

Did she go to school?

Robert played with his food while I tentatively poked at the dry, inedible roast pork.

'Sorry I snapped at you. I was tense.'

'I wasn't moralising.'

'I know you weren't. I'm sorry.'

Robert ate his meal in the methodical, measured way that he did everything. Sipping our tea, we fell into silence. I guess Robert was thinking about all the things he had to do. The ironing he would do before bed. The phone calls he'd have to make first thing in the morning. I stared at my chopsticks, trying to remember when I first learned to use them. A long time ago, in a restaurant just like this.

'We should ask for the bill,' Robert said, looking down at his watch. I nodded in agreement, although I felt shy about facing the waitress again.

She came back to our table, took out her notepad and absently began to add numbers. I was trying to work out her age. I'm sure she couldn't have been more than twenty. As she waited for us to pay, her gaze drifted dreamily across the road to Billboard. The doors had opened, and a wave of youngsters surged into the venue, flushed with the possibilities of the night ahead. It occurred to me that our waitress must have to watch that door night after night.

She caught me looking at her, and this time it was her turn to be embarrassed, as if I had caught her out. I had an impulse to say something, to touch her, but realised how ridiculously inappropriate that would be.

'Thank you for before,' I said.

She didn't answer. I left her a ten-dollar tip, and spent the rest of that night feeling inexplicably melancholy.

Afterwards, I realised that what lay between the waitress and me was the silence that is the gap between two cultures. It is neither misunderstanding nor hostility, just the empty noise of two frequencies out of alignment. Perhaps it is possible to be attuned to both, but it was my fate to cross a threshold from one culture and class into another. Once that is done, there is no going back. That other world becomes a series of imaginary conjectures and 'what ifs,' a land you can only see if you close your eyes and squint.

Anzac Day

James Chong

'He [John Simpson Kirkpatrick, of Simpson and his donkey fame] represents everything at the heart of what it means to be Australian.'—DR BRENDAN NELSON, then federal minister for education, August 2005

In high school I learned to play the bagpipes and went on to lead my band as the pipe-major. Every Anzac Day during high school I would march in the Sydney city street parade with my school's pipe band. It was always a big and proud day, with regiments of decorated veterans marching, some of whom had fought in the country where I was born. I was proud to be a part of this heritage and to pay respect to the soldiers who had served their country in the most difficult of circumstances. I felt at times, though, that because of my heritage and the colour of my skin, I was not allowed to be part of the Anzac tradition, which to many people defines what it is to be Australian. Maybe this was mostly adolescent angst. One year, however, I encountered it in a very public and unmistakable way. In 1992, a friend of my father gave us a video tape of an episode of the ABC current affairs program *Lateline*. The episode had aired just after Anzac Day, and opened with footage of the Sydney march. The camera focused on a kilie-clad piper in full highland regimental dress before zooming in on his Asian face – mine! I was intrigued and excited to see myself on television. Then the theme of the show appeared, flashed across the screen in big letters:

TRUE BLUE?

I didn't watch the rest of the show. I was confused and a little hurt. I wasn't sure what it meant (maybe I should have watched it), but I remember a lonely feeling of exclusion.