

STATEMENT OF INTENTION

Alec Westaway is a peculiar character. While having acute insecurities partly as a result of having an absent father, Alec is independent yet aware and capable of fulfilling what he perceives to be his familial duty. I wrote the creative piece 'Alec' in order to delve further into Alec's values. Set six months after the fatal car crash that killed his friends, and on a tram travelling from Richmond to Flinders Street station, this piece explores the ways in which Alec has matured. On the night of the car crash an ultimatum was thrust upon Alec; Alec had to decide whether he wanted to hang out with his friends or deliver a treasured photograph to his grandfather. It was on this night that Alec's mettle was demonstrated. Not succumbing to peer pressure led Alec to undergo a profound transformation, helping him to align his values.

This piece was written for mature, socially adept young adults; indirect characterisation, through such things as posture, is used extensively. Some aspects of Alec's character are intentionally different from that explored by Toni Jordan. In this piece, an extension of Alec's chapter, the protagonist's syntax and poetic expression has been replicated. Indeed, Alec reflecting that he mustn't 'take things in life for granite' (sic) was inspired by the continual malapropism of idioms in Alec's chapter. Alec's habits, such as referencing notable artists and superimposing his feelings onto inanimate objects (for example, clouds in the sky), have also been grafted into this creative response. Alec has changed, however, in that he more frequently relies on his grandfather's advice in emotionally fraught situations. He has also stopped referencing such things as the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles.

I have also decided to explore themes that were used consistently throughout Jordan's 'Nine Days.' The theme of love is explored through the interaction between Alec and the newly introduced Amber. Alec's open minded reaction to Amber's rejection of his advances reinforces Kip's guiding philosophy, that moments ought to be seized. In Connie's chapter the rain was used to build up and release tension. In this story I used the movement of the tram for such an effect.

SHORT STORY. ALEC.

Picture this: The inside of a packed 75 tram on its way to the teeming metropolis. As crowded as I have ever seen it, filled with its usual assortment of civilisation's discontents. If I were to sketch the nose-ringed punk leering out the grimy window it would probably resemble one of Goya's Caprichos; full of darkness, a hint of absurdity. The clouds outside the rain dappled window appear torn in two. Somber clouds have been struck apart by a pinkish blue river of sky. The cars jostle for position, each driver intent on being anywhere but where they currently are. They fail to examine the present. They fail to realise, as I recently did, that peace can be found within.

I'm abruptly jolted out of my reverie by the tram slowing to a stop outside Jolimont station. The blazing lights of the colossal MCG poke through the branches of a copse of barren white gums. The woman opposite me pulls herself out of her seat, stopping to sweep a length of frizzy hair from her eyes and to readjust the strap of her imitation designer handbag. I can tell it's a replica because the clasp is made of cheap plastic. If Charlotte - sorry, Mum - saw it, she would ramble on about sweatshops in Indonesia and the environmental ramifications of mindless mass scale consumerism.

This thought process is lost forever when the tired office worker is replaced by Venus herself, having ditched her clam shell. I can't help it. My heart, my heart seems to be beating through my chest. My hands, clasped around a battered DS (a game of Mario Bros long since forgotten) are starting to sweat. I steal a glance at her. She has shoulder length hair with all but a few determined strands pulled into a ponytail, and a dusting of freckles around a celestial nose. A Nikon camera is suspended from her neck, the obsidian strap only serving to emphasise the creaminess of her porcelain skin. She turns her head and our eyes catch. She smiles. The tram accelerates. I squirm in my graffiti covered seat. Think, Alec, think! I close my eyes, seeing nothing but that determined splash of crimson that haunts me wherever I go. What

would Grandpa do? Drop the sausages, probably. No, *seize the moment Alec* is what he'd say if he were with me right now, if he were still with us. *Sometimes people disappear, never to be seen again.* I mustn't take things in life for granite. I'm reminded vaguely of a story he whispered to me, a story about his sister and a horse rider and a train station. *You only live one life, Alec. With serendipity, rarely do you get a second chance.* I might never know her name. Would I be content with that alternate world, a world in which I never tried?

I can see her face out of the corner of my eye. She nibbles softly on her ruby red lip. The pause is pregnant with expectation. 'Hello,' I say. 'Do you like playing video games?'

There's a pause. The whole tram is silent. A green blur fills up the window as the pines of Fitzroy Gardens race past the window. She smiles, and it's a sharp slice of heaven. 'No, I'm not really into that sort of stuff.' She looks once more into my eyes, seemingly unsure of what to say, or whether the conversation should be continued at all. Right, introductions. 'My name is... err... Alec. What's yours?'

'How do you do? My name is Amber. Amber Marsh. A pleasure to make your acquaintance.' Lip twisting on one side into a half smile, she extends her arm in a mock handshake. *Be a gentleman Alec. And don't forget, it's the lips that matter!* Always one for good advice, you old fossil. I lean forward, take her pale white hand in mine and brush my lips against the back of it. 'Enchanté.' A spasm of confusion flashes across her face. An onlooker sniggers.

'You're a strange one, Alec.' There's an indecipherable strain to her voice. 'Are you sure you're not a French nobleman?' I chuckle, fidget.

'Oui, mademoiselle. Tu est très belle, voulez-vous coucher avec moi?' I suffered four years of French classes. Is it a surprise that all I managed to pick up were invectives and crude pick up lines? Her eyes, the colour of warm honey flicker with understanding. Fuck. She also speaks French. Outside, the tram's bell rings. Her hand strays to her hair, absentmindedly tugging a few strands of gold. I want to capture her in this pose, paint it. It ought to make the main exhibition at the NGV.

'Not at the rate this conversation is going. Usually guys ask me out for a cup of coffee first.' She pauses, as if waiting for me to say something. The tram lurches around a bend. She sighs and stops playing with her hair. Seconds pass, and I look on as men and women in suits pile out of their glass coated buildings, some opening their umbrella in an attempt to counter the drizzle. I'm lost for words, I'm out of my depth. A game is being played and I don't know the rules. I eye her Nikon, taking care not to let my eyes stray. 'You're a photographer, right?' I say. 'Oh no, this camera is solely decorative.' She glances around, and smiles wanly. 'I'm getting off at the next stop.' The temperature seems to have plummeted. 'It was nice to meet you, Alec.' 'Oh,' I say. 'It was a pleasure to meet you too. Would you like to meet up again?' She shakes her head. 'Um, that's sweet but I have a boyfriend. Maybe we'll meet again in another life, when we are both cats.' I force a quiet laugh. I can't meet her eyes. 'Maybe we will. All the best, Amber Marsh.'

'Au revoir, Alec.'

The tram shudders, and stops outside Flinders Street station. Amber gets up and becomes just one more individual in the stream pushing out through the door.