

# Blood



Peter Kay



*Interactive Press*

***Blood***

*Peter Kay's novel, **Blood**, won the 2012 IP Picks Award for Fiction. It also won him a Residency at Varuna, The Writers' House. Over the past 30 years Peter has written fiction, features, news journalism, academic articles and literary criticism and his work has been published in **The Canberra Times, The Sydney Morning Herald, The Weekend Australian, Tracks, Overland and The Sunday Tasmanian.***

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Brisbane*



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*To the wondrous Annette and to my father,  
Pilot Officer Bob Kay.*

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# Contents

Author's Note	ix
1. Fish at the market	1
2. The beginning of the end	3
3. Mr Pollock and the black crawlers	8
4. Too bloody right!	14
5. You tell me	16
6. Torn, shorn, blistered and black	21
7. PHUT, PHUT, PHUT	25
8. Exceptional cases	26
9. Clark Kent specs	29
10. Fifty-two pickup	31
11. North Shore kids	36
12. Deal?	39
13. Daisy's angel	42
14. Smiles and whispers	44
15. Carnal knowledge	46
16. Flashbang rocket	48
17. A mad weaver's tartan	52
18. Lollywater and leg opener	55
19. Problem child	59
20. Big pink helmet	62
21. Long, black cars	65
22. Ultimate privilege	68
23. Razorback	70



24. Grace the Ace	73
25. Tales from a blue suitcase	77
26. Posters	79
27. Chum	81
28. Photographs	88
29. Shit-hot guru	94
30. There goes my Senior Citizen Award	96
31. Not like a family	97
32. Portraits	100
33. The hand of God	102
34. The Selenas	108
35. Snow White	113
36. Darkness	115
37. Boneyard	116
38. Frida and Diego	118
39. Sweet flying man	119
40. Australian hero	125
41. Conveniently gathered	129
42. Clear blue sky	131
43. Smooth glide approach	132
44. Small black dot	135
45. That US sub ...	136
46. Strings of sardines	137
47. Storm	138

## **Author's Note**

This story contains material that some indigenous and non-indigenous people may find offensive, or be sensitive to, and they should exercise caution when reading.

All characters in this book are fictitious and no reference is made to any living person.



## 1. Fish at the market

**ROB:** Mostly it's called shock treatment. At the clinic they called it ECT - electroconvulsive therapy. Years before I'd seen it in a movie: flickering pictures of live, electrified bodies pitching in blue light, still vivid in my memory.

ECT, ECT, ECT ... the wheels of the trolley clicked along the corridor. I stared at the ceiling lights as I was parked near a shiny sliding steel door which was shut tight. Don't worry about that film. (You mean the spastic fits, the drooling, sitting in puddles of piss?) It's much more civilised now, by far the best treatment for ... melancholia. It's a word he obviously relishes, getting the absolute most out of all five syllables and such tone, such structure - **mel**, you know straight away you're sick ... melancholia, melanoma ... **an**, building, building, you know the worst is to come ... **cho**, so low, captures the blackness, the hopelessness ... **lia**, spent now, sad as a sigh ...

It's quick, it's painless and there are very few side-effects ... You may feel a bit vague, headaches, tired for a day or so, some short-term memory loss, but that will pass ...

Five of us were waiting now, lying on trolleys, stacked like fish at the market. I was stiff with fear. The steel door slid open, me first ...

Four women in surgical scrubs were acting out a well-practised routine. There were no introductions. (How are we Mr Ross, feeling a little less crackers today?) One loomed over me with an oxygen mask. A thin smile as she fitted it over my nose and mouth. Breathe deeply. The comely young doctor stood behind my head and rubbed cool fluid on my temples. This helps the volts flow through bone and brain. I wasn't sure if it's in one side and out the other or in both sides and meet in the middle. I raised my eyes and followed the line of her shapely

apple-sized breasts, rising against her tight black sweater, but the effect was lost as I looked past them and up her nose, which was not altogether clean. The anaesthetist swabbed and injected the back of my hand. My toes twitched, getting ready for the ride. Lying next to me was an oldish woman attached to some sort of monitor ... BLEEP, BLEEP, BLIP, BLEEP ... 'Would you mind turning that off?'

Jesus, my head, my head. Someone shook my shoulder, called my name. I was, a voice said, in recovery. My head hammered, my neck was sore, my calves ached from the convulsions. My first session was over, nine more to go.

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