

## Suitably Stumped

Doris Day started out as a ballet dancer, only becoming a singer and actress when her stars splayed quite dramatically out of alignment one day. She broke her legs in a car crash and her career as a professional dancer was swept away along with the broken glass from the road. We know shit happens. But it usually turns out all right.

Doesn't it?

As she cycled down the dusty road, Jess ran her eye along the eclectic collection of shops that graced the street. The office of the local newspaper, The Stump Leader, sat in The Stump's main street, somewhat euphemistically called Commercial Road. A butcher selling Specialty Packs that seemed to consist mainly of many different cuts of pork - pork schnitzel, pork cutlets, pork loin chops, pork mince and pork profiteroles. Jess' mind boggled at the last entry, but she determined to come back with her pannier and an appetite for the exotic. The hairdresser (Unisex!!!) was called Bangs and Mash. She wondered what it was about the world of hair styling in The Stump that merited three screamers, and whether there was some kind of synergy with the butcher's next door.

There was a gift shop, 'Bali Hoo', a mashup of Indonesian and Scottish styling with Buddhas wrapped in tartan, miniature temples, exotic masks, ornate lamps and mirrors in dark wood sat next to Toby Jugs with creepy bagpipers' faces, flags of St Andrew and miniature Edinburgh Castle ceramics. The newsagent seemed normal (a relief), the IGA had a special on Tomatoe's, Potatoe's and Caulie's (she resisted the urge to buy some chalk and make the corrections). There was a bakery promising Nasi Goreng Pasties and pork satay haggis which made Jess wonder whether the owners of 'Bali Hoo' had shares in said bakery. She shuddered as she imagined what flavour the shortbread would be. There was a bank, a hotel (The Commercial, no prizes for originality), a neighbouring motel (The Stump Inn) and a Tab.

On each lamp post and in most windows, Jess noticed the signs proclaiming that the 125 year celebrations would include the unveiling of the new town monument, children's activities, delicious food and burying a time capsule. At the very end of the road as it neared the residential section there was a promising internet café, Prose, which advertised free WiFi and Fair Trade Coffee. She stopped cycling, propped the bike against the street lamp and went in.

The first thing Jess noticed were the framed prints on the walls depicting famous writers and poets. She felt at home straight away. She chose an organic Ethiopian blend with a slice of banana bread so thick she wondered if they'd given her the whole loaf. She sat under Jane Austen, pulled out her phone and pretended to text. The waitress (moodily beautiful) gave her a couple of 'who are you and what are you doing here' looks as she made a show of spraying and wiping tables. Jess sipped her coffee (smooth, delicious) and wondered whether her surname, McDonald, was the deciding factor for the interviewer, Miss Celia Fraser. Perhaps she was part of the Scottish/Balinese contingent and knew a fellow Braveheart when she saw one on a resume.

'Here about the job?' The voice was male, close by and young. Her instincts told her he had a brown sweepover, blue eyes, a half-hearted beard, some kind of tribal tattoo, skinny jeans and a pastel check shirt, with biceps protruding from the sleeves like sausage meat filling the membrane. Probably vegan or lactose-intolerant or a hemp-lover.

She looked up. Tick for the hair and the eye colour, but she'd take a rain check on the other attributes. 'I am.' She waited for him to speak, unsure whether he was a potential threat as a fellow interview candidate, related to Miss Celia Fraser, or just a nosy random.

'Awesome. You'll do well.' He grinned. Straight teeth, nice face, not too long, not too wide, good skin tone, a smattering of freckles, a dimple in the left cheek. Around 6 ft, slim waist, broad chest, broader shoulders, decent clothes (Levis and a pastel Ben Sherman shirt). No visible tatt. Late twenties. One arm.

'I'm Sawyer Gillies.' He held out his good arm (well, his only arm), left, well-toned, piano fingers, great watch, Seiko slimline on a quality black leather strap. Her

eyes lingered over the shoulder that had no arm attached to it. She knew she shouldn't stare but it wasn't something she'd come across before. Not up so close. She found it fascinating. He noticed her noticing. His eyes flicked to his stump, then back to her. She dragged her eyes back to his face but not before he blushed lightly. She shook his hand, taking his left in her right, which was odd. Firm shake, good grip. Not sweaty.

'I'm Jess. You're not the competition, are you?'

'You mean they're interviewing more than one person?' He pulled out the chair across from her with a jarring scrape that set the waitress scurrying out back, her voice muffled behind the whoosh of the coffee machine but high-pitched enough to suggest she was relaying the happenings in the shop. New girl flirts with damaged boy. Jess knew what small country towns were like. 'I have no idea. Don't they normally?'

'Miss Fraser is convinced that whoever she selects from the resume process will take the job so she rarely offers to interview more than one candidate. If I were a betting man, I'd say you had the job, Miss Jess.'

The waitress reappeared at the sound of their conversation. She grabbed an order pad from the counter and sauntered over. 'Usual, Sawyer?' She pushed her top lip up with the lid of the pen so her mouth made a kissy shape. Tall, around five eight, too skinny, could do with gaining five kilos, black skinny jeans (Lee) to a skinnier ankle, black singlet over white singlet, mini black apron dusted with flour, black ballet flats, blonde hair with minimal roots, foundation a shade too dark for the hair. Can't spell. Late? Really? Either she worked at the IGA as well, or the local school was in need of a good English teacher.

'I might try what Jess has, thanks Rilee.' His cheeks went a bit pink. A hint of either a former relationship with Rilee or a desire to form one. Rilee, on the other hand, looked ever so slightly green at the sight of Sawyer sitting with blow in.

Jess smiled wide. This town could be fun.