

Weak Artist

William Kostakis

I imagined it.

Wrapped in bandages, to let my ego heal.

A mark beside the very representation of my soul.

Every black stroke on the whiteboard a cut like none other. Our teacher was forcing us to look inside, and tell her what we saw, in verse.

I can be personal. I've done it before, but never so blatantly. I wrote this guide to being horrible parents, followed Mum, notepad and pen in hand, and considered Dad's habits before he left to pursue younger Peruvian things. My pseudonym was my protection.

The class was to write a poem – more than one hundred words.

That's a whole lot of personal. Don't get me wrong, it's not hard to write poetry. It's just, I'm reluctant to.

What you do is, you take a short story, and massacre it into a few lines. Then you introduce your Calista Flockhart narrative to a young, budding extended metaphor and hope they hit it off. You can't just have words that sound good, and emotion; you need alliteration, and simile. It has to be composed to be over-analysed, meticulously edited, and edited, and edited, until it's so compressed that it takes five readings to actually digest. An idea masquerading as art, up to its metaphorical neck in all the clever stuff. Good poetry is like a small present in a large box, to give the illusion of something greater.

After half an hour, you'll have quite the arrangement of pretty sounding words and brilliant metaphor. And I refuse to do it, make myself vulnerable like that.

It's not that I can't write, I can, but there's always an agitated teacher to answer to. Always someone to say she wouldn't have done it that way.

The week before last, I finished the biography of a simple boy named Godfrey, a failure at Creator College, who would grow up one day to become God. He belonged to an average family, his father a carpenter, his mother a virgin. Both parents had high hopes for their only child. Unfortunately, he disappointed.

"I worry about Godfrey," his mother had said during the course of the first page, as she casually poured water from a pail, effortlessly converting the liquid into

wine before it caressed her husband's glass. While gifted in the arts, she was known by all men, particularly the married, as quite the virgin. "He's a freak."

To promote dramatic tension, I had Godfrey hear this. He wasn't so much eavesdropping as sitting at the table.

His mother by divine conception poured herself her second glass. After three more sips, she'd button up her blouse, close her legs, place her hands gently on her knees, and prove why word of mouth said she was such a massive virgin.

A wound was all that remained of that last paragraph. My English teacher wouldn't let that see another edit. Too inappropriate, but Godfrey's mother took the blame. It was her character.

When my teacher gives me one of her judging looks, I toss one back that reminds her, rather politely, that you can't hold the historians responsible for Auschwitz.

Godfrey's tale had been marked, both slashed and in the numerical sense. As I noted down the instructions for next week's task, I knew that with poetry, there was no tale to be judged. Just the teller.

Poetry lowers your inhibitions, the Sodium Pentothal of the creative world.

It doesn't let you lie. It doesn't let you hide.

Poetry's you. Right there. On the page.

Your work isn't judged, it's your soul that is. Your soul in just its socks and underwear, left aligned and aesthetically arranged in varying sentence lengths. That story about Godfrey, my soul in its Sunday best – it bled. Streaks of red ink over whole paragraphs, the scars of surgery my teacher deemed more corrective than cosmetic.

A thick line through the title. Judgement.

She wasn't wild about calling it *Hairy-Palmed*, and titling that with *Because God is a* – Now, I was willing to replace the 'W' word with *Self-Pleaser*, but scrapping the title in its entirety was not an option. Godfrey's turn to bulimia for acceptance at school, victim to ironic liposuction. The drastic reshaping of Godfrey's return from the bathroom after dinner to find his carpenter father handling wood, and his mother taking a break from work, a surgical feat. Godfrey had spoken cruelly to the lepers on page three, and it was subsequently severed from the body of text. Confused double-speared arrows scaled the margin, mapping the surgeon's desire to put the fat from the story's hips in its lips. Adjustments to a world. In poetry, there is no world to adjust, just words that are so dissatisfying on their own that their insecure composers assume they must be enlarged.

No matter how hard it's avoided, poetry has this way of emerging onto the pages of even the weakest artist. It's conniving. A generic prologue to a twelve-volume

Written by William Kostakis
Loathing Lola, out now.

fantasy epic in italics, a savage poetic commentary on social politics suppressed for so long that it disguised itself as a little limerick about elves just to be inked.

Characters write the poems their creators are afraid to. In *Bill's Battle*, I had Bill and Tammy sit in the bathtub – both clothed mind you, this wasn't *that* kind of story. Bill was watching the way her curls danced with the slightest turn of her head, and overcome by emotion, he recited a poem he wrote. Something about ink bending backwards for her. That was Bill being personal. He was taking on the firing squad, not me.

If I submit a poem, signed with my name, then it is me. No character, no context, and no quotation marks to take the bullets.

Every crimson streak a slash across my chest.

After all my years of avoiding poetry, it's caught me, pinned me down, and forcing me to look inside, and tell the world just what I see.

In rhyming couplets, of course.

William Kostakis' debut novel, *Loathing Lola*, is out now!

Fifteen-year-old Courtney Marlow didn't exactly think it through. She thought the offer to have her life broadcast on national television was the perfect solution to her family's financial troubles.

She was wrong.

Mackenzie Dahl, the show's producer, promised to show Australia a real teenager. Courtney was going to be a positive role model, someone on television without a boob job and an eating disorder.

Soon, everyone wants their 15 minutes of fame via a little bit of Courtney – especially her conniving friend Katie, and her stepmother, Lola. And Courtney is just beginning to realise that 'ordinary' does not translate to 'entertaining'...

