

Master *

"Yeah Ned you *did* end up better off dead..." the lyrics sung on the album continue to be paraphrased, "... 'cause you *did* at least then get some peace of mind." A smile while wiping clean with a small cloth both lenses of one's round eyeglasses. Putting them back on. "You poor whining Irish bastard." A yawn. "Better to die on your feet than live on your knees. Anyhow we're all going to be mulch one day. All our differences now will be no difference then." Master lowers the volume on his large stereo. "My old records like this Redgum one or Neil Murray are still a lot better than all the *condom* music that's on the radio these days. No home brew at the moment. Although I've just finished my latest beer label which has four police all on horseback. *Apocalypse Lager*."

"Master you *truly* are Australia's greatest modern-day artist. Along with the other political, people, muso and cat labels I still love that last one. Do the *White Kanga*-"

"Fancy a cuppa?"

"Yeah, I'll have one but not a camomile." replies Michael. "I'm relaxed enough. I feel like a real tea. Black with at least a couple of sugars...if not more..."

"Well make up your mind. You always complicate things!" I'll put in three..." Master manoeuvres his lithe body through a small dining area to reach the kitchen. He boils the jug.

Michael picks up a newspaper from the living room floor. "An Aboriginal guy is trying to get over eighty million dollars compensation for the descendants of the two Aboriginal trackers who found Kelly. They didn't get their reward. Apparently, Ned Kelly feared them. *Today's Remembrance Day officially commemorates the ceasing of official hostilities on the Western Front.*" The paper is put down. "Yet the Allies soon sent troops to fight with the Whites against the Reds in 1919. There's always a war goin'-"

"Do you think my grandfather would care about all *that*?"

"You mean who wrote: '*Jack died today*' in his war diary? Not much to say about your best mate."

"Writing that might have been painful enough. In the trenches they were like brothers." A pause. "There was also 'Speed' who got killed at Lone Pine. So you'll have three sugars...?"

"Yeah. Ta."

"LAW 303 still rules the world – worst luck as many would think." Master suddenly adds.

"Yeah anyhow it was pretty good watching *Breaker Morant*." Michael goes into the kitchen. "It's pretty quiet here tonight. Usually you've got a few people coming through."

"It comes and goes. It's surprising the number of 'epsilons' who are put out for a place to stay. I've got three bedrooms plus that other living area which you can fit a mattress in. I only need the 'master bedroom' so why waste resources? As long as the peasants help with the food kitty and some of the bills I don't mind them staying until they sort themselves out. Plus, the masses like to come over for the barbeque muso events I put on in the yard."

"Not bread and circuses but German sausages and strumming guitars...as one would say." ruminates Michael who also cannot help but notice in his host's cluttered living room underneath a painting of a woman dearly holding a dog and quirky suburbia etchings a cricket bat painted all over with colourful Aboriginal designs. To pick it up to have a closer look. "This is perfect for you..."

"I got that an Aboriginal gallery auction along with that big green goanna painting on the other wall. I've been meaning to put that icon portrait you did of me beside it. Very respectful..." Master checks his mail on an old wood brown laminated table beside a Weetbix tin filled with stamps; with scrap paper; a mixed literary pile of George Orwell & environmental books; CDs; DVDs & his two large desktop screens; throws a R.T.A pamphlet onto the floor. "Their 'proposed' freeway! The creek's staying!" Master forcefully passes to his 'audience' a bush regeneration leaflet. "Let's go outside. I need some nature."

The two friends amble onto the back patio. It is a summery night. To head off past a small toilet and laundry shed to reach an ageing, worn array of tables, couches and chairs surrounding a wood fire Master so often typically puts on; he switches on his little old transistor radio with which Michael knows he usually listens to either federal parliament especially the question times of both houses, late night live talk back, ABC NewsRadio as well as nearly everything on the BBC such as from history to science and science fiction to football, the all night 2SR Bob Dylan birthday music marathon through to Australian indie and classical music; otherwise it is the AFL, cricket or the rugby league; tonight what can be heard right now is Beethoven's *Ninth Symphony* which Michael notes finishes off with the choir choral *Ode to Joy*. Master placing on a rickety wooden table a knife and saucer with butter on it to now hold a long thin tree branch taken from a large pyramid-like wood pile to check the aluminium wrapped potatoes which have been previously placed under a round tripod cooking plate to be within a fiery oval of red glowing embers - his 'universe' - to forensically see if they are cooked enough right through; with the large overarching native trees also around the fire it is so easy for both 'new arrivals' to pretend they are at a campsite deep in ancient bush. "Here Jes." A large black and white spotted cattle dog gently rushes up to Master who promptly kneels down to hug the panting animal. "You are worth far more than a dozen people I've had through here. That includes you Mick! Although you do have some value as I do note you also take care of those two female Russian Blue cats for that other female friend of yours...the one whose Lithuanian parents got away from the *human* Russians after the *second* war..."

"Yeah that's right...they're both beautiful...one black named Anya whose always tragically easily frightened of life apparently because she was taken away from her mother too early and the other older regal grey one named Mishka."

"Well their 'mother' has obviously seen the light that the both of them can train you...especially the aristocratic grey one by the sound of it..."

"There's talk of a third Russian Blue: a black kitten named Katya. Also female. Well, with your black 'devil' here as well I'll at least have to brush up on re-reading *The Master and the Magarita* by Bulgakov."

Master is in his own world. Looking on at the yawning pitch-black darkness of his native tree bushland backyard as if to have dismissively ignored Michael's literary reference to a devilish 'master'. His suburban 'garden of Eden'. He finally speaks thinking out loud about his own mischievous black cat yet as if to be speaking to himself. "Yeah Muzzie's full of fury and right now he's hiding somewhere as he's just been fed well but at least the other two cats Billy and Sid are both calm...although 'M' is mellowing out more these days..." A private sublime thought "...true..." another observation: "...too bad he wasn't so mellow when he had a swipe at your cousin's small cheeky black schnauzer when you once brought her around here...can't believe how Ola blames me and always barks when I'm in her line of sight especially when I'm wearing a 'Berries beanie.'" To then acknowledge his guest's loyalty. "At least you don't 'bark' and I can always call on you *slave* for cat minding duties...as for the possums like 'Frank' and blue tongue lizards on this property they have always kept a good eye out for themselves so as to mostly not come to any harm...Frank especially likes the tree house". Master smiles. "Jes here is as smart as *Inspector Rex* - which has to be said: you certainly are not." Jessie is stroked. "I'll put on an old video of your Austrian boyfriend for you. Although Michael here may want to see *Inspector Montalbano* from Sicily." Master looks up at Michael. "How long you minding her this time?"

"Just two days. Jessie's 'mistress' is on a work trip. Her health department job often means getting out of an air-conditioned office..."

"I stare at a screen. Press buttons. At least I can work mostly from home. Yet I still think of switching to horticulture especially since starting all the bush regeneration work at Stotts Reserve. You working regularly?"

"Yeah, enough to keep my old man off my back; especially with this new three-day-a-week community bus job. I'm still thankful how you put me up through that last rough patch." Michael eyes the garden shed. "You've still got that big pile of stubbies beside 'Nauru.'" He turns slowly to survey what's all around him to then glance back at the house. "When there's so much land to have already...fancy keeping human beings-

Knowing what Michael is going to predictably say Master cuts him short only so as to keep to the main point of the discussion. "Yeah, yeah I know those bottles have been sitting around since the time you and 'Lucille Ball' made that roundabout. You think she could have cleaned up that mess during her stay."

"We'll dump them now."

The beer bottles are placed into a recycling bin.

"It was funny driving home from the Hopetoun where we saw 'Living With Robert'." grins Michael. "There were so many roundabouts. Forced to slow down. In the EH. Both tipsy. Circle after circle. Blaming those Greek bastards Plato and Aristotle for all the hassle. Aristotle and his whirring spherical universe! Plato's Theory of Absolute Forms at every intersection! All these stubbies still lying around! Lucy yelling: 'ROUNDABOUTS!' Me: 'It's Karl Marx's birthday!' Lucy: 'Let's build at Master's House the Eternal Roundabout! Peasant! Give way!'" Michael muses. "Funny how it was *that* day as she was really amazed when I once showed her that photo on the mantelpiece of you Master in your thick woollen flannel jacket reading in a newspaper the Premier League results in front of the big Karl Marx bust at Highgate Cemetery. I'd love to-

"Well *slave* when we're finished we can open up two more stubbies."

"Maybe you could get the guitar out-"

"Maybe...but I wouldn't mind having a look at that diary as well. Today's the day for it."

"Yeah," agrees Michael. "You're right. There was no justice in any of it was there?"

"No," surmises Master matter-of-factly. "None at all."

"The gods play with us." broods Michael.

"One thing's for sure - they play. Which reminds me after *Derrick* there's a European Soccer Championship game on SBS at eleven."



Q CODE to a webpage entitled 'Ica's Backyard'.

(<https://nicholasnicolaetchings.synthasite.com/icas-backyard.php>)

* 'Part there of' read out for 'Icafest' (June 7, 2025) an excerpt from the novel *LISA* which presently remains a 'work in progress' and most of the above literary piece was written many years ago, maybe even a couple of decades; yet, with some extra prose recently added. (Further details on webpage but it should be mentioned that although Master is based on Ica there is still some literary licence -being a novel - and the same goes with the other main character Michael who does not automatically align with the writer in so many ways except other than both being Australian of Greek Cypriot background). All the best. Amen. NN.