

# I am a carpark - *A short story by Sally Wenley*

My day starts with a rubbish truck backing in surrounded by beeping noises and flashing lights. The heavy-set driver with his high vis vest flapping across his shoulders jumps down from his cab and lurches toward the rubbish bin on the pavement in front of me. He grabs the overflowing bin liner, spilling cardboard coffee cups, crumpled newspaper and a discombobulated umbrella in his wake.

He returns from the back of the truck with a new plastic liner and then scoots around me picking up the dropped debris. After throwing it in the back Mr. Heavysset leans against the side of his truck sucking down his nicotine fix. As he pauses, I smell a mixture of sweat and cigarette smoke before he hops back into the cab and backs out.

The shadow of dawn is now competing with the beginning of a sunny day and a SUV comes to a sudden halt. I hear a mum telling Master Primary School that 'No he can't have donuts for lunch, and that she's just dashing in to get herself a coffee and some Panadol for a headache. Ms Mum's light sneakers jog toward the shops while I hear two children bickering above me. The automatic window opens and a fluffy caramel coloured teddy bear lands on me with a thump. Shrieking ensues but Ms Mum drives away quickly leaving the green glassy eyes of the teddy face down on the yellow painted lines beside me.

A parking warden with her grim blue uniform and clasping her automatic ticketing machine bends down and picks up the Teddy. She props it on a wooden bench that's to my left for people to take the weight off their feet. "I hope your, who I presume is a young, owner gets you back' she mutters.

A car toots in the distance as a small van has parallel parked across my rear while several trays of bread loaves are rushed into the café. The driver shouts that he "won't be long", and soon returns gasping for breath and sucking a water bottle. A career couple drive in fast and fumble for jackets, laptops and documents. They 'blip' the lock and clip clop along the pavement looking very important.

It's lunch time and the sun's high. An elderly man rests on the bench and picks up the teddy. "I hope your owner isn't too upset about losing you", he sighs and sits it beside him before giving it a soft pat on the head.

The Important couple return bickering about Capital, and Sales-pitch and investment. Blip goes the door lock and their small white electric vehicle quietly reverses toward the road.

A station wagon maneuvers in and the boot opens. I feel a wheelchair being lowered to the ground and brought around to the driver's door via an automatic hoist. A man transfers himself from the seat into his wheelchair with a grunt and then lifts his legs onto the footplate. "C'mon Flash – out you get", he says to a wagging tailed black and white dog. It

trots up to the lonely looking teddy on the bench and has a quick sniff before following his wheeling master down the pavement.

The sun begins to wane and Mr. Flash wheels back to his vehicle with his dog who waits while the chair is loaded back into the boot. “Up you get Boy”, and I soon hear the deep V8 engine fading down the road.

I recognize the next vehicle. It's Mrs. Purple who has been using me for years. She's a sprightly 80 something year old who parks here once a week for her hairdo. It used to be blonde, then grey, and it's now purple. Her hair's lot shorter too than it used to be as it just covers her ears in a curly way. Gone are the days of bleached locks and bright red lips. Mrs. Purple reaches into the back seat for her walking stick and carefully makes her way onto the pavement wearing sensible shoes.

Meanwhile a courier van parks behind her while serious looking boxes are unpacked and taken to the optometrist further down the pavement. The driver glances at the caramel teddy as he waits for a gap in the traffic behind us before backing out.

Mrs. Purple returns with a tidy looking do and more of a spring in her walking stick step. She slowly backs out – while a yellow hatchback with a loud flick, flick, flick indicator waits for me to be available. A young woman sits in the car for a while talking loudly into her latest mobile about tonight's gig and who else will be there. Miss Gig smells of herbal hair wash and stale cigarette smoke. Her black stilettos dart out and return a few minutes later clunking a bag of bottles onto the passenger seat. The car jerks out as Miss Gig misses a gear amid giggles and more loudness on the mobile.

Slowly the sun backs down the western sky and fewer vehicles compete for me. The green-eyed teddy sits on the bench.

A group of business suits stand in me and gabble about advertising, women and jobs options while they wait to cross the road amid a cloud of cologne. They hear a waiting vehicle's beep and straggle across the road.

I see hazard lights above me and a white Ute comes to a halt. A man leans into its tray and gets a large sign that he places on the pavement in front of me along with several bright orange road cones. A passing pedestrian with silver hair and pinstripes gets agitated at Mr. Sign about what it says. “Why is the Council making this area pedestrian only? Do you have any idea how important these parks are for so many people and the local businesses? Closing these parks in a couple of days is very short notice...Is this fair?” He shakes his head and walks quickly away in his smart shiny black shoes.

Mr. Ute stands there saying nothing. He looks around and spots the green-eyed caramel Teddy bear. He gently tucks it under his arm before getting into the Ute and backing out with his hazard lights ticking.

I was a car park.