

# MARIE – LOUISE

by  
Lloyd Nelson



The resources boom in Western Australia brings hordes of new people to Perth. A great many of the newcomers and likewise many local people are fly in, fly out workers. They live in the burbs and fly up to the mining sites for two weeks work and then fly back for two weeks off at home, or three on and one off, whatever is called for at that particular mine or industry.

Marie – Louise, or ML as she is known to her intimates, lives in a nice house in Boronia Avenue – a place that presents a traditional and well kept frontage to the street, but which has been made over in the rear by a clever architect. It has a pleasant long family room opening onto brick paving, Wisteria arbors and a jewel-like bit of lawn. There's no pool or spa, or any of the modern ideas that take so much time and effort of keep up. Marie – Louise is sitting in a chair at her Nedlands hairdressers, waiting to be attended to. The next chair along is occupied by rather a striking willowy blonde who is getting the works. George, the hairdresser, as queer as a three dollar note, is snipping and cutting; the manicurist is working on her finger and toe nails and the next step is to the massage table and the solarium. This girl, seemingly quite an air-head, is chatting away in an amusing way to George.

“Who’s the renovation for, Peggy?” he says, “your husband or your lover?”

“Perhaps for a new lover, George,” she says, “depending on how I go at the singles bar tonight.”

George asks,

“Whatever happened to the hunk who used to have a manicure while he was waiting for you to finish your shampoo and dry?”

“Hmmm,” Peggy replies, “got too intrusive. He got drunk one night and I had to take him home. Never, never take them home and only, only use a card mobile phone. Leave no tracks, wear no wedding ring and leave all ID at home. After that, well, knowing where I live, he starts turning up at inopportune times. Got rid of him fairly easily to a long married friend who was thirsting for a fling, but didn’t have the push to do the singles bars. I sort of rang her doorbell and pushed him in the door. It seems to have been a significant start to a lot more bell ringing. They’re still together, but I hope the beggar doesn’t come to her door when her Derek is back from the mine. He’s sort of territorial and very strong.”

“Gawd,” says George, “the trouble you girls bring on yourselves.”

“And how do you know what your chap is up to when you’re busy down here making a dollar?” Peggy asks.

“Hmmm,” says George, “Hmmm.”

Marie – Louise sits taking this all in. The girl goes on.

“Gosh, George, the story I could write of my life since my hubby went to the mines. Talk about a sea change.”

Little does Peggy or Marie-Louise dream that they both will feature in a short story about this momentous

morning. By the time Marie–Louise is shampooed and blow dried, Peggy has moved to the solarium.

“No kids, George?” Mary–Louise asks, gesturing in the direction Peggy has taken.

“No, none at all,” George replies, “if she ever has any, there sure would be a long list of suspects as to who is the father. She seems to play with fire successfully, no signs of any burns yet.”

As Marie–Louise pays the girl; she pulls herself up to her full height. She is leggy and looks at herself in the mirror wall. Marie–Louise is 38, no kids and is a very good looking woman. Because her fly-in, fly-out is different, she tends to dress older than her age. She is aiming for high places and it behoves her to look reserved and discreet, and to dress in a mature fashion.



Robert, her husband, has not long ceased being a member of State Parliament, coming home for tea every night when the house is sitting, changing into an older suit and returning to work. They are very close and she sees a lot of him and they go to many social occasions befitting a rising man. It’s all going well until one night the Prime Minister rings and outlines some possibilities to Robert. Actually, it’s his plummy voiced English secretary that rings.

“Mr Pearlman?” she enquires, “Please hold for the Prime Minister.”

Little Johnny is soon on the horn.

“Robert,” he says, “I’m just off the phone to Colin Barnett. They’ve got such a sure fire candidate in Wesley Knight that they want a blue ribbon Liberal seat for him.

They think he will add a bit of pizzazz to the election team.”

“Hmmm, and I won’t?” Robert says.

“Oh no, no, no,” Johnny replies, “we want you here like next week. We’ve got an election looming too, you know. What we have in mind is having you serve the remaining term of the late Senator. We’ll shoe horn you in and make you a Parliamentary secretary, which gives you the inside running for a Cabinet post and when the Senate comes up, we can guarantee you number one spot on the team.”

Robert cogitates for a moment. He’s well aware that the Liberal leader wants him out of the way – he’s a bit of a threat. Also, of course, with the growing centralization of Federal government, the State government is becoming much less significant; it’s becoming irrelevant to the picture as Canberra has the purse strings.

“It’s an attractive offer, Prime Minister,” he says, “do I have time to consider it?”

“Certainly,” says Little Johnny, “take half an hour to discuss it with Marie–Louise and I’ll ring back in 30 minutes, on the dot. It’s a here and now deal I’m afraid, but it’s also not a bad deal. There’s nothing like being at the centre of power and it’s not far to some good ski slopes.”



“Hmmm,” Robert says, “yet you elect to live in Sydney.”

Little Johnny laughs, “And so would you if you could live in Kirribilli House, I expect.”

Half an hour later, it's a done deal. Marie-Louise is a bit stunned, but she can see it's a huge step up and gives it her blessing. In no time at all, Robert becomes a power in politics land and rents a nice apartment overlooking Lake Burley Griffin. Marie-Louise goes over to stay when something big is on.

A week is indeed a long time in politics, as some sage remarked. Colin Barnett presents Wesley Knight to the public; he's been head of the huge confederation of capital and is very well known on TV. He gives Knight a big heads up and a Cabinet promise after the vote. Back in cold, old Canberra. Robert likewise settles into the Senate and gets to make his maiden speech, which perhaps he's not entitled to do, as the late Senator whose shoes he fills, would have done this long back. However, with a bit of help from Little Johnny's minders, he gets the timing right and perhaps more good publicity than he deserves.

The election rolls around. WA is up first and in the week prior, some Machiavellian character in Dr Gallop's teams dredges up the baddest of bad news for Wesley Knight. He is nailed for



downloading porn from the Internet. He can't now stand and it's too late to replace him and so the bluest of blue ribbon Liberal seats is snapped up by Labour. Colin Barnett falls at the big jump, with the miscosting of a startling scheme to run water to Perth from the North. He can't get up from the fall and Geoff Gallop rushes past him to the winning post.

Meanwhile, back in Canberra, Little Johnny and his clever henchman Peter Costello, are on the hustings in a big, big way and look certain to beat the Labour

newcomer, Kevin Rudd. However, the pre-poll polls say the electorate is sick of John Howard and many in the seat of government have an uneasy feeling that the polls are spot on. And they are spot on. Johnny makes history by joining Stanley Bruce as the only other PM to lose his seat while sitting in it. Senator Robert Pearlman comes out of it well, as Shadow Minister for Natural Resources and is thus flung in, cheek by jowl, with the big industrialists who move heaven and earth to keep their very profitable work choice deals. He is on the run in WA's north-west and the coal mines of Queensland in doing what he can for the biggies. He's well clear of the Nelson-Turnbull spit and splutter, but he doesn't get home much either.

We return now to Marie-Louise leaving the hairdresser. She gets in her nice little grey Audi coupe and goes up to a highway shop she has never been in before. She is a bit buzzed off with life and now after marrying her first boyfriend and never having been out with any other man; she is planning to kick over the traces. She has a good look around this interesting boutique. The woman behind the counter lets her look and decides to buy into helping this strong and good looking woman, who can't yet see anything she wants and may well walk out and go soon. She walks up to Marie-Louise, smiles and softly says, "What would you hope to achieve with what you want to buy?" Marie-Louise takes in this sympathetic approach from this smart looking woman. "To attract a man," she instantly says.

"Not a toy boy?" says the proprietor.

"Heavens, no!" replies Marie-Louise, "some-one nicely mature."

“Hmmm, that’s a relief,” the shop owner says, “So many people of a certain age try, unsuccessfully, to downsize their age and get into girlie gear. They just don’t realize that you can’t hope to compete (in singles bars) against 17 to 24 year olds who, to put it mildly, put a lot of very young flesh on display in the very, very competitive world of the singles bars.”

“Perhaps it’s too late for me,” Marie-Louise says.

“Stuff and nonsense,” says the girl, “just let me advise you. I’ve been practicing what we’re talking about since hubby became a fly-in, fly-out.”

“I’m married to one of those,” Marie-Louise says. They both laugh.

The owner says, “Have I got something for you, now I know you’re a realist.”

She comes back with a soft Denim frock with nice slits in the skirt.

“Denim?” Marie-Louise says.

“Yes,” the shoppie says, “Denim suits all ages. Try it on. You’ll be staggered.”

The orthodoxy of the denim is completely redeemed by the nature of the cleavage – not blatant, just beautifully revealing. It does indeed suit her to a T.

“That’s the start,” the shoppie says, “I take it you’ve got some racy, but not tarty underwear, but if not, we have it all.”

She produces restrained sling-back shoes, some gold jewellery and a very tasteful costume ring.

“Off with the wedding band,” she says, “put this on. Now have a good look at yourself.” Marie-Louise realizes she looks the berries.

“Now,” the shoppie says, “Perth is cold at this time of the year. Put a long black overcoat over all that –

here's a beauty, and when you get to where you're going....."

"And where's that?" Marie-Louise says.

"I find," says the shoppie, "the very best pickings are at good middle range pubs with a discreet bar, where you can expect well-heeled, perhaps fly-in, fly-out, people staying. Not men in the first flush of youth, just discerning men."

"And the coat?" Marie-Louise says, "Oh, just wear it in, ask the barman to look after it and sit down unobtrusively and await events. A woman with your looks and in that frock will surely get offers quickly if you sit and smoke and quaff perhaps some white wine."

"Never smoked," says Marie-Louise.

"Many men prefer that now," says the shoppie, "just sit quietly and reflectively and you can't miss."

"And a pub suggestion?"

The shoppie writes a pub name on the back of a card.

"It's in East Perth, overlooks Gloucester Park, and has a lovely ambience. Should you see me there, just play it by ear. The bar's on the 10<sup>th</sup> floor." Marie-Louise pulls out her credit card. The shoppie says,

"Boosted up clothing expenditure can be a give away. Why don't you go up to the ATM on the corner and whatever you do, never pay for pub accommodation by credit card. Don't leave any tracks if you can help it."

Evening that same day, sees Marie-Louise sipping a dry white, upstairs in the bar of the upmarket hotel. She's at a table close to the bar and introspectively sitting



there, when a biggish chap, casually dressed; tans, Ralph Laurens polo shirt, nice casual jacket, comes in.

“Hi Tim,” he says, “nice day at The Vines.” Tim serves him a drink and knowing his customers, gives an almost imperceptible nod towards Marie-Louise just over a bit. He takes his drink, walks over and pleasantly asks, “May I join you? We seem to be the only company available.” She smiles. “Surely,” she says, “you’ve been golfing.”

“Corporate day at the Vines,” he says, “sort of tribal experience.” They chat away very amicably.

“You’re waiting for someone,” he says.

“Perhaps he’s arrived,” she says. He takes the point.

“Dinner perhaps,” he says.

“After,” she rebuts and picks up her bag. “Let’s go.”

And they do, to his suite. Things move along swiftly, she is a woman with a need. Later, they order room service dinner. He finds a couple of robes and they run a bit further into what has been a startlingly pleasant evening.

“What do you do?” she asks.

“Drive a huge loader at Telfer,” he says. Marie-Louise knows this is a put-on. His hands, that only minutes ago were caressing her breasts, are not those of a manual worker.

“And you?” he asks.

“Married to a fly-in, fly-out,” she says, “seems to be mainly fly-out of late.”

“But the money’s good,” he says.

“Yes, but money’s not everything.” The big chap cogitates.

“But the difference, if I was teaching philosophy and speaking on how to achieve happiness,” he says, “I would stress or point out anyway, that happiness in this world of wants tends to revolve a bit around having an adequate income. I know for my own part, that the unsettled periods in my life have been those when I’ve been a bit short of the readies. If you’ve money in the bank, it’s human nature to relax and enjoy yourself a bit.”

“True.....true,” Marie-Louise says. Later, he says, “I’m here until Friday. How are you situated? Could I interest you in a run down to Yallingup and a night or two there?”

“Fine,” she says, “name the time and I’ll taxi out here and meet you out front.” And they do. Friday evening, he is catching a flight to Sydney. They part in the airport bar and she leaves him her card mobile number.

“It’s been fun,” Marie-Louise says, “let’s keep it discreetly running, eh!?”

“No arguments from me,” the big chap says with a grin.

There’s a couple of weeks lull until one bright morning, Marie-Louise is mousing along Bay View Terrace, looking at the shiny goods on offer in the windows. She’s no magpie or yuppie collector. She mostly buys antique sort of things; items with the patina of age, but age is not all, for her discerning taste there must be grace of design. Her card cell phone rings. It can only be Dustin; he is the only one apart from Nokia with the number. Sure enough, there’s a very noisy clanking machine coming in loud and clear over the ether.

“M.L.,” he says.

“Dustin,” she says.

“It’s beaut to talk to you, but I must be quick. We’re behind schedule with the loading. What about calling at the hotel Thursday evening? Wear your denim peek-a-boo frock and a nice chap who works the loader next to me, the one you can hear in the background, will be there on his way through to Brisbane and he will give you a ticket in the hope you can get away to Darwin for a few days next week. I’m hoping you’ll come. I have a modern apartment rented in McMinn Street, walking distance from the CBD. Lots of fun. Do come.”

“What do I bring?” she asks.

“Travel light, M.L,” he says, “we’ll source some top gear for you at the Mindil Beach Markets. You’ll never find good tropical gear in cold old Perth.”

“Okay,” says M.L, “what’s this chap’s name? I’ll work it through with him and he can ring you after.”

“Charles Allport,” he says, “a very good machine operator, learnt it on the mines in Utah.”

Thus, Thursday evening, Marie-Louise, looking splendid in her smart casual de collette Denim, walks into the Hotel bar and meets the promised man. Charles looks like John Wayne at his peak and has a wonderful Southern burr in his speech.

“Marie-Louise,” he says, “I’ve heard just so much about you, what about a drink and perhaps dinner?”

A bit further down the track, Charles says,

“Well I have a car downstairs and I’d be pleased to take you anywhere you fancy, but between me and you, the chef here is very hard to beat. What say we call him and see if he can construct something amazing?”

Miguel, a 35ish Spaniard comes in, immaculate in his chef gear. Charles outlines some ideas and Miguel says, “no problem senor”, and he leaves. Charles calls Tim over,

“What does the chef drink, Tim?” he asks. Tim tells him.

“Well then,” Charles says, “take him one of that immediately and every ten minutes to grease the wheels.” Tim laughs,

“You can bet on an extraordinary meal sir,” he says and goes.

They work their way through an absolutely tremendous meal. At the port and cigar stage, Charles says,

“I really need something special to finish on. How about being the after-dinner mints, M.L.?” She looks introspectively into her brandy balloon, swirls the glass and says,

“Why not?”

As he sees her down to her car about 1am, he asks,

“When may I see you again?”

“Hmmm..bottom of the ramp at North Cottesloe at 7am,” she says, “I’m a second shift iceberger. We can try the coffee and croissants at the Blue Duck after.”

When Charles arrives a bit before the appointed time, he meets Marie-Louise getting out of her Audi. The ramp they walk down is a gradual incline, as it’s the means by which North Cottesloe Life Savers put their boat easily into the water. Coming up the ramp is Allen Carpenter, a newish MLA, who is showing a lot of form in the Lower House, although in opposition.



“Morning, M.L.,” he says, “Morning Charles, a bit different to Bondi, eh? Would love to do coffee with you,

but Geoff Gallop wants us in for a shadow cabinet meeting.”

“Any sharks this morning?” Charles asks.

“Oh no,” says Allen, “they only go after lawyers. According to our shadow Attorney General, its just professional jealousy.”

“How the hell do you know him,” M.L. asks.

Charles laughs.

“We swim at Bondi when he’s over. He’s a real surfie at heart.”

At the bottom of the ramp where they hit the sand, a nuggety man is toweling himself off.

“Morning M.L.,” he says.

“Morning John,” she ripostes. Charles is a bit staggered.

“That’s Alan Bond,” he says.

“To the life,” says M.L, “but he’s not Bondy. His main claim to fame is that his granddaddy was the man murdered and cremated, sort of, by Snowy Rowles, the famous murderer out on the Rabbit Proof Fence.” She chuckles. “John’s a character, lives in some pub in Freo. He’s here every morning, seven days a week. He actually commutes up and back by train. He has a stock of wonderful stories of bimbos rushing up to give him a kiss and exchanging confidences before they realize their mistake.”

“Hmmm...awkward,” says Charles, “doesn’t Bondy haunt this beach?”

“Right on,” she says, “we’re bound to see him in the Blue Duck a bit later.” And they do.

Charles flies off to Sydney and a few days into next week, (her husband being away in Northern Italy on a joint trade mission) Marie-Louise touches down at Port Hedland, where Dustin joins her and they travel

companionably to Darwin. Darwin is great fun and he buys her some good tropical gear as promised and they walk everywhere from the McMinn St apartments, when they're not lazing around the outstanding pool or being otherwise engaged (as they often seem to be). Some evenings, they walk right over to Stokes Hill Wharf and dine at the interesting food hall there. He also takes her for a walk around Government House grounds and they share a drink with the administrator on the slatted side verandah. Marie-Louise is a bit stunned at this, but no embarrassing questions are asked and he introduces her to this top man as simply Marie-Louise.



“How in the world do you know him, Dustin?” she asks as they pass the sentry, going out.

“Oh, he’s a friend of Carpenter’s,” he cryptically says and adds nothing more.

The year back in Perth runs out well for Marie-Louise and busily too.

In October, Robert asks her to visit the North, where the richest man in Australia is officially opening FMG Rail link, right on time. Marie-Louise dresses beautifully for the occasion in the manner that the loving wife of the Federal Minister for Natural Resources should dress and joins the VIP’s, who are gathered there in big numbers to honour the richest and now best known man in corporate Australia. There are just five brief speakers. Kevin Rudd leads the charge, supported by Senator Pearlman and to Marie-Louise’s total gobsmacked astonishment, her two extra friendly friends, Dustin and Charles. They are the Managing Directors of the two huge mining conglomerates who have decided that if you

can't beat Twiggy, they should be graceful in defeat and at least pay lip service to his unexpected triumph.

Later, in the marquee, in the stinking heat and dust of the famous Pilbara, huge portable evaporative air conditioners make the finger food and drinkies very bearable. Robert escorts her over to Dustin and Charles and introduces them to a very formal Marie-Louise.

“Would you believe, M.L, these good chaps seem to have some paragon of a girlfriend on tap down south. They never seem to stop singing her praises, and would you believe it – she's also a Marie-Louise? What do you think of that?” the Senator rabbits on. Marie-Louise shakes hands with both of the MD's. She looks them up and down.

“Well, Robert,” she says as she takes in these beautifully suited executives, “All I can say is.....‘LUCKY HER’.”

