

EMOTIONAL STORYTELLING



Anthony Smith

Christmas Court

Winter had offered anguish; spring rang of expectation and with a summer of promise in the offing now lay the summons of an assignment with horror, resonating louder than the penultimate clap of thunder before a November deluge: *If you fail to attend on 24 December 1992, Orders will be made in your absence.*

Just a month ago we danced as once we did when nothing could stop us. Afterwards, her body so pregnant with desire, took me as a lamb consigned for slaughter and I bent to every fantasy.

“I love you, Terry,” she screamed upon reaching the pinnacle of ecstasy. “I’ll always love you.”

We lay there for a while, her hands needing not to incite any reprise in me. My thoughts might be whirling but when I was with her, my body was in prison and she was the warder. How could a mind be so elated yet sliced to shreds at the same time?

I needed to speak, for with the tearful confession about sleeping with her ex-husband and the excuses for doing so fresh upon our congress, my feelings had to count for something.

“What is it,” she asked, stroking and kissing my chest, teasing me into silence. “Don’t concern yourself about that business with him; it was nothing, a house chore. We love each other eternally; that’s all that counts.”

Having demanded specifics, I imaged the scene again and what she might have said when he was inside her, wishing we didn’t share the same name.

And then I just blurted out, “Yes; but it’s merely that, Ciarra, sometimes I don’t feel loved.”

Hardly had the words left my lips than she had fled to the en suite. The shower began running and the door slamming shut was her reply. Making myself scarce would be a smart move on my part. I detoured to the bottle’o, and in the half-hour from there to the place I more called home than the marital bed, half of the six-pack was gone. Such had been our lot for so long. Why?

The other half soon put debate to sleep with me.

Christmas Eve was the busiest court day of the year. I dreaded it. The sandwiched, brooding entrance in Tank Street allowed only privacy for the early arrivals. To my left was a coffee shop and there she was, holding court of her own at a table of four; the poise, the laughter, the style, the sex; Ciarra might just as easily be sipping champagne before modelling at a Melbourne Cup function. Even had she been sitting astride Terry’s lap, the knife couldn’t have been twisted more exquisitely.

Thereafter, ten flights of stairs were no challenge. The barrister read my face, “Tough gig for you, mate, we’ll get it mentioned and then chat,” and I dived into a room as a colleague waylaid me with, *Didn’t think you came to the funny court any more.*

My head was frozen at the bar table. I didn't hear a word the lawyers or the judge said. Her self-possession was breathtaking, a percolation of unmatchable theatre and attention-gathering. She took pleasure from my discomposure, all eyes on the sweetness of her smile.

Outside I said, "Bill, I want you to settle the case here and now. You have open instructions. I can't abide this a moment longer." He patted my shoulder and I was gone, jaywalking towards the cab rank.

Instead I strode to the Breakfast Creek hotel. Lunch had been pre-arranged with Aggers. I squandered the hour trying to put myself together. When Pete arrived, he knew it.