

What I said to the journalist who promised everything was off the record then asked when I knew it was *The End*.

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Not at the start of that crazy summer. Not in the camper van that stank of weed. And I don't mean the cheap stuff we smoked when ditching school, but the really good kind. The sort that painted stupid smiles on our faces for days. If we hadn't been ripping up the stage playing at the Dojo four nights a week, we'd have ballooned real big, ready to pop, because the munchies from that weed hit so hard.

No, at the beginning of that summer we were two girls with a dream and I swore on my hands that we were right on the brink. We were so close to fame it could stick out its tongue and glide along our skin. It wasn't just local guys like you taking our photo and blowing sunshine up our denim skirts. We kept those national press clippings too. Like that rag you work your butt off for now. We plastered the van with those headlines, stuck them to the windows with globs of warm strawberry gum.

I was warned about a change though, told to open my eyes to that thing in the corner I didn't want to see. Ever since I'd known Jay-Jay, I'd had to get used to riding the unpredictable wave of being her best friend. Those drunken highs after gigs, singing into the sunrise, followed by weeks of killing myself with comparisons. I'd never be as beautiful or

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talented as she was. And when you have that voice hollering in your head so loud it hurts, it's hard to hear anything else whispering between that and denial. Denial that anything was wrong. Actually wrong and not just a feeling.

But like I said, I was warned. Jimmy the Spirit – that's what I called him - visited me through a flaming Drambuie. No one else caught sight of Jimmy, but his blue body twisted my way and the voice was not what you'd expect. Fire should have a roar, right? This spirit squeaked: *Girl, don't be silenced, create your own life*. He blew a fiery raspberry and disappeared behind the bar.

I know what you're thinking. What did a weed and whisky inspired fire spirit know anyhow? I spent my days down the ice cream parlour, pouring chocolate sauce over banana splits and dropping the cherry on knickerbocker glories earning the site rent for both of us. It took my mind off a bad break up – God, what did I know about bad break ups before Jay-Jay? – but the boredom from that job was so deep that my head drowned in all these fantastic lyrics.

Course Jay-Jay spent her days by the waterfall with the boys from River Kix - the only other decent band in town that summer. They were going places too: under management, cool black and white photos of them plastered behind all the bars. I pictured Jay-Jay smoking with the boys, flared jeans fanned out in the grass, freckled face turned up to the sun, water spray glistening like gems in her hair, singing lines I'd scribbled on receipts when my boss wasn't looking.

'I love how you turn your pain into art,' she told me. 'Wish I could do the same.'

I put it all down to the fact that she knew nothing of pain. Men didn't leave Jay-Jay. No one stopped being her friend because she'd not called. Everyone she met hung around

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way after the party had ended, drinking in the dregs of whatever part of her life she was willing to share.

One evening, we were staring out of the van window to the long grass swaying under blue skies and she announced someone big was coming to watch us: A record label guy River Kix partied with. Our big break was waiting right there for us. I was all for tearing up that stage, painting it as loud and bright as we could, the way we had so many times since school. But half-way through our set, Jay-Jay pulled out a wooden stool, covered the mic and told me she was trying something different. I looked into those eyes and I could tell that for the first time since we were kids, I wasn't invited along for this ride.

Jimmy the Spirit's warning came back to haunt me because it was as clear as the stud in Jay-Jay's ear that the record guy had come to see her. Not me. When she opened her mouth to sing, her voice was a soft, warm glow of Tiki torches at dusk, and I lay by the stage like a silent, burnt out firework.

Management Guy and Jay-Jay talked and laughed by the bar for hours as he touched her face with his fingers. Years later I heard what a creep he was. Perhaps she later learned what pain was. Whatever, no one deserves an asshole like that in their life. While they were at the bar, Jimmy the Spirit poked his blue head above the bar. *Told you, didn't I? Move on, girl.*

Thing is Jimmy the Spirit never said it was *The End*. And he was right. How could it be *The End*? Every time the needle scratches vinyl on those albums, my younger heart bleeds in the chorus she sings. No offence to you, but every time I turn up to any of these parties, no one asks what music I've written lately. They only want to know if I'm still bitter about how it all ended. My whole life since the band, since Jay-Jay went solo, has been talking about Jay-Jay and *The End*. Like it's some crappy small town I accidentally passed through on a

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road-trip years ago. That summer put her on the radio and me into radio silence. It led to years of my soul and career unravelling into tired, loose threads. Now I've got a bunch of words I've sewn together and the whole world is gonna fucking hear me sing them. For me, and you know what, maybe a little for her too. So yeah, the end's nowhere in sight yet. Nowhere near.