

Discovery

Emma Rzepecky

Her strawberry-scented shampoo weighed heavily on my mind in year 11. The nonchalant laugh she'd throw casually sideways at me in Geography. I grabbed that laugh with open arms and squeezed tight. With boys the crushes were like buying a family size lolly bag and demolishing the whole lot in one go. But with Jen it was like a flame slowly burning down candle wax. It wasn't until year 13 that anything happened. Two years; of sitting next to each other in class; of covert brushes of the hand; of glances through my flimsy long brown hair; of drawing little scribbles in the corner of each other's notebooks.

We were both at Amy's party. She was already there when I arrived, my bare belly button showing in between my black crop top and white shorts combo. I remember her navy velvet dress. It accentuated the curve of her hips swinging to the music. The dress was probably another one of her thrift shop finds.

I had in my hand a red solo cup full of 50/50 split gin and tonic – a lethal concoction – when Jen stopped to talk to me. We were out in the garden with the hedge lights reflecting off her pale skin. When I put my hand on hers my darker skin was in perfect contrast. Our hands looked good together. She giggled and moved closer, brushing my hair off my face with her lightly shaking fingers. Her breath smelled like the \$9 red wine bottle she had been drinking all night, the colour staining her cheeks.

Our lips brushed, the delicate touch sending me soaring. Her lips were soft and full. Warm. Slightly moist from the lip-gloss she wore. The strawberry-scented shampoo was even stronger here in the subtly lit back garden. The boys I had kissed had been different. They had dominated the moment with their tongues and rough smattering of chin hair. She was different. We giggled breathily into each other's mouths. All gin and wine and something sweet.

Jen paused for a second, her eyes fluttering closed, forehead pressed against mine, our hands intertwined on my bare waist. Feet on the deck above pulled her out of our bubble and she pulled sharply away, glancing up at the slouched figure. She looked at me with a darkened gaze, bent down to pick up her hastily discarded wine glass and returned inside.

We didn't talk again before the end of the school year. I sat in the same seat on Monday, but she had moved to the other side of the class.

I still think about her. When I catch the scent of strawberries there she is floating at the edge of my consciousness. Exploring her – exploring myself – for the first time.

