

The Child with a Fang in its Heart by Jamie King

The stained glass wings of the Exam Ship closed with a hydraulic gush and the hemispherical trap was complete. On the parquet floor of this portable atrium, this nucleus of neural gymnastics hanging in a carbon dioxide sky, seven hundred and twelve golden pupils were instructed to turn over the cover page of their Eleven Plus and each adolescent eye locked with words of God -

QUESTION ONE – THATCHERISM (ANCIENT CIVILISATION)

On the opposite side of Venus' smallest moon, in a McDonald's Drive Thru, Sandra McKenzie pulled a protective net over her purple beard so any falling defector hairs did not infect the fries. She dug her wellington-boot-sized serving spoon into the vat of dancing carbohydrate and scooped out the first portion of the day. Her utensil's hologram was activated and its white proclamation snarled her day's earnings -

1 FRIES – £0.00.000008 – 45,687 MORE TILL TARGET

(followed by four heart eyes emojis)

Through her serving hatch onto the cosmos, she watched the Empress' marketing drones tickertape the clouds in a technicolour alphabet. Their message had the heart-slowng authority of an Old Testament masturbation ban as they said -

“It's never too early to start thinking about the Workplace Pension!”

The rodent teeth of Doctor Caliban winced down on all seven hundred and twelve of his charges before he yelled at the top of Welsh soprano vowels -

“No communication, no smuggled information, no defecation unless licensed by General Practitioner's note...”

But in row 47, already infamous since Tara Schiaracca removed her ear drum halfway through a Criminology re-sit in July 3055, there was accidental dissent afoot. As their revision-chapped fingers closed around their government-approved HB pencil, Ariel McKenzie's thoughts drifted through dopamine hits of erratic fantasy fictions as they tried to concentrate on the question like their mother had said -

“The 1988 Education Reform Act began the marketisation of education.”

DISCUSS

As Ariel's mind screamed to focus and a hundred sickly sweet deliriums howled on the end of their mental leashes, as potential introductions and argument paragraphs and counter argument paragraphs did the helter skelter waltz in ghostly graphite hieroglyphs on the prickling taste buds of the page, Sandra walloped the arse of a ketchup bottle and said three Hail Marys for her national curriculum baby.

And Ariel saw their mummy on the page. Between the Marxist perspective and the semi colons, her apron and her bedtime hugs and her deep fat minimum wage fryer pirouetted in shame. Each word of the Thatcher essay became a mark, each mark became a tally, each tally became a grade, each grade became a Curriculum Vitae, the Curriculum Vitae, the Course of Life, became a one way ticket to stardom and a six hundred foot drop to hell, and hell smelled

like portions of fries deep inside mummy hugs on the other side of Venus, as a girl in Row 41 wondered what the Eleven Plus would have been about if not Mrs. Thatcher, and Doctor Caliban wondered if the Eleven Plus would have been about if not for Mrs. Thatcher, and Ariel decided that the first word of their graphite answer was going to be

BECAUSE

Ariel had a secret. Ariel had treasure under their skin. The microscopic X on their upturned forearm marked the insertion spot of last week's injection. Most people their age, the Nurse had said, most of the medically transitioning M T NB pre teens we get in here, had their oestrogen administered in gels against the pores, but because you have magic powers, love, you have to have yours differently. And Ariel McKenzie's schoolkid pupils dilated and the trans dreams of their neuroplasticity tickled the underskirts of their Afro follicles in angel delight. Magic and oestrogen. Lovers' arson in the forest. Born with magic powers and injected with sex hormones. The world was their oyster, their whale, and their phoneix. The voluptuous chemistry to make my blood electric.

As their future happiness teetered on the prick of Thatcher's pencil, Ariel curled the room amongst their fingernails and summoned their non-binary magic. The needle's discharge of truth sang from their arteries and Ariel's heart beat around a yellow curve, witchcraft rising in their chest as a fang formed in the red.

Their wings thudded against the back of the classroom chair. Their throat inhaled the dust of the air conditioning system and replaced it with faere blue. Their wrists and elbows rose from the Eleven Plus and their shoelaces dangled over the desk as Ariel McKenzie flew in coronation glory. They flew from Row 47 and after school revision sessions and flew beyond the mark scheme accuracies of Doctor Caliban's shipwreck. They penetrated the gemstone hemisphere of the Exam Hall and beat their feathers on the Venus wind. Ariel's very armpit hair was doused in neon lilac as they flew and soared down among the flying cars and holographic skyscrapers and radioactive ghettos. They flew, chirping the crest of oestrogen waves, between the workplace pension adverts and emoji clouds massacred at the hands of the Empress. They flew through the Drive Thrus and plant nurseries and the Albiorix Underpass, in search of good points to make about the 1988 Education Reform Act. They flew through fields and lagoons and Sure Start centres and the National Citizen Service and the board of governors and the boys' locker room and Miss Macauly's chalkboard in the only room of Colne Vale Schoolhouse where she taught miners' babies Reading, Composition and Arithmetic, and into what the Parents' Prospectus called the state-of-the-art drama studio where Susie Langford in Year 9 was belting out Don't Cry For Me Argentina. They flew through rolling green pastures where children played all day long and ate jam sandwiches and they hovered in the House of Parliament and shat on the Dispatch Box.

Ariel McKenzie landed in a red plastic classroom chair, in a wooden school hall, with the lights on and the protractors being handed out. Mr. Royce stood at the front and said there were fifteen minutes left. Ariel looked at the page on which they had just written the word Because before they began dreaming about starting hormones and flying round Venus. And Ariel looked at the sociology question, and their birthname on the cover sheet, and wished they were eleven again, because they wouldn't have nightmares about fucking up in A Levels, and working in McDonald's, and struggling to concentrate in exams.