

The 'Burbs are My Ghetto

By Matthew C. Lamb

Blancoa Court is my turf. Everything from the bus shelter on the corner of Gardenia Street to the abandoned Camira at the end of the cul de sac, that's my realm. You come through here, you come through me. I tried to spray paint that onto the fence behind Mrs Knipler's place once, but she chased me with her hose and washed it all away. I got her back by stuffing a Laxette into a bit of leftover chicken and gave it to her yappy little dog. Couple of days later I saw Mrs Knipler's couch getting tied onto the back of her son's ute to be taken to the tip. Serve's her right.

Blancoa Court includes the playground, mind. Or what's left of it. Someone (and I know it was Aaron Gloyde 'cause he gets this look anytime anyone talks about it) they set off fireworks from the top of the slide on the Queen's Birthday weekend. The whole thing went up and the fire brigade had to come. Now the plastic looks like syrup dripping off a pancake and the council's wrapped it all in yellow tape.

I climbed the gumtree by the swings once. It's one of them smooth, white ones with the bark flaking off like an old scab. Taller than two of the townhouses stacked on top of each other, I reckon. In spring you have to wear a stack hat or carry an umbrella if you go near it 'cause there's this magpie that'll go you, but I made it up no worries. Carved my name up there as proof. Aaron Gloyde says that's bullshit and no-one could climb it but he's always measuring me up, is Aaron, like he might have a swing. Hasn't yet. Like to see him try.

Olivia Wilson lives three streets over in Salsola Court. That's beyond my realm. But I've gone over there a few times and we sit on the rocks together. Nearly held hands, once. There was this stick I was drawing in the tanbark with and she wanted a go and we kinda held it at the same time. The other week she lost another tooth and got two bucks from the tooth fairy. We spent in on Zappos at the shops. I tucked a pack of water balloons into my undies as well so I could peg some at Aaron Gloyde. The girl at the counter saw, I reckon, but she didn't say anything and kinda just went back to looking at her phone.

I see her smoking out the back of the shops sometimes. She's fifteen, I reckon. I'm gonna smoke when I'm older because then maybe she'll go out with me. Me and Olivia will probably be done by then because she said her dad's got a new job and she's moving away. It made me sad but I've got to be pragmatic.

'Cause every king needs a queen, and that's what I am.

The king of Blancoa Court.

(Longlisted for the October 2021 Furious Fiction competition run by the Australian Writers Centre.)