropping the baby somewhere. She yearns to scream at him. Tell him the baby's hers and doesn't want the poor child

anywhere except for home. Her home.

'A baby was found abandoned in a bush. The police should be involved' Christopher raises the beer bottle which has been kept secure between his legs, to his lips. Keeping the rim by his mouth to cease Everleigh from continuing conversation.

Her mother would do that. Trace her glossed lips with the end of her cigarette.

'Trip?' Helen's right eyebrow arched quizzically. Her eyes traced the silhouette of her daughter. Everleigh kept her stomach tightly sucked in. When she breathed too deeply, the pins for had laced into the back of her waistband began to pop.

'It's only for a month . . . at most' Everleigh tangled her words as Helen's distaste grew into her expression. Everleigh bounced between feet, her flares scraping against the concrete porch. 'You don't look happy'

'Well, when you rushed on over here, I thought it would be something more exciting for me, like a grandchild, or maybe Christopher died, and you can find someone with more money.' Helen straightened her skirt, seeming uninterested.

Everleigh opened her mouth to protest but Helen took a long drag. The smoke fell from her nostrils and Everleigh knew to be quiet. Helen's lip curled at the corner and Everleigh, although guilty for letting her mother cuss out her husband, was also happy. Proud she pleased her mum even at the expense of herself.

Short beats drum throughout the car as Christopher abruptly spins the steering wheel. He turns to see Everleigh's scrunched profile as she tends to her throbbing temple. Her fingers trace the faint imprint from the

windows edge. Christopher places a delicate palm on her inner thigh, kneading her flesh whilst simultaneously tickling the baby's forearm. Everleigh nods, noting her husband's frequent wordless apologies. He removes his hand to use as a shield for his eyes, avoiding the harsh sunbeam propelling off the tin roof ahead. Everleigh's chest fills with bricks at the acknowledgement of a building. They continue to layer upon themselves at the recognition of Christopher's vast speed increase. Her eyes remain dancing around the infant's face, whilst she vigorously rubs at the space on her thigh her husband's hand once touched.

Everleigh lets the same sunbeam sting her eyes. She wants to keep the building in view. Reminding the sand, wood, bricks, metal, the baby is hers. Block letters spelling PETROL are outlined across a sheet of wood. Its splintered canvas faded and barely legible.

A truck is parked beside one of the petrol pump. Its cathedral frame challenging the slanted wood stationed a few meters to the right.

The car's tires steadily roll forward to align with the filling station. The sole employee gives a swift wave towards Christopher as he rests the hand-held pump against the metal dispenser. Everleigh breathes in deeply. She sniffles as the sand grains enter her nostrils. The soft scalp of the baby rubbing against the tip of her nose.

'Oh no thanks mate, we aren't here for petrol.' Christopher waves dramatically as the employee goes to bring over the petrol pump. With a sharp nod, the man releases it from his grip and waddles over to the window.

'How can I help ya then?' his dark eyes shamelessly examine the interior of the vehicle, reaching through the

open window he trails his fingertip along the steering wheel. 'Nice car' Christopher turns towards Everleigh with wide eyes and an awkward grin. She remains expressionless. Everleigh cradles the infant closer to her chest when she notices the falter in his smile. His eyebrows dropping in defeat,

'Yeah' his voice is strained. 'Can we use your phone, please? This kid, ain't ours. We found it in some bushes and need to tell the police, maybe a hospital.' He shakes his head while he speaks.

The man grunts. 'Strange'. The employee opens Christopher's door from the outside. Assuming the gesture was equivalent to a yes, Christopher follows him toward the small shack. Without addressing Everleigh he closes the door behind him. The car rattles at his strength. The infants profile entangles itself, coaxing a single wail. Everleigh holds hot air in her cheeks. Tracing her index finger along the child's nose, she grins at the simplicity of calming her baby.

Why,

Do you cry?

I've only ever been kind.

Does the green remind you of the harsh leaves?

The cheap material itch your fresh skin,

*The same way the red dirt made
your fresh skin unclean?*

Why,

Do you cry?

With me your life is new,

You can't cry with me

Mother will not approve.

Everleigh lays her head on the seat, tracing her eyes over the large petrol pump. Wide metal pieces clinging together by a dangling screw, around the edges, rust chases the white paint. Red flowers within the browning tin constructing surprisingly pleasant umbrae patterns, similar to the colour Everleigh's mum would paint her nails. Obnoxious tapping flutters her ear drums as she deepens her focus on the patch, curious how such a strange nail polish colour could be found or sold. The tapping layers upon itself, gradually. The infant reaches forward, squirming, nearing a stray curl dangling from Everleigh's crown. Everleigh keeps her pupils locked on the pumps corner. The noise remains the same tone, melody, rhythm, but constructs an orchestra between Eveleigh's eyes. A brown hand knocks the curl slightly. Everleigh is cemented in place.

That same song. Against the kitchen table at Everleigh's childhood home. Her mother's eyes directed down at the recently unacclaimed wedding ring placed between them. Helens remained around her finger. She inched her hand closer. The silver band slightly bounced as her fingers continue tapping on the timber surface. Everleigh

searched her mother's eyes for guidance, but the green was lifeless. A wall is built behind the pupil and in front of the mind.

'He's gone' Helen's monotone grated against the wallpaper. Everleigh held her breath to settle the ill feeling which boiled in her chest. Helen traced her own ring. Her tongue glided across her bottom lip. 'No surprise. We all know why' she extended an eyebrow, gesturing behind her daughters back. Everleigh turned immediately and met her own reflection in the window. Helen stepped away, her child sat alone and analysed the image.

Her peach kissed cheeks, and a vase of brown flower bulbs peaked from behind her shoulder. The water was never changed, so the flowers died before they bloomed.

Everleigh followed her mother's tapping nails against the hard cover book. She had been exploring each element of the illustration. The red and blue lines seemingly thrown onto the plain background. Everleigh created abstract fish from the splatter.

'What's it about?' Everleigh's soft voice lands in the silence like a stone thrown onto still water. Her mother's tapping quickened, but she didn't look away from her page.

'Someone dying but coming back and living lots of lives' Everleigh stayed quiet, but Helen felt the waters ripples continue to wash over her. With a sigh her eyes stopped moving across the page and clung to a singular word. 'At this very moment, the character who has lived his many lives has just found something worth dying for. The novel is ending, and his world is changing. A message, from the author'

'Have you found something, to die for, Mum?' she paused, her nails slid down the cover as Helen placed the

book in her lap. Finally, she looked at her daughter.

'No.'

Everleigh stretched the heavy fabric across her left hip. The buttons refused to meet no matter her tireless efforts, her heaving chest only making the polyester slip further away.

'Everleigh, are you almost ready?' her mother called from the hallway. Everleigh's breaths became more uncontrolled as she fought to keep her tears silent. She looked up at the wide mirror sitting on top of her dressing table, lined with make-up brushes, hairspray bottles, curlers and lipstick. The unbuttoned yellow dress hung off Everleigh's shoulders like curtain drapes. Breast length curls sat flattened, and strays glued themselves to the mascara carried down to her cheeks. She didn't bother whipping her eyes when Helen opened the bedroom door. Everleigh's defeated wails erupted through the room. Met with a disgusted stare from her mother. Without moving from the doorway, Helen uttered

'It doesn't fit' her eyes darted along the image of her daughter.

Everleigh shook her head 'I – I d-d-don't kno.' She is silenced when Helen raised her hand.

'I guess you just aren't going' Helen's gaze didn't leave Everleigh. She noted her mother wasn't meeting her eyes, instead analysed the pieces of flesh which poked outside the fabric.

'I have other dresses... I had a growth spurt maybe' Everleigh hiccupped. Her hand unconsciously latched onto the dress, she continued to pull at the buttons. She knew her other dresses fit just the same.

'Growth spurt doesn't count in width!' Helen lunged

forward and slapped her daughter's hand from the fabric. She held Everleigh's shoulders sternly and massaged the fat around her armpits. 'I don't know how you plan on securing a rich husband like this.' Momentarily, Helen met with her daughter's eyes. Everleigh stood perplexed, finally reading her mother. Although she wished she hadn't. Everleigh explored every crevasse of the complete disdain Helen held for her. Her breaths slowed and tears dried.

Helen released Everleigh and turned toward the door. 'Take it off. You look stupid.' Her tone was bland. She disappeared back into the hallway.

*Born into a burning house,
You believe the whole world is the same.
Equipped with your water tank,
Even when the world bares no flames.*



Everleigh intakes a short breath as the infant tugs on the inviting curl, which has been dangling in front of her for the last three minutes. Everleigh gently unravels the baby's fingers from her hair. A small tongue extends from her mouth while she squirms in Everleigh's lap. As she gurgles, Everleigh reaches for the water bottle. Cold shivers stretch from her fingertips to her cheeks. She shakes the bottle, exhaling deeply when she doesn't hear the familiar slosh of water. The infant weakly flails her limbs and the gurgles deepen. Everleigh slowly shakes her head. Her lips parted. She strokes across the baby's nose as her wails ensue.

Everleigh peers through the windscreen where Christopher is still on the phone. She suddenly becomes unbearably aware of his poorly fitted pants awkwardly hovering above his ankle bone. His thick brown belt hoisted too high and clashing against the checked pattern. The unflattering mustard shirt. An expanding hole can be seen beneath his armpit while he scratches his unbrushed hair. Is this the man her mother planned for her to be with? The man who will offer no children. Or conversation. Or simple decency. Possibly, the sole reason the universe handed Everleigh this man was so he would take her out to Cobber Pedy. To the bundle crying in her lap. She moves her vision towards the truck still parked by the pump to their left. Through the tinted glass she sees the driver whip crumbs from his chin, throwing a crumbled brown paper bag on the empty passenger seat beside him.

Something exciting for me, like a grandchild, or maybe Christopher died.

Everleigh tightens the green shirt across the infant's shoulder blades.

Her curls hanging over her eyes, she jumps from the car. The man's pale blue eyes widen and moustache twitches, as Everleigh pulls the heavy truck door shut behind her.

'You gotta help me! My husbands, he's . . . he's, abusive! I have to save my child' Everleigh's lie stumbles off her tongue. Her desperation only strengthening her case. The truck driver remains still. His pupils examining this stranger, then pausing. Everleigh hugs the infant, hiding her face, and colour, behind her forearm. 'Drive!' she screeches. Heat expands along Everleigh's chest. She gently strokes the infant's head, the hot air ceases as the baby calms. Everleigh herself melts into the large seat. Her sweaty thighs creating strange sounds on the torn black leather. Masked by the heavy gears of the truck shifting, as the man turns away from the petrol station.

Everleigh watches the man cautiously. He holds his profile tort, the grey strands of his moustache sucked between his lips. A hand-woven dream catcher swings from his mirror, the pink wool and cheap red beads calming Everleigh's nerves. She peels her eyes from the driver. Breathing deeply, she focuses on the red sand, wondering why mother nature painted it so bright yet left other landscapes so dull. She wonders if she was painted bright. Or if mother, after all her might, made her bland. Everleigh dwells on this query, ignoring the heavy tear drops spilling from her tear ducts.

A million moments pass soundlessly. The man's cough foreign to Everleigh's ears. She senses his eyes on her. Waiting for her to speak. Needing her to do something. Her cheeks still damp, Everleigh brushes the few black strands of hair on the infant's head, also damp.

'So, are, are you okay?' his Australian accent is fierce.

Everleigh finds herself guessing words which are meant to be in her own language. She holds them in her mind, no response. 'Okay, well I'm okay, just confused. Names Graham, um I've been truck driving for 40 years . . . I have a wife . . .' Their shoulders bounce as the truck's wheels tramples the tiny homes of insects unknowingly built along the man-made path.

With a sigh, Everleigh adjusts her sitting position and whips the sweat dribbling from her hairline. 'Everleigh.' She notices Graham's posture straighten, and the dimples forming on his cheeks. 'And I don't have a wife' she smiles at Graham's raspy chuckle. It feels strange on her face.

'Beautiful name, Everleigh, quite rare. And the little one?' Graham takes his eyes off the road for a moment to greet Everleigh properly. Extending his right arm across his body, his large fingers spread widely, gesturing her to do the same. Calluses sprinkled with Cheezel dust stare at Everleigh. Saliva pooled in her mouth as she recalls the countless ads which urged her to try one. Christopher had slid the orange ring around her wedding finger, they're good just eat one, Everleigh only smiled.

*Stitches tear and scream,
Yellow material pulled tightly, tearing at the seams.
Such a small girl,
Young and terrified.
Starved and all alone,
Inside this yellow dress is where
she is told her worth lies.*

Everleigh listened to her mother's timeless whispers whenever foods not considered safe were offered. Take it off you look stupid. Everleigh didn't want to look stupid ever again.

'Dorothy' Everleigh shakes Graham's hand firmly.

'Dorothy! That's my wife's name, also very beautiful, don't hear many young people called Dorothy' he rests his arm back on the open window, eyes fully returning to the road. Everleigh raises her now Cheezel coated hand to her lips. Needing to know the taste. The processed powder seeming illegal on her tongue. It's just dust, it won't hurt. Everleigh creates excuses for Helen's presence which lingers in her mind. 'Where would you be heading young Everleigh? I know there's a police station a f-'

'No!' she exclaims. They sway to the right suddenly, before Graham swerves the car back onto the path. He sucks his moustache between his lips once more. Everleigh takes a deep breath. 'No police, sorry. I know my husband is . . . but I just want to get home to my mum first before getting anything, legal, involved'

To Everleigh's surprise Graham nods. 'Fair call.' He turns the truck right once passing a clump of bushes covered in blue paint, 'we will go back to Melbourne, I assume that's where you're from, your accent, sunshine coasters aren't as proper' Graham flashes Everleigh a smile. She doesn't say anything. She has finally been granted her wish.

The silence sits heavier on her mind this time. Guilt interlaces with Everleigh's thin tears. Not sad, but exhausted. Her brain itches intensely but she can't scratch it. Her bones ache to do something, overwhelmed with her bodies refusal to move. Eyelashes sewn to bricks Everleigh's eyes shut. She screams at herself to open them.

Her eyelids don't listen, and instead play movies of Helen. The film rewinding and replaying her reaction when Everleigh had rehashed her repeated miscarriages across the years.

Everleigh nuzzles her head deeper into her shoulder blade. The harsh sun is ruthless, forcing Everleigh to wake up. Small plants glide past her view. Their dry leaves laying limp in the dirt. A vibrant splatter of blue paints three of the bushes leaning across each other. Everleigh furrows her eyebrows at the bizarre familiarity.

'Graham are we going back?' she whispers, disguising her instant fear. Everleigh hears Graham's lips clap, just like Christopher.

'I'm, look, Dorothy. She isn't looking too good. I thought it'd only be right to go to the police, hospital' he dramatically waves his left hand in the air. Everleigh follows his movements, casting a cold stare.

'No, I told you I'm not ready for intervention. I have to go to my mum's first.' Pink blossoms across her cheeks, and her green eyes are layered thick with oncoming tears. Everleigh focuses on keeping her voice steady. Refusing to cry for a third time.

'I respect that, I do. But look at her Everleigh' Graham reaches out and strokes the infant's pale forehead. Everleigh is desperate to scrub the baby's skull once he removes his hand. 'I think she needs urgent care.' Everleigh turns her entire body forward. Contemplating if Graham's words are true.

'Can I pee?' Everleigh asks. Graham pauses before nodding hesitantly. The truck abruptly comes to a halt, however Everleigh had already began opening the door. As she leans out of the truck her thongs tangle on the

rubbish sprawled across the floor. She rolls from her seat. Everleigh balances herself with her left hand. The baby secured tightly in her right. A sharp pain ignites from her left heel to her calf as she runs from the truck. Graham's concerned wails are carried by the wind to Everleigh's ears. She knows Graham will follow her. But she also knows on foot she can easily outrun him. The gears of the truck groan as he begins to start the engine. He can't force her to follow him and there's no telephone booths for miles. By the time Graham finds one across this barren landscape, she will be long gone.

'Don't follow me, Graham' Everleigh cries, stumbling along the road. The trucks deep screams quieten, he's hunting for a phone booth. Everleigh's jaw aches as her grin reaches her ears. Her strides are long and dramatic, as if all gravity had left the Earth and Everleigh was carrying herself through space. 'I'm coming mum! I did it!'

Everleigh collapses. Her knees turning inwards, she lands heavily on her side. The baby doesn't cry. She slowly grew silent over the day. As the sun began to fall Everleigh smiled at the pastel colours which engulfed the sky. That was the final time she heard the infant whimper. She reaches out to a lonely plant on her right.

Sonder, Everleigh. Her mother would say. Every living being has a life as complex as your own. Pain, suffering, happiness, experienced all as vivid as you do. Helen explained it to her daughter only once. It was Everleigh's eleventh birthday, and they were at the park. It was January so the hot weather drew everyone from their homes. The equipment was ramped with children, and somewhere between all the chasing and screaming Everleigh was flung into the tanbark. Blood had begun to

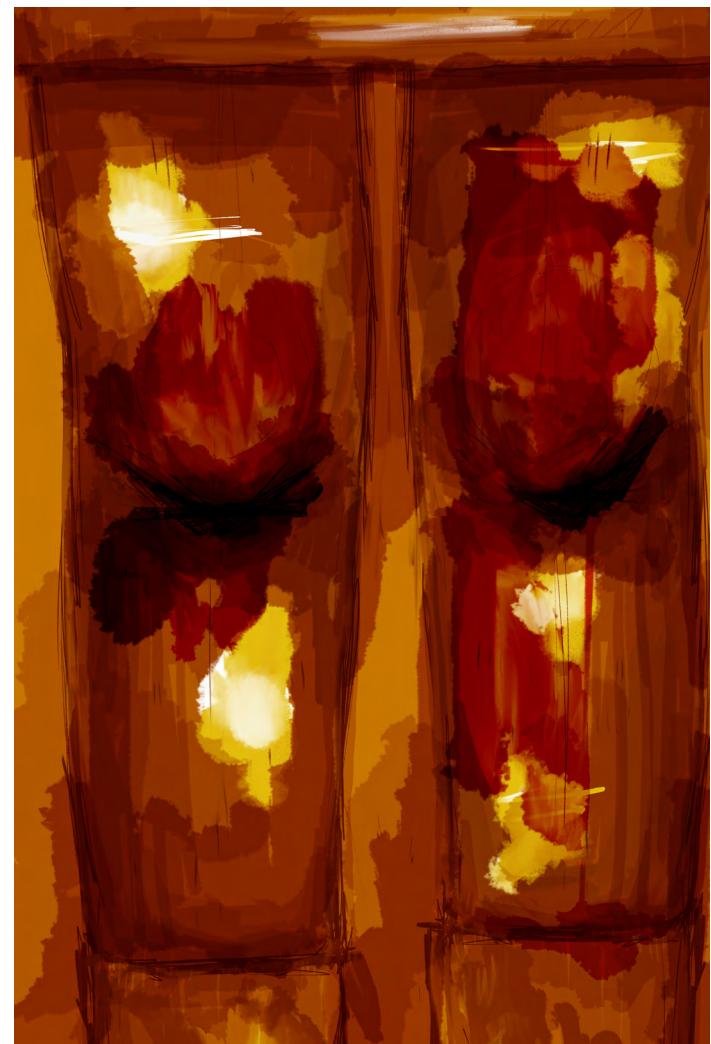
well on her knee as Helen rolled her eyes and walked over. Eveleigh whimpered, but her mother was quick to shush her. She described Sonder.

Look around, everyone and everything is hurting. You scraped your knee you didn't die. It's not always about you.

But is everything as sad as Everleigh? She reaches out and meets the tendril with her fingertip. The leaf is dry and Everleigh is cautious not to press too hard in case it cracks. Did the plant cry when its father left one rainy day? Tears coming faster when it realises his absence felt safer than his presence. That it enjoyed how the scent of alcohol didn't linger as largely now he was gone.

'Oh baby, I'm so sorry. I would've been so kind to you'

Everleigh lay, the infant resting on her heaving chest. She explores the sky. Placing herself within the stars, watching the world from Saturn's perspective. It seemed unbearably lonely. A mad woman and her baby. A lost girl and her believed saviour. A child, trapped in her older self, needing a hug.





How do you know?

I ONCE FOUND peace believing we are living in a matrix. Thinking nothing is real translated in my mind as nothing mattered. When I found this information months ago it was as if the stones in my throat eroded; because my pain and sadness became a nothing just as what had caused those feelings did.

I see you. With every breath my lungs fumigate with stars and suns. My world is speckled with gold dust, and I no longer find joy in being a nothing. I feel you. And I hope it is not a simulation because where the stones once were, flowers now bloom. And I do not want us to be confined to a figment of my imagination.

I'm unsure of what came first. The memory of your childlike smile which swept away the cobwebs inside me. Or if the hard work I put into myself tempted my heart to open on its own, in turn welcoming you back in.

When I was 14, I was too scared to hold your hand because I did not believe in myself. When I was 18, I was too scared to hold your hand because I did not believe in the universe.

Currently I cannot wait to hold your hand again because there is no fear, only possibility.

I know we cannot answer the questions of reality and its connection to self, but I do know, with such certainty, that real or fake our paths have crossed for a reason. Not only crossed but merged. I feel and see stars and suns, no more blank space. Only you.



Meet Me In The Hallway

CARNATION RESTS between the boy's sweaty fingers. The calluses on the tips wrap around her stalk, serrated fingernails imprinting on her wine painted petals. Together they lean against a poorly airbrushed brick wall. A white stamp lays suction-cupped to the cement beneath the boy's Converse. She can only note the faded remains of the word management. Carnation is swiftly raised and dragged across the boy's moist hairline.

'Edward?' an Australian accent calls.

She is shoved behind the boy's back, blind to this new voice, distracted by how she is beginning to wilt in Edward's dampening hold.

'Edward! The team's been asking where the curly one's gone.'

Edward mumbles his words, 'just hanging out here, waiting for you.'

Carnation notices the slow melodic pace of his voice, an aspect missing when he was speaking to the florist.

She remembers her final moments in her old home. Her stigma reaching for the roof Carnation bathed in the attention. She felt the jealous eyes of the daises follow her from the moment Edward picked her up. When placed and scanned on the counter the florist's personal flower, Orchid, leans close to her.

'He's a musician; I hear him on the radio,' Orchid croaks.

'A musician!' Carnation was fascinated by these news words. Orchid was so wise and Carnation was desperate to know as much as her.

'However, he's no Ke\$ha.' with Orchids final rasp Carnation was taken from the shop, remaining in Edward's hand up until now.

The unnamed voice chuckles 'You're hiding, could've been days before I found ya.' He steps closer. Carnation can tell by Edwards sweat droplets which are now climbing down her stem and breaking on the floor below her. She squirms in his grip to relieve the itch. Edwards pinkie finger easing as her thorns pierce his tough flesh.

'I hope not.' Edward hesitates, 'this probably would've died.'

Carnation is presented to her new owner. She had watched her friends being purchased and gifted, sharing dramatized narratives of what the moment may feel like. Elevated to meet cerulean irises belonging to the boy, she analyses behind his doe eyes. Seeing if she herself or the man holding her is enough, or if she will become a tragic tale. Returned, binned, a cautionary anecdote the roses once whispered.

'Do you like it, Will?'

Carnation tilts in the breeze. She feels the grip tighten around her as William reaches out and entwines his hand

with Edwards and her stalk.

'I love it, thank you.' She stands between the two smiling boys for a lingering moment. Edward's green eyes varnished with a delirious infatuation. William stares down at his swaying heels. Although the blush he was attempting to disguise expands along his forehead.

'We should get back to the studio' William gestures towards the door with a nod. Carnation's stem bloats once Edward's grasp drops, preferring the freedom. As the pair begin walking inside Carnation indulges in the energy pulsing through William, she is rested against his chest,

I am their first, she thinks to herself.

After her second night with William, she feels comfortable in her new space. Carnation stretches her petals wide until it strains her stem. They flutter along to the broken rhythm coming from the keyboard. Which is often interrupted by the girls visiting their hotel, distant squeals climb the high walls and knock at the windows, Carnation only rolls her eyes in response. The two boys sit on William's bed, their thighs pressed together and Edward's left foot progressively inching closer to William. Carnation watches from her place on the bedside table, indulging in the music. First William would press a few simple keys, followed by Edward incorrectly playing them back.

Her leaves curl at the edges while he clumsily slams the board, but she sways when he opens his mouth. Edward had the better voice. Carnation pictures what her life would be like with him. She imagines a neater space and not going a day dehydrated. Her vase would be polished and browning limbs groomed. She knew this by the cautious nature Edward explored William's room when

he stayed over.

However, she didn't hate William. Sometimes late at night when she was hunting for any remaining water droplets hiding on the floor of her vase, she'd silently curse him. But then the moonlight would swim over the photo frame of him and Edward, and she'd forget her thirst.

William also wore a radiance around him.

His glowing energy never ending, not once failing to entertain Carnation.

William taps the edge of the keyboard. 'You have a beautiful voice Eddie, even with a shit backing track.'

Edward launches his head back releasing a conspicuous scoff. William digs his finger deep into Edwards obliques, the boy crumbles and grabs at his hand.

'You act like management doesn't give you all the solos.' William teases.

Edward raises an eyebrow 'No, I was offended because you said my keyboard skills are poor.'

'I said they were shit actually, can't hear me over all your curly hair.' Carnation shrivels as William's final words adopt a childlike squeal. He steals his hand back and plants both palms atop Edwards crown. He threads his thumb among the brunette swirls.

'That doesn't make sense' Edward's dimples expand. Carnation sways in her vase yearning (yearns) to join, at moments she wishes she wasn't a flower, limited to gifting and witnessing, but unable to actively experience it herself. She sighs and pretends those feelings aren't there.

William grinds his teeth whilst violently interlacing Edwards penny-tinted ringlets. The tune of their knitted giggles elevates. Hints of privilege rise as Carnation imagines all the sunflowers propped at the front window,

begging to be sold, however they still stand there and she's placed here.

My magic.

William had stopped filling Carnations vase with water after the third week. She feels lines cracking along her petals, a brown umbrae chasing them.

'Maybe it's time to get rid of that flower.' Edward suggests whilst scavenging for the CD player's cable. William waltzes towards the bedside table, his nose twitching as the scent of Carnation's decay settles in. He traces her left petal delicately; she panics as it breaks away.

'Why?' William rubs his fingers together removing the dying remnants.

'It's clearly dead. I can give you a new one,' Edward croaks as he reaches down behind Williams bookshelf. His white shirt falls to his armpits displaying the numerous new tattoos sketched along his abdomen and arms.

'I don't want a new one, don't you dare.' William clicks open the CD player's lid and places one in.

'Jeez, alright. I'm glad you like it so much.' Edward rocks unsteadily on his feet as he stands upright, falling into Williams strong arm.

'Well, I'm glad you gave it to me.' they continue grinning whilst William starts the music. The familiar voices echo through the small space.

'Playing our own album, fuelling my narcissism, how kind.' Edward holds his hand close to his heart, beginning to rock his hips in rhythm.

'I thought you'd appreciate it.' William flips the deodorant can in his hand 'woohoo' the melody jumps off all four walls. Carnation attempts to bend her stem. As William twirls Edward beneath his arms, she hears a

quaint crack ripple through her. The boys don't take notice so she rests in her new position, drooping a single leaf to disguise her damage. The CD repeats 'I love you girl'.

William shivers at the words. 'Back when Stan wrote our music.'

'And now the most talented member of our band does.' Edward points at William, who leaps onto the mattress. His arms wave untamed to the beat. Carnation notes the discrete alteration in Edward's smile, a softness resonates. William wails with the song hysterically, muffling the original lyrics.

'I fell in love with a curly boy, oooo.' He moves in unison to the tune. Edward pauses, gaping in Williams direction. Carnation stared with Edward, the cement mould breaks and her petals quiver. He continues to dance but as the moments pass, he slows his movements. Meeting Edward's eyes he comes to a halt. The music slows and heavy breaths emit within the growing tension.

The dramatized tales of romance she would hear about from the roses.

Edward tilts his head, his cheeks soaking in peaches, 'Curly boy also fell in love.'

William exhales loudly whilst stepping off the bed. 'I think we should tell the others tomorrow'

'They won't kick us out of the band?' Edward takes hold of William's hand while he speaks.

'Nah, we should be right. But Stan might.' They chuckle disguising their underlying concern. Carnation revels within their happiness, she smiles and a sense of achievement unravels inside her. She swallows the loneliness inevitably taking control, longing to be embraced herself.

They're in love.

Carnation is uncomfortably aware of the abundance of

wrinkles along her petals, aged to soot they bend to mid length on her stem. The ache she once felt had progressively become numb, and although she was relieved, Carnation knew she would never stand again once it left. She got used to seeing the boys in this disarranged view, chuckling when they'd dramatically tilt themselves to meet her level. She missed the love songs which were shared under the sheets, the glow of a torch and their soft voices singing secret notes they didn't show to their other band members. (others).

Presently, she winces at the shaking shoulders and uncombed curls laying defeated in William's arms.

'Shh, whatever Stan says we'll be okay' Edward's head raises while William speaks.

'It gets worse every time,' Edwards syllables are broken and barely audible. 'One article mentioned me being gay'

'Ed, anyone who matters knows-'

'A single paragraph William! Suddenly Stan gives you a girlfriend, and me twenty of them. Now with leaked footage, I can only imagine what management will (they'll) do.' Carnation aches to be new again.

'If we don't like what they say we just hang up.' William exhales through his nose.

The death rattle interrupts and the boys gaze simultaneously move to William's phone. The dial is skewed as William answers.

'What in the bloody hell was that? I thought I made it perfectly clear you can wank each other off in your own time but don't dare bring it near the band.' The tip of the phone vibrates as Stan's voice tears through the speaker.

'We didn't know there were cameras.' Edward's tone dances while unheard tears dribble along his cheeks,

'And Lachy was the one to leave the door open, why don't you ring him up?' William holds air in his cheeks. Carnation has noticed he does this only before screaming.

'Lachy wasn't the one kissing his bandmate, William!' The phone tumbles down William's forearm as Edwards bouncing knee knocks it. 'I'm sorry, honestly. It's business and it sucks, but it needs to be done. We have something lined up; you'll get another call before it hits the public.' Silence blankets the room. The boy's eyes meet, William's blue reflecting effortlessly off the clear layer of water plastered atop Edwards.

'I told you we can just hang up.' William's lip curls at the side as he speaks, Edward mirrors his expression and Carnation sighs, drooping slightly more. Suddenly, Edward's features collapse again.

William places his hand delicately on Edward's damp cheek, sinking his thumb into his dimple.

Look at me. Remember me. Remember that day.

Carnation is lost, she hasn't seen this before. She attempts to ruffle her petals; however, she only feels them flake and fall, surrounding the vase.

There's so many now.

William holds onto Edward a little longer this time before he leaves.

William rests on his back above his doona covers, they crinkle extensively as he sinks deeper with each exhale. Carnation notes her own sinking. William's been staying home recently and she has grown to understand tears.

'I fell in love with a curly boy. And I know he loves me too. But is love enough. After all we've been through?' his voice chimes softly, yet inevitably broken. He's been singing alone often. William glances over and rests his

eyes on Carnation, she sees waves of wine petals and a young smile belonging to a curly haired boy within his ocean eyes. The images fade and Williams features curl together, he doesn't bother hiding his face in his hands or concealing his cries with a pillow, his pain flows freely but dangerously through him. Carnation nods, he just realised she is dead.

Oh, how I miss the secret love songs they sang.





Tireless

IMAGINE:
SEWING a tapestry.

hours choosing the sharpest needle resting between
your fingertips.

the widest canvas allowing endless thread to build a
world where others long to exist.

as colours, places, faces bloom from the centre of your
piece, your heart fulfilled and eager for watchful eyes.

though, as those eyes lazily gaze and whisper, your
chest no longer relishes in that same sense of happy.

it was quite swiftly drained. more colours, places and
faces you add.

implementing their instructions.

sewing quickly to avoid disappointment.

still, they whisper.

you intwine your thread.

invest in thicker thread.

vibrant thread.

their whispers will not die.

your canvas is full.
now overwhelmed with its creation, sewing is harder.
they frown at your struggle.
you sew more.
the construction of all the colours, places and faces
they've asked for.
you will forever sew.
their whispers never ceasing.
if one does, another will flower in its space.
the tapestry is no longer yours.
and therefore, no longer enough.



delicate minds

Hannah Whitehead is an upcoming Australian writer.
Inspired by the dimensions of the human condition
Whitehead facilitates emotional connections, uncovering a beautiful sober from the lives she creates. This is just the beginning for her and we look forward to what transpires next.

