

Gaijin Skin

By Allen Davies

Extract six:

After a wounding five year relationship with Mario, Adam is content to be single. Being a self-declared celibate meant Adam and Ita Butrose aren't searching for a hot date. Instead, he could concentrate all his energy onto himself. In a strange way, being celibate felt like a spiritual experience. Of course he would never admit this. If he did, he would be seen by his mates to be a wanker and Morrissey wannabe.

Rebecca takes one step closer to Adam. She places a hand on his shoulder and pinches him.

"Just let go tonight, hun. You deserve a good time, let go, celebrate, c'mon. This is your last night in Brisbane, in Australia for who knows how long!"

Adam expects her to smile, but she doesn't. She doesn't have a frown etched on her face either, but her mouth forms a straight intent line.

"Don't need a man to have a good time. Not when I have you guys for friends," Adam responded.

"But you may need some E," Jo said brushing up to Adam, after which he stands back slightly.

"C'mon it'll bring you out of yourself," Rebecca pleaded.

"Then what or who is going to bring me back in?" Adam asked.

Jo said, "C'mon sister...good therapy they used it for depressed psych patients, after all."

Adam said to Rebecca, "Is he referring to me as a Psych patient?"

"Honey, we're all certifiable on nights like these."

"Speak for yourself" Rebecca laughed.

"No Adam....you're just a bit down and recovering from a real psycho, you know?" Jo said

"Good choice of words, depressed, rather than sad and tragic," Adam said.

Rebecca and Jo pop their pills. Jo takes two for extra impact. Soon all three form a group hug laughing and smiling while patting each other along the shoulders then back.

Rebecca said, "Forget that Adam, no pressure. You are getting on with your life, despite shit happening."

Jo added, "But don't forget magic happens too. So don't forget to be open to it."

Rebecca looks at Jo. "We need another drink," she suggested.

"Make it a rum and coke. Three all around," Jo said. Rebecca braved the crowd and struggled to the bar.

Adam looks at the crowd lost in joy and dancing on the dance floor moving to the house music and thinks that in one way their celebration of life is a kind of worship. In this scene the DJ is God. Sure if he wasn't crippled by past and spent months in a gym, Adam could wear a muscle t-shirt instead of paisley, flex his biceps and display his beautiful self, elevated above everybody else on the dance floor too.

Blinding strobes flash throughout the floor. They should come with a warning, Adam thought. Lasers shoot out from all four corners and dazzle some who look as if hypnotized by the green lines of light. These lights timed perfectly to the beat of grooves sounding mechanical and full of bass vibrating through the building. Throughout the night they would be occasionally broken by Latin soul, synth pop, dub reggae rap and jazz sounds. A collection of buffed bodies in crushed velvet hot pants or rubber and nothing else gyrate, drawing the others into their group. Mouths frantically chew gums, hands raise to the anonymous divas voice on one track as some wave glow sticks in the air. Others wear them around their necks. But Adam is too lithe to be a Muscle Mary. Lucky for him, Adam didn't dance: Adam is too self-conscious to display himself: more the observer than participant: swayer than rhythm queen.

While waiting empty handed for their next drinks, Adam hugs Jo.

"Does this mean your mine for the next thirty minutes Adam," Jo joked.

"You wouldn't have me," Adam retorted.

"No you're not my type."

"What is your type?" Adam asked still with his arm around Jo.

"Young blond and with a pulse!"

How is he going to cope without Jo and confidant Rebecca, alone in Tokyo? He has no idea. As long as Jo has known Adam, Adam has never danced. Supposedly, some people were dancers and others not. Just like some people were extroverted and others introverted. Jo is definitely extroverted, particularly after a few G@T's; he becomes an eighties version of Oscar Wilde at his peak, a latter day dandy. Also Adam's best influence and mate Jo teaches at a conservative private school by day, yet gets lost in decadence at night. It is him who suggested he take the teaching job in Japan. Without his encouragement, he never would have applied. Little did he expect to be successful.

Rebecca returns with Rum and Coke, a wicked look, eyes wide, and bites her lip.

"The leather man sends his regards," she told Adam.

"Ooh how scary," Adam replied.

Rebecca, as frank as ever asked, "See anyone you fancy?"

Even without scanning the throbbing crowd, Adam answered,

"No one".

What is wrong with him? How long did it take others to recover from frightful relationships? One month should have been enough time. Adam thought this celibacy was a cop out from life. Weren't gay men meant to be up for it at any time? Celebrate in any crisis.

Breaking up with Mario ended up with him considering himself to be quite brave. Now he is free as a single guy. Right now he is sure a relationship would drag him down to hellish depths and destroy all this new found freedom. Shyness mostly prevents him from having a one night stand anyway. He thought that could lead to a date, and then an affair, from which a relationship could grow. It is very comfortable standing on the dark side far away from "the display shelf", his name for the dance floor.

Rebecca looks at him too seriously, as if reading his mind. As if to placate Rebecca's silent request, Adam turns around. That look on her face is worrying him. He doesn't bother subtly surveying the crowd. Instead, he turns his whole body and searches the crowd. While looking away from Jo and Rebecca, someone fell backwards onto him. A heavy boot stamps on his soft slip-ons.

"Sorry." Another boy smiles quickly touching his chest in a slow dragging motion.

Adam forgets his pain, moves his foot away from his foot, and said,

"No problem."

One of his favorite songs came on, an obscure disco diva Madonna again from New York- You Can Dance belts out of the sound systems as laser lights beam across the dance floor.

"Wanna dance?"

"Well I can't dance with a wounded foot, sorry."

Actually he did quite fancy this tall brown lanky boy with a small well shaped shaved head, but Adam was such a lousy dancer. Adam imagines his head to feel quite rough and prickly under his hand. Adding to his appeal, he was wearing a white linen shirt. This reveals his smooth pectorals just above the nipples. Adam nearly reaches to return the touch, but he has turned away.

As he is right next to him, he decides not to reveal this attraction to Rebecca. Eventually, all Adam's inner most thoughts, even innermost demons, are revealed to her. She is his confessor. Unlike priests, nothing ever shocks her or titillates her. Tonight he'd keep his thoughts to himself.

Looking out from his peripheral vision, Adam watched him. This linen shirt spunk pushes up against him and feels warm. The object of his secret desire is lost in a circle of conversation with his friends. All of

them shout one line comments, muffle by the raving soundtrack, and then they laugh.

In his fantasy, he imagines him to be so natural and even gentle. He means gentle in an appealing way, not in a weak emotionally crippled manner. Pseudo new age guys never appeal to him. If only Adam could get the bravery to face him again.

He could break into his circle and say an earth shattering witty first line. Words escaped him. Oscar Wilde he most certainly was not- that would be Jo's role. What was the point anyway? He faces Rebecca and Jo again and joins them bopping to the beat. Lost in the beat, he nearly spills his Rum and Coke.

Couldn't he think less and act more. After all he is bound for foreign adventures with foreign men. Here they were all in a decadent wonderland where almost anything is accepted. Sure he had struggled: he'd been unemployed for over a year after finishing university. No one wanted to employ yet another arts student, particularly with long frazzled hair and a nose ring.

According to Rebecca, he just looked too scary- all pierced 6 foot of him. She always sounded like his mother when she said things like this. Replacing the real one wouldn't be too hard, considering they weren't in contact. Before tonight, he figured he was also less attractive as husband material, if he was long term unemployed. Sure he could pretend he was an out of work actor: there was less social stigma attached to that. However his honesty ensnared him. Soon he could brag he was an 'educator'

A second after, the music stops. Lights threw one concentrated white glaring rod of on the bar. Throbbing music bounces off the walls again. A stripper is balancing and dancing on the bar.

"You could do this, if the teaching doesn't work out," Jo joked.

"Sure after two years in the gym and a face transplant."

Unlike Adam, the golden stripper must be devoid of inhibitions and neurosis to do this job. Adam never would have the courage to strip on a bar. In fact, never would he have the body and tan lines to strip in the bedroom! Feeling almost like a prowling sex tourist, he tries not to stare and looks away.

"Wow Whoop, Yeeeh," leaped out of the crowd. Everybody appreciates this solidly shaped specimen of muscled manhood.

Jo looks at Adam and shouted into his ear, "A good man is hard to find, but a hard one is easy to find"

Adam agrees with him. Even though, he isn't really up for a hard man yet, at least not tonight. Jo slunks off into the crowd searching for a one night love. Looking back, he pokes out his tongue. Having known Jo for over ten years, while Adam was on the streets, he fancies he could sometimes read Jo like a book. His looks tonight seem to say; when will you get over him. Avoiding serious thoughts, Adam holds Rebecca's hand. With one grab of her soft hand, he lets go. He decides to be a voyeur and watch the

stripper. Minutes has passed and now he is down to a pair of glittering Speedos.

Adam mentioned to Rebecca, "He looks like a pumped lifesaver on steroids."

Even his speedos are tucked into his firm tanned arse. Each cheek of his buttocks wobbles as he cheekily reveals his body. It now is apparent that he is all muscle and devoid of any fat whatsoever. Each arse cheek forms perfect palm sized hand fulls. Adam asked Rebecca, "Would his head be all muscle too?"

"Probably, but would it matter?" she answered. Unlike him, her eyes were glued to his body. Rebecca hadn't even looked at him in response.

While Adam is over analyzing yet again, it was certain everyone else in the room was imagining the size of his crutch. They don't have too far to imagine. After all, his penis fills his Speedo almost bursting out. There is only a very thin sequined tissue of fabric separating him from total exposure.

Rebecca runs up to the bar and whispers something in his ear. Accusingly she points at her mate Adam. He ducks out of the way: this has no impact.

Just then, a hand reaches out to Adam and he takes it. Rebecca pushes his back. Horrified, yet turned on, Adam realizes it is the golden stripper boy. Thrusting a bottle of massage oil at Adam, Golden boy demands he rub the oil all over him. Sometimes life seems more dream like than actual dreams. In these moments, fantasy and reality melt into each other, leaving Adam speechless. How could he not oblige, nor did he want to cop out; bugger his shyness.

There Adam is in front of a crowd. His face feels warm, and his breathe is heavy. He feels like a smoke. A year ago he turned vegan but didn't stop smoking. The bar is wide but slippery with stale beer and vodka. Each foot sticks to it. There is about one meter to balance on. As he kneels down, it becomes more difficult to balance. Stripper boy lays backwards on the bar. From this angle Adam sees the outline of his crutch and pubic hair escaping. Reaching out, his hand brushes over his package. Adam only allows it to touch for a second, then returns to massaging his pumped up chest. After this, the stripper moves his hands down his tight abdomens.

Trying to forget the body under his oil dripping palms, Adam caresses every inch of that naked flesh. It feels like running your fingers over a boulder. Even his stomach is covered in defined abdominals. Adam's plan is to avoid seeming too turned on and sleazy, even though he has a zipper splitting erection. He plays it cool. Adam looks up at the stripper's face which radiates a perfect smile under a golden blond fringe.

This guy appears to love every moment. Maybe like a true exhibitionist he is turned on by others watching him, Adam thought. He has stripped to a g-string. As the music stopsd, the lights vanish. With

one quick kiss, that is more of a motherly peck, the show and Adam's part in it is over- his 15 minutes of fame finishes. The stripper, or golden boy as Adam thought of him, disappears behind the bar into darkness. Adam is left feeling hot and frustrated. Standing up, feeling his face which burns red, he feel dizzy. An ankle tangles with his other, and he fumbles, falling off the bar. The fall is only a meter or so. A leather man, the same as before, reaches out to catch him. For once, he is glad he is there. Looking into his eyes, leather man said, "Does this mean your mine?"

"For a minute of gratitude- yes," Adam said while finding his footing on the more stable floor. He gives the leather man a quick laugh and thank you, before turning back into the crowd. Everybody he passes smiles or laughs at him. Suddenly, he feels smaller even though he is six foot. The hotness in his face burns brighter. Walking up to Rebecca, he looks around for Jo, but he is lost in the crowd.

"Guess Jo is on the quest tonight?"

"You know Jo, too social for he's own good."

"Sometimes he's like a queen holding court"

"Like a queen. He is a queen, baby. Pure Oscar Wilde"

"All he needs is the crown."

Just like Jo said, perhaps it is time for him to be over it and find a man. Glancing sideways he notices the boy with shaved hair again who notices his glance. A gushing smile from him surprises Adam.

When he is nearly about to go to the shaved spunk, Rebecca hops closer to him, and announced, "I can't believe you did that. Lucky guy."

"Guess some of us are born lucky," he retorted

"You need good luck. Maybe you're karma's finally turned for the better"

"Not from want of trying. It couldn't get much worst."

"Honey I need a real man, you do too. Ain't going to find him here."

"What about a "sensitive new age guy"? You love a guy you can share skin care with and philosophical musings into the moonlight with!"

"Darl, only when they are gay. In romance I want a chunky rough spunk who can fix my motor without worrying about greasy hands."

"Think about it, we're having the safest sex-no sex," Adam said.

"We're in a drought and were desperate to get rescued from the desert, more like it. You're celibate anyway. What are you talking about, Adam hun?"

Raising his empty glass Adam replied, "I need a drink. I've definitely got a thirst needing quenching!"

"Guess, we're lame?" Rebecca said raising her hands.

"I know we've got our own language."

"Don't lower your standards, Adam. If you need celibacy and self-analysis do it regardless. No honestly, you are a true romantic. It's rare."

"Tragic and paranoid about AIDS more like it. So what does that make you?"

"Fag hag extraordinaire and mad bad and dangerous to know?"

"Honestly after that stripper, I could do with someone to share my pillow with tonight!"

Wisely she quipped, "Love happens when you're not looking."

"In the meantime, what's wrong with sex? Sometimes you just need to blow your mind and that other thing. Celibacy can wait".

They laugh but only for a moment.

Past has a habit of creeping up on you, especially when you are about to enter a new exciting future. In seconds their smiles are wiped clean. Each other look scared at one another. Rebecca's mouth contorts into a grimace. She bit her bottom lip and gulps the last sip from her rum. They see that venomous individual. Adam's x-lover, Mario, stands ahead of them in the crowd. Adam's instinct is to duck, until he realizes it would be futile: Adam's height towers above the crowd making him obvious. Instead he stands backwards.

Silently they look at each other and mouthed, "Oh fuck!"

Leaning forward, Adam cups a hand around Rebecca's left ear whispering into Rebecca's ear, "When you're young it's easier to make some mistakes, but honestly some mistakes won't let you forget."

Seeing Mario is a nightmare recurring. As far as hellish breaks ups go, this one has to be up there. During the course of the month, following the break, he'd: pursued him, spat at him in public, threw literature at his head in bookshops, took a hammer to all his furniture, spread rumors he didn't care to re-tell, and burnt his nicest clothes.

Jo jumps out of the crowd, like a boxing kangaroo. A young boy accompanied him and leans into his side.

"Did you see what I saw?"

"Do you mean the vampire haunting me?"

"Don't worry. Be relieved it's over," he said massaging him on the back.

Jo asked, "Need a refill?"

“Yes the stronger the better,” Adam said.

Then Jo skips off holding hands with the new boy. Adam thinks, weird how a boxing kangaroo can suddenly skip like a big girl. Adam has come to the revelation that the bust up was as toxic as the relationship had been. Without doubt he had wasted his time with a complete psychotic. Apparently, an unhealthy relationship had to end in a tragic unhealthy way too. Otherwise, it would be a huge surprise.

“Hopefully he will just ignore us,” Rebecca said with eyes opening wider.

Jo jumped up in front again and offered Adam his drink, and whispered, “Your nightmares back”

“I know. Don’t remind me”

“What’s she wearing: a giant stocking?”

“Don’t look. Don’t attract his attention.”

Jo always made Adam laugh and lightened the moment. It did look like one huge stocking. For some reason Mario thinks he looks good in a tight lycra one piece. It leaves nothing to the imagination.

“What were you doing with him, anyway? You’re out of his league?” Jo asked.

Out of the crowd the horrible face emerges angry and fuming. Somehow, Mario has seen him, despite Adam’s attempts to hide.

“I saw you. You slut. Groping stripper boy. You bitch! I’ve cursed you. I want your life to be hell. Revenge is sweet,” Mario squealed only centimeters from Adam’s face.

“Too bad it didn’t work. My life is a dream without you,” Adam said. Adam turns the other cheek away from him. Rebecca and Jo stand closely alongside him.

One hand clenches in a fist. Mario’s nostrils flare as if a wild bore, while another hand raises. Adam ducks expecting the sting of a slap. Except, there is no slap. Rather cold ice and gin cascade at him, almost like a broken faucet, drenching him. Adam stands there speechless. Before he could react, Mario escapes into the busy crowd. He is stockier and shorter, easier to hide. But not in a one piece stocking or lycra sock! Jo goes to the bar and asks for a towel and then thinks maybe he should ask for flea powder too! Adam stands there shocked and silent.

Does reality change and we experience it differently at different times? At one time he seemed like a dream lover. Tonight he seems like a psychotic bitch with extremely bad taste in accessories as main couture. Had he always been like this? Was he blinded by Love? Or had he changed? Letting out all his negativity and spite has that turned Mario into this creature, who gave new meaning to the word foul. It was as if he wanted to suck the life and very marrow of his existence out al in a one piece lycra sock! As

much as Adam tries to let go and forget, he couldn't. Here in Australia there would always be something to remind him. Now he carries a heavy weight of hate and shame about being stupid enough to be with Mario in the first place; talk about young and stupid. Adam bows his head and shakes off the drink the best he could with shaking hands.

Rebecca takes the towel from Jo who had gone to the bar to get it and wiped his face. She said, "Don't worry. Tomorrow you'll be Tokyo. A world away."

She is right. Rebecca is forever sage like. Tomorrow, enough physical and emotional distance would be between them. Lifting his drink he sips it, turns away, and feels his crucifix under his closed shirt collar.

Mario emerges out of hiding from the crowd. Never had Adam hit Mario, but tonight he feels compelled to smack him.

"Just ignore him," Rebecca said as if she was sensing his normally passive mood changing and gurgling away the calm.

Yet, Adam can't ignore her advice. Watching him out of the corner of his eye, Adam pretends to be lost in conversation with Rebecca. Adam could see Mario gyrating up against a stranger on the dance floor. He wondered how sweaty that lycra could get? Then reminded himself to wear rainbow socks instead of black lycra ones, but on his feet and not body. It was almost obscene, especially with that fat muscled body and delusion that he was catwoman in a cat suit. Adam hopes he wouldn't be recognized by him ever again. Tonight is a celebration of a new start, not a re-living of his past ill fortune. Mario's dancing seemed strange and uncoordinated. His arms float around and then stop, like unwashed Gonzo the Muppet on steroids. Mario grabs any stranger off the well lit dance floor.

Mario sprints faster than Adam had ever seen. With that rugby union type body, he barges his way through the thick line into the bathroom. Adam's heart still tells him to be concerned, but his mind tells him to forget the past. Moving on was hard, but despite reluctance he is moving on tomorrow figuratively and literally moving country. In one year he hopes to find true love, realize a dream job, and in the process grow wiser through adventure. It would be his version of skydiving: he would never jump out of a plane but is prepared to jump into a new life and fly, until he knows where to land. Still he looks worried. What if he had over heated, was having heart palpitation. He did look very sweaty. Someone had to be there for him to make sure he isn't going to collapse. Then, another man followed behind Mario holding up his back. He'd be alright. He is welcome to handle him now. Adam is relieved.

With a quick re-introduction to stripper boy, in defiance Adam's body tells his mind something completely different. It is: get laid. Just do it safely. Get hot sex! Fuck AIDS! Let go of celibacy tonight. That

iridescent Colgate grin greets him again. Golden boy was half clothed with tight Levi jeans and no shirt. Unbelievably the golden boy with the impossible body is making moves on him. First he accidentally bumps into him and feels his groin; not very subtle at all. Continuing with his chiselled smile throughout, golden stripper quizzes him with personal questions and throws in a joke or observation. This is perfect for Adam, because stripper boy initiates everything; he isn't forced to make the first move. All he has to do is laugh at the right moments, smile in adoration, and touch him occasionally on those bulging lateral deltoids. It takes Adam's mind off Mario, the fallen angel, who is now lurking in the shadows.

Jo and Rebecca move away and keep a discrete distance; yet they look at Adam's and golden boy's way pulling faces. They move onto the dance floor and continue doing this.

Jo dancing was a wild sight. What the hell, he thought. Music throbs through him and the crowd sways in unison. All the rum was having an effect. Adam asks the golden boy home, to which he fortunately or unfortunately, he couldn't be sure, answers yes.

Leaving the room with his ego still intact, Adam waves and winks at Rebecca and Jo. Both retort cynically with a light clap as if they were watching an opera. At the door exit they bump into Mario who sways at the bathroom door wiping vomit from his mouth. Luckily, Mario is too out of it too again recognize his x-partner for life. At least stockings body or not are wash and wear. Never had Mario been so out of it and so sick, but as Adam realizes tonight there is a first time for everything, namely sex and no obligations or personal history needed. Maybe no condoms too. Despite everything, silently Adam wished Mario well. Adam thanked God for new starts and new chances. Amazing himself, he prayed for Mario, prayed for his happiness, prayed for him to get on with life free from bitterness. With help from his friends, he is going to let go of celibacy and jump into the unknown.

As they tumble out of the club and on top of each other and squeeze into the back of a taxi, only one of the rabid Christians approach the closing door.

He looks intent, then licks his lips, strokes his bulge in pants crutch, points at Adam, and mouthed, "I want you."

Bizarre, Adam thought, before locking lips with his golden boy and stripper forgetting the taxi driver has a rear view mirror. If only he had condoms, but passion is too hot to stop sometimes.