

1950

*A generational microcosm reminisces*

The first thing I notice is the smell. The smell of the dust of ages - not so much a random collection of ancient, microscopic detritus, no; but a dusty, a musty smell that can only come from a house that has endured a lifetime of cleaning. A house where the dirt is so clean that it has been ground into the wall themselves.

He lounges there like an extension of the chair, face wrinkled, but eyes afire as the flicker and glow of the television speckles the room in alternating light and shadow. Sunlight streams through the gaps around the edges of the curtains and picks the motes of dust out of the air.

A whistle blows on the television as a goal is scored. His gnarled fingers curl into a fist and thump against the wooden armrest. I look up in surprise. "Bloody stupid Collingwood! Pack of bloody ratbags, the lot of them!" I laugh and nod, and he glowers in frustration as the ads come on. His fingers rap against the armrest for a moment, before he seems to come to a decision.

"Dot! Dot, where's my bloody cup of tea!?" he bawls, with a voice so drenched in cliché I can't help but smile. Like a scene straight out of the 1950's, my Nanna bustles in, bearing a tray adorned with tea and biscuits. You can almost see the dimples in the carpet, almost feel the collected weight of this weekly ritual as a thousand repetitions breathe a sigh of collective relief that the requisite tea and biscuits have been delivered without incident.

He raises the cups to his lips, hands trembling only ever-so-slightly. Only the barest fraction of a second later, the 1950's opens up around us and his voice shrieks through it, barreling and bellowing.

"Bloody hell, Dot, it's stone bloody cold! What the bloody hell do you call this?" She doesn't even pause in her work, practiced hands deftly exorcising the tiniest amounts of imagined dust from their bookshelf. "Oh, shut up and drink your tea, Percy. The game's on now, anyway."

The cup is at his lips, but begrudgingly, and even I can see his eyes tightening the barest fraction from the scalding heat of the tea. I know from experience Nanna makes a tea you could strip paint with. He gulps it down anyway, as he has done a thousand times, eyes riveted on the game.

For a few minutes, there is nothing but the roar of the crowd, and the shuffle of Nanna's feet around the room. The Eagles score a goal, a hard-earned one from the looks of it, if Grandpa's knuckles are any judge. White and taut, they release their grip on the armrests and he sinks back in the chair. A thousand practiced hands reach down to a thousand plates, grasp the same biscuit and pop it in the same mouth. He smiles a smile of satisfaction I have seen a thousand times before.

I sip my lemonade, and taste the tang of the battered metal cup on my lips, marveling to myself that outside these musty curtains, beyond this delightfully broken record of a living room, it is the real world.