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The
DISTANCE
BETWEEN
DREAMS

Emily Paull



FREMANTLE PRESS

PART I
WINSTON

The girl in the yellow dress
Fremantle, 1939



The Sunday Times, Sunday 19 February 1939

Willis Cigarettes opens factory in Fremantle, offering employment to hundreds

Fremantle will soon be known for more than shipping, as Mr Robert Willis opens his new cigarette factory this month, offering jobs to hundreds of out of work men. Mr Willis says that this is to be the first of many, and he has his eye on a number of premises across the metropolitan area. Mr Willis used the proceeds from the sale of his family farm to start up his business. He has recently moved with his wife and daughter to East Fremantle ...

The Daily News, Monday 20 February 1939

21st Birthday Party in East Fremantle

To celebrate her twenty-first birthday last Saturday, Miss Marlene Jones of Riverside Road, East Fremantle invited a large number of her friends to a cocktail party at her family home. Among those present were Miss Florence Longbourn, daughter of Judge Trevor Longbourn, Mr Duncan Welsh, Mr Vincent and Mr Alexander McAndrews, Miss Sarah Willis, newly of East Fremantle, and Mr Anthony Eldridge, whose family own one of the largest sheep stations in the Northwest. At the party, it was announced that Miss Jones and Mr Eldridge are engaged to be married. Not even a fracas breaking out before midnight could spoil the conviviality ...

Chapter 1

February 1939

They could hear the party long before they could see it.

Winston hurried along the sealed road, struggling to keep up with Lachie as he strode ahead. There were more motorcars on this one street than Winston had ever seen in his life – one on every driveway, and more still lining both sides of the road. The chrome on their bumpers shone in the fading sunlight.

A dark green Ford roared up the street towards them, and Winston jumped out of the way as it sounded its horn. The young woman sitting in the passenger seat laughed and leaned out the window to whistle at Lachie, whose full-forward's physique was on display beneath his singlet as he carried his dress shirt over his arm. Lachie waved cheerfully in reply.

'I think we're late. The party's already started,' Winston called out. It had been a long walk from the train station, but somehow Lachie had not a hair out of place. Winston, on the other hand, felt as if he looked like he'd been wandering the jungle for a week. His hair was plastered over his eyes, making him wish he'd had time to get it cut. He tried to relax back into a walk.

Lachie flashed a grin at Winston. 'Don't worry, still plenty of time.' He pushed his way through the side gate of the biggest house Winston had ever seen.

Lachie's confidence had got them both into trouble more than a few times. It didn't matter what suburb he came from or how much money his family did or didn't have. On the football field, Lachie Bell was untouchable, but sometimes he forgot that off the field these things mattered to other people.

'I'm pretty sure the waitstaff are supposed to be there before the guests ...'

'It'll be fine,' called Lachie over his shoulder as they crossed the back lawn. 'Party was supposed to start at six, and it's only six-ten now. We'll tell them the train was late, apologise, grab a tray and start serving. I've worked parties for the Joneses heaps of times. They're nice people.'

'Did you tell them you were bringing me?'

'Not exactly. I asked if they'd need extra waiters.'

'And?'

'And the housekeeper said probably.'

Winston coughed, attempting to get rid of the lump in his throat. The Jones house was white and square like a wedding cake, surrounded by an iron fence. The boys dropped back a few steps as a young woman with short, white-blonde hair hurried past them, squealing in excitement as she raced up to a group of other girls. Lachie rolled his eyes.

'Rich girls, hey?' said Lachie.

Winston grinned.

At the side of the house, a door had been propped open with a breeze block. The house was high up on a hill, and Winston paused a moment to look at the view. Below them, the Swan River was lit up by the sun, and the foam on it was tinged a creamy brown, like the head on a pint of beer. Sailboats bobbed up and down on the surface, and to the west he could see the cranes at the port, colossal and still. This place felt a world away from the Fremantle Winston knew.

‘Imagine looking at this every day,’ he said to Lachie.

Lachie tucked his shirt into his pants. ‘I bet they don’t even see it anymore. Come on. You can draw it *after* we work, da Vinci.’

Winston kept his eyes on the horizon for a moment longer, fixing the image in his mind. Then he ducked through the door after his friend.

The door led straight into the kitchen. Young men in red waistcoats ferried trays full of appetisers out and trays full of empty glasses in. An older woman – presumably the housekeeper – was checking trays before they left and barking orders. She frowned when she looked up and saw Lachie and Winston standing in the doorway.

‘You’re late, Mr Bell.’

‘Sorry, Mrs Flanders, the train —’

‘You should have taken an earlier train then, shouldn’t you?’

Lachie flashed her one of his best smiles and pressed his hands together like he was begging. ‘I’ll stay late, do dishes after my shift is over. It won’t happen again.’

Mrs Flanders put her hands on her hips and shook her head, but even she wasn’t immune to Lachie’s charms. ‘You’re on your last chance, Mr Bell. Who’s this then?’

‘Winston Keller. We work together at Mills and Ware. You said you’d need extra servers.’

She looked at Winston for a long moment, frowning, though not unkindly. Somewhere behind them a timer went off, and she hurried around the bench for a tea towel before turning her attention back to the oven. Lachie reached for the egg timer and silenced it, waiting.

Once the food had been removed, she turned back to the boys. ‘Lachlan, if you wanted me to take on your friend, you should have been on time. I’ve filled all the spots. The only reason I’m letting

you stay is because Mr and Mrs Jones like you, and if you're not here they'll ask me why later.'

Winston's heart sank. He'd been counting on that money. 'So, there's no work for me?' he asked.

Mrs Flanders pressed her lips until they disappeared into a thin line. 'I'm sorry, love, no. You've got Lachlan to thank for that. Just because he's South Fremantle's star player, he thinks he can ignore the rules. Now, I've got a party to run, and only one waistcoat left.' She retrieved the red garment from a bag hanging on a drawer knob behind her, tossing it to Lachie across the bench. 'Go on with you now.'

Lachie looked at the waistcoat for a moment, then at Winston. Winston felt his pity like a punch. He willed Lachie not to say anything, but it was too late. 'Okay then, so what if Winston takes the waistcoat and I leave?'

'Lachie, no, don't —'

Mrs Flanders raised her eyebrow. 'Has he done this before? Does he know what to do? I don't have time to train him. Sorry, love, next time.'

Lachie opened his mouth again, a fresh idea ready to go, but Winston clapped his hand on his friend's arm. 'It's fine, Lachie. I'll see you tomorrow. Thank you anyway, Mrs Flanders.'

Winston watched as Lachie shrugged his way into the waistcoat and circled the bench to grab a tray from the housekeeper. 'You're a hard taskmaster, Mrs F,' he said, dropping a kiss on her forehead. She turned her attention back to the stove.

Lachie paused by the kitchen door, and beckoned Winston over with a jerk of his head.

'Give her an hour and she'll wish she'd taken you on, even if it was just to dry champagne glasses. Go enjoy that river view, and I bet you anything she sends me looking for you.'

Winston thought again about the money. His mother had been talking about getting a job in a café somewhere if her mending work didn't pick up soon, but her back ached all the time as it was. If a few hours of work here could stave that off a bit longer, he'd wait outside all night for a chance.

'You're on,' he said. 'But if she doesn't, you're paying me back for train fare.'

He snuck a furtive glance at the housekeeper, who seemed to have everything under control, the director of a sophisticated dance. Trays went out, trays came back in, she stirred pots and plated foods and iced cakes, and all the while neat and tidy waiters moved around her. Even in the kitchen with the staff, Winston did not belong.

But as he headed outside, he hoped he'd at least get a chance to pretend that he did, if only for one night.