



Fiction



Change of HEART

Fran stared in astonishment at the evening news on TV.

On screen flashed an image of Barry, their elderly next-door neighbour. He was at the head of a protest rally.

“Fifty thousand Australians marched through their cities today,” said the news reader, “demanding action to tackle climate change.”

“Matt, take a look at this,” she called out to her teenage son.

No response.

“Crazy old bugger’s painted blue,” she said.

Matt shuffled into the room. When he saw Barry, his jaw dropped.

Pinned to Barry’s blue overalls were several fish, made from what looked like cardboard covered with aluminium foil. His face and hands were blue.

Fran smirked. “He looks like the fish John West rejects.”

Matt scowled at her.

“Fat lot of good it’ll do,”

Fran continued, waving a solitary sock at the TV.

The other sock had disappeared, lost to the washing machine.

“I’m the rising sea levels,” Barry said to the camera. “We have to cut greenhouse gas emissions.”

The crowd roared.

Fran was taken aback.

“They love him, don’t they?”

“Yeah, at least he’s having a go,” said Matt.

The rest of the story was drowned out by the wail of a siren. She was surprised when it stopped outside.

Fran’s neighbour left her an important message *my neighbour calls me crazy, it’s her son, Matt, who will pay if we don’t act. All our sons and daughters will pay.*

Fran opened her front door as two ambulance officers banged on Barry’s door. “Spare key’s under the pot plant,” she said.

The paramedics entered. Fran paced back and forth across her veranda. She

The paramedics entered. Fran paced back and forth. She hoped he was all right

hoped the old bloke was all right. After what seemed an eternity, one of the medics came out to get a gurney.

“How is he?” asked Fran.

“Had a massive heart attack. I’m very sorry. We were too late,” he said.

Fran’s hand shot to her mouth. Barry’s body was brought out. It was covered with a white sheet, but his

arm, still painted blue, stuck out on one side.

A few days later, Fran stood in Barry’s hallway, holding a roll of garbage bags. She had volunteered to pack Barry’s belongings. He had no living relatives.

An open door, straight ahead, revealed a small office. She entered. In the centre of the room was an old-fashioned typewriter on a large, antique desk.

On a shelf above the desk was a huge silver cup. Fran read the words engraved on it, *Oil Industry Awards, 1980*. She couldn’t believe it: the climate change campaigner was an oil guy.

“You had a change of heart, didn’t you?” she said.

Tucked in the typewriter was a letter addressed to the prime minister. She pulled it out to throw in the rubbish, then hesitated. This might have been the last thing Barry did.

She read the letter. Her

eyes widened and filled with tears as she read, *I’m 76 years old. I don’t have any children. Even though*

my neighbour calls me crazy, it’s her son, Matt, who will pay if we don’t act. All our sons and daughters will pay.

Later that day, Fran stopped at the postbox, an envelope in her hand.

Matt loped towards her, his school bag over his shoulder. He peered at the letter. “What are you writing to the prime minister for?” he asked, incredulous.

“This is Barry’s last letter,” she replied and pulled a second letter from her bag.

“What’s that?” asked Matt.

“My letter. I had a change of heart,” Fran replied. “Barry helped me see why it’s worth having a go.”

She ruffled her son’s hair and posted both letters.



L.A. Larkin’s thriller, **The Genesis Flaw**, will be on sale from August 2. Published by Pier 9. RRP \$32.95