

## THE PREFECT

He ambled along the footpath in the silent avenue. Prunus trees on the nature strips were in full bloom and the pink blossoms, dropping like confetti, gave the street a bridal festive air.

She turned the corner, riding a red BSA bike, extending her arm to signal. The bike wobbled, only half controlled. She stalked the lanky figure in his grey flannel trousers and then drew alongside him. If he saw her he ignored her.

*"Hello!"* she called. He looked at her but said nothing.

She rode away, back pedaling to control the speed. He continued to walk, hands in his pockets. A pair of headphones attached to a radio clipped to his steel-grey belt, gave him the appearance of a koala.

From the corner of his eye he saw her cross, idling in the gateway of a period house. She zipped out, rode the bike over the nature strip and bumped onto the roadway. She jumped off and straddled the bike, walking in the gutter. Her yellow runners matched her track suit. All the rich kids in the area wore matching gear.

*"Were you on the school bus?"* she called. He lifted one earphone and raised his eyebrows.

*"Sorry?"*

*"You were on the school bus."* A statement. He shook his head.

*"Yes you were. I saw you. You were in the back seat with the Xavier boys."* He replaced his earphone dismissing her.

*"What are you listening to?"* she shouted. He looked around at her.

*"Shut up, will you. I'm listening to a race"*. He stopped and kicked at a weed growing in a crack in the paving stone. She saw him snap his fingers. He smiled to himself and slipped his headphones down around his neck.

*"You're too young to bet on horses."* He gave her a look of contempt.

*"I'm 18 and it's the dogs, stupid."* She looked at him with exaggerated admiration, her mouth open, her eyes wide. His maroon tie was knotted loosely and the top button of his grey shirt was undone.

*"Are you a prefect?"* He nodded.

*"Ace!"* she grinned and jumped off her bike, then walked beside him on the nature strip. The bike hub ticked.

*"I've always wanted to have it off with a prefect."*

He stopped walking and chewed the inside of his lip. His glance traveled from her hair in its two tails, secured with rubber bands, to her feet.

*"How old are you?"* he asked.

*"Um. I'm sixteen..."*

*"You're about 14, you titless wonder. I'd be hard up to have a go at you. Go home – it's time for your ugly pills."* He watched her ride out of sight. He turned the corner and found her waiting for him, confident as hell.

*"I'm not fourteen. I'm fifteen and I've been doing it for years."*

*"Liar. Who with, the Xavier boys?"*

*"Nope. They ride bareback."*

*"Where do you go to school?"* he asked. His face was stern.

*"PLC. The Ladies College"* she sniggered.

*"Some lady."*

Her eyes raked over his trouser front and she said, *"How long is it?"*

*"How long's what?"*

*"Since you did it?"* He felt her eyes on him. The look was almost physical and he responded.

*"Last night – and if you don't clear off, I'll do it again."*

*"On your own?"* He looked straight ahead, as though she had discovered a secret.

*"Will you do it with me?"* He ignored her.

*"I want to kiss you all over"* she sang. He looked around to see if anyone had heard. A woman watering her garden was watching, po-faced.

*"If I said you had a beautiful body, would you hold it against me?"* she sang.

*"For God's sake."* He smiled and lifted his shoulders at a man who poked his head from under a car at the kerb. He walked on and then turned.

*"Come over here,"* he ordered. She hopped off her bike and trotted beside him.

*"You're sure you've done it before?"* he asked.

*"Sure. Twice."*

He stopped and opened one of a pair of gates set in a high fence.

*"Come on then."* Her walk was hesitant, all bravado gone.

The Edwardian house seemed to intimidate her, with its old trees and tidy flowerbeds.

She looked around her. *"What about your parents?"* He gave her a leer and twirled an imaginary moustache.

*"They've gone away for the night. They think I'm doing my homework."* He took her bike from her and they walked on the newly raked gravel of the circular drive. He wheeled the bike into a double garage that held a black Buick. She ran her fingers over the paintwork on the bonnet.

*"If they've gone away, whose car is this?"*

*"My mother's. They don't go away in separate cars. Do you want to go for a burn?"* She shook her head.

*"Later. After."* Cocksure again, she pointed the tip of her tongue at him, then crossed her eyes.

*"Don't do that, you idiot."* He pulled her to him. They kissed moistly.

He led her to the side of the house and pushed up a window.

*"Locked myself out."* he told her and bunked her up so that she could crawl inside. He followed.

*"Want a drink?"* The massive sideboard held an array of bottles on a silver tray. He poured two Haig Dimples into heavy hand blown glasses, took two cigarettes from a Dunhill packet and lit them, passing one to her.

The dining room table was laid with organza place mats and crystal glasses. Remains of a sweets dish, dotted with strawberries, had hardly been touched. She circled the table sipping the whisky and taking shallow puffs of the cigarette.

*"Didn't you eat with them?"* Only two crumpled linen napkins had been tossed beside the plates. She butted the cigarette and picked off a strawberry, licking the cream from it. Her square, perfect teeth bit the fruit.

*"I cooked it for them as an anniversary present. Lemon chicken with scalloped potatoes and snow peas. It's their Silver Wedding anniversary. I served it too."*

*"Are you going to be a chef?"* He looked disgusted.

*"I'm going into computers."* He took her drink from her and led her to a couch. He ran his hand under her top.

*"Surprise, surprise."*

*"You called me a titless wonder."* She pouted but allowed him to pull the top over her head.

A thought seemed to strike her. *"Have you got a thing? I don't want to have a baby or get AIDS."*

*"Course. I've got two."*

*"You wear two at once?"* He rolled back, laughing.

*"No. One's new and the other's used."* She grimaced.

*"Do you recycle them?"* She watched as he loosened his tie and undid his shirt.

*"No. I keep them as trophies. I nail them to a board in my room."*

*"How many have you got?"* He was sitting now, pulling off his shoes and socks. Then he stood, unbuckling his belt.

*"Sixty-four."* He slid his trousers off, with his underpants inside, in one smooth movement. *"And that's only first timers. I've got their names on all of them. Alphabetically. What's your name? I haven't got an X or a Z."*

She started to giggle.

*"I'm not telling you. You can put a question mark on mine."*

He pulled her to her feet and held her close. She squirmed against him as his hand slipped under the elastic of her yellow pants and then withdrew, teasing her.

They left their clothes behind them. His were folded and placed in a pile, hers lay where they had dropped. She giggled as they went upstairs.

He undulated on billows of doona on the king size bed.

*"It's their waterbed,"* he said. *"Come on."*

In the morning he showered and dressed and went down to the breakfast room. She had been up before him and had cooked breakfast. He sniffed the bacon and opened 'The Australian'.

*"How do you feel?"* He turned to the sporting page.

*"Bit silly."* She sat opposite him and poured herself a cup of black coffee.

*"You were brilliant. You should be on the stage,"* he said. The sun glinted on his hair.

She looked at him with affection then waved to a boy outside carrying two potted silver birches, bedecked with ribbons and a gift card.

*"I hope you plan some thing more dignified for our golden wedding,"* she said. *"I can't see myself riding that bike when I'm seventy."*