

## SYNCHRONICITY

By Corinne Pentecost (Australia)

The sergeant shifts his weight on the seat and sighs; the government-issued chairs have been designed for smaller officers. He switches on the tapes.

“Now, Travis,” he says to the young man sitting opposite, “do you agree there’s no one else in the room except me, you, and your dog Chopper?”

“Yep,” the boy answers.

“Can you say your name for the tapes, please?”

“Travis Heavens.”

The officer begins filling out a form: a young life detailed in triplicate—yellow, blue and green.

“Address?” he asks.

“29 Smithers,” the boy answers.

“And your date of birth?”

“May 6, 1991.”

“Are you employed, Travis?” asks the officer.

“Nuh.”

“Receiving any benefits?”

“Just Centrelink.”

The sergeant is tired; he’s hot. The day has been hectic: bag snatches, a stabbing in the park, an overdose. But there are more questions to ask, more forms to fill out. If he cuts corners today, tomorrow will be worse.

“Jeez it’s boiling in here, Sarge,” says Travis. He runs a straightened forefinger across his sweating brow, like a windshield wiper. “Can we open the window?”

“Sorry, mate.” The officer doesn’t look up.

“Are you worried I’ll escape?”

No comment; the officer has heard this before.

“Well, can Chopper have a drink?” the boy asks.

“He’s got one,” says the sergeant, nodding at the bowl next to the boy’s dog.

“No, I mean can he have a beer?”

The officer wants to smile but checks himself; he cannot forget why the two of them are there. He stops writing and looks at Travis, who’s grinning now, revealing crooked teeth. There are a few scars on the boy’s shaven head, and the right side of his face has fresh cuts and swelling on the cheekbone. The sergeant’s own son is around the same age.

“How’d you get those cuts?” he asks.

“Oh, just my old man, gave me a bit of a hidin’,” the boy says.

“Yeah? Why’d he do that?”

The boy shrugs and pulls at the quick on his thumb.

The sergeant notes that his nails are bitten right back. “Do you know why you’re here, Travis?” he asks.

“Nuh.”

“You’ve been identified as one of two lads who tried to rob a taxi yesterday. What can you tell me about that?”

“Nothin’,” Travis answers.

“The driver says he recognised you,” the sergeant says.

The boy continues studying his thumb. “Dunno what you’re talkin’ about.”

The sergeant goes back to his forms. The big dog stirs and snuffles, then resettles. Outside, a cloud floats off to reveal the sun and there is a shift in light. Through the window, the late-afternoon rays stream directly onto Travis, bathing his face and chest in brightness.

But there is something else: the vertical bars on the window have cast their shadows down the boy—by chance, the random placement of a chair and the positioning of the sun have marked him for a life of confinement.

Sitting there in his shadow prison, Travis cannot know that his future has been inscribed across his face, across his heart, or that the small supply of dreams he dared to gather has been stolen.

And even if the kindly sergeant moved the boy’s chair or pulled the blind to, he is not a miracle man. He knows before he looks up to see the play of light, the boy is marked. He can only do his job, then go home to his own son and tell him the things he knows.