

Me an' Angus by Terri Janke

A grey sheet of cloud hangs and threatens the rain. This place gets packed by 10 o'clock. This is where Angus used to play the didgeridoo. The international tourists love it, he used to say, and he could make plenty money just on one good day.

I like to busk at the Quay, not because of the money, but because there are so many people passing by, you get to reach a wider audience, and that's important for my message. The Museum of Contemporary Art is at the north of Circular Quay. I arrive before the other buskers, and the crowds of tourists moving like ants around the water's source.

I make my way with my guitar case, slapping against my skirt, the man at the newspaper kiosk unpacks the paper. The front page has two main stories. The pictured story is about the cricket. The other headline screams:

"Terrorist laws to lock up objectors", the by line of seven year terms for sedition.

Pemulwuy once lead the resistance here. The red, black and yellow flag flies over the western side of the sandstone building of the MCA. This is Gadigal land.

Angus and me used to love to come to the MCA because it was free to get in. On the fourth floor, there is a work by an Iranian artist, Hossein Valamensh. He takes his inspiration from a Rumi poem written in the 1200s and reading the last line now gives me inspiration.

'The lover circles his own heart.'

I am drawn to the huge white sculpture of a manta ray. It reminds me of Angus, he loved the ocean. Next to it, an Aboriginal artist's work, a brown, woven fish trap, a silhouette against a grey painted wall. There is an outer cage, with a smaller space inside, where the fish swims in and gets trapped. Does it mean that fish have no rights?

Back out on the street, I pass a woman unravelling a community art piece, thongs of all sizes, strung together. One thong is painted by an Iranian visitor— he left an inscription, “It is my second time here – I come from Iran – I love Aussie.”

Melody – there is a song in my head, but I don’t know if I should sing it. I watch a man talking to himself, as I get on the bus, he has a green cap, a beard, and a dark jacket with big zipped pockets. The jacket is his home, the zip is his lock, and the pockets are his wardrobes.

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At the Paddington markets, the rain spits. I pull out my guitar, and start to sing. Next to me, a woman sits at a low table. I know her she has been here for years, and she is still here. I recognise the criss cross of her stockings, the hair dyed blonde, or a new grey. The glittery pink, and flaky tablecloth. A cloth hat with cherries. Her customers sit on blue milk crates, compliments on Dairy Farmers.

I am halfway through the song, and then a security guard is on to me,
“What’s in the case?”
“It’s a guitar?”
“Have you got a permit to play here?”
“Who from?”
“There are laws that say you have to have a permit.”

I explain that I haven’t got a permit and can’t afford to pay.. They won’t give me a permit anyway.

She doesn’t care, she says, that’s too bad but the law is the law, and besides singing peace songs are not allowed. I have to go into the lock up. It’s a cage at the side of the Church, just near the drop in centre for the homeless. I once had a meal there with Angus. Although it was a long time ago.

I share the cage with a big tall crazy bloke. He keeps reciting poetry. He says he is a writer. His published books have been pulped. Now he prints his own and sells them at the markets. He’s locked up, though, because he advocates against fear. He says love. He doesn’t really mean fear, he means love.

I wonder, can love other throw a government? Love is stronger than fear but people are scared to love.

I remember the last day I saw Angus.

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He was sitting in a chair, looking nervous. The purple dye was tested first to make sure it looked okay. Angus sat in a black chair, the sunglasses on his head. The tattooist grabbed his shoulder into position.

The colours are mixed on a tiny palette. The tattooist with one foot on the pedal, ready to go, the noise is like a buzzing mosquito stuck in a can. The swirls of dark purple paint push into his arm.

It's a tribal design something about exile, but also freedom.

The cricket game, Australia versus the rest of the world. Inside this tattoo room, an fake elephant's head on the wall. A dragon holds to lamps. The buzz of the metal contraption, a plastic rubber band, and the pump of the foot. Small talk continues.

“What does it feel like?”

“It feels like a continuous scraping of the skin.”

“Like going to the dentist?”

“I'd rather go to a dentist.”

The tattooist's hand tightens, the black tip touches Angus's skin, a small flick here and another there.

He does the outlines first in small lines, curves, and strokes.

“It'll be red in a minute, okay.”

“Sure,” says Angus.

That night he had to go to the hospital. We said his arm was sore. The doctor gave him painkillers. We sat out the front of the hospital. Above the Eora dedication wall, with Aboriginal art. Underneath the Aboriginal flag, there is a bench where he smoked a cigarette.

Mary the Virgin Mother of God has cobwebs on her face. Standing in the garden, I can't remember all the words to the Hail Mary. She looks over a row of lavender, and I ask her to please save him, to show me a sign that he is going to live me that he is going to live, and that I am sorry that we fought about stupid things.

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Out the front of McDonalds, we set up to play. I sang as the people swaggered and prowled, the people with eyes that loll, and cruise. The , I sing here a lot. The men calling out the front of the strip joints don't make eye contact.

A man with suit on, with a kangaroo tie says, "Play Black Magic Woman." "I don't want to sing that song because it's not promoting a good image of black women."

Angus glares at me. "But it's only two chords." He calls.

Mr kangaroo tie is still singing his songs.

"It's just F N' C."

"Did you swear at me?"

"No,"

"You did," says the man..

The fight starts. A fist to the face. Then a blue and white new sneakers in the head. The car doesn't stop, it hits him.

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The nurse was prodding him, and he would not wake up. She pushed his arm, the new tattoo still red with dried blood. A kid can get run over by a car, a man can die in a moment, and what is there left of him? If you want to leave this world. If you are angry enough, if you felt caged in enough, what can you do but sing.

Angus – he is my brother and I'll sit in this cage, and I will keep singing his song.

When we will,
Be free, when will we,
When will we be free?
Oh, don't be afraid to love.