

That's Why I Wrote This Song

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Insomniac Road Concert

'Billy, Billy, Billy.' throbs through the stadium. Billy, the lead singer, punches the air with both fists, *Don't judge me. Don't judge me.*

The four girls sing in time with Insomniac Road. Billy swivels towards the front row of fans. He lunges over his microphone making the words swivel with him. The four girls scream as the crowd surges forward pressing everyone into an uncontrollable wave. The music rises into a crescendo of pounding sound. Pip sings the song, reaching out her arms. Karen does as well, shaking her long blonde spikes in time with the beat. Irina's voice with its Russian accent belts out the words. Angie doesn't sing as she presses against Pip's shoulder.

The bass guitarist bangs on his guitar jumping across the stage while the lead guitarist hammers out music. Billy shouts, *Don't tell me how to live*, holding out his microphone towards the crowd. They sing back, *Don't tell me how to live*. Girls are crying and guys are yelling as fluorescent green and foggy yellow lights throb through the darkness. Body heat engulfs the four girls like fire. Sweating bodies glue strangers together as arms pump the air. Thousands of fists punch the beat. Surging fingers make a sign. Index and small fingers extend outwards – *we're here and we're not taking it any more.*

Energy, electricity, flames belch across the stage while the drummer goes crazy. His head half hidden by a black beanie, seems connected with the sticks as he pounds drums and cymbals. His whole body pulses with the wild beat. He *is* the music.

Suddenly Billy jumps into the crowd, surfing across heads. Yells, laughing, music, words surge over him. Pip stretches her arm out to the maximum. She touches him with the tips of her fingers. Tremours vibrate through her and she screams. Screams until she's gasping for air. And then Billy is pulled back onto the stage. Microphone in his hand, he sings, *Why'd you leave us Dad? Leave us in the dirt.*

The lead guitarist claps his hands over his head. Thousands of hands clap back. Voices rise - *in the dirt, in the dirt.* Girls on their guys' shoulders rock and sing. Singlets fly through the air landing anywhere, everywhere. Billy flips and his tattoos catch the lights. The base guitarist starts smashing gear on the stage as the music ramps up into a crescendo of mania. The audience is screaming. There's more smashing, until there's no more and the guys play their guitars and the drummer is beating his drums and Billy is singing. *It's not going to be like this.*

'It's the music,' Billy shrieks as the concert spirals downwards into the finish. 'It's the music.'

Everyone yells back 'It's the music. It's the music,' and suddenly Insomniac Road is gone.

Lights blare. People blink, refocus. The stage is smashed wood and smoke. The screaming has stopped. Security guards hover around as the crowd jostles and spikes towards the exits.

The music is gone but the sounds are still there. Insomniac Road pumps inside the girls' heads as they stumble out of the pavilion towards the train station. Pushed along by the pack, they lock arms. Goths, freaks, dress-up fairies, punks, fans connect in an energized mood.

Suddenly Karen gives a shriek. 'You touched him, Pip.'

'I did,' Pip gasps breathlessly. 'I did.' Suddenly she sings, '*It's not going to be like this.*'

'*It's not going to be like this.*' Irina hits the air with imaginary drumsticks.

'All those tattoos,' Angie crinkles her nose.

'Tattoos?' Karen grips Angie's arm. 'It's them.' She laughs, rocking to the imaginary beat. 'They're amazing.'

Pip rocks with her, then Irina, then Angie, until the four girls are all rocking and singing. '*It's not going to be like this.*'

CHAPTER 1

What you did was wrong

That's why I wrote this song

'The tempo has to be faster,' Karen taps her fingers on the table. Her long blonde hair swings in time with the beat.

Irina speeds up the rhythm of the drum.

Angie strums a chord progression on her guitar. 'Is that better?'

'It's better, but the chords. Something's wrong with them.' I scribble down a different combination. 'Try this one.' Angie strums the new chords with me.

'That's good Pip,' Karen nods at me.

'Sure,' I shrug.

Good? I don't know about that. I write because I write. I've always done it. Private, emotions-on-the-page lyrics. Not-to-show-anyone words. Lately it's been spilling out. Flooding me. Sometimes the music screams at me, exploding into my mind. Lyrics and music. I can't stop them.

Suddenly the sound of Insomniac Road blasts into the room and I jump. Karen is laughing. I shake my head at her.

‘Do you like this?’ Karen knows I can’t live without their music. She strums her guitar, mimicking Insomniac Road.

‘Very funny,’ I tell her.

Insomniac Road. It’s the sign for a break from our song writing. We relax on the carpet listening to the music.

I love the lead singer Billy. His songs are always inside my head, and on my phone. I’ve stuck photos of Billy and Insomniac Road onto my bedroom walls and wardrobe doors. Insomniac Road is the last thing I see when I go to sleep and the first thing I see when I wake up. The world feels safer with Billy there in my room.

I know it’s insane. Billy doesn’t even know me. What would he care? Except I think he does care. I connect to Billy, his honesty, his anger, his guts. When his father was drunk, he’d hit Billy. When he wasn’t drunk, he’d hit him too. She’d drink too. People called her trash. In the end, Billy called his mother trash too. It didn’t matter what happened, he kept fighting to make it. His music is brave. I don’t know if I could ever be that brave. I want to be.

Irina gets up to play the drums, backing up the Insomniac Road CD. ‘Sounds good,’ Karen calls out. She nudges me and starts talking about writing our songs.

‘Sure, sure,’ I close my eyes. The songs we’re working on are only due for the mid year school concert. It’s months away. The trouble is that we have to do major

research to support our songs. At least Karen and I are allowed to do our journal together. I'm working on the history of the genre. Rock genre. Secretly I like the research, but I don't love copying it into our journal and I hate the essays. Writing the arrangements for our songs, music scores for the guitars and the drums, all the technical parts, is hard work. It's like sucking out the soul of the music and flattening it. But Karen and I refuse to let that happen. There is no way our songs are going to be a '*Love Is In The Air*'. I can't stand corny, lovesick songs. As if that's real. Dancing around like some soap advertisement, falling into each other's arms.

Our music teacher Mr Connelly has always known what music means to Karen and me. Maybe that's why he never let us get away with anything. He'd accept Angie's excuses for no music homework, but never ours. Even though Angie's always played with us, it's different for her. Her guitar is just as exciting as a new dress. No, it's less exciting than a new dress.

Mr Connelly asked Karen and me, to perform one of our songs at the school concert. Asked is really the wrong word. Pressured, harassed, drove us insane. 'Writing music and lyrics are part of curricula requirements. So you have to write it. I want everyone to see how talented you girls are.' We groaned which made Mr Connelly smile. 'Showcase your work at the school concert.' We caved in. No choice. We're going to perform our own song at the school concert. But it's not going to be a '*Love Is In The Air*', that's for sure.

The school concert is the big midyear event with everyone involved, from class choirs to our rock group to the school orchestra. The rule is that all girls have to participate.

The senior music students do the arrangements, rehearsals, perform, run the concert. That means we have to do all the work, except when there are dramas and crises. Then teachers have to help. There'll be parents, teachers, guys, friends, everyone in the audience on the night. See what I mean by pressure?

As well as all that, we now have to write, arrange and perform our own song. It'll be a premiere. Of what, is another question. We've got to sound good or. A lump sticks in my throat every time I think about it. If people hate our song. No ... I've got to be like Billy. I'm doing it, good or bad. I'll play the rhythm guitar. Karen will be the lead guitar. Angie's on base guitar and Irina's on the drums.

I glance at Irina. She didn't have much of a choice playing the drums. Mr Connelly found her for us. Luckily Irina discovered that she loves playing drums, and we need her in the band. I want to be part of a real band. Play at real venues. Maybe even go to the Breakers Festival. Imagine being at Breakers, with iconic bands and singers? New bands perform there as well. Insomniac Road was discovered at Breakers. And it's on the river with mountains and fields and friends and music. Amazing music. I catch my breath. Maybe one day. One day, I could even play there, with Insomniac Road. It's a dream. You have to have dreams. Billy taught me that. I want a real band so much but Irina is the problem.

Mr Connelly may have found her for us, but she misses so many band practices. It's because of her parents. They expect too much from her. They don't like our music because of ridiculous Russia. Russians must hate drums. 'Drums are for idiots,' her

father roars. 'Russians play good, the violin and the piano.' Who cares about that? We're not in Russia and our music is important. Irina's important.

Irina was twelve when she arrived at school. I can't believe that was already three years ago. She played the piano and spoke Russian-English. Not a great combination. She sat by herself for months. Even now, I feel terrible that I ignored her. Then Mr Connolly introduced her to the Music Home Room and us. A Mr Connolly introduction means guilting us. We felt we had no choice but to let Irina tag along. Karen, Angie and I were already best friends. We've known each other since kindergarten and played music together since then too. We didn't need another friend, but we did need a drummer. So Mr Connolly, guilt and necessity worked. Irina was in.

'Irina,' I turn off the CD. 'Come on. Do a solo. One for the Music Home Room.'

Irina looks up, smiles quickly as she raises her arms. Slowly her sticks graze the drums, feeling the beat, creating the mood. Her pace starts to increase, until she's into it crashing into wild segments, with us thumping the floor. Irina's at home in the Music Home Room. I am too.

The Music Home Room is only for the music girls. There's carpet and instruments, a CD player and computers for music programmes. A brown beaten up lounge is in the corner. The fridge is a small new one the Music girls bought, with the money we raised on a school cake stall. The kettle works and Mum donated a sandwich maker. There are three private alcoves for Seniors. We've taken control of the alcove next to the window, that overlooks the parklands. Stuck on the wall, is our calendar with all

the dates for the big events – the mid year school concert, music exam performances, Rockfest, Big Day Out, bands at the Pavilion, the Breakers Festival. I add important birthdays. All my friends and of course, my birthday. Insomniac Road posters are on the wall, next to Mozart.

The school is refurbishing the room next door, to make an even better Home Music Room. Everything is being updated, including the couch. Even when Mr Connolly gets all excited about it, privately, I like our Home Music Room the way it is. I don't want to move there.

When Irina first arrived in the Music Home Room, she tried to disappear into the brown beaten up lounge. That was until she fell in love with the drums. I loved the way she could just play them. Then Karen and Angie connected with her music. Ever since, it's been three guitars and a drum. Two song writers and nearly a band. Irina is part of us now. Muso friends. Friends.

'Let's play.' Karen spins into a seat with her blonde hair flying. We grab our guitars and jam, mucking around, playing whatever works or doesn't work, until we're tired of it.

'I'm hungry.' Karen gives a loud strum of her guitar and brushes her hair away from her eyes. She has piercing blue eyes. People always stare at them. My eyes are brown. Present from my parents who both have brown eyes.

I throw a guitar pic at her. 'Shut up, Karen. You're always eating and you're still thin.'

She does a spin. 'Genetics.' It'll be another day of grated carrots and sliced celery for me. Why was I born with a bum and boobs? Another present from my parents. Well, my mother at least.

'Is everyone going to the party tomorrow night?' I wink at Karen.

'As if I ever miss a party,' she winks back.

Irina gives a drum roll.

Karen bows. 'So will you be there, Irina? Or is it study, study, study?'

Irina's voice is prickly. 'So I study. Is that a problem?' She doesn't wait for an answer. 'And yes, I will be there.' This time she gives the drum a slam.

I cut in quickly. 'Should be a great party.'

Angie is oblivious to the tension. 'Who's coming shopping tomorrow?'

Angie knows I'm coming. I've got nothing to wear. Irina can't because of endless parent duties, whatever they are. Karen doesn't bother answering. She needs food urgently. I do too. I bite into an apple. My emergency food supply.

Angie starts talking about what she plans to wear to the party. 'I need something that matches my green eyes.' I roll *my* eyes. Angie gets self-obsessed sometimes.

Everyone has to get home. Karen detours to the local sandwich shop to buy a chocolate milkshake and avoid strangling Angie who's getting on her nerves. We'll call each other tonight to confirm everything for the party tomorrow.

'I'm home,' I yell.

Dinner is cooking. 'Stir-fried noodles and beef tonight,' Mum calls out.

'My favourite,' I answer as I wave to Eddie through the back door. He's throwing a ball into the basketball net in the back yard.

All is happy on the home front because Dad is away. I can't stand the tension when Dad's home. An excited shiver zips through me. The party's tomorrow night.

Dinner is quick. I have to get to my phone. For a party to work there have to be arrangements. My phone has been running hot all week, as I make the final checks on who is going, where everyone will be, what time to arrive, what clothes to wear, whether we are going out afterwards, who is bringing alcohol. It is basic survival.

I'm exhausted from all the talking by the time Angie rings. She is the last phone call before sleep. 'See you tomorrow.'

‘I’ll be over at eleven-thirty. I need something to match my green ...’

‘eyes,’ I finish her sentence and roll my eyes. My eye rolling has become an automatic reaction lately. ‘See you tomorrow. Not early. I mean that.’ I’m definitely not a morning person.

Saturday, high noon. Angie and I head for the shopping centre.

Luckily my music shop job means I have money to spend. I love working there. Well, I don’t love the hours, but the manager lets me play my favourite music which puts me in a good mood. I also love getting my own money. I don’t need to ask Dad for money, which means no interrogation on why and what I spend. I only ask Mum if desperate. She never buys anything for herself, just for the family. It makes me angry.

Angie has money of course, from her father. She’ll never get a job except as a princess, and there aren’t many ads for them in the newspaper. Angie definitely thinks she’s wearing a diamond crown.

I laugh. Who cares? Angie is a princess and we’re going shopping and it’s going to be fun. I grab my bag and we race towards the shopping centre.

We target fourteen shops. I gasp when Angie comes out in a dress that looks like a bus stop, orange and square. Some of the dresses make me look like the back of a bus, which is even worse. We try on skirts that edge up our bums and trousers that drag along the floor, shirts where everything is hanging out and ones that look like we're joining a circus.

We're desperately laughing by the time we find something we really want to buy. 'The top brings out the green in your eyes. I promise.' I roll my eyes of course.

'We're gorgeous.' Angie twirls around making her dark hair dance.

'We're definitely gorgeous,' I giggle.

Saturday night. Angie's father drops Angie off with her overnight bag. Karen isn't allowed to sleep over tonight for some irrational reason devised by her Frankenstein father. It happens to be convenient, not that Karen's dad cares. Angie and I have private things to talk about.

Mum waves Angie's father away as we sprint towards the bedroom. Her voice follows us down the corridor. 'Hello, Angie.'

She calls back, 'Hello,' as she throws her bag under my desk, nearly knocking over my CD collection. 'Sorry.'

‘You should be.’ I smile as I put on Insomniac Road’s new album, *Passages of Living and Dying*

It hurts like death

Wars erupting

People dying, crying, lying.

‘Too much,’ Angie shudders. She usually pretends to like Insomniac Road, but not tonight. ‘It’s a party, Pip.’

‘Their music is about real life, Angie.’

She screws up her face into an expression of pain.

I can’t help smiling. ‘Okay, you win.’ I put on one of Mum’s old CDs. I call it The Laugh Collection. *Love Is in the Air*.

We both laugh but secretly Angie likes the song. She’s a romantic at heart. Her voice tinkles through the room. ‘That’s better.’ She flourishes her make-up bag.

‘You’ll never change, will you?’ Make-up equals living or dying to Angie. Sometimes I wish I was like her.

I slump onto my bed, facing my new built-in cupboards. Mum wants me to have mirror doors so my room looks bigger. Imagine getting up every morning seeing

floor-to-ceiling me, on both doors. Not enough that I have to worry about the world, my father, life and death, but I'd have to face me every day in magna-vision too.

Mum tells me that I am perfect the way I am. 'Sure, sure,' I say. I wish I didn't have my bum and breasts.

My boobs are the worst. Hereditary boobs. They are not like my room which is small. I'm always bulging out of tops, with the buttons ready to explode. When guys talk to me, they fixate on my breasts. It feels like violation. I fold my arms in front of myself. It stops me from slapping their faces. Sometimes I wish we didn't have bodies at all. We'd just be spirits meeting. It would be so much easier.

Suddenly Angie whacks my bum. 'Hey, are you here?'

I jump. 'Just thinking.' I rub my bum. 'Be careful of damaging the goods.' My bum. That's a tragedy too. Why can't it be smaller? I look at Angie. Wish I had her bum. But no. Breasts and bum. That's me.

The music hums while Angie whizzes around the room. *Love Is in the Air* finishes at last. 'No more. No more,' I beg as Angie goes to press play again. Angie giggles making me giggle too. Compromise. I put on some soft rock while Angie shows me endless pairs of ear rings. I point to a gorgeous silver waterfall of crystals.

Jewellery and clothes cover my bed in a clutter of colour. It's fun, but I have to stop Angie from trying on another set of ear rings. 'We'll miss the party. Then no one will

see *any* ear rings.’ Angie jangles some green beads in front of my nose. I grab them.

‘We’ve got to get ready. It’s on tonight, not next week.’

‘Okay, okay.’ She smiles.

I give the ear rings back to her. They sparkle in the light as she runs her fingers through her long dark brown hair. A stab of jealousy makes me close my eyes for a second. I shake the feeling away because I love Angie.

‘Boyfriend or die?’ Angie spins around. She takes my hands and I spin with her.

‘Boyfriend or kill,’ I call out.

That sends us into a hilarious fit. We fall onto the bed, knocking over Fluffy Rabbit who always lies on my pillow. I grab Rabbit, plopping him between us as we lie there laughing. It’s pretty obvious that we’re really nervous. It’s called camouflage.

Suddenly Angie jumps up. ‘Eye shadow?’ She fossicks in her make-up bag and flashes every shade known to the world in front of me. ‘Which one?’

I shake my head.

‘We’ll be beautiful together. Which one? Which one?’

Beautiful? I never feel like that. ‘Okay, okay. Sparkles. Silver.’

Angie spreads sparkles across my eyelids and under my eyebrows. Then she does her own eyes. She gives me a sideways glance, blinking her dark lashes at me. Then she attacks me with mascara. Too much, of course. I blink my eyelashes at her and head for cover. I slump onto the floor next to the CD and put on another disk.

My dressing table is groaning under her truckload of lipsticks, gloss, blush, foundation, eyeliner and mascara. Angie's make-up box could supply a supermarket. She's upgraded from princess when it comes to make-up. She's the cosmetic queen. Not that she needs it. She's gorgeous, with her wavy brown hair, green eyes and long legs and everyone can see that she has no bum. Lucky Angie. Unlucky me.

Bums. Eddie teases me mercilessly. 'Hey, Bum- belina. (Thumbelina.) That was very bummy (funny). Hey, the bum (sun) is out.'

Mum doesn't tell him to stop any more. She had no luck stopping him when I was nine, so why would she when I'm nearly sixteen? He loves sending me up. I don't. Sometimes I think I'll put rat poison in his cereal. Do all males have teasing disease? My father has it badly. Luckily Dad is away most of the time for work. He sends me postcards. There is never any teasing in them, so I know men can control themselves if they want to.

Angie shovels make-up onto her face. I really don't mind. It's comforting watching her line her lips with lipstick, then pencil in her plucked eyebrows. Angie is forever waxing and she's talking about a Brazilian. I instinctively put my hands in front of my crotch. I am a hairless type of person. I shave my legs and that is it. Angie has to do

her arms and nearly to the top of her legs as well as the bikini line. Even Angie isn't perfect.

I have medium length brown hair, dark brown eyes and dimples. My eyes are startling because they are like Mum's, brown and bright. But my father gave me the dimples. I wish I didn't have them. When I was little I'd sometimes stop smiling for a day to try and make them disappear. My father's dimples will never disappear. They are a hereditary curse, like my bum. My father. Shudder. He's away for two weeks this time for work. The house gets angry when he is home. He makes me scared. Quickly I take a breath and shake him out of my mind. I want to be happy. I'm partying tonight.

'Let me do the rest of your make-up,' Angie traps me.

'No Angie.' I try to escape, but she pulls me up off the floor. 'All right. All right. You win.' I sit on my bed while Angie layers foundation, powder, lipstick and silver sparkles onto my face, then reapplies the eye make-up. The intimacy feels warm.

'We're twins,' Angie holds up a mirror.

'Twins,' Twins? I don't think so. Angie is stunning. I smile because Angie thinks we are. She's already sixteen, like Karen. Sixteen. I want to be sixteen, but my birthday is ages away. It feels like everyone else is sixteen. I'm thinking about having a sixteenth birthday party with music. Lots of music. And boys? Maybe boys, maybe not. Boys. Everyone has or has had a boyfriend except Angie and me. Everyone has gone past

second base. I've been to first base with a few jerks. Kissing in dark corridors with guys I don't like. Karen is already at third base. She hasn't made home base yet, although she's been everywhere else.

Angie and I are sick of being the 'losers'. Angie and I like these two boys. They've said hello to us on the school bus. We've seen them through the school fence that divides the boys' and girls' schools. So tonight is the night. Boyfriend or die. Angie is targeting Christopher. I hope Oliver is mine.

The decision about what to wear is insane. We mix and match clothes. I finally decide to wear jeans with the slinky black top I bought today. Angie is wearing a black top too, but with green sparkles. Matches her eyes. I roll *my* eyes of course. She looks good in her hip-hugging shimmering grey skirt that flips out at the bottom.

I am struggling in my very high backless heels. If someone knocks me over I'll end up with a broken leg. What we do for love or should I say *luv*? I smile. Suddenly I shiver, rubbing away goose bumps from my arms. I pose in front of the mirror, focusing on my feet, not my boobs or bum. Think positive. The heels look good and I am going to look good. Will I kiss Oliver? Not that I want him to fall in *luv* with my shoes, just me would be great. I put on my apple flavoured lip-gloss. I am going to taste delicious as well as being very tall.

'You look great, Angie.' I fiddle with the edges of my top. 'Do I look fat?'

'Never, Pip.'

I feel nervous. I play on Insomniac Road again. Angie groans. I ignore her.

I look at the posters stuck on my walls. Angie doesn't understand them. Doesn't understand what they mean to me. She can only see the band's tattoos. It's not about tattoos. It's their music. Billy the lead singer has 'I LUV Mum' on his shoulder. I don't know if he really does love his Mum but. I love mine. I hum teasingly, 'Insomniac Road writes the songs that make the whole world sing.'

'Very funny.' Angie smiles.

Well, my world anyway.

'Are you ready?' Our chauffeur, Mum calls to us. She's waiting in the lounge room with a camera, when Eddie bounds through the lounge. He's got a date and is on his way out. When he sees us, he gives a long whistle. Angie giggles. Even I laugh.

Mum grabs him for a few photos. 'Just a couple with the girls.' Eddie loves a photo opportunity. As Mum snaps us, Eddie makes rabbit ears with his fingers on my head.

'Don't Eddie,' I shove his hands away, but the ears pop up again, on Angie's head this time.

'A serious photo Eddie.'

Eddie stands between us. Mum clicks a few times, then he looks at his watch. 'Got to run.' I laugh at the panic on his face. This must be an important girl, not that he tells us anything. A girlfriend is secret business. Angie saw him down at the beach talking to a blonde girl.

He disappears through the door, leaving a scent of male aftershave. He must want to impress this girl. Mum takes a few last photos before we head for the car.

Mum is the official photographer of my life. Embarrassing baby shots of my brother Eddie and me sit on the mantelpiece, next to the Kindergarten Kids photograph. That photo is so cute. Karen, Angie and I were five, Angie with her wavy dark hair, me with my curly brown hair and Karen with her straight blonde hair in pigtails, holding clanging triangles. Printed at the bottom of the photo is 'The Most Talented Award, Kindergarten'.

There are other school photos jumbled between them of Angie, Karen, Irina and me in school concerts. Eddie's head suddenly pops up in a few of the photos. He hates being left out. That's Eddie.

As we leave, Mum becomes teary. 'You both look perfect.'

I don't think so. I run my hands over my bum. If only I could lose five kilos. Even with my health program, walking home with Angie every day from school, netball and no chocolate, I've lost only one kilo.

‘The boys will fall at your feet.’

I wish that Oliver would fall at my feet, or at least my very high heels. ‘Okay, Mum.’

I give Angie a look. ‘Let’s really go now.’