



## SLQ Young Writers Award 2012 winner

### **Gap**

by Rebecca Jessen

Looking on the streets  
for the hangers-on

never know  
who's lurking round these parts

seen me leave his house  
round the back

pale and sweaty  
what have I done?

Walk the twenty minutes home  
from his to mine

these paths I remember  
all too well

happy for the busted streetlights  
tonight

done with the letters  
to council  
keep the lights out.

Didn't mean to do it

now I've wasted  
years of getting back  
on track  
now I'll spend years  
getting over it

tell myself  
it was the only way

he made threats

on your life  
on Indie

my kid sister  
caught up in  
my mess again

not too different  
to mum after all.  
Back to my territory  
the Gabba lights  
illuminating the sky

good old Park Rd railway  
no one round these parts

not at night  
no one so stupid

pull myself over the rusted wire  
they forgot about this place

grass grows too high  
enveloping the weeds

rotted sleepers  
that would split  
if you kicked hard enough.

Haven't seen rain in months

grass looks like wheat  
scratching at my legs  
as I tramp through

gotta get out of here  
before the 11 o'clock train

take it out  
of my backpack

throw it in the overgrown scrub

wouldn't look here  
wouldn't come looking for me.

Fields of wheat  
seen on family car trips  
we hadn't taken

since  
I was too young

to know what I'd turn into

since  
Indie was still  
falling at my feet.  
Stumbled home from this train station  
too many times

with a girl  
but mostly

alone  
wasted  
forgetting.

I haven't ever done  
anything like this

will that hold up?  
to the suits

and the yes please  
no sir  
pass the water thanks?

got a history  
but who doesn't?

self-defence  
they'll find holes in my story  
but I'll cry poor

didn't mean to see the bastard  
dead

just a warning  
one he was never gonna  
forget.

Been in trouble before  
petty stuff

stolen  
from petty people

got mixed up  
with the kind of crowd  
I'd take home to my mother  
something pulled me out of it  
slapped me hard

Indie

working two jobs now  
stumbling among  
dead weeds

took a long time  
finding my way back  
from what I used to be.

The nights aren't  
normally

cold  
like this

wrap my arms  
round my trembling body

might not be the cold  
after all.

Guess us girls  
got mum's luck

shit  
that is

cops on the doorstep  
our *Saturday Disney*

tell myself  
mum tried hard

I tell Indie anyway  
kid's too young  
to know otherwise.

Usually find me  
flailing  
in my own shadow

tonight's no different

got me caught up  
two doors down  
jumping at the sight  
of the dark behind me.

Lights still on  
what's my excuse  
worked back

someone has to pay the bills

don't say that though  
Indie's heard it enough

'hey Ana,'  
she's watching *Rage* again  
'where you been?'

'work. keep it down  
don't stay up late.'  
this kid's too smart

head to my room  
dump the backpack  
lock myself in

Indie rages  
til one

start to sweat again  
thinking  
she'll come in  
for her clothes  
or to sleep

keep thinking  
pull out the sofa Indie

don't want you to see me

lying in the dark  
wet-eyed  
heart wrenched.

Listen to her routine  
peels herself off the  
cheap vinyl couch

turns off the TV  
listen to the static crackle

flicks the switch  
remembers what I told her  
saving power is  
saving money  
another switch  
awful sound of  
the sofa bed

limbs stretched.

3am and I'm tired  
already  
of the feeling

that these walls  
just got a whole lot smaller

gonna close in  
around us

any day  
any time  
take Indie away  
back to the shit  
back to mum

couldn't do it to her  
done it to myself.

Run my fingers  
down my legs

still brown from last summer  
still tired  
from all the running

trace the scratches  
skin already raised and red

have to stop stumbling.

'Morning,' Indie says  
head down  
in a bowl of froot loops

I nod  
slump in the creaky chair  
five bucks at the local  
Lifeline

told Indie I'd make her feel  
at home

she pushes the cereal box  
can't stomach it

concentrate instead  
on the word maze  
did they make these things childproof?

'what are you doing today?' Indie says  
I'm still looking for that damn word

she kicks me under the table  
'nothing. work.  
you need to study  
got your year 10 exams coming up  
and keep off this stuff

how you gonna function  
with all that sugar?  
I snatch up the box  
'grouch,' Indie says  
as I walk  
into the bedroom.

Hole in my favourite shirt  
Indie got it for my  
23<sup>rd</sup> birthday

what am I gonna tell her  
sorry kid

ripped it on  
rusted wire fence

trying to hide  
the evidence.

Mum did her best  
that's what I say

loser dad  
dropped out of our lives  
too young to notice  
I didn't tell her  
that I blame  
mum

her and her dropkick  
boyfriends  
who let me  
snatch beers  
sniff drugs

get addicted  
then  
kick me out of the house

sixteen with no hope  
couldn't stay in school

kid sister Indie  
stuck with them

didn't ever think  
life could shift

didn't ever think  
I'd lift the stains  
from the walls

don't know how Indie kept her mind  
in a place  
like that.

Mum always said  
get a job Ana  
you raise yourselves

see how easy it is

what you gonna do  
with an education?

us Robertson kids never read books  
think you're special?  
that you got something to give  
more than we do?

dropkick boyfriend  
laughed  
snorted  
made a groove in the couch  
with his stupidity

decided to let mum  
sink in too

but not Indie  
kid's too smart for our shit  
she's still got hope.

Get outta here  
mum's screaming like a mad woman

sure the neighbours knew  
think they locked their doors  
when they saw us coming

threw my stuff on the lawn  
piss off kid  
make your own life now

never missed that shithole house  
mum had us  
picking mould off bread  
not made of money kids  
perfectly good

didn't ever see her  
lift the bag to her nose  
take a whiff of the rot.

'I'm going out,'  
I say to Indie

'do some school work  
might bring back something nice.'

Indie smiles  
thinks I'm some fucking hero  
doesn't know what I've done

just to get to this place  
or what I'm gonna do  
to keep us here.

Go back to the tracks  
stupid thing to do  
11am on a Saturday

people heading into town  
looking for something lively

bunch of kids  
hanging round the platform

don't see me glancing over  
at the tracks  
the scrub

don't know what I hope not to find  
traces of myself  
from the night before

wouldn't look here  
wouldn't come looking for me.

Best thing about the Gabba  
ten minutes walk  
a pub on every corner

walk to the closest  
find a dark place

find myself again  
in a double shot scotch

group of people come in  
all laughs and pats on the back

don't look around  
at what I'm not missing

but I hear her  
and I know it's her

I know that laugh

then I look  
I know those legs  
that ass

I know her out of uniform.

She's with her cop mates  
light beers all round

most of them look too young  
too pretty  
to be messing around  
in the jaded lives of crims

why aren't they all  
making a living  
picking daisies?  
don't try hard  
to stop myself  
from looking over

those arms  
more toned than I remember

she's taller than the rest  
and darker

she catches me not looking  
excuses herself  
slides in next to me.

'Bit early for that,' she says  
looking at my double shot scotch

'bit early for policing,' I snap  
'you keeping out of trouble Ana?'  
'was never in trouble to begin with  
Sawyer.'

'good,' she says  
looks at me a while  
makes me remember those grey eyes

not as hard as she'd like to think  
I know her soft  
I know her broken

'haven't seen you in a while  
things been all right?' she says

'you asking as a cop

or a friend?’

‘both.’

I scull my drink  
‘just fine Sawyer  
aren’t you a bit old to be hanging around those kids?’

‘good seeing you,’ she says  
standing up

I’m too choked up in my double woes  
to say

don’t you remember?  
Sixteen and on the verge of dropping  
out of school  
out of life

didn’t have anyone back then  
looking out for me

except her.

She was a year above me  
and that’s how I liked her

everyone talked  
it wasn’t common then  
locked in the toilets  
with your best mate

not talking about boys  
or fixing your makeup  
just fixing each other  
hands pinned against locked doors  
people heard things  
people knew

Sawyer didn’t care  
I’d got her good

she knew I was trouble  
even back then  
didn’t stop her chasing me  
before class  
after school

I didn’t think much at the time  
guess I had too much else  
going on

didn’t see Sawyer, trying  
to hold me so tight

I couldn't fit  
where I used to  
didn't see her eyes

didn't see her hurt after I  
dropped out of school  
off the chart

Sawyer and Ana never existed  
at least  
not until I left

then it hit me

ever since  
we've caught up again  
tried to brush over it

just some fun in the girls toilets  
something rough to  
fill our time

didn't ever try to hold on  
to any of that  
couldn't

if I did  
might have kept me straight.

She keeps looking over  
she laughs  
holds her beer in a way that says

I've got it together  
I won't take your shit

she's showing the young cops

but I know it's me  
she's talking to

I see her glance in my direction  
more than once

and I stick close to the corner

so I don't go over there  
so I don't grab her waist  
and take her home again.

The last dregs of summer  
dripping  
from the last pub

before home

sun setting  
sky meets land

trying to remember

the things I once found  
breathtaking.

Indie's locked up  
in her corner  
studying

doesn't see me come in  
doesn't see me go to the bathroom  
lock the door  
throw up in the sink

Sawyer will be all over this  
once she finds out  
once the neighbours complain

about the smell  
coming from  
his street  
his house

can't look Indie in the eye  
kid knows me too well

she'll see it  
dark and sharp  
the gap  
I've opened up.