

Ockhams Sampler

Extracts from
the finalist books in the
Jann Medlicott Acorn Prize for Fiction
at the 2021 Ockham New Zealand
Book Awards

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AWARDS

Jann Medlicott Acorn Prize for Fiction



The Jann Medlicott Acorn Prize for Fiction at the Ockham New Zealand Book Awards is the country's richest literary prize, with \$57,000 to be won in 2021. It recognises both novels and short story collections by a single author. This year's fiction judging panel says the three novels and one short story collection on the 2021 shortlist all pack an immense literary punch. "Craft, nuance, urgent storytelling, rage against injustice, and

new perspectives are at the forefront of these four impressive books."

The 2021 fiction judges are reviewer and writer Kiran Dass (convenor); books editor and feature writer Paul Little; and writer Claire Finlayson, former programme director of the Dunedin Writers & Readers Festival. They are joined in deciding the ultimate winner from their shortlist of four by award-winning American writer Tommy Orange.

This Ockhams Sampler gives you a taste of the craft at play in each of this year's shortlisted books. You can read the judges' comments about each fiction finalist in blue at the start of that title's extract.

Look out for samplers of the finalists in the other three categories in the Ockham New Zealand Book Awards. As they are rolled out in the coming weeks, you will find them here:

www.anzliterature.com

www.nzbookawards.nz/new-zealand-book-awards

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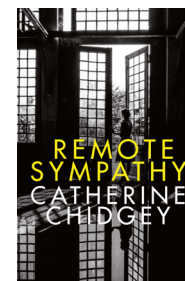


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Published by **Victoria University Press**

Bug Week & Other Stories

JUDGES' COMMENTS

Atmospheric and refined, *Bug Week* is compelling from start to finish. A tightly wound collection of short stories which explore the weird, the eerie and the mordantly funny, there's a sense of quiet unease and slow-burning rage. A talking albatross at an open mic night, an envious sibling, a desperate ex-lover and a melancholy brothel owner are some of the characters encountered in this collection, which delves into the female experience, anger, male entitlement and restless malaise.

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Extract from 'Billy the Pirate Poet.'

In those days I was something of a closet poet. I had a few old exercise books and diaries, bought quarter-price in July, in which I would pen my creations and paste found pieces of paper, like other people's grocery receipts or cryptic letters written by paranoid schizophrenics, hand-delivered to every mailbox in Newtown. Often, or mostly, the stuff I wrote was awful. When I was stoned, especially so. I used to attend an open mic night every second Thursday at one of the local pubs. One evening I was shoving things in my dowdy backpack when Billy asked if he could tag along. You slotted your arm through his, and we made

our way through the darkening streets, passing derelicts who smelled of meths and unwashed pants, students with their eyes fixed on their shoes, African mothers in head-to-toe rainbows. The pub was relatively quiet, and the patrons were mostly known to us. There was Serious Will – was he really getting himself in the mood by composing something on a sugar packet? There was Far Too Old Dave, thus named because he was the wrong side of thirty and still flattening with university kids. (I laugh about this now that I am older than Far Too Old Dave was then.) There was Jackson the bicycle mechanic, who had nursed a light flirtation with you into a wounding passion, the way a child scratches a mosquito bite and picks the subsequent scab until a fleshy scar forms. He looked deeply morose to see you at Billy's side, your head nestled into his armpit. There was Jenny Heming, a buxom New Age type who worked at the Nepalese restaurant down the road. She got talking to Billy like he was an old friend. He admired her amber beads and stared at her breasts. You kicked your shoe against a bar stool and talked louder than usual. Billy was probably skint, but bought us all a cider. This was part of his schtick – a madcap affability, a reckless generosity.

When it was my turn, I read a confessional prose poem. It featured me in the bath. The paper trembled in my hands. There was the usual tired clapping, and you let out an ululation, which I felt was gratuitous. Far Too Old Dave gave me a seedy smile. I gave him a vicious glare.

Billy read next. His work was clichéd, even by my standards. He'd written a rambling ballad of the road entitled 'Southern Country', with a few rhyming lines thrown in here and there for the ease of it. The only line I remembered was 'black as the ace of spades', which I felt was taking things too far. Serious Will bruised his sugar packet and muttered, 'Should have called it

"Country Without The O": I don't know what you thought, but you ululated some more. Out of politeness we each bought Billy a beer and shared another between ourselves. The bar owner must have eventually cottoned on to the brokenness of wannabe poets, because she canned the open mic nights shortly afterwards. You and I used to fill water bottles with vodka and tonic, smuggle them into gigs under our dresses. Or we'd drink cheap plonk at home first, smoke a spliff and then weave into town arm in arm. I remember us downing a bladder of nameless wine while waiting for the bus, drinking straight from the plastic tap, laughing so hard it ran down our faces.

Billy got talking to Jackson about bikes. The conversation quickly became boring, and after unsuccessfully sighing and rolling your eyes, you walked home with me. 'I'll see you soon,' Billy called to us, although it would be 2am before we heard the front door click.

As we turned into our street, you squeezed my arm and said, 'I think I'm in love with him.'

'Be careful,' I told you.

'And I think he really likes me,' you went on, oblivious. I couldn't talk you out of it. You were dreaming of following Billy around the world. You were wondering if one could buy motorcycle leathers that were vegan.

Although the house prices have gone up, and some of the places that used to look semi-derelict have been painted in fashionable colours, Newtown is still much the same. The same green grocers that sell mangoes and plantain bananas, the same Indian restaurants, the same op shops. The fish 'n' chip place, the cheap bakeries. The Syrian shop with its bottles of rosewater and jars of tea. The place that sells old ladies' nightgowns. Outpatients

dawdling the streets during the day, muttering to themselves. I don't often go there, nowadays. Once our playgroup went on a trip to the zoo, caught the train and bus together. Small children seem to love anything that moves. Put a kid in a carriage with seats, with a window she can press her fingers to, with the world rushing past, and she'll be happy. One of the other mums said something about how scungy it was, and another said she'd had food poisoning from the fish 'n' chips.

'I lived here for five years,' I said, mostly to myself. One of the playgroup kids was singing 'The Wheels on the Bus' and it was hard to talk over him. I shouldn't judge. I knew all the words to that song. *The mummies on the bus go blah blah blah...*

8 The Banksy-esque stencils that seemed to replicate themselves, the layers of posters for punk gigs. The punk rockers must have been in their fifties by now, knees wrecked from pogoing. There was a group of kids walking up Rintoul Street, dreadlocked and pierced, all in black. They looked like people we'd known, in younger incarnations. They'd be going home to eat lentil dal and plot the revolution.

It's maybe a forty-five-minute drive to Newtown from where I live now. In fact, my daughter was born there, in the hospital you and I used to walk or cycle past on a daily basis. I remember when they were dismantling one of the old wings, and you could see into the exposed rooms as if they'd been sliced in half. 'I don't like to look at it,' you told me. 'There are ghosts in there.' On one side of the complex there was a chimney that always steamed, and I assumed it was the laundry, but you said, 'That's where they cook up all the old body parts. You can smell it.' After that, though I'm sure it was just water vapour, I always could. Old tonsils, amputated limbs – who knows what. 'They have to cook them up somewhere,' you told me.

When Bella was born we had a corner of a room in the post-natal ward, somewhere halfway up one of those towers. But from the inside, when I looked out, I had no idea where I was. Around me, babies screamed, doors banged, the buzzers sounded constantly. I was surrounded by people and noise. A lactation consultant pulled my breasts out of my smock with scarcely a preliminary explanation. Bella fed, my nipples turned raw, and I felt as alone as I have ever felt. Only a few rooms away, life was coming forth into the world on a regular basis: bloody, pushed between legs or pulled out with giant spoons or sliced from an abdomen, held up by a masked surgeon. Everything was tubes and bags of saline and things with lights and numbers. The times Mike wasn't with me I looked out the window or at the ceiling, and I might have been on the moon. How did they keep the sheets so white, with everything that happened on them? I went through acres of maternity pads. I thought about the laundry, and what you'd said about body parts. I wondered where you were. You had a husband and kids, but I didn't know their names. You lived in the Bay of Plenty somewhere, where your husband was from. He was a roofer – good with his hands, in general. I couldn't remember which town.



Published by **Victoria University Press**

Nothing to see

JUDGES' COMMENTS

Looking at surveillance, identity, gender and people living on the margins under the fallout of capitalism, *Nothing to See* follows the lives of Peggy and Greta, who are recovering alcoholics (or rather, one alcoholic who has splintered off into two). And just when you think you've cracked what is going on, Pip Adam turns everything in this dazzling novel inside out, leaving the reader momentarily disoriented but exhilarated.

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Extract from 1994

1

'Huh?' Greta was lying on Peggy's stomach.

'Everything seems so dark,' said Peggy. They were both reading. They'd gone to their room with the intention of reading. 'We're just going to read,' they'd said to their flatmate Dell. But for the last half hour or so they'd been staring out at their room over the top of their books. They were just learning how to spend time.

'Like everything,' Peggy said.

Greta was sleepy. They'd been up too late. The cold and heavy

of the Sunday evening was settling down.

'When I think back to what we did this week or last week or the week before. It's all so dark.'

'We've been up a lot at night,' Greta said. She put her book on her chest.

'Yeah.' Peggy turned round so she could see out the high window above their bed. Greta's head moved with the change in Peggy's position. 'You're right.'

They sat like that for a moment. Peggy wound round to look up and out the window, watching the grey sky. Greta staring at the ceiling, book on her chest, and head, precarious now, on Peggy's stomach.

'We should get some food,' Greta said.

'Yeah,' said Peggy. 'Do we have any money?'

Greta scratched her head. Her hands were swamped in a long jumper and she scratched her head through the sleeves. Her dark, short hair stood up. She wiped her nose with the sleeve of the jumper. 'Not much.'

'Enough for tom yum?' Peggy's voice lightened a little.

'Yeah?' Greta said. 'How much is tom yum, again?'

'Eight bucks,' Peggy said. She was getting up now. Greta fell off her lap. 'Eleven, if you have noodles. The noodles are three dollars. If we have the noodles we only need one bowl of soup.'

'What's the date?' Greta said.

Peggy shrugged. 'Like, the sixth?'

'We should be golden.'

'Can we get spring rolls?' Peggy asked. They'd both put on heaps of weight since they'd stopped drinking. A few weeks ago, Peggy worked out that if they took more Antabuse than they were supposed to it gave them diarrhoea. The counsellors at rehab were dark on dieting or vomiting but Peggy was pretty sure

they'd get away with it now they were out. Except, Greta pointed out, if they both kept taking more than they were supposed to, they'd probably need more Antabuse sooner than they were supposed to.

'What date does rent come out on?'

'Like, the fourteenth?' Peggy was pulling on their Converse All Stars. She pulled a floral dress over a long-sleeved top and leggings. The dress had been bigger. She was looking around for their fisherman's rib jumper. Then she stopped. 'But...'. She rubbed her eyes and the black eyeliner left over from the day before smeared more. 'We can't fly too close to the wind,' cause it's not like if we spend the rent it'll magically come again from somewhere else.'

'How much do we have in cash?'

Peggy started going through the pockets of the jackets and trousers on the floor.

They'd gone to a budget advisor. He hadn't said much and had mainly looked at the pieces of paper their case manager had sent. He'd cut their credit card up in front of them – while they were still sitting there. They'd looked in the rubbish bin at the fragments of plastic while he moved on to other things. He rang the gym that had sent their debt to a debt collector, and worked out 'terms'.

They were on a sickness benefit, but every now and then they'd sleep with men for money. The counsellor at rehab said if they sat in the barber's chair long enough they'd get a haircut, which as far as they could tell was true (the others from rehab were falling like flies), but sometimes the rent was due and it wasn't like anyone would give either of them a job. A job that still left time to go to meetings and counselling and doctor's appointments. 'That's what the sickness benefit is for,' the

counsellor said as he signed the forms for them before they left rehab. 'So you can concentrate on staying sober.'

They wanted to stay sober more than anything. They sat up late into the night talking about how much they wanted to stay clean. How much they wanted to start a new life. What they'd do to stay away from a drink. 'If I was like . . . if I thought I was going to drink, I'd fucking . . . I'd go to the police station and say "Arrest me" and if they wouldn't, I'd break a window.' 'Yeah,' they'd both say. 'Yeah.' They went to a meeting every day – most days they went to two meetings. They were making friends. They got invited to go tenpin bowling. They got sick together and they'd get well together.

'Three dollars,' Peggy said. She was resting the combination of coins in her hand – they had small hands.

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'Well,' said Greta, who was still lying on the bed. 'That's the noodles already. Like, in your hand.'

'There's so much fucking money,' Peggy said. They'd pissed a lot of money against the wall. Things were tight now, but they had a roof and some clothes and they had enough for noodles without even checking their EFTPOS card.

'Fucking love being sober,' Greta said.

'Fucking love being sober,' Peggy said.

'I'm going to check the wallet,' said Greta, and she grabbed their canvas army surplus bag and pulled everything out until she found the wallet. There was a five-dollar note. Greta looked up at Peggy with a smile so broad her face might come apart at the seams. 'We're fucking loaded! We've got like' – she counted it – 'eight bucks!'

'We must have three in the bank?' Peggy said.

Greta looked at her.

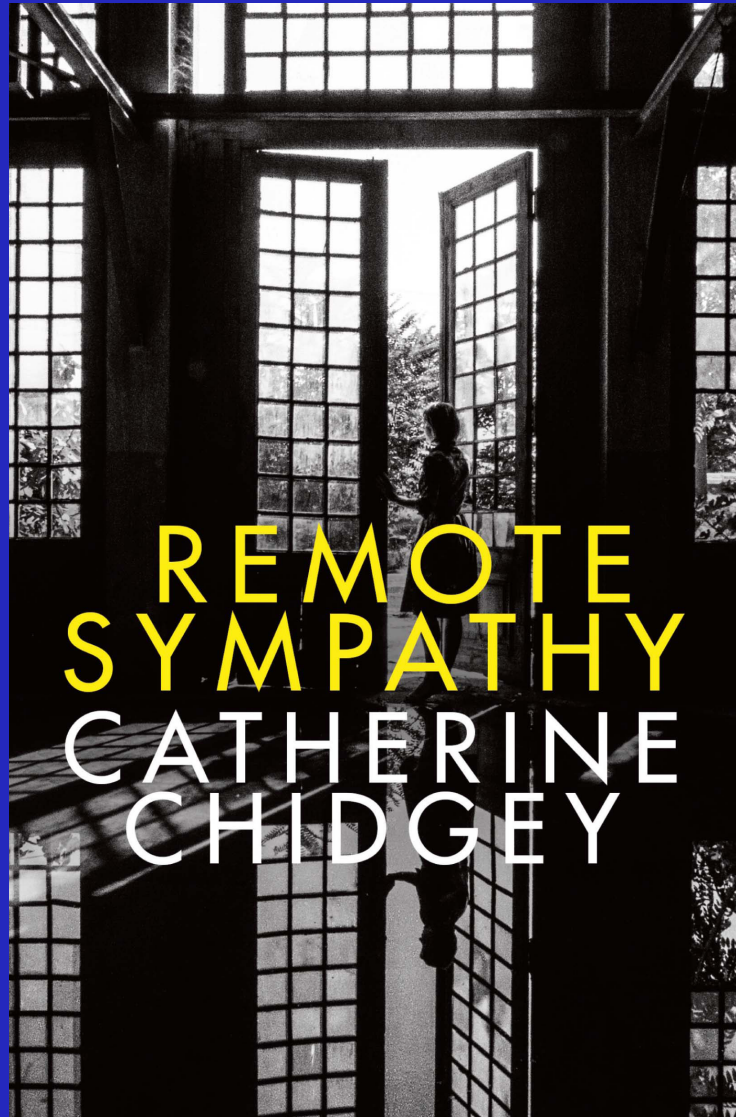
'For the noodles.'

'For the noodles,' Greta agreed.

It stopped them for a minute. How lucky they were, and they just stood and looked at the wall and basked in the luck.

'Shouldn't we be happy with just the soup?' Greta asked. 'Like, finding that eight bucks – that's pretty awesome.'

Peggy thought about it. 'I think god would want us to have noodles.'



Published by Victoria University Press

Remote Sympathy

JUDGES' COMMENTS

This transcendent novel about 'wilful blindness' is written as a series of letters, interviews and diary entries told from four different angles – the newly-appointed camp administrator at Buchenwald labour camp Sturmbannführer Dietrich Hahn, his wife Frau Greta Hahn, Dr Lenard Weber, who has invented a machine called a Sympathetic Vitaliser which he believes can cure cancer by using a process called 'remote sympathy', and the collective reflections of Weimar citizens. Immersive, profound and plotted with a breathtaking dexterity, *Remote Sympathy* is vividly evoked.

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Extract from Part Six

...

'I'm afraid I don't understand what you're asking, Sturmbannführer,' I said. I felt the tiniest thrum of power.

He ran a hand through his thinning hair. 'Is there any sign yet,' he said. 'So far, is there any sign the treatment is working?'

'It's still early, Sturmbannführer,' I said. Another spark leapt from the fire and lay glowing on the carpet. Hahn just stared at it. 'Still very early – but I think we can be hopeful, based on my observations to date. Based on the recovery of my last patient.' There I stood, Lotte, all but promising him my second miracle. I

thought that surely he must know I was lying; surely he must see right through me. I had to keep reminding myself that he wanted to believe in the machine as much as I did, and if he admitted it was a fraud, there was nothing more for him to do than wait for his wife to die. The spark from the fire glowed brighter. It could take hold, set the whole beautiful room alight. Porcelain vases cracking in the heat. The sails of the model ship swelling with flames.

‘Only she seems to be getting worse,’ he said.

‘This is quite normal,’ I said. ‘When the Vitaliser begins to break down a tumour, it releases toxins into the system. Gradually the body processes and expels these.’

Hahn’s face relaxed a little.

‘What we are seeing is an effect not of the disease,’ I said, ‘but the destruction of the disease.’

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‘I see,’ he said. ‘Yes, I see. Well, tell me if there is anything more you need. For the treatments, I mean. It won’t be a problem.’ He stamped on the spark. ‘Too green,’ he said as if to himself. ‘Full of sap.’

I went to the spare bedroom first, to collect the doctor’s bag Hahn had taken from the personal effects room for me. It must have been a few decades old, but it had been well looked after, and though the handle had moulded to the shape of another man’s fingers, the black leather was still supple. The clasp opened and closed with barely a sound.

As I crossed the hallway I heard a heavy thud coming from the bathroom, and a cry. Through the door I saw Josef sprawled on the wet tiled floor.

‘I’m all right,’ he mumbled, but I helped him up and sat him on the edge of the bath. ‘I’m all right,’ he repeated. I could see a lump already forming on his forehead. A bottle of bubble bath had

overturned and was slowly emptying itself down the drain, and when he tried to snatch at it I thought he was going to fall again.

‘Just stay sitting down for a minute,’ I said. I righted the bottle and checked his pupils as well as the lump on his forehead. ‘Do you feel dizzy? Or sick?’

‘No.’

‘What day is it?’

‘What?’

‘Do you know where you are?’

He laughed at that. ‘Do you?’ He watched as I turned on the water and began to rinse away the spill. ‘You won’t mention anything, will you?’ he said.

‘Why would I mention anything? What would I say?’

‘It’s just – plenty of people want this position.’

The bubbles kept frothing under the stream of water, and the whole room smelled like lavender. The bath was a massive affair, big enough for four or five children. It was much more modern than the one we’d had when I was little, with its claw feet and its dark space underneath that my mother liked to check for dust so she could be sure the maid was doing her job. I used to think that it could walk, and that one day it might wrench itself free of its pipes and escape. I remembered how light I felt when I lay with my head on its curving rim and the rest of my body floating: I was driftwood, I was kelp. My mother had been a nurse before she married, and she used to tell me the names of my bones as she washed me. *Lateral malleolus*, she would say, soaping my lower leg. *Medial malleolus*. *Fibula*. *Tibia*. *Patella*. The words sounded like spells; strange and secret names for things we couldn’t see. And I remembered reciting them to you too, Lotte, when I washed your little body in our bathroom at home.

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'I should go,' I said to Josef, and he placed his hand on my forearm for a moment and said, 'The Lord is nigh unto them that are of a broken heart.'

Frau Hahn was asleep when I entered the room, lying on her side, knees drawn up to her chest. The only sound the tick-ing of the alarm clock on the bedside cabinet.

'Good morning,' I said, but she did not stir. 'Good *morning*,' I repeated. 'Frau Hahn?' I stood at the side of the bed in my dead man's suit, the jacket too broad across my back, the sleeves and legs too short. This was the only time I saw my reflection at Buchenwald: in the Hahns' many mirrors. 'Are you awake?' I said.

When I used to work late at the Holy Spirit, Lotte, your mother always asked me to wake her when I came home – so she would know I was safe, she said, and then she could sleep. I'd creep into our bedroom, navigating the dark space by memory, by touch. Only when I was in bed would I speak, whispering to her as I settled my body down the length of hers. *Anna. Anna. I'm home.*

I didn't know how I should wake Frau Hahn – it felt far too familiar to touch her hair, her shoulder, her hip. For a moment I stared at the drawing pinned to the wall above her bed: a dog sitting at a table, drinking a glass of something red – well, was it a dog? Why was a dog sitting at a table? Perhaps it was a man. Without warning they came to me then, Lotte: all the pictures you had drawn of the pools and the parks you could not visit. The Italian ice-cream parlour on Frankenallee; the Palmengarten with its yawning grottoes. Little windows to lost places. Did you draw the gardens of Sanssouci, too? Or am I only imagining that you drew them, because of the calendar page I'm writing on? *The Terraced Vineyard of Frederick the Great in Spring.* I can no longer say for sure.

I cleared my throat and was just about to reach out and wake Frau Hahn when she opened her eyes. She blinked at me as if she didn't know who I was.

'Good morning,' I said. 'It's time for your treatment.' She blinked again, frowned, then said, 'My treatment. Of course. Good morning, Herr Doktor.'

SPRIGS

BRANNAVAN GNANALINGAM



Published by **Lawrence & Gibson**

Sprigs

JUDGES' COMMENTS

A searing novel which examines violence, racism and toxic masculinity, *Sprigs* looks at the consequences of a sexual assault at a high school rugby game aftermath, and the ripple effect of trauma that follows. Brannavan Gnanalingam deftly brings together a hefty cast of characters, skillfully orchestrating multiple voices and perspectives. Written with sensitivity, nuance and not without bursts of comic relief, *Sprigs* is an unflinching novel which forces us to reckon with uncomfortable truths about power and privilege in Aotearoa.

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Extract from Part 3: The Meeting

When the Year 9s to Year 12s had left, he scanned the Year 13s. There were fewer than usual. No matter, he thought. Since the party was at Tim McGlashin's, he needed to talk to Tim about whoever else might have been there. He liked Tim. Tim was responsible.

Before he was about to say why they were gathered, he saw Rupert Campbell-Black and Burt Snr walk in. They beckoned to him. Denver said to the mic, "Just hold up boys, talk among yourselves." He walked to Campbell-Black and Burt Snr, realising that nobody was talking among themselves. Campbell-Black

had a pile of papers. The staple parallel to the top edge of the page. Single sided, with at least 16pt spacing, on 120 gsm paper. Denver looked at them.

“For the boys,” Burt Snr said.

“For the boys,” Campbell-Black repeated, with more enthusiasm.

“For the boys,” Denver murmured to himself. Should he be doing this? They were the lawyers. He took a pile and went back to the front. None of the boys had said a thing in that whole interlude.

“Thank you all for staying behind. One of the key things I wanted to discuss with you, and it was just good luck that we had a separate assembly today, is the leaving dinner.” Denver tried not to look at Burt Snr, but he hoped Burt Snr would see the seamless way he would work the two things together. “The usual tradition is that we host the leaving dinner here and order a spit-roast and the like. There has been some clamouring in the past for us to head off-site, but I want to get a gauge from you all as to what you think. Of course, if we go off-site, then there might be some additional cost, but we could work that out.” The boys looked confused. “Can I please get a show of hands from you, as to whether you’d prefer to follow tradition and have the Leavers’ Dinner here or whether we break the tradition and go off-site, though that may lead to some budgetary constraints and you might only be able to bring one parent, not two, if you have two parents in this day and age. Ok, so hands up for tradition and having the Leavers’ Dinner here.” Nearly two thirds. “Ok, off-site?” There weren’t many hands. It didn’t seem like a third, but no matter. “Ok, we’ll have it on-site. So, with that in mind, we have a document that we’d like you all to sign. We’ll need it signed by every one of you in this assembly, and it will be a

requirement for going to the Leavers’ Dinner.”

Campbell-Black yelled, “Make sure you print your name as well. Teenage boy signatures can be like the Voynich Manuscript.” The boys looked blankly at Campbell-Black.

None of the boys had pens with them, having left their bags in their lockers. Campbell-Black ran up to everybody and handed them Shorten Smith branded pens. Burt Snr tried to hold him back. He didn’t want the boys to be reminded of lawyers in the room. He looked around and couldn’t see his son. He frowned. He tried to see some of the rugby players that his son had mentioned in passing, but they all looked so young in their uniforms and their badges and their pimples. None of them could have been capable of what they were being accused of. It couldn’t have happened like that. Young people had over-developed imaginations.

Some of the boys shrugged their shoulders, flicked to the back, and signed. Others looked at the boys signing for confirmation. One was reading it, and was nudged by his neighbour, so he signed it. Pritchard signed loudly, with his signature much larger than usual. He’d practised his signature since he was a kid, in case he became a famous sports-star. He wanted to show the others there was no shame in signing this. From a brief glance, he knew this was nothing to do with the Leavers’ Dinner.

Tim felt surly. The school’s reaction to *The Biz* article made him suspicious. Emblazoned on the front was “Confidentiality Agreement.” For a Leavers’ Dinner? He read through the background. Some of the provisions. Not to disclose confidential information about the school or its students. Including at school events which may or may not have been officially sanctioned by the school. Tim put the paper inside a prayer book. Wilson, next to him, did the same.

Denver seeing most had signed said, “Thank you all for confirming that the school leaving dinner will be here. And thank you for signing the document.” Denver hadn’t read the document and had no idea what it covered. “Anyway, I hope you’ve all read the document well and agree to follow it. Essentially, you have to keep schtum. Not spread gossip. You know, the usual stuff. People will ask questions. About the school. Including about the Leavers’ Dinner. So we would be grateful if you didn’t say anything. At all about the school. And the Leavers’ Dinner. To anyone. Anyone. Thank you all, you can have an extended lunchbreak. Please leave your signed agreements on your chairs. Tim, can I please have a word with you? The rest of you can go.”

Tim gulped. Had he been that obvious in not signing? Why wasn’t Wilson called up? He could see Wilson hadn’t signed either. Wilson scurried away. Why did so many of the others sign without reading? Tim wondered if he should sign now and get it over with. Who was he going to talk to anyway? No, there something dodgy about that document. What about the police? Surely he could talk to the police if he had to? Pritchard walked past him and muttered, “For the boys bro.” Tim ignored him. There was something about being told to do something that made him want to do it less. He felt his resolve coming back.

Denver walked to him. Campbell-Black was collecting the signed papers. Most of the boys hadn’t put the NDAs on their seats. Burt Snr stood in the corner with his arms folded. “So, er, Tim, this is a slightly delicate question. You’ll have seen *The Biz* article, I presume? Yes. Well, I understand that the incident happened at your place, the er, alleged incident, is that correct?”

Tim nodded. “Yes, I... I was at the gate and didn’t see anything.”

“No, no, son, not interested in that side of things. We know...

We, no, don’t worry yourself about that side of things. What I’m interested in, is would you happen to know everyone who was at the party? I understand it would be helpful – you know in terms of managing your friends’, er, exposure... in the media, scurrilous stories, you know... if we got everyone at the party to sign a document that protects us... um, them.”

Tim tried not to panic.

Denver said, “So, um, if say you could provide me a list of everyone who was at that party...”

Tim interrupted to say, “I was at the gate so I didn’t see everybody who came in. I couldn’t see into cars. I was watching things there so I wasn’t really looking at that stuff.”

Denver continued as if he hadn’t heard. “Well, ask around, it’d be good if you can get me a list by the end of the day. Then you know we won’t have to worry about things, you know?” Denver walked away to talk to the suits.

Tim tried to figure out if Denver had just threatened him.

Denver, for his part, was barely thinking about anything he was saying at the moment. He was running on adrenaline and a hangover.

Tim walked out of the chapel to see Finn Burt waiting outside the hall. Burt said, “Hey,” but Tim wasn’t interested in talking.

“What’s going on in there?”

“Not sure, I’ve got to go.”

“Is my old man in there?”

“I don’t know who your old man is. There are a couple of suits in there.”

“Looks like me? Perhaps. Everyone reckons he does.”

“I dunno. Why don’t you just go in. You might have to sign that document of theirs.”

Burt wavered. Tim decided now was his chance. “I have to go. See ya.” He was going to go sit in his car and study. He needed to be away from everybody. Studying, even if he couldn’t concentrate, was better than nothing.



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Join us at the **Ockham New Zealand Book Awards** ceremony on 12 May, during the Auckland Writers Festival, to hear all the finalists read from their shortlisted books, and the winners announced. And seek out these fantastic books in bookstores and libraries countrywide.



The Ockham Samplers were compiled with the assistance of the Academy of New Zealand Literature.

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