

short cuts

We have had an overwhelming response to our "Short Cuts" competition. There is obviously so much undiscovered talent out there in Melbourne and we at the metro news are proud to be providing writers with a forum to express themselves.

Entries have included a range of styles from thrillers to children's stories and romance. Please keep writing and keep sending in your entries (see conditions below).

We will continue to publish as many as possible over the coming months.

A Conversation in the Square

(by Sue Robertson)

I'm sitting in the shade of an ancient plane tree by the fountain in the square of a tiny village in the south of France. It's a hot day late in June. My companion today is Frederic, a builder by trade, but a craftsman and an artisan by his own description. He is a shameless flirt. An attractive man, and completely unselfconscious about his view of the world. I often sit here. It's really the only place in the village to sit and have a drink.

'So, what did you do today, Patricia?' he says, after delivering the obligatory three kisses to my cheeks. None of this air-kissing in this part of the world. He pulls out the chair opposite and sits.

I close the book I have been doodling in, and fold my hands over it.

'You didn't go with the others,' he says.

I shrug. Shrugging as a response has become second nature since I've been living in the village.

'Non?' he says. His eyes are clear as ice crystals. His head gleams after a recent shave but his face bristles and is unshaven. 'Mais, why?'

The *franglais* we now take for granted. A meeting half-way. It works best in the daylight when facial expressions and hand movements can be seen and interpreted along with the words.

For a man like Frederic, women should be with a man, and if not a man, then they should at least stay in predictable groups. Again, I shrug.

To say I wanted the time alone, that I have travelled half the way around the world to do just that, would be incomprehensible to

him, so I tell him I have spent the day writing in my journal.

'Ah,' he says, leaning back into the iron rungs of the back of his chair, and running his hands across his bald head. We're back on common ground.

In this village which boasts a scanty population of two or three hundred, at least a third whom are expat Americans seeking self-expression, to write in a journal is acceptable.

To sit alone in the square staring up at the various colors of the window shutters, or the clarity of the sky, is not.

His tone brightens. 'So what have you written?'

'I've been writing a story about a GO at Club Med who's had 800 women,' I say.

Color rises high on his cheeks but I can tell he's pleased I've spent time recording his story - told after way too much red wine last night.

'Oh, la la,' he says slowly. 'C'est vrai?' He runs his finger around the rim of his glass.

'And that he has finally decided that it is better to settle for one,' I say

He takes a final gulp of his pastis, and waves his empty glass toward the waiter. Clearly he is fonder of this milky aniseed concoction that I am.

'There's more?' he says.

He knows there's more, because last night he told more. We both drink. He, after pouring water onto the thick syrup at the bottom on his glass and twirling it until it becomes milky; me from my glass of the region's cherry-red rose.

'He marries a girl from the village, an artist, and they have one son ... it doesn't work out.'

He nods. 'He meets another woman but she's married.'

'Ah,' he says, swallowing his pastis. 'Wrong time.'

'Wrong time,' I agree.

He shakes his head for his failed marriage and his bad timing. 'He's doing better,

my son,' he says.

'He was having a bad time and his teacher was not happy. But now he has a stepfather, and for him it is the same. It is a stable home life.'

I've seen his son playing cowboys with friends in the narrow passageways that lead through the walls of the village, but I know it's not the same.

'It's not the same,' I say. 'You are his father.'

'I am his father but I am happy he accepts his stepfather.'

'You love your son.'

'Of course.'

We drink in silence and take in the ambiance of the square. Thankfully, its sheer beauty and

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short cuts Writers' Competition

Is there a short story writer in you just waiting to emerge? This is your opportunity to launch yourself as a local Melbourne writer.

The metro news invites budding writers to submit short stories for publication.

Romance; tragedy; humor; fiction; non-fiction, whatever your genre we will accept entries.

The stories should be 600 to 800 words and must not have been published previously.

The competition is open to everyone. We aim to showcase the work of creative and talented people in the community.

The editors will judge the best entries and they will be published with your name. What are you waiting for?

Dip your pens in your inkwell, sharpen your pencils or get tapping on your keyboards now.



Entries should be emailed to editor@metronews.com.au or posted on disc to SHORT CUTS metro news, PO Box 2224, St Kilda West 3182

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