

## Blue Butterfly



The cold from the concrete step seeps through the bum of my jeans and there's just enough heat from my smoke to keep me out here.

I stare down to the back shed and at what was the veggie garden. Now it's a mess of weeds killing what I

## THE ONLY CONSTANT

planted there. Weed. I don't smoke it these days but every now and then when I think I've got my shit together, it's like a little seed of it's been left behind and it sprouts in a furrow in my brain, watered by the doubt that rises from the pit of my gut. It fucks up my thinking and stops me being that man Ali needs and that good dad I want to be to Charley.

I finish my smoke, and chuck the butt into the flowerpot that used to have pansies in it. Ali planted them when she moved in. I'd dug a small flower bed in the front yard for annuals—poppies, salvia and some alyssum—but worked most on the soil in the back yard to give everything the best chance to grow. Turned what was heavy and clayey to rich aerated soil that could breathe. I added lime, manure and worms to get the pH right. It was all about balance. I finally felt I had some in my life and I was putting energy into the right things. Went from hitting that dry, hard surface to being able to lift the soil, sift it through my bare hands and watch it fall back to earth. I took on an extra job at the pub so I could afford my own place. I shared a house with a couple of mates, but I was over a lot of that guy stuff. Cut out pics of chicks whose boobs were so heavy they looked like they could fall off the wall and topple into the room. I came home one night and the smell of curry hit me when I walked in the front door. There were plates caked with leftovers on the coffee table and the

## BLUE BUTTERFLY

couch. I can't remember if I was just a bit stoned, but I was majorly pissed off and chucked the lot out in the bin. I threw back the lid, held the plates high above it and then dropped them in. Funny, you think they'd smash into lots of tiny pieces, but they don't. They were wedge shaped almost the size of a piece of pie. I can't quite describe the sound, but I felt this release, and I laughed 'cause I remembered the time Mum threatened to throw all the dishes out if I didn't wash up. I thought I'd called her bluff, but when I came home the only plates in the house were paper in a pack on the bench with a picture of a dinner set cut out from the Myer catalogue and a note that said 'Your shout'.

I had most of the things we needed and I bought a bassinet and cleaned it up. We knew we were having a girl, and we both liked Charlotte for a name. Me, because of the movie for kids about that friendly spider, and Ali after the writer of some old book she said was about independence for women. I googled the meaning of Charlotte. It meant free man, but I guessed we could make it work for a girl as well. Free. That was the important bit. Ali shortened her name to Charley. Nan thought it was bad luck to name the baby before she was born, but went along with it. Pop just shrugged his shoulders in the way he did when he didn't understand something and said why not just give her a girl's name. Just before she moved in, Ali found this butterfly to put

## THE ONLY CONSTANT

on the front wall next to the door. Bloody great blue and black thing made of wrought iron. I attached it tight with superglue and then screwed it on like Pop had showed me, but it still looked as if it could fly away any minute. Whenever I left the house I looked back to check it was still there.

\*

I was outside planting some cauliflower seedlings Pop gave us, covering them with dust to keep the white moths away when I heard Ali yell from the kitchen. I thought there was something wrong with the baby. It was too early, she had another three months to go, but when I went in Ali was laughing.

‘Quick. Brad. Quick. Come feel.’ She put my muddy fingers just below her left rib, and didn’t worry about the mark I might leave on the white top stretched over her belly.

‘Feel it?’ Her eyes had this light in them now that filled me. I pressed a little harder because I wasn’t sure what I should be feeling. Then I felt it. There. This little ripple, and then a stronger wriggling and then something harder. A kick. I imagined Charley starting to stretch out her arms and legs and push against the boundaries that were keeping her safe.

## BLUE BUTTERFLY

‘They call it a flutter.’ Ali covered my hand with hers. ‘Like a butterfly.’ She lifted her hand and crossed her thumbs and wiggled her fingers like a kid would do to create one.

‘I want to take you to Queensland one day,’ she said to me. ‘So you can see the real Ulysses butterfly in its natural environment. You know, people think butterflies only live for a day, but some of them live longer.’

I started to think about what it would be like to fit in everything I ever wanted to do with Ali in just one day. Yes—a day would be enough.

‘There’s a sanctuary for them up there just near Cairns. Not just the Ulysses, but lots of different butterflies.’

‘Ulysses? A butterfly? Thought it was the name of a motorcycle club.’ Her eyes dropped to the table covered with her uni books and I thought she was reading, but then I saw her lips move upward a little bit, just at the edge. Her eyes crinkled and the crease disappeared underneath her wispy blonde fringe and she looked out from the corner of her eye at me.

‘Just kidding.’ I smiled at her. ‘When Charley’s old enough we’ll go to Cairns on a holiday. I know you like it up there.’ She looked back up from her books and I kissed her smile. In my head I started to plan the holiday. It was in the future and I knew that the future included being a dad, and that solid ground I thought I was on

## THE ONLY CONSTANT

started to crack. I could feel the tiny tip of green as that seed resprouted, unfurled and started to spread through my head.

'You okay?' she asked and held my hand more firmly against her belly.

'Yeah.' I took my hand away, moved my head down and kissed where Charley's foot had been. 'I need to finish up out there.'

\*

Want to read more? You can buy 'The Only Constant' from the good people at BookPOD. [bit.ly/Rz9COC](http://bit.ly/Rz9COC)  
Also available at Albury Dymocks - 02 6041 1805