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## List of Authors

### TEAM 5

Matt Bartlett  
Tom Condon  
Tim Coorey  
Nick Ingram  
Nick Needs  
Luke Smith  
Peter Toohey

### PARAMETERS

Primary Character 1:	<b>Clothes Designer</b>
Primary Character 2:	<b>Street Busker</b>
Non-Human Character:	<b>Talking Parrot</b>
Setting:	<b>Movie Set</b>
Issue:	<b>Dieting</b>

Random Words which must appear at least once somewhere in the story:

**Nurse**  
**Heart**  
**Joy-ride**  
**Underground**  
**Sneeze**

## Copyright

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## Acknowledgements

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## Prologue

The new metro underground line was a sight to be seen. It was the jewel in the crown of Sydney. People could get from Newtown to Sydney CBD in less than 10 minutes. Today was, by anyone's standards, a very ordinary day. It was 9:30 in the morning and the carriages were all full. Even those who were outrageously dressed did not stand out. It was just a large collection of various people.

One man had his ten year old son sitting next to him astride an old beaten up guitar case. A young blonde haired girl sat with a \$2 shop briefcase on her lap reading the free "MX" newspaper she was handed at the station. Businessmen and women wearing expensive suits spoke on brand new mobile phones with more unnecessary features than last year's models. A young couple lay asleep in each other's arms. The air in the carriage was very close; it wasn't the most pleasant ride available to the commuters in the peak hour but it was the easiest. It was silent save for some older school boys conversing boisterously in the rear seat compartment of the carriage.

The man and his son conversed quietly together. Their conversation was very intellectual; those surrounding pretended not to overhear but were secretly impressed by the evident intelligence of such a young boy.

The blonde girl's phone rang. She spoke jocularly with what sounded like a sister, speaking to her in terms of common housekeeping;

"I thought you were going to get those light bulbs. Argh... It doesn't matter I'll get some today... Alright thanks honey, have a good day"

The trip went by very quickly for everyone. The train pulled into town hall station and as the doors opened, the carriages emptied like water pouring from a bucket. Just as it was aboard the train, there were no standouts. The schoolboys all headed off in the direction of the museum. The business people moved on to their respective buildings. The blonde girl moved on toward the south of the city. The man and his son walked off towards the quay where the son's school was.

The man let out a sneeze just as he was walking up the stairs to the hustle and bustle of the city. The girl didn't see or hear him but was compelled to wish him better. In her sweet nature she shouted out a quick "God bless you!" The man looked up. He was curious; he hadn't heard anything but still felt as if someone had made a friendly and polite gesture to him. Neither had time to pursue the events further, so they carried on their day as if nothing had happened.

## Chapter 1

“Sam!” came a screech from the steamy bathroom “Can you get some Bread on the way home?”

Samantha cursed her pathetic efforts at trying to leave the apartment unnoticed by her flat mate.

“Yes Mercedes” she replied “Just tidy up in there when you’re done”

A moan that came from the bathroom was quickly killed by Sam closing the door behind her as she hurried down the stairs to catch the train to her first job since uni.

Samantha grew impatient as the bus pulled into the depot of the movie set. Her long hair blew in the mild summer air as she got up and made her way to the front of the bus passing a sweet smile to the bus driver who acknowledged her with a dip of his hat. Fresh out of university, she was eager to start on this, her first assignment. She had been given a job as the costume designer for an upcoming movie. She presented her papers to the security guard at the gate of the studio who examined them with authority, looked up and then passed her through with a smile.

“Great to have you with us” he said

As she passed through the gates a great feeling of a new beginning came over her. She had never felt so accepted; her large build had usually stirred insult from her peers at school and at uni. She stopped to consult her map of the studios, found her bearings then headed off in the right direction. Her workplace was in lot number twenty two at the rear of the studios. She was unsure exactly what she would be doing but she didn’t care as long as she had the freedom and peace which she longed for. She was met at the front of the studio hanger by the inviting figure of her supervisor.

“Terry Jane” she said “You must be Sam, we were amazed we could get you at such short notice, follow me and I’ll show you where you’ll be working”

Sam gladly followed her through the great complex of sets, changing rooms and buffet tables all bustling with activity. Friends meeting with smiles, co-workers in friendly conversation all of whom acknowledged her as she passed; *this is where I want to be, everyone is so perfect*. Her supervisor slowed until they were walking next to each other.

“I think you will find this a very pleasant place to work. Everyone knows each other and are very friendly. You will be working right over here”

She gestured to a room out of the way of the bustle of the main studio, lit by several dozen fluorescent lights. In the centre there was a substantial drafting table strewn with fabric and materials.

“Sorry about the mess” Said Terry “The last designer left in a hurry”

“Don’t worry; Cleaning up will let me know where everything is”

Her supervisor smiled “I’ll leave you too it. Someone will be here soon to tell you what you’re designing” she said fleetingly as she left.

Samantha waited until her supervisor was out of sight before engaging fully in her surroundings. She could not believe all this were true. Her dream job, her dream of freedom all at once.

“Hey” came a foreign voice; disturbing her peace “you the new dress girl?”

“Umm yes, Hi, I’m”

“The dress girl I know” she interjected “I need a new ball gown for act three scene one in three hours. Take it to set five, possible designs are on the table”

Samantha was dazed. She summed up the figure as she walked away. Her sculpted legs and thin figure seemed to dance along as she turned out of view. For a brief moment, Samantha was entranced; despite the way the figure had rudely addressed her she felt strangely inclined to carry out her orders with the upmost of respect, respect that would reflect the figure’s beauty. She set to work straight away.



## Chapter 2

“You ready yet J.J.?” John shouted to the other side of the studio apartment.

“Coming dad, just putting my shoes on” J.J. replied.

John McMahon and his son stepped out of there one bedroom apartment on the bottom floor of a large complex in the underground of society. He locked the door behind him double checked he had everything and set out with guitar in hand and son by his side.

They walked quickly and silently towards the train station until his son asked, “Why do we have to catch the train, dad? Other kids at school get dropped off in cars”

“Well son, it’s more enjoyable and relaxing to catch a train and not have to worry about driving.”

J.J. reflected on his father’s response seemingly bemused.

“But dad, driving a car’s faster.”

“Never mind that now son the train is here.”

The train slowly pulled into the station with a screech. J.J. and John waited for the other passengers to move on and off and leisurely walked to the back of the carriage where they found two spare seats. The whole monotonous journey passed slowly as it had every day for the last few years. When John and his son heard their stop called they again waited for everyone before slowly beginning the walk to school.

On arrival at school John waves slowly to his son while watching him enter the gates trying to make the moment last as long as possible as he was not looking forward to what the day ahead would bring. Walking away towards Town Hall to do the unpleasant but necessary task of busking he caught a fleeting glance of a parrot in a nearby Pet Shop. He grinned at the simple life it led uncorrupted by the difficulties of the world.



## Chapter 3

*I'm sitting in my apartment, looking out my 3rd story window watching the world go by. How did it come to this? How did I end up with a minimum wage, designing a fucking yeti costume for a low budget film? I had dreams, I was going places, and now I'm living large in a two bedroom apartment with a slightly eccentric roommate...*

"Hey, whatcha doing?" Mercedes interrupted her thoughts.

"I'm not too sure, just thinking."

"You need to get out more, go for a walk."

"No, I'd rather stay here; I'm tired enough as it is."

"That's fine, you can stay here, but Neighbours is coming on soon" she said jokingly

That was the one thing that they completely disagreed on; Mercedes loved certain shows that Sam thought were a load of you-know-what. Samantha bolted out the door. *Great! What do I do now? I have half-an-hour to kill, where am I going to go?* She walked around Kings Cross, but decided quickly that it was a better use of her time to walk into the city. She would have been wondering around for over 15 minutes, eventually, she saw a rusted sign above what looked like a miniature zoo "Best of the Beasts" or at least that's what she could make out. It didn't look like anyone was in there, and it seemed like a great place to get away from all of the people, smiling at the 18 stone woman waddling around the city.

She went in, there was no-one in there except for the one eyed, creepy looking store owner, and he was busy listening to the radio. A single bird in the corner caught her eye, the most extraordinary colours on a single bird she had ever seen. The parrot seemed to take an interest in her as well, so she walked over to it.

"Hello, you're looking sad. Anything the matter?" It said.

Samantha stood still, bewildered. She decided to play along.

"Hey, I don't mean to trouble you, but I am looking for someone to discuss my problems with."

The parrot seemed very understanding "Yes I can see you are troubled, I suppose you are worried about your weight?"

"That is one of many things, I have a terrible job, I am lonely, and I have practically no money. I could go on like this for ages; I just don't know what to do."

"Well, I see a lot more than you would imagine from this window and it seems to me that the people that are the happiest are the people that enjoy each day when it comes, they take what they get and simply enjoy what good things they have, even if it isn't much."

She left and went back home to find that Mercedes' show had finished, and that her next one was starting. Sam just smiled and looked out the window again, just a little happier than before.

## Chapter 4

Carrying his faded guitar case by his side, John turned his back on the school gates and headed through the masses of children rushing to get in before the bell. As he walked past, many people turned to watch him, gawping at the father dropping off his child among the throngs of mothers in gas-guzzling 4WDs, puzzled also by the fact that he was carrying a guitar. Oblivious to the many pairs of staring eyes that were focussed on him, he turned left at the lights and headed into the city, protected by a wall of bustling commuters.

Although he appeared calm on the outside, John was unsettled. Thousands of thoughts rushed through his head like a movie reel, each reminding him of another and suddenly forming a pool of muddled questions, opinions and doubts. *How will I be able to afford J.J's education? Where will we move if the rent becomes too expensive? How am I supposed to provide for a child just by busking?* He was finally brought back to reality by the great golden headlights of a white cab. Brakes screeched and fumes fogged up his vision. His feet jerked beneath him and he moved back onto the kerb, backing away from the various profanities which blasted at him from the window, cushioned by the even louder blasting from the car's horn.

He crossed the road and stopped, crowds of businessmen moving like flocks to either side of him. Staring through the crowds, staggering his vision like a flick-book, John saw "Best of the Beasts", the pet shop that had been there for eternity, sitting on the same corner and host to only a few odd customers, who dawdled in every so often. Yet today, in a cage near the window, was an impressive parrot, its feathers creating a multicolour blur-green, red, blue and its crest of a dazzling, bright sun-drenched gold.

As he walked closer he could not hear the parrot squawking, but rather speaking in fully comprehensible English in a slightly British, slightly South African accent. Entering the shop, he acknowledged the shopkeeper with a smile and a nod, noticing a faint glint in his left eye.

'What's up mate?' He said to the parrot, the shopkeeper staring in disbelief. 'Anything interesting been happening lately? You must see a lot from this window.'

'You are quite right! You can learn so many different things passively, just sitting here and observing the world around you, the different things that you can see and



the people in their own little worlds with their own troubles.'

'It must be calming. That's just what I need. Even I have a pretty full schedule, and I'm just a busker. Dropping off J.J., my son, at school, getting around the city, busking, writing new music, housework, and then I have to go and pick J. up from school again.'

'You're married?'

'Was once, but she left me. Don't really mind. Doesn't even make a difference. The bludger never did anything anyway, just expected me to do everything around the house. Haven't kept in touch with her. It's just me and J.J. now. I like it that way.'

'Too bad, I never was married myself. She didn't understand me. I have no idea, but she would never talk to me, just squawk like some common bird, like a pigeon. You haven't got a cracker have you?'

'Jeez, you parrot's are all the same. Here.' John pulled an Arrowroot from his bag and slipped it through the cage. 'Lucky he hasn't got his right eye facing us.' He glanced at the shopkeeper, whose glimmering eye still faced in the same direction as it had for the past five minutes.

The bird nibbled at the biscuit at the bottom of the cage.

'Enjoy,' John said, leaving the shop quietly and heading down Market Street to set up on his usual corner. He strummed softly on his guitar, tuning with his other hand. *Just right.*

## Chapter 5

Her life was becoming an emotional wreck! Samantha had become very self conscious lately, and the stress of her daily schedule seemed to invade her mind and manipulate her into a miserable mess. The fact of dieting, too, become a better model didn't appeal to her at all. It was all so hard for her. Sighing with relief that another demanding day had passed, Samantha opened the door to her 20th Century terrace style apartment. "Sammy, is that you baby?"

Mercedes was not your typical roommate, she was much different to the friend you would expect of a beautiful, sophisticated young lady like Samantha. Her hair was of a short length, jet black and identical on both sides. She had two ponytails which drooped effortlessly over her ears, like a small fountain of oil pouring out from the side of her head. Her face was lean, the white complexion seemed to emphasise the crimson red lipstick and black eye shadow which cast a silhouetted darkness over her deep blue eyes. Her neck bore a spiked collar, like the one you would expect to find around the neck of the biggest junk yard dog in Sydney. Her wrists were much the same, the spiked wrist bands seemed to cover up some of the practises of which her beliefs enforced.

Samantha rounded the entrance of the apartment and replied "yes it's me", in a rather apathetic tone. She turned the corner at the end of the corridor to find Mercedes sitting in the middle of the lounge room with candles and waxes strung all over the old wooden floor boards. She was sitting in the centre of the circle, breathing heavily embracing the aroma of her ancient gothic traditions, accomplishing her daily satisfaction. Mercedes was full of surprises.

Samantha burst out laughing; she was unable to contain herself. Mercedes was always there for her, she needed to be there to give Samantha that extra hint of happiness and meaning in her life. "w-w-what's with the candles?" asked Samantha inquisitively in a somewhat humorous manner. "I like trying different things, you know, experimenting to finding out who we really are"

It was the stupid but funny things which Mercedes did that brought a smile to Samantha's face. She always found a way to try and lighten up her day.

## Chapter 6

This was his release, the wind in his hair and face, the lights blurring as he sped past and around cars and signs. Here despite being surrounded by humanity he was alone. Here he could forget his problems and the daily grind. He tried to do this at least once a week, just get on a bike and drive for no reason for hours on end, just to clear his head.

He turned off the busy streets to a quiet street and pulled up at the lights. Then peaceful quiet was shattered by two ear splitting roars from behind him. Two bikers pulled up, they were covered in leather and metal spikes. That reminded him of himself back when he was young, when he competed in underground bike races with his gang.

The smell of diesel and the roar of unmuffled engines brought back memories of his mates' underground race track in a disused train track. Swept away by a feeling of nostalgia, he decided to head over and see if any of his old gang mates were still there. The track was on the other side of town and it was nearly midnight when he pulled up. All around him were bikers in varying degrees of leather and metal all yelling for one of two racers who sped around the track.

"Hey you! It's a hundred bucks to use my course..... John!" the speaker was Mad Matt who had been in John's gang and had found the disused train track. Matt opened the gate and motioned for John to come in.

"No charge" he said, waving away John's offered cash "lemme get you a beer."

Later that night John and Matt were joyriding around in the street when they were challenged by a group of younger bikers to a race, "just up the street" Soon they were flying up the road weaving in and out of traffic. Once again John's world was alive with flashing lights and moving cars. He was interrupted by the wail of police sirens and he saw Matt and the other bikers split up and disappear. That seemed like a good idea and he took off home.

The next day John was at the train station waiting for his train. The platform was full of people whose blank faces expressed no anticipation for the day ahead. Just ahead of him a slightly larger young girl dropped her bag, containing a variety of wigs, masks and odd bits of clothes. It spilled out all over the station floor. She was so distressed she could barely hold in her tears.

The lady looked up when she saw John move up to help her. He was struck by the worry lines that creased her face. "Quite a collection you've got there" he remarked. He helped her pick up her bag and carry it onto their train. As they sat down, she smiled at him warmly.

"Thanks so much for that." She said with the same warmth underlying her tone.

"You're very welcome" he replied with a mild laugh. "What exactly do you do?" he asked gesturing towards the miscellaneous items she held.

She explained it to him.

John was thrilled to have a conversation with such a pretty young girl, but just as she finished explaining her job, the train pulled into Newtown. It was his stop. He apologized and bade her goodbye.

“It was great to meet you” he said as he prepared to alight the train. The doors opened and John let out a sneeze. Samantha shouted down after him as he disembarked

“Bless you!”

## Chapter 7

Samantha made the arduous journey to the film studios as she had for the past five days. The genesis it had been for a new life was all but destroyed as she again gave her papers to the security guard flashing a false smile as she did so.

“Great to see you here so often” he said genuinely

Again she smiled that false smile which so infuriated her. All she had believed in had been snatched from under her by those creatures of the screen with their fake appearance merely a facade to their true inner self. She despised the way they flirted, the way they interacted; everything about them. However she was still unable to get them out of her mind. She was shaken from her trance of thought by her supervisor.

“Sam” she said sternly “where have you been, you’re half an hour late! There are five orders already, quickly go to your work area”

Sam gave a false excuse justifying her absence and made her way to her work space; trying to conceal her inner turbulence. She rounded the corner and was immediately confronted with one of the very creatures she despised. She smiled nicely at her opposite.

“Sorry I’m late”

“And so you should be” she said with rigor “just look at these dresses, we need all of these repaired and altered by noon.” She threw a pile of dress indignantly on the table, turned gracefully and strolled away. Sam tried to be oblivious but when she was sure no-one was watching, she threw her pin box down in disgust, overcome with emotion. She slumped in her chair with her head in her hands and felt like she was stuck in a current from which she could not escape.



## Chapter 8

I woke up in the apartment I have learned to live with over the years; after all, my job doesn't pay as well as someone in one of the high-rise office blocks I busk outside of. Sometimes I wonder why I don't just go into one of them and look for a job, and I must admit I have thought about it. Eventually, though, I realise that I love what I do, that my music is all I have. I stay here in this apartment, not wanting any more for myself, because I know that tomorrow I'm going to wake up and express myself in the only way I know how, with a guitar in my hand and the case open for what will become my rent.

I come to the pet store whenever I can to talk to one of the only friends I have in this world that I can have a decent conversation with. The bell rings as I walk through the door, I walk past the one-eyed owner and to the corner where the parrot always is, expecting to see a familiar face. I did.

"Fancy seeing you here!" I was very surprised.

The beautiful blonde girl I had seen on the train, however, was not as cheerful as I had remembered her. "They've taken him." She was distraught. As I tried to comfort her, I realised that the parrot I had come to see, the one that had been my unconditional friend for as long as I can remember, was no longer in his place. "They've taken him." She repeated. It was at that moment that I knew she had been talking to the parrot as well, that she was his friend too.

"I'm sorry, folks," came a voice from the shopkeeper, who was looking at them with his right eye, the other appeared to be eyeing a cage of mice against the wall. "The parrot was sold to another pet shop in Pymont just this morning. The owner took it with him straight away."

"I think it was for the better." I was suddenly realising that everything that has happened to me over the past month was all leading to this moment.

"What do you mean?" She was trying to dry her tears.

"Well, if the parrot hadn't been taken, and you left earlier, I would have missed you."

Samantha received a text message on her outdated mobile phone.

*Come to the Royal North Shore. It's Mercedes.*

## Chapter 9

The world suddenly became a haze of worthless matter. The taxi sped through the packed streets of Sydney with a speed which was unimaginable in such a populated area. The car swerved in and out of herds of busy businessmen, phones glued to their ears, each shouting in booming voices and exchanging hurried words into the ends of their cell phones. Thousands of different suits and ties whizzed past the car window. It was as if the people in the streets were in a display at a museum and the three of them, the woman, man and child, were observing them like tourists.

The vehicle slid into the hospital drive, sheltered by the canopy. John grabbed J.J. and the three of them bustled out of the car and through the revolving doors. There was a rush of cool air as they burst into the sterile, air-conditioned atmosphere of the hospital.

At the front counter, Samantha threw herself on the desk.

'Mercedes O'Malley, please, it's urgent,' she said, catching her breath again.

'Four-thirty-one,' the concierge replied, 'anything else?'

'No thanks.'

*What could have happened to her? Will she survive?* Samantha thought.

They ran to the elevator and Samantha slammed on the button. An annoying PING sounded as the display above the doors notified them that the lift was currently on Level Seven. When the lift finally arrived, they piled in and pushed for level four. When they finally came to Room 431 they opened the door quietly. Samantha crept around the door and entered the room.

Her head was in a cast and only her eyes and mouth were visible. The rest of her body was draped in the thin hospital linen and a loosely stitched blanket. The scent of a processed pumpkin soup drifted slowly on the otherwise odourless air and Samantha looked down upon a small bowl which sat on the bedside table. A nurse entered the room, J.J. moving out off the way of the door in the small room.

'Dr. Andrews will be here to see you shortly,' she said, 'I don't think it's anything major but she should pull through.'

'Thanks,' both Samantha and John replied simultaneously. Still looking, shocked, at the seemingly lifeless Mercedes, lying on the bed. It was hard to believe that this same person had, only a few days ago, brightened her with her unique sense of humour.

The door closed as they noticed that the doctor had come into the room.

'Well, she should be alright. There are only a few minor injuries on her head. I heard that the joy rider ended up crashing into a pet shop in Pymont. I think the only thing that was harmed was some parrot. You should come back into the hospital after a week for a check up. You've got a nice little family, I must say.'

Samantha grinned at John and John grinned back. Suddenly there was a rustling from the bed. Mercedes smiled too.

## Epilogue

Samantha, John and J.J. all sat on the metro line to the CBD. John propped up his guitar on his knees. J.J. sat up on Samantha's Lap. John looked at her. She looked beautiful. Her blonde hair flowed down to her waist. She was wearing a beautiful purple dress she made herself on set in her spare time. She was as trim as any of the models on her set and far prettier. Samantha's briefcase was falling apart but she didn't care.

They looked like a beautiful family. They all talked together in the same way John had spoken to J.J. before they met Samantha. The carriage was packed full of unfamiliar faces. It was stuffy and hot. Boys from Sydney Grammar talked loudly about what boys from Sydney Grammar talk about. The tree of them all walked to JJ's school in Circular Quay. It was an exam day. JJ was never nervous. He always held his head up high and got the highest marks in his classes.

John and Samantha saw JJ off for the day. They moved on towards Hyde Park to see Samantha's costumes on the set. John would later set up shop next to the fountain to get his rent.

John wrapped his arm around Samantha's waist. She looked up at him and smiled.



Recommended for 14 years +

