

# **Dara"s Firebird Lovesong**

Dara's Firebird Lovesong

by Damian McDonald

## PART ONE

Dara and Jody sat on the sun-scorched concrete with their backs against the bus shelter. They were sharing an apple, one of those tart green ones, and as Dara took her turn gnashing into it, Jody gagged and vomited up some peel.

‘Shit, are you okay?’ Dara asked, rubbing Jody’s back.

‘Um, yeah,’ Jody croaked, and started to laugh. ‘Just dying of apple peel.’

Dara began to laugh too. Looking at the little pile of fruit skin and foam brought on more laughter, and they were both suddenly breathless but unable to cease the spasms of laughter hiccupping up from their stomachs. They had to lean on each other to save falling over, and even the tut-tut tongue-clicking of the old Italian lady having to divert around them on the footpath could barely stop the infinite but elusive humour. The bus droning into the stop enabled them some composure, but once on board just looking at each other was enough to start it up again.

This was the coolest day Dara had had in forever. Jody and her had decided to wag school just that morning before rollcall, and despite her anxiety — this was actually the first time Dara had ever wagged — she was so, so glad she did. They were both in Year 11, and had only become friends three months earlier. They were from totally different scenes at school, but one maths lesson had changed all that. Jody had borrowed someone’s correction fluid — in fact it was Mr Dickinson, the teacher’s correction fluid — but it was borrowed from someone who’d borrowed it from him. At the end of the lesson Jody was packing her stuff up and didn’t know what to do with the bottle of white-out, so she tossed it out the window of the classroom. Dara had seen her do it, and thought it was just so cool. Jody had done it not in the hope of getting attention, because no one was paying attention, they were all packing up their own crap as fast as possible; she’d just done it. She looked at the bottle, didn’t know what to do with it, didn’t want it, so just casually tossed it out the open window behind her. Mr Dickinson began hollering for his correction fluid. Jessica, who Jody had borrowed it from, shouted that Jody had it as she left the classroom. Jody pretended she didn’t hear, Dara could tell, and zipped up her bag. Mr Dicko stopped her at the door though, and asked for his bottle.

‘Um, I don’t have it, sir,’ she said.

‘Well you’re not leaving until I get it back,’ he told her.

Mr Dicko was a complete wanker. Dara disliked him most out of all her teachers. He was just so humourless, and he always had tiny beads of sweat on his forehead; Dara imagined they must smell like the water from boiled pork bones. Stuff him, Dara thought.

‘Here, I had it,’ Dara said and retrieved her own white-out from her bag.

‘Thank you, Dara. I know *you* pay attention in my class,’ he said and raised his overgrown eyebrows at Jody.

Whatever that’s supposed to mean, Dara thought.

Dara handed Dicko her white-out and Jody and her headed out for lunch.

‘Thanks, um, Dara. Dicko’s such a dick.’

‘Yeah, he sure is.’

‘You saved my arse there. That’s very cool of you.’

‘No worries,’ Dara said.

Jody was one of the cool chicks in school. Always had been, since Year 7. Boys always liked her. Her natural bloneness, blue eyes but dark skin, conformed exactly to so many tastes. Jody was always effortlessly a part of all the cliques. Dara was geeky when she’d come to high school. She was thin, short, flat-chested, wore glasses, and her actual enjoyment of class-time put her at odds with the cool kids. But by Year 11 Dara didn’t care so much about being cool and appealing to the masses of Marrickville High. She’d started taking guitar lessons in Year 9, and was getting pretty good. Music had become her life, and she’d become the school expert on everything rock n roll. She felt comfortable with herself, and even a little cool. Despite the geeky approach to her immense interest in rock music — studying everything she could get hold of about her favourite musos, and practising guitar at least four hours a day — it’d paid off. Her peers found her genuinely interesting. Becoming friends with Jody was an unexpected, but nonetheless cool coup though. Dara would be right at the top of

the stupid social order when she moved into her final year of high school.

The girls walked into Steve's Guitars and Dara actually blushed when she saw it. It was like seeing a rock star hanging up there on the wall. A Gibson Firebird; and not a re-issue. Just like the one Dave Grohl from the Foo Fighters uses. Not one of the original daggy reverse body design ones, but a much cooler looking late 60s banjo tuners one. Black with a white scratch-plate. Just like Dave's. Dara was speechless. It was too high for her to reach, so she breathlessly asked Jody to get it down for her.

'What? This old one?' Jody said.

'P-please,' she whispered.

It was beautiful. Neck through body. Not too heavy. And signs of tough love all over it. She strummed it with the pick she always kept in her pocket. It was in tune. The action was so low it felt like she was playing cool air. Not like her old bomb of a Les Paul copy. She played some of her favourite songs, and it looked like Jody was getting bored, but Dara couldn't stop playing.

'You like the Firebird, hey?' Steve said.

'I'm in love,' Dara said.

'They're not for everyone. Give me an SG any day, but if you want it, I can let it go for fifteen hundred. I got a good deal on it.'

'Please, please don't sell it. I'll get it. I just need to, um, you know, convince my parents.'

'Tell you what. I'll tell people it's sold. For a few days.'

'Thank you. It's perfect.'

'If you say so.'

Dara couldn't believe the day she'd had. She'd jiggled with Jody — who she was sure she was developing a massive crush on — and found the most absolutely awesome guitar. She felt like she was on the precipice of ultimately cool things happening to her. She'd already convinced her parents that she needed a new

guitar. Hers was becoming embarrassing — constantly slipping out of tune and the pick-ups cutting out. Fifteen hundred was a lot, but her grandmother had left her and her sister three thousand each. She'd tell her parents she'd never ask for anything else. And she actually believed she never would. And as for Jody, who couldn't believe that she actually loved that old scratched up guitar, well, Dara would be happy if they just stayed friends, but if anything more should happen, she'd be more than happy. She could tell Jody liked her; it was just a matter of how much.

Dara's dad could be such a pain, but it was cute the way he was trying to get a better deal on the guitar.

‘And what about the strings? They look old and will break I reckon. Don't you think you better throw a couple of packets in?’

‘Ah, well, the strings were put on just a week ago, but sure, why not. I'll chuck in two packets of D'Addarios.’

‘Good, good. And a lead? One comes with the guitar?’

‘Dad!’

But getting the Firebird home and plugging into her little Marshall fifteen watt and playing everything she knew was, well, the term that came to mind was *better than sex*, though she'd never had that. And she felt if she could just have this guitar forever, she'd never need it. And that night she couldn't sleep for just laying there looking at the guitar on the stand at the end of her bed, perfect in silhouette.

The weekend her parents went to Dreamworld and Movieworld with her little sister, Dara invited Jody to stay over. Jody suggested having a party, but Dara said her parents would find out and shit. Really though, she just didn't want anyone else there. Dara did have other friends from school, but they were more like her: less into the social side of school, and way more into how what they did at school would shape their academic and professional careers. Dara felt almost one hundred percent sure she'd be accepted into conservatorium after Year 12, and so could afford to put a little time into the now of her life.

Jody turned up several hours after she said she would, but seemed in high spirits and had brought a bottle of sherry she'd knocked off from her mum's place.

They had a few glasses of the booze, and Dara had never tasted anything so disgusting. Sweet at first, but then something like foul bile juice. Jody didn't seem to mind it at all. Dara played Jody some of her favourite CDs: Nirvana, Foo Fighters, The Strokes, The Beatles, Led Zeppelin, The Who, The Stones — all the cool guitar songs. They danced, and laughed, and talked about the other kids at school. Jody had slept with some of the boys, and Dara was shocked to hear about how they acted with Jody; the boys seemed so confident and blasé at school, but from what Jody was saying, they were just like little kids — embarrassed about their penises and what they couldn't do with them. Jody asked which guys Dara liked. Dara picked randomly, because she didn't really like any of them. Not even just to talk to really.

'Brett Ellis is cute,' she said.

'Yeah, Brett's not bad. But he's going out with Meredith.'

'Oh,' Dara said, and hoped that conversation was over.

Jody asked to use some of her makeup. She didn't have much — just stuff people had given her as presents. They sat in front of her bedroom mirror and studied each other's faces.

'You're so lucky,' Jody said.

'Me? Look at you.'

'You look so good in black, Dara. You can just wear anything as long as it's black and you'll know that it suits you.'

'But you can wear anything. Anything at all, Jody.'

'Nah. For a start, I can't wear black.'

Dara had never seen Jody wear black, it was true.

'But anything else.'

'I wish I had your hair, your skin, your eyes. You don't even need any makeup.'

'You're crazy, Jody.'

‘You’re so lucky to be Asian,’ Jody said.

Dara didn’t know what she meant. And didn’t really want to know. She did have Thai heritage, but it didn’t define her. Not in her mind. She hated being reminded of it in that way: making it seem like such a big difference. She had so much more in common with Jody than with any of her cousins in Thailand. And it kind of hurt that Jody saw such a difference, whether she called being ‘lucky’ or not.

‘Believe me, you’re the lucky one.’

They made some Indian food, and just as they started eating, someone knocked at the front door. As Dara went to the door, she could hear whoever was there whispering. When she opened it, it was Peter Tootslakis, a Year 12 guy from her school. He must have been whispering to himself. Freak. She didn’t know Peter at all — only that he was loud and had a large group of friends, mainly all the Greek guys.

‘Yes?’ she said.

‘Dara, how ya goin’, mate?’ Peter said.

‘Um, okay. What is it?’

‘Just thought I’d come over, see what’s happenin’, ya know.’

‘Oh. Not much. What do you want? I’m having my dinner.’

‘Dinner huh? What are you havin’? Chinese or somethin’?’

‘No.’

‘So, what else is happenin’?’

‘Nothing. Look, what do you want, Peter?’

‘Just seein’ how you are ‘n that.’

‘I’m good. I have to go now,’ Dara said. This was weird. This was just bizarre. What the hell was this guy doing here? She didn’t know him. Had never, ever talked to him. And would never by choice. She didn’t like the vulgar cockiness



of Peter and some of his mates. They seemed to take pride in being ignorant.

‘Hang on,’ Peter said. ‘So, do ya go to the gym ‘n’ that? Ya look pretty trim ‘n’ that. Like ya work out.’

‘No, I don’t.’

Dara heard someone whistle in the street behind Peter. It was one of those things he and his group did to each other at school — like using someone’s name was beyond them.

‘Okay, Dara mate. I gotta scoot now. You take care huh,’ Peter laughed.

‘Bye,’ Dara said, and closed the door. Hard.

‘Who was that?’ Jody asked when Dara came back to the table. Dara was happy to see Jody hadn’t continued eating while she was at the door.

‘You won’t believe it. Peter Tootslakis.’

‘What did he want?’

‘I have no idea. Did he know you were coming over here?’

‘No, why? Is that what he said?’

‘No. It’s just that he’s never talked to me at all. And I’ve never told him where I live.’

‘Ah, don’t worry about him. Let’s finish dinner. Do you want another glass of sherry?’

‘Yuck. No thanks.’

It was gone. Fucking gone. And the amp too. The Firebird, the case and the amp. Gone from her room. It couldn’t be, and her mind wouldn’t allow it either. They must have been moved. But her wide open window and curtain flapped with the flooding truth of it. Someone had come in through it and stolen her beautiful guitar.

‘JODY, fuck, Jody. No.’

Jody came into the room and stood there.

‘What? What happened?’

‘My guitar. It’s been stolen.’

‘What? Are you sure? Maybe you put it away.’

‘Just help me look.’

They began searching the house, Dara flushed with a hysterical false hope. And then it hit her.

‘Jody. Jesus, that’s why Peter Tootslakis came. Someone stole it while I was at the door. Did you hear them?’

‘What? No, I didn’t hear anything. I put that CD on.’

It was true. Dara hadn’t even noticed. Jody had put on a Soundgarden album. Strange, she quickly thought, she wouldn’t have picked *Badmotorfinger* as Jody’s choice of record.

‘Jesus Christ. I can’t believe this. I’m calling the cops,’ Dara said, pulling her hair back hard.

‘The cops? Don’t tell them I’m here.’

‘Huh, oh, okay. Um, why?’

‘Just, um, my brother’s been in some shit with them. I don’t want my name coming up with the cops, you know, my dad would crack a shit.’

‘Okay. But I have to call them.’

‘Yeah. I know.’

It had been three hours and the cops still hadn’t shown up. Dara couldn’t help it. She had to cry. Jody hugged her. Dara felt the comfort in it. And despite her loss, her chest flooded with the hot feeling of true friendship. She nuzzled Jody’s neck. Jody rubbed her cheek on Dara’s head. Then they kissed. Long, long slow kisses. Dara’s head felt lighter than the oxygen around it. And she felt weak, but

had the strength to kiss on like this forever. She could barely breathe, but felt she didn't need to. They kissed and hugged for what seemed like a very long time, but when the front door pounded she realised that she wanted it to go on for far longer. .

Officer Polkinghorn seemed dubious. He asked where Dara's parents were at least eight times. And whether she was the only one home. Jody had gone into Dara's little sister's room and locked the door when the cop knocked so loudly at the door. Polkinghorn examined the window the guitar and amp had been taken out of. Then eventually said he'd pay a visit to this Peter Tootslakis.

Dara was wholly exhausted. After the cop left she fell onto her bed next to Jody and vanished into a thick sleep. Her phone was screaming at her to wake up some time later, and she had to reluctantly pry herself away from the warmth of Jody's arms and legs around her. Officer Polkinghorn informed her on the phone that Peter Tootslakis had been at home all night with his parents, and he was not in possession of her instruments. He then gave her an incident number for insurance purposes which she wrote on the back of her hand. Dara got back under the covers with Jody and her warm and sweet smelling body.

## PART TWO

Dara sat at her desk and thought back to the words Professor Lovelock had said at the beginning of her first semester at conservatorium. He'd asked the room of some two hundred students who of them were musicians. Everyone raised their hands. Then he'd asked how many of them were paid musicians. All bar a few dropped their hands. He then began asking students at random what they were going to do when they graduated. All were saying they would either become composers or professional musicians. Professor Lovelock then said that those who were already being paid to be musicians, maybe one third would be able to declare that their main income, and the rest of the room would become taxi drivers, sales assistants, administrative officers, telemarketers, waiters, and the luckier ones would become part-time function musicians or the really lucky ones music teachers. It was an ominous start to the degree, but Lovelock turned out to be a fun teacher and brilliant musician, and the degree was so cool that his words were forgotten, or at least repressed, along with the majority of things learnt in first year. But his words were true. Dara hadn't even ended up as one of the lucky ones. Well, nearly. She did work for one of the largest music act agents in the country. But she was an administration assistant. Everyone at the agency was a musician or an artist of some kind. The work wasn't so bad, and the people were cool, and she did get to meet most of the artists the agency represented. But some days it could be a bit depressing. And it made her think. What if she'd never lost the Firebird? Would her passion have stayed so strong that nothing could have stopped her becoming a successful musician? What if she'd just missed that lecture of Lovelock's, and his words weren't always at the back of her mind?

An incoming email notification on the computer screen brought her back. It was Andrew, wanting to know if she was able to meet for lunch. Andrew was a guy the agency often used as a sound engineer for newer artists. He said his talent was making drunk, sloppy musos sound slick and pro. It was true, Dara supposed. She'd gone out with him a couple of times, and he was nice, and didn't act cocky at all when it was just them, but she wasn't sure what she felt for him. She knew her parents would like him. He looked so young and clean. She felt that maybe she should give him a go. There wasn't much to dislike about him.

*Yep, where do you want to meet?* She replied.

They ate down at the Quay. It was a striking cerulean Spring day, and the sun on Dara's back was like a masseur's skilled hands. Andrew convinced her to have a glass of wine, and it only added to the perfect balance of weather and mood. Andrew was telling her about a band he was mixing and how he didn't think their career was sustainable, as they could barely play, and had to be wasted to do that. Dara had heard their demos and the first thing she'd noticed was that the guitarist's D string was way flat. They had a cool image though — not her thing, but certainly what was selling now — and, unfortunately, she could see that they would receive advances ahead of much more talented bands. Andrew was cute, but actually maybe a little conservative for her, Dara thought. Probably because of the wine, she could tell he really liked her. And he'd always agree with everything she said. And that was nice. But she felt she needed something more *dynamic* was the word that came to mind. But he did like her. And that meant a lot, didn't it?

They got up reluctantly to return to their jobs. Dara was a little dizzy. As they idled along the concourse, Andrew stopped her and kissed her on the mouth. She went with it. It felt like he'd thought about doing it for a long time, and was very anxious about it. But it was nice. He said he'd call her later, and looked like he had tears in his eyes. I must be drunk, she thought. She walked back to the office, relaxed, but not tired. A little wired actually.

She sat back at her desk and thought about the kiss. It was nice. It was nice that someone wanted her in that way. And it reminded her of a time. A beautiful, but also ugly time. The time she had with Jody back in high school. They'd kissed. And they were the most delicious kisses Dara had ever experienced. But they'd drifted apart not long after. Or Jody had drifted away. Jody had just started hanging around more with her people at school again. Even that asshole Peter Tootslakis. And Jody knew exactly what he'd done. By the end of Year 12 Dara and Jody barely spoke at all. And Dara forgot about her. Or tried anyway. Jody would just appear in her thoughts. Like today. After kissing Andrew. Then Dara did something she couldn't believe she hadn't done before. A myspace search for Jody.

She hadn't changed much, from the photo she had up of herself. Location, Sydney. Single, orientation, bi. Dara clicked on *Send Message*.

*Hey Jody, remember me? Must be what six years? Hope you're doing well. You look great. Would love to catch up if you're interested. Dara.*

She'd taken half an hour to write the two lines. Drafting and deleting. Finally going for the straight-to-the-point approach.

Three weeks. And Dara had noticed that Jody had logged into her myspace several times in that time. But finally, after almost a month she replied.

*hi dara luv 2 catch up. i work at general pants in the city, near myer. come by and we'll hook up.*

Laugh lines were the only thing distinguishing the contemporary Jody from the high school Jody. Maybe her thighs were a tiny bit bigger, but that suited her. Dara was relieved that Jody seemed genuinely happy to see her.

'Oh my God! Look at you, Dara. So funky now. Very cool,' Jody shrieked when she recognised her.

'Hi, Jody. You look great.'

'Thanks. Look, I finish work at six. Why don't we meet up at the Art House and have a drink. I can't believe how funky you are now! So, six then?'

'Um, yeah. Six at the Art House.'

Dara thought it was a tiny bit rude of Jody to just dismiss her until after work so quickly like that, especially considering how far she'd had to walk on her lunch break. But she guessed Jody didn't know that. And it also proved that Jody really hadn't changed in six years at all.

'So I tried a bit of modelling, but could only get some bikini work and thousands of offers for nude modelling, but modelling's not my thing anyway. They kept telling me I'm too short. Too short, can you fucking believe it? So then I got a job in a call centre and saved up a bit and took a loan and went travelling across America, have you been? Mad over there. Anyway, then I met Roberto. Great looking, but knows it. And, as it turns out, an arsehole. He came back here with me, but only lasted three months. I bummed around staying at mum's for a while, but she wouldn't stop hassling me, so I ended up having to find a job. General Pants is my third and *last* retail job, I can fucking tell you. What about

you?’ Jody said, sipping her Vodka and lemon squash. Dara wondered how Jody could go from talking to drinking without a breath.

‘Well, I went to uni, conservatorium of music, went to Thailand for four months, then came back and got the job at the agency. Not much else really. Still play guitar, but I never really got into a band or anything. Just record stuff for myself.’

‘Ah. Still play the guitar, hey? So do you see anyone from school still?’

‘Nah, not really,’ Dara said, ‘no one you would remember anyway.’

‘Yeah, I didn’t stay in touch either. Met too many cool people after school. Oh, no offence,’ Jody added and took a long sip.

‘I see. Yeah, I just concentrated on study. I know it sounds nerdy, but I was just glad when high school was over and I could try and start a whole new life.’

‘I wish I went to uni,’ Jody said.

‘It’s never too late.’

‘Hey, I love this song!’ Jody said, sculling down her drink. ‘Let’s have one more vodka and go dancing. I know a cool club on Oxford Street.’

The club stank of sweat and stale alcohol. It was half full and Jody seemed to know everyone. The music was way too loud, and all bottom end. And every song had the same composition: rudimentary three or four note keyboard melody played on the high octaves, bass line simply following an un-altering one-two percussion line with exaggerated bass and snare. After four more vodkas she felt as though she could dance to it though. But Jody would take off from the dance floor and run up to someone who’d just walked in, and Dara felt like an idiot left there alone. She sat in a booth and felt a little nauseous. She wasn’t used to conveyor belt drinking. Two was usually her limit on a night out. After half an hour of sitting alone Jody brought some more drinks over. Dara had a sip but felt like she was going to puke.

‘I think I’m going to go home, Jody.’

‘Home? Already?’

‘Yeah, I’m a bit too, um, tipsy. And I can see you have plenty of friends here.’

‘Tipsy hey? That sounds interesting. Have another viddy and I might take advantage of you.’

Dara feigned a giggle and a smile.

‘Look, I’m getting bored of this place. You wanna come back to mine for a bit?’ Jody asked.

‘Um, yeah, sure. Where do you live?’

‘Ten minutes away. Just over in Surrey Hills.’

‘Okay. Let’s go now though, Jody,’ Dara had to leave. She couldn’t take another minute in that fetid place.

Jody lived above a convenience store. The stairway up to it was very off-putting. It was narrow beyond belief, and Dara found herself wondering how in the world Jody got any of her belongings up to the flat. The precarious stairs also seemed to bow under Dara’s slight weight. But inside the apartment Dara was relieved to find a quite clean and homely flat. Two small but comfy looking two-seaters sat nearly facing each other, not the TV, with a neat little table in between them. The window and surrounds were decorated with dark-red Indian inspired fabric, and most surprising was a wooden bookcase with two rows of books; the rest dedicated to CDs and DVDs. But still, Dara couldn’t remember Jody ever reading a book at high school. Dara sat on one of the lounges and Jody bought them both a glass of red wine.

‘It’s just cask,’ Jody said.

Dara wouldn’t be able to taste the difference anyway. She sipped at it. It wasn’t nauseating like the vodka.

‘I can’t believe how good you look now, Dara.’

‘Thanks. You too.’

Toward the end of their night out Dara had started to regret hooking up with Jody again. But here, back in her flat — which smelled quite beautifully hinted



with lavender too — she felt that attraction flooding back. The attraction she'd had for Jody as a teenager. It gave her a feeling she hadn't had since then as well: a feeling of hope and of something new and fresh — and just for her..

'I'm starting to look old,' Jody said. 'But you've just gotten hotter.'

'You don't look ol —'

But Jody covered Dara's mouth with her own.

Dara had never had sex before. Not with anyone else anyway. And Jody had known exactly what to do. Everything felt so perfect it exploded out in almost endless crescendos. And Jody had looked so beautiful in the half-light of her little bedroom. Although Dara had thought about what she would like to do to Jody, she was a bit unsure when she actually had the chance. But when she started, Jody seemed to love what Dara did. Dara had been so into what they were doing all night she'd not even called or messaged her mum to let her know she wouldn't be home. Although she wanted to stay in bed with Jody forever, she knew she'd have to get up and call her mum.

It was early morning, but her mum would be awake. Her parents trusted her, but Dara knew they'd be worried as hell. Her mum was okay about it. She told her she'd stayed at a friend from school's place, and that she'd be home a bit later.

'A girl friend I hope, Dara,' her mum had said.

I hope she's my girlfriend, Dara thought.

She turned on the kettle and searched for a teabag. There wasn't much in the way of food and associated items in the place, but there was an ex-motel English breakfast sachet in the cupboard. She couldn't find sugar, but the tea was good anyway. Dara walked quietly around the flat. There was a small room next to the bedroom — too small to be called a second bedroom, but too big to be a closet really. She opened the door a bit and looked in. The homely order of the flat was counter-balanced in the room by stowed chaos. Things had been quite obviously pushed in there and the door shut. Half unpacked boxes, strewn clothes, piles of paper, even empty bottles. It was a bit of a thorn in the mood Dara had woken up in. It wasn't that bad really though. Jody had done a good job on the rest of the flat. And a wonderful job on her last night. Dara smiled to herself. She knew she'd have to take the dark with the light with Jody. She'd known that six years

ago. Then something caught Dara's eye in the little room. A Gibson logo. Gibson? Jody hadn't mentioned having a guitar, let alone a Gibo. Dara put the cup down on the floor and ventured quietly into the room. She moved some boxes and clothes and cleared a path to the unmistakable emblem. It was a case. An old one. With quite a few dings. And one that was way too familiar. Adrenaline thumped into Dara's veins as she pulled the case out from under a pile of clothes and opened it up. Her Firebird. Definitely her Firebird. She took it out and turned it over. That wear mark on the back. Jesus. What the hell? Did Jody buy it somewhere? Did she buy it from Peter fucking Tootslakis? Dara instinctively held the guitar in the playing position, knocking a box off the top of something: her Marshall amp. There was an old toaster in the box and it hit the floorboards with a chunky metal-to-wood clang that hurt the silence of early morning. Jody pushed the door fully open, squinting, and showing now her age.

'What are you doing?' Jody groaned.

'What the hell, Jody. This is my guitar.'

'Oh.'

'How the heck did you get this?'

'Shit, Dara. It's too early. Come back to bed.'

'Come back to bed? How come you've got my guitar?'

'Do you want it? You can have it.'

'I can have it? Jody, please. What's it doing here? You don't know the shit I went through when this got stolen.'

'Look, Peter what's 'is name gave it to me.'

'Peter Tootslakis? I knew that asshole took it! Jody, why didn't you tell me?'

'Because I asked him to steal it.'

'You? You asked him to?'

'Look, Dara, he was in love with me, so he reckoned. And he said he'd do

anything for me. I wasn't interested in him though. I was interested in you. And I thought you liked me too. But when you got that guitar, all you loved, all you were bloody interested in was that thing. I actually hated seeing you play it. The look on your face. I asked Peter to knock it off.'

'Jesus, Jody. I did like you. And the guitar *is* a thing, not a person.'

'But you loved it like a person.'

'So if I had started being friends with another girl back then, you would have what, asked Peter Tootslakis to kill her?'

'Maybe.'

Dara put the Firebird back into its case, hauled the amp out from under Jody's crap and started dragging them both out of the room.

'Are you going then?' Jody asked, biting the nail of the right index finger.

'What do you think?'

'I think you're being cruel.'

'I'm starting to think I need to be cruel.'

The guitar felt the same as it had when she first played it, even though the strings were rusty as hell. Dara doubted Jody took it out of the case more than once. Her rage had given her the strength to lug the amp and the guitar out of the flat and into a taxi, but back at home her emotions were crashing in on one another like birds caked with oil slick. She plugged the Firebird in and started strumming. Chords and notes just came, fitting and flowing. Dara hummed a melody over them, and began turning it into words.

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