



VINTAGE

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FALL

COLIN MCADAM

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Acknowledgements

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## About the Book

A place of pressure and contradictions, St Ebury is an exclusive boarding school for the children of Canada's elite, where boys must act as men while navigating their adolescence.

One of only a handful of girls at the school, Fall is the most beautiful. Noel, a clever, ghostly loner, watches her, certain that one day Fall will come to know him deeply. But like everyone else, she is drawn to Julius, the confident and magnetic son of the American ambassador to Canada. They fall in love and Noel keeps watching.

In their final year, the boys room together and as Julius grows closer to Fall, Noel's enthusiasm for their relationship shades into something darker as he imagines himself as a confidante to Julius, sensing that the time has come for him to enter Fall's life forever.

## About the Author

Colin McAdam lives in Montreal. His first novel, *Some Great Thing*, was published in 2004.

ALSO BY COLIN MCADAM

*Some Great Thing*

*For Suzanne and old friends lost*

# Fall

Colin McAdam

VINTAGE BOOKS  
London

HALF AN HOUR of lips and silk in the front and back and her cheeks are like peaches like peaches like peaches.

I love your hands.

I love *your* hands.

I want to pull over. You're so beautiful I'm gonna pull over.

Can we.

Now.

Can we.

Now.

I love that smile of yours you're blushing like a hot summer peach I say.

Yousupwiseme.

Mmm.

You surprise me.

Mmm.

She says she watches me. She says I'm shaped like a V. Your shoulders and your waist.

I can do an iron cross.

O god.

Can we. Please.

Now.

I don't know when you're joking or not, I love your smile so much. Can we.

Here.

I don't know, we could try back there I say and I run outside to open her door and It's so sweet and green around here she says.

Her voice always sounds like she's smiling and smart.

I kiss her up against the car and I feel like I'm William opening the back door for her.

Hurry up, Julius, it's cold she says. Do you like my bra.

Yes!

It's silk!

I take off my shirt and she helps and her fingers are feathers, look lick.

You're a woman I say.

Bingo she says.

But I mean it I can't explain it.

She smiles and shivers and says Keep me warm.

I want to ask if she's scared because I get scared no matter what, no matter how many times I've done it, fifteen, but I don't want to distract her.

I love the neighbourhood right now, we're hugging and I'm kissing her neck.

Look out the window she's saying. It's so green and black.

I'm afraid the whole thing is turning to talk, lipping words where kisses and mmms should be but she kisses my scar and bites my lips and unclasps her bra and says Clasps with her tongue and her teeth and a lisp.

I need to blow my nose.

I roll her on top and stare.

School on Monday she says.

Yeah I say.

You're shaking she says.

No.

You're frowning she says.

No.

Boys get very serious when girls have taken their shirts off she says.

I love your smile. Ffuck. I don't know what to say.

She unbuttons her jeans. She likes that since I said I liked it.

Do you like these.

Yes!

They're silk!

She says she loves the back seat of the limo. I say we can roll around like we're in a field, a big leather field, and she says You're full of peaches and farms tonight.

I roll her underneath me and think I should undo my jeans like she did.

I'm not wearing silk tonight I say.

She makes me tell bad jokes.

I'm tired of being a stranger and telling bad jokes.

We should do everything right now I say, and then it would be over and we could do everything again, I mean it.

Mmm.

I've got the car from William, who doesn't like his belly, who says whenever I borrow it, This could cost me my job, and laughs because he doesn't want his job, the only thing he wants is girls and a place in the Indy 500, he told me. When William's behind the wheel he's in his own world, he says, and my dad's in the back seat in his own world, and I think about how two people in a quiet black car can be in two big worlds, driving along, where are we.

I want to be close to you I say.

I think I hear a car she says.

I want to do everything now.

I can't breathe like this.

No one can see in Dad's car. The windows are tinted I say. At a party I asked a marine to shoot at the windows but he wouldn't. You can't see in here or shoot us.

What she says. Wait, you're heavy. There.

You don't have to be scared I say.

I'm not scared she says. She's looking me in the eyes and smiles. I'm modest she says. She opens her arms to show me everything.

She's everyone's everything and she's here in the back seat.

I'm gonna calm down.

I sit back here with Dad sometimes, he's here in the back seat.

Don't move I say. I wanna see.

I've never looked so close. No one ever lets me look that close.

Please.

Everyone I know.

Look through the window of this dark car.

You're not really scared, are you.  
Do I need to be she says.

*Noel*

THE DAYS THAT made me, that were supposed to change me, that didn't actually make me, are showing me now what I was. My days in the room with Julius. Years have provided some safety.

That was not a school with pipes and dons and tweeds.

It wasn't a place where people spoke like people don't speak.

It wasn't in the Highlands of Scotland or the hills of New England.

It was a place of traditions but the traditions weren't old.

Like most private schools it was part fantasy, part reality, and therefore all reality. A place where stories happened, not fables, where there was learning, not lessons, and no one came away with memories of neat moral episodes. I came away with memories.

There were too many contradictions for there to have been any sense, and my life has always been so. We were boys who wore suits, monkeys with manners. We didn't have parents but were treated like babies. We were left on our own but had hundreds of rules to abide by.

We were eighteen years old, as grown up as we could be.

My memories are twitching like morning in the city.

'Laundry day,' said Chuck. He was standing in the hall with Ant, looking into our bedroom, where Julius was lying with a cloth over his eyes.

'Laundry day,' said Ant, echoing Chuck, and he rushed into our room, swung his laundry-filled pillowcase and pounded Julius in the head.

Julius said, 'Fuck off, I mean it.'

I had to take a test to get into St Ebury. I was fourteen. My parents took me - just before they went away. The three of us sat across from the Head Master, who did all the

interviews himself and I noticed that he never looked at me oddly.

'Noel will have to take a test,' he said. I looked for signs.

Money was all that mattered - that's what I'd heard about St Ebury. Money wasn't an issue. I looked for signs on his face to see if he was uncomfortable about my eye.

'It's an Intelligence test, essentially,' he said.

'We weren't told,' I said, speaking for my parents.

'There's no preparation,' the Head Master said. 'No need to study. All you need is this pencil.' I was sent to an empty classroom.

Julius had a hangover.

'He's hung,' said Chuck.

'Big night,' said Ant.

'Big hung,' said Chuck.

'He wishes,' said Ant.

'Better hung than you,' said Chuck, and Ant pounded him in the head with his laundry-filled pillowcase.

'Get the fuck out,' said Julius, his face in his pillow now.

It was Sunday and everyone had stories about the weekend.

'Ant found some of your barf on his shoes this morning,' Chuck said to Julius.

'I smelled it first,' said Ant. 'Then I found it. A bit of, like, potato, caught up in the laces.'

'Fffuh,' said Julius.

'And you're cleaning it,' said Ant.

'It's laundry day,' said Chuck. 'Clean away the weekend, man, wash it all away. I can *not* believe how Fuck In drunk I was last night, and there I am in the corner thinking I will *not* get any action tonight and I look over at you two, Jules over here, Mr Hurlius, hurling and heaving all over your shoes, and I think, man, I *will* get action tonight because I am *not* as ugly as those two chumps.'

'And the fact?' said Ant.

'The fact is,' said Chuck, 'that I did *not* get any action.'

'The sad truth,' said Ant.

'It is the sad truth, Antony, and the sadder truth is that you have barf on your sneakers, and sadder . . . the saddest truth of all is that Mr Hurlius here got action and we came back with nothing.'

'Sad,' said Ant.

'So,' said Chuck. 'Wake the fuck up, Julius, and tell us.'

'Cheeses, Choolius, tell us all about it.'

'Please get out,' said Julius. He rolled over to make it clear. 'Please, get out of my room,' he said, and buried his face again.

'Your room?' said Chuck. He leaned on the top bunk, looking at Julius on the bottom. He tapped on the empty top mattress.

'Your room?' said Ant, who looked towards the sink in the corner of the room.

'Come on, Jules. Wake up. Don't feel sorry for yourself. Wake up. It's two o'clock. It's sunny. It's laundry day. Three hours before Chapel. One load of whites. One load of darks. Two smokes. And Chapel is upon us.'

'Come on,' said Ant.

'Come on,' said Chuck.

'Come on,' said Ant.

'Come on,' said Chuck.

'Come on,' said Ant.

'Oh for fucks,' said Julius and he rolled out of bed, landing on the floor face upwards. He lifted up his shirt, exposing his nipples, looked at Chuck and Ant, and said: 'Suck 'em.'

Chuck opened the door to the closet and grabbed Julius's laundry-filled pillowcase from the closet floor.

'His nipples are brown,' said Ant of the nipples of Julius.

'Yum,' said Chuck.

'It's a tan,' said Julius.

Chuck threw the pillowcase at Julius. 'The man with the tan,' said Chuck. 'Now,' he said. 'Tell us. Tell us how this

man with the weird brown nipples gets so fuckin lucky.'

They walked towards the door, one, two, three, and each raised his eyebrows at the sink in the corner.

I was standing by the sink and continued to brush my teeth.

St Ebury sat on a hill in the richest part of town, Sutton, where all the ambassadors lived. St Ebury turned 121 that year, making it one of the oldest schools in Canada. There were 114 boarders between grades 9 and 12. Only thirty of them were girls.

Usually Seniors could choose their room-mates. Julius had too many friends. He had so many friends that they all assumed he was spoken for. They all paired up and Julius was left alone. He didn't get the room-mate he wanted.

I had been at St Ebury since grade 8. Julius arrived from the States in grade 11. I was friends with no one.

Seniors had only one room-mate. When people arrived in grades 9 to 11 they got stuck with two or three other room-mates in big rooms with two sinks, two bunks and two closets.

Seniors lived in the rooms along the front of the school, looking over the main entrance and the avenue to the Head Master's house. The rooms were narrow, a bunk and a sink along one wall, and two desks with shelves along the other.

The Head Boy lived alone, and there was one other single room for one other Senior. Everyone thought Julius would be Head Boy but the story was that his father intervened and said it wouldn't look right.

Then once everyone realised he hadn't found a room-mate, it was assumed that Julius would get the other single room. Being alone was a privilege. It was quiet. You could have loud dreams or dreams where you would cry and nobody would know.

They gave the room to Chris, whose real name was Tim. Chris had acne all over his face and body. One day in grade 9 a boarder made him smell a dirty gym shoe. He put Chris in a headlock, held the shoe over his nose and mouth, and the struggle tore some of the acne scabs off his face so it looked like he was crying blood.

The grade 9s and 10s were mostly on the floor above. One of the Housemasters had an apartment up there, and two Prefects shared a big room at the other end of that hall.

Julius should have been a Prefect as well, but he decided that the extra duties would get in the way of things. The Prefects helped with monitoring Prep at night and making sure lights were out at bedtime. They were supposed to keep everyone in line, especially the Juniors, and every night between Prep and bed one of the Prefects would hold detention in room 21 - an hour for anyone who had misbehaved on the Flats.

Julius's and my room was right above the main entrance to the school. The entrance had a porch with large latticed beams that seemed designed for climbing. Most nights Julius would climb out the window to have a smoke in the park across the street from the school. Often enough he would only get as far as above the porch - stopping halfway across the beams, just outside the window, perched up high with his cigarette tip glowing and fading. Sometimes someone else would be out there with him. Our door would burst open at midnight and Chuck or Ant or both would kick the lower bunk, say 'Smoke!' and they would slide the window up and go out.

'Let's go to the park,' Julius might say, and 'Fuck that' might be Chuck's response. So they would perch out there just beyond the window and share a cigarette's length of talk.

Chuck: 'I hope we can still play rugby at McGill.'

Ant: 'I'll be too busy fucking.'

Chuck: 'Your aunt is going to McGill?'

Ant: 'Funny.'

Julius: 'I like the smell of the leaves.'

They had to leave the window open a crack so they could undo the latch to get back in. They would sit out there sometimes when it was cold saying *jesus jesus jesus* while the wind blew into the room. Later in the year Julius went away at night and never knew that the papers on his desk turned blue when the moon shone in.

The daily routine did not change much from year to year. The only thing that changed was curfew. Grades 9 and 10 had to be in their rooms at 9:30 with Lights Out at 10. Eleven had Lights Out at 10:45 and Seniors had to have lights off at 11:30. But things were more flexible the older you got, and everything depended on who was on duty.

When I arrived at St Ebury everyone said:

'Her father's an Italian count.'

'Fuck off.'

'They wear gloves when they eat dinner.'

'Her real name is Fallon.'

'Fallon Fitzgerald Destaad.'

'DeStindt.'

'She's cold.'

'She's funny.'

'She's a bitch.'

'She's not a real blonde.'

'She's smart.'

'She's the smartest in the school.'

'Her father's High Tech.'

'Rich.'

'Filthrich.'

'Started IncoTel.'

'/s IncoTel.'

'*Was* IncoTel, he ditched and made a stinkload.'

'King's ransom.'

'Mother took it all.'

'They're divorced.'

'I've seen them together.'

'They're always in the paper.'

'I've never seen them.'

'Lives in the High Tech Hills.'

'No one knows why she's a boarder.'

'Scholarship.'

'She's the smartest in the school.'

'She only looks Italian.'

'Born in the High Tech Hills.'

'Her hair is chestnut, pure chestnut, and natural and I think it's beautiful.'

'I want her to be my friend.'

'She is my friend.'

'She's everyone's friend.'

'I love her.'

I remember first seeing her in the downstairs common room floating across the school's eye.

One face could be my guide and salvation. It could be my comfort and the goal of superstition. It seems incredible that I can no longer picture her.

When I achieved a perfect mark on an essay, it presaged Fall's eventual love. When I scored a shot from the line in basketball, which I rarely did, it was because I would kiss Fall that week, that term, that year.

Whenever she was near, I knew it. At assemblies I always knew where she was sitting, almost without looking. If she was in a crowd at the end of a hallway, out of sight, I sensed that she was there, and I would come close, pass by.

I didn't need her to notice me right away. I knew that she would come to know me deeply. I felt like an explorer sailing past an uncharted piece of perfection. I knew where it was, I would land there one day and my race would grow.

And when Julius arrived and everyone, including Fall, was drawn to him, I somehow wasn't upset. I felt it was part of a

plan. I saw them together in the halls and I liked his face, thought she deserved a guy like that for a while.

Certainly, I never wanted to hurt her.

Boarders had to arrive the Sunday night before term started. Parents drove up throughout that Sunday dropping off sons, daughters, suitcases. From the rooms along the front of the school you could watch it all happening.

The younger boarders usually came up to the Flats with wet noses from saying goodbye - the new ones especially. They wore clothes that they would probably never wear again - sweaters from home, jeans with holes, things that they either wouldn't be allowed to wear on the Flats or would learn to dislike once they saw what the experienced boarders wore.

If a room had two new boarders they would be friends right away. 'Should we wear anything in the shower tomorrow, like a bathing suit?' was usually the first question. One would have more answers than the other.

'There's no Prep tonight because it's the first night, but tomorrow it'll be at 7:30.'

'What's Prep?'

'Study.'

'What do we wear to Prep?'

'I don't know.'

'I'm thinking of showering early, just to beat the rush. Maybe I'll shower at night.'

'I'm not sure we can do that.'

They would unpack neatly, and would usually be careful about sharing space. 'Do you want this drawer?'

'No, you take it.'

'I've already got four.'

'So do I. You take it.'

'Sure?'

It was the last polite night of the year.

For the boarders who already knew each other it was all routine, and part of the routine was making sure the new kids knew they were more experienced. Chuck and Ant were lifers - they'd been there since grade 5 - and they sat around on those first Sunday nights like nothing was happening. New kids would bump into each other, be aware of everyone, look nervous or over-friendly; some of them would ask Chuck or Ant for directions. 'Umm, L Wing?' Chuck or Ant would raise a lazy arm and point, or Chuck or Ant would look at the kid's chin or ear, never in the eyes, and say, 'You're there.'

If they were curious, parents would come up to the Flats and look at where they were leaving their children. They always smiled and said 'Great, isn't this great' and whispered advice like 'You should take the desk near the window.' But it was usually just kids coming up on their own, dragging bits of their home with them - posters, stereos, favourite lamps.

The quiet, shy ones would be quiet and shy, announcing themselves more obviously than the ones who tried to make friends. They were doomed. Most of the bullying started in the lower grades.

There was a kid named Edward in grade 9 that year who was six foot five and skinny. He hunched his shoulders and leaned forward like he was afraid of being so tall. His dad came up to the Flats with him that Sunday and between them they carried a gigantic metal chest that attracted everyone's attention. The only difference between Edward and his dad was that his dad was smiling. They both ducked when they went through Edward's new doorway. His new room-mates were there, staring, and other people were curious about his chest.

Edward's dad kept smiling and said, 'I don't know what you've got in that chest, but I hope she's alive,' and he blew a laugh out his nose with a rope of clear snot which made

him stop laughing abruptly. He looked around embarrassed and said, 'This is Edward.'

Edward's dad was serving in The Hague, and Edward had spent the summer in Holland. He was another diplomat's kid who would be at St Ebury as long as his parents were overseas.

Both of his new room-mates had arrived and unpacked and were quiet while Edward's dad was still around.

'Let's say one last goodbye to your mum,' said the dad.

While Edward followed his dad downstairs his two new room-mates moved towards that huge metal chest and started playing with the lock. A few other new grade 9 went in and they all started pulling on the lid and kicking the chest, gently at first.

When Edward came back up they moved away from the chest.

'You can't keep that there. It's too big. You'll get in trouble.'

'You'll get in trouble, Edward.'

'What's in it? You should just empty it.'

Edward had his pants pulled up high.

Edward's shirt was tucked deep into his pants.

Edward banged the toe of his big shoe on the corner of the bed when he moved towards the chest.

When he spoke and said, 'There's stuff in it, there's nothing,' his voice was a shaky version of his dad's.

When he opened his chest weeks later it was full of ugly treasure.

There was a dinner that Sunday for those who wanted it and nobody wanted it. Kids like Edward would pull out a book and lie on their bed. The quiet ones with pimples read science fiction or something about wizards.

That Sunday somehow always passed quickly, even though everyone was nervous about the first day of school or about their new home.

Julius arrived late that night and said 'hi' kind of nicely to me. It was dark and almost quiet. Someone upstairs was bouncing a basketball along the hallway and then there was a rush of footsteps and an OWW and then quiet.

'I didn't know who I was going to room with,' Julius said. He had two big duffel bags which he threw into the closet. He unzipped one of them, took out his toothbrush and a pack of cigarettes and put both of them in his pocket. 'It's a nice night,' he said, and walked out again, closing the door quietly.

Everyone had to be awake by 7:15 every morning and the Prefects started banging on doors at 6:45.

There was one bathroom on every wing. Some had more showers than others but most of them had three in an open row. There would usually be about ten people waiting in each bathroom for one of the showers to be free. Most wore towels while they waited. Some wore slippers. A Chinese kid named Patrick Chu wore slippers, a shower cap and plastic gloves, and looked so weird that no one bothered to make fun of him. There were benches and radiators across from the showers which you could sit on while you waited, if you were early enough. In the winter the radiators were the best place to be.

The longer people lingered in the bathroom, the more senior they were, usually, and the more comfortable they were with being naked. At the start of the year there were always a few new guys who wore bathing suits while they showered. They waited their turn, got quickly into the shower, faced the wall so their backs were turned to everyone waiting, got out as quickly as they got in. After a week or two they would answer the question in different ways.

'Why do you wear a bathing suit in the shower?'

'It's warmer.'

'Why do you wear a bathing suit in the shower?'

'That's what I wear at home.'

And then they would start going naked.

Everyone's sleepy eyes wandered into the hot fog every morning. They found the radiator, they found the showers, they found the penises of everyone else on the wing. The sad wet mushroom belongs to Chris. The blue-white thing in the nest of red belongs to Archie the Scot. The half-hard penis from morning dreams, so big that it almost touches his neighbour's leg when he turns around, is the belonging of Carlos and if Chuck sees it half hard once more, he said, he's going to stomp on it and break its back so it never grows again.

You looked at everyone's, but when you were in the shower you never saw anyone looking.

Edward wore a bathing suit for his first shower. On their way back to their room Edward's new room-mates were trying to whip him with their wet towels. They were new to the technique so they were weakly hitting the air instead of snapping at Edward's skin. They were practising; and Edward was trying to figure out how to react. His towel was wrapped tightly around his waist, getting dyed blue by his wet new bathing suit and he was laughing like someone who has to choose laughing instead of fighting back.

Julius came out of our room in his towel, watched the young ones running down the hall, and wandered into the bathroom later than everyone. He timed it every morning so he never had to wait for the shower, and showered as long as he liked.

He was a chart of what the body should be.

We watched him in his towel.

At the end of the first full day of school after everyone's lights were out, Julius lay on the bottom bunk and said to me, 'I'm beat from practice, man, goodnight.'

He was a messy guy, but he tried to change. For the first few weeks he left his soccer clothes strewn around the room. Socks so wet with sweat that the carpet was damp when he eventually picked them up.

'This room smells like balls and an armpit,' said Chuck, and Ant said, 'Whose balls does it smell like?'

Julius would scoop up his clothes eventually, fill pillowcases with them and throw them in the closet for laundry day, but the smell lingered until someone came in and said it stank. Julius tried to be more tidy.

He could fill a room with his presence, but if you looked closely sometimes you could see he was somewhere else.

On the second night of school, after the lights went out, Julius looked up at the underside of the bunk above and said, 'I was talking to someone who said your dad's Ambassador to Australia or something.'

'Consul General.'

'OK.'

'Mmm.'

'I'm so fuckin tired, man, goodnight.'

Julius's father was the US Ambassador to Canada. His residence was in Sutton, a seven-minute walk from the school, but he insisted that Julius be a boarder. Julius could go home whenever he wanted, but theoretically the rules of the school said you couldn't go off campus during the week and could only leave on weekends if you had somewhere to sign out to. Julius went home most weekends, even though his father wanted him to integrate with the students at St Ebury as much as possible - to become part of the culture.

His father's time in Canada may be remembered for its curtailment. And he was unusual in some ways. A widower - a single ambassador in the days when the probity of being single no longer existed. He was outspoken, but as I look back through articles I kept he was also frequently

misquoted and misrepresented. Perhaps I'm inclined to sympathise. I was a stranger to him, but was essentially responsible for his departure.

I am reading an article at the moment that says there are men listening to the noises of submarines. The men are in England, the submarines in the Arctic. The men are Canadian, the submarines Russian and American. I can see the men wearing earphones, straining their ears to hear muted signals; sounds bouncing off the ocean floor telling secrets they do not mean to tell.

I remember every night, every detail. The early days of love. There was a strange quiet on the third night. Prep was at 7:30 and there wasn't a noise for two hours except of pages turning and pens dropping on desks. Two hours later the lights stayed dim, and most boarders started getting ready for bed. All the new students were yearning for a routine, trying to keep the strangeness from growing. If they could be quiet, do homework, keep to themselves, go to bed, they wouldn't have to be so aware of how odd it was to be living with eighty-four friends and strangers - they could pretend they were on their own. One mood could settle on everyone.

Julius propped up his Algebra book first, stared at it like a possible enemy, let it rest again, open, copied some problems, worked for half an hour. He sighed. He stretched and yawned a silent roar. He closed the Algebra book, took down Philosophical Analysis from the shelf above his desk and opened it for the first time with a sort of delicate ceremony. He blew out his cheeks, turned a page, looked at me, closed the book. He took down Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, in the modern English version that he wasn't supposed to read.

When Prep was over he turned to me and said, 'Farts can be funny things to write stories about,' and then he farted.

He disappeared until it was time for bed, and then, back in the room in the dark, he said to the bunk above, 'Australia?'

'Yeah.'

'What's it like?'

'Bright.'

'But you're Canadian, right?'

'Yeah.'

'Diplomat's kid. Same here. American.'

'I know.'

'Were you there this summer?'

'Winter. It's upside down.'

Julius was quiet for a while, like he was figuring something out.

'So in Australia I'd be on the top bunk,' he said.

'That's right. And your pants would be over your arms.'

'Right.'

There were long silences in those rooms sometimes when one would wait to see if the other was falling asleep or was thinking of something to say.

'I saw a picture of Australia once,' said Julius. 'A beach. And sky. And a girl.'

There was another long silence.

Everyone was in their bunks, suspended on different planes in the dark, conversation going upwards, from the bottom bunk to the top, to the roof. Sometimes there would be understanding. Sometimes the one on the top would roll to the side, look down at the bottom and say, 'Really?' Sometimes we were corpses in drawers, dreaming up.

'Can a woman ever really be on top in Australia?'

'I know one who was,' I said to the roof.

I'd been working out for over a year. By that September I could bench-press 225 pounds. Julius later said that when the bar was halfway up, my eye would open and swell, open and swell, like something that kept trying to be born. He never shied away from it. He said 'shit' in a tone of

admiration when I held 215 pounds above my head. The military press, weight pushed high, arms up straight in heavy victory. Once, he said, 'You should see yourself.'

In the first week I made a start on the *Iliad*, among other things. I read a lot during the week - after school, after dinner, during Prep. After Prep I went to the weight room. I liked going to bed with a mind full of someone else's words and my muscles full of blood. I don't think I really analysed it at the time - I simply got into that routine and liked it.

The sameness of each day somehow never gathered into a blur. The beginning of every year in boarding school holds a sense that something, this year, has to be different. I'm wandering the same halls, I'm restricted to the same things, but I'm older, bigger, smarter, and something has to change. A new knot in the tie, a conversation with someone you'd never talked to before - things like that would distinguish each day. The potential for anything to be truly different was so limited that tiny things would make a day stand out.

Julius was gone for the rest of that week. He hadn't left school, but he always disappeared after Prep and came back to the room after Lights Out. He said 'hey man' in the mornings when I was brushing my teeth. I kicked his soccer clothes to the side of the room, hoping he would notice that they bothered me.

Sometimes even though I exhausted myself with weights and was too tired to read I would still be awake after Lights Out. Usually at around midnight, once the Duty Master was settled in his own room, there would be a small storm of noises somewhere on the Flats. Pranks were one of the first signs that friendships were being made. You could hear footsteps thundering down the hall upstairs and you would know that at least two new room-mates were getting along well enough to disturb the sleep of someone in another room - usually someone who hadn't made any friends yet.