

**SPLIT**  
**The prequel chapter to SPILL**  
**Melanie Pickering**

Copyright 2021 Melanie Pickering



The darkened living room reeked of sweat, cigarettes, and that stale beer stink that always reminded Flynn of piss. His heightened senses made the foul stench a hundred times worse as he stepped through the front door. Behind his ribs, his heart hammered in anticipation. Where the hell was Mick?

An angry grunt came at him from his right, and he stepped back, dodging the blow that swung at his face.

‘You don’t get to hurt me, old man. Only I get to do that,’ Flynn said through clenched teeth. As if to prove the point, the newest slice on his torso stretched and tore open.

‘Wouldn’t be too sure of that.’ Spittle flew from Mick’s mouth as his bulk filled the doorway.

Flynn’s gaze took in the stained wife-beater and ill-fitting rugby shorts, the durry hanging from his lips. *Typical bogan shit-kicking arsehole.*

Anger lit his veins and poisoned his blood. He was done fearing this sweaty, middle-aged thug snarling before him. His mum’s latest piece was nothing more than a parasite and a coward.

Dropping low, he brought his fist up under Mick’s chin. The older man was slower—his reactions dulled by alcohol. His jaw, however, was like granite, and Flynn knew the exact

moment the skin on his knuckles split open, slicking his fingers with blood. Adrenaline surged. Satisfaction tinged with remorse.

Mick staggered back against the armchair, rubbing at his jaw with meaty fingers. 'Huh.'

Flynn edged away, his whole body on high alert, knowing the prick would retaliate. Also, knowing that sleeping at home would be impossible tonight. Maybe forever.

'Get the fuck out.'

Flynn didn't need to be told twice. His lanky frame skidded along the balcony and down the stairs, dropping his skateboard with a slap on the concrete drive. He thought he heard Mick spit over the balcony, but he was already putting metres between them.

That fucking prick. What right did Mick have to kick Flynn out of his own home?

It took a few minutes for the adrenaline to wear off and, as Flynn's body cooled, he began to shake. Under the next streetlight he bent double, catching his breath and tried not to puke. He didn't regret standing up for himself, but there would be no coming back from this. It changed everything.

The cut on his side hurt like hell, but the pain reminded him he was alive. He could handle it, although he suspected it was now worse than what he'd self-inflicted that morning. Lifting his t-shirt, Flynn used the light on his phone to have a look. The cut had split right open, and although the blood was congealing, he knew it would need some cleaning up. *Shit*. It wouldn't be too hard to find an all-night servo bathroom to wash in, but he needed somewhere safe to crash for the night. And he didn't want to go to Luka's this time.

Even though his best mate had been there for him every other time he'd had a run-in with Mick, he was loathe to disturb the Marinelli family so late at night. He let out a huff at that irony. If only he'd come home on time, he could've snuck in under Mick's radar, and none of this would've happened.

Maybe.

Maybe not. The prick was too unpredictable, even when he was sober.

Gritting his teeth against the ache in his side, Flynn skated off, only slowing when he passed by the school. The sprinkler shed sat at the edge of the oval, like a small, dark bunker. If there weren't so many damn mosquitoes, he would have been happy to hole up in there for the night, but being the middle of summer, he'd get eaten alive.

It was after eleven. Even though he knew Luka would still be up gaming or some shit, and his neighbourhood wasn't that far away, Flynn hated to burden his best friend or his family. Not that he had much choice. It was that or taking a chance on the streets.

Flynn jumped over the garden bed and slunk up the side of the Marinellis' house to avoid setting off their security lights. At the back, a predictably soft neon glow shone from Luka's bedroom window. Propping his skateboard against the brickwork, Flynn slid open the sash and hoisted himself up on the sill to climb inside. As he crawled through, his shoe got caught up in the curtain and he stumbled into the bedroom, almost pulling the iron rod down on himself and knocking over a pile of books.

'Fuck!'

'Make some noise, why don't you?' Luka stood just inside the doorway, holding an energy drink in one hand and a large tub of tiramisu gelato in the other. He didn't look surprised in the least.

Flynn slunk to the carpet with his back to the wall. 'Sorry, man.'

Luka simply walked toward him, both hands outstretched. 'Which one do you want?'

Flynn declined both. 'I'm buzzed enough as it is, but I could do with some ice.'

'Help yourself.' Luka motioned to the hall and dropped to the floor beside him.

Flynn shucked off his shoes and padded to the kitchen to retrieve some ice-cubes. Bundling them in his t-shirt, he tied the whole thing around his hand and returned to find Luka already setting out the roll-up mattress and some sheets. 'Cheers.'

Luka tossed him a pillow, eyes flashing to his ribs where the cut blazed angry and red. 'You okay, mate?'

Flynn managed a nod as the burn from the ice penetrated his swollen fist. He'd cleaned up most of the blood while in the kitchen, and Luka didn't press any further. He never did, knowing that Flynn would talk when he was ready.

Which was usually never.

Because talking didn't make him feel better. Only one thing did that.



Flynn waited until he was sure Mick had left before he ventured back home. The prick had a regular Saturday date at the TAB, so he should be safe for a couple of hours at least. Still, he jumped off his board at the bottom of the drive and carried it the rest of the way, just in case Mick hadn't left yet and was listening out for him.

Voices drifted down from the second floor and he froze in the harsh, blazing sun. It couldn't be Mick—the voices were female. Yet, it was barely ten in the morning and already they sounded tired and frustrated. Had Mick called the cops?

Flynn slunk backwards as movement flashed near his front door. A girl appeared on the balcony, before disappearing into the flat beside his. Intrigued, he backed into the shade by the drive, and sat down on the retaining wall, so he could observe from a distance.

His neighbouring flat had always been a revolving door of tenants, and the last lot had moved out weeks ago. Flynn never made an effort to know them. But maybe that was about to change. And it wasn't just because this girl was pretty. She looked as though she didn't belong, and that created a problem. It made her an easy target for Mick.

The girl reappeared, shuffling down the stairs and around the back of the building to a small hatchback that had seen better days. She pulled a suitcase from the boot and dragged it back to the stairwell. He guessed it had been pink once, but was now faded and

dirty, and stuffed full to overflowing. As she hefted it up one step at a time, the wheels hit each rise of the stairs with a resounding crack that echoed off the concrete.

The sound changed to a dull thud and something small rolled off the stairs. Two small somethings. No doubt her suitcase wheels, seeing as they'd taken quite a beating already. Flynn leaned forward, chewing his lip. This was better than any movie he had to watch for school. What was she going to do now?

The girl paused, her head bent low. Then she slumped onto the steps and buried her face in her hands. Hell, she wasn't crying, was she? She wouldn't last two seconds living next door to Mick if she was that soft. But then her head lifted, and she looked straight at him.

Flynn stared back. Should he risk getting to know her? Would it be worth it? Who knew how long she'd be staying, and she probably had a father to look out for her, anyway. And he sure as hell didn't need to get on the wrong side of another middle-aged man right now.

Still, he walked towards the small wheels laying on the path under the stairs and picked them up. They didn't appear broken and would likely snap back in place, but he couldn't tell for sure and didn't really care. It wasn't his problem.

Climbing the stairs, he gazed at the girl through his fringe. Now that he was closer, he could tell that she was about his age and shorter than he'd first thought. Her body was quite athletic, but he doubted she could manage the suitcase on her own. He held out the wheels. 'Unit six, right?'

She took them from him with trembling hands and a barely recognised nod. Shit, had she noticed the blood on his t-shirt? He knew he looked like hell. And since when did he care, anyway? But then her eyes slowly rose to his—huge and blue. They weren't dark like his own, but the colour of the denim shorts she wore.

Silently, he picked up her luggage and dropped it by her door. Turning back to the stairwell, he waited for her to appear, though he didn't know why. He sure as shit wasn't

looking for gratitude, and he really didn't need to get involved with this girl. What he needed was a shower and a clean shirt. He blew out a breath as she approached.

'Thanks,' she said with a shy smile.

He shrugged, inching backwards to put some distance between them. 'If you need anything, I'm next door. Number five.'

Then he retreated into his own flat, determined to forget all about her.



The rooftop of the unit block was blistering in the heat, but Flynn didn't give a shit. He knew he needed to come up with a plan for when Mick came back, but right now, all he wanted to do was escape.

Even though he wasn't a fan of heights, the flat roof was secured with a brick surround and reminded Flynn of a carpark. And when he skated up there, it was like flying. He kept an old board tucked into one of the far corners behind an air vent for when he needed it. Like now.

It was weird—even though the walls of the flats were paper thin and everyone could hear each other's business, he could make as much noise as he wanted up there and no-one ever knew.

Or so he thought.

He didn't know how long the new girl had been standing there watching him, but in the shadows cast by the iron stairwell, she was like a ray of fucking sunshine. Catching her eye while in the middle of a lay-back slide, he flashed her a smile.

'What's your name?' she called out, her boldness surprising him.

He stood tall and flipped his board to a stop, grabbing it by the toe. 'Flynn.'

'Hey. I'm Amy.'

Having heard her mum calling out to her all morning, he'd figured that out already. But he kept it to himself.

She sauntered across the roof, stopping to rest her elbows on the ledge. Flynn grinned. The view might have only been suburban, but he'd always found it peaceful. And for some ridiculous reason, he hoped she did, too.

He was about to say so when she braced her hands on top of the ledge and next thing, was standing on top of it. Flynn's heart almost lurched out of his throat. He dropped the skateboard and lunged for the edge.

But she barely gave him a glance before performing a perfect cartwheel along the ledge. *Jesus fuck*. It was only a foot wide. Her scuffed high-top sneakers landed beside him. She was looking to the sky.

'Why do you skate up here?'

His heart rate was still slowing down after her little stunt, but he didn't need to think about the answer. 'Because up here, I can forget about everything that's going on down there.' He turned to lean on the ledge next to her. 'It's like a totally different world. Where I can just be me.'

She glanced away, nodding. 'Do you mind me coming up here?'

He looked her over—from her tiny denim cut-offs to the cropped white t-shirt that looked like it came straight out of the late eighties. *Fuck, no*. 'Not at all. You brighten up the place.'

She frowned and looked at the ground. 'No-one's ever said that to me before.'

'You're kidding.' She was one of the prettiest girls he'd ever seen.

'Nope.'

She sighed and looked back over the edge; her honey-blonde hair catching in the hot wind and tickling his arm. He didn't hate it.

'Do you know what it's feels like to be invisible, Flynn?'

She then told him that her dad had left them behind four years ago for a new family, and how she and her mum had been on the move ever since. He didn't share with her his own sordid past. How many times had he wished he could've just disappeared? Being invisible was more than just a state of mind.

'When you have to shift schools and homes a lot, you get pretty good at not being seen. I swear I'm like a ghost sometimes.'

Clearing his throat around a sudden lump, his voice dropped low and husky. 'I don't think you could become invisible if you tried.'

She frowned at him as if he were joking. And *shit*, that tore him apart.

He was stuck between needing to walk away and wanting to protect this girl from Mick's attention. He didn't know why; he hated the idea of being anyone's saviour. Yet, there was something about her openness, her easy vulnerability that called to his baser instincts.

'Anyway, I'd better go.' *Great. Now you've made her feel uncomfortable.* 'But I just came up to say hi and thank you again for your help. You didn't have to, and it was really nice. So, maybe I'll see you around sometime?' Hope shone from her eyes.

Was she flirting with him?

'Uh, yeah.' Flynn found he was grinning. Like full-on smiling. 'Yeah. I guess.'

She turned and retreated to the stairwell. Once she'd disappeared from view, he called out to her. 'Hey, Amy?'

Her head popped up above the roofline. 'Yeah?'



There was still a couple of weeks until school started, and the girl next door wanted to see him again. He could do better than *sometime*.

‘Anytime.’

## THE END

Thank you for reading SPLIT. I hope you enjoyed getting a glimpse into how Amy and Flynn’s story began. If you’d like to find out what happened after their meet-cute, you can download SPILL at your favourite store below.

[Amazon](#) | [Barnes & Noble](#) | [Apple Books](#) | [Kobo](#) | [Google Play Books](#)

[Book Depository](#) | [IndieBound](#)