

Chris Doran

IT'S HER FLAT

It's her flat, he reminds himself. He wakes early, again, and watches the night lessen into the sunrise. First light, and he goes to the kitchen and makes coffee the way she'd shown him only the week before, on his first day here. Their first day together in this place. The kitchen window looks out onto the back garden. Just over the row of terraces is the Harbour, and further past its definition, the sea. East. He throws the window open wide. Like distant music he smells the salt of the sea over the cars and exhaust and the coming fineness of the heat.

He comes back into the bedroom with the coffee, not wanting, but wanting, to disturb her. He waves the coffee just under her nose.

"Morning," he says. Kissing her cheek.

"Umm. What time is it?"

"Oh, late. Noon."

"Uh huh." She glances at the bedside clock. "Jesus. Yeah, real late. It's seven o'clock."

"I thought we could walk down to the Harbour and watch the sunrise."

She smiles, her tired slightly condescending smile of patience. "Still can't sleep?"

"Naw. Must be jet lag."

"It's been over two weeks. Come back to bed. We don't have to get up for anything until the barbecue this afternoon at Pete and Helen's."

"Have I met them?"

"No. But you'll like them. They're lovely and want to meet you." She reaches for him, pulling him to her without opening her eyes. He sets the coffee down and gets back into bed, cuddling against the heat of her.

She falls back to sleep instantly. He closes his eyes. "One thousand three hundred and seventy six dollars and 37 cents," he thinks to himself. "Not even thirty seven, since they don't have pennies here. Thirty five cents."

The point of no return. He would soon be past that.

Sleep. *S L E E P*, he repeats to himself. Long slow breaths. But he is so awake he has to shut his eyes deliberately to blink. The room is now filled with the white light heat of the sun.

Hot. He thinks it idly, as if, presented by his brain often enough, the strangeness of it might dissipate. Or maybe the heat itself. Or maybe both.

He crawls over her and goes out to the balcony, but it's too hot, in the sun. He walks back past her sleeping with a sort of determination and leaves the flat.

Saturday. The main street is crowded, loud. The sun cuts a lathe of heat down the centre.

Cafes line each side of the road. He's never seen so many places just for drinking coffee. He wanders up and down, picks one at random and enters. Hardwood floor; all the noise and people's voices bounce off the floor and walls. A consistent banging comes from behind the counter. Everyone seems to be wearing black jeans, sunglasses, white t-shirts.

"One thousand three hundred and seventy six dollars and 37 cents," he thinks as he sits down.

He pulls out pen and paper and resumes the letter to his brother.

It'll be weird to spend Christmas somewhere hot. Jane says we'll have a barbecue and then go to the beach.

He pauses, reading back over the words.

I guess it won't be a white Christmas.

"What would you like?" The waitress.

"Just coffee thanks."

She stays, hovering, looking at him, pen poised.

"What sort?"

"What?"

"What sort of coffee?"

He feels himself blush with the intensity of her question and his lack of comprehension. The word "dumbfuck" is formed on her lips.

"Oh ... just some milk."

"A flat white then?"

"A flat what?"

The table next to him stops their conversation to listen. Sniggers.

"A flat white. Espresso with milk." While she says it she grabs the menu and flips it over, pointing with a thump of her forefinger on the different coffees.

"Okay. A flat white."

She turns away without replying. He can hear her talking in the kitchen, the snickering as she mimics his accent. *A flat what?*

A guy from the next table leans over to him. He has a buzzcut and measured sideburns.

"You from Canada?"

"Wha? No. No, I'm not."

"A Yank."

He smiles and tries to go back to his letter.

"Travelling around?"

"No, not really. I'm here with my girlfriend."

"I reckon you're probably glad to get out of the States. All that violence. One of my mates was over there travelling around and got mugged twice. Why's everybody gotta have a bloody gun?"

He senses the whole cafe, the people on the street, waiting for his answer. Traffic backs up. Engines turn off. Car windows roll down.

"Not everybody does." He smiles weakly. "I've never owned one."

"Maybe not everybody, but heaps. I reckon you know somebody. Friends and stuff."

The sun is pouring through the window. He's beginning to sweat.

"You should get out and see some of the country. You going to travel around at all?"

His face is burning. The coffee arrives and he takes a sip but it's so strong he can't drink it.

"I'd like to. Maybe go up to Cairns."

The table erupts. "*Cairns*," they repeat, mimicking his accent. "It's *Kanz*, mate. Not *Cairns*."

He takes another sip, trying to appear oblivious to the laughing around him. Some of the girls are whispering to each other, looking at him and then giggling.

He drinks what he can of his coffee, forcing the thickness down. He then gathers up his writing materials and leaves.

"Have a nice day," the girl who served him calls out. More laughter, grins from the rest of the cafe as he makes his way past the tightly packed tables on his way out.

She's still sleeping. His backpack is in the corner, nearly full, never having really been unpacked. He gathers what he can see from the bedroom and stuffs it in. He then sits in the lounge and pulls out the letter.

It's her flat, he writes.