



Source: Ed O'Loughlin, 'Nowhere to hide as death comes calling', *Sydney Morning Herald online*, 08/03/08.

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Soon after, his son David came into the room. The little insomniac, he thought, as David stood near the heater in his homemade Star Wars pyjamas. He looked at the patterns on the pyjama top and thought about his son sleeping with Princess Leia and Chewbacca. He belched and smiled as he thought about this, his weird little son sleeping with the daughter of Darth Vader and a half-man, half-animal. The belch reeked, so he moved his head away from it.

David looked at his mother. She was talking to her own mother, as she had been doing since the father arrived home. She was flustered again, as she often is when she speaks to her mother, and kept repeating 'It'll be okay'. The father looked at David staring at his mother; the boy just staring as if there was nothing else in the room. The father belched again, and this time he could smell the onions from the hamburger and the bourbon. It was foul. How could his body produce that?, he wondered, as he continued to look at David looking at his mother.

The father sighed from boredom, a boozy boredom, as he pushed back on the lounge and looked across at his wife. It was nine thirty for chrissake, he thought, as he pictured her mother at the other end, making her daughter get all flustered. He didn't know what trick she was pulling out this time, but it was working. She was looking at David, her forehead pulled down as she listened. 'Stand away from the heater, honey' she whispered, before turning back to her mother and whatever it was that was going on there.

Without a word, David went back into the bedroom. It occurred to the father that he probably only came out here to warm his pyjamas, and he had just now carried that warmth back into his bed. This reminded the father of resourceful mammals he had seen on Life on Earth and he felt strangely proud. He put his feet up on the arm of the lounge. He knew his wife hated this, but this time he did it to stabilise himself, especially his stomach which was now reacting violently to the hamburger and bourbon. In any case, she was distracted, telling her mother of numerous visits to doctors, details of prescriptions and their associated costs.

Just then, David came back into the room, this time with urgency. 'He's having another one of his spastic attacks', he said, as he looked to his mother and then his father. Back in his bedroom, his brother was convulsing in bed, his head thrashing from side to side as he made a strange sound with his throat. He had been doing this sporadically for three days, just at the point where his body got so hot it became confused. It wouldn't last for long, perhaps a minute,

and would for the most part not be enough to wake him; he'd just convulse and return to exactly the same state he was in before it set in. But David didn't understand this. And he became frightened every time it happened, both for his brother and for himself. Last night a bit of spit shot across and hit his face, which made him think that he too would become spastic.

The father hated David using that expression. He had told David a hundred times now that it was not a 'spastic attack'. Just as he lifted himself away from the lounge, he was overcome—with anger and bourbon-confusion. As strange as it seems, he kicked David. He didn't kick him exactly, it wasn't as deliberate as that sounds. He didn't know what he was doing, actually. It was as if his leg just thrashed out by itself, just like his youngest son's head in the next room. But his foot smashed into David's little face. It was a perfect movement and his son's front teeth broke free as cleanly as a whistle: the whole teeth, roots and all.

The father and his son were both silent and immobile. The two teeth had fallen near David's feet, half covered in the purest red blood. Their immobility was broken by the mother who, equally silently, rushed passed; she swooped up David and his teeth in one streamlined action and took them all away.

The father heard sounds from other rooms: water splashing; a young boy coughing; another young boy making sounds with his throat as he thrashed about. He moved out of the room and into the kitchen. He lent against the Aga, closed his eyes, and thought about paris france.

His only early childhood memory was of his father lifting him to his shoulders and asking 'Can you see paris france?' He always said yes, because he didn't know what paris france was. So paris france wasn't the city, but an imaginary place that always carried with it feelings of exhilaration and incompetence. Pure exhilaration at being on his father's shoulders; complete incompetence because he didn't even know what it was he was looking for. All he saw was a wall, or curtains, or a tree through the window. And even as he pretended that he could see it, he continued to strain his eyes, hoping so hard that at some point it would, as it had for everyone else, come into view.

He now went to paris france and the memory of another, now lost place. As he always did at moments like these.

Adapted for performance by Barbara Campbell from a story by Shaune Lakin.