

Road Trip

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A photograph of a laundromat provides a catalyst for the setting.
The theme must include curiosity.

I park outside the laundromat.

Not sure where I am, but it doesn't matter. North of Shepparton. South of Townsville. Caught between the person I was and the person I'm becoming.

I've nothing with me except cash. My new identity is waiting. And right now, my clothes are giving me grief. The laundromat looks like heaven.

A remnant of the life I'm leaving caught me in Queensland, leaving me bloody and bruised. Nothing broken, but hardly the look for the new me.

I walk inside, taking note of the deserted streets. An old bloke at the pub across the street nurses a beer, watching me. No one else in sight.

The laundromat is bright and airy. Not one of those dingy, grubby places you'd find in a city. Sunlight streaming through the window, pot plants in every corner. Furniture's seen better days, but it's welcoming.

I strip to my boxers, chuck my clothes in the wash and flop on the faded couch. The seats are against the window, and I feel vulnerable in boxers with my newly short hair.

There's nothing to read and I'm what you'd call 'in between' phones, so I settle back to enjoy the quiet. I notice a sign: 'Friday 21st we are closed'.

Curious. Why would a laundromat close for a day? A renovation? Not likely. Staff shortage? No staff. Local event? Perhaps. What else?

The machine's door eventually clicks and I rescue my jeans, cotton shirt and socks. They're fresh and clean with no trace of stains. A good advertisement for washing powder.

Outside I look for a place to eat. I need a meal in my belly before I hit the road again.

This town really is deserted. The newsagent next door is dark, with a small sign in the window: Closed Thursday 20th and Friday 21st. The café next along has an identical sign. And the hairdresser. Curious and curiouser.

The old bloke at the pub looks up as I walk past. 'You're looking tidier now. How'd'ya come to be travelling without clothes?'

'Unexpected trip.' I go inside before he asks more.

Inside it's dim and quiet. A solitary barman, two old codgers propping up the bar, television playing silently in the corner.

I order a pie and coke, and sit where I can watch the yellow Hilux. Not a colour I'd have chosen.

'It always this quiet?' I ask, when the barman brings my food.

'Not like this. People are spooked.'

'Spooked?'

'They reckon there's some escaped con comin' through. Armed and violent. Police've been tracking him for days. They're about to set a road block. Figure he'll get here eventually. You'd be wise to leave soon. Where ya heading?'

I cough a little and duck my face. 'Hoping to be in Shepparton by morning. What should I look out for?'

'Wild-looking bloke. Dreadlocks. Driving a 2012 Commodore. Redback spider tattoo on his left arm. You take care now.'

I thank him, securing my long sleeves. Suddenly, I'm not so hungry.