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illustrated by Chia Moan



Wakefield
Press

1. GOING TO THE CHAPEL



James lies on the bed staring at his Soccerroos poster and wriggling his toe into a hole he's making in the doona cover.

He has a problem, a big one.

It's his grannies, Anne and Julia, and the conversation at Sunday lunch. Everyone was looking at photos of a cousin's wedding and Julia got excited, the way she does. 'Oh Anne. To hell with them. Legal, illegal ... why don't we just get married anyway? We'll have a big party.'

Gran said that Julia didn't really mean that. 'Since when did you believe in marriage?'

'Well I don't,' Julia said. 'But that's a different question. It should be legal. We have to stand up and be counted.'

At school on Monday James asked Finn about legal and illegal. Finn wears glasses and knows things.

'Legal is good,' Finn said. 'Illegal is bad. Police cars and that. They arrest you. You know, like handcuffs.'

James's heart sank when he heard that. Gran and Granny Julia are planning to marry each other at an illegal wedding, and they'll get arrested.

No one else seems to be worried, but probably they haven't thought about it. Dad and Mum are always jumping into things,

so they'll probably help with the wedding, and then they'll be illegal too.

They don't realise, that's the trouble with his grannies. They never get it that there are rules. They just do whatever they feel like.

Even if it wasn't for the police it would still be a weird thing to do. Old people don't get married. At his cousin's wedding it was all long white dresses and flowers and kissy stuff. Gran and Julia aren't like that.

Nobody else has a grandmother getting married, even at a legal wedding.

Panic rises in his chest. There'll be pictures in the local paper and on Facebook and all the kids will see. Especially if the police take them off to gaol in their white dresses.



Of course they'll expect James to be at the wedding. And Mum and Dad will never let him stay home.

He loves Gran and Granny Julia and he doesn't want to hurt their feelings. He wishes, not for the first time, that he was a brave person.

Maybe he could pretend to be sick.

A terrible chilling thought fills his mind. What if they want Victoria to be a flower girl? And him, James, to be a page boy?

He'll have to run away.

2. ... TO THE BARRICADES



Julia has completely forgotten her throwaway remark about marrying Anne and therefore has no idea that James is in a panic.

Today Julia is on the boil about sexism. Her yoga class is usually a quiet oasis in the busy week, but now she has trouble freeing her mind. Counting her breaths doesn't work, and nor does 'In. Out. Peace. Joy. Good in me. Good in all.'

She is unable to find good in the campaign against Julia Gillard, Australia's first woman Prime Minister.

Shock jocks and their followers are invoking tampons and childlessness and other scary aspects of womanhood. Guillotines have been mentioned. Can the PM be both Marie Antoinette and Madame Defarge?

It is only a matter of time ... yes! Here it is. *Witch*. The ultimately terrifying woman. (*Lesbian* has slipped back to second



place for the moment.) The PM, they say, is a red-headed witch.

She is also, more mundanely, a bitch.

Julia holds no political brief for her namesake PM. She hasn't forgiven the ALP its failings on uranium mining and gay marriage. But this is not the moment to quibble. It is clear that the sexist campaign against the PM is intended to promote hatred. Honourable Australians, men and women both, are mobilising. Women who hold meetings are holding meetings. Women who tweet are tweeting. Women who lobby are lobbying. Women who write on walls are writing on walls.

The age-old fury of women is doubled in intensity for feminists who thought they had won ground in the seventies and now find it gone. A jibe about the PM's recently deceased father is simply the last burning coal, the last joule of heat under the simmering cauldron. The subterranean force of womanhood is grumbling deeply, measuring higher on the Richter scale than it has for decades. The Prime Minister has delivered a scolding but controlled plume of steam, a warning.

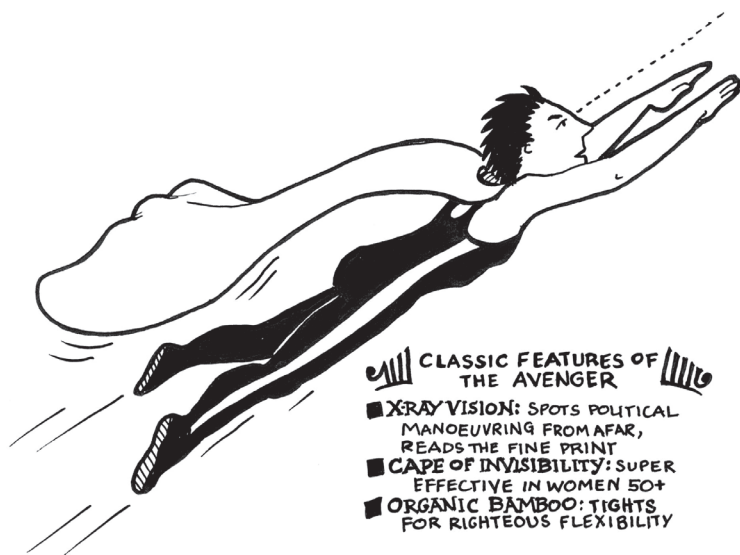
In Adelaide Anne is busy with meetings.

Julia has no patience for meetings. She and a cohort of silver-haired women are dusting off their dark clothing and stocking



masks. They are oiling their joints and having forty winks so that they can stay up late. They are making lists.

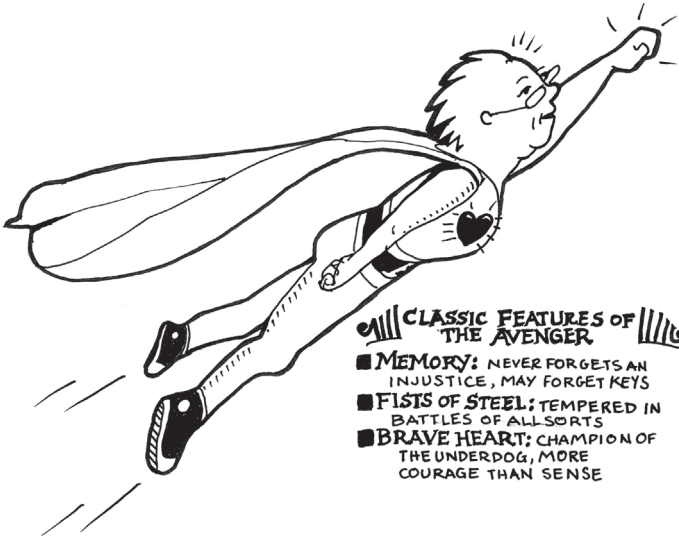
Billboards and city walls are calling out to them in a way they had almost forgotten. It is time to get back out there. Graffiti time. Twenty-first-century graffiti that will appear and



disappear overnight. The photos, however, will live on the net, digital, immortal, interleaved in subversive domesticity with pictures of cute grandkids and baby animals.

Is it a coincidence in this time of neo-conservatism that women are teetering around on heels that are higher than they have ever been? Higher even than the 1950s. The silver-hairs add shoe shops to their hit list.

Perpetrators beware. The Adelaide Avengers are on the move.



CLASSIC FEATURES OF THE AVENGER

- **MEMORY:** NEVER FORGETS AN INJUSTICE, MAY FORGET KEYS
- **FISTS OF STEEL:** TEMPERED IN BATTLES OF ALL SORTS
- **BRAVE HEART:** CHAMPION OF THE UNDERDOG, MORE COURAGE THAN SENSE

3. FRIDAY DINNER



James kicks rhythmically at the back of the driver's seat until his mother tells him to stop.

He slips his sandals off and tries inserting one foot into the split seam of the seat-cover. He is making a study of what toes can do.

'James!' Mel exclaims, feeling another kick in the small of her back.

James sighs and tucks his foot underneath him. He returns to the question of running away. He has realised one thing. He can't run away from Gran and Granny Julia's wedding and leave Victoria to be arrested.

He looks sideways at his sister without moving his head, a skill he is practicing. She is sitting in the booster seat singing happily to herself. It's the song about the ants marching. He knows it because he had the same Reception teacher. Victoria is only up to four by four. He slides his eyes back to the front and squeezes them open and shut a few times.

'Are you okay?' asks his mother, peering at him in the rear-vision mirror.

'Yeah,' he mutters.

His mother is distracted by an intersection and falls silent.

James will have to take Victoria with him. He makes a list

in his head of everything they'll need. Victoria's teddy, jammed beside her in the booster seat, for a start.

They meet Dad and Auntie Gemma and Sarah in the Market. Once James has got his spring rolls he squeezes in with the others round a table in the food hall and tunes back into the general conversation.

'So are you coming to the Pride march next Saturday?' Gemma asks everyone.

'I guess so,' says Brett, James's Dad. 'I feel like we ought to this year. Support Pink Parents.'

'But we aren't pink parents,' Mel says.

'No,' says Gemma. 'But Anne and Julia are. So I suppose Brett and I are pink kids. And you're a pink daughter-in-law.'

Mel objects. 'Daughter-out-law. We aren't married.'

'Pink daughter-in-sin.'

'What about the kids?' asks Mel.

'Pink grandkids.'

'Yes but should we take them? Those fundamentalists last year ... the heckling was poisonous.'

'That's why I think we should go,' says Brett. 'Show of numbers.'

A terrible truth is dawning on James. It's next Saturday they're talking about. But next Saturday is ...

'What about the Pageant?' he blurts.

They all look at him.

'It can't possibly be the Pageant yet,' says Mel. 'It's only just November. I thought it was a Christmas pageant?'

Gemma laughs. 'Only fifty more shopping days. Hell, probably only four hundred till Christmas NEXT year. Get out there and spend, girl.'

James realises that they are missing the point. He looks round for help and sees Victoria, who is still singing. He can only hear the odd word because of the familiar din of the food hall, trays

banging, people shouting and laughing. He thinks she's up to twenty-six. No help there.

'All the other kids are going,' he says.

Couldn't his family, just once, do what everyone else does?

Unexpected support comes from his cousin Sarah. 'I'll take James and Vic to the Pageant,' she says. 'It's in the morning. We could still do Pride in the afternoon.'

The adults look at each other.

'I'm not sure Sarah,' says Gemma. 'You're only fourteen.'

'Nearly fifteen. And what can happen at the Pageant? You could drop us off. Or Uncle Brett.'

James looks at her with awe and adoration.

But will the grown-ups agree?

