

The city was scarily, eerily, silent. A window shutter creaking on its hinges was the only sound to be heard in the deafening silence of the once-bustling, once-thriving heartland of Australia. The ~~beat~~ sickly beat of my own heart accompanied the creaking of the window shutter and together they created a ^{staccato} symphony which greeted on my ears.

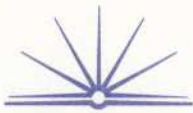
So it was true.

I hadn't believed it - hadn't believed that my home, my ~~home~~ shelter, my sanctuary had been reduced to nothing. The wind blew through me as I stood, alone, amid the forsaken ~~the~~ buildings. Twenty years ago, the last time I was here,



The city had been different - it had danced to a different beat. Stores had bustled, people had filled the streets with purpose, laughter and chatter. The air used to permeate with the swishing sounds of traffic and voices and business being carried out. The ~~Harbour~~ Harbour Bridge used to crawl with thousands of ~~tiny~~ minute vehicles, ~~and~~ while the air used to ~~thrum~~ thrum with the buzz of aircraft. At night, the city used to be alive with the sound of music, as people danced to the beat of music, life and laughter. So it was true.

It had changed. But to change and to change for the better are two different



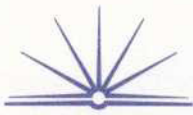
Things .

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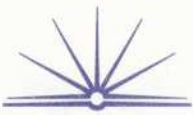
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The woman was jostled by another
an elbow was stuck in her face,
and her body was pushed and
squashed in the crushing weight
of the crowd. ~~As~~ As they all
~~crowded~~^{stamped} to their destination, she
was suddenly swamped by
a wave of sadness, as she
remembered how it used to be.
She once welcomed the push
of crowds, the sense of purpose
- life in the city was everything
she dreamed it would be.
But the ~~push~~ crush of this
crowd was different. It
was the ~~crushing~~ crush of a



crowd with panic in their nostrils and fear in their veins - they surged forward, each trying to reach the ~~the~~ massive shelter, a symbol of protection against nuclear arms, against biotechnological weapons, against anything "they" ~~might~~ decided to throw. And only out here in the country could such mass shelters be erected. The woman stumbled, as her vision was obscured by a ~~film~~ film of fine tears which ~~trickled~~ ~~to~~ obscured her sight for a moment, as she remembered the mass exodus from her beloved city. What was



~~it like? she wondered.~~

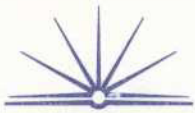
it like now? she wondered.

Empty? ~~Forsaken~~ Forsaken?

Had anyone come back and wondered what had happened to the once-bustling, once-throbbing heartland of Australia?

The siren sounded, and a fresh surge ~~from~~ of panic swept through the mind of the crowd, propelling a fresh surge of bodies ~~on~~ through the entrance of the shelter. The outback was hot.

No breeze stilled the woman's hair, as it ~~clamped~~ stuck sweatily to her neck. She remembered the old days of dancing wildly in the cities. Now there was no music, in case it



altered "them." ~~They~~ The
people were certainly dancing
to a different beat. ~~A~~
~~stronger~~ ~~beat,~~ A more panic-
stricken beat. A more fearful
beat. A more dangerous beat.