

*Frame 1*  
*Story 1*

Rob's Corolla came with an extended warranty. Travis arrived without a manual. Things might have been easier if Travis' mum hadn't drifted to triceps down the road. Things might have been easier if Rob had switched to day shifts. As it was it wasn't, and those rare times when Rob and Travis were both awake in the same room was when Rob tried to help and it didn't help at all. Words had always confused him. Words like art or crap. Words like temper or listen. Rob's excuse was that things had changed and mostly without his permission. When Rob grew up things were either for or against, good or not, and milkshakes came in stainless steel cups with curves along the sides. Chair scrapes at six had Rob and Travis sitting down to plates of meat and one veg, and it was only a matter of time before Rob's mouth filled with words from his own father. Four-letter words like wife, home, kids. Four-letter words that led to four-finger actions. A week later when the next factory roster came around, Rob was the first to raise his bandaged hand for another three months of night shift.

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*Frame 1*  
*Story 2*

Four years of high school had taught Travis that Pythagoras was dead and that Macleod's daughters bared their breasts slower than the saints of St Helena. Curled lips told Travis that Indonesian was important, but not having any Indonesian girls at school meant he couldn't understand why. At lunch Travis was sent to the careers counsellor, and after ten minutes of flicking through course guides and triple-digit entrance scores, Travis admitted to the glasses behind the desk that all he wanted to do was draw. The glasses replied by suggesting a signwriting course. Travis found himself answering with a nod. That afternoon in Geography he drew the word signwriter in his diary. He drew it three times, complete with perspective and shading, and after half an hour when it still didn't look right, he morphed it into a man in thongs vomiting a fish, who was vomiting an ant, who was vomiting a tiny thong. That night at dinner Travis declared that his hands were made for drawing, and his father's reply across instant mash was worthy of three stiches.

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*Frame 2*  
*Story 3*

Trish could hear the bell from her bedroom. She could hear it from the kitchen. Every weekday at nine and a quarter past three the school bell across the road would trill. Even in the middle of January. Trish didn't need to walk past the mesh fence to remember dragging red gum sleepers for all those working bees. All she had to do was blink and she was nervously waiting at parent teacher nights. And despite not being on Facebook, Trish also knew that Ben's page was still out there somewhere and that his friends posted well-wishes for his last five years' of missed birthdays. The first year it was all too much and she tried deleting his account by using every login she could think of before being locked out for trying too hard. According to Facebook being the mother of a dead son wasn't authority enough and when the next February came around she drowned in mullets once more. Twelve months on and Trish found herself stuck between the Mission Brown of her kitchen with a phone in hand, and pressing one on the speed dial, she stood there desperate for an answer.

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*Frame 2*  
*Story 4*

Paul was the patron saint of healthy livers and the king of wishful thinking. Paul missed plenty of things. The Fitzroy Football Club, ice cream burgers and the smell of reef oil at Half Moon Bay. He also missed Ben and his fringe and their fishing trips and the way he said awesome, but apparently the pain didn't come close to what Trish was still feeling. Paul was able to spend a whole day checking spreadsheets without being crippled with thoughts of what if. That first week he and Trish had cried in each other's arms, and by the end of a month Paul's tears were slower to run, and after a year he didn't have any tears left. Trish kept on crying for both of them. She cried over casseroles, she cried over pegs, she cried under gentle thrusts. Sometimes Paul found himself at the front door again, watching Ben throw his bag into the back of a mate's car. Sometimes a hand waved goodbye. Waves didn't heal the hurt of being lied to or replace those fifties from wallets. Waves didn't blur those pin pricks in blue.

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*Frame 3*  
*Story 5*

Brittany's son was born under the flicker of fluoros and now she couldn't afford the electricity. For a while Brittany drifted out to Lang Lang where the rent was cheaper from a friend of a friend and she watched banana lounges yield to rust. But the burbs had jobs and the burbs had schools, so between cleaning shifts and cutting lunches, Brittany watched cooking shows to care about cast iron and quinoa even when her pay from scrubbing toilet floors only led to a diet of Teflon and rice. The twelve-hour shifts plus three-block walks meant she risked falling asleep in aisle three and waking up labelled as the *other* other white meat. Instant noodles. Three kinds of cereal. Home brand cans of tuna. Brittany had heard that gluten was linked to everything and that everything was linked to ADHD, and that ADHD was linked to the screams and fits she endured when her son met an addition to his to-do list. At least today she made it beyond the cashiers without falling asleep and even the self-serve checkout forgave the unscanned packet of gluten-free pasta.

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*Frame 3*  
*Story 6*

Two thirds of Tom swung under a desk. His top third drifted past other heads and lice to the whiteboard, and dodging the strange pen markings, his mind took a left through the open window to air and grass and downball. The tennis ball in Tom's pocket was skinned and ready. Back at home he had tried skinning it with a peeler, and when that broke he tried a splayd, as knives were apparently only for adults. It took a while to scrape off all the fur and glue before it turned the required shade of bald. With this ball Tom had practised open palm spin shots and used clenched fists for power. Downball didn't care about second-hand maths books with the questions already solved by someone who failed fractions and female anatomy. Downball didn't care that Tom never played Metal Gear because his computer at home wasn't fast enough. Downball didn't care that his shirt came from the op shop and his sneakers had to last until next Christmas. Downball was about a ball. Downball was about the bounce. Downball was a game Tom could win.

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