

# Fiction

## Iceberg

**Tina Cartwright**

lives on unceded Wurundjeri and Boon Wurrung lands. Her writing has been published in New Zealand and Australia.

My first job in the new country is in a restaurant in the rich suburb. The customers sit outside under white shade sails. Down the tree-lined streets the hill dips into crystal waters.

In the mornings, I wheel a trolley to the basement car park and collect dusty bottles of organic juice or cola from a cage. Before I go I check the trolley but somehow a wheel always breaks on the steep driveway back. Either that or I forget the key to the cage, or I have to go back for my notebook. When I return one boss yells, "What's taking so long?" and "Where's the cart?"

My bosses are three women who went to private school together. Two of them have short hair. The other one is unhappy. You can tell just by looking at her. Her eyes sag. She is the one who runs the front of house while I work. It's my job to make fancy juices. They have names like Awaba, Warringah and Curraghbeena, which someone tells me are places. The problem is people order two Awabas hold the pawpaw and the rambutan. I don't know which fruits these are. I have never seen them in my life. Sometimes my boss ducks behind the counter and takes a sip

before giving it to the customer. She turns red in the face.

"This doesn't taste like Awaba."

She might be right because I have no idea what Awaba tastes like.

"I'll do it myself," she huffs, elbowing me out of the way.

Later, a customer sends a friand back because it's not warm enough. My boss rolls her eyes at me so hard they might stay that way.

"How long did you microwave it for?"

Her voice is acid. I feel it burn. I did not know you were supposed to microwave a friand. I had never seen one until I walked in there and asked for a job.

"Put it in for a short time."

I set it for two minutes. My boss puts her finger on the friand before giving it to the customer. She can't believe it. I think she will spit on me. I've never had a microwave, I want to say. Two minutes is not very long.

That afternoon when the cafe is empty the three bosses sit at a table with their feet up. They order juices and complain loudly.

"This doesn't taste right. Where's the ginger?" They swivel in unison, watching me. I hear the word "friand" many times. The one with the shortest hair says, "I'll do it."

An hour before closing she calls me outside. Before she fires me, she gives a talk about never having to fire anyone before, just so I know that I am the most useless of useless.

Years later I get a job in a freight company office. The boss there is called Dave or Cliff or something. He comes in late, laughing and hitching his pants. He doesn't know that I met him once. One night out drinking, moving from one bar to the next, there was a rowdy group of men. Not the sort to worry about.

They're laughing and more interested in beer than bothering women. The boss says hi and I say hi back as I pass. They call out to me and a tall redheaded guy leans on the boss's shoulder and says, "Hey, it's your lucky day. This is Dave (or Cliff). He's the boss."

I am not kidding, that's exactly what he says. I am in a smartarse mood, so I shake his hand and say, "Nice to meet you, boss."

So, it is ironic that years later he is, indeed, my boss.

I don't have that much to do with Dave or Cliff. I am on the phone mostly, directing irate customers to whichever strange place the courier has decided to leave their package. "He says he delivered it at 10am, out of sight. Is there an urn on your front porch?"

One afternoon Dave or Cliff shuffles out of his office. His shirt is untucked and he has a watery tomato stain just above the hump of his belly. Smiling, he catches my eye.

"Cindy, you're the one." He waggles a finger at me. "I need you to do something."

Dave or Cliff wants me to ring around all the competitor freight companies pretending I am a high-school student doing research and find out their prices, delivery guarantees and policies. I smile back at Dave or Cliff, pleased that I have been selected. When he's gone, I start to think about *why* I have been selected. I look around the office. It's true that I am not young, but I am the youngest. I am also the newest. I think about the ethics of it. Some big, big boss has asked Dave or Cliff to find out these things.

"I have thought about it and I am not comfortable with doing that," I tell him.

From then on Dave or Cliff notices me all the time. He can't pass my desk without making a loud "joke" about how I would

never do anything just to impress someone.

I am older now and I think that's still true. Occasionally I wonder what happened to these bosses. I'm almost certain they'd never remember me. I have them, recorded in my tatty red notebook: the way Dave or Cliff laughs too loudly so that people notice his approach and make way and how the restaurant boss's shoulders fold in when no one's looking. I think if I work her into a story it will be about transformation so she can learn compassion, especially for herself. Dave or Cliff would easily be coerced by power; perhaps I'll make him a compromised politician. Either way, back then I decide two things. First, that power is like an iceberg. Second, that I will put these bosses in a story one day. ●

## The Cryptic

Solution next week

**Liam Runnalls**

is a puzzle-maker and cartoonist living in regional Victoria.

### ACROSS

- 6. Thespian lost second and first in 2002 (3,7)
- 8. Headwear covered enormous head in 1995 (4)
- 9. 1994 senate leader had profound reflection (5)
- 10. 1944 netballer got thin (8)
- 11. Discussed Simpson mortgage in 1990 (4,5)
- 12. Shorten: Month with opposition leader in 2007 (4)
- 13. I do hate all US men terribly in 1991 (6,3,6)
- 17. Bravo to Lincoln in 1995 (4)
- 19. Ignoring a cuckoo re-hatching in 2018 (3,6)
- 21. Quietly blushing with Australian Tax Office opening review in 1987 (8)
- 23. Central Europe V Italy in 1996 (5)
- 24. Jack was disgraced in 1975 (4)
- 25. Mixed up tennis commentary in 1991? (5,5)

### Down

- 1. Therapist sounds bubbly? Oh! (6)
- 2. Safe land disturbed by beach invader (4,4)
- 3. 1952 transgression by soldier with 9th period at home (6,2,3,4)
- 4. Trade centre trademarks banking devices (4)
- 5. Loud Barty took back No. 1 with opening serve methods (8)
- 7. Speller misspelled market earlier? (7)
- 8. 5-across 7-across 5-across. A poem along these lines? (5)
- 14. Faulty inhaler kept boron frozen (8)
- 15. The French opening guillotine, in regard to saint's support for sitting (3-5)
- 16. She ends chaos of college blaze, we hear? (7)
- 18. First buttercup of dry Easter season is an omen (5)
- 20. Councillor with a large container of neckwear (6)
- 22. Raised Cash with eastern film (4)

Today's puzzle is rated difficult. Need an extra hint? Get bonus clues for this puzzle at [twitter.com/LRxword](https://twitter.com/LRxword)

Thanks to Twitter user @KeikoServices for 8-down. To enter our weekly cryptic clue competition, follow the hashtag #TSPclues on Twitter.

