

Love in the Time of Carparks

Angie Faye Martin

Leo

I glance across at her as we glide hand-in-hand along the lengthy airport corridor, accelerating our momentum every so often on the moving walkways, as though we are hitting a fluorescent turbo arrow in a game of Nintendo Mario Kart. I glance across and see the woman with whom I fell deeply in love. The sparkle has returned to her eyes, and when she turns to smile back at me, those cute dimples in her cheek make me squeeze her hand possessively.

My pants are still wet from where the air host spilled a glass of champagne over me. The glass shattered when it hit the pull-down tray and my finger is now bandaged where a small shard split my skin. It doesn't bother me though – I'm in love with my wife all over again. She reaches my hand up to her lips to kiss it, as though she can sense my thoughts.

We needed the time away. Jason had told me about the cheap flights and hotels on offer in Hawaii. He'd noticed I'd been quiet at work and asked how I was when we went to get coffee one morning. I'd admitted that things between Maya and I weren't going that great. I may have used the words 'bored', 'sexless', and 'tempted to cheat' but I can't remember now. Jason said that he and Kath went to Hawaii recently and haven't been able to keep their hands off each other for the past few months. 'It's something to do with all the swoony music,' he'd said. I'm not sure if it was the music for me, but I think he was right.

Maya

He's holding my hand the way he used to hold it, like he's proud that I'm his wife. It's such a relief to be having good sex again. When I confessed to my sister recently that I'd been flirting with the new trainer at gym class, she scolded me. I knew she was right so I tried to push the temptation from my mind. But if I'm honest, before we came on this holiday, I was seriously starting to imagine how I would make a move on him in class.

We're entering the baggage claim area now and everything feels so easy and effortless compared to when we left Melbourne. There is a natural energy to our movements, and I can't wait to get home and jump straight into bed with him. Ha! When was the last time

I thought like that about my husband? My husband. I smile and watch his muscles flex as he collects our suitcases.

Leo

We wheel the suitcases through customs and the international arrivals gate. Maya glides along casually reapplying her lipstick and it doesn't even annoy me. The people waiting look happy to see their loved ones, holding flowers and balloons. I have my loved one right next to me. She takes a moment to pause and squeeze my chin and I grin back at her. Christ, she's cute.

As we walk out the automatic sliding doors, I make a mental note to thank Jason for his advice – that old tiger knows what he's talking about – and I turn to the left. Maya turns to the right and we almost trip with the movement.

'It's this way,' she says.

She's right of course. I laugh and follow her. I really am terrible at directions.

Maya

He's terrible at directions. I laugh remembering how he was so adorable in Hawaii trying to navigate through a rainforest mountain hike that we did early one morning.

But I forgot to take the water, and he remembered. We're like that, we make a good team.

'You remember now?' I ask him and he nods at me, and we head towards the lift. 'I wasn't expecting it to be this hot here,' I say, pulling at my linen top to let the air in. We get into the lift with two other families and a small child stares up at me. I smile back reluctantly because the mother is watching, but the child has quite the stare. Leo presses the button for Level 3.

Leo

'We're on Level 4 North,' Maya says to me, as four more people cram into the lift, pushing us towards the back.

'Are you sure?' I ask. I'm pretty sure we're on Level 3. She nods back at me and I wonder why we didn't write it down.

'I'm sure, honey,' she says and I reach around the people in front of me and press the '4' button, giving an apologetic face to the elevator crowd as the lift pauses awkwardly on Level 3 to open and close with ironic deliberation.

I squeeze Maya's hand, but she doesn't return the pressure.

Maya

Leo is trying to squeeze my hand. I'm not going to give him reassurance when he's wrong. If he paid more attention, then he wouldn't get lost as often as he does. I'm doing him a favour by withholding reassurance.

I almost throw myself out of the lift when it reaches Level 4, relieved to escape the staring kid and someone's rapidly permeating bowel gas, and head straight for aisle... what was the aisle?

I forget the aisle.

I look to Leo. He's smirking. 'Ahhh... now who's forgotten?' The air is hot and humid. He's smirking like he knows, and he turns down Aisle J, but something tells me it's not Aisle J. I follow because he has the suitcases, and it's true – I have forgotten.

Leo

Maya can be aggressive and overconfident. My friends and family tell me to be careful and stick up for myself around her. I can hear her behind me – her steps are heavy and her breathing is audible. She's annoyed with me. We'll be in the car soon, and I'll crank up the aircon, turn on the music and before we know it we'll be back in our beautiful house. Rasputin, our budgie, will hop around for attention. Maya will be sorry for being so cranky with me. I think there was beer in the fridge...

I stop at Parking Bay 32. It's a red Nissan hatchback. We own a black Toyota sedan.

Maya

'I knew it wasn't this aisle,' I say to him, regretting trusting him to pull me so far down the aisle in this heat. 'If you hadn't been in such a rush, we could have paused back there until I got my bearings.'

'What do you mean a rush?' he says to me. 'I didn't rush you. And I didn't force you to follow me.'

I can't look at him. I glance around the carpark to see what I can recognise. Concrete pillars, row after row, neat white lines... Leo is saying something to me but I block him out.

If everything quietens down, I can feel my way out of here...

'Yeah, it's my fault.' His voice comes through my meditation, and although I tell myself not to bite, I can't help it. 'I didn't say it was your fault.'

Leo

She's doing that thing where she looks at me like she hates me. 'How about we just go back to the elevator and we'll find our way again?' I hear her say to me.

And then she walks away before I agree. I follow with the suitcases. My forehead is dripping with sweat and I check my water bottle. Empty. I hope there's a drink machine back near the elevator. I watch her walk ahead. She didn't even bother to offer to take one of the suitcases.

'Are you sure it wasn't Level 3?' She doesn't say anything. I think it was Level 3. I go to call for the elevator.

'See what I mean?' she says.

'What?'

'You're rushing me. Just let me get my bearings.'

The elevator opens. I let it go and roll my eyes so she knows how angry I'm getting.

Maya

We stay on Level 4 and I look down Aisle K, but when I look down there it doesn't look familiar. I can see a bin this time, but when we arrived, I can't remember passing a bin...

'I'm going down to Level 3,' Leo announces.

'Fine,' I say.

'Actually, I think it's best we stay together, my phone is low.' Oh. My. God. I can't stand this man right now. 'I don't want us to separate.' He says it in such a whiny tone. For a second, I hate him so much for not going down to Level 3.

The elevator opens next to us and the smiling faces of a sun-kissed couple emerge. It's Rosa and Haru. And they're wearing matching pink and blue hibiscus prints.

'Well, well, well! Fancy meeting you two love birds here,' Rosa announces.

Leo

Oh shit. Not them. We spent an evening with them watching the sunset and sipping matis by the pool at the hotel. They are perfect.

'Hey there!' I say. Surely they can tell my smile is fake. I rack my brain trying to think of something to say to ease the tension.

'Oh no! You've lost your car, haven't you?' Haru guesses before I can come up with another reason for why we're standing in the lift well. 'Let us help you!'

I look across at Maya whose rage is also simmering dangerously close to the surface. A vision of the four of us walking around the carpark in five hours' time looms before me.

'Thanks buddy!' In my vision we're still trying to be polite to each other. We're still trying to keep up appearances. I cannot and will not let that happen. 'Wrong level. We're on Level 3.' I even manage to get out a laugh.

'Ahh... don't you hate that?' Haru slaps me on the back, and Maya and Rosa part once again mentioning that double date idea that's been thrown around a few times.

Maya

We watch as the couple walk away and Leo presses the lift button but I'm not falling for his ploy to go to Level 3. I know we're on this level.

The lift doors open. 'Are you coming?' he asks.

'No,' I tell him.

'I'm not going without you,' he says.

'I want you to.' I'm so sick of him. Why did we even bother with a stupid holiday in paradise when we know our relationship is shit?

Leo

'Want what?' I ask her.

'Out.' I think I know what she's saying. I think I want it too.

'Good.' I say. And I think I mean it. We could just end it right here. Go our separate ways. I could ask that sexy barrister out. I'm sure I've caught her checking out my arse.

'Here.' She throws the keys at me. 'You can take the car – if you ever bloody find it. I'll catch a cab.'

Maya

'Fine!' He shouts back at me. I can't believe he said it.

'Fine.' I say. I'm not sure I mean it, but it's out. He misses the keys and they fall to the ground. In that instant the car in the building across from us – in the southern carpark – flashes its lights twice.

Angie Faye Martin (Kooma/Kamilaroi/European) is a writer and an editor from Meanjin/Brisbane. Her debut novel, *Melaleuca*, a crime thriller, is out June 2024.