

A Woman in Pine Block

Bastard, she'd think, looking out her back kitchen window. Lucky white bastard, at that glimpse of two-storey house through its surround of big old trees and its oh so secure greater surround of rolling green pastureland, while she – Clicking her tongue, Oh to hell with him. Or good luck to him, if she wasn't in too bad a mood. ...

And sometimes she'd be upstairs, looking out her bedroom window at the view on the other side of the house, the front. If you could call it a view; just a mirror reflection across the street of her house and the half next door and the whole fuckin street of exact same state dwellings. A mile-long picture of the same thing; all the same, just two-storey, side-by-side misery boxes. Only thing different was the colour of the paint job, and even then you hardly noticed it. And your neighbour through a few inches of wall.

And Beth'd watch the kids; the scab-kneed, snot-nosed, ragamuffin-clothed kids of the area doing their various things out there. Beth wondering, all the time wondering. At them. The kids. The unkempt, ill-directioned, neglected kids. And her own kids. How were they going to fare? How were they faring now? If you could call living in this Pine Block state-housing area faring. ...

And not having dreams. Like him out the back there, Trambert; of dreaming of one day owning a house like him, and a farm. Mr fuckin white Trambert with the big stately dwelling (Oh very funny, Beth) and endless green paddocks that backed onto the line of miserable state boxes erected on land he'd once owned but sold to them, the government, so they could house another lot of brown nobodies. To *dream*, of being like him, with acres and acres of land to feel under your feet, and hundreds and hundreds of sheep growing fat and woolly to add to your thousands and thousands in the fuckin bank. To dream. Of *peace* in the world; like Trambert must have peace in his nice white world. While here, down there on the street below, are kids practising to be the nothing nobody, but violent, adults of the future.

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She went upstairs, went through the kids' rooms, trying to find a book and finding only comics and magazines, karate mags, boxing and rugby mags under the two older boys' beds, and – (Oh, what's this? A *Penthouse* snucked right away underneath Nig's bed. The eldest. Her favourite. My Nig. Flicking through the pages – good God. What's this? Recoiling in horror at the sight of a woman in full-colour naked glory with her – her fanny exposed for the whole wide world to see ... she searched on, in the girls' room, Grace and Polly's. Mags and comics. No books. Teenage girl mags with pages and pages of pictures of prissy white girls dolled up, or in skimpy swimming outfits, why would a Maori girl with dark skin even for a Maori want to read look at stuff like this when she has no chance of looking like them? No chance. Then Beth realised she was thinking like Jake about her thirteen-year-old daughter's prospects, her future. Oh, let her read this kind of stuff if that's what turns her on. But no books. And Polly, she was ten when her school reports had her getting poor grades for reading so she wouldn't likely have books under her bed, though Beth did check

just in case Polly surprised her. So she went downstairs and it wasn't necessary to go into the sitting room cause sure weren't no books in there, up to the kitchen where she sat down feeling quite drained. Thinking over and over again: bookless. We're bloody bookless, all of us. ...

A woman'd come home from town – in a taxi, feeling like Lady Muck, for a change, steada Lady Blues who ain't got no money – her supermarket shopping filling the taxi boot and she, Lady Muck, in the back not wanting the ride to end, as if she was a princess. And she'd be looking out the window and she'd notice the Pakeha houses, how most of em had well-kept lawns and nice gardens with flowers and shrub arrangements and some with established trees and others with the foresight to have young ones planted, and Lady Muck'd start feeling depressed. Then the vacant lot of land separating Two Lakes from Pine Block that no one, not in sixteen years, had ever built on, it'd fill a woman's vision with its ugly overgrown look, remind her of what was to come. Pine fuckin Block. And she'd feel like whatshername, Cinderella, in her taxi, waiting for it to turn into a pumpkin at the sight of her residential reality, and the rotten little kids everywhere, and the mean-faced teenagers, and the gang members sauntering around like they owned the place. No gardens here. Not trees, nor plant arrangement, not nothing.