



Source: AP, 'PM turns his attention to weighty matters',
The Age online, 29/12/05.

Tags: [animals](#), [child/parent](#), [home](#), [violence](#)

Writer/s: [Caroline Lee](#)

© 2008 Barbara Campbell and the writer/s

It had all started when Louis was born; in fact, even before he was born. Lily had rented a small cottage in Paddington. It was the worst house in the nicest suburb. 'Cos that's what her brother Jim had always said to her: 'If you want to get into real estate, then choose the worst house in the best suburb and you can't go wrong. There you have it, Lily. Instant profit. It stands to reason. Shore up against the future. Make things safe.' And lots of other rational, sensible advice. He lived in New Farm, and had made a killing buying and selling properties during the boom in the late 90's. Lily wasn't sure if quite the same principles applied to renting, but she had wanted to be in an inner city suburb, seeing as how it was just her and the baby, close to the comfort of coffee shops, nice restaurants, nice shops, even if all she was able to do was look. She wanted to be somewhere beautiful. The cottage was tiny, barely even one bedroom, and very rickety; but despite its seeming fragility, it had felt right to Lily. The right place for her and the baby.

She'd moved back to Brisbane to be near her family. After their initial shock, her parents were taking it pretty well. A grandchild is a grandchild, after all, and although they wished she and Stephen had stayed together, the fact was that the family was going to be blessed with a new soul, and that was reason enough to celebrate. For Lily too, the baby was a wonderful gift, a kind of a miracle, creating a new sense of purpose, of wholeness. Maybe, just maybe, Lily dreamed, she wouldn't fall into that hole again, the dark hole that had awaited her in the twisted recesses of her early thirties.

After the first few days she realised that as well as being beset by the usual Brisbane cockroaches, the house had ants. It didn't matter how vigilant she was about not leaving food scraps around and doing the dishes, the ants would still come. There was one particular trail though, that seemed to have nothing to do with her or the food or anything. One night she followed it carefully and saw that it started in the hallway, went across the kitchen floor, through the bathroom and then out a small hole near the toilet.

And so, over the next couple of weeks, with the baby growing ever more heavy inside her, she put down poison, she sprayed, she disinfected, but still the little trail of ants continued on its way. They began to haunt her. She'd find one trying to swim in the bath water and then spend the next half hour thinking there were more. She felt them in bed with her, at night. She'd even find the occasional ant in the fridge. Having a winter holiday.

One morning Lily got up and, after stepping over ants on her way to the bathroom, and then killing a couple she

found on her legs while sitting on the toilet, she realised that more decisive action was needed. The baby was close. She knew it. And so she went to the hardware shop and got some putty. Special stuff with silicone in it that would seal up the holes where the ants came in, but also be able to shift and flex with the movement of the house. When she got home, she was excited. She got down on her hands and knees and slowly and carefully puttied up all the small holes where the ants came in. She worked her way right down the hall, until the paths merged off across the kitchen floor, and then she started again in the bathroom, meticulously filling every hole, every gap. Stopping those determined and stubborn soldiers from their march through her life. When she was finally finished she was elated but also exhausted, and fell into a deep sleep on the living room floor. And when she woke, her waters had broken and her labour had started and she took a taxi to the hospital and seven hours later there he was, her gorgeous little Louis, all 8 and 3/4 pounds of him, screaming.

Once or twice, during the chaos of visits from doctors, midwives and everyone in the family, (even, surprisingly, Stephen) she would think about her little cottage with pleasure, the fact that she had at least managed to make it safe before Louis arrived, to seal him off from danger.

But she had not reckoned upon Stephen. Upon the force of paternal passion which alighted upon him like a fever at the hospital when he saw his son. A fever which grew and grew until it was a tempest, a wild tempest; and so huge it was that one night, late, Lily was woken by pounding on the cottage door, and by Stephen shouting outside that he wanted his baby, that she had tricked him, that she had stolen Louis away from his father forever. Lily was terrified and tried to calm him; told him through the door that Louis was still his, that they could work something out, but Stephen was too wild, too enraged. He kept pounding, and as Lily retreated and sat, huddled with Louis in the living room, she could hear the house shuddering against the force of Stephen's blows. 'Hold on,' she murmured, 'hold on, little house,' as he continued to bash at the door.

But then she felt something moving on her leg. It was an ant. She looked at the wall and saw that the putty had split, and that ants were crawling through. She knew then that this was the end of her haven, her dream, that Stephen would get in and that she would have to deal with his anger and his grief; that the force of life could not be sealed up any longer.

Adapted for performance by Barbara Campbell from a story by Caroline Lee.