

Crying and shaking, with her knees buckling under the weight of a 20-year prison sentence, Schapelle Corby did her best to cool overheated emotions on that last day in court. She flung up a hand and called to her shrieking mother: "It's okay, Mum, it's okay, just stop."

Too little, too late. The genie had been out of the bottle for a long time, and the histrionics of her mother and sister were just extras in a story already slated for the history books, the novelised treatment and probably a movie. The press had been waiting for the verdict for months, and vast sums and untold effort had been devoted to feeding the rapacious Australian appetite for Corby stories.

Now, on this last day, the real-life drama was screening on televisions across the nation. The saga would be wrung of all emotion, every last angle would be covered, and, finally her more ardent supporters would feel compelled to bully, threaten and intimidate Indonesians and rational Australians. As she was led from the courtroom, through the grounds of Denpasar District Court, where screams and shouts rang through the air, Corby looked stunned. Most Australians in Indonesia shared her disbelief.

These days Schapelle sits in a small hot cell, weaving and praying, as a wild cast of Corbyphiles continue to posture and prance across Australia and Indonesia. Her face has launched a thousand news stories, galvanised a number of Australian government ministers into agitating on her behalf, and damaged Australian-Indonesian relations. Rarely has one young woman done so much with so little. After all, besides the small matter of having 4.1 kilograms of marijuana in her luggage, there is nothing particularly special about the 27-year-old from the Gold Coast.

She's pretty, yes, with big green eyes and long dark hair. Befitting a former beauty school student, Corby was always carefully made-up in her hearings at Denpasar District Court, with waterproof mascara, eyeshadow and a touch of lipgloss. Wearing flattering clothes, with her eyebrows plucked to thin lines, Corby sported a range of different hairstyles. She played up to the photographers, spending more time looking at the lenses banked at the windows of the court than at the judges or the prosecutors. The image tugged hard at Australian heartstrings: the young woman sitting up straight, weeping, hugging her lawyers. But the substance simply wasn't there.

Corby is an ordinary suburban Australian woman who worked in a takeaway shop, saved up for a holiday in Bali, and somehow galvanised an entire nation. She's no professional, no intellectual, she's done nothing heroic, nothing outstanding. She has shown no sterling self-control, strength or serenity in her court

hearings. She didn't even finish her beauty course, and her letters to the judge and prosecutors were, to put it kindly, unimpressive. She's not on death row, unlike the Australian Nguyen Tuong Van who awaits imminent hanging in Singapore for drugs crimes. She's not 16, unlike Australian Gordon Vuong who has been jailed in Cambodia, where he is serving a 13-year prison sentence. Nor has she been sentenced to death for her marijuana smuggling conviction, unlike the Indonesian Kiagus Zainal Abidin. She's simply a young woman convicted of a stupid crime, for which she might well be guilty. As the Indonesian vice-president Yusuf Kalla said, an Australian in exactly her circumstances, but a bloke with tattoos, would hardly get a passing nod from the Australian public.

But Corby is attractive, she's white, she has cried for the cameras, and collapsed when the occasion seemed to call for it, and she's from a working family. Perhaps, most importantly, until she was sentenced in May, death by firing squad was more than a remote possibility. Even now, the Bali High Court can increase her sentence, to life in prison, as the prosecution has recommended, or even to death. By the time she was sentenced, the Australian public was so firmly on side that even a 20-year-sentence seemed catastrophic. Rage prompted all sorts of racist remarks, and even the posting of threatening packages to the Indonesian embassy.

AUSTRALIA WILL PROBABLY never know the truth of the matter. The mystery will endure of whether Corby put the vacuum-packed and flattened plastic sack of marijuana worth a conservative \$35,000 into her boogie-board bag. But the public at large remains fascinated with the saga. There's the Australian discharged bankrupt mobile phone entrepreneur Ron Bakir, Corby's reported financial backer, with the furious former girlfriend whom he alleges threatened to shoot his "cock off". Then there's the Bali lawyer Lily Lubis, who wept in at least three hearings, startling the judges and embarrassing those around her. There's Jakarta lawyer Hotman Paris Hutapea, with a pistol on his hip and a massive diamond on his finger.

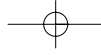
Then, of course, there's the half-brother Clinton, incarcerated in a Queensland prison, the Japanese ex-husband Kimi, and the one-time boyfriend apparently known as Shugs. Then there are the celebrities with a heart: movie star Russell Crowe told the Australian public "the photographs of Schapelle Corby broke my heart" (before he had his own run-in with the law), and Lindy Chamberlain has written to her saying "my heart bleeds for you". And finally, the Australians who have visited her in Kerobokan prison, braided and sunburnt, wearing shorts and sarongs, thongs and singlets, and, usually, indignant expressions. Bearing small gifts of soap or chocolate, they want to see the woman



PACK

Everyone wants justice for convicted

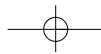
AAP, CRAIG HUGHES



"Everybody can't believe this is happening to her," says Mercedes of her sister Schapelle (outside Denpasar Court, Bali, on May 27).

MENTALITY

1 drug smuggler Schapelle Corby – and whatever else they can get out of it. *Sian Powell* reports.



◀ who has dominated their television screens for so long: Our Schapelle.

Meanwhile, the convict in question has busied herself with religion, weaving mats, reading magazines, and meeting her lawyers and some of her relatives. Said to be in high spirits and a pillar of strength by some visitors, she is profoundly depressed and needs medication to sleep, according to others. Two Australian tourists, a mother and daughter combination, muscled their way in to see her in the days after the verdict was handed down. She was crying, they reported to the journalists waiting outside the prison. Her head was in her hands, tears were on her cheeks. "But she was still beautiful," said the visitor from Perth, eerily reminiscent of two Australian women in court in an earlier hearing: "She's beautiful, isn't she?" one said to her companion. "Oh yes, she's very beautiful; [and louder] we're on your side, Schapelle."

The drama seems to bring out the worst in people — if not the worst, the most bizarre. One tourist who came to the prison began to hoick up her shirt to show the waiting journalists her pierced nipples, until hastily averted eyes and muttered objections stopped her in her tracks. An Australian tourist brought a toddler in a pushchair to court to hear the verdict, and almost lost the child in the melee. Vandals spray-painted "Free Corby" graffiti on Western Australia's parliament house. It has been ugly, and it could get uglier still if the Bali High Court runs true to form and increases her jail term.

It seems Corby was taken by surprise when the panel of three Indonesian judges at Denpasar District Court found her guilty and sentenced her to 20 years in prison. Most of her relatives were insanely optimistic, and apparently fed her hopes that she might even be found innocent and released. In the weeks before the verdict was handed down, her mother, Rosleigh Rose, snapped at a reporter who asked what kind of cell Schapelle might be moved to after the sentencing. Her daughter would be freed; she would be released the day after the verdict, Rose said. And she would be taken straight home to Queensland the next day.

As the matriarch of the Corby family, Rose displays a winning strength and honesty, coupled with a disarming naivety. With the same eyeliner-rimmed eyes as her daughters, she has shouted at journalists, flicked water at anti-drugs activists bearing "execute Corby" banners, and personally cleaned the grimy squat toilet in the holding cell at the back of the Denpasar Court so Schapelle wouldn't have to face the filth. "It's good to have a big family," Rose says one day in the courtroom, while waiting for her daughter to appear. "I had three [kids] in two-and-a-half years, they're so close. They're like twins."

Rose's experiences in Bali have put her off travelling overseas, and her one wish now, she says, is to see her daughter released. "I'm never going anywhere again. Not overseas. Camping and fishing, that's what I like." Yet, like her daughters, she will not tolerate racist criticism of Indonesians or Balinese. Tourists and locals wander into the family takeaway shop, she says, and start to lambast the Indonesians. Rose tells them to stop. "You can't think of it like that, that's too much hate," she says. "They come into the shop and they say they want to go over there and shoot them all. You can't have that."

The three Corby children are still extremely close. Although Rose is her mother, Schapelle seems instinctively to turn to her older sister Mercedes in times of trouble. The pair can somehow hold hands walking single file, Schapelle's arm twisted backwards,

year placing in a Balinese surfing contest. That's one of the more ridiculous elements in the Corby saga: with all the determination to hate Indonesians and boycott Bali, the more rabid supporters seem to forget their pin-up girl has an Indonesian brother-in-law and a half-Indonesian niece and nephew.

On the night of October 8, Mercedes did not go to the airport to pick up her sister, who was arriving with two friends and her then 17-year-old half-brother James Kisina. Coming to Bali to celebrate Mercedes' 30th birthday, the four intended to make their own way to the hotel. "We were actually going to the hotel, because we had other friends ... I was actually cursing, thinking she'd given me the wrong hotel," Mercedes remembers. "Where is she? Where is she? Wayan went there, and they were like no, no, no Corby here, no-one here. I kept ringing up and then I got the call

asked time and again, why would anyone smuggle marijuana through an airport in an unlocked bag with a correct name and address tag firmly attached to it? Because it's a fall-back excuse, the detractors say, thought up willy-nilly on the off-chance the drugs were detected. Pretty girls can get away with an awful lot in this world.

Mercedes says that's all rubbish, and no-one in their right mind would try to sell marijuana in Bali anyway. "Usually stuff gets found inside surfboards with the glass resined over it," she says, sharply. "You wouldn't even be able to sell that stuff, you'd be caught before you sold your first bag. For sure, for sure. There's so many doblers and people, there's no way you'd get away with having that here." Faced with a horde of sharp journalists and sharper lawyers, Mercedes is out of her depth, floundering in search of the right answer, the answer that won't make things any worse for her sister.



There's "too much hate", says mother Rosleigh Rose (with sister Mercedes, in court).

Mercedes shadowing her, surrounded by a buzzing throng of photographers. Mercedes has been there for her younger sister since October 8, 2004, the day Schapelle was arrested at Ngurah Rai airport. Mercedes will stay the distance with Pelle, as she calls her, putting her two children into Balinese schools, visiting the prison nearly every day, rebuffing the press, reining in her parents, striking the deals. Money will be a problem, she says, although she wasn't earning much in Australia, filling supermarket shelves at night and working in the family shop.

A SLIGHT 30-YEAR-OLD WITH A sharp temper who has on occasion whacked a cameraman with her handbag, Mercedes led the Corbys to Bali. She's been visiting the island since she was 17; her first trip was a prize for winning a mechanical surfboard contest in a local Queensland pub. She has been married to Wayan Widiartha, a Balinese surfer, for nearly seven years, and she's still surfing, last

from one of the other girls, crying. I thought it was a joke at first."

Racing to the airport, Mercedes says she had no idea of the scale of the disaster. "I almost died. I walked in and said, 'Are you all right?' I had no idea. I thought maybe someone had put a little bit in her bag or something. And I went out to the police, and I went, 'What's going on? They pointed, and I walked in the door; I like, screamed, my legs collapsed, I could hardly breathe.'"

Mercedes had seen the huge clear plastic sack of marijuana that later bulged over the Bali drug squad chief's table and, later still, lay menacingly in the Bali courtroom, shedding sprigs and flecks and emitting a powerful smell. It's potent Australian marijuana, according to the Indonesian police, and sells for far more than ordinary Indonesian dope, giving any smuggler some kind of profit motive. Although, as Corby's backers point out, it can't be very profitable, because no-one else has ever been caught taking marijuana into Bali from Australia. And as her sister has

WHEN THE TRIAL BEGAN, WAY back in January, Corby seemed almost jaunty, smiling at the cameras, seemingly expecting an early end to a distasteful episode. After a number of hearings in the hot, damp and noisy court, the real possibility of long-term imprisonment seemed to hit her. She stopped talking to journalists and, as the interest mushroomed and the press scrums got rowdier, she apparently began to pray; eyes downcast, lips muttering. It had become all too real, and the smiling girl wasn't pouting for the cameras any more. Then, for whatever reason, she seemed to stage a faint, crumpling gently on to her interpreter's shoulder, prompting her mother to shriek, her father Michael Corby to yell, her sister Mercedes to leap to the top of the court guard rail in a tight camel-coloured skirt (a feat still discussed admiringly by Indonesian journalists), and the judges to crossly adjourn the hearing. It was downhill from there, into a swamp of fear and apprehension.

"She's one of nature's real beautiful people," Mercedes says of the sister who plastered the wall in the corner of her cell with snaps of her friends and family. "She's nice, she's lovely, she's funny. She doesn't do anything wrong. She's got a lot of close friends and everybody just can't believe this is happening to her."

A simple, sporty woman, Schapelle adores body-boarding, and was a dab hand at doing 360s in the Queensland waves. One photo shows her leaning against her board, bottom pertly stuck out; a sexy surfer girl in her high-cut swimming costume. "When she used to come to Bali, she was at the beach all day," Mercedes says, adding that the October holiday was her first visit to Bali in five years. Before that, Schapelle visited the island more regularly, often dropping in on her sister on the way to

and from Japan where she lived and worked in a traditional inn. Mercedes had also returned to Australia for good, but in October she was on a six-month visit to Bali so her kids could get to know Wayan's family and pick up a bit of language before her son started school. Like Mercedes, Schapelle helped out in the family shop. "She saved up so long to come on this holiday," Mercedes says. "She gave me her spending money, actually, at the police station."

THE FAMILY SEEMS ROCK-SOLID (with the possible exception of the jailed half-brother Clinton, dubbed the black sheep by Michael Corby). Mercedes is willing to put the lives of her husband and kids on hold while she waits in Bali. Brother Michael has visited Bali; James Kisina, Schapelle's teenage half-brother, was travelling with her to Bali for Mercedes' birthday. Meleane, a 15-year-old with a wide smile, took a cake into prison to have a little birthday party with her big sister Schapelle. Rose has often visited the prison with her boyfriend, Greg Martin, and sometimes, too, with her one-time husband Michael Corby. They separated when the three Corby children were young, and Michael Corby is now seriously ill with cancer. They have an amicable relationship, and Schapelle was helping to look after her father when she left for her holiday in Bali.

About 20 members of the extended clan packed into Denpasar District Court on the day of the verdict - aunts and cousins, in-laws and close friends. One friend, Jodie Power, lived in Bali for months with her two children to lend her support to Corby. Others have swung in and out of Bali, traipsing down to Kerobokan prison to visit her. The loyalty is admirable, but the family has not handled the case well; it needed discretion and diplomacy, not ranting and wailing. A lot of the surge of sympathy for



Corby in a detention house at Bali Prison in February. She now shares a crowded cell.

Schapelle has been prompted by that crowded and grimy jail. Not only would a marijuana smuggler convicted in Australia get away with a far more lenient sentence (a first-time offender perhaps serving four or five years in prison), but it would be in a more salubrious environment, with regular exercise, a bed of one's own and enough food.

In Kerobokan, she is crushed in with a fluctuating number of women, always too many for the small cell. "They're squashed in so tightly. She's got a narrow mat, she can't sleep sprawled out," Rose says. "The men, some sleep with their legs through the bars because they're too tall." The electric light is left on 24 hours a day, and Schapelle needs an eye mask to sleep. There's no fan, no running water. Each inmate is given a bucket of water a day to wash with and to sluice the squat lavatory. The food

provided to the prisoners isn't really enough to live on, and most of them rely on extras from family and friends on the outside. On the other hand, Kerobokan allows long visits almost every day, and food and gifts to be brought in. Missionaries often visit to hold prayer meetings, and Schapelle has apparently taken to praying and hymn-singing.

Outside the prison, the wrangling continues, a perpetual sparring between elements of the media, the government, Corby supporters and, of course, the Corbys themselves. Unsophisticated, ready to resort to shouts and screams, it seems probable the Corbys have been taken for a ride by some smooth operators. The Corby story has "made for television" written all over it, and television producers leapt into the fray.

The core Corbys have struck deals with various elements of the media.

Mercedes has given exclusive interviews to *New Idea*. Rose has been managed by *A Current Affair* - and she makes no bones about it. The program apparently picks up the tab for her airfares to Bali - a pretty good deal in comparison with other bought stories. "I don't book my tickets; *A Current Affair* does," Rose says, blithely. "I just tell them when I'm coming home and they book it. They booked me on Qantas once, although I didn't want to fly Qantas. Schapelle said, 'Mum, how could you?'" (Her daughter flew Qantas to Bali.)

Corby herself was interviewed on the *60 Minutes* program before her trial even began, and the great prize now would be a live interview with her in prison. To that end, journalists have snuck legally and not-so-legally into the jail, irritating the prison officials, and a Sydney radio station carried an interview recorded on the inside.

Everybody's on the make in the Schapelle story: someone is making a buck from printing *Free Schapelle* T-shirts; media organisations are making money from advertising; relatives are earning cash for interviews; there is dough to be made in special documentaries, books, specials, licensing agreements. One enterprising organisation even began a cottage industry in Australian airports offering plastic-wrapping for the bags of nervous tourists. Rose had her bags wrapped on her last trip to Bali. The girl at the counter, she says without smiling, offered her the service for free.

Staunch and matter-of-fact, Rose has little time for weepers and wailers. Although she knew matters were dire, even before the verdict was handed down, she kept her chin up. "My daughter's alive. She's got her legs. There's no use curling up in a corner, crying and bawling. What's the use of that? There's always tomorrow." © Sian Powell is *The Australian's* Jakarta correspondent.

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Jack Watts Corrie DCAR579_WI

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