

# Tracks

—Stephen Muirhead

You haven't slept since yesterday. All night you'd stayed glued to the TV, watching in horror as the news spread like wildfire throughout Australia, and all hell had slowly broken loose. And it was not just hell that had broken—the windows in the house, the car windshield, and Sam's giant neon lamb which adorned his house, all now lay shattered upon the ground.

The riots were quite unexpected. You knew that Australians were a patriotic lot, but there was genuine blood lust visible in people's eyes when they realized that their genetic make-up had been changed against their will. Apparently, this is very hard news to swallow.

It's been silent outside for many hours now, a sinister peace after the night's madness. Your eyes flicker as you watch the gray daylight break, lighting up a landscape previously bleak and desolate. You flinch as you remember the pained howling of citizens, and the gangly teenagers, scampering around the streets like sewer rats, tagging every window and wall and Australian Post box in their path.

Yet it was that girl who shocked you most—how could you erase her image from your mind? Her fuschia lipstick smeared across her face, eyes glazed and body possessed as she jumped and cartwheeled violently before you in that New York Yankees cheerleading costume. You looked on in horror as her pom-poms jolted frantically before you. This madness simply cannot go on, you think to yourself. These people are desperate.

Why, then, has the scientist with the cure not come forward? He alone holds the key to reversing the genetic code. You'd heard about the behavior of certain drug companies, but to hold out for this long, extorting an entire population? It beggared belief. But there was another explanation. Dubya said that he'd deal with it, and perhaps he was true to his word after all.

Sunlight now; people returning to the streets, a little less frantic as if resigned to their fates. You decide you need some fresh air, but smoke from smoldering spot fires forces you to cover your mouth with your sleeve as soon as you step out the house. Some kids play hopscotch on the road, oblivious to all other concerns. As you walk closer, hoping some of their serenity will rub off on you, the hopscotch outlines carelessly chalked into the road stand out at you. This doesn't look like any game of hopscotch you've ever played.

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