In Dreams, a Novel and its Exegesis

In Dreams – Novel

The place of dreams in the novel and the cinematic work of David Lynch

– Exegesis

Andrew Leggett
Bachelor of Medicine and Bachelor of Surgery, University of Queensland
Master of Philosophy in Creative Writing, University of Queensland
Fellow of the Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatrists

School of Humanities
Arts, Law and Education Group
Griffith University

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SYNOPSIS

Dr Garrick Willis, the protagonist of my novel *In Dreams*, is a recently divorced neurologist who suffers premonitory dreams and intrusive violent fantasies. Willis loses his girlfriend Jade to a drug dealing pimp and comes to be wrongly accused of her murder, a crime that has plagued his waking fantasies and haunted his dreams. At the start of the novel, Garrick’s first patient for the afternoon is Nick Myshkin, with whom he has just shared a seat on the train from Meadowbrook to Princess Alexandra Hospital. Nick is a bass player in the grunge band Return of the Evil Youth for Christ, who deals amphetamines in Fortitude Valley nightclubs and pimps mysterious women on the streets. Garrick is not aware that his discomfort with Nick’s utterance of the name ‘Jade’, during complex partial seizures, is based in their common interest in the same woman, or that he and Nick were born to the same mother. Jade progressively unravels towards a violent end. Her attachment and investment moves from protagonist to antagonist, as her nursing colleague Rachel takes her place in Garrick’s heart.

Garrick struggles to contain the expression of his passionate and violent emotions in poetry, to translate his destructive impulses into clinical research and expressions of love. His poems, integrated into the text, serve as vehicles for twists in its structure. He fails to heed his premonitory dreams, and his vacillations cost him dearly. He does too little, and always arrives just too late.

While it is clear from the start that Jade is doomed, tension in this psychological thriller is maintained throughout as to who is the killer and who will be blamed. This tension is built into the mystery of Garrick and Nick’s brotherhood, paralleling that of the two Allans in Wilkie Collins’ *Armadale* (1864-1866; 2010a), and of Prince Myshkin and Parfyon Roghozin in Dostoyevsky’s *The Idiot* (1868-1869; 1982; 2001). The premonitory dream as narrative device in my novel follows a tradition originating with Collins that was developed in David Lynch’s and Mark Frost’s *Twin Peaks* (1990-1991) television work. The novel ends, refusing to deliver redemptive justice, leaving the reader much
more dissonantly affected, thrown into a Lynchian state of dis-ease and irresolute mourning (Leggett, 2009).

The novel’s exegesis addresses the question: ‘How is the writing of the novel *In Dreams* influenced by viewings of Lynch’s cinematic work and readings of Dostoyevsky’s *The Idiot*?’ Reading Dostoyevsky’s *The Idiot* (1868-1869) and viewing David Lynch’s cinema and television work informed the writing, in response to questions arising in fiction as it mirrors life, and those presented in Lynch’s work. Both the novel and the exegesis address questions of the nature and meaning of violence, disintegration and passionate investment. This creative writing exegesis informed by cinema develops as a practice-led work articulating inception of dis-ease into the human subject through trauma. The exegesis compares and contrasts the ways in which this inception of dis-ease works in the places of dreams in Lynch’s cinema and in the novel *In Dreams*, acknowledging the limitations and possibilities inherent in an ekphrastic process, moving from the sound-image and time image medium of cinema to the solely textually-dependent medium of the novel.

The three chapters of the exegesis are, in turn, an introduction to the place of dreams in my novel and in David Lynch’s cinematic work, including an autobiographical account of the process of development of the novel and my understanding of its historical antecedents and their appropriation; a detailed analysis of the development of Lynch’s place of dreams; and the questions such reflection raises regarding the possibilities and limitations of the ekphrastic writing a novel with a place of dreams that responds to Lynch’s; and finally, a chapter arguing the necessity for the violently disruptive nature of the place of dreams in Lynch’s cinema, and in my novel, concluding with reference to the impetus thus given to generate further narrative and further dreams, ending as dreams end, without resolution.
STATEMENT OF ORIGINALITY

This work has not previously been submitted for a degree or diploma in any university. To the best of my knowledge and belief, the thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the thesis itself.

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Andrew Leggett
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The following works published by the candidate prior to commencement of the candidature have been incorporated into or provided a basis for work included in the text of the novel:

- ‘A night in the toolroom’, the candidate’s short story, of which Chapter XXI of the novel (A Night in the Toolroom) is an expanded adaptation, first appeared in *Social Alternatives* in 1986.

The parody of a haiku attributed to the character Nick Myshkin in Chapter XIII won the candidate first prize in the Haiku Slam at the Brisbane Writer’s Fringe Festival in 1997.

The poem ‘Shadow’ first appeared in *Stylus Poetry Journal* in 2009, published by the candidate during the candidature.

Chapter IV of the exegesis, ‘Violence against civility and the destruction of fantasy in the novel: The waning of the Oedipus complex in *In Dreams* and David Lynch’s *Blue Velvet*, is an expanded application of a paper published by the candidate in the journal *Crossroads* during the candidature in 2009.

All of the above works authored by the candidate and cited above are fully referenced in the list at the end of this dissertation.

Conference papers developed in the context of the candidature, later contributing the text of the exegesis were presented by the candidate at the following conferences: *Mourning and Its Hospitalities, University of Queensland 2007; Rhizomes IV Power Violence and Language, University of Queensland 2008; Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatrists Section of Psychotherapy Conference 2010,*
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Novel

In Dreams
IN DREAMS

A novel – a psychological thriller

ANDREW LEGGETT

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A candy-colored clown they call the Sandman
Tiptoes to my room every night
Just to sprinkle stardust and to whisper,
‘Go to sleep, everything is all right.’

– Roy Orbison, In Dreams
I
SOMETHING FUNNY HAPPENED

The Pacific Highway can be a real bastard when you’re stuck between petrol tankers drag-racing. Garrick Willis parked his black BMW in the basement of the main building at the Princess Alexandra Hospital, walked to the Dutton Park Station, and took the train down to consult at Logan. This gave him time to catch up on *JAMA* and the *New England Journal of Medicine*. He could more easily have walked to the station from home, but then the Beemer would stand all day alone, missing the company of Mercs and Audis.

At lunch time, Garrick boarded the return train at Meadowbrook, taking the only vacant seat in the carriage, next to a tall skinny man in black jeans, a studded belt, white tee shirt and upturned-pointy-toed black boots. For Garrick, the man’s dark coiffé, gelled to a horn in front, just like the Leningrad Cowboys, functioned as a fascinator, as much as a girl’s little hat might, should her whim be to pin it on, getting dolled up for the races. This fellow’s earlobes were distended, with huge piercings rimmed with onyx rings. Stylised serpents ran down from his arm, through the bend of his right elbow, around its effeminate carrying angle and down the forearm, all the way to his slender wrist. Garrick noted the track marks and moved his butt a little to the right, away from the stranger.

As his neighbour chomped away on nicotine gum, Garrick sat stiff on the edge of the bench and stared at a spot about 5cm inside the back of the head of the plump Samoan woman occupying the seat in front of him. When she left the carriage at Kuraby station, Garrick reached down to open his brief case, hesitated, and then decided against it. As the train moved on, with the traffic on Beenleigh Road flashing past the window at the stranger’s left shoulder, strong as the urge might be, this was not the time to pull out the *New England Journal*. Not the thing to do up so close to someone, who if he reads at all, normally struggles past the cover of *International Tattoo* or *Prick Magazine*.

With rush of the train, the sunlight flickered through the gaps between the palings of the fences that separated the rail line from suburban wilderness. Garrick noticed his
travelling companion’s right arm spasm. A few sharp jerks followed, of that arm only, and nothing else. Then the stranger slumped a little into the seat, his teeth clacking together as his jaws chomped. The man came around with a start, looked down at the small patch of damp in the crotch of his jeans, glanced quickly to his right, muttering ‘Sorry, Jade, sorry!’ None of the other passengers seemed to notice, but to Garrick, the diagnosis was immediately evident.

It was not so much the complex partial seizure that troubled him, nor the stranger’s ejaculation, but the name spoken in his postictal daze, the utterance of that particular name. It brought on a chill under Garrick’s skin, crawling from one shoulder to the other. An unpleasant tingle ran down his spine, just like when his fifth grade teacher screeched a fresh piece of chalk across the blackboard. It was as though the speech was harbinger of some horrific event yet to be suffered by the one who bore the name, a name on the edge of which Garrick teetered, losing his balance on the verge of an amorous abyss.

As the train lurched to a halt at Dutton Park Station, Garrick grabbed his brief case and strode off towards the barriers. He was not usually so determined in making his way across the Translational Research Institute campus towards Building 15, at the hub of the hospital designed to seem as though the Starship Enterprise had warped its way through hyperspace to land thunking down beside Ipswich Road, splintering the grand old mango tree that once gave shade to doctors and nurses during flirtation breaks by the outdoor cafe. This time Garrick wanted to put as much fresh air as possible between him and the man with the serpents, the seizures, and the stiff black coiffe.

The hair on the back of Garrick’s shaggy neck was rising under his button-down collar, prompting him to look back over his shoulder. There, about twenty metres back, the coiffe was following him, now with a grey canvas knapsack slung across one shoulder and a cigarette smouldering out of the left corner of his mouth. The stranger did not return his gaze. He didn’t duck, nor did he wave. He showed no sign of pleasure or aversion. Garrick reached the tunnel beside the basement car park and kept on walking until he reached Building 15. He caught the lift and pushed the button to the second floor, exhilarated, but not relieved, when he looked through the gap before the lift doors closed.
Garrick saw the stranger stubbing out his butt and chucking it into the waste bin as he entered the building.

The lift opened at the second floor. Garrick nodded hello to Jilly at reception as he passed, dumping his briefcase beside the desk in Consulting Room 4. He registered disgust at the pile of bowls and cups in the hand basin. He never had the courage to say anything to Jilly about it. He found her intimidating. She was forty-five, with flaming hair like the matchbox girl, five feet ten enhanced by four inch stilettos, size sixteen in a tight black skirt and fully bosomed. He had no idea of how to complain to such a woman, at least not in a way that couldn’t be construed as sexual harassment. So he drew the blue curtain around the sink and the clinical couch, pulled out his prescription pads and booted up the computer, hoping that none of his patients would require a serious examination.

Garrick stepped out into the reception area and picked up his first patient file, read the name, took it back into his office for a moment to read the GP’s brief referral note, then stepped out and called for ‘Nicholas Myshkin!’ The man with the coiffe rose from his seat, picked up his grey rucksack and stepped towards Garrick, who extended his hand. ‘I’m Dr Garrick Willis.’

‘Call me Nick, Doc! Funny thing that was, you sitting next to me on the train. Do you get down Logan way a bit?’

‘Yes, it was strange. I had no idea you were coming to see me. I do a clinic down at Logan Hospital, one morning a week. We can talk more inside. Come this way, then.’ Nick followed. Garrick paused by the door, ushering his patient through with a sweep of his hand. ‘Take a seat over there.’ Garrick arranged the furniture so that his swivel chair faced the computer. He’d set the patient’s chair at a right angle to his desk, so the man would sit with his back to the curtain. Garrick turned around to ask Nick, ‘So what would you like me to help with? What’s the trouble?’

‘Haven’t you read my doctor’s letter?’

‘I’m interested in hearing directly what’s bothering you.’

‘Whatever, let’s just get on with it.’

The brief note from Christine Smythe at the Gladstone Road Medical Centre went:
Dear Garrick


Regards

Chris Smythe

‘Are you aware of what Dr Smythe has written?’

‘More or less. She said I was cranky when she wouldn’t write me a new script, then something funny happened. Seems like I scared her. I don’t remember doing anything.’

‘So what do you make of it?’

‘I don’t know. You’re the specialist!’

‘Has anything like this ever happened to you before?’

‘Not sure. Sometimes I lose track of time and end up somewhere. I don’t know how I got there. Once I woke up in bed with a blonde girl in a trucker’s motel on Main Street, Kangaroo Point. All I remembered was that I’d had a few drinks. She told me I’d been doing some strange stuff. Scared her a bit, too. But now she comes round and gives me a blow job whenever she wants some ice. Maybe she likes the scary stuff.’

‘You do much ice?’

‘A bit, now and then.’

‘And other drugs?’

‘I smoke a bit of weed. I like a drink. I’ll do smack if I can get it. And speed. I like the ice, but it makes me irritable and sometimes people tell me I do weird shit when I’m on it.’

‘Like?’
‘Well this chick says I was chasing her round, swinging a crow bar. That sort of shit.’

‘What do you think of that?’

‘Well, heavy shit, if it happens. I don’t remember it, so it’s hard to know. Maybe it should worry me, but it doesn’t, because I don’t remember it.’

‘Do you make the stuff, or just sell it?’

‘Don’t make it, although I sometimes pass some Pseudofed on to the guy that’s got the lab. Don’t deal much either. Just to the musos I play with, and a bit to the chicks that hang out with the band. What’s it to you?’

‘I’m going to ask you about some things that sometimes happen to people who have the kind of condition I think you might have …’

‘Okay!’

‘And I want you to tell me if they ever happen to you.’

‘Fire away.’

‘Do you ever smell funny smells?’

‘Yeah, Doc. Like when you farted?’

By now, Garrick was having difficulty maintaining professional demeanour. A psychiatrist might say he had a countertransference problem coming on. Garrick Willis considered himself to be a cut above most of his physician colleagues when it came to sensitivity and attunement. And this deadbeat was definitely getting his goat. The provocative fuckwit was leaning forward and staring him down, grinning from ear to ear, begging for a sharp reaction. If Garrick said what he wanted to say at that moment, it might trigger a report to the Health Quality and Complaints Commission. This arsehole isn’t worth it. Time to switch cognitive set to anger management mode. Garrick took a deep breath and carried on.

‘No, weirder than that. Now look, I’ll be straight with you. I think you’re here today because you want help with something that you don’t understand or know much about, but it really frightens you. But you have no idea how to let someone help you, so you act like a smartarse clown. But this isn’t school. I actually do want to help you, and I
am trying to understand this weird stuff that happens to you, so I can help you manage it, maybe even stop it from happening. I will try to help you if you let me. Can we go on now?’

‘If you’ve finished the lecture, Doc! I’ll pull my head in. You do your stuff.’

‘All right then. So tell me about the smells?’

‘Well sometimes when I’m banging a girl, it just comes on, like burning rubber.’

‘Maybe it’s friction with the condom?’

‘Now you’re being the smartarse. I don’t use condoms!’ Nick snarled. His teeth were yellow, with a gap between the top incisors, and a crowded, crooked bottom row.

‘Sorry! Any other strange sensations come on with the funny smell?’

‘Sometimes things look really big, then they shrink right down and are really little again.’

‘Mmm. Anything else?’

‘Sometimes I hear a noise like a train engine chuffing in my head. And I can get a weird queasy feeling that starts in my belly and crawls down my body into my legs. Objects seem to turn onto odd angles, and I see coloured lights. And then sometimes I lose it. Well, once that started in a nightclub, when the strobes came on. I lost it, and didn’t come around for twenty minutes or so. People said I was thrashing around on the floor. They called the ambulance. I thought I must’ve just had a bad pill.’

‘Did they take you hospital?’

‘No, the ambos wanted to, but I wouldn’t let them. I had too much shit in my system. I just told them to fuck off, took a cab home and slept it off.’

‘I see you’re hepatitis C positive. Are you still sharing needles.’

‘No, Doc. Always use cleanskins now. Bit of a scare, that.’

‘But you let girls go down on you without a condom?’

‘You only live once, Doc! So what do you think it is?’

‘Well, I’m almost certain that you suffer with epilepsy, and the strange sensations and movements, and maybe even the violent episodes you don’t remember, are what we call complex partial seizures, caused by some focus of abnormal electrical activity
somewhere in the brain. When you fell down and were thrashing on the floor in the night club, that was what we call a grand mal seizure, brought on by flashing strobe lights stimulating a wave of electrical activity that generalises throughout your whole brain and causes you to have a fit.’

‘So why me?’

‘It’s more common than you think. About one in twenty-five people has some form of epilepsy.’

‘Maybe that’s them, but not in my family.’

‘It’s not usually hereditary.’

‘Well what the fuck did it then?’

‘Most commonly it’s due to some part of the brain being injured when you’re a baby, not getting enough oxygen during the birth process. The brain has a little horn that sits inside the skull just behind your ears. That part is especially sensitive to lack of oxygen, and most easily damaged. Many of the symptoms you have could originate from an abnormal electrical focus there, due to scarring. Another cause of that can be the long fits that some little children have when you have a high temperature. Did your mother ever tell you anything like that?’

‘I was taken away by Children’s Services when I was three, Doc. They said she was an alky prostitute, not a fit mother. None of my foster parents knew anything about that kind of stuff.’

‘Sorry to hear that. You have had a rough time, haven’t you?’

‘I just get on the best I can. So what do we do about this epilepsy shit?’

‘Well, there’s medication. But you don’t start that until we’ve done some tests to make a definite diagnosis. And you must stop using amphetamines. They can kindle the abnormal electrical focus and make things much worse.’

‘Fat chance! What tests, Doc?’

‘Well, Dr Smythe has already done a CT brain scan, and that’s negative, so it’s not likely this is due to a tumour or a blood clot. Sometimes it can be. Maybe we should do an MRI scan too, because there are tumours, knots of small blood vessels, and other
abnormalities in the brain that show up better on that kind of scan. At PA, we have a three month waiting list for that, when it’s not an emergency. But in the meantime, we must do an EEG with photic stimulation.’

‘What sort of shit is that?’

‘An electroencephalograph – a test for which we put a little cap on your head and tape some electrodes to your skull.’

‘You mean shock treatment?’

‘No, there’s no electricity going into the wires. They are there so we can measure the electrical activity coming out of the brain in the area under the part of your skull that the wire’s taped onto. We don’t give you any shock. That’s a different machine.’

‘Well, thank Christ for that! So what do I have to do to get it?’

Garrick chose to ignore the question. ‘But we do send flashing lights into your eyes during the test and watch the trace for a response.’

‘Sounds like fun! I guess you’d better book me in.’

‘Do you drive?’

‘No, Doc, not since I came off my bike on the Gold Coast Motorway and cracked my head.’

‘Well, sometimes trauma can cause it too, but there’s nothing to show on the CT scan. And it’s possible that you could have a seizure while riding your bike. That could cause you to have an accident. So don’t take up driving again now. And one more thing: Dr Smythe mentioned someone called Jade in her letter? Who is Jade?’

‘She’s the one that drops round for ice every now again. The one that gives me head jobs.’

Garrick showed Nick out. He asked Jilly to book the tests, and the follow-up. Garrick was sorry for this Jade, and very grateful that he had a Jade of his own, who was not the Jade doing jobs for Nick.
II
BROKEN FOR ME

Garrick poured himself a glass of traminer, picked up his Blu-ray remote from the coffee table, flicked on *Blue Velvet* and flipped forward to the scene where Ben, with the face paint, picks up a stage light and lip synchs Roy Orbison’s *In Dreams*. Slumped on his couch in front of the flat screen, Garrick downed the wine with three spring rolls and a bowl of lemon grass braised beef with rice vermicelli. The encounter with the new patient left him quite unsettled. He couldn’t stop ruminating on Nick’s strange utterance, during the seizure – ‘Sorry, Jade, sorry!’

Garrick’s concentration was shot. He made no progress with his research that afternoon, after clinic. He’d gotten nowhere with analysis of the eye movements of the shoplifters he had lined up in the lab last Wednesday, wired to the electroencephalograph, watching *Clockwork Orange*. He was hoping to identify patterns, genetically determined, that might predict recidivism, contributing an evidence base for sentencing offenders. No longer would magistrates be left to rely on eugenics and phrenology. So far the only pattern he could discern from his observations was the disappearance, from his office, of several issues of *Ralph* magazine, a pale green flower vase and various items of stationery. These losses always followed *in vivo* laboratory sessions with volunteer subjects who’d responded to the notice he posted in the foyer of George Street Law Courts.

Garrick paused the disc just as Jeffrey Beaumont, bruised and battered, woke in the field where he was abandoned after Frank Booth took his pleasure at the end of that wild ride. Garrick was losing concentration. Time to call it a night.

So he was, at 10.00 p.m., sprawled across the bed in his Dornoch Terrace unit, wining and dining alone, staring at the print on his bedroom wall – a black-and-white photograph of a blonde girl, her hair blown back by the whoosh of the rollercoaster in some anonymous fun park, her eyes alight. One hand clutched the safety bar, the other
struggled against the breeze that, at the moment caught by the shutter, revealed the silk above her stockings, pushing luck against the hemline of her short flounced skirt.

Garrick had fallen in love with a rollercoaster goddess. He found himself plunging from heaven, headlong into a bottomless elevator shaft, leaving the contents of his stomach behind on several floors, such were the vicissitudes of the ride. Although Jade had long since left to work the late shift, Garrick found himself drawn like a lamb on a shepherd’s crook into the fold of her absence. In a couple of hours she would return, wouldn’t she? Or not? She still kept her little cottage near the Gabba Cricket Ground, said it helped her to feel less claustrophobic. She slept there sometimes. He rested his head on her pillow, allowing him to lose himself, falling into it. When he lay where she had been with him, missing her, he wanted to smoke. He caught himself reaching for the gold foil of her near-empty packet of Benson and Hedges Extra Mild on the bedside table. Then pulled his hand back, as the movement woke the memory of the last time – three cigarettes, after sharing the second litre bottle of frascati with Penny at Romeo’s, on a rare long weekend in Airlie Beach at the end of the eighties, away from Bowen Hospital, in those optimistic days of the bullet-proof suit, the third year after marriage. That time, the nausea came on as he stumbled out the door after settling the bill. He staggered back to their hotel, repeatedly falling over Penny, then lay down on the bed as the room began to spin. The pleasures of the night that followed involved the serial projectile waste of garlic prawns and fettucini pescatore. Garrick withdrew from touching the gold foil and cellophane, and reached instead for the page on which he’d printed a recently drafted love poem. He picked it up and settled into pining for Jade, reading his own text over again until he drifted into sleep:

_Broken For Me_

_Before she woke,_
_he turned to her and kissed_
_the cracked lips of the dawn,_
_taking from her mouth_
_the eucharist of dried saliva._
_He knew nothing_
_of its transubstantiation_
to a fleshy rose
that would stick in his throat,
take root in his chest
and press its thorns
deep into the base of its skull.
His only thoughts were of the beauty
of her fierce red acne
that blossomed in the first two months
of oral contraception
and the dull sense of relief
that it was her body
that was being broken.

* 

Garrick was an onlooker in his own dream. He watched himself walking in a strange city, a much older city than Brisbane, more like the oldest parts of Hobart, or of old Sydney down by the Rocks. Darkness surrounded him. Darkness followed him. The gas lamps dimmed as he approached, then returned to incandescence when he’d passed. From a fourth storey window on the left-hand side of the street, a gravelly voice bawled out several verses of *Good Night, Irene.* The street was too narrow. He passed a row of squalid, sandstone Georgian terraces, his boots clomping across the cobblestones and splashing through a fetid puddle rising up from a blocked drain. Sacks of garbage lay strewn across the pavement, broken into by dogs. The smell of rotting prawns and decaying vegetable matter prevailed, in spite of the chill air. Cold rain drizzled down. Although the collar of his long black coat was turned up snug, gusts of wind stung his face with sleet. Overhead, a brown moon attempted to peek out through a thin patch in the cloud cover. In spite of the inclement weather, the expression he observed on that face was one of resolute purpose.

He turned left into an alley between two buildings constructed out of dull red convict brick. At the end of the lane there was a similar wall from which a single spotlight shone its beam onto an old MG convertible, reflecting from the bright red duco. On the driver’s side, the black racing wheel and gear stick knob contrasted sharply with the cream kid
leather of the seat. On the passenger side, a substantial form could be made out, covered in a white canvas sheet through which something crimson seeped.

Garrick watched his shadow-self approach the vehicle and lift the sheet from the passenger side, exposing the corpse of a blonde woman in a short black dress, her cherry lipstick smeared all over her cheeks and chin, her throat ripped open. His eyes rested on the tattoo on her left shoulder, torn into a shapeless symbol by the marks of savage teeth. A dozen men in black uniforms with peaked caps sprang out and surrounded shadow-Garrick, drawing Smith and Wesson .38s, menacing his head. Out of the shade of a rusty fire-escape stepped a sad-eyed Police Commissioner, gesturing an order to lower hardware. The Commissioner stepped forward, bowed his head and clasped shadow-Garrick in a powerful handshake. As the Commissioner’s grip tightened, his face morphed into that of Nick Myshkin, the patient he’d encountered on the train, whose strange utterances had unnerved him. Commissioner Myshkin gripped shadow-Garrick by the shoulders and leaned in close to whisper a secret greeting in the condemned man’s left ear. The watching Garrick strained to read the Commissioner’s lips. He imagined he could hear the words ‘I am Judas, and with this kiss, I seal the endless repetition of events’. Then witness-Garrick noticed a cherry-red stain on shadow-Garrick’s cheek. The Commissioner turned away, shook his head, and offered a ‘thumbs down’ signal to his men. Garrick watched as his doppelgänger was forcibly cuffed and escorted up the lane towards the dog-box of a black paddy wagon. He screamed against his dry closed glottis, then screamed and screamed again until, from somewhere far away and long ago, the sound of screaming came.

*

Garrick’s scream was interrupted by Jade elbowing him in the chest. She turned to him and looked into his face with her wide green eyes, sleep sticking to the lashes. The lipstick smears of her hot pink kisses rode lewd against the shadow of his salt-and-pepper
stubbled cheeks. ‘That must’ve been some dream, honey! You’ve been squeezing me so tight I couldn’t breathe. I need a cuddle.’ She giggled. ‘Come and give me a kiss.’

‘When did you come in?’

‘Just a few minutes ago. When I lay down here beside you, you were thrashing about and kicking. I thought you must be having a nightmare.’

‘No, I couldn’t’ve been. You can’t thrash about when you’re dreaming. In dreaming sleep, your muscles are completely paralysed.’

‘Thanks for the lecture. So why am I imagining that you’re kicking me?’

‘Well, was I snoring?’

‘Sometimes you do, but not this time. Why do you ask that?’

‘Well, if I had sleep apnoea, I’d snore when I was obstructing. I’d thrash about and kick my legs when I stopped breathing.’

‘And what am I supposed to do then?’

‘The thrashing and kicking would jolt me out of it, get me going, make me breathe again.’

‘And what if it didn’t?’

‘You’re a nurse. Resuscitate me.’

‘Yeah, I could give you the kiss of life.’

‘Now that sounds like fun.’

Jade tossed her head and pouted her lips at him. ‘Well, were you dreaming?’

‘Well, yes I was.’

‘You’re a terrible liar, you know.’

‘Maybe, but you must be lying, too, about me kicking you.’

‘No I’m not! Want me to show you the bruises?’

She did bruise, only too easily. Such a fragile thing, really. And so often gone, like a genie, in a puff of smoke. If only to do his bidding, and return, whenever he wished for her, whenever he took hold of the lamp and gave it a little rub. ‘It’s too early for you to be bruising.’
'Yeah? Well look at this one then. She drew her pale left calf from under the sheets and pointed to the purple patch.

‘Gee! Sorry, Jade.’

‘So you are dreaming and kicking. How does Professor Willis explain that?’

‘Well, maybe the dream isn’t happening in REM sleep, like most dreams do, but in deeper stage IV sleep, the stage in which sleep walking and sleep talking happens. Do I ever talk in my sleep?’

‘Not much, not that I’ve noticed.’

‘But sometimes I do?’

‘Yeah, sometimes.’

‘What do I say?’

‘Not much. Sometimes you mutter. Sometimes I hear you say things like “Sorry, Jade!” I wonder then what kind of bad boy you’ve been, what you might’ve been up to when I’m gone.’ She grinned wickedly, then her smile disappeared when she noticed that he didn’t seem to find that funny. ‘So tell me about the dream.’

‘I wouldn’t want to trouble you with it.’

‘You know, just now, and when I woke you, you look just like a little frightened boy, like you would if you’d just been visited by the bogeyman.’

‘Well, maybe I’ve had something like night terrors. I used to have them when I was a kid, for a year or two after Charmaine went away – you know, my mother. Dad said that I would run around the house with my eyes wide open, pointing at something in the air, screaming. He would grab me and shake me, but sometimes I just wouldn’t wake up, or when I did, I would tell him that I’d had a bad dream, but I couldn’t remember it.’

‘Well, can you remember this one?’

‘No, not really, I can’t now.’

Jade could easily tell when he wasn’t telling the truth. It was that coy, sheepish look. He was so transparent. ‘I think you remember some, but you’re just not telling me,’ she sulked.
‘Well, maybe, but it’s like when I was a kid. The scary dream fragments would slip away from me and defy translation into stories. I couldn’t talk about them coherently. Like the dreams that David Lynch shows in his movies. But only sometimes. Some of the dreams he shows are stories, like in Eraserhead, and anyway, the dreams in films aren’t really dreams, are they?’

‘Then what are they?’ She really didn’t want to get him started on this. She shouldn’t’ve taken the bait. She should know better not to encourage him, once he started on about David Lynch.

‘Well, there’s this thing called the oneiric metaphor, but with Lynch it’s not really a metaphor, but an endless series of hints, of hidden messages, a trail of anamorphoses …’

Jade’s eyes rolled back in her head as she raised her eyebrows. Garrick noticed. Why was he chuntering on, obsessed with Lynch, in spite of being in bed with a well-toned blonde woman with perky tits and the finest silky fur on her belly. She was wearing Ysatis by Givenchy and nothing else. Just before her mouth closed over his, he caught the scent of lime vodka cruisers on her breathe. He glanced up at the clock on the wall. It was 1.30 a.m. If she had just come in, she must’ve gone out drinking after work. Sometimes they did, those girls on her ward, after a late shift.

‘Just shut up and fuck me,’ she said. As she worked her way down, kissing his chin and chewing on his nipples, he found that, even in the dark, she could readily disrupt his efforts to think about dreams in film. Instead, he found himself imagining her back arching and her taut little arse sticking up. He grabbed her breasts. He wanted to turn on the bedside lamp, so he could watch her tits jigging up and down as he moved to push his way into her mouth. She gripped the base of his shaft tightly with one hand, and squeezed his balls relentlessly with the other. It was impossible for Garrick to reach for the switch without letting go of her nipples. He began to pant and to moan, imminently ready to blow.

Then Garrick’s pleasure was interrupted by the intruding image of a large kitchen knife. In the vision, he was wielding it, raising it above his head, poised to strike at Jade’s
ignorant flesh. To drive the knife-wielding devil-Garrick away, he substituted an image of himself with Jade’s friend Rachel, and then each of them taking turns swallowing his cock. That was more than enough to send him off. Jade winced and gagged for an instant, then kept right on. Garrick reached down and grabbed her by the hair, pulled her face to his mouth, whispering what a good girl she was, then kissed her and felt her hot kisses coming back at him. The knife returned to its sheath. He loved the taste of his cum in her mouth.

*

When Jade realised that she was slotting into Penny’s old place in Garrick’s Saturday morning ritual, she choked back her resentment and did the best she could to make him notice that she was different. She wore blue eye shadow, black mascara, bright red lipstick and a generous spray of that French perfume he’d given her on Valentine’s Day. She strapped on her cork wedge sandals, pulled on a tight white t-shirt, stepped into her green suede miniskirt and cocked her pelvis provocatively, fluttering her lashes as she looked back at him over her shoulder and called for him to zip her up. Garrick had complained to her that Penny would never wear short skirts, nor shave her legs, let alone wear make-up.

Jade giggled as she felt him rise. Garrick dealt with the zipper and the hook, then wrapped his hairy arms tight around her waist, pushing up under her t-shirt. ‘You’re a naughty boy,’ she said. ‘We’ll never get to Espressohead if you start that!’

On the short drive to Boundary Street, Jade was relieved that Garrick was quiet. At least he wasn’t telling her how much he missed Penny, and that brat who was always into everything, smashing plates and swinging on the cupboard doors. He’d be over again this evening. Tom would cuddle up to her for a while, after she had changed his wet sheets, then push her away and start screaming for his mother. He was as frail as he was beautiful, and he was not hers. In spite of all the effort that she made, by dressing to please, to bring Garrick out of his preoccupation with what he had lost, she believed he
would never love her enough to give her a little boy of her own. She could only bear his puling for so long. When Garrick began to carry on about what an idiot he was, what he had left behind, and how much he had lost, sometimes she’d lose it, too. It was just too much. Maybe she should go out. Say she’d picked up an agency shift.

Again today Garrick’d take off leaving her to claim his favourite table, slip up to the corner to buy a newspaper and then sit opposite her, open it like a shield and bury himself in it. He’d cause her more embarrassment, bringing back cakes in a bag from a bakery in Vulture Street, rather than order from the menu. Then he’d begin to rabbit on about old times with the barista, an ex-vice squad cop who’d blown the whistle on a mate who’d waive your parking ticket for a blowie, left the Force and ended up making coffees. No one else would give him a job. She could remember that dick snooping around Bad Girls in plain clothes. He’d’ve been more comfortable sniffing around a glory hole upstairs at the Den. Never seemed much impressed by the spread when I was up on the pole. Less fun than a barrel of holy rollers at Glad Tidings Tabernacle after Sunday service. Might’ve even offered him a lap dance. Can’t recall I ever saw a happy ending. He’d’ve made a good body double for Nick Cave. If he recognised her, he wasn’t letting on.

* 

Garrick settled himself into his chair at the same table at which he’d sat every Saturday morning for the past ten years, opened the Weekend Australian to the books section. He began to sip his double shot latte, wrapping it in a paper napkin. Reaching for the Paris breast he’d bought at the French patisserie, he noticed that he was not sharing it with Penny, but with some fiercely sexual creature with spiky blonde hair and lots of pale freckled thigh showing below the hem of that ridiculous skirt. He reached across under the table and stroked the fine down, causing her to jerk away and arch her spine to the frissons of current generated from their sacral origin. He wondered how perverse a burden it might be to bear the company of an obsessional neurologist.
Jade seemed twitchier today, drumming her fingers compulsively, making sideways glances at Phillip, who was struggling to clean congealed milk froth off the steam spout of the espresso machine. He wondered why she showed such furtive interest in him, this man that she had nicknamed ‘Constable Plodd.’

Then Garrick saw it, on page three of the *Review of Books* – his poem – the one he’d written when he was beginning to recognise the rifts along the fault line, the tectonic plates that cracked and spread into the chasm that separated him from Penny, via the ritual killing of love. Jumping out at Jade from behind the wall of paper, he startled her. Yelling, ‘It’s here!’ he thrust it at her, pointing at the column of text at the bottom of the page. When she made out his name in bold type, she squealed, ‘That’s my Garrick! You’re such a clever weasel. You’re in the paper. Wow!’ Then Jade insisted that he read it to her aloud:

*Wallaby Dreaming*

*There is an old killing in the place*
*and he is drawn up the gully rockhopping.*
*The afternoon is failing as he jumps*
*between the trunks of fallen eucalypts*
*and limestone outcrops. Cicadas*
*and the gumflowers fill the air*
*with scent and roaring. He stumbles*
*at a landfall, missing the ledge.*
*Both knees are grazed. Below*
*the wallaby people are making their dreaming*
*in the clearing on the high kikuya.*
*The light is failing and the dew is settling*
*on the skin of the intruder. Somehow*
*he is spared.*

*Later that evening, she is driving.*
*He is drawn too late to warning*
*as the wallaby blind to the high beam lights*
*jumps at the bumper of the green Charade.*
*The warclub thuds, the car*
*skidding across the road before braking.*
*The air is full of animal rubber fear.*
*She and the beast are whimpering.*
*The wallaby has smashed a femur.*
He takes the wheel and ploughs
the front wheel drive from first to reverse
from reverse to first again
across the neck he loves.
He is killing his dreaming.

‘Oh Garrick! I’m so pleased for you.’ She never quite knew what to say. She’d
never pictured herself dating an intellectual, even less an arty one. She never quite knew
what to do with him, this blind poet boy, so she resorted to doing what she knew best.
Whatever the poem was about, she didn’t know, but surely hoped it didn’t mean that
someday, when she was going down on him and he had her by the hair, he’d lose it
completely and end it all with a little twist.
III

TOO LITTLE, TOO LATE

After Garrick read little Tom to sleep, he and Jade spent an irritable Saturday evening in bed. Both quickly lost interest in watching Emanuelle. ‘Why did you get this boring crap?’ he snapped after five minutes of watching forty-five year old men, in Raybans and Hawaiian shirts. These blokes arrive, in red Mustangs and Cadillacs, at a pool party, somewhere off Mulholland Drive, stumble through the California bungalow and out to the back yard. They take off their shorts and shirts, sun their hairy bellies, lying on banana lounges.

The girls loll around, waist deep in the water, giggling, stroking each other’s breasts and helmets of long wet hair. To suggest they must have been recruited by producers reclining in bucket seats, revving thirsty machines outside fraternity houses at Midwestern Adventist tertiary teaching institutions, would have been to imbue the filmmakers with a moral dignity and aesthetic sense they did not possess. Some of the girls looked as though they weren’t old enough to have graduated from junior high school, and most worked just as hard as the middle-aged actors at giving an impression that such achievement would be beyond their capacities.

‘You said you wanted something with a story!’ snapped Jade. ‘You’re impossible to please. I can never get it right! Now you want to make me feel stupid again.’

‘Well, do you like it?’

‘No, but I got it because I thought you’d be pleased. I’ve never hired a porno before, and you’re always saying that you want me to suck you off while we’re watching a vintage sex movie.’

‘But I meant something with Nina Hartley, or Annie Sprinkle – or a sexy documentary with tantric yoga and naked hippies dancing to tom-toms at sunset on Watego.’
Jade’s face wrinkled and stiffened. Garrick felt her limbs go rigid. She turned her back on him and curled like a foetus, tucking her knees under her chin. Garrick leaned on his elbow and looked her over. A tear was forming in the corner of her exposed left eye, ready to run down her cheek. She always did this when she was getting ready for a good cry.

Garrick got up and turned off the DVD. Hollywood real estate agents porking high school girls just didn’t do it for him. He returned to bed, reached for Jade with both arms and forced her to face him. He closed his mouth on hers and held her as she sobbed and beat his chest with her fists. The nipples on her small firm breasts stood up like cherries on gelatine desserts, made to be bitten. He moved his mouth to nibble at her left ear lobe. Jade tensed her neck like a turtle and began to giggle. Garrick stiffened. He nuzzled her ear and whispered, ‘I’m sorry. I couldn’t give a shit about the video. Just suck me off again!’ She giggled, sprang around on top of him and said, ‘If you tell me all about what it would be like with Rachel!’

Garrick’s tribal didgeridoo had come decorated in a manner befitting an elder of the kangaroo totem, beeswaxed at the mouth end and finished all over in a thick coat of Estapol. It also came with a sheet of instructions intended to initiate the novice player into the mysterious art of circular breathing. Garrick had never quite mastered it, but his flatulent attempts served to further increase the respect that he had developed for Jade’s capacity for continuous fellatio. *She must breathe through her nose,* he thought, kneading her breasts and telling her lies about things he wished he’d done with her Canadian friend, the girl who sometimes sunbaked topless on his balcony with Jade on Saturdays. Each time she swallowed, his story lost coherence. His mind melted, merging with Jade’s mouth and with all the other parts of the world that were soft and mellow. He squeezed her left breast hard and sank his teeth into the strange tattoo on her left shoulder.

For the first few minutes, Garrick felt grateful and relaxed, but then his anxiety mounted with the awareness of losing control. He fought the intrusive images, but they came regardless, disrupting his sense of blissful merger, as he saw himself ripping Jade
open again with that kitchen knife. He pushed her away, roughly. She looked up at him, offended. ‘What did you do that for?’

‘Sorry, honey,’ he said. ‘It was just too much for me.’

‘Too much of a good thing, I suppose?’

‘It was so good. Then suddenly I began to feel terrified of losing you.’ The images had gone now. There was no need for her to know.

Jade glanced at the bedside alarm clock, showing 9:45 p.m. She kissed Garrick and rose, telling him, ‘I’ve just got time to shower, get into my uniform and get to work.’

‘I thought you weren’t due to start night shift again for another three weeks.’

‘They rang while I was out at the video store. Someone’s called in sick, so they offered me an extra shift.’

Garrick groaned. Jade’s nakedness faded like a ghost at the bathroom door.

*

In spite of the ceiling fan continuously whirring the air like a helicopter rotor, the bedroom remained oppressively humid. Garrick tossed about and kicked off the sheets. There was something quite strange about Jade’s new enthusiasm for overtime.

Sleep now seemed impossible without her. After sex, a cloud of tenderness seemed to envelope them, like unborn twins in a womb, sharing a single amniotic sac. When she curled up against him, her body fitted so neatly into the nest his made, as he wrapped himself around her from behind. This was the way they lay together, each on their left side, his right arm wrapped around her waist, with his hand resting on the velvet down that grew on her belly, just above the bikini line. In her absence, all things seemed terribly amiss.

Jade showered, then returned to dress. She exited the bathroom a little after 10.00 p.m. Garrick noticed the opacity of her navy uniform. The shapeless knee-length front-buttoning garment left him wondering which hospital’s staff had contributed the naughty nurse fetish to popular culture. Back in his student days, at least the nurse’s uniforms had
been white and transparent enough to enable a fair guess at the colour of a girl’s panties. The way some nurses wore them, they hadn’t left much scope for guesswork. His view of Jade’s arse reminded him that he should be grateful that work was the only place that she wore flat shoes and conservative underwear. He yelled out, ‘You should take up that hem about six inches if you wanted to pick up anyone tonight.’

She turned around to him, pretended to frown, and shook her finger. ‘You’re a very bad boy!’ She blew a kiss to him and disappeared, leaving him lying with all that space beside him in bed.

When Garrick found out which hospital it was that insisted their nurses dress in strict accordance with the fetish, he would apply for a position there as Executive Director of Medical Services. It certainly wasn’t the Princess.

These thoughts ran through Garrick’s head. He could not rest in the emptiness between his sheets that night. When the storm broke about 1.00 a.m., he found relief in the crashing thunder, the flashes of luminosity at the window and the beating of rain against the glass. Perhaps it was the fall in atmospheric pressure that helped, or the massive release of positive ions into the atmosphere that finally folded his spirit into the dark envelope of sleep.

*

In the dream, no matter how fast Garrick pushed to run, he found himself moving slowly, like the projection of a 16 mm film reel, wound by hand from one frame to another, moving at the frozen speed of terror, always too little, too late. *Never man enough to say what must be said, never in time, with the balls to do what must be done.* His feet were lead weights, and his movement through the air was like that of a wooden spoon through molasses. Just the same, he made it up past the Laundromat on the corner of Harcourt and Brunswick Streets, crossed the road, jumped the gate and through the main entrance. Frantic, he charged down the poorly lit corridor of the old boarding house. A termite infested hardwood staircase with a broken bannister and a rift in the middle led to the
upper level on the left, just inside the entrance. Old paisley paper curled and lifted from
the walls, revealing cracked plaster and the stain of paste long since eaten by the
skittering four inch American cockroaches, those that failed to depart with their war
brides in 1946. A smell kicked up at him from the decomposing carpet, like that of mould
mixed with stale vodka and industrial cleaning products. In his nostrils, it was the stench
of nameless dread. The must woke up memories of his grandfather’s open grave dug
nine feet down, through the sandy loam and deep into the clay of the Lismore lawn
cemetery, to make room for Grandma, who’d be joining him later. Six feet down, a green
line marked the seepage into the soil of body fluids from the 108-year-old neighbour’s
coffin. At his grandfather’s funeral, he had stepped a couple of metres across the purple
carpet of fallen flowers that lay over the grass, to the other side of the jacaranda tree, and
found a plaque for Ann Mackenzie, the mother of a childhood friend, who’d blown her
brains out at the age of forty-six. She must’ve been just sixteen when Jamie was born, yet
to Garrick she seemed like an old lady when she’d been so kind to him over Sunday
dinner.

A substance best described as liquid doom rushed through his veins as he came to
the flaking timber door of number 6. From somewhere, as though at a great distance, he
could hear his animal scream as he ran the door with his shoulder, rebounded, then picked
himself up and threw himself at the slab again and again, until the hinges began to give.
With another thrust, the screws wrenched free of their moorings, giving a scream of their
own as they ripped their way out of the wood. He fell inwards with the door, bouncing
off it as it landed, thudding like a terrible drum. The smell that punched his nostrils was a
corruption of Jade’s scent, of acetone, sweet almonds, urine, faeces and the salty tang of
blood.

On the far side of the bed, a tall thin man, with an extravagantly gelled coiffe, lay
snoring, face into the pillow, his right arm hanging down beside the bed, the hand still
encased in a bloodied garden glove, wrapped around the neck of a litre bottle of
Stolichnaya, more than half gone.
The axe lay on the floor beside him, skewed to the right of the bed at a forty degree angle, the blade facing outwards, sullied by the soft white matter, strands of hair and other tissues, congealed and clotted. It brought to mind a specimen that Garrick, as a medical student, had seen in a jar at the pathology museum – a tumour of the womb in which the structure of the tissues had become so chaotic that the core of it had come to hold a fluid cyst lined with skin, out of which grew long strands of hair sparsely scattered between outcrops of great jagged teeth.

What was left of Jade lay wrapped in a torn batik-patterned kimono in the middle of the bed, her face cloven through the right cheek, her teeth in similar disarray to those of the tumour in the pathology pot. The gash extended through to the socket of her right eye, which protruded – terrible, vitreous, ruptured and dead. The robe hung open at the front, showing the wounds. The spikes of broken ribs protruded through her left breast, from which the blackened blood continued to extravasate and pool in the recess of her umbilicus. Further down, it made a mat of sticky silk in the little vee she’d trimmed above her bruised and swollen lips.

As Garrick screamed, the delicate membranes that separated the compartments of his mind ruptured, and the separate fractional essences of his being ran together all at once. He staggered to the bed, lay down beside the corpse, and wrapped himself around her. In doing so, he paused his screaming for long enough for some mute, black, bat-winged thing to burst out from his throat and fly away with the force of the first of a multitude of sobs.
**IV**

**THE ANGEL MORONI**

Nick stepped out through the doors of the Kentucky Fried Chicken franchise on Main Street, Woolloongabba. His belly was full of Coke, fries and fat, a little rabbit and the bones he dared not leave behind as a clue to the demise of the neighbour’s cat. So fortified, Nick was ready to face the night, whatever truckers it might bring to cross his way. He brought several foil-wrapped refresher towels. There were no coasters to steal at KFC. *No gig tonight with the band. On again late at the Zoo next Saturday.*

The waning moon illuminated the golden statue of the Angel Moroni, standing on a grey granite plinth, with his trumpet raised, on the roof of the Mormon Temple. From this position of vantage, the Angel faced the place where the sun would rise tomorrow and watched over the houses between Main Street and Riverside Terrace, beyond six lanes of traffic, on the other side of the road.

Previous sightings of the statue had inspired Nick to surf the net for information. He learned that the Latter Day Saints believe that Moroni, son of Mormon, was an ancient American warrior, the last of his Nephite tribe, to whom Jesus appeared and revealed essential teachings. This gospel was inscribed on golden plates, which Moroni buried before he died. Somehow resurrected as an angel, Moroni stood guard over the plates for many centuries before guiding the Prophet Joseph Smith to their secret location in 1838.

Nick also found that the website http://theangelmoroni.com advertises steel-cut Angel Moroni ornaments at $9.99, packaged in an open-faced gold box, containing not only the crafted ornament, but also a printed lesson to assist the family in their endeavours to place Christ back, where he belongs, in Christmas. It crossed Nick’s mind that over the next two hours, the moon would set. *By what light would the Angel see then, to watch over the temple, the city, the people, in the hours before the dawn?*

Nick crossed Toohey Street and continued on. He reached Bromley Street just as he caught sight of her. There she was, in her high black boots and red tartan miniskirt,
just over the street, leaning against the wall, on the right hand side of the entrance drive of the Southern Cross Motel. Jittery and restless, she moved her weight back and forth from one leg to the other, picked and fiddled with her skirt, clenched and unclenched her hands. Her straight jet black hair, extending half way down her back, was stark in contrast with her pearlescent, slightly freckled skin. Eyes straining, he could just make out her nipples standing erect through the spandex of the white sports bra that was all she wore above the waist. He was left with no doubt that she was hungry for it.

Nick watched a huge Volvo truck slow up, indicate and take the left turn into the motel drive. The driver signalled to the girl, and she followed. Nick watched her butt, and the rear end of the truck as it receded. ‘You are passing another Fox.’

Nick walked on to cross Baines Street at the lights, from the Thai restaurant on one side, to the Pineapple Hotel on the other. He bothered to wait for the walk signal, mindful of the news report of a teenager killed here, just the other week. He pushed the button when he reached the other side, repeating the ritual of the wait for the lights to change again before he could cross Main Street. He wandered on up to the Night Owl, placed his backpack at this feet, leaned himself up against the wall next to the entrance, lit a cigarette, and waited for the call.

*

Nick trod the terracotta tiles past the reception and down the corridor to the lift, took the lift up to the first floor, turned right and walked the full length of the beige carpet to the door of room 27. He rapped three times in quick succession. The girl came to the door. He liked the way that little skirt hung low over her bony hips. She was obviously agitated. That belly button stud with the dragonfly quivering was really something. And the swish of her long black hair when she turned and walked towards the trucker again, him sitting in the red arm chair beside the bed, his huge hairy belly hanging over his boxers. There was just a glimpse of one arse cheek after another with the swing of her hips. Now you see it. Now you don’t. Here today, gone tomorrow. She sat herself down
on the trucker’s lap. Let him wrap those disgusting hams of arms around her, with their barbed wire tatts. Her arse began to gyrate on something that might have been the trucker’s wiener, supposing he had one hidden away there, under all those rolls of fat.

‘You wanna point?’ said Nick.

The trucker nodded, nuzzling his bristly triple chin against the girl’s fair neck, as she arched her back and began her theatrical repertoire of low soft moans. ‘How much?’

‘Sixty for the point, and another sixty for the girl’s. And you pay 130 for the room. Another fifty for thirty minutes with the girl.’

‘Anal?’

‘An extra fifty for that.’

‘Show me the gear …’

‘When you show me 350 smackeroos.’ Nick took his right hand to loosen the strap and shrugged off the pack.

The trucker reached for his wallet on the bedside table and shelled out seven plastic notes, all bearing the heads of Edith Cowan and David Unaipon. Holding them in his right hand, he poked in Nick’s direction, then waved them to summon him over.

Nick approached with the pack in his left hand, reached out and took the notes with his right, stuffed them into the hip pocket of his black Levi 511s. He reached into the pack, and pulled out a plastic zip-lock bag, full of smaller sealed transparent packages. He took a seat up at the pillow end of the bed beside the trucker’s armchair and shook a couple of them out onto the red bedspread. He held one up for inspection. ‘The crystal.’

‘No Ratsak, battery acid? No shit like that?’

‘100 per cent pure.’

‘Then fix me up.’

Nick dipped into the backpack again and pulled out a sealed injection kit, a stainless steel soup spoon with the handle bent to ninety degrees at the spoon end, and a long black shoe lace. He tore the outer plastic open to unload five 1 ml syringes; five 29 gauge needles; three cotton filters; five alcohol wipes; and a couple of 5 ml plastic phials of sterile water. He took two syringes out of their packs, locked capped needles on, ripped
the crystal packs open poured the contents into the spoon. Holding the spoon steady in his left hand, he uncapped a phial of sterile water with his right. He jiggled the spoon until the crystals dissolved, then popped a cotton filter into the solution. He placed the spoon, with the filter in its bowl, on the bedside table, picked up the first set, uncapped the needle, poked it into the cotton wad and drew the plunger. He turned the loaded syringe upside down and pushed, to expel the air bubble, then recapped and laid the fit down beside the spoon. He repeated this procedure with the second syringe, then picked up the cotton wad between his fingers, stuck it in his mouth, ground on it with his molars and sucked his cheeks in.

The trucker raised his eyebrows. Nick’s glare told him he’d better not open his mouth.

Nick tied the shoe lace round the trucker’s left biceps, just below the extremity of the ink work. ‘Make a fist. Clench and unclench.’ Nick took the trucker’s huge left paw, with its tired scratched 9 carat gold wedding band, in his own left and patted the back of it with his right, hoping to bring up a decent vein. So much fat! Just the same, that one looked a chance. ‘Clench your fist again. Now let it go. And again.’ Nick took the trucker’s hand and patted the vein again. Yes, this one should be a goer. He tore open an alcohol wipe and swabbed the skin, thinking of how much this was like cleaning the grease off his fingers after tonight’s Kentucky Fried Chicken. He picked up the syringe, uncapped it. ‘Put your hand out on the table there. Don’t bump anything. He held the hand still with his left, and slid the needle in with his right, secured it in place with the thumb and forefinger of his left, then drew back on the plunger. Yes. A back shot of blood into the syringe. He gestured to the trucker to undo the shoelace. Then he pushed the meth into the vein.

The trucker tensed, then sighed, ‘Jesus!’

Now it was the girl’s turn. She used to be easy, but less so now that so many good veins were buggered up.

When it was done, Nick stuffed the rest into his pack, zipped it up, turned his back on them, walked to the door, let it close behind him and took the lift to reception, where
he insisted on paying cash for the couple in room 27. The boy at the desk must have been about that age. No questions asked. As for the night’s takes, the rest would be the girl’s.

*

Out on the street again, Nick lit another cigarette. Then he walked on, taking in the scene over the road. There had been an AFL game at the Gabba stadium earlier that evening. The Brisbane Lions had been done over in the home game by Collingwood, by a goal and two behinds. Some of the fans who had persisted past closing time still hung around the Piney, wearing Lions guernseys, jackets and maroon and gold supporters scarves. The crew for the band that had been playing earlier on were packing the drum kit into the back of a Holden Rodeo utility truck. On Nick’s side of the street, he came across a couple of likely looking boys outside the Night Owl, but he figured, from the way that they were eyeing each other up, they were more into it for fun than to earn what it took to keep them in tabs. He gave them a nod as he passed, and walked on towards the Story Bridge, to cross the span to hawk his wares to cougars in the Valley clubs. The angel, with his trumpet raised, proclaiming the Restoration, stuck to his post.
V

FAMILY

At around ten minutes past ten, Jade parked her white Toyota Echo in the narrow carport of the cottage with the bull-nosed verandah at the Wellington Road end of Toohey Street, Kangaroo Point. Jade had lived here with her grandmother until the old lady went into the nursing home at Annerley 18 months ago. As much as Jade hated that place, with its bins of soiled linen in the corridors, and the smell of atomised meals coming from the kitchen, she reminded herself that she must pop in to see Gran sometime tomorrow, at least for a brief visit. Gran would not come home again. Her vascular dementia, resulting from a series of strokes, had progressed so that she could no longer feed herself. Gran would not see another Christmas.

The house would pass to Jade, now that her father also was gone. He had been Gran’s only child, and she, in turn, his. She held Gran’s power of attorney, enabling her to draw Gran’s savings to pay the rates and other bills. She had kept Gran’s room untouched. A few of the old lady’s nightgowns still were hanging in the dark stained Tasmanian Oak closet. The wedding photo gathering dust on the bedside dresser showed Pop looking stiff and severe in military uniform. They married in 1946, a fortnight after he returned from cleaning the prisoner-of-war camp in Burma. Gran and Pop had lived in this house together all their married lives, while he worked as a technician at the old Woolloongabba Telephone Exchange, and finally before retirement, in that great ugly Telstra tower. It was hardly likely that he loved the tower, but Pop, it seemed, had lived to work. He dropped dead, just two weeks after he retired, with a massive heart attack, leaving Gran at home alone.

Gran had been admitted to Garrick’s unit at the Princess when he was on intake for neurology. Garrick’s team arrived for their afternoon ward round just as Jade had been visiting, in uniform, about to leave to go to handover for the evening shift on the intensive care unit. He’d asked her to stay, not knowing she was family. He had spoken so kindly to the old lady, and been so delicate in the way that he examined her. He took time to
demonstrate the signs to the students, and managed to do so without making Gran feel that she was a freak show. Jade had been very impressed. And noticed that he noticed her. He seemed to be looking at her when he was talking to the students, giving orders to the registrar. Then he picked up Gran’s hand carefully, and made eye contact directly. Jade had seen him before in the hospital canteen, and remembered the smart stitching on his grey Ted Baker suit, but had no idea who he was. She perked up when he asked her what was Gran’s blood pressure. She blushed and said, ‘You’ll have to ask a nurse. She’s my grandmother. I’ve just been visiting.’

He seemed quite flustered, apologised profusely.

She took the opportunity to say: ‘Actually, Dr Willis, I have a few things I would like to ask you about her condition. Do you mind if I call you when it’s quiet a little later this afternoon?’

‘Of course, I’d be glad to discuss Mrs Carson’s condition with you. With your permission, of course?’ asked Garrick, turning again to address Gran.

Gran had nodded and smiled the half smile she could just manage with the right side of her face sagging.

So that was how it started. When Jade called Garrick, just on her dinner break, he was still in the hospital. He invited her to come around and talk with him in the Neurology Consultants office. They spoke for a little over half an hour, and she was late getting back to ICU, her pink lipstick intact, his direct number punched into her phone contacts list.

A few days later, he looked pleased to see her when she asked if she could share his table in the staff dining room. And a week or so after that he’d hardly seemed surprised when she rang him to say that she had tickets to the nurses’ ball, and wondered if he would like to come with her. After the ball, as she fumbled to fit a condom on to him on his first night in the bed at Toohey Street, he’d whispered in her ear that she must never tell his colleagues how they met.

Jade crossed the verandah and turned the great iron key in the lock. The door swung open and she reached inside to flick the light switch. The hallway stretched past
Gran’s room on the right and hers on the left, extending to the lounge with the open fireplace, with another doorway through to the kitchen and the dining area. The bathroom and laundry were at the back on the left, and on the right there was a covered rear deck. This was where most meals were taken in summer. The ceilings were pressed metal, with intricate rose patterns at the centre of each room, from which the light fittings hung down on long cords. The vertical-joint timber boards that made up the walls stretched fully twelve feet up to them. The original floorboards were nine-inch polished pine, dating the house back to about 1880. It must’ve been one of the first cottages in the area.

Jade opened the door to her room and flicked on the light. The big old silky oak bed with its steel-ringed tester, designed to hang mosquito nets, had not been her father’s. It was something she had picked up cheaply at auction, stained as it was with dark pitch that a bored child had scratched all over with a nail or compass point, revealing for her the beauty of the grain, the potential reward for effort in restoration. She had slaved many hours, stripped it down, sanded it back, and sealed it. She had transformed it into an object of beauty, beauty that would endure even when she, like the bed, had grown old.

As her father had not. Strange that she should sleep now in the room that had been his, when he was a boy, right up until he’d completed Teacher’s College at Kelvin Grove, and still after that, when he visited Brisbane on holidays away from the Allenstown State School in Rockhampton, where he’d been appointed to his first teaching job. He met Mum when they were teaching together at the East State School in Toowoomba – he had Year 7, and she had a combined Year 1 & 2. They married. Jade was born a few months later. She couldn’t remember living in the little house in Mackenzie Street. They moved down to Brisbane when she was three, into the lovely old house on Mowbray Terrace, so close to Gran. Dad was made Principal of the East Brisbane State School – the one that lost half its playing fields to the expansion of the Gabba Cricket Ground.

After the move to Brisbane, Mum stayed at home with Jade until she turned four, just a few days before Christmas. Then Mum took a contract teaching the first grade at Norman Park, and took Jade with her from preschool on. At least they had the sense
never to put her in Mum’s class. She remembered being nine when Mum was diagnosed with breast cancer.

*

When Rob Carson came home late after the meeting at head office, Jeannie had been smoking at the table, stone-faced, already in her slippers and her night gown, an ashtray full of butts in front of her, and half a bottle of red wine already gone. This was so unlike her, Jim knew not to complain that she’d done nothing to get a start on with dinner, and that little Jade was still up watching television. It certainly wasn’t the time to be bothering her with his own troubles. He bent down, kissed her gently on the cheek and said, ‘Looks like you’ve had a bad day.’

She took his hand and squeezed it, saying, ‘I’ll tell you when we’ve got Jade tucked in bed.’

Rob heated a frozen ham-and-pineapple pizza and told Jade that, just this one time, she was allowed to eat in the lounge room. He poured himself a beer and shared the pizza with the girl, taking no notice of the antics of the residents of Ramsay Street as they played out another episode of their lives on the tube in the plastic box. When Neighbours finished, Rob picked up Jade and told her, ‘Time for bed!’ He took her down the hall, tucked her in, kissed her good night, and returned to Jeannie where she sat, still smoking, at the kitchen table.

He took her hand again. ‘Things didn’t go so well at the doctor’s, did they?’ She shook her head and burst into tears.

*

Rob Carson’s phone rang at his desk in the old school office. ‘Rob, it’s the Regional Director, he wants to speak with you.’

‘Put him through, Ruth.’ Rob waited for Grainger’s voice.
‘Carson, it’s Jim Grainger. It’s not good. They’ve decided to take the complaint out of my hands and escalate it to the CJC.’ The Criminal Justice Commission! All over the groundsman doing a few jobs at home for him outside school hours. ‘I’m sorry, Rob, but I’m afraid I have to stand you down.’

Rob put down the phone, took off his jacket and hung it on the back of his chair. He removed his wallet and his keys, placing them neatly beside the telephone on his desk. He sat down at the chair, wrote a brief note, lifted the keys again and placed it underneath. Then he rose and strode out the door, past Ruth Grayson, without a word or a glance, along the verandah, down the stairs, across the parade ground to the gate, then down Wellington Road, turning left into Shafston Avenue, and on to the Story Bridge.

*

Jade remembered Dad’s suicide being all over the front page of the Courier Mail. Mum was inconsolable. At the funeral, the recreational mourners at Our Lady of Mt Carmel had formed a cordon of crows around her, while the little girl was left staring blankly at the mahogany box in the back of the hearse. After that, Mum’s cancer progressed rapidly.

It was not such a good thing for Jade now, to let Dad come into her mind. There were too many reasons not to be alone here where so much could wake up his memory.

Gran moved in, and nursed Mum right up until the end. Mum passed away at home, the day before Jade’s 11th birthday. After the funeral, Gran organised the sale of the house, and the packing and disposal of the contents. Mum left everything she had to Jade, with Gran as trustee. So Jade moved into her father’s old room in the Toohey Street cottage. At the end of that year, Gran took her out of Norman Park School and sent her to East Brisbane for Year 7. It was strange going there, after what had happened to Dad. Her teacher, Mrs Doherty, was extra nice to her, but she often heard the other staff whispering about her father when she passed them in the playground, and felt weird, like they had her packed in cotton wool. It was a relief to finish the year.
Jade’s selection for the State Schools cross-country running team brought her a place among the cool kids in the eighth grade at Brisbane State High. It was good to move on there, to somewhere she could be herself and not the dead man’s daughter.

At home, though, she continued to be living under his shadow, in this old room of his. She picked up her mobile phone, sent a quick text message to Rachel, unzipped her uniform and let it fall around her ankles. She stared for a while at her reflection, in the mirrored door of the old wardrobe, naked but for lipstick and a ruffled yellow G with red polka dots, then opened the cupboard and pulled out a short black-and-white patterned stretch mini dress with a plunging back, and matched it with her meanest pair of red patent leather stilettos. She preened and pouted at the mirror while fixing her eyeliner and thickening her lashes with mascara.

* 

Jade opened the door to greet Rachel Flanagan as she pulled up outside the cottage and stepped out of the bucket seat of her beige VW Beetle. Rachel provided a vision of silk-smooth legs, all the way up to the hip, with her red velvet mini kimono riding up in that moment just after the car door opened. She wore a black choker with a white cameo and Barton black square-toed pumps with bows and Louis heels. Her long black hair swished and her hips swayed as she made her way up the steps. Most of the cat inked from her shoulder, down her arm, all but the head, showed below the cuff of the sleeveless dress.

‘Hello, Tiger!’ said Jade, reaching out to plant a kiss on Rachel’s cherry glossed lips.

‘Well, hello to you too, Blondie! I’m the tiger all right, but by the look of you tonight, I’d say it’s cougar time!’

‘Let’s get into the Valley then and hit the dance floor.’

‘Hell, girl, those boys ain’t gonna know what hit them.’ Somehow Rachel’s Toronto accent made her seem even more exotic than her Eurasian features, with her straight black hair all the way from China, and the woody scent of Opium on her freckled alabaster Irish skin. ‘Where’s Garrick tonight?’
‘He’s back at the unit with Tom. He thinks I’ve gone off to work at the Princess to do night shift. What an idiot!’

‘You minx!’ Rachel collapsed into Jade’s arms laughing, nearly stumbling down the stairs on the way back out to the car. Rachel drove to the end of the street, then turned left down Wellington Road, into Lytton Road at the lights, and then on, across the Story Bridge, high above the coils of the broad brown snake of the Brisbane River. She veered right at the end of the bridge to McLachlan Street, and was lucky enough to spot a street park on the left just across Brunswick. The girls walked the block back to The Family nightclub arm-in-arm, passed the scrutiny of the bouncer and the door bitch, and were soon inside leaning across the bar, sipping lime vodka cruisers and checking out the scenery as DJ Fluffy laid down her mix of the latest cougar groove.

A couple of Indian girls in their early twenties were on the dance floor gyrating in keeping with the Bollywood convention. The skinny one wore a sequined silver number. The other girl, short and buxom, was dressed in a tight white blouse, half-unbuttoned, and a black suede skirt hanging scarcely fifteen inches from her hips. They were drawing a little male attention, as a trio of pimply-faced body-building Uni boys hovered, moonwalking awkwardly in their vicinity. All this, in spite of Fluffy playing Ricki-Lee! Over in a corner, Jade spied a man closer to thirty, his long black coiffe protruding like a horn from behind a supporting pillar, together with the front end of his pointy-toed black suede boots. Jade downed the last of her second cruiser, grabbed Rachel by the arm and waltzed round the corner, giving a quick parade in front of him. Just enough to catch his eye, then sashayed out onto the dance floor. He took the hint, took to his feet, and soon they found him bobbing up and down between them. ‘Nick!’ he said.

‘Jade!’

‘Rachel!’

They bobbed and wiggled their way through Do It Like That. In the brief lull in volume that signalled Fluffy’s segue into the next mix, Nick placed an arm on each of the girl’s shoulders and leaned in towards their ears. ‘Would you ladies like a taste of something?’
The girls giggled and nodded, obediently following him back to his lair behind the pillar, as Atomic Kitten come up with their cover of Blondie’s *Heart of Glass*. Nick reached behind the pillar and pulled out a little backpack. He unzipped a pocket at the front and took out a zip-locked plastic bag. ‘Just thirty dollars a tab, girls.’ After handing over the cash, they each took an eccy and swallowed, then returned with Nick to the dance floor, just a little away from the leggy Lakshmi, curvy Saraswati and their ashram of devotees. The night was just beginning to liven up.

Nick drifted off for a while. They returned to the bar for a break and another drink while watching Nick smooth his way into a number of other business transactions. By now they were laughing out loud and falling over each other. Rachel put her arm around Jade’s shoulder and rested her hand on Jade’s left breast, the nipple of which was standing up perkily and staring out through the stretch fabric of her tight white dress. This activated tingles that ran all the way down Jade’s spine. She steadied herself on her bar stool and reached her hand down inside Rachel’s left thigh, caressing that fabulous patch of skin just below the red riding hem. Both girls were a little surprised when, around 2.00 a.m., Nick returned to them, leaned in, looked in turn into Rachel’s dark almond eyes and Jade’s round green ones, and said, ‘I’d have something even more interesting to show you, ladies, if I was offered a bed for the night!’

A few minutes later, they were a trio of mutual chemical benevolence, a Jake the Peg, with Nick the extra leg between the two girls, one arm around the waist of each, heading down McLachlan Street towards the Beetle.

*Back at Toohey Street, Jade put on a Rolling Stones CD in the lounge room. Nick soon had talked both girls round to trying crystal meth. ‘Once you’ve taken it into the vein, you know you’ll never go back to tabs or snorting shit like that,’ he warned them. Out came the packets, and the ninety degree spoon, as well as a fresh injection set. First Jade and then Rachel. Nick saved most of the point for himself. As the rush came on, they all*
danced a wild burlesque together, heading towards the bedroom, backed by Jagger singing *Satisfaction*. Then they kissed and sucked and blew and slapped and rimmed and fucked in every imaginable way, until the girls collapsed into sleep. Just before dawn, Nick grabbed his backpack and slipped away, leaving two complimentary double passes to next Saturday’s gig on the dresser, with his mobile number written on the back of each.
VI
THE IDIOT

Garrick woke alone to the buzzer of the digital alarm clock on the bedside table drilling into his mind. He groaned. An arm shot out to hit the snooze button, authorising the infernal mechanism to repeat after a five minute interval.

Responding to the second assault, Garrick successfully located the off switch. He had slept badly. Reaching out for Jade, he found an empty space beside him. That space had been there now two mornings in a row. She had not returned since Saturday night, nor had she called or texted him. He missed her being there to kiss, but did not miss being told that his breath stank.

Garrick dragged himself out of bed, staggered to the bathroom, inhaled Seretide powder from a purple flying saucer, snorted Nasonex, gargled Listerine. In the shower cubicle, he lathered his face from an aerosol can and shaved blind. He improvised a misanthropic blues when he nicked himself under his right ear, in exactly the same spot as the previous day.

I got out of bed
When I was dead.
I shaved my corpse
And I kicked the cat ...

On waking, and for up to an hour afterwards, Garrick was afflicted with a stream of drivel in the place of thought. It was as much as he could do to prevent himself from singing it aloud. Sometimes it was only the want of an audience that stopped him. In Jade’s presence, there were times when that sadistic impulse came to be more than he could resist.

Garrick stepped out of the shower, dried himself on Jade’s towel and pulled on his charcoal grey Macpherson underpants. He could not have The Body, as she had been dubbed by the journalists, but he would always have the label. When Fred Hollows was
dying, the supermodel had given the ophthalmologist a personally signed copy of her latest 
lingerie calendar. Elle had given Fred an eyeful.

As Garrick pulled a white cotton long-sleeved Tommy Hilfiger shirt off its hanger, he reflected on how brightly the surgeon’s light had burned in that last street; and then on 
the way the lamps had snuffed themselves out as he observed himself approach them in 
his dream, as though in fearful recess from the homicide. He ducked into the bathroom 
for a moment, to gaze intently at the mirror, finding himself suddenly in the grip of an 
urge to check that, in the night, no angel had come to blaze the mark of Cain on his 
forehead. He thought of the blonde woman lying cold under the canvas sheet, black blood 
congealed at her open throat. He ached for Jade in her absence, bowed his head and 
prayed to the goddess on the wall, her face fixed in ecstasy on silver gelatine film, her 
dress blown up by the rollercoaster’s rush. As the neurologist climbed into his Rembrandt 
trousers, Pablo’s Le Pierrot in his portrait on the opposing wall shook his head again from 
side to side. Emerging from the bedroom, he picked up the remote and pointed it at the 
bench-top stereo. The Kinks picked up where they had left off, halfway through Death of 
a Clown.

Scenes from Gus Van Sant’s My Own Private Idaho flashed through Garrick’s 
mind as he ground two scoops of coffee plunger-fine and switched on the electric kettle. 
Cumulus clouds, tinged ochre-red, billowed in a cobalt sky as the tarmac rolled through 
the desert to a point where the haze at the horizon’s edge bisected the frame. In a 
roadside motel, Hans the salesman danced with a bedside lamp, a gothic burlesque to 
smooth Keanu Reeves’ and epileptic River Phoenix’s hustle of the thieves. The song that 
backed that scene was Leonard Cohen’s First We Take Manhattan, Then We Take Berlin.

That film paid homage to Midnight Cowboy, but Garrick’s wandering mind sought 
out its roots in Dostoyevsky’s The Idiot, in which another gentle epileptic fool had loved a 
darker man who turned his attentions to the assassination of love. Sipping coffee, he 
flipped back through his notebook to the draft that was his own take on the theme, written 
the day he couldn’t stop himself from staring at that girl with the long dark hair, the one in 
the red tartan miniskirt, sitting with her legs crossed, on the other side of the courtyard at
Café Babylon. It was on a Saturday afternoon, the January before last, a few weeks after he’d left Penny, with her still breast-feeding their son. He’d scribbled a sonnet out on a piece of scrap paper, went up to the girl’s table to present it, turned bright red and left it with her. Then he fled. Back at his unit, he nursed his shame, painstakingly reconstructing it:

*The Idiot*

_Bewitched, Prince Leo Nikolayevich_

_Myshkin, last and poorest of a line_

_of noblemen, stares across the room_

_at her tattooed shoulder, gripped by the itch_

_to approach her. Nastasya Filippovna gulps her wine_

_and glances back at him across the room._

_Gripped by a fit by the throat in its garrotte,_

_he falls to the floor and froths, the idiot!_

_By the time that he comes to, she’s gone_

_and he is lying in his own shit._

_After the seizure, his state of mind is one_

_of insight and shame. (He’ll get over it.)_

_He knows he wants to tell her she has better_

_tatts than Tank Girl, so he writes her a letter._

The sense of mastery that he achieved by writing this draft imploded on Monday morning when Rachel Flanagan joined his ward round, long black hair plaited and secured with a ribbon, tattoos and thighs neatly covered by her modest blue uniform. She introduced herself as the new clinical nurse consultant, fresh from Toronto.

*

Nick Myshkin turned up on time for his EEG that morning, but at the wrong place. The volunteer at the patient information desk inspected his appointment card and misdirected him to cardiology. He grudgingly complied with the nurse’s demand that he strip down to nothing but his underpants and slip on a white gown, velcroed at the neck, but totally unsecured at the back from the shoulders down. Whoever it was that designed this piece
of shit must’ve been the sort that would read the *Holy Bible* on the can, tearing out pages to wipe his arse. Nick even lay down on the couch when he was told, and it was only when he asked the kinky-haired Samoan nurse, ‘What the fuck has sticking paper dots with wires on my chest got to do with measuring my brain waves?’ that the mistake was realised, and he was spared an unnecessary electrocardiogram. The nurse made a call up to the neurology laboratory and negotiated for the test to go ahead, even though he was half an hour late for it. She insisted on sticking Nick in a wheel chair, calling a wardsman, and personally escorting him to check in at Electroencephalography. She wasn’t such a bad sort, really. This place might be like *Fawlty Towers*, but at least this girl had a bigger heart than Sybil, and huge tits.

Nick wondered what motivated people to be genuinely helpful. He wasn’t like that. But, thinking of *Fawlty Towers*, was he more like Manuel, or more like Basil? No, that Dr Willis would make a better stand-in for John Cleese as Basil Fawlty. Maybe there could be more than one Basil – a whole dynasty of Fawltys, each with his own series, like all the variations on Dr Who. The only things steady and constant in all that were the Daleks. He was about to get wired up to look like one, judging from the rubber cap that Asian bloke in the white coat was waving at him.

‘Hello, Nick, I’m Hoa Bui, the nurse technician. I’ll be setting you up for your EEG today. Come and sit over here.’

Nick got up and walked across to the blue vinyl reclining chair.

Hoa continued his orientation speech. ‘Dr Willis is over there on the other side of the glass screen. He’ll be watching you on the video monitor and checking your trace as it comes out on his computer screen in there. He’ll tell me what he wants me to do when we come to the photic stimulation.’

‘What the hell is that?’

In his left hand, Hoa held a white hair net with nobs on it. This was the Dalek hat Nick had already seen. That wasn’t worrying him so much as the thing in Hoa’s right hand, the hand that he’d held behind his back when he first came in and bent over Nick,
peering at his coiffe with a gaze that Nick misread as emanating from a position of fierce disapproval, or else from one of alien detachment.

‘You mean this?’ Hoa enquired, brandishing the black plastic thing that looked a bit like a hair dryer and a lot like a ray gun. ‘That’s for drying the gel and fixing your coiffe back in place after we’ve finished.’

Nick had a lot of trouble telling when Asians were joking, and when they meant business. Especially this guy, who was good at keeping a straight face. So fucking inscrutable!

‘Don’t look so worried!’ said Hoa, now breaking into a broad grin, which Nick found even more confusing. ‘I hope you can take a joke! It gets very boring in here setting up for these tests every day. Sometimes I like to play a little. It’s the photic stimulator!’

‘And I’m supposed to find that reassuring?’ This was the kind of guy who only turns up at church so he can try out his joy buzzer when he shakes hands with the preacher.

‘When Dr Willis gives me the signal, I will point the gun into your eyes, and a stroboscopic laser beam will be projected through this vent, a bright blue flashing light. Sometimes that can cause some people to have a fit, or maybe just to space out a little. I will watch your behaviour and report back to Dr Willis what I see. I’ll keep the flashing light going for about one minute, while he watches the EEG trace on his monitor screen.’

‘So you’re going to use that to try to make me have a fit?’

‘Yes, you could say that! It’s better to find it out here, now, okay? Better than if it happens next time a strobe comes on when you’re out clubbing, or when the screen flickers on the television, or when you’re driving and the sunlight flickers in and out through a paling fence. All these things sometimes trigger people to have fits. In some situations that can be very dangerous.’ Far from being inscrutable, Hoa’s animated expression showed that he was enjoying this part of the orientation ceremony. Hoa put the ray gun down on the bench, continued to hold the rubber cap in his left hand and picked up a squeeze bottle of Capilano honey with his free hand.
Nick could tell that it was honey by looking at the jubilant bee logo on the label.

‘What are you going to do with that shit?’

‘I’m going to squirt it on to special places on your scalp. It helps to give a better reading. And besides, it helps the cap stay on!’

Nick wasn’t sure when he was supposed to take this guy seriously.

‘But I don’t know what we’re going to do about that mighty coiffe!’

‘You leave that alone! You’re not touching it!’

‘Whoa! Easy now! No need to get all het up and shirty with me!’ Hoa was struggling with the net cap now, trying to pull it on over the unicorn horn that Nick had made out of his hair.

‘Careful! You’ll break the gel!’ Nick jerked his head away from Hoa’s hands.

Hoa shrugged and said, ‘I don’t know what to do.’ Then, scratching his head: ‘I suppose I could cut a hole in it, and let the coiffe poke out. You OK with that?’

‘Yeah, sure. Give it a shot.’

Hoa picked up a pair of scissors and cut away at the netting at the front of the cap. He then eased the net along the horn of Nick’s coiffe from the pointy end, cutting the net a little more as he went, allowing the hole to become sufficiently wide to allow Nick’s solid gelled stalk to poke through without interference. Then he pulled the net over Nick’s crown and stepped back with what Nick guessed might pass for an Asian version of a satisfied look. ‘There we are now. All done!’

Hoa went over to turn on the contraption connected to the lead coming out of the back of the hairnet cap, then walked to the other machine, just to the right of Nick’s chair, and pushed the start button. The brushes began to trace wave patterns as the roll of graph paper began to move.

Nick asked, ‘How does that thing trace my brain waves when it’s not connected to the cap?’

‘Each of the knobs in the cap is a radio transmitter with an electrode on the end near your scalp, picking up the electrical activity over the part of your brain beneath it. These signals are transmitted to the receiver in this machine over here, and then converted into
movements of the arms that put the ink onto this paper trace. The computer that sends the signal to the arms is also sending signals to the monitor Dr Willis is watching next door. First he wants a resting trace. Now I’m going to give you a few simple commands that I want you to follow. I will signal to Dr Willis when each action starts and stops by pushing this button. Now close your eyes and screw them up tight! That’s good. You can relax and open your eyes again now. Now poke out your tongue and hold. That’s good. Relax again now! Now clench your teeth and grind them! Yes, that’s good. Now relax!” Hoa spoke into the microphone protruding from his headset. ‘Dr Willis, was that all okay?’

‘Yes, Hoa, that’s all good!’ Garrick’s voice came out of the speaker in the wall, causing Nick to jump. ‘What was that?’ asked Garrick.

‘I think you frightened him, Garrick!’
‘Hello, Nick! Sorry to scare you. How are you doing?’
‘Well, this is all a bit weird, but I’m all right I guess.’
‘Has Hoa told you about the photic stimulation?’
‘Yeah, after he waved his ray gun around for a while!’
‘And are you okay with that?’
‘What if I have a fit?’
‘I’ll ask Hoa to put in a rubber mouth guard with an air hole in it before we do the next bit. And put a butterfly needle into the back of your hand. We’ve got some Valium drawn up over there on the bench. If you start to fit, I’ll watch here for a little while so we get a trace, then I’ll pop in on you after a few seconds and inject the Valium to stop it. We might need to keep you here to observe for a couple of hours then if that happens. Shall we go ahead?’

‘Yeah, all right, Doc, but this is all pretty weird.’

Hoa had put on rubber gloves while Garrick was speaking with Nick. He brought the mouthpiece in a silver kidney dish, picked it up and asked Nick to open wide as he inserted it. He went to the bench and picked up the ray gun again. ‘Right to go now, Doc?’
‘Ready, Nick?’ asked Garrick-who-lived-in-the-speaker.

‘It’s hard to talk with this thing in my mouth, but hit me with all you’ve got, Mr Spaceman!’

Hoa raised the stroboscope, pointed it at Nick’s face and squeezed the trigger. Flashing waves of bright blue light came out of the broad end of the barrel, the part that made it look so much like a hair dryer.

Nick looked bewildered for a moment. Then his eyes began flicking rapidly towards the left, drifting back more slowly to the right each time. Air hissed from the hole in the mouthpiece. Nick’s eyes closed, his jaws clamped, his back stiffened and arched, his fingers clenched into fists and his toes curled under. Then his whole body began to jerk and twitch spasmodically. Hoa had seen this many times in response to photic stimulation, but not usually so rapidly, or so dramatically. A patch of moisture spread out from the front of Nick’s gown. Hoa was glad he had placed an absorbent pad on the seat. He wondered how long Garrick would let this go on.

Garrick-on-the-other-side-of-the-screen watched the monitors. The seizure activity had first shown itself on the trace from the left temporal electrode, but very rapidly spread throughout both cerebral hemispheres. The trace showed all the electrodes generating huge spike and wave patterns, and via the direct observation monitor, Garrick could see that the patient was having a full-on grand mal seizure. It had gone on long enough to be diagnostically conclusive, so it was time to stop it. Garrick got up from his chair and opened the door in the glass screen. ‘Valium 10mg, please!’ Hoa looked sheepish. ‘Don’t tell me you’ve forgotten to draw it up!’ At times like this, Garrick was prone to wonder what it was that had destined him to work, as he did, surrounded by idiots.
VII

GRANDMA STIRRING

By the time Garrick returned to the ward for his round, Nick was wide awake, chatting with Rachel Flanagan, who seemed to be responding in a way that Garrick found overly familiar.

Rachel bent from the waist to feel Nick’s forehead. Somehow the top two buttons of her uniform blouse had come undone. Garrick envied the patient’s view of her cleavage, and the way she pressed her thigh against Nick’s arm as she leaned over the bed and said, ‘I’d better take your temperature. You’re feeling a little hot!’

‘Not half as hot as you, nurse,’ responded Nick, rubbing her leg from under the sheets with his hand.

Rachel jumped back a little, bringing her butt closer to Garrick as he approached the bed. ‘That’s enough of that, you cheeky man!’

Garrick found Rachel to be a kind, efficient and otherwise competent nurse, but somewhat loose in her professional boundaries. While he had been extremely embarrassed to discover, on his second date with Jade, that she knew Rachel, and the two girls were becoming close friends, it also gave him fuel for certain kinds of imaginary events. Sometimes these thoughts made him blush and stammer when they came to him on rounds, or when Rachel occasionally called him over to sit with her at lunch in the staff cafeteria. Her nebulous limits had not extended so far as to accommodate him, other than in dreams. Still, it was strange that she should be so flirty with Nick, after having to clean him up when he was sent down from the EEG laboratory. Garrick sensed somehow that this might not be the first time that Rachel had met Nick. Dark thoughts began to play like imps in the posterior fossa of Nick’s neurological head. What would draw a girl like Rachel to a deadbeat like Nick?

Garrick beckoned Rachel to leave the bedside and, just outside the curtain, whispered to her, ‘Did you notice anything strange as he was coming round?’
‘He just kept muttering ‘Sorry, Jade!’ or something like that,’ Rachel shrugged.

Garrick, troubled, returned to the bedside with the nurse. Turning to address Nick, he asked, ‘So, how’s it going now?’

‘A bit of a headache, Doc. And I’m aching all over, like I’m been hit by a truck. What happened? I must’ve been out for a while?’

‘Well, the photic stimulation brought on a fit, a full grand mal seizure. You lost consciousness, your muscles tensed up, then your whole body began jerking. I had to rush in from next door and give you an injection of Valium to stop it, to make sure you didn’t come to any serious harm.’

‘So I really had a full-on fit, Doc?’

‘Yes, you did. You definitely have epilepsy, Nick. So we must start you on tablets to prevent more fits. If you’ll stay until tomorrow, we’ll give you a loading dose of Epilim tonight, and be able to make a fair guess at a regular dose to discharge you on tomorrow morning. Dr Sorensen will write you a form for a test, to check the level of the drug in your blood in five days, and I’ll see you again at my private practice clinic next week. I’ll have the results back by then, and we’ll adjust the dose. It might take a few weeks to get the levels into the right range for you.’ Garrick turned to Rachel and asked ‘What does he weigh?’

‘Seventy-five kilograms, Dr Willis.’

‘Thank you, Sister Flanagan.’ Garrick was having those thoughts again. He hoped he wasn’t turning pink and flushing all over. ‘We’ll give him a stat dose of a gram tonight, and start him on 400mg twice daily for discharge tomorrow.’ Garrick turned to the intern, reminding her: ‘Dr Sorensen, if you write that form and script right now, we’ll make the pharmacy run, and he’ll be out of here by ten in the morning. We must think of freeing up beds, and that demands, to improve the patient journey, that we learn to work efficiently.’

‘Yes, Dr Willis,’ nodded Maggie Sorensen, a big-boned, awkward, joyless woman, just older than Garrick, in her early forties, but fresh out of medical school now after a mining engineering career in the Emirates. Sometimes it seemed to Garrick that the
weight of that Littmann Cardiology III stethoscope, with its black plated chest piece and ear tubes, was too great a burden draped around Maggie’s shoulders.

‘And Rachel, make sure you book him into my Thursday clinic.’

‘As good as done, Dr Willis!’ chipped Rachel, with a flounce, and a disarming pearly-white grin.

‘And what are the side effects, Doc?’ asked Nick, just as Garrick turned his back on him and moved in the direction of the next bed.

Garrick’s iPhone rang, sounding the theme from *The Twilight Zone*. His father’s mobile number appeared on the screen. He turned back to Nick and said, ‘Sorry, I must take this call. Dr Sorensen will tell you more about the medication. I’ll see you in clinic, Thursday, next week. Don’t forget to go to pathology and have the blood test done on Monday. In the morning, before you take your tablet.’ *The Twilight Zone* continued to wail weirdly in the background until Garrick took the call. He stepped out into the corridor and began striding towards the lifts, holding the phone to his ear. ‘Hello, Dad?’

‘Hi Garrick, I know you’re busy, but your Grandma’s had another stroke, and she’s in a pretty bad way. Dr Throsby’s put her in St Vincent’s. She can’t walk, talks a lot of rubbish and one side of her face is numb. She’s had a fall and broke her arm, too. They can’t operate to fix it unless they stop the drugs that prevent the strokes for at least a week. Old Throsby says the she’ll probably die before then if they do, but he said the surgeon would like to talk to you before we make a decision. I’ve got Mum’s Power of Attorney, but your Aunty Charlie’s pretty upset and can’t take it in. We’d really appreciate your help down here, son. And your Grandma’s been calling out for you. Can you make it down?’

‘Okay, Dad! I’m supposed to knock off at 5.00, but I’ll tell the juniors I have to go. I’d better talk to Jade and grab a few things from home. By the time I’ve done that, it’ll be 4.30. So I’ll get to Lismore around seven tonight, and see you up at St Vincent’s then.’

‘Yeah, well, come and have a beer and stay over with us. It’s about time we caught up.’

‘All right, Dad. See you soon.’
When Garrick arrived at St Vincent’s, a crowd had gathered around Grandma Edie. The Baptist pastor had just left, and various members of the family were talking over the top of each other. Aunty Charlie sat anxiously beside the bed spitting out a monologue on Edie’s movements over the past week. She hugged Garrick and said, ‘Grandma was looking forward to the holiday at Caloundra that Holden and I have booked for a fortnight’s time. We were going to take her away for a few days.’

Don, Garrick’s dad, a grey-haired man with tanned and weathered skin, still on the kinder side of sixty, wiped his hand on his khaki builder’s overalls before taking Garrick’s and shaking it, saying, ‘Good to see you, son! Glad you could make it.’

Aunty Charlie broke in again, loudly interpreting the groan that came out of Grandma’s throat after a belch when Garrick entered the room as ‘Mum’s way of letting us know that she was pleased to see her doctor grandson’. Garrick walked to the right hand side of the bed and took his grandmother’s hand.

‘She knows you’re there, Garrick! She’s been waiting for you.’ Aunty Charlie yabbered on. ‘That’s why she’s hung on. She’d been calling for you, and she knew you were coming.’

Don raised his eyebrows and nodded in Christine’s direction. Garrick had never quite known what to call her. But she’d been good for his Dad, and apart from Grandma, the closest thing he and his sister Sandy had known to a real mum. Mother was a word that was fuzzy for Garrick, fuzzy and confusing. Which one should he call Mum? Weird as he was, he knew he loved his Grandma, and that Christine had treated him with greater kindness and warmth than he’d ever known from Charmaine, his birth mother. Not that he even knew where Charmaine was these days. The last he’d heard of her she’d been doing rehab with the Salvos, in a place surrounded by banana farms, somewhere up in the hills near Cobaki. Garrick couldn’t think of any time in the last decade that she had been straight when she called him, or when the call had been for any purpose other than to hit
him up for money. He had been too young when she left them, but old enough to see how much it hurt his dad, and he had never quite been able to let her back into his heart.

Aunty Charlie chattered on, offering a high-pitched racing commentary. Garrick could remember Grandma being just like that when Grandpa was dying. It’d been hard to get a word in edgeways, even just to say goodbye to the old man. There was no doubt, Aunty Charlie was turning into Grandma. Each year that went by, Charlie grew that little bit more like her mother. Mercifully, Christine interrupted Charlie in the middle of a fine recitation of the old lady’s last shopping list. ‘Come on, Charlie, let me take you for a coffee, you’ve been here all day with her and up all night too. You need a break.’

Garrick shook his shoulders to release the tension and let out a sigh as his stepmother shepherded Aunty Charlie out of the room. Charlie’s husband Holden followed, silently. *He’s like a handbag*, Garrick thought to himself. He was glad that his Dad stayed behind in the room, as did Aunty Alison and Uncle Phil, who were both managing to stay remarkably quiet. Garrick wondered about Uncle Ray, whom he hadn’t seen for a year or two. Ray was just a few years older than him, much younger than Dad. Three years younger than Uncle Phil. But somehow Ray seemed more like an older brother to Garrick, whereas Phil seemed like part of Dad’s generation, even though there were more than ten years between Phil and Don. Ray had probably been in earlier, and most likely was now working on the evening shift as nurse in charge of the surgical emergency theatre up at Lismore Hospital. Garrick knew that he had been the last to come, except for his sister Sandy, who was still on the way from Dubai, probably in the air by now. No one expected Grandma to last this one out. Garrick was in full agreement with Khan, the orthopaedic surgeon he’d spoken to briefly on the phone before taking the drive down. It would not be safe to operate on Grandma’s arm unless the Plavix was stopped for at least a week. Otherwise she’d bleed to death on the operating table. And now that the Plavix had been stopped, she’d be almost sure to have another stroke within a few days, and that would take her.

Grandma seemed awfully quiet. If she was breathing at all, her breath was very shallow and slow. Her left arm was shortened at the shoulder, held in a splint, and lying
across her chest in a sling. Just the same, the intravenous line had been inserted in the
back of her left hand. The IVAC quietly monitored the flow of dextrose and saline from
the bag on the stand and into her veins. The second line, Garrick guessed, must be the
morphine infusion. That smaller bag was nearly empty. Garrick had Grandma’s good
hand in his right. Gently, he felt for her pulse and was relieved to find it – weak and
irregular, with lots of dropped beats, but a pulse is a pulse. Grandma was still with them.
Then he got up, went to the foot of the bed and uncovered her feet. He drew his car key
from his pocket and ran it up the outside of the soles of each of her feet, from the heel to
the toes. No reaction. Grandma was either brain dead, or else the morphine had put her so
deep that even her reflexes had gone to sleep.

None of the others, not Phil, nor Alison, and certainly not Don, dared to ask Garrick
for an explanation. He returned to the side of Edie Guyton’s bed and took her right hand
again, gently and tenderly, in his. Garrick bent low over his grandmother’s face and
kissed her cheek, then lowered himself into the seat again and tried to speak, but found
that his body wrenched with the first of a series of violent sobs, and that the tears began to
flow from his eyes and down his cheeks, and his nose began to run. He hadn’t cried like
this since he was seven, when his little fox terrier pup Jackie had slipped out of her collar
and run in front of a truck. Grandpa had been walking her down to the corner shop. But
then he had Grandpa to hold onto while they both cried and sobbed. Now the old man
had been gone for seventeen years, and while Garrick still carried his Grandpa’s tender
heart, he had to do the crying all alone. Well, not quite. Don had stepped forward and put
his arm around his son’s shoulder. Garrick accepted the embrace, but didn’t turn to see.
If he had, he would have found his father’s leather cheeks were just as wet, but Don was
just so much quieter in his way of showing it.

Maybe it was that he shook the bed as he sobbed, jolting her broken arm and
waking up the pain, but as Garrick rattled and gasped out his gratitude and grief – as he
struggled to say ‘Thank you so much Grandma for everything you’ve done. You’ve
taught me what it is to love, and I love you so much. I don’t want to say it, but I’m glad
I’ve gotten here while you’re still alive, so I can say goodbye’. The old lady stirred and
opened her eyes, looked into his, gurgled and appeared to be struggling to speak. Then a pained look came over her face, and her previously still, limp legs kicked and thrashed. Then her eyes closed, and she was still again. ‘Dad,’ said Garrick, ‘I think we’d better call the nurse. Gran needs more morphine.’

Just then the IVAC began to beep, asserting the truth of the statement. Alison peered at the bag and confirmed, ‘It’s empty.’

The nurse, a brawny redhead country girl with arms thicker than Garrick’s thighs, a huge heart and big bum, came in and set up a new bag of the infusion. As she was finishing, Christine brought Aunty Charlie and Uncle Holden back. Charlie looked exhausted, yet the machine-gun chattered on, though Holden remained quieter than the unmarked grave that was the fate of any soldier who might cross her. ‘It’s getting late,’ said the nurse, whose excess kilos did not hinder her insight. ‘You folks look like you’ve been through the wringer. But you’re not going to do any good here tonight. When that shot runs through, Mrs Guyton’s gonna need her rest, and so you’d best go home and get some too. We’ll call you if she looks like she’s gonna slip away, but I’d say that won’t be tonight, and tomorrow’s gonna be another big day for you, so go and have your dinner and we’ll watch over her.’

‘Thanks, Sister,’ said Garrick and led the way out the door. The others filed after him, with his Dad and Christine having to drag Charlie out, one on each arm, while Holden guarded the rear.
VIII

HIS MOTHER’S BODY

Garrick spent the night at Dad’s place up on the hill at Goonellabah, not so far from Grandma’s house at East Lismore, where he slept for the first weeks of his life in a cot in his father’s old room, before Dad and Charmaine had managed to find a place of their own. When Charmaine left and Dad went off to work in the mines, he and Sandy had stayed with Grandma. Dad’s room had been his room then. He was glad not to have to be there tonight. With Aunty Charlie smelling Grandma’s presence everywhere and Holden lurching around, it would have been too much. If he slept in that bed, the old nightmares would return, and maybe the ghosts as well. Now he was sleeping in the room he had at Dad’s during his high school years, after Dad and Christine had set up house here, and things had gradually become more stable.

At least at Dad’s place, Garrick would not hear graves being dug outside his window, but he already had managed a recurrence of his childhood dream of entering a system of Chinese tunnels, in which he had become terrifyingly lost, until he finally emerged in a cemetery in which a family member (always ambiguous as to which one) had arrived in a long black hearse, ready for burial, the coffin all decked out with pink and white gladioli. Somehow he missed the service at the church and must sneak around the periphery, lest he be caught. Yes, that dream came back to him again, even here.

So he was up at 3.00 a.m., with the light on in the kitchen, scribbling into his notebook, crossing whole lines out and scribbling over them again. Writing helped sometimes, even if he didn’t believe all that psychoanalytic guff about trouble from things remaining unprocessed.

*Down the tunnel of fear, I follow, through the Chinese cemetery inside my mother’s body, where the drum of the heart beats hollow as the gong and the kookaburra choir of a sunburnt country laughs at my longing for the silk-seamed calves of the femme fatale from film noir.*
The kitchen clock showed 4.30 a.m. Garrick decided that fragment was the best he could do for now. He got up and turned the light off on the way back to his bed, where he lay awake staring at the ceiling as the dawn began its struggle to penetrate the open slats of the venetian blinds. Around 5.00 a.m. the kookaburras in the bloodwoods on the vacant lot next door really began to laugh. By this time it seemed they were laughing at him, not with him.

Garrick gave up on sleep, got out of bed, put on his blue striped cotton robe, picked up his toiletry bag and headed for the bathroom. After a shower and a shave, he dressed and made himself coffee and toast. He left a thank you note for Dad and Christine, and drove back to Brisbane for Tuesday’s work.

*

Don called again at 11.00 Thursday morning, more than a week after his son had returned to Brisbane. Garrick was just about to strike the medical wards of Logan Hospital with a lightning neurology round. That was how he worked at Logan, where there was no shortage of clinical material, no staff specialist and no other visiting neurologist.

Garrick tried to fool himself that there wasn’t a messianic bone in his body – or if there was, he’d had it surgically removed, then deposited it when the offering plate came round during his annual Christmas ritual, taking Grandma to worship at the Lismore Baptist Church, while Dad and Christine stayed home making prawn cocktails and baking the turkey. On Logan days he felt like Jesus must’ve after a hard day out healing the sick, then having to convince the apostles to remain optimistic about the prospect of feeding five thousand people from a parcel of five pre-packed bake-at-home dinner rolls and two small whiting.

The call interrupted the Persian registrar’s unsympathetic presentation of a middle-aged Cambodian woman with a debilitating case of *tic doloreux* – chronic facial pain – and oral narcotic addiction. Garrick still found it surprising when successful refugees from oppression looked down so much on those who hadn’t done so well. Garrick had been about to bluntly suggest that a childhood spent in Pol Pot’s killing camp, and the memory of watching her baby sister torn from her mother’s emaciated breast and swung
by the heels until her head smashed against the banyan tree in the yard of the desecrated
temple might have something to do with rendering her now so useless. But he could see
that the Khmer interpreter was doing the job for him, and that the teaching method most
commonly used on him in medical school – public humiliation – was the wrong one. He
also wondered, if Dr Amirzedeh had the opportunity to present the patient’s history in
Farsi, would the kindness of his heart’s regard have been more readily apparent? Perhaps
it was just as well that his father’s call came then, milking the venom from the glands
under the neurologist’s tongue.

_The Twilight Zone_ persistently sounded from Garrick’s phone. He excused himself
to the patient and the interpreter, leaving Dr Amirzedeh to bear the pain and carry on. In
the corridor, he pressed the answer button. His father’s voice came down the line.

‘Your Grandma, Garrick, she’s gone.’

‘I’m so sorry to hear that, Dad. She seemed to be getting back from it.’

‘She made a massive recovery from that stroke, didn’t she? It was seeing you that
brought her back. You were her favourite grandchild. You know that?’

‘Did she say that?’

‘Yes, son. She was so proud of you. She really rallied after you came to see her
that night. She did all right with the surgery, too. Might’ve been home in a few more
days if it hadn’t been for the blood clot in her leg. They were just about to start the Plavix
again. She had the clot, in spite of them wrapping her up in those big white stockings.
Then, the next thing, it went straight to her lungs. In the early hours, this morning. When
the pain came, she was gripping my hand and looking up at me with those pale blue eyes.
Reminded me of Lou Reed singing that song with Velvet Underground back in the sixties,
when I was just out of school. The pain in those eyes. And now she’s gone. Half an hour
ago.’

‘How was it at the end?’

‘I told them that we didn’t want to see her suffer anymore, and she wouldn’t want
to linger on. So they gave her a big shot of morphine. Aunty Charlie and I were there
when she closed those eyes for the last time. She’s seen a lot through those eyes, a lot of
pain, son. And she’s always been there for us. But she’s gone now. At least she went
peacefully. I couldn’t see her suffer any more, not knowing all that she’s been through.’
Garrick heard his father struggling over the words, to be a man and not break down and cry. Not that Don would think that’s what made a man a man. The way he had been brought up was to have a tender heart, but watch your back, and be careful who is watching, who is with you, any time you show a weakness. ‘I’m so sorry, Dad. You did the right thing. It’s a bit of a shock to me though, too. Grandma’s always been there. I guess when I saw her last, she looked to me as if she wouldn’t make it, and so I really let go of her then. But I didn’t give her credit for being so tough. And she made it through to have the surgery. And some hope of going home. She never would’ve coped in a nursing home, Dad. She had to have the surgery. And she was always going to be a big risk. But she took the chance. Funny, though. It’s going to take me a while to get used to the idea that she’s not there anymore. I guess I’d somehow thought that maybe she could live forever.’

‘Yeah, she was a fighter, son. She sure fought for us kids after my Dad died and she was left for us … Anyway, the funeral’s set for Monday. Apparently she’s arranged it all in advance. She’s written everything down in a little pink book. And she told Charlie that she wants you to do the eulogy.’

Garrick gulped. ‘Are you sure, Dad? Wouldn’t she have left that to Uncle Phil? He’s almost qualified as a minister.’

‘No, she was absolutely clear with Charlie. She said: “My grandson, Garrick, the doctor will speak at my funeral. You can all help him tell my story. I’ve written all the dates and places in this little pink book. I don’t want that biker son of mine, Phillip, thinking he can tell all the dirt on me just because he’s been to Bible College. Garrick will do a nice job of it. He’s got a nice speaking voice. And he can write poetry.” So I guess you’ve got the job, son, and we’ll be expecting you to do her good. When can you come down again?’

‘Well, Dad, I guess I’m writing the eulogy, I’d better see if I can get a couple of days of bereavement leave. If I can, then I’ll come down tonight and have tomorrow and the weekend to work on it with the family around to help me.’

‘And are you going to bring that fast lady nurse of yours with you this time? Reminds me of your mother. You’ve got to be careful with that one, son. But I will say this, she’s certainly got your mum’s body.’
Waiting for the train at Meadowbrook Station, Garrick was hoping that he wouldn’t run into Myshkin again. Why would the man be coming from down that way, anyway? Didn’t he live at West End? Or was it somewhere over at New Farm? He’d rather not see him anywhere outside of the clinic. And he wasn’t too fond of seeing him there, either.

On the way to Dutton Park, Garrick found himself running through a series of mental pictures of Grandma at all the different times of his life. Who really was his mother? Grandma had certainly been more of a mother to him than Charmaine, but even Christine had done better for him than that. And she’d been so much better for Dad.

When Garrick made it back the Princess, Nick Myshkin was already there waiting for him. He checked his afternoon list – just Myshkin and one other, a bus driver with Gilles de la Tourette syndrome. Mercifully, the verbal tics were rare, and a milligram of risperidone a day seemed to keep the motor tics at bay, with less severe side effects than when he’d tried haloperidol. Best of all, now that unfortunate man was virtually cured, he often forgot to come to his appointments. Today though, he had rung to cancel, just an hour before. If only Nick had stayed away as well.

Garrick said hello to Jilly, whom he noticed was wearing a new perfume. *Hypnotic Poison*, by Dior, unless his olfactory bulbs were failing him. A little overpowering, but not unpleasant, in spite of being manifest in combination with a lime green tube dress and matching heels. He didn’t have the foggiest notion of how to begin to tell her that, although Spring had sprung, lime was not the new black, at least not for redheads. Better not to go there. He picked up the file and called Nick Myshkin in.

‘How’s it going, Doc? You’re looking a bit down. Like a dog’s breakfast?’

‘I’m fine, thanks,’ snapped Garrick. ‘I don’t seem to have your blood test results?’

‘I forgot until this morning. Then I went in and couldn’t have the test anyway, because I had already taken my tablet.’

*That’s something, anyway,* thought Garrick. *At least he’s taking them.* That was more than he’d expected. ‘Any trouble with the tablets?’
‘I was a bit groggy in the morning, the day after I left hospital. And a bit queasy in the belly. But no trouble since then.’

‘Any more fits, or faints, or funny turns?’

‘No, Doc! I’ve actually felt clearer in my head since the fit that happened when you were doing the EEG test with the ray gun. I don’t know if that’s the tablets?’

‘It might be, but it’s more probably just the fit itself, at this stage. Until you’ve had the blood test, I can’t know whether or not you’re on an adequate dose. I expect I’ll have to put it up, once we know the levels. But there’s no better protection against fits than having a huge fit like the one you did when you were in hospital. It stabilises the nerve cell membranes in a way that regulates the brain’s electrical activity. Often patients report greater clarity of thought and improved mood for months after a really good fit. And at least we confirmed the diagnosis.’

‘You sound like Ian Drury from The Blockheads, listing Reasons To Be Cheerful.’

‘Well, there’s always plenty to be cranky about if we go looking for it. I’d better write you a new prescription. And if you get that test done tomorrow, I can get you back to clinic next week again, so we can adjust the dose.’

Garrick wrote out the script and handed it to Nick, who pulled his wallet out of the back pocket of his jeans, intending to stuff the thing in there with the bank notes. In the process, he dropped the wallet at Garrick’s feet. It landed with the photo page open. Garrick bent to pick it up, and noticed that the shot was of a Slavic man on a big bike, and a woman with long black hair trailing back, holding the man’s waist tight as she straddled the pillion, her boots on the pegs, leather skirt riding up to show her thighs wrapped round his. A wild ecstatic expression on her face, she turned to the camera, slightly blurred by speed. Scribbled across it, in a strangely familiar hand: ‘Leo and Charmaine, 1975.’

Garrick said, ‘You know, we could almost be brothers’. He passed over the wallet. Nick grinned as he took it, then reached to shake Garrick’s hand.

His mother’s body, wrapped around a Ruskie on a Harley.
IX
PALE BLUE EYES

In the dream, Garrick was seventeen again, his slender body in the blue and gold uniform of the Lismore Athletics Club, running down a moonlit pathway between the monuments on the hill in the North Lismore Memorial Rest Park, where the tombstones had been removed in the sixties and lined up in tight little rows looking down on the newly anonymous graves of those under the green field below. As he passed the cross of William Steenson, the one famous for its eerie glow, a tall gangly figure in a long brown robe jumped out from behind the stone. A quick look over his right shoulder, gave him a view of the creature’s face. Garrick’s own face, but with pale blue luminescent eyes, a drooling snarl and long exaggerated canines – vampire teeth. Garrick’s hair, at that age, was thick and sun-bleached, growing down just beyond his collar. The creature’s hair was long, streaming out behind him like a pennant in the wind as he ran. The doppelgänger’s every stride matched Garrick’s, and then some, so that it was slowly gaining on him, barefoot, seeming unimpeded by its cassock covered in magic symbols sewn on to the coarse burnt umber cloth in patches of woven gold.

It was at Garrick’s shoulder, running on his shadow, where it cast none. Soon it would overtake him, and then it would take him over. At this thought, a rage rose in him that was greater than his fear. He spun round to face the thing, his back to the crest of the hill, taking the stance he instinctively assumed when attacked in the streets by a dog on the loose, knees bent and feet planted wide apart, hands up in front of him ready to grapple. The creature howled as it leapt towards him, flying through the air to connect with the Nike shoe at the end of Garrick’s well aimed solar plexus kick. Doubled up and shrieking with pain, the creature torpedoed in the trajectory of the boot. Up, up and over the moon, never to be seen again.

*
Strange, thought Garrick, that he should dream that dream again here the night before Grandma’s funeral. He woke from the dream feeling exhilarated, relieved, alive, as he would after coming out on top from a great physical ordeal. He remembered feeling like that after he’d broken the record in the school cross country, and when his club soccer team had won the grand final that same year. But also liberated. Then, only a little later, apprehensive, realising that he had turned his back on something vital, repudiated some essential part of himself. That dream had been the last nightmare he’d had before finishing school and leaving home to study medicine in Brisbane.

Nothing much had troubled him after that, not until he encountered gross anatomical dissection in the second year. He had shared the task with five other students, all of them gathered around a stainless steel table, ridged drains at the sides, three students to each side. He and his friend Melissa (where was she now? Working for the WHO, running a hospital for AIDS orphans somewhere in Africa?) had worked on the lower limbs and the pelvis. Sometimes the flirting across the table could be intense. The cadaver had been a big heavy-set old woman who’d reminded him too much of Grandma. He’d come home to College in the evenings stinking of formalin and then have to face the meat concoction on his plate in the dining room, smelling and looking much the same as what he’d left on the slab.

For a while after that, Garrick found himself unable to dream. Or at least he didn’t remember them. Except when he came home on holidays. Except when he slept in this room.

Garrick reached out to put his right arm over Jade’s waist, and slipped his left arm under her. She’d swapped out of a late shift to make it down last night, so she could stay on for the funeral. He stroked the fine down on her belly, and played with the golden dragonfly he’d bought her when she had her navel pierced. She was small and curvy, tucking into him so nicely when he wrapped himself around her. He began to poke at her and tickle with what seemed to him, after a dream like that, to be a surprisingly huge boner.

*
Having been with Grandma when she died, and knowing what a state Aunt Charlie would be in, Don and Christine had decided not to attend the viewing, so Garrick drove Sandy and her fiancé Ahmad over to the Parkview Funeral Home, just a few streets away, where the Szeliski boys had laid Grandma out in the dress that she had worn on the day of Garrick’s marriage to Penny. Jade came along for the ride, but decided to stay in the car with Ahmad. She had only once met Mrs Guyton alive, and Ahmad had never had the pleasure, so why should they be involved?

Garrick took his sister’s hand, and they walked together through the door to reception. The duty manager showed them to the viewing room. Grandma looked very peaceful. Those Szeliski boys had really done a good job. The older one had taught Sunday School at Lismore Baptist when Garrick was a boy, and the younger one had been in the year ahead of Garrick at Lismore High, and also played soccer with Garrick’s club. Come to think of it, he dated Sandy once or twice before she went away to do her information technology degree at Armidale. Anyway, they’d been fond of Grandma, and gotten used to her regular attendance at so many of the funerals they’d run, in her unofficial role as chief mourner Lismore branch of the Women’s Christian Temperance Union. Even in death, they treated her well. Soon the duty manager would close the lid on Grandma for ever, screw it down tight, and call for assistance to wheel her round to the chapel, ready for the 11.00 a.m. service.

Garrick held Sandy tight as they approached the coffin. Yes, Sandy had her mother’s long black hair. And Grandma’s pale blue eyes. They were beginning to water. He took Grandma’s cold hand in his, and leant to gently kiss her on the cheek. Sandy did the same. Then Garrick looked up at Sandy and said, ‘Do you remember when Grandma was really cranky, she’d threaten to send me away to boarding school, and sometimes even to send me to Boystown?’

‘Yes,’ said Sandy. ‘I do. And she used to threaten to sell me to the Arabs!’

*

When Sandy and Garrick came out of the viewing room, they found that Jade had climbed over into the back seat next to Ahmad and was engaging him animatedly about the
prospects of work for Australian nurses in Emirati hospitals. Ahmad was the administrative manager of the cosmetic surgery unit of the one in Dubai that was most frequently patronised by members of the Sheikh’s family. Garrick took the driver’s seat, and Sandy, rather bemused at Jade’s antics, climbed into the front passenger seat beside him. Garrick started the engine, and took them for a short drive over to Grandma’s house, where he stood in silence for a while under the macadamia tree in the left front corner of the yard. He bent down to pick something up and put it in the right inside breast pocket of his charcoal grey suit. He checked in the left breast pocket, reassured himself that the eulogy was there, then walked around to the back yard where Sandy was wandering about, gazing at this tree, and that vine, and especially at the dilapidated set of swings, with the chains rusting. A bud on one of Grandma’s rose bushes, a dark pink one, was just beginning to open. Garrick reached down and took the stem in his hands, thorns and all, broke it off and handed it to Sandy. The shine in those blue eyes of hers was truly remarkable.

Sandy pinned the rose to the lapel of her jacket. ‘You’ve made yourself bleed,’ she said, looking at the spots on his palm where the thorns had pricked him. She pulled a tissue out of her purse and handed it to him. He clenched on it.

‘Reminds me that I’m still alive,’ he said.

Garrick drove back to the chapel, which was beginning to fill for the service.

Big fat Uncle Phil roared into the drive on his Ducati Streetfighter 848, wearing full leathers with the God’s Squad Northern New South Wales chapter patch on the back of his jacket. He took off his helmet and opened the right side pannier, fishing for his Bible. Phil hung about outside. He didn’t immediately follow them into the chapel.

Garrick took a seat beside his father in the second row. Sandy led Ahmad around to sit next to Christine, on the other side of Don. He found himself looking around for Charmaine, although he knew she wouldn’t be there. It wasn’t that he missed her. It was just that at any important family event, something drove him to look for her, and to acknowledge to himself that she was absent. It was as if in some way, for him, her absence had come to be a kind of presence, one that had to be checked for and given its place, before anything could begin.
Aunty Alison, recently widowed, was sitting just in front of Garrick. Aunty Charlie held her hand, with the dutiful Holden beside her. Uncle Ray and his partner Günther came in and joined Alison, Charlie and Holden in the front pew. The other grandchildren, Garrick’s cousins, filed into the couple of rows behind him. Great Aunt Jeanie, Great Uncle Doug, his wife, and all their families, as well as Great Uncle Ron’s, sat in the front pews across the aisle way. Behind them, the chapel was full to overflowing with church people, and with those who’d known Grandpa Guyton through the TPI League, Legacy and the RSL.

Jade must’ve taken her time finishing that cigarette. When she came in, she walked up to join the family and sat down on Garrick’s right. Interesting that Phil should follow and plant himself next to her. With the Good Book in his left hand, Phillip reached across Jade to offer Garrick his hand. They shook. Garrick had never liked Phil, who was old enough to successfully torment him when they lived together at Grandma’s house, but too immature to know better. Garrick liked Phil even less after he caught him playing inside Sandy’s pants up in the old cubby house under the mulberry tree. Garrick felt powerless to do anything about it. Their eyes met as they shook hands. In spite of all that, it was hard to keep up his hatred of Phil when he too had Grandma’s pale blue eyes.
Phil did not have his way. The senior pastor of the Lismore Baptist church presided over the funeral. Grandma had chosen all the hymns herself, some of which were not familiar to Reverend Anderson, who was left guessing as to what she’d meant. A number of those that were on offer were entirely unfamiliar to most of the congregation.

Phil, who had imagined himself in a much more prominent role, had to settle for doing the reading Grandma had chosen from St Paul’s second letter to the Corinthians, chapter four, verses seven to eighteen. Phil read from the New International Version, although Mrs Guyton had been adamant that she wanted it from King James: ‘But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that the all-surpassing power of God is not from us. We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed. We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus can be revealed in our body. So then, death is at work in our body, but life is at work in you.

‘It is written: “I believed; therefore I have spoken.” Since we have that same spirit of faith, we also believe and therefore speak, because we know the one who raised the Lord Jesus from the dead will also raise us with Jesus and present us with you to himself. All this is for your benefit, so the grace that is reaching more and more people may cause thanksgiving to overflow to the glory of God.

‘Therefore we do not lose heart. For our light and momentary troubles are achieving us an eternal glory that outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.’

When Phil sat down, Ray Guyton rose from his seat and came to the microphone to sing one of Grandma’s favourites, ‘The Old Rugged Cross’. Ray had a fine voice, but he was shaking with emotion, cracking on the high notes, and barely managed to hold together through the third verse. He seemed to recover a little each time he invited the congregation to join him for the chorus. When Ray had finished, Reverend Anderson got
up again and announced that Mrs Guyton’s grandson, Dr Garrick Willis, would give an account of the life of Edith, in accordance with her wishes. Garrick stood, pushed past Jade and Phil to the aisle, walked up past the coffin, and came to the lectern to deliver the eulogy. Phil immediately moved himself closer to Jade.

‘My grandmother was a wild farm girl, riding a horse six miles every day to the Ironpot Creek State School. Great Uncle Ron told me all the boys were scared of fighting her. This was some advantage to him, his brother Douglas and his sister Jeanie. There was also a downside to having a volatile older sister. One time, Edie brought a kerosene tin down on Great Uncle Doug’s head. She was jealous of a gift from their grandmother, who’d granted Douglas exclusive access to a tin of condensed milk.

‘Edie took no notice of her father’s warning not to interfere with a shell-shocked warhorse he was breaking in. No sooner was Herb out of sight than she vaulted into the saddle and rode that skittish animal into a lather of sweat and foam, up and down the hillside, leaping over fences and whatever obstacles came their way, until the poor thing collapsed outside the stable. She copped a thrashing for that, as she did regularly for her own misdemeanours, and sometimes for those of her siblings as well.’

Garrick looked up. Jade was smiling at him, pouting her lips. Phil looked very pleased with himself, scratching at the bulge in his pants.

‘Later, Great Grandpa Ormiston leased the farm and moved the family to Kyogle, where he bought out his brother-in-law Murdoch Jefferson’s business. Great Grandpa had spent much of his childhood in Kyogle, where his father Vic Ormiston had been the greengrocer. They lived in a haunted house with a spooky door, down by the railway station, with their other grandmother, an amputee, who dragged herself to safety on her hands, escaping from a house fire. My grandmother was not to know then that she would survive similar ordeals later in her life.

‘After three years in Kyogle, the family moved to Lismore, where Herb Ormiston and sons became colourful business identities, with the guns, saddles, camping gear and second hand goods all run together with the pawnbroker’s license and the used caryards out the back of the shop on Molesworth Street, just up from Magellan. My father Don has told me of visits to his Grandpa and uncles in their shop when it was all joined together
prior to Herb’s death in 1969. Don loved the smell of leather, and the opportunity to lift himself into the saddles to ride along the canyon with the boys from *Bonanza*.

‘You may find that as I tell this story, time and place blur and weave, coalesce and separate, twisting back on each other. You may become confused about names, and the tenuous web of interpersonal and intergenerational connections. That’s the way time and place were for my grandmother, the way the stories she told us came out. I’m not sure of the early history of the Ormiston’s Lismore business, or when the family moved into the Oliver Avenue house, and whether or not that was after Edie married, but I know that Great Aunty Jeanie was living there with her parents when Grandma moved back there with her children after a cataclysmic event, about which more will be said later. Now just when Great Grandpa Ormiston sold the farm at Ironpot Creek, I don’t know, nor how it was that the Lismore business came about while the Ormiston’s were farming again at Uki, thirty two miles north-east of Kyogle, but I must take you there for the start of another important chapter in my grandmother’s life.

‘I don’t know whether these stories refer to the family’s life in Kyogle, Lismore, or on the farm at Uki, but through them my grandmother gave me a sense of my gentle, staunchly Methodist great-grandmother Edna, who grew up on the banks of the Maroochy River. She played in what is now the car park of the Westfield Sunshine Plaza shopping complex on Horton Parade, named after my great-great-grandfather, the first European settler in the area. Great Grandma lost her young brother in the last months of the Great War, and her fiancé, an infantry Captain, also died. They both lie under poppy fields in Flanders.

‘Great Grandpa Ormiston was one of those men just too young for the First World War, just too old to be compelled to serve in the Second. My grandmother told me that sometimes, during the Great Depression, her father would bring home hungry people that he’d met at church to share the Sunday roast, and begin to offer second helpings with Great Grandma slaving in the kitchen, seeming not to notice that she had not eaten. So Great Grandma Edna would go on serving, always putting the welfare of others before her own. Edie needed to be careful not to become attached to her teddy bears and dolls. She never knew when her father would reclaim them to sell them in the shop. We were told that this was what it took to keep a young family thriving in those difficult times.
‘Grandma stayed on at school only to the seventh grade, although she was later proud to achieve her intermediate elocution certificate. She left school to work on her parents’ farm, feeding the animals, milking the cows. By her late teens, my grandmother was dying to get away from the farm.

‘It may not surprise those of you who knew my grandmother for the horsewoman that she once was – my grandmother had a mighty thing for men on motorcycles! When a young man named Athol Willis, who worked in management at the local sawmill, came courting on his Harley Davidson, he took Grandma for the ride of their lives. They married when she was 18 and Athol was 21, and a year or so later, my eldest aunty Alison was born, followed two years later by Charlene, and after another four years, by my father Donald.

‘By that time Athol, a first class engine driver, had helped Hogan’s saw mill to a commendation for its contribution to the war effort, and moved the family from their original home at Doubtful Creek, where Grandma was troubled by the howling dingoes, to a more pleasant place closer to her parents’ farm at Uki. Edie and Athol enjoyed fishing together in Uki Creek. Athol managed the Smith’s Road saw mill. My grandmother kept the books and allocated the men’s wages, in addition to her duties at home.

‘Unfortunately, this happy time was cut short by the poliomyelitis epidemic of 1953. Athol took sick suddenly, and died four days later in an iron lung in Lismore Base Hospital. By the time Edie was allowed to enter the isolation ward to say goodbye, Athol was already unconscious. He passed away as she waited out on the hospital verandah. She went home to her parents’ Oliver Avenue house and bluntly said to my aunts and my father, “I have something to tell you. Your father is dead”.

‘For Alison and Charlie, it meant losing a much-loved father and plummeting into a time of great turmoil and uncertainty. For Don, it meant becoming the man of the house before he was two, never having the opportunity to know Athol, and growing into adolescence as a boy who must learn from his mistakes and fight his own battles, with no father to look out for him.
‘My grandmother and her children lived for a few months with her parents. Then they moved into the old timber house that once stood at 18 Bentley Road, South Lismore. Grandma worked in whatever jobs she could to support the children.’

Phil was not only scratching his balls and staring at Jade’s thighs, where her skirt had ridden up to show the lace at the top of her stay-ups. Now he was picking his nose.

‘She took a cooking job at a Scripture Union beach mission at Kingscliff, coming up to Christmas 1960, where she met my grandfather, Humphrey Guyton, a middle-aged bachelor school teacher, whom she rapidly won over with her wonderful cooking and that special charm it was that bound them together. Now that I have learned about Athol’s Harley Davidson, I wonder if it might’ve been her appreciation of the little red Vespa scooter that was Humphrey’s means of transport. For the next few months, Humphrey drove that thing from Southport to Lismore every weekend, and by April 1961 they were married. After that, Grandma made him give the Vespa away, in the midst of worry about how many times he’d come off it on the highway and landed on his head!’

The packed chapel – family, Baptist Church people, latecomers standing at the back – were all roaring with laughter. Garrick glanced up from his notes. Phil was edging his way closer along the pew towards Jade, now placing his snotty hand over hers. She pulled away a little, but Phil followed her. Garrick cleared his throat and endeavoured to push on.

‘Grandpa had been teaching in Southport at the time, near the house in which he lived with his parents at Ashmore. Alison, by this time, had gone to live with Great Aunty Jeanie and Great Uncle Rex at the Bithramere farm, outside Tamworth. Don and Charlie moved to Southport with Mum and Dad. They rented another house at Ashmore, but Dad was transferred to Nerang State School just before Uncle Phil was born. That meant another move, this time to Weedons Road. Four months later, Grandpa Guyton’s parents were settled again in Nerang, and Grandpa had sold the house at Ashmore, so that he was able to put his money in with Grandma’s to buy the Bentley Road house together.

‘On teacher’s wages, my grandfather had taken on the task of parenting three teenage children who’d been so long without a father. He was also beginning, at the age of forty-six, to father children of his own. My father asked that I acknowledge his gratitude for the efforts that Humphrey made on his behalf, and say how glad he is that
Grandma chose to marry Mr Guyton, so that he could have a father to stand up to him and to encourage him to achieve at the time when he most needed that.’

Garrick watched Phil stretch his left arm up on to the back of the pew and reach to tap Jade on the shoulder. She turned in Phil’s direction, looking down to where Phil was pointing with his right hand at the silver of the foil wrapped parcel that was now protruding from his hip pocket. Garrick’s blood was on the boil, but he pushed on.

‘Uncle Raymond was born in December 1964. He was a precious baby with whom Grandma always retained a close and loving bond. Ray’s birth came at a time of great strain for my grandmother, as earlier in her pregnancy, she had to nurse Uncle Phil back from the verge of death from all the illnesses that followed a severe burn he’d inflicted on himself by climbing up on the kitchen bench and pulling a jug of boiling water down over his arm.’

Phil was at it again. Now he was pretending to doze off, listing to the left to allow himself to bump against Jade’s shoulder. He watched her body jerk at the surprise. Then she tapped Phil on the knee. They turned and exchanged a glance, then Jade giggled, looking up at Garrick, appealing. Garrick frowned back at her.

‘The girls moved away to start families of their own, and Grandma had to face the terminal illness of her own mother. Great Grandma died of cancer the day before Uncle Phil’s fourth birthday. Phillip told me that he thought all the visitors that came to that Anzac Day were there just for his party.

‘In May the following year, the family left that house and moved into Grandma’s last home in Magellan Street. All of my memories of my grandmother are tied to that house with its ramshackle garden she and Grandpa made together. Rather than detail them all, I will share with you a story that Uncle Phil told me. This captures the essence of Phillip’s relationship with his mother.’

Phil was still sitting too close to Jade. He sat straight, looking bright and sparky now. This part was about him.

‘Phillip was five when the family moved into Magellan Street. Grandma found the house was too modern. She hated the sliding doors that separated the kitchen from the lounge and dining area. She never got the knack of controlling the temperature of the hotplates on the electric range. So she put in a wood stove, with unfortunate later
consequences. On the first day there, she set out to make a caramel pie, boiling up a can of condensed milk in a battered aluminium saucepan until the Nestlé label separated from the tin. The pot boiled dry. The can went bang! The neighbours registered the sound of gunfire, just as when, a few months later, her ginger beer exploded. The caramel spread to set, like fibreglass, across the ceiling. Uncle Phil climbed up on the electric stove, sanded down the lumps on the ceiling and painted over them in the summer months before he turned sixteen.’

Jade reached out her hand, placed it over Phil’s and gave it a squeeze, then slowly withdrew it. Garrick watched Phil turn pink from his collar up.

‘Back in 1968 my father Don was a hard working passionate young man driving a purple iridescent EH Holden. He followed his heart by marrying young, with strong encouragement from my grandmother, who was determined that my place in the family should be secured. Dad and his first wife Charmaine worked hard in many jobs to sustain their family. They kept it together for seven years with my grandmother’s support. Sandra’s birth came four years after mine. When my mother abandoned us, Grandma stepped in to look after Sandy and me. I am very glad that my sister has flown from Dubai to be with us here today, with her fiancé Ahmad, and that she was able to join me in saying goodbye to Grandma at the viewing this morning.

‘1969 proved to be a year of disaster. My grandfather suffered a major breakdown in health. Psychiatric complications of his longstanding epileptic illness forced him into premature retirement. While Grandpa Guyton was ill, Great Grandpa Ormiston passed away suddenly after a car accident. Somehow they weathered all this. My grandparents fell back on their Christian faith, with the support of the Lismore Baptist Church community. Uncle Phil has asked me to say how grateful he was for the affection that his older siblings showed him during that time, when it seemed to him that, at the age of seven, the bottom had fallen out of his world and he would have to somehow manage the tasks of caring for his mother and younger brother while becoming his father’s protector.’

Jade’s hand was back on Phil’s again. The fat fuck looked very pleased with himself. Garrick found himself itching to meet Phil out the back after the service. Then he thought about Grandma, and pulled it together to finish the job.
‘It was fortunate that my grandmother inherited a rental house and some shares from her father’s estate, and that my father sent whatever he could from his work in the mines, because we could not have gotten through it all on the pension, the little bit of cooking that my grandmother did for a while again at the Wilson Motel, and my grandfather’s half a day a week or so of gardening and odd jobs.

‘My Uncle Ray has asked me to highlight my grandmother’s warmth and generosity towards anyone in need, and to tell you that she taught him to love cooking and arranging flowers, things unusually rare in a man. Dad has also asked me to mention the unexpected gift envelopes that would appear, although Grandma had so little for herself. I can also vouch for this, from my own personal experience. When I was living in College at St Lucia, Grandma’s letter would arrive with a $10 note folded inside, just when there was a textbook that I couldn’t quite afford, or when the car was out of petrol and there was nothing but moths in my wallet.

‘After Sandy and I went back to live with Dad, when he married Christine, and I later left home to go to medical school, I have a sense that things were better for my grandmother, especially after I was able to work out what was really wrong with my grandfather, to help him to understand his condition, and to get a better pension. During this time, Charlie, Dad and Ray managed to maintain a closer relationship with my grandmother, and they would be better placed to speak about it.

‘A year or so before my grandfather passed away, he poured hot ashes from the potbellied stove into a plastic bucket, then went outside to chip some lighting wood. When he saw the smoke, he ran up to find the kitchen ablaze. He tried to wake my grandmother by tapping on the bedroom window. Fortunately, the smoke woke her and she staggered out the front door just a few seconds before the refrigerator in the kitchen exploded and sent a fireball through the bedroom. My Dad and his wife Christine took my parents in at that time, cared for them, and helped them negotiate all the hurdles in the process of rebuilding.

‘When we put Grandpa under the ground a few weeks after his eightieth birthday, Grandma was alone, but my Aunty Charlie and her husband Holden never left her for long. I wish to express my thanks to them, although I know that the family can never adequately repay the debt we owe them for their devotion to my grandmother’s care.
Without their support, Grandma would never have been able to achieve what she did last Sunday, to live to a good old age in her own home, die peacefully, and cheat the nursing home out of a customer.’

Garrick, struggling to hold back tears, returned to his seat, as the congregation applauded. Phil reached out again to shake his hand. Somehow, Garrick managed to resist the urge to give his uncle a good hard shove.
Edie’s life had given rise to a long story, but more was to come. To the dismay of all present, barring serious Baptist Bible nuts, Reverend Anderson had also prepared a sermon. Themed as it was on the reading from 2nd Corinthians, his thesis on ‘light and momentary troubles’ proved wearisome. Like all forms of torture, eventually it came to an end. It was almost 12.30 p.m. when the congregation rose to sing ‘Abide with Me’. The family trailed out behind the Szeliski boys as they wheeled the coffin to the chapel door, where the hearse was waiting to carry Edie Guyton to her final resting place.

Garrick lined up in the middle on the right hand side, with Don positioned opposite him, Uncle Phil and Uncle Ray up front, and Holden and Garrick’s cousin Patrick behind him. That Grandma was heavy was no surprise. When they lifted together, the coffin came neatly off the trolley and progressed as directed by the Szeliskis. Holden stumbled momentarily as they approached the open tailgate, but the others bore the jolt and held fast to ensure that Edie should not suffer a final indignity.

Don turned to his son, after the coffin was secured in the back of the hearse, locked in place. ‘Well, one thing’s for sure. Your Grandma sure loved her tucker. We’d better move over to shake a few hands.’ They walked together around the back of the chapel to the refreshment room, where it seemed that half of Lismore were hoeing into the Szeliski fare.

Garrick found himself across the tea cake from Günther, who had met Ray in the lobby at a concert hall in Stuttgart when playing flugelhorn in the orchestra for Lotte Schneider. In spite of his work experience in comedy, Günther was puzzled by the day’s events. ‘In Germany, funerals are very solemn occasions. But here in Australia, I come to an old lady’s funeral. The grandson gives the eulogy. And everyone laughs. Again and again. All the way through. It may be that I am Schwäbisch. Doch, alles hier ist ganz unheimlich!’

Although he might be a hick from the deep South, everything here is so weird. It must be a relief for him to exchange a few words occasionally with someone who at least
has good high school German, thought Garrick. Given the distraction Jade provided, standing in her patent leather stilettos, holding a plate of lamingtons and flirting with Reverend Anderson, he was inclined to agree with Günther’s analysis. Then out of the corner of his eye, in the periphery of his visual field, he saw an emaciated middle-aged woman in high black boots and red tartan miniskirt, leaning against the wall, over by the door, staring into space. Jittery and restless, she moved her weight back and forth from one leg to the other, picked and fiddled with her skirt, clenched and unclenched her hands. Her most striking feature was her straight jet black hair, extending half way down her back, stark in contrast to her pearlescent, slightly freckled skin. Her face was weathered and wrinkled, but no more than one might expect of an Australian woman who’d grown up in the sixties, using coconut oil to tan. What was she doing here?

‘Unheimlich? Doch, alles ist hier ganz verrückt! Entschuldigung!’ Garrick responded. Things here aren’t just weird, they’re quite crazy. He excused himself and took off towards the door, just as Charmaine slipped away. The apparition was no longer manifest. Garrick looked down the drive in both directions. Then he began a frantic search behind the hedges, in the garden beds, and between the parked cars.

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Reverend Anderson turned out to be not quite the life of the party – perfectly understandable, given that it was a funeral, after all. Jade couldn’t remember the last time that she’d tried to charm a clergyman, let alone anyone wearing ‘Morrie’ as a moniker. ‘Maurice Anderson,’ he’d said, ‘but you can call me Morrie!’ The chances of scoring anything with Morrie were low, other than an invitation to next Saturday’s Annual Sunday School Picnic. She might get lucky and be asked to partner him in the three-legged race!

That fat biker, Phil, seemed to have a wicked streak, in spite of God’s Squad and Bible College. There he is winking at me again. Standing there jiggling away, with his hands in the pockets of his leather pants. Randy old bugger. Up and down like a monkey on a trampoline. ‘You’ll have to excuse me, Morrie! That man over there seems to be
straining to get my attention. He looks like if he inhales another scone, he might have a heart turn. I’m a nurse you know, so I’d better attend to him.’

Jade had noticed Garrick beetling out the door, in pursuit of a junked-up grandma cougar, dressed like a streetwalker. She was pretty pissed off about that. What was that woman doing here, anyway? She didn’t look as if she taught Sunday School, and she couldn’t possibly be family? And what business could Garrick possibly have with her that was so urgent anyway? Jade walked up to Phil. ‘How long have you had the Ducati?’ she asked. ‘Any chance of a ride?’

‘Well, I guess we’d better get the old lady down under, before we think about that. But if you follow me, I do have something you might like to have a look at.’

Phil walked bowlegged out the side door, with Jade following. He turned sharp left into the men’s room.

Jade hesitated for a moment, looked both ways to check that no one was watching. Then she followed him in.

Phil raised his eyebrows, feigning surprise.

Jade broke into a high pitched giggle.

Phil brought his finger up to his lips to shush her. He jerked his head in the direction of an open cubicle.

It was Jade’s turn to raise her eyebrows, now. Just the same, she went in.

Phil locked the cubicle door, dug deep into the right hip pocket of his leather pants, and drew out a huge spliff, with a twisted end like a home-made firecracker. He put the other end in his mouth, flicked up the flame on his silver lighter, held it to the paper and drew back. He inhaled deeply, suppressing a cough as the smoke burned his throat and rushed down to fill his lungs. He held on as he passed the joint to Jade. She popped the wet end into her mouth and sucked.

Jade spluttered.

Phil doubled up, wheezing out his laugh. Smoke gushed out of his nose as though he was the rear end of an old Mazda 1200 that had just done its rings. Fortunately somebody in the next cubicle flushed, masking the sound. Phil leaned into Jade, who’d brought the joint up to her mouth and was about to suck in again, placed his mouth over the smouldering end and blew. Puff rushed all the way down her bronchial tree. Phil took
the joint out of her mouth and drew back on it again, pulled it out, pursed his lips, tilted his head up and puffed three little smoke rings over the top of the white-glossed melamine partition. Then he leant towards her face and puckered up his lips.

Jade pushed him in the belly, turned her head away and squeaked, ‘Hey, you’re getting a bit fresh!’

Phil was confused. He shrugged, dumped the squib of the joint in the bowl, and flushed. _Another Saturday night’s fun and games down the gurgler._ He unlocked the cubicle, poked his head out to check that all was clear, then traipsed out through the washroom and into the open air.

Jade followed, colliding with Garrick, who was pacing up and down outside, wide-eyed and frantic.

‘That’s one hell of a girl you’ve got there!’ quipped Phil.

‘Shut the fuck up, or I’ll shove your Bible so far up your arse that you choke on Deuteronomy!’ Garrick’s knee met Phillip’s crutch. Uncle Phil gasped, folded double and collapsed on the path.

*

It was a ten minute drive, via Oliver Avenue and Skyline Road, to the Lismore Cemetery. ‘What do you think I imagined you were doing with Phil in the toilets?’ snapped Garrick at the wheel of the Beemer.

‘And what were you doing chasing that slag?’ retorted Jade.

‘That slag,’ screamed Garrick, braking suddenly, ‘is my mother!’ The black sedan skidded on the gravel before coming to a stop, just a few feet from the back of the hearse, near where Holden was staring down, seemingly mesmerised by his size eleven feet. The Szeliski boys were pacing anxiously. Garrick slammed the driver’s door and walked over to take up his position with the other pall bearers, mumbling apologies.

‘Where’s Phil? asked Don.

‘I don’t know, Dad!’
‘Well, he’d better get here quick. That Scotsman’s being paid by the minute.’ Don nodded in the direction of the piper in Maclean o’ Duart tartan standing by the open grave, under the jacaranda, chanters squealing as he pushed on the bellows.

Just then the Ducati roared through the cemetery gates and up the drive. Phil almost spun a 360 on that spot that Garrick’d hit a couple of minutes earlier. He kicked the stand into place, pulled off his helmet and sauntered over.

‘Take your time, brother,’ muttered Don.

‘You don’t look well,’ said Ray.

‘When you’re ready, gentlemen,’ prompted Pete Szeliski.

The piper squeezed the bellows and launched into the first bars of Amazing Grace. Six men bent their knees, and on a signal from Pete, they lifted. Slowly they began their progress forward.

Phil was particularly vulnerable, with Garrick following immediately behind.

Most of the family had come to the graveside. All the hangers on from the church had been sent on their way, but that still left forty or so sons, daughters, grandsons, nieces, nephews, their spouses and offspring, all waiting to pay their last respects to Edie Guyton. Her sister Jeanie and her brother Doug had been thought too frail to stand. By now they would be ready for another cup of tea and pikelets served by Charlie, round at the old Guyton home, when things at the cemetery were over. Athol Willis’s grave was nearby, and so was Ron Ormiston’s. Grandpa Guyton waited down below. The gravediggers had been discreet enough not to quite uncover his box.

The casket was brought to rest on the chrome frame. A wreath of lilies, roses and white gladioli lay on top. None of the pall bearers had fallen into the grave. It was time for Morrie Anderson to step forward. ‘Dear friends, the time has come for us to commit the soul of our much loved Edith to her Lord Jesus, who has welcomed her into his arms, and to lay her body to rest in the ground.’ The Szeliskis released the pinions and the pulleys began to lower the box all the way down into the hole. Stan Szeliski held out a bag, from which Morrie took a scoop of sand and poured it down on to the coffin, saying: ‘Earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust. Just as the Lord God has breathed life into this shell, in His own time, in accordance with His will, He has taken life away. I now invite each of you to come forward, and say goodbye to Edie in your own way. You may
choose to place flowers, or precious objects, or to take a scoop of sand from Stan and scatter it in the grave.’

Alison went first, with her son Patrick to support her. Then came Charlie and Holden, Don and Christine, Phil and Ray. Günther hung back at a discreet distance, leaning against the jacaranda. Ahmad stood in the shade beside him, arms folded across his chest. Garrick stepped forward, with Sandy on one side and Jade on the other. He disengaged his right arm from Jade’s elbow and dipped into the left breast pocket of his suit, pulled out a macadamia shell, and tossed it in. A thunk rose out of the grave as the object bounced off the coffin.

‘What was that?’ whispered Jade.

‘Grandma was born in Kingaroy. She planted that tree from a seedling raised on her parents’ farm – a Queensland nut!’
There was little opportunity for Garrick to speak with Jade after the funeral. Sandy and Ahmad were in the back seat as they drove back to Goonellabah. Jade had packed her things that morning, intending to leave for Brisbane immediately after the burial. She was to begin a four day stint of night shifts that evening. She drove away, leaving Garrick with a perfunctory peck on the lips.

Don poured Garrick a glass of shiraz. ‘Son, you did a great job of telling your Grandma’s story today. There’s something I’ve been neglecting that I know that Mum would want me to say if she was here. We’re a very open and welcoming family. And I hate to think of anyone taking the piss out of us, and least of all out of you. But certain things that I’ve noticed lead me to believe that girl of yours would make a better mistress than a wife. And you know, I hope you’re not planning to marry her, because if you are, I’m not coming to the wedding.’

Garrick almost choked on a half chewed lump of roast. His father was not usually this frank with him. Don had rarely had anything to say at all when Garrick was in the midst of the troubles with Penny. And things were difficult enough. He wanted to ask his Dad if he had noticed Charmaine, if he had any sense of what she might’ve been doing there, or of why she had taken off so suddenly. But that would stir up more trouble. Charmaine wasn’t someone who could be talked about in this house. There was too much pain around her. But he desperately needed confirmation of the sighting. If it wasn’t that Jade had seen her too, he would still be wondering if she had been a ghost. Maybe he was losing his mind?

Garrick took a big gulp of the red wine that his father had poured for him. It burned at the back of his throat, long after he had swallowed. ‘There are times, you know, Dad, when I wish my Grandpa was still alive. Times when I wish I could talk to him again. Sorry, Christine, the food’s great, but I think I’ll go for a drive.’

It wasn’t like Garrick to pass on lamb. He got up from the table, picked up his keys and walked out into the crisp August evening. He drove down to Kadina Park, where his
grandfather took him to play when Don was away at the mines. He got out of the car and sat down on a park bench near the barbecues, just out of the direct range of the overhead lights. A couple of teenage girls were playing on the roundabout across the path, still in their Lismore High School uniforms. Their socks hung loose around their ankles. They had unbuttoned their white blouses and tied them in knots at the front to reveal their slender bellies. Their black-and-white checked pleated skirts were hitched up high and folded down at the waist. ‘Hey mister,’ called the girl with her hair in long dark plaits, ‘you got a cigarette?’

Garrick smiled and shrugged.
‘Just one cigarette?’ she pleaded.
‘Sorry, don’t smoke!’ Garrick shouted back.
‘You got any money?’

That was the kind of trouble Garrick didn’t need. He got up and walked back to the BMW, activated the push button ignition and drove around aimlessly for about half an hour before heading back home.

*

He slept fitfully that night, and what dreams there were came in fragments, scenes in which he was chasing after impossible women, women who always seemed to be further away, no matter how tantalisingly close he was to catching them. Charmaine stood in a clearing, dressed in her black boots and tartan mini, looked over her shoulder and beckoned to him, then turned and walked into the forest. He ran after her, but she had blended into the trees, and from every one of them her voice rang out, mocking him. ‘Garrick! Gar-rick!’

Then somehow it was Jade and Rachel, as naughty schoolgirls, soliciting outside the Night Owl on Main Street in Woolloongabba, near the Pineapple Hotel. Jade’s hair was punked up short and spikey, Rachel’s long, black and sleek. Just as he was about to cross at the lights that Myshkin fellow walked up to them, drew a wad of cash out the pocket of his Levi 511s, took one girl on each arm and walked away with them. They
both turned back to laugh at him over their shoulders as he stood forlorn, still waiting for a change in the lights.

Garrick lay awake for a while, trying to sleep, but couldn’t shut down the cinema of cruel Lolitas running in his head, nor stave off the flood of images of violent retaliation, of the wounds inflicted on the bodies of each of these hapless coquettes. Soon it was just too much. He sat up, swung his feet over the side of the bed, pulled on his blue flannel robe, slipped into his ugg boots and padded out to sit at the kitchen table with his pen, his notebook and a tattered Penguin paperback edition of *The Idiot*.

Writing might help, but Garrick found himself in such a state of agitation that putting pen to paper was impossible. To interrupt the terrible images, he tried to cast his mind back to pleasant childhood memories.

Late in September, a few months after he turned ten, Grandma and Grandpa had taken him and Sandy for a short holiday to Toowoomba for the Carnival of Flowers. Uncle Phil had been off at Uni then, and Uncle Ray had begun nursing training, so it was just the four of them. In the morning they had watched the parade, with all the marching bands and floats, then they had walked up to Queens Park, bypassing the rides and the sideshows (much to his and Sandy’s disappointment), walked through the botanical gardens and up to the horticultural hall. Walking around a flower show for two or three hours was not Garrick’s idea of a good time, nor even Grandpa’s, so it was arranged that, while Sandy stayed with Grandma, Grandpa would take a long walk with Garrick up to Picnic Point.

Garrick was very pleased to have Grandpa to himself, so they could talk. Grandma never stopped talking. Sometimes she went on so much that it was quite intolerable. Garrick walked back along Lindsay Street with his Grandpa, yabbering on about all the wonderful things that they hadn’t been able to discuss with Grandma around. They crossed the road, turned left into Margaret Street and walked up the hill, past the Grammar School, and on to Weis’s Restaurant on the corner, then turned into Tourist Road, all the way up to Picnic Point, where the strange rotunda sat just opposite the playground. By the time they reached the camera obscura, Garrick’s legs were tired, and he was just about talked out. Grandpa might be an old man with knobbly arthritic knees, but he was very fit.
Grandpa chattered away to the skinny grey-haired lady who met them at the ticket window, and then came to the door to let them in. She seemed to Garrick more like a children’s librarian than a Time Lord, but the inside of the octagonal rotunda was very like the Tardis. The lady talked as she turned off the lights and turned on the machine. From out of a big funnel coming down from the ceiling, the camera projected a bright image of the valley below, with Table Top Mountain sticking up out of it, onto a circular white table in the middle of the room. Grandpa and Garrick stood on one side of the table, and the Camera Obscurea Lady stood on the other, talking them through a virtual tour of the vast panorama, as the lens outside rotated slowly through a full 360 degrees. For Garrick, it felt like they were moving, travelling through space and time, but really it was the camera that was turning, and they were standing still in the little pavilion at the top of the Toowoomba range.

When the show was finished, Grandpa thanked the lady, who showed them out. Garrick was sad to say goodbye to her. This little room was something truly magical, and he had been so glad to share a special time, in such a special place, with Grandpa. And this strange lady was the one who ruled this space, this place, that time. Years later, Garrick had driven up to Toowoomba with Penny for a weekend just before Tom was born. They’d dined at the Picnic Point Restaurant, but found the camera obscura gone, replaced by an ordinary little band rotunda.

Still, nothing came when Garrick tried to put pen to paper. At least the intrusive images were gone … at least for now. He picked up Dostoyevsky, unfolded the corner of the page where he left off, and continued on with the scene where General Yepanchin’s daughter Aglaya is humiliated in the course of her haughty attempt at confrontation with Nastasya Filippovna. It all backfires. She storms off when she is sleighted, leaving the Prince entirely vulnerable to Nastasya’s caprice.

Then it came to him. Garrick dropped the book and took up his pen. He began scribbling furiously, went on for a few lines, then crossed it all out and started again. The dawn was just creeping home, and kookaburras in the bloodwoods had begun to laugh by the time he had this draft on paper:
Camera Obscura

Bereft, Prince Leo Nikolayevich
Myshkin, last and poorest of a line
of blue-eyed optimists, sits on a bench
alone and waits for a dark woman in boots
to appear in the shadows of his autumn wish,
to only say the word and you’ll be mine.
He gives his bottle a rub. No genie. No wench.
No chorus of derision. The screeches and the hoots
are come-ons from the teenage prostitutes
playing in the dark. Their pleas for cigarettes
make him laugh out loud as he retreats
from riding the roundabout of jeune fillettes,
bumps into a secret door in the walled rotunda
and falls, never to emerge from the camera obscura.
Nick found it worked better to go into gigs at the Zoo fully loaded. So there he was, an hour before opening time, outside the entrance on Ann Street, staring at his own poster as if it was an alien life form worthy of his best efforts at engaging conversation. If ever intergalactic diplomacy failed and the squid-like life-forms spurned the friendly hand extended, Nick would be there with his black Fender 70s Jazz Bass in its hard case, ready to burst back into the action as soon as the aliens reversed the shrink ray. The poster read:

Return of the Evil Youth for Christ
play the Zoo
launch new EP Necronomicon
Saturday 31st August 2013
Plus Spoken Word Open Mike Haiku Slam
Doors: 8.00 p.m.
$30 Student Concession $20
Upstairs 711 Ann Street Fortitude Valley

Yes, he was wired. As the poster was not talking back, and no door bitch responded to his knock, he picked up his back pack and his bass and walked up the street, down the lane and round to the back where the rest of the band were unloading amps and the drum kit from Ned’s XR6 Ford Falcon ute.

‘Hey Nick! Where are those girls you keep crapping on about? Weren’t you supposed to be bringing the pussy tonight?’

‘Fuck up and die, Ned!’ Nick gave his mate a stiff-arm shove in the chest.

Ned bounced against the brickwork with all the puff knocked out of him. ‘Whoa man! Easy! You’re all wired up and strung just a little bit tight. I hope you’ve saved some pills for us – something better than your Epilim? There’s gotta be something to
supplement the couple of jugs of beer the stingy bastards here expect us to share with the whole band? You got some eccys? Or are you saving them all up for toolie time at schoolies? Get your bass upstairs and come and help me shift these drums.’

Nick’d had so many pills he was rattling. And a couple of points of crystal. The beer drought was not likely to be too much of a worry for him. As for Ned, Geoff, Dave, Mike and any girls they might pick up, they knew he could fix them quick for a fifty, and his backpack was stuffed tight with tabs.

With the drums, the mikes and the amps in place, and all the cords secured with duct tape, soon it was time to be tuning up and checking the sound. Dave was down there on the mixer, signalling to Geoff to rattle something up on the drums. Nick joined in with a base riff. Dave dropped the volume on the woofers and upped the treble on the mikes. The crowd were drifting in, pretty thin, but what could you expect at this time of the night?

Down there at the bar, waving at him and calling out ‘Nick!’ … it was that blonde nurse, and her chink mate from Canada. And who was that they had in tow? Shit a brick, man, if it wasn’t the Doc! Nick touched Ned on the shoulder and said to him, ‘Look yonder, oh ye of little faith! The pussy’s just arrived.’

Ned grinned and punched him in the belly, pulling at the last moment.

* 

In the queue to pass security, Garrick was already feeling uncomfortable. His black Sportscraft pants, blue-and-white striped Tommy Hilfiger shirt, Kent Lloyd jacket and side-zippered Doc Martens ankle boots made him seem conservatively overdressed in the midst of the grunge twenty-somethings in their checked shirts, skinny jeans, Connies and train driver caps. Most of the girls wore short tight minis and sharp stilettoes, but there were a few in boots and jeggings. Skulls and roses seemed to be the most popular motif. Garrick was in the queue just behind a tall redhead in a Hell Bunny Reckless mini dress by Atomic Cherry and Doc Martens Aubrecia high heel boots in black pebble leather.
And there were so many tattoos. Jade and Rachel were just behind him, waving their complementary passes about, preening in their backless stretch minis and fluttering their eyelashes. He thought the girls blended better than he did. Hopefully, as he was with them, they’d at least let him in.

Garrick looked back across the road and up at the hoarding on the side of the building opposite. It used to be the Brisbane City Mission, founded in 1859 and administered during the Great Depression by the clergyman who’d married Grandpa Guyton’s sister, Great Aunty June. He’d recently found a video of her on YouTube, distributing blankets to the poor in 1939. The sign on the side of the building facing up Ann Street used to say: ‘Jesus Died for Your Sins!’ His great-uncle had been the Good Samaritan of Fortitude Valley. Now here he was, queuing for a ticket to see Return of the Evil Youth for Christ. Just how the girls had come by compliments, that was a mystery, one into which he considered it beneath his dignity to enquire, in the absence of any explanation volunteered. Jade had declared that she and Rachel were going, and if he didn’t want to spend Saturday evening alone, he’d be coming too. And there would be poetry, she said. She’d expect him to get up and do something for the open mike, although he couldn’t imagine that any form of barbarism could possibly exceed that of a haiku slam.

The African security man’s biceps were popping with veins like railroad tracks as they bulged out of his short-sleeved muscle shirt. No one in their right mind would want to give him any trouble. He gave Garrick a sly wink as he looked the girls up and down, then motioned them towards the woman at the door. She was wearing silver stiletto sandals, an ‘I Heart Zombies’ stretch cotton and spandex miniskirt, a plain white t-shirt and classic black fishnets. Her long blonde hair hung straight at the back to below her waist. She had more kohl around her eyes than Morticia Addams channelling a Turkish belly dancer. She smiled as she took Garrick’s money, scanned the girls’ passes, stamped their wrists and sent them up the stairs.

The bar was right up the back, but just to the left of the entrance at the top of the stairs. There were a few metal chairs scattered around tables at that end of the space, with
the part of the hall in front of the stage left bare for dancing. The floor was polished hardwood, quite worn in places, and not at all slippery or shiny. The musicians were just warming up. Garrick went up to the bar and ordered himself a Crown Lager and a couple of lime Vodka Cruisers for the girls. While his back was turned to them, Jade began waving her arms wildly and shouting ‘Nick!’ Garrick turned to see what all the fuss was about. Rachel was smiling and waving too. The base player was waving back. It was that drug-dealing epileptic patient of his, Nick Myshkin.

*

The band opened with a lively cover of the Nick Cave version of *Black Betty*, with Nick Myshkin doing backing vocals. When they followed up with Hole’s *Malibu*, Nick pulled on a blonde wig and a pair of man-sized heels to sing the lead in place of Courtney Love, who was otherwise indisposed. The crowd went wild. The band segued into David Bowie’s *Sorrow*, Ned singing the lead, with Nick hamming it up on all the lines about ‘long blonde hair’.

Jade was mesmerised, clapping and squealing, crossing and uncrossing her legs. Wet with excitement. Yes, she was! When the boys moved into their own material, the launch of the ominously named *Necronomicon* EP, she found herself more than a little lost, especially mystified by the single note thrumming of the bass to beat like a Native American war dance, and by Nick and the other backing singers growling out unintelligible syllables, from the backs of their throats, that might’ve registered on sonar as those of a giant squid in its death throws. ‘Cthulhu, cthulhu ...’ Maybe being lost was what it was all about, and if she was lost, then so were most of the crowd, who were, with the possible exception of Garrick Willis, lots of fun to be with.

After the EP launch, the band took a break, which Ned announced would be followed by the haiku slam. All intending participants were to register with Dave, who would also judge the slam, with the prize going to the poet who elicited the loudest audience response.
While Garrick was busy cultivating Dave, Nick strode over to the table, hugged both the girls enthusiastically, slipped them each a pill, and offered to buy them drinks. He was away at the bar when Garrick returned. Nick came up with a tray of Vodka Cruisers, said ‘Hi Doc, sorry I didn’t have any idea what you were drinking! Enjoying the show?’

‘You’ve certainly got a talent for the bass!’ replied Garrick, brimming with generosity.

Then Ned began announcing the contestants. Seven brave souls had entered, with Garrick sixth on the list. When Garrick was called to the microphone, he offered this:

> September night
> too chill for the moon
> stars plunge into the pool

There was muted applause. Jade noticed Rachel was clapping, so she thought she’d better clap too. Then Garrick hung around the mike for too long, as if expecting something more. He looked dispirited. He’s a bit of a dickhead, really. Acts as if it all should be high art. Then he’s pissed off when they don’t get it, she thought. Garrick left the stage and sat down.

Nick was the last contestant to be called. He walked up to the mike, took it from the stand and spat out:

> Charley Bukowski
> nearly had an erection.
> Quick! More alcohol!

The crowd roared and hooted and clapped so loudly that Dave’s decibel meter knocked over the top of the scale. Nick was the clear winner! He bowed and smiled and blew kisses in all directions. Ned jumped up beside him, awarded him the prize and then announced him as the featured spoken word artist for the evening.
Nick went over to where he’d racked his bass, picked up his blonde wig, slipped on his pumps, hung a syringe on a piece of string as a necklace, smeared his lips with a tube of cherry lipstick, and tottered back to the microphone to announce:

*Courtney Love Still Mourning Kurt Cobain*

For my loss, this sadness never ends.
Ask any widow, black the hole
blocked off with spider’s web
behind the veil. With this syringe
I stop my breath. Only your kiss
(I’m growing pale) can bring me back
from DEATH!

This last word screamed maniacally, Nick leapt from the stage in his Cuban-heeled platforms and ran arms flailing, over to the table where Garrick was seated with the girls. He grabbed Garrick by the front of his shirt and bodily lifted him up and leaned in to clinch a kiss. Both men fell forward, over Garrick’s chair. Nick landed on top, slobbering and smearing all over Garrick’s face. Garrick spluttered and pushed at Nick, thrusting him away. Nick broke into a high-pitched laugh as Garrick struggled to his feet with cherry lips all over his face. He ran for the door as Nick pursued, high heels clack-clack-clacking on the hardwood floor. Garrick tumbled down the stairs, picked himself up and ran out into the street before Nick turned, still laughing and bounded back up the stairway, poked his head through the entrance and roared, ‘Who’s next?’ The crowd erupted in uproarious laughter and applause.

* 

Garrick’s heart was racing in the dazed world of numb as he staggered up Ann Street towards Kemp Place and the Story Bridge. When he collided with a clutch of young clubbers outside Cloudland, he received a shove into the traffic and ‘Watch where you’re going, mate!’ He was given cause to thank the ABS breaking system on the Black-and-White taxi that would have otherwise cleaned him up. He struggled round the corner and
negotiated several more crossings before he realised where he was, on the outbound pedestrian walkway of the Story Bridge, making his way painfully towards Kangaroo Point. He looked down at the muddy waters of the Brisbane River below and momentarily considered throwing himself off, then collected his wits and walked on. The Angel Moroni on the skyline saluted him with his rampant trumpet as he approached the Pineapple Hotel, where he managed to flag another taxi down. His attention was so fractured that he entirely missed the lonely figure patrolling the other side of the road. The taxi took him home to Dornoch Terrace, where he collapsed, fully clothed, into his lonely bed.

In the dream, Garrick was again walking across the bridge, his body numb with despair. Each step was like lifting an elephant in a lead-lined coffin. Somehow everything was enveloped in a thick fog, and as his hand clutched the railing, he found it wet, covered in droplets of cold condensation. Suddenly his eyes were blinded by a torch beam. He blinked, and as his pupils accommodated, he began to make out the figure barring his way – that of a tall pale woman with flaming red hair hanging down in curls on either side of the peak of a police cap with a black-and-white chequered band. She was wearing high motorcycle boots with gaiters, tight black leather hot pants bunched and ruched around the mound of her crotch. She held the torch in her left hand, shining it insistently into his eyes. Her face was whitened with zinc, to a geisha effect. Her lips were blood red, like those of the late Marcel Marceau. She raised her right hand in the signal to command him to stop. Her black cycle gloves dripped fresh blood, which seemed to be running from puncture wounds in the cubital veins inside the elbows on both arms. ‘Turn around, Garrick Willis,’ she commanded in a deep dark brown voice, more like that to be expected from Louis Armstrong or Paul Robeson. ‘Your friends are in danger, and you must go to them!’ Her eyes rolled back into her head, showing the whites. Then the lids fell over them. Her face turned blue. She fell, and as he screamed out to her, the torch dropped and went out. She dissolved into the mist. He woke to the beat of his pounding heart, to himself in the empty room, in the lonely bed, to his pillow slip smeared with cherry lipstick.
The next thing Jade knew, she was naked in her bed in the cottage at the Wellington Road end of Toohey Street, her sheets wet with blood from wounds inside both her elbows, and trickling from below the clotted mass of hair over her pubic mound, and there were bruises and needle tracks up and down her arms. She was about to scream when she heard a banging sound coming from Grandma’s bedroom. She grabbed the iron crow bar that she kept close by the bed and ran across the corridor. She swung the door open. Ned was clutching Rachel’s body by the hips, fucking her hard, doggy-style, up the arse. The banging was her head making contact, like a coconut, with the wooden bed head, with each vicious thrust. Rachel was like a rag doll, unconscious, with froth and vomit dribbling out of the corner of her mouth.

‘Stop!’ screamed Jade, raising the iron bar, ready to brain Ned right across his shaven pate.

Ned took a look around, pulled out, grabbed his shirt and jeans, pushed past her as she swung at him and missed, and ran down the hall, out the door, across the verandah and out into the street.

Jade jumped on the bed, hauled Rachel onto her left side, stuck her fingers into her mouth and scooped around the back of her throat, hauling out a bolus of vomit, mucus, cum and congealed blood. Rachel coughed, gasped and heaved, belching forth more of the foul soup. Jade cleared the airway again, satisfied herself that Rachel’s breasts were moving up and down as her rib cage expanded and contracted, and that her lips had already turned from deathly blue to a bruised shade of red. She pulled the doona up over the naked body of her friend, then grabbed an old dressing gown from Grandma’s wardrobe, wrapped it around herself, picked up the iron bar and systematically searched the house, lining herself up on the wall with the weapon raised before poking her head around each corner and each doorway to ensure that the room was clear, that Nick and the other boys had also gone. Then she ran for the phone and called 000.
‘Fire, police or ambulance?’

‘Get an ambulance, please, quick!’

‘Connecting you now.’

Jade realised that she shouldn’t have left Rachel, so she rushed back to her as the ambulance triage operator took her details. Fortunately she was still breathing, but hadn’t yet come round – at least not while she was alone.

About five minutes later, the ambulance and the paramedic arrived in separate vehicles, almost simultaneously, sirens wailing down the little street. After a quick assessment, they had Rachel under the sheets and the space blanket, onto a gurney and into the back of the van.

‘Can you please take us to the Mater?’ Jade pleaded. ‘We both work at Princess Alexandra Hospital. We know everyone there in emergency.’ Jade climbed in and took a seat beside Rachel, who was still unconscious. As the van turned the corner into Main Street and sped towards the Stanley Street corner, Jade peered out the window and caught a glimpse of an emaciated middle-aged woman in high black boots and red tartan miniskirt, her long black hair falling all the way down her back as she paced up and down the footpath from the Night Owl to the Southern Cross Motel.
XIV

FATHER’S DAY

As much as Garrick tried, he could not persuade either girl to report the rape to the police. The staff at the Mater had called in the sexual assault worker as soon as they had checked out Rachel and found that Jade’s cardiorespiratory status was stable. After a shot of Narcan, Rachel regained consciousness, just before the sexual assault specialist arrived. Both girls refused to allow the examination, and neither was willing to make a statement to the police. They also initially refused to give blood samples for toxicology, but later realised they’d better let some blood be sent to test for hepatitis B, hepatitis C, and HIV. They also allowed the doctor to take swabs for chlamydia and other STDs, to collect urine samples for microscopy and culture, and to examine them for vaginal tears which, thankfully, proved minor, not requiring surgical repair. It was too early for pregnancy tests, but the doctor insisted that they do them anyway. Rachel was required to stay in overnight, but after Jade received a shot of intravenous antibiotics to cover her for syphilis and gonorrhoea, she called up Garrick to collect her.

By then it was 4.30 Sunday morning, Father’s Day. All over the city, whole families of health fanatics were waking and dressing in running gear, making their way by car, bus or train to the Murarrie end of the Gateway Bridge, to line up in their tens of thousands for the Bridge to Brisbane Fun Run. Garrick had planned to give it a miss this year. Just as well, given the previous night’s misadventure.

Garrick lay on the right hand side of the bed, with Jade clutching onto him for comfort. He looked down at her, covered in bruises, and with needle tracks all up and down her arms. The dragonfly had been torn off her belly button stud. And were those cigarette burns?

Sleep was impossible. Whenever he closed his eyes, Nick’s leering face with its red lips and the blonde wig came to him, and his nostrils filled with the rank smell of the man’s body odour, and the sour taste of his assaultive mouth, accompanied by the urge to
gag and retch. Hatred, loathing and fear overcame him, not obsessional thoughts of harming the women that he so much desired and loved. Or thought he did. As he looked down at Jade now, he wondered how he could’ve allowed himself to fall for a woman so disloyal, so open to cruelty, and with so little in her that was on the side of life. Did he love her? As he had thought he did? As he had imagined, in his dreams?

But it was Father’s Day, and soon he would need to rise, shower, dress and drive over to Ascot to collect his son. Tom was to spend the day with him, and be returned to his mother before dinner. He had planned to take him with Jade on a paddle-wheeler cruise up the river to the Lone Pine sanctuary. He had promised to show him the animals. He looked at Jade again and thought that it might be better if Tom did not see her like this. But why should he be feeling so ashamed? It wasn’t damage that he had done.

The clock was showing seven. Jade continued to sleep, occasionally snoring. Garrick slipped out of bed, padded softly to the shower, immersed himself, towelled, and pulled on his jeans and a fresh t-shirt. He made his way out to the kitchen, grabbed his car keys, slipped on his sandals by the door, and headed out.

*

When Garrick arrived, Tom had not yet had breakfast. Penny was cold and officious, but had helped Tom select a card. She had written in it for him, and bought and wrapped a box of Darrell Lea chocolates. ‘Well, you are his father, after all,’ said Penny, when Garrick thanked her, commenting that he had not been expecting this.

‘Are you going to share them with me, Dad?’ asked Tom

‘Sure, Tom, after we get you some breakfast. What would you like?’

‘Can we go to McDonald’s?’

As they came up to the drive-thru, Garrick asked Tom what he wanted.

‘Hot cakes, Dad!’

Garrick ordered three serves, drove further up to the window to receive them, and then on to Highgate Hill.
'Is Aunty Jade coming with us to Lone Pine, Dad?'

'She’s still sleeping. I think she might be too tired. She had a bad headache last night. We’ll see how she feels after she’s had coffee and some breakfast.’

'Is coffee good for headaches, Dad?'

'Sometimes, Tom! Sometimes.’

Was it the Dunwich Horror? Jade had quite a shock when she looked at herself in the mirror. The bruises were beginning to come out around her cheekbones. Her head was throbbing. She took a couple of Nurofen from the cannister on the ledge above the basin and swallowed them. There was a small haemorrhage under the outer layer of the white of her right eye. And there were needle tracks everywhere. It was beginning to occur to her that she had been lucky to come out of this alive. She would have to call in sick for work. There was no way that she could turn up there until the obvious signs had settled. She found a tube of Hirudoid cream in the drawer in the vanity basin and began to rub it into the bruises. Then she sat down to pee. It stung like buggery.

By now, the craving was beginning to set in again, and she fiddled with her hair and picked at the quicks of her fingernails. Soon Garrick’d be back with Tom, who’d be all over her and into everything. That was enough to give her the sensation of tiny insects crawling under her skin, without the withdrawal symptoms.

Jade heard the key turning in the front door lock. Surprising how sharp her senses were. And even more, how much it startled her.

'Are you there, Jade?’ enquired Garrick, through the bathroom door.

'Hello, Aunty Jade! We’ve got hot cakes!’

'Hello, Tom! I’ll be out in a minute. Garrick, would you put some coffee on?’

Jade picked up her white cotton towelling robe and wrapped it around herself after spraying her chest with *Ysatis*. She Colgated a brush and cleaned her teeth. She spat a lot of blood when she rinsed.
‘Hurry up, Aunty Jade! Your hotcakes are getting cold.’

*

They had a very nice seafood buffet lunch on board the Mirimar on the way to Lone Pine. The prawns were neither as large nor as fresh as they should be. That didn’t stop Jade from taking her plate around three times, with a quick trip to the toilet in between each helping.

On the way back, Garrick pulled out the framed polaroid shot he’d purchased of the two of them standing behind Tom, while the little man cuddled a sedated koala. ‘Don’t we make a lovely family!’ he quipped.

They walked to the BMW from the peer. Garrick drove Tom directly home to Ascot. Jade waited across the road in the parked car during the handover.

‘Do you think he had a good day?’ asked Garrick, pulling out from the curb to head back to Highgate Hill.

‘He seemed happy enough.’

‘I think he really likes you.’

‘That’s all very well, but I don’t think you’ll ever want to be a father to my baby.’

This was about all that Garrick needed just now. ‘Let’s talk about that some more when we get home.’ They finished the journey in silence. Once they were back at the unit, Garrick reached out for her and pulled her to him, gently and tenderly. ‘So you want to talk about having a baby?’

‘Well, not just now. I think I’m going to be too sore to fuck for at least a week!’

‘But is that what you’re wanting?’

‘I don’t know. I can’t see that I’d be able to rely on you. You’re not even divorced. And I think you’ll go back to her soon anyway. You’re always talking about how you should be with her.’

‘That’s ridiculous! Come here!’ Garrick reached to draw Jade closer, intending to kiss her. She pulled away and fled into the bedroom, locking the door behind her. Soon
he could hear her sobbing. ‘Hey, don’t do that, honey! Let me in! Let’s talk some more about it.’

After a minute or so, Jade opened the door a crack and peeked around it. There were tears rolling down her cheeks, but she was already quite naked. Garrick found himself intensely aroused. ‘All right,’ she said, ‘but get your clothes off, and come in here.’

As he lay down beside her, Garrick noticed that she was breaking out in gooseflesh all over her thighs, and there was cold sweat on her arms and on her forehead. ‘How long have you been mainlining?’ he asked.

She turned on him suddenly, with a vicious snarl. ‘Why do you ask that?’

‘Darling, I’m a doctor. I can tell that you are going into narcotic withdrawal. You had a lot of shit stuck in you last night, but you wouldn’t be breaking out like this if that was the only time. I’ve wondered before when I’ve seen you with those band-aids inside your elbow and on the backs of your hands. I’d thought maybe you’d been popping crystal meth, but you’re looking more like it’s heroin now. And you seemed to know that fellow Nick too well. You realise he’s my patient, don’t you?’

‘Holy fuck! How dare you accuse me like that! You smartarse, with your puny little prick! All you do is carry on with “Suck me baby, suck me up, suck me more!” You ought to learn to get your face down between a girl’s legs and lick. But you just want to take it all, and never give. And if I had a baby with you, you’d be chasing after some other skirt while I was still in the hospital, probably trying to get a leg over the midwife just as its head was popping out. I could never trust you to be a father to my kid. You’re a miserable worm and you just don’t give a shit. Why don’t you just fuck up and die!’

Inside Garrick, something broke. This was Father’s day. He’d just dropped off his kid. His Grandma had just recently died. And here he was, trying to comfort Jade after her rape ordeal, and talk lovingly about fathering her child. This junky slut. And look at the way she turned on him. Insight dawned on him, not so much with a rosy glow, but as a sudden blinding light. If he were to marry Jade, he might well be provoked to murder her a week later. ‘Get out!’ he screamed at her, raising his hand and slapping her hard
across the face. His hand moved ever so slowly and he heard the crack as if it was coming from far away. ‘Get out, you bitch!’ he screamed again.

A stunned look came over Jade’s face. She reached up to touch herself on the cheek where it was stinging. She felt strangely alive, like a hunted animal. She sprung off the bed, grabbed her gown and ran, screaming, ‘Fuck!’

Garrick heard the front door of the unit slam. He lay there alone. She was gone into the night.
A LETTER TO MY LOVE

A late cancellation in clinic gave Garrick an opportunity to draft a letter to Nick Myshkin, excluding him from the practice.

Dr Garrick Willis
Consultant Neurologist
Queensland Brain Institute
Princess Alexandra Hospital
199 Ipswich Road
WOOLLOONGABBA, QLD. 4102

5th September 2013

Dear Mr Myshkin

Due to your unfortunately aggressive behaviour towards me when we met by chance at a social event last Saturday evening, I am not able to continue as your treating neurologist. I will write to your referring doctor, Christine Smythe, to summarise my findings and treatment plan. You should consult Dr Smythe, who will be able to advise you as to the adequacy or otherwise of your current Epilim dose of 400mg twice daily, provided that you have attended Queensland Medical Laboratories for your blood test as previously advised. Should the need arise again for you to consult a neurologist, I will not be able to make myself available to you for consultation. In that event, you should consult Dr Smythe and seek a referral to another neurologist.

Yours sincerely

Dr Garrick Willis

cc Dr Christine Smythe

Garrick printed three copies, signed them, addressed an envelope to Nick, and gave it to Jilly to put in the post. He quickly penned another letter to Christine, outlining the clinical findings, diagnosis and recommended treatment, with an added line saying that he would be happy to discuss the reasons for his decision to cease treating Myshkin, should she wish to call him. He enveloped Christine’s letter, together with her copy of the one to Nick. Hopefully that would be the last he would see of that man.
But would Jade be able to stay away from him? It seemed she may have already had too much of a taste, and that she was already spiralling downwards. Garrick was sad, and worried about her, but it was over between them.

Jade had returned to the unit briefly to collect her things while he was at work on Monday. She left a note in an envelope, together with her key, saying that he should not expect to hear from her again, and not to show his face around at Toohey Street. And he hadn’t. But he had called her mobile several times. She had not answered, and had not responded to the messages he’d left.

How was Rachel? On Monday, Garrick dropped in at the Mater at lunch time, brought her some flowers. She seemed to be pleased to see him. He thought she was doing okay, but he could see the shine had been knocked off her confidence, and she was not likely to be so ebullient any time soon again. They were sending her home that afternoon, after she had a CT brain scan. She asked Garrick to meet her for a drink on Friday at the Chalk Hotel after work. He reluctantly admitted to himself that he was looking forward to seeing her, and not just because she might have word from Jade.

* 

When Jade fled from Garrick’s unit, she was barefoot in her bathrobe, but she had grabbed her keys, her phone and her purse from the kitchen as she headed out the door. She walked to the top of Highgate Hill and turned left into Hampstead Road, where she managed to flag down a taxi, in spite of her strange attire.

Jade leaned against the left passenger door and let out a huge yawn as the cab turned into Vulture Street, heading towards the Gabba.

‘That was a big one,’ remarked the driver. ‘Since you’re already in your dressing gown, I’m wondering if you need a place to sleep?’

‘Just take me where I told you. My girlfriend’s waiting for me. She’s a cop, and I called her just before I flagged you down. She knows I’m coming home in a taxi. If she
doesn’t see me home within half an hour, she’ll be out after me. You want me to call her now?’

‘Jesus, lady! I was just trying to help.’

By the time the taxi arrived at Toohey Street, Jade was sweating profusely, her eyes and nose were watering, and she was beginning to experience terrible cramps in her belly.

The driver noticed that her hands were shaking as she passed him her credit card.

‘You sure you’re all right, lady?’ he asked.

‘Fine. Thanks for asking!’ she snapped back at him. By now the gooseflesh had spread upwards from her legs and was erupting all over her body. She knew she wanted to get out of the cab and up the stairs before she began to hurl, and especially before she lost control of her bowels. She got through the gate, belching and retching, then threw up all over the stairs. She unlocked the front door and raced to the bathroom, where she vomited twice more into the toilet, then sat down and fouled the bowl with the product of gut-wrenching spasms of her colon.

Jade didn’t feel safe anymore in the house, not after what had gone down last night. She couldn’t quite tell whether the noises she heard were inside or outside, and it was hard to hear at all above the sound of her own chattering teeth. Every shadow was that of a hostile intruder. And the last person she wanted to see was Nick, but she just had to get a hit, and get it quick. She reached in her pocket for her phone.

Nick answered. ‘Hello? Had a nice time last night?’

‘You’re an arsehole!’ Jade screamed into the phone, then remembered that he was an arsehole that she needed, just as hers exploded again and squirted all over the white ceramic.

‘I like it when you’re angry!’ Nick said. ‘What can I do for you.’

‘I need a hit, Nick! I’m withdrawing. I had no idea that it could be like this.’

‘Ice or smack?’

‘Both, but more smack. And quick!’
‘Slow down, little lady. I’m busy here on a job at the moment, down at the Southern Cross Motel. And you’re going to have to do something for Daddy, if you want Daddy to bring you sugar …’

‘I just need it so badly, Nick. Please, Nick! Don’t be such an arsehole. Get over here and help! You’re only just down the road.’

‘But it’s not so simple, little baby. It’s not all about you. If you want sugar, you’re going to have to do a job for Daddy.’

‘What?’ She was already nauseous, and very soon she would be overwhelmed by her own stench. She had to stop shitting, or the vomiting would start again. Her bowels rumbled and she trumpeted out a noxious fart that could have been the pride of many a military bugler.

‘When you talk so sweetly to your Daddy, you get him so hard and drive him so wild that he can hardly think. Now what was it that I was wanting you to do? Oh yes, there’s a boarding house on the corner of Harcourt and Brunswick Streets in New Farm, just up from the Valley. Go over there and wait for Daddy in room 6. You’ll find that the main door is unlocked, and the key to room 6 is under the mat.’

‘Why don’t you just finish up what you’re doing at the Southern Cross and come down the street. I’ll do whatever you want, but here, and quick!’

‘Patience, child! Patience and obedience. If baby girl wants sweet things, then she will do what needs to be done to please her Daddy. So get over there! And when Daddy comes home to see you, he will show you what he needs you to do.’ Nick hung up the call.

*

Garrick snuck away from work for a haircut at lunch time on Friday. He took the BMW out of the hospital car park, turned into Ipswich Road, to the Gabba corner, where he turned towards West End, eventually parking behind Calliope’s Salon, next door to Thanh Le’s Restaurant in Hardgrave Road. Calliope Piakis rushed up to him immediately, her
wide hips swaying in her tight black knee-length tube dress, her long black hair curling down over her bare shoulders. ‘Dr Willis! So good to see you again! Can I get you a coffee while Spiro washes your hair?’

‘Sure Cally! Flat white would be great. Please just call me Garrick.’ He fumbled in his pocket and brought out the folded A4 sheet. ‘I have this poem I wrote after the last time I was here. I wanted to show you.’

‘A poem, for me!’ Cally squealed and fluttered the long black lashes over her bright blue-green eyes. She looked very excited. Garrick realised that ever since Demetrios had left her, she had been looking at him as a potential catch. She always took care to make sure that he was booked on to her personal list, except last time, when she had been away with family in Melbourne.

‘Well, not exactly,’ said Garrick. Cally immediately deflated, but she took the poem from him anyway, her thin pencilled eyebrows furrowed, her lips pursed into a pout.

‘I’ll read it while Spiro does his thing, then I’ll be back with you in a minute, darling.’ She turned away. ‘Spiro,’ she called, ‘make Dr Willis a flat white, and then wash him up at basin 1!’ She took the poem out the back and carefully unfolded it.

Hair Care Products

At the hairdresser
Leanne gets me coffee
and a questionnaire.

I tick the ‘rarely’ box
for the question about how often
people offer
compliments about my hair.

She cuts it like I ask her.
The shorter the better
now I’m going balder.

She wants to sell me
masculine shampoo
repair conditioner
Leanne can tell
that I’m a tough customer.

She asks if I believe in UFOs
while she cuts away
at the back of my neck
with a cut throat razor.

I tell her that the aliens
have used my bald patch
as a launch pad
for their spacecraft.

Leanne tells me
that she had a bald patch
but she rubbed it daily
with the hair restorer.

She tells me women
have been known
to use the masculine shampoo.

Her arms wave wildly
with the cut throat razor.
I reach for my wallet.
I leave with several
hair care products.

When she returned there was a little tear welled up in the corner of Calliope’s left eye. She dabbed it with a tissue, careful not to smudge her mascara, then faced her persecutor, dismissing Spiro abruptly to broom duty. ‘I let Leanne go last week,’ she said. ‘What can I do for you today, honey? Will you let me black your sideburns, get rid of all that nasty grey?’

Garrick, as much as he was full of himself, realised that he had hurt her feelings. He’d been trying to give her a hint about Leanne and Spiro, and the need for her to send them for customer sensitivity training. ‘No thanks, Cally, don’t make me like a Greek boy. But it is time for a change. I’d like you to take it all off with the clippers, with no blade, then do the back of my neck with the razor.’
'All right, honey, but you would look so good with it all dyed black. Make you look five years younger!'

*

The cab brought Jade to the corner of Brunswick and Harcourt Streets. She paid the driver and stepped out with the carry-on bag in which she kept toiletries, a work uniform, a fresh towel, and a change of clothes. She was shaking so much that she struggled to unlatch the gate of 548 Brunswick Street. She pulled her bag up to the front door under the portico of the large two-storey house with the sign announcing ‘HARCOURT LODGE – Casual and Permanent Rental – Low Rates – Vacancy’. Jade glanced across the road, meeting the gaze of a tall redheaded woman in black leather hot pants and motorcycle boots who was leaning against the wall beside the door of the Laundromat, puffing on a cigarette.

The main door of the house was unlocked, just as Nick had said it would be. The hallway was poorly lit. A termite infested hardwood staircase with a broken bannister and a rift in the middle led to the upper level on the left, just inside the entrance. Old paisley paper curled and lifted from the walls, revealing cracked plaster and the stain of paste long since eaten by American cockroaches. A smell kicked up from the decomposing carpet, like that of mould mixed with stale vodka and industrial cleaning products. Room 6 was the third on the right, at the back of the house, on the ground floor. Yes, there was a fibre mat, and under it, a key. She tried the key in the lock and pushed on the door, which creaked loudly on its rusty hinges as it swung open.

In spite of the tremor, Jade found an old brown Bakelite switch just inside the right hand door frame. It was rather gratifying that the light came on, although it was a bare bulb, hanging on a brown cloth-covered cord coming directly out of a mouldy and discoloured plaster ceiling rose. There was a queen-sized bed in a wooden frame, with a window, dressed with lace curtains, set behind it, just above the bed-head. The light from the Laundromat shone through, projecting a silhouette of the old garden shed that stood...
just inside the fence. The bed was made up with plain sheets, pillows and a doona, garish in red with orange sunbursts. On the left of the bed was a tall open cupboard with hanging space. The locked door beside it led to stairs down into the garden, visible through the window. On the other side of the bed, there was a small low table with a toaster, an electric jug, two coffee cups, and a small gas burner attached to a cylinder underneath. Through the wall to the right, an open door led to a small en suite bathroom with a toilet, a shower enclosure, and a basin with a dripping tap.

Jade stepped across the threshold, closed the door behind her and placed her bag inside the cupboard. She took off her shoes and lay down on the bed to wait for Nick as instructed. From where she lay, facing the door, she saw that a rack had been mounted on the wall to the right of the door. Hanging from it were various exotic apparatus, including handcuffs, a riding crop, a leather hood, a rope, and a short-handled cat-o’-nine-tails.

*Ned turned sharply into Harcourt Street and pulled the XR6 up abruptly beside where the garden shed stood, just through the fence, towards the back of the house. Nick jumped out of the passenger seat, vaulted the fence and went up the stairs to unlock the back door into room 6, causing Jade to jump right out of her festinating skin. ‘Come downstairs and say hello to Uncle Ned!’ Nick pushed her out in front of him. ‘Stand there on this side of the fence.’ Nick climbed back over.

Ned got out of the ute, walked around to the tail, dropped the gate and, with Nick’s assistance, hauled out what seemed to be a long roll of old carpet, secured with straps at both ends, with a substantial bulge in the middle. The redhead on the corner pretended not to notice anything. The two men lifted the carpet onto their shoulders and walked to the fence. Nick ordered Jade to take one end as they pushed it half way across the fence. Then he vaulted the fence again and asked Nick to push as he took the middle, motioning Jade to step back slowly as Ned eased the mass along, feeding more to Nick as he went. Then Ned jumped over and took the rear. Nick replaced Jade at the front and ordered her
to take the middle. Nick led them around the back of the house to the other side of the low plastic temporary fence to the construction site on the other side, where they stopped by the dark green industrial bin. Nick told Jade to leave the weight to him and Ned, to go round and lift the lid of the bin. Nick and Ned pushed the carpet into the almost empty bin. It fell with a thud. Jade dropped the lid. The construction zone at the back of the house was otherwise quiet. There was no light, and no sign of anything stirring in the yard.

Nick told Jade to get back inside and wait. He and Ned would bring her something soon. He returned with a long black wig, a little tartan miniskirt, a white spandex crop top, and a pair of high black boots. He tossed them at her. ‘Here, strip and get this gear on! You’re working for me now, bitch! And if you want a fix, you can give Uncle Ned here his reward, while I mix up!’

*

Late Friday afternoon, just as he was preparing to drive out of the hospital’s basement car park, Garrick’s phone rang. He picked up and answered, ‘Garrick Willis?’

‘Dr Willis, Sergeant Tammy Moroney here, from New Farm CIB.’

‘Yes, Sergeant?’ Garrick was already apprehensive.

‘I’m afraid we may have some bad news for you. Are you on your way home at the moment?’

‘I was just about to leave the hospital to head out to meet a friend.’

‘I suggest you call your friend to say you’ve been delayed. If you want to drive home, and perhaps to call up a support person to be with you, we could drop around in about half an hour to talk. It’s not something I’m prepared to tell you on the phone.’

Now Garrick was really spooked. ‘Yes, thank you, Sergeant. I’ll do that, and I’ll be expecting you at my place in about half an hour.’

‘I’ll be bringing my partner Senior Constable Graeme Dixon with me. You’re in Dornoch Terrace, Highgate Hill?’
Garrick confirmed the address. He called up Rachel, who insisted that she would come over and join him, rather than wait at the Chalk alone. He was about to suggest to her that she was not likely to be left alone for very long, but thought better of it and drove home to wait for the police. He parked the BMW, took off his tie and undid the top two buttons of his shirt, before taking the lift up to the unit.

Rachel was first to arrive. She hugged him and kissed his cheek. He found himself grateful for the intimacy, and glad to see the girl in tight white hipster leggings, a dark blue sweater and navy platform sandals. She looked good from the back, with her long straight black hair coming down almost to the top of her bum. ‘Something’s wrong?’ she said. ‘The police?’

‘Let me get you a drink. I’ve no idea, except they said they have bad news. They want to break it here at home. Hope it’s not Jade.’

‘Me too! You say things have soured between you two, since Saturday? And you’ve not heard anything since Sunday night?’

‘No! And you?’

‘Not a sound. It’s not like her’

The doorbell rang. Sergeant Moroney, with her flame-red hair and green eyes, reminded him immediately of someone he had met. He couldn’t quite place her. Senior Constable Dixon, blue eyes, brown hair and 6 feet 4, winked at him. They had definitely met before, not only in dreams, but in the hot tub at the Kruise Klub in Fortitude Valley, during a dry time, the kind of time that Garrick often had, during his marriage to Penny. There are some things that are best said in the company of friends, even friends who are only friendly strangers. The two police officers introduced themselves and shook hands with Garrick. Garrick showed them into the lounge and introduced Rachel, ‘My friend, Rachel Flanagan, a work colleague.’

Tammy Moroney began by reassuring Garrick. ‘Dr Willis, we’re from CIB, but I want you to know that we are not interviewing you on the basis of suspicion that you might be involved in criminal activity. Rather, we are here to bring you news, rather
unwelcome news, of the death of someone who may be of significance to you, and in the hope that you might be able to assist us with our investigation.’

Garrick looked at Rachel. She was agitated, biting her lip and clenching her fingers. ‘Somebody I know has died?’

‘Dr Willis, a woman’s body was found in a dumpster on a New Farm construction site this afternoon. A woman with long black hair. We found a letter, with the body, stamped, sealed and addressed to you. Of course the letter is being held as evidence, but we have made a copy, and we thought it was best that we should deliver it to you personally.’

She handed him the note.

2nd September 2013

Dear Garrick

I want you to know that I often think of you and Sandy, and although I do not know you as well as I should, and I have not been there when you needed me, I am very proud of you, of both of you. I knew you had become a doctor, but it was not until I heard you speak at your Grandmother’s funeral that I really was able to know just how smart you are, not just with a science, but with words and feelings. I hope that someday I may be able to show you who I really am, and why I left your father, why I cannot be any good as a wife, or as a mother. And I hope you will be able to show me the same kindness that you show to others, to be able to forgive me.

With love

Charmaine

‘Dr Willis, when did you last see your mother?’

Garrick had been bracing himself for the worst possible news, but somehow hadn’t thought at all about Charmaine. He glanced over at Rachel, seated in the recliner just to his right. The look on her face was one of puzzlement and perplexity, but also of relief. Tears were welling in the corners of her roasted almond eyes. She looked worried about
him, and through the wave of horror that had rushed over him like a grey tsunami, he could feel her empathy. ‘Well, I wasn’t sure, but I thought I saw her at my grandmother’s funeral in Lismore – let me see – eleven days ago, the Monday before last. She was standing near the doorway of the funeral home café. When I noticed her, she fled. I went after her, but she slipped away from me. Then I thought maybe I had seen a ghost. She was supposed to be in rehab with the Salvation Army down at Cobaki, the last I’d heard, but I don’t hear from her that often. Mostly when she calls, she tries to hit me up for drug money.’

Dixon asked, ‘What was your mother’s name?’

‘Charmaine, Charmaine Willis. At least that’s what she used to be called. She was Charmaine Craig before she married Dad. She left us when I was four. Went off with some biker guy.’

‘Is it possible that she may have had other children?’ asked Moroney.

‘Well, there was my sister Sandy, two years younger than me, but she scarcely remembers Charmaine. She was too young. Others? I don’t know about that.’ For a moment an image of the photograph he’d glimpsed in Myshkin’s wallet flashed through his mind, but he dismissed the ridiculous notion well before it had a chance to form.

‘Dr Willis,’ said Dixon. ‘Homocide have not yet been able to positively identify the woman whose body was found with this letter. If she was Ms Willis, then you would be the next of kin. Are you willing to come down to the morgue with us and take a look?’

Garrick’s stomach tightened in a knot. His heart was lead. His limbs had swum a deep water race in a sea of molasses. ‘How did she die?’

‘Well, the coroner will decide that at the inquest,’ said Moroney, ‘but there were needle marks up and down both arms, and cigarette burns all over her thighs.’

‘I suppose we better get this done,’ said Garrick.

Rachel looked up as Garrick dragged himself to his feet. There was compassion in her gaze, and something that could even turn to love, given a nudge. ‘Garrick, I’ll wait here for you,’ she said.
XVI
GROUND FOR SUSPICION

While the bad news was being broken, a cold front blew through. The temperature outside dropped by several degrees Celsius, and the rain began to fall. Tammy Moroney drove the modified Toyota Aurion police vehicle over to the John Tonge Centre at Coopers Plains, Graeme Dixon seated beside her, Garrick Willis in the rear seat immediately behind her. The windscreen wipers worked efficiently, back and forth. Something sure and reliable in a cruel and arbitrary world.

This isolated shower reminded Garrick of the weather leading up to the January 2011 floods, at which time one third of Brisbane, a city of two million people, had been underwater. While he had not then been forced to purchase snorkelling gear to get to work, he preferred to believe that it was the weather that was making him feel uncomfortable, and not his destination, or what he was likely to find there.

In 1992, the John Tonge Centre was relocated from Gardens Point in the city to a site next to the QEII Hospital. For more than a century before this move to a dry part of the south side, the morgue had been located at various times on five different sites on the north bank. After the building was inundated in 1887, the 1890 flood caused it to collapse, with its entire contents, into the Brisbane River. In spite of this, another riverine site was chosen, and it flooded again in 1893.

The receptionist at the morgue unlocked the side door and showed them through. The technician moved the bright overhead operating theatre light to shine directly onto the covered face of the corpse.

‘Are you ready for this?’ asked Tammy Moroney.

Garrick nodded. There was a knot in his throat that he just couldn’t swallow.

The technician lifted the face sheet. The face was grey, as corpses are, with long black hair. ‘It’s her,’ said Garrick.

‘Charmaine Willis? Your mother?’ enquired Moroney.
‘Yes,’ said Garrick, gesturing to the technician to cover the face again. As Garrick signed the identification certificate, he asked, ‘How long until the body can be released?’

‘Well,’ said the technician, ‘Dr Stavanger will perform the autopsy tomorrow. What happens after that will be up to the coroner, but due to the circumstances in which the body was found, it may not be for some time yet.’

‘Will I be allowed to see the autopsy report?’

‘Yes, the report can be released to family after it has been reviewed by the coroner, provided that there are no suspicious circumstances. In this case, as there may be, the coroner will review Dr Stavanger’s report and authorise him to discuss it with you, so long as that is not considered likely to compromise the investigation. We’ll be able to let you know about that within a few days. Are there other family members to be notified?’

‘Charmaine was an only child. Her parents have been dead for many years. So far as I know, there’s only my sister Sandy in Dubai. I’ll call her. Charmaine and my father were divorced more than thirty years ago. I’ll tell him anyway.’

‘I’ll give you my card. If you or any other family member should need the service, we have counsellors available. Please contact me, and I’ll arrange it. I can also address any other enquiries.’

Garrick thanked the technician, who buzzed the receptionist to show them out. Dr Willis was not one for casting aspersions. Poor dress sense and limited interpersonal capacity may not have been key selection criteria for technical positions at this establishment, but it was clear that they were little hindrance to permanent employment. Taken in isolation, they were not sufficient grounds for suspicion that Charmaine’s body might not be safe from unnecessary interference. When the receptionist arrived, Garrick turned to leave, flanked by Dixon and Moroney.

*

Garrick made his way up in the lift to the fifth floor and entered the unit, after farewelling Moroney and Dixon at street level.
‘You’re still here?’ Garrick was surprised to find Rachel waiting for him, slaving over a hot wok.

‘You were expecting otherwise? You’re rather pessimistic for a man who keeps a stock of all the ingredients for Singapore noodles!’

‘Thank you.’ *You’re an angel,* he was about to continue, but contained it, realising just how naff that would sound. Instead he asked, ‘Would you like a beer?’

‘I wouldn’t mind!’ Now she was being coy.

He reached into the fridge and pulled out two stubbies of Cooper’s Pale Ale. ‘Is the stubby okay, or would you prefer a glass.’

‘Do you have a cooler?’

Garrick glanced up at his lone Sir Leslie Patterson insulation sleeve and decided that while Les might have his place in this kitchen, this was not his time. ‘No, sorry, I don’t.’

‘I’ll have a glass then.’

Garrick reached up into the cabinet and pulled down a Crystal D’Arques tumbler, part of his small share of the wedding spoils. Penny had kept all the furniture. He poured for Rachel, and drank straight from the stubby. ‘Well, we get to share a drink after all!’

He clinked his bottle against her glass.

Rachel brought the wok over and set it down on a bamboo chopping board, protecting the surface of the table. ‘And you get to taste my noodles!’ She paused, and looked him in the eye, rather coyly. ‘Did you know that the stubby holder was invented in Canada?’

‘Bullshit! Or if it was, it was done by an Australian who didn’t want his balls to feel like they’d been hit by the puck at a hockey match every time he sipped his Canadian Club and thought of Port Jackson.’

‘No, really. But the Americans call them “koozies” and imagine they came about due to their own genius sometime in the mid-1980s.’
'My Dad and his mates wouldn’t touch a beer without one in the seventies. They were made out of styrofoam then. It’s a bit like Grandpa used to say about the Melanesian boys diving from the peer at Port Morseby during the Second World War …’

‘Yeah? How so?’ Rachel was intrigued.

‘Well, a Yank would throw a penny in the water, and the boys would dive for it. Never mind the sharks. The Yank would say to Grandpa, “Gawd! It’s a miracle the sharks don’t eat them boys.” Grandpa would come back and say, “All the boys have “America won the war!” tattooed on their butts. Even the sharks won’t swallow that!”’

Rachel giggled.

Garrick smiled for the first time in days. It was good to find someone who would laugh at his jokes.

Rachel served the steaming noodles into pasta bowls. As she leaned down towards him, hovering a clutch of noodles over his bowl, Garrick found himself noticing the bumps in her blue sweater. Her nipples were erect.

*She must be wearing a sheer lace bra under that. White, like those leggings.*

Garrick just caught her fragrance before it was drowned by the chilli, cumin and coriander. *Mimosa, orange blossom and a touch of rosewood ... Amarige by Givenchy?* He’d need her closer to be certain, or else to bury his head in the front of her sweater. He opted to restrict himself, for the moment, to demonstrating his appreciation of the provisions over which she had laboured. He took another sip of his beer, picked up his chopsticks and twirled them to pick up a load before transferring them into his mouth. It did not surprise him that she was able to manage this more neatly than he could, but he found the extent of her appetite remarkable. Somehow he registered that it was not the table leg that was rubbing against his calf. They continued to devour the noodles, each pausing occasionally for another swig of Cooper’s.

Garrick finished his stubby. He noticed that Rachel’s glass was still half full. He took another beer from the fridge and sat down beside her again. He felt the pressure on his calf again.
Rachel reached over and took hold of his left hand. She looked into his pale blue eyes with her dark almonds and asked, ‘How was it?’

Garrick began to shake, and then to cry.

*

Jade woke to the sound of rain pounding on the iron roof of her grandmother’s cottage in Princess Street. After the dream, with its wild carnival of railway station buskers, walk-in roadside stalls for psychoanalysis, burlesque police inspectors, and rock-tart amateur porn stars intent on disembowelling her with shivs fashioned out of fractured plastic ice cream containers, it was a relief to be able to make out something familiar in the room. The high window above the French doors that led out on to the side verandah allowed just enough moonlight to enter.

That was as good as it would get. Jade was naked, cold and painfully stiff. Her teeth were chattering. It was difficult to tell where the shivering stopped and the involuntary twitching started. Someone had rubbed her eyeballs with sandpaper until their skin was so thin that they were about to explode. Her throat was stinging and dry as a hyena doing stand-up at The Comedy Club. Her shoulders had been torn halfway out of their sockets. They were behind her head, her arms tied together, stretched out straight-elbowed and secured to the pole that held up the mosquito net tester. Her legs were splayed open, tied at each ankle to the ornamental posts at the foot of the bed. Her skin crawled. Her nose was bleeding, and her pubic hair was clotted and matted.

The relief at familiarity receded quickly. Jade plunged into a state of conviction that her father had risen from the grave and was walking down the hallway to revisit his childhood room, where he would be so affronted at the state in which he, the undead, would find his daughter, that he would flee from the house, run back and forth across the road all the way down Main Street, heedless of the traffic, until he reached the Story Bridge. He would stop, just a little past half way over, just on the Fortitude Valley side.
There he would mount the rail, raise his hands to the sky, roar fiercely, as the undead do, and launch himself once again to be broken on impact with the brown river so far below.

Footsteps came down the hallway. The handle turned and the door creaked open. Jade screamed.

‘Quiet, little lady! I’ve brought you something to eat.’ Nick threw the plastic carry bag with a KFC Dinner Box on to the bed.

‘Untie me!’ she pleaded, straining on the pantyhose, tears streaming down her face.

‘Well, I’ll do that if you’ll hurry up and shower, eat some chicken, put on your little tartan skirt and your black wig again. Daddy’ll fix you up then, cos he needs to get his girl back out flogging her arse on Main Street.’
XVII
A NEW BEGINNING

When Garrick woke, Rachel had gone. His gaze drifted to the space beside him, to the indentation she left in the pillow. He found himself wishing that she was still there and that he could reach out to hold her. For the first time ever, that previous evening, he had been able to make love to a woman without suffering the intrusive images of cutting, hurting and maiming her. He had been able to gain and maintain his arousal without substituting the image of another woman for hers. He had been able to enjoy love-making without guilt, ambivalence, fear or self-loathing. Strange, that it should happen in such circumstances, with the shock of his mother’s death so fresh, and with Rachel, who had been his impossible object of desire, in whose presence he found himself ludicrous, truly an idiot. With Rachel, who had recently suffered sexual trauma. He was desperately hoping that she was all right, that she had not left early because this unanticipated union had somehow reawakened the horror of her recent rape. Yet she seemed to enjoy it all, as much as he had.

Was it like this for Leonard Cohen, the day he composed his Hallelujah? Garrick was a poet, but no musician. Someone else must sing for him, so let it be Cohen.

And what of Jade? Jade, whom he and Rachel had so easily forgotten? What would become of them, all three of them, with this new triangulation? And where was Jade now? Was she alone? Who shared her bed? Was she safe? Would she return? And who would she be, and what would they be, when she did?

Garrick knew he didn’t care as much as he should. He forced himself to cut off from ruminating. It could destroy the lightness and hope that came when he thought of Rachel, all the good done by their encounter last night. With Jade, it had been a wild ride. Sometimes it had been a joyride, and at other times, it had been incredibly painful. Being with Jade was like riding the rollercoaster at Dreamworld. He sat next to her in the carriage, strapped and bolted in tight, their knees touching, his right hand high on the inside of her bare thigh, his left hand clutching tight on the safety bar as they peaked at
the top of the ride, screaming together as they plummeted into the drop. At the end, it was a relief just to be able to get off.

In the shower, Garrick thought of those he must telephone with the news about his mother. It was not a long list: Dad, Sandy in Dubai – who else was there? Charmaine’s parents had been killed in a car accident just a few weeks before she and Don had married. There was no one else that he could think would be interested. No, that wasn’t true. He’d better call the Salvos who ran the rehab at Cobaki. They had been very kind to her. They had given her the best chance she’d had. And they might know who else should know. They might have numbers. But it was always him they called when she was breaking out, and about to be thrown out, or overdosing and being sent to hospital. As though he was her dad, and not that she was his mum. Well, she always put him down as next of kin. And there probably wasn’t anyone else who had cared. Maybe a dealer somewhere would weep at the loss of a regular customer. Strange, to think that she was really gone, and there’d be no more desperate late night calls. On the slab there, at the John Tonge Centre, she had seemed so small, so grey, so old. Fifty-seven, but somehow, like a dead child. Like his dead child.

Then Garrick thought of Tom, something he didn’t do often enough. He paid his child support regularly, and once a fortnight he took the little fellow overnight, but he wasn’t much of a father. He wished he could feel a stronger bond with his son, but somehow it just wasn’t there. Could parental capacity be made or built, or was it just something that you have, or you don’t have? He’d better try harder. He’d better change his mindset and make a better effort, until it worked, like that little train engine in the book that he read to his son, the one that could. It was access night tonight, and that wasn’t going to be put off.

Garrick shaved and then rinsed under the shower. He towelled himself dry, brushed his teeth, put on his bathrobe. He wouldn’t be able to face those calls without coffee, although the longer he put them off the worse it would be.

And then, there it was, on the kitchen table, weighed down by a chocolate heart, wrapped in red foil – the note:
Dear Garrick

I’m sorry that I had to leave you early this morning. I have an early shift and must get home to change for work. I know this is very sudden, and that it is a very difficult time for you, but I want you to know that I was really glad to spend the time with you last night, and that I loved what we did together. I have always had a bit of a thing for you, ever since you gave me that stupid poem! And I remember how kind you were to me, on that terrible night, a while ago, in the ED at the Mater. I hope that, for each of us, and for us together, it might be a new beginning. Please call me later today. I want to see you again, soon.

Love,

Rachel xxx

* 

Nick took the call lying down, keeping a firm grip on Jade’s short blonde hair, bobbing her head up and down as he forced himself down her throat. He was fully wired. *Who the fuck’d be calling me this time on a Saturday morning?* The digital display on his iPhone read 10.00. There was plenty of light streaming in from the little window high up on Jade’s bedroom wall. So maybe it wasn’t such a bad call after all. ‘Nick here!’

‘Nick, it’s Dave. Listen, I’m duty manager today, but something’s come up. I need to get away at lunch time, one of the little jobs I do for Mr Bui. Would you do me a favour? Get in here and take over on the door until 11.00 tonight? Gina’s on from then.’

‘Yeah, okay Dave! I can manage that.’ Nick tightened his grip and jerked a pull on Jade’s hair. The little bitch was beginning to bite.

‘Another thing … I sent Tanya home. Seems she’d spent the night in the watch house. She’s covered in bruises and still throwing up. Not a pretty sight when she’s swinging out on a pole. So we’re short on talent today. You know any girl that’d like to pick up a casual shift? Doesn’t need to get up on stage, just to lap dance.’

‘Dave, I think I have just the girl for you! I’ll bring her down.’
‘Good on ya, Nick! We’ll give her a go, and if she’s any good with the customers, we’ll keep her on. I’ll let you train her.’

‘See you at twelve then!’

Nick hung up and tossed the phone onto Jade’s side of the bed. Using both hands, he jerked her head up and down vigorously, held on clenching his teeth despite her gagging as he shot his load. Then he let go and lay back. She coughed and spat, looked up at him with vacancy signs out in both pupils. ‘All right, slut! Daddy’s got work for you. Go and have a shower and get yourself cleaned up. We’re spending Saturday down at the Blue Velvet.’

*

‘Dad, it’s Garrick. Are you okay to talk?’

‘Yes, son. What is it?’

‘You got somewhere you can sit down?’

‘That bad?’

‘Bad as it gets. It’s Charmaine …’

Don had been anticipating such a call for many years now. At times Charmaine had turned up at the house at Goonellabah, raving and off her face. Don had to call the police, and eventually he had established a permanent restraining order. Just the same, that didn’t stop the occasional call in the early hours, when she would plead with him to come down and bail her out of the Lismore watch house. He’d been glad when, eventually, her attachment to him seemed to fade, and the emergency calls passed on to Garrick. Just the same, he was sorry for his son. ‘Yes, son, go on.’

‘She’s dead, Dad. I went down to the morgue to identify her body last night. Some workmen found her rolled up in a carpet in a waste bin out the back of a construction site in New Farm. She’d been shooting up. They don’t know whether someone had been hurting her, or if she’d started to mutilate herself again, but she had cigarette burns all
over. I don’t know. Maybe she overdosed and her dealer or whoever she was with panicked and decided to dump her.’

‘I’m really sorry, son, but it was going to happen someday. Just a matter of time. It’s a wonder she lasted this long. I’m sorry, though, for you. Does Sandy know?’

‘I didn’t feel up to calling anyone last night, after the time at the morgue. And they’re six hours behind us. So I’ll call her when we’re through. It’ll be early morning over there.’

‘Well, I hope you can catch her. It’s my guess it’ll be all over the front page of the Sunday Mail tomorrow. It’s a wonder the police have managed to keep the press off it so far. I’d hate to think of her finding it on the internet. Do you have any idea when they’ll release the body?’

‘No, Dad. That’ll be up to the coroner. They’ll notify me, when they have the autopsy report. I don’t really feel like putting on much of a funeral. And she’s got no other family. I wonder if you might come with me when they release the body, and we’ll have her cremated. If Sandy can’t get out for it then, we could keep the ashes, and she and I could scatter them together sometime later.’

‘Charmaine lived a hard life. Can’t say I’ve got much feeling for her now, except maybe relief that she won’t be troubling us again. But I’m very sorry, son, and I’ll be there for you if you need me to do that.’

‘Thanks, Dad! I’ll need to take you up on that, when the time comes.’ Garrick ended the call, then tried to get through to Sandy.

After the usual sequence of pips for international calls, Garrick listened to the dial tone ring three times at the other end. ‘Alo!’ A male voice answered.

‘Is that you, Ahmad? It’s Garrick Willis here, in Brisbane, in Australia. Is Sandy there? May I speak to her, please.’

‘She is sleeping. Please call back later.’

‘I need to speak to her. It’s about her mother.’

‘It is very early and she is sleeping.’
Garrick heard the click at the other end as Ahmad, or whoever else it was, put an end to the conversation.

*

Jade remembered going to the late nineteenth-century building that now housed Blue Velvet, to see Michelle Shocked, when the club was Van Gogh’s Earlobe. Jade must have been eighteen. Michelle had grown her hair long, and appeared on stage in a dress. She sang *Cotton Eyed Joe, Come a Long Way* and *Anchored Down in Anchorage*. She delivered some great acoustic sets, but it seemed as though motherhood had just about knocked the skateboard punk rocker out of her.

Soon after that concert, the live music venue closed, and a franchised branch of a Fortitude Valley strip club called Bad Girls replaced it, taking the building back closer to its original function as the site of brothels serving the maritime public of the old South Brisbane docklands, and the resident doctors at the Mater Misericordiae Hospital. Subsequently the club had changed hands several times and was now trading under a new name, although the name on the licensee’s plate had only recently changed after Henri de Brioche’s association with a hydroponic enterprise in the Numinbah Valley was splashed across page three of the *Courier Mail*.

These fragments raced through Jade’s mind as the methyl-desmethyl-amphetamine accelerated on the bends of her veins, skidding across the feeling that she would otherwise have had as she gyrated, for the first time, around a silver pole on stage – that of being somewhat overexposed.

*

Garrick located Rachel in his contact list and pushed the call icon. The ringtone sounded seven times before going through to message bank.
‘Thank you for calling Rachel Flanagan …’ The Toronto accent purred into Garrick’s iPhone. He waited for the end of the message, then hung up the call. A few moments later, the phone rang back. ‘Hi honey, sorry I missed your call. I was in the shower, just freshening up after work.’

‘I’m calling to say thanks for your note. It was very moving. And to thank you too, for being there for me. You’re a beautiful girl, and I’ve been glad to have the opportunity to begin to know you. I’d love to see you again, too.’

‘Well how about a movie this evening then?’

‘I’ve got Tom, so not unless it’s G rated, over here, and available on DVD.’

‘Well, if you think it’s okay, I’d love to meet him.’

‘I’ll cook for you this time, and if you’d like to stay …’

‘Of course I would!’

‘Well, I’m on my way over to Penny’s to pick him up now. We’ll grab a movie at Civic Video. So how about you come over around 5.30? Do you like dry red peanut curry of chicken?’ It was something he knew he could cook quickly.

‘I’ll try anything once!’ chipped Rachel.

Garrick imagined her standing bare-breasted in the bedroom of her small apartment, just inside the door to the en suite, having just pulled on her high cut ragged denim jean shorts, her long black hair hanging wet against the curve of her back. Funereal as the times might be, he hoped she would always be that cheeky.

*

Tom loved the smell of the seats in his father’s BMW. Usually he felt safe with the black leather around him, but today Daddy was strange. Maybe something was wrong. As he sat strapped into his plastic booster seat just behind Garrick, Tom stared out the window at the pylons of the Grey Street Bridge flashing by and said, ‘Daddy, what’s a Charmaine?’ He had heard Garrick and Penny whispering.

‘Charmaine was a lady Grandpa used to know, a lady who has died.’
‘What’s died, Daddy?’

‘It means she’s gone, and she won’t be coming back.’

‘So Char-Main won’t be coming back?’

‘Tom, Daddy’s going to cook Thai curry for dinner. Would you like that?’

‘No, Daddy! Pineapple pizza!’

‘Okay, Tom, we’ll order one at Dominos, and go to the video store for a movie while the pizza’s being made. But I’ll have to cook the curry anyway.’

‘Why not eat pizza?’

‘Not tonight, Tom. Tonight we have a guest, and Daddy is cooking Thai food to share with the guest.’

‘Will Aunty Jade be coming?’

‘No, Tom. Aunty Jade won’t be coming.’

‘No Aunty Jade? Aunty Jade’s nice. Why won’t Aunty Jade be coming?’

Garrick said, ‘Aunty Jade has gone away, and she won’t be coming tonight.’

‘Aunty Jade gone away? Not coming back? Has Aunty Jade died? Like Grandpa’s friend Char-Main?’ Tom burst into tears.

Garrick pulled up outside Dominos in Boundary Street, opened the back door, unclipped Tom’s belt and lifted him from the booster seat, up across his shoulder. Tom thumped his father’s back and screamed. ‘Bad Daddy! Make Aunty Jade go away. Just like Char-Main! I want Aunty Jade!’ The boy began to kick at Garrick’s chest.

Garrick steadied himself, patted Tom gently on the back, and strode towards the doors of Dominos saying, ‘Let’s go and get that pizza, son.’

Once Tom was buckled back into the booster seat, behind his father, on the way down the road to the video store in Russell Street, he asked: ‘If Aunty Jade’s not coming, who is coming then?’

‘Daddy’s friend Rachel will be coming for dinner tonight.’

‘Who’s Rachel? Why is she coming over?’

‘Rachel is Aunty Jade’s friend too.’
Garrick opened the car door, lifted the little boy out of his seat, put him down on his feet and took his hand. As they walked into Civic Video, Garrick said, ‘I think you’ll like Rachel. She is very nice. And she is looking forward to meeting you. Should we get Bob the Builder again? Or Sponge Bob?’

‘No Daddy, I want Wallace and Gromit!’ Tom pointed to the case. ‘That one, the one with Wallace and Gromit, and the Rachel monster!’ Garrick picked up the case and walked to the counter to hire *Wallace & Gromit: The Curse of the Were-Rabbit.’*

Tom was quiet all the way back to the Dornoch Terrace unit. He insisted that he should carry the DVD, and that his father bring up his overnight bag, as well as the pizza. Once inside, he ran into his room and came out clutching the photo from Lone Pine. ‘Will Rachel come with Daddy to take me to see the koala?’

Garrick sighed and shrugged his shoulders. Suddenly he felt old, and not very wise.

‘I don’t know, Tom. Sometimes Daddy just doesn’t know. Would you like some lemonade?’ He poured the Sprite into a lime green Tommee Tippee sippy cup, sat Tom on the couch in front of the television, slipped the DVD into the machine and pushed play, before retreating to the kitchen.

Garrick lit the wok burner on the gas range. He took two chicken breasts from the fridge, drew his kitchen knife from its scabbard and cut them into two centimetre cubes. The flesh was pale and bloodless. A flash of the old imagery came momentarily, made him drop the knife. He countered it with a big red octagonal mental STOP sign, shook himself and pulled together. He picked up the knife and finished the job, poured a small volcano of cornflour onto a corner of the board, ground black pepper and sea salt into it, then rolled the chicken cubes in the mix one by one, plopping the first one into the cooking oil to check that it was warm enough to frizzle before going on. He continued until all the cubes were coated and beginning to crackle in the oil, as moisture evaporated. He dropped each one in by hand, copping an oil splash on the back of his left, just inside the thumb, below the index finger. He jumped back in pain, and was just about to run it under the cold tap at the sink when Tom toddled in, holding the cup with the dinosaur motif upside down, shaking it, proudly announcing: ‘Sticky froth!’
'Shit!' yelped Garrick, as one of the chicken cubes deep-frying in the wok launched another pop of hot oil at almost the same spot on his hand.

Tom dropped the cup and fell on the floor wailing. ‘I want sticky froth!’

Garrick jumped towards the sink, clutching the hand. He turned the tap on with his right and ran the left under it, his feet dancing a little dance like a man with prostatitis stuck too long in the queue outside the toilet cubicle. Tom flung the almost empty cup at his father, yelling ‘Bad Dad!’ from where he lay, kicking and flailing. Fortunately the wok of frying oil remained stably on the burner ring, crackling away as the doorbell rang. Garrick scooped up Tommy, still wailing, and went for the door, leaving the cold tap running.

Rachel was wearing scarlet lipstick and a mandarin-collared emerald green silk dress, pinched at the waist, then flowing over her curves, hugging her contours to mid-thigh, with a slit rising almost to her left hip. Garrick wasn’t looking at her sandals, but they were lime green straps on cork platforms. The smell of Opium rising through the silk from the cleft between her breasts promised many happy hours to be spent, chasing the dragon. ‘Hello, gorgeous!’ Rachel said to Tommy, who cautiously raised his head from where it was pressed against Garrick’s chest and stared up into her face.

‘I’ve got blue eyes. Aunty Jade had nice green eyes. You’re eyes are like a cat! I don’t like you!’
In the dream, Garrick was working undercover with the tall redhead. He wore a charcoal grey pin-striped suit with wide lapels, black pointy-toed patent leather shoes with white spats, a black shirt, wide suspenders, a white tie and a grey rabbit’s fur Akubra fedora. The redhead wore black leather hot pants and high stiletto lace-up boots. Her lashes were black and false, with green eye shadow and a zinc white face. Her white silk shirt was tied in a knot to reveal her slender waist, the sheen of fine velvet on her belly, her pierced navel roosting an articulated silver owl with yellow sapphire eyes. Her breasts spilled over the balconnets of the three quarter cups of her black Victoria’s Secret bra. Her hair was aflame, and her lips were fire-engine red. She wore her police cap at a jaunty angle, and twirled a set of black steel handcuffs as a bracelet and chain on her right wrist. She was a prostitute, and he was her pimp. And there were guns.

The redhead handed him a stubby revolver, very much like an Arco No. 125 Sting toy hand gun, with Made In Hong Kong stamped into the metal over the trigger guard. This little boy was playing gangsters with his wicked older sister. She drew a standard police issue Glock Model 22 .40 calibre semi-automatic pistol. She raised it to her rounded lips and blew across the tip of the barrel, turned to him and said, ‘It’s time for a reckoning, Dr Willis’. She gestured with the gun. He followed. They slowly raised their heads above the low sandstone wall, behind which they’d been crouching. They looked down into a street lit by pale gas lights.

On the corner, not ten metres from them, Myshkin was there, in profile, wearing his Commissioner’s uniform, arresting a waif-like woman with long black hair hanging straight down her back. Her breasts were bare. She was naked apart from a red tartan micro-miniskirt, torn fishnets and black stilettos. When she turned her face to them, her blind green eyes stared at them like emeralds from the funeral mask of an ancient pharaoh. Her torso was mottled with black and yellow bruises. Blood poured from the wounds inside her left elbow where the fit had been dislodged, streaming down her
forearm and dripping onto the pavement. Myshkin turned his back on them as he raised his baton to beat the junkie streetwalker all the way through the portal to the City of the Dead.

‘You go first, Willis,’ said the redhead. Garrick cocked his gun, lifted himself up on to the wall and dropped down. The sound of his landing brought Nick Myshkin face about. Garrick raised the gun and pulled the trigger. A sputtering sound came from the barrel. A small lead pellet and something like the spring from a Parker pen dropped on to the pavement in front of him. Myshkin’s baton came down on Garrick’s gun, scattering springs and ball bearings all over the street. Myshkin raised his baton to strike the girl again, as a bullet from the redhead’s smoking Glock pierced his forehead and blew out the back of his skull, splattering his brains all over the streetwalker’s long black hair.

Garrick woke to find Rachel straddling him bareback. The gunshot was the bedhead banging against the wall.

*  

When the call came through on the radio, Tammy Moroney was in the driver’s seat of a squad car up on the grass at Orleigh Park, next to the South Brisbane Sailing Club, parked under the branches of a gnarled old Moreton Bay fig. Moroney’s flame red hair hung down below her cap, and all the buttons of her uniform blouse were undone, exposing her silver chain with its crucifix and St Christopher that jangled as she tugged on the short lead attached to the dog collar around Senior Constable Dixon’s neck, bringing his mouth down on to the pink nipple of her left breast.

What were the New Farm CIB doing at 7.30 p.m. on a Saturday evening around the bend on the wrong side of the river, so far away from the fleshpots of Brunswick Street and the dogging beats that they could otherwise be patrolling in New Farm Park? At this time, when off duty, Moroney would normally be found among the congregation emerging from early evening mass at Holy Spirit church, thanking Father O’Flaherty for
the sermon, then dashing home to her Merthyr Road unit to change into knee boots and black leather hot pants to go clubbing.

Just above the patrol car, a flying fox launched itself from the upper branches of the fig and took flight towards Toowong, startling Dixon. His teeth clenched involuntarily on the nipple, earning a harsh jerk on the lead and a slap on the right cheek. ‘Bad dog!’ exclaimed Moroney, pulling herself away from him as the radio chirped and crackled.

*

Calliope’s was working late that Saturday. Dave was the last customer to leave the salon at around 6.45 p.m., losing his beard and shedding all his hair except the rat’s tail. Cally sent Spiro off to meet his mates at the Wickham, called up Thanh Le’s to order herself spring rolls with rice vermicelli, swept the floor of the salon, tidied up the magazines, and slipped next door to collect her take away.

Dave was still out the front, rummaging about in the back tray of a Ford XR6 ute parked three doors down from the restaurant. He hefted a can of mower fuel out onto the pavement, as Cally walked by with her bowl in a white plastic bag. Dave watched her for a moment from behind as she turned towards the salon.

Once inside, Cally locked the front door, slipped into the office down the back, pulled a bottle of ouzo out of the fridge and settled down to a date with her small business accounting package.

*

Jade found herself naked, apart from a pink lace G-string, appliqued in black cotton with the Hustler brand, dancing on the lap of a stocky Vietnamese boy in his late twenties, in a room out the back of the Blue Velvet. He smiled at her placidly as she leant down to whisper in his ear and rattle out the no contact rule. Up close, he looked vaguely familiar. For a moment, she wondered if she had seen him at the Princess, but she rapidly
dismissed the thought and carried on encouraging him, her mouth chattering filth like a pillbox machine gun, her hips gyrating over the tent in his jeans. That was what he reminded her of – the little fat man with the laughing mask, the one who runs out in front of the lion dancers at Chinese New Year, the one who shakes the coin collection box. Her mind was racing on from one association to another, exploding like a string of poha firecrackers. He clamped his hands onto her breasts, pulling her down hard on to him, thumbs and forefingers twisting her nipples.

Jade screamed, and Nick burst in through the curtains, brandishing a pair of sticks joined by a short chain. Hoa Bui lifted his left hand from Jade’s breast and held her to him tightly round the waist as he reached down with his right and pulled a Smith & Wesson double-action .45 ACP semi-automatic from his ankle holster, flicked off the safety catch and pointed it at Nick’s head.

Jade was momentarily silent. ‘Don’t stop talking dirty, baby,’ said Hoa. ‘It soothes me. Calms me when I’m trigger happy.’

‘Aren’t you that little prick who stuck the net on my head in the Neuro lab?’ asked Nick, raising the weapon behind his head.

‘Yeah, and I was laughing as you pissed and shat yourself when you fitted! Drop the nunchaku before I blow your fucking brains out.’

Nick obliged, mindful of the Smith & Wesson.

Hoa shoved Jade over towards Nick. He pointed the gun in her direction. ‘Bruce Lee’s gonna give me a head job.’ He beckoned to Nick with his left hand.

Jade watched as Nick kneeled, unzipped Hoa’s jeans and went down. ‘Do it good, and don’t bite me, bitch, or you’ll never do a deal in my Dad’s bar again.’ He gestured to Jade, ‘You can go now, girlie!’ and put the barrel of the gun against Nick’s temple, caressing him with the metal as he bobbed up and down.

Jade bowed slightly, turned and slipped out through the curtain to the bar, where she found herself returning to her work with renewed fervour.

*
Dave had the pantyhose pulled over his face, with the nylon legs hanging down his back. He was just about to douse the pile of cardboard cartons by the mini-skip outside the back of Than Le’s in Hardgrave road when Constable Mei Ling Wu surprised him from behind, deviating around the back of the restaurant, where she was about to collect her dinner before heading in for an overnight shift at West End Station. Wu was known for her sensitive nose. While she was still at the Oxley Academy, they’d threatened to loan her out to the Federal Police, swapping her for one of the beagles that patrolled customs at Brisbane Airport. This transfer never eventuated, not because Wu’s sniffing ability was in any way inferior to the dog’s, but because she rapidly came to be known for her fierce temper, and for a share of courage disproportionate to her stature. Her trip down the side of the shop was directed by an intuition brought on by the stink emanating from a can of four-stroke mower fuel. ‘Drop the lighter, prick! Turn around! Hands behind your head!’

Dave obediently deposited the lighter on the pile of cardboard, raised his hands slowly, then swung a roundhouse kick that knocked the Glock from the police officer’s hand. He followed up with a gut punch that set the constable reeling, scrabbled for the gun and pumped a couple of rounds into her left hip. Wu ground her teeth and whimpered. Dave yelled: ‘Shut up bitch’ and clipped her under the left ear with the Glock, silencing her for long enough for him to pick up the lighter and can, then head into the crowded restaurant through the back door, wielding the Glock.

Constable Wu reached down into her belt for the portable radio and put out a call to all units, then drew her Taser and began to painfully inch her way towards the flyscreen door that Dave had left ajar, alert to the sound of smashing glass, to the screams and the gunshots.

*

Under the Moreton Bay fig, the radio crackled inside the squad car. Another bat dropped guano on the windshield, as Sergeant Moroney answered the call and quickly buttoned
her blouse. ‘We have a shooter!’ she told Dixon, who was perilously close to that status. ‘Officer down!’ She turned the key in the ignition of the supercharged Toyota, hurtled down Hillside Terrace and Orleigh Street, swung a left into Hoogley, right down Ganges, and hard left again into Hardgrave Road, coming to a screeching stop outside Thanh Le’s just as Dave burst out the front door, brandishing his Glock. Moroney sprung out the driver’s door and lunged for him.

Dave gunned her down before she could draw. When Dixon hit him for the first time with a bolt from his Taser, Dave was standing over the fallen officer, grinning stupidly, as bright red blood pumped liked a fountain out of the sizeable hole just inside her left breast. Dave fell as Dixon hit him with the Taser, again. Somewhere, in a place far away, Constable Dixon was imagining what he would say to the coroner when his dental records revealed a perfect match with the bite marks on Moroney’s left nipple. Dixon reached up with his free hand to remove the dog collar that was still fastened around his neck. The refrigerators in the kitchen exploded, sending a fireball through to the front of the restaurant, showering Dixon, Dave and the corpse in a million fragments of glass. Dixon squeezed the trigger on the Taser. As the first fire engine and the paramedics screamed down the street, Dixon pulled the trigger again.

* 

On Monday, Garrick found he was able to throw himself into the laboratory work with new energy and zest. He opened his email to find news of ethics committee approval for a modification of his clinical research trial protocol. After a sad run of recidivism in the shoplifters, culminating in the loss of his favourite Parker pen, his iPhone and the screws that held his computer workstation together, he had been dying to replace Kubrick’s *A Clockwork Orange* with a new weapon, hitting the bastards with a full three hours of deterrent dysphoria.

Hoa Bui seated the three subjects in their chairs, capped and wired-up them up, and strapped them in securely as Garrick watched from behind the observation screen. Garrick
waited for Hoa to give the all clear signal, then pushed the button on the console to project David Lynch’s *Inland Empire* on to the theatre screen. If three hours of Hollywood starlets falling out of haunted screen sets down rabbit holes, accompanied by 90 decibels of dystonic roaring wasn’t enough to set the shoplifters’ guts churning, then having the actors stalk each other through shanty towns until one is disembowelled with a Phillips screwdriver would have to turn the trick. Not to mention the finale, back in the mansion, where all join hands like sisters with the rabbits and break out into Bollywood dance.

Garrick watched the multiple EEGs on the electronic monitors for a while, then reached for the *Courier Mail* that Hoa had left lying on the bench. He’d spent the afternoon in bed with Rachel yesterday after dropping Tom off at Ascot, so he hadn’t caught up with the news. The front page headline read: ‘THIRTY DIE IN WEST END RESTAURANT BLAZE: Police Say Worst Since Whiskey Au Go Go’. Garrick turned to Hoa and asked, ‘This wasn’t your Dad’s place was it?’

‘No,’ said Hoa, ‘but they were friends of the family.’

Garrick read on a little further, alarmed to discover that Dave, the man who’d judged the haiku contest at the Zoo, was now in Coronary Care under armed guard. He’d had a heart attack while being repeatedly Tasered by a police officer at the scene of his arrest. The officer’s name was Dixon, same as that of the man he’d had that fling with years ago, the one who worked with that redhead. Dixon had been transferred to the Toowong Private Hospital after receiving treatment for minor burns, cuts and abrasions at the Princess Alexandra Hospital emergency department. Two women police officers had died at the scene, one shot through the heart, point blank, by Dave, the other incinerated when the restaurant kitchen exploded. The fire had spread to the hairdressing salon next door, where a valiant fireman had carried out the proprietor from the back office, recently asphyxiated, overwhelmed by smoke inhalation. Paramedics had attempted to resuscitate her. She’d had a pulse when the ambulance left to take her to the Princess Alexandra Hospital, but she succumbed on the short journey, and was dead on arrival.
Poor Cally! Garrick could not bear to take in any more of the story. He didn’t flip towards the end of the paper where, on the obituaries page, he might have read the official version of the life of the soon-to-be posthumously decorated Sergeant Tammy Maroney.

He mooned his way through clinic and ward rounds, where Rachel misinterpreted his distracted state as dissonance over the factors that now complicated their relationship in the workplace.
Garrick rang the buzzer at the entrance to Rachel’s tower in the Story Apartments. He was carrying a change of work clothes, his swim goggles and speedos, his bathrobe, his toiletries bag, a bottle of wine and his running gear, all in a black Adidas sports bag. In his other hand he held a bunch of red roses, purchased hurriedly at Coles. He nervously moved from one foot to the other. This was the first time he had been to Rachel’s for a sleep-over.

‘Who’s there?’

Garrick jumped. The Canadian voice came from the intercom.

‘It’s me, Garrick!’

‘You were really weird in the ward round today. You’d better tell me what’s up. It’s unit 7, on the second floor. Come on up, Dr Strangelove!’

Garrick shared the lift with a slender blonde woman whom he judged to be in her early forties, coming up from the car park below, dressed in lycra three-quarter pants and a red Lorna Jane sports bra. Her runners were blue and white Mizuno Wave Rider 15s. She was wearing Thorlo Lite ankle socks that retail for about $30. She glowed a healthy orange without runnels, direct from the tanning studio. Garrick could detect no sign that she had shed a drop of sweat. She smiled at him and commented on the scent of the flowers. ‘You can bring those to me on the fourth floor anytime you like, darling!’ she told him, with a cheeky flash of her bleached fangs, as he alighted at the second floor. She watched him blush and stutter as the lift doors closed, enabling her to continue her ride.

Rachel met him at the door. He had suggested they go for a run together. She was already dressed for it, in an outfit almost identical to that worn by the blonde woman in the lift, right down to the Mizunos. Her fluorescent pink socks and her Sally kick shorts with the red tie at the front were the only difference. Rachel had a frown on her face, but
lit up with delight at the sight of the roses. She burst out laughing. ‘You really are an idiot, aren’t you! Are those for me? They’re lovely!’

Garrick was perplexed. He often felt like one, but he wasn’t quite sure why she should be calling him an idiot just now, or how it was that bringing roses qualified him.

She reached out to take the flowers, embraced him warmly and kissed him on the lips.

‘I hope you’ve brought your running gear,’ she said, ushering him into the bedroom. ‘Hurry up and get changed!’

Garrick put down the Adidas bag, unzipped it, pulled out a bottle of Kabiminye Kerner, 2010 vintage and passed it to her. ‘My favourite vineyard,’ he said, ‘in the Barossa Valley. You’d better chill it.’

‘Really? Lighten up! I thought I’d put it in the microwave instead, and see how long it takes to explode.’

‘That’s a bit difficult after what I saw in the paper today. I had to write a poem about it. I want to show you …’

‘We can talk about it while we run. And then I want to get you in the pool. You can show me the poem later.’

Garrick pulled on his black Nike dri-fit shorts, his bright orange Adidas shirt, his Run-Speed-One socks, his yellow Nike cap, his prescription Raybans and his blue Mizuno Wave Riders. He wasn’t really one for colour co-ordination. Leave that for the girls. Real runners dressed for comfort.

Soon Garrick was panting, as Rachel glided down the O’Connell Street hill, shuffling and clumping along as fast as he could behind her, regretting that 10 kilogram tyre he’d put on around his waist since the last time he’d run the Gold Coast half marathon. They crossed over the foot bridge at Dockside, took a right turn to run past the marina, a left at the ferry terminal and on along the boardwalk by the river, past the spot where the catamaran had breached the boardwalk wall and grounded during the January 2011 floods. Many of the boards were still loose, and some of the paving bricks stood up a fraction on the walkway further on. Otherwise, no signs remained of the inundation.
‘So what is it?’ she said, as he managed to come up beside her, just before they ran into Captain Burke Park and up to the drinking fountain under the Story Bridge.

‘Did you see in the *Courier Mail*, about the fire at Thanh Le’s? That was my hairdresser who died in the salon next door.’

‘And did you see, in the obituaries, that Sergeant Moroney who took you to see Charmaine on Friday night, she was the one gunned down on Hardgrave Road?’

‘Shit, no! I didn’t get that far into it. I was knocked about thinking of Calliope, the hairdresser. She seemed to have a bit of a thing for me. Poor woman. I couldn’t get it out of my head, her amazing blue-green eyes. In the poem …’

‘Shut up and run. You can show it to me when we get home.’ They ran up to the ferry terminal next to the Jazz Club, then turned and ran all the way back again. ‘Let’s cool off with a swim,’ said Rachel.

‘Can I show you the poem first?’

‘All right, so long as you get changed straight away. I’ve bought a new Brazilian bikini and I want you to tell me that it doesn’t make my bum look big.’

‘Okay,’ said Garrick. They were already half way up in the lift to the second floor. He walked into the en suite bathroom and shed his running gear, pulled his black speedos out of the sports bag and grabbed his goggles. He couldn’t stop himself pulling out his Collins 3880 Feint and Paged account book, the one with a red cover, in which he drafted his poems during spare moments at work. This one hadn’t even made it into a Word file yet.

Rachel emerged topless. She had slipped on the tiniest little orange bikini bottoms Garrick had ever seen. She turned her back to him, leant forward and stretched towards the ceiling. The only big that Garrick could think of was the effect she was having on the bump in his speedos.

‘Well?’ she said.

‘You look really nice in those togs. From behind you look just like Behati Prinsloo in the Seafolly posters. But I like your long black hair so much more.’ Garrick hoped he had said something right. ‘Now can I read you the poem?’
‘All right, but be quick. I’m dying to get wet.’

Garrick opened the notebook and read aloud:

_Shadow_

My hairdresser’s eyes 
were delicate windows 
with awnings shadowed 
in fluorescent aqua 
and fringed with lashes 
of kohl black mascara. 
I told her of fever 
that burned in the seventies 
for girls in the city 
with blue eye shadow. 
Their acrylic tipped fingers 
wore an itch to scratch 
less tender than hers 
as she worked at the basin.

After the fire 
that burned out the salon 
my hairdresser’s eyes 
were blackened windows 
to a shut down soul 
still open for business 
but closed to kindness. 
I raked the embers 
until I found words 
to bring on grief’s labour 
in a basin of tears. 
I have forgotten her name 
but I won’t forget the colour 
of my hairdresser’s eyes.

‘Very nice,’ said Rachel, with that sulky look that Garrick was coming to know.

‘Maybe if she’d lived you would have read it to her, too. Maybe you’ll write a poem for me some day.’

‘I did, the day I first saw you. I fell in love with you across the room – with the tattoo on your shoulder.’

‘And you delivered it to my table – to a total stranger!’
'I guess I can be a bit of an idiot.'

‘Yes! And now that you know me, and I’ve fallen in love with you, I just keep hoping you’ll do it again, and again – write me a poem, that is, not fall in love with a total stranger.’

‘I’m working on it,’ said Garrick, crestfallen.

‘Now why don’t you look into my eyes? Do they look like cat’s eyes to you? Chinky?’

*

As the club was closing in the early hours of Sunday morning, Hoa gave Nick a gentle shove, with the barrel of his gun, out onto the sidewalk before pulling down the roller door and locking up. He turned to Jade, seated behind him on a bar stool, speeding away as she sipped on a cocktail of grenadier, blue curacao, and ice. She was still wearing the pink lace G-string and her red stilettos. Her hands were jittering, shaking the glass and spilling the liquid over her breasts as she turned around on the stool, swaying dangerously and threatening to tilt towards the floor.

‘Would you like me to take you for a ride?’

‘Whatever!’ she said, intercepted by Hoa’s arm around her waist as she attempted to rise from the stool and staggered to the right.

Hoa led her out the back of the club and half-carried, half-dragged her to the passenger side of the black Mercedes SLK convertible parked in the lane. He fastened her seat belt. By the time he’d made it to the driver’s side, her head was lolling, and she’d fallen fast asleep. Noticing the goose flesh rising all over her body, and the bluing of its extremities, he reached behind the seat for a tartan picnic blanket and threw that over her before driving the few blocks to his South Brisbane unit.

*

In the dream, Cally came to Garrick through a cloud of smoke, coughing and spluttering. She wore a black negligee, through which the nipples of her ample breasts protruded in a
way that he had never imagined himself noticing while she lived. The part of him that
observed the dream as though from another place also wandered into realms of inquiry
concerning hairstyle. He found himself wanting, as he never had when she was alive, to
reach out and lift the hem of her short silken garment, to check her pubic manicure.

Somewhere, a long way from Hendersonville, Johnny Cash was singing *Ring of Fire*.

‘I wrote you a poem,’ said Garrick-in-the-dream.

‘But not until after I died,’ reproached Cally. ‘Heed me, Garrick Willis, for I have
not long to tarry. The harbinger will follow me, bearing the message. *Pay heed, lest you
loiter, and vacillate, lest you invest too little, and love too late.*’

Garrick-in-the-dream strained to reach out to her, but she faded and disappeared
into the smoke, vanished leaving the scent of aniseed and an archaic rhyming couplet
hanging in the air. He began to shiver. The heat that surrounded Cally’s spectre was
replaced by a moist, icy chill. What had seemed to be smoke now was fog, sticky and
seeming to creep in tendrils up his trouser cuffs and down under his collar. When he
reached to wipe his brow, he found it covered with droplets of condensation. Suddenly
his eyes were blinded by a torch beam, seeming to originate from a spot somewhere
beyond where Cally had appeared to fade, then disappear.

Garrick-in-the-dream blinked. As his pupils accommodated, he could make out a
figure advancing towards him – that of a tall pale woman with flaming red hair hanging
down in curls on either side of the peak of a police cap with a black-and-white chequered
band. She was wearing high motorcycle boots with gaiters, tight black leather hot pants
bunched and ruched around the mound of her crotch. She held the torch in her left hand,
shining it insistently into his eyes. Her face was whited as though with the shit of a
nightingale – a geisha effect in white zinc. Her lips were painted blood red, like those of
the late Marcel Marceau. She held her right hand over her heart. When she raised it to
command him to stop, a fountain rushed out from a gaping chest wound. Her black cycle
gloves dripped fresh blood. The red stream bubbling from her thoracic lesion made the
larger contribution to the gore, but it was joined by rivulets that ran from puncture
wounds in the cubital veins inside the elbows of both arms. ‘Turn, Garrick Willis,’ she
commanded in a deep brown voice, more like that to be expected from Louis Armstrong
or Paul Robeson. ‘You are too quick to forget. A friend in trouble is spurned too soon.
You readily embrace the new, but with the gift, remember, something old with something new, and something tinged with a touch of blue. Death, too soon, will follow. Go now, or death will come, with you too late.’ She reached down inside her pants, drew out a long black wig and pulled it over her shock of red-as-Ronald-McDonald hair. As her left hand stretched towards him, placing a white rectangular wafer in his right, her face morphed into that of his mother on the mortuary slab. Then she was gone. He looked down into the palm of his hand with a sense of something vital coursing through his body, as though he had just received his first communion. On the middle of the rectangle, a blue plus sign was distinctly emerging.

Garrick woke with a jolt. Rachel turned restlessly in her sleep, pulled the sheets off and bumped him with her left elbow. The sweat was chill on his bare torso.

*

The spring sunshine streaming in across the balcony of the fifth floor apartment at Riverview Gardens played on the sticky dust the Sandman sprinkled on Jade’s eyes in the early hours of Sunday morning, when Hoa Bui carefully placed her in his bed, then lay down beside her to sleep. The crust that fastened her eyelids and her lashes together was almost thicker than the mat of her pubic hair and even stickier than the itching gel below.

It was the urge to take a piss that woke Jade, rather than the morning sun. She blinked as best she could, amidst the glue of mucus and mascara, and noticed Hoa lying prostrate on his back, snoring softly. She took in the burner, spoon and other apparatus on the bedside table and stumbled out to the en suite, where she found the seat of the white ceramic pedestal was up. The smell of androstadienone is, for some, an aphrodisiac pheromone, but for Jade, this morning, it induced a wrenching in her guts. She retched, experiencing a desperate urge to flush. The water cascaded at the push of a button. She lowered the lid, sat down and pissed. Her swollen breasts hung down on her chest as she crouched. Unless it was yet another drug-related sensory distortion, she could swear that they were larger than they were a week ago, although she had eaten very little. They were sore and tender to touch.
Jade stepped into the shower, lathered herself and luxuriated in the soothing effect of warm water beating on her chest, running down across her navel and further down to clean between her legs. She emerged dripping wet, temporarily subject to the illusion of being clean again. She wrapped herself in Hoa’s blue bath sheet, shook her hair like a wet dog, then picked up the bath mat from the floor and made it into a turban. She dried herself and looked around for something to wear. She passed on the little wisp of lace now stained with congealed secretions, and opted instead for Hoa’s black silk bathrobe, embroidered with golden dragons, lying across the foot of the bed.

Hoa stirred, stretched, and opened his eyes. ‘Hello, blondie!’ he said.

‘Would you please take me home?’

‘Sure thing, pussycat. You’ll need me to visit soon. I’ll let you know when I have work for you.’

Rather than have Hoa drive her home to Toohey Street, where she hoped she might restore for herself a haven of separation between the worlds, she gave him the New Farm boarding house address. At Harcourt Lodge, he kissed her tenderly by the shed, and left her at the bottom of the short flight of back room stairs.

Later that morning she wandered down to the seven-day chemist at the Merthyr Road Shopping Village, where she bought a test kit. In the women’s toilets under Vue restaurant, she passed a few drops of urine into the depression on the little white plastic rectangle, then watched the blue cross materialise distinctly out of the shadow cast by the rim, at the centre of the blot. She bought a cask of wine at Vintage cellars, trudged up Brunswick Street, and returned to her room. It was not until Tuesday that she could bring herself to charge her phone again and text Garrick for the first time since Father’s Day.
Garrick tossed and turned, but couldn’t get back to sleep. He had been in the midst of another dream, of which he could recall very little – something about a heart-shaped locket from which his mother’s photograph had been removed. Nothing had replaced it, then an image of two little hearts, beating in synchrony on an early foetal ultrasound. He blinked and looked around him in the street light that made its way through the window. He was a stranger to this apartment, and to everything in its space. Rachel’s long black hair lay in a tangle on the pillow beside him. Even the down in the little curve that made up the small of her back was beautiful, beautiful and very strange. His iPhone rang, sounding the theme from *The Twilight Zone*. The screen showed 4.00 a.m., and Sandy’s number.

‘Sandy?’

‘Garrick, why didn’t you call me? I’ve just been talking to Dad.’

‘I did call, on Saturday – early morning your time. The chap that answered wouldn’t put you on – said you were sleeping. I told him it was urgent, and to tell you to call me.’

‘Well, he didn’t! I’m so sorry. I’ll have to chew him out later.’

‘What’s his problem?’

‘He’s very jealous. Any time a man calls, he accuses me of sleeping around.’

Garrick was inclined to doubt the wisdom of Sandy’s choice of fiancé, but knew this was not the time to say so, or even to put to voice his question as to whether the Emerati were excessively prone to imagining that the infidel brothers of their betrothed were fucking their sisters.

‘Well, she’s dead.’

‘And you’ve had to go and identify the body, all on your own.’
‘Well, not on my own, not strictly. A couple of nice police officers accompanied me to the John Tonge Centre. But one of them has since been shot dead, and the other’s been suspended on full pay, following allegations of excessive use of force in the process of apprehending his partner’s killer.’

‘So how did she die?’

‘Well, they haven’t released the autopsy report yet. And there will be a coronial inquest. But she had track marks all over her. The police are treating the matter as homicide. Her body was found wrapped in an old carpet, placed in a dumpster on a building site in New Farm. But it was probably just a drug overdose. I’m guessing that her dealer fixed her up, then she arrested on him in his shooting gallery. He may have been off his face, and not tried to resuscitate her, or else he tried and failed. Either way, he had a corpse to deal with, and probably panicked.’

‘She lived a wild life.’

‘She never should’ve had kids. We’re lucky we had Dad, and he was lucky Christine came along.’

‘So what will we do?’

‘Well, we have to wait for the coroner to say it’s okay to release the body. That could be months away, given that the police will want to charge someone, at least with interfering with a corpse, if they can find the dealer.’

‘Much chance of that?’

‘Well, I think that Sergeant Moroney, the one that was shot, she must’ve been on to something. But now that she’s gone, the investigation may be dropped – in which case, maybe a few weeks.’ He paused, to clarify his thoughts. ‘Moroney, the police sergeant who was killed, and Dixon, the constable – they’re New Farm CIB. What were they doing, responding to a call in Hardgrave Road?’

‘Does it matter?’

‘Well if they’d been minding their own business, on their side of the river, she would not have been killed.’

‘She might just as well have been gunned down in any nightclub in the Valley.’
‘Yeah, I suppose. But somehow, I think not. She seemed to me that kind of woman who knows how to keep everything under control.’

‘I hope you’re not looking for a dominatrix! You’ve got trouble enough on your hands with Jade. Even Ahmad took a fancy to her.’

‘We aren’t together anymore. Things blew up on Father’s Day, and I haven’t heard from her since. She’d been more and more erratic over a few weeks, well before Grandma’s funeral. And now I think she’s been missing from work too. I’ve been worried about her, but she’s texted forbidding me to check up on her, so I haven’t gone round to her place. I hope she’s all right. Anyway, I’m seeing someone else now …’

‘My poor brother! That’s a quick move.’

‘Well, maybe, but we’ve known each other for a while.’ He looked around him, at the strange surrounds, and at the slender woman by his side, just beginning to stir from sleep.

‘Well, I hope it turns out all right. I just don’t like seeing you hurt. Let me know when they let us have the body, and I’ll come out. Maybe we should have her cremated, and scatter the ashes somewhere, or something.’

‘Yes, it’s hard to know what to do. No one knew her really well, not even Dad. He found out the hard way, just how little he really knew of her. I don’t think she had any real friends, only dealers, and the men who used her. Maybe the Salvos – they were the ones who really cared about her. But she resented them, and was always bucking the rules. Like she could never let the love get in.’

‘Well, I’d better go now, brother. Ahmad’s beginning to wonder why I’m taking so long.’

‘Bye, sis! I’ll call you as soon as I hear.’ He hung up the phone just as Rachel turned to him with a puzzled look on her face.

‘Who was that?’

‘Sandy, my sister, in Dubai.’

‘Why’s she calling at this horrible hour of the morning?’

‘She’s only just heard about what happened to Charmaine.’
‘Didn’t you tell her on Saturday?’

‘I tried, but I couldn’t get through.’

‘Well, I could do with some more sleep. And I could use a cuddle. Are you coming back to bed or not?’

*

When Rachel was asleep again, Garrick gently dislodged himself from her arms and went and sat out at the dining room table. In the pale rose glow that was beginning to make its way in through the window from over the eastern reach of the Brisbane River, he took out his notebook and began to write:

locket

entering the locket
without a photograph
father dreams
the image
of unborn children

their hearts
pitter-patter
in and out
of synchrony

each swallow of the amnion
each kicking limb
alters the rhythm
of the little drums

they ride
the oscillation
of his thrusts
as mother shudders
drawing breath

*
On the long walk home from the Blue Velvet, Nick could still smell gunmetal, and the taste of cum niggled at the back of his throat. He looked up towards the statue on the roof of the Mormon Temple. He could’ve sworn that the angel dipped his trumpet, wiggled its hips and gave a little bow, in mock celebration of his oral defloration. He walked up Main Street, past the Southern Cross Motel, and on to the Night Owl, where on the corner opposite the Pineapple Hotel, there used to be a woman in a tartan miniskirt, with long black hair streaming half way down her back, restless and shivering, waiting for him to come with his backpack, his rubber tubing and his kit, but there was no one, not even a wisp of mist. The breeze blew a grey plastic shopping bag across the street.

A bat took off towards New Farm from one of the ancient figs in the park. Tomorrow he would go to Bunnings to buy a brand new set of secateurs and a durable pair of oversized gardening gloves. The words of Neil Young’s *Lost in Space* ran through his head. She was his, and he was nobody’s bitch.

* 

Garrick drove to his Dornoch Terrace unit after he finished his clinic, collected a fresh change of clothes and headed back to Rachel’s apartment in the BMW. It was difficult to find a park on the streets among the unit towers at Kangaroo Point. He felt uneasy leaving his gleaming machine out in the open, so vulnerable to the hailstorm he expected might be brewing in those thunder clouds that had been mounting all afternoon, swelling up beyond the horizon somewhere out in Moreton Bay. It was blowing in, green and overbearing, an emerald menace in the sky, overshadowing the town. He was yet to repair that long key scratch across the lid of the boot, a reminder of the many reasons to take the train and not to drive and park around Logan Hospital. Although this was not Logan, but inner city Brisbane, Garrick wasn’t confident that, only a few streets from the Story Bridge Hotel, his car would be safe from vandals.

Garrick was lugging his Adidas bag up the ramp to the security door when the signal sounded on his iPhone. The text was from Jade: ‘I’m sorry for what I said. I’m pregnant.’
Please help.’ The sky lit up with a flash that cleaved a tree in nearby Mowbray Park. The thunderclap was almost simultaneous. The heavens opened and began to empty onto him as he collected his sensibilities to buzz for Rachel on the intercom. The father in the sky had spoken, with his hammer, with his axe. Somehow, the words of Roy Orbison were singing ‘Together, forever, in dreams’ in his head. Perhaps this was because he had, that afternoon, in the gaps when patients failed to front, been reading Michael Ondaatje’s *Divisidero*. He realised that Rachel might not be entirely pleased to hear this news of her old friend. He hoped that someone, somewhere, was watching over him, someone who would cradle him and know what to do. Just like the novelist, he was feeling the need for a father who would know what to do, the ‘need for a lullaby, not a storm’.

* 

All day Hoa Bui played with the key in his pocket. As he prepared the patients for their EEGs, as he wired them up, watched over their welfare, cleaned up after them, and printed the electronic traces of their brain waves, he smiled internally, smug with the knowledge that, once again tonight, he would be fucking the boss’s girl and feeding her habit.

    When the clock made half past four, Hoa took the lift to the ground floor, down past Pharmacy and Patient Enquiries, took a left turn at the florists, away from the main entrance. He walked past Australia’s most successful Starbucks franchise, then on to the tunnel that led to the staff car park entrance. He pointed the remote at the Merc, enjoying the way the lights blinked at him. He was out the gate a minute later, drove home to collect the gear, then changed into a pair of baggy cargo pants and his khaki Roxy Music t-shirt with the showgirl reclining in a pink feather boa. Then he was on the road again, taking a quick stop at McDonald’s on Main Street to buy himself a McOz and a Happy Meal for the girl before driving over the bridge and off towards New Farm.

*
In the lobby, there was no sign of the blonde woman with the orange glow. The lift lurched to a stop halfway between the first and the second floors. Garrick’s guts kept on rising, bashing rudely into his diaphragm before they thudded back down into their usual anatomical positions. The light inside the lift flickered for a moment, went out, and then came back on again. A whirring noise entered from the lift shaft above, then there was a clunk, and the lift began to move once more. It came to rest with the doors open onto Rachel’s corridor, and Garrick was glad to get out.

When Rachel greeted Garrick at the door, she was dressed in another pair of those little shorts, this time with a lime green trim on black stretch synthetic fabric, and a lime green sports bra to match. Her stomach was taut, and perfectly flat. Her skin reminded him of the burnished rose gold found in engagement rings of the nineteen thirties, rings that could be scoured from antique stores and pawn shops. He remembered such a beautiful ring on the third finger of the left hand of a patient’s corpse. He could not remember the wedding band. In the moment before the embrace, he wanted to pierce Rachel’s navel and set a sparkling emerald jewel in it. The skin of her back, in the place between her shoulder blades, was silken as he held her tight, then ran his fingers up and down the mane of her long black hair, imbued with the scent of jasmine and lemongrass, as he returned her kiss.

‘Why so grim in the face, Dr Willis?’ she asked, releasing him. ‘You look like you’ve just seen your poor mother’s ghost!’

‘It’s Jade,’ he said. ‘I’ve just heard from her. She’s in trouble.’

‘Well, come in and tell me about it,’ she said, walking over to sit on the couch and patting the cushion next to her.

Garrick sat down, took his phone out of his pocket and showed her the text.

‘Is it yours?’ asked Rachel.

‘I don’t know. She’s made some strange friends lately, and she’s had her secrets. I couldn’t bear the outbursts anymore, and the taunts. I think she’s been pumping it up her arm and I got to be pretty dull by comparison. Have you heard from her at all?’
‘Well, she rang me at work on Thursday, asked me to tell administration that she was off sick and might not be back for weeks. I asked, ‘Why don’t you tell them yourself?’ She called me a stuck-up bitch, screamed at me over the phone and then started crying. Mumbled something about a boarding house on the corner of Brunswick and Harcourt. Then the phone went dead.’

‘Why didn’t you say something before?’

‘To tell you the truth, I’ve gotten sick of her antics myself, and I after all the drama with you and your mother and us getting together like this, so unexpectedly, it was driven out of my head. I guess I just didn’t want to think about her.’

‘I don’t know what to do. We can’t just leave her in this mess.’

‘We?’ She edged away from him a little, waving her hand in front of her delicate nose. ‘By the way, you need to get out of that work shirt and take a shower.’

Garrick chose to ignore the latter comment, but took in the implication that, if Jade was pregnant to him, he had begun to stink for Rachel, maybe worse than Lazarus, rising after three days in the tomb. ‘Well, I thought you were her friend. And it seems that now, more than ever, she needs friends.’

‘Well, we’re not going looking for her now!’

‘I guess not,’ said Garrick. ‘I suppose I’d better get changed so we can go for a run, then get some dinner. Look! It’s already bat o’clock.’

A squadron of leathery mammals crossed the patch of sky above the glimpse of the river that could be seen between the apartment towers, through the glass of Rachel’s tall picture window.
XXI
A NIGHT IN THE TOOLROOM

It was just on five past ten when some gorilla of an ex-Valley Diehards front row forward gave Nick a shove out the side door of the public bar of the Empire Hotel, ripping the black Megadeath muscle shirt off Nick’s back. He fell on the concrete drive and lay there swearing softly, clutching the neck of his brown paper bag into his belly and thanking God for saving the Stollie. His backpack followed him, hitting the pavement hard beside him, just missing his head.

Upstairs, Sydney DJs Sam Scratch and fRew were laying down the tracks, with the doof doof booming across the iron lace that bordered the verandah, spilling into the street. Nick held onto the Stollie with one hand, and onto his head with the other. He struggled up onto his wasted legs, discarded the remains of his shirt, picked up his backpack and staggered round the front to throw up into the Brunswick Street gutter. The wretched taste still burned at the back of his throat as he set off unsteadily across the road. A Black-and-White cab bleeped its horn and swerved to miss him as he stepped out from behind a parked Commodore. The driver yelled, ‘You stupid bastard!’ and disappeared into the night.

The drizzle gave way to light rain when Nick reached the corner of Harcourt Street. He pushed on past the Laundromat, where the redhead in leather hotpants and stiletto boots, lolling under the awning with her hands on her hips, was a police officer breaching the Trade Practices Act – advertising a service she did not intend to deliver. The rain was falling heavily. The damp began to work its way through. Nick was wet to his thighs in his black stretch Levi’s. Water seeped into his boots each time he wandered off the footpath and into the swelling gutter.

Nick turned the corner into Harcourt Street, intending to slip into the yard of the boarding house by vaulting the fence, just behind the old garden shed. He noticed Constable Redhead’s back up team conversing earnestly with a man pushed, hands flat,
head down, across the boot of the patrol car. The man’s once-smart Studio Italia suit was becoming increasingly dishevelled. Nick couldn’t help smiling at the thought that the damp Australian all-wool fabric would be steadily and irretrievably shrinking in the rain. He recognised the suit as belonging to the Legal Aid duty solicitor he’d been allocated last time he’d appeared in the Brisbane Magistrates Court on charges of possession of a smoking implement. The Legal Aid man should’ve known the only good-looking girls soliciting on Brunswick Street were police out to trap a few players. The redhead’s cheeks spilled nicely on both sides of those pants. Nick thought of Jade begging for him to draw her up another hit. She’d be waiting.

The police were enjoying themselves too much to notice Nick slip the bottle into his pack, then lift himself up on both hands to go over the paling fence. As he dropped through the vines to the other side, he took in the morning glory, the blooms ripe with that sweet rotten moonflower scent. He followed the path down past the empty carports, negotiated the bins full of uncollected garbage and avoided stumbling into the weedy beds. The path ended in front of the tool room, at the foot of the stairs that led to the back entrance to the room where Jade was kept.

Nick took the Stollie out of his pack again, unscrewed the lid. He took a deep swig. After replacing the cap, he kept a tight grip on the neck of the bottle with one hand and hung onto the rail with the other. Up the stairs he went. He leant against the rail at the top and banged on the door with the old brass knocker. She didn’t answer.

Nick descended the stairs and wandered around to the pale light of the window, struggling through knee-high weeds. He looked up at the dirty white lace curtains, hanging in the open casement, moving in the breeze. A glow that could have been a lantern torch threw shadows shifting in the blur of his lustful imagination. The shapes behind the curtains tossed and turned. Nick smelt the cocktail mix of male and female – of sweat, cheap wine and stale old cigarettes. When the breeze blew the curtains apart, it was barely possible to distinguish the interlocked forms. They clutched and sighed and groaned and whispered as they moved.
There was nothing to be gained by standing out in the back yard all night, soaking up the rain. Nick walked down the side of the house, through the weeds again, then sat for a while at the bottom of the front stairs. She’d have to be finished with Bui sometime. This was the only way out, now that the internal staircase had collapsed, leaving no safe passage down the corridor to the main entrance.

Nick decided to take refuge in the tool room. The door to the little shed by the fence had been left half open, just across from the stairs. He pushed on it and entered. It swung back to where it had been stuck scraping on the concrete floor, leaving a gap just wide enough to let the light through to cast a shadow on the back wall. Against the wall, at floor level, stood a row of empty bottles. An old Hessian bag lay in the back corner on the darker side, covered in a scatter of loose tobacco papers and discarded cigarette butts. Nick lay down on it, with his head towards the door, took the Stolichnaya bottle by the neck, unscrewed the cap and settled into spending another long uncomfortable night.

Nick’s eyes became accustomed to the dark, enabling him to make out the details of the little workshop. He shivered as the warmth leaked from his bare chest. An old grey woollen blanket was draped over the lawn mower. He reached for it to cover himself, took off his back pack, pulled out the secateurs and gardening gloves and picked up the can of mower fuel. Nick poured four-stroke on to the secateurs, then rubbed the gloves all over them, polishing until they were so clean that any time they caught a glint of light, they shone. He propped himself up on one elbow to get a better view of the tools that lined the wall above the bench. A baton-sized piece of timber was still clamped in the vice and the saw that had bitten into it lay out on the workbench with the dust and the shavings. The other tools hung neatly on the wall in custom-made brackets, an impressive array of instruments from which to choose.

Nick took a gulp from the bottle every now and then as he studied the tools. His gaze shifted excitedly from one to another, enjoying their destructive potential. He favoured a small hatchet hanging at about head height, just to the dark side of the shadow line cast by the door. As the night passed, he found himself continually returning to it. He became increasingly aroused, centring his fantasies around a visual image of the
hatchet. He lost awareness of the room surrounding him as he stiffened, focused on the axe. The image blurred and jumped about, blurred and sharpened and blurred again. It seemed that it increased in size, feeding on the substance of his longing. The light reflected from the cutting edge glinted and flickered wildly as the axe continued to grow. It left its place on the wall and, when intensity was maximal, exploded within him in a kaleidoscopic frenzy of colours and emotion. Nick came and lay empty in the empty room.

*

Just before dawn the room was at its coldest. The bleakness gave way slowly to invading warmth and light. The damp remained. Nick lay still on the hessian mat, covered by the grey blanket, his bottle half empty beside him. He was roused as the door above opened and the sound of pre-dawn goodbye shoes came falling on the steps. He raised himself on his elbow again and turned his head to catch a brief glimpse of Bui as he passed. His figure was short and stolid, with greasy black hair and dark eyes, the whites sticking out like almonds on a glazed Christmas cake. He was wearing Nick’s old leather jacket over a khaki t-shirt, printed with a girl reclining in pink feather boa, just visible in the half-light. He looked ridiculous in cargo shorts.

As Bui walked slowly down the dim path, Nick struggled up onto his numb legs. The blood began to flow painfully as he shook the arm that he’d been lying on. Quietly, he reached up and removed the hatchet from its bracket, taking a tight grip on the handle. He blinked his way out of the tool room and ran with the hatchet raised above his head, catching Bui at the point where the path veered towards the front gate. Down came the axe on Bui’s unprotected crown, cleaving the skull open. Hoa Bui fell on his face, his brains spilling out on the paving bricks.

Nick ran back to the gloom of the shed, placed the bloody hatchet next to his pack and returned to retrieve the body. He picked up Bui by the legs, gripping him around both ankles, just above his blue Converse shoes. Nick lifted one leg over each of his shoulders
and towed the injured man, still breathing, bubbling and gurgling, twitching a little every
now and then, back to the garden shed and inside the door. The transport technique could
be likened to a man pulling a plough, with Bui face down, so that the teeth of his lower
jaw acted as the blade, breaking on pavers as Nick, like a Clydesdale, towed him, step by
step, back to the shed.

Nick dropped Hoa Bui beside the pile of sacks that had recently served as a bed,
then sunk the pointy toe of his long right shoe deep into Bui’s rib cage, enjoying the feel
of the yield, and the satisfying crack. Bui groaned and rolled over, conveniently giving
Nick access to the front of the cargo shorts. Without removing the garden gloves, Nick
reached down to retrieve the Smith and Wesson .45 that was tucked under the belt, down
the front of Bui’s pants. Nick tossed the gun into his backpack, then reached for the well-
oiled secateurs. Bui continued gurgling as Nick slipped the secateurs under the front of
the cargo shorts, near the zip, cut through the belt and went on down through the fabric.
Nick chuckled at the discovery that Bui was wearing lacy French knickers. He snipped
through the gossamer, scooped a handful of Bui’s shrivelled dick and balls, and gave
them a good hard squeeze through the glove before he began to cut. Bui gurgled, kicked
and squealed as the tissue gave way and the blood began to spurt. When Nick had cut
them clear, he took his prize and shoved the whole bundle down Bui’s throat. Bui’s arms
waved wildly and his legs kicked for a while. He went blue. Then Bui’s arse relaxed,
releasing a mighty stench, just before he came to be entirely still.

Nick picked up the hatchet in one hand and the bottle in the other. He stepped out
into the pink dawn light and started up the steps. Jade would be waiting.
XXII
IT’S HAPPENING AGAIN

In the dream, Garrick found himself slowly walking up Brunswick Street towards New Farm. When he came to the Laundromat on the corner of Harcourt Street, a tall pale woman, with flaming red hair, stiletto boots and black leather hot pants, beckoned him from the doorway. In her left hand, she held a police cap with a black-and-white chequered band. He noticed that she was wearing green gardening gloves, in places soaked with blood, not yet congealed, not yet maroon. In her right hand, she held a length of rope, the end knotted into a neat, tight noose. She offered it to him, saying: ‘Your nurse has been with your patient. She is late for work at the hospital. Your faithful assistant will also be absent. It’s all been happening. It’s happening again. You will find her in the Harcourt house. She has worked late too often. The baby is coming. It’s too late for the hospital. Do not call for assistance. When you find her, it will be too late. Take it, Dr Willis, a rope for your neck!’ She moved towards him, gyrating her hips, swinging the noose like a lasso, puckering her lips.

Garrick screamed, and as he screamed, he woke, already jumping out of bed. Rachel tossed and stirred beside him. He pulled on a t-shirt and a pair of old shorts, slipped into his sandals. As he bent to kiss Rachel, immense tenderness and panic welled up all at once inside his chest, threatening to cut off his breath. Then he ran out of the apartment, caught the lift to the basement car park and drove his black BMW recklessly toward Toohey Street. His tyres squealed as he came to an abrupt stop opposite Jade’s cottage. He flung the door open, raced over the road and up the steps. The verandah was dark, even as the edge of the sun began to creep over the rail at its east end. There was no sound of movement inside, and no response to his furious knocking.

The speech of the redhead in the dream came back inside Garrick’s head, somehow taking on the voice of Sergeant Moroney. He remembered ‘the Harcourt house’, then twirled to what Rachel had said Jade mentioned in her last confused call – the old
boarding house, on the corner of Harcourt and Brunswick, opposite the Laundromat. He turned and ran down the stairs, over the road, and jumped back into the BMW. As he rounded the corner, into Main and sped past the Night Owl he thought he saw a pale woman in knee books and a red tartan miniskirt, long black hair all the way down her back, jittering from leg to leg as she stood on the corner. He looked again, and no one was there.

Garrick sped over the Story Bridge and into the Valley, squealing the tyres again on the right turn into Brunswick Street. At the Laundromat on the Harcourt Street corner, Garrick swung sharp left, and pulled up just beyond the spot where a tall redhead in black leather hot pants leaned into the window of an Audi TT, stiletto boots cocking her arse into the street. The uniformed police were too preoccupied with roughing up the latest customer to notice Garrick’s heart jumping up and down inside his chest as he exited the BMW.

Garrick ran around to the front of the house, pushed through the gate and kicked open the front door, which was swinging slightly ajar. He ran down the corridor, lit only by the dawn sneaking through the tiny window at the end. His passage was blocked by fallen timber, crawling with white ants, the debris strewn about when the staircase collapsed. He scrambled over it, like an infantry recruit on a hazardous assault course. He fell on his face. A stench kicked up at him from the grey carpet, like that of mould mixed with stale vodka and industrial cleaning products. In his nostrils, it was the smell of nameless dread. It awakened images of his grandfather’s open grave dug nine feet deep, through the sandy loam and into the rich clay of the Lismore Cemetery. He remembered it again when they’d opened the ground to make room for Grandma who’d come to join him later. Six feet down, a green line marked the seepage into the soil of body fluids from the neighbouring coffins.

Liquid doom rushed through his veins as he pulled himself to his feet and went on until he came to the flaking timber door of room 6. Internally, the voice of Tammy Moroney said, ‘This is the one!’ From somewhere, as though at a great distance, he could hear his own animal scream as he ran the door with his shoulder, rebounded, then picked
himself up and threw himself at the slab again and again, until the hinges began to give. With another thrust, the screws wrenched free of their moorings, giving a scream of their own as they ripped their way free of the wood. He fell inwards with the door, bouncing off it as it landed, thudding like a terrible drum. The smell that punched his nostrils was the corruption of Jade’s scent, of acetone, sweet almonds, urine, faeces and the salty tang of blood.

On the far side of the bed, Nick Myshkin, shirtless and unshaven, lay snoring, face into the pillow, his right arm hanging down beside the bed, the hand still encased in a bloodied garden glove, wrapped around the neck of a litre bottle of Stolichnaya, more than half consumed.

The axe lay on the floor beside Nick, skewed to the right of the bed at a forty degree angle, the blade facing outwards, sullied by the soft white matter and other tissues, congealed and clotted. It brought to mind a specimen that Garrick had seen in a jar at the pathology museum – a tumour of the womb in which the structure of the tissues had become so chaotic that the core of it had come to hold a great fluid cyst lined with skin, out of which grew long strands of hair sparsely scattered between outcrops of great jagged teeth.

What was left of Jade lay wrapped in a torn batik-patterned kimono in the middle of the bed, her face cloven through the right cheek, her teeth in similar disarray to those of the tumour in the pathology pot. The gash extended through to the socket of her right eye, which protruded – terrible, vitreous, ruptured and dead. The robe hung open at the front, showing the wounds. The spikes of broken ribs protruded through her left breast, from which the blackened blood continued to extravasate and pool in the recess of her umbilicus. Further down, it made a mat of sticky silk in the little vee she’d trimmed above her bruised and swollen lips. On the bedside table, under the old lamp, lay a methylated spirit burner, a tarnished spoon bent to a ninety degree angle, a red tartan miniskirt, and a silky wig of long black hair.
As Garrick screamed, the delicate membranes that separated the compartments of his mind ruptured, and the fractional essences of his being ran together all at once. He staggered to the bed, lay down beside the corpse, and wrapped himself around her.
XXIII
THE NEUROLOGIST’S CRIMES

It must’ve been around 8.00 a.m. when Nick yawned, stretched and recoiled at the touch of something cold and hard. His head ached, assaulted by the light streaming in through the tattered curtains, irritated by an ululation in the background. Nick was about to reach again for the axe when he reminded himself that Jade was dead, and noticed that someone else had joined them as they slept. *That doctor, the fool who’d put the little bitch on a porcelain pedestal, like she was special, Princess Shit.* Nick remembered him from the hospital, acting so concerned. *Kind eyes, wide, like an animal on the road blinded by the headlights. The idiot probably thought he would marry the slut, and somehow, everything would be all right. Well, look at him. He’s really lost it now.*

In the deep structures of the reptilian vestige that occupied Nick’s cranium in place of a brain, electrical discharge occurred. Seconds later, he was able to reframe the neurologist’s visit as less of a nuisance and more of a convenience.

The worn cartilage of Nick’s left knee clicked as he rose and reached for his bottle. After a long swig, he looked around and noticed he had made a mess. Things didn’t smell the best in here. The doctor sobbed and gibbered where he lay, drooling, rocking and mouthing at the corpse’s tattooed shoulder. It was time for Nick to leave.

*  

Out on Brunswick Street, walking back towards the Valley, Nick ran into the truck driver from the Southern Cross Motel. The fat, greasy bastard turned his head and quipped, just after Nick had passed, ‘Bit early for a drink, isn’t it, mate?’ Nick clenched the bottle tight and bared his teeth, instinctively inclined to respond to the provocation. Then he noticed his hands, and registered that he was still wearing gardening gloves, saturated with dried blood. He remembered that his back pack contained a loaded .45 calibre automatic pistol
and a substantial stock of illicit substances. In such circumstances, it was better to pretend he hadn’t heard the call to battle. Up ahead, a police car was still parked up on the footpath.

Nick ducked into the side street behind the Philip Bacon galleries, where he found an industrial waste bin. He downed the last of the Stollie before consigning the bottle to the garbage, pulled off the gloves and threw them in after it. The lid clanged as it dropped.

As Nick passed the police car, the uniformed officers were manhandling a short unshaven man in a dirty polo shirt down the steps of the worker’s cottage as he shouted obscenities over his shoulder at a woman who screamed back at him from behind the half-closed lattice doors to the porch. The police were too busy to pay any attention as Nick promenaded his bare torso on down Brunswick Street, walking back towards the Laundromat.

There was no sign of the redhead, although something of the sweet corruption that might’ve been her scent still lingered. Nick peered in the window at someone’s clothes rotating in a lonely tumble dryer, and a tired-eyed boy in a hoodie inhaling the contents of a blue plastic bag, with an uncapped aerosol deodorant can on the bench beside him. A wave of sadness passed over Nick. That boy could have been him at fourteen. He waited for a white Commodore to pass, then escaped the past by crossing the road and heading back towards town.

Just before Martin Street, Nick turned left and walked up the little hill to the cliffs over the river, taking in the city view between the spans of six-lane suspension bridge. As he crossed on the left-hand side, he found himself pushing to the right side of the pedestrian pathway, remembering his mother’s nagging that he shouldn’t ever go near the edge. Well, he had sailed there and gone over. The old feeling rose from somewhere round his navel, travelled up his thorax to his neck, down his arms and up to the top of his head. A yellow light burst behind his right eye, and his visual fields suddenly narrowed. A freight train was pumping along in his head as the premonitory migraine burst around his eye sockets. A strange compulsion to leap came over him, familiar now and therefore
easy to resist. He clung to the rail and staggered on. It had been two weeks since he had last taken Epilim.

   Somehow Nick made it to the end of the bridge, down the road on the other side, through Dockside, up another road and round the bend to the unit complex in Thorn Street. He turned left out of the lift on the fourth floor, dipped in his jeans pocket for the key, entered his studio apartment with his head in a cloud of horror, staggered to the bed and was felled by the flash that came before the lights went out.

*

A few blocks away in O'Connell Street, Rachel woke to the empty space in the bed beside her. He had gone after Jade, and left her behind.

   Tears ran down her face, blending with the droplets of hot water spraying from the shower rose. She dried herself and opened the cupboard to pull out her uniform to dress for the day shift. She gazed wistfully at the shoe box and the unopened shopping bag, the outfit she had bought to surprise him, hoping he would take her clubbing on Saturday night. Black stiletto knee boots, a tight white sports bra and a red tartan miniskirt.

*

It was dark when Nick woke in his unit at Kangaroo Point. His spirit was clean and light, scrubbed back to a state of infantile innocence by the redeeming fit. He was a *tabula rasa*, wiped free of all accumulated karma, free to begin his whole life again, as though from the start. The clock radio beside his bed showed 9.45 p.m. He had slept for more than twelve hours.

   Nick rose and showered, put on clean jeans and a crisp white shirt. He made himself a sandwich and ate it slowly, washing it down with a glass of milk before walking to Main Street to work. As he approached the Pineapple Hotel, the golden angel Moroni, reflecting a glint of moonlight from the right eye, threw him a sly wink from the top of the
dull white edifice of the Mormon Temple blocking the northern skyline. Nick saluted as he crossed the road and turned right at the Gabba, then walked on down Vulture Street, ready to take over the night shift from the doorman at the Blue Velvet.

‘No sign of Hoa, not for a few days now,’ remarked Ned.
‘Maybe he’ll be in tonight.’
‘My guess is he’s been laying low after all that business down in Hardgrave Road.’
‘Shame about Dave ending up in the clink. I’ll bet Hoa’s hoping our mate’ll keep quiet.’

‘Well, good luck to you if he comes in. I can’t say I’ve found it any great loss.’ Ned signed his time sheet, and left by the back door to collect his ute.

It was a quiet night, with the usual punters there to drown their impotence in alcohol, wolf-whistling, cat-calling and ogling the girls, drifting away into the land of ‘would if I could’. A buck’s party rolled in just before midnight. They had all been out to dinner at the Enjoy Inn, a Chinese restaurant in the Valley. They had pub-crawled their way from City Rowers to the Rugby Club on Eagle Street Pier, hooted and snorted their way through the Botanical Gardens, taken the City Cat across the river to South Bank and wandered down to the Blue Velvet, hungry for a ritual flash of prenuptial pussy. Nick negotiated with the best man, a young doctor who was prepared to pay a hundred bucks to see his colleague joyfully humiliated, hauled up on stage to be handled by Tanya.

When Sally stripped down to her cowboy hat, boots and spurs, cracking her whip at the sound system blaring out *Rawhide*, Nick Myshkin found himself feeling entirely at home. This was the good life. *La dolce fucking vita. Rawhide* segued to Marianne Faithfull’s version of *Wait for Me Down by the River*:

> *I fell in love with a gamblin’ man.*
> *He only wanted to play ...*

And there were Sally and Tanya, Ally and Jenny, Mandy and Micky, but no Jade tonight.

Dawn came, and the last of the drunks washed out on to Vulture Street. Nick swept the floor, pulled down the roller door and took off down the road, brushing South Bank
just short of the Ship Inn. He walked on towards West End. Once on Boundary Street, he ducked into a news agency and bought the morning’s *Courier Mail*. At Café Tempo, on the dark side of the boundary, he ordered breakfast, then sat down at a table. Several of the stars of the Brisbane Writer’s Festival were there, among them an award-winning poet. A tall redheaded girl, who danced, and sometimes purchased, winked at him past the lug of a uniformed officer sitting opposite her at the table over the way. He blew her a kiss, knowing that while young women scribbled and waited, pouted and flirted, lap-danced and solicited their way through postgraduate creative writing degrees, the trade in party drugs would always be secure. He smiled and spread out his paper to read the news of the neurologist’s terrible crimes.
Exegesis

The place of dreams in the novel and the cinematic work of David Lynch
CHAPTER 1:
INTRODUCTION TO THE PLACE OF DREAMS IN THE NOVEL AND THE CINEMATIC WORK OF DAVID LYNCH

The research question

How does an exegesis on the place of dreams in the cinema of David Lynch come to be partnered with the manuscript of a novel, *In Dreams*, to be submitted as a research dissertation for a doctorate of philosophy in Creative Writing? This question, one that is expected to spring to mind immediately contingent upon the observation of such a pairing, leads by corollary to the research question of this dissertation: How is the process of writing the novel, *In Dreams*, a psychological thriller retelling Dostoyevsky’s *The Idiot* (1868-1869) in the setting of contemporary Brisbane, influenced by viewings of the cinematic work of David Lynch?

When I searched for literature on the artifice and the art of the formation of the research question in the creative writing exegesis, I discovered Nike Bourke and Philip Neilsen’s paper on ‘The problem of the exegesis in creative writing higher degrees’ (2004), which addresses many of the questions regarding the problematic nature of the exegesis in the field, but not that of the artifice of the research question. I wondered why not, when so many other problems are bravely and frankly addressed in this paper, not least ‘Why there should be an exegesis?’, and ‘What is the exegesis for?’ Then I found Nessa O’Mahony’s (2009) essay ‘That was the answer: Now what was the question? The PhD in creative and critical writing: a case study’. O’Mahony shows, by the title of her paper, that she is taking seriously the question of the question and its incongruity with the task, and she shows in the paper how the research question comes to evolve in the context of the practice, so that it is neither artificially created to fit the finished product of the creative manuscript, nor is it something that exists in clearly defined form at the outset of writing, as it might if the exegesis were chosen as a virtually separate piece of critical writing on the work of an author or artist emulated by the writer of the creative
dissertation. Rather it evolves, through the generation of a series of questions arising in the process of the writing, often coming out of questions based in the life experience of the author. Thus the research question of the Creative Writing exegesis may be understood to potentially develop in and give rise to the context of the exegesis as a practice-led work of autobiographical writing.

As this essay progresses, I will show how my reading and viewing, in the context of a complex and non-sequential array of life events, led to the process of writing this dissertation, the novel and its exegesis. Questions that arose in this life process included those of the nature and meaning of violent and disintegrative processes in human beings, both self-directed and relational, and that of the possibility or otherwise of an overtly decent person coming to be corrupted in the process of passionate investment. These questions, addressed in the novel and the exegesis, are based around the works that, for me, have best encapsulated them: firstly, Dostoyevsky’s *The Idiot* in its entirety; secondly, David Lynch and Mark Frost’s depiction of such a process of corruption as it occurs in the life of Special Agent Dale Cooper in his investigative role in the television series *Twin Peaks* (1992) together with the numerous parallel processes in the lives of others, including the lawyer Leland Palmer and his murdered daughter Laura, the desirously invested object of the mystery; thirdly in Lynch’s creation of characters such as the monstrous antagonist of *Blue Velvet* (1986), Frank Booth, who answers my questions by being one who would never ask them, and Jeffrey Beaumont, who asks my questions for me—‘Why are there people like Frank? Why is there so much trouble in this world?’ (Lynch 1986).

In pursuit of answers to such impossible questions, I have turned to writing, to dreaming, and to cinematic viewing. In the process, I have experienced what Gregorio Kohon (1999: 107) has termed ‘the horrors of writing’, where the writing becomes, rather than a therapeutic source of solace, the locus from which the writer comes to experience what Nigel Krauth (2006: 195) has described as ‘the domains tilting’ as the writing comes back at the author to be traumatically manifest in the life. Stephen King (2000: 207) describes this also in the epilogue to his memoir *On Writing*, written after his own real life encounter with misery that he had written, following his near fatal pedestrian encounter.
with the rogue driver of an out-of-control vehicle on a lonely road in rural Maine: ‘… I have nearly been killed by a character right out of my novels. It’s almost funny …’

Functions of the Antagonist, the Omniscient Narrator and the Perfectly Good Man

Larry Morgan, the narratorial protagonist of Wallace Stegner’s *Crossing to Safety* (1987), was not readily impressed by the argument that Dante’s use of Ugolino gnawing on Ruggieri’s skull (Alighieri 2003: 253-263) was an attention-seeking device that ought to be ignored by those privileged to be led on a stroll through Hades by an erudite Arcadian guide. Larry’s friend Charity Lang urged him not to follow the lead of modern writers readily impressed by Ugolino’s antics, and instead to ‘write something about a really decent, kind, good human being living a normal life in a normal community, interested in the things most ordinary people are interested in—family, children, education—good uplifting entertainment’ (Stegner 2012: 256).

I am impressed by Stegner’s temerity in publishing a novel, as late as 1987, that sustains a single narratorial viewpoint, and also by his gently ironic efforts to allow himself to be led by Charity. No developed character in this novel could be construed as other than good, however peevishly domineering a personification of the puritan matriarch his Charity might be. Sid Lang, by contrast, is presented as a highly intelligent docile fool, a potentially able poet, but one whose service to love drives him to settle for a life as an idiot scholar. Yet Stegner manages to ennoble Sid, through this foolish devotion and discipleship to Charity, although stunted as he is written to be, by the locus of investment of his faith, hope and love.

Patrick Gale has endeavoured to write the life of *A Perfectly Good Man* (2012). His Barnaby Johnson, in the course of failing to live up to the title, becomes more readily loveable. Gale’s use of a multiplicity of viewpoints to achieve this end is more in keeping with our times than is Stegner’s late modernist work. These viewpoints, including that of a despicable character, Modest Carlsson, facilitate the growth of the reader’s love for Barnaby, and mine for Gale, as hatred for Carlsson is progressively incited. By presenting Modest as such a bad man, Gale engages and develops our sympathy for the good in
Barnaby, and for that in our own hearts and lives. Barnaby Johnson, in contrast to Sid Lang, is not a docile follower, but a man prepared to risk the stain of imperfection in the cause of the complex truth of his divided self, which he invests in those whom he allows to be more than his parishioners, to bring them his love. Barnaby is idiot enough to risk his sanctity in the process of proving himself human, even if he is not a perfectly good man.

Only four years after Stegner published *Crossing to Safety*, Bret Easton Ellis in *American Psycho* (1991) offered his satire of a young New York stockbroker who is a very bad man. In doing so, he collared the American society of that time, demanding that it question its loss of humanising values, and asking that, if greed is judged to be good, then why should the novel’s representation of relentless consumption, including graphic sexual violence, be shunned? By following Stegner in sustaining his representation of Patrick Bateman from the viewpoint of a first person narrator, Ellis managed to make this monstrous character discomfortingly close to the reader, whose view of the world of Bateman comes from inside Bateman’s skin. At the same time, through Bateman’s hyperbolic reviews of rock concerts and critiques of the couture of his Wall Street colleagues, Ellis made the novel immensely funny. *American Psycho* is the kind of novel that Charity Lang railed against, the kind of novel that Stegner’s Larry Morgan might have been provoked to write after enduring a saturated dose of Charity. Even Stegner feels obliged to kill her off at the end of *Crossing to Safety* (2012).

In my own novel, *In Dreams*, in creating Garrick’s and Jade’s antagonist, Nick Myshkin, I have made a man somewhat like Patrick Bateman, although Nick Myshkin belongs to an underclass, whereas Bateman’s stockbroking is a more socially accepted form of relentless trade than that practiced by my Myshkin. Also, my omniscient narrator sits outside, and not inside, Nick Myshkin’s skin.

My narrator is a voyeur, one who reports on what is to be seen, as though viewing it all on a film screen, or watching like the eye—the part of the self that watches through a movie camera, or the witnessing-self that watches and monitors as the dreaming-self dreams a dream. It is this voyeuristic narrator who has generated out of my own intensive viewing of the film and television work of David Lynch, and especially of that work of
his that might be situated architecturally within a cinematic place of dreams. The evolution of this narratorially mediated cinematic quality of my novel, *In Dreams*, in relation to the cinematic work of David Lynch, will be discussed later in the exegesis in the context of consideration of the uses and misuses of post-Lacanian theory (McGowan 2004; McGowan 2007a; McGowan 2007b; Kuersten 2008) as a filter through which to view film, together with the potentials opened and problems generated when working from film to narrative, and translating narrative to film. But first there is more narratology that must be discussed as back story.

The narratorial regard moves between considerate disinvestment (like that of a gilded angel watching events from the roof of a stone temple) and intense libidinous investment, with a propensity for violence that is manifest in the textual clips and portraits that are shown as images in moving sequences. This peeping eye invests its surveillance in the bodies, male and female, of my characters, whether they are whole or shattered, broken with blunt instruments and dragged across rough paving bricks; whether or not they are competently packing Glocks, wearing clinical coats, clad in burlesque police uniforms, or exposed in yellow-polka dotted g-strings. The purpose of such a narrator, who draws such pictures in words and regards them so intensely, is as hyperbolic as William Blake’s (in ‘The Marriage of Heaven and Hell’) in his depiction of Ezekiel, who postures and eats dung to ‘other men into a perception of the infinite’ (Blake 1994: 190), and that of Ellis, who shows something else when Patrick Bateman gets to work with his chainsaw (1991).

I find a similar regard emanating from the viewpoints of the female first person narrators of both Elmore Leonard (2010) and Janet Evanovich (2001). It is also manifest by the omniscient narrator of Tara Moss’s *Hit* (2006), speaking from the multiplicity of viewpoints created by an author who makes it plain that she is accustomed to being looked at.

I am grateful to those among the readers of the first draft of my manuscript who persuaded me not to call my protagonist Andrew and not to write in the first person, after the fashion of Michel Houellebecq’s narratorial Michel (1998; 2001; 2002; 2004). Their influence also persuaded me to bring my protagonist to a similar, though somewhat
crueller, end to that of Dostoyevsky’s idiot, rather than to lead him, like the Houellebecq of *The Map and the Territory* (2012), to bear witness to his own murder, thus necessitating Houellebecq’s resort to the omniscient third person narratorial voice in this work as he had previously done, for the first time, in *The Possibility of an Island* (2005). In that work, Houellebecq’s narratorial viewpoint moves not only between several characters, but across several generations of their genetic clones.

Houellebecq, in *Platform* (2001), brings his Michel to give an account of the process of mourning in the wake of Michel’s father’s murder. Then, in *The Map and the Territory* (2012), the author’s third person narrator tells us of the murder of Michel Houellebecq, the death of a minor character, but not a death of the author (Barthes 1967). I lead Garrick Willis to walk in dreams with death, as one who has walked in the valley of its shadow, but I do not lead him to his death as final act of obedience to a destructive master, as does John Andrew Scott to his idiot Andrew, the protagonist of *The Architect* (2004).

My narrator remains omniscient, and therefore able to switch between a multiplicity of viewpoints. Although he manages to keep a little distance from the author, Andrew, he sometimes loses the struggle not to identify too strongly with my protagonist, Dr Garrick Willis, who is, like Sid Lang, an underdeveloped poet and a mostly benign, mostly gentle, idiot.

This narrator of mine, like Moss’s (2006), also directs intense regard to scenes of graphic violence. There is nothing especially male about the way in which these narrators (Moss’s and mine) direct the reader to look at violence, as though convicted of its necessity, and the necessity to bear witness, and even give way to it. I have written of such conviction in my *Crossroads* paper on *Blue Velvet* (Leggett 2009). This ideology of narrative is formulated around Slavoj Žižek’s (2008) notion of the necessary disruptive function of real violence and its representations in the contexts of Alessia Riccardi’s (2003) spectropoetic interpretation of Pier Paolo Passolini’s stance on mourning, and of psychoanalytic theory concerning intergenerational and cultural upheaval in the waning of the Oedipus complex. My narrator works like David Lynch’s (1986) placement of Dorothy Vallens’ naked accusation of Jeffrey Beaumont on his front lawn in the presence
of his family; like Jeffrey’s violent response to Dorothy’s more private invitation; like the
lesson, inflicted by Frank Booth’s injection of himself into Jeffrey’s body and soul, not to
‘be a good neighbour’ (Lynch 1986), to ‘be together forever in dreams’ (Blue Velvet
2000; Orbison 2008). My narrator’s regard serves to plunge the reader into a place of
terrible nostalgia; to long to return to a place that has never been visited; to desire the
restoration of that unsullied thing which is now violated, but has never been had.

Ellis’s (1991) Patrick Bateman does not so much direct a gaze towards scenes of
violence. Rather he tells it and shows it as he does it. But I am not convinced that Ellis’s
intention is not similarly mournful, although his Patrick Bateman is not at all like my
Garrick Willis, who loses his mind gazing, after the fashion of Walter Benjamin’s (1968:
257-258) reflection on Paul Klee’s Angel of History, on all the horror that he strove to
prevent, but could not, and all the damage that cannot be undone. This angel makes its
way into my novel also, in the form of the Angel Moroni as he stands on the roof of the
temple, raises his trumpet and looks to the east, but does nothing to save the people of
East Brisbane. Perhaps, like Garrick Willis, the Angel has seen too much, and the
traumatic impact of all that he has looked upon and watched over has been sufficient to
render him dull, metallic, speechless, impotent and ultimately useless.

It interests me that Ellis (1991) turns in his first epigraph to Dostoyevsky, and it is
the voice of the narrator of Notes from Underground that we first read in American
Psycho, and that voice brings us an allusion to an argument for the necessity of a certain
kind of person who ‘not only may, but must exist in our society, if we take into account
the circumstances which led to the formation of our society’ (Dostoyevsky 2004: 263).
Dostoyevsky has that person ‘explain the causes which have not only led, but also were
bound to lead, to his appearance in our midst’ (2004: 263). As I will demonstrate, my
novel derives from a struggle to find such reasons, some of which will be articulated in
the overview of the place of dreams in David Lynch’s cinema, in the exposition of the
application of what is to be found there to the place of dreams in this novel, and in the
imaginary conversations with David Lynch, in their regard to this meeting. These
attempts at reason in such a place generate an infinite chain of further questions to follow
and to chase, long after Garrick Willis has, by such a process, been rendered a gibbering idiot, just like Dostoyevsky’s Myshkin.

There are other ways to use a narrator to create explanations for such horror, and to address such questions with regard to inhumanity to Woman and to Man. I argue this necessitates a narratorial voice that shifts between investment and disinvestment, with corresponding shifts in regard. These shifts can, however, be achieved by other strategies than that of my unstably invested third person narrator, such as that employed by Hannah Kent in *Burial Rites* (2013).

Kent chooses to shift between the invested first person narratorial viewpoint of Agnes Magnusdottir, a woman condemned to death for her involvement in terrible crimes, and a less invested, mournful, omniscient third person narrator. Agnes is slow to reveal her story, some of which is told in flashbacks to premonitory dreams, both her own and those of her murdered lover, Natan Ketilsson. This revelation, to a family of strangers who move from fear and loathing of her, at last, to compassion and to love, is also told too late, to a gentle naïve priest whom she has called to be her chaplain. The chaplain, Assistant Reverend Thorvadur Jónsson, comes to her too late, as she has to Natan, when death is all that can be offered. There are many ways, besides those of difference in the use, to similar ends, of narratorial regard and voice, in which Kent’s story could be the sister to my own, but the story of their sibship and their belated meeting, late in the afternoon of this project of creation, if it is to be told, must wait for others to do the telling, in another time, another place.

*The Idiot*

It was out of my first reading of the Penguin edition of Dostoyevsky’s *The Idiot* (1982), more than 30 years ago, that the idea of the novel *In Dreams* evolved. My initial identification was with Dostoyevsky’s idiot, the saintly fool Prince Leo Nikolayevich Myshkin. It was only much later that I came to also recognise my identification with Parfyon Rogozhin.
When these two unlikely friends meet on the train to St Petersburg, they are not only destined to become blood brothers, but they will share in the broken body of Nastasya Filippovna, and in that partaking they will become what they have always been, one and the same. As a man in my early twenties, I felt passions as much as did Parfyon Rogozhin, but I struggled to transcend them, unlike Rogozhin who became entirely dissolute in their expression as he gave way to them. In the common experience of struggling to transcend that which is ordinarily human, that young man came, through experience, to recognise that, as Gwen Harwood puts it in ‘Boundary Conditions’ (2001: 41):

… in the heart more violence lies
than in the bomb …

When starkly confronted with embodiment and carnal reality, the young man that I described in my poem ‘Wallaby Dreaming’ (Leggett 1998c: 48), attributed in the novel to Garrick Willis, was like Rogozhin, in that he was capable of ‘killing his dreaming’ (48).

Then as a medical student on elective placement in a psychiatric hospital in New Zealand, I met an epileptic man who had killed a woman in passion, following a similar path and the same method as Rogozhin’s. He had slept with the body for ten days after the murder, decorating and preserving it with honey, peanut butter and jam. Ten years later, he still had no recollection of these events. He was Rogozhin, but it seemed that his killing of the object of his passionate love had rendered him mindless, like Myshkin.

I began to wonder what had gone on in that man’s mind in the hours before he took to his lover with the axe, and out of my daydreaming and nightmaring around that question, my second published story ‘A Night in the Toolroom’ (Leggett 1986) came to be written. I have adapted that old story to form part of the chapter of In Dreams that bears its name. In it, I play with the depiction of the sensory distortions characteristic of epileptic auras, complex partial seizures and postictal phenomena. With these I was very familiar, from early childhood, as my father had suffered the illness. It was my curiosity regarding these phenomena that led to me to diagnose his epilepsy and refer him to a neurologist for treatment while I was still in medical school.
Dostoyevsky wrote Prince Myshkin’s seizures and sensory disturbances from his own subjective experience as one afflicted by the condition. I wrote as a witness. In spite of my late father being a highly intelligent, gentle fool, much more like Dostoyevsky’s Prince Myshkin than his Parfyon Rogozhin, perhaps it was my experience as witness and diagnostician that leads me to write my neurologist protagonist as the idiot and his antagonist Nick Myshkin as the dissolute epileptic. My novel’s protagonist is the one who watches, and knows, and does not know just how much he does not know.

In dreams

In my Masters thesis, Dark Husk of Beauty (Leggett 2005; 2006a) and in the paper published from it, ‘Goethe’s delicate empiricism—what I wasn’t taught in Gross Anatomy’ (Leggett 2006b), I wrote of the horror that was my experience of anatomical dissection, and of the defences we eighteen year old medical students mobilised to cope with such premature exposure. The cadaver we dissected was that of an obese elderly woman who see med terribly like my mother.

For me, it was not until seven years later, after the birth of my first child, that the nightmares erupted. They began with dreams of bringing home an arm from the anatomy lab and forgetting where I put it. I would wake in the middle of the night in a sweat, with my heart pounding, a terrible sense of guilt that I had borrowed something that I shouldn’t, and that it was still with me somewhere, where I was living then, thousands of kilometres from the St Lucia campus of the University of Queensland. I had to get up and check under my bed to make sure that thing was not still there, rotting and stinking beneath me as I slept.

These dreams recurred, and progressed in series. Another was of being on a Christian youth camp where bodies were kept under sheets in a large hall. During the day I would participate in the usual activities with the other campers, but at night I was up in the hall, in my white coat, picking away under the lamp. I made a perfect art of whittling the corpse down to the bones and ligaments, so that the result was a cleanly articulated
skeleton. Then I woke kicking and spitting, with the horrific realisation that I had performed the entire dissection using my teeth.

It wasn’t until after this that the dream sequence progressed to being like that experienced by my novel’s protagonist. Some of Garrick Willis’ dreams are based directly on my own experiences at that time, and some are fabrications, after the style of the predictive dreams of Twin Peaks’ Special Agent Dale Cooper. The key dream of being wrongfully accused of a murder similar to those that Maria Tartar (1995) writes of in Lustmord, prevalent in German art of the Weimar period, is based on the worst of those recurrent dreams:

Garrick watched his shadow-self approach the vehicle and lift the sheet from the passenger side, exposing the corpse of a blonde woman in a short black dress, her cherry lipstick smeared all over her cheeks and chin, her throat ripped open. His eyes rested on the tattoo on her left shoulder, torn into a shapeless symbol by the marks of savage teeth. A dozen men in black uniforms with peaked caps sprang out and surrounded shadow-Garrick, drawing Smith and Wesson .38s, menacing his head. Out of the shade of a rusty external fire escape stepped a sad-eyed Police Commissioner, gesturing an order to lower hardware. The Commissioner stepped forward, bowed his head and clasped shadow-Garrick in a powerful handshake. As the Commissioner’s grip tightened, his face morphed into that of Nick Myshkin, the patient he’d encountered on the train, whose strange utterances had so unnerved him. Commissioner Myshkin gripped shadow-Garrick by the shoulders and leaned in close to whisper a secret greeting in the condemned man’s left ear. The watching Garrick strained to read the Commissioner’s lips. He imagined he could hear the words ‘I am Judas, and with this kiss, I seal the endless repetition of events.’ Then watching-Garrick noticed a cherry red stain on shadow-Garrick’s cheek. The Commissioner turned away, shook his head, and offered a ‘thumbs down’ signal to his men. Garrick saw his doppelgänger forcibly cuffed and escorted up the lane towards the dog box of a black paddy wagon. He screamed against his dry closed glottis, then screamed and screamed again until, from somewhere far away and long ago, the sound of screaming came (see p. 23).

Of course, this is not the dream, but an artifice, a device, a construct that performs a narratological function in the architectural context of the structure of a novel. There is in it something that was experienced by the author in a dream, or a series of dreams, and many things that have been condensed, distorted and displaced from other locations and origins, by all the mechanisms that Freud (1900; 1992) describes as operant in the
formation and the recollection of dreams. In the process of recollecting a dream on waking, the dreamer is already subject to such mechanisms operating unconsciously, and so the dream recollected is not the dream that occurred when the dreamer was asleep, but a version that has already been subject to processes similar to those that a novelist or a filmmaker might use in the construction of a story stimulated by direct empirical experience, whether in dream or in waking life. The difference between the dreamer recollecting the dream and the creative artist exploiting the dream to make a work of fiction, either prose or film, is that the distortions and displacements of the dreamer making and recollecting the dream occur unconsciously, and without premeditated intention, whereas those used by novelists and filmmakers are consciously and deliberately constructed. They perform intended diegetic and mimetic functions within the architecture of the story.

David Lynch (2006) describes how this was so for him, when he was stuck, searching for the ending of his screenplay for Blue Velvet (1996). Then a dream came to him, from which he remembered only a few fragments. From these he was able to construct the entire last scene. Although Lynch, in his films and in work for television, frequently makes use of dreams as mimetic and diegetic devices, he claims that the last scene in Blue Velvet is the only place in his entire body of work where he creates directly from what he has experienced in a dream:

I love dream logic; I just like the way dreams go. But I have hardly ever gotten ideas from dreams. I get more ideas from music, or from just walking around.

On Blue Velvet, though, I was really struggling with the script. I wrote four different drafts. And I had some problems with it near the end. Then one day, I was in an office and I was supposed to go in and meet somebody in the next office. A secretary was there, and I asked her if I could have a piece of paper, because I suddenly remembered that the night before I’d had this dream. And there it was. There were three little elements that solved those problems. That’s the only time that’s happened. (Lynch, 2006: 63)

The dream sequence quoted above from my novel borrows from a dream, but it also borrows from other places, such as John Scott’s narrative poem ‘Preface’ (1995), and from the place of dreams in the cinema of David Lynch, a place that Greg Hainge (2010)
convincingly argues is to be found in the architectural space of the cinema. So now it is time to introduce the discussion of how it was that Lynch’s place of dreams came to give rise to the research questions of this dissertation, to influence the creation of this novel, and by what processes.

**An ekphrastic process**

James Heffernan (1993) defines ekphrasis as ‘*the verbal representation of visual representation*’ (3). He goes on to say that:

> This definition excludes a good deal of what some critics would have *ekphrasis* include—namely literature about texts. It also allows us to distinguish ekphrasis from two other ways of mingling literature and the visual arts: pictorialism and iconicity. (3)

Therefore Heffernan views literary criticism of visual art as other than ekphrastic. He says ekphrasis is not creative writing that involves the generation ‘in language effects similar to those created by pictures’. Nor is it creative work that involves ‘a visible resemblance between the arrangement of words or letters on a page and what they signify’ (3)—pictorialism—or ‘work that entails an implicit reference to graphic representation’ (3)—iconicity. He goes on to say that ekphrasis, pictorialism and iconicity are not mutually exclusive, ‘[b]ut ekphrasis differs from both iconicity and pictorialism in that it represents representation itself … What ekphrasis represents in words, therefore, must be *representational* in itself’ (4).

After thus narrowing the definition to that which is representational, although not necessarily traditionally so, Heffernan declares that ‘ekphrasis first appears as a descriptive detour from the high road of epic narrative’ (5), but ‘we must explain why and how it challenges both the movement and the meaning of the narratives in which it appears’ (5).

So in that sense, then, I argue that the writing that creates the place of dreams in my novel is ekphrastic work, ekphrastic in its poetic representation, after the fashion of and in
response to David Lynch’s audiovisual representation, of a place of dreams in his own work, and in its function of both carrying my narrative and disrupting its effect on the reader. In this respect, dreams in my novel function as both the dreams in Lynch’s cinematic work, and his film works as oneiric metaphor, function to seed the narrative of the film with mysteries and the mind of the viewer with disruptive disease.

Of this there is much more to be said later in this exegesis, and of the limitations and possibilities of a literary work written in ekphrastic response to audiovisual art. These limitations and possibilities arise in the process of representation, in text, of that which is shown and served in Lynch’s films through both complementation and juxtaposition of movement image and time image with sound image. These all must be representationally and suggestively conjured in text, and not prescriptively provided to the viewer as they are in film. But for now I return to discussion of the place of dreams in the novel, having disrupted this narrative discourse with reference to the ekphrastic nature of the work.

The place of dreams in the novel

In his introduction to The Interpretation of Dreams (1900), Freud expounds on two prevailing traditions of dream interpretation: the prophetic and the reductionist. In the biblical account of Genesis, Chapter 41 (1978), Joseph offers Pharaoh an example of the former, by interpreting the dreams of the seven fat cows devoured by the seven lean ones, and the seven full ears of corn devoured by the seven shrivelled ones. Pharoah is wise enough to heed this dream and seek its interpretation. Impressed by the wisdom of what he is told, he appoints Joseph to oversee the collection of the harvest and the preservation of a grain store for the years of drought that are to come, thus avoiding the famine. In this early literary account of predictive dreaming, there is no evidence of idiocy, not in the dream, nor in its telling and interpretation.

Freud writes also, in ‘The Uncanny’ (1919), in a manner pertinent to construction of the place of dreams and to its function in Lynch’s cinema, and in my novel:
... in the first place a great deal that is not uncanny in fiction would be so if it happened in real life; and in the second place ... there are many more means of creating uncanny effects in fiction than there are in real life

The story-teller has this license, among many others, that he can select his work of representation so that it either coincides with the realities we are familiar with or departs from them in what particulars he pleases. (18, italics in original)

A method open to the novelist, and used also by Lynch as film-maker, is invitation of the reader, or the viewer, into a state of suspension of disbelief, by casting otherwise unbelievable events as prophetic dreams. We have seen that this literary device is so old that it was utilised by the authors of the biblical Old Testament. But now I will draw attention to one of its earliest uses in the construction of a novel.

One of the first psychological thrillers, and among the earliest detective stories in the English language, is Wilkie Collins’ *Armadale* (1866). In the gothic setting of the wreck of the ship in which his father was drowned by the father of his dearest friend, the naively generous, high spirited Allan Armadale is brought to suffering awareness of disease and distrust by a portentous dream, one which Ozias Midwinter, the son of the original murderer, regards as prophetic, ominous and to be heeded. Allan, who has written down the dream, is persuaded to reveal the contents of the manuscript for interpretation. Mr Hawbury, the village doctor, makes a fool of himself by persuading Allan of the reductionist view, in keeping with that which prevailed within the medical profession of that time, and also of Freud’s (1992), and still to this day, that ‘A dream is the reproduction, in the waking state of the brain, of images and impressions produced on it in the sleeping state’ (Collins 2010a: 99). Hawbury goes on to debunk the superstitious valuation of the dream held by Midwinter, hacking at it with the blade of science, a ‘moral dissecting-knife’ (Collins 2010a: 104). Collins leaves us with the sense that it is Allan who is foolish in being so readily convinced of the rational explanation, and Ozias the wiser man, in holding on to his magical thinking of the dream as portent of the repetition of the events of an evil past that is to come between them.

So Collins introduces to his fiction the device of dream as harbinger, and the planting of the dream as seed of dis-ease and discord between brothers, one a benevolent
and generous idiot, the other a man of darker passions. There has been much speculation (We Can Read It for You Wholesale 2013) on the influence of Collins’ Moonstone (1868) on Dostoyevsky’s The Brothers Karamazov (1880), but the place of the dream and its telling between two men in this earlier Collins novel Armadale (1866) leads me to speculate on the likelihood that Dostoyevsky read it before he wrote The Idiot (1868-9).

Prophetic dreams in Stephen King’s Christine

This device of Collins’—the textual construction of dream as harbinger, the prophetic dream—has subsequently been used by other authors to create tension and a sense of foreboding regarding an inevitable unfolding of events which might otherwise seem less than feasible. Garrick Willis, in my In Dreams, experiences the horror of his worst nightmares becoming reality as he rushes, too late, to the scene of Jade’s murder. I use the repetition of the text representing Garrick’s dream, with slight alteration, to narrate his experience as he enters the boarding house where she has died (see pp. 34-36, 170-171).

Stephen King has used a similar device in Christine (1983). Through a series of dream narratives, he gradually builds a sense of the potential active malevolence of a 1958 Plymouth car, not as murder weapon, but as seductress and supernatural serial killer. This begins with the first of Dennis Guilder’s nightmares:

—Come on, big guy. Let’s go for a ride. Let’s cruise.

I shake my head. I don’t want to get in there. I’m scared to get in there. I don’t want to cruise. And suddenly the engine begins to rev and fall off, rev and fall off; it’s a hungry sound, frightening, and each time the engine revs Christine seems to lunge forward a bit, like a mean dog on a weak leash ... and I want to move ... but my feet seem nailed to the cracked pavement of the driveway.

—Last chance, big guy.

And before I can answer—or even think of an answer—there is a terrible scream of rubber kissing off concrete and Christine lunges out at me, grille snarling like an open mouth of chrome teeth, her headlights glaring— . (King 1983: 75-76, italics in original)
A reader’s capacity to suspend disbelief may be facilitated by the use of dream sequence as harbinger of the occurrence of improbable, even impossible events. Christine’s malevolence is first presented as arising in the dream world and then in the imagination of the narrator, but then the events of the dreams come true, including those of dead and decomposing drivers and passengers of a murderous demon car. Such events come to seem not only feasible, but inevitable by the gradual presentation of the evidence of strange occurrences such as spontaneous regeneration of damaged body work, and the progression from Dennis’s narration of increasingly bizarre and terrifying dreams to accounts in an omniscient narratorial voice of these events occurring in real waking time.

By contrast, the dream sequences in my novel serve similarly as harbingers of what is yet to come in the waking life narrative, but they also serve as warnings to Garrick Willis, the protagonist, upon which he fails to act in time to prevent the horrors that the dreams foretell. In this respect, the place and function of dreams in my novel has more in common with those warning Special Agent Dale Cooper in David Lynch and Mark Frosts’ television series *Twin Peaks* (*Twin Peaks* 1990-1991; 2003; 2007) that ‘it’s happening again’. Cooper heeds these warnings, and other clues regarding Laura Palmer’s killer, in the process of his investigations, but he is still not able to intervene rapidly enough to prevent new horrors occurring.

**Dreaming in Twin Peaks**

Just days before my twin daughters were conceived, I woke in the middle of the night from a dream which I wrote down as a poem, the one on the last page of my first collection (Leggett 1998b: 101):

Locket

entering the locket
without a photograph
father dreams
the image
of unborn children
their hearts
pitter-patter
in and out
of synchrony

each swallow
of the amnion
each kicking limb
alters the rhythm
of the little drums

eye ride
the oscillation
of his thrusts
as mother shudders
drawing breath

A few weeks later, when the portent was confirmed by ultrasonic examination, I panicked when I thought I saw the outline of a third head. ‘No,’ the obstetrician assured me, ‘that’s just a shadow.’

I lay awake on many nights contemplating how I was to manage not only as father to my existing children, but soon as well to baby twins. I longed for a father myself, for one who could be said to truly know, for one who was not like my own, of whom I have written in ‘Guiding Father’ (Leggett 1998a) when I dreamed a few months after he died that he was wandering in need of my guidance. I escorted him back to the grave and pushed on alone. No, I was in need of a wilder, fiercer father, one who has been to battle and returned—one who knows. This longing, brings me to tears, when I read its reflection in Ondaatje’s citation of Marc Triviere (2001) in Divisidero:

And so I hoped that someone would come, a man, why not my father, at nightfall. He would stand in front of the door, or on the path leading from the forest, with his old white shirt, the everyday one, in shreds, dirtied by mud and his blood. He would not speak in order to preserve what can be, but he would know what I do not. (Ondaatje 2007: 273)

Like Ondaatje, it was a lullaby I longed for, ‘and not a storm’ (273). But no father came, other than the one who had already come, and the one whose reflection I saw when
I faced the mirror. In the video rental store, I came across *Twin Peaks* which I had missed when it was first on television, and I turned to Lynch instead. I compulsively viewed all 36 episodes, in bed, on the VCR, as the twins kicked at my poor wife’s diaphragm, all through the night. I was in such a state of mind that it seemed to me that all ancient wisdom was somewhere hidden in the screenplays and the scripts of this hyperbolic soap set in the wake of the terrible transformation of a decent father into a defiling monster when possessed by a demon called Bob. It was the investigator protagonist, Special Agent Dale Cooper, who impressed on me the value of the predictive dream as trope, and of the value of the knight’s move in narrative construction. Cooper was a well-intentioned idiot who thought it wise to prefer to choose between those suspected of homicide by throwing stones at beer bottles; to follow the advice of the giant that manifested in his dreams, in spite of all evidence to the contrary; to be suspicious of owls that are never what they seem; and to make a pact with a demon who took his virtue in exchange for the safe-keeping of the woman in whom he invested his love. I doubt that Lynch and his scriptwriting team were thinking of Prince Myshkin when they wrote Dale Cooper, but for me they became one and the same as I wrote Garrick Willis *In Dreams*.

Once I had exhausted *Twin Peaks*, I found the dis-ease that woke in me when I fathered the twins behaved like a fire that has received a dowsing, not with water, but with kerosene. I moved on to *Blue Velvet*, in which I found the story of what can happen to a young man seeking after a father in the wake of the real man falling down. In the dual settings of Roy Orbison’s *In Dreams* within the *mise en scene*, I found just how terrifying a lullaby can become. I was spurred on by Jeffrey Beaumont’s anguished cry, after he awakens from the traumatic dream of Frank Booth, after the beating. Lynch, like Jeffrey into Dorothy, had put his dis-ease in me and put me on the quest to know ‘Why are there people like Frank? Why is there so much trouble in the world?’

**Concluding this introduction to the place of dreams**

As I pushed on, as though possessed, through Lynch’s other work, I found so many Prince Myskins, so many Rogozhins, so many Nastasya Filippovnas, so many disintegrating
Dorothy’s full of Jeffrey’s dis-ease. What they woke up in me, what came then in my own dreams, compelled me to tell the story of a man of gentle intelligence who naively follows his love to his destruction, a man who, like Cooper, follows his dreams, but loses everything of value by arriving, always, just a little too late—to tell his story alongside that of the man with the hatchet in the tool shed, the story I had first told in 1986, to bring them together in their story in inner city Brisbane, where, like Prince Myshkin and Rogozhin, they were more than blood brothers. They live in the same skin. They are, like Bob and Leland in the two lodges, one and the same.

In the second chapter of this exegesis, I will offer an overview of the development of the place of dreams in the cinematic work of David Lynch, referring to that place as it manifests successively in each of his known works to date. I will sequentially and comparatively discuss the influence of the dream places in Lynch’s works and my novel, in terms of similarities and differences; identifications and distinctions; investments and disinvestments. These discussions will refer to what Lynch has expressed of his views on dreaming, informed by Lynch’s films and television works, by the body of criticism and critical theory that his art has generated, and by Lynch’s own texts, including Catching the Big Fish (Lynch 2006) and the interviews published in Lynch on Lynch (Rodley 2005). I will show how Lynch’s use of dreaming as trope serves as a focus for a review of the body of his work in television and cinema. In the third chapter, an expansion of my similarly titled (2009) paper, I will use Lynch’s Blue Velvet as an example from which to compare the way in which the place of dreams in Lynch’s cinema and in my novel In Dreams are places of violence against civility and the destruction of fantasy. The final chapter will offer concluding comments on what has been learned in the process of writing a novel influenced by viewings of David Lynch’s cinematic work with attention to its place of dreaming as a trope and the eclectic research that has contributed to a theoretical base from which to discuss the creative writing of this work. This will necessitate a spectropoetic overview of the possibilities and limitations of interpenetration of the place of dreams in Lynch’s cinematic work and the text of my novel, looking back on the process of such influence, at the ghost that is manifest as evidence of a meeting which might have happened in the place of dreams in which it passed.
The novel and the exegesis are, like Prince Myshkin and Parfyon Rogozhin, to find that they become blood brothers. Like Lynch’s cinema, they belong in their own architectural space (Hainge 2010), in which they serve singular functions. The challenge will be to keep them sufficiently apart so that they do not damage each other, in a cataclysmic union of opposites, similar to that which characterises much of Lynch’s work. I must bring in ‘the candy-coloured clown they call the Sandman’ (Orbison 2008) whenever the need arises, to sing them to sleep with a lullaby; to keep them from realisation of the transcendental illusion (Grier 2001) from the black arts that would cast them as one and the same.
CHAPTER 2:
THE TROPE OF DREAMING IN THE CINEMATIC WORK OF DAVID LYNCH

Comparative exploration of the territories of the novel and Lynch’s place of dreams

In this chapter, I will outline the development of the place of dreams in the work of the American filmmaker David Lynch, comparing and contrasting an aspect of the place in Lynch’s work with that in my novel *In Dreams*.

I will address those aspects of Lynch’s place of dreams relevant to the research questions articulated in the previous introductory chapter. This comparative approach will, in turn, generate questions as they arise in the place of dreams they build, which is not Lynch’s place of dreams, but mine, an ekphrastic place in this author’s mind generated by my exposure to Lynch’s cinema and television work, the process affected by my visits to Lynch’s place of dreams, and by the creative dis-ease put into me in that place of my visitations. It is this Lynch-infested place of dreams in this author’s mind, whence the novel *In Dreams* is generated, with its own dreams, in their own place, spewing forth as though from a dream generator, its dream machine. This place might just as readily be compared to the place in which the exegesis functions, in the creative writing thesis, as its own research question generator. The place at which we arrive is the creative work of the conversations that occur in the place of dreams in the exegesis.

An author might just as readily get there by following the map that identifies the eponymous place in Wim Wenders’ (1984) film, *Paris, Texas*—a map that leads to an empty and desolate piece of desert—a place, in search of which Wenders has his protagonist Travis Henderson wander after the disrupted self that he has lost, with little to guide him other than the steel parallels of a railway track and a fragmentary memory of the map of that place, one widely advertised as being *Paris, Texas*—a place in the mind. Lynch’s *Blue Velvet* arises in the wake of Wenders’ film, a wake that reverberates in waves throughout the rest of Lynch’s repertoire, not least so in *Lost Highway* (1997).
Lynch later extends his appropriative grasp even to Wenders’ actors, including Dean Stockwell (*Blue Velvet* 1986) and Harry Dean Stanton (*The Straight Story* 2000; *Wild at Heart* 2004).

In *Lynch on Lynch* (2005), and in *Catching the Big Fish* (2006), Lynch tells us that he has only ever once depicted in a film something that he has actually dreamt. He speaks of experiencing a block to the creation of the ending for *Blue Velvet*, then seeing it in a dream prior to writing it. Lynch tells us of the derivation of certain objects from the dream, including the police radio, Frank Booth’s disguise, and the gun retrieved from a dead man’s pocket. He dreamt the transmission of a message as a ruse which, when applied in the film, allowed Jeffrey Beaumont to shift position to his advantage in the final confrontation with Frank Booth. But of the process of the translation of the dream into script, into film, Lynch tells us only that: ‘I just had to plug and change a few things to bring it all together’ (*Lynch on Lynch* 2005: 136). He does not offer us anything of the process by which his dream contributed to the disruptive elision of Jeffrey Beaumont’s nightmare with Sandy Williams’ dream, leaving the viewer to search for the devouring animatronic robins that appear with menacingly ambiguous valence at the end of the film.

Such ambiguity necessitates that the researcher into the place of dreams in the cinematic work of David Lynch must shift repeatedly from one viewpoint to another in order to find and see these anamorphoses within the work, and to apprehend their overdetermined nature. The way in which a viewer finds the dreams in Lynch’s work depends as much on the viewer’s stance on the relationship between dream and film as it does on whether or not Lynch has written, directed and produced dreams. If we accept that the ending of *Blue Velvet* (1986) was dreamed before it was filmed, then we find therein the basic problem with the place of dreams in David Lynch’s films. The problem is that dreams are things that happen as we sleep, and films are things that are born in the minds of film-makers, filmed on film-sets and shown in cinemas. Lynch says something very similar in *Catching the Big Fish* (2006)—that dreams are not what we do in waking life, not what we do while we are walking around.
Eraserhead

But Lynch has a habit of saying one thing in text, and doing quite another in his film and television work. Already in Eraserhead (1976), Lynch is beginning to improvise that uneasy and uncomfortable playing space that is his place of dreams by making its boundary ambiguous, so that it is difficult to identify the seam between those moving pictures and the sounds that belong to the time when Henry sleeps, those of the overt dream of the little lady in the radiator, and what goes on when Henry is awake. So the viewer becomes disorientated as to what is the place of Henry’s dream. At one point, there is a sharp cut, between Henry in bed in his pyjama shirt and Henry lying with his day shirt buttoned to the collar. At first glance, this cut seems like a clumsy editing slip, but serves to discombobulate the viewer sufficiently to foster the illusion that the film may be a dream, and that a dream might occur within that dream, although the film remains a film and the viewer is awake.

Lynch does not explain this apparent slip. There are many potential explanations, including the possibility that, at the end of a day’s shoot, Henry has fallen asleep in his pyjamas, but the actor, Jack Nance, turned up the next shoot in his day shirt, and Lynch just got on with the take. From Lynch, the change in shirts mid-dream generates no comment, but he tells us the most interesting thing about Henry is his apartment! ‘There was plenty of ambiguous torment in Henry’s apartment—actually, his room—was, you know, fairly cosy. It was just this one little place he had to mull things over. The anxiety doesn’t let up, but it doesn’t let up for anybody. Pressure is, you know, always building. In a way, I’d like to live in Henry’s apartment, and be round there. I love Hitchcock’s Rear Window because it has such a mood, and even though I know what’s going to happen I love being in that room and feeling that time. It’s like I can smell it’ (Rodley 2005: 57).
So, if Henry’s apartment is the place of dreams, then is the depiction of the dream more important, the narrative of the dream, or that Lynch shows us the dream arising in that place? Is it that the apartment itself generated the dream, as if it could only happen in that place?

Henry’s apartment is a place of torment. Henry is tormented by a terrible dream, in that place. Lynch has shot the apartment as though it was as much a living thing as Henry himself. Thus Lynch puts the sense of Henry’s torment into the viewer. Lynch makes it such that something sinister about the place gets into Henry and discombobulates him, and the viewer. It’s impossible to tell dream from waking, waking from dream, place from Henry, Henry from place. Henry’s dream is a place of terror, or terrible torment, set in and arising from a terrible place, one where nothing is secure or certain, where a man is stretched beyond his limits, a place of extremes. A place of terror, the place of a terrible dream.

This place is mapped out repeatedly in Lynch’s films, most of all in *Inland Empire* (2006), where the set serves as a conduit into the horror of a film that couldn’t be completed, where the uncompleted film invades the new film and repeats the murder of its actress, orchestrated by the eye of its director. This is the place of the ghosts that make such things happen. Just as the dream giant in *Twin Peaks* says, ‘It’s happening again.’ *Inland Empire* was a terrible film, like Michel Houellebecq’s *The Map and the Territory*, a terrible place of the killing of self and other, a place where such distinctions break down and the sense of self is lost in the dream in the place of dreams within the dream, down the rabbit hole, into nightmare territory. Each viewing of Lynch’s films involves journeying a little further into that territory, similarly to the way that Jeff Vandermeer, in the second and third novels of the *Southern Reach* trilogy (2014), uses the notion of the *terroir* of a terrible place to create a sense of dread of his Area X, of creeping horror, of a horrible territory creeping across its borders while all those outside of this terroir struggle frantically to hold to them. But the *terroir* of Area X gets into everything and changes everyone and everything that touches it (Vandermeer 2014a, 2014b).
Dis-ease and dreams in the early films

Lynch’s first film was a continuous loop projected onto a sculpted canvas where six human-shaped heads perpetually vomited, accompanied by the wailing of a siren. He named this animated sculpture *Six Figures Getting Sick*. Exposure to several cycles of this work in the short film *Six Figures Getting Sick Six Times* (1966; 2005) generates a somatic experience of nausea and malaise in the viewer. A wealthy fellow student at Lynch’s art college, after viewing this work, commissioned Lynch to make him a film. *The Alphabet* (1968; 2005) was Lynch’s first use of the trope of dreaming, a trope ubiquitous in his film and television work. In the film, Lynch’s first wife Peggy plays the role of young girl who falls asleep in bed and dreams a nightmare of the symbols of the alphabet being forced into her, to the musical accompaniment of her singing the alphabet song, until she becomes so sick that she vomits blood. The film concludes with her waking from the dream in a state of stained distress. In his commentary on the digital video disk *Short Cuts* (2005), Lynch describes *The Alphabet* as the nightmare of a young girl struggling with what she has been forced to learn that day. Then he corrects himself and says that the film is his ‘imagining’ of her nightmare. In his introduction to the YouTube presentation of *The Alphabet* (1968), he tells the viewer that the film is based on Peggy Lynch’s version of a nightmare as described by her niece, the telling of Peggy’s niece’s dream as he imagined it.

This confusion about what is dream and what is waking nightmare continues on beyond *Eraserhead* and those early short films into Lynch’s later work, as in *Mulholland Drive* (2001), in which Lynch has a man take his friend to the diner that he’d dreamt about the night before. They engage in conversation regarding the need to go outside and check reality, to prove that this was just a nightmare, but then find the monstrous hobo from the dream alive and kicking, out the back where they dump the trash. The viewer is pushed into a state of confusion and dis-ease, as the dreamer collapses in this place of terror. Such is the territory of Lynch’s place of dreams.
The irrational cut

While Lynch, after Hitchcock, takes up the trope of dreaming in film, his development of that trope differs from that of Hitchcock’s collaboration with Dali in *Spellbound* (1945), in that Lynch’s dreams are not the sum of their symbols; are resistant to a reductionist structural analysis; and do not relate teleologically to the solution of a mystery. Hitchcock’s dream sequences are presented as a montage of movement-images in which each element stands for something else, and even when, in *Spellbound*, the eye is cut by a dream protagonist with a giant pair of scissors, this is not the irrational cut that Gilles Deleuze (1989) says characterises the shift between time-images in the dreams of cinema. Dali’s dream sequence is not the place of the Deleuzian dream of Hitchcock’s film. Deleuze identifies, in *Spellbound*, the compound of the lines in the snow, the sounds that go with them, and the traumatic memory that they imply, as standing among the earliest cinematic examples of a shift in cinematic representation of dreams. This shift is away from the movement-image, towards the time-image, and towards the arrangement of film images in such a way that the compounding of the visual image and the sound have a sense of their own that is not dependent one on the other. Thus, they come not to depend on a sense of continuous narrative, but on an arrangement of irrational cuts.

According to Deleuze, these irrational cuts make their way into cinema in the break between silent cinema and talking cinema, particularly that kind of talking cinema which is not dependent on the imposition of a narratorial voice-off, that kind in which the ‘sound image is born, in its very break, from its break with the visual image. There are no longer even two autonomous compounds of a single audio-visual image, as in Rossellini, but two “heautonomous” images, one visual and one sound, with a fault, an interstice, an irrational cut between them’ (1989: 251). It is the disjunction between the sound and the images of the lines in the snow that, from a Deleuzian perspective, are of importance in the making of the place of dreams in Hitchcock’s *Spellbound*. Later we will see that the place of dreams in David Lynch’s cinema is similarly dependent on such irrational cuts between sound and image. This generates problems of translation for the novelist creating a place
of dreams in which the sounds and images and the cuts between them must be conjured in
text, rather than delivered with the empirical immediacy of sound and images that is
possible in film.

Mysteries

In Lynch’s dreams, like Hitchcock, he plays with mysteries. Unlike Hitchcock’s dreams,
Lynch’s dreams fit with Deleuze’s (1989) statement that ‘the dream is not a metaphor, but
a series of anamorphoses which sketch out a very large circuit … not metaphors, but a
becoming which can by right continue to infinity’ (56-57). In 1945, Spellbound was made
in the context of an immediately post-Freudian, modernist culture. Hitchcock presents us
with a mystery that initially seems shockingly incomprehensible, but that mystery yields
to the science of popular psychoanalytic interpretation in a manner that is reassuring with
respect to the potential for reintegration of the post-traumatic subject. Lynch’s use of the
trope of dreaming in film is playfully post-Hitchcockian, but Lynch’s dreams, although
often clichéd, kitsch and nostalgic in their manifest content, spill out into waking life,
spreading disquiet, and infecting everything with a taint of the uncanny. Attempts at
analysis of Lynch’s dreams do not lead to neat solutions, but unravel into an exponential
multiplication of mysteries, exceeding the limits of analysability.

Lynch’s dreams relate to psychoanalysis in that they arise in a post-psychoanalytic
culture. Any resemblance they might have to Freud’s (1992) dreams occurs because
elements of Freud’s dream theory have been taken up by the culture that prevailed in the
late twentieth century when Lynch, in the process of developing his film work, imagined
the use of dreams as tropes. They are post-Freudian in that they are overdetermined and
feature condensation and displacement, but are neither analysable nor reducible.

The unanalysable kernel
While Freud acknowledged that the analysis of some dreams is limited by an unanalysable kernel or residue, Robin Truda (2007) argues that it was only nightmares, including some of Freud’s own and those recounted to him by traumatised war veterans, that he acknowledged might not be entirely analysable. When writing about such dreams, Freud described something closer to the Lynchian dream:

There is often a passage in even the most thoroughly interpreted dream which has to be left obscure, this is because we become aware during the work of the dream that at that point there is a tangle of dream thoughts which cannot be unravelled and which moreover adds nothing to our knowledge of the content of the dream. This is the dream’s navel, the spot where it reaches down into the unknown. The dream thoughts to which we are led by interpretation cannot, from the nature of things, have any definite endings; they are bound to branch out in every direction into the intricate network of our world of thought (1900: 525).

By contrast with Freud’s, Lynch’s dreams are less metaphoric, more resistant to translation into narrative, less diegetic and more mimetic. They more extensively exploit the effect of the juxtaposition of extradiegetic visual imagery and sound from shifting viewpoints and origins. They affect the viewer somatically, rather than being centred in the viewer as witness to the dream and as human subject. If they are post-Freudian, they are even more post-Lacanian in that they are not beholden to the symbolic, nor to Saussurean linguistics and structuralist semiotics. So it could be argued that the place of dreams in Lynch’s work is a post-psychoanalytic place, and that applied psychoanalysis may be of limited use in its exploration.

**Failure of the oneiric metaphor**

Thus, I argue that Lynch’s dream cannot be adequately addressed in terms of Christian Metz’s (1982) construction of an oneiric metaphor of dream in film. While Metz’s psychoanalysis of cinema strives to move beyond the Lacanian emphasis on the symbolic through integration of the Kleinian realm of the imaginary, with cinema thus cast as ‘good object’ (3) to which the spectator has ‘veritable “object relations”’ (5), Metz’s project of the cinema as dream remains one construed as analysable, potentially subject to the
critical spectator, as analyst, as breaker of the dream code: ‘My dream today is to speak of the cinematic dream in terms of a code: the code of this dream’ (6). Although the body of Laura Palmer, for whom Lynch’s *Twin Peaks* (2003; 2007) stands as a work of mourning, may be ‘full of secrets’, neither Special Agent Dale Cooper as shamanic seer, nor his laconic forensic scientist colleague Special Agent Albert Rosenfield are able to penetrate, decode and reveal them all. Lynch’s cinema as dream remains a place of mystery, one that confounds the investigators’ eclectic attempts to master it, make sense of it and reduce it elementally to symbolic meaning.

Post-Lacanian critique

While the critical works of Michel Chion (2006), Slavoj Žižek, and Todd McGowan seem to fit better with Lynch’s cinema than that of Metz, these theorists, who write from psychoanalytic viewpoints after Lacan, risk scripting Lynch as though the director creates in order to demonstrate the theories of the psychoanalytic Master.

It is Chion who shows most promise of potential to break away from this tendency to portray Lynch as auteur prophet of the temple of Lacan when he writes that Lynch ‘always uses contrast to structure his films’ (2006: 5), quoting Lynch as conceiving his film projects in the following terms: ‘“Contrast is what makes things work”’ (2006: 5). Chion also emphasises the role of extradiegetic sound in Lynch’s oeuvre, and the way in which this works ‘not because he is always bombarding us with sound but rather because … he deliberately sets up violent contrasts in sound intensities’ (2009: 149), but he falls back readily into a position of homage to the symbolic when he writes of ‘nondiegetic music’ coming to ‘play an increasingly important role in narrative continuity’ while expressing his conviction that ‘words would always retain their privileged power to evoke’ (2009: 48). Chion reduces the umbilical cords in *Eraserhead*, Jeffrey’s father’s garden hose and Frank’s strip of Dorothy’s velvet dressing gown in *Blue Velvet*, to ‘the phallus … cut out of nature! Thus it does not completely reach the symbolic stage, but remains a part of the world’s body and signifies something like a wound, a violence done
to nature’ (2006: 173), thus demonstrating his capacity to see in Lynch’s work something that is outside of and beyond the realm of Lacanian semiotics, while continuing to speak reverently of all the signs of linkage in Lynch’s work, as though they were designed for appropriation to an apologetics of Lacan’s (1977: 287) construction of the signifier-phallus.

In his introduction to Žižek’s *The Art of the Ridiculous Sublime—On David Lynch’s Lost Highway*, Marek Wieczorek writes: ‘There is a radical decentering of human subjectivity characteristic of Freudian/Lacanian theory that runs through Žižek’s essay on Lynch’ (2006: xi). While I have no reason to take issue with Wieczorek on this matter, Žižek’s tendency to present himself as Lacan’s cleverest apostle dominates his work on Lynch, rather than that ‘radical decentering of human subjectivity’ that is Lynch’s singular show. Given that Žižek tells that Lynch, like himself, is primarily a showman, I would prefer that Lynch be freed to put on his show for me, rather than be told that ‘Bobby Peru in *Wild at Heart* stands for an excessive phallic “life power”’ (Žižek 2000: 22-23).

**Pasolini’s polyvalence**

When it comes to semiotics, I prefer Pier Paolo Pasolini’s declaration that a filmic image of a tree represents a tree (and not a phallus), that it is ‘indexically related to that tree’ (Rumble, 2012). Lynch’s project of the place of dreams, and mine, are better served by Pasolini’s statement that cinema is ‘naturally poetic … because it is dreamlike, because it is close to dreams, because a film sequence is a sequence of memory or of a dream’. Pasolini continues: ‘things in themselves are profoundly poetic: … a human face photographed is poetic because the physical is poetic in itself, because it is an apparition, because it is full of mystery, because it is full of ambiguity, because it is full of polyvalent meaning’ (1969: 153).
Limitations of psychoanalytic critique

Erich Kuersten’s (2008) review of McGowan’s *The Impossible David Lynch* (2007a) is scathing with regard to this tendency to write Lacan into Lynch’s films, and to claim that Lynch shows Lacan intentionally, or else that Lynch, even should his creation be independent of Lacan, stumbles serendipitously on the Master’s truths, especially with respect to the *real* and the *objet petit a*. In this sense both McGowan and Žižek may be construed as indulging a similar kind of error with respect to their apparent claims for the supremacy of psychoanalysis over film to that error for which Kevin Brophy (1998) takes Freud to task:

> Freud made frequent use of literature and other arts both to demonstrate psychoanalytic concepts and to lend these concepts authority. But despite this respect, Freud often dealt with art, and literature in particular, as a rival threatening to claim for itself a significant priority in uncovering ultimate and sublime truths about the human self. This tension was taken to its extreme when psychoanalytic discourse attempted to displace literature as the pre-eminent discourse for speaking about the human psyche. (59)

Brophy depicts Freud as claiming the supremacy of psychoanalysis over literature, and claiming that literature, as the inferior discourse, should serve the ends of psychoanalysis, which is presented as superior, rather than that literature (or film) should serve its own independent ends.

At times McGowan steps aside from his casting of Lynch as Lacanian disciple and prophet to give him credit for achieving something outside of the Lacanian symbolic order. McGowan posits Lynch at these points as an ‘impossible’ film-maker, in that: ‘What is impossible in the symbolic order, is in the real, perfectly achievable. It is in this sense of the term *impossible* that Lynch’s films allow us to experience it actually taking place’ (25). It is within another Lacanian order that McGowan views Lynch as operating, the order of the Real. Lynch remains for McGowan, a Lacanian, but is given credit for providing ‘a fundamental challenge to the ruling symbolic structure, forcing us to see possibilities where we are used to seeing impossibilities’ (25).
Kuersten’s critique is not to be set aside, but in defence of the Lacanian camp, it should not be overlooked that Lynch graduated from film school in Philadelphia, and from art college in Boston. So he has been institutionally educated into Lacanian theory of art, including the version espoused in the film theory of Metz (1982). Lest we should presume that Lacan is venerated by Lynch, his prophet, viewings of *The Alphabet* and *Six Figures Getting Sick* show something contrary in Lynch’s attitude to early education. Both films protest violently against forcing homage to the symbolic, to written and spoken language, over other ways of knowing, perceiving, creating and communicating. Other than by stretching as far as McGowan, in invoking an impossible order of the real made possible by Lynch, it is difficult to construe these early works of Lynch as apologetically supporting a Lacanian order.

**An alternative semiotic approach**

However much a novelist also might protest, the novelist, in contrast to the film-maker, is limited to the written word as medium, and must conjure all that is made and shown and awakened in the reader through the limited medium of text. So can a novelist influenced by viewing the work of Lynch be as free as the film-maker in making such a protest? Can a novel influenced by the cinematic work of Lynch conjure something that exceeds the rule of the symbolic, at least the Lacanian symbolic? If it is to do so, a semiotics is needed that encompasses more than text and spoken language, while reliant on text as its medium. It is to this end that Alessia Ricciardi’s spectropoetics after, or looking back towards, Pasolini’s semiotics, in contrast to Lacan’s, may be invoked. Ricciardi writes that:

> If we wish to further differentiate Pasolini’s work from the most hegemonic strains of postmodernism, we might consider his original approach to a poetics of quotation. Unlike most postmodern artists, he does not indulge in an ironic superficiality of citation. Instead, he is interested in recreating and bringing back to life “the substance” of the cited work itself. (2003: 125)
She refers to the way in which Pasolini’s films quote other works of still art in a manner such that they “reanimate” … the very substance of paintings’ (125).

**Spectropoetics**

While Ricciardi informs us that ‘spectropoetics’ is ‘a term introduced by Jacques Derrida in *Specters of Marx* to name both the tropology of ghosts and phantoms inherent in Marxist language and the contemporary necessity of mourning Marist ideology’ (125) and hence is applicable to Pasolini’s post-Marxist work as poet, novelist, essayist, and filmmaker, she uses the term in the context of a ‘mode of mourning’ through which Pasolini ‘conjures up such spectral personae’ (125), I argue that ‘spectroetics’ can be applied to the manner in which Lynch conjures that which has passed away into immanence in his cinematic work, such that the cultural past of American cinema interpenetrates his work in an overdetermined manner, especially the place of dreams in his work, including the manifestation of revenants.

Drawing on Lynch’s cinema, adopting a similarly ekphrastic stance, I argue that it may be possible, as I have endeavoured with *In Dreams*, to write a novel in which premonitions and spectres of what is in the process of passing away are conjured in dreams that also sustain a protest against reductive symbolism through textual evocation of dreams. These dreams, like Lynch’s, are neither analysable nor reducible into elements of meaning. Such dreams function, in my novel, to conjure mysteries, rather than manufacture sense. The process of writing the novel *In Dreams* occurred within a field of research into the question of the possibility of such a spectropoetic reanimation of Lynch’s cinematic dream work.

**The early shorts**
But for now, let us return to the discussion of other features of the place of dreams in Lynch’s early shorts. For the purposes of this current work, a greater reward is to be found when viewing The Alphabet, for what it shows of the evolution of Lynch’s place of dreams. Although in The Alphabet, the boundary of what is presented as dream and what is shown as waking life for Lynch is clearly demarcated, it becomes much less clearly so in his later work, in which the limits of the place of dreams are much more ambiguous, with such ambiguity effected by the way Lynch cuts his films. An early example from Eraserhead, and the contribution of such cuts to overdetermined, ambiguous and anamorphic nature of the place of dreams in Lynch’s work, have been previously mentioned. The Alphabet served for Lynch as a base from which to apply successfully for his first grant, which he used to make The Grandmother (1970), a short film of 34 minutes duration. The style of The Grandmother is similar to that of The Alphabet, and it continues to address what is forced into the subject in the course of transgenerational conflict, emphasising the indelibility of the stain of such conflict, and the irreparable nature of the wounds sustained in the process. This film shows, more clearly than was to be seen in The Alphabet, Lynch’s saturation in fantastmatic representations, to the point where they fail and implode, plunging the viewer into a painful world of mourning, impossible desire and confusion, as discussed in Todd McGowan’s The Impossible David Lynch. The Grandmother is a film that could have been presented as a dream, but in contrast to The Alphabet, the bookends that signal The Grandmother’s representation of a dream have been removed. Although there is a great deal of lying in bed and rising, there is no falling asleep and no waking up. The style is dreamlike, but unlike The Alphabet, this film is not presented as a place that can be entered by falling asleep or escaped by waking. So The Alphabet is presented as the imagining of a nightmare, and The Grandmother is presented as dream-like, but without the limits of dream that promise the possibility of escape into waking life.

**Eraserhead revisited**
Recognition of the quality of Lynch’s work in *The Grandmother* opened to him the possibility of a grant to make his first full length film, *Eraserhead*, in which the transgenerational conflict, relational failure, disease and irreparable wounding are continued, with the place of dreams represented as one into which escape can be possible, but from which escape is never possible, as the disease erupts in the midst of the dream of the little lady in the radiator, and Lynch’s way of cutting the film interferes with the possibility of ever truly waking. Lynch and those who committed themselves to his work suffered for five years to make this film on an impossibly frugal budget. Fortunately it was a huge success, aesthetically and financially, achieving a wide international distribution. So while Lynch, his family and his friends may have broken down in the process, the film worked, and so more films were made.

**Elephant Man and The Straight Story**

The first of these, *Elephant Man* (1980), is neither dream-like, nor does it make use of dreaming as a trope. It shares these characteristics with only one other of Lynch’s full-length feature films, *The Straight Story* (2000), both of which are biographical accounts involving diseased subjects and saturated in ideology (in one case, that of liberal humanism, in the other that of fraternal fidelity) to the point of the actualisation of impossible fantasies, which rather than failing, are fulfilled, but with the possibility of such failing always imminent, so that the integrity of the gaze and the implied reality of the impossibility of such desire is sustained, without resort to the trope of dreaming.

**Dune**

Following Lynch’s commercial success with *Elephant Man*, he was contracted to work with Dino de Laurentiis on a sequence of feature films, of which *Dune* (1984), an adaptation of Frank Herbert’s (1965) science fiction novel, was the first. The film features a single short dream sequence. Paul Atreides falls asleep after a conversation
with his father, Duke Leto, in which the patriarch announces that ‘the sleeper must awaken’. He dreams of his conquest of the spice world Arrakis, of a woman whose eyes have luminous blue sclera, and of dueling with his nemesis, Feyd-Rautha, nephew and heir of the lasciviously cruel Baron Harkonnen. From the dream, a traditionally Freudian wish fulfillment, Paul awakens. As in *The Alphabet*, there is a clear demarcation between the dream, which occurs while Paul is sleeping, and the waking life, even within the narrative fantasy. The content of the dream is saturated in fantasy, in contrast with life on the Atreides planet Caladan where, according to Todd McGowan (2007a), desire dominates, and more in keeping with life on the Harkonnen planet which is a fantasmatic world of unfettered enjoyment. Paul Atreides’ dream is placed with clear boundaries within the diegesis, although the dream later spills out into the narrative, in that, in the wake of the destructive invasion of Paul’s world by the Harkonnens and his escape to Arrakis, the dream comes true. It functions as a teleological device within the diegesis—that is, it is made to seem that, because Paul dreamed the dream, the dream was prophetic and contributed to the actualisation of the fantasy. In this, Paul Atreides’ dream is not at all like Freud’s (1900; 1992) dreams, which are distorted but analysable representations of the wishes of the dreamer, and do not foretell the future.

*Blue Velvet*

Lynch blamed the failure of *Dune*, at the box office and according to the judgement of the director and most of his critics, on his loss, purportedly in deference to commercial interests, of artistic control over most aspects of production, including the final cut. Dino de Laurentiis agreed to bankroll one more film provided that Lynch manage on a small budget and take a substantial pay cut. The director accepted these constraints in exchange for his autonomy in making *Blue Velvet* (1986), including screenplay and the final cut. The result was a film that Michel Chion (2006) describes as a dream, the dream that arises when the father of college student Jeffrey Beaumont falls down. According to Chion, ‘the film is a dream, but a structured one’ (85). That Jeffrey’s discovery of the severed ear
leads him into the underworld of *Blue Velvet*’s place of traumatic dreams seems to be a key signifier of Lynch’s distance from Hitchcock, with a new emphasis on sound, giving the imperative that the viewer should not only be a voyeur at the keyhole but a listener with an ear to the bedroom door. Chion’s (2006) reference to dream in this instance appears interchangeable with fantasy arising in response to trauma and loss. The dream that is *Blue Velvet* is a locus of wounding. The experience of Jeffrey’s wounding, and the dis-ease that it places in him is also put into the viewer as participant voyeur. Out of Jeffrey’s wounding, a dream sequence arises. In a similar way to that in *Dune*, this brief dream sequence makes use of irrational cuts between intensely affect-laden but disconnected images and the associated exaggerated voice-over, primal and inanimate sounds. But the dream is depicted as a post-traumatic phenomenon, and the parricide that it leads on to is represented as a real consequence of such traumatic wounding, not as a wish fulfilment. The parricide occurs within the diegesis in the realm outside of the dream, but the objects that constitute the *mise-en-scene* have been taken from Lynch’s real dream.

Lynch introduces another way of presenting dreams in *Blue Velvet*, with Sandy Williams’ direct narration to Jeffrey of her ridiculously optimistic dream of the robins breeding in the Spring. Lynch uses this naïve technique of dream narration only twice in his entire body of work—here in Sandy’s dream, and in the terrible re-enactment of the nightmare of the hobo behind the diner in *Mulholland Drive* (2002). By the end of *Blue Velvet*, Sandy’s fantasy has been corrupted and stained with Lynch’s dis-ease, that which is aroused by the object-cause of impossible desire. Sandy, although changed by the encounter, lives on, unlike the less robust dreamer of the dream placed in the Hollywood diner. By the end of *Blue Velvet*, it is Jeffrey who ‘falls into the paradisiacal world dreamed of by Sandy and which she rapturously described to him, a girlish dream hatched in her wonderfully corny bedroom, a happy snare’ (Chion 2006: 158). But robins are predators so, according to Chion, Lynch shows us that when Jeffrey falls into Sandy’s dream, they are actually falling together, ‘from the frying pan into the fire’ (158).
Twin Peaks

Lynch’s next commercial venture was the Twin Peaks television series, produced in co-operation with Mark Frost (1990-1). The film-length pilot begins with the discovery of the naked body of high school homecoming queen, Laura Palmer, wrapped in plastic, downstream in the race of the waterfall just below the Great Northern Hotel, the place of hospitality in which the dreams are dreamt and in which most of the drama takes place. Angelo Badalamenti’s haunting theme tune complements industrial and natural images, again cut irrationally but, in the context of Badalamenti’s soundtrack, each having a sense of its own. The introductory theme sequence suggests for each episode a dream-like quality.

This quirky soap opera explores the life of the lumber town of Twin Peaks in mourning, with everyone seeming to fall in love in the wake of Laura. After the fashion of Michel Chion’s critique of Blue Velvet, Twin Peaks could be viewed as a dream arising after Laura and all that she represents has passed away, a dream arising in the wake of Laura. I find some closeness of fit with Alessia Riccardi’s spectropoetic analysis of cinematic representations of mourning. Twin Peaks, as hyperbolic soap opera, protests ‘the jaded, knowing spirit of what is now defined as a postmodern culture’ (Ricciardi 2003: 2) epitomised, according to Ricciardi, by Lacan’s abandonment of Freud’s mourning as ‘the working-through of a historically specific event of loss’ (2) and Lacan’s replacement of it by ‘an idea of desire that celebrates the object’s inherent absence’ (2). I find Ricciardi’s post-Marxist, post-Pasolinian critique to better fit Lynch’s work than does most of his criticism by the post-Lacanians. Ricciardi’s view is that we live in ‘an age grown sceptical of traditional historical methods’ (1) but failing ‘to develop an adequately critical approach to the past’ (1). I suggest that an attempt to see this in Twin Peaks would depend on writing too much of Ricciardi’s post-Marxist ideology into Lynch’s art.

The cultural mourning Lynch shows in Twin Peaks is his own singular contribution to that (Laura) which has passed away or is almost caught, just too late to be caught in the act of, but always just after, its passing. Yet it is with Laura, not only in her wake, that
Lynch invites us to walk, beyond safety, into a place of immanent mysteries, his place of dreams: ‘Through the darkness of futures past, the magician longs to see. One chants out between two worlds: “Fire walk with me”’ (Twin Peaks 2002).

In my novel In Dreams, I took this stance of Lynch’s on mourning from my viewing of Twin Peaks and carried it into authorship of a mourning of the downfall, destruction and death of Jade, and of Garrick’s love for her. There is in it also a mourning of my city, of its culture, and of my place in it as place of dreams—of a Brisbane that has passed away, and of its perpetual passing.

Twin Peaks features numerous representations of the dreams of the lead investigator, Special Agent Dale Cooper, played by Kyle MacLachlan, also the lead actor in Dune and Blue Velvet. These dreams are bookended, in that they occur when Cooper sleeps. Like Hitchcock’s dream sequences, they are the key to mysteries, but unlike Hitchcock’s, these mysteries have no single concrete solution, and the entire series is packed with anamorphoses. The dreams take Cooper into a place, the Red Room, where he communes with Laura, whose revenant whispers secrets in his ear, and alerts him to the secrets that are to be found within her body, and in the primaeval forest of omnipresent, susurrating pines in which ‘the owls are not what they seem’. These dreams are not sensibly analysable, and their place, the realm of a demon called Bob, a dancing dwarf and spirits that feed on creamed corn, is a place of what Žižek calls the ridiculous sublime, in that it is a sublimely ridiculous place. As the two series of the show progress, the contents of Cooper’s dreams spill out into a series of traumatic events in the lives of the community of Twin Peaks and the Red Room is revealed to be a real place within a Black Lodge, a Žižekian ‘Other Site of the fundamental fantasy’ (Žižek 2000: 44) from which all pain and suffering emanates, a place of terrible trauma that Žižek might argue, following Lacan, lies inaccessibly ‘beyond the wall of language’ (Žižek 2007a). It is from such a place that Žižek posits that a ‘voice that no one can perceive’ (2000: 44) might speak, a voice ‘which nonetheless dominates us and produces material effects’; ‘the voice which the subject cannot hear because it is uttered in the Other Site of the fundamental
fantasy’ (2000: 44). Žižek proposes such a place to be one of ‘the comic horror of the fundamental fantasy’ (2000: 44).

**Wild at Heart**

In *Wild at Heart* (1990) Lynch’s rock’n’roll road movie parody of *The Wizard of Oz*, there are no dream sequences, but saturation in eroticised fantasy as shield against an overwhelming immersion in traumatic memory is sustained throughout the film. The film is a Deleuzian dream sequence of time images in the way it is cut and put together, with incongruous sound accompanying scenes of ridiculous enjoyment of the symptom, such as the sadistic ritual killing of Johnny Farragut, and Marrietta Pace-Fortune smearing her face with red lipstick and vomiting into the toilet, contrasted with naïve visions of fairy godmothers and wicked witches. The crystal time-image treatment of regressions to scenes of childhood trauma also serves to give the film a dream-like quality.

**Fire Walk with Me**

In *Twin Peaks: Fire Walk with Me* (1992), the feature film prequel to *Twin Peaks* showing the last seven days in the life of Laura Palmer, the place of dreams is entered by concentration on a picture hanging on Laura’s bedroom wall. It remains ambiguous as to whether this occurs as Laura falls asleep, or whether it is the means of Laura’s dissociative escape into fantasy that protects against the horror of her repeated experience of incestuous rape. Like the television series, in the prequel investigators also disappear inexplicably into other worlds, demons and familiar spirits emerge from them and walk about wreaking havoc in the human world, and scenes of impossibly intense violation occur in box cars. Almost the entire film is composed of such irrationally hyperbolic scenes, featuring extravagant exaggerations and distortions of costume, characterisation, sound and camera angle. Another murdered woman’s body is found, and once again she is ‘full of secrets’. The film is full of tantalising hints at anamorphic mysteries. It is
structured in such a way as to drive the viewer to struggle towards the pursuit of sense in a manner that must fail, and into an experience of unravelling in sympathy with the breakdown of Laura’s integrity and with the horror of her demise.

Lost Highway

The blurb on the DVD cover for Lost Highway (1997; 2000) refers to a breakdown into schizophrenia, but any interpretation of this film as depicting the process of a psychotic breakdown misses entirely that the world of the protagonists in this film has been broken into by the uncanny, invaded by messages from Žižek’s ‘Other Site’ well before Fred breaks down and kills Renee, after experiencing the nightmare in which her face is transformed into that of the lasciviously mocking Mystery Man. The dream is not the place, in this film, from which the breakdown in rational sense begins, but it is the site at which the breakdown of Fred as integrated subject originates. As with Henry’s dream in Eraserhead, the point of falling asleep is clearly demarcated, but after the nightmare, there is great confusion in the cut as to when waking occurs, and confusion spreads out into the rest of the film.

The film becomes, as Greg Hainge describes it, like a Francis Bacon painting, in that Fred as subject is no longer determined by his context, and the space he inhabits ceases to be a narrative space, or any space at all to which the rules of narrative apply. Evidence for an ekphrastic influence of Bacon’s art on Lynch’s film includes comments made by Lynch during interviews with Chris Rodley in 2005 (Rodley in italics, Lynch not, as per Rodley’s text):

When you started looking at other established painters, who really struck you?

Francis Bacon is, to me, the main guy, the number one kinda hero painter. There’s a lot of painters that I like. But for just the thrill of standing in front of a painting … I saw Bacon’s show in the sixties at the Marlborough Gallery and it was really one of the most powerful things I ever saw in my life.
What excited you most about Bacon? The use of the paint, or the subject matter?

Everything. Normally I only like a couple of years of a painter’s work, but I like everything of Bacon’s. The guy, you know, had the stuff. (Rodley 2005: 16-17)

Lynch unambivalently owns Bacon’s influence, but Hainge takes this further by considering Bacon’s ekphrastic influence on Lynch’s *Lost Highway* from a position informed by Gilles Deleuze’s work on Bacon’s art, describing that art as ‘estranged from the very context in which it is situated, the narrative of the Figure can no longer be determined by its context’ (2005: 140). Further, Hainge writes that: ‘Few would deny that there is in *Lost Highway* a deliberate attempt to confound narrative linearity (indeed the October Films press release stated that Lynch and Gifford “fashioned a script that actually subverts the rules of conventional filmmaking” and more generally, the viewer’s understanding—when this latter term implies a hermeneutic reduction and not an intensive feeling’ (2005: 141).

An alternative but complementary viewing of *Lost Highway*, following the critical paradigms of McGowan (2007a; 2007b) and Žižek (2000), might be that the film presents a fantasy that attempts to circumvent the impossibility of desire through a series of impossible transformations, translations and tessellations of subjectivity that collapses at the extremes of its excess, leaving the viewer overwhelmingly flooded with strange sights and sounds, at the mercy of the ineffable desire of the Other.

*Mulholland Drive*

*Mulholland Drive* (2002) may be the most complex of all of Lynch’s films, and the one least amenable to analytic reduction. Earlier in this essay, reference was made to the narration of the dream in the diner, one of only two narrations of dreams in the entire body of Lynch’s work. Unlike the other instance of the use of this technique, in Sandy Williams’ dream of the robins in springtime, the dream in the diner is enacted as it is told.
The dreamer has brought his friend to the diner to tell him that he had a nightmare the previous night about meeting him there, and that they went outside and found a dishevelled hobo with a blankly inhuman (desubjectivised) expression on his face. They go outside, and the man from the dream appears in his anticipated place. The dreamer collapses in a state of terror.

Many interpenetrating narratives are woven together in this film, but there is no apparent rational connection between the dream in the diner and the other narratives, other than that Diane Selwyn goes to the diner, where she sees the man who dreamed the dream, just after she settles a deal with the hit man who will fail to kill Camilla. Then Diane goes home with the key to the mysterious blue box, falls into a state of horrific hallucinosis, and shoots herself in the mouth. Earlier in the film, Betty and Rita (formerly Camilla) went to Diane Selwyn’s apartment and found her lying dead on her bed. Later, the Cowboy, who seems to be a messenger from Žižek’s ‘Other Site’, has clicked his fingers over the corpse of Diane and told her that the time has come for her to wake up.

This suggests that the film is Diane’s dream, from which, and to which, there is a wakening, and a falling down, but no falling asleep. Each of the lead characters, Betty/Diane and Rita/Camilla have dual identities with Betty/Diane seeming to experience her subjectivity and sense of capacity breaking down as the film progresses, while Rita/Camilla gradually regains hers. Betty’s and Rita’s stories seem to run as though in parallel on either side of a Möbius strip, eventually running together as though on a single surface.

The places of dreaming in this film are manifold, and the distinctions between waking and dreaming, and between fantasy, reality and exposure to the horror of the Real are even more ambiguous than in Lost Highway. The confusion and distress, put into the viewer, are even greater. The film is more compelling in its demand for the viewer’s engagement, and in the compulsion it evokes for multiple viewings.
In Lynch’s most recent feature film, *Inland Empire* (2006), there are no dream sequences, but the film, about making a film that is the remake of a film left unfinished due to the murder of an actress, is constructed as a nightmare in which the unfinished film and the current film, and the lives of the actresses inside and outside of the film, crystallise and disruptively interpenetrate in their cohabitation of the architectural space of the set. Nikki, the lead actress, begins an extramarital affair on set, unaware that her husband is filming her and watching. In the setting of anxiety generated by the transgression, she loses her sense of place and loses herself in the process. She comes to experience her involvement in the film as a nightmare in which she screams loudly that she is dreaming, but the terrible transformations, translations and tessellations, similar to, but even less rational than, those in *Lost Highway*, continue unabated and to the point of a tortured saturation, accompanied by nauseating and deafeningly loud inhuman noises. These are even more macabrely affective than those in *Eraserhead*. It is very difficult to sit through three hours of this, and very few viewers would endure it, other than for the love of Lynch, and the compulsion to be subject to the latest of the messages from that ‘Other Site’, those messages that constitute his dis-eased project. Nikki, who by now has become Susan, one of the street prostitutes in the film, is fleeing another streetwalker, who in the world Nikki inhabited before she became Susan, was the wife of Nikki’s lover, now chasing her, intent on disembowelling her with a screwdriver. Susan/Nikki takes refuge at an exposed card table outside a seedy nightclub, where she begins to spontaneously regurgitate an entire life history of false memories of trauma and abuse to an affectively unresponsive and uninterested bespectacled man, who offers a wonderful parody of the psychoanalytic cliché of the talking cure. This does nothing to protect Susan, and she is stabbed, then dies ignominiously in the street with those around her oblivious to her plight, talking inanely about lost bus routes. Then somehow, in a process of magical transformation, involving cuts to a room in which people in rabbit suits watch television, she is back in the studio, alive and herself again. Next thing she is back in her stately and lavishly decorated home, entirely at ease, dancing a choreographed burlesque with a bevy...
of raucous streetwalkers from Hollywood Boulevard, to the accompaniment of their synchronised finger-clicking, with an irrational cut between this scene and the sound of a saw biting through wood in the background. This film progresses rapidly from the clichéd and familiar world of the Hollywood set, and from the life of a wealthy actress, into a nightmarish dissolution of subjective identity and of orientation to place and time.

As Greg Hainge says in his catalogue essay for the *David Lynch Between Two Worlds* exhibition at the Queensland Gallery of Modern Art, ‘You can search for the explanation for as long as you want: many have tried before, so why wouldn’t you? … Confused? You should be. Or, rather, you will be for as long as you insist that this place, neither here nor there, should conform to something you can recognise as either here or there’ (2015: 33). *Inland Empire* is Lynch at his most postmodern, post-psychoanalytic to the point of parody, dreamlike in its saturation of time-images and irrational cuts. This irrationality in the cut occurs in both the movement-image, between image and image, and the time-image, between image and sound. In this film, Lynch’s art is extreme enough to test the limits of the most Deleuzian imagination, and threatens to outdo Žižek in its thrust for the sublime by way of the ridiculous.

**The Art of the Ridiculous Sublime**

David Lynch is an audiovisual artist, and his threefold use of the trope of dreaming—mimetic presentation of dream sequences within the diegesis, diegetic narration of dreams, the dreamlike cinematic representation of saturation in fantasy as a sequence of irrationally cut Deleuzian time-images—is placed in the service of his art, and of Lynch’s sense of beauty. Žižek, in *The Plague of Fantasies*, tells us that:

The gap that separates beauty from ugliness is the very gap that separates reality from the Real: what constitutes reality is the minimum of idealisation the subject needs in order to sustain the horror of the Real. (1997: 66)
In *The Art of the Ridiculous Sublime—On David Lynch’s Lost Highway* (2000), Žižek argues that Lynch pushes his representations of such idealisation to fantasmatic levels of beatitude, and that he pushes his representations of abjection to impossibly sublime levels of enjoyment, so excessive that they cannot be held within the subjectivity of the viewer. In states of such saturation, subjectivity breaks down, and with it the distinctions between beauty and abjection, good and evil, subjective self and other, are substantially lost and exposed as ridiculous. Ordinary objects are treated in a sublime fashion, and clichés become magically redemptive. Žižek views Lynch’s aesthetic as deadly serious in this regard, and not at all ironic. Citing scenes from *Fire Walk With Me*, *Lost Highway* and *Blue Velvet*, Žižek writes:

… in a paradigmatically postmodern way, these scenes are simultaneously comical, provoking laughter; unbearably naïve; and yet to be taken thoroughly “seriously.” Their “Seriousness” does not signal a deeper spiritual level underlying superficial clichés, but rather a crazy assertion of the redemptive value of naïve clichés as such. This essay is an attempt to unravel the enigma of this coincidence of opposites, which is, in a way, the enigma of “postmodernity” itself. (2000: 3)

The novel as ekphrastic response to David Lynch’s place of dreams

Many scenes in my novel *In Dreams* are written similarly—including what occurs when Jade wakes from the rape by the band members, Nick’s preparation for the electroencephalograph, Hoa Bui’s behaviour in the strip club, the brutal murders and the dream sequences—in such a way that this quote from Žižek might fit them just as well as it fits so many scenes in Lynch’s cinema and television work.

The place of dreams in the cinematic work of David Lynch is the set in which such excesses are created, and the sets in which the dreams are placed are characterised by saturations of the *mise-en-scene*—the zig-zag patterned black-and-white floor of the Red Room, the red velvet curtains, the black armchairs and the white Grecian statues, with and without arms. The place of dreams in Lynch’s cinema also depends on saturations of soundtrack, and on excesses of cinematography, casting and choreography.
In the process of writing a novel influenced by exposure to Lynch’s cinema and television work, I was subject to limitations and possibilities not applicable in cinema. Saturations of sound, visual imagery of setting, depiction of characters and their movements all had to be conjured in text, rather than being presented directly to a viewer, as they would be if the story were presented in film medium.

While the text medium is thus more dependent on the imagination of the reader, with the possibility of a greater variety of readings of a novel than there might be of viewings of a film, the place of dreams presented in my text medium is also necessarily one of less forced cognitive disruption than is that in Lynch’s cinema. In the place of dreams in Lynch’s film and television work, the viewer is immersed in an extraordinary experience of ordinary objects and sounds put together in such a way that they serve to break down the capacity for sensible subjectivisation, and generate a sense of somatic disease, of nausea, and even physical pain.

Although there are differences in medium and hence in intensity and degree of forced inception, in Lynch’s place of dreams, and in that created in my novel, as the saturation in fantasy breaks down, sensibility breaks down. The real trauma of the collapse of subjectivity may be manifestly experienced as an entrance to the place from which the Other might look on us and speak in a voice so utterly inhuman, inaudible and inarticulate that the lie implicit in every truth spoken by a human tongue is exposed, and differentiations are confused and obliterated as they run together into an impersonal transcendental whole.
CHAPTER 3:

VIOLENCE AGAINST CIVILITY AND THE DESTRUCTION OF FANTASY: THE WANING OF THE OEDIPUS COMPLEX IN *IN DREAMS* AND *BLUE VELVET*

Introduction to violence against civility

In the previous chapter I reviewed the place of dreams in David Lynch’s film and television work, referring to ways in which Lynch’s work influenced the process of writing my novel *In Dreams*. I also commented on differences between the way that Lynch is able to use dreaming as trope in his cinema and the way in which I use it in the novel. Some of these differences arise because of the differences, both in possibilities and in limitations, between cinema and textual fiction.

Chapter 4 strives towards a more detailed understanding of the cultural context and function of one of David Lynch’s films, *Blue Velvet*, the influence that film has had on the creation of my novel and the impact that each might have, respectively, on viewers and readers. In so doing, it contrasts and compares *Blue Velvet* with *In Dreams* as examples of violence against civility and the destruction of fantasy, expanding on my paper ‘Violence against civility and the destruction of fantasy: The waning of the Oedipus complex in David Lynch’s *Blue Velvet*’ (2009).

Its discourse follows from Michel Chion’s (2006) critique of the oneiric metaphor in David Lynch’s *Blue Velvet* (1986) and uses it as a base from which to compare and contrast the place and function of dreams and dreaming in that film with those in my (2015) novel manuscript. In *Blue Velvet*, the diegetic function of the dream is one that upholds civility. The dream also serves as a locus for the mimetic strategies that Lynch employs in the service of the violent destruction of the fantasies that emanate from such
civility. I argue that Garrick Willis’ premonitory dreams, while giving the dreamer license to escape from civility into fantasy, contain an imperative to act to uphold civility, while foreshadowing the ultimate failure of such efforts and the necessity that violent destruction will prevail as a consequence of that failure.

The dreams in my novel *In Dreams* are the locus of such conflict and serve a pivotal function, as civility in the novel waxes in the fantasies and actions of Garrick Willis and wanes with the brutal development of the character and actions of Willis’ nemesis, Nick Myshkin. I propose that Lynch’s use of such narrative and mimetic devices generates confusion in his critics, and that similar confusion regarding authorial intention is likely to be generated in the reading of my novel *Blue Velvet*’s construction as dream provides a field, and the narration and demonstration of dreams in *Blue Velvet* serve as foci, for a transgenerational struggle in which civilisation is at risk.

By contrast, *In Dreams* locates this struggle within an unconscious sibling rivalry, a twinship, between Willis and Myshkin as protagonist and antagonist, one in which, in further contrast with that between Myshkin and Rogozhin in Dostoyevsky’s *The Idiot*, civility ultimately fails in the absence of any redemptive action on the part of the antagonist. The narratives of *Blue Velvet* (Jeffrey Beaumont and Frank Booth) and *In Dreams* (Garrick Willis and Nick Myshkin) each depend upon contrasts of opposite characters in violent collision, in opposition to civility.

Thomas Ogden’s (2006) reinterpretation of Hans Loewald’s (1980) watershed paper ‘The waning of the Oedipus complex’ is applied to the elucidation of this hypothesis, to which end Alessia Ricciardi’s (2003) presentation of Pier Paolo Pasolini’s (2005) polyvalent spectropoetics is also brought to bear. The polyvalence of symbolic parricide in *Blue Velvet*, fratricide and matricide in *In Dreams*, and the dis-ease resulting from such murder, are considered with respect to the co-existence of nostalgic traditionalism and innovation achieved through destructive transformation in Lynch’s *Blue Velvet* and my *In Dreams*. 
Violence, civility, polyvalence and mourning

In *The Universal Exception*, Slavoj Žižek defines civility as ‘rules we are expected to obey without being ordered to do so’ (2007b: vii). The practice of civility involves ‘feigning that I want to do what the other asks me to do, so that my compliance with the other’s demand does not exert pressure on him or her’ (2007b: xi). Civility mandates the keeping up of appearances, a practice opposed to that of the child, in Hans Christian Anderson’s *The Emperor’s New Suit* (1887), who cries out that the Emperor is naked. The keepers of civility are those who silence such a child in the interests of the maintenance of such a sense, a civil sense, of the sincerity and splendour of the ruler as the incarnation of community. David Lynch’s stance on violence, and mine in *In Dreams*, involve polyvalent expressions of mourning. The stance of each work is consistent with that of Žižek in *Violence*. Žižek identifies ‘a violence that sustains our very efforts to fight violence and promote tolerance’ (2008: 1).

Various authors have written about the politics of Lynch’s fantasmatically nostalgic constructions and the violence of their destruction in *Blue Velvet*. I will compare and contrast these viewpoints while considering the roles of nostalgia and the processes of its violent destruction in my novel *In Dreams*. I will argue for the necessity of a polyvalent viewing of Lynch’s film, and a polyvalent reading of my novel. I propose that the parricide Lynch portrays in *Blue Velvet*, and the sexual murder, matricide, fratricide and betrayal of innocence of which *In Dreams* tells, constitute necessary violence against civility. *Blue Velvet* is not merely a shocking morality tale serving conservative ideological ends. Nor is *In Dreams* merely a desecration of Dostoyevsky’s conflicted tale of passionate killing and its redemptive mourning in *The Idiot*. Carrying the case for such a viewing of *Blue Velvet*, such a reading of *In Dreams* will depend on the susceptibility of the reader of this exegesis to its violence and the dis-ease that violence generates, opening the possibility of mourning that is less nostalgic.

I am encouraged by Alessia Ricciardi’s view that ‘one of the most important challenges that lies ahead of psychoanalysis is to find a way to give voice to a mournful
ethical and political imagination that transcends the ethics of nostalgia’ (2003: 68). Application of such a stance to understanding Lynch’s films and their influence on the process of writing my novel might ‘fulfil a political and critical function, encompassing not only the horizon of the past, but that of the future, critically dwelling in a condition of cultural belatedness’ (2003: 141). Such work necessitates the adoption of a polyvalent stance with respect to cinematic movement-image, sound-image and time-image (Deleuze 1986; 1989), and also to text, as repositories of memory and keepers of tradition.

Ricciardi (2003) attributes such a stance to Pier Paolo Pasolini, whose cinematic proclamations of heresy culminated in the violence of Salo (1975) and in his own brutal murder. Ben Lawton, in his preface to Heretical Empiricism, writes of Pasolini’s sadomasochistic attack against all forms of political correctness—those hegemonic abominations which are most nefarious when they purport to defend our most cherished hopes, dreams and aspirations. (Lawton 2005: viii)

Salo mourns the death of the possibility of carnal pleasure. The film has been widely misunderstood and is open to misinterpretation as nostalgic mourning of the passing of Fascism. It is with this particular problem in mind that I raise the spectre of Pasolini in the context of a critical response to Blue Velvet and Lynch’s influence on my novel In Dreams.

Ricciardi examines Pasolini’s work from a viewpoint she constructs as ‘spectropoetics of film’ (2003: 141). Ricciardi’s spectropoetics derives from the Friulian director’s statement of cinema as

naturally poetic … a human face photographed is poetic because it is dreamlike, because it is close to dreams, because a film sequence is a sequence of memory or a dream. (qtd in Ricciardi 2003: 142)

Pasolini continues:

things in themselves are profoundly poetic: … a human face photographed is poetic because the physical is poetic in itself, because it is an apparition, because it is full of mystery, because it is full of ambiguity, because it is full of polyvalent meaning. (142)
**Polyvalent politics**

Ricciardi cautions that psychoanalysis has often colluded with conservative political and cultural movements. This may be the cost of psychoanalysts’ enactments of fantasies of respectable civility and cultural authority. Similar criticisms have been levelled at Lynch—that he is not so much a cultural innovator as manipulator of nostalgia in the interest of support for the kitsch Republican visions of Ronald Reagan.

While investigating the place of dreams in the cinematic work of David Lynch, I have found considerable confusion prevailing in the critical literature regarding the politics of Lynch’s project. Is Lynch a keeper of civility, or is he its incendiary opponent? Is Lynch’s work the perpetration of serial assaults on such civility? And how has intensive viewing of Lynch’s cinema influenced the politics of my novel? What of the failure of reparative efforts, the apparent reign of graphic violence, the perversions and the lack of redemptive justice in *In Dreams*?

In *Pervert in the Pulpit*, Jeff Johnson (2004) argues that Lynch is the Manichean preacher and purveyor of a renewal of puritanism. According to Johnson, the wild ride on which Lynch takes us is a pilgrim’s progress, in the course of which we learn that, however great our scopophilic pleasure in the Lynchian extravagances of sex and death, we should follow the advice given to Adam, the director in *Mulholland Drive*. We must fall into line with Ronald Reagan, accepting with as much grace as we can muster that it is not for us to question our masters, those who annunciate the will of the Other. Johnson’s judgement of Lynch’s moral stance is certainly to cast him as a keeper of civility, and as a sinister conservative.

By contrast with Johnson’s view, Todd Mc Gowan, in *The Impossible David Lynch* (2007a), argues counter-intuitively that Lynch, by saturating the viewer in fantasy, commits a radicalising violence against the civil conventions of Hollywood. I wrote such violence into *In Dreams*, infused with similar dis-ease to that which *Blue Velvet*’s
Dorothy Vallens accuses Jeffrey Beaumont of putting into her, and that resultant from vicarious traumatisation of the kind the angel Moroni might experience, watching over contemporary Brisbane as it passes away, its vessels pumping with the madness of crystal methamphetamine. In that, my cry comes from a similar place to the one I hear from Bret Easton Ellis when I read *American Psycho* (1991), a scream of similar intent to that McGowan writes into his viewing of Lynch’s violence against civility.

I propose that, contrary to Barthes’ (1967) suggestion that the author is dead, readers of *In Dreams* will be infused with my dis-ease, but will each read it differently. They will read into it a multiplicity of intentions, each projected out of their own experience. Given the greater freedom of imagination that text medium facilitates for readers, the range of these readings may be even wider than the range of viewings that we read in the critics of Lynch. A new novel might be find at each reading, in the same way that I discover a different film each time I watch *Eraserhead*, *Blue Velvet*, or *Mulholland Drive*. Under Lynch’s influence, I have endeavoured to implant anamorphoses, to write mysteries of which there are many traces, but no solutions.

Nicholas Rombes critiques the ‘post-punk poetics’ (2005: 61) of *Blue Velvet*, which he considers to be radically incendiary in nature. Rombes views the film as ‘a subversive exposé of a kind of sham past, an exposé whose cultural logic is similar to “Nick at Night” or other forms of ironic deconstruction’ (2005: 66). I am inclined, by contrast, to view the film as mourning the passing of a more naïve, but more polite America, one loved and highly valued by Lynch, even as he writes its destruction in the narrative and in the process of development of his Jeffrey Beaumont. I don’t consider Lynch to be ironically subversive in this regard, any more than I consider Dostoyevsky to have been in his dual mourning and celebration of the inseparable twinship of Russian saintliness and dissolute passion in *The Idiot*, or my own mourning of what passes away in the process of Jade’s downfall, when she moves away from the gentle foolish decency of Garrick Willis into the swathe of the violent psychopathy of Nick Myshkin in my novel *In Dreams*. Lynch doesn’t, nor does Dostoyevsky, and neither do I, offer this kind of mourning of the
collapse of simple civil notions of goodness and virtue in a way that’s intended to be ironic. Nonetheless, such offerings may well be judged incendiary.

Weighing up the contradictory critical positions regarding Lynch’s work, I am drawn to the view that his art is ambivalently of the sustenance of civility, but also of its destruction. McGown (2007b) seems to be coming around to such a view when he refers to Lynch’s work as arising in a place of collision of fantasy and desire. Like Blake puzzling over the antics of Ezekiel, I find myself wondering of Lynch, ‘why he eat dung & lay so long on his right & left side’ (1994: 190). Why does Lynch so staunchly lie to the right in his sustenance of civility, then turn to the left in the most extreme acts of violence against it? He juxtaposes one stance against another, so that these conflicting ideologies appear to meet, with incendiary consequences.

**Oedipus complex and transgenerational struggle in *Blue Velvet***

Nowhere in Lynch’s project do I find this to be more so than in *Blue Velvet*, especially in that film of transgenerational struggle, and in his exploitation of the oneiric metaphor. For that reason I have chosen *Blue Velvet* as the focus of a more detailed discussion of the influence of Lynch’s place of dreams on the process of writing my novel *In Dreams*, with its own place of dreams and its collisions of violence and civility in a polarised sibling rivalry, rather than in transgenerational Oedipal struggle.

Michel Chion (2006) writes of Lynch’s films as though they were dreams, but poses the question ‘whose dream am I in?’ (158). Of *Blue Velvet*, he writes: ‘The film is a dream, but a structured one’ (85). Jeffrey Beaumont is called back from college when his father collapses on the front lawn of the family home in sleepy Lumberton. I read this town as metaphor for civility, and Tom Beaumont, garden hose in hand, as its benign keeper.

As McGowan reminds us, ‘immediately after Tom Beaumont’s collapse, the tone of the film undergoes a dramatic change’ (2007a: 95). Lynch signals this by offering his
extreme close-up view of the lawn, revealing its underside teeming with brutal vitality. From this point on, the film could be understood to be Jeffrey’s fantasy, dreamed and conjured up to fill the hole that Tom’s fall punches through the wall separating the civil world from its wild and violently desirous underside.

After visiting his stricken father at the hospital, Jeffrey finds a severed human ear lying in a field. Jeffrey initiates his own investigation of the crime, in the process becoming dually enamoured with Sandy Williams, the daughter of a real detective, and with Dorothy Vallens, a nightclub singer whom he accurately intuits to be linked with the criminals. In the absence of paternal restraint, Jeffrey’s curiosity drives him to break into Dorothy’s apartment where he hides in the closet, fascinated by the strange and terrifying scene he witnesses as he peers out through the slats in the door. He sees Frank Booth engaging in a violent stylised simulation of intercourse with Dorothy, whose husband’s ear it is that Frank has severed. The grunting, snarling Frank screams ‘Don’t look at me!’ and punctuates a series of bizarre movements with exclamations that ‘Daddy’s coming home!’ and ‘Baby wants to fuck!’ When Frank has gone, Jeffrey in his hiding place is discovered by Dorothy and forced into further enactment of sadomasochistic fantasies. In the process, he falls for her, but finds himself bewildered and unable to meet her desire.

The primal scene

Chion (2006) suggests that this primal scene is the kind of fantasy of parental intercourse that a child might elaborate on the basis of what might be overheard by an ear pressed against the distorting filter of an intervening bedroom wall. It is imbued with all the ambiguity of Freud’s primal scene fantasy, a concept derived in the process of his interpretation of his patient Sergei Pankeiev’s wolf dream. The patient recounted this dream from early childhood:

“Suddenly the window opened of its own accord, and I was terrified to see that some white wolves were sitting on the big walnut tree in front of the window. There were six or seven of them. The wolves were quite white, and looked more like foxes or sheep-dogs, for they had big tails like foxes and
they had their ears pricked like dogs when they pay attention to something. In
great terror, evidently of being eaten up by the wolves, I screamed …” (Freud
1990: 259)

This dream presented challenges to Freud’s thinking. It was the question of historicity that
was spotlighted by the Wolf Man’s dream. Freud’s initial hypothesis was that Pankeiev,
at a much earlier age, had witnessed and interrupted a ‘primal scene’ of doggy-style
parental intercourse. Freud proposed that the dream was a fantastic reconstruction of these
events, in which the little boy’s fascinated stare had locked with that of an angry, erect
father staring back at him. Freud later abandons this idea to postulate that the dream may
be entirely fantasy, arising out of something phylogenetically constitutional, activated by
the boy’s longing for the attention of a virile father from whom he had been separated.
This longing was fulfilled in the dream in a manner that Pankeiev as a four-year-old boy
found overwhelmingly terrifying. Freud oscillated between these possibilities, in the
process developing the concept of the primal scene fantasy that holds its power and its
position of psychic centrality by means of this very ambiguity with respect to historicity.

The primal scene, the castration complex with its implicit terror of absence and lack,
and the negative Oedipus complex are all to be found represented in this dream by those
imaginative enough to be susceptible to Freud’s talent for the kind of biographical
narration that Lawrence Johnson (2001), in his discussion of Freud’s relationship with
Pankeiev, has described as ‘improvisation’. Sam Ishii-Gonzales (2004) has written of the
link between representations of the primal scene in Freud’s case history of the Wolf Man
and those in Lynch’s Blue Velvet. Further improvisation is required to conceive of a
viewpoint from which the trace of such primal scenes might be followed in the film. The
place in the diegetic construction of Lynch’s film where suspension of disbelief in such
things is possible is the place of dreams. In that place, the eye of the viewer may meet a
gaze in the film that awakens an awareness of what is torn and what is lost in the process
of coming into being.

The narrative of In Dreams differs from that of Blue Velvet. In Dreams infers an
incestuous matricide, via a thread of anamorphic mysteries for which a black wig and a
red tartan miniskirt serve as traces. In *Blue Velvet*, the primal scene is overt by Lynch’s Frank Booth and Dorothy Vallens, and witnessed by Jeffrey Beaumont. The violation is later avenged by Jeffrey’s execution of Frank, but it is a matricide, unavenged, that is overted in my novel.

**Loci of traumatic engagement**

The common link between Lynch’s place of dreams and that of my novel is that they are loci of traumatic engagements, loss and mourning; places of alternation between intense involvement in fantasy and its dispassionate obliteration. They are places where viewer and reader are exposed to the radically disorientating representations of gaps between binary opposites that become apparent when invested and disinvested positions explode as they collide.

Lynch’s film project is presented as one in which intergenerational succession comes as a result of incendiary encounters. Lynch’s story is a dream that arises when the father and the civil restraint he represents is weakened. My novel presents destructive sibling rivalry and matricide arising in a situation in which civil restraint is too weak to hold back matricidal violence. Vengeance for the primal scene is turned against the mother, against the eroticised and objectified female body. Cultural innovation in Lynch’s film is born of the traumatic rupture and reconstitution of extant structures and forms, at the expense of subjective fragmentation, decentring and destabilisation. My novel leaves the reader with a situation of such traumatic rupture without any construction of cultural innovation, leaves it more to the reader’s imagination to construct what comes after such destruction.

When Lynch depicts dreams in his films, as I do in my novel, they are usually represented as the consequence of trauma, and as harbingers of its imminent and relentlessly repetitious catastrophic irruption. Lynch’s dream sequences, while sporadically represented, often function pivotally in his films, acting as disorienting
catalysts that disrupt the subjectivity of the viewer, cognitively and affectively. In this regard they serve as a special example of Lynch’s techniques of the evocation of shifts in visual object and focus, away from the personal subject, towards the impersonal environmental realities, both animate and inanimate, in such a way that the viewer’s sense of personal subjectivity is lost. Rather than being experienced as a singular and personal event, such loss is experienced as though it were originary. This loss has a destructive effect on the fantasies into which Lynch seduces the viewer’s emotional investment, fantasies that serve to shore up illusions of unified personal subjectivity. The demolition of these fantasies and their replacement with the painful dissonance associated with such loss is aided by Lynch’s use of affective juxtaposition of image and soundtrack as described by Chion (2006) as evoking in the spectator a singular kind of viewing. Žižek has described this kind of viewing as ‘looking awry’ (1991:11), as though looking into the wake of the departure of the ephemeral object of desire.

**Jeffrey’s dream**

Within Lynch’s film, there are two dreams depicted—Sandy’s, diegetically drawing on the metaphor of nesting robins as primal fantasy, and Jeffrey’s, mimetically as a series of fragmentary images, spoken words and terrible sounds, shown to the viewer from the viewpoint of the dreamer as the dream is dreamed. Jeffrey’s dream arises as the consequence of trauma, after he becomes a participant observer in the sadomasochistic burlesque of Lynch’s primal scene fantasy.

After Jeffrey leaves Dorothy’s apartment, descending several flights of an external fire escape in chiaroscuro lighting, he steps out of the shadow, looks up towards the camera, and is starkly flooded by light as the soundtrack builds to a loud monotonic dissonance. The scene segues to a distorted image of the face of Jeffrey’s stricken father. The father groans something unintelligible, as though straining to communicate some vital piece of knowledge, something that causes the ear to strain after it lest it should be forever lost. His face dissolves into an image of Frank Booth in profile, opening his
mouth, showing his teeth, with the soundtrack providing a roaring as though coming from a wild beast, but metallically distorted in timbre. The scene flashes into an extreme close-up of a candle-flame, with the roaring continuing—now more alien and inanimate. The flame goes out. The words ‘It’s dark’ are spoken. A partial representation of Dorothy’s face in extreme close-up appears, saying ‘Hit me!’ Frank’s angry face appears again. The sound of a fist meeting a face accompanies Dorothy’s scream as the scene cuts to Jeffrey waking from the dream in his bedroom at home. The camera’s view tracks from Jeffrey’s troubled face to a light fitting on the wall, as Jeffrey (huskily) makes the utterance ‘Man, oh man!’

The waking from the dream is unambiguous, but the viewer is left afterwards to suffer considerable ambiguity with respect to how much of that which has gone before has been dream. After the dream, Jeffrey takes Sandy for a drive and tells her what he has learned of the strange world of Dorothy and Frank, but not of his sexual adventure. He emphasises the trouble that Frank represents. He offers her the anguished questions: ‘Why are there people like Frank? Why is there so much trouble in the world?’

Sandy’s dream

Sandy responds, as the extradiegetic organ music wells into a romantic anthem, by telling him of her optimistic dream of the robins returning in the Spring, bringing with them hope and love. Sandy’s effort to wipe away Jeffrey’s anguish, with such a reparative assault on the tear in Jeffrey’s sense of a benign reality, takes civility beyond the cliché and on to its epitome. This tactic of Lynch is identified by McGowan (2007b) as a radicalising saturation in fantasy. Žižek (2000) calls it The Art of the Ridiculous Sublime.

The candy-coloured clown
In spite of his knowledge of Sandy’s hopes, Jeffrey, driven by desires that drag him away from cloying stultification, visits Dorothy at her apartment once again. Just as he is leaving, Frank arrives with an entourage of sycophantic henchmen. They take Jeffrey away to Ben’s house, a place of collision of fantasy and desire, of violence and civility. Ben—polite, effeminate, and suavely theatrical—is the captor of Dorothy’s husband, and the caretaker of Dorothy’s son. It is in Ben’s place that mortality is realised.

Here, Lynch imposes on the viewer what Freud shows us of Pankeiev’s drawing and what he tells us of the wolf dream from which it was derived. He makes us into vicariously traumatised witnesses. In ‘Beyond the pleasure principle’, Freud (1920) seems himself to have become such a witness as he describes his grandson’s efforts to come to terms with his mother’s death by means of a fort-da game with a cotton-reel on a string pulled back and forth behind a curtain. At Ben’s, Lynch has the henchman Raymond violently demonstrate the principles of this game when, holding Jeffrey at knifepoint then flicking the switch to retract his blade, he says: ‘Here today, gone tomorrow!’

After Ben turns on the stereo, picks up a stage light to use as mock microphone, and lip-synchs Roy Orbison’s beautiful lullaby In Dreams (2008), the viewer is left with a new and terrible apprehension of this ‘candy-coloured clown they call the Sandman’, and of what might be done when he visits the boy’s room every night, ‘just to sprinkle stardust and to whisper: “Go to sleep! Everything will be all right.”’ With this effect achieved, Lynch then has Frank and the henchmen leave Ben’s to take Jeffrey on a wild ride into the countryside. When they arrive at their destination, Frank ensures that Jeffrey’s neighbourly presumptuousness with Dorothy is punished with a brutally dramatised beating, one that she is forced to witness. As Roy Orbison’s song blares loudly from the car’s sound system, Frank warns Jeffrey of the love letter that he intends to send straight to his heart and announces that they (Jeffrey and Frank) will ‘be together forever in dreams’.

Lynch spotlights the civility violated in this oedipal theatre by soundtracking Jeffrey’s intimidation, feminisation and brutal beating with Roy Orbison’s soothing
lullaby. Frank punches the lyrics home to Jeffrey, brutally eroticising the union such violence brings, covering his lips with candy-coloured kisses before putting out his lights. Lynch seduces and punishes his viewers, saturating us with the sweet civility of his cinematic dream, then brutally blowing up the fantasy that we’ve taken in. Lynch leaves us irrevocably transmuted by our injuries, haunted by spectres of childlike innocence and lost integrity.

**The reckoning**

In the only scene in all his work that Lynch acknowledges as inspired by an actual dream (Rodley 2005), when Frank and Jeffrey confront each other again in Dorothy’s apartment, it is Jeffrey who raises a gun through the slats of the closet. When Jeffrey pulls the trigger, it is Frank who falls down. When we look into the eyes of Frank staring Jeffrey down, we find the eye of psychoanalysis staring right back as we take aim.

If we return to Sandy’s dream of the robins nesting in springtime, the place of this dream within the diegesis may be seen to be a polyvalent one, and much more than that of the artifice of the restoration of surface. The expense of such nesting—of the life that it takes away, and of the new life that it brings—is now obvious. Lynch also shows us that he is aware that civility can bear sinister fruit, and that civilisation may not always be the worthy end served by the sacrifice of desire. When Dorothy intrudes naked on the Beaumont lawn, Jeffrey’s choice of Sandy, with her cloying promise of maternal propriety, over Dorothy’s apparently darker sensuality, does not come soon enough to avoid the rupture of Sandy’s civility. Sandy slaps Jeffrey’s face in an act of violence against her own civility; her slap sounds just like that of Frank’s fist against Jeffrey’s face, or the polyvalent smack of Jeffrey’s hand striking Dorothy. When Dorothy bursts out of Jeffrey’s fantasy and destructively into Sandy’s, she ensures that Sandy will never quite be able to enjoy Jeffrey in accordance with the cliché of her fantasy. Instead, Sandy’s robins will nest mechanically, and the naive perfection of her love will be torn, so
that she snaps and tears at Jeffrey and clutches him like the writhing bug that he’s become, tightly held between the jaws that grind her beak.

Dorothy points to Jeffrey and announces to Sandy: ‘He put his disease in me!’ But it is her dis-ease that she puts into all who encounter her in this film. Lynch has cast Isabella Rosellini as whore-mother, in the process drawing as much flak from feminists of the time as Estela Welldon drew praise for *Mother, Madonna, Whore* (1988). In doing so, Lynch has put his dis-ease into Rossellini. Through the medium of her acting and that of Denis Hopper, Lynch puts it into his viewers, so that we shudder with excitement at the primal scene, the witnessing of which is the origin of our desirous discontent, of Lynch’s dis-ease in us.

In this film, Dorothy is never slapped publicly, and so we are left to fear for how she will fare, with Jeffrey so tightly in Sandy’s hold, and Frank soon to be struck down by Jeffrey’s hand. Now that Dorothy has provoked Sandy to give Jeffrey the slap that he has longed for, the kind of passionate response that he fails to imagine that his wooden mother could even conceive of, Jeffrey has no further need of Dorothy. By locating the disease in Dorothy, and allowing her to be taken away on a gurney, Lynch causes the civility of appearances to be restored. Now that Dorothy has served her vitalising function, her allure diminishes, and she is allowed to fade. Jeffrey has taken Frank’s aggression into himself, and in the wake of the execution, Jeffrey and Frank remain ‘together, forever, in dreams’. Now it is Sandy and Jeffrey who must carry the dis-ease inside them, and bear whatever fruit will come of it.

Lynch leaves the viewer to speculate about what Dorothy now will do for kicks, and what it is that Sandy and Jeffrey have become. This stands against Jeff Johnson’s reduction of Lynch to a Puritan crusader for the Right, and of *Blue Velvet* to a nostalgically simple morality tale.
A bleaker nightmare

In my novel, though, there is much less resolution, with Nick Myshkin left free to continue his destructive activities, after slaughtering Jade, Hoa Bui and his own mother, while the innocent Garrick Willis bears the blame. The reader is left without any grounds for hope of redemption of this situation through Nick Myshkin being brought to justice. If redemption or retribution are ever to occur, they are yet to be written, in another story. In this, my novel contrasts with Dostoyevsky’s *The Idiot*, upon which it draws structurally, leaving the reader with much more dis-ease to process than does the work of the nineteenth-century (but arguably modernist) Russian novelist. The place of dreams in my novel leaves its reader bearing also even more dis-ease, and even less sense of moral purpose, than does David Lynch’s *Blue Velvet* as place of dreams. Garrick Willis, left in custody, bearing the blame, is a protector who has failed through naivety, a dreamer who has failed to heed and keep the dream, one who has fallen too far, having done too little, too late. If *In Dreams* is a dream, it is a far bleaker nightmare than *Blue Velvet*.

The waning of the Oedipus complex in *Blue Velvet*

Chion (2006) has invoked the oneiric metaphor in his analysis of *Blue Velvet*, with his proposition that the dream begins as Jeffrey Beaumont’s response to his father Tom’s collapse. I side with McGowan (2007b) in reading Chion as meaning that the film is Lynch’s fantasy of what might arise in the mind of a young man in danger of losing his father. Lynch writes Jeffrey into a fantasy that takes him across the threshold into adulthood, one in which his gentle ailing father is replaced by the fiercely vital Frank Booth, whose presence is enough to guarantee disruption of civility. Lynch’s conjuring of Dorothy as sensual whore-mother, enflamed and imbued with life by Frank’s exuberant violence, contrasts with the desiccated acquiescence of Jeffrey’s mother. Lynch gives Frank and Dorothy to Jeffrey as substitute parents who rise up in his time of need for a father who can be a force to reckon with, and for a mother sensual enough to spark the desire required to keep the rivalry alive. Frank and Dorothy serve their purpose. Then
they are dispensed with, but something of them lives on inside Jeffrey and Sandy, who have been changed by the encounter. Lynch leaves the future open, open to what fruit their seed will bring.

Thomas Ogden (2006) reads Hans Loewald’s paper ‘The Waning of the Oedipus Complex’ (1980) as crucial in the decline of structuralist American ego psychology, opening the way to developments in psychoanalysis that more adequately addressed the fragmentation and deficit states manifested by patients presenting in the late 1970s. Loewald’s paper was written in response to Freud’s (1924) similarly titled piece. Ogden argues that the decline of the Oedipus complex is an active process, and that symbolic parricide is a necessity of generational succession, a mandatory rite of passage into adulthood. While emphasising the necessity of parricide, Loewald casts the oedipal battle as one in which ‘opponents are required’ (Loewald 1980: 389). Ogden argues that ‘the felt presence of parental authority makes it possible for the child to safely murder his parents psychically (a fantasy that need not be repressed). Oedipal parricide does not require repression because it is ultimately a loving act’ (Ogden 2006: 656) that transforms the assailant by means of what Loewald describes as ‘a passionate appropriation of what is experienced as loveable and admirable in parents’ (389). Neither Loewald nor Ogden view the Oedipus complex as a stage to be negotiated, or a phase that gradually wanes or passes away, but as a source of continuous regeneration.

Loewald argued that Americans (after Freud’s 1929 thesis in ‘Civilisation and its Discontents’) had become excessively civilised. Youth culture, at the time that Loewald was writing (1980), was becoming increasingly concerned with protest in the form of violence against civility. *Blue Velvet* was released just a few years after Loewald’s paper and its narrative and aesthetics (see Rombes’ [2005] ‘Post-Punk Poetics’) are consistent with Loewald’s argument for the necessity that the children should rise up and kill their parents, at least symbolically, taking back into themselves the fragmentation and destitution resulting from this violence, but enabling a process of continuous restructuring of decentred and destabilised subjectivities, those in which the rent is never entirely healed, and thence the impetus for creativity remains, radiating from the point where,
repeatedly and always, integration fails. *Blue Velvet* offers a parricide consistent with this position of Loewald’s, filmed out of the same cultural time as that in which Loewald writes.

**Destruction of the Oedipus complex in *In Dreams***

My novel *In Dreams* offers another sort of parricide (matricide), the ignominious demise of a failed parent and a failed and seemingly completely castrated hero, with its murderous antihero on the loose, free to kill again. So the wound delivered by *In Dreams* is even more raggedly rent, more difficult to heal, and even more evidently casting shockwaves of dis-ease from its dream as locus of the failure of integration. Might *In Dreams* be a narrative in which the Oedipus complex has been so severely assaulted that it has been completely and irretrievably destroyed? Whether or not this leaves me as author, or my potential readers, with a greater impetus for creativity (even for a sequel) remains an open question. Leaving a killer such as Nick Myshkin on the loose motivates me as author to dream another story, but not necessarily one that will offer such closure and reassuringly redemptive justice as I imagine a reader might long for.

In contrast to Freud’s Oedipus complex, which is so centrally dependent upon castration anxieties, Loewald’s oedipal narrative is one of the transgenerational containment of loving and hating as a creative process, with emphasis on appropriation, challenge, relinquishment and mourning. In this process, Ogden argues, the Oedipus complex must not merely be repressed or superseded, but actually demolished and destroyed, in a way that significant psychic experiences never actually can be, so it continues to generate a tension ‘not unlike the experience of living with unresolved … oedipal conflict. It unsettles everything it touches in a vitalizing way’ (2006: 665). To demonstrate this tension and its creative consequences, Loewald turns to the ancestors, invoking Shakespeare in a psychoanalyst’s self-conscious appeal to cultural authority. Citing Ariel’s speech in the *Tempest*, Loewald tells us that ‘nothing fades, “but doth suffer a sea-change into something rich and strange”’ (1980: 394).
Broken fathers in *Blue Velvet*

Lynch demonstrates to us the terrible nature of the choices that confront Jeffrey and the transformation in the way he negotiates them, as well as the originary nature of the loss he suffers and the mourning he awakens when he kills off Frank, the mourning for a father fallen down. When the prevalence of benign authority is disrupted by Tom Beaumont’s collapse, an opportunity opens for Jeffrey to step outside the safety provided by the vitality that his father previously possessed. Jeffrey is egged on by the wooden deference the women of his household show him in the wake of Tom’s invalidation, but this places him in a rather frightening position. He finds himself at a loss and begins searching, knowing not what for. It is from this void, in this state of deficit, that a primal couple, Frank Booth and Dorothy Vallens rise up, respectively, as a worthy opponent and as a prize for which to challenge. Both are intensely passionate, unlike his real parents, but neither is safe or enduringly strong. Taking them on, Jeffrey must face his own frailty, and be left with the knowledge of theirs in him.

Jeffrey’s seduction and the subsequent parricide are experienced ambivalently, and cast by Lynch as necessary violence, both in the cause of, and against, civility. When Frank Booth falls down, Tom Beaumont rises again from his sick bed. Jeffrey is no longer a child, but a man who has been changed. The father has not died, and the son has not taken the mother in his place. The Oedipus complex, although it has been smashed in fantasy, is not actually destroyed. It remains in Lynch’s mind and that of his viewer as a source of civility and order, but also as a structure of disquiet, disorder, or dis-ease, from whence a necessary violence is perpetually brewing.

**Irretrievable destruction in *In Dreams***?

*In Dreams* protagonist Garrick Willis is a weaker, or a more thoroughly defeated, character than Lynch’s Jeffrey Beaumont. Like Dostoyevsky’s Prince Myshkin, he is a
naïve lover, one who chooses to his own detriment to overlook or not to see the faults in others, nor to apprehend dangers, let alone intervene, until it is too late. It is his anguished rejection of Jade, on Father’s Day, when she denigrates his potential as a father for her child, that accelerates the trajectory of her demise under the domination of Nick Myshkin, as antagonist. And this Myshkin, the dealer and the pimp, brutally murders her, because Garrick has failed to be able to weather her attacks, to stand by her and stand up to her, to stem her self-destruction. When he is warned in his dreams, he does too little, too late. His end is that of a broken and defeated father, with only the dark father that Nick Myshkin has become, through matricide, left standing. We know, too, that Jade is not the only mother Nick has killed—that he has taken, used and killed his own mother, too, and in doing so he has killed Garrick’s, because they are from the same womb.

So when Garrick lies down, ready to be blamed for Nick’s crime, the father is entirely defeated, and there is no lesson learned. No order or civility remains, but disquiet, disorder and dis-ease prevail. So the novel achieves what Ogden tells us ought to be the aim, to upend civility all together, through violence, but it goes beyond what Ogden proposes to be culturally necessary, in that it destroys the Oedipus complex all together—or does it?

The reader is likely to be dissatisfied with such an ending, deeply troubled by it, perhaps even irritated or enraged by it. The mind of the reader is afflicted. Given such impetus for a creative quest, good order might yet be restored, but the question of the potential for Garrick’s resilience from his position of brokenness and defeat is left to the reader.

Although Nick Myshkin may have broken and defeated the father, taken the mother, used her, denigrated and humiliated her, and even killed her, we are yet to see what the internalisation of these primal murders will do to Nick’s mind, or what kind of strength might yet arise in Garrick, and whether or not Rachel, in the wake of her former friend and defender Jade, might yet wake up strong, and somehow put matters right. So the Oedipus complex may yet re-emerge and find new life, although seemingly destroyed.
By leaving the reader with such a wound, as author of the wound, I have created a space more polyvalent, even totipotential, than that in which Lynch leaves his viewer at the end of *Blue Velvet*. Lynch leaves the viewer with the very strong hint of the robins in Spring time, whereas I leave the reader with just the murders and the bodies full of ragged holes. And it may be that, in such a space, there can be dreams.

**Why are there people like Frank?**

Ogden has posited that the negotiation of the Oedipal situation, like Lynch’s narrative, can never be complete, but involves an increasingly complex and ambivalent awareness of what he calls ‘a multitude of evolving forever-problematic aspects of the human condition’ (2006: 663). Loewald dubs it ‘the troubling but rewarding richness of life’ (1980: 400). The stultifying effect of civility and the necessity for a violent assault on it provide an answer to Jeffrey’s anguished question. Frank stands as the embodiment of both these things, and offers himself to the challenger as an opponent. When he is gone, Frank wakes up in the victor, who must bear the dis-ease put into him by the victory, and by the loss. Jeffrey mourns for his innocence, and for his idealised parents and their love. The political and cultural consequences of such a victory may depend on the kind of mourning that follows, and the extent to which the form of atonement chosen by the parricide constitutes an ossified return to tradition or else its spectropoetic reinterpretation.

While the potential for a conservatising effect on the viewer is there in *Blue Velvet*, the activation of its other valence, a potentially transformative one, depends upon the extent to which the viewer is prepared to take on, and bear with, Lynch’s dis-ease. From such a position of dis-ease, it may be possible to respond to the parricide with a mourning that is less nostalgic, one dependent on what Ricciardi calls ‘greater openness and care on the singularity of the past’ (2003: 48). Responding thus to Lynch’s film, and considering its violence against civility as necessity rather than as morality tale, it is possible to speculate on, and to conceive of, a future for the parricide beyond it. Lynch’s return, at the
very end of the film, to the image of that animatronic robin clenching its beak firmly around a writhing black beetle, provides us with a key signifier of such returns and such futures, and of the places of violence within them, of which more will be seen in the Lynch films that follow *Blue Velvet*.

**Yet another story?**

*In Dreams* ends with an even more disquieting situation than *Blue Velvet*’s, one which may leave the reader with nightmares, but also with a sense of potential space, which this author feels within himself as though it were not only a wound, but also a womb, one into which dreams may come, when they do, to fertilise it. Through such alchemy, there may be hatched, as in the nests of Lynch’s robins, yet another story.
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