

Couch

Matty woke up shirtless on the old green couch. He woke up peacefully, just gradually passed from a state of unconsciousness to awake. Only his eyes moved, the rest of his body remained motionless like he was velcro-ed to the couch. He closed his eyes and slowly opened them again, his eyelids coming up like stoned roller doors. He had a strong feeling that he was being watched. Almost as if that feeling had woken him up. He furrows his forehead and blinks his eyes but can't shake it.

He moves his head a couple of degrees. Someone is watching him. The little girl that lives in one of the other flats is standing just inside the front door. Matty frowns, he must have left the door open last night. Matty lives in an old Queenslander that is split up into three flats, two in the front and Matty's one at the back. The little girl, Sarah, lives with her Mother in one of the ones in the front with a proper front door.

Sarah, she's beautiful, is pressed up against the door jamb staring at him wide-eyed like she's frightened or something. She's only about two and a half feet high, with cute little dark curls, real bright blue eyes and rosy cheeks on perfectly smooth skin. She's got the curls tied up with little ribbons, a blue one in one side and a red one in the other, matches her little blue and red dungarees. She looks so pretty that Matty can only stare back. Like someone has shined a torch in his eyes. The way she is staring at him isn't helping, her eyes bugging at him like he's some kind of monster. "Are you all right?" she says to him, in not much more than a whisper.

Matty frowns again. "Of course I'm all right." He rubs his neck where it is sore from the slumped position he's been sleeping in. "What do you want?"

Sarah lives with her Mother. She's a nice kid, just had her fifth birthday. She's not a smartarse or a beggar like some of the kids in this neighbourhood, the ones that hang around at the shops or in the bus stop and ask Matty for money when he walks by. He never gives them any dough. Why would he? And so they have to call him names. They call him stupid shit, Dumbo and Spazzo. Trying to be nasty. Doesn't bother him though. They just seem to have bugger-all to do. There's one kid in particular who always has a go at him. The other kids think he's funnier than Seinfeld. Probably just because he's bigger than them.

This one in Matty's doorway, this little girl Sarah, she isn't one of those. She's nice, a raisin in the porridge. She always calls out his name and waves whenever and wherever she sees him. He might be at the supermarket or putting the bin out on the street and he'll turn around and see Sarah waving madly and calling his name. She always giggles with pleasure when Matty does one of his silly waves back. Maybe two-handed like he's lost at sea or just with his pinky. Matty used to push her round and round the clothesline on her tricycle. Little red one that she'd got for Christmas, her first bike. She'd scream and giggle and shout "Faster Matty, faster." Sometimes she'd giggle so hard she'd fall over and wouldn't be able to get up. She'd try and pull herself up but would burst into giggles and fall back down until Matty had to pull her to her feet and then she'd collapse giggling again and he'd have to keep on picking her up. At times like that when she looked so happy, so pure, Matty felt happy and pure too. He could feel it on his insides, like they were fresh from the bath.

Then one day fat Keith, who lived in the other third of the house, ran over her tricycle in his HQ station wagon. Squashed it to about three inches high in his hurry to get to the bottle. Sarah hadn't left it in the middle of the driveway or anything like that. Her Mother taught her to always put her stuff away when she'd finished with it. She'd just left it in their part of the garage. Fat Keith, who had a bit of a beer problem, i.e. he couldn't get enough, ran over it while he was backing into their garage to turn around. Young Sarah was entitled to be pissed off, but all she said when she saw it was "Oh well" and went off to find something else. Matty had liked that. Liked the way she didn't get hung up on it. As a tricycle it had been her favourite thing. But as a piece of mangled steel, three inches high, she had no use for it.

Apart from taking his hand off the couch to rub his neck Matty hasn't yet moved on his couch. Sarah has moved maybe a foot inside the door. She seems to muster her courage. "Mum would like to know if please she could please have a cigarette please." She is edging slowly inside but is still just out of a whisper.

"Why can't Mum buy her own cigarettes like every one else has to." Matty meant like he has to.

"Um, she said she would but we don't get our cheque until tomorrow."

Matty sighs, relents. Being cranky at a five-year old girl isn't going to get him anywhere. Mums alright anyway, seen a bit of life and it showed, but alright, friendly enough. She'd put it on Matty for sex a couple of times when they'd first moved in. Matty managed to hold himself back though. In fact he'd much rather hold himself than have any sort of sexual encounter with Sarah's Mother. Sarah might be as pretty as a picture but no one's ever going to wack a frame around her Mum. Matty didn't know what she'd been up to but living her life had definitely taken its toll.

"Okay." Matty sighs and rubs his neck again. "The pack's on the table there, just here." He nods at the coffee table and the pack of Stuyvies on it. "Take a couple." Sarah comes in. Creeping across the lounge room like Matty is still asleep. She takes two from the pack and sticks one behind each ear like he's seen her Mother do. Then she turns, raises her hand and sticks her pink little finger out at Matty. "What's that?" she says.

"What's what?"

"That." She waves her finger again. This time Matty realises she is pointing at his chest. He looks down. There sitting on his chest, more stuck to it, is a dried-out fried egg, two pieces of bacon and two slices of bread. And a fair smattering of tomato sauce spread over the surrounding flesh. He remembers, last night, late last night. He'd made himself a sandwich, mostly because he was hungry but also because he'd had a burst of energy, must have been a little burst. Seems he'd had enough energy to make the sandwich but not enough to eat it.

Matty looks at Sarah then back at his chest. He pries a piece of bacon off his chest, it comes off like a wet band-aid. He dips the bacon in the clotted pool of tomato sauce filling his belly button, sticks it in his mouth and gives it a bit of a chew. Then he looks back at Sarah. "It's a sandwich." He says.

"Oh," she says and walks out. "Mum says ta for the cigarettes."

