

9/4/06

Summer

Chief Brody: Be careful, for chrissake.

Close up of Hooper, who's hyper-ventilating... smiles to reassure Brody.

Hooper: Be up in a minute

Brody watches Hooper fall into the black sea, descending in a froth of bubbles. Cut to underwater sequence. Hooper travels the bottom of the sunken boat in the inky darkness looking for damage with his hotlight, he comes across a jagged hole two-thirds of the way forward. The wood around it has been bashed and splintered. Hooper explores the hole with his hands, then uses a knife to prise out a huge shark tooth, his light wanders upward, pointing directly into the dark hole. Hooper looks up and a dead face pops into the hole, its eyes and mouth gaping in frozen horror. Close up of Hooper, terrified, bumps his head on the hull and yells through escaping bubbles, his mask filling with water as he flails for the surface.

That was when my sister spilled half her coke into her popcorn and said she wanted to leave. I hissed at her to stay even though my chest was pounding. I couldn't handle the local kids in the back seats seeing us go and calling us private school pikers for the rest of the holidays.

I don't reckon me or Lily went in past our knees that whole summer on account of the imaginary cello kicking in every time we went near the water. Most afternoons, we would stand guard on the end of the wharf scanning the harbour behind the breakwall for any suss black shapes lurking in the deep. As you do when you've got sweet FA to do for a month until you get piled into the car and head back to the city for first term.

The faint white lines on Lil's chocolate back was like a record of how many days we'd had at the beach. Her string bikini top shifted around because she didn't have boobs yet to keep it in place. Mine however, were new for the summer.

'They're Skates' said the rangy red haired boy in torn off tracky dacks and bloodstained t-shirt. He was leaping around the end of the wharf like a blowie around a dog turd, the hook on the end of his rod whipping around over our heads. I hadn't seen him in town at all that summer.

'They'll zap ya if you're not careful. See? That's the male and that's the female' he said pointing out a pair of midget stingrays rocketing around in the shallow water between the pilons.

'I'm gonna catch one'.

'What's *your* name?' said Lil straight up.

'What? Max,' said red-hair boy jumping off to one side. He hadn't looked at us yet, but my eyes were glued to him.

'Where you staying?' Lil followed up.

'What? Bellbird Van Park'.

'Just for the holidays?' I said chiming in behind Lil.

‘What? We live here. Just moved here’ he fired back, shoving his hand into a plastic bag of grey shells.

‘So where you going to school?’ Lil said continuing the Spanish inquisition.

‘What? I’m not. I don’t’, Max fired back, ‘Mum and Dad home teach me’

‘Cooo-ool’ says Lil.

‘Sort of’ Max called out leaping back and forth to keep in touch with the fast moving skates.

‘You goin’ to the carnival tonight?’ he says skewering a pipi on a hook. I watched his wet fingers delicately feed the soft, slippery, fleshy folds around the head of the hook and felt hot and good inside. ‘It’s at the oval’.

‘Have to ask Mum’, said Lil. ‘Maybe’.

Despite the busted light bulbs on top of the ticket van and the daggy collection of rides spilled across the footy oval, this was like Disneyland to us after sticky nights under hot sheets and the drone of the telly in the lounge room all summer. A warm onshore wind carried the sweet scent of low tide seaweed over the crowd. Mum had given us five bucks each and Lil was hell bent on a pluto pup and as many rides as she could cram in.

‘Maybe I’ll chuck’ she said happily heading off in the direction of the giant slide. Seaweed and vomit. There’s a combo.

‘Where’s your sister?’ Max stepped out from behind the hot food caravan.

‘She’s...’ he’d caught me off guard. He looked older in dark Amcos, check Miller shirt with pearl snap buttons.

‘Want some chips?’ he said, I felt hot again. ‘I got a couple of tickets for hoop-the-hoop, want one?’

‘Sure’, I smiled.

‘It’s fucken rigged anyway’ Max said. ‘Wanna durry?’.

‘No thanks’. We were in night shadows watching the dodgems. Max had the smoke neatly tucked inside his hand. We talked about school, mum, music, movies I liked and other stuff, but I wasn’t concentrating. Every time he took a drag, the soft orange glow worked the lines on his face. His hands danced around as he talked and I found myself laughing easier, in tune with his personality. The kiss was musk. Electric, like the tail of one of those skates he didn’t catch. The sparks from the dodgem flared blue. I closed my eyes and heard two cars thump into one another as his hips ground into mine. That kiss kept me going all winter.

Strange creatures play exotic big band music on odd-looking instruments as Luke, still giddy, downs a fresh drink and follows Ben and Chewbacca to a booth where Han Solo is sitting.

HAN: Han Solo. I'm captain of the Millennium Falcon. Chewie here tells me you're looking for passage to the Alderaan system.

BEN: Yes, indeed. If it's a fast ship.

HAN: *Fast ship? You've never heard of the Millennium Falcon?*

BEN: *Should I have?*

It took two full summers for Max to con me into the back row and just twenty minutes after the lights went down, he'd worked his hand up my skirt and into my pants like I knew he would. The saggy flip up seats and wide wooden armrests were a serious challenge for every local bloke and a well known insurance policy for girls who needed to put the brakes on if required. But tonight, I'm lost in the roll of his tongue on mine and those fingers I'd watched for so many weeks on the end of the wharf. The little timber cinema is like a sauna and getting hotter as each second flashes past. I feel a bead of sweat slide down between my shoulder blades to the bra strap. I shift up the seat and to the side to meet his hand. Those fingers. Working the soft fleshy folds of the pipi. Soft. Slippery. Easing the hook through. Up and over. Folding the fleshy bit over. And over. *There.*

LUKE: *What's that flashing?*

HAN: *We're losing our deflector shield. Go strap yourself in, I'm going to make the jump to light speed.*

The galaxy brightens and they move faster, almost as if crashing a barrier. Stars become streaks as the pirateship makes the jump to hyperspace.

EXTERIOR: SPACE.

The Millennium Falcon zooms into infinity in less than a second.

'Oh Shit' I breathe into Max's ear. Lungs heaving heart pounding head full of heat 'Shit, *Shit*' I keep saying into his ear too loudly as it goes on and on 'enough... enough now'... tender, now *tender* 'Max. Max. *Enough*'. I say holding his hand still as the long wave passes. 'God, I ...'. A flashlight fills my face and a voice hisses at me to shut up. The light splashes all over us and I see Max's dick poking sideways under his boardies. My skirt bunched up high. Knees apart. Max's hand sliding away. We scramble into the back of our seats, accusing eyes everywhere suddenly on us. Finally, the usher kills the flashlight. I look across at Max. He knows I'm watching, smiles and lifts a handful of popcorn to his mouth. With those fingers.

'I'm not doin' fifth form.' Max announces as we meet Lil out the front.

'Was that you two up the back?' she says knowingly.

'How come?' I say turning back to Max.

'What? Because I got a job at the Co-op three days a week.'

A part of me feels a little jealous of the freedom and the promise of money the word 'job' conjures.

'Hi Mrs Jeffries' Max says to mum hopefully.

'Max' mum says offhand. 'How was it girls?'

Long I say but good. How would you know Lil says. You missed half of it. Mum throws me a look. Let's go girls. Bye Max. Offhand again. Mum's twigged onto it.

'I was going to walk with Max back to the van park mum'

'It's late Em and we've gotta get up early. Packing remember?'

'I'll see you tomorrow. I'll come round after brekky' I say to Max.

There'd always been two caravan parks at the Bay, but if you were a first time visitor, you'd only notice the exxy one in the prime spot near the surf club. Bellbird was out the back of town, a few streets behind the shopping centre with a bunch of Millard on-siters for rent and a heap of permanents lined up against the rusty fence that ran all the way down to the bowls club. I preferred Bellbird. It meant something to people. I loved the idea of living in a van. Max said that's because I'd never lived in one. Max's van smelt like a roast dinner all day long. The faded stripy canvas awnings promised a summer holiday that never really arrived. There was grass up over the tyres and mould on the pilons of bricks under the back end of the van. It was different being a permanent.

'Hi Em' Mrs H said. Her yellow terry towelling robe and plastic bathroom bag was a morning ritual to the showers rain or shine. Her long red hair was wet and her pasty white skin was clear and clean in the morning sun. She was pretty for her age.

'Come in, Max is just getting milk' she had an easy way that made you feel grown up.

'Last few days of freedom eh?' she said with a smile.

'Yeah, I guess' I said sliding in behind the foldout kitchen table.

'Looking forward to it?'

'I spose. Everyone says this year gets harder'

'Yes, true. We need to get Max to step up this year. I'm afraid we're going to have to put the pressure on'

He hadn't told her. He had told me first. I felt pleased that he trusted me that much, but guilty for having the knowledge too.

'Want some toast?'

'No thanks. I've had brekky. I just came 'round to...'

'Yes, Max said you were going back today' she said sadly.

'Hey' Max stepped up into the half-light of the van. Funny how it seemed to get smaller with more people in it. Mrs H picked up a basket of washing and smiled at me as she stepped down into the sun. Max opened the bar fridge and forced the milk into the door shelf.

'What time you leavin?'

'Soon. Mum's probably on her way over now'

'You back next summer?'

'Sure, why not?' I want to kiss him before Mum gets here, but I'm stuck behind the kitchen bench. We look at each other. He's about to say something but stops. Finally I slide out and around, but too late. A tyre on gravel steals the moment. Mum stays in the car. Hello, I hear her say to Mrs H. Mrs H says you must be Em's mum. All packed and ready for the trip back I see, says Mrs H. Mum spots me at the door. Yes, she says with a nothing smile. Hi Max. Come on Em, long trip ahead.

Mrs H. is watching Max's face. Max is staring at mum with dark eyes.

'See ya' I say touching his arm. It's all I can do. Mum watches everything. Mrs H politely waves at mum as we pull away. Mum pretends not to see.

'Seatbelt Em' she says like nothing's happened.

Indy shoots out of a cut-off hallway and turns toward the exit. The rumbling is very loud and now we see why: right behind Indy a huge boulder comes roaring around a corner of the passage, perfectly form-fitted to the passageway. It obliterates everything before it, sending the stalactites shooting ahead like missiles. Indy dashes for the light of the exit. His hat flies off his head. Almost immediately it is crushed by the boulder. Indy dives out the end of the passage as the boulder slams to a perfect fit at the entrance, sealing the Temple. Indy lies on the ground, gasping for air. A shadow falls across him and he looks up

BELLOQ *Dr. Jones, you choose the wrong friends. This time it will cost you.*

I always guessed the old theatre wasn't soundproof. Now I knew. Christ, you could sit out here and listen to a whole movie. The back of the building looks like a big nose against the stars in the deep shadows of the huge Cypress tree out the front. The three quarter moon teeters on the apex of the roof, about to roll off into the gardenia bed below. Max shifts position and grunts into my neck as he rocks back and forth, rasping away, breathing getting faster. Summer's at an end and I got my first preference at UNSW. I'll just tell him outright. We share one of his smokes in the dark as he slides a long white limb into his Amcos. The franger lies in the grass like fresh roadkill, twisted sadly over on itself.

'Sydney eh. So where you gonna live?' says Max matter of factly. He's too offhand.

'I got a place at Basser college', I say hugging my knees, 'on campus'. Max hasn't got it.
'Actually at the uni.'

'You live *at* the uni?' he says laughing.

'Yeah'

'So you back next summer?' he says.

This was it.

'I don't think so. But maybe the summer after' I offer quickly 'you'll be here right?'

'What? Not sure. Thinking of going north'.

That's the last thing I remember Max saying.

MAXIMUS: *My name is gladiator.*

[Maximus slowly turns around and begins to walk back to the other gladiators.]

COMMODUS *How dare you show your back to me, SLAVE. You will remove your helmet and tell me your name...*

[The Praetorian take a ready-stand, and the gladiators, without weapons, move forward ready to fight with Maximus. Maximus stops, takes a deep breath, removes his helmet, and turns to face Commodus.]

MAXIMUS *My name is Maximus Decimus Meridius. Commander of the armies of the North, general of the Felix Legions, loyal servant to the true emperor Marcus Aurelius. Father to a murdered son, husband to a murdered wife, and I will have my vengeance in this life or the next.*

It doesn't seem right that Russell Crowe is relegated to a roof mounted telly at the video store.

'So what happened to the old cinema?' I say to a pimply boy behind the counter.

'What cinema?' he says handing over our videos and change, 'they're due for return Friday midnight'.

It's been years since I've been back. No reason to return really since mum sold the holiday house. Just a few things have changed here. But everything has for me. Sydney is home and has been for a long time now. It's where my career began. Where I was married. It's all my children know. I take Jamie through the town with our girls and tell him of the many adventures Lil and I had here. He's careful to smile generously.

The stench of low tide seaweed stuns me for a moment. I'm drifting up and up. Above the shops. Looking out across to the lights of the carnival at the footy oval and the blue flare of the dodgem cars. That kiss. Those fingers.