

OYA,
CELLO
and the
PLANET
EARTH
 Bay Owl
PRESS

SAM BUNNY

 Bay Owl
PRESS
COLOMBO



Bay Owl
PRESS

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P R E S S

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I've been having strange dreams my whole life. Nothing new about that I suppose. People sometimes tell me they've had a strange dream, out of the blue. Or if I volunteer my dreams, they'll share theirs. I'm volunteering this one. It's about how people from around the world get to work. It's all, how do you say, interspliced. It started off in Indonesia and some of the locals crossing a brown river on a barge or something, then it went into the hills in Africa somewhere, I could tell from the women in their colourful clothes hanging off the side of a bus ploughing through the red soil and banana leaves and then into Times Square and all the neon lights and the people in Western clothes walking into each other. I'm not sure what it means. Maybe it's trying to say something about turf. Where you live. Maybe where you live tells you everything you need to know about everything. Maybe not.



I grew up in Western Sydney. The rough part. The part at the end that's fallen off the edge of the world. I won't say the names of the places. That only makes people that live there feel worse than they already do. Jesus, I nearly said 'disclose' the names of the places. I heard that word the other day and thought bloody hell I'm going to look that word up. The problem is if you're not brought up with words, you know,

around the house, when you're a kid, you don't bother with them. If anything, they only get in the way. It's happened my whole life. Words, getting in the way. Someone told me the other day that 'knowledge is power', but I don't know, I think it's more like 'who you know', not what you know'. What use were words in Corduroy, where we lived. Corduroy, is that some kind of joke. No-one I knew in those days could spell it, or say it, or ... do anything with it. I never saw anyone wear it. We and ... who are *we*? Well, there was Mum, Dad, Petunia, my sister, named after the flower, and me, Cello, after Seychelles, the holiday we never went on. Dad was a miner, and his Dad before him, in Actor, in the Illawarra. I went there once, to visit my grandfather. There's a moment when you drive into Actor, up the incline, towards the face with the miner's hat painted on the wall of the hotel. But the sun gets in your eyes, you can only see the fuzz of the glint off the worker's cottages that have been there since they were digging coal out with picks, shovels and horses. Well, that's Actor. I don't know, is it? I'm sure there were other things going on, under those tin rooves. Births, deaths, marriages. And rumours about the coal price. I never heard much more about it though. Mum and Dad didn't like talking about Actor. But there was something else. Dad won a prize in a raffle, a holiday in America. And that's where the stories fork. One thing I heard from my grandfather was that he had too good a time in the Rockies one night and got lost in a snowstorm. He changed after that, something about the snow, and when he got back he couldn't go down the hole anymore. Mum doesn't want to talk about it. I don't know if either of them liked the mines, but their families had worked in them since the start. They were lost in Corduroy. Everyone was lost in Corduroy.

The thing about Corduroy was that the town itself was stuck. Stuck in some municipal planning nightmare, between the fringes of Sydney and the Blue Mountains. Someone in the planning department thought it up, built it up, and then forgot about it. There was a pretty joint, Kingswood, where I was born, not too far, on the Nepean River, but that was right before you crossed the bridge and went up the mountain. Corduroy was neither here, not there, stuck in the suburbs between Sydney and the river. There was a strip of shops, a milk-bar, Payless, KMart, pharmacy, fish'n'chips, pizza and an ATM, but that was about it, for retail and jobs. It stayed that way the whole time I was there. Not even a place to have lunch, with a barista, when all the other suburbs got theirs, and more. There was no access to Corduroy except the M4 bottleneck, there was one bus in and out, and only one school, Wishart, for primary and seniors, further back up the M4 to Sydney. The colour of Corduroy was bleach. The brick veneers, the weatherboards, the fibros, it didn't matter, everything, the awnings, the steel extrusion fences, the roller-doors, the garden creatures, broken cars, the grass, everything was bleached. Even the 'entertainment' they put in the year before I left school, the skate-ramp and a shed. Raked with the Australian sun and a colourlessness of poverty of people that had given up, or had been forced to give up. No wonder I spent my time looking up at the sky, anything to get a moment's relief from the incredible *forgettable* that was Corduroy. It was the suburb of the ones who are forgotten, the ones who are persuaded to forget, the ones who want to forget. I use the past tense with everything because I'm looking back on what happened to me, but also because I heard later they bull-dozed Corduroy. Razed it,

eliminated it, 'not helping with the crime statistics' was how some wit put it in the paper.

What's Corduroy got to do with anything? Well, for me, everything. I saw my life as 'diaphanous'. It's a word I looked up. I liked words, right from the start, I don't know why, but because I didn't hear many around Corduroy, I looked them up. Diaphanous: 'Light, veil-like, insubstantial'. I'm still not really sure about it, but I think it's the closest thing to me. And the reason of course was Corduroy. It had a impact on me like the guy I saw on the news who was 'dismembered' by a Great White, five metres and two tonnes of shark, near Esperance, but still managed to float in on a wave and get help. I wouldn't have told anyone, ever, about Corduroy, if I hadn't met Oya. But Oya came much later and somewhere very different. And even before I met her, I had a lot of explaining to do, to myself, about the point of being here. It struck me very early in life, and very hard. Perhaps it was the same for every one in Corduroy, but I can't really say about that, because no-one ever really said anything about anything in Corduroy. To me, it was like living on another planet, except for maybe those Earthly 'oddities' of Pompei's mum, who seduced me near the bbqs in the mountains, Vat, the Laos girl who vanished, and then my mentor, a drug dealer called Dr Spool. From them, I learnt a few things outside the 'preserve' of Corduroy, or the video arcade, gangs, over-the-counter and other drugs, early pregnancies, paltry welfare and the dial of the long-hand on the clock, on the cenotaph, planted in the roundabout on the way back to Sydney.

I don't know if I blame anyone for what went on in Corduroy, or Cordi, as we called it. The town planners, well

maybe them, but not Dad, who somehow slid into crime, or Mum, who let the whole thing happen as if nothing was happening. Those two were beyond 'reproach', if that's what the people on the other side of town would say, well they were to me, at that time, since I was still living under their roof, or sort of. There was no way around it, you were either in Corduroy, or you were on a bus into Sydney and eventually, emptied out on the street. Things were that cut and dried, even for my older sister, Petunia, a hell-raiser. Our house, if you could call it that, was on Anzac Pl, a dead end street, on the back side of the Corduroy shopping strip, named after fallen heroes who probably would have mutinied if they could have forseen what they had fought for. It was a three bedroom fibro, in a row of fibros, except our one had sea-green window frames. I think some Slavs, dreaming of the Adriatic, had lived in it before we moved in and they moved on. There were little reminders of them here and there, like the 'incongruous' white ceramic sea-horses either side of the faded brown wooden landing, or the silent copper sweet potato grappa still, in the back shed. There were also rows of scrappy vegetable garden beds in the square of overgrown grass at the back, but we kept right out of there, particularly during summer when red belly black snakes would somehow navigate the endless suburbia to our back yard, perhaps in search of a ratty snack. It was pitiful to see, through the cracked back-window, what possibly once was a 'cornucopia' of flowers, fruit and vegetables, now withered, flying in the wind on rusted trellis wires running from the back of the house to a toppling back fence. Inside, things were no more 'plentiful'. There was a lounge to the left, that the Slavs might have put together in the 70s. On entering,