



Garcia's Smoking House

KEVIN GLANCY

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*For the Megster, my best friend and the kind of
daughter every dad should have.*

Contents

Prologue	1
The First Sign	7
A Missing Sign	15
A Sign of Desire	23
A Sign of Jobs for the Boys	27
A Sign of Trouble Ahead	37
Not a Good Sign	41
A Sign of Real Brother	45
A Sign of a New Beginning	55
A Sign of Tension in the Ranks	61
A Sign of Anarchy in the Chamber	67
A Sign. Where There's Smoke, There's Fire	71
A Sign That Love Is in the Air	77
A Sign That Fools Do Rush In	85
Not Quite a Sign of Integrity	89
A Sign of Skullduggery	95
A Sign of Progress	99
A Sign of a Good Story	105
A Sign of Sheer Stupidity	109
A Sign of Deep Frustration	115
A Sign of Misadventure	119
A Sign That Two Can Play at This	127
A Sign of Life	133
A Sign That Something Is Very Rotten in Denmark	137
An Invisible Sign	143
A Remarkable Sign from the Past	147
A Sign. People at Work	153
A Sign. Politicians at Work	159

A Sign to Call It a Day	165
A Sign That the Pen Is Mightier Than the Sword	169
A Scary Sign	173
A Sign of Something Very Special	177
A Sign of Grief	185
A Sign of a Musician	191
A Sign of Conservatism	195
A Sign of a Titanic Struggle	199
A Sign of Frustration	205
A Sign of a Drunkard	211
A Sign of Superiority	215
A Sign of Persistence	219
A Sign of Political Expediency	223
A Sign of a Silver Lining	229
A Sign of Panic in the Bedroom	235
A Sign of a Cunning Plot	239
An Unmistakable Sign of Passion	241
A Sign of a Serial Killer	247
A Sign of Things to Come	251
Postscript	261
Show Me a Sign	263
Epilogue	265

*Sincere thanks to my editor, Susan Cutsforth, for fixing
up the little things.*

Prologue

According to Zoltan A. Ridgeway (*Professor of Conservative History, Online Global University*), in a series of cyber holo-lectures he delivered in 2045 entitled: *The Slow Death of Invisible Socialism*, Garcia's Smoking House is the "definitive account of that extraordinary 'pre-dawn' period." Ridgeway began his lecture to his students with the following:

"The year was 2017, and in this part of the world much had changed. What was once a country renowned for its generous hospitality and possessed by a fun-loving, free spirit was now lost in the shadows, clouded by gloom and despair. Its people, overburdened by years of stifling taxation and restricted by a never-ending range of social laws, were becoming increasingly paranoid. Their once care-free spirits were at breaking point as their country teetered on the brink of violent anarchy.

"One new law would be enough to take them over the edge and into that inevitable chaos. On April 17 of that year, one new law was introduced."

THE FEDERAL SMOKING HOUSE ACT OF 2017

(vii.) The smoking of tobacco products is prohibited in domestic residences or in any venue, indoors or outdoors, whether public or private, unless that venue is a Licensed Smoking House as registered with and by the Federal Government for that purpose.

"Students of modern history, don't be fooled, as there is far more to this story than just a law. However, a good story has to start somewhere, and in matters of history and conflict there isn't a hero until someone lights the fire. Now, there's no doubt that the new law provided even more oxygen for a nation smoldering under the heat of

oppression, but the final act of ignition that brought about the end of democratic socialism was actually committed by the Federal Government Minister responsible for that new law.

“His name was William Tolfer, and it was his actions beyond the realms of Parliament that would unleash a series of events that would not only destroy his own career and his marriage, but would lead to corruption, murder, and a fiercely fought national election campaign that would bring both the best and worst out of many.

“Younger students should perhaps consult their parents before remaining online, because this aspect of our history is a particularly murky chapter. It involves the questionable sexual antics of a high-ranking police officer, the blackmailing boyfriend of the Minister for Homeland Security, a bungling undercover operative, and a few other desperates whose names are not relevant at this time.

“As for the Smoking House Law? There was nothing surprising about the new law. It was simply the summit of what had been an increasing range of social restrictions placed on the hapless smoker over the previous twenty-five year period.

“However, this time there would be consequences, because this time it was different. It didn't matter whether you were a smoker or not. Social engineering had reached new heights. The government had now breached the walls of fortress home.

“War had been declared and a hero was needed.”

**Garcia's
Smoking
House**

Extract from the Diaries of David Merchant

The politicians only have themselves to blame for this chaos. We, the oppressed, must nevertheless share that blame. We made our first mistake when we allowed them the power to make laws and stood back while they made too many. While they talked of freedom, justice, and equality, we did nothing as they divided us, took away our independence, and turned us into victims with laws designed to make us less responsible for ourselves. Without a murmur we allowed them to take complete control of our lives, leaving us bereft of freedom. Worst of all, we saw the signs and did absolutely nothing.

So for the children, let this be the last sign that they will ever see.

Freedom starts now!

Anthony K. Ellison, June 1, 2019—Garcia's Smoking House

NOVEMBER 9, 2019

David Merchant couldn't see the coffin even though he was standing right in front of it. It was still too personal. While other mourners gathered around the coffin to share their grief, David was still caught in another place in time, held by a horrifying image he could not escape.

It was the image of his best mate Tony Ellison. Tony had just lit a cigarette in public for the first time in many years. It was only a symbolic gesture, a sign to the crowds of people who had gathered outside the Smoking House that victory was now theirs. David, as usual, clutched his notebook with his pen at the ready and stood watching the cigarette smoke slowly waft into the sky. As Tony exhaled, the crowd cheered, but David continued to watch his friend intently, waiting for the first words of his victory speech. No words were uttered, however; instead and suddenly, where Tony's words should have come from, his jaw exploded, disintegrating as it spewed out jagged fragments of bone tissue, chunks of flesh, and so much blood.

David hadn't even heard the shot, nor had he seen the sniper in the upstairs window across the road. Why would he? Such destructive things did not exist in his world, and he was even oblivious to the spatters of red warm liquid that showered his white shirt, the one that he had especially worn to mark the occasion. Nor did he see Tony Ellison fall in a crumpled bloodied heap on the ground. Instead, he stood frozen to the spot, suspended in time as the graphic image of Tony's exploding jaw constantly replayed over and over, seemingly never to be erased.

In some ways David Merchant didn't want to escape this horrific nightmare; beyond the devastation there was only eternal despair. His closest friend, Anthony K. Ellison, was no more, apart from the shocking image that still prevailed. Tony hadn't just been his only real friend but was the one person who had allowed him to remain silent. He was someone who had made no demands and yet had allowed him to be part of a unique journey, an incredible march to freedom in a time that David Merchant would never forget.

Now it was over; at least it would be, if only he could break through the foggy mist of blood red images and reflect on a shattered life he once knew.

Extract from the Diaries of David Merchant

Time goes so quickly for the dead; we, the living, should never waste it.

Anthony K. Ellison, May 14, 2019—The Speaking Wall, Whitlam Park Estate

The First Sign

MAY 14, 2019

David Merchant smiled in anticipation, as he watched his mate walk hurriedly past him through the long grass to take up his usual position on the speaking wall. Although this part of their journey had now become a daily ritual, Dave always looked forward to what was to come.

He'd followed Tony Ellison for almost a year now and had already seen how others could be affected by what Tony had to say, but here, where the high-rise used to be, Tony would talk just to him. He would stand on what was left of the low, red brick wall that had once formed a quadrangle in the middle of the now demolished concrete and brick public housing estate. Once in position on the wall, Tony, standing upright, legs slightly apart and with his hands behind his back, would look out across the patch of overgrown grass within the quadrangle as if seeking the attention of a large but invisible audience. Only when satisfied that the last imaginary cough had died down, would he begin his speech.

He would talk about politics, justice, democracy, and equality, or about any subject that had driven him to the speaking wall on that particular day. But his passion for his chosen subject was undeniable, and the logic he employed to deliver his message would have made his argument hard to debate, had there in fact been an audience to hear

him speak. Yet, none of that mattered to Dave because he, David James Merchant, was there. He was always there and he wrote down every word because that was his job. Tony Ellison had told him so.

“The world Dave? Gone up its own arse, mate, and we’re gonna fix it. So Dave! Start taking notes.”

While Dave couldn’t quite grasp the concept of the world going “up its own arse” or how—if that was the case—such a terrible thing could be stopped, he also knew that there wasn’t much to like about where he lived. He also trusted Tony, because the things Tony talked about always sounded to Dave like commonsense, and so he took to his job with a quiet determination, confident that Tony would reveal all in the fullness of time. Dave also assumed that if he did his job properly, he could then play a very important part in rescuing the world from its perilous anal position.

So the moment Tony climbed onto the speaking wall, Dave would assume his place, sitting on a patch of grass in the foreground, his pen at the ready in one hand and in his other, a notebook held open at a fresh blank page. It was here in this place, amongst the ghosts still trapped by the remnants of the old housing estate, that David Merchant had at long last, discovered a sense of purpose in his otherwise unremarkable life. He would record on paper everything that Tony said that he considered important, so that others would hear his words and hopefully they too would see the same bright light that he could see.

At times when Tony spoke, Dave would look down at his notebook, half close his eyes, and almost see the revolution taking place on the page. What Dave liked most about the speaking wall was that he heard the thoughts of Tony Ellison for the first time and more importantly he heard them before anyone else did. As Dave watched Tony on the wall, it was clear to him that his mate held the key to the world’s survival and his words were critical. If the people heard them, then they would follow him and they would all find their way to the free world.

But that was in the future. For now David Merchant considered this patch of waste ground amongst the broken buildings to be almost sacred. It was here that he and Tony had formed a pact, a bond that could not be broken. It was here, from this small patch of ground that together they would begin their journey to a better future, because Tony had told him so.

However, for its former tenants, the green lawn that had once occupied the quadrangle in the middle of the old housing estate had pro-

vided the only visual relief. Their view of life had stretched no further than the layers of dull and lifeless grey slabs of concrete that had shaped their lives. Yet in the middle of the estate, despite the years of neglect, the scrappy patch of grass where Dave now sat and saw his own future begin had not only survived but had grown tall. The new growth of green grass had clearly forgotten the sound of a lawn mower and had prospered in stark contrast to the reality faced by the residents in the drudgery of their day-to-day existence, before the bulldozers had swept away their run-down homes and any reminder of their mediocre lives.

For his part Dave was convinced that the quadrangle was haunted. Often when Tony had finished one of his long sermons, Dave was sure that he could almost hear voices. Although they seemed distant at times, the voices seemed to be coming from the branches of the lone tree that sat in the corner of the quadrangle. Sometimes he called out in the direction of the tree, hoping to make contact with these voices from the past, but there was never any response. Maybe today it would be different, as Dave noticed Tony bending down to look at something in the middle of the quadrangle.

“Hey Dave! Take a look at this.”

It had been years since Tony Ellison had seen one of these. The white sign was almost hidden by the long grass, and if it hadn't been for the words, written in contrasting dark green paint, Tony wouldn't have noticed it at all.

“Now there's a sign! Quick Dave! This is it!”

The way he emphasized the words sounded like he'd reached the end of some kind of spiritual journey and that every sign he'd seen before hadn't been a sign at all.

Dave, who was standing nearby, was sure he detected a slight tremble in Tony's voice, and it made him feel uneasy. He wondered whether this was going to be another one of Tony's emotional moments, and in a way, it was.

“You know, I reckon this was the first sign I ever saw...ever!”

The way Tony emphasized the word “ever” indicated his surprise and astonishment at such a discovery. For a few moments he paused and said nothing, as if making sure that it was in fact the very first sign of this type that he had seen from the day he was born until now, twenty-eight years later. Dave watched as his friend stared intently at the sign, almost hidden in the long grass. Tony appeared to be in some kind of trance, seemingly caught by a past memory, as though held by a time long ago. Dave had seen it all before, and he knew that it was

more than likely a place where Tony often went. A time that Tony sometimes spoke of, before his marriage had failed and when life had been so much simpler.

Before the "Nanny Years," as Tony called them.

"Before the self-appointed lawmakers took over and ruined everything. When the stick replaced the carrot, and laws placed limits on every aspect of human endeavor. Gradually, they took away our basic right to make decisions in our own best interests so we could no longer be responsible for ourselves. Over time, apathy ensured the creation of a new 'victim class.' Those who saw any problem they faced, as something that must be someone else's fault. What little democracy remained soon faded as minority groups with media support were able to impose their narrow views on everyone else."

David Merchant knew the words off by heart; it was Tony's mantra.

He'd first met Tony a few years ago at a Lost Dads' meeting. It was a support group for single fathers, and Dave was there, not because he had been married or in fact had any children, but because he just liked to attend meetings. Watching other people at meetings made Dave feel less alone, and hearing others speak of their troubles made him feel less desperate about his own life.

Tony, on the other hand, had good reason to be there as he had lost contact with his two children from his failed marriage and was severely depressed. He wasn't into what he called "group therapy," and rather than seek the company of other "lost" dads he only went a few times. It was just as well really, because he soon wore everyone out with his endless warnings about the perils of the nanny state. Of course, nobody listened then, and apart from Dave, nobody had ever listened since. Now, watching his friend still transfixed by the sign, Dave remembered Tony's final words to the packed room of lonely fathers, who were more concerned about seeing their children than what Tony had to say about the future.

"You'll be sorry!" And of course, he was right on both counts.

Dave had listened intently that night because much of what Tony had said at that meeting had made a lot of sense to him. In fact, he'd written most of it down in the little notebook he always carried in his top pocket. Impressed by Tony's grasp of current affairs, Dave had followed him out of the meeting and they had been friends ever since. Now, two years later, Dave was on his eighth little notebook, having filled all the previous books with the thoughts of Tony Ellison. As he watched Tony staring at the sign, still half hidden in the long grass, he reminded himself that he should soon replenish his supply of little

notebooks, particularly as Tony's speeches were now getting longer and some people, particularly those at the Smoking House, had begun to listen.

As if on cue, the wind picked up; a slight chill seemed to caress the air around them, and it broke their deep concentration. The brisk gust of wind that followed created a slow, drawn out whooshing sound that swept the long grass aside to reveal a perfectly preserved green and white sign.

If Tony and Dave were impressed by nature's wondrous way of producing such a curious, well-timed revelation, it didn't show, and no words were spoken as Tony slowly bent down to take a closer look at the sign.

As he did, Dave, now standing a few steps behind Tony, cocked his head slightly to the side mimicking the kind of curious "dog look" his counselor usually wore during one of his weekly therapy sessions. As he stared intently at the back of Tony's head, his eyes seemed to glisten for the briefest of moments. It was as though some unexpected tinge of sadness had suddenly disturbed his thoughts.

Tony began to read the sign aloud, slowly, emphasizing each word as if discovering the sign for the first time, and not quite knowing what it meant. "Keep...off...the...grass."

When he'd finished reading the sign, Tony stood up and turned around, expecting Dave to respond in some way, but Dave, his head still tilted to one side, appeared to be staring at the tree in the quadrangle. Tony also noticed the strange melancholic look in Dave's eyes but thought better of disturbing him and turned his attention back to the sign.

"That's where it all started, you know Dave? On the green stuff." Tony raised his voice to make sure that Dave could hear him.

Dave's eyes cleared instantly at the mention of "green stuff." "What! Dope?" he asked in a loud whisper.

"No! Green stuff...GRASS! Er,...lawn you know...this! What we're standing on."

Tony realized he was almost shouting at Dave, and regretting his impatience, he said quietly, "You know? What you walk on...the grass. That's where it all started. One day we could walk on it, then they put up a sign, and the next day, we couldn't. See what I mean Dave?"

Dave just nodded slowly and quickly pulled his notebook out of his pocket. He knew that it didn't matter what he said because Tony was

about to tell him anyway, and without even waiting for Dave's response, Tony continued.

"That was their plan from the beginning. They put up a sign telling you not to do something that you've always done. You see Dave, when we go to the park, we walk on the grass, because that's what parks are for, to get away from walking on concrete and bitumen."

Tony was excited now and he spoke hurriedly. "So they knew if they put up a sign like 'Keep off the grass' and we obeyed the sign and didn't walk on it, then they could put up a sign telling us not to do something anywhere they liked. In this way, they could slowly start modifying human behavior and activity. Dave, they've been doing it for years. It's called social engineering, and now we're stuffed. We can't do anything without them telling us whether we can do it or not. See what I mean, Dave? This sign, 'Keep off the grass,' was the very first sign and no one challenged it. The rest is now history."

"You've got a lot of 'em Tony," Dave remarked.

"What do you mean, lots of them?"

"Your collection!" It was Dave's turn to get impatient. "Your signs Tony!"

"Oh! Yeah! Them." Tony chuckled. "I've certainly got lots of signs. But this one's more important than any of them. This one gave them the power because we obeyed it, and from then on, they didn't have to justify any other sign they put up. See how long the grass is now Dave?"

Again, Tony waited for Dave to say something, but nothing came forth, so he went on.

"That's what happens when no one walks on the grass. It just gets longer. That's the trouble with signs and most of the laws they make. They always go too far and don't really deal with the problem and end up creating another one."

Still Dave said nothing. Tony, on the other hand, continued to examine the sign.

"That sign's pre-nanny-ism you know!"

Dave always thought of his granny whenever he heard Tony use the "nanny" word, but showing the kind of consideration that mates sometimes do, he tried to show some interest by staring at the sign.

"This sign should be number one in my collection, numero uno," said Tony.

It was too late; Tony was on a roll now and didn't need an excuse. "Why's that?" Dave heard himself say and wished he hadn't.

“You see, Dave, if no one had taken any notice of ‘Keep off the grass,’ none of the other signs would have happened, and we’d all still be free. With that first sign we, the people, gave the government total ownership. First it was the grass; now it’s pretty much everything! Now, we’re surrounded by signs, and each one they put up doesn’t actually solve the problem it’s meant to, but just brings the prison walls a bit closer. I mean, look at the length of this grass. I’m amazed we didn’t end up with a sign that said, ‘Don’t even think about looking at the grass.’ That would be typical of those bastards! As if you could avoid looking at the grass when you’re surrounded by the stuff, and why’s it so bloody long? I’ll tell you why! Because none of us walked on it, and now they can’t afford to mow it. Friggin’ idiots!”

Tony’s attempt at humor didn’t seem to impress his mate, probably because Dave was now lost in his own thoughts. He was thinking about Granny Locombe, the kind old lady who had moved into the house next door, just before his parents had disappeared.

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