

## **Southern Cross University**

**Dallas J Baker**

### **I'm going to set you to boiling baby**

Abstract:

This work is a creative and Foucauldian-style ethical intervention into the author's childhood memories. Specifically, it re-imagines a moment in the author's youth when he first acknowledged his sexuality and gender difference. The script fuses non-fiction and fiction methodologies to produce a dramatic narrative. The finished work is neither fact nor wholly imagined. The script was developed using an interdisciplinary approach including factual research (evidence from author diaries and interviews with family members and such like) and fiction techniques such as associative and stream-of-consciousness writing. In this way, a script was produced that adheres to the core components of the "true" story whilst refiguring others to emphasise aspects of the author's experience that were wholly internal and even non-verbal (associations, imaginings, latent feelings etc). The result is a work that operates both as memoir and as an intervention into memory.

Biographical note:

Dr Dallas J Baker is an academic in the School of Arts and Social Sciences at Southern Cross University. He has an MA from Swinburne University and a PhD from Griffith University. His study and research intersect with a number of disciplines: writing, media and cultural studies. Dallas is also a writer with creative work published in a number of journals and anthologies. His current research interests are Queer Theory and its application to subjectivity and self-making in cultural practices such as creative writing and popular music consumption.

Keywords:

Creative writing – Scriptwriting – Memoir – Ethics of the self – Queer writing

## **THE CHARACTERS**

DALLY - Dally is fourteen years old but looks twelve, has wavy blonde hair, pale skin and greyish eyes.

NARRATOR - Dally's voice at age fourteen.

GEN "THE GENERAL" HOOD - An effeminate American who has taken up residence in one of Toowoomba's oldest homes.

MOTHER - Dally's mother. She is in her mid thirties with blonde hair.

NANNA - Dally's grandmother. She's in her mid sixties and has a tangle of grey hair.

DELIVERY GUY - Good looking, muscled and with tattoos.

FINN TWINS - Two rough and tumble teenage boys.

## **SETTING**

The action takes place in Toowoomba in late winter 1982. Toowoomba was on the cusp of change then, but still felt like a small country town stuck in the 1950s. It was backward looking and a little run down.

### *Locations:*

Toowoomba streets

Corner Shop

Dally's place - an old weatherboard cottage

Tor House - a dilapidated mansion divided into flats

## I'M GOING TO SET YOU TO BOILING BABY

TITLE UP: *TOOWOOMBA, QUEENSLAND, 1982*

FADE IN:

1. EXT. SUBURBAN TOOWOOMBA STREET, ESTABLISHING - DAY

From a bird's eye view, we see a suburban street typical of a Queensland town of the time: weatherboard houses with corrugated iron roofs on large blocks with deep backyards.

A Butcher bird sings, accompanied now and then by the call of a magpie. Redbrick chimneys puff gently into the wide sky, above backyards with mango or macadamia trees and chicken coops. It is quiet, but alive. The neighborhood looks a little shabby, but not neglected.

NARRATOR (V.O)

This is how I remember things. I've been told that this isn't exactly how things were. But that doesn't matter to me. My memories are my own, and I will make them what I will....

CUT TO:

2. EXT. SUBURBAN TOOWOOMBA STREET - DAY, CONTINUOUS

The street is straight and wide. In the distance, about two blocks away, is a corner shop. It's a weatherboard building with a broad timber awning. It has seen better days. A fading "Paddle Pop" sign has pride of place on the shop façade, directly above the awning.

In the foreground, below us on the footpath, a child with wavy, shoulder length blonde hair meanders down the street towards the store. This is DALLY. When we zoom in on Dally, the slightly muffled sound of pop music drifts upwards.

CUT TO:

3. EXT. SUBURBAN TOOWOOMBA STREET - DAY

From behind, at street level, we see that DALLY is carrying a portable cassette player or "tape recorder", quite a clunky thing. It's playing "synthetic" pop music. There is cord tied to the cassette players handle which is strung over Dally's shoulders, making the cassette player look like a weird shoulder bag. From this angle, Dally appears to be female; wearing a pair of maroon corduroy jeans and a cream cardigan. Dally's feet are bare.

From the front, we see that Dally looks about twelve years old with rosy cheeks and pink lips. There is an ambiguity to Dally's gender. The longish hair and rosy cheeks suggest femininity, but something about Dally's gait, and the bare feet, say otherwise.

Now that we are closer, we can hear that the music is "Don't You Want Me" by The Human League. We focus in on the turning wheels of the tape player, then move up to the open cardigan, beneath which is a purple t-shirt bearing an iron-on transfer of a toothy, ogre-like monster with the caption "Trust Me".

NARRATOR (V.O)

That's me; thinking I'm the height  
of cool. And yes, I'm a boy,  
despite appearances.

A white Holden Kingswood drives up behind Dally and slows down to coast alongside him. The occupants, a largely overweight middle-aged man at the wheel and a bone thin middle-aged woman in the passenger seat. Both are smoking. The cabin of the car is like a gas chamber. The occupants of the car stare at Dally and shake their heads. Dally is oblivious that he is being watched, too busy walking in time with the music. He doesn't even notice when they honk their horn and drive off.

NARRATOR (V.O)

I was lost in my own world. If you  
were a girly boy growing up in  
Toowoomba then, you'd have  
retreated into your own world too.  
Trust me on this.

Out of nowhere, something strikes Dally in the arm and splatters. Before he has time to work out what's hit him, another projectile strikes him in the side of the head; a lemon. It bursts all through his hair. He ducks and staggers. The tape recorder slips off his shoulder in the process, and then goes silent. Another lemon hits Dally in the chest and he falls down.

He looks around to find the source of the lemon bombardment and sees two teenage boys across the street semi-concealed behind a paling fence. They have mulish looks on their faces. These are the FINN TWINS. The Finn boys look very rough and tumble. Despite the cold, they're wearing only singlets, footy shorts, a few freckles and a sneer. They're shoeless as well. Their hands are full of lemons. They fire another volley and three hit Dally in quick succession.

FINN TWINS

(hurling more lemons)

Cop that poofter!

SUPERIMPOSE: *Poofter* ('pʊftə) – noun: 1. A man who is considered effeminate or homosexual. 2. A contemptible person.

The lemons land all around Dally and explode. One hits the tape recorder, causing the lid to pop open and the cassette to eject and the tape to tangle.

DALLY

No!

Dally hurls himself towards the tape recorder. When he removes the cassette, which is called *Hottest Hits 1982*, the tape snags on the player and unspools.

DALLY (CONT)

(to the twins)

Bastards! You've nearly ruined my  
Hottest Hits cassette!

He gingerly untangles the tape, rewinds the tape onto the cassette and wipes it clean with a handkerchief.

DALLY (CONT)

(to himself)

My favorite thing ever.

He tenderly wraps the cassette in the hanky and puts it in his pocket.

The Finn Twins laugh and run off. Dally stands up, sighs and wipes the lemon debris off his face and clothes. His hair is poking up at odd angles now, and looks sticky. He picks up his cassette player, wipes it off with his hand, and continues on his way.

NARRATOR (V.O)

No matter how hard I tried, I just couldn't convince the locals that, rather than hate me, they should appreciate me for my coolness. But most of the locals wouldn't have known cool if it bit them on the rear end. I suppose, neither did I, really.

CUT TO:

4. EXT. CORNER SHOP - DAY, CONTINUOUS

DALLY is still fussing with his hair when he arrives at the corner shop. He glances up and sees something that makes him stop still and stare.

DALLY

(stunned)

Holy...

Sitting, with his legs crossed, on the bench under the awning outside the store, is a very strange looking man. He is a shortish, plump, soft-faced and lamb-haired fellow in his sixties. This is GEN HOOD. He is dressed in a grey flannel suit and a highly-ironed white shirt. This is all topped off with a ruby red ascot tie decorated with golden pheasants. His head is adorned with a straw fedora.

Gen is slurping on a raspberry iceblock. He seems unaware that he is being watched. In fact, the childish delight with which he is devouring the iceblock makes it clear that he thinks he's completely alone.

NARRATOR (V.O)

I'd heard a lot about him, but never seen him before. He was American. The local kids called him "the General". In a neighbourhood where most of the men wore work shorts and singlets, the General stood out like a peacock in a henhouse.

Clearly fascinated, Dally continues staring at Gen Hood as he slowly walks toward the shop entrance. He takes one final look back at the man before he goes inside.

As Dally enters the store, Gen Hood's eyes flick briefly towards the door, showing that he was aware, after all, that he was being watched.

CUT TO:

5. INT. CORNER SHOP - DAY, CONTINUOUS

DALLY enters the shop, glancing over his shoulder through the shop windows to where the General is sitting outside. He smiles tentatively at the shopkeeper, MRS. GILL, an austere woman with tight black curls and thick black glasses. Mrs. Gill is doing a crossword in a large-print crossword book.

Dally goes to an aisle in the back of the store and, looking embarrassed, hesitates to pick up an item from the shelf in front of him.

The shelf is full of brightly colored packages of sanitary napkins. Dally sighs and picks up a packet. On the way back to the counter, he stops at the freezer, slides the door open and selects a chocolate Paddle Pop. He arrives at the counter looking embarrassed, his hair still all sticky, the t-shirt saying "Trust Me!"

DALLY  
(cautiously)  
Hi Mrs. Gill.

SHOP LADY  
(coldly)  
Hello.

NARRATOR (V.O)  
The local kids were all terrified of Mrs. Gill. She'd once spent a night in the lock-up for beating her husband unconscious with a sizzling frying pan.

Mrs. Gill stares disapprovingly down her nose at Dally. He puts the Paddle Pop and the sanitary napkins on the counter and takes a small step back, watching Mrs. Gill with anxious eyes. The shopkeeper glances at the sanitary napkins and the Paddle Pop and then, her lips tightening with even more disapproval, looks at Dally as if he was something awful she's found on the sole of her shoe. As she rings-up the prices of Dally's items on the cash register, she says, almost to herself:

MRS GILL

No boy should be buying his own  
mother's period pads.

DALLY

(nervously)

I... I think she's too embarrassed to  
buy them herself.

MRS GILL

Perhaps she likes to fool herself  
that periods are something that  
only happen to other women, women  
whose sons aren't gormless enough  
to buy their mother's feminine  
hygiene products for them?

DALLY

(trembling)

What's gormless?

SUPERIMPOSE: *Gormless ('gɔ:mlɪs) - adjective: stupid, dull.*

MRS GILL

You are. You're the very definition  
of gormless.

Dally looks perplexed.

MRS GILL (CONT)

Look it up in a dictionary, if  
you've got one.

Mrs. Gill looks at Dally as though it is very unlikely that he  
has a dictionary. Dally smiles back, trying to look friendly,  
but, given his sticky hair and the Trust Me t-shirt, he only  
manages to look more gormless.

MRS GILL (CONTD)

That'll be \$3.90.

Dally hands over the money. Mrs. Gill places his change on the  
counter, gives Dally one final disdainful look and turns back  
to her crossword book.

CUT TO:

6. EXT. CORNER SHOP - DAY, CONTINUOUS

As DALLY comes back out of the store, his face pink with shame, he stuffs the sanitary napkins under his armpit, presumably to hide them from the gaze of passers-by.

He looks to the bench where the General had been sitting, but the man is no longer there. Dally's face shows that he is disappointed. As if to ease this disappointment, he frees the chocolate Paddle Pop from its wrapper and subjects it to a series of long, cold licks and heads back up the street in the direction he came.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

There's nothing like a chocolate  
Paddle Pop to ease disappointment  
and lingering period pad shame.

SUPERIMPOSE: *Paddle Pop: a milk-based frozen dairy snack  
popular in Australia and New Zealand.*

CUT TO:

7. EXT. SUBURBAN TOOWOOMBA STREET - DAY, CONTINUOUS

Dally meanders towards home, paying more attention to consuming his Paddle Pop than his surroundings. It's as if he's on sugar-induced autopilot.

The cassette player hangs silent at his side, but for a thwacking noise it makes as it bangs against Dally's thigh as he walks.

8. EXT. DALLY'S HOUSE - DAY, ESTABLISHING

DALLY enters the yard of his home. The house is a dump; only slightly better than a shack. Its paint has long since peeled away, leaving the exposed weatherboards cracked and grey. Some of the windows are broken, sealed up with thick plastic and tape. The grass of the lawn has grown to shin height.

Dally finishes his Paddle Pop and throws the stick in a nearby bush. He mounts the rickety wooden stairs of the house and goes inside.

CUT TO:

9. INT. DALLY'S PLACE, KITCHEN - DAY, CONTINUOUS

A woman with wavy blonde hair, much like DALLY'S, is sitting at an old kitchen table with a cup of tea. A steaming teapot sits in front of her. This is Dally's MOTHER. She looks a little downcast. The kitchen table is in the center of the room. There is a large wood burning stove against one wall. A curtain-less window over the sink is a little grimy but lets in shafts of yellowish light.

DALLY enters the kitchen and takes the sanitary napkins from under his arm and puts them on the table. He removes the tape recorder from his shoulder and puts that on the table as well.

Dally's mother watches him remove the tape player, blinks and slightly rolls her eyes but says nothing about it. Unburdened by the recorder, Dally places the change before his mother as well.

MOTHER

Is that all the change?

Dally sighs with a note of indignation, as if offended at the suggestion he has pocketed some of the money.

DALLY

Yep.

MOTHER

(smiling softly)

Didn't buy anything else? No little treats?

DALLY

(unconvincingly)

Nope.

Dally, shiftily avoiding his mother's gaze, grabs a cup and sits down. He pours himself some tea from the pot on the table. He adds milk and reaches for the sugar.

MOTHER

You're going to have to go to school on Monday. You stayed home all last week already.

Dally pauses in his reach for the sugar, but then continues as if his mother hadn't said anything. He adds two spoons of sugar and stirs.

MOTHER (CONT)

You can't keep wagging school  
Dally. They'll send someone 'round  
and I'll be in trouble... Why don't  
you want to go?

DALLY

I just don't want to...

MOTHER

Yes, but why? Are the other boys  
mean to you?

DALLY

I just don't want to.

Dally's mother sighs. She looks troubled but when she goes to  
say something further, Dally interrupts.

DALLY (CONT)

I saw that General guy at the shop.

MOTHER

(looks into his eyes)

Which General?

DALLY

The one who always wears the suit  
and the hat; and those bright ties.

MOTHER

Oh *him...*,

She says this with a distinct tone of disapproval.

MOTHER (CONT)

He's not a real General, Dally.

DALLY

Then why does everyone call him  
that?

MOTHER

I don't know. I think maybe it's  
his nickname. I'd stay clear of  
him, he's a bit strange that old  
man.

DALLY

Strange?

MOTHER

Yeah, with the hat and those ties,  
and that old suit. He's a bit  
touched in the head, like your  
nanna.

She smirks at this last. As if on cue, an elderly woman with a  
craze of grey hair shuffles past the kitchen door. She is  
barefoot too, wearing only a loose-fitting white nightgown.  
She's mumbling animatedly to herself and making wringing  
gestures with her hands. This is NANNA.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

Our nanna was the yardstick of what  
was normal and what was nuts. She  
was a paranoid schizophrenic and  
regularly ran away from home  
wearing nothing but her underpants.

Dally watches his grandmother disappear down the hallway.

MOTHER

So, don't you go talking to that  
old man, okay? Promise me?

DALLY

Okay.

Dally gets up and heads out of the kitchen, leaving his mother  
looking worried, absentmindedly rolling her cup of tea in her  
hands.

Dally enters the hall, his brow furrowed with thought.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

I knew right then and there that  
that was a promise I was going to  
have to break.

CUT TO:

10. INT. DALLY'S PLACE, LOUNGE ROOM - DAY, CONTINUOUS

DALLY enters a darkish lounge room. There is one window  
letting in some light but most of the light is coming from a  
lit open fireplace. The room is furnished with an old Genoa  
couch and a clunky old black and white television.

NANNA is sitting on the couch. She is barefoot as well. She has a clutch of naked Barbie dolls in her hands. She is fiddling with them unconsciously, tugging on their hair, as she watches an old movie on TV.

Dally pays her no mind and sits on the floor directly in front of the TV. The old film is "Hush, Hush Sweet Charlotte" starring Bette Davis. The scene playing is the one where Charlotte bursts into a cotillion ball covered in blood. Dally is instantly drawn in. He scoots forward on his bottom so that he's even closer to the TV.

SUPERIMPOSE: *"Hush... Hush, Sweet Charlotte": a 1964 Southern Gothic film starring Bette Davis and much admired by homosexuals.*

NANNA

You'll ruin your eyes sitting that close.

Dally's eyes flick up and to the left in the general direction of where Nanna is sitting, showing that he's listening to her but he doesn't say anything. His attention is on the screen.

Nanna wrings the necks of the Barbie dolls and cranes her neck this way and that to try and see around Dally who is now blocking the screen.

NANNA (CONT)

Was your father a glass blower?

DALLY

(not looking at her)

What?

NANNA (CONT)

I can't see through your head...

Dally shuffles to the side a little and turns to check with his grandmother that she can see the television now. She nods in the affirmative. Dally notices the dolls, then turns back to watch the TV.

DALLY

(staring at TV)

What's with the dolls Nanna?

NANNA

They're whores. Americans. They're gonna burn.

She gestures with her head to the lit fireplace. Dally doesn't see this gesture, but his eyes glance in that direction also.

SUPERIMPOSE: *Delusion* (dɪ'lu:ʒən) – noun: A belief held in the face of evidence to the contrary, that is resistant to all reason.

DALLY

That's nice Nanna, you burn them  
American whores.

Dally returns to gazing at the screen, but then his eyes flick up as a thought occurs to him.

DALLY (CONT)

(still watching TV)

Nanna, do you know where that  
American, the one they call the  
General, lives?

Nanna twists the heads of the dolls in her hands and shifts uneasily in her seat.

NANNA

Oh, yes, I know where that American  
lives, he lives up on Newmarket  
Street, at Tor.

Dally's eyes widen.

DALLY

At Tor House? Really? Are you sure.

NANNA

Oh yes, I'm sure. I know where all  
the Americans are. *All* of them...  
The CIA sends them... They watch me...  
they watch me through the TV,  
through the ads.

Dally's brow furrows with thought again. The light of the black & white television reflects in his eyes as he thinks.

NARRATOR (V.O)

As soon as I heard the General  
lived at Tor House, I knew I wasn't  
going to school the next day. I was  
fascinated with that place...

CUT TO:

11. EXT. DALLY'S HOUSE - DAY, ESTABLISHING

The next morning, down the side of his house, DALLY is hanging the portable tape recorder on the handlebar of a beat-up old purple bike.

He takes a bundle out of his pocket and un-wraps it. It's the Hottest Hits cassette. He rubs it lovingly with a finger, then puts it in the tape recorder and presses play. As the tape begins to spin, emitting that strange quiet static that precedes the first track, he hops on the bike and pushes away.

12. EXT. TOR HOUSE - DAY

DALLY rides his bike around a corner and into a normal looking tree-lined Toowoomba street. His portable tape recorder is slung over the handle bars of his old beat up bicycle. It is playing "I Ran" by Flock of Seagulls.

SUPERIMPOSE: *Flock of Seagulls: an English New Wave band better known for their eccentric hairstyles than their music.*

Over the tops of the houses and trees, and stark against the sky, the folly tower of Tor House rises, dramatically different from all the houses surrounding it. It is eerily gothic and dilapidated.

Even in its dilapidated state, the folly is beautiful; endowed with an intricate façade of eclectic styles, a heady mix of neo-classical and neo-gothic. Tor is set back from the street, and so only the tower is visible.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

Tor was like a weird gothic doll house that'd been plonked down in Toowoomba by some temporal or spatial anomaly; maybe teleported there by aliens. It would've been more at home on Mockingbird Lane, next door to the Addams Family, than it was in our neighbourhood.

SUPERIMPOSE: *Addams Family: Gothic television program featuring an eccentric family who delight in the macabre. Much admired by homosexuals and depressives.*

CUT TO:

13. EXT. TOR HOUSE - DAY, CONTINUOUS

DALLY dismounts from his bike at the head of the long u-shaped driveway to the house. Tor, once a grand mansion, is now a rabbit warren of flats, so Dally checks the mailboxes to see which of the flats is the General's place. The mailbox for number four has the name "Gen. J. E. Hood" written on it in black marker.

Dally stashes his bike behind a large camphor laurel tree, leaning it up against the trunk, and then, his face showing a mixture of both nerves and excitement, heads up the drive towards the mansion.

The closer to the house he gets, the more the tower seems to loom above him.

As he approaches the front of the house, Dally sees the number four painted on the door to the tower. His face lights with excitement at the realisation that the General lives in the folly.

He takes a deep breath, walks up the handful of steps at the front of the tower, hesitates just a moment, and then knocks softly on the door.

Just seconds after Dally knocks, as if he'd been waiting for someone to come to the door, GEN HOOD swings the door open and looks down at Dally with a puzzled expression on his face.

GEN HOOD

Who, on earth, are you?

Gen's voice is a rich Southern twang, albeit a little high-pitched, not unlike an older woman's. He is wearing a quizzical expression and his usual grey flannel suit with a blue ascot tie.

Dally steps back a little, apparently dazed by Gen's sudden appearance. He swallows, mustering his voice. In the meantime, Gen taps his foot on the threshold and says:

GEN HOOD (CONT)

Well, what do you want? I'm waiting on an important delivery today...

Dally looks into Gen's impatient face and notices that his eyes are a little red. His blonde, lambs-wool hair, normally hidden beneath a fedora, is uncombed. He also looks sad, like he's been crying. He sighs, as if Dally's appearing on his doorstep is the final straw in a series of unpleasant events.

GEN HOOD

Well? What do you want?

DALLY

I, I don't want anything... I just, I just thought maybe we could be friends...

It is clear by Dally's face that he hadn't planned to say this, it just came out.

GEN HOOD

Friends? Are you mad? I'm sixty-one years old and you must be hardly ten...

DALLY

(apologetically)

I'm fourteen...

GEN HOOD

(in a softer tone)

Fourteen? Well, ain't you tiny for fourteen... What makes you want to be friends with me, *little one*?

DALLY

I just, I just like Americans and... well, you're always dressed so nice.

GEN HOOD

Well, little one, the latter is certainly true, but I find it hard to believe the former. You must be the only person in the whole of Toowoomba who likes Americans. There's so much anti-American feeling these days, what with how Vietnam went and everything, I can barely leave the house without getting shouted at.

DALLY

My nanna hates Americans, but I don't, I love them...

GEN HOOD

You don't say? You sure you're not nuts? You ain't an escapee from Bailey Henderson mental hospital are you? Have they got a children's ward up there?

DALLY

No, they don't. They got some teenagers up there though.

GEN HOOD

Well, if I'm to believe you, you are a teenager. So, what'd you do? Did you break out? Are you on the run from the nuthouse?

DALLY

No, I live just down the street... I saw you at the shop the other day...

GEN HOOD

Oh, that was you, the one staring at me like I had rabies or something? Not lettin' me eat my raspberry popsicle in peace?

DALLY

I didn't mean to stare. I just... I just liked your tie... the one with the birds...

GEN HOOD

Pheasants.

DALLY

Pheasants, yeah. I really liked that tie.

GEN HOOD

You an' me both little one... Well, I suppose you want a cup of tea? You Queenslanders always do.

He turned and took a few steps into the house. Dally stayed put, unsure what to do. Gen glances over his shoulder when he realises his visitor hasn't moved and says:

GEN HOOD (CONT)

Well, come on then, it's time we got started being friends.



GEN HOOD

I'm goin' to set you to boilin'  
baby.

Dally's eyes widen and his mouth opens a little; a look of confusion and surprise. Is Gen talking to the kettle? As Gen retrieves cups and saucers from a wooden cabinet with frosted glass doors, Dally shakes his head, indicating that he thinks he must have misunderstood. He watches Gen even more keenly as he bustles around the kitchen, but Gen doesn't say anything more.

As the kettle begins to heat, Gen comes back into the sitting room and goes to a lamp on an end table right by the sofa where Dally is sitting. Dally watches him like a hawk. Then, as clear as day, Gen says to the lamp:

GEN HOOD (CONT)

I'm flippin' you on honey.

Dally does a double take. What on earth is Gen doing? True to his word, Gen flips a switch on the lamp and a soft golden light comes on. He then glides over to a cabinet by the staircase. There is a record-player positioned on top of it in-between two tall stacks of records.

As Gen flicks the stereo on, placing the needle gently onto the revolving black vinyl, he says:

GEN HOOD (CONT)

I'm settin' you to spinnin' and  
singin' sugar.

Dally's face shows that he has never witnessed anything like this before, not even from his grandmother. Gen really is talking to inanimate objects. As Gen stands back up, a sad song by Billie Holiday fills the room.

GEN HOOD (CONT)

That's it Billie, you spin and you  
sing.

SUPERIMPOSE: *Billie Holiday (1915 - 1959): An American jazz singer and songwriter much admired by those light in their loafers.*

Dally's curiosity can no longer be contained.

DALLY

Umm... why are you talking to the  
lamp and stuff?

GEN HOOD

Oh, it's just a little thing I do to keep my ear attuned to my voice. See, for the last five years I've spent most of my time alone. I rarely speak to anyone at all anymore. Months and months can go by without me using my voice even once... A little while ago, I had to go to Pigotts to buy me a length of satin to dress up that sideboard there.

He indicates an antique sideboard behind Dally gleaming darkly with many layers of polish, a solitary vase set at its centre.

GEN HOOD (CONT)

When the sales attendant asked me what I'd like, I started to say "Only a yard of your Christmas green satin if you don't mind", but as soon as I said the first couple of words I was so shocked by the sound coming out of my mouth, by my own voice, that I froze.

Dally looks like he doesn't really understand.

GEN HOOD (CONT)

You know how when you ring up to a radio station and make a request and you hear yourself coming out of the radio and you think "Who on earth is that? That can't be me!" Well, that's what it was like. I was so put off by how high and screechy my voice sounded I couldn't say another word. I just clamped my mouth shut and walked on out of there. I ain't been back to Pigotts since, I was so embarrassed. Anyway, I'd gone so long without speaking that I forgot what I sounded like. So now, I say little things to the appliances so that I don't shock myself again. I find that it acclimatizes me to the, ah, unusual pitch of my voice.

Dally is silent with wonder.

GEN HOOD (CONT)

(self-consciously)

I know it's silly, but it's better  
than feelin' embarrassed every time  
I open my mouth out in public.

Dally contemplates this for a moment and then asks:

DALLY

So, why do you only talk to the  
appliances? Why don't you speak to  
the furniture too?

GEN HOOD

Because, little one, the furniture  
doesn't do anything.

He says this as though it were the most obvious thing in the world. Furniture doesn't boil water, or light up a room, throw heat, wash clothes, play records or cook food and so there's no point speaking to it.

He leaves the room and comes back with a tray loaded with a steaming pot of tea and two cups. He places them on a coffee table in front of the sofa.

Gen pours Dally a cup of tea and adds milk and sugar without asking. Dally takes the cup he's handed and sips, loving the milky white sweetness. He holds the cup close to him, savouring the warmth, and has a closer look around.

The wall opposite where Dally is sitting is covered in an assortment of framed photographs, most of them showing a handsome man spanning many years. The oldest picture, in which the man is maybe twenty, is black and white and browning at the edges. In it, the man smiles disarmingly at the camera, sitting shirtless on the bank of a creek. The newest picture is in colour and looks like it was taken maybe a decade ago. In this photograph, the man is much older, perhaps fifty years old. He is sitting on a maroon couch by a window in Gen's flat with his eyes closed, soaking up the sun that is coming through the window in bright shafts. Dally looks over to the window and sees that the couch is still there.

GEN HOOD

How's your tea?

Dally starts with fright; he'd been so absorbed in the photographs that he hadn't noticed Gen sit down right next to him.

DALLY

Lovely.

GEN HOOD

(echoing & smirking)

Lovely...

Dally shifts uncomfortably in his seat, sips at his tea.

GEN HOOD (CONT)

What's your name anyway?

As he waits for Dally to answer, he stirs sugar into his own tea with a silver teaspoon that clinks softly against the bottom of his cup.

DALLY

Dallas.

GEN HOOD

Dallas? That's almost as unusual as my name.

Dally smiles a bit uncomfortably.

DALLY

People always say *something* about my name. Usually about Texas, or about the TV show, you know with J.R and Sue-Ellen Ewing.

SUPERIMPOSE: *"Dallas": a long-running American television soap opera revolving around a wealthy, feuding Texan family. Made popular by hysterics and, you guessed it, homosexuals.*

DALLY sips more tea, a little uneasily.

DALLY (CONT)

Why do they call you the General?

GEN HOOD

Well, that's the postman's fault really. He spread it about that my mail was addressed to a General. But he doesn't know the whole story...

Dally looks like he wants to hear the whole story.

GEN HOOD (CONT)

I hail from a very traditional Georgia family. It was the custom among my people to name the first born son after a Confederate War General. I was unlucky enough to be conceived first, and so I was named after General Jubal Early.

Gen raises an eyebrow as if to say 'Can you believe it?'

GEN HOOD (CONT)

General Jubal Early was the hero of a number of successful battles against the North. My full name is General Jubal Early Hood. Now, Mamma refused to call me General. So instead she used to call me Ju, Little Ju, Ju Baby. Much to my Daddy's horror, who was a flagrant anti-Semite. So Daddy started calling me Earl, short for Early. Oh, I hated that name. There were already two boys in my family called Earl and both of 'em were right next door to total imbeciles. One of them used to eat dirt. He'd sprinkle it on his baloney sandwiches. Dreadful. Though I dare say dirt could only improve the flavour of baloney. It's an awful meat...

Gen pauses to take a sip of his tea.

GEN HOOD (CONT)

Anyway, I liked Ju or Jubal about as much as I liked Earl. It reminded me too much of jelly jubes which I never liked. So I just started calling myself Gen, short for General. Before long, everybody took the hint and was calling me Gen as well. In the South, unusual names are quite accepted, most Southerners being eccentric in the naming of their children to begin with. That's especially true of Georgia.

DALLY

If you're from Georgia, why did you come to live here?

Apparently, Dally cannot imagine why anyone from anywhere else would choose to live in Toowoomba.

GEN HOOD

I was billeted here as a soldier during World War Two, right here in this very house. I was only twenty years old and I'd never been further than about fifty miles from my hometown, Covington Georgia. Once the war broke out, I enlisted as soon as I could. I'd wanted to get away from Covington ever since I was old enough to figure out there was more to life than that claustrophobic little town. When I got here, I felt at home straight away. I just loved the light, and the strangeness of all the plants and animals... And on my first day here in Toowoomba, I met my lifelong friend, Eddie, Edward Beit.

Gen indicates the man in the photographs on the wall.

GEN HOOD (CONT)

I had to come all the way across the world to find him. He was unique, one of a kind, and we were soul mates... He was descended from one of the original owners of this house, but his family had long since lost their money. I'd never had a friend like him before... It changed my life to know, for the first time, that I was loved just for being me...

Gen pauses, looks down at the carpet. There is a glimmer of tears in the corners of his eyes. Dally looks away, out the window to the overgrown yard and a line of white sheets hanging heavily on an old clothesline.

DALLY

So, you were friends, best friends?

GEN HOOD

Friends, and so much more.

After a moment, when Dally looks back again, Gen's face has taken on a worried expression, as though he fears that he's said too much. But Dally hasn't connected the dots.

There is an awkward pause in which neither of them knows what to say. A soft sound from above, not unlike swift footsteps muffled by deep carpet, ends the uncomfortable silence. Dally looks at Gen enquiringly.

GEN HOOD (CONT)

(with a smile)

Just the resident ghost...

DALLY

(looking up)

This place is haunted?

GEN HOOD

Oh yes, utterly haunted!

DALLY

By who?

GEN HOOD

Well, it's a bit of a sordid tale. A long time ago, during the residence of the second owner of the house, the kook who built the folly, there was a maid who committed suicide, up there in the tower. She hung herself. The rumour is that she was pregnant and the owner, her master, was the father, the dirty old dog. Of course, that would've been terribly shameful back then in the 1800s. Evidently it was a shame she couldn't live with. It's her ghost that paces around up in the top of the tower.

DALLY

(nervously)

Does she ever come down here?

GEN HOOD

Oh no, she stays up on the second floor. But lots of strange things have happened all over the house. I suspect there's more than one ghost. Chairs move around on their own, wardrobe doors are flung open in the dead of night and a bloody-looking dampness spreads on the walls and then disappears. There's one spot on the floor in the old ballroom that is freezing to the touch. Oh, and once, I felt an invisible finger tap me on the shoulder...

DALLY

Holy Mother Mary!

GEN HOOD

Yes, it was wonderfully terrifying.

DALLY

How was it wonderful?

GEN HOOD

Well, little one, fear is a great illuminator. It shows us who and what we really are beneath all of our civilised composure.

By the look on Dally's face, this concept is a bit too deep for him at the age of fourteen. He takes another sip of his hot tea. Then there is a knock at the door.

CUT TO:

15. INT. TOR HOUSE, SITTING ROOM - DAY, CONTINUOUS

GEN leaps up and opens the door to reveal a young man, maybe in his early twenties. The young man is tall and lean, but with a solid chest pressed into a tight black polo shirt. His solid legs are encased in tight black jeans. His biceps strain under the cotton of his short sleeves and are covered in tattoos of flaming skulls, flaming swords and serpents writhing in flaming halos.

He is clearly a DELIVERY GUY, for he is holding a large bouquet of blue carnations. There are about two dozen of them, all a startling peacock blue with the tips of the petals a pristine white. The Delivery Guy looks at Gen as though he might have come to the wrong address.

DELIVERY GUY

Delivery for *General* J. E. Hood?

GEN HOOD

(beaming)

Oh yes, that's me. Would you mind bringing them in?

The Delivery Guy shrugs his shoulders and steps up into the sitting room. When he spots DALLY on the sofa, he gives him a weak smile. Dally smiles back; his eyes taking in how well-dressed and good looking the delivery guy is.

GEN HOOD (CONT)

(to Delivery Guy)

If you'd just pop them in the vase on that sideboard there...

He indicates the darkly gleaming cabinet behind Dally where there's a blue glass vase shaped like a funeral urn. The Delivery Guy places the flowers in the vase. Dally watches as the flaming skull on the guy's arm seems to wink as it moves when his bicep flexes.

Once the flowers are settled in their container, the Delivery Guy turns and hands Gen a small envelope.

DELIVERY GUY

That's your card.

The Delivery Guy then turns towards the door and heads out. He gives a half-hearted wave as he leaves and says to the room at large:

DELIVERY GUY

Enjoy.

Gen closes the door behind him with a sigh. He taps his chest lightly, as if to hush or calm his heart.

This action by Gen makes Dally feel uneasy, he shifts in his seat and nervously sips at his tea.

Gen goes over to gaze at the carnations.

GEN HOOD

Aren't they exquisite?

DALLY

What are they?

GEN HOOD

Carnations, lovely, no?

SUPERIMPOSE: *Carnation (kɑ:'neɪʃən) - noun: A flowering species of Dianthus popular in the 1980s and long favoured by homosexuals and Irish playwrights.*

DALLY

Yes, they are... You know, you're the only other person I know who uses words like that, like "lovely" and "exquisite". Once I said a sausage roll from the PF Chicken Bar was exquisite and my whole family looked at me like I was something horrible at the bottom of a toilet.

Gen looks over his shoulder at Dally quizzically, perhaps still wondering if the boy is actually a little nuts.

GEN HOOD

Delicious story, little one. But I think you'll find we have more in common than quirky names, a love of books and a shared vocabulary. I sense that when you grow up, you'll be a lot like me.

Dally looks a bit confused and worried.

GEN HOOD (CONT)

Anyway, you can hardly compare a sausage roll, even one from the PF Chicken Bar, with these carnations... Aren't they just wonders of our modern times...?

DALLY

What do you mean?

GEN HOOD

I mean that it's just incredible the things they can do now. Look at these flowers, when they were cut they were just ordinary white carnations. The florist has had them drinking dye for the last two days to turn them blue. The effect is wonderful isn't it? The little white tips make them look like they've been lightly dusted with snow.

DALLY

They look like lolly flowers sprinkled with icing sugar to me.

GEN HOOD

(chuckling)

You're right, they do.

Gen opens and reads the card.

DALLY

Who are they from?

He sighs before answering.

GEN HOOD

From me.

DALLY

From you?

GEN HOOD

Yes, you see today is a rather special day. Five years ago today... my Eddie passed away.

Gen looks over at the wall of photographs and smiles sadly. His eyes are now unmistakably teary.

DALLY

I'm... I'm sorry...

Dally says this a bit automatically. A realisation is dawning on his face.

He looks at the photographs of the handsome man on the wall, and then notices a few things around the room he hadn't noticed before: a small statue of Michelangelo's David, a book on male nudes on the sofa by the window. Then he looks over the flat again, at all the books and cushions and ornamentation. He puts two and two together and his face pales.

SUPERIMPOSE: *Homosexual: (həʊməʊ'seksjuəl) – noun: 1. A type of well-dressed man much favoured by other homosexuals. 2. A person who is sexually attracted to members of the same sex.*

Gen is oblivious to Dally's discomfort.

GEN HOOD

There's no need for you to be sorry, little one. But it's nice that you are... The desperate thing is, today's also my birthday, and the anniversary of when we first...

Gen pauses, looking at Dally as if considering how much to tell someone so young.

GEN HOOD (CONT)

When we... first met.

Dally says nothing. Comprehension that Gen Hood is gay is dawning on his face, and that comprehension is mixed with fear.

GEN HOOD (CONT)

We met on my birthday, then, after I got discharged from the military, I came back here and we moved in together, also on my birthday. And then he died on my birthday... five years ago... five years ago today.

Gen turns his back to Dally, looking down at the flowers, his breathing changes to strained, irregular gasps. Dally glances longingly at the door, then back at Gen, clearly calculating if he can just get up and leave. But before he can do so, Gen speaks again, still with his back turned.

GEN HOOD (CONT)

Every year for my birthday, Eddie used to bring me 24 carnations; each birthday a different colour. Since he died, I've been sending them to myself. Seeing them here...

He touches the tips of the carnations with a trembling hand.

GEN HOOD (CONT)

...fools me into believing that he's still with me.... And as I wake tomorrow morning, I'll catch the scent of these carnations and think, just for that moment before I'm fully awake, that he's there in bed beside me, that he... that he never died.

Dally's face shows that this information is too much for him. He looks to be in some kind of pain. He glances longingly at the door again, then back at Gen. It's very clear that he wants to get out of there.

GEN HOOD (CONT)

Memory is a funny thing, you know. Since I started performing this little ritual, sending the flowers to myself, I'm almost able to forget that Eddie is gone. Why, this morning, I was sure I felt him kiss me, here on my cheek... But then I woke and his side of the bed was empty, cold...

Gen turns and looks at Dally, catching him looking longingly at the door. The look on Dally's face brings Gen out of his reminiscences. He takes a deep breath, wipes the tears from his eyes.

GEN HOOD (CONT)

I'm so sorry, little one, I shouldn't have said these sad things to you.

DALLY

It's okay.

It's clear by Dally's voice that it isn't okay. His face is filled with a mixture of pity and anxiety.

Gen moves back to sit down next to Dally. Dally tenses up.

GEN HOOD

Let's talk about something else.... What did you think of that delivery guy?

Dally shrugs, utterly bemused.

GEN HOOD (CONT)

I saw you watching him... you  
couldn't keep your eyes off of him.

Gen's voice is kindly, but Dally takes the question as an accusation. His face shows acute worry. Gen just keeps smiling at Dally, waiting for an answer.

DALLY

(defensively)

I liked his tattoos.

GEN HOOD

(smirking)

Of course you did. Another thing we  
have in common.

Dally's eyes widen. His anxiety is growing. He peers down into his cup, staring at its milky contents as though he might find something other than tea inside. Then he looks back at the door.

GEN HOOD (CONT)

I saw that burly fellow out the  
back of the florist when I placed  
my order. He didn't see me, he was  
dragging boxes around. But I asked  
specifically for him to make the  
delivery. I thought his appearance  
at my door might spice up my  
birthday a bit.

Dally looks up into Gen's face, apparently surprised at this confession and distracted, a little, from his own anxiety.

DALLY

But..., but Eddie...

GEN HOOD

Oh, don't misread me little one,  
I'm faithful to Eddie, painfully  
faithful, and though I'm old,  
painfully old, I'm not blind. And  
neither was Eddie for that matter.  
He would've liked that young man's  
tattoos just as much as we did.

Gen smirks, glancing over to the black and white photo of a shirtless, grinning Eddie.

This is the last straw for Dally. He breaks down into tears. The teacup shakes in his hands.

GEN HOOD (CONT)

What... what's the matter?

DALLY

(sobbing)

I don't want to be like you... All alone and, and talking to yourself and sending yourself flowers, and so, so sad...

Gen looks taken aback. He carefully puts his teacup down and takes the one from Dally's hands and puts that down too.

GEN HOOD

You listen to me little one. You got me on a bad day. I'm not sad like this most days, not really... Besides, when you're as old as I am you understand that, even though life is a real bitch sometimes, it's worth it if you've spent most of it with someone you love... Do you think, all those years ago, if I'd known that Eddie and I would be parted like we were, and that I would spend my last years alone, that I would've changed anything? That I wouldn't have loved him? Well, I'll tell you right now, I wouldn't have changed a thing. I loved Eddie more than anything in the world, still do. I wouldn't give up a single day of my time with him to save myself from all the years of grief I've felt since he died.

Gen takes Dally's hand.

GEN HOOD (CONT)

And I'll tell you something else, life is hard. Real hard. There's no avoiding it. And when you're like we are, it's even harder. Sometimes you're going to want to give up, but don't. There will be wonderful things for you, and one day you might even meet someone like Eddie, who'll love you simply for who you are.

DALLY

I can't believe anyone'll ever love me like that.

GEN HOOD

Well believe it little one, 'cause it's going to happen. If someone can love me, as odd as I am, you'll have no problems. Why, you'll grow up to be a real charmer, I can tell. I got me an eye for such things.

DALLY

Really?

GEN HOOD

Trust me, I never lie.

DALLY

But you do talk to yourself...

GEN HOOD

(grinning)

Nobody's perfect. Now, you better head on home. It's getting late. I feel the sunset comin'. I got a twinge in me bones.

Dally gives a small smile. He takes a breath, gets up and walks towards the door. Before he reaches it, he turns and walks back to Gen. He hesitates a moment, as if weighing up a momentous decision, then he takes something out of his pocket and gives it to Gen.

DALLY

Happy birthday... Don't open it till I'm gone.

GEN HOOD

Uh, okay. Thanks.

Dally heads back to the door, opens it and pauses. He asks:

DALLY

Can I come back tomorrow?

GEN HOOD

Sure, sure you can come back tomorrow.

Dally smiles, then turns and walks out the door. Gen unwraps what Dally gave him. It is the Hottest Hits cassette. Gen looks perplexed but amused.

CUT TO:

16. EXT. TOR HOUSE - DAY, CONTINUOUS

DALLY is smiling softly as he walks down the front stairs of Tor House. He walks up to his bicycle, which is still leaning against the large tree. He takes hold of the cassette player hanging on the handle bar and says:

DALLY  
I'm going to set you to spinning  
and singing baby.

He takes another cassette out of his pocket and presses the play button. "Through Being Cool" by Devo comes out of the speaker.

SUPERIMPOSE: *DEVO: A post-punk band much admired by juvenile delinquents and teen homosexuals.*

Dally mounts his old purple bike and rides off down the street, still softly smiling. The folly tower of Tor House stands tall against the blue sky above him. As he rides into the distance, the music fades and is replaced by a voice over:

NARRATOR (V.O)  
I never regretted giving away my  
favourite thing ever, not once. I  
saw it as a fair trade. Gen gave me  
something much better than *Hottest  
Hits 1982*. He'd made me feel that I  
was worth something, and that one  
day I would know what it felt like  
to be loved just for being me.

CUT TO:

17. EXT. SUBURBAN TOOWOOMBA STREET, ESTABLISHING - DAY

From a bird's eye view, we see a suburban street typical of a Queensland town of the time: weatherboard houses with corrugated iron roofs.

A Butcher bird sings, accompanied now and then by the call of a magpie. Redbrick chimneys puff gently into the wide sky above backyards with mango or macadamia trees and chicken coops.

NARRATOR (V.O)

This is how I remember things. My memories are my own, and I will make them what I will...

FADE TO BLACK

END OF SCRIPT

## Research statement

### *Research background*

Memoir is lately garnering more scholarly attention (Williams 2013). Core to much scholarly discussion of memoir is the nexus between fact and fiction and the role of memory in understanding both (Williams 2013; Murdock 2003). This work undermines the ‘factual push’ of much memoir by drawing on growing understanding that memory is fluid and changeable (Murdock 2003). This work applies these notions of memory as fluid to creative praxis.

### *Research contribution*

The genre of memoir occupies a significant place in the cinematic and literary arts (Murdock 2003). This creative work extends the application of memoir as mere retelling to one of *refiguring* of memory. This script foregrounds the mutable nature of memory (Murdock 2003) and actively intervenes in memory to recast or ‘queer’ past events. This is done as part of a Foucauldian ethics of the self (Foucault 1986) to remake both memory and subjectivity. In this way, this script makes a contribution to the rethinking of scripted memoir and of memory itself.

### *Research significance*

This work is one of the first Queer Theory informed, creative applications of ideas around the mutability of memory to a creative work. The work is innovative in that it applies theories of memory, gender and sexuality from multiple disciplines. This script is among the first to be created and published as a script in and of itself as a research output irrespective of any possible production. It is also a wholly original creative work.

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