

Wombat and Cockie

The annotated script



Tom Graves

Privately published by
Tetradian Publishing
Unit 215, Communications House
9 St Johns Street
Colchester
Essex CO2 7NN
England

<http://www.tetradianbooks.com>

ISBN 978-1-906681-20-3 (paperback)
ISBN 978-1-906681-21-0 (e-book)

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Introduction

Background to the story

On the surface, *Wombat and Cockie* is a straightforward cops-and-criminals black-comedy – and I do trust that it works as such. There’s the bad-guy – boo! hiss! – who turns out to be a bit more complex than a simple villain; there’s the steadfast heroine – cheer! hooray! – who piles on the pressure without quite realising she’s doing it; and a whole host of minor characters who push the story along in their own chaotic ways. Of course.

But the real story behind the story goes quite a bit deeper.

Much of my professional work these days revolves around fairly abstract notions of structure and relationship in large organisations; yet although they’re concerned with concrete fact, often the best medium to explore them is in fiction. This story is one such example, using the cops-and-drug-gangs genre to explore and illustrate some of the ways in which dysfunctional views about interpersonal power play out in practice in a social context.

The key idea is a simple observation: the physics definition of ‘power’ is, in essence, ‘the ability to do work’; but most social definitions of power are closer to ‘the ability to *avoid* work’. This applies not just to physical work, but to mental work – thinking things through – and particularly to relational and aspirational work – accepting personal responsibility in relationships and for one’s own sense of self. This provides *plenty* of possibility for social problems... and for comedy, too – hence the role of fiction as a means to explore these themes.

To be somewhat technical about it, power-problems arise in two levels of severity, ‘power-over’ and ‘power-under’ – more commonly known as ‘violence’ and ‘abuse’, and, respectively, propping self up by putting other down, and offloading responsibility onto the other without their engagement or consent. (Those are the more common ‘win/lose’ styles, though there are also ‘lose/win’ variants: putting self down to prop other up, and taking responsibility from the other

without their engagement and consent. 'Lose/win' is often regarded as 'praiseworthy', 'selflessness' and the like, but in practice it can be every bit as dysfunctional as 'win/lose' - and often is, especially in codependent-pair relationships.) The *form* of the dysfunctionality doesn't matter all that much in practice: it's the *fact* of the dysfunctionality - whether 'win/lose' or 'lose/win' - that matters most, together with the intensity. So whilst there may be much societal focus on physical violence, for example, it may often be less damaging, in terms of ability to work, and of time-to-recovery, than non-physical forms such as those that set out to destroy the sense of self.

And the reason *why* all forms of violence and abuse are such a problem is that they don't actually work: they do give a short-term illusion of having propped oneself up, or evaded responsibility, but ultimately solve nothing in the longer term. But precisely because of that short-term illusion, violence and abuse are very popular, and far more common than most people are willing to admit - and also very, very addictive. One common trigger for apparently 'unprovoked' violence - as in the starting-point of the story here - is an inadvertent challenge on failure to enact personal responsibility. Mutually-violent 'codependent' relationships eventually settle out to a relatively stable 'balance of terror', which will immediately worsen as soon as *either* party tries to face up to their responsibilities; whilst in more open social contexts - as in this story - the more active party will often ramp up the violence to ever more extreme forms whenever it fails to achieve the intended aim of 'propping self up by putting other down'. It is, in short, a mess: and it's startling just how much of our social chaos arises from that one small, simple, lethal mistake...

If you're interested, there's a lot more detail on how all of this plays out in the business context in some of the books in my Tetradian Enterprise Architecture series, such as *Power and Response-ability: the human side of systems*. A couple of decades back I also did a lot of research on how it works in the domestic-violence context, and in the process discovered that most existing tools for domestic-violence resolution - such as the supposed international standard, 'Duluth' - are so riddled with design-flaws that they would be likely only to make things worse, and in some ways almost appear to be designed to do so. (Not amusing - especially for those on the receiving-end - but an all-too-predictable outcome of the fundamental self-dishonesties underlying most present-day gender-politics. Oh well.) Somewhen I'll get round to publishing all of that as well, though I've woven examples of all ten of the key categories of violence into this story, as will be seen in

the notes. But for here... well, it's just a story, isn't it? And the best way to convey a complex message is to have fun with it. Which I did: and I hope you do too.

Another theme woven into the context and plot of the story is the relationship between rights and responsibilities, and thence the basis of a society's economy. As I see it, responsibilities are real, whereas rights are not: they are at best a declaration of a desired outcome without any indication of how we get there, but more often an attempt to use social mechanisms to offload responsibility onto others – in other words a 'right' to abuse others that's actually enshrined in law. Our society's basic concept of property takes exactly that form: it's defined as a 'right' to exclude others from access to resources, regardless of who actually needs those resources. Money is not the problem in our society or economy: it's just a standardised form of barter, and in most regards is a huge improvement on one-to-one barter. The real problem is the concept of 'right' of possession that underlies barter, and hence money. And the bleak fact is that there is no way to make a possession-based economy sustainable: hence the spiralling problems we face at present, as the pyramid-game that's been used to conceal that fact for the past few thousand years finally runs out of room for manoeuvre, and moves into the first phases of full catastrophic failure.

An economy based on possession cannot be made sustainable; but if instead it's based on responsibility, it can. Such was and, in the few surviving cases, still is the basis of the economy of most if not all 'traditional' societies. Aboriginal law, for example, has a clear and explicit concept of ownership: but it's based on responsibility to maintain the resource, not 'right' to exploit without reference to others in the present or elsewhere. So at some point, if our society is to survive, it must somehow shift from a possession-based economy to a responsibility-based one. To say there might be a few vested interests against such a shift is somewhat of an understatement... hence no matter how desirable and advisable and urgent it may be right now, in practice, the only way that change is likely to happen is if there's no other choice.

Hence what I've described in the notes here as the '*Yabbies* scenario' – so-called after the title of another unpublished project. This describes, in fictional form, one supposedly improbable yet plausible way in which such a transition could occur. For the scenario to take place for real, three things have to happen: a fundamental failure of the socio-political system; an almost simultaneous fundamental failure of the economic system; and a legal framework such that change can take

place *within* the existing law – otherwise the change itself would not be sustainable. In the *Yabbies* scenario, these are described as follows:

- Sociopolitical failure: during the later stages of an election campaign, the leadership of both the police and the major political parties are caught all too literally red-handed in full-scale drug-dealing and murder. There is instant loss of trust in policing and politics: the police are leaderless and discredited, and the election results in a fragmented parliament of independents. (This may sound unrealistic at first, but in practice is all too credible in Australia, given the history there; and as I write this the entire British parliament is in serious trouble over an expenses scandal that's affected all political parties.)
- Economic failure: most systems are designed to survive a single major failure, but few can survive three or more at once from different directions. In the *Yabbies* scenario, this happens a few days after the election, whilst police and government are still in turmoil. In practice, anything could trigger this failure, and it's most likely to be caused by something we *don't* expect; but for the scenario I envisioned over-reliance on a single computer-technology with an unexposed fatal flaw in its physics; an unexpectedly-successful virus-attack on computer networks; and an over-dependence on financial leverage which assumed endless uninterrupted increase. (The last of these has already happened since I wrote *Wombat & Cockie* – the 'sub-prime' fiasco that's pulled the entire financial system to its knees. On its own it's still not enough to cause a full catastrophic collapse, of course – but watch the skies, perhaps? The ground? Or anywhere?)
- Legal framework: a mechanism in which *all* existing property-titles can be overruled, such that the state takes possession of all property and re-assigns it back to whoever's actually *using* it rather than 'owning' it. In the scenario, this framework is described as the Federal Emergency Management Act. (This isn't fiction: it's a real long-standing law in Australia, with equivalents in most other countries; and although it's an extreme interpretation, it really *does* allow for that to happen.)

As you'll see from the story, Cockie thinks the first part of the scenario provides him the freedom to do whatever he wants, with absolute impunity; but the next part of the scenario blows that

delusion out of the water. See the notes – and the plotline, for that matter – to see how this unfolds in practice, though some of it will perhaps only make sense from what you’ve seen here.

About the characters

Having established the story-theme of power, responsibility and the dysfunctionality of violence, the next step was to find suitable characters to express the storyline. At first I toyed with the idea of inverting the gender-stereotypes, with a woman as key ‘bad-guy’, but it became too complicated, and with so much personal pain for me around women’s violence and the societal dishonesties thereat, I frankly couldn’t find enough humour to make it work.

The breakthrough for me was the Australian drama-comedy *Bad Eggs*, about a pair of hapless cops accidentally exposing full-on corruption between senior police and politicians. The film is mostly forgettable, and its lead-actor even worse, but Bob Franklin as ‘Mike Paddock’ struck a chord: hard-edged yet human, an ideal foil for one of the leads. And the storyline suggested ideas that linked well with my existing *Yabbies* scenario.

One idea led to another, and another, as they do, so the key characters and plot-line came out all of a piece over a few frenzied days. The structural relationships between the characters are straightforward enough: two leads pitched against each other, one steadfast, the other forced to change, with various minor characters helping or hindering as per their standard structural roles. As in many other stories, there are also a pair of ‘clown’ characters, to counterpoint the drama with direct yet often dark-edged comedy. In that sense, nothing special. What *is* unusual is that, in line with the Australian context, there’s a strong Dreamtime element: all of the characters are named after animals or birds – the former the ‘good guys’, the latter the ‘bad guys’, with a few variously-important exceptions – and each aligns closely with the characteristics from the respective Dreaming. Hence, for example, the two lead-characters, Wombat and Cockie.

Ellen Hughes, or **Wombat**, is like a wombat: small, stocky, solitary, rather downbeat and dowdy, yet quietly determined to go her own way. She’s a single mother with two small children, struggling to survive on the single-parent pension. I imagined her not as divorced or unpartnered,

as per the usual stereotypes, but with an absent husband who is 'missing presumed dead' – an additional source of stress in her already overloaded life. Any middle-class pretensions inherited from her parents have long since been ground away by the rigours of everyday existence: but what's left is an unshakable core of commitment to principle. In terms of story-structure, she represents the 'steadfast' character.

Christopher Cocker, or **Cockie**, is like a sulphur-crested cockatoo: large, loud, raucous, showy, excitable, in the midst of the action, perhaps thinks he's big enough to be up there with the big bad boys but isn't much of a predator in practice. In some ways he's everything that Wombat is not: wealthy, ambitious, vain, self-centred, with no respect for conventional morals. He's not a 'bad guy' as such – unlike some of the other characters we meet, who really *are* the kind of people you wouldn't want to meet alone on a dark night – but the need to prop up his own sense of importance somehow, *anyhow*, has long since taken control of his life. Yet his only real anchor is something – or someone – that he lost many years ago; which leaves him without anything to hold on to as the world changes around him. So in terms of standard story-structure, he's the 'changing' character – he doesn't have any choice about that.

Cockie's right-hand man, Ken Keyborough, or **Kaybee** (the role which I'd imagined would fit well for Bob Franklin) is like a kookaburra, solitary, stolid, taciturn, unflappable, patient, watching – and, without warning, will suddenly swoop down and strike. I'd imagined him as being ex-military, probably former special-forces – Cockie refers to him sarcastically somewhere in the story as "SAS-man". His background seems intentionally uncertain; but whatever the truth may be, he's certainly hard – much harder than he seems at first glance.

Cockie and Kaybee's two chaotic sidekicks, **Maggie** and **Crow**, fit closely in appearance and behaviour to their Dreaming analogues, the magpie and the crow. Their cluelessness provides a comedic counterpoint to the serious themes of the story; yet they too are scavenger-predators, and as their counterparts in Neil Gaiman's *Neverwhere* once put it, "you should never imagine that just because something is funny it is not dangerous". Likewise **Ssu** and the other Chinese-criminal characters break somewhat with the 'bird versus animal' mapping, but they're all predators in the classic Chinese context – snake, dragon, tiger.

And so too with all the other minor ‘animal’ characters: **Wally, Edna, Joey, Possum, Dingo, Cat** and so on. It’s a simple tactic, but there’s a lot of deep sense in the Dreamtime metaphor: and it works remarkably well for this type of story.

About the script

Wombat and Cockie was my second attempt at a film-script. (The first was *Yabbies*, which is still far from complete; the third to date was *Eureka!*, which has already been published in this series.) None of these scripts has been produced in film format, though there’s some thin chance that *Wombat* may happen somewhen.

Like the other scripts, it’s perhaps too Australian for a general market, and certainly some of the language does need translation to more conventional English, as indicated in appropriate places in the footnotes. But it is fairly true to the cultures depicted: I have several single-parent friends over there (both female and male), so had ready access to information about that lifestyle – if it could be called such – and also contacts who had first-hand experience of the shadier side of Melbourne and its gangland *mores*. There really are people who will kill to protect their own fragile sense of self, or who will treat others as disposable objects that exist only to further their own ends; and there are many, many people who will ‘turn a blind eye’ to evade their social responsibilities to others in trouble. The good thing about this story, I suppose, is that it isn’t *all* bad news... though I’ll admit that in parts it’s literally a catalogue of all the different ways in which people hurt each other, and how hitting back is usually the worst thing we can do.

Looking back, I believe it does sort-of work as a story, though there’s still a lot of clean-up still to do. The characters do seem to work, and the interactions between them do hold true, if perhaps too much exaggerated in places. The greatest problem is the story’s dependence on the *Yabbies* scenario, which stretches credibility a bit too far for a tale whose emphasis is more in individual and interpersonal conflict than in the much broader scope of politics and economics. But I have played my part enough in bringing the story this far to fruition; the next part, if you wish, is up to you.

FADE IN:

1. EXT. STREET BESIDE PARK -- DAY

[first minute provides backdrop for credits]

We're in the near future in an unspecified Australian city. An expensive yellow two-seater sports car is parked with the driver's side towards the pavement, in front of the entrance to a gardens. A few people are wandering past, some with small children going to the playground in the park. We're looking forwards along the side of the car.

All we can see of the driver, COCKIE¹, is his arm straight out from the window, holding a cigarette. He's talking on the phone.

COCKIE

(grandiose)

Hi, Ssu², it's Cockie. ... Yeah, it's goin' sweet, sweet³.
Tell you what, got a good batch comin' in. New G-M
ganja, double-E, G-B-H, coupla new designers⁴. The
best. Courier's already through, no worries. Cut you in
for a hundred grand street? Special for you, right?

A pause whilst the other caller responds.

¹ Metaphorically, Cockie is a white cockatoo: tall, very fair complexion, corn-yellow fair-hair, dressed in smart white, evidently very pleased with himself, and with a loud raucous voice that frequently includes a specific squark-like word! Since white is just about the most common colour of car in southern Australia, his is yellow; and whilst it's expensive, it's only in the middle price-bracket - perhaps a Lotus rather than the Maserati he craves, as we'll see later.

² Pronounced closer to 'tsuh', it means 'snake' in Chinese. Although we hear quite a lot about Ssu - though without one important item of information - we don't actually get to meet this person until quite a while later in the story.

³ Translation from Australian slang: "yes, everything's going just fine for me, thanks".

⁴ Genetically-modified enhanced cannabis, super-strength ecstasy, GHB (gamma-hydroxybutyrate) and a couple of other 'designer-drugs': all of which, together with the "hundred grand street" - \$100,000 or so at street retail-value - tells us straight away that Cockie is a mid-ranking 'wholesaler' of illegal street-drugs.

COCKIE (CONT'D)

Huh? Say again?

Another pause. The arm starts gesturing angrily.

COCKIE (CONT'D)

You *can't*!

(forced laugh)

Ssu, you fucking *can't* buy from anyone else! I always give you the best deals! Don't I?

Another pause.

COCKIE (CONT'D)

Well, who the fuck *is* it, then?

Another pause.

COCKIE (CONT'D)

All right, so don't fucking tell me... What?

Another brief pause.

COCKIE (CONT'D)

No, I don't wanna buy any of your fucking smack⁵ from your fucking secret supplier. An' you an' your fucking ninja clowns can keep away from *my* fucking customers and *my* fucking turf, y'hear?

There's a click as the call is cut off. The arm stops flailing. The cigarette is thrown to the ground; the arm is withdrawn into the car.

COCKIE (CONT'D)

Shit.

⁵ Heroin – against which Cockie has a very personal antipathy, as we'll see later.

(beat)

Shit.

The engine starts with a low rumble. A cloud of cigarette smoke drifts out from the window, followed moments later by an empty cigarette packet. The view follows it as it falls to the ground. A woman's hand appears, picks up the packet, places it neatly back in through the car window.

WOMBAT (V.O.)

(politely)

Excuse me, you dropped this.⁶

COCKIE

Fu-uck!

Cockie explodes out of the car. He's in his mid-20s, fairly tall, built like a footballer, dressed in expensive white designer clothes, with expensive sunglasses.

He storms up to WOMBAT⁷, is about to hit her when he notices that other people are around; he settles for ranting at her instead.⁸ She's a single mother in her late-20s or early-30s, fairly short and a little dumpy, wearing an op-shop⁹ coat in some dowdy tweed-like fabric.

With her are her two children: JOEY¹⁰, aged five, who seems to be engaged in some hopping game on the pavement; and wide-eyed Phoebe - also known as POSSUM¹¹ - aged two, sitting in a rather battered pushchair.

⁶ Back in my student days, I once did exactly what Wombat does here, politely returning a discarded cigarette packet to its owner. Unlike her, I *did* get beaten up for doing so...

⁷ Metaphorically, she's a wombat, of course.

⁸ A combination of category #2 'Intimidation' and category #4 'Emotional abuse' ("putting others down, calling them names, etc"). Notice this is also 'displacement': his real anger is at Ssu, but Wombat is a more immediate and more obviously 'blameable' target - not so much 'hitting back' as 'hitting sideways'.

⁹ Australian term for charity-shop or thrift-shop.

¹⁰ Metaphorically, a child kangaroo - as indicated by the hopping game.

¹¹ Metaphorically, a possum: small, wide-eyed, and naturally rather cute. 'Possum' is a very common nickname that Australian parents would use for a small child.

COCKIE (CONT'D)

Who the fuck d'ya think you are, you stupid fucking wombat? Just keep your fucking do-gooder paws to your fucking self, right?

Wombat doesn't move during this tirade, even though Cockie is yelling only inches from her face.¹² A brief pause.

WOMBAT

(politely, calmly)

Have you finished? You can shout at me if you must, but I'd rather you not use that language in front of the children, if you don't mind.¹³

Cockie is taken aback. He pauses for a moment.

COCKIE

(spat)

Well, fuck *you*.

He turns round, storms back to the car, jumps in, pointedly revs the engine two or three times, then roars off erratically down the street with squealing tyres. The cigarette packet flies back out of the window.

Neither of the children seem upset by this; if anything, Joey is just plain bored, as if he's seen it all before.

¹² From an abuse perspective, note how important it is that Wombat *doesn't* respond. The basic win/lose abuse-'export' mechanisms rely on 'the Other' either falling into submission - which confirms the 'export' - or responding in kind - which 'justifies' further attacks and counterattacks until one of the parties finally 'wins'. But if the Other doesn't play the game, doesn't fall into the win/lose pattern, then the game has nowhere to go - as can be seen from Cockie's derailment here. Since he feels he *must* 'win' in every possible conflict - because his fragile ego depends on perceiving himself reflected by others as 'above' them - this one small interaction triggers everything that follows.

¹³ A brief reference to abuse-category #8, 'Using children'.

JOEY

Can we go home now, Mum?

WOMBAT

Soon, love. Shopping first.

She's more shaken than she's let on: she takes a deep breath, sighs, then pushes the chair along the street with Joey hopping behind her. She picks up the packet and drops it into a waste-bin as she goes.

2. INT. SUPERMARKET -- LATER

WOMBAT with JOEY and POSSUM at the supermarket checkout, the usual stands arrayed with junk-magazines and racks of lollies exactly at child-height. Possum is in the trolley seat, Joey with his hand on the side. There's not much in the trolley, none of it luxury-items, and all of it either own-brand or with out-of-code or on-special labels. The trolleys of most other people are full, though some are as empty as hers.

Wombat looks tired and strained. Joey hopefully holds up a packet of lollies; she shakes her head.

WOMBAT

No, Joey love.

(gently)

It's only little-pay this week.¹⁴

Joey pouts, but puts it back on the rack without a word.

¹⁴ A very specific Australianism, this one. The standard pay-cycle in Australia is fortnightly, not weekly. For single-parents, welfare payments are paid in alternate weeks: the personal 'single-parent pension' one week, all the other payments such as child-benefits and housing-rebates in the other - hence, since the two amounts are different, the weeks are often referred to as 'big-pay' and 'little-pay'. The relentless hand-to-mouth struggle of the single-parent's existence is just that much harder in a 'little-pay' week: it's no wonder she's tired and strained. In effect this is also a reference to category #3 'Economic abuse', but at a societal rather than interpersonal scale.

3. INT. COCKIE'S BAR -- LATER

The back-bar-cum-bistro of a nondescript city pub, tables laid for the evening meal. The style is 'secondhand Italian', the fading remnant of a once-thriving restaurant gone to seed. A television stuck on the sports channel can be heard but not seen in the front bar.

Sitting on a stool beside the bar, glass in hand, with attention glued to the unseen television, is KAYBEE¹⁵, Cockie's right-hand man. He's in his mid-30s, perhaps, but has a harder edge than Cockie - a real street-fighter, rather than Cockie's macho posturing.

COCKIE enters through the bistro door, looking angry, and heads to a table in the far corner. He sits down, back to the wall, as Kaybee moves to join him, holding a whisky in one hand and a newspaper and notepad in the other.

KAYBEE

Hi, boss. Boys on their way.

Cockie grunts an acknowledgement as Kaybee, still standing, hands him the whisky and newspaper. Cockie waves him to a chair; he sits, to Cockie's right, and pulls a pen out of his pocket, notepad at the ready.

KAYBEE (CONT'D)

Wassup? You had a blue with some civvie sheila?¹⁶

COCKIE

(irritably)

Who the fuck told you that?

¹⁵ Metaphorically, a kookaburra. It's a land-based kingfisher, a fair-sized bird about the same size as a European crow, pale brown, with a longish tail and a large, very hard head crowned by a flat tuft of white feathers. It can often be seen perched on a telephone-wire, sometimes with its long, tough yet lethally-sharp beak clenching a snake - one of its favourite targets, as again we'll see later. It's perhaps best known for its raucous, laughing, donkey-like bray of a call, which earned it the nickname of 'Laughing Jackass'.

¹⁶ Translates as 'had a fight with a woman who was not of our criminal fraternity nor one of our customers'.

KAYBEE

Ssu. Called to try sell us hash¹⁷ and smack again.
Said one of the boys had seen it. Laughing fit to
burst.¹⁸ Sorry.

COCKIE

That fucking slope! Seriously pissing me off. *No-one*
laughs at me an' gets away with it...¹⁹

KAYBEE

We ain't got their firepower, boss. Can't touch 'em.

COCKIE

God I wish! Still pushing that fucking smack...

KAYBEE

So why don't we? The money's good.

COCKIE

(angry)

'Cos it fucking kills, that's why!²⁰

(reflective pause)

We was both fifteen, right? My first girl. Fooled around
before that, but this was real, know what I mean?
Dove²¹, her name was. Beautiful. Just fucking
beautiful.

¹⁷ Another perhaps better-known nickname for cannabis.

¹⁸ Ssu applying category #4 'Emotional abuse' - Cockie's attempts at abuse of Wombat already seen as having backfired.

¹⁹ A variant of category #10 'Minimising, denying and blaming'.

²⁰ Cockie displaying the characteristically tangled morals of the gang-world here.

²¹ Another Dreamtime metaphor, of course.

Cockie sighs; a wistful pause; then he switches to anger.

COCKIE (CONT'D)

Smack-boys got her.²² Couldn't get through to her after that, she couldn't think of nothing but the next hit. And they got her broken, on the streets, on the game, to pay for their fucking smack; and she needed the fucking smack to cope with the game.²³ Watched her fall apart, in less than a year. Can still see her now.

A sad, bitter, angry pause.

COCKIE (CONT'D)

Then a john stiffed her.²⁴ Dumped her in a fucking wheelie bin. Cops were fucking useless, of course. Smack-boys didn't give a shit: pricks'd had their money, told me she was 'disposable' an' all, laughed in my face. Stopped laughing when I put two bullets into each of 'em - 'disposable' all right, disposed of *them* in the fucking river. *And* the john - what was left of him after I finished with the bastard.²⁵

An angry, bitter sigh.

²² Translates as 'enticed into becoming addicted to heroin'.

²³ A reference here to the all-too-common linkage between heroin and street-prostitution.

²⁴ Translates as 'murdered by a prostitution client' - thankfully fairly rare these days, but still does happen often enough to make drug-driven prostitution a disturbingly dangerous 'game'.

²⁵ Several different categories of abuse and violence referenced here, obviously - including #4 'Emotional abuse', #5 'Sexual abuse', #1 'Coercion and threats' (with the threat carried through to actual murder) and #10 'Minimising, denying and blaming'

COCKIE (CONT'D)

But it don't bring her back.²⁶ So don't ask me about smack, okay?

A sympathetic pause.

KAYBEE

Sorry, boss, keep me trap shut.

COCKIE

(still bitter)

You do that. You fucking better.²⁷

His mood lightens somewhat as MAGGIE and CROW come in from the front bar.

Crow²⁸ is tall, heavily-built, a 'muscle-man' in his late 20s, dressed in black leather trousers, black leather jacket and black t-shirt.

Maggie²⁹ is slightly younger, medium-height, with a heaviness of build that owes more to fat than muscle. He's dressed in black jeans, black denim jacket and a rather grubby white t-shirt; he has earphones on, and is warbling quietly to a music only he can hear.

CROW

Hi, boss. How's it goin'?

²⁶ A key point in the abuse-cycle: "it don't bring her back", it doesn't actually resolve anything. In short, it doesn't actually work - especially in the longer term.

²⁷ A milder form of category #2 'Intimidation'.

²⁸ Metaphorically, yes, he's a crow. The Australian crow is very similar to the European one, if perhaps a little larger: sleek, black, struts around a bit, but nothing like as showy or self-obsessed as the cockatoo.

²⁹ Metaphorically, he's a magpie. The Australian magpie is more of a piebald crow, quite a bit larger than the European magpie, and with a shorter crow-length tail. As with Crow, his clothing and stance here reflects the Dreaming creature's colouring and appearance. Their call is a bizarre gargling warble - the first time I heard it, I thought it was some kind of misbehaving electronics. Magpies can be quite friendly, even almost tame, much of the time, and then - especially in springtime - will suddenly swoop perilously close to passers-by, apparently for no reason other than that they can.

KAYBEE

Maggie, will you turn that bloody thing off and pay attention?

MAGGIE

Sorry, Kaybee.

KAYBEE

Right, go for it.

Cockie looks up with vague interest.

CROW

(to Cockie)

All done, boss, 'cept we lost Drako.³⁰

Cockie looks up sharply, then at Kaybee.

CROW (CONT'D)

Bloody cops busted him last night.

Cockie and Kaybee look at Crow, with worry plain on their faces.

CROW (CONT'D)

SOGgies³¹ everywhere, searching everyone. Bloody lucky we were clean by then.

(beat)

He'd paid us, of course.

Cockie relaxes,³² but Kaybee continues to look worried.

³⁰ In metaphor, another bird – this time the male (drake) of a fairly gaudy-coloured duck that's not actually native to Australia – hence, in metaphor, perhaps Serbian or some similar culture. The 'o' ending in the nickname is another common Australian characteristic. This is the only time we hear of Drako, by the way.

³¹ Special Operations Group – an elite 'tactical actions' unit in the Melbourne police.

³² Mild inverse of category #3 'Economic abuse', combined with #10 'Minimising, denying and blaming': Cockie's

KAYBEE

Another bust? We got a bloody dog in the woods.³³
Crow, keep your eyes open, we gotta find that bastard.

MAGGIE

Why Crow? Why not me too?

KAYBEE

(grins)

'Cos Maggie dear, I'd trust you about as far as I can
throw you, and with your weight that ain't very far.³⁴

MAGGIE

Oh. Okay.

KAYBEE

Right, today's Barfly and Lounge Lizard.³⁵ You know
the drill: pick up at Wagtail's³⁶ this arvo³⁷, drop off
tonight.

crew has their money, so the impact on Drako is nothing to do with them any more. Kaybee, however, can see the bigger picture.

³³ An informer, passing information to the police. (This common Australian term also lines up nicely with the Dreamtime motif, of course.)

³⁴ Mild form of category #4 'Emotional abuse' – in this case taken as routine banter rather than as an attack, hence Maggie's none-too-bright non-response.

³⁵ Two more Dreamtime-like names – though I was horrified to discover that there really *is* a bar called 'Lizard Lounge' in central Melbourne.

³⁶ Metaphorically, the pied-wagtail – a smaller black-and-white bird, common throughout most of Australia, and harmless (to humans, at least), with a long tail that's fanned out to scare insects, which the bird then eats. We don't meet Wagtail, but his place is evidently used as their 'safe-house'.

³⁷ Translates as 'this afternoon'.

(hands over a list)

Bugger off and do it, yeah?

CROW

(birdlike squawk)

Yeah!

Maggie and Crow move out through the bistro door, as Kaybee makes notes in his notebook.

COCKIE

Jeez, they're a useless pair... dunno why I keep 'em on.

KAYBEE

'Cos they *do* do what they're told. Eventually.

(pause)

Anyway, what was Ssu's asking?

COCKIE

Twenty for ganja, forty for smack.

KAYBEE

Shit! We can't even get it raw for that!

COCKIE

Yeah. Fuck knows where Ssu's getting it. Sure as hell didn't tell me.

Kaybee writes the prices in his notebook.³⁸

COCKIE (CONT'D)

Kaybee, do you have to do that? Anything on paper's a risk.

³⁸ In case this isn't obvious already, this is, yes, a setup for what happens later.

KAYBEE

Best way, boss. Trust me, I know what I'm doing.

COCKIE

Yeah...

(grins)

You're right - you're the best.

Kaybee grins back.

KAYBEE

I am at that.

He closes the pad and gets up.

KAYBEE (CONT'D)

Gotta see Owl³⁹ about the accounts - don't want him falling behind. See you here tonight?

COCKIE

No - tomorrow'll do.

KAYBEE

Right-oh, boss. See ya.

Cockie opens the newspaper at the sport pages as Kaybee leaves via the bistro door.

4. EXT. EDNA'S HOUSE -- DAY

A quiet, leafy, older middle-income suburb. WOMBAT arrives outside her parents' house in a tired and somewhat battered-looking two-door car, with children JOEY and POSSUM in the back.

³⁹ As is evident from the name, metaphorically an owl – of which there are many species throughout Australia. Skilful night-hunters like all owls, I was thinking here more of the fabled (if for the most part literally so, in fact) intelligence of the owl – hence the bookkeeper for ‘matters of the night’. Just exactly *who* that bookkeeper might be is another setup for later.

Joey climbs out. Wombat moves round to the boot, pulls out a pushchair, unfolds it, then struggles through the narrow space between the front seat and the doorway to disentangle Possum from her harness. She succeeds, lifting Possum into the pushchair, as her parents EDNA⁴⁰ and WALLY⁴¹ - both in their late 50s - arrive at the gate.

JOEY

Hello Gamma! Hello Poppa!

WALLY

Hello Joey! How's my hopping boy?

Wally takes Joey's hand, and they both hop two-legged into the house,⁴² as Edna looks on in distaste.⁴³ Wombat looks up from trying to strap a wriggling Possum into the pushchair.

WOMBAT

Hi Mum.

(to Possum)

Oh all right, possum, you can get out.

Possum gets out of the chair, totters over to Edna and clings to her skirt.

POSSUM

Gamma.

WOMBAT

Yes, it's Gamma.

⁴⁰ Metaphorically, an echidna - small and prickly and curls up into an even more prickly ball if threatened.

⁴¹ Metaphorically, a wallaby - somewhat smaller than a kangaroo, but runs (or hops, rather) *very* fast into the woods on any sign of danger.

⁴² Well, they *are* both sort-of kangaroos, after all...

⁴³ ...and she's as prickly as an echidna!

EDNA

(to Wombat)

Still no sign of that wayward husband of yours, I suppose?⁴⁴

Wombat sighs; her face shows pain.

WOMBAT

No, Mum, I would have called you.

Edna humphs in disapproval.

WOMBAT (CONT'D)

Please, Mum, it's not his fault. I don't even know if he's alive.⁴⁵ It's been more than two years now.

A brief, sad pause; then she folds the pushchair.

WOMBAT (CONT'D)

And we manage.

EDNA

Survive, you mean. Humph!

Edna, Possum and Wombat head into the house.

WOMBAT

Really, Mum. And it's been a lot easier since Cat moved in with us. She helps with the children, and...

⁴⁴ Yet another variant of category #4 'Emotional abuse'.

⁴⁵ This is actually a subtle setup for later: we never do find out for certain what happened to her husband, but we do get an explicit hint near the end of the story.

EDNA

(curt, interrupting)

Huh. Never trust a foreigner.⁴⁶

Wombat shakes her head, but keeps quiet.

5. INT. EDNA'S HOUSE -- CONTINUOUS

As they enter the house, Edna points to a stack of newspapers on the hall table.

EDNA

Wally's finished with the Sundays. All yours.

(beat)

Nothing in them but the wretched election these days.⁴⁷

Huh.

Wally pops his head round the kitchen doorway.

WALLY

Edna my lovely echidna, do you have to be so prickly about everything?

EDNA

Huh.

WOMBAT

He's right, Mum, it's the only way I keep up with what's happening in the world.

EDNA

Don't know why you bother. Really.

⁴⁶ Mild racism is another very common example of category #4 'Emotional abuse' and #10 'Minimising, denying and blaming'.

⁴⁷ This is a linkage to the *Yabbies* scenario, as mentioned in the introduction.

They move into the kitchen, where the table is laid for a meal. Wombat lifts Possum into a high-chair, while Wally guides Joey to another chair.

JOEY

Mama had another fight today!⁴⁸

EDNA

(to Wombat)

Not again. Who was it this time?

WOMBAT

Just a man at the park. Littering.

WALLY

Being responsible's all well and good, love, but it could get you into trouble one of these days.⁴⁹

JOEY

He said lots of rude words!⁵⁰

Wombat looks embarrassed, Edna disapproving, but Wally ignores the comment and hops to the other side of the table.

6. INT. COCKIE'S HOUSE -- LATER

COCKIE stands in the living room of the house he shares with partner Myna. The style and decoration is an odd mixture of class and crass, glamorous and gaudy, with several items, such as an amazingly over-decorated wet-bar, which could only be described as expensively tasteless.

⁴⁸ The helpfulness of children when you want to keep your troubles to yourself...

⁴⁹ Abuse rather than violence, in the form of active promotion or condoning of *evasion* of social responsibility: category #10 'Minimising, denying and blaming' again.

⁵⁰ ...uh, yes, *really* helpful...!

COCKIE

Fuck it. Myna!

MYNA⁵¹ enters the room. She's in her early 20s, beautifully dressed, beautifully made-up - a picture-perfect model.

COCKIE (CONT'D)

You moved my Maserati.

He points to a large-scale model car in a display-case, tucked away in a corner.

MYNA

It didn't fit where it was, darling. It clashes with my style.⁵²

COCKIE

(grins)

Crap!

He moves the model to the middle of the coffee-table, then stands back with pride.

COCKIE (CONT'D)

Now *that's* got class! Shows people where we goin', know what I mean?

He grabs hold of her by the waist, pushes his face toward hers, with a grin.

COCKIE (CONT'D)

C'mon, bitch, where's my kiss?⁵³

⁵¹ Metaphorically, a mynah-bird – an 'unintended import' from India. A rather beautiful mid-sized bird in pale and dark brown, with bright yellow 'eye-liner', it thrives all over eastern Australia – mainly by working in pairs to beat-up other birds.

⁵² Both Cockie and Myna are here playing mild variants of category #6 'Privilege abuse', each trying to claim 'privilege' over the other. Cockie 'wins' this particular interaction; whether he 'wins' overall is yet to be seen.

⁵³ As will be all too evident, subtlety and awareness of others are somewhat beyond Cockie's comprehension. This is

She pulls away and moves to the other side of the table.

COCKIE (CONT'D)

Jeez, you're temperamental tonight! What's up with you?

MYNA

You're not so hot yourself.

COCKIE

(sighs)

Yeah. You're right. Had a run-in with some bossy bloody wombat woman at the park. One of Ssu's boys saw it. Story'll be halfway round the fucking city by now.

He wanders to the wet-bar, pours himself a whisky.

COCKIE (CONT'D)

That bloody snake Ssu. Half us on ganja. Fucks up the market.

(reflective)

Some new supplier. Dunno who the hell it is.

He looks puzzled and worried as he puts the glass back down onto the bar.

7. INT. TELECOM OFFICE -- DAY

The interior of a busy technical office in a telecomms business. Alexandr Topolski, or MOUSE⁵⁴, a rather excitable technician in his early 30s, is in front of a computer screen, with audio speakers

also a combination of category #4 'Emotional abuse' and #5 'Sexual abuse', so routine that he doesn't even notice that he's doing it - though she certainly does!

⁵⁴ Again, both names match their characters in the Dreamtime metaphor. This whole scene is again drawn from the *Yabbies* scenario.

visible. He's playing back an audio file, looking puzzled, as his supervisor Charlie Nguyen - nicknamed GNU - comes past.

MOUSE

Gnu? Is this the right call?

(beat)

Sounds like it's about drugs...

He plays back a fragment.

HARD VOICE (AUDIO)

...our people should be getting the larger cut - it's from our confiscated stock.

ANGRY VOICE (AUDIO)

Rubbish! It's New South's! We sold it.

LUGUBRIOUS VOICE (AUDIO)

No, the party should get the largest share. We're making this possible for you, after all.

Charlie runs his fingers through his thinning hair.

GNU

Well, it sure isn't about frequency allocation on mobile towers. What the heck did you record?

MOUSE

It's the right teleconf number. Nine nine one four oh three two, pin four two oh, standard encryption.

GNU

Mouse, you're a twit. Should have been *three two oh*, pin *oh four two*.

His face shows disappointment, frustration, and a complete lack of interest in the actual content.

GNU (CONT'D)

Damn. I wanted that transcript.

A moment's pause.

MOUSE

So what do we do with this?

GNU

Dunno. Call Police Liaison, I guess?

MOUSE

(excited)

I'm on my way!

He starts out of his chair; Charlie gently pushes him back.

GNU

Nah. Hold a jiff... there's something odd about this.
Play it again?

Alexandr looks disappointed, but presses a few keys to wind it back and replay.

GNU (CONT'D)

(puzzled, over audio)

That voice... I've heard it before... Who is it?

MOUSE

Who cares? Let the cops sort it out!

With the sound still running, he jumps up. This time Charlie doesn't stop him. Alexandr runs out of the office.

GNU

(to himself)

Wait a minute...

(beat)

That's Patterson - the Attorney General!⁵⁵

(beat)

And Commissioner Morenzi!⁵⁶

He runs to the door and yells after Alexandr.

GNU (CONT'D)

Mouse! Come back! Don't go to the cops! It *is* the cops!

Too late: he's already gone.⁵⁷

8. EXT. CENTRELINK OFFICE -- DAY

A wide suburban mixed-business street, including shops and a large used-car yard with its gaudy flags and hyped-up "Special Offer!" signs. We see this from COCKIE's POV, as he cruises through the street in his car, speaking excitedly to KAYBEE on the phone.

COCKIE

Yeah, that's what I saw. Fuckers out of the game for at least a couple days.⁵⁸ What's best way to use it, you reckon? Ship in more stock? Or move out of Wagtail's?

⁵⁵ Australian equivalent of the US Secretary of the Justice Department - a party-politician, but in effect in charge of all police affairs in the country.

⁵⁶ The Chief Commissioner is the most senior police officer in each state.

⁵⁷ And, in the *Yabbies* scenario, to his death - murdered by the police themselves, as described in the Introduction.

⁵⁸ In the *Yabbies* scenario, the public trust in the police-force has slumped to well below zero. Demoralised and in complete disarray, with many of their most senior officers either arrested or in hiding, the police are out of action for any functional purposes - which Cockie sees as a huge opportunity for immediate action.

A pause, as Cockie cruises past a news kiosk, with billboards showing "Drugs: Top Cops Corrupt", a photo of Mouse with "Whistleblower Murdered", and "Force Suspended".

COCKIE (CONT'D)

Yeah, I reckon. Hey, *wait* a fucking minute...!

Cockie's attention is distracted by seeing WOMBAT get out of her car on the far side of the road, in front of the local Centrelink (state welfare) office.

COCKIE (CONT'D)

... it's that stupid fucking wombat! Kaybee, grab hold of Maggie and Crow, get your arse over here - gonna have some fun with this!

9. EXT. CENTRELINK OFFICE -- LATER

WOMBAT comes out of the Centrelink office to find a crowd around her car, which is now lying upside-down on the sidewalk.⁵⁹

MAGGIE and CROW stand to one side of her car, trying to look threatening but generally failing, and KAYBEE to the other, looking genuinely dangerous in his quietness, whilst Cockie's car is parked neatly in the space where her car had been - facing the wrong way relative to the traffic.⁶⁰ COCKIE lounges against the side of his car.

COCKIE

(sneering)

Took your fucking time, didn't you, wombat? Well, miss namby-pants,⁶¹ here's a lesson for you: keep your

⁵⁹ In the standard abuse-categories, this is #2 'Intimidation', because it involves threat via damage to personal property.

⁶⁰ Parking against the flow may be commonplace in Britain and elsewhere, but it's at present illegal in some (maybe all?) Australian states - hence Cockie pointedly parking this way round.

⁶¹ Fairly obviously, this is category #4 'Emotional abuse'.

fucking mouth shut where it ain't wanted, and always
make way for your betters, right?

WOMBAT

Bettors?

COCKIE

Yeah, sweetheart, *bettors*. Money is power, darlin': I
got money, you ain't, so you better shut the fuck up.⁶²
You got it?

WOMBAT

(firm)

No, I haven't, thank you. And there *are* police here,
you know.

Cockie laughs at her; Maggie and Crow dutifully follow suit, while Kaybee watches the crowd for
any moves.

COCKIE

That's what *you* think, you stupid bitch. Too poor to
read the fucking papers, are you? You can call all you
want, there ain't no police, not today. Been naughty
boys, they have, oh dear oh dear oh dear. So I'll do
whatever I fucking well want, and no stupid wombat like
you is going to stop me. Get it?

Wombat face shows shock, but she stands firm. Cockie opens the door, gets into his car, starts
the engine.

⁶² In addition to the obvious category #2 'Intimidation' and the like, this is also #6, 'Privilege abuse', using relative
wealth to claim automatic privilege - literally 'private possession of law'. A multi-layered setup, this one, with several
different payoffs later.

COCKIE (CONT'D)

Tell you what, I'll ask my boys to put your car right for you, if you ask me nicely. *Really* nicely, know what I mean?

WOMBAT

(firm)

No.⁶³

COCKIE

Well, fuck you!

He slams the car into gear and roars off with a squeal of tyres, tossing an empty cigarette-packet out of the window as he goes. The car's number-plate – 'COCK1E' – is clearly visible.⁶⁴

A brief pause. Maggie and Crow look to each other, then start to edge away from the car, towards Kaybee's car on the other side of the road. Kaybee stands still, looking at them. Nobody else makes a move, or a sound.

KAYBEE

(peremptory)

Do it!

MAGGIE

But she didn't ask...

KAYBEE

Just *do* it!

He walks off across the road, as Maggie runs round Wombat's car, and, with exaggerated effort and Crow's assistance, pushes the car upright back into its original parking place.

⁶³ Again, refusing to play the game – either by submitting or by fighting back – pushes the pressure back on Cockie.

⁶⁴ Which allows Wombat to note it for recall later – a fairly obvious setup, but also a very 'normal' one.

Kaybee waits beside their car until Maggie and Crow scamper across the road and dive into the car; Kaybee then drives off without a word.

The moment they're out of earshot the crowd explodes, with phrases like "How dare they?", "Appalling!", "Outrage!" and the like. But no-one offers Wombat any actual help.⁶⁵

Wombat walks round her car, looking at the damage: several panels dented, one side-window broken and the others cracked, one headlight and indicator-set broken, a smaller crack in the windscreen. Driveable, but almost certainly not legal.⁶⁶ She sighs, opens the door, gets in.

She turns the key, glad to find the engine still works. Then she notices a piece of paper lodged in the fold of the passenger seat. She pulls it out.

WOMBAT

"Bell Street Police Station. Platt and Kohl." Odd. Got to go there anyway, I s'pose.

She puts the car into gear and drives off.

10. INT. POLICE STATION -- LATER

The public area of a medium-sized district police-station. There's a general air of demoralisation: two police officers sit on the battered chairs, slumped, not even talking to each other. One of the two is BULL⁶⁷, in his mid-20s. The other is SHEPPARD, a slightly older policewoman.

WOMBAT comes in through the door, goes to the counter, but there's no-one there. She turns to the other two.

WOMBAT

Is anyone on duty?

⁶⁵ Regrettably, this seems to be the usual public response to a public problem – do nothing whatsoever that's useful other than make lots of noise *after* the event is safely over. In effect, this is a societal version of category #10, 'Minimising, denying and blaming', in its passive form (abuse rather than active violence).

⁶⁶ Another setup for later.

⁶⁷ Two more names aligned to their Dreamtime characters – with Sheppard as a sheepdog-like character.

SHEPPARD

(dry)

No. Ain't you heard?

WOMBAT

I gather there's a problem?

SHEPPARD

One way of putting it.

Bull looks up.

BULL

Oh, good afternoon, Mrs Hughes.

SHEPPARD

(to Bull)

A regular?

BULL

Our side of the fence.

(to Wombat)

No news of your husband, Mrs Hughes.⁶⁸ Checked the homeless-shelters list again last week.

WOMBAT

Thanks, but that isn't what I came for. Someone's damaged my car...

SHEPPARD

(interrupting)

Nothing we can do about it.

⁶⁸ This is part of the pick-up from Edna's disparaging comments earlier.

WOMBAT

...no. But they left a note in my car. Saying I should talk to...

(checks the note)

...Platt and Kohl.

SHEPPARD

Platt-ypus 'n koala? They're in. I'll go get 'em.

She gets up from the chair and saunters through the door to the back area. Bull slumps back to looking at his hands; Wombat stands waiting, looking at the door.

The door is opened a few seconds later by PLATT⁶⁹ - tall, thin, late 20s, sleek black hair - and KOHL⁷⁰ - early 40s, best described as 'cuddly', but with a morose expression.

PLATT

Mrs Hughes?

(she nods)

Platt's the name. Drug squad.

KOHL

(gloomy)

Her Majesty's purveyors of fine illegal drugs, so we're told...⁷¹

Platt looks at Kohl with a wry grin, then turns back to Wombat.

⁶⁹ Metaphorically, a platypus - somewhat odd, but sleek, surprisingly athletic in its own environment, and with a poison-spur in its hind-feet.

⁷⁰ Metaphorically, a koala - not a 'bear' at all, but actually a kind of tree-dwelling wombat, and with a similarly irritable and determined temperament, though perhaps even more morose and pessimistic.

⁷¹ Another brief reference to the initial part of the *Yabbies* scenario.

PLATT

You asked for us?

WOMBAT

Not quite. See, I found this note inside my car. My *locked* car.

She hands it to Platt, who looks at it briefly, then passes it to Kohl; they share a momentary quizzical expression.

KOHL

Nothing to do with us, ma'am. Some jackass⁷² sent you on a wild-goose chase.

PLATT

Your car was damaged, Shep said?

WOMBAT

Yes. They turned it upside-down onto the pavement. A man I'd had an argument with in the park, and his friends, I guess.

PLATT

Get any numbers?

WOMBAT

The ringleader, I suppose you'd call him, had a flashy sports car with a silly number-plate.⁷³ See-oh-see-kay-one-ee, I think. Didn't get the other car.

⁷² A setup for later – perhaps too obvious, in fact, but never mind.

⁷³ As in Britain and (especially) the US, Australia allows personalised car number-plates if the naming fits in with (in this case) an up to six-character structure.

PLATT

'COCKIE'.

He again shares a brief glance with Kohl.

PLATT (CONT'D)

Should be easy enough to find for you. Except we can't. Officially, that is.⁷⁴ *Unofficially...*

He again shares another glance with Kohl, this time much more explicit; Kohl nods in return.

PLATT (CONT'D)

...we know a bloke who can. Dingo. He's a journo⁷⁵ at the "Tribune". We'll call him for you.

He politely ushers her towards the door.

PLATT (CONT'D)

Nothing else we can do right now, so go on home, okay? Dingo'll be in touch soon.

(gentle emphasis)

Bye.

She pauses a moment, as if to ask more, then nods a thanks and leaves. We see Platt and Kohl for a brief moment longer, talking with each other, but don't hear what they say.

11. INT. COCKIE'S HOUSE -- LATER

The living room in Cockie's house. An immaculately-dressed MYNA is adjusting the positions and layout of various objects in the room for maximum visual effect. She sighs, purses her lips, shakes her head as she notices the model Maserati in its display case. She looks up as there's a

⁷⁴ In the *Yabbies* scenario, the police force have been suspended at this point, so they're not even allowed to use their own computer-systems.

⁷⁵ Translation: journalist.

crash of a door being opened carelessly toward the back of the house. COCKIE comes into the room, bright, breezy, pleased with himself, shaking off a designer-style overcoat, throwing it casually over a sofa that she's just finished re-arranging.

COCKIE

Hi, bitch! Good day, yeah?

Her eyes narrow at the 'bitch' greeting; he doesn't notice.

MYNA

Yes, darling, it's been good. Till now.

He goes to the wet-bar, pours a whisky, spilling a small amount down the edge of the glass. He goes to the display case, puts down the glass on the coffee-table, lifts out the model, caresses it, admires it, puts it back, Myna watching every move he makes, with folded arms. He picks up the glass, leaving a wet ring on the coffee-table, which Myna notices with pursed lips. She looks up again at Cockie, who has a smug expression on his face.

COCKIE

I put that wombat in her fucking place.

Still with folded arms, Myna tilts her head to one side, appraising, almost sneering.

MYNA

Why are you making such a fuss about her? Why's *she* so important?⁷⁶

Looking up, Cockie smiles, almost in a world of his own. He replies as much to himself as to Myna.

COCKIE

No fucking woman's gonna tell *me* what to do.⁷⁷

⁷⁶ A fairly subtle form of category #7 'Isolation', "controlling whom the other sees or what the other does", "using jealousy the justify actions against the other"...

⁷⁷ ...countered by another variant of #7 'Isolation' and also #6 'Privilege abuse' - presumed gender-privilege, in this

He turns to Myna, then smiles to himself again.

COCKIE (CONT'D)

She ain't gonna be botherin' *me* no more.

He doesn't notice Myna's frosty glare.

12. EXT. EDNA'S HOUSE -- LATER

WOMBAT outside her parents' house in her now very battered-looking car, once again disentangling JOEY and POSSUM from their harnesses. Both children are very quiet. Joey again runs up to WALLY and EDNA as they come to the gate, though without a word; this time Possum is willing to be put into the pushchair. Edna glares at the car.

EDNA

What *have* you done to it?⁷⁸

WOMBAT

Nothing, Mum. Some hoons⁷⁹ at the mall turned it over.

(beat)

For fun, apparently.

Edna's face shows an odd mixture of shock and further disapproval of Wombat.

EDNA

With the *children* inside?

WOMBAT

No. They were at home. With Cat.

case.

⁷⁸ A fairly blatant example of #10 'Minimising, denying and blaming' combined with #4 'Emotional abuse'.

⁷⁹ Translation: hooligans.

EDNA

Huh. Not sure which is worse.⁸⁰

An embarrassed silence.

EDNA (CONT'D)

Huh. Don't know what the world's coming to. Worse by the day. Suppose we just have to accept it.

(to Wally)

Don't we?

WALLY

I hope not. But we can always run away elsewhere if it does get any worse.

WOMBAT

You could, maybe. *I* can't. And where to, anyway? It'd be the same there, wouldn't it? Best to sort it out on our own territory to start with.

A brief pause. Wally looks at her, suspicion on his face.

WALLY

This wasn't your being over-responsible again, was it?⁸¹

A sigh from Wombat.

WOMBAT

Could have been, I suppose. It was the same man from the park, anyway.

⁸⁰ And here, combined with #7 'Isolation' and #8 'Using children'.

⁸¹ This exchange deals briefly with the whole issue of personal and social responsibility – the lack of the latter being evident in the crowd's sanctimonious inaction at the initial incident to Wombat's car.

WALLY

You can't say I didn't warn you, love...

WOMBAT

Well, *someone's* got to do it, haven't they?

WALLY

Yes, but does it *have* to be you?

An embarrassed pause.

EDNA

Huh. It's your own fault. And we can't help you if you insist on getting yourself into trouble.⁸²

(beat)

No-one can.

(beat)

No-one will.

Another embarrassed pause, broken by the sound of Wombat's mobile phone.

WOMBAT

Hello?

(pause)

Yes, that's me.

(pause)

Yes, they said you'd call.

(pause)

That's right - fifty-two Albert Terrace.

⁸² Here, evasion of responsibility is condoned, whilst accepting responsibility is actively punished – again, a common societal form of category #4 'Emotional abuse' used to reinforce #10 'Minimising, denying and blaming'.

(pause)

Yes, that'd be great. Thanks. See you in the morning.

She closes the phone, and grins. Her face shows relief, contrasted with Wally's concern and Edna's all-too-obvious disapproval.

WOMBAT (CONT'D)

Good! That's *some* help, anyway.

(beat)

I hope.

She looks at the others.

WOMBAT (CONT'D)

Shall we go inside?

They move into the entrance-way of Edna and Wally's house.

13. INT. WOMBAT'S HOUSE -- MORNING

The narrow entrance-hallway of an older-style single-storey terrace house, almost certainly a rental property. The decoration shows there's not much money here, though also a much-loved home rather than just a house. A hall table to one side with a telephone; some children's toys discarded on the floor.

The old-style mechanical doorbell clatters.

CAT (O/S)

I'll get it!

CAT⁸³ appears in the hallway, runs to open the door. She's tallish, mid- to late-20s, rather beautiful in the dark, smouldering southern-European style, dressed well but with the emphasis slightly more on comfort and lack of cost rather than class.

⁸³ Metaphorically, yes, she's a cat – technically foreign, but with all of the Dreamtime-like characteristics that go with a cat.

Standing at the door is DINGO,⁸⁴ in his early- to mid-30s, dressed in smart-casual style, with a bright, knockabout manner and easy smile that indicates an Aboriginal heritage.

DINGO

G'day! Ellen Hughes?

Cat's face shows that she likes what she sees, but is trying to hide the fact.

CAT

Uh, no, she's out back, with Joey.

(beat)

Her son.

(beat)

You're...?

DINGO

Peter Woolf, from the Tribune. She's expecting me.

CAT

I'm, I'm Cat. We're housemates.

A brief, slightly flustered, slightly embarrassed pause from Cat.

CAT (CONT'D)

I'll get her for you.

She turns back into the house, where Wombat is just coming up the corridor.

CAT (CONT'D)

(to Wombat)

Yours.

⁸⁴ And metaphorically, a native-born type of dog – hence about as *non*-foreign as one could get! – though the characteristics align with the Dreamtime metaphor, too.

(whispered)

Can I have him when you've finished?⁸⁵

Wombat grins as they pass. She greets Dingo at the door, shakes hands.

DINGO

Peter Woolf. They call me Dingo.

WOMBAT

I'm Ellen.

Dingo turns and heads down to the gate, Wombat following.

DINGO

Great! Let's just say I *haven't* done a look-up on that system that I don't have access to, so I got your *friend's* address okay.

He turns his head back towards Wombat.

DINGO (CONT'D)

He's out on the Marina development. If he can afford there, he can certainly afford to pay for anything he's done to your car.

They come out of the gate; Wombat points to her car.

DINGO (CONT'D)

Ouch. Or buy you a new one, more like.

(beat)

I think we'll take mine?

⁸⁵ This lovely line comes from a friend who's very much like Cat in attitude, and whom I once heard saying exactly these words at a party!

He flashes a grin, opens the door of a somewhat newer and less battered car, and holds it for Wombat to climb in.

14. EXT. DINGO'S CAR -- LATER

WOMBAT and DINGO in Dingo's car, passing through the same shopping street.

WOMBAT

Why the nickname?

DINGO

(grins)

'Cos I'm an Abo wolf?

They pass the news kiosk. The billboards now show "Corruption: net casts wider" and "Election chaos".⁸⁶

DINGO (CONT'D)

An' 'cos I'm a newshound, I guess.

(beat)

Big story right now is the cops-and-drugs one, of course. Everyone's mixed up in it, government *and* opposition. Dirty deals all the way to the top, for years and years. Plenty hints it'd been goin' on, but now we got proof. Nasty business.

They're moving past the park, into new territory.

DINGO (CONT'D)

It's turned the election on its head, too. No-one'll trust any of the main parties.⁸⁷ Half the pollies⁸⁸ are

⁸⁶ These billboards in effect give us regular updates to what's going on in the *Yabbies* scenario. As Dingo explains here, the scandal has exploded right the way through the whole of politics, barely a week or two before national elections – with huge ramifications for every aspect of politics.

breaking away as independents, and there's a whole bunch of new ones, all interesting but no track-records. So it's anyone's guess as to which way it'll go.

He turns more directly to Wombat.

DINGO (CONT'D)

You into politics?

WOMBAT

(wry grin)

I'll admit I'm more interested in getting my car fixed.⁸⁹

DINGO

(laughs)

Yeah, right! Though there's a good angle there as well. Way too many people played dirty while the cops were suspended, and your fancy 'friend' is rich enough to know better. Reckon he could do with seeing his face on the front page in a way he won't like.

He glances across to Wombat in a more appraising manner.

DINGO (CONT'D)

Your face'd grace it a bit, though.

(beat)

You're a good-looking chick, you know that?

Wombat grins. Her expression shows she knows which way the conversation's headed.

⁸⁷ Interestingly, this is exactly what's happened in Britain as I write these notes, following an expenses scandal in Parliament in which politicians of all major parties have been involved.

⁸⁸ Translation: politicians.

⁸⁹ A good illustration of the sheer single-mindedness of the real wombat.

WOMBAT

I'm *married*, Mr Woolf.

(beat)

Mike may be missing, but until I hear otherwise he's still my husband. The children's father. And to me will remain so, "till death us do part".

Dingo's face flushes with embarrassment.

DINGO

Oh. No offence meant. Honest.

WOMBAT

None taken.⁹⁰ I know many people don't take their vows seriously, but I do.

(grins)

Sorry.

(beat)

Better luck elsewhere?⁹¹

He grins back, as they move into an area with more-upmarket housing.

15. EXT. COCKIE'S HOUSE -- LATER

WOMBAT and DINGO climbing out of Dingo's car, outside Cockie's house. It's one amongst a suite of large, expensive houses on large, expensive blocks, though perhaps indicating rather more money than either sense or taste. Wombat looks around at the ostentatious opulence of the whole district, then follows Dingo up the curving path to the front door.

Dingo rings the bell; a few moments later the door is opened by a surly COCKIE.

⁹⁰ Note that Dingo's 'testing of the waters' is taken at face-value, and left at that by both parties: there's no space left here for 'abuse-games', so none happens.

⁹¹ A nice friendly setup on behalf of Cat, of course.

COCKIE

Hello.

A moment later, he recognises Wombat. He's instantly on guard, sneering, looming above them on the upper step.⁹²

COCKIE (CONT'D)

(to Wombat)

What are *you* doing here?

(to Dingo)

And who the fuck are you?

DINGO

Peter Woolf, from the Tribune.

He presents a business card, which Cockie takes with a bad grace.

DINGO (CONT'D)

I'm doing a story on Ms Hughes and what happened to her car. I understand you had some part in it.

(beat)

It'd be good if that story had a happy ending, wouldn't it?⁹³

A tense pause.

⁹² Immediately, Cockie sets up category #2 'Intimidation' and #4 'Emotional abuse'.

⁹³ This is a routine use of societal pressure, otherwise known as category #9 'Using others', or 'Third-party abuse' via challenge to personal reputation. It's generally acknowledged as one of the limited range of sanctions that societies can use to enforce responsibility, but it's an 'abuse-game' that can easily backfire; to someone like Cockie - to whom self-image is all-important - it's interpreted as a personal attack, and hence he responds accordingly, escalating the abuse.

COCKIE

You're after money? From me? For this fucking wombat? Who the fuck d'you think *you* are?⁹⁴

Dingo tries to look nonchalant, but it's clear he's already struggling.

DINGO

I don't know what you do, but you certainly look as if you could afford it.

COCKIE

Me? I'm the Candy-Man. I'm one of the good guys, like the booze-makers. I make parties happen, give people a good time. Keep everything sweet, make everyone happy. And yeah, keep the money rollin' in.

He prods Dingo in the chest.

COCKIE (CONT'D)

Until some stupid shithead turns up and tries to spoil the party.

He prods Dingo again.

COCKIE (CONT'D)

A shithead like you.⁹⁵

And again.

⁹⁴ Cockie here escalates rapidly from category #6 'Privilege abuse'...

⁹⁵ ...to #4 'Emotional abuse'...

COCKIE (CONT'D)

(sarcastic)

I eat fuckwits like you for breakfast. If you think this is going to go some kind of court, sunshine, you can get fucked.

A brief, tense pause; Dingo regathers his strength.

DINGO

Let's say I represent the court of public opinion. And you're already in it.

Another tense pause.

COCKIE

You threatenin' me, dickhead?⁹⁶

Dingo stands firm, doesn't answer.

COCKIE (CONT'D)

Listen, mister news-man. You like stickin' your nose in things? You stick your nose any further in this, you're gonna find you ain't got it no more. Maybe a whole lot of you you ain't got no more. Know what I mean?

He points to Dingo's car.

COCKIE (CONT'D)

You got ten seconds to start movin' towards that car before you start losin' parts of yourself. Get it?⁹⁷

A battle of wills; then Dingo backs down. He nods, turns to Wombat.

⁹⁶ ...to #2 'Intimidation' ...

⁹⁷ ...and finally to overt and immediate threat - category #1 'Coercion and threats'.

DINGO

Better get going.

She nods; they walk back to the car. Cockie yells after them, sneering.

COCKIE

That's right - get the fuck out of here. And *stay* out, you hear me?⁹⁸

Wombat and Dingo get into the car and drive off, with Cockie still standing on the doorstep, smiling smugly.

16. EXT. WOMBAT'S HOUSE -- LATER

DINGO and WOMBAT on the sidewalk outside Wombat's house, Dingo leaning against his car, head down, not looking at Wombat. He's fidgeting, tapping his fingers on the roof of the car, looking both embarrassed and frustrated.⁹⁹

DINGO

I'm sorry - this one's outside my league. Way outside.

More fidgeting.

DINGO (CONT'D)

I'm used to dealing with people who've at least *some* sense of decency...

He turns to Wombat, fear and self-disappointment visible in his face.

DINGO (CONT'D)

I can't do anything more unless you give me the story.

Wombat reaches out to placate.

⁹⁸ In effect, Cockie has 'won' the abuse-game here.

⁹⁹ This is classic 'displacement activity' shown not just by many people but by many other species when faced with an insurmountable threat.

WOMBAT

Look, please, you've been an enormous help. We now know who he is and where he lives. I couldn't have done that without you, okay? So thanks for that, at the very least.

Dingo brightens up a little, and then brightens up some more as CAT joins them from the house.

DINGO

G'day!

Cat's expression becomes shy, again failing to hide interest.

CAT

Hi!

(to Wombat)

No joy?

Wombat shakes her head.

WOMBAT

Not yet, anyway.

Dingo moves towards the driver's door; Wombat turns towards the house, deep in thought.

DINGO

Best be going. Good luck!

Wombat briefly turns back toward him.

WOMBAT

Thanks. Thanks for trying.

She reverts back to thought, head slightly down, biting the side of her lip, as Cat waves a bright goodbye to the departing Dingo.

17. INT. WOMBAT'S HOUSE -- MOMENTS LATER

WOMBAT and CAT enter the hallway.

CAT

What's he like?

She nods 'out there'; Wombat, still deep in thought, doesn't notice.

WOMBAT

Fancy clothes, fancy house, foul temper and absolutely foul mouth. I'm in trouble there. But I *must* find a way to get him to fix the car.

Cat's face flushes with embarrassment.

CAT

Uh... I meant Dingo, actually.

Wombat looks up, and grins.

WOMBAT

Oops. Yes, he's fine. Nice. Friendly. Perhaps a bit *too* keen, if you see what I mean?

She gives Cat another wry grin.

WOMBAT (CONT'D)

I don't think we'll see him for a while, though. Too busy chasing other tales.

(beat)

Pun intended.

They both grin, then Wombat sighs in frustration.

WOMBAT (CONT'D)

I'm going to have to go after that man myself.

She stops for a moment by the hallway table, gently hitting her loosely-clenched fists on its surface.

WOMBAT (CONT'D)

He's always looking for a fight, because he knows he'll win. But there must be *some* other way to get through to him...¹⁰⁰

She stops, looking upward, still deep in thought, whilst Cat looks on silently from the background.

18. EXT. COCKIE'S BAR -- NIGHT

A table laid for a candle-lit dinner; half-full wine-glasses; a man's hands reaching out to a woman's on the table. It's COCKIE and MYNA, out in the tawdry surroundings of the bistro at Cockie's bar; and Myna's expression makes it clear that this isn't her idea of a romantic evening, especially as the table is laid for three, not two.

Sitting at another table some way off, closer to the bar and without the candles, are KAYBEE, MAGGIE and CROW, laughing in a birdlike way, though we don't hear anything they say. There's no-one else in the bar.

The bistro door clicks open, and LONG¹⁰¹ enters. He's thin, lithe, sinuous in movement, Asian, smart-casual clothing, probably mid-20s. He glances round the room, as if checking it out, then nods through the door, opens it with a hint of a bow to whoever's coming through.

SSU enters. She's Asian, tall, slim, probably late-20s, dressed in a smart Asian-style business-suit.¹⁰² An air of haughty coldness, like a Japanese samurai princess. She's followed by YIN,¹⁰³ a young Asian woman much like Long, but more catlike in her movements. Cockie rises from his

¹⁰⁰ Unlike Dingo, Wombat has recognised from the start that standard 'abuse-games' won't work here.

¹⁰¹ The Chinese word here means 'dragon' - hence also the same in the Dreamtime metaphor.

¹⁰² This is the payoff for *not* using any gender-pronoun for Ssu earlier in the story.

¹⁰³ The Chinese word translates here both as 'female' and as 'tiger' - both attributes apply in the Dreamtime metaphor. Neither she nor Long ever speak in the story - they just act, immediately, smoothly, inexorably, in elemental fashion.

seat, not quite managing to conceal an underlying nervousness; he gestures to Kaybee and the others to rise also, which they do, whilst Myna remains seated; then gestures to Ssu to join them at the table.

COCKIE

Ssu. Please.

As Ssu comes toward them, Myna looks at her in frank hero-worship. She whispers to Cockie.

MYNA

You told me Ssu meant 'snake', but you never said she was a woman!

He gestures to her to keep quiet, whilst presenting a forced smile to Ssu, and sits down. Yin comes forward to pull back Ssu's chair; Long stands guard at the door. Ssu sits, with an expression showing disdain. She comes straight to the point.

SSU

You wish to join forces, share territories, suppliers and supplies.

It's a statement, not a question. Cockie nods.

SSU (CONT'D)

Agreed. Contingent upon your active promotion of all our range. Including heroin.

Cockie's face shows turmoil, indecision.¹⁰⁴

COCKIE

Not smack. You *know* that.

If anything, the disdain on Ssu's face grows stronger.

¹⁰⁴ He knows that in this case he's facing someone with whom he will *not* 'win' an abuse-game.

SSU

Pah!¹⁰⁵

Cockie tries to change the subject, gain the upper hand.

COCKIE

Look, can I get you a drink? Wine?¹⁰⁶

SSU

Saké. If this... *place*... is civilised enough to have it.¹⁰⁷

COCKIE

Uh... yeah... sure...

He rises from his seat, goes towards the bar, gestures to Kaybee to join him, starts an urgent conversation with Kaybee and the barkeep CROC,¹⁰⁸ who shakes his head.

Myna strikes up conversation with Ssu, which we also don't hear.

Meanwhile, Maggie moves over towards Long who, like Yin, hasn't moved a muscle or said a word since entering the bistro, but is standing a tense sentry-duty.

MAGGIE

Unfriendly bugger, aren't you? You too high-an'-mighty to even talk to us, hey?¹⁰⁹

Long doesn't move. Maggie makes mocking pounce-movements with his head, either side of Long, who still doesn't respond.

¹⁰⁵ Ssu, by contrast, knows that she *can* 'win' any abuse-game, and launches into one straight away, starting with category #4 'Emotional abuse'...

¹⁰⁶ ...which Cockie tries to deflect...

¹⁰⁷ ...leading to a reiteration of the abuse by Ssu.

¹⁰⁸ Not only an obvious Dreamtime metaphor, but also a tribute to the eponymous character in Terry Pratchett's 'Discworld' parody of Australia, *The Last Continent*.

¹⁰⁹ Maggie tries his own abuse-game, likewise starting with category #4 'Emotional abuse'...

In the background, Kaybee leaves quickly through the front-bar door, whilst Cockie stands at the bar, remonstrating with Croc.

MAGGIE (CONT'D)

Think you're so *ninja*, huh?

(*sneering*)

You can't be so smart if you're workin' for some bloody
woman.¹¹⁰

Ssu lifts her head momentarily from her conversation with Myna.

SSU

Yin, take him!¹¹¹

Without a sound, Yin launches herself across the room at Maggie, in kickboxing style. A single kick to Maggie's ample midriff sends him flying across the floor, ending up against the wall. Yin halts, in an on-guard posture; Long has still not moved a muscle. Crow stands back in shock; Cockie runs across the room, grabs hold of Maggie's shoulder, hauls him upright. Maggie pulls himself together, with near-panic on his face.

MAGGIE

(*to Long*)

Uh, right, you workin' for a woman, no worries, sorry I
arksed¹¹² ...

Ssu rises, with a brief nod to Myna, who remains seated.

¹¹⁰ ...and, getting no response, escalates to the classic racism / sexism combination of #9 'Using others' and #6 'Privilege abuse'...

¹¹¹ ...resulting in a 'game'-retaliation of an all too literal category #1 'Coercion' and #2 'Intimidation': Maggie spectacularly 'loses' the abuse-game.

¹¹² A surprisingly common Australian mispronunciation of 'asked'.

SSU

(sneering, to Cockie)

This is the best you can do?¹¹³

She gestures to Yin and Long.

SSU (CONT'D)

Come.

She moves imperiously towards the door; Long opens it, they leave, Yin first, then Ssu, then Long. A brief moment of silence.

COCKIE

You *fuckwit!* Just don't know when to back off, do you?¹¹⁴

A brief, angry tableau, Cockie still holding Maggie's shoulder.

19. EXT. COCKIE'S HOUSE -- DAY

WOMBAT gets out of her battered car outside Cockie's residence, and walks up the pathway to the front door, watched by a neighbour watering her garden, and another on the other side washing his expensive car. The up-market suburban idyll, complete with disapproving glares at those with less obvious wealth.

She rings the doorbell, looks around for a moment until COCKIE appears at the door. He eyes her up and down, then glares at her.

COCKIE

What do *you* want? I told you to fuck off, didn't I?

Wombat manages to hold her ground.

¹¹³ Ssu piles on the category #4 'Emotional abuse'...

¹¹⁴ ...which Cockie attempts to re-'export' to Maggie. (And yes, this line is another setup for later.)

WOMBAT

Look, I know you can pretend you didn't damage my car yourself, but you certainly told your friends to do it for you. Deliberately. You know that.

(beat)

And you *did* offer to put it right.

(beat)

So I'm asking you again, *please*, to put it right.

(beat)

You can afford to. I can't.

MYNA appears behind Cockie. The neighbours stop what they're doing and look towards the door. Cockie glares at them. Wombat points towards the car.

WOMBAT (CONT'D)

I know it doesn't look much, but it's all I've got. It's my lifeline. My *children's* lifeline.

A woman passes by, walking her dog. The car-washer is joined by his wife. They all stop to listen.

WOMBAT (CONT'D)

Please understand this. I'm a single mother. A widow, as far as anyone can tell. My only income - my *family's* only income - is the single-parent pension. And that's barely enough to live on as it is. There's no way I can afford to repair the damage you did.

Myna drifts away again, but a few more walkers have stopped to listen in: there's quite a crowd out there. Cockie is barely listening to Wombat: he's looking at the people looking at him, and isn't pleased to be seen this way.¹¹⁵

¹¹⁵ Wombat has inadvertently set up a category #9 'Third party abuse', but because it's not overt, as was Dingo's previous attempt, there's nothing that Cockie can do to respond to it without increasing the pressure on himself...

WOMBAT (CONT'D)

Here.

She holds out a piece of paper; Cockie, still looking at the crowd, takes it automatically without even glancing at it.

WOMBAT (CONT'D)

That's my address and phone-number. Call me when you're ready to fix the car.

Cockie comes back to paying attention to the person in front of him.

COCKIE

What you think I am, some kind of fucking charity? You deserve everything you got: you fix it yourself!

(beat)

Piss off!¹¹⁶

He turns round, walks into the house, still holding her note, slams the door in her face.

WOMBAT

(calm but firm)

Fine. But I'll keep coming back until you *do* fix it.

She walks back toward her car. The neighbours watch her, without comment, as she goes.

20. INT. COCKIE'S HOUSE -- LATER

The living-room in Cockie's house. Cockie has the display-case open, and is holding the model Maserati, admiring it, almost fondling it. Myna is seated in an armchair, mirror out, checking her make-up.

¹¹⁶ ...so he settles for category #4 'Emotional abuse', and immediately closes the 'game', to try to pretend to himself that he's 'won'.

MYNA

She's after your car, you know.¹¹⁷

Cockie spins round to look at her, face in shock.

MYNA (CONT'D)

Or you.

Cockie's expression shifts to complete confusion.

MYNA (CONT'D)

She's probably more your type, anyway.

(beat)

About as useless in bed, I'd guess.¹¹⁸

Indignation on Cockie's face. Myna puts the mirror back into her purse, gets up from her chair.

MYNA (CONT'D)

I'm going out.

She gently rests her hand on his chest; Cockie is still holding the Maserati.

MYNA (CONT'D)

Don't worry your pretty little head, darling. Just a girls' night out.¹¹⁹

(beat)

A *real* night out.

¹¹⁷ This starts a long series of setups that don't fully complete until very close to the end of the story.

¹¹⁸ A fairly blatant example of category #4 'Emotional abuse' combined with #5 'Sexual abuse', as sexual denigration.

¹¹⁹ Myna piling on the #4 'Emotional abuse' and #5 'Sexual abuse' here. It's also another setup for the storyline – though for a separate thread that pays off rather earlier.

She gives him a perfunctory kiss on the cheek, pushes him gently away, then moves toward the doorway. At the door, she stops, one arm resting on the door-frame in classic 'Hollywood seductive' pose.

MYNA (CONT'D)

Whatever we do, it can't be less interesting than watching you play with your toys.

She blows him a mocking kiss, then leaves. Cockie stands stock still, lost longing on his face, watching the doorway as if to will her to come back. She doesn't. Eventually he lets out a sigh, puts the model back into its display case, slumps back into an armchair in front of the coffee table, head back, deep sadness on his face.

A moment later, he swings upright in the chair, with a frustrated, angry expression. As he does so, he notices two items on the coffee-table: Wombat's note with her address-details, and Dingo's business-card. He picks them up, looks at them both for a few seconds; then, still holding them, leans back in the armchair with a malicious grin on his face.¹²⁰

DISSOLVE TO:

21. INT. CENTRELINK OFFICE -- DAY

WOMBAT seated on a battered, uncomfortable chair, looking at a card held in her hands, in amongst a smattering of other people on a line of similar chairs at the side of the Centrelink reception area. A staffer comes past and waves to Wombat with a friendly smile; Wombat returns the smile, weakly, and resumes a worried expression. A middle-aged, heavily-built woman, wearing a name-badge 'Mrs Ramsey' but more usually known as 'the RAM', comes out from behind the counter. She looks around contemptuously at the line of people.¹²¹

¹²⁰ As will be seen in the next scene, Cockie is setting up one of the most feared of all forms of abuse, the full #9 'Third-party abuse'. The 'initiating perpetrator' - Cockie, in this case - misleads an 'active perpetrator' - the Ram, here - to carry out abuse against the innocent 'identified perpetrator' - here, Wombat - who has actually done nothing wrong.

¹²¹ Ram is probably almost as addicted to abuse as is Cockie - a perfect 'stooge' for a third-party abuse setup.

RAM¹²²

Ms Hughes?

Wombat gets up from her chair; Ram signs for her to follow. They move to a side-booth, and sit down, Wombat's hands folded in her lap.

RAM (CONT'D)

(*severe*)

Ms Hughes, you are aware that your single-parent allowance is conditional upon your domestic status?¹²³

WOMBAT

Yes, I...

RAM

That you may not cohabit with a partner?

WOMBAT

But I don't...

RAM

Of either the opposite sex, or of the same sex?

¹²² All right, metaphorically this should be a ewe, but 'Ram' fits better as a name, and as a description of behaviour. As indicated by 'the friendly staffer' here, many – perhaps most – benefits-office staff are far more humane and respectful than Ram, but her self-styled role of 'God's Police' is apparently not uncommon – or so I'm told by various friends who've been on the receiving-end of her idea of 'the law'. I've all too often come across other forms of this same kind of self-righteous, angrily smug savagery amongst Australian women: in my experience it does seem to be a more common characteristic there than in other countries, anyway.

¹²³ Single-parent benefits in Australia are relatively generous: in some areas – especially those with high unemployment – the benefits total can easily exceed the median low-income wage. Since the benefits are – as Ram indicates – strictly conditional on remaining demonstrably 'single', many families can survive only by forcing the male to leave: if a partner is present, the family loses its entire income. In the longer term, the social consequences of this policy are proving extremely serious – to say the least.

WOMBAT

But what's this to do with...?

RAM

We have received information that you are cohabiting with a man.

WOMBAT

But I'm not...

RAM

A person by the name of...

She glances at a note, but still gives Wombat no chance to get a word in edgeways.

RAM (CONT'D)

...Peter Woolf.

Wombat leans back in surprise.

WOMBAT

Dingo? But I... But who said...¹²⁴

RAM

So you do admit to knowing this person?

WOMBAT

Yes, but it's not...

RAM

Ms Hughes, defrauding the government is a serious offence.

¹²⁴ Note that in most deliberate third-part abuse – as in this case – the ‘initiating perpetrator’ is either anonymous or unidentified, making this type of abuse easy to carry out with almost guaranteed impunity. No wonder it’s so popular...

WOMBAT

Yes, but...

RAM

The penalties are severe.

WOMBAT

I'm not living with anyone!!

She finally succeeds in getting through. Ram leans back with a sniff.

WOMBAT (CONT'D)

Other than my children. And my housemate Cat. Not a partner in any sense. I've told you all this.

RAM

Nonetheless. Your allowance will be suspended whilst we carry out an investigation.¹²⁵

WOMBAT

(shocked)

For how long?

RAM

However long is necessary. Two weeks is usual. Perhaps longer. *We* decide, not you.

WOMBAT

But how am I to live? How am I to feed my children?

¹²⁵ Third-party abuse is usually a mechanism to enact another form of abuse – in this case, category #3 'Economic abuse'...

RAM

That is your problem, Ms Hughes, not ours. If you contravene the rules...

WOMBAT

But I *haven't!* That's what I keep trying to tell you!

RAM

Prudence is necessary, Ms Hughes. It is our duty to protect the public purse and...

(sniffs in distaste)

...public morality.¹²⁶

(beat)

Good day to you.¹²⁷

She gets up and walks away without another word, leaving Wombat staring after her, open mouthed. The friendly Centrelink staffer, who's overheard Ram's last comments, does the same, and shakes her head in horrified amazement. Eventually Wombat gets up and walks toward the outside door.

22. EXT. CENTRELINK OFFICE -- CONTINUOUS

Wombat comes out of the Centrelink office, shoulders slumped, head down. She lifts her head up, sighs - then sees a police officer leaning over her battered car, parked just opposite the office. It's BULL - and he's placing a 'canary'¹²⁸ 'Non-Roadworthy Vehicle' sticker on her windscreen.

¹²⁶ ...though Ram throws in some category #4 'Emotional abuse' and #6 'Privilege abuse of her own...

¹²⁷ ...and closes the 'game' to prevent any defence by the person so abused.

¹²⁸ It's called a 'canary' because it's a bright yellow colour. Given that in *Yabbies* scenario the police are still barely functioning at this point, he may just be doing traffic duty for something to do - *something* to keep focused on the law as 'the law'.

BULL

Oh. Good afternoon, Mrs Hughes. I'm sorry, but a vehicle in this condition may not be used or parked on a public road. Section 42, Road Traffic Act, amended 1994.

WOMBAT

But I'm... I mean, if I'm not allowed to drive it, how do I get it home?

BULL

You'll have to use a tow-truck.

Desperation creeps into Wombat's voice.

WOMBAT

Frank, I don't have any *money*. Nothing. And Centrelink've just cut me off, I've no idea why...

Bull finally drops the formal tone.

BULL

(softer)

Ah. If you lead, I'll follow you as an escort...¹²⁹

A sad, grateful sigh from Wombat, just holding back tears.

WOMBAT

Thank you...

¹²⁹ Technically illegal, of course but Australian police, like most small-community police everywhere, will often find a way to bend the rules if it'll help someone who's genuinely in trouble - as Bull does know is the case here, given the literal years they've helped in trying to find Wombat's lost husband.

23. INT. WOMBAT'S HOUSE -- LATER

Looking out through the open front door of Wombat's house, WOMBAT can be seen coming up the pathway. She checks the letter-box,¹³⁰ looks back, and waves as a police squad-car pulls away, then comes in through the door, letters in hand.

WOMBAT

Dad? Mum?

WALLY appears from one of the doors in the passageway.

WALLY

Hello, love. Just me.

She kisses him on the side of the cheek.

WOMBAT

I saw your car. Please tell me the kids are alright? It's been a horrible day.

He gives her a reassuring grin. She tosses a couple of the letters onto the sideboard in the hallway, then notices that the message-light is blinking on the answering machine. She clicks on the play-button.

COCKIE (AUDIO)

(sneering)

I can screw you any time I like, you stupid wombat. So back off, next time it'll be your kids.¹³¹

With an intake of breath, Wombat rewinds and replays the message. She looks at Wally in shock.

¹³⁰ Australian house letter-boxes are mounted by the sidewalk, not in house-doors as in Britain.

¹³¹ Often in third-party abuse, the initiating-perpetrator will remain hidden; in this case, Cockie 'needs' to at least make his presence known so Wombat will know that he has 'won' his current abuse-game. He also escalates the threat, of course.

WOMBAT

That man Cockie...

WALLY

You can't beat them, love. The law's for the rich, the rest of us have to accept that as fact.¹³²

WOMBAT

Well, *I* don't!

WALLY

Please, love, *please*. You heard what he said. Just keep out of his way till this all blows over.

WOMBAT

I can't keep running, Dad, I *can't*.

(beat)

Won't.

(beat)

I'll get him to fix my car, if it's the last thing that I do.

WALLY

That's what I'm worried about...

She sees his expression of genuine fear.

WOMBAT

Oh... Oh, dad...

She hugs him, gently.

¹³² Wally here condoning category #6, 'Privilege abuse'.

24. EXT. WOMBAT'S HOUSE -- DAY

We see WOMBAT, with JOEY in tow and POSSUM in the pushchair, walking towards the shopping centre. She looks tired even before she starts; by contrast, Joey is hopping about. They pass the battered car with its bright yellow 'Non-Roadworthy Vehicle' sticker.

25. EXT. CENTRELINK OFFICE -- LATER

WOMBAT, JOEY and POSSUM on the busy sidewalk of the shopping centre, Joey looking tired now. There's still an oil-stain on the sidewalk outside the Centrelink office where her car was tipped over. The news-kiosk billboards show "Election Results", "Morrison: landslide victory" and (quotes) "A new era of responsibility"; once again Wombat takes no notice of this, but plods slowly past.¹³³

26. EXT. WOMBAT'S HOUSE -- LATER

WOMBAT returning down her street, trying to carry a now-exhausted JOEY and push a sleeping POSSUM in the pushchair, which contains only a few of the most basic own-label food-packets. A police station-wagon comes up from behind, passes her, and stops beside her car.

WOMBAT

(to herself)

Oh no, what *now*?

As she comes closer to the house, the car's occupants climb out. It's PLATT and KOHL.

PLATT

Afternoon, Mrs Hughes.

He sees her anxious face, and grins.

¹³³ The billboards again reporting the current developments in the *Yabbies* scenario, and Wombat again showing the single-mindedness of the real wombat.

PLATT (CONT'D)

Don't panic, no worries! Just we had a chat with Dingo this morning.

KOHL

After your little adventure in rich-man's-land.

PLATT

Seems like your friend with the fancy car may be more than just your common-or-garden dickhead.

KOHL

He's interesting, shall we say?

(beat)

S'pose you *could* call it interesting...

Platt notices the 'canary' on Wombat's car, then looks at it more closely.

PLATT

Uh-oh. Bull-in-a-china-shop been giving you grief, has he? Oh dear. Bit too conscientious, that lad.

(to Kohl)

Mick, kill the canary, will you?

Kohl nods, dives back into the police-car and pulls out a spray-can and a hand-held computer terminal. As the others look on, he sprays the sticker, peels it off, crumples it into a ball, tosses it into the back of the police-car and starts typing on the terminal. Platt explains to Wombat.

PLATT (CONT'D)

Correcting the records. Oops, what unfortunate irresponsibility on our part. But keep the car out of Bully-boy's sight, will you?

WOMBAT

(confused)

Which one?

KOHL

(grin)

Both?

Platt grins, then chews his own lip in concern.

PLATT

A bit worried about friend Cockie, to tell you the truth.
Looks like there might be something going down.

(beat)

Mind if we keep an eye on you for the while? Just
friendly, like? A couple of weeks?

Wombat is slightly taken aback.

WOMBAT

No - I mean yes, please do. Thank you. Uh, what do I
need to do?

PLATT

Nothing, really.

He moves to go back into his car, waving Kohl to do the same, Platt heading to the driver's side.

PLATT (CONT'D)

Just keep your eyes open, let us know straight away if
you have any kind of run-in with our lad. Or any of his
friends, for that matter.

Wombat nods as Platt climbs into the driver's side and starts the engine. Kohl winds down the
passenger-side window, with a slightly worried expression.

KOHL

Good luck.

Platt waves as they drive off. As their car disappears round the corner, Wombat notices an
envelope lying on the driver-seat of her car. She tries to open the driver-side door, but it's locked,

as are all the other doors.¹³⁴ She reaches in her bag for the keys, unlocks and opens the door, picks up the envelope. She turns it over: no message, no markings. She slits it open with her finger, to find that it contains a small bundle of bank-notes, though still no explanatory letter or note. She starts back, then quickly estimates the amount.

WOMBAT

(to herself)

The same as two weeks' money. Perhaps a bit more.
How did...? Who...?

She shakes her head with a bemused "what's going on?" expression. She pockets the envelope, returns to the sidewalk, and guides the children towards the house.

27. EXT. SHOPPING STREET -- DAY

The same shopping street, with the Centrelink office visible in the distance. It's the middle of a normal shopping day, so there are plenty of people about.

There's a gap in the line of parked cars; Cockie's car roars up, too fast, and swings neatly into the parking spot. COCKIE jumps out of the driver's side, swaggers round to the passenger-side, opens the door for MYNA with exaggerated bravado.

As Myna starts to come out of the seat, in perfect Hollywood-starlet style, she looks back, past Cockie, to WOMBAT, coming up fast, leaving JOEY and POSSUM with CAT in the background.

MYNA

Oh look, here's your girlfriend again.¹³⁵

Cockie spins round, to find Wombat already standing directly behind him.

¹³⁴ The idea here is that it can't have been Platt and Kohl, since they arrived after Wombat did. The overall setup is perhaps a bit *too* obvious, though... oh well!

¹³⁵ Category #7 'Isolation' - "controlling who the other sees" - with implicit #4 'Emotional abuse'...

WOMBAT

(calm but firm)

Excuse me, but *when* are you going to fix my car? I can't even drive it now.

Cockie is caught open-mouthed by the suddenness of the incident; he's about to launch into a snarl when Myna, still seated, interrupts from behind.

MYNA

(singsong voice)

She's after your car, you know...¹³⁶

He spins round to Myna, open-mouthed again, then turns back to Wombat.

COCKIE

(sneering)

What the fuck are *you* doing here? You shouldn't have any money by now.

WOMBAT

So it *was* you who dobbed me in to Centrelink.¹³⁷

(sadly)

You miserable fake. Piling one dishonesty on top of another.¹³⁸

COCKIE

(turning to anger)

Who the fuck d'you think you are? My fucking conscience?

¹³⁶ ...and category #4 'Emotional abuse' with #2 'Intimidation' via implied loss of personal property.

¹³⁷ Translation: 'dobbod me in' is 'informed on me' – or false information, in this case.

¹³⁸ This could be category #4 'Emotional abuse', except that it's more descriptive rather than for the purpose of 'propping self up by putting the other down'.

A small crowd is starting to gather; a heftily-built BYSTANDER intervenes.

BYSTANDER

Excuse, miss, is this bloke giving you trouble?

WOMBAT

No, but I'm trying to get him to repair the damage he did to my car.

COCKIE

Yeah, she's giving *me* fucking trouble.¹³⁹

BYSTANDER

Well, if you *did* damage her car, then you got responsibilities, mate.¹⁴⁰

COCKIE

Fuck that! What about my right to privacy, hey? My right to be here without being pestered by some fucking wombat? Or a dickhead like you?¹⁴¹

The crowd start jeering. In her own sarcastic way, Myna joins in from behind.

MYNA

Well done, Cockie, you've just won the popularity award for the week.

¹³⁹ Cockie trying to turn this into category #9 'Third-party abuse', by getting the bystander to turn on Wombat...

¹⁴⁰ ...but the attempt backfires, leaving Cockie no apparent option to go fully onto the attack – which backfires even further.

¹⁴¹ This exchange provides a quick overview of the complex trade-offs between rights and responsibilities – and the ways in which the concept of 'rights' can so easily be misused as a means to *evade* responsibilities.

She pulls her leg back inside the car and closes the door. Cockie is exposed, facing an increasingly angry crowd, and backed up against the car. He clenches and unclenches his fists, looking quickly from one face to another. There's nowhere to go.

COCKIE

Fuck off! Get fucked, the lot of you!

He edges towards the front of the car, then sprints round the front, pulls open the driver-side door, jumps in, slams the door shut, starts the engine. With a jeering crowd leaning over the car, he wrenches it out of the parking-spot and zooms off into the distance with screeching tyres at extreme acceleration.

DISSOLVE TO:

28. INT. COCKIE'S BAR -- EVENING

COCKIE roaring up in his car to the outside of the bar: it's some time later, and he's now on his own. He gets out, slams the bar door open. We now see the usual inside of the back-bar - except that SSU is sitting in Cockie's regular place, with her enforcers LONG and YIN to one side, and KAYBEE standing on the other, explaining something to her. MAGGIE and CROW are closer to the bar, with Maggie rather too obviously keeping Crow between himself and Yin.

Cockie glares at Kaybee, who replies with a "not my idea" shrug and palms-open gesture, and a sideways nod towards Ssu. Ssu leans back in her chair; Long and Yin shift posture slightly, ready for action against any moves; Maggie hides even further behind Crow.

SSU

Ah, the wanderer.¹⁴²

She taps her hands against the table, rises, glances toward Long and Yin.

¹⁴² Category #4 'Emotional abuse', ramped up to the full here - Ssu knows exactly what buttons to press to cause maximum pain to Cockie.

SSU (CONT'D)

I came to urge you to accept my proposal, but there seems little point in that.

She moves up to Cockie, gently rests a hand in the centre of his chest.¹⁴³ Subtly and silently, Long and Yin move to protective positions behind her.

SSU (CONT'D)

(sarcastic)

Such a big, strong man. Yet whose discipline is so *pathetic...*

She thrusts hard with her hand, sending Cockie reeling back, only just holding his balance. Kaybee, Long and Yin all drop to a fighter crouch; Crow leans back, while Maggie calls out from behind Crow's protective bulk.

MAGGIE

'Ere!

Cockie recovers his balance, if not his composure; no other action, though the sense remains of tightly-coiled springs on a hair-trigger.

SSU

...that he cannot control even one defenceless woman.

Her face shows utter disdain.

SSU (CONT'D)

Not *worthy* of alliance.

Keeping her eyes on Cockie, she calls to Yin and Long.

SSU (CONT'D)

Come.

¹⁴³ Note that this is a nominally-unintentional echo of Myna's action in the earlier scene as she left for her 'girls' night out' - though the degree of force and the end-results are radically different.

She sweeps toward the door, Yin and Long maintaining protective positions; Long opens the door, they leave. A moment's silence; then Cockie turns almost apoplectic.

COCKIE

(shouted)

What the *fuck* is going on here?

Maggie comes out from behind Crow; they both speak at once.

MAGGIE

Well, I...

CROW

Y'see, it's...

Kaybee waves them to silence.

KAYBEE

Her boys seen you up the shops, in another blue with that civvie sheila.

Cockie shakes his head, exasperated.

COCKIE

Shit! How does *she* get to hear everything I do?

He switches to fury.

COCKIE (CONT'D)

She wants discipline, I'll give her fucking discipline! I warned that wombat bitch, this time we're taking out her fucking kids!¹⁴⁴

¹⁴⁴ Classic 'displacement activity' here: Cockie knows he can't tackle Ssu, so he uses category #10 'Minimising, denying and blaming' to go after the easier target of Wombat; note also that he's escalating the violence to category #8, 'Using children'. He also tries to take it out on Kaybee, who defuses some of the tension by showing submission, allowing Cockie to again believe he's won this 'game'.

(beat)

Maggie, Crow, find out where she goes, find where she leaves 'em, then grab 'em. Kaybee, I want a cage set up at Wagtail's, we don't let 'em out till she begs for forgiveness. In front of Ssu. Get me?

Kaybee tries to remonstrate, arms forward, palms out.

KAYBEE

Boss, *please*. Going after civvies is not good tactics. Stuffs up the strategy, distracts from the game, takes us away from our real targets...

COCKIE

(interrupting)

So where's *your* fucking discipline, S-A-S man?

(sneering)

Ain't you supposed to *take* orders, not give 'em?

Palms still out, Kaybee pulls his head back, stopped; then lowers his arms, and nods acceptance. Cockie looks at all three in turn.

COCKIE (CONT'D)

Just get out there and do it, right? I'm off home, I don't want to hear another peep from any of you dickheads till it's fucking done.

He goes to the bistro door, opens it.

COCKIE (CONT'D)

Know what I mean?

He goes out and slams the door shut, leaving Maggie and Crow looking open-mouthed at Kaybee.

29. EXT. PLAYSCHOOL -- DAY

MAGGIE and CROW standing on the sidewalk beside a leafy hedge. Maggie looks pleased with himself, whilst Crow looks doubtful.¹⁴⁵

CROW

You saw her?

MAGGIE

Yeah!

CROW

With the kids?

MAGGIE

Yeah!

Crow points to the playschool sign, a couple of doors up the road.

CROW

Goin' in there?

MAGGIE

Yeah!

CROW

An' she left without 'em?

MAGGIE

Yeah!

CROW

You're sure of this?

¹⁴⁵ One point to perhaps note from this scene is that comedy and cluelessness can all too easily conceal what in reality may be – and is, in this case – literally life-threatening abuse.

MAGGIE

Yeah!

CROW

Where?

Maggie points to the same playschool sign.

MAGGIE

Just there!

(beat)

Why?

Crow shows a brief look of wry exasperation.

CROW

Just checkin'.

(beat)

Okay, what they look like?

MAGGIE

Who?

CROW

The kids.

MAGGIE

Oh.

(beat)

Why?

CROW

'Cos we need to know *which* kids to grab. There'll be dozens of the little buggers in there, won't there?

MAGGIE

Oh. Right. Well, there was a little one... and a bigger one... and... uh...

He trails off without managing any further description.

CROW

"A little one and a bigger one." Great. Well done mister master-spy, you've stuffed it up again.

MAGGIE

How?

CROW

'Cos we ain't got a clue which ones are hers.

MAGGIE

So?

CROW

So we can't just run in and grab, like Cockie wants. Be no bloody good if we grab the wrong ones, will it?

MAGGIE

Why not?

Crow shakes his head in exasperation.

CROW

Never mind.

A brief pause whilst Crow runs one hand through his thinning hair, in what passes for thinking.

CROW (CONT'D)

We're gonna have to get them to get them for us. And we're gonna have to do it quiet like.

Another thought-encrusted pause.

CROW (CONT'D)

Yeah, that's the way to do it.

He pulls out his mobile phone, sends a brief text-message, then turns to Maggie.

CROW (CONT'D)

Okay, Maggie, I got news for you: you're gonna be a dad.

Maggie wakes up and beams with pride; Crow briefly passes one hand across his brow in exasperation, takes a deep breath, gets ready to explain what to do.

30. INT. WOMBAT'S HOUSE -- MOMENTS LATER

The living-room in Wombat's house, littered with anatomical charts and heavyweight texts as well as the inevitable five-year-old's random dispersion of toys. WOMBAT, sitting beside the main table, picks up a chart and holds it facing away from CAT, who's slumped in classic student-fashion against the base of the sofa.

WOMBAT

Okay, your turn. Give me the brachial plexus and its nerves.

CAT

"The brachial plexus is formed from the spinal nerves from vertebrae C5 to T1." These nerves are responsible for the arm. They are the axillary, radial, ulnar and...

The phone in the hallway rings.

WOMBAT

Hold a second.

She gets up, goes into the hallway, picks up the phone.

WOMBAT (CONT'D)

Hello?

An indeterminate male voice, sounding perhaps disguised.

UNKNOWN

Ellen Hughes?

WOMBAT

Yes? Who's that?

UNKNOWN

Your children in daycare?

WOMBAT

Yes, but who...

UNKNOWN

Surveillance. Get them out! Now! *Now!*

The phone goes dead. Wombat looks at the handset for a brief moment, throws it back into the cradle, and runs out of the front door.

CAT (O/S)

Ellen? What's up? *Ellen?*

Cat comes out into the hallway, looking out of the door as Wombat disappears from sight.

31. INT. PLAYSCHOOL -- MOMENTS LATER

The entrance-hall of a childcare centre run inside an old Edwardian-period house with a through-corridor. The bell rings, a CHILDCARE worker opens the door. MAGGIE is standing in the doorway, trying (and failing) to look presentable, whilst CROW looms behind him.

MAGGIE

Arternoon, miss. I'm Mr Hughes, er...

(glances at Crow)

...Billy Hughes,¹⁴⁶ yeah, that's me name. I've, uh, come to pick up me kid. Kids.

The childcare worker looks at him with suspicion, though also with concern and a small amount of fear.

CHILDCARE

Phoebe and Joey?

MAGGIE

That's right, yeah.

CHILDCARE

I'll, I'll check if they're ready.

She moves back along the corridor, leans in to a side-room for a moment as if to talk to someone, then looks back at Maggie and Crow in suspicion again. She moves further down the corridor to a room where children can be heard chanting.

In the meantime, another five-year-old boy scuttles up to the front door and sticks out his tongue at Maggie - the tongue is bright blue¹⁴⁷ - then scuttles away again as Maggie bends down and takes a swipe at him in a pecking-like movement.

MAGGIE

Gerroutofit, you little horror!

Perhaps a little too obviously, Maggie resumes his 'grinning caring father' pose. At the far end of the corridor, the childcare worker reappears, without the children, and another worker leans out of the room to look at Maggie and Crow. Behind them, the back door opens, though from this far view we can't see who comes in.

¹⁴⁶ Billy Hughes is the name of a well-known former Australian Prime Minister - probably the only name Maggie could remember in the circumstances.

¹⁴⁷ The blue-tongue lizard is common throughout eastern Australia - back to the Dreamtime metaphor again, even in this small example!

32. EXT. PLAYSCHOOL -- CONTINUOUS

Looking from the rear of the childcare centre, we see it's WOMBAT who's appeared at the back door, somewhat out of breath. The CHILDCARE worker turns to her, speaking fast, slightly nervous.

CHILDCARE

Oh, Mrs Hughes, good, it's you. Some man at the front says he's your husband, asking for the children. We didn't know him, so we thought we'd best...

Taking care to keep herself as hidden as possible, Wombat glances past the childcare worker.

WOMBAT

(interrupting)

He's not - he's a thug who works for a man I've had a fight with. Call the police, quickly, *please!*

CHILDCARE

We already have, but...

WOMBAT

Keep them busy, give us time to get away. Please.
Now!

The childcare worker turns round, nods to her colleague at the side-door, closes the back door. A moment later, a door to one side, along the back verandah, is opened by the other worker, carrying a sleepy POSSUM and a slightly bewildered and excited JOEY. She passes the children to Wombat.

WOMBAT (CONT'D)

Thank you!

(to Joey)

Come on, we're going home now.

The second childcare worker waves as they go out of the side-gate, concealed from the front by a row of high shrubs.

33. INT. PLAYSCHOOL -- CONTINUOUS

MAGGIE and CROW still standing in the front doorway of the childcare centre. The CHILDCARE worker comes up the corridor to meet them, with the second worker following behind her, and another older woman looking out from the side-room. The sound of children chanting in the backroom can be clearly heard.

CHILDCARE

The, uh, children are having their nap just now. Could you come back in half an hour or so?

MAGGIE

Uh... right... yeah...

Crow leans forward, whispers in Maggie's ear.

CROW

Bloody *listen*, will you? Kids ain't sleepin' - they're bullshittin' us.

Maggie looks up at Crow, then turns back to the childcare worker with clenched fists.

MAGGIE

(indignant)

'Ere! You can't do that! I'm their dad!

A police siren can be heard faintly in the distance.

CHILDCARE

(exasperated but cautious)

Look, we don't know you from a bar of soap.¹⁴⁸ We can't just let you walk in and take the children away, can we? Be reasonable.

¹⁴⁸ Translation: "I have no idea who you are" - another happy Australianism here.

The siren is getting louder and closer; another siren joins in from another direction. Maggie glares at the childcare worker, but she stands her ground.

CHILDCARE (CONT'D)

I'm afraid we must insist you show us something, some form of I-D, that proves you *are* their father.

Maggie puffs himself up like a bullfrog, aiming for bluster rather than force; but the sirens are getting closer.

CROW

Outatime, Maggie! Get the hell outta here!

He grabs hold of Maggie and pulls him backwards down the path; then they both run off down the street as a siren slows and comes toward the childcare centre from the opposite direction.

34. INT. WOMBAT'S HOUSE -- LATER

The hallway in Wombat's house. There's a rattle of keys, and the door opens, showing WOMBAT holding POSSUM, with JOEY beside her. She gently pushes Joey through the door as CAT appears in the doorway to the living-room.

WOMBAT

In you come, Joey love, there's a good boy.

The words are calm, but there's an edge of near-panic in her voice. She deadlocks the door and slips the security-chain across.

CAT

Ellen, what's going on!

WOMBAT

Wait... Please, wait?

(to children)

Okay, kids, let's have a nap now, shall we?

Cat follows Wombat down the hall and into the children's room, where she helps tuck them in. They move back out into the hallway.

WOMBAT (CONT'D)

That man Cockie. He sent his men after the children.

CAT

The *children*?

They move into the living room, where Cat clears enough papers from the sofa for Wombat to be able to sit down, then runs out of the room. Wombat sits, running her hands through her hair for a moment; then Cat returns with a drink, hands it to her, kneels in front of her.

WOMBAT

I think they were trying to kidnap them. I've no idea why.

CAT

But the *children*!

WOMBAT

All I want is for him to fix my car, just like he said he would, after he broke it.

CAT

This is crazy! Can't the police do anything?

WOMBAT

No. Everyone knows he's doing it, but there's no proof. He'd just claim his 'rights', and they're stuck.¹⁴⁹

CAT

Ellen, we've got to stop him. We can't let him get away with this!

¹⁴⁹ A good illustration of the real ways in which 'rights' are used as a means to evade responsibilities.

WOMBAT

I can't. I can't risk the children.

She's only just managing to hold back the tears, her face a mixture of frustration, fear, anger and defeat.

WOMBAT (CONT'D)

The children...¹⁵⁰

Cat sits up, with a determined expression.¹⁵¹

CAT

(firm)

Where does he live?

WOMBAT

Twenty-nine Coral Waters.

CAT

Huh. Fancies himself, does he?

Wombat's expression shifts to concern as she sees the determined look on Cat's face.

WOMBAT

Cat, you're not... No... Please... Please don't do anything...

CAT

Ellen, we've got to. It's not just you or the kids, or me, for that matter. Who'd be next if we don't stop this right now?

¹⁵⁰ Cockie has finally found a leverage-point through which Wombat must 'submit' ...

¹⁵¹ ...but also the point at which others will at last take action on her behalf.

She reaches out to stroke Wombat's hair in a soothing manner. Wombat bows her head in acceptance.

CAT (CONT'D)

This isn't about you any more. In fact it's best if you stay out of this from now on. But if he wants a fight, he's going to get one!

She stands up, angrily, moving her hands as if flexing her claws.¹⁵²

DISSOLVE TO:

35. INT. COCKIE'S HOUSE -- DAY

The hallway at Cockie's house, much as at the start of the previous scene. The bell sounds, followed by a loud hammering on the door. COCKIE swaggers up to the door, wrenches it open, to find an angry CAT on the doorstep. Two other women stand behind her; perhaps twenty or thirty more women and men are standing further back towards the roadway. A roar of anger wells up from the crowd as the door opens.

COCKIE

What the fuck...?

CAT

(seething)

We know who you are. We're watching you...¹⁵³

Cockie slams the door in her face, muting but not entirely silencing the noise of the crowd. MYNA calls out to him from the living-room, in a lazy, sarcastic voice.

MYNA (O/S)

You've picked up a nice little fan-club out there.¹⁵⁴

¹⁵² The Dreamtime metaphor again: the cat is loose...!

¹⁵³ Technically this is category #2 'Intimidation', of course...

(beat)

Or is it your girlfriend's repo-men coming for Cockie's pretty little car?¹⁵⁵

(beat)

Looks like your girlfriend isn't there, though.¹⁵⁶

Cockie yells back, angrily, still facing the door.

COCKIE

Shut the fuck up, will you?¹⁵⁷

(to himself)

Shit! *Shit!*

Myna's voice follows him as he storms down the corridor towards the back of the house.

MYNA (O/S)

That's right, fly away Cockie, fly away to your nice safe little roost, leave me to tidy up your mess again...¹⁵⁸

Cockie has already gone. A door slams, then there's the sound of a high-powered engine starting up, revved wildly, followed by squealing tyres fading into the distance.

36. INT. COCKIE'S BAR -- LATER

KAYBEE, MAGGIE and CROW in the back-bar, drinks on the table, cigarettes smouldering in the ashtray.

¹⁵⁴ ...to which Myna adds her own category #4 'Emotional abuse'...

¹⁵⁵ ...#2 'Intimidation' (threat of loss of property)...

¹⁵⁶ ...and #7 'Isolation' (using jealousy to limit who the other sees)...

¹⁵⁷ ...against which Cockie has no immediate release, hence flight is the only apparent option...

¹⁵⁸ ...and Myna grabs the chance to maximise her 'win'.

MAGGIE

(pleading)

We tried, honest we did.

KAYBEE

(dry)

Yeah, sure. Don't suppose you heard of the word 'subtlety', have you?

MAGGIE

Wassat?

Kaybee shakes his head in wry amusement, Crow his in near-disgust.

CROW

Dunno what happened, Kaybee. Cops bloody everywhere. Cottoned on to us real fast.

KAYBEE

An' you're surprised, with Maggie here tryin' to pretend to be the kids' Big Daddy? He'd be more believable tryin' to play Big Bird on Sesame Street, for heavens' sake! Might have more luck with the two of you dressed up as Bananas in Pyjamas...¹⁵⁹ at least you'd look less stupid than you usually are...

(beat)

Sheesh. Cockie is *not* gonna be happy 'bout this.

The bistro door slams open as COCKIE storms in.

¹⁵⁹ A long-running Australian children's television series. Its two lead-characters are indeed bananas in pyjamas - labeled 'B1' and B2' respectively - who have various harmless low-key adventures. I'm delighted to say that I've never seen the programme, that I gather it's very popular with three-year-olds or so.

MAGGIE

Uh, boss, we...

COCKIE

Shut it! You fucked up again, you dickheads!¹⁶⁰

CROW

How'd you...?

COCKIE

'Cos I had a whole bunch of whingeing women outside my place, that's how!

(beat)

At *my* place! *No-one* does that to me! *Ever!*

He slams his fists down on the table.

COCKIE (CONT'D)

I've had enough of that fucking wombat!

(to Maggie and Crow)

You two, get the fuck out there an' take her out!¹⁶¹

KAYBEE

Not a good idea, boss, too visible, too much attention...

Cockie turns on Kaybee, shouting.

COCKIE

Did I ask your fucking opinion?

Kaybee holds up his palms in submission.

¹⁶⁰ Cockie here goes straight into category #2 'Intimidation' and the full-on 'blaming' aspect of #10 'Minimising, denying and blaming'...

¹⁶¹ ...and uses the 'blaming' as an excuse to escalate to the extreme of #1 'Coercion and threats'.

CROW

Uh... I don't think...

COCKIE

Did I hear you say 'think'? You're not paid to fucking think, you're paid to do! Now get out there and fucking do! Do her in! *Now!*

Kaybee shakes his head in the background, as if mentally washing his hands of the whole thing.

KAYBEE

(quietly, to himself)

It'll only make things worse...

Still raging, Cockie ignores him.

MAGGIE

(tentative)

But... How do we do it, boss?

COCKIE

I pay you to think, don't I? So fucking think of something!

Maggie and Crow look at each other in confusion, then back at Cockie.

COCKIE (CONT'D)

Get out there! Do it! Go! Now! *Go!*¹⁶²

¹⁶² Note the codependent relationship here: Cockie has ordered the violence, but won't actually do it; Maggie and Crow will enact the violence, but can claim that they 'were only following orders'. This sets up a perfect mutual category #9 'Third-party abuse' and #10 'Minimising, denying and blaming', in which each party can deny responsibility and blame the other - a common 'game' in abusive cultures.

Maggie and Crow flinch backward for a moment, then sprint (or, in Maggie's case, make a fast waddle) for the door. As the door closes behind them, Cockie slumps into his chair, hands in his lap, a glazed expression on his face. Kaybee saunters down to the bar.¹⁶³

KAYBEE

Croc? Think he needs a whisky. Just a single for now.

CROC appears at the bar, glass in hand.

CROC

On the slate?

KAYBEE

On the slate.

CROC

When's he gonna pay the slate?

KAYBEE

Somehow I don't think this is a good time to ask?

He nods toward Cockie, who now has his elbows on the table, head held between his hands in exasperation.

KAYBEE (CONT'D)

(to Croc)

Reckon it's time we cooled things down a bit, don't you?

He saunters back towards Cockie with the whisky-glass.

¹⁶³ This brief interaction about need, the 'slate', and paying, is also a setup for a contrast later, in the next phase of the *Yabbies* scenario.

37. EXT. BACK STREET -- EVENING

A dimly-lit back street, with a row of older cars lining the sidewalk. MAGGIE and CROW are wandering down the street, stopping by some of the cars, apparently checking them out. Maggie is moving in a would-be furtive manner that would be immediately suspicious to anyone happening by, but there's no-one other than themselves in the street.

CROW

This is friggin' stupid - I'm a standover man,¹⁶⁴ not a bloody child molester! You tell me, Maggie - why the hell we doin' this?

MAGGIE

'Cos we do what we's told, like we oughta.

CROW

You didn't do what you was told when you was in the skin-game wi' Rabbit Kowalski¹⁶⁵, did ya?

MAGGIE

Hey, hang on, that's different.

CROW

Why?

MAGGIE

I was just sampling the merchandise, that's all.

¹⁶⁴ In Melbourne gangland-speak, an enforcer and professional intimidator - usually with threatened or actual violence.

¹⁶⁵ Somehow Rabbit seems an appropriate name for a pimp...!

CROW

Sticking it where it weren't wanted, more like. Rabbit nearly had your friggin' tackle for that, yeah? An' I don't blame him, you daft prick. Bloody lucky not to lose it.

(beat)

We'll be bloody lucky not to lose the lot if Cockie keeps on goin' this way...

He looks more closely at the car that they're passing, and pulls a long thin strip of plastic from his jacket.

CROW (CONT'D)

Look, we're wasting time. This one'll do.

MAGGIE

No, no, you can't do that!

CROW

For crysake, what's got into your tiny mind *now*?

Maggie points to a football-club membership sticker in the car window. The sticker shows black-and-white stripes and a magpie.¹⁶⁶

MAGGIE

Can't nick this one - look, he's a Collingwood supporter!
Fully financial,¹⁶⁷ too.

(shouts excitedly)

Go the 'Pies!

¹⁶⁶ All of the clubs in the Australian Rules football league have their own symbol of some kind: in Collingwood's case it's the magpie - hence the club's abbreviated nickname of 'the 'Pies'. It seems apposite that Maggie would be a supporter: not only does the club manage to arouse extraordinary emotions in football fans - every bit as much against, in derision, as in exuberant support - but it's also his own totem-animal in Dreamtime terms.

¹⁶⁷ Translation: full paid-up member.

Crow grabs at him, throwing a hand over Maggie's mouth.

CROW

(hissed)

Shut up, you idiot! You wanna wake the whole street?

Crow releases Maggie's mouth, but keeps it close by for a moment in case Maggie starts shouting again. He doesn't.

MAGGIE

Oh. Sorry.

Crow shakes his head, and moves to the next car in line, a beaten-up old ute¹⁶⁸ with a hefty bull-bar in front.

CROW

(sarcastic)

Am I allowed to touch this one? Any more objections?

Maggie shakes his head.

CROW (CONT'D)

Thank Christ for that.

He flicks the strip of plastic down the side of the window. There's a click as the door-lock is pushed aside.

CROW (CONT'D)

"The Lord giveth and the Lord taketh away." Well, us, actually, but it comes to the same thing.

He opens the door, pulls a bundle of skeleton-keys from his pocket, pushes one into the keylock.

¹⁶⁸ Translation: 'utility-truck', smallish pick-up truck. Out in country Australia, where cattle have a penchant for sleeping in the middle of the road, and kangaroos and wallabies may run across in front without warning, a bull-bar or 'roo-bar' is a near necessity; but in the city the bull-bar is much more of a hazard to pedestrians - which presumably is Crow's point here.

CROW (CONT'D)

Car, meet your new owners.

MAGGIE

Hey, I wanna drive!

CROW

(sighs)

Yes, Maggie, you can drive.

He reaches through, flicks up the passenger-side lock, walks round to that side of the car, opens the door. He calls out to Maggie, who's still standing gormlessly on the driver's side.

CROW (CONT'D)

C'mon, get a move on, we ain't got all day.

They both get in the car; Maggie starts the engine, and they move off, closing the doors as they go.

38. INT. WOMBAT'S HOUSE -- EVENING

The hallway to Wombat's house, with the phone sitting on the hallway table. It's dim: there's only a standby light. Nobody home. The phone rings, four cycles, then the answering machine cuts in.

WOMBAT (AUDIO)

Hi, you've reached Ellen and Cat. Leave us a message.

The 'record-message' bleep sounds; then the same indeterminate male voice as before.

UNKNOWN (AUDIO)

Ellen! Watch your back!

The phone clicks dead. Silence returns, as the red message-light blinks out its unheard warning.

39. EXT. STREET BESIDE PARK -- LATER

Moving through the shopping street, seen from inside the stolen ute as MAGGIE and CROW cruise around, looking for Wombat. Maggie is driving - more accurately, is behind the steering-wheel, because they're wandering all over the road, Maggie looking round almost everywhere but in front. Crow is in the passenger-seat, with an expression that shows he's on a short fuse and about to explode.

CROW

Maggie! Keep your bloody eyes on the road!

Maggie turns toward him, gesticulating wildly.

MAGGIE

I tell ya, she's 'ere somewhere! I can feel 'er! I'm clever, I am!

A blaring horn brings Maggie's attention to another near-miss with another car. He screams out of the window at the other driver.

MAGGIE (CONT'D)

Gerroff the road, ya dickhead! 'S *my* right of way!¹⁶⁹

(muttered to self)

Bloody Sunday drivers...

CROW

(contemptuous)

It ain't Sunday, Maggie.

MAGGIE

So?

¹⁶⁹ Another all-too-common example of a routine misuse of 'rights'.

CROW

So friggin' *drive*, will you? Leave the shouting to me?

Maggie slumps into a sulk.

MAGGIE

(muttered)

Huh. Never bloody listens to me. Never credits my superior skill. Not fair. Why should *he* be tellin' me what to do?

They move out of the shopping-strip and past the start of the park. Maggie suddenly perks up.

MAGGIE (CONT'D)

Look! See, I *tolja!* I *tolja!*

On the opposite sidewalk, some distance up ahead and walking away from them, are WOMBAT and CAT, carrying study-bags and chattering as they go. Maggie slows down, following them from some distance behind. Another car, following behind, is forced to swerve past Maggie's ute. As that car passes them, Wombat and Cat glance along the road, then start to cross.

MAGGIE (CONT'D)

Gotcha!

Leaning forward, with a gleefully triumphant expression, Maggie slams the car into gear, floors the gas-pedal. With a squeal of tyres, the ute leaps forward, weaving wildly from side to side as Maggie struggles to keep the car aimed straight at Wombat. Cat leaps back to the sidewalk in a single bound,¹⁷⁰ whilst Wombat stays frozen in the middle of the road,¹⁷¹ brightly lit by the oncoming headlights.

¹⁷⁰ The agility of the real cat...

¹⁷¹ ...and the equally typical behaviour of the real wombat...

At the last moment, just before the car hits her, she jumps *up*,¹⁷² landing on the car's bonnet, sliding to sprawl across the windshield, completely blocking the forward view, with her face looking straight at Maggie. He panics: he lets go of the steering wheel, trying to cover his face.

MAGGIE (CONT'D)

The eyes!¹⁷³ Crow! Help! She can see me!

There's a crunch and a lurch as the car bounces over the edge of the sidewalk. Crow makes a grab for the steering-wheel, which is spinning out of control; the ute lurches wildly from side to side.

CROW

(shouted)

Shut up! Just drive!

(beat)

No! Stop! Stop! *Stop!*

Past Wombat's flailing legs, Crow sees what's coming up fast: the trees of the park. On reflex, Maggie slams on the brakes; Wombat rolls off to the side. A moment later, the ute piles head-on into a tree.

An *interesting* pause.

Steam rises from the crumpled front of the ute. Some way behind, Wombat rises unsteadily to her feet, as Cat leaps the park fence and runs to her aid. With a creak of crumpled metal, the ute's

¹⁷² ...whilst this *isn't* typical wombat-behaviour, of course – though it *is* typical in the sense that if you hit a wombat with a car, it may well be the car that comes off worst. A wombat is like a dense ball of muscle with a kind of cartilage armour-plate just under the skin on the back; I've even heard of one that managed to survive being hit by a five-ton truck, whilst the truck itself was a write-off. Wombats are tough – as Maggie and Crow are in the midst of discovering.

¹⁷³ One of the few things that will dissuade a magpie from its springtime swooping-attacks is a large pair of eyes. Schools and shops sell self-adhesive stickers to put on bicycle helmets; in the older days, post-office telegram delivery-riders used to stitch large cloth eye-badges onto their official uniform caps. It looks bizarre, but it works – as indicated by Maggie's response here, too.

doors fall open, and Maggie and Crow stagger out of the wreckage. Holding himself upright with both hands against the car, Crow takes a deep breath, starts to launch into a tirade.

CROW (CONT'D)

You're a fuckwit, Maggie! A total bloody fuckwit! You...

He's interrupted by a screech of brakes back at the roadside, as an unmarked police car comes to a squealing halt, and BULL and SHEPPARD leap out.

CROW (CONT'D)

...shit! Where'd they come from? Run, Maggie, *run!*

He disappears into the bushes, followed by Maggie, limping as fast as he can. Moments later, Bull charges past in hot pursuit, whilst Sheppard stops to help Cat with Wombat.

40. INT. EMERGENCY ROOM -- LATER

The typical clutter of a booth in the minor-injuries section of a hospital emergency-department. WOMBAT is having a few grazes and bruises attended to by a NURSE.

NURSE

That's it for now. See your doctor next week for another checkup.

WOMBAT

I'm fine, thank you. I can look after myself.

NURSE

Don't kid yourself. You were lucky to get out of that alive.

Visible through the curtain of the booth is a television, facing the reception area beyond.

ANNOUNCER

...this urgent newsflash. The Prime Minister has appealed for calm following the total failure of the worldwide monetary network...¹⁷⁴

Neither Wombat or the nurse appear to hear this.

41. INT. COCKIE'S BAR -- DAY

COCKIE and KAYBEE seated in their usual places at the far side of the back bar, Kaybee with notebook open, nodding and taking details down as Cockie dictates, in a voice too quiet for us to hear. In the background we can hear the television still on its incessant sports-channel.

A pause; Cockie looks up, Kaybee continues writing.

COCKIE

Where the fuck are those idiots?

Kaybee looks up from his note-taking.

KAYBEE

Got a garbled text said they'd had some problem, but yeah, should be here by now?

Cockie gets up and starts to pace around, irritable, fists clenched.

COCKIE

Something's wrong...

Over in the front bar there are shouts of "Hey!" "What?", "Huh?", as the TV sports-reporting suddenly stops. There's an attention-grabbing chord, then the single voice of what sounds more

¹⁷⁴ This is the key transition in the *Yabbies* scenario: with the country effectively bankrupt, and all 'normal' control-options unavailable, Morrison's government switches over to a responsibility-based economy rather than the possession-based or money-based economy that we would at present think of as 'normal'.

like a news commentator than sports, but too quiet to hear from the back bar. The barkeep CROC howls out loud.

CROC (O/S)

Take *everything*? From *everyone*? How can they do that?

(beat)

Shit, they can, too. They have.¹⁷⁵

(beat)

Bloody 'ell.

Croc swings into view.

CROC (CONT'D)

'Ere, Cockie, Kaybee, you better come listen to this.

He ducks back into the front area as Cockie and Kaybee move towards the bar. There's another agonised wail from Croc in the background as the not-quite-audible voice of the announcer continues.

CROC (O/S) (CONT'D)

*No money?*¹⁷⁶ How'm I s'posed to run this place?
People still want the stuff but they ain't gonna pay for it?

¹⁷⁵ This is the crux of the *Yabbies* scenario. The means by which the government pushes through the transition is the (real) Federal Emergency Management Act, which – according to the current wording of the Act, at least – really does allow the Emergency Commissioner to requisition any property “as he sees fit”, up to and including every single item of property in the country. In effect, the country transitions to a literal ‘commonwealth’ by a single stroke of the pen. For simplicity – amongst many other more serious reasons – the clash with the current possession-based law of property is resolved by stating that the present ‘owner’ retains the responsibility for that item, on behalf of the commonwealth; but in case of any dispute, the actual ‘possessor’ is the commonwealth. The way this would work in practice would be a great deal more subtle than that, of course, but it would probably be very close in structure and principle to another existing system of law that is *already* technically valid in large areas of Australia, namely Aboriginal law.

Cockie and Kaybee lean over the bar to get a glimpse of the television.

ANNOUNCER

...only alternative to martial law in this international emergency...

A ticker at the base of the television screen shows '...in accordance with Federal Emergency Management Act 1986...'. Cockie leans away from the bar, pulls Kaybee towards him.

COCKIE

No fucking money means we ain't running neither.¹⁷⁷
Best get out there, read the street, find out what the fuck's going on.

KAYBEE

On my way, boss.

He heads to the door as a snort of bitter laughter comes from behind the bar.

CROC (O/S)

Responsibility? "What you need"? Whatever dickhead dreamed this one up ain't never tried runnin' no bar.

(beat)

Bugger this for a laugh. *Last orders*, jennelmen, please?

¹⁷⁶ The *Yabbies* scenario again: a direct corollary of a shift to a responsibility-based economy is that the whole concept of money becomes redundant. This point is not easy for most people to grasp – as Croc makes clear in his following comments.

¹⁷⁷ Unlike Croc, Cockie *does* grasp what it means – including the bald fact that his entire 'business model' has just vanished into nothingness.

42. INT. COCKIE'S BAR -- EVENING

COCKIE sitting in his usual place in the bar, alone, reading the sports pages of the newspaper, his mobile phone on the table in front of him. He's visibly tense. The background television is off, and there's no sound of other people in the front bar. The barkeep CROC can occasionally be seen moving behind the bar, tidying up.

MAGGIE and CROW enter, somewhat unwillingly, pushed through the door by KAYBEE.

COCKIE

Well, well, look what the cat dragged in. Where the fuck have you been? Did you get the bitch?

MAGGIE

Uh... sorta...

KAYBEE

(firm)

Tell him, Maggie.

MAGGIE

Well, we got this car, y'see, an' we seed her, an' we took a swipe at her, an'...

CROW

He missed.

MAGGIE

I didn't! I got her, I did!

CROW

Yeah. An' you got so excited you totalled the bloody car, not her.

(to Cockie)

Reckon she was no more'n bruised, boss - couldn't see no more 'cos we had to run like shit, bloody cops was

after us. Got onto us so quick they musta bin watchin' her.

KAYBEE

(sarcastic)

They probably were, after your last little stuff-up.

Cockie jumps up from his chair, visibly getting frantic.

COCKIE

For fuck's sake, can't you do *anything* right? Get out there! Finish the fucker! Do it! *Now!*

CROW

No.

COCKIE

You *what?*

MAGGIE

We was only in it for the money, same's you. And there ain't no money no more, so why *should* we do what you tell us?¹⁷⁸ Anyway, we ain't goin' after women and children no more, not for no-one. We got our pride.¹⁷⁹

(pause)

So we're off, thankyouverymuch.

Losing himself to fury, Cockie pulls out his automatic.

¹⁷⁸ Amazingly, Maggie seems to have grasped this specific corollary of the ending of the possession-based economy.

¹⁷⁹ This wonderfully scrambled set of morals is actually typical of many gangland-style sub-cultures, from the Mafia to the Hell's Angels and beyond.

COCKIE

Like fuck you are! You get out there, you do what I
fucking well say, or I'll blow your fucking brains out!¹⁸⁰

Crow and Maggie cringe towards the door, as Kaybee calmly walks into the line of fire.

KAYBEE

No, boss. No. Not here, not now. Too many
witnesses. Too messy. Cool it. Cool it, okay?

Cockie slumps back into his chair, the gun-arm clattering onto the table. Still shielded by Kaybee,
Crow and Maggie scarpers out of the door.

KAYBEE (CONT'D)

(to the bar)

Croc? Whisky, please? Make it a double. An' a light
for me?

He saunters down to the bar as Croc appears with the drinks.

CROC

Guess you do *need* these, huh?¹⁸¹

Kaybee grins, then returns with the glasses to the table where Cockie sits listlessly, head
slumped, still holding the gun. He sits down opposite Cockie, gently pries Cockie's hand off the
pistol, wraps the hand round the whisky-glass instead, then puts the pistol into his own pocket.¹⁸²

¹⁸⁰ Having failed so far to 'win' his abuse-game against Wombat, Cockie shifts from a mutual category #10 'Minimising, denying and blaming' with Maggie and Crow to direct, overt #2 'Intimidation' and #1 'Coercion and threats'.

¹⁸¹ A contrast to the previous setup about paying the 'slate', even Croc here is beginning to grasp the 'need' concepts of the responsibility-based economy.

¹⁸² This is a necessary action for safety, of course, but it's also a setup for later.

KAYBEE

C'mon, boss, get your act together. Forget those fuckwits, we got some serious thinking to do.

With a face oscillating between fury and desperation, Cockie downs the whisky in a single gulp, and slams the glass down onto the table.

COCKIE

Right. Shoot.¹⁸³

KAYBEE

If money's out of the game, we gotta work out how to reshape the game, and fast, before some other bugger takes over. Rethink our alliances...

Cockie's phone shrills to indicate an incoming message. He glances at it, does a double-take to look at it again.

COCKIE

(shouted)

Oh fuck! *No!!*

He jumps up, almost screaming, and runs toward the door. Kaybee spins the phone round to look at the screen.

KAYBEE

Oh shit...

He knocks his chair over as he runs out after Cockie. As he goes, we see a close-up of the message.

MYNA (V/O)

"Had a better offer, so goodbye to you and your cheap possessions".

¹⁸³ I couldn't miss this rather neat pun!

DISSOLVE TO:

43. INT. COCKIE'S HOUSE -- LATER

The entry-way to Cockie's house, with the front door wide open. We hear screeching brakes and car doors slammed, then COCKIE comes running through the doorway, closely followed by KAYBEE.

The house has been stripped: furniture, furnishings and decorations have all been taken.¹⁸⁴ Cockie goes into the bedroom: the bed is gone, but the remnants of his clothes are lying on the bare floor, sliced into pieces as if by a samurai sword.¹⁸⁵ Down the hallway his books and magazines lie scattered, sliced into confetti.

They enter the main room. All that's left is the display-case; but it's been smashed to the floor, with a sledgehammer embedded in the crushed remains of the model Maserati. Neatly tied to the handle by a pink ribbon is a note in careful calligraphy: "Goodbye and good riddance".¹⁸⁶

Cockie stands still for a long moment, staring at the wreckage, with Kaybee keeping a respectful distance behind; then switches to fury.

COCKIE

This is all that fucking wombat's fault!¹⁸⁷ I'll fix her! I'll
fucking fix her!

He grabs the sledgehammer and runs to the door, slamming it behind him as he goes.

KAYBEE

No, Cockie, no!

¹⁸⁴ Category #3 'Economic abuse', in the form of 'domestic theft' – disturbingly common in relationship-breakdown...

¹⁸⁵ ...to which Myna and her aides have added #2 'Intimidation' in the form of destruction of personal property...

¹⁸⁶ ...and Myna's own personalised #4 'Emotional abuse'.

¹⁸⁷ Again, this is classic 'displacement activity': too hard to strike back directly, so pick on an easier target to attack as proxy.

He runs after Cockie, but too late: with squealing tyres and engine screaming, Cockie is gone. Kaybee shakes his head, then slowly, almost sadly, pulls out his phone, dials a number, then holds the phone to his ear.

44. EXT. WOMBAT'S HOUSE -- LATER

Outside Wombat's house, a quiet suburban street, the late evening just turned to dark. Cars parked up and down the road outside the houses, Wombat's car among them. There's no-one out; nothing moves. The peace is shattered by Cockie's car careering down the street at full speed, coming to a screeching halt sideways across the road outside the house.

COCKIE all but falls out of the car, clutching the sledgehammer to him more like a child's security-blanket than a weapon.

COCKIE

(screamed)

Where are you, you fucking wombat? Come on out,
you bitch, you gonna get what's coming to ya!

Outside-lights go on in houses up and down the street, though not at Wombat's. Cockie lets go of the sledgehammer with one hand, letting the head fall to the ground. Leaning forward, using the sledgehammer almost as an anchor to keep himself steady, and waving his other arm toward the house, Cockie continues his rant.

COCKIE (CONT'D)

Gonna get you for what you done to me!

People start to come out of their houses and stare at the scene, but still no response from Wombat.

Struggling to stay upright, and almost in tears, Cockie picks up the sledgehammer again, clutches it to his chest. He returns to fury: swinging the hammer wide, he slams it into the front of Wombat's car.¹⁸⁸

¹⁸⁸ The car is used as the only available proxy in Cockie's last attempt to 'win' the abuse-game.

COCKIE (CONT'D)

You want me to fix your car? I'll *fix* your fucking car!

Sirens can be heard in the far distance. Becoming more and more frenzied by the moment, Cockie slams the sledgehammer into the car again and again: windscreen, bonnet, side-windows, side-panels, everywhere.

COCKIE (CONT'D)

I'll fix it... I'll fix it... fix it...

The hammer-head breaks off; he continues flailing at the car with the remainder of the handle.

COCKIE (CONT'D)

...fix... fix...

Cockie comes to an exhausted halt just as the first police cars arrive. He lets the hammer drop to the ground, and slumps to the ground himself, weeping. Several police, including BULL, SHEPPARD, PLATT and KOHL, come over to him as, almost unnoticed, WOMBAT appears silhouetted in her doorway, holding POSSUM and with JOEY clinging to her clothes.

Sheppard moves to stand guard at the gateway, whilst Platt and Bull gently lift the unresisting Cockie to his feet, and lead him towards a police-van. Halfway there, he seems to recover himself enough to struggle for a brief moment, but relapses back into his weeping as they load him into the van.

With children in tow, and CAT now behind her, Wombat comes out of the house to stand, shaking her head in incomprehension, beside the wreckage of her car.

45. INT. COCKIE'S BAR -- LATER

The usual scene at Cockie's bar, except that now it's MYNA sitting in Cockie's place, with KAYBEE seated beside her, talking through various papers, though we don't hear what they're saying. A change of management, but otherwise it's business-as-usual.

SSU enters, flanked as usual by LONG and YIN. Myna and Kaybee both rise in greeting; a brief pause, then Myna bows, Ssu bows in return. Myna waves Ssu to the seat in front of her.

MYNA

Please.

Myna sits as Kaybee pulls out the chair for Ssu, who sits down, facing her across the table. Kaybee remains standing; likewise Long and Yin.

SSU

An invitation to combine forces? Agreed - except there shall be no doubt as to who is the senior partner here. Ever. I trust you understand this?¹⁸⁹

Myna flinches for a moment, then recovers composure, though her face remains pale.

MYNA

Yes.

SSU

Good. We proceed.

She gets up from her chair, starts to pace up and down.

SSU (CONT'D)

In the new order, your associate's obsession with mere party-drugs would be a waste of effort.

(to Kaybee)

I congratulate you on removing him from the picture. He and his childish aversion to heroin need bother us no more.

Kaybee nods in acknowledgement.

¹⁸⁹ Ssu here demonstrates her mastery of category #2 'Intimidation' and #1 'Coercion and threats'. Elsewhere in this sequence she also illustrates extremes forms of every other category (except perhaps #8 'Using children') - though always in a 'hands-off' form, issuing orders rather than doing any of the violence herself.

KAYBEE

Sure. But how do we make our customers pay?
There's no money no more.

Ssu grasps the back of the chair, looking alternately at Myna and Kaybee.

SSU

Do not doubt this: we need addicts to whom we are the lords of life and death. Our servants. Slaves for a new empire. The women we can sell overseas, some of the men also. We have tested this with worthless street-people; few survived the journey, we will improve.¹⁹⁰
The rest will do our bidding here, or die.

(beat)

Those who disobey die slowly.

She glares at Kaybee, who doesn't flinch.

KAYBEE

Who else should we ally with?

SSU

Sex is the obvious use for slaves, but without money, Kowalski is irrelevant. Our best alliance would be with Horse. He can coordinate burglaries, even with addicts: we store the take until it can be shipped.

A moment's pause; Ssu looks upward, reflectively.

SSU (CONT'D)

Antiques, I think. Jewellery. Gold and silver, if there is any to be found. This backward country has little else of interest.

¹⁹⁰ This hints at the probable fate of Wombat's husband.

KAYBEE

And our role?

SSU

Convert your customers. Find new ones. There are supplies enough.

KAYBEE

Yeah, of the crap Cockie sold, but where can we get the real stuff?

SSU

Here.

She pulls a small clear-plastic packet from a pocket and throws it on the table. It contains a white powder. Myna glances at the label.

MYNA

N P S D ?

With a quizzical expression, she passes it to Kaybee.

KAYBEE

'No Prohibited Substance Detected'. Drug-squad marking.¹⁹¹

(to Ssu)

Where'd you get this? - nick it from the cops? It's useless, anyway.

He places the packet back on the table.

SSU

Not at all. It's street-quality heroin.

¹⁹¹ This is real...

KAYBEE

Nice one! So what's the scam?

SSU

Everything collected by the police is available to us. Once they have set it aside for destruction, it is cut for street use, re-packaged, and re-labelled NPSD.¹⁹²

She holds up the packet.

SSU (CONT'D)

It is supposedly harmless, so it is 'thrown away' - to us. We re-sell it. If any of our downline distributors misbehave, we point the police to them; a few convictions keep the police quiet, and in time the supplies return to us. Everyone gets what they want; nothing is wasted.

KAYBEE

"Reduce, re-use, recycle".¹⁹³ That's just beautiful!

Ssu bows, with a sardonic smile.

KAYBEE (CONT'D)

But how come this didn't break when the big boys got busted?¹⁹⁴

¹⁹² ...and, scarily, so was this - if not yet on the scale indicated by Ssu here. Not, at least, that anyone has been discovered doing it: if it really *was* on this scale, we wouldn't hear about other than by the kind of accident that lead to Mouse's murder earlier in the story.

¹⁹³ 'Reduce, re-use, recycle' is the 'Green' slogan used just about everywhere in Australia - so I couldn't miss this lovely pun, either!

¹⁹⁴ A reference back to the earlier part of the *Yabbies* scenario, with corrupt police.

SSU

They know that if any of them talk, they all die - their families first.

KAYBEE

So you got 'em by the short-and-curlyes. Good one.

He stops, and turns to Myna with a brief deferential nod, to re-establish correct relationships.

KAYBEE (CONT'D)

Your orders?

MYNA

(to Ssu)

When can you deliver? Who do we contact?

SSU

Call seven six seven one four two four eight, any Tuesday between four and five. Code is "dragon". Ask for Acting Sergeant Fox.

KAYBEE

(to himself)

Oh, Foxy-baby! Of course! Why didn't anyone think of that?

Both Ssu and Myna turn to him in surprise.

SSU

What?

KAYBEE

(conversational)

You know, I think this is what we call a wrap.¹⁹⁵

Long and Yin join in the general stares of incomprehension.

KAYBEE (CONT'D)

(loudly)

Kittens!

(friendly, normal)

And there I was worried you might have seen the new decorations.

The others look wildly around. Ssu spots what Kaybee meant - new security-cameras hidden in plain view on the walls and ceiling, some of them also partly hidden by the old Italian decorations. She shouts in Chinese to Long and Yin, and starts to pull out a gun, but Kaybee already has Cockie's pistol in his hand.¹⁹⁶

PLATT, KOHL and police in grey Special Operations Group coveralls - the 'kittens' - rush in from the front bar, with shouts of "Police!". A fight ensues: Long tries to pull a knife but is flattened by the charging Kohl, while Yin tries to take on Platt, and discovers that he's a better kick-boxer than she is - the platypus' poison-spur on the hind-feet!¹⁹⁷

Keeping out of the melee, Myna edges towards the back door of the bistro. She opens it - and finds BULL standing outside.

¹⁹⁵ In terms of plot, Kaybee's double-game here was perhaps rather too obvious - but it also fits the Dreamtime metaphor, with the kookaburra capturing the snake.

¹⁹⁶ The payoff for the earlier setup, when he took the pistol from Cockie.

¹⁹⁷ From a gender perspective, it would be better if Platt was female too, but unfortunately the poison-spur of the platypus is only on the male, so would break the Dreamtime motif.

BULL

Good evening, ma'am. You are under arrest. You have the right to remain silent. You have the right to a lawyer...¹⁹⁸

She slams the door shut again, and turns back to the room, shock on her face, as SHEPPARD and other standard-uniform police finish the arrest of Ssu and company. Kaybee turns to her.

KAYBEE

Sorry, Myna - blew your freedom after just one day, didn't you?

He bursts into a clatter of kookaburra laughter.

46. EXT. CENTRELINK OFFICE -- DAY

In the shopping street, a couple of days later. The billboards beside the news kiosk show "Settling Down" and "A New Freedom". In the Centrelink window is a huge hand-drawn sign, "Workshare Assignments"; a long queue stretches from the door down the street. We catch a few comments as we move past the queue.¹⁹⁹

QUEUE #1

...collected the money from parking meters...

QUEUE #2

...stockbroking's dead, but we get to keep the Beemer...

QUEUE #3

...Pay Clerk Level 2 last year, would have been Level 3 this...

¹⁹⁸ Bull presenting himself once again as the perfect rule-follower here.

¹⁹⁹ Some quick examples of the detailed impact of the *Yabbies* scenario: when money is removed from the equation, many current 'jobs' disappear - one way to illustrate the wastefulness and redundancy in the current possession-economy.

QUEUE #4

...not a penny more, not a penny less...

At the end of the queue stand MAGGIE and CROW, side by side, arguing.

CROW

What the hell are we doing here, Maggie?

MAGGIE

We gotta do *something* new, ain't we? 'S only fair.

CROW

Like what?

MAGGIE

Cobbler, perhaps? You useta trim people's shoe sizes for 'em.²⁰⁰

CROW

Maggie...

MAGGIE

How's about hospital orderly? We put enough people in there.

CROW

You're gonna be hospital disorderly right now if you don't shut your beak!

A hand lands on each of their inner shoulders. They spin round, to find KAYBEE between them.

²⁰⁰ In Northern Ireland the IRA's preferred punishment for 'misbehaviour' was 'knee-capping' – shooting someone in both knees, to cripple them for life. In Melbourne's gangland culture, the equivalent was 'toe-clipping' – cutting off the victim's toes – hence Maggie's euphemism here.

KAYBEE

Hi, boys! How y'doin'?

He looks into their surprised faces, and grins.

KAYBEE (CONT'D)

Want a new job? How d'ya fancy rock-breaking?²⁰¹
Sewing mail-bags?²⁰² Mashing number-plates at the
bluestone college?²⁰³

A horrified comprehension dawns on Crow's face, while Maggie stares at them both in bewilderment.

CROW

No! *You* was the dog!

KAYBEE

Yup! And *you're* busted!

BULL and another uniformed cop appear from either side and pull the struggling Maggie and Crow away.

47. INT. SUPERMARKET -- DAY

WOMBAT at the supermarket checkout. POSSUM is in the trolley seat, JOEY visible in the background returning from an errand of his own.

There's quite a bit more in Wombat's trolley, a random mixture of own-brand and branded goods, but also still a few out-of-code labels. The trolleys of most other people are about the same, though other women glare and mutter at a fully-loaded trolley of luxuries that goes past, sent back

²⁰¹ The stereotype hard-labour in US prisons...

²⁰² ...in British prisons...

²⁰³ ...and in Australian prisons - the 'bluestone college' was the nickname for the old Victorian (in both senses) men's prison at Pentridge in north Melbourne, now demolished.

to unload some of the content that was questioned as being truly "what you need". The usual racks of lollies and junk-magazines are no longer at the checkouts.²⁰⁴

Wombat looks much more at ease. Joey runs up, hopefully holding up a packet of lollies; she shakes her head with a grin.²⁰⁵

WOMBAT

Do you *need* that, Joey love?

Joey pouts, then grins, and runs off to put it back on the rack.

48. INT. COURT CORRIDOR -- DAY

It's several days later. WOMBAT walks down the corridor of the County Court, accompanied by CAT. As they pass a huddle of lawyers and uniformed police, one of them breaks away and calls out to her. It's KAYBEE, in police uniform – though a different uniform from the others – with a name-badge 'Det Sgt K. Keyborough'.

KAYBEE

Mrs Hughes? Ellen?

As he comes over to join them, she stares at him, then shakes her head in confusion.

WOMBAT

Sergeant? You're a...? But...? I didn't know...

KAYBEE

Neither did they!

²⁰⁴ The subtle, homely details of the shift to a responsibility-based economy – literally so, since the direct translation of 'economy' is 'the management of the household'.

²⁰⁵ This is a simple wrap-round from their state at the start of the story – and even though for Joey the outcome is still the same, the feel is a great deal happier all round.

(nods to Cat)

Ma'am. Pardon the duds, gotta be dressed up for court. Seconded in from up north, was the only way to gatecrash Cockie's party.

(beat)

Goin' back after this, if there's any way to get home, that is. Won't be able to do undercover here no more, that's for sure.

(beat)

Pity.

He grins, then stops for a moment, looking embarrassed.

KAYBEE (CONT'D)

You got my messages okay, but I still owe you an apology. Using you as bait to wind up our Cockie till he cracked.

She blushes.

WOMBAT

You were more of a help, I think. I would have got myself in trouble anyway.

(rueful grin)

I seem to do a lot of that.

KAYBEE

Well, you keep right on doing it! Cockie made lots of noise, Mrs Hughes, but he was only small fry. Thanks to you we've broken a much bigger game, right across the country. You'll have saved tens, possibly hundreds of lives, and worse than that for hundreds more.

WOMBAT

Worse than dying?

KAYBEE

Yup.

He doesn't elaborate. A moment of disturbing silence.

WOMBAT

Oh.

KAYBEE

Best be moving, Mrs Hughes. We've got the big bad
lads right now in Six. Drowning in reporters. But I'll
see you later for Cockie-boy in Three.

As he's been speaking, DINGO has appeared, hovering in the background. He comes up as
Kaybee leaves.

DINGO

G'day, Ms Hughes. You brought me a story all right!
Thanks. Talk to you later?

He flashes a seductive grin at Cat, who pulls coyly into Wombat's sleeve.

DINGO (CONT'D)

See ya!

Cat gazes after him in over-interest as he runs off to follow the group of police towards Courtroom
Six. Wombat shakes her head and grins at Cat.

WOMBAT

Don't. You'll end up fighting like cats and dogs.²⁰⁶

A pause, then both women burst out laughing.

²⁰⁶ And yes, that was another pun I just could *not* miss!

49. INT. COURTROOM -- LATER

A small but crowded courtroom. A disheveled COCKIE is in the prisoners' box, paying little attention. WOMBAT and CAT can be seen in the front row of the witnesses' section. The 'beak', Ms OESTERREICH,²⁰⁷ is summing up her sentence.

OESTERREICH

...although the defendant was legally responsible for his behaviour at the time of the offences, the court accepts the psychologists' report that this would no longer apply. We therefore sentence him to be held indefinitely in a secure psychiatric unit until such time as assessed competent and fit for release.

A brief pause as she shuffles her notes, then looks at the court over her glasses.

OESTERREICH (CONT'D)

I think that covers everything?

Wombat rises to her feet.

WOMBAT

Excuse me, your honour. There's the matter of my car.

OESTERREICH

Ah, yes.

She raises her eyebrows in a "Continue?" signal.

WOMBAT

All I wanted was for him to fix the damage he did to my car, but it's now a write-off. Is there any way I can get it replaced?

²⁰⁷ Metaphorically, an ostrich – though an emu would be a better fit for the Dreamtime motif, of course.

OESTERREICH

Indeed. In fact, under the new rules, I ought to assign you his car. It's very valuable, you know.

The crowd explode in thunderous applause and cheering. Cockie returns briefly from whatever imaginary world he's been in.

COCKIE

No! Can't have it! Mine! *Mine!!*

Tears roll down his face, not of anger but of lost desperation. Oesterreich bangs on her gavel for silence, several times; the crowd eventually quieten down, while Cockie slumps in his seat.

WOMBAT

Uh... thank you, your honour... but no, if that's all right.²⁰⁸

The crowd is suddenly silent.

WOMBAT (CONT'D)

I mean, it's very pretty and all that, but it's no value to *me* at all.

(beat)

I know it was expensive, but that doesn't make it valuable.

Cockie's mouth is wide open in shock.

WOMBAT (CONT'D)

Value's not about price, it's about whether things are any use. And that isn't.

²⁰⁸ This sequence illustrates that Wombat is one of the few here who's fully grasped – in fact already *lives* – the practical implications of the *Yabbies* scenario: the distinction between possession-based versus responsibility-based ownership, and the centrality of *need* as a driver in a responsibility-based economy.

(shrugs)

It's just a silly toy for silly boys, really.

The last is said as simple fact, not denigration. Cockie bursts out crying, in a kind of lost, demented way. Wombat shrugs again, arms out, palms up.

WOMBAT (CONT'D)

How on earth am I going to fit two small kids in the back seat, when it doesn't even *have* a back seat? It's not what I *need*.

There's a long silence, broken only by Cockie's disconsolate sobbing.

OESTERREICH

Ah. We'll have to do something about that.

DISSOLVE TO:

50. EXT. CAR YARD -- DAY

The same car-yard in the same suburban mixed-business street. The gaudy flags are still there, rippling in the wind, but the hyped-up sale-boards are gone, replaced by one large sign saying "What do you need? Let us help you."

WOMBAT drives up in Cockie's car, enters the yard slowly and cautiously, stops it with a jerk, clambers out awkwardly, and sighs with an "I'm glad that's over" expression.

The SALESMAN leads her over to another car, almost identical to her original car, but in somewhat better condition, a five-door hatchback model rather than her original two-door sedan. They exchange keys; she climbs in, adjusts the seat, winds down the window, starts the engine, closes the door.

WOMBAT

Thank you. It's just what I need.

The salesman waves as she drives away.

51. INT. PSYCH WARD -- DAY

A padded cell. COCKIE squats on the floor, alone. A stuffed toy bird - a dove²⁰⁹ - lies unnoticed beside him. He's clutching a gaudy stuffed-toy car to his chest, looking down at the toy.

COCKIE

Mine! *Mine!*

He looks up, bursts into tears, rocks back and forth in lost misery.

COCKIE (CONT'D)

Mine...

The tears continue to roll down his face.

FADE OUT:

²⁰⁹ A wrap round to the early part of the story - yet sadly this too is neglected. At each moment, Cockie made his choice: what's happened right the way through this story is the direct or indirect consequence of those choices. The same applies to each of us, too: that, in effect, is the 'moral' of the story.