

'vivid'
LUCY TRELOAR

'unflinching'
ANNE BUIST

'unputdownable'
ANGELA MEYER

SCRIBE

**ALL
THAT
I
REMEMBER
ABOUT
DEAN
COLA**

TANIA CHANDLER

ALL THAT I REMEMBER ABOUT DEAN COLA

The white sheet was soaked with blood.

I was embarrassed, horrified; I hadn't been expecting it until next week. I tried to cover it with the blanket.

'I don't mind,' you said, warm breeze ruffling your hair. 'And it means you can't get pregnant, right?'

I nodded against your chest; you had hair there. Above the rusty smell, I caught the scent of your skin: citrusy, fizzy — like Fruit Tingle lollies. Had you not been covered in my menstrual blood, I would have liked to have licked you all over to see if you tasted as good as you smelled. I was OK with human contact back then, and I slithered up your slippery body and made do with your mouth: milk, but not really — something lighter, sweeter. Words from a childhood story fluttered to mind: sweet, fresh butterfly milk. You were Fruit Tingles and butterfly milk.

'For a minute I thought it was your first time,' you said between kisses.

It *was* my first time, but I didn't admit it, didn't want you to think I was immature.

'Looks like somebody was murdered here. Better go soon.'

I didn't want to go; I wanted to stay there forever. Freeze that one pure perfect moment in time, ungainly as it was.

A starry night hung above my special place by the river back home, where we'd laid the sheet and blanket. Boats went by. I know that's false, a twist of the mind — no boat, aside from my old rubber dinghy, had ever sailed that khaki-brown water. I turned my face and heard the low, dull beat of your heart against my ear.

Back in that one perfect moment, I imagined my future-self walking past, looking down from the riverbank, seeing us, captured there, at the water's edge, always. How wild would it be to see your past-self looking back at you from an earlier time? Why did I have to ruin the present by thinking like that? About then, when it was still now.

My future-self started thinking (and dreaming) about you again when I came out of hospital this last time. Or maybe it was before that. Perhaps it was because of The Poem. I'm not sure.

We met at Jay Jays disco back home, New Year's Eve 1988. I used to wear perfume oils from the health-food shop, and before going out I'd made up a blend of strawberry, vanilla, and sandalwood. I can see myself frowning at the cheval mirror in my bedroom, concerned that the dress my mother had made, my nail polish, and my shoes were three different shades of red. Of course, nobody at Jay Jays noticed. What were you wearing? Jeans and a grey shirt? I liked the way your rolled-up sleeves hugged your biceps. Or perhaps I'm making that up — filling in the spaces that are blank.

I think we kissed at midnight, we must have, but I can't remember that kiss. At some point, I left Jay Jays with you to go for a walk, smiley-face pass-outs stamped on our hands. Perhaps I'd drunk too many West Coast Coolers and needed some fresh air. I slid an arm around your waist, a hand into your back pocket — I'd never done that to a boy before, and it made me feel grown up. A car drove past, a horn blasted, somebody shouted 'Happy New Year!', a big white bum hung out the passenger-side window. Why can I remember that vividly, but not the midnight kiss?

There had been a concert at the showgrounds, but it was over when we got there, the area deserted. Streamers and cans and bottles littered the ground. A hot north wind blew the dry grass flat and flung a white ribbon into the air. I leaned back on the stage and watched the ribbon dance against the stars. You told me I smelled like heaven. Another kiss. I remember that one. And that I loved you instantly.

I can't recall going back to Jay Jays that night, or how I got home.

But I remember lying in my bed; the leaves on the tree outside my window rustling, whispering, *Dean Cola, Dean Cola, Dean Cola*.

You had my number, but you didn't call. I saw you again at Jay Jays, maybe two or three weeks later. I was dancing with another boy when you swaggered onto the floor. The song playing was 'American Pie' — I remember that clearly because I hated that song (I hope that wasn't *our* song). You dragged me by the hand to the table you were sharing with friends. You pulled me roughly into your arms, glassy-eyed, swaying. Then you pushed me away and vomited on the floor. Two security staff grasped hold of your arms and marched you to the door. Your mates laughed as I followed. I walked with you up and down the street. *I walked with you until you were sober / In the Hedera helix green and white* are lines from The Poem, but there was no garden — no ivy, no greenery at all — out front of Jay Jays, just a footpath. Perhaps I've got this part wrong.

What happened next? There is a gap in my memory until some time after the puking-at-the-disco incident. A few weeks, maybe a couple of months, definitely the same year, your sister (she was in Year 11, a year older than I) bailed me up at the school lockers and warned me to stay away from you. Your mates didn't like me, they were giving you a hard time, calling you a 'cradle-snatcher', and you couldn't see me anymore. I nodded and shrugged, and told Shelley I didn't care. After that confrontation, I walked coolly to the girls' toilets, locked myself in a cubicle and cried all lunchtime.

You were the local football star. I have an image in my mind of you taking a speccy, or maybe that was a photo in the paper. Your face is coming back to me now: a one-sided smile, a chipped front tooth, Johnny Depp eyes.

I saw you drive by in the blue-and-green Cola Hardware pick-up truck one time while I was hanging out with my friends at the lake; I lowered my head and ignored you. I can't recall our paths crossing again that year. Aside from the night at the river, when we were supposed to be at Sandro D'Angelo's party.

AIMI GLANCED over her glasses a couple of times as she read *ALL THAT I REMEMBER ABOUT DEAN COLA*. Could she tell, just from looking at Sidney, that she was off her meds? The room shimmered and crackled with something like electricity. The current entered her body and messed with her heartbeat. Just excess adrenaline. The last of the drugs fighting and fighting out of her system. She tried to ignore it, focused on fiddling with a loose thread on her glove. *Be a duck – paddle as madly as you like beneath but stay calm on the surface*. Her mouth was dry, but she couldn't remember how to swallow. *Don't let Aimi see. And don't cry*. She wanted some water, but her hands were shaking too much to pick up the tumbler on the side table. Her inner ear itched. *Be a duck, be a duck, be a duck*. She studied the seascape again. Grey sky, distant finger of land, ocean spray against rocks. *Don't cry, don't cry. Don't cry for Dean Cola, Dean Cola, Dean Cola*.

Aimi finished the last page. 'This is beautifully written, Sidney.'

Her heart reached for her throat, trying to choke her from the inside. Panic iced down the insides of her arms, but then exited through her fingertips, dispersing into the air like dust motes. She could see the colour of Aimi's orange-blossom fragrance. Something rustled and shifted in her head, and she heard a whisper that wasn't hers.

<to the river walk re-sent recent>

It was nonsensical – word salad – but she smiled because it was comforting. She remembered how to swallow, suddenly calm, no longer alone. She picked up the tumbler and drank.

'I'm interested in why you've chosen to write *to* the person, like a letter.'

Second-person narration is often used as a distancing device. A split or duality in the writer's thought processes — a way of dissociating while simultaneously documenting. Aimi probably thought the language revealed upheaval, denial, or depression. *But she'll ask if I'm depressed.*

'Have you been feeling depressed?'

'No.' She didn't tell Aimi that she'd written the first draft in third person, but the 'she' voice had disturbed her, so she'd changed it to 'I', and then typed a few more drafts before adding some second person. With each revision, something new had surfaced in her memory. The joy of the process — the forming, trimming, and refining of sentences, somewhat like the shaping of her bonsai — reminded her not that she was mad, but that she had once wanted to be a writer. Perhaps writers were inherently mad. Elmore Leonard said writing was a socially acceptable form of schizophrenia. 'I just wanted to create an effect of emotional depth in retrospection.' She wasn't sure what she meant by that exactly, but it sounded clever, like something a book reviewer might say in one of the highbrow papers.

'What you've written sounds good enough to be part of your novel.'

Was Aimi implying she'd made it up?

'It's interesting that you've suddenly remembered so much.'

She was! She folded her arms. 'You said that sometimes memories aren't lost, they're just hard to access.'

'Yes, but —'

'I think writing was my cue to get back.'

'Do you think some of the recovered memories could be false?'

She sighed.

'What can you remember from just before your hospital admission?'

She didn't want to talk about that; she wanted to keep talking about Dean. 'Which time?'

‘This last time.’

‘I was at our flat. I remember reading my book in bed. Christos had a night shift, and he brought me a cup of hot chocolate before he left for work. Then I felt a bit dizzy, and I fell asleep.’

Aimi nodded.

‘I must have woken up and gone into the kitchen. I turned on the gas and left it going for a long time. I had a box of matches, and if I’d lit one there would have been a huge explosion and fire.’

‘Do you remember that?’

‘No. It’s what Christos told me happened. He said I was delusional, hallucinating.’

‘I thought you said he was at work that night?’

‘Apparently I called him when he was still on his way in, saying I was going to burn down the flat, and he came back.’

‘Can you recall the book you were reading in bed?’

‘Yes. *Wolf Hall*.’

Aimi frowned. ‘Anything else?’

‘It’s a fictional account of Thomas Cromwell in the court of Henry —’

‘No, about that night.’

‘Next thing, I was in hospital. Again. Heavily sedated. *What’s your name? What year is it? Count backwards by sevens.*’

‘At the time ...’ Aimi opened a file on her computer and read the notes, ‘you’d decided to start confronting your repressed memories with your previous psychiatrist. Hypnotherapy.’ She shook her head and tutted. ‘An ... interesting ... approach for someone with a trauma history.’

Sidney remembered how upset Christos had been when she’d told him about that. He’d made a fuss about ‘dodgy shrinks and false memories’. Lucky she’d mentioned it so he could cancel her appointments and find her a new psych.

‘Do you think that might have had something to do with the episode?’

She shrugged, having lost the thread of Aimi's questioning.

'Have you been hearing voices?'

'No.'

Aimi looked at her for too long.

She blurted, 'But I did make up one part of *ALL THAT I REMEMBER ABOUT DEAN COLA*,' and instantly regretted it.

'The first part, at the river?'

How did she know? 'Yes.'

'So you *did* go to Sandro D'Angelo's party.'

Aimi should have known that she never talked about that.

<walk walk re-sent recent to the river re-send>

'Do you remember?'

Funny how *Do you remember* and *Don't you remember* mean the same thing. Like *flammable* and *inflammable*.

Aimi opened her mouth to say something else. Sidney stood up and said she'd had enough for today and wanted to go home.

