



THIS IS NOT A LIE

S. C. Farrow

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The Voice of the New Age

Man muss noch Chaos in sich haben,
um einen tanzenden Stern gebären zu können.

(You must have chaos within
you to give birth to a dancing star.)

Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*

It takes two minutes to fix, five seconds to tie off,
ten seconds to get the rush, one reason to become an addict,
and one moment to fall in love.

Pauly's House

Friday, June 29, 1984

Light from the kitchen sluices down the hallway and splashes up against the bathroom wall. I sit in its dim wake, on the edge of the bathtub, mixing a fix. I don't need much light; I've done this hundreds of times. Normally, I'd revel in the ritual. I love the ritual. The routine. The process. But today it's different. Today, I just want it done. Today, I just want it to be over. The truth is, if I can't have him, if I can't be with him, I don't want to live at all.

My hands tremble as I pull back the plunger and draw the liquid, the same colour as Harry's eyes, into the syringe. I wind a belt around my bicep and take a deep breath as I pump my fist and raise a vein. It's been a while now, but I instinctively angle the needle against my skin and plunge it in.

A wisp of blood blooms in the cheap plastic tube. It's a good hit. I press down on the plunger and release the belt that bites into my skin.

I close my eyes.

It's over.

No more pain.

Now, there's just peace.

Silence.

And the endless expanse of nothingness...

CHAPTER 1

Public Bar, The Seaview Hotel Friday, March 9, 1984

A garbo found a dead junkie in a back alley today. His body, stone cold and grey, was slumped in a pool of his own piss beneath the stairs at the back of the laundromat on Fitzroy Street. It won't make the news, of course. He wasn't important enough to waste ink on a headline. He was just another addict who didn't have the willpower to give up his habit in order to fall in line with the good tax-paying citizens of Melbourne. Instead, he was someone those people could feel smug about as they sat at their kitchen table discussing the rising level of crime while devising ever-more cruel and barbarous ways of punishing those who live outside the norm.

Fifty-years old, the man was a true bohemian, an eccentric Polish poet and sometime resident of the Gatwick Private Hotel. Despite summer's killer heat or winter's dismal chill, he would stand, unperturbed by honking car horns or dinging tram bells, amid the flurry of activity on Fitzroy Street, reciting poetry for passers-by who never bothered to stop and listen. Except for me. Every time I saw him, I'd stop. Even if it was only for a few minutes. When he recited his words, his face lit up, his movements became animated, and his voice became louder and increasingly fervent. Fractured, jangled, and repetitious, he'd ramble about horses and loneliness and angels who'd travel from place to place delivering messages of peace and comfort to those who were lost and

suffering. His words connected odd ideas and disjointed realities that reflected the truth in which he lived. To most, he would have sounded like a madman, but I was always mesmerised as I waited to hear where those connections led, to hear the way his truth bled from his head to his lips and out into a world that would have been happy to wash its hands of him.

To wash its hands of me.

I look down as I reach for my glass of Jack Daniel's and Coke and realise that my hand is trembling like a vibrating guitar string. Not enough to spill the contents over the rim, but enough for the bartender to give me a second look. What can I say? I'm like the poet. I'm a sick man. A sick, sad man who's happy to drink alone while waiting to score.

I slide my gaze around to all the patrons in the room. Where's that fucking Pauly? He knows I've got a gig at the Emerald Hill Hotel later and he's already twenty-five minutes late.

Once upon a time, this place, with its marble walls and mosaic floors, was one of Melbourne's leading hotels. The rot set in after World War II and by the 70s the hookers, dealers, and petty crims had taken up residence. Now, a nebula of cigarette smoke clings to the ceiling, and the entire place is encrusted with a layer of desperation and depravity.

I peer at the end of the bar. The stranger in the black leather jacket is still there. A swoop of dark brown hair falls from a side parting across eyes that strive to get my attention. He has no idea what he's doing to me, the things he's stirring inside of me. Things that belong in the past. That need to be forgotten. Ignored and buried. Absolutely buried.

I tear my eyes away and get my mind on the gig. If I'm late again, especially because I'm scoring dope, Karen will have my guts for garters. My assertive yet well-meaning sister loves me, but her disapproval of my 'lifestyle choices' are a constant source of aggravation.

And Madison. Shit. She's working tonight... I can't forget that I promised to pick her up after the gig. After I deal with Chris. Our vainglorious frontman. I had no idea what vainglorious meant until Angus told me. It's a good word to describe him, but I still prefer backstabbing asshole. We spent months searching for

a singer, then, when we found Chris, we spent months working with him, teaching him how to sing the songs, how to dress, how to use a mic, how to talk to the audience... Now, he's about to betray us. My fingers tighten around my glass as I think about it. Where the bloody hell is Pauly? If he doesn't get here soon...

'Joel!'

Thank God. I turn around to see Pauly, pasty and weedy and baring his nicotine-stained teeth, standing behind me grinning like a psych ward escapee.

'Hey, man,' he says, slapping me on the shoulder with a sweaty, slimy palm like I'm a long-lost friend. 'How ya going?'

I shrug him off. 'I was just about to go and get a burger.'

He loses the smile. Every junkie in St Kilda knows they can score from the hamburger joint up the road, a twenty-five-dollar foil of junk served with lettuce on a hamburger bun. It's more than what I pay Pauly, but price is nothing when your stomach starts cramping and your skin starts crawling.

'You weren't really going to go there, were you?'

'Let's go. I've got a gig tonight.' As I turn to leave, I look back at the stranger at the end of the bar. The edges of his mouth droop with disappointment when he realises I'm leaving. This town is full of freaks and weirdos, misfits, outcasts, queers, and eccentrics. It's easy for people to be themselves here. Everyone except me. I gulp the last of my Jack and Coke and head for the door with Pauly trailing like a dog behind me.