



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
23rd 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.