

Some Angel Pray for Me

Gus is reading the paper in his kitchen. Almost out of sight behind him is a young man, James. The headlines Gus is reading are sung to us by four singers (two male, two female) dressed in black and white.

Gus (sipping) Tea. This is how to start the day.
B&W1 City to become abortion capital of Australia!
Gus Mmm.
B&W2 Quake toll rises: further shocks predicted.
Gus Hmm.
B&W3 Drug bust goes wrong: cop tells!
Gus They do get excited.
B&W4 Lover accuses prince!
Gus The troubles of the wealthy.
James (a high voice, falling; very penetrating) Some angel pray for me!
Gus Good heavens! What was that?
He gets up and looks around.
James Pray for me, someone pray for me.
Gus Someone's in distress ...
James If there's any angels in heaven, couldn't one come to earth for me?
Gus (looking around) Nobody outside, nobody in the house ... (He picks up his paper again.) Oh, this is interesting ...

B&W1 Seven dead.
B&W2 Gunman goes on rampage.
B&W3 Seventeen injured.
Gus (reading) A little before sunset yesterday, James Villiers took down his gun to clean it, but instead he loaded and went outside. Something snapped. What began as an afternoon walk, albeit with a loaded rifle ...
James Aaaaaaaahhh ...
B&W4 ... quickly turned the park into a shooting gallery ...
We hear the sounds of firing, bullet after bullet, and screams: also cars accelerating, swerving, more shots, the sounds of anxious or excited onlookers, then a siren or two.
B&W1 When the police saw he was trying to reload, they rushed him ...
James Aaaaaaaahhh ...
B&W2 In a spree that lasted less than half an hour, he'd fired every bullet he possessed.
B&W3 He'd killed seven people, wounded more, and ...
B&W4 ... left the lives of countless families changed forever.
James Oooooooooohhh ...
B&W1 See editorial, page eleven!
Gus What was I doing? I was trying to ring Don Gillies, but he wasn't home. So I had a glass of red ...

B&W2 ... or two ...
Gus This is dreadful. (picking up the paper) Let's have a look at him.

James advances, accompanied by B&W3 and 4, who hold a large picture frame in front of him.

James Get that thing away from me!
B&W3 From now on, you're whatever people see inside this frame.
B&W4 The frame is you, mate. The frame is you.
Gus Yes, you have to bear it, I'm afraid. Let's see what they've found out ...

Gus puts the paper on the table and reads again, more closely this time.

B&W4 Want to look at him sir? Here he is.
Gus Shoosh, I'm busy.
James Whatever they say, it won't be fair. They want to sell their bloody papers.
B&W1 Keep your head in the frame. Stop wobbling about. You're all over the place like a mad woman's shit!
James So's your bloody news, and it stinks just as much!
B&W2 Keep in the frame. You'll find it's worse if you try to get out!
Gus Poor bastard. Look who's got their hands on him.
James (kneeling, though still inside the frame) Some angel pray for me. God, if heaven's not empty, send someone down.

Gus (sympathetically) I think heaven is empty. I wouldn't be sending my hopes up there.

A dejected James turns away. B&W3 and 4 stay with him, keeping him in the frame, and they disappear. Gus glances at the paper again, still trying to come to terms with the news of the shooting. We hear a door shut, and then the sound of a shower.

Gus Ah, Lillian's up. She'll want some fruit.

Lillian, a young woman of about twenty-one, comes on.

Lillian Morning dad.
Gus Morning darling. Some fruit there, when you're ready.
Lillian Looks good. (She starts eating, then glances at the paper.) Hoh!
Gus (noticing her reaction) Quite a story.
Lillian Quite a surprise. I know that bloke. I met him at a party. Two weeks ago, at Andy's.
Gus (as if opening up a matter of some delicacy) That was when you came home in that taxi, and I ...
Lillian That was it, dad. That was it. (indicating that there's no need for him to go on) I talked to him before the night turned into a rave, and I liked him. He seemed thoughtful. I thought he had a good chance ...
Gus (indicating that the chance is now gone) Mmm.
Lillian Looks like he's stuffed everything now.
Gus (agreeing) Mmm.
Lillian Mustn't be late. Gotta go. See you, dad.

Gus See you, darling. It's going to be warm. Salad tonight, not sure what we'll have with it.

Lillian Sounds good, dad.

She grabs her bag of books and rushes out the door, on her way to university.

Gus (looking at the paper one last time) Lillian knew him. Isn't that amazing. (He notices that B&W1 has come back.) The vultures are gathering. Thank god they haven't got anything on me!

B&W1 It's an unsafe world. You close the front door, you look over your shoulder.

Gus No I don't. I drive the car as if I owned the world.

B&W1 Until you come to a crash. Roadblock, cops, tow trucks, ambulance or two.

Gus I choose my roads. I keep out of trouble.

B&W1 Trouble chooses us! Did you see page seven? On his way to the shops, man hears a scream. Goes to help. Meets a man running out, says, 'Just a minute!' It's his last minute. Man pulls a knife. End of story.

Gus Now listen, the world's always been like that. You're not telling me anything new. So what's the answer? Live quietly. Keep out of harm's way.

B&W2 (appearing) Fashion supplement, page eleven. Did you see this? 'Singer says, anyone wants me, they pay a price.' Trouble is, her man paid a price to get her, and when he had her, he paid another price.

When they put you in a box and bury you, it's because you've lost!

Gus (disgusted with them) At least there's only two of you.

B&W 3 and 4 appear, though still some distance away.

B&W3 There's important connections to be made.

Gus Uh huh! Ganging up, are we?

B&W4 Providing information. Offering an all-round view.

B&W3 Reminding you ...

B&W1 You're a man of experience. You bought your daughter that car.

B&W2 She's a good driver, but ...

Gus But what?

B&W4 There's some tricky spots on her way to uni.

B&W3 Couple of crossings where people run red lights.

Gus Lillian's told me about that. She knows what she's doing.

B&W1 Course she does ...

B&W2 It's just that ...

Gus What?

B&W2 ... if anything was to happen, you'd want to know.

Gus So?

B&W1 We're at your service.

B&W2 Twenty four hours a day.

Gus (very sourly) Thanks.

B&W3 When you put your head on the pillow, the world doesn't go to sleep.

B&W4 It keeps on going.
 B&W3 And when you wake up, and you want to know what's happened ...
 James (out of sight) Aaaaaaaahhh ...
 B&W4 ... we're here and ready, with the news!
 James Some angel pray for me!
 Gus (grabbing the paper again) Yes, he killed all those people! Yes, he wounded others, and he wrecked the lives of who knows how many ...
 B&W1 And?
 B&W2-4 And?
 Gus (insisting) ... but ...
 B&W1-4 But what?
 B&W1 Why don't you say and?
 Gus But ...
 B&W1-4 But?
 Gus ... at the same time, and I can't stop myself thinking about this, he ruined his own life. Yes, he did a shocking thing, but the worst thing of all was what he did to himself!
 B&W1 We won't be printing that, Gus ...
 Gus I don't expect you will. You don't have feelings, so you can't put them in your paper. So you're in a shameful position, can't you see?
 B&W2 Think about it this way, Gus. It's a matter of how you want to live. Head in a blanket ...

Gus ... with one of your cameras pressed against the window, trying to snatch a look!
 B&W3 The public have a right to know.
 Gus (scornfully) Hmm.
 B&W3 Do they not?
 Gus You're like jackals. You wait till the lions have left the corpse, then you rush in, salivating
 James (in the distance, quietly) Pray for me, pray for me...
 B&W4 (referring to the prisoner) Why did he do it? Who's going to tell people what they want to know ...
 B&W1-3 ... unless it's us.
 B&W4 It's our job.
 Gus (weakening) Hmm.
 B&W1 Public opinion's formed by knowledge ...
 Gus (knowing they'll soon have him beaten) Now listen, I've got to get to the shops. Something for dinner tonight.
 B&W1 When your daughter gets home.
 B&W2-4 If!
 Gus Blast you!

He grabs a basket and walks off. The other four slip into the background. Then we notice a statuesque figure appearing, a woman who is blindfolded. She sits, and signals to two other figures, who bring her a symbolic-looking pair of scales, and a sword. She drives the sword into the stage floor, and touches the scales so that they swing faintly, one side up, the other down, then vice-versa.

B&W1 Gunman facing charges.
B&W2 Police interview parents.
B&W3 Wongle Street killer kept apart from other prisoners.
B&W4 Victims struggling for their lives.
B&W1-4 Darkest day in years, says Premier.

The two figures who accompanied Justice onto the stage return with James. He kneels before the symbolic figure of judgement. He is invited to touch the sword and the scales, but declines to do so, bowing his head instead. The figures of B&W 1 to 4 are also seen, watching with interest.

B&W1 He's in the presence.
B&W2 What sentence will he get?
B&W3 Life.
B&W4 Twenty five years, minimum.
B&W1 Good behaviour?
B&W2 Who? Him?
B&W3 The screws get sick of them.
B&W4 When the system reckons they're beyond doing any more damage.
B&W1 When they're too old, you mean.
B&W2 He's only young.
B&W3 Life.
B&W4 They'll let him out one day ... when everyone's forgotten.
B&W1 That's something we won't let happen.

The two figures supporting Justice lead James away.

B&W2 Back to the cells, you bastard.
B&W3 They're keeping him in solitary.
B&W4 Safe from the rest of them, locked up in there.
B&W1 To keep ourselves safe, we need to lock a few away.
B&W2 We're safest, of course, when everyone's of like mind.
B&W3 Thinking all the same thoughts.
B&W4 That's when we're safe.
B&W1 Trouble is, it's boring.
B&W2 So there's a norm in the middle ...
B&W3 Speaking of norms, here's Gus.

Gus returns, carrying a couple of bags of shopping, which he puts on the table. He empties the bags and puts things away.

B&W4 There's a norm in the middle, and around it is uncertainty ...
B&W1 Fear.
B&W2 No place for any self-respecting self.
B&W1-4 Ha ha ha.
B&W1 Not hard to keep'em in order, is it?
Gus Lillian met him. (picking up the paper) There's a picture, but that's not the man. (He thinks.) He had forces inside him that he needed to lock down, but they got away. All hell broke loose, but hell's a part of us. We pray to heaven, but that's us as well. (He lies down.) We're such a mixed bag, every one of us, no wonder we can't manage very well. Oh dear ...

Gus goes to sleep. Then we see Lillian and her friend Andy (female), talking about James.

Andy What're we going to do?

Lillian Go and see him. It's up to us. No one else will.

Andy He'll be in that awful jail.

Lillian We can go in my car.

Andy What're we going to say?

Lillian Ask him how he is, I suppose. Ask him what happened.

Andy We know that, unfortunately.

Lillian Inside his head.

Andy That's where everything happens.

Lillian We can ask him if he knew what he was doing.

Andy How could you know what you were doing, and keep shooting?

Lillian It's all a mystery to me.

Andy My parents have known his parents for years. I grew up with James.

Lillian The name sounds funny now, doesn't it? Somehow he's not the same.

Andy You think he'll want to see us?

Lillian He will. It's a way of not being alone.

Andy You're never on your own. You're always with yourself.

Lillian That's his problem, isn't it. I think that's why we're going.

Andy When do you finish today?

Lillian At three. I'll meet you at the car.

Andy Cool. I know where you park. Anything we ought to take?

Lillian If he needs anything he'll tell us.

They leave the stage. Gus is still sleeping. The figure of justice takes her position high, and behind, her attendants caring for her sword and scales.

B&W1 He's gone quiet.

B&W2 God must have told him to shut up.

B&W3 He might be sleeping.

B&W4 How could you sleep with that on your mind?

B&W1 (referring to Gus) No problem for this fellow.

B&W2 He'd sleep through the last judgement.

B&W3 (indicating the figure of justice) Speaking of which!

B&W4 James'll be shaking in his shoes by now. His knees'll be knocking.

Gus wakes, rubs his eyes, then goes to the table, pushing the paper aside.

Gus Same day, same news. When's it going to change? (He starts to put things on the table, ready for the salad he's going to prepare.) Iceberg lettuce, still the best. (He looks at the imposing figure of Justice, overlooking all.) Never resting, always ready. (loudly) What a job! (back to his salad) Spring onions, dill. Cucumber, oregano. Oil. Vinegar. Time was, there wasn't any Australian oil. Look at this.

Top class! Lillian should be home by now. I had a sleep too long ... as you might say. What is the time? She's late. Lovely day, though. Might have gone for a swim. With Andy, thick as thieves those two. I'll get everything ready for when she gets home. She's such a part of my day. She'll have kids of her own one day. Not yet, I'm pleased to say. She's my responsibility and I need it, more than she needs me. (He notices the paper.) Oh! (He folds it and puts it over the back of a chair.) I don't need to look at that again.

The figure of justice stands, beckoning to her helpers. One takes the sword from the floor, while the others pick up the scales.

Gus What's going on?

Justice and her helpers leave the stage.

Gus Funny? It leaves a gap. There's got to be justice, or what sort of a world are we in? That young fellow didn't sing out again, did he? (He listens.) No. (He goes to the back of the stage for a look.) Ah, here's Lillian. Salad! Chip chop, chip chop.

He starts chopping, and putting the salad ingredients in a bowl. Lillian comes in.

Gus Hi darling, did you go for a swim?

Lillian Andy and me went out to see James. We thought they'd let us in.

Gus (indicating the paper) James ...

Lillian Yeah, that James. We were his only visitors. Not that I was expecting a crowd ...

Gus How was he?

Lillian Pleased to see us. They've got him in solitary. To protect him, they say. People who run prisons can't talk straight because they can't think straight. That's how it looks to me.

Gus Did he say anything about ...

Lillian (shaking her head) We didn't ask. He'll have to think about it one day but he isn't ready yet.

Gus Speaking of which, I was just about to make some salad. And I'll grill some fish. Won't be long.

Lillian Thanks dad. No rush. In fact, I need a couple of minutes on my own.

She leaves the kitchen and goes to the high seat where the figure of justice sat. Gus looks at his daughter in amazement.

Gus Mercy banishes justice. Whoever would have thought ... From my own house, unexpectedly ... To my own amazement ...

James (softly) Aaaaaaaahhh ...

Lillian (calling) Did you hear something, dad?

Gus I thought I did, but maybe I was hearing things ...

Lillian You were, and I heard it too. You been hearing things all day?

Gus I have, on and off. The news in the paper was very upsetting ...

Lillian Funny, it didn't seem true when me and Andy were
 with him. A pretty cruel place that jail. But I felt
 protected. I knew we wouldn't come to any harm.

Gus You were protecting him, the two of you.

Lillian I think I'm getting hungry now dad.

Gus Couple of minutes, darling. Bit of fish to grill and
 we're there.

Lillian I'll stay out here, dad, until you call me. That okay?

Gus That's fine, darling. Won't be long ... (He speaks the
 last words to himself.) Unless someone else calls out.
 (He pauses to think.) There's always someone out
 there in need, but who hears them?

Lillian (coming in) You been sitting out there this arvo, dad?
 The seat felt warm.

Gus (knowing that what he says isn't true) I had a little
 sleep this afternoon. Couple of cushions and a rug.
 I'm ready to serve up now darling.

Lillian Go for it! I'm ready, willing and able!

They sit at table for their dinner.