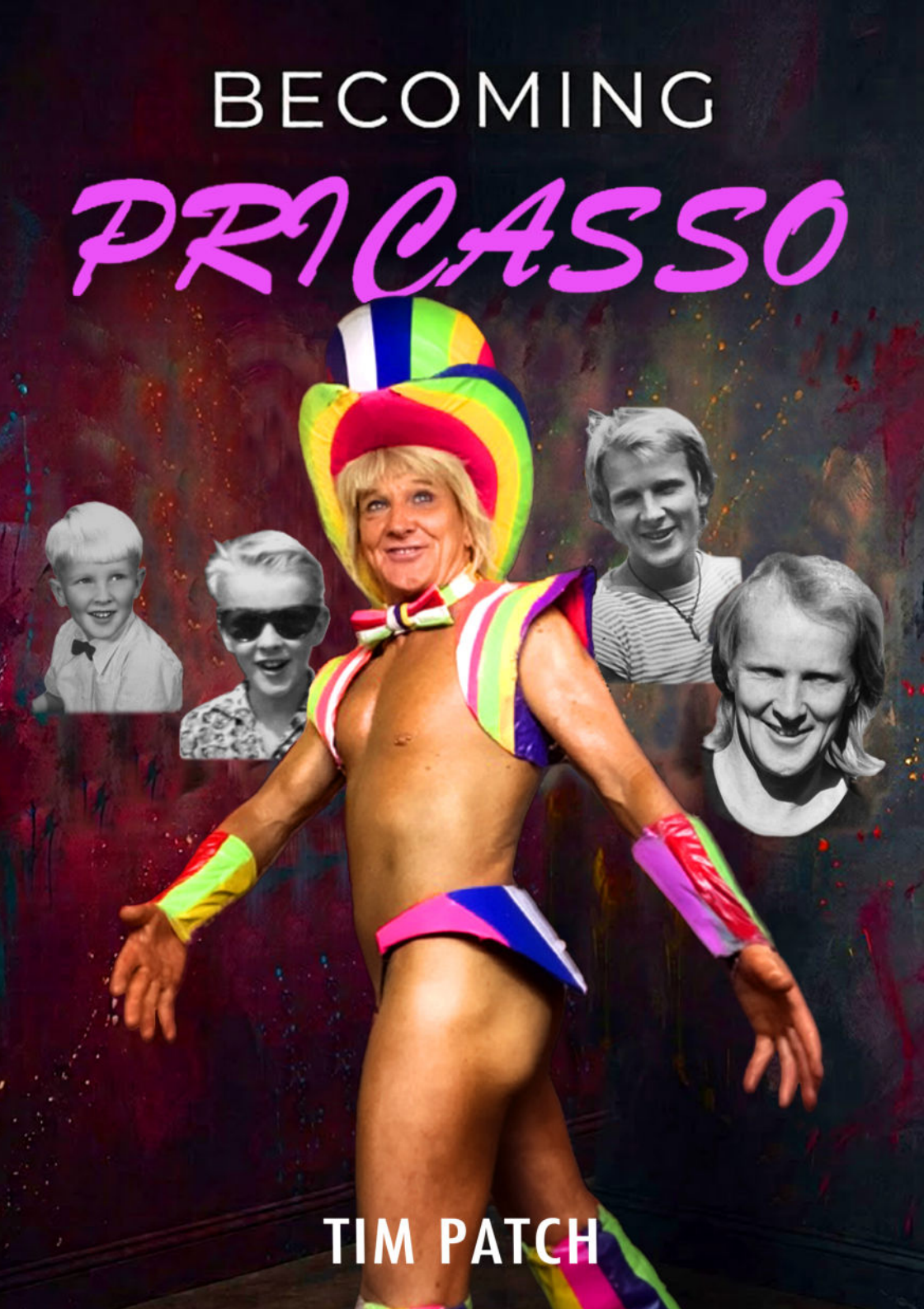
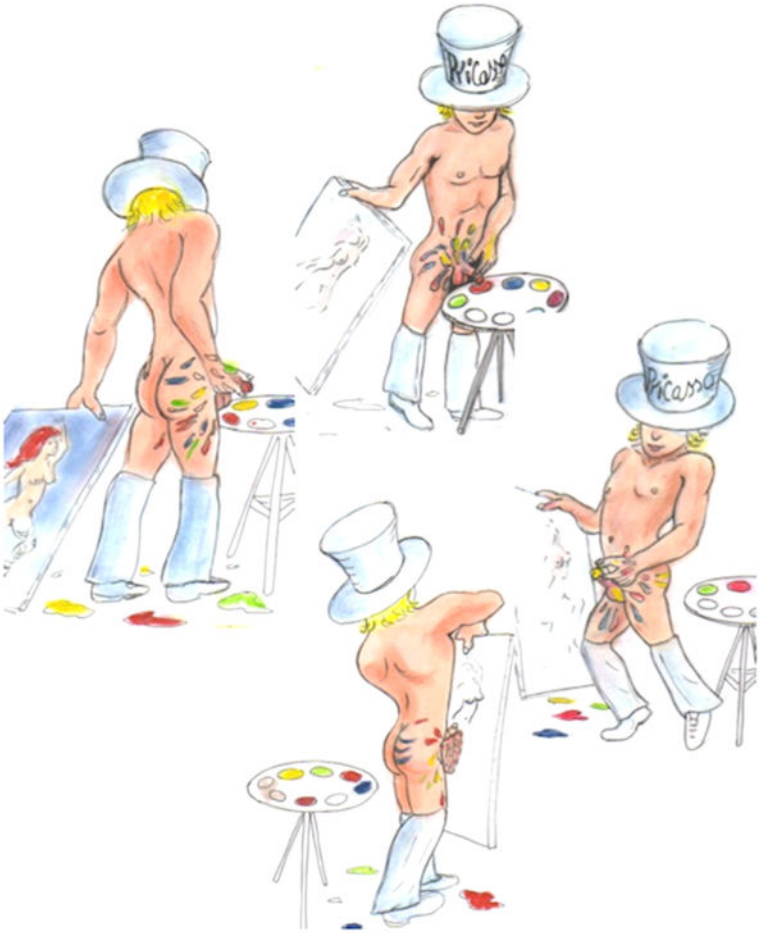
BECOMING PRICASSO



TIM PATCH

BECOMING

PICASSO



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PROLOGUE

Tim was an unassuming blond boy with an ordinary start in life, yet from an early age, he was captivated by his own reflection in the bathroom mirror. He saw perfection in that image and longed to share it with the world, but crippling shyness kept him silent.

The story follows Tim through the highs and lows of his life, from the first fumbling intimacies of adolescence to the crushes he nurtured during his years at boarding school, among both boys and girls.

Academically, Tim struggled with undiagnosed dyslexia, which hindered his progress, but he never lost faith in his artistic ability. However, his shyness betrayed him at every interview, costing him a place at any of the London art schools he applied to. Finding solace in manual work, he became a carpenter, a trade at which he truly excelled. Yet in that hyper-masculine environment, his youthful, boyish looks made him an easy target for teasing and persuasion. Encouraged by his workmates, he posed for sexually explicit photographs, a decision he would later come to regret.

Desperate to conform to society's expectations, he marriage, at an early age, raising a family and migrating to Australia, divorcing shortly after. With the help of his sister he started Hellfire Pottery. Now collectable on ebay.

He married again, but when his second marriage fell apart, he abandoned convention entirely and plunged into a raw and unfiltered odyssey of self-discovery, bondage, swingers' clubs, gay bathhouses, and naked performance art. It was during this chaotic period that he stumbled upon an improbable revelation, he became the first person in the world to discover that painting portraits with his penis was not only possible but deeply pleasurable.

CHAPTER 1

LOVING MYSELF

My love affair with my own skin began not in the bold sunlight of my mother's homeland, but in the steamy, cloistered warmth of an English bathroom. The house itself was a perpetual cocoon, heated against the damp chill by my Australian mother's unwavering decree: comfort was a sacrament. Perhaps it was a lingering fear, a phantom of the pneumonia that had twice rattled my small chest before I was four, that made her keep the radiators purring day and night. That warmth became the silent accomplice to my earliest act of self discovery.

There, in that bathroom with its fuzzy towels and the faint, clean scent of soap, stood the full length mirror my portal. Stripped of the itchy woollens and confining straps of childhood, I would stand before it, a pale, slender figure in the quiet hum of the house. The air was still and kind against my skin. I'd turn slightly, a young critic assessing a masterpiece only he could see. To my eyes, the proportions were perfect the smooth line from shoulder to hip, the straight legs, the neat arrangement of myself. A profound and simple wonder would bloom in my chest: Why do we hide this? Why must we bundle away this feeling of air and lightness?



The desire to parade, to share this perfect, unadorned self with the world, was a fierce, bright flame in my gut. Yet, it was instantly doused by a shyness so profound it was a physical force. My body, so traitorous in its honesty, would betray me in an instant. At the mere thought of attention, a searing blush would bloom like a rose stain across my fair cheeks and chest, a blazing banner of self-consciousness. So the mirror became my only audience, the warm, silent room my sole gallery. In that private space, caught between the longing to be seen and the terror of it, my appreciation took root deep, secret, and passionately alive.

Seizing every chance when the house was still and Mother elsewhere, I'd parade before that mirror. I'd often

hold my penis, a familiar and comforting weight in my hand, a private anchor in a confusing world. I'd twist and crane, trying to glimpse my backside, convinced with the unshakeable confidence of a child that my bum was far superior to the ones I'd glimpsed on my friends.

My constant companion in those early years was my sister, Sally, just a year older than me. We were inseparable two golden haired imps darting through the cottage and garden, turning every ordinary day into an adventure. She was my partner in mischief, my confidante, the other half of my laughter. Wherever I went, Sally was never far behind, her presence a steady comfort in our little world.

Our mother, though born in Australia, was the very essence of an English lady, elegant, effortlessly charming, with a voice that carried the refined lilt of someone who belonged in drawing rooms and garden parties. She would have been the sparkling centre of any gathering, my father hosted, or attended aboard the ships he commanded. He was an officer in the British Navy, a man of discipline and tradition, his life dictated by the tides and the Admiralty's orders. His long absences at sea meant that Mum was left to manage our home and manage it she did, with a resourcefulness that bordered on artistry.

Our garden was vast, a sprawling patch of earth that, in those post-war years of rationing and scarcity, became



our lifeline. Mum, ever practical, refused to be bound by shortages. She kept chickens that scratched and clucked in the dirt, their feathers ruffling in the breeze, and we lived on a steady diet of raw eggs, fresh milk, and vanilla essence, whipped into frothy golden drinks she called “egg flips.” She even raised pigs unusual sight for a naval officer’s wife their stout bodies rooting happily in the mud. I often wondered what my father, a man of strict naval decorum, thought of this miniature farmstead, but he rarely protested. We adored him, despite his long absences, and when he was home, his presence filled the house like a steady, reassuring tide.

One afternoon remains etched in our memory. Mum had gone out for tea with her friends, leaving Dad in charge a rare occurrence. He sat in his favourite armchair, the newspaper spread before him, a curl of pipe smoke drifting lazily toward the ceiling. Sensing the absence of Mum's firm hand, Sally and I grew wild with freedom, our laughter spiralling into shrieks as we darted through the house like a pair of naked nymphs, utterly unselfconscious in our joy. At first, Dad tried to settle us with a quiet word, but as our energy mounted, his patience frayed. Finally, he snapped "Bloody well stop!" his voice sharp as a whip crack. The effect was instant. Sally froze, her face crumpling in shock, while I burst into inconsolable tears. And then, as if summoned by the sudden storm of emotion, Mum appeared in the doorway, her keen eyes taking in the scene. I don't think we ever truly forgave Dad for that outburst or at least, we never let him forget it.

Mum and Dad had met during the war, when he was posted to Australia to teach mine-sweeping techniques to the Australian Navy a skill at which he was an expert. Mum, too, had been in the Navy, though her role was rather more glamorous. When I once asked her what her rank had been, she replied breezily, "Oh, I was one of the escort girls." I burst out laughing, but she only looked puzzled the term must have carried a different meaning in those days. She had been striking, well spoken, and capable behind the wheel, tasked with escorting visiting VIPs around Sydney. She must have been excellent at her job, considering she ended up marrying one of them. Her best friend, Mickey, had been assigned to escort a young naval officer named Philip later to become Prince



Philip during his visit to Australia. Mickey, ever the social climber, eventually married a much older, exceedingly wealthy man and named her son Philip in his honour.

Years later, when Dad received orders for a new posting, the entire family was to go with him. It was the beginning

of a new chapter one that would take us far from the thatched cottage, the clucking chickens, and the quiet, sun dappled lanes of the English countryside we had always known. I trace this love of bodily freedom back to the two years my father, a British Naval Officer, was posted to Australia the spring of 1954 I was 4 years old.

DAD POSTED TO AUSTRALIA

The environment itself seemed to breathe a warm, unburdened spirit that spoke to me, even as a small boy. Though I was too young on our first voyage out to remember much, one memory persists: the pale, washed-out green of the cabin walls, a colour that to me became the very hue of journey and change.

I had had pneumonia twice in the UK before the age of 4 so on arrival in Australia mum brought some cough mixture which I loved and always wanted small spoonfuls I loved it, a couple of years later back in the UK Dad found out it had a small amount of heroin in it. And was banned. So when I state i've never taken drugs in my life, I lied!

We settled in Neutral Bay, back then, a leafy, well to do suburb of Sydney where the houses seemed to whisper of quiet money. my sister and I started at a little school just streets away. Children then possessed a glorious,

unspoken liberty. We were allowed to walk to school alone, and we'd stretch those walks endlessly under the generous Australian sun, dawdling over cracks in the footpath and the droning of buzzing bees in the hedges.

I was an always artistic. I adored school and excelled in art. Haunted by the majesty of the ocean liner that brought us, I filled pages with ships, impressing my teachers by sketching them in three dimensions, bows breaching the paper as if steaming straight toward the viewer. In the playground, we'd grind rocks against concrete to harvest yellow and red ochres, mixing them with spit to make a gritty, primal paint.

Every morning at prayers, we'd recite, "Our Father, which art in heaven." My own father was often away at sea, so I quite literally believed I was praying to him, picturing him sailing on a great vessel named Heaven. I might have been artistic but wasn't a very bright child, but the logic was perfect.

Our back garden held mulberry trees and hydrangea bushes, great mop-heads of blue and purple. My memory paints the whole scene in a golden, sunny haze, scented with the medicinal tang of eucalyptus and the salty ozone rolling up from Sydney Harbour, just a stone's throw away. Everything felt looser, freer. We could walk to the local milk bar and buy a chocolate milkshake served in a frosty aluminium container, and we'd always slurp obnoxiously at the straw to get the dregs, much to the



delight of the gang of kids perpetually loitering outside.

There were many children around, some truly wild. I remember one afternoon following a friend to a house where a knot of excited, young kids had formed a tight circle. Pushing my way to the front I was terribly short I saw they had tied a boy, to a dustbin. What they intended next, I'll never know; a bolt of pure panic shot through me, and I turned and ran all the way home, back to the safety of our palatial harbour side home. Swimming lessons in the public baths, or to be more specific, a section of the sea caged off by shark mesh. They put us in a harness with a leash, held by an instructor walking safely on the boardwalk above. I can still recall the primal terror of wondering what lurked just on the other side of that metal grid a fear that, admittedly, sped up the learning process considerably.

I was talking to my sister recently, and she asked, “Can you ever remember either Mum or Dad ever giving us a cuddle?” I couldn’t. But I know they were devoted to us in their own way. They were simply products of their own unusual circumstances, their love shown in actions in driving through floods, in posting us across the world, in letting us walk to school under the vast, free Australian sky.

My sister, Sally, and I attended a tiny school called Myra dong, just a few streets away. I believe it was nestled in the grounds of a church, because my clearest memory is of leaning back during assemblies, gazing up at a vaulted timber roof. The beams arched high above like the ribs of some great, wooden creature, and in those quiet moments, I would drift into daydreams, lost in the geometry of it all.

One morning on our short walk to school: finding a giant block of ice that had tumbled from the ice man’s delivery van. (Yes, people had ice delivered then, used primarily in meat safes and keeping the beer cold maybe not in that order.) Sally and myself with a sense of momentous purpose, heaved it onto a tramline embedded in the road and waited, heart pounding, for the next tram to approach. It came with a clatter and a groan, only to nudge my frozen prize casually aside. “Bugger,” I thought, my hope for a spectacular explosion thoroughly dashed. I was a confused kid, sometimes waiting for the world to be more dramatic than it was, and sometimes not.

GRANDMOTHER'S HOUSE

Our grandmother provided a sanctuary. She lived in a modest house with wide, mosquito netted verandas in the beach side suburb of Corollary. Mum would deposit us there some weekends. Grannies garden was a wonderland, dominated by a whispering forest of bamboo so thick we could carve secret paths through it, a living maze. When our cousins came to stay, Granny would inevitably scold them, then turn to us and sigh, "Why can't you be more like Sally and Tim? They are little angels." Sally and I, two small, blond, well- spoken "Pommies," would stand there perfectly, only to make faces and poke our tongues out the moment her back was turned. I think they hated us for it then, though we always laugh about it now and my cousin Penny always says if only she could see what I get up to now days.

Family trips were adventures written in bold strokes. I remember camping in the outback around Bathurst in 1955. The skies were a riot of shrieking budgerigars, their numbers so vast they seemed to change the colour of the air. We stayed on a relative's wheat farm, where we'd cling perilously to the backs of tractors as they pulled harvesters a thrilling, dangerous game that would give any modern safety officer a heart attack. Another time, camped by a river in a thick canvas tent that smelled of damp earth and adventure, a sudden rainstorm flooded the site. Dad, in a heroic scramble, managed to pull down

the tent and drive us out just in time, tying ropes around the back wheels for grip as we slithered to safety.

Our parents upbringing had been carved from harder stone. Dad's mother died when he was five, and he was packed off to boarding school soon after, never quite seeing eye to eye with his stepmother. My mothers parents split when she was young, a pattern that seemed to haunt the family. Her father was a much older, retired Scottish tea planter from Ceylon, set in his ways. He lived on a property atop Mount Panorama long before it became famous for car races. He was reportedly furious when the track was built and he had to join the car race just to cross to get to his pub!

My mother Pam joined the Australian navy during the second world war I asked her once "what rank were you mum in the Australian navy" she replied in the most English of accents, "Oh, I was one of the escort girls," this made me burst out laughing the meaning was far more innocent then, she was referring to her job driving and escorting VIPs. She did that job well enough to meet and marry my father, who was posted to Australia, and he got here not in a boat but flying in a Catalina flying boat his mission was to teach mine sweeping techniques to the Australian navy something he had done for most of the war.

BACK TO THE UK



I was 6 years old as we sailed back to England remains a vivid tapestry. It must have been early 1956 as we came back to a miserable British summer. Sally and I had the run of the ship. We'd climb railings to watch dolphins arc beside the hull and flying fish skitter across the waves, sometimes finding their iridescent bodies dried on deck in the morning. We loved operating the lifts 'B Deck' still rings a bell, where our misty green cabins must have been.

Crossing the Equator was a riotous ceremony: adults drunk as skunks, pillow fights over a greasy pole spanning the swimming pool. the men would then enter the shower rooms to wash the grease off In the gents

changing rooms, I went in there several times to have a pee. It was very steamy and I was probably not noticed as I was very small, my vision was level with the mens private parts so I witnessed a bewildering parade of uninhibited male nudity, a sight that, for better or worse, has remained with me all my life. I was fascinated and couldn't believe how huge and different they became as they rubbed at the stubborn grease.

We made friends onboard, including two girls who, in the privacy of their cabin while their parents were at the bar, would run around naked with a shocking, giggling curiosity. I was amazed and excited as they showed off every part of their bodies, I wanted to exhibit mine but my sister wasn't anything like that and looked slightly alarmed.

Through it all, Mum was our great enabler. She supplied endless art materials and the space to make a mess an artist's true necessity. She was without a trace of gender bias; my sister grew up to build her own mud brick house. Mum encouraged me to make my own clothes, and I crafted a pair of skin tight shorts from a shimmering silk that I was inordinately proud of. I remember admiring the reflection of my bum in the mirror they wouldn't look out of place at the Sydney Gay Mardi Gras parade today. She taught me to knit, a skill I mastered early, the click-clack of needles a soundtrack to my childhood.

They were not demonstrative with hugs, my parents. Their love was not worn on the sleeve but was woven into the fabric of our days in the freedom they granted, the dangers they navigated, the creative soil they tilled, and the complex, wounded history they carried so we might walk on slightly softer ground.

The return to England carved our days into a new, greyer rhythm. Dad would disappear each morning, his silhouette swallowed either by the vast, clanging fortress of Portsmouth Naval Base, with its shouts of sailors and smell of damp wool and engine oil, or by the train to London, towards the hallowed, echoing corridors of the Admiralty. Left in the quiet shell of our house, our world contracted to the domain of Mum the soft percussion of coffee mornings, the sweet, steamy scent of her baking, and the slow, safe tick of the kitchen clock. Our weekly beacon was Saturday afternoon next door. We would file into Nelly Vine's pristine parlour, with its smell of furniture polish and faint mothballs, to crowd before her marvel: a new black and white television.

We suffered first through the interminable, droning football results, a desert of numbers we had to cross before reaching the promised land of The Lone Ranger. When it finally came, the crackling gunfire and silver-screen galloping of the Texas plains felt mythic, glowing in the dark room.

School life was a fog of confusion, a place where letters twisted and danced on the page, locking me out of stories everyone else seemed to understand. I now know this was the family inheritance the silent dyslexia shared by the boys in our line. I sometimes caught Dad looking at me, a quiet resignation in his eyes. He knew the dream was fading no London stockbroker son, no future member of gentleman's clubs sipping claret by a leather bound fire. The one bright horizon was the summer holiday. Yet our grand adventure, a pilgrimage to Cornwall's shores to relive the golden Australian beach days, usually dissolved into a cold, wet ordeal of endless traffic jams. The car would be filled with damp hope and the smell of wet dog from our packed belongings. Dad's new caravan, our 'home away from home,' was a capsule of damp warmth. It was impossibly small; my sister Sally and I were banished to sleep in the chilly annex. The sweetest compensation was the morning, when I would sneak into the big bed, curling into the soft, sleepy warmth of Mum, though I was always chided, in a hushed, flustered whisper, for my absent-minded 'fiddling.' They had bought a house that was more promise than comfort, a place of exposed lathe and drifting plaster dust, but it possessed a wild, wonderful garden. Beneath a cathedral of sighing pine trees on a sloping bank, we built our kingdom. Using scrap floorboards, and salvaged nails, we constructed a cubby house. Ever the engineer, I insisted on modern conveniences: a working sewage system. We built the main fort atop the bank, from which a careful, clay lined drain snaked down to a dug out pit a sophisticated solution, we proudly declared, for 'Number Ones' only. My education was a patchwork of different schools, each a new attempt to decode the indecipherable, each move

quietly underlining a disappointment I felt but couldn't yet name. The words remained stubborn hieroglyphs, and the world of books and ledgers that Dad respected felt like a fortress with the drawbridge permanently raised against me.

MY COUSINS CAME TO STAY

My mother's sister who had made the bold move to join my mother in the UK some years before , but after a turbulent relationship with an artist who had suddenly walked out on her, leaving her to navigate the challenges of single motherhood with four lively children in tow. In a whirlwind of chaos and shifting dynamics, they all moved into our home, transforming our once spacious abode into a bustling, cramped haven of energy and laughter. Although space was tight, Sally, my sister, and I thrived in this newfound arrangement, embracing the invigorating camaraderie of our rapidly expanding family. Together, we formed an inseparable gang, a small band of rascals bonded by mischief and adventure.

As the youngest, I often reviled in my role as the charming troublemaker. With my striking blue eyes, blond hair, and an innocent visage that could melt anyone's heart, I learned quickly the art of deflection. I perfected the ability to shift blame onto others, leaving my poor cousins to shoulder the consequences of my antics. I must admit, I took pleasure in the fact that I was my

mother's favourite, a fact that undoubtedly fuelled my mischievous nature.

The days rolled on in a blur of laughter and chaos, but the inevitable caught up with me; my cousins, overwhelmed by my relentless pranks and antics, soon found themselves packed off in a hastily arranged £10 shipment back to Australia. As for me, I was left to face the stern walls of boarding school, a place shrouded in the antiquated traditions of corporal punishment and an atmosphere thick with fear. It was a stark contrast to the rambunctious life I had known, and I found myself grappling with the confusion of burgeoning adolescence. Thoughts of my changing body began to occupy my mind, particularly as I navigated my new reality, where unexplained curiosities stirred within me.

My uncle The Major a Royal Marine and decorated war hero owned a dairy farm in the rolling, green swathed hills of Dorset. He was the most delightful man a gentle giant with weathered hands and eyes that crinkled at the corners with genuine interest. He had a way of leaning in as you spoke, making you feel that whatever you'd been up to was the most fascinating tale he'd heard all week. I am sure my own father felt the same deep affection, but his feelings were held behind a dam of quiet reserve, his emotions a locked book whose pages were not so easy to read.



The farmhouse, with its ancient stone walls and thatched roof, appeared grand with three levels and low wooden beams that added character to the home. The inviting atmosphere inside was filled with the comforting aroma of a well loved and lived in space. My Aunt's beloved King Charles Spaniels lazed on antique chairs, adding to the charm and coziness of the farmhouse. The daughters, all attending a prestigious ladies' college, were actively engaged in community affairs, serving on committees and participating in church activities. Major Oliver himself was a respected member of the council, balancing his duties with the early morning milking routine on the farm, starting at 4:30 AM. After the morning chores, Major would shed his work clothes and boots in the warm back porch before entering the colossal farmhouse kitchen. The heart of the home, the kitchen featured a cream and black AGA stove that was always busy, with the family even making their own butter. The hustle and bustle of daily farm life, the aroma of freshly baked bread, and the

laughter of loved ones made the farmhouse a place of warmth and joy.

My uncle's wife Constance was an extraordinary person, a whirlwind of elegance and warmth who spoke with a memorable, melodic accent a refined lilt that spoke of heather covered hills. She had been raised, almost storybook-like, in a draughty Scottish castle, and she brought that air of graceful command to the farm house chaos. Together, they had five daughters, a constellation of sisters who were inseparable, their laughter ringing through the corridors. They were all close, friendly, and possessed a radiant, healthy beauty. Our families exchanged visits often; we would journey to their world of mud splattered Wellies and warm milk, and sometimes they would descend upon our more sedate life in our little town of Emsworth.

One memory from those visits shines with a peculiar, boyish clarity. I was in the bath with my sister, as was our usual routine, but this time one of my cousins had joined us. It was different. To my secret astonishment and their barely suppressed amusement, my penis was hard and jutting stubbornly from the soapy water. Flustered, and with a child's instinct for deflection, I used it as a makeshift peg to hang the face flannels on. Well, what else could I do with the confounding thing? Yet beneath the embarrassment, I found a thrilling, secret pleasure in the attention, in the sheer, strange fact of it the story must have got back to My Mother as from then on, I had to bath alone.

The journeys to Dorset in my father's car were trials of endurance. He would chain-smoke Player's Navy Cut, one cigarette lit from the glowing end of the last, usually with all the windows sealed tight against the English weather. The air would grow thick and blue-grey, a fog that stung my eyes and clung to my clothes. The vibration of the cars engine transmitted through the PVC seat covers making me rock hard for hours it had a mind of its own and getting out for refreshments impossible.

At home, my weekly ritual was Sunday Night at the London Palladium with Bruce Forsyth. Glued to our black and white television, I was mesmerised by the sheer glamour of it: the spinning stage, the sequinned costumes, the roar of the crowd. It planted a quiet, desperate yearning in me a spur to be noticed, to step into that brilliant light. If you had told that wide eyed boy that over sixty years later he would stand on those very same boards, under the hot glare of the Britain's Got Talent cameras, he would have laughed in disbelief. Even though Simon Cowell, with a dismissive flick of his wrist, buzzed me off almost immediately and stalked from the set, the circle had been closed. I had been there and although I didn't go on to the next round, the publicity was great, I was mentioned in all the British papers the next day the act that was too hot for Simon!

Simon Cowell storms out of Britain's Got Talent audition after man paints with his penis

Britain's Got Talent judge Simon Cowell stormed out of an audition after a 70-year-old began painting with his penis on stage

Comments 0

3AM By Verity Sulway

09:57, 22 Jan 2020 | Updated 09:58, 22 Jan 2020



Simon Cowell stormed out of Britain's Got Talent audition after 'Pricasso' painted using his willy

BOY FUN

The warm, unruly friendship I found at St. Nicolas was my anchor. My best friend lived in a weathered house that stared directly out at the harbour, its windows holding the entire glittering expanse of the sea. His mother, a modern woman with salt in her hair, would often shepherd us down to the water for swimming. Our games in the waves were a riot of boyish, exploratory chaos a slippery ballet of yanking each other's swimming trunks off and hurling them into the deep, followed by fumbling, curious grasps in the churning water. The first time another hand held me there was a jolt, a secret, fantastic electricity buzzing under the skin.

But one afternoon, carried away by that new, raw thrill, we didn't notice the current's gentle theft until it was too late. My swimmers were gone, a tiny dot swallowed by the blue. Shame burned hotter than the sun as I had to scramble up the beach, one hand cupped desperately in front of me, to confront his mother with a stammering, feeble excuse. She simply nodded, her smile a quiet enigma. She must have known of our clumsy explorations perhaps she even enjoyed the innocent, sun-dappled spectacle of two naked boys wrestling like pups on her lounge room floor, turning a merciful blind eye.

BOARDING SCHOOLS

I was having too much fun. Mum and dad transferred me to a new school where his navel friends sent their kids. My childhood was framed and sometimes, it felt, imprisoned by the imposing stone edifice of Oakwood School. Where I arrived at the age of ten, a new boy adrift in echoing corridors, and by my eleventh birthday I was a boarder, 1960 my world officially contracted to its grounds near the town of Chichester.

The school was housed in what we grandly, and with a touch of desperate pride, called our ‘mini Versailles.’ It was a classically proportioned Georgian mansion, a pale stone slab of history rising three solemn storeys above the earth, its foundations sunk into a cavernous, whispering basement. Inside, the scale was meant to humble. Ceilings soared a dizzying twenty feet, from which crystallised chandelier. Light entered through floor to ceiling windows, each pane guarded by heavy, internal shutters that folded back like wooden wings; when closed, they cast the rooms into a profound, slatted gloom, making ghosts of the afternoon sun. Out front, a regiment of bleached pillars supported a grand portico a drop off zone for parents that felt less like a country house entrance and more like the grandiose porte-co of a Las Vegas hotel, a jarring note of theatrical arrival.

Every room was a lesson in faded grandeur. Each held the same centre piece: a vast, gilded mirror, its mercury bleeding black at the edges, mounted above a cold, white marble fireplace. In those mirrors, a small boy could see himself repeated into infinity, a speck in the reflection of

endless, high ceilinged space. But the true masterpiece lay outside. The grounds had been shaped by the former family, who had owned the land for centuries. They had planted ancient cedars, their massive, horizontal limbs cloaked in dark, dusty green, standing like wise and brooding sentinels who had seen generations of boys come and go. The playing fields were an empire of perfect, manicured green, seeming to stretch to the very horizon. Their boundary was not a fence, but a clever ‘Ha Ha’ a sudden, sunken trench two metres deep, its grassy far wall rising sharply. This hidden moat created a delicious, silent illusion: that the school’s ordered lawns bled seamlessly, and without barrier, into the wild,



untamed promise of the farm paddocks beyond. It was a vista of impossible freedom, permanently, cruelly, just out of reach. Beneath this elegance lay a more primal world.

The cellars served as changing rooms for football and rugby. I can still conjure the thick, animal odour of hundreds of sweaty boys after a match, a fog of mud, and adolescent exertion. We would wash it off in a stark, concrete shower room, a dungeon with multiple shower heads raining down from the ceiling. It was often a sexually charged riot a thrashing mass of thirty or so naked boys in high spirits. Some hunched modestly, arms crossed, while others, emboldened by the chaos, would shriek and lunge, trying to grab hold of any private parts they could, usually belonging to someone smaller and slower. It was a brutal, confusing baptism into the pack dynamics of boyhood.

After the long day had finally unwound after the mumbled prayers, the struggle with homework, and the last sweet, steaming sip of hot chocolate we would all head for the bathrooms to clean our teeth then fall, exhausted, into our beds.

The house would settle into a creaking silence, and soon, without fail, the soft dip of the mattress would signal Scott's arrival. He was older than me and, already carrying himself with a quiet authority that commanded a certain respect from the household, so no one ever batted an eye or thought to question it when he slipped into my bed. For me, It wasn't about sex I was still pretty innocent. It was about the simple, profound warmth of another human being a kind of closeness that I now realise I had been starved for most of my young life. When he climbed into bed beside me and wrapped his

long, solid arms around my smaller frame, I felt like I had finally come home to a place I never knew existed. I was in heaven, Curled against him, I became his cuddly teddy bear something small to be held, protected, and squeezed in the dark. Lying there in the quiet, I would feel the slow, steady rhythm of his breathing, and the subtle, unconscious shift of his body as he pressed against me. I could feel the hard length of his erection rubbing insistently against the crack of my bum, a persistent presence through the thin fabric of our pyjamas. Looking back on it now with adult eyes, I understand that while I was simply basking in the safety of his embrace, he was quietly, deliberately getting his rocks off, moving against me in the darkness until he found his release. It might have happened once or twice, or maybe it was a regular, unspoken part of the ritual.

In those moments, my own mind was a blank slate of innocent comfort. I didn't understand what was happening, or why he needed to hold me so tightly. But even then, beneath the blissful haze of feeling wanted, a tiny, persistent knot of guilt would form in my stomach a vague, childish sense that maybe, somehow, this secret warmth we shared was something we shouldn't have. But the other boys were talking about me referring to me as a slut, he was never mentioned, at least I had been noticed albeit for all the wrong reasons!

MR POTTER

The head master Mr Potter was a man etched in contradictions and eventual tragedy, he was suspended when, rumours slithering through the dorms like poison gas, whispers of interfering with some of the boys. He would patrol the rows of desks his hands coming to rest on a boy's shoulders, fingers kneeling the tense muses in whiten what was mentioned to be a reassuring massage. But then you'd feel it the subtle unmistakable pressure of his groin against your shoulders blade a lingering weight that turned the gesture into something cloying and wrong.

He was a tactile man, so when it was your turn we learned to sit very very still. I don't know all the details of the allegations and part of me felt a confusing pang of



sadness for him. He was, undeniably, a bit of a sadist.

Corporal punishment was his doctrine, administered with theatrical solemnity. I was caned by him a few times never in the daylight of his office, but always at night, summoned to his private quarters. That walk through the silent, sleeping house amplified the dread, turning punishment into a silent ceremony. pushing your PJ bottoms down to humiliate you more bending over his vast desk feeling helpless The cane itself was a searing lick of fire across your bare buttocks, a pain so sharp it stole your breath away. Yet amongst the boys, it was a badge of honour. You returned to the dormitory to a couscous of grim jokes “did it hurt….. much? Lets see your bum” Ha. Ha. The humiliation was part of the price, yes we were naked humiliated and sore. But I can say with stark clarity memory sometimes grants, he never touched my penis.



But some time later after I had left the school, members of the first eleven cricket team were overheard to say; they had traded him sexual favours, instead of getting corporal punishment, he was stood down whilst an investigation took place, it was never concluded as he took his shotgun to a deserted area, and

under a vast indifferent sky placed both barrels in his mouth and erased himself.

BEMBRIDGE SCHOOL

I didn't want to go to the senior boarding school, a dread that sat like a cold stone in my stomach. But Dad, a Naval officer, was



immovable. A state school, he felt, wouldn't do his status any good, and besides, the Government still paid most of the fees. So, off I was sent, crying silent, hot tears all the way to the Portsmouth ferry terminal, my world shrinking to the blurred view from a car window.

The year was 1963 I was just fourteen years old that September, a late developer standing a mere four foot three inches 129.54 cm, a small, blond-haired, blue-eyed figure lost in a sea of roughhousing boys. I was the smallest in the entire school, even slightly shorter than Toshi, a Japanese student who would later become a friend, our bond forged in the shared experience of being outsiders. The school was on the Isle of Wight, a windswept island off England's south coast, home to the Royal Yacht Squadron and haunted by the ghost of Queen Victoria. At the Portsmouth ferry terminal, Mum and Dad said their stiff, sad goodbyes. They helped me haul my luggage to the approve platform: me dressed in the school uniform stiff white shirts with detachable collars that required starched precision and sharp collar studs, a suit, a blazer, caps, and, most absurdly, two vast cricket jockstraps that hung with cavernous emptiness, "certainly room for growth," I thought with a desperate hope. I'd tried them on at home in front of the mirror, the absurdity sparking a brief, solitary laugh. Alongside it was my tuck box, a wooden crate of personal sanctuary I'd packed tightly with paints, pencils, and sketchbooks, and one of Mums fruit cakes.

Of the hundreds of shifting faces on the wind whipped ferry that afternoon, I knew only one: Alex. A familiar face from my previous life, at Oakwood school his presence

was a solitary, steadying landmark in that churning sea of strangers. We didn't speak words felt too heavy, too final but we drifted together instinctively, a silent pact of mutual recognition against the vast, grey unknown.

When the ferry groaned its final protest against the slick wooden pilings of the dock, we were herded like skittish livestock onto awaiting train. It was a real, breathing steam engine, a "Puffing Billy," Black iron and hissing vapour. Years later, watching Harry Potter's journey to Hogwarts, I'd feel a visceral jolt; here was my own past, pulled from the sepia-toned ache of memory and set to music. Our luggage was spirited away by unseen hands to our allotted houses. Mine was Old House. The House Master delivered a crisp, echoing welcome in a wood-panelled hall that smelled of beeswax and distant cabbage. He introduced us to the prefects, and our designated guardian was an easy going sixth former who seemed, to my now fourteen year-old eyes, a fully formed man of the world. His sole duty appeared to be extinguishing the dormitory lights at 9pm sharp. But he was a ghost, a rumour likely buried in late study or visiting his girlfriend at the girls' school two miles distant. In his absence, our dormitory would hum with a low, frantic energy, a kicked beehive

CHAPTER 2

PUBERTY

I could sense, however, a different kind of attention from some of the older boys. A gaze that lingered a beat too long in the corridor, a smile that held a cryptic question. Some sent me what could only be described as love letters clumsy, passionate notes scribbled on stolen exercise paper, smelling of pencil shavings and desperate longing. I was flattered, in a confused and secretive way, and kept them all, hidden like contraband.

I began to spend time privately in their company, a deserted classroom, the old squash courts bringing chocolate, crisps, and soft drink from their private hoards, treasures bought at the tuck shop or the village store. My own pocket money was a pittance, about fifty pence a week, when a Mars bar cost twelve pence. Some boys got ten pounds; the Arab students, considerably more, with open accounts at local shops. So I learned to navigate this new economy. I used my small stature, my “cute” looks, to my advantage, trading companionship, fondling, and sex for biscuits and chocolate. I soon learned who to wiggle my bottom at. The label soon followed: a whispered, sneering “little fucking tart” in the changing rooms. It didn’t bother me much, not truly; at least it was an identity, a role to play in the grand, harsh theatre of the place.



I had so many nicknames. Because my voice stubbornly refused to break, lingering in a humiliating treble until I was sixteen or seventeen, boys would cough in a high-pitched, falsetto mockery whenever I passed. I was called “Single Ball,” or “Tampax Tim,” or simply “Tampax.” Each name was a stone thrown, but I collected them too, until their sharp edges wore smooth in my pocket.

Bembridge School's chapel was a fortress of faith and tradition, built from deep russet bricks that glowed like embers in the afternoon sun. Inside, the air was cool and carried a faint, sacred scent of old wood and wax. On either side of the long central aisle, rows of massive oak pillars rose like ancient trees, holding up a breathtaking ceiling. Above, the roof was a skeleton of colossal wooden beams, arranged in a traditional pitched and vaulted design that felt both grand and strangely intimate. Five or six rows of pews flanked each side, tiered steadily upward at the back so that every boy, from the smallest first year to the prefects in the rear, had an unimpeded view of the chancel where the school orchestra the institution's justifiable pride would perform.

Morning prayers were a ritual etched in light and sound. Sunlight, fractured by magnificent stained glass windows, threw pools of jewel toned colour across the floor. This visual beauty was matched by a superb, crisp sound system, through which we were made to listen to a classical piece each morning. Then, a boy would be chosen to read. The journey from your allotted seat to the distant, eagle-topped pulpit felt like a mile-long walk of shame, every eye upon you.

The day I was called remains an unforgettable moment in my school career. As soon as I stood, a chorus of high pitched, theatrical coughs erupted from the shadows of the pews. It was a pointed, merciless soundtrack that followed me the entire, endless walk up the centre aisle and only ceased as I climbed the pulpit's narrow stairs. To

my horror, I was too short to see over the lectern. A wooden block had to be found, amplifying my humiliation. But as soon as I started to speak I felt better, and I survived the ordeal and felt like I could overcome anything.

SCHOOL HOLIDAYS

The holidays that year held a quiet, hollow kind of loneliness. Dad had just moved us into a sprawling, L-shaped house on two acres, a puzzle of a place with different bits added over the decades, all tucked beside a stretch of muddy harbour beach near the Hayling Island bridge. I knew no one. My only companion was the vast, echoing space of the property itself.

That summer, I claimed a secret kingdom: a flat section of roof covered in black asphalt. When the sun was out, the tar would grow soft and radiant with heat, though the English summer—small, cotton wool clouds constantly drifted over, stealing the warmth. To capture it, I would stretch out directly on the searing surface, my skin pressed against the grainy, sun soaked black. I always sunbathed naked whenever I could, a solitary, sun-worshipping secret in that empty sky. Nobody ever knew I was there. A private sanctuary where my imagination went into overdrive.

I loved playing sport but my size was always a problem, yet I got so much more exercise up on my secret roof, without the fear of getting caught which was always a problem at school, although I usually found a secret spot on the cliff to relieve my frustrations.

The School was perched right on the edge of these soft, crumbling cliffs that fell away to the beach below. We'd scramble down the chalky paths to find these hidden nooks, secret little platforms of grass tucked into the cliffside. They were perfect secluded spots where a couple of boys could get away from it all, strip off, and have some naked, fumbling fun in the sun on their way down to the sea.

One time in particular with my mate Dickey. He was built like a brick shit house, a proper rugby player strong, stocky, solid. We were always mucking about in the dorm, wrestling, usually trying to pull each other's pyjamas off. It was just our thing. So one hot July day, we knew exactly where to go. This little clearing, just off the main path, hidden enough. We threw our towels down; I was starkers in seconds, just lying there, soaking up the freedom and the English sun. I remember the warmth on my skin, the light going red and orange through my closed eyelids, and my little dick standing up, enjoying the heat. Dickey got his pants off quickly and started touching me, just casually, the way we always did. It was nice.

Suddenly he just stopped. Frozen. I opened my eyes, and my blood ran cold. A middle-aged couple were standing on the path some distance away. We ducked behind a bush and fumbling with our clothes we were in a total panic. But they didn't look angry. They just smiled, sort of knowingly, gave us a little wave. The next time we looked they had carried on down the path to the beach like it was nothing. We just stood there for a minute, catching our breath, then peered over the cliff. We could see them down there, already settled on the beach, relaxing. We looked at each other and just started laughing. And then, well, the sun was still out, so we got on with our afternoon fun.

HOLIDAY IN PARIS

The whole business of the Birds and the Bees was a mystery Mum and Dad never saw fit to unravel with words. Instead, in a move that still strikes me as bizarrely pragmatic, they packed my sister Sally and me off to Paris. I was fifteen, all elbows and awkwardness; Sally was a year older with a veneer of worldly wisdom, which I envied.

We did the required rounds, of course: the echoing, gold leaf caverns of Versailles, the daunting marble chill of the Louvre, the iron lattice of the Eiffel Tower sketched

against a pigeon-grey sky. But it was after dark that our true, unspoken education began.

They shepherded us into the neon glow of the Moulin Rouge, the decadent plush of the Follies Bergère, and then, with a determined nonchalance, on a tour of three strip clubs.

The first two were exercises in faintly sad spectacle. To my fifteen-year-old eyes, the performers seemed less like sirens and more like elderly aunts indulging in a radical, and slightly confusing, act of rebellion. They shed their sequins and feathers to reveal bodies mapped with experience, leaving only the merest scrap of fabric a G-string that seemed to defy physics, clinging to their ‘bits’ as if by wishful thinking. It was okay, I supposed, but I remember thinking wistfully of magazine pictures of girls who looked like they’d never heard of a mortgage.

The third club, however, erased all prior comparison. Here, the atmosphere was charged with a different, darker electricity. Men, all leather and menace, dragged women across the stage by their hair, throwing them about with a violent choreography before stripping them utterly naked. The finale was a raw, simulated act that left my mouth dry and my heart hammering against my ribs. In the bewildering economy of a teenage boy’s mind, it was, unquestionably, the most astonishing thing I had ever witnessed.

The trip wasn't all nocturnal revelations. By day, we were tourists. On the cobbled hill of Montmartre, we had our portraits drawn mine a smudged caricature of adolescent gawkiness. And there, amidst the easels and the smell of pastels, I stumbled into a coincidence: Sammy. He was the best looking boy in my year, with coffee-coloured skin, oval-shaped eyes of a startling green, and hair styled in a perfect, timeless wave like Cliff Richard. His family was rich, a fact he wore lightly, without a hint of flash. He was Jewish, and his mother, he mentioned casually, was friends with Barbara Windsor from the *Carry On* films.



HOUSE IN BRIGHTON

Back home in England, the phone rang. It was Sammy, inviting me to stay at his place in Brighton. I arrived feeling like a fish in a desert.

His house was a splendid, airy confection of glass and light. For lunch, we went to his mother's hotel a leviathan of Victorian brickwork, eight storeys tall, commanding the seafront with what seemed like five hundred windows all staring out to sea. I was utterly blown away.

The afternoon was a blur of sun and spray. We went water skiing from the back of his father's speed yacht a sleek beast with gleaming teak decks that cut through the Channel waters. Looking back towards land from the choppy deep, all I could see were the towering white cliffs, colossal and sheer, filling me with a thrilling, stomach-dropping terror. It was a moment seared into memory.

And so, too, was Sam's body. He had just returned from the South of France, from his mother's villa, and carried its sun deep in his skin a dark, golden tan that made his green eyes glow. He had also returned strangely, impressively knowledgeable about the facts of life, the very syllabus my parents had avoided. In his vast, empty house, where his parents were perpetually elsewhere, he held court wearing nothing but the smallest, most expensive designer white underpants, a vision of casual, sun-kissed sophistication that completed an education Paris had only begun.

The following year, I'd shot up like a weed, a small weed, all elbows and knees at first, then filling out into a stockier, more solid version of myself.

They moved me to a smaller dormitory—five of us, I think a cramped, intimate space that smelled of wax polish, stale socks, and boyhood. There, I forged friendships that felt like blood pacts. On those secret nights when the house master was out and we knew the prefects were preoccupied—drawn like moths to the distant, mythical glow of Grey lands School for Young Ladies a couple of miles down the road—we became daring commandos in pyjamas, and wanking competitions were always fun.

Our speciality was the dormitory raid. We'd wait in the shadowy corridor, a breathless huddle, until the muffled talk from the other room faded into the rhythm of almost sleep. Then, with a shared, silent signal, we'd storm the citadel. Our mission: to strip as many beds as possible in a whirlwind of flying sheets and blankets, then escape in a thunder of bare feet and stifled laughter. Our crowning glory was attempting to heave a mattress out the window a monstrous, ungainly thing that would lodge in the ivy or tumble into the bushes below. We'd watch from our window, giddy, as they spent the rest of the cursed night hauling it, cursing, back up the fire escape. A week later, we'd wait, hearts thrilling with anticipation, for the retaliatory strike. It seems like pointless chaos now, but then, it was everything.

HIDING IN THE ART DEPARTMENT

I spent most of my time in the Art and woodwork department to evade the bullies and hurtful taunts from two faced ex-sex friends. I drew from books—secret territory, mapped only through the muted, respectable channels of knowledge. My explorations were conducted in the hushed aisles of libraries and the musty pages of heavy books. Art books and encyclopaedias offered a sanctioned glimpse, with their grainy photographs of marble gods and goddesses, their muscles and curves cold yet improbably alive. But the true, thrilling revelations came from *National Geographic*. Those magazines were a passport to a startling, sun-baked reality African villages where life was lived openly, and the men, captured in unselfconscious moments, possessed a majestic, unapologetic physicality that my English textbooks never hinted at.

I would spend hours bent over my notebook, my pencil labouring to capture the bold lines of those figures, trying to steal their truth onto paper.

My greatest treasure was a book on Leonardo da Vinci, a dual fascination with his tender, shadowed nudes and his intricate, clockwork machines. While my friends would clamour for the pages featuring women, sniggering over the anatomy, I found myself quietly devoted to the male

forms. The fascination with “tits,” as they called them, eluded me; they were soft, complicated, and infuriatingly difficult to draw with any conviction.

I did try my hand at modern art. There was a pile of old wood they were going to burn; I could see a use for it, and it did keep me out of trouble for the rest of the term without having to play cricket, a great trade-off.

With O Levels looming, and having only just cracked the code of reading the year before, I decided to make a run for it to art school. I could have stayed two more years, probably should have, but money at home was tight, a quiet tension over the dinner table. To everyone’s shock, mine most of all, I scraped together seven O-Levels and even an A Level in Art.

Portsmouth Art School accepted me into the pre-diploma course in Fine Art.

My school career finished in 1966, the year England won the Football World Cup, as I embarked on a sailing adventure to France. I really only wanted to go as I had an enormous crush on one of the boys. We were very close and I was as close to being in love as I have ever been. The weather was horrific; everyone was seasick, which bonded us all even closer. But within a few months we all went our separate ways and lost touch.

FIRST GIRLFRIEND, ALEXIA

The course was very abstract and modern, which left me cold, but my social life combusted. It was the year of The Beach Boys' "Good Vibrations." That song forever belongs to Alexia, a petite redhead on my course who seemed as childlike as I did. We'd wander the wartime bomb sites, drawing the half-demolished brick carcasses that still pockmarked Portsmouth crumbling brick shells frozen in time, our private, post-apocalyptic playgrounds. We'd find a secluded landing with a clean floor, kiss and cuddle amidst the rubble, until it got cold and dark.

One day, she took me to her parents' council house. They treated me with a nervous, deferential awe, retreating to the kitchen to give us the lounge. With them just a thin wall away, Alexia's passion was overwhelming, but she stopped decisively short it was because her parents were the other side of a thin wall. I rode home in a state of agonising, unfulfilled ache, my blue balls begging for release.

The next week, my cousin Graham arrived from Australia in a battered old London taxi, a tornado of Antipodean energy. When Alexia mentioned a party on Hayling Island, Graham dropped me off. I found her amongst a

crowd of strangers, drinking cheap Baby Cham. I, a novice, was soon talked into cider. The night dissolved into a spinning, pebbly beach blur. I have glimpses of laughter, of her face close to mine, of the world tilting on its axis. I woke somehow back at home Dad must have picked me up clinging to the cold porcelain of the toilet bowl, vowing eternal sobriety, a vow I've broken, but whose memory has always policed my limits. Alexia and I stayed friends, but she soon disappeared into suburbia, pregnant by an older student.

Another door, not quite opened, gently closed. I passed the year but couldn't understand the emphasis on abstract art. I could draw and paint realistically and was all set to go to a proper art school studying Fine Art.

I applied for the three best art schools in London and got three rejections. I was mortified and my ego was completely crushed, so I decided to fill in the year working, much to my parents' relief.

MY FIRST JOB

The first job I found was a slice of another world. I was a human ATM at Billy Manning's Funfair on Southsea Pier,

an ancient arcade of clattering machines, bumper cars, and dizzying lights. My domain was here: I wore a leather bag from which I exchanged half-crowns, shillings, and sixpences into the copper pennies that the machines would accept great, heavy stacks of pennies. I'd walk the planks, my leather bag jangling like a walking bank, servicing the crowds. The clientele was a parade, mostly of sailors of every nation here in Britain's biggest naval base in Portsmouth boisterous and flush with pay, and alongside them, the young working girls, a constant, watchful presence in tight skirts and tired eyes. I worked alongside others cleaning but mainly I was there to change money.

A boy named Terry. He was a bit bigger than me, a couple of years older, stockier too, with a wild thatch of unruly brown hair that seemed to have a life of its own.

He was not an employee but knew everyone. When he spoke, his words came out in that sharp, musical Cockney rhythm that made everything sound like a joke or a proposition. Terry was street wisdom made flesh; he moved through the chaos of the pier like he owned it, weaving between crowds with an easy swagger, chatting up the girls with a wicked glint in his eye that promised he knew secrets they didn't.

"Hey blonde, what's your name?" His voice curled around the words like smoke.

“Tim,” I said, feeling very inferior and small.

He grinned immediately. “Good to meet you, Timmy. Where’d you get that toffy-nosed accent, then?”

I looked embarrassed and blurted out, “This is my first job.”

He clapped me on the shoulder, a gesture both rough and oddly kind.

Terry took me under his wing after that, introducing me to everyone like I was his personal project. One night, in the quiet between shifts, I confessed something I’d been carrying like a stone in my chest: my virginity. In that hyper-masculine world of sailors and working girls and men who’d seen everything, it felt like a shameful secret. I still looked about twelve, all elbows and knees and unbroken voice, and I think he had a crush on me.

He nudged me with his elbow, that wicked grin spreading across his face. “Don’t worry, Timmy. I can arrange your education, seeing as you’re so fucking hopeless to manage it yourself. I know so many girls who’d love to help you out, know what I mean?” I didn’t really know what he meant, but I kept silent.



The days blurred together mornings spent scrubbing and cleaning, evenings changing money at a little booth or walking around shouting “get your change here” while the fairground lights flickered to life around us. I worked really long shifts, and in between, I would collapse in the large rest room where a big

kettle of sweet tea was always brewing, its dark amber depths promising warmth and energy. The boss, Aron, was a solid block of a man with a crew cut, watchful eyes, and tattoos snaking up both arms; he looked like he'd stepped straight out of a London gangster film. I was a bit scared of him and felt so small I couldn't help looking twelve; my body was a betrayal I lived with every day. But Terry was always around, managing the girls I guess; he just laughed, slinging an arm around my shoulders and pulling me close. The rhythm of the pier became my whole world the shriek of fairground rides, the salt-stiffened wind, the constant press of bodies.

Then Terry pulled me aside with that particular look that meant he had something to tell me. "I've talked to Diana and she's willing to give you a go, but you owe me, OK." I knew then I would be pushing pills for him soon.

This approval warmed something hungry in my chest. I drove home exhausted on my scooter, the cold wind biting at my cheeks. A few more weeks passed. Then the next day, perhaps out of philanthropy or a particular kind of boredom, Diana led me down the creaking steps beneath the pier onto the dark, pebbly beach. The air smelled of seaweed, salt, and damp timber, with fishermen's lights twinkling in the distance. Kissing, undressing, touching her breasts and vagina, I wondered how many guys had touched these soft places before me? It didn't matter, and very, very soon it ended. A quiet whisper surfaced in my mind: *That feels no different than it would with a boy.*

I knew then that I was different. My father's homophobia loomed like a wall I dared not approach his casual cruelties, his suspicious glances. I wanted to please everyone, to be normal, to fit into the shape the world expected. I think my mother sensed the truth in my silences, the things I didn't say, but she never spoke it aloud. So I made a decision: I would be normal. I would investigate girls.

The funfair hours were gruelling, eleven in the morning until midnight, then a perilous scooter ride home through sleeping streets. One rain slicked morning, a lorry overtook me too close, its tailgate snagging my handlebars. I was flung through the air like a rag doll, bouncing along the tarmac in a blur of pain and terror. The scooter was a twisted corpse. I was lucky to be alive.

The job had to go. I left with a pang, missing the gritty, survivalist camaraderie of the pier kids, their rough warmth, their acceptance of whoever I was becoming. And I was thankful, too, that I had an excuse to back out of getting involved with Terry's business, pushing pills and being nice to some sailors in that particular way. I needed a job now. Something that wouldn't kill me from disease, or exhaustion.

BUILDING SITE

I settled for a job on a building site. My small frame was perfect for crawling into roof spaces to lay insulation. The money was good, but the cost was hidden: a fine, itchy dust that coated my throat and lungs, scarring them slowly; no masks in those days. I started helping the foreman, Tommy, with carpentry. He was about twenty five years old with a magnificent body, not an ounce of fat, every muscle defined, and his skin was a golden colour which contrasted markedly with his hair, bleached bone white by Floss, his girlfriend. He had access to a trove of illicit porn magazines, some photos, he claimed, he'd taken himself.

I got almost used to the itchiness of the fibre. One advantage of working in the attics in winter was the trapped heat; under the tiles, it became pleasantly warm, but as summer approached it became a suffocating oven, so Tommy said, "Just

work in your undies. I'll get you some water in a forty four-gallon bin to wash off with."

Climbing up into the loft gave Tommy a view, something I knew he would love. He then passed up the bales of bats and left me to lay it all out. When I had finished, I'd emerge, hot and sweaty, slip off my undies, and slip into

the tub of cold water. Right on cue Tommy appeared; he shut the door and helped wash me. After we had finished, he felt a bit guilty and said we should be more careful in future.

Our conversations always circled back to his past boyhood experiments with a graphic relish. He'd stare openly as we worked. "You've got such a kid like body," he'd muse, passing more bags of fibre up through the manhole. I could see he was thinking of how to ask me something; I knew him so well by now.

He looked into my eyes with such intensity and with hesitation in his voice said, "Tim, my girlfriend Floss is a really good hairdresser and great with make-up. I have told her lots about you and how gorgeous you are. She guessed we had played a bit, she knows me too well. Anyway, her brother is a photographer and is always looking for models to photograph. She suggested we ask you to get dressed up as a girl! She would disguise you so completely, false eyelashes and make-up, transforming you into a young girl with a dick! Her brother would take some photos which they would sell. No one would ever know it's you."

The idea, at first, was a dark, glittering shard in my mind, dangerous and illicit, and that was precisely what thrilled me. Tommy talked about it with such casual, repeated fervour that its sharp edges began to dull, wrapped in the gauze of normalcy. My curiosity, a traitorous and hungry

thing, pulled me forward even as my gut coiled in a silent, primordial *no*. The path felt inevitable, a slope I had already begun to slide down. So, when the moment came, I simply agreed.

Their council flat was a revelation of shabby intimacy. The air was warm and close, thick with the scent of stale cigarette smoke, cheap floral air freshener, and something vaguely sweet. Floss, Tommy's girlfriend, was larger than life, with a boldness amplified by heavy, precise make up. Her eyes, lined in dark kohl, swept over me with an appraising intensity that made my skin prickle. "Fuck, you're pretty!" she exclaimed, her voice a raspy boom in the small room. "No wonder Tommy likes you." The words felt less like a compliment and more like a brand. I said nothing, my tongue a useless weight, utterly petrified.

Tommy pushed a cold beer into my hand. I hated the bitter, yeasty taste, but I took a few dutiful sips, clinging to the bottle as if it were an anchor. The faint buzz began to blur the sharp lines of my fear, and a fragile, false sense of relaxation trickled through me.

Then Floss was in front of me, her own face a masterpiece of applied colour. "Hold still," she commanded, her voice dropping to a conspiratorial murmur. As she fixed the false eyelashes, glueing them into position with special twisters, I felt the slick, waxy drag of a pencil against my eyelids, the puff of powder



dusting my cheeks. Her scrutiny was clinical.

"There," she said, pulling back to survey her work, her expression unreadable.

"Christ. You do look like a skinny teenage girl." The statement hung in the close air, not cruel, but utterly devastating, a stark reminder of the gulf between her practised world and my terrifying, newfound vulnerability.

Floss had a wardrobe of girls' underwear, stockings, and brassieres. As I took off my pants I had shrunk to almost nothing. Tommy laughed and said, "I'll get that up in a bit, but for now it's just great. These pink ones will fit and you won't hang out the sides at all."

When I was all dressed in a mini skirt, tank top, and stockings, I looked into the mirror and couldn't recognise myself at all, but I had to agree I did look hot.

The session went on for hours until I had lost the dress, undies, suspender, high-heeled shoes, and stockings. I was on fire as I touched myself to the sound of a

clicking camera flashing away and Tommy and Floss's constant praise and helping hands as I eventually reclined onto a couch and quickly led to the performance's inevitable conclusion.

Her brother paid me for the session and offered to book me again soon; he was over the moon with the photos he had taken. And asked if I would make a film next time. But a small voice in my head was telling me I had made a catastrophic mistake. A vow hardened within me: never again.

The photos, I'm sure, were traded in certain shadowed circles, but this was a world before the internet's eternal memory; I clung to the hope that they would fade into ghosts, swallowed by time and obscurity.

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eft Tommy's building site shortly after. Disappointed with myself, but Tommy assured me no one would ever know and paid me a small amount of money extra. We parted as friends, and later I relived that night many times in my mind and was actually grateful I had experienced it. I loved being the porn star for one night!

Fed up with the frozen, pre-dawn drives and the crushing 3:30 PM darkness of the British winter, and partly to please my father, who had recently retired from the navy and started an antique shop and restoration business, I began spending time in his antique shop repair workshop. He was a brilliant, instinctive restorer of paintings and furniture, a man who could whisper life back into battered things. I learned by osmosis, studying his alchemy for mixing the perfect grey-green of a stormy sea or for ageing a new varnish to a honeyed, centuries old patina. Inspired, I began my own clandestine work in the back room. Using discarded old canvases and authentically gilded frames, I conjured "antique" masterpieces from nothing. Mum, ever the pragmatist, even listed a couple at a local auction house, they sold for a surprising, thrilling sum. But when Dad found out, his face pale with a terror far deeper than anger, the terror of fraud, of reputations ruined, he shut my entire operation down. It left a bitter, coppery taste of shame, once again one that finally made me lay down my brushes. I abandoned my unsettlingly successful foray into forgery, and art forever.

CHAPTER 3

FRAN AND RICHARD

I arrived at the West of England College of Art and Design in September 1969 and met the other students in my class. Richard made a beeline straight for me. He was lovely, and so gay. I knew straight away we were going to be best friends. But my experience with Tommy held me back. Across the room was a vision of loveliness, and I immediately thought: *way out of my league*. Richard, or Dick, as he liked to be called, had no such reservations and went straight up to her and introduced us. There was an unspoken bond between the three of us straight away.

This private world awakening existed alongside the vibrant, real-world tapestry of my family. I was exactly the same height as Fran when we met; a few years later, I had grown three inches. I was so immature and shy. One time my parents came to Bristol to visit us, but we had hopped out and left the door open, so they made themselves at home. Mum began tidying up. I did realise later I had forgotten to clean all the used condoms from under my bed!

The act of sex itself felt simple, almost incidental, a physical release with a friend. That was the unbreakable

rule: Richard had to remain, for now, just that, a really good friend. People spoke of marriage as work, a deliberate construction, and so, tentatively, I adopted that



philosophy. There was, however, a profound and unexpected bonus: I was genuinely in love with Fran's family. They were a sunlit constellation of charisma. Bruce, Fran's dad, was the coolest man I had ever met, possessing an easy, weathered charm that made everything seem possible. Nicky, Fran's sister, was someone to die for, cute, younger, and sharp with an intelligence that glittered in her eyes.

Fran's parents were unashamed nudists, and they carried it with a casual, unselfconscious grace, their bodies

tanned and toned from years of open-air living. After months of dating like rabbits, Fran, during a heatwave that melted the asphalt, suggested a trip: all of us, piling into Bruce's bottle-green Triumph Vitesse, heading to a nudist beach in Dorset.

THE NUDE BEACH

My nerves were a trapped bird fluttering against my ribs. The drive was an agonising crawl through heavy traffic, a purgatory of exhaust fumes and dread for which I prayed might last forever. We arrived. Nicky and her boyfriend, Keith, were with us. With a laugh that broke the tension, Bruce and Mary were the first to shed their clothes, moving with the ease of shedding a coat. I couldn't help but notice, with a jolt of adolescent insecurity, that Bruce was impressively, classically built. Mary was an older, more serene version of Fran, her hair a darker cascade. Nicky was slender and elf-like, a vision of contained sexuality. Keith, with jet-black hair, seemed almost hidden within himself. I, by stark and mortifying contrast, felt blindingly, blatantly exposed. My fair skin and blond hair made me a beacon, a situation made infinitely worse by an involuntary, stubborn erection. I fled, a pale streak across the hot pebbles, and plunged into the shocking cold of the surf. The sea did its merciful work. The tension dissolved, and for the rest of that golden afternoon, I felt a liberation so profound it was like floating.

Back in the rhythm of daily life, Fran and I were inseparable, spending languid days tangled in bed. Life assumed a hazy, pleasurable shape: rolling into college in the early afternoon, immersed in a design course I adored. I had a knack for innovative ideas, and the tutors' praise was a warm, frequent glow, though I treated it with a cavalier disregard I would later rue. I was essentially buying three relaxed years, the currency paid in time spent mostly in bed with Fran.

SUMMER HOLIDAY

Our first summer, we worked at the Brook Bond Tea factory, jobs arranged by Bill, an old school friend whose family had once owned the company but still had connections with management. Fran was stationed on the monotonous production line, while I stripped aluminium liners from tea chests and lorded over the sweaty, roaring boiler house. We missed the infamous annual factory outing, a legendary bacchanalia described by the other workers with gleeful, graphic detail, a day-long mobile party that ended as an orgy in the back of a bus.

The second summer, we house sat my father's place while my parents toured Italy, giving up work entirely for a two-month idyll of our own. Our third summer break was an epic: eight weeks on Spanish beaches, acquiring a tan so deep it felt like a second skin. We'd driven a patched-together Fiat 500 down to the south of France, camping



on beaches and living on tomatoes, gritty French bread, cheap wine, and each other. The Fiat broke down with loyal frequency, but the French locals were astonishingly kind, bringing us coffee and scavenged spare parts as I sweated over the engine, perhaps pitying the two young kids stranded in the middle of nowhere. We lived like vagabond royalty in our two man tent, a tiny kingdom of salt crusted skin and simple feasts: sun warmed tomatoes, crusty baguettes that shed crumbs like golden sand, cheap wine that tasted of earth, and each other. The only luxury that

haunted me was cheese, a rich, creamy Camembert just out of reach, a phantom flavour we couldn't afford.

Graduation yielded certificates I promptly filed away. A tutor offered me a job at his architecture firm, a golden ticket I politely declined. Fran wanted a family, and I, brimming with a naive confidence, decided I could make more money working with my hands as a house restorer.

GETTING MARRIED

It was a grand, incense heavy Catholic affair, a pageant I viewed as a charming piece of theatre. Fran's grandmother, a wizard with fine wool, crafted stunning dresses for the bridesmaids. The reception was in a renovated castle, where Bruce, Fran's dad, greeted everyone with his charm, then drinking to his customary, cheerful oblivion. Richard was our best man and woman combined, equally loveable by everyone.

A brief, bewildering honeymoon in London left us both exhausted, and we hurried home to the next project.

THE ONE THOUSAND POUND HOUSE 1972

My father lent me a thousand pounds. With it, I bought the four storey corpse of a terrace house in St. Paul's, Bristol's red-light district. It was a skeletal thing, but the roof held and the rendered front looked defiantly waterproof. My plan was a slow resurrection from the basement up. Damp bloomed on the walls like a map of decay.



I attacked it with brute force ignorance, hacking off sodden plaster and slathering on waterproof goo, trusting in common sense over code. Plumbing and electrics

were darker arts I had to decipher from library books in that pre-internet age.

There was an unexpected community. The women and their watchful pimps were friendly, seeming to appreciate the oddity of us, a young couple trying to resurrect a house. Fran worked at a graphic design firm; dressed up for the office, she was a stunning sight, and sometimes was driven to work by her boss, a young trendy whiz kid. I had an inkling of what he had in mind, but me being left alone all day renovating, naked, my imagination kicked in and I jerked off many times, reliving my frustrations. I finished the top floor first and rented it out, feeling the first, glorious surge of income.

An advert on the university pin-board conjured Nick, a student with a Boris Johnson mop and toffy-nosed drawl, who thought our gritty address was impossibly bohemian. He filled the flats with his student friends. When we finally moved into the finished basement, the Vice Squad paid a visit, bemused by our presence in a street of obvious brothels. I found it darkly amusing, a seal of authenticity that kept Fran's parents, wide eyed with middle class horror, firmly away.

The neighbourhood pulsed with a ragged life. Dozens of women perched on the low walls sunken before the basement wells, their figures silhouetted against the perpetual *thump thump thump* of African music that vibrated through the day and night.

OUR SON KIM 1973



You could sense the slippery presence of drugs, a phantom operation that seemed to shift from one decaying house to another. Yet, the women and their watchful pimps were surprisingly friendly; I assured the police we felt quite safe. We didn't take drugs or sell sex, and the immigrants really liked our presents in the street. I really think they appreciated a young couple actually trying to mend a piece of the broken street. We had no trouble for the entire time we lived there.

The renovations complete, I bluffed my way onto a building site, my deception immediately questioned by a huge, bearded foreman who farted with seismic, toxic regularity. He saw through me straight away but, after a

day of watching me, obviously appreciating what he saw. he offered me a deal: in exchange for a lift to and from the building site every day, he would teach me everything I needed to know to fit in on the worksite. I was a bit nervous at what I had agreed to, but when we arrived at his house, his two slobbering Alsatian dogs greeted me as he cracked open his first beer. He didn't want anything else except friendship and treated me as the son he had never had. My looks and manners had won out again.

I worked on the futuristic Esso Motor Hotel, a modular puzzle where entire bathrooms were craned into place.

Home life accelerated. We decided to sell, though I hesitated, I'd grown fond of the frail old lady next door and had dreams of renovating her house too into four more flats. But as Fran was now expecting a baby, we settled for a crumbling terrace house in the upcoming Bristol suburb of Redland.

There, I had befriended Charlie Asgard, the 98-year-old veteran who was our neighbour when I was a student living next door in the house my dad had bought four years before. Charlie was a living archive of the Boer War. I bought his house with a life tenancy deal, but his habit of slowly feeding burning floorboards into his fireplace, a dangerous slow fuse smouldering across the room—made cohabitation impossible.

OUR DAUGHTER VICKY 1975

I contacted his daughter, who took him in, and we were finally alone. I was again renovating, and when it was



finished I rented out a couple of rooms to students, and even dug a swimming pool in the backyard, hauling hundreds of barrows of earth through the terraced house.

Kim, our first son, was two when Vicky was born. Life was a merry, exhausting blur of hard work and young family chaos. I renovated, rented to students again, and in a fit of madness, dug a swimming pool in the backyard, wheeling barrow-loads of earth through the house. Then Fran was pregnant again. We sold at a big profit and, dizzy with confidence, decided to build a brand-new house from scratch on a perfect plot by the river.

We sold at a substantial profit and, flush with confidence at twenty three, decided to build our own modern house on a perfect plot by the river. The architect's plans were sleek. What could go wrong?

BUILDING A NEW HOUSE

The excavator uncovered a hundred foot-deep well, a gaping historical throat. Panicked by the delays it promised, I made a secret, unilateral decision: I filled it in by night, burying history under tonnes of surplus soil. I told myself it was still there, just sleeping, and that a gaping pit was no place for a child to play.

The build was a struggle of guesswork and observation, but we finished, and Fran gave birth to our daughter Vicky

KIDS, SUCCESS AND FAILURE

We were the picture of mid seventies success: mortgage-free modern house, new car, two blond children, a beautiful wife. We were catapulted into a social scene of affluent, bored executives and their restless wives. Cocktail parties and fondue nights blurred together. Both of us, still looking like teenagers, found ourselves in a swift, secret current of casual encounters with neighbours. It felt like harmless, exhilarating play.

The zenith was a riotous Toga party in the scorching summer of ‘76. The house throbbed with music. I’d concocted a volcanic punch that grew stronger by the minute. My toga kept slipping, and I danced in naked, liberated abandon, encouraged by laughing shouts. Unable to find Fran, who i’m sure was having fun too, I slipped out with a neighbour’s wife, tumbling into her sterile, quiet house. A few weeks later one of Fran’s best friends, who offered a tangible, passionate distraction. Our subsequent rendezvous, stolen afternoons on a grassy hill overlooking a motorway, revealed a shocking truth: in her smaller, more athletic frame, I felt a direct, electric charge I realised I had been missing with Fran. When I confessed the affair, our fragile world finally shattered.

CHAPTER 4

AUSTRALIA 1977

Amid the wreckage and everyone's concern, I proposed a nuclear option: Australia. A year-long holiday to erase the slate, away from our parents and the ghost of Patrick. Fran, thinking of the children, agreed. We sold the house for a massive profit and shared a final, tearful dinner with the neighbours," It was 1977.

We boarded the plane, trailing the ashes of our old life behind us, headed for a blank, burning new sky. We



3ed day in Australia on Bondi Beach

stumbled into Sydney, the southern sun a glaring stranger after a lifetime of muted English light. My bag, heavy with crumpled banknotes, felt both like a treasure and a target. Adrift in the swirl of accents and traffic, I spotted a policeman ,a pillar of crisp khaki and authority. I left Fran resting on a sun-bleached bench a few hundred metres back, too weary to move.

Approaching him alone, I asked for a recommendation for a moderately priced hotel. He looked me over, a lone young man with a travel-worn bag, and with a quick nod directed me to a place in Kings Cross.

The taxi ride was a blur of climbing streets and unfamiliar foliage, ending with a jarring halt. I couldn't believe it. The hotel foyer was a riot of neon and garish posters, plastered with images of naked girls and strippers, a temple to neon decadence. My heart sank, then rose with a wild, reckless laugh. It wasn't what I'd asked for, but it was an experience, our first raw, unfiltered taste of a new continent.

The next day, I managed to contact my cousin Graham, who had settled in Sydney. We gratefully transferred our bags to his spare room, a brief respite while we found our feet. With urgency fuelled by a desire for freedom, we soon bought a second-hand caravan and a dependable Holden station wagon, our new home and steed for the year-long adventure that called to us. We had other connections. Nick, a former student lodger from Bridge





Stock Road, our student with the Boris Johnson lookalike, all rumpled blond charm, was now married with children and living in Sydney. We'd kept in touch over the years and could have stayed with his family, but the open road was a siren song, pulling us away from suburbia's gentle grip.

Before we left, however, Graham invited us to a friend's party in a posh Sydney suburb. I'd just bought the Holden, so we made a snug bed in the back for the kids. Upon arriving, we left them there to sleep in the driveway, a common and seemingly safe practice in that more trusting era. The party was a whirlpool of Antipodean hedonism. A raucous music group played, Eskies groaned with icy beer, and a glittering swimming pool held a few frolicking, naked men. The atmosphere was infectious, a champagne bubble of abandon. Soon, everyone was drunk, and of course, Fran, radiant and the most striking girl there, was playfully persuaded to strip off and join the men in the pool. It was all seemingly tame, and I soon followed, the warm water and the night air dissolving inhibitions. Yet, a thin wire of anxiety tightened in my chest. I noticed some of the guys' appreciative gazes lingering on Fran a little too long. The mix of booze, nudity, and that unspoken tension decided it. By dawn, the decision was crystallised, it was time to leave Sydney. We would head up the coast, to see what untamed promise Queensland had to offer. So we were out of there fast, the city's lights shrinking in our rearview.

Our Home a Caravan

The year that followed, travelling around Australia, was the most profoundly beautiful of my life. We were a tight, sun-bleached nuclear unit, sleeping in the caravan's cosy confines. We witnessed spectacular sights: blood-red

sunsets over ancient rock, thunderstorms cracking open the sky above endless plains. We swam naked on deserted beaches where the sand was like powdered diamond, hiked up mist-shrouded mountains, and visited resilient outback towns where the pubs echoed with hearty, welcoming laughter. It was a year of unvarnished wonder.





But such freedom carries a price. Our savings dwindled, and the comfortable fantasy began to fray at the edges. Reality, practical and demanding, soon became apparent. I had to choose: settle back in the UK or in Australia permanently. The irony was rich. I had been the one to initially push for this Australian adventure, but now it was Fran who was utterly, irrevocably set on making this vast, sun-drenched country our permanent home. And so, of

course, we did. The wanderer had found his anchor, and the adventure quietly, seamlessly, became a life.

Our extensive travels had made one thing clear: if we wanted work in Australia, it would be in either Sydney or the Gold Coast. We chose the Gold Coast for its kinder climate and cheaper living, and that decision shaped our future.

Building a Home on the Gold Coast

Our first step was buying a block of land in Ashmore from the notorious real estate developer, Larry Wall. Larry was a character straight out of a Gatsby-like fantasy. He held court from the penthouse suite of the first twenty-storey high-rise he'd built on the coast years prior, surrounded by a trio of glamorous secretaries. His hands were a spectacle in themselves, laden with gold and diamond rings, flashing with every gesture, reminiscent of an old-school Liberace. Charming, undoubtedly, but with a flamboyance that hinted at the stories buried in his rise.

Once our house was finished, I had to find work with other builders. For a time, I laboured on frames and roofs fashioned from native hardwood. The work was brutally physical in those days. We worked in pairs, a system that required not just brawn but a partnership, you had to find someone compatible and share all your building

knowledge freely. Living on the caravan site, Fran had a girlfriend, whose partner was a young carpenter, new to town but already known for his hard work and easy smile. When he agreed to become my work partner, building house frames and roofs took on a different energy.

I learned quickly at his side, and within weeks we fell into a steady, reliable rhythm, the harmonious scrape of planers, the mutual reach for a tool, the silent understanding that needed few words.

I guess I had a bit of a crush on him. It was hard not to. He was a beautiful young man, a blond-haired surfer somehow translated into a carpenter's frame, with sun-bleached curls escaping from beneath his cap and a physique honed by waves and work. It was a quiet pleasure just to be near him every day. We became as close as two guys can be without crossing into a sexual relationship, though the air between us sometimes hummed with an unspoken current. I knew, in the way you know these things, that he might have agreed to certain lines being blurred. "Whilst you're down there," he'd sometimes joke with a casual, crooked grin, and the suggestion would hang in the sawdust-filled air. Several times, he told me outright, his voice low and conspiratorial, that he would love to be alone with Fran. But I always dismissed the idea, waving it away as a fantasy too dangerous to even contemplate.

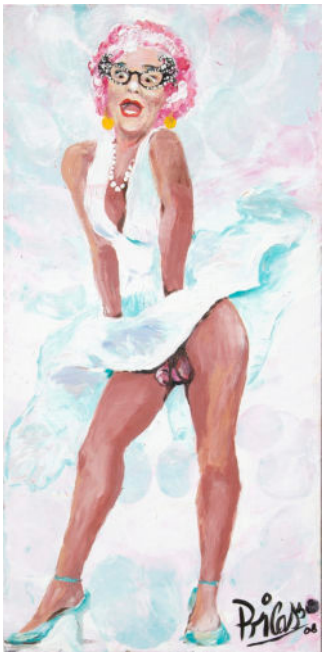
My life with Fran was solid, our sex life fundamentally good, yet it had settled into a predictable pattern. It felt monotonous, a bit repetitive, a well-worn path without surprises. I was not good at communicating this to her; the words felt like accusations waiting to be born, and I feared causing a hurt I couldn't mend. So I stayed silent, and in that silence, I grew confused. My situation felt increasingly hopeless and lonely, a comfortable trap. Frustration coiled tightly in my chest. I longed, with a sharp and specific ache, for the thrill of a new partner, not to replace what I had, but just for fun, for a moment of forgetting, for a break from the echoing quiet of my own tangled desires.

Yet, through every sunburnt day, through the blistering heat that shimmered above the construction site, the relentless thwack of nail guns and hammers driving nails, and the back-straining haul of rough-cut timber my mind was never truly there. It drifted, a restless bird, to a quieter, more vivid place where I dreamed of creating art. At night, to soothe that persistent, creative itch, I would retreat to the garage. There, under the lonely hum of a single bulb, I took up wood carving, the scent of cedar and pine filling the air, and dabbled in painting, leaving smudges of colour everywhere.

THE LADY NEXT DOOR

I had crafted a few wooden rocking horses for the kids. I remember one particular afternoon, a day so hot the air

felt thick enough to drink. Fran was out with her friends.



The garage door was open, a rectangle of blinding light. I had just finished sawing by hand a sheet of plywood into strips and was going to laminate them together. Sweat streamed down my chest and back, and in the stifling heat, I wore only my smallest, most faded pair of board shorts, the dust sticking to my damp skin. I was heading for the shelves which held all the odds and ends that were too numerous to stack in order.

That was when she appeared, the lady a neighbour. I had admired her from a distance for months: an executive, always sure of herself, impeccably kept, her life seeming as neat and organised as her



tailored skirts. Her partner was away often, and our interactions had never been more than polite, neighbourly small talk exchanged.

Now, here she was, a vision of cool composure silhouetted in my dusty, chaotic garage. She stepped into the haze, her eyes adjusting to the dim light. “What are you doing?” she asked, her voice cutting through the drone of the heat.

Caught off guard, slick with sweat and lost in the physicality of my work, I gave an innocent, dumb, and utterly honest reply. I held up the saw, gestured to the wood, and said, “I’m looking for a screw.”

The moment didn’t just pass; it hung in the heavy air. Dust motes drifted in the sunbeam between us. Our eyes locked, and in that silent, electric second, the double meaning dawned on us both. A faint, knowing smile touched her lips before she mastered it. “Well,” she said, her tone dry and poised, a perfect contrast to my dishevelled state, “you won’t find one in here.” She approached me, gave me a long kiss on the lips, then with a last lingering look, turned and walked back toward her neat, orderly house.

I hesitated,, but she turned her head looking back and playfully smiled, her hand beckoning. I followed her all I could see was her bottom swinging all the way up the road and through her front door.

She slipped out of her suit and pushed down my pants. What followed was pure animal sex. She screamed and bucked; my sweaty body slipped around hers, above and below, and finally, after about half an hour, she thanked me and we agreed it had never happened. This time I would never tell Fran, as I had a few years before, back in the UK. My innermost thoughts and secrets were now a closed book. But every day I knew I wanted to use my artistic talents. I felt trapped, living a lie in more ways than one, as I walked home feeling better than I had ever felt for a long time.

Life in suburbia unfolded easily. We bought a new car, invested in camping gear. Then, on a whim, we visited a boat show and bought a cabin cruiser, which became our passport to freedom. We would speed across the Broadwater to Tipplers Resort, where we could party, sleep on the boat, or pitch a tent on the shore. A short walk over the sand dunes placed us on the vast, empty expanse of the Pacific Ocean, with rolling surf and miles of deserted beach—a secluded paradise where clothes were optional and time seemed to melt away. And when the kids were surfing, we could hide away in the dunes and make love under the hot sun.

It was there we met Don and Silvia and his naturist family. Don had an amazing voice, deep and lyrical, which he'd used for some radio work. He also had a huge stack of porn magazines and videos. A former solicitor from Melbourne, he'd reinvented himself as a Gold Coast real estate agent and was making a fortune. We became fast



friends. It was Don who, sensing my restlessness, persuaded me to sell up and build again. We followed his advice, moving to a block on Hill-view Parade, the most prestigious road in the suburb of Ashmore. Don lived just a few doors up, a big house with a swimming pool, which we all swam in naked all the time. He was an enthusiastic artist, so we skated his collection of porn magazines to create sexually explicit sculptures in the A-framed studio he commissioned me to build in his private garden. He owned a houseboat, and we spent memorable weekends on it, anchored at one of the deserted sandy islands that fringe the coast.

Our new home saw its share of wild parties which always ended up with everyone naked and massaging each

other. I had built a small swimming pool for the kids and life was smooth, although I still craved to become more artistic. As Don shared my ambition, I was thinking this could all work out well.

Then, a family directive arrived: my parents and sister, with her kids, decided to retire to Australia. They told me to scout for a spectacular property that could serve as a future family base. The news, to me, was a genuine delight. For Fran, however, it landed with a dull thud of dread. Her relationship with my mother had always been a frost-threaded history of polite barbs and subtle tensions. The prospect of her mother-in-law taking root next door, a permanent fixture just beyond the garden fence, was one she did not remotely anticipate with joy. Yet, we were all older now, seasoned by life; we clung to the fragile hope that time had sanded down the old edges, and things would, somehow, work out.



I mentioned this growing dream to Don. He seized upon it with the fervour of a quest, taking up the hunt with unbridled gusto. Days

later, he came rushing over, breathless, his eyes alight with triumph. He had found it: a hundred wild acres crowning a mountain, a kingdom in the sky. It held the sprawling Gold Coast in a panoramic embrace, its gaze stretching inland over rumpled, blue-green valleys for more than seventy miles. And there, nestled in its heart, were not one, but three run-down houses on it. The moment my boots sank into that resilient earth, breathing air so thin and pure it tasted of cold quartz, and gazing at an horizon that promised infinity, a profound certainty settled in my bones. This was where I wanted to breathe my last.

MY FAMILY FOLLOWS US 1982

Acting on that instinct, I immediately placed the ten per cent deposit. Dad, ever the pillar, duly sent the substantial sum to secure our future. It was done. When he arrived a month later, his disappointment was a palpable chill in the mountain air. Having just parted with his impressive home on Chichester Harbour with its own private stretch of shore, this rugged, remote expanse seemed a raw and daunting exchange. I understand that now. But then, we were utterly wrapped in the sublime beauty of the place, intoxicated by the possibility of three homes for our scattered clan.

His spirits lifted, like sun burning off a mist, when Mum and my sister Sally finally arrived months later, and once I had repaired and extended his designated house into a worthy gallery for his cherished antiques. As the family

tapestry began to weave itself back together, I bought an old church nearby and got permission to create a craft shop in it, as it was on the main tourist route.

But with my family there Fran and me drifted apart I wont go into the details but in the end we had an amicable split with joint custody of the children

GARY MY FRIEND

Later, seeking something I couldn't quite name, I went up to Brisbane with a friend, Gary, who visited us regularly. He was very gay, and had always flirted with me and asked me to explore the gay scene. We started at a bathhouse, tucked away in a quiet part of the inner city. The entrance was unremarkable, a plain door marked only by a number and a faint "Bodyline" sign. The smell of disinfectant met us on the stairs, sharp and clean. At the top, a friendly man at the kiosk greeted us with a "Darling" or "Sweetheart," and asked if we'd been before. Gary said yes, paid, and we were given towels and a locker key. Inside, the air was warm and close. We undressed in a cramped locker room. Anonymous hands found me in the dimness, brief, searching touches in the dark. The rule was clear: no means no. It was fascinating, thrilling in its honesty. Soon I was lying back on a bench in the middle of a room surrounded by men, their hands, mouths, and genitals all over and in me. It was fantastic, sensuous, and eventually climactic.

Afterwards, we showered and headed to a gay nightclub, the Wickham, where Gary wanted to meet friends and dance before driving home. The whole night was an eye-opener, raw and real.But this was the early ‘80s, and AIDS was in every headline. Anxiety soon clouded the excitement. I worried I’d been exposed, but Gary reassured me. I got tested, negative. I was lucky! Years later,I heard Gary had died of AIDS. I’m not sure, and I hope it isn’t true. He was such a lovely man.

CHAPTER 5

THE DIVORCE 1985

I kept quite close to Fran, who over the years I saw more and more. As I analysed my life, I now know I was living a lie from the start. She has subsequently become my best friend, living quite close with her husband of twenty-something years.

The house on the property back then wasn't much of a house at all. It was a weathered, ramshackle shack, its timbers silvered by rain and sun, a lonely silhouette against the vast sky.

I took up wood carving to numb my mind of everything, getting lost in the grain of the pieces I found on my rambles through the rainforest. It was time-consuming, and selling them was difficult without my church gallery. I soon lost interest.

Reeling from the raw ache of my divorce, I became obsessed with a single, solid idea: I would build a swimming pool. Not some polite, rectangular plunge, but a great, grinning mouth of water right next to my back door.





Once the hole gaped, raw and red, we set to work, a skeleton of steel rebar and a circulatory system of pipes, all waiting for a skin of concrete. I piled sacks of cement and aggregate like sandbags against a siege, and on the chosen weekend, I enlisted my son, my nephews, and a ragtag band of their friends. We worked in a blur of sweat and shouting, mixing and pouring until, two days later, it set: a smooth, grey-blue lagoon gleaming in the uncertain light.

IT WAS MAGNIFICENT

We didn't stop there. We felled a few straggling trees and built a cathedral over the water and the yard, a sturdy

frame of big, rough sawn beams, roofed in corrugated clear plastic that turned rainfall into a drum solo and sunlight into liquid gold. We walled it in with salvaged windows, each pane a different history of smudges and clarity. On the roof, hundreds of metres of coiled black water pipes snaked like veins, drinking in the sun to warm the pool below. It was a paradise, forged by hand, a party hall that doubled the very heart of the house.

And did we have parties? Oh, yes.

With no neighbours for miles, our freedom was absolute, a roar against the quiet dark. The air hung thick with the sweet perfume of marijuana, a permanent incense. Our centrepiece was a relic: an old naval sea mine, once repurposed as a silencer for the timber mill that had previously stood and burned on this land. All that remained of that industry were some twisted saw benches and the rusting hulks of log-carriers, silent sentinels in the long grass. The sea mine, hollowed out, became our fireplace. I set it right by the pool's edge, and on party nights, we'd feed it until its iron belly glowed a furious cherry-red, swallowing a whole trailer-load of wood before dawn. The radiant heat was a primal comfort, perfect for drying off with a beer in hand, skin tingling.

The music thumped on until morning. The bedrooms were never empty, or people would simply slip into the warm, dark embrace of the pool itself.

I was now thirty six.

Before this, my life had been quiet, my romantic history a short, unremarkable list. But now, working as a maintenance man at Binna Burra Lodge and suddenly, shockingly single, a curious alchemy occurred. People seemed to take pity on the divorcé in the crazy house with the pool. I've always looked younger than my years, and suddenly, I was swept up in a current of youth-filled, music throbbing, fire-lit world. I had so many affairs I lost count. I could have taken the title of Shagger of the Year away from Russell Brand.

The old, broken shack was gone. In its place, I had built something else entirely: a vibrant, pulsing engine of life, and for a while, I was its glowing, grateful centre. I was slightly noticed, and I loved the adulation.

SINGLE AT LAST

The hotel was my world that entire season. Each week unfolded in a warm rhythm of work and camaraderie. It was a wonderfully sociable place; the clatter of plates and the murmur of guests were the backdrop to our shared exhaustion and laughter. Mid morning, without fail, we'd all collapse into chairs for a sacred ritual: warm scones, thick clotted cream, and the syrupy blush of strawberry

jam. For lunch, we were granted the small, glorious privilege of eating in the restaurant itself, amidst the very guests we served. It felt like heaven.

I used to live for Friday nights. We'd all descend on the Canungra pub, a tide of hotel housemaids and waiters, where a live band's chords would thump through the sticky air. We drank and danced with abandon until they ushered us out around 11:30. Then, armed with cheap pizzas, we'd spill into the park or someone's house, a tangle of youth and freedom, laughing and fooling around until the early hours.

When I was drifting into sleep, I'd often hear it; the distant, sputtering complaint of a trail bike slicing through the suburban silence. It would be her, an Aboriginal girl with fierce, dark eyes, arriving astride her husband's bike, a ghost of the night riding on two wheels. I, young and selfish, took the warmth she offered without question. Sometimes Brett would accompany her, quiet and watchful. Brett, a surprisingly tender kisser, would undress and kiss every square inch of us both intimately in a *ménage à trois*, something I felt really erotic and fulfilling. The best. A shadow of warmth and urgent whispers, and then, when we were finished, they would dress in a silent, swift ritual, climb back onto the machine, and vanish into the swallowing darkness to return to her life.

Brett, I heard years later in a passing, painful sentence, also died of AIDS. He was also a close friend of Gary.

MEDITATION

My studio was a wreck, so I set about remodelling it, attaching a new exterior cladding made of ferro cement. I was inspired by Antonio Gaudí, the Spanish design architect. It was like meditation ,a cure for depression. The build went slowly and took many years as I kept finding other projects, there was no hurry.

It was the mid-eighties, and the AIDS epidemic had turned the world outside into a threat I couldn't see but felt everywhere, in the hushed conversations, the fearful glances, the grainy news reports that painted intimacy as a kind of Russian roulette. So I retreated. Socialising felt like stepping into a minefield, and I wasn't brave enough to play those odds. But a guy has needs, not just the obvious ones, though God knows those burned hot enough, but something deeper: the need to feel alive, unbroken, untouchable. And so I found my salvation in the bush.

Our property was vast, a sprawling thumbprint of wild land pressed right up against the Canungra warfare centre, where the distant thump of artillery sometimes echoed like a heartbeat through the trees. Most

afternoons, I'd run down to our dam, a murky, sun



warmed pocket of water fringed with reeds and lily pads, and strip off every stitch of clothing. The air hit my skin, cool and curious, and I'd wade in until the

mud squelched between my toes, then swim a few lazy laps, watching ripples scatter the sky's reflection. Afterwards, I'd pull on only my boots, tough, scuffed leather that knew every inch of this land, grab my machete, and vanish into the green.

It was heaven, that pretending. I was Tarzan one moment, swinging from vines in my imagination; Rambo the next, a one man army against nothing but silence and shadow. Indestructible. Completely, utterly free.

But freedom came at a price. I moved slowly at first, hacking through thick, virgin rainforest where the light fell in fractured gold coins and the air smelled of wet earth and rot. Spiky lawyer cane grabbed at my arms, leaving thin red scratches that stung like paper cuts; lower vines coiled around my ankles like patient serpents, and I'd get tangled so badly I'd have to stop, panting, and saw myself loose with the machete's dull edge. It hurt, God, it hurt, but that was part of the ritual, the blood price for entry into this cathedral of leaves.

Sometimes I'd climb. There were strangler figs older than anyone I knew, their latticework trunks a chaos of woven roots that had squeezed the life from their host trees a century ago. One in particular became my secret spire: its hollow core opened like a dark throat, and I'd shimmy up inside it, hand over hand, my bare feet finding purchase on damp, crumbling bark. At about a hundred feet up, I'd pause, heart hammering, my skin smeared with moss and the fine grit of decaying leaf matter. Spiders skittered across my shoulders; beetles tickled my ribs. I didn't brush them off. That grime was my camouflage, my armour. From that height, the world fell away, just me, the sway of the fig, and the distant murmur of wind through the canopy. It was meditation, yes, but also something rawer: a release that burned through every anxious thought until all that remained was breath and pulse and the glorious ache of being purely animal.

Eventually, the terrain began to shift. The rainforest thinned, giving way to drier, more open country where the

sunlight hit harder and the grass turned blond and brittle. Here, borders of spindly acacia and ironbark marked the edges of unseen territories, and small kangaroos, wallabies, really, bounded across my path in twos and threes, their dark eyes watching me with cautious curiosity. I'd follow the gradual descent until I reached my destination: a single, flat topped boulder the size of a small car, bleached by decades of sun and worn smooth as bone. From up there, the view was magnificent, a sprawling quilt of valleys and ridges that stretched all the way to the blue smudge of the horizon. I'd sprawl across the warm stone, let the heat soak into my tired muscles, and bake for an hour in absolute silence, nothing but the chirr of cicadas and the far-off cry of a hawk to keep me company.

Then came the return. The bush was never kind on the way back; it reclaimed its territory with vicious generosity. Vines whipped my face. Brambles raked my chest and thighs. By the time I reached the dam again, I was a tapestry of fresh welts and old scars, my skin crosshatched with thin red lines that wept tiny beads of blood. I didn't care. Not one bit. Those scratches were proof that I'd existed outside the fear, outside the headlines, outside the cramped little box of caution the world had tried to seal me in.

I couldn't get lost. There was no need for a compass or a map. I just headed up, always up, and eventually the land would tilt, the trees would part, and there would be my house, small and ordinary, sitting at the top of the ridge

like a patient anchor. I'd step through the back door, bruised and filthy and grinning, every muscle singing with exhaustion, and know, with absolute certainty, that I'd had the freest day a man could ask for. Stress? Gone. Fear? Forgotten. For those few hours, I was nothing but muscle and bone and will, moving through a world that asked nothing of me except to keep going.

CARNARVON GORGE

Later, I was transferred from the chaos of Binna Burra to the vast, red dirt expanse of Carnarvon Gorge, to work on the tourist facility there. It was a close-knit constellation of



staff, itinerant guests, and hardened country folks from isolated stations, a world bound by shared sunsets and generator hum. I truly loved it. The staff were hungry for fun and sexual experiences, and the daughter of a local cotton farmer, sun-bleached and capable, came to the lodges' outback pub to mingle, and the community nodded in approval; I might have been absorbed into that land through marriage. But

NERIDA, CIRCUMSTANCES KEPT US APART I WILL ALWAYS MISS HER.

beneath the wide, star-crowded skies, I knew my own heart was a compass needle, stubbornly pointing back to the familiar contours of our family property and regular sex.

At the time I was seeing a lady from a few doors down, the mother of my son's school friend. Our arrangement was clinical, regular. She was a figure of theatrical glamour, all slightly false notes, with enormous, improbable breasts and fingernails sharpened and painted a warning shade of red. It ended the day her husband returned. He was a solid man, about fourteen stone of quiet muscle, and his voice on the phone was calm, too calm, a flat river stone over a deep, cold current. He suggested we "sort it out, man to man." I understood the unspoken physics of the situation, the weight of him, the righteousness, the closed garage door. I politely, firmly declined and stayed behind my own locked door. Nothing ever happened, except for the quiet, hurried departure from the street a few weeks later, a

vacancy that felt less like peace and more like a sentence left hanging, forever unanswered.

AFFAIRS

My heart was utterly, foolishly lost to a pair of sisters who lived on one of the sun-bleached dairy properties, their lives smelling of fresh milk and cut grass. They also worked up at Binna Burra Lodge, moving through the misty, eucalyptus-scented air of the mountain like a dream. They were half my age, a fact that pulsed in my mind like a warning bell, yet I was besotted, a man caught in a sweet, torturous spell. I waged a silent war with my conscience, avoiding them until the struggle tipped me into a grey, hollow depression. One of them spoke of wanting four children and a simple, normal life, and after those initial, breathless few months, I shattered the delicate thing between us. It was a decision that has haunted me, a ghost of regret that has lingered for the rest of my days.

Seeking a distraction from the ache, I grasped at life. A few weeks later, the crackle of the radio announced a fancy dress party at a Brisbane nightclub, the prize a holiday to Hamilton Island. On a whim, driven by a need to escape myself, I became someone else. With my rough-hewn resemblance to Paul Hogan, I fashioned a ludicrous, magnificent crocodile from a painted plastic bubbly pool cover and wire, a creature I could climb inside. I even convinced her sister, who bore a passing

grace to Hogan's screen partner, to accompany me as my Linda. Inside that hot, restrictive shell, I was anonymous, free. We drank cheap champagne under strobe lights, our laughter bouncing off the crowded walls, and somehow, miraculously, we won.

Still tender from the recent heartbreak, Kim, my partner for the night, was very young, and I am proud to say we shared an entirely platonic weekend of sunburned shoulders and saltwater smiles, a bittersweet parenthesis of joy on an island meant for lovers.

The long, hollow months after Fran left were filled with the sound of a chisel meeting wood. As a distraction from the quiet of an empty house, I began dabbling in wood carving again, seeking forms hidden within the gnarled roots of old trees. With every scrape and gouge, animals would emerge, a possum curled in a knot, an owl's face in a burl, as if they had always been sleeping there. This private therapy project unexpectedly caught the eye of the local paper, which ran a spread featuring my rooted menagerie.

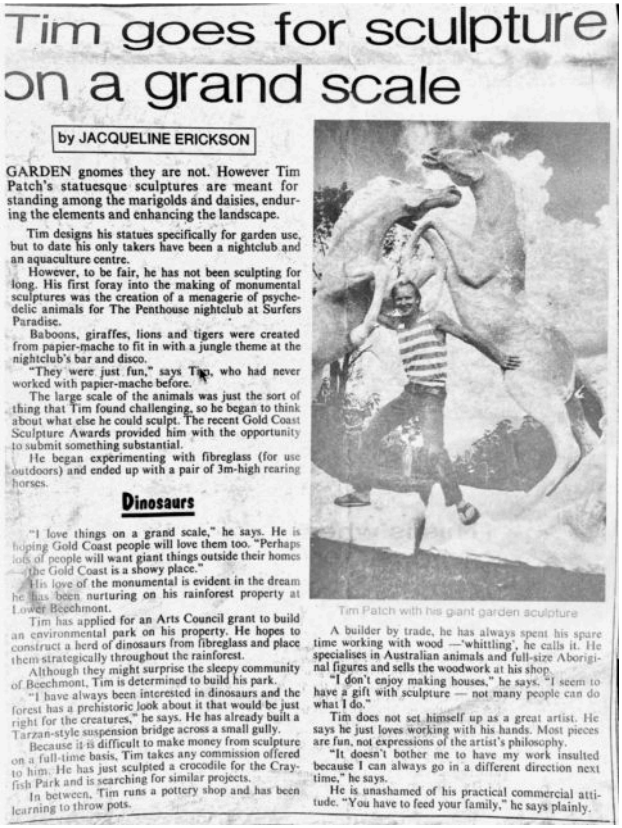
THE PENTHOUSE NIGHTCLUB

That article prompted a call that felt like it came from another planet: the Penthouse Nightclub in Surfers Paradise, a temple of disco glamour and mirrored balls.



They wanted a fantasy, a full-scale paper mâché jungle, their words, to transform the entire second floor of their five storey palace. The vision was a fluorescent ecosystem where lions, panthers, parrots, and snakes would loom over the dancing crowds. I, of course, said yes.

The scale was absurd. Most animals were life sized, though the giraffe, constrained by the ceiling, stood in a perpetual, stooped lunge, its neck stretching forward across the acoustic tiles. Overwhelmed, I asked my father for help with painting the beasts that would adorn the pillars and doors. To my surprise, he was ecstatic. For one solid week, we worked side by side in that hollow, echoing space, the air thick with the scent of fresh paint and drying paste. It was the closest I've ever felt to him, a



Tim goes for sculpture on a grand scale

by JACQUELINE ERICKSON

GARDEN gnomes they are not. However Tim Patch's statuesque sculptures are meant for standing among the marigolds and daisies, enduring the elements and enhancing the landscape.

Tim designs his statues specifically for garden use, but to date his only takers have been a nightclub and an aquaculture centre.

However, to be fair, he has not been sculpting for long. His first foray into the making of monumental sculptures was the creation of a menagerie of psychedelic animals for The Penthouse nightclub at Surfers Paradise.

Baboons, giraffes, lions and tigers were created from papier-mache to fit in with a jungle theme at the nightclub's bar and disco.

"They were just fun," says Tim, who had never worked with papier-mache before.

The large scale of the animals was just the sort of thing that Tim found challenging, so he began to think about what else he could sculpt. The recent Gold Coast Sculpture Awards provided him with the opportunity to submit something substantial.

He began experimenting with fibreglass (for use outdoors) and ended up with a pair of 3m-high rearing horses.

Dinosaurs

"I love things on a grand scale," he says. He is hoping Gold Coast people will love them too. "Perhaps lots of people will want giant things outside their homes — the Gold Coast is a showy place."

His love of the monumental is evident in the dream he has been nurturing on his rainforest property at Lower Beechmont.

Tim has applied for an Arts Council grant to build an environmental park on his property. He hopes to construct a herd of dinosaurs from fibreglass and place them strategically throughout the rainforest.

Although they might surprise the sleepy community of Beechmont, Tim is determined to build his park.

"I have always been interested in dinosaurs and the forest has a prehistoric look about it that would be just right for the creatures," he says. He has already built a Tarzan-style suspension bridge across a small gully.

Because it is difficult to make money from sculpture on a full-time basis, Tim takes any commission offered to him. He has just sculpted a crocodile for the Crayfish Park and is searching for similar projects.

In between, Tim runs a pottery shop and has been learning to throw pots.

Tim Patch with his giant garden sculpture

A builder by trade, he has always spent his spare time working with wood — 'whittling', he calls it. He specialises in Australian animals and full-size Aboriginal figures and sells the woodwork at his shop.

"I don't enjoy making houses," he says. "I seem to have a gift with sculpture — not many people can do what I do."

Tim does not set himself up as a great artist. He says he just loves working with his hands. Most pieces are fun, not expressions of the artist's philosophy.

"It doesn't bother me to have my work insulted because I can always go in a different direction next time," he says.

He is unashamed of his practical commercial attitude. "You have to feed your family," he says plainly.

silent, focused teamwork, our bond built stroke by stroke. Our soundtrack was the thumping bass of *Dirty Dancing* routines, practised relentlessly by dancers every afternoon, their shadows flickering past our ladders.

My medium was humble: chicken wire, flour, water, and torn newspaper. From this messy pulp, a papier-mâché menagerie took shape. I painted them in a psychedelic riot, shocking pinks, electric greens, and ultraviolet blues that would later vibrate under the nightclub's black lights. We caged them behind massive bamboo bars, and the effect was astonishing. They were vibrant, savage ghosts

frozen in mid-prowl, a silent jungle awaiting the storm of Saturday night.

Yet, for all their neon grandeur, my creations were profoundly fragile. Their fate was not fire or party damage, but something quieter and more comically tragic. Slowly, quietly, an army of mice found the flour and paste sculptures. Under the cover of darkness, they nibbled this temporary jungle into hollow, lace-like ghosts. Looking back, the true danger wasn't rodents, but the enormous fire risk that hung over the dance floor, tonnes of dried paper and flour that could have ignited in an instant from a stray cigarette. My glorious, glowing jungle was, in the end, a beautiful tinderbox, quietly being devoured from the inside out.

MODELLING

The filming year unfolded, and I was called before the lens once more. The first adventure took me deep into the green embrace of the Beechmont hinterland, to a waterhole that seemed spun from liquid light. It was a hidden gem for the Binna Burra advert, where the water, chilled by mountain springs, held the perfect, clear reflection of the sky. Sunlight, fractured by a canopy of scribbly gums, danced on the surface like scattered coins. There, waist-deep in that pristine chill, I was cast as the ideal tourist, part of a honeymoon idyll. My co-star was one of the lodge's own ,a woman with a smile as warm as the afternoon light and a laugh that echoed



softly off the water polished stones. We paddled and played our parts, the scene a vignette of whispered jokes and perfect, camera ready serenity, all cool water and dappled gold.

WEATHER MAN

But the true character role came later, at Crayfish Park. They transformed me into a knockabout bushman, a deliberate homage to a certain cinematic crocodile hunter. I remember the weight of the worn Akubra on my head, the deliberate swagger in my stride, and the feel of a prop knife (blunt, of course) at my side. The dusty tourist park became my outback, and sharing the frame with me was none other than Brian Bury, Channel Nine's own trusted weatherman, trading his satellite maps for a bit of bush comedy.



The set crackled with a different energy, less serene, more mischievous. Between takes, Brian's easy-going charm turned director's calls into riotous banter, and my exaggerated Dundee squint was often broken by genuine laughter. It wasn't just acting; it was a blast, a memory forged in the good-natured chaos of make-believe.

CHAPTER 6

HELLFIRE POTTERY 1987







Seeking solid ground, I turned to clay. My sister worked for Beach Mountain Pottery, and I knew the earthy weight of a spinning wheel from school. I asked John, the owner, for a chance. He agreed with a nod, and within weeks, my hands remembered their craft. I became a production potter, my world reduced to the centrifugal hum of the wheel, the slick grey slip between my fingers, the rhythmic rise of hundreds of mugs, casseroles, and jugs from formless lumps. It was a





monkish, meditative life, and for about a year I was single-minded and focused.

The three years I'd lived as a

single stud stretched behind me like a string of dimly lit rooms, each holding its own fleeting affair. There were good ones, bad ones, moments of laughter and sharp words, all of which I chalked up vaguely to “experience.” Yet the tally, when I finally paused to count it, left a peculiar chill in my veins, a feeling of something hollow and worn thin, as if I’d been collecting shadows instead of warmth. I was tired of my own echo. The desire to settle down wasn’t a gentle yearning, but a quiet, urgent need.

My father, watching my life’s frantic pace with worried eyes, had put it more bluntly: “You’ll kill yourself if you don’t slow down.” I began to sift through the faded chart of my past, my inner eye scanning its hazy horizons for a safe harbour, and Penny ticked all the boxes. Penny was artistic, and had a daughter Sky the same age as my kids. She was clever, a teacher with numerous degrees, with respectable parents who prophesied to give us all the help we needed to create a happy family. But as life would have it, subsequently fulfilled none of these quiet requirements. I see now, with the clarity of years, that the failure was chiefly my own fault. I had sought a solution, not a soulmate, and had mistaken a pleasant arrangement for the foundation of a shared life.

During that vibrant, clay dusted period, my long-held vision for a pottery business didn’t just take root, it flourished. With my sister Sally as my steadfast partner, we embarked on transforming the old, echoing schoolhouse. We renovated it into a spacious home for Penny and me, but the true magic happened at the rear.



There, we built a vast, sunlit workspace, a cathedral of creativity designed to accommodate roaring kilns, spinning wheels, a chugging pug mill, and orderly rooms for storage and packing. From this hive of activity, Hellfire Pottery was born; it was the name of our farm, as the original land owners had a feud going. Signs of which remained when we first brought the property . A sign on the cattle grid said Keep out, a bit further along the road was another on a shed which read you have been warned, been spelt bean, and the third said you are now in range!

But the pottery name also hinted at the transformative fire at our craft's heart, pieces now sought after and collectable across eBay and the internet.

I threw myself, body and soul, into the creation of a distinctive range. My focus became crafting pieces adorned with detailed, three dimensional Australian animals. Our breakthrough came in our first year, at the Australian Craft Show in Sydney. Our work was so

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Croc Dun-tea

Meet Crocodile Dun-tea and his creator Beechmont potter Tim Patch. The unusual teapot is one of the many different pieces made by Tim at his Beechmont studio.

on a grand scale

by JACQUELINE ERICKSON

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edited by AUDREY CHAPMAN

Care for afternoon tea ... with a bite?

☐ Left: The frilleneck lizard is the next popular after the crocodile — what would your afternoon tea guests think?

TIM and Sally Patch's Australian-themed pottery and sculpture business is on its way to the top.

The brother-sister team has been operating Hellfire Pottery from Beechmont for only 18 months and are already supplying 25 shops throughout Australia with merchandise.

The secret of their success is the use of Australian animals. Each piece features a native creature whose tail becomes the handle of a mug or whose mouth is the spout of a teapot.

Tim said the crocodile range was the most popular, but there were also sets with frilleneck lizards, kookaburras, possums, sharks, kangaroos and eagles. Emus will be their next challenge.

The animals are made from press moulds, designed by Tim, and are stuck on the pieces before they are fired.

"It's pretty time-consuming," said Tim. "It takes about an hour to make 12 mugs."

And they don't sell cheap — mugs are $18 and sugar bowls are $20. Although most of their merchandise is sent to stores in Darwin and Kakadu, Tim said shops at Pacific Fair and Coolangatta Airport also sold their ranges.

He admitted their work did not appeal to everyone.

"It is aimed at Australians and Americans — the Japanese tend not to like them," he said. "I think they're fun — people either love them or hate them." Hellfire has become a true family business with Tim's son, 17, doing most of the throwing, Tim doing the actual press moulds and Sally glazing and keeping the books.

They will be one of the exhibitors at the Australian Craft Show in Sydney and Canberra at the end of this year.

"We are flat out at the moment," said Tim whose income, as well as his sister's, comes solely from the business. "We are expanding all the time."

"It has taken us a year to get it perfect but I think we have it now."

Originally from Portsmouth in the United Kingdom, Tim has been doing pottery for about 2½ years and was previously a builder.

"I have always been interested in sculpture," he said. "My sister was working in a pottery business in Beechmont and we had the idea of making high class souvenirs incorporating sculpture and pottery but which were also usable."





☐ Above: The coffee mug handles are the tails of frilleneck lizards, possums, sharks, kookaburras, sharks or kangaroos.

☐ Left: Anyone for a cup of tea? Beechmont potter Tim Patch with part of his crocodile range, the most popular set Hellfire makes.



Left: Little lovely, Kamara Green . . . lost in a bubble of homemade ice cream at Riverside

uniquely evocative that the organisers themselves used images of our pottery to advertise the entire event. To our astonishment and delight, we sold out completely. Hellfire Pottery is now vintage pottery and has become quite collectable on eBay and the Internet, selling for more than ten times the price I charged in the 1990s.

Suddenly, we were making a small fortune. This newfound success granted Penny the freedom to follow her own passions. She left teaching behind, giving herself wholeheartedly to breeding exquisite miniature horses and to the meticulous craft of making teddy bears.

MINITURE HORSES 1986

The land already held its own rhythms, marked by the aimless, dignified wandering of a few cows. We would fatten some for market, but the transaction never sat easily with our souls. On the fateful day the livestock truck arrived, a couple of the cleverer beasts made a wild, panicked bid for freedom, vanishing into the thick bush. There, they grew large, shaggy, and wild, their domestic past forgotten. Their independence was short lived. The enormous, barrel chested bull from the neighbouring farm caught their scent on the wind. One mighty charge later, our aging accent fence was mere splinters, and the deed was done.



The consequence of that wild romance was a struggling calf abandoned by its mother in the thick gorse for its slight deformity. Penny's caring spirit, where any creature was concerned, snapped into fierce, mothering mode. I remember the profound weight of it, the spindly legs dangling, as I carried the trembling life half a mile uphill, each step a prayer. It took up residence in our laundry room, a makeshift stable smelling of hay, milk formula, and hope, for the next few weeks.

It was during this time that the very official, very pragmatic building inspector arrived to grant the pottery house its final approval. He stepped into our unconventional sanctuary, clipboard in hand, and stopped dead. His eyes widened at the heart-wrenching, beautiful absurdity of the scene: there, in the middle of the domestic realm of washing machines and tile work, stood

a makeshift manger, a tiny, deformed calf blinking up at him from a nest of clean towels, the air humming not with compliance, but with the raw, messy song of unconditional care. Surprised would be a profound understatement.

The horse-breeding venture flourished with a life of its own, a verdant, almost magical success that grew beyond the bounds of commerce. Penny's heart, however, was a gate that only swung inward. Her tenderness made her incapable of parting with a very few soft nosed foals, each one becoming a beloved, permanent fixture. Our once tidy home and land surrendered joyfully, every surface frosted with a fine layer of golden hay, every quiet moment filled with the contented sigh of a creature loved beyond reason. It was the fluffy mess of our intertwined dreams.

Life rolled on with the grim, weighty inevitability of a river dragging silt toward the sea. Yet the pottery business was booming. My son Kim and daughter Vicky helped keep the pottery going, but a few years passed. Vicky left to take up nursing and my sister Sally, pragmatic and weary, left the business also. The success gradually faded. It was encroaching on every corner of the house, a creeping empire of clay. Bisque fired bowls colonised the kitchen table; glazed mugs stood in battalion rows on every shelf; the gas-fed kiln's electric hum was the soundtrack of our lives.



BUILDING AN ALTERNATIVE HOUSE 1995

We were being evicted by my own vocation. I needed to find somewhere else to live, and quickly. So I built an earth ship house as far from the road and council inspectors as possible. My time was fractured three ways: building the business, building a house,

Then the world shifted on its axis again. Penny was pregnant. After Oliver was born, a beautiful boy. But our new life seemed cursed by the very elements. It rained constantly, a dripping, grey despair that lasted for months. The dirt road down to our sprawling, makeshift house became a quagmire, a sucking clay trap that only a groaning four wheel drive could negotiate, leaving long, scar-like ruts in its wake. The power, inadequate and fragile, flickered like a dying pulse. We lived in a state of semi darkness, and as if to punctuate our isolation, we were struck by lightning not once, but regularly. The violent, white hot cracks would shake the foundations, a celestial verdict on our chosen exile. We were damp, trapped, and utterly, profoundly lost.



China, in those years, began its great, silent flood into the world, and a tide of impossibly cheap pottery washed into every market. I felt it first as a quiet chill, a lingering silence from shopkeepers, a thinning of orders that once arrived as thick as autumn leaves. The studio felt emptier, the whir of the wheel echoing a little less in the space. The sky was a relentless, bleached blue, and the earth cracked open in thirsty gasps. Horse feed prices skyrocketed, The pottery market, as we knew it, had

collapsed entirely. The money didn't just run out; it evaporated, leaving a vacuum of quiet panic. The sacrifices began.

I struggled on alone, as we drifted apart, a desperate, grinding rhythm claiming my life. My week was a blur of shapeless clay, the kiln's dry heat, and the endless, lonely making. Then came the markets: the Friday night frenzy at Surfers Paradise, under neon and the smell of fried food, hawking mugs to tourists. Then drive through the night to Eumundi. The dawn setup chaos of the Saturday market, with its trendy vibe and hippie innocence. It was there I met Stan. He was nearly ten years my senior. He was a caring man, recently divorced, with kind eyes and a quiet way of listening that made you feel safe. We would set up our stalls beside each other and talk all day, my sole buddy. I would unload all my problems upon him and he became my shrink.

To try and close the financial gap I was staying overnight at his house, in-order to do a soul-wearying Sunday market, we needed the money and I needed the friendship of another human. Life was brutal, physical, and dust dry. And in my constant, exhausted absence, the final, most devastating crack appeared. Penny, isolated with the hungry horses and the silent phone.

I was breaking my body in a hundred hot parking lots, my soul bartered for a handful of coins. Then another biblical, snarling storm descended, tearing at the land with furious

claws. When the thunder retreated and the light returned, the damage was absolute: the winding dirt road that descended to our house at the bottom of the property had been erased, sculpted into a ragged gully of mud and shattered rock. The house stood there, stricken and isolated, a ship stranded in a sea of clay.

In the storm's wake, a colder front settled between us. Penny moved up to the small, sun-bleached cottage I had built years earlier near the road, a place that overlooked the ravaged land like a watchtower. I was to move back to the pottery studio, which stood on my father's land, as if our shared life could be so neatly redrawn.

Time passed so slowly in this dystopian reality, two kingdoms fighting over a small child and a plot of land. It didn't last. The legal counsel was a sobering, cold compress on the fever of my disbelief. He explained Penny was entitled to not just half, but because Penny had custody of our son Oliver, considerably more, I could fight, he said, his pen tapping a slow, grim rhythm on the desk, but the litigation would be a vampiric process, likely costing me virtually everything over the next few years. Into this desolate negotiation entered Penny's lawyer, Geoffrey. He was, disconcertingly, a beautiful man, polished, with a voice like smoothed oak and an air of tranquil authority. On inspecting our storm-wracked, dream-drained property, he did not see the grief or the history. He saw an opportunity. He decided to buy it himself, offering an "amazing" price, a figure that felt like both a rescue and a surrender.

CHAPTER 7

DIVORCE NO. 2, 2002

The papers were signed with a silence that screamed. Having purchased a heritage listed house in Tasmania, placing the breadth of a turbulent sea and an entire continent between us, the distance was clearly the point.

Seeing her drive off in her new car with Oliver: a confused, wide eyed elfin prize whom I had lost, maybe forever was the worst part.

But I, at last, had my freedom for the second time in my life. It arrived not with trumpets, but with a vast and echoing quiet. The financial fabric of my adult life unraveled down to the last thread. Yet, as I stood amidst the ruins, I drew a deep, shuddering breath of the unscented air. I was, against it all, still alive and healthy. The battle was over. The landscape was scorched, but I was, unmistakably, still standing upon it, and made a pact with myself: I would never marry again.

The land across the road had be subdivided and new grand houses were under construction my studio was a wreck so I set about remodelling it ,finishing the exterior made of ferro concert I was originally inspired by Antonio Gaudy the Spanish design architect, it was like meditation a cure for depression. When it was finished It was featured on Channel nine's program called Amazing Homes hosted by Peter Everett]]

Our amazing homes

Patch work in progress

A builder-cum-artist has turned a typical hinterland home in to what he calls a living work of art. **Vanessa Jones** explores



Welcome to the wonderfully wacky world of Tim Patch.

Some might call him eccentric. He says he's just different.

A potter, a painter, a sculptor, a builder; a son, a brother and a father.

Whether Tim Patch the potter or Tim Patch the builder, there can be no doubt there is something incredible about this man and his kingdom.

Traffic comes to a grinding halt when passing his cave-like dwelling in Freemans Road, Lower Beechmont, and where the first thing that meets the eye is a life-size sculpture of two rearing stallions.

But while the two gargoyles gazing down from atop the unusual structure may look sinister to some, there is certainly nothing scary or intimidating about this cheerful man.

Once upon a time, the house he calls home was much like many others of the ilk and age on the mountain.

But a desire to emulate the works of renowned 19th-century Spanish art nouveau architect Antoni Gaudi inspired Patch to create his own "living work of art'.

Three years later and Patch says the structure is yet to be completed.

"I love starting and getting things going, but finishing off has always been a bit of a problem," he says.

Patch's long-term dream is to open a gallery on the lower level of the house to sell his sculptures and paintings.

Next door, he eventually hopes to gain council approval to turn what was once his father's house into a coffee shop.

Currently that building retains its original timber facade while his father, Tom, has moved into the next house along with his daughter – Tim's sister – Sally.

The artistic streak obviously runs in the family, with Sally, Tom, Tim and Tim's son, Kim, all dab hands with a paint brush.

Patch is also a registered builder, although he says he 'gave it away' about 20 years ago.

His fair complexion meant long periods working in the sun effectively ruled him out of his chosen profession.

But it didn't rule him out of

> "This is my passion. I call it the biggest sculpture on the Gold Coast"

turning his house into a work art based loosely around ideas of his favourite architect

"Gaudi created natural bui ings with no straight lines a I've tried to emulate some of t but also tried to fit in with earth," he says.

"This used to be a weath board house.

"The sculpture is really jus facade. The actual structure the building, which is about 80 90 years old, is still there.

"This is my life-long passic I call it the biggest sculpture the Gold Coast."

By welding metal togeth and placing it and then mesh the existing structure, he creat a base on which to pour his co crete and his dreams.



The Friday night market at Surfers Paradise was a carnival of noise and routine, but for me, it had become a weekly exercise in exhaustion. I was lucky, in a way, to be stationed next to a young Asian man who drew charcoal portraits. While I arrived a full hour earlier, unloading my van of countless polystyrene sarcophagi, each carefully packed with brittle, breakable pottery, he would stroll in with mere minutes to spare. His entire



enterprise fit into a single, elegant briefcase: a small folding stool, a slim easel, a pad of paper, and charcoal.

I would then stand for hours, a haunted vendor trying to sell glazed ghosts of my labor, while beside me, a steady, smiling queue formed. He created not just drawings, but experiences, ten minutes of chatting and laughter, followed by a flattering likeness on paper. At night's end, as I began the heartbreaking archaeology of repacking,

always hearing the sickening crunch of at least one casualty, he would snap his briefcase shut and vanish into the crowd within five minutes.

During the week, I imagined him sipping coffee somewhere quiet, or working another easy job, while I was a prisoner in my own studio, chained to the wheel, making more stock to replace what had just shattered.

A revelation, hot and clear, cut through my resentment: I was convinced I could do what he was doing. The thought was followed by a wave of self-reproach. *How stupid am I?* I had been trading backbreaking, fragile bulk for pennies, while he traded ephemeral skill for instant, joyful cash. That night, a mission was born.

BECOMING A SKETCH ARTIST, 2002

I bought charcoal and paper and began to devour images, drawing first from the glossy pages of magazines, then cornering friends, relatives, and obliging neighbours, anyone who would sit and chat for twenty minutes. My world, which had shrunk to the diameter of a kiln, suddenly bloomed outward.

The pottery became a distant memory as I have never been good at multitasking. I joined the local sculpture

society and, with driven fervour, eventually became its president. I attended life drawing classes with my sister and even my Dad, the shared silence in the art room a new, profound language between us.

My social life, so long parched, burst into riotous colour. My sex life, dormant in the dust of the studio, flourished once more. I found willing and wonderful companionship among the creative, open-minded people I met in these new circles. And in myself, I made a conscious, quiet decision, a decision not to be limited by gender in matters of the heart, even as a small, internal voice whispered that my father would be quietly horrified.

Or would he, really?

OUR FAMOUS GAY RELATIVE

Dad's relative and namesake, Thomas Patch, was a mildly famous artist, admiringly born in 1725 in Exeter, UK, where our family had lived for hundreds of years. Here is what Wikipedia said about him:

Thomas Patch (13 March 1725 – 30 April 1782) was an English painter, printmaker, physiognomist and

historian. He made a living from painting views of Florence and Tivoli and appears to have sold a number of painted caricature groups to members of the Anglo-Florentine community and to young British men on the Grand Tour.

BiographyPatch was born in Exeter in 1725. He was the son of a distinguished doctor and was expected to become an apothecary. He had not completed his medical studies when he journeyed to Rome in 1747 with Richard Dalton, who was to become the librarian to George III. In Rome he met Joshua Reynolds, who was, at the time, producing a number of caricature groups. In Italy he worked for Joseph Vernet, creating landscapes of Tivoli and pastiches of Vernet's work.

In 1755, he was banished from Rome by the Tribunal della Santa Inquisition, apparently for homosexual indiscretions. He fled to Florence, where he A

SELF PORTRAIT BY THOMAS PATCH 1747.
"Weird right !"

for the rest of his life. He was assisted by his friendship with Sir Horace Mann, who was the British envoy and a point of contact with British tourists arriving in Florence.



THOMAS PATCH WAS GAY!!!. And Dad thought he was brilliant, and not the black sheep of the family. This set a precedent for me to explore my sexuality a bit.

VISITING A BATH HOUSE

This awakening stirred a memory, long buried but never forgotten: that evening long ago with Gary in Brisbane, the nervous curiosity, the foray into the city's gay scene. We had visited a bathhouse, a place that had seemed then like a foreign, slightly intimidating planet.

On a sudden, compulsive impulse, I drove back to the city, my heart a drum in my chest. The building was still there, a discreet facade in a quiet street. The man at the

reception was warm, his eyes assessing. “Welcome, muscles,” he said, a nickname that felt both alien and strangely pleasing.

It was a towel-free day.

In the locker room, under bright, impersonal lights, I shed my clothes, and with them, the last layers of my suburban identity. The only thing I wore was a locker key on a tight rubber band around my wrist, a simple bracelet marking my new anonymity. The ritual was mandatory: a thorough shower in a tiled, steamy room, a cleansing before entry into another world.

Stepping out, I crossed a threshold into a realm of subdued darkness. The air was warm, humid, and carried a faint scent of chlorine, sweat, and clean musk. The only constant sound was the low, rhythmic hum of a spa pool pump, a mechanical heartbeat beneath a symphony of soft, human noises: rustling movement, low whispers, and the occasional, unmistakable sound of a man in the final, shuddering act of release.

My eyes adjusted to the dim, red-tinged light. The space was a labyrinth of narrow, concertina corridors. Figures, mainly older men, moved through the shadows with a slow, purposeful stroll. They were ghosts of hope, their gazes both offering and seeking a connection that required no names, no history, just a silent, mutual

recognition in the dark. It was a world of pure, unadorned potential, and I, a newcomer once more, had entered its quiet, pulsing orbit.

MUM: HER LAST DAYS, 2003



Having looked after my mother for three years as she had

MY AMAZING PARENTS

dementia, she was now ninety. Dad and Sally booked her into an old people's home.

The week unfolded in a rhythm of transformation, both within the pottery and within my life. My days were spent inside the old studio's shell, a symphony of dust and demolition. I tore down the flimsy walls of its small, temporary storage rooms, pulling away the past to reveal

the bones of one vast, airy space. Sunlight, previously chopped into fragments, now streamed across the raw floor. Outside, I patched the weather-worn exterior, smoothing over cracks like healing wounds, then covering it all with a fresh coat of paint that gleamed under the sun, a blank canvas awaiting its future.

In the quiet hours, I had helped my sister care for our mother, whose world had shrunk to the few paces she could manage. To give her back some dignity and joy, I installed hand winches throughout the house, a system of pulleys and strong straps that allowed us to lift her gently into the bath, which remained her small, cherished sanctuary. Each morning, I would strip off my own clothes, the practical solution becoming a kind of intimate sacrament. We would navigate the routine together, her body frail and trusting, her laughter at the absurdity of it all a light in the muted morning.

This daily routine did more than help her; it quietly stripped away my own self consciousness, until my skin felt merely like skin, natural and unremarkable in any circumstance.

I never told my Mum about the idea of the penis painting, as I hadn't thought of the idea whilst she was alive, though deep in my bones, I know she would have been tickled pink privately, wonderfully proud. I've always carried this quiet certainty that her early adulthood was

threaded with a wild and secret sensuality, a life kept carefully folded away from my sister Sally and me.

She was born in 1913, a woman forged in another world. By twelve, she was already driving her siblings between Bathurst and Collaroy in a rattling car, the red dust of the road settling on her shoulders, a small, capable girl steering her family through the quiet scandal of her parents' wealthy divorce. She stood just five foot three, but she was stunning. Not just pretty, but magnetically good looking, with a chatty, vivacious energy that must have turned heads in every room. I can picture her, a terrible and delightful flirt, sailing to the UK with only her sister for company long before the shadows of war gathered. There, in their daring Twenties, they cycled from London to Scotland, the wind whipping colour into their cheeks, seeking the Scottish relatives of the father who lingered like a ghost in their past.

Beyond those dazzling fragments, the driving, the sailing, the cycling, her social life before meeting Dad at war's end remains a beautiful, twenty-year mystery.

By 2005, the mystery of her was being erased by a crueller force. The dementia had grown fierce, confining her to bed. Most days, her bright eyes looked through us, not knowing who we were. Dad and Sally were worn to exhaustion, their love frayed by the endless, grinding care. The decision to move her to a home was a heavy, sorrowful stone in our chests.

After the move, Sally took Dad back to the UK, a respite among his brother's wife Constance and her five daughters, where I hope laughter and nostalgia gave him some peace.

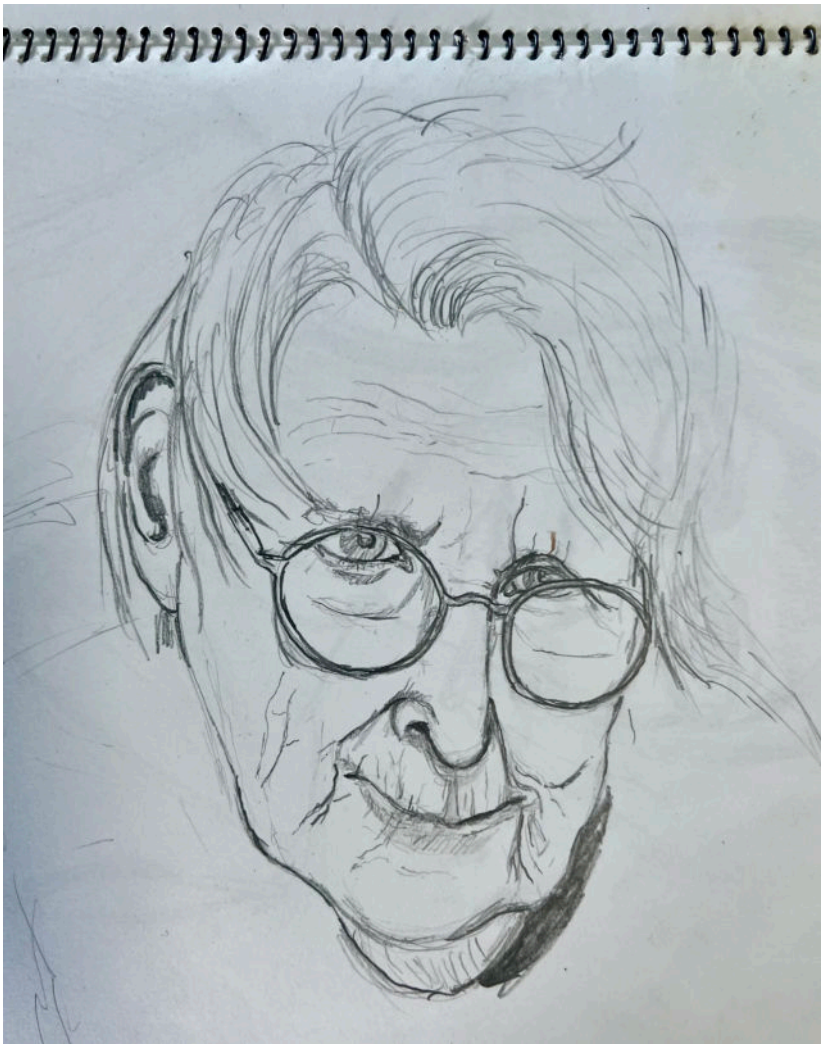
I visited Mum every day. She would greet me each time with that amazing, reflexive smile, a ghost of her old warmth, before her gaze drifted away to that distant, unreachable land. To fill the hollow hours, I started sketching the other residents for practice, for distraction. Their minds were often clearer islands in the facility's quiet sea.

On one visit, during a rare window of alertness, I turned my pad toward Mum. She hadn't truly seen her own reflection in years, though her hand still performed the habitual, gentle motion of brushing her hair. I showed her the finished sketch. It was honest, achingly so, the paper captured the delicate skull beneath her skin, the elegant weariness. She studied it, her once-vibrant eyes focusing slowly.

"It's not very flattering," she said, her voice a faint whisper of her old self.

The other old ladies, meaning to be kind, only deepened the wound. "Oh, that's exactly you, Pam!" they chimed.

She didn’t argue. She simply retreated, closing her eyes, and slipped back into sleep.



She never properly regained consciousness. The next three days were filled with the awful, rasping sound of the death rattles, a sound that seemed to shake the very air. And then, she was gone.

In the quiet that followed, a terrible, unspeakable conviction took root in me: *I had killed my mother with a drawing!*

I wrote a poem which I read tearfully at her funeral.

PAMALA 1913-2003

Your sparkle was missing in your very last years,

No twinkling eyes as seen through my tears,

My thoughts now go back to happier days,

Those final few hours I would like to erase.

I only knew you for about fifty years,

But in all the old photos in which you appear,

Your inner-most beauty stands out a mile,

Your beautiful face and your radiant smile.

To conform but be different is the image you sought,

Never be governed by what people thought,

One of a kind, the eccentric mum,

A day spent with you was always such fun.

As I stand here in silence, and you're in your coffin,

I loved you, Mum, you will not be forgotten,

I'll think of you often the best way I can—

Happy, smiling, laughing Pam.

Beyond the familiar walls of my home and studio, I cultivated a private universe. Within my various clubs, I wove a rich tapestry of friendships, threads that often spun into something deeper and more intimate. At the life drawing group, where I secretly yearned to be the one sketching with charcoal, I instead offered my own body as a subject. I would hold poses until my muscles trembled and ached, a silent, strenuous art of my own.

Over at the Sculpture Society, I found a different kind of expression, stepping into a role of leadership. For two years as President, I lost myself in the gratifying chaos of organising exhibitions, a conductor of creative tumult. I

organised the annual Erotic Exotic exhibition and made myself into a living David, I made a silicone white head and massive dick which was attached by a metal device with springs. I invented it; it worked well, but I couldn't wear it for long.

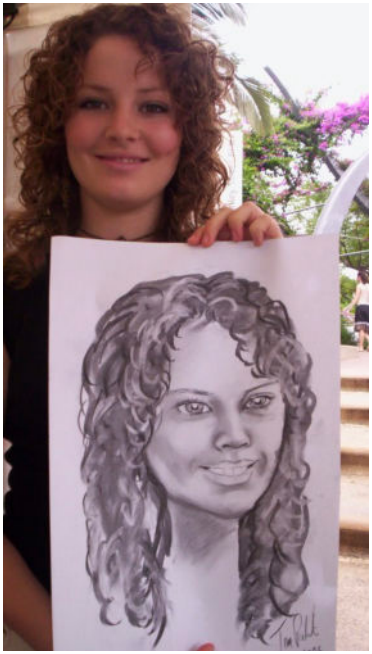


Years later, for a pottery exhibition, I revived my old 'Crocodile' range from the Hellfire Pottery days, firing a whole kiln load of those fierce, textured pieces that seemed to snarl from the shelves. A man approached me, his admiration sharp and specific. He offered to buy the entire collection, not with cash, but with fifty of something he called "Bitcoin."

The word meant nothing to me then; it sounded like a child's play-money, a vague digital trifle. I dismissed the offer with a polite, almost amused wave of my clay-dusted hand, turning back to the solid, tangible world of terracotta and crystalline glaze. It was a refusal made in a

heartbeat, a slight miscalculation whose profound weight I would only feel much later: again ignoring my nephew “the Oracle” Raffy and my sister Sallys advice to buy some, the years turned and that ethereal currency transformed into a ghost of fortune, forever lost.

SOUTH BANK MARKET



Months later, I was at the South Bank market, not as a vendor but as a man with a portfolio under his arm. I got chatting to several stallholders, familiar, weathered faces from my years of hauling pottery there. Over coffee, they mentioned that the regular portrait artist, a beloved figure, had just returned to Brazil for a year-long holiday. They were desperately looking for a replacement.

I got the appointment straight away. The air seemed to still around me. The chaos of the last few years, the storms, the collapse, the heartbreak, seemed to reorder itself into a perfect fit.

After a few weeks sketching at the market, the sensation of being watched had melted from a nervous tremor into a familiar warmth, like sunlight on my shoulders. I'd settled into a rhythm, my hand moving with a loose, unfussy ease. While my style lacked the slick, photographic precision of the Asian artist I had watched at the night-time market, a true virtuoso with a flawless likeness,I found I had a knack for capturing the spirit in a face. I loved it so much.

One of the great advantages of drawing at the market was the steady stream of fascinating, unexpected people who drifted past my stall. They weren't just buyers, they were genuine admirers of my art, their eyes lighting up when they recognised something true in my lines and colours. Sometimes those chance encounters led to warm invitations: a cup of coffee, a home-cooked dinner, a shared evening that stretched into the small hours.

DEBRA

One such invitation came from a girl named Debra. I was drawing at the Redcliffe festival, the salt breeze off the bay tugging at my sketchbook pages, when she stopped to watch. She lived right there in town, an artist herself, with wild hair and a laugh that turned heads. She loved to dance.

After dinner at her little cottage, we pushed the furniture against the walls. She dragged me reluctantly up and started dancing to a local radio station party music. Soon we were getting hot, so the night developed into a slow strip, dancing competition, erotic and energetic.

It was on that sensuous night that I heard the advertisement on that radio. An act was coming to the Gold Coast Arts Centre: *Puppetry of the Penis.*

PUPPETRY OF THE PENIS

The name alone, delivered in the announcer's polished baritone, sent a jolt through me. Later recounting it to my daughter Vicky, she confirmed it with a snort of laughter, having caught their show in some gritty pub down south. "It's actually hilarious, Dad," she said, her voice rich with the implication that I, of all people, simply had to see it. And so I went.

The theatre itself was all plush velvet and hushed anticipation, a starkly formal frame for what unfolded. I watched, utterly captivated, as two completely unselfconscious men stood naked under the stage lights,

performing an hour of astonishing, and absurd, anatomical origami. With a twist, a tuck, and a deadpan expression, they conjured imagined objects from their own genitals.

Vicky was right. It was profoundly, achingly funny, a class in sheer, ridiculous invention.

Then, the lightbulb moment !

It wasn't a flicker, but a full, blinding flare in my mind. The connection was instantaneous and absurd: *If they can sculpt illusions with that… could I paint with this?* The idea was too electrically stupid not to pursue.

During the interval, I made a beeline for the gentlemen's bathroom. It was a temple of cold, institutional marble, and there, gleaming under the fluorescent lights, my canvas: an enormous, uninterrupted wall of stainless steel serving as the splash back for a long, communal urinal.

I waited, feigning interest in the soap dispenser, until the last chuckle and zip faded and I was alone in the sterile quiet. My heart thumped a comical rhythm against my ribs. With a deliberate, experimental focus, I… moistened the implement.

Then, carefully, on a dry section of the cool, gleaming steel, I drew.

A simple smiley face. Two dots, a curved line.

To my utter delight and shock, it worked. A faint, but perfectly clear, damp sketch smiled back at me from the metal. A laugh burst from my chest, echoing off the tiles. The medium was unorthodox, but the principle was sound. The paintbrushes at home suddenly seemed terribly conventional.

CHAPTER 7

A LIGHTBULB MOMENT

I couldn't wait to get back, to see what this newfound, utterly ridiculous tool could really do. I was so impressed I brought their book, *Puppetry of the Penis*, which many years later Simon Morley signed for me.

I got home about midnight. It was a perfect time, as no one would be calling in on me now. Finding some acrylic paints in a drawer in my study, I squeezed them out onto various mismatched dinner plates—mostly the ones Penny's mum had given us years before—and with a blank canvas in one hand and my penis in the other, I plunged just the head of my dick into the paint. Almost immediately I found out my first problem: I was instantly erect. It was still possible, but I realised it would be much easier without an erection—a problem easily solved.

I imagined myself on a stage or at a party in the same situation. I smiled. The vision I was having then has come to fruition many, many times over the next twenty three years.

FRIEND STAN



My friend Stan from Eumundi Market lived close by. After leaving Debra's, I rang him on impulse. "Come on around," he said, his voice warm over the crackling line. We got on famously—two people strangely on the same page about marriage, about sex, about the messy business of being human. Sitting in his dim kitchen with mugs of tea growing cold between us, I made up my mind. I would confide in him. I would tell him about the painting process I had devised, the one no one else in the world was doing.

His jaw dropped. His eyes went wide. "You're serious?" he whispered.

When I nodded, he burst into a grin, over the moon, he was, genuinely amazed. Then I mentioned a show I'd seen a year before: *Puppetry of the Penis*. He blinked,

then howled with laughter, and of course he wanted a demonstration. Well, I'd just left Debra an hour ago, so I was fairly relaxed in that department, not too excited, but I gave him one anyway. He laughed so hard he nearly slid off his chair. Then he wiped his eyes and said, "We need to throw a party. My friends. My neighbours. You as the entertainment."

I hesitated. He thought the painting idea was brilliant, but he worried, reasonably, I had to admit, to keep it a secret until I was ready. So we talked it through, and I agreed: a video of the painting being made, sold alongside the painting itself. That would make it truly unique. We decided I'd create a whole body of work, each piece with its own video, for an exhibition later in the year, but first, to get me used to being a performer, starting at his party.

Stan rang a couple of friends on the spot, a gay couple who rushed over for a private demonstration. After my second performance, they were practically bouncing off the walls with excitement, and shucked off their pants to copy what I had just shown them, manipulating their equipment with laughter and giving each other a helping hand. Soon we were all far too compromised to bend anything. They couldn't wait for the party.

PUPPETRY PARTY

A couple of weeks passed, and I practiced until my dick ached. I bought a top hat, a little ridiculous, and a curly blond wig to disguise myself. To my surprise, the getup actually made me look younger and unrecognisable, as I wanted to do it incognito.

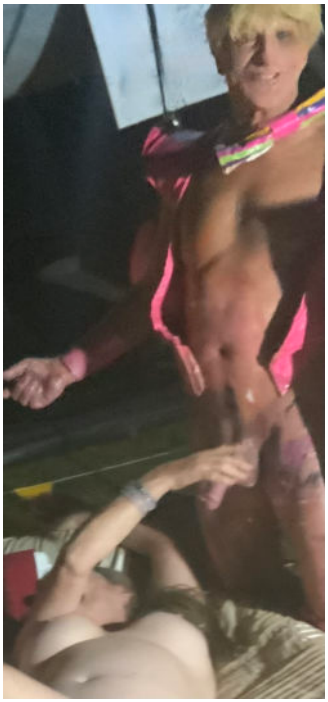
The party was held next door to Stan's place. The lady there was thrilled to host and had arranged chairs in a careful semicircle across her back yard, all of them facing the raised back patio. String lights blazed down on that makeshift stage, turning the night into something theatrical. It was perfect.

I was terrified.

My stomach churned. I nearly vomited with nerves just before I stepped out. Too late to back out now.

But the moment I walked into the spotlight, something shifted. The heat of the lights on my skin, the sudden hush of the crowd, everything changed. I felt completely different. Alive. Electric. A feeling I'd never known before.

The show went well. They laughed, loud, genuine, rolling laughter, and I knew in that instant: I loved it. I wanted to do it again.



Later that night, a lesbian I was chatting with leaned close and said her partner was away in Sydney. She looked me up and down with a half smile. “I’d be willing to change teams,” she murmured. We commandeered Stan’s bedroom for half an hour of passionate kissing, cuddling, and oral sex.

Later, when everyone had drifted home and the yard was empty except for scattered cups and the echo of laughter, I sat with Stan for a while. Then we went back next door and I showed him my painting technique properly, brushed a few simple seascapes, using my butt cheeks, cock, and balls. He was most impressed and has become my best friend. Somewhere in the quiet between us, we spent the rest of the night together.

CLASSIFIED ADVERTISEMENT

We'd been circling the problem for hours: how on earth was I supposed to sharpen my performance skills when I had none to speak of? I was a raw nerve, a bundle of unpolished enthusiasm with no technique to back it up. The conversation twisted and turned until, eventually, we landed on a solution that felt both reckless and inevitable: I would place an advertisement in the local *Courier Mail*, buried deep in the classifieds, nestled among the palm readers and massage parlours under "Adult Services."

But the wording was a minefield. *Puppetry of the Penis*, that cheeky, infamous phrase, was trademarked, locked away behind legal walls I couldn't scale. I racked my brain, scribbling and crossing out drafts on scrap paper, until I settled on something that felt suitably vague yet intriguing: "

—————————————————————-

Have me at your party, … Strip at your party.
Sketch or Paint you Naked at your party,…. .
I perform genital origami, lap dance, straight-gay single Couples Phone…07 …….165

—————————————————————-

" It was clunky, desperate, and utterly unpolished, but it would have to do.

Placing the advert turned out to be its own small ordeal. No online transactions or discreet clicks, this was old-school. I had to walk into the local newsagent, cash in hand, and recite my request to the man behind the

counter. He didn't flinch. He simply smiled, a slow, knowing curl of the lips, and took my money without a word, as if he'd seen a hundred nervous souls do exactly the same.

When Saturday morning arrived and the paper hit the stands, all one hundred glossy, ink-scented pages of it, I felt a peculiar mix of dread and hope. Would anyone even find my tiny square of text amidst the chaos of car sales and furniture clearances?

To my astonishment, the phone rang.

And then came her voice: calm, assured, slightly husky from what I'd later learn was champagne. She wanted me to dance with her and her friend, and slowly strip. She wanted something different, something to surprise her companion for an afternoon treat.

I hadn't expected replies so soon. My throat tightened. My palms went damp. Would I be safe? Could I even dance? I'd never stripped before in my life, not properly, not for an audience. And now I had less than twenty four hours to transform from terrified amateur to… whatever they expected.

I swallowed hard, said yes, and scribbled down the address and time with a trembling hand.

The next afternoon, I stood at the end of a neat, sun-bleached driveway, staring at a sleek red sports car that gleamed like a ripe cherry in the harsh light. My heart was hammering against my ribs, a frantic, irregular drumbeat, but underneath the fear, a current of electric excitement buzzed through my veins.

The woman who answered the door was immaculate: crisp clothes, tidy hair, a warm but measured smile. She was around my age, maybe a fraction older, and her friend, perhaps five years her senior, lounged on the sofa with a flute of bubbling champagne already in hand. They'd clearly been at it for a while; their laughter had that loose, unguarded quality, and Donna Summer's "Love to Love You Baby" throbbed through the room, all breathy moans and pulsating bass.

She looked at me, eyebrow raised, and asked if I could strip to that.

I made a mental note, must remember to bring my own music next time, a boombox with something reliable, but I nodded without hesitation. It was a sweltering day, the kind where the air feels thick as syrup, and I've always felt more at home in my own skin anyway.

The music took over. My loose-fitting clothes slid off easily, almost naturally, as I moved to the rhythm. They were laughing, clapping, their eyes bright with tipsy delight. When they reached out and tugged down my jocks, I didn't resist, by then, I had a rather proud bulge straining against the fabric, and the moment it sprang free, they shrieked with such genuine, delighted surprise that I couldn't help but grin.

Then they wanted to dance with me. And what dancers they turned out to be—they must have been instructors in another life, because they guided my hips, showed me how to wiggle and roll in ways I'd never considered, their hands gentle but confident on my waist. They showered me with compliments, their words warm and slurred with affection. After about twenty minutes of this sweaty, laughing, utterly-lost-in-the-moment performance, we collapsed onto the plush settee, me sandwiched between them like the filling in a very luxurious sandwich. Their hands grew bolder, roaming with increasing curiosity, and the woman who had hired me hitched her skirt up without ceremony, an open invitation gleaming in her half-lidded eyes.

Another bottle of bubbly appeared, popped, poured, consumed, and before I knew it, the three of us were climbing the stairs together, our footsteps muffled by thick carpet. The big bedroom awaited us, curtains drawn tight to subdue the harsh afternoon glare. "To hide our wrinkles," they joked, giggling as they pulled the fabric closed, plunging the room into a dim, honey-coloured twilight. And there, in that soft, secret

light, the afternoon unfolded into something I'd never



quite anticipated, messy, thrilling, and utterly unforgettable.

The next call sent me to the far edge of town, to a dead-end street that felt like a film set, too pristine, too eerily quiet, like the glossy façade of Peyton Place just before the camera catches the rot beneath. The house sat at the cul-de-sac's blunt end, its driveway laid in immaculate geometric tiles that gleamed wetly under the porch light; I actually hesitated before pulling my rattling old van onto them, convinced the oil stains dripping from its

undercarriage would somehow permanently mar that perfect checkerboard.

The man who answered was middle aged, unassuming, and disarmingly normal, friendly, even, with a handshake that was warm and dry, which made the interior of his home all the more jarring. The walls were crammed with original artwork, floor to ceiling: canvases of nude men in every imaginable pose, some rendered with such graphic, pornographic detail that the sheer volume of it felt less like appreciation and more like obsession made manifest.

He didn't waste time with small talk. With a casual "right this way," he led me straight down a carpeted hallway into a bedroom so vast it could have swallowed my entire flat, dominated by a bed the size of a small raft. He clambered onto it with an almost boyish eagerness, settling against the pillows, and gestured for me to begin the "entertainment."

I summoned every scrap of my recent education from the ladies a few days prior—their coy glances, their teasing pivots, and made a performance of wiggling my bare backside in his direction, accompanied by strains of Donna Summer and Bronski Beat from my portable, newly acquired sound system from a second-hand store, a few days previously, an absurd contrast to my own growing nakedness. When I was completely bare, he patted the duvet beside him with a soft *thump-thump*.

Here we go, I thought, bracing myself for the inevitable.



But instead of closing in, he shifted to one side, motioned for me to lie flat on my stomach, and began to knead my buttocks with firm, deliberate fingers. Then came the oil, a warm, slick cascade that flooded my back in glossy rivulets, and his hands turned expert, finding knots I didn't know I had, dissolving tension with each deep, rotating press. My mind melted into a haze of pure, uncritical pleasure; the room, the paintings, the strangeness—all faded to a warm buzz. After an eternity of bliss, he told me to turn over, and his fingers resumed their magic across my chest, my thighs, my calves, until I crested helplessly, shuddering against the sheets.

He cleaned me up with a soft towel, efficient and clinical, and only then did he finally undress—not to join me, but to hand me a sketchbook and charcoal. “Draw me,” he said. That was all. No reciprocity, no touch, just a series of sketches, some in contortions so unnatural they seemed almost anatomical studies, his body a still life for my trembling hand. He paid me and we kissed for what was longer than I can remember, then I skipped back to my van.

The third phone call came late at night. The voice was oddly high-pitched, confessing an obsession with his own penis, he wanted a grand, monumental painting of it, nothing less. I agreed, telling myself it was just another job: I’d strip, paint it, keep it clinical. But something in his tone, a wet eagerness, made my scalp prickle. I even left a note on my bed at home with his address on it, in case I was never seen again. I was having an adventure and didn’t really care what happened that night, I could be raped by a dozen guys and I would chalk it up to an experience.

When I arrived at the high-rise unit, I was swaddled in my loosest clothes, a vast rolled canvas tucked under one arm and a suitcase bumping against my knee, packed with my newly acquired boombox. The lift exhaled me onto a dim corridor; I found the door number and knocked.

A man in a wheelchair answered, his face half-lit by the hellish glow spilling from inside. The flat was a grotto of red and black, velvet drapes, black painted walls, candles guttering in crimson glass, so dark and satanic it felt less like a home and more like a subterranean shrine. A goat's head, taxidermies and malevolent, glared from the feature wall, flanked by framed German war photographs and two towering nude male statues, their marble muscles gleaming dully. Scattered across every surface, shelves, tables, even the floor, were dildos and hyper-realistic rubber penises in every size, shade, and texture, a horrifying garden of synthetic flesh. Through an archway, I glimpsed the bars of a prison cell, genuine steel, bolted to the concrete. He hadn't been exaggerating; obsession was too mild a word.



For the first time in this strange odyssey, genuine fear prickled down my spine.

Without a word, he rolled back the blanket draped over his lap, revealing that he wore nothing beneath, just his naked groin, which was less a body part and more a pincushion of gleaming metal. Piercings crusted every inch: rings, bars, studs, a constellation of chrome and steel. He picked up his member with a casual, proprietary grip, showing me his Prince Albert, a horrifying modification where the urethral opening had been split cleanly in two, the flesh carved into something resembling a pair of puckered, scarred lips.

He motioned for me to hold it. I stared, transfixed and repulsed; it was the ugliest, most mutilated penis I had ever seen, a tangle of keloid scars and glinting hardware, his scrotum so densely pierced it looked like a chain mail pouch, and he confessed, with a wet, confessional pride, that he spent every waking hour manipulating it. He wanted me to capture that ruined beauty on canvas.

I knew, in that moment, that doing it justice was impossible, but far worse was the question I had to ask. “Do you want just a painting,” I managed, my voice thin, “or… a performance?”

He didn't blink. "The full show," he said, his fingers still tugging at his disfigured, grotesque anatomy.

I pressed play, and grabbing at my own crotch I simulated sexually suggestive dance moves, then kicking off my shoes I placed one bare foot gently on his penis. He took off my shirt. I then turned around, bending over and wiggling my bum almost into his face. He pulled down my tracksuit pants; as I stepped out of them I was forced down until I could feel his metallically adorned member rubbing against my anus. He was gripping my dick and balls tightly. To rescue them I said, "I really need to paint your amazing penis before I explode!"

This jolted him almost back to normality, but then he said, "Whilst you paint, I have toys I'm going to insert into you. Make the video as sexual as we can," as he continued pulling at his Prince Albert adorned, scarred, deformed, grottiest dick.

The painting quickly became the ugliest I have ever done, signing it with my DNA splattered randomly all over it.

As I grabbed my suitcase and headed for the door, I thought: *Never again. This wasn't for me. I had to find another way.* But I have never forgotten that night and think back on it as one of the most terrifyingly exciting moments of my life. Was this really me? If it was, what else did the future hold?

Of all the threads woven through my life, one of the brightest and most tender leads to an old friend, I became utterly, poetically infatuated. She was a stunning, fiercely intelligent divorcee, a woman who carried both grace and a quiet resilience. I was smitten to the point of writing her poems. She was slightly younger than me, with two boys the same age as my eldest son. Our children attended the local school together; they were thick as thieves, and that familial overlap stitched our worlds even closer.

The first time she invited me to dinner, I decided on a statement that would bypass all small talk. As she lived on a secluded rural bush property, I arrived naked, save for my shoes, carrying a large, headless nude sculpture I'd just completed at the Sculpture Society for an upcoming exhibition. The cool evening air made my skin kind of electric; the piece, of smoothed terracotta, felt alive in my arms, a tangible, silent testament to creation and vulnerability. I presented it not as an offering, but as our secret, suggesting it might find a home in some wild corner of her rambling, extensive garden, among the lavender and climbing roses. It was a declaration of intention, modelled and fired, needing no words.

It worked. The ice didn't just break; it melted into a warm, laughing stream. We had a great relationship, and still do,

She remains a very close friend, a constant in the kaleidoscope of my history.

CHAPTER 9

PRACTICING PENIS PAINTING 2003

I didn't tell too many people of my ambition for a long time, but kept practicing by night, as no one usually came to visit after midnight. I covered my body with cooking oil, the paint was easier to wash off, and it also made my reflected image in the mirror look amazing. So I started exercising with weights, activating my dormant testosterone levels. As the sessions became more erotic over time, the paintings improved. I was on a roll.

The amber glow of a fading sunset washed over the South Bank market, gilding the strings of lanterns just beginning to glow. The air was a rich tapestry of scents: sizzling garlic from a food stall, the damp, mineral scent of the Brisbane River, and the sweet perfume of evening blooms from a flower cart. It was there, amidst the gentle murmur of evening crowds and the distant laughter from a riverside pub, that I fell into conversation with a strongly mystical lady clad in a loose, almost see through material which flowed in the wind, revealing glimpses of what lay underneath.

She was, I noted, about my own age, but where I felt the day's weariness, she seemed charged with a quiet, kinetic energy. Her eyes, a shade of hazel that seemed to



shift in the twilight, held a disarming directness. Our chat began in the usual shallows—the charm of the market, the unseasonable warmth of the evening, but she quickly steered us into deeper, darker waters. With a smile that was both conspiratorial and analytical, she began to ask questions that bypassed the surface completely. They were probes into shadowy corners of my mind, inquiries about experiences that defied the mundane, about fantasies that weren't meant for daylight hours.

My answers became careful things, sculpted from half-truths and pleasant evasions. I offered her the polished shells of stories, not the living, messy creatures inside. I watched my own reflection wobble in the dark surface of her wine glass as I deflected. A pause settled between us, filled by the shriek of laughter from the nearby pub.

Then she leaned forward, the lantern light catching the curve of her neck. Her voice dropped, not to a whisper, but to a low, clear note that cut through the market's hum.

"Could you," she asked, her gaze unwavering, "paint a nude portrait of me?"

The world seemed to narrow to the space between our two chairs. The clatter of plates, the flow of people—it all dissolved into a distant buzz. The question hung in the fragrant air, no longer a mere inquiry, but an offer, a challenge, and a door swinging open to a room I had only ever skirted in the dim halls of my own imagination.

"I can paint you with my dick!"

Seeing my escape from the previous interrogation, I grasped at reckless humour. "I could paint you with my dick, if you like," I said, the bravado thin in my own ears. "But not here, in the market. And I haven't my paints with me."

Instead of offence, her laughter was a low, knowing chime. The tension shattered, replaced by a charged and impulsive current. She made a phone call, asking someone, "Darling, I know it's late, but has Dillon any acrylic paints there we could use tonight?"

Before I fully understood the decision, I was following her through labyrinthine streets, away from the river's glow, toward a night I sensed would offer no rest.

Her name was Eve, and she lived in a vast, silent house that seemed to swallow the street whole. It was built around a central courtyard where a black pool lay perfectly still, reflecting a sliver of cold moon. The house, however, was not silent with emptiness, but with a watchful, populated quiet. It was filled with lodgers, she explained, and as we entered, they emerged like spectral attendees to a silent play, descending staircases, drifting from shadowed doorways, to greet the new arrival.

Their smiles were sharp, their welcomes a soft, murmuring chorus. In that moment, standing before the assembled gaze of strangers in that watery courtyard, a visceral fear seized me. The air turned cold. I felt, with a sinking certainty that hollowed my stomach, that I had just made another catastrophic mistake.

The scene that unfolded before me existed in a realm far beyond strange, it was a surreal suspension of all ordinary social physics. The first to greet me were two men who seemed less like individuals and more like embodied concepts from some bizarre mythology. One was a colossus of muscle, a living testament to bulk and ink. His body, entirely devoid of any stitch of clothing, was

a canvas of swirling tattoos, vibrant and dense, depicting serpents, grim reapers, and arcane symbols that vanished into the topography of his flexed physique. His biceps, bulging like carved cantaloupes, strained with a permanent tension. A grin split his broad face as he extended a hand the size of a dinner plate, calloused and powerful, in a gesture of welcome that felt both friendly and faintly threatening, like being greeted by a nude, decorated gladiator.

Beside him, a study in stark contrast, stood an older man. He was a wisp of a figure, skinny to the point of spectral, with long, thin strands of hair clinging to his shoulders. A goth's goatee, a patch of wiry black, adorned his chin, but when he smiled in greeting, it revealed a dark, toothless cavern. His movement was swift and spider-like. Before I could process the giant's handshake, this second man had bypassed any greeting and lifted the loose dress over Eve's head. As the fabric pooled at her feet, she gestured toward me with a nod, her voice bright and shockingly matter-of-fact, as if announcing the evening's entertainment.

"This is Tim!" she declared, her words bouncing off the walls of this impossible situation. "He's going to paint a nude picture of me…" A beat of pause hung, charged and ridiculous, before she finished with a laugh, "…with his dick!"

The air left the room. Or perhaps it was just my own breath that stalled. The statement did not just hang there; it exploded, then collapsed in on itself, creating a vacuum of pure, unadulterated absurdity. And she added, “He will need to unwind and be totally relaxed before he can paint —you two, can you get him ready?”

The muscled giant chuckled, a low rumble from his chest. The toothless man cackled again, his gums glistening. And I stood there, my artist’s sensibilities, my personal boundaries, and my very grasp on reality not just challenged, but utterly, completely dissolved.

Eve’s enthusiasm to begin was a tangible current in the air, sharp and infectious. The older man moved with a quiet certainty that froze my words. His hands, warm and work-rough, grasped the hem of my tee shirt and in one fluid motion lifted it straight up over my head, the cotton brushing my ears before it was gone. The air felt cool on my bared skin. Before I could process this, he was crouching down in front of me, his gaze level with my genitals. His fingers found the button of my pants, deftly undid it, and hooked into the fabric. With a steady, deliberate pull, he drew them down. I wasn’t wearing anything underneath.

The sudden, shocking exposure was a vacuum, silencing the earlier excitement, leaving only the stark reality of the moment and the dusty, musky scent of the room closing in. He gripped both my buttocks strongly and looked up



into my eyes, asking permission to engulf my awakening manhood into his toothless mouth. I nodded. He lunged forward, encircling all my genitals with his wide-open toothless mouth.

Eve was reclining on the couch, playing with herself, ready to be painted. She had been our audience and signalled for me to lie down with her, as she understood I needed to relax now. After a while, I was being given a sensual massage with oil, the giant's sensuous fingers pressing new life back into my body. I was in heaven. But she motioned for him to stop and for me to start the picture first. She was in complete control, a well honed Dom.

The drive home in the pre-dawn gloom became a tunnel of thought, the empty highway a black ribbon pulling me back through the evening's surreal tapestry. My mind kept returning to that strange house and its even stranger occupants. Eve's invitation to paint at her fetish club's upcoming party, Club Libertine hummed in my veins like a low voltage current. I hadn't the faintest idea what to expect, but a thrilling, nervous anticipation had taken root, and I couldn't wait to see it bloom.

Eve had been the one to plant the idea. She told me that before I could so much as set up an easel within the hallowed, velvet draped walls of the club, I'd need to formally apply for membership. She'd whisper my name in the right ears, she assured me, but the committee demanded a performance, a piece of moving evidence, something filmed, something that would make their jaded, black clad hearts thrum with delight. So I dug out an old, clunky video camera from the back of my wardrobe, its lens dusty and its battery swollen with age, and began my strange little project in the cocooned privacy of my bedroom.

What a dizzy, giddy joy it turned out to be. Alone with my paints and that unblinking electronic eye, I threw decorum to the wind. I painted with my penis, smeared cerulean across my testicles, dabbed my buttocks in cadmium red, and mouthed silent, theatrical obscenities at the lens—every crude gesture and lewd act I'd never dare unleash in any company. It was a liberation, a cabaret of filth,

pigment, and happy endings, lots of happy endings. I was my own most riveted audience.

But that wasn't enough. I needed a finale. So I retrieved a dusty shoebox from under my bed, inside which lay the silicone genitals I'd sculpted years before, during a feverish, half-forgotten phase of exploration. I spent the next hour reworking them with painstaking care, layering flesh-toned pigments until they mimicked the delicate blush of living skin, then painstakingly gluing on a patchwork of fine, dark pubic hairs, each strand a tiny act of obsessive devotion. The result was almost obscenely life-like, a masterpiece of mimicry, save for one glaring detail: it was preposterously, laughably, monumentally too big. A pagan idol's joke of anatomy.

I called Stan that night, my voice buzzing with nervous excitement, and begged him to come along. We rose before the sun, the world still a bruise of violet and grey, and drove down the empty highway to Surfers Paradise, the ocean a restless murmur to our left. There, on the cool, damp sand of early morning, I strapped the monstrous creation around my waist and draped a towel loosely over it, like a flimsy curtain over a scandalous statue. We began our leisurely stroll along the water's edge, the tide nibbling at our ankles. Stan walked a few paces behind, camera poised, waiting for the perfect moment. When the beach yawned empty ahead and behind, no joggers, no dog-walkers, no early-morning swimmers, he gave the signal. With a theatrical flourish, I whipped the towel away and strode forward, my silicone



appendage bobbing with each step like a grotesque, proud figurehead. In the distance, the great glass high-rises of the Gold Coast caught the first molten rays of dawn, their facades glowing a soft, impossible orange, as if the buildings themselves were blushing at the spectacle. The whole scene felt hallucinatory, surreal and gleaming, a fever dream set to the crash of surf.



When I was certain we'd captured enough footage, enough absurdity, enough nerve—I packed the contraption away and drove home. Stan wanted

to try it on but soon gave up, as the metal spring attachment was really quite painful, and my laughter didn't help. He gave up when his real dick became too big to hide inside the silicone.

I sent the cassette off to Club Libertine with a prayer and a smirk. Within days, my acceptance arrived, swift and almost breathless, as if the committee couldn't bear to wait another moment to welcome their newest, strangest little star.

I had been going to the drawing group at the Royal Queensland Art Society, partly because I loved to sketch, but mostly because I was in the middle of an affair with Melissa, the zany, wild-haired woman who still runs the group today. She was all chaotic energy and sharp laughter, and one night, as we lay tangled in the sheets, I finally told her my secret. I knew I could confide in her. Her eyes went wide, then soft, and she was absolutely over the moon when I confessed. She wanted me to paint her portrait right then and there, barely taking time to pull on a robe. Over the following weeks, she helped me more than I could say, feeding my fragile confidence until it began to grow roots. I even ended up busking with her in the humid, bustling streets of Brisbane, drawing portrait after portrait under the awnings just for practice. She suggested I paint some of the models who posed each week for the drawing group, the ones with tired limbs and patient eyes. I could drive down to New South Wales, she said, to the free beach with its salt-scoured winds, and

paint there on the sand, or in my own house, and she would film every brushstroke for me.

Around that same time, my sister Sally had started going



to Toastmasters. She came back from each meeting buzzing with new words and small victories, and she convinced me to join her. At first, I was reticent, shy to the bone, terrified of a podium. But then I thought of the implications, the unexpected advantages of learning to speak in front of a crowd. Seeing I was pretty shy back then, I decided to give it a go. I didn't tell Sally the real reason I wanted to go, but I would be eternally grateful for her push.

TOASTMASTERS

I started off as a timid member, lurking in the back of the room, hoping no one would call my name. But after I spent a long, painstaking time composing my first speech, writing, rewriting, memorising the rhythm of each line, I made a discovery that struck me like a flash of lightning: I could make them all laugh. The room erupted, and I stood there blinking in the warmth of it. It was a revelation, something I had never known I could do. From that night on, I got really keen. I practiced constantly, improved quickly, and slowly, joke by joke, the shyness began to fall away.

A few weeks later, I left the market just after ten p.m., as the club's world was only beginning to stir. The address led me to a desolate industrial district, a canyon of corrugated steel and echoing silence. In a vast, blank wall, illuminated by a single, jaundiced bulb, sat the only entrance: an unmarked green door. It looked less like a portal to a nightlife venue and more like a secret. I knocked, the sound swallowed by the heavy metal as the door slowly creaked open to reveal a towering figure sheathed entirely in black leather, from his polished boots to the stark, domed cap on his head. He looked like a phantom sentry, a living caricature plucked from a bygone



music video.

“Eve invited me,” I managed, my voice thin in the cool air.

A silent nod. I was ushered inside, hauling my bulky suitcase of paints and canvas, my own disguise in tow, feeling suddenly very amateur. Inside, I was steered first into a humming, mirrored changing room. The air was thick with the scent of perfume, powder, and latent excitement. Several people were in various states of transformation, assembling costumes that were less about concealment and more about revelation, straps of latex, glints of chainmail, lush velvet, a crutch-less ensemble, a bold declaration of a hidden self.

Deeper into the labyrinthine complex, the space suddenly opened into a vast meeting area. It was a cathedral of shadows and low, crimson light. Perhaps twenty people lounged at intimate tables or prowled near a long, polished bar. The murmur of conversation was a low, intimate drone. Remembering my role, I had brought no alcohol, but the bartender, a severe figure with eyes that missed nothing—softly explained they offered complimentary soft drinks. As I stood there, adrift in this new ecosystem, a diminutive woman with a sleek black bob approached me. She moved with the silent precision of a cat.

“You are Tim, yes?” she asked, her voice a melodic clip.

I nodded, wordless.

A small, knowing smile touched her lips. “Eve is expecting you. Come, she is over here.”

I was then led deeper into the vast, subterranean heart of the club. The space was a cathedral of shadow and suggestion, its ceiling lost in a gloom pierced only by the occasional, dramatic pin-spot of violet or blood red light. The air grew thicker, warmer, carrying a metallic tang and the low, resonant hum of something primal. Around us, the architecture of fantasy took solid form. Against the rough-hewn walls, medieval-looking torture devices emerged from the darkness: a rack, its gears silent but threatening; an iron maiden standing sentinel. Stark steel jail cells held their occupants, some mostly naked and kneeling in postures of silent submission, others watching the world pass with heavy lidded eyes.

My gaze was drawn to a hanging contraption of leather and polished wood. A woman was suspended within it, her arms secured behind her, her body arched and legs splayed in a graceful, vulnerable curve. A man stood beside her, holding a long, tapered candle. A droplet of molten wax fell, sizzling softly against her skin, leaving a jewel like bead upon a swath of alabaster flesh. She shuddered, a breath catching somewhere between a gasp and a sigh.

Nearby stood X-shaped wooden crosses, heavy metal cuffs dangling from chains, waiting. But the scene that most arrested me was in a far corner, bathed in a sterile, clinical white light. It was a fully equipped operating theatre, absurd and terrifying in its precision. A man in an immaculate dinner jacket, white shirt, and black bow tie stood over a hospital gurney. Strapped to it was a young woman, her legs elevated and held apart in stirrups. This, however, was no tableau of torment. The man was mixing a bowl of rich, frothy shaving cream, his movements methodical. With the care of a master artist, he applied the warm lather between her legs. Then, with a straight razor that flashed under the lights, he began to shave her with exquisite, deliberate slowness. Her head was thrown back, eyes closed, a smile of profound, concentrated pleasure on her lips. This was a ritual of transformation, of intimate service. When he was done, surveying his work, she was as smooth as a baby's bottom, he proceeded to make her even more happy.

Eventually we met Eve. She was practicing lifting heavy weights attached to her labia. Well, why not, I thought. She stopped her practice, which was obviously painful, and lay down on a settee. I stripped off all my clothes, arranged my paint table, dipped my brush into the paint, and started. At first, no one took much notice, but one by one a crowd formed around us until virtually the whole club was watching. When I had finished, they applauded, and several people asked for portraits to be painted. It was a dream becoming reality.

The managers made me an honorary member and asked me to come back every weekend after the market finished. So I sketched all day till ten at night, then painted till four in the morning at the club, every Friday and Saturday, for about a year.

The quiet desperation to belong, to weave myself into the very fabric of the club's strange tapestry, became a singular focus. My recent history was a landscape of relational ruin—the twin shipwrecks of my marriages had left me beached, wary of any tide that felt too strong or too swift. Yet, there she was: a quiet, delicate presence, a woman of such slight, almost ethereal build that she seemed constructed of bird-bones and whispered conversations. I learned she weighed thirty-nine kilos. A number that planted in my mind a wild, persistent seed. An idea, both absurd and compelling, took root: If I could lift her, attached to my genitals, could I lift the weight of my own isolation? Could I, quite literally, connect?

The mechanics of it became an obsessive puzzle. I began a series of private, painful experiments in my workshop, far from prying eyes. I fashioned straps from soft, supple leather, lined with fleece, engineering a harness that fit with a tailor's intimacy around the most vulnerable parts of myself. The design evolved: two separate supports, joined not by thread but by short, gleaming chains of polished chrome, culminating in a single, heavy hook that felt cold and final against my skin. The theory was a brutal geometry of counterweight and tension.



I started with weight I could measure. Twenty kilograms of sandbags was a trifle, a tease. I moved to forty—filling two robust petrol jerrycans with water until they sloshed with the promise of strain. For weeks, I practiced in the silent cellar, the chains biting, the hook a cold fulcrum, my body learning to translate searing discomfort into steadfast resistance. The pain was white-hot, but I learned to breathe through it, to make a pact with it.

The final component was a sling, a canvas cocoon I designed to suspend myself face-down, arms and legs splayed and secured, transforming my body into a rigid, horizontal plank. But this was a solo act no longer. I needed a conspirator. Peter, one of the club's more flamboyantly inventive gay members, with a mind as open as his laughter was loud, was the only conceivable

choice. I confessed the scheme to him over a whisky. His eyes, instead of widening in horror, sparkled with theatrical delight. He saw not perversion, but performance; not madness, but mechanics. He was enthusiastically in.

The test was conducted in the stark theatre of my bedroom, a stout overhead beam serving as our gallows. I lowered myself into the sling, the canvas gripping me, the world tilting to an unfamiliar axis. Peter, with a stage manager's care, lifted the twin jerrycans, their weight formidable and sloshing, and with infinite gentleness, settled the chrome hook onto the waiting harness. For a suspended moment, it worked. A universe of pressure focused into a single, shocking point of contact. The chains held. The straps creaked.



My vision swam at the edges. It was a success, measured in seconds of agonising achievement. But the pain was a clarion bell, undeniable.

We lowered the cans. “More padding,” I gasped, the words scraped raw from my throat.

Peter, ever the practical artist, agreed. We added layer upon layer of dense foam, sheathed in silk, a buffer against the brutality of the act. It was, we decided, after further adjustment, going to be okay.

The spectacle was viable. The connection, however terrifying, was possible.

The air in the warehouse hung thick with anticipation and the dusty scent of old rope. Everything was prepared, the event whispered and then announced through clandestine channels: an attempt at the Penis Lift. A large, silent cloud of spectators gathered in the gloom, their collective breath still.

I was guided into the heavy leather harness, the straps cold and stiff against my skin. Then, the stars and chains were connected, their metallic links whispering as they dangled, a chilling, elegant weight suspended from my genitals. On the concrete floor before me, the Japanese girl was arranged in a masterful captivity. She was crouched, utterly bound in intricate rope patterns, a

complex topography of tension and release previously laid by the visiting Dom. At the centre of the latticework on her back was a perfect, load bearing loop. Into this, the cold chrome hook was inserted, linking her bondage to my suspension.

At a nod, one of Red's slaves took hold of the hoist chains and began to pull. The mechanism groaned. My body left the ground with a jarring lurch that tightened into a steady, soaring strain. I was hoisted into the air, a puppet on a string of my own making, the chains and the girl dangling from the same unforgiving point. She was lifted with me, her bound form rising until the tension left the ropes and she hung, a graceful, living pendant, about twelve inches above the concrete.

We should have ascended further, into the apex of the feat. But Red's voice cut through the focused silence, sharp with alarm.

"Lower them. Now."

She had seen the risk, the dangerous angle, the extreme tension, and spoke of others permanently disfigured, and a end to my dick painting future! The warning became an immediate command. The descent was not gentle; it was a swift, urgent release. The chains rattled wildly as we were lowered, the girl settling softly back into her crouch,

me stumbling back onto my own feet, the sudden absence of weight a shock to my system.

But it had been enough. In that brief, elevated moment, the required photographs had been taken, the stark, unassailable proof of the feat. The flashbulbs had captured the suspension, the shared strain, and I was instantly accepted into the fetish community, becoming the most famous member.

CHAPTER 10

SEXPO 2006

Eventually, the portrait artist I'd been covering for returned from Brazil, tanned and smiling, and my comfortable little perch in the market vanished beneath me like a tide pulling out. I packed my brushes and watched that steady income recede into the distance.

But fortune, it seemed, moved to its own peculiar choreography. Just as one door clicked shut, another swung open with an almost theatrical creak. My



summons came from the glittering, peculiar world of Australia's Sexpo lifestyle exhibition. That very morning, Tracy the secretary with the efficient, no-nonsense voice had received the video of my work. She'd marched it

straight into the office of David Ross, the CEO, and the moment the footage finished flickering on his screen, her voice on the phone carried a bright, electric invitation. They wanted me in Perth. In two weeks.

The news detonated like a firecracker in my chest. Me, being blissfully ignorant of my own worth, didn't think to ask for a single dollar. I had no map of what I was walking into.

At the time of that call, I was crammed into a car with two girls from my life drawing group, bumping down a dust track toward a nude beach near Byron Bay, the windows down, salt air whipping through the cabin. My head was full of another plan entirely: a series of nudes, captured on canvas and in video, their creation unfolding like a slow, intimate documentary. One of the men from my life drawing class, a gallery regular with enthusiastic connections, had been pushing hard for a Sydney exhibition at his favourite haunt. I'd modelled for him privately a few times, and he was always generous, paying the going life model rate, plus a warm bonus of dinner and wine, his appreciation as tangible as the clink of glasses.

But the Sexpo offer shimmered with a different kind of possibility, and my plans began to warp and reshape themselves around it. Though I was, to put it bluntly, spectacularly broke.

I mentioned the offer to a couple at Club Lib one night, the air thick with smoke and the low thrum of conversation. Snot Boy, his club name, delivered with a deadpan grin, immediately declared he'd throw a money raising party. Ten bucks entry, all of it going to my expenses. I was stunned. I wondered, with a hollow little twist in my stomach, if anyone would actually show up.

To my astonishment, nearly a hundred people materialised. They spilled out into someone's garden, the grass damp underfoot, many in extravagant fancy dress, some in barely anything at all. It was late autumn, the air carrying that first bite of chill, and I was set up outside, painting in the flickering, fickle light. People started fetching buckets of hot water and tipping them over me in playful bursts—steam rising, laughter curling into the night. I had to edge closer and closer to the fire, its glow licking at my skin, until I was practically in the flames. Hands found my back, my bum, rubbing warmth back into me as I painted, my brushstrokes wavering in the dancing orange light. I got warm again, eventually, though not entirely from the fire. It was the first time I had orgasmed in front of an applauding crowd.

The Perth exhibition hall was cavernous, a cathedral of commerce and curiosity. I met Tracy, Mark, and David Ross the CEO, alongside the MC, John Savage. I caught myself wondering if they'd taken one look at me, dressed like an old bloke, rumpled and out of place, and thought I was far too ancient for this young, glossy world. The



female MC was Arianna Star: gorgeous, seductive, with the kind of bum and breasts that seemed sculpted by a divine and mischievous hand. My allotted spot was right next to the bucking penis rodeo ride, a mechanical bull reimagined with a lewd twist. I had absolutely no idea what I was in for.

The canvases arrived from a local supplier, and I'd ordered them far too big, my imagination running wild with visions of expensive, monumental pieces that would command attention. They were sturdy, but rough as sacking, and I knew the delicate skin of my dick wouldn't survive long against that abrasive surface. A frantic hunt for a builder's supply in central Perth proved fruitless. I'd brought heaps of paint, but not the base coat I desperately needed. One call to Tracy, and almost

instantly, a delivery arrived: a tin of white paint and a broad, flat brush. That afternoon, outside the cavernous hall, I worked under the blazing sun, coating and re-coating the canvases while heat shimmered off the pavement in wavy mirages, sweat dripping from my brow onto the wet gesso.

My costume was minimal, a cheap top hat perched on my head and a pair of wire-framed pants that offered more suggestion than substance. I felt like a nervous novelty act, a clown in a circus I didn't understand. But I found quick kinship with Justine Morley, of the *Puppetry of the Penis* show, Simon's brother, warm and grounded amid the chaos. His presence was a buoy in the turbulent sea of the exhibition floor. My space, wedged beside that bucking penis ride, became a stage of its own. Its operator, a grizzled man with a wicked grin, became my most enthusiastic customer.

I gave a slew of media interviews, cameras flashing, microphones thrust forward, but a core of terror held me frozen. The blank, primed canvases loomed like thresholds I was terrified to cross. But once I began, the rhythm took over, my arm moving in familiar arcs, the brush a natural extension of my hand. I completed only a few paintings each day, and took the stage twice for live performances. By the fourth day, my dick was raw and sore, the friction unrelenting. I knew I needed to find a

way to protect the skin on the head, I was certain I'd be busier in Sydney, where David had already invited me to perform again.

One customer, a middle-aged man with gentle eyes and an air of quiet authority, approached with a specific request. He wanted to be painted in his unit on Sunday night. Needing the money, I swallowed my suspicion and agreed. His address was a towering high rise near the entertainment centre, glass and steel piercing the sky. The penthouse suite was all clean lines and expensive silence. He was a famous British author, I learned, quite ill, his body fragile but his gaze still sharp and searching. A sweet, melancholic man. He reclined silently for forty five minutes as I worked, the only sounds the soft scrape of my penis on canvas and the distant hum of the city below.

The resulting painting was strange, something that seemed to capture not his face, but the weight behind it. Afterwards, with a gentle solemnity, he insisted on bathing me, a ritual of closure, it seemed. He was pleased with the experience. I showed him all the pictures from my house on my phone, and he said, his voice thick with conviction, *"Now I know I was right. You are a unique artist."*

I left in the pearl-grey light of early morning, returned to my nearby hotel, and went straight to the airport, the

scent of his strange cologne still clinging to my skin like a ghost.

The Perth Sexpo had left my wallet far lighter than I'd ever intended, a hollow feeling that echoed in my empty bank account. Yet a stubborn certainty took root in my chest: I could earn it all back in Sydney. This time, I decided to drive down and take every canvas with me, smaller ones, eighteen by twenty-four inches, that I could turn around quickly with bold, urgent strokes. I'd found a dusty, forgotten shop selling them for a pittance, their raw cloth smelling faintly of size and promise, the fabric cool and tactile beneath my fingers.

My plan had a logistical anchor in Brisbane: a weird, clever guy I knew from Club Lib. A doctor by trade, though no longer practising, he loved pain with an almost academic fascination. One night at Club Lib, he'd made a pin cushion of his ball sack, threading more than fifty hypodermic syringes into his scrotum until, when complete, it looked like a hedgehog nestled between his legs. I made a special effort to reconnect, and ended up crashing in his sterile yet comfortable unit overlooking the Brisbane River at New Farm Park. It became an unofficial basecamp every time I passed through, the river glittering beyond the window, the hum of the city a distant lullaby.

It was there, amid takeout containers and the quiet hum of his air conditioner, that I finally asked his advice about the persistent problem with the skin on my dick wearing

thin. With clinical calm, he recommended a special surgical adhesive, the kind plastic surgeons use instead of stitches. The only catch, he noted with a faint, academic smile, was its vivid, unmistakable purple colour and its breathtaking expense. I needed a solution, so I ordered it through him at a discounted price, and we embarked on a series of careful, absurd experiments in his pristine bathroom on how best to apply it. The white tiles gleamed under fluorescent light; the adhesive glistened like amethyst. It was, in its own peculiar way, always fun. And the purple colour was easy to disguise with skin-toned paint, a quick dab and blend that made the whole affair almost professional.

SYDNEY SEXPO 2006

The drive to Sydney turned treacherous long before I saw the city's skyline. Somewhere along the monotonous highway, a silent stowaway—a servo pie, perhaps, or a dubious chicken roll, began its insidious work in my gut. By the time I was unloading my car at the Moore Park exhibition show ground, a deep, grinding weakness had settled into my bones, my limbs heavy as lead. The television I'd brought to demo my process, normally a manageable weight, felt like a lead-lined crate. I strained, my muscles watery and unresponsive, barely heaving it onto the stand, the world swimming at the edges of my vision. But I was here, and the show, as they say, must go on.

The real siege began as dusk fell. My gut twisted into knots of hot, cold pain, sending me in a frantic, stumbling sprint for the venue's restrooms, a cycle that repeated itself relentlessly. The mere thought of being more than ten seconds from a toilet was unimaginable. I retreated to my car, a desperate sanctuary parked in the shadow of a public toilet. That night was a sweaty, shivering purgatory. Vomiting joined the assault. I was a leaking vessel, utterly broken. With public facilities locked and my situation dire, I resorted to a grim convenience store purchase: a box of plastic bags and a packet of wet wipes, the pathetic tools of survival.

My search for proper refuge led me to a crumbling multi-story car park, a concrete labyrinth that smelled of diesel and urine. In its stark, vile bathroom, my body finally capitulated. The world pinched to a dark point. I came to an indeterminate time later, my cheek pressed against the cold, damp floor, my clothes pasted to me with acrid sweat. I crawled out, dragged myself into the driver's seat, and with animal instinct, pointed the car toward the open horizon of the sea. I was at Bondi Beach, not to an alarm, but to the oven like heat of the sun-baked car and my own profound stench.

The Pacific glittered, vast and indifferent. Staggering out, I walked straight into the cool, cleansing saltwater, clothes and all, letting the waves rinse away the nightmare. Revived, if hollowed out, I drove straight to

Moore Park, arriving just thirty minutes before the doors opened.

That's when the second shockwave hit. David and Tracey were in a state of palpable panic, scanning the crowd with wild eyes. *"Where have you been?"* David hissed, grabbing my arm. *"There are one hundred and sixty newspaper reporters inside. All here for you."*

A violent, uncontrollable tremor seized my hands. I was a ghost, hollow-stomached, pale, and shaking after twenty four hours of total purge. I must have looked shockingly gaunt. I mumbled my state to Justin Morley, who, with a look of pure pity, shoved a muesli bar into my hand and muttered, *"I'll talk to David about the car thing. Just get in there."*





The interview with the Reuters journalist is a blur of bright lights and white noise. I remember the feeling of my dry mouth sticking, my mind a perfect, empty vault. His final question pierced the fog: *“Well, why not? Can you demonstrate your skill?”* It was a challenge I was physically and mentally incapable of answering. Luckily, Justin’s voice cut in from the side, cheerful and assured: *“No worries, I’ve always wanted a portrait painted with a dick, he’s on it.”*

Somehow, my hands remembered their job. The portrait emerged, the reporters crowded in, impressed, and David



later caught my eye with a curt, grateful nod. *“Thank you, Tim.”*

The show itself was a relentless, welcome whirlwind. The crisis had, perversely, curated a gaunt, dramatic look for me, and the story, now public, drew constant crowds. I sold everything. By Saturday morning, I was rushing out to Bondi Junction shopping centre to buy every spare canvas I could find, the previous night’s terror now fuel for a frantic, triumphant energy. But now my dick was bleeding, red blood running down the last canvas. Justine had had a chat to David, who came straight down, hurriedly gave me a bundle of cash, and said that from now on they would fly me everywhere and put me up in a four-star hotel nearby, and also pay me an appearance fee. All thanks to all the help I had got from numerous people too many to mention the future looked rosy and one reporter who ran me from Spain said I was the most famous artist in the world …. That day !

TASMANIA

The pull to see my youngest son had become a physical ache. He’d been in Tasmania with his mother since the split, a distance that felt continental. Our tether was the nightly phone call, where my voice crossed the Bass Strait to weave stories into his imagination. We had traversed the entire wizard world of Harry Potter together,

and were now adrift on the vast, surreal ocean of *Life of Pi*, which he adored.

With the recent publicity around my new… vocation… I felt a certain, grim confidence that his mother would have heard. The door, however reluctantly, might be ajar. So I went. I pointed my car south, then left it in the metallic gloom of a Port Melbourne carpark, a lonely metal box awaiting my return.

I booked a sleeping compartment on the ferry, a tiny, vibrating cabin that hummed with the ship's deep machinery. The crossing passed in a blur of salt-sprayed porthole views and the dull roar of engines, and all too soon, the rocky green outline of Tasmania resolved in the morning mist. My stomach tightened. Would Penny even meet me? I stood on the deck, a solitary figure amidst families and tourists, wondering if I'd be taking a taxi into a silent war zone.

But she was there. And she was astonishingly convivial. Not warm, precisely, but civil, pleasant even. It was a disarmament. The ensuing days were a carefully negotiated amnesty, a peaceful and surprisingly gentle interlude of shared meals and cautious laughter with my boy. When I finally drove back to the ferry, the car held a new lightness. I was happy.

Back on the mainland, my new career was gaining its own peculiar momentum. I was now the requested entertainment for a barrage of “hens nights.” The initial moments were always a trial, navigating some inner-city

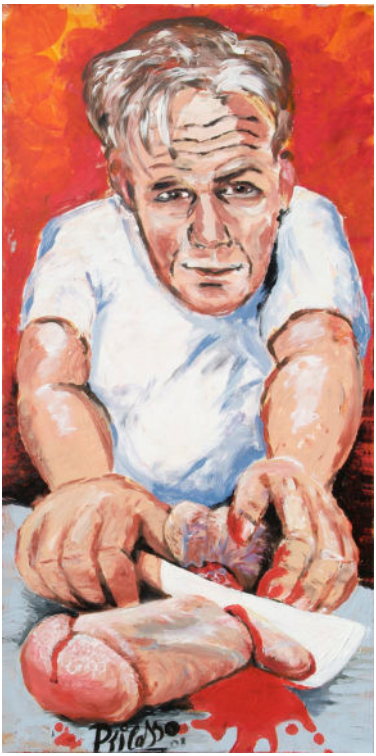


apartment or suburban function room, hauling my gear under the skeptical, razor-sharp gaze of twenty young women. Their unspoken question hung in the air, thick as perfume: *What is this old bloke doing here?* But the magic, as it always did, happened with the first strokes of paint. The chatter would die, replaced by a focused, amazed silence as a portrait emerged from the chaos. It was transformative.

Truthfully, it was the middle-aged hens parties I attended with genuine relish. There was a different energy—less shrieking, more deeply held wine glasses and wicked,

knowing smiles. They operated under a sacred, self-imposed code: *“Whatever happens at Darlene’s party, stays at Darlene’s party. No photos… except the tasteful ones.”* They were celebrations of liberation, and I was their sanctioned chronicler. Often, if I didn’t have a second gig to race to, they’d insist I join them at the club they’d booked. I’d find myself swept along, sipping a drink in a corner, watching them dance with an abandoned, joyful fervour until the early hours. In those neon lit moments, surrounded by the beat and the laughter of women seizing their night, I felt a bizarre, soaring conviction: I was, against all odds, living the dream.





I then returned to the counsel of my doctor friend, seeking a more permanent

shield for the most vulnerable point of my anatomy, the sensitised head of my penis. In the calm, clinical light of his surgery, he produced a solution that seemed almost space age: a supply of ultra-thin surgical dressings. Each was a sophisticated laminate, a protective membrane sandwiched between two covers, a protective paper backing on one side, a clear plastic film on the other. The secret was a pre-applied medical-grade adhesive, activated only once both protective layers were peeled away.

What followed was a period of meticulous, almost ritualistic experimentation. We developed a precise protocol. First, a rigorous cleansing with medicinal





methylated spirits, their sharp, astringent scent filling the air as they scoured every trace of natural oil from the delicate skin, leaving a sterile, dry canvas. Next, a whisper-thin layer of a special, expensive adhesive was brushed on, a viscous liquid that dried to a clear, tacky film. Then, with the precision of a watchmaker, we would take a fresh dressing and, using a pair of sizers, snip out a tiny square of the inner membrane, no more than five millimetres across, a minuscule shield. Peeling away the paper backing revealed the sticky underside. With breath held and hands steady, I would place this microscopic patch onto the most critical, abraded terrain—one positioned as close as possible to one side of the urethral slit, and its twin on the other. Finally, the last plastic cover was gently tugged free, leaving the transparent guardian firmly in place.



That evening, I painted with these dots in situ, a test under fire. The sensation was strange but unobtrusive, a faint, foreign presence on the threshold of feeling. I went to bed with a sense of cautious hope. Morning light brought quiet revelation. We examined the area, half-expecting failure, only to find the tiny films steadfastly

adhered, holding their ground through the night's unrest. It was a small, profound victory, a fusion of medical ingenuity and personal necessity that promised, at last, a semblance of sanctuary for my well worn flesh.

My initiation into the world of swingers' clubs and private parties soon settled into a rhythm as regular as a heartbeat. The clubs operated on an easy, open-door policy: whenever you can make it, just rock up. The first exclusive invitation, however, was to a hotel suite at the Springwood Towers.

I arrived with my mind a blank canvas of nervous anticipation. The suite was a landscape of low light and softer laughter. I changed in a bathroom that smelled of someone else's expensive cologne and clean, starched towels. Stepping out, I entered a current of warm, perfumed air and murmured conversation. Guests flowed



in, kissing cheeks and sharing easy, familiar touches a society that clearly knew its own codes. Feeling conspicuously new, I set up my paint table in a corner, arranging pigment like a surgeon's tools.

The lady who had hired me, a vision in emerald silk, clinked a glass. With a charismatic smile, she announced my "special talent" to the room: I was there to paint portraits, she explained, in the intervals between their other… engagements. A ripple of curious, somewhat skeptical glances moved through the crowd. Sensing the hesitation, she shrugged off her robe, settled herself on the chaise lounge before me, and with a look that was both challenge and invitation, said, *"I'll be first."*

The dynamic shifted. As I mixed flesh tones on my palette, the act of focused observation, the careful study of light on skin, the curve of a hip became its own kind of intimacy. It worked. The painting became a bridge. Later, a woman with kind eyes and a mischievous smile approached, offering not to pose, but to help. *"You look tense, artist,"* she murmured, and with a warm, soapy sponge, she gave me a slow, thorough bath right there, her skilled hands coaxing my body to a full, aching readiness. When she sought to finish what she'd started, I had to gently stop her. I was learning the practical logistics of this new world; I knew my recovery time would be a liability. Better, I figured, to maintain a semi-aroused state through occasional, discreet self-touch, or to ask for a helping hand—a service even some of the men proved

amiably willing to provide, a matter-of-fact courtesy in this economy of pleasure.

I painted for hours in that gilded, surreal bubble. The final photographs with the couples were rarely conventional. They'd hold my brush like a curious trophy, or include it in the frame while laughing, their partners sometimes joining in with a playful, performative kiss. A part of me hovered near the ceiling, watching, thinking: *I can't believe this is happening.*

One couple commissioned a group portrait on a bed in one of the dimly lit bedrooms. The lighting was a crimson gloom, so low I could barely distinguish the tubes of paint in my hand. The resulting canvas was more suggestion than detail. I finished it back in the brighter lounge, where one of the women, emboldened by wine and the night's momentum, stopped me painting and laid me reclining the full length of the coffee table. She cleaned the paint off with a towel and without a word lowered herself down, enveloping me in a warm slippery place. She rode me on the coffee table, which creaked and wobbled. People were gathering around now. It was a fitting end to a memorable night.

The clubs often featured steamy aquariums of desire: spa tubs and steam rooms where bodies slid against each other in the mist. I usually avoided them, perpetually smudged with acrylics. But at one club, a woman with

fearless eyes made a specific request. She wanted me to paint her—with my dick.

BODY PAINTING



She lay down on the tiled floor like an offering. I straddled her chest, pots of vibrant paint arranged around us like a warrior's colours. Dipping myself into the cool, slick pigments, I began to transform her breasts into elaborate, blossoming flowers. A crowd gathered, a ring of silhouettes asking for permission to photograph. She breathed a husky yes.



By the time my brush, a soft, sensitive tool suddenly feeling as intimate as a fingertip, drifted toward her clitoris, the atmosphere in the room had transformed. A charged, voyeuristic silence had settled, thick as honey, broken only by the ragged rhythm of breath from the watching crowd. To my own astonishment, her clitoris had grown hard and prominent beneath my gaze, a tiny, flushed pearl demanding attention. I was achingly erect, an artist consumed by his most living, responsive canvas, in a space where the line between creation and carnality had not merely blurred, but vaporised. The energy crested, spilling over. Other members of the audience, emboldened by the tension, joined the performance, lips meeting skin, hands tracing the painted contours of our bodies.

Amidst the swirl of sensation, I moved with a clumsy, urgent grace. I arched my back, awkwardly presenting



my bum in the air to protect the artwork already blooming across her skin. Then, in one fluid motion, I pivoted 180 degrees to face her directly. Suspended on one knee, I gripped my chosen brush, and applied myself to painting that exquisite, pearl hard nub, a surprise even to me, a miniature landscape begging for its own erotic conclusion.

As the performance neared its end, she rose from the floor. With a knowing glance, she bent over, planting her hands firmly on her knees, offering the new canvas of her buttocks. I adorned each cheek with more elaborate flowers, my strokes deliberate and reverent. The final act was the most primal: now impossibly stiff, I painted a single, sinuous line up her cleft, over the curve of her bottom, the friction and the heat a devastating counterpoint to the cool paint, a motion I repeated until my own climax tore through me with a silent, shuddering intensity.

The spell broke. The room exhaled. We took our bow under a storm of applause, captured a few fleeting



photographs of our shared, glistening masterpiece, and then, wordlessly, turned to seek the cleansing rush of the showers.

Adelaide Sexpo was a more intimate affair compared to the sprawling spectacle of Sydney, and we settled into a hotel in the heart of the central business district, a grid of polished stone and glass. On the first morning, lured by clear skies, I decided to walk to the venue, which

lay on the other side of what appeared on the map to be a generous sweep of parkland. The reality was a vast, sun bleached expanse of lawns and winding, indistinguishable paths. I took a wrong turn almost immediately, my confident stride slowing to a confused halt as identical groves of eucalyptus trees seemed to circle me. By the time I stumbled upon the exhibition centre, I was flushed and late. A frantic Tracy was pacing near the entrance, her phone pressed to her ear, trying to locate me, the press had arrived, and once again, they were primarily there for me. It didn't go quite as well, but didn't really matter, they still got photos and a story.

After Adelaide came Brisbane, then Melbourne, and in what felt like a dizzying blink, a full year had evaporated. I lived in a suspended state of disbelief that my work was still in such demand. With each show, my technique grew more assured, the paintings flowing from the brush faster and with greater confidence. Crowds didn't just gather; they formed patient, winding queues that lasted all day, leading me to start formal booking lists that filled with bewildering speed. The days were a marathon of focused creation and performance, ending each night around eleven PM in a state of profound exhaustion.

My body, however, registered a more specific complaint: a raw, persistent soreness that settled deep in my groin. Over the following days, the simple soreness swelled into something more concerning, a tender, throbbing inflammation that was both a surprise and a constant, uncomfortable presence. By Saturday, I initiated a desperate, clinical routine. Each night, I would carefully apply a cooling layer of antiseptic cream along the entire length of my shaft and across my testicles. To keep the medicine in place, I resorted to kitchen cling wrap, that clear, self-

adhering plastic film. I would wrap snugly, anchoring it around my balls to prevent the plastic bandage from slipping away in the night. The effect was strange and palpable; by morning, my imprisoned member would be straining urgently against the transparent sheath, a full, aching pressure seeking release, as if the very core of my vitality was pushing against its bizarre, sterile

confinement. As I unwrapped it from its mummification, a miraculous transformation had occurred. I squeezed and slowly gave it a few hard pulls, it was no longer at all tender.

TAKASHI OKAMURA

An email arrived unexpectedly, slicing through the usual clutter of my inbox. Its subject line was simple, but its origin,Japan, piqued my curiosity. A production company was asking, quite politely, if I might be willing to paint a Japanese comedian named Takashi Okamura. I confess I'd never heard of him, but the proposition was so intriguing I replied without hesitation: *"Yes, no worries."* They mentioned they'd be dropping by my house on the Gold Coast while filming in Australia. It all seemed casual enough.

The first hint that this was more than a casual visit came with the arrival of his manager a week prior. A discreet, sharply dressed man who appraised my sunlit studio with a professional eye, silently studying my canvases as if





gauging their potential for something unseen. He gave a nod of approval, and that was that.

Nothing, however, could have prepared me for the Wednesday morning several weeks later. A small van disgorged a film crew of seven people onto my quiet driveway, transforming my humble home into a sudden hive of activity. Lights were erected, sound booms poised, and reflective panels angled the brilliant Australian sun. I stood in my back garden, a bit stunned, as the quiet coastal murmur was replaced with the brisk, technical chatter of television production. This, they then explained, was for Okamura's annual New Year's Eve special.



Then he arrived. Takashi Okamura emerged from the commotion with a kind of electric calm. We met,

exchanging greetings—a respectful dip of heads that felt both formal and strangely intimate. He was a compact man, much shorter than I, but he filled the space with an infectious, crackling energy. He was constantly laughing, his eyes crinkling with genuine amusement at the sheer absurdity of the situation: a Japanese TV star in a stranger's house in another part of the world.

The segment began straightforwardly. Outside in my garden, surrounded by chickens which added to the comedy, I painted a simple bowl of fruit to demonstrate the process. Then, with a mischievous glint in his eye, Okamura proposed the real challenge. *"Can you paint me,"* he asked in English, and then translated to Japanese for the audience in Japan, *"while I am painting you?"* I agreed, imagining us as a pair of earnest, cross-legged artists, brushes poised.

I could not have been more wrong. As the cameras rolled, he didn't reach for a brush. Instead, with the flourish of a seasoned performer, he began to disrobe. There was no awkwardness, only a committed, hilarious theatricality. My canvas was suddenly a portrait of a naked, grinning man, and my lesson in comedic art began. He taught me, through action, how to make painting a penis uproariously funny. It was all in the exaggerated ceremony: the elaborate, almost devotional washing of himself with a giant, bright yellow sponge and a child's seaside bucket, performed with the gravitas of a sacred ritual.





My own challenge was perspective. Bent over my easel, I could scarcely see his face, just a blur of focused movement. Luckily, tucked among their equipment was a promotional poster of Okamura. I stole glances at it, working to capture the specific gleam in his eye and the set of his smile, translating the flat image into living paint.

To my relief, the likeness began to emerge from the canvas.

When our time was up, the crew called a finish. Only then did we reveal our works to each other. I turned my canvas to show a detailed, recognisable portrait of the comedian, captured mid laugh. He, in turn, presented his. On his small canvas was a wonderfully basic, round face topped with a lopsided top hat, two simple dots for eyes, and a curved line for a smile. It was charming, naive, and absolutely perfect in its simplicity.

The crew packed up as swiftly as they had arrived, the whirlwind departing and leaving behind the familiar scent of eucalyptus and salt air. Standing alone in my suddenly quiet studio, surrounded by the lingering smell of paint and the memory of uproarious laughter, I had to smile. It had been, in every conceivable way, a really beautiful day.

CHAPTER 11

TRAVELING OVERSEAS 2008

I had tried, with modest effort, to keep my newfound notoriety a quiet thing. That hope shattered when *Picture* magazine hit the stands with my image caught mid-brush-stroke, splashed across the front cover. They'd dubbed me "Prickasso." I remember the surreal moment of walking into the Beechmont general store, only to be greeted by Dina, the woman who ran it, not with her usual nod, but with the wide eyed, grinning reception one might give a minor celebrity. The news was out. From that day, everyone in the local community knew, and to my quiet relief, they met it with a surprising, collective tolerance. There was an unspoken understanding, I following; they had always sensed I was a bit different.

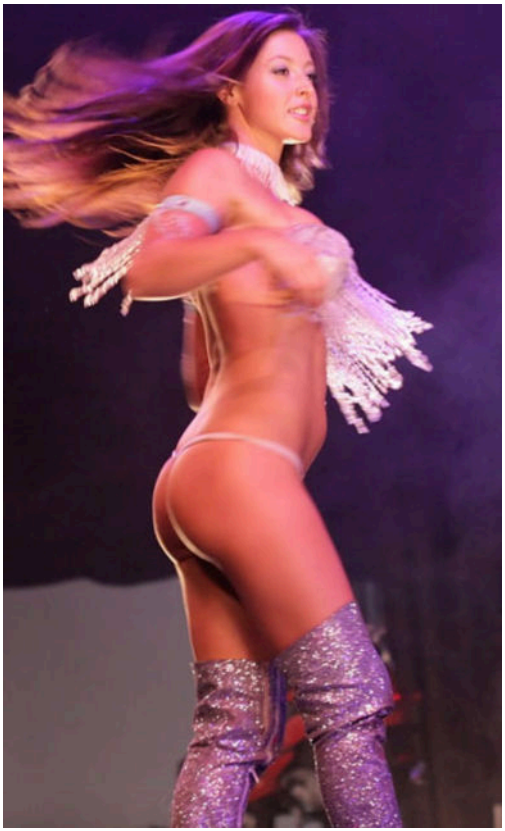
SOUTH AFRICAN SEXPO

The following year at the Sydney Sexpo, a new chapter materialised in the form of three energetic brothers from South Africa. They arrived with ambitious plans to franchise the entire show across their home country. Brought to my display area, they buzzed with entrepreneurial energy, keen to know: if they proceeded, would I be willing to travel and perform there? They asked, too, about Arianna Star, the show's irresistibly cute and flirty MC, who also performed breathtaking



aerial silks. The answer, for both of us, was an immediate and eager yes. The world, it seemed, was still simpatico.

We found each other on the plane, a stroke of logistical fate, our tickets must have been booked in tandem, seating us side-by-side. We chatted effortlessly for the entire long haul, a stream of easy conversation that flowed over meal trays and through the dimmed cabin. We got on remarkably well, a natural simpatico that felt both surprising and comforting. She was less than half my age, and she later confessed that my presence felt like a shelter to her, the steady, paternal figure she'd always quietly wanted. I wasn't entirely sure that was the note I wished our harmony to strike, but the connection itself was a gift, and I was more than happy to let the nature of it remain undefined, resting in its own gentle ambiguity.



When Silas, our new boss, picked us up from the airport, that world was immediately framed by another. We drove past miles of shacks pieced together from cardboard, corrugated tin, and plastic sheeting, a desperate patchwork clinging to the edges of the motorway. The disparity was so violent it stole my breath. I asked him, “Doesn’t it worry you, seeing all this inequality?” He laughed, a bright, sharp sound in the air-conditioned cabin of his car. “Yes,” he said, “they should build a big fence so we can’t see it.” I knew he didn’t mean it; it was his dark, defensive humour, a shield against a reality too immense to confront.

The more time I spent with him, the more my attraction grew. He was a study in organised chaos, effortlessly in control. He whisked us to a television studio for an appearance on *Carte Blanche*, a prestigious current

affairs programme. There, live on air, I painted a presenter during a segment about Sexpo that featured my work for a full twenty minutes. Though I didn't know it then, it was the single best advertisement for my art in South Africa, a broadcast that would seed my reputation there for the next two decades.

My friendship with Arianna was to span several years of travel, beginning with that first, intensely energetic week living together in a sprawling five-star Johannesburg hotel. The management, perhaps misunderstanding our dynamic, had given me a lavish suite of three rooms, a space of echoing solitude I hadn't wanted, while the others, including Arianna, had single rooms each. David, the unflappable nerve centre of Sexpo, was there as our anchor, a problem-solver moving with calm efficiency.

The inaugural night was a baptism by neon. Silas, the most audacious of the brothers, swept us on a tour of Johannesburg's nightlife, culminating in a club buried deep underground, hewn from the bedrock of an old mine shaft. It was the coolest place I had ever been, a throbbing, primal cavern where the air was cool and tasted of earth and bass. Shots of Jägermeister, a bitter, medicinal liquor I despised, were passed around like sacramental offerings. I took only one, much to Silas's theatrical displeasure.

We spilled back into the hotel lobby in the gauzy light of early morning, the world above ground feeling surreal

and silent. Arianna, blurry with sleep, had told me to wake her for breakfast. “Not too early.” So, at 9:30, I used the key she’d given me and entered her room. I called her name softly from the doorway. In response, she simply sat up and slid out of bed, completely and unselfconsciously stark naked, as if it were the most natural thing in the world. “Make a coffee, will you?” she



said, padding toward the bathroom. “I’ll shower.” She emerged later, skin glowing from the steam, and proceeded to dry off and then sit at the vanity, still gloriously nude, to meticulously apply her makeup. I didn’t mind in the slightest. As an artist, to be granted

such an uninhibited audience with a form of such perfection was a privilege. I let the lines and curves of her figure settle into my memory, content to simply lap in the vision. I would have been happy to skip breakfast altogether and continue this quiet study, but she was hungry.

The breakfast was a colonial-era tableau of impeccable service, presided over by a host of black waiters whose manners were a ballet of quiet efficiency. We gorged ourselves from a magnificent buffet, and I had an omelet made by an enormous, radiantly happy black woman whose laughter was as warm as the grill. We both agreed it was the best breakfast we'd ever had. David, already reading the paper by the pool, looked up and reminded us we had a venue to check out. Our schedule was a frantic mosaic of radio shows and media appearances.

Silas was an echo of my old friend Richard, "Big Dick" to everyone who knew him, whom I'd met on my first day at college in Bristol forty years before. Like Richard, Silas was unmistakably, unapologetically gay, and carried the same lovely, generous energy. And like Arianna, he was far too young for me, a fact I noted with a quiet, familiar ache. He owned a large PR company, a sleek operation with numerous employees and even a company cook who fed the entire staff daily. His world was one of curated abundance. Amidst the electric buzz of the studio lights, however, I could see a different story tightening the skin around Silas's eyes. He was constantly on his phone, his voice a low, urgent rumble beneath the production chatter, arranging and re-arranging loans. I gathered the financing for the entire entertainment centre

was still hanging by a thread, security deposits not yet secured. But by the end of that dizzying day, I sensed the formidable, invisible network of his family had finally swooped in to rescue the venture.

The next morning, Silas's mother collected the three of us in her Porsche Carrera, an SUV missile of polished German engineering. The traffic around the venue was pure chaos, a solid, honking knot of overheating metal. With a gambler's grin, she simply wrenched the wheel and drove straight onto the manicured grass, the Porsche bumping and lurching like a boat in a swell until we were deposited near a service entrance. The queue to get in, however, was another beast entirely, a vast, restless snake of people that coiled around the massive structure and disappeared into the petrol-scented haze.



Inside, Silas was laughing with the hysterical edge of relief, but David snapped into action, barking orders, organising temporary parking on every spare inch of grass and pavement. Arianna and I, clutching our bags of

supplies, shared a wide-eyed look of pure terror before hurrying into the roaring belly of the venue, the wave of anticipation at our backs.

Inside, the roar was a physical force. I was introduced to his dad, who was my age, old money South African, polished and calm amidst the storm. They were part of the crew running the expo, basking in the success. His mother oversaw catering for the staff, and we were constantly supplied with succulent steak sandwiches and cold drinks throughout the day, a necessary fuel as the venue was so packed it took twenty minutes to fight your way to the toilet and back. I think I painted twenty-four paintings that day, mostly doubles, my brush a blur. With three days to go, my art supplies were dwindling, but luckily his father quietly offered to procure more.

Arianna was a natural as the MC, a radiant queen holding court. All the stallholders were a little in love with her, and she didn't forget me, pushing her way through the sweaty crowds to visit my stall several times, making me feel wanted in the maelstrom. Silas, meanwhile, kept bringing reporters to me, and I painted their portraits while they conducted interviews, a bizarre and thrilling multitask. The day ended in a haze of exhaustion. That night at the hotel bar, we drank with the desperate gratitude of survivors, keeping the staff in a whirl of clinking glasses and laughter until the small hours, the room blurring into a warm, golden hum.

DAMAGED PENIS

By the end of the fourth day, my body was a territory of ache. “Swollen and sore” could not capture the deep, resonant pain in my joints, the raw skin on my brush hand. Wrapping myself in crisp, antiseptic-scented bandages felt like preparing a fragile artefact for shipment. The next afternoon, Silas drove us to the airport for the final time. During our farewell hug, pressed against the sun-warmed linen of his shirt, I was engulfed by a powerful, foolish want to kiss him. It was more than infatuation; it was a craving to seal the experience he had crafted, an experience so luminous I feared nothing would ever match its sheen. “The next show is in Durban,” he said, his breath near my ear. “In a couple of months.”





My luggage held a fortune in Rand notes, a thick, chaotic brick of paper currency I buried among my clothes. The two kilos of loose change, the tangible clatter of appreciation from a hat on my stall, I had already given to

the homeless and hotel staff, their surprised smiles a more immediate and satisfying reward.

As I walked towards the sliding airport doors, he remained by his car, a diminishing figure of beautiful, chaotic potency. He stood at the centre of the whirlwind he'd conjured, already receding into a memory that felt both raw and priceless, a finished canvas I was forced to leave behind.

GERMANY GOT TALENT

The invitation arrived like a bolt from the blue, just days after the Japanese crew had left. There, in my inbox, was an email from Germany. The subject line: *Das Super Talent*, their equivalent of *Got Talent*. They wanted me, they said, to perform my interpretation of the Mona Lisa. Live. In three minutes.

The concept was absurd, thrilling, and had to be discreet. My version was a cartoonish rebellion: cheeky bum prints for cheeks, subtle penis prints for eyes. To execute it on primetime TV, I devised a rubber cover, a second skin, and spent hours in my studio, not just painting, but practicing the delicate, swift art of strategic concealment.

A few weeks later, I was airborne, hurtling toward the adventure. The filming day was a marathon of surreal moments. We darted around historic locations, interviews of how I started painting and me painting a tame scene with a brush. Then came the transformation. In a cramped backstage area, two wonderfully flamboyant dressers fussed over me, their German exclamations sharp and amused as they struggled to fit the rubber sheath with no success at all. The entire ordeal was filmed very discreetly, but I had to call for a short break, as I had to fit it myself when the brush was behaving itself. Later, about fifteen of us contestants were herded into a vast, gilded waiting foyer. It looked like a palace parlour, with antique lounge chairs and elegant platters of food. The air thrummed with a nervous energy that I could taste on my tongue, metallic and sharp. By then, my own anxiety was a live wire under my skin.

When my name was called, the world narrowed to a tunnel. The stage manager in the wings uttered a crisp “Go!” and I felt near to passing out, my legs moving on pure instinct. I emerged into the middle of a vast, black stage, the silence suddenly profound. Looking out, I was dwarfed by a breathtaking Victorian theatre, a cavern of gold leaf, intricate sculptures, and dark velvet. Balconies and private boxes tiered upwards into shadow, and right before me, illuminated like deities, sat the panel of four judges.

The two dressers had taught me my lines in German. I delivered them, my accent undoubtedly butchering the grammar, and was rewarded with a warm, forgiving wave of laughter from the audience. Then, the ceremony of

concealment: my helpers rushed forward with a large black sheet, holding it up as a screen. Behind its safety, I stripped down, the cool stage air hitting my skin. When I was ready, back turned to the crowd, they dropped the sheet. The gasp was audible, then it erupted into wild, rolling applause. On the video playback later, I saw what they saw: a figure of bold, ridiculous performance art.

The painting itself was filmed with discreet, clever angles, and the audience roared their approval. One by one, the judges' lights switched to "Ja." I was through. The euphoria was electric, but the reality, like a slowly settling dust, was pragmatic. These shows trade in exposure, not pay cheques, unless you win. And as I rode the high of the yeses, a calm, clear voice in my head acknowledged the truth: the odds of me, a novelty painter with a rubber dick, actually winning were, in my frank opinion, deliciously, wonderfully slim. It was the experience that was the prize, a golden, gilded memory already painted in permanent ink.

DURBAN SEXPO

The whirlwind never seemed to stop. I was catapulted from Germany back to South Africa for the Durban Sexpo. Silas, due to the success of the first show, had organised two more shows almost back to back, and to save airfares he wanted me to stay in South Africa for the two weeks in-between shows. He had organised for me



to stay at a nudist camp near the Botswana border and then do the Cape Town Sexpo. The idea appealed to

so in my sterile, air-conditioned room at the Durban Hilton, I could practice for the German final. We all partied with Silas and his brothers every night, and I am sure Sexpo was banned from that hotel forever after we departed. The view was of a sun-bleached harbour, but my world was the smell of paint, the texture of primed canvas. I painted a picture of Cape Town beach with Table Mountain in the background and practiced for the final of *Das Super Talent*.

The Sexpo itself proved a disappointment; the crowd was a slow-moving, conservative tide of Indians and suits and polite applause. I was driven to the holiday in the interim nudist retreat set deep in the game park, something I will never forget. Driving through small villages, dirt roads with two nude gay men I had met at their nudist booth at the Durban Sexpo seemed quite normal. I spent the first

few days living in thatched huts, outdoor showers, and got some amazing massages from them. Every day we were transported on a massive trailer seating thirty of us, pulled by a huge tractor through the African bush, stopping at various game sights to look at the cheetahs, zebras, and elephants. Then at night, outdoor barbecues and social drinking. I of course started painting some portraits and was soon invited to spend the rest of the week with a young couple in their private thatched hut, the week of rest turned out to be quite the opposite.

The show in Cape Town was okay, but I was over it all by then. Arianna was the only thing that kept me sane. My return journey became a logistical nightmare, canvases and tubes of paint I hadn't planned for, which I'd haul straight to my next German commitment.

BACK TO GERMANY



Germany greeted me with a biting, white silence. Snow fell in thick, relentless curtains, and my thin jacket was a cruel joke. My first stop wasn't the venue, but a shop where I bought a coat so expensive it felt like a betrayal of my dwindling funds. At the show, the producers had a sudden, brutal rethink. They no longer

wanted a series of quick cartoons. Instead, they demanded a single, enormous, serious portrait of the head judge, with only a couple of days to execute it. I practiced manically, my brushes flying until the homemade skin-friendly paints ran dry. The replacement paint they supplied was good quality but corrosive; it clung to my skin with a sinister heat, and as I had already spent the preceding weeks in South Africa, my skin was now red and raw after hours of contact.





The costume they presented me was a masterpiece of absurdity: an outfit sheathed in thousands of dangling rhinestone fringes that cascaded like icy rain from my arms and legs, with a particularly dazzling concentration over my… crotch area. It glittered under the stage lights with a spectacular, distracting beauty. Painting in it, however, was torture. Every movement set off a chiming, chaotic symphony of clicking stones; the fringe caught on my palette, my brush, my elbow. So I had to take most of it off. The performance was, unsurprisingly, a disaster.

The weather was cold and frozen, and I still had four days left to fill in, as I wasn't in the finals anymore. I retreated down to the hotel bar to console my dejection in gin and tonic. At the bar was a middle-aged German lady drinking on her own. I had nothing more to lose except my dignity, so I offered a friendly "G'day." She smiled and said, "Are you Australian?" I smiled, the ice broken, not the ice outside, but in the cosy, dimly lit hotel bar. We chatted comfortably; she had seen my appearance on TV a few weeks previously and became very friendly, laughing and joking about my brush mostly. Her plane had been cancelled and she was stranded until the weather cleared. She asked me if I wanted a coffee in her room. The unspoken meaning was clear. I knew straight away where we would end up that night.

I retreated home, my skin burning and my spirit bruised, questioning the very value of these talent show circuits for a non-mainstream penis painter. Was this circus worth it?

A grim realism set in. Thinking my days of whimsy were numbered, I resolved to focus solely on perfecting speed paintings, but people had other designs on my time. Australian festivals kept calling, also African events, now four a year. Bachelorette parties, and, increasingly, swingers clubs found my number, their requests pinging into my phone with near-daily persistence. Emails ordering me to paint portraits of their friends, usually wanting very pornographic videos of it being painted, to play on a big screen at the victim's birthday party. The absurdity was busy, and mildly profitable.

CHAPTER 12

CONTROVERSY WITH A SILVER LINING

The email arrived on a Tuesday morning, buried beneath a pile of spam and promotional newsletters. It came from a polished corporate address, bearing the logo of one of Wikipedia's official content partners, a media organisation that licenses the foundation's articles for educational and commercial use. The sender was polite, almost deferential, and got straight to the point: would I, Pricasso, be willing to paint a portrait of Jimmy Wales? Not the abstract concept of the man, but the flesh-and-blood co-founder of the world's largest free encyclopaedia. They even supplied a high-resolution reference photo. They referred to him simply as "Wikipedia," as though he and the website were one and the same, and casually mentioned his personal motto in passing: "the free speech guy." It was meant to reassure me, I think, a signal that he was open-minded, even playful.

I knew the commission wasn't just about the painting itself. To keep things interesting, I wove in a mildly erotic visual layer. It was tasteful in its own avant garde way, but undeniably provocative.

I sent both the still image and the raw video footage back to the content provider. They were thrilled. Within hours,



they had edited my footage into a snappy, music-backed montage and uploaded it to their official social media channels, tagging Wikipedia, Jimmy Wales, and a handful of major news outlets. The video went viral faster than anyone expected. By the end of the first day, it had clocked 2.3 million views. Comments poured in from every corner of the globe, some laughing, some horrified, some genuinely moved by the technical skill on display. It was art, it was performance, and it was chaos.

Then came the storm. Jimmy Wales himself surfaced in the replies. His Twitter account, verified, blue-ticked, unmistakable, posted a short, terse response. He didn't laugh. He didn't shrug it off. He accused me, in so many words, of trolling him, of using his likeness and his platform's goodwill as a vehicle for cheap provocation. The man who had built a career on championing open discourse, on defending the right to say almost anything, was now drawing a line in the sand. So much for "the free speech guy."



A few days later, my mobile rang. He didn't identify himself by name, but he spoke with the quiet authority of someone who had been hired to make problems disappear. He mentioned "repetitional risk" and "brand alignment" and "unforeseen consequences." Then, with velvet smoothness, he implied that if the video remained online, there could be "formal steps"—a phrase that hung in the air like smoke. He wasn't shouting; he didn't need to. The message was clear: remove it, or else.

I explained, as calmly as I could, that I hadn't uploaded the footage in the first place. I was just the painter. To this day, I'm not entirely certain what happened behind the scenes. All I know is that one morning, I refreshed the page, and the link returned a polite error message: "This content is no longer available." No explanation. No apology. Just digital erasure.

With the publicity, I had received offers from all over the world started to appear—including one from a UK newspaper which I spent some time on.

THE ARCHIBALD PORTRAITURE PRIZE 2011

Someone suggested I enter the Archibald Prize, Australia's most prestigious portraiture competition. My gut coiled into a knot of warning. I should have listened. But the temptation, the sheer audacity of it, was too great. I couldn't secure a famous subject, so I became my own. For weeks, I designed a grand, tasteful composition: a self-portrait in the full, ridiculous glory of my rhinestone costume. I painted it before a mirror, a strange dance of observation and creation, and documented the process. The result pleased me, a paradox of spectacle and technique.



David, the CEO of Sexpo, arranged for a photographer to meet me at the hallowed steps of the New South Wales National Gallery on delivery day. I could have couriered the piece, but no—this ritual demanded presence. A flight to Sydney, a hotel room for the night (a tax deduction, I noted wryly), and the solemn handover of my painted alter-ego to the institution's cool, impersonal care.



Not a race ... Tim Patch, who uses a unique no-brushes technique, with the self-portrait he has entered in the Archibald Prize. Photo: Bob Pearce

Tired and sore, but a handy likeness

Louise Schwartzkoff

AS FRIDAY'S deadline looms for entries in this year's Archibald Prize, portraits are piling up in their hundreds on the packing room floor at the Art Gallery of NSW.

A very serious Brendan Nelson on canvas glares at Kerry O'Brien's likeness across the room. Works from Archibald veterans, including Rodney Pople and Paul Jackson, share floor space with the paintings of unknown amateurs.

The most unusual entry so far comes from Tim Patch, who calls himself Priceaso, after his pens-down, no-brushes-required painting method.

To create his nude self-portrait, Patch dipped his penis in paint and applied it to the canvas. He first entered the prize last year with a painting of the plastic surgeon Dr Joseph Georgiu, but failed to impress the judges with his technique.

"It's not like a running race where there's a clear winner," Patch said at the gallery yesterday after delivering his work. "It's just people's perception of what's good and what's not. I can usually get a pretty good likeness, but I guess I am breaking the boundaries a bit."

Patch spruiks his wares at Sexpo festivals around the world, creating 20-minute masterpieces on paper. He discovered his talent two years ago at a New Year's Eve party, and with this year's Archibald entry, learnt to suffer for his art.

"Painting on canvas for hours on end is not very kind to your skin. It's pretty tiring and it gets really sore ... I use antiseptic, but I had to use my bum to paint in the background, because you have to have the occasional break," he said.

As many as 700 paintings are expected to arrive at the gallery before 4pm on Friday, giving the board of trustees less than week to select the finalists for next Thursday's announcement.

smh.com.au
VIDEO
See Tim Patch at work

The look ... the ABC TV presenter Kerry O'Brien, by Brendon Darby.

Upright ... Sally Parris's portrait of the Liberal leader Brendan Nel

In the end, it worked. Not as I'd naively dreamed, of course. My portrait didn't win; it wasn't even selected among the final forty hung from the hallowed walls ,chosen from seven hundred hopefuls. But in the rejection slip's wake

came a different victory: my face, my costume, my story, splashed across some of the top newspapers in Australia and around the world that week. It wasn't the acclaim of the art world, but it was a louder, brighter echo in the pop culture canyon.

In the weeks that followed, my social calendar became a whirlwind of hedonistic possibilities. Invitations flooded in with increasing frequency, elegant, discreet swingers' clubs with their velvet ropes and dimly lit corridors; intimate gatherings hosted by sophisticated swinging couples in their sprawling suburban homes; and vibrant, uninhibited gay parties that pulsed with energy until the early morning hours. Each week brought a new envelope, a new text message, a new opportunity to explore the boundaries of unconventional society.

Despite this sudden immersion into a world of libertine adventure, maintaining a traditional romantic partnership had become utterly impossible. My days were consumed by my art, splattered in vivid hues of crimson, cerulean, and ochre, I would emerge from my studio looking less like a painter and more like a living canvas myself. The paint clung to my skin in abstract patterns, drying in cracked masterpieces across my arms and torso.

Yet something unexpected bloomed from this solitary, paint-covered existence. Each time I completed a piece, standing back to admire my work while still dripping with the colours of my creation, I found myself transformed into an exhibitionist of a different sort. The completion of every painting became its own performance, its own ritual. I began inviting the women who had gathered, curious observers, fellow artists, friends of friends, to participate in washing the paint from my exhausted body.

What started as a simple request for a sponge bath became something electric, charged with possibility. Occasionally, if the stars aligned and chemistry sparked, the sponge would lead to something more intimate, a slow exploration, a shared breath, a connection that transcended the evening. But most of the time, I understood my role: I was there to entertain, to perform, to be the curious spectacle that satisfied their voyeuristic desires. And in those moments, standing paint-stained and vulnerable before an audience of eager eyes, I discovered a strange and profound freedom in simply being watched.

I had hired a PR girl to take over the management of my social media. One morning, she came bustling into my space, practically vibrating with urgency. “There’s a guy in Canada using your name, Pricasso,” she announced. Then, with the casual indifference of someone commenting on the weather, she added, “and by the way, your career is over. He has an amazing body and a bigger dick.”

Well, naturally, I had to check him out for myself. I navigated to his page, and I had to admit she wasn’t wrong. There he was, all rippling muscles and chiselled physique, and he was clearly packing. To make it worse, he was twenty years younger than me. I fired the girl on the spot. Then, out of sheer curiosity, I decided to reach out directly. I emailed the other Pricasso—his real name was Brent, and despite the bizarre circumstances, we actually became friends, bonding over the internet.

It turned out I had a crucial ace up my sleeve. Years earlier, on the insistence of David Ross, the CEO of Sexpo, I had secured the trademark for the name Pricasso. (Thanks for that nudge, Dave.) Still, I always kept a wary eye on him. After all, they do say imitation is the sincerest form of flattery, but that doesn't mean you trust the imitator. Eventually, he pivoted and started using his own name, Brent Ray Frasier.

From what I could gather, Brent was an undeniably talented performer and intensely sexual on stage. But everything he did felt meticulously choreographed, rehearsed down to the last gesture. He didn't have the ability to pluck a random volunteer from a crowd and capture their likeness in a frenzied, spontaneous burst of painting. I had to admit, though, he was landing more TV appearances than me, his great body and commanding stage presence were tailor-made for the camera.

But his rise didn't stop the orders from pouring in for me, nor did it slow the stream of live adult show invitations. I just shrugged it off and got on with my life as Pricasso. Even back then, people were already predicting my career had an expiration date, muttering that I was in my early sixties and couldn't possibly keep it up (excuse the pun).

MACAU



The Hong Kong-based exhibition company nurtured a gleaming, improbable ambition: to transplant a full-scale sex expo onto the fever-dream island of Macau, that gilded speck of Portuguese-Chinese kitsch floating just fifty miles across the Pearl River Delta. They had studied the blueprint of events like Sexpo with forensic care, but rather than buying a franchise, they reverse-engineered the entire machinery, every booth, every stage, every

contractual clause, and imported the living flesh of the spectacle directly from Australia. I was part of that cargo.

We touched down in the humid, diesel-tinged Macau afternoon, and within twenty-four hours, our troupe of performers was herded into the belly of The Venetian. It was less a casino than a climate controlled fever

A FAMOUS CHINESE ACTRESS



hallucination, a vast, airbrushed cathedral to excess, where indoor canals curled under frescoed ceilings that lied about the sky, and gondoliers in striped shirts serenaded passing gamblers with operatic fragments swallowed by the clatter of slot machines.

The light never changed; it was perpetual, synthetic twilight, golden and suffocating.

Before I could even orient myself in that mirrored labyrinth, a handler materialised at my elbow. Costume. Now. Paints. Now. My heart kicked against my ribs as I was steered away from the others, down a corridor of velvet ropes and unmarked doors, and into a cavernous audition hall that smelled of floor polish and anxiety.

At the far end, a panel of fifteen men sat in a rigid crescent behind a long table. All were middle-aged, Chinese, dressed in nearly identical charcoal suits, their faces carved from the same block of unsmiling granite. They did not blink. They did not shift in their chairs. The silence that radiated from them was not passive; it was active, a pressure against the skin. A cold, visceral knot tightened in my stomach. *What have I walked into? What have I done wrong?*

One of them rose, a slim man with silver-rimmed glasses, and approached with the measured gait of a prosecutor. In clipped, carefully enunciated English, he explained that the panel would determine whether my work qualified as Art or mere pornography. The test was simple: I was to paint a portrait of him, right there, exactly as I would at the expo. My mind, in a desperate spasm of self-preservation, offered up the absurdly defensive thought: *Well, there’s no way I’ll get an erection in front of this

lot.* So I stripped off my clothes, took hold of my brush, and began.

The quiet that followed was immense, thick enough to chew, heavy with the weight of fifteen pairs of eyes dissecting every stroke, every breath, every involuntary flicker of my expression. The stress was a physical thing, a vice around my chest. And yet, paradoxically, the act of painting became a kind of sanctuary. The brush in my hand, the drag of pigment across paper, the narrow focus of matching flesh-tone to light, it all coalesced into a strange, defiant solace. I stopped performing and simply worked.

It worked. One by one, the granite faces cracked. Nods appeared. Murmurs of approval rippled down the table. The organisers, suddenly warm and back-slapping, were delighted.

The expo opened to a tsunami of humanity, pulsing, sweating, electric with collective appetite. Eighty percent were young men, barely out of their teens, each clad in the uniform of Macau's nouveau prosperity: designer sneakers, slim cut tailoring, watches that cost more than my first car. They came armed like war correspondents, formidable DSLRs with lenses the size of artillery shells, plus the latest iPhones held aloft like offerings. I worked without pause, a one-man assembly line of erotic portraiture, my body and brush in constant motion under the hot glare of exhibition lights. In hindsight, I could have

charged triple. But the organisers' flat fee was reliable, and they kept the foot traffic flowing by parading a rotating cast of Chinese celebrities—actors, models, influencers, to my corner for a souvenir portrait, each one trailed by a frenzy of phone cameras.

By the third day, the authorities arrived. Not with drama, but with quiet, bureaucratic efficiency. Crisp white barriers materialised around my booth, cordoning me off like a biohazard. The crowd was now rationed, forty viewers at a time, queued behind the partitions like patients awaiting triage. To counteract the dampening effect, the organisers deployed a young Chinese woman as a hype-agent, a human magnet stationed just outside my barriers. She was lovely luminous skinned, quick smiling, and had been educated in Melbourne, her English pristine and faintly Australian inflected. In the lulls between her crowd charming duties, she confessed that her family owned a sprawling house in Hong Kong, complete with domestic staff and a view of the harbour. But her manner, beneath the polish, radiated a quiet, almost desperate hunger for an Australian passport, for the clean air and wide skies of a country she'd only glimpsed in brochures.

I was fresh from the wreckage of my second marriage, still picking shards of that failure from my psyche, and in no condition for anything real. So we didn't do real. We did laughter, flirtation, reckless banter in the shadows of the barrier; we did the kind of momentary, probably unwise escape that two lonely people manufacture when

the world is watching but not really seeing. It was fun. It was necessary. It was never going to last.

They asked me back every year for the next decade. But each time, I found myself installed in a blanked-off cubicle, partitioned from the main carnival, painting in

sterile isolation. It wasn't particularly enjoyable, the energy had drained away, replaced by routine and fluorescent hum. But they looked after us like prized livestock: five star hotels, generous meal allowances, drivers who knew the shortcuts through Macau's snarled traffic. So I treated it as a working holiday, a paid pause from the mess of my real life. Ten years of artificial twilight, of barriers and buffets, of painting strangers while the slot machines never stopped singing.

BRIZIL



Lula da Silva is the 39th and current president.

During the run of the show, a new invitation materialised: a sex exhibition in Brazil the following week, sponsored by a major porn magazine. They emailed the tickets swiftly. Feeling buoyant, I rocked up to the Johannesburg airport, only to be halted at the check-in desk. I needed a visa. The shock was physical; I had just missed my flight

back to Australia. Stranded. But the women at the information counter were angels of efficiency. They summoned a driver, a man in a serene Mercedes, who took me to a nearby hotel, assuring me he'dat dawn to drive me to the Brazilian embassy in Pretoria. Worry churned in my gut, but what choice did I have?

He was as good as his word. The Mercedes glided through the morning traffic, the embassy process was a blur of forms and fees, and by the next day, visa in hand, I was watching South Africa fall away beneath the wing, the surreal journey to Brazil suddenly, improbably, back on track.

The show was housed in the disused carcass of a shopping centre in São Paulo, a place where the ghosts of commerce lingered in the dusty, echoing corridors. My stage was a vacant shop unit, its entire front a single, vast sheet of glass that divided my world from theirs. For six days, I performed behind that transparent wall, a living exhibit for the paying public who pressed close by, their breath fogging the barrier.

Inside that fishbowl, I did several photo shoots for various porn magazines. Some were solitary; others involved other boys and girls, suggestive, teasing tableaus. The timing was fortunate; I had just come from Sexpo in Johannesburg, my body still primed, still responsive. I was swollen and performing well, even if I knew I probably didn't fit the industry's extreme blueprint. But in

that moment, I didn't care. I was in Brazil, and on the other side of the glass, the crowd stood with mouths agape, a silent, wide-eyed chorus to the spectacle. It did remind me of what a monkey would feel like in a zoo, holding on to its sex organs and shrieking.

SÃO PAULO AFTER PARTY

The local organiser's profits were rooted in the after-party at his own night and sex club. But the porn sponsor, who had covered my airfare and put me up in a five-star hotel, had a rival club and insisted the party be held there. My arrival was a scene from a surreal movie: a stretched limo, a sudden eruption onto a long red carpet flanked by hundreds of clapping, cheering people. The energy was a physical force, funnelling me into the pulsating heart of the club.

I was guided onto a stage under blinding lights. The sponsor spoke in rapid Portuguese, a river of words I didn't understand, and then… a beautiful, nearly naked girl was to be painted, she was probably a famous porn star. I painted her quickly, the air crackling as people took photos from every angle, whilst she contorted into outrageous positions for them to capture the scene. And then I was being given a larger area to work from for the next few hours. It was fun, charged with a raw sexuality.

After a few hours, saturated in paint, I was led upstairs to what only could be described as a high-class brothel. I was first taken to a bathroom, a young man assisted me to take off my costume and cleaned it. When I stepped out of the shower, he was there with a big fluffy towel. I remember the boy's eyes looking up at me as he towel-dried my groin, the roar of the club dissolving into a silent moment. I put my clean costume back on.

The memory of that night fractures into sharp, surreal pieces. One moment, I was stepping into a blistering cone of stage light, the roar of a clapping audience a physical wave of sound that hit my chest. The next, a man with a transactional smile was leaning close, his voice a confidential murmur beneath the pulsating music. "You were a hit," he said, as if offering a critique. "Do you prefer girls or boys? We have lots of each." The offer hung in the air, thick and strange, I was still in recovery mode. I managed a vague, "Maybe later," as he handed me a drink, the words lost in the thumping bass.

After that, the curtain falls. I have recollection of beautiful naked dark-skinned girls touching me, more drinks, subtle lighting, and the room turning upside down. I was pissed. I awoke the next morning in my hotel bed, naked. The sheets were tangled, my body aching with a hollow fatigue. Sunlight stabbed through the gaps in the curtains, illuminating the few short hours I had before my flight home. Panic was a sour taste in my mouth until the expo organiser arrived, his face a mask of strained courtesy. He wasn't happy, but he absolved me with a

tight-lipped, “It’s not your fault. It’s mine for getting the porn guys involved.” The drive to the airport passed in a blur of silent shame and relief.

Seeking absolution, on my return to Brisbane I returned to that same gay sauna a few months later, drawn by their promise of free HIV tests every Tuesday. The clinic room was cold and fluorescent, a stark contrast to the steamy decadence of the floors below. The wait for the result was an eternity compressed into twenty minutes, a clock ticking loudly in my chest. When the nurse said “negative,” the wave of relief was so profound it felt like rebirth. I walked out into the ordinary night air, swearing a silent, fervent oath to myself: *Never again.*

MEXICO CITY



After a few muted months at home, the road called once more—this time to Mexico City. The journey was a comedy of errors from the start. I landed at LAX, a sprawling labyrinth of noise and light, and had to switch to a Mexican airline. I collected my luggage, dragged it out of one terminal, and trekked across a vast, sun-baked parking lot, sure I was headed the right way. I was wrong. The check-in desk I finally found was for ' Mexico, air ' not Aero méxico. The agent's correction sent a bolt of pure adrenaline through me. I spent the next frantic minutes in a literal sprint, suitcases banging against my legs, weaving through crowds for what felt like a kilometre. I arrived at the correct gate sweaty and gasping, to find a stoic gate agent who informed me they had held the plane. My luggage, they said, would not be so lucky; it would follow me a day later.

Mexico City was a thrilling, chaotic beast. The venue for the show was a long, wary distance from our hotel. We entertainers, a troupe of mostly American strippers and rugged muscle-men dancers, were ferried each night in an armoured bus, its dark windows and heavy chassis a constant, unspoken reminder. "It's safer this way," they said. From what, I never knew, but the speculation hung amongst us, a low hum of nervous energy.

The expo itself was vast, a city within a city. I was given command of my own dedicated stage, complete with a booming sound system and a DJ who also handled the money. He collected pesos from the endless stream of

people with a charming grin, organising the waiting couples, taking his percentage, well deserved, as I would be lost without his advice, but the cash he handed me at the end of each night was still substantial. It was, against all odds, fun. The audience around my stage could hold hundreds, and it seemed perpetually full, a sea of upturned faces, whistling, calling out, me getting lost in the performance. The energy was a tangible force, a circuit that ran from the crowd to me and back again.

The show ran for a full week, but the beast outside our bubble was restless. The word came down, not from the producers, but from the air itself, a tightening of tension: *It's not safe at night.* When the show ended, our armoured buses collected us for the final time, and we retreated from the pulsating stage lights back into the quiet, guarded safety of Mexico City, the spicy food, Hard Rock Cafe, and McDonald's, the exciting rhythm of the week still echoing in our bones, as we partied in the hotel's bedrooms and spa pools.

MY FAVOURITE CLUBS

Swingers' clubs were my favourite venues back then, unlikely cathedrals of after hours hedonism, usually tucked away in soulless industrial estates where the only daylight came from security lamps. By night, while the neighbouring businesses stood shuttered and silent behind roll-down grilles, these clubs came alive. The entrance was deliberately discreet: a black painted door,

maybe an unmarked buzzer, nothing to hint at the world waiting inside. Once through, you'd step to a check-in desk where a big-breasted smiling cashier took your fee, then into a stark changing area where unfazed semi-naked people squeezed into crotchless panties. The real transition happened at the bar.



That's where the atmosphere took hold. The music pumped from a sound system stuck somewhere between 80s synth-pop and 90s house, because most of the clientele were from that generation. They knew every lyric, every bass line. People wore skimpy costumes or less, and there was a strange, relaxed social equality in the air: accountants next to electricians, nurses next to delivery drivers, all of them stripped of their day-job armour. A pool table sat nearby, baize scarred from years of off-centre breaks, and some of the members would spend the entire evening there, chatting, drinking, laughing while their partners were getting laid upstairs.

Single men were discouraged at most clubs unless they were known to the management. I was one of the exceptions. At certain clubs, management would sometimes hire well-hung foreign students to help out the mostly out-of-shape guys, call it practised generosity or just good business. There were private rooms and open rooms. Voyeurs gathered in the latter, watching the evening's "performances"—a shift of anonymous bodies, each encounter blending into the next. Meanwhile, I had my own role. I was painting either single portraits, or couples seated together on a small raised podium in the dance area. They'd often record a video of me working, phones angled over the crowd's shoulders, fascinated by the way paint and flesh became one.



The formula I perfected went like this: She would massage the skin protection oil onto my paintbrush and bum, making doubly sure I was fully erect. I would have to stop her before it became too sensitive, especially as the evening wore on. Sometimes the partner would lend a helping hand, stroking my perineum,

or straight to my anus. Then I'd begin painting in earnest, stopping each time my brush needed attention. At the finish, they'd wash all the paint off my body, laughing, scrubbing, admiring my throbbing erection, and then, to the applause of the crowd that had gathered to watch, they'd pose with the finished portrait, snapping even more photos, sometimes with my penis lost in someone's mouth, it was crazy.

I'd usually paint about six couples a night. It was hugely popular. For several hours, in the dim electric glow of those seductive rooms, the last portrait of the night, I wasn't just an artist; I was the performance, as I got vigorously and erotically masturbated, or someone would offer to lie down on a bench and we'd make love on the podium. It was all part of my art.

TOSH.O AND JACKASS

I told my son I had a call from a show called *Tosh.0*. I'd of course never heard of it, but he was jumping up and down with excitement. So after he got on the bus for school, I made a very bad connection on Skype, my internet being very slow. I painted him quickly and had a bit of a chat, and that was it. But the orders increased substantially.





A short time later, another show, *Jackass*, emailed wanting me to paint a portrait of Dave Carnie and sent a very revealing photo. They wanted a really raunchy video to go



with it, which I had great fun painting, and wondered if it was a bit over the top for TV. But enquiries went into overdrive.

Many years later, I was asked by Gorilla Flicks to paint the *Jackass* logo for their 25-year reunion art show.

CHAPTER 13

AMERICA

I've traveled to America several times, but the strangest trip by far was for the Erotic Exotic Ball in San Francisco. The event was held on a crumbling industrial complex situated on an island on the edge of the bay, a forgotten patch of land where a collection of abandoned warehouses stood like hollow skeletons. Inside those gritty, echoing buildings, performances unfolded, and vendors set up their stalls under flickering lights. This being San Francisco, a city famous for shedding inhibitions, there were no real rules about modesty. My body painting, as bold as it was, barely raised an eyebrow. Still, I did pretty well. I had heaps of publicity, and many of the paintings I created there pushed every boundary I knew, raw and unapologetically raunchy.

The management, however, wasn't exactly straight with me. I never saw a dime of my appearance fee, and my airfare went unreimbursed. But amid that chaos, a stroke of unexpected kindness came through: a wonderful couple made me an offer I couldn't refuse. They put me up for two weeks in their luxurious house after the guys who'd hired me eventually scraped together enough money to pay for the hotel I'd been booked into. On top of that, the organisers got into a bitter dispute with the bus company they'd contracted to ferry people to and from the event. That limited the crowd to a disappointing trickle, casting a real damper over the whole affair.



Still, I made the most of my time in San Francisco. I did



all the classic tourist things—clattering up the hills on a

cable car, feeling the wind whip my face, and visiting the infamous prison on Alcatraz Island. That place was truly amazing, steeped in eerie silence and the ghosts of its violent past.

When I got home, at the next expo, I mentioned this to Sexpo management, who offered to get their solicitors in America onto it as I had a bounced cheque from the guys in the States. But I didn't go through with it. They did try to get me back the next year and offered to pay me double. I thought: double of nothing is still nothing. So I just ignored the request.

LAS VEGAS

Several swingers' clubs from Vegas reached out to me around the same time that my friends Mark Anthony, his wife Lo, and their friend Bobby were planning a holiday there. So I booked a ticket and tagged along. The accommodation was shockingly cheap back then, which left me pleasantly surprised.

What truly captivated me were the hotels—each one a fever dream of architectural fantasy. I spent hours walking the Strip, wandering through every lobby I could find. One casino welcomed me with cascading waterfalls and indoor rainforests; another showcased a massive replica



of a spaceship hanging from a glittering ceiling.
Everywhere I turned, there was vast, unapologetic luxury.

I caught a couple of shows with Mark and his entourage, but after a while, the neon buzz began to feel repetitive. So I rented a car and headed out to the Grand Canyon. On the way, I passed through an Indian reservation, the desert heat shimmering off the asphalt. The real highlight, though, came at a roadside café, a humble, sun bleached building where I had an unforgettable meal. To this day, I can still taste their hot, spicy jalapeño-spiked bread, served fresh from the oven, its heat blooming on my tongue long after I'd swallowed the last bite.

When I returned to Vegas, I finally made my way to a sprawling Spanish-styled swingers' club, paintbrush in hand. I was warmly received; the people didn't really know what to expect. As with most clubs, I painted mostly couples, creating portraits. But one creative girl, the last woman I painted—requested something special. As she bent over, her head almost touching her knees from the back, we got a stunning display: her clit peeked through invitingly. During the painting, a guy, maybe her partner, lubed her up and, to the applause of the audience gathered around, penetrated her. It didn't matter; I had finished the detailed bits by then. A portrait just for her.

After I finished, we ended up soaking together in a hot spa pool surrounded by other couples, steam rising into the cool desert night. Hands wandered everywhere. It was a wild, perfect ending to the evening. And the next night? I went back for more. But the patrons had heard of what the last girl got me to do, so every painting I did that

night was an interactive sexual performance. I ended the evening on a bench in the middle of the room with someone cleaning me.

L.A. 2015

The Los Angeles sun bled through the smog like a blown-out bulb as I stepped into the hallowed hush of the Playboy studio, a cathedral of velvet ropes, vaulted ceilings, and the faint, cloying perfume of hairspray and old money. My mission: to capture Hugh Hefner on canvas, to translate that parchment-thin skin and perennial smirk into light and shadow. I worked in that echoey space from photos, the scratch of my penis hard at work against linen the only sound beneath the low thrum of refrigerated champagne cases. The portrait took shape, his gaze both weary and amused.

But the real show began when the brushes were cleaned. I was ushered into a cramped, soundproofed booth for Playboy Radio, my ears still ringing with the ghost of studio silence. Across the table sat Charlie Murphy, Eddie's older brother, all lanky limbs and lazy-eyed cool,

Hugh Hefner's Portrait being presented to him at the Playboy Mansion in L. A.



his voice a gravelly drawl that could make a eulogy sound like a punchline. He was being interviewed about life on the road, about the circus of arenas and afterparties, when the host leaned in with that vulturous curiosity: “Charlie, you must have groupies throwing themselves at you every night. What happens to the leftovers, do your roadies get any of the surplus?”

Charlie didn’t flinch. He let the question hang in the stale, cigarette-tinged air, took a slow sip of something amber, and then let loose a grin that was equal parts shark and

philosopher. His answer came out like a country proverb told

CHARLIE MURPHY



in a blues club: *“Trickle-down pussy.”*

The room erupted, wheezing laughs, slaps on the table, the engineer nearly knocking over his headset. I just sat there, brush still stained with Hefner's flesh-tones, knowing I'd just heard a line that would outlive any portrait I could paint. After the interview, we drove to the Playboy Mansion, a Gothic pleasure-dome where peacocks screamed in the twilight and the grotto steamed like a Roman bath.

The portrait was presented and an explication of how it was painted. I'm sure he wasn't impressed. But in my mind, I wasn't seeing Hefner's face. I was hearing Charlie Murphy's gravelly drawl, watching that slow-motion grin, and knowing that the real portrait of that day wasn't on canvas—it was etched in a single, perfect, scandalous phrase that would follow me like a ghost through every gallery opening since.

MIAMI

The moment I stepped off the plane in Miami, the humid, salt-tinged air hit my lungs like a wet blanket—and my already raw throat seized up in protest. I'd arrived with a miserable cold, a hacking cough that rattled my chest, and a stubborn commitment to perform at a bargain-basement erotic art show that probably shouldn't have been on anyone's bucket list. My accommodation, a suspiciously cheap Airbnb tucked somewhere off the

main drag, seemed like a calculated risk at the time. How bad could it really be?

As it turned out, my imagination had been embarrassingly optimistic.

The "apartment" turned out to be a cramped, claustrophobic bedroom with peeling beige walls and a single flickering fluorescent tube that buzzed like an angry insect. I was sharing it with three South American immigrants, their belongings spilling out of suitcases and across every available surface—a tangle of worn sneakers, half-empty water bottles, and the faint, clinging aroma of fried plantains that never quite faded. There was barely room to breathe, let alone sleep. The nights were a symphony of snoring, muffled Spanish murmurs, and my own relentless coughing fits, which I tried to muffle into a damp pillow. It was a complete nightmare, a feverish blur of exhaustion and homesickness.



Salvation came in the form of Perego, a fellow artist with an easy smile and the kind of warm, unshakable friendliness that felt like a lifeline. He was outrageously talented, his sketches alive with energy, and he took one look at my hollow eyes and wheezing chest and insisted I abandon my miserable crash pad. Within hours, I'd checked into his hotel room on the glittering beach strip—a world away from my previous squalor.

The room was modest but pristine, with sliding glass doors that opened onto a balcony overlooking the ocean, and the steady, rhythmic crash of waves became the lullaby I desperately needed. There, wrapped in crisp white sheets and gulping down glasses of fresh orange juice, I finally began to recover.

And recover I did. In that sun-drenched room, with salt on my lips and the roar of the Atlantic in my ears, I threw myself into the final preparations for the art show. Something clicked—a strange, feverish clarity that comes when your body is healing and your mind is finally at ease. I produced some of the finest portraits I had ever created, each stroke of charcoal and brush laden with a new confidence I hadn't known I possessed. The show itself was chaotic, raw, and gloriously unconventional, but my work stood out, alive with a vibrancy that surprised even me.

The after-party, however, was the true spectacle.

It unfolded in a haze of neon lights and thrumming bass, held in a backlot that smelled of gasoline and saltwater. And there, leaning against their gleaming American Utes—monstrous pickup trucks with wheels the size of small children—stood a group of men who seemed to have stepped straight out of a Scorsese film. Impeccably dressed in linen suits and gold chains, they spoke with low, gravelly voices and laughed with the easy arrogance of men who owned the room. I was introduced as "el artista," and they welcomed me with the kind of theatrical warmth that felt both dangerous and intoxicating. They pressed real Cuban cigars into my hand—thick, tightly rolled torpedoes that smelled of

earth and honey and old money. One of them, a silver-haired man with a scar through his eyebrow, demonstrated the ritual: toast the foot, rotate slowly, draw gently. I followed suit, and the first puff was a revelation— But my rebellious lungs had other ideas. A single, deep inhale sent me into a paroxysm of coughing, my eyes streaming as the men roared with laughter and clapped me on the back. "Muy bien, amigo," one chuckled. "You are a true artist—you suffer for your art.

We stayed until the sky began to pale, and then, on a whim, we wandered down to the beach. I sank into the cool, grainy sand, still buzzing from the night's strange magic, and watched as the horizon shifted from inky black to bruised purple, then to a wash of coral and gold. The sun crept up like a slow-burning ember, spilling liquid light across the tranquil water, and right on cue, a procession of colossal cruise ships—floating cities of white steel and endless decks—glided into the harbour in perfect, silent formation. They looked like ghost ships, majestic and surreal, cutting through the glassy surface of the bay as if they owned the very dawn.

That morning, stumbling back to his hotel with sand between my toes and cigar smoke still clinging to my clothes, I collapsed onto the bed and slept. Not a nap, not a doze—but the deep, dreamless, comatose sleep of the utterly depleted. Two full days slipped by in a silent blur. When we finally surfaced, groggy and disoriented, I realised with a jolt of panic that I had nearly missed my flight home. I packed in a frenzy, threw a grateful glance at the ocean one last time, and raced to the airport with some of Perego's borrowed things still in my bag and the ghost of Cuban tobacco still haunting my senses.



Miami had chewed me up, spat me out, and then inexplicably handed me a masterpiece. I left with aching lungs, a suitcase full of my finest work, and the strange, indelible memory of watching the sun rise alongside men who might have been mobsters—and who taught me how to smoke a cigar like a king.

MACAU THEN TAIWAN

But not long after, another double opportunity emerged, first in Macau, then in Taiwan. Macau was a whirlwind: busy, electric, nonstop. I painted for four straight days, barely pausing to breathe. And somehow, in the midst of all that chaos, I began to feel like myself again.

The final curtain fell on our Macau show to the sound of my own private misery. Every fibre of my being, particularly my throbbing, sore willy, screamed in protest at the very idea of performing again so soon. Instead of rest, we were herded, a weary troupe of performers, onto a flight to Taiwan, traded one stage for another, and were granted a fleeting, four-day mirage of a holiday at a luxury spa resort with hot spring water gushing from waterfalls outside, hot and cold nude plunge pools inside, and spa pools in every bedroom.

The woman running the new show was a vision of fierce attractiveness, a spark in the fog of my exhaustion. But I was a hollow man, running on fumes. My body and mind had one united, desperate desire: the oblivion of sleep. This craving was brutally denied the very next morning when I was escorted, once more, to a sterile room for an audition. Another panel of elderly gentlemen watched with detached curiosity as I, moving like an automaton, managed a reasonable likeness for them. The beautiful lady organiser was profoundly grateful, her smile a bright, distant light I was too tired to reach.

We talked, and our conversations often spiralled into the territory of sex—theoretical, worn-out currency between performers. I wanted to press pause, to explain, “Wait. Just a few days.” I see now I should have voiced it, but the words were lost in the dense cotton wool of my fatigue. By the time I had recovered, the moment had evaporated. She was a whirlwind of logistics, the show

consuming her entirely, and that spark of interest had been buried under paperwork and schedules.



My world within the show became a walled-off area, a private cage. As compensation, they assigned me a helper who spoke the language, a genuinely cute and effervescent Asian guy named Jia-ming. He was a friendly force of nature, swiftly becoming my enthusiastic promoter. He dragged curious guests into my sequestered space, orchestrating photoshoots that escalated into almost pornographic poses. Hidden from the main floor, we cultivated a raunchy, liberated atmosphere that the Thai audience adored. Jia-ming took particular, gleeful interest in my physical reactions, rushing in with his camera at any sign of an erection, always eager to offer a “helping” hand with cheerful, unabashed encouragement.

On the last day, I made a final attempt to connect with the lady organiser. But the show had soured, its energy

faded. Whatever chance there might have been was gone. She vanished quietly that night, slipping back to the capital. My genitals were on fire after two shows back to back, so it was just as well.

I did invite some young stallholders who popped in from time to time to watch my performance at the show. They had a stall next to mine selling sex toys. I invited them to come and visit the resort. Those social and sparkling eyed young people with beautiful faces brought a couple of their skinny Asian friends. They were so impressed with the resort, all said they had never seen anything so luxurious.

My room at the spa resort was a sanctuary of surreal luxury. The centrepiece was a massive sunken spa pool, tiled into the bedroom floor like a hidden lagoon, in front of a panel of glass overlooking a panorama of the resort and the ocean beyond. A large iron lever stood sentinel beside it. Pulling it released a gush of thermal spring water through a narrow, 30-centimetre-wide channel that filled the immense pool with a steaming, mineral-rich river in just ten minutes. That night, the room transformed into a wet, chaotic paradise. They were a tangle of naked bodies play-fighting, splashing, and fooling around under the massive waterfall of the shower head, laughing as they spilled heaps of precious thermal water across the tiles. In that steam-filled chaos, my mind was finally, completely wrested away from the pain, the exhaustion, the pressure. They were a beautiful, happy sight. But I did find my money bag a lot lighter after they left—and I

was grateful for the hotel room safe. Still, it was worth it to see them all enjoying the opulence which was wasted on me, old, tired, and worn out.

As I got on the plane to fly back home, my penis and balls were so swollen and on fire I wondered if it had been worth doing two shows back to back.



HONG KONG

Another time, I flew directly into the humid, electric energy of Hong Kong. The expo organisers were putting on a show inside a sprawling marquee tent right along the bustling waterfront, where the city's giant Ferris wheel turned slowly against a dramatic skyline of glass and steel. Once



again, they gave me a private, walled off booth, but this time, with a strange new set of restrictions: my brush had to be shaped like an elephant's head, and it absolutely had to look *really cute*. Crafting it became a week-long journey of trial and error. I worked with stretchy PVC, liquid silicone, and elastic bands, materials that seemed to fight back at every turn. My sewing machine had to stitch with surgical precision; one wrong move and the whole thing would warp. But after seven exhausting days, I finally held the finished product in my hands. It was soft, squishy, and admittedly adorable, with floppy ears and an oversized floppy trunk. I was genuinely proud of what I'd made.

At the show, the crowd's reaction was pure joy. People laughed, pointed, and clamoured for photos—no one wanted me to cover up my little elephant brush as it looked like small comical pants. For a moment, I even had grand visions of it being perfect for TV shows. But to this day, I've never used it again.

I had a few days before and after the event. Before the event, for publicity, I went for a walk around Hong Kong. It was wild. I thought I might get arrested, but my minders were quite confident it would all be sweet.

I played the tourist. I hiked the steep, green hills behind the city, rode a breathtaking cable car up a misty mountain, and came face-to-face with a colossal bronze Buddha sitting in serene silence at the summit. As I stood there, I had this quiet, nagging feeling that I would never be in Hong Kong again. The authorities hadn't been happy with the expo, and sure enough, it never happened a second time.

FAKE TAN

Thanks to my English bloodline, my complexion is pale. To avoid looking like a ghost haunting my own reflection, I religiously slather myself in fake tan, shades of toasted almond. The trouble begins the moment I check into a hotel. without fail, housekeeping takes one horrified look at the orangey residue smudged across their crisp, starched pillowcases and instantly assumes I've been using their Egyptian cotton as a drop sheet

I invested in a full-body painter's coverall, constructed from reinforced, whisper thin paper fused with a crinkly plastic laminate, it breathes remarkably well; a faint whisper of air circulates against my skin with every





movement, and the cool, sterile texture is oddly delightful. One of these suits comfortably outlasts four nights of restless tossing, which conveniently sees me through the duration of most theatrical runs.

I stumbled upon a discount store, garment that practically called my name: a sleek, full body black cat suit, sinuously crafted from the most forgiving, butter-soft spandex zipped all the way up the front its four-way stretch clung to every contour of my frame like a second, liquid-shadow skin. I convinced myself it would be the perfect answer.

Foolishly, I decided to debut it during a stay at a decidedly upscale hotel. That night, the room was stiflingly warm, as I drifted off encased in that shimmering ebony

cocoon.. Dawn crept in through the heavy blackout curtains, and when I groggily threw back the mountain of pristine white bedding, my blood ran cold. There, smeared across the sumptuous sheets like an aquatic bruise, was a sprawling, unmistakable stain of vivid, oceanic blue

Panic seized me.I yanked the soiled linens from the bed, stuffed them into a plastic bag, and hurried out into the sleepy, unfamiliar streets in search of a laundrette. I spent that entire morning hunched over a chugging, industrial washing machine,, praying to the gods of Tide and bleach that I could erase the evidence before the hotel's unforgiving housekeeping staff could add to my permanent file.

AMERICA'S GOT TALENT

Then, out of nowhere, a double disaster struck. It began with an email from *America's Got Talent*. They wanted to know: could I paint one of the show's presenters live, in just two to three minutes? My stomach dropped. I had serious doubts, but my fingers typed "no problem" before my brain could stop them. The catch? It had to be done discreetly, hidden behind a screen, yet still convincing enough that the audience believed I was actually painting in real time.

I spent hours at home practicing, but nothing seemed to work. The paint smudged, the likeness was off, the timing

felt impossible. Then, another email arrived. This one was from the UK. They wanted me on a television show, this time to paint a celebrity, just two weeks after the *America's Got Talent* appearance. Of course, I said yes. I figured I'd have those two weeks to prepare, to breathe, to get it right.

In the end, I somehow managed to paint Howie Mandel reasonably well, hidden behind a low screen while he narrated what was happening to the audience. It kind of worked. Afterward, I was treated like a rockstar—interviews, flashing cameras, warm handshakes. They told me I'd be coming back to paint another panel member. But now I had a new problem. I found out who I'd be painting on the British show: John Paul Gaultier. I could hardly believe it. My nerves crackled. But before I could even process that, *America's Got Talent* contacted me again—they wanted me back just days after the UK trip to paint a female panellist. So I practised her face, her features, her expression. I barely thought about John Paul. I told myself he'd be easy.

JOHN PAUL GAULTIER, 2016

I was wrong. A few days before I was set to fly to the UK, an email arrived that stopped me cold. *America's Got Talent* informed me their sponsors had banned me from appearing. They wouldn't be using any of the footage we'd already filmed. I was devastated. A fog rolled in,



heavy, grey, suffocating. I slipped into a quiet depression, my thoughts frayed and scattered.

The morning of my flight to the UK, I got ready mechanically. My son dropped me at the train station. An hour and a half later, I arrived at Brisbane Airport only to realise I was twelve hours early. I'd been awake for eighteen hours before even boarding the plane, my mind spiralling about the painting I was expected to deliver on live TV. I couldn't sleep on the flight.

By the time I landed in London, I was a wreck. A complete mess. My hotel wouldn't let me check in until 2 p.m., so I left my bags and trudged out into the city. I needed canvases, the size they'd requested wouldn't fit

in my luggage. I should've asked them to handle it. Instead, I wandered through unfamiliar streets, a mission that felt endless. I finally found what I needed and returned to the hotel just after 4 p.m. My room was a glorified cupboard. Tiny. Cramped. There was no way I could practise in there. So I ate dinner, tried to rest, and slept in fragments. They were picking me up at 7 a.m.

My alarm screamed at 6. I stumbled downstairs for breakfast, but the service didn't start until 7. I arrived at the studio, was whisked into makeup, changed clothes, and then—hungry and cold—I waited. And waited. John Paul was rehearsing his lines for what felt like forever. The studio was freezing, barely 15 degrees, but he was warm under the lights, sweating through takes. I stood there almost naked, shivering, exhausted, nervous, and deeply frustrated that I hadn't had time to practise more.

After what seemed like forever, they started asking me questions. The whole experience turned surreal. I was brain-dead by then, disconnected, floating somewhere outside my own body. Still, John Paul was lovely, charming, funny, genuinely kind. He tried to help, cooperating as best he could.

I began drawing with my dick, his rough outline, eyes, nose, mouth, his distinctive hairstyle. But then the producer interrupted. They wanted me to start with bum prints first. So I had to destroy what I'd begun. By the time I finished that detour, there was far too much paint

on the canvas. The cold room meant nothing would dry. I knew I was doomed. The final painting was terrible. But there was no time to redo it, they had just one day to film the entire episode. What a disaster.

They aired it anyway. The episode was called *Euro trash: Brexit Edition*. After that, several TV shows I'd been scheduled for were quietly cancelled. I thought my career was over.

It was either a feast or a famine, the two offers arriving together so I didn't have the time to concentrate on either fully, and I failed at both.

GERMANY EROTICA

At that time, I was travelling to about ten adult shows a year, three in South Africa, three or four in Australia, Macau, and Amsterdam twice annually, plus the occasional stop in Germany. The Erotica show in Germany was enormous, a sprawling chaos of neon lights, pounding music, and crowded aisles. I didn't speak the language, so most of what was expected of me floated past in a blur of unfamiliar syllables. I was genuinely surprised when they told me I'd be expected to perform onstage several times a day.



When they came to fetch me, I realised I needed someone to watch my stall, as my passport, money, camera, laptop, and every valuable possession I owned were there, since the hotel had no safe. But I don't think the guy who came to fetch me spoke English, as no one came to help, so I stayed at my area. The organisers covered all my expenses but called the performance "an opportunity for exposure." I normally make sufficient to cover expenses and a bit more, so I decided to do it.

The trouble was, my stall sat at the dead end of a narrow lane, and right next to me was a beautiful porn star who performed many times a day, stripping completely, doing everything porn stars do and using a variety of toys, inserting them slowly into every orifice she possessed.

The act drew a seething, shoulder-to-shoulder throng of men wielding massive camera lenses, the shutters flashing in relentless bursts. They completely blocked the alley, turning it into a wall of bodies and equipment, making it impossible for anyone to even see my space. Not that many were interested—it wasn't erotic enough. I ended up just a bystander to her endless exhibitionism.

Devastated, I left my bags with a friendly stall holder I'd known for years, and started wandering the aisles. It was a massive exhibition, and I knew I wasn't ready for this just yet, if ever. It was there, in that frustrated fog, that I met Ron Jeremy, then the world's most admired porn star—cheerfully selling his own brand of rum. He was remarkably friendly, and I would cross paths with him again a few years later at Sexpo in Australia, where I'd eventually paint his portrait.

LONDON 2016

Sexpo did make it to London just once. Like in South Africa, it was franchised to a company there. It wasn't that successful, probably due to a lack of advertising. I went with David Ross, Sexpo's CEO, and before the show opened, we took an eye catching ride on a topless bus around London. I wore a Sexpo T-shirt and top hat, which got a few selfies from curious fellow travellers. It was a cool, crisp, sunny day, taking in the iconic London sights as a tourist, hopping off a few times for food and a pint in one of the city's iconic, dark-wood pubs, the kind



that smells of old ale and history.

At the show itself, my painting station was positioned directly across from a bizarre and unforgettable area: a cluster of young men disguised as dogs, doing what dogs do, sleeping on plush, cosy oval dog beds, dressed only in meticulously



sculpted leather dog heads, studded collars, and leather harnesses, with tails attached to a multi strapped girdle which emphasised their genitals and especially the butt hole. These butt plugs were big, in your face, either black or diamond encrusted.

TWO DOGS

One afternoon, while I was on a break since I was nearly always busy painting, a strange lady began a conversation with me. She was unmistakably a dominatrix, and could command attention. She wore blazing red high-heeled shoes that clicked with authority, glossy black stockings that clung to her legs like a second skin, and suspenders that whispered with each step she took. But it was her corset that stole the show: an intricate masterpiece of blood-red and midnight black fabric, laced so tightly it cinched her waist into an impossible hourglass and pushed her breasts upward until they seemed ready to spill over the top. I couldn't help staring—they were right at my eye level. She towered over me like a statue, yet her eyes held a strange, reassuring calm, as if she had all the power in the world and no need to prove it.

In one hand, she carried a whip, its leather tail curled like a sleeping snake. In the other, she held two chrome plated chains, each attached to a thick, studded dog collar. Those collars circled the necks of two almost naked young men crouching on all fours beside her. Their skin was dark and glistened as if oiled, their bodies sculpted to perfection, utterly flawless. They wore nothing except magnificent leather dog masks, complete with sculpted snouts and ears, and their matching collars, leather harnesses, with tails attached directly to butt plugs looked so genuine.

She guided them on tight leashes, and from time to time, with a casual flick of her wrist, she would crack the whip, making them whimper like chastised hounds.

I mentioned Club Libertine, the Brisbane fetish club where I'd learned to paint, and then mentioned Norman, the man who used to shave people's pubes there. He had grown up in London and always mentioned the club Torture Gardens. He had been deeply entrenched in the fetish scene for decades, but he was much older and she didn't recognise the name. But a few minutes later, her voice softened, turning almost polite, and she asked, "Would you paint my slaves?" gesturing and patting them lovingly, almost tenderly. Her voice, rather posh, continued: "And in return, we will give you a massage you will never forget."

"You mean… massage me here?" I asked, glancing around the bustling show.

"You will obviously have to paint the slaves here, as you're all set up," she replied smoothly. Then, after a pause: "And when the show closes, I'll drive you back to my establishment nearby." She tilted her head slightly, a glint in her eye. "Do you like being spanked?" I was slightly tempted.



“They will perform brilliantly for you boys, 69 position for Pricasso.” One dog immediately rolled over onto his back, losing his codpiece and now displaying his genitals. The black dog’s bottom was now high in the air, with the tail sticking straight out of his anus, his right leg cocked as dogs do when pissing, displaying proudly his rampant cock high above the brown dog’s face, at the same time his face was going down on the brown dog. The scene before me became such a powerful, strange, and striking composition.



I simply couldn’t refuse. The scene before me shifted into something so

powerful, so strange and striking, that it became an instant composition I had to capture.

As I painted, a crowd gathered, drawn in by the bizarre beauty of it all. A stool was found for the black dog to rest his cocked leg on so he could hold the pose, and others were only too keen to keep his cock rampantly erect. That crowd, in turn, brought me many more customers wanting portraits, keeping me busy for the rest of the show.

At the end of the night, the trio reappeared dressed in ordinary clothes: jeans, jackets, everyday faces. Both young men were beautiful, and I found myself wondering why they let themselves be so humiliated. She hailed a London cab, and within minutes, we were pulling up to her apartment. It was luxury personified, but strangely decorated, a place that felt like stepping into someone's hidden, private theatre. Across a vast checkerboard-tiled entrance hall, peacock feathers fanned out from vases. A fluffy bearskin rug lay stretched across the floor, its glassy head still attached, jaws frozen mid-snarl, that the boys were now rolling on, play-fighting, stripping each other's clothes off. She scolded them: "Settle down, you two." They went quiet but still grabbing inside each other's underpants!

Exotic Indian furniture stood throughout, carved and ornate, whispering of distant lands. She took off her coat and was still dressed as she was at the show.

I was ushered down a spiral staircase toward an old iron-hinged oak door studded with black rivets—her "dungeon," as she called it. Her sexy workspace. Inside, a cellar with a vaulted ceiling loomed around us. Soft light glowed from inside old hurricane lamps, casting flickering shadows across whips of every size and degree of cruelty, some slender, some braided, some tipped with knots. From chrome chains hung handcuffs: some solid black leather and severe, others fluffy and almost playful, all looking brand new, custom made. Quality dildos of stainless steel, glass, and silicone were arranged in gleaming cabinets like museum pieces.

She told the two slaves, who by now were completely naked, to undress me, which they dutifully did, and led me through to a small marble room with shower jets, some cascading down and some shooting water at my groin, which the boys gleefully soaped me inside and out. Later, as we climbed from the hot bubbling spa pool, I was now intimately acquainted with them, they led me back to the Dominatrix, who now stood only in her red boots. She laid me face down on the padded massage bed with many strategically placed holes. The boys then crawled underneath into a very tight space from which one already had his tongue deep inside my mouth.

The massage that followed was an experience, a mixture of pleasure and pain, each sensation bleeding into the next. I really did enjoy it, especially with the many hands getting me to a point and then keeping me there before

letting me relax. Ice cubes, hot stones, and spankings worked in unison, their touch both soothing and startling. The boys were truly adorable. Time felt suspended, as if the world outside had ceased to exist. Their lips kissing and sucking from below me, her soft breasts sliding over my buttocks, whilst hidden fingers probed my anus. I understood why they were with her: it was all a performance, giving the clients a lasting, expensive memory.

In the early hours of the morning, as my legs felt like rubber, I took a cab back to my hotel. She had very important clients coming in the early hours, and I had to be back at the show by 11 a.m.

CHAPTER 14

PHILLIP AND HOLLY 2016 / 2019





Another time, I found myself back in the U.K., promoting a segment of a television show I was appearing in, when an unexpected invitation landed in my inbox, a slot on *This Morning* with Phillip and Holly. The kind of opportunity that makes your stomach flutter and your calendar suddenly feel very small.

I arrived at the studio in the bruised, pre-dawn darkness, the kind of morning where the mist hangs low and damp, clinging to coat collars and turning streetlights into hazy amber orbs. The building loomed, anonymous and industrial, but inside, a quiet hum of readiness pulsed through the corridors. A production assistant led me to a dressing room, compact, functional, with a mirror ringed in unforgiving bulbs, where I changed and wrapped my fingers around a Styrofoam cup of coffee that was more comfort than caffeine. The warmth bled through the cup as the makeup artists descended next, their brushes light and quick, powdering away the early hour from my face.

Then came the moment I was ushered into the studio proper. And there they were—Phillip and Holly, seated like old friends who'd simply saved me a chair. They greeted me with such easy, radiant warmth that the studio lights felt almost unnecessary. Before I could settle, they pressed a glossy photograph of themselves into my hands and grinned: *Paint us.* Just like that. No pressure. Except, of course, the cameras would be swinging in my direction at carefully choreographed intervals, their red lights winking like knowing eyes,

cutting from the sofa to my canvas and back again, as if the whole nation were peeking over my shoulder.

I painted as the show rolled on around me, chatting, laughing, the low murmur of live television threading through my concentration. When I finally set down the brush, the painting had turned out better than I'd dared to hope. The colours felt alive, the likenesses captured with a looseness that surprised even me. I leaned back, loosening my shoulders, and for the first time that morning, I felt genuinely relaxed. I was shown to a small bathroom to clean up, cool tiles, the distant echo of studio activity muffled by closed doors, before being guided to the main sofa for the interview. Settling into that plush seat, with the sweeping, grey-blue expanse of the Thames glittering through the glass behind me, felt utterly surreal. The river moved slowly, indifferent to the bright chaos inside, and for a moment, I had to remind myself to breathe. Phillip and Holly were so natural, so quick with a quip, that it felt less like an interview and more like breakfast with old friends who happened to have a few million viewers.

At one point, Phillip was told how the painting had been created, brushstroke by brushstroke, live, on air, and his reaction was so gloriously over the top, so theatrically stunned, that I nearly laughed out loud. He clutched his chest like a man who'd just seen a magic trick, and the whole thing was so absurdly funny that time seemed to fold in on itself.



And then, just like that, it was over. The lights dimmed, the microphones came off, and I was walking back out into the damp London morning, the whole experience already feeling like a dream I'd borrowed.

A few years later, for their tenth anniversary special, they reached out again. This time, they wanted something

celebratory, a playful, cartoon painting emblazoned with the number ten. I painted it back in my Australian studio, where the sun poured through the windows and the cicadas buzzed in the heat beyond the glass. I even filmed a time-lapse of the process, watching the colours bloom and the digits take shape under my hand. The show only aired a short snippet of that video—just a few seconds, really, but the publicity that followed was unexpected and delicious, rippling out across social media and interviews, reminding me all over again how a single, whimsical moment can echo far beyond the studio walls.

THE NETHERLANDS , KAMASUTRA SHOW

I've traveled to The Netherlands more times than I can count, each time drawn back by the same dark, throbbing promise: the Kama Sutra erotic fair. It was nothing like the polished, glittering chill of Sexpo. No, this place had a pulse. Deep in the belly of the venue, behind heavy curtains and shadowed arches, lay hidden rooms, secret gardens of skin and sound, each one demanding an extra fee to enter. And inside those rooms? Nudity. Live sex. Bodies tangled and glistening, moving without shame, breathing hot and low in the dim light. That layout worked beautifully in my favour. Not everyone had the appetite or the nerve to linger long in those charged, sweeter-than-sweat chambers. So they drifted to me. To my corner. To my brush.



I painted there, half-lost in the scent of paint and perfume, my fingers moving slow and deliberate. My brush, always a little raunchy, a little too knowing—seemed to have a mind of its own. It dipped, dragged,

and teased the canvas like a lover's fingertip trailing down a spine. And people noticed. They gathered close. Their breath warmed my bare shoulder. Their eyes weren't on the canvas so much as on the way I moved, the slow roll of my wrist, the wet glide of my penis against surface.

I didn't mind when they pulled out their phones. Not at all. Let them film. Let them capture the way my brush lingered a moment too long, the way the paint glistened like something freshly touched. I never said no to a photo, a video, or handling, my penis was a pleasure shared. And sometimes, at the end of the evening, when the crowds thinned, a few of my most avid fans would get naked too and get all the raunchy photos they could.

The appearance fee? Laughable. A joke. But the attention? Ah, the attention was intoxicating.

The crowd was so wonderfully open, unashamed, unguarded. They watched me like I was part of the performance, my brushstrokes as erotic as anything happening behind those velvet ropes. And for a while, that was enough.

But then they began holding three shows a year. *Three.* Suddenly, the journey became a slow unraveling. First a plane, cramped. Then a train, rattling through flat, wet fields. Then a taxi at the end of a long, aching night, the

driver silent. By the time I arrived, my desire dulled to exhaustion. Too much. It became too much. Even a brush that knows how to dance can only go so far before the hand holding it grows tired.

But there was one final, unforgettable highlight, on the last leg of my flight from Dubai to Amsterdam. I was settled into my seat, half-dazed by the recycled cabin air and the dull hum of engines, when I noticed the man beside me: a small, wiry Asian guy, early thirties, with sharp cheekbones and restless, curious eyes. We exchanged the usual polite nods at first, the silent treaty of strangers sharing armrests, but didn't really speak until he glanced over and caught sight of my laptop screen. I was deep in the weeds of redesigning a section of my website, tweaking fonts and margins ahead of publishing the moment we landed. That's when he leaned in, almost shyly, and confessed he was my biggest fan. His voice was warm and well-spoken, and his face lit up with such genuine, boyish pride that I almost laughed, not at him, but with sheer surprise. He told me he'd always hoped to meet me, and here he was, by random cosmic luck, squeezed into seat 14B beside his online hero.

CHRIS

He introduced himself as Chris, a nurse from Sydney, transferring to Amsterdam for two years. The pay, he

said, was excellent, good enough to finally start ticking places off his world map. He wanted to see everything: canals, castles, cobblestones, chaos. I liked the way he said it, like he was already tasting the adventure.

Before we cleared customs, I spotted him again near the baggage carousel, tugging an old, scuffed suitcase off the belt, looking slightly adrift in the glossy, echoing arrivals hall. I asked where he was staying. “Some hostel in the CBD,” he said with a shrug, already bracing for thin pillows and creaky bunk beds. I happened to have a car waiting, a rare luxury for me, and since my hotel was in the same district, I offered him a lift. He smiled, relieved, and tossed his bag into the trunk without hesitation.

When the car pulled up outside my hotel, a sleek, modern high-rise with mirrored glass and a revolving door, he got out and blinked up at it like it was a spaceship. On impulse, I said, “Hey, Chris, come up to my room. Have a coffee with me. I’m sure there’ll be a kettle and some instant somewhere. You can figure out your lodgings after.” He agreed readily, almost eagerly, and followed me into the mirrored lift where I got a good look at him. He was beautiful.

The moment he stepped inside my suite, his eyes went wide. The bathroom alone, a gleaming cube of chrome, marble, and rainfall shower heads, was enough to make anyone pause. He ran a finger along the vanity edge and asked, almost hesitantly, if he could take a shower. “My

hostel won't be nearly this posh," he admitted, then added, with a mischievous curl to his lips, "honestly, I'm gagging for a bath." I caught his phrasing, *gagging for a bath*, and felt a little flicker of heat. Was he flirting? And why a bath, not a quick shower? That seemed deliberate, playful, a test of sorts.



My suspicions were confirmed when he didn't bother with modesty. He stripped off in the bedroom, jeans pooling at his ankles, shirt tossed over a chair, and padded, completely unselfconscious, into the bathroom. A moment later, he wandered back out, dripping a little, announcing the water was too hot, his skin already flushed pink from the steam. I looked at him—really looked, and my breath caught. There he stood, lean and lithe, his boyish body golden with an all-over tan, his smile so bright and

knowing it could've powered the whole city. He knew exactly what he was doing to me. And he was loving it.

We ended up at opposite ends of that enormous tub, the water lapping gently around us, a steady trickle from the centre faucet keeping the temperature silky and warm. Steam rose in lazy curls, fogging the mirrors and softening the edges of the room. I asked him to soap my back, and he laughed when he saw my website tattooed across my shoulder blades, a permanent, ridiculous billboard of my own name. I returned the favour, but I didn't stop at his back. I soaped him all over, slick and thorough, spreading his legs over my shoulders in the warm, sloshing water, washing every inch of him until he was gasping, not just from the suds, but from laughter, spluttering and nearly drowning as I tipped him off balance. We dissolved into helpless giggles, water slopping over the rim, hands slipping, foam everywhere.

That afternoon unspooled like a lazy, golden dream. We had so much fun, the kind of easy, unforced joy that makes you forget time even exists. Later, we went out for dinner along a canal-lined street, the city lights winking on the dark water, and eventually found his hostel, a modest, creaky building tucked between two gabled houses. He registered, tossed his bag on a bunk, then came straight back to my hotel without a second thought, slipping into my room like he belonged there.

The next morning, I had to set up at the Kama Sutra Erotica show. Chris came along, helping me haul banners and arrange displays, his energy infectious. But by that

evening, back at the hotel, I knew I had to be honest. I told him, gently, that I needed to rest up, the next three days would be brutal, fourteen hour shifts, non-stop crowds, and then a red-eye flight straight home. I could feel the exhaustion already banking behind my eyes. It was a sad parting, softer and more wrenching than I'd expected. He hugged me at the door, his cheek warm against mine, and whispered a quiet goodbye. If he'd stayed much longer, I would've been a wreck, torn between work and wanting, sleep and surrender. So I let him go, and watched him disappear down the hallway, his old suitcase bumping softly behind him, already missing the weight of him in the room.

ROMANIA

This was a big mistake. I should have led with that.

It all started when the guys running *Romania's Got Talent* reached out with an offer I couldn't immediately refuse: they wanted me to have a live paint-off against Brent Ray Fraser, the infamous Canadian "penis painter." Yes, *that* Brent. The guy who had used my Picasso name a few years previously, but luckily I had taken out the trademark many years before he started copying me. And honestly? I was keen. More than keen. I was convinced I could knock out a portrait faster and more spontaneously than he ever could, no gimmicks required.

So I said yes. They booked my flights. And the moment those tickets were in their system, the rug came out: Brent backed out. No showdown. No rivalry. Just me, now rebranded as a regular competitor in their talent show.

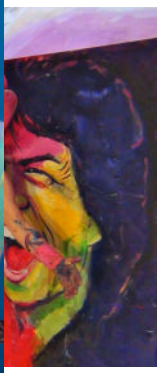
The flight to Bucharest was a nightmare, delays, tight connections, the kind of endless, cramped hours that leave your knees aching and your skull stuffed with cotton. By the time I landed, it was already afternoon. No rest. Just a quick handoff to production, a restless night in a strange hotel bed, and then an early morning pickup that felt more like an abduction.

They threw me straight into the machine: interviews, cameras following my every step, a long, surreal walk through the capital dressed head-to-toe in my stage costume while photographers shouted for poses. Tourists stared. I smiled until my cheeks hurt. Then back to the studio for more filming, more waiting, more sitting under harsh lights while my brain slowly curdled.

Of course, I was the last act to go on. Nearly midnight. I had been up for eighteen hours—after a forty-hour flight, by the time I hit the stage. I was exhausted. Brain dead. Running on fumes and stubbornness.

The painting, what was supposed to be my moment, didn't work. The image felt wrong. My hands weren't fast enough for the five minutes allowed. And the panel let me





have it. Humiliated under hot lights, live on television, in a country halfway across the world from my front door.

When I finally got home, all I felt was relief. Not triumph. Not pride. Just the quiet, heavy knowledge that my stamina wasn't getting any stronger. And that maybe the biggest mistake wasn't saying yes, it was thinking I still had the energy to say yes at all.

CHAPTER 15

THE ROAD TO COMEDY

I first heard about Mandy Nolan through the grapevine, that familiar, buzzing network of whispers and half-truths that runs through any small community. She was running a “Learn to Be a Comedian” workshop in Byron Bay, that sun-bleached, incense scented town where hippies and hipsters collide. Curiosity got the better of me, so I signed up and showed up.

On the first day, we all had to stand up and give an account of who we were and what we did for a living. You can imagine the response I got when it was my turn: wide eyes, a few muffled laughs, and that particular kind of disbelief that hovers somewhere between shock and admiration. A couple of them recognised me, though. They’d seen me at Sexpo before, so at least I didn’t have to start from scratch.

The course itself was intense, six weeks of pushing past comfort zones and collapsing into new ones. There was plenty of homework: crafting sonorous lines that landed like tiny explosions, working in different teams each week, the group dynamics shifting like sand. But the main focus was always there, hanging over everything like a dare: creating an original stand-up routine that each of us

would have to perform at the end of the course in a proper theatre with an audience.

Of course, I wasn't there just to learn the basics. I was there to figure out how to make penis painting funny. Yes, you read that right. And Mandy? She was fabulous, sharp, encouraging, utterly unflappable. I still use some of the material she helped me dream up to this day. Well, she dreamt up, actually.

PERFORMING ON STAGE

My journey into live performance began with a hesitant invitation. In those early days at exhibitions, I was asked to take the stage, but I quickly discovered a brutal truth: the fierce concentration required to capture a likeness in a very short time left no room for banter. The stage lights felt like interrogators' lamps, and my attempts at conversation died in my throat, choked by the need for anatomical accuracy.

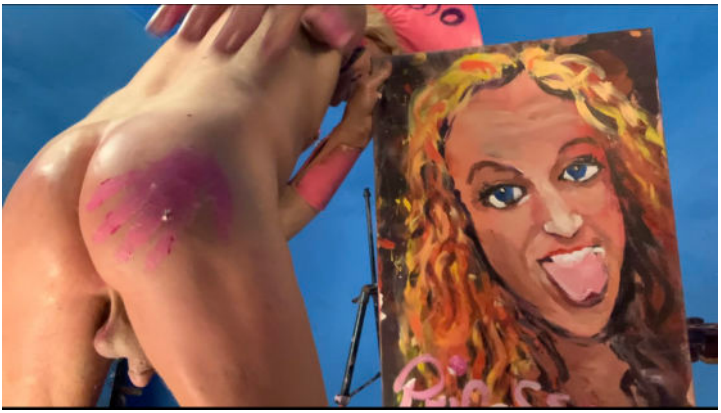
I practiced at home, diligently painting caricatures of politicians while reciting memorised lines. It was an improvement, but a mechanical one; the spark of spontaneity I craved remained stubbornly absent.



Russell Gilbert, the MC, became a kindly beacon of encouragement. The organisers of Sexpo, however, were less convinced. They relegated me to a spot near the stage, a blessing and a sentence. For twelve hours a day, I painted in a whirlwind of requests, the air thick with the smell of body sweat. And the noise of the speakers positioned each side of the stage pounded through me. Twelve







hours a day, I couldn’t complain; the money was good, and the queue never ended.

We did a Sexpo only once on the Gold Coast so I was able to have my car there and visit my gymnast day. I ducked into the gym one morning with an hour to kill before the show started after about 30 minutes , I shuffled toward the showers, only to find a queue that was moving slower than a snail on sedatives. So I as I was only moderately sweaty I grabbed my stuff and made a beelined for the sanctuary of my car.

I slid into the driver’s seat of my white chariot which I’d owned for precisely one week peeled off my clammy gym attire with the enthusiasm of a snake shedding its skin. I gave myself a vigorous once over with the towel, feeling gloriously grime free, and then, possessed by a moment of pure, unadulterated hedonism, I leaned back. Naked as a plucked chicken, I melted into the cool, buttery-soft leather seats. It was divine. It was serene. It was the quietest, most refreshing five seconds of my entire week.

And then, like a record scratch in the middle of a symphony, a horrifying thought pierced my blissful bubble: My car doesn't have the leather seats currently cradling my bare posterior.

Panic, hot, primal, and deeply embarrassing, flooded my veins. I realised, with the dawning horror I was in someone else’s car naked, air drying in their front seat.

In a blur of sheer, unadulterated terror, I yanked my shirt and trousers into a crumpled ball, clutched the towel

around my waist and launched myself out of the door. Into my fabric seated, vehicle a few spaces away.

It wasn't until I was three blocks away, I realised I had left my sweaty, gym shorts and tank top in a crumpled, pungent heap on the floor of that poor, innocent person's luxury sedan.

ADELAIDE FRINGE

Then, in 2015, I gambled on the Adelaide Fringe. I applied to a string of venues, vowing to accept the first offer. That offer came from the smallest, most forgotten box of a theatre, tucked away in a silent lane. I accepted. Then, as fate would have it, a better venue said yes. Then, the one I'd truly dreamed of. Suddenly, I was locked into a month of shows, a prospect that filled me with cold dread.

How does one fill forty five minutes with penis painting?

Panic built a stage in my living room. I wrote scripts until dawn, stitched together costumes of exotic feathers and shimmering vinyl, and watched my custom orders pile up, neglected.

I



emerged with two characters: one flamboyantly, joyously gay; the other, a figure of dark bondage with a savage mohawk. The concept was loose, a framework to hang time upon. A trial show for friends brought polite applause, a fragile confidence. I hired a PR company, and on opening night, they delivered a crowd that filled the best of my three venues.

Then, the first disaster struck. My wearable microphone died with a final, hollow crackle. Muttering apologies to a sea of impatient faces, I fumbled backstage for ten eternal minutes. Finally connected, I called for a

volunteer. A woman swayed forward, her grin loose and eyes glazed. She was charmingly, catastrophically drunk. Her hands, like independent creatures, sought my crotch and clutched my backside throughout the routine.

My script evaporated. The painting became a hasty, messy compromise. I fled into my quick costume change, only to emerge and see the cruel, silent verdict: people were leaving. The second half fared better, but the damage was etched in the terrible reviews that followed.

The next eighteen performances were technically good, played out to theatres where the echoes outnumbered the audience. It was a brutally expensive education.

The following year, I settled for a venue on the festival's fringe, both in location and spirit. My show was now leaner, sharper. Then came an offer from a Swingers club —a venue and a ten-day stay. It was heaven. The week dissolved into a raunchy, sexual blur with guests and owners alike, and I created some of the most graphically pornographic videos of my life.

My theatre owners that year were angels, whisking me out to the Adelaide CBD to hand out flyers. I went in full costume, a spectacle that drew cameras and cheers. Then, a tap on my shoulder. I turned. A young man towered above me, his face tight with disgust, snarled, "You're inappropriately dressed. There are kids around."



His fist followed the words, a blinding explosion of pain against my jaw. The world tilted; the back of my head met a brick wall with a sickening thud, and the pavement rose to meet me.

I woke in a hospital bed, my head a pounding cavern, my eyes shaded with violent purple. The venue owner was there, her compassion a soft blanket in the sterile room. I performed once that week, under layers of makeup. The police caught my attacker: a fifteen-year-old boy. He received a suspended sentence.

But Sexpo was still going and still I was getting publicity,



like on the *Morning Show* with Larry Emdur, so I decided to stay home and just paint orders and work on my property, putting walking tracks through the bush, which was fun on a small excavator I borrowed from a neighbour.

This was interrupted when I got a strange request.

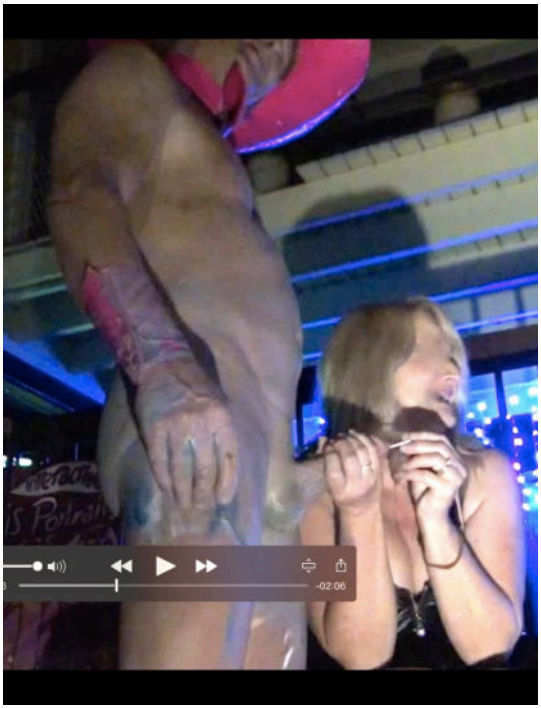
THE RICH STRANGE COUPLE

The email had said “small gathering,” which in my line of work could mean anything from six to twenty young girls. This one was in a Brisbane high-rise, a glass and steel pillar glowing against the dusk. The foyer was a cathedral of cold marble and echoing silence, where I was met not by a hostess, but by a middle-aged man. He was slightly overweight, in a shirt that strained at the buttons, and his handshake was damp. His smile didn’t reach his eyes.

“Just a very small party for my wife’s birthday,” he said, his voice a low, hurried murmur. “In fact… it’s just the three of us.”

A warning chime, soft but persistent, sounded in the back of my mind. Just the two of them. And me. I scanned the empty foyer, the vacant security desk, and wondered, with a sudden crystalline clarity, if it was safe to step into the elevator.

The ascent was a sealed, silent journey. In the mirrored lift, he stared straight ahead and offered his confession to my reflection. He spoke of a farm, a terrible accident with a live wire years ago, a body left damaged. “I can’t… satisfy her,” he said, the words clinical and heavy.



Then, the ask: a portrait, but not like any I'd done before. He wanted it painted by me, very erotically and explicit. And would I mind, he phrased it as a courtesy—if he videoed the entire session? The offer of money followed, a sum that doubled my rate, thrown out like an



anchor to secure my compliance.

When the doors opened, it was not into a party, but into a pristine, muted apartment smelling of antiseptic and air conditioning. His wife was there, waiting. She was Asian, attractive, dressed not in birthday attire but in a stark, tightly fastened nurse's uniform, the white fabric severe under the cool down lights. She smiled, but it was a professional, detached expression.

The logic I cobbled together was flimsy but necessary: I was already here. The money was significant. And a part of me, the part that frequented clubs where rules were optional, reasoned that in another context, this might just be adventurous fun. I agreed.

His next question, delivered with the tone of a mechanic checking oil, severed that fragile thread of pretence: "Do you have any STDs?" The question hung in the sterile air, reshaping the evening entirely. This wasn't about art. A cold knot tightened in my stomach. What, exactly, do you have in mind for me to perform?

There was no discussion. I changed into my costume right in front of them. Lizzy, his Asian wife, helped me into it and getting it ready for the afternoon ahead, whilst he was already filming everything. I set up my paint table, the familiar routine feeling like an absurd pantomime.

The moment I gestured I was ready, he lifted the camera, its tiny red eye a new point of focus.

“Slowly,” he instructed me, “take off her paint-covered uniform.”

The performance resumed. Each button of the crisp nurse’s outfit with deliberate slowness as his camera lens watched, unblinking. Now her raw, unadorned skin, we resumed painting—not on the canvas but a little more sensuously, peeling away one fiction to uncover another beneath. The fabric whispered to the floor, and then we were both laid bare, no roles, no costumes, just skin under the stark lights, stripped and shimmering with the remnants of the canvas forgotten.

The colours mapping haphazardly across her form, until he guided me behind her, her hands taking charge of the brush she tried to paint on a canvas with it but with little success I took back control and the curve of her breasts. Her body had become a messy, sliding abstraction, coating her backside and chest in swirling, glossy hues.

The room had taken on a different charge, a thick and silent voltage in the air to which my own body hummed in answer, fully and achingly erect. My voice was hardly my own when I asked, “Could you… wash it please?”

She applied the cool sponge with a clinical efficiency that only sharpened the surreal thrill. Then came the permission, the guiding of my hips toward the tray of pooled colour.

For five suspended minutes, I kissed her body, it became a blur of impulse and sensation, each kiss a strange release. Her laughter was a constant, bright soundtrack, a silver melody threading through the intense, focused quiet of the act. Into full, urgent sexual penetration. She was a living canvas beneath me, every movement smearing our shared palette. We sank onto the protective drop cloth, a tangle of limbs and colour, the act itself becoming a kind of frantic, physical art.

He captured it all, the slippage, the strain, the vivid, dripping tableau. Afterward, spent and streaked, we showered together under his direction of his ever-present camera, his voice thick with a director's satisfaction. He lifted the camera, its tiny red eye a new point of focus as the water ran in chromatic rivers down the drain. There was more intimacy in the steam, a slippery, warm continuation.

Cleaned and dressed, the odd normalcy of being taken out to dinner followed. His payment, when it came, was not just generous; it was a silent, weighty acknowledgment of the spectacle.

Several weeks later, his email arrived, a digital summons that was both absurd and compelling. He had hired a Penthouse suite on the Sunshine Coast, he wrote, a gilded cage for a weekend of “entertainment.” The attached offer was an insane amount of money, a number that made practical objections wither into silence. He also added that my participation and videos had reawakened his sexuality and was overwhelmingly grateful and hoped I would accept this next awakening in him.

When I arrived, the clinical nature of the fantasy was immediate. He presented laminated itineraries, a schedule of games, sex play, and precise times. The rules were explained: a nude weekend, punctuated only by orchestrated “dress up” interludes, all inevitably sexual.

As a preview, he gestured toward a bedroom. Inside was not just a collection of toys, but what seemed like the entire contents of an adult shop, wholesale, a surreal warehouse of desire. Videos were stacked neatly beside handcuffs; a sex swing hung ominously from a reinforced beam; whips were displayed like artisan tools. Dildos of every conceivable size, colour, and texture lined shelves, a silent, plastic audience.

Once the formalities dissolved and we were all naked, his approach was oddly transactional. Under the gaze of



Lizzy, he held my manhood, rubbing it with a detached, assessing focus, as if checking the mechanism of a valuable instrument. It was in that silent moment, his fingers on my skin, that a cold sliver of doubt slid into my mind. Was he telling the truth about his medical condition?

He then handed the now bigger tool to his Lizzy, a symbolic transfer, as he set up the ever-present camera. Her grip was possessive, tight, as she led me wordlessly into the master bedroom. There, a sprawling spa tub bubbled like a cauldron. We all fooled around in the warm, churning water for quite a while, a tangle of slippery limbs. I noticed then that he was quite a big man, a thick bead of pre-cum, premium he would likely call it, dribbling steadily. The sheer volume seemed unusual, a physiological footnote in the steam.

She was sitting on me, riding with determined intensity, when he abruptly shut off the bubbles. The sudden silence was jarring. He climbed out, returned with a stern-looking paddle, and issued orders. We emerged, dripping. His wife was directed into a swing chair. He cuffed my wrists, one on each side, attaching me to the frame so my face hung inches from her lap. The world narrowed to that intimate geography.

I started licking as he began to softly spank my bum. The rhythm was almost gentle, meditative, and against all odds, it was actually quite nice. I could feel her climax build and break after about twenty minutes, a shuddering wave against my mouth. As they led me from the swing harness I saw his fully erected penis with an amazing stream of glistening pre-cum dripping from its end. I had never seen anything like it before or since; he was obviously feeling a lot better.

Next, they cuffed my ankles and led me, hobbled, to a bed fitted with a sinister band, more cuffs dangling from each corner. Face up, I was secured.

“You could always struggle free if you felt unsafe,” he said cheerfully, framing my bondage as another game with an opt-out clause I knew was theoretical. They left, returning from the kitchen with a platter of lunch. Cold cuts, cheese, salad, and butter rolls were then spread not on

plates, but across my stomach and genitals, a human charcuterie board.

He recorded everything, the camera's red eye unblinking.

"Suck him off," he directed his wife.

When I came, he dripped premium on to the bread too, which I was then commanded to eat, the salt of my own release mixing with his glistening fluid. Too much, much to my delight, he didn't insist.

The entire weekend spiralled in this vein, a surreal cycle of scripted decadence. He was, by his own admission, somewhat impotent, chasing sensation through elaborate spectacle. I took a pharmacy's worth of Viagra; by Sunday night, I felt utterly drained, hollowed out. It was different, a paid descent into someone else's meticulously crafted mania, and in a weary way, I was glad to help them find a little satisfaction.

As I drove home that afternoon, a profound, bone-deep exhaustion claimed me. I had to pull over, the world blurring at the edges, and sleep in the silent car, the strange weekend finally, mercifully, over.

After that, I retreated. I resigned myself to my property and my studio, a world with defined borders. I hired an excavator from a friend and spent days reforming the old logging tracks on my fifty acres, land that was slowly healing from its past as a dairy farm, reverting to lush, tropical rainforest.

HARRY

Not everyone at Sexpo was cut from the same cloth as that guy, some with leering grins and their phones ready to take photos of my penis, their cheap cologne that hit you like a chemical weapon. But this man? He was different.

Average height, with a frame that carried just a few extra pounds around the middle, softened by good living. His face was distinctly Eastern European, high cheekbones, a strong nose, and skin so deeply bronzed it looked like he'd been baked in the Mediterranean sun for decades. A thick, gleaming gold chain rested against his chest hair like a declaration of wealth, and his wrist was weighed down by an expensive gold watch that caught the strobe lights and threw tiny, dancing flares across the exhibition hall.

He was always there. Every day. All four days.



While other punters came and went in sweaty, excited waves, he floated through Sexpo like a permanent fixture—a VIP pass dangling from his neck like a badge of office. Mostly he haunted the Sydney venue, but sometimes I'd spot his burnished tan and that glint of gold in Melbourne or Adelaide, as if he were following some invisible circuit. At first, I assumed he was just another wealthy punter angling for a backstage pass to my trousers, the way his gaze would linger on me while I painted felt a little too heavy, a little too long. But he never made a move. He'd just stand there, arms folded, watching my brush dance across the canvas, his expression unreadable.

Over time, he started drifting closer, striking up conversations that seemed casual but always circled back to my work. Eventually, I even learned his name: Harry. It felt strange to attach such an ordinary, almost bland name to a man who seemed to operate in such a calculated orbit. He'd occasionally bring young Asian women to my booth, pretty, glossy-haired things with bright smiles and nervous giggles, and commission



portraits on the spot, he would then take numerous photos and then always peeling crisp notes from a thick roll of cash. Four times a day, sometimes, like clockwork. The girls would sit, pose, pay, and vanish, leaving behind nothing but the faint scent of their perfume and a growing curiosity in my gut.

One afternoon, Harry leaned in, close enough that I could smell the mint on his breath and the expensive leather of his jacket. He told me he hosted private parties, and he wondered if I'd be willing to fly down to Sydney to paint at them. All expenses covered, he promised: flights,

accommodation, and a generous fee for every portrait I painted. It sounded almost too good to be true, the kind of offer that makes the back of your neck prickle even as your wallet perks up.

Coincidentally, I already had a hen's party booked in Sydney about a month out, a raucous bridal affair I'd agreed to weeks earlier. The timing felt strangely convenient, even a little suspicious, but I chalked it up to dumb luck, the universe occasionally throwing a bone to a struggling artist. Harry insisted he'd pick me up from the airport himself, and when I asked about lodging, he waved a dismissive hand. He owned over fifty properties, he said; this was nothing. He'd put me up in one of his units, a place currently being renovated into self-contained flats. The builders would be knocking about during the day, hammering and drilling, but if I could tolerate the noise and the dust, the place was mine.

So I flew down. I did the hen's party, a blur of feather boas, champagne fizz, and laughing bridesmaids, and then, a few days later, I showed up at Harry's address.

During the day, I saw nothing of him. The unit was sparse but clean, the air thick with the smell of fresh plaster and sawdust. But come evening, the growl of a Ford Mustang would rumble up the street, and Harry would appear, sliding out of the driver's seat like a man who owned every inch of pavement he walked on. He'd take me to dinner at quiet, upscale restaurants where the lighting

was dim and the wine list was longer than my arm. Over plates of rare steak and roasted vegetables, he'd talk about his chronic medical issues, his family back in Croatia, the weight of his properties and his past. Then, without ceremony, he'd drive me back to the unit, drop me off, and disappear into the night.

That was it. No hints, no propositions, just the hum of his engine fading into the darkness.

Then came the day of his party. He picked me up in the Mustang, its leather seats still warm from the afternoon sun, and drove me to one of those narrow, trendy terraced houses, the kind that look like a dollhouse from the street but stretch back surprisingly far, swallowing up what had once been a garden. Inside, the air was cool and smelled faintly of fresh paint and plastic. He had transformed one room into a makeshift studio, draping the floors and furniture with clear plastic drop sheets that crinkled underfoot like frozen water. A massive TV blared a football match on one wall, his attention kept flicking to it, as if the game were the real main event.

He told me the girls, his models, would be arriving in waves throughout the afternoon to be painted. My stomach tightened, but I nodded.

Then he dropped the line that made my blood slow down: "Tim, I'd also like to take photos with the girls in various

positions. I've got props to make it fun, they won't mind, they're expecting it to be pretty raunchy."

I excused myself to the bathroom to change into my work costume, locking the door behind me. I stared at my own reflection in the mirror, the hum of the extractor fan buzzing in my ears. I found myself thinking, absurdly, that I might need a Viagra for the afternoon's work, not out of desire, but out of some strange, defensive instinct. Harry hadn't said much, but the air in that house was thickening with unspoken expectation. I could feel it creeping under my skin, a quiet certainty that he wanted to photograph me in ways far raunchier, far more exposed, than I'd ever allowed myself to be at Sexpo.

Then, a sharp knock at the front door cut through the static. Two stunning Asian women breezed in, all glossy black hair and shimmering dresses, their laughter ringing through the narrow hallway like wind chimes. They greeted Harry with warm hugs and light kisses on his cheek, their affection effortless, practiced. He introduced me, and within moments, my brush was in their hands, and Harry was snapping numerous shots on his camera even before any paint was on it.

Then I started their portraits and the girls were genuinely fascinated and so happy while the football game droned on, while Harry hovered at the edges, taking more photos now of my erect brush while the afternoon stretched into something I still couldn't quite name. When the paintings



were finished Harry would get them to wash my brush and balls, put fluffy handcuffs around my genitals and pretend to lead me by them, all very sexually innocent. Sometimes the girls would strip off too and pose for photos. Occasionally their Asian boyfriends were with them; I always tried to get them to paint a bit too but I knew they were too shy to get their cocks out, but they always were keen to be involved in the set-up photos, holding my cock or pretending to kiss it.

When the last girls had left he would pay me and drive me back to the airport, making a date to see me at the next Sexpo.

SWEDEN

The phone call was an unexpected jolt of excitement—an invitation to fly to Sweden. They wanted me to create a TV special centred around my work, and simultaneously, host an exhibition at a gallery in Stockholm. The logistics, however, loomed before me like a mountain. Transporting twenty finished paintings, along with my paints, costumes, and equipment, felt like a logistical nightmare. To solve it, I decided to paint on lightweight foam boards, each about a metre square. The subjects were already chosen for me: a glittering cross-section of Swedish society, from beloved football players and influential politicians to the royal family themselves.

It was a daunting task, a leap into the unknown. The gallery also wanted me to paint live throughout the entire opening night, which meant packing a small arsenal of paint supplies. As if that wasn't enough, they asked if I could extend my stay for another week, they wanted me to appear as a guest act on *Sweden's Got Talent*.

The schedule that followed was a full-on, paint-splattered cyclone. Every single day was a blur of activity. It started from the moment I landed, with cameras already rolling. I'd find myself applying fake tan and makeup in airport bathrooms, then rushing to the gym for a workout, all of it filmed. Even quiet dinners or hurried lunches were captured, the camera lens a constant, unblinking eye. In the precious hours between these obligations, I was frantically setting up the paintings for the exhibition, my nerves strung tight with anticipation.

Finally, the opening night arrived. The gallery hummed with the murmur of an arriving crowd and the sharp, bright lights of the local TV crew. I changed in a small, cluttered back room, the sounds of the event muffled by the thin walls. When I was introduced, the warm swell of applause washed over me, and then the host's voice rang out, inviting anyone who wished to have their portrait painted.

For the rest of the evening, I was a whirlwind of motion, my brush dancing across the foam boards as I captured the faces of Sweden's celebrities. It was incredible, exhilarating, and by the end of the night, nearly every single painting had found a new home.

In the aftermath, the two organisers who had masterminded the entire trip treated me to a whirlwind tour of Stockholm's sights. We glided through the cobbled streets of Gamla Stan, the old town, and admired the

city’s stunning architecture from the water. Then, with the perfect, surreal timing that had defined the entire trip, they dropped me off at the towering glass building that housed the *Sweden’s Got Talent* studio. It was a quiet, reflective moment before stepping back into the whirlwind.

SWEDEN’S GOT TALENT

They made it painfully clear from the start: I was booked for one show and one show only. No second chances, no callbacks. So I told myself I was just doing it for the



media exposure, after all, I was already in the country. I trudged through the usual pre show circus: the stiff, overly bright interview rooms where they asked the same tired questions; the flurry of forced smile photo sessions

under harsh studio lights; and all the other media-friendly hoops the talent shows make you jump through before you even see a stage.

I remember the minutes before stepping out. My heart was hammering against my ribs, my palms slick with a cold sweat. But then, as always happened, the moment my feet hit those stage lights something shifted. The brightness washed over me, warm and familiar, and the nerves just melted away. I felt surprisingly calm, almost weightless.

The painting went well. Better than well, it flowed.

The two male judges ate it up. Their eyes lit up, and without a word, they turned to each other, grinning like kids, and slapped a loud, satisfying high five right there at the judging table. Two emphatic yeses.

One of the female judges, though, she dove under the table, knees first, disappearing in a fluster of fake panic. All part of the act, of course. Part of the show's choreographed chaos. And the Black lady judge? She sat back, arms crossed, watching me with something that looked like appreciation, a small, knowing smile tugging at the corner of her lips. Pretty sure she loved it. But still, she pressed the red button. A firm, deliberate no.Just as we'd pre-arranged. And just like that, I wasn't asked to come back.



GET A NERVE – ZURICH

Then, in 2018, I took a trip, this time to Switzerland, though the destination was actually a fringe show called “Get a Nerve,” staged in conjunction with Art Basel Zurich. The show itself was a strange, modern affair, held inside a crumbling old mansion spread across several creaking levels. It was January, and the cold outside was the kind that bites through layers of wool and memory. But inside the house, it was blissfully, almost decadently warm, radiators ticking gently, windows sealed against the winter.

My designated corner was the old iron-and-glass conservatory, a Victorian hothouse that, during the short, pale Scandinavian days, glowed with soft, filtered natural light. Painting there felt effortless, almost meditative. The show promoted me heavily, so I had a steady, almost overwhelming stream of clients. I ended up painting full family portraits, including squirming, wide-eyed children, something I would never, ever do back in Australia. But in Zurich, the parents were insistently charming, the kids genuinely fascinated by my brush and pigments, and somehow it worked.

For most of that week, snow fell without pause, thick, silent, muting the city in a hush of white. My accommodation sat right in the middle of Zurich's red-light district, which was, to put it mildly, an interesting contrast. On my way to my own line of work, making portraits, painted with my penis, I'd walk past shop-front windows lit in pinks and reds, each displaying a different woman, posed like living mannequins. It was impossible not to look. Every time I passed, a few of the girls would call out or gesture, offering… well, I wasn't entirely sure what. I felt their gaze like a second layer of cold. I was no different.

One day, tired of the daily gauntlet, I stopped and started a conversation. I simply told her what I was really doing in the neighbourhood and why I was in Zurich, that I was a painter working the fringe art show. Her whole face changed: impressed, suddenly curious, friendly. She

asked questions. I answered. And not long after, I invited her to the show if she had time to get her portrait painted. I then became her first client of the day when she eventually sat for a painting, laughing at the absurdity of it all, but she loved the experience. Her strange, snowy warmth remains one of my happiest memories of Zurich.

I was asked back a few years later for a party. They flew me there, put me up in a hotel and paid me well, all for a ten-minute painting. But I did stay on for another week as I have a cousin there; we went on a massive cable ride up a mountain to a sky resort and had lunch. I wasn't going to ski, I would probably break my hip or leg or something.

Life went on. I was getting orders over the internet and I was charging in American Dollars; the currency began getting stronger, so I was making considerably more money. Hens' parties and appearances at various clubs around Australia kept growing, and I was still going to South Africa for the newly renamed Love Sex Expo. Australian Sexpo had changed hands and was a different beast entirely. I did it once for one day before leaving; the show went into the hands of the receivers shortly after, only to be brought back a few years later by David Ross, the original founder, and rebranded in 2025 as Sexpo again.

CHAPTER 16

THE PANDEMIC

But then the pandemic lockdowns arrived, and with them, a strange new hunger. People didn't just miss parties, they thirsted for them, the way you crave air after being held underwater. The offers flooded in, technically illegal, but there were loopholes, small cracks in the law wide



enough to slip through if you knew how to bend. "Essential work" permits could be had with the right wording, every clause and comma crafted with a solicitor's cunning. I secured one, though I doubted any

bureaucrat wearing a pressed shirt and a bored expression would classify a hen's party as essential.

Approaching the border crossing, my heart ticking like a cheap watch, I followed the advice I'd been given: a high-vis tradesman's shirt, still faintly smelling of someone else's sweat; work pants stiff with fake grime; a hard hat tossed in the back window like an afterthought; tools scattered across the seat as if I'd just stepped out for a smoke. I clutched my perfectly worded permit, the paper already warm and slightly damp from my palm. The officer glanced at the costume, the fluorescent vest, the mud-flecked boots—gave a curt, disinterested wave, and didn't even ask for the papers. The performance had already begun, and this time, the audience didn't clap. They just waved me through.

I was among a starkly fortunate few in our profession. One of the lucky ones. While the world of live performance shattered around us, splintering into silence like a dropped chandelier, my piece of it only cracked. I watched as a tide of silent, unpaid invoices and cancelled contracts drowned the careers and spirits of so many I knew. The collective devastation was a cold, palpable thing, something you could feel pressing against your ribs when you lay awake at 3 a.m. It stole the light from friends' eyes, that bright, manic spark of someone who lives for the stage, and, in two terrible, final instances, it

stole the friends themselves. They were casualties of the void: of stages gone dark, the velvet curtains still and ghostly; of airfare repayments that compounded into mountains of debt, each statement a fresh avalanche; of an entire year's expected income vaporised overnight, like frost under a sudden sun.

My own losses were measured, finite. Five international airfares, bought cheap and uninsured, became mere paper monuments to plans that would never be, boarding passes destined only for a drawer full of other dead dreams. A significant sum, yes, but just a sum. It was money lost, not a life. And that distinction was the only thing keeping me upright.

For others, the collapse was total. Total in the way a building falls, not all at once, but floor by floor, room by room. I saw people lose not just gigs, but the houses those gigs paid for. I heard the silent, seismic fractures as families, strained by financial terror and the oppressive weight of an idle future, broke apart in quiet despair. A door closed too softly. A suitcase rolled out at dawn.

The cruelest cut was the silence from the systems meant to be a safety net, the government hotlines that rang forever, the websites that looped back to themselves, the forms that asked questions no artist could answer. While others received lifelines, these artists, these small business owners of the soul, were met with a bureaucratic void, as deep and indifferent as space. They

weren't just unemployed; they felt invisible, erased, betrayed by the very architecture of society that their work, in brighter times, helped to uplift.

And yet, strangely, I still had lots of orders. Plenty. Too many, maybe. But I did think my performing life was over. I could feel it ending, like a long note finally fading.

The hens' parties and mens' parties kicked off in a blur of sequins and shrieking laughter, but at first, I could feel their eyes on me, sharp, curious, a little wary. The young girls were all silently asking the same question, their thoughts practically scribbled across their foreheads: *What is this old man doing here?* I caught it in the sideways glances they threw over champagne flutes, in the way their giggles stuttered and stalled the moment I stepped through the door, as if I'd walked into a private joke that wasn't meant for my ears.



But then I started painting, and the moment the brushes found my fingers, the moment I dipped them into pools of cobalt and vermilion and let colour bleed

across the canvas like something waking from a long sleep—their skepticism evaporated. It melted away, slow and then sudden, like frost surrendering to the first real heat of morning. Suddenly, I wasn't an old man anymore. I wasn't the awkward stranger crashing their celebration. I was just the man with the gift, the one who could trap their laughter and their glow on a stretch of white linen, and they gathered around me like children around a campfire.

So I raised my prices. I put them up high enough to make people wince, high enough to feel like a polite but firm *no thank you*, hoping the sting would thin the crowd, hoping the phone might stop its relentless ringing. I kept hoping, right up until it rang again.



3EXFEST

My reputation among the naturist

community and the swingers' clubs had long been my secret currency, the thing that made my single life feel less like loneliness and more like adventure, a perpetual carnival of skin and trust and shameless joy. And when a group of lovely couples west of Ipswich, tucked away on a sprawling rural property, decided to craft an event unlike anything I'd ever attended, I knew I couldn't say no. They called it 3EXFEST, three days of unbridled hedonism set against the quiet hum of the Australian bush.

The valley itself was a hidden pocket of green, two hundred acres of private grassland cradled between gentle hills, and they had transformed it into a temporary village. Motorhomes and caravans were parked in neat, sprawling rows, their awnings flapping in the warm breeze. They'd installed hot showers, glorious, steaming luxury, and portable toilets that were kept surprisingly pristine.

At the heart of it all stood a vast carpeted marquee, its floor raised on a sturdy wooden platform like a stage awaiting its players. Inside, ten queen-sized mattresses were laid out in a row, swathed in crisp white sheets, with a small army of housemaids whose sole job was to change the linen regularly, a detail that spoke volumes about the weekend's ambitions.

A catering facility nearby pumped out cooked breakfasts and hearty dinners, enough to fuel all three hundred



couples who had snapped up tickets before I'd even heard the event's name. I was invited to paint them all.

The Master of Ceremonies was a force of nature, a man with a booming voice and a flair for the theatrical, keeping the party rolling with a string of competitions that had the crowd roaring with laughter. There was the wet T-shirt contest, where cotton clung to skin like a second layer of temptation; the best-bum parade, which drew appreciative wolf-whistles from every corner of the marquee; and the best looking cock, a category that showcased some truly spectacular specimens, tight-

fitting, eye-popping, and worn by men who knew exactly what they were doing.



The MC would gather about twenty volunteers and line them up like prized cattle, their partners usually hovering behind them, grinning whilst their hands were busy on their partners' cocks. Then the judges, three or more women, their eyes gleaming with mischief, would work their way down the line, assessing, deliberating, and tasting the goods on display proudly for all to see until a champion was finally crowned to thunderous applause.

The crowd that gathered for these spectacles was always large, always well lubricated, and always hungry for more.

When I arrived, the valley was already buzzing with activity. Nudie people, sun-kissed and utterly unselfconscious, were busy putting up annexes, their bodies moving with the easy grace of those who had long shed any trace of shame. Stalls were being erected: coffee kiosks that promised caffeine for the weary, adult toy tables laden with glossy silicone and leather, bondage supply booths that sparkled with chrome and black nylon. The air smelled of sunscreen, grilled sausages, and the faint, sweet tang of something floral drifting down from the hills.

They had set aside a marquee just for me, a generous white canopy that fluttered in the breeze like an artist's flag of surrender. I decorated it with the most pornographic photographs of my work, twenty years of women holding my equipment, pretending or not

pretending to have it in their mouths or whatever, moments frozen in time, taped to the canvas walls like a gallery of memories. Right next to it, I pitched a big tent for sleeping and cooking, its nylon walls humming with the heat of the day. I'd brought along two queen-sized blow-up beds, the really thick kind—the kind that, once inflated, looked almost indecently comfortable, like proper beds you might find in a boutique hotel, not camping gear at all.

Darkness fell quickly, swallowing the valley in a cloak of deep indigo, punctuated only by the soft glow of lanterns and the occasional flare of a campfire. Our lights worked well enough to paint by, casting a warm pool of halogen brightness onto my easel. A passing couple, two women, lively and slightly intoxicated, their cheeks flushed with wine and laughter, their bodies swaying to music only they could hear, stumbled into my marquee with the unsteady grace of dancers. I was hoping to start the next day, and before I could dip my brush into the olive oil, they were offering to lube it up for me!

The couples continued to want to be painted all weekend, and mostly they were stretched out on the blow-up mattress in compromising positions, and we were mostly interactive.

NEW YEAR'S EVE



At most New Year's Eves, I was invited to the Sportsman's Bar in Brisbane, a notorious gay nightclub, to paint on stage. The majority of the guys there behaved just the same as when I'm at a hen's party, with a few exceptions. Some guys who wanted to show off their own brush to the applause and laughter of the crowd would then dip it in the paint and then get paint on their trousers! It was always the same, except sometimes I would get cornered showering the paint off in the toilets

by someone who wanted to help me clean myself. It was always flattering and fun.

THE LOVE SEX EXPO

An unexpected offer drifted across the wires from South Africa. Silas, along with his two brothers, had resurrected a venture from the ashes, a new, defiantly bold sex expo. This was a phoenix risen from the old Sexpo, which Silas had sold years before only to watch it falter and fail. Now, they were building something new from the ground up.

When my plane touched down in Cape Town, the air was thick with salt and possibility. I was met by a whirlwind of production: a stage manager with a production company buzzing with the chaotic energy of a launch. Their proposition was unconventional. They wanted me to craft a live, ten-minute stage show: a quick, intimate portrait of a stranger plucked from the audience.

“Just be yourself,” they said. “Chat with them. Ask what brings them here, what they do. If there’s a moment where you need to concentrate to truly capture a line, a shadow, an expression, tell us. We’ll play music for ten minutes while the audience watches you work in silent focus.”

The first night, under the blinding heat of the stage lights and the palpable gaze of a curious crowd, I tried it. A volunteer sat before me, a little nervous, a little game. We talked. A bit, my hand moving almost of its own accord. Whilst I said my comical spiel, and when I was about to paint the teeth, I'd say, "I have my cock in your mouth." In that bubble of sound and concentration, the world narrowed to the curve of a smile, the glint in an eye. I finished my act by painting the edges, sliding the canvas through my butt cheek crack, I called it the credit card swipe. The applause was immediate, a warm, rolling wave. But I was not quite finished,I would then sign the painting using a brush which I inserted down the eye of my willy. This always brought the house down in a chorus of shrieks of disbelief. Afterward, the stage manager clapped me on the shoulder. "That," he said, his voice edged with relief and surprise, "was great. Don't change a thing."

Twice a day for four days, I repeated this alchemy, this dance of conversation and quiet capture. Each performance was a leap of faith, each stranger a new challenge. The rhythm of it settled into my bones: the chatter, the double meanings, the credit card swipe, the final signature. As the Cape Town leg closed, the offer came: would I bring the show to Johannesburg in a few months?

I said yes. And just like that, almost by accident, born from a post-pandemic gamble on a distant continent, I now had a stage show. I had Silas once again to thank.

Carried on the weary tide of a long day's end, I had been with him most of the afternoon and into the velvet embrace of the Johannesburg evening, until my energy and canvases were utterly spent. Now we were alone in the back of a taxi, the city a smeared tapestry of amber and neon sliding past the windows. The close, shared dark of the cab loosened his tongue. He told me, his voice softened by drink and a rare, unguarded melancholy, of a decade marked by failed relationships, each one, I sensed, a silent fracture in his glittering armour. He confessed to a low, persistent depression, a shadow that even his formidable energy couldn't always outrun. Slightly intoxicated and beautifully, tragically vulnerable, my feeling for him had never been mere infatuation, but a deep, abiding care that had weathered years and distance. I could have reached out in the dim light. I could have told him.

But my body was a failing instrument. A deep, grinding fatigue had settled into my bones, and a sharper, more sinister pain whispered of limits being breached. I knew, with a cold and clinical certainty, that to give in to the conversation, to the confession, to the fun would be to bankrupt the last of my reserves. I needed silence, stillness, and the barren refuge of sleep if I was to muster even a ghost of myself for the final day's work.

So, as the taxi pulled up to the hotel, its engine sighing, I let the perfect moment pass. I said nothing. I simply offered a tired smile, a mumbled excuse about the hour,

and stepped out into the cool night air, leaving the words *I love you* tangled in the quiet dark behind me, and carrying only the dull, necessary weight of survival forward into my lonely room. Instantly, I was asleep.

ORDERS

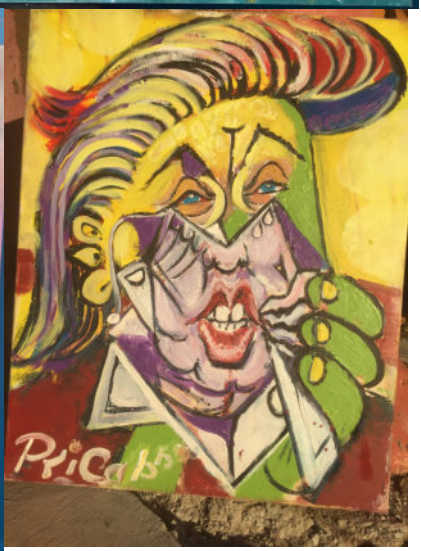


Despite the quiet solitude of my studio, orders still arrive from all corners of the world, though the bulk of them tumble in from the United States, heavy with the promise of fresh canvases and new ideas. Years ago, a live painting I did on the comedy show *Tosh.0* set off a sudden avalanche of commissions, but the real turning point came when I painted a portrait of Donald Trump, a deliberately irreverent reimagining of Picasso’s *Weeping Woman*, all









fractured angles and garish, sorrowful colour. An American journalist with a sharp eye and a loyal following

of business elites wrote a column praising the piece, calling it bold and strangely poignant. I was so moved by his words that I sent him the painting itself. He was genuinely touched, mentioned me again and again in subsequent columns. Soon after, the commissions grew stranger and more lavish: a millionaire from Fifth Avenue who swore he'd hang my work right beside his Andy Warhol; a Texas oil baron who had me paint his six top executives as if they were Renaissance saints; and even quiet requests from European royalty, sealed with crests and old world formality.

I credit much of my sustained energy, and my outward appearance of fitness: lean, weathered, alive to the very process I've refined over the past twenty years. That, and a disciplined routine: a clean diet, deep sleep, and just enough alcohol to keep the edges soft.

Before I touch brush to canvas, I warm a small pool of golden olive oil between my palms and smooth it all over my face and body. It shields my skin from the acid bite of paints and the chemicals in them. After a long session, with paint crusting under my nails and streaked across my forearms, I wash everything off with hot water no soap, then reapply the oil like a second skin. Before bed, I lavish on another layer. My sheets grow slick and faintly yellowed after a while—greasy to the touch, like the inside of an old artist's smock, but I live alone, and there is no one to complain, no one to press a clean cheek against my pillow but me. And I've noticed this: olive oil is a natural cleanser, something ancient and honest. Since I

began this ritual, not a single spot or blemish has appeared on my skin. Not one.

Because of the way I paint, I always document the process on video, recording every layer, every shift in colour and form. And because I want my “equipment” to look as respectable as possible on camera, presentable, even dignified, without tipping into the crude unless the client specifically requests that direction, I have to begin each session with a bit of careful preparation. That means coaxing things into a semi-state first, a process that can sometimes take a while. I don’t mind, as it is a pleasurable experience. I could use Viagra, but it comes with side effects I’d rather avoid. Luckily, I’ve set up my exercise equipment right in front of a full-length mirror. So I can alternate between reps and… well, let’s call it exercise to “sex-er-size.” The truth is, I’ve loved looking at my own body ever since I was young, the lines of muscle, the shift of light across skin. And that self-scrutiny, that familiar appreciation, actually helps me drop into the right headspace to paint. It’s part of my ritual.

Once I’m satisfied with both my physique and my equipment, once everything feels balanced and ready, I turn to the canvas. I lean into the work, exaggerating every brushstroke, every bum print left behind from my studio stool. Within about five minutes, I can usually get a reasonable likeness down. From there, the real dance begins: repositioning the camera to a new angle, crouched low on the floor looking up, or perched near the ceiling looking down. But each time I move the camera, I

have to get the brush “pumped up” again. And that takes time.

So a painting that should take half an hour ends up stretching into two or three hours, depending on how complex the composition is. But the result, in the end, feels earned, both the painting and the performance that made it a work of art.

PRICASSO ONLY FANS

I had always had a gut feeling that I would love performing, being my true self on live camera, entertaining fans in an intimate way. I had seen it many times on Chat ur bate and other streaming channels, but the problem was where I lived, the internet connection was too weak and slow, until I signed up for Star link.

My friend Raice has a daughter, Solo. She set me up with an account for Pricasso, as it was too complicated for little old me to work out. Raice arranged for her to sign me up, and all too soon I was obligated to start putting up videos of a seventy-something old man being very sexual. But softening the performance was my special talent, painting something, filming it, and pleasuring

myself. For about a year, I was quite diligent putting up the required content. It was always fun, until I started to feel very tired. The uploads became fewer, and the feedback reflected this.

I had to stop, which I am sure was a disappointment for Solo and my followers, for which I apologise.

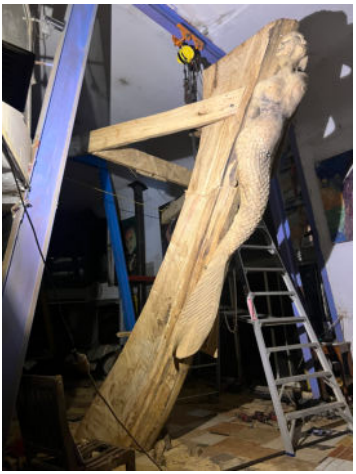
CARVING A FIGUR HEAD 2024



I found a fallen tree in the forrest which inspired me to start wood carving again, I envisioned a old boat wreck

crashing into rocks which I





hoped one day to be erected at the back of my studio overlooking a water feature.

The project got very large and took up so much of my time I eventually put it on hold as I started to get too exhausted. I didn't know then I was in danger of having a stroke.



THE PICTURE HOUSE, BRUNSWICK HEADS

Brett texted me from The Picture House in Brunswick Heads, it felt like a jolt of lightning. Their invitation to join the Cheeky Cabaret for a ten-night run was more than a gig; it was a golden ticket into a world I'd only glimpsed from the audience. Each night, I'd step into the spotlight for my twelve minute slot, a brief but precious window where I'd hone a gesture, tighten a

The sound guy, Rhys, was a perfectionist. So along with the music I had been given when I was in Melbourne at a radio station for Carrie Bickmore and Tommy Little, their music department had created a version of "That's Amore" by Dean Martin but changed the words to:

He's a man, he's a king, he can paint anything… that's Pricasso…

He can paint anything just with his ding-a-ling… that's Pricasso.



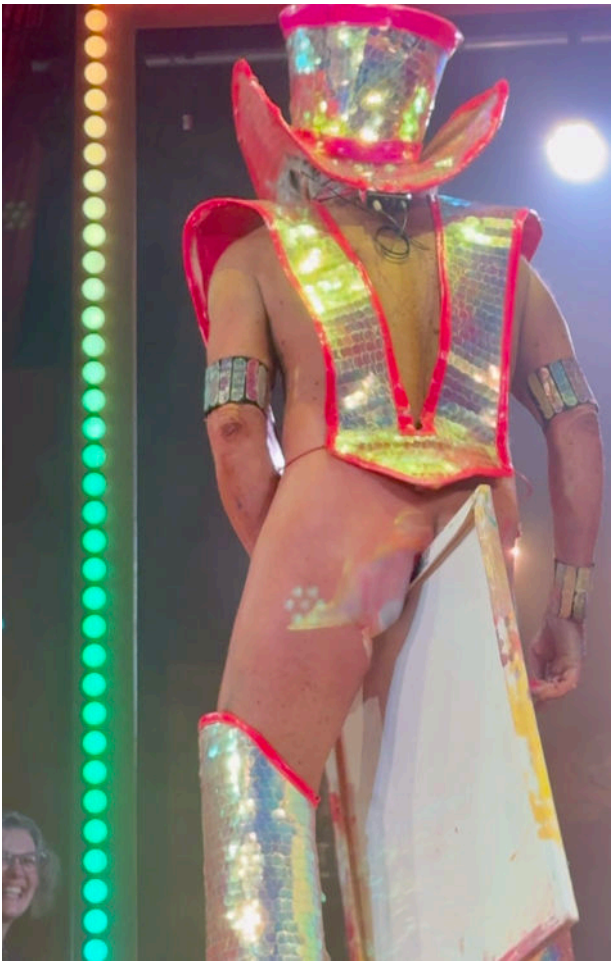
But he didn't stop there, he managed to get Pavarotti in also, and a crescendo at the end. It was amazing.

Backstage, I was the wide-eyed newcomer, but the other performers wrapped me in their bohemian camaraderie. The real revelation, however, was the dressing room. For hours before the show and in the humming interludes between acts, it was a temple of unselfconscious preparation. People moved about, utterly uninhibited in their nudity, discussing weekend plans or applying elaborate makeup with a focus that transcended vanity. As someone with a deep appreciation for human beauty, I found the whole scene, the casual grace, the sheer living art of it, immensely and quietly enjoyable. At the end, I painted a few of the performers, which is always enjoyable to see their apparition.

WYNNUM FRINGE

Not long after, an email arrived from Tom Oliver. He was a whirlwind of a young entrepreneur, a talented singer who had poured his pandemic restlessness into the white heat of creation. Armed with a government grant and fuelled by Wynnum's fierce, sun bleached community spirit, he had birthed the Wynnum Fringe from nothing but sweat and vision. Now, he was staging a show headlined by the legendary Rhonda Burchmore.

Rhonda, of course, was magnificent, sequins catching every light, her voice a thing of velvet and steel, drawing



a devoted sea of fans who hung on her every note as if their own hearts depended on it.

My own act was still a work in progress, rough around the edges. Some of my fellow performers, Helen and Clark, took me under their wing, tutoring me in the small, sacred arts of the stage: what not to say, the delicate choreography of a punchline, the precise heartbeat of a pause. By the end of the show, Rhonda herself said I had improved immensely. Praise indeed.

But the crowd's warmth never faltered, it always crested in that same defining wave of screaming applause, the sound of a thousand hands clapping me offstage into the wings. Yet, in the quiet moments after, when the lights dimmed and the echo faded, a new sensation whispered at me. A faint, creeping awareness of my own mortality.

I had always carried a quiet, stubborn conviction that I was meant to perform, not behind a mask or a stage persona, but as my unvarnished, true self, live on camera, entertaining strangers in that strange, intimate digital theatre I'd watched so many times on Chaturbate and other adult streaming channels. There was something magnetic about it, the raw exchange of energy across miles of fibre-optic cable. But for the longest time, the dream stalled on a mundane technicality: where I lived, perched in my mountain hideaway, the internet crawled along like a sick animal—weak, fitful, prone to dropping dead mid-thought. That all changed the day I signed up for Star link, and suddenly the world opened its throat.

My friend Raice's daughter, Solo, a girl with the sharp, cheerful competence of a generation born with a screen in her hand, took pity on my fumbling confusion. She set up my Pricasso OnlyFans account, because the mechanics of it all were simply too tangled for a little old man like me to unpick. Before I could catch my breath, I was obligated. Committed. The clock was ticking, and I had to start filling the void with videos of a seventy-something pensioner attempting to be erotic, a pairing

that felt, on paper, about as natural as oil and water. But I found my softening grace note, the thing that made it bearable, even joyful: my painting. The brush in my hand became a kind of permission slip, a way to blur the lines between the ridiculous and the sublime.

For nearly a year, I was diligent, almost monastic in my routine. Sometimes, when an order landed demanding the more explicit video version, I'd kill two birds with one stone, merging the carnal and the creative into a single, messy performance. It was always fun, in the beginning, a giddy, reckless sort of play. But somewhere along the way, the well began to run dry. The effort of summoning the mood grew heavier, like hauling water up from a deepening pit. I felt the tiredness first in my bones, then in my spirit, a slow, creeping exhaustion that leached the spontaneity from my performances. The videos grew stiffer, more laboured; the uploads thinned out like hair on an old man's head. The feedback, once warm and eager, turned tepid and sparse. Eventually, I stopped altogether. I know it must have been a disappointment to Solo, and to the followers who had stuck with me. For that, I am truly sorry.

A friend had arranged an exhibition for me in his new gallery in the bustling heart of Melbourne. I had a show to perform in Sydney the week before, so I drove two thousand kilometres, a pilgrimage made, and I looked forward to it as I could stay with my cousins in both cities. Arriving in Melbourne unusually tired, I appeared on opening night, brush in hand, painting before a polite,

wine-warmed crowd. But the next morning, the news crackled with warnings: a cyclone was churning its way toward the Gold Coast, due to make landfall in three or four days. I had no time to linger. I packed and pointed the car north, and for twenty-four hours I drove—stopping only for fleeting snatches of rest, the kind that barely takes the edge off. To keep myself alert on the long, empty stretches, I did what I always do when I'm alone on the open road: I drove naked. There's something liberating about it, the cool air on bare skin, the absurdity of it cutting through the monotony.

But the road has its own hypnotic cruelty, the endless oncoming traffic, the droning hum of tyres on asphalt, the paranoid dance with speed cameras. But nudity, podcasts, and twenty four hours of foreplay has its eventual reward, when I finally rolled up to my mountain home.

The relief was a physical thing, a warm, heavy blanket settling over my shoulders. I had made it.

The next two days were a frantic, sweat-soaked blur of preparation. I lay in bed that first night, staring up at the hundred-year-old roof above me, its timbers dark with age, cracked and weeping resin, groaning under their own weight. I knew, with a sick certainty, that they wouldn't hold. So I threw myself into a race against the coming storm: two days to rip out the rotten wooden beams and replace them with steel. The world shrank to

the brutal grind of the saw, the high-pitched shriek of metal being born, and the searing, blinding flash of my arc welder, a small white sun sputtering and hissing in my hands, casting frantic, dancing shadows across the workshop walls. I worked until my body screamed in protest, until my muscles trembled with exhaustion.

Finally, after the last joint was sealed, I laid down the welder. It was then I noticed something was terribly wrong. My vision had tunnelled, a dark, creeping curtain drawing closed from the left side. The right half of my world had simply vanished, wiped away like chalk from a board. I blamed it on the welder's flash, that actinic burn searing into my retinas. Stumbling to bed, I prayed that rest would reset my sight like a flipped switch, that I would wake to wholeness.

The cyclone crossed the coast fifty miles north that night, a beast of wind and water. My repairs held fast, praise be to steel, to sweat, to stubbornness—but the window above my bed gave way with a catastrophic groan, a sound like the death rattle of something ancient. Wood splintered and glass shattered in one long, terrible sigh, and I was jolted awake to chaos: wind howling like a wounded animal, stinging spray lashing my face, and a shower of glass fragments glittering like fallen teeth in the pitch-black dark. The power was long gone. The only light came from sporadic lightning—each flash a cold, blue-white revelation of destruction, illuminating the ruin of my room in stark, merciless snapshots. In that absolute darkness, my compromised vision became just another

thread in the tapestry of disaster. One more thing broken. One more wound to tend.

I felt my way downstairs, shivering and soaked to the bone, every step a blind negotiation with the unfamiliar dark. But as I stood there, dripping onto the cold floor, a deeper malaise settled in, something beyond the physical. A profound wrongness I couldn't see my way clear of, not with my eyes, not with any map I knew. It was the kind of darkness that lives not in the room, but in the chest. And I knew, with a quiet, terrible clarity, that some curtains, once drawn, never fully open again.

Dawn revealed a neighbourhood torn apart. Chainsaws snarled as people carved paths through fallen trees, their teeth biting into wet wood. Several houses lay crushed, their spines snapped. In the face of such destruction, my half-blindness seemed a trivial complaint. An inconvenience to be ignored. My children, however, saw what I would not. When they discovered my blood pressure sat at a bizarre and dangerous 230 over 65,a boiler about to blow, they overruled my protests and called an ambulance.

HOSPITAL



The hospital was a blur of controlled urgency, fluorescent lights, the squeak of rubber soles on polished floors, the quiet beep of monitors counting out my remaining chances. Over several days, medication coaxed the numbers down, but the right side of my world remained a blank, fuzzy wall, a missing page in a book I had been reading my whole life. The doctors were cautiously optimistic, suggesting time might heal it. Time. Such a small, generous word.

Scheduled for release the next day, a foolish sense of normalcy tricked me. *I'm on the mend*, I thought. In that private hospital room, alone and briefly foolish, I indulged in a long awaited and terribly ill-advised moment of self-relief. The consequence was immediate and severe.

My blood pressure rocketed, alarms triggering a swift, terrifying rush to an MRI scanner, the cold tube of truth. The image revealed the hidden landscape inside me: my arteries were seventy percent blocked. The temporary blindness had been a warning flare, a match struck in a dark room. Now, there was no ignoring it. They would need to operate.

Two hours I was awake with a local anaesthetic whilst the surgeon scoped the danger from my blocked arteries in my neck. I did feel better. So three weeks later, I went back to my property.

I recovered fast and was soon contacted by Tom Oliver again for another show alongside Rhonda Burchmore at the Fringe in Darwin. I was a bit tired but pushed myself to the limit to be there. Luckily, all went really well.

On the final day, still riding the high of performing alongside Rhonda Burchmore, Tom Oliver, our producer, treated the cast and technical staff to dinner at a rather posh restaurant. Ceiling fans spun lazily overhead, stirring the thick tropical air, and we drank ice cold cocktails that beaded sweat onto the glass. I think it was Helen who asked if I had anything next on the calendar. I shrugged. “Only some orders and a few parties to paint at,” I said, “but I did just get an email from someone called Scott.” A long silence fell across the table, the kind before a storm. Then they all exploded in laughter and disbelief tangled together.





After my audition, where I painted Jess the producer, although it was held with no real audience, just the gaze of Scott and the stage crew, I managed to paint a reasonable likeness,



although not my best work, and speak my comedy monologue successfully enough to land a five-week gig: four nights a week, with the stage all mine, if only for twelve minutes a day, under the blaze of those heavy overhead lights.

As soon as I knew, I reached out to an old friend, Ryan, someone I hadn't seen in twenty years. He was eighty-four now, but still working a few days a week in his old plant clowning business, now moving with that slow, deliberate grace of a man who had simply outlasted time.

When he heard my voice, he was over the moon, absolutely radiant with joy, and insisted I stay at his flat. He even offered to drive me to and from the venue every single night, a kindness so deep and quiet it made my chest ache. I remember thinking, *He would have made me a wonderful wife*: he cooked every day, and some mornings he'd even appear with breakfast in bed. A bit

too early, yes, but I appreciated it more than I could say. It was something I had never once experienced in my two marriages.

The month dissolved like sugar in rain, over before I could catch the last drops. I threw myself into the craft of holding a room, learning to read the tide of a crowd: the way a dry chuckle rippled across the front row, the sudden hush when a joke landed too close to bone. I pruned every dull line like dead wood from a tree, cutting whatever made eyes drift to the ceiling or fingers twitch for phones. Soon the set lived in my mouth without thought, parrot-perfect, rote and ready—so that my mind could wander elsewhere, up into the canvas, into the slow alchemy of pigment and breath. The words ran themselves while my willy dreamed in colour.

Choosing a subject from the shifting sea of faces became its own fierce ritual. I scanned for the crooked nose, the extravagant beard, the gleaming dome of a bald head, the thick-rimmed glasses that caught the footlights like twin moons. I steered clear of the blonde, straight haired prettiness that postcards and perfume ads had worn thin, faces that photographed like angels but painted like ghosts, all surface and no story. To me, they blurred into one another, lovely and forgettable, while the peculiar ones carried whole novels in their cheekbones.

By the time five weeks had burned to ash, Jess and Scott came to me with an offer that landed like a struck match:

more shows, a circuit of Melbourne, Sydney, and back to Brisbane's humid, river-wrapped embrace. It all starts in a couple of months. I can already taste the unfamiliar dressing-room mirrors. I could hardly believe it.

I always mingled with the audience during the intermission and at the end of the show, having photos taken constantly. Many people held my brush, mostly for a laugh, during the time the photos were taken. I still got many offers, sometimes offering me big money, mainly from guys to go home with them. I always made excuses and didn't take up any of them, as the show and my health was now my priority.

A few weeks before I was due in Melbourne, I was back in hospital with swollen extremities—my hands and feet puffy and wrong. More MRIs. My bladder was blocked. And most worrying of all: my heart arteries were seventy percent blocked and calcified their entire length, making it impossible to operate. Luck, that strange nurse, had been working behind my back. My bladder and brain, on their own accord over many years previously, had diverted blood to smaller vessels, which acted as mini-bypasses, and with modern drugs, the surgeons say, I will now live a normal lifespan. One breath at a time.

I had to miss the first week in Melbourne as the hospital said I wasn't strong enough to go home. But once released, I boarded the plane to Melbourne. I was feeling very weak but tried to hide it. Luckily, I could stay in the hotel for most of the day and only be at the show for three hours. My paintings began to get slicker and I



perfected the performance there. Slowly, something began to shift. The knot of tension in my chest began to loosen. I grew more comfortable under those lights, and during the day I found a specific sort of sanctuary: the quiet solitude of a hotel room, sealed off from the chaos and petty crises of family life, from ringing phones and sudden obligations. Just me, the muffled hum of the air conditioner, and the slow crawl of the afternoon light across the carpet.

I was getting paid for my recovery. I could concentrate on becoming really healthy, and for five months I did just that. As my house and property deteriorated, I became reborn as a seventy-seven-year-old stripper. I can't thank Scott and Jess enough. Their gift to me was simple but profound: just twelve minutes on stage a day. The rest of the time was mine—truly mine.

PRICASSO ALL MENDED NOW AT 77

AUCKLAND, NEW ZEALAND—JUN

