

## ANNE LLOYD

### DR PAPANICOLAOU'S LEGACY

"It is unfortunate that by the time cancer of the cervix is visible to the naked eye, it is so far advanced that no matter what treatment is given, one woman in every two will be dead within five years. But if it is detected before it is visible, the disease is 100 per cent curable." — Derek Llewellyn-Jones.

"Ooh, Level three, very bad, very serious." He carves, caresses his scalpel-sharp ballpoint into my patient's card, too malleable lump of soap, sunlight soft and promising yellow: "Almost cancer. Not quite. Very bad." That tut of tongue.

Legs spread wide, clamped in his medical vice, I promise myself respite from three-monthly checks and "Level Three, very bad": that all clear without face or name, neatly crumpled on a piece of cardboard.

Calipered, I observe he's wearing a black bow tie today, a crisp white laundered shirt which flaps above the sheet: "Those long ones get in the way, you know, you understand?"

Outside, a slick and private racing machine is drumming its fingers on the top of an ancient hearse, preparing for an emergency getaway. It's his ebony I hate more than anything.

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### INSOMNIA

So Rip Van Winkle snored too. And did his wife then lie awake for thirty years? I practise deep-breathing exercises, try to make my mind divorce itself from worn-out limbs. Wriggle the big toe first, relax, let all the tension dissipate. Loosen the tightness of the next, force each body part to rest, go limp. I am the rag floppy doll, stretched out. I am a traveller on the longest escalator in the world. I can levitate across space.