

# **The Coliseum (*Mayfield*)**

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## Abstract

*The Coliseum (Mayfield)* is about the life of local Newcastle eccentric Leo Maley. After Leo's death in 2000 it was discovered that this man who lived like a pauper, was in fact a millionaire. This fictional biography explores some of the stories that surround Leo, where memories of him have come to possess almost mythical status.

Within *The Coliseum* these myths are at times counterbalanced by other stories, making the truth about Leo Maley as intangible as his reclusive life.

*The Coliseum (Mayfield)* also reveals some of the many faces of Mayfield, as it exists within Newcastle; a place with perhaps as much ambiguity as Leo Maley himself.

A critical and reflective exegesis *The Coliseum: Storytelling, archetypes and place as icon* follows the creative component. This work investigates the challenges associated with collecting oral histories, how people fit stories of their lives around their personal notions of archetype-in particular, the eccentric-and how these stories in turn reflect upon and influence change in the place in which they are told.

# The Coliseum (Mayfield)

Meg Vertigan



The Coliseum circa 1990

## **THE COLISEUM (MAYFIELD)**

### **Preface**

*The Coliseum (Mayfield)* is an imaginative biography of infamous Mayfield eccentric, Leo Maley. Leo Maley lived his entire life in a shop named The Coliseum. Upon his death local newspapers ran stories trying to uncover the mystery of Leo's life. His friend, Peter Boyd, put a notice in the paper announcing a memorial service for Leo Maley. Many locals attended and told their stories of Leo and The Coliseum.

The stories within this book were collected from newspaper articles, court transcripts, family letters and local stories told by people who lived within the community of Newcastle. These local stories may or may not be able to be substantiated, but they all have helped to create the legend of Leo Maley.

The new emperor of The Coliseum, George Burke, allowed access to his private collection of letters, photos, newspaper articles and other memorabilia of his predecessor. George Burke has done a wonderful job of renovating The Coliseum with respect for its history, and has always welcomed customers' stories of Leo Maley.

All the names within *The Coliseum (Mayfield)* have been changed.

*NO PROBLEM HERE, BUSINESS AS USUAL, IT'S ONLY THE STUPID COUNCIL*

*From sign in Coliseum window*

**Margo**

*James Carol placed the Styrofoam box in the centre of the tables and looked out the empty shop window. He watched as an attractive blonde came from the opposite direction, skirting around two men with faded green tattoos, who despite their sunken bodies seemed to take up the whole footpath. She ducked into the doorway of the shop to let the men pass.*

*James turned back to his task. He'd pushed two tables together in the centre of the room. The tables were of differing heights making it impossible for him to place the box neatly in the centre, as he had imagined. He pushed the box to the head of the table and stood for a moment, contemplating the chairs.*

*There were eight chairs around the tables. Surely that would be enough? He pushed at the chairs, fussing with the distance between them and wondering whether anyone would come to sit on them.*

*—Do you need any help?*

*James turned to see the blonde woman standing in the doorway.*

*—Ah, no. Everything's under control, replied James, pleased that someone had seen the notice he'd placed in the paper.*

*—I'm James Carol.*

*—Margo, she shook his hand, surprised at its smallness.*

*His eight chairs were soon full and more people were arriving at the disused bike shop. They stood in the doorway and looked at him expectantly. James introduced himself as he returned from the storeroom for more folding chairs. He resembled one of Santa's elves as he hurried around, muttering into his oversized beard.*

*The people in the room became willing volunteers and were soon coping with the uncomfortable feeling of being in a room full of strangers by arranging and rearranging chairs. When as many people were seated as could be and others stood behind them an old lady entered and paused while she waited for the room to re-organise itself to give her a seat.*

*James Carol stood at the end of the table, his fingers picking nervously at the box in front of him. He focused his eyes on the old Raleigh race bike poster on the wall opposite. He pulled off a few balls of foam and rubbed them between his fingers as he spoke*

*—My name is James Carol, and I'd like to thank everybody for coming today. Your presence here today, well it shows how Mr Maley was such a well-known member of the community. Mr Maley obviously, aroused passionate feelings in all who knew him, which is why so many of you have come here today.*

*I ah...; he paused and looked around the room, his eyes settling on the blonde woman who had arrived first. He kept his eyes on her and she wriggled in her seat.*

*I was thinking that it would be a fitting tribute to Mr Maley if we went around the room and each talk a little about how we knew him.*

*The air in the room shifted uncomfortably.*

*Margo knew she would be expected to say something then. Her mind went blank. What could she say? 'I never even knew Mr Maley except as the butt of childhood pranks and gossip.' She wished she had never come. The people around the table were all looking at her now. Waiting.*

*—Well...my name is Margo and I moved to Mayfield in '96, when I bought a house here. I remembered the Coliseum from when I was a child growing up in Tighes Hill.*

*She looked around her. All she had wanted to do when she came here was to ease her guilt. She hadn't been expecting to have to participate.*

*She looked at the people watching her, waiting for something more.*

*—I'm sorry, she said. I really don't have anything to say. I just saw the notice in the newspaper and I remembered Leo Maley, and I remembered the Coliseum, and I guess I was just curious.*

Ω

“My God, Margo. I still can't believe you bought a house in Mayfield.”

Margo stood on the corner of Maitland Road with her sister, trying to remember if there was a decent coffee shop nearby. She felt like a tour guide, trying desperately to find some interesting landmarks to show off. She hoped Jan wouldn't notice the parents that hung around the Woolworths car park, stuffing McDonalds down their babies' mouths.

Margo had spent the previous week cleaning and painting, even putting flowers in a vase in preparation for her sister's visit. Jan had shown little interest in the house, though, barely sitting down before she dragged Margo down to explore Maitland Road.

“Mayfield is changing,” said Margo, and they watched as a family walked past, a husband and wife holding hands. The husband walked proud, a child upon his shoulders, two others at his feet. His wife still had the long hair of her youth.

They stopped at the ATM. “Hang on, I'd better get some money out too,” said Jan.

She selected a card from those on display in her wallet and waited behind the family. The children bounced around, talking so fast that they overlapped each other, excited by some promise. The woman plugged her numbers into the machine, her hip jutted out, her hair flicked back, relaxed. Then she straightened, her husband's eyes flicked to her, sitting heavily on her back, her shoulders. The oldest child stopped bouncing, her questions hung unanswered in the air.

The youngest child was demoted from the father's shoulders and the other child was reprimanded, her bouncing suddenly annoying.

The woman stared with disbelief at the paper spat from the machine. A few dull words were exchanged. Enough to cause the father's chin to sink and her shoulders to cave in. Margo watched as the family slunk back down the road.

Jan didn't seem to notice and put her card in the machine, confidently retrieving fifty dollars a few moments later.

"I mean," said Jan, as if there had been no break at all in the conversation, "there's nothing here."

"The houses are cheap," said Margo, not wanting to tell her sister that she and Steven had been lured to Mayfield by the opportunity to buy a house with extra bedrooms and a backyard for potential children.

"And besides, it's only a ten minute drive to Newcastle Beach" she continued. Margo remembered the excitement she'd felt as Steven took her photo with the real estate agent. They'd shaken hands beside the 'Sold' sign and she'd hoped her hands weren't sweating too much as the sun glared down on them. She'd imagined planting a tree in the barren yard that would grow up to have swings hanging from the branches, waiting for giggling children to come home from school. She'd imagined its branches shading the place where she stood now, framing the art deco windows. Margo had known as soon as she saw those windows that this was the house she would buy.

Steven had surprised her by sticking the photo to the fridge with a frangipani magnet the day they moved in. It shocked Margo. She had been seeing the yard in her mind with the tree already grown, with the front fence fixed and painted, with lavender and daisies overflowing onto the pavement. This photo showed a yard so barren that even the clutch of weeds that had grown up the posts of the sold sign wilted as if it was too much effort to stand up straight. The paint on the window frames was bubbled and curled from the sun. Margo saw herself standing next to the sign, squinting from the glare and smiling like an idiot. The

real estate agent hid his eyes behind dark glasses and grinned. She read the sign. “Convenient, close to shops, schools and transport. Ideal for first home buyers”.

Margo remembered Steven aiming the camera at them and she had giggled as she repeated his “cheese”. The agent had said that property prices were sure to go up round Mayfield once everyone discovered the bargains to be had. He’d hinted at phone calls from Sydney, investors who would change the suburb overnight. She’d felt proud as she smiled for the camera, almost like a pioneer in a new land.

Whenever she opened the fridge door now she avoided looking at the photo. It made her feel foolish, like the snapshot of her in Bali when she was drunk and dancing in her bikini on the beach. At the time she had felt so sexy, so alive, but in the photo her nose was bloated and red from sunburn and alcohol, her skin blotchy and freckled.

Margo didn’t tell her sister about how she and Steven had repeated the estate agent’s stories to each other while holding hands under the doona the first night they slept in their new house. They had breathed in the fresh paint as they tried to convince themselves that they hadn’t made a big mistake, while just outside their bedroom junkies hung around a phone box buying and selling, both dealing and sabotaging deals.

“More people like us will move here soon,” Margo had said the next morning as she weeded the syringes out of the front lawn.

As Jan and Margo headed down Maitland Road the adult bookstore was one of only a few shops still open. When they came upon a used car yard they could see the outline of a large regal brick building that stood above the black circles of old chewing gum and filth on the footpath.

“Ah, remember this place?” said Jan. “Remember we used to come here when we were kids?”



Leo Maley sat behind the counter of the Coliseum watching the two blonde women as they looked at his window display. He knew they wouldn’t be able to resist coming into the shop, and was glad that he’d put the new sign in the window.

Leo was looking after the Coliseum until his parents returned. He knew that his mother, especially, would be pleased that “these types of women” were once again being attracted to The Coliseum. His mother was right, the suburb was returning to the way it used to be.

As he sat in McDonalds each morning reading the paper, Leo watched these women walking their babies along the street in their new buggies. They looked different in their trim

casual clothes and modern hairdos. Not like the usual dopes that hung about the place. Leo thought they looked like they'd been teleported straight out of Cook's Hill.

Leo stood behind the counter, going through his records and redrafting some letters that he had written the day before. The Coliseum was ready for the business of the day. The store had an attractiveness that led customers to stay for longer than they had planned. They would come in to buy hair ribbons from shelves that were stocked with general drapery and millinery needs in every colour and style. Soon their eyes would be drawn to the fine display of knitting patterns on the wire rack next to the counter. Travel luggage was stacked from floor to ceiling and every modern kitchen appliance was available.

Husbands brought in to fit a new sweater from the window display were soon engrossed in the shelves of tools and wicks for kerosene lanterns. Leo had his docket book ready, and his pen. He waited.

Leo hadn't changed The Coliseum a lot in his parents' absence. His mother had had such a sense of style that he had left the store layout according to her design, although he had added some new lines. He looked around him; there was everything anyone could want. That was why the shop was so successful and continued to attract customers when the big shopping centres in Kotara and Charlestown had sent other businesses in the area broke. The Coliseum still got customers looking for those things they could never find elsewhere.

The women moved towards the entrance of the shop, just as Leo knew they would. He watched as they hesitated at the new turnstile, one of the additions that Leo had made. He knew they wouldn't hesitate for long. Something would capture their interest and before they knew it they'd be piling items on the counter.

Having grown up watching his parents run the store, Leo knew that customers could be put off by over-zealous shopkeepers who sat behind the counter and watched their every move, so he retreated to the back of the shop to give the women some privacy.

Ω

Margo and Jan stood looking in the front window of the Coliseum because although the door was open the shop didn't look like anyone had been inside in years. Kitchen utensils hung in the window, their packets faded. Hand written price tags had become pale and curled at the edges. When they peered inside the shop it looked dim, as if it had been abandoned.

Margo knew that it was a mistake inviting Jan to see her new house. She wished she'd just met her for a coffee on Darby St. Margo hadn't been past The Coliseum since she'd moved into Mayfield, and wished now that they hadn't walked in this direction. She waited in humiliation for Jan to point out the dirty, dated products.

“Let’s go back,” she said but Jan wasn’t listening. She had fallen back through time.

“I used to have a school case just like that when I was in Primary school,” said Jan, pointing to a stack of old fashioned travel cases that had sunken in on itself, resembling a piano accordion. Jan only saw the dust and faded packages as memories of a time long gone.

“I remember this place from when we were kids, remember Margo? There was that crazy old guy that used to scare the shit out of us, remember? Let’s go in.”

“I don’t think it’s open. It’s dark inside.”

“Look at the sign.”

Margo had already seen the sign, hand-painted as if by a ten year old saying, NOTHING WRONG HERE, BUSINESS AS USUAL, IT’S ONLY THE STUPID COUNCIL. Margo didn’t know what the council had to do with anything but she had hoped that Jan hadn’t seen it.

“There’s a light on inside,” Jan was already standing in the doorway. They could see a single low-watt bulb hung over the counter, while the rest of the store hid in the shadows.

“This place is bizarre. Oh, check this out.”

Margo followed her sister to the doorway. The skin on her arms bumpy and cold like a plucked chicken, just as it had been years ago when they had run in and out of The Coliseum tormenting the old man and stuffing useless items into their pockets—whatever they could lay their hands on before he emerged from the shadows.

Jan stood now in the doorway looking at a strange contraption. A bicycle wheel was attached horizontally to a post in the middle of the doorway, resembling the old-fashioned turnstiles that they used to have in supermarkets. It looked like a trap that someone had rigged up to block the entrance.

They could see the stock on the shelves, faded and dusty, as if the whole place had been closed up in a time capsule since their childhoods. This was what lured Jan in, this sense of mystery, and Margo followed her through the turnstile, happy to some extent that Jan had found something in Mayfield that interested her.

“Hello, hello,” called Jan as they headed towards the counter. Margo felt cold. A soft musty breeze circled her neck. She wanted to run for the door but by this time Jan was looking at old Cleckheaton patterns on a wire rack. Margo watched her. There was something familiar about them, as if the years she’d spent drifting around the world and the drama of lost love affairs had never happened. She was back in high school, looking for excitement and an excuse not to go home. Even the air felt the same as it had back then. She almost

expected to look down and see herself in her too short school uniform with biro love hearts on her thighs, filled with long ago forgotten initials.

“Oh my goodness, look at these,” Jan said, pulling an envelope from the front of the wire rack.

On its cover a young woman smiled, her cardigan faded to the pink of her cheeks. Behind her, still on the rack, smiled her twin. Her smile looked self-satisfied and Margo thought that maybe she smiled because she knew that her cheeks shone brighter; the sun hadn’t faded them like her sister’s.

“These patterns mustn’t have been moved in years,” said Jan, and Margo cringed as she shoved the pattern roughly back onto the rack. But the girl still smiled, bowing slightly where the wire bent her in the middle.

Jan moved on further into the dim corners. Margo straightened the pattern up. In her own way she was trying to make amends. She felt sure that someone was watching. She heard a fluttering noise behind her and hurried to catch up with Jan.

“Oh my God, I haven’t seen one of these in years.” Jan’s voice sounded brash and harsh. And loud. Margo wished she were quieter.

Jan was near the far wall of the shop looking at enamel kitchen scales that must have been from the fifties.

“These would look fantastic in my new kitchen.”

Jan picked them up, leaving their impression in the dust on the shelf. As they stood there the dust motes floated around them like snow. If they stood there long enough perhaps they would turn to dust like victims of a biblical tale, thought Margo.

Again she felt a breeze on her neck. She wanted to go. What if Old Leo Maley recognized her from when she was a child, playing tricks that no longer seemed funny? What if he appeared beside her and grabbed her by the wrist with his bony old hands and dragged her into the dust? The thought that he was probably dead by now didn’t make her feel any safer. She wanted to grab Jan by the hand and run panting into the sunlight, as they had when they were children.

“I’m going to buy this, remember Nanna had one just like it,” said Jan.

“Hello,” Jan called as she headed to the counter, dusting the back of the scales as she went, looking for a price. She rested them on the countertop and called out again, “hello, hello,” while Margo hid behind her fringe and followed close behind.

While they waited at the counter they started talking about other things like lunch and workplace dramas, until their minds became entangled again in the timing of their everyday lives and forgot that they were waiting for anything at all.

Margo's eyes drifted again to the Cleckheaton patterns. The girl on the pattern had bent over further, her eyes now staring at the floor. Her brighter twin smiled at them sweetly, taking her sister's place but not realizing that she, too, was beginning to fade.

Silent shadows moved on the other side of the counter.

"Hello?" called Jan.

"Coo-ee," hooted Margo, taking on some of her sister's bravado.

Something creaked on the other side of the counter causing both Jan and Margo to simultaneously stand on tiptoes, like children on an errand for their mother. They leaned their bodies over the glass cabinets to get a better look.

Below them crouched an old man, hiding from them. He was small and frail like a bird with a broken wing. Jan screamed and ran towards the doorway. Margo grabbed at Jan's bag and was pulled from the shop by the strap.

As the sunlight hit their eyes they stopped and breathed again, feeling silly and guilty and childish. Jan pulled her shoulder strap up as Margo let go of her end. They walked back down Maitland Road in search of a café, still laughing.

**Woomera Memories**

28<sup>th</sup> January 1954

*Dearest Leo,*

*Was glad to read that all was going along so well. I will look out for the clothes at the station and will let you know when I will be sending them back.*

*We are indeed stepping down the ladder now. There is really no hope of ever climbing it again. The odds are packed against us too much. If we hold our own we will be very lucky but I think England does not think much of Australia as a country. They seem too busy doing their own work of pulling down the ladder, and up to date making a good job of it. Our only hope is that the new visit from the Queen will show her the promise our country holds within it for the future.*

*There are rumours that she will be visiting Newcastle. The council is sealing Corona Street, right past our shop, and we are all hoping that this is connected to her upcoming visit. I have been in a frenzy with the shop windows, just in case.*

*Always have some camphor in your waistcoat pocket, Dear, and in around a handkerchief. It helps anytime.*

*This is only a short note this time. Hoping you are well and that the weather is better again,*

*Lots and lots of love*

*X X Mother*

Ω

*Leo was the spit out of his mother's mouth.*

*Anon*

## **Mummy's Boy**

*—I wonder what happened to him. Margo didn't realize she had spoken so loudly until James Carol answered her.*

*—It must have been some kind of a shock. Maybe a relationship that didn't work out, replied James Carol.*

*—He certainly never spoke about it.*

*—People say he never got over the death of his parents, especially his mother. But maybe he was always strange. The relationship between his parents was strange enough, began an elderly gentleman wearing a bow tie. He reminded Margo of Willy Wonka.*

*—Mrs Maley really was the boss. She ran the show. Old Mr Maley was terrified of her. He used to sit in the window of The Coliseum, reading his paper in the morning sun. He had a mirror set up so that he could see her coming. I used to work there when I was just a young lad. Old Mr Maley had me keep watch also, and I had to signal to him if she was about.*

*—Oh, yeah. I remember that mirror, said James Collins.*

*—If you stood in the right place in the entrance there, you know, off Corona Street and all that, you could use the mirror and your own reflection in the window to wave your arm and stand on one leg and it looked like you were flying, it really did. We used to love that, but we'd run if we saw Old Mr Maley, he gave us the creeps.*

*—What people forget, though, is that Mayfield used to be an affluent suburb, began the older man, again.*

*—My mother always used to tell me about when the wealthy people from the town still used to come here as a retreat, to enjoy the fresh air. They would catch a train from Newcastle to Waratah station and then go by coach to Mayfield. I think it took them about half a day to get there.*

*My mother always used to say how the local shopkeepers would know who the rich people were by sight and when they went into a shop they'd just clap their hands and the shopkeepers would stop what they were doing and serve them first. It didn't matter who they were already serving. My mother used to call them the "hand-clappers". It was before my*

*time but my mother told me that story many times, and every time she told it she'd get really furious.*

*When I was a young boy I think that affluent side of Mayfield had pretty much disappeared, but it was still a great place to grow up in. I remember we used to go round the shops on Maitland Road and each shop would give us something to sell at the school fete. Shops wouldn't give you anything for a school fete these days, but we had lovely fetes back then.*

Ω

The children had skipped along Maitland Road, their matching hair ribbons drooping in the heat. To prepare for their school fete the children would enter each shop, giggling and flushed, and wait, fiddling with their socks and hair ribbons, until the flustered shopkeepers had time for them. They would leave laden with treasures— half a dozen bottles of drink to sell from the corner store; pressed meat from the deli that their mothers would make into sandwiches.

Once the children entered The Coliseum and saw Old Mr Maley their tongues would be too dry to ask for anything. They remembered that feeling like ants walking along their spines when they were sent to buy cigarettes for their fathers or butter for their mothers. They'd run through the front door on the corner and back out the side door, round and round, once, twice, before Old Mr Maley suddenly appeared behind them and they ran shrieking and giggling into the street.

Mr Maley didn't mind though, as one of the children in her haste might lose one of her ribbons. Mr Maley would then pick it up from the floor and smooth it with his fingers, knowing that he would resell it to her mother before the end of the week.

It was Mr Maley's aim that everyone in Mayfield would carry a little of The Coliseum with them. He watched the men that rode down Maitland Road on bicycles ten to fifteen abreast. His small blonde-haired son, Leo, could press his nose against the windows of the Coliseum and watch for a quarter of an hour as they flew past like a flock of black crows.

Having inhaled so much soot by day each man's skin was grey but ten minutes from the refinery the air felt clean and soft as they breathed it in.

Mr Maley glanced up at his son as he counted the day's proceeds under the hanging bulb and smiled. He knew that each of the bicycles had a repair kit strapped under the saddle that had been purchased at The Coliseum, and a packet of Bex in their cupboard at home so the neighbourhood kids wouldn't keep them awake when they were sleeping off the night shift.

He also knew that the men jumping off the tram down the road, and racing across the road to the Stag and Hunter before closing, were tapping their impatient feet in heavy steel capped boots that he had sold them. One of them fingered in his pockets a few nails to fix the porch railing or mend his front fence. Several of them carried cigarettes behind their ears that he'd sold them earlier that day. Mr Maley would close the doors of the Coliseum, satisfied.

Ω

*—I don't think things were so good by the twenties. That is when I was going to school up there. I used to go to school with Leo, you know, up at Mayfield East. Us kids would all go to school in a gang, mucking about on our way there. We'd meet each other out in front of our houses, or further down on the corner if our houses were really bad. Some of us were doing it really tough back then. We were all doing it tough, but some of us were doing it real tough. The fronts of our houses showed how tough we were doing it, whether we could afford paint for a fence, or had flowers in the garden. Some of my mates' houses we never went into. We were never invited and we knew not to ask to be.*

*That wasn't the only reason we met on the street, though. We didn't want our mates to see our mums kissing us goodbye or what have you. If you had a mum like that you got it all over and done with in the kitchen as you grabbed your lunch pail off the table. We were only young too, five or six maybe. Not like the little kids you see now holding their mums' hands all the way to the school gate. It's nice, I'm not saying anything against it or anything, but back then you'd be called a mummy's boy for sure.*

Ω

Laura Maley kissed Leo's cheek in the doorway of The Coliseum, and then watched as he walked along Maitland Road as if he owned it.

His well-pressed shirt was tucked in, his hair slicked to the side, his shoes shone. She felt proud as she watched him refusing to let his heavy school satchel weigh down his shoulders. He was only a small lad, but he was as strong as an ox, and twice as determined. He would go well in this life, Laura was sure of that much.

A gaggle of Mayfield East boys rounded the corner. They laughed out loud over some joke or other, or perhaps just from the joy of being together. They poked at each other as they jostled their way along the path, not far behind Leo.

As they came up behind her son the group wordlessly separated like oil and water with three going to the left of Leo and the other two to the right. They rejoined in front and left Leo walking alone behind.

Laura's heart turned hard as she watched her son continue up the hill as if he hadn't noticed the other boys, hadn't wanted to be a part of their gang. His shoulders were straight but Laura knew he must have been sad inside.

She watched the group of boys as they ambled up the hill, sometimes running, sometimes stopping to pick gum nuts off the trees and throw them at each other. Their hair became mussed and their shirts un-tucked. One of them didn't even have any shoes! How could they choose *him* over her son when he was without shoes?

Leo continued on, oblivious, as Laura went back into the Coliseum.

Ω

*—I remember one day at school, though, and this teacher was giving us a spiel about personal hygiene, you know, washing your hands and all that. He was saying, "It is very important that you wash your hands before you eat, and not just wash your hands but also clean the dirt out from underneath your fingernails". He demonstrated by sliding the nails of one hand underneath the other and flicking the dirt out across the classroom.*

*The next thing is Leo Maley puts up his hand, "Yes, Mr Maley?" said the teacher and Leo says, "I don't have to do that".*

*"Do what Mr Maley?" said the teacher. "Wash my hands, clean under my nails like that. I don't need to do that". That's what Leo said. I'll never forget it. We couldn't believe it. I mean this was back in the days of the cane. No one answered back to the teacher.*

*As it turned out when I left school I went to work at The Coliseum. It was my first job. I was thirteen years old and of course I called my employers Mr and Mrs Maley, but that was normal in those days. A young boy like me would never call his employers by their Christian names. It wasn't heard of back then, but they also used to call each other Mr and Mrs Maley too. It was very formal.*

*Sometimes when they were both working in the grocery store for some reason, probably packing up orders, if one of them wanted to get to the other side of the counter he would say, "Forward Mrs Maley," or she would say, "Forward Mr Maley," and the other one would lean their body forward over the counter so as not to brush their clothes against the other. Even back then I thought it was very strange, calling each other Mr and Mrs Maley.*

*—What kinds of things would you sell in the grocery store? Fruit and vegetables?*

*—Oh, no, no. There was a fruit and vegetable shop across the road that sold that sort of thing. No, we sold flour and sugar as I said before. We also sold biscuits. Arnott's biscuits they were. Do you know Iced Vo Vo's?*

*—Sure.*

—Well we used to sell Iced Vo Vos and other such things.

—Really? Are those biscuits really that old?

—Sure thing girly. They didn't come in packets like they do today though. They used to arrive in big tins and we'd put them in little display cases on the counter, covered by a cloth to keep the flies off.

—I'm surprised people had the money to buy such things back then.

—Sure they did. We sold a lot of them, back then. Nothing was packaged up like it is these days. We also used to sell cheeses. Have you ever seen cheeses when they are still in a big round block? They used to arrive at The Coliseum like that, covered in wax. Mr Maley used to put them on a cake stand, under a glass lid. When customers came to the shop they'd ask for the cheese by weight and Mr Maley would always be the one to cut it. It was as if he didn't trust me. He'd take the lid off and cut a wedge off for the customer.

Later, when there were no customers in the shop and I'd be sweeping the floors, or some such thing, he'd lift the lid off the cheese. If the day had been warm, I could smell it straight away. Then he'd cut off a wedge and look straight at me while he slowly ate it off the knife. He never offered me a piece. Never, not once. My stomach would be doing back flips for it I tell you.

Oh, the Maleys were so tight it wasn't funny. I got paid the minimum wage, but that wasn't unusual back then. But that Mrs Maley, she'd see a horse go past... horses and cars were still all mixed up on the roads back then. Accidents were sometimes literally a lot of hair and flesh and scraping metal, I can tell you. I remember there being horses even up until the mid-fifties. Actually once a horse went berserk and ran across Maitland Road in front of The Coliseum and killed a woman on Corona Street. Us kids all knew the spot and used to dare each other to stand on it. Not too many of us were game though. I don't know what we thought would happen.

I remember we still got our bread delivered by horse and cart. It's hard to believe, isn't it? But that horse had a nosebag, and it knew where to stop while the driver took the bread into the houses. Now if the horse left a manure trail behind, in front of The Coliseum, then Mrs Maley would send me out there to collect it for her vegetable garden. I kid you not.

—So they were frugal then.

—Oh, frugal! Frugal isn't the word. I tell you we'd get big bags of potatoes from Tasmania. I'd divide them up and put them in the paper bags. These potatoes, they were the ones that were still covered in dirt, and there would be a bit of dirt in the bottom of the bags when I had emptied out all of the potatoes. Well, it was that nice red dirt that comes from

*Tasmania. Have you ever been there? Even the sheep are red, as if they have been rolling in the stuff. That dirt is as red as a sunset, and very fertile.*

*Well, I had to brush the dirt off each potato back into the sack and then empty that red dirt into Mrs Maley's vegetable garden. It was part of my job. Imagine that.*

*—What about Leo Maley. What was he like as a boy?*

*—Oh, well, he really was always a loner. He had one friend at school, the jewellery shopkeeper's son. He kept to himself mostly though. Studying, I guess. He played the violin, I know that much. I didn't see Leo much. He looked just like his mother though, even back then. They reckoned he was the spit out of his mother's mouth—they looked that much alike. She was a well-dressed woman. They both were. Mr and Mrs Maley. I don't know what happened with Leo, though.*

*—What kind of work did you do at The Coliseum? asked Margo.*

*—Oh, well. You see, the second part of the shop, not the part on the corner, that was the haberdashery shop, see. Mrs Maley ran that part. No, I was in the grocery store next door. It was the first store like it around here where you served yourself like in a modern supermarket. Before that there were the general stores where the shopkeeper measured out the amount of flour or sugar or what have you. The customer sat on a chair in those days and the shopkeeper would measure out an order while you waited.*

*In The Coliseum we were like a modern grocery store. Bags of flour and sugar were all measured out into paper bags. Old Mr Maley was proud of his shop being like a modern grocery store.*

*—Now, you asked me what I did, young lady, and he winked at Margo. She giggled and felt silly, flattered and annoyed all at the same time, but the old man's eyes crinkled around the corners with his smile and she knew he didn't mean anything by it.*

*—I used to make all those paper bags to put the flour in, and the sugar in, and things like that. I had these metal rectangles of different sizes, and I had to get the paper and fold the bottom around it and glue it in position to make the bottom of the bag.*

*—Really?*

*—Sure, there was nowhere to buy paper bags in those days. Shops had to make them themselves. So that was one of my jobs. I also used to deliver the groceries. There was a pushbike that belonged to The Coliseum and I used to deliver groceries around Mayfield, balancing a box on the handlebars.*

*—Oh, yes. I remember that bike. Leo used to ride that bike around town for years.*

## Vertigan

*—Yes, that's right, he did. It was a black bike. We used to joke that the bike was riding him, because he was so slow. It was like he was hardly moving. He used to wear an old construction hat without a strap because bicycle helmets had only just come in.*

*—Blue actually, it was navy blue. I remember it from the deliveries.*

*—Very dark, anyhow. It must have looked black.*

## Woomera Memories

*Trevor: The Queen is coming. It's the words on everybody's lips, and even those who have no royal allegiances are slicking their hair down flat when they go to the shops. Just in case. In case of what, I'd like to know. The Queen won't even be here for another three weeks.*

*John: That is very true Trev. My next-door neighbour is fixing his front fence and all the sheilas are lining up for the beauty salon. I mean, it's dusty here like always and my sister is wearing the bristles off the broom sweeping the front porch of her house. The orange dust just cakes onto her shoes and then settles back on the tiles again, so I don't really see the point.*

*Trevor: Neither do I, John, neither do I. There will be just as dirty here when her Royal Majesty visits us, and I for one am looking forward to seeing the dust on her shoes.*

*John: Oh Trevor, I wouldn't go that far. I am sure her majesty will be beautiful whether she has dust on her shoes or not.*

Woomera's local access radio 103.3  
transcript

Dated the 25<sup>th</sup> of February, 1954

*You will not find anybody in Newcastle who will have anything good to say about Leo Maley.*

*Anon*

**Paul**

*—I remember a couple of stories about Leo. Well, I grew up in Mayfield and I don't remember The Coliseum as being anything other than run down. Even when I was a kid there were faded cornflakes packets in the windows and that must have been back in the fifties.*

*There were bolts of fabric too, and I'll always remember that there was this big pair of giant bloomers in the window that must have been there for years. My brother and I used to laugh about them but they gave us the creeps as well. They were all dusty and full of moth holes, whenever I think of The Coliseum I think of those bloomers.*

*There was also an old crank up phone on the wall that people used like a pay phone. Sometimes I'd go in there with mum if she had to make a call. If Leo served her he never looked at her, at her face. He always looked down when he spoke, maybe he even had a stutter, or maybe he was just nervous. I don't know. He was always very quiet in those situations.*

*Paul paused, trying to think of a story that that didn't show Leo in a callous light, but although he could think of many incidents from his childhood, they were all stories that involved laughing at Leo, like the time he'd lit a fire out the back of The Coliseum on a total fire-ban day and the fire brigade arrived. He'd had a great time laughing with his mates as the firemen tried to stop Old Leo putting more boxes on the flames. He was putting them on as quickly as the firemen were taking them off. Paul looked around the room and at James Carol standing out the front and wondered whether he should say more.*

*—Leo was said to have been a very intelligent man, Paul began again. He was supposed to have worked at Woomera in the fifties and he was introduced to the Queen when she visited. I think that was in '53 or '54. He was working there as one of the top scientists or metallurgists, but then something happened.*

*James Carol stood up again and Paul stopped, afraid of saying too much.*

*—So you used to shop at The Coliseum as a child? What sort of products would you buy? asked James.*

*—Well it was usually something for mum, some flour or something like that. Or sometimes dad would send us down for some cigarettes. It was no problem us kids buying cigarettes in them days. Dad would sometimes send us down after hours when the shop was*

*closed and we'd just knock on the residence door down Corona Street there. The door is still there, we'd knock on that and Old Mr Maley would come out and sell us the cigarettes. I reckon we only would have been six or eight years old. He laughed then.*

*Sometimes us local kids would knock on the residence doors and run away. Old Mr Maley would come out and look up and down the street and we'd be hiding behind a fence somewhere laughing. He never chased us or called the cops, he'd just look up and down the street and then go back inside. We thought it was hilarious.*

*Us kids used to get up to all sorts of mischief back then. There used to be a store at the end of The Coliseum that the Maleys used to rent out. I remember it being a lawnmower shop at one stage, I think, but back when I was a kid it was a ladies hairdressers, and then it was like a General Store. It sold Coke and ice creams, things like that. Well, back then you could get five cents for a Coke bottle if you returned it to the store, so me and my brother used to go round the back of The Coliseum to the bit behind this store and steal the empty Coke bottles and go back round to the front and return them to get the five cent return deposit.*

*He laughed.*

*— We eventually got found out of course.*

*But it was different then. Kids were different then. The street was our playground and we amused ourselves. I remember we used to shoot at each other with slug guns. I shot my brother right in the face once, right above his eye and he had to go to hospital because it all swelled up. It would never happen these days.*

*Mayfield was different too, there were butchers everywhere and bakers delivered bread with a horse and cart, would you believe. People still had country houses, rich people who lived up in town. Houses here were like country retreats for them. They'd catch a train to Waratah and a coach would pick them up from there and bring them to Mayfield. You can still see Ingall house up on the hill.*

*And there were the Chinese market gardens, but they were closer to BHP. We used to ride up there on our pushbikes and have a look around. If you didn't have a bike you got dinked on the handlebars of your mates' bikes. There were no fences in those days, and all us kids just went wherever we wanted.*

Ω

*I got out again after dinner easily enough, Dad being on shift and needing to sleep. He sat at the kitchen table drinking tea to wash down his Bex. He didn't notice as my older sister Fran slipped out, her Sunday satin dress peeping out from under her house dress. She ditched*

her house-dress in our old cubby house and picked up her cigarettes from where she'd hidden them in her doll's teapot. Lucky for me she didn't check the packet because I'd flogged a couple of them and had them hidden in my shorts.

Roger was waiting for me on the corner and I reckon he'd been sitting there the whole time I was eating my sausages and pudding. I stopped so he could hop onto my handlebars. He laughed as the bike lurched onto the road when I tried to avoid riding into that spot where some woman was crushed by a crazy horse. The cement path had a crack in it where her head had hit and I knew that her blood had poured into the ground. I was always careful to ride round that bit.

We met up with Sam further up the road. He was hiding nervously around the corner from his house. He wasn't allowed out after dark. He thought we didn't know that and we never let on that we did, although it was obvious from the way he whispered 'til we were blocks away from his house. He kept looking behind him, all nervous and twitching. Tonight he had his little brother, Martin, with him. He hung white-knuckled to the back of Sam's seat, holding his glasses on with his shoulder.

The little squirt probably said he was going to tell on him for sneaking out and now he was coming along to ruin our fun with his sniffing and whingeing. I pretended not to notice him sitting behind Sam. We stood up in our saddles and panted our way up Havelock Street to the BHP oil refinery. There was never that many of us that went up there, much less than the usual gang that played tag and cricket in the streets. By the time the street lights came on most of us were expected home, and the girls even before that.

We rode up the hill, I easily overtook Sam and rode up in front. He tried to pass us a couple of times but even with Roger weighing me down at the front I managed to stop them from passing us. It was punishment for him bringing his brother along, and he knew it too because he didn't complain about it.

When we got to the top of the hill we were all sweating even though it was dusk. Except Sam's brother, he was probably too young to have sweat glands. The only wind was what we made as we rode slowly through the sticky air, but even that felt warm and thick as it blew against our cheeks. Ahead of us we could see the outline of the steelworks, grey against the dusky sky, with the bicycle sheds out the front, just behind the steel gates. Smoke hung over the chimneys, too lazy to move away. Roger already worked there because he was fourteen and he told us stories of men's beards catching fire when they got too close to the furnaces.

We rode round the back of the buildings and then walked the last bit to the water and dumped our bikes. The water glistened like black molasses in the dark and we sat on the edge and watched it for a while.

None of us spoke. We had all been here before, except for Sam's brother that is. But we always had that hesitation before we went in. The warnings rang in the back of our heads.

Roger stood up first and ripped off his shirt, throwing it into the dust. He stretched his arms high above his head showing off his new working-man's muscles. We all followed his lead and undressed. I made sure my shirt landed on a patch of grass so it wouldn't get too dirty and Sam hung his over the handlebars of his bike. Our mothers would have noticed the dirt in the morning and asked questions. Soon we were standing half naked behind Roger. I crossed my arms across my puny ribcage. Roger looked like he was about to jump so I moved alongside him. There was no way I was going to be the last one in.

Sam and his little brother also moved closer to the water's edge on the other side of Roger. We stood there then, the four of us, still warm although we were almost naked. Then Roger started laughing, clutching his ribs like Felix the Cat.

I looked at Sam's little brother, all elbows and knees and quivering in the dusk. He was wearing a bright blue bathing costume with racing stripes down the sides. Sam punched Martin in the arm and we all laughed. None of us wore bathing trunks, just our underwear.

The next thing I heard was a splash and Martin was in the water, holding his glasses with one hand and splashing and squealing. We couldn't laugh at his swimmers now when he was the first to jump in, him only a little kid and all that. Then Sam and Roger jumped in the water behind him and I found myself left still standing last on the water's edge. The last one in is a rotten egg.

I jumped then and let the freezing water cover my ears for as long as possible. I knew I'd be teased as soon as I surfaced so I kept my head under water, going deeper and deeper, trying to touch the bottom. The water was so black that I couldn't see my arms in front of me, and so cold that my lungs shrunk to the size of golf balls. I kept going, determined to touch the bottom this time.

"That old mine shaft goes all the way to the ocean."

I exhaled, bubbles floating from my mouth as I kicked my body further down. I would show them I wasn't scared. I'd swim all the way down to the ocean and come up in the waves at Carrington, surprising the night fishermen while the others would still be waiting for me to surface.

My lungs burnt so much that I thought they'd explode. I turned and swam the other way but the water was so black I couldn't tell if I was swimming towards the surface or sideways or back down to the bottom. I felt the tickle of ghosts on my flesh and kicked harder, just breaking the surface and panting for air when I felt something grab my ankles and jerk me under.

Water raced up my nose but I managed to break free until I was coughing and spluttering on the surface again. I imagined a skeletal hand and splashed and screamed my way to the edge, snot and water pouring from my nose and mouth. I grabbed at a tuft of grass at the water's edge, and turned back round, looking for my mates.

"Something's in here! Something's in here!" I screamed my warning to them as I was dragged under again.

I kicked harder this time, and remembered the story my dad told me of a grandfather, father and son who'd died when this mine-shaft filled with water. They had just enough time to hoist the son onto their shoulders. The son grabbed for a rope that was being lowered down the shaft while water replaced air in the older men's lungs. But the rope was too short.

My dad would look at me then and say,

"They are still in there, all three of them. The young one still reaching, still grabbing for that rope."

My sister and I would scream but as we got older we would laugh about it. We called them 'the father, the son and the holy ghosts,' but when my foot touched something hard I swam with the last of my strength to the edge. I kicked myself over the bank and yanked my feet out of the water before whatever it was dragged me back under.

That's when it hit me. The laughter of the others.

"Glug, glug, glug. I'm the monster from the deep," yelled Roger and the others laughed. Martin laughed along with them as if he wasn't just a little brother along for the ride.

I knew I should get back in then, to save face and all that, but my legs felt like jelly and I couldn't trust Roger not to do it again. I was glad of the dark as shame coloured my skin but I rested my head back on the grass in what I hoped was a nonchalant manner, ignoring the water being kicked up against my stomach and legs.

After a while I remembered the cigarettes and grabbed my shorts, pulling one out of my pocket. The others were still laughing and splashing and making stupid noises.

The cigarette was a bit bent and wet from my hands, but I lit it and lay on my back, knowing that the orange glow would lure the others out of the water. Sure enough a moment later Roger was beside me. He'd already developed a man's habits since he started working.

"Give us one then," he said. I handed him a cigarette and the two of us sat smoking in silence.

Martin and Sam swam up and trod water in front of me. I ignored them but was careful to keep my feet tucked up under me, watching them as they climbed onto the bank beside us.

Roger passed them his cigarette.

"Here you go Marty."

Marty? I couldn't believe Roger called him Marty, like he was one of us instead of Sam's little brother. Like he wasn't just a scrawny little kid who had no right to jump into the shaft first.

I giggled as Martin choked on the cigarette smoke but then Roger just said, "Nah mate, like this," as if Martin was his own little brother and he didn't want him to look stupid.

It was dark by then, with only the orange glow bobbing along from one of us to the next. We finished the smoke and started searching for our clothes. It was so dark as we dressed that we couldn't tell whether we were putting our clothes on the right way or not. Martin couldn't find his socks and while Sam helped him look, I felt them under my bare feet. As I turned to walk back to the bikes, I ground them into the dust. Finally they gave up their search and Martin sulked as he pulled his shoes back on his wet, grimy feet.

We headed for our bikes and I slid as I clambered up the slope. By the time I got to mine the others were already silhouettes moving down the street. I raced to catch up then coasted for a bit before I reached them so they wouldn't hear my puffing breath.

Roger was riding Sam's bike, his calves bulging as he carried Martin high on the handlebars, with Sam jogging alongside. Martin sat up there with his back straight and his hair ruffling in the wind. He held his arms high in the air as we turned down Havelock Street, as if the shaft had made him brave in all things.

I rode a bit faster to overtake them but Roger kept zigzagging so I couldn't get past. I drifted back behind them and nudged his back tyre with my front one. Their bike jolted and Martin had to grip tightly on the handlebars.

A couple more bumps and Martin looked again like the little kid who'd stowed away on Sam's bike earlier in the night. That was more like it.

Roger turned and gave me a warning glare so I let up for a bit and we all rode along in silence. Roger's shirt was undone and billowed above Martin's head like the cape of a superhero.

As we rode down Havelock Street the music from the local dance met us and we slowed down. The music became louder as we coasted down the hill, our legs straight out and our feet just inches from the road. As we got closer we heard the singer's voice coming from the hall and animated squabbling as we passed a group smoking and drinking beer as they stood in the street.

Soon the YMCA emerged from the shadows, the rows of windows glinting at us. We slowed further to hear the music, feeling the excitement in the air.

Roger stopped his bike then and called back to me, "Hey Paul, go get some more fags off yer sister."

"I can't. She's in the hall. I can't go in there."

"Nah, that's her over there."

I turned and saw the unmistakable emerald green of her dress spread out across the bonnet of a car.

"Yeah. That's her alright," said Roger. Samuel and Martin didn't say a word, lucky for them.

"Go, get us some."

I'm not sure why I did what he said, just left my bike leaning into the gutter and walked across the road to where my sister's ankles were dangling over the bonnet of the car.

As I got closer I was relieved to see that they weren't kissing or anything. She had her chin resting on his shoulder and a bored look on her face, until she saw me standing in front of her. Her eyes came alive then and she sucked in the cigarette that hung from her lips and breathed two jets of dragon smoke out of her nose. A moustache of sweat glistened on her upper lip. I guessed that was why this bloke wasn't game to kiss her.

She flapped her hand at me like I was a fly but I could feel Roger and the others watching from behind me so I had to ask.

"Got any gaspers left sis?"

"Go home," she said, shooing me away with her hand again, showing a dark stain under her armpit. I wondered what he saw in her.

The bloke reached into his shirt pocket and tossed his cigarette packet towards me. It hit my shoulder and landed softly on the road next to my bare feet.

"Now piss off yer little weirdo," said the bloke.

As I picked up the packet I could hear the others laughing behind me. I turned around just in time to see them sailing down the hill away from me. Martin was riding my bloody bike. A police car pulled up then and a cop got out of the car right in front of me. There I was standing in the middle of the road, all wet and holding those cigarettes. I was terrified. Luckily he wasn't interested in the barefoot boy with the cigarette packet standing like an idiot in the middle of the road.

I sat in the gutter and watched, pleased that Sam and Roger would have to beg me for details later on. Perhaps there'd be a gunfight with a gangster and the dancers would run from the hall, screaming into the night. The concrete beneath me was still warm. I looked into the cigarette packet and there was only one crumpled cigarette left. One of the cops turned and looked right at me, so I stayed as still as possible, the cigarette unlit in my hand.

A man in a suit came out of the hall then and met up with the cops. I couldn't hear what they were saying but I followed his gesturing hands and saw Mr Maley from The Coliseum up on tiptoes looking in the windows of the dance hall. He looked like a little kid trying to be served at the lolly counter.

It was only crazy Leo Maley from the bloody Coliseum. My imaginary bandits faded into the cracks in the cement and I almost wished I hadn't stayed.

But for some reason I did stay and watch from my vantage point as the cops moved towards him. The cops said something and I'm not sure if Leo answered, but the tall cop moved closer to him, his arm outstretched.

That's when hell broke loose. Leo turned around and swung at the cop, pummelling his fists into his stomach. It was like when you see a little kid trying to fight with his older brother. Leo was hitting and hitting but the cop was just laughing at him. Then he just grabbed Leo by the shoulders and threw him to the ground, pushing at him with his foot until he was lying face down on the footpath.

Leo didn't give up though. He kept kicking his legs and squirming even as the other policeman shoved his knees into Leo's back, pulling his wrists behind him. A gob of Leo's saliva dripped onto the cement. The cop held both of Leo's skinny wrists in one hand as he unclipped his handcuffs from his belt.

They stood up then, the big man pulling Leo up by his handcuffed wrists. He was panting from the fight and had to hop sideways to avoid Leo's feet as he tried to kick the copper in the shins. The tall cop held him by the back of the belt, lifting him slightly up from

the ground so that it looked like Leo was dancing to the Jitterbug as he kicked his legs out across the road towards me.

When they got back to the police car one of them opened the back and the other one picked Leo right up off his feet where he danced for a moment in mid-air before he was shoved into the backseat of the car.

The police car drove away and I sat for a while in the gutter, listening to the music still coming from the hall. The street was deserted; the group drinking out the front must have gone when the police arrived. My sister was gone too.

I sat listening as the music slowed into a waltz, and then got up and walked home alone.

Ω

16/03/1954

### **Woomera Whisperer**

*It was forty-five degrees in Woomera yesterday but that did not stop folks from coming out and lining the road to wave at the royal entourage and try to catch a glimpse of our young Queen. Despite the heat Elizabeth II remained fresh faced as she disembarked from the back seat of her car and walked over to greet her legions of loyal subjects.*

*This leg of her tour culminated in a tour of the Woomera rocket launching facility, alongside her husband. That is where the Woomera Whisperer took the following photo of the Queen shaking hands with our own top nuclear physicist, Mr Leo Maley.*

*When asked, Maley responded, "It is a great honour meeting with the Queen of our fine country."*

*Elizabeth II returned to her hotel and will resume her tour of South Australia tomorrow before heading to Mildura, followed by Perth.*

Ω

*Oh, please. He was just a mad old dude that was tight and someone left him heaps of property. He was just romanticised after his death.*

*Former tenant*

## **Kelly**

*Kelly didn't sit at the table but chose a seat at the back where she wouldn't be noticed. She could see everyone coming in the door before they saw her. Every man that walked into the room could have been him. Some old, some fat, some bearded or with long hair. She could imagine so many versions of what ten years had done to him. She tried not to think about what they had done to her. Looking into the mirror that morning she had been glad of the dim light in the bathroom. It hid the crevices that were burrowing into the flesh surrounding her lips as she put on her lipstick.*

*As soon as she had heard about Leo Maley's death Kelly had thought of Patrick. What she wasn't sure of was whether that had made him think about her. Not that he was ever that far from her mind. She wondered whether he had heard the news. Surely someone had told him. An old friend. His bitch of a mother.*

*Even as she cast her own mind back to that time it seemed blurred like the edges of a sleep scented with frangipanis and the sweat of a lover.*

*Behind her an electric urn was heating water, clicking on and off every few minutes and shooting steam into the air. Soon the seats were all taken and the room was warming. But Kelly was thinking of that cold winter in 1986, when first the flowers and then the leaves deserted the frangipani tree in the front yard, leaving it barren.*

*The urn sent another shot of steam into the air as Kelly listened to a woman about her own age telling her story of Leo. She made him seem so vulnerable. Kelly felt like the new kid in the playground as the people took it in turns to tell their stories, bypassing her as if she wasn't there.*

*—Oh well, I guess it's my turn then.*

*Heads turned to see James Carol. He had a soft voice that subdued those around him. He paused, long enough for somebody to interrupt, but nobody did.*

*—My name is James Carol. I knew Mr Maley for the last few years of his life. Mr Maley was a softly spoken man, a very gentle man. He was timid, but he was friendly. Mr Maley didn't give the impression that he was approachable, but he was agreeable when he*

*was spoken to. He felt more and more vulnerable towards the end of his life, as he was taken advantage of by thieves who broke into his house constantly.*

*Kelly wanted to scream. Leo Maley wasn't the victim. He was a heartless man. Heartless and cruel!*

*She looked around the room but nobody made eye contact. Everybody was looking at James Carol, sucking in his story.*

*—I guess at this time we were feeding quite a few people who were down on their luck. Some were unemployed, or heroin addicts. We used to pick up leftover pies from Michelle's Patisserie and bread from the bakery and feed people that came to our house each day. We had our own church and part of our ministry was to encourage these people to do something to help themselves, or to contribute in some way, and most people bought something along occasionally to add. It gave them a sense of entitlement, like they had added to the meal.*

*Leo never brought anything.*

*Everyone chuckled.*

*The urn clicked on. Kelly felt hot and itchy as the steam rose up her back.*

*Patrick wasn't coming. Of course he wasn't. She'd been fooling herself to think that he would.*

*She felt silly. As if he would have come to this memorial service. As if he'd even know about it. Even if he knew that the old prick had died. He would just have laughed as people do when remembering the crap times in their lives. As if their laughter would insure against them happening again.*

*Patrick wouldn't even remember her.*

*James laughed again, and continued:*

*—Finally one day Mr Maley came over. It must have been only about a year ago, and he handed me a packet of two-minute noodles. They were Home-Brand, you know, the ones that only cost about twenty or thirty cents or something.*

*He chuckled again, and was joined in his laughter by those around the table.*

*—Even then, I think somebody probably gave them to him. Mr Maley never spent a cent on anything.*



The night was hot and although the window above their bed was open, the curtains didn't stir. Patrick lay on his back beside her, his arms next to hers, just their fingertips touching. It was too hot for anything else. Their passion lay slumbering in their bellies.

They lay like that, sleepless and sweating for hours, listening to an occasional car hum down Maitland Road. A mosquito flew in through the torn screen and hummed around their heads, looking to draw blood. Patrick waved it away and Kelly tossed her head to rid her ears of the drone. The curtain moved a little, as if it was breathing.

“Must be a hole in the screen,” said Patrick, knowing that although she didn’t answer him, she would be awake. No one could sleep in this heat.

He lifted his arm and felt along the screen. Locating the hole with his fingertips he was easily able to put his hand through it.

“It’s bloody well cooler out there than in here,” he moaned.

“And less mozzies, no doubt.” Kelly slapped at her forearm.

“C’mon,” said Patrick, jumping out of bed and rummaging around on the floor for his clothes. “Stuff this for a joke. Let’s go.”

“Go where?” Kelly had no intention of moving.

“Swimming.”

Ω

Their thongs flipped and flopped in the night as they crossed Dangar Park. Kelly usually avoided that place, even during the daytime. The kids that hung out there in small hard groups scared her. She called it Danger Park. In the distance a woman hurled abuse. A man muttered a restrained response and the woman screamed her anger at him in reply. Patrick held Kelly’s hand tighter and pulled her along.

“Hang on,” she said, pulling her hand out of Patrick’s sweaty fist as she realized she had lost her thong several steps behind them. Not sure what was on the ground she hopped back to get it, and then caught up with Patrick again who was standing against a railing, waiting for her.

They shuffled the rest of the way to the pool, hand in hand.

“I can’t believe I’m doing this,” said Kelly as Patrick boosted her up the brick wall.

“What if we get caught?” She started to panic. They were in full view of the road.

Patrick laughed, “It’s forty degrees. It has been all week. I’m sure the judge will go easy on us.”

Kelly grabbed the top of the brick wall, pulling herself under the barbed wire.

“What would your mother say if she could see us now?”

“It’s alright,” Patrick laughed again as he levered himself off a stump and lay on the wall beside her. “She knows you’re not a good girl.”

“Why? What did she say?”

“Nothing...look.”

In front of them the pool glimmered in the dark, promising them relief from the heat. Patrick eased his legs down the wall and jumped. The sound of his thongs slapping on the concrete echoed around the empty space. Kelly cowered on top of the wall. She was afraid that someone had already called the cops and they would be taken wet and humiliated to the police station.

But below her Patrick was peeling his sweaty shirt from his skin and she imagined the cool water caressing her body.

“C’mon, scaredy cat,” said Patrick, helping her down beside him.

Ω

Kelly slid into the water. She swam beneath the surface with her eyes closed for as long as she could, washing the dank house from her mind. She wished she could pick their whole house up and drop it into the pool until every speck of grit and grime and all the stains floated to the surface and washed away. Then she’d grow a mermaid’s tail and live under the water forever. The creepy landlord would come to collect the rent, but there’d be nothing left besides a concrete slab and a frangipani tree.

Surfacing again Kelly floated on her back and looked at the stars. She kept her legs together and kicked, imagining they were her tail. The water rushed in and out of her ears, whispering secrets only she could understand.

Then Patrick floated up beside her.

“I’m a mermaid,” she said.

“You most certainly are,” said Patrick.

She stood up and kissed him, her whole body pressed against him. He felt cool and warm at the same time.

“Does your mother know that you aren’t a good little boy either?” she asked, laughing. No longer worried about her voice echoing off the concrete walls.

The next evening Kelly stood on the front porch and watched as Patrick left, his bag over his shoulder. She could still feel where he had bitten her neck. As the day took on the haze of evening she waited and watched as he rounded the corner. The frangipani tree had littered its flowers at her feet like a bridesmaid. She sat for a while, breathing in their scent and thinking about how she would wake with Patrick making love to her, gently entering her dreams until she opened her eyes and saw him.

Ω

Now she remembered this as one of the best times of her life, despite everything. The frangipanis probably had something to do with it, as they'd scented the air around her. She hadn't cared that the porch light didn't work; or that the front step had a hole in it under which she could hear the scurrying of creatures that preferred to live in the dark. Time had made her forget that back then she had wanted to stay in bed all day with him— after those nights she'd spent alone and sleepless while Patrick was at work.

She'd wandered about the house aimlessly, putting the television on for company, even though the picture was fuzzy. She'd walked from room to room, re-arranging this and that, without actually cleaning anything. Kelly had sometimes kept her glasses off so the mould between the tiles blurred and she couldn't see the cockroach shit that collected on the shelf next to their toothbrushes. When she was the only one awake the house was dismal, with walls begging to be scrubbed.

Kelly didn't know where to start, and would find herself slipping back into bed with Patrick as the sun forced its way between the curtains and lay in crooked lines across her face, stinging her guilty eyelids.

She knew she should be up and about, making their house a home, and promised herself that she'd just have a small nap, then go and scrub the bathroom. But Patrick would grab her arm in his sleep and pull her towards him until she was resting her head in the nest of his armpit. They'd breathe in unison. She'd close her eyes and when she opened them again Patrick would be in the shower, getting ready for work as the sun lowered in the sky.

Tonight would be different, though, she was going to make it count. Things were definitely going to be different now because she was on a time limit. A nine month time-limit.

Kelly went outside and pulled a bouquet of frangipani off the tree and returned to the kitchen. Dirty dishes glared at her from the sink. Kelly arranged her flowers in an empty jam jar and put them on the bench. Already the room felt better. Standing in front of the sink Kelly pulled open the window to let the night air in to flush the musty air from the house.

She filled the sink with water and stared into it. Some rust spots flaked off and floated amongst the soap bubbles. She dropped in a cup and the flakes clung to it. Kelly's stomach heaved. The water dripped into the ever expanding chipboard cupboards. Usually this would defeat her but tonight she could still taste bile in her throat, and it made her feel strong.

She grabbed the bucket from under the sink and started again. With the bucket in the sink slowly filling with water Kelly breathed deeply at the scented air. She already felt a sense of accomplishment.

Once Kelly started she couldn't stop. She scrubbed the benches and found dirt on the splash-back so she scrubbed that too. She added so much bleach to the bucket of water it ate through her rubber gloves. But that didn't stop her and she continued until the whole house smelled of it.

There was a knock at the door, strong and demanding. It must have been Patrick's mother and Kelly drew breath at the thought. Had the old witch guessed that she was pregnant? Had she come over now, when she knew that Patrick wouldn't be home, to spit anger at her between pursed lips?

"No," she thought to herself. "It must be Patrick home early. He must have forgotten his keys." Kelly ripped off her gloves and plucked a flower from the vase as she went, sticking it behind her ear. She sang to herself as she twirled towards the door. She opened the door, to find Leo Maley, the landlord, standing before her.

"The rent," she thought immediately. She searched for excuses even as her lips curved up into a smile.

"Oh, hello."

Leo Maley didn't say anything.

He stared into her as if he'd asked a question and was waiting for her response.

"I'm sorry?" she asked, but still he just stared. A cold chill ran down the backs of her arms and she crossed them across her chest.

She waited, but he didn't move or speak. She could feel the dusk closing around them, merging them together. Kelly caught her breath and tripped backwards into the house, flinging the door closed and running and jumping on her bed like a child afraid of ghosts.

"So stupid," she told herself. "You are nearly a parent now," and forced herself to look out the window. He was still there, standing on the footpath and staring through the crack between the curtains. At her. She jumped back on the bed and waited until the night came and he was gone.



Kelly got a job at the new Woolworths up the road. She didn't tell them she was pregnant and just nibbled on dry biscuits in her lunch break, trying not to retch when customers came through the check-out with their meat lying raw and bloody on its Styrofoam bed.

Kelly would hold her breath and scan their items as fast as she could. The boss once had told her that she was a fast worker, but she needed to smile. Be friendlier to the

customers. She nodded and clenched her teeth together against the smell of McDonald's gherkins on his breath.

Kelly bought little bits and pieces for the baby when she got paid. Most of their money was used to try to catch up on the rent, but she would always have something tucked up in her handbag when she got home. Safety pins for nappies or a bib with ladybugs on it.

Kelly hid them in a bag at the back of the wardrobe. She planned to tell Patrick soon, as soon as the house was clean and they were up to date on the rent and bills.

Ω

One day Kelly came home from work. She had just rounded the corner of the paint shop next door to their house when she heard a clanking. Patrick was on their roof.

"Hello beautiful," he called down to her. She wished his mother had been there to hear it.

"What are you doing up there?" Kelly laughed up at him. "Is that a TV antenna? Where did you get that?"

"I bought it for you, so you won't be lonely anymore."

"What am I supposed to do? Invite it in for a cup of tea and a scone?" Kelly laughed back.

"Sure, or you could go dancing together," he said, twirling around the antenna like a ballerina, while Kelly laughed up at him. Then he danced across the roof and down the ladder jumping down beside Kelly. He lifted her and twirled around and around, his feet slipping on the wet sludge of the flowers that had fallen on the path.

With the picture on the television now clear Kelly was less lonely. Her new onscreen friends entertained her. Bo and Hope accompanied her about the house on the days she wasn't working. She put her glasses back on and let the world focus around her.

She followed Charlene and Scott's wedding plans and gasped in delight when Charlene's brother came home with the bride's dress of her dreams.

Ω

That night the knock came again, and Kelly went to the door, wary this time. She opened the door but didn't step out. Leo Maley stood in front of her.

"What do you want?" she asked, but he didn't answer her.

"We'll pay the rent on Friday."

Still he just stared and she hid her body behind the door as if she was naked.

"Okay?" she giggled nervously then, but he didn't move.

“Okay?” She slammed the door, running again for her bedroom where she waited behind the curtains until she heard him step off the creaky porch. Her fingers trembled as she watched him amble across the yard.

Ω

Kelly knew as soon as she woke that the baby was gone. There was a heavy feeling in her stomach. It was as if all the blood had pooled there, stagnant and festering. She groaned and rolled over, but Patrick had left already.

Kelly pulled the pillow to her chest and dreamed of a green-eyed child with his father’s face laughing up at her. A knock woke her up she and she forced herself to the door, her head full of sleep. She opened the door and stood in her pyjamas in front of her landlord.

“What do you want!” she yelled at him.

He didn’t move.

“What the fuck do you want!”

Ω

Patrick found her shaking and crying.

“What’s wrong, baby, what’s wrong?”

He held her and rocked her. She tried to tell him about the baby, but the words wouldn’t come. Just a hacking cry that erupted from her chest and she sobbed against him.

Finally she spluttered, “The rent’s late,” and gushed out the story of the landlord’s nightly visits to hide her loss. She exaggerated the story to match her distress and felt Patrick’s body grow stiff with anger.

“I’ll get that prick for you baby, don’t worry,” said Patrick and he wiped the tears from her cheeks with his rough thumbs. “Come on, it’s alright. I’ll make you a cup of tea.”

Ω

Patrick stayed at home that night and waited for Leo Maley. The light outside faded until the windows reflected the kitchen in its streaky glass. He watched Kelly as she crashed about, doing the dishes. He’d never seen anyone do the dishes with such energy before, as if her life depended upon it.

She pushed up her glasses and tucked her hair roughly behind her ear, returning the glasses to hold her hair in place. A few bubbles from the washing up clung just above her ear like a tiara. She looked small and vulnerable and Patrick felt angry that anyone could hurt her.

He wished she'd take the rubber band from her hair and let it cascade over her face. Just for once. But she never did anymore. As soon as she had her shower she'd pull it back tightly and trap it in that elastic.

When they first met, her hair was wild with curls that she never even attempted to tame. She bounced as she walked and the curls danced joyfully in a halo around her head.

Then the knock came. Patrick jumped out of his seat.

"Oh, no. Patrick don't."

The knock came again, loud and urgent. Kelly almost hoped it was his mother.

"Don't."

Patrick wrenched open the door as their landlord was in mid-knock. He leaped out the doorway, barrelling Leo Maley backwards down the stairs.

"What the fuck have you been playing at!" he yelled.

The old man backed onto the footpath.

"Don't you come round here again, you dirty little pervert!" Patrick yelled.

Leo was halfway down the street by the time Patrick had his boots on. He raced after Leo. Patrick picked up his pace, surprised at how nimble the old man was. When he rounded the corner of The Coliseum Patrick saw that the old man was wrenching at the side door. But when he saw Patrick he took off again like a frightened rabbit.

Leo raced along ahead of him but Patrick closed the gap between them with his long legged strides. He grabbed Leo by the back of his shirt. He'd show the old bastard. Leo struggled and his shirt tore in Patrick's fingers.

He flung the old man round to face him like a woman at a dance. The old man stunk. Then a young guy yelled out from across the street,

"Hey, leave him alone!"

"Mind your own business." Patrick still had his fingers laced in Leo's shirt. He reminded Patrick of a leprechaun that had to give up his pot of gold if caught. Patrick suspected the old bugger had a fair bit of that that too, seeing as he collected all that rent for the shit-hole they lived in.

But now that he had caught the old man he wasn't sure what to do with him. His body was light as a child's, but his eyes were balls of fire, glaring at him. Daring him.

"Leave him alone, he's just an old man. Leave him alone," the man crossed the road towards them. Patrick felt then that Leo Maley was shaking beneath his grip. He was just a little old man. He felt ridiculous holding him like that.

“He had my wife petrified,” he said. He let go of his landlord’s shirt and Leo Maley jumped nimbly over a gate next to them and disappeared into somebody’s backyard. Patrick wiped his hands on his jeans and walked back home.

Ω

“You can’t take that. That’s mine, you dope.”

Patrick couldn’t believe it. He looked down from the roof where he was trying to dismantle the TV antenna and sure enough, there was Leo Maley climbing up the ladder.

“You can’t take that. It’s on my property, it’s mine.”

“Piss off you old fruit loop,” Patrick yelled back.

Patrick resumed the dismantling of the antenna. It had been easier to put up than take down. He marvelled at how in just a few short months the screws had rusted fast to the pole. He thought he’d have to break them to get it off. He sprayed the screws with WD40 and swore to himself as he dropped the can and it rolled into the gutter.

Patrick finally wrenched the antenna free. He placed it by the ladder and went back to collect his tools. The wind was blowing in from Kooragang Island, filling his nostrils with the pungent stink of the tidal river. Dead fish, rotting weed and garbage in putrid mud.

“I said that antenna is mine, it belongs to the house.”

Patrick turned to see Leo at the top of the ladder, snatching at the antenna.

“You really are nuts, aren’t you old man?” said Patrick.

Patrick crashed his way across the tin roof. He grabbed at the antenna and the ladder wobbled on the roof’s edge.

He heard Kelly scream from the yard, “What are you doing up there?”

He looked down and saw her, glasses in hand, squinting up at them. The stinking air filled Patrick’s lungs, and he was glad he’d be out of there soon.

“It’s mine, it’s mine, it’s mine,” Leo chanted.

“I’m gonna fucking kill you.” Patrick hurled the words into the stinking wind and climbed back up the roof. Patrick yanked the antenna from Leo’s hands. Leo lost his footing and fell to the ground with a thump, one of his legs bending the wrong way. Kelly screamed.

Ω

Kelly pulled her shoes from the wardrobe where they lived in a tangled mess of sparkly straps, buckles and laces; she sat on the floor with her lank curls over her face and ordered them into pairs.

She put her golden heels into a cardboard box. She couldn’t imagine all her things in boxes. She couldn’t imagine leaving. She shook her head, pulled the heels back out again,

and reached for her sneakers instead. Her hand hovered over them, small and white and uncertain. The box was still empty. She didn't want to live anywhere else. With anyone else.

Kelly pulled at her loose hair and tucked it behind her ear. She adjusted her glasses to hold the hair in place. Patrick stood and kicked his last box towards the doorway. He was ready and impatient to leave. Waiting for her to tell him to go. That it was okay. That she was okay. Kelly let her hair fall over her eyes again so she could pretend she hadn't noticed him shuffling in the doorway.

She wondered whether she should tell him about the baby. To make him stay. At least for a while as she sobbed out her story and clung to him. He would dry the tears from her cheeks with his thick, stained workman's hands.

But he wouldn't stay for long. She knew it was useless. It almost made sense to her that their relationship would dissolve along with their unborn child.

Maybe he already knew. Surely he had noticed her small buds of breasts swell and grow pink, then slacken. Surely he'd noticed the black mildew that crept up the wall next to their bed; that his work-shifts had become a mystery to her as day became night and night felt like day, and all the time she felt thick and slow.

But Patrick hadn't noticed the glow in her cheeks, the shine of her hair or the expectant excitement in her eyes. He had gone to work and come home, his overtime money sucked up by debts and bills. He hadn't noticed her scrub at the mould that flourished between the tiles in the bathroom.

Nor did he notice when the life within her curled up and died, leaving her grey and saturated with grief that leaked from her eyes onto the pillow as he slept beside her.

He didn't notice now that one of her hands stroked her stomach. She remembered the baby that had put dreams into her head. Dreams that had entwined them together forever.

"Well, um, I guess that's it then," he finally said.

"Yes, I guess it is."



## Woomera Memories

*Dear Mum and Dad,*

*A few lines to say all is well and I received the parcel O.K.*

*Everything is quiet here after the Queen's visit. Just some quiet buzzing as people retell their stories, which is happening less each day now. As the top nuclear physicist I was given the honour of shaking her hand as a gesture of goodwill for the newspapers. I had her hand placed in mine for an almost unsavoury length of time while we waited for the picture to be taken. Her hand was of course gloved, but I could feel the warmth of her hand inside it.*

*Our new Queen is clear skinned and beautiful, a real lady, this young Queen of ours. She holds herself well yet is elegant and softly mannered.*

*I have enclosed a copy of the article and photograph from the Woomera Whisperer.*

*Well, that is my news for now, everything is going alright and I am keeping well. I will sign off for the present,*

*With lots of love,*

*Leo*

*X X*

Ω

## Mother

*Leo served the customers as they came into the shop. Conversations were traps. He kept his head down and his voice low. They could start any number of ways. With the weather or a query about the price of wool. When Mrs Milton walked into the shop with a curious look on her face and started browsing amongst the hardware, Leo knew to be careful.*

*Finally she came over to the counter with a sink plug and a hinge. Leo knew she wanted conversation then. She wanted to leave The Coliseum with a new plug for her kitchen sink along with details she could share out amongst her friends like a cake.*



There is nothing ominous, nor joyful, about the sound of a ringing phone. The ring that announces the news of a baby born, a marriage proposal or a dead mother all sound alike. Except as a memory.

When Leo thought back to this call he remembered the ringing phone sounded threatening, the footsteps of the hall monitor coming closer to his dorm room hollow and heavy, the knock at his door echoing with significance.

But the phone rang the same way as it does for mothers and lovers. No clue as to the nature of the call. He just made his way to the phone at the end of the hall as usual, expecting it to be his mother.

Until he picked up the receiver.

“Hello Leo, this is your father.”

The carpet began to blur and suck at his feet, the words as distorted as if in a dream. A phone call from the parent who never calls can only be bad news. His father’s voice so steady, his words rehearsed.

“Your mother passed this morning.”

The gentle monotonous tone.

“It was unexpected or I would have contacted you earlier. Her illness came on quite suddenly. Dr Allen said she had massive dropsy. She died of congestive heart failure.”

The words echoed inside his ears.

Congestive heart failure. Massive dropsy. Massive heart failure. Congestive dropsy. Massive failure. Congested heart.

Leo dropped the receiver and watched as it swung from left to right like a hypnotist’s watch. He could still hear his father’s tinny voice coming from the receiver, “hello? hello?...?”

The sun shone despite his suffering, its face laughing and golden. Mocking him. Leo walked to the car, the sun sitting on his shoulders like the reassuring hand of a friend while the wind blew gentle caresses through his hair. But Leo had no memory of it.

Ω

*Mrs Milton watched as Leo tallied up her purchases on the cash register. He fumbled with a paper bag while he waited for her money.*

*“How are you today Leo?” she asked. She had heard about his mother, and wondered about the shop opening again so soon.*

*He mumbled his response into the paper bag and put her purchases on top.*

Ω

Leo headed towards the car. That was all he had to do. Get to the car. He took steps, then the door was opened for him like he was a woman and somebody held his elbow as he was manoeuvred into the passenger seat. The door closed.

The car left the college grounds. They left the city and the scenery blurred. Leo clutched the fabric of his trousers tightly each time they passed a familiar landmark. The road followed the train line as it crossed the Brooklyn Bridge north of Sydney.

As they drove into Newcastle, Leo longed for the blur of the trees on the highway that disguised the landscape and let him believe he was anywhere.

Ω

*As careful as he was, this woman was both bold and strategic. Mrs Milton waited for that moment when he returned the change to her and he had to look up for a moment to see why she wasn't holding out her hand.*

*Then it was too late. She was looking straight at him with her eager grey eyes. He was caught now, and couldn't look away. Without blinking she said, “I noticed that there is no white hat elastic on the shelf, only black.”*

*Still holding her change in his hand, Leo rolled the top of the paper bag down to form a handle, his eyes finally released from hers. He waited for her question.*

*Mrs Milton continued, “I was wondering whether you had any in stock, out the back somewhere perhaps. If not could you tell me when you expect to get more in?”*

*Leo looked past her at the rolls of fabric draped in the window. The patterns lined up on the wire rack next to the counter, the least fashionable on the lowest rung. His mother had organised the braids into their shelved rows and women's special items were kept discreetly on the highest shelf.*

*The dust was starting to gather on the counter already. Leo looked down at the accounts book in front of him. His mother had drawn little pictures on the inside of the cardboard cover. The swirling figure of a girl; the alphabet. The woman held her palm out, waiting for her change.*



Before they got to the church it was easy for Leo to picture his mother working silently in the kitchen while he drank dark tea at the table with his father. Neither of them said anything to acknowledge the occasion that had them dressed in suits.

When they arrived at the church, Leo stood next to his father and shook hands with people as they arrived, as if he was sealing a business deal. A firm handshake just as the school principal had taught, just like shaking hands with the customers after his father. There was nothing unusual about that.

Then the hearse arrived, with a box in the back. There were lilies on the top as white as a bride. His father exchanged words with the driver, nodding his head at the box with the flowers on as if it was something he'd ordered and just needed to be signed for.

As Brahms began playing on the pipe organ, the six men hoisted the coffin onto their shoulders. Lawrence on the left, Leo on the right, with his mother between them.

But it was so light; she couldn't possibly be in there. Not when she should have been at home planting new potatoes in her vegetable garden. Not when she had the store to look after and was expecting a delivery of haberdashery. Not when the windows needed re-dressing and the month's books needed to be balanced.

Although it was only March the light that came in through the stained-glass church windows brought with it no warmth. The black vested priest waited for them at the altar. The box Leo carried was empty, as light as a feather. A feather that would float away at the end of this dream.

They reached the altar and lowered the box from their shoulders. Lawrence was a tall man and Leo was small so the box was uneven between them. The coffin lurched as they rested it onto the table before them. First the left, then the right, the cloth masked the sound of wood striking wood. But Leo thought he heard another sound from the coffin. Perhaps a limb shifting, a body.

The box was not empty.

Leo stood for the hymn. He knelt for the prayer. His head tilted right in the direction of the priest for his sermon and left for his father's brisk eulogy. His feet took him to the front of the church for the communion and his knees bent before the priest. He swallowed the

cracker instead of flesh, but the priest's words didn't bring him the comfort or tears that a priest's words should.

The only thing Leo heard was his mother's weight shifting inside the coffin. His only thoughts were, "mother is in there," as his mouth twisted around the sounds of the hymn.

"She is in there," as his knees bent in prayer.

"She's in there," and he imagined her flesh shrinking over her bones. He imagined her as she lay under the weight of the earth. She would be motionless and speechless below the mourners laying flowers at her graveside.

"She isn't at home. She's in there," thought Leo as they left the church just like any Sunday. The sun surprised the coffin bearers by greeting them at the doorway and they tried to blink it away. Leo's legs trembled and buckled as everything went white.



Leo woke in the living room at home with his shoes off and the feeling of being sucked into the lounge. He kicked his legs, trying to sit up, but the quicksand of the couch wouldn't allow it. Invisible snakes curled around his neck. He couldn't breathe.

The doctor was there, gripping his wrist and mouthing numbers while staring at the clock on the wall. His father was there too, hovering in the background, and everything suddenly made sense. He was sick. He must have been hallucinating. The church, the funeral, none of it was real. Evidence of his mother was everywhere. There was a flannel on his forehead, and the smell of soup in the air. His shoes were off so as not to dirty the couch.

Leo felt the relief of waking from a bad dream. Even as its details replayed behind his eyelids and the feeling of it sunk into his bones. The doctor wavered in front of him like an apparition, holding fingers in front of his eyes. Floating fingers that danced and separated from the doctor's hand even as he still held onto Leo's wrist.

His father's face grew large behind the doctor, creased and anxious. A big worried moon. A face on a balloon that drifted up to the ceiling and hung there above them, looking down.

Leo closed his eyes, pulled himself into a tight ball and waited for them all to leave.

He fell asleep.

When he woke the doctor was gone. He had taken his snakes and air flowed easily into Leo's lungs. His mother had pressed the patterns of her tapestry cushion into his cheek while he slept. His father sat writing at the table in the dark.



*Leo dropped the change into Mrs Milton's palm.*

## Vertigan

*“Mother’s out at the moment. I’ll let her know you were in and she will deal with this matter directly.” Surely a note on a writing pad would only be left by someone intending to return. Someone who’d just stepped out on an errand or a visit to a friend.*

*Leo’s chin fell to his chest, leaking customary farewells, and finally the woman was gone.*

Ω

## Woomera Memories

*Dearest Leo,*

*We could all hardly believe your news. Your father has been carrying around the photograph you sent of you together with our Queen and showing it to all and sundry. He is a very proud man and I am afraid the photograph is already looking worn. I hope you thought to procure another copy and have kept it safely. Between the pages of a book would be ideal, and I think, in this instance, your Holy Bible would be a fitting place.*

*You look very handsome in the picture, by the way, as the young professional you have become.*

*Our visit from the Queen ended up becoming a bit of an anti-climax. We thought the procession was going to go down Maitland Road, right past The Coliseum. It ended up going down Industrial Highway to the BHP. Why the Queen would be interested in going there I don't know. She would much prefer to see my new window display, I am sure. All that work was done for nothing. We were simply bypassed, as if Mayfield isn't a place of history and importance.*

*I have included a cartoon from the newspapers here. I think it is very apt, if cheeky, and I hope you find some pleasure in it.*

*I must go now as I am alone in the shop today.*

*Lots of love,*

*X X Mother X*

Ω

*It seems to me highly likely that the accused believed that if he could but destroy that one tell-tale piece of paper, then he could deny, obfuscate, prevaricate and lie outright in an attempt to distance himself from any connection to Ms XXXXX. It is for that reason and that reason alone Leo Maley endeavoured to eat the evidence.*

*Judge Freeman*

## **Court**

*James scratched under his beard with a pen as he began to speak. It was as if he was about to deliver the final verdict on Leo Maley.*

*—It is true about the court cases, Mr Maley was obviously a learned man. I think he had trained himself in law and it was obvious in court that he became more confident. He lost that quiet, stilted way he had of speaking and was very conversant in the words that the lawyers used. I think he could have become a lawyer himself.*

*The first time I met Leo Maley, well I didn't meet him there exactly as much as come across him so that when I met him later I already recognised him. I was at court in Newcastle. I had decided to represent myself on a certain matter and I was very worried about it. I had been on the court-house steps before daylight. It was only just getting light, but I was there waiting. I couldn't think of anything else to do. Sleep had been impossible for weeks. I just stood on the steps and looked up at the sky. It was too cloudy for stars. I wanted to see a star, a sign, something to show me that everything would be alright.*



James could hear the ocean from the courthouse steps. He thought about walking up to the beach, but worried about looking out at the sea. The ocean often seemed so angry and he could never figure out why. James didn't need to be in the presence of anger that day, so he paced the steps until the sun rose enough to create shadows. Police started to walk back and forth past him into the station on the corner, and the noise of the ocean waves blended with that of the cars as people made their way to work.

A few days earlier James had found himself up at the beach, standing on the rocks. The lighthouse was behind him, his silent witness as he hurled a fistful of papers out to sea. He'd had enough of this court case. He'd asked God for advice and in the absence of a direct answer he'd ended up there. At this end of the earth. But the sea didn't want to hear the news

of his misfortune, and she hurled the papers back at him. They clung to the rocks and the ink of his hard work bled. This seemed like the only sign James had been given in a long time. He has the papers with him now, mostly retrieved and flattened out. Their splotches deciphered with notes made with green pen in the margins.

He ached with the worry of it all. But he knew what would happen if he hurled himself off the rocks into the waves. The sea would throw him back too. She didn't want him just as she didn't want the miserable details of his life. She took the guts of her own dead fish, thrown from the hands of men as an offering of appeasement. She took men much braver than him. Plucked them off ships in the prime of their lives. But James Carol wasn't in his prime. Far from it. And the sea would not be appeased by his body as a sacrificial offering. She took the golden wedding rings that were too hot with betrayal for their wearer's fingers. She took young lovers so she could torture their bodies to match their hearts. But James, no. He knew he'd just end up smashed on the rocks, broken and wet. Left to dry off in the sun, the lighthouse the only witness to his rejection. She would whisper it to the ships as they lined up in the horizon, full of coal.

No. He would prefer the wrath of God to the wrath of the ocean. The ocean didn't have a soul, and neither did anything in it. The eyes of mermaids and of fish were the same. Soulless.



The court was opening. James stood back and watched as others walked up the stairs and followed behind them. He looked on the notice board for his name. He was on in the morning. There were only two others before him:

Nicholas Wilfer

Leo Maley

James Carol



*—Everyone rose when the judge entered, of course, and the judge scanned the room and made some comment about self representation. It seemed as if the three of us, Nicholas Wilfer, Leo Maley and myself had all decided against having a legal professional represent us.*

*A small, elderly gentleman, who turned out to be Mr Maley, asked to say something then, and for some reason the judge consented to this request. I am sure that he didn't have to. It was his courtroom, after all.*

*Then Mr Maley gave a wonderful speech. The whole courtroom watched him. I am sure some were watching in horror at his braveness, but he did receive a small round of applause after.*

Ω

Leo Maley:

It is to be noted that the application in this matter contains all the essential requirements of any application to the Court and as such is in a basic approved form.

I am the herald of a new order and demand that the Court comply with this new order of things and unbend and attend to this application in the normal way either with or without a barrister as spokesman.

This is the hallmark of progress commencing right now.

The court will have to unbend and widen its outlook and be less self-centred and contain a person of knowledge that comes before it in this case as an advocate of the cause.

The cause supersedes anything else and is more important than the person. It would seem that you are presently trying to set yourself up as some tin gods in an artificial cloud so come down to ground level again there is only one God and you are no more than Him or of I either.

The function of your Court is simply to apply common sense to matters before it. Monopolistic attitudes—that you are to be spoken to only by privileged groups—is a thing of the past and is superseded by this new order of progress of the present and future.

The old order is replaced by this new order and it is the way that progress is made and an exemption has to be made. This is how progress was made by your forefathers and our forefathers and this becomes the watershed of progress here.

So I am calling on you all on the Bench to progress also in this new Era as above with your approval. I would like you to advise me that this is a general way to attend to such matters before you because you are apparently dealing with a person of merit.

Is that now agreed?

Ω

Note to Bench to Tenuer

To assist the court.

It is essential from the defence's point of view that a demonstration be given to the Court about this matter and that an exhibit be available so that a demonstration can be given to the Court with it.

For this purpose

A clean large Wiz bin with lid is required and the defendant is not ready to proceed without it.

I have been unable to go out and obtain one to be here today so request that instructions be given for someone to go down to the Council depot in Hyde park opposite and ask the foreman there for a loan of a large clean Wiz bin with lid and for it to be brought here as Court exhibit in this case.

The foreman there gave his permission previously and allowed me to borrow same when this matter was listed previously and only needs to be requested again for his permission to borrow it again and to be returned to the depot later.

This item is an essential part of the defendant's case and I am not in a position to proceed without it.

So request that this matter be adjourned and instructions be given for this to be arranged and attended to.

L. Maley  
Defendant

Ω

*—I sat that morning watching as Nicholas Wilfer conducted his case. He was very charismatic, walking the floor and pontificating as he made his legal case. I didn't understand half of what he was saying and it made me feel as if I'd made a big mistake in representing myself. I couldn't possibly speak like him. I thought I must have been living in fantasy land when I was preparing for that day. This man wore an obviously expensive suit. The fact that he won his case didn't make me feel calmer; he was in a different league to me.*

*Then I looked over at Mr Maley, and despite the speech he had given earlier I felt reassured by his presence. He looked just like an ordinary gentleman. His satchel was old and tied up with something. That made me feel better, that bit of rope, or whatever it was, tying up his bag.*

Ω

Evidence to Give

Preliminary Remarks:

This whole matter was only a police scam from the very beginning. Even before they came to the defendant it is apparent that they had preconceived ideas about the accused.

It can be said there was no assault by the defendant on the police at any stage in this matter at all. It is all make believe by the police as this will clearly show.

---

The position regarding the matter was as follows:

Evidence

I phoned the police that there had been a break-in at the premises and they subsequently came to me to inspect same. They noted the particulars regarding the break-in and then they said to me they have brought along some fine warrants about these for you pay, or words to that effect. I disputed that they were owing and so we all went down to the police station. They claimed that seven days notice about same had been given.

I disputed that. They said words to the effect pay up and I indicated that I had very little money with me. They then said words to the effect that as you have not paid you are now under arrest and you will be sent to jail to cut them out.

After discussions we walked around to Myola Street nearby. There was a large Wiz bin in the middle of the footpath near the front gate of the premises there. It was an obstruction to pedestrians and the public hazard on the footpath so I grabbed hold of the handle bar of the Wiz bin and started to wheel it toward the gateway which was only a few yards away, to wheel it off the footpath.

The woman constable indicated she was not going to let me do that saying words to the effect that I am not going to allow you to move that bin. To me it appeared that she was exceeding her authority and had no instructions to prevent the Wiz bin being moved off the footpath so I ignored her. It had only a short distance to go to move it off the footpath and I had already moved two other bins off the footpath from the corner to the premises just previously.

So I continued to wheel the Wiz bin off the footpath towards the gateway that was only a couple of yards away. It appeared to me that they were only engaging in small time petty spite when they tried to stop me wheeling it.

Now the whole action centres around that standard type Wiz bin. And it is important from a defense point of view to demonstrate what happened to that Wiz bin thereon. I therefore call for the exhibit (the Wiz Bin type) to be brought into the Court room so that I can give a short demonstration with it and I call for two persons to assist as actors in the demonstrations.

Note: The Wiz bin was empty at the time.

Demonstration:

I had hold of the handle of the Wiz bin like this. The woman constable said something to the effect that I am not going to allow you to wheel that Wiz bin off the footpath.

I did not take any notice of her and continued to wheel it and kept my hands on the handle bar of the bin because in my opinion she had no authority to stop me and I was not doing anything wrong and so continued to wheel it towards the gateway which was only a few yards away.

My two hands were gripped around the handle bar with my hands pointing downwards. The policeman constable went in front of the Wiz bin and grabbed hold of the two hand grips on top of the bin like this.

I continued to pull the bin. And then there was a tug of war I continued to pull and he started to drag it back to prevent me moving it. This resulted in the bin tilting towards him and the lid partly opening and rising upwards. I still had my hands on the handle bar.

The woman constable then came around and placed her hands over top of my hands that was still gripping around the handle bar with her fingers outstretched. She tried to break my grip on the handlebar so the other constable let go of the lid top grips that he was holding and started to come around the other side.

When he did let go of the lid grip the lid dropped down again and the other side of the lid came down with it suddenly and jammed on top of the other constable's outstretched fingers.

That is how her fingers became injured, no other way. I heard her say ouch when this happened. My fingernails were also short and all my fingers were facing downwards anyway and could not inflict any injury on anyone at all under those conditions. The action to her fingers was caused by their actions alone I did nothing to the constable's fingers at all.

While there they did not say that I was under arrest for anything occurring around there.

Following on this the woman constable tried to put handcuffs on me and she was having difficulty in trying to do that and the other constable came around (apparently to assist

her) and my arms were waving about then and apparently it seemed that he positioned himself in the wrong position and ran into one of my waving arms which came in contact with him.

I did not assault him at all it was his own fault not watching out where he was going.

I walked back to the police vehicle with them and then we all returned to the station.

I submit that it is clear that they were exceeding their duties at the time of the Wiz bin incident and they were not under any specific authorisation or direction to prevent that Wiz bin being wheeled the few yards off that footpath.

The defendant also did not assault anyone and what occurred there with the Wiz bin was the result of an accident caused by their own actions and not the defendant's part at all.

I submit that the appeal should be upheld because as this was a criminal charge and it has not been established beyond reasonable doubt that there was any assault on anyone by the defendant at all.

Also he was not resisting arrest he was prior arrested at the police station over the warrants not for anything about the wiz bin incident.

Ω

Mr Bousefield: Mr Maley last appeared before your Honour on 14<sup>th</sup> of April this year when the appeal was determined. For the record, Mr Maley appeared before the court of Petty Sessions on the 7<sup>th</sup> of May, 1982 in respect of an offence of assault female, a further offence of resist arrest and a third charge of assault police. In respect of those matters he was sentenced to terms concurrently. Those offences were on the 9<sup>th</sup> of February, 1982. The date of conviction was 7<sup>th</sup> of May, 1982. He did not enter unconditional bail until the 21<sup>st</sup> of May.

Mr Bousefield: Your Honour ordered a psychiatric examination.

His Honour: Mr Maley, do you have any objection to the report being tendered?

Appellant: I do not know its contents.

His Honour: Do you object to it?

Appellant: I do not even know it.

His Honour: Show this report to Mr Maley. Have you read it?

Appellant: Yes.

His Honour: Do you object to it?

Appellant: I do object to it.

His Honour: What is your ground of objection?

Appellant: I think that some of his interpretations that he has made are incorrect.

His Honour: You disagree with them but that is not a ground for objection. I admit the psychiatric report as Ex.A for the purpose of today's proceedings.

Appellant: In relation to that it is important to draw attention to certain matters. I have certain remarks to say and they are not meant to be misconstrued. I am not saying them in any way to be derogatory of the Bench as the Bench has often difficult matters to attend to but this time it has been carried away and placed these matters out of context and has become confused and placed these matters out of context.

His Honour: Did you think that up by yourself or did you get some help at the Gaol?

Appellant: No.

Appellant: As Shakespeare would say "These are much to do about nothing". The whole show really stinks and should not have been the subject of a court action at all in the first place.

One of the constables tried to take action in this case merely to cover up his own dirty actions.

His Honour: Mr Maley, what does this have to do with any question of mitigation?

Appellant: Not only should justice be seen to be done but justice should appear to have been done in this case.

His Honour: Unrepresented people, by and large, must be given every opportunity to be heard. Your history indicates that you have had quite a degree of forensic experience having appeared for yourself on numerous occasions. I will allow you some latitude, but there is a limit. You have heard me say, more than once, that I will hear you only in relation to questions of penalty and I repeat that.

Appellant: I draw attention to the fact that these are trivial matters.

His Honour: Yes, I agree with you to some extent.

Appellant: Merely instigated by others to try to get at the defendant on the slightest pretext and work for grudge or spite. They were misconceived in nature and the courts have more important things to do than to have such trivial matters put before them at all.

(Appellant addressed, rapidly and at some length. Further submissions not recorded by direction of His Honour.)

IN THE MATTER OF THE APPEAL OF LEO MALEY

JUDGEMENT

On the last occasion that that these matters were before me at the East Maitland District Court on the 15<sup>th</sup> of April, 1983, that day having been the culmination of hearings on some six days interspersed over a long period which came to the view that this appellant had undoubtedly committed the offences charged and was either one of two things; he was what is commonly known as a “crank” or he was a person who, through no fault of his own, was afflicted with some form of mental illness, perhaps some form of paranoia or schizophrenia.

I rather had the impression that the former was true, but to exclude any doubt I requested that a psychiatric report be obtained. That report indicates that although the appellant, Mr Maley, has wide areas of eccentricity, in the psychiatrist’s opinion, he is legally sane and therefore responsible for his actions.

Since the alternative has been eliminated, I return to my first diagnosis. I am afraid, although I do not wish to indulge in excessive language, I have come to the view that this appellant is a self-righteous and intractable old crank, who is a pest in our community, and who habitually commits petty, anti-social acts.

A man’s record in the past should never be used to increase penalties and I adhere to that matter of elementary principal. However, when I look at the appellant’s record to see whether it attracts any leniency, I find that he has been a persistent offender who fought each and every one of his cases through the Courts of Petty Sessions and then by way of appeal in the District Court.

I have the distinct impression that the reason that the appellant appears here unrepresented is not due to impecuniosity, but to his disinclination to rely on the legal profession because he believes he is far more capable of defending his own cases than any trained lawyer. I believe he is sadly mistaken in that belief but, nevertheless, it is one to which he is entitled. It does mean that he must be given, and has been given, a large degree of latitude, which he has seized and utilised to the last degree.

I have endeavoured to listen patiently both to the evidence and to the appellant’s at times extremely convoluted submissions while the charges were tried and also in relation to questions of penalty. I regret to say that the overwhelming impression I have is that, far from there being any discernable element of contrition in what the appellant has had to say on this and other occasions, he has demonstrated that his attitudes are intractably those of injured innocence. He has not the faintest degree of remorse, nor any discernable intention in the future of regulating his behaviour to conform to a more socially acceptable pattern.

I take into account that all of these matters arose on one occasion. I take into account that the complainant was a fairly formidable woman. Had this episode ended with the appellant having applied rather too much force upon that lady, then the matter could have been dealt with otherwise than by way of custodial sentence.

However, the police to whom she complained, were satisfied (as I am upon hearing the evidence was satisfied) that Mrs ----- had been assaulted and they acted thereafter as required by their duty and I am satisfied that they did no more than what was required of them. Although the appellant is a man of diminutive stature and of apparently advanced (though resolutely undisclosed) age, he set about them as best he could, causing some injury to one of those police officers.

Not content with that, the appellant, in what I am satisfied was perjured evidence, sought to vilify the police officers and denigrate their reputations. As I said earlier, I am not so naïve as to believe that police officers, being human, are incapable of assaulting persons or using too much force or that from time to time they do not do precisely that; but nothing in this place raises any such suspicion in my mind.

I am satisfied that this appellant is so lacking in credibility that no damage could be done to the reputation of either officer from any assertion that came from the appellant. I believe that this appellant is totally unrepentant and, although these are not really serious criminal matters, I nevertheless take the view that police officers are entitled to expect the assistance of the courts so long as they behave lawfully and reasonably.

The appellant is imprisoned with hard labour for a period of one month on each charge concurrent and those sentences will commence from today.

Ω

*—Mr Maley also spoke at length during his hearing. He was obviously a learned man, as I have said before, and it became apparent to me that he knew more about the law than his tattered briefcase had led me to assume. But Mr Maley was not successful in this instance, and was led off to prison by a man twice his size. I almost left then. I didn't feel as if I was meant to be doing this at all. It was almost lunchtime and I felt sure that the judge, after such a busy morning would take his recess and then I would leave.*

*But the judge called me straight away and looked me up and down. I held a large folder of paperwork in front of me and I could almost feel as if the judge was looking straight through it, reading and dismissing it before I even had a chance to submit. I was shaking, I know that much. What I didn't know was whether the judge could see that.*

*He looked me straight in the eye then and said, “Mr Carol, just tell me simply. What is it that you want?”*

*And I told him and he said, “Done,” and that was the end of that. I thanked Mr Maley and Mr Wilfer in the foyer. The judge must have had enough of us representing ourselves. Or maybe he just wanted his lunch.*

Ω

06/04/1954

## **Woomera Whisperer**

Rumours abound today about the source of the fire that burned brightly behind the fences of the Woomera testing site well into yesterday evening. The flames could be easily seen in town causing residents to take in their washing for fear of it becoming covered with soot.

“We closed our windows while we ate our dinner. We were as hot as anything but I was afraid the children would get asthma from the chemicals in that fire,” said a resident of a nearby Woomera street.

A spokesman from within the site, John Overbridge, has denied rumours of an explosion or the fire being chemical based. “The people of Woomera do not need be alarmed,” he told the Woomera Whisperer late last night. “The fire is under control and is not being fueled by any dangerous substances.”

When asked whether the fire was deliberately lit, Overbridge answered, “No comment,” and denied any suggestions that the fire is in any way linked to the sudden departure of nuclear physicist, Mr Leo Maley.

“Mr Maley is returning to NSW for personal reasons,” he asserted, and denied any further suggestion that the departure of Mr Maley would jeopardize the top-secret nature of the site.

Mr Maley’s departure comes just weeks after he was photographed by the Woomera Whisperer with the Queen as part of the royal tour.

Ω

*Note: I am not the person to which the enclosed is addressed to.*

*L.Maley*

## **Earthquake**

Tiffany woke with the cruel morning sun penetrating her eyelids. Anthony was gone. She could hear footsteps slow down as they passed the open bedroom door. She imagined Anthony's flatmates staring in at her and kept her eyes shut, feigning sleep and hoping to God that the sheet was covering her.

She waited for them to leave for work, to go to the shops, anywhere, just so that she could get out. The day was already heating up and she imagined catching the bus in her last night's clothes with the smell of everything that had happened the night before. The alcohol, the sweat, that salty beach smell. Tiffany picked at the sand in her scalp. She wished she could have a shower. No one else here seemed to be having one. They were all at the other end of the house, talking and smoking.

She had to leave. Tiffany tried to remember the layout of the house, but all she remembered was suddenly being in the bedroom and Anthony ripping off his shirt. The disappointing shock of freckles. The feel of metal tipped dreadlocks tickling their way across her bare stomach.

Tiffany opened her eyes, surveying the room for her clothes. A shiny ball of orange lay on the carpet between her and the open door. She sat up, holding the sheet around her and kicked the door closed with her toe. She picked up the dress and pulled it over her head. It was too orange for the daylight. Too translucent, the splits at the sides too high. She had felt more comfortable in it at night. Her pale skin glowed in the daylight. Maybe she could jump out the window.

Finally Tiffany worked up the courage to re-open the bedroom door. The voices in the lounge room were barely audible. The soft slow speech of the stoned. They wouldn't notice her. She'd just slip up the hallway and be gone.

Then she thought about Anthony. She remembered his name at least. Maybe she should leave him something so he'd know where to find her. She looked down at her dress. There was no way she could leave in that. She looked around the room for a pen. The room was a mess, or would have been a mess if there had been enough stuff to make a mess. It was almost identical to her own share-house room. Second-hand furniture left by who knows who or found who knows where. Clothes on the floor. A sleeping- bag on the bed as if they were

camping. There had been a surfboard the night before, but that was gone now. On a desk some books, magazines, and a couple of pens. A plate on the floor with a candle on it. The cupboard sagged open and a few clothes hung half out of it as if they were not sure whether to jump.

Tiffany grabbed at a T-shirt from the cupboard and twisted it round her hand. She scrawled a note on the cover of a magazine.

*If you're looking for your Billabong shirt then call me –Tiff- 49 622 869.*

The hallway ended in a partly open door. The couch faced away from her. There was another door at the other side of the room. They wouldn't notice her. They wouldn't. Or at least they'd be polite and pretend that they didn't. Tiffany walked quickly across the room and opened the door. In front of her was the kitchen. Behind her, giggling boys in board shorts.

Tiffany turned and walked back across the room, almost running by the time she got to the hallway.

"Front door's the other end of the hall."

Kissing noises followed her down the hallway as she pulled open the front door and hurled herself out onto the street. She felt the daylight instantly announce that her dress was from last night and she hadn't made it home yet.

Tiffany stopped and put on the T-shirt. It was soft and smelled of men's deodorant and the sea. It made her feel better and she vowed to keep the shirt and never to return.

But she did.

Tiffany started to walk towards Hunter Street, to her place in Hamilton. There weren't many people about. A soft morning breeze caressed her and she turned on her heel, retracing her steps. Barely thinking she headed for the beach.

She took off her thongs and sank ankle deep in the cool white sand, so different to the hard pebbles at the beaches where she came from. There was such a distance between where she stood and the wet sand near the shore. The muscles in her calves ached with each step. A few surfers sat and chatted on the flat surf. Someone had already passed by and left their footprints for her to wonder about. Tiff pulled Anthony's T-shirt and her dress over her head in one motion and threw them, entwined together, on the soft sand.

The cold water made her gasp as she dove under the waves, the salt water cleansing her. She kicked her legs under the water, bubbles streaming from her nose. She floated like a starfish face down on the water and let the unbroken waves tug her towards the lighthouse. She wondered if there was anyone up there watching her, wondering whether she was dead.

Tiffany caught a wave back into shore. Back on the sand she sat and waited for the early sun to evaporate the water beads from her body. She rubbed her hand through her cropped hair. The gel had washed out leaving her hair soft and floppy, the curls that she hated returning and flicking up around her ears as it dried. She breathed in and for some reason felt happy for probably the first time since she'd been in Australia. She had often come to this beach when she was homesick, looking out across the ocean for a small British pub with its bar in the centre and a man behind it, too old for her, and too married.

Tiffany stretched her dress back over her softened flesh. She'd put on weight since she had been here, too much alcohol and uni hours. She rubbed at her hair with Anthony's shirt, putting more sand back into it than anything, and started to walk back towards the road.

A taxi drove past, the driver looking at her hopefully, but the change in her purse wouldn't have paid the flag fall. She sat down at the empty bus stop. As a man walked towards her, she tucked her outstretched feet underneath her. Clothes hung off him in rags. She had seen him from a distance before as he made his way round the bus stops in the city, as if he was looking for something. As he got closer to her she saw the black filth ground into his bare feet, and the massive knot of his hair. She wondered how he could be left to live like that, even if he wanted to.

She looked away, trying not to stare. Skye called him the Ragged Bone-Man and told stories of a fabulous career, the tragedy of his family killed in a car crash. He wouldn't take money, just walked round his circuit of the city, seeing nothing. Instinctively she felt for her purse, but the man passed by lost in a world that didn't include her.

"There's no buses."

Tiffany looked up to see another old man in front of her.

"Why are you talking to me, looking at me?" she thought as she tried to decipher his accent in her mind.

"There's a bus strike. The fools want their buses to go slower," his voice was soft and slippery. It took her a moment to understand.

"Oh, no buses?" but the man was already walking away.

A car sped past, with too many heads poking out from the windows. Shouted words curled into her ears along with the smoke from the exhaust pipe. What did they say? Something about open legs?

Tiffany pressed her fingers onto her eyelids. She must have drunk more than she thought last night. Everything she saw was staccato and blunt. She felt like Alice in Wonderland. She must have drunk the drink that makes you bigger. She felt like a great big,

bright orange pimple on the street attracting weirdoes. She flicked the sand off Anthony's T-shirt and put it back on.

Tiffany waited until the old man was half a block in front of her before she started walking. She didn't want to talk to him. It was a good day for walking—not too hot. Her thongs were comfortable, she was grateful for that much. She was starting to like this country where you could go out at night in a sexy dress and a pair of thongs. Newcastle seemed to have bypassed fashion, which was another reason she liked it. If you felt like wearing a bright orange sequined dress and a pair of thongs out to the pub, then you did it.

The old man ambled along in front of her, and then abruptly turned left to cross the street, as if he had suddenly realised he had somewhere important to go. She wondered for a moment where he could be going with such a sense of purpose, each foot planted on the footpath, aimed towards some destination or other.

She left the old man to walk into his own future and continued on, hoping that when she was his age she would have somewhere to go.

"Maybe he is going home after a night of love too," she thought and laughed to herself. "Maybe he is running away before she wakes up".



Anthony. Strange that he had introduced himself that way. Not Tony, or Tone or Ant, those contractions that Australians loved so much.

She had been knee deep in water at the kiddie's pool, digging alone in the dusk. She had left Skye and the others at the Bogey Hole, jumping off the rocks. They were drunk and exhilarated to be able to stand in the moonlight with drops of water glistening on their skin. They splashed in the half-light, and knew that the gods had given them the stamp of youth which made them all beautiful. And they knew they had it all.

"The big kid's pool is over there," said a voice from the beach.

She ignored him. Smartarse.

"Sorry, I mean. Have you lost something?"

She'd looked up at him then. Dreadlocks. A surfie for sure. He held something that glowed silver in the dimness. Not her type. And she definitely wasn't his, not that she was looking. Being single was all it was cracked up to be and she was loving every minute of it.

"Kind of." She wasn't sure why she answered him at all. Maybe it was because of the Christmas she'd just had. It was so hot here. She had made so many new friends, and yet everything had felt upside-down and confusing.

"What, like a ring or something?"

She laughed.

“You have a fight with your boyfriend and throw it in there? You should have thrown it into the waves if you wanted to lose it for good.”

“The waves might bring it back to me.”

“Well you are looking for it anyway, so maybe you need all the help you can get.”

She looked at him again as he held the glowing bag to his lips. She recognized it now, the silver inside cushion from cask wine. “Goon”, Skye called it. She had poured it down Tiff’s throat the night she moved in, like some kind of an initiation. Now they only resorted to goon when they were too poor to drink something that came from glass, and then they blew up the silver cushions and kicked them around the yard like footballs.

Yes, he was definitely a surfer. Two ropes of muscle disappeared into his boardies. She was a sucker for those every time.

“You think you are clever, don’t you?”

“Why?”

“Why? Asking me about rings and fights with my boyfriend. Trying to find out if I am single.”

“Ahh, well, I’m sorry to say that most people who throw their rings out to sea do it from the rocks. The waves might bring them in eventually, but most of them are found by old men with metal detectors.”

“It sounds like you have experience with this.”

She told him then, not sure why. “Actually, I am homesick. I’m looking for my country.”

“Ah, the map.”

“Is it real, tell me it is.”

“Well, maybe. But from where you are digging I reckon you might come out in the middle of India. You look kind of more Anglo Saxon to me.”

“See, I knew that you were a smartarse. My flat-mate told me about the world map under here, she’s seen photos of it.”

“Yeah, but it’s been removed. Ages ago. Can’t remember why.”

“Oh.”

“But, look. Here, I’ll draw you one.” Anthony stretched out a toe and drew a crooked looking H. There, that’s Australia. Here’s England,” and he drew a small peanut off to one side. Tiffany laughed.

He drew France and Spain and Italy, a ridiculously large boot kicking its stone. She walked onto the beach and drew Africa and South America as mirror images of each other. Then Anthony was cupping his hands under her chin and pouring goon into her mouth as a priest passing out wine at communion. Asia and Russia were indistinguishable scrawls, and Canada was forgotten about when North America was drawn by Tiff, using the toe of her thong.

They drank more and argued about which pole Santa lived in. They drew hasty lines across their Daliesque world—showing where they'd been, and ended up lying on their backs, looking at the stars. And Tiffany told him of the map inside her head.

"I'd love to go to America, and do all the cliché things. Visit the Statue of Liberty, drive an open topped Mustang to Las Vegas and get married dressed as Elvis."

Anthony squeezed the last drips of wine into his mouth and then blew on the nozzle until he had a silver cushion which he placed under his head. His dreadlocks fell over it onto the sand like a large clump of seaweed.

"I reckon I might just stay here."

They looked up at the stars and listened to the ocean. Voices called to them from the direction of the Bogey Hole but they didn't move. Soon the ocean reached forward a little further and wet their feet, reminding them who was in charge. It was time to go.

"There they are! Hey Tiff!"

Anthony grabbed Tiffany by the hand then and they ran together over the sand, over the boardwalk and across the road. Down a couple of streets and into a house, into a bedroom. And that was that.



Now Tiffany continued down Hunter Street. She had always found the centre of Newcastle to be a strange place. Most of the shops looked like they struggled. Shopkeepers sat behind counters doing crosswords or reading the paper as if they weren't expecting any customers at all. Some dusted. She wondered how they ever paid the rent.

Finally she reached Islington, and turned to walk up Beaumont Street, behind the Kent Hotel to the house she shared with Skye. She stopped at the gate and prepared herself. All she wanted to do was go inside, have a shower and go to bed. She didn't feel like explaining herself.

Tiffany stood and looked at the house, assessing whether Skye was awake or not. She usually slept in, but it was the holidays. Ten people could be still awake in the lounge room. It all depended on what had happened the night before.

Suddenly her stomach dropped as if she was in a lift. Her vision blurred so it looked as if the whole house jumped in front of her. Her bedroom window fell onto the front yard and shattered. She grabbed the front gate to steady herself and watched as the whole house leaned against the one next to it as if it had had the big night and was too tired to stand up by itself.

Skye came racing out the door towards her, as if she was the one who had made this happen. Tiffany didn't move but clung to the gate, in her last night's dress, sure that she was still drunk. The noise of it was still ringing in her ears. She looked around to see that the neighbour's brick wall had fallen across the front of Skye's car. For a moment she wondered whether Skye would be angry at her.

On the street someone yelled "bomb" and others ran from their houses and onto the street. Those who remembered the ships in Newcastle Harbour in World War 11 thought it was the Japanese finally returned.

What was going on? What was happening?

Ω

That night Tiffany and Skye decided to go to a friend of Skye's who lived in Broadmeadow and cram around the television. They walked up Beaumont Street, the police ushering them onto a side street so they couldn't see what was going on.

"Weird, huh. We have to walk all the way up to Broadmeadow to watch what is happening around the corner," said Skye; but Tiffany didn't answer her. She was trying to get a view of what a huddle of people were trying to dig out from under the pub. Or who.

"Hey Chris, this is my... this is Tiff." They all squeezed onto a small patch of stained carpet in front of the sagging lounge.

"Okay, okay, shut-up everyone. This is it."

The news showed people walking around David Jones in the centre of Newcastle and then a reporter started interviewing a man about the bus strike.

"Ah, so there really was a bus strike," thought Tiff, remembering the long walk home that morning.

The news reporter was interviewing someone from the bus driver's union when suddenly the camera shook.

"Whoa, check that out."

"Oh, my God."

"Freaky."

But Tiffany was a little disappointed, “That was it?” “The camera went wonky?” It felt much more powerful than that in real life. She had wanted to *see* the earthquake. “What does an earthquake look like anyway?” she thought as she watched the news.

It looked like a reporter standing in front of a fallen building, unsure of himself, excited and unprepared. It looked like people looking through the rubble, and a woman who worked at the chemist having her fifteen minutes of fame, “Then everything fell off the shelves and we ran out the back.”

But she didn’t see the earthquake because earthquakes can’t be seen. All that could be seen was the havoc it caused. All that could be seen was people helping, or just watching. Women waited outside BHP and yelled at the reporters because they thought their husbands and lovers had been caught in an explosion.

Nobody knew what had happened, not the boy riding his BMX up Beaumont Street or the fat lady sitting on a chair in the street, clutching her handbag and staring at the church roof which had fallen on her car. The fat lady must have thought that if she closed her eyes and opened them again then everything would go back to normal.

The news showed the Worker’s Club. The walls had swayed outwards during the quake, causing the roof to fall in. People were trapped under the concrete and dust. “We can see them in there, their arms and legs waving. But we are not sure how to get to them as the façade is unsafe.” The man in the cherry picker was unable to help, unable to do anything but look at the chandeliers glinting amongst the rocks and rubble like half sunken treasure.

They said there could be fifty people trapped inside, mainly elderly. Maybe that’s where the old man was headed that morning. He wasn’t leaving a lover, or returning to one. The poker machines were drawing him in with their magnets of addiction. Tiffany wondered if he was trapped inside, crushed by the impossible weight of concrete on his chest. His last secret hope pushed from his mouth. The poker machines holding onto their riches.

The news showed the evacuated hospital. Nurses held up sheets in front of the cameras while they treated patients one-handed.

“Oh, yeah, my sister works at the hospital right. And she reckons that this woman had her baby on the front lawn and this reporter dude from the newspaper climbed a tree to photograph her cause they had sheets up and that.”

“You are kidding.”

“That is so slack.”

“I can’t imagine it.”

Everyone shared their stories then, because that is what they had really come to do. They ignored the television showing an old woman looking for things in a house with the front sheared off. Nothing could hold their attention now as Chris told them about the homeless kids playing in the fountain in town, as if this day of chaos was a holiday for them.

Ω

Afterwards Tiffany and Skye walked home together. Beaumont Street was still blocked off. A security guard hurried them away from the rubble of the Kent Hotel which had fallen to the ground.

“You can sleep in with me Tiff.”

“Nah, it’s alright. I’ll just sleep on the couch.”

They drank on the front verandah, Skye smoked her menthol cigarettes and squashed the butts into a Milo tin, like she did every night. Tiffany sat and watched her, the orange glow disappearing along with their conversation and another one appearing, just as one of them thought of something else to say.

Tiffany sat on her bed and pulled off her dress, throwing it behind her bedroom door. Her wardrobe hung open, clothes spilt onto the floor. She stood on tiptoes and pulled her backpack off the top of the wardrobe. It was almost empty except for those odds and ends she had spent her last days in Britain madly running around buying and hadn’t used since. The thermal underwear, the mosquito net, the traveller’s journal. She opened the bottom of the pack, and pulled out a grey marle T-shirt, and held it to her face. Although it had spent a long time curled up in the bag she could still smell an English pub. The smell of lager and a marriage that didn’t belong to her.

Tiffany put the shirt on over Anthony’s and lay down on her bed, enjoying the breeze that blew her curtain like a ghost at the broken window. Whispering to her. She closed her eyes, listening, and soon fell asleep dreaming of arms and legs waving at her through broken bricks and crystal chandeliers, but she couldn’t get to them before they slowly sank and settled into the dust.

It was dark when she woke and went out to sit on the front step, her window glistening like a black hole on the grass, beckoning her to step into it.

After a while she went back inside and lay on the scratchy couch in the lounge room. One minute she was lying there and the next everything was falling. Glasses hit the floor in the kitchen, the ceiling came down and there was nothing she could do. She jumped off the couch and ran down the street. An awning fell and crushed her and Skye was screaming but Tiffany couldn’t move or answer. There was concrete in her mouth.

Tiffany saw Anthony's feet sticking out from under the rubble. She knew she shouldn't pull on them in case he had a neck injury but she did anyway. They didn't move and the warm, bony skin around his ankles slowly got colder. Tiffany doesn't know where her mum is and she doesn't know where her little brother is so she can't stop to help the fat old lady stumbling along the street with blood sticking her hair together.

She woke on the scratchy couch without any breath and felt all alone, although she knew she was one of the lucky ones.



Twenty homes in Mayfield were marked for total or partial demolition. On Silsoe Street houses looked like they had exploded from within, spewing their owners lives onto the street. Christmas decorations tangled in the debris were left uncollected, except by some enterprising birds looking to renovate their nests. One house had lost its front so that it gave the impression of being a giant television. People drove by slowly to watch Norma sorting through her possessions, deciding what to take. Photographs of the kids growing up or a comfortable pair of sneakers and insurance documents? Her empty Christmas tree standing in the corner of the lounge room.

Magpies gathered on her front fence, watching her intently as she went from room to room, waiting for the chunks of Devon she usually threw them in the mornings. They sat looking at her, as if they too were watching the television, refusing to sing until they were paid.



HBS.G Gibson.LG

14/28703-5/-/01

Leo Edmund Maley  
Executor of Estate of Laura Ellen Maley  
110 Maitland Road  
MAYFIELD NSW 2304

LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1919

SECTION 249(h)

ORDER TO DEMOLISH A BUILDING WHICH IS UNSIGHTLY  
DILAPIDATED AND DANGEROUS

The Council of the City of Newcastle HEREBY ORDERS you as Owner to demolish the building described in the Schedule below within a period of (30) days from the date hereon.

The building is in such a dilapidated condition as to be prejudicial to the inhabitants of the neighbourhood of such building.

The building is dangerous to persons using a public place namely corner Maitland Road and Corona Street Mayfield.

DATED THIS FIRST DAY OF SEPTEMBER 1989

for

W B LEWIS

TOWN CLERK

SCHEDULE The cantilevered awning and parapet attached to the building situated at Lot 184 and Parts Lot 183 DP 95375 No. 116-122 Maitland Road, Mayfield. Your attention is drawn to the provisions of the Local Government Act, relating to (a) rights to appeal against this order, (b) the right of Council to demolish if the order is not obeyed and to recover the costs involved and (c) a penalty if the order is not obeyed.

*His Honour: And Mr Maley, just to put onto the record, you're appearing for yourself, is that right?*

*Accused: That is correct, your Honour.*

Ω

Anthony licked the dried salt from his lips and watched as a strange little man hurtled out of the building and grabbed at the barricades he was holding. Anthony was surprised. He had assumed by the look of the place that nobody had been inside it for years.

"Hey," the old man shouted. Their faces were close enough to smell each other's breath. "There's nothing wrong here. We are all fine."

"All?" Anthony looked at the building again. It must have been a shop of some kind, but certainly not recently. Everything in the windows was all faded and sunken, as if it had been stuck in a time warp. Old egg-beaters hung in the window, making him think instantly of his grandmother when she came to visit, making sponge cakes with his mother. They beat eggs with the egg-beater and beat up their husbands with their endless talk.

Anthony looked back up and the old man was gone. Maybe he'd imagined it. He went back to work spacing out the barricades, when the old man was in front of him again.

"This is my place of business," he said, his voice soft and old fashioned as if he, too, had been caught in a time warp.

"We don't need these. We are fine."

Anthony looked into the shop again, but couldn't see anyone else. His skin prickled.

He didn't want to say anything in case the old man vaporised into thin air and he was left talking to himself in the street. Then Phil would think he was mad for sure; he was already annoyed with him for being late that morning.

The old man pulled on the barricades. They were still in pieces. The yellow and white striped plank and the two black metal legs. Anthony and Kev were unloading them from the truck, seeing how many they'd need before they put them together. He presumed Phil would then take one look at this dump and sign the form for them to come back and pull the fucker down. End of story.

Then the thin, old hands of the man pulled the barricades straight out of his hands, and went over and threw them back onto the back of the truck. Anthony was surprised at his strength. He obviously wasn't a ghost. "Just a nu--er of some sort," as Tiff would say. Anthony laughed at himself. He was even starting to think in her accent. He couldn't believe anyone would give a shit about this eyesore. Nobody obviously had for at least the last twenty years by the looks of things.

Ω

*Borosh: The general circumstances are that the Crown would be alleging that a number of barriers were erected by the Newcastle Council around Mr Maley's premises in the Maitland Road, pursuant to powers of the Council under the Local Government Act; That Mr Maley attempted to interfere with the erecting of those barricades: that some officers from Newcastle police were summoned and spoke to Mr Maley; Mr Maley asked for permission to lock up his shop, which was granted; the officers followed him into the shop and when he declined to leave, the officers attempted to escort him from the premises and, at that stage, Mr Maley resisted the officers escorting him from the premises.*

*Accused: Well, I wish to mention, your Honour, that this is not just a usual ordinary appeal. There's an important question in law involved and I will be asking you to watch carefully the evidence as it comes before you, which you usually do, of course, and you'll understand what I mean by this aspect, which hasn't yet come up.*

Ω

*Borosh: And as a result of that (earthquake), did the Council carry out certain works and inspections in the Newcastle city area?*

*Buckley: Yes, it did.*

*Borosh: And what were those works and inspections in relation to?*

*Buckley: The works and inspections were in relation to making safe buildings and, well, particularly buildings and road works in the area, immediately after the earthquake.*

*Borosh: Sir, as a result of receiving that rapid assessment form, did you then cause something to be done?*

*Buckley: Oh, I put into action a gang of men with barricades to barricade as described on the form.*

*Borosh: When you arrived at the property, what did you observe?*

*Buckley: I observed the proprietor, should I say, not allowing them, or impeding them from doing...*

Ω

Phil Buckley came rushing down, his tie flying in the wind, cursing under his breath. The earthquake had heightened everyone's emotions and he'd had enough of being called from one site to another because some silly bitch had left behind her favourite lipstick. Phil Buckley was pissed. If they called the cops he'd end up in court. He didn't have time for that when half of Newcastle needed inspections.

Ω

*Borosh: When you say “impeding”, what was he actually doing?*

*Buckley: Well, he was picking up the barriers as they were placing them and returning them to the truck.*

Ω

Anthony watched as again that strange little man started picking up the barriers and taking them back to the truck. He'd pick up the whole three pieces at once, just like Anthony and Kev. Anthony wondered how he had the strength for it. Later he would tell Tiffany, “He looked real old and frail, like. You know, like an old man.”

Anthony and Kev sat back and watched their boss talking to Leo. They hid their smirks behind their hands, hoping they would have a punch up. It was funny to watch Phil all steamed up like that.

Ω

*Borosh: Was he a person that was known to you at that time?*

*Buckley: At that stage, no.*

*Borosh: You say the proprietor was moving the barriers, were these barriers assembled or unassembled?*

*Buckley: The ones I noticed him moving were unassembled. They were in the process of being assembled. I said, “Mr Maley, we need to erect these barricades because of – we suspect there’s some earthquake damage done to your shop”. He said, “There’s nothing wrong here. We don’t need these”. Or something to that effect.*

*Borosh: And did you say anything then?*

*Buckley: I said, “Well, I have an order here which directs me to erect the barricades again”, which he ignored.*

*Borosh: You say “ignored,” what did he do?*

*Buckley: He turned and just walked back into his shop.*

Ω

Phil Buckley started out talking to the old man gently. He had a way of explaining things that made it sound like this thing he wants you to do is the most important thing in the world, usually working overtime, or having a late lunch. Anthony would find himself doing it, only wondering later why he had worked on a Sunday of his own free will. Phil was clever like that.

Anthony didn't think they'd have it that simple with this old man though. He seemed like a bit of a crackpot. He must have been, judging by his shop.

“Must’ve sweet-talked him,” said Kev, as they watched the old man walk back into his shop. Phil Buckley turned and nodded at them.

Anthony seethed. “That’s all he has to do,” he thought. Turn and nod, maybe twitch his hand a bit like you would to a dog, and we are back grabbing the barricades out of the back of the truck and lining them up along the roadway again.

“I guess that’s the difference between bosses and the rest of us. They know we’ll obey them, and we just can’t imagine anyone obeying us like that. That’s the difference”.

Ω

*Borosh: And did they?*

*Buckley: They began.*

*Borosh: And what happened then?*

*Buckley: He returned from the shop and picked the barricades up and put them back on the truck.*

*Borosh: And what did you do then?*

*Buckley: I warned him that if he was to do that again, I’d be forced to call the police. After I’d warned Mr Maley, he took no heed of my warning and interfered again and at that point I called on my two-way radio to our switchboard and asked them to summon the police to that address.*

*Borosh: How many were there?*

*Buckley: There were two officers.*

*Borosh: And did you speak to them?*

*Buckley: Spoke to them, yes.*

*Borosh: What did they do?*

*Buckley: They advised Mr Maley that this work was needed to be done and it was to be done without interference.*

*Borosh: And what did Mr Maley do?*

*Buckley: Mr Maley spoke to them and reiterated that there was no damage or no problem with his shop.*

Ω

“Hey look,” said Kev. “Coppers.”

Anthony half turned to watch two policemen walking towards them. It made him nervous.

“Geez, is that really necessary?”

“Smoko time has been and gone,” Kev answered. “Gotta get on with it somehow.”

Despite their hunger Anthony and Kev enjoyed watching Phil cluck about like a mother-in-law at Christmas time, large sweat marks under his pits. He wasn't used to being out of the air-conditioning. Those sweat marks gave Anthony some kind of satisfaction. But most of all he just wanted to put the barricades up so he could go and eat his sausage roll.

Ω

*Borosh: Right?*

*Buckley: And then he, from memory, went back inside and one of the officers said, well, we could go ahead and erect the barricades then.*

*Borosh: And did you do so?*

*Buckley: We did. We began to erect the barricades.*

Ω

Anthony stood up again, yanking the barricades out of the truck. He didn't bother to do it fast this time. Kev was in front of him. He went at it as gung-ho as ever. He considered work to be a workout. Loved lifting things. "Building up my muscles," he said.

Kev strutted back and forth in front of the shop, showing off. He was loving it now he had an audience. It wasn't just Phil and the police now neither. People were slowing down on Maitland Road to watch what was going on. Some people were coming out of their shops further up and walking down for to look.

Anthony slowed down. He had figured out what was happening. The old man would wait until there were four or five barricades lined up before he came back out of the shop. He was putting on a spectacle himself.

"You should have seen it Tiff, it was absolute madness. There were these coppers standing there in their uniforms, then Kev doing his little show and the old man in and out of the shop like a Jack-in-the-box.

The boss got nervous in the end though. I could see by the way he was walking. Like he was scared, even. It was all too much for him. If he wasn't such a turd I would have felt sorry for him."

Ω

*Borosh: And what happened?*

*Buckley: Mr Maley again returned from his shop and was about to interfere with the barricading once more and a police officer warned him that if he was to touch the barricades, he was to be arrested.*

*Borosh: And did you see what happened?*

*Buckley: After the officer spoke to him the second time, Mr Maley then bent over to pick up another barricade. It was when the officers then arrested him.*

*Borosh: And how did they do that?*

*Buckley: They, I think, they just seized each arm.*

*Borosh: And what happened then?*

*Buckley: I overheard the officers saying to him that they were going to give him the opportunity to close up his shop and he was to accompany them.*

*Borosh: What did Mr Maley do?*

*Buckley: He proceeded back into his shop, and the officers waited for a short time.*

*Borosh: What did the officers do after they waited the short time?*

*Buckley: They proceeded into the shop after him.*

*Borosh: And did you see them emerge?*

*Buckley: They emerged with Mr Maley.*

*Borosh: And was anything happening?*

*Buckley: There was a struggle.*

*Borosh: Who was struggling?*

*Buckley: Mr Maley.*

*Borosh: And how was he struggling?*

*Buckley: He was physically trying to remove each officer from his arm. There was an officer on each arm.*

*Borosh: And did they eventually put Mr Maley into the police car?*

*Buckley: They did.*

*Borosh: And they left?*

*Buckley: They left.*

*Borosh: And the council workers completed erecting the barriers?*

*Buckley: We did.*



Anthony was glad when the police finally dragged the old man away. It only took them half an hour to get the barricades out when he was gone and by then he was really ready for a beer. They went up to the pub and got hot pies. Anthony didn't even bother with the sauce he was so hungry.

Anthony and Kev waited there until their break was over. They weren't keen to return to the worksite knowing that Phil was annoyed.

“He’ll have to go to court now,” said Kev. “He’ll win though, for sure. Nothing to worry about.”

“Yeah, except paperwork. Ha ha.”

Ω

*Borosh: The barricades were on public property?*

*Buckley: The barricades were on the public footpath.*

*Borosh: Outside his shop?*

*Buckley: Outside his shop.*

*His Honour: It strikes me- well, I don’t know if I should prejudice Mr Maley’s case, but there’s not a shred of evidence that the council had authority to put them there.*

*Borosh: Well, your Honour, not wishing to prejudice Mr Maley’s case, the Crown would be relying on the council’s power under the Local Government Act.*

*His Honour: That’s not before me and I’ve got no evidence of that.*

*Borosh: A matter of law, your Honour.*

*His Honour: What? The council can put up barricades any time it thinks it’s appropriate and people are bound by it?*

*Borosh: No. Council can erect barricades when an opinion is formed as to the safety—*

*His Honour: Where’s that evidence? It’s not there. I’m not going to take into this case assumed powers of the council to throw up barricades whenever it considers it mete and fit and just to do so.*

*Mr Maley had every right as a citizen to resist the legal activities of police officers who, as I have found on the first count, were acting illegally in maintaining the council’s illegal erection of, and maintenance of the erection, of these obstructions to his shop.*

*This is not a trial connected with the reasonableness of the arrest. It goes to this man’s activities. Is he committing a crime when he, innocent, tries to use that force which is necessary to remove blockades from his house. That’s the issue. And if that involves struggling with a police officer who is maintaining an illegal barricade to his shop, he’s entitled to use that force which is necessary.*

*Borosh: I’d submit your Honour is in error in that regard.*

*His Honour: That might be true in Hungary and Moscow; it’s not true in Newcastle. You can submit that to the CCA. I’m not going to waste my time on this matter any further.*

*Borosh: Your Honour pleases.*

*His Honour: What did the magistrate do to him, Mr Crown?*

*Borosh: Fines, your Honour.*

*His Honour: The fines are quashed.*

*Accused: But the other part of it too. As far as in resist, I was given two weeks' gaol.*

*His Honour: Was he gaoled as well?*

*Accused: Yes.*

*Borosh: My understanding was fines, your Honour.*

*His Honour: Was he gaoled as well?*

*Accused: Yes.*

*Borosh: Yes, your Honour, I withdraw that. It's pointed out by my instructing friend, two counts of 14 days gaol.*

*His Honour: Yes. With respect, the convictions are quashed and the sentences of imprisonment are likewise quashed. Does that conclude the matter?*

*Accused: Yes.*

*Borosh: Yes, Your Honour.*

*His Honour: What was going to be your big legal point for the day?*

*Accused: Well, the legal point which I wish to draw out attention to is that if you looked at the Act... I have a copy of the Act here...the legal point I was going to draw to your attention to, is the way the Act is worded: "interfere with a barrier erected on a street, fence, or whatever". The main fact is that the defendant picked up planks and triangles, which were lying flat on the footpath. Now those things—*

*His Honour: So you reckon it wasn't erected—*

*Accused: They are not barriers until they're assembled, so they would have missed out on that as well.*

*His Honour: I don't know if that's the truth. You can go home. You've had your big triumph in Newcastle.*

*Accused: Yes.*



The last two earthquake victims were found in the basement of the Worker's Club sixty hours after the earthquake. Tiffany tried to go to sleep but she kept imagining those two; covered in dust; frozen in time; chatting over a coffee; perfectly preserved like the victims of Pompeii, a fitting tribute to their own lives. But under three levels of building she knew they would be more recognizable by their clothes than anything else. She remembered the man who told her about the bus strike, and wondered if he was one of them.

Finally she got up. It was still early, but warm, so she went for a walk. The beach drew her like a magnet as she left Skye still asleep and she found herself walking past all the old miners' terraces in Cook's Hill. She tried to catch glimpses of the people inside as the suburb started waking up. It reminded her of her neighbourhood in Brixton, except for the sound of waves in the distance instead of sirens. Finally she ended up at the Bogey Hole to wash the dust out of her mind. It wasn't like the first time she'd been there when every available space had been taken up by people getting drunk on wine and music. She passed a couple on the stairs on her way down, snuggling into each other.

"The two-headed monsters," she thought. That's what Skye called couples.

"It's all yours," said the guy as they passed, and it was. She sat alone on the slimy rocks and put her feet in the water. She lifted the coolness up to her face and rubbed it through her hair.

"Ah, the T-shirt thief. Hello, I know you."

"I left a note."

"I was too shy to call."

"Yeah, right."

"You angry?"

"Nah. Where did you go though?"

"Surfing. Sorry, she's my first love."



Tiffany woke the next morning with a stream of light invading the room in a horizontal beam where one of the plastic louvers was missing. Anthony was missing too.

She left her parrot earrings on the bedside table, as insurance, and went to find him. He was surfing near the lighthouse— sitting on his board and squinting out to sea, lining up for the next wave. He smiled and raised his hand, catching a wave to her feet as if she had lured him there. That made her feel pretty special, until she realised that he was watching the other surfers the whole time he was talking to her. They walked to the car park together where he hurriedly changed from wetsuit to work boots. She looked away from the thick blobs of freckles on his shoulders.

"Sorry, I can't be late for work, or the boss will kill me. Much as I'd prefer to stay here."

"That's okay."

"C'mon, I'll shout you breakfast."

Breakfast was a Diet Coke and a packet of chips from Scotties along with a quick kiss on the cheek on the way out. The kind of kiss you give your sister, or a friend. Someone that you don't want the girl working in the milk bar to know you spent the night with. Someone who has come to find you at the beach first thing in the morning, like a girlfriend. Anthony didn't want a girlfriend.

Tiffany watched as Anthony hurried down the street. He was cute with his dreadlocked hair, his body lean and muscled. Every part of him had been moulded by the waves, his hair, his muscles, his brain. She definitely wasn't his first love, she knew that. But for some reason that made him all the more attractive.

She wasn't interested in a nice guy with flowers and dinner dates telling her he loved her after three days. Telling her that his mother would love her. Or else telling her, finally, about his wife.

Anthony rang her that night. Skye passed the phone to her with raised eyebrows.

"It's the Billabong guy."

"He probably just wants his T-shirt back."

"I think he wants a bit more than that."



Their lives slowly became entwined, sharing each other's beds, toothbrushes and more and more of each other's time. Tiffany had stuffed her sarong in the gap of the missing blind. Anthony woke at a quarter to seven to the orange haze and watched Tiffany sleeping beside him. Her short blonde hair was clumped up at the back with stale gel so she looked like a cockatoo. Her shoulders were naked. "It's too late for surf, but I've still got time to get to work with a smile on my face", thought Anthony.

His mates used to make handbrake noises when he was hanging out with Kate instead of them. He'd started surfing later each day, until it was only the weekends. His days were filled with work and Kate whining in his ear on the phone.

He looked at Tiffany again. Did she look smug in her sleep? He looked back at the clock. Still time for a quick surf. He grabbed his boardies and left the room naked, surf board under one arm, so as not to wake her.

Anthony felt with satisfaction the soft click as the front door closed behind him. The door had never latched properly until the earthquake. Now it swung perfectly and closed softly. He chuckled to himself. He must be about the only person who had benefited from the earthquake. He imagined his Tiffany, undisturbed inside, still warm, and had to restrain himself from going back up and sliding into bed beside her.



Tiffany woke alone, Anthony's flat mates were smoking in the lounge room. Josh and Jared or Jamie or something. All "J" names. She groaned. But at least now she had a change of clothes. She knew her way to the front door.

On the street she paused and looked towards Scotties milk bar. Anthony was leaning up against the doorway swigging on his Coke, next to his surfboard. It wasn't like he hadn't warned her; she wasn't his first love.

But she wanted to wake up beside him at a decent hour. When the sheets were too hot and their skin was salty with sweat. She wanted him to look at the board standing near the window and turn back to her. To realise that her eyes were the colour of the ocean, and that just for today, that was all he needed.

Anthony saw Tiff watching him and waved her over. Tiff looked at him. He hadn't even moved his back off the wall. Just waved her over and expected her to come. She turned and walked to the bus-stop. She knew he could see her there, but he didn't come over. When the bus came she stole a look at Scotties. The doorway was empty.



Anthony woke in the dark, not sure if he'd slept for hours or minutes. He was drunk and hung-over at the same time. Anthony felt the emptiness of his bed. The same emptiness that he'd felt while downing beers at the Brewery. He'd switched to bourbon, trying to obliterate himself. He'd succeeded but the emptiness didn't leave. He could feel it through the burn of spirits down his throat and the fuzziness of the walls as he made his way to the urinal. He could feel it through his exuberant yahooing down the sleeping streets. Anthony didn't recognise it. He had never felt it before. He didn't know what it was, but it annoyed him so he drank some more.

It had been Anthony's idea to go out for a night on the town.

"Well, what's left of it anyway," Josh joked, a joke that became funnier the more they drank, and the more they drank the more they repeated it. And the funnier it was.

"Let's go to the Kent," Jordan said, and they laughed. And Anthony would laugh although he was thinking of Tiff sitting at the bus-stop, refusing to look at him. He thought of how good a Coke tastes after a surf when you drink with your lips in the rim of the bottle so you can taste the salt.

Tiffany's sarong was flapping in the breeze of his open window, hanging over the blinds. He couldn't remember doing that. He spread out like a starfish on the empty bed and stretched. Jordan and Josh were still asleep, not yet waking up to their hangovers and

fragmented memories of the bouncers kicking them out of the Brewery. Anthony remembered being dragged away from a skinny girl with skinny lips. He felt the empty bed next to him and breathed a sigh of relief.

They'd walked through the streets looking for something to do and continued on to the Empire. The bouncers hadn't let them in so they would all wake up with all their teeth intact. It had been a good night.

It was only five am when Anthony walked up Scott Street to the beach with his surfboard under his arm. Despite his early hangover, the sea had lured him out of his bed. His head felt heavy and dull, like a simple child's. His stomach swirled back and forwards with seasickness as he walked. Anthony knew from experience that the only way to make a hangover better was to be underwater. You can't feel a hangover underwater. Salty water, early and cold. No air touching your body.

Although it was still dark there was no density to the darkness. Only outlines of the buildings were clear. A few people emerged into the day, but it was too early to have to acknowledge each other and so the stillness hadn't been broken yet. The grass was cold between his toes as he stood for a moment before crossing the road to the beach, trying to decide whether to surf at Nobbies or Newcastle. He walked through the cool grey sand looking at his feet, barely lifting them as he waded through it. When he reached the water's edge he looked back at his tracks through the virgin sand. Soft and messy in the dry, then more defined in the wet. They looked like a lazy man's footprints to him and he wondered how he had ever ended up here.

The water licked at his toes, as warm as the air. Anthony paddled out past the breakers where he pulled himself up onto the board and sat, rising and falling with the unbroken waves. He looked at the white glow of the lighthouse on Nobby's Head and scanned the beach. It was empty except for the occasional mound of seaweed. On the ocean, three coal carriers were waiting to port.

He could see Newcastle hospital, flickering with lights as it geared up for the day. It was as if the people inside were unaware that the northern wing had fallen away during the earthquake. It looked like it had been destroyed by a giant creature that had come out of the sea. Anthony had always thought it wouldn't be so bad dying in that hospital, looking at the sea. He would go there when he was old and his life had turned to memories that faded in and out of reality while he watched the waves.

The sky was clear and only the lightest of breezes tickled his bare chest, like a lover stroking his nipples. He cupped some water in his hand and let it fall over his forehead. Despite his hangover, he knew in his heart that he lived in the best place in the world.

Anthony let the sea take him in her own way. Filling his mouth with her salt while she lashed at his ears. His dreadlocks whipped at his back like ropes of flagellation. He coasted in to shore, skidding through the white foam as vans started to pull up. Anthony knew that soon he wouldn't be alone. He paddled back in and looked for one last wave. And another last wave. And then another until there was a jam of surfers all waiting their turn, and he hauled himself out of the waves and skinned off his wetsuit like a merman losing his tail ready to become a human for the day. He wondered why mermaids would ever do this. Surely they could never feel a love so strong that it would take them from the sea?



Tiffany wrestled with her bed sheets, checking her watch. Six-thirty. Surely it was later; the heat was already dense around her skin. While she lay trying to convince herself that she could get back to sleep a whole other world was happening outside. People walking their dogs, yelling at their kids, and closing car doors as they left for work impossibly early in buttoned shirts and leather shoes.

Anthony walked past the ocean baths with his board under his arm. The boardwalk was thick now with dog walkers and joggers. The dogs seemed grateful. The sky was clear blue decorated with wisps of cloud that brought with them no promise of rain

Anthony's mood sank when he remembered where he was working. Demolition in Mayfield. "Oh shit," he thought. That place again. His hangover returned.

They were all lined up as he parked his van, like a procession waiting for him to arrive. Through bleary eyes Anthony watched as cops and suits passed papers between them.



The Coliseum saw the congregation meet in front of her. She saw them looking up at her, but Leo was there and she knew he would protect her.



Anthony climbed out of his van. There was a news reporter and a cameraman standing off to the side where they could get a nice angle. "Fucking hell," thought Anthony. "I don't want to end up on the news. Looking like an asshole. What if Tiff sees me?"

Phil Buckley was once again trying to placate the old man. "But, Mr Maley. Your home is unsafe."

Anthony walked sideways like a crab as he went to sit next to big Kev, trying to avoid being noticed by the people from the television station, by the police, or by his boss. The demolition workers weren't part of the huddle. Big Kev was waiting for him on the curb, directly under the awning that had been deemed unsafe. A hand painted sign on The Coliseum's window said: NOTHING WRONG HERE. BUSINESS AS USUAL. IT'S ONLY THE STUPID COUNCIL. Anthony went and joined Big Kev under the awning. It was already a stinking hot day so it was worth the danger just to sit in the shade.

Anthony knew that they weren't going to start anytime soon, not with that old lunatic running around, yelling at everybody. Bloody hell it was stinking hot, he just wanted to get on with it. The only reason he could see that would be bad to get rid of the awning was that there would be a few less metres of shade in the world. Other than that, for God's sake, it was just a bit of old rusty tin. It looked like absolute shit. He wanted to get rid of it, so he could go home and have a sleep. Full stop.

The police were already there, waiting. Six of them in total. The young ones muscled, chests out and arms held slightly away from their bodies, as if to make them seem bigger. Like a row of blue parrots fluffing their feathers. They were ready for action. It seemed like overkill for little Leo Maley.

The older police were bigger. Their muscles had turned into undefined bulk and their belts held their stomachs in, or at least up. Their authority had superseded their need for muscles.

Anthony watched the parade in front of him. They looked confident, like they knew they were the winners this time. For today was D-day, and even that old man with all his glorious ranting looked like he knew it too.

  

The Coliseum watched Leo putting on his show out the front, and she realised that is all it was. A show. Leo was strutting about like a man much larger. He was getting too close to people. People don't like that. They don't like it when you put your fingers in their faces.

  

Anthony lay on the footpath and pulled his cap over his face. This was going to take a while.

"Wake me up when it's over," he said.

"Check that out then," said Kev, pointing to the boss. Phil Buckley was running around in a flap again. Delegation over participation had always been his thing. Today he would be forced to participate. He'd be drawn in to face this crazy little dude.

His boss was wearing a tie that day, despite the heat. He must have been the only man in Mayfield wearing a shirt and a tie. Next to the uniformed coppers, and the workmen, even in his madness the old cunt had singled him out. Honed in on him like a hunting dog.

The reporter was on to it too.

“Looks like they got a good shot of him really sticking it to the boss. Just about had his finger up Phil’s nose.”

“Oh, the poor bastard,” said Anthony. “If they stick that photo in the Herald I’m gonna blow it up on the photocopier and stick it on the notice board.”

“Mad cunt.”

“Who?”

“You,” and they laughed into their fists like schoolboys.

Anthony didn’t really want to stick around and see the carnage. Didn’t have the stomach for it. He’d just watch it on the news that night. Josh and Jordan would fill the empty seats around him and they’d laugh and drink beer until their hangovers were just dim memories that they could delay for another night.

The heat was unbearable by the time they started working.

Ω

The Coliseum felt resigned and betrayed. Sure, the corrugated iron shrieked a bit when it was torn from her, buckling like thunder. But she could do nothing to prevent her face being torn from her and thrown onto trucks to be taken away. She stood exposed, the sun glaring in at her windows. Eyes that couldn’t blink. Motorists had slowed down to watch her great undressing. That was the spectacle of the day and even Leo couldn’t match that.

Leo was an insignificant ant. She would no longer protect him. He had already abandoned her and strangers had come and walked through her rooms. They had left their syringes and taken everything else. They had ripped a fireplace from her wall.

Ω

The demolitionists could feel the heat of the corrugated iron through their gloves. Anthony could smell the previous night’s bourbon leaching out through his pores. He threw a sheet of iron down to the truck and stopped for a moment, looking up and down the deserted street. Shoppers had abandoned this area in favour of air-conditioned shopping centres, but the Mayfield shopkeepers sat and waited, just in case. A lone sparrow pecked at some chewing gum that was melting into the road, unsure of what to think of this rare treasure.

Anthony looked back up the road towards home, and the ocean, unable tell whether he was looking at heat haze or whether it was his light-headedness that was making the road in front of him blur.

The job took longer than expected, with all the hold-ups in the morning. A group of kids were coming home from school by the time they were sweeping up the path. They came in a rush, their leather shoes tied to their schoolbags. One girl squealed, trying to catch up, as she ran along the street in her bare feet. Sweat curled her hair into ringlets that escaped from her ponytail. They ran from the shade of one spindly tree to another. Anthony watched them as they ran, their feet burning on the concrete as they ran past The Coliseum.

Anthony breathed a sigh of relief. The job was done. Phil had gone back to the office, looking flat. He had long since dispensed with his tie.

As he sat in his van and pulled off his boots, Anthony looked back at The Coliseum. He lingered for a while, unable to leave. But he didn't need to see the look on the old man's face either. He didn't need to lie in bed at night with that in his mind.

So he started up the van and imagined what he'd do when he got home. Fall in with Josh and Jordan, drinking cold beers on the porch waiting for the breeze to come in. It would get dark and it would still be too hot. He would know he wouldn't be able to sleep so he'd have another beer. The hair of the dog. So he wouldn't feel so shit tonight. So he could feel shit tomorrow instead.

Anthony passed Islington Park. Hookers were already out on the street. The desperate ones. He pulled over and raced across Maitland Road to the phone box. The concrete was still hot under his feet, the metal buttons too hot to press, the receiver too hot to hold. He held it away from his ear.

49 622 869...he had run that number over in his head all day.

"Hey? Tiff?"

Ω

No one slept that night. Anthony sat on the beach, talking to Tiff. She fitted so snugly beside him, contour for contour. And she told him of her plans, and he told her of his dreams.

Leo sat in his father's chair in the window of The Coliseum. He looked out onto the street and waited for the sun to come up. The Coliseum could not be consoled. She creaked and groaned like always but she sounded different somehow and he couldn't understand her anymore.

## Vertigan

Leo sat there all night in the window, unshielded by the awning. The sun got too hot too early. Passers-by noticed him and stopped to stare. He hardly blinked. Sweat formed on his forehead and trickled down each side of his nose.

Soon, the sun glared right into The Coliseum and made her hot and angry.

Ω

*The Town Clerk  
Newcastle Council  
City Hall  
King St,  
Newcastle 2300*

*Due to the council's blundering in the first place the awning at 116-118 Maitland Road Mayfield was torn down without us ever being consulted.*

*It is clear that it was torn down soon after the earthquake because of envy, spite, and prejudice of the Council's staff and they knowingly hid the real facts.*

*It should never have been taken down in the first place.*

*The intrigue, spite and prejudice of the Council's staff about this is clearly evident from the fact that if they really thought that there was anything wrong or danger requiring attention they would have had or placed props supports to the awning like they did to many other buildings at the time all over the district. But no props of any kind were placed there at all.*

*In the mania immediately following the earthquake this matter arose as a Council blunder or mistake. They attempted to make out that it was an earthquake hazard/matter and so it was torn down wrongly without consulting us and we never knew anything prior.*

*The council has attempted to hoodwink and bamboozle the court about this with a bundle of figures but I have unravelled it all and exposed the whole false set up. They have grossly, blandly manipulated their account in this matter. Therefore all of their evidence should be dismissed and disallowed. The council is clearly only trying to deceive the court about same with fakes. The court is not meant to be deceived by such goings on in this way. The court has more important things to do. I am calling on the council to put a stop to all these goings on and clean up its act.*

*Leo Maley.  
6 November 1992*

Vertigan

Mr L. Maley  
c/- 118 Maitland Rd  
MAYFIELD NSW 2304

Dear Sir,

NOS 116-118 MAITLAND ROAD, MAYFIELD

I refer to your letter of 1<sup>st</sup> July, 1992 and advise as follows:

1. Your insinuations in regard to the removal of the awning at the above premises is strenuously rejected.
2. Council acted in accordance with the legislative requirements of the Local Government Act, 1919 at all times.
3. Council accepts no responsibility whatsoever for the replacement of the awning.

Yours Faithfully,  
W. Grant  
GENERAL MANAGER

**Newcastle Herald**

**Man ignored city notices, court told.**

Date: 29/10/1998

Newcastle Herald

A MAYFIELD man repeatedly ignored Newcastle council repair notices, then prosecuted the council when it removed an awning from the building, Newcastle District Court heard yesterday.

Representing himself, Mayfield recluse Mr Leo Maley is taking action against the council for dismantling an awning from the landmark Coliseum building in Maitland Road, Mayfield, in 1990, following the 1989 Newcastle earthquake.

He is also claiming damages for the removal of building materials from the premises in 1994.

Mr Maley cross-examined himself during yesterday's proceedings, addressing himself as Sir.

Barrister Mr Simon Arben, representing the council, suggested that Mr Maley returned repair notices to the council to deny he had received them.

"That is your practice—every time you got a notice from council, you sent it back and pretended you never got it," Mr Arben said.

Mr Maley denied the suggestion.

"On one notice hand delivered to you, you wrote: "I am not this person," then signed your name on it," Mr Arben asserted.

"It is signed by an L. Maley. Is that your signature?"

"I don't take much notice of notices."

Mr Arben replied:

"You don't take much notice of anything."

Mr Arben said that letters from a tenant of the building about the building's condition had been ignored by Mr Maley.

Mr Arben said that photographs taken of the building's yard in 1991 showed the shed was "dilapidated".

Judge Delany will continue hearing the matter today.

Ω

## **Woomera Memories**

Oh, yes. I remember Leo Maley. He was a funny little man. He charged about the place like a blowfly, only stopping when he just about crashed into something. He didn't move out of the way if you were walking past him on the street. If you didn't move he'd just crash right into you, mumbling something or other.

I remember the fire, that's for sure. All the Woomera kids charged towards it, looking for excitement and adventure. They didn't get much of either, the security guards sending them back to town before they even saw what was going on.

Taken from "Woomera on the Web" 12/ 04/1999.

Ω

*I danced with Leo Maley once. We were young and he was very handsome. I'll never forget it.*

*Anon*

## **Mark**

*Mark sat stiffly in his chair like a man who had spent his life in uniform. He'd had the kind of relationship with Leo that many police do with those who live their lives on the boundaries of the law. Beneath their contempt for each other was a relationship of mutual tolerance, forced upon them both as it is with siblings that have to share a room.*

*There was a brief silence as James Carol finished speaking. Mark filled that silence with his strong, steady voice.*

*—Name's Mark Henderson. I'm a retired police officer. I worked in Mayfield, then Wallsend. Later on in Hamilton. Left the force in '97.*

*As you can imagine I had a lot of dealings with Leo Maley over the years. Leo Maley was a very intelligent man. I think a lot of people forget that because of the way he lived and such, but he was a very smart man.*

## Ω

Rob walked up Havelock Street towards the boarding house. The old YMCA stood at the top of the hill. The deep front yard and a couple of date palms gave the suggestion of her former glory. A different era when women had waists and men short back and sides. And they went to Saturday night dances to meet and marry, often unhappily. So creating the problems of the next generation.

As Rob got close to the top of Havelock Street he could see vehicles in various stages of disrepair standing in the yard. Some of the residents were attempting to fix them up, without cash, or skill. Just intermittent daydreams.

One car had sunk into the mud, forgotten or given up on.

Rob's room was plain but liveable. A desk and a bed. He kept the few clothes he owned folded in his cupboard. Socks in pairs. A neatly folded towel hung over a coat hanger on the back of his door. He had tried to make the space into his own.

The youths that had met in groups ready to dance had all gone. And so the YMCA stood until her curtains grew old and faded, hanging dismally out of windowpanes. The

building stood, waiting still, like an aging wallflower as the cracks appeared in her brickwork.

Now the rows of windows held tenants whose faces weren't so fresh. Pock marked by childhoods devoid of the necessary ingredients to make an adult that could avoid drugs, crime and jail.

They came here, like Rob had when he got out of goal, for the cheap rent. No need for a bond. He slept in his room with his bed and his desk. It felt comfortable for him. Familiar.

Rob stuck with the one or two that he trusted. At least while he was watching them. They walked in and out of those front doors, like the dancers had before them. And they called this place home.

Ω

*—So as a police officer I had to spend a fair bit of time in court. And Leo Maley was often there. He used to always carry this old briefcase. It was so old he had it tied up with a bit of rope. Or else he carried all his papers in plastic bags, a bunch of them in each hand.*

*Leo Maley always defended himself. He was sort of famous for it. Well, you've probably all read something about that in the papers. We all knew him. The coppers, the judges and all that.*

*But like I said before, Leo Maley was a very smart man, you know, and he used to represent himself. I remember one time I was in court to give evidence and Leo Maley was there. He was up before us and so we were just waiting around, my partner and I, until it was our turn.*

*Often when we were in court for the day we'd go for a short walk, get some coffee and hang around the lobby, waiting to be called. But we saw that Leo was up first so we decided to stay and watch. It was like free entertainment with that man. He was completely different in a courtroom situation than on the street. He was confident and articulate. He would have made a really good lawyer.*

*Well, on this day he walked straight up to the judge and he said, "I demand a gwardiare, or a gravaman, something like that. Some word like that, a gwardiare or something".*

*Well the prosecutions lawyers were looking at each other like they had no idea what was going on and the judge was this little old man, he looked down over his glasses at Leo Maley with his eyebrows all bunched up above his glasses and asked him to repeat himself.*

*"I demand a gwardiare," said Leo and it turned out that word meant something like a trial within a trial. Leo Maley was questioning the whole letter of the law regarding his case to throw them off his own evidence.*

*The judge had to dismiss the case and Leo got off scot free. I think he used to go up to the law library at the university and look up all these obscure legal precedents and that's how he won most of his cases. He really was a very clever man.*



As Rob walked towards the corner he squinted his eyes against the sun and looked up at his room. A torn curtain hung lifelessly out of his screen-less window. He imagined another day and night. A whole day of pacing the floor until the pains left him clawing at his stomach like a woman in labour. Sleeplessness. That endless day that finally went black and cold as he lay waiting for the light to come back into his room.

And he would try to sleep with the daylight on his face. And finally the night would come again and he would try to sleep in that cold dark room but he'd be too sick to get under the blankets. Unable to avoid the mosquitoes that drank his watery blood. He'd hear all the noises of the doors closing and footsteps returning, before the day came again.

Payday.

Rowie would come knocking at his door. Timid at first as if worried about waking him.

He'd go away for a while. A minute or two and then he'd knock again, louder this time. Offering to drive him up the street. To get some cash. Some food. To score.

Rowie hung around like a hungry bird, waiting for his castoffs. Rob would lay on the bed wanting to tell him to fuck off, but feeling too weak and too sick. Soon he'd be sitting in his stale, sweaty clothes in the passenger seat of Rowie's brand new Pajero. Butterflies in his stomach as Rowie turned the key. Rob would look over at him in his neatly pressed college boy clothes, with his pretty blonde hair hanging over his eyes. But Rowie's eyes were just as desperate as his.

Although he always had a belly filled with breakfast and soft, pink, healthy cheeks; despite the clothes and the car that his parents had bought him for going to rehab, they were the same. The same butterflies. Although they'd planned to go to the bank, then the supermarket and then score, they'd score first and then wander around Woolworths with an empty trolley until they finally left with a box of Cornettos that they ate at Nobby's beach, sinking into the sand.

It was a whole day from payday. A day and a night, but as Rob got closer to the boarding house he saw that Rowie was waiting for him. He had Mike with him. Rowie sat half-hanging out of his Pajero talking to Mike, who sat on the nature strip, smoking. The Pajero shone in the sun, recently polished. Even Mike didn't smoke in the Pajero.

"What you got there?" asked Mike as Rob got closer.

"Nothing."

"Show us."

And Rob handed the bag over like a guilty child.

"Perfect," said Mike. "These are perfect. Got any batteries? Do they work? These are the cooda, man. Perfect, I've got a job for you."

Rob wasn't interested. He felt sick, his legs weak. He just wanted to go to his room. Away from these people, away from the sunlight.

Mike took two small snap lock baggies from his pocket.

"One for before and one for after," he said looking at Rob and Rowie in turn. The first bag didn't interest him. Small white stones. Wet. Rocket fuel. Drugs for kids. But then Mike pulled another bag out from behind it. Rob started listening then. The sun shone through the bag, glinting off the crystals. Darker, a dirty beige. Heroin. His baby.

He sat on the grass and looked up at Mike as he slowly replaced the drugs into his pocket. Butterflies threatened to fly up his windpipe and choke him. He vomited into the grass. Mike was looking down on him with that look he was so familiar with. That look of contempt. That sneer. The victory in his eyes. They both knew he was Mike's slave now.

And so Rob sat on the grass in front of Mike, listening to his plan.

Ω

They shot the speed in the Pajero. Mike cooking it up on the base of a Coke can and passing it through to Rob and Rowie in the back seat like he was their mother. Making sure they all had the same amount. No fighting. Although of course Mike's was the biggest.

Mike watched as Rob stabbed at himself, trying to find a sunken vein. It was sickening. He'd met Rob in jail just a few years ago. Rob had earned his nickname because he looked like Rob Lowe. But his face that was too pretty for prison had sunken in on itself, leaving his eyes and his teeth protruding like a half starved rat.

Mike watched the blood trickle down Rob's skinny arm, Rowie waiting patiently beside him with his face still pretty, like a before and after shot. He knew that Rob couldn't be trusted. He'd rob his own grandmother for a shot. And as for Rowie— he was just a baby, with a baby habit, driving his daddy's car.

But the blood pounded in Mike's temples, beating out the plan. Their mission. He would take Rowie and go and talk to the old man. The old fool would take one look at him and give him what he wanted. Rob would be the lookout. The easy job. Just watch the street with his speedy eyes and collect the heroin at the end. He sat in the driver's seat like the Pajero was his and watched a group of kids walk past. The kids scattered like seagulls when Mike and Rowie jumped out of the car.

Mike and Rowie felt united in their mission. They marched down Havelock Street, away from the hostel with its secrets behind each door. Away from the broken windows and towards The Coliseum. The Coliseum had broken windows too, but it also contained the promise of wealth.

"This will be real money," Mike said as they walked along. "Not just enough to get you through to the next dole day. Enough to set you up. To set you free."

It was enough to make them dream again and believe in what they dreamed. So as they walked down Havelock Street and The Coliseum came into view ahead of them they stopped talking and dreamt their rich, poor man's dreams.

Rowie saw himself driving down to Bar Beach in a brand new Porsche. He'd drive it right up to the esplanade where all the posh girls walked along past the water, showing off their expensive tanned legs in their short jogging shorts. And they'd be looking at him, flirting at him between their lashes. They wouldn't be able to help themselves with a car like that.

Rowie walked next to Mike down Havelock Street, proud to be next to him. He didn't take anything with him. He had his dreams, but what he really needed was a torch. Some batteries.

Mike saw himself back at the gym in gaol. He'd be working out, bigger than ever. With all that jail food and no drugs to suck the power out of him. But the biggest thing would be his reputation. All the new guys, bragging about their crappy little crimes. Date raping flat-mates and breaking into cars. They would stop talking when he walked by. They'd know they couldn't compete. And they'd sit in awe, asking him questions, "It was a cinch really. I can't believe that no one got to the old bastard earlier."

Mike was the only one who'd thought ahead. The natural leader and planner. He had a walkie-talkie and a Swiss Army knife in his pocket. And the rest of the drugs, they were the most important thing. Drugs to buy loyalty. What he really needed was some water.

As Rob drove Rowie's Pajero down Havelock Street he also dreamed. He imagined himself sitting on his bed in the boarding house. On the desk beside him sat the biggest rock he had ever seen. He lay on top of his bedspread and looked at it through slitted eyelids. The voices on the other side of the door didn't penetrate the cloud surrounding him. He felt truly happy, and truly safe.

Rob had his walkie-talkie and fifteen dollars in his pocket. He drove down Havelock Street, following the scent of the heroin in Mike's pocket like a dog. What he really needed was food. Real food.



Rob parked in front of The Coliseum and watched as Rowie and Mike appeared at the bottom of Havelock Street. Mike nodded slightly, acknowledging Rob's presence as they crossed the road towards him. Rob was glad no one was around. Mike was easy to remember in a big, meaty looking kind of way. Especially walking next to Rowie. Anyone walking past would wonder why they were together. They clashed, Mike's nylon tracksuit and Rowie's green Levis. People notice that kind of thing.

Rob watched as they walked round the back of The Coliseum. Once Rob was sure they were inside he pulled the sunshade down but the sun still shone through the side window. He closed his eyes, but the insides of his eyelids glowed red. He waited. Time passed.

His thoughts bubbled and gurgled, racing round in circles endlessly repeating themselves. He hated speed and longed for a spongy heroin brain. Clouds of cotton wool. Not these thoughts that raced around and imploded in on themselves.

He turned his back to the sun and the steering wheel dug into his leg, he closed his eyes again but images threw themselves up against his eyelids. His mother's frown. The look on his girlfriend's face when she'd left him shivering at the coffee shop. The coffee in front of him wretched and stinking, making his stomach heave.

What would have happened if he'd gone after her? But he hadn't been able to trust his feet to walk between the maze of tables onto the street. Past all the people staring and watching and looking at him. So he had sat shivering in his parka looking at his upside-down reflection on his teaspoon. His own ugly face. His red eyes and big mouth with too many teeth. Way too many teeth. That's why she'd left. She couldn't bear to look at him.

He stared at the silent walkie-talkie on the dashboard but he didn't see it. All he could see was that coffee, that wretched, stinking coffee and his own ugly face in the teaspoon. Upside-down with too many teeth.

The afternoon wore on. The steering wheel dug into his leg, and the sun cooled down. He licked his lips and dug change out of his pocket. He needed a Coke. He counted the coins in his hand just as another car drove up and parked in front of him. There were two people in it. He looked again. In the passenger side sat his girlfriend, her hands dragging through her straw coloured hair. What was she doing here? She leant over and kissed the driver. A long, passionate kiss. Rob sat straight up in his seat, craning for a better look.

He'd kill the motherfucker. He opened his car door to throw himself out but his seatbelt kept him trapped inside. His girlfriend must have heard him, stumbling like a fool half-in, half-out of the Pajero. She turned around and smiled at him with her perfect teeth. A perfect u-turn.

He closed the car door quietly and watched as the driver in front of him turned around also, shoulders bouncing with laughter. And then, still watching him, he drew her head closer to his and kissed her again. She leaned closer into him until they merged together and into the seats themselves. The car dissolved.

Rob shook his head and closed his eyes again. The image of the car stayed trapped inside his mind. They were there in front of him again. Kissing and kissing and kissing. And the steering wheel dug into his leg.

Rob pulled the rear vision mirror down and looked at his eyes. Red-rimmed and aching for sleep. He closed his eyes again but still saw himself. His mouth crowded with teeth inside his cracked, bleeding lips.

Then the walkie-talkie crackled to life and he realised not much time had passed at all. "We're cool, right mate?"

Rob looked out onto the empty street. The car in front of him was empty. The shop windows were boarded up. The sun still high in the sky.

And he found his swollen tongue in his mouth.

"It's sweet. It's all good."



Rob cleaned the dashboard with the cuff of his shirt. Digging dust out of the crevices around the steering wheel. Once he started he couldn't stop, and the more dust he found. He had no idea how long he'd been doing this for but when he looked up the shadows were stretching out lazily behind the cars as they cruised past him up Maitland Road.

He looked up at the McDonalds sign. It wouldn't take long to walk up there and get a Coke. Maybe force down a burger to keep his strength up. Through the walkie-talkie he heard

scratches of voices. Rowie singing and Mike's voice, deep and slow. Then the old man, quick and wet sounding.

Rob imagined him talking, his tongue loose between his teeth as he confessed the location of the money. And he thought again of the massive rock he'd buy with his share. Big enough so he could just scrape a hit off the top whenever he wanted to slide away.

Ω

*—But that Coliseum, you could buy anything there. I remember mates who used to go camping a lot. They'd go in there and buy pans for gold fossicking. Of all things. Now where else would you get something like that? Not at a regular hardware store, I'm sure.*

*We actually had him up in the cells one Friday night. I can't remember what we'd arrested him for but I was on nightshift and it was pretty late. Everyone was being kept awake by these drunk kids we had in the cells as well, yahooping and carrying on. Yelling out to each other down the row of cells, knocking on their bars, hanging their arms out and signalling to each other. They thought they were big tough guys in a jailhouse movie or something. At least until the alcohol wore off, and they had to call their mums and girlfriends to come and take them home.*

*So I was talking to one of the guys I was working with that night and he was saying how he'd been looking for these wicks for some old fashioned tilly lamps. I think he was a scoutmaster or something like that. Anyway, he had been everywhere looking for these wicks and it didn't seem like they existed anymore. They weren't in any hardware store or camping shop or anything like that. I think he'd done a pretty thorough search looking for them.*

*So he's telling me this and we had Leo in the cells at the time being kept awake by the drunks so I call over to him, "Hey Leo, do you have any of those wicks for those old tilly lamps?" and he just blinked at me and said, "What size do you want?"*

*The guy I worked with drove him back to The Coliseum the next day and picked some up. Amazing".*

Ω

Inside The Coliseum Rowie and Mike stood in front of Leo, not believing their luck. They'd heard the old bastard liked a fight but when they got there he'd been writing a letter or something, standing up and leaning on a wheelie-bin like a priest at a pulpit, ready to deliver a sermon. He was a tiny bloke, all stooped and frail and they'd literally grabbed one arm each and picked him straight up off the ground and had him hog-tied on the floor while he was still sputtering around trying to get a sentence out.

Mike walked up and down the room, pacing behind Leo towards the door then back to stand behind him. He ripped off his shirt and tied it over Leo's head, covering his eyes. They sat Leo on a filthy old mattress on the floor, his feet tied together over his trousers, his hands tied in front of him. He sat like a child sitting ready to be told a story. Mike flexed his jailhouse muscles. He had a story to tell.

Click. Click. Click.

"Now we know you've got a heap of money in here somewhere. Don't worry about that. We know that. And my friend here will find it even if he has to look in every box in this place. Even if he has to dig up the whole fucking backyard."

Click, click, click. Mike opened the knife and snapped it shut. Opened it and snapped it shut. He opened a bottle of water that had been sitting on the wheelie bin and tipped it up into his dry amphetamine mouth. The water was warm and tasted of plastic. He spat it onto the ground and threw the half empty bottle across the room where it landed with a satisfying thud.

Rowie laughed, dancing in front of Leo and miming cutting his throat.

"You are wrong, that much is for sure. I am just looking after this place for Leo Maley. My name is George Melby. Now if you would kindly untie me we can rectify this situation," said Leo, his voice confident.

"Bullshit man. We know who you are. And we know you've got a heap of stash, so quit arsing us around and tell us where it is," said Rowie, trying to hide his private school accent with slang.

"You are drug addicts, that much is for sure. Your minds have become contaminated by that filthy stuff and now you are imagining things." Leo gestured to the piles of debris around him. "Look at this place. There is no money here. I am just an old pensioner."

"Fucking hell, old man, he's holding a knife to your throat. Aren't you scared? Are you some kind of nut job or what?"

"I will not tolerate this kind of nonsense. You boys need to untie me and get out of here."

"Boys?" repeated Rowie. "Boys? We're not boys. We are men!"

Leo laughed.

"You are boys, that is for sure," said Leo.

"Right," said Mike, the speed still flowing gracefully through his veins so it felt as if he was walking just a few millimetres above the floor. He could feel the air gently embracing him. He looked around him at the boxes stacked against the walls. He felt the small snap-lock

bags in his pocket and knew he had time. Heaps of time. The old man would talk soon enough, and if not...

"We'll just find the treasure ourselves then shall we," said Mike. Leo's head turned from side to side, following Mike's voice as he paced in front of him.

"This is a farce," said Leo, getting angry now. "This is an absurd farce, that is for sure. I am expecting my father to come by very soon."

"Your father," laughed Rowie. "How old is he? A hundred and five? What's he going to do when he gets here anyway? Run over us in his wheelchair?"

Mike listened but wasn't worried. He hadn't really expected to get the money that easily. He opened a door near the front of the shop that backed onto the window display with its faded, hand-written signs with obsolete prices for obsolete goods. He kicked aside dusty boxes, faded and buckled by the sun, and peered between a crack in the boarded up window.

Mike could see Rob in Rowie's Pajero. He was looking at himself in the rear-view mirror. Mike chuckled to himself. It was probably the first time that Rob had ever driven a new car and he was wasting it staring at himself. "Vain prick," he thought.

Mike scanned the street, but although the sun was high in the sky there was no one about. He knew that nothing could go wrong today. Behind him Rowie was slapping the old man about the face. Leo just sat, as if he was staring at Rowie through his blindfold. Remembering him.

"Hey, wait a minute."

Rowie turned to face him. Leo turned also.

"Can you see me, old man?" asked Mike. "Can you see through that blindfold?" Walking over to him he crouched down and put his face directly in front of Leo's so that their noses were almost touching. He could feel the sour breath of the old man on his lips. Leo bent his head back away.

Mike pulled the knife out of his pocket, quietly opened the blade and placed it next to Leo's eye. Leo didn't move.

"You are lucky, old man, you are fucking lucky." Mike stood up again.

"My father will summon the police immediately."

"Ha! The police now," said Rowie.

"That's enough. We don't need the old man," said Mike. "Take his socks off."

Rowie bent down and untied Leo's shoes. He pulled them off and grabbed onto the socks. They were stinking and wet. Mike and Rowie both pulled back from the smell.

“My God!” Rowie held the sock away from his face. “Your socks smell worse than...”

Mike ripped the sock from Rowie’s hand. He pulled his T-shirt off and wrapped it tightly over Leo’s eyes and wrenched the old man’s mouth open. Mike shoved the sock inside, gagging him against any further insults.

Mike had been looking at the boxes around the room. He ran his fingers down piles of newspapers that were stacked against the walls. It was as if nothing had ever been thrown out. Ever. Mike knew about people like this. He’d seen them in prison and he’d seen them in the halfway houses. Those men who’d had everything taken from them and now couldn’t bear to lose anything again. They kept everything. An elastic band could be as important to them as a wallet full of cash. These guys hated their stuff being tampered with more than anything. They knew where everything was.

Mike knew he’d outsmart Mr Leo Maley yet. He had experience and brains. He was the man with the plan. His heart was thumping in his chest and he felt the power of it all.

“We’ll find the cash ourselves,” said Mike. He crouched down then in front of Leo, eager to watch the scene unfold in front of him. He knew exactly what would happen as soon as Rowie started tampering with Leo Maley’s old piles of junk. The old man would be begging to tell them where the money was. Just to get them out of there. Just so they’d leave him and his piles of crap alone.

“Where do I even start looking?”

Mike looked up to see Rowie hovering above him like a dog waiting to be thrown a bone. He looked a bit like a dog too, thought Mike as he watched him. Never still, his fat hands pawing at the air when he spoke. And his eyes. They were way too pretty for a bloke.

“Anywhere, man, it doesn’t matter where you start looking. This geezer has got millions stashed around the place. He owns half of Newcastle, you know that? And he’s got the shop, too. Born into it. Never had to work for it or anything.

Look, there used to be these three old bitches that lived across the street. They ran that old newsagents there, right?” continued Mike.

“Yeah. I remember them—I used to go in there when I was a kid. They never had the lights on so it was all dark and gloomy, like, and they never got rid of the old newspapers that they didn’t sell. They were stacked up all over the shop until you had to walk up these tunnels to get in there.

I used to collect these old model cars, and those old sisters always had a stack of them at the back of the shop. They ...”

Mike cut Rowie off, “Yeah, well, so these old birds never put any of the money they made from selling newspapers and that into the bank. They just had this old bathtub under the counter and whenever anyone came in and bought something, they just chucked the money into this bathtub. All the customers could see them throw the money in there. It didn’t take a genius to figure it out.

Anyway, one day the place was robbed, right, and they found even more cash all round the shop in shoeboxes. Anyone could have just walked out with one. Anytime. Go in, buy a paper for 80 cents or whatever and then walk out with a box of dosh. Thank you very much.”

“Nah, there was never a robbery. One of the old sisters fell off a pile of newspapers. She stood on a pile of them behind the counter so she was kind of looking down on us.”

“There was a robbery. They found the bathtub full of coins behind the counter,” Mike insisted.

“Nah, the money was upstairs in the bath. The ambulance guys found it full of coins.”

“Coins, yeah, that’s all because the notes were all gone, right? And the best bit is, wait for this right? After the robbery the cops came and the old Sheilas said they’d never even been robbed at all. Or no money was taken anyway. That’s why no one was caught.”

“What, why would they do that?”

“Cause of the taxman. They didn’t want to pay the taxman.”

“Huh?”

Mike paused.

“If the cops knew all this money had been flogged, the taxman would be asking why they’d never paid tax on it right? Anyway, the best part of the story is that the cops saw all this cash in the bathtub, and by then it was just coins, right. So they had to get two Armaguard trucks to take it all away to get counted.”

“Bullshit, no way.”

“Yeah, no shit. There was like eighty grand in there. The guys that stole the money didn’t bother with the coins. They just took the notes, right? Imagine how many dollars they got?”

Rowie's hands pawed the air and he looked around as if he expected the cash to float right over to him.

“Right, I’m onto it.” Rowie moved towards a pile of old newspapers.

“Start with those boxes over there,” said Mike, pointing to the other side of the room.

“Yes, right, of course,” said Rowie, moving over to them.

“I’m just going for a slash. Keep an eye on the old man,” said Mike.



Mike felt like an adventurer as he searched for the bathroom. He felt his way down the corridor, dim despite the daylight outside. He found the bathroom, more by following the stench than anything else. Through the doorway he saw a claw foot bathtub, blackened and reeking. He felt along the wall for the light switch, his skin crawling with filth.

His searching fingers found the switch but the light didn’t work.

“Blown,” he thought.

The bathroom stank and Mike added his contribution, his urine acrid from the speed. He flushed but nothing happened. He turned the tap. No water. No whine of lazy pipes taking their time. Shit.

No water, no light. Mike breathed deeply. Breathe in, breathe out. It would be dark soon and they might need more time to force the old man to talk. Or to find the cash in this mess. Can’t find anything in the dark. The place was dim enough in the daytime with the windows boarded up like that. Mike walked back along the hallway until he found another light switch on the wall. Click, no light. Shit.

Then he remembered the kerosene lamp the old man had next to him when they walked in. He must have used it during the night. He found his way back to the front of the shop. The lamp sat on a wheelie bin, a box of matches beside it. He lit a match and put it to the wick, it fizzled and sputtered. The match burnt his fingers and he had to drop it.

About a metre or so away from where he stood there was a pile of matches on the floor, as if every night for years and years the old man had lit the lantern, and thrown the match onto the floor. There were hundreds of them. Mike lit another match, the same thing happened. He breathed again. Breathe in, breathe out. Breathe in, breathe out. He was about to kick the pile of matches across the floor, but somehow the thought of the old man standing for night after night, lighting the lantern and throwing the matches onto the pile stopped him. He walked back to the wheelie-bin and picking up his wasted matches he added them to the pile.

It would be dark soon, and the stacks of junk were taking on menacing shapes. Even in the daylight the place creaked and whined like it had its own spirit. Like it didn’t want them in there. The shadows around them shifting and stirring.

Breathe in, breathe out. Mike fiddled with the dial on the lamp. Twist it to the right. A little more wick. Light a match. Twist it to the left. Try again. Breathe in. Breathe out. Breathe...He threw the lantern on the floor; a spider web of cracks appeared on its glass.

Mike made his way back to Leo and crouched down in front of him. He could feel the muscles in his thighs, holding him in position. He could stay like that for hours. That's what gaol had given him. Strength, patience, time to think. To plan.

He watched as Rowie pulled at a box, trying to rip it open. Leo twitched in front of him. He was right. This old man would not be able to cope at all with people going through his stuff. It reminded him of a young ex-alcoholic guy he'd lived with in a halfway-house years ago. Dale was his name. Apparently used to drink Methylated Spirits. When he stopped he went mad. He kept everything he owned in separate plastic bags. He had hundreds of these plastic bags in his room. He'd literally have one sock in one and one in the other. One would hold a shoe, the next its lace. He just walked round the streets during the day looking for certain things. He'd know what they were when he found them. Sometimes it was a Coke can, or some broken glass. Sometimes it was a lost hair ribbon. When Dale found what he was looking for he'd put the item into a plastic bag and carry it home. He believed that doing this would stop something bad from happening. A car crash or something. He was completely nuts. Mike thought he might have been better off on the Methylated Spirits.

Mike had gone into Dale's room one night when he was eating dinner. When they asked him later at the hospital, Mike said he'd been looking for a lighter. Actually he'd been looking for some cash. That was Mike's drug. Money. Money for drugs. He thought there must have been a wad of dough in there someplace because Dale was clean.

Dale was only a little guy but he'd caught Mike completely off guard. He wasn't concentrating, that was why. He was just looking through the bags, fascinated. And he was hanging out. That didn't help. He'd found a child's teething ring in one bag and an empty packet of cigarettes in another. Dale had hurtled into the room and pushed a steak knife into Mike's guts, just missing his kidney.

The other residents just stood there and watched. And of course none of them saw anything either. They knew the rules. Mike had broken them. Stealing from someone in the house. They were both kicked out.

Agitated. That's what Dale was. A little hurricane had unleashed itself. He didn't care who was watching. He didn't know that his plastic bags held a heap of useless shit.

Mike had seen Old Leo Maley too, walking down the street with a handful of plastic bags in each hand. He'd seen the junk stacked up in The Coliseum's windows. He knew the fairytales of the miser, the millionaire. And he knew. He knew how to get the old bastard to tell him where the treasure was hidden.

The muscles in his thighs felt as if acid was burning in them. Mike enjoyed the feeling. He flicked open his knife blade. He closed it. Rowie was still fumbling around with the box. Carefully pulling off the gaffer tape like a girl opening her Christmas presents. He opened the knife blade again. He licked his dry lips. A knot grew in his stomach.

“Here, use this.” Mike threw the knife to Rowie.

Rowie reached out his hand and caught it.

“Hey, the fuckin’ blade’s open!”

Mike laughed.

“That hurt.”

“C’mon, have you made me rich yet or what?”

Rowie cut the tape off the box, looked inside and tipped the contents out onto the floor.

“Ribbons.”

Mike waited as Rowie cut open more boxes.

“Lace.”

“More lace.”

“Fake flowers.”

“Hats, lots of hats.”

“You writing your wish list for Santa Claus or what?” Mike teased, keeping his eyes on Leo sitting in front of him. Sweat was rolling down the sides of Leo’s nose. His hands were trembling. Mike knew they’d break him soon.

“Holy shit, check this out.”

Mike looked up and Rowie was holding a massive pair of bloomers.

Leo twitched and squirmed. Mike knew he’d be frantic by now. This would be a cinch. He stood up, ignoring the blur of the room in front of him and waited for his vision to clear. He walked around behind the old man and leaned heavily on his shoulders, but Leo didn’t cower in front of him. He was like a Chihuahua standing up to a German Shepherd. Stupid. Mike swallowed and licked his lips again. Walking over to the other side of the room he picked the water bottle up off the floor and gulped the liquid inside. Warm as his spit.

Mike returned to Leo and crouched down in front of him again, their faces close, as if he was about to tell a secret. He lowered his voice, “Tell us where the money is, old man.”

In the corner Rowie was pulling the bloomers on over his green jeans. He pulled a heap of flowers out of a box and shoved them into the band of a hat.

With the hat on his head he paraded up and down the room singing, "I'm too sexy for my shirt, too sexy for my shirt. So sexy it hurts."

Leo's face was red hot. Twitching and sweating.

"He's got your mother's underwear on, you know," whispered Mike into Leo's ear.

He pulled the sock out of Leo's mouth. Leo closed his mouth; a line of drool glistened, wet, on his skin. Mike held the bottle up to the old man's mouth and let the last of the water dribble inside. Leo swallowed.

Mike stood up slowly this time, and walked across the room. He pulled at a pile of papers, scattering photos and letters on the floor at his feet. He couldn't concentrate. Halfway down the stack he stopped suddenly and walked over to a box near the doorway. It was a cardboard box, like so many others around it, but this one had a handwritten note taped to the side, too faded to read.

It was as if it had a magnet had pulled Mike over to it and he was sure it was the one. He ripped the side out of it. Barely pausing to examine the contents he went back to the first pile. He then noticed his knife in the floor where Rowie had left it and went to retrieve it.

Mike walked slowly back towards Leo, trying to focus his thoughts.

Rowie sauntered over to the door near the front of the shop and opened it. He stood in the window display posing like a mannequin, flowers falling from his hat. He tapped at the window, trying to get Rob's attention. He pushed the cracked glass until it bent in its frame. Rowie gyrated in the window display, "So sexy it hurts."

"Get the fuck out of there," said Mike, and then to Leo, "Where is the fucking money?"

Rowie danced around in the background. He was a liability. Mike knew that now. He should have left Rowie as the cockatoo outside and had Rob in here with him. That had been a mistake. Rowie was just a stupid airhead, thinking he was playing a game. Playing a game with the tough guys.

It was getting darker and they didn't have any light. He couldn't trust that Rob wouldn't wander off at some point either. His flesh rose into bumps as he looked at the piles of junk, the money better hidden than he'd thought. He needed water.

Mike breathed. Breathe in, breathe out. It was going to be dark soon. He asked the old man again, "Where is the money?" and stabbed at Leo's feet. The knife bounced off a bone. The skin broke and started bleeding. The old man flinched. The corner of his mouth twitched and his head jerked upwards as if he was surprised. Surprised! Mike would show him fucking surprised.

He realised then that Rowie was standing just behind him, still wearing the hat and the bloomers over his jeans.

“Jeez, man. Was that really necessary?”

Mike stabbed at his foot again. Leo flailed about this time, trying to tuck his feet under his body but Mike caught one of them and stabbed him again. The knife sunk deeper in this time.

Leo Maley cried out, a strangled cry that could easily have been heard from the street. Rowie ran to the window display and peered out. A couple of men were walking past. They slowed down, looked right at him. Then they continued talking, walking away. But Mike hadn't even looked up. Rowie watched as Mike stabbed the old man again, twisting his knife in his foot as if he was trying to wedge the bones apart. Blood ran between Leo's toes.

Veins bulged in Mike's temples and spit flew from his mouth onto Leo's face.

“Tell us where the money is you dirty old freak!” and Mike stabbed at Leo's feet again and again. Leo shook, jerking with all his strength away from Mike and pulling himself into a tiny, squeaking ball.

“Scream you fucker!”

“My name is George Melby,” pleaded Leo. His voice was shaking. “I am merely looking after these premises for Mr Maley.”

Rowie stood back near the doors to the window display, his blonde hair now hanging in greasy strands from below the hat on his head. The speed was wearing off leaving him shaky and empty. He was coming down.

“Hey Mike, relax man. People can hear you on the street.”

Mike sank to his knees in front of Leo, as if he was praying to him. He bowed his head and sat until his breath slowed. Rowie whistled as he sucked air in over his stinging lips.

“Fuck,” he exhaled, and they sat there in silence. Leo stayed curled in a ball, There was blood all over the floor. Mike was still crouched down, now almost in a begging position, blood spattered over his bare chest. He could taste the old man's blood on his lips. Rowie hovered, twirling his hair in his fingers, the hat still on his head. Mike shoved the sock back into the old man's mouth.



And the dark closed in. Small scuttling creatures became busy in the blackness around them. Leo's breath rasped in his throat. Rowie made a place for himself in the window, his

eye at the crack between the boards. Lonely cars drove into Newcastle. A silver Volvo drove in the other direction. Out of Mayfield and Newcastle altogether. Rowie would follow it soon. He'd drive up to Queensland in case the cops came looking for him. Maybe pick up a good looking hitchhiker on the way. After they found the cash. And he'd had another shot.

Mike sat on the floor next to the mattress. Shadows moved and drifted above the floor, above his head. Coming towards him. Warning him.

Ω

*—I remember one night we came across Leo Maley when I was on night shift. He ducked into the shadows when he saw us coming so we knew he was up to something. I shone my torch on him then and there he was blinking and blinking like he did, holding a bucket of water.*

*He mumbled something, you know, like he did. It turned out he was stealing buckets of water from the neighbours because the council had turned his water off for not paying his rates. He lived like that for a long time at the end. No water, no electricity, lights and heating and such. It was very strange because we know now that he had enough money to live well, but he never paid a bill. Never spent any money at all on The Coliseum. Or himself for that matter. He looked half-starved most of the time."*

Ω

Mike paced as Rowie silently resumed his search. He gave instructions now and then, and Rowie nodded. Mike knew Rowie was biding his time, thinking of an escape plan. He sat near the doorway and watched. Rowie sat where he'd last been searching, his flowers and hair sticking out roughly this way and that.

They needed light. Mike realised he had been stupid to smash the lantern. There was nothing they could do but wait until the morning—with no water to wash off the blood. Mike tried to rethink his plan. To get out of there unseen. To keep Rowie from leaving and taking Rob and the Pajero with him. And Mike watched the old man, shifting and stirring, then not moving for a while. Mike was sure that he was dead. Then Leo shifted and groaned again and Mike shivered where he sat.

Across the room Rowie fiddled with the walkie-talkie. Whispering to Rob. Moving about. Mike watched him. Was he taking off the bloomers? The walkie-talkie clicked on and off as Rowie colluded in the dark. Was he worried that his father would report the car missing, or worse: come and find them himself? Was Rowie more scared of his father than of him? Mike sat with the knife in his pocket.

The daylight finally returned and Mike helped Rowie in his search, leaving the old man sweating and stinking on the mattress. Rowie was waiting for the opportunity to leave. To leave Mike, and the old man on the floor. Rob was waiting for him outside. Waiting for his signal to start up the car. And then they heard a car door slam. Rowie disappeared into the window display, reappearing a moment later.

“He’s gone.”

“Screw him, we don’t need him.”

“He’s got my car. He’s got my fucking car. Dad’s gonna kill me.”

They immediately felt vulnerable. They felt their armour fall away.

Rowie kept going to the window, peering out between the boards. Pacing, licking his dry lips. He was hot but too dehydrated to sweat. The heat prickled and itched his skin. Mike sat. Rowie paced and kicked at Leo as he slipped off into sleep. The daylight cast shafts of light between the cracks and nail holes of the boarded up windows.

Rowie knew the look his father would have on his face when he got home. He’d be grim and silent and his eyes would go straight to his hands, hiding the fresh marks in the crook of his elbow. But he couldn’t leave Mike. He couldn’t even imagine what Mike would do to Rob when he caught up with him. Mike was big and mean, but as the daylight streamed in, Rowie knew his dad would be awake soon. He would look at his bed not slept in, the car still gone, that fucking car that came with so many conditions. The infernal guilt that choked at his throat until he couldn’t breathe. The car that was supposed to turn him into a good boy with a job, with a haircut, with a girlfriend, a future. The car that was supposed to buy his obedience. It was a curfew. A curse. A leash that strangled him.

He had to go. He had to find the car. It wouldn’t be hard. It was Rob’s payday. He’d be in Lambton, waiting to score. Or back at the hostel, slumped at the wheel of the Pajero parked round the corner. Couldn’t even wait ‘til he got inside. His eyes pinned. Maybe he’d have some left over.

Rowie had to go. He wasn’t thinking of the police or the old man shrinking on the floor. He needed to get on. He knew that Mike was watching him out of the corner of his eye. He paced back again, then over to the window. To look for Rob. But he knew Rob wouldn’t come back now.

He had to go.

“Where you going?”

“Toilet,” said Rowie, and he went down the corridor, sneaking down past the bathroom and out the back door into the shocking daylight.

Mike knew Rowie was gone for good. He knew he'd follow Rob. Follow the drugs. Weak junkies. His head throbbed. He needed water. When he stood up his legs screamed out in protest. His neck ached. A grey cloud cleared, leaving him with a headache that felt as if his brain would explode. He stood with his head in his hands, all the mess around him hurting his head even more. It was chaos. A chaos of rubbish. No order. Mike needed order. His room at the hostel had neat piles like he'd been taught at juvi, then in jail. A respect for the few things that he had.

Mike was glad they were gone. He'd find the money himself and it would all be his. He made his way to a pile of boxes and lifted his arms up for the top one. He felt as if he was a hundred years old. He pulled down the box and looked inside. It was full of receipts and papers. More receipts and useless paper. He threw it on the floor in frustration and looked about him. Zigzagging across the room he opened this box and that. Even his eyelids ached as they scraped across his eyes each time he blinked.

Mike looked at the old man, still tied up on the bed. He seemed to be watching him through the blindfold. Mike knew the old man could see him. He was memorising his face for the police. His features. The tattoo of the black rose on his wrist. That stupid tattoo.

Mike still had no shirt on but the heat seemed to increase the longer he was there. He felt angry and frustrated watching the old man. The smug little turd sitting on a mattress full of cash. That was it. The mattress. Of course. All the oldies kept their money under their mattress. He tossed the old man off and tipped the mattress up. Nothing under there. Just dust and a dead cockroach.

Mike grabbed his knife and sliced the mattress open. It came apart in a ragged line. The insides were putrefied with age. Rubber gone to dust. His thick tongue felt as if it had been scratched from running over his dry teeth. His arm ached from the exertion of slicing the mattress. He sat on the bed and looked at the tattoo on his wrist. His branding that kept him in his caste. He started picking at his wrist with the knife, lightly at first, not enough to draw blood. Then deeper so that little beads of red showed up on the black rose.

He'd slice it off and make the old fucker eat it. He looked at Leo, half lying on the floor. Blindfolded, sock hanging from his mouth. Stinking of piss. Of shit. Dried skin covering a skeleton. Already a corpse.

"Hey old man," whispered Mike. "You stink, you know that? This place stinks, and you stink. How do you live like this? You'd be better off dead."

"Hey, old man," he asked softly, "you ready to tell me where the money is?"

He saw Leo Maley's shoulders shaking. Was he laughing? Was the old fucker laughing?

Mike threw Leo back onto the mattress, face down. His knife clattered to the floor. Mike bent excruciatingly to pick it up. Fuzzy dots formed in front of his eyes and fell to the ground. The pain in his head. His brain must be bleeding. He was going to die. He stabbed at Leo's feet again. At the soles.

Leo drew his legs in, making sounds like a trapped mouse. That was more like it.

Mike sat on the floor next to Leo. He lay down close. Felt the heat radiating off him. He felt the old man holding himself stiff, trying not to move but twitching occasionally. And the walls started to move. Faces appeared and melted away again. There was a pain in his belly that made him nauseous. And as he lay there he saw figures walking towards him, and then dissolving into the air. He could see the air. The walkie-talkie crackled to life. Mike picked it up.

"Hey man, where did you go?" but there was no one there.

Mike needed to think. He needed water. Food. Supplies. Torches and batteries. He'd just go and get what he needed and then come back. It wasn't over yet. Leave the old man here. Keep him tied up. He'd be back. Back for his cash. He'd come in and say, "Hey, rich man. Remember me?"

Mike hauled himself off the bed and left Leo alone.



*"It is well known that he was a genius at school. I heard that Leo Maley got a Masters in Maths or Science, something like that. Apparently he went to university in Sydney somewhere, and that would have been very significant in those days. Most people left school when they were thirteen or fourteen and went and worked for BHP or something like that."*



And Leo sat, his wrists bound to his feet, sticky with clotted blood.

Leo sank into himself. It had been two nights since he had eaten. Or had a drink. Two nights since he had slept. He stopped trying to untie the knots. He couldn't call for help or spit the sock from his mouth. His stomach shrunk into a leather glove and his dehydrated skin stuck to his bones.

The blackness behind his blindfold turned grey as another day dawned on The Coliseum. She creaked and groaned and all the creatures that had made their homes within her rooms returned to their hiding places. Mice lay down to sleep amongst the piles of papers. And Leo too dozed. And woke. And dozed. And woke.



—Well, one night we got a call when I was on night shift. A woman had been walking past The Coliseum. Must have been about ten or eleven o'clock at night. She heard noises coming from there like someone was crying out.

We went to check it out. I thought maybe Leo had fallen over and broken his hip or something. He was getting on by that stage. I think it was about in '93?

I had this young bloke with me, recently graduated and all gung-ho. He wanted to be like a cop on TV. He couldn't wait to get his hands on something other than drunks and pricks who'd beat up their girlfriends, excuse my language. Hadn't realised yet that policing was mostly about old ladies who'd heard strange noises and stolen cars that vanished into thin air. Cars we never got to chase, that turned up torched on Stockton beach and left us with paperwork. Endless paperwork.

Anyway, we got into The Coliseum easily enough and we could hear the noises. Like the bleating of a lamb who'd lost its mother. There was so much rubbish in the place. It was piled up against the walls until you were walking through a maze of tracks. It was quite disorientating. And we couldn't see anything either, the only light was from our torches.

The young guy I was with had his hand on his holster. I could tell he was quite nervous. The place was really spooky you know, like a haunted house in the movies or something.

I think I smelt him before I saw him. Sitting in his own excrement. Poor old fella.

Some guys had broken in and were trying to find out where his money was. There were always whisperings that he had this money, you know. They kept him there for a couple of days, torturing him. They stabbed his feet.

He didn't tell them where the money was though. And they left eventually, I don't know why. Then it was another two or three days until we found him, so he was in a bit of a mess.

We never did find out who did it. They disappeared and that was that.



*He never had the bullshit needed to excite a woman's emotions.*

*Anon*

## **His Father's Son**

*People were starting to leave. Margo had edged her way to the door when she heard someone say,*

*—I actually lived just around the corner from Leo Maley for the last twenty years or so. I moved here just after I had my last child and she's twenty-three now. I think she was two when we moved in, so that would make it over twenty years ago.*

*There was something about her voice that caused Margo to stay and listen. She was fascinated by the woman's eyes that were still a clear blue, almost purple, peeping out from the verandah of her eyelids. She was the old lady who had arrived late.*

*James poured cups of tea with too much milk and placed them hopefully on the table.*

*—The shop windows stayed the same for years, towards the end. Leo Maley never came into my house. He never ate with us or other things like that which would indicate friendship, and yet there were certain things that happened between us that I guess would suggest that we were friends, or that he considered me to be a friend.*

*When he went to gaol he often left certain things with me to look after. The Coliseum was not a safe place by this stage. It was being broken into constantly and I guess there were certain items, generally documents, court documents I guess, that I looked after for him when he was in gaol. Some things he just left on my verandah, and then collected when his time was up. A suitcase or something like that. I never looked inside them. I didn't want to know, to tell you the truth. I really did keep the man at arm's length as much as possible. I didn't mind looking after his things occasionally but I didn't want to get too involved.*

*By this stage in his life he was living quite badly. He smelt bad and looked undernourished. I believe that he was becoming incontinent and as The Coliseum had no amenities at this stage he was emptying his, there is no nice way to say this, his excrement in the bins of the other business owners next door and onto the street. It really wasn't a good thing. There was all sorts of fuss about it.*

*Leo was living really tough. I understand that he had a little room at the back of The Coliseum, it was just a little storeroom. He had this room as his living quarters. I suppose it*

*felt safe. It was like a cave, with an old mattress on the floor, and he used these bins that he had inside to write on or eat off.*

*Everything was still in the shop window, but he never really opened up any more. The door may have been open but no customers really ventured in. They were liable to be yelled at if they did.*

*After all the trouble with the awning Leo complained that the stock was all faded. He was going to sue the council and wanted me to take photographs of his faded stock. I wouldn't do it. There was no way I was going to become entangled in one of his legal disputes. But I saw him out there one day. He had some poor young bloke out there, taking these photos. I'm sure he never would have paid him or anything like that.*

*There used to be some garments hanging up in the windows, mostly workmen's clothes. There was a jacket, though, and Leo used to take it off the display and wear it every time he had a court case, and then hang it back up in the display after. By the end the front of it was faded but that didn't stop him. Then the last time he came out of jail he had a new suit on that they'd given to him, so I don't know what happened to the jacket.*

*He looked good whenever he came out of gaol. He seemed to be in and out a fair bit at the end. He looked especially good when he had that new suit. He came to get some of his things off me, but I suspect he wanted to show me how good he looked. He was clean-shaven and well fed. That was the biggest difference; he looked so much fitter and healthier after he'd been in gaol for a while. He wore that suit continuously until it just about fell off him though.*

Ω

Nobody met Leo when he was released from Long Bay. The prison looked as a prison should; large, solid, and imposing on the landscape.

It was early morning when Leo walked through those iron gates to freedom.

He was wearing a new suit that had been issued to him by the prison. As they said to him, he looked better going out than he did when coming in. He was handed his belongings that had been taken from him when he arrived eighteen months earlier, but the jacket was missing. He had his keys and his legal notes, but they had taken his clothes that he'd worn when he arrived and replaced them with this suit.

On arrival at the prison he'd had to endure the indignity of a strip search. The new inmates were all forced to squat to see whether they had anything hidden in their buttocks. Leo couldn't squat because of his injured leg so fat, gloved fingers had parted his arse and then directed Leo towards the shower.

Those yet to be tried were given jumpsuits zipped and padlocked at the back of the neck, but Leo had graduated to the standard green tracksuit. And now he had a new suit.

He waited for the bus that would take him to the station. He didn't sit down next to the young woman, waiting in a very short dress. He could see her bra every time she bent down to attend to one of her children. The children made him nervous.

There were three of them, all looking as though their birthdays were impossibly close together. Leo could see she had a tooth missing every time she opened her mouth to take a drag of her cheap cigarette. But the children were well dressed.

An older woman sat next to her and they chattered together about the children. The older woman had been visiting her son in the gaol. She couldn't understand why they couldn't have a beer on Christmas Day. Just one.

The two women swapped their stories. Her son would know better next time. There wouldn't be a next time. His mother knew that. He was a good boy, her son. He'd just gotten in with the wrong crowd. When he got out he'd get a job, maybe a trade, and then the whole family could put this behind them.

Still, she didn't understand why they couldn't have a beer on Christmas Day. The other woman agreed. She bragged about the designer labels her children wore. Her man always provided the best. He made sure of that, even though he was in gaol.

Leo climbed onto the bus when it arrived, sitting as far as possible from the children. They started to race up and down the aisles, touching the back of his seat, the fabric of his new collar.

The worry had almost driven him mad while he was inside. He worried that he'd arrive at The Coliseum to find it a dusty heap of rubble. Those fools at the council had the perfect opportunity while he was away. Either that, he thought, or an aggressive group of dope addicts had moved in and were squatting like dogs, messing up and stealing all his stock. Maybe they wouldn't even let him in. His mother would be livid.

It was night by the time Leo got off the train at Broadmeadow station. His leg was stiff and a chill wind followed him home, flipping up the tails of his suit coat like an annoying child. The sun had swung to the west as he sat on the train. Leo tried to find the dopes hiding amongst the shadows as they slunk towards his home.

The sun had been in cahoots with the thieves while he was in gaol, setting early and low over the west of the building each night. The Coliseum was left to glow as a silhouette for just a short time before the sun went to bed early, providing the thieves with the blanket of deceit that they needed to enter and exit as they pleased.

Now Leo walked towards The Coliseum as if being pulled by the heart like a long distance lover. By now the sun was gone. Leo turned the corner onto Maitland Road. Soon he could see the dense square of darkness on the horizon that was his Coliseum. He could see the solid brick walls that blocked out the streetlights and knew that the worst of his fears had not been realised. The Coliseum still stood. Leo stopped for a moment, happy to be breathing in Mayfield's air again. Those dopes from the council hadn't had their way.

Leo rounded the back of The Coliseum, and up the back steps. He knew his way perfectly in the dark but felt the cold now as the wind slid her icy fingers up his back. The back door swung in the breeze, creeping and scraping backwards and forwards on its broken lower hinge.



*The tea in everyone's cups had lost the little warmth it had to start with. There were still some biscuits left. Those standing by the urn poured themselves another cup, adding their milk themselves this time.*

*—I said to him once, when he stopped for a chat, I think he was complaining about the break-ins. And I said to him, "Why don't you sell up, get yourself a unit. Then you won't have all these worries".*

*And he looked me right in the eye, which he rarely did. He usually mumbled around, looking at his feet, but he looked me right in the eye this time and he said, "That's not a life".*

*Margo listened into the conversations around her as she added more sugar to her tea.*

*—In court, and he said to himself, "Sir, are you a psychic?" and then he answered, "Yes".*

*—Ate the evidence, right in front of us. Of course we arrested him straight away.*

*—He had a pipe going right into his neighbour's property to steal the water. When he realised, the bloke was so irate he chopped up the pipe with an axe.*

*—He always rode that bike everywhere, never had a car.*

*—The receptionists would spray fly-spray round the office after he left to get rid of the smell.*

*—Well, old Leo took them to court and sued them for destroying his pipe. He won too.*

*—Yes, he went to gaol for that all right, over only a few hundred dollars.*

*—He really did end up being quite famous, though, didn't he? Do you think the media dogged him in the end?*

*—Dogged him? More like he dogged them.*



Leo knew they were waiting for him to die. He knew that. They all were. Then the vultures would have free reign. He had seen them circling for so long now, picking chunks off him when he couldn't defend himself. Taking things from his shop when he wasn't there to keep watch. Lamps and clothes and lengths of rope, even the decorative cornices from the ceilings.

His leg ached from the long walk home so he leaned against the wall for a moment and looked out the front window onto Maitland Road. Leo watched a group of junkies and they reminded him of molecules heating under a microscope. They bumped slowly against each other, forming small groups then moving faster and more erratically until the whole of Maitland Road vibrated. Gradually they would score and the magnet pull that drew them together became slack like old elastic and they would sink back into the empty pits of their lives. He'd watched it a thousand nights before.

He took a match from its box and struck it, lighting the gas lamp. He dropped the spent match on the pile behind the counter. It came up to his knee.

He read through his notes for the next day, changing words here and there, checking the spelling. He was happy with most of it though, some professional turns of phrase that he had picked up from the university law library. They were sure to impress the judge. Leo added another, "I put it to you," just for good measure. He felt confident in his arguments, but the spelling made him nervous so he checked through it again, smelling the ghost of his father's sour breath at his shoulder. They both knew the errors would be there.



Leo rechecked the Sydney train timetable He felt thirsty, but would have to wait until the morning for water. He picked up the lantern when a car screamed past. A grizzly looking youth hanging out the window threw something at the shop front. Leo ducked behind his pulpit, jolting his leg.

The car disappeared down the road, its primate laughter chasing it towards Hamilton. The Coliseum was silent again. A scratchy kind of silence that kept out of sight, staying in the dark, waiting for him.

Leo saw the yellow gob of yolk slowly slide down the windows. He felt humiliated that his hands still shook as he turned off the lantern. His leg froze underneath him and he dragged it behind him to the mattress on the floor, where he lay down and waited.



*—But what was he famous for, exactly? No one knew he had any money until he was dead. Was he just famous for being crazy? All his court cases and that?*

*—He was certainly famous round at the station. We were always getting called round to The Coliseum for one reason or another. All the coppers knew him. We were called out there constantly I tell you.*

*He lowered his voice so that James Carol couldn't hear, and Margo moved herself closer to the circle that had formed around the retired policeman. Baby birds waiting to be fed snippets of gossip.*

*—We went there once because he'd had an argument with one of his customers.*

*Soon others were turning their heads to hear what he was saying, but he lowered his voice again, privy only to those in his nest.*

*—He ran straight out of The Coliseum and bent the antenna off his customer's car. When the police arrived because he was kicking up such a fuss, he ran back in and grabbed a knitting needle and stabbed the copper with it.*

*—Really, stabbed him?*

*—Yes, he ended up in jail. I'm not sure if that was why or because of another time when he assaulted a female police officer. He went to jail several times, anyway, for this and that.*

*—We did know about the money, you know... Margo spoke up, remembering the bogeyman of her childhood. She remembered wandering around the store with her high school boyfriend, fascinated by the cereal boxes on display. They were all empty. They'd walked around, rearranging things until Leo stepped out of the shadows and scared them again. They loved it.*



Leo walked down Maitland Road, straight through the puddles on the pitted footpath. He lifted his feet carefully with each step, so as not to tear the plastic bags that were tied around his feet, keeping them dry.

"That's him," a voice followed him, coming from within a group of teenagers in their school uniforms, their untidiness reflecting their respect for their school.

"He's that guy, he's a millionaire, you know."

And the girls looked at him then.

The wind bit through Margo's thin school dress. She put her arm around Tim, easing her icy fingers into his warm jacket pocket.

She felt comfortable now to touch him.

She looked up at Tim, the stubble on his chin and the way his shoulders were crammed into his school blazer made him look ridiculous and sexy at the same time. He breathed out a mouthful of smoke and steam. He gently held his cigarette to her lips, as if that was what she had been wanting.

Margo watched it glow brighter as she sucked the smoke into her mouth, trying to pull some heat into her. Tim put his hand in her pocket too and they walked along like that for a while, feeling lucky and at least partially warm. The others were walking behind them, the usual entourage. They always followed along, barely leaving them alone. Margo felt like she was being chaperoned, and especially on such a cold day was keen to duck into an empty doorway and feel the warmth of Tim's body pushed up against her, his icy fingers trying to find their way around under her school jumper.

"Oh yeah, he's a nutcase," said Tim loudly as they passed him,

The others behind him giggled. But Margo felt herself shrink from him, no longer enjoying the feel of his damp fingers. She looked behind her to see Leo continue walking along the street with determination, studying the footpath, as if he was looking out for the puddles, but then walking straight through them anyway.

"They reckon he's rich as," said Nicky from behind them.

"Who is?"

"That dude. That Coliseum dude. They reckon he owns half of Newcastle."

Tim slowed then, and turned, steering Margo so they were walking backwards facing the group.

"Who reckons?"

"Everybody."

Ω

—*He said his parents willed everything to the Catholic Church so he wasn't able to spend any money.*

—*Hit his father in the head with a hammer.*

—*They buried Old Mr Maley, as they were old friends of the family, but Leo refused to pay for it. He said his father was still alive and living in Perth. It went to court, he told them to get the money off the father as it was him that they had buried.*

—*Nobody went to the father's funeral. Leo hadn't told anyone he was dead. I was the only one there.*

—*Worried about The Coliseum when he was in gaol.*

—*Something must have happened to him.*

—*His mother.*

—*He won again. I don't know how he did it.*

—*A legal mind.*

—*He never got over it. Spoke as if they were still alive.*

—*Sad.*

—*Very sad.*

—*He would become very animated. Talking about solar flares.*

—*Wash his clothes, they would disintegrate.*

—*Sat outside to eat because of the smell.*

—*The academic community obviously just wasn't ready for him.*

—*He had an accident at some stage, and broke his leg. That's how we ended up looking after Mr Maley, when he had a broken leg. There was no water at The Coliseum, so he used to come to our place and a friend of ours would give him a shower.*



Leo lay on a single mattress in the small alcove of the old storeroom. The mattress was filthy, not covered by a sheet. He had a couple of old blankets that had lost their original colour and taken on the same grey-brown as the rest of the room. The same colour as his skin, his hair, his heart. They lay crumpled at his feet, out of his reach.

Leo tried to flip them up closer to his hands with his good leg, but they were caught under his right leg, still stiff and painful after the accident.

He repeated this several times until he gradually moved almost one hundred and eighty degrees. By this time Leo was exhausted, his mouth dry and his breath thin. He reached out his arm and grabbed a handful of blanket. The veins in his hands bubbled and popped under his skin.

Leo listened to the air around him, swollen with damp. He watched his shallow chest rise and fall as he breathed, his shirt barely moving as the cold pressed down on his ribs and stuck his throat together. Small tufts of fog escaped from his body with each breath.

Leo breathed in deeply through his mouth, trying to quench his thirst by sucking the dampness out of the air, but the mist escaped again as he breathed out. He pulled the lump of blanket back onto himself, remembering when his mother would come into his room in the middle of the night. He could smell her violet perfume. Sometimes Leo would be asleep, but sometimes he would be in that heavenly place where sleep and wakefulness meet and play in perfume scented dreams. And soft, white, marble hands smoothed his blankets and lips

touched his cheek. He would drift off into a land of such soft edges they couldn't be grasped by the prying hands of memory in the morning.

Now Leo laid horizontally-cross-ways on the bed. The cold chased his sleep away for as long as it could before it followed him into his dreams, filling his nostrils so he couldn't smell anything. His head rested awkwardly against a wheelie bin. There were three or four of these in the room. Since the accident Leo had found them the perfect height to rest against now that sitting made him feel as if his bones were grinding together.

The wheelie bins were much more practical. Leo leaned against them to read and write his articles and letters, draw up his legal documents. He kept his food there, the bread or pies, whatever James Carol had given him the night before.

Ω

*—Never married.*

*—No children.*

*—Is it true that you found him?*

*—It was my wife actually. He must have had a stroke, because he couldn't move at all. I was away and she hadn't heard from him or seen him for a few days so she went round to The Coliseum with my nephew.*

Ω

Leo lay on the mattress, unable to move. He needed to write. With his good right hand he patted at the bin at his side, trying to knock a pen from its lid. He heard the pen roll across the top of the lid and fall.

He slept. He waited and he slept some more.

"Hello?"

"Mr Maley?"

Ω

*—When I got back I went straight away to visit him in the hospital. He was difficult to understand and saliva dribbled from his mouth.*

Ω

Leo lay in his hospital bed. The sheets were hard and rustled when he moved. The nurses came and went, offering him tea and checking his chart, giving him tablets that stuck in his throat when he tried to swallow them from the plastic cup that never had enough water in it. The comfort of the pillow was unfamiliar, making him feel unsafe.

Leo kept time by the arrival of his meals, none of which he ate. The day before a big-bosomed nurse had cut his meat into tiny pieces for him so he had eaten a couple of forkfuls

while she sat with him and smiled. The other nurses who came and went were terrifying in their directness, calling him by his first name and prodding and poking at him.

The room was silent. Out in the corridor he could hear occasional footsteps, the soft whelp of carefully closing doors, not like the flickering, flapping silence of The Coliseum. He needed to get back there.

Ω

When Leo woke James Carol was on the chair next to his bed. His feet swung above the ground giving him the appearance of a child, with his fluffy white hair and beard surrounding his child's face.

"Hello Mr Maley," he said as Leo opened his eyes. "How are you today?"

Leo opened his mouth but the words came out loose and unformed. Saliva leaked from the corner of his mouth and hung from his chin. James went on regardless, as if he didn't notice and that the garbled words made perfect sense to him.

Ω

*—I prayed for him, and he didn't say anything but I could tell he was angry.*

*—Why? Wasn't he religious?*

*—No, it wasn't that. I think it was because he thought that my prayer would make him live longer, and he just wanted to die. If he couldn't go back to The Coliseum, then he just wanted to die.*

Ω

As James prayed, Leo imagined he was back at his Coliseum, lying on the floor. James's voice became the sound of cockroaches scavenging in their kingdom. He heard the cars driving past and felt the walls of The Coliseum around him. Protecting him.

Ω

*James thanked everyone for coming.*

*—I am so moved that this man has created such feeling in those in the community that you have all come out here today to pay homage to him. He may have been a man without a family but he is an icon within Mayfield and the Mayfield community.*

## Woomera Memories

I saw the fire. I was living in Woomera with my parents at the time, must have been the mid-fifties. I was about ten or eleven then. I was with Potsy. You said you had kids there at that time. Do you remember him, Kevin Potts? I was with him, and another kid—I can't remember his name, just that he had heaps of freckles, and was real skinny, but tough as guts. He ran round the streets in bare feet, over the roads and everything. You remember the roads? They were all dirty and rocky, and hot as anything most days.

But we all watched the fire. We were hanging off the fences there, watching. They tried to get rid of us, but we just kept hanging on there.

A couple of men were throwing buckets of water on the fire and this little bloke, the one from the papers with the Queen and all that, he was throwing books on there. I kid you not. They weren't reading books, they were more like ledgers. Like the accounting books me mum had in her shop.

Full of secrets, we knew that. It really captured our imaginations. How to make weapons. He was burning them all. Ripping out pages of some, or burning them whole. No one could stop him. He was like a madman. One guy even threw a bucket of water right over his head but it was like he didn't notice. Part of his trouser leg caught fire for a bit too, and it was like he didn't notice that, neither.

Bits of the books flew up into the sky. Secrets, they were. Pages of top secret stuff all mixed up and scorched. We ran round collecting them and shoving them in our pockets. We thought we'd build our own rocket. Ha. But it didn't make any sense to us anyway. Just numbers and letters all mixed up. Worse than maths class at school. Heaps worse. It was a bloody nightmare.

But it was the most exciting thing that happened round there for ages. The Queen didn't thrill me too much. Mum was so excited about the colour of her dress and all that. But me and Potsy and this other kid kept those bits of pages for ages, and we'd go out to the desert and read them and dream of making rockets ourselves. It was our own secret.

Oh, the memories. They keep flowing now this website is up and running. I keep thinking about people I haven't thought of in years.

Taken from "Woomera on the Web"  
15/04/1999.

## Epilogue

The blue foam box sat in the middle of the kitchen table, out of the reach of his son's exploring fingers. The family ate around it and James Carol would stare at it blankly whenever he tried to write.

His wife would clear the table and wipe it with her sponge. She never moved the box from the centre of the table. It was as if her arm was physically repelled, so that by the end of five days there was a moat of crumbs and grease surrounding the box where her sponge had failed to clean.

People still came to eat with them and she put platters of pies onto the table, never commenting on the box. It became a large hole in her conversations with her husband, and visitors seemed to know that it was safer to stick to the usual topics of the food, God and heroin.

The days grew warmer, warning him that Christmas was approaching. His wife's silence became too much for James to ignore. He woke one morning, his skin prickling from the heat coming from her back.

James swung his legs over the side of the bed. Outside the birds were singing loudly enough to drown out the sounds of a nocturnal suburb dying down. He scratched at the sweaty skin under his beard and drew the coolness of the timber floor into his bare feet.

In the kitchen he opened the freezer door and took out a Danish. He rested it against his forehead for a moment, then bit into the pastry, disappointed that it didn't cool him. The foam box was still on the table amongst the chaos of the previous evening.

He went to the bathroom and splashed water over his mouth, pulling at his beard to remove the pastry crumbs, succeeding only in crushing them into smaller, dandruff like flakes. Standing over the pile of clothes behind the bathroom door, he lifted one crumpled item at a time until he was dressed.

In the next room he could hear his wife tossing and snorting softly to herself. He knew then that he didn't have much time to escape from the house unquestioned.

With his thongs as silent hostages in his hands, James picked up the box from the table, holding his breath as the foam squealed against the screen door when he closed it behind him.

Outside he dropped his thongs to the pavement and fumbled blindly with his toes to slide them on. The box resting on his belly, obscuring his view of his feet.

James didn't see anyone on the short walk to The Coliseum. People were staying inside to avoid the heat. Dogs hid from their owners in the shade of their houses, tongues lolling, happy to forfeit today's walk.

Someone had boarded up the windows of The Coliseum again. James went round the back and as he moved the box under his damp armpit, he felt the contents shift inside. James imagined its contents reforming, taking on shape.

He fiddled with the back door until it opened.

He stood in the doorway for a moment, feeling the cool air of The Coliseum coming to greet the stagnant air outside.

Inside he found a place where the floorboards were rotted enough to pry them apart and placed the box onto the safety of the cool earth below.

James crouched on the floor and looked up at the sagging ceiling. Nail holes in the plywood window coverings let in thin streams of morning light, like hundreds of eyes looking in. James muttered a prayer under his breath.

*Yea, though I walk through death's dark vale*

*My soul waits for the lord*

*More than watchmen wait for the morning*

*More than watchmen wait for the morning.*

With that James stood up and left Leo alone in his home.



## **CRITICAL EXEGESIS: STORYTELLING, ARCHETYPES AND PLACE AS ICON**

Leo Maley was infamous in Mayfield, Newcastle, where he lived in a rundown shop known as The Coliseum. He has been described as a recluse, a courtroom gladiator, a crank and a genius but most often as an eccentric. Originally intended to be a work of creative non-fiction, *The Coliseum* is a collection of short stories based on the life of Leo. These stories were inspired by interviews, personal letters, legal documents and court transcripts, Leo's private writings and photographs.

A collection of researched material necessarily requires adaptation when transformed into written word and film. This can become problematic when attempting to make these adaptations in non-fiction. Community stories of unusual characters, whether factual or mythical, evolve to fit national archetypes. In turn these stories affect the perception of the place in which they are set.

When interviewed, people build upon the cultural knowledge they have to form their own narrative about the subjects and places, and deliver their stories within the bounds of this knowledge. This exegesis will also explore the notion of the eccentric within the national body of film and literature, and how community stories are manipulated into myths that fit these national notions of the eccentric.

In turn, stories set in real places change the reality of that place. A notion of place as having an identity creates the place "even as much as the architects and the builders" (Donald 4). This exegesis will seek to discover the value of storytelling to the notion of place as icon.

These aspects of storytelling link directly to the creative work which accompanies this exegesis, titled: *The Coliseum*

## Chapter One

### From fragments to product

The decision to fictionalise the life of Leo Maley occurred when my research into his life was in its final stages and the process of writing well underway. Initially, as I interviewed members of the local community, I intended to write a non-fiction piece about Leo's life. This was still my intention as I scoured microfiche for newspaper articles, joined relevant web groups and applied for court documents. I soon had a vast array of information, but wasn't sure how to turn it into a workable narrative.

Kate Grenville had similar problems when working with all the information she gathered about her great-great-great grandfather Solomon Wiseman for *The Secret River*. She writes:

I imagined that this family history business would be tidy: a matter of stepping from one fact to another. I had an idea of myself as an orderly researcher, with index cards and colour-coded folders. The past would be put together like a jigsaw puzzle, I thought: take enough time, have enough patience, collect enough facts, and it would all make a picture. (31)

Later, when Grenville's piles of research had grown, the solution to the problem of sorting her project into a workable story was no closer. In Grenville's experience as a film editor she had found that the plot could be something that is discovered in the editing room, rather than something that is fashioned into the script. She writes:

Before I was a writer, I'd been a film editor...I'd worked on some *cinéma vérité* documentaries. The director started out with only a rough sketch of the script. The idea was to go out and shoot life, as it happened. Later, in the editing room, you'd find the story in the shots.

That's what I had to do now: go through what I had written and find a structure for all these fragments. (152)

As I began the writing process I was struggling with the task of collating the vast quantities of material I had gathered and making some sense of it all. My Coliseum project at this point consisted of photos, interviews and newspaper articles, court transcripts and conversations with strangers at the bus-stop. It was my job to pull all this into a readable story. I had to find within all my research a workable plot, or theme, and make decisions regarding characterisation. This was a daunting task. A certificate for a three-legged race, personal letters and photos were all vying for inclusion. Azar Nafisi describes the need to process these raw materials as she writes about her research for *Reading Lolita in Tehran*:

In retrospect, when historical events are gathered up, analysed and categorized into articles and books, their messiness disappears and they gain a certain logic and clarity that one never feels at the time. (157)

Therefore, although a narrative may be the product of careful research, any narrative is the product of material that has been carefully selected and put together by the author. This manipulation of data is important when oral histories are used as a source material. Michael Frisch writes:

Books that use oral history material (in whatever form) present a seamless and flowing narrative. But the raw material is often choppy; the narrator jumps around all over the place; sentences are incomplete, indistinct, garbled, and change direction halfway through. (34)

The construction of a story from a series of recorded interviews, therefore, is the result of many decisions that need to be made by the writer. These stories have to be carefully reconstructed, to be shown in a logical

manner. The writer needs to decide whether to translate incoherent or incomplete sentences. As well as decisions that may effectively edit the original material, oral histories need to have dimensions other than a copying of their aural qualities added to them. For interviews to evolve into written stories they have to be changed, filled out, characters need to be developed. When reading a transcript of an interview, many aspects of the original storytelling experience are missing, including the facial features of the storyteller, the mutual knowledge of the place, its history, and its inhabitants. All of these need to be recreated by the writer.

### **Narrative: Deciding what to leave out**

When writing a non-fiction piece there is always the dilemma of what items to include, or exclude: which events to cast shade over or which to shed some light on.

In *The Coliseum*, some of the content of newspaper articles, interview stories or letters was omitted simply due to the constraint of writing a story that fits together. My project, however, also eliminated letters and other information because their content had the potential to erode any empathy for Leo Maley at all. I needed to create some degree of empathy for Leo Maley, and due to his personality and actions it was difficult to garner in any case, without including purposely inflammatory material. This led me to realise that it was just as important to decide which information to leave out.

Lee Gutkind, author of *The Art of Creative Non-Fiction: Writing and Selling the Literature of Reality*, writes (66), that the creative non-fiction writer can be subjective in a way that the journalist cannot. He discusses how the writer can sound completely objective while being subjective due to the omission of certain data, interaction or experience.

As an example of this, I refer to Truman Capote's *In Cold Blood*, which is an account of Richard Hickock and Perry Smith who were on death row for the murder of a wealthy farmer, Herbert Clutter, his wife Bonnie, and two of their children, teenagers Nancy and Kenyon. These murders were an

unprovoked and unplanned attack on strangers. Truman Capote befriended the murderers in order to write about them, and even helped them gain access to legal help during their appeals process.

In the period leading up to their execution, Capote interviewed Hickock and Smith and wrote detailed accounts of their lives. Yet Capote left out information that one of the murderers, Hickock, told him in a statement shortly before his execution. This statement within *In Cold Blood* included extended details of Hickock's previous jobs and girlfriends. These descriptions were written out verbatim, but when referring to Hickock's paedophilia, Capote simply writes, "Here Hickock revealed his paedophilic tendencies, and after describing several sample experiences, wrote: 'I know it was wrong'" (270).

Capote, disclosing in detail the mind of a murderer who is soon to be executed, has left out the details of Hickock's paedophilia. Capote is directing the shade onto Hickock's paedophilia in order to highlight other more acceptable aspects of his personal history such as previous jobs and girlfriends. To include details of this unseemly side of his personality would have had the effect of casting shade over all other aspects of the character he had created. While it can be argued that events occur at random, non-fiction writers consciously redistribute these random events to create their stories.

There are always reasons why the writer will choose to elaborate on one event over the other. In this way some events are overvalued and others not mentioned at all. Collating the data and making decisions about what events to include, which to emphasise, and which to leave out (as if this event never happened), is therefore a creative act.

The documentary, *Bastardy*, showcases the life of Jack Charles, an Indigenous Australian actor. *Bastardy* took seven years to film and over one hundred and twenty hours of film were edited to create the feature-length documentary. This meant that the film was necessarily edited to convey certain themes and to put the chaos that is anyone's life into a cohesive story. Jaimee Edwards says in his essay, *Identity and Reconciliation in Bastardy*,

Early in Amiel Courtin-Wilson's documentary *Bastardy*, the filmmaker's white arm can be seen reaching around the camera to accept a gift from the film's subject, Jack Charles. The gift is a necklace with a medallion beaded in 'the (Aboriginal) colours': black, red and yellow. This gesture of gift giving from Charles, and Courtin-Wilson's receiving of it, orientates the viewer to the film's subtle politics of Reconciliation. (n.pag)

This gesture may have been made early in the film, but not necessarily early in the film-making. Therefore it was a moment that Courtin-Wilson decided to shed light on. The process of making the documentary began when Courtin-Wilson first met with Jack Charles to discuss the possibility of making a documentary of his life. Charles insisted they start immediately, thus the filming of *Bastardy* really began in a small café in Brunswick Street in Fitzroy. This scene was one of many chosen by Courtin-Wilson to be eliminated. At what time within the seven years and one hundred and twenty hours of filming the necklace was given is unknown, but it was placed at the beginning of the movie for narrative reasons, and so the story of Jack Charles began.

### **Creating character**

As Courtin-Wilson created the story of Jack Charles, I began to create the story of Leo Maley. In the absence of any living family I spoke with many of Leo's acquaintances, but only one of them considered themselves to be Leo Maley's friend. The character James Carol in *The Coliseum* is based on Leo's friend, Peter Boyd. Peter Boyd arranged the memorial service where stories of Leo's life were told. As in *The Coliseum*, he fed Leo each day in the final years of his life and returned his ashes to The Coliseum. I collected other stories from people in the community; some were neighbours of The Coliseum, and others I met through the owner of the renovated Coliseum.

Others I met by putting up notices in The Coliseum's new coffee shop, or via a newspaper article in the local paper.

The stories that I collected offer different aspects of Leo Maley's character and life, unavoidably ensconced within the fragility of memory and the ruggedness of opinion. Leo's own thoughts were available through his letters and articles he wrote with the unrealised intention of publication in various newspapers.

When writing *The Coliseum*, I didn't want to be limited to the people I had interviewed. I found through Leo's letters that he had a very distinctive style of speaking, and certain words, such as "dope" made up his own vocabulary. My interviewees often commented on Leo's formal way of speaking. They spoke of his accent, as if he had been privately educated, and then that he had often, paradoxically, mispronounced words: for example, when writing and speaking he said "chimbley" for "chimney". They also described his stammer, or stutter, and his mouth wet with spit. It seems Leo often spoke in a mumble, not looking directly at the person he was speaking to. The letters Leo wrote also presents another aspect of his personality. Inside the mind of this man who mumbled and stumbled over simple words, Leo saw the world differently. It was a place he could take charge of.

From all my research I gained many stories and opinions of Leo, but as with Grenville's search for Solomon Wiseman, I found that it wasn't naturally adding up to a logical narrative. There were too many contradictions, too many versions of stories, and too many facts that could not be substantiated. I wasn't at all sure who Leo Maley was at this time: whether he was a genius or a madman, whether he was a violinist or a metallurgist, even whether he was rich or poor.

My search reminded me of Lichenstein's *Rodinsky's Room* in which Rachel Lichtenstein tries to figure out who David Rodinsky was. *Rodinsky's Room* is a recount by Lichtenstein of her search for what happened to a Jewish man, David Rodinsky, who disappeared leaving behind a room filled with his belongings as if his departure had been unexpected. He left behind his writings which included studies of various languages and religious texts.

Lichtenstein became obsessed with solving the mystery, not only of what happened to Rodinsky, but also of who he was. The stories told to her by the people in the neighbourhood gave her wildly contradictory accounts of his character, personality, and even his occupation. Iain Sinclair, co-author of *Rodinsky's Room*, writes of Lichenstein's search:

The more documentation Rachel could file, the more artefacts she could photograph and label, the more elusive this fiction, David Rodinsky, became. She improvised with all the required roles: private detective, archaeologist, curator, ghost writer, ventriloquial deliverer of Rodinsky's voice and art. (4)

As with Lichenstein, the more information I had, the more I felt that showing all the dimensions of Leo Maley's nature to be impossible. I realised that when attempting to describe any human life, whether famous or common, to depict the intricacy of their character is difficult. Jaimee Edwards, when writing of the documentary, *Bastardy*, says, "Perhaps it is redundant to suggest that identity is multifarious; yet, portraiture, (as this is) historically seeks to capture and stabilise its subject" (n.pag).

While this need to "stabilise" a subject is the ideal, one of the characteristics of Leo's life was the messiness. It wasn't just his home and shop that were messy, but the contradictions within his own myths, of his own character and life. Although I am asking my readers to 'imagine' Leo, to neaten up his life and put it into chronological order would not only be showing merely an illusion of Leo and his infamy, but would also pasteurise the stories of him beyond recognition. Grenville writes:

I already had two Solomon Wisemans, my mother's and my own. From this search (Internet) I now had nine. But somewhere behind my sources - the family story, the Old Bailey records, and these terse and perhaps unreliable entries on the Family Search site - was the real man. He had lived and died not as a story or a set of entries on a

website, but an individual as precisely himself as anyone  
I knew. I hungered to find out who he was. (24)

Grenville discovered the necessity to recreate character from several different versions of Wiseman, which led her to describe real human beings as “slipperier than those of fiction”. Grenville realised that by depicting Wiseman as a character she had to take the information she had found and create a new truth. Grenville eventually solved her dilemma by fictionalising her narration of Wiseman’s life.

### **Character: Being objective**

I wanted to show Leo Maley to my reader without my obvious sympathies for him becoming apparent. I wondered whether this was possible. Capote describes Buffalo Jones, an itinerant buffalo hunter who had a lot to do with the expansion of Garden City into an “opulent ranching centre” (31). He describes Buffalo Jones, “who lost his money and then his mind (the last years of his life were spent haranguing street groups against the wanton extermination of the beasts he himself had so profitably slaughtered)” (31).

*In Cold Blood* was written in 1966 before the widespread concern for environment and public awareness of endangered species. Capote’s parenthesis exists to justify the ‘fact’ that Buffalo Jones had lost his mind, yet the loss of one’s mind is such a subjective concern that if this story were being written today Jones could be considered an environmentalist. It is unclear from the text whether the ‘fact’ that Buffalo Jones lost his mind is the opinion of Capote or the residents that he interviewed. Either way, this Buffalo Jones “who lost his money, and then his mind”, was presented to the reader as a fact.

Which facts I could present about Leo Maley was a dilemma from the start. He was well known in Newcastle as a “crack pot” and ordered to have a psychological analysis by a judge (the doctor found Leo Maley to be sane). Residents referred to him as a genius, but why would a genius chose to live

a life of poverty, engaging in insignificant court squabbles? Without blatantly showing my personal sympathies towards Leo, it is, however, impossible for me not to write a biased account of his life.

### **Character: Stereotypes**

While I did not want to make my sympathies for Leo Maley obvious, I was more concerned about Leo becoming a caricature. Locals tell funny stories of him running out of The Coliseum after a startled customer and breaking their car antenna, or trying to eat the evidence of a petty crime. While there is evidence of these stories in police reports, they were difficult to write about without caricaturising Leo: making him out to be crazy. How was I to show the many aspects of his personality? As with creating a narrative, this ‘capturing and stabilising of a subject’ cannot be done without further manipulation of the raw material. In the case of Jack Charles, as mentioned earlier, this is done through the editing of film footage. As Jaimee Edwards writes in *Identity and Reconciliation in Bastardy*:

The identity of Jack Charles is at the heart of *Bastardy*’s narrative structure. However, identity is, from the onset, revealed to be slippery. Jack Charles is Aboriginal, he is of the Stolen Generations, he is an actor, a cat burglar, a heroin addict, he is homeless, he is homosexual, he is also a songwriter, a potter, an activist, and respected elder. While the documentary reveals, in paced succession, these aspects of Jack’s character, it does not emphasise one over the other. (n.pag)

While it may be true that Courtin-Wilson does not emphasise one of these facets over another, he does take the viewer and lead them by the hand as he invites them to imagine Jack Charles in the same way as he, Courtin Wilson, does. Jack Charles is initially shown giving a gift, then this is followed by the grand tour of Charles’ “home”, the outdoor laundry of a block of flats. Before we see Jack injecting heroin, we see him as a man that

can give gifts although he is homeless. Before we realise he is stealing off the crew, we see him stealing from the wealthy. We are shown Jack Charles redeeming himself by firstly admitting to his crimes, and secondly by returning the stolen items. This careful layering of one event over another allows us to see Jack as Courtin-Wilson wants us to.

As in the cases of Jack Charles, Solomon Wiseman and David Rodinsky, it was difficult to pin down Leo Maley. He was a shy man, yet he loved a fight. He was articulate in the courtroom, yet stuttered and mumbled when speaking to his customers. He would stand up to men twice his size, yet hid behind the counter from female customers. He was described as rude, polite, intelligent and semi-literate. Leo Maley, like Jack Charles, was full of contradictions and the best I could hope for was to show my readers how I had imagined him.

As with the viewers of *Bastardy*, the readers of *The Coliseum* are asked to constantly review their image of Leo Maley. Was Leo crazy or was he really a genius? My focus changed from Leo Maley, a mystery that needed to be solved, into Leo Maley, a mystery I wanted to share. The selection and ordering of my chapters allowed me to recreate Leo Maley. In the first story he is a weak old man, hiding from two women in his shop. In a later chapter I showed him as a tyrant seeking his rent money, but then as a son in denial about the sudden death of his mother. My readers are able to make up their own minds about Leo, yet I have selected and ordered these events. I am asking my readers to imagine Leo as I have imagined him.

### **Showing place**

Gutkind writes that despite the author playing with their research, it is more important for the reader to learn something about how people live, or lived, within a recent era, than for the objective delivery of facts. Gutkind writes:

This is a three dimensional teaching experience and not just an exercise that communicates information. The

writer captures the adventure, the people behind the adventure, and the panoramic landscape of the place in which the adventure occurs. (71)

I not only wanted to show Leo to my reader, but also the place in which he lived. Mayfield has as many contradictions as Leo himself. Mayfield has homesteads left over from her glory days, sharing a suburb with the old YMCA building that has gone from hosting Saturday night dances to being a halfway house for released prisoners. There are houses that have been newly renovated next to others that are dilapidated. I wanted to show Newcastle off as a place of promise, with some of the most beautiful beaches in the world, set against the backdrop of empty shops and unemployment.

Not only did I want my readers to get to know Leo, I wanted them to be able to feel Newcastle. I think this is more important to my project than having the facts of Leo's life displayed verbatim. I wanted to capture a portion of Leo's multifaceted personality in some of the stories told about his life but I also wanted to create the panoramic landscape of the suburb of Mayfield as it exists within the city of Newcastle. I wanted my readers to discover the oxymoron of Mayfield, with its many fine historic homes juxtaposed against its reputation. I wanted to transform Mayfield by writing about it.

### **Inserting a theme**

When working transcribed interviews into a story, something more than a simple retelling occurs. As stated earlier, there must be narrative cohesion; but also some type of thread or theme is often used to give the story meaning or to pass on a message. Stories have for generations been a method for teaching and passing on social mores and moral codes. Gutkind agrees that it is important to have as a main point of focus some kind of an overall theme, intent or meaning to tie the elements of a story together.

I was left then with the issue of theme. Joining together these fragments to create a narrative not only involved the selection of the material to be included, or excluded, as discussed earlier, but also the discovery and exploitation of the natural themes of the story. I toyed with theme ideas for my project, planning to disguise them within the stories. There were many themes that I could have woven into the plot, such as society's fascination with the eccentric, the ability to be an eccentric when you are self-funded, or the realities of getting old; perhaps even the morality of letting people live in sub-standard conditions, even if this is the way they choose to live, or the idea of madness versus eccentricity.

The beginnings of these themes were there within my research, but I couldn't bring myself to force them into my writing, adding a theme using metaphor and clever words. It made me cringe. But surely my project needed a theme? I tossed these ideas about, nursing them for a while before discarding them. For some reason I just couldn't bring myself to do it, despite Gutkind's advice.

Azar Nafisi also rejects the notion that we should try so hard to fix themes to our work that we end up writing to our ideology. She writes that to add a fixed theme would be to force all other aspects of the work, the plot, the characters, even the place to become slaves to our personal ideology in a bid to entwine them discreetly within the text. As Nafisi writes in her book, *Reading Lolita in Tehran*:

"But it's the truth."

"Lady, he says, we do not need your truths but your fiction-if you're any good, perhaps you can trickle in some sort of truth, but spare us your real feelings." (338)

Christos Tsoilkas, when writing about *Bastardy*, asserts that neither a "pretend objectivity nor sentimental liberal pieties are adequate to show the truth of Jack Charles life." He argues that only by showing the relationship between Jack Charles and Amiel Courtin-Wilson is a truth able to be seen. (n.pag)

## Chapter Two

### Imagining the eccentric

Eccentrics within the national body of film and literature are depicted as being of superior intelligence. There is then a catalyst which precipitates their eccentricity. Although sharing some similar qualities, eccentrics differ from Australia's other great love, that of the larrikin. These archetypes both evolve from, and are reflected in, community stories.

As Patrick O'Farrell says of Australian oral histories, "they are about diggers and bushrangers and the like, the archetypal common man... the virtuous notion that everything and everybody is of historical interest has an ideological base in the cult of the common man, of the ordinary person, the worker" (6).

Australian film and literature is full of these archetypes. Australian audiences identify with larrikins and diggers as Anglo archetypes. Turner argues that, "in film, the dominance of documentary realism results in the representation of characters as types, their distinguishing marks deriving from that aspect of Australian life for which they act as metonyms" (90).

As such, Graeme Turner, author of *National Fictions*, asserts that these character types may depict social groups rather than individual people, although the characters themselves are colourful. Eccentrics are one of the character types found across Australian film and literature. Turner asserts that it is necessary to examine popular film as well as literature to find examples of "the dominant and defining structures of Australian narrative" (23). For this reason I have included film in my study of the eccentric as a national fiction.

Australians are fascinated by stories they can relate to and audiences are engaged by stories with a familiar structure. When community stories are told narrative devices are used, and the opinion of the storyteller is often added as a conclusion. Anna Green writes, "we explain our lives as stories, using the cultural conventions and devices of our own time and place" (7). When people relay events that happened to them, they add elements to

contextualise these events within the moral and storytelling codes of their time. Green asserts:

Oral historians have become increasingly aware of the imaginative dimensions of storytelling. In particular, cultural myths may be powerful devices through which to make sense of the past. By myth, I mean the ways in which archetypes and symbols may be used. (19)

It is within this context that the emergence of archetypes can be seen within many oral history interviews, cultural myths and local storytelling, which I will discuss further. Firstly, however, it is necessary to ask: What are the characteristics of an eccentric within the context of Australian literature and film?

### **Myths and eccentric characters**

The narrative of an eccentric often is often set up as a caricature or a side-kick. Alternatively, the eccentric character may adapt and change to conform to the society around them. The eccentric as a peripheral character is noted by Turner in *National Fictions*. He writes:

The singular individual, richly endowed with indicators of difference, survives in fact in much of Australian fiction in essentially peripheral roles-such as those filled by the array of characters in *Such is Life* (the signifiers of its ethos). Where there is difference in Lawson's stories, it can indicate victimhood (the cook in *The Shearing of the Cook's Dog*), madness or eccentricity (*The Bush Undertaker*), or a kind of constitutional unsuitability for communal life (*Giraffe in Send Round the Hat*, who is eventually consigned to the care of his sweetheart and thus banished from Lawson's world for good). (92)

Sometimes the eccentric character does “adapt to a social structure” (Turner, 93), as in the long-running character of Toad-Fish in *Neighbours*. When the character of Toad-Fish moved to Ramsay Street, he was misplaced within his white, middle-class, suburban surroundings. He entered Ramsay Street wearing a flannelette shirt and sporting a mullet. His family consisted of brothers and cousins all with similar marine-inspired nicknames, such as Stone-Fish, Sting-Ray and Tadpole. They were all bogans, products of the juvenile justice system. They were too loud, too fat, and too unfashionable. As a result, they were short-term characters, brought in to add some shock and indignation to the white, middle-class street, as much by their fashion sense as their behaviour. But Toad-Fish stayed, became Toadie, and finally Jared. He got a haircut, lost weight along with his ocker accent. He got a job. He is still not as good looking as the rest of the cast, but his looks are made up for by the further evolution of his character into a lawyer. Toad-fish ultimately adapted and changed to become like all the other white (washed) characters.

Eccentric characters as protagonists are rare. Turner writes:

Where the singular individual occupies the centre of the novel, as in Richardson’s fiction, he derives little benefit from his individuality. Indeed, Richard Mahony’s singularity, denoted finally through his inability to adapt to a social structure and its harsh economic realities, is precisely the attribute which renders him vulnerable to rejection by the very community he wishes to enter...for its part the Australian version as constructed in our fiction sees in difference, and thus individuality, an implied criticism; and so it reacts with suspicion and resentment. (93)

The incidences of well-known eccentric protagonists within Australian film and literature are surprisingly few. Although Australian novels and film are littered with eccentrics, the eccentric as a protagonist is less common. Just as eccentrics by their very definition are on the peripheries of

Australian society, they are also on the peripheries of Australian literature and film.

### **Eccentrics and “eccentrics”**

Is there a difference between a real eccentric and those who, based on reality or not, are written or cinematic reconstructions? Despite their odd appearance and behaviour, the idea of the eccentric is positive. As nineteenth-century British philosopher John Stuart Mill wrote:

Eccentricity has always abounded when and where strength of character has abounded; the amount of eccentricity in a society has generally been proportional to the amount of genius, mental vigour, and moral courage which it contained... That so few now dare to be eccentric, marks the chief danger of our time. (Wilson n.pag)

This framing of the eccentric still exists today, not only within society but also within literature and film. Mill's link between eccentricity and genius is the principal characteristic within the notion of the eccentric and was common in the stories I gathered of Leo Maley, and I wondered whether Leo was a genius, or whether this aspect of his character was applied retrospectively to stories told of him. David Joseph Weeks's study of eccentrics begins by lamenting the fact that eccentrics are still a mystery for psychologists. His study is predominately focussed on whether there is a correlation between eccentricity and mental illness; it found that the one hundred and thirty eccentrics he studied ranged across the social spectrum and many were of average intelligence; therefore the link between eccentricities and genius is one of myth.

What other attributes are bestowed upon eccentrics within literature and film? This exegesis will examine other characteristics of eccentrics, such

as the conditions surrounding their childhoods, both within national stories, and their correlating possibilities of myth.

Within the context of the national body of film and literature, there are three components that make up an eccentric. The first component mirrors that of Mill, in depicting the eccentric as having qualities of genius. More specifically, this genius is evident in the eccentric character from childhood. The mythical fine line between genius and insanity has long circulated and perhaps it is a line that our eccentrics (created eccentrics within literature and film) balance on, or attempt to negotiate.

The second component of the national eccentric story is that an event occurs, such as a mental breakdown, which can be used to explain their eccentricity, or the way they are. This breakdown seems most often to occur during adolescence, thus serving to separate childhood (genius) from adulthood (eccentricity). Although the behaviour of the young character could possibly be described as unusual, their eccentricity is contained. In each case something happens to unleash their eccentricity, as if it had been lying dormant within the character.

The final component of the national eccentric story is that the eccentric character will ultimately end up old and alone. Stories depicting eccentric protagonists tend to span a long period, giving their subjects time to become older and weirder.

Weeks' study of eccentrics examined many aspects of eccentric characteristics, such as beliefs, lifestyle and health. When comparing his study with the three points found within our national body of film and literature, the findings are contradictory. As stated earlier, most were of average intelligence, Weeks also discovered that most of his eccentrics knew they were different from childhood, which suggested there was no catalyst for their eccentricity. Most had never suffered a breakdown, or trigger for their eccentricity. Although a proportion of them were single, they often lived happy and fulfilled lives. Others were in a marriage or other type of partnership. This suggests that these three aspects of the narratives that surround eccentrics only exist within our national film and literature, and therefore is myth. It is interesting to note that although these aspects of

eccentricity are myth, Australians still enjoy watching their eccentrics being depicted in this manner. It has become a part of what we think an eccentric to be. Why would we depict eccentrics in this manner if it isn't true? Turner asserts that it is necessary to examine the ways in which a specific culture most commonly represents its individuals. He writes:

In fact, many accounts of the subjectivity of the author now see it as a mechanism that reveals the *culture's* meanings more than the *author's* individuality...It is thus necessary to examine how often certain structural arrangements, certain patterns of image or representation, recur in our narratives to reveal the nature of the culture's specific selection and generation of meanings and significances. (56)

Turner outlines some of these recurring themes within texts and it is worthy to note how many of these themes occur not only in texts, but also films with eccentric characters. These same themes can also be seen in the stories told to me of Leo Maley. Turner writes:

These [themes] include the foregrounding of the sense of alienation and isolation; the individual's disaffection from society; and the ambivalent representation of the landscape, which is perceived as offering the twin possibilities of freedom and defeat. (57)

I have mirrored this narrative pattern in *The Coliseum*. Leo lived in a community and yet was isolated from it. As I have only retold the stories of Leo it is fitting to say that these stories contained a common narrative. This may have been why I, as well as the people of Newcastle, am attracted to the stories of Leo. Leo's strange behaviour alienated him from society, and therefore he sought refuge within The Coliseum, and as such it also offered him the twin possibilities of refuge and defeat, and the constant threat of the loss of the Coliseum.

The theme of defeat is dominant within films with eccentric protagonists, if not Australian cinema more broadly. Turner cites Bob Ellis who writes of the grim endings of many Australian films:

They are only part of a larger national perception, so apparent in our cinema, of the pointlessness of every effort, since nothing ever changes and you end at your beginning. Aunt Edna recaptures Bazza, Judy Davis rejects Sam Neill...Don's party doesn't win the election. Petersen fails the exam. Breaker is taken away and shot. Jimmie Blacksmith, is taken out and hanged. Ned Kelly is taken out and hanged. Mad Dog Morgan is shot, decapitated and his scrotum given to Frank Thring. Phar Lap is taken out and stuffed. Richard Moir gives up looking for Anna. Jack Thompson in *Sunday* ends up broke and lonely as he began...Mr Percival the pelican is shot...Bill Hunter, in *Newsfront*, grim and principled as ever, loses his wife and mistress but keeps his limp. (58)

Perhaps Australian audiences like their eccentrics to be geniuses. Perhaps we like to be able to explain why they are the way they are, to be able to pinpoint that moment in their youth when something happened to change their very being, their dress, their personality. Perhaps eccentrics represent the part of ourselves that we rarely get to explore; flaunting the rules; the wearing of avant-guard clothes; the keeping of numerous cats. Perhaps we like the fact that despite being misunderstood, our eccentrics are secret geniuses. Perhaps we also distrust happy endings.

### **Eccentrics and larrikins**

My search for eccentric protagonists led me most often to sidekicks and caricatures, from those found in Lawson's stories to those found on *Home and Away*. I had imagined that Australian writers would have more eccentrics as protagonists. Are not eccentrics simply another version of that

other Australian icon, the larrikin? Those loveable lads that just don't quite do things the way they should be done, follow the rules like everybody else, or obey orders? Don't Australians love this stuff? Don't we love our eccentrics in the same way? We certainly love talking about them and watching them.

The main difference between stories of eccentrics and those of larrikins comes at the end. The loveable larrikin makes it in the end. He gets the girl. Think of *Crocodile Dundee*, he wins against the odds. Dundee is a bumpkin from the bush and yet he wins the love of a beautiful woman from her wealthy fiancé. In fact it is the essence of the larrikin within *Crocodile Dundee* that wins the girl's affections. We especially love the larrikin's eventual success because it gives us permission to embrace our own inner larrikin, that quirk inside all of us which we hide most of the time.

But the eccentric is a sadder story. Like the larrikin the eccentric doesn't follow the rules. Like the larrikin, the eccentric may win the prize, but due to their eccentricity, is unable to take advantage of it. This inability to claim their prize is shown in Kate Grenville's novel, *Lilian's Story*, a tale of a young middle-class woman in the late twentieth century, who is lucky enough to be one of the first women to attend university. David Helfgott in *Shine* similarly wins a scholarship to study music overseas. The eccentric is unable to succeed where he/she is clearly gifted and has been given an opportunity. This causes the protagonist's sanity to be questioned in a way that a larrikin's never is. The larrikin accepts his prize, he is victorious and triumphant. The eccentric is just as likely to wander the streets and quote Shakespeare instead of attending the classes that would give them the opportunity to be an educated person, as in the case of Lilian. Similarly, Leo left his courtroom winnings, a cheque worth \$6000, on the floor in an envelope for six years, not to be found until after his death. This action alone puts him in the category of the eccentric, instead of the larrikin.

Eccentrics as main characters, real or imagined, invariably grow old, live alone, and are just a little bit too weird. Perhaps this is why they aren't in our bookshops or on our screens as much as I thought they would be. For these reasons it is a relatively small assortment of literature and film

that features the eccentric as the main character, at least within popular culture. Eccentric characters, like their real life counterparts, are more likely to be on the fringes of society. The documentary *Bastardy*, despite being nominated for five AFI awards, was only shown at fringe festivals and at independent cinemas.

This is not to say that our eccentrics are not likeable. David Helfgott, Lilian and Theodora (from *The Aunt's Story* by Patrick White) all say what we are all thinking. Jack Charles is shown helping his disabled brother walk down the street. He plays the guitar and sings for homeless men. Tsoilkas says, "Jack Charles is an Aboriginal elder. His wiry ash-white hair acts as a crown as he wanders through the streets and people call out his name, listen to his singing, embrace him and honour him" (n.pag).

Despite this almost Christ-like depiction, Charles is a heroin addict and a thief. How did film-maker Courtin-Wilson still make us like him? Is it because Charles is also honest and admitted to stealing from members of the crew? Perhaps this shows a bravery and strength of character that exonerates him from the original crime. Is it because of his talent, or his story? Or perhaps it is because despite everything, despite his addiction which leads him to theft and to jail, Jack still has hope for the future. We share in his delight of his first residence, a dismal housing commission unit that is his first home in decades.

Tsoilkas says, "We have fallen in love with Jack and we want him to succeed," (n.pag) showing that Courtin-Wilson's careful portrayal of Jack's character has indeed made us love him. As mentioned earlier, this documentary has been carefully edited to show these different aspects of Charles' life.

For all of these characters, their eccentric behaviour is both their doing and their undoing. It is why we love them, covet them, and feel empathy towards them. It is why we wouldn't want to be them, and why we don't understand why they make the choices that they do. Yet Australian myths, stories and urban legends all draw us towards the eccentric. As Courtin-Wilson writes in his production notes for *Bastardy*, "I had grown up

hearing almost mythical stories about his [Jack Charles] escapades as both an actor and a cat burglar” (n.pag).

These stories of Jack Charles, and similarly oral histories, evolve in the telling. Portelli suggests that at the core of the oral history narrative “we find motifs and themes that insist on the relationship of the individual and public.” These include “standing up to the man” or “personal confrontations with figures of authority” (26).

As Leo’s many courtroom antics prove, he not only fits the character of the eccentric as far as stories about him are concerned, but also fits a narrative of “standing up to the man,” which may be part of the natural anarchic inclinations of the eccentric.

### **Genius: Eccentricity generated by trauma**

The childhood characters of David Helfgott and Lilian could be described as unusual, but their eccentricity is contained until something happens to unleash it. In Lilian’s case it is being raped by her father, who then commits her to a mental institution where she resides for the next forty years. Lilian then emerges as an eccentric. In *Shine*, David Helfgott is brought undone by Rachmaninoff. As a child, Helfgott had a desire to play Rachmaninoff, which was forbidden by his father. When Helfgott travelled overseas to study and finally begins to study Rachmaninoff, he strives for perfection. Perhaps this is to win his father’s love, or perhaps it is in rebellion against his father. Helfgott breaks down during a performance, and once again, this breakdown, this brutal point in his life, is cast as the plot catalyst for his eccentric behaviour.

It is interesting to compare the David Helfgott of *Shine* with the real David Helfgott. Helfgott has been diagnosed with schizoaffective disorder, and although diagnosis before the age of thirteen is rare, Helfgott had early mental illness indications. Although *Shine* portrays Helfgott as having a breakdown that seemed to be related to studying Rachmaninoff’s Third, and resulted in the lovable eccentric character, the real story is of a man born

with a mental illness, regardless of Rachmaninoff. As Bruce Morrison from *Gramophone* argues:

Yet even when *Shine* blends facts and fiction to a shrewd and skilful degree it hardly disguises a dark subplot and undertow...Music quickly loses its human face, and emerges as a destructive rather than a life-enhancing or enriching force, and Rachmaninoff's Third – the most daunting and opulent of Romantic concertos – hovers like some nightmarish totem, engulfing in its emotional and technical maelstrom all but the most formidably equipped pianists. (14)

In the wake of the popularity of the film, Helfgott began performing at concert halls, even Rachmaninoff's Third. Although many audience members who had fallen in love with his character in *Shine* enjoyed his performances, critics were united in their negative reviews. The *New York Times* article, *The Shine is Diminished*, described his performances as "pallid, erratic and incoherent."

American journal, *Fanfare Magazine*, was not only critical of Helfgott's performance, but of his producers. The magazine described them as, "marketing his pain". *Gramophone* also gave a scathing response to the "exploitative nature" of Helfgott's performances which were marketed as him being an "unsung genius" when it is obvious to the trained ear that he is not. Morrison calls Helfgott's story a "fairytale," and writes that film personnel, astrologers, and publicists are the only ones to call Helfgott's music genius. Morrison describes Helfgott's performance as it "skitters and slithers from one crisis to another with numbing inadequacy". Philip Kennicott also writes, "in a few years this will be mere curiosity, not the abomination of marketing that it now seems" (88).

The twisting of the truth to make Helfgott, a mediocre pianist, into a genius; a sufferer of a mental illness into a lovable eccentric (remember the scene where he meets his future wife while he is jumping naked on the trampoline), follows the national imagination of the eccentric.

The depiction of Jack Charles also follows the national imagination of the eccentric. Jack Charles's intelligence is shown through the marked distinction in his manner of speaking to his other street-dwelling peers. He seems educated, has been a famed actor, most notably in *The Chant of Jimmy Blacksmith*, and moves easily between the world of criminals and intellectual bohemia.

What happened to Jack Charles as a catalyst for his eccentricity is referred to both directly and indirectly in *Bastardy*. That something did happen which has defined Jack is indisputable. The film shows images, although not of Jack implicitly, of a similar childhood; images of Aboriginal children in missions. Jack is a member of the Stolen Generation. Without explicitly saying that these events were the catalyst for Jack's life, the implication is there.

If this contributed to him becoming a heroin addict, then these events also made him an actor, a person who stands out on the street with his odd clothes and wild hair. He is a man who plays his guitar and sings to a group of homeless men on a street corner. He has somehow balanced his two careers, that of an actor (to replenish his soul), and that of a thief, to supply heroin (also to replenish his soul). Such a man can only be described as an eccentric, and the inference is within *Bastardy* as to how he became the man he is today.

The fact that neither David Helfgott nor Lilian coped with their respective scholarships does not put into question their intelligence, or genius, merely their ability to cope within the confines of an educational setting, and therefore within the confines of society's expectations.

### **The ending of the eccentric**

The third aspect of the eccentric narrative is that the victory of the main protagonist is subjective. The eccentric story spans a long period, giving their subjects time to become older and weirder. Photos of Jack Charles as a young man show an unusually dressed but good-looking Aboriginal man, usually in newspaper articles relating to his acting. A

teenage Lilian climbs trees at match-making parties, attracting rather than repelling the attention of boys, and a teenage Helfgott is talented, yet enticingly modest and funny, also attracting the attention of the opposite sex.

The character of David Helfgott becomes a balding man living in a room above a bar, cooking dinner out of a can on a gas ring beside his bed. Helfgott, although winning fame and the girl, is still more child than adult. He is someone to be cared for and laughed at, someone to be patient with, and to put up with. He is famous for his piano playing only because of his story.

Eccentric Lilian leaves the mental institution. She wins the right to be free, to recite Shakespeare on the streets to anyone who will listen. None of us wish to trade places with her. We love her, but we don't want to be her. When she is finally released from the mental institution, she is too old to be educated or to have children. She wins the love of an alcoholic homeless man as her consolation prize. The story of Lilian ends with her living on the streets.

Jack Charles eventually gets a housing commission bed-sit, the first home he has had since he was seventeen. Although it is his sanctuary that he occasionally shares with friends, Jack is also alone at the end of the documentary. Again, his is a life that hasn't fulfilled its potential.

Gone are the days of their youth when their rebellion against society's standards was charming and enticing. This is how eccentrics end up, as a warning to us all, while the national story of the larrikin ends when he wins the day. Yet I wonder how these larrikins really end up, fading to a family life in the suburbs.

Perhaps the dismal endings of eccentrics' stories are not only specific to narratives of the eccentric, but are a trademark of Australian stories in general. Turner argues that Australian stories often end in defeat, and cites Tom Ryan who writes,

Perhaps the most significant narrative pattern is that which locates the characters in a position of

powerlessness in relation to the movement of the historical periods in which they are placed...Australian narratives...are peopled by characters who are governed by forces beyond their control, and who are shown to be in a position of defeat at the close of the film. (58)

Similarly, I ended *The Coliseum* with the death of Leo Maley. Even before his death, he was incapacitated, his home had been vandalized and he was in fear of losing it altogether. He had no family in this time of need. I could have ended *The Coliseum* with the renovation of building, with an ambitious new owner, yet I unintentionally wrote to an ascribed narrative pattern.

### **Leo as eccentric**

When reviewing the interviews for my project, I found that Leo fit into all three of my eccentric categories. Most of the people I interviewed were emphatic about him being a genius. Some of them thought he had post-graduate studies in mathematics, others thought it was in a science, and still others were adamant that he had attended the conservatorium of music as a violinist. His said careers were as an academic at Newcastle University, a metallurgist at BHP, a head scientist in the top-secret Woomera rocket launching project in the 1950s, with stories of him meeting the Queen. Of course, there were also his courtroom antics that impressed a lot of people. Nobody denied his intelligence and some went as far as to say that the academic community wasn't ready for him yet.

All of the interviewees wanted to explain Leo Maley's increasingly erratic behaviour. Everyone I spoke to gave a reason for his eccentricities. He never got over the death of his mother (or father). He spoke of his parents as if they were still alive. He didn't tell anyone his father had died, resulting in only one person attending his funeral. Leo didn't even pay the funeral bill, arguing that his father was still alive. When telling me stories of Leo, Peter

Boyd compared what must have happened to Leo to when he himself found out that he was adopted, saying, "It must have been some kind of shock."

Leo died old and alone. He had no family, but his death was of interest to many Novocastrians. Some had heard the rumours of his money, many had enjoyed the voyeuristic attraction of watching him through The Coliseum's windows, or reading about his antics in the newspaper.

Leo's school reports, however, show an average student. It is true that he attended Sydney University and became a metallurgist at BHP, but he seems to have been far from a genius. He had to check his writing numerous times for the most basic of spelling errors, and his reports show average grades. Why, then, did everyone think he was such a genius?

Because Australians understand eccentrics as being close to genius.

Why did everyone explain away Leo's eccentric behaviour as being the result of his parents' death?

Because the national image of eccentricity includes a catalyst for a breakdown.

### **Oral history and archetypes**

It seemed that the stories I collected had been influenced by archetypes even before I converted them into fiction. Anna Green, co-author of *Remembering: Writing oral histories*, has examined how stories evolve to include commonly held myths about people and places. Green believes that folklore helps to ingrain the Irish hatred of British oppression, as well as the Australian mateship ethos (5). These folktales may have evolved with time and retelling, but their internal myths have become their own truth.

Patrick O'Farrell asserts that rather than being about the "truth", as in how things happened or how things were, oral histories are more likely to be about "how the past has been recollected" (5). O'Farrell discusses the problems associated with gaining historical knowledge from people, such as selective memory, opinion, and subjectivity.

Green doesn't argue against the proposition that oral histories are subjective recreated memories, but argues that oral histories have their own

validity. Green argues that, "Reality is complex and many-sided; and it is a primary merit of oral history that to a much greater extent than most sources it allows the original multiplicity of standpoints to be created" (4).

Green states that community stories are constructed interpretations, whether consciously or subconsciously interpreted, rather than pure recollections. These constructed interpretations can be seen in the way the storyteller emphasises certain things, and glosses over others, as well as by how they draw moral judgements. Green also argues that the way in which a story is told depends upon cultural factors, such as repertoires of stock interpretations and situations, as well as codes of expression. She writes:

Oral historians have become increasingly aware of the imaginative dimensions of storytelling. In particular, cultural myths may be powerful devices through which to make sense of the past. By myth, I mean the ways in which archetypes and symbols may be used. (19)

Green argues that these "symbols and archetypes" mediate between what is real and what is imagined. Green describes a woman from Frankton Junction in New Zealand as an example of how archetypes are used to explain the behaviour of a strange woman.

Catherine Hill was known to the locals of Frankton Junction as "Coffee-and-Bun." Every day Coffee-and-Bun walked to the railway station to meet each train. She met the three am train, the seven am train and the eleven am train. Each time she went to the railway station she bought a coffee and bun, hence her nickname. The locals believed that someone, perhaps a husband or a son, had failed to return from overseas.

The collective myths that surrounded Coffee-and-Bun's odd behaviour always began with a physical description of her. She was said to wear black lace-up boots and black stockings. She had thin legs and beady eyes. The local children were all terrified of her, especially as they thought she may look at them with her beady eyes or drag them into her house, in which case they were sure they would never return. Green writes:

Many remarked at her ability to disappear, only to re-emerge moments later elsewhere. It was surprising to find the cultural archetype of the witch alive and well in stories recounted in the early 1990s. (20)

Turner argues that as these kinds of myths are so much a part of our culture, it is natural that they should infiltrate our stories. He writes:

That such a perception [...] is still commonly expressed points to the effectiveness of these myths in being able to naturalise themselves and their own versions of history. (105)

These versions of reality become natural to us through telling, and retelling. O'Farrell describes a debate about the Spanish civil war given at Melbourne University. Mr Santamaria debated on the side of "the Spanish Government is the ruin of Spain." Many people distinctly remembered Mr Santamaria giving the fascist salute at the end of his speech.

Although Santamaria did *not* give the salute, his being on the affirmative side of the debate may have led to the myth of the salute. As O'Farrell writes: "Such is this natural flow and the ready congruence between their image of him and that action, that it comes to matter little whether he actually performed it or not. For them it is part of his reality" (8).

O'Farrell uses this argument in his attack on oral histories as it is proof of the fallibility of people's memories. Yet as he asserts, "It comes to matter little whether he actually performed it or not. For them it is part of his reality" (8). The *myth* of Mr Santamaria giving the fascist salute is real. In the same way it came to matter little whether or not Leo performed certain actions. Whether he shook hands with the Queen or lit fires at the Woomera rocket launching facility is of less importance than the fact that these are the stories, the myths that are a part of Leo's, and subsequently Mayfield's, identity. As such they are real.

O'Farrell argues, oral history "is not a precise history. That is what it is *not*, but what is it? And where will it lead us? Not into our history, but

into myth” (8). The reality of Leo Maley’s life may have been different to the stories told about him. As such *The Coliseum* is an example of myth making, and how community stories evolve to fit national archetypal patterns. Despite O’Farrell’s misgivings there is more to oral history than accuracy. As Green claims:

The social sciences and humanities have begun to pay much more attention to the role of language and culture in shaping beliefs and actions. The consequence for history was a partial eclipse of social history - the investigation of broader social and economic structures and economic patterns and their impact upon ordinary people - in favour of cultural history. The latter explores the way in which human beings endow their world with meaning. In this context, the subjectivity of human memory became a positive resource for the study of history, not a liability. Through oral testimonies it was possible to explore the many ways in which individuals construct frameworks of meaning. The incorporation of myth, ideology, imagination, or moral rhetoric into oral narratives about the past provided valuable insights into the making of meaning. (2)

As referred to earlier, the subjects of my interviews may have contradicted each other, but they all described Leo within social and storytelling constructs. Leo became not just an eccentric, but followed the archetype of the eccentric from Australian literature and film. Despite his average school reports he is remembered as a man of remarkable intelligence. His eccentric behaviour was explained as triggered by the death of his mother. As Green writes, “we explain our lives as stories, using the cultural conventions and devices of our own time and place” (7).

So why do we recollect the past as a story? How does the past change within our stories of it? By unpacking oral histories, Green is interested in finding out what these metaphors mean, why certain aspects of a story were

included or excluded. Green writes about a policeman, Francis Bonnington, in Frankton Junction, New Zealand in 1944. This policeman was renowned for dealing with misdemeanours with the sole of his boot. She writes:

Memories are partial and fragmented, and in the process of reassembling them for others we decide what to include or exclude. We also seek to make meaningful connections between the present and the past. Popular forms of storytelling provide the narrative structures that frame the story. To make sense of our past we draw upon the vocabulary and metaphors of our time and culture, creating complex codes of meaning that can be opaque to later generations or cultural outsiders. Finally, oral history is recorded in a social context that rewards the skills of storytelling and rhetorical persuasion. Because we need to take all these dimensions into account, oral histories have to be ‘unpacked’ to reveal the richness and variety of their contents. (11)

The policeman’s boot was often referred to in the context of rugby, making his behaviour acceptable, at least in people’s memories, by referring to the nostalgia in which people look back on their pasts. In the same way as a film maker or writer may produce a product out of fragments, as described in the first chapter, so too do people make similar choices when recounting their lives.

When talking to the community about Leo, people told their stories with a certain fondness for the crazy proprietor of The Coliseum. I have unpacked many Leo Maleys.

## Chapter Three

### Imagining the Coliseum

Places are endowed with significance through the stories that are told about them, and stories that evolve from them. These stories can explain the history of the place, how it was created, or the lives of the inhabitants of the place. These stories influence the way we see place (negatively or positively), how we behave in the place (with reverence or with fear), and therefore it can be the nature of the story, more than the nature of the place itself, that changes place.

### Nostalgia and place as character

The Coliseum is the wife Leo never had. She cossets him, protects him, understands him and feels betrayed by him, as would a lover. The Coliseum is more than Leo's home, it is a character of the novel in much the same way as the house in Tim Winton's *Cloudstreet*. These names, Number One Cloud Street and The Coliseum, signify the importance of these places to their stories. As McGirr writes of the house in *Cloudstreet*:

Like the river, the house has a personality and ecology of its own, which reaches after the imagination of those who settle there... At the moment of Dolly and Rose's reconciliation, there is one of many blurrings of the distinction between architecture and emotion: "The sound her mother made taking breath was like a window being torn from its hinges" (357). Conversely, the house reacts in an almost human manner to emotional events: "The house twisted its joists, hugging inwards, sucking in air, and the two women wept together on the sagging bed" (357). At other times, the house breaths, sighs, itches, moans, bruises and laughs. It is sometimes hard to tell if it is the house or the people in it that are quiet

or boisterous: "There'd been a silence in the place for the last year or two, an aching, tourniqueted silence." (56)

This blurring of any distinction between architecture and emotion also occurs in the relationship between Leo and The Coliseum:

But she could do nothing to prevent her face being torn from her and thrown onto trucks to be taken away. She stood exposed, the sun glaring in at her windows. Eyes that couldn't blink. Motorists had slowed down to watch her great undressing. That was the spectacle of the day and even Leo couldn't match that. Leo was an insignificant ant. She would no longer protect him. (Vertigan, 87)

As with Number One Cloud Street, The Coliseum's sounds were able to be interpreted by Leo. This conversation between Leo and The Coliseum ended when her awning was removed: "The Coliseum could not be consoled. She creaked and groaned like always but she sounded different somehow and he couldn't understand her anymore (87).

As *The Coliseum* is as much about Mayfield and Newcastle as it is about Leo Maley and The Coliseum, so it is also about place, home and the passing of time. The stories in *The Coliseum* are infused with nostalgia for a time when children played freely in the streets and created their own fun. A time when grocery shopping was delivered on a bicycle in handmade paper bags, and family businesses donated goods to be sold at the school fete. It is a time when parents sent their children to the shops to buy cigarettes. Horses and cars shared the roads, and tired shift workers joined their wives for, "a cup of tea, a Bex, and a good lie down."

Tim Winton also uses well-known brands to place *Cloudstreet* within the recent past, creating a feeling of nostalgia. Winton used brands that live in the memories of many of his readers, which surface upon reading along with the readers own personal memories of their youth, the street they grew up in, and perhaps of their childhood homes. As McGirr writes:

There are aspects of *Cloudstreet* that share a remote kinship with this kind of nostalgia. The book is riddled with the names of products that are either no longer available or no longer used in everyday life. Bairds department store, where Rose Pickles works on the switchboard, is one of those venerable institutions, like Buckley & Nunn in Melbourne or Mark Foy's in Sydney, that has long since given way to the big department store chains. Velvet Soap is no longer a ubiquitous commodity; "Frigidaire" is scarcely used generically for refrigerator. (56)

Winton also employs slang that brings to mind a time gone by, when drongo was the insult that has now been superseded by Americanisms. McGirr writes, "there are neither fuckwits nor arseholes in *Cloudstreet*, only plenty of drongos" (59). As mentioned in Chapter One, using Leo's personal vocabulary was important for reasons of authenticity. Outmoded forms of expression such as Winton's "drongo" and Leo's "dope" create a reflection of a time gone by, just beneath the surface of the reader's imagined memories. McGirr asserts that,

Winton is nostalgic for a *time*. The period in which the book is set is just beyond the fingertips of his own experience, its nostalgia an articulate lament for a period of greater moral security, greater cultural diversity, a larger lexicon of words...The etymology of the word 'nostalgia' points to other dimensions of meaning. It is Greek in origin and means a longing for home. This is the longing that undergirds *Cloudstreet* and contributes to its most beguiling complexities. (60)

These feelings of nostalgia are also depicted in the stories told by the former residents of Frankton Junction in *Oral History*. The stories are of a place and time that no longer exists, a railway town that has been overtaken

by nearby Hamilton. Underpinning the stories of its residents is of a place of community. These eccentric characters acted within the oral histories of the place in contrast to the normality of the residents.

Frankton Junction's community spirit is shown most clearly in stories of the tornado, which went through the town in 1948. The stories told of this time reflect stereotypical news stories of a community rallying around to help each other after a natural disaster. One such story that was repeated to Green by all of her interviewees is of a house that was picked up by the tornado and carried across the street, while its inhabitants were drinking tea at the kitchen table. It is as if this moment in time is cemented in the memories of the former residents, after the demise of Frankton Junction, the tornado and the passage of fifty years. Green cites Samuel who writes, "each of the stories contributes to the memory of Frankton Junction as a safe, secure place of traditional families and good neighbours... It is impossible to doubt the importance of such myths and symbols in meditations between the imaginary and the real" (*Oral History*, 67).

As the life of Coffee-and-Bun was altered in the telling of her story, so was the place of Frankton Junction. The stories endow the town with a community life that lives on in the minds of its former residents. This is not to say that Frankton Junction's residents didn't help each other out in a moment of crisis. The oral histories collected by Green may have incorporated truths of Frankton Junction as a place that inhabits a time gone by: A place of "secure long-term government employment and state provision of affordable housing" (*Oral History*, 34). Yet these stories show an idealised version of the times of Frankton junction, an imagined reality. Green argues that these stories act to "preserve an alternative set of values in the present" (34).

While many stories of Frankton Junction depicted a strong community spirit, there were also other perceptions of the place. Many people from Frankton Junction felt as though they were "branded by where they lived" (28). Many young men would give their hometown as nearby Hamilton. The nostalgic stories of Frankton Junction were based on myth, a topic which would be the subject of a further study by Green.

## **Storytelling and perception of place and space**

The town of Frankton Junction could be described in terms of its roads and buildings, its history discovered through architecture rather than stories. But to remember Frankton Junction devoid of people and their lives would be to deny the essence of the place. Within geography there is a movement to focus on people's relationship to the natural and built environment. As Peter Whitridge writes, "place has increasingly acquired a specialised sense as opposed to space, as the local and meaningful are opposed to the universal and objective" (214). "Place" is used when studying people's relationship to the landscape, and "space" describes the physical inscription of the landscape; therefore place can be thought of as a specialised imaginary. Whitridge argues:

There is no imaginative place-world wholly apart from quantifiably real landscapes, bodies, and things, but neither is there a material world that is not thoroughly invested in significance as a precondition of human thought and action. Neither one nor the other has ontological autonomy or priority (216)

Therefore, place cannot exist without space and vice-versa. As Green shows, place is interpreted through stories, with the effect of creating iconic landscapes, monuments, and architecture out of space that in and of itself may not have been significant. This imaginative mapping of space emerges from story-telling, from gossip and local legends to news stories and film. These stories frame how we interpret our surroundings, how we put them into a context and give them value. As James Donald writes in *Imagining the Modern City*:

If it is not quite a representation, maybe (taking the imagined community of the nation as an analogy) it would be more accurate to think of the city as an

*imagined environment*. This environment embraces not just the cities created by the ‘wagging tongues’ of architects, planners and builders, sociologists and novelists, poets and politicians, but also the translation of the places they have made into the imagined reality of our mental life. In that sense, I live in the same city as Victor Burgin; or, at least, I live in the city in the same way. The city in our actual experience is *at the same time* an actually existing physical environment, *and* a city in a novel, a film, a photograph, a city seen on television, a city in a comic strip, a city in a pie chart and so on. (48)

In this way, an imagined space may be created by one person for another. Sir Thomas Mitchell, Surveyor General of New South Wales from 1827-1855, was responsible for large tracts of land to be opened up to free settlers. Mitchell was said to be the most literary of Australia’s explorers, writing books about his expeditions which were very popular. Delia Falconer cites Paul Carter’s work, *The Road to Botany Bay*, asserting that Mitchell “invented a country for others to live in” (143).

When Grenville began her research into Sydney’s white history while writing *The Secret River*, she describes how the way she saw Sydney began to change. Returning to Sydney from Europe, Grenville began to see Sydney cove as it was in 1788, as well as how it is today. She writes:

It began to dawn on me that the Sydney I was walking in now was a different city from the one I’d left only a few weeks before. It was still the city I’d grown up in, where I had lived most of my life. But now I was seeing it as Wiseman’s place as well. With my new eyes I could erase the Opera House and the fancy apartments and see it again as a long rocky arm protecting the cove. Over to my right, where the cruise ships were tied up now, he (Solomon Wiseman, convict) would have stepped ashore, and glanced up, as I was, at the high ridge of The Rocks. The Harbour Bridge loomed above the whole place now,

heroic and overwhelming, but he would have seen the steep hillside, with its angled plates and shelves of rock. He'd have seen the creek, the tents, the raggedy dirt tracks that were about to be named Pitt Street and George Street. And, up there on the ridge, he might have seen the silhouette of another man, watching. It was all gone, but it was all there. It had taken a foreign place to let me see what lay underneath my own. (74)

As Grenville's research continued, the city that she saw in front of her began to be overlayed by the city she saw in her imagination. To Donald, the city is more than simply the physical - buildings and roads and other tangibles - but the city that exists in our imaginations. Before we have ever visited a city we are captured by stories, we not only believe we know how it looks, but also how it feels. We are familiar with its character and its atmosphere. Of Dickens' *Bleak House*, Donald writes:

Although the passage represents a there (London) and a then (the middle of the 17<sup>th</sup> century) rather than a here and now, the city conjured up by Dickens is not a place we have left behind. As the architect Kevin Lynch once observed, Dickens helped to create the London we experience as surely as its actual builders did. The city presented by *Bleak House* remains part of the present in which we live, part of our common sense. It does so less through its vivid representation of that city then, however, than through its pedagogy. The novel tells us how to see the city, and how to make sense of it. It defines the co-ordinates for the imaginative mapping of space. (2)

In this way the place, history, stories and facts of a city do as much to locate us within its context as does the space, its streets and their buildings. We fear the danger, or are intimidated by the glamour, by our prior knowledge of a place. Our experience is reality filtered through

representation. Often we place greater emphasis on this representation, or this myth, than on what we see in front of us. The stories of Leo give The Coliseum an iconic stature greater than its brick frontage, stained-glass windows and ambitious name. Leo has made The Coliseum a place of mystery.

### **Perception of place: Acting in space**

Dimond and Kirkpatrick's *Literary Sydney* invites readers to engage with stories they have read by discovering the writer's residences and favourite haunts. Walkers can discover places where artists were inspired by their surroundings and in turn, as Donald argues, change "the way we live in, and act upon the city" (8). *Literary Sydney* opens with an introduction inviting the readers to explore, "how writers are influenced by the city in which they live and work and how they, in turn, influence the way the city is read"(1).

How do stories influence the way we read a place? Mitchell infused his love of the Australian landscape on potential new settlers, and Grenville's newfound knowledge changed the way she saw, or read Sydney. Can stories go one step further, and by changing the way we act upon a place, can we also change the physical architecture, the solid lines of the space?

Stonehenge and Uluru are two places whose ancient competing mythologies and more recent controversies have led to changes in the physical architecture of the space. Stonehenge is the most important prehistoric monument in Britain, consisting of 1620 hectares of protected land and attracting close to a million visitors per year. The origin of the ring of stones has always been the subject of controversy. Supernatural folktales told that Merlin had a giant build them from Irish stones, or that they were the work of the Devil (Bender, 4).

To add to the mystery of Stonehenge, a barbed-wire fence has been erected around the stones to create an exclusion zone in order to restrict people's access to the stones, and influence their behaviour once they enter this zone. A road has been removed, to the inconvenience of the locals, in

order to protect the stones from fumes. These changes to the space have increased the perceived value of the stones, as well as adding to their mystery. Barbara Bender, author of *Stonehenge: Making Space*, argues that landscape is not timeless, but cumulative and reworked, and that “places and spaces can be created” (159). Although Stonehenge is thought to have been erected circa 3100BC, restorations of the stones, the creation of the exclusion zone, even the charge for admission through the barbed-wire fence have changed our reading of the place, and therefore, the way we act upon the space. As Bender states:

Surely ringing the stones in barbed-wire and a phalanx of riot police, or probing the soil beneath them to analyse and exhibit the finds, are as much varieties of creative place-making as holding a rave amongst them, or erecting the stones in the first place. In each case, certain meanings surrounding the site are stabilised, reworked, or created... (183)

The myths surrounding Stonehenge still influence people’s relationship with the famous monument. Practising druids would like free access to Stonehenge for their pagan festivals, and are in constant conflict with the National Trust and the English Heritage Society regarding access. As Whitridge writes of Bender’s *Stonehenge*, “in an innovative analysis of Stonehenge [Bender] explores the continual reworking of meanings and social practices around the stones, from their creation, modification, and reappropriations in the remote past, to contemporary struggles between countercultural groups and heritage authorities over rights of access to the stones for festivals” (215).

Stonehenge has become a place for tourists to photograph (from a distance) with reverence and awe. The barbed-wire fence limits access to the site, forcing the stones to be treated as a commodity. Direct access to the stones is possible, however a higher fee is demanded, tours need to be booked well in advance and even then time with the stones is limited to one hour. All this serves to protect the stones, but it was only recently that

visitors to the site were handed hammers and chisels by their guides to cut themselves a piece of Stonehenge to take home with them. (*The Independent*, 22 May 2008).

This new treatment of Stonehenge as a place that needs protecting, has created feelings of awe in some and rebellion in others. In May 2008, souvenir-hunters broke into the Stonehenge site to chip away a piece of the Heel stone using a hammer and chisel. This act required planning; the men involved were seen acting suspiciously outside the fence in the days prior to the incident, and drove away holding plastic sheeting over their getaway car's windows to conceal their identity. The incident was described as an attack on the stone and the two men described as vandals, although they were doing what only a few years earlier had been acceptable. The limitations on access to the stones became the catalyst for these "vandals" to change the way they acted in the space by taking considerable risks in order to procure a piece of Stonehenge.

Similarly, in 1988, two people were convicted in Newcastle Local Court for breaking into The Coliseum. Neither had any prior convictions and when the judge asked them about their motives, they answered that they were curious about The Coliseum and what was in there. The judge handed down a light six month good behaviour bond and said, "I understand your curiosity in such a place as the Coliseum" (Newcastle Court transcript, 5th May 1988). Leo created an icon out of The Coliseum, his stories created mystery, so just as the vandals could not resist breaking the law in order to obtain a piece of Stonehenge, neither could the two people resist breaking into The Coliseum.

The myths and controversy surrounding Stonehenge have altered our reading of the place and also our interaction with the space. In turn the space has changed: roads, visitor's centres and car parks have been created along with fences and rules. The stories have impacted on the space, while the reworked space has attracted new stories. Uluru has followed a similar cycle, with the stories of the place changing people's interaction with the space. Until recently these myths affected only the actions of indigenous

Australians, but now they serve to influence the actions of white Australians as well. As Paul Tacon asserts:

Throughout the ages many cultures have conceived of geographic space and expressed those conceptions in a variety of ways. One expression of these conceptions has been the establishment of sacred geographies. Sacred geography may be broadly defined as the regional (and even global) geographic locating of sacred places according to various mythological, symbolic, astrological, geodesical, and shamanic factors. Perhaps the oldest form of sacred geography, and one that has its genesis in mythology, is that of the Aborigines of Australia. (23)

According to the traditional custodians of Uluru, the Anangu, the landscape was featureless until the movements of creator beings travelling across the land and created its features. There are many stories of the Dreamtime creation of Uluru. Norbert Brockman's (1997) *Encyclopedia of Sacred Places* tells of two tribes of ancestral spirits who were invited to a feast, but were distracted by a beautiful Sleepy Lizard Woman and did not show up. In response, the angry hosts sang evil into a mud sculpture that came to life as the dingo. There followed a great battle, which ended in the deaths of the leaders of both tribes. The earth itself rose up in grief at the bloodshed, becoming Uluru.

Anangu land is still inhabited by the spirits of dozens of these ancestral creator beings which are referred to as Tjukuritja or Waparitja. Perhaps the earth's grief, the spirits of the dead, or the stories of the Anangu still haunt the visitors to Uluru today.

For the Anangu, walking through their sacred geography was a way to support and regenerate the spirits of the living Earth, and also a way to experience a living memory of their Dreamtime heritage. This is how the Dreamtime stories directly and immediately directed indigenous Australians in their relationships with the landscape.

Possibly the most well-known and controversial aspect of our relationship with Uluru is the climbing of the rock. Climbing of Uluru was traditionally forbidden except by certain male elders, yet tourists have been climbing the rock for years. The Australian Government installed a metal chain in 1964 in order to assist climbers. Yet it wasn't easy to silence the spirits of the land and the myths and wishes of the original custodians have begun to be recognised by Australians. The Anangu's wishes are written clearly on tickets to Uluru's National Park:

Welcome to Aboriginal land. Parks Australia and Anangu, the Aboriginal traditional owners, welcome visitors to Uluru-Kata Tjuta national park. It is requested that you respect the wishes of Anangu by not climbing Uluru.

Climbing the rock is not illegal, and some tour guides play down the importance of this request by the Anangu people in order to attract climbers to the rock. However, the Commonwealth Department of Environment's webpage advises:

The local Anangu do not climb Uluru because of its great spiritual significance. They request that visitors do not climb the rock, partly due to the path crossing a sacred traditional Dreamtime track, and also due to a sense of responsibility for the safety of visitors. The visitors guide says "the climb is not prohibited, but we prefer that, as a guest on Anangu land, you will choose to respect our law and culture by not climbing. (n.pag)

Anangu Dreamtime is now changing the way in which white Australians and others interact with the landscape surrounding Uluru. In the last twenty years, thirty five per cent less tourists climbed the rock and many are taking up alternatives to the traditional climb, such as indigenous

guided tours of places of cultural significance around the base of the rock (*National Geographic*).

As with Stonehenge, the stories that have influenced our reading of the rock have also made it a place of mystery, perhaps even of menace. In the same way that some have broken through the wire to steal a piece of Stonehenge, some visitors have chosen to desecrate the sacred site not only by climbing Uluru, but by using her platform for playing golf. The taking of souvenir rocks from Uluru is discouraged by the Anangu people. As with the security around Stonehenge, this request has encouraged many people collect rocks from Uluru. The Commonwealth Department of Environment's webpage also advises that "It is sometimes reported that those who take rocks from the formation will be cursed and suffer misfortune. There have been many instances where people who removed such rocks attempted to mail them back to various agencies in an attempt to remove the perceived curse". (n.pag)

### **Acting on place: Changing space**

Even before his death the stories of Leo had made The Coliseum into an icon. The Coliseum was bought by George Burke and renovated into an antique centre following Leo's death. The local community doesn't see The Coliseum simply as an antique centre, but as the place where Leo lived. His legend was so important to the business of the new Coliseum owners that they planned to exploit the locals' curiosity by naming the adjoining coffee shop *Leo's*, with copies of Leo's letters and photos framed on the walls and used as placemats.

Perhaps these placemats would serve as reminders to those who cared enough to take a few moments to read them while they drank their coffee; to serve as a reminder of a life in the same way as a memorial plaque in a park. Dimond and Kirkpatrick's *Literary Sydney* and Delia Falconer's *Sydney* discuss similar reminders, like the plaques around Mort Bay Park commemorating the dry dock and local maritime history, the tomb in

Camperdown Cemetery for the one hundred and twenty-one people who were killed in “Australia’s greatest maritime disaster” (Dimond and Kirkpatrick 142) and the plaque in honour of The Criterion Hotel, whose (in)famous clientele included Germaine Greer and Thomas Keneally (Dimond and Kirkpatrick 13).

As with Stonehenge and Uluru, the influence of stories on our perception of place can change space into icon. Industries develop around these icons, attracting thousands of visitors per year. Two well-known Australian examples are the Three Sisters, and the dog on the tuckerbox.

The Three Sisters are a rock formation in Katoomba. The dreaming story tells of these sisters, Meehni, Wimlah and Gunnedoo, and how they fell in love with three brothers from another tribe. Tribal law forbade them to marry so the brothers planned to kidnap the sisters. A battle followed, and to protect the sisters, their tribal elders cast a spell on them turning them to stone. During the battle the elders were killed, leaving the sisters as rock forever. The Three Sisters formation is on the World Heritage Register and attracts thousands of visitors each year.

The dog on the tuckerbox is the story of a faithful dog waiting for its owner to return, unaware that he has died. The original story was written in verse by an unknown author and went through several incarnations, eventually becoming a popular song by Jack O’Hagan in 1937. The town of Gundagai relies on the dog to attract tourists driving between Sydney and Melbourne. Both of these spaces have changed as a result of their stories, with car parks, cafes ready to serve visitors, and gift shops ready to exploit their desire for a souvenir.

Another one of Sydney’s familiar stories is that of the “Eternity” man, Arthur Stace. Although many people will not know his name, most will be familiar with the story of the word *Eternity* written in yellow copperplate across the city. Falconer writes of the end of the millennium New Years Eve fireworks, “Eternity wrote itself across the Harbour Bridge in red, blazing letters on the stroke of midnight. For once the city is almost united, cheering this as the happiest of choices...the gesture was a triumph, honouring one of the city’s nocturnal eccentrics” (53).

Dimond and Kirkpatrick wrote, “Many older Sydneysiders recall the experience of coming across the grand and glorious word as they walked along a street, and in the years since 1967 it has become a deeply resonate symbol for the city” (37).

This one word poem has changed the way we act upon the city. The story of Arthur Stace has been memorialised into film, his story told, as was Leo’s, from the perspectives of the people who knew him. The city has changed, as architect Ridley Smith unveiled the copperplate one word sermon in Martin Place. The *Sydney Morning Herald* (13 July 1977) reported: “In letters almost 21cm (8in) high is the famous copperplate message ETERNITY”. Stace’s symbol was copyrighted by former Sydney council mayor Frank Sartor. This hasn’t stopped people appropriating it for their own personal uses, including a tattoo I saw on the inside wrist of a young woman; the unmistakable copperplate *Eternity*.

This creates a feedback loop, where the stories influence the reading of a place, and then in turn influence our behaviour within that place, and finally changing not only our perception of the place, but the space itself. This occurs not only when the stories are oral recounts or ancient myths, but also when more conventional narratives are present, such as poems and novels. Slessor’s most famous work, *Five Bells* (written circa 1935) was an elegy for a friend (Joe Lynch) who drowned in Sydney harbour. The poem made Slessor’s images of Sydney Harbour as a haunted place famous. In the same way that Grenville’s perception of Sydney changed as she learnt more about its history, so too did Falconer’s reading of the harbour become infused by the haunting nature of Slessor’s poem. To Slessor, the harbour is a menacing place, where the night and water are one; the harbour plays tricks on one’s eyes and it has all the symbolism of the cross reflected upside-down in the water:

Deep and dissolving verticals of light  
Ferry the falls of moonshine down. Five bells  
Coldly rung out in a machine's voice. Night and water

Pour to one rip of darkness, the Harbour floats  
In the air, the Cross hangs upside-down in water.

Falconer argues that, “the poem’s real power lies in the way it puts its finger on the gut sense felt by anyone who has spent some time in this city, that there is a kind of troubled sadness within the beauty of the harbour, a longing so strong it almost seems to pulse and glow” (48), and “beneath the harbour’s glazed, almost moribund, stillness there is turmoil. Drowned Joe, “long gone from the earth, haunts the harbour, but he is no melancholy apparition” (49). This poem has also influenced and inspired other artists. John Olsen’s amoeba-like *Five Bells* hangs in the art gallery of New South Wales and his mural, *Salute to Five Bells*, stretches around the foyer of the Sydney opera house (Falconer 48). Olsen was so influenced by the poem that it changed the way he behaved in the city, creating these works that decorate the foyer of the Opera House, changing the experience of thousands of tourists, and Sydneysiders alike, each year.

Ruth Park’s novel, *The Harp in the South* won the 1946 inaugural *Sydney Morning Herald* novel competition. The story depicted a family living in the slums of Surry Hills. Park’s controversial portrayal of poverty eventually led to the demolition of the terraces, and replacement by a Housing Commission development for its former residents (Falconer 178).

In the same way that Ruth Park showed Australians an unacceptable poverty, so too the stories surrounding Leo Maley have led to changes in the place in which he lived. The Coliseum has become a place where the stories of Leo Maley are retold, and where his legend lives on. There was extensive local media exposure after Leo Maley died, through its subsequent sale to George Burke and its reincarnation as an antique centre. Many local residents had followed the story of The Coliseum as it became increasingly dilapidated, and Leo’s behaviour became more erratic. They read about Leo’s death and the sale of The Coliseum under newspaper headings such as, “The Coliseum Emperor’s Reign Ends,” when Maley died, and “The Coliseum may Rise Again”, after The Coliseum was bought by George Burke.

Locals of both Mayfield and the greater Newcastle area have been fascinated by this transformation of The Coliseum and continue not only to be curious about The Coliseum and its new owner, but enjoy visiting The Coliseum to tell George their personal stories of Leo, (or in some cases, let him know that the fireplace that graces their renovated Mayfield cottage was appropriated from the derelict Coliseum).

When Leo Maley died, The Coliseum was in disrepair. The roof was leaking and the floorboards rotten. Developers wanted to buy the property for its land value only, with the intention of demolishing the building. George Burke had just returned from a holiday to Italy. Reading the newspaper one night he saw, "Coliseum for Sale." Having just visited The Colosseum in Rome his imagination was piqued. Merely by sharing its name with the great Colosseum of Rome, its Mayfield namesake, became a place of interest for George.

Ignoring those who said it would never work, George replaced Leo's precious awning, rebuilt the roof and added a large (colossal) extension. He lined the back wall with antique radios.

Arthur Burgess, who had worked in The Coliseum as a teenager in the early 1930s tells the story of Leo rigging up a turnstile at the front of The Coliseum. He stood on the exact spot of this contraption on the opening night of the newly renovated Coliseum, and showed the audience the patch on the wooden floorboards marking the place where this piece of home-made engineering had stood. Locals stood and listened as Arthur told of the turnstile Leo had made out of a bicycle wheel laid horizontally and fixed onto a device on the floor in an effort to compete with the more modern Woolworths that had just been built further down Maitland Road. He told of Leo's effort to compete with big stores in a shop that still had an advertisement for Bex on the wall behind the till. He told how Leo had converted the till, built for the imperial pounds and pence, to decimal currency with paper tags showing dollars and cents sticky-taped to the keys.

George Burke used Newcastle's curiosity about Leo as a hook to attract customers to his opening night, and into his shop. He provided a space for myths about Leo to be told and retold, keeping them alive in the

minds of Novocastrians. Through the telling of Leo's stories, the way that people, especially George Burke, have acted in a place has been changed. As Donald states:

Ways of seeing and understanding the city inevitably inform ways of acting on the space of the city, with consequences which then in turn produce a modified city, with consequences which is again understood and acted on. It is not just that the boundaries between reality and imagination are fuzzy and porous. In the development of cities can be discerned a traffic between the two, an economy of symbolic constructs which have material consequences are manifested in an enduring reality. (27)

In this way the myth of Leo influenced the way people acted in the space of Mayfield, which in turn has changed one small corner of the city. The myths of Leo brought the community, many of them strangers, to his memorial service. Some locals even volunteered their time in the renovation of The Coliseum and George invited the public to tell their stories of Leo at the re-opening of The Coliseum. This influence on The Coliseum has again brought to life the stories of Leo Maley. Perhaps this is evident in *The Coliseum*, and the way that Leo's stories have again been adapted. It is interesting to wonder about what affect my adaptations of Leo's myths may again have on The Coliseum.

I asked George Burke whether the myths of Leo had influenced the success of his business. George (a man of few words) said, "Yes, definitely, yes."

## Conclusion

A few years ago I wanted to enter a short story competition about, “a person who to me represents Newcastle.” I immediately thought of Leo Maley and his shop in Mayfield. I had walked past several times, fascinated by the dusty products in the windows that promised an obscure find inside. The door was open. But it was dark in there. It was creepy. I never went inside.

Then Leo died and my brother-in-law told me he had once gone into The Coliseum and an old man had shouted at him to leave. I immediately regretted that I’d never gone in. I hadn’t been brave enough, and as a result I hadn’t found any treasure. I didn’t have a story to tell.

I researched on the Internet and found this old man had been a millionaire, but had died without a will. Without any immediate family his money went to the government. I found newspaper articles about his court cases and my short story began to grow. I found more than I bargained for, including archived boxes of his underwear, hair and fingernail clippings.

My journey ruined many of the myths. Leo wasn’t a genius. His parents didn’t bequeath all their money to the Catholic Church, leaving him destitute; a myth that many believe was most likely made up by Leo himself to avoid spending his money. But I loved the stories about Leo as much as the realities. I love the way people describe Mayfield as always soon to be discovered, much as Newcastle often is itself. I love the conviction and passion of people’s stories.

I love the collective fantasy of Leo as an old eccentric. I wanted to believe he really was a mad genius who wooed the courtrooms, winning cases over more educated men. I love the idea that his heart could be so broken over his mother’s death that he was never the same again. I love the way he fought for his beloved Coliseum, the love of his life, and was returned to her after his death.

But most of all I love the fact that The Coliseum lives on. I love that people go to The Coliseum coffee shop, and tell their stories of Leo, not knowing that his ashes lie in a blue Styrofoam box under the floor beneath their feet. To George it is a tragedy that the coffee shop proprietors didn’t

take on Leo's name, but if The Coliseum had been bulldozed, the stories of Leo Maley would be gone forever.

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