

## Sydney Evening

'Now, did I tell Mel the Yip? Think so, Yip and the Piano, but it won't be late enough yet, if not's not a worry. Yip yip yahoo. Might not even have got off. A huh, a huh-huh... shit what a clown, bugger me if it isn't.'

That was the form of words. It made small print tracks across street crossings, under the historic Coke sign, threaded in block-square letters through and around the solid metallic joints of scaffolding at the fag-end of the Strip past the King's Cross club and bar signs. Where the light died yielding to light. Cracked neon, red and specious yellow. Fail light, fall light; where the night draws down its brow. Beetly-nighto. Hey yeah good one.

'What did you say your name was?' the girl Neeomi had asked.

'Yehune.'

'Oh. Um, I'm sorry, can you say that again?'

'Yehune.'

'Oh, right. What sort of a name is that?'

'It's of Hebraic origin,' he'd said to her, face held enigmatic under the strip-lights of the bar before: yip-yip.

'Ah...'

Print Shop Tony put in in a stage whisper, 'He means he's Jewish, dumbo.'

'Oh, *Jewish*? Why didn't you say so? No need to be embarrassed, we love the Jews over here. This *is* a civilised country.'

Thees *eez* a see-vilised country. Seev, a seev-a. Words appeared to him again like shark's teeth carried on the many-lustred air, just as the tail of his eye was drawn to an unusual shape lying down in the gutter. What looked like the broken-off snout of a shark moulded in iridescent plastic. Why not? he thought for a moment incoherently: says he's Jewish.

Past the angles of pipes, the busker he'd seen took on line and detail, bobbing and ducking in the face of a small crowd. He was

cadaverous in an orange raincoat, with a clown's deep-red mouth, working to a beat in the middle of a bombsite of strewn cups and paper plates and fragments of old food. A huh, a huh-huh; rubbish of a street-fest; Sydney Lighting Association. Banners hung from the trees. Just as Yehune drew in, the clown was making a show of offering kids the limp prophylactics of burst balloons.

Sucks, wouldn't you say? And: kids, so there are kids in fucking King's Cross, this hour; but those could be the parents just over there. Not those others. Three taller ladies stood off to one side, done up in careful plumage.

Unhesitatingly, Yehune broke formation. His workmate Tony was just then gassing discoursing print print on about something, the girls caught in different attitudes behind them. His first trip was to the gutterside to pick up the shark-end, then he had a job matching the souging splintered edges roughly to the borders of his face. Got it – there – but can't see fuck. Next, he bore down, bore in, making a sort of noise in the back of his throat, *mm-ooiinn*, *mm-ooiinn*, which made for a strange discordancy with the tin-blip beat of the ghetto blaster. Shark warning; out of the water. Better get a wriggle on. A voice from behind him, Tony's voice, 'Ah... Yehune?' was lost in the logic of moments streaming back behind him, and broken into by a far louder shrilling from one of the transvestites,

'Owwwm, look what's comin' *our* way darlings.'

Near the last moment, the clown met his eye through a gap, and before the crescendo of his throat-noise turned to words Yehune was able to see just one time the sad apprehensive brow under grease paint, the eyes, the chin too long under the ruby smile: a real person, flawed and fallible, life not artifice.

He roared into the shark-mask,  
'I – eat – clowns.'

The busker registered hesitancy. Well you might, after all, balloon burst... whaddaya. It wasn't possible to think too much in the moment-to-moment stringing of event, in the rattling on of moments. When the busker picked another scrap of balloon out of the small sprig under his left arm and held it out, his attacker could only think, got you now anus-head. He tossed the headpiece

savagely, bracing the movement over the short even stubs of his legs. The clown retreated, toe over toe. And from the ragged collection of bystanders was shouted,

‘Hey! Whyn’t cha leave ’eem alone?’

‘Yeah. The keedies were liking ’eem.’

Resistance; but in the lull the shark had found a weak point, and he stooped to menace the velvet ruffle-hat that had been stood on the pavement to catch coins. The clown did confusion. *I’ll* confuse you, sucker. But just then, a tall someone in tight lycra put her weight behind a cleverly-angled elbow. *Oouwoff*; fuck it; he stumbled, shark-head dropped; though he managed to clutch it down to his side with a wrench of defeated plastic.

‘C’mon now big-dong, give the *artiste* a chance,’ sang out razor-edged like the cry of an Australian parrot over the cacks and gestures of the rest of the sidewalk flock. ...