

# Cameron. A sad story from many true tales

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Cam rolled over in his bed, scratched his belly and farted. He rubbed his eyes to open them and reached for his packet of Long beach. Two left he noticed. Pay day tomorrow. He lit one up, drew back deeply and sent a long stream of smoke out. He sighed. Another day. He turned his clock radio around—he always faced it away from him to sleep so the glow wouldn't bother him. Glanced at the time, expecting it to be 10-ish. Stopped, looked again, what the? he swore under his breath. The clock was telling him it was 9.85pm. Hang on. That's not right, he thought, and banged on the top of the clock. Looked again. Still 9.85pm and wait, the date was showing as well: 45.5.2165. No way, he thought. I couldn't have slept that long. He sat up, rubbed his eyes again, checked the clock again. Still the same. What was this—some sort of time travel? The end of the world? Or just his eyes playing tricks on him.

He sat, dragging on his cigarette deeply. He was an obese man, bright red curly hair, dirty and matted. His belly from his bad diet and medications couldn't be contained by his singlet; the bits of flesh it didn't contain were covered in more of the bright red hair and freckles. The singlet, a Bonds blue long since grey was frayed and filthy. Below the belly he could just see his toes. Filthy, with long dirty nails.

Cam rummaged around in his ashtray and found a butt of cigarette with a bit left on it. He lit it from the butt from the one he just finished. He shook his head. He thought he had been going ok, that weird shit had stopped happening for a while, he was taking his tablets and every few weeks Steve came and gave him that injection. Steve was ok, he was one of the good ones—sometimes if he had time he'd take Cam for a coffee and cheese toasties.

He got up from his bed and shuffled to his kitchenette, switching on the kettle. Fishing his dirty Garfield mug out of the sink he spooned International Roast into it and waited for the kettle. He smiled as a memory came back of Garfield. It was that

time he was really crook in hospital and the ward had a cat called Garfield—he loved cats and every one smiled and said they looked a bit alike, being both big red and hairy.

That wasn't such a bad time; he'd gone in because he'd been told to burn down his old primary school to save the kids from the paedophile teachers. It was his duty he was told. Old Peter Hitchener on the TV had told him so he knew he had to and he did. They told him later when he stopped hearing the message that he had only managed to burn down one portable classroom, thankfully. That was years ago now, when the old bin was still open. Nurses then were pretty good. He remembered the pregnant nurse; Julie he thought her name was. She was carrying baby Jesus and he made sure everyone was kind to her and looked after her. He and Garfield were her bodyguards.

There had been many more hospital admissions since then. There was the time he became Superman and was ready to fly off the roof at St Vincents stopped only when a bunch of burly security guards landed on him and someone had given him an injection and he'd slept for a week.

Or the time he couldn't stop standing on a chair on the corner of Gertrude and Brunswick yelling out his poetry to anyone who would listen. Trouble was no one did and the someone called the police who arrived and dragged him to hospital again. It hummed back into his head now:

“Rag bag, mag man

mad man bag,

man sag, lag dag

wag, dog, cat, pat

pat, pat the cat,

he chortled at Pat the cat—always thought that a good name for a cat.

He hadn't always thought this way as he shuffled to the bed again slopping his coffee as he went. He did well at school and he had been close with his parents and sister. But it had started to change in his teenage years. He needed to spend more and more time in his room because he kept having these thoughts. Like the time his mum put cameras in all the light switches to watch him. His dad through these years had got angrier and angrier with him and Cam used to cry but also wonder if it was true that his dad was CIA. That's what he kept hearing though he couldn't tell you who was saying it.

And then there were the cars driving past his house at all hours, looking for him. He had been to a party in his VCE year—he hadn't really wanted to go but his mum insisted. His old friend Lewis had given him a spliff to smoke. It sent him off the deep end, and then the drug dealers kept coming past his house because Lewis told them he owed them money.

His mum had taken him to the doctor after that one, but she couldn't see the cars. Their old family doctor had given him a lecture about not using drugs. And he hadn't, not again after that. But odd stuff kept happening and the only way he could block it out was by drinking his way through his parents' cocktail cupboard.

It didn't really help though, and the crunch had come because of the ducks. His mother had these two China ducks on the mantelpiece—they were a family heirloom she said, but they were creepy buggers. They started to tease him, chanting:

“Quack, quack, quack, crack, crack, crack,

Sack, sack, sack, quack, quack,

I can see Cam's crack crack, put him in a sack sack”

Then they would cackle evilly away to each other. He tried blocking his ears but that didn't help—they would go on for hours. In the end he picked each of the evil little ducks up and threw them against the wall. That fixed them. Unfortunately, that was the last straw for his parents too and he wound up in his first psych bin, even though he knew those ducks were real. Years later he used to listen to a song by a bloke called Christy Moore—he reckoned the singer had the same problems as him and was

glad he wasn't the only one who saw this stuff. He hummed it to himself again now, recalling the song about DT with seeing the pope and John F Kennedy and Child of Prague dancing around the mantlepiece.

Feeling a bit more awake he chanced another look at his clock. Shit, still the same. What was he going to do? He started to feel a familiar panic rise in his belly. What would happen if he went out of his room? Would he be in another world? Were there aliens? Or had the world ended and he had slept through it? Or had he really just slept through 60 years? If he had then he'd now be 90 and he didn't ever want to get to 90.

He went fishing for another butt and lit it. There had been plenty more admissions after the duck one. The doctors told him he had a mental illness and used all sorts of long names. He didn't agree—he thought the doctors were there to put electrodes into his body or to steal his soul. He had refused all medicines and foods at times, sure that he was being poisoned or bugged. In the early days they had to hold him down and give him a needle in the bum. Sometimes that was ok, he could sleep, blank out. But it usually just left him blurry and sleepy, lazy, unable to string a sentence together.

His mum and dad had split up and he hadn't seen his dad since he was 18. His dad had come to say happy birthday to him in hospital and left with tears in his eyes. Crocodile tears, he thought, spy, phoney, faker. Works for the CIA. His mum and sister were better but they couldn't have him at home any more—he kept disconnecting the cameras and lights and his sister had cracked it when she came home to find all the posters on her walls ripped down and shredded. They had been a noisy bunch on her wall, always trying to sing over the top of each other.

So he'd been on the streets for a while. That was sort of ok. He had hung out with the Koorie winos on Smith street—they were ok with loonies were the winos, they didn't mind. But that had ended when he told them all he was an albino Aboriginal and he pointed his finger at them. Being Aboriginal they didn't like fingers or bones being pointed at them so told him to piss off.

A couple of years ago a nice young social worker had got him this special accommodation room. It was safe enough; he had a lock on the door and his rent

was managed by state trustees so it got paid. Steve, his case manager visited him every fortnight and once a month his mum or his sister would come and take him for lunch. But it was getting tougher and he was tired. Last time he had started to hear voices he took a bunch of tablets and ended up having his stomach pumped in the emergency department.

Most of them nurses had been ok but there was this hard arse of a nurse who said to him she was sick of people like him cluttering up her ED. She was so busy with real patients, if he was going to knock himself off, why didn't he do it properly and stop wasting her time? He looked at her then and thought how right she was. He couldn't even do that properly.

Steve had come by not long later and taken him home. Since then, he'd upped his visits and Cam thought he was going a bit better cause he was remembering to take his tablets more often. But now, waking up and finding the clock was saying this? He was sick of it. He was sick of arguing with people, of living in this squalid room, of no one believing him. Sick of scabbing smokes. Sick of International Roast. Sick of weird stuff happening.

He sighed, stood up and shuffled to the kitchen once more. He rummaged under the sink and pulled out a Woolies bag. From it he took a  $\frac{3}{4}$  bottle of vodka and a bottle of tablets that he had been saving for a while now. This time he wouldn't waste anyone's time. This time he would do it properly. He washed the tablets down with the vodka and went back to his bed. He lit his last Longbeach. Wouldn't have to worry about pay day now.

Gerry the older of the two ambos looked down on Cam lying still on the bed. Poor old bugger, he said. What a bloody life he had. He was a decent enough guy. Harmless, loved cats; all the local cats used to follow him around. Taylor his brand-new buddy ambo looked over his shoulder. God, he was only 30, she said, what a waste. Then she looked at the bedside clock, look at this Gerry, his clock is weird. 9.85 pm on the 54/5/2065. That's so weird. How can that happen? Clock looks like it's stuffed. Could that be what set him off do you think?

Gerry thought for a minute and said “Poor fella, it was like he lived about 90 years in in his life. I dunno what’s happened to his clock, but it’d be enough to set him off I reckon.” They were both silent with their thoughts for a minute, then Gerry said slowly and with sorrow in his voice, “What a bloody awful illness schizophrenia is.”