



EVIL CAN TAKE MANY FORMS

THE
TRIBUTE

JOHN BYRON

'Begins as a compelling crime novel,
then shifts into something even more shocking and wonderful.'

CHRISTIAN WHITE



John Byron grew up in Sydney where he went to medical school for a time before leaving in the interest of the public safety. He has worked as a barman, a factory hand, a help desk operator and a federal political adviser. He now lives in Melbourne and works in the university sector. His writing has appeared in *The Australian*, *Meanjin*, *The Australian Book Review*, *The Conversation*, *Time Out* and *Rip It*

Up. *The Tribute* is his first novel and was shortlisted for the prestigious Victoria Premier's Literary Award for an Unpublished Manuscript in 2019.

Sunday 8 April – morning

Over the PA came the Midnight Oil surf tune ‘Wedding Cake Island’, calling the swimmers to order at the northern end of Coogee Beach. The nervous chatter dropped as the guitars swelled on the mild Sydney autumn breeze; then the starting gun fired, and the 2018 Coogee Island Cool Water Challenge was underway. Jo ran in fast, dived cleanly under a breaker, then surfaced and steamed towards New Zealand.

She swam out past Wedding Cake Island and fought the lurching open ocean swell beyond it for a hundred hard metres, then turned into the channel between the island and the blocky base of the South Coogee headland, the surge behind her now. After passing the Ladies’ Baths, the swimmers swam parallel to the beach behind the breakers, and Jo hit the gas. She powered past the tiring field before turning in and catching a rearing wave that propelled her inshore. Exhilarated and breathing hard, she crossed the finish line on burning legs at a shade over forty-six minutes, a personal best.

Jo towelled off, feeling better than she had in ages. She was fit and strong, ready to be in the world again after a long period of emotional retreat. Her small family was thriving, her career nicely on track. Mellowed by a mild, pleasant summer unmarred by fire or flood, Sydney felt vibrant and optimistic. The year had started well, and Jo felt it was shaping to be a good one.

She could not have been more wrong.

Because eleven kilometres away, a strange and intense man was finalising his plan to execute a macabre tribute to the object of his overwhelming intellectual obsession.

His work would begin in three weeks’ time, and Sydney Town would be never be the same again.

FRONTISPIECE



B A S I L E A E .



Death presides.

The Anatomist has forsaken the professorial chair, and come down onto the floor with the corruptible flesh. This very stance is a declaration: of war, of science. One hand is inside the ventilated abdomen, the other making a subtle point, but not for the benefit of the noisy crowd around him. He is gazing calmly out of the page, looking straight at the future. He is speaking to us. Speaking to me.

All around him bustle the chattering primates of his time: men of commerce and of politics; men of the book and of the cloth; worthies, voyeurs and hacks. The monkey and the dog of his predecessor Galen's dissections play innocently, displaced by the human corpse; the barbers and butchers stand idly by, banished by this impudent scholar, his own learned hands applied to the physical task. All have been deposed from their ancient roles of brokering ignorance, in favour of the Master's determination to craft a new Anatomy: unmediated, palpable, empirical. They understand no more of this moment than does the cadaver.

A field of calm around the dissection excludes the commotion of the pedestrian and the drone of the self-important. There is only the candidate and the Master.

And the Protégé. Hemmed in by the crowd, above and to the left, near the naked man and his admirer. Peering between two fools debating anatomy without reference to the body. Who might he be?

Above them all, above even Death, a banner unfurled bears the legend:

Andreas Vesalius of Brussels,
Professor in the School of Medicine at Padua,
On the Fabric of the Human Body in Seven Volumes.

This is the frontispiece to the incomparable *De Humani Corporis Fabrica Libri Septem*, the foundation text of modern anatomy, published at Basel in 1543 when Vesalius was only twenty-eight years of age. It not only secured the Master's future – it immortalised him. Along with *De Revolutionibus Orbium Coelestium* of Copernicus, published that same year at Nuremburg, it is one of the most influential books in history.

The *Fabrica's* break with the past is absolute. Its significance is not in its findings, impressive as they are: its revolutionary contribution is its method. Long before the Enlightenment, Vesalius abjures tradition and received doctrine, looking instead and only to the evidence before him. With this masterpiece, the Master ushers in the empiricism of the scientific age.

His approach is the very model of the new enquiry. He disdains theory and theology. He finds out for himself, learns from the source. He is calm, logical, unsentimental.

He is not afraid to get his hands wet.

His Protégé learns, and emulates.

Monday 30 April – morning

Detective Senior Sergeant David Murphy turned off Parramatta Road and drove up Glebe Point Road, past the hipster cafes and the old Valhalla Cinema, and up onto the butte of hard rock over sandstone that loomed above the surrounding lowlands. He turned into a dignified residential street and parked at the end, overlooking the awful redevelopment below that covered the old Harold Park harness-racing track.

He had to sit for a moment composing himself. He hated this place. The property developers were bastards, but they weren't the problem. What lay directly beneath him through the rock was the problem.

His father had died down there, in the old metropolitan goods railway tunnel, back in the late seventies when Murphy was just a boy. The tunnel was half a mile of sheer determination dug by veterans of Gallipoli and the Somme to take freight off the passenger lines. It was now a light-rail line for inner-west hipsters.

Murphy had heard a bit over the years about the murder of his old man, and a copy of the file had found its way to him soon after he'd joined the Force. Diarmaid Murphy had been an influential detective at a time when the New South Wales Police had been filthy all the way through, the genuine descendant of the colonial Rum Corps. Murphy didn't know whether his father had been bent or straight, but either way it was crooked cops who'd got him.

Diarmaid Murphy had gone into the goods tunnel late one night – after the freight trains had stopped running for the day – to meet a fellow cop about a notorious killing in the genteel suburb of Double Bay. It was known around town that the murder had been a police hit, which was tolerable up to a point, as long as such business was

contained to the dodgy streets of Kings Cross. The leakage into the leafy eastern suburbs had caused an uproar, and the issue was still hot when Diarmaid Murphy went down there for whatever reason and took a brace of .38 Special bullets in the chest for his trouble. A train driver found the body early next morning. An investigation was opened but went nowhere. The Wood Royal Commission put the broom through the Force in the mid-nineties, but the tacit deal behind the anti-corruption inquiry was that pretty much all the sleeping dogs should be allowed to lie. The case was open, technically, but cold as the morgue.

So all his life, Murphy couldn't even drive over the Anzac Bridge without glancing across Blackwattle Bay and thinking of his old man. Of dirty cops on the take, selling out their brothers for coin. Brown paper bags full of cash and nylon sports bags full of heroin. Free roots and free booze; cheap TVs off the back of a truck. Dead hookers and dead addicts; dead civilians and dead police.

Of his mother bereft and grieving, and a five-year-old boy with no father.

So yeah, Murphy tended to avoid this end of Glebe.

Up top today, though, it was your perfect bright, crisp Sydney autumn day. Leaves on the turn and filling the gutters in auburn piles, but a clear blue sky and a warm sun tempered by a faint cool breeze. The kind of weather that made you grateful. Murphy pulled himself together, got out of his car and walked past the forensics truck to his crime scene. He ducked under the crime-scene tape and passed a large sign on his way in that said *KEEP OUT – CONSTRUCTION SITE*.

He took his bearings inside the front entrance of the terrace house while slipping on a pair of disposable nitrile gloves. He was standing in a large, open room, inner walls completely stripped back to studwork and brick, floorboards exposed and recently sanded. A clear sheet of heavy plastic hung down from the ceiling in front of the studwork of the room's former back wall. Straight ahead, a steep, narrow flight of

stairs hugged the right-hand wall, its balustrade and a couple of steps missing.

Murphy grunted. Fucken home renovation: the latest great Australian obsession, along with cooking like an English wanker. People watched too much crap on television these days. What was wrong with footy?

‘Homicide!’ he yelled.

‘Come through, Spud,’ came back from beyond the thick plastic curtain. He knew the voice – it belonged to Dr Lachlan Kenworth, the most experienced scenes of crime officer in the state. He was a medically trained civilian attached to forensic services, working out of police headquarters at Parramatta. Naturally, everybody called him Mack.

A white shape approached the thick plastic veil from behind, which proved to be another SOCO in a paper crime-scene suit. ‘Morning, Detective,’ she said, holding the curtain open for him.

‘Morning, Angela. I hear it’s a beauty.’

‘This one you’ve got to see for yourself. Unbelievable.’

Murphy raised his eyebrows: SOCOs rarely talked like that, and Angela had seen a fair bit. He crossed the former dining room, empty apart from a bar fridge with a kettle on top, through to a clapped-out kitchen: a mid-century bolt-on that had been last updated thirty years ago. This time, the owner was not mucking around. An internal door at the far end revealed a sparkly bathroom all tricked out in the latest gear. The kitchen itself was still a mess, but it was a mess with intent. The old cupboards had been ripped out, and work was underway on schmick new cabinetry. Murphy shook his head. Fucken madness.

‘G’day, Mack. What have you got for me?’

Mack was standing at the sink, his hands out of sight in the basin. He lifted his gaze over his glasses to meet Murphy’s eyes.

‘Afternoon, Spud.’ It being 10.47am, this was Mack’s way of giving Murphy shit for being late: since Mack was almost always at a crime

scene before him, it was a familiar sledge. ‘Male, whitish, forty-odd, in good shape until the weekend.’

‘Any ID?’

‘Probably the owner, Anthony Williams, but it’ll take dental to confirm it. He’s not particularly intact.’

‘How so?’

‘Most of him is upstairs in the back room,’ said Mack, indicating the mottled ceiling directly above them, ‘but there’s bits of him everywhere, poor bastard.’ He lifted his hands towards Murphy, presenting the specimen they held like an offering.

Murphy recoiled. It was half a human arm, sawn off just above the elbow and pared right back, all gristle and bone with strips of meat hanging off here and there. ‘Christ, Mack.’

‘I know. Gets worse.’ Mack placed the forearm gently in the sink and nodded towards the draining board, where a tech was taking photos.

Murphy leaned over for a better look, then reeled back from the knuckled segment. ‘Jesus fuck, what’s that?’

‘Cervical spine,’ said Mack. ‘Neckbones. I don’t know what our man was looking for, but he was thorough.’

A voice came through from the front. ‘Mack, Ray found the skull-cap, in the upstairs bathroom. Picked clean.’ It was Detective Senior Constable Amy Chartier, who’d been on call overnight as Homicide’s first responder. ‘Wait till you see upstairs, boss,’ she said to Murphy as she entered the kitchen. ‘I’ve never seen anything like it.’ Murphy nearly didn’t recognise her – his detective’s usually bronzed skin looked clammy and greenish, and something had let some air out of her usually taut, athletic frame. Still, she made a point of looking steadily at the remains in front of them.

‘Who found him?’ Murphy asked Chartier.

‘Day labourer named Greg, just before seven this morning. He’s been helping with the renovation; showed up as normal, but the door

was locked and there was no answer. He jimmied the front window and went upstairs where he'd left off on Friday afternoon.'

'Alibi?'

'Avoca with the girlfriend's family, all weekend. Unconfirmed at this point, but it'd be a lousy lie.'

'Where is he now?'

'Harris took him for interview, if he can handle it. He's not doing too well.'

'No shit,' said Murphy. He turned to Mack. 'So, all this from the one body, you reckon?'

'Yes. One of everything so far; no remainders.'

'That's something. But still, fucken butchery or what?'

'You don't know the half of it,' said Mack. 'It's a charnel house up there. Soft tissue everywhere, and all of the bones are chopped up.'

Murphy watched Chartier step to the open window and take a deep breath of fresh air. *Must be bad up there to unsettle her*, he thought: she was one of his best, not easily rattled.

'I tell you this,' continued Mack, 'he's not an orthodox Jew or a devout Muslim.'

'The vic or the perp?'

'The perp.'

'Why do you say that?'

'He underestimated drainage, big time. Five litres of blood goes a long way.'

They all looked up at the old brown patch on the ancient kitchen ceiling and shuffled out from beneath it. No point taking chances. 'What about tissue samples?'

'Nothing obvious so far,' said Mack. 'We've bagged a hell of a lot of material, as you'd expect on a construction site. We'll do another full sweep and then go over it all in the lab. But it looks like he was careful. Nothing's leaped out yet.'

'Just one perp, you reckon? Or a team?'

‘Hard to say. The autopsy might tell us, based on the incisions. It’s a lot of work for one cutter, though.’

‘And what do you make of that?’ Murphy asked, gesturing to the forearm in the sink. It was stripped back so far you could see between the bones. The words *tibia* and *fibula* floated into Murphy’s mind, unbidden.

‘I dunno, Spud. He’s cut all the muscle away very carefully with a sharp knife, sturdier than a scalpel. He’s left some tendon attachments intact and cut others completely away, but it’s pretty delicate work. Then he’s sawed through the humerus to get the joint out so he can go even finer. Looks like he’s used the victim’s own circular saw, although it’s an extremely fine blade. Not quite surgical, but close. Harris tells me you wouldn’t normally see one like it on a building site. Our boy brought it with him.’

Murphy waved towards the chain of vertebrae sitting on the draining board. ‘Same for the other bits? Neck and skull?’

‘Looks like it. After he’s cut the bits out, he’s spent a lot of time on them in good light on a stable working surface. He’s worked over the lower cranium in incredible detail, after taking the lid off and clearing out the soft tissue.’ Mack turned to Chartier. ‘And apparently he’s taken his time with the top of the cranium, too?’

She nodded. ‘Same deal, in the bathroom sink.’

‘What about the rest of the body?’

‘He’s done the torso in situ, after he’s removed all the viscera, but you can see the fine cutting,’ said Mack.

‘Fuck me.’ Murphy shook his head. This was way over the top, even by Sydney Homicide standards.

‘Yeah, it doesn’t make a lot of sense,’ said Mack.

‘It’s homicide, Mack, it’s not meant to make sense,’ said Murphy. ‘If this shit ever starts making sense to you, let me know.’

‘You’d lock me up.’

‘For the protection of society, mate,’ said Murphy. ‘So how long do

you think it would have taken him, all up?’

‘A good while. It’s a pretty systematic operation.’

‘Could it be done in a day, say?’

‘I doubt it,’ said Mack. ‘More like all weekend.’

‘Bloody hell, that’s quite a risk, taking that much time.’

‘For sure, although the neighbours would be used to all the building noise.’

‘And there’s that big sign out the front,’ added Chartier.

Murphy tried to imagine some sick fuck spending the weekend deconstructing his victim while life went on over the other side of the wall. The neighbours probably heard the circular saw rev up while they were cooking breakfast. He rode out a wave of nausea and pushed the thought aside.

‘Let’s see what your second pass pulls up. With days on the job there has to be some DNA. Bag everything, okay?’

Mack nodded. ‘Always do.’

Murphy turned to his detective. ‘Chartier, let’s give the SOCOs some room. Start on the doorknock. Call the squad and get some help over here, and a couple of uniforms too. Keep good track of it, come back for anyone who’s not home.’ She nodded. ‘Ask about the entire weekend: any movement or unfamiliar faces from before this Greg character left on Friday until he came back this morning. I want to talk with him once he’s ready, too. You should be there, since he’s met you. And tell Harris to follow up on that blade thing. I want to know where it came from.’

‘Yes, boss,’ said Chartier.

‘And get Janssen over here, pronto.’ Murphy wanted his deputy on deck, right from the start. He had a bad feeling about this one.

‘Righto, boss.’ The detective turned and fairly bolted for the front door. She couldn’t wait to get outside.

Murphy turned back to his forensic specialist. ‘So, Mack: what else?’

‘What do you mean, what else?’

‘Come on, mate, I know you. Something’s on your mind.’

‘Fair enough.’ Mack paused. ‘It’s just, whatever else you pull up, this is not your normal killing.’

‘No shit.’

‘No, I mean ... it might be a hit or a jealous husband or something, but the extra stuff, it’s not recreational.’

‘What are you getting at? Have we seen this bloke before?’

‘No. Well, we’ll see what CrimTrac throws up, but I don’t think so.’

‘So what’s your theory?’

‘Look at this,’ said Mack lifting the length of forearm from the sink and turning it to show Murphy the elbow. ‘Can you see where the joint capsule has been opened up, and the cartilage cut away?’

Murphy reluctantly leaned in and tried to concentrate on the anatomy. ‘Yeah.’

‘It’s been done very carefully, with a scalpel.’

‘Okay.’

‘And he’s revealed the joint with extraordinary precision.’

‘Mmm ...’

‘It’s expertly done, actually. Meticulous.’

‘Yeah, and?’

‘Well, it’s just a feeling, but it’s so ... orthodox. Textbook.’

‘Jesus, Mack, use your words, will you? Pretend you’re in court.’

Mack sighed. ‘Sorry, Spud.’ He looked frankly at Murphy over his glasses. ‘Look, I couldn’t place it at first, but I’ve seen this before; this exact thing. But not at a crime scene. And not for ages.’ He held up the arm, contemplating the painstakingly displayed inner joint of the elbow.

‘This looks for all the world like a medical school dissection.’

Monday 30 April – evening

‘That was great, Jo!’

Dr Joanna King had just delivered a public lecture at Sydney University on depictions of the body in art and science. She smiled at her sister-in-law. ‘Thanks for coming, Sylvia.’

‘Wouldn’t have missed it. Sorry about Dave, he was held up at work.’

Jo shrugged: her brother was a homicide detective, so he often went missing. It went with the territory. ‘Was that all right? Not too academic?’

‘Not at all, you pitched it perfectly. Everybody loved it.’

‘Yes, we did,’ said an elderly woman who’d approached. ‘Sorry to interrupt, Professor King, but I wanted to thank you for such an engaging lecture.’

‘I’m not a professor, but thank you so much.’

‘Well, you should be. You’re an interesting thinker and a clear speaker, not like these scrawny old roosters they wheel out. Wouldn’t know an original idea if it bit them on the bum.’

Sylvia smirked unhelpfully, but Jo just gave a diplomatic smile. ‘You’re very kind.’

‘Keep at it, dear; your time will come. Those old coots can’t live forever!’ The elderly woman patted Jo’s forearm before making way for a nervy, intense man who’d been hovering at her shoulder, barely suppressing his agitation.

‘That was exceedingly interesting, Dr King; thank you so much.’ He was clutching a volume of Vesalius woodcuts tightly to his chest. ‘Most informative, and a daring hypothesis, if you don’t mind me saying.’

‘Thank you,’ replied Jo. ‘I see you’re something of an enthusiast yourself.’

‘Oh yes, he was the greatest mind of his time.’

Jo’s eyebrows shot up. ‘That’s quite a claim.’ Copernicus, Da Vinci, Michelangelo, Erasmus and Galileo all overlapped with Vesalius.

‘Oh I’m not belittling his contemporaries; they were Titans. But the Master’s legacy is far more profound than the historians generally allow, for mine. Present company excepted, of course.’

‘You may have a point,’ said Jo, not missing the acolyte’s title for his hero.

The man leaned in, glancing aside at the others waiting. ‘I should be grateful if we were to discuss this in further depth. At your convenience, of course.’

This time it was Sylvia who raised her eyebrows, but Jo felt confident this was only the innocent if socially inept advance of a slightly obsessed hobbyist. All the same, this wasn’t her first rodeo.

‘Why don’t you give me your phone number? Perhaps we can arrange a coffee.’

‘I’d be very grateful,’ he said, pulling out a notepad and inscribing a heavily-underlined *VESALIUS* followed by his name and number. ‘It’s always refreshing to find a like mind, don’t you think?’ He tore out the page and handed it to her.

Jo looked at the sheet. ‘I look forward to it, Mr Porter.’

He laughed. ‘Stephen, please.’ A woman at his elbow cleared her throat and gave him a nudge. ‘Well, I must be off. I look forward to hearing from you, Dr King. Goodnight.’

Jo smiled faintly at the odd man as he wheeled away, then turned to the next in line. She chatted briefly with a few more loiterers before Sylvia leaned in and said to the others, ‘I’m terribly sorry, but we have to go now.’ Jo smiled her regret and bundled her papers into a Crumpler messenger bag. They made their escape, strolling through the mild autumn evening towards Sylvia’s car on City Road.

‘Good crowd,’ said Sylvia. ‘You even brought out the trainspotters.’

‘He was a bit strange, wasn’t he?’

‘You’re not going to call him, are you?’

‘Not likely. I’m sure he’s harmless enough, but you never can tell.’

‘Well you certainly struck a chord, anyway. The punters loved it.’

‘I hope I got the balance right. It wasn’t too artsy?’

‘Not at all; from a nurse’s point of view you hit the mark,’ Sylvia assured her as they got in the car. ‘Stop angsty about it, Professor.’

Jo stuck her tongue out, then laughed.

They drove to Sylvia’s place in Randwick and went through to the big, open living room at the back of the house. Sylvia dumped her keys in a gigantic mortar bowl that Jo had given them as a housewarming present. Its heavy marble pestle lived by the front door, in a drawer of the hall table. Her husband said he liked to have a weapon in every room.

‘Tea?’

‘Actually, I could use a drink.’ Jo slumped into the sofa with a sigh.

‘Now we’re talking. What’ll it be?’

‘Do you have any of that Spanish black sherry?’

‘Always.’ Sylvia found a bottle of Pedro Ximénez and a couple of sherry glasses. ‘So did you end up calling that bloke from the gig?’ she asked Jo while she poured. They’d been to see The Audreys the week before and met a couple of nice fellas who’d shared their table during the set break. One of them had given Jo his phone number, at Sylvia’s covert suggestion.

‘No, he wasn’t my type.’ She was still wary of intimacy with men. And with women, for that matter. Humans generally. It didn’t leave a lot of options.

‘What do you mean? He was lovely!’ said Sylvia, handing Jo her sherry. ‘You had heaps in common.’

‘It all just feels so pointless, Sylv.’ Jo shrugged and looked into her glass. ‘I mean, how do you even reach people?’

‘But you have to try, Jo. Otherwise how would anyone connect?’

‘Yeah, but it just takes so much energy. Then most of the time it all comes to nothing anyway. Sometimes I wonder how anyone can be bothered, you know what I mean?’

Sylvia was shaking her head at Jo’s bleak assessment when the front door opened, way up the hallway.

‘Ahoy, me hearties, anyone aboard?’ came the cry.

The women looked at each other, parking the conversation for another time. ‘You’re just in time for a drink,’ called Sylvia.

Murphy bustled into the room, which suddenly seemed to shrink. ‘Christ, I could do with one,’ he said. ‘Landed some new business today.’ He took off his jacket then shrugged off his shoulder holster, depositing it, revolver and all, into one of the kitchen drawers. He came into the lounge room and leaned down to kiss his wife.

‘Jo’s lecture was brilliant tonight,’ Sylvia told him as he pulled away.

‘Oh, great,’ he said, kissing his sister on the cheek. ‘What was it on again?’ He crossed to the sideboard to add his own keys to the mortar and withdraw a beer from the built-in bar-fridge.

‘A painting by Hans Holbein the Younger, *The Body of the Dead Christ in the Tomb*. Dostoevsky made a fuss about it.’

‘Was he your PhD guy?’ asked Murphy as he flopped into the armchair.

‘No, that’s Vermeer. Holbein was Henry VIII’s official painter.’

‘So what about this painting?’

‘I have a theory about its influence on Andreas Vesalius.’

‘Who’s that?’

‘Oh, nobody, only the founder of modern anatomy.’

‘All right, smart-arse. And what was it in aid of?’

‘This new arts-meets-science outreach program the uni’s running.’

‘It was a big deal to be invited to deliver it,’ Sylvia said pointedly.

‘Sorry I missed it,’ said Murphy, ‘but new customers always have

priority.’ His expression turned serious. ‘Shit.’ He lunged for the remote and switched the television on. Jo thought he was checking the news regarding his new homicide case. But, no. ‘Forgot about the replay.’ He flicked the channels until he found the rugby league. ‘I missed the Anzac Day game last week. You girls don’t mind, do ya?’

The women exchanged a look: *too bad if we do*. Jo finished her sherry and tilted her head towards the front door.

Sylvia nodded. ‘Walk you home?’ Jo only lived fifteen minutes’ walk away, in Coogee. Well, fifteen minutes there, twenty back: there was a decent hill in between. Sylvia could do with the stretch.

‘You can stay, sis.’ Murphy’s eyes were glued to half a dozen shiny white arses, all heaving and flexing, straining against an opposing knot of dark blue.

‘Nah, early start.’

‘Righto, then, see ya.’ His eyes didn’t leave the screen.

Jo came around in front of Murphy, deliberately blocking his view, and leaned down to kiss him on the crown of his head. ‘See you, bro.’

‘Oh, for ...’ Murphy ducked his head to the side to keep the screen in view. ‘Don’t be long, darl,’ he told his wife.

The Dragons won the scrum but coughed it up immediately in a crunching tackle. A certain amount of chatter went on between the womenfolk in the background, so he turned up the volume. He heard the front door, then silence.

He leaped up and grabbed another beer from the fridge without taking his eyes off the screen, but the Roosters spun it out the backline fast, culminating in a bold cut-out pass to the winger who barged over the try-line out wide. ‘Fuck.’ Murphy bolted up the hall and changed into tracky dacks and an old Bintang T-shirt. He made it back for the conversion, an impressive kick from just inside the touch-line. ‘Faark.’ He flopped onto the sofa, took a swig of beer and let out a fruity belch. This was more like it.