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WRECKED

LOUISA REID



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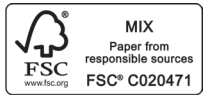
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"You said a bad driver was only safe until she met another bad driver? Well, I met another bad driver, didn't I?"

The Great Gatsby, F Scott Fitzgerald

PART ONE

NOW

BOXED

Court room,

Caught room. I'm in the dock.

There's no way out.

All exits blocked.

ALL RISE

Jury,
then judge.

There's a hush.

I want to burst it,
take a pin to its weight,
explode the silence –

escape.

Head down,
arms out,
I'll speed through these walls,
like I'm made of steel –
like I can't fall.

I'll
spread my wings wide,
taste air, breathe
sky.

But facts are – I'm trapped –
stiff shirt like a noose,
new suit, buttoned up;
strait-jacketed truth.

CHARGES

"Joseph Goodenough.

In the early hours of
The first
Of January
Two thousand and nineteen,

You are accused of causing the
Death
Of **Stephanie White**.

To the charge of
Death
By **Dangerous Driving.**

How do you plead?"

STOP

I'm winded,
almost doubled over –

That's all it takes to put me
there – again,
in that black, dark night,
on that black, dark road,
with Imogen, just Imogen,
by my side.

And I shut my eyes
to hide from the scene,

but
there's light
coming at us

from around a dark corner
it's tunnelling forwards
it's upon us,
almost,

it's
bright,
it's
full beam
it's
up
in our faces –
and
we're driving
straight
at
it

can't stop –
are we braking?

But

there's no
way
out
because

these seconds are small,
and this car is so huge,
and the wheel won't turn

it's heavy and slow
we're out of control

it's still coming at us
so fast,
horn blaring
lights flashing
Jesus,
please

STOP –

IMOGEN –

NO.

DEAD

Not Imogen, not me,
but
the woman in the other car.

I staggered up the road
towards the wreck
and saw
a body,
(or something like)

and a jagged hole
where the side of the car should have been.

I stared at
white bones.

Saw
red skin stretched

into a silent scream.

Torso twisted,
face glassed
into

p e e
i c s

I howled.

She didn't twitch.

Her blonde hair in a plait.
Scalped.

Finished.

DAWN

When I'm lying in bed
crawling up, out of whatever sleep
I've caught that night
it's almost not there,
I've almost forgotten to remember,
and then
before I can open my eyes on the day
that dead body slaps me awake.

She's always wearing white,

her blood pulses and glows
dripping, staining, seeping
over her clothes.

And I'm running to the bathroom
throwing up in the sink
spewing nothing –
empty belly
twisting with
guilt.

WHAT DO YOU PLEAD?

They're waiting.

Why can't I say it?
I need to respond,
and I open my mouth like I practised this morning
in front of the mirror, in front of my mum.

Not guilty, I said then,
pulling the words up and out from inside,
like fish

flapping and flailing,
caught on a line.

I try once again –
open my mouth, and breathe

but the sounds are stuck
in my t h r o a t
I can't squeeze them free,

"N-"
the first sound comes
and then the rest in a rush,
"Not guilty," I say
convincing no one,
not even myself.

Because I'm still at the scene –
stuck
in the past, in the frame,
here in the dock,
frozen with shame.

TRUTH (i)

It shouldn't be this hard to tell the truth –
to spit it right out,
(like the teachers used to tell me,
when I couldn't make a sound).

Small Joe stuttered and big Joe's no better,
not now he's trying to makes sense of the senseless.

Because – and don't ask me why – the truth is
elusive, it swerves and it slides –
like the car did that night –
now it's greasy with lies.

The truth is shattered, like the glass on the road
that I find in my hair, in my dreams and
my clothes. It's a mouth ripped open, it's a tongue
that
lolls.

The truth is in hiding, it's scared, it's weak.

You see, I've been waiting so long
for my chance to speak.

WAY BACK THEN – YEAR TEN

ONCE UPON A TIME

Imogen sat down next to me.

"Hey," she said,
"Joe, show me your notes?"
Tongue between her teeth,
she sat and copied every word –
my homework too –
then handed back my book with a smile.

"Thanks, babe," she said
and I caught the smell
of mint and roses
and something else.

Imogen was in my form.
The new girl,
who didn't mind the spotlight's shine
every time a teacher asked her for her name
her London voice
sounded posher than mine.
She laughed and didn't care
when someone took the piss and called her

snob –
she flicked her hair,
"Yeah?" she said.
"Prove it."

She sat next to me again that day,
"Hey, Joe," she said and nicked a chip,
leaning across me to talk to Ryan Wall
who was on my team and played in goal.
I nearly gave her all my dinner,
nearly said, *here, go on, you finish it*,
instead the blush
that flushed my face
made me so hot
I couldn't even look up
and meet her eye.
I legged it outside –
trailing fire.

After that I tried
so hard to understand
everything
before the teacher even taught it –

I read books
actual books,

the librarian nodded when I snuck in before school
when no one was around to take the piss,
I sat in the corner
gulping down
thousands of words:
particles and plateaus
algebra and allegory
bloody poems
and
stories,
tragedies,
comedies.
I was going to get expert
just in case
she needed me to explain
something
inexplicable –

like why I couldn't tell her
how she made me feel.

There had to be a word for that –
some biological term
that explained
the way
my tongue tied itself up

in knots –
tight like the laces on my football boots –
my words
frayed and tattered
and got stuck
before I could
present them to her
in a perfect bow.

SO NOW

I'm outstanding at biology
and geography, maths and English too –
top of the class.

And all because
I have traced
the particularly perfect web of Imogen's veins
on the insides of her arms,
and on the soft skin of her neck,
and over her ribs,
and back, and body,
so many times

that I could
make a map of her from memory,
turn her into a sonnet,
calculate her heart rate down to its last beat.

POPULAR

I burned
and Imogen was the match
that set me alight –
I knew how close she was, how far away,
and wondered if she'd talk to me again –
I heard her voice echoing up and down the corridors
as she sang her way through school.

Small.
Fierce.
Head high,
dancer's stride.

Sheet of long hair,
hot in the sun.