

Strip-searched in Carlton on a sunny afternoon

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I couldn't have felt better. Being one who enjoys just about anything, the other day my lady friend gave me a lift to Carlton after our lunch in Reservoir so I had the best of both worlds. She dropped me by a familiar bus shelter and a pleasant fruit shop midst beamy sunshine in Lygon Street.

As I waited for the bus I read the paper and relaxed wondering what was going to happen next. Possibly I shouldn't have because it was something beyond hallucination.

It was four in the afternoon and the bus pulled to a welcome halt filled with citizens like me citizens all going somewhere or nowhere in a sort of daze you'd connect with painkiller addiction.

But then, to my mild surprise, a police pursuit vehicle performed an astonishing U-turn screeched up right in front of me and other harmless people waiting for the bus down Elgin Street.

It had smoke billowing off the wheels and the lights flashing and the siren was deafening. I wondered who they were after. It was me.

The two armed officers got out with an almighty rush and blocked the path of the bus with the car. The policewoman was bearing a clipboard and demanded I stand there perfectly still. Everyone was staring as the male officer said: "A person answering your description has stolen a T-shirt from Kmart and

we need to ask you some questions about that. He has a sore right knee like you have and trackies covered in paint. What were you doing 30 minutes ago?"

I said I was in the Nova cinema courtyard and also that to my knowledge there's no Kmart in Lygon Street. The policewoman asked me repeatedly what I did for a living. I replied I was an English teacher specialising in poetry composition. Then she asked me what school I taught at. I said Genazzano Girls' Catholic School in Cotham Road Kew. She asked me its address and I gave it. I also wondered to myself who could possibly match my description because I don't believe anyone looks like me except my three brothers.

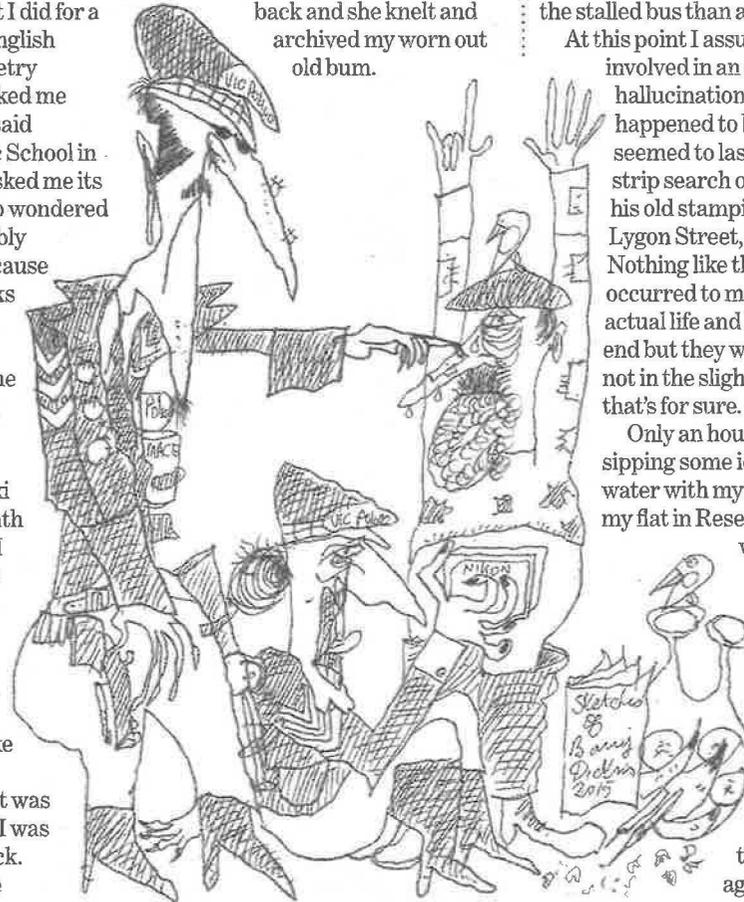
The policeman asked me what was the matter with my knee and I said it was sore. I had torn my knee ligament running for a taxi in Nicholson Street a month ago and it still hurt me so I was rubbing it. He said he hoped it would soon get better and I politely thanked him for that.

The policewoman then quickly squatted with a camera and told me to take down my pants to check whether the stolen T-shirt was hidden there. I did this as I was in a state of complete shock.

To my stupefaction she

added to drop my underpants as she had to film me completely. It really did feel then that I was in a movie and not reality.

I did this and she took photographs of my pubic hair, which blew my mind as the hippies used to say. Then she demanded that I take down my trackies at the back and she knelt and archived my worn out old bum.



It was embarrassing because the people waiting for the bus were all staring at me, as was the open-mouthed bus driver who wanted to get going just like we all wanted to get going. I was stared at by my fellow bus commuters but I didn't hold their fascination for long and they looked more concerned about the stalled bus than anything else.

At this point I assumed I was involved in an ordinary hallucination but unluckily it happened to be true; it seemed to last forever; this strip search of an author in his old stamping-ground of Lygon Street, Carlton. Nothing like this has ever occurred to me in dreams or actual life and I expected it to end but they were certainly not in the slightest hurry, that's for sure.

Only an hour before I was sipping some icy cold mineral water with my lady friend in my flat in Reservoir and now I

was naked in Limbo. It's a strange world!

The last thing they did was photograph my driver's licence held in my hand and the policewoman again asked me

what I did for a living, and I told her again I'm a teacher and the reason I had coloured paint on my trackies was that I also work as an artist and paint was just part of art unfortunately and she then said I could pull my pants up again.

Eventually, when they were both satisfied I didn't have a stolen Kmart T-shirt on my body they screeched off again up Lygon Street with their siren sounding and lights blazing away, maybe looking for another artist with a sore knee to have a go at.

Is this how we beat the war on crime, I wondered?

I hopped on the ever-faithful Collingwood bus and whizzed down Elgin Street with the people who'd just seen me naked and I hoped they wouldn't hold it against me.

I got to Victoria Park station with no more enforced dishevelled and walked up the old ramp to catch the return ride to Reservoir. I was really having difficulty understanding what had happened to me and I suppose it seemed as though I'd been in Hell for a time outside the bus stop I know so well, just as I've come to know Carlton so well over a lifetime.

I got home and I walked to my flat and watched the news on the ABC as I ate my chilli chicken rissoles that were delicious indeed, half expecting to see myself on television with no pants on. From now on I will be on the lookout for another me with a sore knee in paint-covered trackies and a carry bag filled with mandarins and the daily paper.