



KATE LANCE

Tempo book 4

*Make love
not war?
If only.*

SHADOWS
in **JADE**

SHADOWS IN JADE

Tempo book 4

KATE LANCE

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BY THE SAME AUTHOR

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Embers at Midnight
Testing the Limits
Silver Highways
Atomic Sea (As CM Lance)
The Turning Tide (As CM Lance)

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TO THE MEMBERS OF THE
1ST AUSTRALIAN CIVIL AFFAIRS UNIT

In a time of destruction they did their best
to heal, teach, cultivate and build.

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PART I. APPLE GREEN

1. JEN: MARY QUANT SHOES (OCT 1966-FEB 1967)

I've loved Tibor Adler since I was six years old.

We met in 1957, at a barbecue my parents' friends were holding to watch a silvery light drift across the night, the amazing new Russian satellite, Sputnik. We kids — the cluster of cousins and friends our hostess Billie always calls the 'horde' — sat together as we ate, balancing plates of smoky meat and tasty nibbles on our laps.

When I confessed I didn't understand how satellites stayed up in the sky, seventeen-year-old Tibor reassured me he was just as ignorant. It was a simple kindness to my small shy self, but his brown eyes left me breathless. Of course a child of six is supposed to know nothing of love, yet there it was.

And now, nine years later, there it still is.

Yet Tibor lives in Sydney, while our home is in Newcastle, one hundred miles to the north. Most of our friends and relatives are in Sydney too and we visit them in the school holidays. But *how* I wish we lived in Sydney and could see the friends and relatives — and Tibor — whenever we wanted.

Newcastle is just a boring industrial city. It's only got one trendy clothes shop, Pumpkins, which hardly compares to Sydney boutiques like the House of Merivale.

But we *do* have long sandy beaches, and in summer I lie in the sun with my best friend Linda, and swim in the surf, and eat chips from the kiosk, then lie in the sun again. So sometimes Newcastle is okay.

My big brother Leo loves the beach too, and spends every spare moment, summer or winter, bobbing up and down on his surfboard and catching waves. Leo is tanned and tall, and his curls are sunburnt blond. He mostly ignores me. Leo turned twenty recently and had to register for National Service.

A lottery is held every six months to pick boys to go into the Army for two years, and perhaps get sent off to Vietnam. But Leo always says only a few guys ever go and he isn't worried.

Our parents are.

I tell Mum, 'Don't worry, they wouldn't take Leo, he's too lazy,' which makes her laugh, then sigh. 'If only he'd done medicine, or something with a longer course, he could have postponed for a few years ...'

'Oh Mum, you didn't really think *Leo*'d ever do medicine?'

That brings another sigh. Leo has never had the slightest interest in anything that might demand hard work. He barely scraped into uni in the first place and his finals last year were a close call, mainly because all he ever does is surf and hang around with Bazza and Shazza.

Now he's grudgingly doing a year of teacher training at the Technical College, but still spends most of his time drinking beer with Bazza (Barry, who's also in the ballot) and trying to get Bazza's sister Sharon to go out with him. I think Shazza's still resisting, but that doesn't dent Leo's confidence for a moment.



In September we gathered around the TV to watch the National Service lottery draw. They displayed the barrel and the marbles engraved with birth-dates, and introduced someone supposedly famous to extract the marbles one by one. They don't tell you the drawn dates on the night itself, so Leo has to wait for the letter that might change everything.

But a month later he *still* hasn't heard. I'd much rather be looking forward to Christmas in Sydney (and Tibor), but everyone else is only interested in whether Leo has been balloted in or out. He just grins and says it could be fun to learn to shoot, but doesn't sound quite as smug as he used to.

My family has a strange connection to Vietnam. Mum's brother Pete and his wife have lived there for ages, ever since the old days when it was the French fighting the North Vietnamese.

Now it's the Americans arguing over who owns the rice paddies, which sounds pretty stupid to me. Must sound stupid to other people too, because lately there have been lots of marches against the war. President Lyndon B. Johnson just visited Australia and protesters tried to stop his parade by lying down in front of the cars.

Then NSW Premier Askin — who Aunt Tina always says is as crooked as a dog's hind leg — told the drivers to 'run over the bastards'. And what if they *had*? Poor old protesters.

The headlines keep saying *All the way with LBJ*, which I think is silly too. But Leo says I don't know the first thing about it, and if we don't stop the communists in Vietnam then all of Asia will collapse like dominos under their sway.

When he comes out with things like this, Mum say crossly, 'Don't be *absurd*, Leo. It's a national independence movement, not the communists against the world, and especially not against us.'

And Dad takes off his glasses and sighs (they both do a lot of sighing) and says, 'Leo, you should really be a little more critical of what you read. The papers are simply repeating American propaganda.'

Leo just shrugs and goes surfing.



After school today Linda and I take the bus to David Jones, the department store on Hunter Street, to see if the latest Mary Quant shoes have arrived: and there they are, lit up on a glass stand. Glossy maroon leather, low heels, squarish toes and straps with darling little buttons.

'Oh,' breathes Linda. We gaze in awe, knowing we'll never get to wear them — they cost an impossible eighty dollars, which is about twice a weekly wage. Dad's a doctor and Mum works in an office, but we don't have money like that, not even for the most beautiful shoes in the world.

Linda and I read everything we find about Carnaby Street and Swinging London, and plan to go over there when we're old enough.

We wear our uniform skirts as short as we can, even though the school insists the limit is eight inches above the knees. They make all the girls kneel sometimes and measure with a ruler.

We're in our fourth year at high school and supposed to be studying for the School Certificate exams in a few weeks, so after the Mary Quant shoes we go to Linda's and do some science homework.

But really we just listen to the Beatles on her portable record player. Revolver came out a few months ago and, like the Mary Quant shoes, it's so special and different from anything else here in Newcastle.

The Beatles have long moustaches now and wear bright satin outfits, but I prefer how they were a few years ago: dark-suited and serious, with bouncy songs I'd listen to on my transistor radio. George is my favourite, although Linda likes Paul best.

I walk home happily humming *Good Day Sunshine*, so it's a worry when I go in the kitchen to see Mum's been crying. She takes a breath.

'It's alright, love. I'm just —' She swallows. 'Leo got the letter. He's been balloted in.'

'Oh, Mum. Only a few boys get sent overseas.'

'But your Dad and I can never forget the war —'

'That's ancient *history*. Leo'll be okay. What did he say anyway?'

'He hears they have pretty good surf in Vietnam. Silly boy.'

To Leo's delight Bazza is also balloted in. Bazza's still doing his apprenticeship and Leo has to finish his teacher training, so they'll both go into the army early next year.

Still, I don't have time to think about that because my exams are about to start. I manage to concentrate on studying for a few weeks (although Dad keeps putting his head round the door and asking how can *anyone* work with the radio going)

Then the School Certificate rolls over us. It's terrifying and boring, and there are hours and *hours* of it. Even when it's over I keep dreaming about having to sit exams for subjects I've never studied.

December comes and I find out I've passed: two As, three Bs and one C. Now there's only Fifth and Sixth Forms ahead of me, then high school will be over forever!

This Christmas, weirdly, Leo says he's not coming to Sydney for the usual get-together. But I'm going, and at last the great day arrives. Dad drives the Holden along the winding Pacific Highway, and we stop for sandwiches outside Gosford, half-way to Sydney. I have cordial and my parents drink tea from a flask, and the amazing chimes of bellbirds echo from tree to tree.

It takes about three hours to cover the hundred miles to Sydney (Australia has just changed over from imperial pounds to decimal dollars, but they say miles will be used for ages yet). It's a nice drive though, and quieter too without Leo, who's always tapping his fingers or whistling or asking how long till we get there.



Dad's sister, Aunt Tina, used to live in a big flat above her nightclub in Kings Cross. But a couple of years ago she bought a two-storey house in a street nearby, with high ceilings and coloured glass in the doors. I usually stay in a little bedroom upstairs at the rear, which was once a maid's, Tina says, and from the window I can see over tin roofs and sooty chimneys to a slice of the blue harbour.

Last time we visited was at Easter, nine months ago, and I asked her son, Róbert, if the old house was spooky with just Tina and him.

'Well, maybe it is a bit spooky, Jenny, but it's still nice.'

My cousin's only eleven, four years younger than me, but he always seems older. He has a round face and thick brown hair, and when he smiles it makes me smile too.

After we get to Tina's today the grown-ups drink tea, while Róbert and I get watermelon and go out to a table in the yard. The garden is only small but it's got a lemon tree and rows of little flowers along the fences.

'I'm going to high school next year, Jenny,' Róbert says, spitting watermelon seeds onto his plate. 'What's it like, *really*?'

'Well, lots better than primary, that's for sure. You get different teachers for different subjects, and there are laboratories with bunsen burners, and sometimes you heat chemicals in test-tubes so they change colour. It's fun, really.'

'Our teacher said we'll meet kids from all the other primary schools then,' says Róbert. 'That'll be good. I'm a bit sick of the ones I've known for years.'

'Are they still being horrible about your name?'

He nods in resignation. 'At high school I'm not going to tell anyone my name's Róbert.' (He says it the way Aunt Tina always does, *Rrrow-bairt*.) 'I'm going to be just *Rob* from now on.'

‘Rob’s okay,’ I say. ‘Yeah, that’s quite mod, really. What does your mum think?’

‘Haven’t told her yet, but suppose she’ll be cranky. Anyway, it’s *my* name.’

Aunt Tina is blonde and pretty, even though she’s old, almost fifty. But she’s also strict and you can see why her staff jump to do everything she says.

‘She’ll get used to it. *I’ll* call you Rob, anyway.’

‘Thanks.’ He smiles. ‘I’ll call you Jen too, if you like. That’s sort of mod as well.’

I’m surprised. I’ve never thought of it before, but he’s right.

Jen is *very* mod.

I could imagine a Jen in a dazzling Pucci shift, with painted lashes beneath her eyes like Twiggy. A Jen would ride in an Aston Martin — perhaps she’d even drive it herself — with a bright silk scarf around her head. A Jen would wear Mary Quant shoes *all* the time.

‘Oh, I think I like that, *Rob*.’

‘That’s okay, *Jen*.’ We giggle.

I take another slice of watermelon and say, ‘Why does your mum call you Róbert, anyway? Is it Irish, because of your dad?’

Rob shrugs. ‘Don’t think so. I asked her once and she said it was Hungarian, from some promise she’d made to a friend. But it just says ordinary old Robert on my birth certificate. Mum’s always been the one who’s insisted on this weird version.’

His dad died when Rob was only a baby. For some reason Aunt Tina went back to her maiden name after that, so Bell is Rob’s surname too, same as mine. It’s all a bit strange, and now I think about it I’ve never seen any photos round their house of Rob’s dad. I wonder if maybe Tina didn’t like him very much.



Next afternoon my parents are upstairs dressing for the Christmas party, but I’m already sitting in the lounge-room, impatient to go. I’m in a lovely kaftan from London that Billie gave me. It’s made of floaty cotton with wide sleeves, and printed with tiny gold and pink flowers.

I've put strawberry lip-gloss on, and washed my hair and brushed it dry. It almost reaches my shoulders now. A few weeks ago the hairdresser cut me a fringe, so when the rest gets longer it'll look really fashionable.

Rob is being his usual quiet self, sitting across from me in tidy clothes, his hair brushed back with water. His legs are comfortably propped over the arm of the chair (which Tina is always telling him not to do) and he's reading volume 3 of the Encyclopaedia Britannica, *Bolivia to Cervantes*. He expects to finish all thirty books by the time he's fifteen.

At last the grown-ups come downstairs. Mum and Tina both look pretty and smell of perfume, though Dad is the same as ever — glasses, tie, tweedy jacket.

Tina and Rob are going to the party in her smart little Mini, so after the fuss of gathering keys and handbags we finally leave. As Dad drives to the party I gaze at passing glimpses of Sydney Harbour, and think about names.

Whenever anyone says 'Jennifer' I feel as if I'm back at primary school, in trouble and about to be sent to the headmaster (again). Once I got caught reading a book, Biggles, in some boring scripture class. That nearly got me the cane on the hand, the headmaster was so furious. Honestly, you'd think he'd be pleased I was actually *reading* something at school.

And 'Jenny'? It's a lazy, friendly name, like someone who works in a shop or hangs around Leo's surfer friends. Of course I go to the beach, but I'm not a gidget, a soft, agreeable Jenny.

But a 'Jen'? A modern, stylish, *confident* Jen?

I suppose I'm not really that either. Straight brown hair might look good on models but doesn't on me. And I'm thin and flat — so flat that a nasty boy at school christened me 'surfboard,' which is humiliating. Perhaps one day I'll catch up to the other girls in my class, the girls with curvy waists and hips, but I'll never live down being called surfboard. I can't change that, but I *can* change myself. A bit, anyway.

I take a breath. 'Mum, Dad? I've decided I want to be called *Jen* from now on, not Jenny.'

Dad says, 'Why, love? Jenny's so pretty.'

‘Jen is more *modern*,’ I say firmly.

I can hear the smile in Mum’s voice. ‘If that’s what you want, darling. But you’ll have to forgive us if we lapse into old habits now and again.’

‘That’s okay, I don’t mind about you two,’ I say. ‘But for everyone else I want to be a *Jen*.’

Dad parks the car and I get out, my heart thumping. The party is at Nikos and Billie’s house in Rose Bay. It’s high on the side of a hill and looks out to the harbour, and I love it so much. This is where I first met Tibor, nine years ago.

Tina and Rob arrive and park just behind us. We go through the gate and Billie opens the front door, grinning. She’s Mum’s oldest and best friend, tall and slim and always trendy, even though there’s more silver than red in her hair now.

There’s lots of hugging and kissing, and Billie has a special hug for me. Tonight she’s wearing jeans cut low on her hips and a floaty pale blue shirt with a wide collar. I touch the fabric reverently.

‘Crepe, kid,’ Billie says. ‘House of Merivale.’

‘Oh,’ I say.

‘Never know — might be another one under the tree with your name on it.’

‘Billie!’ I hug her again.

In the lounge-room Nikos kisses the top of my head and says, ‘Good God, young lady, you’ve grown six inches since Easter.’

Nikos isn’t Billie’s husband but they’ve been together for years. I don’t know why they don’t get married, but Billie just laughs if I ask. Even though he’s old, Nikos is so handsome. He’s got dark eyes and a grey beard and his hands are big and muscular. He and Billie go sailing on his yacht and flying in Billie’s little seaplane. I think they’re the most glamorous people *ever*.

Their lounge-room is one of my favourite places too, with comfy couches and big windows that look out across the water. You can see the old flying-boat base, and the city and Harbour Bridge, with all the little lights twinkling in the water.

I turn and realise Claire is there, drinking wine and chatting to someone. She’s one of our horde of kids as well, but she always makes me feel so ... drab.

She's seven years older than me, with pale blonde hair in a French roll, and blue eyes that Mum calls cornflower. She's famous for her good posture (I'm famous for slouching), *and* she's been to university.

I liked Claire much better when we were younger, when she and Leo would argue and tease each other all the time. Funny though, they don't seem to be friends any more. I think they might have had a fight when we were here last Easter. I asked Leo and he got really grumpy about it.

There's another knock at the door. Nikos goes out and returns with the Adlers and their daughter Devorah and — oh, at last — *Tibor*. My cheeks are warm but I try to smile normally.

Everyone is laughing and hugging and shaking hands, and somehow, in the hubbub, Tibor's eyes meet mine. Understanding flows between us, as it always does when we meet, and I feel something like contentment: if contentment is composed of happiness and hot coals.

Honestly, how could Newcastle ever compare to this?



It's only a party tonight, not actually Christmas, which is in a few days. But it's still fun, with nice food and old jokes that make the grown-ups groan. Tibor's family are Jewish so they don't celebrate Christmas, but something else called Hanukkah. Devorah says it's kind of the same, though different.

Devorah and I didn't like each other when we were little. Our parents were always telling us to go and play together, even though she's younger than me. But we finally became friends because she's sharp and funny, and says things about people I'd never dare. Anyway, how could I not like Devorah? Her brother is Tibor.

And suddenly there he is, two glasses in his hands. 'How's my favourite girl, then?' he says, giving me a quick kiss on my hair and sitting beside me on the sofa. 'Here, have a lemonade.'

'Oh, *hi*, Tibor. Thanks.' (I think my head will float free from my body.) 'Well, we had our School Certificate exams and I passed everything. I even got As in Science and English.'

‘Science and English? Planning to be a very literate physicist, then?’ says Tibor, sipping his beer.

‘Not likely! I only got a C in Maths. Anyway, lady scientists are plain and boring. But what have you been doing?’

‘No exams, I’m glad to report. Some office politics though. Worse than exams.’

‘Tibor, *nothing’s* worse than exams.’

He smiles. ‘Well, I’m going crazy. We’re setting up an office in London next year and I’m supposed to organise it.’

‘You’re going to *London*?’

‘No, just helping set it up. Why? Should I go?’

‘Go to London if you have the chance? Of course you should!’

‘But Mary Quant doesn’t make shoes for men,’ he says, his dark eyes teasing. ‘And you’re always telling me she’s London’s only attraction.’

I laugh. ‘Silly. There’s Carnaby Street and the Beatles and Buckingham Palace too, and *everything’s* so clever and cool!’

‘So you’ll be off there like a rocket then as soon as you can?’ he says reproachfully. ‘While the rest of us stay behind in drab old Australia?’

‘Only for a while,’ I say. (I couldn’t imagine living anywhere Tibor wasn’t.) ‘I wouldn’t leave forever. But ... I *do* want to travel a bit first.’

‘Come on, tell the truth — you really want to marry a Beatle.’

‘No I don’t!’ I laugh. ‘Anyway, they’re all taken now.’

‘A Rolling Stone then?’

‘Never. Tibor, I think they take *drugs*.’

He shrugs. ‘Probably. Most people do nowadays, Jenny. See my beer? That cigarette Dad’s smoking? All drugs.’

‘I suppose. But listen, there’s something I need to tell you. I’m changing my name to *Jen*. I don’t want to be Jenny any more.’

He gazes at me. ‘Why? Jenny’s pretty.’

‘It’s *too* pretty. Too boring. I want to be crisp and smart and modern.’

‘You’re certainly smart and modern. Crisp?’

‘Oh, I don’t know. Sort of like Claire, all cool and sharp.’

‘Ah. She is, isn’t she?’

‘You know,’ I say quietly, ‘I think she and Leo had a big fight last Easter. Leo’s been really strange about her ever since.’

‘They’re both at complicated stages of their lives, Jenny ... Jen. And Leo — well, he’s always going to be *Leo*. Only interested in the next wave.’

We smile at each other. ‘True,’ I say. ‘But I’d still like to be more like Claire.’

‘You’ll always be yourself, Jenny-wren, and nothing wrong with that. But did you hear about Claire’s new job with the society pages?’

‘Society?’ says Claire. ‘Do I hear the siren-song of my calling? Hello, Jenny.’

‘She’s Jen, not Jenny now,’ says Tibor. ‘Way more modern.’

Claire nods and sits down with us. She tilts her head, considering. ‘Yes, Jen suits you. You *are* modern, certainly more than me or Tibor, who’s practically middle-aged.’

‘Thanks, Claire,’ I say, pleased. (Of course I don’t *really* dislike her. Yes, she is clever and elegant, but she’s part of our horde and she’s always been nice to me. Oh dear. I suppose I’m not only thin and boring, but mean and envious too.)

Tibor says, ‘Twenty-six is middle-aged?’ in an injured voice.

‘Well, *I’d* define middle-aged as the sort of guy who doesn’t turn up for drinks when he says he will,’ says Claire coolly.

‘Will you *ever* forgive me for that?’ says Tibor. ‘I honestly couldn’t leave the office that night, the brief had to be ready next morning. Anyway, you and Leo still had fun.’

‘And Asher came too,’ says Claire.

‘What, my little brother actually stopped demonstrating in favour of a night out?’

‘He left fairly soon to meet a pretty hippie, I think,’ says Claire.

Tibor laughs. ‘See? You didn’t need me there at all.’

‘Probably not. But now, look at us in our middle-aged outfits and Jen in that gorgeous kaftan — is it from Carnaby Street?’

I flush with pleasure. ‘Yes, Billie gave it to me last birthday.’

Claire nods. ‘You put Tibor and me to shame.’

‘But aren’t you wearing a *Chanel* suit?’ (Billie told me that and even she was impressed.)

She nods ruefully. ‘Practising for my new job.’

‘I didn’t even know you wanted to work at a newspaper, Claire.’

‘I’ve never spoken about it much, but somehow it seems to have happened.’ She laughs in a flustered sort of way.

‘What will you be doing?’ I ask.

‘I’ll just be a secretary in the Social Department at the Daily Mirror, covering fashion and parties. I fear I may have to wear a hat and gloves at all times. Still, it might lead to better things.’

‘But what would be better than *parties*?’ I say.

‘Real reporting. Politics, war, current affairs.’

I’m puzzled. ‘But ladies don’t usually do those sorts of stories.’

Claire nods. ‘Not many, but there’s a few.’ She smiles suddenly. ‘And I thought you were such a *modern* girl, Jen! You can do anything you want nowadays, you know.’

‘Gosh, that’s true. I *will* have to become more adventurous if I’m going to go to London.’

‘London,’ says Tibor. ‘Always comes back to London for you, Jen. But now, what’s the latest on old Leo? And why isn’t he here for Christmas?’

‘Well, he got through his teacher training finals, which amazed *everyone*. Still, I haven’t the foggiest why he’s not here. Said he wanted to stay in Newcastle for the holidays. Suppose he wants to make the most of the surf before going into the army.’

‘And when will that be?’ says Claire, gazing at her glass.

‘Late January, I think.’

Claire nods and tilts her head to swallow the last of her wine.



1967 arrives. This year, Fifth Form, I’m going to do English, Science, Maths, Art and French. Linda’s doing Economics instead of Art, because she wants to be an accountant. (Sometimes I wonder if she’ll *really* come to Carnaby Street with me when we’re grown up.)

Just before the school holidays are over, Leo and Bazza take their national service medicals and pass easily, both of them lean and fit from surfing. Early one morning they board a bus with twenty other shuffling boys and disappear, grinning, to the Third Recruit Training Battalion at Singleton, forty miles up the Hunter Valley.

Poor old Mum and Dad! Their usual mild exasperation with my brother changes to a sort of mild anxiety.

We don't hear from Leo for a fortnight, then he phones us and says he's been chosen to do officer training, and he's going away to do a six-month course at some place near Sydney.

My parents' mild anxiety turns to mild perplexity.

Leo? *Officer* training?

2. CLAIRE: THE SOCIAL DEPARTMENT (APR 1966-FEB 1967)

I was four when we emigrated from London and settled in an old house in Balmain. It's not far from Elkington Park, where I spent hours swimming in the harbour pool or playing on the swings, while my mothers sat beneath the gnarled Moreton Bay Fig trees and talked about poetry and books and life.

Yes, I have two mothers. Klara became pregnant with the help of friend Toby Fenn and — so the family joke goes — a clean glass jar. Toby married Klara to protect me and give me his name, but he died in the war before I ever knew him. The love of Klara's life is Yvonne, my other mum. Klara is a poet and teacher, and Yvonne runs her own publishing house, the Watters Press.

When I was eight, light-hearted Vivy McKee, Jenny and Leo's cousin, came to live with us as my babysitter: she was just embarking on her singing career then but she made my home life even happier. School was a different case as I was an eccentric child, precise and reserved. Still, I went my own quiet way, ignored the bullies and found a refuge for myself in the library.

In any case, my closest friends were — and are — from the horde, the children of my parents' friends and relatives, although we're widely scattered in ages: Vivy is older than me by eight years and Jenny is seven years younger.

Really, I don't even know why I'm thinking about Vivy now. She isn't here in Sydney any more. Hard to believe it's been so long, but she went away to sing jazz in Europe nine years ago, soon after that night we gathered to watch the mysterious Sputnik satellite.

Such a strange evening.

Only four of the horde were there: twelve-year-old me; Tibor, magnetic at seventeen; Leo, supremely confident at eleven, and shy six-year-old Jenny. I remember Tibor murmured something kind to Jenny, who gazed into his eyes and began to worship him. (As a teenager Jen still does, and it worries me a little that even now Tibor still so carelessly turns on the charm.)

As usual, self-assured Leo and I were sparring. The first time we'd met as small children, I'd said crossly his eyes were *slippery*, and he'd retorted mine were *sharp*. By now it was one of those old jokes, and somehow it came up again.

Lulled by magical Sputnik, I asked Leo what he'd meant in the first place by 'sharp'. He said it was because I always looked at things as if I could see right through them.

Coming from him that astonished me, because it was so perceptive: I was always trying to see *beneath*, to the hidden scaffolding of the world.

Leo then asked casually what I'd meant by slippery, and I said (more truthfully than kind) it was because he only ever saw what was on the surface of things.

Typically, he took this as a compliment and whispered to Billie, 'I'm going to *marry* her one day.'

Wise Billie murmured, 'Well good luck with that, kid.' It was probably as clear to her, as to me and everyone else, that Leo and I were utterly incompatible.

Even today it's more obvious than ever. Lazy Leo barely got off his surfboard long enough to attend college, while I studied hard all through uni: and did well too. But I've never wanted to be a teacher like Leo. In my heart I've always yearned to write, to make a living as a journalist.

I rarely speak of it though, it matters too much. Perhaps it stems from knowing of the wartime hardships my parents endured, or perhaps I simply want to *witness* history, to illuminate the happenings of the world for myself.

Still, that's all just a silly dream. The few female journalists who report on anything other than society doings are known only for their curiosity value; so after graduating from uni I started at the Watters Press.

My mother Yvonne is easy to work with, and I'm learning lots of interesting things about papers, inks and printing. But secretly I still yearn to do something that demands more of me.



Last year, during Easter week in April 1966, the phone rang at the printery and it was Tibor Adler.

‘Hey there, Claire — Leo’s around. His family’s here for a holiday. Want to catch up for drinks this evening?’

‘Great. Where?’

‘Tempo? They’ve just redecorated.’

‘Okay, meet you there.’

‘About eight o’clock’d be good,’ Tibor said. ‘Got to finish a brief at the office first. I’ll find out if Asher’s free as well.’

I was pleased. I had a new summer dress I’d been hoping to have a reason to wear, and the evening was warm and just right. We older members of the horde often had drinks together, especially when Leo came to Sydney, and it was always easy fun.

We used to bring dates. Tibor’s were gorgeous lawyers with French twists, Leo’s wore pale pink lipstick and teased hair, Asher’s were earnest hippies, and mine were Political Science postgrads with glasses.

We stopped doing that, though, after the evening Tibor’s girl fell for Leo, Asher’s snuggled up to Tibor, and Leo’s took a shine to my post-grad. Now we usually just stick to horde kids — at least we don’t have to explain the rapid-fire family jokes.

In the evening I ate with Yvonne and Klara, then got ready. My new shift was a halter-neck in fine blue cotton, the hem well above my knees. I combed out my hair — wavy and fair, I usually pull it back into a roll, but that night I let it brush against my bare shoulders.

It took two buses to get to Kings Cross, but they were quick and I was at Tempo just before eight. I met Tina as she greeted guests in the foyer and we hugged. Her dress was a shift too, short-sleeved, expensive red Thai silk, and she looked amazing.

We chatted for a few moments. Klara and Yvonne sent their love. Young Róbert was well, in his last year of Primary school. Tina thought Tempo’s heartblood, jazz, was becoming less mainstream, and she was worried she’d have to start a discotheque.

‘Don’t fret,’ I said, ‘it’ll take years for *anything* that trendy to be acceptable in Sydney,’ and she laughed. She called a waiter over, told him to find me a nice table, then we parted.

After seating me the waiter took my order, and I looked around. The recent redecorations were good. Modern furniture, the stage larger, the bar more comfortable. Tempo was a famous jazz club during the fifties but Tina was right. Jazz was now less mainstream. As I've got older I've come to quite like it — but still, a discotheque? That could be fun.

Tempo was different from its heyday in other ways too. The clientele now flaunted fewer furs and jewels, and there were fewer obvious criminals. Probably a good thing. Tina has always had to skate a fine line between business and the darker side of Kings Cross.

Still, she's had a couple of lucky breaks. One was when liquor was legalised in the fifties, so the criminals turned away from nightclubs to the illegal gambling dens. The other break? Her friendship with Moshe Adler — Tibor, Asher and Devorah's father.

It's an open secret the Adlers were once a powerful underworld family. They may have turned respectable now but the name still matters: and the Adlers have always protected Tina's club.

The waiter arrived with my white wine and I checked my watch. Twenty past eight. Leo and Asher weren't very good at turning up on time, but Tibor was usually reliable. Oh, well. After a mouthful or two I noticed Leo approaching, and waved.

'Hey, sharp eyes,' he said, grinning. 'How're you going?'

Most of the horde kids hug, as easy with each other as a litter of puppies, but with wisecracking Leo I usually keep my distance. I just said, 'Fine. Any sign of the others in the foyer?'

He shook his head, signalled the waiter, and ordered beer.

'Your parents and Jenny settled in at Tina's?' I asked.

'Yeah. Mum and Dad are seeing Billie and Nikos this evening, and Jenny's minding Róbert.' He gazed around. 'Who's playing?'

'I saw the poster, Bernie McGann Quartet. Should be good. Oh, *there* you are.'

'Greetings, comrades,' said Asher, rubbing Leo's hair and hugging my shoulder as he sat down. 'Ordered me a beer?'

'Under no circumstances,' I said. 'You know what you're like.'

'It was only that one time I slithered under the table.'

'Yeah, but after a *single* middy?' said Leo. 'Pathetic.'

The waiter brought over a jug of beer and two glasses. Leo poured Asher a drink and said, 'There you are, Che. Vive la révolution.'

'Mmm,' I said. 'Think that's France and about two hundred years out of date, Leo.'

Asher smiled. 'It'll do. Speaking of Vietnam —'

'Were we?' said Leo.

'Come July, are you going to register for national service?'

'Why not? If I don't I'll be balloted in anyway. Better to register and hope not to get drawn.'

'And what if you *are* drawn?' said Asher.

'Jeez, Asher, don't be such an awkward bastard.' Leo laughed. 'I'll go if I have to, no big deal. Suppose you're planning to fight every inch of the way.'

'Yeah. My draw isn't till next year, but I'll try for a conscientious objector exemption.'

'And if that doesn't work you could drink coffee for days and fail the medical. Hey, I reckon you're half-way there already, mate,' said Leo helpfully.

Asher laughed. His fringe was falling over his eyes, his glasses were held together with tape, and his shirt, heavy with anti-war badges, hung on his slim frame. It's almost impossible to annoy him, and despite all his anti-war activities he's brilliant at uni, studying subjects in mathematics most of us can't even spell.

'What about doing a postgraduate course next year instead of tackling the might of the law?' I said. 'You could postpone things for a while then.'

'Nah. Time to stand up for my beliefs, Claire.'

The lights went down, the band began, and the boys turned their seats side-on to watch. I sipped my drink and glanced at them in the dimness. Leo couldn't be more of a contrast to Asher: high-cheeked, long fringe, curls bleached by the sun. Tanned, broad shoulders, muscular body. Attractive enough, I suppose, but I always say I prefer brains to brawn.

The music was excellent and the break came quickly. Asher half-stood. 'My shout, you two, but I've got to go.'

'Mine's a schooner, and Claire's drinking white,' Leo said. 'Why've you got to go?'

‘Met a nice girl, going to paint some placards for the demo next week.’

‘You and your nice girls,’ I said. ‘Aren’t there any horrible ones in the anti-war movement?’

Asher smiled. ‘Not a one. You should join us, Claire, you’d fit in perfectly. And hey, forgot to say before, but your frock looks fantastic too.’

‘It’s a shift, not a *frock*,’ I scolded, pleased. At least someone had noticed. ‘Not sure I’d make a good hippie, though.’

‘Not only hippies in the movement, plenty of others too. Anyway, comrades, I’ll order your drinks at the bar. See you.’

When Asher had gone I said, ‘Wonder where Tibor is. Not like him to miss a night out.’

‘What was he doing?’ Leo said.

‘Oh, working on a brief, something legal. Don’t really know.’

‘Ah well, might turn up yet. How are things at the printery?’

‘Good. I really like working with Yvonne, but —’

‘But?’

I shrugged. ‘Not sure I want to do it forever.’

‘What would you prefer? Not much call round here for French-speaking political scientists.’

‘Amazed you even remember what I studied. So how’s teacher training going?’

Leo groaned. ‘Awful. English and French haven’t quite equipped me for the modern world either. I’d be better off in Vietnam.’

‘Don’t even *joke* about that. My parents never got over the last war, and I bet yours didn’t either.’

‘Yeah.’ He hesitated. ‘Thing is, I don’t know what to do, Claire. I’m so bloody *bored*.’

‘Ha! I thought as long as there were waves to catch you couldn’t be bored.’

Leo grinned. ‘Guess there’s that.’

Our drinks arrived, and we sipped and watched the crowd.

‘You didn’t answer my question,’ Leo said. ‘What would you rather do, if not the printery?’

By now the wine must have gone straight to my head, because for some reason I stupidly let down my guard.

‘Actually ... I’d quite like to become a journalist and work on politics and current affairs.’

As Leo opened his mouth I said, ‘Yes, I *know*, Leo. Women can’t do that.’

‘That wasn’t what I was going to say.’

‘All right, what?’

‘Why don’t you start as a cadet at a newspaper?’

‘Because *women can’t do that*.’

‘No, I read about one who did. Once you got a toe in the door, who knows?’ Leo gazed at me, smiling a little. ‘I’m certain you’d do it, Claire, one way or the other.’

I scoffed. ‘And why are you so bloody sure?’

‘Because it’s what you’ve wanted all your life.’

I stared at him, puzzled, then drank more wine. ‘Why would you say that? I never talk about it, and certainly haven’t to *you*.’

Leo stared back. ‘Yes, you have. Don’t you remember, about seven years ago?’

I shook my head.

‘*Really?*’

The lights dimmed. ‘No. But shh, they’re starting again.’

After a moment Leo turned his chair to the musicians. What on earth did he mean? I’ve never told him about my dreams.

I pondered, and towards the end of the set, half-way through a slow sax solo, I remembered: and a wave of embarrassment flooded every cell of my body.

People applauded, the lights came on, the band left the stage. And still my face burnt. Leo got up, ordered more drinks at the bar and went to the bathroom. I thought wildly, can I climb out a window in the Ladies loo? (No. The windows are too small.)

The waiter brought our drinks over and I gulped half of mine before stopping, telling myself, look, it’s not that bad. Leo returned, sipped his beer, and gazed at me over his glass.

It was that bad.

‘I see you’ve remembered,’ he said.

‘How?’

‘I didn’t know shoulders could blush. Or arms. Legs too, I reckon. Will I check under the table?’

‘No!’

‘But why are you so embarrassed, Claire?’

‘You know why.’ How could the idiot not know *why*?

‘All right,’ said Leo patiently. ‘When you were fifteen you told me you desperately wanted to become a reporter. That time in front of the fire at my place. I never forgot. Why did you?’

I gazed at my drink. ‘Probably didn’t want to recall anything about that night.’

‘Come on, Claire. It was *nothing*, we were just kids. Practically an accident. Bet you’ve kissed a few other guys since then.’

‘Of course I have. Look, it was ages ago and just a stupid, childish moment. But I’d still prefer it forgotten. *Okay?*’

‘Okay.’

I took another drink. I certainly have kissed other guys since then, and more. A year ago I decided the time had come, and enticed one of my post-grad dates into my bed. A nice man, attractive, thoughtful. It was interesting. I tried another. Pleasant but no fireworks, so I’m *still* not sure what all the fuss is about.

Yes, I have kissed a few other guys since then, Leo: but not with precisely the same effect.

I drained my glass, but the music was over, the evening clearly winding down.

‘Maybe we’d better —’ said Leo.

‘Yeah.’ I stood up, wobbling. ‘Okay. Might visit the Ladies.’

Staring in the mirror, I wiped a smear of mascara from under one eye, applied a new layer of lip gloss and ran my fingers through my hair.

Tina met us as we were leaving. ‘Leo, here’s my car keys. The Mini’s parked outside my house, so take Claire home to Balmain.’

‘I can get the bus,’ I said unsteadily.

Tina smiled. ‘Off you go, love.’

Leo and I walked the two streets from the club to Tina’s house in silence. I had a bit of trouble with my heels. The footpath seemed ... unreliable. I sat down in the passenger seat of the Mini with a sigh of relief, glad someone else was at the wheel. Some woozy time later we were driving through Balmain.

‘Ah, this way, down here, Leo.’

'I know.'

'Wait,' I said. 'Don't.'

'Don't?'

'Turn left instead. Along here, beside the park. And down there.'

We drove until the street ended and the harbour lay beyond. In Elkington Park the leaves of the Moreton Bay figs whispered in the summer air.

'Claire? Maybe you should go home. You're a bit pissed.'

It was hard to focus, but I blinked and shook my head. 'But how would I *do* it, Leo?'

'Do what?'

'I really, *really* want to be a reporter.'

'Suppose you go and find a low-level job, pass the cadet exams, then work your heart out.'

'Come on. How do I even *get* a low-level job?'

'Guess you need a connection in the business.'

'But I don't know *anyone*.'

'You sure?' He smiled. 'Claire, you know one of the most powerful people in Sydney.'

'I do?'

'Talk to Tibor's dad. The crims and the newspapers have always been good mates.'

'Mr *Adler*?'

'He's pretty fond of your family, after all. Remember when Yvonne published Mrs Adler's cookbook and made her a fortune?'

'But I thought he'd gone all respectable.'

'I reckon a few proprietors still owe him favours. Give it a go.'

Lights rippled on the water, leaves rustled overhead, and suddenly my mind was swimming with possibilities, amazing, stunning possibilities.

'Leo, oh fuck, that's *incredible*!'

He laughed aloud. 'Is that the judgement of restrained, sensible Claire?'

'Who?' I reached out and took his head and kissed his mouth as if I've never kissed anyone since that moment in front of a fire when I was fifteen.



Afterwards I didn't see or hear a word from him. The Christmas party came and went, but he stayed behind in Newcastle. Jen said he was going into the army in January: this month. Now.

Stop it, Claire. You *cannot* let yourself think about Leo! Today is far too important.

After all, it's the start of my new job at the Daily Mirror and I'm sitting dry-mouthed and neatly-dressed on the 433 bus from Balmain to Central Station.

The air is warm, thankfully not too muggy. I get off at Central, walk to Elizabeth Street, a couple of blocks further to the corner of Kippax and Hay, and there's Mirror Newspapers Limited, a plain brick building of five or six storeys. They say everything rumbles when the massive presses start up in the basement.

A woman at the reception desk phones the Social Department, and a friendly girl comes to get me and takes me up in the lift. I sign some papers and get shown to a desk with a pile of scruffy folders on top. Reassuringly, there's a fairly modern typewriter there too.

Another woman (says she's Mary something) dashes over. 'I've got to go out this *minute* to do an interview. Here are my notes from the big weekend wedding. Type them up for me, will you?'

At my dazed look, she says, 'You *can* read shorthand, can't you?'

'Yes. Okay, that's—'

But Mary is pulling on gloves and settling her hat as she dashed out the door and away.

I don't actually want to be a secretary but it's the only way into a newspaper job for a woman, so I've done a shorthand and typing course at Mrs Moggs' Secretarial College. The shorthand in Mary's notebook is more idiosyncratic than anything Mrs Moggs ever taught us, but eventually I get the notes transcribed and try to make a story out of them.

By then it's mid-morning and the tea-lady brings around her trolley. I take a welcome cup of tea and an arrowroot biscuit. There are seven other desks in the room, with women typing busily, or carrying papers here and there. I get a few sympathetic *hellos* but no one seems to be in charge of telling me what to do.

Just after midday Mary dashes back. I hand her my transcript and most recent attempt at an article. She reads quickly, then winces slightly. 'Oh. Maybe we need to —' She looks up. 'Want some lunch, Claire?'

I follow her down in the lift and she takes me to a small Greek cafe nearby. We get ham and salad sandwiches and sit in a booth.

After a few mouthfuls, Mary says, 'You're looking a bit less stunned. Good.'

'I'm not sure what I'm supposed to be doing, Mary. Are you my boss? Do I get any training?'

'No, it's sink or swim, pal,' she says. 'I'm not your boss, and in fact we don't see him very often, he's always at the pub or playing golf. But we girls know what's needed for copy each week. So just have a go at whatever anyone throws at you. You'll learn the ropes soon enough.'

'Okay. What were you busy with earlier?'

'Society morning tea. Took one of the photographers, got a few snaps and stories about an offspring's wedding, a charity do coming up, and someone else's travels. The usual.'

'Oh.'

Mary smiles. 'Not your idea of fun?'

'Actually — I'm hoping to sit the cadetship exams.'

'Really?' she says. 'Usually only the boys do that and anyway, the job's just carrying copy from desk to desk and picking up whatever you can from the reporters. They're pretty uncivilised too, so I doubt they'll temper their foul mouths just because a girl's come into their territory.'

'I know it'll be rough — but come on, it's the nineteen-sixties.'

Mary shrugs. 'They'll send you out to do their legwork so they can get more pub-time. Police reports, murders, road accidents, gambling raids, scandals. Pretty gruesome stuff.'

'But I'm interested in politics and current affairs too. Perhaps ...?'

'Politics is a very cushy beat and they won't let a girl in easily.' Mary appraises me. 'And you're probably too young and pretty to survive. What, twenty-one?'

'Twenty-two. And I've done uni. Women aren't very welcome there either.'

‘True. What subjects?’

‘History, French, Political Science.’

Mary nods. ‘Not bad, though you’ll still be up against it. But I’m puzzled, Claire. How *did* you get a job here anyway? There are queues around the block for anything we’ve got.’

‘Oh, a family friend suggested me to the proprietor.’

One eyebrow lifts. ‘Ah. That’d be the way.’

‘But I’m *serious*, Mary. I’ll work as hard as possible.’

‘Guess we’ll find out. Anyway, let’s go and write up this morning’s stuff. *And* sort out that article you did. You won’t get a cadetship if you can’t string a proper story together.’ She smiles. ‘But the Social Department will smooth off your rough edges. We’re smarter than we look.’

3. LEO: SCHEYVILLE (FEB-NOV 1967)

Basic training is hard, and different from anything I'd expected. Officers worry more about how we roll up our socks than how good we are with guns. The yelling is unbelievable — the sergeant-major won't have vocal chords left in a few years. And the food is disgusting.

Two weeks into this hell they show us a cheery propaganda film and ask us to apply for officer training school at Scheyville. I don't hesitate. Officers have food we can only dream of, and people don't yell at them all the time.

Bazza is pissed off with me, but this is survival, mate.

So I do the interviews and sit a few tests. Another medical and some 'outdoor leadership exercises' involving ropes and logs. No sweat. I'm nervous the day the sergeant reads out the names, but when I hear mine I wonder how I could ever have doubted it. Bazza always said I was a smug shit and he's probably right.

When I ring and break the news to the family, my parents are pretty happy my moment of reckoning has been postponed for six months. I doubt my sister cares, probably because it doesn't involve Mary Quant shoes, whatever they are.

Dad says, 'Skyville? Where's that?'

'Near Windsor, outside Sydney. It was a migrant camp after the war.'

'Oh, *there*,' said Dad. 'Scheyville. Now I'm with you.'

'Yeah, so they decided they needed more officers for training the conscripts.'

'And commanding platoons in Vietnam,' Mum says flatly.

Sometimes I wish my mother didn't have such a good grasp of politics. She was in British intelligence during the war, though she never speaks of it. But it gives her an unfair advantage. I can't bullshit her very easily.

'Yeah, but who knows, Mum? Maybe it'll all be over by then. Anyway, better food, better pay — I'm not complaining.'

I can almost hear a certain look I know well passing between my parents, so I quit while I'm ahead. 'Anyway, gotta go, there's half a dozen blokes waiting to use the phone.'



Scheyville? Fuck me dead, it never stops. A marching pace that's basically running. Lessons and exercises all day, every day: fieldcraft, tactics, military law, navigation, physical training. Just minutes allowed between classes to change from boots and greens to training kit and back again, and woe betide anyone who's late to a lesson or meal or whose room isn't immaculate. At least we do have our own rooms, small and basic, with a little blessed privacy.

We're allocated a 'father,' an officer candidate who's done the first three months of the course so is in the senior class. If we screw up he gets punished too. My guy is nice enough but reserved, probably worried about what disasters I'm going to draw down upon our heads. With good reason.

The punishment for screwing up is 'extra drills', or just *extras*, which means up at 5.30 am, in full gear and on the parade ground by 6.00 am. Full gear is boots, greens, field equipment, pack, bedding, rifle, sewing kit (yes), boot polish and water bottle.

Some crisp drilling, then the gear has to be broken down and displayed in inspection order on our beds. After that (oh Jesus), a mad dash for breakfast, then a race back to make sure the room itself is ready for inspection.

Our greatest sin is being separated from our weapon, the 7.62 mm self-loading rifle. Once I leant mine against the mail-room door as I entered for ten bloody *seconds*. I got three extras for leaving the rifle unattended. My 'father' was not very happy.

While hard to believe, some are worse than me at training and gradually our ranks thin. I thought I was fit before, but now I'm fitter than I ever imagined possible.

It's good to feel that sense of controlled power, that reserve of strength to call upon. Most of our trainers have combat experience from Borneo, Malaya and Vietnam, and they talk about '*when you go*' rather than '*if you go*.'

We're kept so busy there's no time, or desire, for reflection. Most of my mates take the approach that (a) it's their job, (b) they're pretty good at it, and (c) if some bastard's shooting at them then they'll get what they deserve.

If we survive the course we'll be commissioned as second lieutenants, supposedly capable of commanding the lives of an infantry platoon, thirty-five men or so. We do field exercises at night, at dawn, at the end of long, exhausting days. We learn how to attack and defend, to take cover, to manoeuvre, to slip in and out of essential positions during patrols.

We calculate distances to targets, we move in ten-man sections, we give silent field signals, respond to contact, ambush, and counter-ambush situations. We study military history and do weapons drills over and over until we have blisters on top of our calluses.

During battle inoculation exercises we're hit with the overwhelming racket of gun, mortar and artillery explosions, and somehow still have to prevent it affecting our concentration.

Even when we're not training we're playing viciously brutal sports. We have a little leave, usually one night and the following day and evening. Just long enough to get to Sydney, enjoy spending our minuscule pay, then return. On time or else.



One weekend I borrow a mate's car and race off to Newcastle. I check in with my parents, then go to see Shazza: though she likes me to call her Sharon when we're in bed. Hey, I'd call her anything she wants when she's there, all soft and warm and perfect.

After an enthusiastic homecoming, she says, 'Will you get lots of leave, Leo?'

I'm still catching my breath, but manage to say, 'Not much.'

I know there's another guy Sharon likes, a plumbing apprentice whose marble didn't get drawn. 'Seen Thommo lately?' I ask.

She shakes her head vigorously. 'Um, no.'

Ah, Shazza.

I kiss her, and after a little teasing we go for it again. It's as great as the first time, but when we say goodbye I feel a bit low.

Shazza told me that Bazza's already been deployed to Vietnam with the Seventh Battalion, 7RAR. Hope he's okay.

At breakfast next morning my parents still seem stunned at the sight of me.

Dad says cautiously, 'You're looking very smart, Leo.' I run my hand over my head. Can't get used to the short back and sides.

Jenny — now apparently calling herself Jen — says, 'Did you cry when they cut your hair off?'

'No, pipsqueak, I didn't cry.'

'What will you be when you finish officer training? A *general*?'

'A second lieutenant, if I make it. But there's a thirty percent drop-out rate. It's not easy.'

Surprisingly my little sister says, 'You'll make it, Leo, I'm certain of it.'

I laugh. 'You'd better tell our sergeant-major that. Anyway, the sun's shining and I haven't been to the beach for ages, so I'll see you lot later.'

I go for a nice surf at Nobby's then lie on the sand in the April sunshine. Not many others around. The water is slowly crashing, wave after wave. It's hypnotically soothing and, for what feels like the first time in months, I relax.

And, of course, my mind blank, I think of Claire.

Claire.

Last Easter — a year ago now — I was in a strange state of semi-suspense. The draw for my intake of nashos was still a few months away and I was doing teacher training, mainly because there wasn't much else possible with my crappy degree.

On a quick trip to Sydney I arranged a night out at Tempo with the older members of the horde, Tibor, Asher and Claire.

Claire was already there. I ordered drinks, carefully trying not to notice her bare shoulders, her soft fair hair, her spectacular new dress.

Then Tibor, who'd organised the evening, didn't even bother turning up, the drongo. At least Asher came. He's only a year younger than me, but somehow he's a different generation. Still, he's great to be around, messy, hopeful, enthusiastic, and how he yearns for peace, the fool.

Has no idea what he's up against. Doesn't he know if the military doesn't have someone to fight it won't get any funding? There's *always* got to be an enemy. Doesn't matter who, anyone will do. Now it's those poor buggers in Vietnam.

Asher, mate, no matter how many marches, sit-ins, lectures you do: no one will listen. No one will care. I think about the badges that weigh down his shirt. *Draft beer, not boys. End national servitude. Smash U.S. Imperialism. Bread not bombs. Vote with your feet, vote in the street. Withdraw all troops now.* And the glorious perennial: *Make love, not war.*

Oh, I wish.

Still, what a way to meet girls. Asher's always got a new one, and he left half-way through the evening to go and paint placards with some cutie. Bastard. Still, it was a good night, the music great, and Claire was looking ... amazing, all blue eyes and pale-gold hair.

I kept telling myself, think about Shazza, pretty hazel-eyed Sharon, her nipples hard and coral-pink. Our first time had happened just the previous *weekend*, for fuck's sake! Why would I even notice another woman?

But then somehow Claire and I were talking about the past, when we were barely more than kids. That night beside the fire. Her sweet mouth. Her amazing scent. Her fury with me, too — at her own vulnerability, I suppose. She's certainly kept me at arm's length ever since.

Just memories, that's all, I told myself. Be sensible. Anyway, she was totally pissed. Tina told me to drive Claire home. Okay. She was *so* drunk, she could hardly get herself to the car. Off to Balmain we went. Then she wanted to go to her beloved park. Down the street to look at the water. Ignition off. Silence.

She was unhappy, thinking a life as a reporter would free her. How to make it happen?

I mentioned Moshe Adler, the man with a finger in every Sydney pie, the man whose reputation alone was as good as a bunch of goons to guard Tina's club. Mr Adler? She'd never even considered what he meant to her family, or what he might do to help her.

But when she did — and I can't suppress my smile — that kiss. Oh, *Claire.*

Followed by my long, stupid silence. Christ knows why. Maybe my own confusion — how could I tell her about me and Shazza? Claire's not that sort of girl, she's always got a sort of untouched air. (Still, I wonder how many other guys she *has* kissed?)

And when my marble was drawn, life suddenly became so confusing and shadowy. How could I figure out *anything* then?

I go for a few more surfs, get a burger from the kiosk, lie down and have a snooze. All too soon it's evening and the sliver of daytime moon is turning silver.

Will it look like that in the sky over Vietnam? Closer to the equator, might be different. And doesn't it rain a lot there? I think of fog, and dripping jungles, and clouds of smoke from artillery shells.

Despite the warm air, cold seeps through the sand beneath me. Time to get going. A quick shower at home and goodbyes to my family, who still keep staring at me in puzzlement. I didn't think I'd changed *that* much.



At Scheyville we're watched constantly, marked on everything. Our scores are even fed into a computer, with punched cards collating every screw-up. Or occasional success.

After three months, and the winnowing of more candidates, we become the fathers to a new batch of cadets. Now it's platoon-level work, coordinating thirty or forty men during live-fire exercises, with *real* bullets zipping over our heads.

We call for artillery onto coordinates that may be only metres from our own positions, but luckily those gunners aren't shooting the real thing or, in one horrifying incident, I'd have got us all killed.

We're taught about Vietnam and the Australian forces headquartered at Nui Dat, fifty-odd miles south-east of Saigon. We even get a smattering on the politics of the whole situation, but the wisdom of ever having got involved in the first place isn't much examined.

This six months has been such a grind of learning new, and undeniably interesting skills, that I haven't had time to think about what the ending might mean.

It's expected we'll soon be allocated to the Infantry corps, go to Queensland for jungle training, then be shipped off to Vietnam. But conscripts nowadays have broader skills than the volunteers of the past, so we're given the chance to apply for other corps, like Artillery, Signals, Engineers or Intelligence. We're handed a form and told to specify three preferences, keeping in mind, as always, the outcome depends upon administrative whim.

Surprisingly, some of Asher's anti-war diatribes seem to have stuck, and I realise I've got slightly different views of what's going on than most of the guys. My parents' weary replies when I was spouting all that crap about dominos are also a counter-balance to the general attitude it's only about Commies (them) versus Goodies (us).

In fact, lately I've had the growing feeling I don't really want to have to kill anyone. Our training has made it perfectly clear our job is not simply a matter of firing back at bastards who shoot at us first, but in some situations we're expected to be aggressors too.

And my error in coordinates that could have wiped out a platoon? I still wake up sweating about that. I don't *want* to be responsible for other lives. I'm barely responsible for my own.

I've tried talking it over with a few mates, but they don't seem to make any distinction between the semi-enjoyable demands of training and what lies ahead. Some are from pretty grim backgrounds or boring jobs, and say this is the best time they've ever known. Of course they feel apprehensive, but none feel — or admit to feeling — the way I do.

So all up, I've got reservations about staying in Infantry. The other corps? I'm a bit claustrophobic, so Armour doesn't appeal. Artillery? No, not after my excruciating mistake. Aviation? I prefer my feet on the ground. Engineers? I'd be a danger to myself and everyone else: I still carry the scars from Industrial Arts classes.

Specialist corps like Medical, Dentistry or Legal are obviously out, but then I start thinking about the Educational Corps, which trains soldiers wherever they're stationed. I never much wanted to be a teacher in the first place, but somehow survived it — so maybe the Educational Corps would be okay. I put it first, then Intelligence. Mum'd like that. Then Signals. Ah well, let's see.



In August, towards the end of the course, we're helicoptered to Gospers training area deep in the bushland. The flight is exhilarating, the work exhausting. We dig trenches and establish secure bases, practise search and clear operations, patrol through the thick bush, day and night.

The final exercise is the walk-out from the training area back to Windsor, twenty miles carrying fully-laden packs. It's not easy and I'm left with massive blisters on both feet.

But then it's over.

Our graduation parade in the winter sunshine is surprisingly moving, as we slow-march off between the ranks of our 'sons', soon themselves to be fathers to a new lot of bewildered recruits.

That night my parents and Sharon arrive for the graduation ball. I wear my formal patrol blues, with trouser stripes and high collar, my new second lieutenant's gold pips on my shoulders. And on my collar the badge of my posting: the flambeau, crown and boomerang of the Royal Australian Army Educational Corps.

Shazza looks amazing. Her hair is up with flowers in it, her eyes are shining and her cheeks pink. Her dress is some miracle of engineering that covers the essentials but somehow doesn't, and as we dance I get quite a few envious glances. (Though I dance pretty slowly, my feet still hurt.)

My parents have always got on well with Sharon, and all three are staying at a motel in Windsor. When we say goodnight I watch their car leaving the base, aching with lust.

A motel with Shazza? If only.



Next day, our belongings packed, we say our goodbyes and leave Scheyville behind. It turns out my Educational Corps posting is to the Third Recruit Training Battalion at Singleton, exactly where I began army life. Ho-hum. If nothing else, it's familiar.

There's one other education lieutenant at Singleton. He shows me the ropes, then I'm thrown in the deep end.

There are a lot of classes, ranging from basic literacy to courses for staff promotions, and after a time I start to enjoy them. The basic literacy guys, some with pretty difficult backgrounds, are defensive at first but slowly let down their guards.

Most try hard to catch up with what everyone else, including me, just takes for granted. I've always been a reluctant student but now I see how lucky I was to grow up in a house full of books, with parents to encourage me all the way.

At least now I'm not too far from said parents, and we're allowed a little more leave. One weekend I take the train to Newcastle, say hullo, borrow Dad's Holden and race off to Sydney.

I arrange drinks with the horde — I haven't seen them for a whole year and a half, not since that Easter: that amazing evening Claire kissed me.

Our official civvy outfit is black shoes and socks, grey trousers, white shirt, narrow tie and a dark blue blazer. I sigh. I look like someone selling Bibles. Still, who cares? Tempo awaits.

But even Tempo seems to have changed while I've been away. For a start the miniskirts are up to *here*, and the jazz is more like pop. Still, it's bloody good to see the others.

Smooth bastard Tibor is in a suit, his haircut carelessly styled to pretend he isn't. Asher is his usual scruffy self, though Mum told me he's under a lot of pressure: he was balloted in and is refusing to go.

And Claire is wearing something green that makes her blue eyes a sort of turquoise. I don't know. I can hardly look at her.

We have a few drinks and I get a lot of jokes about my hair, then Asher says, 'Hey, Leo — I'm up before the magistrate next week. Probably heading for prison time.'

'What?' I say. '*Prison?* Surely ...'

Asher shakes his head. 'Got to set an example.'

'Oh, mate,' I say. 'Sorry. Hope it's not too bad.'

'Don't you need him in Vietnam supporting you?' says Tibor.

'Nah. Anyway, who needs support? I'm stuck in Singleton, might never even leave the country.'

'Dream on,' says Claire.

'So, how's life at the newspaper?' I say as smoothly as I can, given how mesmerising she is.

‘Well,’ she says, ‘it was something of a wrench to leave the joys of the secretarial department behind — gloves, hats and demure demeanour — but I got through the cadet exams and was finally permitted to join the holy sanctuary of the newsroom.’

‘Congratulations!’ I say. ‘Didn’t I always say you’d do it?’

Claire’s eyes narrow with an unspoken *Don’t you dare*, so I shut my mouth.

‘Being simultaneously ignored and loathed is quite the experience,’ she says. ‘But I’m sure I’m all the stronger for it.’

‘Frying pan into fire?’ says Asher, grinning.

‘Absolutely. Now I run around with copy, learn curses I didn’t even know existed, and cover for reporters when the lure of the front bar outweighs gruesome autopsies on road-accident victims.’

‘But you’ll eventually be promoted, won’t you?’ I ask.

Clair laughs. Her hair is loose on her shoulders and I recall the scent and rippled weight of it against my face.

‘Promoted? Not bloody likely.’ She leans forward. ‘Our stories come in from the wire agencies, so one day I asked my boss why we don’t have our own reporter in Vietnam. Nah, no need, he said. So I offered to go myself.’ She takes a drink. ‘The newsroom’s hardly been able to stop snickering about it since.’

I’m horror-struck. ‘You? Are you out of your *mind*?’

Her face is cool. ‘I’ll go wherever I like, Leo.’

‘For God’s sake, Claire, I’ve just spent the last six months learning exactly why no one sane would go anywhere near that place.’ I can’t stop myself. ‘Don’t even *think* —’

She stares at me as if we’re total strangers and shrugs. ‘Shh. Music’s about to begin.’



Life’s pretty busy at Singleton, but a few weeks later I find time to have dinner with my long-suffering parents in Newcastle. They don’t hide their relief I’m still in the country, and I’m pretty glad to see they’re doing well too. Mum’s content. She works at the State Dockyard — she’s always been mad about ships, and Dad too, that’s how they met, about a million years ago.

Dad says he's still enjoying his practice, but he turned sixty-five this year and I suppose he'll retire soon. My sister Jenny — Jen — is bright-eyed and chatty, and doesn't seem at all worried about school.

Shoes still matter, but now the entire focus of her life is a record by the Beatles about some sergeant's lonely hearts club band. I nod and pretend enthusiasm. The sergeants I know swear like souls in Hell and would never wear satin.

When Jen goes upstairs to play records, we have coffee, then Mum says suddenly, 'Oh, I meant to tell you, love. Yvonne rang yesterday to say Claire's gone to Vietnam.'

'What? To *Vietnam*?'

'Just upped and left,' says Dad. 'Took her typewriter and bought a one-way ticket to Saigon.'

'But I *told* her not to go near the place. Jesus, why didn't someone stop her?'

'Not sure anyone's been able to tell Claire what to do since she was about six,' says Mum. 'But it's all right, love. Journalists usually stay in Saigon and Charlotte says that's been peaceful for a long time. And don't forget, she and Pete have been there since the mid-fifties. They'll help her.'

'Uncle Pete's too fond of a drink, and Aunt Charlotte? Mad as a cut snake. How can *they* help?'

Dad gazes at me over his glasses. 'Never let it be said I'd defend Charlotte, but she *has* kept that orphanage going since —' He thinks. 'When was it, love? When she and Pete ran off and got married the second time round? Dear Lord, you'd think *once* was enough.'

'Fifty-four,' says Mum. 'After her Général helpfully met his fate at Dien Bien Phu.'

'Wait on,' I say. 'Charlotte's previous husband died at Dien Bien Phu? We studied that. Encirclement, brilliant tactics by the Viet Minh, insane assumptions by the French. Wow.'

'No need to be quite so enthusiastic, darling,' says Mum drily.

'Oh, okay. But seriously, how the *hell* do we get Claire to come home again?'



A few days later, all my concerns for Claire have to be put aside. I'm informed that the Army, in all its wisdom, is assigning me away from Singleton. In December I'm to go to Canungra in Queensland for advanced jungle training, then join the small First Australian Civil Affairs Unit.

There's a certain logic to it. 1ACAU has a detachment in education, as well as detachments in engineering, medicine and agriculture. It's a fairly new unit, part of a pacification program designed to bolster support for the allies and the government in South Vietnam: for winning hearts and minds.

And there it is. Sorry, Mum, looks like I'm off to war.

4. VIVY: AMSTERDAM (JUN-DEC 1967)

How grudgingly men fall in love, I think, wiping off my eye-liner at the dressing-room mirror. My charming husband Henk sometimes seems almost resentful he fell so hard for me and threw away his easy bachelor life. Or at least fell so hard for the woman on stage, microphone at her crimson mouth.

I liked Henk and still do, so when I made it clear I expected little more of him than his name he became much nicer to live with. Now I don't really care about the pretty young friends he takes for 'drives to the country,' although I can't help but envy their silken skin and careless beauty.

Lately my face responds poorly to makeup and — I peer — oh, those bloody creases beside my eyes, although I'm only thirty. Surely my mother Charlotte looked younger at this age? She always seemed angelically beautiful to me, flitting between our Southampton farm and her war work in London.

'But I must help, Vivy,' she'd say. 'All those poor kiddies we're saving from the Nazis. You'll be much happier here with Daddy and Taffy. A *pony* couldn't come and live in London, after all.'

Quite true.

I think even her friends feel that Charlie's best moments were during the war. The rest of her life was something of a mess: affairs, divorce (from Dad) and remarriage to Louis, the French General. It seemed at last she'd found stability, but after years together Louis died in some stupid battle.

Then, soon after Louis' death, my mother visited Sydney, to hear me sing she told everyone. I was eighteen and believed her. It mattered after a lifetime of distance — the closest I'd ever had to a mother was easy-going Billie (who, to my delight, had just become engaged to Dad).

I sigh. That night, that extraordinary night at Tempo.

I was immersed in a slow Ellington number when Billie, a streak of green sequins, dashed out of the nightclub.

During the interval I noticed Charlie sitting surprisingly close to Dad, but really, I had no idea of what had happened.

Later, in the foyer, Dad gave me a sheepish kiss, got into a taxi with Charlie and drove away. Tina, watching, shook her head. 'I'd heard the bitch was ruthless, but she's something else. These things happen, Vivy. Billie'll be fine. Just a bump in the road.'

But it wasn't.

Charlie *had* to have a husband, even one she'd already discarded, so she stole Dad from Billie, took him away to bloody Vietnam, and left me behind without a thought.

But even if I'd realised at the time, would I have much cared? I laugh quietly. Probably not. After all, that was the evening I first slept with Steve: first slept with any man.



There's a tap at the door. 'Vivy,' says my manager Lucien. 'Here is Nina, remember?'

He ushers in a thin girl with dark hair, a heavy fringe over her eyes. She sits down quickly, glancing around the room. She's a new singer he's taken on — German he'd said — so I was expecting someone solid and blonde, not this semi-child.

'Nina has not much français, yes, darling? Only anglais. Vivy, please assist.'

'Hello Nina,' I say. 'Suppose I can help you find a place. Have you been in Amsterdam long?'

She shakes her head.

'Nina comes today on the train,' Lucien says in his husky voice. 'Peut-elle rester chez toi, Vivy?'

'A *ma* maison? Lucien, non!'

He shrugs. 'Henk n'est pas là. S'il te plaît, chérie. Two, three days, that's all. The last favour for me before I retire, I promise.' Not fair: he knows how much I'll miss him. I glance at Nina's slumped shoulders. Poor mouse, must have been a long trip.

'All right. You can stay with me for a few days to settle in.'

She looks up and I'm slightly taken aback. Her eyes aren't mouse-like at all, they're angry, suspicious. Oh, God.

We go back to our flat and I show Nina the spare room and make food, which she resentfully devours, then we have coffee.

After a time Nina says, 'This is not for long. My boyfriend is coming.'

'That's nice,' I say. 'What will you do then?'

'We will have our own place.' She gazes with dislike around my rather nice kitchen.

'Okay. Look, there are towels in the hall cupboard, and the bathroom's down there. I'm a bit tired, so why don't you sort yourself out as you please. I'm off to bed.'

Next morning my guest is a little less unpleasant. Maybe she needed a good sleep. In the kitchen she says hesitantly, 'I have made coffee. And omelettes. If that is okay ...'

'Perfect. Thanks, Nina.'

We eat, but she doesn't look at me.

Finally I say, 'So what are your plans for today?'

She smiles and it's a transformation. 'My boyfriend is arriving by train.' She meets my eyes. 'Tonight, he can stay here too?'

The spare room is a fair way down the hall so hopefully the noise will be contained.

I nod. 'Fine. For how long?'

'Only tonight and tomorrow,' she says. 'He has a friend who —'

'Great. Look, I have to do some shopping now. Here's a key. You'll be all right?'

She nods and says stiffly, 'Thank you.'



Steve Loukas played the piano in my backing quartet and the attraction had been building between us for a long time.

Three years older than me, he was handsome, dark-eyed and passionate. That extraordinary night at Tempo, Steve emerged from the dressing-room and I told him what had happened with Dad and Charlie, feeling confused.

The rest of the band appeared and Jeff the drummer said, 'Coming back to the flat, guys? Got some good grass. You might even try it this time, Vivy.'

I'd always resisted their light-hearted attempts to draw me into what they fondly imagined was the jazz lifestyle, but this time I cleared my throat and agreed. We crammed into Jeff's old Morris and went back to their flat near the Conservatorium, where they were all studying. They were very serious about their musical training and Steve the most serious of all.

The boys smoked a few joints though I didn't (and almost never have in my life, my voice is too important). But I drank some wine and we played records and chatted. I was simply content to watch Steve's face—darkness, light, concentration, pleasure.

When the others drifted out to the kitchen for food he came to sit beside me on the couch, to show me a new record, he said. It was a Thelonious Monk album, but all I remember is his hands holding the cover as he read some of the liner notes to me.

The others were making a lot of noise and arguing about butter, cheese and random condiments, and Steve murmured, 'Let's go somewhere quieter.'

Then, in his room, the long-awaited moment: kissing, discarding of clothes, touching of mouths, chests, thighs. The comfort of bed, the sweet, strange pressure of a body on mine in the semi-dark, a faint landscape of veins across Steve's hands as he caressed me.

Our breathing a rhythm as easy as music, then a pang, a driving towards an expanse of possibilities, and afterwards, the shy reality. Tissues. Soft laughter. Blankets drawn up. And arms, shoulders, feet, finding their first tentative accommodation with each other.



Steve and I were together for three years. I was singing at most of Sydney's jazz venues, then Steve graduated and wanted to study classical music in Greece, his grandparents' homeland. The band teased him, because he'd spent most of his life trying to escape from his background.

(Billie, who got over Dad's betrayal and ended up happily with Steve's father Nikos, would say she always thought his real name wasn't Stavros, but Call-Me-Steve.)

At the time I lived in the basement flat at Klara and Yvonne's.

I'd moved there at sixteen to become wise young Claire's babysitter, although the family joke, mostly true, was that it was really the other way around.

After Steve and I got together, Yvonne says there were a lot of slammed doors in the basement, as we fought more and more. I didn't want him to go. I wasn't sure enough of myself to think I had a chance in the European jazz scene, and we fought.

The break came one sad evening at Nikos and Billie's place, where we'd assembled to watch some stupid satellite. Steve held me close in the dark, away from the others at the barbecue. He was leaving in a fortnight. He didn't ask me to come with him. I'd already refused.

It was a big night. I noticed Tina in the garden, weeping, comforted by Billie. I think she'd been a widow for a year by then, ever since small-time crook Jimmy Kelso drove his car off a cliff. No one much missed him, but I expect it still upset her.

Poor Billie had to comfort me later in the kitchen as well, while Steve and Nikos talked over his plans in the living-room, their voices rumbling.

At home, Steve made promises in the dark. We'd always stay friends. He'd be back, only a few years apart. And, especially, he'd write to me every week.

But when we waved goodbye, streamers parting as the ship eased away from the wharf, with Nikos trying to hold back his tears and me not even trying, I knew it was the end.

Steve wrote to me once or twice, then never again. It hurt terribly.

We found a new pianist, but for the first time singing gave me little pleasure. Tina was good to me — we'd have late-night brandies or tea in her flat above Tempo. Róbert was three then, and would sometimes wake up for a cuddle, his round brown eyes as adorable as a puppy's.

'Is it the band?' Tina said one night. 'Perhaps you need to find another.'

'Not them really, though I don't much like the new pianist. He thinks I'm a perk of the job. And he's crap in the slow parts, has no idea about leaving me a bit of space to open up.'

'There aren't many players around who are that versatile, Vivy.'

'No. I've only ever had two — Steve and László.'

‘László,’ said Tina slowly. ‘Yes, he was good. Sometimes I almost imagine he’s still here, you know. You remember this used to be his flat?’ She sipped her brandy.

‘Oh, yes! He’d let the band crash here after gigs, and I’d snuggle up on the couch in your office. László always made sure I felt safe, especially in the club. Such a lovely man, taught me so much about music. Did you ever find out what happened to him?’

‘Jimmy said he’d gone travelling, implying he’d disposed of him somehow.’

‘Disposed? *Not* —?’

‘Not for lack of trying,’ says Tina. ‘Luckily László got away to Europe, but even after Jimmy died he didn’t want to come back. He wrote to me once — too many difficult memories, he said. I’ve heard nothing since and Moshe can’t find him either.’

László was barrel-chested, brown-eyed and cynical, always smoking his favourite cigarillos. He’d been a music teacher in pre-war Hungary, and a prisoner in the terrible Auschwitz camp, then he and Moshe Adler had arrived in Australia on the same refugee ship.

László helped Tina set up and run her nightclub. He also played piano like an angel and encouraged and accompanied me when I was just starting out.

I felt a twinge of guilt that I’d almost let him slip from my mind when he’d done so much for me. But Steve ... *bloody* Steve. He was all I’d thought about for so long.

Still, he’d been gone for months now and I really needed to forget him.

One morning I was noodling away on the piano at Tempo, working on a new song. The club was closed and I didn’t notice Moshe Adler arrive.

Some mornings he’d come by to see Tina in her office, as he was involved in some way in the club’s operation. (Steve used to joke that’s why Tempo was never bothered by the Kings Cross criminals. Or the Kings Cross police.)

‘Most pleasing, Miss McKee,’ he said politely. ‘Are you settled in with the new band?’

‘No,’ I said, unable to pretend any more. ‘It’s not the same.’

He nodded. 'I believe you are wasted in this country. It is a suitable place to raise a family, but for culture and sophistication?' He shrugged. 'The kind of jazz you sing, the music you appreciate, it is wasted here. In my opinion, of course.'

'Thank you, Mr Adler,' I said. I hardly knew him except as Tibor's rather intimidating father, but he always had a similar look to László. Reserved, watchful, sceptical.

'Have you considered a career in Europe?'

I laughed sadly. 'It's been suggested. But here I've got family and friends. There, where I don't know *anyone*, don't have a *manager*, don't have the *money* —' I stopped, blinking. 'Sorry. Fact is I'm pretty lost. No idea what to do.'

I was surprised at my outburst—and my honesty—because since Steve left I'd been cultivating a facade of indifference. But Mr Adler simply nodded, sat down and lit a cigarette.

'Tina has mentioned your situation. I have contacts in Europe and if you wished to go I might be able to help. You would be safe under my protection, and I would make certain you had an honest manager. Are your parents, perhaps, in a position to assist you?'

I laughed shortly. 'We're not close. My mother runs an orphanage in Vietnam dedicated to her second husband, the late Général Louis de Ferrier. I'm not sure what my father, her first and third husband, thinks about that, but she's always been good with children. Impartially and in the collective, of course.'

'Ah. And not very good with her own?'

I gazed at the piano keys, suddenly blurred, and wondered why I was telling him so much.

'No matter, Miss McKee,' Mr Adler said. 'I would find the expense bearable and of course, you could repay me in time. You have excellent prospects.'

'But why?'

'I owe Tina a great deal. We both believe you have a fine career ahead.' He looked at his hands. 'And your music reminds me of my friend, László. It would please him.'

I left Australia in early 1958 and spent time in the London and Paris jazz scenes, building up a following and releasing a few albums that did reasonably well.

Eventually I repaid Mr Adler, and the manager he found for me, Lucien, became a good friend. A few years ago Lucien wanted to build a presence in Amsterdam, so I came here and met charming, urbane Henk, married him and stayed. He runs a small music business, Straat Records. That's been good for me too, of course.

Amsterdam isn't as well-known for jazz as Paris, but the giants of music still perform: lately I've seen Miles Davis, Charles Mingus, Ben Webster, Nina Simone, Ella Fitzgerald, and Art Blakey and the Jazz Messengers.

I like Amsterdam. I was raised in the English countryside, and Amsterdam's misty canals and old buildings feel welcoming. It's a country town where everyone knows everyone else, without Paris's intensity or London's war-damaged grimness.

And after all, I only lived in Sydney for seven years — from fourteen to twenty-one — and in some ways I feel more at home here than I ever did in the beautiful harbour city. I don't regret Amsterdam.



Henk has returned from his weekend away, so we kiss and chat. I go to lie down for a rest before tonight's performance, and Henk follows me into the bedroom. I'm tired, but my shoulders are sore and he's a wonderful masseur. And lover.

Afterwards he takes a shower, and I fall asleep, relaxed. Our relationship is a puzzle, not only to our friends, but often to me. I enjoy his company and don't care what he does or who he does it with when we're apart. Is it that odd, really?

It's dark when I awake. I dress for the nightclub, and find Henk in the kitchen, making us both supper.

At the table I say, 'Oh, I've just remembered. We've got a house-guest, a bad-tempered little sparrow that Lucien's foisted upon us for a few days.'

Henk groans. 'Again? Vivy, you *must* say no next time.'

'She's only staying one or two nights, but she's collecting her boyfriend from the station today, so he's staying too. I'm sorry, darling.'

‘Early to bed for me, I think,’ Henk says gloomily. ‘She will demand I produce a record for her.’

I get up, kiss him and put on my coat. ‘I’d better go.’

‘Do you wish me to drive?’

‘No, it’s only a couple of blocks, and it’s not raining. I’ll be fine. See you later.’

It’s a fairly quiet night at Het Tuin, The Garden. I do my best but the crowd is small. The owner, Geert, shrugs his shoulders as I leave. It’s a chilly spring and I walk briskly home.

When I’m taking off my coat, I hear laughter from the lounge room. Henk, Nina and the newly arrived boyfriend, I suppose. Henk must have found them pleasant enough, as he hasn’t retreated to bed. I make myself some tea in the kitchen then go to greet everyone.

‘Ah, darling!’ says Henk as I open the door to a fog of cigarette smoke and alcohol fumes. ‘Join us. Will you have a whiskey?’

‘No thanks, love, tea’s fine. Hello, Nina — and this is?’

The man is on the couch beside her, and as he turns I’m struck dizzy with realisation, my heart pounding. The voice I’d been hearing was familiar, the form in the dimness is familiar, and the face gazing at me is shockingly familiar.

Nina says proudly, ‘Meet Stav, my boyfriend.’

He stands and there’s no mistake. He holds out his hand and I shake it quickly, then sit in an armchair before my knees betray me.

‘Hello Vivy,’ Steve says evenly. ‘Thanks for having us here. It’s good to see you again.’

‘Isn’t it wonderful, darling?’ says Henk. ‘Fancy your old friend from Australia turning up like this, with his pretty girlfriend!’ He goes to the drinks cabinet. ‘I think this is certainly cause for a celebration. Nina, Stav — let me refill.’

Nina tells us in excruciating detail how they met in Germany last year. Then, such *amazing* good luck, just as Nina signed a contract for Amsterdam, Steve (Stav now, apparently) was offered a contract teaching music theory at the Amsterdamsch Conservatorium.

‘Amazing,’ I murmur. I clear my throat. ‘Look I’m a bit worn out, think I’ll —’ I stand. ‘Lovely to see you again, ah, Stav. Must catch up on all the gossip. Goodnight, everyone.’

I make it out of there without falling over. Bathroom, teeth, face cream, nightdress, bed, lights off. But oblivion doesn't come, and I lie on my back staring at the ceiling. The murmur of voices and laughter drifts down the hall to my bedroom.

For God's sake, focus on something else, anything else.

Oh, right, I think bitterly. That'd be Charlie's latest demand. Over time, via letters and phone calls, we've rebuilt a sort of relationship, although I haven't seen her for years. Why on earth would I go to hot, dangerous Vietnam?

But now my mother wants me to check on a château in Normandy left to her by Louis de Ferrier. She's fond of it, and understandably so — I have wonderful memories of the place too from childhood holidays.

In recent years my parents would visit there, but I refused to go to see them as I was still too angry at their casual abandonment of me.

About four years ago the place was rented out. I was living in Paris then, so finally agreed to go on my parents' behalf to sign papers and check the tenant was suitable. He was: some bland Englishman with the funds and the will to take on a long lease.

It's not even a château either, that's just Charlie's usual pretentiousness, it's just a neglected old villa. The Englishman said he'd fix things, but I have no idea if he has, and now he needs money for more maintenance. So my mother wants me to check whether the proposed repairs are necessary.

Of course I can't go right now: the summertime tourists will soon be flocking to the jazz clubs. But perhaps when it's cooler? If Nina and her boyfriend are going to be hanging around I might want get away for a while. That thought at last is soothing and I slowly fade into sleep.



I wake early. Henk is snoring quietly and I get up and quickly wash and dress. I'll go for a walk, clear my head. This isn't such a disaster. The European music scene is closely connected and I'm just surprised we haven't run into each other before over these last ten years.

In the kitchen, Steve — *Stav* — is at the sink. He turns. ‘Want an apple? I was just stealing one.’

‘Please, help yourself to anything,’ I say. ‘Just off for a stroll. See you later.’

I flee. I don’t want to talk to him. What could I possibly say? I don’t want to know what he’s been doing. Who he’s been doing it with. I’m content, my life is settled. I don’t *want* to talk to him.

Around another corner and ahead is a small green park. I find my favourite bench. A few rays of morning sun emerge and glimmer on the small pond. An elegant blauwe reiger, a blue heron, stalks thoughtfully among the reeds.

I take a deep breath, close my eyes and relax. Footsteps crunch as someone walks on the gravel in front of me. I look up. Oh God.

Stav says awkwardly, ‘Sorry. I wasn’t following you. Just came down that lane there and across the grass.’

‘Of course,’ I say. ‘Lovely morning for a walk.’

‘Yes.’ He gazes into the sky. ‘Might rain later, though.’

‘Suppose it might. Usually does. Here in *Amsterdam*.’ My teeth are suddenly clenched.

‘Look, Vivy, I’m really sorry we ambushed you last night. I had no idea it was your place.’

‘Oh? Nina didn’t mention any of Lucien’s more prominent clients when he signed her?’

He shrugs a little. ‘She’s not much interested in other singers.’

There’s a silence, then he sits gingerly on the end of the bench. More silence.

‘Are you well?’ he says.

‘Oh, yes, I love Amsterdam. My career is fine. Henk and I are very happy.’

Stav clears his throat. ‘Good. I’m looking forward to living here. I’ve spent most of the last ten years in Athens, Vienna, Rome. Suppose that’s why we haven’t crossed paths before.’

‘Suppose so.’

‘Sorry I didn’t write much.’

‘Wasn’t really expecting it.’ (He’d *promised* and oh, how his silence had hurt.) ‘Starting a new life in Athens, you must have been busy.’

‘Overwhelmed. Confronting all the years I’d spent as an Aussie pretending I wasn’t half-Greek.’

‘Must have been quite a homecoming.’

‘No. My few relatives are on an island in the Mediterranean, my Greek was atrocious, and the coursework was almost beyond me. I nearly went back to Sydney several times.’

‘But you managed.’

‘Eventually. But that’s why ... in the end, I chose to be Stav, not Steve.’

I laugh lightly. ‘Well, I’ve stuck with the same name all my life. But I’m glad you’ve finally figured out what you want.’ I stand. ‘Now, I’m going *that* way. And I’d quite prefer it if you didn’t.’



A foolish moment of defiance. Nina quickly recognises Henk’s potential — perhaps as lover, but certainly as owner of Straat Records — and becomes a fixture around the place.

Over the second half of 1967 Stav and I are forced into a certain proximity, so we develop a bland social relationship, chatting lightly about music and concerts, and of course the news from Sydney.

My mother keeps nagging me about the villa in Normandy too: now it seems the rents aren’t coming through. My parents are prosperous enough, so I have no idea why this is such a concern. But in any case, I’m *certainly* not running off to France right now, my work is my priority.

Oddly, to the world I’m simply pretty Vivy, the sultry chanteuse; amusing and sophisticated. Most people have no idea how single-minded I am.

Do they imagine I get by without practising every day? That a repertoire of hundreds of songs simply bloomed complete in my mind? That my emotional interpretations are some sort of *accident*?

I have worked, dear God, how I’ve worked!

Unlike Nina, the sulky sparrow. She’s already the toast of Amsterdam, all tight jeans and gamine charm. She sings of lost love with a dewy pout and not the slightest edge of experience to convey the truth of it.

Oh, Christ, I'm getting old and cynical. I was so satisfied with my career before, but suddenly I'm tired and a little anxious. Am I afraid of losing Henk? Nina has become one of his 'little friends,' and suddenly she seems to matter, when none of them have mattered before.

It's absurd, but I'm even flirting with the idea of having a baby. I'll be thirty-one this year so I'm probably well overdue. When we married I stopped taking the pill, but didn't become pregnant. Henk was tested and came home joking, 'My swimmers are all fine,' so it was clearly me who had some sort of problem. At the time I wasn't interested in the exploratory operation the doctors suggested, but now ... perhaps?

And Stav? The passionate boy has become hard. He's fond of Nina, but it's clear music is still the only thing he loves. Perhaps all that kept us together so long ago was the single-mindedness we must have recognised in each other.

We quarrelled constantly: I don't remember why. All I remember is my yearning, the frustrated yearning no sex could ever satisfy.



Henk says, packing a shirt into his suitcase, 'Will I need my grey suit?'

'Unlikely, darling,' I say. 'Countess Frederika's weekends are always fairly casual.'

'Good. I doubt Nina has anything formal to wear in any case.'

'You could always get her something. Business expense, naturally.'

He smiles. 'Vivy, darling, you're not jealous are you?'

'Oh, just a touch. A bit bored, really.'

'It is only two weeks before we launch her first single. This exposure is important.'

'Of course.'

'My blue sweater, do you think?'

'Yes, that suits you.'

He puts it in the case then sits on the bed beside me.

'Vivy, you know you don't have to be bored. You know what we agreed.'

‘Yes, darling, but I’m not in the mood for an adventure.’

He runs his fingers through his blond hair, now fashionably long (Nina approves). ‘What about your old boyfriend, Stav?’ He shrugs. ‘He and Nina are pretty well done, I think.’

‘Oh? I thought it was the love of the ages. According to her.’

‘Everything changes, Vivy,’ says Henk, smiling with his quite extraordinary charm. ‘Except us, we know each other so well. I never want us to change.’

‘Well, better make certain Nina understands that,’ I say lightly.

‘She is very young. She will find out soon enough how the world works.’ It’s a relief to hear his words, and we embrace for a long time in the evening light.

Then he kisses me. ‘I love you, Vivy, never forget that. And I love our life together just as it is.’

‘Off you go, darling, and have a wonderful weekend. Give my best to Frederika.’



Tonight I’ve got a gig at Het Tuin, and Geert is cheerful. Even this late in the year we’re getting plenty of tourists visiting the club (relatively famous in Amsterdam terms), before they make their way to ogle the girls in the nearby red-light district.

Het Tuin runs over several floors in one of Amsterdam’s old, narrow buildings. I’m singing in the top room tonight, and when I come on stage I notice Stav at one of the side tables. He raises his glass to me and I nod. Suppose he’s at a loose end with Nina away for the weekend.

Still, what does it matter? The place is packed!

I launch into my first number and everything works, song after song. It’s satisfying: oh, more than that. I’d forgotten how pleasing applause from a large audience can be, and they call me back for three encores.

Later, I wipe off my makeup at the dressing-room mirror, and smile. What a night! Who cares about Nina or any of those hungry young chanteuses? They could never do the songs I do, with the expression, the mood, the sheer *depth* I bring to them.

A knock at the door, and Stav enters with a bunch of spicy-scented carnations, my favourite. I know he didn't have to go far to find them — Amsterdam has flower-sellers on most corners — but it's a nice gesture.

I accept his peck on the cheek and fill an old vase with water.

'Sensational, Vivy, the best performance of yours I've ever seen.'

'Well, you've missed rather a lot of my singing over the years, so that may not be the compliment you intend,' I say, arranging the flowers. 'But I'll accept it anyway.'

I sit down again at the mirror, to remove the last of the makeup. 'Nothing to do? You could have gone to Countess Frederika's manor if you wanted.'

Stav shrugs. 'Not sure I could stand hearing, yet again, about Nina's single being launched —'

'— in two bloody weeks?' I say. 'Nor me. Still, it must be a novelty for her.' (I may be permitted a little smugness. My sixth album, *Vivy After Midnight*, is selling very well.)

'I don't much care. Actually, Nina and I are finished.' He hesitates. 'But don't you mind Henk spending so much time ... with her?'

'It's his business.'

'Not quite what I meant.'

'But it's what I meant. We're adults and our marriage has a very strong foundation. Little friends with a lot more substance than Nina have come and gone over the years.'

'And — little friends of yours?'

'Oh? One or two.' I smile drily. 'I have a lot less free time on my hands than Henk.'

'You work harder, you mean.'

'Of course. If nothing else you should know that about me.'

'I do now. I'm not sure I understood it back then.'

I glance at him. Stav and I rarely mention our relationship, ended ten years ago. But I'm on a high from the night and suddenly that seems a long and forgettable time in the past.

'Look,' I say. 'Do you want to get some food? I'm starving, and if you've got any gossip from Sydney I'd love to hear it.'

Of course, in staid Amsterdam most restaurants are closed by now, so we end up at a street vendor's cart near Centraal.

We buy cones of patajes, the delicious hot chips with light mayonnaise sauce. Then we get coffee and sit by a narrow canal.

The Amsterdam autumn sky is typically overcast, but the night air is mild. I gaze at the rippled reflections of golden-lit bars along cobbled roadways, while Stav reads out a letter from his dad, Nikos. He and Billie are planning to sail their yacht to Tasmania, and I shudder at the prospect.

‘Weeks of discomfort and they’ll imagine they’re having a *wonderful* time.’

Stav laughs. ‘I couldn’t bear it either. They’re mad, both of them, all that sailing and flying. They’ll never understand the pleasure of just sitting down and enjoying music.’

‘Oh, I had a letter from Tina a few weeks ago,’ I say. ‘Apparently Americans on R&R are swamping Kings Cross, but they only like pop or psychedelic bands. She’s trying out some new programs at Tempo, but isn’t sure how it will go.’

‘Poor Tina,’ Stav says. ‘Her first love was jazz — must be hard to have to change.’

I nod. ‘At least here it’ll always find appreciative audiences.’

‘You hope. But what about *my* uncertain life? Experimental music only attracts the truly committed and if it wasn’t for teaching I’d never play a thing. And my contract *at the Conservatorium* is up in the middle of next year.’

‘What will you do then?’

‘Don’t know. London perhaps? Or maybe home to Sydney.’

I scoff. ‘If jazz has a hard time in Sydney, experimental music won’t have a chance.’

‘Unkind, but probably true.’

I can’t stifle a large yawn. ‘Think I need to go now. I’m exhausted.’

Stav walks me to the flat, a kiss on the cheek, then he’s gone. Good, that was a pleasant, civilised evening.



A fortnight later it’s Nina’s record launch. I don’t go because I’ve got a gig, but in any case she wouldn’t want anyone there who might attract some of the limelight.

Stav isn't invited because they've definitely parted. Nina's got her own flat now, paid for by Henk, I suspect.

So I have another good evening at Het Tuin, and Stav takes me out afterwards. But winter is almost here and the patajes cart shut, so Stav offers to cook me something at his flat.

'What?' I say. 'You mean you've got a saucepan left after the sparrow moved out?'

'You're joking. She's got no idea what saucepans are for.'

'And you do? Don't remember skills like that in Sydney. Seem to recall you and the band eating nothing but junk food.'

'I learnt to cook in Greece, student necessity,' he says. 'I'm not as good as Dad, but you probably won't get food poisoning.'

'That's a relief. Okay, let's.'

His flat is on the second floor of an old house overlooking a canal. The living room has a piano, guitar, flute, saxophone, music stands and stacks of notation books scattered everywhere.

'Ah,' says Stav, grabbing piles of music and moving them on top of other piles. 'Hadn't expected a visitor. Sorry it's a slum.'

'Musical slums are the best sort.'

He laughs. 'True. All right, here's a glass of red. And —' he puts a record on a turntable and carefully lowers the needle. 'Thelonious Monk's latest. See what you think.'

I sip the wine and watch the rain falling on the canal. Does he remember our first night together, when he read me the liner notes from a Monk album? I doubt it. Chopping sounds and metallic clanks come from the kitchen, soon followed by rather nice smells. After a time Stav brings in crockery and cutlery for the small dining table, then several steaming plates.

'Just ordinary stuff,' he says. 'Dolmades, spanakopita, salad.'

'Ordinary? I'm impressed. Smells great.'

The food is fantastic, and finally I say, putting down my fork, 'Well, if I get food poisoning it'll have been worth it.'

'You won't, I swear. So what did you think of the new Monk?'

'Great. The Ellington track is perfect.'

'You always did prefer the standards. I reckon he's going to get weirder and weirder and end up in my experimental music world.'

I smile. 'That I'd like to see.'

‘Ah, who knows. Maybe I’ll make my way back to jazz instead.’

‘That I’d like to see, too.’

‘Actually,’ he hesitates. ‘In the kitchen I realised something. Two months ago it was exactly ten years since that night at Dad and Billie’s. Remember, Vivy? When everyone came along to watch the satellite?’

‘Ah yes. The night we split up, you mean. Heavens, how time flies,’ I say drily.

He smiles. ‘After the other evening I wrote something. The canal, the patajes, the peace. I’ll play it for you later.’

‘The peace?’

‘Yeah. Didn’t you feel it?’

I nod slowly. ‘Yes. I liked the quietness, the simplicity of it.’

We clear up the remnants of the meal, then go to the living room with brandies.

Stav clears his throat. ‘Will I —?’ He waves at the piano.

It’s a short composition, perhaps five minutes. I watch him, focused on the music, his well-defined hands moving confidently, his black brows drawn in concentration.

He’s not as classically handsome as his father Nikos, there’s a certain dissatisfaction, even sadness, to his face. Who knows, perhaps his break with Nina hurt him more than he lets on.

Ten whole years since we parted? God. His ambition was always greater than mine — I wonder if he feared how much he felt for me, in case it held him back? Oh, *Steve*.

I try to see him objectively, as a stranger, but suddenly I’m swamped with the memory-sensation of the warm corner of his neck and shoulder, the place my head once fitted so well.

The music, Vivy, *concentrate*.

It’s exquisite. I hear golden ripples, soft air, the ease of friendship, of connection. Of old connection. Deliberately-suppressed connection. My eyes sting. Don’t be a fool. He’s not Steve, he’s Stav. And someone you hardly know any more.

The music flows like the canals, ending with shimmering droplets. A long silence. A breath. Of course I know him. I *know* this man. I get up and wrap my arms around him from behind, and the scent of his hair is heartbreakingly familiar.

‘You liked it, then?’ he says, a smile in his voice.

‘I liked it. Turn around.’

He does so. I sit on his lap and we embrace for a long time. I rest my head in the sweet angle of his neck and shoulder, and sigh.

‘Oh, dear. Henk wants me to have an *adventure* with you, so he doesn’t feel guilty about Nina.’

‘And what do you want, Vivy?’

I raise my head. This is the first time I’ve seen his eyes so undefended, so vulnerable.

I stroke his cheek. ‘I think, Stav, perhaps ... I want to have an adventure.’

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