

Jenny on the Run

Jenny's driving too fast in a stolen Buick, getting a head start on the line of police cars she thinks she'll see if she turns around. She hasn't driven a stick in two years. It's bucking her like a bronco. She's thinking of Tara, and how she didn't kill her on purpose, but she did kill her. And the three times she's pulled over now, it wasn't because of the tears blurring her vision, it was because her hands just couldn't grip the wheel, or her foot just couldn't press the pedal, or her heart was in her throat, and it was choking her.

She keeps picturing a police barricade, a helicopter, the *thumping* of a helicopter's blades. She's hearing sirens that aren't there, and they're blaring, and she's waiting for megaphones to shout at her, *Stop, pull over*, and she's wondering if she'll run, on foot, if it comes to that. And if she does, will a dog chase her down and crash its teeth into the bones of her ankle; tear veins, draw blood. She thought about how, when the cops do catch her, they'll slam her down on the pavement, her tits squat and hurting, stones cutting her chin, their knees in her back; the metal clamps around her skinny, bony wrists. *Killer*. Jail. Showering naked with strangers, shitty food, no music, bullies. Life after jail: the looks in people's eyes, the treatment she'd get, the stain on her name.

She's afraid of jail and that feels selfish. Her thoughts should be 100% on missing Tara – the way she'd always sing the lyrics wrong, or how one hand was always deep in a bag of cheezies. Hawkins cheezies, the hard kind Jenny'd always hear Tara crunching through. Sometimes for breakfast. A wet suck as she cleaned her fingers to talk, open-mouthed, about how her heart still pittered and pattered for Tony.

Tony had taught them everything about how they lived. Like how to steal a car, drive a stick, spot a mark to hustle. Now Jenny's in a car, and she's going too fast, and she doesn't know where she's going. She's got no way to pay for more gas, so she'll probably steal another car to keep her head start on the cops. *The States*, she thinks. *Boston*. If she can just get there, maybe there's a law that she's not guilty in the USA for what she did in Canada. Maybe there's a rule like that, or maybe they'll never find her down there.

It was *not* the riskiest scam she and Tara had ever pulled. Tara would crawl into an empty suitcase, and be packed into a bus's luggage storage, then crawl out of the suitcase, steal the contents from all the other luggage, and tuck herself back into hers. They had hearts, Jenny and Tara, bigger than most. But they'd rationalized it: anyone who could afford a vacation could also afford new belongings. That was Jenny's stance. Tara's stance, laughing, was, *No one really needs jewellery and shit. Not the way we need food and music*. With her cheezie-stained fingers, Tara would etch, "Music is blood" into everything – condensation on car windows, dust on diner tabletops. And for them, music was their blood. Late nights and loud music and dancing to it, together, arms over their heads, shirts showing belly buttons, like youth was loud and perfect and fearless, and nothing was going to mute that feeling. They'd steal shirts and vinyl from merch tables at live shows. One girl flirting with an awkward or slutty guy, while the other got what they really wanted. The scams they pulled were relatively harmless, in that no one got hurt. *Stealing a T-shirt*, Tara justified, *is just free advertising for a band, every time we wear it*.

They got by on shoplifting and the quick scams Tony had shown them. But those fifty-dollar scams were every day work. They wanted big five-hundred dollar scams that could last them a week in bills and pizza and concert tickets. And they were getting clever, proud of themselves, branching out from Tony's teachings. They'd been naming their original ideas,

emailing Tony all the details of each scam they'd conjure up. They'd give them alliterative names, like "the fiddle fiasco." Tara had gone into a pawnshop claiming her "wayward druggy cousin" had stolen a fiddle from their grandfather. A fiddle that was worth far more than the cousin realized. "You don't understand," she'd told the pawnshop owner, wide-eyed and adamant. Fists bunched up on his table. "This was handcrafted in the 1800s, by Sir Gilbert *Helms*, so it's worth *far more* than this druggy cousins realizes. We're talking *three grand*, and she sells everything she steals from us for *fifty bucks*. The sentimental value alone is beyond the price, you know?" She nodded so he would, that was her thing: to know she was being heard, and to make the other person feel compassion. "If she comes in here with it, call us right away. We'll give you a hundred-dollar reward for calling us. My grandfather. He's heartbroken over this."

The next day, Tara played make-up artist, and they transformed Jenny into a drug-addled cousin, hoping the pawnshop man might be waiting for her. Tara had dabbed so much white foundation onto Jenny's face and neck – to make her look *pale and strung out* – that it got in Jenny's eyes, stung, went up her nose and made her gag. *Seriously, G'ah!* and they shrieked in laughter as Jenny twitched and snorted and panicked.

"My eyes! It's in my throat! It's enough, that's enough, stop!" and Tara tackled her with it, playful, for fun, catching Jenny as they both fell onto a bed. Tara landed on Jenny the way men guide women to a bed in the kinds of movies Tara loved. They both lay there a few seconds. "You okay?" Tara asked. When Jenny opened her eyes, Tara was right there. Her eyes peering down, full of love and concern and respect, and it was enough. It was enough to have one person care for her so truly and deeply. It was enough for Jenny that everything that really mattered to her was all in the same place: Tara Morgan.

Tara did a push-up to crawl off Jenny. She'd had a tank top on, no bra, and with her breasts dangling like that, forming a long line of cleavage, Jenny could see what it was that made men lust after tits so much. They'd evoked some kind of pull in Jenny. Then a T-shirt came out of nowhere and hit Jenny in the face; a soft rush of fabric and everything went black as the shirt rested on the crown of her head. "Try this on," Tara said. "It'll be too small and tight and you'll look like a slutty-junky whore!"

Tara picked up the cheap fiddle they were hoping the pawnshop guy would buy. They'd made alterations; etched meticulous lettering into it, based on photos from the Internet. It looked like the real thing. Jenny sat up, looked at Tara, pulled her shirt off. She left her hands clasped together by the cotton sleeves around her wrists, and she laid her hands in her lap. She sat there a few seconds, maybe five or ten, before grabbing the shirt Tara had thrown at her to try on.

"Whoa!" Tara said. "Put your tits away, we're not a couple of lesbos here, are we?" Jenny took it personally, because Tara wasn't that kind of girl, a homophobe who'd say shit like *lesbos*. It meant Tara wasn't comfortable in that moment, and that she was joking her way out of feeling awkward.

Jenny pulled on the ratty, extra-small band t-shirt.

"Whoa, yeah, that'll do," Tara said. "Actually, wait." She pulled open a dresser drawer. Fetched some scissors. Cut a few holes in the shirt. Tara had her hands all over Jenny, as she tilted her head and twisted her body, looking for places to cut holes. Careful not to cut Jenny. More careful with her than anyone had ever been with her.

"Let's go get some stains on me!," Jenny said. "Peanut butter smears, to mimic junky street dirt!" They laughed and got to it. Hands everywhere. Tara fixed her own hair instinctively,

but forgot about the peanut butter on her hand, got it in her hair, but all Tara said was, “Oh, your hair!” She’d screamed the revelation. “We gotta make your hair greasy! Vaseline! Vaseline’ll do it! There’s some in Tony’s dresser, for when he jerks off.” It deflated Jenny that Tara knew right where it was. Right where Tony kept his Vaseline, and the tissues he’d hand her after he’d get his gunk all over her. The feeling was too akin to rejection and jealousy. *We’re not a couple of lesbos here, are we?*

“Punch me,” Jenny said.

Tara turned from the drawer she was rooting in. A look something like disgust on her face. “Um, What?”

“So I look like a real junky whore.”

“What the hell, Jenny? No. My God.” She lobbed the Vaseline to Jenny, and Jenny caught it, thinking Tara was going to smear it into her hair for her. Jenny did one of her too-obviously-fake laughs. “I was kidding, *kid-ding!* Relax, dingbat!” and Tara laughed now too. “Creep,” she said. “Creepy junky whore.”

Jenny waltzed into the man’s pawnshop that day with a forty-dollar fiddle. The man bought it for three hundred, smirking like he could sell it for a grand. The fact they could so reliably count on greed made it easier to rip people off. They knew people would do the same to them.

They were on a roll – fake charity drives, a dozen variants on the fiddle fiasco. This time around, the idea was Tara would crawl into an empty suitcase, climb out, steal peoples’ stuff, then climb back in. Simple as that. They practiced it. They stole a massive suitcase from the

airport's luggage corral. It was big enough that Tara could fit in there. Comfortably. *Me and a bag of Hawkins*, she joked. They reversed the suitcase's zipper, so it could be pulled from the inside. She could let herself in and out. Tara crawled in, zipped it up, stayed in there for fifteen minutes, for twenty, for twenty-five. *We're good*, she'd said. She could breathe okay and be comfortable enough and open the suitcase just fine. Jenny made sure she could roll all hundred-and-forty pounds of Tara. It was perfect, it was brilliant. They'd emailed Tony; called the scam "The Man in the Box" after an Alice in Chains song.

But Jenny handed the suitcase to the bus driver, and watched the man loading the luggage onboard, and the luggage storage space was getting fuller than they'd anticipated. Suitcases pressed against suitcases like bricks in a wall. She watched the man stuff the last two suitcases in like they weren't going to fit. They didn't. He took some out, rearranged them. His hips got involved, butting the suitcases into place. He shut the door on the luggage corral, and the sound, the *whack*, hasn't left Jenny's ears. She can't drown out the echo. Not even with the music, and the stereo dial's up on ten.

Tara's everywhere, still, as Jenny tears down that highway to nowhere. There's memories, like invisible graffiti, all over the province. Jenny's driving passed the only gas station where they ever pulled off the Quick Change scam. She's thinking of the way Tara plunked her heels down on the dash whenever Jenny was doing the driving. Tara would always make them themed mixed CDs. Bjork's "An Army of Me" came on, and Jenny thought of how Tara claimed there was Norwegian blood in her family, in *her*, and she'd point to her face wanting Jenny to see the Bjork-ish, angular cheekbones.

The *Norwegian-maybe-Swedish* blood Tara claimed she had would've come from Tara's father's side of the family, and that's why Tara never knew for sure: her mother would not talk about her father. Her mother would not talk about anything, really, other than *The Young and the Restless* or bad action movies. Jenny noticed there were certain things that reminded Tara of her mother, once she and Jenny started living together: the way rattling wine glasses sound like the word *bring*, the sound of liquid pouring, the sound of a woman snoring, the sound of glass smashing. Jenny had always been careful how she'd pour a drink – orange juice, water, anything – in Tara's presence, because if she poured too audibly, she'd see how Tara's body would tense up. It was something even Tara never noticed about herself. There were tons of things Tara never noticed about herself: she was too good to be Tony's little sex doll – he did whatever he wanted with her, and some of it was gross. She was better at guitar than she gave herself credit for; she could have busked for cash. She did not have Bjork's angular face bones, but she did look better than she thought she did – Jenny would often catch Tara looking in the mirror, pushing her hair around, looking at herself from different angles, like there was something missing she was trying to fill in by squinting.

Tara was also a little too extreme about how shitty her mother had been at being a mother. Absent, yes, drunk all the time, yes, but she still made token gestures: birthday cards and all that. They'd dubbed their mothers Useless and Heartless, Tara's drunken mother was Useless and Jenny's former foster mother was Heartless. All that talk of moms and families made them feel like sisters somehow. It made Tara see Jenny as a sister, nothing more. A sister is more meaningful than a friend, sure, but the label, *sister*, it boxed them in.

"Tina's Glorious Comeback" came on the car stereo, snapping Jenny out of the flashback. Dan Mangan had been their soundtrack for the best summer of their lives. Europe.

Flirty French Boys. Unpasteurized fatty cheese. The dirty old Spanish man. Art galleries and volcanoes. Stolen vineyard grapes that burst in their mouths like the taste of summer. There was a night on a beach. Somewhere. Jenny can't remember the city, the country. *Just do it.* Tara had said. *Fuck it. It's dark out.* The cool night air rang life into their wet bodies on a nude beach. There'd been a bonfire in the distance, making shadows dance all over Tara's bony body. Jenny's mind had wandered when she'd seen Tara's pubic hair, raked down to nothing. She thought of her own natural tuft: thick enough to hide something in. Thick enough to *get in the way* she thought, and then the whole pubic hair maintenance thing made sense: she pictured Jenny's face down there, a hand on her belly for balance. Jenny shook it off, the image, the sensation. She left her bottoms on, mesmerized at Tara's nonchalance, her *Tara-ness*. Unflinchingly naked on a beach with boys around. Jenny stole another look at Tara's body. Tara's breasts were smaller than her own, but more attractive, somehow, in the way they were set.

Tara's hand came out of nowhere. "Take your bottoms off too!" she said, grabbing at them, letting the elastic snap hard. Jenny shot up with the pain, and a rush of something gushing through her.

"Ewwww, *no!* There's sand fleas, and God knows what else!" They'd been drinking. Drinking enough for Jenny to admit to herself that she wanted Tara to stand up and tear the bottoms right off of her.

The people around the bonfire, not twenty feet away, had been playing ukuleles, guitars, bongos, and eventually came over, begging them in body language and broken English to *join with us, to the fire?* They did. Because Tara said they should.

And now Jenny's driving down a highway, and the treeline is a blur along the bottoms of clouds, and she can't imagine doing a Goddamn thing without Tara Morgan's fearless encouragement. She can't imagine sharing an apartment with someone else. She can't imagine wanting to.

When the bus driver shut the door on the luggage, Jenny saw there was no way for Tara to get out of that suitcase. But her tongue was sewn to the floor of her mouth, or it wouldn't move, and her brain forgot every word she'd ever learned, and her heart was hammering her ribs into dust, and the world was spinning, and the door was shutting. *Whack*. Jenny could have said something. Right there and then. Jenny could have saved her life. She should have insisted she needed her luggage back, or that she wasn't boarding the bus, but Tara – the one in the fucking suitcase – had always been the brave one. Tara was the one who always did the talking. The one who shushed and calmed Jenny the night they fucked around with those two boys from the bonfire. Jenny had been in the backseat with Bruno, Tara in the front. She told herself she wasn't watching Tara, but Jenny saw Tara's fingers in that guy's jet black hair, grabbing handfuls of it, to guide his face where she wanted it. Down there. Jenny had always been jealous of Tara's command over men. She wanted to grab Bruno's head with the same bravado, and get what she wanted from him. She didn't. And it was Bruno's hands on her head, pushy and demanding. Holding it there.

On the bus, Jenny's eyes couldn't dam up the tears, and her face caved in. Tara was trapped in that suitcase. A lady in a thin red dress looked at Jenny like maybe Jenny was leaving her mother behind. Or a boyfriend. That she was going to miss home. The old lady held out a traveler's pack of tissues, *Be strong*. This woman looked exactly like Jenny's foster mother, but

she looked full of concern, empathy, kindness – and that threw Jenny off. She couldn't look at this woman without feeling lonely. Without worrying more for Tara.

Jenny was worried about Tara cramping up down there in the suitcase. She was worried about oxygen. She was worried Tara had been crushed, and Jenny's own bones felt folded and painful. She hugged herself, felt a chill, rocked and swayed to calm herself. She thought she could hear Tara screaming down there, and her lungs felt vacuumed out.

“Just *stop!* Just ...” She went running up the aisle, grabbing the backs of headrests, accidentally pulling hair, knocking hats off, getting *what-the-fuck* eyes from passengers, as she bobbed and swayed to the bucking of the bus. “Just fucking stop! Pull over!” and the brakes were on, tossing her to her knees; her hands stinging from the slap of catching herself.

“Ma'am!” The driver looked more in security-mode than sympathetic. It had been an hour, *an hour* Tara had been down there. Jenny was thinking, *People drown in five minutes, flat, easy*. So they'd suffocate just as quickly.

When the bus driver thought he'd calmed her down some, he took Jenny outside, because her panic was contagious on that bus, and the driver didn't want that. Didn't want the others rattled too. He'd taken her by the arm. Outside, he'd given up trying to reason with her, to understand. Everyone had seemed concerned for her at first, until they were annoyed, and started turning on her. Their heads shaking, their eyes furious. A ten-minute delay while the driver fished her luggage out of storage. *This one? NO! This one? No!* and then he found it. No sounds coming from it. No movement.

“You sure you're okay?” He plunked her suitcase down and she could tell from the way he struggled with the weight of it, that it held Tara's body. Maybe dead, maybe alive. He'd even

eyed it, like, *What's in there?* “Are you *sure* someone can come get you here? I have never ... I’ve not left someone on the side of the road like this, and don’t know that I’m even allowed to do it!”

Jenny patted her pocket to insinuate there was a cellphone in there. “Y-yes. Calling Mom.” He rolled his eyes and walked away.

The day Jenny left her home, her forced relationship with her foster family evaporated. She’d never had a mother, as far as she was concerned; she considered herself born out of thin air, and that was easier than Tara’s story about a wino mother and a jailed father and a shitty life and the scars up her arm that she’s ashamed of in hindsight. She put them there in her teens, and hid them in her twenties, under long-sleeved shirts, even in the summer, if the sun was up. She hid those pink slits like an angsty tattoo that others – even herself – would judge her for if they caught a glimpse.

Jenny had run her fingers over the scars on Tara’s arms one night. They were stoned, Tony was asleep on the couch, an arm slung down over one of Tara’s shoulders. She remembers that Tony was snoring. Jenny just went for it. *Tell me about them, tell me why*, and she ran two fingers up Tara’s arm. Felt the little ridges of the scar tissue, felt the smoothness of the scars. She felt what it feels like to touch someone you love.

“Tell you what, Jenny J-J? You know me, you know why they’re there.” That’s what Tara had called Jenny for one whole year, Jenny J-J, and Jenny doesn’t know why she liked it so much. “Some day, I’ll have these scars surgically concealed. Until then I might as well wear a shirt that says *Tragic Little White Girl*.” Tara pushed her sleeve up, allowing Jenny’s hand more skin to rub. Tara had a dopey stoned face, and she looked like a happy cat someone was petting.

Don't stop, she motioned. "Tony never rubs me like this, and I beg him to." Just as Jenny smiled hard and weird, just as she cocked her body to give Tara the kind of arm rub that would *mean something*, Tony woke up. "Awesome!" he shouted. "Is it threesome time?"

Jenny knew how shocked she must have looked, mainly for getting caught rubbing Tara's arms. Tara stood up and took Jenny by the arm, led her down Tony's hallway, shouted over her shoulder, "You're sleeping on the couch tonight, T."

Jenny looked back at Tony, who – stoned and groggy with fatigue – merely waved a *Whatever* hand in the air and went back to sleep. Tara shut the bedroom door behind her as they stepped into the room. "That's Tony's side of the bed," she said, as if Jenny didn't know. "I'll sleep there in his greasy space." She pulled a blanket down over itself. "You can sleep in my spot." She tugged her top off, "and if you rub my belly 'til I fall asleep, I'll totally make you pancakes in the morning."

Jenny met Tara in high school, before they dropped out of grade 12 thinking Tony – the guy who sold them their hash – could teach them more about life than school and *a real job*. He was maybe twenty, dealing dope to high school kids, but everyone knew he was a con artist too, through rumours he'd taken the school principal for ten grand. No one knew how, it was a rumour and the details changed. But he really was a con artist, and that made him even more alluring than the guy with all the hash. He also worked merch tables when their favourites bands came to town. He'd started letting Tara sit behind the table with him, and sometimes, he'd get them on door lists, so they wouldn't have to pay to see bands like Metric and The Weakerthans. And the time their fake IDs failed them at a Hayden show, Tony was there to smooth it over.

“Thanks!” they’d both yelled, discreetly, from either side of him; Tara on his left arm, Jenny clung to the right. They walked across the bar together. “No sweat,” he said. “You’re eighteen, what’s the difference in eighteen and nineteen, really?”

“No, really,” Tara said, still holding his arm, “*Thank-you!*” Jenny watched Tara’s chest rubbing all over Tony’s arm. “I *love* this guy, I’d have been devastated to miss it!”

“Well, go fetch me a drink to prove it! I’ll be at my table,” he pointed to the merch stand. “Also, I’m having an after-party tonight. You two had better be there!”

It wasn’t long after that night that they were basically living with the guy. An inseparable trio. The first scam they pulled together was the “Wal-Mart Art Scam” because he’d needed them for it. He’d told them to put on old clothes, and he dipped a paintbrush in a variety of colours, and sprayed them in paint so they’d look like artists at work. Jenny still remembers the taste of green in her mouth; how fun it was to watch Tara squeal in joy as the paint sprayed her face red, her body white; her eyes slammed shut and her fists clenched in irrational fear. They bought five large paintings from Wal-Mart for a less than a hundred bucks, and set themselves up like street vendors downtown. Tony walked up and down the street, handing out pamphlets with fake bios about Jenny and Tara – *Kara and Kana Schroeder, Swedish wunderkinds*. He lied about all the awards they’ve won, and the galleries that seek out their work, because that was the Schroeders’ supposed shtick – never selling to galleries, selling right to the people. “It means you can get a four hundred dollar painting for two hundred dollars,” he’d told people on the street. “And all the money goes in the artist’s pocket. Everybody wins!”

They’d sold two of those twenty-dollar paintings that day. At two-hundred dollars apiece. They’d netted three hundred and sixty bucks, half a month’s rent, and the girls were amazed,

converted to a new lifestyle. And Tony wasn't all bad. He'd keep the drawers stocked with Hawkins cheezies for Tara, and let Jenny get the first shower if they both headed towards the bathroom with towels in hand. Tony was where Jenny wanted to drive her car now. She'd cry, falling into his arms, *She's dead, gone! Tara's gone!* Tony would know what to do. Tony had gotten them out of everything. Because he could. Except now Tony was in jail. He'd been in jail a year. He went too far, just once, got violent, broke his own rules, got caught. He'd dressed like a security guard, called the man who owned First Street Jewelry, and told him the alarm was going off and he needed permission for entry. A small, hunchbacked senior showed up, very concerned. They found nothing but the shattered door, which Tony had smashed himself, but Tony suggested a look around. He convinced the owner, *Okay, let's open that safe, make sure everything's still in it*, and then he helped himself to the contents, wrestling the man off him as he fled the scene. He'd disabled all the cameras, but not the one across the street.

That was Tony's excuse. There was a camera across the street he couldn't have done anything about. Jenny didn't have an excuse. She watched that bus driver entomb Tara. She had every chance she needed to save her. Before Jenny got up and demanded the bus driver stop the bus, the woman in the red dress tried again, "My dear, what's wrong? Maybe I can help somehow?" This woman, she really did look too much like the foster lady who'd never really cared, and that was it: Jenny would get up and she'd stop the bus, for Tara, and she'd tell her, finally, *I love you, I don't know how or why or in what way, but I love you, and you've got to talk me through this*, and it sounded so Goddamn cheesy and vacant and meaningless.

The bus driver left her on the side of the road, and there was nothing in sight but the strip of road and the trees it ploughed its way through. Jenny rolled the suitcase down into the ditch, and tried rolling it up the other side, to walk into the woods, but it was heavier than a dead horse.

She pulled it and pushed it, and she knew Tara was dead, because she was asking Tara questions and hearing no answers. She was begging her to say something, but she was too terrified to open the suitcase on the road, where cars might whiz by and see her there with a body. She fell twice getting the suitcase up the other side of the ditch, and the second time, she'd hit her elbow hard off a rock, and it throbbed the way a thumb does, when you hit it with a hammer. There was some blood there, and she might have twisted an ankle too: her ankle felt hot like bleeding.

There was a small clearing in the woods, where the trees weren't packed too tightly together, and it's where Jenny opened the suitcase. When she screamed, no sound came out. When she fell, she couldn't feel the earth at her knees. She was sinking through it. Tara's body was still warm, but there was no pulse, no puffs of air coming out of her nostrils, and she looked like a broken doll. Her eyes glassy already, staring at Jenny. And Jenny just fucking left her there. So she could run. Fast and away.

Jenny ran through the woods, crying, her vision like she was underwater. Eventually, a tree branch caught her hair. She didn't notice and kept running, and it yanked her backwards and snapped her neck; her legs flew out from under her, and she fell, hard, on her back, in a way that emptied her lungs. It wasn't pain she felt though. It was panic, nausea, and she threw up. A warm rush down her chin and throat and under her shirt and over her chest. She rolled over, into a ball, rocking herself. Dirt collecting in the tears on her face. Grabbing fistfuls of soil and throwing it and saying *No!* and kicking her legs in the air, and saying *No!*, and pounding her fists against the ground just to feel something there.

Tara didn't *feel* gone. There was a space Tara had filled in Jenny's life, and it still felt full. Because it had to. Because, without Tara Morgan, she'd have to start life all over again, and she didn't want to, and she didn't want to have to.

It was getting dark, and she lay there until the sounds around her had stopped feeling eerie. *So what if it was a fucking bear.* She deserved it, to be mauled, to be released from this. Or she didn't care if it was a bear, she'd tear its Goddamn eyes out and make it all the bear's fault. Everything. She lay there on the forest floor, counting the stars to calm her mind. It was something they did, her and Tara. They counted everything. Or it was something Tara did, and Jenny counted along – the number of moles on Tony's body, the number times Nate looked hot in an episode of *Six Feet Under*, the number of minutes Tara could stay in that suitcase: her record had been twenty-six minutes, at which point she plain got bored, and *a little bit panicked*.

Jenny lay there watching the stars shine like this was any other night. She lay there watching the stars, and part of her hoped one of them was a comet. And it was coming. And if she lay there, the blast might fuse them back together again. Her and Tara. *Jara. Tenny.*

She woke up hugging herself, cold; her back pressed against a tree. She'd decided to go steal a car. The guilt, the pain and regret: there was only one thing she could truly outrun. The police. And she'd try for that much.