



Source: Sarah Smiles and Ed O'Loughlin, 'Shooting suspect warns Australia over extradition', *Sydney Morning Herald* online, 26/09/06.

Tags: [intimacy](#), [sex](#), [sexuality](#), [home](#)

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I met Shuan the day after New Year's Day in some gay dive where a nude go-go boy gyrating in slow motion fell off the bar. As bad luck would have it, he fell on his lit cigarette and the broken glass from the cocktail he'd been nursing. The bartenders took a while to tend to the boy because they were both drunk and arguing about whether the boy had passed out as he was dancing or after he'd fallen on his head.

The ramshackle clientele was drinking booze like water. They had to get beyond the hangovers they'd been through the last week and by so doing, create even more debilitating ones.

At least the holidays were over. The manic tinsel music had faded. The only physical remnants of the holiday were garbage cans full of bubble-gum-pink Barbie boxes and crumpled Santa wrapping paper. This would be followed by weeks of toppled, ornament-stripped pine trees that would lie like Skid Row bums on the sidewalks in blackening snow.

I didn't notice Shuan until he made a big deal about smiling at me. He was sitting at the bar and I was sitting on a wooden ledge against the wall behind him. He kept on smiling at me until I smiled back. That was all he needed. He hopped right over and started talking to me. He wasn't a bit shy.

After a few drinks I began to relax with him. It wasn't unusual for young men to pursue me. He touched my blonde hair a couple of times and I rubbed my fingers across his arm. His skin was velvety and far darker than any skin I'd ever touched. His crooked teeth caught the light of the neon Budweiser sign whenever he smiled.

An hour later we were in my bed. Two hours later I could imagine never getting out of bed again.

From that very first night, Shuan loved to tell me stories. He told me his first lover was a Mafia man who took him to Australia and left him there to figure things out after just three days. He told me he had an identical twin brother who hated him. He said the scar on his forehead was left over from when his mother threw a hot iron at him.

Shuan started visiting me a couple of nights during the week and usually spent the weekend. I never knew where he lived. He said his nasty brother had been tossed out of his apartment and they had to share a place. He didn't want me to be around that.

I didn't pry. I let him tell me what he wanted to tell me.

Shuan stayed clear of my white cats. He said ghosts lived inside them and he was afraid because they always stared at him whenever he was in the room.

His birthday happened to be on Easter Sunday that year. I bought him fancy cowboy boots and made him go on a treasure hunt with poetic clues on index cards to finally find them in the clothes dryer. He loved them. He was born to wear designer clothes. Everything looked good on

him. He might never have money for lunch, but he always had a new outfit.

Everyone I knew said Shuan was trouble. He took several things of mine without asking and wouldn't admit it or return them. Somehow, I thought I owed him these things.

I asked him if he wanted to move in with me to a new apartment. He beamed.

We looked at some ideal places, but when it came time to sign the lease, he wouldn't show up. After three times, I just took a place by myself without telling him. I was furious.

When he called me and found that I was in a new place, he refused to visit me. I met him at our old dive and we had too many drinks. He wouldn't come home with me and wouldn't take me to where ever he lived. I still didn't know where that was.

I said I didn't want to see him again. He stomped out in his cowboy boots.

For years after that, we spied each other around town with other lovers. We spoke amiably to each other as though it was good it was over, but our eyes maintained contact long after the small talk was done.

Eventually, I became involved with someone who looked something like Shuan, but was my own age. We had much more in common as well as a passionate sexual connection. After a few months, he dumped me without warning, moving off to the opposite coast to live with a long-term lover. I was devastated.

A few weeks later, I ran into Shuan on the street. He had never looked so good to me. He asked me to come with him.

He lived in a beautiful penthouse with a big-time divorce lawyer. The view of the river from so high up made me gasp and then I cried. He held me in his arms until I was too tired to continue. He made us strong pink cocktails from behind the bar in the living room and then made us toasted ham and American cheese sandwiches.

He put on some music and we just held each other again.

Shuan went to the bathroom and I took the opportunity to look in the bedroom. The bed was bigger than my own bedroom. It must have cost more than what I paid a year for rent. The closet door was open and I saw the cowboy boots right there in front: scuffed and the soles worn all the way down.

He called to me through the bathroom door, but I left him there without answering. I saw my own smudged lipstick smiling back at me in the mirrored elevator as I came down to the ground floor. I couldn't help wondering if this would've happened differently if I'd been a man.

*Adapted for performance by Barbara Campbell from a story by Rob Stephenson.*