

TEJA B. PRIBAC

## Bob, Nando, Pat, Alice and Other Species

*to Odi The Pig*

Bob, as his name suggests, may be considered a typical Australian – if there is such a thing as a typical Australian (or rather, if there is such a thing as an atypical Australian). Nando, who for a long time lived in the outskirts of Perugia, Italy, eventually also joined the mob of typical Australians, albeit of a different kind compared to Bob. It can get a bit claustrophobic when you spend most of your life in one place and everybody knows each other – or so it is believed; a lot of the time, in fact, nobody knows anybody at all, and that's perhaps the greatest tragedy of it all.

But things never quite worked out for Nando. His salary was higher in Australia but so were the rent and other expenses and the family was struggling – not seriously struggling, but it didn't feel as comfortable as it should have felt. Nando eventually made up his mind and took up a job in mining. He knew that Lucia, his wife, an environmentalist at heart, would not be impressed, but he was hoping she would understand or at least tolerate, after all weren't they in it (life, things...) together? No, according to Lucia who obviously had enough and walked off with a tree-hugger. *Tree-hugger* – a handy term that Nando had learnt for those softish amoebish wife-stealers!! and one that his mates would sure understand. So when Bob met Nando in town and Nando looked like a worn-out football and his hand gesturing was just slightly out of proportion as was the pitch of his voice while he was trying to explain to Bob how great he felt, Bob invited him for a beer. And then another and another. And round about the fifth beer, while Nando, having dealt with all the others, was kicking and punching the last tree in Bob's yard, Bob, who's not exactly known for his gregariousness, pulled Nando over to the table, put a bowl of unshelled peanuts in front of his guest to keep his

hands and grinding teeth busy, fiddled around with his own bottle of beer between his fingers for a moment, wondering why the hell he got himself into this kind of shit again, and then said:

‘Nando...’

‘Yes?’

‘It’s a hard life for us guys...’

‘Yes, I know, it’s like...’

‘Shut up, asshole. I’m trying to say something ...’

‘Sorry...’

‘It’s a hard life for guys because guys are expected to be like machines. We are raised like that and the whole world for the rest of our days expects us to be like that. Slowly, we buy into this myth ourselves, and become so worried about appearance that appearance is all we have left.’

‘I’ve never thought about this...’

‘What happens, for example, when a rat gets into the house? The guy is supposed to deal with it. Does anyone ever ask the guy if he *wants* to deal with it or if he’s *comfortable* with dealing with it? No. What about a snake, say, a deadly poisonous snake like the ones we have around here? Who’s got to deal with that? Okay, I’m not saying that no woman can or would ever deal with it on her own, but normally it’s us who are called upon. Or take for example the news... do you watch the news?’

‘Yes.’

‘I don’t, not much these days... but anyway, say there’s this huge bombing of civilians happening somewhere or some kind of invasion or whatever... what do the headlines say? Almost without exception, they’ll say “X-number of people were injured and killed, including women and children.”’

Bob paused for a moment, trying not to get distracted by his visitor’s confused look, cleared his throat and continued.

‘It’s like we don’t count, or don’t count as much. It’s as if when my leg gets blown off I won’t feel the pain, if my heart gets broken it doesn’t matter because there was no heart there in the first place, right? just some kind of pumping stone. If I don’t weep, because that’s the first thing we are taught, *boys don’t cry*, nobody will see the tears drowning me inside, so they don’t exist, right? And if a bloody tear does come out of me eventually, do you know what happens? I get bullied. *Oh, look at him, he’s crying! Bob is a girl, Bob is a girl...* Have you ever been bullied?’

‘Yes.’

‘I haven’t, but I’ve seen a lot of it, and it’s not nice. Have I tried to prevent it? No, didn’t have the guts... that itself could make you the next target. So what does one do?’

‘Yes, what does one do...’.

‘Time to go home, Nando. Pat and I will drive you over, just to make sure you get there in one piece. Dunno what one is to do, Nando... but it’s not the trees’ fault, so get over that, okay?’

Safely home, Nando curled up on the sofa – he hadn’t slept in the bed since Lucia had left – holding the pillow tightly, weeping like nobody was watching.

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Upon their return that night, Bob retreated to his cabin, while Pat lay down on the soft grass in the middle of the paddock and stared at the moon. When Bob got up in the morning, Pat was gone.

Pat is also a typical Australian, or rather he was until he rejected the ‘modern’ way of life and largely exiled himself from society. But even that may be typical Australian, who is to know? It wasn’t always like that for Pat who doesn’t call himself Pat anymore, but as hard as he tries, Bob cannot remember Pat’s new name. Pat only ever returned to visit Bob once. He brought bush berries, pine nuts and a ti-tree twig.

‘Pine nuts?’

‘Yes, I was walking past a large pine-nut tree and the cockatoos were willing to share it with me. Okay, it’s not a native... but you know where I stand, Bob, anyway. Cooperation. There’s good and there’s bad stuff in just about everything. How about we plant native grass

in the middle of our camomile lawn just to give it a touch of.. of.. of... nativeness, and then we shoot any kangaroo that attempts to eat it? Hahaha. I could genuinely laugh if it wasn't so pathetic and tragic.'

'What about the ti-tree twig? Some kind of *wild* version of a toothpick?'

'Haha, if that was sarcasm, sorry to disappoint. Yes, it is... it's actually a toothbrush. You should give it a try.'

'Sure... solar powered, ha?'

'You've been keeping up with trends, ay? I'd read about these things before. You know, I'd be sitting at the computer at night, doing one thing or another, and suddenly I'd wonder when the toothbrush was invented. So I'd check. I don't remember when it was invented, I think it had something to do with the Chinese, but then you wonder of course not all of the world would get the toothbrush at the same time even if it existed somewhere, so what were they using in these places, and what was used before? Twigs! From a variety of trees, but ti-tree works great. Handy, ay? It turns out, of course, that many people have actually discovered this and have had the wits to dump the modern crap and go back natural and economical. I'm talking about people who *can* afford a toothbrush, who *can* afford shampoos, who *can* afford creams and stuff, but they think it's silly to use the commercial varieties when you don't need to. I didn't give it much thought at the time, I thought it was sensible but why would one bother? ... crazy, I know, but that's the mind-frame one grows up with: fast fast fast, new new new, consume consume consume... *shrink shrink shrink*...'

'I missed you, Pat.' Smile. 'Now enlighten me: how do I use it?'

'Easy: you chew the end so it turns into a kind of brush, then you start brushing like you would with a normal toothbrush. And then you end up with this kind of toothy beauty', smiling broadly.

Pat is an Indigenous Australian who received a mainstream formal education, and after a successful career start in economics, returned to study psychology part-time, something he's always been interested in. He was working on a PhD in traumatology when he read about the African free-living elephants who were diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder. This turned his life quite literally upside down, but at least this time, as he saw it, it was heading in the right direction, though he had no idea what the final destination was going to be. It wasn't

the fact that elephants may develop PTSD under certain conditions that shook him so profoundly as to make him give up his doctorate, his job and many other things. No, he'd known for a long time that animals are very complex psychological creatures, and that all that fuss about human exceptionalism was a big load of self-serving garbage. He'd had many an opportunity to witness it first-hand during school holidays, which he'd spend with his uncle who ran an unofficial and semi-secret rescue and rehabilitation practice for kangaroos at first, though over the years it grew both in numbers and species. Beside the regular physical ailments uncle had to deal with, psychological issues of animals were perhaps the hardest thing to tackle.

What struck Pat about the elephants' story was the fierce insistence of some that even well-meaning so-called eco-tourism parks were not going to do a great deal of good to the traumatised individuals, let alone cure them personally and the elephant society at large, and that some kind of radical change was needed – such that would basically enable the elephants to set their own pace for healing, the only way to ensure restoration of their psyche. Others argued that such radical change of the globalised world is unlikely to happen so the best chance for the elephants to survive was for them to make a pact with the devil – the traumatogenic oppressor – and try to act as normal as possible so people will like them and chase them with cameras instead of munitions.

The latter made practical sense, physical survival first, regardless how precarious, but as Pat's uncle used to say in regard to the animals he'd known: 'They are fucked, you know. The whole place has changed, there's little space left for them, little food, they're being incessantly persecuted, it's like living in a war zone; the mothers don't know how to mother anymore, the kids are scattered, looking for somebody to look after them and all they find is more scatteredness.' 'It's not something that I can fix here,' he'd say, 'I can alleviate it a little bit, but not much more than that. It's easy to break someone, much more complicated to fix them. Maybe it's easier for livestock... I don't know...they've been slowly domesticated and over time I guess you get more used to it.' Through his reading over the years Pat had learnt sophisticated terms for these things, for example 'trans-generational trauma', which means that trauma can transfer from one generation to another. There's a lot of evidence for this in animals (though for political reasons, instead of trauma it's usually called some other, less 'anthropomorphic' name), and there's lots of talk about it in reference to the Nazi Holocaust survivors.

Will the elephants eventually get used to it? *Habituate*, as they call it? Or will they just go numb? Survivors of the physical genocide and victims of psychological extinction – the latter being another term that came up in the elephant business and that haunted Pat.

He was sitting on the balcony of his rented flat in Surry Hills, listening to the screeching fruit bats, puffing circles of smoke into the night and thinking of his mum out West. She was so happy that he *had made it*, but seemed even happier to see him come *home* when his city duties permitted it, ditch his city clothes and help clean the shed or gutters or whatever was necessary, as if somehow she had always hoped that he would make it but maybe a little bit closer to home. Don't all mothers feel like that?

Is she traumatised? he suddenly wondered. It'd not been an easy life for her, as far as he could tell; she didn't talk much about it. Is *he* traumatised? Affected perhaps by trans-generational trauma if not necessarily 'direct' trauma? For someone who knew so much about trauma, he was suddenly at a loss.

His life has been good. Except for a brief period in his teens when things were a bit shaky. But he managed to finish high school with top grades and go to Uni. This always seemed very important but that night on the balcony with the warm Westerly blowing in sand from the desert – there was no sand, not really, but Pat could feel it anyway, rubbing his hands together gently tasting with his fingers every grain of it – nothing seemed certain anymore. The job, the flat and his life generally may work quite well on paper if one was to follow the cognitive therapy theory: you cognitively analyse your situation, work out why, how etc., and once you understand it all, you get over it. Okay, it's not quite that simple but along those lines. *The theory of the rational man*. There's another theory, more complex and scientifically as well as intuitively sounder: the one that is based on embodied emotions and that takes the whole developmental reality into account and suggests that real healing is possible only when subconscious patterns are tackled and reorganised in an organic way, which cognitive-behavioural therapy models or any approaches of that kind are unlikely to achieve.

Has there always been this elephant in the room that he'd never recognised before? How was he to reconcile, truly reconcile in his flesh and soul, the violence perpetrated towards his people and implicitly towards himself, along with the annihilation of everything they've ever been, done and achieved, with his current life, which may under the guise of empowerment in fact just be helping to speed up extinction? A cognitive behavioural

‘therapy’ model of some kind? Is that what he’s been subjected to without realising it? There is no doubt that mainstream education is crucial and indeed empowering, at least in the short term. But is it possible to truly heal when you are being rushed into it because your pain is inconvenient to the rest of the society? And is it really going to work in the long run, even if for just a moment you set aside the whole issue of real and potentially delusional healing, when you put your hopes into a system that already seems to be cracking within? The white-man’s system, of which Pat was now part too, with its mindless consumerism and overall destruction of the land, overconsumption of resources... forget psychological extinction, it didn’t look too good for physical survival either. There must be another way, some kind of radical shift. But Pat couldn’t quite think of anything that would work or that people might be prepared to accept. People are very adaptable animals, he thought, but they seem to only be able to work within a very limited framework, so he wasn’t too hopeful. He didn’t want to be part of what he now saw as the likely problem, he wasn’t quite sure how to be part of the solution either because he did not have a solution, so he decided to take time off to contemplate the lot. That’s how he ended up at Bob’s place.

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Bob lived in the mountains with a small herd of sheep and some other animals that he’d always slaughtered himself and sold for meat to the locals and the occasional tourist. Pat saw an advertisement for a farm-hand. The pay wasn’t high – as it turned out there was no pay at all because Bob couldn’t afford it – but money was not what Pat was after anyway; a roof over his head and a couple of warm meals a day with plenty of time to think – or rather just to *be* – was all he needed at the time.

Bob’s grandfather, Jack, came from England on a ship as a missionary. Jack diligently wrote his diary on the ship but due to his vulnerable stomach most of the diary entries involved intestines and God, and it’s not quite clear where the two divert if at all, at least Bob couldn’t work it out. Bob’s father, Tom, sceptical of any religious and other abstractions, following his (clear or not) gut feeling, distanced himself from the father and acquired a piece of land where he set up a dairy farm. It was all going more or less fine until one day Tom was found dead in the cows’ dam. Heart failure, but the actual death seemed to have been the result of drowning. The kids being very young – big darlings but mostly unhelpful due to their age – Bob’s physically (and doubtlessly emotionally at the time) fragile mother didn’t feel she could run the farm by herself, so she sold up and moved in with her older sister who

lived in a small town nearby. Bob got his first real job at the age of fourteen at the local butcher's, and most of the rest of his life has revolved around butchering of some kind. As such, he's never been Alice's favourite person, but they'd exchange civilities as most neighbours do.

One day Bob came to Alice's place and somehow placidly asked if she could help him rehome one of 'his' ewes.

*You want me to do what???*

Seeing her incredulous look, Bob rushed to explain: 'I want to find her a home. She's delivered a dead lamb recently, it was probably pulpy kidney. I vaccinated her, she's fine now, healthy, but I don't want to breed her anymore. She's around seven years old, very good stock. I've done this before, you know... found new homes for animals...'.

'Of course, I'll help you find her a home! I'll come over with the camera later, we'll take some photos and then write up a bio and send it off... and of course we'll make sure she ends up in a *good* home!'

Bob's face lightened up. He lowered his head slightly, softly smiling: 'She's like a pet, you know. She lives near the house...', and then sternly again: 'She's good stock!'

'I've read about this'.

'What?'

'That farmers may allow themselves to get attached to what they call "breeding stock" but not to so-called "store stock". You got attached to this ewe but you don't give a damn about her poor babies that you've regularly taken away from her and slaughtered and possibly eaten some yourself.'

Bob was a bit puzzled, he'd never thought about it in those terms, but before he could say anything, Alice resumed. 'I don't get you. You know... when I first moved here I used to watch the lambs playing on your property, I'd occasionally film them, they looked so happy. Then one day I'd be watching them again and I'd notice one was missing. Then later another one went missing. And another. So I stopped watching them. And I try hard not to think about them every time I look out of my kitchen window and get a glimpse of your paddock and the creatures in it.'

Alice paused, looked over the valley towards Bob's property, which wasn't visible from where they were standing due to the thin strips of luscious Mountain Ashes: 'People think we are crazy. The other day my friend got a call: somebody had spotted a pig wandering about, he looked lost but also appeared to be injured. When she got there, she found he had a huge wound on the back of his neck; the back of his neck was literally just a huge big hole full of maggots, billions of them. She tried to find a vet who'd clean it out and treat him, but guess what? All they wanted to do was kill him. All of them. My grandmother was also rotting away, her feet, and they stank like hell, but nobody ever suggested to kill her, instead she had a nurse coming in to clean them out every day. But he was a pig, and who gives a shit about pigs.'

Bob was trying to think of what to say, but couldn't come up with anything, and he was glad of it a moment later as it became clear that Alice hadn't finished yet.

'It hurts, you know... it fucking hurts! You might be able to choose who you get attached to and who you don't, but I can't. And many other people can't either. I look at an enslaved animal and I see an individual there. I feel his pain from the day you chop his tail off without pain relief to the day you slit his throat. There's nothing I can do about it. It's even got a name, this thing. It's called vicarious trauma.'

'What trauma?'

'Vicarious trauma. It's like direct trauma, it just comes to you in a different way, it gets triggered by somebody else's experience then takes over you as if you were the direct victim yourself. It affects you physically too, you feel it in your bones, you can't eat, you can't sleep, you get nightmares. It's a major problem for people who work with victims of violence. It's taken seriously when it affects people working with *human* victims, you know... therapists, emergency staff, humanitarians. But when it comes to us working with animals, they just consider us a bunch of over-emotional weirdos. They have no idea what we see and what we deal with. They just want us to go away so they can enjoy their steak and their *lifestyle* in peace. And they preach about tolerance, their *right* to choose what to eat, and crap like that. It makes sense in a way, I guess, they have to protect themselves and the bubble they live in. Imagine if they had the guts to look under the surface, these bougie schmucks, the whole society would collapse.... Or if *you* allowed yourself to get attached to the little lambs...'

There was silence for a moment. Then Bob, as if he was trying to change the subject, said ‘I know you think I’m a piece of shit. And maybe I am... Have you ever met Pat?’

‘Pat?’

‘The Aboriginal guy who lived on my farm for a few months? It doesn’t matter. He was going through some shit, trying to work out people and the society and all... Anyway, he asked me if I felt that as a domesticated animal it might be easier for me.’

‘Domesticated animal?’

‘Yeah, he thought that I was like a domesticated animal because I’ve been around these people – the people who are running and shaping the current society, basically white people – for longer, at least through my ancestors, so I was closer to them, also because over time my ancestors helped to shape it, intentionally or not, just by being there. And he saw himself more as a wild animal because his ancestors weren’t there from the start but got suddenly invaded and forced into it – or out of it, whichever way you want to see it.’

‘Interesting perspective. What did you answer?’

‘Well, I’d never thought about it that way so I wasn’t sure what to answer. But then I said that it probably depends what kind of domesticated animal you are. If you are a dog it may be easier, but if you are a pig... well, I’m not so sure. But then Nando came, and I guess he showed that puppies can crack, too.’

‘Who is Nando?’

‘Ah, just a guy. He’s probably one of those people who’d preach you tolerance while devouring a steak in front of you but would run away in tears if he came anywhere near a slaughterhouse. Your typical “bougie schmuck”? In reality, he’s just like anybody else and we all do what we can to keep ourselves afloat. As much as we try to change things around us to make our lives better, it’s usually things around us that change us.’

‘Mhm...So if he’s the puppy, you are the pig? Is that what you are saying?’

‘Something like that.’ Silence.

‘Are you going to explain?’

‘I don’t like butchering animals. I don’t think anybody does.’

‘Except for example the pig-doggers and other hunters out there who do it for “sport” disguised as “conservation”.’

‘Yes, but they are fucked. I mean really fucked. Nobody in the right frame of mind would want to kill for pleasure, let alone torture for pleasure, and I don’t think it’s safe to have them walk freely in the society anyway. They are dangerous bastards... But not all hunters are like that! You have hunters who truly believe in conservation and do a quick kill whenever possible. But I guess even that is different, you know, they shoot from a distance, they are not dealing with individuals... I mean... they *are*... but they don’t see it that way... don’t get the chance to see it that way. They just shoot a moving target. Most of the time they don’t even get to meet their eyes, just a lump of fur.

‘To understand what it’s really like you need to work in a slaughterhouse. I did that... for a long time... perhaps too long. I don’t know if your books tell you about that?’

‘About what?’

‘About what it’s like to work in a slaughterhouse. About what it does to you.’ He stopped, looked at Alice as if waiting for her to say something, which she didn’t, so he went on. ‘I’ve seen the change, been part of it, if you want. The change in the way things are done. When I started, it was all more slow, more relaxed... it’s never been nice, it’s always been hard work, especially with the large animals... they are very strong and they certainly don’t want to die, they show you this quite clearly, they can smell death, so the whole thing is a total mess, and it can be quite dangerous.’

‘Lethal,’ Alice not trying very hard to hide her sarcasm.

‘Yes, but I’m talking about people not animals. When you do it at home, you can’t wait for it to be over, and you somehow cope with it knowing it’s necessary, and you think of the sausages or something that makes it somehow worthy. To make themselves feel better about it, some people have all sorts of rituals around slaughter, God and all that stuff. The things that one sees, you know... like once when I was still an apprentice, I went to this place where we were supposed to butcher a pig. It was a Christian sect of some kind, I’d never seen anything like that. The whole extended family was there, twenty to thirty people, the women were standing in a circle, the kids were all over the place. The moment the guys announced that they were ready to bring the pig out of the barn, the women started to sing. The singing got louder and louder, and when you thought it couldn’t get any louder, it got even louder.

The whole thing was totally spooky, and the singing, which by that stage was pure shouting, suddenly stopped when this guy fell onto his knees and lifted his head and arms up towards the sky and mumbled something that I couldn't decipher. But that appeared to have been the signal that the pig was dead. And when I thought of that weird singing later on, I started to think that the whole purpose of it was to disguise the squealing of the pig. It was all done just with a knife back then, no stunning and that sort of stuff, and of course in open view of everybody, and pigs can be quite loud, hell they can.'

'Yeah, the main purpose of religions seems to be encouraging disguise and denial.'

'In a slaughterhouse it's different. It's not a once-a-year event, or even once a month, you deal with it every day. There's no escape. When I started things weren't as bad. It was never pleasant; a lot of jobs aren't pleasant but you have to do them, and I needed a job. Over the years things got really bad. The number of animals increased, the abattoirs got bigger, the machinery got faster, you can barely keep up with it, a lot of the time you can't and you end up with all sorts of injuries.'

'Bougies wanting their meat, and wanting more and more of it and cheaper and cheaper.'

'Yes, that's why the industry's grown so much. And the reason meat's so cheap has as much to do with modern farming methods as it does with the conditions in the slaughterhouse. But what I'm trying to say is that you never really get used to all that blood. You can't. People deal with it in various ways; for example, you start to really appreciate the bottle. It's not a healthy place, and you bring that home with you. You can't just take off your apron, wash your hands and forget about it. It doesn't work like that. As you said, it settles in your bones. But that's not something the pups like to hear, is it?'

'I guess not. It's not something farmers want to hear either, is it? Or they wouldn't be sending their *beloved* animals to the slaughterhouse, would they?!' Alice regained some composure: 'There's been a little bit of work done on that. Nothing hugely systematic, but just the other day I was reading an article about the psychological issues of "meatworkers", as they call them, and the effects on the communities where large slaughterhouses operate: increased arrest rates, especially for violent crimes, rape etc. They didn't find that when they compared it to other manufacturing industries.'

'I'm not surprised.'

‘The reformers in the early eighteenth century who were arguing for public slaughterhouses – by “public” they meant state regulated and hidden from public view as opposed to private butcher’s sheds – referred to it as “morally dangerous work”, that’s why they thought it should be hidden from the view of the general public and state-regulated. Then just recently a researcher suggested that slaughterhouse work should be classified as “ultra hazardous activity for psychological wellbeing”. I guess that would be an *ultra hazardous* thing to do if you want to keep making money out of it, for which you have to rely on the society’s blissful blindness to reality. Not to mention animals’ suffering.’

Bob nodded. ‘I’d never take an animal to the slaughterhouse. You can’t avoid abuse, as hard as you try. And I tried very hard.’

‘But you ended up abusing them?’

‘My mates were constantly kicking and punching the animals for no reason, I didn’t see the point but didn’t say anything, it’s not that whatever I’d have said would have made any difference. Then one day, this pig came to me. I was about to slaughter him, and he nudged my hand... you know, like a pet. And I lost it.’

Bob went quiet, looked at the sheep, ducks and others going about their own business in Alice’s yard.

‘I lost it. I don’t know how, it just happened and I couldn’t do anything about it. I grabbed a rod and beat and beat as hard as I could. His head, his back, his legs, anything I could reach. My mates were standing around yelling *Show him, mate! Beat the shit out of the dirty bastard!* And I kept hitting and hitting until I collapsed with exhaustion. The pig had long been dead by then. I went home, I couldn’t eat and sleep for days. I never went back. I guess it’s a bit like with you veggies: people don’t want to know about us, they just want us to do our work as quietly as possible.’

‘So what do you think when a case of severe abuse gets exposed, from a slaughterhouse, farm or some other place, and then people say it’s a single incident and does not reflect the industry as a whole?’

‘I think it’s bullshit. They have to say that to keep consumers happy – and to a certain extent to keep farmers happy, too. At least the ones who still care. We’re not all monsters,

you know. We like to think that our animals are treated more or less okay when we send them off to places. But mostly they are not.'

'Have you heard about the recent abuse case involving shearers who were punching the sheep's faces, beating them with hammers and all that?'

'Yes, I have. And some of the farmers were outraged but didn't know how to stop it except sending the contractors away. Who's going to shear your sheep then?'

'Luckily, the Shearing Contractors Association has already worked out a way of reducing grumpiness in sheep – by starving them prior to shearing – so the shearers won't *need* to abuse them anymore! How fucking insane is that? But how handy to calm people down and make them believe all's gonna be okay from now on so go ahead buy that oh so much needed fucking woollen sweater! And sure all farmers believe the animals will all get five-star treatment from now on too, right?'

Alice was fuming, and quietly, inside, Bob was, too. Then he said: 'I heard this guy on the radio once. He believes that one day people will stop eating meat. I know meat is not the only issue, but it's a big one, no?'

'Yes.'

'Until then he wants to give people the opportunity to buy truly humane meat, so he's got this free-range farm with all sorts of animals that he treats well and kills them himself.'

'Curious to think that good treatment could involve slaughter... but anyway... Is that why you do what you do?'

'I don't know.' Long pause. 'Probably not. It's more likely because that's all I *can* do.'

'Have you tried growing potatoes?'

'I grow potatoes!'

'Try growing more? You've got quite a bit of land there, if you grew vegetables instead of wasting it on grazing, you could feed the whole town and make money out of it.'

Bob looked away, they both remained silent for a moment, then he looked back at Alice:

'I'm tired.'

He was; it wasn't hard to see that.

'I've heard you've been planning to retire. Divide the land, sell it to bougies for their neat little townhouses and piss off? I'm thrilled!'

'I'm sorry.' He smiled, looking genuinely guilty. 'Maybe you can buy it along with my animals?'

'I'll sure try.'

'Thank you for the ewe. She's a good pet.'

'She'll be alright.'

Bob returned to his cabin, dragged the bag of old bread to the paddock, stood there for a moment to watch the sheep negotiate their way into its contents, then walked off to the other end of the property where a luscious blackberry bush was growing. 'You didn't ask to end up here either, did you? But don't worry, the Council's pests can't find you here.' He picked the juicy fruits, broke a twig off a ti-tree nearby and sat down to watch the new generation of wild ducklings learning how to swim in the creek, somehow feeling glad they weren't in Victoria where hunters would be after them before they could experience their first offspring. He thought of Pat, wondering what he was up to these days. He hadn't seen Nando since the 'tree-wrestling' night either, so the pup must have moved out of town. He missed them. He even missed Alice, who lived just across the road. He felt he somehow connected with all three of them, even though they were entirely different species.

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