

## **CHAPTER THIRTEEN**

Bells' not having it: Professor Bloke he's off to emergency, that's her final word!

"He's been assaulted" she says firmly, "He's a visitor!"

So A &E it is; the Ron Torney ward to be precise; pride and joy of Wy-Wy.

When Professor Bloke and Sarge take their ticket, the waiting room's packed. Outside round the entrance raggedy looking bloke's stand nagging and smoking and kicking the planter beds.

"District court day" whispers Sarge, "gets the ferals out of the bush, District day. Big day out. Five times a year" tilting his head at the men, women and kiddies pulped in a wad of soggy misery. "Do it all in one trip".

Despite the long front wall of glass, the tray lights, the pot plants and all manner of colourfully presented informational displays, this long, white, waiting room has an air of deep hopelessness.

Cheap plastic seats –green - bolted to iron bars, run through from one end to another and every base is loaded.

Up front at reception, hard faced staff listen blank and bored to this complaint, that complaint, this problem, that problem; while behind 'em, nurses go dashing through, never stopping and orderly blokes rush in scooping people up, passing docs ask quick questions, everyone official slides in and out with eyes straight ahead.

And all the while on the cheap carpet tiles, the sitting, waiting crowd, twitch, moan and mumble. Some rub cramp from their arms. Others stand up to give 'emselves a shake. Puffy red faces wear fixed, vacant stares. Kids grizzle among the drooping heads.

Everyone's dressed in dirty sporting gear and despite the air con the room's stinking hot.

Those on the nod, jerk awake when the buzzer blurts and another red number clicks on the screen.

On the elevated telly at either end, tanned women and men with white toothy smiles stroll far away beach under swaying palms.

After a few more ads, there's cartoons: a pink dog chasing a green hen. Professor Bloke watches the hypnotised expressions sucking it in through one shared straw.

Stuck between the Sarge and someone he don't want to look at, he can hear the scratch of finger nails on skin, the wheeze of breath; the bleat of kids and someone singing softly out of tune. He can smell socks, skin, sores.

Outside in the car park, someone's floating a leisurely curling pass of piss, high into a planter box. In the mirror the Sarge spots security, bustling over, flashing their wallopers as they hustle to the scene.

He puts his hand across his mouth and starts telling Professor Bloke how the bush's full of ferals: dope growers, bail jumpers, debtors; all of that: speeders, runaways, unlicensed drivers, you name it; beaten wives, dead-beat dads, acid what-you-call, casualties; crazed vets, lost hippies. How in the end it don't matter much what you call 'em, "'cause man, woman and child, everyone's totally totalled on Datura".

"It's a weed," when Professor Bloke looks puzzled, "hallucinogenic" says Sarge, "That the word? Hallucinogenic? Love it they do. Trouble is they never come back".

Professor Bloke shifts and wriggles on the hard plastic seat.

You can see his mind's split in four halves.

"Oh they hate the law alright" mumbles Sarge.

"Oh yeah" pushing back in his seat, "crawling with informers the bush is, every bloody tree... and the cops – well..." pausing for a second, "you've had a taste yourself"

"Mind you" he adds, staring round, "poor people do it tough, no risk about that. Rich blokes like old Perry Cracker, they've got a bloody army taking their pulse, every wish every bloody word; they never miss a beat rich blokes: secretaries, cooks, mechanics, they got the lot. All busy doing it for 'em.

These poor bastards," waving his hand, " 'specially them sheilas, they gotta find it all for 'emselves: food, cash, house, whatever. Every bloody day. With four kids in tow and all, no worries! 'Cause they always got four kids, that's a fact. Don't ask me how. No help for them, no, no. Every damn thing they find it 'emselves, day after day. That's being poor for ya."

Sitting up straight, saying more normal. "that's why them feral sheilas built big and tough. On account of the wear and tear".

Professor Bloke nibbles his knuckles.

Not long ago, Maggie the witch told Sarge he'd meet a bloke who'd change his life, get him and his daughters out of Wy-Wy. So he could start again some other place.

Now sitting here next to Professor Bloke, his eyes flick back and forth, searching for anything this bloke might want.

In truth, the idea he could provide some service for a real live Professor from the city, well, it's rather overtaken poor Sarge.

Being more used to carpentry as he is, school bus driving, garbage turns, blackberry eradication, fencing, those sorts of capers.

And while, he's always good for them jobs and never knocks nothing back; there's something else inside. Something he nurses day after day as he combs the cracks of Wy-Wy, and this something else is a yearning for something better.

Right now he's sitting still, muttering some passage from his guide book, an empty gaze on his face.

For his part Professor Bloke's staring hopefully at the nurses. Can he draw attention to himself, like secretly, and speed it up? That's what he wants to know. He's trying to be practical. After all, his ticket's 83 and 37's on the red display. That's a fair old wait. He's starting to fret about his dad. Mind you he better do it on the quiet. Wanting special treatment, that's officially un-Oz behaviour that is, oh yeah!

He's interrupted by an elbow to his sore rib "Over there sir, by the door, see that bloke".

Sarge flicking his eyes towards a hippie in an army jacket and a cloud of yellow dreads, "that's Phil Firtree. Lives at me mate's Gi's joint, waters Daley's crop. What's he here for? Sarge throwing in a bit of background. "I'm saying sir, Phil Firtree, that's his name Firtree. He lives with my mate the Giant ..."

"Stop right there. Hold it" blurts Professor Bloke feeling cranky, "Who's this giant you're on about? Like I need to know"

"Oh Dave,... he's me best mate sir. That's his real name Dave, but his mates call him Giant. Makes him happy. Small thing to do. Lives out of town he does, on his own place. Lots of blokes, bludgers like Phil, they bunk there. He's got a big heart Gi ...sure has. Knows stuff as well"

"Yeah I'm sure he does" sighs Professor Bloke displaying standard academic contempt for unregistered learnings.

"Oh yeah, yeah" continues Sarge regardless, "He comes out with all sorts of stuff; right out of the blue. Last week he told me straight up that white people are melting. How about that?"

"Black is he?" snorts the bored Professor.

"Oh no sir! Whiter than you"

"Anyhow, I wish this lot'd melt. That'd be handy" sighs his companion, staring at some woman flopped asleep and sliding out of her chair. This entire parade of misery reminds him of something from Grapes of Wrath with Henry Fonda.

Anyhow, another red number clicks on the board, another beefy woman with five kids takes five minutes to herd ‘em to the desk and another ten feels like, to find the letter as the baby grizzles in her arms and she carries on three conversations at once telling her kids to stop it. Professor Bloke stares at the ceiling and sighs.

“Look, my rib’s ok, I’m alright. Let’s tell Bell we got in straight away and it’s all ok aye? Let’s do that” he’s hardly got thist out however, when the swinging ward door in front of ‘em bursts open and right before ‘em, stands none other than big fat Copper Russ staring at the Sarge like he’s Christmas dinner.

Now, fair to say, up till this point, Russ’s had a prick of a day.

First, he lost brekkie, cause of the murder. The suicide got him all stirred up and finally, right on the brink of bloody lunch, he’s called out to some ute jack-knifed out by the five mile bridge, so there goes lunch as well.

Jesus Christ – two feeds on the trot!

So, having the Sarge unexpectedly at his mercy ... well, the day might yet be saved.

As he tells his wife later, ‘the stress just washed right off me’.

However, lucky for our two blokes, no sooner has the words “Gotcha cunt” sprung from the happy copper’s mouth than the doors bursts open behind him, spewing forth a crashing wave of ferals straight on top of copper Russ - all of ‘em doing their block, screaming how Russ’s flogged their gear, cash, car keys, bling everything!

While they were up in X Ray!

And without further ado they set upon him, the fat copper, right there and then. Punching belting him and giving him hell.

And right then and all, the whole waiting room does its collective block!

Every dozy bloke, exhausted shiela, grizzly kid, leaps from their seat screaming and sets about Russ the local copper, till he’s just this big fat blur of blue, warding off punches, waving his gun, bellowing like some wounded bull.

All of which Professor Bloke sees with his heart in his mouth and his jaw on the floor.

Luckily his mate’s more on the ball, and seizing him hard in a barrel grip, he hustles him straight out the waiting room, through the pouring-in crowd and into the car park. The entire room too busy milling and screaming to notice.

A cascade of everything reigning down on the blue back of Russ; who’s screaming into his radio, waving his gun, backing and stumbling to the door.

While Sarge and Professor Bloke, they’re up the road in a tic, leaving it well behind ‘em.

After a bit the Sarge stops, leaping into the air at the top of the rise, clapping his hands yelling and laughing at the top of his voice.

“God! God! Never figured on seeing that. My god! Un-fuckin’-believable! Fuckin hell. Not in this town I didn’t. Fucking unbelievable!!”

“Look sir” he rushes up to Professor Bloke, “Russ is the biggest crook in this town, well, maybe not the biggest” he looks round quickly, “but the busiest, that’s a fact. Absolutely. Not a word of a lie. I mean ...say he comes round to tell you something, you know cop business, copper stuff. Well, no risk, straight off he’ll swipe something; oh yeah right out of your house; off your front table, coming in, going out. He don’t care. Doesn’t give a shit. Do it right in front of ya if he has to. No risk. Anything at all.

I mean say he takes you to hospital, after some accident. Well then he steals your gear, just like he did back there. Calls it ill-gotten drug income, some bullshit like that! Your car, your wallet, any bloody thing, while you’re flat on your back and all.

Or if he pulls you over for speeding, you better have dough on ya, yes sir. Don’t know how he’s lived so long, tell the truth. He’s an absolute shocker” shaking his head.

Saying, after a bit more, laughing.

“It’s all ‘cause of the ‘Law Against Everything’ that’s the cause of it. That’s what I reckon anyway. You know the Law against Everything?” explaining, when Professor shakes his head,

“In this town sir, yeah, just like the rest of Oz, ain’t no different anywhere, there’s a Law against Everything. Yeah? Jesus you must know that”.

He stares at Professor who’s standing with a condescending air,

“Fair dinkum. The law against everything. I mean the lot: living, breathing. Dropping stuff on the pavement. Smoking. Having a bee-hive in your back yard. Eating this, eating that!

Getting too fat. Whatever! Everything! From here to there, start to finish” he pauses for breath – “and these coppers, these government blokes, they can do anything they like ‘cause of it. Anything! Anytime they want you, they hook you, and make it up afterwards.

Whenever, whatever. You know I mean,..... walking to the mall, going down the club, driving, oh yeah, ‘specially driving. No worries” shaking his head vigorously in agreement with himself,

“I mean it’s all down to that, the Law against Everything. But on the other hand Russ is the law, ain’t he? And there’s no other law ... so well...”.

Professor Bloke continues to listen bemused,

“Well sir” continues Sarge, waving his arm, “A flourishing trade appears...that’s what happens, an exchange of needs and wants ... know what I mean sir, the free market ... the market yeah?” He stammers to a halt, staring at Professor, waiting for support.

“Mmm” says Professor vaguely, “that’s interesting” wondering as a matter of fact, when the Sarge started calling him sir and wishing he’d stop.

Truth is, Professor Bloke don’t know too much about the Oz he lives in. After all he resides in a modern world class city located by the ocean, with great beaches and so forth. Never ever thinks about the inland, what’s behind him. Never!

Don’t care he don’t know neither.

What’s the point? Nothing to do with him. What for?

And that’s why, here, in Wy, well, he’s baby Moses in the bulrushes, know what I mean?

Plenty like him in Sydney. Don’t know shit about Oz, ‘cept they live in it.

I mean, when you think about it, he’s only here for his newly rediscovered, soon to be dead dad, nothing else.

And what he’s getting instead, is like, one story after another. Things that make no sense, like this Sarge babble; or things that get contradicted round the next corner: riots, beatings and all round nameless bloody lunacy!

With a nasty edge and all. After all he’s been done over himself this morning. He stops in the middle of the pavement and shakes his head. He can hardly believe this place is a city or that it’s in his Oz at all; feels like darkest Africa tell the truth.

For a start, there don’t appear to be no rules!

Leaving that aside, there’s his vague lifelong conviction, that he’s a Rum Corp sorta bloke, a ruler of this land, and somehow now, he’s appears to have ended up down with the convicts.

That’s disturbing.

“Yeah Russ” says Sarge making one final attempt, “See sir, it’s like, if you’re ever talking to Russ and your wallet’s only half empty at the end, well.....you’ve done alright”

Professor Bloke’s finding this a bit hard to believe; the streets being so calm and empty like always.

Besides, there’s his dad to worry about. Which is how come he suddenly up and strides off leaving it all behind; with Sarge running to catch up. All the way home it’s like that: Sarge babbling this and that: telling why them townies hate him and do him over non-stop. Telling ‘bout his wife who used to be Tiger’s girlfriend, and who weren’t no good anyhow. About how Tiger and them Grimsons run the town, cooking go-ey in their garage and how Daley

isn't with 'em, but Russ is; which is how come he's still alive; and how Irene's the best, never taking shit from anyone and how the Sarge hopes she's ok.

All that sort of stuff. Not a word of which Professor Bloke even hears.

All the way to Bell's front gate, which is where he wakes up and grabs Sarge saying, "Look, Look, please! Stop! Please! This is all very interesting I'm sure, but I just want to see my dad. That's it. All of this" waving his arm around, "it's like walk here, walk there, walk someplace else. I'm sick of it. I don't give a shit about Wy-Wy, pardon my French" he waves his arm, "but it's not my city and Russ, he's not my business...or no murder either, come to that" His waving arm falls to his side and he stares straight into the other's face, "I just want to see me Dad. He's dying".

He takes a deep breath staring at the sky.

Sarge shamefaced, promising, "yeah, yeah, see what I can do", saying he's sorry, stumbling and apologising for messing him about. Promising they'll be straight out the gate, "soon as we find where he's at exactly".

"No worries. Straight in, straight out Sir. Sorry Sir. No probs".

Telling himself while he's talking to bloody focus! Stop pissing this Professor Bloke about and get on with it.