

Moment – Grace, Year 11, NSW

Silence deafened the room as quickly as the heat rose to my cheek, forming a scarlet imprint of her hand as it met my cheek like a sword to Caesar's back. Mouths wide open and gawking were silenced by the inescapable loud. Stalls quickly unlocked. Feet pitter-pattered. Girls circled the scene like seagulls around a packet of Maccas fries. Some leapt up mid-piss, others' fingers left their throats, and suddenly the small drama surrounding who had the most puffs were swiftly drowned. Melancholy compared to this soap opera.

For that second, the world was silenced. Hit with a frozen blast from the impact. The world was still.

Avery stayed frozen like the rest. Unable to comprehend the consequence of the power held by the beast she had just realised. I had never seen her look so powerless. No one had ever seen her look so powerless.

She wasn't particularly pretty, but something about her grabbed every guy's attention. Flaxen hair: her prized possession, poised perfectly upon her head, a synthetic wig. Cerulean eyes that seem to stare directly through you. Judgement smeared across her face and emphasised in every breath. Her skirt was pulled higher than anyone else dared. Three buttons of the school shirt were undone at once. She wore the uniform in a way that wouldn't look good on anyone but her. I'd tried but just ended up looking desperate. She was everything I wasn't, and I envied her for it. Like, she wasn't pretty, but she had everyone under this spell. I used to think it was cool like feminine power and that but lately, she just did it for the sake of it. Lately, Avery had been doing a lot of things 'just for the sake of it,' and as of that fateful morning when her entire empire fell, I had had enough.

The D block girls' bathrooms were inhabited by girls like Avery. Girls who spent more time assessing their appearance in the blurry reflection of the smudged mirrors that lined its walls. The saccharine stench of 'mango ice' acted as an air refresher to the repugnant dried blood and moulding silicone rubber that inhabited the stalls. Cruel affirmations were plastered on the walls, some real quotable numbers lay against illustrations of dicks and tits. Every term we would come back to some new mural to attempt to cover them up. The school quickly ran out of new inspirations as they discovered that high teens would take every opportunity to make something sexual.

After two years, Avery started to morph into a human reflection of those bathrooms. Covered head to toe in illicit gibberish she had 'tattooed' herself with my dulled, blood-inundated compass and the ink out of her 90c pastel KMART pen. Clouds of Mango ice hung upon every item of clothing she ever wore as she stood wasting whole school days in front of those smudged mirrors, assessing her blurry reflection.

Through the corner of her eyes, she spotted me. The blood rushed through my body, and I swallowed down the bile climbing its way up my throat.

Avery took a drag. Stared me dead in the eyes and blew the sweet sickly smoke in my face. I pushed past as a sudden uproar arose. Squawking and cackling penetrated my mind as Avery's cronies cackled furiously.

"Real funny!"

It wasn't funny. I hated Avery's guts. My spark dimmed a little more the more I surrounded myself with her.

So, yeah -- I did what I did because sometimes you can't give in to the silence. The STIG was just there, it was so easy to slap it out of her hands. I didn't know it would shatter on the floor. But I also didn't know she would smack me dead in the face, so I guess I don't know everything.

It was worth it to see the look on her face.

Mouth gaping, unable to scream, open so wide the corners of her mouth began to crack from the sheer pressure. Her face, though still caked in a foundation five shades too dark, was paler than the icing sugar that topped the finger buns she 'allowed' herself to gorge on every Wednesday afternoon. Her eyes, once a cold and distant sapphire, shone a light grey almost undetectable to the human eye, so iridescent I could almost see a small family of penguins waddling across them on the way to find food. Her eyes seemed to tell a story so genuinely terrifying I almost felt bad. I almost pushed my way through the wall of the girl and left, apologising profusely all the while.

Almost.

For that moment it was just her and I. We had never been so connected; yet I have never loathed her more.

I blinked. Let the steamy heat that compressed my eyes wash over my face as the years of fat-shaming, name-calling, judgment, and fear cascade down my cheeks.

In that moment of letting go, I had never felt more in control.