VOLUME 1: A DISSERTATION, THE CREATIVE LEAP: THE SCIENCE AND PHILOSOPHY OF CREATIVITY.

by

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SIGNED BY CANDIDATE
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ABSTRACT

The mystery of creative thinking, and creativity itself, has long fascinated human beings, and not only those of us, namely artists, who have taken it upon themselves to bring something new and original into the world and who consequently find themselves struggling through the dark and forbidding landscape of the creative process. This struggle is a well known trope of popular culture, but as the economy of modern societies becomes increasingly dominated by the need for innovation, the questions of what creativity is and how it can be stimulated have become more pressing. For a number of decades now various kinds of scientific investigation have attempted, with some limited success, to define and analyse creativity, while the earlier psychoanalytic approaches, first sketched by Freud, have been eschewed as no more than unscientific speculations. This dissertation is an attempt to build a case that some of the confusion relating to creativity, and consciousness in general, stems from unresolved philosophical questions arising from the bifurcation of European thought after Descartes’ announcement of the Cogito, and that a more productive research program might arise, and indeed is beginning to arise by putting aside the animus between what is currently described as science and the work of Freudian inspired thinkers such as Jacques Lacan. All this I consider in the context of a process, developed by Dr. Sue Woolfe, and called by her “the Lull,” which she teaches to student writers so that they can wilfully invoke for themselves the creative state. While this technique and its teaching is not unique in providing a model of creativity with practical applications,¹ by looking at the Lull and its effectiveness I hope to show that a rapprochement between contemporary neuroscience and Freudian-inspired thinkers is not only possible, but necessary if we are to give a fuller description of creativity, this most vital element in human consciousness.

¹ The Geneplore Model (GENerate and exPLORE), for example, or Amabile’s Componential Model, both of which offer practical guidance to the development of creativity.
Introduction

This dissertation, like Dr. Sue Woolfe’s *The Mystery of the Cleaning Lady* (2007), began as a practical exercise, an attempt by a writer to understand his process after many years of practicing it, and a few of teaching it. Central to that practice was and remains a respect for and fascination with the unconscious. While, as the writer in question, my understanding of that protean term has shifted over time, from the kind of pseudo-Jungian psychic jungle of the dark instincts popular in psychological dramas of the 1960s, to what is today something perhaps less threatening but more mysterious and curiously intimate, an unconscious continually at work shaping and disrupting my language, it has remained my aim to understand and map its contours in order to harness the creative energy which I believe finds its source there.

In the past, I accepted in general terms the Freudian view according to which the sexual energy of an organism, called by Freud the “libido,” is repressed and sublimated in human beings in all sorts of productive and unproductive ways (Freud, “General Introduction” 55), and that art, and consequently creative writing, is one of them. More recently, I have moved to a slightly different point of view, one informed by French theorist and psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan, which gives considerably more emphasis to writing and language than Sigmund Freud did. It proposes that writers such as myself are enjoying our “sinthome,” his spin on “symptom” (Luke 15), and have a peculiarly liberating relationship with our “jouissance,” a Lacanian term roughly similar to Freud’s libido (Lacan, “Ethics in Psychoanalysis”). But before I take the plunge into that particularly dark pool, let me consider a concept central to Woolfe’s account of creativity, namely “defocused attention” (Woolfe 89).

Creativity has fascinated human beings at least since the Renaissance,² and its godlike quality is attested by the almost mystical vocabulary associated with it: artists

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² See, for example, Albert & Runco. But this interest is not as venerable as one might think. The ancient Greeks, for example, used the words “techne” (τέχνη) for what we would now call art, this meaning “the making of things according to rules.” Our word “inspiration,” is a Middle English word dating from 1300 and tracing itself back to the Latin in-spirare “to breathe”. The concept of creativity as we know it today is really a rather recent development. See, for example, Tatarkiewicz.
are “inspired,” filled with “genius” or “spirit,” or perhaps visited by a muse under whose influence they are able to “create”—a term itself suggesting the conjuring of worlds from nothing. Its mysterious quality is emphasised by its close relationship with dreaming and trance-like states, and there is a general sense in which creativity is regarded as belonging to certain gifted or perhaps mad people, but not other, more ordinary mortals.³

It was only in the nineteenth century, however, with the rise of psychology as a science, that creativity began to be studied and analysed in a more rigorous way, leading to the breakthroughs of American psychologist J.P. Guilford, who began to devise tests in the 1950s aimed at doing the apparently impossible, namely bringing the muse to earth, as it were, and measuring creativity (Haggbloom 139–152). This pioneering work was developed further by Ellis Paul Torrance, resulting in the now standard Torrance Test (Runco 361), which has been used extensively in the United States to assess the creativity of schoolchildren since the mid 1960s, with some fascinating results and disturbing trends (Kim 2011). In the course of the rise of this burgeoning area of creativity studies, a distinction began to be made between what were termed “convergent” and “divergent” thinking strategies; convergent thinking referring to focused, problem-solving thought processes, and divergent to a more diffuse thought process resulting in multiple perspectives and alternative solutions to perhaps ill-defined problems, considered by Guilford to be the more creative (Guilford 1950 444), though this relationship was subsequently shown to be more complex and nuanced than Guilford appreciated (Baer 2011). The role of word association in these tests was a clue missed by most working writers interested in what they were actually doing when they were writing. Yet, in 1997, doctoral candidate Christopher David Stevens interviewed novelist Sue Woolfe for his thesis (subsequently titled *Crooked Paths to Insight: The Pragmatics of Loose and Tight Construing*), dealing with the creative process, telling her about American psychologist Colin Martindale’s work. Intrigued, Woolfe, who was struggling with the problematics of her own creativity, followed up, finding to her delight that the scientist was indeed talking about something she felt true from her own experience. Writing of an earlier

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³ With this assertion being the particular target of some more recent studies of Creativity. See for example Attridge (2004), Carter (2004) and Pope (2005), who all emphasise the social nature of creativity. Pope’s Foucauldian influenced analysis, and his familiarity with Lacan, has been especially helpful to my own understanding of the issues surrounding creativity.
experiment relating the attentional state of the subject to the number of word associations (or “nodes”) that could be made to a trigger word provided by the experimenter, Martindale wrote that focused, concentrated attention produced fewer word associations than a more defocused, relaxed state: “When attention is focused, the word will strongly activate only a few other nodes. Thus, the associative hierarchy will be steep...When attention is less focused, more nodes will be activated to a lesser degree. Thus, the associative hierarchy will be relatively flat” (qtd in Smith, Ward, and Finke 257). Recounting this experience in her subsequent book, The Mystery of the Cleaning Lady, Woolfe describes this as the beginning of a process that would lead her not only to a deeper appreciation of what she was doing when she wrote, but also to a way of teaching that most elusive thing, artistic creativity itself (Woolfe 91).

Formerly dismissed as the inaccessible realm of inspiration and genius, and so occluded by the craft elements of writing—which can be easily taught—creativity , at least insofar as the working writer is concerned, and is vitally concerned, for example, in times of crisis called the “creative block,” is beginning to reveal its secrets and the ways in which it can be encouraged and destroyed. The first step on that journey of discovery is the fortuitous use of word association by these early researchers to begin their explorations.

In the experiments Martindale was considering (Clockwork Muse 137), subjects were asked to note down words suggested to them by a trigger word provided by the experimenter. The trigger word “table”, for example, might suggest a chain of words such as “chair”, “furniture”, “food”, “dinner”, “mother”, “father”, etc. The cumulative number of words associated with the original trigger word was regarded as a measure of the creativity of the subject (the greater the number, the greater the creativity). But what was observed was that those subjects, who paused before they began noting down their associative chain tended to associate more words. Woolfe then developed this very suggestive observation into a practice she teaches her writing students. She termed this practice the “Lull,” aimed at putting students into a kind of expectant frame of defocused attention from which creative associations and surprising thoughts and insights might arise, apparently unbidden and at random—a result, which has been illuminated further by

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4 Described in a little more detail below.
recent experiments in neuroscience, which I detail in Chapter 4. But these practical issues of such pressing concern to writers are not the end of the matter; and I use this leitmotif of the Lull, and the defocused attention it rests upon, to explore the knotted paths of creativity, neuroscience and Freudian and post-Freudian dynamic psychologies. For it is my contention that Freud and his successors have much to offer to contemporary psychology and neuroscience, because they also explore this most fascinating field. Together, they can form not only the basis of a functioning theory of creativity, but also provide some useful insights into the promotion and cultivation of creativity in educational settings and for individual artists.
Chapter 1:
The Lull - What Is It?

In Woolfe’s interpretation, the Lull is described in almost contradictory terms as a consciously induced mental state of inattentiveness. Or in other words, a willfully sought carelessness. “When I teach,” she writes, “I insist that students ‘lull’ their minds, rather than writing down the first, often the most obvious, thing that occurs to them. Students are usually intrigued and inspired by the associations they discover. Lulling the mind is a basic first step to being creative” (Woolfe 90-91). How this might be achieved—how people can stop themselves from thinking—is discussed later. For the moment, I follow Woolfe’s account as she describes the physical sensations associated with the Lull as a kind of trance, “so profound that I lose track of my physical whereabouts, my sense of time, my sense of myself and even my own name” (Woolfe 91). This disintegration of some of the most basic elements of identity would normally be regarded with alarm, and indeed the sensation of “losing oneself” is most often associated with experiences of horror and destitution—a catastrophic collapse of ego, for example, accompanying the collapse of a marriage or some other terrible personal defeat. The fact that, in this case, it is a sought-for effect produced, it would seem, with ease and some considerable pleasure points is a quality this practice shares with other dangerous, yet also sought-after activities such as the indulgence in alcohol and other drug-related pursuits, or even the participation in life-threatening extreme sport. Such activities are sometimes described as resulting from a desire to “get out of it,” to disrupt normal thinking and behaviour and connect to something more primal and “real” (Zuckerman 45). What the people indulging in these activities are looking for, arguably, is a break from the mundane predictability of consciousness and an unleashing of some other part of our being.

The idea that there is an unconscious, a part of the mind hidden from conscious awareness but nevertheless affecting in profound ways human behaviour grew throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, fuelled by philosophers such as Friedrich Schelling (McGrath 72-91) and Arthur Schopenhauer (Margetts 115-38) as well as early psychologists such as William James (Weinberger 439-45). Indeed, it became such a prominent part of the zeitgeist of the period that historian Mark Altschule wrote, “[i]t is
difficult—or perhaps impossible—to find a nineteenth century psychologist or psychiatrist who did not recognize unconscious cerebration as not only real, but of the highest importance” (Altschule 199). Freud’s contribution was to elaborate a structure and, connecting it to language, propose a way it could not only be studied, but enlisted to provide a cure to some of the most troubling symptoms presented to medicine—symptoms without any apparent physical or biological basis, but which were nevertheless traumatically real. In doing so, through his interpretation of dreams and the undertaking of word association exercises with his patients, he opened a world for inspection that had previously appeared murky and indistinct.

Freud and subsequent psychiatrists believed word association, in particular, reveals a way to unravel chains of meaning grotesquely and exquisitely individualised that arise from the intricacies and suffering of very personal histories (Brennan 188). That Woolfe, following Martindale and other pioneers of what gradually became known as creativity studies, found this same technique of use in unraveling the mysteries of her own creativity is suggestive of the unconscious processes at work in writing. But what was it she was eliciting from her students as she got them to abandon the tried and true method of planning their writing before they ever put pen to paper (or finger to keyboard), and had them instead meander through apparently random thoughts and observations, jotting down ideas as they occurred on whatever scraps of paper were available? What were the words giving shape to?

“L’idée vient en parlant” (von Kleist 42), the German writer Heinrich von Kleist famously said: “[t]he idea comes in speaking,” giving voice to a familiar thought expressed by E.M. Foster with acerbic wit as “[h]ow do I know what I think until I see what I say?” (Forster 99). The idea that words simply spring from writers’ mouths, or perhaps hands, seems counter-intuitive, scandalous even. Surely there is thought involved, care and deliberation? Are writers not supposed to be considered people carefully weighing their arguments and choosing their words?

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5 See also in the same essay, “I believe that, at the moment when he opened his mouth, many a great orator did not know what he was going to say.” (43)

6 This was certainly not Forster’s own approach, but is noted here as a sarcastic retort to André Gide’s avowed method.
Most writing courses do indeed emphasise how much preparation and planning is needed before any attempt is made to embark on the perilous journey of actually sitting down and writing. Woolfe’s own journey, depicted in the book under consideration, begins almost apologetically as she confesses that this careful and methodical approach is most certainly not the way she writes; nor, upon enquiry, was it the way most of her writing friends and colleagues wrote, also to their shame (Grenville & Woolfe xi). But what if writing itself is, as Marcelle Freiman suggests, a form of thinking (Freiman 2015). This certainly resonates with me as a creative writer, having had the experience of completing the research, reading the books, underlining the passages, and taking transcripts of the interviews, and well and truly preparing the path, only to finally sit down to begin the writing and having absolutely no idea what to do, because none of my maps, notes, plans or transcripts was in any way helpful to the task at hand. Namely, filling the empty page in front of me with something resembling breathing, sweating life made from words that come from some other and, apparently, much more mysterious and inaccessible place. But where exactly?

“Che vuio? What do you want?”7 (Lacan, Écrits 691) is that mysterious question Lacan places at the very foundation of individual psychology as the infant contemplates the enigma of its mother’s desire. “What do you want.” of me, Lacan contends the child wonders as the mother flits inexplicably in and out of view. And this is the same question that now rises before the stranded and bewildered writer staring at the blank page, as attested by Ernest Hemingway who, when asked what was the most frightening thing he ever encountered, replied, “A blank sheet of paper” (Schmidt 42). What do you want? With the you in question being both the writer and the blank page itself. What does the infinite whiteness want from the writer in order to be filled and what has brought the writer to this empty place, as bereft of meaning as Douglas Mawson’s appalling Antarctic nightmare (Mawson 186)? In facing the nothing of the empty page, the writer, like the explorer, is forced to face the truth of their own desire, the thing impelling them, and from this nothing they begin to discern...a world. In the words of William S. Burroughs, “In my writing I am acting as a map maker, an explorer of

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7 Lacan quoting from Cazotte’s novel, La Diable Amoureaux (1772) where the devil is summoned and asks the startled central character that same question.
psychic areas, a cosmonaut of inner space, and I see no point in exploring areas that have already been thoroughly surveyed” (Burroughs 35).

But who or what is speaking if not the conscious writer? “The pages are still blank, but there is a miraculous feeling of the words being there, written in invisible ink and clamoring to become visible,” Nabokov says (qtd in de Mancelos 257). D.H. Lawrence writes similarly, “Not I, not I, but the wind that blows through me” (Lawrence 195). It is as if there is something inside the writer, but which is not the writer, or at least the conscious writer or artist. Science fiction author Ray Bradbury expresses it this way, “[w]hat is The Subconscious to every other man, in its creative aspect becomes, for writers, The Muse” (qtd in Dively 47), which is to say something crucially separate from the writer, other in the most profound way, but inspiring their work. And even more intriguingly, it is this alien visitor that the writer wishes to free in order to tell the truth of their desire as if their ordinary, everyday social persona is inadequate to the task. Associate Professor in Writing at Swinburne University, Dominique Hecq, states that “all writers are ‘in transference’: texts are invested with unconscious desire before and in the process of writing, and writing bears the mark of this desire” (Hecq 184). Expressed in this way, it is clear how close the observation is to Freud’s approach to therapy, which is based on a fundamental mistrust of the conscious expressions of the Ego, and an attempt to stir into life and thought the processes of the unconscious in order to reveal the patient to him- or herself and, hence, cure them of the psychic torment plaguing them (Freud, *Five Lectures* 22). Do writers need to be cured? Is that what draws them to that particular activity? Are they attempting to re-write their script, as it were? Or is it that this is just psychobabble with no scientific credibility, and that people like Bradbury are just plain wrong about their process? But before I attempt to answer those questions, I should return to Woolfe and Martindale.

Using Martindale’s results from his word-association tests, as well as a few other clues, Woolfe embarked on a teaching procedure aimed at putting her writing students into a state she identified as the Lull which they reported subsequently to me as freeing up their writing and taking them in unexpected and original directions. She did this by proposing general topics or exercises, such as “Go for a walk and write about what you

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8 In my capacity as Head of Writing at the National Institute of Dramatic Art, at Sydney, Australia
see”, or using collections of found objects—a rock, a wooden spindle, a bottle cap—to provoke thoughts or memories, and to write these down, following the seemingly haphazard logic of mental whimsy. Such techniques have long been known to writers but their efficacy has not been previously explored. In Woolfe’s hands, the point was not to write about something at all, but rather to let the writing lead the writer onward (Woolfe 91), trying to cultivate that state of divergent thinking identified by creativity researcher, J. P. Guilford, as an aspect of the creative process (McCrae 1258). But how? What was going on?

Convergent thinking, divergent thinking—the scientific-sounding jargon of American experimental psychologists (Sternberg 449) from whose work Woolfe soon selected Loose Construing and Tight Construing for closer consideration as she pursued her goals. But what did it all mean? According to pioneering researcher George Kelly, what he termed the “Creativity Cycle” involved an oscillation between Loose Construing, characterised by him as “the cessation, deliberate or otherwise, of anticipating a result” (qtd in Woolfe 92), and the more logical, goal oriented Tight Construing, representing the opposite process, defined as “one which leads to unvarying predictions” (Kelly 391).

These similar and related terms suggest a dynamic of creativity, with insights arising in the Loose Construing of what Woolfe was now calling the Lull being more rigorously explored under the harsher critical light of Tight Construing, giving us a kind of Loose Construing-Tight Construing-Loose Construing iterative process. This resonates with my own writing practice, which I occasionally describe as “the snake eating its tail,” a procedure of writing and rewriting akin to spiraling in toward some final and ultimately more focused result which is hardly ever visible from the start. But what are these words really describing and are they really any better than Freudian terminology? Certainly they are suggestive of techniques and procedures, as well as of future research paths, as will be seen later, for example, where the role of different types of drugs on the creative process is clearly indicated as an area of interest—but questions such as “Where it is all coming from?” and “What significance does it have?” remain as mysterious as they ever were.9 And with them, perhaps more profound questions still, such as “Why do

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9 Though with some powerful suggestions coming from more recent neuroscience, which I will explore further below in Chapter 4.
human beings make art at all?" and “What can art tell people about how they can be happy?”—questions as fascinating as they are beyond the reach of experimental psychology to answer.

But Woolfe, like some of her guides, including the earlier noted Christopher Stevens, whose thesis, Crooked Paths to Insight: The Pragmatics of Loose and Tight Construing, was seminal to Woolfe’s own work, does not eschew Freud, who flits hauntingly through her book. Yet she also does not take full advantage of all that Freud and the Freudians have to offer as means for not only understanding the creative process, but also for tapping into it.

So far, this is the argument: Woolfe has identified a practice capable, it seems, of opening the world of the imaginary. The empty page is confronted, or perhaps contemplated, and gradually words begin to appear and flow on to it, not necessarily in any particular order or with much coherence, but flow or trickle nevertheless, as if by magic. The desire to bring order to the jumble is to be resisted as a killing urge that will bring this relief from wordless misery to a halt and plunge the hopeful writer once more into silence. The timid thing sending words onto the page, whatever this other is, resists judgment, and so the scraps are collected and the author begins the ascent that will eventually fill that first empty page, and then the second and then the next, till all the empty pages are finished, this first part of the writing is completed, and the first draft is confronted. The next step, of course, is more methodical and familiar to those teachers of creative writing emphasising the planning approach. It engages all those things writers are supposed to be good at. The chaos is shaped and moulded according to the conventions storytellers are supposed to learn and know, and gradually, in that back and forth movement known to weavers as they make their cloth, form emerges, the end is reached, and that particular thread of meaning is exhausted.

Reverting to the Freudian language I’ve been using to frame things so far, is the writer then cured of that particular urge impelling them to write? Based on my own experience, for the moment, yes. Writing those magic words, “The End,” can be a cathartic and emotional moment filled with relief and regret associated with a very real physical

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10 And we now know that we are not the only species that makes what we recognise as art, after the discovery of markings on a shell dated from 500,000 years ago, and believed to have been made by Homo Erectus. Callaway, E. “Homo erectus made world's oldest doodle 500,000 years ago” Nature, 3 December 2014, Ps 228-231
sense of unburdening. But this does not in general last, even when the writing is torn away to suffer its ultimate humiliation and be actually published or produced, revealing to the whole world how thoroughly inadequate it is in revealing what the writer really wants to say.\textsuperscript{11} For in truth what artists are undertaking is a fool’s errand, and no language, verbal or non-verbal, is adequate to the incessant demands issuing from the void that first drew them to itself.

\textit{What do you want?}

The writer is an explorer discovering him or herself, uncovering their desire, and finding relief from the insistent urge driving them, an urge expressed by poet Diana M. Raab as “The need to write” (Raab, \textit{Huffington Post}). Writers and other artists choose subjects without necessarily being able to explain why, or, if they can, often ending far from their original departure point, believing that in following their muse—pursuing their desire—and holding true to their compulsion,\textsuperscript{12} the reasons will slowly be revealed to them. “My experience,” says the artist Catherine Murphy, “has been that I keep discovering my obsessions little by little. Something keeps cropping up in my work again and again, and suddenly I’ll realise what it’s about”\textsuperscript{13} (\textit{Bomb Magazine} 53).

This type of writing—fragmentary, disconnected—issuing forth from the Lull and loose construing, is not without precedent or pedigree. It is sometimes called “discovery writing” (Donovan 2), by which is meant unplanned, or rather, unplotted writing that reveals itself in the course of the writing—as opposed to the type of writing referred to earlier, which is typically presented in writers’ manuals, where the journey is so thoroughly mapped out that it becomes a virtual \textit{join-the-dots} exercise by the time you get to the actual writing part. Famous discovery writers are Stephen King and \textit{Game of Thrones} author George R.R. Martin. King describes his process as akin to uncovering—or discovering—a fossil, and continues:

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{11} See, for example. Booker Prize Winner Anne Enright writing in the Guardian on June 22, 2013, “Even when I am pointed the right way and productive and finally published, I am not satisfied by the results. This is not an affectation, failure is what writers do” (Enright, A., “Falling Short”, \textit{Guardian}, 2013).
\textsuperscript{12} Which even, in its pathological form, has its own name, hypergraphia
\end{flushleft}
You can liberate a fossil from the hard ground with a jackhammer...but the jackhammer is going to break almost as much stuff as it liberates. It’s clumsy, mechanical, anti-creative. Plot is, I think, the good writer’s last resort and the dullard’s first choice. The story which results from it is apt to feel artificial and laboured. (S. King 6)

But while lacking most of the qualities attractive to King—like for example an organic feeling of completion and wholeness, which makes us keep coming back to what are called the classics—such techniques do have the advantage of being manageable to people whose job it is to manage. They are loved by commercial interests and producers such as those in the Hollywood studio system, for example, whose mass-produced films and production line processes from conception to completion and distribution (Staiger 12-27) was so effectively analysed by Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno in their 1944 treatise The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception (94–137).

And so, the myth continues that successful writing is a methodical, thoroughly thought-out and consciously controlled process following tried and true methods that can be learnt in writer’s school. And there are certainly many examples of this type of writing as the careers of Tom Clancy, John Grisham and Stephenie Meyer attest, none of whom has ever been overly praised for their subtle characterisation or thoughtful content. Nor is this a recent phenomenon as the life story of Eugène Scribe, the early nineteenth century French dramatist and theorist of what he termed “la pièce bien faite,” now known as “the well-made play,” shows (Arvin viii). The author of between three and four hundred plays, many of them produced in his famous “factory” with paid employees adding plot, jokes, dialogue, etc., much like a modern Hollywood studio, 14 Scribe is the shining example of writing according to plan but without inspiration. Enormously successful and internationally renowned in his time, Scribe’s fame died the day he did, and his name is virtually unknown today except to teachers of theatre history and writers hoping to emulate his success undaunted by the fact that of those four hundred odd hit plays, barely one survives in the repertoire. And nor, perhaps, would Scribe have been surprised, having seen his writing as basically a business proposition. People go to the theatre, he wrote, “not for instruction or improvement, but for diversion and distraction,

14 Disney Studios’ 1995 film, Pocohantas, credits 28 writers, according to the Internet Movie Data Bank, IMDB
and that which diverts them most is not truth but fiction” (Scribe 6; also qtd in Carlson 216).

Scribe valued commercial theatre and, aside from financial concerns, did not need to write his plays, it was not a compulsion, as with some of the writers already quoted, it was his business. The thought that his plays might have arisen from some deep part of his psyche, accessible only through some mystical sounding process called the Lull, would probably have struck him as utterly dangerous nonsense. But Scribe did not represent all writers, and his methods were roundly ridiculed, most famously perhaps by Oscar Wilde in *The Importance of Being Earnest*, ironically a play displaying all the virtues of the well-made-play formula it so wickedly satirised; and for those writers, there was something mysterious and hidden about their art.

*Che vuio?* What do you want?

Speaking personally, as I enter what I now recognise as the Lull, I begin to sense the objects of my desire rising unbidden around me. Wistful and mysterious, the words begin to take shape, gradually coalescing into a world, the figures of that world animated by the same thing that animates me, the same passions—disguised or displaced—illicit fears and vain weaknesses. What am I doing as I entertain the fantasy? What brings a character to life or gives vitality to a storyline if not my own febrile needs? An actor’s performance can be wooden or spontaneous. And spontaneity, even in a highly planned and scripted piece, is the quality the audience is looking for, the thing that gives it the sense of truth and realism. As a recent text book puts it, “Stanislavski says that...the most important thing is to create the impulse to action. All actions should not be planned and contrived because that creates mechanical, clichéd acting” (Gillett 102). What is true of a performance is equally true of the writing: as soon as the audience senses the author’s hand behind the words, choosing, manipulating, avoiding and concealing, the illusion is shattered and the work loses its charm and becomes instead contrived and artificial—mechanical. And it clearly is an illusion, the product of innumerable decisions and

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15 But certainly not exclusively: George Bernard Shaw, for example, in his preface to *Three Plays by Brieux*, wrote scathingly, “Commercially, the classic play was supplanted by a nuisance which was not a failure: to wit, the ‘well made play’ of Scribe and his school. The manufacture of well made plays is not an art: it is an industry. It is not at all hard for a literary mechanic to acquire it: the only difficulty is to find a literary mechanic who is not by nature too much of an artist for the job; for nothing spoils a well made play more infallibly than the least alloy of high art or the least qualm of conscience on the part of the writer. ‘Art for art’s sake’ is the formula of the well made play, meaning in practice ‘Success for money’s sake’” (Shaw & Pollock, xx-xxiii).
repetitive rehearsals. So how is this planned illusion of spontaneity maintained? In the actor’s case, in the Stanislavskian system, by shifting his or her attention away from the effect being sought—the emotional state—and directing it to a physical action capable of eliciting it (Stanislavski 41). Similarly, in the writer’s case, by disconnecting their urge to wilfully control and not looking to produce an effect on the audience, but rather by placing the writer him- or herself within the story and experiencing it as the audience does, with all the sense of surprise, wonder, suspense and thrill they hope the audience will experience. “Writing became such a process of discovery that I couldn’t wait to get to work in the morning: I wanted to know what I was going to say,” American author Sharon O’Brien writes (qtd in Martin 33). The writer is, indeed, often the first audience of their story. But how can the writer be surprised by what they write? Through what trickery do they deceive themselves into thinking they are listening to a tale they are actually creating? When it is coming from the other. By willingly suspending their critical faculties, and not wringing the life out of what they are contemplating rising within them and forcing it in any particular direction. “Write drunk; edit sober,” Peter de Vries wrote in his novel about Dylan Thomas (de Vries 240), continuing, “you have to have both elements in creation—the Apollonian and the Dionysian, or spontaneity and restraint, emotion and discipline.” Hemingway agrees that it is counter-productive to be critical too early because “[t]he first draft of anything is shit” (qtd in Lazarus 89). By opening themselves to the impulses freed by what Woolfe calls the Lull, the writer releases conscious control of the wheel normally guiding their action\(^{16}\) and surrenders to something else, trusting they will not crash.

But does it matter if they do? A novel or play is not a passenger plane. If it crashes, the consequences are not nearly as dire. Art, and this type of art, writing, has the quality of a daydream, fanciful and careless, irresponsible even. And like a daydream, it can indulge the endless play of what-ifs rising from—what else is there to call it?—the Unconscious, this other inside us whose presence we sometimes sense in embarrassing slips of the tongue. In the Lull, the writer consciously stills the anxious questing for determinate answers, and instead mulls things over, allowing him- or herself to rehearse possibilities, permutations and counter-histories to problems that are themselves in the

\(^{16}\) Though as we shall see in Chapter 3, this may be wholly illusory.
process of formation and formulation. Of course, life is full of problems and questions, from the mundane to the most abject and profound. So, which are the ones being mulled? Philosopher David Hume presents the most succinct answer when he says “[r]eason is the slave of the passions” (Hume 266). If this is so, then reason, whatever form it takes, is an attempt to solve pressing passionate concerns arising from somewhere outside of reason itself, but being expressed in reason through words. “The Greeks have but one word, logos, for both speech and reason,” Hobbes says in his philosophical tract, *Leviathan*, “not that they thought there was no speech without reason, but no reasoning without speech” (Hobbes 29). Speech and reason, passion and words, the very stuff of writing; for the truth is writers love words (Brown 32), and anything that can get them flowing. “I love the word clot,” author Emma Healey said in a recent Guardian interview (“From Plitter”), “meaning a solid mass, or lump, especially a lump formed by coagulation. Apart from anything else, it is a really satisfying word to say and is almost onomatopoeic.” It is not just, or even, the meaning of words, but their mere presence in the mouth. The joy of writers as diverse as Joyce and Shakespeare in mere babble is obvious in the sheer audacity of their language:

Stephen closed his eyes to hear his boots crush crackling wrack and shells. You are walking through it howsoever. I am, a stride at a time. A very short space of time through very short times of space. Five, six: the nacheinander. Exactly: and that is the ineluctable modality of the audible. (Joyce, *Ulysses* 15)

You can sense Joyce almost licking his lips at every crackling syllable; and one cannot mistake his hedonistic esprit joyfully bubbling forth: “How, how, how, how, chopped logic?” Shakespeare has Capulet sputter in *Romeo and Juliet*, “[w]hat is this? ‘Proud’—and ‘I thank you’—and ‘I thank you not’—And yet ‘not proud’? Mistress minion you, Thank me no thankings, nor proud me no prouds” (*Romeo and Juliet*, 3.5: 149-52). His thundering at his wayward daughter reveals a thrill of language overspilling itself in wild, voluptuous abandon. Indeed, it almost eclipses meaning. Here, playing with language itself is the goal. Instead of being the transparent deliverer of a clear and paramount message, it becomes an object of joy to be pulled, distorted, juggled with all the deftness of an expert juggler entertaining an enchanted audience.
Shakespeare makes verbs out of nouns: “Destruction straight shall *dog* them at the heels” (*Richard II*, A5, S3). He glories in verbal play, in ribald puns, interminable double entendres, in all the poetic techniques at his disposal, because he loves language, and especially *spoken* language, and the power it gives.\(^{17}\) To conjure worlds. The ability to *name* things is a gift from God himself: “And out of the ground the LORD God formed every beast of the field, and every fowl of the air; and brought *them* unto Adam to see what he would call them: and whatsoever Adam called every living creature, that *was* the name thereof” (Genesis 2:19), as the King James translators have it,\(^ {18}\) reminding also of those other words opening the Gospel according to St. John, “[i]n the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God” (John 1:1).

Which is all by way of suggesting that the Lull is tapping some profoundly important aspect of being, namely the deep pleasure humans take in words. A pleasure evidenced by the centrality of poetry to every culture’s project, great works of poetry being foundational gestures of every great culture, from Mesopotamia (*The Epic of Gilgamesh*) to Greece (*The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*) to China (*Shi Jing* and *Chu Ci*).

But words are not only a source of pleasure. They can also be a cause of great annoyance and irritation, not only to distraught babies unable to express what they want, but more generally, to all humankind. Who has not been frustrated and bewildered by their inability to say what they mean, finding themselves floundering in the inadequacies of language to express exactly what it is they are after? This aspect of the human condition is equally important in understanding the significance of the Lull, for there is something in its elusiveness, a poetically enigmatic suggestiveness that points to another aspect of this phenomenon. And a phenomenon it is, surely, for who is unaware of this “present absence,” this waiting, noted by Rilke, for example, in his essay “Concerning the Poet,” where he describes a sea journey he undertook while visiting the Greek island of Philae:

> I had the rowers facing me, sixteen of them. Mostly their eyes saw nothing, their open gaze going out into the air...But sometimes I would catch one of them deep in thought, meditating on the strange disguised phenomenon

\(^{17}\) As well as its sexuality. See Fineman for a discussion of the eroticism of Shakepeare’s language.

\(^{18}\) One of whom legend has it was Shakespeare himself.
facing him and on possible situations which might disclose its nature...When noticed, he immediately lost his strenuously thoughtful expression, for a moment all his thoughts were in confusion, then as quickly as he could, he reverted to the watchful gaze of an animal...until the beautiful serious expression became again the usual silly baksheesh face, with its foolish readiness to assume any required humiliating distortion of thanks. (qtd in J. Collins 16)

Is this not describing what Woolfe terms the Lull, and is this not in a sense one of the most common human experiences?

In Lacan’s view, Freud’s account of the Oedipal complex (by which the father separates the child, boy or girl, from the mother with the more or less explicit threat of physical castration) is, upon closer inspection, the process through which the child becomes subject to language. “Lacan starts from the position that all subjects are castrated by language”, writes Feldman (26), resulting in a permanent split in the child’s being between the speaking, socialised Ego and the non-speaking, inarticulate Subject of the Unconscious (Chiesa 39) railing at the restrictions placed on its freedom and frustrated by its inability to make itself understood and get what it wants (Gallagher, “Seminar V” n. pag.). Yet, it can never put this into words, because the words it might use are always someone else’s (Lensmire & Beals 411), the words of the Other that it must force itself into in order to be understood; or rather, misunderstood. Like Freud’s Unconscious, Lacan’s is the product of repression—principally and foundationally driven by the socially unacceptable desire for the mother (Braunstein 112). The Unconscious is repressed to the point where its very existence is consciously denied. Evidence of its existence is discerned in the slips, ellipses, unexpected pauses and distortions it produces in language (Eagleton 146). So, the Unconscious can almost be seen as an effect on language, something shaping and distorting it, signaling the presence of another message. When Ted Kennedy, for example, cupped his hands over his chest in heartfelt conviction to declare “[o]ur national interest ought to be to encourage the breast”, which he quickly corrected to “best—and the brightest” (qtd in Pincott), his reputation as a high-living playboy was humorously evoked for many in the audience. Kennedy’s unconscious slip of the tongue, as Freud might describe it, told his audience more about what he really thought the national interest ought to be than his scripted words so piously delivered. And it is in
such slips that the power of the Lull is revealed. For the Lull is the arena where such homonyms and word plays can disport themselves, and are encouraged to do so.

This is certainly joy to the playwright, and further proof of the great power of dialogue. For writers of dialogue, the last thing they want is for anyone to say what they really mean, which in most circumstances would bring the drama to a shuddering halt (“Look, Ophelia, what I’m really doing is pretending to be mad so I can trick Claudius into admitting he killed my father.”). There is nothing less dramatically interesting than a conversation simply telling us what is going on. This is the lowest form of storytelling, known pejoratively as “expositional”: Peter Rubie, for example, advises new writers to “avoid exposition of any kind, especially in dialogue” (Rubie 161). Creative writers of all hues are warned against expositional writing, sometimes referred to disparagingly as “information dump” (Bell 71). This is for many reasons, two of which are of importance here: first, expositional writing prevents the audience or reader from engaging their own imaginative faculties and thus prevents them from investing themselves in the fictive process, which is a crucial part of the theatrical, or indeed any viewer or reader’s experience (Bennett 5). Secondly, it is just not realistic. Writers want their dialogue to have the same qualities as dialogue in life, and the communication of states of affairs is one of the least interesting. Typically, when people engage in dialogue, their intentions cover a whole range of motivations, from the desire to seduce and persuade to the hope to intimidate and threaten, or perhaps amuse and deceive (Maybin 21), and many more. In short, to inform is one of the least interesting functions of speech—for as Oscar Wilde said when told by a journalist that he never spoke about anything for which he did not know the facts, “That must limit your conversation frightfully” (Wilde & Keyes 32).

In the normal course of a conversation, reactions can range from attraction to fear to fascination to revulsion and on and back through the whole repertoire of complex emotional responses people have to one another. If it were not so, then uncovering the truth would not be such an important part of human existence. People want to know the

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19 A typical example: “Nothing will slow down a plot faster than information dump. This is where the author merely tells the reader something he thinks the reader needs to know before moving on with the plot” (Bell 71).

20 Unless they happen to be critically important to the listener – hence the role of the unexpected letter or surprise discovery in Scribe’s theory of the well-made play often delivering the news that changes everything.
truth, because they are well aware that they are surrounded by lies, and are convinced of that, because they know themselves to be liars desperately trying to make a good impression (Reyes, “Why People Lie”). Everyone lies, to each other and to themselves. People lie about their motivations, their intentions and their desires. They lie about their beliefs and hopes. And they lie because they must lie, because they live in a social world, where advantage and camouflage are essential to survival and progress and deception is unavoidable. “Art is a lie,” Picasso tells us, “that makes us realise the truth” (qtd in Barr 10). It is acknowledged to be a carefully constructed deceit presenting the truth, in a harmless setting, which is surely one of the sources of humour evident, for example, in farce. In other words, dialogue and fiction in general, unlike technical and scientific prose, are shot through with the same unconscious clues and impulses as ordinary life. This makes them uniquely close to processes such as the Lull, which is a psychological state almost like a stage, a mental space, where words and fancies can come to life, allowing the writer to muse upon them in all their endlessly fascinating intricacy. It is this deep connection between the writer’s unique individuality and their social character that shows the Lull as a bridge between the inner mental life and the outer public product of the work of art. This makes the Lull not only a method of unblocking the writer’s creative capacities, but, more profoundly, a key to the same result in a wider social setting. It creates the kind of hypnogogic state theatre audiences have frequently been noted as entering (e.g. Rzepka 115 or Schechner 194), suggesting that in order to produce and receive art, the artist and the audience must enter a somewhat similar trance-like and suggestible state where a kind of public dreaming can take place. If this is true, then it provides the frequently asserted link between contemporary storytelling and earlier forms of spiritual and artistic expression, such as corroborees and religious rituals. Here, trances of this sort have also been noted to allow access to a higher world, not only as an effect but, more importantly, as a goal (e.g. Cahir 106).

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21 Dr Kang Lee has published many articles on this subject and calculates that by the age of four, 90% of children are capable of lying (Evans and Lee 1958-1963); while University of Massachusetts psychologist Robert S. Feldman calculates that 60% of people lied at least once in a ten minute conversation (Feldman, Forrest & Happ 163-170).

22 A good example being the 1970s comedy Fawlty Towers with its foundation on embarrassment and humiliation.

23 Including, of course, the original Dionysian festival from which theatre arose in the first place.

24 See Rouget for a fuller account of ritual and trance.
But rather than follow this lead here, let me return to where I started by attempting to define what the Lull is, and to summarise the results so far. In exploring the work of contemporary psychologists and researchers imbued with the empirical methodology preferred by such people as Martindale, Baer and Damasio (who emphasised the crucial role of emotions and decision making), Woolfe developed a method of producing a state of attentive inattentiveness, called by George Kelly *loose construing* (Fransella 37). She began working with students to see if the promotion of such thought processes could indeed improve writers’ creativity. Her reasons were initially personal, arising from a need to understand her own process as a novelist, and to find a way out of a creative block she herself was experiencing at the time (Woolfe 1). Having firmly rejected Freud on both philosophical and feminist grounds, as well as having a direct and personal experience of the great complexity and power of creative thought, Woolfe leapt at this rapidly expanding field, hoping that neuroscience would give her the rigorous answers she was looking for (Woolfe 87).

And certainly the scientists to whom she began to appeal did bring rigour, though perhaps one should not forget that Freud himself began his life’s work as a neurologist studying the nervous system of lampreys (Triarhou 1-13), and never felt ill at ease in the presence of science. Indeed, it was his ambition to make a science of the mind, and so it was as such that he regarded psychoanalysis. Yet his scientific credentials have been rejected, most devastatingly by philosopher Karl Popper in *The Open Society and its Enemies* (1945). And even though his tendentious arguments and poor scholarship were witheringly exposed by Walter Kaufman a few years later (Kaufmann 88-119), this did not prevent his opinions becoming the doxa amongst undergraduates and researchers alike—at least in their public statements—ever since (Singer). The damage was done and the

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25 e.g. “The poets and philosophers before me discovered the unconscious; what I discovered was the scientific method by which the unconscious can be studied.” (qtd in Trilling 34)

26 Also see Grant & Harari, 446–52. Popper is now a much diminished figure, as noted by Martin Gardner, the regular contributor to *Scientific American* in his well-known 2001 article, “A Skeptical Look at Karl Popper” reprinted in his book *Are Universes Thicker than Blackberries* (New York: Norton, 2003): “Sir Karl Popper, who died in 1994, was widely regarded as England’s greatest philosopher of science since Bertrand Russell. Indeed a philosopher of worldwide eminence. Today his followers among philosophers of science are a diminishing minority, convinced that Popper’s vast reputation is enormously inflated. I agree” (12).
impression remains, especially in the English-speaking world, that Freud, if not a fraud, has certainly been superseded.27

But the rigour sought by empirical science has come at a cost: it has further obscured what is in fact a very common human experience readily available to anyone with the time to daydream,28 but which has been completely misunderstood and consequently ignored except insofar as it has become able to be isolated in a laboratory. In this context, it is worth recalling the words of Rilke above, in which he describes his experience of sitting in an open boat being rowed from the Greek island of Philae. Is this not the Lull described by Woolfe? Is this state of bored staring not also a staring inwards, in which the ever-present sense of self referred to by Freud as the Ego is suspended, in some quite liberating way initiating a loss of self-awareness?29 Freud saw the Ego as an intermediary, managing the various demands of those other parts of our psychic apparatus and the world at large (Freud, The Ego and the Id 89). Lacan pushed this public-relations aspect of consciousness further. In the words of Derek Hook in his study “Lacan’s Mirror Stage,” “[i]n this regard, Lacan’s notion of the ego has powerful resonances with that of the early Freud. Both observe the ego’s capacity to mislead and trick its owner” (Hook, Watts, Crockcroft, Duncan 274). As such, it is a rationaliser, if not outright liar and prevaricator (Hill 18), capable of denying a traumatic truth staring it in the face. The Ego is not to be trusted, and is not a natural ally in the Freudian or Lacanian therapeutic session, and Freud’s approach is definitely not that of the Ego therapy that eventually took root in the United States (Schwartz 10). Rather, Freud and Lacan’s approach to therapy is that of a watchful hunter, looking for the chinks in the Ego armour in order to lure out this strange Other to the patient’s Self somehow beyond their conscious thoughts, but pulsing through, shaping and distorting their language in the normal course of conversation. And in this, Freud and his successors used certain tools, “free association” being one of them. In Freud’s words, “[w]e instruct the patient to put himself into a state of quiet, unreflecting self-observation, and to report to us whatever

27 A recent example of this genre is Torrey Fuller’s Freudian Fraud: The Malignant Effect of Freud's Theory on American Thought and Culture, Ulan Press, 2012.

28 It is very tempting to ascribe the noted drop in creativity over the past few decades cited above to the rise of the internet and the “forever connected” subject who has no time to daydream at all anymore.

29 Until the cruel return to reality is provoked by another’s gaze, and “the beautiful serious expression became again the usual silly baksheesh face, with its foolish readiness to assume any required humiliating distortion of thanks” (qtd in Collins “Introducing Heidegger” 16).
internal observations he is able to make” (Freud, *Introductory Lectures* 328). With all this expressed inevitably through words\(^{30}\) linked in certain, sometimes surprising, ways. Free association. Following the chain of signifiers as one word suggests another like a magnificent thesaurus, at once very public and very private, leading, for example, from *table* to…*home* to…*mother*. Perhaps. As Dr Julie Walsh of the University of Warwick says, “Freud’s talking cure sought to unravel the knots of repressed (and often maddening) desire at the level of language” (Walsh 11). This same technique was then taken up by surrealist writers. André Breton even defined it as “psychic automatism in its pure state” (Breton 26). Other writers adopted a stream-of-consciousness approach culminating in Joyce’s magisterial *Ulysses*, and Virginia Woolf’s novel *Mrs. Dalloway*. Free Association, babble, and in the case of Joyce, babble leading to what Lacan called “lalangue” (Lacan, *Joyce the Symptom* n. pag.), where vivid, overflowing joy explodes ecstatically into language at its most elemental level, almost a pre-language of pure joy, a sound rising from within, like the primal ranting of the Delphic oracle, deliberately freed from the constricting demands of reason, rationality and meaning, but in its enigmatic pronouncements revealing a new meaning and a new continent of experience, which is exactly what a practicing author like Woolfe was seeking in order to set her own writing free.

This desire places her right at edge of that gulf, first noted by Bertrand Russell, between “the two schools of philosophy, which may be broadly distinguished as the Continental and the British respectively” (Russell 642), a gulf moreover which has become perniciously reflected in the debate about the nature of creativity and the creative act. This has come to confuse and confound these crucially important topics, rooted as the two sides are in their mutually exclusive reaction to empiricism, which Russell identifies as the first area of difference (Russell 642). On the one side, the determinedly anti-philosophical empiricists have dismissed Freud and retreated to the

\(^{30}\) The centrality of language, and spoken language, to Freud’s practice and theory was first noted by Lacan, who then used this observation as a springboard for his own development of Freudian theory. See, crucially, “The Function and Field of Speech and Language in Psychoanalysis” of 1953 translated and reprinted in *Écrits: The First Complete Edition in English* (Lacan, New York: Norton, 2006)
seemingly calmer waters of experimental science and drug-therapy. On the other side, creativity remains part of the philosophical problem of subjectivity, the question of how a sense of consciousness and self-consciousness arises in a speaking being. While the neuroscientists have made some important strides in uncovering the neural pathways of creativity, their answers to me seem flat, reductive and unconvincing when compared to the actual experience of being a creative writer.

The question of the efficacy of the Lull, therefore, is not just about a technique that writers might be taught in order to improve their creativity (and whether or not it does so will be explored in the next chapter). More importantly, it represents an opportunity to re-examine this historic schism in our intellectual culture and, I believe, to find the common ground upon which a new theory of creativity can be built, using the insights of post-Freudian psychoanalysis and German philosophical idealism to give meaning to the experimental results of neuroscience.

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31 In the process, turning the United States into the most drug dependent society in history, with the Center for Disease Control and Prevention, for example, reporting that doctors wrote more than 259 million prescriptions for antidepressants in 2012 alone to 70 million Americans, more than twenty percent of the population. (CDCP “Opioid Painkiller Prescribing”, 2014)

32 See Chapter 3 for a discussion of creativity and neuroscience / brain chemistry.
Chapter 2:
The Lull - Does It Work?

It was the work of Colin Martindale that inaugurated a new era in creativity studies in the United States when he reformulated the results of Sarnoff Mednick’s 1962 Remote Association Test (RAT) for creativity (Mednick 220-32), which looked at the correlation of what he called the experimental subjects’ “associative response gradients” with their creativity as determined independently by other tests and self-reportage. Mednick was an “associationist,” meaning that he thought that, in some general sense, words and ideas arise through a process of “association” with one another. This is akin to what Lacan had termed in 1957 the “signifying chain of meaning” (Lacan, Écrits 502) linking—in a very personal way—word associations producing neurotic symptoms that psychoanalysis seeks to disentangle (Rogers 99) and cure. Mednick meanwhile found that the associations he was studying could be correlated with creativity, showing that the more creative a subject was, the more distant resonances that subject would associate with any particular word (Mednick 226). But Mednick did not propose anything more than a general mechanism explaining this process, leaving the opportunity to Martindale, who with his own experiments on what he termed “creative” and “non-creative” subjects boldly suggested a theory which, when developed further with Hans Eysenck, eventually became known as the “cognitive disinhibition theory” (Martindale, “Disinhibition” 177-82). While in no way Freudian, because it is principally a biological hypothesis concerning cortical activity and the level of disinhibition observable in creative people (Martindale, “Biological Bases” 142), there is enough resonance with Freudian accounts of repression to make it both suspect to some (Martindale & Dailey 409-14) and intriguingly suggestive to others (e.g. Boag). Certainly, the longer Martindale thought about the matter,

33 Creativity studies are as rife with schisms and animosities as most other disciplines, with “associationists” vying with behaviorists and humanists, amongst others, for attention and grant monies. All perfectly understandable, of course, but not quite the dignified progress of science envisioned by Popper, who used similar disagreements amongst Freudians as evidence of their unscientificity. Interestingly, Popper himself was well aware of all this, having become a vocal partisan arguing against the Copenhagen Interpretation of Quantum Mechanics, because it offended his philosophical leanings (see his “Quantum Mechanics Without ‘the Observer’”, 1967).

34 Martindale goes on to indicate that this is not a question of will, but of physical disposition.
the more Freudian, or proto-Freudian, he became (Martindale, “18th Century Anticipation” 362). Although he never ventured further than stating that:

[a]ll of the theories of creativity reviewed say essentially the same thing—that creative inspiration occurs in a mental state where attention is defocused, thought is associative, and a large number of mental associations are simultaneously activated. Such a state can arise in three ways: low levels of cortical activation, comparatively more right- than left-hemisphere activation, and low levels of frontal lobe activation. Creative people do not exhibit all of these traits in general, but only when engaged in creative activity. (Martindale, “Biological Bases” 148–49)

While the note about “low levels of frontal lobe activation” is interesting and the point about left and right hemispheres is perhaps overstated, these early forays into the nature of creativity by experimental psychologists did not contribute to determining ways of enhancing it—a point of particular interest to artists, and gradually economists as well following the announcement of the “knowledge economy.” In fact, it seems inescapable that Martindale was as pessimistic about being able to teach or enhance creativity as was the behaviourist B.F. Skinner, who saw it only as another example of the power of positive reinforcement, approvingly quoting Samuel Butler, “A poet writes a poem as a hen lays an egg, and both of them feel better afterwards” (Skinner 345).

In the face of this, it is difficult to avoid the impression that an impasse of some sort had been reached, and that something profound was missing from the equation. In their attempts to define and measure creativity, the scientists seemed to be caught in a bind—perhaps, like someone ramping up the magnification and peering through a microscope, hoping to see the soul. If this feels oddly familiar, it is because our culture has been here before, circulating around the same problem since Descartes, who, at the beginning of the Scientific Revolution, in his 1633 Treatise of Man, revived what became known as the “Mind-Body problem.” Repeated in somewhat starker terms in January 1640, this crystallised into his famous assessment of a formation in the brain, known as the pineal gland. “My view is that this gland,” he wrote, “is the principal seat of the

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35 See Chapter 3
36 e.g. Nielsen, and also Kalbfleisch.
37 e.g. Seltzer & Bentley
38 Descartes, Galileo and Francis Bacon were contemporaries.
soul” (Descartes, *Correspondence* 143). In Descartes’ considered view, a human being was a machine (Descartes, *The World and Other Writings* 99) with which the soul communed through the said gland.\(^{39}\) For, some such solution had to be proposed, because the soul had to be connected to the body somehow, or else body and soul fell apart (Remnant 377). This was indeed their subsequent fate as science abandoned the absurdity that the pea-sized pineal gland had a supernatural function, and relegated talk of the soul to religion in order to be able to concentrate on what could be measured and studied according to the new scientific principles formulated by philosophers such as Francis Bacon\(^{40}\) and Descartes himself.

Descartes was nothing if not a man of his convictions, and his contention that all God’s creatures were nothing but marvellous machines encouraged him in the belief that animals do not in fact feel pain, leading him to conduct his own experiments, such as the vivisection of a rabbit, writing in a letter of February 1638, “I opened the chest of a live rabbit and removed the ribs to expose the heart” (Cottingham et al 79ff). The idea that human beings were just machines in a mechanical, unfeeling universe of relentless cause and effect was thus set loose.\(^{41}\) And with it the urgent search for the source of those things which had, up to that point, been regarded as centrally human characteristics: free will, self-consciousness, a moral conscience and empathy.\(^{42}\) To which we might now add, creativity. What, in other words, is the biological seat of our apparently unique consciousness?

The psychologists hunting down associative hierarchies in their RAT experiments hoped to avoid metaphysical talk of that sort altogether.\(^{43}\) But the possibility of doing this regarding such a central humanist concept as creativity is as remote as attempting to

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\(^{39}\) A small endocrine gland in the centre of the brain that produces melatonin and is now known to regulate sleep patterns.

\(^{40}\) Ironically related to the great 20\(^{th}\) century figurative painter, also known as Francis Bacon, whose work is renowned for its exploration of the Unconscious, both in its content and practice (see, for example, Zeki & Ishizu 850).

\(^{41}\) As was, inevitably, the reaction against it, with David Hume countering Descartes’ rational certainty with his own empirical skepticism (see, for example, Loeb).

\(^{42}\) With this being the subsequent history of Western philosophy, as is clear from any account of philosophy over the last four centuries, such as Bertrand Russell’s *History of Western Philosophy*.

\(^{43}\) Metaphysical talk, which, strangely, Popper was quite willing to entertain. “Among the metaphysical doctrines that he defended were free will, indeterminism, scientific realism and his theory of an ontological realm of abstract and autonomous thought that he dubbed ‘World 3’” (Gorton 28).
solve the problem of human freedom by studying the calcium potential in muscles. Even if such a research project might explain how people are able to run away, answering how a muscle extends and contracts is not the same thing as understanding why it does so. Such things are of a different order. “The rose is without ‘why’,” the seventeenth century mystic and poet Angelus Silesius wrote, “it blooms simply because it blooms. It pays no attention to itself, nor does it ask whether anyone sees it” (qtd in Franck 60). Such wisdom, however, was not to prevail as the power of the scientific method, and the Industrial Revolution it begat, began their conquest of the world. Soon all those things that apparently made human beings special began to appear as nothing more than misunderstood qualities of the special springs jerking into action the automata that human beings were (Descartes, Treatise 113). Seen from this angle, the title of Martindale’s popular account of the creative pursuits, The Clockwork Muse (though according to him, referring to the totally predictable rise and fall of artistic trends), seems not in the least ironic. It is a perfectly respectable extension of the scientific account of the clockwork universe to what most people would regard as the domain of the uniquely human. As physical creatures subject to the same laws as billiard balls and solar systems, humans in the age of steam trains needed to understand their place in the causal chain. And if that seemed to leave very little room for freedom, exactly the same could be said for creativity. It was a failure in the system, a malfunction, a weakness that impelled sometimes exactly the same people into prison as to the heights of artistic achievement.

To quote Martindale in full:

Creative people are characterized by a lack of both cognitive and behavioural inhibition. Eysenck (1995) links creativity with the personality dimension of psychoticism. Both theories are close to the degeneration theories of genius of Lombroso (1895) and Nordau (1895). The gist of

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44 First outlined by Sir Francis Bacon in his 1620 book, Novum Organum (trans.: New Method).
45 Martindale proposes that the quest for novelty is what drives art, and defining a function he terms the “Primordial Content” of a piece, he uses computational analysis to, for example, calculate the novelty of John Dryden’s poetry between 1659 and 1700 as PC = 2.73 - .37t + .01t² - .32PCt - 1 - .36PCt - 2. Inspired by this, Computer Scientists from the University of Sydney worked out an algorithm that could determine the amount of creativity in a work of art (see Saunders & Gero).
46 As amply exemplified by such artists and writers as Caravaggio, Cellini, Sir Thomas Malory, the Marquis De Sade, Paul Verlaine, William Burroughs etc. none of whom would be regarded by any stretch of the imagination as exemplary citizens or responsible human beings.
47 i.e. both Martindale’s and Eysenck’s
degeneration theories is that degeneration (a construct similar to psychoticism) predisposes one to criminality, psychoses of all types, and genius. (“Biological Bases” 143)

Such reductive thinking sometimes has advantages, exhibited perhaps most spectacularly in Einstein’s decision to cut the Gordian Knot of the great philosophical question “What is time?” Debated endlessly and, according to him fruitlessly, for millennia, he answers this question with the blunt reply “Time is what clocks measure” (Ivey & Hume 65). From there, he spins out the implications of this apparently simple statement into the Special Theory of Relativity that changed science’s entire understanding of the cosmos.48 Giving a similar answer to the question of creativity, i.e. “Creativity is what the Torrance Test measures” (for example, when it asks subjects to enumerate as many uses as they can for a brick) has been far from similarly productive (Kim, 2006).

While not yet finished with the scientific approach to creativity, I wish now to consider it from a slightly different point of view, that being expressed in the practical claims for Woolfe’s Lull, in order to see if this illuminates where it comes from and what it might indicate about human nature.

Can the Lull increase creativity? The need for silence and contemplation has been frequently noted as a prerequisite for artistic achievement (e.g. Caranfa). Withdrawal, retreat, silence; all are words associated with the word “lull,” which itself is related to the sound mothers make to ease their infants to sleep. What do such activities—or cessation from activity—achieve? “Great minds produce more when working less,” Leonardo Da Vinci said, “[f]or with their intellect they search for conceptions and form those perfect ideas which afterwards they merely express and portray with their hands” (Honour & Fleming 466). There is, indeed, confirmation that Leonardo spent a great deal of time contemplating and brooding before setting about the actual physical work of painting, as evidenced by the words of an eyewitness to his method: “Many a time I have seen Leonardo go to work early in the morning and climb onto the scaffolding because the Last Supper is somewhat above ground level; and he would work there from sunrise

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48 In a manner not entirely uncontroversial, as documented by Canales. In case one is tempted to think the controversy was settled almost a century ago, it remains actively alive today in the continuing dispute about causality between Relativity and Quantum Mechanics.
until the dusk of evening, never laying down the brush...Then there would be two, three or four days without his touching the work, yet each day he would spend one or two hours just looking, considering and examining it” (Matteo Bandello, qtd in Whiting 60). This account reminds us of the role of introspection and isolation in art, as James Baldwin reveals in his essay “The Creative Process,” “[p]erhaps the primary distinction of the artist is that he must actively cultivate that state which most men, necessarily, must avoid; the state of being alone” (Baldwin 17). This same idea was also expressed by the painter Claude Monet when he said “[m]y work is always better when I am alone and follow my own impressions” (qtd in Sullivan 51). These and many other similar quotes, such as Picasso’s “without great solitude, no serious work is possible” (qtd in Cain, “Groupthink”) or Matisse’s “creativity requires silence to flourish” (qtd in Siegel 228), suggest that the solitary artist is not entirely the creation of romantic mythmaking, and if this is so is this the manoeuvre that Woolfe achieves by engaging in the Lull? Furthermore, in the absence of any direct studies of the Lull, are there similar techniques that have been shown to have a positive effect on creativity?

“Mindfulness” is a currently popular term aimed at “the intentional, accepting and non-judgmental focus of one’s attention on the emotions, thoughts and sensations occurring in the present moment” (Zgierska 266). Using techniques based in Buddhist spiritual practices (including meditation), it rose to the attention of the wider clinical community with its successful application in what came to be known as “Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction” (MBSR), developed by Dr Jon Kabat-Zinn of the University of Massachusetts Medical School (Kabat-Zinn 336). Researchers noted in 2004 that “MBSR is now used widely to reduce psychological morbidity associated with chronic illnesses and to treat emotional and behavioral disorders” (Bishop et al. 231). Sharing some features with the Lull, in particular the active attempt to remove judgmental aspects of thought and embracing a more accepting view of one’s thoughts and emotions, it can perhaps give some way of testing Woolfe’s claims regarding the Lull’s influence on creativity.

Increasing numbers of experimental results support the contention that mindfulness increases creativity. In 2012, experimental studies involving eighty six subjects were the first to demonstrate that “a direct relation between mindfulness and creativity [exists]”
(Ostafin & Kassman 1031). In a review of empirical studies undertaken by Ravi S. Kudesia of Washington University in St. Louis, Kudesia notes, “Greenberg et al. (2012) found that those who underwent mindfulness training did not fixate on their initial solution representations and could flexibly adjust solutions in response to the demands of the situation. This led to greater rates of problem solving,” (Kudesia 200). He further states that “[i]n another line of research, a colleague and I have found significant and strong associations between the ability to ‘step back’ from discursive thought, described by mindfulness researchers as decentering or defusion, and cognitive flexibility” (Reb, Atkins 202). The mindfulness theory of creativity proposes that “rigid” and “habitual” modes of thought prevent people from seeing creative solutions to problems, and that Mindfulness is a way of de-rigidifying subjects. While this is not the standard view adopted in creativity studies, the results of the mindfulness experiments recounted here can be reformulated in more familiar terms. However formulated, though, these results do start narrowing the field of possible theoretical explanations. For example, it is hard to see Martindale’s biological hypothesis of creativity surviving the Mindfulness contention, which posits that creativity can be improved through conscious effort. Behaviourism, of course, still applies, because the experimenters could be thought to have introduced some unconscious positive reinforcement biases along the way. I will be returning to these important questions in Chapter 3 below.

For now, mindfulness experiments and studies do support elements of Woolfe’s Lull hypothesis, a hypothesis which, I hasten to add, does not yet attempt an explanation of the (perceived) results. In her interpretation, the Lull does employ meditation type techniques to defocus. Is meditation, then, a closer approximation of the Lull, and can we look at meditation for guidance?

Numerous studies have found that meditation does improve creativity. Yet, interestingly, not all forms of meditation. In 2012, Lorenza S. Colzato and her colleagues at Leiden University in the Netherlands tested two different forms of meditation. They termed these “open monitoring meditation” (OM), promoting divergent thinking, and

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49 Though in The Mystery of the Cleaning Lady, she does find neuroscientist Antonio Demasio’s 1994 claim that thought is coloured with emotional states compelling (43). I am also intrigued by this finding, as well as by Woolfe’s statement that “The outside world is represented ‘in terms of modifications it causes in the body proper’”(43), and develop this insight below.
“focused attention meditation” (FA), in which a specific solution to a specific and well-defined problem is searched for.\textsuperscript{50} They found that while FA did not show any effect on creativity, as measured by the “alternate uses task,”\textsuperscript{51} OM did. They concluded in the press-release announcing their results that “[t]hese findings demonstrate that not all forms of meditation have the same effect on creativity. After an Open Monitoring meditation [that form of meditation most akin to the Lull] the participants performed better in divergent thinking, and generated more new ideas than previously, but Focused Attention (FA) meditation produced a different result. FA meditation also had no significant effect on convergent thinking leading to resolving a problem” (Leiden University, “Meditation makes you more creative” n. pag.). The Leiden team is not unique in this field of research. Other researchers such as Xiaoqian Ding and his colleagues at the Dalian University of Technology in China found that even a short session of meditation by non-practitioners improved creativity (Ding, Tang, Tang, Posner 2014). This is certainly an interesting result, especially for writers looking to improve their process. It seems that divergent thinking promoted by Open Monitoring type meditation, which encourages not thinking about anything in particular, or rather attempts to still the inner voices and thoughts constantly vying for our attention, is demonstrably efficient in increasing creativity in scientifically rigorous experiments, and so supportive of Woolfe’s claims.

But the use of meditation to still the mind is itself very suggestive. What about drugs, for instance, and that most widespread drug of choice, alcohol? The list of writers who have succumbed to alcohol is a long one: Henry Lawson, Dylan Thomas, Scott Fitzgerald, James Joyce, Ernest Hemingway, Jack Kerouac, Brendan Behan, Malcolm Lowry, Edgar Allen Poe, to name but a few.\textsuperscript{52} Are writers particularly weak souls, as researchers such as Eysenck and Martindale seem to suggest (Eysenck 233); or is there something fatally attractive to writers about alcohol?\textsuperscript{53} At least until recently, the study of writers’ creativity and alcohol has been strangely neglected, even though alcohol’s destructive

\textsuperscript{50}Thus promoting the obverse, “Convergent Thinking.”
\textsuperscript{51}This is the famous “brick” test proposed by Guilford and his colleagues and used now as a standard test of creativity. For the original study, see Guilford, J.P., Christensen, P.R., Merrifield, P.R., & Wilson, R.C. (1978). \textit{Alternate Uses: Manual of instructions and interpretations}. Orange, CA: Sheridan Psychological Services.
\textsuperscript{52}Numerous references, e.g. Goodwin.
\textsuperscript{53}One should not forget that philosophers, also, are partial to alcohol, and that the Greek word symposia, of which, of course, Plato has perhaps left the most famous description (Plato 6), comes from the phrase συμπίνειν sympinein, “to drink together.”
effects are widely known, and its historical use in mystical settings and religious ceremonies spanning millennia and from ancient Africa to China points to a long appreciation of its psychoactive properties. The easy connection of alcohol, wit and repartee, where a modest amount of alcohol seems to free the tongue in a social situation, is well recognised in popular culture, as is the stimulating effect of drinking, Hemingway saying, for example, “When you work hard all day with your head and know you must work again the next day what else can change your ideas and make them run on a different plane like whisky?” (Hemingway 420). So, it is surprising that so few general studies have been attempted to map the effects of alcohol on the brain, apart from those investigating the devastating effects of rampant alcoholism. There is, however, a growing number of studies that confirm a positive correlation between alcohol consumption and creativity, a recent study concluding “[i]t has long been thought that intoxication unleashes the creative juices of individuals. Though only a first step, the current research represents the first empirical demonstration of alcohol’s effects on creative problem-solving” (Jarosz 487-93). This resonates with my own personal experience of alcohol, where at the end of a day of creative writing I would often sit alone for an hour with a couple of drinks not really thinking of anything, but in the course of which ideas and approaches for the following day’s work would arise and be noted down in a way that I discovered subsequently to be not dissimilar to the process of lulling described by Woolfe. For this to happen, however, it was necessary for no other distractions to be present. That particular effect of alcohol was absent in a social setting. Such a direct personal experience makes me wonder if the real reason alcohol can have such a devastating effect on artists in general is that the positive effect modest alcohol consumption is now documented to have on creativity opens the door to alcohol abuse for the unwary.

Needless to say, not all drugs produce this result. Interestingly, coffee, which promotes focused, convergent thinking, is one of them (Konnikova, “Caffeine”). But drugs such as hallucinogens are not only well known for their use in enhancing the experience of highly creative people (notably visual artists and musicians, including John Lennon)

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54 See, for example, Hucker; Burkert 70/73; Delia; or Bernal.
55 Perhaps another example of the painful effects of moralism on science. In fact, the role of ideology on scientific research is a much-neglected area of investigation.
but have had these effects confirmed for general users in numerous studies.\textsuperscript{56} These were conducted especially in the 1960s and 1970s, when hallucinogens—both natural, such as psilocybins, and artificially produced, such as LSD—first came to prominence in Western cultures. Users reported, for example, that “there was no fear, no worry, no sense of reputation” and “the normal blocks in the way of progress seemed absent” (Harman & Fadiman 246) when dealing with problems requiring creative solutions. Spectacularly psychoactive drugs of this sort, apart from their use by organisations such as the CIA (Marks 57), rapidly fell into disfavour, and their investigation for scientific research has been curtailed by their legal proscription. Recently, however, prominent scientists such as James Rucker of Kings College London have called for an easing of bans to facilitate further investigation (Rucker 2902).

Meditation, then, and certain types of drugs have now been shown to increase creativity. What else? What about boredom? Does boredom promote creativity?\textsuperscript{57} Surprisingly, there are now studies indicating it does (e.g. Harris or Baird et al.). Anthropologist Ralph Linton even argues “the human capacity for being bored, rather than social or natural needs, lies at the root of cultural advance” (qtd in Smith “Schadenfreude”). What about naturally occurring states of inattention (though perhaps few other things would seem quite as natural to human beings as being bored\textsuperscript{58})? What about drowsiness, for example, or sleep? Though little research has been done on such relaxed states in this regard, widespread anecdotal evidence certainly suggests that both promote, or at least can promote, creativity. The scientist August Kekule famously related the story of how the cyclic structure of benzene came to him while dozing in front of a fire, imagining seeing the atoms of benzene dancing before him, forming themselves into a snake eating its own tail (qtd in R.M. Roberts 76). Rousing from sleep, he immediately understood and noted down the structure, which upon more rigorous examination and

\textsuperscript{56} See, for example, Baron or Pletscher & Ladwig.

\textsuperscript{57} Freud saw a connection between creativity and daydreams, outlined in his Introductory Lectures, as “he (the creative writer) understands how to work over his daydreams in such a way as to make them lose what is too personal in them and repels strangers, and to make it possible for others to share in the enjoyment of them. He understands, too, how to tone them down so that they do not easily betray their origin from proscribed sources...he has thus achieved through his phantasy what originally he had achieved only in his phantasy—honour, power and the love of women” (Freud “Introductory Lectures” 376)

\textsuperscript{58} Interestingly, boredom is also related to evil, through everyday sayings like “An idle mind is the devil’s playground” or Kierkegaard’s assertion that “Boredom is a root of all Evil” (Kierkegaard 232). The relationship of Satan and evil to creativity has also been explored by Harold Bloom in his book Satan.
experimentation proved correct. This story, related by Kekule himself, was interestingly disputed more recently by Dr John H. Wotiz, himself a chemist, who was anxious to discount any possible psychoanalytic implications of this significant scientific discovery (Wotiz 222). But Kekule was not alone in appreciating the creative potential of relaxed states.\footnote{59}

A well-known legend has it that the aforementioned René Descartes, renowned both as mathematician and philosopher, and also for his lifelong refusal to rise before eleven in the morning (Clarke 82), came up with the idea for what became known as Cartesian Coordinates, a way of graphing familiar to most school-children, while lying in bed watching a fly crawl across the ceiling (Johnson & Moncrief, “Coordinate System”).

But it is not just relaxed states such as meditation, drowsiness or sleep that seem to aid creativity. Their exact opposite, insomnia, also appears to at least relate to the creative state (Healey & Runco 49).

How could this be? How could such a diverse and contradictory collection of causes and behaviours, from drug taking to napping or not being able to sleep,\footnote{60} stimulate what we recognise as creativity? Artists ranging from Marcel Proust to Samuel Taylor Coleridge used them to spark their work, and indeed create major works under their influence, Proust writing \textit{À la recherche du temps perdu} while suffering insomnia (Carter 61) and Coleridge dreaming “Kubla Khan” in an opium reverie (Hayter 218).

What insights does all this provide to an understanding of Woolfe’s Lull?

It would seem that the Lull is a generic term used by Woolfe for a state of intentionally sought inattentiveness obtained through various means, and probably including any or all of the above-mentioned states, and more, but all aimed at stopping directed focused thought of the sort one engages in when problem solving or planning. The Lull relaxes and expands attentional space, so that the thinker seeks to abandon the Hedgehog mentality—using Isaiah Berlin’s famous metaphor of the tightly focused creature that knows “one big thing” as opposed to the fox, who knows and connects many different things (Berlin 1953). Woolfe encourages her students to be foxes, sniffing here and there while roaming far and to no particular end,\footnote{61} all the while writing disconnected

\footnote{59} Nor is he the only scientist who credits dreams with this power. Einstein, Bohr and Nobel Prize winner Ottis Loewi, amongst others, all related crucial parts of their scientific inspiration to dreams.

\footnote{60} And even physical exercise! See, for example, Colzato.

\footnote{61} And in this resembling the French flaneur made famous by Balzac and Baudelaire, the careless
fragments, snippets, bits of overheard conversation that momentarily strike the fancy, memories aroused, and whatever else pops into their heads—in no particular order, and just as they tumble out, jotted down in a notebook they are encouraged to carry with them (Woolfe 93), for no other purpose than it all, perhaps, accumulating eventually into some work of art, novel, short story or poem; or else not. Allowing the thing itself to gradually take shape, almost by its own volition, and so ironically confirming the title of Roland Barthes’ famous essay “The Death of the Author.” Indeed, the author in the sense of an intelligent agent consciously crafting a work of fiction almost completely disappears in a chaotic welter of words; and strangely, this reflects the experience itself, which is frequently described in terms similar to Annie Dillard’s comment that “At its best, the sensation of writing is that of any unmerited grace. It is handed to you” (qtd in Atkinson 55).

In my own experience, the ecstasy of the effortless free flow of words, when the writing in going well, is unlike anything else. To disappear and become nothing more than a transparent conduit of language is what keeps many writers trudging through the endless swamp of confusion that precedes such incandescent moments. In the words of Hungarian psychologist, Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, such experiences entail

Being completely involved in an activity for its own sake. The ego falls away. Time flies. Every action, movement, and thought follows inevitably from the previous one, like playing jazz. Your whole being is involved, and you're using your skills to the utmost. (Wired 1996)

I have no doubt that this is what Matteo Bandello was witnessing when he saw Leonardo working “there from sunrise until the dusk of evening, never laying down the brush” in the quote above (qtd in Whiting 60). Such poetic descriptions are of course not much use to most hard-headed men and women of science, but scientists have given more than enough data to answer the question of whether or not the Lull works. If the Lull is a creative mental state accessible through various means (including particular forms of meditation, drugs such as alcohol, the state of relaxation as we go to sleep, of boredom, exhaustion, insomnia, or even exercise), then there is overwhelming evidence that

idler seeking nothing in particular but soaking up everything.
the Lull certainly *does* work. People entering the Lull are measurably *more creative*, according to the scientist’s definitions and measurements, as a direct consequence of this activity.
Chapter 3:  
The Lull - How Does It Work?

The findings outlined in the previous chapter indicate that the Lull, and practices like it, do work, but the question remains why? In order to answer it, I return to the scientists to see what they have to say, and perhaps more interestingly, what they try to avoid saying. In Chapter 2, I quoted Colin Martindale writing in 1999 that

All of the theories of creativity reviewed say essentially the same thing— that creative inspiration occurs in a mental state where attention is defocused, thought is associative, and a large number of mental associations are simultaneously activated. Such a state can arise in three ways: low levels of cortical activation, comparatively more right- than left-hemisphere activation, and low levels of frontal lobe activation. (Martindale, “Biological Bases” 148-149)

As noted there, this gave rise to what became known as the “cognitive disinhibition theory” (Martindale, “Disinhibition” 177-82). Yet it is the last part of the formulation, “low levels of frontal lobe activation,” that I find particularly suggestive, especially in the context of the previous chapter’s conclusions. The methods enumerated there as being of use in aiding creativity, from meditation through alcohol and drugs to insomnia, all have profound effects on the frontal lobe.62 What is interesting about this is that the frontal lobe has been described as being responsible for the “executive functions” (Elliott 49) of the brain, including planning, reasoning and problem-solving. Apart from their obvious importance to wider human performance, it is exactly these functions that are most commonly promoted as being central to successful creative writing. It was because of her guilty secret that she did not practice them, that Woolfe set out to investigate the matter in the first place (Woolfe 36), this leading to her development of the Lull as a creative tool.

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62 As shown, for example, in Holzel et al. or Riley et al. etc. The claim that the frontal lobe is affected by such techniques is incontestable.
What if derailing these executive functions is actually a key to successful creative thought? Martindale did not consider this option. In his view, creative people were biologically predisposed to weak inhibitory forces, and creativity must be thought of as merely a symptom of this physical defect. However, as demonstrated in the last chapter, it is clear now that creativity can be changed through consciously chosen mental effort. That is, humans can learn and implement techniques that make them more creative, and that is what the Lull utilises.

But it is what led Martindale to his wrong conclusion that I think is especially interesting. “In some earlier publications,” he writes in “Creativity, primordial cognition, and personality,” (Martindale, “Creativity” 410) “I used the terms secondary process—primary process, but this caused confusion, as readers thought that I was embracing Freudian theory rather than just using the terms in a descriptive manner.” It is clear from his careful wording that he wishes to distance himself from Freud. Indeed, this rejection of Freud is endemic not only to research psychology, but to all the empirical sciences enlisted in the attempt to account for creativity—including more recently neuroscience. To be taken seriously as a science, it is the inevitably mechanistic approach of causes and effects that is not only necessary, but exclusively so. Set in motion by Descartes’ splitting of the human organism into body and mind, described above, and the reinforcement this received from Popper as he attempted to build an unbreachable wall between what he called science and pseudo-science (Popper 44), it is obvious that there is no space left for human freedom, volition or anything outside the chain of causality and which would typically be regarded as essentially human. Such hypotheses are inherently unfalsifiable, and so, according to Popper, unscientific and

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63 A possibility that would immediately call into question the efficacy of hard-talking, the-truth-hurts-tell-it-like-it-is script editors and dramaturgs berating the writer to “get real and get to the point” too early in their creative process.

64 Recall Martindale’s comment, noted above that, “[t]he gist of degeneration theories is that degeneration (a construct similar to psychoticism) predisposes one to criminality, psychoses of all types, and genius” (Martindale “Biological Bases” 143).

65 There is a veritable genre of anti-Freud literature, with titles such as Why Freud Was Wrong by Richard Webster. Controversial in his own lifetime, he remains so today, with Lavinia Gomez even going so far as to call her recent book The Freud Wars.

66 Though with some significant and important exceptions, as we shall see shortly.

67 Actually, the value of falsifiability in even hard science, such as chemistry and physics, disappears immediately as soon as one realises how many issues are involved in even getting an experimental result, let alone falsifying something. See Mulkay & Gilbert, who conclude that Popper’s influence on scientific methodology has been
merely metaphysical assertions. That is to say, there is no experiment imaginable that can, for example, conceivably answer the question of whether or not human beings have free will. The reason for this is that any experiment that appears to do so, such as Benjamin Libet’s famous work in the 1980s (Libet et al. 623–42), equally celebrated and condemned from Time Magazine (Harrell, “Think Again”) through to Scientific American (Schiller, Carmel), reveals that unconscious brain activity precedes conscious volition. Consequently, the conscious part of the mind usually identified with human identity and agency cannot be the seat of will-power at all. This shocking claim, however, is easily dealt with by simply pushing the volitional agent further down the chain of command for those who wish to maintain their belief in free will, or else confirms the mirror beliefs of those who do not.68 If it was Popper’s aim to draw a hard line between science, as practiced by physicists like Albert Einstein, and people he regarded as enemies of the Open Society, like Marx69 and Freud (Miller, 127–28), then he did so by locating most of what we find interesting about human life outside the boundaries of scientific study.

Are we banned from asking what makes humans creative in the first place, for instance, or in what sense are people free? And what of that earlier question, “Che vuò? What do you want?” that Lacan puts at the centre of our desire? Surely, all these questions are intimately related, for freedom is only possible to creatures that can imagine something different, and imagining something different is the essence of creativity. So freedom and creativity are crucially intertwined, Sartre stating “[i]magination is not an empirical or superadded power of consciousness, it is the whole of consciousness as it realizes its freedom” (Sartre 270). Moreover both of these attributes, freedom and imagination, are related to desire—I desire what I do not have, and driven by desire exercise my freedom to creatively obtain it. Desire-Freedom-Creativity, a powerful constellation of forces hovering over human life. Or at least so the Romantics, from Rousseau to Shelley, would have it, Rousseau setting the tone in his foundational “Confessions” (1781), declaring:

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68 Importantly, Libet framed his results as meaning that while we can't consciously initiate action, we can veto it. Thus, what we experience is not “free will,” but “free will not” (Obhi & Haggard 358).
69 Not forgetting, of course, Plato and Hegel (Popper “Open Society” 81 and also 242).
I am commencing an undertaking, hitherto without precedent and which will
never find an imitator. I desire to set before my fellows the likeness of a
man in all the truth of nature, and that man myself. Myself alone! I know
the feelings of my heart, and I know men. I am not made like any of
those I have seen. I venture to believe that I am not made like any of
those who are in existence. If I am not better, at least I am different.
(Rousseau 5)

The Romantics were not the only ones upholding the ideals of a triumphant
human spirit forged in freedom, for to believe the opposite, that we are not free, but
animal-like are driven by the natural forces of gravity and instinct, no matter what myths
we like to tell ourselves, is to embrace the impossible of dull and meaningless destitution
in a wind-up universe. This might be the dismal legacy of scientism, but it cannot fail to
disappoint. As Hannah Arendt put it, “a life without meaning is a kind of living death”
(Arendt 87), because humans crave meaning, and meaning is an aspect of language, not
atoms.

So let me now turn to language. If science, at least as it has been interpreted
through Popper’s lens, has proven disappointing in uncovering the roots of creativity,
then perhaps a different approach is warranted.

French psychiatrist Jacques Lacan placed language at the centre of his re-thinking
of Freudian theory. “In other words, the man who is born into existence deals first with
language,” he says, “this is a given.” For Lacan, the crucial aspect of human existence
is its immersion in language. Even before conception, as the mother and father sometimes
wish their child into existence, imagining the baby in what Lacan termed the Symbolic –
even before the child has biological existence. “He is even caught in it before his birth,”
Lacan says, “Doesn’t he have a civil status? Yes, the child who is to be born is already,
from head to toe, caught in this language hammock that receives him and at the same
time imprisons him” (Lacan, “Interview with Lacan” n. pag.). The traumatic entry into the

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70 Though I haven't yet finished with science. See Chapter 4 below. I should also hasten to add that Popper is not
without his critics amongst scientists, with physicists Alan Sokal and Jean Bricmont, for example, writing in their
book Fashionable Nonsense that “When a theory successfully withstands an attempt at falsification, a scientist
will, quite naturally, consider the theory to be partially confirmed and will accord it a greater likelihood or a
higher subjective probability...But Popper will have none of this: throughout his life he was a stubborn opponent
of any idea of ‘confirmation’ of a theory, or even of its ‘probability’ [but] the history of science teaches us that
scientific theories come to be accepted above all because of their successes” (62f). Nor is he the last word on the
Philosophy of Science, with philosophers such as Kuhn and Feyerabend providing radically different accounts of
what constitutes scientific knowledge and progress.

physical world is simultaneously an entry into the world of language. It is around the exigencies of language that the individual’s character, their weaknesses, failures and neuroses are formed (Lacan, Écrits 189). Language splits the subject into the speaking part and a frustrated, speechless nothing at its centre. “This momentous split is the product of the functioning of language...our alienation in language” (Fink 46), American psychiatrist Bruce Fink explains, with the inarticulate, repressed side forever kicking against the imposition of the Other’s words—words, moreover, that can never perfectly capture the meaning of the neonate's needs.72 Humans learn what to desire from those closest to them. First from their mother and then from whomever else they come to depend on for their survival. “Desire is the desire of the Other,” Lacan says (Seminar 22). This (M)other sets the “master signifiers,” the ideals and values, the desirable things, around which the child begins to build itself. It fashions its Ego and Ego ideals in a way that it hopes will make it the answer to the question of what the mother wants (Écrits – A Selection 290). The process of separation from the mother, described by Freud as being undertaken in the resolution of the Oedipal Complex and the fraught negotiation of the Castration Complex, is viewed by Lacan as the child’s entry into the world as a speaking subject. It is forever separated from its fondest wish, the complete and uninterrupted union with its mother, whose loss it explains to itself through the Fundamental Fantasy, where the Fundamental Fantasy “represents what occurred at castration in the terms of a narrative of possession and loss. This fantasm thus consoles the subject by positing that s/he at one point did have the phallic Thing, but that then, at castration, it was taken away from him/her by the Other” (Sharpe n. pag.). Each of these steps and processes is mediated through language, and the laws of language as first described by Ferdinand de Saussure and subsequently developed in semiotics (Hook, “Phallus” 65).

What I want to highlight in this very brief account of Lacan’s reworked Freudianism is the centrality of language (Hook, “Phallus” 81), and with that the significance of what traditionally would be regarded as literary categories such as metaphor and metonymy for an understanding of human psychology (Grigg 151-2, 160), and, ultimately, that most human faculty, creativity (Bronowski 36). For Lacan, these literary

72 Reminiscent of Kant’s refutation of Descartes’ Cogito as merely demonstrating the existence of an “I, or He, or It (the thing) which thinks,” which is not identical with the agency-filled “I am” – see Kant 346.
terms have direct application in the dreamwork identified by Freud, whereby repressed (dangerous) wishes are translated into experienced (palatable) dreams (Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams* 183). Such an account is surely suggestive of the way those other fictions—literary ones, dealing with vicissitudes of life, the pain, trauma, suffering and failure of existence which provide the raw material of both tragedy and comedy—emerge from writers’ brains.

*Pain, trauma, suffering* and *failure* are not words usually found in the scientific literature, but are nevertheless very close to most people’s experience—at least as conceived by religion, art; and psychiatry. As Freud himself said, the modest goal of psychoanalysis was to turn “neurotic misery into normal unhappiness” (qtd in Krell 382) and he was no stranger to the dark world of the Book of Job: “My flesh is clothed with worms and clods of dust; my skin is broken, and become loathsome” (Job 7:5). So at least at this level, Lacan and Freud seem to be a little closer to what it feels like to be human than the research psychologists trying to banish such subjective terms from their language.

But for Lacan language is even more fundamental than that. *Contra* the received notion according to which the Unconscious is understood as a hidden bag of wanton drives and instincts kept at bay by a vigilant Ego, Lacan asserts that “[t]he unconscious is structured like a language” (Lacan, *Four Fundamental Concepts* 4), that “it speaks” (*Écrits* 179) not only through symptoms and slips of the tongue, as Freud himself noted (*The Psychopathology of Everyday Life* 74), but in the pauses, breaks and denegations of ordinary discourse, in hesitations and back-trackings. In short, in all the features of language that make it human, enigmatic and interesting both to the world at large and to writers in particular, for whom, as we have seen, dialogue is a major tool in revealing the inner world of their characters. The Unconscious evades the repressive mechanism by a logic of disguise and symbolisation that can be untangled from the

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73 Notably Condensation and Displacement, the analogues of Metaphor and Metonymy.
74 E.g. “Freud conceives the unconscious as something like a seething mass of banished ideas and brute energy that will resort to any means to return to consciousness and the censorship barrier as a counterforce that works to inhibit the entry of repressed ideas to consciousness, a filter that deactivates some of the potential tension of the unconscious by breaking it up and rearranging it to make it incomprehensible to consciousness” (Trahair 120).
75 There is a way, of course, in which this assertion is straightforwardly true: We only know the unconscious through its effects, including its effects on spoken language. Epistemologically, therefore, the unconscious we know must be structured like a language.
scrap and hiccups of meaning issuing from our mouths (Cuellar 191), and as I have shown, at least some writers—and artists in general—have seen in these strategies a road to creative work. In Lacan’s view, the Unconscious is ever present, clear to the observant Other, but concealed from the Subject itself, its fragile Ego quick to deny its existence when its presence is unexpectedly revealed in a slip of the mask. As Mexican psychologist and philosopher David Cuellar has it, “[t]his unconscious resides in the speech uttered through the individual subject, but articulated by a language whose perceptible complex social structure could never be intelligible for the subject. Thus, in speech, the subject experiences the unconscious” (Cuellar 191). For writers, the masters of language, this is a particularly interesting claim, for if what is keeping them from the source of their creativity is the mask of the Ego, then they must unmask themselves if they wish to penetrate the mysteries of their desire, and in this ally themselves with the Unconscious against their timid and fearful Ego.

But is the Ego, who for most purposes can be regarded as the thinking, conscious “me,” really so unreliable?

Both Freud and Lacan viewed the Ego, the conscious mind typically regarded as denoted by the “I” in the statement “I speak” (where most people would also locate their agency), as the ultimate unreliable narrator. To quote Lacan:

> The notion of the ego today draws its self-evidential character from a certain prestige given to consciousness in so far as it is a unique, individual, irreducible experience. The intuition of the ego retains, in so far as it is centered on the experience of consciousness, a captivating character, which one must rid oneself of in order to accede to our conception of the subject. I try to lead you away from its attraction with the aim of allowing you to grasp at last where, according to Freud, the reality of the subject is. In the unconscious, excluded from the system of the ego, the subject speaks. *(Seminar II 58)*

If it can be accepted for the moment that this Ego is a much less grandiose figure than theorists since the Renaissance have made it out to be, it becomes possible

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76 Bradbury, Page 14 above and Bretton, Page 34, to give but two examples, but the painters Dali and Magritte are equally obvious examples.

77 In Lacan’s terms, “Je” as opposed to the “moi” of my split subjectivity.

78 Though this is a little harder to do since Libet’s startling experiments, referred to above.

79 And whose dethroning Freud regarded as his greatest achievement, (in)famously comparing himself to Darwin and Copernicus in his *A General Introduction to Psychoanalysis* (168).
to agree with Libet that, while the conscious mind cannot initiate action, it may be the
nay-sayer fielding the impulses assailing it.\textsuperscript{80} We would then be able to hypothesise that
perhaps it is this part of the mental apparatus that needs to be neutralised for those
impulses to be set free and creativity flourish. But is this true? As anyone who has
participated in a brainstorming exercise might attest, a room dominated by someone
saying “No, can’t work, it’ll never happen” is a room very quickly reduced to dull
silence.\textsuperscript{81} The logical, planning, reasoning part of the psyche, ruled according to Freud by
the Reality Principle (“On Metapsychology” 36), is not the part of us that dreams of
naked floating elephants or being chased through seas of ice cream. On the contrary, it is
the part that keeps such thoughts at bay as ridiculous or dangerous nonsense. Which is
all very well for negotiating the shopping trolley through the supermarket, but not
necessarily for falling in love; or writing a masterpiece. Nothing great was ever achieved
by being sensible (Berlin & Hardy 10). To access that part of the mind, I dare say, it needs
to be stilled, \textit{ lulled}, and its \textit{no} momentarily disabled to allow the free play of the non-
conscious—\textit{un}conscious—parts of the mind to take over, for the absurd, ridiculous, insane
connections and juxtapositions between totally unrelated words and concepts to be
made—which according to Steve Jobs, is exactly what creativity is (“Interview”).

As noted earlier, Martindale and other researchers found that creativity was
associated with low levels of frontal lobe activation (Martindale, “Biological Bases” 148–
49). This experimental result led eventually to the “Cognitive Disinhibition Theory,” which
as we have seen and contrary to its name, did \textit{not} present a Freudian view of creativity
as the release of the repressive mechanism, but clearly resonates with such a theory. I
have reviewed the literature in this field, showing there exist a number of different
pathways, both behavioural and pharmacological, that can alter and indeed \textit{improve}
creativity in well-established and scientifically measurable ways.\textsuperscript{82} What all of these
approaches to creativity indicate—including meditation and the use of alcohol—is a
muting of the frontal lobe, of which the prefrontal cortex is a crucial part (Abernathy,
Chandler, & Woodward 727), with this muting being measurable as Martindale’s “low

\textsuperscript{80} There is a particularly interesting experiment revealing the power of language to shield us from our impulses
involving a chimpanzee called Sheba, discussed in Clark (Clark 293).
\textsuperscript{81} See, for example, Lehrer.
\textsuperscript{82} And just as interestingly, the reverse. The enhancing role of alcohol, for example, disappears after more than two
standard drinks. See Jarosz referred to above.
levels of frontal lobe activation.” The literature therefore supports the view that in order to experience creative insight, subjects need to disengage their critical faculties (Libet’s volitional no of the conscious Ego) and so allow the free play of the unconscious mind to promote the connection of apparently unrelated words and ideas normally prohibited by the vigilantly conscious Self. If this is allowed, it might go some way to explaining the often shocking revelations, violence and sexual depravity frequently exhibited in creative writing and artistic output in general, the monstrous horrors of Shakespeare’s Titus Andronicus, for example, the ghastly sexual violence of American Psycho or Gaspar Noé’s film and screenplay, Irreversible. Do these not bespeak an un-inhibited imagination, and perhaps even extravagantly so? And is this not something that the writers involved—Shakespeare, Bret Easton Ellis and Gaspar Noé—have found from within their own psyches? But Shakespeare, that “sweet witty soul...mellifluous & honey-tongued” (Meres, Palladis Tamia) was by all accounts a pleasant fellow, not a murderous psychopath lusting for rape and blood. So from whence did these terrifying thoughts arise if not from somewhere hidden from normal view? And is the Lull not a technique for accessing them?

Freudian psychotherapy came to be known as “the talking cure,”83 because it appeared that through a process of talking to the therapist, real physical symptoms such as paralysis of the limbs could be undone—cured—as if words and meanings had become entangled with the living flesh of the patients. To conceive of words being written in flesh seems an absurd proposition, but strangely, neuroscience is beginning to unravel the mystery. It is to this development that I would like now to turn my attention.

But before I do, let me summarise the results so far. Building on many clinical experiments and theorisations from the last forty years, including the seminal work of neuroscientist Dr Nancy Andreasen (to be discussed in the next chapter), Woolfe developed through the early years of the twenty first century a process she taught her writers promoting loose construing. She termed this process the Lull. Subsequent research has shown that the techniques Woolfe employs do, as she surmised, improve creativity.

83 So named by an early patient, Bertha Pappenheim.
But while it appeared to work, and her students were enthusiastic about her techniques, there was no agreed explanation for the results.

Coincidentally, I myself had begun teaching in a way similar to Woolfe, emphasising a discovery process of writing, unplanned and spontaneous, but theorised from a Freudian point of view seeing the crucial part of the writing process as the freeing of the Unconscious from conscious control, and thus giving unconscious impulses freer reign to create whatever it was it wanted to create, or in other words, to speak uninhibited. And postponing the more formal elements of the writing art, the crafting of this eruption of primal creativity, until a later time; turning it ultimately into a coherent, and perhaps even beautiful, work of art.

Alternatively, in Nietzschean terms (19), it was a process whereby the first violent and anarchic impulses of Dionysus were tamed by the arrival of calming, reasonable Apollo. This was, of course, crucial to the whole process, an assertion with which Woolfe would completely agree. The first part, however, the Dionysian explosive release of the untamed forces of creativity, was something that writers and writing courses had generally neglected under the impression that it could not be summoned and encouraged, but merely awaited and hoped for, something we now know not to be true, Woolfe proposing a whole series of procedures that can achieve just that.

What I would like to do now is to build on these results, and refine them a little further in light of some more recent work undertaken by neuroscientists to show not only that Freud and the post-Freudians have a great deal to offer regarding the roots of creativity, but that neuroscience is to some extent vindicating the Freudian project. Its central concept of the Castration Complex, understood now in the less literal terms proposed by Lacan as the entry of the subject into the speaking universe (Grigg 45), places writing, and creative writing, at a particularly interesting nexus between art and healing which might be just the key for a deeper understanding of what creativity is, at least in the context of the lives of highly creative individuals such as writers and artists; and through them, the rest of the world.

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84 This from personal observation in my capacity as Head of Writing at NIDA, in Sydney, Australia.
85 In a way similar to that described by M.G. Stephens in his essay Francis Bacon's Studio, where he describes the it in the following terms: “The studio may be the closest you will ever get to seeing inside the mind of the creative imagination—the imagination inchoate, without the trappings of form and function. The unfocused imagination is like an engine off the rails; it is a maelstrom” (163).
Chapter 4:
The Neuroscience of Creativity

How can art, and in particular the art of writing, present itself as a solution to the pain of castration? First, let me be clear what I am talking about: it is Lacan’s development of Freud’s original concept that is of particular interest here. For Lacan, developing Freud, castration describes the wound left in the growing child’s psyche inflicted by its entrance into the social world, the world of language. But is the experience of learning language really so horrifying? Lacan says yes, depicting language as the means by which the child is snatched and removed from its mother in the name of the father, and beginning the process of individuation and socialization leading eventually to adulthood, a process fraught with many opportunities for mistakes and danger:

The father’s presence introduces the world of the symbolic order, the world of language, which destroys the imaginary union between the child and the mother. The imaginary also enables the child (or adult) to deal with the world of the Unconscious, or the ‘Other’. In contemporary psychological parlance, the father’s introduction to the symbolic other, or language, allows the child to perform the necessary task of separation from the mother and the construction of a uniquely individualized self. (Mayfield 124)

In addition to this, the thrusting of the child into the world of language creates a split in the psyche, and a realm of what the Lacanian inspired philosopher, Slavoj Žižek, calls “pure negativity,” the seat of Freud’s much-unloved Death Drive—a primal no within the Subject. Indeed, it constitutes the Subject, refusing the apparent comfort of every word sent to describe and console as it is driven from the intimacy and pure joy of the mother’s presence and thrust into the cold comfort of social discourse (Žižek, The Ticklish Subject 160). Is language, and the spoken language in particular, really such a reservoir of loss and what do writers get out of immersing themselves in the very

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86 I should acknowledge my debt to Kevin Brophy’s Patterns of Creativity: Investigations into the Source and Methods of Creativity, and especially his chapter “Peculiarities and Monstrosities: Consciousness, Neuroscience and Creative Writing,” for this chapter.
87 And flesh, as we shall see below.
88 But not to be mistaken for Libet’s “no” referred to above.
substance of their estrangement? In fact, if that really is the case, why are there writers at all?

So let me begin here, at the most outlandish part of Lacan’s claim. What is the perverted pleasure of writing?

Speaking as a creative writer myself, it would be in the first instance its power, and not merely imaginative or imaginary power, but the real power attendant upon the control of language. The ability to create worlds through the poetic use of language is an almost magical potentiality, which has made its masters objects of suspicion and envy from the very beginnings of culture. Plato infamously banished both poets and playwrights from his ideal republic, because of their ability to confuse and deceive (Plato 203). Tyrants of all descriptions have seen fit to persecute, murder, and imprison writers throughout history, and not just ancient history. Pen International calculates that in 2014 alone, there were nine hundred writers imprisoned, murdered or disappeared throughout the world. While many of them were journalists directly involved in the political life of their countries, three of the five featured writers in Pen’s “Day of the Imprisoned Writer” (celebrated annually on November 15) were poets and novelists, people normally regarded as indulging in the innocent pleasures of introspection. This harassment suggests that imagination is implicitly subversive, proposing as it does that there is an alternative to the blunt, brutal factuality of what is. Writers, to the extent that they engage in an imaginative and imaginary world, are in their essence visionaries, and consequently suspect. At the same time, they are indispensable to the promotion of a particular world-view or reality.

This question of reality needs to be teased out a little further to properly appreciate the true power of language and, consequently, of writers.

In Kant’s view, we know the world through the “transcendental forms”—faculties of understanding that logically precede sensory perception. The most basic of these transcendental forms are time and space, without which the data of the senses would be incomprehensible (Kant 30). In other words, the world exists, but is intelligible only to a

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89 And I cannot resist repeating Freud’s observation, noted above, that in writing, the writer “has thus achieved through his phantasy what originally he had achieved only in his phantasy—honour, power and the love of women” (Freud “Introductory Lectures” 376).

90 Though it was perhaps also professional envy, for as Badiou points out, Plato himself was an exceptional dramatist, as evidenced by the dialogues themselves (Badiou “Plato” 8).
creature already armed not only with the organs to perceive it, but with what we have come to understand as the hardwired tools to organise and interpret those sensations in a more or less coherent whole. This position has gathered support from robotics and computer science, a recent paper stating for example that “[a] child, or young human-like robot of the future, needs to develop an information-processing architecture, forms of representation, and mechanisms to support perceiving, manipulating, and thinking about the world, especially perceiving and thinking about actual and possible structures and processes in a 3-D environment” (Sloman 558-73). Advances in neuroscience and brain lesion studies have permitted a more detailed understanding of brain anatomy and the identification of areas of the brain referred to collectively as the “association cortex,” which is that part of the cortex associated with each of the primary sensory areas that processes the sense data received by the primary cortical area.91 I will be returning to this association cortex a little further on, but now would simply note that neuroscience supports the original Kantian insight that for the world to be comprehensible, indeed for the world to be anything other than a chaotic flood of unintelligible sense data, it must travel through an intricate series of neural pathways, ordering and categorising it along the way, and fashioning it into something coherent and actionable (Hobson 115).92

Put more radically, reality is constituted by the mental processes of the organism, and is not directly accessible. The world we perceive is crucially dependent on what we are. So, the reality of the spider will be somewhat different to the reality of an Amazonian Indian. Which real is real is an interesting question, but let me pursue the main point, which is that all sentient creatures are active participants in the construction of their reality, which is crucially dependent not only on what they are, but on what they need to live, survive and reproduce.

Language is part of that construction, at least insofar as humans are concerned.93 Hence the importance of controlling language. The idea that language completely determines thought and emotions, and so limits cognitive categories, is known as the

91 for example Mesulam 1013
92 Also see Palmer.
93 Though many animals, such as bees, for example, are believed to have the ability to communicate in at least some limited ways, indicating language of some sort (von Frisch 102ff.).
“Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis” (Hoijer 92). It is illustrated, for example, by George Orwell in his novel *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, where an attempt is made by a totalitarian state to make certain things unthinkable through the imposition of an institutionally approved language called “Newspeak.” This hypothesis is no longer accepted by the scientific community, but a weaker version, acknowledging the *influence* of language on thought, is allowed. Linguist Andrea Graumann, for example, writes in 2007 that “[w]hile the strong form of the Sapir-Whorf-hypothesis has only few defenders, the weaker form of linguistic relativity has been widely accepted” (Graumann 134). And why would it not? Examples spring readily to mind in every field, from the effect of “designating wear and tear of cartilage as ‘osteoarthritis’ (the suffix, ‘-itis’, points to inflammation that is not present) wrongly suggest[ing] that anti-inflammatory medications are necessarily better than gentler painkillers,” as noted by an orthopedic surgeon in reply to an article by linguist Guy Deutscher titled “Does Your Language Shape How You Think?”; through to a 2006 study of the indigenous Saami language in Norway which found that these dwellers of the far north have more than one hundred and eighty snow- and ice-related words, compared to the handful of words in English, in addition to more than a thousand words for reindeer (Magga 31). This seems to make complete intuitive sense. People whose lives and survival rely on a detailed knowledge of the harsh environment in which they live have finer descriptions of it than those who do not. It is of no surprise that, where an inhabitant of temperate Sydney might simply see *snow*, a Saami speaker might see *skárta* or *vahca* or any one of the other numerous words available in that language (Magga 32) to describe what they are looking at. While the Sydneysider could, if pressed, come up with a better description such as “thin (more or less ice-like) layer of snow frozen on to the ground” (*skárta*), it would also require them to look more closely at what they would probably otherwise just perceive as undifferentiated *white stuff*. That is to say, the experience of the phenomenon depends very much on the language we are using, and the language is related to the purpose for which it is being used. Or, in the words of linguist Roman Jakobson, “[l]anguages differ essentially in what they *must* convey and not in what they *may* convey” (Jakobson 126). That is, languages direct us to what we need to

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94 So named after Edward Sapir and Benjamin Lee Whorf and proposing that language determines thought.
95 Echoing, of course, Sapir’s work on the Inuit language.
96 Indeed even a cursory familiarity with the specialised vocabulary of plumbers indicates as much.
pay attention to in the circumstances in which we find ourselves. Writers, as masters of language, have their hands on a very powerful tool.

I would like to make the case a little more strongly, and say we do not see it—experience it—unless we can say it, and that that, indeed, is one of the techniques of finding something that is otherwise lost in the visual field (Lupyan & Swingley 1068). The abstract of a 2012 study concluding just this is worth quoting in full:

People often talk to themselves, yet very little is known about the functions of this self-directed speech. We explore effects of self-directed speech on visual processing by using a visual search task. According to the label feedback hypothesis (Lupyan, 2007a), verbal labels can change ongoing perceptual processing—for example, actually hearing ‘chair’ compared to simply thinking about a chair can temporarily make the visual system a better ‘chair detector’. Participants searched for common objects, while being sometimes asked to speak the target’s name aloud. Speaking facilitated search, particularly when there was a strong association between the name and the visual target. As the discrepancy between the name and the target increased, speaking began to impair performance. Together, these results speak to the power of words to modulate ongoing visual processing. (Lupyan & Swingley 1068)

In other words, saying it aids seeing it. From the above, it is also clear that the converse is true, and not saying it hinders seeing it. So what is seen instead? Nothing at all. Not a blank spot in the visual field, which would inevitably draw attention to itself; but a blur, an inconsequential nothing that can come alive should mother suddenly snap, “[i]t’s staring you in the face! Look!”97 It is not that the eyes are failing to register the light being reflected from the unseen object. The signals are passing from the eyes along the optical nerves and the primary visual cortex if the brain is firing as it normally would. But what is not engaged in this paradoxical setting is the nearby, and much larger, association cortex that is able to identify the particularities of the sought-for object and disentangle it from the surrounding visual field.

97 Thus waking us from our loose construing floating dream into the tight construing world of the pre-frontal lobe. To see in this sense is to be focused and aware in a conscious way. This is similar to the equally common experience of passing through any kind of unfamiliar territory—a natural setting, an art gallery, a museum—with a guide pointing out previously unobserved details that suddenly spring into life through the magic of the guide’s commentary. Indeed, this is why we seek out and pay guides: to show us things we would not—literally—see ourselves.
How is this sought-for recognition achieved? By matching the incoming data from the primary visual cortex with features from a learned catalogue in the visual association cortex, and combining these with other sense data in a higher associative cortex. Here, the resulting manifold is finally recognized and discerned (Treisman & Gelade 134)—seen, smelt, touched, tasted—sensed, a critical step along the way being the accessing of a pre-existing catalogue of templates, which are learned and memorised\(^\text{98}\) in the form of neurons and synapses allocated for that purpose. That is to say, we learn what is important to know: faces,\(^\text{99}\) scenes or places\(^\text{100}\) and objects,\(^\text{101}\) amongst others; and perhaps most importantly, the mother’s voice (DeCasper & Fifer 1174–6). In the process, the associative cortices are moulded—built (as they continue to be throughout life [Pascual et al. 377–401]), a critical part of this process, at least insofar as humans are concerned, being what their attention is directed to by their parents as well as other important authority figures who may intervene in their lives. This process of language learning and the identification of particular features of the social and natural worlds has a direct effect on the brain architecture (Mårtensson et al. 240). Consequently, it can be said that language is literally written in the flesh—incorporated in the so-called “neuroplastic brain” (Teskey 6). While this is not exactly what Freud meant in his theorisation of hysteria, where harsh or misunderstood words became symptoms embedded in the limbs of his patients, it is not quite so far away as his many critics have contended (Ferrell 90).

Clearly there is a causal link between spoken language and the human ability to experience the world, not only at a perceptual level, but at an emotional level as well. As neuroscientists Elizabeth Kensinger and Suzanne Corkin reported in 2003, “[a]cross all tasks, details associated with the presentation of words (assessed through subjective and objective measures) were more likely to be remembered for emotional than for neutral items. The benefit emerged for words that had valence only, as well as for words with arousal, although the magnitude of the effect was greater for words evoking arousal”

\(^98\) Together with their emotional context. Emotions are recorded in a separate part of the brain, leading to the possibility of manipulating the emotional significance of particular memories, for example, see Kensinger and de Lavilléon et al.

\(^99\) The Fusiform Face Area.

\(^100\) The Parahippocampal Place Area.

\(^101\) Lateral Occipital Complex.
(Kensinger & Corkin 1177). Memories, and the words associated with them, are already charged with emotion\(^1\) and literally written into the tissue of the brain waiting to be accessed in order to make the world comprehensible.

To state this another way, attention is directed to the environment in the course of learning a language. The features of the environment noted are remembered by the re-wiring of the neuroplastic brain, and by that memory’s linking to an emotional charge. When the object (situation, face, body part, etc.) is re-encountered, it is recognised together with the emotion associated with it, because it is remembered from this past experience. And if it is not remembered then it is not experienced, unless it impinges on us in a significant—emotionally important—way (Fisher “Lost Cities”). And if it does not impinge on us in that way, then in an important sense it is not actually experienced at all. It is there, of course, if somebody wishes to point it out.\(^2\) But it is there in the same way that every other irrelevant or insignificant detail is—as part of the relentless rush of the real. This has to do with what the French philosopher Alain Badiou describes as the “multiplicity of multiplicities” (“New Concept”) that constitute ontological Being: Being can never be exhausted. No matter how much is said about something, something else can always be said without repetition. Being, or what Heidegger might call the “is-ness of things”, is infinitely deep. Consequently, the experience of reality must always be an infinitesimally small window onto all the potentially experienceable elements of it. Hopefully enough to survive, but frequently not.

To reiterate the argument so far: language, the tool of writers, is encoded in the brain in a way that registers both its denotative and connotative elements. This language has effects not only on cognitive processes, but also on perceptions. For example, what is seen, felt and heard, and what it means, culturally and specifically to the person perceiving it, is intertwined with their own personal history encoded in their memories laid down in their associative cortices. This gives a tremendous power to people such as writers, whose art turns on a mastery of language, as is evidenced in the activity of advertisers and war propagandists.\(^3\)

\(^1\) A point also made by neuroscientist Antonio Damasio, and which provided Woolfe with another piece of the puzzle in her Mystery of the Cleaning Lady (Woolfe 42). See for example Damasio, Descartes’ Error.

\(^2\) An artist or writer perhaps.

\(^3\) Of which more below.
Which real is real? The spider’s or the Amazonian Indian’s, or the relaxed Sydneysider admiring the view of the Harbor, enhanced perhaps by her memory of Slessor’s “Five Bells”? All are rooted in an experience of a world sliced from an infinitely complex multiplicity. Kant would warn that to step beyond that simple statement into asserting something like that we are all part of the “universe” or perhaps “nature” is to risk soon finding oneself lost in contradiction, for a part of something cannot imagine the whole, except by stepping outside it. We are—spider, Indian, Sydneysider—finite creatures pressing on the horizons of our finite worlds, never exhausting their possibilities, even if they never overlap.

If it can be agreed that while language does not determine reality, it nevertheless influences how reality is received and perceived, and further, that this implies that words create, or at least delineate, objects by bringing them to attention, then we are on the way to appreciating the importance of language, not just in reporting and communicating experience, but in moulding and shaping it. Creating it, or at least parts of it, one might say.

Let me consider, for example, what are sometimes called untranslatable words, i.e. words from one culture which have no direct equivalent in another (Wierzbicka 2). Words such as Schadenfreude (German), Saudade (Portuguese), Komorebi (木漏れ日, Japanese) or Gökotta (Swedish). Each of these words can be translated into English. Schadenfreude, for example, is defined by the online Oxford Dictionaries as “[p]leasure derived by someone from another person’s misfortune” (“Definition of Schadenfreude”). An English speaker will recognise the emotion, even if it is something most people would only grudgingly acknowledge, and have no single word for. But what about the Japanese Komorebi? The online Collins dictionary defines it as “showers of light—sunlight that filters through trees—filtering between leaves” (“Komorebi”). While an English speaker might understand

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105 Kant’s fundamental epistemological point is that we cannot speak meaningfully of things about which we have no possible experience. No human being will ever experience the “universe,” and consequently any statements about the “universe” are meaningless and misleading.

106 Not an uncontroversial view. For example, see Richard Rorty.

107 It would seem a straightforward proposition that the world of the medieval alchemist, filled with spells and demons, is a quite different world to that of a modern scientist, though gravity works in exactly the same way in both realms. That being said, evangelical Christians might share more of the world-view, and their experience of the world, with medieval alchemists than they do with modern scientists.

108 Unless you happen to be as candid as Gore Vidal, who wrote, “Whenever a friend succeeds, a little something in me dies” (Barnes 44).
what is meant, after a moment’s reflection, it has not been such a noteworthy feature of our culture’s aesthetic appreciation as to demand its own unique word. A similar case is the Swedish word Gökotta, which, according to the online dictionary Interglot, means “dawn picnic to hear first birdsong” (“Translate ‘gökotta’ from Swedish to English”).

Again, an English speaker understands the literal meaning of the words, but it is clear, as in the case of Komorebi, that there is something missing in our understanding, something we do not get about it, and that cannot be fully conveyed by apparently equivalent words in our own language. It is this that makes poetry notoriously difficult to translate and that indicates foreign words are not just different words for the same things, but actually delineate different things, and consequently different worlds. Perhaps only subtly different, but different nevertheless.

As Salman Rushdie says, “[a] culture is defined by its untranslatable words” (qtd in Reid 28). Words like Mangata, another Swedish word for the road-like reflection of the moon on a body of water (Young, “From Mangata to Kilig”). And while many such words relate to the landscape or the environment, others relate to the social and emotional realms. Indeed, words denoting emotions usually feature prominently in lists of the untranslatable, with words such as Gezelligheid, Dutch for the comfort and coziness of being at home with friends (“19 Emotions with no English Words”) being an obvious example. I agree with Rushdie that words such as these are part of the defining quality of a culture, the thing that makes it different. And so, as makers of language, as creators of language, writers in general, and poets in particular, are the definers not only of cultural values, but of the ways people see and experience the world, and—following the argument above about the connotation and denotation of words being inscribed in our brains—of the way they feel. When the Portuguese poets of the newly established Royal court (Leal 267) took the Latin word Solitatem (solitude) in the thirteenth century and turned it into Saudade by way of saudar (to greet, salute), it is my contention that they created a unique cultural sensibility, a melancholic longing, that has come to identify Portuguese culture and national character ever since. It distinguishes it not only from the nearby Catalan—a region not geographically separate, as might be expected, but which

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109 Dante is seen as “the Father of the Italian language” turning his native Florentine dialect into the standard of the entire peninsula through the popularity of his great poem (Haller 244).
was *made* separate by deliberate political and cultural choice—but also the entire non-Portuguese world. In Shelley’s words, “poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the world” (Shelley 56). The poets invent a word and use it to describe a subtle variation of some perhaps universal emotion, opening up a new state of being; and in doing so, awake something unique in the world.

This is obviously not the whole story. History and politics have a great impact on *which* words take hold and which do not—indeed which languages, and consequently which peoples, survive and which do not, as our own dismal history of colonial conquest attests. But I hope my point is clear: the makers of language have a crucial and privileged role in determining not only how people *see* the world, but, because of the intimate way words and emotions are intertwined in the meat of our brains, of how they *feel* it, as anyone who has tried to penetrate the complexities of a foreign culture can confirm. It is not just that the language and food are different, it is the way people are in themselves.\(^\text{110}\) Words have shaped them and their associative cortices, for finally, this is where these words are written, along with their emotional charge, waiting to be awoken, perhaps in the course of the musings of a writer as they enter what I am now calling the Lull in an attempt to express the inexpressible of their souls.

It should come as no surprise, therefore, that writers are great connoisseurs and makers of words. Dylan Thomas put it this way, “I fell in love—that is the only expression I can think of—at once, and am still at the mercy of words” (Thomas 185–86). Shakespeare was a great inventor of words, as was Milton, who is credited with creating over six hundred and, of course, the French writer Rabelais. J.K. Rowling, author of the Harry Potter series of novels, has herself added hundreds of new words to English most famously *Muggle*. Writers are revered, where they *are* revered, because they are the keepers of the fundamental unifying feature of a culture, its language. The composer Igor Stravinsky, for example, described T.S. Eliot in exactly those terms, as “not only as a great sorcerer of words but as the very key keeper of the language” (qtd in Poetry Foundation). Each new word brought to life by a poet or writer comes with a new object—physical, intellectual or social\(^\text{111}\)—and a subtly new emotion associated with it.

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\(^{110}\) See, for example, Johnson.

\(^{111}\) “meme,” for example (Dawkins 189)
which builds an edifice of reality that through use feels like home. “Language is the house of Being,” Heidegger says, “[i]n its home man dwells” (Heidegger 117), thus identifying the deep power of the writer: to have a finger on the foundation stones of reality, Philip K. Dick perhaps overstating this by saying, “[t]he basic tool for the manipulation of reality is the manipulation of words. If you can control the meaning of words, you can control the people who must use the words” ( Dick). Be that as it may, Freud’s nephew Edward Bernays, described at the time of his death by the New York Times as “the Father of Public Relations,”112 combined his famous uncle’s psychological insights with the ideas on crowd control as formulated by Wilfred Trotter113 and Gustave Le Bon114 to give birth not only to the modern advertising industry, but to produce one of the first books on the scientific manipulation of public opinion, appropriately called Propaganda, where he writes:

The conscious and intelligent manipulation of the organized habits and opinions of the masses is an important element in democratic society. Those who manipulate this unseen mechanism of society constitute an invisible government which is the true ruling power of our country...We are governed, our minds are molded, our tastes formed, our ideas suggested, largely by men we have never heard of. This is a logical result of the way in which our democratic society is organized. Vast numbers of human beings must cooperate in this manner if they are to live together as smoothly functioning society...In almost every act of our daily lives, whether in the sphere of politics or business, in our social conduct or our ethical thinking, we are dominated by the relatively small number of persons...who understand the mental processes and social patterns of the masses. It is they who pull the wires which control the public mind. (Bernays 38)

Needless to say, they are ably assisted in this enterprise by artists of all kinds, and prominent amongst them writers doing what writers do best, persuasively creating worlds, feelings and ways of understanding them.

This detour through the ethnosphere has been undertaken to explain one of the pleasures of writing, namely the power it gives, imaginative and real, to the writer. Yet this

113 Neurosurgeon famous for the concept of the “Herd Instinct.”
power, ironically arising from what Lacan describes as their castration in language, is not the only pleasure of writing. For the writer, as Freud observed (Freud, *Creative Writers* 439), there is also the concomitant gratification of wish-fulfillment, as confirmed by thriller-writer Lee Child who states bluntly that “[a]ll of us write wish fulfillment” (Sachs 2012). Even the aforementioned J. K. Rowling admits, “I wrote the Hermione/Ron relationship as a form of wish fulfillment” (Watson 184), while Doris Lessing tried to re-imagine her fraught relationship with her mother, a theme that haunted many of her books (Harriott 93), in her influential novel *Martha Quest*. Writers are their own first audience, and in their writing are able to engage the private fights and myths that traumatise and sustain their fantasy lives. Freud observed about the poet and dramatist Sophocles: “The artist, like the neurotic, had withdrawn from an unsatisfactory reality into the world of his imagination” (Freud *Autobiographical Study* 73). In this wish-fulfillment impulse, the writing process resembles a dream, or at least “dream” as conceived by Freud (Freud *Interpretation of Dreams* 147). While it is sometimes hard to discern the wish hidden inside a nightmare, every writer knows the truth of Macbeth’s line, “Let not light see my black and deep desires” (*Macbeth*, 1.4), which the world prescribes should be shunned and repressed, but which the artist can indulge because it is only fiction.

But what is repressed returns (Freud, *Repression* 141–58). The recurring nightmare parallels the endless repetition of the same incident, the same situation, which often accompanies the therapeutic session. This echoes the experience of repeatedly writing the same story, either disguised or undisguised, even when the writer is consciously attempting not to. In both the cases (including therapy and writing), it is generally the unsuccessful resolution of the matter at hand that is the precondition for the repetition. In fact, therapy is deemed successful when the psychic work is finally done and the symptoms disappear.115 But there is a neurosis where this does not occur that is of particular relevance to the original question of this chapter, namely, how can art, and in particular the art referred to as creative writing, present itself as a solution to what Lacan describes as the trauma of castration, our entry into language, and the loss of the maternal object, and this is when the repetitive cycle has itself become the object of desire, and the neurotic’s constant circular return around the loss becomes its own painful

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115As opposed to the trauma being simply remembered, as in hypnosis, which has no effect on the symptom.
pleasure. The painful repetition becomes itself the source of pleasure, which of course is not an experience confined to writers, as anyone who keeps repeating the same mistake (e.g. falling in love with the same type of wrong person\textsuperscript{116}) can attest. But in this case, it is the instrument of the original trauma, language itself, which becomes the fetishised object upon which the writer ecstatically squirms (Kristeva 37). Seen from this perspective, writing is a particular solution to what might be called the destitution of language, where the instrument of the writer’s subjection becomes itself the object of desire. According to Lacan, then, at least some writers are the perverts of language (Eyers 151) from whose agony and ecstasy the world sometimes receives great art.\textsuperscript{117}

I have outlined the Freudian-Lacanian view of the Unconscious, indicating the centrality of language to its functioning. I have identified the dynamic of unconscious, repressed desire, as the motor churning the language machine, with meaning sliding along very personal chains of signification forged in the Oedipal dramas of childhood and giving rise to worlds of personal meanings and associations from which the writer can draw. Lastly, I have demonstrated how neuroscience discovered these linguistic structures as encoded in the various associative cortices of the brain, where words are stored with their accompanying emotional charge (Vilis, “Association Cortex”). All of this points to a coherent psycho-anatomical model of creativity rooted not in notions of somatic weakness or dysfunction posited by Martindale and Eysenck, but rather firmly located where artists themselves feel it to be, namely in their lived experience and personal history, driven by passions inaccessible to their rational, logical minds for reasons that are often quite obscure. In the words of Goethe scholar Humphrey Trevelyan, “[a] great artist...must be shaken by the naked truths that will not be comforted. This divine discontent, this disequilibrium, this state of inner tension is the source of artistic energy” (qtd in Sarton 22). Heinrich Heine agrees, adding, “[t]he artist is the child in the popular fable, every one of whose tears was a pearl” (Heine 121). Indeed, the notion of the suffering artist is so rife as to be almost a cliché, Milton composing \textit{Paradise Lost} in the shadow of both his wife and daughter’s death, Shakespeare composing \textit{Hamlet} after the death of his own

\textsuperscript{116}A source of comedy rampant, for example in the works of Woody Allen.

\textsuperscript{117}e.g. Swensen \textit{Becoming a Published Author: Agony and Ecstasy of Writing a Book}. 
eleven year old boy, Hamnet,\textsuperscript{118} while Lennon and McCartney began their musical partnership in the desolation of their own mothers’ deaths (Zara 7). It is the suffering and longing of unrequited love that drives boys and men to write poetry for perhaps the only period of their lives: “At the touch of love, everyone becomes a poet,” Plato tells us in the Symposium. And Gauguin is surely not the only artist to have felt “[t]he reason I am great is because of all the suffering I have done” (Gauguin & Guerin 53). It is in art and writing that people sometimes search for solace from the suffering afflicting them.

And sometimes it can cure. A recent study of what is coming to be known as the “writing cure” used in a therapeutic setting to treat Post Traumatic Stress (PTS) conditions concluded “[w]riting therapy is an evidence-based treatment for PTS, and constitutes a useful treatment alternative for patients who do not respond to other evidence-based treatments” (“Writing Therapy”). Numerous studies also indicated that writing contributes to general well-being and happiness (e.g. L.A. King). That is to say, the torment many writers claim to be suffering from can be eased by the writing act itself. “Writing a book is a long, exhausting struggle,” says George Orwell, “like a long bout of some illness. One would never undertake such a thing if one were not driven by some demon whom one can neither resist nor understand,”\textsuperscript{119} novelist Gail Sher adding “Writing saved my life” (Sher xiii). That she is not alone in this sentiment can be readily seen by simply Googling that exact phrase.

What all this indicates is that these two divergent, and many would say conflicting, accounts of creativity (namely, the empirical-neurological attempt at locating it in anatomical structures and the secrets of the synapses; and the Freudian or post-Freudian psychological search for clues in the dynamics of deep-seated traumas and drives) are, in fact, perfectly compatible. The open antagonism frequently shown by scientists toward the Freudians is not only unwarranted but also deeply unproductive for the limits and restrictions it places on research projects. In fact, the profoundly

\textsuperscript{118} Such a connection has been vigorously contested by critics who reject the relevance of personal biography to artistic output, most recently the New Criticism school. But which is easier to believe: that this sweet, witty soul was affected by his young son's death, or that he was not? Ben Jonson’s profoundly moving poem on the death of his own little boy, “On my First Son” (Riggs 96), leaves no doubt in his case at least about the relationship between his art and his personal suffering; something I would say is glaringly obvious to any working writer.

\textsuperscript{119} Orwell, George “Why I write” P. 10
problematic philosophical basis of experimental science, beginning with the typically unexamined assumptions of empiricism itself, such as the idea that you can even make observations without having a theory in the first place,120 have cascaded remorselessly down the centuries to Popper’s now discredited views, one critic pointing out that if Popper’s standards of scientific value had been applied to Darwin and Einstein, neither man would have been taken seriously (Gray 7), while another—himself a physicist—states that if falsifiability was the criteria, exciting and productive areas of current research, such as string theory and quantum gravity, would need to be abandoned as unscientific (Mukhi 2014). But falsifiability retains a hold on the scientific imagination, prominent scientists such as Stephen Hawking claiming to be adherents and echoing Popper’s position (Hawking 10) and this confusion within the scientific community about what they are doing sees it tying itself in knots when dealing with those most problematic features of the human condition, namely freedom. And creativity. And, of course, consciousness itself. In fact, consciousness has proven to be such a “hard problem” (Chalmers 200) that some researchers have abandoned it altogether, the famous philosopher and cognitive scientist Daniel Dennett, for example, declaring it to be no problem (Dennett 406) after all, because what we are suffering from is, as the title of his 2003 TED Talk explained, “[t]he illusion of consciousness” (Dennett 2003).

An expression suggestively similar to Einstein’s conclusion in 1922 that “[t]he time of the philosophers does not exist” (Il n’y a donc pas un temps des philosophes, qtd in Canales 19) after his instrumentalist assertion that time is what clocks measure, mentioned above, led him to his famous Theory of Relativity.121

The impasse between, on the one hand, experimental psychology and neuroscience and on the other, Freud and his intellectual descendants, is a destructive artifact of an older conflict, which is driving the hard-headed men and women of science into stranger and stranger realms. These should perhaps be acknowledged if we are to come to any real understanding of creativity. If it is true, as scientists say, following Einstein, that the passage of time is an illusion; and (following Libet), that free will is an illusion, and (following Dennett), that consciousness is itself an illusion, then it seems that science is

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120 See “Seeing is a theory laden undertaking” (Hanson 19).

121 And the notion of the Block Universe, according to which everything that could happen has already happened, and the passing of time is only a weird illusion which no longer frightens even aging and dying scientists.
really saying that human beings are very diminished creatures compared to those depicted by Leonardo and Michelangelo at the height of the Renaissance, and with few of the characteristics that have historically been regarded as making them more worthy of inspection than, say, nematodes.

But is that true, or is the debate still stuck in the problematic announced by Descartes almost four hundred years ago: the split between Mind and Matter, and how to connect them?

Not everyone is so bewildered, and a rapprochement between the two disciplines is providing some interesting results. Let me give the last word to a neuroscientist. In Nancy Andreasen’s 2011 book, The Creating Brain: The Neuroscience of Genius, this famous American scientist described a series of experiments involving PET scans of subjects’ brains to study the neural basis of free association.

“Can you guess what I found?” she says, “[w]hich brain regions would you predict to be active during randomly wandering unconscious free association?” (Creating 73). Her answer is worth quoting in full:

Not surprisingly, it was almost all association cortex. It was those areas in the frontal, parietal, and temporal lobes that are known to gather information from the senses and from elsewhere in the brain and link it all together—in potentially novel ways. These association regions are the last to mature in human beings. They continue to develop new connections up to around the early twenties. They are also much larger in human beings than in other higher primates. They have a more complicated columnar organization than other parts of the brain. They receive input from primary sensory or motor regions, from sub-cortical regions such as the thalamus, and from one another. Presumably this organization is used to permit the brain’s owner to integrate the information he or she receives or possesses and to produce much of the activity that we refer to as—the unconscious mind. Apparently, when the brain/mind thinks in a free and unencumbered fashion, it uses its most human and complex parts. (Creating 73)

In a more academic setting, in an article published in 2011, Andreasen remarked, after quoting artists’ accounts of their creativity, that:

[i]f we try to understand these descriptions using the framework provided by our understanding of the mind and brain, then we are led to the
conclusion that the creative process arises from the unconsciousness rather than occurring as conscious process. (“A Journey into Chaos”)

For Andreasen, and some other recent researchers,\textsuperscript{122} there is no conflict between anatomy and psychology, mind and body.\textsuperscript{123} In her 1993 Presidential Address, quoting lines from a Yeats’ poem (“O body swayed to music, O brightening glance, How can we know the dancer from the dance?” (“Schizophrenia” n. pag.), she continues:

[y]et just as, in the lines by Yeats, the dancer and the dance are indistinguishable, so too are the mind and the brain. What we call the mind represents the product of activity within the brain occurring at the cellular, chemical, and molecular levels. (“Schizophrenia” n. pag.)

For how else could it be, unless we are merely complicated automatons lacking a mind altogether, or dust momentarily animated by spirit, yet somehow anchored to it? An experimental method open to both descriptive modalities—the neurological and the psychological—is not doomed to the sterile impasses of either taken separately.

\textsuperscript{122} See, for example, Carhart-Harris, Friston.
\textsuperscript{123} Notwithstanding the warnings against “The New Phrenology” being issued by researchers such as William Uttal (Uttal).
Conclusion

This dissertation began as an attempt to understand my writer’s process, and the role of what Woolfe describes as the Lull. What I have come to understand is that the Lull not only names a crucially important but generally unremarked part of the creative process, but also suggests methods of achieving it, methods that have independently been shown to aid in the cultivation of creativity. Woolfe’s breakthrough is to employ these methods in an educational setting and to open up the possibility of teaching creativity. There can be no reason now to doubt that this can be done, and is now being done in my own workplace, the National Institute of Dramatic Art in Sydney, in which I am Head of the Writing for Performance MFA course, where we are employing these techniques to assist writers as they undertake the completion of a full length play, screenplay game template or other such creative work.

I have also looked at the neuroscience supporting Woolfe’s contentions, and hope given reasons for encouraging a dialogue between contemporary neuroscience and Freudian, dynamic psychology. I have been encouraged by the groundbreaking work of Nancy Andreasen, who has demonstrated the profound significance of the associative cortices and their clear affinity with the Freudian Unconscious. I am also inspired by other figures such as Eric Kandel, the Nobel Prize-winning neuropsychiatrist, whose 2012 book, The Age of Insight: The Quest to Understand the Unconscious in Art, Mind, and Brain, from Vienna 1900 to the Present also attempts to bridge the gap between neuroscience and Freud, providing a genuinely intriguing account of how creative work is produced and received. There is serious work left to be done, not least at a philosophical level, where the strands of creativity lead inevitably to the nature of consciousness and self-consciousness. Here also some exciting results are being presented, not least in the work of physicist John Gerald Taylor, who wrote in his 1999 book The Race for Consciousness that:

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124 And naming, as I hope my discussion above has indicated, is a crucial part of even recognising an effect.
125 For, contra Stephen Hawking’s assertion that philosophy has been superseded by science, there has never been a time when the need for philosophy has been more urgent, as is clear from the conundrums and contradictions currently plaguing Hawking’s own science, physics, and especially the conflict he is most aware of, namely, the one between Quantum Mechanics and Relativity as expressed in the study of Black Holes.
[C]onsciousness involves memory structures or representations of the past of episodic, autobiographic, semantic, pre-processing, and emotional character. These structures are used to give conscious content to the input in a manner that endows that experience with meaning related to the past. Thus consciousness arises from the intermingling of recorded past experiences with incoming present activity; as such the process is dynamic. (37)

—a suggestion startlingly akin to Bergson’s account of what he called “duration” (Pearson 59), which provides the necessary self-reflectivity one imagines is essential to consciousness. I would like to end here with one last observation from philosopher Slavoj Žižek who has been greatly exercised by this same problem. Writing in his book *The Parallax View*, he says,

> This brings us to the crux of the matter...Consciousness emerges as a result of a unique short circuit between present (input) and past (working memory). This interaction between the present and the past has to reach a point of self-relating...and once the short-circuit of self-relating occurs, neural activity...glides off, released from the ties that previously shackled it. (212)

A short-circuit between our experience of the present and our memory of the past. What better way to describe consciousness? And what better way to describe the flash of insight, that Eureka moment, of creativity, adding one last term to the signifying chain suggested earlier? Freedom. Creativity. Desire. And Consciousness. Is that where thought is taking us? Is that what beckons in the study of creativity?


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VOLUME TWO: THE FICTIONAL WORK, WOLF

A Novel

by

STEPHEN SEWELL

B.Sc.

Volume Two of two Volumes submitted in fulfilment of
the requirements of the degree of Doctor of Arts (D.Arts)

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CERTIFICATE OF AUTHORSHIP/ORIGINALITY

I certify that the work in this thesis has not previously been submitted for a degree nor has it been submitted as part of requirements for a degree except as fully acknowledged within the text.

I also certify that the thesis has been written by me. Any help that I have received in my research work and the preparation of the thesis itself has been acknowledged. In addition, I certify that all information sources and literature used are indicated in the thesis.

SIGNED BY CANDIDATE
One.

Sometime that afternoon, a breeze blew up deep in the surrounding valley, sending leaves scattering and making trees tremble, and though no-one was there to see, it felt like a change, like the arrival of something new.

The chain-saw was chewing through the splintering pine trunk propped up on the sawhorse, but even with his ear-plugs in, Bob could hear a commotion rising further up the hill. Hitting the kill switch as the wood dropped onto the dirty snow, he glanced up over the fence in time to see a pack of kids scampering along the back lane into the walkway cutting through the shamble of houses sitting atop Mulgrave Bluff, under the ridge where the main street curved through the town. Something was up, for sure, he thought, but Bob had a pile of wood to cut and from the look of the clouds tearing over the waving tree tops there was another dump of snow on its way, so pulling his visor down he pulled the cord and set the sharp teeth of the saw back to the log. Whatever it was the kids were after, they'd be after another one tomorrow, he thought, and God help us all.

But nobody was paying him any mind as the kids darted up and over the muddy rise into the dip beyond and then up again into the spider web of lanes and back alleys scratched like a scab across the side of the mountain where the town lay. Kanangara, was perched on the edge of a cliff that seemed to stretch all the way around, and nestled in the deep white woods of the Solitary Mountains where Winter had finally settled, deep and stark.

"There!" someone called, and like a pack of hounds, the kids turned in the direction and bolted. There was five or six of them, maybe more that Mrs. Holloway could see as she pulled the curtain aside to see what the hubbub was; definitely more, all running through the criss-cross patchwork of tracks and pathways that only kids could ever know, with the oldest at the front, alert and excited, and the younger ones behind trying to catch up, but already infected with the blood lust throbbing through the icy air. No-one had seen it yet, or knew what it was, just that it was big, and savage. The friable world of adults had been left behind, and the dark, mysterious world of the chase and the hunt entered, and looking about, each tried to be the first to catch sight of it again so they could be the one to let loose the primal call.

"There!" another voice shot.

Ahead, but not far ahead, a lumbering presence panted and smelt the foul, unfamiliar air, searching for an escape. The heavy acrid stink of coal hung like a dirty veil over the place, blackening the sky and catching in the back of its throat as it looked this way and that through the labyrinth it had somehow become trapped in. The sound and clatter of the pursuit swung closer behind, and slipping on an icy patch it slid into an overflowing garbage bin, knocking rot and stench onto the frozen mud before righting itself it looked back to see the swarm of creatures closing in, clambering over one another
and gaining ground with every step. Leaping away, it charged past the blackened, dirty bricks feeling the grit of man's filth slimy beneath its paws.

Chasing forward, mittens flying, one of the boys saw it first. "There!" he cried in awe and fright, "There it is!" He'd never seen anything as big, a dog, or shadow, something enormous and untamed, moving confident and unafraid, free. But it wasn't free, it was lost, and it was afraid; and somehow its instincts weren't working, or had become confused in the chaos of sights and smells engulfing it, and feeling itself already dying it began to panic, slamming into the biting corrugated iron and rushing, scratching for a way out.

Sergeant Grant broke out his Remington and checked the magazine. It wasn't standard issue, but something he'd bought himself for the kinds of things a policeman in a country town needs to do, putting animals out of their misery, that sort of thing; horses caught in a fence; and right now he wasn't quite sure what he was up against, just that there was a hue and cry through Kanangara that he could hear all the way down here at the station as he reached into his drawer and pulled out the ammo box. Rabid dog, or something the man on the phone had said, but Grant couldn't even remember the last time there'd been a rabid dog up here, so it didn't seem likely. But whatever it was, he knew how it would end.

It wasn't something that he liked doing, killing, but it was the nature of his job, and if he didn't do it, someone with a lot less concern would, and filling up the magazine Grant felt the hard darkness entering him as his resolve began to focus on one thing, and that thing was to hunt whatever it was that had entered the town from the wild, and kill it. Not because it was bad, because it didn't belong here. And it was his job to make sure lines like that weren't crossed by man or beast.

Up in the town, the chase was on. It was still early, and the mist hadn't yet lifted, but the news that a wolf was loose had everyone up, standing in the damp on their verandahs or else peering out through the frosty windows, even people still in their pyjamas and slippers. The kids, of course, were all out, with the stragglers slipping on their gum boots to charge after the rest of them while there was still a chance to join in the chase, and even the men had started grunting and stumping about, grabbing whatever they could—axes and pick-handles—a few guns—in case they needed to lend a hand. Of course, no one believed it was a wolf—not the adults, anyhow—because wolves didn't exist in this neck of the woods—or anywhere in the mountains. They never had, except in the stories you tell to frighten the kids. So it had to be a wild dog, though even that seemed unlikely. Probably a hunting dog that got loose out of someone's yard and was now causing merry havoc up on the main street. Still, you had to be careful, and no-one was sure what surprises lay in the valley and deep woods beyond, so driven by some primitive instinct that would have seemed quaint even to them if they'd thought about it, the men stepped up to make sure the town stayed safe.

The animal, meanwhile, was being herded further and further up the hill, past the old cinema and toward the railway station and the shops. There were kids everywhere by
now, even red cheeked toddlers rugged up against the cold and being dragged through the slushy snow by their bigger brothers and sisters so they could get a look at the phenomenon. Right across the town you could hear children calling and egging one another on, and by the time it arrived in the wolf's ears, it sounded like the terrible cracking of a rockfall gathering pace and closing behind. Feet were running toward it on all sides, and hands armed with sticks were beating at the rotting fences lining the laneways that were funneling them all toward some dreadful destination. Bewildered and panting, the creature heard an eagle high above, and looking saw its dark, eerie shape hovering in the brightening sky, but it wasn't pointing the way, it was saying goodbye, and in an instant, the animal was out in the open, a wide snow-covered street lined, it now saw, with humans craning to see it. Cowering back in fright, the creature yelped, trying to retreat, but retreat was already impossible as the children crammed into the opening and stood waiting to see what would happen. The wind was blowing flurries of snow across the frozen asphalt, and from the distant valley the animal caught a whiff of pine needles and gum trees before it heard the click of a bolt into a metal chamber. Looking in the direction, the wolf watched as a man raised something to its shoulders, but before it could do anything, it was down, scrambling in its own blood. It didn't need another bullet, it was already dead, and for a moment the whole town held its breath at the passing of something wonderful and mysterious.

And as the townsfolk gathered round the beast's dead carcass bleeding onto the snow, they were even more amazed by its size. "Lookit that thing," someone marvelled, "Big enough to eat you." And it sure was. It sure was big.

And up the road, Sergeant Grant unloaded his gun and spat the dead cartridge out. One shot, that was all he needed, though he wished he hadn't needed that at all. Living things shouldn't be cut down like that, was the way he felt, wild things anyhow. But it wasn't up to him and order had to be preserved, and glancing back down the road, he could see people pressing forward to have a look.

"Pretty," a little girl murmured. No-one was quite sure what she meant, looking as they were at the monster's claws and teeth, but she could see its fur waving gently in the moon-soft breeze and wanted to touch it. "Pretty," she said, stretching her hand out. But snatching it back, her mother cried a frightened "Don't touch it, it might not be dead!" That thought made them all step back before someone answered with a smug "It's dead, alright," and poking it with a stick to prove his point, the crowd relaxed, sensing the superiority of man over dumb senseless nature. "Fancy that," a woman marvelled, "A wolf in Kanangara. Who would have guessed?" Who would have guessed, indeed; not any of these folk, not any of these folk in a thousand years.

But further down the hill, something else was moving as a dark figure silhouetted in the dim light of the movie projector peered through the small glass slit into the near empty auditorium of the Orpheum Cinema and Bing Crosby began singing White
Christmas on the torn, faded screen. Up in the back row, a smooching couple got down to some serious smooching, while closer to the front a rat sniffed at a curled up cheese sandwich under one of the seats and scuttled off. But up in the projector room, Frank didn't know or care. What people did in the cinema was their business, as long as they didn't break the chairs, and after that it was all a great big blank that Frank didn't want to know about.

That's how he lived his life now, and he didn't have any reason to change.

"What am I going to do, Frank, I'm trapped," an unexpected voice said behind him. The sudden sound made Frank start. He'd forgotten the kid was there, Rob, and shooting a look at him, saw him flicking apathetically through an old Playboy in the dull glow of a desk lamp.

"You should have thought about that before..." Frank scolded, and gesturing to the stick magazine, he added, "...I wish you wouldn't bring that stuff in here." Frank wasn't a prude, but he didn't like it. Not here. Not at work. Not in a young man's hands.

"Talk to him for me, will ya?" the kid whined, flipping the magazine shut and putting it away. He had another one at home, anyhow. Rob was Frank's assistant, but he was starting to feel more trouble than he was worth. "It was a loan till payday, that's all," he said, trying to justify his pilfering. "I didn't know he was going to check the petty-cash tonight."

"If you don't want to get caught, don't do it," was Frank's advice. It wasn't that he didn't want to help the kid, of course he did. Not that he was a kid, at eighteen, he felt like it, and Frank had a soft spot for young people, or anyone in trouble; but the last thing he wanted to do was get caught up in something that could turn nasty if their boss, Epstein, took it into his mind to pursue the matter. Maybe it sounds piss-weak, but he had his reasons.

"Shit, Frank, I thought you were my friend," Rob said, still trying the hurt bird strategy.

"I am your friend," Frank answered, "but you got yourself into this, you get yourself out." He was right, and that was the best advice anyone could give, or anyone with Frank's background, anyhow. But what he didn't say was come clean because he knew that never got anyone anywhere.

Moving through the empty corridor and down the worn steps toward Epstein's office, Frank's footsteps were swallowed by the red patterned carpet and moth-eaten drapery dripping like stains from the stucco plastered walls. The Orpheum had had its day a long time ago, but now its art deco interior was cracked and dusty and the silver of the mirrors across which he passed rubbed and peeling with age. Like Kanangara itself, the movie house was past it, a relic of a bygone age, held together by the force of habit or maybe lack of imagination, the lack of imagination in this case being on the part of Jack
Epstein, whose grandfather had built the cinema when it was seen as a sign of future
greatness and not the high-water mark of a soon to be forgotten prosperity. Epstein's father,
who'd also been Jack, had inherited it and the decline had continued into the next
generation, with Jack Junior, Frank's boss, when the only movie left or he could afford was
*Holiday Inn* and nobody cared anyway because they all had their own home entertainment
centres filled with pirated porn. Still, he had his apartment in the bowels of the building
and must have had some savings, because he wasn't in a hurry to sell it to one of the
supermarket chains that was snapping up movie houses across the mountains to put
everyone else out of business, and nobody much paid any attention to it anymore, apart
from the courting teens who weren't there to watch the movie in any case.

Hopping down the last steps into the basement office, Frank shoved the door open,
startling the chubby man working at the untidy desk.

"Hey, knock, will ya..." Epstein snapped. Frank looked around the cluttered room
and wondered what he'd been up to.

"Why? Who're you expecting?"

He spotted the petty cash tin on the trolley next to the book case. Glancing back at
the door, Epstein growled, *You couldn't been anyone—Close the door." As far as Frank
knew, no-one but him had come through that door all the time he'd worked there, so he
wasn't sure what Epstein was being so sensitive about, but he had something else on his
mind, and against his better judgment had decided to slip the missing money back into the
petty cash tin when the other man wasn't watching.

Because the truth of the matter was that Frank didn't trust him and the thought that
Rob might fall into Epstein's grip because of some stupid mistake was a bit more than he
could take. It wasn't that he was evil, or even bad, Frank didn't think that, and he even had
a soft spot for him because he was the kind of man you could get along with—private, not
too demanding, and with enough sleaze to keep him amusing. But he wasn't the sort of
man you wanted to have one over you, and Frank wanted to unhook Rob before it was too
late. You've got to protect the kids.

"How many in there?" Epstein grunted as Frank crossed the floor. Meaning the
auditorium. Frank didn't know what sort of bookwork Epstein needed to do because if
there was one thing he knew, it was that this place didn't earn a dime. But so what? It
wasn't his problem.

"Two," he said, "Matinee."

"Matinee," Epstein repeated, returning his attention to the ledger. "It's the same
thing every day—I bet I know who it is, too—That Caruthers chick—You know how old she
is? Fifteen. We oughta get a cut."

That's the sort of joke Epstein made, downbeat and ugly, and heavy with a dim
view of human prospects.
"Maybe I should set up a camera behind the curtain," he said, warming to his subject, "What do ya reckon? We might be able to sell it and make some money out of this flea-pit."

Glancing over his shoulder, Frank could see he was busy scribbling, and glancing to the side, Frank reached for the petty-cash tin.

"How long you been here now?" Epstein asked without looking up.

"Why?" Frank answered, slipping the money out of his pocket. He was so close he knew he could get away with it. Why not? Why wouldn't you want to help a kid out of a jam if it wasn't going to cost you?

"Have to fill in this Health and Safety thing for those fuckheads or they'll close us down," Epstein answered, glancing up in time to see Frank jerk his hand away from the cash box.

"A year," Frank answered, trying to sound innocent. Epstein was onto him, he knew it. That's what the prick was like, he saw everything, and it always came back to get you.

"I'll put down you just started," the man said, returning his attention to the form, "No need to tell 'em everything." Frank knew what that meant, but what did he care. There was a lot going on in this place Frank didn't know about, but as long as Epstein kept his distance he could do what he liked. What did Frank care?

"The Solstice is coming up, you know that?" Epstein remarked, like Frank was interested. It was cat and mouse now. Frank still hadn't been able to put the money into the box, and was starting to lose his nerve. By rights he should have let it go—Rob was no-one to him, a kid—that's what he told himself anyhow—but there was something ornery about him as well and everyone likes putting one over the boss.

"No. What's that?" Frank said, watching the guy from the corner of his eye.

"Longest night of the year," Epstein answered, tapping the copy of the Kanangara Chronicle lying by the phone. He was enjoying himself, stretching back in his chair, Frank could tell. You can always tell when someone thinks they've got you. "Says so here."

Standing, Epstein reached for book in the shelf behind him.

It was now or never. Straightening the notes in his hand, Frank reached for the cash box, saying, "So what do you want me to do? Turn on the lights a bit earlier?"

"No. I thought you might be interested," Epstein answered, letting things tick along as he stood there flipping through some pages, adding "You know...longest night of the year..." Frank reached for the tin and opened the lid as gentle as he could. "Give you more time to pork whoever it is you're porking," Epstein concluded.

"I'm not porking anyone," Frank said holding his breath as he slipped the money in and closed the lid.
"Then what are you doing" Epstein asked, spinning with a smirk to confront him.

Turning slowly, Frank held up the form, "I'm filling in the Print Report, Jack, what do you think I'm doing?"

A smile curled across Epstein's lips, the sort of smile people use to let you know they've got you exactly where they want you. "I've got something for you to deliver for me," he said as he reached for his cigarettes. This isn't how it was supposed to end; this isn't how it was supposed to end at all.

"What?" Frank asked, still trying to play innocent.

Epstein was having trouble with the cigarette because the lighter wouldn't spark. "It'll only take half an hour," he added, like he cared, "Just down the road." He pushed a brown paper package, about the size of a card pack, across the desk. "Drop it off to Greg Wintle at the old service station."

"What is it?" Frank asked, wondering what to do. He didn't like doing this shit; it wasn't part of his job.

"You seen my lighter fluid?" Epstein asked, rummaging around the desk and pulling the top drawer open. Looking, Frank was startled to see a revolver sitting next to the stapler.

"I don't want to do this anymore," he said. Maybe it was the gun; maybe he was sick of it. Maybe it was time to move on. Epstein tried the lighter again, and a low, sickly flame flickered up.

"Why not?" he asked, lighting the cigarette, "You got a hot date?"

Sometimes Frank hated him, like now. Why would he say something like that to him? To rub it in, that's all. Frank could guarantee the last time Epstein had a hot date, they hadn't worked out what gonorrhea was.

"Tell you what," Epstein continued, "Take some money out of the petty cash tin there and get yourself some petrol on your way over."

Frank glanced across at the petty cash tin he'd snuck the money into and could feel Epstein's eyes boring into him. That's the sort of prick he was, looking for the chance to let you know who's boss. Frank could have walked, should have; should have a long time ago; but he hadn't, and he wasn't going to now. Maybe that was the truth, the two of them were too much alike to let go.

"Ok," he answered slowly, "but this is the last time."

Sure, you could see Epstein thinking. It wasn't that he didn't like Frank; in fact in lots of ways Frank was his only friend, but that's how they played each other, with the sort of rough affection that can turn nasty without you even seeing it coming. And reaching
back for the tin Frank took the notes out again. "You're alright, Frank, you know that?"
Epstein gloated, "You're alright."

Stepping back out into the shadowy basement, Frank glanced at the store room door, noticing it moving like there was a draft blowing it, or there was someone there. There wasn't, but that's the way the whole place felt, like there was something there in the shadows, waiting for its chance to get you. And maybe there was. Frank had been in places like that before, filled with ghosts. People need them, he figured, to make themselves feel alive. Frank didn't, but he didn't mind them. He wasn't frightened, because in lots of ways he was already dead, and that's the way he liked it. He didn't need people's shit, the crap that keeps them going. He wanted to be left alone, sitting in his box up there in the projection room, staring out at nothing through a slit in the wall. That's why he'd come here, to this little lost town in the middle of nothing, and that's all he wanted for the rest of his days.

Climbing back up the steps, he made his way across the marble floor. Rob had already gone, and the Caruther's girl was still pulling at her dress and smooching with her date in the courtyard. It wasn't yet dark, but it soon would be, so he locked up and headed out. Glancing at the packet he was carrying, Frank wished he was stronger, like kids do when they're being forced to do something they don't want it. He hated this, what he'd become, but he hated the other thing more. All of a sudden he could feel the confusion of thoughts he feared rising within him, and with a shock he realised he hadn't changed at all, and that he had to be ready, even after all this time. The thing was still there, waiting for him, waiting to pounce. He could feel it in his muscles and the knot in his stomach. Pulling on his jacket, he felt in the pocket for his keys, and crossing the outer lobby he stepped back into the gathering dusk, and outside, Kanangara hunkered down for the night.
Two.

It was one of those old fashioned towns you still find sprinkled across the mountains, lost in a time-warp under a blanket of pine needles and snow. It was only a bus and train ride from the capital, but somehow that was enough to let it slip out of memory into its own special place of what in other circumstances might be called genteel decay, but here was more like amnesia. Quiet and inward-looking, with wide streets and slow traffic, it was a good place to hide away and bring up kids, relaxing into your autumn years, and if you didn't have a dog you could always find a neighbour to talk to over the fence or bump into along its quiet, tree-lined thoroughfares. The people of Kanangara weren't proud, because they didn't know much different, but they were content, which is more than you can say for most people.

They weren't exactly his thoughts as Frank's station wagon cruised out that quiet Friday night past the last few shops and houses heading toward Greg Wintle's petrol station, but the gentle rhythm of the wipers brushing the drizzle from the windscreen had settled him a bit after the unpleasantness back in Epstein's office. He didn't know why he let himself get upset; he'd been in plenty of situations a lot more awkward than that; but it certainly stirred something up inside that he could now feel slipping back into the numb darkness that was the way he liked to feel. Anger was dangerous, any sort of anger, and Frank had been angry. He hated any kind of excess, because there's no telling where it might take you, and Frank was now the kind of man who wanted to know where he was going. Lest he wind up some place he didn't want to be.

But right now he was headed for Greg Wintle's. Not that Frank knew the guy, or even that he was a real person. He'd passed the sign over the garage once or twice when he'd been out and about—one of those small sole-proprietor places with a cottage out the back—but he'd never bought petrol there because it was on the opposite side of town and Frank wasn't one for exploring. He'd arrived in Kanangara last Winter, unannounced and uninvited and had laid low for awhile, checking it out, getting the lay of the land, and once he'd decided it was safe, had gotten the job at the Orpheum and sort of settled in without anyone even noticing. And slipping out of sight of the few who did. He knew the people pretty well, or so he thought, and while naturally wary, wasn't expecting anything untoward from what he'd decided was a detour on his way home.

Still, the packet sitting on the front seat next to him was a worry. Frank didn't like doing favours, and this wasn't the first time Epstein had imposed, as someone polite might say. But it's difficult to say no to your boss, especially when things were as tight job-wise as they were after the much vaunted prosperity they heard about on the television somehow by-passed Kanangara before spluttering to a halt in the rest of the country as well. So you had to be careful. Or at least Frank did. It didn't happen often, doing parcel delivery, but it had happened often enough for Frank to be uncomfortable, and as he drove out into the darkening bush that surrounded Kanangara, he made a resolution that this would be the last time. Yes, the last. He didn't know what he'd do if Epstein gave him the
sack, move on, he supposed, but he'd face that challenge when he came to it. If push came
to shove, he could up stakes and leave as silently as he'd arrived. There was nothing
holding him here. Or anywhere else, for that matter.

Wintle's was about five miles out of town, on a short stretch of straight road before
it curled off again up the mountain and got lost further along the range. Coming around the
corner, Frank could see it up ahead as someone flicked the lights on, but glancing at the
package, he came to a decision, and gently braking, eased over to the side of the road so
the car was out of the light. Better stay in the shadows than show your hand straight up.
That's what he'd learnt, if you wanted to keep out of trouble.

What sort of trouble it might be, Frank didn't know, and he wasn't in a hurry to find
out. It could be a strange place, Kanangara, full of odd little whirlpools of gossip and fuss
that sprang up and died away as fast. They were something Frank tried to keep clear of, but
sometimes you couldn't, and that thought always put him on edge. Maybe he should have
paid more attention to what was going on, but he didn't. He'd rather not know. But as his
dusty boots scuffed across the gravel toward the dim light ahead he wondered if that was
his mistake.

A stocky man in his fifties wearing blue overalls was wrestling a metal "Closed"
sign into the driveway as a car sped past, hitting a dead wallaby on the edge of the road
opposite. Looking over his shoulder, the man called to someone in the repair shop, "Get
that thing off the road, Brad." There was only a pick-up truck parked under an elm, so
Frank figured there was no more than two of them, and the speaker was the boss, so
Wintle. "The damn thing'll be stinking up the place like a sewer-pipe by tomorrow
morning," the man continued. There was a light drizzle falling, and Frank could feel the
ice crystalising in the air, but as he stepped into the light the crunch of gravel underneath
made Wintle turn and challenge, "Who're you?" in a hostile voice edged with fear.

Frank came to a stop. He knew that tone of voice, and knew what it meant.

"I've got a package for you, Mr. Wintle," he said, holding it up, "Jack Epstein asked
me to give it to you."

Wintle looked at the package and then across the concrete drive toward the repair
shop. Rubbing his chin, thinking, he turned on his heel. "Come into the office..." he said in
a low voice. Glancing to the side, Frank could see the mechanic step into the doorway
wiping his hands on a dirty rag and giving him the once over. He wasn't a big guy, but he
looked like he could handle himself.

Crossing the shadowy shop, Wintle moved toward the door into the living area
behind and pulled it shut. Stepping up to the drinks fridge, he grabbed a bottle and asked,
"Coke?" Frank wasn't there to chew the cud. "I stopped by to drop off the package, Mr.
Wintle," he said, "I've got to get back to work."
Wintle flicked the cap off and took a swig, squinting at him over his knuckle. "Yeah, work," he said, like he was still figuring out what to do, "Who do you work for?" The shadows were darkening inside the shop. The clouds must have been rolling in outside.

"I told you," he said, "Jack Epstein—Down the cinema."

"The cinema, ay?" Wintle said, sceptical and interested at the same time, "What do you do down there?"

"I'm in a bit of a hurry, Mr. Wintle," Frank answered, trying to keep it casual. What did Wintle care whether he was the projectionist or the popcorn seller, Frank wanted to get out of there. And the more Wintle talked, the more uneasy he got.

"We all are," Wintle answered, looking edgy, "What did you say your name was again?"

"Frank." he answered.

He was starting to get irritated. Frank was doing the both of them a favour, after all.

"Frank who?" Wintle asked. It was like he was looking for a fight, or playing for time. Whatever, it was certainly getting on Frank's nerves.

"I don't want any trouble, Mister," Frank said, trying to put things straight, "I want to give you this and get going."

"So what is it?" Wintle asked, looking hard at him.

"How would I know?" Frank answered, unnerved. But somewhere deep inside him, he did. Not exactly, of course, not in detail, but enough to know it was trouble.

But surging toward him, Wintle exploded, "Yeah, sure," he said, giving Frank a hard shove back toward the door, "Fuck you, and fuck all of you! Now get out!"

Caught wrong-footed, Frank fell back against the magazine rack sending it flying as he cried a surprised, "What?"

"Go on, get out!" Wintle shouted, pushing him out the door into the night air, "I told him before: I don't want his shit! I never want to see his shit again!"

Frank tumbled backwards down the step onto the driveway and was standing in front of the bowsers. "What are you fucking talking about?" he spluttered.

"Get out I said..." Wintle ordered, heaving from the exertion. And turning to the mechanic standing nearby in the roller-door to the garage, he continued, "You ever see this guy again, you kill him, right?"

Not the sort of thing you expect to hear every day. Not in Kanangara, anyway.
"Are you out of your head," Frank coughed, "What's your fucking problem?" But taking a menacing step forward, the mechanic pulled his overalls aside to show a gun pressed against his greasy singlet. "Piss off..." he snarled.

Frank didn't need to be told twice, and putting his hands up in surrender he started to back away, "Fuck, yeah—Whatever you say," he answered, watching the man's hand. You don't argue with someone with a gun; not in Frank's experience, anyhow.

"Piss off and don't come back..." the mechanic growled, keeping his eye on him. "You don't have to worry about that," Frank said, but as he turned toward the car, he heard a dog's excited yapping, and looking back over his shoulder saw Wintle storming away down the side of the building toward the bungalow out the back, with a Chihuahua snapping at his feet. "Elvis!" Wintle shouted, "Fuck off!" He was kicking at it, trying to get rid of the dog, but the mutt thought he was playing, and scampered playfully around his feet, barking louder than ever. "Fuck off," Wintle roared, "Fuck off, you mongrel!" But the dog wouldn't stop and Frank would have laughed if he hadn't thought he was about to be killed. Looking back at the mechanic, he saw the man again gesture for him to move on, and Frank turned away and kept walking.

Stepping up to the safety of the car, he glanced down at the package in his hand and cussed as he threw it onto the passenger seat. Whatever it was, drugs or whatever Epstein was up to, this was shit, and he didn't have to put up with people threatening to kill him. He was going to go back to the Orpheum and settle it once and for all. This wasn't his job; he didn't have to put up with this shit.

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The packet swung heavily in Frank's hand as he stalked along the carpeted corridor calling, "Jack?!...Jack!" into the shadows. He was fuming now, angrier than he'd even been when the prick had threatened him with the gun. But the cinema was dark and empty, and had that dead, empty feel of somewhere closed off and forgotten, like a tomb in a lost valley. Stepping into the projection room, he saw Rob re-winding the film. "Where's the boss?" he demanded, forgetting himself. It wasn't the kid's fault. Startled, Rob looked up at him, and could see straight away something was wrong.

"He had to go out," Rob answered.

"Go out where?" Frank asked, regretting his tone, but still not able to curb it. Epstein never went out anywhere. He didn't know anyone, and no-one knew him, and that's the way they all seemed to like it. Rob didn't know what was wrong, and wasn't feeling so good himself.

"He said he was going out," he answered, "He said to make sure the place was locked up tonight, that's all."

If he'd had a dog, Frank would have kicked it. Maybe Wintle had already rung up and given Epstein an earful, or maybe it had been a setup all along, and Epstein was giving
him shit. Frank didn't know, but rubbing his hand through his hair like he wanted to tear it out, all he could do was spit, "Geez..." That's what Epstein was like, somehow always out of reach when you wanted to tell him something.

"Thanks, Frank..." Rob offered, watching him. He'd never seen Frank like this before; he was always so calm.

"What for?" Frank asked, shooting him a look.

"For sorting things out for me," Rob answered sheepishly.

"What things?" Frank asked, not sure what he was talking about.

"The money," Rob replied, surprised, "You sorted it out with Mr. Epstein, didn't you? He didn't say a word."

"The money?" Frank asked, wondering. He was sure Epstein had seen him; but maybe he hadn't. Maybe Frank had misjudged him, and was getting paranoid. Living by yourself does funny things to your mind. "Sure," he said, "No worries."

"What did you tell him?" Rob asked, curious to know the details, "What did he say?" But Frank had other things on his mind than how they'd put one over the boss, and looking at the package in his hand, he tossed it into the drawer and slammed it shut. He'd find out what that was about, for sure; but not tonight. But he'd find out and set it right.

"Nothing," he said, "Just don't do it again."

"But you must have told him something," Rob insisted, "What did you tell him?" He was a kid, that's all, someone's kid that you hope is going to be alright.

"Nothing," Frank said, "I didn't tell him nothing: and if you're smart, you won't tell him nothing, either. In fact you'll never tell anyone nothing about anything because all they'll ever do is use it against you."

It came out harsher than he intended, like a reprimand, and Rob felt like he'd been slapped. And maybe it was a reprimand, but a reprimand to Frank himself, when he was a youngster with his future ahead of him. But if it was, it was too late for him, and Frank knew it. His futures were over, all he had now was a past. But he wasn't in the mood to do any more explaining, and flicking off the desk lamp, he turned back toward the door.

"You going?" Rob asked, "What about tonight's show?"

"Tonight's show? Are you kidding?" Frank asked, incredulous. It was like he was racing at a hundred miles an hour and everyone else was doing twenty. "Is anyone in there?"

"No," Rob answered, looking toward the auditorium.
"Then there won't be any show tonight," Frank shot back, his anger flashing out again, "Finish up and go home." If the boss couldn't be bothered to be there, what made him think anybody else would?

"Will we get paid?" Rob asked.

"Fuck, Rob." Frank said, "Are you kidding?" Like being paid mattered when someone pulled a gun on you.

"Sorry for asking, Frank," Rob said, confused, "Is everything alright?"

Frank didn't even know what to say.

"It's fine," he answered, calming himself. Rob didn't deserve any of this, and Frank had started kicking himself.

"I'm sorry..." Rob said. And he was sorry, though he wasn't quite sure what for.

"It's not your fault," Frank said at last as the disturbance inside him settled, "You've got to be careful, that's all."

"Whatever you say, Frank," Rob answered, not sure what he meant. He loved Frank without realising it, without knowing what that meant and without even being able to put it in words. But he loved him, and would do a lot for him, like he knew Frank would do for him. Had done for him. He knew he could count on Frank, because Frank was a good man, and everyone who met him knew it.

Frank turned back to the corridor, but hesitated, glancing back.

"You've got to be careful," he repeated, like that meant anything, but it did. In fact that was how he lived his life. People had to be careful, and if they were, they'd be left alone, and that was the most important thing, to be left alone. Because as soon as someone noticed you, you were dead. It might not be what anyone liked to hear, but it was the truth. This world was a trap.

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It felt late by the time Frank got back to the boarding house, with the black wind whipping up from the valley and rushing with a roar through the ghost gums swaying high above the narrow road snaking its way through the bush. Turning into the drive, the headlights swung across the sign shaking in the wind. "Lavender House—Casual & Permanent Accommodation" it read. Parking by the wattle whipping at the sky, Frank got out of the car and felt alive as he looked across the wide valley before the darkened house. A child's plastic windmill buzzed and hummed in the dead cold garden as the wind blasted up from the valley. Stepping up to the door of his room cut into the sandstone foundations in the side of the house, Frank brushed the tendrils of the overgrown ivy aside and took out his key.
"Frank?" a woman's frightened voice croaked into the night, "Is that you?"

Looking back into moonlit garden, Frank could see someone, a figure standing a little further off, with a thick wooden stick gripped in her hand. "Frank?" she repeated.

"Vivien?" Frank answered, stepping into view, "What's the matter?"

The woman looked uneasily about the raging darkness, and stepping up, Frank saw the state she was in.

"Are you alright?" he asked, feeling like he had to get her inside as fast as he could.

"I thought there was something here..." she said, staring into the bush. Following her gaze, Frank tried to see what she could see, but wondered if he ever could.

"Why?" he asked, "What did you hear?"

"Sounds," she said, "Snuffling."

"Snuffling?" Frank repeated, wondering what she meant.

Looking at him she said, "I don't know what I heard. I thought there was someone here."

Frank watched her a moment longer, wondering what she knew, and then looked back out at the bush. Vivien was like that, fragile and brave. Maybe there was something there, Frank didn't know. He couldn't see anything.

"Everyone's gone..." she said later as she poured him some tea. It wasn't often he went into the house with her, but she'd invited him, and something made him accept. "The honeymoon couple...?" he asked. There had been a honeymoon couple staying in the top hut the last couple of days, quiet and dreamy and not thinking of the future at all, or else imagining a happy one.

"Yes. Gone," she said, settling down in front of the small fire, "They're all gone..."

And the way she said it, it was like the end was near. Frank wasn't sure how old she was, maybe forty, still beautiful, describe her but sad beyond words. "I'm not frightened, Frank," she said, looking across at him.

"I know you're not, Vivien," he answered, not sure what she was getting at. The place smelt of musk and candle wax and felt like it had been carved out of the night itself.

"I'm not frightened," she said again, turning back to stare into the still bright embers. Watching her a little while longer, Frank picked up his tea and held it warm in his hands, before sipping and returning to his own thoughts. But when he said goodnight and went around the house and back downstairs, he looked out again into the night and felt the fury blasting toward them. Perhaps there was something out there, how would you know? How would you know till it was on top of you?
Flicking the waving ivy out of the way, he took out the key, but something made him pause, and tensing, he reached forward and tried the handle. He'd lived in hard places too long. It was still locked, as he'd left it, and relaxing a little he looked again over his shoulder to see if anything was there, and turned the key. The place was still and quiet. That was always a moment of reprieve for him, with his back against the door and facing the warmth of his solitude, away from everything that could disturb him. Realising he'd been holding his breath, he let out a sigh and moved through the stillness, listening as the wind whistled under the door and through the rattling glass of the window. He liked that sound, the sound of his own aloneness. He was safe here. Safe and forgotten.

The place was undisturbed, his single bed pushed into the corner, with its sheets tucked under the mattress, the way he’d done it for twenty years; on the other side of the room, the table and chair were where they should have been, square against the blank wall where he ate his breakfast the same way every day, with his bowl and spoon already set there. Everything was in its place, the bright, clean gas ring where he heated his food—mostly soups and stews, the sort of thing you could buy in cans—and set it under the window looking South, where he cooked; the box of waterproof matches on the right hand side. So he could always find them. His clothes—three shirts and a pair of pants—hanging neatly on the rail he'd hung from the ceiling, and his socks and underwear in the drawer of the low cupboard beside the bed. All quiet and still and orderly, as it should be for a soul at rest, and as he knew everyone would want to see, right down to his slippers beneath the bed that he sometimes wore, but at other times simply stared at, wondering what they could possibly mean. He looked across at the mirror and saw a man looking back at him. Or rather, himself, or what was left of him. He was getting older, greyer, not yet an old man, but with the years piling up, and the beginning of lines subtly etching themselves into his pale skin. Everything looked familiar and strange, himself, his life. But his eyes were the same, the same eyes that had always stared back whenever he’d dared look to see if there anything was there. Brown and depthless and impenetrable. *The eyes of a killer,* the prosecutor had said. Were they, he wondered. Was that him, or someone pretending to be him? A thief who had snuck in through the window and stolen his life, and was now staring back out through his eyes. He didn't know. It was him as he had known himself to be for as long as he could remember. The him that the world knew him to be, even here, where there was no world to reassure. It was him, yes, and even here, he was still frightened of who he might become.
Three.

The next day was one of those still, crystal clear winter days that appear like magic where the mountain air seems to ring with anticipation as parrots screech through the ice blue sky like skaters across a pond and all the tumult of winter evaporates for a moment in an explosion of hope. Frank needed some shoe repairs, so went to work via the main street, which is why he was surprised to see a crowd gathered in the Remembrance Park under a banner strung up across the broken memorial clock announcing Christmas in June! Celebrate Yuletide with the Kanangara City Council!!

It was a marketing thing dreamt up by a travel company to trick tourists into coming to Kanangara, and sure enough he could already see the local dignitaries gathering to cut a ribbon to mark the occasion. Kids were running, making merry havoc the way kids do, and a busload of Japanese tourists were already busy taking one another's photos in front of the war memorial commemorating the glorious war against Japan, which Alderman Hannay made a mental note to have it covered up next year, lest it cause offense. But Frank wasn't one for crowds, so made off down a laneway before anyone noticed. But not before a young girl in the crowd spotted his hunched figure scurrying away out of view. "Christina!" someone called, but she didn't even look, watching Frank's retreating figure with interest as she licked her ice cream. "Christina," the boy repeated as he ran up, heart beating and nervous; but she wasn't interested in him, he wasn't mature enough for her, and he soon wandered off, disappointed. She was a girl, that's all, and not much older than the kids running through the crowd in animal masks chasing a terrified puppy they'd tied a string of crackers to. Someone grabbed the pup and told the kids off for being cruel to animals, but it didn't take any of the fun out of the day, and glancing back at the podium, Christina continued enjoying her treat. then the Mayor stepped up to the screeching microphone and declared this season the happiest season of all, and the Yulefest open. But Christina hardly heard anything he'd said at all, because she was already thinking of something else.

But a block away, Frank slowed in front of a newspaper dispensing machine as he saw the headline on the local paper. Wolf Shot in Kanangara, it said in stark black letters, with a big picture of the dead wolf lying in the snow splashed across the front page. Coming to a halt, he dug into his pocket for a coin, and taking a copy from the dispenser, he stood there on the street reading it, and from his interest, you would have thought it was about him.

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Bursting through the front doors into the Orpheum, Frank spotted Rob stacking soft drink bottles under the stairs.

"Do you know anything about this?" he demanded, throwing the headline down.
"Yeah, weird, ay?" Rob answered as he dropped the crate with a loud rattle, "Sergeant Grant shot it down on the Main Street yesterday. Someone said there might be another one still down the valley."

But something was up Frank, and grabbing the boy by the arm, he started hustling him across the tiled floor toward the box-office.

"Do me a favour, will you, Rob?" he said, "Ring the cops and find out what happened to it."

"I told you what happened," Rob said, confused as Frank bustled him toward the phone, "Sergeant Grant shot it." Frank was hurting his arm, he was holding it so tight.

"No, that's not what I mean," Frank said, "Where is it now?"

What did Frank care? "Where is it?" Rob repeated, confused, "It's dead."

"I know it's dead, " Frank said, "But where's the body?" This wasn't making any sense at all.

"What body??" Rob asked, perplexed.

"The wolf's body," Frank said, holding up the phone. Did wolves have bodies? It was a big dead dog. But Frank made it sound like it was a person.

"Why don't you ring?" Rob asked, looking at him. What was wrong with him? Rob had never seen him like this.

"Do me a favor, will you," Frank pleaded, "You owe me."

Whether or not Rob owed him, Frank was more agitated than he'd ever seen him, and sure, people had asked about Frank when they heard Rob was working with him, but all he'd ever said was that he was alright by him, and that's all that counted; but right now, looking at him, he wasn't so sure, because right now, standing there holding the phone out with a strange look in his eye, Frank looked like someone else, someone you didn't say no to. And as Rob took the phone and dialled, a ray of light caught the bezel of the dusty glass door leading out onto the forecourt and shone through the gloom of the lobby straight onto the statue of Orpheus, standing with his harp in the scalloped recess by the lolly counter, a reminder of a time when people knew who that was, and of his long journey into Hell to save the maiden he loved. The strings of its instrument were rusted and long gone, and the dirt was so ingrained it looked like leprosy smeared across his white skin, but there was no mistaking his sadness, or the emptiness of the world that was his.

The phone rang, and then answered, and the voice at the other end sounded abrupt and businesslike. "That wolf that was shot the other day," Rob started, not sure what he was going to say, "Where is it now?" It was Sergeant Grant he was talking to, he could tell because he sounded like a man, not the boy he knew the other copper was. "Where?" he
repeated, writing down the address. He didn't even know there was a taxidermist in Kanangara.

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The rose bushes shook in the cold blast blowing papers up the empty street, and taking in the low, liver-red brick building before him, Frank stepped forward and knocked on the heavy door. It was in a quiet part of town, not far from the old railway silos, that had the rough, lonely feel of a cemetery. It didn't sound like anyone was home, so Frank knocked again, and after a moment he heard echoey footsteps coming down a long hallway, moving toward him like destiny. After a moment, the door swing open, revealing a girl staring at him.

"Yes?" she asked like he was an intruder in her kingdom. Frank wasn't sure he was in the right place.

"Is your father in?" he said, looking over her shoulder into the shadowy interior behind.

"My father...?" she asked, unsure what he meant.

"I can come back," Frank suggested, "Is there anyone here...?"

"What can I do for you, Mr. Cave?" the girl asked, straightening as she took charge.

Surprised, Frank inspected her more closely. "I want to have a look at the wolf," he said.

"Why didn't you say so?" she asked, stepping out of the door to let him in.

It was a quiet waiting room, filled with the mournful sound of a grandfather clock. Watching as she pulled on a white-coat, which made her look more official, Frank apologised.

"I'm sorry," he said, "I didn't realize you worked here."

"I'm the assistant," she answered, "Christina."

There didn't seem to be anyone else there, him and her, which seemed weird and made him uncomfortable. But he was there now, and he had to go through with it.

"Funny sort of job," he said, trying to sound relaxed as he fell into step behind her while she led him down the dark hall. It was all mahogany wood panelling and brass fittings, with certificates and inspirational quotes hanging from the picture rails.

"What?" she asked, "Stuffing animals, or burying people?"

"Burying people?" Frank asked, surprised, "I thought this was a taxidermist."
"It's a funeral home," she explained, leading him on, "The taxidermy is the director's hobby."

Hobby? Frank thought, Pretty weird hobby for a funeral director.

"Anyone ask him to stuff their family?" he asked. It was an odd thing to say, but somehow it slipped out. Maybe it was the company. He could see her hair soft and warm on her shoulder.

"Not yet," Christina answered, glancing back at him with a wry smile, "but we're waiting." He was handsome. More handsome than she'd thought. "But you'd be surprised at how many people want to take their pets with them," she added, trying to be agreeable.

It was more chat than he'd had in a while, and he was feeling even weirder than he had when he first came in.

Stepping into the embalming room, Frank felt a chill as he saw the mortuary table and smelt the formaldehyde. Christina noticed his discomfort, so slid the tray out of the fridge.

"There he is," she said, looking down, "What do you want to see?" Frank didn't know, and confronted by the beast, was lost for words.

It was big, a big animal, bigger than anything he'd imagined. He'd never seen an animal that big.

"It's a Timber Wolf," she said, but he was hardly listening as he put his hand out to touch it, mesmerised by the sight.

"Do you mind...?" he asked, almost unconsciously. She could see the effect the animal was having on him.

"Go ahead," she answered, "Its fur's a bit stiff now, so it's not as nice to touch as it was when they brought him in. Do you like animals, Mr. Cave?"

"No," he said without thinking. But it was true; he'd never liked animals, even when he was a kid. They were dirty.

The fur was still soft but from the way he was touching it, she could tell he was looking for something.

"They didn't need to kill it, you know," she said, "it was like a house pet. He'd eat out of your hands if you wanted him to."

"How do you know?" Frank asked, looking at her. How could she know such a wondrous thing? That this animal would eat out of your hands.

"I do," she said, getting bored, "What are you looking for, Mr. Cave?"

Blinking Frank looked back at the wolf, curious himself.
"What?" he asked, like she'd discovered him doing something he shouldn't be.

"What are you looking for?" she repeated.

"Where did it come from?" he asked, coming back to himself.

"Someone let it out of the Western Plains Zoo," she answered, "Maybe some Animal Liberation people. Cruel."

"The zoo?" Frank answered like he didn't understand what she'd said to him. Of course it was the zoo; where else could it have come from. "But that's more than two hours drive away," he calculated.

"Wolves don't drive, Mr. Cave," she said.

The way she spoke was strange, like she was answering questions he wasn't asking.

"No," he agreed, looking back at the animal, but no matter how long he stared at it, it still kept its stubborn secret.

"How do you stuff it?" he wondered.

"How do you think?" she answered. She was funny, a kid, but knowing and cynical as well. "It's interesting," she relented, "if you like that sort of thing."

Frank's head was swimming as they made their way back through the gloom to the front door.

"Cruel," she repeated, "once a wild animal's tamed, you can't let it out in the woods again and think it'll be able to fend for itself."

He wasn't listening to her, or even thinking. It was more like he was already swarming through the thickets and byways of his mind, struggling to make sense of all that he'd seen. But before he knew it, there he was standing once again in front of the open door leading back into the world outside.

"Thanks..." he began, at last looking up into her eyes, and being surprised at how blue they were.

"Christina," she reminded.

"What?" he asked.

"Christina," she answered, "That's my name, in case you forgot."

He could see now she was maybe sixteen or seventeen. She wasn't wearing any makeup, so she hardly even looked old enough to be out of school.

"Thanks, Christina," he said, "Thanks for taking the trouble to show me."
"No trouble, Mr. Cave." She answered. She was looking straight at him, like she didn't have any fear.

"Someone brought it here, that's what you're saying, isn't it," he said, still thinking it through.

"Why would anyone want to do that?" she asked, but it was like she knew the answer, and was testing him.

"How come you know my name?" he said, realising what was bugging him.

"Everyone knows your name, Mr. Cave," she answered.

He didn't know what she meant. "How?" he asked.

"They do," she said, and taking a card from the hallstand, she handed it to him, saying, "If there's anything else I can help you with, call me."

"Thanks," he replied, looking at it without seeing it. It was like the dream had started again, and time had started to play its tricks, because all of a sudden it was night once more.

"It was nice meeting you, Mr. Cave," she said.

Frank looked at her, but he wasn't seeing her at all, he was seeing all the trouble that lay ahead of him that he had no way of avoiding.

"Christina," she reminded, "It's an easy name to remember. Christina."

"Why?" he asked blinking into her eyes.

"Why what?" she asked blankly.

"Why is it here?" he said.

That was the question he'd wanted to ask from the very beginning, but did he think she knew the answer, or had she somehow opened the door into his secret.

"There aren't any wolves in Australia," Christina answered.

"No," he answered, wondering what she was telling him, "There aren't any wolves. Except this wolf."

"That's right," she said, "Except this wolf." They were talking a secret code now, or maybe they weren't talking at all, feeling something about each other.

He stood there a moment longer, thinking about that, before once more looking into her eyes and then turning back toward the street. Standing in the doorway, she watched him move into the blustery dark till he finally disappeared into the blackness beyond the street light. Later, she would slide the wolf out again and wonder what it meant, and why it had brought the two of them together. She now knew who he was, and wondered how long
it would take him to know her. Life was strange, and sad; and frightening. Someone else was going to die, she knew. But she hoped it wouldn't be him, and she hoped it wouldn't be her.

The shock, or numbness, that engulfed him as he stepped back onto the street, was hard to describe; a kind of emptiness that had rediscovered itself after a long absence. Frank was empty, he knew that; he'd emptied himself so as never to find that place again, that place of suffering; he'd rid himself of as much of the human baggage—the grief and need he'd accumulated—as he could—the feelings, the memories, the hopes that keep the machine of life going. Sure, he felt a certain—protectiveness—toward Rob—even toward Epstein, but they were all hedged around by all sorts of trip wires primed to go off if anything like real friendship, real love or loyalty, started to take over, because that was wrong and dangerous—feelings were dangerous, and Frank didn't ever want to feel anything ever again.

But he could feel something now. Fear. And if he'd seen what was happening out along one of those half forgotten roads outside of town leading off into the wilderness, he would have been even more frightened, because something was moving the pieces of a machine that was about snap shut around him. And though there was nobody there to see it, the explosion that ripped through an abandoned car and set it alight on the asphalt was the beginning. Not the beginning of the whole thing—that had happened long before anyone had even noticed—but the beginning of the town's awaking to the sort of place it had become as it dreamt its simple dreams of happy anonymity. Because Frank wasn't the only one who'd been asleep, Kanangara had been lost in the folds of time for far too long, imagining itself to be something it could never be, an uncomplicated haven of the simple and the wholesome. When really it was a settlement of men and women who were at that moment waking to the horror of their lives as one of their number returned to settle accounts and collect his dues. The day of retribution had come, the day when the light would be switched back on, and blinking at one another, everyone would realise what they'd become.
A sudden sharp knocking on his door cracked like judgment day through the murky light filtering into his room, and Frank jolted wide awake. He didn't need to be told who or what it was, because he knew already, that sound, strong and insistent, incapable of being ignored, he'd heard it often enough before, waking him from his stupor, and opening the door into the harsh glare of the morning light, he shielded his eyes with his hand as two hulking figures loomed over him.

"Mr. Cave?" one of them said, he couldn't tell which. They were both in uniform. Both armed, he could see, with pistols on their hips.

"Yes?" he said, already feeling guilty. "Would you mind telling us who you are?"

Down at the station, Frank couldn't keep his eyes off Grant's Remington hanging on the wall behind the man.

"It's not my car," Frank said, trying to sound reasonable as he pushed the photo of the burnt out wreck Grant had given him back across the desk, "You saw my car."

"But it is your name," Grant noted, pushing the rego paper toward him, "And your address." A tap was dripping monotonously into the wash basin to the side, and somehow Frank couldn't get it out of his head.

"It's not my name," Frank corrected, "I changed my name by deed-poll."

"When you were released from prison," Ted Jincks noted, making it sound like a likely story. The younger policeman was standing behind him checking Frank out like he was something someone had scraped off his shoe.

"Yes," Frank answered tiredly, "When I was released from prison." Coppers seemed to delight in stating the obvious. It was part of their charm.

"Why didn't you make yourself known to us at that time?" Jincks pursued. He had that cocky, insolent edge that young people sometimes assume when they think they can get away with it. Frank tried to control his irritation.

"I served my time," he said, "I didn't need to tell anyone."

"Weren't you on parole?" Jincks asked.

"No," Frank said, "I served my sentence and I've got my papers. End of story."

"Twenty years," Grant observed. He'd pulled the paper-work out to check. "It's a long time."

"It is a long time," Frank agreed, "And I served it and I never asked for any special concessions and I never got any and now I'm a free man."
"While the man you murdered is still dead," Jincks observed sourly. That was the truth and there was nothing anyone could do to change it.

"I didn't make the law," Frank answered. Maybe it was justice, maybe it wasn't; all he knew was that when he got out they gave him a paper bag with his things in and told him never to come back.

"A free man," Grant repeated, "whose car got blown up not fifteen minutes drive from here."

"It's not my car," Frank insisted, annoyed, "And that's not my signature," he added, pointing to the form, "So if you don't mind, I'd like to get out of here." He rose as if to leave, but Grant wasn't finished with him yet.

"You're not going anywhere, Mister," he said, nodding to Jincks to put Frank back in his seat, "What's going on?"

Frank was used to being man-handled by the police, but he didn't like it. He didn't know what was going on, he said, and didn't even want to guess.

"Please," he finished, feeling the wind finally going out of him, "All I want is to be left alone. Is that too much to ask? What I did was wrong and bad, I know that; I know that and I paid the price; I served my time, what else do you want me from me?" That was the thing about cops, they always had more time than you did, because that was their job, to turn your life to shit, and that's what they liked doing.

"What do you know about the wolf?" Grant asked, leaning forward, and Frank felt the pit of his stomach give way. There was no escape; it was going to be forever.

"What about it?" he asked.

"That's what they called you in prison, wasn't it; that was your nickname in jail," the policeman continued, "Wolf. Why did they call you that?" How he knew about that was anyone's guess, though it was no secret. But it wasn't the sort of thing you expect outsiders to know.

"You're not a murderer, you're a sadist, aren't you," Grant pursued, watching him to see what effect his words were having. "You cut that man to pieces." And it was almost true. Not literally, but almost. It's hard, being reminded of the worst thing you've ever done in your life; hard being reminded of the worst thing you've ever done in your life; hard being reminded who you are.

"I know what I did," Frank said, looking down at the pattern in the lino floor, "Is there anything else you want to tell me?"

Grant considered him. He'd heard about the case, read about it. It was a long time ago now, but looking at Frank, the details started coming back.
"Do you think it's got anything to do with that?" he asked, "His family, maybe? Friends coming after you?"

"He didn't have any friends," Frank murmured, broke and humiliated.

"Who was he, anyhow?" Grant asked, sounding friendly, the way coppers sometimes pretend to be.

"He was a fucking pervert, that's who he was," Frank spat back, the fire flaring up inside him again, "and if he was still alive I'd do it all again."

That's when Grant and Jincks saw the killer—a little glimpse, but it was so unexpected it took their breath away. Yeah, he could do it alright.

As soon as he'd said it, he regretted it.

"Nobody knows where I am," Grant observed.

"Did you do it?" Frank asked, and as he looked up for the first time, Grant could see his gently mocking brown eyes. That was the other thing people said about him at the trial, how no-one could understand how someone like him could do what he did.

"No," Grant said, the two men staring at one another a moment longer, each getting the measure of the other, till Frank looked away, and they returned to the blankness of the polite society.

"Alright," Grant said, relaxing back in his chair, "I suppose that's it. It's not your car, and you've got nothing to do with it. Pretty strange, if you ask me, but what would I know?"

"I can go?" Frank asked, already standing.

"Well I guess I could charge you with littering and get you to clean up the mess," Grant said, "But I don't think that'd get us anywhere."

"It's not my car," Frank repeated, beginning to wonder whose it was.

"So you said," Grant answered, slipping the photo of the wreck back into the folder, "Alright, you can go," he said, "But if you're going to stick around Kanangara, you'd better be careful, because I'll be watching you."

"This is my home now," Frank said, "So you'd better get used to it." It wasn't intended to come out sounding quite as aggressive as it did, but there it was. Jincks watched Grant to see how he'd react.
"I'm doing my job," Grant said, putting him in his place, "And my job is to enforce the law. You stay on the right side of the law, we'll get along fine; but you put a foot out of place, and you'll find me standing there waiting for you."

"It's nice to feel special," Frank said. He shouldn't have, but he couldn't help himself.

"Nothing special," Grant answered, putting the folder back in the drawer, "That's a promise I make all my customers."

"Hey," a voice called from behind as Frank made his way toward the front door. Looking back, he saw Jincks holding up a Stanley Knife. "This yours?" It was the sort of smart-arse stunt a milk bar punk'd pull. Frank had killed the guy with a Stanley Knife.

"What's wrong with you people?" Frank groaned, "Why can't you leave me alone?"

It was so plaintive Grant almost felt sorry for him.

"Yes, alright, Mr. Cave..." he said, and turning toward the younger officer, he ordered "Go and get me a coffee, Ted."

"Not every day you find you got a celebrity killer living in your town," Jincks said, flicking the blade shut.

"I paid my dues," Frank protested, "I don't owe you or anybody anything."

"Alright, Frank," Grant soothed, "You can go now." The man had his rights, Grant knew.

"You ever killed anyone?" Frank asked, shooting a look back at him.

"No," Grant said, squaring up. He wasn't going to take lip from any ex-con. "And I'm glad to say I've never had to."

"Well don't," Frank answered, "Because it'll be the worst day of your life." Grant believed him, and could see the remorse in his eyes. He'd never even applied for parole, the poor prick, served out his sentence because he'd judged himself the worst man in the world. That terrible crime of passion had destroyed Frank's life, Grant knew. He'd lost everything, his wife, his family, everything. And now here he was, with something moving in on him that he couldn't even name.

"I'm here for you, too," Grant said, softening, "Don't feel like you're alone."

But it was words. Frank knew he was alone, had always been alone, because that's what people are, no matter what they think or say; and stepping back out through the door, he looked off into the dull grey distance where the snow clouds were already gathering atop the range, and gripping his hand he tried to get it to stop shaking. He knew what he had to do now and he was going to do it, but he wasn't going to take the blame for Epstein, if that was what this was all about. He wasn't Epstein's fall guy, and he wasn't going to get
caught up in whatever shit Epstein and Wintle were involved in. He knew enough about
crap like that not to ask too many questions, and when the shit hit the fan it would be their
problem, not his. But right now, for his own peace of mind, he needed to know. He didn't
want to, but he needed to go out and see the car.

Driving out past the last houses of the town and into the surrounding bush, Frank
slipped into the kind of neutral state he often did. He didn't like thinking about things any
more than most people. The here and now, that's what was important. *Mindfulness*, he'd
heard someone call it. One of those counsellor types that used to turn up in Occupational
Therapy every now and then to make it look like the Department of Prisons was serious
about rehabilitation. Focus on where you are and what you're doing, he'd said. Don't worry
about what happened in the past or what's going to happen in the future, hold on to the
thing in front of you, and all the shit of your life'll disappear. And that's what he wanted,
for it all to disappear, and sometimes, like now, he felt like it might. It was a nice day, a
nice winter sun breaking through the clouds every now and then in the low, lonely sky.
The snow of the last couple of days was melting away, at least on the eastern side of the
road, and the scribbly gums and thorny bushes trembled in the dry breeze that was snaking
its way up through the hills like fingers looking for something to take hold of. Somehow
he felt warm and safe, cruising along the back roads outside of town, and if you'd asked
him he might even have said he was happy. Weird, sure, but that's why he kept away from
people. Not that many understood.

The car was cold and dead when he got there, with a sour, burnt toast kind of smell.
The boys from the bush fire brigade had done their job, and covered the wreck in a grey,
dirty sludge that was slowly drying on the blackened gravel where the hulk had been
pushed, a mess of burnt plastic and rubber and scorched molten metal. Brown and black
marks showed through the grey slick, and the tyres smelt of singed darkness. Frank was no
policeman, and didn't know what to make of it. Someone had set fire to a car, someone
who knew his name and went to the trouble of registering it with his address that he'd been
very careful to keep to himself. Why? To have Grant and the young copper pop down and
check him out? To scare him? Wintle was the most obvious candidate, but if Wintle had
wanted to scare him off, he'd already done that, and in any case he'd be more likely to send
the grease monkey around to give him a beating with a spanner than to go to all the trouble
whoever had done it obviously had. But he hadn't, of course, because he was someone
frightened for his own skin and trying to keep as far away from the cops as he could. So
who was it? This was a different level of bad to anything Wintle or Epstein could come up
with, so there was no question, he had to go back to the cinema to find out what it was all
about. It was against the grain of everything he'd been trying to do, of the way he'd been
trying to live his life, without questions or involvement, but there was no choice. Epstein
was pulling him into something and he had to find out what.

It was late when he got back, and Rob had already gone home. Stepping up to his
desk, he jerked the drawer open and snatched out the package, weighing it in his hand like
it was a brick he was going to heave through someone's window. It was heavy, and solid.
Hard, like sin. Pulling at the string, wondering if he'd open it, he grabbed a letter opener and slashed the thing, jabbing and cutting it like he wanted to hurt it before spilling the contents cascading across his desk like he was casting a Tarot. Cards. Picture cards. Holy pictures, like you see in church. Frank didn't go to church anymore, but did when he was a kid so knew what it was straight away. Picking one up and turning it over, he saw a woman with her heart exposed—Mary, Mother of God. There was some writing on the back, "In Memory of Your First Confession, Aunty Eileen," but nothing that seemed to mean anything. Not code or anything. He picked up another one of Christ on the Cross, and it was the same thing, a little hand-written note from another universe where people sent their best wishes and love. There were others of the Baby Jesus and the manger, and gentle, lowing cows and resplendent angels and praying saints and on and on, hundreds of them—all the wonderful hopes that we live in a world of grace and care, of saints with halos and upward turned eyes, angels thrusting devils back into hell where they belong, of guardian angels protecting rosy-cheeked children strolling along cliff tops, and of martyrs being lifted to their reward from their terrifying torments below, pictures like he remembered from his childhood, all in deep reds and greens and browns, edged with gold as if they themselves were relics of the sacred, holy objects bespeaking God's caring love in your very own hands. And the thought that Epstein might be sending Greg Wintle a subtle message from the sublime he didn't believe in made Frank angrier than he'd been in awhile. This was wrong, whatever it was, and Frank had had enough of their bullshit.

Stalking down the corridor to confront him, he was startled by a loud voice calling from further along "Sure you can, Jack! You own the place!" And stepping out of the way back into the shadows, he watched as Epstein was pushed forward by a tall, tough looking man with a gun pointed straight at his head.

"I don't think it's a good idea," Epstein was pleading weakly.

"Of course it's a good idea!" the man roared back as he unzipped his fly and turned to piss against the wall, "It's my idea!" Frank didn't know what was going on, but it wasn't good, and there were two of them: the guy with the mouth and another one, about the same size, but quieter, bringing up the rear, watching, with his hand in his pocket where Frank had no doubt he gripped another gun.

"It's..." Epstein began.

"It's what?" big-mouth said, turning toward Epstein and pissing on his shoes. "Oh, look," he smirked, "You made me go to the toilet on your carpet. Now you're going to have to clean it up."

But Epstein's frightened eyes had found Frank, and following his gaze across the hall, smart aleck spotted him.

"Well if it isn't the man himself," he cried like they'd already made an acquaintance. And raising his gun to head level, he threatened "What are you doing all on your lonesome over there—Come and join us."
"No," Epstein faltered, pleading, "Leave Frank alone."

"Frank," the man said, "nice name—Honest in a bat-shit-boring kind of way—Step this way, Frank, and show shit-features here how to be a gentleman."

"Who are you?" Frank challenged. He was a man with a sharp haircut, and a hard, solid gym-taut build under a smart suit, with the hint of a scorpion tatt sneaking from beneath one of his cuffs. Stylish, with a rhinestone ring on his right hand. And not from anywhere around here.

Shoving the barrel under Frank's chin, the guy leaned forward to snarl, "I'm the guy with the gun, fuck-head, and don't you forget it." The parcel of photos dropped from Frank's hand as he flinched back, but grabbing him by the arm, the man shoved him forward, ordering, "Get moving." Frank saw Epstein give him an agonised look as they were bundled up the stairs toward the Circle.

Tripping up the step, Epstein grabbed at the railing, crying "Please, Dave..."

"What did you call me?" the man roared, slamming the butt of his gun down on Epstein's hand, "What?!

"Tony!" Epstein screamed, pulling his hand away, "Alright—Tony!"

"That's right. Tony," the man snarled before winking at Frank, "Boyhood chums, and the prick can't even remember my name."

But Frank had been waiting his chance, and surging forward he grabbed the gun roaring, "Get out of it, you fuck!" as the guy bringing up the rear smashed him hard across the back of the neck and brought him crashing to his knees.

"You've got more balls than sense, pencil-dick," Tony said, yanking him to his feet, "but I can soon fix that," and shoving him up the loft stairs he pushed the two of them toward the dress circle foyer.

"What are we going here for?" Frank asked groggily, feeling if he still had a head.

"Yours is not to reason why," the man answered, pushing him ahead into what was called the old store room, but was in fact an enormous space at the top of the stairs. Frank hadn't been there for awhile, and it hadn't improved any in the intervening time. Filled with the junk of fifty years, it was a fire-trap primed and ready for the match. Old curtains and ropes, broken projectors, yellowing movie posters, tins of forgotten films spilling out over mildewed cinema seats, and high up above, the actual roof itself through which the rain was pouring through innumerable holes. Yanking him to his feet, Tony or Dave or whatever his name was threw him toward the roof stairs, kicking him forward.

"No, Tony, don't," Epstein was pleading above the downpour, "Not the roof, it's dangerous." "What's a little danger?" Tony said, leaning across and shoving the door open into the deluge, "Isn't that what life's about?"
Pushing them forward, Tony exploded onto the roof as thunder cracked overhead and water cut from the black, pitiless sky, stinging their eyes and skin. "Kanangara!" he cried, "My town!"

They were already drenched even before they were out the door. Blinking through the rain, Frank tried to get his bearings. They were going to kill them, he knew that, and he knew they didn't have long. He'd never been on the roof before, and could see why. Water was gushing through open holes gaping in the tar paper down into store room they'd come from, and broken, rotting beams of wood were poking out everywhere. But that wasn't putting Tony off his stride as he marched around, "Look at it, the way it always was." He must have been on uppers, because he didn't even stop when his foot went straight through the roof up to his knee. "It's all here, isn't it..." he said to no-one in particular, or maybe the big guy in the sky, "The dress shop—The butcher," and tapping his head knowingly, he pushed his face into Epstein's, snarling "Set out like it is in your memory, ain't that right, Jack. Remember? Remember what it used to be like??"

Jack could remember. "Listen, Dave," he said, "Tony," he corrected, "We don't have to talk about this up here."

"Why not up here?" Tony said, "What better place than up here?" His clothes were soaked, and clinging to him like the sodden sails of a ghost ship, but that wasn't stopping him roaring at the wind.

The other guy, the quiet one, was standing in front of the roof door like a bouncer waiting for orders. Maybe there was a fire ladder, Frank thought, but he couldn't see one. He wasn't going to die with Epstein because he worked for him. There was stuff lying about—wood, debris, a TV aerial on a pile of rubbish, a bag of cement. Epstein was bound to make some sort of mistake, and when he did, Frank could grab one of the four by twos and thump the bouncer while Tony was distracted, and shoot back down the stairs before anyone noticed. Maybe even get away.

"O, ciel, que de vertus nous faites hair!" Tony was shouting like it was his very own private concert, his exultant face looking up at the clouds ripping across the sky. But then noticing Frank's look of incredulity, he snapped "What's the matter with you, shit-for-brains? Don't know your Corneille?"

Frank had met guys like him before, hopped up and full of themselves, and decided not to bite.

"Let me put it in more prosaic language," the man said, "What virtues, Lord, Thou makest us abhor'—Sound more familiar now? What virtues, Lord, Thou makest us adore," he repeated, "Ain't that the truth? Ain't that the truth??"

"Why don't you drop dead?" Frank answered, not able to contain himself any longer. It was the wrong thing to say, but there weren't too many right things left.
"Me? Drop dead?" the man said, looking like the fence post had piped up. "You don't get it, do you?" he said. And striding across to grab the terrified Epstein by the arm, he flung him toward the brick parapet. "You're the ones who're going to... Drop...Dead..."

It was getting close to crunch time, and Frank knew it.

"Stop, Dave! Don't!" Epstein was crying, steadying himself against the wall as a loose piece of masonry clattered into the darkness below. It was a good drop, big enough to kill you, no problem. "He doesn't learn, does he?" Tony joked.

There was no question in Frank's mind. He was a psycho. With a gun pointed straight at them, and every intention of using it.

"Up on the wall," he ordered.

"No, Tony, don't!" Epstein cried. And he was crying, Frank could see that. Tears of fear shooting straight out from his eyes. Frank had seen that once before in his life, and it wasn't a happy memory.

There was another building behind, or more a shed attached to the shop next door. It was a drop of about fifty feet, and Frank could survive it if the corrugated iron roof held, which was pretty unlikely, but the guy by the door must have been a mind reader. "Stay where you are," he ordered.

"No way," Tony called, as if remembering Frank, "Up here with everybody else, pardner. Let's have a party!"

"Tony, please," Epstein was saying. There was a big statue he was holding onto, one of those fake Greek ornamental things people used to stick onto their buildings to show they had a bit of culture—Neptune or something—and Epstein was holding onto it like his life depended on it. Which it did. "I need a bit of time," he said, "give me some time."

"You're all out of time, dipstick," Tony answered, waving the gun at Frank and ordering him to "Go on, get up; you, too."

"Shoot me," Frank said. He wasn't getting up on the wall. If he was going to die, he wanted to be shot, not lying for hours down on the road in the rain with his life ebbing out of him. But surging forward pointing the gun at his face, Tony bore down on him, shouting, "I will, you fucker; try me." Frank didn't flinch.

"No!" Epstein cried in terror. Frank wasn't sure if it was because he felt any loyalty, or knew he'd be next.

"Or what?" Tony shot back, swinging the gun back at the whimpering man clinging to the statue.

"I'll do it! I'll do it!" Epstein cried, frightened and broken.
"You'll do it, will you?" Tony said, sounding like he didn't believe him, or didn't care.

"Yes, I'll do it," Epstein sobbed, "I'll do it, whatever you want—I don't care, leave us alone—I'll do it."

There weren't too many things Epstein wouldn't do, so Frank was curious to know what was so bad he had to be threatened like this, but he could see the way Tony was tensing that it wasn't going to be that easy. "I know you will," the man said, crouching a little and starting to sprint forward.

"Jump, Jack! Jump!" Frank cried, throwing himself down on the roof.

"No!" Epstein screamed in terror, holding on as hard as he could to the statue.

"You'll do it, alright!" Tony roared, now on top of him.

"Jump!" Frank howled.

And as Epstein leapt out of the way from the wall, Tony slammed hard into the statue, giving it an enormous shove sending it toppling over the edge and crashing into the darkness of the street far below.

It was quite an effort, and he was breathing hard, staring straight ahead into the rain pelting down.

"Never hold onto what makes you feel safe," he warned, "it's what'll drag you down the furthest." And then noticing Frank lying prone in the pool of water he'd fallen into, he added, "What are you doing there? You want to catch your death?" and rousing himself, he swung back to the roof door, calling, "Let's go get some grub!"

Looking at Epstein lying full length, sobbing in the drenching rain, Frank stood and wiped his face. Whoever his new playmate was, Frank didn't like him, and Epstein could sort him out himself.

"Don't mention this to anyone, you got me?" Epstein growled a little later, pulling Frank aside in the hallway.

"You must be used to a lot more trouble than you look like, Jack," Frank said, glaring at him. But Epstein wasn't budging.

"You keep your nose out of it, alright," he answered, "This has got nothing to do with you."

Right then Tony roared through the open door of Epstein's office further along the hall, "Whatever happened to good old fashioned hospitality?" he called, "Let's have a party!"
Looking back at Frank, Epstein repeated, "Not a word to anyone, got me. Nobody's to know about this; nobody."

Whatever the big secret was, Epstein was welcome to it, but as he turned away back toward the shadows, Frank spotted the parcel where he'd dropped it on the floor. Now wasn't the time, but picking it up, he wondered what the connection was, and figured he'd find out sooner or later. He could hear someone put on one of the Country and Western albums Epstein liked, about forlorn love, and it sounded like they were settling in. Settling in for what was anyone's guess, but looking at the first card, he could see Christ on the Cross, with the words, Jesus died for Your sins.

He should have saved himself the trouble, Frank thought. He wasn't one to believe in the perfectibility of mankind; not lately, anyhow.

But driving back to Lavender House, something kept nagging him. The wolf, the car and now this. For a little town where nothing happened, a lot had. Frank had come here to get away, to hide, not from the police—You can't hide from them—But people; people prying, asking questions, digging into your life trying to turn you into a case, the proof of whatever it is they're trying to prove, about the evil of man or whatever. But no, it was something else—not that—he was trying to get away from himself and find some place where he could just be.

Nothing. That's all he wanted, to be, without the voices tormenting him, pricking him, the voices that had been in his head since that day when everything died. Sometimes he felt like a scarecrow stuck on his own cross, with birds pecking at him, pulling the stuffing out of him. He didn't want anything. to be left alone. And not think.

An icy wind was whipping through the roaring trees when Vivien stepped out of the back door with the shotgun. She'd heard a car drive in, but nothing else. "Hello? Who's there?" she called, turning on the lights. There was a big storm rumbling down in the South and lightning was flashing off the cliffs. And then she saw him, standing, as still as a statue in the yard. "What are you doing there, Frank?" she asked, concerned and fearful.

Her words roused him. "Can I borrow your car?" he asked, looking across.

"What's wrong with yours?" she said, seeing it parked by the shed.

"Battery's flat," he said, "Won't be long."

Frank had never lied to her before as far as she knew, so she was curious.

"Sure," she said, "Do you want something to eat?"

"I ate in town," he answered, already moving off. She wasn't going to pry anymore.

"The keys are in the ignition," she said.
"Thanks," he answered, stepping up to it, but she knew he was already miles away, doing whatever it was he was doing. Of course she knew who he was, but it didn't bother her; they weren't that different, she knew, and both of them were hanging on.

Frank wasn't sure himself what he was going to do. Watch, maybe, just watch. But that's what all criminals say. And that's what he was good at. Maybe find out who the guy was, what he was doing there. And what it had to do with him. From the sound of it, Tony was from somewhere around here, and knew Epstein, maybe for a long time, maybe even from when they were kids. If he did come from the town, he hadn't been there for awhile because with his looks and manners he would have stuck out a mile. Maybe he'd been away in jail, which by the look of things would have been a very good place for him. So who he was and where he was remained a mystery, as did what exactly he was up to. In the normal course of things, Frank would have thought the less he knew the better, and been happy to ignore it, but something made him feel he couldn't do that this time, and that whatever Tony and Epstein were doing, it would be a good idea for him to know.

Parking opposite the courtyard entrance, Frank hunched down in the driver's seat and felt the chill of the night air start to settle on his bones. The rain had stopped, or at least eased off a little, and you could see the puddles in the road starting to ice over. Across the road, the wind whistled through the fake Spanish turrets and ornamentation that had somehow got mixed up with the Orpheum's art deco design, and letting himself drift, Frank remembered what Epstein had told him about Orpheus, about how he was a musician, and how his wife had died and so he'd gone down to hell to try to bring her back—Mad stuff that he hadn't been able to understand, but had nodded like he did because his boss was telling him something that was important to him. Orpheus, who was eventually torn to pieces, leaving only his head, still singing. Mad, like every man's life. Shaking himself, Frank glanced about. Now wasn't the time to doze off.

The men would be drinking for hours, he knew, not because Epstein was a boozer, but because Tony was flying so high it'd take a lot to pull him back down. The other guy was a gofer, a henchman, that's all. He was some guy along for the ride, a bodyguard, that's what he was, and from the way Tony was carrying on, he needed one, because his particular specialty was rubbing people up the wrong way, and he was very good at it. Big fellas like the big fella Tony had in tow get paid to be cool and laugh at the jokes. Or at least smirk. And if they're any good tend not to go to jail because for them it's a job, not a passion. A doorman, that's all he was. Someone to stand in the way and tell you to go home and not get into trouble. Their violence is directed, a means to an end, and they know how far to go. Of course, there's idiot doormen like there's idiots everywhere, but they don't last long, or get put somewhere else where they can pursue their interests without affecting business, but you can have a conversation with a doorman, and they'll listen, and that's what that guy looked like. He could kill you, sure, but not because he liked it. Not like Tony. Tony had the look of someone who'd enjoy it, and tell you so while he was doing it.
The sound of the glass door crashing open in a gust of wind shook him awake, and looking he could see the two of them tumbling across the courtyard holding one another up as they stumbled toward the street. Sliding down a little in his seat, Frank peered over the wheel as they fumbled with the car keys and then kangaroo hopped forward before somehow swinging around to do a u-turn and driving off. Giving them a moment, he started his own car and swung after them. It wasn't something he was used to, following people in the dead of the night, but you're never too old to learn.

Frank wasn't a crim. He'd been sent to jail, for sure, and had had some pretty lurid headlines written about him, but he wasn't what you'd call a professional, like a forger or bank manager on the make. He'd committed a crime of passion according to the prosecutor in his summing up, but it was still a crime, and a crime of such horrific barbarity that it had placed him well outside the norms of civilised society and firmly in the realm of the pathological, where he still provided grist for the doctoral theses. Not that Frank believed in civilised society by the time he got to his final cell, or believed in anything very much anymore, to tell the truth. He'd slipped into what felt like an alternate universe lurking beneath the one that until that point had seemed like reality, and somehow had never been able to scramble his way back out. But that didn't make him any smarter about how to stay out of trouble. He didn't know anything about guns or crim hideouts or how to follow people or any of that other crim shit people like him are assumed to know, all he knew was that people were a lot more dangerous than they seem, and that included himself, but here he was trying to keep sight of the tail lights of a car as it prowled through the shifting mist now seeping up from the valley far below.

Kanangara was a ghost town after about 6, and this was a long time after that. That's what it felt like anyhow, and that's what Frank liked about it. Nobody paid that much attention to anyone else because they weren't that interested, so most people's lives were vague outlines suspended in the darkness, seemingly normal because you didn't know any of the details. Till it was too late. You weren't encouraged to go much beyond the good morning, how are you level of civility that kept things ticking along, and that's the sort of place he wanted to be. He wasn't here to find out how people ticked, he knew that; he was there to hide away and forget until he himself was forgotten and lost in time. What did he care what people were like? He knew what they were like. Had seen the wife murderers and bashers, the rapists and drunk driver killers, the ordinary criminals who populated the prisons wondering what hit them. He'd rubbed elbows with the remorseful pay-clerks with a gambling problem and the clowns who couldn't control their tempers; the prisons were full of them, liars who couldn't live with their lies and fools whose tricks had finally caught up with them—Ordinary people with ordinary weaknesses who should never have had that drink or put a twenty cent piece into that slot machine, but had and seen their lives ruined, unraveling into horror and degradation before winding up on a cell-room floor broken and unhappy and none the wiser about how they got there or what it all meant. Ordinary people swept up into something they didn't understand and never would because everyone was like him: so terrified and ashamed of what they'd done they'd never been able to look at it
closely enough to figure it out. But that didn't make it go away. Ordinary people like Frank himself. He never saw it coming, none of it, and now that he was here, he still didn't understand.

The other car swam through the night like a shark on the prowl. The mist turned into fog that was soon so thick it didn't matter whether his head-lights were on or not, so he turned them off. It was late, and the world was in bed, but the street lights glowed lonely and forlorn in the lost stillness that had descended, as if the wings of the creature that had been beating the wind had stopped as it settled somewhere high above them to watch and wait. Frank wasn't a night hawk, not ever and not now. Epstein would sometimes ask him to do something in his apartment, change a light bulb, fix the toilet flush, that sort of thing, and he'd hurry home through the shadows afterwards feeling nervous and exposed, but most nights he was locked up safe and sound with his sins well before this, and it made him feel strange, even a little daring, seeing the town now, closed and watchful against the gathering dark. He'd never thought about it much, what Kanangara meant; never wondered if it meant anything, it was the place he lived, but right now it looked sad and afraid, like a kid standing in the doorway of the pub looking for their father. Or maybe that was the way he felt. Not because he knew who the man ahead was, but because he didn't.

The car took a left, and then a right, and then a left again, like they were looking for something but didn't know what. Frank didn't think they'd seen him, and were trying to shake him off, and they weren't speeding, so maybe they were cruising, looking for an address. But it didn't look like that, either; not out here. The bouncer guy was driving. Frank had noticed that Tony had seemed to be the drunker of the two, garrulous and stumbly, so maybe he was going to drop him off wherever he was staying, and then go on. It'd be good to know where that was, but Frank still didn't know what he was going to do, even if he knew. Kill him? Shoot him through the window. In the end, most crimes aren't committed because they're too ridiculous to pursue. The bright idea to pull off the payroll job that starts to fester after a slab of beer with a few work-mates but looks like the rubbish it is in the bright glare of the morning hangover. Or doesn't, and sets you on a course you'll regret the rest of your life. The temptation that you can change everything with one decisive act.

The car turned into a light industrial estate off the main road out of town, and by the time Frank got there, had disappeared into the fog, like an eel into the murk. He didn't know the area—He'd never been there before, and hardly even knew it existed—and all he could see were smash-repair joints and tyre places, scruffy non-descript buildings and weedy, overgrown dead-ends. He could hear a dog barking somewhere in the distance but that was all. It was a tricky situation. He was out there alone, and if Tony found him he wouldn't be asking any questions. Something told Frank it'd be a good idea to turn around and go home. But he didn't. He kept on after them.

Pulling over, he wound the window down and turned off the engine, straining to hear where they'd gone. The fresh smell of wet eucalypt and mist seeped into the car,
fogging the window. Winding it back up, he waited for a moment, wondering what to do, and then got out to have a look around on foot. If he'd lost them, he'd lost them, and bad luck. There was probably another entrance somewhere they could get out, and he hoped there was. He didn't want to stumble onto them doing a break and enter, if that's what they were up to. Tony'd kill him, for sure, if he found him, or at least give him a good doing over. But there was no question he had to do it. He wished he had something to even up the chances, but all he had was a wrench, and shoving it down his jacket, he moved off into the night.

It was cold, but eerily still the way it sometimes gets in winter. That's the way the mountains are sometimes, tense and watchful, waiting for something they alone know, and creeping between the dark buildings and sheds, with the blue metal crunching underneath, Frank felt like he might be in a graveyard, or the no-man's-land of a battlefield. He still couldn't hear the car, and wondered if he'd lost them and hoped he had. Who were they, anyway, and what were they doing here? Tony was on a mission, that much was obvious. Epstein probably owed him money, and the big guy was there for the muscle. Well, pay him out and piss him off, what's the problem, unless it was more than he had, and how much is that if someone's threatening your life? But there was something else, and this didn't feel like a simple shake-down. Or even revenge.

Coming around a corner, Frank pulled back as he felt the glare of a floodlight shining down on the field in front of him. Tony's car was there, parked a couple of hundred yards away on the grass, and the two men were standing up taking a piss a few feet away, their figures silhouetted in the bright light shining down from the railway bridge up above them. Glancing about, Frank tried to see somewhere closer he might be able to get a better look, and maybe hear the conversation. There was a building nearby, one of those self-storage places, and ducking around the back, he hurried along a lane till he found a narrow passage squeezed between a welder's shop and a second hand tile warehouse. Holding his breath, he inched his way through the rubbish bins and refuse, kicking the rodent traps out of the way as he shimmied through. The welder's had a high chain wire fence topped with razor wire, to make you feel welcome, and the place had that burnt acetylene smell they all stink of. He could see the light shining through the end of the passage like it was a tunnel, but as he got there and propped to sneak a look around the corner, there was the sudden sound of a chain snapping taut and the guttural choke of a mad, slavering dog he could already see in his mind's eye shooting straight for his neck. Spinning, he saw the biggest rottie he'd ever seen throwing itself full throttle at the fence, and flinching back he banged his head hard against a nail in the tiler's wall. Tony and the bouncer looked back over their shoulders at the commotion, trying to see what was bugging the mutt, but back in the shadows, Frank was pressed against the wall, his heart thumping and blood streaming from the wound in the back his head, with the dog barking and carrying on as it tried to bite through the fence to get him. There didn't seem much chance of that, and the collar and chain choking the mongrel were holding, but it was wet and muddy and the last place you'd want to be on a cold night and Frank wasn't a happy laddy. Looking back toward the
light, he shook himself and then crept forward the last couple of feet. Looking back at the
dog to make sure, he could see the thing still barking and carrying on when a sound, like a
whimper or a groan—deep and unearthly—made him turn his head back to see the men
doing—what?—He couldn’t make it out, it was so weird—The bouncer had somehow
gone down on his knees on the wet grass—But why?—And Tony was standing over him,
legs spread aggressively, with something in his hand. It took Frank a moment to realise
what was happening, but when he saw the flash from the gun muzzle and the man flinch
away, holding up his palm as if that could stop the bullet, he knew. Blood and matter
sprayed from the man's head as his body flailed lifeless back into the mud. It was all over
in a second, over so fast Frank didn't even know whether or not there was a sound, but
there must have been, because all of a sudden the dog was quiet and attentive, looking in
the direction of the men. Before exploding once more into ferocious life and throwing
itself against the fence baying for blood.

He'd shot him. Tony had shot his off-sider clean through the head, execution style,
like he was acting out a scene in a movie. Frank had never seen anything like it, not even
in the toughest prisons, and he wasn't going to stick around to find out what was going to
happen next. Taking off, he ran and skidded through the mud till he was back at the road
and running as fast as he could back to the car. Throwing himself in, he took off, not
bothering to push it out till he was a safe distance away, but starting up and taking off,
keeping his eye on the rear vision mirror the whole way home in case he saw the demon
swinging around the corner on a broomstick after him. He'd never seen anything like it, a
man on his knees whimpering and begging for his life while another man stood over him
gloatting. And gloating was the word. Frank could almost see the sneer plastered across his
face as the bastard pulled the trigger. And driving on through the sleet that was now
cutting through the night, more and more details kept jumping out at him—The colour of
the blood, the terrible, pleading gesture as the poor bastard tried to protect himself, the
ghastly horror of watching a man meet his end. And then he felt something hot and sticky
on his fingers, and holding his hand up to the light, he could see he'd cut himself somehow,
somewhere in the mad scramble to get away, maybe the razor wire, or that sharp edge he'd
grabbed tearing around the corner, and thick blood was dribbling down his hand and
dripping from the wound and smearing the wheel. He couldn't remember how he'd done
it—Couldn't remember anything, even though he could remember everything—But that
wasn't what he was thinking about, looking at it; what he was thinking about was how it
didn't make any sense; none of it made sense. The blood on his hand, the dead man on the
grass; Tony standing over them like something from outer space. Who was he? What did
he want? Frank didn't know. All he knew was that he was alive, and someone else was
dead.
Five.

Sergeant Grant's boot scraped the dry, frozen ground, kicking over a couple of dead thistles. "Here, you reckon?" he said, squinting across the empty field. There was nothing there, no sign of a struggle, not even a blood stain. Frank looked about, bewildered as the sound of an angle grinder from one of the shops screeched through the icy air.

Jincks was kicking at the weeds nearby. "I can't see anything," he said.

"Hereabouts," Frank answered as a goods train shunted back over the bridge. It was a dull, grey day with an untidy wind wheezing across the field.

"You wouldn't say it's exactly the perfect place to commit a murder," Grant noted, running his eyes over Frank's hunched figure.

"Look, you can either believe me or not," Frank answered, "but I was standing over there against that fence, and that's what I saw."

"Let's have a look," Grant said, turning toward the welding shop. Not every day someone witnesses a murder and then loses the body.

"What did you do to your finger?" Jincks asked as he stepped up beside him like he was already his prisoner.

"Cut it," Frank replied, glancing at the dirty bandage he'd wrapped around it. He'd been thinking about it all night, whether or not he should say something, and here he was, with his foot right in the middle of it. Stepping up to the chain-wire fence, Grant saw the welder lift his visor and greet them,

"Morning, Sergeant... " he said.

"Morning, Zac... " Grant replied, "You notice anything funny when you come in?"

"Like what?" the man said glancing at Frank as the dog saw him and started up again. Grant noticed the dog's interest, and turning, asked Frank, "So where were you?"

"In there," Frank said, nodding toward the gap between the fence and the tile place. "What were you doing in there?" Grant asked, craning to have a look. The welder was checking it out as well, and you could see what he was thinking.

"I did notice something..." he began as Jincks saw some footprints in the mud.

"They your footprints?" he asked, "Show us the soles of your feet."

Uncomfortable, Frank lifted his muddy boot. They were his, alright.

"What were you doing in there, I said," Grant repeated. Not irritated, insistent. He didn't have a problem, he knew there was more going on than Frank was letting on.

"I heard a noise," Frank answered evasively, "I didn't want to be seen."
"They're his, alright," Jincks observed. To let Frank know they were onto him.

"You didn't want to be seen by who," Grant asked, cocking a look at the man. He was a cop, but this was a bit more than he was used to.

"The killer," Frank said, not looking at him.

"How'd you know he was a killer?" Grant said.

"No killers around here, Sergeant," the welder interjected, taking the chance to say something sensible, "I don't think we've ever had a murder in Kanangara, ever." That was the truth.

"So we can locate you here last night," Grant said, looking at the footprints, "but nobody else." Frank was starting to regret the whole thing.

"He must have taken the body with him," he said.

"Sure..." Grant replied, "Makes total sense. Kill someone out in the open for the whole world to see, and then clean up the mess and disappear the body to confuse things. Man is certainly a devious animal."

There were two Grants: the strong, reliable one he felt comfortable with and the nasty, cynical one that snuck out every now and then when he smelt a rat, and that's what he smelt right now.

Jincks had squeezed into the passageway and was poking around the dirt and rubbish. "Hey, Cap, look at this," he said, rising and holding up a bullet case. Grant knew what it was.

"You own a gun?" he asked, looking at Frank.

"No," he answered, feeling something closing in on him.

"There's blood here, too," Jincks said, bending to take a closer look.

"Look," Frank began, "if you think I killed someone last night, and then brought you down here to show you, you need your head read."

Grant could hear the fear in his voice.

"What were you doing here last night, Frank?" he asked, trying to catch his eye. "I told you, I went out for a drive," Frank said, avoiding his gaze. He was bad at this. Bad at lying. In fact he wasn't much of a criminal all round.

"After your car blew up," Grant reminded.

"It wasn't my car," Frank answered, desperate. At least he was sure of that.

"You're getting yourself into some pretty funny situations lately, wouldn't you agree?" Grant answered, watching him squirm.
"I'm telling you what I saw," Frank said, feeling the blood draining away.

"Yeah, sure," Grant said, "Look, fella, how about coming clean? What's going on?"

It was a mistake. The sort of mistake Frank had vowed never to make again. Never go to the cops for help, never ask them anything. They were useless, worse than useless, they'd take whatever the crims had left behind. By the time they get through filling in their forms and scratching their nuts the crooks were already long gone, and that's the way the cops like it. Because the last thing anyone wants is to catch someone at it and work out what to do with them.

"I'm trying to help you guys out, alright?" Frank said, looking at his feet and feeling like shit, "There's a killer in this town."

"I know," Grant said, "And I'm looking at him."

"I didn't do anything," Frank said, glancing up, but Grant wasn't going to let him get away with that.

"You didn't kill that guy you killed, you mean?" Is that what he was saying? There was a lump in Frank's throat as big as a fist, and he couldn't budge it. That's what he was, a killer, that's all he was and he'd be that till the day he died.

"I killed him, yeah," Frank gulped, trying not to think about it.

"Is that what this is about?" Grant asked, sounding sympathetic but trying to work out what the hell was going on.

"No," Frank said. He knew what they did, how they played these games. And he wasn't going to give him an inch, because this time it wasn't about Frank, it was about someone else, and it was important.

Grant considered him for a moment longer, and then glanced at Jincks as he swung back toward the patrol car. "Get a description of the car off him," he ordered, "The one he says they drove here. That's what you said happened, isn't it," he asked, looking back at Frank, "He had a car."

"Yes," Frank answered, feeling lost.

"But you didn't get a number plate?"

"No," Frank said. He could almost feel Grant's contempt in his tired sigh.

"Get a description," Grant repeated before giving Frank one last look, as if to fix him in his memory. But Frank had made his mind up and didn't even bother to look back. He'd had it with all of them, with their procedures and their shit, and Grant hadn't given him one reason to change his mind.

"You know what, Frank?" Grant said as he turned away, "You can stew."
"There's a killer here," Frank spat swinging around after.

"Give me a call when you decide to tell me who it is," Grant answered. And watching him drive off, Frank felt the door of the world once more close against him.

"So what sort of car are we talking about?" Jincks asked barely concealing his scorn as he flipped open his notebook, "Or don't that matter, cause that disappeared as well?"

And behind him a little whirly wind of dust and rubbish blew up and skipped across the dry, lonely field.

-0-

Later that afternoon, Frank was standing outside the gun shop in the mall, checking out the rifles in the window. The shop-owner had gotten into the swing of things, and had hung tinsel and a bulls-eye target over a reindeer, but Frank was more interested in the weaponry. He was no expert, and if truth be told even looking at them made him queasy, but he figured he'd have to get something to protect himself with for all the help the police were offering. Either that or leave. But for where? There was nowhere left for him to go. It was all one big blank.

"Oh, Mr. Cave," a chirpy voice behind exclaimed, "Thinking of doing some hunting?"

It was her, the kid from the taxidermist's.

"Oh," he said, startled at being discovered. She could see he was flustered and had forgotten her name again.

"Christina," she reminded, with a happy lilt in her voice. It was like they were old friends. The weather was again closing in, and low grey clouds were tumbling across the sky above them, but she was looking at him bright and expectant, like they'd already started a conversation.

"Yeah, Christina," he repeated warily, "No."

"No?" she asked.

"No, I'm not planning on doing any hunting," he explained, looking for an escape.

"I thought you might still be after that wolf of yours," she said cheerfully. There was something about her that made him feel uncomfortable, like she was laughing at him. She was so friendly and natural he wondered what was wrong with her.

"Actually, Christina, I'm not all that interested in wolves," he said, trying to get around her.
"No?" she answered, falling in step beside him, "I thought that's why you came to see me that day." He glanced at her, wondering what she wanted.

"That was just—something..." he said vaguely.

"A passing phase, you mean?" she asked, like it was an expression she'd learned from a TV show and was trying it out for size. Frank had somehow turned the wrong way, and had come to a toy shop at the dead-end of an arcade.

"Yes..." he said, feeling trapped and trying to backtrack but with her somehow standing in his way, no matter which way he turned.

"But now it's guns," she said, as they danced around each other, "A man of many facets."

A middle aged woman in a coat glanced uneasily at them as she bustled past toward the bakery. Frank had lost his talent for small talk a long time before and was starting to feel hemmed in.

"What do you want?" he asked, with panic already making his voice ragged.

"Want?" she asked, not understanding.

"Yes, what do you want," he snapped, "Why are you following me?"

"I don't—I'm not," she faltered, flushing and shaken.

This was not what he wanted, an ugly altercation in the street, no.

"What do you want?" he demanded, again, "What do you people want from me?" Still trying to get away.

"I don't want anything," she choked, taking a step back in alarm, "I was trying to be friendly!"

There was something horrific, frightening and unpredictable, in his manner and eyes shot toward them, with a shopkeeper from the nearby gift-store stepping into his doorway to see a young girl being confronted by some crabby old man.

"Just leave me alone!" Frank demanded, feeling the judgment of the world on him.

"Why are you yelling at me?" she cried.

"What's going on?" the shopkeeper said, stepping in, "Is this man bothering you, miss?"

"No, I'm not," Frank cried, "She's bothering me!"

"I was trying to be friendly!" Christina sobbed, bursting into tears.

"Oh, God," Frank said, realising.
"You get away from her," the shopkeeper warned, taking another step forward.

"Oh, God, I'm sorry," Frank tried to soothe.

"It's alright," Christina said to the shop-keeper, trying to calm things, "It's alright."

"I'm sorry," Frank repeated, "I'm so sorry."

She was weeping, shocked and choking back tears as hostile eyes peered at them from every direction.

"I was trying to be friendly, that's all," she sobbed again.

"Come on," he said, putting his arm comfortably around her. She was the first woman he'd done that to for a while, and she slipped into his embrace, warm and soft. "Come on, I'll get you something to drink."

"I was trying to be friendly," she repeated, breaking down into bitter tears.

"I'm sorry," he repeated, ushering her away.

A small Christmas tree ornament was stuck to the greasy counter of the railway kiosk facing the station as Frank stood, sipping his coffee while she cupped her cocoa in her hands, perched on the stool beside him.

"Not much of a coffee..." he said, guiltily glancing at her as he swirled the indifferent muck in the thick china cup. She was a kid, that's all, no more than a kid. "Don't suppose I deserve much," he added to show his remorse. She was staring off into the mid-distance over the rim of her own mug. "How's the chocolate?" he asked.

"Alright..." she answered, indifferent.

"Look, Christina," he started again, "I'm sorry, alright; I didn't mean to yell at you."

"Why did you?" she asked, looking back at him, her eyes glistening again, "You got too many friends?"

A train had pulled in, on the Western line, and people were getting off and labouring up the stairs to the ticket barrier. He looked back at her. Maybe she was smarter than he thought, but how was he going to tell her what was bothering him?

"There's too much going on," was all he could say, taking another sip. He didn't even know why he said it. He didn't even know what he was still doing there. She wasn't anyone to him. She couldn't be anyone to him.

"What...?" she asked, and it was like she wanted to know; or did know. Like she was offering him something no-one had done in a long time. Like she cared.
Frank had read about Kanangara toward the end of his sentence in one of those Sunday magazines they sometimes got in their packages from one of the charities that used to send them stuff. It had some pointless headline, like *A Town Lost in Time* or something equally rancid, with some pictures of the main street in the snow and the mayor opening the new library, and it didn't look like anything or anywhere, or rather it looked like a million anythings and anywheres tucked away from the world, and maybe that's what made him take a closer look. The thought of *disappearing* had been on his mind for awhile, and gradually it occurred to him, reading about the gruff, friendly loggers and their wholesome families and how the roadhouse specialised in scones and homemade strawberry jam, that maybe this might be the place. Somewhere hidden far away high up in the mountains that nobody cared about and that didn't care about anyone else either. Some little cul-de-sac in nowhere where he could put his roots down and die. Because that's what he wanted to do, die, only he didn't have the guts to do it. And now here he was.

"You know who I am?" he asked, staring into his mug.

"What's your name, you mean?" she said, glancing up at him, interested, "Your real name?" Everybody knew. That's what she'd said. And he was fooling himself by pretending otherwise.

"Yes, my real name," he answered.

"No," she said, "Does it make any difference?"

"In jail, they used to call me the Wolf."

"Why?" she asked, lowering her voice. She glanced over her shoulder, like they were sharing a secret. And they were.

"Because of what I did," he said.

"What did you do?" she asked.

"I tore a man apart," he answered, not wanting to go any further, and not even knowing why he'd gone this far. "How?" she said, almost breathless.

"I was an animal," he said, looking at her.

"You're not an animal," she replied. And she was the first person who'd said that to him since his life had fallen apart.

"Yes, I am," he answered, "And you've got no right hanging around with me. I'll hurt you, and I don't want to do that. Not you or anybody."

She was watching him carefully now, studying his eyes, and he could feel her probing him, fending off the questions he knew were already taking shape within her.

"Why did you do what you did?" she asked at last.
"Because I thought he knew where my little girl was." It was almost too painful to talk. He hardly ever did, and he couldn't remember the last time he had.

"Did he?" she asked.

"If he did, he didn't tell." he answered.

"Why not?" she asked again. She would have, given what she guessed Frank had done to him.

"Maybe he was even scareder of someone else more than he was scared of me," Frank said, "Or maybe he didn't know."

"But you killed him anyhow."

"I didn't mean to," Frank said, feeling a lump welling up inside him, "I meant to keep him alive for as long as I could."

"And you never found her?" She was probing him like a scalpel, watching the effect of her words on him. This was as close as she'd ever come to someone like this.

"No," he answered, "I never found her."

"That must have hurt," she said. Did she mean that? Did she even understand what she'd said.

"You can't imagine," he answered.

"Maybe I can," she said, but he looked at her.

"No, you can't." he said, "And if you could, you wouldn't be sitting here with me."

They didn't say much after that. She sipped her chocolate and he tried to lock all that stuff back down where it couldn't hurt anymore. It's hard, letting it out and then trying to shove it all back under the covers again. You'd think it'd get easy after awhile, but it doesn't. You've got to be a man, he'd sometimes tell himself, you've got to keep going. But sometimes, like now, he wasn't sure why. Still, she didn't make him feel terrible or worthless, and it was nice, being there, with her sneaking looks at him over her mug and him leaning on the counter with people rugged up against the cold milling around, not paying them any attention. It was nice. The grace of the world. Sometimes it happens like that, unexpected, and you've got to be grateful.

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Frank had a workshop down the back of the Orpheum. Nothing elaborate, a place where he could keep his tools and do the sorts of repairs the place so badly needed but which were still outpacing him no matter how many he ticked off his list. It wasn't his job, but it kept him busy. The Orpheum had been built long before, when people were hopeful about the future, but once that future had turned out to be the dreary fizzler it had they'd
sort of let it slide and the Orpheum and the town itself had settled into a genteel decline eased by the dogged determination of making do supplemented with more or less constant tinkering. Nothing worked, in either the town or the Orpheum, from the plumbing and wiring to the door handles and seats of the theatre, and the same could be said of the whole place, not that it was what you'd describe as a hive of activity, a place where it wasn't unusual to see people fiddling around in the backyard, or up a ladder at the side of the house. The hardware shop was part of everyone's life. But for all the painting and replacing and mending and patching, it still felt like a place sinking into neglect, because deep down people had stopped caring, without yet realising that's what they'd done. While their parents and grandparents had an idea they were going somewhere better, their children no longer did, and in fact could only imagine something worse. Sometimes, much worse. Here they all were, perched on the precipice, and while not exactly mesmerised by the depths yawning before them, they were at least not in a hurry to look too closely, for fear of what they might see. People were nervous and anxious, without being sure why. It was like a fairy-tale palace that had been cursed, cast into a spell and overgrown with vines and forgetfulness, leaving its inhabitants in a century long slumber beneath a layer of gathering dust. But it was worse than that, because a wind had begun to blow, and life was once more trembling through their raw flesh.

"Frank," he heard a quiet voice behind him say. Startled, Frank stiffened, the hairs on his neck bristling. His first instinct was to hide what he was doing, but something told him Epstein wouldn't even notice. "That thing last night," the man began as he stepped up, confidentially pulling out his wallet, "I'm sorry about what happened."

"Not as sorry as you're going to be," Frank said grimly, turning as he covered the metal bar he was fashioning on the tool bench, "That guy's a killer." Epstein wasn't a big man, but he had a strong impression of his own importance.

"You don't know what you're talking about," he answered with a smile, holding out some notes. "I do know what I'm talking about," Frank answered, not even looking at the money, "I followed them down to the railway yards last night and saw him blow the head off that other fuck he was with. That's what I know, and I know it because I saw it."

Epstein didn't know whether to believe him or not, but turned pale. He wasn't a hard man; all puff and bluster. "Killed him?" he said, his lips trembling, "Is that what you're saying?"

"You heard," Frank replied. He didn't like watching Epstein crack, but he had to know the truth.

"The big guy?" Epstein repeated, "He killed the big guy?" It was like he wasn't sure he'd heard right.
"Yes. Killed him," Frank spat back, angry at the memory, "On his knees begging for his life and bang, straight through the head—What the fuck have you got yourself involved in?" Epstein looked like he was going to start crying, but gritting his teeth, he dug into his wallet for a bigger wad of money.

"Kill him," he said, his voice constricting with angry resolve, "Kill the fuck."

"Kill him yourself," Frank answered, startled.

"Do it for me, Frank," Epstein insisted, pressing the money on him, "Kill him—I've got a gun I know where he is—" The gun, Frank remembered, that's why he had it.

"Are you out of your mind?" Frank answered, shoving his way past the man.

"Help me, you've got to help me," Epstein whimpered, turning to follow him, "You saw what he's like, help me."

"Go to the cops," Frank said, making his way for the door. It was too much. Everything was going too fast.

"What will the cops do?" Epstein pursued, keeping on Frank, "They don't care, they even know he's here—Nobody knows he's here, except you and me. As soon as I go to the cops, I'm a dead man."

"What's he want?" Frank asked, turning back on him, "What's this prick want?"

That was always his problem: he couldn't leave well enough alone; he had to know why.

"He wants to disappear," Epstein explained desperately, "So make him disappear!"

"Who is he?" Frank demanded.

"He's one fucked up son of a bitch," Epstein answered, keeping on him, "And he's back. Kill him."

"You kill him," Frank replied, brushing him away and taking off again.

"How can I kill him?" Epstein cried, chasing after him, "Look at me!"

"Well what makes you think I can?" Frank answered.

"Because you have!" Epstein said, "That's what you do: you're a killer, so kill him! I'll pay you!"

Frank felt sick to his stomach, like he was going to vomit.

"What did you say?" he asked, turning on the man, "What did you say to me?"

"Who do you think you're fooling, Frank!" Epstein spat back, "Everyone knows who you are! Why else did you think I gave you the job!"
Now it was Frank's turn to have the wind punched out of him.

"You gave me the job...because you knew...?" he stammered, like it was a secret he'd been keeping from himself finally exposed.

"Because you'd do what you're told," Epstein said coldly. Because he'd do what he was told. That's all he was, a runner, an errand boy, a slave. That's what his life had made him. A slave. With some fuck standing in front of him ordering him to kill someone he was frightened might kill him. He had to get out and nothing was going to stop him. Shoving past Epstein, he barged forward. This wasn't happening; this was worse than anything he could have imagined.

"Frank, come back," Epstein was crying, "You've got to help me, he's going to kill me; he's going to kill both of us. You've got to help me!"

But Frank couldn't hear him, or didn't want to. He was already gone, already rushing into the dull light down the steps and through the narrowing corridors, running as fast as he could to get out of the place. They were mad, all of them, Epstein, Tony, Wintle, all of them hunting and running away from one another, all of them scuttling through the shadows of their guilt looking for some escape from the madhouse they'd turned their lives into and that was somehow dragging him back down into the depths with them. Had Epstein said any of those things, or was Frank imagining it, thrashing around still in the nightmares that plagued him through all those years of imprisonment when he'd wake sweaty in the middle of the night thinking it was all a dream and his wife was there in the bed next to him and his little girl asleep in the next room. Only it wasn't, she wasn't and it was all gone like it had never even been there. Would he ever get out, he'd wondered, ever get out of this nightmare world filled with ghosts and masks and voices inside his head, and now here they were again and here he was again wondering what was real and what was paranoid delusion that he'd soon wake out of. But he wasn't waking out of it, and the darkness was getting darker and the blackness blacker. Kill him, Epstein had said, and Frank remembered those words, too, from somewhere outside of time and history, Kill him, a commandment from the centre of existence; Kill him, an edict that couldn't be rescinded; Kill him. Was Frank that man, that creature, he'd read about, or maybe imagined, that scapegoat to take on the sins of the world, not by being the sacrifice, but the executioner; was Frank now the masked executioner chosen to walk with blood on his hands into the twilight and carrying the guilt of the world with him, was Frank the chosen killer, but not anonymous, hidden by a blank hood, but rather wearing the mask of his face, for all to see and fear? Was Frank the forever killer?

He hovered in the shadows opposite the police station, not even sure how he got there or what he was doing, but desperate to go in. To go in and what? Say what? That Epstein had sent holy pictures to Greg Wintle and offered Frank money to kill someone no-one else in the town could see? To plead with Grant to believe him that something was there, some evil lurking and reaching toward all of them but about which only he was prepared to speak? And what would Grant say? What could he say? What could anyone
say? Nothing. Because there was nothing there. Not even a body. Something in the dark, that's all, and perhaps not even that. Nothing at all. He was alone, Frank knew that, had known that now for most of his life, but it had never felt as empty as what it felt now. Somehow he'd imagined something else, relationships, maybe even friendships with the people around him, but now he saw that was a pipe-dream, and if they wanted him in their lives, it was for this. To be their shadow, and to do what they didn't want to do or become themselves. Nothing. He was nothing. And that was all he now could ever be.
Six

"Frank...?" He could hear her voice on the other side of the door. "Frank, are you in there?" It was Vivien, and something was wrong. After standing in the cold outside the police station for a restless three quarters of an hour, he'd reluctantly driven home, passing the lonely ghost gums stark and white in the head-lights. He didn't know what else he could do. Put his foot down and keep going was one option, and he was certainly tempted to do that, but there was something else there as well, a curiosity, or dread, that he wasn't caught up in someone else's drama, but that somehow it had something to do with him, and that no matter what, and no matter where he went, this man would follow him because he was on his case. And whether it was paranoia or ex-con's intuition, he had a bad feeling, and wanted to get rid of it. Or did he want to be important again? There'd been that side of it, too, of being a notorious killer, and if he was honest he'd have admitted as much, which sometimes he did. We don't live our lives in the mundane. He'd been a tradey, but that wasn't all he was, or even a small part. Everyone knows, that's what Epstein had said, That's why I gave you the job. What job? What job did he give him? What had Epstein agreed to do that night on the roof?

As the car swung through the gate, the lights had flashed across something in the garden, but when he looked again, it was gone. He'd skulked toward his room and locked the door behind, but a few minutes later heard her voice from the other side of darkness.

"Frank?" she hissed, "Frank is that you?"

Pulling himself together, he went back out to see her standing in the doorway in her night dress with a kerosene lamp in her hand.

"What's wrong, Vivien?" he asked, looking into her face.

"There's something here." she said. Looking over her shoulder, all he could see were the torn windmills turning listlessly in the garden.

"What?" he asked, cautious.

"A dog," she answered, "Something. I don't know."

Frank couldn't remember how they'd met. Maybe here, at the house, maybe in town, in one of the hippie places she used to go to. Not that there were many, and not that he frequented them himself, but there was an organic place in one of the side streets, and a coffee shop where people used to play guitar on a Friday night, and where she'd sing her mournful songs. And play the piano, too. Yes, Frank remembered that now, her beautiful voice, but that was before they met, that was when he'd first arrived and was staying in the hotel trying to get his bearings. Frank didn't know where the people who hung out in the basement bar came from, and wasn't that interested himself, but he remembered there was a notice board advertising rooms for rent, and maybe that's where he saw the ad that brought him here, to the end of the road that snaked along the cliff, and where he first met her, formally, and they exchanged names. It wasn't that far from town, but it was secluded
and right on the escarpment and it suited him, right down to his room under the house. Some nights he'd sit there on the cliff, hanging his legs over the edge and looking out across the dark sea of trees swaying hypnotically beneath him. And sometimes he'd wonder what it would be like to run as far away from anything as possible, to the ends of the earth and beyond. And sometimes she'd be there, too, or at least he'd sense her presence in the air.

"What dog?" he asked.

She showed him the footprints that she'd found, down the side of the house, and though he was no expert, they didn't look like any dog prints he'd ever seen. They were big. Huge.

"What do you think it is?" he asked, wondering what she'd heard.

"I don't know," Vivien answered, rubbing her hands up her thin arms to warm them against the cold, "There's been noises all day."

She invited him in to the house, and put on some soup. He didn't feel like it, but it was better than being alone.

"What sort of noises?" he said at last as the fire crackled in the grate.

"Scratching," she said, staring into the embers. "Snuffling."

She'd settled in to her armchair—her throne as she sometimes called it, when she was feeling regal—and poured herself a drink from a hip flask she'd kept from some previous life. Frank didn't drink himself, not for a long while, but he didn't mind watching other people do it. Most other people, anyhow.

"The wolf?" he asked, seeing if she'd bite.

"The wolf's dead, Frank, didn't you hear?" she answered, her voice laced with anger. She had an affinity with animals, she liked them, and sometimes people would bring injured wildlife to her—birds with broken wings, that sort of thing—and she'd care for them until they either got better or didn't. And she buried them. "That's what they do to the wild things around here," she said, "kill them."

That was the business of the town, gouging and cutting, she'd say sometimes; it made for some uneasy conversations, and folk tended to be careful what they said and where they went, because she wasn't the only one who thought that way, and was hated because of it. Not that you'd guess, driving through the town, but that's like most places, looking at them you'd never guess what goes on.

"I'm not imagining it," she said at last.

"I didn't say you were," he answered, wondering how often she sat here, alone, listening to the wind rattling the roof. There were talismans and things, dream-catchers and
feathers, scattered around the room, and Frank knew she had an interest in the occult, like a lot of people up here, though they wouldn't admit to it very often, and not unless you asked.

"There's a story—lots of stories," she began, "about animals taking human form—Have you heard of that?" She wasn't looking at him, but it sounded like she wanted to talk.

"No," he said. She'd tell him things like that sometimes. He didn't know whether they were true or not because he wasn't much of a reader, but he liked listening to her.

"The Chinese think that human beings are the highest form of life, and that everything else wants to be like us."

"I don't think I'd agree with that," he said. In fact if he thought about it at all, he would have thought the exact opposite. Because human beings are about as low as you can go.

"No, but that's what the Chinese think," she said, "Or some Chinese at least—There's lots of stories about animals changing themselves into humans, and tricking people—especially foxes."

"Foxes?" Frank asked, wondering where she was going with the story. "But other animals, too," she said, "Wolves."

"Wolves?" he asked, looking to see the light of the flames flickering across her face.

"Yes. But a wolf is more dangerous than a fox," she said, not returning his gaze.

"How?" he asked. She had a way of taking him to places he hadn't visited since his childhood.

"Wilder. Untamed. You can't tame a wolf, Frank. They won't let it."

"And when a wolf changes into a man, what does it do?"

He'd started to sniff out the trail she was leading him to.

"It gets confused, and starts feeling lost," she said. Was she talking to him, he wondered, was she saying something directly to him? "A wolf is instinct and urge, but when he becomes a man, his mind gets clouded, gets lost and he becomes dangerous," she said, "Wolves out of their place are dangerous," she repeated.

"Even when they want to be men?" Frank asked. Did Frank want to be a man? No, he didn't. Not this sort of man, anyhow. With these sorts of men.

"Especially when they want to be men," Vivien answered like she was still telling a story, "Because all it does is make them mean."

"Why?" Frank asked. What was she getting at? What did she want?
"Because the emptiness inside a man is too deep for any wolf," Vivian answered.

He could see she was crying, now. He didn't know what it was about or why, and women had always been a mystery to him. He didn't think it was because she was scared, because he knew her better than that, but he couldn't think of any other reason. The emptiness in man, sure. Something had happened to her, he knew. He didn't know what, but it must have been bad. Maybe almost as bad as what had happened to him, though he couldn't guess what, and had never ventured to ask. And maybe there was an emptiness inside him; it had felt like that, when the judge made him stand to pronounce sentence, and everyone around had looked at him like they couldn't imagine what might be said, but he hadn't even felt a thing; not a single thing, because it had all been emptied out long before; so that he could barely even hear the words that fell as hard as the hammer he banged down at the end of it, to make sure, but Frank was already far away, somewhere else, away from all the words and the anger, away from all the jabber about guilt and punishment because the worst thing in his life had already happened, and his little girl was dead, he was sure; she had to be; dead at the end of a horror beyond words that he hadn't been able to save her from. His girl, his daughter. And nothing was ever going to be as bad as that.

"You've got to get help, Vivien..." he said, the fire coming back into focus. He didn't know what else to say. There was nothing else to say.

"There's something here, Frank, I know."

"You've got to get help, Viv; it's no good, festering away out here," he repeated.

"What about you?" she asked.

"What about me?" he said, looking back at her. He was going to die. That's all the what-about-me he cared for. Die and melt back into the earth.

"Don't you deserve to live?" she said.

"No," he answered without hesitation, standing. He'd had enough of the wolves and meanness and men with lost souls. He'd had years of it.

"According to who?" she asked, "Them in the town?"

"I don't care about them, and neither should you," he answered, and it was true. He was past caring, even to hate. He didn't hate them, and why would he? They were there, somewhere and it didn't matter to him one way or the other. And something told him it was the same for her because there was something between them, a kind of telepathy that didn't need words that made her the only person he didn't mind being around. He'd felt it the first time he'd seen her in the hippie bar. She was beautiful and sad. Proud, he thought, like he was. Proud to be still sane, if that's what you call it, but somehow still on the edge. The two of them were on the edge, and sort of holding one another's hands to stop each other from falling over. Or jumping. But she wasn't sane, she was mad, Frank knew that. And maybe he was, too. The maddest ones are the one who
think they're sane. And maybe the whole world was mad, but wasn't prepared to admit it yet.

"Why do you care what they think?" he said to her, "Why do you even care if there's a dog after you?"

"It's not after me, Frank," she said, "It's after you."

And looking at her, he saw she meant it. Was it after him? Maybe it was. He'd felt it, too, over the years, felt it padding through the maze of his life, remorseless, unstoppable. He used to dream about it, coming after him, sniffing the ground to follow his trail, but that was in his dreams, not in the world, not in the here and now. But here it was, and it wasn't a dream.

"Well it's not going to get me," he answered, "I don't care what it is."

There was nothing there, in where she was leading him, madness, that's all; and he wasn't going to give way to madness. Not this time.

Shoving into his room, Frank closed the door and went straight to the loose floorboard where he hid his stuff. Maybe establish this earlier. Reaching down he pulled out a battered shoebox, and settling on the bed, he put it on his knee and lifted the lid. Inside was the Stanley Knife, now rusty and discoloured with blood. He didn't know why he'd kept it, and wished he hadn't every time he saw it. A roll of duct tape that he should have thrown away, it brought back such terrible memories; and a curled up, faded picture of a little schoolgirl, the last thing left that reminded him of what it was like to be a human being. Everything that told him who he was. It was all there. And then looking up, he sensed something else in the dark, and stiffening, his gaze seemed somehow directed by the moonlight slanting through the window to the mirror on the opposite wall. Standing, he could see something written on it, a note stuck there; or maybe it was a trick of the light. But putting the shoebox down he stepped closer to get a better look, and that's what it was, for sure, a piece of paper, a receipt, maybe, or docket...taped to the mirror under a word scrawled on the glass. Moving around, trying to make it out, he could see it floating over his reflection...Wolf, it said. And stepping up he pulled it off, and saw it was a dry cleaning docket. "Jacket and Pants," it said. From the Blue Bird Dry Cleaners down in the town. Jacket and Pants. In the name of Wolf. Something had been there, and it was after him.
Seven.
It was down the narrow, untidy alley leading to the car-park behind the bank. There were a few shops, a gardening store, leatherware and saddlery, a knife sharpener, that sort of thing, and cars parked tightly beside the dumpster in the back of a hardware shop facing the main street. Frank found it after walking past a couple of times, but still had to double back after going the wrong way from the arcade that fed into it, even though it had a pretty blue bird logo painted on the window. But Frank had gotten out of the habit of paying much attention—you learn that pretty fast in prison—and he'd never been much good with directions, anyhow; and the plain truth was that he didn’t need a dry cleaner’s, or anything much this town had to offer, and hadn’t been too concerned where the various stores apart from the supermarket, up on the main street, were, so even though he'd been in Kanangara enough time to make his way around, he was still an outsider and wasn’t in a hurry to change that. But there it was at last, the Blue Bird Dry Cleaner's, like on the docket.

The bell over the door tinkled as he came in, and the lady at the steam press looked up.

"Yes?" she asked, "Can I help you?"

She was a stocky woman with a tired face who looked like she had some sort of trouble with her legs as she stumped over to the counter toward him. *Fluid*, flashed through his mind. *She's got fluid.*

"I'm not sure," he said, "Is this your ticket...?"

He held it out and she pulled down her glasses to hold it up to the light. She was a woman in her fifties, practical and friendly.

"Looks like..." she said, turning back toward the racks of freshly bagged clothes and beginning to flick through them, looking for the number. "No...No..." she was saying as she moved along the overhead conveyor.

It was a little place smelling of ammonia and something that made his nose wrinkle, and Frank wondered idly if that’s what was making her sick. Not that he knew she was sick, but she didn’t look well. Overweight and pasty and past caring. Amazing what people’ll put up with, even when they know it’s killing them.

"No...No..." she kept saying, like it was a real puzzle, when all of a sudden she stopped and looked up. "Oh, yes, now I remember," but a quizzical expression dawning on her face, "The jacket and pants for Mr. Wolf." And looking back at him, she added, "The ones with the blood."

As soon as she said it, Frank remembered that Tony had been wearing a suit. "Who brought them in?" he asked, "Was he a big guy, strong?"

But swiveling on her sore leg to look at him more closely, she cocked her head and peered at him, saying, "But it was you, wasn't it. Aren't you Mr. Wolf?"
"No, I'm not," Frank answered startled. What was going on? How could he have impersonated Frank?

"I'm sure it was you," she said, before remembering, "Oh, wait a minute, that's right – It wasn't you—It was your friend who picked them up for you."

"Picked what up?" Frank asked. Is that what he'd said? That he was Frank's friend?

"Yes," she said, "Your friend, the one you sent."

"I didn't send anyone," Frank answered, his panic starting to rise inside.

"Except he didn't have the ticket," she said, like she was putting the pieces of a puzzle together, "He said you'd forgotten to give it to him."

"I didn't send anyone," Frank repeated, "And this isn't my ticket – I found it."

But he might as well have said nothing, because she kept on blabbing.

"He said you'd drop it in—Frank, isn't it—That's your name. See, I wrote it down." She held up a notebook where she'd written his name, "Frank Wolf, that's you, isn't it."

"No, that's not me," Frank said, "And it wasn't my suit."

"But I saw you," the woman said, bewildered, "You brought the suit in."

Frank was getting confused.

"I didn't—I don't know anything about the suit," he said backing toward the door, "It's got nothing to do with me."

"Then what are you doing here," the woman said, looking at him as the penny dropped, "Mr. Cave...?"

He had to get out of there, but it was like he was stuck to the floor.

"This man, what did he do with the suit?" he asked.

"He took it over there, of course" the woman said, looking across the street, "where you live."

"I don't live around here," Frank said, following her gaze across the street, "I've never been in this street before—I've never been in this shop."

"But you live there," she repeated, nodding in the direction, "You said."

"There's been some mistake," he said, "Someone is trying to mix me up..."

"Over there," she repeated. And turning to get a proper look, he saw fire-stairs leading up to a grimy first floor flat with dusty shuttered windows over the back of a dispensary.
"Me...?" he asked forlornly. What was going on?

"Yes. Over there," she answered, "That's where he said you lived."

"Who?" he asked plaintively.

"The man, the man," she repeated, but he was already stumbling toward the door. The bell again tinkled and he stepped back out onto the street, but it was like he’d stepped into a different world, and even the light from was darker.

It was a set-up. Of course it was. And even though he wasn't thinking straight, he could see that as clear as day. He was being set up, and he could already hear the old woman identifying him in court. "Yes, him, that man sitting there." Tony had set some trap and was luring him on, but he was in too far now and couldn't turn back. It wasn’t that Tony wanted to kill him, not straight away, anyhow. He could have done that already if that's what he wanted. Killed him and Vivien both because Frank now saw he'd been sitting out there in the dark, watching them; watching him the way he'd maybe been watching him for months, laying his snares, his little trip wires that Frank was just now becoming aware of. But he wasn’t trying to kill him, not yet, anyhow, he was trying to spook him into doing something. And he was succeeding. Because here he was heading straight for it. A kid on a bicycle rang his bell and swerved to miss him while a young mother bent to wipe her toddler's face. But why? Why go to all this trouble? Revenge on Frank for killing the guy he’d killed? Who was he, his brother? Tony? The man didn't have a brother, he was nobody, a loser, a poor fucked up loser nobody even wanted to claim at the funeral. That's what Frank had only understood right at the end, when it was all over. He wasn't what he'd thought, some criminal mastermind protected by people in high places etc etc.—all those things you imagine when you don't know. When the truth is even worse. That all he was was, a broken down fucked up nobody living with his mother who'd gotten away with what he had because he had the time to do it, and nobody cared enough to stop him. Nobody cared whether the man lived or died, and they couldn't even scratch up anyone to give a victim's statement at the trial. So if it wasn't him, then what? For something Frank had done in jail? Some psycho he'd rubbed up the wrong way? But he'd spent most of his time in solitary because the other crims were too scared to be around him. A guard, maybe, could it be a guard harbouring some secret grudge? Or a fan. One of those weird fans murderers get, a stalker obsessed with the crime who wants to be his best buddy? Is that what it was? Is that what it could be?

Or something else. Something worse. Frank didn't know what had been done to his daughter, she'd disappeared. Sometimes he imagined that she'd survived, and was still alive, somewhere, not even remembering who she was or what had happened. Not remembering him or anything, or perhaps remembering it all too well and still wondering why he hadn't been able to do what fathers were supposed to, and protect their little girls, their children. Wondering why he'd let all those terrible things happen to her. He'd thought about that. Meeting her again, now; trying to explain, trying to hug the pain away. His pain and hers. Would that be possible? Could they both put it all behind them and turn their
back on the world and live happy in each other’s arms again? But what if that was Tony’s secret? That he’d been part of that? What if Tony knew what had happened? And that’s why he was here?

Frank was used to these thoughts. These mad, crazy thoughts that would sweep him away and send him running in every direction. And it was taking all his effort from stopping them take hold of him all over again and turn him into that thing. That thing he'd kept locked up ever since lest he do it again, hiding himself away the way he had; but it was still there, he knew, growling inside its cage; waiting for its chance to get out and he could feel it now, snarling inside his chest. He'd never felt so alive as when he'd been the beast, and even the police who'd caught him had tried to keep their distance, for fear of what he might do. Because he'd do anything. And everyone knew. He'd do anything, and he had.

It was a dirty, blank weatherboard building that looked like whoever owned it had died years ago, with blistering black paint and rusty, overflowing guttering. The cracked windows were boarded up, or papered over, like it might have been used as a storeroom for one of the nearby shops, but it was dirty and unkempt, like something in a dream you find at the end of a long, winding labyrinth. The stairs zig-zagged up from street-level to the sagging balcony, where there was a door and two square windows with cobwebs in the corners, like a kid’s idea of what a face looks like, or a haunted house. Frank didn’t know what was up there, but it looked like the kind of place you might pick to commit a murder. There was something twisted about Tony, for sure, something not quite right. It wasn't that he was bad, it was that he liked being bad; he enjoyed it. He'd seen guys like that before, through bars in high security. Not many, but enough to make him want to keep his distance, the way you keep your distance from a dangerous animal. They were the kind of men who'd gouge your eyes out for the heck of it. He knew what their problem was, the hate they felt, but while he'd pulled back into himself, they'd settled in to enjoy the ride. Mad and bad is what they were, and Frank figured that’s what Tony was, too. In fact he was sure of it. And the only reason he was still alive was because no-one had had the gumption to kill him. But one day someone would, and everyone would jump in to have a go, to give it to him while they still had the chance, and maybe that's what he was waiting for, the chance to take on the world knowing he wouldn't get up. Because he hated himself and them so much. That's the sort of thinking you learn in maximum security.

Frank was half way up the steps now. It seemed weird, that he could be here, thinking these thoughts, while all around him, down there passing by, people were carrying on with their normal, everyday lives. Though what that consisted of was anyone’s guess, or rather, from what he’d seen in jail, was pretty far removed from what he used to think, anyhow. Maybe Tony was down there himself, watching, enjoying the spectacle.

The sound of a refrigerator door sucking open dragged his eyes back down to the street, where he saw a man, all muscle and grunt, the driver in bloody, blue striped overalls and a stained cap heft heave? half a pig carcass out of the truck freezer and lug it into the
nearby butcher’s. A young woman’s high heels click-clicked past in the opposite direction as she made her way to a lunchtime tryst, by the look of the lip-stick she was applying to her face; (as she walked?) a flock of pigeons shot with a sharp clap of wings into the still air and flew lazily off, and the whole place oozed something heavy and lethargic, like it was waiting for something repeated from above. to die. Taking hold of the weathered handrail, Frank pulled himself up the last remaining steps, keeping his eyes on the door at the top of the stairs in case it sprang open and death stepped out. A roll of soggy carpet came into view on the landing lying like a giant slug next to some rubbish, and the whole place smelt of rot and decay. Stepping up, he felt the floorboard beneath him crack and glancing around, looked for some clues as to why he was here, or maybe stalling for time, because he didn't want to go in. Not into that place.

On the other side of the lane, the dry cleaning lady was standing behind the blue bird in her window, holding her breath and watching as he hesitated to make his move. But reaching out, he turned the doorknob. He wasn’t going to knock, because whoever was inside already knew he was there. That was the reason he was there.

And shoving it open, he stepped in.

It was still and quiet, musty and expectant, and he was trying to listen to the sticky heat of whatever it was that was in there, because he knew there was something there, he couldn’t see it yet. He’d closed the door behind because he didn't want whatever it was to get out, and looked back into the void that was so thick he felt like he was disappearing himself, like he was ink being absorbed into a blotter. It was empty, dead, like a vault, and he could feel the still, stagnant air dusty and already sticking to his skin. As his eyes adjusted, something came into view a few feet away, or rather he felt its presence, something there in the dark. It was moving slightly, a presence, Frank could feel it, darkness blacker than the black around it, waiting.

"Who's that?" he croaked.

He took a step forward, and the floorboard creaked beneath him, but the figure didn't move, or didn't stop moving the way it had been, swaying backwards and forwards like he was shifting his weight from foot to foot, masked by the darkness, or maybe something else, masked by a real mask, was that him? Wearing a gas-mask, yes, or those night-vision things—Yes, was that it? Was that what he could see?

"Who's there?" he challenged again, this time stronger.

What if it was him, sitting there in the corner, the man imp? chuckling to himself at how clever he was making all these people run around after him, watching him, with his gun pointed straight at his belly. What if it was him? Frank waved his hands in front of him, trying to feel the dark.

"Is that you?" he demanded, sifting the air with his fingers, "Are you there?"

No-one answered, and it was so dark he could barely see his flesh in front of him.
"Hello?" Frank said, turning to a sound, "Who's there?"

Is this what it would be like when he died? Reaching forward, terrified he might touch something in the dark? Maybe he was dead already, had died years before, and was now waiting for his body to catch up, for it to realize, and drop to the ground to be scooped up and disposed of before he caused any further embarrassment. Maybe Kanangara and all that had happened was a desperate dream, something flashing through his head before the trap door opened and the rope snapped taut around his neck as he plummeted to hell. Where did all these thoughts come from? When would they stop? When would this drumming inside his skull come to an end, and he could find some rest. Who could save him from what his life had become?

Taking another step, he brushed past something, sensing it nearby, even though he barely touched it. Gingerly reaching out, he could feel it, soft and fleshy, plastic, a bag, a plastic bag, maybe like a bag from the dry cleaner’s, or something else, hanging in the darkness in the middle of the room. But it was bulging at the bottom, like it was filled with something, and warm, animal warm, and there was something dripping from it, thick and viscous, dripping sticky on the floor underneath, because Frank could feel it, on the soles of his shoes, wet and thick and smelling like blood, and then he felt himself spinning out, because this wasn't right. So not right he wasn't sure what he was even doing there. Somehow it was too stuffy in here, like the killing room in an abattoir, the dry air and dust caking at the back of his throat and the blood, his blood now, was thumping inside his temples. He wanted to get out; throw the windows open and get out, only he didn't know where the door was, which way was out, and shoving past in his panic, he set the bag swinging, if that's what it was, and the thing felt heavy and ponderous, like a body, a pendulum, swinging back and forth, back and forth, the dull plastic glinting and catching the light coming from somewhere, a hole in the roof he couldn't see, but there was nothing else in the room, him and the bag, spraying whatever it was spraying now onto the floor, onto his boots, when something took hold of him, some mad thought, and he lifted the knife he remembered he had in his hand—the knife he'd brought with him to do what?—and aimed it as the bag swung in slow motion past, smothering it in its folds and exploding it like a balloon bursting and splattering a flood of shit and blood splashing out into the air and floor beneath. Splashing out with all the ghastly horror of an animal spilling its guts. And leaping back, Frank heaved as he saw what was in it, with blood and organs slithering out like worms, like intestines from an eviscerated body, from a limbless torso swinging lifeless in the dark dripping death onto the floor. But then he saw it glint, a flash of bloody white that was there and then gone, and reaching down into the steaming heap, thrusting his hand deep into it, Frank scrambled, searching for the clue, because he knew now that's what he was there for, that's why he'd been led there, for a clue, because that's what Tony was doing, leaving a trail of clues, and Frank was helpless to resist because now he wanted to know whatever secret Tony was there to tell him. He wanted to know as much as he'd ever wanted to know anything. And then he saw it, bloody, white, glinting up in the muck. A tooth, hard and unmistakable. It was like in one of those dreams, where you're cowering
under the sheets and blankets, and you can feel something crawling toward you, from the bottom of the bed, and you daren't look, you daren't put your head up, but you can feel it getting closer, you can feel its weight crawling over your body cringing beneath the covers, and you want to scream, but can't. Your voice is stuck in your throat, desperate to get out, desperate to leap from you, but stuck, like you are, waiting for its breath to be spraying spit into your face as your body arches back in terror. A tooth, but not human. Something else. He already knew what it was. This was to make sure he understood, and that it wasn't a mistake. This was to tell him there was no way out. This was Tony's way of saying "Do you want to play?" Frank felt something tighten around his soul and start to strangle it. This was the beginning. And this was the end.
Eight.

Watching Frank as she slid the dead wolf from the freezer, Christina asked curiously, "So what do you want to see?"

He’d driven back up there as fast as he could to make sure. She’d opened the door again, like she lived there, or was waiting for him, and led him down the same long hallway into the back-room again. Where they kept the bodies. But it wasn't like the first time they went down there together. It already felt different. Maybe it was him that was different, he wasn't sure, but something was, between them, like they were together, without yet realising it. And as he’d followed her down the shadowy passage he looked at the photos they passed on the walls, of stern, proud men, righteous even, the pioneers of this town honoured there because the funeral director was some sort of amateur historian, and looking at them Frank felt a kind of coldness creeping into him from the frozen world she inhabited, this world slowly drifting into the sepia light. Here they were, the founders of Kanangara, the men who'd cut it from the brittle wilderness and made it what it was, remembered in the only place they were remembered, a funeral parlour tucked away out of sight down near the silos.

"I want to look at its teeth," he said, leaning over the animal and already smelling death seeping out of it. Curious, Christina pulled on some surgical gloves and reached toward the animal's jaws.

"Sometimes they have pathogens in the saliva," she explained, "I don't want to get sick."

Watching, he saw her fingers working at the lips.

"Top or bottom?" she asked, glancing up at him for guidance.

"I don’t know," he said, feeling uncertain. He could sense her close to him, their faces together, her warmth. Gripping the creature's bottom lip, she pulled it back, revealing the gum and jaw, still sticky with saliva and pale in the yellow light shining from the book lamp she’d pulled across to see.

"Run your finger along..." he asked, bending to look more closely. Their heads brushed, and embarrassed, he took a step away. She slid her finger along the inner jaw, curious what he was looking for.

"Now the top ones..." he said, tilting his head to get a better look, and not taking his eyes off the creature, as if at any moment it might snap from its stupor and lunge at them. Pulling the top lip back, she again ran her finger along the gum, till he saw it. A gap.

"There..." he said.

There was a hole in the back of its mouth, where a tooth had been knocked out. And taking the piece of bloody tissue paper from his pocket, he unwrapped it in his hand,
revealing it to her. Taking hold of it, he leaned forward and slipped it snugly back into the socket.

"That's it," Frank said, like he'd put the key in the lock, "He's after me."

Christina looked at him, wondering what he meant.

"What's going on?" she said as she pushed the animal back into the fridge and stripped off her gloves.

It was uncanny how she could shift effortlessly from a young girl you'd hardly notice into someone who could be his boss.

"I know why the wolf's here," he answered, his mind already chasing through distant valleys, hunting for answers.

"Why?" she asked, watching him carefully. Blinking he looked at her like he didn't even know she was there.

"I've got to go," he said, collecting his things, "Thanks again."

"You'd better go to the police if you know who did this," Christina said, turning to face him, "Is he still here? This man? Is it someone you know?" But Frank wasn't listening.

"Yes," he said, not thinking because he was already in overdrive, "Thanks for everything you've done for me."

"Who is it?" she asked, and her voice struck him like a bell and turning back, he reached forward and grabbed her arm.

"Why are you being so nice to me?" he asked. He was looking straight into her eyes, searching them.

"I'm not being nice to you," she said, returning his gaze, "I want some answers."

"And I'm not either," he said, "You can't get involved in this. You can't see me anymore."

It was like they were breaking up but they hardly knew one another's names.

"Why not?" she said, looking at his hand on her arm. It was him. He was touching her. Her skin. She could feel him.

"It's too dangerous," he said, trying to make her understand, "These people, this man, they're too dangerous—Different to anyone you've ever met."

"How do you know who I've met?" she asked him. He was close now and she wanted to smell him, smell his breath.
"Well if you'd met this guy I wouldn't need to explain it to you," he said. He didn't know why he was still there, but he was. Looking at her.

"Why?" she asked, "What does he want?"

Frank couldn't tell if she wanted to know or was keeping him there. Why would she be keeping him there? Who else was in the building? Were they alone?

"I can't tell you," he said, swinging for the door. He had to get away. "But don't ask any more questions," he said, "and don't say anything else about the wolf—To Sergeant Grant or anyone."

"What's going on, Frank?" she said, following him into the hall. It was the first time she'd called him that, and it felt strange. Wrong. But she was glad she said it.

"He's after me," Frank answered, looking back at her, "He knows who I am and that's why he's here."

"What does he know about you that no-one else does?" she asked, but he wasn't going to answer any more questions.

"This isn't for you," he said, reaching for the door, "Forget about it. Forget about me, forget about everything. You don't need to know about this sort of stuff; no-one does."

She watched as he hurriedly left, scurrying off into the afternoon in a shower of leaves. As he got to the other side of the street, he wondered if she was still there in the doorway watching him, but looking back, he saw that she was gone. And that's the way it had to be. He had no business with her, nor she with him, and that was the end of it for both of them and the confusing thoughts that had erupted in him. That wasn't why he was here. He had work to do.

The Orpheum was dark and empty as Frank burst in, calling "Jack!" his voice echoing off into depths of the building. "Jack?!" he called again. Epstein knew; he had to, and Frank was going to find out what. "Jack!" he cried.

The ghostly voices of "Holiday Inn" were wafting eerily from the auditorium into the chasms and fissures of the dark building, but the place felt alone and abandoned. Pushing into the projector room, Frank saw Rob sitting round-shouldered at the work bench and demanded, "Where's the boss?" The boy glanced indifferently up from his magazine.

"Don't ask me..." he said, a hint of insolence in his voice as he stood to check the projector while the reel rattled in the sprocket. Frank wasn't going to put up with any more shit.

"What's wrong with you?" he demanded. He was sick of all of them, sick of their lies.
"You tell me," Rob answered, coldly, not like the boy he knew, the one he'd helped.

"What do you mean?" Frank shot back. Surely he had one friend, surely there was someone in this place he could count on.

"There's this guy..." Rob said, relenting. And Frank knew.

"Who?" he demanded.

"There's this guy walking around like he owns the place." Frank didn't need to ask anything more as Rob pleaded "What's going on?"

"He was here?" Frank answered, his throat now constricting with fear and anger, "You saw him? What was he doing?"

"I don't know," Rob said, "Setting up a projector in the storeroom." Frank looked over his shoulder like he might go straight there. "When I asked him who he was, he walked past me like I wasn't even there. He was scary, Frank—Who is he?"

"Listen, Rob," Frank said, stepping toward the boy, "Something bad's going on. Something real bad. Keep your head down and your trap shut."

"Is it the parcels?" Rob asked, glancing away.

"What parcels?" Frank almost jumped, "What do you know about the parcels?" And picking up one from the bench, Rob held it out, saying, "The parcels, Frank—These parcels." And there it was. A different one, but wrapped in the same way, brown paper and string, one of the parcels Frank had been delivering.

"Where'd you get that?" he asked in a low frightened voice, "Who gave it to you?"

"You said you'd fixed it up for me, Frank," Rob answered, hurt and disappointed, "but you didn't. Mr. Epstein said he knew what I'd done and if I didn't do delivery for him, he'd go to the cops." Taking the package from him, Frank turned the boy toward the corridor. "Get out, Rob," he said, "Now. Go."

"Go?" Rob asked, confused and frightened, "Go where? Home you mean? You can't fire me."

"Go, Rob, get out of here" Frank ordered, pushing him into the dim hall, "This place is evil."

"Evil?" Rob answered, bewildered as Frank hunted him out in front of him. "Just go!" Frank fumed, marching him down the stairs and toward the front door.

"What's going on, Frank? Stop it!" the boy cried, trying to resist. But pushing him out the door into the courtyard, Frank swung back into the building to roar "Jack?!" and disappear back into the building. Frightened and uncertain, Rob hovered in the cold dark wondering what to do. He couldn't leave Frank to bash Mr. Epstein, because from the
sound of it, that's what he was going to do; and he didn't want to get in trouble about the parcels—What were they anyhow? Drugs? Not drugs, no, but something else. Something worse.

"Jack!" he heard Frank’s voice echo darkly again from deeper inside, and making up his mind he turned to creep back through the gloom and into the building as a musty owl settled on the wall to watch him go. But Rob didn’t see it because he was too much in a hurry to find out what was going on. He’d be sorry he had, but even if he'd seen the bird, he wouldn't have heeded its warning.

But inside the building, the darkness was pooling in the recesses. "Jack?!" Frank roared again as he swung back through the gloom. By now he didn't care what happened to him. To involve a young boy in this was more than Frank could forgive anyone, even Epstein. "Jack!" he called, "Jack!"

"What?" Epstein snapped without looking up as Frank stormed through the door into the stalls. He was sweeping between the seats with a broom and pan looking for money.

"This is what!" Frank spat, swooping down on him, and throwing the parcel at his feet, "What's this?!"

And before either of them could say another word, the package hit the floor and split open in a shower of – stuff – Frank wasn't sure what it was at first—photos. Grainy black and white photos—exploding across the bare floorboards at their feet. Photos of children, naked, frightened, children with looks of horror and dismay on their tiny faces as they stared at what awaited them. Children betrayed and abused, broken, crying, children sent to hell and kept there for as long as they could survive. Children like his own daughter. Is this what happened to her? Is this what he was part of?

"What did you think, Sherlock?" Epstein sneered, "How do you think I’ve been keeping this flea-pit going?"

"You fuck! You fuck! I’ll kill you!" Frank cried, leaping toward the man's throat. And stepping up to the corner of the door, Rob’s blood ran cold.

"Is this what it is?" Frank shouted, wept, spat as he fell on Epstein, strangling him, "Is this what you've got me involved in?"

"Let me go! Let me go!" Epstein coughed, spluttered, thrashing to get out of Frank's iron grip.

"I'll kill you! I'll kill you!" Frank cried, shaking him with all the fury he felt inside. Rob didn’t know what to do – Should he shout? What?
"Because that's all you are, you fucking creep, a fucking killer" Epstein bawled, pushing him away and scrambling across the seats to protect himself, "And that's all you ever were." Gulping, Frank shoved the animal back inside.

"I'm going to the police," he said, steeling himself, "I'm going to tell them everything I know and you're going to jail, you fuck, to be fucked so hard your arse'll bleed because that's all you deserve, you shit. You're going to jail."

"Yeah, sure," Epstein spluttered, sprawled back on a bank of seats as he gasped for breath, "And they'll believe you like they did when you went squawking to them yesterday."

"How do you know that?" Frank spat, spinning back on him. Tony had been here; had told him. Frank looked up and around the auditorium, half expecting to see him sitting there, squawking.

"I do because I'm not an idiot, like you," Epstein answered, trying to pull himself together, "and if you want to do anything to stop this shit, you'll listen to me." That was Epstein, always a man with a plan.

"Listen to you?" Frank said, exploding into anger again, "Don't tempt me, you shit, don't you tempt me." He could already see what he was going to do to Epstein, he could already feel how good it was going to be to hurt him. And it was going to hurt. Frank would make sure of that.

"Yes, listen to me," Epstein said, grasping for a straw, "Because if we're gonna get out of this, we're gonna have to do it together."

"I'll show you together," Frank said, leaping over the seats and grabbing him by the collar to swing him back toward the aisle, "Get a move on." And with a shove he was stumbling back up the stairs.

"Hey, let me go!" Epstein shrieked, "What are you doing?" Epstein was a natural whiner. It was something he learnt in childhood and never grew out of.

"You're going to write a letter," Frank said, breathing hard and pushing him toward the tattered leather doors, "You're going to write a letter saying what you've done." Yes, that was it. Stay within the law. Do things their way. Trust Grant. That's all he had to do. trust Grant.

"You're making a mistake," Epstein pleaded as Frank pushed him roughly ahead of him, "You're in this as much as me."

"Shutup!" Frank ordered, giving him a thump and making him stumble and sprawl face down onto the carpet, bloodying his nose. He wasn't going to kill him, but he wasn't going to let him go without getting a good going over, either. Hiding behind the door as Frank lifted the man up and smacked him down the hall, Rob tried to think. Even if he called the police, Mr. Epstein’d be dead by the time they arrived, so maybe he should keep
listening, and if it sounded like he was about to get it, Rob could make a noise or something, distract him – Frank wouldn’t do anything if he knew Rob was there, would he? The boy hadn't heard a lot of what was said, and hadn't understood the rest, but he'd never seen Frank so angry or another man so frightened, not ever. Maybe he should set off the fire alarm or something, anything to disturb them. Because Rob could see it was all going in one direction. Hearing Epstein's door slam shut further down the hall, he turned uncertainly and crept forward. He was frightened, but he was too interested to run away.

"Don't be fucking stupid," Epstein protested as he fell stumbling into his office. There was something pathetic about him, something round and soft and helpless, like the school-yard fatty you wanted to punch yourself but couldn't be bothered.

"Shut up, I said," Frank growled slamming the door shut behind them. Crossing to Epstein's desk, he pulled the gun out of the drawer and ordered him to "Sit down!"

"Listen, Frank" Epstein said earnestly, watching what he was doing with the gun, "if people want something, they'll get it." But Frank wasn't having any of it. He was sick of listening to Epstein, sick of hearing his voice.

"And you're happy to give it to them," he answered, slamming the pen and paper down in front of him, "Is that what you mean? Do you make it as well? Is that what you do here?!"

"It's fucking make believe," Epstein protested, watching Frank step away, "People make it for fun—They're models." Did he believe that? Was that what he told himself at night?

"Fuck you," Frank snapped, checking to see if the gun was loaded. Should he kill him? Is that what he should do?

"They're fucking models!" Epstein insisted with a chuckle, like that might convince Frank, "look at 'em! Eighteen years old! It says so in their contract."

"And you're careful about contracts, aren't you," Frank snarled, his finger tightening on the trigger.

"What's your fucking problem?" Epstein shot back, a sense of the injustice of it all welling up, "Are they your kid?"

"Yes," Frank snapped, smashing Epstein across the head with the butt of the gun, "Yes they are. Every single one of them. Now start writing!"

"What? What do you want me to write?" Epstein said, his eyes welling with pain and tears.

"What you did. What's going on here." Frank yelled back in his face, feeling clearer than he ever had in his life. That was it, that's all he had to do: get Epstein to write a
confession and take it to Grant. Maybe then he’d believe him. Maybe then he’d understand
the danger they were in.

"I didn't do anything!" Epstein cried, "I didn't have a choice!"

"You had a choice," Frank answered, "Everyone has a choice."

"And so did you." Epstein spat back, "Because you were the one doing delivery, not me!"

Epstein flinched back from his own words as Frank surged forward. "What did you say?" he bellowed, "What did you say to me?" Throwing his hands up to protect himself, Epstein cowered away.

"All I'm saying is that you're involved," he blubbered, "We all are, whether you like it or not." He was shaking in fright, but that didn't stop him from wriggling as hard as he could, "And if I'm going down, so are you..."

"You're going down, alright," Frank shouted, taking hold of him, "And if you want to take me with you, I'm happy to go down even further to make it worthwhile!" Epstein could feel his fingers digging into his flesh.

"Stop! Stop!" he cried, trying to pull away, "All I'm saying is, it doesn't have to be like that! We can get out of this. You and me both."

Frank had that taste, that same glinting, metallic taste in his mouth he'd only ever had once before in his life. "You and me, you mean?" he answered darkly. But something was holding him back, something as faint as breath. "Get writing."

"He's a killer," Epstein said, lowering his voice to a whisper like the man was there, on the other side of the door, listening to the two of them, "And he's still out there, and you know who he's after, Frank? You." He was playing his last card, and he knew it.

"You're the one he's after," Frank answered, "But if you don't hurry up, I'll beat him to it."

"He's after you, Frank," Epstein repeated urgently, "and your copper mates aren't going to do a thing to help, because they couldn't care less whether you're alive or dead, and you know it." How did Epstein know that? Were the cops involved as well? Was that how Epstein was getting away with it?

"What do you mean?" Frank faltered, "Who is he? What's going on? What does he want?" Frank's head was spinning.

"I told you what he wants," Epstein said, sensing victory, "He wants to disappear. He wants to wipe the slate clean and disappear." That's what Frank had wanted, and look where it got him.

"Why?" he asked, wondering.
"What do you mean, why? Isn't that what everyone wants to do? But you can't can you; you can't just disappear; you can't walk away, because that's who you are, but Dave doesn't think that—Dave, that's his real name, when he lived here, when we were kids."

They'd been kids together, in this town. "He doesn't think that," Epstein kept going. "He thinks he can be whoever he wants to be because he's mad, Frank; that's why he's here. He thinks he can be free." It wasn't making a lot of sense but it made enough to make Frank take a step back.

"Free?" he asked, trying to think.

"Yeah, free," Epstein said, feeling at his neck. "Remember that?" he continued, "That's what you were supposed to be when they let you out of jail—Are you free, Frank? Is this free?" This was too much, too deep and Frank panicked. "I'm going," he said, swinging back toward the door, "Fuck the lot of you; you can kill each other fall all I care – I'm out of here."

"You're not going anywhere," Epstein answered, feeling confident. And out in the corridor Rob crept a little closer, trying to listen as the words dropped away.

"What have you done?" Frank groaned, "What have you involved me in?"

"Nothing, and there's no reason to get upset," Epstein answered, trying to stop his hand trembling.

"Shutup!" Frank roared back like a wounded animal, "shut the fuck up!"

"You shut the fuck up," Epstein ordered, "And start thinking: there's some fucked people in the world, and no-one's going to change that, not you, not me, no-one; but that's not what this is about, so stop acting like it is."

"What's it about," Frank growled, defeated. There was no hope. This whole place was evil. "It's about him, and it's about you," Epstein answered, "and if you don't kill him, he's going to kill you."

"Why?" Frank asked, looking forlornly up at the other man.

"Because that guy you killed worked for him, and he wants to make you pay," Epstein replied, watching him hard to see if he believed it or not. It was so mad Frank wondered if he'd heard right.

"What are you talking about?" he asked.

"That guy you took down," Epstein repeated, staring at him, "That's what this is about." The door Frank could feel being wrenched open in front of him was so big, it was hard to imagine he'd never noticed it before.

"My daughter was one of those kids?" Was that it? Was Epstein telling him the truth?

"Where is she?" Frank roared, "Where is she?!"

"He knows – Tony – He's the only one who knows," Epstein answered, thinking fast.

"You're a liar! You're lying!"

"You know I'm not," Epstein answered, knowing he had him, "Why else would he go to all this trouble." Frank could feel the room spinning. "Kill him, Frank," Epstein hissed, leaning forward, "Kill him and do us all a favour."

Rob wondered why they'd gone quiet. Was he too late? Was Epstein already dead?

"I'll tell you who I'm going to kill!" Frank cried, springing on him, "I'm going to kill you!"

Terrified, Rob threw himself into the shadows as Epstein cringed away, screeching, "No, Frank! No! You've got to believe me! I was trying to protect you!" But falling onto him, Frank reached for the first thing he saw, the letter opener lying on Epstein's desk to rip his throat out, and he would have done it, too, almost did it. When the horror of what was happening gripped and pulled him back in time, with Epstein splayed across the desk gasping in a terror he'd never known and Frank's face contorted in a way he'd never seen a human face take, breathing hard and looking at his hands like they belonged to something else, some horror that was still looking for a place to hide. But turning, he started bolting for the door, running as fast as he could to get away with Epstein reaching out toward him, pleading, "Help me, Frank, you've got to help me."

Rob ducked down and hid as the door smashed open and Frank exploded blindly out, because he was beyond helping anyone now, not even himself and he was falling, struggling and crashing through the walls and barriers he'd built to keep him safe, "Die, you fuck; die!" he yelled as he ran toward the night and escape. It couldn't be true; it couldn't. Epstein was a liar, he had to be, and everything he'd said had been a lie.

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He didn't know how or why, but somehow he found himself standing at the door of the funeral parlour with a bright slash of light falling across his face as a man wrapping his dressing gown around him peered through the gap out into the night. "Christina?" he was saying, "No, she went home hours ago. Don't you know what time it is?"

"This is important," Frank heard himself say, sounding calm, but with his heart still thumping, "Could you tell me where she lives?"

"Well who are you?" the man asked, stepping out onto the verandah and glancing about to make sure Frank was alone. He had a slight stoop and pencil thin moustache
etched across his upper lip that gave him an odd, rakish look. His bald head was gleaming in the porch light he'd turned on.

"A friend," is all Frank could think of saying.

The man’s eyes narrowed as he looked more closely at him, but after making a call, he gave Frank the address and watched him head back into the night. *He's old enough to be her father,* he mused, but it was none of his business, so he closed the door and put the security chain back on. Sometimes it's best not to inquire, as long as it doesn't affect business.

Fifteen minutes later, Frank was on the other side of town, standing on the verandah of a modest bungalow in one of those tree-lined streets that look so pretty in the summer and so lonely after dark. By the time he got there, he was back to himself, feeling more or less normal. His hands were still sweaty and he wiped them on his pants as he walked up the path, but he'd swept that shit at the Orpheum away. Epstein was a prick who'd say anything to save his own skin, and he knew all of Frank's buttons. What was important now was to stay calm, that was the most important thing. He could hear the TV playing inside, some sort of game show, and after ringing the bell, saw a girl's silhouetted figure step up behind the mottled green glass of the front door saying, "I'll get it..."

And then she opened it, and he saw her, and as their eyes met something came alive between them again. "I need your help," he said. And looking at him, she reached for her coat.

-D-

Dry leaves clattered like crabs across the car park as a gust of icy wind blew down on them and they stared out the windscreen at the town's lights blinking through the mist below. Mount Parker Lookout, they called it, after someone dead. "That day you showed me the wolf," Frank began, "Did anyone else ask to see it?" He could feel her beside him, her feet stretched out in the passenger seat.

"Lots of people," she answered. Christina had a hamburger, and was picking half-heartedly at it, like she thought she was in trouble.

"Who?" he asked. It was strange, being here alone with her, and he was trying to be careful that there not be any misunderstanding. She was wearing a pretty dress and her coat had slipped open a little, exposing her leg.

"Someone from the Courier," she said, glancing back at him, "They came up and wanted to take some pictures—Some animal welfare people that wanted to check if it had been put down humanely."

"Did anyone come—a man—Someone you didn't know?" She wasn't sure what he was after, but he was after something.
"You," she said, giving him a challenging look.

"Apart from me," Frank answered. He was calmer now, and able to focus again. Sometimes it was like that, things would blow up and rush through him like a summer storm. That's a phrase he heard somewhere. Maybe something his mother used to say. Like a summer storm. There and then gone. His mother was gone. They all were. Like a summer storm. He wouldn't mind when it happened to him.

"No," she said. There was no-one else there at the lookout and it was even too cold for furtive teenagers to be out admiring the scenery, so they were there on their own. They could do anything.

"Could someone have broken in?" Frank asked, "Found a way of getting in?"

"I suppose," she agreed, thinking it through as she took a small bite of the burger, "You mean how did he get the tooth?"

"Yes," Frank said, grateful that she'd believed at least that part of the story.

"Well I don't know," Christina answered, wiping her mouth with the paper napkin from the milk bar, "There's an alarm system, but Mr. Jackson doesn't always put it on—Sure, someone could have broken in—it's not exactly Fort Knox—But why would anyone break in somewhere to steal a wolf's tooth?"

"What do you know about me?" Frank asked, turning toward her.

"Just what you said," she answered, looking away, "You hurt someone bad —"

"Killed them," Frank corrected. He always felt a certain grim satisfaction when he was forced to name it.

"... and went to jail." she finished. It wasn't every day she got to say something like that, and it made her feel grown up, to be able to say it so calmly.

"Do you know why?" he asked. She was unsure why the conversation had taken this direction.

"You thought he took your daughter," she answered. Frank was still. She couldn't even hear his breathing anymore. Looking back at him, she could see his eyes were closed. She wasn't sure what to say. "He raped your daughter, is what I heard," she said, "She was nine. He raped your daughter and tortured her. Is that right?"

He didn't say anything for awhile. "She was eight," he said, "And, yes, everything you said is true. And I killed him."

"Sounds like he deserved it," she said, not meaning to sound quite as callous as she did, but not regretting it, either.
"Do you think I had the right to hurt him?" It was a strange question, said in a
distant voice that reminded her of a little boy.

"I don't know," she finally answered. She wondered why he'd brought her up here
when they could have parked somewhere down in one of the side streets in the town.
Maybe that would have been better.

"You've never heard anyone crying to die, have you," Frank said.

She looked at him and couldn't think of anything to say. "There's no other sound
like it," he said, "No other sound that even comes close, of something crying to die."

"You mean you wouldn't try to save your girl again?" she asked. He looked at his
hands, and then back out the window, wondering what he was doing there, but no, blank;
empty and hurt. "What you did was right," she said.

"How would you know?" he said, ready to go. This was a mistake. He should never
have come here and didn't know why he did.

"Yes, it was," she said, "and everyone who knows the story knows it."

He looked at her, wondering if she understood what she was saying. "Not if they
knew what it was like to die that way," he said.

"Well what about her?" she answered.

There were no rights and wrongs, were there; needs and fears. Frank had thought
about it as much as any man could. Was he right? Would he do it again? Everyone wants
the law until it's stopping you from saving the most important thing in your life, and then
all you want is for the human race to get out of your way or die. Frank had done the right
thing, and nobody wanted to be in the same room as him. Even in jail, they were
frightened, which suited Frank because he'd never wanted to see another human being as
long as he lived if that's what they were like, and if they hadn't put him in solitary, he
would have asked for it. Monster, they'd called him, and they were right: he was a monster,
and he never wanted to even smell another human again.

"Kill him," she said, "Why not?"

"Kill who?" he asked, blinking.

"The man who killed your daughter," she answered.

"That's what I did."

"Then what are you worried about?"

What was he worried about? Nothin'. Sitting up here at the end of the world with a
schoolgirl telling him what to do.

"How long have you been working at that place?" he asked, "The funeral place?"
"Not long," she said.

"We should go," he said, reaching forward to the ignition.

"Did you find her?" she asked.

"No," he said, slumping back in the seat "I never found her." And then, something gripping him, he turned to her, pleading, "She's not alive, is she? She couldn't be alive?"

She didn't know what he was asking her. "No," she faltered, "I don't know."

There was such a depth of sadness and horror in his voice that she thought she might burst into tears herself, and that's probably what she'd always thought about him, when she'd seen him on the street hurrying along, bent over and turned in on himself, trying to be ignored; he was a man whose whole life, even the way he walked, felt like hurt.

"How could she be?" she said after awhile.

How could she be? Frank didn't know. It was years ago now, centuries. Another life he could hardly even imagine anymore. How could she be?

"Not everybody is brave, like you," she slowly began again, "Ready to do what you need to do to save somebody you love."

"I never saved her," he said, pushing that thought away. But she kept going, "Not everybody can do what you did. People say things like that, 'I'll kill him, I'll tear his head off' that sort of thing, but they don't mean it, because they're scared..."

He'd started to cry. He didn't know why, but he had, only she hadn't noticed yet.

"People are scared of taking things into their own hands, becoming real —"

"Real...?" he murmured in disbelief, as she continued, "because basically they're all cowards; but you're not a coward, you're strong, and you did it, you did what everyone would want to do if they was in the story, but they're not in the story, they're reading it, but you were in the story, and you did it. You're a hero."

"I'm no hero," he whimpered, hiding his face from her, "I'm no hero, I'm nothing; a fucked up psych case too frightened to let myself out of the box in case I do it all over again."

"Do what again?" she asked, studying him. He was crying. She could see he was crying, and outside the ice was creeping across the puddles.

"Hurt for the sake of hurting, the way little boys hurt; the way they hurt each other, the way they hurt flies. For the love of it. I loved squeezing as much pain out of him as I could, I loved what I did to him—hearing him cry, twisting him enough to take him to the edge but not over—I wanted it to last for as long as I could make him feel what I felt, I
loved it because it made me feel good—Do you see now?" he said, looking straight back at her, "Do you see now what I did?"

"Yes..." she answered faintly, horrified by his torment.

"Do you see now why people are afraid of me?"

"I'm not afraid of you," she answered, staring back at him.

"Well you should be, because there's nothing I wouldn't do because I've done everything, and it made me feel good. When I had him, tied down there, strapped down, his mouth taped, his eyes standing out of his head while he watched me lay out my stuff, when I had him there, helpless and alone, like my little girl was helpless and alone somewhere, time stood still and the world and all its shit disappeared and I felt more alive than I ever had and I wanted his pain to last forever; I wanted to paint myself with his blood."

He'd never spoken this way to anyone else, and didn't know why he was doing it now, but somehow she'd given him permission.

"You liked it?" she asked after a moment.

"Yes," he blurted, "And it made me think that's what I was born for; that's what human beings were made for, hurting one another—We're our own devils—and that's what I found out in jail, because everyone I ever spoke to said the same. They loved it and they'd do it again the first chance they got. And the only thing that stopped me keep doing it to him was that he died and I wasn't able to bring him back."

"And if you had?" she asked.

"I'd still be there doing it," he answered.

"What does that mean?" she asked after thinking about that for a little while, "That you're frightened you'll do it again?"

"No," he answered.

"Then I don't understand."

"No, I won't do it again, because I'd rather be dead than go to that place again."

"So you could," she said, "You could do it again, and that's what you're frightened of—"

"No," he said again.

"But why?" she asked, now curious, "What's wrong with—" She didn't know what the word was.

"Being a god?" he said.

"Yes," she answered.
"Because I didn't become a god. I became someone no better than him."

A light drizzle was falling, glazing the windscreen with ice.

"We're not gods," he continued, "we're not even animals."

"What are we?" she asked.

"Cripples," he said, "dragging ourselves through the world. The dead is what we are, but still breathing."

She could feel the sadness inside him. "So you don't like people," she said.

"No," he gulped, realising himself what he'd said, "No, I don't."

"That's good," she answered, "Because neither do I."
Nine.

It wasn’t that conversation, but somehow his decision had been made, and he was already putting it in motion. He was going to kill Tony. He knew what it would do to him, the night terrors and screams, the horrible sense of moral filth that would follow, the endless showers trying to get rid of the smell, but right now his mind was clear. That was the only decision he could make.

Tony was there for a reason, and Frank was that reason. Yes, sure, he wanted to disappear, whatever that meant, start a new life and all the rest of it, but he hadn't needed to come back here and do any of that. He'd come back here for Frank. Epstein had told him who he had on the payroll, mentioned the famous killer he had working for him—Frank could almost hear him gloating—and for some reason that had tickled Tony's fancy as well. You can waste a lot of time trying to figure out madmen and Frank didn't have the time. Tony was going to kill Epstein, that much was obvious, for whatever reason he had, maybe because Epstein knew who he was, and nobody likes that; and then he’d do whatever he had planned for Frank. Maybe for the right to be able to say, *I took that fuck down, and he hurt bad*. Frank had seen plenty of that in prison, as well. But it wasn't going to happen to him, and the only way of stopping it happening was what he was on the way to the Orpheum to do now. Get Epstein to give him the gun and tell him where Tony was.

Climbing the steps up to the Orpheum forecourt, Frank crossed the slippery tiles. The solitary street light glowed in a halo of mist as he reached into his pocket for the key, but to his surprise the thing was open. Not sure what that meant, he pushed in.

Inside, the place was dark and moody, with a dull, empty feel that swallowed every sound. Frank figured Epstein would either be in his office, or up in the apartment that he kept on the first floor, but he was alert to something else, a dead stillness in the air that put him on edge. Making his way toward the office, he kept close to the wall, in case.

On the other side of town, Christina was standing in the lead-light bay window looking out onto the street. Frank had dropped her off after the lookout and she'd left him sensing something dark and deep was moving beneath Kanangara, something that perhaps only she could feel, but which would soon rise to disturb all their sleep. She didn’t know what it was, because there was a part of her that lay hidden and mysterious even to herself, but she could feel it moving, coiling, twisting beneath the hills. It was life, the beginning of a life very different to anything she had known before, with a man who didn't yet know who she was. Life, or something else. When we live, we breathe, and Christina could feel her breath, and the prickly cold on her skin. She was alive, she knew, and soon she would be dead, and when she was dead, none of these things will have mattered, they will simply be what happened. She was a spirit living in a spirit world where everything had already been decided. Seeing the tree outside shiver in a sudden gust of wind, she pulled the curtain across and turned back into the house.
Descending the steps toward the office, Frank could see the light shining from under the door. Hissing a quiet, "Jack...?" as he entered, he saw straightaway there'd been a struggle. The lamp was knocked over and the ashtray spilt across the floor. Crossing, he opened the desk drawer and saw Epstein's gun lying on some books. He didn't know what sort of gun it was, and didn't care, but it would have come in handy if Epstein had had the guts and the chance to use it. Checking that it was loaded, Frank flicked the safety off and turned back toward the corridor.

The apartment was down the back and up a high flight of stairs behind the actual screen. Epstein didn't entertain, but Frank had been there a few times to do some repairs. It hadn't looked like he'd changed a thing since his parents had died, and it must have been creepy even then, all satin and drapes and the musty smell of mold. Epstein lived alone, and Frank had never even seen him with a woman. He was one of those men you can't imagine being with someone. Maybe someone like Frank himself. Maybe that was the reason he still felt loyal, even now, after everything Epstein had done to him. But that was the story of his life. If Frank could have been rational, none of this would have happened. His daughter's killer would have been caught, and punished; and Frank'd be sitting somewhere now, with a new life, hardly remembering all the horrible things that had happened. Until he read in the paper one day that the man had been released after serving his time, much like Frank himself had, and it all came flooding back again. Is that what would have happened? If Frank hadn't done what he did, hadn't killed, would he be able to live with himself? Was killing his daughter's killer the only way he could stay sane? Had he ever had a choice?

Climbing the steps toward the apartment landing high above, Frank gripped the gun with one hand and the railing with the other. If Tony stepped out of the door above him now, or came around the corner below, he was dead, and he knew it. He could let off a few shots, maybe, hope to hit him or scare him off, but stuck up there with nowhere to go except over the side to the floor twenty feet below, he was a sitting duck. But he was there now, and there was no turning back.

Coming to the landing, he paused for a moment before steeling himself and pushing his way in. It was quiet, and dark inside, the way he remembered it. The television opposite the old armchair in the corner was hissing static, and the filter in the aquarium on the sideboard murmured reassuringly. "Jack..?" Frank hissed, peering through the gloom. A stuffed mongoose with its hair falling out reared on the fireplace mantle-piece beneath a mildewed cobra towering menacingly over it, and the heavy gilt frames of pictures of murky cherubs and dusty grapes hung from the picture rail on the faded flock walls. It was like a memory from a gloomy past, a time capsule that Jack had never been able to get out of, his parents home the same as what Frank imagined it had been on the day they died. Some people never grow up, they get older.

Prowling forward over the worn Persian carpets, Frank saw the kitchen, with a stack of dirty plates in the basin and the fridge door half open, and then the bathroom, cold
and functional. Epstein’s bedroom was equally unsettling, with gloom hanging like the drapes dripping from the frayed bed canopy, and a depression in the mattress where he slept. "Jack..." Frank repeated, but Jack wasn’t there. Nothing was there. The place was dead.

Stalking forward down the hall, Frank drew to a stop as he saw a door ahead trembling ever so slightly, like there was someone hovering there, behind it. Stepping carefully up, his finger on the trigger, he gave it a sudden, sharp kick and sending it crashing with a loud bang back against the fibro wall, but there was nothing there, only the toilet. But then he saw it. A bloody hand-print smeared across the wall. And looking at the floor he could see drops and puddles of blood leading toward the door at the end of the hall.

"Jack," he whispered at the second door, and the air frosted up in front of him like the place was filled with ghosts. Opening it, he saw another set of stairs, narrower, with the cold seeping down from somewhere higher up, and stepping forward he felt his stomach knot as he looked toward the roof. "Jack..." he hissed again, his courage beginning to leave him. Was this the right thing to do, or was he walking into a trap? It wasn't too late to go back. The confined space of the stairwell pressed in on both sides, like a grave, and the blood and the darkness felt like a blanket smothering him. What was up there that Tony wanted him to see? Why was he leading him there? Because he was, he was leading him, and had been leading him to this place all this time. The gun was a revolver, so he had six bullets. Reaching out, he steadied himself against the wall and looked up, craning to see what was ahead. He didn't even know these stairs were here, or where they led. What if he was waiting at the top; what if there was no escape. Then there was no escape, and that'd be it. Frank had thought about death a lot, over the years, the years in solitary, the years when there was no hope, and at times he'd yearned for it, and regretted ever waking up. But not anymore. He wanted to live now. And then he was through, up out of the black pit and standing, blinking, looking around trying to get his bearings, and it was a moment before he realised where he was, in the large space of the store-room, having come into it from a different direction, with the roof high above and crates and boxes stacked like blocks all around him. There were tarpaulins covering everything like it was a ship's hold, and ropes were hanging in loose coils from the rotting beams overhead, so the place had the feeling of a derelict hulk, lost and abandoned on a forgotten sea. And somewhere in the darkness chains were clanking in some ghostly wind stirring the still air.

"Hi, Frank," a voice said, and swinging around, Frank saw him in the dark, "Or should I say John?...Or Wolf?...Woof, woof..."

"Where’s Epstein?" Frank answered, raising the gun, "What have you done with him?"

Tony glanced up at a piece of rope dangling overhead. "Oh, he’s – Hanging around..."
"I don't like people playing games with me..." Frank answered. He'd made up his mind. He was going to shoot as soon as the other man stepped into the light.

But bending to pick something up from the floor, Tony replied, "Who'd be stupid enough to play games with you, Frank? You're a killer."

"That's right," Frank ordered, "Put it down." He only had six bullets, and he didn't want to waste any. Not on Tony, because he knew he'd need every shot he had. But the other man was playing with the end of the rope he'd picked up, cool as could be. "Don't get your knickers in a twist," he said, "Don't you want to have a chat?"

"Not with you," Frank said, "Come out where I can see you."

"I like it here," Tony said, "And I do think you should talk. I'm sure you could learn a lot."

"From you? What could I learn from you?"

If he kept him talking, at least he knew where he was.

"Let's start with how to live," Tony said, "How's that for an interesting topic."

"I don't think you could teach me anything about that," Frank answered. His eyes were getting used to the dark now, and he could start making out some shapes.

"I probably know more about it than most people," Tony answered, "I sure know a lot more about it than you do."

"What makes you say that?" Frank said. There was a patch of light above and to the left of where Tony was standing. If he could get him to move a little.

"Because you're about to die."

"You're the one who's going to die if you don't tell me what you've done with Epstein," Frank said, making a move, but hitting something with his foot.

"Epstein sold you out, did you know that Frank?"

"Where is he?" Frank said.

"He told me I could do anything I liked with you—that's what that thing on the roof was about. You're a real sucker, aren't you."

"Where is he, I said," Frank demanded.

"Are you getting mad now? Is this you getting mad?" Tony asked. Mocking, like he didn't care Frank had a gun pointed at him.

"Yes," Frank answered. That was his mistake. He should have shot.

"Good, because I like that," Tony said, "I like people who lose their marbles."
"Put your hands up," Frank ordered.

"Why, Frank?" Tony said, stepping into the light, "Are you going to kill me now?"

"Yes," Frank answered. But as he lifted the gun to shoot, Tony flicked his hand, dropping a coil of rope down on him and knocking the gun from his hand. "Hey!" Frank cried in surprise. But reaching into his pocket, Tony pulled out a Stanley Knife as he stalked forward.

"You were saying?" he snarled.

"No," Frank cried, flinching back struggling with the rope entangling him.

"Now don't be like that," Tony said swaggering forward, "You're a man of taste and discernment, so I'm sure you'll enjoy what I have planned for you."

"Keep away from me, you freak!" Frank shouted, reeling away through the cobwebs and disaster as he struggled to pull the rope off.

"I'm glad you said that," Tony growled, "It makes it so much more personal."

"No! Stop!" Frank cried, thrashing at the torn satin curtain looming in front of him only to reveal Epstein, hanging strung up from two chains, his bloodied, naked body swinging mid-air in the middle of dark space. "Frank..." he said, lifting his battered head a little through the torment of his pain.

"Fuck—No!" Frank cried, looking up at him. It was all coming back. The horror that was always there, no matter how much you tried to live an ordinary life.

"Tragic, isn’t it," Tony scoffed from the shadows, "But you’ve got to admire the handiwork."

And then he was there. Slashing at him.

Breaking free of the rope, Frank was ready for it, "You crazy son of a bitch! I'll kill you?!" he cried, smashing him hard across the face with a lump of wood that was suddenly in his hand and sending Tony flying back into the chaos.

"That's more like it," Tony answered, like this is what he wanted. And that’s when Frank was sure. He was either on drugs or else was crazier than anyone Frank had ever known. Diving for the gun, he scrabbled on the ground as Tony kicked it once, twice away from him while slashing at him with the knife. Dodging out of the way, Frank snatched up a crowbar, and leapt up hitting Tony hard across the chest, and flinging him back into some cardboard boxes. He’d never fought like this before, desperate and scrappy, fighting for his life. Tony was back on his feet, slashing the air with the knife—he must have been hurt—and Frank reared back out of the way. "You're good," Tony breathed, rubbing blood coming from a cut over his eye, "You're the best." Frank didn’t know what to do, bolt or
fight till one of them dropped. "Help me, Frank, help me," Epstein groaned, and it was like he'd come alive again, like a fly beating against the enfolding web.

"What do you want?" Frank spat into the gloom, scrambling to get away.

"You," Tony hissed, there, next to him, on top of him.

Tumbling away, flailing his arms, Frank scampered back into the shadows crying, "You're off your rocker."

But tripping him up, Tony was on top of him again, pinning him against the floor with his legs and grabbing him by the hair he lifted his head and kissed him full on the lips, snarling, "You fuck; you great big, beautiful fuck!"

Spitting and rolling away, Frank shoved him off and fled into the darkness while up above Epstein swung on the clanking chains, begging "Frank..."

Pulling a gun from under his jacket, Tony aimed it at Epstein. "Shutup," he snarled shooting, and as the two slugs hit, it was like he'd pricked a balloon, and Epstein's body jumped and fell limp and lifeless, with blood spurting from his chest. Frank scrambled, looking for an escape, because he knew he'd be next.

"Come on, Frank, let's be reasonable about this," Tony said, stalking forward, "He deserved it, and you know he did–Make it one for the kids."

Slamming into a boarded up Fire Exit, Frank tore at the planks nailing it shut but couldn't budge them. "Aren't you curious, Frank," he could hear him getting closer, "Curious to know who I am?"

Frank couldn't see which way to go, the left or right. All he wanted to do now was get away and get that voice out of his head. "Sure thing," he said, "Who are you?"

"I'm destiny," Tony answered, "I'm fate." He was so close Frank could smell the sourness of his breath, "I'm what you go to sleep trying to escape and what you wake up to every day." He sure liked the sound of his own voice.

"I'm the secret only you and I know."

And spinning around, Frank saw the man looming out of the dark ramming the butt of his gun down on him.

"How do you like it?" Tony said, his own face bloodied by Frank's earlier blow. But neither of them was there to chat, and grabbing hold of him, Frank threw him crashing to the floor, rolling on top, and as they struggled for the gun, Frank felt it again, that thing, reaching from deep within, that thing rising up in his throat, that was going to unravel him into something else, something taut and unstoppable. He was going to do it, he was going to smash Tony's head against the floor and watch his brains spill out; he was going to feel his skull crack in his hands and blood shoot into his eyes, and he was going to enjoy it, he
was going to love doing it, he was going to smash the head and keep smashing it till there was nothing but blood and shit dripping from his hands, because that's what he was, a killer that liked it, liked watching life slipping away. "Uggh!" Tony groaned, his voice deep with fear. "Kill him, kill him," the voice inside was roaring. This was it, the joy he'd been running away from, the joy he'd felt as he'd crushed David Robb's life out of him; this was freedom; this was happiness; this was all he ever wanted to be.

"Uggh!" he grunted himself, something stronger tearing his hands free from what he was about to do, and before he knew it, Tony was on his feet, clutching his throat and reeling back into his own madness. Frank couldn't do it. He couldn't do it again. He couldn't go to that place again.

"Frank," Epstein murmured. He was still alive. The poor prick was still alive. "You're good, Frank," another voice coughed from the other side of the dark space, "Pity you're not that smart."

"Frank," Epstein groaned again, and looking up, trying to work out what it all meant, Frank heard a quiet, little puff on the other side of the darkness, and almost immediately saw something flicker and explode into life, and straight away the place was an inferno engulfed in flames.

"Good luck, hombre," Tony called from further off, disappearing into the night, and straight away, Frank knew he'd stepped right into it.

He didn't know how, but all of a sudden there were flames everywhere; leaping up the walls and across the rotting ropes and curtains. The place smelt of bitumen, and looking up he could see the tar roof beginning to melt and drop sparks and flaming spittle down onto him. It was a firetrap and he was right in the middle of it.

"Frank," Epstein cried, but there was nothing he could do. He ran over to where Epstein was hanging, flames now jumping all around him, and tried to break the chains, but the things were caught so tight they couldn't be budged. Epstein's eyes were wide with horror, and he was burning. "Help me!" he was screaming, high-pitched, unnerving like a cat or a baby – It was like it was coming from inside Frank's head. He had to get out, but Epstein wasn't going to let him go. "Don't leave me," he cried, but there was nothing he could do. And then he saw the gun.

"Don't leave me like this!"

Picking it up, Frank turned toward Epstein. The man was on fire, writhing, screaming, an animal in pain. And raising the gun, Frank shot. That was all he could do, that was the only thing he could do for him. There was nothing else left. Epstein was dead.

Racing down the marble steps, he could already hear the fire breaking into the lower floors, but he was out, sprinting down the stairs. By the time he got to the glass doors, he could hear the siren of the fire engine, and shoving the gun under his shirt, he
stepped out into the icy air and hurried across the forecourt. He didn’t know what he was going to do, but he knew he had to get away from there. He was on the street now, walking as fast as he could away. Up ahead, on the other side of the road, he could see a knot of people collecting, looking back toward the Orpheum. He didn’t know if they’d seen him yet, or recognized him. then, a car door was shoved open in front of him, and a voice ordered. "Get in."

It was her. Christina.

"Get in," she said again.

"How did...?" Frank spluttered. The siren was getting closer.

"Get in," she repeated, "And hurry up."

He got in, glancing at her. She was tense, and barely acknowledged him. But somehow she knew where he was.

"Close the door," she said, already starting the engine.

"Where are we going?" he asked.

"Away from here."
Ten

They drove on in silence, leaving the Orpheum, and then Kanangara behind. Frank stared straight ahead, unseeing, into the night, with Epstein’s screams in his head. The flash of something leaping across the road, and the sudden braking of the car brought him back to where he was.

"What were you doing there?" he asked, glancing at her. She was wearing the same dress he’d seen on her earlier that evening.

"What were you?" she answered. Cold and confident.

"I went back to get something," he lied. The less she knew, the better.

"And set the place on fire?" she asked, returning his gaze. He could see her, soft and warm in the glow of the dashboard.

"If that’s what you think I did," he answered, "Why’d you pick me up?"

"Maybe I like you," she said, and looking at his hand, she continued, "Are you hurt?"

Frank looked and saw blood and grime on his hand. "No," he answered, covering it, "I don’t think so. Where are we going?"

"I’d say that’s pretty well up to me now," she answered, changing gear, "wouldn’t you?"

Maybe he should have questioned that, but he didn’t because somewhere inside him he was glad she was there, and he trusted her. He didn’t know who she was, but he trusted her.

About half an hour later, she pulled off the road onto a track leading off into the bush. A couple of gates later they were in an overgrown field, bumping over jagged quartz rocks the size of footballs. As a building came into view, Christina explained, "It’s my aunt’s house. She died a year ago..." and as the headlights swung across it, Frank could see an old style weatherboard farmhouse with a couple of other buildings further back in the quince trees. It was about as secluded as it could be, with the road lost and distant behind the hills. Frank sat there for a moment longer, not thinking at all, propped, his heart still thumping in his chest. The sound of the driver’s door snapping shut roused him, and getting out he felt the chill of the wind blowing across the grass tufts. There was no moon, so it was dark, but still enough light for him to see that somehow he’d gotten in front and was leading the way. He was close to the front door, and without thinking pulled out the gun.

"What’s that?" Christina said, balking.

"What do you think?" Frank answered, sorry to have to explain himself.
"What happened back there?" she demanded.

"I killed Jack Epstein," Frank said.

And without warning, she lunged forward, grabbing and pulling him toward her before launching herself to kiss him as she ran her fingers through his greasy hair. Startled, Frank gave way, folding her in his arms and pressing the handgun hard against her back. Falling through the front door, the two of them rolled down the dark corridor, kissing and groping one another, their hands touching legs, buttocks, rubbing up and down over their straining flesh. He didn’t know what was happening, couldn’t know, didn’t dare to know. Light strained through the wire mesh windows catching her nose and cheeks, the lobe of her ears, her breasts; he was in her, lost as she spread herself beneath him then threw him down again and mounted him on the bed they were making love on, if that’s what they were doing; but the world was astir, they were naked; he and this beautiful girl, naked, and the two of them one.

Later, as he lay there, looking at the ceiling, he saw she’d planned this; had aired the room and brought fresh sheets and covers.

"What are you thinking?" she asked in the dark.

"What do you want?" he said, feeling her warmth close beside him.

"What do I want?" she echoed, "I want to be with you."

"Why?" he said.

"Because you’re alive."

Frank’s wife had trained as a schoolteacher, but hadn’t liked it. She’d worked for a few years, but when she fell pregnant had stepped back and devoted herself to the house and caring for the new baby. He hadn’t minded. They earned enough and he was happy to know his daughter was getting a mother’s love; and he loved it himself, loved being a father and provider for his family. He knew there were plenty of people who didn’t have that chance, who couldn’t afford it, but he was grateful he and his wife could. But when – it all happened – she’d sort of cracked up; she had. He’d cracked himself, he knew that, the whole world knew that; but his wife, she hadn’t been able to handle it at all. And who could blame her. He didn’t, not now, anyhow. At the time he’d resented it; felt like she’d abandoned him, abandoned their sacred duty. To care for their girl. And he never would have called it a sacred duty till that dreadful day when everything he understood and believed got put into the shredder. Until that day, he wouldn’t have even known what sacred duty was. But on that day, he did, and knew there was nothing else he could do other than what he did. Because on that day he knew this world, this planet, is only half of it, maybe not even half. And it wasn’t that he became what you’d call a believer; it wasn’t that sort of sacred; it was that he knew as firmly as he knew anything that we live in another dimension where fear and consequences have no meaning and that is the place where we are immortal. That’s what he felt. Knew. And that’s what makes us monstrous.
Man, human beings, are monstrous. Frank had become monstrous, and she had flinched back from him, unable to accept his face as her own, as the face of humanity. She had flinched back and betrayed their daughter and their love, and for awhile, he hadn’t been able to forgive her. Or even think about her. It had been years since he’d been able to think about her. But now, lying next to Christina, he did, and he was so sorry for being the man he was, and for demanding of her what no man can ever demand of another, for them to love the beast you are. His wife had been right, he was terrifying.

That night, Frank dreamt he was floating somewhere, and every now and then he’d brush her, the girl, and it’d be like a jolt of electricity between them and he’d feel her warm and soft – no, hot and close– and he’d touch her and feel her and the two of them would be bound together again, urgent and needy and he didn’t know how many times it happened, or if it even happened at all, if she was even there, but somehow she was there, in his dreams, around him, occupying him; her hair over his face, the salt of her skin on his tongue, her fingertips resting on his shoulders, her nails scratching into him and it was so wrong he was sure he was already in hell, but she was no devil, it was him, he was the devil, he was the Satan, he was the darkness that was dragging them both down. And then sometime in the night, maybe it was already early morning – no, not yet, the birds hadn’t started calling, but dark still –something relaxed in him, and he felt his muscles go soft, the tense hardness of his skin ease and he was able to sleep in a way he couldn’t remember sleeping since he was a kid, lost and peaceful, almost forgetting everything, almost at rest, suspended, and he had another dream, that all the pain and horror could be washed away and he could be clean again, not the man he was, not that, and he didn’t want that, because now he saw that all he’d been before was dumb and complacent and he didn’t want to be that again. But something else. He wanted to be something else. New.

When he woke, he could smell something. Breakfast. She was cooking him breakfast. Looking at her standing at the wood fire stove was the most beautiful thing he’d ever seen, and the fact that she didn’t notice made it even more special. "Hi," he said, and as if waking herself from a dream, she glanced back over her shoulder. "Hi."

"Is that coffee," he asked, seeing it on the table. "Help yourself," she replied, "I thought you might be hungry."

"You’re not wrong," he answered, sauntering over, "So this place belongs to your aunt."

"It did," she said, "She’s dead now. She gave it to me."

"So it’s yours."

"Nobody else wanted it."

It was a meandering, lost conversation about nothing in particular, nice to hear your voice, and Frank couldn’t keep his eyes off her, standing with her back turned to him, gently swaying as she turned the eggs.
"What are you thinking about?" he asked.

"I’m thinking about what you’ve done and what you’re going to do," she answered, and turning to look at him, she repeated, "What are you going to do?"

"I don’t know," he said, his mind now turning to darker things.

"Leave?"

"No," Frank answered, "Not yet."

"Then what?"

"I don’t know, I said."

She served his eggs, though he was less inclined to eat them now. "Did you really kill him?" she said, "That man?"

"Why did you follow me?" he asked, forcing himself to eat because he knew he’d need it later.

"I followed you because I was worried about you."

"How old are you?" he asked, looking up.

She sat back in her chair and bit her lip. "I’m seventeen," she said, like he’d found her out.

"What are you doing, here with me? What are your mother and father thinking?"

"They’re not thinking anything," she answered, before confessing, "I told them I was at a girlfriend’s."

"Well that’s where you should be," he answered, ashamed, "You shouldn’t be here with me." He looked at the eggs on his plate and pushed them away, "Doing this."

"Well if I wasn’t," Christina replied, "You’d be locked up in the police station charged with murder – So which would you rather be?"

"I don’t want you getting hurt," he said, "I don’t want to hurt anyone else again as long as I live." And that was the truth.

"You don’t have to worry about me," she said, and pushing the plate back toward him, she ordered, "Now eat your eggs."

He didn’t know how it had happened that he was being told what to do by a seventeen year old, but he did what she said, and later as he sat on the back step pulling on his shoes it felt the most natural thing in the world to see her standing there, getting ready to get back in the car. "I’ll bring back some food for tonight," she said, "You stay here and don’t do anything stupid."
"Is there a phone somewhere around here?" he asked.

"What do you want a phone for?" she asked, looking sharply back at him, "Who are you going to call?"

"Someone," he said. It was a bright morning, full of promise, like the start of something new.

"You like living dangerous, don’t you," she said.

"So do you," he answered, smiling at her. It was the first time he’d smiled at anyone for a long while.

"That stuff, last night," she said, dropping the tough act, "That was nice."

"I never thought that’s where we’d end up," Frank replied.

"When you come looking for the wolf?" she said, "No." And then looking away across the hill, she added, "You never can tell, can you?"

"What’s that?" Frank asked.

"Where things might lead."

It was weird, sitting there, feeling so comfortable with her, like they were already something good. Frank didn’t even know he had it in him to talk so freely with anyone anymore. It had been so long since he had that he’d forgotten that feeling. Of company. Watching her get in the car and go, he wondered how it had happened, how something like this could have happened to him. Still, there’d been plenty of other terrible strangenesses in his life, one more was par for the course. But he was glad it was her, and he was glad it had.

He decided to head back for the road, not to walk on it, but to follow it. He knew there were phone boxes sprinkled around the place, leftovers from a time when not everybody had the phone. There were still poor families out here that relied on them, to get the doctor or call the police, and sure enough he found one on a flat not far from what looked like an old church standing by itself next to a couple of sad weeping willows. He knew he’d be lucky to find it working, but it was, and dialing the number, he waited for it to answer. It didn’t take more than a minute to be connected to Sergeant Grant. "Hello, Grant?" he said, "It’s me, Frank Cave. I want to see you."

Frank didn’t like Grant, but there was something about him he trusted. Now that Epstein was dead, he could come clean, tell him everything. He hadn’t wanted to before because he didn’t want to put Epstein in it, and sure it didn’t make any sense, and Epstein was a pain in the neck – No, worse than that, much worse – but he had helped Frank, and so Frank had felt an obligation. But that was all in the past now, and Epstein was dead, so he could tell Grant the whole story, or everything he knew, anyhow. The parcels, Wintle.
Had he done that? Allowed himself to be used like that? There are some truths about yourself you can only approach without looking directly at it. He had his reasons for not asking questions, sure, but to find himself here, confronted by what he’d become part of, was almost more than he could bear. What was it? How had it happened? Is that the way things are? That no matter how pure you try to be, eventually you find some connection, some link, between you and the kinds of things you despise. Frank was no philosopher, he wasn’t a deep thinker, he was an ordinary Joe and, yes, he’d seen those ads they run sometimes, saying how the stuff in your mobile phone is causing civil war in Africa and when you put on your tee-shirt you’re supporting child labour somewhere, but does that stop anyone from using mobile phones or putting on tee-shirts? What else are we going to do? Walk around naked shouting to one another how good we are? What else are we supposed to do? Gas ourselves?

Why not? Why shouldn’t we gas ourselves? Why shouldn't we pay for the shit we let happen?

The church seemed as good a place to meet as anywhere. He wasn’t going into town, and trusted Grant would keep his word and come on his own. Still, he’d kept a watch and seen Grant’s car making its lonely way up the hill, and by the time it pulled up in the gravel outside, was already waiting for him where he said he’d be.

Grant stepped out of the car and took the place in. It was on a stretch of road no-one used very much – part of the old highway – and the church itself hadn’t been used for years. Still, it was pretty, and the sunlight shining down on the golden hills behind gave it a serene look. He didn’t think Frank had lured him up here to shoot him, but he knew he’d have to keep his wits about him.

Slamming the car door shut, he adjusted his holster and started across.

Grant had been in dicky situations before, facing wild eyed men at the end of their tether, wondering if they should blow their own, or your head off. He’d had some close calls, too, but what he’d found by and large was that all anybody wanted was to be told everything was going to be alright, and there was at least one person in the room who knew what was going on. Psychology, it was a funny thing. You can turn the simplest situation into a madhouse, and a madhouse into the simplest situation, by using the right – or the wrong – words. Grant didn’t know what Frank’s problem was, but it didn’t strike him that Frank was an irrational man. He’d done some pretty fucked up things – by now Grant had read the original court documents – but he’d had his reasons, as anyone familiar with the case knew. True, setting a movie house on fire after killing the owner wasn’t exactly the work of a sane man, but Grant was prepared to give him the benefit of a doubt, and that’s why he was here, alone as he had promised, and not accompanied by a posse of sharpshooters to cut the poor bastard down as soon as he showed his nose. There was too much violence in the world, Grant thought, and calming things down was what a peacekeeper ought to be doing, rather than giving them another stir. So here he was,
walking toward an old church in which he knew there was an armed murderer waiting for him. All in a day’s work, he supposed. His wife had tried to get used to it, and then left.

The old door hung off its hinges, and pushing through, Grant glanced about the dusty interior. A couple of pews are turned at a crazy angle to one another in the middle of the dim interior, and flutter of wings lifted his eyes to two pigeons sitting in the rafters beneath a gaping hole in the slate roof. "Take off your gun-belt," a voice behind ordered. Don't follow Frank's thinking here. Freezing, Grant turned slowly to see Frank standing with his gun pointed at him. "Go on," he said, gesturing with the pistol, "Drop it."

"What's this about, Frank" Grant asked, unbuckling his gun belt.

"You know what it's about," Frank said, kicking the holster aside, "And all I want to do is tell you what happened."

"I'm not the one you have to tell what happened, Frank," Grant said, "The court is."

"By the time I get to court, he'll be gone."

"Who will?"

"Tony – Dave..." Frank sputtered. Everything that had been so clear a moment began to muddy again as he tried to put it in words, "The guy I was telling you about."

"The one you saw murdering someone down by the railway," Grant suggested.

"Yes, that's him," Frank answered, grateful.

"He didn't by any chance wear a rhinestone ring, did he?" Grant asked.

"Yes, yes," Frank answered eagerly, "A rhinestone ring and cowboy boots."

"Funny," Grant said, "There's someone fitting that exact description lying dead back there in the attic with Epstein – What happened, Frank? He come in while you were having your fun?"

"No," Frank cried, startled, "Tony? Dead? It couldn't be."

Could he have killed him? Frank couldn’t even remember getting one off at him. The last he saw, Tony was hightailing it into the darkness.

"No, it's not true," he repeated.

"Give me the gun," Grant said.

"Are you telling me there were two bodies in the attic," Frank said, trying to think things through.

"That's exactly what I'm telling you, Frank," Grant said, "And I bet my badge they were both killed with that gun you've got in your hand."
Distractedly looking at the gun, Frank knew it was probably true. "This gun, yes," he mumbled, "But I wasn’t the one who shot him."

"So there’s someone else, is there," Grant answered, slipping into his interrogator role, "What’s his name? Jack? Jill? How many more invisible friends have you got, Frank?"

"Listen to me," Frank said.

"No, you listen to me," Grant said, "I saw that shit up there – That shit all over the floor –"

"What shit?" Frank blurted.

"And I’m telling you, that’s your defense," Grant continued, "That’s what they were up to, isn’t it—Making that stuff —"

"Yes!" Frank cried.

"They were making and distributing it—Raping children —"

"Yes," Frank agreed.

"And you found out about it —"

"Yes!"

"And killed them."

"No!" Frank shot back. How could he tell him, how could he get him to understand?

"You did, Frank, you killed them. You know you did, and all you’ll have to do is tell the court why, and no-one’ll give a damn because the whole world knows what you’ve been through, and no-one gives a fuck what happens to people like that – Can’t you see what I’m saying to you?"

"I didn’t do it."

"Yes, you did, you know you did, say it."

"I didn’t!" Frank insisted, "It was that guy!"

"That guy, sure," Grant said tiredly, "Tony or Dave and you know what? He’s lying dead up there will his face blown off – How do you explain that?"

"What are you saying?" Frank cried, his head swimming.

"There were two bodies at the Orpheum," Grant hammered, "Epstein and your rhinestone cowboy."
"No," Frank said, the truth dawning on him, "It’s not him – It’s the other guy."

"What other guy?" Grant demanded, sick of the whole damn thing. He’d seen this kind of blame shifting before. They all did it. It was the other guy.

"The guy he killed – The one I saw killed."

"What are you talking about?" Grant asked. Why couldn’t he own up? It was as plain as the nose on your face what happened. Cave went nuts. He’d be locked up for the rest of his life in a prison for the criminally insane, but Grant wasn't going to tell him that.

But Frank was putting it together. "That’s why there was no body," he said, "He killed him, and then dressed him up to make him look like him."

"You’re not making any sense, Frank," Grant answered, not following.

"He wanted to disappear," Frank realized, "That’s what all this is about."

"I’ll tell you what this is about," Grant said, "This is about you owning up for what you’ve done –"

"No, he’s still alive," Frank was saying, "He’s still alive – That’s what he was doing here, that’s what him killing his sidekick was about – He wanted to disappear himself, and now he has – He’s made it look like I killed him and Epstein both."

"Because you did," Grant exploded.

"I didn’t," Frank spat back, and now he’d worked it out it had an authority that surprised Grant, "I didn’t kill him. I killed Epstein, yes, but I didn’t kill the other one."

"You killed Epstein?" Grant said, feeling like things were starting to make sense.

"Yes, I killed him—He was dying, and might as well have been dead. But he was burning and I shot him because there was nothing else I could do." There it was, blunt and unguarded, and Grant knew he was telling the truth.

"And what about the other guy?" Grant pursued, "Why’d you shoot him?"

"I didn’t," Frank said, "But I know who did."

"This is bullshit," Grant said, "Maybe it’s true, and we can sort it out down the station, but there’s no way you’re not coming with me now."

"I’m not going anywhere, Grant," Frank said, "I know how you guys work, and by the time you get around to checking out who’s lying on the floor up there, the real killer’ll be long gone – I’ve got to go after him myself."

"Why? You’ve already confessed to killing Epstein, so what difference does it make?"
"It makes a difference to me," Frank said, "About who I am and what I believe in and I’m not going down so someone else can walk free."

"How do you know it’s not all inside your head?" Grant asked.

"How do you know it’s not inside yours?" Frank replied.

"You’re going down," Grant replied, "And I’m giving you the easy option. If you walk away, the next time you see me, I won’t be putting my gun on the floor."

"I don’t want to kill you, Grant," Frank said, "So why do you want to kill me?" "I don’t want to kill you, either," Grant answered, "But I’m going to bring you to justice whatever way you decide to come."

"It’s not easy, being alive," Frank answered, "knowing what people do, knowing what you can do yourself – You ever thought of that?"

"I’m the law," Grant said, "Or the part of it that affects most people. I don’t think at all, I do my job."

"I used to be like that, too," Frank answered, "And I wish I’d stayed like that – Get on the floor."

Grant would rather be shot standing up than kneeling any day.

"What for?" he said.

"Come on," Frank ordered, "Take your belt off and tie it around your feet."

"You’re making a mistake," Grant said, doing what he was told.

"Now kneel up," Frank said, taking the belt out of the holster and tying Grant’s hands behind him.

"You’re not going to get away."

"I’m not trying to get away," Frank said, pushing him over.

"Then what are you trying to do?"

"Your job."

A minute later, Grant heard a gunshot from outside, and after he’d waited the ten minutes Frank had told him to, and extricated himself from the belts, he found the front wheel of his car shot out. It’d be another twenty minutes before he could be on his way, but he wasn’t concerned. Grant knew he’d get Frank. Him, or someone else. Sooner or later they’d get him, because there was no escape. It wasn’t like the old days where you could disappear into the woods, those times were gone. It was a human world now, and everyone was trapped.
Eleven.

When Christina came back that night, she knew there was trouble. Pushing her way in to the dark kitchen with the groceries in her arms, she could see him with his back turned to her, sitting in the shadows, the gun lying on the table next to him. "It's dark in here," she said, feeling the cold chill of fear, "Didn't you see the spirit lamp?"

"Thought it'd be safer sitting," Frank answered, his voice dark and resonant. Christina couldn’t guess what had happened. After what she’d heard in town, she wasn’t sure if she should come back.

"You want something to eat?" she asked, trying to sound normal.

"I didn’t know if I’d see you again," he said. He still hadn’t moved. She couldn’t see his face.

"Why?" she asked, brushing her hair away.

"You going to stay?" he asked.

"No," she said, "I told Mum I’d be home for tea – I can make you something if you like."

"What did they say?" he said, shifting to look at her.

"Who?" she said, studying him.

"The people in the town. What did they say I did?"

The people in the town. They were like scalded cats. Nothing so exciting had happened, ever. The movie house burnt out, the owner barbequed, the pictures.

"They said you cut him up," Christina said, "They said you hurt him real bad."

"Did you believe them?"

"I didn’t know what to believe," Christina answered.

It was like it was happening all over again. The same horror, the same humiliation. Except Christina wasn’t his wife because all that was a long way behind him.

"I didn’t do it," Frank said, "That guy I told you about – Tony – He did it."

"Tony who?" she asked. Was she mocking him? Had she abandoned him as well?

"I don’t know Tony who," he snapped, "I asked you to find out who he was." He must have been tenser than he’d thought. She flinched like he was going to hit her.

"How do you expect me to do that?" she asked, confused and frightened. He didn’t. Of course he didn’t.
"I’m sorry," he said.

"Do you want me to cook you something?"

"No," he said, "You go back to your parents – Thanks for coming back at all."

"I wanted to come back," she said.

"Why?" he asked. He couldn’t think why. He knew he didn’t want to be where he was, and couldn’t imagine why anyone else would want to be there with him.

She was quiet long enough for him to look at her to see if she was crying. "I wanted to see you again," she said after a moment.

"Christina," he began, "That thing that happened last night, that was wrong."

"No, it wasn’t."

"It was. I’m a lot older than you. You shouldn’t be involved with someone like me."

"Are we involved?"

"You know what I mean."

"No, I don’t," she said, "Tell me."

He didn’t know why she was making it hard.

"I’m forty four, Christina." He’d almost forgotten how old he was; he’d stopped remembering birthdays years before and had almost slipped into that timeless abandon that he’d longed for. To not think, to not hope, to not desire, to simply surrender and let himself slip quietly away, that’s all he’d wanted, and with a shock he realized he almost had. Forty four, that’s how old he was. Too old to be still stuck here.

"So what," she said, her eyes dropping to the cutting board in front of her, "My father's sixty, so you’re not as old as him."

"I don’t get you, I don’t understand you," he said, "aren’t there better – " He didn’t know how to put it, "boys—men – than me to be hanging around with."

"Do you want me to go?" she asked.

Their first time together – last night – had been unexpected, passionate, they were in there before either of them realized, and then had gone with it, hoping not to have to think too deeply because it couldn’t stand up to any sort of inspection. Or so he thought, or might have said if he’d been questioned. But this was something else. Now they were looking at it, seeing how it stood up.

"No," he said.
"Then what?" she asked more confidently, "Don't you think I'm good enough for you?"

"Good enough?" he asked, wondering if she was serious.

"To fall in love with."

"I don't want you to fall in love with me." This was getting dangerous.

"Why not with you?"

"Are you telling me you're falling in love with me?" he said.

"No, I'm asking you what makes you think I can't."

"Because I'm poison, Christina; because I'm bad; because I'm an embarrassment."

"You're not an embarrassment."

"This is dumb, Christina – You're smarter than me and you're a better person."

"I'm not a better person."

"Stop it. This is stupid."

"Then last night was stupid, then me coming back now was stupid."

"Yes, if that's what you came back for."

"And you don't have any feelings for me? Those things, last night, that was you getting your rocks off, is that what you're saying?"

"No," Frank said, looking at the floor.

"Then what was it?"

"I needed you," Frank blurted, and there it was.

"And I need you, too."

"You can't," Frank said, "Can't you see what I'm saying?"

"No."

"I'll hurt you, and I don't want to hurt you; I don't want you to be hurt because you're the nicest person I think I've ever met."

"And you're the nicest person I've ever met," she said, moving toward him.

"You hardly know me," he said, feeling trapped.

"And you hardly know me," she said, "But I want you to know me more," and she was standing right in front of him, so he couldn't get away, and she took his hands and
placed them on her breasts, and as he felt his hands on her, her lips parted and she said, "I
want you," and it wouldn’t have mattered if he’d been made of stone because all he wanted
to do at that moment was to be with her as completely as he could and she enfolded him
and pulled him into her and he thrust himself into her and her darkness engulfed them both
and washed their spirits away.

Later, as he ran his finger along her thigh, he could see the soft down of her leg and
smell the sleep already claiming her flesh. "You've got to go," he said, "Your parents are
expecting you."

"Fuck me again," she said, "I want you." His heart was thumping, he felt like he
was sliding off the side of the world into something else.

"Where are we?" he said, lifting her.

"Here," she answered, "Here, where we’ve always been."

She stayed for awhile after they'd finished, and shared a coffee she'd made on the
stove. She didn’t want to go and he didn’t want her to. "Get away, Frank," she said, at last
pulling her hand away from his and gathering up her things to go.

"What do you mean?" he asked, sensing the change.

"These people," she said, "You think they’re good, but they're not. They’ll kill you."

"Kill me?" he asked, curious, "Who?"

"Any one of them," she said, "They don’t like anyone different, and you’re
different."

"So are you," he said. He wasn’t sure what she was saying.

"And they’d kill me if they knew."

"If they knew what?" he wondered.

"If they knew what they were," she said, turning toward the door.

"What are they?" he asked.

"Evil," she said, standing in the doorway, "These people are evil. This town is evil,
and you know the most evil thing about it."

"What?" he said.

"They think they're good."

Frank didn’t know what to make of it. A seventeen year old saying the town where
she lived was evil, he didn’t even know what it meant. He’d seen evil, seen the evil in
himself, knew it’s smell and taste, but he hadn’t seen anything like that here. Maybe he
hadn’t been looking.
But he had, of course. Seen it in Epstein, and Greg Wintle. And now this. Is that what she meant? This town was evil? And Christina knew it?

He’d never understood it, how men are. And not men, but the women who loved them, this thing we are, or reveled in it themselves. The violence inside us. It’s like we’re blind, or choose to blind ourselves. After Frank had done – that – it was like he’d torn the veil aside, and all he could see was savagery, consuming, knives and teeth and horror. The simplest things became impossible, a family meal a cannibal orgy, all our etiquette and good manners aimed at concealing the revulsion our appetites elicit in one another and ourselves–What is the violence of the wolf compared to the violence of a man at his supper? He’d see a mother slapping her toddler and have to turn away to stop himself from screaming; harsh words were full of the razors of their intent, the full armory of human cruelty felt to him revealed in those first few days before he anaesthetized himself again. No wonder nature cringes before us. And he had felt that in himself, the ecstasy of another’s annihilation; Frank knew the joys of watching something die. Something that felt. And he sensed that Christina did, too.
Twelve.

They’d already been to his room by the time he got there. A police tape marked Crime Scene was slung across the door and a warning not to enter pasted over the lock. He tore it off and pushed through only to see the mess they’d left. Not that there was anything much there. He’d pretty well erased himself from human history by the time he got to Kanangara, so there weren’t too many clues to anything other than the fact that he wore clothes and ate food by himself. But they had found the most important thing, and sinking devastated to his knees, he looked at the empty hole where he’d kept the shoebox under the floor-board.

"It's here..." a voice behind him said, and there she was, Vivien, holding it out to him. "I knew you wouldn't leave without it," she said. Somehow she’d saved it, snuck in and retrieved it before they arrived, and taking the lid off to check inside, he could see his girl's photo, the only thing he had left of her, and the other bits and pieces he hadn't been able to let go of, the few things still connecting him to the world. Looking back up at her, he wondered how long she’d known. "I've always known, Frank," she answered, "There aren't any secrets here."

"Thanks," he said. Putting the box down on the bed, he turned back to the room to see what he could salvage.

"What are you going to do now?" she asked, watching him from the doorway.

"Now?" he asked, wondering what she meant.

"Now that there's nowhere left to go," she answered.

He looked at her and it was like the first time he’d seen her, seen her in all her sadness. "I've got plenty of places to go, Vivien," he said, "and so have you."

"Where...?" she asked.

"Anywhere—Away from here," he answered, and it was like something had fallen away from him, some care that he hadn't even known he was carrying and the world felt new again. "I don't know what happened to you," he said, "but it's probably not all that different to what happened to me, and what happened to me was bad, Vivien, but that doesn't give us an excuse."

"Excuse to what?"

"To let go and let it slide," he said, "That's what we've been doing, isn't it, watching it slide away and wishing it could slide even faster." He didn’t know where these thoughts were coming from now, but it was like he’d been thinking about them for awhile, somewhere deep inside him, and here they were, all tumbling out.

"What makes you think that's what I'm doing?" she asked. Tough. She was tough as well.
"I know because that's what I've been doing myself. I lost my daughter and I lost my wife, Vivien. I killed someone and went to jail for so long the thought of sitting in the same room with another human being terrified me – I've done the worst things a man can do, and then I did the very worst thing and came here, and the only reason I didn't jump off that cliff was I didn't have the courage to do it."

"I know that," she said.

"And it's wrong," he kept going. He was galloping now, chasing after his thoughts, only he didn't know where they were leading. "It's wrong, it's wrong, it's wrong because this is the one chance we've got, to live and breathe, the one chance we've got, Vivien, to do anything in this world, to do good, for ourselves and other people."

"You don't believe in other people any more than I do, Frank."

"My girl was a person, Vivien—I believed in her—And that's all you need, isn't it? One person—It wasn't her fault, what happened—She didn't bring this darkness into being—She was the light that lit it up—My girl, my little girl—That's how I felt, looking at her—When I looked at her, my life had meaning and made sense—She saved me, Vivien, the children save us."

"My children are dead, Frank," she said, and as soon as she said it, he understood. "My two girls were burnt to death," she continued, "when I went out to post a letter one day. That's what happened to me."

"Doesn't that make you love the ones you see even more?" he asked. So there it was, and it was as awful as he'd imagined. They were the same; that's why they were both there, sitting on the edge. "I'm sorry, Vivien, I am and no-one can tell another person how to live, but this is what I'm telling you: we can live, we can live with the worst pain imaginable, and we don't have to hate, and we don't have to hide ourselves away; we can stay human."

"No, we can't," Vivien replied, "because if we could, we wouldn't be human at all."

"Then what are you?" he asked.

"Stuck, Frank, like you; hanging on and not knowing why."

Reaching out, he took her in his arms, and she let him. She was trembling, but it wasn't the cold, it was the place where she was, where she'd been ever since that terrible day. And there was nothing anyone could do about it.

"They're still in you," he whispered into her ear, "So let them live." They stood like that, lost in their sadness, for a long while, and then he let go and left by foot, making his way up through the giant gums that still towered over that place and as he got to the top of the hill, he looked back to take one last look. She wasn't waiting for him, but from up there it looked quiet and homey, with a wisp of smoke coming from the chimney, the sort of
place you could imagine spending all your days in. In another life, they might have gotten together. Maybe even in this life. But not now. That was gone, and he knew why. He'd tried to bury himself before he was dead, only the world won't let you do that. It's there, waiting for you, whether you want it or not, and now he wanted it, he wanted to be alive.

The service station was closed by the time he arrived at Wintle’s, and as he crouched in the gathering gloom making himself small in the tree line he could see the stocky man moving around the cottage behind the shop. The mechanic was nowhere to be seen, and after watching for awhile Frank took the gamble, and started to make his way across the gravel. He could handle Wintle, but having to deal with the two of them might be trickier. Still, he probably didn’t have the only gun in the place, so Frank would have to be careful.

Making his way to the hedge giving the back part a bit of privacy, he crouched and waited. Wintle was feeding his dog, which was as well, given how skittish it was. Frank didn’t want to have to kill the mutt as well. There weren’t any street lights out there, so it got dark pretty quick, and as soon as the light on the driveway got turned off, Frank felt for the gun shoved in to his pants and made his move. Nudging his way through the gate, he pressed his back against the peeling weatherboard as the dog snuffled suspiciously at the back door fly-screen. Wintle turned the television on and settled down to watch as the microwave heated up his TV dinner in the kitchenette. Frank knew what he was here to do, so he did it.

"Hands up," he cried, springing through the door, but he was the one surprised by the shotgun resting in Wintle’s hand. "Drop it!" he roared, but Wintle dropped his beer instead, sending it frothing onto the floor with the dog going crazy around his feet. "Shutup! Shutup, you mongrel!" Frank was crying—He hated dogs—"Put the gun down or I’ll blow your fucking head off!"

"Who the fuck are you?" Wintle cried back, not recognizing him. It was mayhem, with the Chihuahua going crazy, the television blaring and Wintle covered in beer trying to put the shotgun down.

"Tell your dog to back-off, or I’ll shoot it," Frank thundered.

"Shutup, you mongrel!" Wintle spat, and all of a sudden the dog stopped, and wagging its tail began licking at the beer pooling on the floor. Reaching for the television, Frank turned it off as the Wiley Coyote charged over a cliff top and hung suspended in the air before the inevitable, sickening drop.

"Alright, you fucking pervert," Frank said, turning back, "I think it's time we had a talk."

Wintle gulped, at last recognizing him.

"I knew you’d be back," he croaked, "But I don’t know a thing."
"We’ll find out," Frank said, "But right now, why don’t you tell me what the shotgun’s for?"

"What do you think?" Wintle said. Not challenging, but a little too cocky for Frank's liking. He drew the blind across the window so no-one could see in and had a quick look around the cottage. A single bedroom, a shower and a small kitchen; altogether not much bigger than a caravan. It wasn’t untidy, but there was no question it was a man’s.

"Alright, why?" Frank said, satisfied they were alone and settling himself in front of Wintle.

"Well after I heard what you did to Epstein, I reckon half the county’d be arming ’emselves in case you called."

"Half the county, you think," Frank said, "That how many of you sick fucks there are around this place?"

"What do you want?" Wintle grumbled, "Money? There’s the week’s taking there in the safe behind you – Take it and fuck off." Not likely, but worth a try.

"Where’s Dave?" Frank asked. He knew it wasn’t going to be that easy, but he could take his time.

"Dave who?" Wintle asked. Acting dumb.

"You know what?" Frank said, "I could start by shooting a hole through that TV set of yours, and then work my way around the room till I get to you – Do you think that’d encourage you?"

"You don’t know who you’re dealing with," Wintle said in a low, frightened voice.

"You, you mean?" Frank scoffed. He was the one with the gun, and he was enjoying it.

"No," Wintle answered firmly, "Him."

"What about him?" Frank asked, interested.

"He’s mad; madder than anyone you’ve ever met," Wintle answered, lowering his voice, "And sick—He’s one sick fuck – I heard he held someone over four days and when they found the poor bastard they couldn’t even work out if it was a man or a woman."

Yeah, Frank had heard things like that before as well. Sometimes they were true.

"You keep nice company," he replied.

"I keep the company I keep, but I’m no killer," Wintle shot back.

"No, you’re just a pedo," Frank answered, leaning angrily forward and making sure Wintle didn't forget the gun, "You know what we do to pedos in jail?".
"I'm no pedo," Wintle cried, "I've got grandkids!"

"And what do you do to them?" Frank cried, "You fuck! You filthy fuck!" His emotions were getting the better of him, and he tried to pull himself back.

"I didn't do nothing, I didn't!" Wintle wept, "It's a sickness and I'm trying to get better! I'm born again in the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ and He has Saved me! Saved me from my sin!! I'm a good man!"

"Yeah, you're all good men," Frank snarled. He wasn’t there for this, not to listen to Wintle make excuses for his pathetic life. Rummaging around in the drawers, he found some duct tape and rope, and tied and bound him to one of the kitchen chairs.

"What's his name?" he asked, settling back down on the sofa in front of him.

"Partridge!" Wintle answered. He knew he was going to have to tell him, so he did. "Dave Partridge – But he wants to be called Tony now."

"Well we all want to be called something different to what we are, don't we?" Frank said.

"What do you want from me?" Wintle whimpered.

"So you've seen him?" Frank asked, secretly relieved he hadn't been imagining the whole thing.

"Of course I've seen him," Wintle answered, shooting a glance at the door, "Why do you think I'm scared."

"He's here?" Frank asked, surprised, "He's been here?"

It made the sort of sense Frank wasn't prepared for. What if he was outside already, listening to them? Standing, he went to the doorway and looked into the backyard. But all there was outside was a still kind of darkness that made you want to lock your door. Seeing the men chatting more or less amiably, the dog had settled into its basket. "Looks like your dog's got the right idea," Frank said, helping himself to a beer out of Wintle's fridge, "We're gonna be here for awhile, might as well make myself at home."

"I don't know anything," Wintle pleaded, "What's it got to do with me, anyhow? I don't do that stuff anymore."

"What stuff," Frank asked, ripping the tab off the can and sitting back on the sofa.

"You're the one that brought it round," Wintle objected, "You saw how angry I was—That was Epstein all over. Never take no for an answer. You know what, I'm glad he's dead, and I hope he fucking suffered—Did he? Did you make him suffer?"

"He suffered," Frank answered grimly.
"They find shit out about you, and they use it against you the rest of your life—
There was a time in my life..."

"What?" Frank snapped. He was losing it, letting Wintle's words get to him. That
wasn't why he was there, so he could hear Wintle's shit. "There was a time in your life
when what? When you weren't like this?" He could feel it now, the joy of humiliation,
the pleasure you could get taunting another man.

"Yes!" Wintle shouted, tears shooting from his eyes, "Yes, when I wasn't like this;
when I could look at myself and not want to puke."

"When was that?" Frank demanded, "When did you become this shit you became?"

"I don't know," Wintle wept, "When did you?"

It shouldn't have hurt, but it did.

"I don't know," Wintle continued, balling, "Maybe when I realised this was all
there was, and there wasn't anything more."

It was a weird thing to say, but Frank knew what he meant. That's when it had
happened for him, too. Only they were both wrong. There was a lot more to this world.

"Tell me what you know about Dave Partridge," Frank said, getting up to pull the
lace curtain away from the window. Outside, something moved in the darkness.

Struggling with his ties, Wintle growled back, "Cut me loose, will you, and I'll tell
you whatever you want."

"I'll cut you loose, alright," Frank answered, "as soon as you tell me who he is. Or
better still, where..."

Wintle thought about that for a moment. "So he's not dead...?" he said at last. And
the way he said it, Frank could hear the satisfaction in his voice, and the dread.

"What do you think?" he asked.

"I think he's so fucking weird he could come back to life if that's what he wanted,"
Wintle answered. He certainly knew his man.

"So what's he got to do with anything?" Frank asked, "What's he doing here?"

That was the question, wasn't it; why here and why now. People like Tony could
hold grudges, but fundamentally they were in it for themselves, and Frank didn't buy it that
he was here for anything as noble as revenge.

"He was this kid," Wintle began, sounding like he was going to tell the truth, "This
crazy kid—His old man used to run the lumber yard down at Stacey's—it's gone now."

Frank had a vague recollection of an abandoned lumberyard over that way.
"Mongrel of a father, he was, too," Wintle continued, sounding like he was talking from personal experience. "Set the dogs on him one time—Seven years old and the old bastard set the dogs on him, can you believe that?"

It figured. You don't get to be that big a prick all on your own.

"He killed his father, I swear," Wintle continued, "Shoved him into the circular saw, and good riddance—There used to be one fatality there every six months, but after that, there were none—But it didn't stop there."

"What didn't stop...?" Frank asked grimly.

"He had this thing about kids..."

"Who did?"

"The old man," Wintle answered, looking up. He was watching Frank now, watching him close.

"What about them?" Frank asked, wishing he hadn't.

"Partridge had cigarette burns all over his body."

"The kid did—Dave?"

"Yeah – Dave, or Tony or whatever the fuck we’re supposed to call him now—He doesn’t wear short sleeved shirts, you noticed that? That’s why."

"His father used to burn him?" Frank asked. He’d heard some fucked up shit in his life, but nothing like this. Tortured his own kid. What sort of man would do something like that? A lot of men, the sort of men you see strutting around telling everybody what to do.

"That's not all."

Frank wanted him to stop. He didn't want to hear anymore.

"What else?"

"He never said," Wintle continued, "But everyone knew. Everyone knew what was going on."

"But you never said nothin’, did you?" Frank growled, "You let it happen, the way people do –" That's what had happened to him, too; with his kid. After it happened, he realised everyone except him knew all about the guy. And maybe even he did himself, but just never wanted to admit it "Why?" he said angrily, "Tell me why it happens."

"I don't know why," Wintle cried, flinching away, "We were scared, that’s why—He was a bad man and no-one wanted to cross him. We —" He stopped mid-sentence, like he couldn’t believe what he was about to say.

"What?" Frank demanded.
"Wished it'd go away."

Frank knew it was the truth, but he couldn't forgive him. "You weak pricks," he spat back, "You fucking weak, pathetic pricks."

"Maybe we were," Wintle protested, "Yes, we were, but you weren't there, so you don't know."

"Don't know what?"

"What he was like."

He sure had them snookered, and maybe that's the way it was. Little places like this, festering away in their own shit, nobody prepared to say boo for fear of offending one of the local hobnobs. Law didn't matter, nothing mattered. All that mattered was whether or not you had the balls to stand up to it.

"Why didn't you tell the cops?"

"What?" Wintle answered.

And there it was. Everyone knew, but nobody knew enough and that’s where they all lived, floating in a wash of guilt and suspicion dreading the day the light’d be turned on and they’d all be discovered to be the moral cockroaches they were. Free to indulge their own vices because they weren't as bad as the ones they knew other people were getting away with.

"So where is he now?" Frank asked, cocking the gun, "Where's Dave Partridge?"

And that’s when the voice behind him cooed, "Gee, Frank, I didn't know you cared."

He didn't need to be told who it was, and spun around, already shooting. The bullet tore through Tony’s coat, but it might as well have been a plug in a spud gun for all it did. Firing again, Frank hit him square in the chest, right through the heart, but it was like he was made of steel or something for all the good it did, because Tony just stood there, glowering. "Frightening, isn't it," he smirked, "The fact is, Frank, I go on forever." And raising his pistol he pulled the trigger and with a bang, shot the gun right out of Frank’s hand.

"Would you like to see that again?" Tony gloated.

Frank was already diving for Wintle’s shotgun because he knew there'd only be one of them walking out alive, but Tony was too fast, and kicking the gun out of his hand, he was already towering over him, pulling his head back hard by the hair. "Why fight it?" Tony snarled, "you and me were made for one another."

Shaking himself loose, Frank gobbed one hard right in Tony’s face. Not because he thought it’d save him, because he wasn't thinking at all right now. Because he wanted to. It
was the instinct of the prison yard, and he was letting himself go. "You don't learn, do you," Tony snapped, pointing the gun straight at Frank's temple. It was too much for Wintle, who turned away, shouting, "No!"

And pulling the trigger, Tony shot.

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The banshee sound of a siren could be heard rising and falling over the grey bush hunkered down against the low, grey sky. Struggling awake, Frank felt like his head was being split in two by an axe that was still lodged there. Dried blood caked his cheek and he still wasn't sure whether he was alive or dead, though he wished he was dead, the way he felt. Looking across the floor, he could see Wintle's body slumped from the chair, his ears and nose cut off in a bleeding mess and his pants pulled around his feet. Feeling for his own appendages, Frank tried to lift himself, but immediately collapsed back down, but somehow his legs were still working, and struggling to his feet he glanced groggily about. The place was covered in blood. Taking a step, he felt something squish beneath his foot and looking saw it was a penis. Wintle was dead, the dog a lifeless sack of fur on the floor. Every time he moved, Frank's head felt like it was going to explode. "Oh, no..." he groaned as he realized he was still alive. Scrambling to his feet, it was like the different parts of him hadn't come together yet, but he was already making his way to the door.

He didn't know why, but he had to get out of there. The dog's throat had been cut. Shoving through the screen door, he could hear the siren getting closer. He was fucked, he knew it, but somehow he was still alive. Wintle's tow truck was on the other side of the bowsers, and for some reason he was making his way there, stumbling-running across the gravel, trying to keep his balance. "No..." he groaned again.

Tearing around the bend with the police siren blaring, Grant leaned forward as Jincks called, "Look! It's him!" They could see Frank shambling across the yard and climbing into the tow-truck.

"You check to see if there's anything to be done for Wintle," Grant ordered, slowing to let him out as Frank took off up the road, "And I'll bring this prick in."

"Take care!" Jincks cried as Grant swerved back onto the asphalt. Frank was already half way up the hill and not looking like he was coming back.

"Alright, you dead-shit," Grant snarled under his breath as he put his foot down, "You had your chance, so now it's my turn."

Frank could see him in the rear vision mirror and knew he wasn't going to stop till he had him face down on the bitumen with his hands cuffed hard behind his back, but that didn't mean he was going to give up, and it didn't mean he was ready to go back to prison for something he hadn't done. It was a set-up, Frank could see that now through his throbbing pain, Epstein's murder, and now Wintle's, the two of them dead, with the cops after him, thinking he did it. And nobody else apart from the dead men knowing anything
about Tony. Was that why he'd done it? Because they knew who he was, and he'd decided to cut his last links, like Frank himself had when he was finally released from jail. Change his name, go to some place no-one knew him, die. Is that what Tony wanted to do? Die? Is that why he'd said, *You and I were made for one another?*

Frank's head was hurting so much he couldn't think, his hands were hurting; in fact every part of him was hurting more than he'd ever hurt before. Grant was creeping forward, up the hill behind him, and no matter how hard he pushed down on the pedal, Frank couldn't squeeze another thing out of it. He didn't want to hurt Grant, but he wished he had a gun, to fuck him off, to piss him off so he could get Tony and—*What? What did he want to do?* Frank wasn't sure, his mind sort of went fuzzy. *Kill him? No, he never wanted to kill another thing as long as he lived. Take him back. Make him confess. Make him tell the truth, that it wasn't Frank that did it, that Frank was a good man, a decent man, an honourable man.*

Only Frank wasn't a decent or honourable man. He was barely a man at all. Frank was a disease, a murderer, someone stained forever by human blood, and no matter what he did, that's what he'd always be. He'd never have another wife, he'd never hold another baby. Where he was right now was about as much hope as he'd ever have.

They were in the wilds now, following the road as it dipped and veered through the bush. Glancing at the fuel gauge, he could see the needle hovering on empty. Snapping to, he reached under the seat and found was he was looking for, an old 45. He'd never worked as a towie, but had met bikers in jail who had, and knew things could get hair-raising at times, which was why they generally carried something with them. And here it was.

Except the fucking thing was empty.

Reaching back under the seat, Frank tried to find the ammo when a coal truck was on top of him blaring its horn. Swerving drunkenly, the tow truck skidded out of the way toward the safety barrier, but swinging the other way, Frank steered it onto the right side of the road.

Grant saw the coal truck almost collect Frank and veered out of the way himself. He was on the radio, barking out Frank's licence number and position in case he got away, but there was no chance of that. None. Or so he thought as his door flew open. *"What the fuck?"* he cried, reaching out to slam it back again.

Further down the hill, at the Wintle's garage, Jincks had his gun out and was reaching toward the screen door. He didn't know what to expect, so wasn't taking any chances. He'd taken the call that had sent them flying out along the old highway, and though the man's voice was quiet and calm, his message was chilling, *I've killed Greg Wintle,* it had said, *Killed and butchered that pedophile son-of-a-bitch. Fuck him to hell,* it had finished, *fuck all those devils to hell.*

Anyone talking about sending devils to hell was capable of anything, and as Jenkins pushed the door open, he could see he wasn't wrong. *"Jesus Christ..."* he groaned,
slipping on some blood. There was sick all over the floor, and the heavy scent of death and fear. He had to get out of there, and backed right out. It was the sort of thing you want to immediately forget; it was the sort of thing you know you'll be dreaming about till the day you die.

Back up the hill, Frank was running out of options. He didn't know how much time he had, but figured it wasn't long. If he stayed on the bitumen, Grant was bound to run him down and drag him to what he thought was ice. The gun was useless, and apart from driving off the road and over a cliff, which Frank didn't intend doing, there weren't too many other things left to consider. The road had swung through a state forest, and pine trees pressed gloomily around him. Spotting a service trail, he was heading straight for it, but not before Grant had turned a corner in time to see him disappearing into the trees.

"Come on, Frank, why make it hard for yourself..." he growled, but part of him wondered. The police car was good, but it was a road car, and this was definitely off-road, and the thought that Frank might get away made him madder than he even was before.

But Frank was too busy lurching through the deep pools of mud the road had become after the previous night's shower to be worried how pissed off Grant was. He was going to have to take off on foot before long, he knew, and was looking for the right place to do it. If he was able to put a bit of distance between himself and Grant, maybe find some place to tuck the truck out of sight, he'd be alright, anything that might give him the few seconds he needed. Was that what he needed? seconds? Was that the difference between escape and capture? Right now, it felt like it and Frank was doing everything he could to grab them as he shot past a lumber-jack chain-sawing a tree. Watching him go, the man looked up and stretched, wondering what the hurry was. But then he heard the siren, and turned his back. He didn't like coppers at the best of times, and this wasn't one of them.

Grant's car was being shaken apart as it jolted from one pot-hole to the next, and the only thing keeping it together was will-power. If he had to, he'd pick it up and carry it himself—Frank wasn't getting away, no way. But out here, it was different. Grant was a country cop, but his real precinct was Kanangara, and whenever he stepped over the town limits he felt a little uneasy, and right now there was something a little off. He could feel it, a raggededness on the edge of things, like there was missing something he was missing, the way you feel some mornings when it's about to go all wrong. The car pitched sideways, cracking his head against the window No seat belt? and he looked out to see the dark trees closing in around him. There's a dead silence inside a in pine forest and looking through the gloom Grant wondered if Frank was armed. Who was he? Grant didn't have a clue. A killer, sure, and that's all he knew, but he was no bar-room brawler, and Grant knew if someone had done something like that to his own kids he might act just the, but when a man crosses that line, there's no turning back.

And Frank knew that now, too, knew that whatever Grant was thinking, it wasn't let's sit down and have a talk. He was a copper, like all of them, and if he was a good one he'd be even worse than most because all they wanted was to go home to their families and
forget the shit of human existence they'd had to confront in the course of the day. The stupidity, the violence, the anger and madness that put some people in hospital, or worse, and other people rue the day they were born as they looked at the inside of cells for twenty years of their lives. It doesn't seem possible till the day it happens to you, and the day it does, it looks like that was the only way it could end.

Here, lost in a pine forest with muddy tracks slashed across it like scars. That's what we've done to the world, hacked it to pieces. Hacked it to pieces and then done it again till there was nothing left to hate anymore, ourselves. Funny, Frank wondered, the thoughts that fly through your mind when you're trying to escape. Funny the things you think when you're trying to stay alive.

But Grant wasn't thinking anything like that as he revved his engine, trying to knock it out of the rut its wheels were spinning uselessly in. But it was stuck fast, like something had it and wasn't letting go and all Grant could think was how much he'd like to kill whatever it was that was stopping him. But Grant never would, even if it were possible. Not everyone can kill. People, anyhow. And Grant wasn't one of them.

And then, the forest seemed to groan with some inner life as the leaves began to shiver and rustle in a wind that was blowing up from deep within.

Frank could feel it, too, a change breaking and groaning from the depths surrounding him. Up ahead, where the road petered out into a rocky outcrop, he could see the state forest giving way to bushland while behind something was crashing, moving through the pines, a darkness and presence that was at first here and then there, swirling and smashing through the trees. Sensing something approach, Grant looked up, startled as a pair of birds crashed into the windscreen, their wings flared out in warning. Alarmed, Grant grabbed his rifle and scrambled to get out. He didn't know where he was, lost somewhere, with the madness of the wilderness swirling about. Then he heard something ahead, further up, a sharp crack through the air, and looking in the direction he could see Frank rushing up the ridge toward the bush. He knew he had one chance, and leaping down he steadied his elbows on the car bonnet and took aim. He could hit him, he knew, kill him. Kill him with a bullet in the back, or bring him down at least. He was a fair distance, but Grant knew he could take him out. Only something kept getting in the way, branches whipping in the wind, a puff of dust that blew up from somewhere, something in his eye. And that thing behind him, whatever it was, getting closer, so close now he could almost feel in on top of him. Not an animal, but something else, a presence like the forest itself, an anger.

Frank paused and looked back, and for a moment Grant didn't recognise him, he was different, strong and alert; not the nervy, broken figure who'd presented at the station, but something else. A man, certainly, but stronger than a man, bigger almost and then, at that moment, Grant flinched instinctively away as he heard the flap of wings beating in his ears and felt an eagle's feathers brush past his head, grazing his hair. And looking back, he could see Frank was gone like he'd never even been there; gone like he was a dream.
Confused, Grant looked about before returning his gaze to watch the bird fly lazily off, like Grant was already a fading memory of something left behind, something not even worth a second glance. But Frank was gone and Grant knew it, and there was nothing for it but to turn tail and find his way out of this place.

"How the fuck do you get out of here?" he eventually said as he tramped past the lumber-jack chain-sawing a tree.

Letting his eyes settle on the muddy, bedraggled figure before him, the man savoured the moment. "You don't mate," he said, "this is hell."

And glancing about the dark, sullen bush, Grant didn't feel inclined to disagree.

But Frank was free, or free for the moment, and leaving the car and all the rest of it behind he climbed higher up over the broken, crumbling granite outcrops till at last he stood at the top, and all below was the thick, protective cloak of green, while in the distance he could see the smudge of dirty smoke hanging like phlegm over Kanangara. There was nothing left for him there, or not a lot, and he didn't know what lay ahead, but he wasn't frightened, and that felt like a change. He could feel himself, feel the breath inside him and the tingle of his skin as the icy air blew up from the valley. There were things to do, he knew, and he was going to do them, but there was something else he knew: there was no turning back now for any of them, for him, for Grant. For any of them.
Thirteen.

He was feeling hungry by the time he made it back to the house. He could see Christina's car hidden under the dark trees at the back, and as he stepped up to get a drink from the water tank she leaned into the doorway.

"Where have you been?" she asked with a warm sensuality in her voice, like she'd been waiting for him.

His hands were covered in dirt and scratches, so it was no secret.

"For a walk," he said. She was beautiful, framed in the doorway with the last light blushing her cheeks. He liked her insolence. He hadn't noticed it before, but he could see she was tough. The water flowed like life into him, cool and fresh, and he washed the grime from his hands and hair, trying not to think. "Come on, we've got to go," he said, making a sudden move full of resolution.

"Go where?" she asked, straightening and shielding her eyes as he stepped into the last glare.

"Have you got the keys?" he answered, brushing past her into the house to collect his things. They were leaving, and they wouldn't be back.

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By the time they drove into Kanangara, it was dark. They'd made their way through the gathering dusk in silence, each of them wrapped in their own thoughts. He'd come to a decision, she knew, and was waiting for him to tell her what it was, and the uncertainty made her nervous, though she didn't know why. He was a man, that's all, someone. She didn't understand him, not; didn't know what to expect. They're animals, that's what one of her girlfriends had said one time at school, and that was pretty well her experience of them, the male species. All of them. Except him. He hadn't hit her, or been rough with her. Not much, anyhow. He'd needed her, that's what had felt strange; looked at her in an odd way, like he was trying to find her, but she'd never let him do that. That was too dangerous.

"What do you want?" she blurted, surprising even herself. She hadn't planned on talking, but there it was.

"Me?" he asked, glancing at her to see what she meant. He didn't want anything. It was other people who wanted things from him; wanting to know who he was, what he was up to. Why he was there. He didn't know why he was there, and was happy enough to move on if people didn't like it. A ghost, that's what he was. He didn't want any part of their world.

"From me," she answered, but she wasn't thinking now that the river of conversation between them had started. It was a river she felt comfortable in, once they'd pushed off from the shore, a river that she wished could go on forever.
"Nothing," he said. What could he want from her? What right did he have to want anything? "What do you want from me?" he said in turn as the motor hummed along, guiding them through the dusk.

"Just to be nice," she said. And it sounded like she was hurt, and maybe she was. She'd come back to the cottage hoping he'd be there, hoping he'd take her in his arms again. She loved his arms, his taut muscles. His smell. Men were different, like sandpaper. She liked that, liked the way he felt. Liked him, even when he wasn't nice. But she wanted him to be nice to her. Maybe that's all anybody ever wants from anyone.

"Aren't I nice?" he asked, feeling guilty. It had started again. He'd started to fall in love with her again. How did she do that? Was it on purpose, or was it something that she was, or something that they were together? Whatever it was, it was dangerous, and he could already feel the tremor of his soul.

"No," she said, "Not when you're like this." It was weird, being spoken to like this. By a kid.

"How am I?" he asked, somehow remorseful and playful at the same time. The night seemed so dark around them he wondered what it was hiding.

"You're mean, and you're not telling me nothin'," she said. Petulant. A seventeen year old again. That was easier to deal with. He liked the girly part of her. Liked it so much that when she cracked the whip it always surprised him, to feel she had so much power over him.

"What would you like me to tell you?" he asked.

"What this is all about—Who are you?" she asked, looking at him. "I know who you are—Your kid and stuff—But I don't know who you are, really—"

"Who I am really?" He'd never been much good with these sorts of conversations. Who you are, really. Who was she, really? Who knows who they are, until it's too late, and you realise you never were the person you hoped to be at all, just a scared, cowering animal trying to protect itself from the beating it knew was coming.

"What you care about, what you want."

"I want to be happy," he gulped, "I want to have someone I care about." That was a mistake, but something had made him say it.

"Don't you care about me?" she asked. Bold and plaintive at the same time, like it was something she hoped he'd say.

"Yes, I do," he said, quicker than he should have, "But I can't and I shouldn't and I don't know why you want to put us both through this conversation again." He could feel his anger again, but he didn't want to get angry with her. Not now. It was hard enough as it was.
"Because I want to know how someone can act like you've acted and then pretend it doesn't mean anything."

"Because I'm a man!" he said. Was that the reason? He was hardly even aware of it, the different worlds he inhabited; the different people he could be. His wife had said that to him, too. Looking at him with frightened eyes like she didn't know who he was anymore. And she didn't; he didn't himself. There were days there where he couldn't even recognise himself in the mirror. Who knows who they are, until they're there.

"Well have you ever thought maybe that's your problem?" she said.

"What problem?" he asked, exasperated. How do women do that? How do women confuse you so easily?

"What problem?" she repeated, incredulous, "You don't think you've got a problem? You think this is what a normal man looks like?"

"Yes," he answered with an intensity that surprised him, "This is what a normal man looks like: hurt and angry and confused and unhappy, and if you cut open any one of those poor pricks out there, that's what you'd find in all of us; we hurt, Christina; this life hurts and none of us knows what to do or where to go because we're more lost than anyone can imagine." He was crying now, hard and helpless tears that he didn't know were in him; the tears of twenty years of solitude, twenty years of sucking it up, twenty years of horror as he tried to be a man but finding that being a man was about the toughest thing anyone could try to be.

"Is that what you think?" she said, looking at him. She'd never made a man cry before, and was astonished at the sight.

"Yes," he blinked. They were approaching town now, passing the first few street lights standing in the still, crisp air.

"Well this is what I think," she began, emboldened, "I think someone prepared to go through that for their kid is better than a man, and I think you're the best man I've ever met and I want you to be my man —"

"No," he said.

"Don't you tell me no, I know what I want," she shouted. She wasn't going to let him shut her up. She was so torn, she didn't know what she was going to say, and she was close to not caring, even though she knew it would be a disaster.

"The world doesn't work the way you want it," he shouted back, like he was her Dad and had the right to shout at her.

"Don't you think I know that?" she cried, bursting herself into tears. The air was on fire and the two of them were inside, burning. "Don't you think I know that?" she sobbed.
It was horror, with no way out for either of them. They were parked now on the side of the road. He'd pulled over somewhere along the line; if you'd asked him when he wouldn't have been able to answer—Back there somewhere, near that blackberry bush, maybe. But the thing was, even though both of them felt like their souls were being scoured with hooks sharpened in hell, this was the most honest either of them had ever been with another human being.

"I want you," she said, "I want to be with you. You make me feel safe."

"And you make me feel whole," he answered, "And I'm sorry, but it can never be."

"My Gran used to tell me a story," she started after a little while, "about a wolf that came up from the valley, and the wolf was lonely because its mate had been trapped and killed by a hunter. And the wolf found the hunter's house and it's mate's pelt on the front wall; and the hunter had a daughter, and the wolf watched, and saw the daughter; and every night the wolf would sing beneath the daughter's window, and as the wolf sang, the daughter could hear the wind in the pine trees and the water splashing over the round rocks of the mountain rapids, she could see the full moon rising in the midnight sky and the roar of the storm bending the trees on the highest ridge, and she longed to feel the wind and sniff the ice in the air and see the first snow frosting the edges of the gum leaves, she longed to ride far and fast across the wilds of the sky. And one day the wolf was gone, and she never loved again." Frank's heart was beating with hers, they shared the same breath. "You are that wolf," she said, "Why did you come here?"

"To hide," he answered. And it sounded so unlikely now, after everything that had happened, and he wondered what had made him think he ever could. Maybe solitary had made him stupid. Maybe he never understood human beings at all.

"You came to the wrong place," she said.

He had, that was true, but there was no other place he could have gone. His world was set now, he could see that; it had probably been set for a long time before, and he was only now realising it.

"Who are you?" he said, looking back at her.

"No one," she answered, "like you," and getting out of the car, she left him there.

"I'll drive you back to your place," he said leaning across to the window. The conversation had finished him, but he didn't want to leave her there, alone on the dark street. "Come on, get in."

"I can find my own way back," she answered, feeling the dull emptiness now opening up inside her.

"You're not no-one, Christina," he said, "you're someone, like me; it's that we're the sort of someones who don't get the happy ever after endings..." He finished and then
looked across at her, "But I hope you do." She didn't say anything, gulped something back. He didn't look at her again. "I'll drop the car back when I'm finished," he said, turning the ignition key. She nodded, or something. There wasn't anything else left to do. He drove off, and she felt a world inside her break. Then there was a movement in the darkness, and she saw the man as he separated himself from the shadows and moved toward her.

"Nice," Tony said, moving down on her, "Very nice."

She stood there, paralysed by fear, and putting his arm around her, Tony cooed, "Why aren't you that nice to me?"
He was on the hunt now, and needed some clues. Wintle had mentioned the old sawmill over at Stacey's, and that's where Frank was headed. It was about forty minutes away, on the Western side of the range, but he needed the time to think, and the car's headlights scooped out the darkness as the road threaded its way through the lost hills.

What was it, he wondered, that had brought him here, to this place? Maybe that was the key. Kanangara was nothing, nowhere, a way-station to somewhere that no longer existed that had had a meaning at some point but now had forgotten to give itself up to the wilds slowly moving in on it. You could see it, in the overgrown allotments and the ramshackle houses turning to ruin. People lived there because that's where they lived, and that's the reason right there: it was somewhere tucked so far away it no longer existed or mattered, and that's what he wanted to be himself; but he wasn't; he'd mattered to someone, he'd mattered to Tony, and Tony had burrowed down deep to find out everything they could about him, because Frank had left a big footprint. There were words. Tens of thousands—hundreds of thousands—of words, he knew, about Frank that had been written by sociologists and criminologists and psychologists, all analysing and theorising and speculating and trying to penetrate the dark mystery he was to answer the question of what it was that had turns an ordinary man into a violent killer. And Frank had read a lot of them himself as he tried to understand what had happened to him. But the more he read, the less he understood and the man they described so chillingly was so different to the man he felt himself to be that it had left him numb wondering who he was and where this violence had come from. Sometimes he wondered if evil was a part of our nature that would be there till some smart scientist figured out a way of cutting it out. What would we be then? When evil was spliced out of our genes? There were facts about what happened, of course, some facts that couldn't be denied by him or anyone. The police had known there was a pedophile living within five minutes of his house. The police had known, but not him. But that hadn't meant they'd done anything about it; that didn't mean they went around to check him out; no, of course not, and Frank hadn't even found out himself till a week had passed. A week after his girl went missing. But mixed up with what the prosecutor kept calling "the facts of the matter" were a cloud of half truths or straight out lies or exaggerations or misunderstandings that seemed to thicken the more often they were told and retold, like in the telling of the story a myth was being born, a fable whose point Frank didn't yet know. Was he this crazed monster, guilty not only of his daughter's killer's murder, but many more as well? Was he a sexual deviate incapable of normal relationships who had driven his wife to despair? Was he himself his daughter's killer trying to cover up his terrible crime by blaming an innocent man? Was he, as some psychiatrist had intoned, lashing out at society because of his guilt at his own perverted fantasies? Frank had read so much that in the end he didn't know who he was anymore until finally he had put them all aside hoping that in his silence he might find himself, but finding only emptiness. A dark, brooding emptiness that had no name, but on occasion broiled and spat something out, standing lurking there, mysterious and foreboding like a shadow hidden in the darkness and afraid of the light. It was like there was a nothing inside him at all, an emptiness
beyond words, and he didn't know if it was a threat or a promise, but he knew it had the
weight of everything he was while the words that flew around him felt like lies, his own or
the lies of the world as it tried to say he was nothing like them, that he was something else,
a criminal, a killer, a demon, something that needed to be blotted out and locked away.
Forgotten. And that's the way he felt about himself. He wanted to forget and be forgotten,
and fade into wordlessness. But now here he was, caught in words again.

Eventually the old bridge came into view, and Frank could see the sign for Stacey's
Creek looming through the fog drifting across the still black water. The ruins of a sawmill
lay beyond, on the right hand side, and checking the rear vision mirror, he slowed and
nudged the car toward the overgrown gate. There was a padlock rusted to the chain, but
when he had a closer look, he could see it had been recently opened, and there were fresh
tire tracks in the soggy ground. Thinking the better of it, he parked the car behind some
bushes further up. Searching around, he found the bullets for the gun, and tucking it into
his jacket he walked back wondering what he might find. If Tony was there, he'd kill him,
no question. It was either that, or let himself be killed, and maybe that'd be the way it'd end
up, too. You go into a place like that, you don't know what's going to happen, and here it
was.

The place was quiet and dead, eerie the way only human places can be. Dark,
empty buildings stood scattered through the leaning gums and blackberry bushes and an
old truck with cracked windows looked like a beached whale decaying in the moonlight.
There was nothing there, not even a bird. The old house stood further away, up on a rise,
and listening for a moment to the wind sifting through the weeds and barbed wire, he
gripped the gun in his pocket and turned toward the brick steps leading up the slope. It was
hard not to imagine it all, after what Wintle had said, the big bull of a man striding down
the steps to terrorise his workers, barking insults and wondering who he might turn on
next. Frank knew the type, and had met plenty of them, but this one must have been a real
prize, to wind up being pushed into a circular saw by his own son. That's certainly a way of
narrowing your options. But maybe being born into a family like that didn't give you too
many options anyhow.

It was one of those older style farmhouses, with a wide verandah around three
sides. Frank had a torch from the tow truck, and shone it down to check the boards were
safe. Stepping up, he tested one with his foot before moving toward the front door. The
place had the grim, lost feel of a mortuary, and a dank, musty smell coming from the
darkness inside. The door was hanging off its hinges, and feathers and tumbleweeds
logged the hallway but rather than go in, Frank veered off along the wall, craning and
trying to peer through what was left of the windows. It was creepy, wondering if Tony was
in there, maybe asleep, maybe waiting. A faded sign hanging from the outside wall
declared Partridge & Son, Lumberyard, and Frank stood there for a moment, considering
it. So there it was. Dave Partridge. Son of a lumberman chewing up the wilderness. And
glancing back over his shoulder, he took it all in again. The mill and outbuildings, the
rotting wood still piled where it had been left years before. Now nothing but dust and
forgetfulness, and somehow still too toxic to be absorbed back into the bush, but sitting there like an scab on the wound the old man had cut into the face of the earth. He hadn't thought too much about those things—Nature and all the rest of it. He didn't know what nature was. something you took your kids to sometimes on your days off. But looking around the ruins here made him want to run and hide deep inside it, far away from the shit of man. This is what they did, people like Partridge. Cut and gouge what they could, chop and destroy. And when they'd done all that, up and go, leaving it like a bad dream for someone else to make sense of. Frank couldn't make sense of it, or didn't want to, he wanted to get away from it. But it was him, too, he knew. This is what he'd done, to himself and to the world, and if man was an animal, maybe it was what the world had finally done to itself in its despair.

Moving around the northern side, there were some French doors flung open onto the verandah, and stepping up he saw a dead wallaby rotting where something had dragged it in. The thing must have been there for awhile, because it didn't smell, or not much, and creeping forward, Frank stepped over it, gun at the ready as he strained, listening to the darkness. There's nothing deader than an abandoned house, nothing sadder. All that life, all that happiness, now gone and stilled forever. But Frank wondered if there'd been much happiness in this place, or it had only been crying and tears. Where had Tony's mother been, he wondered? Maybe cringing and whimpering in some corner where her ghost still cowered, chained to her guilt. We're a savage breed. The wallpaper was peeling away in sheets where the rain flooded down through the gaping roof, and there were holes in the floor where the wood had rotted away and the snakes slithered through in the summer heat. The natural sound of the open air had faded away, and all that was left now was the creepy silence of the decaying building. Still except for the sound of his footsteps and the scrape of his shoes on the dusty floor. It didn't look like anyone had been here in years, not even kids, and the truth was it was quite a way away from anywhere. Even the old bridge over the creek had looked like it was falling down. But that didn't explain the oval photo hanging from the picture rail in the hallway, or the broken furniture still lying there, like whoever had last been there had walked out the door and never looked back.

Reaching out, he took hold of a door handle and gave it a shove. But surprisingly, the door swung easily open. Holding the torch up, he shone it in, and from the faded wallpaper could see it was a kid's room. Gently pushing in, he flashed the beam of light across the wall. There was something. Something on the floor—A body—An animal, was it? No, not a body, rags, a nest of rags and blankets collected together right in the corner. And food. Crackers or something. Milk. He could feel him, his presence, his smell. He flashed the torch around, trying to probe every corner—Behind the door. Tony had been there, Frank knew. This is where he'd been staying. There was a rucksack in the corner.

Anxiously checking to make sure he wasn't there now, Frank rushed to the bag, but there was nothing in it; clothes, that's all. A comb and razor. He didn't want to disturb things too much, not yet. Maybe later, that might be a plan. Let him know Frank was onto him, unsettle him. But not yet. Right now he wanted to find out what the prick wanted.
Why was he doing this to him? Kneeling down he searched through the pile of rags, looking for whatever he could find. Tony had been sleeping in when all of a sudden Frank realised, and looking around saw that this had been Tony's room when he was a kid; that this had been his bed, a pile of rags in the corner, like he was a dog. That's the way he'd been kept. Raising the torch, he saw a hook on the wall, and a chain. He'd been kept like a dog. No wonder the poor prick had pushed his father into the saw; no wonder he'd been waging a war on the human race ever since. There was porn mixed up in it all—the sort you don't want to look at too closely—food scraps, degradation. The kind of thing that'd make you weep in other circumstances, but Frank wasn't here to weep, he was here for answers, and right then he found some. An old tattered folder that looked like it had been thumbed through a lot. And flicking it open his life came flooding back in the yellowing headlines spilling one after another recording the disaster of his existence. *Wolf Killer Given Life—Madman to be Jailed Forever* read one, while another cried, *Frenzied animal dismembered victim.* It was horrible to be confronted in that way by what he'd done. *Mad Killer Ate Head,* screamed another tabloid and Frank felt like he was being bashed as first one then another newspaper story recounted the horrors, both real and imagined, he'd perpetrated. It was like sitting there in the court all over again, every single detail as ghastly as it had been when they were being recounted all those years ago; and even though he'd pleaded guilty, even though he'd dismissed his own legal team and stood in the court and cried *punish me*—Even though he hadn't resisted one moment of justice, but had called its judgment down on his head, the terrible, crushing horror of it all dropped on him once more as if he'd only now woken to what he'd done. Guilty. He was guilty and never could be anything else. And Tony had pored over it, underlining the most lurid details, frenziedly enjoying it, annotating it, cross-referencing and even drawing up a timeline on which he'd noted every single act revealed in the autopsy. Tony loved it, and Frank now understood. Frank was the key that had unlocked something terrible inside Tony's mind, and he wouldn't be free till that mind was blown apart. Frank had to kill Tony. And by the look of things, he'd be doing the poor prick a favour.

And that's when it happened. Right then. A photo fell out from the last page. Christina. But not the Christina he knew now. This was a younger Christina. A girlish Christina, so pretty, and so innocent, that Frank sensed what had happened to turn her into the girl she was now, and horrified, he rushed for the door.
It's her! I heard her car!" a frail Mrs. Laughton cried as she hurried down the hall toward the front door. She'd been worried sick for hours. It was so unlike Christina to not tell them where she was. But throwing the door open, she reeled back in shock as the armed man burst in crying, "Where is she? Is Christina here?"

It was an ordinary house, a worker's cottage, all wood and doilies. Decorated tea cups celebrating the Centenary sat in a glass cabinet and a cosy fire was crackling in the grate.

"Who are you?" the woman whimpered, seeing the gun in his hands, when a man's gruff voice called from down the back, "Who is it, Annie? What's going on?"

Frank should have sensed she wasn't there but didn't know what else to do as he surged down the hallway hoping he was mistaken.

"Which one's her room?" he demanded, more a policeman than a home invader. But his eyes were wild, not a policeman's. There was a closed door off the hall, and throwing it open, he peered in to a girls room, all pink and lacey. "Did she come home tonight?" he demanded.

Making little moves back and forth like a frightened magpie pecking at an intruder, Mrs. Laughton cried, "Stop! Who are you?"

But it didn't make any difference, because Frank's mind was racing already to the disaster engulfing them all. They didn't know; these people didn't know, that everything they thought was true was about to disappear into horror. And that's when he saw the rusting forester's saw hanging from the door-arch.

"What's that?" he snapped. He knew what it was, but needed to know for sure.

"What's going on?" Mrs. Laughton screeched, looking unseeing at it, "Who are you?"

"Who is it, Annie?" the man's voice bellowed down the hallway.

"Call the police, Joe!" the woman shot back, pale and frightened. But Frank wasn't frightened, he was possessed.

"Where is she? I said!" he threatened, surging toward her, "Tell me!"

"He's got a gun, Joe!" the woman squealed, jumping back. But swinging toward the sun room at the end of the hall, Frank swept forward, demanding, "Where is she, I said!"

And bursting through the doorway he saw a man lying on a hospital cot struggling to get a gun out of the bedside cupboard. Slamming the drawer shut on his hand, Frank took aim, crying "Leave it, grandpa! Where is she?!!"
Howling in pain as he jerked his hand out, Mr. Laughton shot him a furious look. "Who the hell are you?" he spat, "What have you done with our daughter?"

And startled, Frank took him in; a man of perhaps fifty or sixty, lying in his pyjamas, and with both his legs amputated.

"Your daughter?" he answered, bewildered, "You're her father...?"

"Damn right I'm her father!" the man shot back, "Who the hell are you?" And looking around at the lumber-jack's memorabilia, the penny dropped. "You're a timber worker," Frank said, "You worked for Partridge."

The name went off like a gun-shot, and the woman flew at him. "What's it got to do with Partridge?" she cried, "Where's Christina?"

"It's got nothing to do with him," the old man snapped, "They're all dead and good riddance."

And that's when Frank knew, and grabbing him by his top, he pulled him up. "You knew! You knew what they were doing!"

"What were they doing?!" Mrs. Laughton wept, "Tell me; somebody tell me!"

Shoving him back onto the bed as he let him go, Frank turned to leave. "You're scum," he cried, "That's what she said! You all knew!"

"Knew what? What did we know?" the other man snapped back.

"Will somebody please tell me what's going on?" Mrs. Laughton implored, bursting into tears.

"He's got her, hasn't he?" Frank said, swinging back at the old man, "Partridge has got her!"

"Partridge is dead!" Laughton shot back.

"He's not," Frank roared, "He's alive!" and turning back toward the hall, he moved off as Mrs. Laughton threw herself at her husband, crying "What did he do to her, Joe?! What?!?!!"

But Frank wasn't waiting around for Laughton's answer. He knew what he had to do to save her and he wasn't waiting for everyone else to figure it out.

A cold wind was blowing up from the valley and through the town, keeping everyone indoors, and over at the Orpheum dead leaves clattered across the forecourt and into the building through the glass door smashing dangerously on its hinges as the clouds whipped overhead.

Further down the hill, a television could be seen flickering inside a house when a woman called out into the yard. "Close the door, Rob. It's too cold." But Rob was looking
at the sky and feeling the strangeness of the night. There was a thrill in the air, like the first hint of ice, and he shivered as he wondered about all that had happened and what it meant. The sound of a tin can rattling down the back alley made him look into the darkness and then turn back toward the house, but taking hold of the door, he was startled when something grabbed his wrist from behind. Looking, he saw Frank. "I didn't do it, Rob..." he said. Rob was frozen, mesmerised. It was him, the killer. His friend. "Help me," Frank said. And Rob knew he would.
Sixteen.

Sergeant Grant stood in the makeshift Operations Room they'd set up next to the kitchen, and addressed the assembled men. "Frank Cave is a convicted killer," he began, "with a history of mental illness. He's wanted in connection with the murder of four people, with another one missing, and we have reason to believe he may have taken a young woman, Christina Laughton, hostage."

"Jesus Christ," one of them groaned, shaking his head in disbelief.

Glancing at the man, Grant continued, "Now I don't care what you've heard or what you've seen, here or in the cinema, this isn't an animal we're talking about, it's a human being, a man—"

"Is it true he poked that poor prick's eyes out and ate his tongue," one of them asked.

"No it's not," Grant answered brusquely, "Not to my knowledge, anyhow."

"And now he's got Christina Laughton," another said. Grant could see they were working themselves up.

"So I don't want to see the use of anything more than minimum necessary force," he said, "you got me?"

The men weren't impressed.

"Any questions?" he asked.

"Yeah, Cap," one of the men, Stan asked, "How come they let this guy loose in the first place?"

"How come they let any of us loose?" Grant asked, collecting his papers.

"You were right, Cap," Ted Jincks said, holding up a fax as the men filed out to collect their weapons, "Dave Partridge was the guy that bought that car."

He'd asked Jincks to follow it up, and taking the fax from Motor Registry, he read it as he asked, "So the physical description was right?"

"Right down to the rhinestone ring," Jincks answered. It was good, acting like a real policeman, following leads and stuff. Jincks felt good.

"Run through this one more time with me, will you, Ted," Grant said, "Epstein and Partridge were both killed with the same weapon, weren't they..."

"Uh-hu..." Jincks agreed.

"...and that was the one Cave used to shoot my tyres out at the church."

"According to ballistics," Jincks said.
"We saw Cave running from Greg Wintle's the morning of his murder, didn't we," Grant continued, "We saw him running and take off in Wintle's tow truck."

"Sure did, Cap," Jincks answered, "I was there with you."

"And Christina Laughton's parents gave a positive ID on him turning up in their house, waving a gun and threatening them."

"No question, Cap," Jincks replied, "It was him alright."

"Then how come my guts are telling me the guy's innocent?" Grant sighed, and it was like something deflating inside him. Jincks wasn't sure what to say.

"It doesn't matter what your guts are telling you, Cap," he said. "He's got a case to answer no matter what way you look at it and we can let the jury try to figure out what's going on."

"You're right," Grant answered, pulling himself together. "File this stuff away," he added, handing the fax back to the younger man, "We don't need it now."

"Why do you reckon he came back, Cap?" Jincks asked as he saw Grant reaching for his rifle.

"Who? Cave?" Grant answered absent-mindedly as he loaded the magazine.

"Partridge," Jincks answered, "Why do you reckon he came back after all this time?"

"Maybe he figured his time was up," Grant replied, "Even a dog'll go back to where it was born when it feels things closing in."

"Well that sure was a mistake," Jincks answered, turning away.

"It sure was," Grant said, looking up. But Jincks was already on his way out the door, and Grant felt very alone. They were all gone, all off now on their private journeys, and that was probably the truth of life: we think we're part of the same big family, rubbing shoulders with our brothers and sisters, but we're not; we're alone from the moment we're born to the moment we die, and everything else is a hope to keep us going.

Grant didn't know why that thought had popped into his head, but there it was. He was going to kill a man, he knew, because Frank wasn't coming back on his own. He'd gone about as far away as a man can go without falling off, and now he had. He wasn't a criminal, he was an outlaw; an outlaw who'd turned his back on the rest of us and was going somewhere no human has the right to go. And it was up to Grant to bring him back. Because creatures like that are dangerous, and it was his job to stop them.
Seventeen

Frank's breath clouded in the night air. "So that's where he was when you saw him?" he said, "Down in the store-room?" They were standing in an alley down by the foundry.

"That's where he was," Rob said, his nose wrinkling at the smell, "He walked straight past me like I wasn't there." Frank knew that for Tony, Rob wasn't. He was a ghost, and maybe not even that.

"Thanks, Rob," he said, hoping he was making the right decision, "keep them busy for as long as you can," and with that he started to sprint back toward the Orpheum.

Watching, Rob barked after him, "Good luck, Frank," before turning to the garbage bin half hidden in the shadows. He knew it was dangerous, what he was doing, but it sure beat sitting at home watching cop shows with his Mum. Lighting a string of tom thumbs he threw them into the bin and slammed the lid down on top. He knew it'd take anyone from up there awhile to figure out where the sound was coming from, so he wasn't in a hurry, and looking up into the sky, he wondered what it would be like to be shot. Would it hurt, he mused, or would it be like it was in the movies. It never occurred to him he might be shot himself. But it should have.

Ducking and weaving through the shadows of the town, Frank made his way up the hill toward the cinema. Tony was there for him, and he didn't plan to disappoint, and as his footsteps echoed off the brick walls, he could hear himself breathe, and feel the muscles in his arms and legs flex and harden. There was a good chance he was going to kill again tonight, and that thought sort of slipped into place, like he was entering a parallel universe where such things were unremarkable. But there was one thing he knew for sure. If she was still alive, he was going to save her, no matter what he had to do. And he was sure she was still alive because finally she was the reason he'd stayed, and Tony wasn't going to lose that leverage. Not until he'd done whatever he wanted to do to Frank.

When the first reports of gunfire down the foundry came in, Ted Jincks got straight on the blower to tell everybody to get down there, pronto. It was a country town, so guns going off wasn't an unusual thing, but not tonight, not in these circumstances. Sergeant Grant was on edge as well, which is why he dismissed his instinct that it wasn't Frank at all, because Frank was smarter than that. But if he had listened to that voice, he would have understood that while Frank was out there somewhere, and was definitely up to something, it wouldn't be breaking in to an old abandoned foundry on the other side of town. Still, it was better than waiting around to see what was going to happen, and he was in his car and on his way to have a look as fast as everyone else.

It was strange, padding through the night toward the movie house. Frank had never felt part of the town anyhow. Not . To be part of something you have to take an interest, get involved, make friends and ask them about their lives; but had never wanted to get involved and didn't give a toss about any of them. He didn't want to answer their questions, or allay their fears, or prove anything to anyone—What did he have to prove? He didn't
care about them. The most important things in his life were dead and the only reason he wasn't was because he didn't have the guts to do it. He didn't want to be part of this community, or any other. They had the right to be afraid of him, should have been afraid, if they wanted to know the truth, and it would have made sense for him to say they should be afraid of one another, and themselves as well. You never knew what someone might do till they do it, and that's the truth he’d learnt in jail. A father sits down with his family for their evening meal, and kills the lot of them because the sauce bottle is empty. When they finally get him down the police station and ask him why, he shrugs and says, *I dunno.* That's what we are, and it's what we've always been. There's a darkness inside that everyone knows but we all try to hide, and we're right to; only Frank couldn't anymore, someone had taken that right away from him, and gliding past the lonely houses, dark on either side of him, he no longer felt alone. What he felt was free, and the people locked up safe and sound inside trying to pretend they were good upstanding citizens were the ones in trouble, because they lived with their fear every moment, but Frank had faced his and would never be afraid again. He'd done the worst things possible, and he was free. He didn't have any further to fall.

When the first police car arrived at the foundry, it was Stan and his partner, and they didn't believe in minimum necessary force, like the Sergeant had said, not for this dirty fucker. They were going to blow Frank away if they got the chance, and they were rearing to go. Rob had heard the siren and didn't need to be told it was time to go, but he'd left enough surprises behind to keep them happy and knew the spot to watch the show, a safe distance away, leaning on a fence in the shadows of the hardware. When the shooting started, Graham Gilmore stepped into his doorway pulling his dressing gown around him. *What's going on?* he asked, noticing the boy.

*"Looks like they got him,״* Rob answered.

*"Who?"* Graham snorted, *"The cops? That'd be the day."* He was right. There was only one cop Frank needed to be wary of, and that was Sergeant Grant. But Rob guessed Frank would be a handful even for him.

Frank wasn't thinking about that right now, or anything else, . He was clear, clearer maybe than he'd even been. The houses of Kanangara slid past him like phantoms at the bottom of the sea, blue and ethereal in the dim, willowy light. Inside he could imagine dreamers floating in their own worlds, no longer troubled by the cares outside, but alone at last with their private fears and thoughts. Which was real, he wondered, that inner world of secret desire or the world of masks we bump through in our waking life. What would it be like if we could see each others' dreams? Or is the truth that we do live our dreams, and we fool ourselves into thinking waking life is something else? Which was more real? Frank slowly jogging through the night to kill a man, or be killed, or Frank sitting in a projectionist box watching endless re-runs of half-remembered movies. This place, here now, where Frank was passing like a shadow, invisible to everyone except the other night animals on the prowl; or the world of light where everything stays hidden, where young
girls slip into the hands of monsters while their parents watch? Frank had thought he'd known; had lived inside his own dream; had gone to work and paid his bills, had dandled his baby and watched her grow; had found everything everyone in this town had found, in happiness and love. Not knowing how little it depended on him at all; him or his wife or the other ordinary people around him; not realising how much was luck, or even casual indifference; how fragile the most important things in his life were. Until they fell apart.

But that wasn't THE truth; for years he'd thought about that, how he'd found THE truth, and how deluded everyone else was. He'd slept in his anger, nursing somewhere a desire to kill them all for what they'd done to him, or let done. But no, that wasn't THE truth. THE truth was that he and his pain were as meaningless as melting snow, and the thought that his suffering absolved him of guilt was a fantasy that kept him trapped because he was as guilty as anyone. He remembered the moment that thought came to him, alone in his cell; he remembered the stillness of the dust and the icy tinkling of the frozen air as he thought about his guilt; not the guilt of murder—of course he was guilty of that, and had never denied it—but guilty of living, and he remembered seeing himself there, falling in the darkness of his cell in the pit of time, and it was like he'd died, or something raging inside him had died, and he surrendered. Surrendered and then walked free, walked through the walls of that prison, and got on a train and left, eventually finding himself here, making his way through this dead night; making his way to find the only other man he'd ever met who knew what emptiness was. To kill him, or be killed himself and still it all forever.

Stan could see him at the end of the laneway, crouching behind a skip as bullets flew all around them, but he wasn't wasting breath calling on him to put his weapon down. Stan was shooting straight back at the fucker for what he did and what he was. "Go around the other way," he yelled at Bob between shots. By now two other patrol cars had arrived, and police were running everywhere looking to be the first to bring Frank down. It seemed too easy, with the fugitive holed up behind a wheely bin, and coppers blocking his escape at both ends. But that didn't stop him shooting, mad and desperate as he was; and every time someone stuck their head around the corner to let off another clip, he'd rat-a-tat-tat with whatever it was he had. "Some sort of machine pistol, by the sound of it," Lieutenant Change, who'd spent a lot of time on YouTube and was a bit of an expert on such matters, explained to his partner. Still, they couldn't get a proper bead on him, owing to the low light. "Get some floods in here!" someone called through the clouds of smoke and dust. Another burst of gunfire shut him up before he called out again, "Was that you, Harvey?" he called, and a voice from the other end answered, "Sorry..." It was a chaotic scene for sure, but there was no question they had him pinned down, fighting for his life. "Come out with your hands up," someone ordered. "Fuck that," another voice cried, before emptying another magazine into the bin. "Mind where you're shooting!" someone shouted back. "Mind where you're standing," another voice replied. "Are you sure there's anyone there?" Gregson asked, peering into the gloom. "Of course there is," Stan answered angrily, "You don't think we'd let him get away, do you?"
Running up the steps to the forecourt of the Orpheum, Frank saw the glass door smashed open and the police tape pulled roughly aside. The doorway gaped open into the black pit of the dead interior. Pausing to unclip the safety on his gun, Frank looked up as the clouds parted enough to reveal the moon lurching across the tumult. The air smelt of smoke and dread. He was here. In the only place left for him to be.

Plunging forward into the blackness, Frank stood momentarily to let his eyes adjust. All around him, the silence creaked as the great, hulking building groaned in its loneliness like a dead ship lurching on a lost sea. Something drawing his attention to the statue, Frank saw Orpheus with his broken harp caught in a shaft of light. He’d loved someone enough to go to Hell to bring her back, but returning empty handed he’d met his fate and been torn to pieces himself. Was that this world? The only promise it had? If it was, Frank was ready, but as he passed the alcove, he noticed Epstein's lighter fluid tucked away behind the base. Pocketing it, he moved on, no longer fearful, but with every muscle of his body on fire.

Back in the alley, the cops were having more fun than they'd had for awhile, but as Grant and Hicks pulled up, they could see things were well and truly out of hand. Townsfolk had started to gather, drawn by the shooting, which sounded a lot like fireworks. Striding across, Grant pulled Stan back out of the way, demanding "What's going on?"

"We've got him, Cap," Stan answered guiltily, "Just listen to him." It didn't sound much like gunfire to Grant.

"Where?" Grant demanded.

"Down there," Stan answered, pointing down the lane as another burst of gunfire made everyone duck.

"Has anyone seen him?" Grant insisted.

"Sure," Stan answered nervously, "But it is dark." Looking toward the alley, Grant moved forward, roaring, "Ceasefire! Everyone ceasefire!"

"Who's that?" someone called from the other end, letting off a shot for good measure.

"It's me!" Grant snapped back, "And if anyone doesn't know who that is, shoot him."

Moving silently along the narrowing corridors, Frank felt his strength growing; he knew where he was going and what he was doing. Tony was here, or would soon be because somehow this was Kanangara, and Frank now saw that Kanangara was at the centre of everything. Tony wanted his revenge on a town whose fearful indifference he must have chewed on like a dog through those long, fearful nights chained to his bedroom wall. And as Frank thought about that, he remembered the man he killed, and the one
question Frank hadn't been able to answer through all that time: what was he more frightened of even than his own death, and now he had the answer, Tony. That was the connection, that was what Epstein had meant. Tony was the minotaur hidden in the riddle of this place, and Frank could see as well that him coming here hadn't been an accident at all, but that something had drawn him, some force inside himself that was now guiding him through the shadows of this world, and whether or not any of that made sense, he now knew it was true because all the pieces were fitting together except that one last piece: what was he going to do when he had him ground to the floor? What was he going to do when he could taste Tony's blood in his mouth, because he hated the same things Tony hated, because he could now see he was Tony, and Grant was right: there was only one killer in this town, and it was him, Frank. Only one murder was enough for any man and he wasn't here to do it all over again.

"Where is he?" Grant demanded. The shooting had stopped, but the lane was still heavy with anger and smoke.

"There!" Stan pointed, desperately aware of the silence now roaring from the laneway.

"What? This?" Grant scoffed, striding down the alley to snatch up an old shirt that had fallen out of a charity bin.

"He was there," Stan shot back. A rattle of explosions in a barrel made everyone duck for cover, but peering in, Grant saw the remnants of a string of penny-farthings.

"This?" he repeated incredulously, picking up the last couple of fizzers.

"He was there," Stan maintained.

"Well he's not there now," Grant answered, scouring the surroundings, "But he's close."

The men looked nervously around, wondering if Frank had them lined up in his sights right now.

"Get out there and find him," Grant ordered, "And try not shoot one another."

Though why that might have been a consideration escaped most of them as they slumped heavily toward their cars.

"Where to, Cap?" Jincks asked as Grant got in.

"I guess he was trying to create a diversion as far away from where he was going as he could, so where would that be?"

"The Orpheum?" Jincks guessed.

"Got it in one," Grant answered, "Let's go."
But Frank wasn't worrying about that yet, and stepping up to the landing overlooking Epstein's office, he could hear something strange...the click-click-click of a projector coming from the store room. Not the thirty five mm projectors upstairs, something smaller, a home projector. Click-click-clicking through the dark. And something flickering through the gap under the doorway. It was all over now, Frank knew; and there was no turning back. And taking hold of the handle, he gave it a shove and burst his way in.

Grant and Jincks had separated when they came within sight of the Orpheum. Grant wanted to check the surrounding streets first, so there weren't any surprises, and had sent Jincks off in the opposite direction to look down the back laneway while he made sure the side entrances were blocked off. He'd radioed Stan and the others to poke around the mall, hoping that'd keep them out of trouble, but still regretting issuing them with live ammunition at all. But Frank was a dangerous man, innocent or not; and they all had the right to protect themselves. Still, he hoped he'd be the one to confront him, if for no other reason than that he was sure young Christina was still alive and he wanted to get her safely back. It was a weird thing, to be repeating the circumstances of the crime Frank had been convicted of, and he wondered how Frank had organised it to be like that. Is that what he'd wanted? To keep repeating it, like someone who can't let go? There was a word for that, Grant felt sure, but he couldn't think of it. And right now wasn't the time to be trying to figure it out as he checked his weapon to make sure it was loaded.

A few hundred metres away, Jincks noticed something moving under an old tarp hanging over a half open garage door. Taking out his gun, he ordered, "Come out with your hands up." Whoever it was didn't move. "Come out, I said," Jincks said again, stepping forward to shove the tarp aside, but seeing who it was, he relaxed a little, "What are you doing there?" he asked. They were the last words he said as a shot rang through the darkness striking him in the chest and blowing his heart to pieces. Grant heard the blast, and knew it wasn't a police pistol; and when he didn't hear anything else, he knew the worst day of his life was about to begin.

At first as he stepped into the glare, Frank didn't know what was going on. Trying to shield his eyes, he swung away, and then saw it was a grainy black and white film of a little girl swinging on a swing. His girl. His daughter. Was that possible? Had he gone mad? It was his girl, a film of his daughter, swinging on a swing. "The dogs of passion, Frank..." a man's voice snarled through the dark, and swinging around, Frank saw him standing, swaying in the black. "They'll hound you till the day you die."

Frank was on top of him before he could say anything else, with the gun jammed hard into his side.

"Where is she?" he thundered, his finger itching to blow the prick's kidneys out.

"Hey, easy go," Tony winced, pulling away, "A thirty eight packs quite a punch, even if you are wearing a bullet-proof vest—You broke a couple of ribs..."
Frank swung him around and threw him hard against the wall before yanking him back again, he knocked his feet from under him and dropped him to the floor, dropping his knee on his back as he splayed Tony's fingers out on the concrete floor.

"Start talking," he said, "or I'm going to start blowing your fingers off."

"Hey, come on," Tony answered cockily, "you haven't even complimented me on my shooting yet. You don't think you got a new hairstyle down at Greg Wintle's because I got the shakes, do you?" Yanking his head back by the hair, Frank pulled the trigger and shot off Tony's ring finger.

"Fuck you..." he snarled in his ear.

Screaming in pain, Tony recoiled back. "Fuck!" he cried. But Frank wasn't letting go.

"Where is she!" he spat.

"You blew my fucking finger off!" Tony howled.

"You've got nine to go, dead-shit!" Frank threatened, pushing down on him, "Where is she?!"

Grant was kneeling in the gutter a block away, looking down on Jincks' body as cops ran up and the sound of the distant shot rang from the Orpheum.

"The movie house—They're up there," he said, his head jerking in the direction as he wrenched himself away from the devastating sight of the young policeman pale and dead on the icy asphalt. Nobody but Grant had ever seen anything like this, and they milled around in the ghostly light uncertain what to do. "Somebody stay here with Ted," he ordered, reaching for his rifle, "The rest of you follow me." Still hurting from the dressing down he got back at the alley, Stan looked up to ask, "That include me, Cap?"

"Most especially you," Grant answered, and though he'd never mention those words again, he'd remember them till the day he died, because that was the moment he knew he was going to kill Frank.

Down in the store-room, blood was spurting from the blackened stub of Tony's hand. "You shot me, you cock!! You fucking shot me!!" But Frank wasn't wasting any more words on the prick.

"It hasn't even started you, fucking shit," he snapped, glancing around, "What is this place? Is this where you bring 'em? Is this where you brought my kid?!" He stood, kicking the projector over in fury. "You shit! You fucking shit!" he roared, cocking his gun, "I'm going to kill you!"

"Well you can kiss Christina goodbye, Grandpa," Tony answered, "Cause she ain't gettin' out of this alive unless I do."
"Where is she?" Frank roared, shoving Tony's head back down on the floor and taking aim at his bleeding hand. But Tony knew he had him.

"Now if you're not careful, Frank," he breathed, "you're going to miss out on a very interesting proposition I was going to put to you." The two of them were one living flesh, sweating and grunting like an animal eating itself.

"I'm not interested in any proposition from you," Frank growled, "Tell me where she is or you'll only be able to count up to eight."

But Tony hadn't given up. "You should be interested in this one, Frank, because it's got a lot to do with you." He had that insinuating tone in his voice that set your teeth on edge.

"Why?" Frank asked, weakening. He shouldn't even have been talking to him like that; Frank was the one in charge, not Tony.

"Because it's the one that's going to keep you alive," Tony answered. Frank didn't want to listen, but he kept right on. "They're going to kill you," Tony said, "They're going to kill you because that's what they do to people like you and me."

But Frank wasn't having any of it. "You're not going to have to worry about that after I get through with you," he replied. He wasn't afraid of dying. Not anymore.

"People like you and me, Frank, we're a different breed." It was like they were brothers. Tony was treating him like an equal.

"I know your breed," Frank growled back, "Now start talking."

"We're a different breed, Frank," Tony repeated. He was getting inside him, getting his hooks into him again, "We're free," he said, "We're gods."

Grant led the men up to the Orpheum, but there weren't enough, even with the reinforcements he'd called in, to search the place safely, so he picked a couple he trusted and put the rest on the doors to wait for whoever was left to come out. But he let it be known in no uncertain terms that he'd be the one to make the arrest. It was a mistake, but Jincks' murder had rattled him and he wasn't thinking straight. None of them were. They were there for blood, and every one of them knew it.

And Tony knew it, too. "look at us, here, now," he continued, "in a little place in the middle of the mountains. A little place with a postcard pretty main street and a bunch of jolly old boys doing what they like because everybody's too polite to say boo. That's the world, Frank, and all the rest of it is bullshit and anyone who knows that is king." That's what Frank had thought, too, in the darkness of his cell.

"Shut up, you sick fuck," he spat back. But part of him was listening. The saddest part. The part that hurt the most.
"Come with me now," Tony cooed, "I've got the car downstairs. All we have to do is get in and drive away. Get in and drive away, Frank, and together we can rip this world apart."

"You 'n me?" Frank echoed, "Is that what you want?" He was playing with him now, because he didn't believe a word of it, "Do you love me?" That was the bitterest thing he'd ever said in his life, because he knew nobody loved him, or could love him once they knew what he'd done.

"Yes, I love you," Tony answered, "Ever since that day you carved up poor old Henry. Man, you had fun with him, didn't you."

"Like I'm gonna have with you," Frank answered, "Where is she, my daughter; what did you do with her?" It was the question he'd wanted answered for twenty years. "She's dead, Frank, and you know it," Tony said. Frank didn't know what he was doing anymore. Grabbing him roughly, he lifted Tony to his feet and shoved him against the wall. "Stand up, you fuck," he grunted, wiping spittle from his mouth. He was beyond mad now, he was a gaping wound of pain, "You're going to die." He hadn't decided yet how he was going to do it, but it was going to hurt.

"You're the one that's going to die, Frank," Tony answered indifferently. Maybe he didn't care, either.

"Shutup," Frank spat back, not even looking at him, "I'm sick of listening to you!"

Tony could see he was losing him, could see the animal taking over. "All I needed was a body," Tony answered, "and I offered you the world."

"Just tell me one thing," Frank said, looking up as he raised the gun to Tony's groin, "Why did you do this to me?"

"Why not?" Tony answered, wrapping his handkerchief around his bloody hand, "You were as good as anyone."

Frank was now standing at the absolute edge of the world. Before him was a blank nothing and behind him a life he could no longer remember. His body had been reduced to a paper thin shell that even now, at this very moment, was breaking into a thousand slivers being blown into the immensity of the hard, dead space surrounding him. Time no longer existed, and there was nothing there, except hurt. He was dead, and somehow still breathing.

"Frank..." she said, "I'm here."

It was a small voice, from another universe, and looking, he saw her. Standing a few feet away. With a gun pointed straight at him.

"Put the gun down, Frank," she said. "Christina..." he answered, unable to take his eyes off her. "Put the gun down, Frank..." she repeated.
Taking a step forward and slipping it out of Frank's hand, Tony moved past, snarling, "Where were you, you bitch? I thought I was going to get a manicure I could do without."

"There was a policeman—I shot a policeman..." Christina answered faintly, her gaze drilling into Frank. She knew what she was doing. She knew Tony was going to kill him now.

"Oh, I don't think that's a very good idea, do you, Frank?" Tony said, turning back to shoot him through the leg. Frank didn't even hear himself cry out as he buckled to the floor.

"Frank!" Christina shrieked, surging toward him.

"Ain't love grand," Tony sneered, taking a step away, "Give me the gun, sweetheart."

"You stay away from him," she cried, circling away and pointing the gun at Tony. Frank's mind was racing. Blood was spurting through the hole in his trousers, and he grabbed it to try to stem the flow as Christina threw him her scarf to tie around it.

"Ooh, gee, that's serious," Tony jeered, "She's pointing the gun at me, Frank—Do you think she's going to shoot?"

"Shoot him, Christina; he's going to kill us both," Frank said, wincing as he tried to staunch the flow.

"He's right, you know." Tony soothed, "Better do what he says, darlin." He was prowling around the room the way he had been on the roof that night, only Frank wasn't sure he was on drugs this time. This time he figured it was the way he was, and had always been. This is how he liked things; this is how he lived.

"Stop making fun of me!" Christina cried, "Stop making fun!"

"Kill him," Frank pleaded.

Tony pointed the gun straight at Frank's head, warning "Now, now..."

Christina shrieked in fear. "Don't!" she cried, keeping her gun trained on Tony as he moved about.

"Frank...she loves you..." Tony taunted.

"Shoot him, Christina..."

It was unbearable. "She can't shoot me, Frank," Tony said, "and you want to know why?" Christina was crying hard now, distraught.

"I know why," Frank answered.
"Oh, you do, do you?" Tony sneered.

"Don't, Tony, please," Christina answered.

"I know what he did to you, Christina," Frank replied.

"He said he'd kill my parents, he said he'd tell."

"I know what he did to you."

"Oh, I did everything to her, didn't I sweetheart. In fact if you hang around, I might even show you."

"I'll kill you, I will!" Christina cried, her aim wavering.

"No, you won't," Tony answered, taking the gun from her, "and you know why? Because you belong to me. Tell him. Tell the bad man who you belong to, baby..."

"No..." she wept. Christina was broken now, hurt and alone, unable to look at anyone; ashamed.

"You belong to me now," Tony continued, "Because I know ever filthy thing about you, and you love it, don't you..."

"No..."

"Love the dirt and the pain and the grind, just like Frank here does. Look at her, Frank," he gloated, "Ain't she a work. Do you want her now? Go on, fuck her. Put on a show for me."

"I know what he did to you," Frank said, "And I love you."

"That's what you all say, you bastards!" she screamed back in fury, "You're all the fucking same!"

And that's when Frank understood, and hope inside him died.

"This is all so cuddly sweet I can barely bring it to an end, but all good things, etc. etc," and throwing something at Frank, Tony ordered, "Put this on." It was a kid's wolf mask, like from Halloween.

"No! Stop!" she cried, swinging the gun on him.

"Kill him!" Frank cried, sensing time was running out, "Kill him before he kills us!"

"You don't get it at all, do you, Frank—This is just foreplay."

"Let me go!" she begged, "Just let me go!"

"Sure," Tony said, turning the gun on her.

"Kill him, Christina!" Frank shouted.
"No!" she cried, realising.

"Hey!" Frank called, and startled, Tony swung back just in time to see Frank douse him with Epstein's lighter fluid. His body knew what was happening before he did, and putting his hands up to protect his face, he was fast enough to see himself burst into flames as Frank bellowed "Get down," to Christina, but too late, as Tony shot, tearing her chest apart with a bullet that went straight through. Slamming into the wall, Christina hardly knew what was happening to her. Tony was screaming in terror as he thrashed about, trying to put out the flames, but he could burn for all Frank cared because he still had the gun and was shooting wildly, so punching him hard, Frank knocked him to the floor.

Out on the street, they could hear the commotion, and people had begun to gather, asking one another what was going on, but nobody knew and the police weren't saying, so they stood there dumbly, some still in their night clothes, looking expectantly toward the Orpheum. A policeman had been shot, someone had heard, the projectionist had done it, that weird projectionist, the creepy one that used to hang around the kids' school, Jack Epstein had found out about him and tried to tell the police; that was why he'd set the fire. It was him, that loner, he'd only been in town a few months, nobody knew where he came from, just somewhere else. Wolf, they called him; he was a bad man. Wolf.

And all of a sudden, there he was, running from the gaping door, his face covered with a wolf mask, and the sight of him made them flinch back in fear. "Halt!" Grant called, but nothing was going to stop the figure; he kept running. "Halt!" Grant ordered again, and then they all saw the Stanley knife in his hand, and raising his rifle, Grant took aim and shot. It was over so fast, people hardly believed it had happened. A man cut down right before their eyes, falling into the snow without even a whimper. And coming up to him, they peered down in wonder. There he was, his hands and feet curled up like he was a baby, a dead leaf caught in his hair. Reaching down, Grant pulled the mask off, but when they saw who it was, people couldn't quite believe their eyes. "Dave Partridge..." they murmured, craning to have a look, "What's he doing here...?" Masking tape wrapped around his head and over his mouth—"Dave Partridge...I thought he was dead..." The Stanley knife taped to his hand..."Dave Partridge..." Looking back toward the Orpheum, Grant knew.

Down in the store room, Frank was kneeling over Christina. She was dying, her blood soaking her clothes. "I'm sorry, Frank," she whispered, "I didn't know what to do..."

"I'm sorry, baby; I'm so sorry," he said, rocking her in his arms. "My life is leaving me," she said, and was gone.

Nobody saw what happened after that. A few years later someone came across some things buried in a hole, a gun, a picture of a little girl in a school uniform, a ribbon. They turned them in to Sergeant Grant, and he looked at them for awhile and then went for a walk. They'd been left at the top of the track leading back down into the valley where
some of them still thought there was a wolf waiting for its mate. Nobody knew what happened to Frank, except maybe Vivien. She used to stand on the cliff, looking down, and you could see her standing there like that, sometimes for hours. But then the snow came, and even she got wiped away, and the tracks and the town slowly faded till nothing was left but the forgetfulness of time and the longing of the night.

The End.