

Wakefield Press

# **Last Bed on Earth**

Teri Louise Kelly (Ratso) lives in Adelaide, South Australia,  
with her partner Mel (Jo Buck), where together they find yet  
more ways to defy the laws of nature.

By the same author

*Sex, Knives and Bouillabaisse*

# Last Bed on Earth

Teri Louise Kelly



Wakefield Press  
1 The Parade West  
Kent Town  
South Australia 5067  
[www.wakefieldpress.com.au](http://www.wakefieldpress.com.au)

First published 2009  
Copyright © Teri Louise Kelly, 2009

All rights reserved. This book is copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purposes of private study, research, criticism or review, as permitted under the Copyright Act, no part may be reproduced without written permission. Enquiries should be addressed to the publisher.

Cover designed by Liz Nicholson, designBITE  
Text designed and typeset by Clinton Ellicott, Wakefield Press  
Printed and bound by Hyde Park Press, Adelaide

National Library of Australia  
Cataloguing-in-publication entry

Author: Kelly, Teri Louise.  
Title: Last bed on earth/author, Teri Louise Kelly.  
ISBN: 978 1 86254 822 0 (pbk.).  
Subjects: Kelly, Teri Louise.  
Tourism – New Zealand – Employees – Biography.  
Tourist camps, hostels, etc. – New Zealand.  
Dewey Number: 338.4791092



Publication of this book was assisted by the  
Commonwealth Government through the  
Australia Council, its arts funding and advisory body.

*To Hank, thanks for the ride.*

*Sleep tight.*

WANTED!

Couple to manage 100-bed roach motel on South Island for high season. Live-in accommodation supplied. Fresh young meat required, please apply in writing to –  
The Owners c/-

# Contents

1.	Some Sort of Jet-Lagged Introduction . . .	1
2.	Follow the Yellow Shit Road	5
3.	Bob's Got Way-Sweet Deals	11
4.	The Reciprocal Welfare Agreement	17
5.	Positions Vacant	19
6.	Infiltrate and Destroy	25
7.	If I Should Die Here, Bury Me in Powder Blue Satin	33
8.	Jeez, We're a Couple of Lookers	38
9.	Number-Crunching Safe-Cracking Jaw-Dropping Hijinks	43
10.	To Serve and Protect	47
11.	Shit Pots and U-Bends	57
12.	The Sisters of Show No Mercy	71
13.	The Keys to Babylon	83
14.	Work for Bed, Apply Within	95
15.	The Addams Family	104
16.	Bouncing Balls, Broads and Czechs	117

<b>17.</b>	<b>Reindeer Games</b>	<b>125</b>
<b>18.</b>	<b>One Indian Doesn't Make a Summer</b>	<b>138</b>
<b>19.</b>	<b>For Whom the Bells Sound</b>	<b>149</b>
<b>20.</b>	<b>A Very Kiwi Christmas</b>	<b>156</b>
<b>21.</b>	<b>Shalom</b>	<b>167</b>
<b>22.</b>	<b>Artificial Highs</b>	<b>177</b>
<b>23.</b>	<b>Filthy Lucre</b>	<b>185</b>
<b>24.</b>	<b>Stripped to the Bone</b>	<b>195</b>
<b>25.</b>	<b>Peek-A-View</b>	<b>205</b>
<b>26.</b>	<b>In the Summertime</b>	<b>213</b>
<b>27.</b>	<b>Upstairs Downstairs</b>	<b>219</b>
<b>28.</b>	<b>The British are Coming</b>	<b>226</b>
<b>29.</b>	<b>If You're Not Part of the Solution, You're Part of the Problem</b>	<b>238</b>
<b>30.</b>	<b>Square Exchanges are Still Daylight Robbery</b>	<b>248</b>
<b>31.</b>	<b>White Girls</b>	<b>256</b>



# 1.

## Some Sort of Jet-Lagged Introduction . . .

*Pennies do not come from heaven.  
They have to be earned here on earth.*  
Maggie Thatcher

Auckland, Year of Your Lord 2002.

There is nothing beautiful about today, not in the least. It is grey and cold and unwelcoming, like Port Au Prince in the old days, when the first things you saw were decapitated heads on stakes. We are a long way from anywhere, marooned by circumstances and brain-shrunk decision-making. There are *signs* of life – but not as I know it. Naturally, there are no hire cars available, at least not in our price range. There are no hotel rooms in our price range . . . this is what they call the budget traveller's dilemma. And I *really* am a budget traveller, a person renowned and admired for thriftiness, as well as for being a light-fingered cheapskate.

Our price range is called 'low end', which is even lower than 'budget'. It is the range between absolutely free and not more than twenty bucks a day, all up. There isn't anything in that range apart from park-benches, skips, railway viaducts and abandoned buildings – oh, and police cells. But all of those are taken; Auckland is a rough-house kind of town.

It's a price range that hasn't worked particularly well on our trip, which is why our credit card no longer functions as it ought to. The card got cancelled in London, or was it Dublin? Whatever, but at least we'd used it to purchase the tickets here. Though I still can't fathom *why* it got cancelled. Okay, so we've been on the road for almost two years, of no permanent abode, and with nothing in the way of stable long-term employment to hold up as material evidence. But these are not good reasons to deny a person – especially a person who is perennially 'between situations' – extended credit.

Without that card we're going to have to do it hard, well harder I guess. No more on-the-slate mid-range hotel rooms, no more en suites, no more continental breakfasts, and definitely no more pillaging of the mini-bar. When it's someone else's money I'm squandering, I'm all for those little luxuries that make extended travel enjoyable, but considering we're unlikely to be able to take a room with crisply laundered sheets ever again, I guess that's not much of an issue right now.

What are of concern are my feet. Somehow my brain has lost contact with my nether regions, in particular my ten digits way down south, and it is becoming somewhat alarmed. Begrudgingly I get up and start shuffling to and fro like a vagrant. To the orderly assembled group of tourists over to my left, I must look a bizarre sight; unkempt, under-dressed, malnourished and shuffling about like Ratso Rizzo in *Midnight Cowboy* while I wait for my own Jo Buck to return with good news. Finally he does, return that is, although he's a she and doesn't have good news – or, I suspect, clean underwear. There was no joy on the free-call phones, no chance of a free ride or a stay-two-get-one-free deal, no deals at all in fact – especially without credit. No one wants to take the risk.

It's entirely my fault, of course, as everything that's gone

wrong on this trip to date has been. It was my *idea* in the first place. I am admired for many traits, but astute judgment is not in the top five. So thanks to me, we're out of credit and stranded at this bleak airport on a frigid dull day. I just keep on shuffling; it seems for the best insofar as my toes are concerned.

Around us, laughing people are clambering into heated vehicles. These people with credit can go anywhere they damn well please, that is how the modern world works, even here in New Zealand. They are all wrapped up and warm, whipping out gold cards and platinum cards and heavy-duty corporate Visa cards . . . and frankly, I hate the lot of them.

Jo Buck scavenges in her bag for some kind of foreign currency, then goes back into the terminal to convert it into something legal. I sit on our bags—*forlorn specimens* that have seen more provident days in the ownership of better prepared travellers—and I watch these strangely competent people go about their business.

Once I had business to go about, but it seems too long ago. Right now I have none, and no business watching other people go about theirs, but what else is there to do? Breakfast is a slim hope—for the past 30 hours we've been eating nothing but re-hydrated airline food and chocolate. My brain, having been momentarily distracted by the lack-of-blood-flow emergency, has now turned its undivided attention to the blockage that is stopping my bowels from functioning. I am gripped by cramps, and a desperate urge to unburden myself—only I can't take the bags with me and I can't abandon them . . .

The Iron Lady was right, goddamn her. That is the moral of this sordid tale, the eternal need for money. When I cast my addled mind back, I can see that was how it all started.

Greed, that was my demarcation point. Ground zero for me was 1987. That year I finally fled the auld country with a sack full of cash and a stupid picture in a passport, and it was all Maggie's fault. Before the greengrocer's daughter got her hands on the reigns of power, England was still an okay place to live, I was still proud to be an Englishman. And then one day the old dart couldn't intoxicate or entrance me any more, I was so over it, sister, and I had cold hard currency in my hand. It was the time of super profit and ME ME ME. So I left, vamoosed, took a jet plane to somewhere far away and I've been running ever since, one way or another. And I have seen worse times than this. The outlook is grim, sure, but not desperate. I have driven hire cars across the United States to depots in the most dilapidated ghettos of the Union. I have served as the cook on luxury yachts around the Caribbean with skippers whose only credentials to pilot such sleek beasts were multiple bank accounts loaded with freshly laundered drug money. I have eaten the foulest entrails man or beast could stomach when my belly was empty and my taste buds eroded, and I have drunk water that even New Delhi street cows would turn their noses up at.

No matter what the current predicament, there are always positives if you are prepared to look for them. At least these people speak English and, I guess, are civilized. Communication will be straightforward and our seemingly dire straits somehow negotiable. All we really need is a break—and a toilet.

Fortune, to be sure, comes when you least expect it. Our luck-o'-meter was obviously swinging, with the offer of a free ride into town. A man had taken pity on us after he and I struck up a conversation about how unseasonably cold it was, and from that little acorn would grow . . . well, I guess you'll see.

## 2.

# Follow the Yellow Shit Road

Once I thought Jamaica was *the* place, after I'd fled from Bermuda like Ronnie Biggs looking for a bolthole. I had these wild thoughts after an even wilder night at the Notting Hill Carnival one year – the same year Marley was big and reggae da thing to chill to.

Kingston was happening, or so they said, everyone was going out on charter flights ex Luton – it just seemed like the sanest thing to do when insanity was all about. I'd thought about dreadlocks, maybe a few beads for authenticity, but the girl said I didn't have that kind of hair. Out there life was sweet, ganja was the substance, Red Stripe the beer, calypso the rhythm of life, the beach a throbbing party – all those clichés that wandering freaks assume as gimmees. It wasn't anything like that, of course. Ganja was a damned expensive, not to mention, soul-destroying habit, and the beer was served too warm; when you popped the ring it always exploded. The only steel drums you heard were when the tourists hit the beach, and rooms with walls were hard to find. Sand fleas were easier to get acquainted with than the locals. The expatriate colony had drawn up a code of conduct and entry requirements that defied reasonable logic. There was no work, not work I'd consider anyhow, and my Caribbean dream simply evaporated like a

cheap joint or a hashish bong passed around the wigwam once too often.

But this time, here in New Zealand, it won't be like that. The lessons I learned in Jamaica and Mexico City will stand me in good stead – easy communication is the key; the basic ability to converse on many levels about topics common to the white man. This driver of ours is pretty loquacious. By the time we're in the city itself he's already lined me up for a few days cash-in-hand work helping his brother with some kind of house extension, which is fine, so long as the cash reward meets my expectations. Despite my girlish appearance and feminine wiles, I am the grandson of a master builder and I've done my time with the hod, ladies. Anyhow, just because I'm new in town doesn't give someone the god-given right to treat me like a patsy.

Five in the morning though, seems like a ridiculous time to start work the day after you've flown almost two thirds of the way around the globe and your pipe work still isn't tickety boo. But it *is* money, and money is the manna on which we must gorge if this particular adventure is going to be successful. I have many pressing concerns weighing on my mind, not least of which is the cost of this hotel room. A quick mental calculation tells me that I'll work three days just to pay this wretched bill and we will still not come out in front.

This room ain't even finished, says Jo. Cheapskates. This is her first utterance in the Land of the Long Grey Cloud other than a few grunted 'bollocks'.

Which is why we've got it at a discount price, baby, I remind her.

This window doesn't shut properly and it's bloody freezing and there's no hot water! Jo groans.

I look around the room. The built-in furniture isn't quite built-in and the legless bed is propped up on phone books – a bummer if you need to call Alcoholics Anonymous at the twitching hour. The television works, but only when one of us stands directly in front of it – which kind of defeats the overall objective. By modern standards the room isn't inexpensive, or modern for that matter, and somehow I can't shake the belief that I've been screwed . . .

You've been screwed, Jo accosts me. Look at this bloody dump. I should never have trusted you. Jesus, you're on more pills than a lab monkey!

I'm too exhausted to traipse downstairs and make a scene or have it out with the feisty blonde sprawled on the sagging bed. At least it's a goddamned room, I tell her wearily.

It's a kennel. That's what it is. Suits you actually, a kennel for a dog.

What?

Puppy eyes. Wagging tongue. Pricked-up ears. Don't think I haven't seen you making eyes with every woman who's smiled at you between Heathrow and here. She turns away from me.

No one forced you to come, baby.

Bollocks. You did. You and your crazy ideas. She shoots me one of her contemptuous looks, the same look she once gave punters she'd just flogged to within an inch of their miserable lives, I guess.

There'll be a silver lining, I tell her . . . and miraculously there *is* – in the shape of a toilet, although it's only after my bowels explode back into action like a hyperactive geyser that I realise there's no loo paper and that a tanker-like turd takes an eon to commence its journey out into the Bay of Plenty or wherever anti-clockwise gravitational interference takes it.

That goddamned stinks! young Jo moans.

Can you go get me some toilet paper, babe, huh? I plead.  
Screw you. Use your hand.

We sleep like thieves, without any conscience or conscious interludes. At four in the morning, I am awakened by reception with my wake-up call – I thank the lady sincerely for her diligence and then slip back into a coma. It is past midday when we finally awake.

Well, there goes the labouring. I am already behind the eight ball. It is a bad start to a new life, a blown chance, a real bummer. At least breakfast didn't cost anything as we've missed it. I go downstairs and call my new buddy on his mobile. He is stuck in heavy traffic someplace I can't pronounce, but will let his brother know, see if we can set things up for tomorrow.

The next night is cold, and the thermal qualities of the threadbare blanketry quite inadequate for the climate. As the temperature plummets even further, I can feel my feet turning blue, then black and finally no colour at all. At four thirty in the morning I'm rude to the wake-up lady, for which I apologize downstairs and impatiently wait for my ride. My employer arrives and we set off. I don't even know my chauffeur – for all I know, this might be my last ever trip on earth. My last glimpse might be of the inside of a black zip-up bag as my final breaths condensate and wispy skits of green dewy grass and English afternoon tea skip across my fading consciousness like old Pathe news footage.

I let the guy talk while we weave through already congested streetscapes until we pull into a big old place with no roof or possibilities. The guy is building some type of conservatory on the rear, though from what I see he's unqualified for such a technical task. I have seen many renovations on my travels,



folks are always keen to show off their handiwork or aspirations, but I've never seen anything quite as shoddy as this effort. The whole job is a botch; there are crudely bent nails sticking out of roughly hacked wood and enough bad joints to make a professional carpenter break down and weep.

I'm loath, however, to advise my paying host that not even Noah would use him to build an ark if by some fluke all of the ark builders had been washed away in an un-forecast flood. So I tell him it's a dandy job all right and this seems to set us up for the day. The first task is coffee, and that's about the only job that has a resonance of reality about it – everything else is like a skit out of some unreality show. The guy has all the tools but none of the knowledge, so instead he uses the hammer and nails, the hallmarks of every backyard home renovator. All day we pound in nails and curse bits of stubborn timber while we claw them all out again, and by dusk we're no further forward than when we had started.

Maybe the guy can smell a rat. Perhaps he suspects I'm playing at being what I'm not anymore. He keeps asking me questions all day like:

Aren't you hot?

You sure you can work with gloves on?

Say, you're working up a sweat there, buddy, and it ain't even summer!

Well sure, I do sweat, it's a side effect of the hormonal invasion. My oestrogen-ravaged body can no longer heat or cool itself – but hell if I'm going down to a muscle shirt, no sir, that'd most likely involve a long walk home through some abrasive neighbourhoods. So I just keep telling him I'm okay, that I came in from the Sudan and that it was hotter than a charcoal pit at high noon over there, I'm still acclimatizing.

Three days looks an optimistic time frame to work within,

three years might have been a surer estimate. But I tell the guy, on the trip back, that three days is the most I can spare because after that I'm off. He takes the news well, which is more than Jo Buck does. Tomorrow she wants to get yet another tattoo, though I'm not sure there's enough skin available. But she's been a trooper on this journey into the unknown, so I tell her she can get the tattoo and somehow we'll work it all out. Septicaemia isn't so bad when you get used to it.

My day of hammering in nails has left me as deadbeat as a flogged dog. My silky soft hands are sore, unaccustomed as they are these days to physical activity, and as I lie traumatized from my sudden switcheroo vis-à-vis genders while mourning five broken fingernails, Jo Buck goes and gets us a curry. We sit in bed and watch the ghosts in the television as we eat, and I can't help but think that love is a fine sweet thing, it is good company to have on the road and a hot-water bottle in a cold bed. Maybe this place will turn out okay you know, just maybe it's our kind of place . . .